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Pirate Whelp

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

A complete novel of Malaya, of a great sea battle, and of Siti Ishtar, the capricious Queen of Kota Sembilan

RANA SINGH, Raynor's Sikh *havidar*, or sergeant, appeared in the Residency doorway. "The Queen arrives, Huzoor," he announced.

Raynor, British Resident of Kota Sembilan, straightened up in his stiff starched whites to receive her. He tried to put on a stern frown, but he loved with a warm and comradesly affection that pirate's whelp, Siti Ishtar, queen of this little Malay principality. She was the daughter of that renowned pirate chieftain of the Banggai Archipelago off Celebes, Haroun Mahomet, and was a wayward and almost unmanageable little ruler of her people. She did about as she pleased here—confound her! But she had been cradled on fighting at sea and her kris had always been sharp and decisive—and prompt—in any emergency that might arise in her kingdom. Raynor had sent for her to come over to Residency Island instead of calling on her ceremoniously at the palace. He always did that when she was in the wrong; a first law of Oriental diplomacy.

She appeared in the doorway, radiant, beautiful, easily the most beautiful girl of her race. She wore a gleaming golden sarong clasped in front of her bare brown thighs by a huge jewelled brooch. A tight knot of a gold and jewelled turban crowned her sleek blue-black hair. Her arms and bust were bare save for two circlets of pearls and jewels that covered her breasts and were held there by a sort of ornamental harness. She looked like something off the stage; but Kota Sembilan was still barbaric and colorful and this costume was real, traditional, having

its roots in immemorial Malay *adat* [custom].

"Why hast thou sent for me, my lord and my counsellor?" she asked, her delicate features all one friendly and confident smile as Raynor rose gallantly to receive her as the British Resident—four years he had been here now as the sole white man advising her.

He gasped at the sheer beauty of her. He was a big, burly man, unemotional, matter-of-fact; a bachelor, save for an occasional Malay girl who did not count. She was little, slender, her great brown eyes under arched pencils of brows dominating the smooth olive face with its piquant upturned nose—but beware how you crossed this savage little beauty, the pirate whelp!

"I have no choice, 'Ku," Raynor said, using the affectionate diminutive of her rank of Tunku. "This won't do! The Wardmans' yacht was held up by two of your armed proas. He's a big capitalist from San Francisco and is interested in tin. We can't antagonize strangers this way."

She seated herself on a huge divan near the Residency desk and flashed a quick smile at him. "I released the yacht, *Tuan*, didn't I? And at risk of my throne, too. My sea datus are very insolent people and will brook no interference from me. They must carry cannon, on our seas, where one meets Chinese junks and Sulu proas that will attack any ship unarmed. Also the yacht carried no guns—so he *should* pay something to somebody, shouldn't he?"

Raynor grinned at that naive point of view. "The steel gunboats of my nation



*"In one lithe movement
she had seized herself
on Raynor's thigh."*

see to that, 'Ku," he told her. "It is forbidden for yachts and merchant vessels to carry cannon, with us."

"*Piu!*" said Siti Ishtar disdainfully. "Are my sea people to go unarmed like women, then? We have no gunboats, save them."

Raynor hesitated to press the point that Singapore had been urging upon him for the past year, to get this native Queen to disarm her proas by a *firman* [proclamation]. She, the pirate's whelp, would be the first to oppose it, and hotly! Besides, it would cause instant civil war in her little sultanate, her sea datus plundering

and burning all along the coast and finally landing to depose her as an unworthy ruler.

"No; but it must come some time, 'Ku," he said. "Wardman has complained to Sir John in Singapore over this hold-up. It was very awkward for me. I want him to develop some tin deposits here, and——"

Siti Ishtar smiled at him archly. "Also has the big white man a daughter, *Tuan*," she reminded him. "Tall and white as the lily is she! *Aarh!*" she bared white teeth in a sudden ferocity. "I hate her!"

Raynor laughed easily. "Varuna? No

fear, 'Ku! Just what we call a flirtation. Who am I, a poor British Resident, to her, a girl worth millions?"

Siti Ishtar's eyes remained jealous. She could not conceive of a flirtation that did not lead to a natural result, however temporary the affair might be. She knew that Raynor was no saint, but a big and powerful man who took his love affairs where he found them.

"Hast never greatly loved a girl of thine own race, Tuan?" she asked him.

Raynor smiled reminiscently. "One, 'Ku. I've seen her somewhere, but dashed if I can place it. But the image remains so vivid. A little girl like you, 'Ku. But fair; short, curly hair, and a habit of biting her lip when excited or upset. Confound her, I've seen her do that, too!" he exclaimed with annoyance at being unable to locate just when and where. "But she's the girl of my heart, 'Ku! I've carried her image there ever since. Her eyes—blue, deep, burning blue, like sapphires——"

"Enough!" Siti Ishtar had risen in a rage. She didn't want to hear any more about this girl with the blue eyes, not she! She advanced on Raynor with her graceful bare arms outstretched to him, her eyes provocative, glowing with passion. There was vibrant tenseness in her tones and a pitiful womanly appeal as she came to him step by step. "My lord and my sultan, *why* dost thou not look on me?" she cried out piercingly.

"Why, 'Ku!" Raynor exclaimed, astonished. "Art not going to marry Ibn Yaïd? Lo, the Vezier has waited for thee these many years! Now that the Sultan Sri Adika is slain and you a widow, the State demands it!"

She ignored that. Her eyes flamed like opals upon him. "Thee I adore!" Her voice quivered hotly. In one lithe movement she had seated herself on Raynor's thigh and was clinging to him like a little

girl—but she was no child but a woman brimming over with desire.

"Confound it, 'Ku!" Raynor struggled helplessly. But Siti Ishtar was not to be denied when she wanted anything. "Really——"

"Give me—give me but one moment of thy love, my great white lord!" her voice panted passionately. She had undone the great buckle of her sarong and ardently she pressed her breasts upon him. "I'll marry Ibn Yaïd!—I'll disarm the proas—*anything!*"—she gasped hotly. "But love me—this once—the Queen begs!—*Aaabhh!*" Fiercely she clasped him. Raynor himself was by now in the grip of powerful sex emotions over which he had no control. No man could withstand this burner of hearts! He did not pretend to understand her; but, oh, well. . . . Fiercely he folded her lithe body in his arms. . . .

"**G**ONOW, Tuan," said Siti Ishtar after a time. "I love thee not."

Raynor stood looking down at her, bewildered. She seemed happy, sated; but there was not a trace of love for him now in her eyes. And he had been seriously, determinedly, in love with her during those mad moments. Wild thoughts of resigning the Residency and reigning by her side as sultan-consort. . . . And now? What did she mean? Unfathomable this storm of passion so quickly subsided! He had been for four years Resident of Kota Sembilan, and he knew and loved this picturesque Malay people as few white men could. Ibn Yaïd, the Vezier, whom all her people had determined that Siti Ishtar should marry in state, had loved her patiently for years and was Raynor's oldest friend here. Together he and Ibn Yaïd had come through the rebellion that had brought him to Kota Sembilan as its first British Resident. Together they had seen Siti Ishtar, the pirate's whelp, come in

a state proa of Haroun Mahomet's and had seen her installed here as Queen to Sultan Sri Adika, that weak reed of a ruler. Together they had lived through the insurrection of Shaitan Sadud, who had looked on the Queen and tried to grab the throne—and her—only Siti Ishtar had slain him with her own kris. At Ibn Yaïd's right hand Raynor had sat in judgment at court while the Vezier dealt out justice. And together they had restrained the ruthless little Queen when Siti Ishtar would plunge into wars that would be disastrous and probably bring in the interference of the British government. And now, ruthlessly, the pirate whelp had had her way with him—though for some obscure reason that was not apparent to Raynor.

"You don't love me, 'Ku?" he asked. "Why——"

"I love Ibn Yaïd, *Tuan*," she said. "He that rescued me as a child from the burning proa! Lo, his eyes are as the eagle's and his beard a yard long!" she sighed raptly in the Oriental imagery. "I shall marry him in state tomorrow."

"But——" said Raynor helplessly. "After this——?"

"*Tuan*," she said, "once there was a Queen in Misr [Egypt]. And the great conqueror, Iskhandar, came upon her and she bore him a son. I had never heard that they were married. . . ."

The legend of Cæsar and Cleopatra and the Cæsarian; even here in Malaya that story was known, but it was ascribed to Alexander the Great, that imperial Greek who had so left his mark on the East that every investiture of a sultan must have the seal of Alexander, the sword of Alexander, as the state insignia. Raynor began to perceive what she had been driving at in this tumultuous storm of passion launched upon him.

"Thou hast given me the White Raj, *Tuan*," Siti Ishtar smiled. "The Queen's

thanks! Lo, are not the English the greatest of all rulers? Thy child that shall govern this people when I am gone will be of that great blood, *Tuan*. It was my heart's desire, my great and good friend!"

She rose and extended her hand, that hand that knew equally the grip of the kris and the caress of love. Raynor smiled at her fondly. The barbaric little whelp! He had been had, tricked; but it didn't seem to matter. As he saw it, he had betrayed Ibn Yaïd and the girl of his dreams—both—by this mad moment of yielding to her. As she saw it, all that was nothing at all compared to bearing a son of his conquering race. It would be a good thing for her people. There would be later children by Ibn Yaïd; but the Crown Prince would be in part Raynor, the Resident, a governor of a race of governors. Nothing else mattered in the least in her naïve philosophy!

"Fare thee well, *Tuan*," she said, smiling radiantly. "In the matter of the proas, I will talk with Ibn Yaïd as to how it may be done. Lo, it is handling fire! At the least hint that my sea people are to sail the seas defenseless as women there will be *ankanan* [uprising]. Yet would I keep my promise to thee."

She smiled up at him saucily and was gone. Raynor stood looking after her uneasily as Rana Singh appeared to escort her out. How about Ibn Yaïd, if he ever heard of this? And then the child; it would be like her, but there would be variations from the type that would not escape the eyes of her people. Much she cared! The Queen did what she pleased here, and you saw nothing, said nothing—if you would keep your head on your shoulders!

RAYNOR turned to his desk and his work as the British Resident. Wardman, the tin capitalist, was in camp at the deposits Raynor had discovered up on the

Sunggei River. He had to be visited tomorrow with the formal concession papers, made out in the Queen's name by Ibn Yaïd. He would see Varuna again there. Raynor tossed his head with finality over her. It was true that he had lost his heart there once, but that was mainly because she was the first white girl that he had seen for two years, and who wouldn't? Big, tall, beautiful, but not for him! At the supreme test of danger, during that hold-up by the pirate proas, when at the risk of his own life and far overstepping his authority here as British Resident he had saved her, she had failed him utterly. The girl of his dreams would not do that. She would be there, fighting by his side, or Raynor would have none of her. . . .

The papers on his desk that claimed him next had to do with George Severance, who had a rubber plantation down near the mouth of the Sunggei River. Another old-timer, for Kota Sembilan, for the young American had been here four years. He was now importing crêpe rolls and other rubber-manufacturing machinery, his trees having nearly reached tapping age. His sister, Roberta, had recently joined him from Singapore, George's letter announced. He owed her a courtesy call from the Resident. Also a talk with George about defending his plantation in case a rebellion of the sea datus should break out. Oh, well, thought Raynor, stretching; he could make it by pony from Wardman's camp down the river trail to the Severance Rubber Estates. . . .

But in the back of his mind was still uneasiness. What would the girl of his dreams—if he ever found her—think of this "affair," as she would call it, with Siti Ishtar, Queen of Kota Sembilan? The strict, monogamous, Western viewpoint, narrow and unreasoning, would be hers. The East was older and more tolerant. "A man's heart may take a day's journey and

yet return to its home," was a Malay proverb. She must never know.

2

GEORGE and Roberta were at breakfast in the big bungalow of the Severance Rubber Estates when the first hint of civil war in Kota Sembilan reached them.

Aieeee!—Aou-aou-aou!—Aieeee!—Wu-wu-wu! A faint and distant wail of women's voices came from the native village on the Estates. A despairing wail, laden with lament, poignantly sinister.

"What on earth is that?" Roberta exclaimed, biting her lower lip with anxious perplexity.

"Don't know," said George indifferently. "Some one dead in the village, I guess."

"Can't be," said Roberta, prompt negation in her burning blue eyes. "I know them all, and there's no one even sick."

"Bit by a snake, perhaps," George was offering, when a heavy tread sounded on the bungalow veranda and Itam Nabi stood in the doorway. He was the village headman and the plantation hunter, who kept them supplied with fresh venison and discouraged tigers and such prowling vermin.

"*Ankanan, Tuan!*" grunted Itam Nabi in his reverberating tones of animal ferocity. "Because of the Queen's *firman*, the Orang Laut have rebelled. May dogs defile their graves!"

"We should worry," said George.

"*Nay, Tuan.* There will be pillagings and burnings all along the coast. Thy servant has mustered fifty guns in the village. Is there a dealing out of *ubat dan peluru?*" [powder and bullets].

"That shall be!" said George, rising in haste. "Does the *Tuan Besar Inggris* [the British Resident] know about this?"

"He is away in the jungle, *Tuan*. Rumor runs that the Queen is taken for her

foolish order. It is for each place to defend itself now, *Tuan!*" Itam Nabi shrugged his thick and bare black shoulders. He held up four blunt and horny black fingers. "*Ampat proa, Tuan.* They mean not well by us!" He pointed down toward the estuary of the Sunggei and the open sea below.

"Meaning four proas of the sea datu down there now?" George cried excitedly. "Good Lord!"

"May the pelted devil reward them!" Itam Nabi cursed with relish. "Lo, we wait but thine order, *Tuan.* Thou art Raj in this village!"

George cursed its fifty guns and the four pirate proas impartially. How like this country! It never stayed quiet long. You fought your way to a grown rubber plantation and ordered crêpe rolls and what-not, and then Kota Sembilan handed you a revolution that stopped everything! He was a business man and hated war. It interfered with work. To Roberta it was all a horrible calamity. That wail of the village women, still ringing in periodic outbursts in their ears, was poignant to her of death and pillage, of burnings and bereavements, of their being hunted into the jungle with barely roots for the existence of themselves and their little ones. It must not be.

"The Resident, George!" she said fiercely. "He must be found. He alone can stop this. He'll get a gunboat up from Singapore and land marines—where did you say he was now, Itam Nabi?" she asked their headman.

"Who knows, *Rani!*" the black Prophet grinned on her indulgently. "It is for us here to defend this plantation and our women and children."

"Some one must go find the Resident, no matter what else we do," Roberta urged. "You must know something, George—he's with a tin man up the river, didn't I hear you say?"

"Sure. With Wardman, Robby. It's about eight miles from here up the river trail. But——"

"Here's what we do," Roberta cut in. "You and Itam Nabi fell a tree, down the river as far as one will stretch across. That prevents those proas coming any farther up. You can hold them there with the village force. Meanwhile some one goes for Mr. Raynor. And the quicker the better."

GEORGE'S brown eyes sparkled on her with enthusiasm for her plan. There was at least a mile of the river below the plantation before it widened out to become an estuary. It was deep water from there down, so that his lighters could ferry rubber out to steamers off the bar; but that tree felled would effectually stop those proas from coming up here to close quarters.

"Takes a woman to produce a real idea, sis!" he answered admiringly.

"Me for that tree, some pronto!"

He talked rapidly to Itam Nabi in Malayu. The latter nodded his head. Yes, he knew of a tree.

"The blessings of the Prophet and the Twelve Imams be upon thee, *Rani!*" he beamed upon Roberta. "Swords out, *Tuan!* We go, and in haste! Thou with two score on the right bank. I, with men and axes, for a tree that I know. Thou wilt see it, *Tuan,* a great tapang, growing on a point. There stop we the owls, the cut-off ones. May Allah not have mercy on their bones!"

Those two were full of action and energy now. George was already starting for the gunroom to serve out ammunition and possess himself of his rifles. Roberta laughed sardonically. How like men! To her mind it was equally important to warn the Resident, immediately; but so far she had heard nothing about that.

"Who's going up into the jungle?" she asked, following them into the gunroom.

George turned on her with indulgent impatience. "Honestly, sis!" he protested, "that's important, too; but this can't wait a minute, don't you see? Those fellows down there must be getting under way to come up here, right now. It's a race. We've got a big tree to fell. And even then a hot fight on our hands—muskets against ships armed with cannon. We need every man."

"Then I'll go find the Resident!" Roberta stamped her foot and her eyes blazed with resolution.

"You? Alone in that jungle?" snorted George incredulously.

"I suppose you can spare me *one* man, can't you?" inquired Roberta, and her voice was cutting.

"But I can't let you, Robby! Under no circumstances!" protested George emphatically. He was hastily filling a basket with bullets and small cans of powder and boxes of percussion caps. Itam Nabi was about to start off for the village with it, but he stopped at the tone of decision in Roberta's voice. Evidently his *mem* wanted something and was not to be put off. He grunted inquiringly.

"She wants to go up into the *ulu* to tell the *Tuan Besar Inggris*," explained George. Even while he was talking Roberta had possessed herself of their light Winchester and seemed not at all disposed to part with it again.

"Now by the Perfections of Allah, in Whom is no change!" declaimed Itam Nabi, "Go, *Ya Bulan-alam!* [O Moon of the World] And may Allah salute you!"

He seemed to assume that nothing could harm his *Rani*, but George gasped: "Not alone, Itam Nabi?" He yelled out the protest.

"Why not?" retorted the old headman practically. "Who would harm the Charmer of Hearts? Is needed thou to

lead one party, and I the other. Else would man-man run away in one of them."

There was logic in that! But George was distracted with fears for his sister now. "Thou art mad as Mejnoon, Itam Nabi!" he barked. "No man would harm her, true; but what of the leopard and the snake and the wild elephant? At least one, jungle-wise, must go with her."

"I want nobody!" said Roberta decisively. "You need every man, George, as he says. I'll take Sufi—and this," she tapped the Winchester. "Our big ape will give all the warning I need."

Itam Nabi nodded, his eyes on her adoringly. That ape was better than a man, the old hunter knew, and approved. "There is a fisherman's trail, *Ya Mata-bunob* [O Eyes-that-slay]. Thou canst not lose the way! Come, *Tuan—Lekas-lekas!* [Hasten!]"

He had disposed of Roberta and her whole enterprise so summarily and with such unconcerned confidence that George gave in. They hurried out of the gunroom together, laden with rifles and ammunition. But Itam Nabi turned at the door for a last word.

"*Ohé!*—Wo to the *Tuan Besar Inggris* when he first sees *ibee*, O Sword of Beauty!" he hissed through his one yellow tooth, grinning upon her obscenely, and was gone.

Roberta flushed. The odious old malefactor! She confessed a curiosity, herself, about this big handsome Resident, whom, the villagers were whispering, the Queen Siti Ishtar was in love with herself. But she hadn't been aware of him in precisely this light, so far, in her own thoughts.

3

SHE unchained Sufi and set out with the big ape ambling along on a leash. Her thoughts were with George now. The village was noisy with wailing women

behind her as all their fighting men went forth to war. Only the fact that those Orang Laut proas would have to be rowed, heavy and clumsy as they were, upstream against a swift current, gave George and Itam Nabi what time they had to fell a big tree and block them from coming up. She smiled archly as she thought of that plan, her own. It was an effective one. How stupid men were, to let a woman's nimble brain arrive at that idea ahead of theirs—military measure though it was and entirely outside her own world of thought! Their battle ought to go well. The proas would be almost helpless in the current and fifty good muskets would be complicating things. They should save the village. The important thing was for Mr. Raynor to know and take action with his government just as soon as might be. One swift gunboat up from Singapore right now would save a deal of bloodshed and pillage. And he was the one man in all this country who had that much power.

Power! ruminated Roberta as she tripped along the river trail at a fast pace. The power over life and death; the sword of justice placed in one man's hands! So had ruled the sultans, here; most of them unwisely and tyrannically, due to the frailties of human nature. But it was always one man who had the power in Malaya. This Resident was a sultan, a beneficent one, but an absolute sultan just the same. The idea fascinated Roberta. All other doings of men paled before what this one could do. Men behaved themselves under his rule, or died swiftly. It was the ideal human government if a people could only be assured of the right man for sultan. Roberta had seen, with disgust, enough well-meaning presidents and prime ministers thwarted in everything they tried to do by the politics and machinations of lesser men. And there was only one will in all Kota Sembilan that even approx-

imately measured up to the Resident's, that of Siti Ishtar, the native Queen. Even she could only go just so far. Beyond that he could, and would, interpose a flat veto and back it up by the ships of his government. He must be a good man to know, this Resident, thought Roberta. So far he had been too busy at the capital to visit them on the Estate since she had come here.

That river path kept her rather busy. It had a way of dipping into unspeakable quagmires and then running through veritable tunnels of roots. All of it was dark green and dismal, unlit by the intense sun stopped far overhead by the jungle foliage. There were snakes, at which Sufi chattered and Roberta threw sticks until they moved off the trail. Once he had climbed all over her in terror and Roberta had stopped to scan the tunnel carefully—to become suddenly aware of a spotted leopard, crouched close on a limb ahead. One shot from her had sent him scurrying out of sight through the dense green tangle of the forest.

Two hours. She must have covered nearly eight miles of it now, and was weary and steaming with the moist heat. She plodded on. A vast bend of the river appeared ahead, all open and covered thick to the banks with bush. Wardman the tin man's camp must be somewhere up there. That hill of scant scrub having a prevailing tone of red laterite she fancied must be his tin deposits. They always occurred under thin and dry bush and in laterite formations. Near there, then. . . .

Roberta took a drink from her canteen and pressed on. In her jungle kit of khaki bloomers and blouse and high-laced boots she felt rather secure against all small creeping things—quite mannish and independent. As a matter of fact she looked intensely feminine, in the soft brown collar of that blouse rolled back like the petal

of a calla lily and open down her bosom save where it was held in by a smart red kerchief. The brown topee, with the rebellious filaments of her hair crushed under its rim, added yet more of the feminine note. One might insist that her small, rosy face was a veritable picture under it; but Roberta did not think so, for she stopped hastily upon coming to the conclusion that she was near the end of her journey, drew out a mirror and a powder-paper from the small pocket over the curve of her right breast, and surveyed herself with misgivings.

"Boiled!" she ejaculated without enthusiasm. "I'm a fright! I simply *can't* walk in on them looking like this!"

A dab with the paper, several of them, torn hastily off the pad. A touch or two at the hair, which seemed to have an alarming tendency to grow stringy from the moist heat. Roberta gave a tweak to the tie and a final rub at the nose until it looked cool and dry; then tugged at Sufi's leash to hurry along. She was quite eager to have it over with, now, to meet, at last, this man whose power was so great in Kota Sembilan that he alone could save it from the horrors of a native civil war. Half a mile more! Well, she was doing a small part, herself, in this world of men into whose work she had plunged. She hoped that George and Itam Nabi had meanwhile been able to—

A VIOLENT series of tugs from Sufi had nearly yanked her over backward in midstride. The ape was squalling hysterically, and in one last frantic jerk had torn his leash out of her grip and raced yelling up a tree. Roberta stopped—to stand utterly paralyzed for an instant. Across her path lay, *not* a root but a great, long, scaly body the size of a pig's. And it was all moving forward, slowly, irresistibly, both ends of it lost in the dense greenery of the tunnel walls. The girl was almost un-

nerved at the mere sight of it, this pattern of gray and white and peacock-coal colorings that crawled with the hideous and timeless deliberation of the great serpents. She did not need Sufi's chatterings, in the extreme accents of fear, to tell her what *this* was—a great thirty-foot Malayan python. She stood aghast before it, utterly at a loss what to do, her eyes almost blind from the shocks of fright and loathing that were coursing through and through her.

And then the thing stopped and began to swell like a huge balloon, to flatten out, to show corded muscles under the smooth and scaly skin. It warned Roberta that whatever she was going to do would have to be done instantly. This huge python was looking at her from somewhere in the dense jungle. All his long body was tensing for battle, for that sudden and terrific lunge that would come crashing at her through vines and twigs and foliage as if they were so much paper. She leaped back and stood peering to the right into the green depths. That was the direction in which this section of his body before her had been moving. . . .

And in there—again the sense of sight left her eyes, blinded with horror! A long, straight column of black and white ran up and up a bare dead branch, as if clinging to it somehow like a monstrous caterpillar. It was the dead-flat straightness of it that unnerved Roberta, not a curve nor the ghost of a loop, just sheer muscle-power and the hold of the great belly-scales on the bark. She had seen the fighting end of that column of python, the drooping curve of a neck, the bony flat head with its expressionless slaty eyes looking right at her. A forked black tongue had spilled out, once, and receded, leaving a round black hole like a pistol-bore.

Roberta fought down an ungovernable impulse to turn and fly as if she had wings.

Not a bit of use doing that! Her mind vetoed it forcibly—his lunge would follow her quick as light and strike her head-long! And then the great coils of him would be upon her, loop on loop. Not a chance! Roberta's features set stonily, partly in fright, partly resolution. Her large and rather petulant mouth became a grim bow, tight-drawn. The rifle rose.

That movement was the signal for a sudden change all along the length of the boa-constrictor. What were smooth lines became on the instant rigid arcs. The soft crash of displaced vegetation ran like a whiplash in the jungle on both sides of the path. The section across her trail now curved in a tense bow. He was all set to strike, and was going to—when, she could not know—but soon!

Roberta whimpered miserably, spell-bound with fear, weeping with anger at her own utter helplessness and inexperience. This diabolical creature! Most of him was out of sight in the dense bush, and she dared not make a further motion seeking out his head with her sights. There was a huge tail somewhere in the undergrowth to her left, she was aware, because of a steadily increasing crescendo of snapping twigs, a sound of saplings and vines being grasped as in the bight of a cable. It meant that he was completing his purchase on something solid, and would strike with the loop of his entire body. She had but about a second more to live unless she did something to defend herself!

Blindly, scarce knowing what she was doing, Roberta leapt into action. She lunged forward with the rifle and pulled trigger with its muzzle not four inches from the side of that gruesome body across her path. The loud report, deafening in this tunnel, the smoke, the bewildering suddenness of enormous forces let loose like a released spring, completely stunned Roberta, bereft her of any capac-

ity to think, to act. Something like a battering-ram had crashed through the foliage at her. It struck her in the side and drove her into the bushes with every atom of wind knocked out of her.

She hung there gasping, the rifle held wardingly across her body with all the strength left to her two hands, her eyes witnessing with a stupefied horror the terrific and aimless struggles of that python. She had shot him nearly in two! That fact Roberta clung to as her one hope in her helpless agony of the returning breath into her lungs. It was not the bullet but the powder-blast of her rifle that had done the work. She had unwittingly done the right thing, the only possible thing. The force of the powder gas at such a close range as four inches had a rending power far exceeding any destructiveness of the bullet. The python's blow when it did strike her had not had a tenth of the force it normally would had he delivered it with all his muscle-power from the purchase of that tail. Right now the section across the path was thrashing about brokenly and all the undergrowth being torn and lashed with the tremendous thumps of his huge loops. The head and neck of him was lunging again and again, blindly, across and across his wound, striking, as an animal will, at the part that hurt under the instinct that the enemy was still there.

Roberta recovered her breath in great gulps, staggered back down the trail, and then with a low cry burst into tears and collapsed on the damp duff. She was utterly unnerved and miserable. The python went on lashing futilely. He would keep this up for a considerable time yet. . . .

4

ROBERTA watched him, shaking all over. Sufi from the top of his tree was keeping up an incessant squalling, but she was hardly aware of it; just a dull consciousness of some continuous noise.

Her eyes stared fascinated upon the python. She saw him slowly advance his long neck, all of it shuddering, across the raw and bloody wound—a great gap that had torn out his whole side and broken the spinal column. He was still trying feebly to reach this thing that was hurting him.

The sight braced Roberta up to try to end his sufferings. Rapidly she stepped forward, put the rifle close to his long head, pulled trigger and jumped back. Followed a wild thrashing of a headless neck. It flailed about with the force of a mighty club; then gradually grew quieter and was striking about somewhere in the undergrowth. Roberta was now screwing up her courage to leap over it and get on with her mission at a run, but then voices came to her ears through the jungle:

"This way, Sir James, I think it sounded!" A woman's voice, in a rich and deep contralto. It carried accents of poise, the voice of one entirely at home anywhere in this world. Roberta pulled herself hastily together, adjusted her tie, dabbed wildly at her tear-stained face.

"Righto!—Coming, Varuna!" she heard a man's voice answer. Jolly, it was, the voice of a big and well-fed Colonial whom no situation in this world could upset. Roberta quivered. Was that Mr. Raynor? And, "Sir James?"

"Goodness, he's a belted knight!" thought Roberta. "We hadn't heard about that at the plantation."

And Varuna? Who was this Varuna? She seemed to own Sir James, judging from the tones of her voice.

"Down this path, Sir James!" it was calling. "I'm sure that second shot came from here—and there's some animal howling."

"Just a bit, Varuna! I'd rather you wouldn't go any farther, y'know," the man was answering her with something of command in his tones. "A shot in the

jungle may mean anything. Wait a bit! That's a frightened ape. Take care!"

That last was an imperative order. Roberta fumbled hastily for a powder-paper and included her nose, her cheeks, and her eyes in one comprehensive and frantic wipe. "I'm a fright!—But it is he that I will see first," she thought, tossing the paper into the bush. She felt a bit more cool and refreshed, now. She awaited events with confidence.

And then a man came hastily down the trail. He stopped on the other side of the python's body—and stood staring at her, his mouth open with astonishment.

Roberta colored. She had never been stared at in quite that way by any man before. Most rude of him! she thought. She could not know that James Raynor was seeing in her own person that little woman with the burning blue eyes whom he had seen once before but forgotten just where, a girl totally unknown to him. All she saw was a large and somewhat florid Englishman with a close-cropped mustache who seemed bereft of speech and apparently was not aware of the impropriety of leaving one's mouth gaped open in the presence of strangers.

"S— Sir James Raynor?" said Roberta interrogatively, since the man seemed incapable of saying anything at all.

Raynor nodded, closed his mouth and gulped. "I say, y'know!—Most extraordinary!" he managed to blurt out at last.

His eyes were drinking her in avidly. Roberta drew back under the stare and dropped the rifle across her knees.

Just then Varuna came up. Roberta saw a tall and stately girl with large gray eyes, cool, clean, and stunningly dressed in a white Chinese eyelet-embroidered suit that must have cost hundreds.

"My word!" she said, the tones rich like a deep bell. She put her hand possessively on Raynor's arm and stood looking down on Roberta over his shoulder, a re-

gal lily, accustomed to being denied nothing that her fancy chose.

"I was coming with a message to you, Sir James," said Roberta. "But I had an—an interruption," she glanced down once at the gory remains of the python and immediately began to shiver uncontrollably.

Raynor had reached her in one leap and she felt his big arm about her.

"I say, y'know—you're done in, aren't you?—This brute of a snake—what?" He was mumbling incoherently and at the same time fumbling for her canteen. He tore out the cork with his teeth and applied it to her lips. Roberta gulped down a mouthful and then drew herself away.

"I'm quite all right, thank you," she told him, somewhat breathlessly, as her blue eyes glanced up into his. "It was nothing. The message——"

"Confound the message!" interrupted Raynor. "Mustn't talk of that just now, y'know. Here—have some more water! Or better—this!" He had produced a small silver flask and was unscrewing it hastily. "You're in no condition to talk, just yet, are you?"

HE FORCED the flask on her, then gave an appreciative "*W'hew!*" as his eyes took in the terrific ophidian events that must have happened here. None knew better than the jungle-wise Raynor what she must have been through. And no one appreciated more her courage in that ordeal.

"I *must* tell you, Sir James!" began Roberta desperately, for he would think of nothing and look at nothing but her.

"*Not* Sir James, please, Miss——?"

"Severance; I'm George's sister," supplied Roberta.

"Oh!" he offered his hand warmly. "My oldest friend in this country," he beamed. "Not Sir James, Miss Severance, but plain James Raynor, please," he

hastened to correct her. "Miss Wardman—er——"

He looked over his shoulder. Varuna was gone. Jealousy could not let her remain here neglected any longer. *She* had read Raynor's eyes, even if Roberta had not! They were alone.

"She *would* title me! Rather embarrassing, y'know. Any of our people would misunderstand and think me a priceless boulder——"

"But my message!" persisted Roberta, for the man was evidently quite mad. "Listen, Mr. Raynor: The Orang Laut have risen, all along the coast——"

"And you came eight miles, all alone, to tell me that!" interrupted Raynor, his voice glowing with appreciation. He did not tell her that he knew it already and was on the point of starting for Kwala Djelan to take action when her shots in the jungle had started him and Varuna investigating.

"And now I must be getting back," said Roberta. "George and Itam Nabi had already set off with fifty men to defend the village when I left."

"Oh, but I couldn't think of letting you!" broke in Raynor. "You must stop here and have some food and rest, first. I've got it!" he exclaimed, with enthusiasm. "Fact is, my saddle-bags are all packed, for I was on the point of starting off for Kwala Djelan this morning. You go down the trail a bit and I'll come. There's lunch for both—*may I?*"

He asked the question eagerly. Roberta looked doubtful. He was being most kind. But he seemed a whole lot too eager, to her maidenly reserve. Was he a philanderer, with his heart at the call of every pretty face he saw, and constant to none? There were queer stories about Raynor and the Queen whispered in the village—for the natives knew everything—and there seemed to have been at least something between him and Varuna

Wardman. Roberta was tired and worn out and raging hungry, but— She eyed him dubiously, the burning blue intensity of the sapphire in her gaze.

Raynor could scarce retain control of himself. He was longing to tell her, right now, that she was the girl of his dreams, the girl whose image he had been carrying around in his heart, certain that some day they would meet. But he dared not precipitate anything so rash at this time.

"I shan't be half an hour," he urged. "Must pay my respects decently to the Wardmans. Try to make them appreciate the gravity of this whole thing, y'see. Really, they ought to be back on their yacht, if it's already as bad as you have just told me. But, first off, we must see to you, mustn't we? May I?" he begged.

"You may!" smiled Roberta at him. His concern for the Wardmans had decided her. He was really the Resident, anxious for the welfare of every one, impersonally, who came into this native kingdom. She could trust herself—impersonally—with him.

He was gone with a cheery, "Right-o!"

ROBERTA coaxed Sufi down out of his tree, not without effort, and set out back for the plantation with the ape tugging ahead on all fours. She did not once look back at the python. That would remain as a grisly memory inseparably connected with her first meeting with James Raynor.

She chose a spot in the trail where a little runnel crossed in a deep furrow and examined its banks gingerly for snakes before sitting down. Itam Nabi had a saying that he who has been bitten by a serpent fears every rope—and Roberta could appreciate fully the force of that now!

Raynor came riding down shortly after. Roberta heard the rapid patter of hoofs in the duff. She looked up, to see not one

but two horses coming. The Resident was astride the foremost and riding as if born to it. Roberta always did admire a good horseman. She received him graciously.

"My syce's," explained Raynor, nodding at the second horse as he dismounted. "I couldn't think of letting you walk back. You must be done up. Rather!—I say, it took rare courage to face that brute of a python, what?"

"I am tired," admitted Roberta. He was unbuckling the saddle-bags now and she eyed them hungrily. "Can I help?"

"Not a bit of it, y'know!" retorted Raynor cheerily. "My party."

He seemed to grudge every moment his eyes were not on her. He fumbled impatiently with the lunch, and finally achieved a spread napkin opened out in his two big hands that was filled with sandwiches and fruit. He approached her on all fours, ludicrously mimicking a native table-boy:

"Deign to accept, *Ya Rani*," he said in Melayu.

Roberta laughed and helped herself.

"Famished!" she told him, her mouth full of bread.

"Rather!" He said no more. He seemed getting tongue-tied again.

"Aren't you going to eat?" asked Roberta, helping herself to another.

"Prefer to watch you, if you don't mind." He was nervous and nipping at his mustache with his teeth now.

"I do mind," said Roberta decidedly. "Don't be ridiculous! The lunch is over, if you don't pitch in." She made a move to rise.

"Oh, please!" begged the Resident. "I'll be good!"

"You'd better," retorted Roberta practically. "You've a long ride ahead of you to Kwala Djelan."

Raynor gave an enigmatical '*Mmph!*' and ate one sandwich. He was hesitating

between another and a ripe mangosteen, when——

Brruummpp! — *Brrummpp-brummpp!* — *Brump!* The muffled thump of gunfire came distantly through the forest. They both listened.

"Cannon!" ejaculated Roberta. "I must go."

"Righto! And I with you," said Raynor, jumping up to buckle his saddlebags.

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Mr. Raynor!" said Roberta sharply. "Your place is at Kwala Djelan, as quick as you can get there."

"But, Miss Severance!" protested Raynor desperately, "you can't think of going back alone—*now!* The attack on your brother's village has already begun. Who knows how it will come out?"

"You can't help any, there," retorted Roberta unmoved. "One man more, that's all. There will be plenty to protect me. Don't worry!—And I'm off!" she added, seizing the syce's pony-bridle and mounting in one swing. "Don't be foolish! Go—I beg of you!"

He stood eyeing her uncertainly, worried, haggard with the mere thought of leaving her to ride entirely alone through this vast jungle. He was yearning to see her safely home, at any cost to his own duties and responsibilities as Resident.

Roberta was sensible of all that, but she gave him no time. A kick had started her pony moving. "Good-bye!" she called back over her shoulder. "Do go, Mr. Raynor! Quick as you can!"

"Wait!" called Raynor desolately.

"Well?" said Roberta, reining in.

"May—may I look in on you, y'know—soon, Miss Severance?" he asked.

"You may—Sir James!" she called back saucily. "But now—*go!*"

"You Americans!" ejaculated Raynor, grinning ruefully and shaking his head.

5

RAYNOR rode back to the Wardmans with his heart in a wild tumult. He had placed her, now. 'Way back at Singapore it was, three years ago, when he was part of the diffident stag party on the side lines at a Gymkhana dance. She had passed, on the arm of another man. Raynor, who didn't dance, had looked at her with a low whistle of appreciation, and that was all there was of it. Those intense blue eyes; her rather stern mouth; that trick of biting her lower lip; her vivacity, and somehow an air of fearlessness—they were all rather striking. His thoughts had been: "Jungle girl! I wonder who she is. Rather the one for *me*—my work up there in Kota Sembilan and all that!"

Most girls would rather not, thank you! It was loneliness and boredom for them. Immured in a native principality, with not a social doing on the horizon. . . . *His* wife would have to like the jungle, its gorgeous peoples, its primitive life, its preposterous intrigues and rebellions. She would have to have guts enough to fight by his side, instead of whimpering for protection, in case of native insurrection. That girl seemed to have all that in her, if one could judge character in a face. This python episode of hers had proved it, amply. No one person in ten would have survived it. Resolution, instantaneous decision, courage, the fighting will. . . .

Well, he had found her, at last. And she was George Severance's sister. . . . He had been too diffident to ask for an introduction to her. A bore, if he couldn't dance, she would view him. . . .

Varuna Wardman greeted him archly. "Who was the little beauty, may I ask?" she inquired with a lazy smile.

"Sister of a planter friend of mine," said Raynor. "They're having something of a row down there. The sea datus are

in rebellion and have begun plundering the coastal villages. You and your father had best get aboard your yacht, Miss Wardman. Anchor her under the guns of the Residency. I'm riding for Kwala Djelan to wire for a gunboat. It's the only way to stop this now."

She looked at him in some alarm. "You don't say it's as serious as all that?" she cried out incredulously. Varuna never could be brought to believe that this Malay state was anything but an opera bouffé principality, where picturesque things happened—but never anything that could menace her, the daughter of the American millionaire.

"Quite. I must start right off, if you don't mind," said Raynor shortly. "You'll pay my respects to your father? And I'd break camp immediately, if I were you."

"You're not going to leave us!" wailed Varuna. "Why, Sir James!" Her eyes were arch with reproof. "How ungentlemanly! And what's going to happen to us, I want to know?"

"There's no danger inland," he said brusquely. "Just head back for your yacht. I'm leaving the Severances in far worse danger than you, Miss Wardman. Nothing counts now but to get back to the capital as quickly as I can. . . . Good-bye."

"Gosh!" said Varuna. She looked after him with consternation. Her dream of attaching the Resident as a latest conquest had vanished. Instinctively her thoughts turned immediately to her personal safety. Get aboard the yacht and get out of this, if there was such a thing as an insurrection going on in this terrible place! "Oh, Father!" she called out to where Wardman senior lay snoring in his tent.

RAYNOR galloped the twenty miles to Kwala Djelan, had a hasty conference with Ibn Yaïd, the Vezier; and had himself rowed out in haste to Residency Is-

land. He drafted a telegram immediately to Sir John in Singapore, requesting a gunboat here as quick as she could steam. He was about to hustle it off by one of the Sikhs when Ibn Yaïd himself was announced.

The tall Muntri, to give him his Malay title for Vezier, strode in and laid a brown line of knuckles on the telegram. "O thou, our father and our mother, the Queen begs that you do not send this *tar!*" he appealed.

Raynor sat looking somberly at the Faithful Servant, he who for years had waited on Siti Ishtar's caprice, patient, wise, enduring; indeed a native Abraham Lincoln, in the way he had guided this people steadfastly in spite of all the follies and wars and intrigues of their rulers. Their Sultan was dead, their Queen a widow, now. Ibn Yaïd was the logical man for Siti Ishtar as Sultan-consort. And Raynor had wronged him, unutterably, from the European standpoint. . . .

"I thought we had decided all that," he said. "This *tar*—"

Ibn Yaïd laughed: "*We had, Huzoor. But I had not spoken then with Siti Ishtar—may Allah cherish her! Difficult is our Queen to counsel, Tuan! La!* She did nearly drag my hair out by the roots at the first word of it! 'Ye men! Ye witless babes!' raged she upon me. 'Am I the ruler here or is that great Englishman stuffed with food? *Ya Allah! How is our face blackened if ye do this thing!*' So sent she me in all haste that you send not the *tar!*"

Raynor laughed—and Ibn Yaïd joined him—over that picture of the rage of this fiery little pirate whelp whose will and whose caprices were the most difficult thing to manage in all the kingdom of Kota Sembilan. Then the Resident grew serious as he faced her Vezier under the strong lamplight thrown down upon

the Residency desk from the great Chinese shade overhead.

"As man to man, O Muntri, think not that I do not sympathize with you, and with her, in that ye hate any interference by my government of Singapore. But, how will ye subdue this uprising of your sea datus without any ships?"

Ibn Yaïd did not at once reply to that poser. Arab-like he was preparing his ground first. And quite evidently Siti Ishtar had said much more to him than that first outburst.

"In truth it would be an evil thing if we could not manage our own affairs, Huzoor. Also when the English warships come they stay, and there are marines landed; and lo, before one can draw breath, our government is but a plaything in a harem and the land is ruled by white police. Even as in Pahang."

His eyes drooped languidly as he made this home-shot upon the British Resident. Raynor acknowledged it with a sober nod. His sympathies with this picturesque people and their Queen were too great for him to contemplate with any satisfaction the inevitable taking over of Kota Sembilan, like all the rest of the Federated Malay States. It had to come some day, perhaps; but why not, in Heaven's name, let them govern themselves if it could possibly be done? He sympathized with that passionate patriotism that imbued native statesmen like Ibn Yaïd, their desire to manage their own troubles without white interference, to show themselves men in the manly art of self-government.

"How is our face blackened!" Siti Ishtar had said it all in one sentence there. The disgrace, the humiliation before all the native world, in that the Resident had to call in a British gunboat because they could not put down a pirate rebellion in their own kingdom. But

what they were going to do, practically, about it he could not see. All the naval force of Kota Sembilan had been these same sea datus, now in a state of *ankanan*. He said so, forcefully, and to the point.

"*Aiwa!*" Ibn Yaïd smiled cheerfully. "Can not we, too, use the wire to Singapore? There is the Queen's father, Haroun Mahomet, with his pirate fleet of Banggai. A swift proa of a man that we know in Menado bears him our *tar* across the narrow straits, and within the week he will be here. *Yallah!* Then comes the Sword of the Faith, and within will be Siti Ishtar herself in the van of his battle. Soon and swift conquer we a submission! It is but to wait, O Presence."

RAYNOR'S big frame sat sunk in thought as he considered this plan of theirs. To him it was ideal, to let the natives handle their own rebellion, to have Siti Ishtar with her father's fleet chastize her datus with a strong sword. That pirate's whelp was perfectly capable of it! She needed no help from his government's warships. Only——

"There's this, Ibn Yaïd," he said at length: "what do we with those proas attacking the Severance Rubber Estates right now? *That* can not wait, not even one hour! When I left the Sunggei there was sound of gunfire down by the coast. Who knows how it is, now, with young Severance? I go, tonight, to give what help I can. The Residency launch is ready and armed. The Sikhs are awaiting me this minute——"

"It is madness, *Tuan!*" cut in Ibn Yaïd, his voice quavering with alarm and disapproval. "What canst thou do in a puny launch against great proas armed with cannon? It is but to sacrifice the *Tuan* Resident and then we are lost indeed!"

"Say you!" retorted Raynor stubbornly. "Consider: the launch has two three-

inch howitzers. And there are a dozen Sikhs, with military rifles, whose trade is to fight. Knowest thou the range of those howitzers, Muntri? At three miles they talk; nor have those proas any speed compared to the engine of the launch. There will be a stern lesson taught to-night!"

Ibn Yaïd threw back his head and blinked his eyes sleepily, a characteristic Arab gesture of conviction yet disagreement. "So be it! Thou hast the power, *Tuan*. But, tell me: suppose thou prevail against these datus? Who, then, puts down the rebellion but the British Raj? And is not, then, the face of Siti Ishtar blackened? For thy launch is but a warship of the English to those datus—and where is then the Queen's government in Kota Sembilan?"

Raynor sat back grasping his chin with perplexity. The shrewd Ibn Yaïd had exposed the whole fallacy of his expedition if the native government alone was to handle this rebellion. A pity, not to hold his own cards in reserve, only bringing in overwhelming force from Singapore when all else had failed! How much more prestige would Siti Ishtar have with her own people if the fleet of Haroun Mahomet could put down the sea datus with a strong sword! And what difference whether a warship hurried up here from Singapore or he himself attacked them with the Residency launch, armed with long-range howitzers that could sink those two proas easily? But there was Roberta and his friend, George Severance—their protection could not wait upon any expediencies of native politics.

He shrugged his thick shoulders stubbornly. "Right, Ibn Yaïd! For the main rebellion we wait upon Haroun Mahomet, even as thou hast counselled. But for these proas at Kwala Sunggei,—it can not be! Remember when thou and I came here four years ago with the *Tuan Sever-*

ance, and the Sultan Mulei Suih was deposed and all this began?"

He waved his hand about the Residency office, symbolical of all that régime of peace and order and development that had started in with the reign of Sultan Sri Adika, the husband of Siti Ishtar, murdered later by the Rajah Shaitan Sadud.

"*Aiwa!* I do remember, *Tuan!* Also has the *Tuan Severance* a sister." Ibn Yaïd's eyelids dropped and the faintest of grins hovered on his seamed features as he eyed the Resident.

Raynor flushed slowly but admitted nothing. "Verily. And the life of a white woman is sacred, Ibn Yaïd. Were it the *Tuan Severance* alone we might leave him to his guns. He has Itam Nabi with him and a strong force of villagers. They should be able to defend themselves. But this white lady makes all the difference in the world. A jungle battle is no place for her! It is what makes this affair a matter for the English power, you see. Nay, it is determined upon!" Raynor said with finality and resolution.

Ibn Yaïd flung a fold of his burnoose over his shoulder and picked up his staff to depart. "Even so, *Tuan,*" he said. "I go to tell the Queen your words."

RAYNOR saw him off at the Residency wharf and then turned his attention to the launch, which was moored along the opposite side of the landing. Under a smoky dammar torch that lit up the brooding jungle night his Sikhs were busy with ammunition and stowage. The howitzers had been set up on their naval mounts at bow and stern. They gleamed, cold and business-like, in horizontal glints of steel under the lurid flares. Ranjit Singh, the Sikh gunner, bent lovingly over the forward gun, crooning over it like a child as he adjusted its sight mechanism. There was the crack and splitting of wooden box-covers and the creak of

nails being pulled out as shell-boxes were uncovered on the wharf. The ammunition was being carried down between grunting Sikhs under Rana Singh's terse orders.

"All ready, there?" called down Raynor impatiently. "I give you five more minutes, Rana Singh!"

"Presently, Huzoor! There is a matter of provisions yet to go on board."

"Get on with it, then. We've no time to lose!" urged Raynor.

But soon there came a hail out in the night. A sampan emerged out of the circle of blackness, from the direction of the village beach.

"The Queen sends you fruits and meat, *Tuan Besar*," called the voice of the boatman. "Also is a *surat* [letter] for thee."

"That's well! Stow those provisions in the boat," Raynor called down. "Messenger, bring here the *surat*."

The sampan slid alongside the launch and her men began passing over three tall and deep baskets of native provisions covered with woven mat tops. Raynor gave them a mere glance and a brief direction to stow them amidships, somehow. They were horribly in the way—but one could not refuse any gift from Siti Ishtar—not with tact!

The sampan man climbed over the launch and came up the wharf steps with his letter. Raynor thought it some message of approval from the Queen as he went over to the flare to open it. And then, after the first glance at the inscription on it, his face set grimly. It was in George Severance's handwriting!

He tore it open and read George's hasty scrawl:

Come quick, old man—for God's sake! Roberta is taken: Kick me, if you will, but while we were holding them, down at a tree that I have felled across the Sunggei, a party of the pirates got around us and raided the bungalow. Itam Nabi with three men had gone back for more ammunition and they heard Roberta and the table

boys trying to defend themselves. They got there just in time to add four more men to their captives. One only got back to me. Afraid he will not live but he saw them carrying her off. Itam Nabi was with her. That's all the hope I have. Get here with the launch tonight if you possibly can. She is probably aboard one of those proas by now. I'm holding fast here, but damned if I know what to do next. They've got us, with her as a hostage. It's up to you now.

GEORGE SEVERANCE.

6

RAYNOR folded the message. Then, to the boatman: "Does Her Highness know what is in this *surat*?" he asked.

"How should I know what is in the minds of the great, *Tuan*?" whined the boatman. "A messenger came to the palace with it. They gave it to me to take out with this load of fruit. That is all I know, *Tuan*."

Raynor considered for a brief moment. No; it would do no good to send Siti Ishtar any return message. This was strictly a white man's affair. Also it gave him ample justification for interference, this kidnapping of Roberta. It was no longer a purely native row.

He went hastily to the wharf side. "That's all, Rana Singh!" he called down. "Cast off the moorings. The food the Queen has sent us will have to do. Make haste!"

He ran down into the launch. The rest of the Sikhs grabbed up their rifles and came tumbling after. There was crowding and confusion, hasty orders to soldiers who were starting to sit on those baskets to keep off them and range along the gunwales.

The mooring lines fell and the engine started. The launch gathered way and fled down the black reaches of the Djelan River. Rana Singh was busy adjusting her searchlight as they crashed through the breakers on the bar and turned north for Kwala Sunggei. They would need that searchlight, Raynor felt, when it came

to the talk he was going to give those datu!

His own thoughts as to the future were nothing but perplexity. How to use the long-range power of his guns *now*—when Roberta was aboard one of those proas as a hostage? That grim fact had shorn him utterly of his whip hand in this. It forced him to come in close, before even thinking of hostilities, lest she be struck down in the gunfire. And that would put his launch where two shots from those long muzzle-loading twelves on the proas could send her to the bottom.

"Oh, Roberta! Roberta!" he groaned aloud in his distress. "How in the devil? . . . Puts the wind up us, *this* does!"

He sat puzzling in silence after that outburst. Passion surged up in him as he thought of that enticing little figure, courage personified, who had faced him, rifle in hand, across the gory wreck of that python not eight hours before. The shock and thrill of that instant recognition when he had known her at sight for the girl of his dreams. . . . Meanwhile the launch was swiftly making the run up the coast. It biffed through the breakers off Kwala Sunggei and presently was winding up the long estuary inland. Raynor went forward to take charge of the bow howitzer himself. Two of those proas were now dimly to be seen, anchored several miles below the Severance plantation. Not a shot had come from them so far. Raynor could make them out under the lagoon stars, a lantern glowing redly atop the poop of each and faintly lighting up the long diagonal lines of their lateen yards.

He headed straight for the nearest. She was broadside-to, and held there at anchor by the monsoon breeze. The wind had at least turned her long twelves under the teak shield on the forecastle so that they

could not be trained on him. All she had bearing was two broadside swivel carronades. These were, no doubt, loaded with grape. But Raynor himself had shrapnel at his command, under one push of his thumb on the firing-latch.

"Stop the engine! On searchlight!" he ordered.

Its beams shot out ahead, lighting up the whole proa and the black and oily stretch of water between them. It revealed gun crews of Malays standing by those two carronades, turbaned gun-layers looking over the large round bore of each, the faint glow of touch-hole punks ready to use. And up on the break of the poop stood the datu, a forked figure of black and gold glittering in the searchlight glare. One of his tight-clad silken arms was outstretched. The drop of it would release both carronades at him, that gesture told Raynor. His gunners were but awaiting it.

FOR a silent interval Raynor just let the launch drift. This affair had come to the point of the gravest consequences to all Kota Sembilan if he did not do just the right thing. Those grapeshot could not fail to do hideous execution at this close range—perhaps one of them strike down him—and that would be the positive end of Kota Sembilan as an independent native state. And he, in reply? Well, he had but to press his thumb, and the datu Ali Sabut—Raynor had at once recognized him as the same one of the yacht hold-up—would be wiped out of this world with an instant finality. But nothing was to be gained by that, nor would it stop the two carronades. No; in force they overreached him two to one. The weapon of the mind was his alone.

"Ya Datu Ali Sabut! What folly is this?" Raynor called out. "Make you war on the British government?"

"Please God!" said the datu after the usual long and reflective Malay pause. "Our *ankanan* is against a tyrant Queen. We but took a white hostage so that you should not interfere, *Tuan Besar*."

"Where is the white girl?" demanded Raynor, not replying further to that naïve explanation.

Datu Ali moved slightly but did not lower his arm. Behind him on the poop Roberta came into the searchlight beams, little, compact, still clad in those khaki jungle clothes that seemed to become her so well as the girl who could shoot and ride. Raynor's heart gave a leap as he saw her. Behind her bulked the massive black figure of Itam Nabi, but whether bound or no Raynor could not perceive.

"Lo, she is my honored guest," said the datu placatingly. "And one was taken aboard with her whom we leave free so that no man may say or do aught that is displeasing to a white *Rani*. Only, the *Tuan Besar* understands, it would be unsafe for her to leave this ship in these troubled times."

Still the upraised arm, at whose drop those carronades would thunder forth on the instant. The datu was telling him, Raynor knew, evasively and subtly, that he did not propose to let Roberta leave his proa, now or any other time, nor under any threat of force. So long as she was on board force could not be used against him and he knew it.

"They are treating me very courteously, Mr. Raynor—don't worry!" called out Roberta herself at that juncture.

Her voice, cheerful, self-reliant, thrilled and reassured Raynor. Here was an American girl abundantly able to take care of herself.

"If my staying here will help you any—please let me," Roberta went on to call out. "I am armed, but he doesn't know

it. They shall not touch me so long as Itam Nabi and I live."

The datu had slowly lowered his arm during this colloquy in English. He did not understand it but he was inclined to be reasonable—and always courteous. But he would be adamant, if evasive, on his main point. His gunners had looked at him, once, and understood that it was not the expected order to fire. But Raynor knew that almost any injudicious answer of his would cause that arm to flash out again, and this time there could be no stopping the catastrophe of cannon-fire that it would let loose.

"Oh, Roberta!" He almost groaned in using her first name in the intensity of his perplexity. "What shall I say to him? You can not stay with them. Within the week the fleet of Haroun Mahomet will be here and you will be exposed to I know not what risks. I wanted to let Siti Ishtar handle this uprising herself—and she will—but your safety is above all else with me."

"And how about yours, Mr. Raynor?" came back Roberta quickly. "You and Datu Ali are like two duellists, each with the other's pistol at point-blank. Oh, please don't take such risks! Have a heart, Mr. Raynor!"

She was bantering him now, but Raynor heard, in the overtones of her voice, the anxiety that she was trying to conceal. It told him that she would do almost anything sooner than see him blown to bits before her eyes. And her next words confirmed it: "Never mind me for the present, Mr. Raynor. Get out of this, somehow, and go to George. I don't like this ominous silence ashore—not a musket-shot in the last two hours! They're up to some jungle trick on him—I feel it. There'll be a chance to get me off somehow. Who knows? Anyway, I'm safe

here, for the present; but you certainly are not! Please go!"

RAYNOR sat stolidly, with his hand still gripping tight the howitzer's firing-latch. Proa and launch had swung imperceptibly in the wind, but both the carronades and the howitzer had followed stealthily that movement, in a fixity of aim that was grimly sinister.

"I—I can not do it, Roberta!" burst out Raynor at length. "To leave you here—not a hope! And there is the principle involved, too!"

Then to the datu, with stern dignity: "I, the Resident, can consent to none of this, O Datu Ali! If you sea datus have this grievance against Siti Ishtar, just why you don't bring it before Ibn Ya'id I can not imagine. Is the Vezier not the soul of common sense and justice? But, if you choose to make war, that is between you and the Queen. It is rebellion, without even an attempt to adjust matters. And she will do well to put it down with a strong sword. In any case it is hopeless, Datu. I have withheld my hand so far; but within two days I can bring here a steel warship to which all your proas together will be but as nutshells armed with firecrackers. Take my advice and make your peace with the Queen's government while you may. I will see that you get justice. . . . As to the white *Rani* that you have there, it simply isn't done, Datu! To lay hands on her is to compel an immediate interference by me, one that can only end in the destruction of the lot of you. I demand that you send her out, *at once*, to this launch!" Raynor concluded with a forceful thump of his free hand upon the barrel of the howitzer.

The datu shrugged his shoulders imperceptibly. They were just where they started, each with cannon at close range ready to loose the minute argument gave

way to action. Neither man had moved one jot from his attitude. Raynor and his threats were nothing before those carronades!

"Get ready to jump, Roberta!" called out Raynor hoarsely. "Over the rail, as quick as you can make it, with my next word. I shall have to hand this swine an ultimatum, my word!" He was thoroughly angry now, at the end of his patience with this shiftless and evasive datu. "*Pileh!*" [Choose!] he barked peremptorily at Datu Ali.

There was a long and tense silence, while the Malay considered. When he did speak, it was more evasion: "Touching on our *ankanan*, O *Tuan Besar*, it is commanded that Siti Ishtar will take away our cannon——"

"*Choose!*" thundered Raynor, interrupting him with savage impatience—this was no time to talk of the *ankanan* and its grievances! And then astounding things began to happen. Behind him Raynor heard the ripping off of basketry mats and then Siti Ishtar herself stood beside him at the gun! He looked up at her once over his shoulder, gasping with astonishment. She must have known the contents of George's letter all along, then, and had invited herself on this expedition—in a fruit-basket!

"Who speaks of Siti Ishtar?" rang out the Queen's clear voice in the night.

The datu was visibly startled out of his calm Malay reserve. For an instant the muttered gasp—"Majesty!"—escaped him. Then a grin of triumph crossed his wrinkled features and he spoke a low word to his gunners. Instantly the muzzles of the two carronades converged upon Siti Ishtar and Raynor standing in the bows of the launch. Raynor could have kicked her for the idiotic tactical error of showing herself at such a time as this. But it was done now, nor could he think

in his bewilderment what possible motive she could have had in doing so.

"Her Majesty will do me the honor of coming aboard the proa," said the datu, again with hand outstretched to stay the gunners. It was a command. His tones scarcely concealed his triumph over having got Siti Ishtar so easily into the power of the sea datu. As a hostage she would be worth many white *Ranis!*

"Of course I'm coming aboard!" said Siti Ishtar silkily. "Lo, I, the Queen, go hostage for this white girl. It is as the *Tuan Besar* has said, Datu Ali, thou didst wrong to bring white people into this. And there is much to talk of concerning this *anakanan*," she said sweetly. "Start thou the engine, *Tuan Besar*."

Raynor's heart gave a leap of joy within him. Now he saw what she was driving at. If he were that datu he would as soon let a cobra get near him as Siti Ishtar! He muttered a low order to his Sikhs as the launch moved forward under a few kicks from the motor. The barrels of the carronades stood out over them now. They could not be depressed enough to aim. There were low mutters of exultant triumph on deck as the trap-door in the proa's bamboo netting raised. For an instant Siti Ishtar stood glittering in her golden court sarong in that fierce whiteness of the searchlight's glare against the proa's side. Then she was climbing up, with Raynor close beside her.

Fierce curses of denial met his head emerging through the bamboo netting. Raynor blocked with a burly shoulder the attempts of two Malays to stamp down the trap-door upon him—and then he had emerged into action already furious on deck. The datu, stabbed by Siti Ishtar's swift kris, lay writhing at her feet.

Beyond her stood Roberta, holding off with drawn revolver a *serang* crouching for her with naked kris. Raynor's fist

shot out and floored yet another rushing for her along the taffrail. Behind him were crowding Sikhs and yet more Sikhs up through the trap-door. Rana Singh's rifle exploded violently close beside him; then he saw Itam Nabi leap for Roberta's assailant and that *serang* crashed to the deck with the burly black atop of him.

THE proa's crew had already given back toward the waist from the poop. They had lost their datu and both his officers in that first struggle. Sikhs continued to pour up through the trap-door, firing as they came. For a moment the Orang Laut were driven headlong in full retreat; then a shout of battle arose from among them and muskets swung out in ranks of long and fantastic barrels.

"*Allab!—Allab!—La illabi illa AL-LAH!*" It crashed out like the roar of tigers, that *sorak!* There must be at least fifty fighting men of the Orang Laut left on this proa, and they would fight for their ship to the last man. He had no time to give the order, "Fix bayonets!" before their fire had lashed out in withering sheets of flame and they charged in a body down the deck. The Sikhs met them with the rapid crashes of their Enfields; then there was a furious mêlée below, clubbed muskets, krisses, spears. Raynor had whipped out his revolver. He and Roberta were firing below from the poop as fast as marks could be distinguished. It was a breathless, deadly, and wholly terrifying moment. The lives of all of them hung in the balance at that instant. Raynor's Sikhs were being overpowered three to one.

"Down!—Into them!" yelled Siti Ishtar. She and Itam Nabi leaped off the poop, and after them jumped Raynor's big body, his fist and clubbed revolver busy. They were instantly in a grunting and rabid hurly-burly of whirling and striking

men, a confused hubbub of individual fights between bearded Sikhs and fierce Malays stabbing with the flashing and snaky kris. Groups of twos and threes fought shoulder to shoulder. Into it Siti Ishtar was boring like a pestilence, her gold-handled kris dealing swift death before her. Raynor found himself confronted momentarily by a big and burly pirate with javelin poised not six feet from him. For a second he could see nothing for it but the blade of the thing through him, and then a revolver exploded close beside him and the man fell, his spear clattering on deck.

"My last cartridge!—Give me something!" gasped a hot voice in his ear. It was Roberta's. Raynor marvelled at the concentrated ferocity in her tones. What furies women were, when it came to life and death for their loved ones! They could fight more bitterly than men—once aroused to it. She and Siti Ishtar would take this proa single-handed if not stricken down! Delirious with the red madness of battle himself, Raynor leaped for that spear and gave it to her and they both closed up behind the Queen. The onset of the three of them had given the Sikhs the advantage. Slowly the whole mass of men was giving back; then there was a last furious rush and the Orang Laut fell back toward the house-on-deck around the mainmast.

"Halt!" rang out Siti Ishtar's imperious voice. Raynor instantly seconded it with his own shout of command that stopped his Sikhs in their tracks. Siti Ishtar had grabbed Itam Nabi, who was about to charge like a wild beast into the rearguard of the Orang Laut. Space opened out between the two parties.

Into it stepped the pirate's whelp, alone. Raynor uttered a murmur of protest, for any reckless javelin from among them could strike her down. But Siti Ishtar was not afraid of them, not she!

"Yield ye, my Orang Laut!" she said sweetly—yet compellingly. "Of what use to die, to the last man?"

Wondrous, the persuasive power of the human voice! There was not a trace of anger in Siti Ishtar's, only compassion and friendliness, tones that stilled the tempest in men's hearts by their mere quality. Besides, Raynor saw, it was of Siti Ishtar herself that they were afraid, more than of him and all his Sikhs. Those who opposed her died with a suddenness. Did she not slay Shaitan Sadud, the redoubtable war rajah, with her own hand? And lo, now their own datu Ali Sabut—and about half of their people besides.

A LEADER stepped forth from the Orang Laut. "Before Your Highness all tremble, Ya Siti Ishtar," he quavered. "But is it justice to take away our weapons and our cannon, so that we must put on slendangs and become women? Not us, the free Orang Laut of the high seas! Yet so says the Queen's *firman*."

Siti Ishtar laughed richly, a tinkling and tolerant laugh such as one would use to children. "Not I! Consider: am I not myself the daughter of the greatest of the Orang Laut? Was I not born and raised on the sea? Lo, before I was ten I had slain my man in battle, on the proa of Haroun Mahomet. Never would I disarm my own Orang Laut!"

That announcement was received with bewilderment. "But thy *firman*, Majesty?" asked the old chief in perplexity.

"*Sahyab!* The *firman!*" Siti Ishtar wrinkled her nose and her eyes sparkled mischievously. She gave a sidelong glance at Raynor and said: "*When* does my *firman* say that ye disarm, O fool?"

The poisonous little double-crosser! Raynor thought hilariously. Ibn Yaid had drawn up that *firman*, but the Queen had put her own spoke in it—which was

to leave it delightfully uncertain and indefinite just when this disarmament was to take effect! It would suit the dilatory Malay temperament exactly, if explained.

It worked here. "Your krisses, my warriors!" Siti Ishtar demanded, and they clattered before her on the deck.

Raynor turned to Roberta with a huge sigh of relief. This much of the insurrection was over at any rate! The trouble would be to get hold of the rest of her Orang Laut, none of whom had read the *firman* with any patience, let alone scanning it closely for the catch in it. Siti Ishtar had also forsworn her promise to Raynor with that catch—which meant just what she had said, "Never." But it didn't matter. . . . They weren't ready for it yet, as a matter of fact, nor would be for a period of some years. He had been too precipitate, worried into it by Wardman's complaints. Siti Ishtar, the pirate whelp, knew better! And she had fixed it, in her own way.

Raynor came out of his thoughts as Resident to become aware that Roberta's burning blue eyes had dropped shyly before his gaze. Instantly the lover in him had returned and was ablaze. "You!" he said, his voice low, vibrant, tense. "We jolly well beat 'em, didn't we?"

His eyes were telling her his admiration, his longing; but his tongue was taking refuge in the fight. Some time, soon, he would ask her the momentous question—but he dreaded it.

Roberta, too, took refuge in the fight. "Thank you for the rescue, Mr. Raynor," she said somewhat breathlessly and kept on looking down at the deck. Her own eyes would betray her if she raised them. "Thank God you came through it alive— you, the Resident! . . ."

"Roberta!"

She raised her eyes to him, then. They stood a moment, holding themselves back by main force of will. No; not here. . . .

Siti Ishtar cast Raynor an arch smile over her shoulder as her Orang Laut knelt around her feet.

"Is this your She of the sapphire eyes?" was her unspoken question.

Raynor returned her glance in the affirmative. He was drunk with happiness.

7

THE fleet of Haroun Mahomet had arrived. The rebellion was still on. It had waxed and grown, rather, into a squadron of all Siti Ishtar's sea datus under one, Redjal-ed-Dem, the Man of Blood, who styled himself Sultan and had been altogether glad of her *firman* as an excuse to try to depose her and seize the throne of Kota Sembilan himself. These intrigues were always breaking out in native principalities.

Raynor sat puffing a cigar and looking out the open Residency windows at that gay and bizarre spectacle of fifteen war proas anchored in a long line between Residency Island and the village beach of Kwala Djelan. They were the size of ordinary trading schooners, but were Celebes craft with outlandish and gaudy superstructures, with long poops of red lacquered bamboo and deck-houses of gilded teak, with tripod masts of bamboo having immensely long and rakish lateen yards pendant from their yokes. There was color everywhere; wild and barbaric, greens, yellows, pinks, silver and gold leaf. Their sheer strakes swept forward to the inevitable flare at the bow for long cannon platforms with slanting teak shields over their muzzles. Compared with them, in their fluttering drapery of huge Arabic flags, the Wardmans' white yacht, anchored off Residency Island for the protection of its guns, seemed some pale creation of a cold-blooded age.

Ashore the village of Kwala Djelan was full of noise and war-like activity.

Parties of warriors had been pouring into town, sent by all the datus of outlying villages in the jungle. Raynor could hear from the mosque the full-throated chant of men singing in unison:

"Upon them! Upon them! *Allah il Akbar!*
 May the foe fall in swaths before our swords!
 Upon them! Upon them! *Allah il Akbar!*
 May our spears drink at their hearts!"

A shattering surprize had Siti Ishtar, the pirate's whelp, prepared here for her rebellious sea datus. Their fleet had been reported as moving up the coast, burning and pillaging as they came. Messenger after messenger had come staggering into the palace, locating them to Siti Ishtar as off Pulo Putih, off Ras-et-Tin, off Kwala Maras. But they had no inkling that the fleet of Haroun Mahomet was here. Raynor had met him officially when that bizarre fleet, none of them over seventy tons and none armed with anything but brass muzzle-loaders and iron carronades taken from clipper ships long ago, had sailed in over the bar two days ago. The father of Siti Ishtar was a grave and dignified Bugis Malay, tall for his race, regally dressed in sarong and turban, with no sign of a lifetime of war about him save one huge and deep scar that ran from his pointed chin to the jowl of a bronze and obstinate jaw. It was this great sire who had given Kota Sembilan the pirate whelp born and raised on the sea.

Raynor meditated over his cigar on his course of action this day. It was to sit tight and do nothing. The Residency launch was ready and armed with her two three-inch naval howitzers, but he did not propose to use her except in emergency. Urgent telegrams to the Governor-General from him had begged that the British power in no way should interfere with this. It should let the Queen's own government put down the rebellion of her Orang Laut unaided. It was the only fair thing to do. If Siti Ishtar and Ibn Yaïd

were to be anything but figureheads they should be allowed to handle this alone.

RANA SINGH, the *havildar* of Raynor's Sikh guard, presented himself at the office door. "The Queen arrives, Huzoor," he announced, saluting stiffly.

Raynor got up in his starched whites to receive her. She had come, not in the state barge, but in a small sampan, which meant that her visit was to be private and confidential. The Resident expected something of a farewell talk, for this was the eve of battle and he might never see her alive again. He was formulating words of encouragement and of policy, in case anything should by any chance happen to her and it be necessary for him to carry on the government, alone or with Ibn Yaïd, when Siti Ishtar entered and the door was closed behind her.

"Greetings, 'Ku!" said Raynor, advancing cordially with outstretched hand. "You have a jolly breeze for it, my word! Take them on the inshore tack, so you have them on the skyline, if I may make a military suggestion:"

He had never seen her looking so lovely, Raynor thought, her rich olive skin radiant with health, her almond Malay eyes like glowing brown stars, her delicate features, with the sleek black hair done tight under some kind of jewelled tiara, ablaze with resolution and excitement. She wore nothing but a filmy silk slendang over her bare shoulders, a tight-girdled sarong with a handsome gold-handled kris stuck in its sash, and over her breasts two metal, jewel-studded circlets, held there by a silver harness over her shoulders and fastened down at the waist. That scanty dress gave her supple body the utmost of freedom, daughter of the sun that she was. Raynor eyed her somberly, for the fate of her kingdom hung in the balance of war this day.

"Jewels remain when empires vanish,

"O *Tuan Besar!*" said Siti Ishtar gayly, noticing his eyes on her ornaments. "Yet fear we not. Who can prevail against Haroun Mahomet? May the protection of Allah encircle his sword! Lo, he has given me five ships; and there are those that we took at Kwala Sungei."

Raynor nodded. That event was hardly a week old, when Siti Ishtar had almost single-handed captured the proa of the datu Ali Sabut and Raynor himself had rescued Roberta Severance from her. George and Roberta were at that moment over on the Wardmans' yacht. Raynor had advised their being somewhere near the Residency until this pirate rebellion was over. He had said no word of love to Roberta yet. But they had found each other—in the heat of battle aboard that proa. The whole incident was now a cherished memory with Raynor. How like a tigress Roberta had fought by his side that night! And then her eyes, wordless, but telling him all, in the moment of victory! He could afford to wait.

"Jolly good; Your Majesty!" Raynor replied to Siti Ishtar. "As I said before, try to get inshore of them. You'll find that shots tell more heavily when the other fellow is on the horizon—and most of his miss you."

"The Queen's thanks, *Tuan!*" said Siti Ishtar archly. "I have used that trick before, when the dhows from Oman came upon us off Pulo Nias. Also"—she hesitated and the smile left her smooth features—"should we not prevail, thou wilt not see me alive again, great white friend!"

Raynor's whole big body moved with negation. Unthinkable! But she insisted with a gesture: "Nay, *Tuan*, it might be. Therefore have I written this *firman*. It gives the government to thee and the English power. I would have it so. Nay!"—Raynor was murmuring further protests

at her solemn mien—"there will be nothing but civil war among a dozen upstarts claiming connection with the House of Menangkabau if you do not do this thing. I and Haroun Mahomet are left, now that the Sultan Sri Adika is slain."

Raynor took with a bow the yellow silk *firman* studded with the great silver chops of the State that she handed him. It left him sole ruler in Kota Sembilan.

"Let's hope nothing of the kind occurs, 'Ku!" he said cheerily. "Also there is this: could not I, alone, intervene at the last moment?—Not with power, but with words," he hastened to add as an almost startling glare of ferocity shot into the Queen's eyes. "Consider: These are the sailor folk of Kota Sembilan that you shoot down, 'Ku. Their grievance is that you intend to disarm them . . . some day. It was all my fault, really. . . . Suppose I go down the coast in the launch and just try to talk some sense into 'em?"

Siti Ishtar tossed her head. "So counselled Ibn Ya'ïd. But ye two are soft-lived in this. There is a time for words and a time for the sword. After the battle, yes; let be! But now—an armed rebellion put down with words will not stay quiet long, *Tuan Besar!* There be hotheads whose blood needs cooling. There always are."

RAYNOR acknowledged the justice of that. Perhaps she was right. After the first heavy encounter would be the time for him to intervene. Human nature was always like that when men's fighting blood was up. Still Siti Ishtar lingered. She had something more to tell him, and it was the real object of this visit, Raynor divined. He could see an unusual coming and going of sampans out to the fleet through the Residency window. It was evident that she would be wanted on board right soon. Yet she was waiting, temporizing, ignoring his hints

that the fleet was about to get under way out there.

And then a delicate rose flush appeared in the olive on her cheeks, a charming and most feminine blush, and she was looking at him slantwise out of narrowed eyelids.

"It has happened, O *Tuan Besar!*" she told him in a scarce audible whisper. "My moon has passed, and—nothing."

Raynor was struck rigid where he stood. Curious sensations, of tenderness, and somehow of pride, tingled through him. He knew perfectly well what she meant; that that moment of passion of theirs had borne fruit.

"The Thee in me, it lives, my Sultan!" said Siti Ishtar with rising fervor. "Oh, I can not tell you my joy!"

Raynor gulped and nodded. Dear to him, this news made Siti Ishtar. He could never love her as he did Roberta Severance; yet this sin of theirs, as some parts of the world would view it, had established a bond between them that was strong as life.

"And Ibn Yaïd?" he asked, his voice low and husky and breathless with emotion. "I—I have not heard yet from the mosque of any state marriage banns."

She was looking at him fixedly, her eyes like stars upon him. "No," said Siti Ishtar, a low and distinct and final note like a bell. "Never! Never shall my womb bear aught after *him!*"

Raynor gasped. Not marry Ibn Yaïd! . . . Capricious—was Siti Ishtar! This last obsession of hers would lead them he knew not where. Every cherished idea of the Western world, honor, chastity, good name, life above the breath of scandal, was shattered to bits by it.

"But—but—the—the proprieties, 'Ku!" he exploded. "This can not be! Can the Queen bear a son and have no husband? And you promised me!"

"*Tuan,*" said Siti Ishtar, and her voice sang with the exaltation that possessed

her, "there was that great Queen in Egypt—she who was beautiful as the immortal hours of paradise. The great conqueror, Iskhanter, came upon her and she bore him a son. Yet was she proud that it be so, and her son became a mighty ruler in his own country."

"A true tale, 'Ku, and not without honor," Raynor agreed. "But, if you do this thing, you break Ibn Yaïd's heart. Are all his years of devotion nothing? . . . Or, is it—me?" He asked her that, hoping sincerely that there was not yet more cruelty to her to come, the agony of an unrequited passion, a hopeless infatuation that would be misery to them both. But her quick smile relieved any apprehensions there: "*Ptu!*—I love thee not, *Tuan!* Gratitude, more than I can ever tell thee, yes! But *him* I love! *Him* I shall dote upon! My kingling! He who shall be greater than all the princes who have ever ruled in Malaya! *Aacha!* Scarce can I wait for him to grow up and take this pestilent government off my shoulders—"

SILVER trumpets ringing out from the proas and a gun fired interrupted her. Siti Ishtar stepped forward impulsively and wrung the Resident's big hand. Her eyes were warm with an emotion that was stronger than friendship, yet less—far less—than the love in her that was now all turned inward. "Enough!—Farewell! It is for *him* that I fight, great white friend! Trust thou, it will be strong battle!"

She was gone, leaving Raynor stunned. What was going to happen? And how manage this caprice of hers? He could not help but feel a fond interest in this son of his who was going to be such a native Sultan as Malaya had never seen. That ruthless little queen with her woman's wiles had had her way with him in this; and, in a large view, it was

a fine thing for this native state of Kota Sembilan. The people would accept her prince as something of a miracle, or at any rate a thing not to be questioned; for their idea of a good Sultan was one who in his wisdom did just as he pleased, and those who demurred died of a swift sword. But this idolizing, deifying rather, the Rajah Muda by his queen-mother to the extent of remaining for ever single, struck at the hearts of two people more than dear to Raynor; his devoted native friend, Ibn Yaïd, and his adored Roberta Severance. How explain himself with them? The Arab would accept nothing miraculous about Siti Ishtar's son. He had a swift vision of Ibn Yaïd standing in this very room with two simitars in his arms—and one of them would not leave that room alive! And Roberta?

Raynor clapped his palms together, shook his big and burly figure like some mastiff that has been enduring a rather bad time of it. He went out on the veranda to watch Haroun Mahomet's fleet get under way. And, after one long stride, he stopped as if smitten by some invisible blow—for out there were sitting Roberta and George Severance, with Itam Nabi squatting beside his *Mem!* A violent and purple flush spread itself over all Raynor's heavy features—he could fairly feel his face sizzle. They must have overheard every word of that talk between himself and Siti Ishtar! Rana Singh had not announced their arrival. . . .

Raynor went over to the veranda rail and watched for a moment that small sampan bearing Siti Ishtar coming alongside a huge and gaudy war proa. Her mastheads bore a string of silver crescents and globes on iron rods jutting up from the yokes of the tops—insignia of a flagship of one of the divisions. . . . He noted it, as he did everything else that was significant in native and Mohammedan customs.

He waited for his face to cool, then turned to George Severance.

"Glad you came over, old man!" He greeted him with an uneasy smile. "Best to be here at the Residency until we all see how this is coming out, isn't it? Your old room, dear chap; and I'll have one got ready for Roberta."

George was looking at him queerly. Half angry, wholly puzzled was the expression on his handsome features. He did not know just how he stood on this, as Roberta's brother.

"Thanks," he said, and there was a certain constraint in his voice, not at all the cordial accents of Raynor's old friend, George Severance. "Wardman's clearing out," George went on explanatorily. "The yacht is unarmed and he felt that she might be an embarrassment to you with this pirate battle coming on. But we decided that we ought to stick with you no matter how it goes. . . . So we came over . . . yacht's boat—" He had stopped because there were far weightier things on his mind than this.

Raynor knew he was in for it. He steadied himself and said: "Right! Roberta—" Raynor forced a smile as he turned to her.

"Miss Severance, please—Mr. Raynor," Roberta corrected him coldly. She had cut short his very first sentence to her. Her face was like death, the large and burning blue eyes filled with a terrible emotion, her large mouth set by a strong will, yet quivering slightly. Her skin was so white under her freckles that they made her look ghastly brown.

"I see that you know," said Raynor briefly. He stood looking down upon her yearningly, his heart rent asunder within him. . . . He was losing her, irrevocably. He knew it.

"Yes," said Roberta. Her voice told

him that she could hardly trust herself to say more lest tears get the better of her. They were welling up in her eyes now. Then, with a gathering storm of anger, "And Varuna Wardman has told me more, Mr. Raynor. I—I think we'd better go back to the yacht, George."

"Fie! Honey of my Heart!" rumbled Itam Nabi. The Black Prophet had been listening as he squatted blinking beside her. He understood none of the English, but he knew quite well what was going on and was scandalized, nay angry, that his white *Mem* should behave so—over nothing.

"Be silent, Itam Nabi!" gulped Roberta huffily. Then to Raynor, through her tears, "It's goo—good-bye, Mr. Raynor. I—we had best part—after this. . . ." She started to rise.

"Fie! Oh, fie!—*Rani* of mine!" growled Itam Nabi. "What mean you?—Look how the Presence is hewn in pieces before you! What blow is this that thou hast dealt him!"

Raynor had staggered back, his hand over his heart.

"Itam Nabi!—Silence!" cried Roberta, stopping him with a gesture. Then to Raynor, vindictively, "Are you Varuna Wardman's, Mr. Raynor? Or are you this native Queen's?" she asked him frigidly. "I assure you it's all one to me! I thought—once . . . but now. . . . Let's go, George. Oh, I can't bear it!"

A flood of tears had overwhelmed her. Raynor stood tongue-tied, unhappy, rocking as if under deadly blows. There is nothing bitterer or more unreasonable than jealousy. And he had no words to answer it. George whistled low and walked off; this was no place for him! They must settle it between them.

Itam Nabi continued to rumble, "Fie! Fie!—What madness is this, Dove of my Soul?" But Roberta did not still him;

she had collapsed into the cane chair and was suffering the tortures of a broken love, of shattered happiness, of disillusionment and jealousy that was voiced with but shuddering sobs.

RAYNOR knelt beside her. He insisted on taking the hand that she tried to wrench away. "Roberta!" His deep and abject tones pleaded with her. "Roberta! Please—there are circumstances—with the queen. . . . You will understand, some day. There is only one love in my heart—you! You! *You!*" He shook her fiercely in his intensity.

Roberta shrugged him off impatiently. "No!" she managed to gulp out. "Go away! I hate you! First one woman, then another—not for me!"

Raynor tightened his hold. "Please, Roberta!" he begged. "You misunderstand—completely. . . . Oh, how can I make you believe? I would give my life for you, gladly. There is no one but you. The rest is lies. . . . Roberta, darling . . . please!"

He attempted to take her in his arms in the fervor of his efforts to make her believe, understand. But Roberta fought him off angrily: "No! Once for all, Mr. Raynor, I tell you!" she lashed at him. "*You*, that have stooped to an intrigue with a native woman! That have begged Varuna Wardman, and I know not who else, to marry you. . . ."

Sobs choked her. Raynor felt keenly the anguish that she was suffering. He groped blindly for the talisman that would show her the difference between a single-hearted fidelity such as his love for her and a low intrigue such as she imagined his with the Queen. But he was no man of words. Even golden words were almost futile in a situation such as this. He tried it, brokenly, desperately.

"Roberta!" he pleaded. "There never was anything between Varuna Wardman and myself. Only folly; a brief infatuation on my part when I first met her, if you like. I hadn't seen a white girl in so long. . . . And I have been in love with you for years, carrying your image around in my heart—"

Roberta hunched an impatient shoulder. What nonsense was this? They had only met the week before for the first time!

"A vision of you, Roberta," went on Raynor tensely and trying once more to take her hand. "Memory, perhaps. I saw you once before, at the Gymkhana in Singapore. And I knew you then for the mate my heart was yearning for, the girl that was my ideal of a helpmeet and partner here—oh, do believe that all I say comes from the bottom of my heart! I love you and you only, Roberta!" he declared passionately. "Some day I'll tell you all that is between myself and Siti Ishtar—nothing that you imagine, I assure you!—but—don't let's discuss it now."

His voice was tender, persuasive, filled with anxiety lest she wreck the happiness of them both by this mood of jealous obstinacy. Roberta sat up and looked him in the eyes solemnly, her teeth catching on her lower lip. "She is going to have a child by you, Mr. Raynor," she told him sternly, "and that's quite enough for me. I don't want to hear any more about it. . . . It's good-b—Oh, take me away, George! I—can't—bear—it!"

She had burst into tears and collapsed in the chair, sobbing wretchedly, her face in her hands, her shoulders heaving. Raynor stood looking down at her a moment, his heart empty and hopeless. Itam Nabi rumbled on unceasingly, "Fie! Fie!—Gazelle of my heart!—What madness is this?—Allah! Allah! Have mercy!"

Raynor beckoned silently to George,

then strode into the Residency, to collapse, himself, in his room.

8

THEY were gone. Back to the Wardmans' yacht. Roberta was out of his life for ever. . . . Raynor came out of his stupefaction, his misery, to grasp desperately at the threads of his work here as the sole thing left in life. Where had he left Kota Sembilan when this catastrophe had come upon him? Oh, yes: Siti Ishtar and her father about to sail. . . . There would be a gory sea-fight this day. And no man could foretell the outcome with such redoubtable antagonists as the Orang Laut. Should he, or should he not, as British Resident, interfere at the last moment?

Raynor found himself answering that in the affirmative, now. Curious. . . . He, who had been all for letting them settle it themselves—so that Siti Ishtar's face be not blackened—now felt the strongest kind of urge to go down there in the Residency launch and do what he could to prevent this battle. And a moment's analysis showed his motive to be the new prince—the one human being that was still his to love. An amazingly tender feeling, this thought of that little life that was in part his! And Siti Ishtar was risking that life, as well as her own, in leading the van of Haroun Mahomet's battle. It *must* not be allowed.

Impulsively Raynor sprang to his feet, raised his voice in a shout of command for his Sikhs, and hastened down to the Residency wharf. And there he was astonished to find Ibn Ya'id seated in the stern sheets of the launch.

"Thou here, old friend!" he cried out. "I had thought that Haroun Mahomet would have given thee at least a division of his fleet to lead."

Ibn Yaïd looked up without replying. Wrapped in the folds of his burnoose, his attitude was that of patience personified. "Ya Allah! It is madness, this thing!" he said when he did speak. "Many will be slain. Our people, all of them! I did counsel that thou and I, as it were the British Raj and the Muntri of Kota Sembilan, go out in the launch and speak words of wisdom to the Rajah Redjal-ed-Dem before it is too late. And for that Siti Ishtar's face is cold upon me. I was not—invited."

Raynor took his hand cordially, yet guiltily, for he could not forget what lay between him and the Muntri. "Thou and I, old comrade!" he exclaimed impulsively. "We two are companions in misery this day!"

Ibn Yaïd raised his eyebrows but did not inquire what was troubling the Resident. The calamities of Kota Sembilan weighed too heavily upon his spirits. He had seen quite enough of war in his youth.

"We go down immediately," said Raynor. "While there is a stone yet unturned we two are for peace, eh, Muntri?"

Ibn Yaïd smiled. "Aiwa! War is for boys, not men! I knew that thy heart would say that, O Tuan Besar!"

"Shove off!" ordered Raynor.

The launch filled with armed Sikhs. She started her propeller with a boil of white water and then slid down the smooth and sunlit waters of the Djelan River, past that long line of barbaric proas which were now dropping from their yards huge and belying green mat sails. They chugged by the Wardmans' yacht, and Raynor looked in vain for any sign of Roberta on deck; but there was no one, only Varuna, who waved at them as if they were off for some circus. Never would she appreciate the depths of feeling in human passions! The real sufferer lay below, Roberta, prostrated in her berth.

Raynor groaned as they left the yacht astern.

THEY crossed the bar. Down the coast came in sight the Orang Laut, a fleet of fifteen sail coming up under the strong southwest monsoon. Raynor measured his chances of getting anywhere near them without hostilities and decided that they were not very good. The red ensign of England fluttered astern of the launch. It meant something to most marauders, but not to Redjal-ed-Dem, who commanded this fleet. "The Man of Blood"—sinister name! He may have heard of England, in a vague way, but that flag meant to him principally the big white man who had urged upon Siti Ishtar the taking away of their cannon and was manifestly a fool.

"No further, Tuan!" warned Ibn Yaïd when they had come within cannon range. "The wise Sultan lets those who would make talk come to him. Also he lays his sword across his knees."

Those hints were not lost to Raynor. He stopped the launch. It lost way and floated idly on the dancing blue waters of the Gulf of Siam. The first law of Oriental diplomacy was to make the other fellow come to you; any unseemly scurrying down to meet that rebel flagship would at once make him, Raynor, the suppliant. And the second law was to have power to back up one's words—the sword across the knees in Ibn Yaïd's picturesque language. So he ordered both the howitzers loaded. And then this small bit of the world-power that is England lay waiting, for peace if possible, for war if it had to be.

Raynor turned to Ibn Yaïd. "And now, old comrade—since thou and I are not likely to come out alive from this—I'll tell thee all that lies between us. Know then: the white girl, she that thou knowest

is the ruby of my heart, she hath cast me from her."

"The *Rani* Severance hath done this?" cried Ibn Yaïd, astonished. "But no, *Tuan!* Look not thus on me as uncaring further to live! Women?—*Thu!* They blow this way and that; but it is all one if the heart loves! It is but to wait; as I have done these many years." Ibn Yaïd sighed and his thoughts were evidently with Siti Ishtar, that pirate whelp that he had loved since she was a child. It cut Raynor to the heart, that patient devotion—and hopeless.

"Nay, it can never be, old friend! The *Rani* Severance still loves, and even there is the bitterness of it. For there is a thing between us—that which among our people for ever parts even those who love with anguished hearts. . . . The Queen, Ibn Yaïd, is in child—by me."

"*Ha!*" shouted Ibn Yaïd and into his eyes shot a white-hot glare of ferocity while his right hand fumbled furiously for a weapon.

"Strike!" said Raynor. "I have wounded thee—and her—to the death. I do not wish to live. . . . Only——" He waved a hand toward the approaching pirate squadron. Their work was yet to do, whether they lived or died.

"The Queen *would* have it so," went on Raynor as Ibn Yaïd continued to stare at him speechless. "She begged of me a prince to rule the kingdom in her stead. Can a man refuse Siti Ishtar such a wish? Nay, I did plead for thee, Ibn Yaïd—but thou knowest Siti Ishtar!"

Ibn Yaïd was breathing hoarsely, in great shuddering gasps. His hand still grasped the dagger under the folds of his burnoose. His eyes were haunted by an expression of mixed pain and anger and perplexity. But his statesman's mind was at once taken with that idea of a prince for the kingdom who would have the wisdom and subtlety of the East combined with

the practical force and directness of the West. Had he not himself once considered even yielding Siti Ishtar to Shaitan Sadud, that a Sultan with a strong sword be born of them? With the statesman was now struggling the betrayed lover; more mortification and despondency over Siti Ishtar's ruthless indifference toward himself than anger at the man on whom she had pressed her favor—for Ibn Yaïd knew Raynor well enough never to believe that his had been the initiative in this.

"Let us die!" he said vehemently at length. "Enough! She has had of thee her wish. It has slain me, slain her whom thou lovest. Why tarry we longer? O Siti Ishtar! Ruthless! Heartless! Faithless——"

"Lo, the new Sultan—who knows?" Raynor interrupted the Muntri's wild outburst. "Thou and I, old friend, this thing have we to do. For her—and for him!" He was pointing down at Redjal-ed-Dem's flagship, now not half a mile off. His fleet was coming up behind him in a long slant, each pair of lateens cutting the wind just beyond the one ahead. It was a good formation, one that permitted any division to turn out of line and block any attempts to get inshore of them. Trained sea tacticians were the Orang Laut! It was any one's fight.

Ibn Yaïd composed himself. "*Aiwa!* What better way to die?" he said. "One last talk, for peace; then they will do what they will. We can not survive if they be deaf and fire upon us."

THE time for it was coming fast. Redjal-ed-Dem's proa bore a white bone in her teeth and her long forward guns had been shifted so that they bore directly upon the launch. Their muzzles stared at them menacingly, two round and gleaming brass eyes of death. Raynor stood up in the bows with Ibn Yaïd beside him and waved his topee.

"*Aback!*—Let go your sheets!" he yelled. "We are come for a great *bitchara!*" [conference].

The proa held her way, coming nearer and nearer. A herculean figure, naked to the waist and wearing a huge golden turban, appeared in the foremast shrouds. That turban proclaimed him the pirate leader.

"Who hails the Sultan Redjal-ed-Dem?" he shouted. His voice was fierce and truculent, ringing like the brass blare of a trumpet.

"I, the British Raj!" called back Raynor. "Let go your sheets!"

Redjal-ed-Dem laughed arrogantly, then turned to give an order. The proas' sheets ran out and her huge mat sails hung slack. She lost way and came to rest not a hundred yards from the launch, her long guns and her side carronades bearing full upon them.

"'Tis done!" jeered Redjal-ed-Dem with a gleam of white teeth. "Thou fool! Thou who didst counsel the strumpet Queen to take away our cannon! Tell me this: Is there aught that can stay us now at Kwala Djelan? With thee, *Tuan Besar*, and thy soldiers under the hot breath of our guns?—O fool!"

"That is as it may be," said Raynor composedly. "You can shoot me down, now, Rajah, if you will. Try it! I tell you that the vengeance of steel ships, of such power as you never dreamed of, will hunt you from the seas if you do! Nay, listen to wise counsel," he went on, raising his voice above the cackling laughter of Redjal-ed-Dem. "Make your peace while you may. I swear that, not for many years, need you fear any disarmament. When all the seas are safe, perhaps; until then—*no!*"

He was talking to deaf ears. His very words were irksome to the Orang Laut. That there would *ever* be a time when they would not be free to roam the seas armed

and masters of their ships against any enemy suggested gunboat patrols of white intruders. Redjal-ed-Dem hooted his derision. And then came the one touch that would instantly kindle the spark of war, a hail from the proa's foremost-head:

"*Vela! Vela! Ya Sultan!* Many proas! Coming out from Kwala Djelan!"

Raynor glanced back hastily over his shoulder. A long line of lateen sails was moving fast over the low flats that hemmed the lagoon of the Djelan River—the fleet of Haroun Mahomet coming out. Its effect on the pirate chieftain was immediate and irrevocable.

"Ha! Treachery!" he shouted. "Verily you are a mighty liar!" he vociferated, using the coarse *kowe* [you] of insult. "Soft words!—And lo, a fleet that I knew not of! *Nay—Fire!*" he yelled, losing his temper.

A double bank of white smoke burst from the proa's bows. The sea boiled white with grapeshot around the launch. Raynor felt Ibn Yaïd staggering violently back against him. He had just time to stoop and grab the firing-latch of the howitzer when the Hand of Death touched him also on the shoulder and his consciousness left him. The enormous thunder of cannon-fire faded away dully in his ears. . . .

9

THE sea fight that is sung of in Kota Sembilan to this day went on without them. Ibn Yaïd was dead, Raynor severely wounded by grapeshot.

It was Roberta who was eye-witness to the battle. She roused out of her own stupor of misery at the first sound of heavy gunfire and came on deck. An Asian scene, familiar enough to her forefathers but perhaps never to be enacted again, spread before her eyes. The blue, dimpled waters dancing under the monsoon breeze, the palm-lined shores backed

by jungly hills—and, crowding the horizon line, that barbaric fleet of Siti Ishtar's proas jammed with fighting men and gleaming with cannon long since abandoned by the white race for more modern ordnance. They heeled over under their raking lateen sails, bearing down swiftly on the rebel fleet. Long bamboo oars with spoon-shaped blades moved in unison, aiding their speed.

Roberta bit her lip. The Resident? Where was he in this, to her, terrifying scene? She had heard gunfire, a sudden burst of it, then silence. She glanced over at Residency Island, but Raynor's launch was not at the wharf. It had been there and was crowded with Sikhs when she and George had gone over. Was he down there, trying to stop this civil war at the last moment, as their Resident and counsellor and elder brother?

Immediately anxiety claimed her. Her heart was telling her that she loved him still, in spite of all. And who was she to judge? This was Kota Sembilan, the East. Its code of morals, its entire philosophy of life, was entirely different from her own. Primitive, gaining its ends by means that were repugnant to the West. Yet Raynor knew and loved them, and it was not for her to set up the rigid white man's standard for him to conform to. There must be some justification for his relations with Siti Ishtar other than the distasteful intrigue that she imagined.

Varuna Wardman came hastily down the deck, a pair of binoculars in her hand. "Something terrible has happened, Miss Severance," she said. "We have been watching Mr. Raynor's launch and it was fired on. Look!"

She thrust the binoculars into Roberta's hands. Her attitude was no longer that of watching an Oriental circus for her benefit but of a frightened and uneasy rich girl.

Roberta trained the glasses. They

picked up, floating idly in the wake of that advancing rebel fleet, a white launch. Nothing moved on it. There were arms, heads, the bristle of rifle-barrels to be seen above its gunwales, but they seemed all dead. A horrified gasp came from her; then—*Boom! Boom!—Boom-a-room-boom-boom!* the long twelves of Siti Ishtar's fleet opened up and all the sea was covered with smoke and flame.

Varuna was speaking agitatedly. "We're clearing out! Father's talking to the captain about it now," she said. "You and your brother are welcome to stay on board, Miss Severance. I think you'd better!"

Roberta eyed her, aghast at the callousness in her tones. "You're not going!" she cried. "Without an attempt to do something for the Resident——"

"Don't be silly," Varuna broke in harshly. "He's dead, isn't he? And that leaves nothing but natives here, all fighting among themselves. It's no place for us, however it comes out. This pirate chief—Father told Mr. Raynor he ought to get a gunboat here, but he had some foolish notion of letting this Siti Ishtar person handle her own rebellion. I don't believe there's a Sikh of his guard left alive!" She waved a hand with disdain toward the distant launch.

Roberta faced her sternly. "Do go!" she said with scorn. "You can escape northward. You have all the sea, clear to China, in that direction. But we—we stay! We're residents, planters, here; and we stand by the Resident. Will you let us have the yacht's gig?"

"Nonsense! What for?" Varuna asked. Roberta's heart sank. This woman did not care two snaps for him! Raynor had told the truth in his pleading. A temporary infatuation on his part for this cold beauty, who collected admirers as some women do French dolls.

"To go down to the Resident, of course!" Roberta answered her fiercely.

"Wounded, or—dead. . . . They must not lie there at the mercy of any datu who feels like firing another carronade into them."

"What? In this battle?" Varuna cried out. "You must be crazy!"

The noise of it had become appalling. The spiteful crash of carronades had added their din to the drumming thunder of the big twelves. Single ships could be seen making for each other under sails and oars, their boarding parties massed on the forecastles. It was all a drift of white smoke, stabbed through with red flashes and glinting with sunlight on steel—krisses, javelins, muskets.

Roberta stamped her foot. "George!" she called forward. "Bring Itam Nabi!—You'll do us the favor of your gig, won't you, Miss Wardman?" she asked with cutting irony.

The yacht's anchor was coming up. Already her engine was turning over slowly. There were preparatory bells. George came running aft with Itam Nabi grunting behind them. His eyes met Roberta's with complete understanding.

"'Bout time!" he said wrathfully. "I've talked all I'm going to! All ashore, sis—if they'll let us."

Roberta ignored Varuna. This was no time to quibble about the loan of a boat! The three tumbled down the gangway in haste and shoved off in it with Varuna still looking at them doubtfully. How "close" they were, these rich people! she thought. Even permission to use their boat—now that the Resident was no longer of value to them. . . . She had not actually given it.

GEORGE and Itam Nabi took the oars and Roberta steered. South, direct for that thundering battle as fast as they could pull. An unintelligible hail came to them from the yacht. Then they saw her rounding on her rudder and heading

out north around Residency Island at full speed.

George sniffed. "Fine and handsome lot! Left Raynor flat! I couldn't budge Wardman—not when there was any danger to his own skin, damn him!"

Roberta said nothing. Good riddance! There was one ghost laid, anyway, Varuna Wardman. She was beginning to see that she had misjudged Raynor, had wounded him cruelly. Repugnant to her was still the thought of Siti Ishtar, but that was nativedom, none of her affair. She herself was his one love. . . .

"A little more east, Eyes-that-burn," Itam Nabi grunted. "Lo, a man could throw up his turban and catch it full of cannon-balls yonder!"

They were circling around the fight. It was at close quarters now, the carronades dubbing like the rapid beating of drums, swarms of warriors crowding over onto the rebel ships. The sea beyond was combed white with spent grapeshot and ricocheting twelve-pounders. The launch still floated—in an iron hail of raking missiles and a fog of drifting smoke. Into it Roberta steered. George and Itam Nabi put their backs to that last dash; then they had sheered alongside and Roberta had flung herself over the gunwale.

It was a ghastly scene of death and blood, Sikhs lying in the bottom where the raking fire had stricken them down, a few still surviving; an arm, a leg, moving feebly. Roberta climbed forward. Ibn Yaïd lay fallen across Raynor's legs, a red patch soiling his burnoose over the heart. The Resident huddled face downward, one arm still reaching up for the firing-latch of the howitzer above him.

Frantically Roberta tugged at him. She drew his head up into her lap and bound up in haste an arm bleeding and broken close up under the shoulder-joint. He was unconscious from loss of blood. George was busy at the water-keg and

Itam Nabi worked over the rest of the wounded. A cup was passed to Roberta. She held it to Raynor's lips and aided him to swallow.

"All right?" George asked. "Let's get out of this!" He turned on the motor immediately, for the sea sizzled around them with the plunge of lead slugs and the smashing spouts of spent cannonballs from where the battle still raged not a half-thousand yards away. The launch picked up speed as the exhaust sputtered. George bore off east in a wide turn, then headed her back for Residency Island.

And presently Raynor came to. His eyes opened, looked up at Roberta's face bending over him. He saw who it was. His one good arm rose up, then. It crooked around her neck and drew her down to him. . . . They said nothing; but Roberta's tears were falling and her arms around him were telling him—all.

LATER they sat together on the Residency veranda, watching Siti Ishtar's victorious fleet come back. Clash of cymbals, boom of drums, squealing of bamboo flutes, twang of stringed instruments. A triple *sorak* crashed out in men's exultant voices as the leading ship passed by. High on her poophouse that was tall as some Seventeenth Century vessel's, a radiant little figure in gold and flashing jewels was waving her kris at them—Siti Ishtar.

Raynor grinned. "The pirate whelp!" he chuckled at Roberta. "Dash it, I knew she could do it! Might as well have sat right here. . . . Let 'em settle these things in their own way does it! They'll have a big powwow over at the Queen's audience hall, next, and I suppose I'll be wanted. Think this beastly arm will let me, Roberta?"

She looked at him admiringly. Always the Resident, thinking of his people first and of himself nothing. Loyal she

seconded him in his duty here. His work was hers now, wasn't it?

"I think you'd better," she said. "May I go along and look after that arm?"

THEY were married, soon after, at the Residency. Itam Nabi got disgracefully drunk on that occasion. His adored *Mem* had seen the error of her ways, and the man for her was a true man, and it was the Power of God, he insisted! George, the first white planter in Kota Sembilan, gave the bride away. . . . And Raynor's work as guide and counsellor went on. Heavier, now, without Ibn Ya'id, the Faithful Servant; for where could a Vezier like him be found again? Siti Ishtar had the grace to weep for him, though her thoughts were now centered on her son.

That son came into the world in due time. The natives did not say much. They valued their heads. The boy certainly did not resemble Ibn Ya'id. . . . But he grew up to be sent to Oxford and Sandhurst and came back to take over the throne, on attaining his majority. And his first official act was to ask admission to the Malay Federated States for Kota Sembilan. He became the first native Governor of that principality—which is quite a different thing from the autocratic rule of a Sultan. Siti Ishtar's had been that; ruthless, strong, but wise. She knew what this people needed better than they did, that pirate's whelp! And for her, throughout the years, Sir James and Lady Raynor had but the warmest of affection. Roberta had forgiven her. Siti Ishtar was the East, and her ways were not to be judged by Roberta's standards. . . .

As for Raynor, there was one pilgrimage that he never failed to make, once a year, at the beginning of the fast of Ramadan. It was to the tomb of the Faithful Servant, in the mosque of Kwala Djelan. Long and narrow and gable-

roofed like the Ark of the Covenant was that tomb. It was plated all over with beaten gold in relief characters in classic Arabic, texts from the Koran. Four huge candlesticks stood at the corners; around it draped flags, religious and war, drooping from their long poles. And, on the narrow end, where was the alms box for the poor that he loved, Siti Ishtar had caused to be engraved:

FAIZ IBN YAID

MUNTRI OF KOTA SEMBILAN

In the bosom of Allah, the Merciful,
the Compassionate

It was a singularly fitting inscription. . . . Raynor communed there in spirit with the man he had wronged; but who was his old comrade, who with him had brought this people up from barbarism to an enlightened state with a progressive young ruler. Siti Ishtar, the pirate's whelp, was in the background now, content to look on and rule over the harem. It was the sacrifice of Ibn Yaïd that had made it all possible; and somehow, as man to man, Raynor felt that he, too, was forgiven.
