

1914
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IN A CORNER
OF ASIA

HUGH CLIFFORD

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"THE OVER

Where are the "Ends of the Empire"? and which are the Over-Seas? At "the Ends" of one may arise the beginnings of other Empires to come. It is notorious that wherever an English-speaking community settles and opens up new lands, it speedily speaks for itself as a Centre; and so rapid is the growth of the great Colonies, that Ministers to-day writing despatches to Dependencies over-seas, receive their answers from nations to-morrow.

But great as is the growth of the Empire and the enterprise of its peoples, the new native-born literatures take years to germinate and generations to arrive. Thence comes it that often we do not understand the atmospheres of the new English-speaking peoples, and often misunderstand the problems, the ambitions, the attitudes, befitting them as new races. And while the British Empire grows richer daily in patriotic fervours, in speeches, in splendour, in cant, and in the oracular assurances of Statesmen, the English people seeks to understand its cousins by the interchange of cablegrams, by debates, and by all the ambiguities of official memoranda.

It is, however, the artist's work to bring the people of his nation and their atmosphere before the eyes of another. It is the artist alone, great or small, who, by revealing and interpreting the life around him, makes it living to the rest of the world. And the artist is generally absent! In the case of the English in India, ten years ago, while the literature of information was plentiful, the artist was absent; Mr. Kipling arrived and discovered modern India to

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AUTHOR OF 'IN COURT AND KAMPONG,' 'STUDIES IN BROWN HUMANITY,'
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IN A CORNER OF ASIA

BEING

Tales and Impressions of Men and Things in
the Malay Peninsula



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TO THE
AUTHOR

PREFACE

OF these Malayan tales and sketches four have already made their appearance in the pages of magazines. 'At the Court of Pěleşu' was originally published in *Temple Bar*, 'The Death-March of Kûlop Sûmbing' and 'A Daughter of the Muham-madans' in the pages of *Blackwood*, and 'The Story of Ram Singh' in *Macmillan's Magazine*. My thanks are due to the editors and proprietors of the above periodicals for the permission which they have given to me to reprint these stories.

The Malays and the forest lands in which they have their home have been to me objects of long and loving personal observation, and it has been my aim in this, as in my former books, to make others of my race-mates acquainted with the men and things which have had for me a powerful fascination. With hardly an exception, the tales contained in this book are true in nearly every detail, the *mise en scène* of all has been faithfully reproduced from a study of real localities in the Peninsula, and since I have striven throughout to convey a picture of realities, not merely to write fiction, it

Preface

is possible that I may occasionally have sacrificed dramatic effects in the cause of truth. The descriptions of native character, of customs, manners, superstitions and social practices owe nothing at all to my imagination. In writing of them I have tried to draw things as I have seen and known them, and in painting the pictures of scenery which are scattered so lavishly up and down this sleepy, sun-steeped land, I believe myself to have shown a fidelity to my models no less scrupulous.

That I shall ever really succeed in conveying to stay-at-home folk' any true idea of the unfrequented places through which I have roamed widely, or of the strange people among whom I have lived so long, I dare not hope; for many even of those who have seen with their own eyes the Peninsula and its brown inhabitants have failed to understand, and where the gift of sight has proved powerless how should mere printed words be of any avail? None the less, since my brown friends and their surroundings have been to me things very real and very lovable, these tales have written themselves, bringing me much pleasure in their fashioning, and if they serve to pass an idle hour for others, they will have achieved, perhaps, the only object for which they are fitted.

HUGH CLIFFORD.

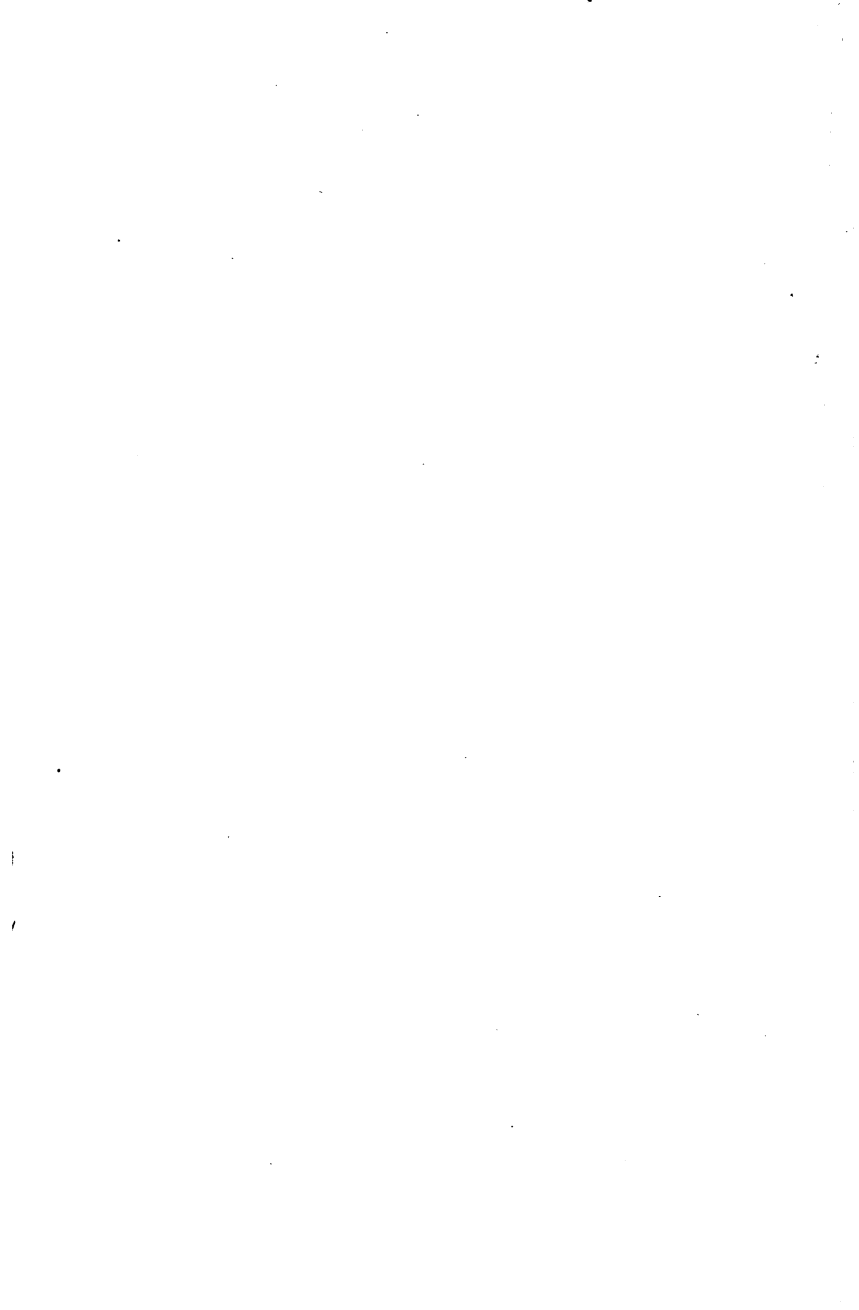
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'I have seen phantoms there that were as men,
And men that were as phantoms flit and roam.'
The City of Dreadful Night.

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AT THE COURT OF PĚLĚSU



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AT THE COURT OF PĚLĚSU

CHAPTER I

‘ Ragged and tanned, and standing alone,
Set with their backs to the wall,
With teeth locked tight to strangle a groan,
The youngest amongst us all ;
With hands hard clenched for the coming fight,
With eyes that glisten and shine,
With nerves drawn taut and with arms grip’d tight,
The foremost skirmishing line.’

SCENE near the coast on the eastern slope of the Malay Peninsula. A broad river, measuring near two miles across, its waters running white in the aching mid-day heat ; numerous islets, covered with greenery of many shades, all motionless in the hot, still air, each frond of the cocoanut trees stretching impotent arms to heaven in a mute prayer for coolness. On the right bank of the river, the clustering thatched roofs of a large Malay village, many of the houses extending far out

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over the waters on the piles which support them. Around the feet of these piles innumerable boats of many sorts, shapes, and sizes, moored in inextricable confusion; and all things throwing shadows against the white sunlight as hard as if cut out of black paper. Such was the capital of the Independent Native State of Pělsu, which some years ago was inhabited by a Malay king of the old school, some unimportant people, and Mr John Norris, political agent.

The King's village consisted of one long lane, running parallel to the river bank for a distance of something over a quarter of a mile, from which various footpaths straggled off, through narrow openings, into the closely-clustering native compounds in the vicinity. The street was unmetalled, but the red and dusty earth had been beaten smooth and hard by the passage of innumerable bare feet. This main thoroughfare was lined on either hand by native houses and Chinese shops of varying and irregular shape and size, which matched one another only in the materials of which they were constructed, and in the air of disorder and neglect which pervaded them one and all. At one end of the street, in an open space facing a rickety landing-stage, a brick mosque, glaringly whitewashed, received, re-

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fracted, and redoubled the heat of the fierce sunlight. Half-way up the village, and standing a little back from the road in another open space, a whitewashed, green-shuttered bungalow, of European type, stood in a neglected garden. At the far end of the village a larger stone building of Chinese design showed its bare windows and its slate roof over an eight-foot wall of stone, patched here and there with a yard or two of bamboo fencing, the whole grown upon by creepers like drapery.

All these buildings were the property of the King, the mosque and the neglected bungalow serving to mark a period in his reign when, after a short visit to the neighbouring British colony, he had for a space devoted to public works some portions of the funds which were more usually employed in ministering to his personal pleasures, and to those of the ladies of his extensive harem. The third and largest building was of older date, and represented the result of a Chinese builder's efforts to construct a palace worthy of a great monarch.

Both the bungalow and the old palace were inhabited by wives of the King—ladies of rank whom he had thought it impolitic to divorce, but whose faded charms had long ceased to hold his fickle heart in any semblance of bondage. Occasionally the King visited these

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ladies, and they not infrequently sent him presents of food in brass trays, covered with brilliant yellow cloths, borne by many maidens, and shielded from the sunlight by the silken spread of state umbrellas. None the less, the King did not grace either of his more civilised houses with the light of his presence. His habits were curious, even for an Oriental king—whose ways are apt to be unconventional in many respects—and he resembled the gentlemen whose names sometimes figure in the police reports, in that, like them, he had no fixed place of abode.

On the side of the main street nearest to the river there were about a dozen squalid huts, whose wattle walls and thatched roofs differed in no respect from the native shops and hovels which adjoined them. But all these huts belonged to the King, and in any one of them he might or might not be found at any given hour of the day or night. Sometimes three or four of these royal residences adjoined one another, and were so arranged that the King could make his way from one house to another without attracting public notice by walking up and down the street on which they abutted.

In each of these huts, it was understood, dwelt a lady who occupied the proud position of concubine to the King. The houses were

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crammed with women, most of them nominally attendants upon the wives of the monarch. Some, of course, were merely cooks or waiting-women, but the vast majority were devoted to the King's more immediate service. When once the monarch entered the doors of one of these rabbit-warrens, where no other man was suffered to set foot, he was apt to be lost to the sight of his loyal subjects for days, or even weeks at a time, the affairs of his country being left meanwhile to take care of themselves, while the State itself drifted placidly to destruction.

An indolent European monarch may perhaps seek comfort in the thought '*Après moi le deluge!*' but the fact that he realises that a flood of troubles is impending shows that he has devoted some time and thought to the affairs of his kingdom. But for an Oriental ruler even such a languid effort as this argues a keener interest in the condition of his subjects, and a greater expenditure of energy than he can well spare from his intimate pleasures, provided that his harem and his opium-pipe are sufficiently filled. Thus it is that in the East, things—and very awful things at that—often go on for years, all concerned being apparently satisfied that the prevailing conditions will last for ever. Then, upon a certain

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day, the deluge comes down, as though one had upset the sea, and evil-mannered native kings and hopelessly rotten native institutions, jostle one another on the surface of the flood.

In the State of Pëlësu, at the time of which I write, the storm, which had long been brewing, was very near its breaking. Many things foretold that clearly enough, and it should have needed no very prophetic vision to recognise in Mr John Norris, political agent, the stormy petrel, the forerunner of the tempest.

Jack Norris was, at this time, one of the many nameless Englishmen who, all unknown and uncared for by their sheltered fellow-countrymen in far-off England, are to be found scattered broadcast over the East at the courts of such independent native rulers as our hungry European acquisitiveness has so far suffered to escape 'protection,' which is one of the official euphonisms for 'annexation.' These men form the first line of skirmishers in the mighty army of England's empire. They are cast as bread upon the waters; and if any lily-white duck—in the shape of some native potentate who has yet much to learn of England's methods—comes and gobbles them up, Great Britain annexes or 'protects' the land in which they died, and moves one step forward over their mutilated remains.

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In modern India the political agent is more or less 'a curled and oiled Assyrian bull,' but in Further India, and in frontier states throughout the East, there are few harder or more thankless billets than that of an agent at a native court. These posts are poorly paid, because pay in the East is largely a matter of age and of seniority in the service, and the elder men, who have made their mark, are old birds who are far too full of wisdom to be caught with the chaff of an agent's billet. On the other hand, those seniors who have never scored their notch, are usually amiable imbeciles who cannot be trusted to do the work. Accordingly the agencies go to the younger generation; and as there is an element of danger in most of these posts, they are eagerly scrambled for by the boys with pluck and brains.

It is a curious trait in the character of most Englishmen, that a prospect of danger always casts a certain glamour over things which, for that very reason and for many others, are eminently unpleasant to the eye of common sense. This glamour, it is only fair to add, often dies away entirely on the nearer approach of the danger from which it is derived, and the Englishman will then, not infrequently, turn and run. Such things have been. Some have

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been hushed up, and others, which have come to light, have been elaborately explained away, or else we have all declined to see them, since they tend to disprove the theory we universally hold, that all inhabitants of Great Britain are brave. Nevertheless, given an Englishman with his back to the wall, and who is thus prevented from making use of his legs, and it is ordained that he should fight as no other man can fight. The political agent, from his position as an isolated white man in a foreign land, where he is usually totally unsupported by any show of force, has his back to the wall as a permanent arrangement, and he accordingly generally shows good sport, and makes a pretty fight of it when he finds himself at last in the inevitable tight place.

The State of Pělěsu had long been an eyesore to the British Government, and eventually the evil deeds of the King gathered sufficient weight to turn the slow wheels on which runs the administration of one of the most ponderous nations of the earth. Treaty negotiations were started with a view to establishing some sort of control over Pělěsu and its irresponsible ruler, but as the State was somewhat inaccessible, and the King a skilful procrastinator, this was a stage of the proceedings which occupied many months. The Government, therefore, looked

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about for a young officer possessed of a good knowledge of the natives and of the vernacular, a tough constitution and a slender stipend, all of which qualifications were found united in the person of young Jack Norris. Accordingly, he was sent to Pěleşu, and when the negotiations were completed, and the treaty signed, he continued to perform the duties of political agent.

He was lodged in a native hut, the front of which abutted on the main street, while the back premises straggled out over the river, on half a hundred crazy wooden piles. This hut contained a *bálai*, or common-room, a square, inner apartment with a raised platform in its centre, on which Jack squatted to eat his rice, or to receive his native visitors. Opening out of this on the left hand was a bedroom, and at the back was a large square apartment, in which his native followers lived, and behind that again was the big kitchen in which food always seemed to be in process of preparation.

Norris spent most of his time in the bedroom, which was oblong in shape, and looked through two narrow windows on to the river, which flowed by and under it. The furniture was not elaborate. The plank flooring was covered with straw-coloured matting made from the plaited leaves of the *mengkhang* palm, and a small mat and pillows spread beneath an enor-

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mous set of chintz bed-curtains—looped up by day—filled one side of the room. Near this lay half a hundred books tumbled together upon the floor, around a green earthenware jar which was used for the reception of Jack's cigarette ends and other similar rubbish. Near the window stood a writing table, littered with papers, and two cane-bottomed chairs—the only signs of European civilisation in the place—were set close to it. In one corner of the room stood two leather portmanteaus, with some of Jack's clothes and his toilet requisites laid out neatly upon them. The raft moored at the steps, which led down from the kitchen door, at the back of the house, to the river, was the somewhat public and primitive bathing-place of the queer household of which Jack Norris was master.

His followers consisted of about twenty Malays—ruffians who had come to Pělěsu at the heels of Norris, with whom they had foregathered in other parts of the Peninsula. They were all men who had known the bad old days before European ideas of right and wrong upset native notions of the fitness of things; they all loved war, or thought that they did, which is often much the same thing; and they all swore by Jack and believed in him intensely.

Such was the position of things at Pělěsu.

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when the north-east monsoon began to break in November 18—, closing the ports on the China Sea, and cutting off all communication with the outside world.

CHAPTER II

‘It’s ill sitting at Rome and striving wi’ the Pope.’
CUDDIE HEADRIGG.

A WEEK or two before the mouth of the river was finally closed for the year by the threatening of the monsoon, Jack Norris lay stretched upon his mat with a cigarette between his lips and a novel in his hand. He was a short, very dark youngster of about three or four and twenty years of age. He was thick-set and very powerfully built, with sturdy legs, and arms on which the biceps stood up in knots. His features were rather broad and flat, with a mouth that shut like a trap, and the dogged strength of a dominant race in every hard line which early responsibility and an eastern climate had drawn upon his ugly face. He was clothed after the manner of Europeans in the Malay Peninsula during their hours of ease—in a short linen jacket, with sleeves reaching to the elbows, in loose linen drawers, and a broad native skirt — or *sârong*, which might be huddled up about his

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waist, or suffered to drop to his ankles, or over his feet if the mosquitoes were annoying in their attention, at the owner's will.

It was evening, and the room in which Norris lay was dimly lighted by a stinking oil lamp which stood on the matted floor at Jack's elbow. One or two Malays squatted at one end of the room, near the curtained door, chewing quids of areca-nut and talking together in low murmurs. Through the narrow open windows the moonlight strove to penetrate, in spite of the greasy lamplight, and the hum of a thousand busy insects, varied by the occasional clear note of a night-jar, was borne upon the pure night air. The surroundings in which he found himself had grown so familiar to Jack Norris, that Thackeray's brilliant description of the *fête* at Gaunt House, at which dear Becky scored her glittering, short-lived triumph, in the book that he was reading for the hundredth time, struck no note of incongruity in his mind. One half of his brain unconsciously assimilated the trivial talk of the Malays near the doorway, while the other half took in the familiar words of his book.

Presently someone came to the door and said a few words in a low voice to one of the Malays who was seated near it.

'There is a Chinaman who would come into

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thy presence, *Tuan*,' said the latter, turning to Norris.

'Bid him enter,' said Jack, sitting up and laying his book down beside him.

The curtains in the doorway were put aside and an old Chinaman entered. He saluted Norris, and then seated himself cross-legged on the floor near the foot of the mat. He was a long-boned, sunken-cheeked, deeply-wrinkled old creature, with a slender pig-tail, composed almost entirely of silk, hanging from the sparse grey hairs on his scalp. His shoulders were bowed by a permanent stoop, and he brought with him that peculiar smell of roasted coffee and chocolate which, combined with a strange closeness of the atmosphere that surrounds him, always denotes the confirmed opium-smoker.

'What is the news?' asked Jack, speaking in Malay, and employing the usual native interrogative greeting.

'The news is good,' rejoined the visitor, speaking in the same language, and making use of the formal reply, which is as empty of meaning as the 'Quite well, thank you,' of the confirmed invalid.

These greetings over, the Chinaman shook himself, glanced over his shoulder at the Malays near the door, and said uneasily,—

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'There is a thing that I would say unto thee, *Thau*.'

'Speak on,' said Norris; 'these men are mine own people. Have no fear.'

'I come to thee craving aid, *Thau*,' resumed the Chinaman. 'I am exceeding troubled. I have a wife.'

'I pity thee!' interposed Norris, sympathetically.

'She is a good woman, very fair to see, and moreover she is virtuous,' continued the Chinaman.

'That is strange! It is difficult to find such a one,' said Jack, who knew something of Oriental morals. 'Speak on.'

'Yes,' assented the Chinaman—'yes, it is strange that she is what she is; the more so, seeing that her beauty is indeed great, and that the King desireth her. It is in this wise. She was married to me some four years ago, and I have had by her two children, boys, and she and I are happy, living together in love. Does it seem strange to thee, *Thau*, that one who is young and beautiful should love me, who am neither the one nor the other? Yet she, who is my wife, loveth me, and will have naught of the King or his presents. The *Thau* knows the ways of the King. He dwelleth often in the house of his concubine,

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Che' Lâyang, the which adjoins mine own. Upon a certain day the King, peeping through the wattled walls which divide my house from that of his concubine, espied my wife playing with the men-children, my sons, and from that time he hath sought many means to seduce her from me. He sent first an aged crone of his household to make known to her his passion; but she, on hearing the words of the old woman, raised so great a tumult of angry screamings that the hag fled in fear of me. Then, later, the King sent diamonds and fine raiment, such as women love, by the hands of certain of his armed youths, choosing for the purpose an hour when I was absent from my house. But she, my wife, received the youths with evil words, and threw the King's gifts forth into the mire of the street, so that the silks were soiled and the very lustre of the diamonds was dimmed.

'Thereafter my wife boarded up the crevice in the wall through which the King was wont to watch her; but in the night the boarding was torn away.

'Thou askest, *Tûan*, why the King hath not seized her by force, as he seized the wife of Âhmad of Pûlau Aur, and the wife of Chi On, the Keh trader. *Tûan*, men speak of thee as the *pen-âwar pûteh*—the white antidote—and but for

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that medicine many a man had suffered death and worse in Pěľsu since thy coming. And I, also, but for thee, had lost either life or honour. It is thy presence, and the fear of those who sent thee hither, which causeth the King to employ stealth and stratagem where, in past days, he was wont to use force. Now come I hither to thee crying and weeping, secretly and by night, hoping that thou wilt aid and protect me, and the woman my wife, and the men-children my two little sons. Both I and my wife are British subjects. Long have we dwelt in Pěľsu, but our birthplace is in the colony. We, therefore, are thine own people, and we trust in thee with a thousand, thousand hopes.'

'If thou so desirest,' said Norris, 'I will speak with the King on this matter.'

'Nay, *Tuan*, I pray thee do not so!' cried the Chinaman, aghast at the mere suggestion. 'Nay, I pray thee, for in very truth I should die at the hands of the King did he but know that I had had speech with thee.'

'If that be so,' said Norris, 'the better course were for thee and thine to quit Pěľsu, and seek refuge in the colony.'

'That also I cannot do,' said the Chinaman; 'my business is here in Pěľsu, and were I to quit it both my children and my wife would die

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of famine. That may not be. Also the mouth of the river closeth to-morrow or the day after ; who can tell when the winds of the monsoon will descend upon us? No—I cannot quit Pělěsu now, but I will do so when the river-mouth is once more open, if all then be well. I have sought thee only that thou mightest know the heavy things which I and mine are bearing at the hands of the King ; and that knowing thou shouldest aid me if occasion ariseth.'

'That will I do and willingly,' said Norris. 'It is a little thing. But the words of the men of old times are true when they say: "It is well to be economical before thy substance is wasted, and to be upon thy guard before thou art smitten." It were in truth better to suffer me to speak with the King now, and so save thee and thine and mine and me from trouble yet to come.'

'I dare not suffer it, *Tuan*—I dare not!' cried the Chinaman, once more. 'Didst thou but speak, I would be as one already dead. I pray thee, think not of it!'

'It is enough!' said Norris, discontentedly. 'It is enough! Have no fear—I will hold my peace, though I doubt not that evil things will result. But now return thee to thy dwelling, and if trouble assaileth thee, come thou to me in the hour of thy need.'

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N The Chinaman salaamed, rose, and withdrew. It is not customary to offer any verbal thanks in Malay. When one is thanked by a native it is silently, and by deeds, not noisily and in words, as amongst ourselves. It may be open to doubt, however, whether the former method, rarely though it be employed, is not, on the whole, superior to the profuse use of the latter, to which we are all so well accustomed in the west—wordy thanks which, in the majority of cases, mean little enough.

When Che' Ah Ku, the Chinaman, had departed, Norris called Râja Haji Hamid, the chief of his followers, to his side, and the two sat talking far into the night.

Râja Haji was a man who, on the other side of the Peninsula, had won for himself an astonishing reputation for courage, and a very evil name for other qualities which, by no stretch of the imagination, and from no conceivable point of view, could possibly be regarded as virtues. He had been one of the most reckless and untamed of a lawless race of *râjas* in an independent Native State before the advent of the white men reduced things to the dull monotony of order, and thus he had acquired a knowledge of the seamy side of Malay human nature which was as curious as it was profound. Norris knew something of

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the same subject also, but when matters of difficulty arose he usually took counsel with the hoary old villain who loved him, and looked upon the affairs of Pělěsu as a game in which they were partners, with the King and the people of the land as their adversaries.

‘I also have seen the woman Chik—the wife of Ah Ku, the Chinaman—and she is fair to look upon,’ said Râja Haji late that night; ‘but there be many in Pělěsu far more beautiful. It is not her loveliness which causeth the heart of the King to wax hot. He desireth her with an exceeding great longing because she alone of all the people of this land dareth to deny herself to him. Men say that he hath sought all manner of love-potions, but they profit him not with her. It is clear to see that the aged man, her husband, hath full knowledge of the occult arts, and hath cast over her a glamour; how else should she be faithful to one so old and ugly? None the less, *Tuan*, it is certain that trouble will arise. It was but yesternight that I dreamed in a dream that the King bade us eat *dûri-an* and other round fruit, and that needeth no skill in the interpretation. The fruit are bullets and cannon-balls, and the dream betokeneth strife. Well, it is long since I bathed me in the smoke and the bullets, and I am *kětâgeh*—longing

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for that to which I am accustomed—as the opium smoker longeth for the drug. Mine will be the greater pleasure if war results with these men of Pělěsu! Ah! it recalls to my mind the ancient days in mine own land. Listen, *Túan.*'

And Râja Haji plunged into the relation of deeds of wrong and rapine, done in bygone days, in the memory of which his soul delighted, and with which he was wont to regale Jack Norris for hours at a time.

It is only by dwelling among Malays in intimacy and good fellowship that a stranger may really learn what manner of men they are. Jack Norris, who, when he came to Pělěsu, thought he knew as much about natives as any man in the Peninsula, soon found out that he was still stumbling over the *a b c* of his study, and was now daily acquiring little odds and ends of knowledge which would gradually piece themselves together, until he should eventually find himself a master of his subject.

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CHAPTER III

'The deed was done in the dark !
A scuffle, a stab, a blow,
A curse, a sob—and hark !
The wail of a voice we know !
The patter of feet that flee,
A body nerveless and stark,
Foul sight of the stars to see !
The deed was done in the dark !'

AT six o'clock one afternoon Jack Norris awoke from sleep. It was one of the peculiarities of his position as a lonely white man, living and working among a courtful of Malayan chiefs, that he was forced to keep their unnatural hours. Time had no meaning for any of his associates, and presently it came to have as little significance for him. He very rarely found himself in bed before six or seven o'clock in the morning, and his hour of rising was proportionately late. Soon after seven in the evening a meal was served, and when an hour or two had been passed in reading and writing, he sauntered out of his compound into the still night air, and with one native boy at his heels, took his way up the village street. He halted at a Chinese shop, and bowing his head to pass under the low doorway, over which was inscribed in Chinese characters the strangely

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inappropriate legend—'The Dwelling of Divine Repose,' stumbled up a dark and narrow passage, which was more like an underground gallery in a mine than a portion of any dwelling-house, such as those with which most white men are familiar. The place was redolent of a thousand odours peculiar to the Chinese, but Norris had subdued his nose long ere this, and the smells inseparable from native houses had almost ceased to annoy him. Arrived at the end of the passage, Norris pushed aside a dingy curtain, cloaking a doorway on his right, and entered a small dark room, the sanctum of Su Kim, the Chinese trader, to whom the house belonged.

The room was more than half filled by a raised platform, or opium bench, which served its owner indifferently as bed, chair and table. Su Kim was seated cross legged upon his bunk, carefully filling a long bamboo pipe with the opium which he was cooking over a small lamp that stood by him. The faint smell of roasted coffee and chocolate, the odour of cooking opium, filled the room as the drug swelled into blisters, or subsided like a bubble, as Su Kim toasted it at the end of a metal skewer. He was an old man, whose creased and wrinkled body was bare to the waist. His legs were cased in

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a pair of black silk trousers, very full and loose, and to the belt which secured them were attached a bead-worked money pouch and a cluster of the silver hooks and prods such as the Chinese use for tickling and picking the insides of their ears.

To the right and left of the room little octagonal tea-poys, or stools, were ranged against the wall, and a small brown teapot with half a dozen tiny china cups, without handles, stood on a wooden tray on the bunk.

To the European eye, Su Kim's sanctum was a sufficiently squalid place, but none the less it was one of the haunts selected by the *élite* of Pělsu in which to meet and gossip, and exchange news. To-night Norris found that he was the first to reach this place of general *rendezvous*, and as he seated himself upon one of the stools, and took the cup of tea which Su Kim handed to him, he began the conversation in the usual way.

'What is the news?'

'The news is good,' replied Su Kim, mechanically. 'Hast thou heard of what befell Che' Ah Ku and Li Tat on the night of the King's feast? Thou hast heard that Li Tat is dead, and that the King hath seized all that he possessed, claiming the same for a debt. It is even so, and now that we are

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alone, I will tell thee of Li Tat's death. We Chinamen, traders of Pěļsu, were all bidden to the feast of the King, and we all went. Che' Ah Ku and Li Tat were told to eat from the same tray of food, but Che' Ah Ku, fearing evil, ate nought, save only the rice, and so escaped death. But Li Tat ate unwarily, suspecting no evil, seeing that from childhood he had served the King faithfully; but, *Tuan*, he had waxed rich, and the King desired his possessions. No sooner had he returned unto his house than a great sickness fell upon him, by reason of the said food, and even before his eyes had closed in death the King's Treasurer came to his dwelling and seized upon all his stores of money and gum; and, as thou also hast heard, Che' Ah Ku is faint with fear, for it is certain that he too is doomed, and now he knoweth not in what way his death will fall upon him.'

'Art thou sure of that which thou sayest?' asked Norris.

'Yes,' replied Su Kim; 'yes, it is in truth as I say; but peace, *Tuan*—someone comes this way.'

Presently the curtain was once more put aside, and a largely-built, imposing-looking man, dressed in gay-coloured Malay clothes, with a short *kris* in his belt and a long

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dagger, sheathed in wood, in his hand, stepped into the room. On his head was a handkerchief twisted into a peak; he had clumsy sandals on his feet, and the light caught the gloss on his cotton *sârong*, or waist skirt, to which a shining surface had been imparted by hard friction with a shell. This man was the Dâto' Bëndähâra Sri Stiâwan, a cousin of the King, whom Norris knew well for a truculent, bullying fellow, with a loud voice, a boisterous manner, and the heart of a little mouse.

The conversation now turned to more indifferent topics, and by-and-by more Chiefs dropped in and joined in the talk. The Ungku Mûda, a little-loved brother of the King, and a friend of Jack's, was among the last to arrive, and shortly after ten o'clock the whole party, including Norris, adjourned to the *bâlai* or State Hall. This was a large building abutting on the main street and open to the air on all sides. It was raised some six feet from the ground on piles, and it was in this place that the greater portion of the evening was wont to be spent in gossiping, in eating sickly sweetmeats, and in gambling.

Norris and the Chiefs had been seated in the hall some time, and sweetmeats in large quantities had just been produced, when suddenly the quiet stillness of the soft Malayan

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night was rent by peal after peal of shrill screamings, such as no throat but that of a woman in misery or pain can produce. Jack started up, moved by that instinct which always prompts a white man who is alone among natives to take the lead in all emergencies. It is the instinct of the dominant race, and natives as a rule are well content to follow and obey on such occasions. The Bëndähâra, however, put forth a restraining hand, and begged Norris to be seated.

'Tis but the howling of a dog,' said he, 'and, moreover, thou knowest the custom, *Tuan*; none may leave the *bâlai* when food is served until they have partaken thereof.'

Very reluctantly Jack sat down once more. Malay custom, he knew, was like unto the laws of the Medes and Persians which altereth not. Quickly he dipped his hand into the dish, ate a mouthful of sickly sweetmeat, composed in equal proportions of sugar, flour and egg, and then, swinging himself over the edge of the verandah on to the ground beneath, he set off at a run down the village street.

The night had been dark a few minutes before, but now a ruddy moon was lying on the horizon amid a bed of fleecy clouds. A broad line of light lay on the surface of the river, ribbed with the thousand ripples of the

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water, and the huts bordering the path down which Norris ran looked black and shapeless, and threw heavy, impenetrable shadows across his way. A few hundred yards down the street a small knot of silent and terrified natives stood pressing one against the other, half in and half out of the shadow. A black heap was dimly discernible in the shallow ditch that separated the huts from the pathway, and the continuous moans and sobs of a woman in sorrow broke upon the stillness. As Jack drew nearer, this black heap resolved itself into the body of a man, lying with all the *abandon* of death or of insensibility, with the form of a woman thrown prostrate across it, her head and arms beating the ground in all the reckless, unrestrained grief of an Oriental. As Norris approached, and the woman caught sight of him, her cries broke out once more with redoubled energy, the pealing screams running up the scale till they broke on a note deafeningly shrill, which sent a thrill of almost pain through Jack's nerves. The man was Che' Ah Ku, and the wailing woman was Chik, his wife.

'What thing is this?' asked Jack, and the little group of Malays broke silence, every man speaking at once, each offering a different explanation of the catastrophe.

'He smote his head against the lintel of the

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door!' 'He hath fallen in a fit!' 'The madness of the pig' (epilepsy) 'hath come upon him!' 'He hath been attacked by a devil!' 'An evil spirit hath laid hold upon him!' were some of the phrases which came, all in one breath, from the various onlookers.

Jack Norris was kneeling by the side of the unconscious Chinaman by this time, and as the clamour of voices ceased, his clear young tones, speaking with the perfect Malay accent for which he was famous, fell upon the ears of the people, and hushed their noisy vapourings into the still silence of fear.

'This man hath been stabbed,' he said—'stabbed at the very door of the King's house. Where are the King's men who keep watch and ward here by day and by night? How chanced it that they saw nought of what passed, and why hath no man aided this woman to carry her husband into his house?'

There was not a man in this crowd but was well aware, in his heart of hearts, that Che' Ah Ku had been stabbed at the King's instance, but in Pěleşu, men who desired that their days should be long in the land knew better than to say all that they thought. Jack Norris's plain speaking filled them with fear, for even to listen to such things might be regarded as a crime, and one by one they slunk away.

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Aided by his own people, Jack then carried the still unconscious Ah Ku into his house, and laid him on the opium-bench in the inner room. He had been badly mauled. A stab from a *kris* had pierced his upper lip, splitting it from the nostril to the gums, and knocking away all the front teeth of his upper jaw. The point of the blade had come out in the centre of Ah Ku's left cheek. A second stab had struck him in the forehead above his left eye, but the steel had been stopped by the bone of the skull. This wound was a very clean one, and Jack's keen eyes saw by its shape that it had been made by a *kris* with a ridged blade, such as only the King's bodyguard were wont to carry. Ah Ku had fallen backwards when he was stabbed, and as he lay upon the ground he had received several heavy blows on the chest from a wooden club, or some similar blunt instrument.

Jack pulled off his coat and rolled up his sleeves. Then he drove all the spectators from the room, except Râja Haji Hamid, and set to work to do what he could to mend Che' Ah Ku. He washed and dressed the wounds on Ah Ku's forehead and cheek, put a couple of silk stitches into the severed lip, and applied a compress to the injured chest. He plied his patient with stimulants, and eventually had the

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satisfaction of restoring him to consciousness. Then having given orders that he was to be tended carefully, and to be fed at regular intervals, he returned to his own house.

Next day Ah Ku was better, and as soon as Jack had dressed his wounds, a statement was made, and taken down in writing, which gave Norris enough information to hang several of his most intimate acquaintances, members of the King's bodyguard. Ah Ku had been sent for by the King's Treasurer upon some trivial pretext, and on his return to his own shop four men had leaped from the shadow near the King's house, and had only ceased their attack when Ah Ku lay in the state of unconsciousness, which they mistook for death.

Jack Norris now passed through some very weary weeks. He tended Ah Ku with elaborate care, and was rewarded by seeing the wounds heal up, though they left hard and ugly scars behind them. But the man continued to wax weaker and weaker, and Jack began to perceive that some internal injury had been sustained, against which his homely doctoring was powerless to prevail. Very gradually Ah Ku lost strength, and Jack watched, with a keenness of anxiety which well-nigh amounted to agony, the race which the ebbing

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life in his patient was running with the time which would bring with it the breaking of the monsoon and the re-opening of communication with the outside world.

It was Jack's object to cause Ah Ku to live until the mouth of the river should be once more open to ships. Then he would remove him to the neighbouring British colony, where his appearance would be all that was needed to complete the long and heavy indictment against the King of Pëlësu, which would be held to justify the Government in taking one more forward step. So Jack fought with death, eagerly and fiercely, day and night, heart and soul, as a man strives to stay the ebbing of a life he loves. His cheeks began to grow pale and lined under his deep sun-tan, and his eyes to shine unnaturally with anxiety and want of sleep, but still he carried on the fight, Chik striving to aid him early and late.

The King shut himself up in his rabbit-warrens, and only once did Jack chance to meet him in the street. The King, in melancholy accents, full of tenderness and compassion, asked anxiously after Jack's patient, and expressed his well-feigned horror of the crime which had been perpetrated. Jack smiled grimly with that tight-shut mouth of his, and in equally dulcet tones, and with an elaborate

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air of respect, dropped into the ear of his royal friend a few sentences that burned like fire. He spoke in that subtle Malay language which lends itself so readily to the framing of soft sounding phrases, that mean so much more than they express. Had Jack's words been analysed, no man could deny that they were courteous and commonplace enough, but none the less, both Jack and the King knew that an accusation of murder had been made against the Ruler of Pělěsu no whit less distinctly than if his Highness had been formally charged in the criminal's dock.

After this, the King went to bed and apparently stayed there, for, if one might believe his messages, he was always asleep, or too sick to rise from his couch, when Jack sought an interview with him. Speech with the King being thus rendered impossible, Jack wrote him a letter, stating in unmistakable language that Ah Ku and his people would be removed from Pělěsu to the colony as soon as communication by sea was re-established; no answer was received to this missive, but none the less Jack remained content. He had given formal notice of his intention, and he was determined to vindicate the right of a British subject to come and go as he pleased. He was particularly anxious, however, to avoid anything which

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could be regarded as the spiriting away of Che' Ah Ku, and though he foresaw that trouble would be not unlikely to ensue, he had made up his mind that Ah Ku's departure should be made openly and in the light of day.

All this required nerve, for the people who thronged the court of Pělěsu began to look askance at Jack Norris, seeing in him now the almost openly-declared enemy of their King.

One night Jack went to the *bálai*, as he had been accustomed to do before Che' Ah Ku was stabbed, but the looks of the *râjas* and Chiefs, which greeted his arrival, showed him that for the time he was the reverse of *bien vu*. The Bëndähâra turned to him almost as soon as he was seated, and said sulkily,—

'How fares it with that Chinaman whom thou art tending?'

He knew Ah Ku's name as well as he knew his own, but he spoke of the man contemptuously as a Chinaman, because he wished to be nasty. Norris was somewhat nettled at the Bëndähâra's manner, and by the unfriendly faces around him, and he said in his heart he would make these men of Pělěsu 'sit up and snort!' He knew, too, that his life was not over safe at this time, and his knowledge of Malay character told him that bluff, and an

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ostentatious disregard of the dangers with which his path was beset, were the best attitude for him to assume if he desired to prolong his insecure lease of life. Therefore, he answered in words such as no native would have dared to use, and in a manner which he knew would send a tremor through his audience.

‘Try to think for thyself,’ he said. ‘How should a man fare who has been stabbed with knives?’

He heard the men around him gulp and draw in their breath at the word, for the official contention at this time was that Che’ Ah Ku’s injuries had not been wrought by man.

‘Who says that Ah Ku was stabbed?’ cried the Bēndāhāra.

‘I say it,’ returned Norris; ‘and all men say the like who speak that which it is in their bellies to speak. Ah Ku was stabbed with knives at the door of the King’s house where the men of the King’s bodyguard are wont to sit.’

‘How dost thou know?’ cried the Bēndāhāra, excitedly. ‘There was a lath of bamboo projecting from the thatch, and men say Ah Ku stumbled and fell against it!’

‘Ah Ku does not measure seven cubits high,’ answered Norris, with a grin; ‘think once more that thou mayest find some better explanation.’

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Then he laughed aloud, while his audience shuffled uneasily, and the Chief scowled at this stranger who seemed not to know what the fear of death might mean.

‘Then I say that it was a devil who did this thing!’ cried the Bëndāhāra, almost with a scream.

‘Thy words are very true,’ answered Norris, and then raising his voice, ‘and mark ye, the devil that did this thing went on two legs, and was armed with a ridged *kris*. Perchance he borrowed the weapon from one of the King’s bodyguard, who are wont to sit at night on the spot where the deed was done! What profits it to seek for explanations when all men know the truth? And, remember, though this thing was done in the dark, it hath come into the light of day, and there may be many in this land of Pěleşu who will live to pay the price of that night’s work, nor will it avail them aught if they strive to make Satan bear the burden of their evil deeds. I ask thy leave to depart!’ And Jack dropped over the edge of the verandah, and left a flustered, awe-stricken court behind him.

This was one of many such adventures which thrust themselves upon Norris at this time. The knowledge that his life hung by a thread seemed to make him doubly reckless,

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and though he was very much alone, though he had no man of his own race to support him, the excitement of his life supplied him with all the stimulant he needed, and he learned to enjoy the risks he ran almost hourly. And thus the days slipped by until the monsoon broke and a vessel was reported as having entered the mouth of the river.

CHAPTER IV

‘When blood runs slowly, when limbs wax weak,
When life is ebbing away,
When lips, that of old were swift to speak,
Are silent for ever and aye ;
When the passing-pain racks the wearied brain,
When the death-rattle tears the chest,
A man may rejoice at Azrael’s voice,
And be glad to go to his rest.

‘But when on the brink of the grave we reel,
Tho’ the Soul to the Body clings,
And never a pang or a pain we feel,
And our joy in all mortal things
Is as keen as of old ; yet the hour’s foretold
For our death, by our foes decreed,
The longing for life, makes furious strife,
And to die may be hard indeed.’

NORRIS set off for the mouth of the river as soon as he learned that a ship had arrived. He travelled in a long, narrow, open boat, taking the oar himself, while sixteen of his men

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bent to the paddles, to the accompaniment of a perfect tempest of shrill shouts and yells. The boat skimmed quickly over the water, and in an hour Jack found himself climbing up the port side of a dirty little steam 'tramp,' and being received by the Malay captain and Chinese Chin-chu, or supercargo, at whose hands she ran many risks, and suffered terrible things every time she put to sea. As he boarded her, he saw certain of the King's men scrambling into a boat moored on the starboard side, and he knew from this that the people of Pěleşu had already done their best to prevent the ship from accepting Ah Ku and his people as passengers.

This suspicion was soon amply confirmed, for the Malay captain and the Chinese supercargo both flatly refused to run the risk of taking out of Pěleşu persons whom the King desired to keep within his country. Norris had anticipated this, however, and he proceeded to calmly explain that if the refusal to carry Ah Ku and his family was persisted in, the good ship *Bang Ah Hong* would shortly forfeit her license to carry passengers, and would meet with other disasters exceedingly unpleasant to her owners. After some further arguments, the captain of the vessel gave in, and when Jack had exacted a promise that the

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vessel should not put to sea until he gave her permission to do so, he once more returned up stream to the capital.

Arrived here, Jack set off on a round of afternoon calls. First he visited the Ungku Mûda, the King's brother, who was on good terms with Norris, and on exceedingly bad ones with the Ruler of Pëlësu. To him Norris explained that on the following morning he proposed to take Che' Ah Ku and his family out of Pëlësu.

'Do not so!' cried the Ungku Mûda. 'The King will never permit it. If thou dost persist thou wilt be slain, and when thou art dead I too shall perish at the hands of the King.'

Norris laughed, and said that the Ungku Mûda had better lend him his aid in the removal of Ah Ku, since, if that failed, they were both, it would seem, like to be dead men before long. The *râja*, however, only reiterated his entreaties to Norris to abandon his project, and bewailed the evil fate which he foresaw was like to overtake him and all connected with him.

'What can one do?' said Norris, philosophically. 'My words have gone forth. I have said that I would do this thing, and now behold the time is at hand.'

Norris left the Ungku Mûda moaning over

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his evil fortune with tears and futile wringing of impotent, irresolute hands, and betook himself to the Bëndähâra.

‘There will be trouble if thou dost attempt to remove Ah Ku,’ said this Chief. ‘There will be trouble, and thou and thine will be slain. But I pray thee leave a record behind thee that so the white men may know that I was ever thy friend.’

The frank selfishness of this proposal set Norris laughing once more. He was in a thoroughly reckless mood, though his voice and manner showed no signs of excitement, and the humours of the situation pleased him.

‘If thou art my friend,’ he said, ‘when the trouble ariseth all men will know it, for thou wilt stand by me. Therefore there will be no need of writing or record to prove thy friendship.’

‘But I am a man devoid of power and authority,’ whined the Bëndähâra. ‘I cannot aid thee, but indeed I am thy friend.’

‘He who is not for me is against me,’ translated Norris, and so saying he took his departure.

He next visited Ungku Tumënggong, another great Chief, who was famed for his prudence; but this worthy, having scented trouble in the air, had departed up stream

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to snare turtle-doves, thus to avoid all connection with whatsoever might occur.

Norris next went to see Tŭngku Indut, the eldest son of the King, who was at this time at enmity with his father, and to him he repeated that at dawn on the following day he proposed to remove Ah Ku and his family.

‘Hast thou well considered this thy plan?’ asked the prince.

‘Yes,’ said Norris, gravely; ‘I have considered it even to the end.’

‘And thy mind is made up,’ asked the prince, ‘even though thou art aware that the King will resist thine action maybe with force?’

‘Yes,’ returned Norris. ‘My mind is made up, and my word hath gone forth.’

‘Then if thou wilt follow my advice, remove Ah Ku by night, so that no man may know the hour of his departure.’

‘That I may not do,’ said Norris; ‘I am no thief, removing by night the property of the King, thy father. Ah Ku and his people are British subjects, and all such come and go as it pleases them. At daybreak to-morrow I take them forth, and I come hither to tell thee my intention that all may be open, and that no man may say that I acted secretly or by stealth.’

‘Then I have no further word to say,’ said

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Tŭngku Indut. 'Do that which thou thinkest right, but verily there will be trouble, and thy life will pay the penalty of thy desire to oppose the King.'

So Norris departed and returned to his house through the darkness, which had already fallen upon the land. He had eaten no food since dawn, but his cravings of appetite were not yet to be appeased, for on his arrival at his house he found two Chiefs, messengers from the King, who brought him word that his Highness was awaiting his coming, and desired urgently to have speech with him.

In spite of all their protests Norris bade all his men remain in the house, and went alone to this interview with the hostile King. He knew that Pěleşu was in an exceedingly excited state, and that the King would be glad of any pretext which would give rise to a quarrel that might terminate in the murder of Jack and of his people. Anything in the nature of trouble that might have the appearance of being wholly unconnected with politics would, Jack knew, be very welcome to the Ruler of Pěleşu, and this of all things he was most anxious to avoid. Therefore he went alone, and the risk which he ran by so doing accorded with the somewhat reckless mood that possessed him that evening.

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The King was awaiting Jack's coming, sitting upon a mat spread on the ground in front of the whitewashed bungalow, of which mention has already been made. The open space in front of the house, and all the approaches to it, were thronged with men, squatting humbly on the earth, after 'the manner of Malays when in the presence of their King, and the moonlight showed Jack that all present were armed to the teeth. Moreover, the people of the neighbouring villages, he noted, had been called in to the capital, a thing in itself so unusual, that Jack needed no man to tell him that mischief was intended, and he felt instinctively that an appearance of absolutely light-hearted disregard to danger was at once the wisest and the safest air that he could assume in the presence of this multitude of his enemies.

'Hai, Mèrah!' he cried laughingly to one burly native against whom he brushed in passing, 'thou and thy fellows are in force to-night!'

The man scowled at him sulkily, and those near him turned round to watch him and Norris.

'It is true that we are in force,' grunted Mèrah. 'It is said that the King desireth to slay a tiger!'

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Norris knew well enough that there was no tiger in the vicinity, and that he was the person whose death the King desired to compass.

'Have a care, Mêrah,' he cried, with the same careless laugh on his lips. 'Have a care, for tigers have claws and teeth wherewith to guard their lives.'

All knew what this hint meant, and Norris had the satisfaction of seeing some approving and admiring looks on the faces of the crowd, for Malays love pluck, especially when it is garnished with a touch of swagger and a ready tongue.

Norris squatted upon the mat opposite to the King, and noted with satisfaction that no man was seated within striking distance of his back. The King sat in silence, frowning at the mat at which he picked unceasingly with restless fingers. His face, conforming to the habit of brown countenances in moments of strong emotion, was almost black in hue, and it was tight set as a clinched vice. All the great Chiefs were present, squatting humbly about their King, and Norris noticed that even their trained self-control was powerless to wholly conceal the anxiety of which they were the prey. For full five minutes no man spoke a word. Norris, who, to all appearances, was the least troubled member of the

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group, sat tapping gently on the mat with one long, thin finger, furtively observing those who sat about him, for their evident confusion appealed to his sense of humour, while he waited for the King to fire the first shot. So much appeared to him to be due to the courtesy which his adversary had the right to claim; but at length, tiring of inaction, Jack took the initiative.

‘Men said that Your Highness desired to have speech with me,’ he said, ‘wherefore came I hither. If, by any chance, this be not so, I pray thee suffer me to depart, for my belly is empty, since all the day long I have gone fasting.’

The King raised his head, looking Norris straight in the face for the first time since he had arrived at the place of meeting. For an instant some of the pent-up anger, some of the passion of hatred, some of the many emotions that he was striving manfully to hide, peeped out of the King’s eyes at the lonely White Man, his opponent in what seemed to be so desperate and so unequal a conflict. Through the mediumship of that glance Jack seemed to peer for an instant into the King’s heart. He saw the overwhelming wonder which he experienced at the bare idea of another daring to cross his will, as no man had dreamed of

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doing for more than thirty years; the wild longing to give the signal which should punish such hardihood with instant death; the fear of the consequences which alone restrained this impulse; and underlying all other thoughts and passions, Jack seemed to see a triumphant certainty that, in spite of the Englishman's air of courage, in spite of his seeming resolution, in spite of all that he had said and done that day to prove the contrary, he must at that moment be quaking in his inmost soul at the dire peril in which he stood, and must, in the end, yield to the circumstances which were so obviously too strong for him. It was this look, which told only too distinctly that the King was confident of ultimately achieving his end, that made Jack's mouth set hard with a resolution that had in it more of personal anger than any sentiment of which he had hitherto been conscious in his dealings with his adversary; and deep down in his heart he registered an oath that, God helping him, he would do nothing then or after that should seem, even for an instant, to justify the triumph in the King's eyes.

‘Have patience for a little space, *T'uan*,’ replied the King. ‘There is a small matter concerning which I would speak with thee. It has been said by certain foolish folk that

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thou dost desire to remove Ah Ku and his family from out of this land of Pěleşu. I place no faith in the said report, for of a certainty it is false.'

'No,' said Norris, calmly; 'it is true. If God be willing, to-morrow at dawn I shall remove these people from out of Pěleşu. They desire it; they have made their desire known unto me; and, moreover, they are British subjects, wherefore no man may restrain their coming in or their going forth.'

'How can they be British subjects?' asked the King. 'Do they not dwell in this land of Pěleşu? Am I not the ruler? Are not all men in my dominions subject to me?'

'Your Majesty,' said Jack, in partial acquiescence, 'all who are born in Pěleşu are thy subjects, and if such as they came to me weeping and wailing, I could in no way lend my aid; but these folk are natives of the colony, mere settlers in Pěleşu. They are subjects of Her Majesty the Queen, the Most Honourable, the Most High, and as such they may claim, and I must give them my protection.'

'They are fortunate folk!' exclaimed the King. 'Verily the protection of thee and of thy so numerous followers is as an impregnable fort drawn round about them.'

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Norris bit his lip hard to keep back the angry retort that was on the tip of his tongue. 'To-morrow at the dawn they go forth from Pěleşu,' was all he said.

'But they owe me money ; they are indebted to me !' cried the King.

'If it be so that the debt can be proved, for indeed this is the first time that I have heard tell of it, I will stand security for the silver, and it shall in due course be paid to thee. But was it not to pay money owing to Ah Ku that Your Majesty caused certain diamonds to be sent to his house, gems which, so men say, were cast forth into the gutter?'

Jack was young, and for the life of him he could not keep back the gibe. It was now the King's turn to wince. The lines about his mouth set harder than ever, and his breath came in short sobs and gasps. When next he spoke it was with a voice that trembled with anger.

'I care nought for the silver, as well the *Tüan* knoweth,' he said. 'But I beg thee to refrain from removing from Pěleşu those whom, as I tell thee, I will not lightly suffer to depart.'

Jack sighed ostentatiously. '*Ya, Allah !*' he said. 'Verily my fate is evil. When men be young, they repose in the wombs of their

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mothers; when they be grown-men they repose in the wombs of custom; when they be dead, in the womb of the Earth. Behold, it has ever been my wish to obey the customs of this land of Pělěsu. When among the kine, I have striven to low; when among the goats, I have joined in the bleating; when among the fowls, I have crowed with the cocks; but now at last I must depart from my custom, for in this matter I may not conform with thy will, but must do that which is bidden me by the Great Queen whose servant I am. I am sad at heart; verily my heart is sorrowful, for I can by no means do that which thou dost desire.'

The speech, with its tags of old wise-saws, was one well calculated to appeal to a Malay audience, as Norris knew; and the calmness, that lay at the back of the firm resolution which the words expressed, impressed the Chiefs, and made the King feel that he was losing rather than gaining ground.

'But, *Túan*,' he almost shrieked, for he had never before been thus opposed by living man, 'but, *Túan*, thou dost not understand! I tell thee that I will not suffer this thing to come to pass!'

'Full well I understand thy words, Majesty,' replied Norris. 'My fate is accursed in that I can by no means comply with them.'

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'But *I* am ruler in this land of Pëlësu!' cried the King.

'That is indeed so; but Ah Ku and his people are subjects of the Queen, the Most Honourable, the Most High, and all her folk are free to come and go whithersoever they may desire. I, too, am her servant, to come at her call, to go at her bidding, and it is laid upon me to do her commands, and to aid her people to maintain their rights.'

'Ah, truly,' said the King, suddenly changing his tone from angry protest to the dulcet note which heralds a sneering Malay remark of many meanings. 'I, what am I, and what is my power? I have neither men, nor weapons, nor power, nor wisdom, nor skill, nor state; whereas thou, *Thuan*, thou art indeed well furnished with all that thou dost need in order to carry out the wishes of thy Queen!'

'I pray thee, sneer not, O King,' said Norris, very quietly, though he did not at all like the tone which his adversary was assuming. 'I know well the meaning of such speech. I, and those who follow me are few and weak; we are a little thing to swallow, like the bait that killed the shark. We are, as it were, only the shadow; but the substance which hath cast us before it hath subdued many lands. To-night thou art all-powerful; thy men are numerous,

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mine are few; but what profits it to discuss such matters? Our talk is not of such things. I have said that I will remove Ah Ku from Pělěsu if he live till the dawn, and I also live, and this thing I will surely do.'

'But, *T'uan*, perchance the man will die, lacking the strength to make the journey.'

'Better so, if he die doing that which from his soul he desireth. Your Majesty's capital hath had no good effect upon the health of this man, else there had been no good to remove him.'

'Men say that he smote his head against the beam of his doorway,' said the King.

'Many say strange things in this land of Pělěsu, knowing in their hearts that they lie,' returned Norris, grimly.

'What then hath caused his illness?'

'He was stabbed, stabbed at the very door of his house, stabbed within a yard or two of the spot where at night-time the members of the bodyguard keep watch and ward over Your Majesty's own dwelling. Moreover, he saw and recognised those who compassed his death, for it is certain that he will sooner or later lose his life, by reason of the wounds inflicted.'

'Who was it that he saw?' asked the King, eagerly.

'When he reaches the colony it is possible that the Governor will think fit to answer that

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question,' said Norris, grimly. 'For the present I say nothing.'

'But how does this affect me?'

'Your Majesty can answer that question far better than I may do.'

'Then dost thou say that *I* slew him?'

'I do not say that it was Your Majesty's hand that slew him or struck the blow,' replied Norris, with meaning.

There was a long pause. Then the King spoke again.

'But, *Tuan*, wilt thou not hearken to reason?' He spoke almost entreatingly. 'I pray thee not to do this thing. If thou dost so desire, take the woman Chik into thy own keeping. I will not harm her. Let her live within thy house, but I cannot suffer her or her man to leave Pêlësu.'

'There is a saying of the men of ancient days: "Set not a snare and thereafter thrust thy head therein." My house is a house for men, and no woman could dwell therein without a scandal arising. Moreover, Chik will also go to the colony with Ah Ku.'

'Is that thy last word?' asked the King. He was growing weary of dashing against this stone wall of resolution, which all known means of persuasion seemed to be powerless to break through.

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'It is my last word ; and, moreover, I am hungry, wherefore I would ask leave to depart.'

'But understand that I cannot suffer this thing!' cried the King, as a parting shot.

'*Āpa bûlih bûat.* What can one do?' murmured Norris, as he arose and made his way through the crowd without attempting any more direct reply.

As he passed back to his house he called in at Che' Ah Ku's dwelling, and found his patient very feeble and sick, but as anxious as ever to depart from Pěleşu upon the following morning. Jack gave orders as to the food which was to be given to Ah Ku at stated intervals all through the night, and Chik herself promised to keep watch by his bed till dawn.

Then Norris went to his house, and at once fell to upon a large meal of curry and rice, to which he did the most ample justice. He was very hungry, having fasted many hours, and though people are apt to wonder how a man can have any stomach for food when he goes in danger of his life, experience seems to show that a prolonged mental strain often whets the appetite even more keenly than does mere bodily exertion.

The meal over, Norris rolled a cigarette thoughtfully, and then called all his people about him.

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'Things are in this wise,' he said. 'The King hath sworn that he will not suffer Ah Ku and Chik his wife to be removed, and I have said that I will aid them to depart. There will be trouble at dawn when we seek to escort these people to the boat, and it may well be that few of those who follow me will remain alive. Therefore think well. If there be among ye any who fear the risk, ye have my leave to depart hence to-night. But may the curse of God Almighty blight the soul and body, heart and brain and vitals of the man who elects to follow me to-morrow and fails me in the hour of need. Give me your answer that I may hear.'

'The *Tuan* speaks for us both,' cried Râja Haji Hamid. He had seated himself behind Norris, for he did not wish to be regarded by the other Malays as one who had any choice in the matter.

'*Tuan*,' said an old man, speaking for his fellows, whose eyes glistened, and whose teeth flashed white in the lamplight, as the excited faces thronged behind the spokesman, 'we all have eaten thy rice, and worn garments of thy giving in the days of thy ease. Now trouble hath come, we will follow thee, not only unto death, but, if God wills, unto the very Lake of Fire. I speak for all my fellows. Come

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—let us make ready our arms against the morrow.'

'It is well,' said Norris, and whistling the tune of 'There's another jolly row downstairs,' which seemed to him to be wonderfully appropriate to the circumstances, he turned into the bedroom.

Shortly afterwards two Chiefs were ushered in. They were friendly to Norris, and came from the King to try if persuasions could not, even now, cause the foolhardy, strong-willed white man to forego his purpose.

'What profits it to talk further?' said Norris, when he had heard all that they had to say, and had listened patiently to their gloomy forebodings of sudden and violent death. 'If we spoke together until the dawn, I could not recall my words, nor would I if I could.' So his visitors returned sorrowfully to their King.

'It is enough,' said the Ruler of Pëlësu to his assembled Chiefs. 'He is a Kafir, an Infidel, and all such know not the fear of death, for they believe in no life to come, nor dread the fires of the terrible place of which they are the everlasting fuel. For me, I go a-hunting, but I leave this matter in your hands, and ye shall not suffer Ah Ku and Chik to leave Pëlësu. Thy King will be

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absent when the deed is done, and so he will know nought of what may befall.'

The Chiefs lifted up their fingers in silent homage. With them to hear was to obey. No man thought of protesting, or blaming the monarch for his selfish policy, and half an hour later the King was being paddled up the river in his boat by a few of his youngest and least-tried warriors. The more experienced men were needed for the work which to-morrow's dawn would see.

It was ten o'clock at night before Jack Norris sat down at his desk to write the despatch which he believed was destined to be his last official paper. He knew that after his death the good people of Pěľsu would seek to justify the murder by the fabrication of some lying story, attributing the event to causes wholly disconnected with politics; wherefore he was the more anxious that a true record of all that had occurred should remain behind him to fall into the hands of those of his people who might hereafter come to gather up his bones. He sent one of his people for a bamboo, in the hollow of which he determined to hide his letters, and he bade a small boy, whose tender years would probably save his life, mark well the spot where he intended to secrete this

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improvised envelope in the thatch of the roof.

He wrote calmly and steadily, a cigarette between his lips, pausing every now and again to seek the word he wanted, or to listen to the 'run' of a sentence. His mind was working with more than its usual activity, and he flattered himself that his despatch would do him credit, though at a date when he would no longer be at hand to profit by it. The grim humour of the thought pleased him, and he smiled. All the time that he sat writing the absolute certainty of his conviction that he was only separated from an ugly death by a few short hours lay at the back of his mind, but it only served to throw his thoughts on other subjects more clearly into relief. The very near presence of Death has a curiously numbing effect upon one who looks him very steadily between the eyes, and fear, for the time, stands at gaze.

When the despatch had been drafted, revised, and finally signed, Norris began a letter to his mother. He told her the facts of the position in which he then found himself, of the certain death which awaited him at dawn, and wound up with a few simple sentences of affection and thankfulness for her sweet love to him. He added a word or two of

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sympathy for the grief which his death would bring, but he was conscious all the time that he reviewed his case dispassionately, as though, in some unexplained way, it were that of some third person, the pathos of whose end had no power to move him to tears or sentimentality. Then he wrote a short line to his little sister. But here things were different, for his words conjured up her piteous, weeping face, and the despair which the news would bring to her wide, soft eyes. He finished his letter with a sob, and from pure inability to go on with it. For the first time that night he felt heartily sorry for himself, and for the distant hearts that loved him.

Suddenly a voice spoke from the curtained doorway, and Jack hastily pulled himself together.

‘*Tuan*, a man hath come from the house of Ah Ku praying thee to go thither speedily.’

‘What is the trouble?’ asked Norris, all memory of sentimentality gone from him in a moment.

‘Thy servant knoweth nought of the matter,’ replied the man.

Norris snatched up a sword, and, crying to Râja Haji Hamid to follow him, ran down the street in the direction of Che’ Ah Ku’s house. Presently the night wind bore to him a shrill,

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despairing keening, which he knew meant death, and on entering Che' Ah Ku's house he found Chik prostrate across the corpse of her husband, wailing as only a native woman can when the horror of death and the loss of one who is very dear have freshly smitten her. Ah Ku had died while Chik sat tending him—had died of the shattered vessels in his chest which all Jack's care had been powerless to heal.

Chik screamed and fainted, recovering to fall once more upon the corpse, whispering little vain words of love to ears that could not hear, and showering caresses upon hands, feet and face that had ceased to feel for ever. Jack knew that until the elaborate burial rites of the Chinese had been complied with Chik would refuse to be separated from her dead, and that all thoughts of removing her to the colony must be abandoned for the time. He assured himself that death had resulted thus opportunely without the aid of poison or other foul play. Then he turned away with his spirit suddenly relaxed from the tension to which it had been strung all through the night, and with a curious appreciation of the bathos with which his adventure had ended causing something akin to disappointment in his heart. He knew now that his difficulties were practically at an end. The mouth of the river was opening to traffic;

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he would no longer be so completely cut off from all communication with his Government as he had been while the monsoon held. The good ship *Bang Ah Hong* would convey to the colony a despatch from him which would speedily bring a gun-boat to his aid, and in the meantime there would be no question of removing or protecting Chik. Even the King would not dare to molest her while she was busy performing the last rites for her dead husband. Norris saw clearly that the British Government would now have no alternative but to annex or 'protect' Pěleşu before the year was out. He felt that he had played his part unflinchingly, and in his heart there was pride of what he had done in the hour of danger, and something resembling surprise at his own steadfastness. But he realised also that the whole affair had terminated in too unsensational a manner for much credit to be reaped by him when such of the facts became known as would eventually be learned by the Government from his own modest report of his proceedings.

Then on a sudden it was borne in upon him, with something like a shock, that his life had been saved in the very nick of time, and the fear of death, and of the extreme peril in which he had stood—fears to which he had been a stranger all the night—fell upon him unex-

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pectedly, and shook him with a tremor which made him ashamed. Presently he was startled from his reverie by Râja Haji Hamid, whose very presence he had forgotten, swearing softly under his breath.

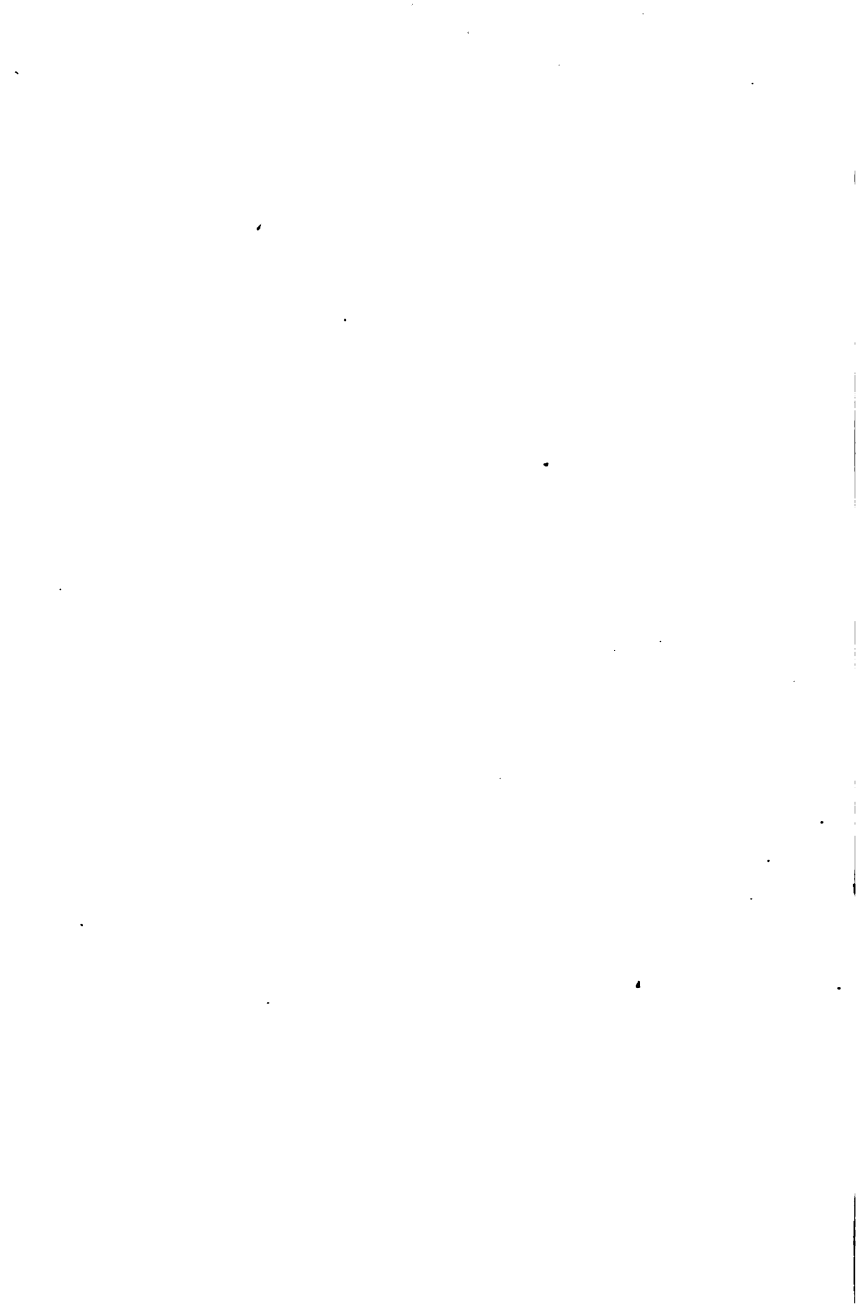
‘What ails thee?’ asked Jack.

‘*Ya Allah!*’ sighed Râja Haji. ‘*Ya Allah, Tûan!* I have dreamed the long night through that now indeed I should once more see shrewd blows given, and the red blood running free! Verily, my fate is an evil fate! And when I looked upon the so beast-like body of this - Chinaman, whose inappropriate death hath robbed us of our play and marred the playing, I could in my wrath have spurned it with my foot!’

Jack Norris laughed softly, but his ugly face wore a look of unwonted tenderness, and his thoughts were with his little sister far away in sheltered England, into whose eyes, as he saw them in imagination, the light of youth and happiness had once more returned.

And thus the British Government took charge of the destinies of the land of Pělësu.

THE DEATH-MARCH OF
KÛLOP SÛMBING



THE DEATH-MARCH OF KÛLOP SÛMBING

‘ From age to age a glowing page
 Their names must win in story,
The men who wrought and dared and fought
 To make a nation’s glory.
Half men, half gods, they feared no odds,
 And made our England’s name
Echo and roll from pole to pole,
 A widening din of fame !

‘ But had their ways, for all their days,
 Been set in lands apart,
Straitened and pent, with ne’er a vent
 For mighty brain and heart,
These very men, perchance, might then
 Have joined the nameless throng,
Who wage red war against the Law,
 But win no name in song.’

The Song of the Lost Heroes.

HE was an ill fellow to look at—so men who knew him tell me—large of limb and very powerfully built. His face was broad and ugly, and a peculiarly sinister expression was imparted to it by a hare-lip, which left his gums exposed. It was to this latter embellishment that he owed at once his vicious temper and the name by which he was known.

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It is not difficult to understand why his disposition should not have been of the sweetest, for women did not love to look upon the gash in his lip, and his nickname of *Sûmbing*—which means ‘The Chipped One’—reminded him of his calamity whenever he heard it.

He was a native of Pêrak, and he made his way into Pahang through the untrodden Sâkai country. That is practically all that is known concerning his origin. The name of the district in which Kûlop Sûmbing had his home represented nothing to the natives of the Jêlai Valley, and now no man knows from what part of Pêrak this adventurer came. The manner of his coming, however, excited the admiration, and impressed itself upon the imaginations, of the people of Pahang—who love pluck almost as much as they hate toil—so the tale of his doings is still told, though these things happened nearly a score of years ago.

Kûlop Sûmbing probably held a sufficiently cynical opinion as to the nature of his countrywomen, who are among the most venal of their sex. He knew that no girl could love him for the sake of his marred, unsightly face, but that many would bestow their favours upon him if his money-bags were well lined.

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Therefore he determined to grow rich with as little delay as possible, and to this end he looked about for someone whom he might plunder. For this purpose Pêrak was played out. The law of the white men could not be bribed by a successful robber, so he turned his eyes across the border to Pahang, which bore an evil reputation, as a land in which ill things were done with impunity, while the doer thrived exceedingly.

He had a love of adventure, was absolutely fearless, and was, moreover, a good man with his hands. In common with most Malays, the Central Gaol, and the rigid discipline of prison life, had few attractions for him; and as he did not share with the majority of his race their instinctive dread of travelling alone in the jungle, he decided on making a lone-hand raid into the Sâkai country, which lies between Pêrak and Pahang. Here he would be safe from the grip of the white man's hand, well removed from the sight of the Government's 'eyes,' as the Malays name our somnolent policemen, and much wealth would come to the ready hand that knew full well how to seize it.

- He, of course, felt absolutely no twinges of conscience, for you must not look for principle in the men of the race to which Kûlop Sûmbing belonged. A Malay is honest and

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law-abiding just so long as it suits his convenience to be so, and not more than sixty seconds longer. Virtue in the abstract does not fire him with any particular enthusiasm, but a love of right-doing may occasionally be galvanised into a sort of paralytic life in his breast, if a haunting fear of the consequences of crime are kept very clearly before his eyes. So Kûlop kicked the dust of law-restrained Pêrak from his bare brown soles, and set out for the Sâkai country, and the remote interior of Pahang, 'where the law of God was not and no law of man held true.'

He carried with him all the rice that he could bear upon his shoulders, two dollars in silver, a little tobacco, a handsome *keris*, and a long spear with a broad and shining blade. His supplies were to last him till the first Sâkai camps were reached, and after that his food, he told himself, would 'rest at the tip of his dagger.' He did not propose to really begin his operations until the mountains, which fence the Pêrak boundary, had been crossed, so was content to allow the first Sâkai villages to pass unpillaged. He impressed some of the naked, frightened aborigines as bearers, levied such supplies of food as he needed, and the Sâkai, who were glad to be rid of him so cheaply, handed him on from village to

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village with the greatest alacrity. The base of the jungle-covered mountains of the interior was reached at the end of a fortnight, and Kûlop and his Sâkai began to drag themselves up the steep ascent by means of roots, trailing creepers, and slender saplings.

Upon a certain day they reached the summit of a nameless mountain, and threw themselves down panting for breath upon the round bare drumming-ground of an argus pheasant. On the crest of almost every hill and hog's-back in the interior of the Péninsula these drumming-grounds are found, bare and smooth as a threshing-floor, save for the thin litter of dead twigs with which they are strewn by the birds. Sometimes, if you keep very still, you may hear the cocks strutting and dancing, and thumping the hard earth, but no man amongst us has ever seen the pheasants going through their performance. At night-time their full-throated yell rings across the valleys, waking a thousand echoes, and the cry is taken up and thrown backwards and forwards by a host of pheasants, each answering from his own hill. Judging by the frequency of their cry, they must be among the most common of all jungle birds, yet so deftly do they hide themselves that they are but rarely seen, and the beauties of their plumage

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—at once more delicate and more brilliant than that of the peacock—and the wonders of the countless violet eyes with which their feathers are set, are only known to us because these birds are so frequently trapped by the Malays.

Where Kûlop and his Sâkai lay the trees were thinned out. The last two hundred feet of the ascent had been a severe climb, and the ridge, which formed the summit, stood clear of the tree-tops which grew half-way up the slope. As he lay panting, Kûlop Sûmbing gazed down for the first time upon the eastern slope of the Peninsula, the theatre in which ere long he proposed to play a very daring part. At his feet were tree-tops of every shade of green, from the tender, brilliant colour which we associate with young corn, to the deep, dull hue which is almost black. They fell away beneath him in a broad slope of a living vegetation, the contour of each individual tree, and the grey, white, or black lines, which marked their trunks or branches, growing less and less distinct, until the - jungle covering the plain was a blurred wash of colour that had more of blue than green in it. Here and there, very far away, the sunlight fell in a dazzling flash upon something which glistened like the mirror of a heliograph,

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and this, Kûlop knew, was the broad reaches of a river. The jungle hid all traces of human habitation, and no sign of life or movement was visible, save only a solitary kite 'sailing with supreme dominion through the azure depth of air,' and the slight uneasy swaying of some of the taller trees, as a faint breeze swept gently over the forest. Here, in the mountains, the air was damp and chilly, and a cold wind was blowing, while the sun appeared to have lost half its power. In the plain below, however, the land lay steaming and sweltering beneath the fierce perpendicular rays, while the heat-haze danced restlessly above the forest.

During the next day or two Kûlop Sûmbing and his Pêrak Sâkai made their way down the eastern slope of the mountains, and through the silent forests, which are given over to game, and to the equally wild jungle-folk, who fly at the approach of any human beings, precisely as do the beasts which share with them their home.

Kûlop and his people passed several deserted camps belonging to these wild Sâkai, but the instinct of the savages tells them unerringly that strangers are at hand, and never once were any of these folk caught sight of by the travellers.

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These people live a nomadic life, roaming hither and thither through the forest in quest of fresh feeding-grounds when the old ones are temporarily exhausted. They have no knowledge of planting, and they live chiefly upon yams and roots, sour jungle fruits, and the fish which they catch in cunningly-devised basket-work traps. These things are known to such of us as have journeyed through their country, for their tracks tell their story up to this point. We know, too, that they camp in rude shelters of leaves propped crazily on untrimmed uprights, and that they obtain wood knives from the tamer tribesmen in exchange for the long reeds of which the inner casing of the Sâkai blowpipes is made. But even when they barter thus, they never willingly meet other human beings, their wares being deposited in certain well-known places in the jungle, where they are replaced by other articles which the wild folk remove when no man is watching. A few survivors of the captives, made by the tamer Sâkai on various slave-raiding expeditions, may be found in some of the Malay villages in Pahang, but of the life of these people in their wild forest state no man knows anything.

Kûlop Sûmbing, of course, took very little interest in them, for they possess no property,

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and nothing was therefore to be gained by harrying them. So he pushed on through the wild Sâkai country, until the upper waters of the Bětok, the principal tributary of the Jělai, were reached.

Bamboos were felled, a raft was constructed, and then Kûlop Sûmbing dismissed his Sâkai, and began his descent of the unknown river, which led he knew not where, alone, save for his weapons, but full of confidence in his ability to pillage this undiscovered country single-handed.

When you come to think of it, there was something bordering upon the heroic in the action of this unscrupulous man with the marred face, who glided gently down the river on this wild, lone-hand raid. The land was strange to him ; the river, for all he knew, might be beset with impassable rapids and unknown dangers of every kind ; moreover, his object was robbery on a large scale, and a plunderer is not likely to meet with much love from those he despoils. He was going to certain enmity, one might say to almost certain death, yet he poled his raft down the stream with deft punts, and gazed calmly ahead of him with a complete absence of fear.

Under happier circumstances Kûlop of the Hare-lip might surely have won rank among

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those brave men whose names still ring through the centuries as heroes, whose courage has won for them a lasting niche in human history.

It was at noon upon the second day, that Kûlop sighted a large camp of the tamer Sâkai in a clearing on the right bank of the Bětok. The sight of a Malay, coming from such an unusual quarter, filled the jungle people with superstitious dread, and in a few minutes every man, woman and child had fled screaming to the forest.

Kûlop went through the ten or fifteen squalid huts which stood in the clearing, and an occasional grunt attested that he was well satisfied with the stores of valuable gum lying stowed away in the sheds. He calculated that there could not be less than seven *pîkul*, and that, even when the poor price to be obtained from a purchaser in a distant, up-country village was taken into consideration, would mean \$600 in cash—a small fortune for any Malay. But here a difficulty presented itself. How was this precious gum to be carried down stream into Pahang? His raft would hold about one *pîkul*, and he knew that the Sâkai would not interfere with him if he chose to remove that amount and to leave the rest. But the sight of the remaining six *pîkul* was too much for him. He could not find it in his heart to

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abandon it, and he began to feel angry with the Sâkai, who, he almost persuaded himself, were defrauding him of his just rights.

He rolled his quid of betel-nut and sat down to await the return of the Sâkai, and as he thought of the injury they were like to do him if they refused to aid in the removal of the rest of the gum, his heart waxed very hot within him.

Presently, two frightened brown faces, scarred with blue tattoo-marks on cheek and forehead, and surmounted by frowzy mops of sun-bleached hair, rose stealthily above the level of the flooring near the door, and peeped at him with shy, terrified eyes.

Kûlop turned his face towards them, and the bobbing heads disappeared with surprising alacrity.

‘Come hither!’ cried Kûlop.

The heads reappeared once more, and in a few brief words Kûlop bade the men go call their fellows.

The Sâkai sidled off into the jungle, and presently a crowd of squalid aborigines came from out the shelter of the trees and underwood and stood looking at Kûlop curiously, with light feet gingerly treading the ground, every muscle braced for a swift dart into cover at the first alarm of danger.

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'Who among ye is the Chief?' asked Kûlop.

'Thy servant is the Chief,' replied an aged Sâkai.

He stood forward as he spoke, trembling a little as he glanced timidly at the Malay, who sat cross-legged in the doorway of the hut. His straggling mop of hair was almost white, and his skin was dry and creased and wrinkled. He was naked, as were all his people, save for a slender loin-clout of bark-cloth, and his thin flanks and buttocks were white with the warm wood ashes in which he had been lying when Kûlop's arrival interrupted his mid-day snooze.

'Bid these, thy children, build me eight bamboo rafts, strong and firm, at the foot of yonder rapid,' said Kûlop. 'And mark ye, be not slow, for I love not indolence.'

'It can be done,' said the Sâkai headman, submissively.

'That is well,' returned Kûlop. 'See thou to it with speed, for I am a man prone to wrath.'

The Sâkai fell to work, and by nightfall the new rafts were completed, and while the jungle folk toiled, Kûlop of the Hare-lip, who had declared that he loved not indolence, lay upon his back on the floor of the Chief's hut and roared a love-song in a harsh, discordant voice, to the lady whose heart the wealth he sought

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so eagerly, and now began to see within his grasp, would enable him to subdue.

Kûlop slept that night in the Sâkai hut among the restless jungle-folk. The air was chilly up here in the foothills, and the fire, which the Sâkai never willingly let die, smoked and smouldered in the middle of the floor. Half-a-dozen long logs, all pointing to a common centre like the spokes of a broken wheel, met at the point where the fire burned red in the darkness, and between these boughs, in the warm grey ashes, lay men, women, and children, sprawling in every conceivable attitude into which their naked brown limbs could twist themselves. Ever and anon they would rise and tend the fire. Then they would sit round the newly-kindled blaze and talk in the jerky monosyllabic jargon of the aborigines. The pungent smoke of the wood enshrouded them as with a garment, and their eyes waxed red and watery, but they heeded it not, for as their old saw has it, 'Fire-smoke is the blanket of the Sâkai.'

And Kûlop of the Hare-lip slept the sleep of the just.

The dawn broke greyly, for a mist hung low over the forest, white as driven snow, and cold and clammy as the forehead of a corpse. The naked Sâkai peeped shiveringly from the

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doorways of their huts, and then went shuddering back to the grateful warmth of the fire, and the frowzy atmosphere within.

Kûlop alone made his way down to the river bank, and there performed his morning ablutions with scrupulous care—for whatever laws of God and man a Malay may disregard, he never forgets the virtue of personal cleanliness, which, in an Oriental, is even more immediately important to his neighbours than all the godliness in the world. A Malay would as soon think of foregoing his morning tub, as he would of fasting when food was to be had in plenty, and the days of Ramathân had sped.

When his ablutions were completed, Kûlop climbed the steep bank once more, and, standing outside the Chief's hut, called the Sâkai from their lairs, bidding them hearken to his words. They stood or squatted before him in the white mist, through which the sun, just peeping above the jungle, was beginning to send long slanting rays of dazzling white light.

They were cold and miserable—this little crowd of naked men—and they shivered and scratched their bodies restlessly. The trilling of the thrushes and the chorus raised by other birds came to their ears through the still air, mingled with the whooping and barking of the anthropoid apes ; but the morning song

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has small power to cheer those who, like the Sâkai, are very sensitive to cold, and it is during the chilly waking hour that men's courage and vitality are usually at the lowest ebb.

'Listen to me, ye Sâkai!' began Kûlop, in a loud and angry voice, and at the word those of his hearers who stood erect, squatted humbly with their fellows, and the shivering of cold was increased by the trembling of fear. If there is one thing the jungle-folk dislike more than another, it is to be called 'Sâkai' to their faces, and the term is never used to them by a Malay unless the speaker wishes to bully them. The word really means a slave, but by the aborigines it is regarded as the most offensive epithet in the Malay vocabulary. In their own tongue they speak of themselves as *sên-oi*, which means a 'man,' as opposed to *gob*, a foreigner—for even the Sakai has some vestiges of pride, if you know where to look for it, and to his mind the people of his race are alone entitled to be called 'men.' When speaking Malay they allude to themselves as *Ôrang Bûkit*—men of the hills; *Ôrang Ôtan*—jungle-folk, or *Ôrang Dâlam*—the folk who dwell within the forests. They love to be spoken of as *räayat*, peasants, or as *räayat râja*, subjects of the King; and the Malays, who delight in nicely-graded distinctions of speech in address-

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ing men of various ranks and classes, habitually use these terms when conversing with the Sâkai, in order that the hearts of the jungle-folk may be warmed within them. When, therefore, the objectionable name 'Sâkai' is used to the forest-dwellers, the latter know that mischief and trouble are afoot, and since they are as timid as other wild creatures, a deadly fear falls upon them at the word.

'Listen, ye accursed Sâkai!' cried Kûlop of the Hare-lip, waving his spear above his head. 'Mark well my words, for I hear the warm earth calling to the coffin planks in which your carcasses shall presently lie, if ye fail to do my behests. Go, gather up the gum that is stored within your dwellings and bring it hither speedily, lest a worse thing befall you!'

The Sâkai rose slowly and walked each man to his hut with lagging steps. In a few minutes the great round balls of gum, with a little hole punched in each, through which a rattan line was passed, lay heaped upon the ground at Kûlop's feet. But the Sâkai had brought something as well as the gum, for each man held a long and slender spear fashioned of bamboo. The weapon sounds harmless enough, but these wooden blades are strong and stubborn, and the edges and points are sharper than steel. Kûlop of the Hare-lip saw that the

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time had come for prompt action to supplement rough words.

'Cast down your spears to the earth, ye swine of the forest!' he yelled.

Almost all the Sâkai did as Kûlop bade them, for the Malay is here the dominant race, and years of oppression and wrong have made the jungle-folk very docile in the presence of the more civilised brown man. The Sâkai Chief, however, clutched his weapon firmly, and his frightened old eyes ran around the group of his kinsmen, vainly inciting them to follow his example. The next moment his gaze was recalled to Kûlop of the Hare-lip by a sharp pain in his right shoulder, as the spear of the Malay transfixed it. His own weapon dropped from his powerless arm, and the little crowd of Sâkai broke and fled. But a shrill cry from Kûlop, as he ran around them, herding them as a collie herds sheep, brought them soon to a stand-still.

No thought of further resistance remained in their minds, and the gum was quickly loaded on the rafts, and the plundered Sâkai, still wild with fear, began to pole them down the river, while Kûlop sat at ease on the last raft, which two of the shuddering jungle-folk punted carefully.

The wounded Chief, left behind in his hut,

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sent two youths through the forest to bid their fellow-tribesmen make ready the poison for their blowpipe darts, since he knew that no one would now attempt to kill Kûlop of the Hare-lip at close quarters. But the poison which the Sâkai distil from the resin of the *îpoh* tree requires some time to prepare, and if it is to be used with effect upon a human being, a specially strong solution is necessary. Above all, if it is to do its work properly, it must be newly made. Thus it was that Kûlop of the Hare-lip had time to load his rafts with gum taken from two other Sâkai camps, and to pass very nearly out of the Sâkai country before the people whom he had robbed were in a position to take the offensive.

The Bětok river falls into the Upper Jělai, a stream which is also given over entirely to the jungle-people, and it is not until the latter river meets the Tělom and the Sěrau, at the point where the Lower Jělai is formed, that the banks begin to be studded with scattered Malay villages.

Kûlop of the Hare-lip knew nothing of the geography of the land through which he was travelling, but he was aware that running water presupposed the existence of habitations of men of his own race if followed down sufficiently far. Therefore he pressed forward eagerly,

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bullying and goading his frightened Sâkai into something resembling energy. He had now more than a thousand dollars' worth of gum on his rafts, and he was getting anxious as to its safety. To the danger in which he himself went, he was perfectly callous and indifferent.

It was at Kuâla Mërăbau, a spot where a tiny stream falls into the Upper Jĕlai upon its right bank, that a small party of Sâkai lay in hiding, peering through the greenery at the gliding waters down which Kûlop and his plunder must presently come. Each man carried at his side a quiver, fashioned of a single length of bamboo covered with the dots, crosses, zigzags and triangles which the Sâkai delight to trace upon all their vessels. Each quiver was filled with slender darts about the thickness of a steel knitting-needle, with an elliptical piece of light wood at one end to steady it in its flight, and a very sharp tip, coated with the black venom of the *ipoh* sap. In their hands each one of them held a reed blowpipe some twelve feet in length. These weapons were rudely but curiously carved.

Presently the foremost of the Sâkai stood erect, his elbows level with his ears, his feet heel to heel, his body leaning slightly forward from the hips. His hands were locked to-

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gether at the mouthpiece of his blowpipe, the long reed being held firmly by his thumbs and forefingers, which were coiled above it, while the weight rested upon the lower interlaced fingers of both hands. His mouth was puckered and drawn in, like that of a man who seeks to spit out a shred of tobacco which the loose end of a cigarette has left between his lips, and it nestled closely to the wooden mouthpiece. His keen, wild eyes glanced along the length of the blowpipe shrewdly and unflinchingly, little hard puckers forming at their corners. *Pit!* said the blowpipe. The little wad of dry pith, which had been used to exclude the air around the dart-head, fell into the water a dozen feet away, and the dart itself flew forward with incredible speed, straight to the mark at which it was aimed.

A slight shock on his right side just above the hip apprised Kûlop that something had struck him, and looking down he saw the dart still shuddering in his side. But, as luck would have it, Kûlop carried under his coat a gaudy bag stuffed with the ingredients of the betel quid, and the dart had struck this and embedded itself therein. The merest fraction of a second was all that Kûlop needed to see this, and to take in the whole of the situation,

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and with him action and perception kept pace with one another. Before the dart had ceased to quiver, before the Sâkai on the bank had had time to send another in its wake, before the men who poled his raft had fully grasped what was going forward, Kûlop had seized the nearest of his Sâkai by his frowzy halo of elf-locks, and had drawn him screaming across his knee. The terrified creature writhed and flung his body about wildly, and his friends upon the bank feared to blow their darts lest they should inadvertently wound their kinsman while striving to kill the Malay.

‘Have a care, ye swine of the forest!’ cried Kûlop, while he cuffed the screaming Sâkai unsparingly in order to keep his limbs in constant motion. ‘Have a care, ye sons of fallen women! If ye spew forth one more of your darts, this man, your kinsman, dies by my *kris*!’

The Sâkai on the banks had no reason to doubt the sincerity of Kûlop’s words, and since these poor creatures love their relatives, both near and distant, far more than is possible in more civilised communities, they drew off, and Kûlop of the Hare-lip went upon his way rejoicing. But he kept his Sâkai across his knee none the less, and occasionally administered a sounding cuff to him *pour encourager les autres*.

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Thus he won his way out of the Sâkai country, and that night he laid him down to sleep in a Malay village in the full enjoyment of excellent health, the knowledge that he was at last a rich man, and a delightful consciousness of having successfully performed deeds well worth the doing.

For a month or two he dwelt in the Jêlai, at Bûkit Bětong, the village of To' Râja, the great up-country Chief, who then ruled that district. He sold his gum to this man, and since he was ready to let it go for something less than the market price, the sorrows of the Sâkai were the cause of much amusement to those from whom they sought redress, and whose duty it should have been to afford them protection.

But Kûlop of the Hare-lip had left his heart behind him in Pêrak, for the natives of that State can never long be happy when beyond the limits of their own country, and must always make their way back sooner or later to drink of the waters of their silver river. Perhaps, too, Kûlop had some one particular lady in his mind when he set out upon his quest for wealth, for if you watch, you will see that the best work and the most blackguardly deeds of a man are alike usually due to the woman who sits at the back of his heart, and is the

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driving power which impels him to good or to evil.

One day Kûlop of the Hare-lip presented himself before To' Râja, as the latter lay smoking his opium-pipe upon the soft mats in his house, and informed him that as he was about to leave Pahang he had brought a present—'trifling and unworthy of his acceptance'—which he craved the Chief to honour him by receiving.

'When dost thou go down stream?' asked To' Râja, for the Jĕlai is in the far interior of Pahang, and if a man would leave the country by any of the ordinary routes, he must pass down that river at anyrate as far as Kuâla Lĭpis.

'Thy servant goes *up* stream,' said Kûlop of the Hare-lip.

To' Raja started.

'What?' said he, in a voice full of astonishment.

'Thy servant returns the way he came,' said Kûlop, calmly.

To' Râja burst out into a torrent of excited expostulation. It was death, certain death, he said, for Kûlop once more to attempt to traverse the Sâkai country. The other ways were open, and no man would dream of staying him if he sought to return to his own country by land or

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sea. It was folly, it was madness, it was impossible. But to all these words, Kûlop of the Hare-lip turned a deaf ear. He knew Malay Chieftains and all their ways and works sufficiently well, and he had paid too heavy a toll to To' Râja already to have any desire to further diminish the amount of his honest earnings. If he wended his way homeward through inhabited country, he knew that he would have to comply with the exactions of every Chief through whose district he might pass, and this was a prospect that had few attractions for him. The Sâkai, on the other hand, he despised utterly, and as he was physically incapable of feeling fear at this stage of the proceedings, he laughed at To' Râja's estimate of the risk he would run. Nay, he saw in the Chief's words a cunning attempt to induce him to penetrate more deeply into a land in which he might be plundered with the greater ease. Accordingly, he declined to be persuaded by To' Râja, and a day or two later he began his return journey through the forests.

He knew that it would be useless to attempt to induce any one to accompany him, so he went—as he had come—alone. The dollars for which he had exchanged his plunder were hard and heavy upon his back, and he was further loaded with rice and dried fish, but his weapons

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were as bright as ever, and to him they still seemed to be all the companions that a man need desire. He travelled on foot, for he could not pole a raft single-handed against the current, and he had to trust to such paths as he could find, guiding himself for the most part by the direction of the river. He passed many Sâkai camps, which were all abandoned at his approach, and he halted in several of them to replenish his scanty stock of provisions, but he slept in the jungle.

It was in the evening of the second or third day that Kûlop became aware of an unpleasant sensation. The moon was at the full, and he could see for many yards around him in the forest, and though no one was visible, he became painfully conscious that somebody was watching him. Occasionally he thought that he caught the glint of eyes in the underwood, and every now and again a dry twig snapped crisply, now to the right, now to the left, now in front of him, now behind him. He started - to his feet and sounded the *sôrak*—the war-yell—that pealed in widening echoes through the forest. A rustle in half-a-dozen directions at once showed him that the watchers had been numerous, and that they were now taking refuge in flight.

Kûlop of the Hare-lip sat down again beside

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his fire, and a new and strange sensation began to grip his heart queerly. It was accompanied by an uneasy feeling in the small of his back, as though he momentarily expected to receive a spear-thrust there, and a clammy dampness rose upon his forehead, while of a sudden the skin behind his ears seemed strangely cold. Perhaps even Kûlop of the Hare-lip needed no man to tell him that this was fear.

He replenished his fire and sat near it, trying to still the chattering of his teeth. If he could find himself face to face with an enemy fear would leave him, he knew; but this eerie, uncanny feeling of being watched and hounded by foes whom he could not see struck him with palsy. As he sat he glanced uneasily over his shoulder from time to time, and at last he drew back against the trunk of a large tree, so that none might strike him from behind. As he sat thus, leaning slightly backwards, he chanced to glance up, and in a tree-top, some fifty yards away, he saw the crouching form of a Sâkai outlined blackly against the moonlit sky.

He leaped to his feet once more, and again the *sôrak* rang out, as he strove to tear his way through the underwood to the foot of the tree in which he had seen his enemy. But the jungle was thick, he lost his bearings quickly,

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and, weary with his exertions, torn with brambles, and sweating profusely, he was glad to make his way back to the fire again.

All through that terrible night Kûlop of the Hare-lip strove to drive away sleep from his heavy eyes. The hours seemed incredibly long, and he feared that the dawn would never come. One minute he would tell himself that he was wide awake, and a second later a rustle in the underwood startled him into a knowledge that he had slept. Horror and fear had their will of him, and those who know them are aware that there are no more skilled tormentors than they. A hundred times he leaped to his feet and sent the *sôrak* ringing through the jungle, and each time those who watched him fled in panic. While he remained awake and on guard, the Sâkai feared him too much to attack him. His previous escape from the dart which they had seen pierce his side had originated in their minds the idea that he was invulnerable, so they tried no longer to slay him from a distance. This he quickly perceived, but fear clutched him once more when he speculated as to what would happen when he was at last forced to give way to the weight of weariness that even was now oppressing him so sorely.

Presently a change began to creep over the

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forest in which he sat. A little stir in the trees around told him that the bird-folk were awakening. Objects, which had hitherto been dark and shapeless masses in the shadows cast into prominence by the white moonlight, gradually assumed more definite shape. Later the colours of the trunks and leaves and creepers, still dark and dulled, but none the less colour, began to be perceptible, and Kûlop of the Hare-lip rejoiced exceedingly in that the dawn had come and the horrors of the night were passing away.

All that day, Kûlop, albeit weary almost to death, trudged onward through the forest; but the news had spread among the Sâkai that their enemy was once more among them, and the number of the jungle-folk, who dogged his footsteps, steadily increased. Kûlop could hear their shrill whoops, as they called to one another through the forest, giving warning of his approach, or signalling the path which he was taking. Once or twice he fancied that he caught a glimpse of a lithe brown form, of two glinting eyes, or of a straggling mop of frowzy hair, and then he would charge, shouting angrily. But the figure—if indeed it had any existence save in his overwrought imagination—always vanished as suddenly and as noiselessly as a shadow, long before he could come

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within striking distance. Kûlop of the Hare-lip found this far more terrible and frightening than the most desperate hand-to-hand fight could have been, for the invisibility and the intangible nature of his enemy added the horrors of a fever-dream to the very real danger in which he now knew himself to stand.

The night that followed that day was one of acute agony to the weary man, who dared not sleep, and about midnight he again marched forward through the forest, hoping thereby to elude his pursuers.

For an hour he believed himself to have been successful. Then the shrill yells broke out again, and at the sound Kûlop's heart sank within him. Still he stumbled on, too dead tired to charge at his phantom enemy, too hoarse at last even to raise his voice in the *sôrak*, but doggedly determined not to give in. But as he waxed faint the number and the boldness of his pursuers increased proportionately, till their yells sounded on every side, and Kûlop seemed like a lost soul, wending his way to the Bottomless Pit, with an escort of rejoicing devils shouting a noisy chorus around him.

Another awful day followed, and when once more the night shut down, Kûlop of the Hare-

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lip sank exhausted upon the ground. His battle was over. He could bear up no longer against the weight of his weariness and the aching longing for sleep. Almost as his head touched the warm, dark litter of dead leaves with which the earth of the jungle is strewn, his heavy eyelids closed, and his breath came soft and regular. This was his surrender, for at last he knew himself to be beaten. He was half-way up the mountains now, and was almost within reach of safety, but—

‘Ah, the little more—and how much it is,
And the little less—and what worlds away!’

Kûlop of the Hare-lip—Kûlop, the resolute, the fearless—Kûlop the strong, the enduring, was at the end of his tether. He had been beaten—not by the Sâkai, but by Nature, which no man may long defy—and in obedience to her he surrendered his will and slept.

Presently the underwood was parted by human hands in half-a-dozen different places, and the Sâkai crept stealthily out of the jungle into the little patch of open in which their enemy lay at rest. He moved uneasily in his sleep—not because any noise on their part had disturbed him, for they came as silently as a shadow cast over a broad forest by a patch of

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scudding cloud—and at the sight the Sâkai halted with lifted feet ready to plunge back into cover should their enemy awake. But the exhausted man was sleeping heavily, wrapped in the slumber from which he was never again to be aroused. The silent jungle-people, armed with heavy clubs and bamboo spears, stole to within a foot or two of the unconscious Malay. Then nearly a score of them lifted their weapons, poised them on high, and brought them down simultaneously on the body of their foe. Kûlop's limbs stretched themselves slowly and stiffly, his jaw fell, and blood flowed in twenty places. No cry escaped him, and the trembling Sâkai looked down upon the dead face of their enemy, and knew that he had paid his debt to them in full.

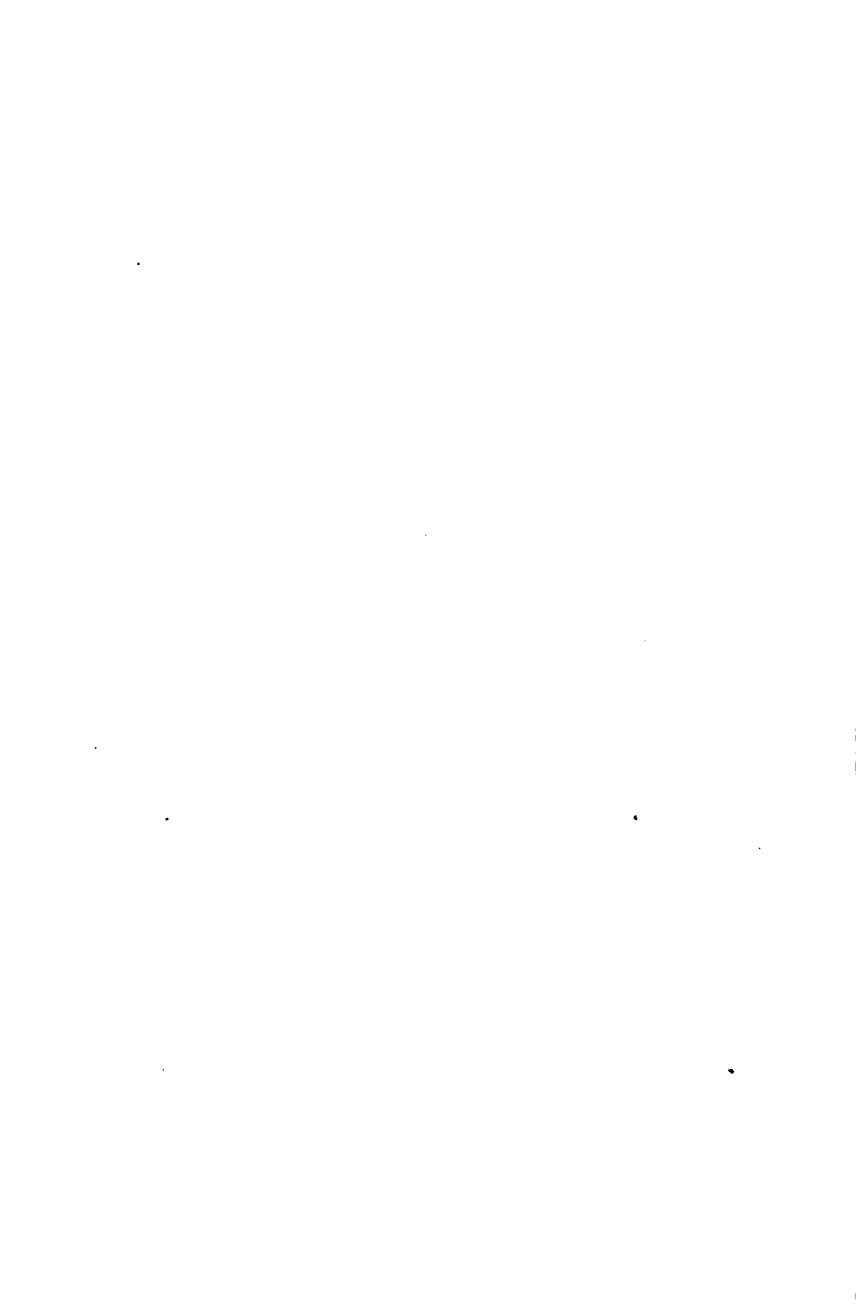
They carried off none of his gear, for they feared to be haunted by his ghost, and Kûlop had now nothing edible about him, such as the jungle-folk find it hard to leave untouched. Money had no meaning to the Sâkai, so the silver dollars, which ran in a glistening stream from a rent made in the linen waist-pouch by a chance spear-thrust, were left glinting in the moonlight by the side of that still, grey face, with the ghastly, pallid lip split upwards to the nostrils. Thus the Sâkai took their leave of Kûlop of the Hare-lip as he lay stretched

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beside the riches which he had bought at so dear a price.

If you want some ready money and a good *keris* and spear, both of which have done execution in their day, they are all to be had for the gathering in a spot in the forest not very far from the boundary between Pahang and Pêrak, but you must find the place for yourself, since the Sâkai to a man will certainly deny all knowledge of it. Therefore it is probable that Kûlop of the Hare-lip will rise up on the Judgment Day with his ill-gotten property intact.

IN THE CENTRAL GAOL



IN THE CENTRAL GAOL

‘**W**HEREFORE, I sentence thee to be pent within the gaol for a space of five years, with labour of a heavy sort,’ concluded the passionless tones issuing from the lips of the white man on the dais behind the big books. The flapping punkah-fringe caught the calm words and heaved them into the body of the court house, over the wooden dock, among the clusters of disreputables of many races huddled together on the greasy benches near the door. The prisoner upon whom sentence had just been passed, gave a guttural grunt as the meaning of the words forced itself upon his brain. Then he looked up at the judge.

‘Whatever the *Tuan* may order,’ he ejaculated, with a half-shrug of his shoulders, and the facile philosophy and ready submission so generally displayed by Orientals when Fate is hitting his hardest. Then the two burly Sikhs, who had been standing within the dock one on either side of the prisoner, suddenly turned upon him, gripped him by the shoulder

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with enormous, rough hands, and hustled him out of the wooden pen. One of them seized the Malay's wrists and snapped a pair of iron handcuffs on to them, a Chinese clerk threw a newly-signed commitment-warrant across the table to one of the Sikhs, and a moment later the prisoner found himself being hurried forth into the pitiless glare of the sunshine, his feet treading the dusty, metalled road on the way to the central gaol.

It had all happened so quickly, so like a piece of machine-made work, that Ismäil, the newly-convicted prisoner, had had barely time in which to realise what was happening to him. Now, as he trudged along between his two bearded guardians, his mind began to move again with its accustomed freedom. He began to observe, to imagine, to realise. The two Sikhs talking together in a barbarous jargon—their native tongue; the manacles about his wrists, which forced his hands to hang limply before him as he walked; the flapping of the little strip of paper which one of his guardians carried in his hand—the White Men, he had heard, could do nothing without writing about it;—all these things were to Ismäil the outward signs of the evil thing which had befallen him. He had 'got' gaol—to use the phrase current among his own people—by reason of an ill-

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advised attempt to possess himself of certain property, to which his sole claim was supplied by the fact that, at the moment, he had experienced a keen desire to have it for his own. The proprietor had proved unexpectedly pugnacious, and Ismäil, as a result, had lost his temper with the fellow. The consequence of this had been that the police had laid him by the heels, had charged him with highway robbery with violence, with causing grievous hurt, and finally, with resisting capture. A week earlier, Ismäil had been a very ordinary Malay peasant, with no marked criminal instincts, and an even less clearly accentuated moral code. He had been deeply enamoured of a lady, however, and since she was no less venal than other members of her race and sex, Ismäil had fallen, or, rather, wandered into crime, with much the same deliberate naughtiness, and with hardly more responsibility, than is displayed by a child who raids an easily-accessible jam-pot. The law of the White Men, however, which regards the sin rather than the moral limitations of the sinner, had come down heavily upon Ismäil, and now he had 'got' gaol, and his fate was excessively accursed. It never occurred to him to blame himself. Fate, luck, and the unexpected pugnacity of the person whom he had attempted to despoil were alone respon-

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sible, in his opinion, for the straits in which he found himself, and he spat in the white dust of the road in token of his extreme disgust at the mismanaged scheme of created things.

The white man had said 'five years.' What did that mean? Ismäil asked himself. Had he said 'five years of maize,' or 'five years of rice' it would have been easier to understand what period of time he intended to name. As it was, Ismäil was quite in the dark. Did the year mean three moons or six? Or was it some purely fanciful measure of time such as the White Men might make use of? The fear of the Unknown was upon him. What did 'getting' gaol imply? Not confinement in a cage without food or sanitary appliances, for this, it was well-known, was an abomination to the Europeans. What then could be the horrors which the strange pale folk regarded as a fitting punishment for one whose fate was insensate? Starvation? Perhaps. 'Work of a heavy sort,' the magistrate had said, and at this prospect, Ismäil groaned.

'*Diam!*—Be still!' growled one of the Sikhs, and the prisoner shuffled on again in silence.

Presently the great gates of the gaol came in sight; then, as the escort and the prisoner

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drew near, a shutter was pulled back and a brown, bearded face looked out at them. A wicket flew open of itself, and Ismäil was hustled into the fenced enclosure. He saw before him a large open space, smooth grass plots, intersected by neatly-kept gravel paths, and brown blocks of wards, raised above the ground on brick piles, standing back discreetly off the grass. The buildings were of wood, stained with Rangoon oil, and their roofs were thatched with dust-coloured palm-leaves. They had massive doors and no windows, but high up in the bare walls a barred opening ran round them supplying the necessary ventilation.

Ismäil was handed over to a Sikh warder, had his head shaved by a deft and businesslike Chinese convict, was bathed at a well in the centre of the compound, was stripped of his clothes, and was presented with a spotless jumper and trousers, blackly marked with broad arrows and his number, 307. Ismäil had ceased to be; Convict 307 had been born into the narrow prison world.

In this new capacity many strange things befell him. He was weighed, an operation which filled him with wonder and superstitious fear; he was examined from head to foot, and all his principal physical characteristics were noted down in a vast ledger; and finally he was ushered into the

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great barred work-shed where he found some sixty or seventy other prisoners standing in a hollow square.

He was roughly bidden to take up a position indicated between two other Malays, and when he attempted to enter into conversation with them a stentorian voice bellowed, 'Be still!' and a warder near him pushed him violently against the wall. Then two convicts came across the gaol-yard bearing a long wooden stretcher between them heavily laden with tins of rice and curry. In dead silence these were placed upon the ground, one in front of each convict. When a sufficient number of rations had been fetched in this way, the senior warder cried suddenly, 'Sit!' The unexpected exclamation startled 307 so, that he jumped violently, bumping into his nearest neighbour and nearly oversetting him. The senior warder glared at him murderously. 'Sit!' he yelled, and 307, frightened out of his wits, collapsed upon the ground. Seeing a tin of rice in front of him, he put out his hand instinctively towards it, but the convict on his right plucked him sharply by the sleeve, and whispered to him to sit still. The senior warder, swelling with importance, stood near the door and looked round upon his charges with the air of a possessor of fatted cattle.

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Then once more he gave a word of command : 'Eat !' Immediately the sixty odd convicts fell to work upon the food before them, messing the rice with their fingers, mixing the curry well into it, and dividing it into neat mouthfuls. 307 looked round him at the strange scene with curious eyes. It was a mixed group of Orientals, Chinese of half-a-dozen tribes, Tamils from Southern India, Malays from many States of the Peninsula and from various islands of the Archipelago, a Muhammadan Běngālī or two, and one stray Siamese. They were a peculiarly healthy body of men, very hard and spare, well-fed, well-nurtured, but with hardly a pound of superfluous flesh among them all. This is the merit of our prison system in the East. We feed our convicts sufficiently and well, but they rise from every meal feeling the least little bit hungry, and they work day in and day out with the untiring regularity of machines. Also, they go to bed early and rise when the dawn is still grey. All this makes for health, and the sheer regularity of the thing bores the native more intensely, and wearies the soul out of him more effectually than any white man can easily conceive. The divorce from tobacco and opium, and the complete separation from his women-folk also take away from the native, all, or nearly all the

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things which represent pleasure to him, and thus, though we have robbed imprisonment of the horrors which were inseparable from confinement in the barbarous gaol-gages of Independent Malaya, the deprivations, the monotony, and, in no small degree, the very cleanliness of the life to which we condemn our Asiatic convicts, carries with it for them a full measure of punishment. Another thing which may be placed to the credit of the system, is that in the eyes of our prisoners and of their neighbours, incarceration does not degrade the victim. A man will, on his release, speak quite openly to casual strangers of his experiences while in gaol. He attributes the accident of his ill-doing to a capricious and inscrutable fate; he regards the time spent in captivity as a payment exacted for the sin of discovery; and both he and his relatives decline to recognise any stigma as attaching to him merely because he has had the ill-fortune to sojourn for a space within the walls of the Central Gaol. Also, it is only the European, who imports his prejudices from six thousand weary miles away, who would dream of refusing to employ a man because he chanced to be an ex-convict; and, therefore, our gaols not only make a man clean and healthy of body, but they do him no sort of harm from a worldly

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point of view, and do not make a ruined life part and portion of the punishment of every crime. On the other hand, they do not act as a very great deterrent to misdeeds, and in the face of any violent temptation the native will too often take his chance of gaol if he knows the nature of the penalty which the White Man will ask him to pay as the price of discovery and conviction.

The hours of meals were the great events in the prison day, and the convicts ate heartily, giving their whole attention to the important task. The noise made by the sixty or seventy prisoners alone broke the silence—a sibilant, guzzling sound of gently-smacking lips, licking tongues and slow mastication. Some carefully selected the choicest pieces of fish or vegetable curry, placed them on one side to be eaten at the last; others greedily stowed the tit-bits away within them, hurriedly, furtively, suspiciously, as though they feared that someone would attempt to rob them of the precious morsels; others again ate steadily through the plateful before them, taking the food as it came their way without choice or selection; all, as they scraped the last grains of grease-soaked rice up from the tin dish bottom to which they clung, turned to drink deeply of huge mugs of cold tea, and then gazed with wolfish, envious

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eyes at such of their fellows as, having eaten somewhat more slowly, had not yet quite finished the ration placed before them. Starvation, it was clear to 307, was no feature in the White Man's system, but it was equally plain to him that repletion was a thing unknown within the prison walls. Another half plateful of rice would just have made the difference, and 307 and his fellows would have risen up from their meal distended of stomach, shiny and greasy of skin, exuding perspiration from every pore, as was their wont when they were their own masters, and money was sufficiently plentiful. But the White Men who had drawn up the scale of diet, knew this quite well, and therefore the extra half-plateful was always lacking, and the complaint of insufficient rice made itself heard at each weekly inspection.

The afternoon, blazingly, mercilessly hot, wore itself away, and Ismäil, who had never worked for another in his life, and had certainly never performed two consecutive hours of uninterrupted toil in all his days, was most sincerely sorry for himself long before the four o'clock bugle sounded, and the gangs working beyond the prison walls began to wend their slow way gaolwards, to a clinking accompaniment of jangling fetters. These latter were 307's chiefest grievance against Fate and the White

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Man's Government, but protest was of no avail, so he went sadly, stumbling heavily in the unaccustomed irons, which added to the aching which the hard out-door work had already occasioned in his limbs.

On arrival in the gaol, the work-parties were mustered, the roll called over and checked, every convict in the place was scrupulously bathed under armed supervision, a meal was served out, and by five o'clock the prisoners were all safely locked up for the night in the big association wards.

In some of the more backward of the Protected States, the cell system has not yet been introduced, the association wards being cheaper to construct and maintain than are the more elaborate prisons. The objections to the more primitive system are, of course, obvious, and in a very few years' time, there will probably be no gaol in the Malayan States such as that in which Ismäil, *alias* 307, now found himself confined.

The ward was a great, long barrack of a place, strongly constructed of timber, tongued and grooved so that no joins were visible in the planking of the bare brown walls. The place was lofty, and was roofed in with solid planks fitting closely; twelve or fourteen feet above the floor, a long, narrow aperture, securely

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barred with iron, ran round the four sides of the building, leaving an open space for the admission of light and air. Through this the gentle, sad light of the Malayan afternoon stretched long, soft fingers, touching here a shaven head and exposing grey points amid the black stubble, there stroking a brown cheek till it glowed with a ruddy hue, drawing the colour out of the plank walls, and flecking the flooring with dancing specks and dashes of brightness.

There were fourteen coarse red blankets neatly folded against the wall on each side of the ward, each with an oblong Chinese pillow on the top of it, and as the convicts filed into the place, they one by one squatted down upon the ground, every man in his appointed spot. At last the whole gang of twenty-eight prisoners had entered, and the great timber doors were closed behind them with a booming clang, and a slapping to of noisy bolts, and a jangling of metal padlocks.

307 squatted down by the blanket and pillow which had been allotted to him earlier in the day, and looked round at his companions. About twenty of them were Chinese, some of whom were apparently bent upon going to sleep without further ado, while the remainder talked together, growling uncouth monosyllables in cautious undertones. The other eight con-

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victs were Malays, one a minor Chief who had headed a conspiracy which had for its amiable object the execution of a Chinaman for a murder which he had never committed, a notion which had its origin in a philanthropical wish to save the real culprit, a relative of the Chief ; one, a noted cattle-thief who was serving in the gaol for the fourth time, and was more at home in the place, and better acquainted with its routine than the senior warder himself ; three gang-robbers, who had been concerned in a raid into a protected State from across the Kēmâman boundary ; a house-breaker of some little skill and repute among his fellows ; an old man who had his sleeping place by Ismâil's side, and Ismâil, or, rather, 307, himself. Two of the gang-robbers were playing a kind of fox-and-geese with bits of stick which they had managed to secrete in spite of the prison authorities, the board being formed by a plank of the flooring which had been marked out into rough squares with the aid of a rusty nail. The cattle-thief and the third gang-robber sat near the players, watching the game with interest, and criticising each move knowingly. The stakes were high, a running account being kept from day to day, but settlement would not fall due until the convicts' sentences expired in about four years' time. The burglar sprawled upon his stomach, his head

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upon his folded arms, his eyes dreamily gazing into nothingness with a gathering film of reminiscence upon them, his lips humming a love song under the breath. He was thinking of a girl, and wondering into whose hands she had fallen since he was taken. He would not know the answer to this riddle for full five years to come, by which time the lady would have lost the first bloom of her beauty ; but the burglar did not think of this. To him she would always be the pretty girl whom he had left behind him. His passion was merely that of an animal for its mate, but it was none the less keen for that. The imprisoned Chief sat apart, huddled up in a corner, knees to chin, arms clasped about his shins, his eyes sullen, resentful. His thoughts were carrying him back to the life which he had been wont to live before his trouble fell upon him ; to his four wives, each in her separate compound ; to his hunting dogs, which gave tongue so lustily when the deer were afoot ; to his spreading rice-fields cultivated by others' labour ; to the money which he had saved that his declining years might be happy and very comfortable ; to the utter freedom and independence to which he had been accustomed all the days of his life ; and then, as he came back with a shock to the reality of his present surroundings, the horror of what had

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befallen smote him cruelly like a blow dealt mercilessly in the face, and he buried his head in his arms, writhed as though in pain, and groaned aloud. The cattle-thief looked up and laughed.

'The Chief hath his afternoon gripes,' he said to his neighbours, with a brutal jeer, and the fierce old eyes of his victim flashed redly.

'Have a care, thou son of an evil woman,' he said. 'Have a care, lest I find means to lay hold of a weapon, even within this cage, and thereafter to smite thee so that thou wilt become in fact, as well as in appearance, what thou art—a corpse seven days dead!'

'Patience, grandfather, patience!' sneered the cattle-thief. 'We, who are of the people; know full well the customs of thee and thine. The Chiefs be ever like the *tôman* fish which preys upon its own young! Thou, grandfather, didst devour too many and too often, seemingly, till thy own kind turned upon thee, and now thou art like unto the fish in the stakes which hath no means whereby escape may be accomplished. Nay, do not rise, for if thou makest a disturbance in this place, we will swear to the *Tuan* that the fault was thine, and thou wilt be slung up to the skin-stretcher, and flogged with a rattan. 'Tis a clean trick for the carding of pride, so sit thee still, grand-

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father, and be wise before thou art hurt. To repent too late, 'tis to repent too long. Thou art not now in thine own village, and we of this place have no mind to be ruled over by thee. Wherefore be still, and bear thy pains with patience, and thy gripes in silence, such as the White Men love.'

The cattle-thief and the three gang-robbers laughed softly at the former's wit and boldness; then they turned their attention once more upon their game, and quickly became absorbed in it. The Chief glared at them like some caged wild beast at one who torments it, and then fell to rocking his body to and fro, to and fro restlessly, in a paroxysm of helpless misery. He knew only too well that the gaol authorities were no respecters of persons; that they would lash him up to the triangles as calmly as if he were the meanest coolie in the land; that that last indignity would surely follow any attempt to punish with violence those of his fellow-prisoners who dared to mock him in his sorrow, and to add to the measureless depths of his dishonour. That he should be suffering in this manner on account of an injustice done to a Chinaman, filled him with unspeakable astonishment and disgust. A Chinaman, forsooth! A creature whom he, the Chief,

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had been wont to rank among the beasts of the field! But 'twas merely one more of the extraordinary ways of the White Men, which none might hope to understand, none even attempt to explain. He groaned again. Some day he would win a grip upon a weapon, and then, then, then. . . . He could see the red blood spouting under the stabbing blade; he could hear his voice raised once more in the *sôrak*, the war-cry; he could mark the fear in the faces of those within the gaol who had done him dishonour; and in that moment he would have no mercy, no, not even upon those who had treated him with respect. Soon, very soon, the chance would come, and he would run *âmok*, knowing once more the joy of living, the pulsing of hot blood through the veins, the delight of fighting, hewing, hacking, stabbing, slaying, until he should himself be slain. Arrrrh. . .

A strange light had come into his eyes, which burned red like the glow of banked embers. This was the picture which was daily growing more and more distinct in his hungry, furious heart, and some time, some time very soon, the picture would become a reality.

The burglar paid no heed to the dispute between the Chief and the cattle-thief. The

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dream of his girl still held him. 307 sat listening in horror. In common with most Malay peasants, his awe of the chiefs was still intense, and to hear one of these terrible beings spoken to like this, filled him with a disgusted indignation which shocked and sickened him. What manner of place was this, he asked himself, where men dealt in so unseemly a fashion with those to whom deference was due? The rudeness of the cattle-thief did more to make the prospect of confinement in gaol distasteful to 307 than anything which he had yet experienced. Good manners, respect to chiefs and elders, the little social amenities which round off the harsh ugliness of life, represent more to the ordinary Malay than to any other human being, a delicate European lady alone excepted. The absence of these things made 307 miserable. He missed them more even than the tobacco for which his whole soul was now pining.

The old man on 307's right had taken no notice of the little war of words. He sat cross-legged, staring stupidly at the opposite wall, his almost toothless gums working mechanically, as though chewing in imagination the quid of betel-nut, which for so many years had never long been absent from his mouth. His fine old face was curiously and

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deeply lined. The stubble of his closely-shaven white hair made a rime upon his scalp; his knotted hands were clasped loosely in front of him, lying limply in his lap; his feet were marked in several places by white patches of *sôpah*, a skin affliction which is of an inherited character, but never gives any trouble beyond an unsightly discolouration. His pupils were contracted to the utmost limit. He was thinking deeply and silently of the past.

‘Father,’ said 307 presently, when he had become weary of the heavy stillness of the place, ‘it is verily hard to be deprived of tobacco. I, thy son, am longing for the taste of the sweet smoke, longing as does the opium-smoker for the suck of his pipe. Is there no means by which tobacco may be procured, father?’

The old man turned lack-lustre eyes upon him, and said in a low, thin voice, like that of a man who for many years has held but little converse with his kind, ‘There be many things of which we stand in sore need in this place—things of greater weight than rich food, betel-nut or tobacco, though surely the two last are the gifts of God, and life is arid and comfortless when they are not with us for our solace. Patience, little brother, patience! ’Tis the fate to which we be born. The hair of all men are alike for blackness, but our lots are

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separate and distinct; we all die, but our graves are not one and the same. Soon thou wilt become used to the lack of tobacco, and in the meantime be patient and endure. 'Tis the lesson of our captivity. Behold I, even I, endure now with some fortitude, and yet I have lived a life free as that of any other jungle thing, for I have been of the forest for fifteen long years.'

He spoke stolidly, with that faint, distant voice of his, with but little expression or inflection, spoke the thoughts which were in his heart, born more of the consideration of his own lot than of any quickened sympathy for his companion; and having spoken, he relapsed into a stupid, heavy silence more depressing, more eloquent of despair, than tears or ravings could have been.

But 307 was loth to let the conversation drop now that he had found someone with whom to speak.

'What mean the White Men by "a year?"' he asked. 'Is it a year of rice—six whole moons, or but three moons—a year of maize?'

The cattle-thief looked across the ward at him and laughed.

'Tis no difficult matter to see that thou comest from the very far interior, Ugly,' he said mockingly. 'In thy part of the country

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men call a bushelful of water a deep pool, and three fathoms of buffalo-wallow an open space! Thou art a jungle-man, Ugly, 'tis very plain, and perchance thou canst count only up to three, like the Sâkai animals who share thy home. What rubbish is this of which thou speakest? A year of rice! A year of maize! Is such ignorance a fitting thing to bring hither to folk who know many things?'

The gang-robbers applauded uproariously, and 307 felt his cheeks flushing hotly with anger.

'Whatever thou knowest thou hast not learned enough to keep thee clear of the prison,' he cried. 'Nor hast thou received from thy parents—if indeed thou wast born to a father who owned thee, which I think unlikely — a teaching either concerning manners or the way in which to speak to elders and chiefs. If there be a jungle-man in this house, 'tis he with the evil tongue, who hath learned the fashion of his bearing from the wild things of the woods. Jungle pig thou art, jungle pig, an abomination to us all.' And 307 spat noisily upon the plank flooring in token of his extreme disgust.

The four gang-robbers broke out into a chorus of delighted approval. 'Strike him!' 'Wet him!' 'Draw blood!' 'Have at him!' 'Deal the return blow!' 'Now with the

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spurs!' 'Enough of beak and fencing!' they cried, borrowing the language of the cock-pit. They none of them loved the cattle-thief, and a fight would be a pleasant break in the dull monotony of their lives. But the cattle-thief knew too much of prison discipline to suffer himself to be drawn into a fight for the amusement of his grinning companions, so he contented himself with cursing 307 till he was out of breath, and then retired into a surly silence.

307 repeated his question as to the meaning of that mysterious period of time called a year by the White Men, into which his sentence of imprisonment was sub-divided, and one of the gang-robbers, speaking with a marked Kēmā-man accent, gave him the required information, with a certain relish in the disappointment which the revelation brought to his hearer.

'A year, according to the reckoning of the White Folk,' he said, 'is twelve things which they, for a reason which no man may name, are wont to term "moons." These spaces of time have nought to do with moons such as we wot of. They begin oftentimes when the moon is at the full, at other times when the moon is well-nigh darkened, or when the crescent is but three days old. Also these said "moons" do not number eight-and-twenty days, as all true moons should do,

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for the White Men slip into them here a day and there a day until the tale is complete according to their mysterious counting. Thus the year is just whatsoever the White Men are pleased to make it—near four hundred days or so, as far as I have been able to reckon it. How long is thy sentence, little brother, and for what trouble did the White Men send thee hither?’

‘Only my fate was accursed, brother,’ grunted 307 in reply. ‘I tried to take a little money and gear, of which I stood in need, from a man who passed often through our village by the new-made road. He was a Běngáli, seemingly, and such folk are wont to make but little fight when set upon. This man—my fate, as I have said, being accursed—made a great outcry and fought like a stag at the season of rutting, and though, since my heart was heated at his ferocity, I split the skull of him with my wood-knife—it went *krus-krus* like a green cocoanut when one cuts it—he lived, the life being very strong in him, and he told the tale to the police, and though I said that I knew nought of the matter, the magistrate would not listen to my words, and therefore I am here in this prison. The Běngáli—may he die a violent death, spewing blood—bore witness against me, and made oath saying that I had robbed him of five hundred dollars, whereas I found but

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eighteen upon his body when I searched him as he lay swooning. Verily, these Běngālī are very cunning, but they are Infidels who pray to a cow, and in the end they will be fuel for the fires of the terrible place. Curse them!’

The burglar turned over on his back with a grunt, pulled the blanket across his stomach and prepared to sleep. The Chief was still staring out of blood-shot eyes at the red-stained scene which his imagination was conjuring up for his comfort. The Chinese still mumbled disjointedly one to another. The gang-robbers and the cattle-thief were once more absorbed in their game of fox-and-geese. The short Eastern gloaming stole up over the land, and within the ward it was already nearly dark. A warder opened the door, and at the jangling of the locks all the convicts threw themselves upon the floor in attitudes simulating sleep. Then lamps were run up outside the walls, and a greasy light was cast by them into the building. The night of the gaol had begun.

Little by little the convicts in the ward began to cuddle down upon the floor to sleep. They fixed the narrow wooden pillows under the napes of their necks, in the comfortless native fashion, and betook themselves to their slumbers, their limbs sprawling about aimlessly, their mouths wide open, strange animal noises

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issuing from them at intervals, making the night hideous. 307 in his unusual surroundings found it difficult to doze off. The glaring lanterns stared him in the eyes and would not let him be at peace; the floor, though no harder than many other beds to which he was well used, was comfortless, and made him restless; the unwonted companionship of criminals of many degrees of blackness gave him an uneasy, suspicious feeling, albeit he knew that he had nothing to lose, and therefore nothing to fear from them; and, above all, the grip of the home-sickness, which had been hovering about him ever since the morning, was beginning to wring from his heart its first keen pangs. The old man on his right was still sitting erect and cross-legged, staring always at the dead wall in front of him. 307 rolled over upon his side and looked up at him. The old man did not stir. 307 was filled with a desire for human converse. The silence, only broken by grunts and snores, was making its horror felt in every fibre of his being; the home-sickness was doubly hard to bear while he lay and thought about it in the semi-darkness and the close, unrestful stillness of the place.

‘Thou dost not sleep, father?’ he said to his neighbour, simply for the sake of hearing himself speak and perhaps eliciting a reply. The

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old man grunted, but he did not turn his eyes away from the wall at which he was gazing stupidly. 'How camest thou to be pent within this gaol, father?'

The old man shuddered and groaned. Then he turned his dull eyes upon 307. 'Wherefore dost thou ask?' he said, in that faint, thin voice of his.

'I ask, father, because I am sad at heart to see one who might be an elder of my village suffering so evil a thing.'

The old man kept his steady gaze bent upon 307, his brows knitted closely, suspicion plainly written upon every feature. Apparently his scrutiny of Ismäil satisfied him, however, for he presently began to speak.

'Thou askest wherefore I came hither into this accursed place. Listen, little brother, and I will tell thee all.'

He paused for a moment or two as though thinking deeply. Then he began the recital of his tale, speaking in a singularly even, unimpassioned tone, still looking at the wall as though hardly conscious of the presence of his listener. It was clear that he was relating the story of his sorrows more for his own comfort than for the entertainment of his companion.

''Twas a long time ago,' he began, 'a very long, long time ago, for I was a young man,

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newly wedded, and lived in the upper reaches of the Bram River. My wife was one of my own folk, a cousin nearly related to me, and we loved one another even before the Feast of the Becoming One had bound us each to each. Within the year after our wedding my wife bore me a child—a daughter. At the first I was sorry and sad because she was not a man-child, but later, when she began to have the power of words, spoken with a voice small and sweet like unto the piping of a *bârau-bârau* thrush, and pretty, dainty ways proclaiming her womanhood, I loved her as much as ever I could have loved a son. In the night-time, when the child was asleep beside us, my wife and I would talk together concerning her future; how we would select for her a husband from amongst our own kinsmen, one gentle and kindly of manner and of tongue, one who would willingly dwell within our house, not taking our little one from us. And in this way time passed—three Fasts or four, I cannot now remember—for my liver was warm and well pleased during that season, and the moons sped merrily.

‘Now, I am afflicted from my birth by the disease which we name *lâtah*—not the nervousness such as old women have that makes them to follow any example which may be set to them by a passing stranger, no matter how

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foolish or unseemly the act to which they are tempted, but *lâtah* of the lesser sort, which causeth me, when suddenly startled, to do violent deeds almost unknowingly, without taking thought for the consequences. And it was this disease, which was a legacy to me from my father, and to him from his father before him, that was my undoing.'

The old man paused in his narrative and moved restlessly, clanking his chains as he did so. He looked round for something, then searched feebly in every direction. He was seeking his *gôbek*—the long, brass pipe in which he had been accustomed to crush his quids of betel-nut since old age had rendered his bare jaws unequal to the task. The jangling of his fetters recalled to him the fact that he was a prisoner, and that the quid, for which he was searching from sheer force of habit, was nowhere to be found. He sighed heavily, plucked feebly at his irons with aimless fingers, and then resumed his tale.

'One evening, just after sunset, I went down to my bathing-hut by the river brink, and having washed my body, I walked back to the house slowly and in peace, for my liver was filled with content. The crop in the swamps promised a goodly harvest; the fruit-trees had blossomed heavily; the kine were breeding

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fast, and the calves were strong and vigorous. All was well with me and mine, and I was happy and well pleased.

‘The evening was creeping up over the land; the sun had sunk to rest; the dusk was upon us; the blindness of fowls, as we of the interior name the first darkness, obscured my sight. Suddenly, as I walked towards my house, something leaped out upon me from the high, ragged grass which lined the path; something that cried shrilly like a *lang stuir*’ (a weird kite-hag, an evil spirit of great potency); ‘something that leaped at me, startling me and filling me with fear. Then my affliction gripped me, and drawing my wood-knife, I struck blindly at the squeaking thing—struck and struck and struck again, felling it to the earth, and raining blows upon it until it seemed to move no more, and the fury in me was exhausted.

‘Then I went to my house and called to the woman, my wife, saying, “I have slain something, but of its nature I know nothing. Bring a torch, that I may see what manner of creature is this which I have killed.” My wife did my bidding, and together we went down the path to where the thing lay a black patch upon the ground, for my eyes had now become used somewhat to the darkness. I bade my wife throw a light from the torch upon the dead

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thing, and she pushed past me to do my bidding, peering at the object in the path. Then she screamed shrilly; the torch fell from her hand and guttered bluely amidst the grass, and she threw herself flat above the dead thing, beating her head in the dust in a frenzy of grief. Then my own heart stood still, and I felt a pain there as though a giant's hand had gripped it. I pulled the woman my wife aside. I plucked up the torch, stirring it to a blaze with my bare finger, and then . . . and then . . .

'She lay there, her little body mangled and torn, her head nigh cloven in twain, her dainty coat and waist-skirt drenched in blood. Her little face had upon it a look of pain and horror; the eyes were open staring at me—I can see them now. *Ya Allah! Ya Tuhan-ku!* How evil is my fate!'

The old man buried his face in his arms, and rocked his body backwards and forwards in an agony of grief.

'Who then was it that thy hand had slain in the darkness, father?' asked 307, excitedly. The old man's story moved him strangely, like a tale told by a wandering minstrel, a 'Soother of Cares.'

'Who was it?' echoed the old man. 'Who was it? It was Jēbah, my own little child. The daughter who was to her mother and to

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me the one thing upon this bitter earth . . . and she was dead . . . killed by the hand that loved her . . . killed in the blind darkness when I dreamed not that any save evil things were at hand.

‘In that hour my reason left me, and I fell upon the ground raving like one smitten by the madness. Then, as I lay there lost to all consciousness, my wife made shift to secure my wood-knife, and to hide all other weapons that lay within the house, else, surely, I had run *âmok*, and so have ended my trouble and that of many others, when at last I rose to my feet.

‘We gathered the little body up, and all the night I watched beside it, and again and again I said within my heart, “This thing is a dream; soon I shall wake.” But the night wore on and still the dream held, and at the last I knew that it was indeed true.

‘Presently my wife, who had been weeping quietly and to herself, as is the manner of women-folk when others grieve sore, and they are loth to add to the burden of sorrow, came to me and plucked me gently by the sleeve, speaking to me, though for a long time her words had no meaning in my ears. Then at last I understood, and for the first time I had a thought for myself also. She said that the law of the White Men would surely require a life for the life which I had all unwittingly

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taken. Therefore she bade me help her bury the little body of the child we loved, and thereafter betake me to the jungle, so that no man might find me. But I said, "Let the White Men hang me on high according to their fashion. What care I more for life? How can aught be sweet to me under the sun now that my hand hath done this thing, and our little one hath been taken from us?" But my wife made answer, weeping softly in the gloom of the house, "Hast thou not still thy wife, and is thy love for her quite dead in thy heart?" And therewith she threw herself upon me with her face buried in my lap, crying and weeping, sobbing out a mad tale of love for me and love for the little one, and bidding me not rob her of both in the space of a single night. For a long time we sat thus weeping together, and comforting one another, and in the end together we buried the little body beneath the *rambut-an* tree behind the house, and when the dawn was upon us I left my wife, and passed into the forest, nor rested until I had reached the thick jungles near the foot-hills.'

Once more the old man broke off, and searched aimlessly for the quid and the betel-crusher which were not there. Then after a space he resumed his tale in the same passionless, monotonous voice.

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'When I entered that forest upon the night upon which the Spirits of Evil robbed me of the life of my child—for I still believe that 'twas a *lang shir*, at whom I first aimed my blows, though by what magic my little one was substituted for the foul thing I know not—I entered a prison from which I came not forth again into the haunts of other men for fifteen years—years—long years of the White Men's reckoning. How did I live? I traded with the Sâkai—the hill-folk—selling them salt, which to their taste is sweeter than molasses, and the salt my wife brought to me in sacks borne upon her back when we twain met by stealth in the deep places of the forest. Fifteen years, fifteen years, years long and weary, years spent as the wild things live their lives, alone, in damp jungles, with the liver leaping in fear at the sound of a wood-knife, or the pulse holding its breath at the sight of a man's slot among the dead leaves. For fifteen years I dwelt thus, a hunted creature in the thickets, biding my time; and Iang, my wife, did all that in her lay to keep the house and the compound, the rice-swamps, and the kine in the grazing-grounds from suffering by reason of my absence. 'Tis a wonder truly what women will do for love. She told the village folk that I was dead, and many youths

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sought her in marriage, for she was sweet of face, but she would have nought to do with them, though at times she was hard put to it to escape from their solicitations. These things she would tell me, weeping, when she visited me at rare intervals, and I would grind my teeth with rage at the thought of the men who dared molest her while I still lived. But our great grief was that no child was born to us, for Iang was very lonely in the empty house, and often, she told me, she would awake at night and speak my name, thinking that I was lying by her side, and often she would turn sharply to the door at a sound which she mistook for the patter of the little feet of our child upon the stair-ladder. But for my sake she bore all things, and so the years passed until she was no longer in her early youth and men ceased to seek her in wedlock.

‘At last Iang came to me, bringing me word that fifteen years of the White Men’s reckoning had passed away, and that our folk said that a crime which had gone unpunished for so long a period of time would be forgiven. My heart was light at this so good news, and lighter still when with Iang I stepped out of the gloom of the forest into the blazing sun-glare of the fields around our village. I had entered the jungle, a young man, springy and

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lithe of limb; I came out that day old and bent, with eyes that blinked at the sunlight like a ghost-bird' (an owl) 'at the blazing of a fire, and with a voice which from long disuse had become faint and thin as you now hear it. Moreover, my hair was white and long and shaggy like that of a Sâkai, and wrinkles had furrowed me, face and body.

That night I slept again once more in my old house, which age had made as dilapidated as I, and upon the morrow my wife guided me to the police station newly built near our village, and here I confessed the crime of murder.

'They locked me up, and thereafter they brought me before a white man, and by him I was, after a weary term of waiting, sent on to yet another white judge. He asked me whether I had in truth killed the child, my daughter, and I answered "Yes." Then once more he asked me whether the deed was done with intent to kill, and I made answer "Yes, I intended to kill the thing, and with that desire in my heart I smote her with my wood-knife." Then the white judge made inquiry saying, "Didst thou in truth kill the child of set purpose, and hast thou no word to say in extenuation of thy crime?" and I said, "*Thân*, 'twas with desire to kill that I struck that stroke and followed it up with many others,

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and behold it was thus that my daughter's life was ripped from out her body. And for excuse," I said, "I have nought to say save only that my fate is accursed." Much more was said both before and after, and much talk there was as to whether or no the madness held me, but the *Tuan Doktor* gave evidence swearing that there was no madness in my mind, the which was very true. Then once more the white judge asked me for more excuses, and I answered that my evil and accursed fate was my sole extenuation, and thereafter seven men who had sat in a box listening to our words, departed out of the court-house, and presently returning bore witness that I had slain my daughter—the which I had unshakenly affirmed from the first. Then the white judge said many and bitter things to me through a very arrogant interpreter, and I was brought to this so dreary place, and am like to sojourn here all the days of my life.'

The old man ceased, and turned to 307 for an expression of sympathy, but that interesting criminal had fallen asleep.

The old man looked round the ward at the sprawling figures, the ugly brown and yellow faces contorted in sleep, at the gaping mouths, and at the smudges of red blanket which

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showed like black, shapeless shadows in the dim light. From without the gaol came the ticking of innumerable insects, the gurgling cough of a tree-frog, and the short, sharp cry of a night fowl. They all spoke to the convict of that vaster open-air prison in which so many years of his wasted and ruined life had been passed; of the freedom and the width of the great wild forest-land which he knew so well; of the rare, sweet visits of Iang—the stolen meetings which had so cheered his solitude; of the many compensations, barely realised at the time, which his former free captivity had held for him, consolations now prized all the more keenly in retrospect since they had been taken from him utterly. Then with a half groan, he shuffled down upon the floor to sleep, and as his senses slowly stole away from him he wondered dimly and gropingly at the strange injustice of the White Men who had sentenced him to suffer heavy punishment for a crime which, to his thinking, he had already expiated.

A fortnight later two visiting justices sat talking together in the little prison office. 'It was a deuce of a business pumping his story out of the old fellow,' said one of them, 'but I think we have got down to the bed-rock of the

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matter at last. I sat up half the night drafting this thing,' and he thumped a bundle of manuscript which lay on the table before him. 'Just cast your eye over it, like a good chap, and see if it is what we want.'

The other pulled the untidy sheets across the table and read the paper with knitted brow. 'I agree,' he said. 'The murder was an accident, and the conviction a mistake, but native human nature—a thing that we shall never really get the hang of—and not White Man's folly was responsible for the latter as much as for the former.' He scrawled his name at the bottom of the joint-report, the perspiration from his hand damping the blotting-paper. 'I think that ought to do his business,' he said,

The author of the report signed his name also. 'Yes,' he said, 'I think that ought to put the crooked business straight, but, Heaven help us! it is difficult enough to run the thing at all in this sweltering heat without having to defend natives from their silly selves into the bargain.'

So in the fulness of time the old man went back to the sleepy village and to the wife that loved him, and with the childlikeness of his people the memory of his past sorrows is now well-nigh effaced by the completeness of his present happiness.

A DAUGHTER OF THE
MUHAMMADANS

A DAUGHTER OF THE MUHAMMADANS

A STUDY FROM THE LIFE

'Swift through the sky the vessel of the Suras
Sails up the fields of ether like an Angel,
Rich is the freight, O Vessel, that thou bearest !
 Womanly goodness ;
All with which Nature halloweth her daughters,
Tenderness, truth and purity and meekness,
Piety, patience, faith and resignation,
 Love and devotement.
Ship of the Gods ! How richly art thou laden !
Proud of the charge, thou voyagest rejoicing,
Clouds float around to honour thee, and Evening
Lingers in Heaven.'

The Curse of Kehama.

THE sunset hour had come as I passed up the narrow track that skirted the river bank, with a mob of villagers at my heels, old men who had seen many strange things in the wild days before the coming of the White Men, dull peasants who seemed too stolid and stupid to have ever seen anything at all, and swaggering youngsters, grown learned in the mysteries of reading and writing, fresh from our schools, and prepared at a moment's notice to teach the

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wisest of the village elders the only proper manner in which an egg may be sucked. The rabble which every Malay village spews up nowadays, when one chances to visit it, is always composed of these elements, the old men whose wisdom is their own, and of its kind deep and wide; the middle-aged tillers of the soil who have no wisdom and desire none; the men of the younger generation whose knowledge is borrowed and is extraordinarily imperfect of its kind.

The glaring Eastern sun, sinking to its rest, blazed full in my eyes, dazzling me, and thus I saw but dimly the figure that crossed the path in front of me, heading for the running water on my right. Silhouetted blackly against the burning disc in the West, it appeared to be the form of a woman, bowed nearly double beneath the weight of a burden slung in a cloth across her back—a burden far too heavy for her strength. This, alas! is a sight only too common in Asiatic lands; for if man must idle, woman must work as well as weep, until at last the time comes for the long, long sleep, under the spear-blades of the *lâlang* and the love-grass, in some shady nook in the little, peaceful village burial-ground. Therefore, I took no special notice of the figure moving painfully athwart the sun-glare ahead of me, until my

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arm was violently seized by the Headman, who was walking just behind me.

'Have a care, *Tuan*,' he cried. 'Have a care. It is *Mînah* and her man. It is the sickness that is not good, the evil sickness. Go not nigh to her, *Tuan*, lest some ill thing befall.'

The instinct of the White Man always bids him promptly disregard every warning that a native may give to him, and act in a manner diametrically opposed to that which a native may advise. This propensity has added considerably to the figures that represent the European death-rate throughout Asia, and incidentally, it has led to many of the acts of heroism which have won for Englishmen their Eastern Empire. It has also set the native the hard task of deciding whether he is most astonished at the courage or the stupidity of the men who rule him. I have lived long enough among natives to know that there is generally a sound reason for any warnings that they may be moved to give; but Nature, as usual, was stronger than common sense, so I shook my arm free from the Headman's grip, and walked up to the figure in front of me.

It was, as I had seen, that of a woman, bowed beneath a heavy burden, a woman still young, not ill-looking, and with the truest,

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most tenderly feminine eyes that I think I have ever chanced upon. I only noticed this later, and perhaps a knowledge of her story helped then to quicken my perceptions—but at the moment my attention was completely absorbed by the strange bundle which she bore. It was a shapeless thing, wrapped in an old cloth, soiled and tattered and horribly stained, which was slung over the woman's left shoulder, across her breast, and under her right armpit. Out of the bundle, just above the base of the woman's own neck, there protruded a head which lolled backwards as she moved, grey-white in colour, hairless, sightless, featureless, formless, an object of horror and repulsion. Near her shoulders two stumps, armed with ugly bosses at their tips, protruded from the bundle, motiveless limbs that swayed and gesticulated loosely; near her own hips two similar members hung down almost to the ground, dangling limply as the woman walked—limbs that showed grey in the evening light, and ended in five whitish patches where the toes should have been. It was a leper far gone in the disease whom the woman was carrying riverwards. She did not pause when I spoke to her, rather she seemed to quicken her pace, and presently she and her burden, the shapeless head and limbs of the latter bob-

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bing impotently as the jolts shook them, disappeared down the shelving bank in the direction of the running water.

I stood still where she had left me, horrified at what I had seen, for lepers or indeed deformed people of any kind, are remarkably rare among the healthy Malay villagers, and the unexpected encounter had shocked and sickened me. Of the men in the group behind me, some laughed, one or two uttered a few words of cheap jeer and taunt, everyone of them turned aside to spit solemnly in token that some unclean thing had been at hand, and the Headman, newly appointed and weighed upon by the sense of his responsibilities, whispered an apology in my ear.

‘Thy pardon, *Tuan*,’ he said. ‘’Tis an ill-omened sight, and verily I crave thy forgiveness. It is not fitting that she should thus pass and repass athwart the track, walked in by such as thou art, bearing so unworthy a load. I hope that thou wilt pardon her and the village. Truly she is a bad woman to bring this shame upon our folk.’

‘Who is she?’ I asked.

‘She is a woman of this village, one devoid of shame. And behold, this day she hath smudged soot upon the faces of all our folk by thus wantonly passing across thy path with

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her man, the leper, and presently I will upbraid her—yea, verily I will upbraid her with pungent words!’

‘Is she also unclean?’ I asked.

‘No, *Tuan*, the evil sickness hath not fallen upon her—yet. But her man is sore stricken, and though we, who are of her blood, plead with her unceasingly, bidding her quit this man, as by Muhammad’s Law she hath the right now to do, she will by no means hearken to our words, for, *Tuan*, she is a woman of a hard and evil heart, very obstinate and head-strong.’

He spoke quite simply the thought that was in his mind. In his eyes there was nothing of heroism, nothing of the glory of most tender womanhood, in the sight of this girl’s self-sacrifice; to him and to his fellows her conduct was merely a piece of rank folly, the wanton whim of a woman, deaf to the pleadings and persuasions of those who wished her well. He had even less sympathy with me when, regarding the matter from my own point of view, I spoke to him in her praise.

‘Of a truth,’ I said, ‘this woman of thy village is greater than any of her kind of whom I have heard tell in all this land of Pahang. Thy village, O Pěnghûlu, hath a right to be proud of this leper’s wife. I charge

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thee say no word of reproach to her concerning the crossing of my path, and give her this—'tis but a small sum—and tell her that it is given in token of the honour in which I hold her.'

This unexpected way of regarding a matter which had long been a topic of conversation in the village, was altogether unintelligible to the Malays about me, but most of them had long ago abandoned the task of trying to understand the strange motions of the European mind, an effort which, they had become convinced, was hopeless. Money, however, is a valuable and honourable commodity, and whatever else he may fail to appreciate, this is a matter well within the comprehension of the Malay of every class. Even in the minds of the simplest villagers, the possession of anything which is likely to bring in cash inspires something near akin to awe, and, therefore, my small gift had the effect of immediately drying up the undercurrent of taunts and jeers at the expense of Mînah and her husband which had been audible among the Headman's followers ever since the strange pair had come into view. Moreover, as I knew full well, the fact that I had spoken of her with words of praise, and had backed my remarks with silver, would do much to increase the importance, and add to the consideration

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n to this brave wife by the people among
1 she lived.

'Tell her also,' I said, as I got into my boat
gin the journey down stream. 'Tell her
that if there be aught in which she
eth in need of my aid, now or hereafter,
nath but to come to me, or to send me
and I will help her in her affliction
ding to the measure of my ability.'

'*Nan!*' cried an assenting chorus of
ers, as my boat pushed out from the
and my men seized their paddles for
omeward row; and thus ended my first
inter with Mînah, the woman of the
ummadans, whom neither the threats of
illage elders, the advice of her relations,
ears and entreaties of her sisters, nor the
tions of those who would have wed with
ad power to lure away from the side of
hateful wreck of humanity whom she
husband.

ter, I made it my business to inquire from
who knew concerning this woman and
rcumstances, and all that I learned tended
crease the admiration which from the
ning I had felt for her.

te all Malay women, she had been
ed when hardly more than a child to a

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man whom she had barely seen, and with whom, prior to her wedding, she would not for her life have been guilty of the indecency of speaking a syllable. On a certain day she had been decked out in all the finery and gold ornaments that her people could borrow from their neighbours for many miles around, had been placed upon a daïs, side by side with the man she was to wed, and had remained there in an agony of cramped limbs and painful embarrassment while the village folk—who represented all the world of which she had any knowledge—ate their fill of the rich viands set before them, and thereafter chanted discordantly many verses from the Kurân in sadly mispronounced Arabic. This terrible publicity, for one who had hitherto been kept in utter seclusion on the *pâra*, or shelf-like upper apartment, of her father's house, almost deprived the dazed little girl of her faculties, and she had been too abjectly frightened even to cry, far less to lift her eyes from her scarlet finger-tips, on which the henna showed like blood-stains, to steal a glimpse of the man to whose tender mercies her parents were surrendering her.

Then, the wedding over with all its attendant ceremonies, for days she had been utterly miserable. She was horribly afraid of her new

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lord, terrified almost to death, like a little bird in the hand of its captor. To this poor child, not yet in her 'teens,' a man and a stranger was much what the ogre of the fairy-tales is to the imagination of other little girls of about the same age in our nurseries at home—a creature all-powerful, cruel, relentless, against whose monstrous strength her puny efforts at resistance could nought avail. All women who are wives by contract, rather than by inclination, experience something of this agony of fear when first they find themselves at the mercy of a man; but for the girls of a Muhammadan population this instinctive dread of the husband has a ten-fold force. During all the days of her life the woman of the Muhammadans has seen the power of the man undisputed and unchecked by the female members of his household; she has seen, perhaps, her own mother put away, after many years of faithfulness and love, because her charms have faded, and her lord has grown weary of her; she has seen the married women about her cowed by a word, or even a look, from the man who holds in his hands an absolute right to dispose of his wife's destiny; she has watched the men eating their meals apart—alone, if no other member of the masculine sex chanced to be present—because,

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forsooth, women are deemed to be unworthy to partake of food with their superiors ; and, as a result of all these things, the woman of the Muhammadans has learned to believe from her heart that, in truth, man is fashioned in a mould more honourable than that in which the paltry folk of her own sex are cast, that he is indeed nobler, higher, greater in every way than woman, and thus as she looks ever upwards to him the man dazzles her, and fills her simple, trustful soul with fear and awe.

So poor little Mînah had been frightened out of her wits by the bare thought of being handed over to a husband for his service and pleasure, and her gratitude to her man had been extravagant and passionate in its intensity when she found that he was unchangingly kind and tender to her. For Mâmat, the man to whom this poor child had been so early mated, was a gentle, kind-hearted, tender-mannered fellow, a typical villager of the interior, lazy, indolent and pleasure-loving, but courteous of manner, soft of speech, and caressing by instinct, as are so many folk of the kindly Malayan stock. He, too, perhaps, had been moved with pity for the wild-eyed little girl, who trembled when she addressed him in quavering monosyllables, and he found a new pleasure in soothing and petting her. And

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thus, little by little, his almost paternal feeling for his child-wife turned in due season to a man's strong love, and awoke in her breast a woman's passionate and enthusiastic devotion. So Mâmat and Mînah were happy for a space, although no children were born to them, and Mînah fretted secretly, when the hut was still at night-time, for she knew that there was truth in what the women of the village whispered, saying that no wife might hope to hold the fickle heart of a man unless there were baby fingers to add their clutching grip to her own desperate but feeble graspings.

Two or three seasons had come and gone since the Feast of the Becoming One had joined Mâmat and Mînah together as man and wife. The rich yellow crop in the rice field had been reaped laboriously ear by ear, and the good grain had been garnered. The ploughs had been set agoing once more across the dry meadows, and in the swamps the buffaloes had been made to dance clumsily by yelling, sweating men, until the soft earth had been kneaded into a quagmire. Then the planting had begun, and later, all the village had marked with intense interest the growth and the development of the crop, till once more the time had arrived for the reaping, and again the ugly bark rice-stores were full to overflowing

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with fat, yellow grain. Mînah and Mâmat had aided in the work of cultivation, and had watched Nature giving birth to her myriad offspring with unfailing regularity, and still no little feet pattered over the lath flooring of their hut, no little voice made merry music in their compound. Mâmat seemed to have become more melancholy than of old, and he frequently returned from the fields complaining of fever, and lay down to rest, tired and depressed. Mînah tended him carefully, with gentle, loving hands, but she told herself that the day was drawing near which would bring the co-wife who should bear sons to her husband, to oust her from Mâmat's heart. Therefore, when her man was absent, she would weep furtively as she sat alone among the cooking-pots in the empty hut, and many were the vows of rich offerings to be devoted to the shrines of the local saints if only the joy of motherhood might be hers.

One afternoon Mâmat came back to the hut, and as was his wont, for he was ever tender to his childless wife, and anxious to aid her in her work, he fell to boiling water at the little mud fireplace at the back of the central living-room, where Mînah was cooking the evening meal. While he was so engaged his masculine fingers touched the pot clumsily, causing it to tip off

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the iron tripod upon which it had been resting. The boiling water streamed over the fingers of his right hand, and Mînah screamed shrilly in sympathy for the pain which she knew he must be enduring ; but Mâmat looked up at her with wondering eyes.

‘What ails thee, little one?’ he asked, without a trace of suffering in his voice.

‘The water is boiling hot,’ cried Mînah. ‘*Ya Allah!* How evil is my destiny that because, unlike other men, thou would’st stoop to aid me in my work, so great a hurt hath befallen thee! Oh, Weh, Weh, my heart is very sad because this trouble hath come to thee. Let me bind thy fingers ; see, here is oil and much rag, clean and soft.’

‘What ails thee, little one?’ Mâmat asked again, staring at her uncomprehendingly. ‘I have suffered no hurt, the water was cold. See, I am unharmed. Look at my finger—’

His voice faltered, then his speech broke off, trailing away into inarticulate sounds, while he sat staring stupidly in mingled astonishment and fear at his scalded hands. The little hut was reeking with the odour sent up by that peeling skin and flesh.

‘What thing is this, Mînah?’ he asked presently, in an awed whisper. ‘What thing is this? For in truth I felt no pain, and even

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now, though for certain the water is boiling, since my fingers are all a-frizzle, no pang hath come to me. What is it, Mînah?’

Mînah looked at the ugly hand her husband held out for her inspection, and she was as bewildered as he. ‘Perchance ’tis some magic which thou hast learned that maketh the fire powerless to harm thee,’ she said simply.

Magic is too common and every-day a thing in the Malay Peninsula, for either Mînah or Mâmat to see anything extravagant in the idea. Mâmat, indeed, felt rather flattered by the suggestion, but none the less, he denied having any dealings with the spirits, and for some weeks he thought little more about the discovery of his strange insensibility to pain. The sores on his hands, however, did not heal, and at length matters began to look serious, since he could no longer do his proper share of work in the fields. By Mînah’s advice the aid of a local medicine man of some repute was had recourse to, and for days the little house was noisy with the sound of old-world incantations, and redolent of heavy odours arising from the strange spices burning in the wizard’s brazier. Mâmat, too, went abroad with his hands stained all manner of unnatural hues, and was deprived of most of the few things which render his rice palatable to an up-country Malay.

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For some weeks, as is the manner of his kind, both in Europe and Asia, the medicine man struggled with the disease he half recognised, but lacked the courage to name; and when at length disguise was no longer possible, it was to Mînah that he told the truth, told it with the crude and brutal bluntness which natives, and country folk all the world over, keep for the breaking of ill tidings. He lay in wait for her by the little bathing-hut on the river bank, where Mînah was won't to fill the gourds with water for her house, and he began his tale at once, without preface or preparation.

‘Sister, it is the evil sickness,’ he said. ‘Without doubt it is the sickness that is not good. For me, I can do nought to aid this man of thine; wherefore, give me the money that is due to me, and suffer me to depart, for I also greatly fear to contract the evil. And, sister, it were well for thee to make shift to seek a divorce from Mâmat speedily, as is permitted in such cases by the law, lest thou in like manner become afflicted with the sickness, for this evil is one that can in no wise be medicined, even if Pětëra Gûru himself were to take a hand in the charming away of the bad humours.’

No one in Asia ever names leprosy. It is spoken of but rarely, and then by all manner of euphonisms, lest hearing its name pronounced,

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it should seek out the speaker and abide with him for ever. But when the words 'the evil sickness' sounded in her ears, Mînah understood, with a violent shock of most complete comprehension; and, alas for frail human nature, her first thought was for herself, for it sent a throb of relief, almost of joy, pulsing through her. Her man was a leper! No woman would now be found to wed with him; no co-wife would come into her life to separate her from her husband; barren and childless though she be, the man she loved would be hers for all his days, and no one would arise to dispute her right, her sole right, to love and tend and cherish him. The medicine man turned away, and walked slowly up the path by the river bank, counting the coppers in his hand, and she stood where he had left her, gazing after him, a prey to a number of conflicting emotions. Then a realisation of the pity of it overwhelmed her—a yearning, aching pity for the man she loved—and in an agony of self-reproach, she threw herself face downward on the ground, among the warm, damp grasses, and prayed passionately and inarticulately, prayed to the Leprosy itself, as though it were a sentient being, entreating it, if indeed it must have a victim, to take her and to spare her husband. She had not been taught, as Christian women are, to

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turn to God in the hour of her despair; and though she breathed out prayer and plaint, as she lay upon the damp earth and tore at the lush grass, her thoughts were never for a moment directed heavenwards. She was a woman of the Muhammadans, unskilled in letters, ignorant utterly of the teachings of her faith, and like all her people, she was a Malay first, and a follower of the Prophet accidentally, and, as it were, by an afterthought. Therefore, her cry was raised to the demon of Leprosy, to the spirits of wind and air, and to all manner of unclean creatures who should find no place in the mythology of a true believer. The old-world superstitions, the natural religion of the Malays before ever the Arab missionaries came to tamper with their simple paganism, always come uppermost in the native mind in time of stress or trouble, just as it is the natural man—the savage—that rises to the surface, through no matter what superimposed strata of conventionalism, in moments of strong emotion. But these things had power to help Mînah but little, and to comfort her not at all, and any strength that she gained during that hour which she spent prone, in agony, and alone, came to her from her own brave and tender heart, that fountain of willing self-sacrifice and unutterable tenderness, the heart of a good and pure woman.

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The evening sun was sinking redly when at last Mînah gathered herself together, re-arranged her tumbled hair and crumpled garments with deft, feminine fingers, and turned her face towards her home. Later still, when the moon had risen and was pouring down its floods of pure light, softening and etherealising all upon which it shone, and penetrating the chinks of the wattled walls in little jets and splashes of brightness, Mînah, tenderly caressing the head of her husband, which lay pillowed on her breast, whispered in his ears the words which revealed to him the full measure of his calamity. No more awful message can come to any man than that which makes known to him that he has been stricken by leprosy, that foulest, most repulsive, and least merciful of all incurable diseases ; and Mâmat, as he listened to his wife's whispered speech, cowered and trembled in the semi-darkness of the hut, and now and again, as he rocked his body to and fro, to and fro restlessly, he gave vent to a low sob of concentrated pain very pitiful to hear. Leprosy has a strange power to blight a man utterly, to rob him alike of the health and the cleanliness of his body, and of the love which has made life sweet to him ; for when the terror falls upon anyone, even those who loved him best in the days when he was whole, too often turn from him

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in loathing and fear. As slowly and with pain, Mâmat began to understand clearly, and, understanding, to realise the full meaning of the words that fell from his wife's lips, he drew hurriedly away from her, despite her restraining hands, and sat huddled up in a corner of the hut, weeping the hard, deep-drawn tears that come to a grown man in the hour of his trial, bringing no relief, but merely adding one pang more to the intensity of his suffering. Vaguely he told himself that since Mînah must be filled with horror at his lightest touch, since she would now surely leave him, as she had a right to do, he owed it to himself, and to what little remnant of self-respect was left to him, that the first signal for withdrawal should be made by him. It would help to ease the path which she must tread, the path that was to lead her away from him for ever, if from the beginning he showed her plainly that he expected nothing but desertion, that she was free to go, to leave him, that he was fully prepared for the words that should tell him of her intention, though for the moment they still remained unspoken. Therefore, though Mînah drew near to him, he repulsed her gently, and retired yet further into the depths of the shadows, saying warningly,—

‘Have a care, lest thou also become infected with the evil.’

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is its wont, the leprosy, as though ashamed of such prolonged inactivity, took a stride forward, then halted again, then advanced once more, but this time with more lagging feet, then came to a standstill for a space, then moved onward yet again. Thus, though the alterations wrought by the ravages of the disease were cruel and terrible, to Minah, who marked each change take place gradually, step by step, beneath her eyes, underlying the grey, featureless face, in the blind eye-sockets, the aimless, swaying limbs that were now mere stumps, she saw as clearly as of old the face, the glance, the gestures that had been those of her husband, and seeing them, she loved this formless thing with the old passion of devotion and tenderness. He was utterly dependent on her now. Twice daily she bore him on her back down to the river's edge, and bathed him with infinite care. To her there seemed nothing remarkable in the act. She had done it for the first time one day long ago when his feet were peculiarly sore and uncomfortable, had done it laughing, half in jest, and he had laughed too, joining in her merriment. But now it was the only means of conveying him riverwards, and she carried him on her back unthinkingly, as a matter of course. In the same way she had come to dress and feed him, first half laughingly, before there was

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any real necessity for such help, but latterly his limbs had grown to be so useless, that without her aid he would have gone naked and have died of starvation. Allah or the Spirits—Mīnah was never sure which of the two had the larger share in the arrangements of her world—had not seen fit to send her a child in answer to her prayer, but she never lamented the fact now. Was not Māmat husband and child in one? And did she not empty all the stores of her love, both wifely and maternal, upon him, who needed her more sorely than a baby could have done, and loved her with the strength of a man and the simplicity of a trusting child? All the womanliness in her nature, purified and deepened by her sad experience, rose up in the heart of this daughter of the Muhammadans, fortifying her in trial, blinding her to the nobility of her own self-sacrifice, obliterating all thought of self, filling her with a great content, and making the squalor of her life a thing most beautiful. And she had to work for both her husband and herself, that there might be rice for them to eat and clothing for their bodies, so her labours were never ended. But the kindly villagers who pitied her, though they could not repress an occasional jeer at her eccentric devotion to a leper, lightened her tasks for her in a thousand ways, so that she found her fields

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tilled, her crops weeded, and the precious grain stored safely, without clearly knowing how the necessary work had been performed at such slight cost to herself. And thus Minah and her man spent many years of the life which even the Demon of Leprosy had been powerless to rob of all its sweetness.

It was some years after the White Men had entered Pahang for the purpose of quieting the troubled land, that a new terror came to Minah, tightening her heart-strings with an anxiety hitherto undreamed of. Men whispered in the villages that the strange, pale-faced folk who now ruled the land, had many laws unknown to the old Râjas, laws unhallowed by custom—the greatest of Malayan fetishes—not endeared to the people by age or tradition, and that one of these provided for the segregation of lepers. Minah listened, dumb with misery, as the village elders, mumbling their discontent concerning a thousand lying rumours, spoke also of this measure as likely to become law in Pahang. The wanton cruelty of the notion was what chiefly struck her. The old native rulers had been oppressive, with hearts like flint and hands of crushing weight, but they had always had a personal motive for their acts, a motive which their people recognised and understood.

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But what good purpose, she asked herself, could be served by robbing her of her man? What gratification could the White Folk derive from such an aimless piece of barbarity? In imagination she seemed to hear his fretful call, his mumbled speech, which none but she could interpret or understand, and the thought of the pitifulness of his condition, if deprived of her love and companionship, came upon her with a sickening pang of dismay, filling her with fear, yet nerving her to fight to the death to save him from this bitter wrong, to fight as does the tigress in defence of her little ones.

Mīnah managed with difficulty to persuade and bribe an old crone to tend Māmat for a day or two. Then she set off for Kuāla Līpis, the town at which, she had heard men say, the White Men had their headquarters. Until she started upon this journey, she had never left her own village, and to her the twenty odd miles of river, that separated her home from the town, were a road of wonder through an undiscovered country. The ordered streets; the brick buildings, in which the Chinese traders had their shops; the lamp-posts; the native policemen standing at the corners of the road—shameless folk who wore trousers, but no protecting *sārong*—the vast block of Government buildings, for to her this

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far from imposing pile seemed a stupendous piece of architecture ; the made roads, smooth and metalled ; the wonder and the strangeness of it all dazed and frightened her. What could the White Men, who had so many marvellous things, want with her poor man, the leper, that they should desire to take him from her? Ah, it was cruel, cruel, more merciless and wanton than any of the deeds of the old Râjas, concerning which men still told grisly tales with bated breath.

She asked for me, since I had bade her come to me in trouble, and presently she made her way along the unfamiliar roads to the big house on the river bank, round which the forest clustered so closely in the beauty that no hand is suffered to destroy. She sat upon the matting on my study floor, awed at the strangeness of it all, looking at me plaintively out of those great eyes of hers, and weeping furtively. She had the simple faith of one who has lived all his days in the same spot, whither few strangers go, where each man knows his neighbour and his neighbour's affairs. It never occurred to her that her words might need explanation or preface of any kind, in order that they might be rendered intelligible, and as she looked at me, she sobbed out her prayer, 'O suffer me to keep my man and my children ; O suffer

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them not to be taken from me! *Allah, Tûan*, suffer me to keep my man and my children!’

I knew, of course, that she spoke of her ‘man and her children’ simply for the sake of decorum, since it is coarse and indecent, in the eyes of an up-country woman, to speak of her husband alone, even though she be childless, but, for the moment, I supposed that she was the wife of some man accused of a crime, who had come to me seeking the aid I had not the power to give.

‘What has thy man done?’ I asked.

‘Done, *Tûan*? What could he do, seeing that he is as one dead? Unless men lifted him he could not move. But suffer him not to be taken from me. He is all I have; all I have, and in truth I cannot live without him. I shall die, *Tûan*, I shall die, if thou dost suffer this thing to come to pass.’

Then suddenly the mist obscuring my memory rolled away, and I saw the face of this woman as I had seen it once before, straining under a terrible burden on the banks of the Jêlai River, with the red sky and the dark green of the foliage making a background against which it stood revealed. Then at last I understood, and the sight of her distress moved me strangely.

‘Have no fear, sister,’ I said. ‘Thy man

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shall not be taken from thee if I can do ought to prevent it. Who is it that seeks to separate thee from him ?'

'Men say it is an order.' To the Oriental an order is a kind of impersonal monster, invincible and impartial, a creature that respects no man, and is cruel to all alike.

'Have no fear,' I said. 'It is true that I have bidden the Headmen of the villages report as to the number of those afflicted by the evil sickness, but only with a view to aiding those who suffer. Moreover, in this land of Pahang, the number is very small, and the infection seemingly doth not spread. Therefore, sister, have no fear, and believe me, come what may, the Government will not separate thee from thy man. Return now in peace to thy home, and put all trouble from thee, and if aught cometh to sorrow thee, remember that I am ever at hand to listen to thy plaint.'

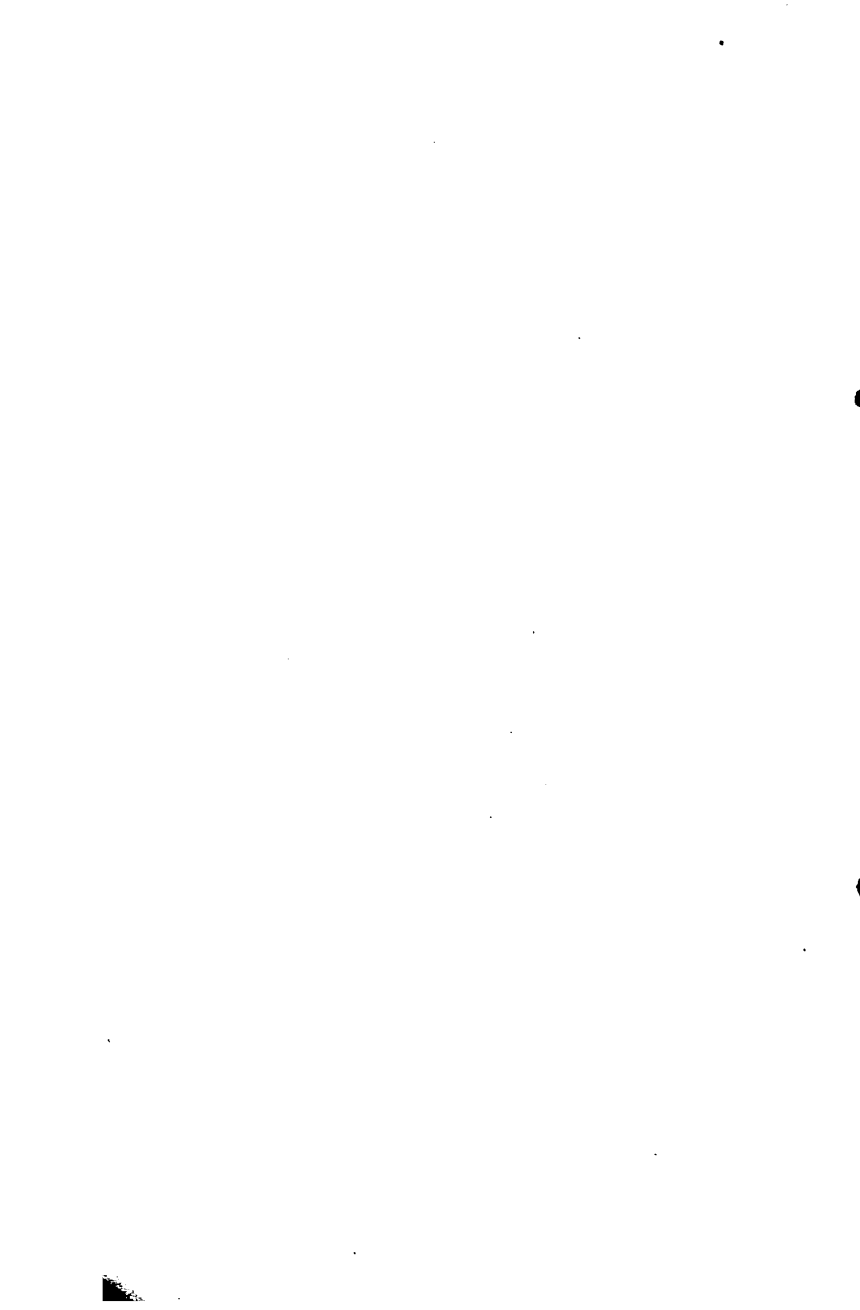
As I finished speaking, the woman before me was transformed. Her great faithful eyes were filled with tears, her brown skin faded suddenly to a dull grey with the intensity of her emotions, and before I could stay her, she had thrown herself full length upon the matting at my feet, encircling them with her warm grasp. I leapt up, humbled exceedingly that such a woman should so abase herself before me,

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and angered by an Englishman's instinctive hatred of a scene, and as I tore myself away from her I heard her say almost in a whisper, 'Thy servant hath little skill in speech, but in truth, *Tuan*, thou hast made me happy—happy as a barren wife to whom it is given to bear a son!' And as I looked into her face it seemed to me to shine with the beauty of her soul.

So Mīnah returned to her home with joy in her heart and that glad look upon her face, and in that secluded up-country village, not twenty miles from the place where I sat writing her history, she still toils unceasingly tending the wrecked creature, that even yet is to her the man she loves, with unfailing tenderness and care. Men say that he can live but a few months longer, and it wrings my heart to think of what the loss will be to Mīnah when, to use the Malayan idiom, 'the order comes' to her man. In that hour of utter desolation and profound loneliness, no human voice will have the power to bring that beautiful look to Mīnah's eyes, and of a Divine Voice this Daughter of the Muhammadans, in spite of her pure soul and her brave heart, has no knowledge from which to seek consolation.

THE STORY OF RAM SINGH



THE STORY OF RAM SINGH

THE night was intensely still. The dawn-wind had not yet come to rustle and whisper in the trees; the crickets had not yet awakened to scream their greeting to the morning sun; the night-birds had gone to their rest, and their fellows of the day had not yet begun to stir on branch or twig. Nature, animate and inanimate alike, was hushed in the deep sleep which comes in this torrid land during the cool hour before the dawn, and the stillness was only emphasised by the sound of furtive, stealthy steps and cautious words whispered softly under the breath. The speakers were a band of some fifty or sixty ruffians; Malays from the Těmběling Valley of Pahang, clothed in ragged, dirty garments; long-haired, rough-looking disreputables from the wilder districts of Trěnggānu and Kělantān and Běsut, across the mountain range; and a dozen truculent, swaggering Pahang chiefs, rebels against the Government, outlaws in their own land, beautifully and curiously armed, clothed in faded silks

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of many colours, whose splendour had long been dimmed and stained by the dirt and dampness of the dank jungles in which their owners had found a comfortless and insecure hiding-place.

A score of small dug-outs were moored to the bank at a spot where the cocoanut trees, fringing the water's edge, marked an inhabited village. The gang of rebels was broken up into little knots and groups, some in the boats, some on the shore, the men chewing betel-nut, smoking palm-leaf cigarettes, and talking in grumbling whispers. They had had a very long day of it. The mountain range which divides Kēlantān from Pahang had been crossed on the afternoon of the previous day; and save for a brief night's rest, the marauders had been afoot ever since. Ever since the dawn broke they had been making their way down the Tēmbēling River, forcing any natives whom they met to join their party; taking every precaution to prevent word of their coming from reaching the lower country for which they were bound; paying off an old score or two with ready knife and blazing fire-brand; and loudly preaching a *Sabil Allah* (Holy War) against the Infidel in the name of Ungku Saiyid. The latter is the last of the Saints of the Peninsula, a man weak and wizened of body, but powerful and great of

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reputation, who sends forth others to do doughty deeds for the Faith, while he lives in the utter peace and seclusion of the little shady village of Páloh near Kuâla Trěnggânu.

An hour or two before midnight the raiders reached a spot about three-quarters of a mile above the point where the Těmběling River falls into the Pahang, and here a halt was called. The big native house, surrounded by groves of fruit and cocoanut trees, was the property of one Che' Bûjang, and no other dwellings were in the immediate vicinity. Che' Bûjang was a weak-kneed individual, who never had enough heart to be able to make up his mind whether he was himself a rebel or not; but he claimed kinship with half the chiefs of the raiding party, and he was filled to the throat with a shuddering fear of them all. The principal leaders among the rebels landed when Che' Bûjang's *kampung* was reached, leaving the bulk of their followers squatting in the boats and on the water's brink, and made their way up to their relative's house. Che' Bûjang received them with stuttering effusion, his words tripping off his frightened tongue and through his chattering teeth in trembling phrases of welcome. The visitors treated him with scant courtesy, pushing him and his people back into the interior of the house. Then they seated them-

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selves gravely and composedly round the big ill-lighted room, and began to disclose their plans.

They were a curious group of people, these raiders who, with their little knot of followers, had dared to cross the mountain range to batter the face of the great Asiatic god Pax Britannica. The oldest, the most infirm, the most wily, and the least courageous, was the ex - Imâm Prang Indëra Gâjah Pahang, commonly called To' Gâjah, a huge-boned, big-fisted, coarse-featured Malay of Sumatran extraction, as the scrubby fringe of sparse, wiry beard encircling his ugly face bore witness. Before the coming of the White Men this man had been a terror in the land of Pahang. The peasants had been his prey; the high-born chiefs had been forced to bow down before him; the King had leaned upon him as upon a staff of strength; and his will, cruel, wanton and unscrupulous, had been his only law. The White Men had robbed him of all the things which made life valuable to him, and though he had held up his hand to the last, doing all in his power to make others run the risks that in the end he might reap the benefit, his fears had proved too strong for him, and he had turned rebel eventually, because he could not believe that Englishmen would be likely to act in good

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faith where he knew that he would, in similar circumstances, have had recourse to treachery. He had suffered acutely in the jungles whither he had fled, for his body was swelled with dropsy and rotten with disease ; and who shall say what floods of hatred and longings for revenge surged up in his heart as he sat there in the semi-darkness of Che' Bûjang's house, and gloated over the prospects of coming slaughter ?

To' Gâjah's three sons, the three who, out of his odd score of children, had remained faithful to their father in his fallen fortunes, were also of the party, They were Mat Kîlau, Âwang Nong, and Teh Ibrahim, typical young Malay roisterers, truculent, swaggering, boastful, noisy and gaily clad. They had no very fine record of bravery to point to in the past, but what they lacked in this respect they made up for in lavish vaunts of the great deeds which it was their intention to perform in the future.

The foremost fighting chief of the band was the Ôrang Kâya Pahlâwan of Sēmantan, who was also present. A thick-set, round-faced, keen-eyed man of about fifty years of age, he was known to all the people of Pahang as a warrior of real prowess, a scout without equal in the Peninsula, and a jungle-man who ran the wild tribes of the woods close in his knowledge of forest-lore. When the devil entered

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into him he was accustomed to boast with an unfettered disregard for accuracy which might have caused the shade of Ananias to writhe with envy, but the deeds which he had really done were so many and so well-known that he could afford for the most part to hold his peace when others bragged of their valour. His son Wan Lêla, a chip of the old block, who had already given proofs of his courage, sat silently by his father's side.

The last of the Pahang chiefs to enter the house was Mâmat Kêlûbi, a Sĕmantan man who, from being a boatman in the employ of a European mining company, had risen during the disturbances to high rank among the rebels, and now bore the title of Panglîma Kîri, which has something of the same meaning as Brigadier-General. He was a clean-limbed, active fellow of about thirty years of age, and he stated that he had just returned from Kâyangan (fairyland), where he had been spending three months in fasting and prayer, a process which had had the happy result of rendering him invulnerable to blade and bullet. Three weeks later he was shot and stabbed in many places by a band of loyal Malays, which can only be accounted for by the supposition that the fairy magic had gone wrong in one way or another.

To' Gâjah spoke when all were seated, and

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Che' Bûjang then learned that an attack was to be made just before dawn upon the small detachment of Sikhs stationed in the big stockade at Kuâla Têmbëling. Che' Bûjang had been in daily communication with these men, and something like friendship had sprung up between them, but no idea of setting them upon their guard occurred to him. To do so would entail some personal risk to himself, and rather than that, he would have suffered the whole Sikh race to be exterminated.

At about three o'clock in the morning the chiefs joined their sleepy followers at the boats. The word was passed for absolute silence, and the dug-outs with their loads of armed men were then pushed out into mid-stream. The stockade, which was to be the object of the attack, was situated upon a piece of rising ground overlooking the junction of the Têmbëling and Pahang rivers, and at its feet was stretched the broad sand-bank of Pâsir Tambang, which has been the scene of so many thrilling events in the history of this Malayan State. The Têmbëling runs almost at right angles to the Pahang, and the current of the former sets strongly towards the sand-bank. The chiefs knew this well, and they therefore ordered their people to allow the boats to drift, feeling sure that without the

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stroke of a paddle the whole flotilla would run aground of its own accord at Pâsir Tambang.

The busy eddies of chill wind, which come up before the dawn to wake the sleeping world by whispering in its ear, were beginning to stir gently among the green things with which the banks of the river were clothed. A cicada, scenting the daybreak, set up a discordant whirr; a sleepy bird among the branches piped feebly, and then settled itself to rest again with a rustle of tiny feathers; behind Che' Bûjang's *kampung* a cock crowed shrilly, and far away in the jungle the challenge was answered by one of the wild bantams; the waters of the river, fretting and washing against the banks, murmured complainingly. But the men in the boats, floating down the stream borne slowly along by the current, were absolutely noiseless. The nerves of one and all were strung to a pitch of intensity. Horny hands clutched weapons in an iron grip; breaths were held, ears strained to catch the slightest sound from the stockade which, as they drew nearer, was plainly visible on the prominent point, outlined blackly against the dark sky. The river, black also, save where here and there the dim starlight touched it with a leaden gleam, rolled along inexorably, carrying them nearer and nearer to the fight which lay ahead, bearing sudden and

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awful death to the dozen Sikhs in the stockade.

At last, after a lapse of time that seemed an age to the raiders, the boats grounded one by one upon the sand-bank of Pâsir Tambang, so gently and so silently that they might have been ghostly crafts blown thither from the Land of Shadows.

The Ôrang Kâya Pahlâwan landed with Wan Lêla, Mat Kîlau, Âwang Nong, Teh Ibrahim, Panglîma Kîri, and a score of picked men at his heels, leaving old To' Gâjah and the rest of the party in the boats. Very cautiously they made their way to the foot of the eminence upon which the stockade stood, flitting across the sand in single file as noiselessly as shadows. Then, with the like precautions, they crept up the steep bank till the summit was reached, when the Ôrang Kâya drew hastily back, and lay flat on his stomach under the cover of some sparse bushes. He and his people had ascended at the extreme corner of the stockade, and he had caught sight of the glint of a rifle-barrel as the Sikh passed down his beat away from him. The raiders could hear the regular fall of the heavy ammunition-boots as the sentry marched along. Then they heard him halt, pause for a moment, and presently the sound of his footfalls began to draw near to them once more. Each man

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among the raiders held his breath, and listened in an agony of suspense. Would he see them and give the alarm before he could be stricken dead? Would he never reach the near end of his beat? Ah, he was there, within a yard of the Ôrang Kâya! Why was the blow not struck? Hark, he halted, paused, and looked about him, and still the Ôrang Kâya held his hand! Had his nerve failed him at this supreme moment? Now the sentry had turned about and was beginning to pace away from them upon his beat. Would the Ôrang Kâya never strike? Suddenly a figure started up against the sky-line behind the sentry's back, moving quickly, but with such complete absence of noise that it seemed more ghost-like than human. A long black arm grasping a sword leaped up sharply against the sky; the weapon poised itself for a moment, reeled backwards, and then with a thick swish and a thud descended upon the head of the Sikh. The sentry's knees quivered for a moment; his body shook like a steam-launch brought suddenly to a standstill upon a submerged rock; and then he fell over in a limp heap against the wall of the stockade, with a dull bump and a slight clash of jingling arms and accoutrements.

In a second all the raiders were upon their feet, and led by the Ôrang Kâya, waving his reeking

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blade above his head, they rushed into the now unguarded stockade. Their bare feet pattered across the little bit of open which served the Sikhs for a parade-ground, and then, sounding their war-cry for the first time that night, they plunged into the hut in which the Sikhs were sleeping.

There were nine men, out of the eleven survivors, inside the hut. The jangle caused by the fall of the sentry by the gate had awakened two of them, and these threw themselves upon the rebels and fought desperately with their clubbed rifles. They had no other weapons. Their companions came to their aid, and a good oak Snider-butt was broken into two pieces over Teh Ibrahim's head in the fight which ensued, though no injury was done to him by the blow. The rush of the Sikhs was so effectual that they all won clear of the hut, and six of their number escaped into the jungle and so saved themselves. The remaining three were killed outside the hut, and Kuâla Těmběling stockade had fallen into the hands of the raiders. Their greatest enemy, the loyal Imâm Prang Inděra Stia Râja, had his village some thirty odd miles lower down the Pahang River, at Pûlau Tâwar, and if this place could also be surprised, the best part of Pahang would be in the possession of the rebels, and a general rising in their favour

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might be confidently looked for. The Órang Kâya and his people knew this, and their hearts were uplifted with triumph, for they saw now that the Saint who had foretold victory to their arms had been no lying prophet.

Unfortunately for the rebels, however, all the Sikhs had not been within the walls of the stockade when the well-planned attack was delivered. Sikhs keep very curious hours, and one of their habits is to rise before the dawn breaks, and to go shuddering down in the black darkness of that chilly hour to the river's brink, there to perform the elaborate ablutions which, to the keen regret of our olfactory organs, seem ever to be attended with such lamentably inadequate results. On the morning of the attack two of the little garrison, Ram Singh and Kishen Singh, had bestirred themselves before their fellows, and were already shivering on the water's edge when the raiders arrived. It says a good deal for the admirable tactics of the latter that it was not until the attack had been delivered that the two Sikhs became aware of the approach of their enemies. Suddenly, as they stood, naked save for their loin-cloths, the great stillness of the night was broken by a tempest of shrill yells. Then came half-a-dozen shots, ringing out crisply and fiercely, and awakening a hundred clanging echoes in

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the forest on either bank of the river. An answering cheer was raised by the Malays in the boats, the tumult of angry sound seeming to spring from out of the darkness in front, behind, on every side of the bewildered Sikhs. The thick mist beginning to rise from the surface of the water served to plunge the sand-bank upon which they stood into fathomless gloom. The ears of the two men rang again with the clamour of the fight going on in the stockade, with the shouts and yells of those who shrieked encouragement to their friends from the moored boats, with the clash of weapons, and with the sudden outbreak of the unexpected hubbub. But they could see nothing—nothing but the great inky shadows all about them into which everything seemed to be merged, and from which issued such discordant and fearful sounds.

‘Where art thou, Ram-siar, my brother?’ cried Kishen Singh, despairingly ; and a heavy silence fell around them for a moment as his voice was heard by the Malays in the boats. Then the cries of the enemies nearest to the two Sikhs broke out more loudly than before. ‘’Tis the voice of an infidel!’ cried some—‘Stab, stab!’—‘Kill, and spare not, in the name of Allah!’—‘Where, where?’—and then came the crisp pattering of many bare feet over the dry, hard sand in the direction from which the Sikh had shouted to his fellow.

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‘ Brother, I am here,’ cried Ram Singh, more quietly, close to Kishen Singh’s elbow. ‘ Alas, but we have no arms, and these jungle-pigs be many. We must tear the life from them with our hands. Oh, Gûru Nanuk, have a care for thy children in this their hour of need ! ’

In the dead darkness both men could hear the swish of naked blades on all sides of them, for the Malays were as much baffled by the gloom as were their victims, and men struck right and left on the bare chance of smiting something. Presently the swish of a sword very near to Ram Singh ended suddenly in a sickening thud, the sound of steel telling loudly upon yielding flesh, and Kishen Singh gave a short, hard cough. The unseen owner of the weapon which had gone home raised a cry of ‘ *Bâsah ! Bâsah !* I have wetted him ! I have drawn blood ! ’ and a yell of exultation went up from a score of fierce voices. Guided by the noise, Ram Singh threw himself upon the struggling mass which was Kishen Singh rolling over and over in his death-agony, with the Malays tossing and tumbling, hacking and smiting above him. Ram Singh’s left hand grasped a sword-blade, and though the fingers were nearly severed he managed to wrench the weapon from the grip of a Malay. Then, with a roar as of some angry forest-monster, he

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charged the spot where the tumult was loudest.

Putting all his weight into each blow, and striking blindly and ceaselessly, he fought his way through the throng in the direction from which the sound of the river purring between its banks was borne to him. The Malays fell back before his desperate onslaught, but they closed in behind him, wounding him cruelly with their swords and daggers and wood-knives, while he in his blindness did them but little injury. None the less, as the dawn began to break, Ram Singh, bleeding from more than a score of wounds, and with his left arm nearly severed, succeeded at last in leaping into one of the moored boats, and cutting the rope, pushed out into mid-stream. There were three Malays on board the little dug-out, but they quickly slipped over the side, and swam for the shore, deeming this blood-stained, fighting, roaring Sikh no pleasant foe with whom to do battle; and as they went, Ram Singh, utterly spent by his exertions and by loss of blood, slipped down into the bottom of the boat in a limp heap. To' Gâjah, furious at the sight of an enemy's escape, danced a kind of palsied quick-step on the sand-bank, cursing his people and the mothers that bore them to the fifth and sixth generation, and administering various

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kicks and blows to such among his followers as he knew would not dare to retaliate in kind. But all this exhibition of bad temper was to no purpose. The excitement of the assault and of the unequal fight in the darkness was over, and the raiders were worn out by the long journey of the preceding day and night. They were very sleepy, and their stomachs cried aloud for rice. The rank and file absolutely declined to give chase until they had eaten and slept their fill ; and thus, as the daylight began to draw the colour out of the jungle on the river-banks, out of the yellow stretch of sand and the gleaming reach of running water, the dug-out, in which the wounded Sikh lay, was suffered to drift rocking down the stream, until at last it disappeared round the bend a quarter of a mile below the rebel camp.

Ram Singh lay so very still that the raiders may perhaps have persuaded themselves that he was dead ; but they should have made sure, for their next move must be down stream, and the success or failure of their enterprise depended almost entirely upon the village of Pûlau Tâwar, in which the loyal Imâm Prang Stia Râja lived, being surprised as Kuâla Tëmbëling had been. The rebel chiefs knew this, but it is characteristic of the race to which they belonged that they suffered the whole of

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their plan of action to be jeopardised rather than take the prompt measures that must have ensured success, because these necessitated a certain amount of immediate trouble and exertion. Ram Singh was also aware of the enormous importance of a warning being carried to Imâm Prang, and weighed against this, the mere question of saving or losing his own life seemed to him a matter of little moment.

Although he was too weak to stand or to manage the boat, he determined to remain where he was until the current bore him to Pûlau Tâwar, and then, and not till then, to spread the news of the fall of Kuâla Těmběling. He knew enough of Malay peasants to feel sure that no man among them would dare to help him if they learned that the rebels were in the immediate vicinity, and that he had received his wounds at their hands. Therefore he decided to keep his own counsel until such time as he found himself in the presence of the Imâm Prang. He knew also that he could not rely upon any Malay to pass the word of warning which alone could save Imâm Prang from death, and the whole of Pahang from a devastating little war. Therefore he determined that, dying though he believed himself to be, he must take that warning word himself. He swore to himself that he would

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not even halt to bind his wounds, nor to seek food or drink. Nothing must delay him, and the race was to be a close one between his own failing strength and inexorable time.

It was a typical Malayan morning. A cool fresh breeze was rippling the face of the water, and stirring the branches of the trees. The sunlight was intense, gilding the green of the jungle, deepening the black tints of the shadows, burnishing the river till it shone like a steel shield, and intensifying the dull bronze of the deep pools where they eddied beneath the overhanging masses of clustering vegetation. The shrill thrushes were sending their voices pealing with an infectious gladness through the sweet morning air; the chirp of many birds came from out the heavy foliage of the banks to the ears of the wounded man, and seemed to speak to him of the cruel indifference with which Nature beheld his sufferings. Presently his boat neared a village, and the people crowding to the bathing-huts moored to the shore cried to him with listless curiosity asking him what ailed him.

'Tis nought, oh, my brothers,' Ram Singh returned, in a voice as firm and cheerful as his ebbing strength admitted.

But a woman, pointing with a trembling finger, screamed, 'See, there is blood, much

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blood!’ and a child, catching her alarm, lifted up its tiny voice and wept dismally.

‘Let be, let be!’ whispered an old man cautiously to his fellows. ‘In truth there is much blood, even as Mînah yonder hath said; but let us be wise and have nought to do with such things. Perchance, if we but speak to the wounded man, hereafter men will say that we had a hand in the wounding. Therefore suffer him to drift; and for us, let us live in peace.’

So Ram Singh was suffered to continue his journey down the stream undisturbed by prying eye or helping hand. The sun rose higher and higher, each moment adding somewhat to the intensity of the heat. By nine o’clock, when but half the weary pilgrimage was done, the waters of the river, struck by the fierce slanting rays, shone with all the pitiless brilliancy of a burning-glass. The colour of all things seemed suddenly to have become merged in one blazing white tint, an aching, dazzling glare, blinding the eye and scorching the skin. The river caught the heat and hurled it back to the cloudless sky; the sound of bird and insect died down, cowed by the terrors of the approaching noon-tide; the winds sank to rest; the heat-haze, lean and hungry as a demon of ancient myth, leaped up and danced horribly, with restless noiseless

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feet, above yellow sand-spits and heavy banks of greenery ; and all the tortured land seemed to be simmering audibly. An open dug-out, even when propelled by strong men at the paddles so that the pace of the rush through the still, hot air makes some little coolness, is under a Malayan sun more like St Lawrence's gridiron than a means of locomotion ; but when it is suffered to drift down the stream at such a rate of speed only as the lazy current may elect to travel, it quickly becomes one of the worst instruments of torture known to man. In the Malay Peninsula men have frequently died in a few hours from exposure to the sun, and this form of lingering death, which is ever ready to a Râja's hand, should he desire to inflict it, is perhaps more dreaded than any other. Ram Singh bore all this, and in comparison the pain of his seven-and-twenty wounds seemed to sink almost into insignificance. The blood with which he was covered caked in hard black clots ; his stiffening wounds ached maddeningly ; the clouds of flies swarmed about him, adding yet one more horror to all that he had to endure ; but never for a moment did this brave man forego his purpose of keeping his secret for Imâm Prang himself, and though the fever surged through his blood and almost

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obscured his brain he held steadfastly to the plan which he had formed.

Shortly after noon a sudden collision with some unseen object jarred the Sikh cruelly, and wrung a moan from his lips. A brown hand seized the gunwale of the dug-out, and a moment later a beardless, brown face, seamed with many wrinkles, looked down into the boat. The dull, unfeeling eyes wore that bovine expression which is ever to be seen in the countenances of those Malay peasants who can remember the evil days when they and their fellows were as harried beasts of burden beneath the cruel yoke of their chiefs.

‘What ails thee, brother?’ asked the face, still without any signs of curiosity.

‘I have been set upon by Chinese gang robbers,’ whispered Ram Singh, lying bravely in spite of his ebbing strength. ‘Help me to reach the Imâm Prang at Pûlau Tâwar that I may make to him *rapport*.’

The instinct of the Malay villager of the old school is always to obey an order, no matter from whose lips it may come. In many places in the Peninsula you may nowadays see some youngster, who has gotten some book-learning and what he represents as a thorough insight into the incomprehensible ways of the White Men, ruling the elders of his village

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with a despotism that is almost Russian ; and the sad-eyed old men run to do his bidding with feet that step unsteadily through the weight of the years they carry, nor dream of questioning his right to command. It is the instinct of the peasantry of this race, as it is wont to be, dying hard in the face of modern innovations.

The man who had hailed Ram Singh did not even think of disputing the Sikh's order, and in a little while the dug-out was racing down stream with the cool rush of air fanning the fevered cheeks of the wounded man most deliciously. An hour or two later Pûlau Tâwar was reached, and Imâm Prang, hearing that a Sikh in trouble wished to have speech with him, came down to the water's edge, and squatted by the side of the dug-out,

‘What thing hath befallen thee, brother?’ he asked, aghast at the fearful sight before him. The dug-out was a veritable pool of blood, and the great fevered eyes of the stricken man stared out at him from a face blanched to an ashen grey, more awful to look upon by contrast with the straggling fringe of black beard. The pale lips opened and shut, like the mouth of a newly-landed fish, but no sound came from them ; the great weary eyes seemed to be speaking volubly, but, alas ! it was in a language to which the Chief could

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find no key. Was the supreme effort which the stricken Sikh had so nobly made to be wasted? For a moment it seemed as though the irony of Fate would have it so; and Ram Singh, deep down in his heart, prayed to Gûru Nanuk to give him the strength he lacked that his deed might be suffered to bear fruit. Mightily, with the last remnants of his failing forces, the Sikh fought for speech. He gasped and struggled in a manner fearful to see, till at last the words came, and who shall say at what a cost of bitter agony?

‘Dato’ . . . the . . . rebels . . .’ came the faltering whisper. ‘The rebels . . . Kuâla . . . Těmběling . . . fallen . . . taken . . . many killed . . . make ready . . . against their . . . coming . . . and behold . . . I have brought the word . . . and I die . . . I die. . . .’ His utterance was choked by a great flow of blood from his mouth, and without a struggle Ram Singh fainted away and lay as one dead.

Imâm Prang was a man of action, and he had his people collected and his stockades in a thorough state of defence long before the afternoon began to wane. While Imâm Prang was busily engaged in profiting by the warning thus timely brought to him, Ram Singh was tended with gentle hands and soothed with kind words of pity by the women-folk of the

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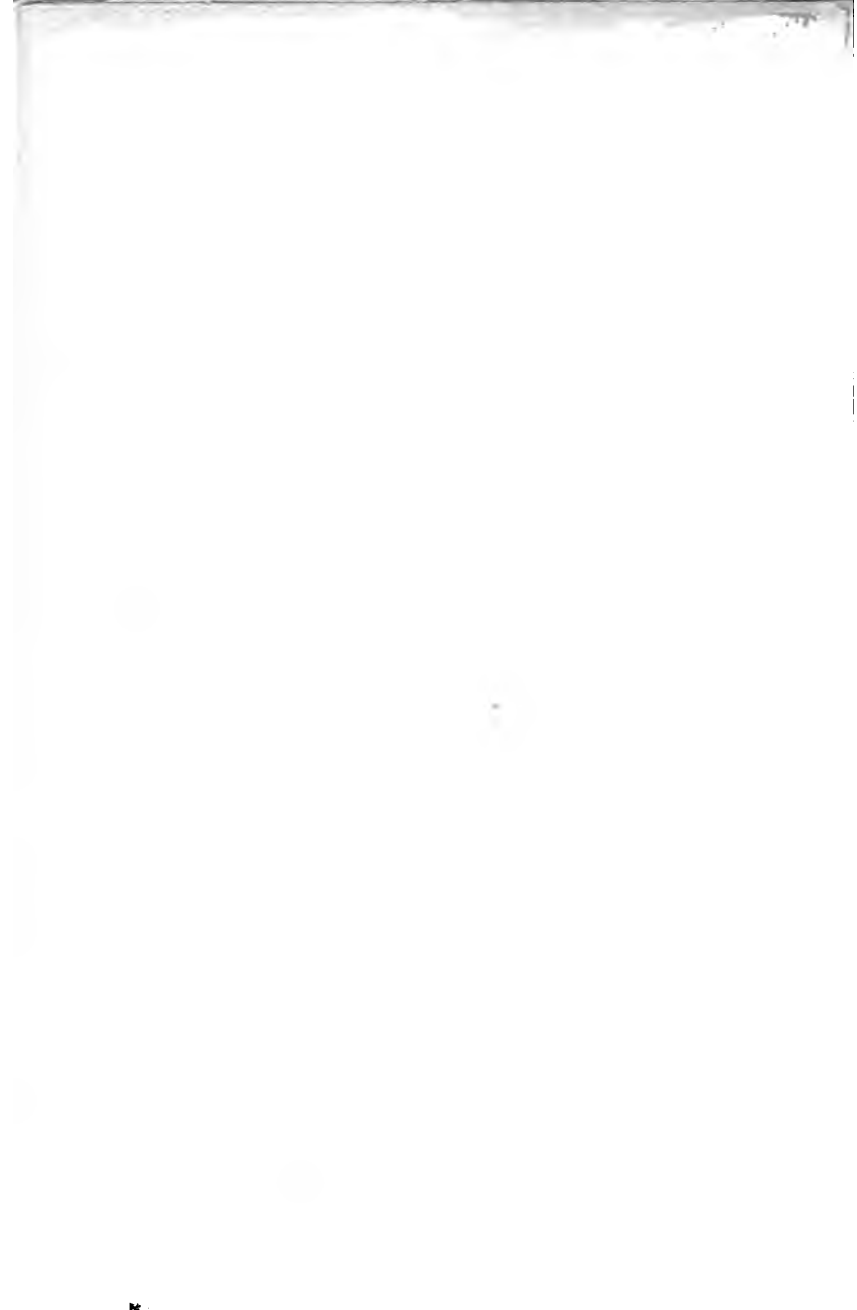
chief's household. He was a swine-eating fidel, it was true, but he had saved them, and all that they held dear, from death, or from the capture which is worse than death.

So the rebels were repulsed, and were chased back to the land from whence they had come, and up and down that land, and across and across it, till many had been slain and the rest made prisoners, and at last Pahang might once more sleep in peace. And Ram Singh, who had saved the situation, was sent

to hospital in Singapore, where he was visited by the Governor of the Colony, who came to him in his great carriage to do honour to the simple Sikh private; and when at last he was discharged from the native ward healed of his wounds, a light post in the Pahang Police Office was found for him, where he will survive until such time as death may come to him in very truth. If you chance to meet him,

you will be much flattered should you allow him to divest himself of his tunic; and you will then see a network of scars on his brown skin, which will remind you of a raised map designed to display the mountain-system of Switzerland. He is inordinately proud of them, and rightly so, say I, for which man among us can show such undoubted proofs of courage, endurance, and self-sacrifice as this obscure hero?

'THE WAGES OF SIN'



‘THE WAGES OF SIN’

IT was once my privilege to be admitted to the intimate and particular friendship of a Malay Râja of the old school—not a ruling prince, such as sit in halls of state and thence give orders for the death and destruction of their enemies, but a subordinate member of a royal family, of the kind that does things. It was my friend's proudest boast that, during the twenty years immediately preceding the advent of the British, he had, with his own hand, brought a larger number of his fellow-creatures to an evil end than had any other of his kind throughout the length and breadth of the Peninsula. He was so genuinely pleased with himself on account of this blood-stained record, that he hugged it to his heart, and very rarely spoke about it; but when, by means of cunning coaxing, I had led him on to talk of his lurid past, he would, in the glow of excitement engendered by his awakened memories, occasionally wind up the recital of his deeds of violence and manifold naughtinesses by slapping his breast, and crying, ‘And in all, *Tân*, Si-

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Hamid hath slain two hundred men—*not counting Chinamen!*'

The words which I have italicised have always appeared to me to represent accurately the value which the average Malay sets upon the life of a Chinese. It is natural enough that a warrior should despise the yellow skin, for he prizes others according to the amount of fight which they are capable of showing upon occasion, and judged from this standpoint, the Chinamen who visit us in the Peninsula are poor creatures indeed. But it is not only the fighting-man who looks upon the Celestial's life as a thing of no account. The opinion as to its utter worthlessness prevails equally with the Râja, the Chief, and the peasant; it is as strong in the villages and the country places as it is in the town and in the palace; and in the estimation of no class of Malays, I verily believe, does the Chinaman rank much higher than the beasts that perish. He is an infidel, for one thing; he is a rich man, often enough, and such are the natural prey of Prince and Chief; he is a skilful and a shifty trader, who cheats the peasants out of their halfpence, and is detested accordingly; moreover, until the White Men came, he was a creature who was utterly defenceless, and one whom no man had a mind to defend; where-

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fore, all these things combined to make the Chinese 'food for spears from the beginning,' to use the expressive Malay idiom.

But the Chinaman, poor fellow, must live like other people, and since the provinces of Southern China carry so large a population that emigration is almost a necessity, in most of the large Malay villages of the Peninsula, the shop of at least one Celestial is to be found. He is despised by those around him, but he makes money; he is an outcast, and knows it, but his own passionate contempt for the *Fan Kui*—the Foreign Devils—enables him to bear all this with a certain amount of equanimity. He is generally alone, and his only means of communication with his fellow-creatures is a language which he finds it quite impossible to learn with any approach to accuracy. He has no woman-kind of his own, and his pleasures are chiefly confined to those which his opium pipe can supply, but the fact that money is being made is for him compensation for many things. In a little space, half the village is in his debt, and as the folk who owe him money are bound to treat him with civility, he begins to taste the sweets of power. He uses it badly, of course, for he hates all the villagers cordially. He has no scruples, no heart, no mercy, no morality, commercial or private. When the

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men-folk are in the fields, or in the jungles seeking gum and rattans, the women come to the shop and either contract debts which they and their husbands are powerless to meet, or else beg for trifles for which sooner or later the shopkeeper makes them pay in very full measure. Thus, presently, half the women-folk in the village are in the power of the alien. Later, perhaps, some woman who has learned to love and long for opium voluntarily takes up her abode with the detested foreigner, and her people, who are deeply in debt to him, dare not protest.

To understand the whole horror of this, you must realise that, to the Muhammadan, the infidel man is a thing revoltingly unclean. His touch is pollution, and the bare idea of an intimacy arising between him and a woman of the Faithful, is sufficient to fill a Malay with loathing and disgust, to bring into being in his heart passions even stronger than those which in similar circumstances would be experienced by Europeans who saw their sisters mated with negroes, or Australians who witnessed the infatuation of a white woman for a despised black fellow. The horror of the thing is so great that, when such events came to pass before the coming of the White Men, a dead Chinaman was almost invariably

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the result ; and if you have eyes to see into the heart of the people, you will find little room for wonder that matters should be settled in this rough and ready way. Now, however, the impartial British Government, among its other strange caprices, insists upon looking upon the life of a Chinaman in precisely the same light as that in which it regards those of other men, and though the hatred and the horror which certain doings inspire in the Malays remain unaltered, the old simple remedies can no longer be used with safety and convenience.

This is one of the many ways in which our higher civilisation has complicated life for the people of the land.

The village of Bûkit S'Gûmpal lies some three miles inland from the banks of the Pahang River, at a point some eighty miles from the mouth. It consists of a number of *kampung* perched upon low hills, which rise directly from the wide rice swamps at their feet. The houses are fashioned of wood, with walls of bark or wattled bamboo, and roofed with palm-leaf thatch cut in the neighbouring jungles. Towering cocoanut trees, with lesser palms of betel-nut, sugar and sago intermixed, surround the houses, and the drooping fronds and the branches of many fruit trees ward off

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the fierce sunshine, making the villages places of perpetual coolness. In the rice swamps below the villages things are different. During half the year the fields lie fallow, unsightly stretches of muddy earth, cut up by low, broken-down dams, and grown upon by rank grass, on which the clay-stained herds of kine graze listlessly. Then later, the buffaloes are driven into pens, and are taken forth four at a time to dance clumsily in the soft earth of the fields until the soil has been kneaded into a quagmire. Meanwhile the dams that separate one field from another, and retain the water in little squares of irregular shape, are repaired carefully with new sods and cakes of mud. Later still, and the rice plants are transplanted from the nurseries near the houses, and are planted out, one by one, till the wide swamps are set sparsely with little tender growths. Later yet, and all the land is covered with an even coating of the purest green to be seen anywhere, save only in an English meadow in the happy springtime, and the folk who watch the growing crop fall to calculating the prospects of the harvest, and weed the fields carefully, with something dimly resembling energy. Then, if so you desire, you may make acquaintance with real heat. The sun lashes down upon the broad expanses of swamp, in which the water

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is tepid to the touch ; on all sides there is sun-glare, fierce, merciless, and not one square inch of shade is to be found anywhere where the rice is growing ; the green blades of the crop rise around you waist-high, and the heat they receive is multiplied exceedingly, and is tossed back again to the brazen sky overhead ; no cloud comes to your relief, save only a few thin films of mist pale with heat, that sail across the heavens robbing it of colour until all is achingly, dazzlingly white ; and above the crop, as far as the eye can see, to the black banks of forest in the distance, the heat-haze dances like a restless phantom.

It was near the edge of one of these rice-fields that a party of Malay weeders, men and women, were at work about mid-day in the autumn months of 1897. They were all dressed in upper garments of coarse cotton stuff, dyed blue with indigo. The men wore short trousers of bleached cotton, stained all imaginable colours by much wear, and round their waists were huddled the folds of their *sârongs*. The women wore their skirts hanging from waist to ankle, and beneath these their loins were girt cunningly to protect them from the assaults of the great horse-leeches with which the rice-swamps abound. Both men and women alike wore cotton *sârongs* twisted

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turban-wise about their heads, in such a manner as to leave a thick pad of material on the top, and a broad curtain of the stuff covering their necks and the upper portion of their backs as they stooped squatting at their work.

On a hill rising abruptly from the rice-swamp, at a distance of less than a hundred yards from the weeders, the wattled walls of a Chinese shop, built upon the bare ground, not raised above it on piles as are all Malay dwellings, showed yellow in the sunshine, for there were no fruit trees to cast a grateful shade around it. In this house, the weeders knew, there was at this time a woman named Lûnet, a near relative of several of the men, own sister to two of the stooping women. She had for some months been living in concubinage with the Chinese shopkeeper, Ah Si, and she had turned a deaf ear to the pleadings and the protests of her own people. She had fallen a victim to the passion for opium, and the craving for the drug was stronger than honour, the love of her own folk, or the hope of eternal salvation. Every one of the weeders owed money to Ah Si, so it was not easy to remonstrate with him. He could so very easily make himself unpleasant. None the less, they and all their fellow villagers took the matter very much to heart. The shame which the

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misconduct of their relation was bringing upon them was very bitter, very hard to bear, and if Lûnet could have been slain by angry words her days would have been few indeed. No wonder that the older men among the villagers murmured discontentedly against the White Man's rule, saying that the *kris* was the weapon designed from the beginning for the solution of difficulties such as the present, and by no other means could the 'soot-grimed' face of the community be cleansed from the shame that Lûnet and Ah Si had put upon it. Little marvel that the party of weeders, as they glanced up at the hut on the hill, growled their disapproval and their hatred, in the intervals of their toil.

But that morning, while the villagers were at work, with the mid-day sun casting little round shadows about each huddled figure, death, cruel and sudden, came to Lûnet, cutting her off in her sins. The weeders reported that they heard her screams, and as they ran to the hut, the men drawing their knives, and the women whimpering at their heels, they saw a Chinaman, named Lim Chong, running from the door in the direction of the jungle, with a chopper reeking with blood in his right hand. The police soon got upon the track of Lim Chong, and in due course the man was arrested. The weeders

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appeared as witnesses, and swore to what they had seen. Two of the female witnesses were sisters of the murdered woman; the others who gave testimony were all more or less closely related to her. Lim Chong tried to establish an *alibi*, but Ah Si and another Chinaman, whom he called as his witnesses, swore that they knew nothing concerning his whereabouts upon the morning in question. Accordingly, Lim Chong was committed for trial, and was in due course sentenced to death.

The absence of the Sultan of Pahang in Singapore, caused some delay in the ratification of the sentence, and when the matter at length came before the Council, rumours of foul play had reached some of the members, and were obscurely hinted at during the discussion that ensued. No one would say anything definite, nor could I learn from what sources the information had been derived. It was merely a rumour, I was told—a tale ‘brought by the passing wind, the flying bird, the flowing stream’—it might, or it might not be true. Did I think it worth while to look into it? Most emphatically I did consider it worthy of inquiry; so the discussion was postponed, and a Malay detective despatched to Bûkit S’Gûmpal, there to pick up the threads of the mystery.

He lived in the village for some weeks, but

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he could hear no whisper concerning Lûnet's murder, save only that it had been done by a Chinese hawker named Lim Chong. Two or three things, however, seemed to him to be suspicious, and at last, weary of idling, he declared himself, and insisted upon all the witnesses in the trial accompanying him by boat to the capital. They came without protest at his bidding, for Malay villagers are very docile folk, having been at the beck and call of others for many generations, and on their arrival at the capital a panic seized two of the women witnesses. As a result, they told all that they knew concerning the death of their sister Lûnet, and when once the long silence had been broken, everyone of the party vied with his fellows to reveal the truth. Even Bakar, one of the witnesses against Lim Chong, who had himself committed the crime, confessed his guilt unreservedly.

It now became my pleasant duty to recommend Lim Chong for the Sultan's pardon, and as soon as the necessary documents had been obtained, I went in person to the prison to tell the poor fellow that evidence of his innocence had at last been obtained. He listened to what I had to say, quite calmly and dispassionately, only remarking at intervals that he had always said that he had not committed the murder, but

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that everyone had refused to believe him. Then, when I had done, he suddenly fell a trembling, and burst into a passion of tears, subsiding to the floor, where he sat rocking his body to and fro, as though in pain. It is the first and only time that I have seen a Chinaman break down so uncontrollably.

Shortly after his release, his presence of mind and his business instincts reasserted themselves. He presented me with a long bill, neatly made out in English. One of the items, I remember, was as follows :—

To one wife, abducted by man while in captivity \$200.

When I read this, I was much shocked at what had occurred, but I was relieved to find on inquiry that Lim Chong was not and never had been a married man. In the East, there are always little bits of comedy like this to be found enlivening even the grimmest tragedies. In the end, the Government presented Lim Chong with \$1000, a sum which represented untold wealth to one of his class and position, and I have no hesitation in saying that, in spite of the cruel mental torture to which he was subjected during the period of his captivity, he looks back upon the day of his arrest on a false charge as the most fortunate in his career.

At the second trial the real facts of the case

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came to light, and these are worth relating, because they throw some light upon the feelings and the nature of the Malay villagers in the quiet country places, and incidentally help to prove how enormously difficult it may often be to deal justly with those accused of crime, upon unimpeachable evidence, in a land where plans may be laid so carefully, may be carried into execution with so much cold-blooded deliberation, and may thereafter be so completely hidden by means of a secret, widely known, yet faithfully kept.

The conduct of Lûnet, as I have already said, had formed the subject of much angry talk in the village of Bûkit S'Gûmpal. Every Malay in the place, from the Headman, Păng-lîma Râja Âkob, to the meanest peasant in the village, had felt most keenly the shame that this woman was putting upon them. Her conduct was an outrage against religion, against custom—which in Malayan lands is often far mightier than the Faith—against honour, and against the credit and good name of all her folk. Protests, remonstrances, angry abuse, had all been tried in vain. Lûnet declined to pay the slightest attention to the pleadings of her relatives. Later entreaties were exchanged for advice and solemn warnings, later still, and these were replaced by threats. But still Lûnet paid no heed.

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Now of all the good people of Bûkit S'Gûmpal who were so exercised in mind at the sight of Lûnet's open profligacy, no man took the matter more severely to heart than Bakar, a native of a neighbouring State, who had settled in the village, and had taken one of Lûnet's sisters to wife. According to accepted Malay notions, he, not being a near blood relation, should have been less aggrieved than many others, but this was not Bakar's view of the situation. The opinion that Lûnet stood in need of a shroud and a coffin appears to have been very generally held and expressed by the villagers around her, and whenever the matter was discussed in his presence, Bakar invariably declared that one of these days he would be forced to make the necessary arrangements himself, unless some of Lûnet's nearer relatives decided to take the matter into their own hands, and that quickly. His declaration was always greeted with applause, and daily his loudly-expressed resolve received some fresh encouragement. In the meantime, as is the way with Malays on most occasions, everyone talked a great deal, and no one did anything.

At last, on the morning which saw the party of weeders stooping over their work in the fields below the house, Bakar strolled through the village with two men, relatives of Lûnet's,

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at his heels. He had again been boasting loudly of his intention to kill Lûnet. On his way to the house he met a third man named Lëmbèh, and invited him to come and see the deed done. Lëmbèh went, being encouraged to do so by the two other men Râsap and Sâpi. Later he declared that he went because he feared for his life should he refuse to accompany Bakar, but I fancy there can be little doubt that in truth he went 'to see the fun.'

Arrived at the house, Râsap, Sâpi and Lëmbèh stood at the door, looking into the single room which formed its interior. Lûnet was alone, lying on the bunk or opium-bench. She had a slight attack of fever which confined her to her bed. Bakar walked quietly up to her, seized her by her long hair, as she sat up to greet him, pulled her face upwards across his knee, and cut her throat from ear to ear with his long, keen wood-knife. Lûnet gave one scream, loud enough to be heard by the workers in the rice-swamp, and then subsided in a limp heap upon the floor of the hut. Bakar at once went out into the open air, and told the weeders, who came running up to inquire, what he had done. Some of the women sobbed and whimpered furtively, but the public opinion, as represented by this little knot of villagers, was in Bakar's favour. Soon the weeders returned to their toil, Bakar

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went about his business, and Sâpi and Râsap sought out Pănglîma Râja Âkob, the Headman, and reported to him all that had occurred.

It is the action of this Headman that is the interesting feature in this very sordid tragedy. He had the reputation of being one of the best *Pěnghûlu* in that part of Pahang, a reputation which his previous record certainly justified; he was a man of known and proved courage; he was well to do, and received monthly from the Government a stipend that was ample for all his requirements; in his dealings with his people he was honourably distinguished as being just, kind, and merciful—to him the proverbial simile, which likens all headmen to the *tôman* fish that preys upon its own young, had never been applied. But he was a man of the people, chief though he chanced to be, and his feelings and his sympathies were the same as those of the peasants around him. It has been said that he had shared the general discontent occasioned by Lûnet's misconduct. He regarded her murder as a simple act of justice, but he knew enough of the manners of the White Men to feel assured that the Government would not share this view. Murder had been done, and a victim must be found wherewith to glut the maw of the Justice of the White Man, but Bakar had done right, in Pănglîma

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Râja Âkob's opinion, and it was out of the question that he should be that victim. Therefore, in order to prevent what he regarded as an act of injustice by which Bakar would suffer, the Pănglîma decided to arrange for a little act of injustice on his own account, the only loser by which would be a Chinaman, a person of no importance.

Fate, who had a mind to make Lim Chong a rich man at the expense of the suffering Pahang Government, had sent that simple hawker wandering through the village of Bûkit S'Gûm-pal upon the day immediately preceding the murder, and since he was friendless and unknown, while Ah Si, the shopkeeper, had friends as well as enemies in the land, Lim Chong seemed to Pănglîma Râja Âkob to be as heaven-sent a victim as did the bramble-trammelled ram to Abraham of old. All the eyewitnesses to the murder, all the weeding party who had seen Bakar while his hands were still red, all the folk to whom they had passed the news of what had occurred, were summoned to the Chief's house, and there they received the instructions as to what they were to say to the White Men—orders which they subsequently obeyed to the letter.

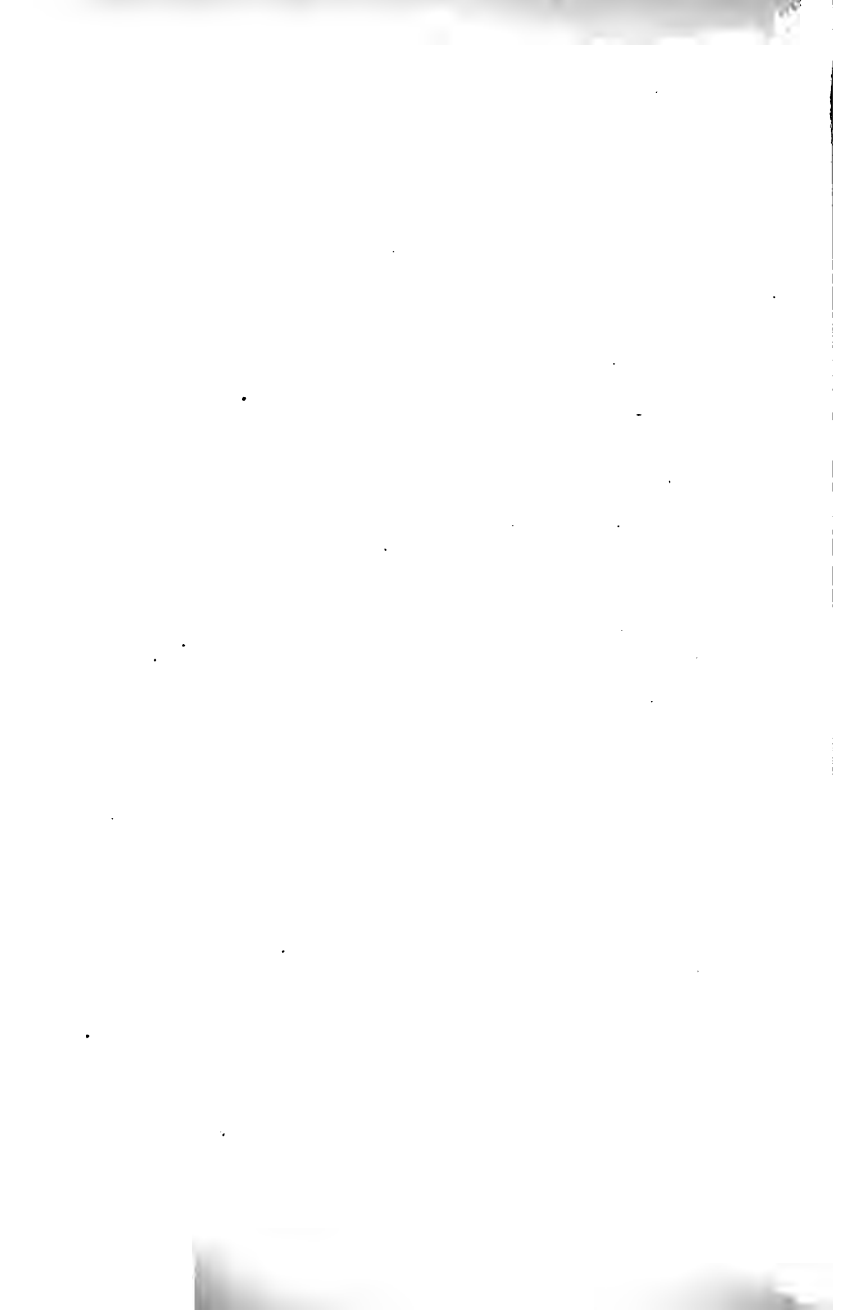
At the time of the murder, Lim Chong was a mile or two distant with Ah Si and another Chinaman, but these worthies had a wholesome

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fear of the Malays—a sentiment very common among their countrymen in the Peninsula—and though they knew that their friend was being accused of a crime which it was impossible that he could have committed, and though the woman who had been killed had been, in a manner, dear to Ah Si, neither he nor his fellow would own to any knowledge concerning Lim Chong's whereabouts upon the day in question. In spite of his despairing entreaties to them to say that they knew that he had been far from the scene of the crime at the moment of its perpetration, they both remained stolidly indifferent, and swore that they had no acquaintance with the unfortunate man. Never, perhaps, has the cruel callousness, the cold-bloodedness, and the utter heartlessness of the craven-spirited Chinese coolie been better or more strikingly illustrated.

When the truth came out, Bakar was sentenced to death, Pānglîma Râja Âkob to imprisonment for life, and Râsap and Sâpi to long terms of incarceration. Bakar, the man who had found it so easy to kill a defenceless woman in cold blood, went to the gallows screaming for mercy, proving at the last that he was a cur at heart, a striking contrast to most Malays, who when their time comes, look a violent death calmly in the face, unflinchingly, with a smile upon their lips.

ALFRED HUXLEY'S RIDE



ALFRED HUXLEY'S RIDE

'As I ride, as I ride,
With a full heart for my guide,
So its tide rocks my side,
As I ride, as I ride,
That, as I were double-eyed,
He, in whom our Tribes confide,
Is descried, ways untried,
As I ride, as I ride.'

Through the Metidja to Abd El Kadir.

ALFRED HUXLEY, the district doctor, stood on his verandah staring at the telegram in his hand. For a moment he went giddy, and the landscape, seen below the rattan chinks, danced and reeled in a manner which was not wholly due to the heat-haze through which he looked upon it. Then he crushed up the piece of coarse paper with nervous, shaking fingers, and thrust it into his pocket.

The little Tamil telegraph peon, with a scarlet cap surmounting the ill-kept hair which he wore in a chignon, stood before him, rubbing one bare foot across the instep of the other, and watching the white man furtively. The peon knew nearly all the news that from time to time came rapping along the wire, for the

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operator, like most of his kind in Asia, was an incorrigible gossip. Natives, too, are far better informed concerning the private business of their 'white neighbours than most Europeans find it convenient to believe, and though the peon's face was innocent of all expression, he was in reality watching the doctor with amused curiosity, and would presently record his impressions for the benefit of the operator with unfettered coarseness and much unconscious humour. Most people, white and brown alike, knew a good deal about Alfred Huxley's troubles, and the knowledge that this was so often made the young doctor wince when he was alone; and since the telegram was calculated to touch up an old sore shrewdly, the telegraph peon felt that he had a right to find some interest in the situation. The sight of pain and suffering is always attractive to a large number of minds of the lower order, and in this the eternal East differs little from the mushroom West.

The telegram was very short :—

'Wife dying for want of a surgeon. Nurse can do nothing. Bring instruments.

'ARCHER.'

Alfred Huxley's lean, hungry, nervous face

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was working and twitching spasmodically, as though the muscles and tendons were being jerked from the back of his head by some unseen hand. His eyes roamed wildly, then stared before him stupidly, fixed vaguely upon nothing in particular. His lips were alternately parting and closing tightly. He pulled himself together with a strong effort, and turned hurriedly towards his bedroom. His steps were arrested by the insinuating voice of the peon.

‘The *Tuan* has not signed the receipt,’ it said.

Huxley turned back angrily, and scrawled his initials across the bottom of the slip of paper which the peon held out to him. Then once more, with the same hurried steps, he turned towards his bedroom. Again the voice of the peon stopped him.

‘Is there no answer?’

Huxley swore aloud. Then he looked at his watch. It wanted a quarter of an hour of mid-day—the burning, blazing, pitiless noon of the Malay Peninsula. It would take him a quarter of an hour to make his preparations, and then a good eight hours to reach Kuâla Bram, where Mrs Archer lay dying for want of a surgeon’s aid—eight hours for eighty miles, twenty of them up the stiff grade of the mountain side. He made the calculation mechanic-

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ally as he turned towards the writing-table on the verandah. Then he seated himself and wrote a telegram.

‘Will be with you by eight o’clock.

‘HUXLEY.’

The pencilled characters, written by the hand that shook so violently, straggled untidily over the rough, cheap paper. Huxley threw his message to the waiting peon, who caught it deftly. ‘Take that to the office,’ he said, over his shoulder, as he once more strode across the verandah towards his bedroom.

As he entered the door he shouted again and again to his ‘boy.’ He continued to shout mechanically, with short intervals for swearing, while he made his preparations for departure with feverish eagerness, but no one answered his summons. His servants, as is the way of the people who tend bachelors in these Eastern lands, had all sneaked off to the bazaar, and not a soul was within ear-shot. Huxley threw off the white duck suit which he was wearing, exchanging it for a dust-coloured pair of Khaki trousers, which had seen much service in jungle and snipe - swamp, wriggled into a rasping flannel shirt, stiff and rough from the ungentle treatments which it had received at the hands

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of the station *dhobi*, drew on a pair of very badly-whitened canvas shoes, crammed a big sun-hat on to his head, and so arrayed, rushed out into the verandah, sweating at every pore. He had dressed in so frenzied a hurry that his haste had but served to delay him, and his clothes looked as though they had been thrown on to his back with a pitchfork. He seized his bicycle, and lifting it clear from off the floor, carried it down the steps that led from the verandah to the ground. He then made the discovery that his trousers were showing a violent eagerness to slip over his hips, and he had to run back into his bedroom for his leather belt, returning presently, strapping it round his waist as he ran. He felt the pneumatic tyres of his machine and found that they were slack, and cursing mechanically, he set to work to inflate them. The operation took him far longer than was in any wise necessary, for his excitement made him lack steadiness of hand and eye, but at length the rubber stood up firm and round, refusing to yield to his testing thumb. He leaped on to his bicycle, and then back to the ground again, and rushed back into his bedroom. He had forgotten his hold-all. The litter of clothes which, in his eagerness, he had scattered up and down his room, on chairs, bed and floor, concealed the bag from sight, and

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before he succeeded in finding it, he had reduced the already disordered room to an absolute wreck. He ran out into the fierce sun-glare once more, and strapped the hold-all on to the backbone of his bicycle. Then he mounted into the saddle, and rode at a break-neck pace to the little hospital which stood a few hundred yards down the white road. A sleepy totie and a very wide-awake Tamil dresser answered his call, and soon the oak box containing the shining instruments was safely stowed away in the hold-all, and Huxley, scorching up the road with his face towards Kuâla Bram, thanked God that he was fairly on his way at last.

It seemed to him that whole æons of time had elapsed since the telegram reached him, and his preparations for departure had been begun, yet as he flew past the gates of the police barracks, the mid-day bugle, blown by a small Sikh boy, puffing for all he was worth, with distended cheeks and a sublime disregard for tune, screamed discordantly through the still, hot air. Huxley, without slackening his pace, looked at the watch which he carried in a pouch at his belt. Yes, it was just twelve o'clock, and he had eight hours in which to cover the distance that separated his station from Kuâla Bram—eighty miles to traverse in the time, if his promise to the Archers was to be fulfilled.

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Huxley leaned forward and raced up the blazing highway, little whirling spurts of smoke-like dust leaping up and dancing frenziedly with one another at the tail of his hind-wheel. He missed a clumsy bullock-cart or two by a fraction, passed like a flash between a pair of strolling Chinese coolies, stone deaf to the sound of his warning bell ; was forced to slacken speed and swerve dangerously to avoid an odd half dozen native urchins, tanned of skin and with hair in frowsy, tattered tufts bleached yellow by the sun, who were making mud-pies out of arid and unpromising materials in the centre of the road ; and yelling himself hoarse to warn the heedless, passed dashing through the crowds of natives like the onset of a typhoon, and vanished down the road, leaving a babbling hubbub of shrill voices, laughter and inarticulate protest in his wake.

In a few minutes he had won clear of the native town, and as he saw the long, empty road, achingly, glaringly white, lying stretched before him, like a solid sunbeam, dazzling his eyes, he increased the already furious pace at which he was riding. In the tumult of emotions to which he was a prey, Huxley found a thrilling delight in the desperate pace, a boundless relief in the exertion and the action, and much comfort in the knowledge that each turn of the

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treadles brought him nearer to Kuāla Bram. Presently he reached the parting of the ways ; the road which he had been following wriggling away through the low scrub jungle, to run on and on up the West Coast of the Peninsula, the other to his right heading directly for the main range. A dozen miles or so away, dead in front of him as he changed the direction of his journeying, Huxley could see the undulating lines of the mountain tops, with the trees that crowned them making a jagged fret-work against the paleness of the white-hot sky. The hills, seen from a distance of a dozen miles, showed a faint, even blue, soft and smoky ; here and there, on a spur that ran forward into the plain, the individual trees that covered the slopes of the forest-clad uplands could be seen with marvellous distinctness through the clear air ; the whole range seemed to dance and shimmer restlessly in the heat-haze. Huxley looked at the mountains, and his lips set tightly. The road, he knew, wound up and up and over the great barrier before him. He felt like a soldier brought for the first time into the presence of the enemy whom it was his business to overcome. Then he breasted the rise, steadying his pace somewhat, for the set of the grade against him suddenly shortened his breathing, and seemed to double the weight

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of the machine. The road ran through low secondary growth, young jungle that had sprung up and lived riotously on land that for a brief season had been made to yield a crop to some indolent Malay, whose energy was not equal to the prolongation of the strife which he had thoughtlessly begun with Nature. Here and there a coffee garden, the plants half smothered for lack of weeding, bearing witness unmistakably to their native ownership, swarmed up a hillside, and fell headlong into big jungle a few hundred yards away. A roadside shop, with clusters of yellow bananas strung across the window on lines of rattan, five or six bottles of 'strop'—sickly sweet syrup, manufactured from unimaginable nastinesses—and an indolent crowd of loafers, lolling clumsily on a rude and comfortless bench, flashed past Huxley as he breasted the slope. A neat cottage in a trim garden, carefully fenced, marked the spot where a party of Javanese road coolies had their home, for these folk are never happy unless they have reared around them some clusters of the flowers for which they have so real and so instinctive a love. Presently, as Huxley whirled along, a dirty cluster of thatched coolie-lines, inhabited by grease and dung-smeared Tamils, naked save for their foul loin-clouts, sprung up on either side of the white road, and he passed

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between the rows of uneven buildings to an accompaniment of many nameless odours, while the lean curs scuttled out of his way, snarling angrily, with tails pressed tightly between their legs. The first flight of the foot-hills was reached in about half an hour, and here the road ran downward for a mile, so Huxley, panting gently, threw his feet on to the rests, and let his bicycle spin away, carried forward at a delightful pace by the impetus acquired by its own weight. He was beginning to leave the secondary jungle, and the forest which now rose up abruptly on either hand showed little sign of having been tormented by man. The great trees raced back towards the station which Huxley had left behind him, all appearing to lean hurriedly forward as they ran. Five or six hundred feet below him the tumbled waters of the river fought their way through a narrow gorge, warring noisily with the serried ranks of boulders that seemed to dispute every inch of their passage. A great jungle crow, with rusty red plumage and a black unlovely head, sprang up out of some clusters of long grass, and swinging clumsily on one great waving stem, cried '*Bab, bab, bab,*' discordantly, as Huxley flew past. The bicycle, unchecked by brake or peddle, bounded forward, the wheels whizzing round eagerly, the whole machine appearing to

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be endowed with life; and Huxley, his lips parted, his breath coming rather short, sweat pouring from his face and drenching his clothes, sat firmly on the saddle, grateful for the momentary rest, and finding the air, which blew so coolly against his cheeks, as he plunged through it, wonderfully refreshing and invigorating.

The road wound down hill, turning and twisting, and almost unconsciously the fingers on the handles of the bicycle guided its course, so that it flew round each sweeping corner as though it chose its way of its own accord, unaided by its rider. Presently the river gleamed brightly under the white's man's feet, as the bicycle flew across the wide wooden bridge that spanned it near the bottom of the slope, and half a mile up stream, Alfred could see the yellow earth upturned by a gang of Chinese miners, their blue-clad figures swarming up and down the notched tree-trunks that served them as ladders, like strings of ants running to and fro around their nest. The river crossed, the road wound up and up again, with here and there a short steep pitch down which the bicycle sped merrily. The grade was about one in thirty, not very steep, but extremely persistent, and each mile made Huxley more and more conscious of the weight of his machine and of

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the hold-all hanging bound between his knees. The river tumbled, and boiled, and foamed, and swore down below him in the valley; the road ran up the edge of the narrow gorge, skirting it giddily; the eternal forest, still, splendid, majestic, rose on every side, mysterious and impenetrable; the mountains, climbing up and up upon one another's shoulders, seemed to reach to the sky, for Huxley had to strain his head backwards to catch a glimpse of the crests overhead; and up the dusty road, amid all this splendour and prodigal magnificence, the white man toiled painfully, kicking his machine revolution by revolution towards the summit of the pass. The last village on the western slope came into view at about a quarter past one o'clock, and Huxley crawled past the untidy hovels on the roadside, and drew up at the little police station, standing in a bare compound, distinguished from its neighbours by its roof of red tiles.

A blue-clad Malay constable brought him a drink of ice-cold water in a glass, that had been cunningly fashioned from an old whisky bottle by breaking off the upper portion, and after he had drunk greedily, Huxley asked the policeman how much further it was to the pass, and what was the nature of the road.

'It is fourteen milestones from this place,'

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said the constable. 'And the *Thau* must climb, and climb, and climb, all the way.'

'Is none of it down hill?' asked Huxley, rather hopelessly.

'Sin! Pig's flesh! . Poison!' exclaimed the policeman, with emphasis. He wished to convey that if there were an inch of descent between the station and the pass he would be prepared to sin, to eat of the accursed meat, and to suffer himself to be poisoned without protest. Being a Malay, however, his energy was not equal to the task of filling in his sentence with all the parts of speech requisite for the proper conveyance of the above sentiment; therefore, he contented himself with the substantives, and trusted to the tone in which he pronounced them to prevent any misunderstanding as to his meaning.

With something like a groan, Huxley remounted his machine, and began the weary plod up hill. The road skirted gorge after gorge, twisting and twining round the sides of the mountains, spanning with tiny bridges the little bustling mountain streams that came leaping and bounding downwards from the upland springs, and climbing up and up and up, steadily, heartlessly, relentlessly. Every now and again Huxley, looking upwards, would see the white road line twisting through the

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greenery hundreds of feet above him, and almost despairingly he would ask himself whether it were possible for him to lug his machine to such a height, and then would press doggedly at the treadles with straining legs and bowed shoulders. Later he would look down and mark the spot from which he had attained the height, wondering that he had climbed it successfully, and wondering, too, whether he had the strength for many more such ascents. He was not conscious of being out of breath, but his heart leaped, and bumped, and jerked, and throbbed, playing a dull tattoo against his ribs. The blood sang noisily in his ears. His body, though drenched with sweat, felt cold and numb. But still he plodded on. A splendid waterfall dancing down the mountain-side, and vanishing in a hissing, splashing torrent of broken water into the culvert that bore it under the road, called to him to stop and rest, to bathe his head and arms, to cease for a moment the hopeless struggle. But still he plodded on. The cool mountain air blew about his face, in strong contrast to the fevered breath of the plain which he had left behind him only an hour or two ago. It should have been refreshing, invigorating ; instead, it seemed to pierce him to the bone, to make him limp and weak, while the wild leaping of his heart

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against his ribs made his eyes heavy as with sleep, so that he longed to stretch himself to rest upon the ground. But still he plodded on. He did not dare look at his watch. He felt that it would tell him that he had as yet only accomplished but a small portion of his journey. Such knowledge, he felt, would fill him with despair, and might, perhaps, rob him of the power to press forward, so he did not touch the pouch that felt so heavy against his aching side. And doggedly, unflinchingly, he plodded on. It seemed to him that the man who was driving the bicycle up that endless slope was not himself, but some other poor devil, whom he, Alfred Huxley, was cruelly forcing to perform the labour for which he was physically incapacitated. He felt a deep pity for the unfortunate creature, a pity, however, that was not in any way inclined to mercy ; and so, despairingly, heartlessly, he plodded painfully forward. The sweat trickled down his face and body, but he was conscious of no warmth, rather the perspiration seemed to be clammy and cold like that which had damped his forehead, he remembered, when the sight of his first operation had turned him sick and giddy. His eyes began to swim, seeing things dimly, unsteadily, with difficulty ; and his heart leaped and bounded more furiously than before. But still, by a

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strong effort of will, he plodded doggedly onwards.

Presently he found himself repeating words mechanically, while only half conscious of their meaning.

‘And does the road wind up hill all the way?’

‘Yes, to the very end!’

‘And does the journey last the live long day?’

‘From morn to night, my Friend!’

Over and over again the words repeated themselves aimlessly in his tired head, becoming inextricably entangled with the motion of his machine—part of himself and it. ‘And does the road’ (plunging kick at the descending treadle) ‘wind up hill *all*’ (despairing shove with the left toe) ‘the way?’ . . . What a weight the machine was! ‘Yes, to the very end!’ (Push it home, push it home, force that treadle earthwards!) ‘And does the jour- (The beast is disputing every inch of the way!) ney last the live long day?’ (That sent it round!) ‘From morn to night’ (another despairing thrust at the obstinate wheel) ‘my Friend!’ And so once more, and then again, and then again, eternally.

‘I’m getting very done,’ Huxley whispered to himself. His words, spoken aloud, seemed to be very faint and distant, and the buzzing in his ears deadened their sound. ‘I’m getting

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awfully done, but I won't give in. It is a little thing compared with what she must be suffering. And it is for Her . . . for Her!' He repeated the words again and again, as though the thought they brought to his weakened memory would nerve him for the struggle that was fast proving too much for him.

Then, as his limbs worked on and on, each effort more painful, more terribly against the grain than the last, his mind went wandering off into the past, and the old agony, that was never wholly still within him, wrung his soul afresh, acting somewhat after the manner of an anæsthetic, making faint for the moment the aching of his limbs, and the violent palpitations of his heart.

He recalled the time when the merry sunlight of the Peninsula took to itself a new meaning, when the chorus of the bird-folk at early morning sang songs to him, the interpretation of which had never before been revealed to his listening ears, when all the world was glad and sweet, and good to live in, because a wonderful thing had come into his life. Alfred Huxley had seen little enough of women during his student days, and very soon after he had taken his degrees, he had come out to the East, where he had mostly been stationed in out-of-the-way places, shunned by

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ladies, like badly-made frocks and unbecoming lights. Then suddenly fever had shaken the life out of one of his superiors at headquarters, and Huxley had been sent for from the jungles where he had found a solid, monotonous sort of happiness, to the little gossiping Eastern town, where folk lived through a sort of perpetual Canterbury Week, with the thermometer hovering about ninety in the shade of the deep verandahs. Huxley had very reluctantly unpacked his tweed clothes, had replenished his almost vanished wardrobe, and, as in duty bound, had taken his share of the 'afternoon gentility,' the laborious and perspiring sociability that men consider due to their high civilisation in the tiny but self-important little capitals of the Peninsula. Then, since he had been long in banishment from people of his own caste, the young doctor fell into a well, after the manner of other oxen and asses. In other words he fell hopelessly in love with Mary Chalmers, the only daughter of a high official, who ruled over a department that he was for ever confusing in his mind with a kingdom. Miss Chalmers was a pretty girl, and as such had many admirers, but she was also a girl of brains, and it was this even more than her beauty that fascinated the young doctor. She had read a great deal, and talked

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well upon many subjects. Moreover, she had the gift of sympathy and understanding which enables a woman to enter whole-heartedly into the thoughts of those about her ; and Huxley, whose solitude had made him silent when among his own people, found himself talking, as he had never talked before, to this girl with the deep, true eyes, and the kind, sweet face. When with her he found himself always at his best ; was surprised to hear words coming from his lips which he knew to be better worth listening to than those of his comrades in the stupid little town ; and, loving the girl with all his soul, he had brought himself to believe that Mary returned his love. The dream had been a brilliant one while it lasted, making all Alfred's world a fairyland, and the awakening had been all the more cruel in consequence. With incredulous horror Huxley learned that Miss Chalmers was about to marry Mr Archer, an official who occupied a position even higher than that of her father, a big man with a sharp, brusque manner, masterful, and, as Alfred thought, cruel almost to savagery. Mary Chalmers, however, was fascinated by Archer, mistaking, perhaps, roughness for strength, and selfishness for manly independence, and it was plain to everyone that she worshipped the very ground he trod upon with his great,

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thickly-shod feet. Then it was that Huxley committed an unpardonable offence. In spite of the certainty of his defeat, he told Mary of his love for her, and though she was kinder than many would have been in similar circumstances, Huxley came away from his last interview with her more miserable than he had hitherto conceived it possible for a human being to be. Since then he had not seen her at all. He had avoided all chances of meeting her during the weeks that he still remained at the capital, and shortly afterwards he had been sent back to his own jungle district, some older man having been found to take the place which death had left vacant. Archer, soon after his marriage, was appointed to the charge of a State on the eastern slope of the Peninsula, and the first and only communication that Huxley had had with him since he went to live at Kuála Bram was the telegram that was now sending him struggling over the main range. The district surgeon, who should have been at Kuála Bram, had recently been sent away to Europe, rotten with dysentery, and Archer had not considered it necessary to send for a special doctor to attend Mrs Archer in her trouble ; a nurse, he thought, would suffice. Now, so Alfred gathered from the telegram, the case had proved itself to be beyond the nurse's skill, and

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with how much reluctance he could well imagine, Archer had decided upon calling Huxley to the aid of his dying wife. That he had done so, proved to Alfred more clearly than aught else how urgent must be the need. Therefore, in spite of failing strength and a wildly galloping heart, he plodded doggedly onwards.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon when Huxley saw the red-tiled roofs of the Government buildings and the dusty browns and yellows of the native hovels, thatched with palm-leaves, reeling tipsily before his swimming eyes. This, he knew, was the summit; and through the narrow gap in the mountains came an ice-cold gust of wind to greet him. On every side the mountains rose, tumbled pall-mall one above the other, each one so close that in the clear air it seemed as though Huxley had but to put out his hand to touch its forest-clad slopes. Every tree-top was seen distinctly, with its wealth of branch and leaf, each with its own peculiar shade of green or bronze or yellow or red or rust-colour. Very far away, thousands of feet below him, Huxley could see the hot, moist expanses of jungle-covered plain, over which a fine blue mist, half damp, half distance, hovered like a thin fog.

A little blue-clad Malay constable tumbled hastily down the stairs of the police station, and

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did his best to look as though he had, in truth, been standing sentry from the first—a duty which he and his fellows regarded as a superstitious practice of the White Man, with which they found themselves completely out of sympathy.

Huxley did not halt for a moment. No sooner had the sudden removal of the weight of the bicycle from his aching legs told him that the grade was at last in his favour, than he set his feet upon the coasters, and let the machine have its own way. With a sort of buck, as though glad to find itself released, the bicycle shook itself free, and leaped forward down the slope. The road wound down and down, with many sinuous twists and curves, skirting the side of the mountain, with one vast bank of vegetation climbing up and up on the one hand, and with another similar slope of jungle dipping down and down into the gorge where a stream pattered noisily. The bicycle whirled downwards with ever-increasing pace, bounding rather than revolving, and creating such a wind in its passage that Huxley feared to be blown from his seat. The shocks which the violent contact of the machine with the ground communicated to Huxley's arms through the mediumship of his handle-bars, ran up his taut muscles to the shoulders, numbing his whole

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body. He clung desperately, impotently, to the machine, his eager, Red Indian face strained with excitement and anxiety, his eyes, puckered against the wind, fixed keenly on the track ahead of him, staring intently through his contracted eyelids. His lips were parted slightly, and his breath came in quick, short pants. But he made no effort to check the desperate speed. It mattered little to him, he thought wildly, if death should chance to come to him in the guise of a broken neck, and each turn of the scampering wheels brought him nearer and nearer to Mary. The mad palpitations in his breast increased rather than diminished, and he felt almost light-headed, all sorts of incongruous memories of days long past and dead, of incidents that had happened when he was a child in short frocks, of the little troubles of his school days, of half holiday afternoons long since forgotten, came crowding into his mind. The bicycle whirled on and on. Curve after curve, and bend after bend was swept round at a headlong pace, the machine canting dangerously at every turn. In little more than ten minutes the fifth milestone whizzed past, a dwarfed white ghost standing aside to let him by; and immediately afterwards, Huxley plunged round a corner to find a clumsy bullock-cart almost across the road. There were about

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two feet of space between the near wheels and the edge of a precipice which dropped sheer down several hundred feet to the granite boulders in the stream below. Frank aimed for it desperately. He had a vision, instantaneous but distinct, like a view seen by the glare of a flash of lightning, of a sleepy Tamil, with a scared black face, rearing himself up from out of the red cloth in which he had been rolled in the bottom of his cart, his thin, eager hands tugging aimlessly at the cord reins; of great rough wheels turning slowly; of two dirty white bullocks with lowered heads, in which the nostrils showed scarlet, and the eyes placid and beastlike; and then on the side of the nearer there suddenly came into being a huge red gash, that ripped along the smooth hide and emitted torrents of crimson fluid. The bicycle reeled, waddled perilously, nearly unseating its rider, and then flew forward upon its way, the off treadle dripping blood. Huxley's throbbing heart came lolloping up into his gullet, at the nearness of the danger and the narrowness of his escape, until in his dazed state he half expected to see it come flying out from between his lips. But the sight, at very close quarters, of the grim face of Death, sudden and precipitate, had sobered him; and, as he whirled on down the grade, the thought came

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to him that Mary's well-being hung, for that one day, upon his continued existence. Therefore, he began to apply his brake, and though the jarring of the lever sent showers of 'pins and needles' flying up his arms to his shoulder joints, the headlong speed of the machine began to slacken, and, for the first time since he had left the divide, he felt that his bicycle was once more under his control. Still he dashed downwards at a fiery pace, and presently the chill, fresh air of the mountains—which ever seems to the sojourner in the plains of Asia to have something so indescribably clean and pure about it—began to be exchanged for the steaming warmth of the hot, damp lowlands. He passed strings of clumsy bullock-carts, and more than once he had to dismount to avoid a destructive collision. But he was up and off again down the white road, almost before he was conscious of having checked the progress of his machine. At a quarter before four o'clock, he whirled past the first police station on the Eastern side of the Peninsula, and entered the forest beyond. The road was level now, and once more his feet had to do their share of the work, but after the long rest which the descent had given them, they appeared to move mechanically, without conscious effort. He had covered the last fourteen miles in three quarters of an hour, and he heaved

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a sigh of relief as he remembered that half his journey, and the whole of the severe hill-climbing was over and done with. His road still skirted a brawling little mountain stream, and every now and again he caught a glimpse of a long reach of troubled water, fretting around great blocks and jagged boulders of granite, a torrent of bronze and olive-colour flowing beneath an arching canopy of heavy foliage. Half a dozen miles further on Huxley passed through a big mining village and stopped for a few minutes to drink deeply of bottled beer, which was offered for sale at a Chinese shop. Then he mounted his bicycle, and once more pushed forward in the direction of Kuâla Bram.

For a mile or two he continued to thread the vast Malayan forest, through which the even-song of the birds was beginning to ring. Then the road passed out of the shady places, and ran for a dozen miles through a narrow valley, covered with coarse grass, wild rhododendrons, and low, sparse brushwood. Here and there a native village, marked from afar by the crests of the coco-nut and betel palms, sat sleepily on the bank of a lazy stream; the bright, intense green of the growing rice splashed the plain with wide washes of colour; and herds of water-buffaloes trooped with leisurely gait towards the river, squeaking plaintively.

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Later, the grassy country was exchanged for the valley of the Bram, where the villages and rice-fields clustered closely about the banks of a beautiful river, that spread out into wide shallows, set with yellow sand-banks, and then contracted once more into narrower compass, to plunge headlong down a granite-bound rapid, below which it once more opened out to saunter lazily along its bed.

Huxley ran down the banks of the Bram for some ten miles, and flew across the great masonry bridge that spanned it below the rapids, just as the dusk was coming, and the noisy chorus of bird and insect, that had almost deafened his ears during the last hour was dying down, its place being taken by the myriad lesser sounds that together make the music of the long, cool night in the quiet jungle places. A faint moon was swimming through the cloud banks overhead, and by its pale light Huxley continued his way, painfully, laboriously. He was very faint and spent. His heart still palpitated savagely, and he felt sick and ill, but still he struggled on. He knew that only some fifteen miles now lay between him and his journey's end, and the thought nerved him to a final effort.

The long, straight road spread on and on in front of him, pale and dim in the veiled moon-

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light ; on either hand the vast black masses of jungle rose above him, gigantic and grotesque, like threatening shadows cast by the mysterious beings of some other world ; a little star peeped out of the clouds and winked at him derisively, mocking his pain ; an argus pheasant, somewhere in the jungle across the river, hooted musically to its mate, and the plaintive howl was echoed from half-a-dozen neighbouring hill-tops ; and on every side, the insects, in their thousands, whizzed, and ticked, and whirred ceaselessly.

As the moonlight brightened, the white mile-stones by the roadside showed rapidly diminishing numbers, then single figures, then a five, a four, a three, a two. The wattled walls of the houses of the station which straggled out over the road came into view ; then the high fence of a gaol ; a Sikh barracks roofed with corrugated iron, looking white in the moonlight ; the big block of Government offices ; and lastly in the near distance the house which, so it seemed to Huxley, had been in his mind's eye ever since he left his own home. The young doctor scrambled down off the saddle of his machine, leaning heavily upon the bicycle as he rested it against the steps of the verandah, and, leaving it, staggered up into the hall. The big clock half way up the staircase chimed the three

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quarters, and Huxley felt a faint throb of pride in the fact that he was full fifteen minutes before his promised time.

Archer came hurrying down the stairs, and shook him perfunctorily by the hand.

'Come up,' he said. 'We've been having the devil of a time. I tell you a man does not know what he's letting himself in for when he commits matrimony. Come up and see what can be done. No, don't stay to change your clothes, there's no time to be lost.'

Huxley reeled to the doorway, and thence crawled back down the steps to his bicycle. With trembling fingers he unbuckled the straps of his hold-all. Carrying it with difficulty, as a man might lift a weight which strained his every muscle, he once more made his way into the hall, and began with pain and difficulty to follow his host up the steep stairs. On the first landing he dropped the hold-all, and reeled tipsily against the balusters. His face was drawn and grey, his mouth twitched nervously, his right hand was pressed convulsively to his left side, the fingers of his disengaged hand scrabbled at the wooden wall aimlessly, his breath came in hard, short sobs, through lips that were the colour of ashes. The whole staircase upon which he stood seemed to be whirling round and round dizzily, and the sound of Archer's

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imperious voice calling to him, in evident irritation at his delay, came to his ears faint and distant, like a cry from another world. Then, almost as suddenly as it had come, the paroxysm passed away, and picking up his hold-all, he crawled with lagging feet up the remaining stairs.

In the bedroom Mrs Archer lay stretched upon the sheets, beneath the looped-up mosquito-net, her open eyes staring blindly at the linen canopy from which the curtain depended. She was either in a faint, or unconscious through the influence of some powerful anæsthetic. The air of the room was heavy and sickly with the fumes of chloroform and disinfectants. As Huxley looked at the prostrate figure the giddiness of a moment before seemed to return to him, and all his love and longing for the girl, the passion which he had restrained so firmly, which he had struggled with so bravely for months, surged up anew in his breast, wringing him with the old torture, the old humiliation, the old despair.

The white-clad nurse stepped across the matted floor on noiseless slippered feet, greeting the doctor with that confidential air which thieves and other professional people are accustomed to reserve for those of their own calling. In a few whispered words she told

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him the details of the case, and Huxley, still dazed and giddy, answered her mechanically in a hoarse undertone. Then Archer, despite his protests, was driven from the room by the mandate of the nurse, and as he paced angrily up and down the passage, the sound of indistinct words, and aimless movements within the room reached his ears fitfully.

It seemed to him as though the operation, whatever it was, which the doctor and the nurse were performing, would never end. He heard the ticking of the crickets and tree-beetles in the palms about the house, the hiccougging note of a frog in the jungle across the river, and every now and again the hooting scream of an argus pheasant. The great clock on the stairs ticked persistently, monotonously, wearying his brain. Would they never have done? Then there came a sharp exclamation, a cry, and silence. Archer, listening without, could not determine whether the sounds had proceeded from operator, nurse, or patient. He stepped hastily to the door, and peered into the room. He saw the still form of his wife upon the bed, and the doctor and nurse whispering together as they bent over her. The nurse, disturbed by his coming, looked up, and motioned him away with her left hand. He obeyed mechanically, and another weary

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period of waiting supervened. Then at last the nurse appeared at the door, and half closing it behind her, stood gazing at him with the handle still held between her fingers. It needed no spoken word to tell Archer that something was wrong.

‘What is it, woman?’ he asked huskily.

The nurse gave a half-hysterical sob; then she spoke in a scared whisper.

‘The operation was a very delicate one,’ she said. ‘I made him try it . . . it was the only chance of saving her. . . . It had to be done at once or not at all. . . . He did his best . . . but his hand was unsteady . . . it slipped . . . it was no one’s fault . . . not immediately fatal . . . matter of hours . . . no one to blame . . . it was the only chance. . . .’

She broke off, weeping and laughing hysterically, as Archer pushed roughly past her, and entered the room.

Mary lay upon the bed, terribly worn and wasted, but still mercifully unconscious. Her open eyes stared unflinchingly at the bed-canopy, but to Archer, armed with the knowledge that she was dying, there seemed to have come a new look of agony and distress into her sweet face. He saw everything in the room with a minute observation of detail

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that was strange to him. He saw every fold of the drooping sheets; the high clothes-horse with some of his wife's dainty dresses depending from them like mocking phantoms of her bright and graceful presence as he had known it in the past; he saw the oil-lamp on the table, and fell a-wondering whether it would smell evilly through being turned down so low; he noted even the knick-knacks on the dressing-table, and the invalid appliances on the stand at the bed-side. All these things, trivial and insignificant, seemed to leap up at him as he entered the room, impressing themselves so forcibly upon his mind that in after years he could recall their every detail without an effort; but for the moment the only thing he was conscious of was the still form upon the bed, and the figure of Alfred Huxley, the man who had loved and killed her, drenched with sweat, caked with dust, kneeling at the bed-side, with his face hidden in his folded arms.

Half mad with grief, that was none the less three parts rage against the man who had taken Mary from him, he strode furiously to the side of the kneeling figure, tripping over an open box of shining surgical instruments as he did so. The bright blades sprawled out over the floor with a noisy clatter, but no one heeded them. The next moment Archer seized

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Huxley by the shoulder and shook him viciously.

‘You villain! You clumsy scoundrel!’ he cried. ‘You’ve killed her, killed her! Robbed me of her—out of malice, as like as not!’ and he swore a great oath.

But Huxley made no answer to his accuser. His body came away from the sheet limply in the other’s clutch, and then, slipping from Archer’s grasp, subsided in a shapeless heap upon the floor, the white face, twisted and contorted hideously by the pangs of the death agony, glaring grotesquely at the ceiling.

The young doctor’s wildly-leaping heart had carried its owner over the unseen boundary which divides the living from the dead, stilling its own pains and sorrows for ever.

**THE VIGIL OF PA' TÙA,
THE THIEF**



THE VIGIL OF PA' TUA, THE THIEF

THAT portion of the China Sea which washes the yellow sands and the dense forests of the Malay Peninsula is still one of the most sequestered spots in all the world. It is studded with half a hundred islands, some inhabited by men, some by sea-birds and swallows only, and one and all smothered from tip to water-line in inextricable tangles of greenery. The few hundred islanders are an amphibious folk who live chiefly by and on the sea, looking to it, not to the land which they cultivate so indolently, so grudgingly, for their means of livelihood. There is, however, one product of the desert islands which is more valuable than anything which these toilers on the deep succeed in wresting from the sea. This is the edible birds' nests which the swallows build in the caves that indent the faces of almost every cliff in the Archipelago, for they find a ready market in Singapore, where huge prices are paid for those of the best qualities. They are much sought after by Chinese epicures, who prefer the soup which is prepared from them to almost anything in the world, un-

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less it be an egg which has been an heirloom in the family for several generations, or certain portions of the interior economy of the chow dog.

The trade in these nests has been, for so long a time, such a recognised means of money-getting, that each cave in the little Archipelago is claimed as the property of the descendants of the original discoverer; and if a new cave be found—as still sometimes happens in these remote seas—the lucky man who first chances upon it has the right to regard it as his exclusive property, no one being permitted to take the nests from it without paying him tribute, or obtaining his permission.

Pa' Tûa was a man of the islands. He had been born and bred on Tioman, the largest of the group, and he had the reputation among his fellows of being able to make his way into any place which a swallow might have the agility to visit. None the less he was a fisherman by trade, and as he owned no caves of his own, he had only occasion to show his skill when others paid him a fee for gathering the nests on their behalf. In this way he made acquaintance with many of the best islands of the Archipelago, but his knowledge was by no means exhaustive, and as is the case with most of the people of Tioman, there were many parts of the group which he had never had occasion to visit.

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By habit and inclination, Pa' Tûa was a thief, and moreover he had the misfortune to be amorously inclined.

In July 1898, Pa' Tûa discovered that he was in love. It was not for the first time by any means, for as his nickname, which signifies 'Old Father,' implies, he was not in his first youth. He had indeed been married, and had thereafter divorced his wives, more times than he could count with ease upon his horny fingers, and even at that moment he had an old woman, whom he had taken to wife in the days of his youth, hidden away in his hut on the beach of Tioman. Nevertheless, since his religion allowed him to be married four deep at any one time, he was anxious to be joined once more in holy wedlock—the comfortable, easily-dissolved wedlock of the Muhammadans. The object of his passion was a widow—a buxom, full-busted girl of the islands—whose cheeks were ruddy under the brown skin with health and fresh sea air, whose straight, firm limbs could manage a boat, husk a cocoanut, and endure a long day of laborious fish-curing with as little fatigue as any woman in the Archipelago. This lady, moreover, was virtuous, which meant that she was only to be won by a formal marriage before the Imâm in the presence of many relatives. This, like many other re-

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spectable things, was inconvenient, for it necessitated the payment by Pa' Tûa of a wedding portion, and also of a further sum of money—the *blanja hangus*, or 'burnt cash'—which should defray the expenses to which the lady would be put on account of the marriage feast. Therefore, like many others before him, Pa' Tûa found that money was the enemy of true love; and though he had made his old wife pinch and screw and stint herself in order to pay for her rival in her man's affections, the process was a very long one, and Pa' Tûa began to grow impatient.

He was the part owner of a fishing boat, and he laboured hard to save up the sum that he needed, but at last, weary with toil, he hit upon a plan by means of which he might enrich himself more rapidly. One of his neighbours owned an island situated at a distance of three or four miles from Tioman, a rocky, jungle-covered place, honey-combed with caves, in which the birds of the most valuable kind built freely. If he could become possessed of half a hundred-weight of these birds' nests, Pa' Tûa would, he told himself, have money enough and to spare. I have said that Pa' Tûa was accustomed to steal whenever the opportunity occurred, therefore he had no scruples about carrying his design into execution. His only anxiety was to escape detection, and to disarm suspicion from

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the outset. To the latter end he went to Che' Ârif, the owner of the desert island, one sunny morning in July, and asked him for the loan of his small boat, saying that he proposed to visit another island, which he named, for the purpose of plucking some coco-nuts in an abandoned plantation. Che' Ârif, quite unsuspecting of evil designs on the part of Pa' Tûa, readily lent the boat, and half an hour later that worthy set out for the island of the birds' nests.

The sea was calm, the sun was blazing overhead, the little waves splashed against the wooden sides of the boat in lazy, playful ripples, and Pa' Tûa sitting in the stern, with a round palm-leaf hat upon his head, paddled steadily until he was out of sight of the village. Then he changed the direction of his canoe and headed straight for Che' Ârif's island. At the end of about an hour and a half he reached his destination, made the painter fast to a projecting boss of rock, and clambered up the precipitous side of the cliff. The island rises from the sea like a lime-stone bluff from out the flatness of a surrounding plain, and Pa' Tûa had much ado to win a footing at all. The first few feet were the most difficult, for the wash of the waves had prevented the creepers and bushes from gaining a grip upon the rock, but twelve feet higher up the luxuriant vegeta-

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tion clustered in heavy masses. When this point was reached, Pa' Tûa halted for a moment or two to rest. Below and in front of him, as far as the eye could carry, the sea spread away and away to the jagged sky-line which was a restless scollop-work of tiny wavelets. Above him, as he craned his neck to see it, the face of the cliff rose up and up, a vast mass of greenery, broken in places by a projecting block of ragged white rock, and here and there by a patch of coal-black shadow—the caves and fissures in which the birds nested.

Presently, when he had recovered his breath, Pa' Tûa resumed his climb. By clutching the creepers and the roots and branches with fingers and toes—for, like all Malays, Pa' Tûa possessed the advantage of prehensile feet—he swung himself up the face of the cliff without any very serious difficulty, and at last found himself, panting slightly, gazing into the depths of the lowest of the caves. It was a cleft in the rock, long and narrow, with high walls rising sheer on either side, and joining overhead so as to form a kind of tunnel. The space between wall and wall was just large enough at the entrance to admit of the passage of a man's body, but the narrow way into the interior of the cave was of varying width, appearing to Pa' Tûa to open out in places and then to become contracted

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again where the rocks bulged together. So far as he could judge, however, the passage was most narrow at its entrance. The roof of the cavern, some twelve feet above the spot where Pa' Tûa was clinging, ran into the centre of the cliff almost horizontally, jagged and broken by projecting rocks. Then it suddenly vanished, vanished in a black mass of indistinct shadow which showed that there was a high arching cave beyond. The floor of the passage dropped away from beneath Pa' Tûa's elbows in a steep descent, sloping down between its walls of rock until it too was swallowed up in the darkness of the unseen cave to which the narrow passage led. This floor was a solid slab of stone, worn smooth by the passing of much rain-water.

Pa' Tûa took off his hat, and hung it on the bough of a neighbouring bush. Next he slipped his waist-cloth over his head and hung it by the side of his hat. Squatting thus, arrayed in his trousers only, he looked round at the sea which lay some fifty feet below him, and was relieved to find that no one was within sight. Then he laid himself flat on his stomach, and began to push himself very cautiously down into the narrow passage, crawling head foremost, and checking his progress carefully with his hands extended before him, and with his

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clinging knees and feet. In this manner he glided slowly over the edge of the cave's brink. No sooner had his toes followed the rest of his body, however, than he found that he was sliding over the smooth stone. The passage was too narrow for him to be able to draw back his elbows, and the sides as well as the floor of the strait were water-worn to a glassy smoothness. He struggled as one buried alive might fight for freedom within the narrow limits of his coffin, but his efforts served only to accelerate the pace at which he was slipping into the unknown abyss. The rate at which he was travelling became furious, and then, with a sickening thud, the rapid motion of Pa' Tûa's body was abruptly arrested. He was conscious of the feeling that all men have at times experienced in nightmares, when for a space one is completely paralysed at a moment when action is of the most terrible importance. He fought wildly, just as the sleeper fights, and in precisely the same manner he was utterly without the power of movement. He could feel the heavy hand of the rock gripping him mercilessly on each side, he could feel his skin torn and rent and smarting, but only his legs were free, and they slid vainly over the polished flooring of the cave, affording him no purchase. He heard distinctly the tinkle of a loosened

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pebble rattling down the passage in front of him; a host of bats, rudely awakened by his coming, flew backwards and forwards distractedly above his prostrate body, whistling and squeaking, and one of them struck Pa' Tûa in the face with its loathsome wings. He made one more violent effort to free himself, tearing his flesh cruelly, so that the blood ran warmly down his body from a score of wounds, but he did not succeed in moving by a hair's-breadth. He was held fast in the grip of the rocks, securely wedged between the walls on either hand by the impetus of his descent into the bowels of the cave. When the whole horror of his position forced itself with an agony of realisation upon his frightened mind, Pa' Tûa for a space lost his reason. He screamed aloud, and the hollow of the rocks took up his cries and hurled them back to him mockingly; the bats awoke in thousands, and joined the hurrying, motiveless band that already rustled and squeaked above the defenceless man, striking him in the face again and again; he dashed his head from side to side, smiting the rocks with it till the blood ran freely, and trickled into his eyes and mouth. His arms, which he had stretched before him, were now cramped most painfully against his sides, and all his wild efforts to free them were of no avail. So he

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struggled, and fought, and screamed, and bruised himself, till exhausted nature gave way, and he lapsed into merciful unconsciousness.

When he regained his senses, the situation was in no way changed. He was feeling faint and sick, and his cramped limbs ached most agonisingly. Also he was conscious of many bruises and cuts, which throbbed and smarted as though he had recently received a very severe and complete thrashing. But the agony of his body, keen and terrible though it was, was of utter insignificance when compared with the mental suffering of which he was a prey. He had come to the island secretly and alone, giving out that he was bound for quite another place. Until the afternoon was far advanced, no one would think of searching for him, and even if his folk did grow anxious, much precious time must inevitably be lost while they were seeking for him on the island which he had never visited. He recalled with horror the view of the empty sea upon which he had looked with such satisfaction just before he began that fatal descent into the cave. No man had seen him enter, and nothing but his hat and *sârông* hanging on a bough near the mouth of the cavern would afford any indication as to his whereabouts. A puff of wind might easily blow them away, and then Pa'

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Tûa knew that he would die in the prison of the rocks without a soul learning his fate until it was too late. His back was towards the entrance of the cave, and in front of him there was nought but black darkness, jagged rocks, and fringe upon fringe of hanging bats sleeping peacefully. He had no means of telling how the day was waning. That it was still day he knew by the faint light that made its way over his shoulder, and was visible on the roof of his prison, but whether he had lain there for one hour or many he had no means of guessing. To him, racked with pain, body and mind, each minute seemed like many days, and each instant brought its added tale of sufferings.

Presently an ant ran up the surface of the rock and passed over the man's face. It tickled his cheek most irritatingly, and he crushed it against the left-hand wall, rasping his skin as he did so. The appearance of the insect filled him with horror. He knew the abundance of ants to be found in every nook and cranny of the Malay Peninsula, and he knew also that they are omnivorous feeders. If no help came, he would himself die of starvation, while he furnished food for countless living creatures! The bare idea drove him nearly mad, and he fell to fighting and struggling with the unyielding rocks more desperately than

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ever. He strove impotently, till he was spent and panting, but his efforts were all in vain. He only succeeded in further wrenching his cramped limbs, and adding new wounds to the cuts and abrasions with which he was already covered. A cloud of blue flies were hovering about him, settling on the clots of blood and the places where his flesh had been torn. They caused his wounds to itch horribly, and though when he moved his legs wildly, some of them rose with a loud angry buzzing, they resumed their meal the moment that he was still again. Their presence made him feel as though he were dead and falling into corruption even while life and the love of life were still strong within him.

All day long Pa' Tûa lay in his painful captivity, suffering grievously from cramp and terror, and torturing himself still more by dreadful imaginings of agonies yet to come. It had been chilly in the interior of the cavern when Pa' Tûa had first entered it, coming straight into its gloom from the bright sun-glare of the tropic noon. Now, as the afternoon passed away, it became positively cold. The fresh landward-breeze, which brings the fisher-folk home to their huts and their rice-pots after the day's toil in the blazing heat, began to breathe faintly over the sea, first in fitful gusts, then in more sustained puffs, and

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later with a steady persistence. Even in the interior of the cavern it made its presence felt, and each breath of the wind was full of fears for the miserable captive, since any one of them might blow his hat and *sàrong* far away, and so deprive him of his last chance of rescue.

At last, at about six o'clock, Pa' Tûa heard the sound of human voices, and with his heart almost bursting with relief and thankfulness, he cried excitedly for aid. His voice rumbled and roared in the roof of the cavern, till it seemed as though the whole hill was shouting for aid, and when he listened for a reply, the sound of men scrambling up the cliff came to him, and filled him with joy. Now that he was discovered, nothing mattered much. He would, perhaps, be punished for his attempted theft, he might have to forego all hope of wedding the attractive widow, but what did such trifling misfortunes matter when weighed against the delight of freedom from his horrible captivity, and a return to life from out of what had appeared to him during the last few hours to be a very grave?

Presently the faint light at the mouth of the cave was obscured by some moving body, and Pa' Tûa cried lustily that he was wedged firmly in the narrow passage and could not get free. He was unable to see the entrance to the cavern, so could not tell who might be his

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rescuers, but soon the voice of Che' Ârif sounded in his ears.

'*Ya Allah!*' it exclaimed. 'He hath tried to force an entrance to the Cave of the Little Children! How shall we set him free?'

'*Ëntah!*' (I know not!) said another voice, indifferently.

'Pull my legs,' sobbed Pa' Tûa. 'O my brothers, I am in agony. My limbs are cramped, so that I may not move. Pull my legs and set me free. O be not slow, for I am in very great pain.'

Che' Ârif, clinging to the face of the cliff, as Pa' Tûa had done, rested his elbows on the brink of the cavern's mouth, and peered anxiously down the narrow passage. The glow of the sunset was behind him, and its light penetrated into the obscurity sufficiently to enable Che' Ârif to make out the form of Pa' Tûa lying wedged between the walls of rock some twenty feet below him, and some ten yards down the passage. The bare soles of Pa' Tûa's feet were towards Che' Ârif, and the toes were bleeding in many places, where they had been dashed against the rocks by Pa' Tûa in his wild struggles to free himself. The rest of the unfortunate man's body, from knees to neck, appeared to be crushed into a narrow compass that even at that distance seemed to

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be altogether too small for the accommodation of any human being. It made Che' Ârif ache in every limb merely to look at the terribly cramped position of the man who had sought to rob him, and at the sight all the righteous indignation that had filled his heart at the thought of Pa' Tûa's scurvy conduct towards him died out within him. Che' Ârif tore Pa' Tûa's waist-cloth, which still hung upon the bough where he had placed it, into a few long strips, and with the deft fingers of a fisherman well used to ropes and knots, he soon fashioned therefrom a fairly stout cord. This he gave to the man who was with him—a youngster named Mat—bidding him hold it firmly in both hands, and lower himself cautiously down the passage, while Che' Ârif held the end and paid the rope out slowly. With that ugly tortured form lying at the other end of the passage, the descent was by no means tempting, but after some discussion and persuasion Mat consented to try the experiment. Mat was not heavy, and Che' Ârif was a strong man, so the former slid down the slippery floor of the passage without difficulty. When his feet touched those of Pa' Tûa, however, Mat found that his own position was so cramped that it was impossible for him to reach any portion of the prisoner's body with his hands. Accordingly, Che' Ârif was forced

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to draw Mat back again to the entrance of the cavern, and after some further discussion a second attempt was made, Mat being lowered into the passage head foremost. This time Mat was enabled to win a firm grip upon Pa' Tûa's ankles with his hand, and he then cried to Che' Ârif to pull. Che' Ârif ran his bare toes into the earth and greenery at the mouth of the cavern, set his teeth, and tugged savagely. The cord cut deeply into Mat's flesh, Pa' Tûa's legs cracked like pistol shots, and the unfortunate man screamed aloud, for the strain upon his cramped limbs caused him unspeakable agony. Then something gave way with a jerk that nearly sent Che' Ârif flying backwards down the precipice into the sea beneath; Mat uttered a shrill cry, half surprise, half fear; and Pa' Tûa's screams ended in a dull groan. The improvised cord had parted in the middle, and Mat lay face downwards in the narrow passage, with his head between Pa' Tûa's feet. Che' Ârif stripped off his own *sârong*, tore it up hastily, and after many attempts, succeeded in joining it to the end that had been made fast about Mat's waist. Then he drew his companion up out of the cave, panting and sweating with exertion and fear. Pa' Tûa remained wedged in between the rocks as firmly as ever.

Che' Ârif cast a glance round the darkening

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horizon, and what he saw made him exceedingly uncomfortable. Where the afterglow of the sunset still lingered, great bulky clouds, inky black against the paleness of the sky-line, were creeping up out of the under-world. In less than an hour a storm would be upon them, and the island on which he stood afforded no shelter for the boats. If he decided to watch with Pa' Tûa through the night he too would be a captive before morning, his boat being dashed to pieces or washed adrift. He could not afford to risk losing his crafts, and he also wanted his dinner. Therefore, he decided to leave the unfortunate Pa' Tûa alone upon the island, and to return to Tioman, whence he would bring help next morning. He explained this to Pa' Tûa, and the news was greeted with cries and screams of entreaty, for the idea of a lonely night spent in the terrible position in which he found himself was horrible to the tortured man.

'*Apa bûlih bûat?* What can one do?' was all the response that Che' Ârif made to these agonised prayers. He shrugged his shoulders, and said philosophically that Fate was an accursed thing, that the hair of all men was alike black, but that the lot of each of God's creatures was a thing separate and distinct. After looking at Pa' Tûa's terrible plight he probably felt grate-

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ful for the fact that Fate had not destined all men to suffer in precisely the same manner. Then he and Mat stepped on board the two boats—the one which had brought them to the island, and the dug-out that Pa' Tûa had borrowed that morning—and made what haste they could back to Tioman. They narrowly escaped being caught by the storm, and as the wind raged all night, lashing sea and land with driving torrents of rain, all agreed, and quite rightly, that nothing could be done to help Pa' Tûa until the day had dawned.

What horrors the long hours of darkness held for poor Pa' Tûa what man can imagine? Do you realise what cramp means? The cramp that you have, perhaps, felt for a moment or two at a time in the muscles of your legs?—when all the sinews seem to tie and twist themselves into hard, swelling knots, which grow harder and more excruciatingly painful every instant, till you jump and kick wildly, and wriggle yourself into every sort of grotesque contortion while you seek for the one position that will give you relief. If the pain lasts for more than a few seconds at a time you cry out from sheer agony, and yet it very rarely happens that your sufferings are in any way continuous, or affect more than a single member at one and the same time. But Pa' Tûa was afflicted with

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acute cramp from his neck to his hips, cramp that wrung every muscle of his body, with its separate, unendurable pang, cramp that he was powerless to relieve by the slightest change of position, cramp that he was forced to bear without moving, without sympathy or commiseration, in utter loneliness.

Over and over again during the night the cramp seized him, wringing him with such a refinement of agony that he fainted many times because he had not the strength to endure longer. Occasionally he recovered consciousness to find that his limbs were numbed for a moment or two into utter insensibility, but all too soon the cramp returned, not in mere spasmodic pangs, but continuously, until once more his brain ceased to work. The storm which broke with such fury over the Archipelago sent deluges of rain pouring in a continuous stream down the narrow passage of the cave, drenching the unfortunate man to the skin, turning his flesh into rough puckers with the cold, and setting his teeth chattering. The bats seeking shelter from the rain whistled and squeaked unceasingly, striking him in the face again and again. The water, however, had the merit of keeping all insects from approaching him. The thunder roared and rolled overhead, and rumbled through the cavern. The lightning played about the

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interior of the cave in great blue sheets and streaks of blinding brilliancy. And all night long Pa' Tûa lay suffering as it has been given to few men to suffer since the world began.

The dawn broke wan and pale through heavy grey clouds that covered all the heavens. The heavy rain storm of the night had been succeeded by a dreary drizzle. All the world looked cold and damp and disconsolate, and the chill of early morning, intensified by the gloom of the cavern, ate into Pa' Tûa's bones. It seemed to him that he waited for hours and hours before the welcome sound of kindly, human voices told him that at last aid was at hand. He was too spent and exhausted to do more than moan inarticulately when Che' Ârif and a score of other Tioman islanders swarmed up the face of the cliff, and spoke to him from the mouth of the cave. To many of the older men it was a marvel that any life was still in him, but Pa' Tûa, who had been marked out by Fate for unusual suffering, had also been endowed with peculiar powers of endurance.

The rescue party brought with them two little boys, urchins of the islands, who knew intimately the Cave of the Little Children, as Pa' Tûa's prison is named, since they were well

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accustomed to climb down into it year after year when the time came for collecting the birds' nests. A number of ropes, fashioned from coir, and a bamboo filled with buffalo fat completed the equipment of the relief expedition.

It seemed to Pa' Tûa that an interminable period elapsed before the party got to work. There was a great deal of talk as to what was to be done, and Pa' Tûa could hear the gruff voices of the men mixing with the shrill trebles of the children. At last, one of the latter, a boy of about nine years of age, wiry and spare, with skin tanned to a deep, rich brown by the sun, and a dirty-looking tassel of ill-kept hair growing out of the back of his shaven head, took hold of a rope in both hands, and, seating himself at the edge of the cavern's mouth, prepared to slide down to where Pa' Tûa was lying. But first, as is the immemorial custom of the children of the islands when they descend into this cave, he raised his voice in a piping cry to the local demon. 'Pardon, O Grandfather!' he shrilled three times in succession, and the wild echoes of the place took up the cry and sent it rumbling along the roof of the cavern at the end of the passage. Then the boy slid lightly down to Pa' Tûa, whither the other child soon followed him. The elder

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of the two climbed through the slit between wall and wall above the imprisoned man, for his little body slipped through the narrow opening without difficulty. He brought some water and a little rice with him, and he tried to feed Pa' Tûa with some of it. The unfortunate man, however, was in too severe physical pain to think of anything save only his coming release, and though he had gone fasting for four-and-twenty hours, he refused the food, but drank eagerly of the water. Then the children with their deft little hands began to daub his body with the buffalo grease until such portions of his brown skin as they could reach shone and glistened like that of a Tamil coolie when he has smeared himself from head to foot with rancid, evil-smelling *ghi*. This done, one of the boys made two coir ropes fast to Pa' Tûa's legs, and gave the word to the men at the pit's mouth to pull with all their might.

The men seized the ropes, and crying to one another to pull all together, they threw their weight upon them, making the while the discordant and inarticulate noises which Malays ever find necessary when a piece of violent exertion falls to their lot. But above the noisy chorus of the fishermen there rose a piercing and heartrending scream, and the boy who could see Pa' Tûa's face yelled shrilly to the

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men to ease the strain. Some of the Malays ceased pulling at once; others did not hear distinctly, and these continued to tug at the ropes until their fellows bade them give over. Then a hubbub of disjointed discussion arose.

‘It causeth too much pain,’ cried the voice of one of the boys from a long distance down the pit. ‘He cannot bear it. Do not pull any more, he cannot support the agony.’ By the sound of his words it was evident to the men at the mouth of the cave that the child was sobbing convulsively. He had been close to Pa’ Tûa’s face when the men began to pull the rope; he had heard that soul-searching scream of agony, not softened by distance, but sounded in his very ear, and multiplied in intensity by the confined place in which it was uttered; but above all he had seen Pa’ Tûa’s face—prominent-eyed, strained, wrung with torture—the face of a man upon the rack. No wonder the child sat in the darkness huddled up and weeping unrestrainedly, no wonder if for months afterwards that awful face came to him in his dreams to make night hideous, dragging him back to consciousness, sweating and palsied with a great fear.

Pa’ Tûa lay moaning feebly, muttering ‘I die, I die,’ over and over again. The bats awoke in

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thousands and squeaked shrilly. The cave took up every sound, and grumbled its dissatisfaction in ceaseless murmuring echoes. It seemed as though the Demon of the Cave was growling angrily because men sought to wrest from his cruel grasp the victim which he had fairly won.

The men of the rescue party disputed loudly but disjointedly as to what was next to be done. No one had a plan, and all spoke at once, most of them being contented with merely exclaiming at the exceeding perversity of Fate.

‘It is indeed accursed!’ said one. ‘What is now our stratagem?’ asked a second, vaguely. ‘He cannot bear the pain,’ murmured a third, as though this self-evident proposition had just occurred to him in the light of a new idea. ‘Let us try once more,’ suggested another. The attempt, accordingly, was again made, but the result was once more the same. Pa’ Tûa could not bear the racking agony of the strain. He was so tightly wedged, and during the long hours that he had lain jammed between the rocky walls he had by his struggles so firmly fixed himself in his terrible position, that he could only be released at the cost of such severe bodily pain as it is given to few to suffer and survive. Malays, for all they are often wantonly cruel, have a great and instinctive horror of pain which it is not their object to inflict. Their

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present desire was to aid Pa' Tûa, and the sight of his agony quite unmanned them, so that at each fresh attempt the men dropped the rope as soon as Pa' Tûa's cries told them that his torment had become insupportable. At last, very reluctantly, the vain effort to free the unfortunate man was abandoned. Had there been a white man within a hundred miles, the fisher-folk would have sought his aid, and had he been provided with anæsthetics, it is possible that Pa' Tûa might have been set free while he lay drugged into insensibility. As it was, there was nothing to be done but just to keep watch and ward over him until in the fulness of time the end should arrive.

A party camped as best they could upon the rocky and inhospitable island, and men came to bring them supplies, and to relieve them at frequent intervals. Rice and other food was lowered to Pa' Tûa at the end of a long bamboo, or was carried to him by little children. Every now and again the watchers would put the miserable man to fresh torture by well-meant efforts to effect his release, each successive attempt proving as useless as its predecessors. They strove to keep him clean, to guard him from the assaults of the myriad ants which hastened from every part to the place where the buffalo grease had been spread so lavishly, and stayed to feast

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rapturously upon the body of the man. They tried vainly to drive away the swarms of flies. But, as the days dragged on, their vigilance often flagged, while the insects gathered numbers, and never wearied or lost heart. And so, before the end came, the horrible fate of being devoured alive, which Pa' Tûa had seen pre-saged in the visit of the first ant, fell upon him, adding new pangs and indescribable miseries to the heavy burden of his sufferings.

Like all those who lead the clean, open-air life of the fisherfolk, Pa' Tûa was blessed, or rather cursed, with a mighty constitution, and thus his life, each moment of which was a separate agony, was prolonged mercilessly. It was not until the fifth day of his captivity had come and drawn to evening that his release came to him. In the quiet night-time, alone and untended—for the weary watchers had gone to their rest—Pa' Tûa, who for hours had been raving wildly in delirium, stepped across the border which divides mental unconsciousness from physical death, and they found him in the morning lying cramped between the rocks, with the life gone from out of him.

Then once more the boys descended into the Cave of the Little Children, but the envious Demon of the place still refused to surrender his victim, and after long and futile attempts to

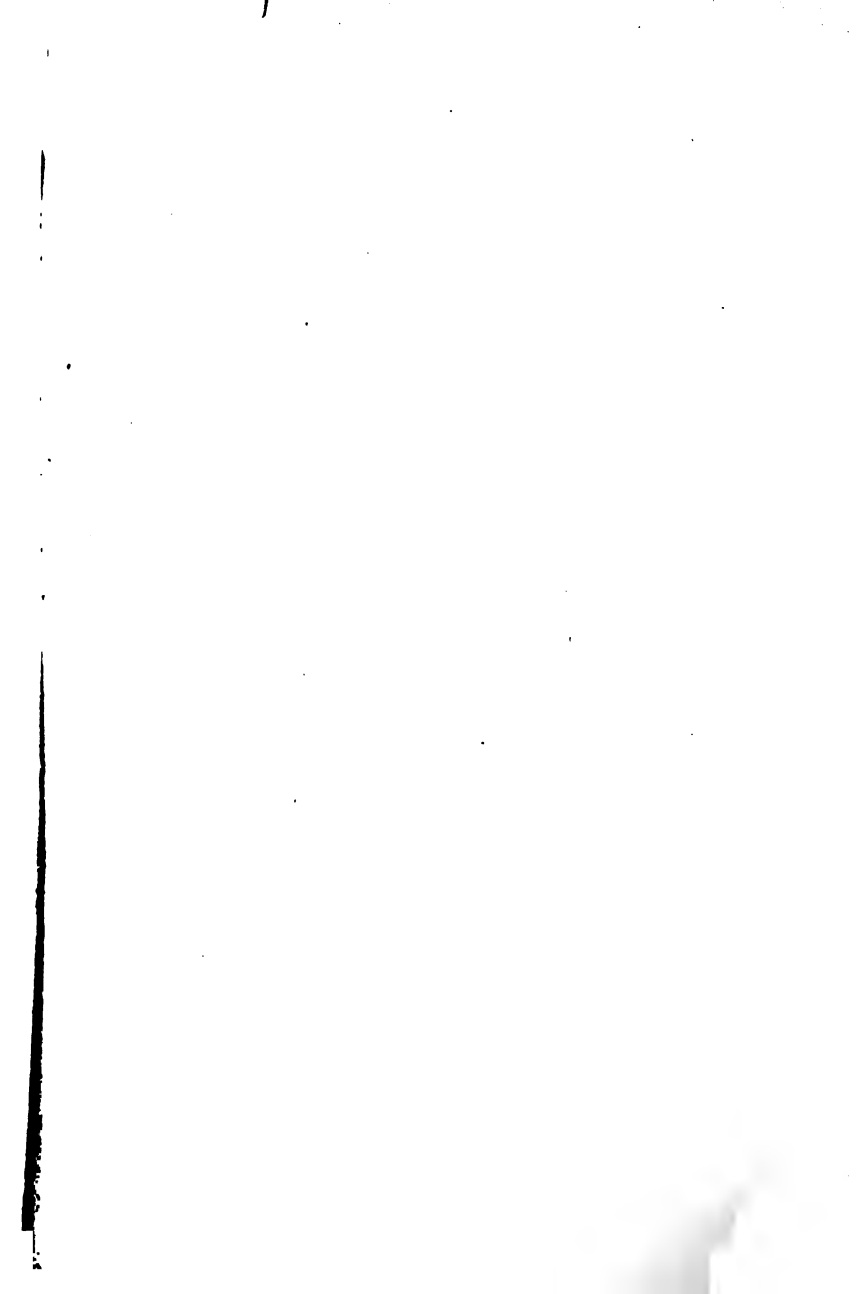
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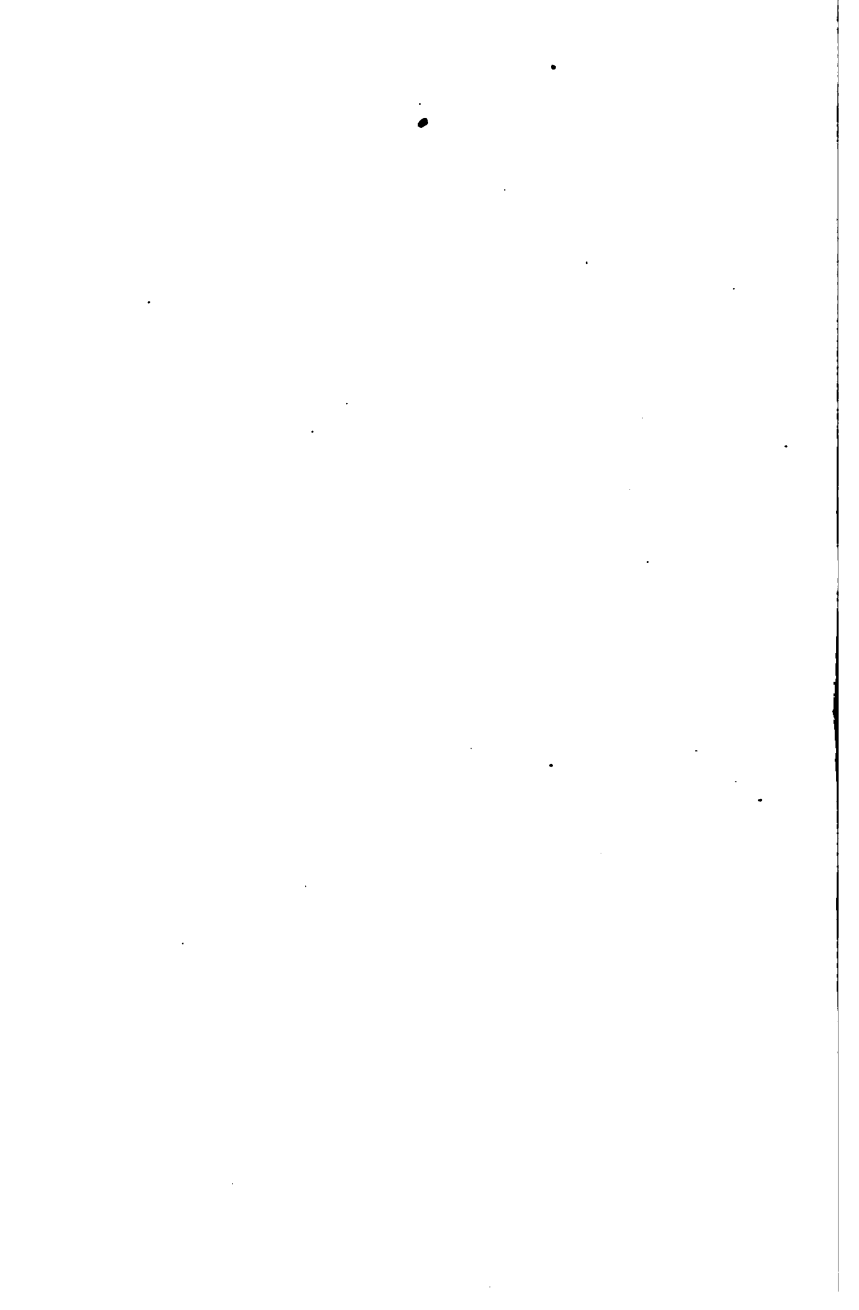
wrench the corpse from the grip of the rocks, the endeavour was finally abandoned.

So Fate, more vindictive than human justice, refused even the burial rites of the Muhammadans—without which, as is well known, the salvation of the immortal soul is by no means assured—to the tortured body of Pa' Tûa, the Thief.

THE END

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