

## VIII

Lingard's soul was exalted by his talk with Mrs. Travers, by the strain of incertitude and by extreme fatigue. On returning on board he asked after Hassim and was told that the Rajah and his sister had gone off in their canoe promising to return before midnight. The boats sent to scout between the islets north and south of the anchorage had not come back yet. He went into his cabin and throwing himself on the couch closed his eyes thinking: "I must sleep or I shall go mad."

At times he felt an unshaken confidence in Mrs. Travers--then he remembered her face. Next moment the face would fade, he would make an effort to hold on to the image, fail--and then become convinced without the shadow of a doubt that he was utterly lost, unless he let all these people be wiped off the face of the earth.

"They all heard that man order me out of his ship," he thought, and thereupon for a second or so he contemplated without flinching the lurid image of a massacre. "And yet I had to tell her that not a hair of her head shall be touched. Not a hair."

And irrationally at the recollection of these words there seemed to be no trouble of any kind left in the world. Now and then, however, there were black instants when from sheer weariness he thought of nothing at all; and during one of these he fell asleep, losing the consciousness of external things as suddenly as if he had been felled by a blow on the head.

When he sat up, almost before he was properly awake, his first alarmed conviction was that he had slept the night through. There was a light in the cuddy and through the open door of his cabin he saw distinctly Mrs. Travers pass out of view across the lighted space.

"They did come on board after all," he thought--"how is it I haven't been called!"

He darted into the cuddy. Nobody! Looking up at the clock in the skylight he was vexed to see it had stopped till his ear caught the faint beat of the mechanism. It was going then! He could not have been asleep more than ten minutes. He had not been on board more than twenty!

So it was only a deception; he had seen no one. And yet he remembered the turn of the head, the line of the neck, the colour of the hair, the movement of the passing figure. He returned spiritlessly to his state-room muttering, "No more

sleep for me to-night," and came out directly, holding a few sheets of paper covered with a high, angular handwriting.

This was Jorgenson's letter written three days before and entrusted to Hassim. Lingard had read it already twice, but he turned up the lamp a little higher and sat down to read it again. On the red shield above his head the gilt sheaf of thunderbolts darting between the initials of his name seemed to be aimed straight at the nape of his neck as he sat with bared elbows spread on the table, poring over the crumpled sheets. The letter began:

Hassim and Immada are going out to-night to look for you. You are behind your time and every passing day makes things worse.

Ten days ago three of Belarab's men, who had been collecting turtles' eggs on the islets, came flying back with a story of a ship stranded on the outer mudflats. Belarab at once forbade any boat from leaving the lagoon. So far good. There was a great excitement in the village. I judge it must be a schooner--probably some fool of a trader. However, you will know all about her when you read this. You may say I might have pulled out to sea to have a look for myself. But besides Belarab's orders to the contrary, which I would attend to for the sake of example, all you are worth in this world, Tom, is here in the Emma, under my feet, and I would not leave my charge even for half a day. Hassim attended the council held every evening in the shed outside Belarab's stockade. That holy man Ningrat was for looting that vessel. Hassim reproved him saying that the vessel probably was sent by you because no white men were known to come inside the shoals. Belarab backed up Hassim. Ningrat was very angry and reproached Belarab for keeping him, Ningrat, short of opium to smoke. He began by calling him "O! son," and ended by shouting, "O! you worse than an unbeliever!" There was a hullabaloo. The followers of Tengga were ready to interfere and you know how it is between Tengga and Belarab. Tengga always wanted to oust Belarab, and his chances were getting pretty good before you turned up and armed Belarab's bodyguard with muskets. However, Hassim stopped that row, and no one was hurt that time. Next day, which was Friday, Ningrat after reading the prayers in the mosque talked to the people outside. He bleated and capered like an old goat, prophesying misfortune, ruin, and extermination if these whites were allowed to get away. He is mad but then they think him a saint, and he had been fighting the Dutch for years in his young days. Six of Belarab's guard marched down the village street carrying muskets at full cock and the crowd cleared out. Ningrat was spirited away by Tengga's men into their master's stockade. If it was not for the fear of you turning up any moment there would have been a party-fight that evening. I think it is a pity Tengga is not chief of the land instead of Belarab. A brave and foresighted man, however treacherous at heart, can always be trusted to a certain extent. One can never get anything clear from Belarab. Peace! Peace!

You know his fad. And this fad makes him act silly. The peace racket will get him into a row. It may cost him his life in the end. However, Tengga does not feel himself strong enough yet to act with his own followers only and Belarab has, on my advice, disarmed all villagers. His men went into the houses and took away by force all the firearms and as many spears as they could lay hands on. The women screamed abuse of course, but there was no resistance. A few men were seen clearing out into the forest with their arms. Note this, for it means there is another power beside Belarab's in the village: the growing power of Tengga.

One morning--four days ago--I went to see Tengga. I found him by the shore trimming a plank with a small hatchet while a slave held an umbrella over his head. He is amusing himself in building a boat just now. He threw his hatchet down to meet me and led me by the hand to a shady spot. He told me frankly he had sent out two good swimmers to observe the stranded vessel. These men stole down the creek in a canoe and when on the sea coast swam from sandbank to sandbank until they approached unobserved--I think--to about fifty yards from that schooner. What can that craft be? I can't make it out. The men reported there were three chiefs on board. One with a glittering eye, one a lean man in white, and another without any hair on the face and dressed in a different style. Could it be a woman? I don't know what to think. I wish you were here. After a lot of chatter Tengga said: "Six years ago I was ruler of a country and the Dutch drove me out. The country was small but nothing is too small for them to take. They pretended to give it back to my nephew--may he burn! I ran away or they would have killed me. I am nothing here--but I remember. These white people out there can not run away and they are very few. There is perhaps a little to loot. I would give it to my men who followed me in my calamity because I am their chief and my father was the chief of their fathers." I pointed out the imprudence of this. He said: "The dead do not show the way." To this I remarked that the ignorant do not give information. Tengga kept quiet for a while, then said: "We must not touch them because their skin is like yours and to kill them would be wrong, but at the bidding of you whites we may go and fight with people of our own skin and our own faith--and that is good. I have promised to Tuan Lingard twenty men and a prau to make war in Wajo. The men are good and look at the prau; it is swift and strong." I must say, Tom, the prau is the best craft of the kind I have ever seen. I said you paid him well for the help. "And I also would pay," says he, "if you let me have a few guns and a little powder for my men. You and I shall share the loot of that ship outside, and Tuan Lingard will not know. It is only a little game. You have plenty of guns and powder under your care." He meant in the Emma. On that I spoke out pretty straight and we got rather warm until at last he gave me to understand that as he had about forty followers of his own and I had only nine of Hassim's chaps to defend the Emma with, he could very well go for me and get the lot. "And then," says he, "I would be so strong that everybody would be on my side." I discovered in the course of further talk that there is a notion amongst

many people that you have come to grief in some way and won't show up here any more. After this I saw the position was serious and I was in a hurry to get back to the Emma, but pretending I did not care I smiled and thanked Tengga for giving me warning of his intentions about me and the Emma. At this he nearly choked himself with his betel quid and fixing me with his little eyes, muttered: "Even a lizard will give a fly the time to say its prayers." I turned my back on him and was very thankful to get beyond the throw of a spear. I haven't been out of the Emma since.