

### **Chapter 13 - BURIED TREASURE**

After the escape of the girl Barunda and Ninaka had fallen out over that affair and the division of the treasure, with the result that the panglima had slipped a knife between the ribs of his companion and dropped the body overboard.

Barunda's followers, however, had been highly enraged at the act, and in the ensuing battle which they waged for revenge of their murdered chief Ninaka and his crew had been forced to take to the shore and hide in the jungle.

With difficulty they had saved the chest and dragged it after them into the mazes of the underbrush. Finally, however, they succeeded in eluding the angry enemy, and took up their march through the interior for the head of a river which would lead them to the sea by another route, it being Ninaka's intention to dispose of the contents of the chest as quickly as possible through the assistance of a rascally Malay who dwelt at Gunung Tebor, where he carried on a thriving trade with pirates.

But presently it became apparent that he had not so easily escaped the fruits of his villainy as he had supposed, for upon the evening of the first day the rear of his little column was attacked by some of Barunda's warriors who had forged ahead of their fellows, with the result that the head of Ninaka's brother went to increase the prestige and glory of the house of the enemy.

Ninaka was panic-stricken, since he knew that hampered as he was by the heavy chest he could neither fight nor run to advantage. And so, upon a dark night near the head waters of the river he sought, he buried the treasure at the foot of a mighty buttress tree, and with his parang made certain cabalistic signs upon the bole whereby he might identify the spot when it was safe to return and disinter his booty. Then, with his men, he hastened down the stream until they reached the head of prahu navigation where they stole a craft and paddled swiftly on toward the sea.

When the three bull ourang outangs closed upon Bulan he felt no fear as to the outcome of the battle, for never in his experience had he coped with any muscles that his own mighty thews could not overcome. But as the battle continued he realized that there might be a limit to the number of antagonists which he could successfully withstand, since he could scarcely hope with but two hands to reach the throats of three enemies, or ward off the blows and clutches of six powerful hands, or the gnashing of three sets of savage fangs.

When the truth dawned upon him that he was being killed the instinct of self-preservation was born in him. The ferocity with which he had fought before paled into insignificance beside the mad fury with which he now attacked the three terrible creatures upon him. Shaking himself like a great lion he freed his arms for a moment from the clinging embrace of his foemen, and seizing the neck of the nearest in his mighty clutch wrenched the head completely around.

There was one awful shriek from the tortured brute--the vertebrae parted with a snap, and Bulan's antagonists were reduced to two. Lunging and struggling the three combatants stumbled farther and farther into the jungle beyond the clearing. With mighty blows the man buffeted the beasts to right and left, but ever they returned in bestial rage to renew the encounter. Bulan was weakening rapidly under the terrific strain to which he had been subjected, and from loss of the blood which flowed from his wounds; yet he was slowly mastering the foaming brutes, who themselves were torn and bleeding and exhausted. Weaker and weaker became the struggles of them all, when a sudden misstep sent Bulan stumbling headforemost against the stem of a tree, where, stunned, he sank unconscious, at the mercy of the relentless bulls.

They had already sprung upon the prostrate form of their victim to finish what the accident had commenced, when the loud report of Sing's revolver smote upon their startled ears as the Chinaman's bullet buried itself in the heart of Number Ten. Never had the ourang outangs heard the sound of a firearm, and the noise, seemingly in such close proximity, filled them with such terror that on the instant they forgot all else than this new and startling fear, and with headlong haste leaped away into the jungle, leaving Bulan lying where he had fallen.

So it was that though Sing passed within a few paces of the unconscious man he neither saw nor heard aught of him or his antagonists.

When Bulan returned to consciousness the day was drawing to a close. He was stiff and sore and weak. His head ached horribly. He thought that he must indeed be dying, for how could one who suffered so revive? But at last he managed to stagger to his feet, and finally to reach the stream along which he had been travelling earlier in the day. Here he quenched his thirst and bathed his wounds, and as darkness came he lay down to sleep upon a bed of matted grasses.

The next morning found him refreshed and in considerably less pain, for the powers of recuperation which belonged to his perfect health and mighty physique had already worked an almost miraculous transformation in him. While he was hunting in the jungle for his breakfast he came suddenly upon Number Three and Number Twelve similarly employed.

At sight of him the two creatures started to run away, but he called to them reassuringly and they returned. On closer inspection Bulan saw that both were covered with terrible wounds, and after questioning them learned that they had fared almost as badly at the hands of the ourang outangs as had he.

"Even the beasts loathe us," exclaimed Number Twelve. "What are we to do?"

"Leave the beasts alone, as I told you," replied Bulan.

"Human beings hate us also," persisted Number Twelve.

"Then let us live by ourselves," suggested Number Three.

"We hate each other," retorted the pessimistic Number Twelve. "There is no place for us in the world, and no companionship. We are but soulless things."

"Stop!" cried Bulan. "I am not a soulless thing. I am a man, and within me is as fine and pure a soul as any man may own," and to his mind's eye came the vision of a fair face surmounted by a mass of loosely waving, golden hair; but the brainless ones could not understand and only shook their heads as they resumed their feeding and forgot the subject.

When the three had satisfied the cravings of their appetites two of them were for lying down to sleep until it should be time to feed again, but Bulan, once more master, would not permit it, and forced them to accompany him in his seemingly futile search for the girl who had disappeared so mysteriously after he had rescued her from the ourang outangs.

Both Number Twelve and Number Three had assured him that the beasts had not recaptured her, for they had seen the entire band flee madly through the jungle after hearing the report of the single shot which had so terrorized Bulan's antagonists. Bulan did not know what to make of this occurrence which he had not himself heard, the shot having come after he had lost consciousness at the foot of the tree; but from the description of the noise given him by Number Twelve he felt sure that it must have been the report of a gun, and hoped that it betokened the presence of Virginia Maxon's friends, and that she was now safe in their keeping.

Nevertheless he did not relinquish his determination to continue his search for her, since it was quite possible that the gun had been fired by a native, many of whom possessed firearms. His first concern was for the girl's welfare, which spoke eloquently for the chivalry of his character, and though he wished to see her for the pleasure that it would give him, the hope of serving her was ever the first consideration in his mind.

He was now confident that he was following the wrong direction, and with the intention in view of discovering the tracks of the party which had rescued or captured Virginia after he had been forced to relinquish her, he set out in a totally new direction away from the river. His small woodcraft and little experience in travelling resulted in his becoming completely confused, so that instead of returning to the spot where he had last seen the girl, as he wished to do, he bore far to the northeast of the place, and missed entirely the path which von Horn and his Dyaks had taken from the long-house into the jungle and back.

All that day he urged his reluctant companions on through the fearful heat of the tropics until, almost exhausted, they halted at dusk upon the bank of a river, where they filled their stomachs with cooling draughts, and after eating lay down to sleep. It was quite dark when Bulan was aroused by the sound of something approaching from up the river, and as he lay listening he presently heard the subdued voices of men conversing in whispers. He recognized the language as that of the Dyaks, though he could interpret nothing which they said.

Presently he saw a dozen warriors emerge into a little patch of moonlight. They bore a huge chest among them which they deposited within a few paces of where Bulan lay. Then they commenced to dig in the soft earth with their spears and parangs until they had excavated a shallow pit. Into this they lowered the chest, covering it over with earth and sprinkling dead grass, twigs and leaves above it, that it might present to a searcher no sign that the ground had recently been disturbed. The balance of the loose earth which would not go back into the pit was thrown into the river.

When all had been made to appear as it was before, one of the warriors made several cuts and scratches upon the stem of a tree which grew above the spot where the chest was buried; then they hastened on in silence past Bulan and down the river.

As von Horn stood by the river's bank after his conversation with Virginia, he saw a small sampan approaching from up stream. In it he made out two natives, and the stealthiness of their approach caused him to withdraw into the shadow of a large prahu which was beached close to where he had been standing.

When the men had come close to the landing one of them gave a low signal, and presently a native came down from the long-house.

"Who is it comes by night?" he asked. "And what want you?"

"News has just reached us that Muda Saffir is alive," replied one of the men in the boat, "and that he sleeps this night in your long-house. Is it true?"

"Yes," answered the man on shore. "What do you wish of the Rajah Muda Saffir?"

"We are men of his company and we have news for him," returned the speaker in the sampan. "Tell him that we must speak to him at once."

The native on shore returned to the long-house without replying. Von Horn wondered what the important news for Muda Saffir might be, and so he remained as he had been, concealed behind the prahu.

Presently the old Malay came down to the water's edge--very warily though--and asked the men whom they might be. When they had given their names he seemed relieved.

"Ninaka," they said, "has murdered Barunda who was taking the rajah's treasure up to the rajah's stronghold--the treasure which Ninaka had stolen after trying to murder the rajah and which Barunda had recaptured. Now Ninaka, after murdering Barunda, set off through the jungle toward the river which leads to Gunung Tebor, and Barunda's uncle followed him with what few men he had with him; but he sent us down river to try and find you, master, and beg of you to come with many men and overtake Ninaka and punish him."

Muda Saffir thought for a moment.

"Hasten back to the uncle of Barunda and tell him that as soon as I can gather the warriors I shall come and punish Ninaka. I have another treasure here which I must not lose, but I can arrange that it will still be here when I return for it, and then Barunda's uncle can come back with me to assist me if assistance is needed. Also, be sure to tell Barunda's uncle never to lose sight of the treasure," and Muda Saffir turned and hastened back to the long-house.

As the men in the sampan headed the boat's bow up stream again, von Horn ran along the jungle trail beside the river and abreast of the paddlers. When he thought that they were out of hearing of the long-house he hailed the two. In startled surprise the men ceased paddling.

"Who are you and what do you want?" asked one.

"I am the man to whom the chest belongs," replied von Horn. "If you will take me to Barunda's uncle before Muda Saffir reaches him you shall each have the finest rifles that the white man makes, with ammunition enough to last you a year. All I ask is that you guide me within sight of the party that pursues Ninaka; then you may leave me and tell no one what you have done, nor will I tell any. What say you?"

The two natives consulted together in low tones. At last they drew nearer the shore.

"Will you give us each a bracelet of brass as well as the rifles?" asked the spokesman.

Von Horn hesitated. He knew the native nature well. To have acquiesced too readily would have been to have invited still further demands from them.

"Only the rifles and ammunition," he said at last, "unless you succeed in keeping the knowledge of my presence from both Barunda's uncle and Muda Saffir. If you do that you shall have the bracelets also."

The prow of the sampan touched the bank.

"Come!" said one of the warriors.

Von Horn stepped aboard. He was armed only with a brace of Colts, and he was going into the heart of the wild country of the head hunters, to pit his wits against those of the wily Muda Saffir. His guides were two savage head hunting warriors of a pirate crew from whom he hoped to steal what they considered a fabulously rich treasure. Whatever sins might be laid to the door of the doctor, there could be no question but that he was a very brave man!

Von Horn's rash adventure had been suggested by the hope that he might, by bribing some of the natives with Barunda's uncle, make way with the treasure before Muda Saffir arrived to claim it, or, failing that, learn its exact whereabouts that he might return for it with an adequate force later. That he was taking his life in his hands he well knew, but so great was the man's cupidity that he reckoned no risk too great for the acquirement of a fortune.

The two Dyaks, paddling in silence up the dark river, proceeded for nearly three hours before they drew in to the bank and dragged the sampan up into the bushes. Then they set out upon a narrow trail into the jungle. It so happened that after travelling for several miles they inadvertently took another path than that followed by the party under Barunda's uncle, so that they passed the latter without being aware of it, going nearly half a mile to the right of where the trailers camped a short distance from the bivouac of Ninaka.

In the dead of night Ninaka and his party had crawled away under the very noses of the avengers, taking the chest with them, and by chance von Horn and the two Dyaks cut back into the main trail along the river almost at the very point that Ninaka halted to bury the treasure.

And so it was that Bulan was not the only one who watched the hiding of the chest.

When Ninaka had disappeared down the river trail Bulan lay speculating upon the strange actions he had witnessed. He wondered why the men should dig a hole in the midst of the jungle to hide away the box which he had so often seen in Professor Maxon's workshop. It occurred to him that it might be well to remember just where the thing was buried, so that he could lead the professor to it should he ever see the old man again. As he lay thus, half dozing, his attention was attracted by a stealthy rustling in the bushes nearby, and as he watched he was dumbfounded to see von Horn creep out into the moonlight. A moment later the man was followed by two Dyaks. The three stood conversing in low tones, pointing repeatedly at the spot where the chest lay hidden. Bulan could understand but little of their conversation, but it was evident that von Horn was urging some proposition to which the warriors demurred.

Suddenly, without an instant's warning, von Horn drew his gun, wheeled, and fired point-blank, first at one of his companions, then at the other. Both men fell in their tracks, and scarcely had the pungent odor of the powder smoke reached Bulan's nostrils ere the white man had plunged into the jungle and disappeared.

Failing in his attempt to undermine the loyalty of the two Dyaks von Horn had chosen the only other way to keep the knowledge of the whereabouts of the chest from Barunda's uncle and Muda Saffir, and now his principal interest in life was to escape the vengeance of the head hunters and return to the long-house before his absence should be detected.

There he could form a party of natives and set out to regain the chest after Muda Saffir and Barunda's uncle had given up the quest. That suspicion should fall on him seemed scarcely credible since the only men who knew that he had left the long-house that night lay dead upon the very spot where the treasure reposed.