

## Chapter 16 - SING SPEAKS

For a week Professor Maxon with von Horn and Sing sought for Virginia. They could get no help from the natives of the long-house, who feared the vengeance of Muda Saffir should he learn that they had aided the white men upon his trail.

And always as the three hunted through the jungle and up and down the river there lurked ever near a handful of the men of the tribe of the two whom von Horn had murdered, waiting for the chance that would give them revenge and the heads of the three they followed. They feared the guns of the white men too much to venture an open attack, and at night the quarry never abated their watchfulness, so that days dragged on, and still the three continued their hopeless quest unconscious of the relentless foe that dogged their footsteps.

Von Horn was always searching for an opportunity to enlist the aid of the friendly natives in an effort to regain the chest, but so far he had found none who would agree to accompany him even in consideration of a large share of the booty. It was the treasure alone which kept him to the search for Virginia Maxon, and he made it a point to direct the hunt always in the vicinity of the spot where it was buried, for a great fear consumed him that Ninaka might return and claim it before he had a chance to make away with it.

Three times during the week they returned and slept at the long-house, hoping each time to learn that the natives had received some news of her they sought, through the wonderful channels of communication that seemed always open across the trackless jungle and up and down the savage, lonely rivers.

For two days Bulan lay raving in the delirium of fever, while the delicate girl, unused to hardship and exposure, watched over him and nursed him with the loving tenderness and care of a young mother with her first born.

For the most part the young giant's ravings were inarticulate, but now and then Virginia heard her name linked with words of reverence and worship. The man fought again the recent battles he had passed through, and again suffered the long night watches beside the sleeping girl who filled his heart. Then it was that she learned the truth of his self-sacrificing devotion. The thing that puzzled her most was the repetition of a number and a name which ran through all his delirium--"Nine ninety nine Priscilla."

She could make neither head nor tail of it, nor was there another word to give a clue to its meaning, so at last from constant repetition it became a commonplace and she gave it no further thought.

The girl had given up hope that Bulan ever could recover, so weak and emaciated had he become, and when the fever finally left him quite suddenly she was positive that it was the beginning of the end. It was on the morning of the seventh day since they had commenced their wandering in search of the long-house that, as she sat watching him, she saw his eyes resting upon her face with a look of recognition.

Gently she took his hand, and at the act he smiled at her very weakly.

"You are better, Bulan," she said. "You have been very sick, but now you shall soon be well again."

She did not believe her own words, yet the mere saying of them gave her renewed hope.

"Yes," replied the man. "I shall soon be well again. How long have I been like this?"

"For two days," she replied.

"And you have watched over me alone in the jungle for two days?" he asked incredulously.

"Had it been for life," she said in a low voice, "it would scarce have repaid the debt I owe you."

For a long time he lay looking up into her eyes--longingly, wistfully.

"I wish that it had been for life," he said.

At first she did not quite realize what he meant, but presently the tired and hopeless expression of his eyes brought to her a sudden knowledge of his meaning.

"Oh, Bulan," she cried, "you must not say that. Why should you wish to die?"

"Because I love you, Virginia," he replied. "And because, when you know what I am, you will hate and loathe me."

On the girl's lips was an avowal of her own love, but as she bent closer to whisper the words in his ear there came the sound of men crashing through the jungle, and as she turned to face the peril that she thought approaching, von Horn sprang into view, while directly behind him came her father and Sing Lee.

Bulan saw them at the same instant, and as Virginia ran forward to greet her father he staggered weakly to his feet. Von Horn was the first to see the young giant, and with an oath sprang toward him, drawing his revolver as he came.

"You beast," he cried. "We have caught you at last."

At the words Virginia turned back toward Bulan with a little scream of warning and of horror. Professor Maxon was behind her.

"Shoot the monster, von Horn," he ordered. "Do not let him escape."

Bulan drew himself to his full height, and though he wavered from weakness, yet he towered mighty and magnificent above the evil faced man who menaced him.

"Shoot!" he said calmly. "Death cannot come too soon now."

At the same instant von Horn pulled the trigger. The giant's head fell back, he staggered, whirled about, and crumpled to the earth just as Virginia Maxon's arms closed about him.

Von Horn rushed close and pushing the girl aside pressed the muzzle of his gun to Bulan's temple, but an avalanche of wrinkled, yellow skin was upon him before he could pull the trigger a second time, and Sing had hurled him back a dozen feet and snatched his weapon.

Moaning and sobbing Virginia threw herself upon the body of the man she loved, while Professor Maxon hurried to her side to drag her away from the soulless thing for whom he had once intended her.

Like a tigress the girl turned upon the two white men.

"You are murderers," she cried. "Cowardly murderers. Weak and exhausted by fever he could not combat you, and so you have robbed the world of one of the noblest men that God ever created."

"Hush!" cried Professor Maxon. "Hush, child, you do not know what you say. The thing was a monster--a soulless monster."

At the words the girl looked up quickly at her father, a faint realization of his meaning striking her like a blow in the face.

"What do you mean?" she whispered. "Who was he?"

It was von Horn who answered.

"No god created that," he said, with a contemptuous glance at the still body of the man at their feet. "He was one of the creatures of your father's mad experiments--"

-the soulless thing for whose arms his insane obsession doomed you. The thing at your feet, Virginia, was Number Thirteen."

With a piteous little moan the girl turned back toward the body of the young giant. A faltering step she took toward it, and then to the horror of her father she sank upon her knees beside it and lifting the man's head in her arms covered the face with kisses.

"Virginia!" cried the professor. "Are you mad, child?"

"I am not mad," she moaned, "not yet. I love him. Man or monster, it would have been all the same to me, for I loved him."

Her father turned away, burying his face in his hands.

"God!" he muttered. "What an awful punishment you have visited upon me for the sin of the thing I did."

The silence which followed was broken by Sing who had kneeled opposite Virginia upon the other side of Bulan, where he was feeling the giant's wrists and pressing his ear close above his heart.

"Do'n cly, Linee," said the kindly old Chinaman. "Him no dlead." Then, as he poured a pinch of brownish powder into the man's mouth from a tiny sack he had brought forth from the depths of one of his sleeves: "Him no mlonster either, Linee. Him white man, alsame Mlaxon. Sing know."

The girl looked up at him in gratitude.

"He is not dead, Sing? He will live?" she cried. "I don't care about anything else, Sing, if you will only make him live."

"Him live. Gettem lilee flesh wounds. Las all."

"What do you mean by saying that he is not a monster?" demanded von Horn.

"You waitee, you dam flool," cried Sing. "I tellee lot more I know. You waitee I flixee him, and then, by God, I flixee you."

Von Horn took a menacing step toward the Chinaman, his face black with wrath, but Professor Maxon interposed.

"This has gone quite far enough, Doctor von Horn," he said. "It may be that we acted hastily. I do not know, of course, what Sing means, but I intend to find out. He has been very faithful to us, and deserves every consideration."

Von Horn stepped back, still scowling. Sing poured a little water between Bulan's lips, and then asked Professor Maxon for his brandy flask. With the first few drops of the fiery liquid the giant's eyelids moved, and a moment later he raised them and looked about him.

The first face he saw was Virginia's. It was full of love and compassion.

"They have not told you yet?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied. "They have told me, but it makes no difference. You have given me the right to say it, Bulan, and I do say it now again, before them all--I love you, and that is all there is that makes any difference."

A look of happiness lighted his face momentarily, only to fade as quickly as it had come.

"No, Virginia," he said, sadly, "it would not be right. It would be wicked. I am not a human being. I am only a soulless monster. You cannot mate with such as I. You must go away with your father. Soon you will forget me."

"Never, Bulan!" cried the girl, determinedly.

The man was about to attempt to dissuade her, when Sing interrupted.

"You keepee still, Bulan," he said. "You wait till Sing tellee. You no mlonster. Mlaxon he no makee you. Sing he find you in low bloat jus' outsidee cove. You dummy. No know nothing. No know namee. No know where comee from. No talkee.

"Sing he jes' hearee Mlaxon tellee Hornee 'bout Nlumber Thirteen. How he makee him for Linee. Makee Linee mally him. Sing he know what kindee fleaks Mlaxon makee. Linee always good to old Sing. Sing he been peeking thlu clack in wallee. See blig vlat where Thirteen growing.

"Sing he takee you to Sing's shackee that night. Hide you till evlybody sleep. Then he sneak you in workee shop. Kickee over vlat. Leaves you. Nex' mlorning Mlaxon makee blig hulabaloo. Dance up and downee. Whoop! Thirteen clome too soonee, but allight; him finee, perfec' man. Whoop!

"Anyway, you heap better for Linee than one Mlaxon's fleaks," he concluded, turning toward Bulan.

"You are lying, you yellow devil," cried von Horn.

The Chinaman turned his shrewd, slant eyes malevolently upon the doctor.

"Sing lies?" he hissed. "Mabbeso Sing lies when he ask what for you glet Bludleen steal tleasure. But Lajah Saffir he come and spoil it all while you tly glet Linee to the ship--Sing knows.

"Then you tellee Mlaxon Thirteen steal Linee. You lie then and you knew you lie. You lie again when Thirteen savee Linee flom Oulang Outang--you say you savee Linee.

"Then you make bad talkee with Lajah Saffir at long-house. Sing hear you all timee. You tly getee tleasure away from Dlyaks for your self. Then--"

"Stop!" roared von Horn. "Stop! You lying yellow sneak, before I put a bullet in you."

"Both of you may stop now," said Professor Maxon authoritatively. "There have been charges made here that cannot go unnoticed. Can you prove these things Sing?" he asked turning to the Chinaman.

"I plove much by Bludleen's lascar. Bludleen tell him all 'bout Hornee. I plove some more by Dyak chief at long-house. He knows lots. Lajah Saffir tell him. It all tluе, Mlaxon."

"And it is true about this man--the thing that you have told us is true? He is not one of those created in the laboratory?"

"No, Mlaxon. You no makee fine young man like Blulan--you know lat, Mlaxon. You makee One, Two, Thlee--all up to Twelve. All fleaks. You ought to know, Mlaxon, lat you no can makee a Blulan."

During these revelations Bulan had sat with his eyes fixed upon the Chinaman. There was a puzzled expression upon his wan, blood-streaked face. It was as though he were trying to wrest from the inner temple of his consciousness a vague and tantalizing memory that eluded him each time that he felt he had it within his grasp--the key to the strange riddle that hid his origin.

The girl kneeled close beside him, one small hand in his. Hope and happiness had supplanted the sorrow in her face. She tore the hem from her skirt, to bandage the bloody furrow that creased the man's temple. Professor Maxon stood silently by, watching the loving tenderness that marked each deft, little movement of her strong, brown hands.

The revelations of the past few minutes had shocked the old man into stupefied silence. It was difficult, almost impossible, for him to believe that Sing had spoken the truth and that this man was not one of the creatures of his own creation; yet from the bottom of his heart he prayed that it might prove the truth,

for he saw that his daughter loved the man with a love that would be stayed by no obstacle or bound by no man-made law, or social custom.

The Chinaman's indictment of von Horn had come as an added blow to Professor Maxon, but it had brought its own supporting evidence in the flood of recollections it had induced in the professor's mind. Now he recalled a hundred chance incidents and conversations with his assistant that pointed squarely toward the man's disloyalty and villainy. He wondered that he had been so blind as not to have suspected his lieutenant long before.

Virginia had at last succeeded in adjusting her rude bandage and stopping the flow of blood. Bulan had risen weakly to his feet. The girl supported him upon one side, and Sing upon the other. Professor Maxon approached the little group.

"I do not know what to make of all that Sing has told us," he said. "If you are not Number Thirteen who are you? Where did you come from? It seems very strange indeed--impossible, in fact. However, if you will explain who you are, I shall be glad to--ah--consider--ah--permitting you to pay court to my daughter."

"I do not know who I am," replied Bulan. "I had always thought that I was only Number Thirteen, until Sing just spoke. Now I have a faint recollection of drifting for days upon the sea in an open boat--beyond that all is blank. I shall not force my attentions upon Virginia until I can prove my identity, and that my past is one which I can lay before her without shame--until then I shall not see her."

"You shall do nothing of the kind," cried the girl. "You love me, and I you. My father intended to force me to marry you while he still thought that you were a soulless thing. Now that it is quite apparent that you are a human being, and a gentleman, he hesitates, but I do not. As I have told you before, it makes no difference to me what you are. You have told me that you love me. You have demonstrated a love that is high, and noble, and self-sacrificing. More than that no girl needs to know. I am satisfied to be the wife of Bulan--if Bulan is satisfied to have the daughter of the man who has so cruelly wronged him."

An arm went around the girl's shoulders and drew her close to the man she had glorified with her loyalty and her love. The other hand was stretched out toward Professor Maxon.

"Professor," said Bulan, "in the face of what Sing has told us, in the face of a disinterested comparison between myself and the miserable creatures of your experiments, is it not folly to suppose that I am one of them? Some day I shall recall my past, until that time shall prove my worthiness I shall not ask for Virginia's hand, and in this decision she must concur, for the truth might reveal some insurmountable obstacle to our marriage. In the meantime let us be

friends, professor, for we are both actuated by the same desire--the welfare and happiness of your daughter."

The old man stepped forward and took Bulan's hand. The expression of doubt and worry had left his face.

"I cannot believe," he said, "that you are other than a gentleman, and if, in my desire to protect Virginia, I have said aught to wound you I ask your forgiveness."

Bulan responded only with a tighter pressure of the hand.

"And now," said the professor, "let us return to the long-house. I wish to have a few words in private with you, von Horn," and he turned to face his assistant, but the man had disappeared.

"Where is Doctor von Horn?" exclaimed the scientist, addressing Sing.

"Hornee, him vamoose long time 'go," replied the Chinaman. "He hear all he likee."

Slowly the little party wound along the jungle trail, and in less than a mile, to Virginia's infinite surprise, came out upon the river and the long-house that she and Bulan had searched for in vain.

"And to think," she cried, "that all these awful days we have been almost within sound of your voices. What strange freak of fate sent you to us today?"

"We had about given up hope," replied her father, "when Sing suggested to me that we cut across the highlands that separate this valley from the one adjoining it upon the northeast, where we should strike other tribes and from them glean some clue to your whereabouts in case your abductors had attempted to carry you back to the sea by another route. This seemed likely in view of the fact that we were assured by enemies of Muda Saffir that you were not in his possession, and that the river we were bound for would lead your captors most quickly out of the domains of that rascally Malay. You may imagine our surprise, Virginia, when after proceeding for but a mile we discovered you."

No sooner had the party entered the verandah of the long-house than Professor Maxon made inquiries for von Horn, only to learn that he had departed up stream in a prahu with several warriors whom he had engaged to accompany him on a "hunting expedition," having explained that the white girl had been found and was being brought to the long-house.

The chief further explained that he had done his best to dissuade the white man from so rash an act, as he was going directly into the country of the tribe of the



two men he had killed, and there was little chance that he ever would come out alive.

While they were still discussing von Horn's act, and wondering at his intentions, a native on the verandah cried out in astonishment, pointing down the river. As they looked in the direction he indicated all saw a graceful, white cutter gliding around a nearby turn. At the oars were white clad American sailors, and in the stern two officers in the uniform of the United States navy.