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For two years, Lingard, who had thrown himself body and soul into the great enterprise, had lived in the long intoxication of slowly preparing success. No thought of failure had crossed his mind, and no price appeared too heavy to pay for such a magnificent achievement. It was nothing less than bringing Hassim triumphantly back to that country seen once at night under the low clouds and in the incessant tumult of thunder. When at the conclusion of some long talk with Hassim, who for the twentieth time perhaps had related the story of his wrongs and his struggle, he lifted his big arm and shaking his fist above his head, shouted: "We will stir them up. We will wake up the country!" he was, without knowing it in the least, making a complete confession of the idealism hidden under the simplicity of his strength. He would wake up the country! That was the fundamental and unconscious emotion on which were engrafted his need of action, the primitive sense of what was due to justice, to gratitude, to friendship, the sentimental pity for the hard lot of Immada--poor child--the proud conviction that of all the men in the world, in his world, he alone had the means and the pluck "to lift up the big end" of such an adventure.

Money was wanted and men were wanted, and he had obtained enough of both in two years from that day when, pistols in his belt and a cabbage-leaf hat on head, he had unexpectedly, and at early dawn, confronted in perfect silence that mysterious Belarab, who himself was for a moment too astounded for speech at the sight of a white face.

The sun had not yet cleared the forests of the interior, but a sky already full of light arched over a dark oval lagoon, over wide fields as yet full of shadows, that seemed slowly changing into the whiteness of the morning mist. There were huts, fences, palisades, big houses that, erected on lofty piles, were seen above the tops of clustered fruit trees, as if suspended in the air.

Such was the aspect of Belarab's settlement when Lingard set his eyes on it for the first time. There were all these things, a great number of faces at the back of the spare and muffled-up figure confronting him, and in the swiftly increasing light a complete stillness that made the murmur of the word "Marhaba" (welcome), pronounced at last by the chief, perfectly audible to every one of his followers. The bodyguards who stood about him in black skull-caps and with long-shafted lances, preserved an impassive aspect. Across open spaces men could be seen running to the waterside. A group of women standing on a low knoll gazed intently, and nothing of them but the heads showed above the unstimulating stalks of a maize field. Suddenly within a cluster of empty huts near by

the voice of an invisible hag was heard scolding with shrill fury an invisible young girl:

"Strangers! You want to see the strangers? O devoid of all decency! Must I so lame and old husk the rice alone? May evil befall thee and the strangers! May they never find favour! May they be pursued with swords! I am old. I am old. There is no good in strangers! O girl! May they burn."

"Welcome," repeated Belarab, gravely, and looking straight into Lingard's eyes.

Lingard spent six days that time in Belarab's settlement. Of these, three were passed in observing each other without a question being asked or a hint given as to the object in view. Lingard lounged on the fine mats with which the chief had furnished a small bamboo house outside a fortified enclosure, where a white flag with a green border fluttered on a high and slender pole but still below the walls of long, high-roofed buildings, raised forty feet or more on hard-wood posts.

Far away the inland forests were tinted a shimmering blue, like the forests of a dream. On the seaward side the belt of great trunks and matted undergrowth came to the western shore of the oval lagoon; and in the pure freshness of the air the groups of brown houses reflected in the water or seen above the waving green of the fields, the clumps of palm trees, the fenced-in plantations, the groves of fruit trees, made up a picture of sumptuous prosperity.

Above the buildings, the men, the women, the still sheet of water and the great plain of crops glistening with dew, stretched the exalted, the miraculous peace of a cloudless sky. And no road seemed to lead into this country of splendour and stillness. One could not believe the unquiet sea was so near, with its gifts and its unending menace. Even during the months of storms, the great clamour rising from the whitened expanse of the Shallows dwelt high in the air in a vast murmur, now feeble now stronger, that seemed to swing back and forth on the wind above the earth without any one being able to tell whence it came. It was like the solemn chant of a waterfall swelling and dying away above the woods, the fields, above the roofs of houses and the heads of men, above the secret peace of that hidden and flourishing settlement of vanquished fanatics, fugitives, and outcasts.

Every afternoon Belarab, followed by an escort that stopped outside the door, entered alone the house of his guest. He gave the salutation, inquired after his health, conversed about insignificant things with an inscrutable mien. But all the time the steadfast gaze of his thoughtful eyes seemed to seek the truth within that white face. In the cool of the evening, before the sun had set, they talked together, passing and repassing between the rugged pillars of the grove near the

gate of the stockade. The escort away in the oblique sunlight, followed with their eyes the strolling figures appearing and vanishing behind the trees. Many words were pronounced, but nothing was said that would disclose the thoughts of the two men. They clasped hands demonstratively before separating, and the heavy slam of the gate was followed by the triple thud of the wooden bars dropped into iron clamps.

On the third night, Lingard was awakened from a light sleep by the sound of whispering outside. A black shadow obscured the stars in the doorway, and a man entering suddenly, stood above his couch while another could be seen squatting--a dark lump on the threshold of the hut.

"Fear not. I am Belarab," said a cautious voice.

"I was not afraid," whispered Lingard. "It is the man coming in the dark and without warning who is in danger."

"And did you not come to me without warning? I said 'welcome'--it was as easy for me to say 'kill him.'"

"You were within reach of my arm. We would have died together," retorted Lingard, quietly.

The other clicked his tongue twice, and his indistinct shape seemed to sink half-way through the floor.

"It was not written thus before we were born," he said, sitting cross-legged near the mats, and in a deadened voice. "Therefore you are my guest. Let the talk between us be straight like the shaft of a spear and shorter than the remainder of this night. What do you want?"

"First, your long life," answered Lingard, leaning forward toward the gleam of a pair of eyes, "and then--your help."