

Henty George Alfred

In the Hands of the Malays, and Other Stories



George Henty

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Henty G.

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Henty G. A. George Alfred In the Hands of the Malays, and Other Stories

IN THE HANDS OF THE MALAYS

On the 1st of May, 1669, a man was standing at the edge of the shore of a rocky island, one of a group of a dozen or so similar in character, lying off the south-western portion of Sumatra. It would have been difficult to fix his nationality. The outline of the face was Arab; the colour of the skin showed that though one or other of his parents had been white, the other had been either Arab or Malay. He stood looking after a Dutch vessel, carrying guns, like all those engaged at that time in the Eastern trade. His hands were clenched, and he was regarding the ship with an expression of malignant hate.

Close by where he stood, a roughly-made grave piled with rocks, with a wooden cross standing at its head, showed that a Christian had been buried there. Any seaman of the time who had seen the man would have rightly concluded that he had been marooned for some crime committed on board the ship that was sailing away, and their judgment would have been a correct one.

The *Dordrecht*, a Dutch merchantman carrying sixteen guns, was chartered by a dozen rich citizens of Holland, who had sailed in her, determined to take up land, to settle, and to cultivate the plants that grew in the island of Java on a large scale. Some were traders, others had been tempted by the tales of the wealth of the island, where the Dutch had, fifty years before, acquired a settlement by conquest. The ship had touched at the Cape to take in a fresh supply of water and fill up with provisions. They had lost their cook overboard in a storm, and thought themselves fortunate in engaging in his place a man who had served with the governor there, and who was recommended as thoroughly understanding his work, whose only drawback was that he possessed a passionate and revengeful disposition, which had led to his dismissal from his office. This, in a vessel carrying a strong crew and some fifty soldiers, was not considered of any importance, and the man speedily justified his recommendation in other respects.

"I don't like the fellow," the lieutenant in command of the troops said to his subaltern one day, when they were a month out from the Cape. "I grant you that he is a good cook, but if I offended him I should not care to touch any food he handled. The fellow is capable of poisoning a whole crew to get his revenge on one of them."

The other laughed. "I grant he has an evil face, Van Houten, but I think that you are a little prejudiced. I own, though, that I felt inclined to knock him down myself this afternoon, when he stood at the door of the galley staring at Fraulein Meyers through his half-closed eyes. He put me in mind of a cat watching a mouse."

"Yes, I have noticed it myself several times," the other said hotly. "It is hardly a thing one can take up. The fellow might declare that it was not her that he was looking at, but that he was merely meditating; and to tell you the truth, although I am no coward, I would rather not make a mortal enemy of that man. I have no fancy for being stabbed to the heart while I am asleep. If he said or did anything insolent it would be another matter. I would have him ironed and sent down below, and kept there till we got to Batavia."

The other laughed again. "You would get into hot water with all the passengers, Van Houten; the fellow cooks so well that they are always singing his praises."

"Yes, there has been a great improvement in the diet since we left the Cape; but still, even at the risk of displeasing the worshipful passengers, I would put the fellow in irons did he give

me the shadow of an excuse. I should not be surprised if he did so, for of late I have observed a malignant look on his face as his eyes fell upon me. It is absurd to suppose that the hound feels any ill-will towards me because I am a good deal with Fraulein Meyers. The assumption is too monstrous, but I really don't see any other reason for him to dislike me. I have never spoken to him since he came on board."

"Perhaps the matter will be taken out of your hands altogether," the other said. "I heard the mate having a row with him this morning, and certainly he is not likely to put up with any nonsense; and he is strong enough to pick the Arab, or whatever he is, up with one hand and throw him overboard."

"I am not quite so sure about that, Erasmus. He looks small beside the mate, I acknowledge, but I should say that what there is of him is all sinew and muscle, and it would be like a fight between a panther and a buffalo."

A week later the passengers were down at dinner. They were in high spirits, for the hills of Sumatra were dimly visible on the port side, and another two or three days' sail would take them to Batavia. Suddenly a shout was heard, and then a sudden uproar. The captain and Van Houten ran up. On the deck lay the mate stabbed to the heart, while the cook, with a knife in his hand, was struggling in the grasp of half a dozen soldiers.

"How did this happen?" the captain asked as he came up to the group.

"I don't know how it began," one of the crew said, "but the cook was standing at the door of his galley, the mate said something to him, and the cook burst into a volley of curses. The mate knocked him down, but he was up in a moment. With his knife in his hand he flung himself upon the mate, and the latter fell, as you see. Two or three of us who were close by threw ourselves on the cook, but it was hard work to hold him, for he fought like a wild cat, and he had slashed some of us before we could get hold of his wrists."

"Drop that knife!" the captain said sternly; but the man was half-mad with passion and continued to struggle desperately. Van Houten caught up a belying pin from its place and struck him heavily on his fingers. The knife dropped to the deck, and one of the soldiers snatched it up. The man instantly ceased struggling and stood impassive, although his breast still heaved with his exertion; then he said in a quiet voice to the young officer: "That is another I owe you, Van Houten, but I will get even with you one day."

"Your threat is an idle one," the captain said. "At sunset you shall swing from the yard-arm. Tie him up tightly, men, and fasten him to the mast. Carry the mate's body forward, and throw a flag over it. We will bury him after we have done with this fellow."

Going below, the captain briefly stated what had occurred.

"But you will not hang him, captain, will you?" one of the lady passengers said. "It is awful that the mate should have been killed, but you see he gave the most terrible provocation. It would be a sad ending to our voyage if a man were hanged on board. Could you not hand him over to the authorities when we get to Batavia?"

"No, madam. I certainly might do so, but the chances are that the fellow would make his escape long before his trial was concluded. I know that he speaks Malay, and he would find some means to get some natives outside to help him, and I do not care to run the risk of the fate that has befallen the mate. I should hardly think that Van Houten would care about it either. I fancy that he would be the first victim, by the look that the fellow gave him."

An hour later the captain went up to Van Houten.

"The women have been begging me not to hang that fellow. As it is evident that I shall gain much ill-will if I do, for he has well satisfied them, and as I have no mind to risk my life and yours if he should get free at Batavia, I have a good mind to land him on one of the islets ahead. I might heave the ship to for an hour, land the poor mate and bury him, and leave the scoundrel there. It will amount to the same thing in the end, for as the rocks are thirty miles from the coast

there would be no chance of his getting off, for it would be very improbable that any native craft will come along this way: they always keep close inshore. That way one would avoid a scene with the women; and I own that there is something in what they say. The deed was done in a moment of passion, and under great provocation, for Werter was a strong fighter and a hasty man, and a blow from his fist was no joke."

"Just as you think fit, captain. It will give him time to think over his misdeeds, which no doubt are pretty numerous, for I dare say his career has been a black one. It certainly has, if his face does not belie him greatly. Still, I would much prefer to see him hung."

Accordingly an hour later the vessel was hove to. The remains of the mate, covered with a flag, were placed in a boat; the cook, still bound, was made to descend into it; and the second mate and eight well-armed sailors, with picks and shovels, took their places in it. The ship's carpenter had made a rough cross, which he handed to the second mate. When they reached the shore, two men were left there with the cook; the others dug a shallow grave, laid the body in it, refilled it, and heaped great stones upon it, and then stuck the cross in the sands at its head. The Arab was brought ashore, and the ropes that bound him were unfastened. The crew and second mate took their places in the boat and rowed off to the ship, which was put on her way again as soon as they reached it. As far as they could make out the figure of the man on shore, he was standing where they had left him, gazing at the ship. On the following day there was a heavy gale offshore, and the ship was blown some little distance out of her course.

In two days, however, the wind fell, and the *Dordrecht* arrived five days later at Batavia. The passengers landed at once, and the captain went ashore on the following day with his log-book. "Is there any special item to which you wish to call my attention?" the official asked.

"This is the only one, sir." And he pointed to the last page. "Cook stabbed the mate."

"And you marooned him on one of the rocky islands off the coast of Sumatra. Why did you not hang him?"

"Well, sir, we had a good many lady passengers on board, and they all rather took the man's part, on the ground that the mate had knocked him down, and that he stabbed him in the heat of passion; but really I think it was because they had been highly satisfied with his cooking during the voyage."

"What nationality was the man?"

"A mixture. He spoke Dutch perfectly well, but his features were Arab rather than European."

The official did not speak for nearly a minute. "What height was he?"

"About the average height," the captain said with some surprise in his tone; "broader than Arabs generally are, but lithe and sinewy. I used to think there must be some Malay blood in him."

The official got up and took down a book from a shelf. "How long had he been at the Cape before you hired him, do you know?" he asked as he turned over the leaves.

"I did not question him. He said that he had been six months cook at the governor's house, and that was good enough for me."

"Had he any particular mark on his face?" the official asked, as he found the entry for which he was in search.

"He had a scar on one cheek," the captain said, "a white line, as if it had been a clean cut with a knife."

"That is the man, then. Your first description at once struck me. I will read to you what is written here. 'Middle height; age about thirty-five; clean shaven; very strong and active figure. Nationality uncertain, believed to be Arab on the father's side by Dutch or Portuguese woman, probably some Malay blood. Long thin scar across one cheek.'"

"That is the man to a T."

"Well, captain, you have missed five hundred pounds and the great credit you would have gained if you had brought in that man dead or alive. He was the boldest and most savage of the

pirates who infest these seas, and is feared by the native traders as much as by the Dutch merchants who trade with the East. He never spared a man, white or brown, that fell into his hands. Sometimes he would sail alone, sometimes with a score of native craft. With these he would land on one of the islands or on the mainland, burn, plunder, and murder, and carry off into slavery the young men and women. The last we heard of him was two years ago. A boat was picked up with two men still alive in her; they were the sole survivors of one of our vessels that had been captured by him. He had transferred the greater part of his own crew to her. Every soul on board our ship had been murdered, with the exception of these two men, who managed to conceal themselves among the cargo, and had, while the pirates were carousing, dropped into a boat that lay alongside, and escaped. In the morning they could see their own ship bearing west while the original pirate was making for the north-east.

"From that day nothing was heard of the Arab. It was supposed that he had intended to cruise near the Cape. There his appearance would enable him unsuspected to approach ships. Six months later, however, a ship arriving here brought news that the *Heldin*, which was the name of the vessel that they had taken, had been lost with all hands some forty miles from the Cape. The natives had brought down a story of a wreck having occurred near their village, and a craft was despatched to the spot, and found the shore strewn with timber. Among the wreckage was the stern of a boat bearing the *Heldin's* name, and an empty keg also stamped with it. That seemed to settle the question, and the wreck had taken place just about the time that the pirate would, had she held on the course on which she was last seen, have arrived off the Cape. There is not much doubt now that the "Sea Tiger", for so he was always called, managed to reach the shore and make his way to the town, and when he found that he was the sole survivor, and no suspicion existed that the ship had changed hands before she was wrecked, found some sort of employment until, by means no doubt of forged testimonials, he obtained a position in the household of the governor. I must at once inform the council, who are now sitting, of what has taken place."

An hour later a government craft, with twenty soldiers on board, sailed from Batavia, taking with it the second mate of the *Dordrecht* to point out to them the island upon which the pirate had been landed and the spot where they had set him on shore. She returned a week later. No traces of the man they sought had been found; but on the shore was a deep mark, evidently caused by a native boat having been pulled up there during the storm. The sand around was greatly trampled, there were chips of wood as if some repairs had been done; and there was little doubt that after the storm had abated and the craft been sufficiently repaired, the whole party had sailed away. The news that the famous pirate known as the "Sea Tiger" had escaped and was again at large, caused great consternation among the merchant community of Batavia.

The captain of the *Dordrecht* was severely censured by the authorities, and was so overwhelmed with reproaches by the merchants that he was glad indeed when he had discharged his cargo and taken in another, and left the island behind him. The female passengers, whose intercession had saved the pirate's life, came in for some share of the unpopularity of the captain, and were made to regret bitterly the part they had taken in the affair. Three months later reports were brought by natives of the doings of a piratical fleet, who had taken and sunk numbers of native craft, had landed at various points on the coast of Sumatra, and destroyed Dutch factories. The natives who had escaped from these massacres all agreed in stating that the leader of this fleet was the dreaded "Sea Tiger" of whom nothing had been heard for so long. Then three Dutch ships which were due did not arrive, and one which came in reported that they had seen a glow of light in mid-ocean. It could have been caused only by a ship on fire very many miles away.

The ship had been headed in this direction, but the wind was contrary and the light had disappeared suddenly. They, however, kept on their course, and although the next morning they came upon some wreckage of charred timber, and had cruised for some hours in the neighbourhood, they had seen no signs of boats. Then rapidly came in the news that descents had been made upon

various points on the mainland, and one morning a horseman rode in, saying that a landing had been effected at a point about thirty miles from Batavia. Plantations had been destroyed, all the white colonists killed, and able-bodied natives carried off as slaves. There was only one vessel of war at Batavia, but the governor and council took up two merchantmen that happened to be there, and put on board of each fifty soldiers, together with a strong crew to work the guns. Lieutenant Van Houten was in command of the soldiers on one of these vessels. His engagement to Fraulein Meyers had now been announced. Her father was settled on a plantation that he had purchased from a colonist whose health had suffered from the climate, and who was now returning home. It was twelve miles to the east of the town, and situated near the sea-shore.

He had been appointed to the command at his own request. He had more than shared in the general consternation at the pirate's escape. He was not one, however, to blame the captain. Certainly the Arab had acted under great provocation, and he knew that had he been in the captain's place he would have yielded to the solicitations of the ladies, especially as it seemed that the death of the culprit was as certain as, if slower than, that by the rope. He himself would vastly have preferred to have seen the man hung. He recognized how dangerous an enemy he was; and as soon as he heard of his escape he became anxious about the safety of his betrothed, remembering as he did the evident admiration that this scoundrel had felt for her. He had even begged her father to move into the town until the depredations of the pirates had been arrested. But Mr. Meyers had scoffed at the idea. "It is just the time for nutmeg picking. It is quite absurd. There is no other plantation within three miles, and even if they came along here, it would not pay them to land for the plunder of a solitary house."

His daughter was very tearful when she heard that her lover was going out in search of the pirate. "There is no occasion for you to go," she said. "Why should you have volunteered for such dangerous service?"

"Because I have a particular wish to capture or kill this pirate. I have no doubt that he has a strong enmity against all connected with the *Dordrecht*, and I shall never feel comfortable so long as he roves the sea. Even putting our own case aside, see the frightful destruction that he is causing. He is depopulating islands, massacring peaceable natives, capturing ships, and murdering all on board. There is not an officer here but is burning to take part in his capture. Besides, I feel he has a particular animosity against me. How it arises does not matter. I know that he has that feeling, and so long as he is abroad and powerful my life is not safe, even in the streets of Batavia."

After this, his betrothed had no further objection to his going. It was known that the pirate's rendezvous was on the east coast of Sumatra, where he had made an alliance with a tribe at war with its neighbours, and had aided in conquering the latter; and it was in that direction that the three ships steered their course, hoping to encounter the pirates as they came down the Straits of Malacca on one of their expeditions. They cruised backwards and forwards for a week without seeing a sail, save a few native boats creeping along close to the shore. One morning, however, the look-out at the mast-head saw a number of sail in the distance. Among them were two vessels much larger than the others. These were doubtless the Dutch ships that had been captured; the others were native craft, most of them rowing, as could be seen as the sun flashed on their oars. Preparations were at once made for battle, for there was no change in the direction of the pirate flotilla after it was certain that they must have seen the Dutch fleet.

"It almost looks", Van Houten said to Erasmus, his young subaltern, who was again with him, "as if they had received information as to our starting in pursuit of them, otherwise there would surely have been some hesitation when they first saw us, some consultation whether they should attack us or not. Unless I am greatly mistaken one of the ships is the *Dordrecht*. She was only three weeks at Batavia. The fellow must have lost no time in getting allies among the native princes in order to waylay her when she came out again. She would be the first object of his vengeance."

"She certainly looks like her," the other agreed. "Well, if so, there is one more debt to be paid off. The captain was a good old fellow, and I liked the second mate very much. I hope both of them fell before the vessel was seized, for we may be sure that they would not have had an easy death if they were captured. It will be a tough fight, for I have no doubt that the boats are crammed with men. There is one thing which I do not expect they have – many guns, except in the two ships; but counting only fifty men a boat – and no doubt many of them carry a hundred – we shall be tremendously outnumbered if they get alongside."

"Yes. It is a little unfortunate that there is not more wind; then we might keep away from their boats, and pepper them hotly. As it is, they can move three feet to our one."

As soon as the pirates were within range, the three Dutch vessels opened fire. They were unanswered for a short time, for the two pirate ships had been outstripped by the prahs. But several of the latter now took them in tow, and presently they began to return the fire with their bow-guns. Although several of the prahs were sunk, and some so badly damaged that they had to drop behind, the others pressed on.

At a signal from the commander of the ship of war his consorts now brought their heads round so that they lay nearly in a line, with their broadsides to the pirates.

With loud shouts, beating of drums, and the blowing of horns, the prahs came along at racing speed. Instead of using round-shot, the guns were now crammed to the muzzle with bags of bullets, and these did terrible execution. But the Malays did not relax their efforts, and presently dashed alongside of the Dutch ships. Soon a desperate fight took place. The soldiers kept up an incessant musketry-fire as fast as they could load; the sailors cut down those who attempted to board; and the Malays threw showers of spears, stink-pots, and missiles of all kinds.

For half an hour the fight continued, and the result was still in doubt, when there was a crash, and the decks were swept by a storm of bullets. Scarce noticed while the struggle was going on, the two pirate ships had come up, passed ahead of the Dutch vessels, and had sailed close up on the opposite side to that on which the fight with the prahs was taking place. The pirates had shifted all their guns so as to bear on the Dutch vessels. Each mounted sixteen cannon, and these poured in their contents simultaneously. The effect was terrible! More than half the defenders were swept away, and a minute later the pirate ships were alongside; and as the Dutch turned to repel the storm of figures leaping on to their decks, the men in the canoes crowded up on the other side. The Dutch soldiers and sailors fought with desperation. They knew there was no quarter, and held out to the last. But in five minutes the ship of war and the one next to her had been captured, and the last of the defenders slain.

The ship that carried Van Houten was at the end of the line, and had up to now been only attacked by the natives. A few of the sailors were withdrawn from their work of the defence of the bulwarks, and were ordered to haul on the sheets so that the sails might catch what wind there was. If she could escape from the attack of the two ships, she might yet beat off the natives. But it was too late; the pirates threw off the grapnels that attached them to the ships they had captured, and again some of the canoes took them in tow. Several of these were sunk, but the way given was sufficient, and the leading vessel ranged alongside the merchantman.

The exultant shouts of the Malays rose high in the air as the men from the pirate ship and prahs swarmed on deck. The Dutch soldiers held together and fought steadily, but their numbers lessened fast as the spears of the Malays flew among them. Few of them had time to reload their muskets and fire a second shot. Erasmus fell by Van Houten's side when the latter had but a dozen men left around him. The leader of the pirates, whom he now recognized, shouted: "Do not touch that white officer! Make him prisoner – I want him!"

A moment later there was a general rush of the Malays. Three of them sprang upon Van Houten and dragged him to the ground, and soon a yell of triumph told that the last of the defenders

had fallen. Van Houten was now allowed to rise to his feet, his arms still clasped by his assailants. "Why don't you kill me, you scoundrel, the same as the others?" he said to the pirate.

"You will be killed soon enough," the Arab said; "but I want to keep you for a while just to have the pleasure of showing you that girl in my hands. I was not good enough to look at her, you thought. Good or not, she shall be mine! I settled on that the first moment that I saw her. Bind him tightly and take him below. Be sure that his cords are tight. No! – tie him to the mast; we shall have the pleasure of looking at him and talking to him sometimes."

Then he gave a number of orders. Prize crews were told off to the three captured vessels; the remaining prahs took the five ships in tow, and in a body they moved away. Six hours' rowing brought them to a narrow inlet. Here was a native village. Two of the men were placed as guards over Van Houten, and the work of emptying the ships of their valuables then began and continued until late at night, everything being taken ashore by the boats. Three days passed in feasting and rejoicing. The prisoner's arms were unbound, so that he could eat the food given him at regular intervals. His guards were changed every two hours, and the pirate came round each day to taunt his captive. Even had the guards been removed, the latter could not have freed himself, for the ropes round his legs and chest were all tied round the other side of the mast, and he could not therefore possibly get at the knots.

On the third evening Van Houten saw that one at least of the two men who came on guard was the worse for liquor. He grumbled loudly at being brought off from the pleasures on shore to look after this white prisoner.

"However," he said, "I have brought off my gourd."

"You had better be careful," the other said. "If the captain came off and found you drunk, he would shoot you like a dog."

"Bah! He went into his hut half an hour ago, and he won't be out again to-night. Besides, I am not going to get drunk; I am just comfortable, that is all."

Nevertheless, the warning had its effect, and the man only took small sips from his gourd. Van Houten let his chin drop on his breast as if asleep, and presently the man, as he passed in front of him, lurched against him. In a moment Van Houten snatched one of the knives from his girdle and hid it beneath his coat. The other guard was standing a few paces away watching the shore, and the action was unnoticed. Feeling for the first time since he had been captured that there was some hope, the young soldier now went off to sleep, a thing he had not been able to do before owing to the tightness of his bonds. When he woke, the sun was just rising, and his guard had been twice changed. The day passed as before, but that evening the boats pushed off to their various ships.

Early the next morning these were towed out of the inlet. The boats that were not to accompany them returned to the village. Slowly and clumsily the sails were hoisted, and the five vessels, each crowded with Malays, set sail. Van Houten had been carried the evening before to the warship of which the pirate captain had taken the command. He was, as before, tied to the mast, but was fastened in a sitting position on the deck instead of a standing one.

"I do not wish you to die yet," the man said, giving him a kick. "I don't want you to be so sleepy that you will be stupid. I want you to be able to take it all in."

The change was an intense relief. For five days he had been kept standing; at times his legs refused to bear his weight, and he had been supported entirely by the ropes round his body. He dropped almost instantaneously asleep when the pirate left him, and the sun was high next day before he awoke. For a time his neck was so stiff from the position he had slept in that he almost cried out from the pain as he lifted it. He had been dreaming that he was in the dungeon of the Spanish Inquisition, and that he was being tortured, and for a moment he could scarce understand where he was, for the pain of the tightly bound ropes seemed to be part of his dream.

Four days passed. He was no longer strictly guarded, for escape in mid-ocean was impossible; nevertheless, the knots of his ropes were examined two or three times a day, as had been the case all

along. He was liberated from his bonds for five minutes four times a day, four of the Malays keeping close to him to prevent him from jumping overboard. Early one afternoon the western extremity of Sumatra was made out, and after the fleet had passed through the narrow straits between that island and the island of Banca, they headed south, keeping close inshore, towards the Straits of Sunda. As Van Houten, when he had taken his last walk before it became dark, saw the ships' heads were pointed south, he thought that from the course they were taking they would strike the island of Java early next morning some thirty miles to the west of Batavia.

"I have no doubt you are thinking," the pirate said to him coldly, "that the people on shore will see us in the morning and take the alarm. There is no fear of that. Before it is light, the two ships I had before will make their way to sea again. We shall have the Dutch flag flying, and shall sail along two miles or so from the coast. Of course we shall be recognized as we pass Batavia, and the authorities will suppose that their fleet has not come upon the vessels they were in search of, and, having obtained news that they were likely to attempt a landing on the island farther to the east, are now coasting along in hopes of falling in with them.

"A bold plan, is it not? By evening we shall be back again off the Meyers's plantation, and by nightfall I shall have my beauty on board. We shall have been already joined by our consorts, and shall sail together to Batavia. The artillerymen in the fort will think we have made a capture during the night, and we shall get in without a shot being fired at us. At the same time the party that have landed will attack the place on the land side. Then we will sack and burn the town, attack the forts from the land side, where they are weak, kill the artillerymen, and carry off such guns as we choose. After that, we shall have a wedding, which you shall witness. If we cannot get a minister to perform it, we will manage to do without one. She shall then be taken on board my ship while I superintend your roasting on a bonfire. That is my programme, what do you think of it?"

Van Houten had stared stolidly astern while the pirate was speaking. The latter, apparently not expecting any answer to his question, with a mocking laugh turned away. As soon as it had become quite dark a boat had been lowered, and the pirate had gone on board the other vessels to give his orders. The prisoner listened eagerly for his return. If the boat were pulled up it seemed to him that the last chance of escape was gone, for, cramped as he was by his long confinement, he felt sure he would not be able to swim ashore. He almost held his breath as he heard it returning to the ship's side. There were no such appliances as now exist for raising boats, and to get one of the clumsy and heavy boats on deck was a work of no small labour.

The pirate sprung on deck and gave an order to the men in the boat. As the prisoner did not understand Malay he was ignorant of its purport; but when the four men who had been rowing her came on deck, and one of them, holding the boat's painter in his hand, walked astern with it, he felt sure that she was to be allowed to tow there, at any rate till morning. After the ships had been put on their course, parallel with the shore, there was soon silence on board. There was no moon, but the stars were bright, and the vessels moved along with a gentle breeze, about three knots an hour. That evening the guard of two men had again been posted over the prisoner, for, certain as the captain felt that escape was impossible, he thought it would be as well to neglect no precaution now that land was near. The Malays themselves seemed to consider that a guard was altogether unnecessary, and, after some talk between them, one lay down between the guns, while the other took up his place by the mast and leant against it, close to Van Houten.

The latter waited for half an hour until he felt that the other guard was asleep, then, taking out his knife, he cut the cords. The slight noise as these fell aroused the sentry on guard, half-asleep as he leant against the mast, and he stooped down so as to assure himself that all was right. Van Houten seized his throat with one hand, and with the other drove his knife up to the hilt into him. There was no need to repeat the blow. It had been driven through the heart. Noiselessly Van Houten lowered him to the deck, then, moving a little on one side, propped up the body against the mast in the attitude in which he himself had been bound. After taking off his shoes he made his way

astern. The Malays were lying thickly between the guns on either side, but all were sound asleep. Reaching the ladder up to the lofty poop he climbed it.

There were no Malays here except the man at the wheel, and he was so intent on his work that he did not notice Van Houten as he crept past. He found the boat's rope, which was tied to the rail, and lowered himself till he was in the water. The boat was some ten yards astern, and, severing the rope, he was soon alongside her. Keeping his hand on the gunwale, he worked along it till he reached the stern; this he grasped and hung on. The boat soon lost her way, and the ship receded fast. He made no effort to climb into the boat until the latter had quite disappeared from his sight, for had he, in climbing on board, moved one of the oars in her, the rattle might have been heard by someone sleeping lightly on the ship. Once assured that she was well away, he cautiously raised himself and clambered over the stern, using the utmost care in each movement so as to avoid touching anything movable. He waited a quarter of an hour, then he crept forward; took off his coat, cut off one of the sleeves, fastened this round one of the heavy oars and put it out over the stern, so that the cloth was in the groove made for the purpose of enabling one man to scull her when near shore. This would prevent the slightest chance of the pirates hearing him at work.

He found it terribly hard at first, so sore was his body from the pressure of the ropes. Gradually, however, as he warmed to his work, he became able to put out his strength, the stars being a sufficient guide to enable him to make his way straight to shore. He had no fear of being overtaken even if his escape were speedily discovered, for they would not be able to tell how long a time had elapsed since he got away. He thought it probable, however, that the escape would not be discovered until morning. The other Malay would have slept till he was roused by his comrade, and would not be likely to wake until day broke, when he would discover the change that had been effected.

The heavy boat moved but slowly, and it was not until a good hour after leaving the ship that he made out the shore. Fortunately the breeze during the afternoon had been a good one, and so the pirates had passed the Straits of Sunda at nine o'clock, and had then changed their course to the east. What wind there was, was from the north, and so helped him, and two hours after leaving the ship he reached the shore. He had fifty miles to go to Batavia, but there would be plenty of time. It was certain that the attack at the station could not take place till the following night. He knew a plantation where a colonist with whom he was acquainted lived, and this could not be more than two or three miles away. His strength, weakened by suffering and mental torment, was greatly diminished, and after walking for a mile he felt that it would be better for him to rest till morning broke, when he would be able to ascertain exactly where he was, and find his way to the plantation.

Accordingly he lay down, but would not permit himself to doze, as, worn out as he was from want of rest, if he did so he might sleep far into the day. He soon found that, lying down, it would be impossible for him to keep awake, and accordingly sat down by a large rock in the position to which he had become accustomed. The hours passed slowly, but he had now no difficulty in keeping awake. He was filled with exultation at his escape and at the prospect of turning the tables upon the pirate. As soon as day broke he struck inland, for he knew that a road ran east and west, by which the various products of the land were taken to the town. In half an hour he came upon it, and after following it for a mile came upon the plantation fence. Arriving at the gate, he entered and made his way up to the house. There was already movement there. A group of native labourers were receiving orders from an overseer, who looked in astonishment at the appearance of an officer, haggard, and blistered by the sun, and whose uniform was still wet, and one sleeve altogether missing.

"This is the station of Meinheer de Koning, is it not?" Van Houten asked.

"It is, sir; but he is not up yet."

"I am the bearer of important news and must see him at once. Will you order one of the servants to arouse him, and tell him that Lieutenant Van Houten desires to see him instantly on a matter of the most pressing importance?"

In five minutes the planter came down. Philip had met him several times in Batavia. The latter gazed at him in surprise, failing at first to recognize the figure before him as the smart young officer of his acquaintance.

"It is I, just escaped from one of the ships of the 'Sea Tiger', who, with four vessels beside his own, is on his way to attack Batavia, and unless I can arrive there in time to warn them, he will do terrible damage."

"Which way were the ships going?" De Koning asked in consternation.

"They were going east. The five ships are crowded with Malays, and they reckon upon destroying the town and overrunning the whole country. I beg of you that you will at once lend me a good horse."

"You don't look fit to ride five miles much less fifty. I will have two horses put into my vehicle and drive you myself. In the meantime, come in and take a glass of wine and some bread. I will have a basket of provisions put in the trap for you to eat as we go along."

In a quarter of an hour a light vehicle drawn by two horses drew up to the door. Philip, who felt refreshed and strengthened by the wine, at once clambered up. The planter took the reins, and they started.

On their way Philip told the story of the events he had gone through.

"And so the scoundrels captured the ship of war and her two consorts? No wonder they think that, with five ships crowded, as you say, with men, they can take Batavia."

The basket contained a good supply of provisions and fruit, and Philip was able to make a hearty meal after the diet of bread and water on which he had lived for the last ten days. The planter had lent him a doublet, which he had put on in place of his uniform coat, and they therefore attracted no attention when, after six hours' drive, they arrived at Batavia and went straight to the governor's house. The latter, on hearing Philip's story, summoned the members of the council and the military commander. After some discussion the plan of action was decided upon. All the troops in garrison were to march to Meyers's plantation. They were to take with them six light guns. The crier went round the town summoning all the inhabitants to gather in the market-place.

Here the governor told them the news that he had received, and then explained the plan of operations. "The artillery are to remain here to man the guns of the fort in case the pirates should change their plan, and one company of soldiers is also to stay behind to oppose any landing. In the first place, I beg that all having vehicles will place them at our disposal – they will be used to carry the troops out to Meyers's station. Then if the troops hear firing here, they will know that the pirates have changed their plans, and will be brought back to the town with all speed, so that in a little over an hour after the first gun is fired they will be here ready to help in the defence. In the next place, it is all-important for the safety of the island and the town that a heavy blow shall be dealt these pirates. There are now four merchant ships in the harbour and a number of native boats. I trust that every man capable of bearing arms will volunteer to man them. I myself shall remain here, but all the members of the council have decided to go in the boats. I think it probable that by far the greater portion of the Malays will land and attempt to capture Meyers's plantation, with the intention of afterwards marching upon the town and attacking it on the land side. If they do this their ships will naturally be but feebly manned, and we have decided to adopt the suggestion made by Lieutenant Van Houten, who has been in the hands of the pirates and has escaped from them, that as soon as the fight begins on shore, and the attention of the pirates on board is fixed on the struggle, they shall be attacked on the other side by the flotilla of boats.

"This attack shall be chiefly directed against the ship of war, which, I am sorry to say, they have captured. She carries heavier guns than the others, and is a fast sailer. Therefore, when she is once taken, her guns can be turned on the others, and I hope these will all be recaptured. The officers and crew of the merchant ships here will aid in the attack. They have as great an interest as we have in their destruction, and will be able to work the guns. If we are successful, we shall at

one blow destroy the power of this terrible pirate, the 'Sea-Tiger', and render the sea open again to commerce. Captain Smidt, one of your council, who is, as you know, a distinguished naval officer, has volunteered to take the command of the expedition, and will lead the boats to the attack.

"He will also arrange the crews of each boat. I beg that you will all inscribe your names as ready to fight for your homes, families, and possessions, all of which will be in grievous danger unless these pirates are crushed. At seven o'clock this evening those who have volunteered will assemble at the fort. The boats will be in readiness with a number painted on each, so that when you are told off you will be able each one to take his place without confusion in his allotted boat, or in one or other of the ships. The pirates will make their landing about eleven o'clock. The boats will row till within three miles of them, then they will be taken in tow by the ships. The sounds of the boats' oars would be heard for a long way on a still night. You will probably get quite close to them before you are seen. The moment the alarm is given, the tow-ropes must be thrown off. The ships will fire a broadside into the man-of-war, and at once range alongside her, and the boats will attack the other pirates."

The speech was received in silence, save that a hearty shout arose when the governor called upon them to volunteer.

"Captain Smidt is already at the town-hall," he said. "Go there and register your names, in order that he may know how many boats will be required, and will be able to make his arrangements accordingly. A cordon of troops has been placed round the town, and no one will be allowed to leave without a permit. Some of the natives might, if they knew the preparations that have been made, make off, and swim to the pirate ships with the news."

As he ceased speaking, the little crowd moved off towards the town-hall. Mounted men were at once despatched to all plantations within fifteen miles, calling upon the planters to drive in instantly with their arms for the defence of the town, which was menaced by an attack from pirates.

At four o'clock in the afternoon the three vessels that had left there ten days before were seen sailing past the town. They should have been sighted some hours earlier, but shortly after daybreak the wind had fallen, and the calm had lasted till midday. All were flying the Dutch flag, which they hauled down in salute to those flying on the fort, but proceeded on their way without changing their course. Everything was apparently quiet in the fort, and the salutes were duly returned. Boats sufficient to carry the number of men available had by this time been drawn up close to the shore, each bearing its number painted on her bow.

At half-past six the townspeople began to gather. All were armed with muskets or rifles, pikes or swords, and quietly and without confusion they took their allotted places, some on the boats, some on the two ships.

The troops had marched an hour before, joined by between forty and fifty men who came in from the plantations. Van Houten had gone with them. They halted half a mile from the station. It was desirable that they should not come up until the native labourers were all asleep. Van Houten himself rode on, and it was nearly nine o'clock as he entered. He was greeted by a cry of joy and surprise from the planter's daughter.

"Why, Philip!" she exclaimed. "How have you got here? We saw your three vessels come along just as it became dark, an hour ago. I suppose you must have landed as they passed Batavia. But what is the matter? you look strangely ill. Have you been wounded in a fight with those pirates?"

"You do look strange," her father added, "and you are not in uniform."

"Things have gone badly," he replied. "Our three vessels have all been captured, and I am the sole survivor of the crews. I have been a prisoner, and only escaped last night."

"Then what are the three ships we saw?" the planter said. "I could have sworn to the man-of-war *Leyden*. I was not sure as to the other two ships."

"They were full of pirates, meinheer, and have probably been joined by two more ships by this time. They are going to land at about eleven o'clock to burn this place down and carry your daughter off, and after that they will storm and sack Batavia."

"Are you in earnest, Van Houten, or dreaming? If your news is true, there is not a moment to be lost. We must have the horses and trap round at once and drive inland or to Batavia. The town can successfully resist."

"I should certainly advise Elise to retire at once to a station a mile or two away. There will be a battle fought here. Two hundred soldiers and forty or fifty planters, with six guns, halted a mile away. They will be here in an hour's time, and will give the Malays a reception that they do not dream of. As soon as the fight begins, their ships will be attacked by two merchantmen and a flotilla of boats manned by every available man in Batavia, with the exception of the governor himself and a small garrison, who will remain in the fort to protect the town should the pirates change their plans. Captain Smidt is in command of the flotilla, Colonel Stern is with the troops."

"This is startling news indeed," the planter said after a moment's silence. "You say they will not attack till eleven. I will have the horses put in at once. I will take Elise to my neighbour Rogen, whose house is three miles inland. I shall be back again in plenty of time to take my part in the affair. Or, no – you shall drive her there, Van Houten. I dare say that you would like to do so."

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