

# MELAKA

- The Glorious Malay Sultanate -

A novel by

MANSOR BIN PUTEH

TELAH DISEMAK

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\* \* \* \* \*

A Palembang prince rested under the *melaka* tree,  
His dog was kicked by a white mousedeer;  
He then decided to found his new country,  
And named it after the tree he was sitting under.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Putera Palembang berteduh di bawah pokok melaka,  
Anjing paduka ditendang kancil putih berseri;  
Maka bertitablah baginda negeri baru dibuka,  
Diberi pula ia nama sempena pokok tadi.*

\* \* \* \* \*

## A FOREWORD

by Datuk Seri Dr. Mohammed Ali bin Mohammed Rustam,  
Chief Minister of the State of Melaka,  
Malaysia.

It is indeed a pleasure, as the Chief Minister of the State of Melaka (formerly spelled *Malacca*), to be given the opportunity to write the foreword of the special Melaka State government edition of this exciting novel.

I have strong reasons to believe that this may very well be one of the more interesting and thought-provoking novels of Malaysia. It is a thoroughly researched and highly commendable effort. In the absence of any novel in Malay or English by Malaysian writers, that had made any international impact so far; this one certainly has the best potential of making it. It is hoped that it will attract international readership with a wider distribution because of its unique story, and the straightforward style the writer uses that makes reading it a breeze. Every page has new intrigues, revelations, colorful drama and surprises.

Some of the information is quite stunning. Many of them were from oral history that the writer had managed to acquire from many relatives, friends and other strangers from his secondary school days in Melaka. On top of that his visits to Portugal, China, India, Indonesia and Thailand - the countries that had major relations with Melaka during the sultanate years, including twenty-eight other countries - had contributed a great deal to the authenticity and accuracy of this novel.

I am pleasantly surprised that such a novel that is difficult to write can be so easy to read. The story stretches for more than one hundred and thirty years of the history of Melaka, an ancient Malay Sultanate that played the pivotal role as the center of economic, political, cultural and religious activities in the Southeast Asian region. This is in most part due to its strategic location that made Melaka into a famous entrepot that encouraged the interaction of peoples and cultures of many races from many countries, within the Southeast Asian region and elsewhere.

This novel is a dramatized version of the history of Melaka. However, I am happy to note that the writer has managed to retain most of the pertinent facts

while employing his creative license to shape and create exciting scenes, characters and intrigues. These are not alien to the history of Melaka and the other countries, which are also part of this novel. His descriptions of many palace intrigues and important historical figures in ancient Melaka, China and Portugal especially are unique, unusual and interesting.

In the past, Melaka had attracted foreign traders and merchants and other interesting characters and personalities to come and trade here; and later the colonialists from Portugal, Holland and Britain and elsewhere. Therefore, I hope that the publication of this novel will bring back the history of Melaka to the world, where it now rightly belongs, as part of the whole human experience. This, will be the missing piece in the jigsaw puzzle of world history.

Therefore, it will not only be Melaka's contribution, but also Malaysia's offering to the international literary world; for no other historical epic can have a greater impact on the readers than this one.

Thus the 'rediscovery' of the history of the Malay Sultanate of Melaka, and its re-telling in the form of the writing and publication of this novel as well as its distribution, is most timely indeed.

MELAKA: THE GLORIOUS  
MALAY SULTANATE

## PROLOGUE

The year was 1380 of the Common Era (CE) or 781 *Hijriah* or known universally as the *Anno Hegirae* (AH) of the Muslim lunar calendar that started with the flight of the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) on the sixteenth of July, 622 CE or AH 01. It coincided with the Chinese lunar calendar of the year of the monkey or *shen* in 4078.

Mr. Samun lived in Bertam Village, an outback in the mid-section of the *Semenanjung Tanah Melayu* or the Malay Peninsula. It was previously referred to as *Hujung Tanah* - which literally means 'the ends of the earth.' He squatted on the banks of the Bertam River early one morning before dawn came, surrounded by the *bertam* trees. In front of him were the hills all covered with vegetation and fruit trees. The river is actually a tributary of the larger river that meandered all the way to the straits from its source some thirty miles upstream. Here was where the elephants drank its water at a place, which would later be aptly called *Alor Gajah* or Elephant's Path, a remote place that did not have any human inhabitant, except wild animals and some elephants.

Samun, like his friends was in his late teens. He looked muscular and dark, but short in stature just like the others around him. His hair, like all his friends' was black and very long; it was not combed, and they only tied around their forehead a piece of cloth that they'd use to wipe sweat off their faces or use as a handkerchief. If it is a big piece of cloth, they would also use it as a blanket to sleep at night in order to keep themselves warm. Alternatively, it could also be used as a towel for bathing after they swam in the fresh water of the river. They seldom took their bath in the sea because the water was salty; it made them feel sticky afterwards when they are dry.

He and a few other fishermen sat there to wait for the first rays to hit their faces. They had gone there to get blessings from the sun or as they called it *matahari* that literally translates as 'the eye of the sun', as this was their daily routine. They enjoyed staring at nature changing in color before their very eyes. They had not ceased to wonder how it could happen that the night could turn to day. The land could be in total darkness, and few hours later, everything was clear, and there was a huge ball of fire that hung over the horizons like that! And it could float up from the water and stood in the open skies like a balloon. They did not know what happened to the ball of fire during that time when they were sleeping in their huts. What actually happened

to 'the eye of the sun' when they were in slumber? They were at wit's ends trying to figure out how such a phenomenon could happen. They pointed to the sun with an extended glee and baring their blackened teeth. With no proper words to express themselves in, they only managed to spout grunts at each other much like the monkeys in the jungle if they became excited. They also enjoyed seeing the reflection of the sun on the water in the river. It was so clear that they could also see the bottom of the river, and the fish and prawns that were swimming in it. They wore skimpy clothes that looked like pants that ended at the calves and a shirt that had sleeves up the elbow. Some only had a piece of rag around their waist.

This was their daily prayer: 'Oh, the eye of the sun,' do bless us with a bountiful catch, for today is the day when we go to the river and sea to bring food for our families. Oh, 'the eye of the sun,' we pray before you to help us pass this very day without any untoward incident...'

These people hardly spoke with each other; their vocabulary was limited to a few words; they dealt mostly with their everyday life, of fishing, eating and sleeping. These words mostly had two or three syllables, and when they spoke, they sounded like they were grunting. The sentences were short and fractured. They mostly ate raw, whatever they could find in the jungles and rivers. And they often wiped their bodies with mud and other oils they could find from the plants, to repel the mosquitoes and to keep them warm at night. Despite that, many of them had died of malaria. The witch doctor tried in vain to save them by dipping those who were infected with the germs from mosquito bites, into the river, when they were feeling hot.

The people in Bertam Village did not have any concept of the world and had not dared to venture beyond their village. If they sailed the seas, it was as far as the *Pulau Air* or Water Island, the island that stood in the south and to *Pulau Upeh* or Upeh Island in the north. These islands were visible to the naked eye from their village. They did not dare to go beyond because they thought there was nothing there, except for a hole. They did not want to fall into it, they thought! However, they were a cheerful group of people who enjoyed each other's company, with no worries in their heads. And they were docile and naïve. They were be easily impressed by any natural and supernatural occurrence. Even a twig that fell on their heads was taken to be some omen from the gods and supernatural beings. Samun and his friends became frightened and hid themselves in the caves or their huts each time they heard thunder clapped or lightning flashed. They thought that the world would end. They chanted 'Please, unknown spirits of the jungle and water, save us! Please unknown spirits of the jungles and water, save us!' endlessly.

None of them had dared to venture beyond the shores and they were not too eager to do so for fear of not being able to return home later. In the seas, their parents and grandparents told them there were demons and vampires. Their eyes were so huge that their glare was enough to frighten the people. They froze in fright and became trees, boulders or islands like those small islands that stood in the sea in the north as well as south! One looked like a pregnant woman lying on her back. The other islands are smaller; many of them would temporarily disappear when the tide was high and resurfaced when the sea returned to its normal water level. They were repeatedly told that the demons liked to swallow these islands when they were nearby during high tide. Because of that, the people of Bertam Village refused to go to the sea for fear of being swallowed by the demons and other sea-beasts, all of that were nameless. If they had to, they would stay close to the coast and hardly looked to towards the horizon.

None of the villagers knew how the name Bertam Village came about, and for that matter the name of the river. Nobody knew which name came first, the river or the village, or if the village was named after the river or vice versa. Most likely, it was named after a kind of fruit tree that grew in abundance in the jungles on the right side of the banks - at the foot of the nearby hills.

'Ab, I'm happy as it is, Samun,' said one of his friends. 'Why must our village be like the others? If this village can give me satisfaction with enough food and safety, why must I want to see it change?'

Samun did not answer his friend's question. He continued to stare at the sun floating slowly above the horizon...

## CHAPTER 1: THE EXILE PRINCE

The villages were unusually quiet in Palembang on the island of Andalas. Lush trees blew gently from left to right and all over, with the breeze that grew in intensity as the day became hotter and brighter. The people bent their backs in the paddy fields and farms as well as in the lakes and rivers especially the wide Musi River with its river-mouth called *Muara Tatang*. It is so wide that no bridge spanned across it. This is the main river that cut through the middle of Palembang dividing the area into the Hulu and Hilir Districts.

The fourth ruler of Palembang or the Paduka Seri Maharajah Damia Raja had disappeared from public view for quite sometime; so was his queen, the Permaisuri Damia Puteri. There was no news forthcoming from the palace either. His disappearance from the public eye in recent weeks had started to make the people to feel anxious, if not worried. They began to wonder quietly amongst themselves if he was all right, if he was in good health. It did not augur well if he was not seen by the *rakyat* (people) for more than a few days, they thought.

The Palembang palace, the most important building in Palembang and the seat of government and the official residence of the ruler sat in the middle of an open space. It was bordered by tall trees, upstream, a good distance from the straits. The ruler of Palembang and the royal family traveled mostly in the royal barge. He seldom stepped ashore. If he had to go to the villages, stocky men carried him on an *usungan* (palanquin). Rumors had it that if his feet touched earth; something nasty might befall the whole state. The truth was that the ruler was already in his advanced age. His legs were becoming weak. His aides and personal physicians did not want him to walk on his feet, lest he would fall. Therefore, they created the story about the dream he had that told him of horrendous repercussions should he be seen stepping on the ground.

The palace stood majestically, without calling attention upon itself. It blended well with the surrounding; not that the designers did not have such an arrangement in mind; they we all planned. New wings were added by subsequent rulers and their consorts, all with their personal touch that made the royal palace grow like a living thing, instead of just a solid building. The garden where many beautiful flowers bloomed added color to the otherwise staid atmosphere. The palace was an oasis of peace in a country that had known intrigues and court drama. It could be seen from miles away. It sat in a valley spreading from as far as the eye could see beyond which were the hills that bordered the plains. Small villages littered in them. Immediately surrounding the palace were villages that were constructed to house the state officials and other senior officials of the royal household. They could be summoned to the palace at the ruler's whims and fancies with the knock of the *beduk* (drum) or gong from the palace. Most importantly, it also acted as a buffer zone for attackers from foreign states. In desperate times, such a setting could allow the ruler and his family and close relatives to flee the palace by way of the river through the exit in the back. Beyond them were the houses for the soldiers and other military personnel. They were placed here as a strategy to surround the state officials and the members of the royal family.



The river ran through the plains and it flowed into the Straits of Melaka. It was the main reason why Palembang became such an important city. Because it was a trading port that sat near a river that flowed all the way to the hinterlands till it touched the foot of the mystical and sacred Seguntang Mahameru Hill or *Bukit Seguntang Mahameru*. It was part of the vast Barisan mountain range that formed the backbone of Andalas Island, which in later years was known, as Sumatra Island. It became a major highway for the people to travel from the hinterland to the sea and back. It was also the highway for the rulers of Palembang to use for easy access to her subjects who lived in villages that clung onto the banks. The banks near the palace complex were the places where royal barges berthed. It was shaped in the form of a legendary bird called the *garuda*. It was supposed to have a mythical persona and magical powers; only these birds could carry them to Heaven!

The shrunken body of the Damia Raja or *paduka seri maharaja* of Palembang lay motionlessly on his bed in the middle of a large bedroom. All his children, his queen, Damia Puteri and other secondary wives and relatives, including his second son, Parameswara and their own wives, children and other distant relatives sat around it. Everybody looked downcast. He was breathing heavily and erratically, like his heart was not receiving enough oxygen. With such a huge crowd of relatives, the room soon became stuffy especially when all the windows were not allowed to be opened for fear that the holy spirits would come to take the ruler to Heaven. A palace assistant quickly opened the windows to allow the fresh air to blow in, but the high priest disallowed him to do that. 'Leave them shut!' he said. 'No way that these windows be opened.'

The palace assistant immediately closed them, much to the chagrin of those who were inside the room. However, there was nothing that any of them could do.

More incense was lit at all the four corners of the room. The smoke and strong aroma filled it until it now resembled more like a temple especially with all the statues of the deities placed around the ruler's bed. Unfortunately, it also aggravated the ruler's respiratory problem. He coughed even more because of the smoke that emitted from the incense sticks acted on his throat and chest.

The medicine men and high priests had also earlier proposed that he went there to get some fresh air and to be close to nature. They knew the end was coming for him. He had to be brought down back to the level of the common person, the ordinary being and the mortal souls. This was to prepare for his entry to Heaven where he was due to confront his maker, and meet all the gods and deities he had faithfully prayed before all his life. This was his *karma* -

fate. He was destined to take the ultimate journey of no return. It was a journey all his ancestors and past rulers of Palembang and the ancient Hindu kingdom of Srivijaya had taken through the ages since they set up the kingdom which had now fallen into his hands. It was established in the seventh century and lasted until this day. Soon, the Paduka Seri Maharajah Damia Raja of Palembang would have to relinquish the throne of Palembang to his eldest son so he would become the fifth ruler of Palembang. It was hoped that under his able leadership the future of the kingdom and the destiny of the people rested. And for that matter the future of their religion, too...

Parameswara was already forty-nine years and he had been the prince consort for three decades. He thought it would be just the right age for him to ascend the throne. His father was also at his age when he became the fourth ruler of Palembang. Parameswara was chosen over his elder brother because the ruler felt that he could be trusted; his eldest son on the other hand, could not. He felt that he was old enough to be installed the fifth ruler, but it was not to be. He had been waiting for the time to come, when his father would want to relinquish the throne, but it never came. He became frustrated because of that. He became defiant and even showed his contempt of the throne when he knew he could escape from doing it simply because he was the *putera mahkota* or crown prince of Palembang. He had immunity and was above the law. Nobody in Palembang could punish him. Therefore, they had to tolerate him. He was more like a spoilt brat, except that he was not too young anymore. He was almost reaching half a century of his existence on this earth. He had secretly hoped his father to relinquish his post earlier and allowed him to ascend to the throne. He had been the ruler for more than four decades, and Parameswara himself had been the crown prince for three. However, it did not happen. It seemed to him that even old age wasn't going to slow down his father, and forced him to relinquish his post as the ruler; only his total incapacity and hence, death could force him to do that. He knew his father was stubborn enough to remain on the throne, even if he was partially incapacitated. This was how strong his desire to remain as the ruler of Palembang was. His idea being, as long as he was able to function, he would continue to serve his people.

Parameswara was born when his father just succeeded his later father, the third ruler upon his demise. However, Parameswara's wish did not come true. He was destined to be the prince consort for more than thirty years during which time his every movement had to be carefully charted by his handlers and palace officials. They were possessive of him, lest he would fall prey to

distractions and delinquency that many other princes and princesses throughout the kingdom and the other royal households all over Andalas and the Malay Archipelago suffered.

This was the main reason why many Malay states collapsed and their religion became less important to their daily lives. Consequently, also the people began to lose interest in their religion. They simply did not have proper leaders who could check their movements and religious activities and imposed stringent measures to curb irreligious thoughts and feelings and anti-social activities amongst them. They were fast becoming narcissistic to the extent that they were beginning to question the existence of all the deities and idols that they had been praying and prostrating before all their lives. They also started to consume food and meat, which were considered forbidden by their religion with relish.

Parameswara dutifully stood closest to his ailing father, the fourth ruler. As the crown prince, protocol dictated that he stood there whereas his elder brother had to settle for a spot next to him. The prime minister, Bendahara Tun Perpathi Tulus who was the highest-ranking officer in the state and the other senior state and palace officials stood on the other side of the bed. They were all crying softly with the women dabbing their wet eyes with pieces of handkerchiefs and sobbing. They were all desperately trying to control their sadness and not be heard. They did not want to distract the ruler. They anticipated that the ruler's death to come anytime now and they were ready for it.

Then the ruler's lips moved slightly. Everybody was shocked when they saw it happen. They were held in more suspense when the ruler started to speak. He seemed to have so much energy despite his frailty, and him lying immobile in his deathbed. Yet, his mind was clear; he knew exactly what to say. He said it slowly and deliberately pausing now and again to gauge the reactions of those in the room. Many who were in the room thought that all their prayers and incantations had worked; the gods and deities had heard their voices and brought the ruler back to life. What happened was nothing short of a miracle. The high priests and medicine men were excited. They knew that their effort to try to revive the ruler was appreciated by everybody. Parameswara was anxious; he did not know what his father was going to say. He must surely have something important urgent and important to say, otherwise, he would not have awoken from his sleep. Something must have pestered him to come to. It could be the whispers from their gods and deities who had awoken him up, they thought. However, his eyes were closed, and his body still limped;

only his lips were moving, but only slightly for soft and faint words to come out through them.

Parameswara's second wife, queen or Permaisuri Dewi Puteri and their children, the Raja Besar Muda, Raja Kechil Besar, Raja Kechil Muda, Raja Kechil Tengah, Puteri Tanjung Buih, Puteri Sang Dewi, Puteri Centera Dewi, Sang Maniaka, Raden Bagus and Raden Pala, who were in the teens and twenties, were there too. They were equally anxious to see whether their father was going to be installed the fifth ruler of Palembang over their uncle. Their future, too now were uncertain and bleak like that of their father. Kechil Besar's wife was the *raja perempuan muda* or crown princess Puteri Kamarul Ajaib. They were married when they were in Palembang. Parameswara's first wife, Nilai Punchadi, died thirteen years earlier. All of them were summoned to the palace on that day because the ruler's health had deteriorated over the night. His closest aides feared for the worst. They returned to the palace from all corners of the kingdom where they were assigned to be in charge of the districts. There were no clear signs that the ruler was going weaker, and they thought that their lives was going to return to normal soon. They all thought that he could survive, and be up within days, like he had done few times before. Once he had become so sick that most of his relatives thought he was not going to survive the night. And the senior officials of the court, and high priests made preparations for the funeral, should he die. Yet, the next morning, he shocked everybody, when he woke up and took a long walk all by himself in the gardens without feeling tired. The few people who were in the palace were so shocked that they almost fainted.

'Don't be shocked,' said the Damia Raja. 'It is me. I am not dead yet. Stop staring at me like that, like I'm a ghost.' He had the audacity to laugh, as though it was a joke - much to the relief of his children, relatives and subjects.

Everybody kept quiet; they did not know whether to laugh or cry. They were confused but relieved that he had come to. They thought the gods had spared his life because he was a good ruler. And they were not about to take him away, because there were a few more things that the ruler needed to finish. However, he enjoyed keeping everybody in the room in suspense by taking his own sweet time. They feared if he didn't do it fast, most likely he wasn't going to be able to leave his last words and promise for them to obey. This was usually the occasion for him to announce before all of them on who to be his successor, or to make his last advice to everyone there.

Although Parameswara had been the crown prince for a long time, yet the succession of anyone remained uncertain until the ruler formally announced it before he died. This was the tradition, unless, of course, the ruler did not get

the opportunity to do so. If he died in his sleep with nobody around him, then the crown prince automatically ascended the throne. No wonder for the past few days, he was anxious and nervous. He could not sleep and eat well. He hoped his father would not spring a surprise like he usually did when he was healthier. Some of the people even thought they had earlier seen few mystical birds hovering over the palace in the evening. This was a sign that agents of the gods were approaching the ruler. They had wanted to convey his wishes for him to come to see them.

Now, the Paduka Seri Maharajah Damia Raja become much older and weaker he had a different scenario to offer them. He had wanted all his children, secondary wives and their relatives to be at his deathbed because he had something to say, since he knew that his end was coming. The gods were calling for him to meet him. He was hearing the angels whispering softly in his ears. And the ruler wanted to give them some valuable advice, so that after he was gone, Palembang would not be in any unnecessary turmoil. As this was going to be his last royal command, so everybody paid close attention; they were all ears. His most senior officer, the prime minister was there together with the other top officers. They were not strangers to the royal family; they had become inseparable to the ruler and all the members of the royalty of Palembang. They had at some time or other requested their personal assistance on official or personal matters, and they were indebted to them in some ways. Besides, they were there in their official capacities. And at such a time, their presence was needed so that they could be witnesses to what the ruler had to say.

The ruler had the habit of making last decrees that had turned the palace upside down. He, like his ancestors had this habit of never believing in issuing notices. He preferred to make unannounced decrees that often left their senior state and palace officials startled many a time; that they had to scurry to rewrite other laws that had now become obsolete by the introduction of the new decrees. They had all learnt how to cope with the ruler's style of government, quirks and personal touch in dealing with the problems faced by the kingdom and its people. Many a crown prince had been demoted by past rulers by the rulers who, on the spur of the moment, offered the throne to their younger sons. This often caused hardship and public humiliation to whoever had been chosen as crown prince all these years. Some of them they had acted in this capacity for many years - even decades - so much so that the people and the neighboring Malay states had already expected they would be appointed the successors of the throne of the country. However, despite that they could still be denied the throne.

Parameswara thought that the reason why he, his relatives and senior palace officials were summoned to the ruler's bedroom because his father had wanted to announce his ascension to the throne of Palembang despite being his second son. He had been crown prince for too long. It could be a mere formality... If he had done so, the people and leaders would not be shocked. Surely, at such a time, his father would not want to spring a surprise and sideline him, and offer the throne to his elder brother instead. On the other hand, his elder brother secretly hoped for his father to make a surprise decision and named him his successor instead, as it had been the habit of their ancestors to do. He was fully aware that his younger brother, Parameswara had not been doing his official duties for the last few years, and his relationship with the ruler was not good. It was a strained relationship. Their father had said so to him few times. And because of that, he felt that there was a strong possibility that his father could choose him instead of Parameswara, the prince consort or crown prince as his successor. However, he was not surprised to see Parameswara in the room, as he was still the ruler's son. What more, he was still the prince consort.

'Let's not cry,' said Damia Raja after keeping quiet for so long. 'My soul will not rest in peace in Heaven if all of you cry like that. Stop it! I am not going to remain on earth for long. The gods are calling me to see them.' He said in a voice that was soft and unsteady with his lips trembling. Those present in the room had to strain their ears and listened hard. They could see how much the ruler had denigrated. He was a faint cry from the person whom they knew all their lives. Now, they were seeing a ruler who had shrunk in his physical self. Fortunately, his mind was still crystal clear and sharp. He could remember all of those present in his bedroom. They stopped crying as ordered.

Crows flew over the palace, and it told the people who stared from a far distance that their ruler's demise was imminent. These unusually large black crows with long white beaks had not been sighted hovering over the palace in a long time. They were not the usual small black crows, but those that were huge with white spots on its head. They reminded everybody that the death of their ruler was imminent. It was a message from the gods. It was a sight many of them had not seen in a long time. They, however, welcome it.

'My time is due. And I want all of you my children, wives, and relatives, to listen to me very carefully,' continued the ruler.

Everybody kept quiet and remained still. The ruler coughed. It went on for many times. It sounded hollow. It was such a painful sight for everybody to see. An aide trusted a spittoon and he spat inside it. The phlegm was thick and

dark in color and it had traces of blood. Those who were there in the room knew that the ruler's condition had become much worse than they thought. They had never seen him vomiting blood like that before.

'I shall appoint my eldest son, as the fifth ruler of Palembang to succeed me. He shall be accorded with similar respects and honor that all of you had shown to me. Let it be known to one and all throughout this land of Palembang. Hear that, my Prime Minister Tun Perpathi Tulus?'

The prime minister who was standing beside him nodded. He was surprised to hear the ruler making such a decision, especially at a time like this. He felt sorry for Parameswara, who had been prince consort for so long, yet he could not ascend the throne. However, he pretended not to be shocked and tried to remain calm. He gritted his teeth though. He knew it was his responsibility now to install the new ruler. He expected that Parameswara and his elder brother to argue over the legality of the last-minute decision. The Palembang princes were famous for creating enmity with each other, especially over the issue of ascension to the throne and division of power. It had happened many times during the entire life of kingdom, since the seventh century. Parameswara was the prince consort for so many years, and was even appointed regent. Surely, the ruler just could not change his mind at the last minute, he thought; it was too late to be impulsive!

His elder brother smiled. His wife who was standing beside him touched his arm. It was a silent way of saying, 'Congratulations, dear.' He then glanced at Parameswara, but Parameswara refused to look eyes with him. He did not want his elder brother to see through his eyes and knew how badly hurt his feelings were and how angry he was at his ailing father. He kept his anger to himself. He did not know how the others in the room felt, especially his mother, younger brothers and sisters or relatives. He fixed his gaze elsewhere and tried to think of pleasant things to dampen his anger and cool down his head.

The senior officers could not do much either; they were just palace and state officials who did not have any business in choosing who to succeed the throne of Palembang. It was the prerogative of the ruler himself, and he alone was responsible to choose his successor. He did not entertain any offer of opinions even from his prime minister, or royal relatives.

'Yes, your majesty,' said the prime minister.

Parameswara felt more than a tinge of regret. He tried very hard to conceal his anger, although his eyes betrayed his true feelings. He was angry with his father, but he did not want to show his contempt especially at this trying time. He was lying in his deathbed, and did not feel he had much time left.

Parameswara wanted to raise his voice and showed his displeasure at his last-minute decision, but quickly changed his mind. He just had to accept it as his fate. He status was destined to change drastically because of such an unexpected announcement. His future was shattered to smithereens. He was destined to live as an exile prince. Remaining in Palembang could only bring him shame. It would be no useless for him to remain in the country anymore. His presence would only provoke the new ruler, his elder brother. There would be no peace in Palembang, leaving it in perennial turmoil with no end in sight.

'But, father...' said Parameswara.

'No buts, my son, Parameswara. It is not the right time to disobey me. You may be the prince consort all this while, but today, and now, I'm relieving you of your duties as prince consort, and hereby appoint your elder brother to succeed me,' said the ruler. 'He is your elder brother, and as my eldest son, he alone deserves to succeed me, and not you. I appointed you as prince consort because I felt that your elder brother had to be relieved of the pressure of the post. I wanted him to be able to mingle with the people as an ordinary citizen. In this way, he could understand their true feelings and needs. He could not do it if he was the crown prince. Everybody would change his or her ways to accommodate him. Because of that, he would not be able to be a better ruler. My own father taught me to do it. And I'm sure your elder brother will also appoint his second son as prince consort and not his eldest son, your own nephew.'

Parameswara was shocked. He nodded obediently. His elder brother smiled but not too widely as the occasion did not permit him to do so. Parameswara did not want to rebuke his father especially when he was lying on his deathbed. What he said had a valid point. Parameswara did not see it until now. Now, he knew why as the second son of the ruler he was chosen prince consort and not his elder brother. He also knew why his elder brother could move about unaided and unattended at most times. He was able to sit with the villagers like he was one of them and they were able to talk to him without feeling awkward. His elder brother grew close to the people. Parameswara on the other hand became quite detached. His close aides had sheltered him too much so that his relations with the ordinary people became strained and too formal. Now Parameswara knew why he was the prince consort and not his elder brother. There was a good and valid reason that he did not know of before until now.

'Hear that, prime minister?' asked the ruler of Palembang.

'Yes. I shall let everybody in this land called Palembang know about this. All the rulers on the island of *Andalas* or Sumatra and the neighboring



countries will be duly informed. I'm sure your majesty's successor will accorded with similar respect and honor,' said the prime minister. 'The Malay (*Melayu*) rulers in Andalas and the whole region will certainly agree with his majesty's wise decision and command.'

'Very well, I shall go now; my time is due. Remember this: Let there be no animosity amongst all of you. Promise me that you will obey my last advice, my dear sons. I love you all,' said the ruler. 'Parameswara...'

Parameswara nodded. 'Yes, father.'

The ruler slumped to the side and died without completing his last sentence. Everybody started to cry, almost in unison. The prime minister and the other state officials lowered their heads in respect. He then pulled the white cloth and covered the ruler's head with it. Parameswara immediately barged out stamping his feet on the wooden floor and made a loud irritating noise as he walked, just as his elder brother tried to hug him. It was a sign of his displeasure. His elder brother knew it. The prime minister sensed that the new ruler was somewhat taken aback by Parameswara's actions. He approached the new fifth ruler of Palembang and kissed his cheeks and as a sign of respect.

'Gods and deities have mercy on the late fourth ruler of Palembang, Paduka Seri Maharajah Damia Raja! And long live the fifth ruler of Palembang, *paduka seri maharajah!*' said the prime minister.

The others echoed him. 'Gods and deities: have mercy on the late ruler of Palembang! And long live The fifth ruler of Palembang!' repeated everybody in the room.

'His majesty will be given a state burial in the Hindu tradition,' said the prime minister with his head bowed. 'And Palembang will be in official mourning for forty days.'

Parameswara stood at the end of the corridor. He stared outside, but did not cast his eyes at any object. He probably saw his life passing by him. He saw how he would have to face his new reality - as a discarded royal. He never felt useless before. He knew his future was doomed; it had crashed like a deck of cards. He knew his days in Palembang were numbered. His elder brother, the new fifth ruler went to him. It was not the tradition for elder brothers to go to their younger siblings, but the new ruler made it an exception, with the hope that it would make Parameswara feel needed and respected by the new ruler. He did not want to take offense that Parameswara had rejected him.

'What's wrong, my younger brother?'

Parameswara did not respond. He stared into void. He stood there, hoping for his elder brother to go away on his own accord. He hoped he did not want to have to chase him away. He also knew that he was in the royal palace that now belonged to his elder brother, as the new fifth ruler of Palembang.

'I am your elder, talk to me. Why the deafening silence? And why the utter contempt? What have I done to deserve this?'

'It is not right for father to appoint you as his successor to ascend the throne, especially at this critical,' said Parameswara. 'It has left me distraught and angry. If indeed dear father had wanted you to be appointed his successor, why couldn't he do it when he was healthier and mentally alert? What did you do to get him to say what he had said?'

'Why not? As the ruler, he had all the right to do anything he pleased. Don't take it as a snub. It is his right. Don't think it was easy for him to make that decision. I would be glad to give you the throne if father had ordered so. But, he did not, and we must accept that. This was his dying wish. It was his last wish - command that had to be carried out. As his loyal sons, we shouldn't make this into an issue. At the very least, you should be grateful to father for appointing you crown prince for more than three decades, but you didn't. You had ample time to say how grateful to him, but you did not. Don't sulk anymore. Don't get mad. It'll eat into your soul.'

Parameswara kept quiet. He remained serious. His elder brother waited for his reaction.

'I have been the prince consort for too long. How could he choose you to succeed him over me? How could I face everybody? What will everybody say? And where shall I hide my face? Everybody in Palembang and the whole of Andalas knows it was I who was going to ascend the throne and not you!'

The fifth ruler kept quiet. What was there for him to say? He knew there was none that he could do to pacify his brother. So, he chose to keep quiet and tried to calm him down so that his brother could see the sense behind the issue. There was a reason why their late father did not choose Parameswara to succeed him.

'It was our late father's wish that I succeed him.'

'No! You must have pestered him! You must have forced him to choose yourself over me! You had talked to him while I was away representing him, while he was lying in bed, too sick and too weak to even move! I knew this was happening, but I didn't want to question your motives then, because I thought you were not up to something evil! How wrong was I!'

The fifth ruler sighed. He knew he could not convince his younger brother anymore and he did not want to argue further. Their late father had made the

decision in front of all their relatives and the state officials, so there was no way for Parameswara or anybody to insist that the decision wasn't valid and made under duress. Who could fight it? And Parameswara was not arguing over the fact that their late father had chosen his official successor. He was merely arguing over the logic of his appointment.

'We shall not create fiction amongst us over this especially at a time like this, brother Parameswara. I beg of you.'

'It is still not right for father to do this to me. I am the rightful heir to the throne of Palembang. I have performed my duties well as prince consort and I deserve to succeed him, and not you. This is my humble opinion that I am sure the people of Palembang will also agree. They'll also attest that I've been performing duties as the prince consort to the best of my abilities.'

'Father was right in appointing you as prince consort, because I was not ready then. He saw you as having the right leadership quality and had a huge following among the people. You were immensely popular with the people. They all liked you; I admit that.'

'Just why then did he change his mind? ...On his deathbed, and in front of all our brothers and sisters and relatives? Was he trying to shame me in front of everybody? Why did he do it then?'

The prime minister approached them. Parameswara kept quiet when he was aware of his presence. The prime minister knew the two brothers were on the verge of a major crisis. He hoped that it did not turn into a national crisis. If it had spilled out of the palace, surely the followers of both princes would take sides. The results would be disastrous. It could even paralyze to the whole kingdom. There would not be any economic development. Chances were that the neighboring countries could decide to take advantage of the situation and launch a surprise attack on them. He feared for the worst. He had never felt so fearful and scared like this before.

'All the religious elders and the high priests are here. They're waiting for your majesty,' announced the prime minister.

'Very well, I'll be right there. You stay where you are, prime minister,' said fifth ruler.

'Very well.'

The prime minister returned to the adjacent room as quietly as he came.

'Listen to me, Brother Parameswara. Whatever it is, please do not create unnecessary fiction between us. Our people depend on us for stability and unity. I can appoint you as one of the rulers of the major districts in our land. You tell me which one, and I will immediately issue a decree. If you require a new palace, we will build one for you immediately after the official mourning

period is over. Or if you need to have more assistants, we will make sure that you will get them, too. How many do you require? Where do you want to have your new palace built?

Parameswara kept quiet. He did not think highly of the proposals; they were not exactly what he had in mind. In fact, it did not even cross his mind to be a ruler of one of the many districts of Palembang.

'Is this a promise?'

'I can't promise you that, my brother.'

'Why not? Do you plan to revolt against me?'

The fifth ruler decided to be straightforward. 'I cannot say what I will do. But one thing that I can say is: I will do whatever it takes to keep this state intact.'

'Suits you. However, please remember this: As the fifth ruler of Palembang of, I have at my disposal all the instruments of government that I can use to thwart any attempt to destabilize my government or me. In any case, between you and the people, I choose the people and country. Just make your move. I can take your anger, but I simply cannot let you go on belittling my position. I am the fifth ruler of Palembang now, remember that! I may be your elder brother, but I'm also the ruler of the land!' He walked off feeling disgusted with the behavior of his younger brother.

Parameswara turned and looked at him until he disappeared in the adjacent room and accompanied by the prime minister and other state officials. 'We will see who is more popular with the people in Palembang. We'll see how long you will remain as the ruler of Palembang,' said Parameswara to himself. 'We'll see.'

The body of ruler of Palembang was being cremated in a huge fire that rose twenty feet in the air. Thick bellows of smoke blew in all directions hitting everybody in the face. They took it as good omen to be touched and enveloped by the royal smoke that had a good smell. The burial ceremony lasted for five hours. His successor and Parameswara were standing side by side with their relatives and other citizens and officials as court protocol demanded. Parameswara's uncle, Tun Perpatih Besar who had the title of Seri Wak Raja II, was there to give him some comfort and a measure of security and strength. He was in the early thirties and much younger than his nephew, Parameswara. He was the *demang* or district chief who acted more like his personal assistant or lord chamberlain who handled all the rituals and ceremonies held in the palace.

Thousands of the subjects had assembled in the royal cemetery. All wore white, but none of them was crying. It was not the norm for the people of

Palembang to cry in public, as it was against their religion. They should be happy because their late ruler was now in the company of the gods and deities. And he was on his way to Heaven for his eternal abode. The men had a white headband while the women a white scarf to cover their heads.

After the burial was over, the fifth ruler walked away with his officials quietly and with their heads slightly bowed. Parameswara walked beside him. The high priests and other religious elders did not sleep for a week. They had to perform a host of rituals and chanted the whole time while tinkling small bells the whole time. They later collected the ashes of the late ruler to be kept in the palace until such a time they thought was most auspicious time before they decide to throw it into the river. This, however, could only happen from six months to a few years. The date to be chosen had to depend on many factors, which only the high priests could determine according to the calculation of the stars in the cosmos, to find the auspicious time and date.

'Have you decided what you plan to do, Brother Parameswara?' asked the fifth ruler.

'I haven't decided on what course of action I want to take,' was Parameswara's terse and rude reply.

'Please bear this in mind; we have all the instruments of government at our disposal. We can smear your good reputation, so they won't know what's right or wrong. At times like these, nobody would care if you had done any good deeds in the past or not. We can manipulate the system because we are the system! You cannot seek justice because we are the law in this vast land! As the fifth ruler of Palembang, I am all of them - the prosecutor and judge! You surely know that, don't you? For as long as you are here in Palembang, there is nothing that you can do, although you may be my own younger brother! Believe me, the people have decided that I ascended to the throne. And it is our late father's wish, too. Remember, nobody goes against the wishes of the ruler of Palembang and gets away with it, not even his son dares to do it!'

Parameswara was speechless. He tried to remain calm. His elder brother waited for his response. He knew there was no way for Parameswara to outwit him on this matter. 'Yes, you've said that to me many times before.'

'And I'll go on and repeat it, should you forget, Brother Parameswara.'

'Thank you.'

'Thank you, too, my brother.'

They continued to walk. The senior officials pretended not to hear them. They were not supposed to. Even if they did, they were supposed not to admit that they had heard anything that the two senior members of the royal family had discussed. They walked dutifully a few steps behind with their heads

looking down and tried not to tune into their conversation. Nevertheless, they were worried with the type of conversation that they were having. It did not sound pleasing to their ears; they had never heard the two of them talking like that before. They had never heard of such a conversation amongst two royals before. Such talk wasn't heard during the rule of their ancestors, Sang Nila Utama, his successors, Paduka Seri Pikrama Wira, Seri Rama Wira Kerma and *paduka seri maharajah* until now.

'Or really? Was I not the prince consort? Have you forgotten? Father had all along wanted me to succeed him. He had prepared me to take over in the event of his demise. Even you encouraged me to go on.' Parameswara brought out the same argument again and it had become trite to his elder brother by now.

'He had his reasons for choosing you his prince consort then.'

'You must have poisoned his mind while he was lying sick in bed, and while I was away with the people, trying to hold the state and people together.'

'I have no time for such talk, my dear brother. I shall leave you alone with your evil thoughts. Remember; any action from you will be met with the severest punishment.'

'Oh, really?'

'We'll see.'

'We will see, too. You make your move.'

The fifth ruler then called for his horse-carriage. He got into it and went off leaving Parameswara behind. Perpatih Besar stood beside Parameswara. He was at his beck and call as always; but mostly he was there to provide moral support. If Parameswara ascended to the throne and became the fifth ruler, he would surely be appointed the next prime minister.

The prime minister went to Parameswara. He could sense something brewing. He knew the two royal brothers were not exactly like peas in a pot. They were more like two different species of wild animals that were put together in the same cage and there was only one piece of meat for them to grab. They were baring their fangs at each other. He did not know when both of them were going to start to strangle and eventually kill each other. Who would succeed? The new fifth ruler had the upper hand though, from his experience. Parameswara was destined to fail. He did not have many people as his supporters; he was very much alone. Even if he did, the whole of Palembang was on the side of their new ruler now. The prime minister thought the least that he could do, as the most senior officer of the country was to try to pacify both of them so they would not go to the extent of creating chaos in the country. They could at least share the meat amongst

them. It was enough for both of them to eat anyway. He had tried to do it once before but it did not work. So now, he wanted to try to do it again. 'What's the matter, your highness Parameswara?' he asked in the most polite tone that he could utter.

It shook Parameswara from his daydreaming. It helped to control his anger, which was peaking up. 'Nothing.' He tried not to shift his anger towards the prime minister because it was not his fault.

'Is his highness still angry that the late *paduka seri maharajah* didn't appoint your highness to succeed him?'

'Precisely.'

'Precisely what, your highness, if I may ask?'

'I am a descendent of the Sang Nila Utama and the Sailendra line of royal family. We are warriors! We thrive on challenges! And we don't accept defeat without a fight!'

The prime minister was shocked with that kind of talk. 'And what does his highness wish to do next?'

'You just leave that to us to decide it, prime minister? Just why are you snooping around us? Whose side are you on? Him or me?' said Parameswara, in a voice that was loud enough for many around them to hear.

'I must obey the fifth ruler of Palembang, your highness. That is what the late *paduka* wanted me to do. But, I respect and honor you just the same, your highness.'

'Good, if that's the case, then you are on the other side.'

'I am sorry, your highness. As your prime minister, it is our fervent hope that nothing untoward happens here in Palembang. We have gone through enough already and the people are tired of it. As an elder, I've have seen many civil wars breaking up all ending to naught.'

Parameswara was angry. 'You leave this to us, prime minister. When the elephants fight with each other, do not come in the way or you'll be trampled!' he shouted.

The others who were near them froze. They pretended not to be concerned by what these two men were talking about.

'Yes, very true, your highness. I am just an insect, a pest! I have no business to mess around with his majesty and your highness' personal affairs. I beg forgiveness, your highness,' said the prime minister. He then offered to kiss Parameswara's hand. He bent down to kiss it, but Parameswara refused to let him touch it. He quickly pulled it, put both his hands behind his back, and stared elsewhere. It almost made the prime minister lose his balance. He quickly stood erect and maintained his composure. He felt humiliated no

doubt, but he accepted it as part of his job. 'Excuse me, your highness.' He excused himself and walked away, walking backwards from Parameswara who was still staring elsewhere. He continued to walk backwards until he got to the door. He then walked out of the room, feeling dejected and unwanted. This was what his long years of unending loyalty had brought him, he thought. Life had not been fair to him, but he was not about to complain about the ruler. He was just blaming his luck, his *karma*.

Perpatih Besar rode his horse and sped towards Parameswara's palace in such great haste, as if he was being chased away by the demons! It was few months after Damia Raja's burial and things had settled down in Palembang with everybody returning to their own laid-back lives. The villagers who were on their way to their paddy fields or farms were amused to see him rushing like that. If he were somebody else, everybody would laugh at him. They just smiled widely. However, since he was the Perpatih Besar, they controlled themselves. They had never seen the count riding like that before. What was he up to? The count passed many narrow roads before he entered the wide road that led to the palace compound. The guards immediately flung open the gates when they saw him approaching. They knew only one person in Palembang who rode like that - Perpatih Besar. And they were able to laugh at him because he was not an official of the palace, but more of a confidante to Parameswara; more so, now that Parameswara's official status had depleted considerably. If he was an officer of the palace, none of them would have dared to laugh at him like they did now. They'd be standing erect and dropping anything they were holding and looked at the direction of the count until he had gone away. But they did manage to smile widely as the count passed before them. The count was too engrossed with his mission that he had neglected to even cast a glance at any of the guards.

He walked along the corridor and went to the windows at the verandah where Parameswara was standing. He knew he could find him there. This was the place where he always went to think, ponder and reflect; most of all, he felt at peace here than anywhere else in the palace or the whole of Palembang. The windows overlooked the hills and the tall trees. Occasionally sounds of the monkeys yelping away could be heard; while at night, the sounds of the creeps could be heard.

Perpatih Besar tried to calm down himself and stop panting before he got close to Parameswara. He wiped beads of sweat that had formed on his forehead, with a piece of handkerchief. He then stood there and waited for Parameswara to acknowledge his presence. But Parameswara didn't turn



around. He continued to stare outside the windows as if he was seeing his bleak future ahead of him appearing like a vision. Flickers of the image of his father lay dying in his deathbed flashed in his mind. He saw his late father's lips trembling as he uttered the words, his last command. Parameswara surely had never experienced anything like this before and he didn't know how to handle his present predicament. No doubt, he was alarmed indeed, but he tried not to panic. He didn't move. He continued to stand there like a bronze statue.

A small bird stood on a branch outside the windows and chirped loudly. Parameswara was slightly distracted by that little creature. He wished he could be the bird as himself and flew off. It took off when a much bigger bird flew and sat near him and shook the thin branch violently. Few dried leaves fell to the ground while the unripe fruits swayed with the branches. One over-ripe fruit fell to the ground with a thud. This woke Parameswara up.

'What tidings do you bear me this time, Seri?' he said after he had realized Perpatih Besar was standing behind him. 'Is the time right? Tell me? I've been waiting for the past few months now. What do I do next? I have been extra patient all these months. Tell me truthfully! I'm getting restless. And my heart is pounding in my chest like it wanted to leave my body. I must settle this matter, once and for all. How much longer do you think I should wait? What's my next move going to be? Tell me!'

Perpatih Besar pondered over all the questions that came to him in quick successions, although the way Parameswara had said it sounded mild. But in reality, they were loaded questions. If the answers were simple, surely he would have found them himself. 'Do forgive me. By next week, your highness can launch a surprise attack on the *paduka seri maharajah*.'

'Why next week? Why not now? Today! And why must I wait any longer? What for? My heart has been pounding endlessly; all the waiting is killing me! And fire is building in my body. Let me release the fire in me, now!'

'Let's wait for things in the palace to settle down just a little. They're getting quite complacent now, as I can see. The *paduka seri maharajah* must be surely be thinking that your highness has finally given up the throne. If we do it now the people won't back us. They, too, are in mourning. It's not been easy for them, too. I know because I've been through the length and breadth of this country and I saw how they were mourning.'

Parameswara thought. 'Why next week?'

*Paduka seri* will be going on a hunting trip in the jungles. It'll be better for your highness to launch an attack on him while he's in the woods. Nobody will know what happens to him, and the people won't be disheartened. If the *paduka seri maharajah* dies, then we can blame it on a host of many things. We

can say that it was an accident, and the people will believe us. They won't be angry at your highness this way.'

'Very well. We don't want to attack the palace, as it will involve many people. Many innocent lives will be lost. Besides, many of them are my relatives and close friends, too.'

'What will your highness want me to do then?'

'You keep an eye on his majesty's movement. Tell me in a day or two if there's a change in his plans.'

'Very well, your highness.' Perpatih Besar nodded and walked away.

'Seri.'

Perpatih Besar turned. Parameswara pulled a gold coin from his pocket and threw it at him. 'Here, take this. More will come your way.'

'Thank you, your highness,' said Perpatih Besar as he caught the coin with his right hand. He then went off.

Parameswara turned around and continued to stare outside of the window. He saw the count riding on his horse away from the palace until he lost sight of him. Only dust floated in the air that had appeared from its wake could now be seen.

The Prime Minister Tun Perpatih Tulus was being driven in his carriage. He was heading towards the royal palace. He was going there with a heavy heart. This was the first time he felt like this. There was no joy for him. He felt like he was going to meet his executors at the gallows instead of the ruler of Palembang in his palace. Even the sight of the palace from the distance looked menacing, as though it was a huge creature that was waiting to strangle and tear him to pieces. He never felt so fearful and uncertain in his whole life. He continued to stare outside of his carriage as it bounced. His face didn't show any emotion. It remained frozen like a statue. He didn't feel anything. Was he expecting trouble to brew in Palembang? He didn't have the answer. He hoped that nothing untoward would happen in Palembang or the palace - at least while he was still alive. But one thing that was certain was that Palembang had not become what it used to be anymore. Since the death of Damia Raja, the fourth ruler, Palembang had changed beyond recognition. Perpatih Tulus didn't know if it was for the better or worse. He had been prime minister for under several rulers. Now, he was beginning to feel like he had lost touch with the new ruler and Parameswara. Both of them didn't behave like their forefathers did; what more when they were two brothers who were becoming enemies in a state whose ruler had just passed away - this didn't augur well for the state, he thought.

The fifth ruler rested in the garden. He had some papers in his hands and he was reading them; they were some papers that he had to sign. The prime minister went to him.

'Yes, my prime minister. What news do you have for me? I am still reading these papers. I haven't decided yet if I'm going to sign them or not.'

'Not much. Your majesty can take time on those papers; they aren't crucial. They can wait.'

The ruler put aside the papers as if on cue. He felt relieved. He felt like he had been relieved of his official duties as the ruler, and a whole load of problems had suddenly been lifted off his shoulders. Now, he could relax a little. He turned around and looked at the prime minister. Perpatih Tulus looked down, as it was his habit when meeting face to face with the ruler. He wasn't supposed to look at him in the eye. He held both hands in front of him with his shoulders curved in to decrease the size of his body.

'What is Parameswara been up to these days? I hardly see him. Is he still very angry with me? Why is he quiet? Is he up to something?'

'I should think his highness Parameswara has accepted the fact that you are the rightful ruler of Palembang.'

The fifth ruler smiled. 'May be what I said to him had seeped into his brains. He has such thick skull. All the years, decades that he was prince consort must have toughen his hide and thicken his skull. The last thing I'd expect from his for him to do something nasty.'

'What did you exactly say to him?'

'I warned him that all the instruments of government were at my disposal. Should he do anything sinister, he'll have to face the full might of the law and the force of our army. He'd regret it all his life should he be able to live to see the effects of his actions.'

'I think that did it. You must have said it right. His highness must have now realized that the state could tolerate his mischievous deeds only up to a certain extent, beyond which the authority has to take stern action. The state and people are more important than he is.'

'But, I'm not going to be complacent. The time of mourning is now officially over, prime minister. Now, you plan a visit for us to the villages. My queen and I wish to pay them a visit. Above all, I wish to gauge the sincerity and loyalty of my subjects. And you may remove your white headband now.'

The prime minister removed his white headband to mark the end of the mourning period. 'Very well. When do you wish to visit them?'

'By next week at the latest.'

'Very well. In that case, I'll prepare for it now. Excuse me, your majesty.'

The ruler nodded. The prime minister went off.

The people of Palembang greeted the fifth ruler and his queen. They had been waiting patiently by the side of the Musi River to wave at the royal barge that took him on the cruise upstream to the remote village. Thousands more stood on both sides of the road, when news of their unofficial visit to the countryside started to spread. The ruler had a golden yellow-colored *mau-pu sarong* cloth wrapped around him with the men holding yellow umbrellas over him and the queen to shield them from the harsh sun. They had wanted to see their new ruler and queen and to pay their respect and showed their admiration for them. Some of them threw flower petals that had been dipped in scented water when the royal carriage passed by them. 'Long live the fifth ruler of Palembang!' they shouted on top of their voices, as if in ecstasy. 'Long live the fifth *paduka seri mabarajah* of Palembang!' they all cried loudly, in unison.

The ruler and his queen smiled and continued to wave and smiled widely at them. The prime minister and other state dignitaries were there. The people came out in droves to see the royal couple. This was the first time fifth ruler had condescended to come to their village and pay them a visit. The older villager folks felt it was rather unusual since he hadn't yet been officially installed as the new ruler of Palembang but they still thought of him as one anyway. They were now wearing their normal clothes and had a wide smile.

Colorful flags and bunting were hung everywhere to welcome the royal couple. The fifth ruler continued to wave at them. And they all waved back.

'Long live the fifth ruler of Palembang! Long live the fifth *paduka seri mabarajah* of Palembang!' they cried.

The ruler was pleased. He knew his subjects were still loyal to him.

'Long live the fifth ruler of Palembang!'

The fifth ruler and the prime minister later went hunting deep in the jungles like they always did after the ruler had toured his country. The state high priest was a few steps behind them. He aimed at a mousedeer and fired a shot. It missed. 'The mousedeer are timid creatures. They just know when to avoid a shot. Ah! But, I'm here not to kill them. I'm here only to kill time,' joked the fifth ruler. 'Is it a good omen for anyone to catch sight of a white mousedeer?'

'Very well indeed,' said the prime minister.

The ruler turned behind at his high priest. 'What do you say, reverend?'

The high priest nodded politely. 'Indeed, your majesty. But such an opportunity is indeed rare; for I have not seen any of them either, your majesty.'

'Very well, whoever gets to see it must count himself to be lucky. His rightful place in Heavens is assured.'

'And more than that, your majesty.'

'Oh! How so?'

'The place where the rare mystical and white mousedeer is sighted, is surely the best place for anyone to found a new country; it awaits a bountiful harvest and the land will be known far and wide.'

The ruler nodded. He was impressed. 'If that's the case, it's not wrong for our ancestors to choose hunting as a serious hobby then and impressed it on us to follow in their footsteps then. I knew all along that there was a better reason for hunting than just trying to kill animals.'

'Indeed, your majesty,' chipped the prime minister.

Then suddenly, there was a commotion. Few men rushed out of the bushes with their weapons. They came from everywhere. All of them wore black. They were Parameswara's men. They were staging an ambush on the ruler. The fifth ruler and prime minister were shocked. They didn't know what was happening. Fortunately, their men managed to cover and bundle them to safety.

'We're being ambushed, your majesty,' cried the prime minister.

'This way, your majesty,' shouted a lieutenant. He and some men then took the fifth ruler and prime minister and other dignitaries away to safety.

'Where are they from? Who are they?' asked the fifth ruler.

'Looks like they are Parameswara's men,' replied the lieutenant.

'Damned Parameswara!'

'Don't worry, his highness Parameswara won't be able to do much damage. All of his men have been contained.'

Parameswara's men continued to fight with the ruler's men. One by one, Parameswara's men was killed. In the end, the few who managed to survive decided to run off for their lives, lest they, too, would be killed.

Parameswara had to flee Palembang in the dead of night in such great haste. He just could not wait because this is the only recourse that was available to him. Staying put in Palembang only invited trouble, most likely, his life too. His attempted coup had failed.

His followers were in other ships that trailed behind him. They were smaller ones compared to the one Parameswara was sailing in which was the largest and more richly decorated with taller masts. They feared that the newly proclaimed ruler of Palembang, the fifth *paduka seri maharajah* would launch a counter attack on Parameswara and demanded for his execution. Even if it was not his desire, his senior officers would surely demand it, too. So, the new ruler had no choice. This was not a family matter anymore, as it had become a

state affair. The people of Palembang could not accept any transgression on their sovereignty, even if the younger brother of their ruler committed it.

'What exactly happened, Seri?' asked Parameswara in an angry tone. He was still in a daze. He did not expect his plans to go astray. He had expected that for him to be the new ruler of Palembang by now, and not his brother.

'There was a miscalculation, your highness, I'm terribly sorry for what happened,' said Perpatih Besar. 'It was entirely my mistake. Please do forgive me, your highness.' He looked down. He just did not dare stand upright and looked at Parameswara in the eye. Perpatih Besar was equally shocked with the outcome of their plans. What happened was beyond their wildest expectations. He thought everything would go on smoothly, and Parameswara would be installed the new fifth ruler without any untoward incident happening. But he was wrong. He knew Parameswara would be very disappointed and angry with him.

'Miscalculation? Is that all that you have to say? Miscalculation!'

Perpatih Besar kept quiet; he felt guilty. The other men waited. All of them looked down. They did not know where Parameswara wanted to go. Their ships were just sailing aimlessly in the vast ocean. Being dark, they did not know which direction they were heading for, whether it was to the north, south, or east or west. The cold night wind blew in the faces and Parameswara's hair was disheveled, because it was not tied with a headband. However, it was the last thing that they were worried about.

'We'll go to Majapahit,' said Parameswara. 'And let nobody say a word on what had happened in Palembang. We do not want the ruler, *Betara Majapahit* to find out why we are fleeing from Palembang. Understand? He is my brother-in-law. My second wife is his younger sister. It'd be good if I can meet the *betara* so that I can explain about what happened in Palembang.'

'My lips are sealed, your highness,' said Perpatih Besar. 'Not a word of it will come out of this mouth, I assure you.'

'Good. We proceed to Majapahit. No one shall know of this.'

Perpatih Besar turned to the captain. 'Do as told, captain.'

'But, Majapahit, your highness and your excellency, is on the other direction,' said the captain.

'Very well, turn the ships, and head towards that direction, if that's the case,' ordered Parameswara.

'Which way is the wind blowing?' Perpatih Besar asked the captain.

'Thank the gods; it's blowing in our direction, your excellency.'

'This is good omen, as I see it,' said Parameswara. 'Let's go to the prayer room and thank the gods and deities.'

His men nodded.

'Yes, your highness,' said the captain. He then turned the ship and headed towards Majapahit.

The captains in the other ships followed suit and they sailed southeast together in a convoy towards Majapahit in Java Island. It was going to be a two-day journey, as the winds were strong enough to take the ships south.

Few days later they arrived in Majapahit on the northern part of the island in central Java where the kingdom of Majapahit was located. Everybody at the port stared at the spectacle. The port situated a few hundred miles from the capital of Singasari where the official palace of Betara Majapahit who was also known as the Rajasanagara or King Hayam Wuruk was. The people had not seen any ruler from foreign lands paying their country a visit in a long time. Even those who came were from the country that were under the domination of the kingdom of Majapahit and these rulers came only to pay obeisance to their *betara*. They knew if they didn't, they'd be severely reprimanded and even punished for being disrespectful to Hayam Wuruk. But, Parameswara had not come in this manner; he had come in peace and as a close relative to their king, or so they thought.

Hayam Wuruk welcomed Parameswara with opened arms. He had not seen his brother-in-law for a long time. So naturally he was excited to be able to meet him again, especially now when the whole of the kingdom of Majapahit was at peace with all its neighbors. 'Welcome to the kingdom of Majapahit, my dear brother-in-law Raja Parameswara,' he said as he opened his arms wide.

Parameswara walked down the gangplank in a port in the northern part of Central Java wearing his finest clothes and widest smile, to a loud cheer from those who were there. To most, this was the first time they were seeing a prince from Palembang stepping foot on Java Island.

Hayam Wuruk walked straight in the waiting arms of Parameswara. They hugged tightly and kissed each other's cheeks. Parameswara realized that his brother-in-law was not exactly young anymore. He was now old; worse, he looked sickly and pale. Despite that, he still insisted to come to the port to welcome him personally. Parameswara was surprised that he was much older than he had thought. He even had to be propped up by some of his aides, lest he would fall to the side. This was the man who used to make the powerful rulers of Kertanagara fearful of him. Whilst since he ascended to the throne of Majapahit, he was able to cast fear on all the rulers in Java who saw him as a strong-willed ruler who brooked no dissent from them. More so when they realized that Hayam Wuruk was considered the reincarnation of Lord Shiva. Because of that, all the rulers in Java Island respected him.

Majapahit was a country that was named after a type of bitter fruit called *maja* that grew in great abundance in this region. So they named the country Majapahit or 'Bitter *Maja*.' It is a hinterland kingdom. It had fertile soil and was suited for rice farming. This became its main source of income and the backbone of the country's economy since it was also exported to the neighboring states.

Hayam Wuruk whose official title was Rajasanagara was born in 1334 CE or 734 AH. In 1350 CE or 751 AH or 4032 and 4048 of the Chinese calendar, respectively. He was called Hayam Wuruk. And at sixteen years of age, he was installed as the *betara* following the death of his father King Jayanegara. However, it was his mother, Queen Tribhuwana Wijayatunga Dewi who ruled the country for a few years because he was too young to ascend the throne. He was now in his forty-eighth year on the throne and was sixty-four years old. During this time, his former grand prime minister and commander-in-chief, Mahapatih Gajah Mada had managed to expand his empire throughout the island of Java which extended to Pahang in the Malay Peninsula and to what is now known as Australia in the south. So when he died in 1364 CE or 766 AH or 4062 of the Chinese calendar, the king could not find a proper replacement. So they decided to appoint six high-ranking palace officials instead and formed a royal council to oversee the administration of the country. The achievements of Gajah Mada were recorded in great details in the *Babad Tanah Jawi* that chronicles the Javanese history and affairs.

But now the king was a faint reflection of his former self. He looked sickly and frail, and much older than his age. He could not walk or talk much and had to be carried in the royal carriage most of the time. Parameswara pitied him. He was not supposed to personally greet Parameswara, but he did just the same since he looked highly on him. In fact, Hayam Wuruk and his men were already standing on the banks of the sea when news got to him that a fleet of ships headed by Parameswara was sighted at the horizons by his men as soon as they entered their view. And he immediately rushed from his palace and waited for Parameswara to arrive.

'We are happy to see you in Majapahit, my dear brother-in-law Raja Parameswara. How is the ruler of Palembang?' greeted Hayam Wuruk in the Javanese language, which Parameswara also understood.

'Very well, your majesty. We're indeed happy to be here, too, in this beautiful and wonderful land and country,' replied Parameswara. 'I look forward to meet your people and also to hunt in the jungles.'



Hayam Wuruk smiled. 'Come, let us go to the palace, and we shall have something to eat. We have a lot to ask you. Here, I want you to meet my sons, crown Bhre Lasem Sang Alemu and Bhre Kebalan.'

'And these are my children, the crown prince, Raja Besar Muda, Raja Kechil Besar, Raja Kechil Tengah and Kechil Besar,' said Parameswara. 'They were all very small when you last met them, now they have grown up. I have named them mostly after my ancestors.'

'Indeed.' Hayam Wuruk shook their hands and hugged each of them.

'And these are my senior officers and prime minister.'

Parameswara shook their hands by gripping them at the arm. He and Hayam Wuruk then entered the horse-carriages. Their officials and men took the other carriages and they proceeded to the palace for a more formal reception where many more state dignitaries and people were waiting to see them there.

The same carriages passed through the woods. The people stopped working in the paddy fields to line both sides of the road and waved colorful flags. This was the first time they were seeing a foreign royalty visiting Majapahit in a long time. They had all heard so much about the Palembang royalty; now they were seeing with their own eyes how they looked. They were impressed with Parameswara and his entourage, especially the way they wore their clothes with the decorations that they had on their chests. They were dignified.

'We are not in the best of health, my dear brother Parameswara. But, your presence here, is good medicine to me. I hope the gods can help to prolong my life,' said Hayam Wuruk after the formality had been done away with. 'I am truly happy to see you here. I do hope that you would find the weather here congenial and the people in my palace helpful. Do not hesitate to call any of them should you require any assistance or wish to go anywhere. If I am much younger and healthier, I won't mind taking you anywhere you like, myself. The medicine men have forbidden to allow me to strain myself, but I insist that I go out once in a while, especially to the woods to hunt to get some fresh air.'

'Please, don't tire yourself unnecessarily. Our visit here in Majapahit is just for leisure and isn't an official one,' said Parameswara.

'My medicine men have advised that I stayed in the palace, but I insisted to come and personally greet you.'

'Well, thank you. The rays of the sun are good for you. I see your cheeks are now pink in color.'

Hayam Wuruk agreed. 'Your are from the well-known and famous Sailendra line of rulers of Palembang. It's indeed a great honor for us to receive your presence.'

'And you, too are a well known ruler in the whole of Java Island.'

'I'm already old; I've no need for glory, Parameswara, my dear brother. But, I have high hopes in my eldest son, crown Bhre Lasem Sang Alemu. He's still young and has a lot to learn. He's just in his mid-thirties. He will succeed me and he'll carry the family name into the next millennium. We Hindus believe in reincarnation: I do hope I will be reincarnated as a horse!'

'A horse? Why?' Parameswara was amazed. 'Why, I'm fond of dogs.'

'Yes, so that I can gaze at the grass, anywhere I like. To be a ruler is a difficult task. I prefer to be a horse anytime.'

'I can imagine it. My late father, too, had hoped to be reincarnated as a horse when he was alive. He also felt it was difficult being a ruler, just like what you had said.'

'He did?'

'Yes. Both of you seem to think alike.'

'Old men always think alike.'

They laughed.

'They certainly do.'

Hayam Wuruk and Parameswara ate in the ornate main hall of his official palace in Singasari together with their children and officials. The Majapahit prime minister, Patih Gajah Enggon looked at the side of his eyes as though he was suspicious of the guests. They sat cross-legged as they devoured the sumptuous food that was spread before them. A Javanese musical group played soothing *gamelan* music. A small group of dancers performed a traditional Javanese dance. They threw out their hands wide and moved about in a slow and calculated way that followed the movements of the lilting music. The women especially moved their heads and used their eyes to describe the intensity of their emotions as the drama they were telling unfolded. Parameswara was distracted by their every move. However, he did not understand most of the song the singers were singing, because it was in classical Javanese. He only knew Malay and some Javanese that he had learnt from his Javanese wife.

'You can stay here for as long you wish, Parameswara,' said Hayam Wuruk.

'Thank you, your majesty.'

The dinner and cultural performance lasted till early in the day; during that time the foreign guests were invited to do the *jaipong* dance that the Javanese

were famous for. Parameswara and his friends hadn't done it before, so their movements were awkward and stiff. This made their Majapahit guests feel amused.

Early one morning, Hayam Wuruk's eldest son, Bhre Lasem Sang Alemu went to his father's bedroom. He knocked and entered. His father was lying in bed. He couldn't wait for his father to wake up and leave his bedroom. 'Yes, my son.'

'I fear Parameswara is bringing with him bad intentions.'

'Watch your word! Why did you say that, my son?'

'Why did he have to flee from Palembang? There was no advanced notice whatsoever.'

'He didn't flee. He said he had come here to see us.'

'Can we trust him? He's come with a thousand followers; therefore, he must want to attack us! Otherwise, why must he come with so many people if he just wants to come here to hunt and meet with you?'

Hayam Wuruk kept quiet. He coughed. 'I am already old, my dear son. I don't have much time for such intriguing thoughts. The gods are calling me. Soon I'll be in their company in Heaven. I'll have to leave everything to you to look after this kingdom. Please relieve me of the burden of having to hear of such nonsense. I had a very cordial discussion with him in the carriage last week and at dinner. He seems to be such a pleasant man. And his late father, too, had desired to be reincarnated as a horse, just like me. We are of the same age when he died few months ago. You are at least ten years younger than Parameswara. So, can't you at least try to be friendly with him? Is this too much to ask? I noticed that you have stayed away from him since the day he stepped foot on our soil. Anything's the matter, son?'

His son was not taken by the ruler's explanation. 'What shall we do, father?'

'I shall go to sleep now, my son. And you shall be the next ruler of Majapahit. Promise me that you will be a good ruler - at least, better than your own father. Is this too much to ask? And promise me that you will respect your uncle, Parameswara.'

'I will, father. I'll try my best. This is my promise.'

Hayam Wuruk then closed his eyes and fell asleep. His son felt suspicious. He went to him and tried to wake him up. But, he realized that his father had died. He quickly turned around.

Parameswara prayed in the temple alone. Perpatih Besar went to him. He prayed that he would not fail again in Majapahit. He stood before the many bronze and stone idols and deities and clasped his palms and put them close to

his chest. He chanted some holy verses softly. He wanted the gods to bless him. He continued to stare at the statues that were placed on the altar in the Sasaji Hall, which is their prayer hall. Smoke from the incense floated in the air filling the space in the temple. After he was finished with his prayers, Parameswara turned around. He saw Perpatih Besar standing behind him. He looked like he had an important message that he wanted to tell Parameswara. He couldn't tell what it was.

'Yes, Seri.'

'And why are you smiling? Why are you so happy about?'

'We can attack the palace and your highness can be the ruler of Majapahit.' Now Parameswara was smiling.

That was what the least that he had wanted to hear from Perpatih Besar. It did not occur to him that he could do such a thing in Majapahit. Nevertheless, he felt that his prayers had been answered. 'I see. And that's why you're smiling. It's not a bad idea. I never thought of that. But, do you think it's possible? What are our chances here this time?'

Perpatih Besar nodded and continued to smile widely. 'There's a way, your highness. It'll work this time.'

'How?'

They walked out of the temple and stood beside Parameswara's carriage.

'How, Seri?'

'There's a way, your highness,' replied Perpatih Besar. He then whispered in Parameswara's ear, which made him smile widely. 'Yes, certainly, my count.' He then entered his carriage and moved on. Perpatih Besar climbed onto his horse and trailed close behind Parameswara's carriage.

Perpatih Besar whispered in Parameswara's ear. He turned around and made sure that nobody else was within his or her hearing range.

'Is it prudent to discuss this here and now, Seri?'

'Nobody will be able to understand us as long as we're speaking in our dialect, your highness.'

Parameswara realized that the people of Majapahit couldn't speak their Palembang dialect, not a word. The people of Majapahit only spoke in Javanese, unlike their rulers and the court officials who could speak Malay well. He always had to count on his second wife, who was a Javanese like them to know what they were saying. 'Very well, what is it? Make is snappy.'

'The crown prince is young. He can hardly handle the army. Besides, he's not popular with the people. Your highness is more popular here in Majapahit than he is.'

'Don't underestimate him; he's still my nephew. He's not shown his potential yet. But, he can still prove to be fatal,' said Parameswara. He knew exactly who the count was referring to, Sang Alemu, the anointed successor of the ruler of Majapahit.

'I doubt it, your highness.'

Parameswara could not conspire to have the new ruler of Majapahit disposed of, as he was still undecided if that was helpful. He was fully aware that to wrest the kingdom from him involved many unnecessary risks because he didn't know his way around in Majapahit. However, after giving it a serious thought, he only finally agreed to embark on this uncertain journey. Even then, it had to happen five years after he had stayed there, when he had become more restless and wanted to get some action. His hands were itchy, he said. He thought he had enough backing from the people of Majapahit by now, and he decided to take the risks; after all for he had nothing to lose. The worst that could possibly happen to him would be to lead a life in exile again. Not that he had got used to it, when he had to flee from Palembang for the first time more than five years before.

The Majapahit guards escorted Hayam Wuruk one bright and sunny day. He looked more dignified now after being the ruler for almost five years now and his clothes were more colorful and well decorated than it was before. The official mourning period was long over. Despite that, there were still many more religious and traditional palace rituals that they still had to perform.

Then suddenly, out of nowhere, a group of men appeared. They sprang from behind the bushes and alarmed everybody there. They rushed from all sides and immediately started to attack him. Hayam Wuruk was shocked. He didn't know what was happening; he couldn't tell who they were. They were all wearing black and were covered from head to toe and looked alien. He turned to his guards. 'What's happening? Guards!'

A guard went to him and said: 'This way, your majesty. Hurry!'

More guards rushed and took him away to safety. Other guards immediately blocked Parameswara's men from reaching the ruler. They put up a stiff resistance. Some of Parameswara's men were immediately killed. The others tried to push their way towards Hayam Wuruk. By now he had been taken away by his men. More of his guards appeared and they continued to fight with Parameswara's men by using all the weapons that were at their disposal. It then became apparent that the ruler's men were having an upper hand. Many of Parameswara's men died instantly in pools of blood; many writhed in pain and they were mercilessly killed by their own men in order to save them from

a prolonged suffering. Parameswara and Perpatih Putih's strategy obviously failed again. They didn't realize that another group of Majapahit soldiers had covered Hayam Wuruk's entourage and were quick to spring to action. These men had with them better equipment and weapons. Many of Parameswara's men lay who were badly injured and lying on the ground; they were trampled upon by horses of the Majapahit men leaving their bodies flattened and bones broken to pieces.

Hayam Wuruk felt fortunate that he had escaped the attack unscathed, save for his personal pride. The close attention he had paid to his personal security since his ascension to the throne had proven to be useful now. But he still didn't know who was behind it although he somehow guessed it was Parameswara's misdeeds. Still he didn't want to make wild allegations. Whoever was responsible for it certainly didn't make any sense, he thought. Who'd want to attack him? Besides, he didn't have any enemies in the whole of Java. All the rulers on that island had personally come to pay their respects to him over the years. Those who didn't were easily subjugated and placed under the political and economic influence of the kingdom of Majapahit.

His guards took him inside a horse-carriage and it sped off, heading towards the palace to safety. Hayam Wuruk cursed himself for his bad luck. Not only that the ambush had spoilt his hunting, it had now made him more vulnerable than before. He kept wondering who was the person behind the attack, but still couldn't find any answer. More guards, all armed to the teeth were later deployed to protect him at the palace. 'Who were they? They don't look familiar,' he kept asking himself.

'They are Parameswara's men, your majesty,' said the guard.

Hayam Wuruk was not shocked; he knew all along that his own uncle, Parameswara was up to something mischief. But he wondered why did he have to take five years to do what he did? He knew his uncle was a mischievous person, but he didn't realize that he was capable of inflicting untold damage and harm on the people. Didn't he also care about his own reputation? There were many things about Parameswara that he personally found to be repulsive and didn't like. Throughout his stay in Majapahit, both of them didn't get along well. They were seldom seen in each other's company. They only met during official functions and never privately. There was something else, about Parameswara he found repugnant. His instincts told him to stay clear of his own uncle from Palembang. He trusted his instincts because they had served him well in the past. He wasn't about to discard them, more so now after what had just happened. His instincts had served him well in the past and he decided to trust them now more than ever before.

'Parameswara's men?'

'Yes, your majesty.'

'Hmmm... Just as I had thought. My late father didn't believe it. He didn't believe that my own uncle Parameswara had come to attack us. I knew all along that he had come with bad intentions.'

'What do we do next?'

'We'll see.'

Parameswara waited at the front door of the guest palace where he had been offered to put up since his arrival here. His men rushed to him.

'Forgive me, your highness. We have failed miserably. We have no choice but to leave Majapahit now! There's nothing for us to wait for!' explained a guard. He was panting and sweating profusely. He look worried and even scared that Parameswara might scold him.

'What? You mean...?' said Parameswara without finishing his sentence.

'We must go now, your highness,' advised Perpatih Besar who had just stepped from the adjacent room. He stood a step beside Parameswara. He was ready to receive any instructions from him like the trusted aide that he was.

'Damned you, Seri. I had full faith in you,' said Parameswara without turning around to look at him.

'They overwhelmed us! They were just too many!' explained the guard.

Parameswara then barged inside the palace stamping his feet on the floor to show his intense anger at what had happened. His plans were destroyed to smithereens and his future in Majapahit was bleak and unattainable. He knew he had to act fast before the Majapahit soldiers came to get him here in the guest palace.

Later that night, Parameswara left the palace. He wanted to hide under the cover of the darkness to sneak out of the palace like a fox and flee Java Island to save his neck, before the Majapahit soldiers came looking for him. They would probably want to clobber him and chop off his head and show it to everybody in Majapahit. He knew how mean the Majapahit people could be at times. Unfortunately, the feelings were mutual for both parties. Surely, the people of Majapahit were be happy to have Parameswara's severed head stuck onto a wooden pole in the middle of the square for everybody to see and spit on. He thought he was not about to give them that opportunity, so he decided to flee Java and to save his life. He took with him all his men and possessions and quickly made to the beach late that night. He had told them that he had wanted to 'inspect the sea' or *melihat laut* - for the second time. It was the tradition of the Malay rulers of Palembang to seek adventure by leaving the country and sailing in the sea for adventure. But in most cases, it was a subtle

way of saying that a prince had been banished from the state. His followers thought they were returning to Palembang. They took boats to their ships, and immediately sailed away in the darkness, leaving Java stealthily. It was in total contrast to the warm welcome that he had received when he first arrived here.

Parameswara stood on the deck and wondered about his bad luck. He let the cold winds hit his face and blew his hair. His eyes remained wide opened as if he was seeing his bleak future ahead of him. This was the second time that he had to flee from a disaster, in the nick of time. Where else could he go to next? His second son, Kechil Besar went to him. 'Where are we heading for, father?'

'We're sailing to Temasik. I hear a ruler who's a puppet of the Siamese ruler is ruling it. His name is Tamogi. We'll see if he can make way for us there.'

Kechil Besar did not know exactly what his father's plans in Temasik were. He just kept quiet, because he knew Parameswara was still deep in thought, he didn't want to bother him by inquiring further, unless he volunteered to explain. Parameswara's men were also on the deck. They anxiously waited for him to give further instructions. He then turned around and entered his cabin without saying anything. They were not too sure if Parameswara was going to succeed again there. He had made two serious blunders so far; could he afford to make just one more? None of them knew much about Temasik or Tamogi or had heard about them. They didn't know how big his army was. But one thing they knew was that he was a vassal of the king of Siam, King Tammaraja II who was based in Sukhothai. He was also the Siamese ruler's son-in-law. The Siamese called him Maha Tammaracha II and he was the person who had chased Parameswara's father out of Temasik.

Parameswara entered his cabin and threw himself on a padded chair. He gritted his teeth. He thought it was just his luck that he was going to expel the person who had chased his father out of the island. He was still thinking hard. His wife, Dewi Puteri who was sitting in bed stared at him; she couldn't penetrate her husband's thoughts. She could only feel sorry for him, but there was nothing that she could do to help her husband. She thought they were having such a good time in Majapahit and they had eventually settled there as guests of the new ruler of Majapahit who was her nephew, until old age. She was the great-granddaughter of Demang Daun Lebar, an earlier chamberlain in Palembang and father-in-law of Sang Nila Utama, the founder of the kingdom of Palembang, and her husband's great-grandfather, too. Daun Lebar had earlier officiated in the *abihiseka* ceremony where by he changed the name of Sang Nila Utama to Sri Tri-Buana that meant 'Lord of the Three-Worlds.' And, even at his old age, he had asked his grandson, Perpatih Tulus to conduct



the same *abibiseka* ceremony. It was he who gave Parameswara the name that would stick with him even after he had fled Palembang. It means 'prince consort.' And no wonder this left many people outside of Palembang confused as to who indeed was Sri Tri-Buana and Sang Nila Utama or Parameswara and the original name that was given by his father at birth. They thought they were different individuals, when in fact, they were the same person! This had also confused the locals, as well as foreign scribes. It was chosen because it marked the new status of Parameswara as the new 'prince consort' or crown prince. He was appointed the new crown prince of Palembang by his father, Damia Raja, the fourth ruler of Palembang. It was a move that surprised some people, but not for the others, because they knew Parameswara had an elder brother who should have been appointed the post of crown prince, but wasn't. It wasn't the tradition in Palembang to do so. This was done so as not to place unnecessary pressure on his eldest son; also to ensure that the best amongst his sons succeeded him. Therefore, when his name was changed to Parameswara it wasn't really a name, but his new status and post.

'What are you thinking of, dear?' asked the Dewi Puteri, sounding almost nonchalantly.

'I failed in Palembang and now again in Majapahit. Will the same fate await me in Temasik, my dear?'

His wife did not answer. She only hoped that they were able to sail as far away from Majapahit as possible, so that they could close their Majapahit chapter forever. Her only disappointment was that she could not be near her mother. She was now an invalid. She could not do anything except to lie motionlessly in bed for most of the time. She could only move if her assistants or nurse turned her body to the side. Sometimes they would prop her up to a sitting position so that her blood circulation improved and to change her clothes. She had lost her voice and could not remember anyone. Her eyes were staring fixed on the ceiling. Dewi Puteri thought that what lied ahead was yet to be seen. She wasn't too keen to look too far ahead; suffice, if she could get some rest and sleep in her cabin later. 'Temasik?' she asked again. She was not familiar with the name or knew how to pronounce it. Above all, she did not know what it meant. It had no meaning. It was a Sanskrit name, which was given by someone to the island. She did not like the sound of it, nor did her husband. And he was determined to change it. But before he could do that, he had to change the ruler, who in this case was Tamogi.

'Yes, that's where we're heading, Temasik. What an awful name! It's a small island south of the peninsula called Hujung Tanah. In fact, the island was originally called Pulau Hujung.'

'Can we manage it there this time?'

'We can handle it. A puppet prince of the Siamese ruler is ruling it. Surely, the locals and especially the Malays there won't like to live under the dominance of the Siamese; nobody does around this region and we're here to save them.

'Besides, the Siamese King Tammaraja II had taken it away from us. For a long time, Temasik was under our dominance. It was my great-great-great grandfather - Sang Nila Utama was the name. Yes, Sang Nila Utama! He was the one who had founded the island and put it under our control. In fact, he was the one who had ruled over the island.

'How did it happen that Sang Nila Utama managed to found the island of Temasik?'

'Oh, he was just hunting in Andalas when he lost his way and crossed over the straits of Sunda. He managed to land on an island and decided to remain there. He called it *Singapura*.' (Singapore)

'Singapura?'

'He saw a lion - *singa* - and decided to name the island Singapura - the City of Lions. But, the Siamese heard about it and liked its strategic location. And they decided to chase away Sang Nila Utama. Now, it's for me to take it back from the Siamese. I have an ax to grind with them. We have more right to rule Temasik than the Siamese do. I want to call it Singapura. Tamogi therefore must go.'

His wife kept quiet. This was the first time she had ever heard that her husband's ancestors had once ruled the island that they were now heading for.

'My late brother-in-law, the late Hayam Wuruk was immensely popular with the people in Palembang, and his son, Sang Alemu, too. I had totally underestimated him. He must have caught wind of what I had planned to do. I do hope Tamogi, the ruler of Temasik won't be as smart as both of them, and my brother in Palembang and nephew in Majapahit.'

'I hope so.'

'He's Siamese - Tamogi! How could the Malays and Sea-People in Temasik like him, if that's the case?'

'Precisely. I have faith that we will be successful in Temasik. It's high-time that we settled down and have our own country to rule instead of living like a nomad, going from one place to another.'

'We've been on the run for too long, dear.'

Parameswara shook his head and sighed. 'We'll see, we'll see.'

They sailed for three days before reaching Temasik, early in the morning since the winds were not strong during these times. In the morning of the

fourth day, Parameswara was stirred from his sleep when his men sighted the island from the distance. It appeared faintly from the horizon, hiding behind the thick veil of early morning fog that made them feel like they were a fantastic zone, an unreal world. It was a surrealistic experience and a welcoming sight indeed. Some of the sailors stood at the railings and stared at the scenery. The island of Temasik began to appear brighter and brighter in their view as the sun began to rise from the horizon, thus clearing up the fog.

Parameswara immediately woke up. He rushed to the deck and stood at the railings with the other sailors and officials. The island of Temasik was still far ahead. His ship inched its way towards the island as the sun started to brighten up. A swarm of birds flew above the ship; they were chirping merrily away. Parameswara took it as a sign of their welcome for him.

'We shall arrive in Temasik before noon, your highness,' said Perpatih Besar.

'Very well, it's been four long days now. I'll be inside my cabin,' remarked Parameswara. 'Why is it taking so long? We should have arrived at Temasik at least one day earlier.'

'The winds have not been too strong, your highness.'

Parameswara's ship swayed with the waving of the water in the river-mouth. They had arrived there at about noon, as they had estimated. It bounced up and down and sideways with the water. After performing some prayers, the high priest gave the permission for Parameswara to climb down the gangplank together with his wife, children and officers. The dogs dashed to the land and ran around in circles, chasing imaginary animals much to everybody's delight. They held to the railings, lest they would be hurled to the deck. The high priests were quick to wash Parameswara's feet with seawater in order to ward off evil spirits. They then offered some blessings by throwing scented flower petals at his feet.

'Look at my dogs; aren't they all happy to land in Temasik?' remarked Parameswara, as soon as he stepped onto the banks of the river. This was the first sentence he had uttered in Temasik. He tried to sound casual and cheerful, but it hid a more sinister scheme.

Tamogi was already there at the banks. The dogs ran pass by him; he ignored them. He and his senior state dignitaries greeted Parameswara warmly. Tamogi smiled widely and readily welcomed him although they had never met before. But, he had heard of Parameswara's reputation as prince consort of Palembang. They then hugged each other in a tight embrace to the delight of all those who were present there. A large group of curious and anxious villagers and ordinary folks were there to observe the arrival of a foreign prince

to their land. They were excited. They especially liked the way Parameswara and his men and women wore their clothes.

'Welcome to island of Temasik, my dear Parameswara,' said Tamogi in a high pitch. He spoke in Malay, but it had a thick Siamese accent.

'Thank you, your highness Tamogi. I'm delighted to see that you are in good health. The gods must have looked you well.'

'They have indeed, your highness. And let me introduce to your highness, our senior officers.'

Parameswara shook their hands and hugged them. 'I'm very happy to be here. I know I will enjoy my stay here a great deal.'

'We shall walk together, Parameswara. The guest palace where your highness shall put up at is close by in that fort over there, behind those trees.'

'Very well indeed.'

They then walked away escorted by their guards.

'Tell me, dear Parameswara: How is the new ruler of Majapahit? I'm sure he's in good health,' said Tamogi.

'Oh, yes, indeed. Both King Hayam Wuruk and I had such a good time, hunting in the woods.' He knew he lied.

'Hunting? Does your highness like hunting?'

'Yes, indeed. And may be if I'm lucky, I'll see a lion, with my own eyes here, too.'

'In that case, we'll have to arrange to go on a hunting expedition sometime, when your highness is fully rested.'

'We shall like that.'

They arrived at the front entrance of the fort. There was a larger crowd of people who were waiting for Parameswara and Tamogi to arrive. There was an air of gaiety and celebration. They smiled and waved their hands at the two rulers. 'Long live Parameswara! Long live Raja Tamogi!' they shouted repeatedly as he passed by them.

Parameswara and Tamogi smiled and waved back at them. Parameswara went and shook their hands. He then turned around and headed for the main entrance of the fort. The doors were left ajar by the guards and they entered. Parameswara looked around him; he noticed that the fort was self-contained. It had a main entrance and few other doors at all sides; some of them led directly to the jungle. He presumed that these doors were to serve as quick exit in case of emergency, or if they were being attacked. Many people lived in there, and it could easily house a few hundred people. There was a bazaar too, where many goods were being traded. Parameswara and his followers were

excited to see it. Everybody there stopped haggling over prices or doing what he or she was doing. They stared at Parameswara and Tamogi.

'We are here now, your highness. I do hope you'll have a complete rest. And may be later we shall meet for lunch at our palace. It's just over there, on that hill. It's called the Forbidden Hills - *Bukit Larangan*,' said Tamogi. 'Only royalty are allowed to go there and not the subjects. There's the king's well where you can take your bath. But it is only for your highness and royalty. The others have to make do with the water that is stored in tanks in the palace.'

'Very well. I will try to bathe there myself soon. I'm feeling sticky already with all the heat and the traveling.'

They shook hands and hugged each other again.

Some Javanese men and Sea-People or *Orang Laut* who had sneaked into Temasik walked to the guest palace later one night. They had heard about Parameswara who had arrived on the island, and they wanted to consult with him over some long-standing issues. They were people who supported him and wanted to help him to overthrow the Siamese representative on the island. They were discreet. They were summoned by Perpatih Besar to have an audience with Parameswara. So, they rowed in their boats from *Belakang Mati* where they lived. It literally translates as Dead Zone. It is a group of islands south of Temasik where laws introduced by Tamogi in Temasik didn't apply, where he was looked with contempt.

The Sea-People and Javanese chiefs looked like they were trying to hide from somebody. All wore dark-colored clothes so that they could be hidden in the darkness; only their footsteps made some noise as they walked. Otherwise, nobody would know if they were there or not. They purposely told Parameswara they wanted to go there at such an ungodly hour in order to hide themselves under the cover of darkness so as not to create suspicion amongst Tamogi's men.

Once they got to the fort, they were quickly ushered inside the palace. The lights were purposely were not lit to welcome them. Perpatih Besar walked ahead of them to show the way. 'This way, sirs.' They passed a few corridors and went straight to a vacant room. They sat on the floor that was laid with a large *mengkuang* mat to await Parameswara's arrival. Few boxes of betel leaf or *sireb* apparatus were laid before them. But, none of them had the desire to eat the *sireb*, as it was not proper to eat before the host came - more so when the host was none other than Parameswara himself. The Javanese men and Sea-People immediately stood up, when there was a sudden commotion outside

the room. They knew that Parameswara was approaching it, from the sounds of the loud footsteps that they were hearing.

A short while later, he entered the room. This was the first time the local chiefs saw him face-to-face and they were greatly impressed. Despite his age, he still looked gallant and taller than they were. He had stature. Parameswara shook everybody's hands by gripping them on the arms and sat cross-legged on the wooden floor. None of them dared to look at him in the eye. They stared down at the mat.

'Do sit down and make yourselves comfortable,' he said as he chewed on the betel leaves. 'Have some *sireb*. They have excellent betel leaves here in Temasik; certainly better than those that we had in Palembang or Majapahit - I can tell you that. And that's why we're here, to eat more of the local *sireb*.' He laughed at his own joke. The others just managed to smile. Parameswara knew he had to make everybody feel at ease, by not going straight to the point. His guests who were the local chiefs were awed with his presence and they were star-struck. He had so much presence that they thought he was a larger than life character. None, however, dared to look at him straight in the face. They only looked down on the mat. Some fiddled with their fingers and continued to chew the betel leaves quietly and spitting the saliva in the spittoon near them. The saliva was red in color like blood.

'Indeed, your highness,' chipped in Perpatih Besar since nobody commented on Parameswara's remarks. 'The weather here is especially kind to the betel plants. And the trouble we took to get here is certainly worth it.'

'But, it's not betel leaves that had made me want to remain here in Temasik, but something else,' chipped in Parameswara as he laughed at his own joke.

Perpatih Besar put out a small smile as a courtesy like the others, too. A person of his standing was not supposed to laugh loudly; all that he could do was to smile. 'Indeed, your highness.'

The others didn't laugh at the joke. They were fearful of Parameswara because he was prince from a much bigger country, whereas they were just village chiefs or *penghulus*. Besides, Parameswara had traveled a lot in the region, while they remained in their villages to look after the few hundred of its inhabitants. None of them had proper formal clothes to wear or medals to pin on their chests. Even their *kerises* were ordinary ones that were laid with precious stones like Parameswara's. Even Perpatih Besar's official *keris* looked expensive. Some of them were chiefs of a very small group of people, like the Sea-People for instance who looked after only around thirty people. Even then, most of them were children and not adults. Parameswara caught sight of some of the kids when they plunged into the sea completely naked as his ship

approached Temasik Island few days earlier. Whereas Palembang had a huge population and a political system that had been established for hundreds of years. On top of that, all the local chiefs had heard about Palembang and Parameswara long before he fled the country. So in more ways, his reputation was already established even before he came to Temasik.

Parameswara offered more betel leaves, and they chewed them, as it was the formality. No conversation could start without this ritual. He turned to look at each and every one of the faces; they looked the same, fearful and condescending. His late night guests continued to munch the betel leaves quietly; occasionally they'd spit in the spittoon to clear their throat. Their saliva was redder and thicker now than it was earlier. Each of them had a mouthful to chew, and because of that, they were not able to respond to Parameswara's comments. This also made it easier for Parameswara since they couldn't argue much with the betel leaf in their mouth. The leaves with it's acidic values made them feel slightly groggy. It was as if they hadn't eaten them before; just that having them late at night always soothed their frayed nerves and made them feel less hostile and jittery or nervous. Because of that, Parameswara had made it sure that they came to see him only at such ungodly hour, too. It was also the Perpatih Besar's idea so that Tamogi was not aware of the scheme they were planning to undertake.

'Do we have your support, gentleman?' said Parameswara in a terse fashion, without mincing his words, except for the betel leaves. He decided to go straight to the point after he thought he had made everybody there feel at ease. 'We want to seize power from Tamogi. He's Siamese; he's not one of us. He's a total stranger to this island and region. And strangers don't belong here. He shouldn't be ruling Temasik.'

He knew the men were very much in support of him for Tamogi from Temasik. Otherwise, he would not have invited them to come to the palace to see him, if they were not. But there was no one brave enough who could lead the pack. They, too, didn't like his presence, and had wanted to eject him from the island, but they didn't have the courage to do it themselves. Now with himself there, they were encouraged to drive out Tamogi from Temasik, once and for all. They had had enough of him. Above all, they didn't like any Siamese presence on the island. They felt Parameswara had come to Temasik at the right time, as though he had fallen down from the skies. It was also at a time when Tamogi's position on the island was becoming too entrenched and less shaky as it was before, when he first got here. They feared if nothing was done to evict Tamogi from the island, the likelihood of him being expelled in the near future would be bleaker and bleaker as the days went by. More so

when were rumors that Tammaraja II was said to be embarking on his first official visit there soon. If this were to happen, Temasik would remain as part of the kingdom of Siam until the end of time. The Javanese and Sea-People would then not have anymore future there. The local rulers thought Parameswara was the only person who was able to unite the people of Temasik. He together with all the local chiefs could form a force to inflict severe damage on the tight grips of Tamogi in Temasik.

'Yes, your highness. We are delighted to be of service to you. All the Javanese here are in complete agreement that we must seek the total destruction of Siamese control of Temasik. We've had enough of them,' said the Javanese leader.

'And you, leader of the Sea-People? What do I hear from you? Tell me,' said Parameswara. 'Say anything so that I will know what the feelings of your people are. And do tell me so truthfully, as your life is not in any harm from us and the skies won't fall on your people.'

The leader of the Sea-People was very much assured by the confidence that Parameswara had shown, more so when it was said in the presence of the other chiefs. 'We, too, are of the same opinion as our Javanese friends. We also long for Temasik to be back in the hands of the Malays,' he then replied.

'Very well, I'm pleased with your support. We will launch an attack on Tamogi at noon and surprise him. There shall be no further delay. We have got to do it now lest the prince catches wind of what we plan to do to him,' said Parameswara. He then turned to Perpatih Besar. 'My dear Seri, prepare all our men and make sure all of them are equipped to the teeth. We shall see success here in Temasik, at long last. We shall not repeat all our past mistakes in Palembang or Majapahit. Understand? Take note of that.'

'Yes, your highness. Tamogi and his men will be in for some surprise themselves, your highness,' replied Perpatih Besar.

They laughed.

'If that's the case, we'd better take our leave, your highness. We need to make preparations and inform our men,' said the Javanese leader.

'We too have to beg permission to leave, your highness,' said the Sea-People chief. 'We need to inform all our men about this.'

They stood up. He shook Parameswara's hand and hugged him. 'Very well, we'll walk with you to the door then. And one more thing...'

The leaders stopped. They turned around. 'What is it, your highness?' asked one of the chiefs.

Parameswara kept quiet. Everybody waited. Parameswara knew how to keep them in suspense.



'What is it, your highness?' asked the Sea-People chief.

'Does everybody promise to keep what we've discussed here within our own selves and nobody shall pry it from our hearts?'

Everybody nodded.

'Oh, yes, certainly, your highness,' said the local chiefs almost in unison.

'Good, good.'

Tamogi went hunting with Parameswara in the woods early next morning like they had done on many occasions previously. His senior officers were not there, but elsewhere. They didn't want to be near him because they didn't want to frighten the animals. Besides, Tamogi always liked to hunt by himself or with his guest, Parameswara. This was their private moment together away from protocol, so they could feel at ease with each other. He turned around and wondered, 'Why is your highness taking me deep in the woods? Don't you think we should turn around? Or, we'll lose our way. Besides, it's already getting late.' He forced himself to smile because he wanted the statement to be a query and not an order.

'We've some business with you, my dear Tamogi,' said Parameswara politely.

'Business? I think we'd better return to the palace then, if that's the case. And we can have some fruits and coconut water.'

'No, that won't be necessary. We can settle it here. Right now!'

'How?'

Parameswara immediately drew his *keris*. Tamogi became frightened. He didn't know what Parameswara wanted to do with the weapon. 'Here take this.' He trusted the *keris* in Tamogi's stomach. He fell to the ground. His eyes remained wide opened. He was shocked that Parameswara could've done such a thing to him.

'Help, help! Guards, guards!' screamed Tamogi as his voice diminished as he fell to the side. He then froze and died in a pool of blood with both his hands still clutching his stomach.

Tamogi's guards heard his cries. They tried to rush to his aid. But, Parameswara's men who were with them stopped them back. 'Wait! You're all surrounded!' shouted Parameswara's guards. They knew what was happening. Parameswara had killed Tamogi. His men started to attack Parameswara's men. And they fought hard. Many of Tamogi's men were killed; others badly injured. Parameswara's men only suffered few casualties. In no time, the whole ambush was over and Tamogi's rule in Temasik had thus ended.

Parameswara went to the verandah of Tamogi's palace. He saw hundreds of Temasik men and women standing outside. They were Malays, Javanese and

some Sea-People. The few Siamese officials from Tamogi's palace had fled into the jungle, fearing their lives and personal safety. Others were assembled there because word had spread throughout the island that Parameswara had assassinated Tamogi whom they, too, had despised badly. They were delighted with the news. Initially everybody thought it was just a rumor. Only later, their respective chiefs informed them indeed that Tamogi had died, in the hands of Parameswara.

Perpatih Besar and the other officials were with him. They were all smiling widely and feeling happy and satisfied at the job well executed. They were surprised that the late Tamogi's men didn't manage to put on a fight. All of them were eliminated within a very short period. Food that their assistants had was contaminated and spiked with poison. It made them groggy and weak. This resulted in all of them not knowing what was really happening and their reactions were slow and tardy. On the other hand, Parameswara's men had received blessings from their high priests and other shamans such as the *bomobs*, *dukuns* and *pawang*s. They were also given special amulets or *tangkal*s that they wore around their wrists and waists to ward off bad luck. On top of that they had also spent almost an hour in a trance so they could use supernatural forces to further help them by chanting holy verses to strengthen their resolve and taut their muscles. Many believed that even if the enemies' *kenses* or spears were hurled at them, their bodies wouldn't take them in; they'd skip off their skins.

'I want all of you to hear this: Tamogi, the Siamese puppet has been eliminated and destroyed! His soul is now roaming around aimlessly in the jungles. Soon, it will inhabit some trees and stay there. He will be totally harmless, because our men have cast a spell on his soul. I am now the rightful ruler of the island Temasik. And from now on, Temasik will be called *Singapura*. My ancestor, Sang Nila Utama who founded this island saw a lion in the jungles yesterday, and he named this country after it. Remember the new name of this country - Singapura or the city of lions!' said Parameswara on top of his voice. 'Temasik has now ceased to exist in this world altogether! Clear the name off your minds.'

'Long live Parameswara, ruler of Singapura!' shouted Perpatih Besar.

'Long live Parameswara, ruler of Singapura!' the people repeated loudly. They turned around and hugged each other. Parameswara waved his hand and smiled widely.

'Long live Parameswara, ruler of Singapura!' repeated Perpatih Besar.

'Long live Parameswara, ruler of Singapura!'

The Malays on the island were ecstatic; Temasik had fallen barely eight days after Parameswara had landed there. It was now called Singapura, a name that was used by the people before the Siamese turned it to Temasik.

A messenger from Singapura rode his horse at a fast pace through the woods, in the dead of the night with his clothes all drenched with sweat. It was four years after Parameswara had ruled Singapura before the Siamese there could consolidate their positions and decided to act on him.

The messenger had just rushed through the torrential rain, and because that he was soaked to the skin. He could have stopped and seek shelter under some trees or in the caves in Hujung Tanah, but he didn't want to have any of it. His only worry was to get to the palace of the Siamese ruler, Tammaraja II in Ayutthaya in the far north of the peninsula as soon as he possibly could. He was assigned to go on a mission to deliver an important note from the late Tamogi's senior officers. They wanted to inform the Tammaraja II of what had happened to Tamogi, their official representative to Temasik. Mostly, they wanted to make him angry. They wanted him to rush men to Temasik and destroy Parameswara before he started to establish his own personal empire there. They feared if help couldn't come immediately, Parameswara could consolidate and stabilize his position there. If this happened it was more difficult for the Siamese to wrest control of the island, which they had dominated for many decades.

Tamogi's senior officers were now hiding deep in the woods in the island. They were safe there, as Parameswara's men did not know the whereabouts of their hideout.

The messenger continued to ride through the woods in the peninsula. In all he took more than two week to ride through some of the most torturous jungle treks, he could ever imagine before he could get to the Siamese border. From there he still had to cover some more distance before he could see the pointed roofs of the royal Siamese palace. He kicked the sides of his horse furiously and it rushed ahead. He knew what he was doing to his horse was cruel, but he had no choice. And before long, he arrived in Ayutthaya in the kingdom of Siam. He also realized how shabby and haggard he looked. He told himself to unrumple his clothes and comb back his hair when he got near the palace. He didn't want to look awful, especially when he was going to be in the company of the Siamese ruler and other senior palace officials. The crown prince Sailutha might even be there as he always did.

The guards realized who he was and noticed Tamogi's official seal on the horse and they immediately flung open the gates wide to allow him to enter.

without being forced to slow down his horse. He knew he was in such great haste, because he had been here many times before on other important and pressing official errands on behalf of the Siamese ruler or the crown prince. They didn't stop him even when he looked inappropriate with his hair disheveled and clothes unkempt. Even his horse had mud covered at its hoofs and legs.

The messenger was then led by a court official through a series of corridors to be brought before Tammaraja II who was called *San Lai Bo Ma Lan Zbe Di* by the Chinese. He had his royal palace in their capital city of Ayutthaya. The Siamese ruler was with his eldest son, the crown prince Sailutha. 'I want you to go on a trip to Temasik and see what is happening to Tamogi. He he's not been sending any news. I worry for his safety.'

'Why must his safety be an issue, father?' said the Sailutha.

'There are people who might not favor his presence, especially amongst the Javanese and Sea-People or *Orang Laut*. We don't know what they're thinking of. Besides, we haven't been able to convince the people to support us. They are totally ungrateful to everything we've done to them. I want to know what has gone wrong, and what's not right. We need to address the problems and solve them, before they become too big and uncontrollable.'

'What do you want me to do there, my dear father?'

'...To ask if he is comfortable in Temasik...if there's anything he needs to make it easier for him to succeed in his mission. If he says, he's not, then I'd suggest that you relieve him of his duties and replace him with somebody else whom we think can do the job and perform his duties well. I've something for him to do here in case if he wishes to return. Besides, he's been there for quite a while now.'

Sailutha thought. All the questions his father had put to him were loaded ones. There was no way that he could answer any of them convincingly. And he didn't want to hazard a guess. He felt he was still very much a greenhorn in matters that related to international politics. He would rather stay in the palace to be with his father so he could learn from him on how to go about performing official state duties that would be useful to him in future. This was to ensure that when the time came for him to ascend the throne, he'd be fully prepared to handle all the tasks as the king of Siam. He hardly knew Temasik and who were the people that they were dominating there.

'Well, what do you think?' asked his father.

Sailutha didn't have the opportunity to reply. Just then, a palace official entered the room. He appeared at the door and dutifully sat on the floor outside of the door that was left ajar.

'Forgive me, your majesty and your highness. There's a messenger from Temasik who has come with an urgent message from his highness Tamogi,' announced the court official.

What could it be, they both thought. They knew that something wasn't right because they were only expecting for a messenger from Temasik to arrive there only after the rainy season and not during that time. They turned. They were surprised that there was indeed a messenger who had just arrived from the island. They just couldn't believe their eyes when they saw him kneeling there on the floor, with his clothes drenched; what more when they were just discussing about Tamogi and Temasik, and came in a messenger from there. Oh, what a coincidence? From messenger's face registered a bewildered look. The ruler and his son knew something was indeed wrong with the prince.

'Where's he from, did he say exactly?' asked the ruler.

'He says he's from Temasik.'

'Send him in. Crown prince Sailutha and I were just talking about Tamogi in Temasik. What a sheer coincidence! Could it be a good omen? This is amazing.' He hoped the messenger had some wonderful news to share, but from the looks on his face, he wasn't sure.

The court official moved back. He didn't dare to make a guess and the messenger had not told him of it. He moved aside to allow the messenger to come closer, while the ruler and his son waited anxiously.

'Here's an urgent message from the late his highness Raja Tamogi's senior officer,' said the messenger in Siamese. But, his pronunciation was not perfect. The reason being that he was a Malay man from the Malay states in the north, which were dominated by the Siamese kingdom for ages. The people there spoke Siamese as well as Malay and they spoke it in a thick Malay accent. It didn't bother the ruler and his son. They were used to it. They were shocked with the brief message that informed them that their representative in Temasik had died.

'The late Tamogi? What do you mean?' asked the ruler. 'Did he die? How did it happen? Tell me!' He was shocked. He hoped that nothing awful had happened to Tamogi. May be he died of a disease.

The messenger then handed the written message to the ruler. He took it. It was written in Siamese. It was brief and straight to the point. In fact, it's casualness surprised the ruler, who didn't expect for his men to send in such a hastily-written letter that looked more like a personal and friendly note. What was written was scribbled and not properly written with a pen. Tamogi's official seal, however, was stamped on it so the ruler didn't doubt its authenticity. Besides, he had seen the messenger at his palace few times before

with other messages from Tamogi. However, unlike the latest message, the others had been warm and cordial; they described about the things that he had done to Temasik that made the ruler happy.

The person who had written the message was a senior officer of Tamogi whom the ruler had known. The ruler didn't think that he had committed *lese majesty* because obviously he didn't have the leisure of producing a more presentable note. Bearing the circumstances, he and the other senior officers were in then, he supposed the ruler could excuse him for his personal discretion. It was just to confirm what the messenger had said. The late Tamogi's senior officer didn't want to send a lengthy letter. They just wanted to inform the Siamese ruler of the prince's assassination in the hands of the ruthless Parameswara. And they wanted the ruler to send in men to crush Parameswara and to drive him and his men away from the island of Temasik. They despised him for calling it Singapura and they wanted to chase him away before his position on the island became too entrenched and firm. More so, before the Malays, Javanese and Sea-People had started to show their full support for him. The short note was mainly to make Tammaraja II angry, very angry - mad if possible! Tamogi's senior officer had deliberately wanted their king to jump out of his chair and curse the person who had killed Tamogi, but it didn't much to the surprise of the messenger. 'He was killed mercilessly by...' he said. However, before he could finish his sentence, the ruler interrupted him. 'By whom? Who the devil did it? Tell me so I can strangle him with both my hands.'

'By his highness Parameswara, the runaway prince from Palembang.'

'Damned him! It's him again. Didn't he do something similar in Palembang and Majapahit? He'll get it from me this time! You watch out, Parameswara! Mark my word!'

'What does it say, father?' asked Sailutha.

Tammaraja II continued to read the letter. He then crumpled it. 'Your brother-in-law, Tamogi is dead and his senior officer is asking our help to avenge his death. Parameswara must pay for his misdeeds!' he said as he gritted his teeth and clenched both his fists. He then held his right hand on the sword that was tied to his waist.

'Who, dear father?'

'Parameswara! The runaway prince from Palembang in Andalas, er...Sumatra. Parameswara. Do remember his name well. He might appear even in your dreams from now on and turned them into your nightmare. It is an awful name, but his behavior is much worse. Just from where did he

acquire that peculiar personality trait; whereas all his ancestors since Sang Nila Utama were had all been cordial and nice to us?

The crown prince shook his head in disbelief. 'Indeed, father. It's such a strange name, but I'll remember it until the day I die. Each time I pray I'll make sure I pray that he'll perish from this earth! May he burn in hell-fire!'

'I want you to go to Temasik, and bring along five hundred of our most able men with the new weapons in our armory. I want you to seek the total destruction of Parameswara and annihilate him from the island and earth. He mustn't be let off. Nobody knows what evil deeds will he be doing next! He'll get worse and worse everyday. But, you don't have to produce his severed head. Suffice if he's dead; it'll be good enough for me. What he'd done just cannot be tolerated, and he must pay for his crime. Didn't he know that Temasik was under us? Didn't Parameswara know that Tamogi was our official representative in Temasik?

'And on the way there, I want you to stop and get help from our Malay allies in Pattani and Pahang. They'll be able to assist you because they too, are Malays, like Parameswara and those people in Temasik themselves. But they are under us and they are not especially fond of Parameswara either.'

'I'll do as ordered, my dear father.'

'Be careful, my son. That Parameswara fellow can be mean. I'm sure he'll ensure that his position in Temasik is safe and he won't stop to do anything within his means to defend his position there.'

'I will.'

Sailutha hugged his father and went off.

'I shall return to Temasik now, your majesty,' said the messenger.

'Yes, but inform the senior officers who are still there in Temasik that help is coming soon. I shall pray for their safety. As for Tamogi, do convey my condolence to his widow and all his children. Tell them also that my son, the crown prince of Siam himself is coming over to Temasik. He will lead the army to crush Parameswara and his men,' said Tamamaraja III.

'Very well.' The messenger bowed down at the ruler and moved back. He shook his head in disbelief.

'Damned it, Parameswara!' cursed the Siamese ruler. He hit his desk hard with a fist; it shook everything that stood on it. He looked very angry. He then glanced out of the palace and saw the messenger riding out of the palace compound and leaving a cloud of dust in its wake rushing as fast as when he had arrived there.

Sailutha of Siam marched with his men through the jungles of Hujung Tanah. This was the first time he had ever gone this far south in the peninsula. He brought along reinforcement from Pattani and Pahang, and together they went to Temasik, with just one aim, to seek the destruction of Parameswara and to reclaim Temasik for Siam. There must be more than a thousand soldiers of various ranks. They were carrying all sorts of weapons in their hands. They spend a month trekking through the woods before reaching the Straits of Tebrau that divided the peninsula and Temasik. They rowed in boats to cross it before arriving on the shores of Temasik Island. They then marched right up to the main entrance of palace.

Parameswara's guards stopped Sailutha when they sensed that the foreigners were not smiling, as if they had come with a lot of hatred in their hearts. The crown prince's face especially looked scary to them. They were surprised to see such a large group of people all dressed for war and were brandishing all sorts of weapons. Many of them were Malays from Pattani and Pahang whom they could distinguish from the Siamese soldiers and officers.

'Who are you? Nobody's allowed inside the palace of his majesty Parameswara, the ruler of Singapura,' said the guard.

'I have no appointment. I'm here to kill him! Go away! Move aside!' said the crown prince.

The guard was shocked. He tried to stop him by closing the door, but Sailutha pushed him aside and his men kicked the door until it broke open and fell to the ground. The guard fell together with the door while trying to hold it from being rammed by the Siamese. He was shocked. 'Help, help!' screamed the guard.

More guards from the palace rushed to the gate. Sailutha trusted his dagger into his chest and he died in a pool of blood that flowed out of a gaping wound. 'Attack!' shouted the crown prince. He and his soldiers then barged inside the palace compound. Few of Parameswara's men tried to attack them, but they were instantly killed. Sailutha and his men entered the palace. They tore down the windows and door and entered inside the palace. They immediately went on a wild rampage and killed whoever was standing in their way. They continued to attack Parameswara's men. Many of the Malays were killed while the Siamese suffered few casualties.

Parameswara was resting in bed in Tamogi's former bedroom and treating like his own. 'What's the commotion outside, dear?' he asked. He thought his men were exercising the art of war in the compound of the palace. 'What's all the noise? Can't they practice away from the palace so that I can have a proper rest?'



'It doesn't sound like our men were practicing, dear,' said his wife, Dewi Puteri.

'Why don't you peep outside of the windows and see what is happening outside, dear.'

Dewi Puteri walked to the window and peeped outside. To her horror, she saw soldiers wearing different uniforms than their men attacking Parameswara's men. The Siamese crown prince's men continued to attack the palace guards. Many dead bodies lay on the ground, with patches of blood everywhere. 'We're being attacked! They look like Siamese. There're some Malays, too,' she shrieked. 'What's happening now?'

Parameswara immediately woke up. He sprang onto his feet and immediately rushed to the windows. Just then, Perpatih Besar opened the door at the other side of the room. He looked worried and scared. 'Hurry, your highness; the Siamese forces are taking over the palace! We must go now! This way! They'll be here anytime now.'

Parameswara grabbed his *keris* and ran out of the room with his wife. Perpatih Besar followed behind them with his *keris* in his hand together with a few palace guards.

Singapura fell to the Siamese forces very quickly, five years after Parameswara had killed Tamogi and ruled the island-state. There was no actual resistance from Parameswara's men. They were not fully equipped to defend Singapura or the fort because they were not familiar with the island. He and his followers quickly fled the palace and fort by way of the north exit that led them to the jungles. He led his soldiers and followers and trekked up north towards the peninsula of Hujung Tanah. They used another route in order to avoid having to face the Siamese. Parameswara's mind was not on Temasik anymore, but on his personal safety. He hoped that he could run as far away from the palace as possible.

They continued to trek through the thick jungle before reaching Seletar by nightfall. There, they quickly set up tents to rest for the night. Parameswara rested under a makeshift tent in the middle of the camp. The night was still, but his heart was pounding heavily. He was lucky to have escaped to Seletar with his men and followers and whatever that they could take with them where they rested for the night.

Perpatih Besar went to him. He cursed his bad luck. He thought Parameswara was fortunate enough to be able to wrest control of Temasik from the Siamese, unfortunately it fell back into their hands. He knew Parameswara had visions of turning the island into a major trading post. He

also wanted to develop it as his eternal country. But it was not to be. He cursed the gods for his spate of bad luck.

'What's the latest news from the palace, Seri?' asked Parameswara half-heartedly. He wasn't in a good mood to be cheerful. He asked the question almost without any emotion as if he could already guess the answer. He didn't think that he could get an answer that thrilled him. He was expecting for the worst possible answer from the court.

'Very bad, your highness. The Siamese forces under the crown prince are now controlling it. Many of our men have died and I'm afraid, all the Malays and Sea-People who had sided with us have been rounded up. Nobody knows what the future holds for them now; I only fear for the worst.'

Parameswara totally disregarded the answer. He wanted to put Temasik aside and think of what course of action could he take from then on. Temasik was now history, and he didn't even want to mention that name again. It was done away with! He's a goner - a has-been! There was no way that he could launch a counter attack and recapture it from the Siamese. He was certain the Siamese now wanted to safeguard the island and didn't take things for granted anymore like they did before.

'How many do we have here with us?'

'Just a thousand, together with the other Malays and new supporters from Singapura who could not remain there, your highness.'

'What luck has befallen me? In Temasik, er...excuse me, Singapura. Even when I'm the ruler, yet I can still be deposed! Where are we to go from here?' asked Parameswara himself. He sulked. But, whose problem was it that caused the island to revert to Siamese rule, he asked himself, not wanting to share his thoughts with anyone. 'We'll rest here for the night, your highness. And tomorrow morning, we'll cross the straits to Hujung Tanah. Will similar fate await us in Singapura as we experienced in Palembang and Majapahit then?'

Perpatih Besar kept quiet. He hoped not. He dared not answer him. However, he hoped that Parameswara had learnt some valuable lessons from both the episodes, in Majapahit and Singapura, and was now a much wiser person. It was always difficult for him despite their strong rapport, to give Parameswara any kind of strong advice these days. Although the count was his own uncle, still he couldn't do anything. Parameswara was a strong-willed person who believed that the destiny of his people lied in his hands. He trusted in his own judgment. At the most, he would consult the fortune-tellers and high priests; they were the ones who could tell him if anything wanted to do was done on an auspicious day and time! But, he later became more confident with himself that he often refused to be advised, even by his own trusted

officer, Perpatih Besar, who had stood with him since they were back in Palembang.

In fact, they grew up together and Perpatih Besar knew Parameswara more than anyone else did. This was what he thought, anyway. The time they had spent together on the run from Palembang to Majapahit and Temasik had brought both of them closer together. Yet, at times the count found Parameswara to be a total stranger. There was no way for him to read his mind anymore. He had a way of disregarding him by not showing it. And being a senior official, the count couldn't do much except to accept the fact that his station in life forced him not to violate their different roles. If Perpatih Besar had his way, he'd surely want to advise Parameswara to stay put at a place where they were away from any harm, and lived the remaining days of their lives in peace. They had been to few places before but none pleased Parameswara. He seemed to be fickle-minded about which place to choose to found a new country. The count took into consideration the fact that they had been on the run for far too long and there were so many women and children with them. They surely couldn't stand the trekking that they had to make through the thick jungles, especially the mosquito bites that could prove fatal. Parameswara, on the other hand, thought only of his self-interests. He didn't have a concept of the wider picture, seeing only what lay immediately in front of him and nothing beyond it. In the vast space ahead of him, the only thing that he could see was perhaps, his passionate desire to found his own country so that his name could be imprinted with it and his name remembered. He had this intense desire to prove to himself and to himself alone, that he could do it. He wanted to prove to his brother, now the fifth ruler of Palembang and those officers who were with him, who thought he was not going to survive should he leave Palembang. How wrong they were, thought Parameswara as he trekked through the thick jungles of Hujung Tanah with his followers and officials.

'I will prove to all of them that one day I will be the ruler of my own country,' Parameswara said to himself repeatedly, like a *mantra*, each time when was faced with the uncertainties and anxieties. 'Mark my word, dear brother! You just mark my word! I will prove to you that I deserve to be a ruler. It's not my loss that I had to flee from Palembang; but it's the loss of the kingdom and the people of Palembang!' He repeated the statement again and again, with his lips trembling. It was therapy to him. What the potions that the high priests and other medicine men and shamans who had followed him couldn't do, the mantra that he repeated again and again was able, to soothe his frayed nerves and calmed down his senses. It even helped to numb the pain that he often felt

in his thighs and body. More than that, it was also able to lighten his load off his shoulders and cleared his mind of his immediate problems.

Parameswara didn't keep it a secret to anyone that he wanted to prove to himself that he had the cut to be a ruler. He thought he was denied to be a ruler once in Palembang so it was now his ambition to find his own country. But this strategy had proven to be a total failure so far. He had wanted to capture Majapahit, but failed. And the second time he had succeeded in wresting control of Temasik and even changed its name to Singapura; unfortunately, few years, he had to leave the island.

## CHAPTER 2: THE MELAKA TREE

*Selat Tebrau* or the Straits of Tebrau, which was known to the people in Temasik, separates the island of Temasik and Johor. It stands between the southernmost tip of the Hujung Tanah or the Malay Peninsula and the island. Legend had it that the island was once a part of the peninsula, but it somehow broke apart, after two demons fought with each other. The minor demon had to settle for a piece that they decided to carve from the peninsula. For a long while there was relative peace in the island, until people started to go and settle there.

Parameswara and his men continued to trek through the jungles of Temasik. He was now back on the road, after staying put in Singapura for five years during which time he ruled the island. The Malays there liked his rule and didn't give him problems, except for the Siamese who were senior officials of the late Tamogji who had conspired to overthrow him. Now five years later, they were successful. Parameswara was trounced and Singapura had fallen back to them.

For five hours, Parameswara and his followers and men trekked through the dense jungles until they arrived at the beach on the northernmost part of the island. They had to traverse through jungles that hadn't been trampled by humans before, except for wild animals. They prayed that the demons and spirits that inhabited in the island didn't cause any harm to them. They had to stop few times along the way to offer their greetings and blessings to these spirits and demons. They had to offer food and fruits, which they laid underneath giant trees and boulders that they were certain, were the places

where they lived. Because he had a large number of followers, close to one thousand men, women and children with him, many of whom were mostly armed, the beasts stayed clear of him; so did the demons and spirits. They also had to cut through thick bushes to make a path for them to move further north. When they had passed by that road, some of the men closed it with twigs and leaves, in order to cover their tracks. They wanted to be sure that Tamogi's men could not track them. On many occasions small groups of his men purposely trekked at different parts in order to confuse whoever was following them. These false paths normally ended at dead-end. Here the men dug huge holes and covered them with leaves, grass and twigs, so those who took these roads would fall into the ground, thus be buried alive and never to be seen again. Sharp-pointed bamboo spikes called *buluh rencong* were stuck at the bottom of these holes. They would pierce through those who fell in them. Slaughtered animal meat was then dumped into the holes to attract the wild beasts, such as lions and tigers that could smell them from a far distance. In this way, they quickly devoured those who were injured.

When they finally arrived on the beach on the northernmost tip of the island of Temasik, they were dead tired. But, they continued to trek on, as their lives were constantly in grave danger, until they could see from the beach Hujung Tanah. They felt a huge relief.

Parameswara had spent in all three years in Singapura during which time, his wife gave birth to a baby boy. It was also here where he had sat on the *Singabsana* or Lion-Throne from where he ruled the island. And it was here that his first grandson had married a princess from the Chola dynasty.

He was also forced to flee from Singapura because he heard that the Javanese had planned to continue to attack him there. They had unsuccessfully attacked him once earlier when he was still in Majapahit. The Javanese were supporters and soldiers from the ruler of Majapahit, Hayam Wuruk whom Parameswara had tried to kill few years before. Now they wanted to seek revenge by killing Parameswara, instead, for what he'd done while there. Although he was the brother-in-law of the Hayam Wuruk, he still saw it fit to kill his successor in order that he could wrest control of the kingdom.

The Malay Peninsula was a welcome sight despite its inhospitable conditions. It was covered with thick foliage, much thicker than in Temasik, with its shores not having been trampled by any human being, saved for wild animals that came out mostly at night. There were few crocodiles on the beach, but they scurried for their lives when they smelled too many men approaching them, and remained in the water. Some of Parameswara's men shot some arrows to chase them away from the beach on the southernmost tip

of the peninsula, where they were at, each time these creatures reappeared from the bushes or sea where they were hiding.

'It'd be good if we can offer those crocodiles some goat meat,' suggested Parameswara. 'Offer some prayers and blessings to their gods, too. We can save our arrows in this way.'

'Good idea, your highness,' said Perpatih Besar. 'I'll order the men to kill some goats and offer them.' He went away and approached some of his men. He told them what Parameswara had ordered and they quickly slaughtered some wild goats and cut them into pieces. They then threw the meat on the beach in Temasik and brought some to be thrown on the beach on the Malay Peninsula. He then went to the high priests and ordered them to chant and offer some prayers to the gods of the crocodiles. They immediately did as ordered, as their own lives, too, were in danger from these creatures. They rang small bells and chanted until night fell. For once, Parameswara was worried that their journey through the peninsula was not going to be easy. All this while he and his men had only sailed in ships to cross the straits of Melaka to get to Majapahit and later to Temasik; now he had to transverse the thick jungles that held many more problems.

Sailing wasn't quite a problem, since the elements were predictable, compared to those on land. In the sea, they might be less demons and evil spirits; but in the jungles every big tree, boulder, or even hill posed a problem for them. Despite that, he still ordered his men to row across the Straits of Tebrau to go to the *Malay Peninsula*, because they simply had no choice. They didn't have any time to build ships or boats to sail along the coast. All the boats that they had were those that his men had made on the beach with wood from the trees. His men had to work day and night because if they didn't do that, sooner or later, the Siamese would be there to hunt them down and to seek revenge. As long as they remained on the island, their safety was not assured.

'We can't remain here forever, Seri,' said Parameswara. 'We must leave Temasik and go to the Malay Peninsula. We won't be safe here. The Siamese must be following our footsteps and are coming towards us, I'm sure of that. They are intent on bringing my severed head back to Temasik.'

'Very well, your highness.'

'Come.'

They then sailed in small boats and crossed the Straits of Tebrau. Not long later, they reached in the middle of the straits and were halfway to the peninsula. Sailutha rushed to the beach with his men to try to get at them, but Parameswara and his followers had already left the shore. They were now

rowing in many boats in the middle of the straits. Fortunately, the tide was flowing in the direction of the peninsula; this helped them to move faster to cross the straits. He continued to stare unblinkingly at Parameswara as his boat sailed towards the peninsula. He gritted his teeth and cursed himself for getting there too late. Had he arrived there in time, he could get Parameswara. He wanted to sever his head and brought it back to Temasik to be produced for the people to see. Many of them had their relatives and friends killed by his men; so there was more than one reason why he badly wanted to possess Parameswara's severed head! But, he was too late; Parameswara was halfway to the Malay Peninsula. The crown prince figured he didn't stand any chance if he decided to give chase. It was to his disadvantage now, since Parameswara was too far ahead. Soon, they were going to land on the beach and disappear in the jungles to their safety - and away from harm and Sailutha's men.

'Here they are!' he said to his men who were standing beside him. This was the first time they were seeing him face-to-face. Other than that, they had only heard his name and known his reputation. Sailutha was surprised to see that Parameswara was not as young as he was. He was in the mid-fifties - quite an old man by any standards. But, he looked younger than his age. His saving grace was that he had a pleasant face and looked quite dignified. So, how could he be so mean? What could have possibly driven him to the extremes? Why was he not contented with living in Palembang? All these questions confused Sailutha. What more, being a devout Hindu prince from Palembang, Parameswara should know better. What he had done to Tamogi was despicable; it was horrendous and totally inhumane. He deserved to be executed if they could arrest him before he managed to catch wind of the Siamese impending attack on Temasik. To them, Parameswara was evil personified; a sub-human, thought the crown prince.

He and his men continued to stare at Parameswara as he escaped to the peninsula. He hoped by some divine intervention, a strong gush of wind would blow Parameswara off his boat, but it didn't happen. He shook his head violently. He was angry with himself for arriving there late. He blamed his men for taking the wrong routes where they lost their way on few occasions. He ignored the fact that some of his own men suffered serious casualties on their way there. He had ordered his other men to leave them behind because there was no way that they could be saved. True enough the wild beasts appeared as soon as they left the men. And they devoured all the wounded Siamese and other Pahang and Pattani soldiers. Their bones and bits of their skulls were strewn in the jungles. It was a gruesome sight. If the Siamese crown prince passed that way again and saw them, he'd definitely vomit or even faint. He'd

definitely put the blame on Parameswara again for trapping his men and allowing them to be exposed to such barbaric acts.

He didn't blame the wild animals, for they were just animals. They didn't care a hoot what they were attacking or eating. All that they wanted was meat to eat. He'd have personally clobbered Parameswara's head and take it to the public square for the people of Temasik to see and to spit on if he could get his hands on him. This was how angry he was. Sailutha consoled himself by saying that now since Parameswara, the lowly prince, and his band of thugs, as he described them, had left and how Temasik would be at peace again with him banished from the island. They only had to worry now on how to give the late Tamogi a royal burial on the island, befitting his status as the ruler of Temasik. Sailutha also made sure the name *Singapura* was ever uttered in his presence. He only wanted to perpetuate the name, Temasik, and not Singapura as what Parameswara had wanted to call it.

'What do we do, your highness?' asked a senior officer respectfully. He knew it was improper for him to distract the crown prince from his thoughts, but he had to since everybody there was waiting for his next move. Besides Parameswara was now too far away and couldn't be seen clearly with the naked eye anymore.

'They are now halfway to the peninsula. There's no way that we can get them now. They're too far now, your highness,' said a senior officer.

'We can still catch up with them.'

'It will be useless. He'll get to the shores by the time we get our own boats. He will quickly disappear in the jungles over there; we won't be able to track him and his men down. Some of our men have died on the way to get here, your highness.'

'I feel very sorry for those who died. Please convey my heartfelt condolences to their immediate families. Tell their wives, parents and children that the men didn't die in vain; they died in the defense of Siam!'

'Very true, your majesty.' The senior officer turned to his men. 'We turn and return to Temasik, now!'

'Men.'

'Leave them alone,' chipped in Sailutha. He was referring to Parameswara and his men.

'But, your highness...' said the senior officer.

'Let them go wherever they want to go.'

'But.'

'Just make sure they do not return, or we'll make sure their heads be severed from their body. And I will personally bring them with me for my



father to see with his own eyes. I will have them stuck on a spike and display them at the road junction for everybody to see.'

Parameswara and his men turned to look at the crown prince who was still standing on the beach. 'That must be the crown prince from Siam.'

'Where?'

'Turn around.'

Perpatih Besar turned around and saw the Siamese crown prince standing on the beach on the island of Temasik. 'He looks like a tiger, I should say.'

'Just a pub...' corrected Parameswara.

They laughed.

'A pub hardly has claws that he could use to scratch even his mother's back,' added Perpatih Besar.

They laughed louder.

'Yes, your highness. He's the Siamese crown prince all right,' said Perpatih Besar. 'Look at his face. He must be very angry with me.'

'What's his name?'

'No idea, your highness. Siamese names are difficult to pronounce; their names are not like ours.'

'Never mind. He's just a young boy. How angry and mean can he be? He's all fire without heat; all carbide without cannons. He still can't piss straight!'

The men laughed. This moment of levity gave them some well-needed respite from boredom, a diversion from their focus and attention. The laughter shook off the some of the fatigue that they had experienced. Perpatih Besar and the others laughed, too. They were surprised to hear Parameswara uttering such a joke. Apart from the lapse in protocol, Parameswara remained serious. He then waved his hand in the direction of Sailutha and then gave a mock salute. This made the crown prince annoyed as he thought Parameswara wanted to make fun of him.

'Send my regards to the ruler of Siam, my son,' shouted Parameswara. He and his men laughed. This made Sailutha more annoyed and angry. He knew they were laughing at his expense. He didn't expect Parameswara to continue taunting him after what he had done to Tamogi. He tried to contain his anger so that he didn't blow his top. He knew Parameswara was trying to provoke him and make him lose his temper. His officers looked at him.

'We get him now, your highness,' said the senior officer of Temasik to the crown prince.

'No, let him go off, let him go,' replied Sailutha. He then waved back at Parameswara and showed his fist that clutched a long sword. 'Don't ever come back, Parameswara, or this sword will welcome you!'

Parameswara ignored his threat. He just smiled and held his *keris* in the air as a show of defiance.

'Have a safe trip, Parameswara. And let me remind you that should you show your face here in Temasik again, I'll personally see to it that your head will be severed. And I will also make sure that it will be planted on a pole for everybody to see at the square,' shouted the crown prince. 'And may the wild beast in the jungles attack you! There're all there, you'll see.'

Parameswara just smiled. He completely ignored the young crown prince tirade; it sounded hollow and petty. Even if Parameswara and his men were to be devoured by the wild animals in the Malay Peninsula, there was no way for anyone to know about it.

'See you again.'

Sailutha became angrier if not immensely irritated at the sight of Parameswara and his men poking fun at him. 'Damned it! He's so good with words; there's no way that I can outsmart him.'

'We sure will.'

Parameswara waved at the crown prince until his boat reached the shore on the other side. His men quickly threw the goat meat at the places where they thought crocodiles would hide. Few of them reappeared from behind the bushes. They grabbed the meat, clamped them with their wide jaws, and disappeared back in the bushes, feeling satisfied with the unexpected meal. He and his men now felt safer now with all the wild crocodiles having been fed, since the coast was all clear of the reptiles and safe for them to land.

Some of Sailutha's men started to shoot arrows in the direction of Parameswara, but all were far too short; they fell in the straits.

'Enough! Don't be silly! Save the arrows for other occasions,' said the crown prince. 'Don't feed the sea with them. We need all the arrows that we still have left!' He took the lead and turned around. His men followed him back. Soon they disappeared into the jungles.

They returned to the palace feeling disappointed and angry that they couldn't lay their hands on Parameswara. But, they were happy just the same that they were able to kick Parameswara out of Temasik and recaptured the island, which was now back in the hands of the Siamese. Temasik was now better off without his presence.

Parameswara and his followers continued to trek through the woods as soon as they landed in the Malay Peninsula. He didn't want to take any risks by remaining there on the beach too long, as Sailutha might want to attack them when night fell. So, he decided to move on as far north as possible. They had to clear the jungles in order to pass through them. They were so thick that the

men had a difficult time trying to cut down the branches and twigs that were standing in the way. Worse, when they even had to wade through the wet and muddy ground, knee deep. The handlers held Parameswara and his wife on separate palanquins while their sons joined the others by walking on their own feet. They decided to put aside protocol because the situation demanded it. They decided not to impose on their own handlers, too, since they were also very young and able.

By nightfall, he and his followers managed to arrive in a place called *Biawak Busuk* or Stinking Lizard, a place that looked peaceful and well covered on all sides. Here, they set up tent to settle for the night. Despite that, Parameswara still asked his men to be on constant guard, lest, they'd be attacked, not just by the Siamese, but wild beasts and other unknown demons and evil spirits which might be lurking in the jungles. Even after having appeased them, they were still afraid of what these demons and evil spirits could do to them. The high priests performed the rituals to ward them off, but they didn't dare to promise anything; they only said they had done their level best. Parameswara didn't want to put pressure on them and thanked them profusely for a job well done. So far, their blessings and offerings of food and fruits seemed to have worked wonders. They were not once disturbed by them when they were fleeing through the jungles in Temasik, and now in the Malay Peninsula. The high priests were relieved that Parameswara had full faith in them and continued to use their services.

Many of the people were resting in their tents. They were too tired and exhausted to walk around the camp. But they were relieved that they were far away from any possible harm from the Siamese. Their only worries were harm from the wild animals that inhabited in the jungle. Babies cried, and their parents quickly hushed them down. They didn't want the babies to attract attention to them there, as they didn't know if the place was inhabited by demons and other evil spirits. The high priests gave more offerings and blessings in order to appease them.

The soldiers rested outside the tents and at various parts to ensure the safety of the people. It was their strategy that they broke into groups and not stuck together. By spreading out, they could ensure each other's safety. If one group was attacked, the others could come to their aid, and vice versa. Some were sharpening their weapons. Some of their weapons had become so blunted that they couldn't be sharpened anymore; they were swiftly discarded. These weapons were the ones that had slashed many a head of the enemies. Other men were giving each other a hard massage on the legs and bodies; they badly needed this as their muscles were badly bruised and their bodies

battered. Other men were tending to the light bruises that they had got while trekking through the jungles the whole day. Some followed the medicine men to collect shoots, herbs and even roots of special trees that they boiled. This gave the medicine or potion that they badly needed to protect them from the elements, or to cure diseases and other illnesses that they were suffering from. The shoots, herbs and roots were also dried and later dipped in water, which was given to those who were sick as medicine.

Many of the young followers and babies could have died if there were no medicines. The mosquitoes posed a serious threat to them so they made sure their bodies were constantly rubbed with special oil that the medicine men had concocted. This made their body sticky, but they had to bear this slight inconvenience as their lives were threatened.

Parameswara walked out of his tent. It was the largest in the camp. It stood in the center of the camp, with the other tents standing around it. He inhaled the fresh jungle air and was relieved that they had managed to flee Temasik, or Singapura.

An assistant looked at the goat that was being burnt at the stakes. It was still raw. Only one side of it was roasted. His colleague went to him. 'Time for his highness Parameswara's coffee. I'll look after this,' said his colleague.

'Turn it upside down so that the other side gets enough fire,' said the assistant.

'I'll do that.'

He then stood up and made some coffee. He then took it to Parameswara who was now resting under a tent. His followers were resting in the other tents. But, they were still on alert for any possible attack, by human beings or animals. The crown prince of Siam and his soldiers could still hound them there. So, they decided not to take any chances. Parameswara's men were on the constant alert at different parts of the jungle, to ensure his own safety and that of the others.

'Here's some coffee, your highness,' said the assistant.

'Good. It'll help to shake me from falling to sleep. There're just too many things for me to worry about,' said Parameswara. 'Besides, it's not easy for me to fall asleep with all the problems playing in my head like this.'

The assistant poured some coffee. Parameswara drank it and immediately felt refreshed. Perpatih Besar sat beside him. He trusted his cup and the assistant poured coffee in it too.

'Thank you very much, my good friend,' said the count.

'Is there anything else, your highness?'

'That will be all for the moment. Er... When will dinner be served?'

'In a short while, your highness, as soon as we can get the goat ready. It will be ready shortly.'

'Very well, do bring it here once it's fully cooked.'

The assistant nodded and left the tent. Perpath Besar sipped some coffee from his cup. He then turned around and looked at Parameswara. 'We have been here for few days; and what has his highness discovered? This place certainly looks good for your highness to found new country.'

'No, not yet. Give me sometime. May be this is a good place to found a new country. We don't need to run anymore, Seri. Once we have established our own country, we'll be able to stay put and develop it. Our people won't have to move about. All this moving about is taking a toll on everybody, not just to you and me, to them too. The women, children and babies suffer too, and not just us.'

'May be its god's fate that we are running around in circles. There must be something good that'll come out of all this.'

'Don't worry, the gods are protecting us. There must be a good reason behind all our sufferings and pains. Yes, I do believe in fate. Our future destiny is not being determined by us, you know Seri. Our gods are determining it. We're at his disposal; we are at his mercy. For he's the supreme being. We're just ordinary mortals, our place here on this earth is but temporary.'

'Yes, your highness. And you're certainly destined to be a great ruler, your highness. Only time will tell.'

'I do hope so. I'm in the early fifties now. How much longer do I have before the gods call for me? I surely want my children to take over from me. But before I go, I want to make sure that they have a new country to rule, and for them to take over from me. I'll be a failure if I do not provide a future for my followers and my sons. They have been following me faithfully all these years and I'm not going to let them down, including yourself, Seri. And I'll assure that you'll be my prime minister, one day, should we be able to found a country of our own. You're still young. What's your age now?'

'Twenty.'

'You have more years ahead of me then.'

'Thank you, your highness for your faith in my capabilities and me. The gods are on your side, your highness. My future is inter-linked with yours. I'll offer my services as long as you need them.'

'Thank you, Seri. You have stood with me through thick and thin. We will see this through together.' Parameswara took another sip of the coffee. He

then stood up. 'I will rest now. Why don't you return to your tent and be with your wife, family, and rest. And call me when dinner is ready.'

Perpatih Besar stood up. 'Yes, your highness.'

Parameswara entered his tent. 'Good night, Seri.'

'Good night, your highness.'

Perpatih Besar walked to his tent.

Guards were manning the area. The assistant returned to the stakes while Parameswara entered his tent. His wife, Dewi Puteri and their sons, Besar Muda, Kechil Besar, Kechil Besar, Kechil Tengah and Kechil Muda were resting and feeling restless. The princesses were in another tent. They chewed their betel leaves until they were smashed into fluid. Their mother was chewing a *sentil* that made her mouth and saliva red. It is a lump of tobacco that is sliced to shreds, and mixed with some condiments that the women, especially those who were in the upper class chewed for pleasure. This is the opposite of the *sireh* or betel leaves their husband ate everyday without fail, in order to numb their senses.

'Dinner will be served shortly. Why don't all of you get ready,' said Parameswara. He then sat. His wife and children looked up. They were surprised at his sudden entrance. Dewi Puteri turned to look at him. 'Are we building a country here, dear?'

'It's not a good place, mother. I haven't seen any mousedeer or rabbit yet,' chipped their son, Kechil Besar even before Parameswara could sit down and answer. Kechil Besar had wanted to register his displeasure at this place.

'I agree that this is a rough place, son. I haven't made any decision yet. We'll have to look around a bit more. Surely, there will be a suitable place in the Malay Peninsula for us.'

'Why don't we just settle here. This place doesn't belong to anyone. It's not under any ruler either,' said Dewi Puteri.

'I know. But, it's very far from the sea. We need to be near the sea to do trading with everybody.'

'Trading? Why do we need to trade for? We can get all the food we need here.'

'We do not engage in trading. Our people need to trade, so that they can have a steady income. This is how we can develop our new country. Trading can bring the country and people prosperity.'

'Why build a new country by the sea?' chipped in Kechil Besar. 'We can build it anywhere, where there is land. At the most we need to locate it near a river so we can choose to ride and fish in it.'

'And foreign traders must be attracted to come so that the wealth of the country can increase,' said Parameswara. 'We take it a step at a time.'

'That's not what I meant, dear father.'

'What did you mean then, my dear son? Tell me,' asked his mother quizzically.

'I mean, if our country sits by the sea, won't that also attract the foreigners, er...to want to attack us? We will then be very vulnerable,' said Kechil Besar.

'What more if our country is successful, any foreign element will be tempted to attack and capture it from us.'

'He's got a point, my dear husband'

'But, we won't be so dumb as not to defend ourselves,' said Parameswara. 'And for that reason, we need to develop our country so that we'll have the resources and means to develop a fully-equipped army and navy to defend our country in the event of an attack by foreign forces. But, we will also want to establish cordial relations with other neighboring states, in the Malay Peninsula and the whole region and elsewhere; if possible with the countries 'above the wind' and 'below the wind'. Only in this way, that we can assure that our position will be secure. Who would then dare to attack us if we have the support of the other rulers?'

Kechil Besar agreed. He nodded. 'Now I see your point, father.'

There was a lull. Everybody pondered to think. But, their mind was blank. They didn't know what they were thinking of. All that they knew was that they were still without a country and whatever they were discussing was just a hypothesis, or at worse, a dream.

Something crept on the ground. It hissed. Kechil Besar turned and to his horror, saw a lizard. He was shocked. It crawled at his feet. He froze in his seat and allowed it to crawl to the other side, hoping that it was not going to hurt him. He didn't want to stamp on it because it wasn't a good thing to do at that time, because they could be more of it.

'A lizard!' shouted Kechil Muda. He was afraid of the sight of the lizards, as it was the first time he had seen them.

Everybody turned around on impulse. Besar Muda, Kechil Besar, Dewi Puteri, Puteri Kamarul Ajaib and Raja Rekan screamed and panicked. More lizards entered the tent. They screamed even louder. Parameswara jumped onto his feet and sat on the bed and shouted, 'My goodness! What are these? Where did they come from? Guards, guards!'

The guards heard the commotion and they immediately rushed in with the weapons in their hands, at the ready. They thought that their enemies, the

Siamese, were attacking the royal family. 'Yes, your majesty,' said one of the guards.

'I want you to clear all these nasty lizards from my tent,' ordered Parameswara.

The guards were relieved. They initially thought that an enemy had entered the royal tent, but it turned out only some lizards had crawled in the royal tent instead. So, they quickly grabbed them with their bare hands and took them outside. They were harmless creatures, but intimidating to those who were not familiar with them. Dewi Puteri and the two boys sat on their beds as the guards caught more of the lizards. There was more screaming outside. Everybody was shouting at various places.

'Lizards, lizards! Help, help! *Tolong, tolong!*' they shouted on top of their voices.

Perpatih Besar rushed to Parameswara's tent to see whether he was all right. He feared for the worse.

'What's the commotion out there, Seri?' asked Parameswara.

'We're being attacked by lizards, your highness.'

'What? There's more? Let's all get out of here.' Parameswara, his wife and children rushed out of the royal tent.

'Your highness can go to the other tent. It's on the hill,' suggested Perpatih Besar. 'You'll be safer there.'

The guards and people continued to catch more lizards. The exercise lasted through most of the night. The women-folks and children screamed and shouted on top of their voice. However, it became less loud as the lizards were caught one by one until a few more were left.

'Everybody, go to that hill, over there. Hurry! Dump all the goats into the river! It's what attracted the lizards to come here,' shouted Perpatih Besar.

They ran to the hill.

The guards quickly grabbed more lizards while a soldier went to the stakes and picked the goats that were being burnt in the fire. He hurled them into the river. He thought the lizards were attracted to the cooked goats and the fire. So, he took a torch and trusted it at the lizards on the ground near him. They fled for their lives, as the heat was unbearable and the light was irritating and blinding them. Some were roasted and died.

'What do we do with these, sir?' asked the guards.

'Dump them all in the river! That's where they belong. What else is there to do with them?' said Perpatih Besar.

All the lizards were finally caught and dumped into the river. Everybody was relieved.



The night when they had wanted to spend resting was thus wasted on catching the lizards. Fortunately, nobody was hurt.

Parameswara sat on a chair outside the tent the next morning behind a table with his wife and children. From here, they could see the whole valley spreading wide below him. They admired the scenery. It was green, as far as their eyes could see. Beyond the valleys was the *Banjaran Titiwangsa* or Titiwangsa mountain range. Perpatih Besar went to him and broke his concentration. 'Looks like everything is under control now, your highnesses.'

'I've lost all my appetite now, Seri. How could anybody eat at a time like this?' said Parameswara, almost to himself. But, it was loud for everybody around him to hear. 'What? It's already dawn!'

'But, your highness must at least have something.'

'Later, later. How's the situation down there?'

'All the lizards have been caught. But, it's advisable for your highnesses to remain here until the next few days, just to be sure that the lizards will not return.'

'This definitely isn't the right place for us to found a country.'

'Definitely not, dear,' chipped in Dewi Puteri.

'Who'd want to play with the awful lizards? I want to play only with mousedeer and rabbits, not lizards. Urgh!' said Besar Muda.

'Me neither,' added Kechil Muda.

'Don't worry sons, I'll find a more suitable place to found a country, that has a river-mouth and a wide space where you can play with your children and with the mousedeer and rabbits. You can sail your boats in the river and sea all day. We can catch lots of fish and we can grow vegetables, too, that we can eat together. Everybody will be well fed, and nobody will have to starve, ever. This is my promise.'

'That's what I want, father,' said Besar Muda.

'Me too,' added Kechil Muda.

'I want you to inform everyone, we will move on the first thing tomorrow morning, Seri. We'll spend today resting here, after what we went through the whole of last night. Ask all of my people to rest and prepare to move out tomorrow,' said Parameswara. 'There's no need for us to linger here any longer. We all know that this isn't a good place. Already I'm feeling bad vibes; not only with the lizards, but something else. Because in the absence of any serious study, we have to trust in our sixth sense.'

'Very well, your highness,' said Perpatih Besar. He then went away.

Next morning after all of them had had their breakfast, Parameswara and his entourage left their temporary camp in this place called Stinking Lizards.

No wonder it was called such, because they had died and their carcass had decomposed and it made a strong stench that was unbearable to the nose.

They moved along a jungle path and headed towards a place called the Old Fort that stood deep in the jungles. They did not realize that was a fort that had stood there for a while. Nobody knew who was the ruler of the country, and why the people had deserted the place and left the fort to rot. Strangely, the fort stood in the middle of a jungle, in the middle of nowhere. How could anyone want to found a country here, thought Parameswara and Perpatih Besar. It was so inhospitable, with no river that they could use to collect water and the land was dry as a desert and all covered up with vegetation and none that they could eat. What happened to them? Did an invading force kill them off? Or did the demons and spirits of the jungles kill them?

'What was the name of the place we left just now, Seri? Have you found out?' asked Parameswara.

'Its called Biawak Busuk, your highness,' replied Perpatih Besar.

'Hmmm... No wonder; there are many lizards there. Even the name of the place is after them. *Biawak Busuk* or Stinking Lizards. What a name for a place?'

'Where will we stop for a rest, your highness?'

'We've been walking for too long now. Let's stop and set up tent for the night. We continue next day. My legs are aching all over.'

Parameswara sat around a campfire that night where they had set up camp, with Perpatih Besar, the other senior officers and the high priest. He turned around and asked the high priest, 'Stinking Lizard. What else is coming our way, high priest? Do you see anything in your mind's eye? Tell me, if you have been given any signs by the gods and the deities.'

'I'm not sure, your highness. Everything is uncertain. The future's still uncertain and bleak. But, we must move on,' replied the high priest. 'I haven't been able to get any signs so far. I know this is strange, but ever since we left Palembang, nothing seems to have appeared in his my mind's eye, not even a flash. I've sensed nothing but bad vibes.'

'Why? What's wrong with this place?'

'I sense something amiss, something which isn't right, your highness.'

'But, doesn't this place look peaceful?'

'Yes, but by day, something will bound to appear; this is the little that I can see in my mind's eye.'

'Like what?'

'I don't know, your highness. I'm not sure; please forgive me. The image I can see now in my mind is vague, blur and uncertain. It's not an object, a thing, or person or animal, but...'

'But what? Tell me.'

'I can't tell.'

'Can't you offer prayers to appease whatever evil spirit that is inhibiting this place?'

'Yes, I can your highness, but, I can't promise if it'll work.'

'Just try. We have traveled too far; we need to settle down someday. And what better place to found a country than this place.'

'Yes, high priest,' said Perpatih Besar.

'I shall try, your highness,' said the high priest.

'I will retire now,' said Parameswara. He stood up. He then went to his tent and disappeared in it.

'Let me stay awake. I will try to appease whatever evil spirits are inhibiting this place, your excellency, Seri,' said the high priest.

Perpatih Besar stood up. 'I'll retire too. I do not want to distract you, high priest. Please do whatever that you have to do. And if you require my assistance, I will be happy to oblige. Just tell me.'

'Thank you, your excellency.'

Perpatih Besar and the others went to their tents to retire for the night. The high priest was now left alone. He then got the other high priests and they immediately started to chant and read sacred verses and threw flower petals and leaves in front of him. They rang small bells to awaken the evil spirits. They lit up incense, carried the pot around the camp, and continued to chant softly. They then drank some water and blew it out of their mouth. They didn't dare to ring the bell loudly for fear that it might attract unnecessary attention from their enemies. So, they tinkled softly by damping the sound by touching a finger on the bells.

Kechil Besar and Kechil Muda continued to ride their horses in the woods. Their elder brother, Besar Muda did not join them because he was sickly and hated like physical activities. All the traveling had taken a toll on his poor health. He preferred to lie in his tent. After a long while, they entered an area that looked weird and eerie. They felt something tingling up their spines. It hit them like a bolt of lightning. The tranquillity of the place seemed to say something of it's past history, like there were restless souls lurking in every bush. They immediately slowed down, galloped, and then trotted slowly. They tried to be careful, lest they would trample on some ancient religious sites.

'The plains are so wide that we can ride on and on. How nice, how nice,' remarked Kechil Besar nonchalantly, as though he had deliberately wanted to fool himself from the sensations he was receiving there. He had wanted the demons or whoever inhabited the place to hear his voice. It was the voice of someone who had come in peace, and who meant no harm. This was what the prince wanted to convey to them, and he used his brother as a vehicle.

'We shall recommend to father to stay put here. I like this place. It's quite suitable to found a country here,' said Kechil Muda.

'Yes, definitely. And look at those hills.'

They then sped off and continued to gallop for a long while. Kechil Besar's horse tried to jump over a dead tree trunk. One of his hind legs was trapped to it, and it fell off. It threw Kechil Besar off the saddle to the ground. 'Ahhh!' cried out the prince. Fortunately, he fell on a soft patch of grass. His younger brother stopped. He turned around and saw the horse falling on to the side. It quickly stood up on its own. Kechil Besar lay on the ground. He could be hurt; his brother was not sure. Kechil Muda turned around his horse and went to his elder brother. 'Are you all right? Are you hurt, my brother?'

'Yes, I'm all right. Thank god, I'm not hurt.'

Kechil Muda went to him. He dismounted from his horse. 'Why don't we stop for the day? Let's return home now.' His horse sensed that it was left behind unattended so it sped off and left his master. He was shocked. 'Hey, wait a second! Where the hell are you going?' he called, as if his horse understood what he was saying.

Kechil Besar laughed. 'Now both of us are without a horse. How about that?'

'We'll walk then.'

Kechil Besar and Kechil Muda walked in the woods, trying to find their way home.

'Are you sure we're on track?' asked Kechil Besar.

'I'm not sure. But, I do remember seeing that large tree over there,' replied Kechil Muda.

'Where?'

'Over there.' Kechil Besar pointed to the right.

'We won't be far away then.'

They continued to walk until they arrived at another part of the woods. The trees there grew wildly; there was no order. There were creepers everywhere; they clung onto trees and branches, making it virtually impossible for anybody to get close to the building, or whatever structures that remained of them. It was an eerie sight. Kechil Besar went closer. He noticed some wooden

structures. They looked like it was part of a building of some sort. They were surprised to see it standing there. It was hidden in the tall grass and creepers that had grown around and in it.

'What's that? What can that possibly be?' asked Kechil Besar.

Kechil Muda turned around trying to find it. 'Where; what, what, what?' He asked in quick succession without waiting for any answer.

'Over there, look.' Kechil Besar pointed to the right and his brother look at the direction and noticed it.

'It looks like it's the remains of an old fort.'

'It's an old fort all right. What does it mean, brother?'

'It means that this place is indeed haunted. Let's go and find out.'

They went closer to the fort. An old fort had rotted beyond recognition. Only the main structures were standing while the walls had totally collapsed or been covered by foliage. They stood outside the fort and stared at it in amazement. It looked eerie with all the statues that had been cut down at the necks and bodies. Some of them had no limbs. Who could have lived here, they wondered. The piercing eyes of some of the statues hit directly at both of them, as though they were saying something.

'Are you thinking what I'm thinking?' asked Kechil Besar.

'What are you thinking?' asked his younger brother.

'That this place is indeed haunted.'

'Let's inform father to leave this place. We must leave this place immediately. This place is not good for us.'

'Run.'

They ran as fast as they could towards the camp. By the time they got there, both were panting heavily and sweating all over. Parameswara was distracted with the heavy pounding of legs. It sounded like somebody was running away from trouble, like there were four legs pounding on the ground. He turned around and saw both his sons rushing towards him. He didn't know what was happening. 'What's happening, my sons? Where're your horses?'

'And why are you both looking pale?' asked their mother, Dewi Puteri.

'We must leave this place, father, mother!' said Kechil Besar.

'It's haunted,' added Kechil Muda.

'Haunted?' asked Parameswara.

'There's an old fort over there. Surely, evil spirits must have chased the people. This place is called Old Fort,' explained Kechil Besar.

Permaisuri Dewi Puteri was shocked. 'Old Fort? Old Fort?'

Parameswara turned to look at the high priest. 'This is what I've been worried about all this while, your highness. his highnesses, Kechil Besar and Kechil Muda are right,' said the high priest.

'What do you mean?'

'I thought I saw something that looked like fort, but it wasn't clear then. Now that both your highnesses had seen them, the image is now clear.'

Parameswara turned to Perpatih Besar. 'Let it be known to all of my followers that we desert this place.'

'Yes, your highness.'

Parameswara led his men and they trekked through the woods and headed south. They wanted to go as far north as possible to an unknown destination. They had no idea of what to expect from the trip. None of the senior officers or any of Parameswara's children knew where they were heading for, as none had been there before. Everywhere they looked at, it was just trees and more trees. Beyond were the surrounding hills. The place looked inhospitable, even for wild animals; they did not dare to loiter around here! Occasionally, however, they could hear the sounds of elephants trumpeting, or lions and tigers roaring. Their voices were so faint. Parameswara guessed they were at a distance, far away from them.

After trekking in the jungles for half a day, Perpatih Besar went to Parameswara and inquired. 'Where are we heading for, your highness?'

'We move on, until we find a river,' replied Parameswara. 'I've no idea of what to expect from this trip. We just go on as far away from Singapura as possible. Who knows if by chance we arrive at a good place, we will stay there for a while. The main thing is to get near a river.'

'If that's the case, there's a good place called Ujong River not far ahead, your highness. And further up is Muar and Sening Hujung.'

Parameswara was surprised with the revelation. But, he did not bother to ask how Perpatih Besar knew about the place called Ujong River; he had heard about it from strangers in Temasik when they were there. This was his style; he liked to talk to strangers and they occasionally gave him tips or valuable information that were important to him.

'It's on the banks of a river, you said?' asked Parameswara. His face lit. It was something for him to look forward to although he still did not have any idea of what to expect in Ujong River or its whereabouts. He was happy that Perpatih Besar knew about the place. Most likely, it was a good place; otherwise, the count would not have heard about it. 'It is, your highness.'

'We set up tent there, then.'

'Very well, your highness.'

Parameswara's children were relieved. Everybody was relieved, too. They had been walking through the thick jungle for hours, and all of them were longing to stop for a good rest. Now, they knew that they were going to stop by a river. They looked forward to dipping in it and soaking themselves to the skin to cool down and to refresh their tired bodies that were aching at every part and relieve their taut muscles and sprained ankles and joints. Most of all they wanted to wash up. Even the animals they had bought with them such as the horses, elephants, goats and dogs, too, would be happy to get a splashing, to clean themselves. On top of that, they could also have an abundant supply of fresh water fish for their meals, especially after they had trekked to Muar and Sening Hujung and still Parameswara was not impressed with them. Their feet were tired. Few of the women and children and dogs collapsed. They had to rest briefly in Muar so that they could rest completely. They then moved on to Ujong River. They were looking forward to getting to this place as it could get a complete rest and eat well. This could provide them with the energy that they needed the most to allow them to proceed with their trekking beyond Ujong River, i.e. if their leader, Parameswara decided not to found his new country there, but elsewhere.

By evening, Parameswara and his followers had set up their tents there, and were resting peacefully. Many of the followers were dipping in the river to wash themselves. The women-folks also took the opportunity to wash their clothes and themselves, too. The younger followers swam and dived in the river. They splashed water at each other. For a while their problems were far away from their minds. They were now enjoying what nature had to offer them. The water was clear and fresh, and the men managed to catch a lot of fish that they could fry for dinner later for everybody's enjoyment. Some of the fish was also dried and salted. We could take these on the journey so we could all eat them later.

Kechil Besar's wife, Kamarul Ajajib rushed out of her tent and vomited. Her husband, Kechil Besar rushed to her. He did not know what was happening to his wife. 'What's the matter, dear?' he asked.

'I feel nauseous,' replied his wife.

Dewi Puteri rushed to them. 'What's wrong with her, dear?'

'Let's return inside. She could be under the weather. It's chilly out here,' suggested Kechil Besar.

They went inside the tent. Kechil Besar wiped his wife's mouth with a piece of dry towel. He then put her down in the bed and continued to wipe her forehead and face. She was sweating profusely. This made him worried. He turned to look at his mother, as his wife closed her eyes tightly and tried to

withstand her discomfort. Her stomach was churning. Could it be food poisoning, wondered Kechil Besar. Kamarul Ajab reclined in bed and looked pale and sickly. Her mother-in-law went to her, held her hand, and offered some comfort.

'Shall we call the medicine man, mother?' asked Kechil Besar.

'Don't worry, son, your wife is just pregnant. She is not sick at all.'

Kechil Besar smiled. He was relieved that his fears were totally unfounded. Just then, Parameswara entered the tent upon hearing the commotion from outside. 'What's the commotion, dear?' he asked.

'Raja Kechil Besar's wife is pregnant, dear,' said Dewi Puteri.

Parameswara was relieved and excited. 'The gods must have answered my prayers. I've been longing for a grandson for too long.'

Kamarul Ajab tried to sit up. 'Sit down or you will faint,' said Dewi Puteri to her. Parameswara also took a seat near them.

'Can we stay put here, father? This is definitely a good omen,' suggested Kechil Besar.

'Ujong River is quite a nice place, I should say,' added Dewi Puteri. 'And there's a river, too.'

'We will see. The fishermen had gone further south, to another place called Bertam, and they have a report for me,' said Parameswara. 'Ujong River is not too wide. So, it does not meet one of my main requirements for a new country.'

'Bertam River?' asked Kechil Besar.

'Yes. It has a wide river-mouth and there is a small fishing village on its banks. This place sounds more interesting from the way they had described it to me,' said Parameswara. 'I want our men to find out if the fishing village is under the dominance of any ruler. I don't want to repeat my past mistakes and try to take over another country again. I'm much too old now for such adventures.'

A guard appeared at the tent. He then entered it.

'Excuse me, your highnesses, Mr. Andak and his friends, the fishermen are back,' announced one of the guards.

Mr. Andak, and his four fishermen friends, Mr. Semail and Mr. Misdun sat at the feet of Parameswara outside the tent. They took shade under a tree. Kechil Besar and Kechil Muda were with him. 'It's true, your highness. There's a small fishing village at the mouth of the Bertam River,' said Mr. Andak.

'And there is no ruler,' added Mr. Misdun.

'Who then rules them? Surely, there must be a chief of the fishing village,' said Kechil Besar.



'Have you checked, Mr. Andak?' asked Parameswara.

'Yes, your highness. The fishermen said they are not under the control of anyone. They are basically living on their own. They are free people, and there has been no war there either. No foreign power had come to attack them. On top of that, they had never known of any foreign element. And they also wondered who we were... However, they have heard of Palembang, Sumatra, and his highness 'name.'

'Really?' said Parameswara. He was clearly elated. However, he didn't ask how they had heard about him. He was surprised that his reputation had spread far and wide and at unlikely places.

'They knew your highness is a descendant of the famous Sailendra line of rulers of Palembang, your highness.'

Parameswara was greatly relieved. He didn't realize that the reputation of his ancestors had extended to these parts. He was greatly relieved that the people of Bertam Village knew his reputation as the descendant of the former ruler of Palembang, and not because of his failed exploits in Majapahit and Temasik. His sons turned to him. 'What do you say now, father?' asked Kechil Besar.

'We certainly can give it a try. How far is it? It won't hurt to consider it,' said Kechil Muda.

'It's only a few days by boat from here, your highness,' said Mr. Andak.

Parameswara was not sure. He turned to look at his sons. 'What do you say, my sons?'

'We go there, and find out for ourselves. Not that we do not trust our men, but, it is better if we see it with our own eyes. Then, we can make a decision on whether we can found a country there or not,' said Kechil Besar.

Parameswara nodded. The other men smiled. They were happy that he wanted to give Bertam Village a shot. 'Very well. We go there the first thing tomorrow morning. Besides, we have nothing to lose. Did you tell them who we were, Mr. Andak?'

'Yes, your highness. I told them that your highness was a prince from Palembang, and we are all his followers. Because that was what they wanted to inquire about your highness,' said Mr. Andak. 'And they said they've all heard about your highness, like what I've said earlier.'

'And what did they say to that?'

'They were delighted to know that your highness was here. They'd heard so much about Palembang, your highness.'

'Very well, we will proceed to Bertam River then. Do send them my warmest greetings and do tell all of them in Bertam Village we will be delighted to make a trip there to meet all of them.'

'Very well, your highness.'

'You and your friends can go back to your families. Have a rest,' said Kechil Muda to Mr. Andak.

'Thank you, Mr. Andak,' said Parameswara. He then pulled out some gold coins from his pockets. 'Here's something for all of you.' He offered the fishermen a silver coin each. However, he did not just hand them in full view of everybody else. Instead, he shook their hands and transferred the coins with the grip of his hands; the coins slipped to the other person's hand. This was how they handed coins, so that their business was secret and only both parties knew the amount was exchanged. However, if they did not have a coin to exchange they would shake hands by extending all the way to the elbow, so that they not only shook hands, but also held each other's arm. In this way, they were sure that the other party did not have any ulterior motives, and wanted to hurt each other, now that they were locked at the arms and could check each other's moves.

'Thank you, your highness,' said Mr. Andak. He and the other fishermen stood up and went away. They carried with them their day's catch and a wooden paddle on their shoulder. They walked ahead towards their tents and entered them to return to their families.

'I do hope this will be our last stop, my sons. It will also be good for your wife. Let her give birth to my first grandson in a new country which he too will inherit from both of us,' said Parameswara.

'I do hope so, too, father,' said Kechil Besar.

Two burly men carried Kamarul Ajaib in a palanquin or *usungan* that was usually reserved for Parameswara's wife. However, this was not something unusual, since she was entitled to it as his daughter-in-law and crown princess, too. She was now at a later stage of her pregnancy and her face was puffy and pale.

There were few other women, wives of the soldiers and ordinary men. They had to trek through the jungles on their own two feet. They were not given any special attention. The crown princess pitied them, but there was nothing that she could do to help. They were not entitled to sit in the palanquins like she did. But, surprisingly, none of these women was suffering like she did, despite of that. They were tough women who knew the rough life and had been through physical hardships unlike the crown princess, the daughter of a high official in Palembang. She had never experienced personal discomfort all

her life, and was always looked after nannies and handlers since she was small, right up to her marriage to Kechil Besar, the eldest son of Parameswara. Dewi Puteri walked beside her to keep her company and to comfort her. Occasionally, she offered her daughter-in-law a spittoon where she spat saliva. She also rubbed ointment on her forehead to try to soothe her nerves. She knew how her daughter-in-law was feeling, being pregnant for the first time. But, her personal experience was nothing compared to what her daughter-in-law was experiencing. She was holed in the warm and safe comfort of her palace in Palembang, with scores of maids, all at her disposal at any time of the day and night, who worked in shifts. She was never alone. Her slightest discomfort was enough to turn the whole palace into frenzy. She would send some of the maids on errands to get for her some unusual fruits when she had the sudden craving for them. And when her skin started to look pale, the *mak bidan diRaja* or royal midwife gave her special meals and a facial to bring back the colors on her face. Occasionally, she would give her a total body massage in order to rejuvenate her system or to 'heat' the blood, as she would say.

'Just take it easy, Seri,' advised Dewi Puteri. 'I am sorry that you are in this condition. You should not be traveling with your condition you are in. I won't be able to take this if I were you. You are a tough woman. Fortunately, this isn't your first pregnancy, so you're able to handle it better.'

'I hope so, dear mother.'

The crown princess nodded and forced a smile, knowing that her mother-in-law was walking beside her and giving her comfort.

'I hope father will decide to stay put in Bertam, mother,' said the crown princess. 'All this traveling has taken a toll on all of us, including the animals. We are just too lucky that none of us had died of disease or wounded seriously. There are mosquitoes in the jungles here. They are everywhere. They can reduce even the toughest of men into skeletons within days, with their poisonous sting. So, do take good care and sleep only in nets and don't expose yourself. Cover your body as much as possible.'

'I think so, too. We've been traveling for too long now; it's time we found a new country so we don't have to move on and on like nomads. We cannot go on running all our lives, mother. Even the goats know where to find their own sheds to stay. How much longer do we have to travel, dear mother?'

'Why? Are you in pain?'

'Yes, slightly, only slightly. I'm aching all over my body.'

'We stop here and rest then.'

Mr. Andak and his friends steered their boat to the riverbank. They were happy to return to the mouth of the Bertam River after being away for ten days. Their friends saw their boat and eagerly waited for them to land on shore. Mr. Semail threw a rope and one of them caught hold of it. He then pulled the boat and tied it to a stump. Mr. Andak and his friends got out of the fishing boat and stepped foot on dry land.

'Welcome back, my friends,' greeted Samun on seeing Mr. Andak arriving at the banks. As usual, he smiled widely and held his arms wide and invited Andak to come right into his embrace. He smiled and bared his blackened teeth that now had a gap in it. He had fallen smack on his face and a stone hit his front teeth. As a result, one of it dropped to the ground.

Samun was now in the forties, and he had ten children, all running around naked save for a bark skin that wrapped at their groin. He had lived in Bertam Village all his life and knew of no another place. He was grateful for staying put. He did not want to lead the life of a pirate anymore, when he found a young twelve-year old girl loitering on the beach alone, by herself. She looked lost. She was naked, with not a single threat on her. Samun took pity of her and invited her to live with him as a couple.

'Greetings. We are grateful to the deities for our safety,' said Andak. 'The sea has been extraordinarily calm.'

'Greetings,' replied Samun.

They hugged each other. And as always, they sat on the floor to rest and have some refreshments of coconut drink and fruits and to rest, and to exchange conversations.

Although nothing much seemed to happen in Bertam Village, they still found something to discuss or talk about at great length. Samun talked about how he had finally managed to cut the trees with the sword that Mr. Andak had left him on his last visit there. It was now a village property, for the men to use when they needed it. This is their village tradition. Everybody's properties were considered communal property. At one time, even their wives were also communal property to be shared equally by all the men. Then when they grew much older, and when the women started to give birth, they decided to do away with this arrangement. They thought it was difficult for the women to be sleeping with every man when they were now looking after the children. So, they just kept the same women for themselves; thus, the marriage institution was introduced in Bertam Village. However, they still had not selected from amongst the men who would be the leader or chief, as the need for it had not come yet.

'Let's sit, so we can have something to eat. You must be very hungry,' suggested Mr. Samun. 'It's on me this time. I can't let you pay again and again. You're my guest and I am your host.'

They laughed.

'Very well, my stomach is empty. It surely can take in anything,' said Mr. Andak. 'I like roasted wild boar.'

'That's not available today, sir,' said the food stall-owner.

'Because they knew you were coming, that's why?' joked another man.

They laughed at their own joke. They sat on the wooden benches. There were few other fishermen from Bertam Village and elsewhere who were eating, drinking, and talking amongst themselves. They glanced at Mr. Andak and his friends. Andak patted their backs. 'Nice to see all of you gentlemen, my dear sirs.'

'Likewise, sir,' replied the men.

'It's good to see you here again, Andak,' said Samun. 'I'm happy that you're in good health and as always, cheerful, as though there wasn't a problem that you're carrying on your shoulders.'

'Likewise.'

'What has your ruler decided on, Andak?'

'Our ruler, his highness Parameswara has expressed his wish to come to Bertam Village and so he could personally see this place his own eyes. He believes it is a convenient place to settle at. The location is just perfect and ideal for a new country that his highness wishes to found. I am sure his highness will like this place. It is beautiful.'

'Thank you, *Ab*, that should be good. It's an honor to have a member of the royalty from Palembang pay us a visit; better still if he decides to stay put and be our ruler, too. It is definitely a good omen. It will bring good luck to this place and everybody here. We will all be a lot better off living under the protection and leadership of a distinguished ruler such as his highness.'

'But, we are not sure if his highness will want to found a new country here. He was still undecided. It is just a small fishing village with no natural resources.'

'But, didn't you say just now that he wanted to found his new country here?'

'I did. However, what I meant was that his highness has decided that he wanted to see for with his own eyes first, to see if the location is just perfect. I did not know what his tastes are. I definitely cannot assume that his highness will like what he'll see.'

'Why not?'

'It's all up to him to decide. It is not for any of us to second-guess his actions,' added Mr. Misdun.

'If his highness says he wants to found his new country here, we'll all be happy. We'll welcome him with open arms,' said Andak.

'It'll be good if the prince from Palembang decides to found his country on the river-mouth so that it can be developed,' said Samun. 'This place has a lot of potential. Actually, all the men here sit on the banks every morning before the sun rose, to await for the arrival of our new ruler.'

'I see.'

'Now, he's coming in the form of the prince.'

'We'll leave it to his highness,' replied Andak.

'Our prayers have been answered. I always imagined a prince from a far-away land would one day descend upon this land and be with us,' said Samun.

His friends smiled and agreed.

A girl by the name of Chantik was plucking flowers from a branch with her friends in the woods not too far away from their camp. Her friend Mawar called in her soft melodious voice. 'Be careful, Chantik.'

'I know what I am doing, Mawar. I'm not a small girl, you know,' said Chantik, as she stretched out her hand and tried to reach her hand to pick a flower that hung at the end of a branch.

'I know, you're old enough to be my mother.'

Mawar and her female friends laughed.

'Not funny, Mawar. I've heard that joke before. Someone had played it on you when we were in Biawak Busuk, except that she meant that you could be her great-grandmother.'

They laughed.

'Okay, you're teasing me again now, huh?' asked Mawar.

Chantik extended her right hand further and tried to reach for a flower. The branch gave way. It snapped and broke in the middle. She fell to the ground. The girls screamed and immediately rushed to her aid. They feared the worse. The screaming attracted the attention of Kechil Muda. He was riding his horse nearby. He heard the scream; it sounded to him like somebody, a woman or a girl was in danger. He instinctively turned his head and saw a group of girls. He rushed to them. He was riding in the woods by himself trying to find fresh flowers to pick, while at the same time keeping his eyes on beautiful damsels who were suitable to be his wife.

'What's the matter, girls?'

'Chantik has fallen, your highness,' said Mawar who immediately recognized who he was. Nobody could ride a horse like that unless if he was the son of Parameswara. There was a medallion on the forehead of the horse that made it stand apart from the other horses. And the saddle, made of leather had special designs only royally of the court of Palembang could sit on. Kechil Muda dismounted from his horse and tied it to a branch of a tree nearby.

'She's fainted,' said Mawar.

'Let me see.' Kechil Muda bent down and touched Chantik's forehead. It felt warm. 'Are you all right, girl?'

'Her name is Chantik, your highness,' said Mawar.

'Chantik? That's a beautiful name.' It means 'beautiful.'

Chantik immediately woke up when her name was mentioned. She opened her eyes. 'Where am I? Who are you?' asked Chantik. She was still feeling groggy and not knowing what had happened.

The girls were relieved that she had come to although she looked pale.

'Are you all right, Chantik. I'm Kechil Muda.'

'Yes, your highness,' said all the girls, almost in unison.

'What happened?' asked Chantik. She squinted. The rays of the sun hit her eyes. They were harsh on her eyes that made her squint had, because they had been closed for a while. She could not distinguish who was standing above her. He appeared as a silhouette against the bright light. And there seemed to be a glow about Kechil Muda that made her feel scared. It could even look like an apparition. Chantik could be forgiven for her lapse in judgment, if she thought that she had died and now standing before her was her creator.

'You fell from the tree.'

Chantik woke up, still not knowing what was happening. She rubbed her eyes, and then blushed when she realized that Kechil Muda, the fourth son of Parameswara was standing beside her. He stood so close that she could breathe in the sweet smell of the perfume he was using on his body. She was sure glad to be up and well again. What was he doing here and how did he get here, she thought. She felt embarrassed that the son of Parameswara was staring at her. She became conscious of herself, as she was not used to being stared at by a young prince and the second son of Parameswara at that. What was he thinking of, thought Chantik. 'I am sorry. Excuse me, your highness.' She looked at the other side and did not dare to look directly at his face.

Kechil Muda smiled. This made Chantik even more embarrassed. She blushed even more. She then immediately stood up and went to her friends. Kechil Muda looked at her in amazement. She looked scared and guilty like she had done something wrong.

'Pardon us, your highness,' said Mawar.

'That's okay.'

Chantik and her friends walked away.

'Are you sure, you're all right, Chantik?' asked Kechil Muda.

'Yes, your highness,' replied Chantik. 'We have to go now, your highness. Sorry for troubling your highness.'

'Not at all.'

Kechil Muda stood there. He smiled at them. He fixed his eyes on Chantik and did not let them go off her even until her shadows remained and her body was been hidden behind the bushes. Suddenly, he felt his heart was pounding mercilessly in his chest. He knew immediately that he had a special feeling for her. He knew she was the girl whom he had been looking for all his life. The girls were now at another spot in the woods. They rested on the branches of a tree.

'No, I did not blush,' insisted Chantik. 'I did not!'

'Yes, you did, I saw with my own eyes. Everybody saw it, too, Chantik,' insisted Mawar.

'You mean to say he actually held me in his arms? Did you say he touched me? He stared unblinkingly at me?'

'And he also blushed. He must fancy you, Chantik. It was mutual.'

'Don't be ridiculous; he's the second son of his highness Parameswara. I'm just a 'nobody's' daughter. How could he have a fascination for a simple girl like me? Stop making fun of me, girls. At least enough for today.'

'You both make an excellent couple,' chipped in Intan. 'Why did you blush then?'

'Perish the silly thought Intan. Come; let's go home, it's getting late. Besides, we will all be moving on to Bertam soon. That is what I heard. I'm sure when we start to unpack and move, he'll think of something else to keep himself busy,' said Chantik. 'Come on. Stop standing there like statues.'

Her friends didn't move.

'The demons and evil spirits in this jungle will be out to play anytime now. This is the best time for them to go out of their houses. Hurry!'

The girls got scared, they turned around. They then rushed to their respective houses together with Chantik and gave out a scream. 'Wait! Wait for me!' screamed Intan as she rushed to her hut.

Parameswara led his men to the banks of the Bertam River. He could see that it was not very wide as he had imagined. He could see the other side of the river. The banks were not high either. Most probably, it was because of the



high tide at that time that made it look low. During low tides, the banks stood at about five feet from the water level. And the water was crystal clear. He could see the bottom, and the fishes swimming in it. 'The water is so clear, and there are even fish in it,' he remarked. 'How could a river be so clear?' He later went further downstream about fifteen miles away. He turned left and saw the river spreading open as it got closer to the sea. Beyond it was just the sea and nothing else. It spread until the horizons. There were some small islands in the far distance, to the right. And on the left, there were small islands near the coast, and a larger one beyond them. The whole scenery now looked exactly what he had imagined all this while.

'They call those islands on the right, Upch Island, your highness,' explained Andak, who was standing beside him.

'And those on the left?' asked Parameswara.

'The largest on at the back is called, Large Island.'

'I see. These islands are strategically located that they act to block the strong winds to blow inland.' Parameswara turned around and stared at the whole place, in one sweep. A soft wind blew in his face. He quickly held his hair and tied his headband tighter. He seriously thought it was a good location to found his new country. From the side of the banks where he was standing at were more trees and the jungle quite dense. There was also a hill which was not too high, but steep. There was no way that anybody could climb on it, unless somebody cut a path through the thick bushes. And across the river, coconut trees grew in abundance in an area that stood close to the beach. They were of the same height. The fishing village where the huts of the fishermen stood was on the side of the river. This was where Parameswara and his followers stood. The other fishermen stopped doing what they were doing to stare at them. This was the first time they were seeing Parameswara in person. They were amazed to see a person of this stature standing in their midst, as though the gods had blessed them by his presence. They stood and waited for Parameswara to approach them to break the ice. They could not start the conversation, as it was not proper.

'Is this the mouth of the Bertam River?' asked Parameswara. 'And that the Bertam Village, over there?'

'Yes, your highness,' replied Andak.

Parameswara saw the small fishing village and the wooden huts clinging on the banks. But, he was still not decided whether to found his new country there yet. He was still uncertain about that place. He didn't feel anything - no good vibes. The place looked different though, but not very special. However,

he liked the thought of opening a country near a river-mouth where the river ran all the way from the hinterland into the wide sea.

'How long is the river?' Parameswara asked Samun.

'We are not sure, your highness,' replied Samun. 'It must be very long because it goes on and on forever until the end of the earth. But, it becomes narrower and narrower as we row inland until we can jump over it. There's not much to see there, except that the trees tend to grow until they are in the water.'

'How come none of you have ventured to go there?'

'We are happy to be here, your highness. Besides, there are crocodiles in the water, and we do not know when they are going to resurface and where they are. Because of that, none of us had rowed upstream, your highness.'

'Why? Are there also demons and evil spirits?'

Samun kept quiet.

'We're scared to venture there, your highness,' chipped in Andak. 'We heard there were dragons and other unusual creatures that inhabit that place. Some of them spew fire and they had hundreds of eyes.'

'I see.'

'What do you think, father?' asked Kechil Besar. He seemed to like the place. 'I say we stay put.'

Parameswara kept quiet. He didn't dare to commit himself until he was fully satisfied with the place.

'I hope your highness isn't disappointed,' said Perpatih Besar.

'The people seem to like your highness,' said Andak.

Parameswara turned around and looked at the villagers, they were all smiling widely. He waved at them, and they waved back.

'See what I mean, your highness.'

'Yes, your highness,' added Perpatih Besar.

'We'll see. I can't make a decision to found a country in such great haste. There are many things that we must consider' He patted Samun and Andak's back and waved his hands again at the other fishermen who were staring at them. And they waved back at him and bowed deeply. Parameswara then walked away.

Perpatih Besar and Kechil Besar walked near him with the others trailing close behind. He then turned around and returned to the woods. He was still undecided.

'Bertam Village,' said Parameswara to himself. Nobody else heard him because it was too faint for even the Perpatih Besar to hear. Only his lips moved slightly without a word coming out through them.

Parameswara sat under a shady tree after he and his followers had returned to Bertam Village. It was a short tree, hardly ten feet at the most, and it had such fine leaves. He did not know what tree it was. He had not seen a tree like that in his whole life. It was an unusual tree, unlike those around it; they were much taller but they grew in all directions. He chose this particular tree because it gave him the most shade. It stood on its own apart from the rest, like it was trying to attract attention to itself away from the rest. It had no flowers, just small buds or fruits. Most likely they were not edible, otherwise, the villagers would have plucked them to eat or cook with the food. And it looked very much like an umbrella that opened at the top of the tree. Because the leaves were so fine, they were able to filter the harsh lights from the sun above, and allowed some light to go through, thus lighting up those who sat under it. Otherwise, they would be in darkness.

Parameswara sat cross-legged under the shade of this particular tree, on a mat that had been laid down by his assistants. All sorts of food and drinks were placed before him, including fruits that they had taken from the trees in the jungles nearby. Kechil Besar, the high priest and Perpatih Besar also sat with him as though they were in a conference. Parameswara's favorite dog rushed about in front, chasing imaginary animals around chasing his tail. The other dogs were at the other side. They were busy trying to search for the scent of wild animals in the jungles, to hunt or play with.

'Look at that,' said Kechil Besar. He thought the dog would soon become so groggy and collapse to the ground on its own. May be he was scenting something in the ground. They laughed at the sight of the dog, which was acting strange. Parameswara and the others had never seen the dog behaving like that before.

'And why is the dog running like it's been possessed by the devils?' asked Parameswara. 'I have not seen any of my dogs acting like that. It's so strange. This is the first time I am seeing it behaving like that. Is he trying to say something to us? Or, may be this place is haunted, that is why the dog is acting weird.'

The dogs continued to run in circles, oblivious to the attention that he was getting from his masters and everybody there. Suddenly, a mousedeer appeared from the bush. It was not an ordinary mousedeer. It was white in color! This was also something unusual. There were not many mousedeer white in color that that Parameswara or anybody else who was there had seen before either in Palembang or anywhere they had trampled their feet at, till now. No wonder all of them stood frozen for more than a brief moment to gape at it in awe and amazement.

'What on earth is that?' asked Parameswara, as he shrieked in fear, delight and awe, not knowing what the strange creature was, although he knew it looked like a mousedeer.

'It's a mousedeer, your highness,' replied Perpatih Besar.

'I know, but, a white mousedeer? Is there such a thing?'

'This is an unusual mousedeer, your highness.'

'I know it is, that's why I asked.'

Parameswara's dog saw the mousedeer and immediately stopped running to stare at it. It got scared. It sped off in the bush. The white mousedeer gave chase. He and his followers laughed. They thought it was funny, for a dog to be chased by a mousedeer, which was much smaller and more timid compared to the dog. Because the sun was shining high in the skies, the strong rays of light gave it a special glow. It looked fantastic, almost like an apparition. Parameswara was enthralled with the sight of the mousedeer. He and the others sat transfixed at the sight of it chasing Parameswara's dog. They all knew in normal circumstance it was the dog that would be chasing it and not the other way round. And it was not just another dog, but Parameswara's favorite dog.

'And I've not seen a white mousedeer before, too,' said Kechil Besar after the elders had commented on it. 'White in color? Am I seeing things, father?'

'Neither do I, Son. Shhh! That's not an ordinary mousedeer. It is a totally different species, a rare breed. May be it's just light and not form or substance!'

They hushed down and observed carefully. The dog continued to run for its life. The mousedeer gave chase until they got to the riverbank. The dog was now trapped. It could not move back or forward. After a while, it decided to speed off by running at the side of the mousedeer. The mousedeer then kicked the dog. It was hurled up high in the air until it fell into the river. Parameswara and the others who were with him were shocked. His dog was kicked by a mousedeer, and it had fallen into the river! A white mousedeer at that! Parameswara froze in his seat. He was speechless. He knew instantly that there was an omen in the incident. 'My goodness, a mousedeer kicking my dog into the river! What does it mean high priest? It is a good omen or what? Tell me.'

'It is, your highness. A white mousedeer is indeed rare in these parts, or anywhere for that matter, your highness. How could there be a *kanal* this white?'

'Go and catch it. Hurry, before it runs away,' said Kechil Besar to the soldiers who were standing by.

'Yes, your highness,' said one of them. He handed his spear to his colleague and rushed off. He immediately ran towards the river where the two animals

were. He tried to catch the mousedeer, but it quickly ran away and disappeared in the bushes. That was the last time they ever saw the white mousedeer. It was never to be sighted by anyone ever again.

'Don't let it go!' shouted Parameswara.

The mousedeer continued to hide in the bushes.

'Go, don't let it run away!'

Few more soldiers ran to search for the mousedeer.

'He's gone, father,' said Kechil Besar.

'Too bad,' said Parameswara.

'Come back, all of you,' shouted Kechil Besar to the soldiers.

The soldiers returned to Parameswara. 'I am sorry, your highness. The mousedeer is too fast for us,' said one of the soldiers.

'That's okay. But don't forget my dog. Get it somebody.'

A soldier nodded. 'I will do so, your highness.' He then rushed to the riverbanks and jumped into the river. The dog was trying to float by kicking its front legs. The soldier quickly grabbed it and took to the shore. He then went to Parameswara with the dog in his arms. 'Here's the dog, your highness.'

Parameswara took it in his laps. Somebody offered a piece of cloth and he wiped it until it was dry. 'Why, what happened?'

The dog kept quiet as though he was feeling sorry and ashamed. The others waited.

'Do take good care of this dog, and never leave it away from your eyes,' said Parameswara. He then handed the dog to the soldier who had earlier fished it out of the Bertam River.

'Yes, your highness,' said the soldier. He took the dog and continued to wipe it with a piece of dry cloth. He then walked away.

'This is indeed a good omen, your highness,' said the high priest. A white mousedeer and your highness' dog being kicked into the river like what had happened just now.'

'You really think so?'

'Indeed, your highness.'

'I think so too, father,' said Kechil Besar. 'What else could it be if not a good omen?'

'The gods must be saying something to your highness,' chipped in the high priest.

Parameswara pondered and closed his eyes. The others waited. After a while, Parameswara opened his eyes. He turned around and looked at the high priest. 'Is this a good place to found a country, high priest?'

'Yes, it is, your highness.'

Parameswara pondered again, this time a lot longer. He just stared in the far distance at an unseen object as though he was seeing a vision and tried to see what was in his mind's eye. The others waited for his reaction. 'This looks like a good place to found a country after all. The villagers seem to welcome our presence. I could see it in their faces that they were happy to receive us. Besides, it would not do us any good if we found a country here if the people do not welcome us.'

'But, they did welcome you, father,' chipped in Kechil Besar.

'It's true, your highness,' added Perpatih Besar.

'But, what shall we call it then should father decide to found a country here?' asked Kechil Besar.

'Good question,' said Parameswara. He looked at his four sons and the high priest. They kept quiet. 'Any idea?'

He had none.

'But I can't use the name Bertam, can I?'

'Definitely not, your highness,' said Perpatih Besar.

'Why?'

'Because it is an old name. We need to have a new name to signify that this is a new country, and not just a village that had grown into a new country. Besides if your highness uses the name of Bertam, then it will be like your highness's taking this place away from them, when it's not the case.'

'Good point.'

Parameswara turned to the high priest. 'Any other suggestions?'

'Not quite, your highness. I believe it's best if your highness personally chooses the name, for the name will remain with us through time immemorial and your highness will be credited for that by the scribes, in their books, too.'

'Indeed, your highness. What the high priest has said is most correct,' said Perpatih Besar. 'It is important for your highness to choose which name to use. But, certainly not Bertam, because it is an old name.'

'All right, what name can I choose now? It is not an easy task. Bertam's out. What else is there for me to choose from? *Palembang Baru*? No, it's too simple. *Seri Negara Parameswara Jaya*. No, too long. Besides, I do not want my name to be used for my new country. It's simply too narcissistic.'

Nobody had the answer. They looked around at each other's faces. They were all blank. Some shook their shoulders. Parameswara turned to the high priest. 'Do you have any idea, high priest?'

'Why? It's called the *melaka* tree, your highness. It's called *amalaki* in Sanskrit.'

'*Amalaki? Melaka? Melaka tree?* Is that so? It has an unusual name, too. I've not heard of a tree with a name like that before in all my life. I'm certain there aren't any tree with that name.' He was delighted. He liked the sound of the word. It was short, had only three syllables that stuck so close with each other that the word could not be said if one were not certain of it. *Ma-lac-ta*. And one could even join the three syllables and make the word sound like it only had two, and not three like *amalaki. Mela-ka*.

'Yes, your highness; Melaka is the name.'

'I like the name. It is something unusual and different - *melaka tree*. Melaka! Here, a bud has fallen right into my palm.' He gave the bud to his son, Kechil Muda who took it. It looked small like beads and did not have a smell either when he took a sniff at it. He then handed it to his brother, Kechil Besar who took it. 'I shall put it in the ground so a new *melaka tree* may spring from it,' he said.

Parameswara then sprang onto his feet, much to everybody's surprise. He touched the leaves and felt that they were fine and smooth. The branches were thin looking more like twigs. They were strong, but could not be snapped easily despite looking delicate. They were strong. He fondled the fruits, while the others observed. He seemed to be enthralled with the tree, like he was communicating with it. 'It is a very short tree, not particularly shady either. The leaves are so fine and the branches too thin, but they are very strong,' said Parameswara to himself. 'There must be good spirit lurking in this tree.'

The people stood around him because Parameswara was standing. Perpatih Besar and the high priest smiled widely. They were getting the impression that Parameswara was going to name the new country after the tree.

'If that is the case, I want to build a country here. It shall be called Melaka after the name of this tree I had sat under. And from here too, I had seen how a white mousedeer mysteriously turning up from the bushes and kicked my favorite dog into the river. What can be more memorable and remarkable than that? What can be more meaningful than that?'

Everybody smiled. They were greatly relieved that finally they were going to have a new country of their own. Their search for one had thus ended here on these very banks. They could now rest their tired bodies and settled to a normal family life, where they could build their own houses, rear livestock, plant food and fish in the river and sea. For the first time, they could cook food in their own huts and see smoke flying in the air from their roofs. And where they could sleep in the privacy of their own houses, instead of having to share tents with friends and strangers alike.

'Very well, your highness. And Melaka it will be called, your highness,' said Perpatih Besar. 'And the river there will also be called the Melaka River.'

'Indeed, my dear count. Let the people of Bertam Village know that from now onwards, Bertam Village will cease to exist on this earth. And its place grows our new country of Melaka, and the river is no more the Bertam River, but the Melaka River,' said Parameswara. He then turned around and saw the hills that stood between the river and the straits. 'I shall also call those hills, the Melaka Hill,' he proclaimed, much to the delight of the people who were crowding around him. 'And on its foothills will be the houses of the four ministers whom I shall appoint, they are the *Bendahara* (Prime Minister), *Temenggong* (Customs officer), *Bendahari* (Treasurer) and *Laksamana* (Admiral.) The prime minister's house, however, will be further north, and it will be called the Prime Minister's Village. And as for me, my palace will be upstream away from the port and river-mouth. It will be called the Bertam Palace. In this way, our enemies will not be able to get near us; they will be trounced even before they can come close to me. But I will have a palace on the hill to receive visitors.' He then remembered how the layout of the royal palace in Palembang and wanted to copy it. The fact that the ruler of Palembang's palace was upstream was what helped the rulers from potential harm from foreign forces through the ages. He felt it was wise to copy it.

Perpatih Besar then whispered in his ear. 'What about the straits, your highness?'

Parameswara turned and looked at the straits. 'Very well, I shall call the sea in front of us, the straits of Melaka.'

'I shall obey your command, your highness,' said Perpatih Besar. 'I will make an announcement to all of the villagers so that they will know of this exciting turn of events, your highness. I'm sure they will be so excited that they won't be able to sleep tonight or go to sea for a few days, simply because they are so happy and excited. For they, too, have been waiting for this day to happen.'

Kechil Besar was relieved. They now finally had a place to stay put. They could now rest their tired bodies and stopped erecting their tents and setting up camps, to sleep at, but could now build their own huts where they were able live in greater comfort. Their trek through the thick and unfriendly jungles had now come to an end. They had finally arrived home. And home for them was now in Melaka, their new country in the Malay Peninsula and not quite across the straits of Melaka from Palembang in Sumatra where they came from originally. So, it was in 1390 CE or 792 AH of the Muslim lunar calendar or 4088 of the Chinese calendar, that Parameswara finally founded his new



country that he called Melaka. It was eleven years after he had been on the run from Palembang that took him to Majapahit and Temasik before he came to Melaka and two years after he had lived in Bertam Hulu.

He walked towards the banks at the river-mouth. The fishermen were still there. They were happy to see him approaching them. They greeted him. 'Long live, Parameswara! Long live, Parameswara!' They were all excited when Perpatih Besar had told them of the wonderful news that Parameswara had finally decided to found his country at the spot where he had rested at, under the *melaka* tree (*Emblica Officinalis*). They, too, liked the new name of the country - Melaka. It was a new word for them, but they would soon get used to it. They were told of how Parameswara had finally decided to found his new country there. They heard about the white mousedeer but none of them had actually seen it before; about how it kicked Parameswara's favorite dog into the river and the tree called *melaka* that he was resting under called. They were all pleased; they thanked the gods for their good fortune. They had seen this particular tree many times before. So, naturally they were amazed that Parameswara was inspired by it and decide to found his new country here.

Parameswara and his huge entourage were a spectacle. They had come to bring not only joy, but also glory and development and peace, thought Samun. Personally, he thought his prayers were answered. He knew that Bertam Village would be visited by a foreign dignitary, but little did he expect the dignitary that finally came was not alone, but with his entire royal household who were equipped with the finest royal paraphernalia.

The soldiers looked like they were well trained, disciplined and orderly. They wore a uniform and looked like a replica of each other, right to their mustaches and beards. They looked regal like they were royally themselves and more presentable than the villagers. As for Parameswara, the villagers held him in high regard. They thought he would definitely make a good ruler for their village. He had the stature and good looks, and he could command everybody's attention without demanding it. How lucky could the people in Bertam Village be? How did he get to this point, asked Samun to himself; how did he know the people in Bertam Village were hoping for a ruler like Parameswara to lead them? The gods had answered their prayers. It had come twenty years after they had first envisioned that their little remote village could one day become a country of it's own with their ruler. Although they did not expect that the ruler would be someone as glorious and dignified as Parameswara whom they had heard before.

They then started to relate the same story to their friends and relatives, and to all those who had not heard of it. And the story continued to be told and re-

told, but the essence remained, until it was related to the people in the neighboring countries via the fishermen who had come to Melaka River to fish. They thought it was funny to arrive at Bertam Village and return to their own states from Melaka instead. Because of them, the story of the founding of Melaka was remembered for ages. Later Malay scribes wrote it down on goatskin for posterity. They were engaged by the succeeding sultans of Melaka as well as those foreign rulers who had stopped by on their way to the Far East or Middle East, depending on from where they were from. These were people from the 'land above the wind' or the 'land below the wind'. This was how the world was conveniently described by the Melaka folks and officials who thought that the world were divided in two, i.e. those who lived to the east or west of Melaka. They were the people who visited Melaka by sailing with the Northerly or Southerly winds. These winds caught their wide sails and pushed their ships and junks to the new port of Melaka. Here they rested and traded with each other, before returning with new goods to the countries where they had come from.

'God save Melaka and our ruler Parameswara! God save Melaka and our ruler, Parameswara!' the villagers shouted in unison.

Parameswara waved at them. He was pleased with the support that he was getting from the people. Although he was a stranger in Bertam Village, yet the villagers welcomed him and his entourage with open arms like a long-lost son. He could sense that their welcome was sincere.

'Listen everybody: I shall build on the mouth of this Bertam River, a new country called Melaka. And this river will be called the Melaka River from this day on. And Perpatih Besar is my loyal and trusted prime minister,' announced Parameswara in a loud voice that boomed. 'Therefore, I'd like to seek the blessings from all of you in the former Bertam Village to give all your support so that Melaka will be prosperous and well-known throughout the region.'

'We thank the gods and the holy spirits of the jungle!' chanted the villagers in unison. Samun, who had now become their unofficial leader, led them. 'We thank the gods and the holy spirits of the jungle! Our prayers have been answered this day.'

The people of Bertam Village and his followers were delighted; more so those who had come to Bertam with him. They were eager to stay put after going around in circles by taking whatever possession with them. They were also relieved that they were now able to rest their tired bodies and find a permanent home for themselves and their children.

'Long live, Parameswara! Long live, Parameswara!' shouted the fishermen and Parameswara's followers and officials.

'But, do remember, Melaka shall be built upon the combined strength and ingenuity of all of us,' said Parameswara.

The people shouted their approval. Perpatih Besar smiled. He was relieved that Parameswara had made the decision two years after they had lived here.

'I, as your ruler will ensure that Melaka becomes an important trading port for foreign merchants, and all of us will live prosperously as our new country develops.'

'Long live, Parameswara!' shouted the fishermen. 'Long live Melaka!'

Samun and his friends later rushed to the *melaka* tree. They erected a wooden fence around it, and placed some offerings to the gods and holy spirits of the jungle. They then lay prostrate before it for a while before standing up. They then plucked some leaves and ate them. They hoped their lives to were blessed with it. They then took a branch with leaves and returned to their huts where they stuck it to the wall for protection and blessing. Others rolled some leaves in pieces of cloth and tied it around their neck for added personal protection and blessing.

Parameswara immediately set out to build his new country. He looked around and saw a spot, which he thought was just nice to build his city and port. It was at the river-mouth near the foot of the Melaka Hill and not too far away from the straits. There were tall coconut trees on the north, while the hill was covered with lush vegetation and trees. He trekked through the jungles and climbed on the Melaka Hill with his senior officials. He was happy with what he saw from the peak. The scenery looked stunning. He could see the mouth of the Melaka River that opened as it met with the straits of Melaka. 'This is simply breathtaking, full of life and promise, my dear count,' he remarked. 'The scenery is simply stunning. I've never seen a sight like this before.'

'Indeed, your highness,' said Perpatih Besar.

Parameswara turned and saw some islands on the left and right of the river-mouth. The one on the right was the largest of the islands that were already known as the Large Island and Upeh Island, respectively by the people. The sun was beginning to sink in the horizons. The whole area was bathed in golden-red light. Parameswara was still standing there. The high priest went to him. 'Shall we offer some prayers, your highness?' he asked politely.

'That's a good idea. Proceed.'

They held a short prayer service on the peak of the Melaka Hill.

Chantik was drying clothes by herself behind her family's new wooden house. She looked a lot more matured now than she did when they just started out on

the trekking with Parameswara. She was like a flower bud that was about to bloom with its petals spreading out. No wonder her parents were now more protective of her than they did when she was just a small child.

Now that the people knew that they were staying put in Melaka, they had built for themselves wooden huts that were more sturdy. They had been living in tents the whole time they were on the move, that living in these newly built wooden huts was a luxury they enjoyed immensely. They were more pleasant looking, spacious and certainly more comfortable to live in, especially during the day when the sun was high up in the sky, or when the rain fell, when they could still be dry. Mostly, many of Parameswara's followers were now putting on weight. They were thin and lean when they were trekking through the jungles or fleeing from Majapahit or Temasik now that they had stayed put in Melaka, they were able to live comfortably and eat well. As a result, they put on weight and looked healthier than they were before. Sounds of excited kids running and screaming about were heard. All of them also made sure that in front of their houses were their spirit houses that they had built so they could offer their prayers and blessings to the gods, for their good fortunes everyday without fail. They now adorned them with twigs and leaves from the *melaka* tree for more blessings.

Kechil Muda rode his horse and went to Chantik. He knew he could find her there. Since the first meeting in the woods he had, his heart pinned on her. She was in his mind all the time he was awake. He thought she was just ripe for marriage and motherhood. He wanted her to be his special girlfriend first, and she agreed. However, they did not want to let their parents know about their relationship for the moment because they feared that they would not allow it. Her father was just a fisherman like most of the followers of Parameswara who had come to Melaka with him. What would he feel if he found out that his eldest daughter, Chantik was involved in a serious relationship with the second son of Parameswara, the first ruler of Melaka, she thought.

Parameswara still had no official title. He did not know what to call himself, sultan or ruler. He had not come to the point of seeking a formal title for his followers to call him. He had other more important things to think about. Most importantly, he wanted to establish Melaka so that it could become a port of call for foreign traders and merchants.

News of the founding of Melaka was spreading slowly in all directions, even to Palembang where Parameswara had come from. But his elder brother the fifth ruler of Palembang just ignored him. He had severed his ties with Parameswara and considered him an ungrateful person, an ingrate. He thought

Melaka could not survive long, and Parameswara would be up to his old mischief again and cause trouble wherever he went. Because of that, he really was not optimistic for either Parameswara or Melaka.

The fishermen and traders from the neighboring Malay states who come to Melaka were surprised to see that there was some order there, compared to the past, when they could just arrive, catch fish and rowed out of the river. Now they were pleasantly aware that the village had a ruler, and his name was Parameswara. It was a highly unusual and difficult name to remember, but soon they were able to pronounce it well. There were also more wooden huts, some bigger than the others were. The largest hut was the palace of the ruler himself. It stood on the peak of the hill not too far away from the river-mouth. But, it could not be seen because the woods and trees were hiding it. It did not look anything unusual, except for its size. The wooden walls were not decorated with carvings while the roof was just made of *attap* leaves that they had collected from the hinterland. Trees grew well and in abundance on the banks of the Melaka River.

'How are you, my dearest?' asked Kechil Muda. His voice was so gentle that he could melt Chantik's heart like ice on fire.

'Very well indeed, my sweetheart,' replied Chantik tenderly. Her voice too had changed. She feared to look at the face of her boyfriend. She felt embarrassed that he managed to catch a fleeting glance of him. She hid her face under an extra piece of *sarong* that she covered the top of her body.

'I will tell my parents about our wedding. I can't wait to make you my wife. It has been torturing me. Every minute I am without you in my sight is like a year in the fires of hell. I'm a tiger now, and I want to gore you to pieces; I'm no more a kitten like I was before I first set eyes on you.'

'I'm sure they won't approve of it.'

'Why?'

'I am a commoner from an ordinary family. My father's just a fisherman here, your highness. How could the daughter of a fisherman in Melaka be romantically involved with a prince, and son of his highness Parameswara, our supreme and much glorious ruler?'

Kechil Muda smiled. Chantik was surprised. Her family background and social status was not an issue with him and he made it clear to her. 'Perish the thought! They will accept whomever I have fallen in love with. Besides, it's good omen that ours be the first wedding to be held in our new country of ours. This is an opportunity for us to throw a feast for everybody here in this new country.'

Chantik finished drying the clothes. She picked up the empty washing basket and went off. 'I have to go now.'

'I'll see you later,' said Kechil Muda.

Chantik preferred not to respond. She continued to run towards her house nearby.

'Wait. I have many more things to talk to you about.'

Chantik stopped and turned to look at Kechil Muda. 'My parents are inside. They won't like it if I see anyone out here. I have strict orders not to remain outside too long, alone; besides, I have to pound rice with my mother in a short while. See you later, my dear.'

'Pounding rice?'

'Yes, by using the wooden pounder or *tumbuk*.'

'I'll see you soon. You won't have to do that yourself, dear. Do they know about me?'

'No. I haven't told them yet. They're still too busy with themselves, I don't think they're interested in me. They still think I'm a child who hasn't any need for love yet.'

'Oh, really?' Kechil Muda smiled. He stared at Chantik and did not let his gaze off her until she had totally disappeared inside the house, and the last bit of her shadow had disappeared. In the absence of her, even her shadow was good for him to stare at, for it was her companion, too. She closed the door. Kechil Muda then rode off, feeling not fully satisfied that he had not got her in his arms.

He walked along the corridor of their new palace. Some of the workers were still working on another parts of the palace, which were partially completed. A symphony of sounds of the workers and artisans knocking on the wood was heard from inside the palace. But, Parameswara did not mind it; it was music to him. He was happy that his followers were now engaged in pursuits that are more meaningful. Many temples too had been built everywhere for the people to pray and offer their blessings. At night the compound of the palace turned into a fairyland, with all the torches lit by the workers who poured kerosene and lit all the lamps. The high priests, too, were happy with the development. Melaka could become the center for the spread of their religion; other than for trading and commerce although the other states in the region were under the control of rulers and kings were still devout Hindus.

News of the founding of Melaka spread wide to the neighboring states. The rulers had not yet tried to make any contact with Parameswara either personally or through emissaries. All of them were still adopting a wait-and-see

attitude. They wanted to see how far Parameswara was going to develop Melaka and see if it could come to the same par with their states. They had sent their men to spy on what was going on there, though. They returned to give glowing reports on what they had observed and studied there. They told of the spanking new palace on the hill near the mouth of the Melaka River. The other Malay rulers were delighted.

'This palace will be completed soon, son,' said Parameswara. 'I have ordered that it will take the shape of our former palace in Palembang. I particularly like to have a Minangkabau-style roof.'

'Good,' replied Kechil Muda. 'Everybody in Melaka is anxious to see it's full completion.'

His father nodded. He then noticed that his second son's face seemed to be hiding something. It belied his true emotions. 'Why are you looking so quiet these days, son? You've not been yourself since we got here.'

'Is anything that is bothering you. Are you keeping a secret in your heart?' added his mother, Dewi Puteri.

Kechil Muda kept quiet. He was reluctant to explain. His father waited.

'Go on, you can tell me.'

Kechil Muda looked up straight in the face and stared at his father. 'A very beautiful girl is distracting my consciousness; it's making my heart pound and making me lose sleep. I have never set eyes on such a beautiful thing like that in all my life, dear father, mother.'

'Good for you,' said his mother.

'And I wish to take her as my wife.'

Parameswara and his wife were delighted.

'Who is she?' asked Dewi Puteri. 'I'm happy for you, son.'

'Chantik.'

Parameswara and his wife were not familiar with her. It did not sound like the name of a girl from a well-known family. She was definitely not royal or a daughter of a high-ranking official whom they knew. A name like that was mostly for girls from the ordinary class. May be her father was just a fisherman, thought Parameswara. Nevertheless, she must be a very beautiful girl; otherwise, her parents would not have named her so. Chantik is a Malay word that means beautiful.

'Is she one of the dignitaries' daughter?' asked Dewi Puteri. 'Is she a foreigner, with a name like that?'

'No. She's the daughter of a commoner, mother. I hope both of you are not disappointed. She had been with us since we left Palembang many years ago, with her family. Her father is just a fisherman.'

'Fisherman?' asked his mother. She almost choked. She put her hands on her chest.

'Why should we? Any girl my son desires we'll accept her with open arms,' said Parameswara. 'And we shall arrange for your wedding right away then. There's no need to wait. This wedding will thrill everybody in Melaka.'

'That's right. All of us are anxiously waiting for the birth of Seri's son and now, your wedding... It will be the first to be held in Melaka. The gods and deities have blessed us all. I'm sure the people will also be delighted with your marriage,' said Parameswara. 'Bring her parents to see me first thing tomorrow morning and we can set the date. I will also discuss with all the high priests to see which is the most auspicious day and time to have your wedding,' added Dewi Puteri as he hugged her son.

Kechil Muda was relieved beyond measure.

An elderly Indian-Muslim merchant, called Khoja Muhammad appeared with some men at the main entrance of the palace. Fortunately, he came few weeks after the mourning period was over. The guards allowed them in because they looked respectable and presentable. Mostly, they were already known as important traders from the district of Gujerat in India, where there was a Muslim majority.

They then stood in the compound and waited for the next instructions. This was the first time they had stepped inside the compound of the palace of the ruler of Melaka, although they had wanted to do so much earlier. Khoja Muhammad was reluctant to come to the palace earlier because he felt that Parameswara, being a Hindu, would not open the gates to him being a Muslim. '*Asalamulaiikum*', your majesty,' he said in Arabic.

Parameswara and Kechil Muda turned around. They did not know what the Indian-Muslim merchant had just said.

'What did he say, my son? Do you know?' asked Parameswara.

'What did he say?' asked Kechil Muda. 'I haven't the faintest idea.'

Dewi Puteri was also not sure. She shook her head. Parameswara and his son and wife waited.

'*Asalamulaiikum*,' repeated the merchant.

'What does that mean, my dear merchant?' asked Parameswara again.

'It's Arabic, and it just means, peace be with you.'

'*Ab*, how nice. And peace be with you, too.'

'Thank you.'

'Do come in, dear merchant,' said Kechil Besar.



Khoja Muhammad slipped off his leather sandals called *capals* and washed his feet at the container that had been placed near the stairs. He then stepped into the front part of the palace, which was very much like the verandah. He shook Parameswara, Besar Muda and Kechil Muda's hand. He nodded at the *permaisuri* or queen Dewi Puteri because he did not want to touch her hand. She thought it was strange that he did not offer to shake her hand.

'Come, let's sit here,' said Parameswara.

'I'll go inside, dear,' said Dewi Puteri to her husband. She entered the palace and left the men alone in the verandah. He then took with her the box of *sentil* with her. She, however, left the box of betel leaves for the guests to help themselves.

'What brings you here, my dear friend?' asked Parameswara. 'Have some betel leaves.'

'That's okay. I wish to seek some advice from your majesty,' said Khoja Muhammad.

'Very well, let's sit over there.'

They went to the *bendul* and sat at the edge of the verandah overlooking the straits. Dewi Puteri walked the other way and entered the palace proper.

'It is breezy here. Yes, what do you have in mind, dear merchant?'

'My name is Khoja Muhammad.'

'Yes, Mr. Khoja Muhammad, it is nice of you to come here and pay your respects here. And where are you from, did you say?'

'Gujerat in India. I've brought all these wonderful presents from where I've come from, your highness,' said Khoja Muhammad. He then opened the cases. Parameswara was surprised to see fine cloths and gold bangles and jewelry that he had not set eyes before.

'These are for your majesty and your highnesses.'

'They are beautiful, my dear merchant. What's your name again?'

'Khoja Muhammad.'

'Khoja Muhammad? What sort of a name is that? I have not heard of it before. It doesn't sound Indian. Are you Arab?'

'No, your highness. I am an Indian from Gujerat. I'm not Hindu, but, a Muslim. My ancestors were Hindus, though, but they had converted to Islam and *masuk Melayu* (became Malays) few hundred years ago, and so I'm a Muslim by birth, too.'

'How can an Indian be a Muslim at the same time? Tell me, I'm confused. Aren't all Indians, Hindus?'

'Not really. My father had embraced Islam long ago.'

'Won't the gods and goddesses, deities and idols curse you?'

'On the contrary, I have been blessed with a good life. And that is why I'm here.'

Dewi Puteri alighted from inside the palace looking slightly puzzled with the commotion. 'What's the commotion all about?' she asked.

'Here is Khoja Muhammad, a merchant from Gujerat in India. He has come with presents for us,' said her husband.

She then went to there. 'These will look good on Kechil Muda and Chantik, for their wedding.'

Kechil Besar and Kechil Muda stood before the altar in the temple that had been erected inside the palace. They stood with both their hands clasped and held close to their chests. The high priest was conducting the service. He chanted verses in Sanskrit, offered greetings to the gods, idols and deities, threw flower petals, and sprinkled scented water. Later that night, Kechil Besar's wife gave birth. The baby's cries were heard. This was the first time a baby's cries was heard in the palace. Parameswara, Kechil Besar and Kechil Muda rushed to the room.

'It's a prince, your highness,' said the royal midwife.

'Thank god, my prayers have been answered,' said Kechil Besar. He then rushed into the bedroom and saw the baby lying beside his mother, Kamarul Ajaib. Kechil Besar then went to the baby and raised it in the air.

'What shall you name him, my son?' asked his mother.

Kechil Besar thought. 'I shall call him Tengah, mother.'

'Ab, that's a good name.'

There were now many wooden huts on both sides of the banks of the river than there were before. Some of the people had even moved in the hinterland where they opened new settlements for themselves. These were mostly the farmers who needed more land to cultivate. The fishermen preferred to stay near the river-mouth so that they could fish or go to sea. And there were many fishing boats and ships from the neighboring states in the river-mouth. Melaka had developed into a full-fledged port. Not too far away was the new palace. It was now visible to anyone from the sea. The trees and bushes had all been cleared with a road constructed to connect the palace and the new port where there was a hive of activities as more ships and boats berthed or docked. The people were speaking in many languages that were confusing when all of them started to speak at the same time.

Parameswara went to the river-mouth with his grandson in his arms. He remarked, 'I am happy to see that the port has developed. There are many foreign ships and merchants. What a sight; wonderful, just wonderful.'

An Arab holy man, Syed Abdul Aziz greeted Parameswara in the warmest and friendliest tone that he could possibly utter. '*Asalamulaikum, ya, Kechil Besar.*' His intonation, however, was distinctively Arabic.

'My warmest greetings to you, my dear Syed Abdul Aziz. And where are you from? Gujerat in India, too?'

'No, your majesty, Arabia.'

'How far away are you from here?'

'It is a long way from here. If I set sail today, I will only arrive home in two to three months. It depends on the winds; if they are strong, I can arrive home in two months. If they are weak, I will arrive there in three. Allah knows best, your majesty. We're all His humble servants.'

'Allah?' asked Kechil.

'Yes, your highness. *'Allahuakbar! Aryabaduallah billah washaduanna Muhammad darasullah.'*

Parameswara was confused. 'No, I'm afraid I don't understand a word of Arabic, my dear friend. I only speak Malay and a little bit of Sanskrit or Tamil. But, I know how to say *Asalamulaikum*. I know it means 'peace be with you.' An Indian merchant who was came from India, Khoja Muhammad is his name, taught me how to say it. He says my pronunciation is perfect. He should know. It is a very long word, very difficult to pronounce in the beginning, because my tongue was not familiar with the syllables. You see, the Malay and Indian, and even Sanskrit languages have syllables that sound totally different.'

'No wonder.'

'What exactly did you say just now, Syed Abdul Aziz? Tell me. I want to know.'

'It just means that "There is no God but Allah, and Prophet Muhammad is His Messenger.'

'I'm confused. What does that mean, my friend.'

'This is our religion; it is called Islam. I am a Muslim. The religion originally came from the Arabian Peninsula and it was spread by the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, because he was commanded to do so by Allah to save the whole of mankind.'

Parameswara was more confused now. 'Very well said my friend. We will be very happy to go to your country some day. I'm sure it's a beautiful country.'

'Do come. Our house is open anytime. But don't expect to see lots of trees; we only have the desert and sand, but hardly any trees. It's very much like the sea, where you can see as far as you eye can, in all directions except that in the desert, instead of the water it is sand and more sand. Sometimes there are the

oases here and there. The oases are like ports or cities where we rest our tired bodies and replenish ourselves before moving on to our destination.

'Whatever it is, I'm sure it is a lovely place.'

Abdul Aziz nodded.

'Have a good day,' said Parameswara. He then went away. He saw other Indian traders doing about their business at the other part of the port.

'These foreign traders are very happy to do trading here, father,' Kechil Besar.

'But, why is everybody just fishing? Can't they do something else besides?'

'What is there to do besides fishing, father?'

'We have so much space; why can't they cultivate the land, and grow fruits so that they don't have to be dependent on the sea.'

'That's a brilliant idea, father. I shall inform the prime minister to get more of our people to cultivate the land. In this way, they won't be left idle. Strange thought can seep in the minds of those who are idle, father.'

'Very true,' said Parameswara. 'But don't force them to work, if they are not keen to toil the land. Let them do it when and if they feel like it. Remember; do not engage force on anyone, least of all on our people. We are nothing without them!'

Kechil Muda nodded.

Kechil Muda and Chantik were being married. It was conducted in the usual Hindu way that was also steeped in the Malay tradition of Palembang royalty. The high priest performed the rites. Hundreds of state dignitaries including Perpatih Besar were there. Some were from outside of Melaka, and they were wearing their own traditional costumes of all shapes, designs and colors. They had all come to witness the grand wedding. The ordinary people crowded around the palace compound. They were now neatly dressed, compared to just a year or so ago, when they were wearing shabbily in tree barks and leaves. They were hoping to catch a view of what was happening there, especially the royal couple, Kechil Muda and his bride, Chantik. They were both resplendent in their golden colored wedding costumes; and especially Chantik who was bedecked with gold ornaments that had been passed down to her by her mother-in-law's mother. They stood tiptoed and craned their necks in order to catch a better view from their vantage point outside of the palace building. Apart from the locals, many of them were permanent residents of the country who were from Java, Riau, Sumatra, the Arabian Peninsula and India. They were mostly fishermen, but some of them were petty traders and merchants.

Fortunately, Pala's wedding was brief. Everything was fine and it happened in an orderly fashion. The high priest took it as a good omen. After the long wedding ceremony, Kechil Muda and his bride were then taken out of the palace and paraded throughout the city for everybody to see. The people lined both sides of the road. They showered scented flower petals at their feet as the couple passed by. There was merriment throughout the whole state, because it was the first time the people had seen a royal wedding taking place there. Everybody was ecstatic with the sight of the procession that was half a kilometer long. Most of all, the people of Melaka were happy to see the Palembang wedding traditions being exhibited; it was totally different from those that they were familiar with.

### CHAPTER 3: THE CHINESE ADMIRAL

The City of Nanjing in China in 1403 CE or 805 AH in the year of the rooster or *you* in 4101, or three years after the founding of Melaka by Parameswara. It was the southern capital of the imperial Chinese government and Emperor Yong-le was just in his first year of his reign. It was a large city of a few hundred thousand with stone and brick houses that lined the streets, all having similar features, with Chinese-style roofs, cobbled pavements and wide streets. It was very difficult to distinguish between the houses; so were the people, who seemed to look the same, despite their large number. They wore the same clothes and hairstyle, too.

Nanjing stood three miles from the *Yangtze-kiang* or Yangtze River. From there, a canal was constructed that linked it to the imperial palace, so that the emperor's barge could sail from there to the river. Around the palace was a thirty-three-kilometer long wall that literally enclosed the whole palace compound. Two hundred thousand men constructed it over twenty years. It had thirteen gates with the Heping Gate in the north and the Zhong-hua Gate in the south. The center of the city, however, was where the Drum Tower sat at. It was built in 1382 CE or 873 AH in the year of the snake or *si* in 4080 and could be seen from all directions despite the many new buildings that had been built around it. It was one of the city's more prominent landmarks, and became its focal point of direction for the people living there. Other important landmarks in the city included the Porcelain Pagoda Tower that was built by

Yong-le in the palace belonging to his mother. There were also bridges that were built which used red granite with circular arches beside the pagoda. The most famous of which is the Five-Dragon Bridge.

Being the cold season, the people were all wrapped up in bundles, with only their faces and palms exposed. When they spoke, vapor spouted from the mouth like the dragons. Here and there, men, women and children stood near fires that were lit to keep them warm.

The Chinese Prime Minister Hai Shou was being driven in a horse-carriage across the city. It passed through many streets and headed straight towards the palace. It entered the compound without being stopped by the guards. They immediately flung open the heavily decorated wide metal doors of the imperial palace when they caught sight of the official flag of the prime minister as the carriage was coming their way, in the far distance. They bowed deeply until the carriage had gone far inside the spacious compound of the palace. The road was wide and it extended to two miles so that whoever approached it could be ascertained of their identities. Surely, only those who had official business and were related to the emperor and the royal family had the need to pass by that road. This could be determined from the carriage they were using. Only those who held high posts in the court of imperial China had such carriages. The more powerful an official, more carriages would travel in his or her convoy. And with it, men on horsebacks could be seen rushing on both sides of the carriages. Only the low-ranking officers had a horseman riding far ahead of his carriage. His duty was to inform the guards at the main gates of the impending arrival of their bosses. Even then, the guards of the palace did not easily recognize some of these junior officials. The horsemen found it difficult trying to explain that their bosses had an urgent audience with the emperor or any other senior official in the palace. Therefore, in order that they were not stopped, these horsemen sometimes had to carry a letter of invitation that they could produce to the guards before their bosses were allowed inside the palace unhindered. Even then, the entrance that they could use to enter the palace was not the main one, but the smaller side entrance used mainly by the junior officials of the palace and other local dignitaries. This entrance was also used for traders to send in provisions to the palace.

The prime minister alighted from his carriage after it had rolled to a stop in front of the palace building. The lord chamberlain Huang Chang, who also acted as the minister of protocol, greeted. 'Good day, prime minister.'

'Good day, my dear lord chamberlain,' replied the prime minister.

The lord chamberlain then escorted him inside the palace, where Emperor Yong-le was expecting him. 'His supreme majesty is expecting your excellency in the Fien-Tian throne room.'

Hai Shou was surprised; he did not believe what he had just heard. 'The throne room?' This could not be real; normally he only met with emperor in the royal study. There must be something important that the emperor wanted to discuss, he thought.

'Yes, his supreme majesty has something very important to discuss with your excellency that couldn't wait. And his supreme majesty wishes to discuss it with all the senior officials of the palace so that they are also aware of what is happening here.'

'Oh, I see. Very well then, if that is what his supreme emperor wishes, I will gladly obey.'

Yong-le sat on his throne with his gaze fixed at an unseen object, as was his habit. He showed no emotion. He looked exactly like all the colorful portraits of his ancestors on the wall. However, only one was a past emperor of the Ming dynasty who was his father who founded the dynasty more than three decades earlier. He, a Han peasant by the name of Zhu Yuanzhang had rebelled against the emperor and established the Ming dynasty and became its first emperor for thirty-one years and was later succeeded by his fourth son, Yong-le. His original name, however, was Prince Zhu Di before it was changed to Emperor Yong-le.

They senior court officials were at the ready to meet with the needs and demands of the emperor. They stood in front of him, looking down. None dared to look at him in the face. The lord chamberlain entered the throne room. He took his usual spot near the door. At this time, the prime minister was still not seen. He was asked to stand a few feet behind the lord chamberlain until his presence was formally announced. This was their custom - their royal tradition that had been brought handed through the ages.

'His excellency, the Prime Minister Hai Shou of your supreme majesty's imperial government is paying homage to the supreme majesty Emperor Yong-le,' announced the palace official who was standing by the door in his usual melodic and high pitch voice. He then entered the throne room and escorted the Hai Shou who went before the emperor and immediately lay prostrate before him as the others waited. He then stood up to start with his official business.

'Your loyal prime minister is at your service, your supreme majesty Emperor Yong-le,' said the prime minister in court Mandarin that sounded melodic to the ear especially with its high pitch sound. It reverberated in the

spacious room. 'And I, your humble servant, have come here at your royal command. Please let us know what your supreme majesty has to command me to do and I shall execute it to the very best of my capabilities.'

'What's this I hear of another state in *Nanyang* - South Ocean Lands called Melaka, with a new ruler, called *Bai Li Mi Su La* (Parameswara), if I'm not mistaken? Is this how he is called?' asked the emperor. 'There are still areas in the region that we have not yet controlled or dominate. How's this? Are there more barbarians whom we have not dominated yet - these 'overseas barbarians'? We must do something fast so that these barbarians do not quarrel with each other among themselves. They are like dust, even though small, yet they can cause us eye irritation.'

'Very true, your supreme majesty; indeed, there's a new country in the Malay Peninsula called Melaka. It sits in the mouth of the Melaka River, at a strategic location, your supreme majesty. It was just a small fishing village before the new ruler founded it. It was called the Bertam Village and the river, Bertam River. There is a hill called Melaka Hill where the ruler has a palace made of wood.'

'Will they be friendly towards us, or will they be our new sworn enemies? What is the position of their emperor? Do they have an emperor, or a king, my dear prime minister? What do they call their ruler? What is his name? Does he know about me? Is he aware of our imperial kingdom? And tell me what else do you know about them. How could a ruler and kingdom suddenly spring out of nowhere? Did they fall down from the skies, too, like our ancestors, did?'

The prime minister tried to remember all the questions that came in quick successions. He had been adept at remembering many questions all at once. The emperor had this habit of shooting all the questions in one go, without giving his officials the chance to reply to them one by one. He had formed these questions in his head long before the prime minister appeared before him.

'It's very difficult to say, your supreme majesty; from what I have discovered the state of Melaka indeed has a ruler, but he's not yet proclaimed the sultan, as the other Malay rulers in the region call themselves.'

'Where is he from? He just can't appear from anywhere. Did he also come down from the Heavens like my ancestors did?'

'It is a known fact that he is a runaway prince from the powerful kingdom of Palembang in Sumatra. He has a colorful history, no doubt. He had traveled to Singasari, the capital of the kingdom of Majapahit on Java Island and inflicted untold damage to it. He then he fled for his life to the island of Temasik and repeated his misdeeds there on the official Siamese



representative, Tamogj who was a relative of the Siamese king. And because of his misadventures there, he had to flee again from the island and crossed the Straits of Tebrau and went to the Malay Peninsula. I have been informed that he had founded a new country there that he called Melaka, your supreme majesty.'

'Melaka? What sort of a name is that?'

'It was the name of a tree where the ruler of Melaka had sat when his dog was kicked by a white mousedeer. And because of that he decided to remain there and found his new country.'

'A white mousedeer? Is there such a thing as a white mousedeer? I have not seen it before. Do we have them here in China?'

'I am afraid not, your supreme majesty; the white mousedeer is indeed a rare breed of animal like the *garuda*. No wonder Parameswara took it as a good omen. Can't blame him for that... He certainly had made a wise move, worthy of a ruler of a new country.'

'Dragon? *Chen?*'

The others kept quiet; they were not sure, but they didn't want to tell the emperor who guess it was the year of the dragon.

'It is auspicious indeed.'

'True, your supreme majesty.'

'Did the people of Bertam Village welcome him with open arms, or were they angry with him? Did he have to kill anyone to get hold of the state? Didn't the villagers have their own leaders, too?'

'On the contrary, the people of Bertam Village welcomed them with open arms. They were very happy with his presence, because this was what they had been praying for years.'

'What is the religion that he profess? Hindu, Buddhist, too, like all the other Malay ruler in the region, Nanyang?'

'Yes indeed, your supreme majesty. All the rulers in Nanyang are devout Hindus or Buddhist like all their ancestors before them. And they are many temples all over the country, for the people to pray at and offer their daily blessings to their gods and deities. In fact, they have been Hindus for ages, ever since the Sri Vijayan empire was established in southeast Sumatra in the seventh or eighth century, your supreme majesty or eight hundred years ago!'

Yong-le thought hard. He was impressed with his prime minister's vast knowledge of the region. It was so precise, well described, and thoroughly researched. No wonder he was described as a scholar-prime minister. He was amazed at his knack for facts and figures, and his assessment of the ruler of Melaka and the country. No wonder Yong-le was greatly impressed with him.

He then started to wonder if it was wise to embrace Melaka in their sphere of influence, or to attack and dominate and turned it into their new satellite or puppet state. He squashed the later proposal because he knew Melaka still posed a strong threat to the Chinese forces, because as they were dependent on the winds. These were necessary to help propel their junks that carried whatever supplies they might need to ship later, should their first attempt at attacking Melaka failed. Worse, because Melaka was so far away. And there were many islands in the straits where their potential enemies could hide and where they could launch fierce retaliation against them, should they decide to attack Melaka. On top of that, the other Malay states surely would not want to keep quiet if one of their brethren was attacked. China therefore stood no chance of winning if this were to happen. ...And what about the Siamese? Surely, they would not want to keep quiet, too.

Yong-le showed keen interests in the development of the Malay states in Southeast Asia or Nanyang as the Chinese called it. It was he who also moved the capital city to Nanjing to be their new 'southern capital city.' They had received delegations from Palembang and many Chinese traders and merchants had gone there to trade. In fact, Palembang was their important port of call at that time. Now Yong-le was confronted with the possibility of another city overshadowing Palembang. Therefore, naturally he was concerned. He had earlier received and studied a report written by a Chinese emissary, Liang Tai-ming who had gone to Nanyang, especially to Palembang. And he had also read the reports written by other royal scribes called *Ming Shin Lu* or 'History of the Ming Dynasty,' *Shu Yu Zhou Zu Lu* or 'The Record of Foreign States,' and *Guangdong Tong Zhi* or 'The Guangdong Almanac.' They described about Palembang's greatness, and he was greatly impressed. Liang Tai-ming was the son of Sun Hsuan, a grand commander of the Chinese imperial government; he could be trusted with his judgment and analysis. However, what made Yong-le the more anxious was when some Muslim traders who had come to China told him about a new port called Melaka. Earlier, when they passed by that place, it was just a river-mouth, now it had become a successful port of call for many ships.

Hai Shou and other dignitaries waited for the emperor's next comment. All of them bowed down and dared not to look at his face. After it seemed like eternity, the emperor then made his final decision. And like all his earlier decisions, they were deemed law throughout the empire and its colonies and other puppet states. He decided against attacking Melaka. The emperor was wise enough to trust his judgment of Parameswara and the forces that he might have in Melaka, and decided to embrace Melaka and its ruler instead so

as to establish cordial relations with them. In this way, they could avert war that could cause untold damage to both their countries. Melaka had nothing to lose in the advent of a war with China; only the reputation of China could be severely damaged should the forces of Melaka outwit them and cause their own defeat. On the other hand, it was the stature of the emperor of China that could take a tumble, in the eyes of the people of the imperial empire. They expected their country not to lose in any adventures and exploits overseas, especially on smaller countries. This should make the Siamese to stop paying homage to it, too. China had never attacked other countries; it was not their policy anyway to launch such actions anyway. Their policies were always to engage the other states and put them under their domination through diplomatic means. And this policy had not change. This was the attitude that Yong-le wanted to adopt towards Melaka.

'What if we send an emissary to Melaka? Does the prime minister have any objection to that? Will it be a good idea?' he asked, after much deliberation.

'Definitely not, your supreme majesty. I think it is a brilliant and well thought of idea. It will serve us well to find out for us if Melaka and its ruler can be brought under our dominance through diplomacy as this has been our tradition and policy. I'm sure he will welcome it because it can help to enhance his reputation amongst the other rulers in the region, too, your supreme majesty.'

'Why did you say so?'

'Because Melaka is a new country; as such the ruler will want to have some protection from us, so the other neighboring Malay states won't want to harass and dominate them. From our past experience these things normally happen when a new ruler appears in the scene, especially in Nanyang where the rulers like to seek adventure and extend their own influence.'

Yong-le pondered long over the suggestion by his trusted and loyal prime minister. The others who were in the throne room held their breath. The lord chamberlain caught a furtive glance at the Hai Shou, as if to say in non-verbal language that he thought his suggestion was equally brilliant. He nodded at him and put out a weak smile so as not to breach the protocol. He was an old man; he did not want to see any adventures in foreign territories that involved the lives of many young Chinese. He had seen many young Chinese boys who had gone on many of these missions to the north, who did not return. They were killed in the wars and their bodies either perished in the fire; or they were thrown into the pits in unmarked graves or holes. Their parents wailed at their children's disappearance. They were pacified when they were told that these

young boys had died in the defense of the motherland and his imperial emperor.

'Do they have an army or navy such as ours?' asked Yong-le. The short question broke the silence that had enveloped the spacious throne room and woke up everybody there. They were relieved that their emperor had descended back to earth - an expression they liked to use to describe their emperor's behavior of keeping quiet and talking again.

'No, your supreme majesty; even if they do, we won't call it a navy in the right sense of the word; at the most they have some small boats with men who are poorly armed. But, they're good in the art of self-defense called the *silat*.'

'That's hardly what we'd call a navy, my dear prime minister.'

'Yes, indeed, your supreme majesty.'

Yong-le thought again. This time he glanced around the throne room and saw the faces of each and every official who was there, including the prime minister. He wanted to read their reactions. All of them were staring down on the floor with their hands to the side. They were not supposed to look at the emperor's face or bad luck shall befall them. They just stood there, frozen in their position like stone statues. They could only spring back to life when called upon by him to answer his questions, or to do other chores for him. Yong-le then stood up. He stood there erect as if he had come to a conclusive decision and was ready to proclaim a new law. 'Very well then, I'll send a delegation to Melaka to have an audience with the ruler of Melaka,' he said.

'Yes, your majesty,' said the prime minister.

'Do you have anybody who can be entrusted to undertake the journey to Melaka and see his majesty Parameswara?'

'Yes, your supreme majesty.' The prime minister was indeed relieved that the emperor had finally come to a decision that was similar to his. What this meant was that his status quo and standing in the court of imperial empire had not changed. On the contrary, it had even been further enhanced by his superb display of diplomacy and intelligence. He was glad with the decision. But, he forced himself not to smile.

'Who's he then? What is his name?' asked Yong-le.

'May I suggest the interior minister, your supreme majesty,' replied the Hai Shou.

'Interior minister?'

'He is our roving ambassador; he had done wonders for your supreme majesty's imperial empire of China in the past. And I am sure he will repeat his deeds again for this mission. He can only bring back glory to your majesty and the whole empire.'

Yong-le was taken by the suggestion. 'Very well, if you think he is the best person for this particular job, just send him over, so I can see him personally. I wish to see and talk to him personally. I will also personally prepare a letter for Parameswara and chop it with my official seal. But, do give me some time, because I wish to write an especially long letter to him, to express my heartfelt desire to establish cordial relations with him. Or as we say, we want to have a father and son relations with them in Melaka.'

'Father and son, your supreme majesty?'

'Yes, we are a huge country that has been established for thousands and thousands of years; compared to Melaka, which is hardly a baby with any teeth. Surely, a father-and-son description is most apt, compared to a brother-brother relationship.'

'Very well, your majesty has certainly said it beautifully. Now I understand it.'

'Go now and do whatever that you have to do, and do bring the good and loyal ambassador to me right away, in my study.'

The lord chamberlain nodded, because it was his duty to escort the prime minister and ambassador when they returned to the palace later for their audience with the emperor. Hai Shou bent his body all the way to his knees before the emperor stood up and moved back. The other officials who were there remained in their position. They could only move when asked to by the emperor.

After Hai Shou had left, Yong-le walked towards the adjacent room followed by some of his aides including the omnipresent lord chamberlain as he headed towards his bedchamber. He felt a huge relief, like his shoulders had been relieved off a whole load of burden! He knew a new load would be heaped on those same shoulders, because the tasks of the lord chamberlain and minister of protocol were always burdensome. Not a day passed when he could feel free to relax with his family, or be alone with his personal thoughts. He had to be on his toes all the time, because the emperor could call him anytime, to carry out a huge burden or a simple errand.

'We shall have to get to Melaka first before anybody else does, or we will have to make them our enemies,' said Yong-le. 'This will be totally unnecessary. We don't need enemies at especially at this time when we are expanding our political influence. What our Admiral of the Western Seas, Zheng-he is doing is excellent; he flies our flag gloriously and plants them everywhere.'

'Very true,' replied the lord chamberlain. 'Your majesty's Middle Kingdom is now known throughout the Celestial World.'

'Who is Parameswara? Where did he come from?'

'I beg your pardon, your supreme majesty. His majesty Parameswara seems to have appeared out of the blue. There was no mention of him - not even a hint, by the Arab or Indian traders who had gone to Melaka. Some of them have come here, but none of them has said anything about him, your supreme majesty. But, we're fortunate that the prime minister has some every important information on him that was useful for your supreme majesty.'

'Is he the 'son of heaven', too, like my ancestors and me? Did he come down from the skies, like our ancestors also did?'

'Most probably he did, your supreme majesty. Parameswara has died and he is succeeded by his son, Kechil Besar.'

Yong-le stopped. 'Why do you say that?'

'How could his majesty just appear from nowhere and turned a simple fishing village into an international port of call of ships from many corners of the earth? I'm truly impressed.'

'I want to know what extent is his rule. Is it far and wide? Does he control the whole of the Malay Peninsula? Is he controlling the whole of Nanyang? Or does he have any plans to control the whole of this rich and huge region? Lastly, will he make a good friend? Or will he be our worse enemy in Nanyang?'

The lord chamberlain kept quiet. He had no answer to these questions; they were the same questions that he had asked the prime minister a while ago when they were in the throne room. But they were directed at him and not the lord chamberlain. Now the same questions were being asked of him. They came out of the emperor's mouth in quick succession that he simply could not catch up with any of them. They were very difficult questions. Furthermore, he doubted it if the emperor really wanted answers to his questions. It was just his way of expressing his personal concerns on Melaka.

Yong-le stopped outside of his royal bedchambers. The lord chamberlain stood and waited for his next instructions. 'Very well, my lord chamberlain, I shall retire for the day now as the sun has now set in the far horizons and the chicken have all returned to the barns. Let me know if the prime minister is back with the ambassador. What's his name again?'

'His excellency interior minister Yin-ching, your supreme majesty.'

'Very well, interior minister Yin-ching. I do not remember ever meeting him before. May be I have. However, I do not seem to recall much about him or remember his name. How strange.'

'Yes, you have, your supreme majesty.'

'I have? May be I have. But, what does it matter? I'll be seeing him again, and I'm sure I'll remember then.'

'Indeed. Few times, if I'm not mistaken, your supreme majesty.'

'Few times? Here in this palace?'

The lord chamberlain nodded politely.

'Whatever it is, I'm sure the ambassador is a capable officer; otherwise, the prime minister won't dare to propose that I send him on this unusual mission to Melaka.'

'Indeed, your supreme majesty.'

A palace assistant held the door to allow the emperor go inside. He then closed it. The lord chamberlain was relieved that his duties for the day were over and he could now return to his family quarters to be with his family. He turned around, walked along the corridor, and went to the back to the quarters.

'Good night, your excellency,' said the palace assistant.

'Good night,' replied the lord chamberlain.

The prime minister's male house-help went to the garden and placed a tray of tea and snacks on a concrete table. He was tending to his rare fish in the pond. He threw pieces food that he had squeezed with his fingers until they became tiny particles for them to eat.

'Here is tea, your excellency,' said the house-help.

Shou turned around. 'Is it for two persons?'

'Yes, your excellency.'

'Where is the interior minister?'

'He'll be here shortly, your excellency.'

Just then, interior minister Yin-ching's horse-carriage appeared at the far end. The sounds of the horses' hoofs hitting the road grew louder and louder before it stopped in the compound in front of the prime minister's official residence.

'Ah, here he is. Show him here.'

'Yes, your excellency.' The male house-help went off.

Yin-ching alighted from the carriage. He was a young man, in the late thirties, and eager to seek adventures. Despite his forceful-sounding name that meant 'Tiger-Dragon', he looked innocent. All the years that he had spent in the sea had changed his characteristics to that of a sheep. He had become him mellow. He knew that the only reason the prime minister had wanted to see him was to send him off to sea again. There was no other reason for him to

discuss with him, other than state matters. Where did he want the ambassador to go this time, he thought.

'What does the prime minister want from me? Where is he?'

'This way, your excellency,' said the house-help. He then escorted Yin-ching to the garden at the side of the residence.

'Ah, there he is,' said Hai Shou as he stood up.

Yin-ching went to the Hai Shou. They clasped their hands and held their fists on their chests in the traditional Chinese-style greetings. Yin-ching still did not know what the prime minister had in mind. 'What tidings do you bear me, my dear prime minister?'

'Have a seat first. I am sure you will be delighted to hear this. But, do have some tea first. It will do you good; it will help to calm down your frayed nerves. I know that you haven't been at sea for far too long now. You will surely like to know what our supreme emperor has in mind.' Hai Shou poured some tea and they took a small sip simultaneously as a courtesy to wet his mouth.

'What is it that you want to tell me exactly, prime minister?'

'His supreme majesty has commanded for your excellency to embark on a trip to Melaka, to pay homage to the ruler. What do you say, your excellency?'

'What do I say? I will go, as it is a command from his supreme majesty Emperor Yong-le. If that's the case then I'll prepare. I will not delay any further. How can I ever say no to the supreme emperor's royal command?'

'But, his supreme majesty Emperor Yong-le wants you to have an audience with him first, before you sail off to Nanyang. I know he has never done this before, but since this is a very different mission, he, therefore, wants to see you personally. He has a special letter that he wants to send to the Parameswara. He is writing it now himself now. He says the letter is going to be the longest he has ever written. This is how important he is taking this mission.'

'Melaka? I have not heard of this country. Where is it at?'

'Nanyang. It is a new country they called Melaka. It is named after a tree called the *melaka* tree.'

'We will then go together to the imperial palace to have an audience with his supreme majesty then. When will it be?'

'Now.'

'Very well.'

They took their teacups and finished all the tea in them.

'Ah, what a fine tea,' remarked the prime minister. 'Now, let's make a move. You leave your carriage behind and we go there together in my carriage,



so that we can continue to talk along the way. But, do finish up your tea first and don't ever waste even a drop of it.'

'Very well, your excellency.'

They took a few more sips of the tea. They stood up and went to the horse-carriage. They sat inside and headed for the palace.

'Remember, your excellency, this journey is different. You are going to Melaka this time. This is a new country for us to deal with, and we do not know what to expect from them. They might be hostile towards us or friendly, we do not know. But, we are willing to find out, before the other rulers do, especially the Siamese. But, from what we can tell, the Melaka ruler is a different sort of ruler,' said the prime minister. 'We need him as much as he would need us. I'm sure he's aware of the precarious position that his new country is in now. Being new to Nanyang, he needs to be told of this lest he would think that the others in the region won't be hostile or feel envious towards him - and the grave danger that he might be if he is not supported by us. We cannot put it to him in a less poetic or philosophical way than this, I'm sure. We must be direct, but not too crude.'

'How good is he in the diplomatic language?'

'I'm not sure of that. Most probably, this will be the first time a foreign ambassador is coming to see him, so he will not know how to behave or act. Most probably, he will not know the severity of his own problems. Therefore, it will be up to you to highlight them to him. You'll have to find out when you get to Melaka and actually see him.'

'How is Melaka crucial to our imperial empire, your excellency? How so?'

'We need to establish a base for the expansion of the Chinese empire in Nanyang. If we do not get Parameswara's attention first, the others will do it. I know for one, Tammaraja II of Siam will be keen to establish some sort of friendly relations with Melaka, but with a pretext to dominate it later, like what they did in Temasik. Remember how they went there and pretended that they were coming as friends, and when the Malay ruler of Temasik agreed to receive them, they quickly turned around and hounded him out of the palace?'

'Yes, I still remember this episode very well.'

'Good.'

'I will bear that in mind, prime minister. I will not let both his supreme majesty and you down.'

'That's good.'

'But, how come you have not recommended Admiral Zheng-he? He's a much wiser ambassador and certainly more experienced than I am.'

'The admiral is not in the country at this time; that's why. He won't be back anytime soon. His imperial majesty cannot wait for him to return before we embark on another adventure. And when our imperial emperor asked me to give me a suggestion on whom we want to send to Melaka, the first name that struck on my mind was you. It would be good if Admiral Zheng-he can stop by at Melaka at a later stage, when he takes our Treasure Fleet to the Western Seas though. For the interim, we just need to send just an envoy there.'

Yin-ching nodded. He knew if the admiral were to go on the trip to the West, he would normally stop at the Arabian Peninsula to perform his pilgrimage to Mekkah. As a Chinese-Muslim, he was pious and always welcomed a mission to that region in particular.

Yong-le was writing at his desk in his study. It was a letter that he wanted to send to the ruler of Melaka. He wanted to write the letter personally because he attached immense importance to Melaka especially the ruler, whom he had not seen before or had the opportunity to communicate with. He decided to do away with his official writers and wrote it himself. This was something that he had never done before. The writing of the letter took so much of his time. This was the third day that he was writing it. The scroll was exceptionally long by his normal standards that when it was finally completed and rolled up, it would look like an average bamboo stick. It was that thick! Even the linings were different; they looked more colorful and had more gold ink than the other scrolls that the emperor had ever written. It was then tied up by two strands of red ribbon after which it was stamped with the imperial seal. This could only be broken by the Melaka ruler, and no other. It would then be slipped in a barrel and sealed from outside in order to safeguard it from being exposed and hence destroyed by the elements while at sea.

The court official opened the door from outside the study, and dutifully announced the arrival of Hai Shou and Yin-ching. 'His excellencies, the imperial majesty's prime minister and interior minister.'

The emperor stopped writing and looked up. 'Do come in. I was just completing my letter; what perfect timing.'

The two men entered the study. They bowed their heads slightly.

'Don't just stand, sit down. Aren't your feet tired of walking and standing the whole day?'

They sat on the black lacquered chairs and waited. This was the first time Yin-ching had ever entered the emperor's private study. He was overwhelmed by it. He glanced across all the books that were stacked in rolls on the shelves. They were some of the finest books that he had ever set eyes on. They were

mostly literary works produced by some of the most important writers in China. Some were the only copies available and the earlier Ming dynasty emperors who were Yong-le's ancestors commissioned them. On the other side were scrolls of letters and documents that were sent to the emperor. They were rolled up and arranged neatly on the shelves, itemized and arranged according to their chronological order of receipt and importance. The lesser important ones were stacked at one corner, and were one step before they were to be discarded.

Both of the men were surprised that the emperor was less formally attired. He was not so particular of his attire when he was in his study. He always did away with protocol, and oftentimes even personally served tea to his guests with his own hands. This often made the guests feel awkward. How could the emperor do that, they always thought. But, it was nothing to the emperor who was used to some form of casualness in his staid life, since he was out of the public glare and attention. None of his guests dared to describe what they had seen in the royal study to the others, lest they were charged for committing *lese majesty*, an offense that resulted in public caning or even hanging. Nobody would believe them anyway.

'Have you explained everything to Yin-ching, prime minister?' asked Yong-le.

'Yes, your supreme majesty,' replied the Hai Shou.

The emperor turned to look at Yong-le. 'Are you aware of the importance of your trip to Melaka, ambassador?'

'Yes, your supreme majesty,' replied Yin-ching.

'I have just finished writing a personal letter to the Melaka ruler. And I want you to deliver personally it for me. Understand? I am also preparing some presents in the form of silk, silverware, jade, and chinaware for his majesty. Remember also, that I do take this visit of ours very seriously. And do repeat with your own words the importance I consider our future relationship with the ruler of Melaka and its people. Say it often so that his majesty will fully understand the importance we are putting on this trip, and our future relations between our two countries. But, the least that you can do is not to torment him. Try to keep your distance and remember always that he is the ruler of Melaka and should be treated as such, with reverence and full of respect, as though you're speaking to your own imperial emperor. Understand?'

'Yes, your supreme majesty, I do understand that. I won't put your supreme majesty down. I shall go to Melaka and achieve what your supreme majesty has commanded me to do. Besides, I have never failed in my duties in the past.'

'That's right, good. You have made many trips abroad and had carried our flag and the good name of our beloved country with honor and in full esteem. Now I remember having met you before.'

'That's true, your supreme majesty,' chipped in Hai Shou.

'Very good. Very good.'

Yong-le stamped the chop on his letter and folded it. He then tied it with two red ribbons and then pushed the rolled-up scroll into a barrel. He tied it and sealed it again. 'Here.'

Yin-ching extended his hand and bowed down. He did not dare to look at the Yong-le's face. He waited until he had put the letter in his hand. When he felt that the letter was there in his palms, he took it and pulled it towards him near the stomach. He then held it in the right hand and then lowered both his hands and put them at his side.

'The Southerly winds will be blowing any day now, ambassador,' said Hai Shou.

'Did you check with the rear admiral and the harbor-master, prime minister?' as Yong-le.

'Yes, I did, your supreme majesty.'

'Good. And I suggest that you make immediate preparations. Let there be no further delay. You may take your leave now, ambassador, prime minister.'

They stood up and bowed at the emperor.

'We take our leave now, your supreme majesty,' said Hai Shou.

'We take our leave too, your supreme majesty,' said Yin-ching.

'But, before you leave for Nanyang, do come back. I wish to have a last word with you, ambassador,' reminded the emperor. 'Who knows I might have some last minute things to say and presents to give.'

'Very well, your supreme majesty.'

'Very well, you two may take your leave now.'

They then moved a few steps backwards until they reached the door. They then turned around and walked out of the study.

Not long later, after making all the necessary preparations, and choosing the men and necessary equipment, Yin-ching was on his way to Melaka. He had earlier met with the emperor for a last audience, during which Yong-le gave him some valuable advice that the ambassador accepted readily.

Many large junks went with him on this particular mission. They sailed off from the port in Nanjing, the most important port in Ming dynasty China. This was meant to show to Parameswara how much importance China was putting on the trip. One of the junks had no passengers or officials. It was packed with presents of all kinds; mostly china and other silk cloths called the

*nankeen* cloth, which was named after the city where it had come from and velvet of all colors, textures and designs.

Yin-ching went to the deck to look out at the sea. He had been holed in his cabin and was feeling restless. The ship had not been sailing at a very fast pace. He saw some sailors throwing cooked rice off-board to feed the fish. They were meant to ward off the large fishes from attacking the sides of the ship. The other Chinese junks were following behind and the sailors on board them also did similar thing, i.e. by throwing cooked rice into the sea. 'How far are we from here, captain?' he asked.

'We are lucky to have good winds. I believe we will be in Melaka within one week. We've been at sea for more than two weeks now.'

'Very well. We are equally anxious to arrive in Melaka and see what it is like there and especially to meet the ruler of Melaka. Never have I felt so excited and anxious to arrive in a new country before in my whole career as a roving ambassador. Believe me: This mission is not a normal one; it is very different. Never in my wildest imaginations that I would be summoned to have an audience with our supreme Emperor Yong-le before my mission abroad. The first time I met him in his private study where he personally offered me tea and poured it in my cup. And the second time, we sat outside in the garden, when the weather was fine.' He did not care if the captain believed in what he was saying; it sounded like a tall story for the captain to believe in.

'Why don't you take a good rest now, ambassador. We have enough food for everybody. The cooked rice has dissuaded the large fish from getting near our junk. They can cause tremendous damage to the ship if we do not feed them.'

'That's good. But, the winds are not blowing well.'

'This has slowed down our trip considerably, your excellency.'

'Don't open the sails too high and too wide for the masts might break. Our supreme emperor knows that we're at the mercy of the winds.'

'That's right, your excellency.'

Yin-ching then returned to his cabin. He threw himself slumped on a chair behind a desk in his cabin. He glanced at the chessboard opened on the table. The chips were still in the box. He wanted to play some Chinese chess, but did not feel like he wanted to get somebody to play with him there. So, he decided to write some notes in his personal diary instead. It was his personal notebook. This was his daily chore, as it was also his duty to do so as the captain of the expedition, so that the emperor and the people of China knew what he was doing all the time.

Yin-ching wrote briskly as though he was certain of what he had wanted to write on. His strokes were swift and deft. He handled the Chinese brush and wrote with confidence. He knew exactly how much ink that he needed to pick from the bottle with the brush so that it did not spill or make the strokes he made look too thick and messy. The cabin swayed as the ship sailed ahead, but it also did not affect his writing; he was used to writing when the ship was sailing - except when it was too rough. If this were to happen it even made him tumble to the side that even his inkbottle toppled to the floor and spilling the ink on it. The waves were especially gentle in the South China Sea that day. It made him feel like he was being pushed on a swing. The male masseur knocked and entered the room.

'Yes, captain. Er...masseur,' said Yin-ching.

'Time for your massage, ambassador.'

'Oh, really. I've completely forgotten.'

He put down his brush in the bottle beside the black Chinese ink palette. He stood up and removed his shirt. 'My body's aching all over from all the rolling and shaking of the ship.'

'You have been traveling a lot too, ambassador, for a person your age.'

'I'm not that old, masseur; I'm not even forty.'

'I don't mean that, your excellency.'

Yin-ching then removed his shirt aside. It looked like a loose robe the kinds only people of his stature was allowed to wear. He then lay on the bed. The masseur applied some ointment on his back and started to massage him by first rubbing it gently with both palms. He then started to punch with his fists in quick succession; they were not hard, but gentle. The spots he had chosen were specific, at the nerves that connected to the various parts of the body that sprained the most. This made Ying-ching's blood rush through his veins and to the vital organs and replenished them with more oxygen. This helped to rouse and rejuvenate the cells back to life. He could feel it, the tingling of all the cells in his body. He felt much fresher and better now than just a minute ago. The ointment he had applied on his body seeped into the ambassador's skin and the flesh. It stirred his cells that had all been inactive all this while. He had meant to heat up Yin-ching's blood before he could give him the real massage that involved more strenuous physical contortion of his arms, legs, thighs and body. He also planned to twist his neck to loosen up his neck muscles so that the blood could flow more freely to his brains. In this way, he could increase his thinking power and memory.

'This is good, this is good,' remarked Yin-ching.

The masseur then punched his back harder and harder with each successive punch. Yin-ching winced. It was not too painful, just soothing and relieving. Still the tingling sensation made his muscles taut.

'*Ab, ab!* Not so hard, not so hard! My bones will break into pieces, masseur,' joked the Yin-ching. 'I must arrive at Melaka in once piece and not in a casket.'

'Sorry, ambassador. What I've given you are mostly for young boys.'

The ambassador tried to laugh at the masseur's joke. The masseur suddenly made another twist at his arm. He tried to resist and harden his arm muscles, but the masseur was stronger. He had now managed to twist the arm until it bent into an unusual shape. It snapped at the joints and made a loud cracking sound.

'My god, masseur, are you trying to dislocate my arm? What did you do to my arm?' cried Yin-ching. 'Do not break it. I need it to write.'

The masseur ignored the ambassador's pleadings. He then proceeded to rub the back gently. He applied more ointment. The smell filled the whole room. It was made of many roots of trees that he had taken in China. He boiled them until the latex melted and become an ointment. It seeped quickly into the skin and acted on the muscles fast. With a good rub, the ointment entered the skin faster and worked on the tired muscles better.

'The smell is also good for your chest, ambassador,' explained the masseur. 'Don't open the doors or windows. Let the smell remain in your room until it disappears on it's own.'

'This is the ambassador's job, masseur. Each trip I undertake normally takes up few months, sometimes few years. I hardly get to spend time with my family.' What Yin-ching was referring to was not his own family, for he was a eunuch. The masseur knew about this, so he did not want to inquire further on them. Yin-ching was referring to his parents, brothers, and sisters who were in Nanjing.

'What about me? I may not be an ambassador like you, but I do have to take lengthy and strenuous trips out of China, too.'

'Oh, yes, you too? How are your children?'

'The youngest one did not recognize me the last time I returned home. And soon as they started to be familiar with me, I'm back at sea again.' He continued to massage Yin-ching's back. Yin-ching then raised his right hand. 'Enough for today.' He then sat up. The masseur waited. 'Anything's the matter, ambassador?'

Yin-ching stood up and put on his shirt. 'I am thinking of retiring after I return to Nanjing. It's not fair to my wife and children. I've denied them my personal attention for too long.'

'I'm sure you've served the supreme majesty, Emperor Yong-le long enough.'

Yin-ching got out of the bed, poured a cup of tea, and drank it. His body started to sweat more profusely now with the extra fluid that he had consumed and the heat that his body had trapped. He took another cup and drank it in one gulp. 'I have served his father and grandfather. Yong-le only ascended to the throne last year,' he said.

'I shall now take my leave, ambassador.'

'Have you hurt anyone while giving them a massage?'

The masseur was amused with the question. 'It's my job to do that, ambassador. Occasionally, I managed to dislocate their bones and squeezed their muscles too much until they suffered a severe cram.'

'Are you serious?'

'I am. But, they always got better the next day, after a rest and taking some medicines and tonic I usually brought with me.'

Yin-ching smiled. The masseur left the cabin. He thought the masseur was just joking. But, again, may be he was not. 'I will come back in a few day's time, ambassador,' said the masseur before he left the cabin.

'Yes, you do that; I could use a massage anytime.'

The Chinese junks anchored in the straits of Melaka. Because of their huge size, they could not dock at the port, which was also congested with smaller ships, boats and *sampans* of all shapes and sizes from many countries. Some were colorful than the others. There were smaller ones called *perabus* or *koleks* that plied in between the larger boats, carrying light goods and passengers who wanted to get to shore.

The *syabbandar* or harbormaster immediately stepped out of his office and stared out at the sea. He was astonished to see the huge Chinese junks anchored in the straits. The masts and the junks were hundreds of feet long. His jaw dropped as he gaped at their immense size. He had never seen anything like that before. He was amazed. He thought was seeing a whole new city that had sprouted in the straits, with many tall buildings and colorful triangular shaped flags decorating all them.

'*Seperti kota atas lautan rupanya,*' he remarked. (It looks like a floating city.) He then summoned the messenger and ordered him to inform the palace



officials of the arrival of a group of foreigners at the port. 'I want you to rush to the palace and inform the lord chamberlain of the arrival of some guests.'

'Yes, sir.' The messenger then rushed to the palace as fast as he could.

'*Kenapa, ya tuan?*' asked someone. (What's the matter, sir?) He did not turn around and replied: '*Ada tetamu dari jauh.*' (There are strangers from a distant land.)

Admiral Yin-ching walked down the gangplank and went to shore. He looked around him and saw that the port was a hive of activities. He was surprised. He did not expect Melaka to be so busy and popular with the foreign traders and merchants. He had never seen so many people of different sizes, shapes and nationalities, all in the same port before. Where did they all come from?

Officials from the Melaka palace welcomed Yin-ching cordially. They rushed to the port to welcome them personally. They came there as soon as the messenger told them about some foreign people who had arrived at the port. He was stationed there to relay the message to the palace when foreign guests came to the port, so that a welcome ceremony could be arranged to greet them. This was the custom in Melaka. The traders and merchants who first came with their ships and good were always welcomed with open arms.

'Who could these people be?' asked the Melaka official.

'No idea, your excellency,' replied his assistant. 'They don't look at all familiar to my very eyes.'

'They can't be that alien.'

'They are, sir. They look pale and their eyes are hardly opened. Are they sick?'

'Are you joking or serious? How could they walk with their eyes shut like that?'

'I'm serious, sir.'

'Are they ghosts?'

'Heavens forbid.'

'Why then are they not opening their eyes then?'

'I believe they have small eyes, unlike ours which are round and wide, sir.'

'Small eyes and looking very pale, *eh?*'

'Yes, sir.'

'And what language they speak?'

'No idea sir. But, from what I have heard, they sound like birds chirping merrily.'

The palace officials still had no idea from which country their foreign guests came from. They had not seen any Chinese junk or man before. The

junks were much bigger and the sails wider and taller and more colorful. The senior officials wore long flowing robes with colorful hats, while their lower-ranking officers and sailors wore black. While the sailors had their hair was woven into a rope that they called *tokchang*; it ran down in the shape of a rope to the back near their waist. It was long, and it came down from a round patch on their head that had been shaven clean. Yin-ching's costume was the most colorful. He wore a black cap with two spikes that extended from the left and right side of his head. Everybody at the port stared at them and they tried to hear what language they were speaking in, but all that they could hear was something that sounded like birds chirping merrily. They knew not a word of Chinese.

The Chinese, too, cast furtive glances at the locals, especially the Malays, who were mostly bare-cheated. They were very dark. Many had long hair, beards and mustache; and had a piece of cloth tied around their forehead. To the surprise of the Chinese, there were people of other races there too. But, they seemed happy to be with each other. The Malays and others giggled at the sight of the short and fair Chinese men and their costumes that they thought were funny; they were too colorful and had many drawings on them. They whispered amongst themselves. Some of them even tried to pull their *tokchang* as a practical joke. The Chinese men just smiled, and hurled it around them so their long *tokchang* struck them like a whip. They laughed at the antics of the Chinese and thought they were trying to be cheeky and friendly. The Chinese, too, looked at the men of Melaka who mostly wore two pieces of cloths that they wrapped around their bodies with the shorter one above the other, while some wore tight-fitting pants that stayed just below the knees.

'Welcome to Melaka, dear ambassador. From which country have you come from? Are you from the 'land above the wind' or the 'land below the wind'? We are indeed surprised to receive your visit. We trust that you have come in peace and with no ulterior motive. And what is your real motive for paying us a visit in Melaka? Or, are you just passing through, to go elsewhere? Nonetheless, we're indeed honored to receive you as our guests,' said the Melaka admiral. 'Do you have any need to see his majesty Parameswara at all? I am sure his majesty will be equally delighted, for his highness too had not set eyes on people of your kind.'

'We have just come from the imperial empire of China. We are here at the command of our supreme majesty, Emperor Yong-le. Our main aim is to seek an audience with his majesty, the Melaka ruler. We have a very important letter to deliver to him from our supreme emperor. And we have to deliver some

personal gifts for his majesty from our supreme emperor,' said Yin-ching. 'This is our supreme majesty's token of friendship to your ruler, sir.'

'Very well, please follow us. I'm sure his majesty Kechil Besar will be delighted to receive you.'

The people at the port continued to stare at them. No doubt, they were all distracted by the delegation from China as the admiral led Yin-ching in a procession. They walked to the new Melaka Palace that stood behind the hill, along the beach that was just a short distance from the port. The people stopped doing whatever they were doing to look at them. They all hardly blinked their eyes. They dropped all tools and stopped eating or drinking to gape at them as they passed by. Even the fishermen who were fishing in the river and sea stopped work to stare at the colorful procession. Everybody looked like they were frozen and were now statues, including those who were in their houses peeped through the windows and doors.

'Who are they?' asked a Malay man to his friend, as the Chinese delegation proceeded to the palace.

'They say they're Chinese,' replied his friend.

'Chinese?'

'Do they speak Malay? Are they also Hindus like ours?'

'No idea, my friends; your guess is as good as mine. Why don't you ask them, if they can understand you!' He laughed at his own joke.

'Why are you laughing? I am serious. If they come as friends, it is our duty to reciprocate and welcome them as friends, too.'

'I doubt if they could speak our language. You should know better!'

'I guess so. From the way they wear their clothes, they would not be able to speak a word of Malay or Indian or Arabic. But their leaders wear robes, too.'

The Malay men and the others waved at the Chinese delegation, and they smiled and waved back. They were all forewarned not to feel jittery or be unduly alarmed when they got to Melaka, even when challenged or provoked. However, none of this sort of thing happened. The people of Melaka welcomed them with open arms, even if they were not familiar with them or could speak each other's language.

'The palace of his majesty is not too far away from here, ambassador. So, we can walk; in this way, we can see the sights and the people. How friendly do they look,' said the admiral.

'Indeed they are. And I can see it in their faces and feel it in their hearts. The scenery is breathtaking, too. I have not seen this many trees and leaves like this in my whole life before, admiral. They are all green and fresh like it was springtime in my country. We don't have trees with leaves of different

colors like what those we have back home? Or don't the leaves change with the weather here like they do in my country?'

'We are blessed with abundant flora and fauna, ambassador. No, this is the only season that we experience here in Melaka, except perhaps for the rainy and fruit seasons.'

'Really?'

'Why does the weather in your country change, ambassador?'

'The moon and sun move and because of that the weather, too changes. For few months we have hot weather, and afterwards, it becomes cool and much later the temperature comes down until ice and snow drop from the sky. Then the cycle changes with and the weather getting hotter and hotter. It has been like this for ages.'

'Strange. Surely, your gods know what is best for you, I'm sure.'

Yin-ching smiled. 'I'm sure they do, admiral.'

They continued to walk around the hill and hardly twenty minutes later, they arrived outside the compound of the palace. By that time, the Yin-ching and his men were sweating. He quickly wiped sweat from his forehead and face and neck with a piece of cloth that he had stuck in his lapel. 'It is so hot here in Melaka. No wonder everybody's skin is dark.'

'It sure is, ambassador,' said the admiral. 'But, we'll be more comfortable once we get inside the palace.'

The guards manning the main entrance of the palace were surprised to see the sight of the Chinese delegation heading towards the palace. They were hundreds of them; many wearing colorful costumes the likes that they had not seen before. They turned to look at each other in amazement and looked surprised; because they were not warned beforehand of any unusually large group of foreign delegation who were going to visit Parameswara that day. They then opened the gates to allow them to enter the compound. The Chinese musical group stopped playing as the Yin-ching and the Melaka admiral stepped inside the compound of the palace. They stayed just outside of the main palace building.

Parameswara happened to be sitting in the verandah with Kechil Besar and the Prime Minister Tun Perpatih Besar. Besar Muda turned and noticed the foreign guests who were outside and commented: 'We have a foreign guest, dear father. But, I doubt if I know who they are, or where they had come from? They don't look like anything I've seen in my whole life. And they are so many of them. If they hadn't come in peace and with weapons, we wouldn't have the chance to defend ourselves.'

'They have come in peace, and we'll receive them with open arms, my son.'

'Indeed, my dear father. This is our tradition. Our religion always teaches us how to treat strangers like we are long-lost brothers and sisters.'

Parameswara turned around. He was surprised to see the Chinese ambassador and his admiral walking towards him. Some of the senior Chinese officials followed them. Behind them were hundreds of men who were all waiting outside of the palace gates. They were panting and sweating profusely because they had walked from the port and climbed the Melaka Hill. Some palace assistants quickly offered them drinks.

'Who can he be? I haven't seen anything like this before,' remarked Parameswara. 'Is he the emperor?' He then stood up.

His admiral led Yin-ching and his senior members of his delegation stood at the staircase. Some palace assistants helped to remove their shoes. The Chinese were surprised. They looked at each other. They did not know what was happening, but allowed them to remove their shoes. They then washed their feet with water and wiped them. They turned and looked at each other and did not know what to expect next. The admiral then climbed up the stairs and led them inside. Yin-ching and his men followed suit and climbed up walking barefoot to the verandah where Parameswara and his sons were anxiously waiting. They were all barefooted and wearing *sarongs*.

'Good day, your majesty. We have a foreign visitor from the imperial court of China, he says,' announced the admiral.

Parameswara clasped both his hands in the Indian style. Yin-ching just clasped his fist close to his chest. He then turned to look at Yin-ching. 'Is it true that you've just arrived from China and have come in peace?'

Yin-ching's translator quickly told what Besar Muda had said to him into Chinese, in his ear. He nodded and replied. 'Yes, your majesty.'

'Very well, I am delighted to see you here. Do you've good intentions?'

'Yes and thank you. And how do you do yourself?'

'Very well, thank you. And this is my son, the crown prince Kechil Besar and prime minister Tun Perpatih Besar,' said Parameswara. 'My sons, Kechil Muda is out hunting. But, he will be back before sundown and you can meet him later. He's a fine boy.'

Yin-ching then nodded at Parameswara and at the others who were there.

'Come to the other end of the verandah, its a lot more comfortable and breezier there. Let's sit at the *bendul* so that we can get the winds blowing in our faces,' suggested Parameswara. 'It is especially hot time of the year. Is it also hot in your country?'

'Not really; its winter there.'

'Winter?'

'The cold season.'

Besar Muda was not sure of what his guest said. 'How could it be so cold there, and so terribly hot here?'

The admiral glanced at Yin-ching.

'The seasons change with the times in our country unlike here where it remains the same throughout the year,' explained Yin-ching.

'Is that so?'

Parameswara then led the way and took them to the other end of the verandah called the *bendul* where they and sat. He and the Malays sat cross-legged in a style called *bersila*. Yin-ching and his senior officers followed suit, but they were not comfortable sitting in that posture. Their long and wide robes always came in the way and they had to flip them to the side in order to maintain their decorum, especially while having an audience with Parameswara. The Malays felt comfortable sitting with their legs crossed like it was second nature for them to do so. Their legs folded nicely and formed a chair for them to sit on, whereas the Chinese had to bend both their legs sideways like what the Malay women did called *bertempub*. In this way, the women did not have to spread their thighs, as it did not look decent.

'I hope you're comfortable, interior minister, is that your name?' said Parameswara.

'Yes, but do forgive us. We are not familiar sitting like this,' said Yin-ching as he adjusted his robe. 'Give us some time.'

Besar Muda nodded. 'I understand you people sit on chairs.'

'Yes, your majesty.'

'Betel leaves, *sirih*, anyone?' Parameswara showed the way by taking a betel leaf. He put some condiments in it, wrapped it up, and ate it. He then pushed the betel leaf box to his eldest son who took a leaf and ate. Perpatih Besar took another leaf and ate it too. He then pushed the apparatus to the Yin-ching. He did not know how to handle it.

'Have one, ambassador,' insisted Parameswara. 'It's good for your health. It helps to soothe your nerves and put you at ease. What more since you have just come from a long distance... Surely, you must be feeling dizzy. But, I assure that you are in good company. We are friendly people. We mean no harm to you or anyone. We've been through enough already.'

'I'm afraid my stomach won't be able to take it,' said Yin-ching. 'Not that I don't like it. It's new to my people and me. Do excuse us. We don't mean to offend your majesty.'

'Very well, just push it aside, so we know that you do not wish to eat it.'

Yin-ching then pushed the apparatus to the side. 'I'm sorry for not being familiar with the local Malay customs. But, I'm sure we'll get use to it soon.'

'That's okay, ambassador. Don't worry about it. If I go to China, I will feel uncomfortable with your own local customs, too. By the way are you Hindus like us, too?'

'No, Your majesty; we are mostly Buddhist. But, there is small group of Chinese who had converted to Islam and *masuk Melayu* (became Malays), the religion that was brought to China by the traders and merchants from the Arabian Peninsula. Many of them are in the interiors and in some major port cities in the south.'

Parameswara was surprised. 'Islam? This is not the first time I'm hearing this, although I have personally met a few of them here in Melaka. This religion sure has traveled a long way from its place of origin, the Arabian peninsula. Who is responsible for this?'

'Nobody. The winds seem to have taken with them. Yes, your majesty.'

'We, too, have people from the Arab countries and also from Gujerat in India who said they were Muslims. *Ab*, never mind. I'm sure you're not here to discuss about the religion, Islam. What really is your main intention for coming to Melaka then, your excellency, and ambassador? Forgive me; I have forgotten your name. I am not as young as any of you are, you know.' Besar Muda turned to his admiral.

'That's all right. I do forget my own wife's name sometimes.'

They laughed.

'Have you been at sea too long, ambassador?'

'Yes, your majesty.'

'No wonder then.'

'Yin-ching. His excellency's name is Yin-ching and his title is interior minister,' replied the admiral.

'I see; it sure is. Please forgive me interior minister. I'll try to remember it. Yin-ching, Yin-ching...'

'Yes, your majesty,' said Yin-ching.

The guards and lesser officials from China and Melaka remained outside the palace. They did not know what the men at the *bendul* were discussing about. They gestured a lot and occasionally broke into peels of laughter. They saw Parameswara and the other senior officials from the court of Melaka spitting red saliva in the spittoons, much to their amazement. They thought he was sick. If their emperor had vomited blood like that, he would be sent to bed immediately by the royal doctors or *sinsubs* where he was forced to rest completely until he had recovered from his illness. The doctors would also

regulate his intake of food and drinks so that they were not contaminated. This was one of the few times when the emperor's demands and personal needs could be overruled, but only by the doctors and nobody else in the palace, including the lord chamberlain or the prime minister.

'Are you all right, your majesty?' remarked Yin-ching, when he saw that Parameswara was spitting red saliva in the spittoon. 'Are you sick?'

'Don't you worry, ambassador. I am not sick. This is not blood. This is what normally happens when you eat the betel leaves.'

The Melaka men smiled at their guest's ignorance. Yin-ching smiled. He was relieved that Parameswara and his officials were not sick after all. Parameswara then took another betel leaf, wrapped it with the required gambier and chips of nuts and ate it again. He chewed on it repeatedly. The chemical reactions from these condiments was what made the saliva of those who ate it look red. It was thick like blood. Yin-ching and the other senior Chinese officials sighed who were outside the palace. They were relieved. They continued to watch them, as their leader discussed with the Malays. Parameswara rested on the railing and sat cross-legged, as it was his habit. He put both his arms on the wooden railings. Kechil Besar sat beside him. An assistant waved him with a large fan over them. 'Look, everybody here in Melaka is excited to see you, ambassador.'

Yin-ching turned and looked at the Melaka people crowding around the palace and smiled at them. They shifted position to get a better view of Parameswara and his guest from China. They smiled back.

'And I'm also happy to see them, too,' said Yin-ching.

'Now, please tell his majesty your main motive for coming to Melaka, ambassador,' said Perpatih Besar.

'I have brought with me a letter from our supreme majesty Emperor Yong-le. Here it is, your majesty,' said Yin-ching. He took the scroll from his assistant who was sitting near him. He offered the letter with both hands with his head slightly bowed down. Besar Muda took it, broke the seal on the scroll container, and pulled out the letter. He then broke the seal, opened the ribbons, and unrolled the scrolled up letter. It was very long about five feet. He was amused to see a letter like that, for the letters that he had seen all his life were mostly written on goat or cow skin that were only one or two pages. The one that he had received from Yong-le was exceptionally long. It was written, not in Tamil or Arabic, but in characters that flowed from top to bottom in straight line. The material that was used was not goat or cow skins either, but something else. 'What sort of skin is this? Its definitely not goat or cow skin,' he remarked as he touched the scroll with his fingers.



'Its not goat or cow skin, your majesty.'

'Then what animal skin is this?'

'It's not the skin of any animal, but paper.'

'Paper?'

'Paper! Yes, paper. *Cbuan-tse, pan-tse.*' (Rolled paper and white paper.)

'I cannot read a word of it. Here, what does it say?' said Parameswara, after his eyes had set on the Chinese characters. It was the first time he was seeing such characters; they looked unusual to him. He then gave it to the prime minister.

'I'll get somebody who can translate it for us,' said Perpatih Besar. He then handed the letter to the Melaka-born Chinese translator who was sitting to his right. He took it and read. 'I am the supreme majesty Emperor Yong-le of the imperial empire of China in Nanjing. I wish to extend warm and cordial greetings to his majesty Parameswara wish to establish diplomatic relations with the ruler of Melaka and its people,' read the translator. 'The supreme majesty of China cordially invites his majesty Parameswara to pay a visit to his supreme majesty Emperor Yong-le in Nanjing so that we can talk eye-to-eye in mutual respect. We have heard so much about your majesty and the might of Melaka and as such, we have the strong desire to establish relations so that both our countries can contribute towards our people's prosperity. And we have asked our Interior Minister to take along many nice gifts for your majesty's personal pleasures.

'Lastly, we do hope that this first meeting between our roving interior minister and his majesty will pave the way for more visits by our respective representatives. I hope that it will in the result in your majesty's personal visit to our land. We will welcome you and your queen and senior officials to our land, gladly with open arms and we will ensure that your majesties' stay here an eventful one. With this, I hope your majesty Parameswara will be accorded with long life by your gods and deities. Yours sincerely, Emperor Yong-le, royal imperial palace of the imperial Chinese empire in Nanjing.' He then rolled up the scroll and handed it back to Perpatih Besar who took it with both hands.

Parameswara was impressed; he liked the way Yong-le had written the letter. It was personal, friendly and didn't have the normal diplomatic wordings like in his other letters to other rulers. He was touched by it. 'Very well, we will surely like to make a trip to China and see for ourselves the beauty of the Chinese country and it's people. May be later on, the Chinese Emperor Yong-le, too, can pay us a return visit. In this way, we can continue to promote

goodwill, friendship and greater understanding between the two of our peoples and us. Is that so, ambassador?' asked Parameswara.

'Certainly so. And we have also brought on behalf of his supreme majesty Emperor Yong-le some beautiful presents, like what his supreme emperor has said in his letter,' replied Yin-ching.

'Really?'

Yin-ching turned around, looked at his men, and ordered in Mandarin: 'Bring the trunks.'

They brought the wooden trunks and put them before Parameswara. Yin-ching opened them and pulled out the presents one by one as if he wanted to hold Parameswara and the other Melaka officials in suspense. They did not have any idea of what to expect. He and the Melaka dignitaries were pleasantly surprised to see all the presents that they had not seen before.

'These are silk,' explained Yin-ching.

'We haven't seen anything like this before, ambassador,' said Parameswara.

Yin-ching handed it to Besar Muda who took it. 'It's so fine. What piece of cloth is it? ...Or is it gold? How come it glows like gold?'

'Silk, your majesty.'

'Silk?'

Yin-ching then pulled some chinaware. 'And these are chinaware. They're made of clay.'

'Clay? How could clay be so beautiful and colorful like this? Are they strong? You mean, you use clay to make these? Isn't it dirty? Let me see.'

Yin-ching handed a piece to him. 'Be careful, your majesty. This chinaware is beautiful. It looks strong and sturdy, but it is very brittle, because it is made of clay. Yes clay that we get from the ground. We burn it and turn it into many objects, not just utensils, but statues, too.'

Parameswara took a few pieces of saucers. One of them slipped off his hand and dropped to the floor. It broke into small pieces. 'It is, ambassador,' he said. They laughed. The palace assistants immediately went out to clear the splintered pieces of China that had fallen onto the floor.

'The supreme majesty Emperor Yong-le wishes to receive a reply to his letter, your majesty,' said Yin-ching to change the subject and to maintain the seriousness of the occasion so it did not stray from his original intentions.

Parameswara became serious. 'We promise to hand it to you just before you return home, ambassador.'

'I hope to remain here for few months. There are many things for us to see and many interesting places to visit in Melaka. I don't know when I'll get the opportunity to return.'

'If that's the case, my prime minister will see to it that you're housed in the guest palace on the peak of the Melaka Hill.' It was formerly his official palace but it had been turned into the guest palace when Parameswara built another larger palace that had more rooms and wings at the south of the foot of the hill. In this way, he did not have to climb up the hill each time he wanted to go there. Because of this, he stayed less at the other palace upstream on the Melaka River.

'Very well. But, you do not have to write it on goat or cow skin. We have some stock of paper for your majesty to write on.'

'Is that so? Let me see.'

One of Yin-ching's assistants pulled out a stack of paper and handed it to him.

'This is paper that has not been written on. It is plain white, so you can write on it. And there are two thousand pages. Some of them are in pieces, and if you so desire, you can use the longer ones that are in scrolls.'

Besar Muda took the paper in his hands and touched its surface. It felt smooth and light. He had never seen anything like it before; it was white in color, smooth and could be folded like cloth, too. He was amazed.

Later that night, Parameswara sat in his bedroom. He continued to admire the silk cloths with his wife, Dewi Puteri until early morning. He held a piece on her shoulder and felt its texture. It was so smooth and the colors were bright.

'I want to cut these and use them for my new clothes. They're so fine and smooth,' said Dewi Puteri.

'Should we make a trip to China then, my dear wife?'

'What did the prime minister advise?'

'He said we should be cautious. Perhaps we should send an envoy first, like what the Chinese emperor had done. Then may be later, we can go there.'

'If that is the case, we will follow the *bendabara's* advice. I think it is wise. Besides, we've got nothing to lose.'

'Nobody knows what the Chinese people will do to us, if we set foot there. They might be setting a trap for all of us. And we might not be allowed to return home to Melaka,' she cautioned.

'It will also be advisable to send our emissaries and ambassadors or envoys first, before we take the trip.'

Parameswara and his wife only slept late in the morning. Barely a few hours later, they were stirred from sleep by the distraction of the sounds of the bells. The high priests were striking them to signify the dawn of a new day, and for the day's blessings to be offered to the gods and deities.

Yin-ching was being taken on a horse-ride around a hill near the palace. Perpatih Besar accompanied him and acted as a tourist guide. The hill was covered with trees and bushes. It was mostly not disturbed; not a hut was seen on it, or anywhere near it. It was pristine and natural. Occasionally, they could see some mousedeer running about. But none of them was white like the mythical white mousedeer that had impressed Parameswara few years ago.

'Melaka is so beautiful, my friend. You are lucky to live here. I wish I could remain here forever,' said Yin-ching. 'Just take a look at those animals.'

'They are called mousedeer.'

'Mousedeer?'

'Why? You can remain here for as long as you desire, ambassador.'

'Ah, but I have lots of work to do back home. An ambassador's job is never done. Most of all, I miss all my wife and children and my beloved country.'

'Why didn't you bring all of them? In that way you'll be with them.'

'It is not our way to bring our wives and families on official trips, prime minister. We have been in Melaka for more than two years now. I'm beginning to sound like a Malay man myself. It's time for us to return.'

'Yes, you speak good Malay, too. We will miss all of you. I'm sure if I were to stay in China for two years, I'd be able to speak in Chinese, too.'

'Certainly. And does his majesty plan to pay our supreme majesty the emperor a visit?'

'Not yet, ambassador. But his majesty will send an envoy to pay homage to your emperor first - exactly as what you are doing now on behalf of his majesty Emperor Yong-le. This is my humble advice to his majesty Parameswara. We should not rush things. We take it one step at a time; in this way, both of us will not fall. Even if we do, one of us will extend our arm and to help carry us up.'

Yin-ching kept quiet. He looked disappointed. But, he did not want to show his displeasure because it was Parameswara's wish, too. He had thought all along since they first met that Parameswara was willing to come to China with him, but it was not to be.

'Don't feel disappointed, ambassador. Melaka is just opening its doors to traders and surely, his majesty will have to be here to ensure of its continued progress. I hope you will fully understand his position. It's not easy to be a ruler, you know. From what I've heard, from your senior officials, your supreme Emperor Yong-le, hardly leaves the imperial palace, what more your country.'

'I do, prime minister. Believe me, I do. It's true our supreme majesty never leaves the imperial palace.'

'But always bear in mind that his majesty wishes to have friendly and cordial relations with China, and with his majesty the Supreme Emperor Yong-le. Do tell this again and again to your supreme emperor, so his majesty will fully understand the seriousness his majesty attaches to the special relations that we have established thus far. Your men had returned to China few times while you're here to relay this the good things which his majesty Besar Muda had shown you and your officials.'

'Indeed, my dear prime minister.'

'And his majesty is writing a long letter of reply which you can take along with you for your supreme emperor to read. It will be written in Malay with a Chinese translation.'

'Yes, prime minister, I'm sure his majesty is also fully aware that his majesty the supreme emperor of China takes this mission to Melaka seriously, too,' added Yin-ching.

'Will you be returning to Melaka again in the near future, ambassador?'

'I'm not certain, *bendahara*. It all depends on what both his supreme emperor and what the prime minister decide. I am just a servant of the imperial court of China, you know. My moves are being dictated by their command. I'm not at liberty to do whatever I like.'

'We are in the same position, admiral. But, I hope that your visits will continue, even if his majesty the supreme Emperor Yong-le sends another envoy to Melaka.'

'Yes, I'm sure more missions will come to Melaka.'

There were many boats, ships and junks of all shapes and sizes at the port of Melaka. It was noisy and dusty. The heat was unbearable. There were traders of many nationalities doing business there. They walked about doing their business, in a formation that looked like well-orchestrated action with each one going about as he or she was part of the bigger jigsaw puzzle - the well-arranged confusion. They mingled with each other and shouted over each other's shoulders and voices. Some were lying on their backs as they brought things out from their boats and the trunks. Many were carrying on their heads and shoulders goods that had just arrived at Melaka from elsewhere. Most of them only wore their pants, with no shirt. More goods were packed in wooden crates or earthenware and jars. Many passengers from foreign countries who had just stepped foot for the first time on the banks of the river looked lost in the crowd. Many of them had not seen so many people in their life before.

They did not expect Melaka to be this large. They had all come here to seek employment and a new life. For many of them, this was their final destination. They did not plan to return to where they had come from. They had heard so much about Melaka, and were drawn to the port and city like it was a giant magnet. What more; with each story that were told about Melaka, it was usually described in the highly imaginative and fantastic way. The image of Melaka that had been retained in their minds was like Heaven, where there was an abundance of food, and life was comfortable and secure. This was the main reason why they all wanted to come to Melaka, to share in the excitement and to enjoy their lives here. Not many, however, were disappointed when they first arrived at the port because they could easily get jobs and a place to stay. The authorities in Melaka did not bother them as long as they behaved themselves. They knew nobody could afford to misbehave because they feared they would be bundled up and sent back to where they had come from on the first available ship or boat by the authorities.

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*The Chinese Emperor Yong-le was delighted to bear the report by his Ambassador Yin-ching. He immediately sent another more experienced envoy Admiral Zheng-he who was called 'The Three-Jewel Eunuch' to Melaka who was the first Chinese-Muslim man to sail and explore the areas in Southeast Asia. He paid a courtesy visit to Melaka in 1407 CE or 808 Hijiriah and Melaka continued to prosper. He was the Admiral of the Western Seas and Commander of the Treasure Fleet in Nanjing. There were hundreds of junks in enormous sizes that were berthed at the dockyard there, where the Royal Navy was based. The shipyards where the ships were built were also there nearby.*

*And he also brought with him a Scribe called Ma Huan to jot down notes on his travels. Like Admiral Zheng-he, Ma Huan was also a Chinese-Muslim. Apart from him there were few other Scribes like Fei Xin, Zhang Xie who later wrote the Dong Xi Yang Kao or 'Study of the Southern and Western Seas.'*

*Besar Muda was especially delighted because Zheng-he had brought with him a royal official seal, a chop and official robes and declared him, on behalf of the Chinese Emperor the legitimate Ruler of Melaka whose status was equal to that of a king. Thus his status was enhanced and it cast fears in the minds of the neighboring Malay rulers. Because of this, the Siamese who had been harassing Melaka started to distance himself from Melaka. And because of that, too, Besar Muda stopped paying obeisance to them as he felt that he did not have to anymore.*

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Admiral Zheng-he was greeted personally by Parameswara and all the senior officials of Melaka at the port in Melaka. They were amazed to see so many Chinese large wooden junks that were anchored offshore. Zheng-he could not dock them at the port, because they were huge that they almost touched the clouds. So, he laid anchor offshore and took smaller boats to row to the shore, where Parameswara and the others were eagerly waiting with open arms to receive them. 'We're happy to see you, my dear Admiral Zheng-he,' he said as he hugged the admiral.

Zheng-he was happy with the reception especially with the large group of musicians and dancers were there to perform for him and his entourage. They also brought more presents, many of which were unusually large and unusual. The locals were awed when they saw them being carried in wooden crates, metal boxes and bales, all decorated with dragon motifs, a creature no one in Melaka had seen before.

'Where have you come from, admiral?'

'From Nanjing, your majesty.'

'Are you on your way to 'land above the wind'?'

'I have to return to China and report to his supreme majesty first.'

'Very well, come to my palace so we can sit.'

Zheng-he was happy with the time he spent in Melaka. It had enabled him to know better the ruler and the people. And Parameswara enjoyed talking to him and to exchange ideas. Zheng-he delighted him with his exploits around the world by describing how he had visited more than thirty countries so far, and his journey was not about to end here. He still had a few more missions to do on behalf of the Chinese emperor. Parameswara was delighted when his guest showed him the map of the world, where he had pointed all the ports and countries that he had visited.

'What is this drawing? I have not seen anything like this before.'

'This is a map,' replied Zheng-he.

'A map?'

'A drawing or illustration of what the world looks like.'

'Really?'

'This is Mekkah, where I performed my *Haj*.'

'Mekkah? *Haj*?'

'I am a Muslim. *Alhamdulillah*.'

'Muslim?'

Zheng-he walked with Parameswara in the garden after they had spent time at the port where he was shown the admiral's ship. He toured all the rooms

and the deck. Parameswara was amazed at the immense size of the ships and the thousands of men who were sailing with him. He then stood on the deck and admired the other junks from there. They were the finest junks that the Chinese builders had constructed in China. They represented the 'Treasure Fleet of Imperial China.' And Zheng-he was its rear admiral who was in charge of the navy. He also delighted Parameswara by explaining about his family and his father who was a Muslim with the name of Ma Hazhi and on his pilgrimage to Mekkah.

'Are you married?'

Zheng-he was taken aback with the question. Besar Muda waited.

'No, your majesty.' Zheng-he kept quiet. He was reluctant to explain the problem he was experiencing.

'Go ahead. You don't have to be embarrassed. Tell me.'

Zheng-he pondered long.

'No, your majesty. I have been castrated.'

Parameswara was shocked. 'Why?'

'The soldiers arrested me when I was ten years old. Three years later, they castrated me because they wanted me to become a eunuch at the palace. However, I became a servant to the fourth son of the emperor called Prince Zhu Di. We became close over the years. When the emperor died in 1402 CE or 804 AH or 4100 in the year of the horse or *wu*. Prince Zhu Di succeeded him. He appointed me the admiral to look after the 'Treasure Fleet of the Western Seas.' The original name my father gave me was Ma Ho. But, Prince Zhu Di changed it to Zheng-he. It means 'Three Jewels' or *Ong Sam Po* in Chinese. Prince Zhu Di too changed his name to Emperor Yong-le as his majesty is known now when his majesty ascended to the throne.' Zheng-he did not bother to explain how Zheng-he was able to do that considering he was just the fourth son of the late emperor. The truth was that he and Yong-le had rebelled against the chosen successor to the first Ming emperor, his eldest son, and seized the throne, in a bloody coup.

Parameswara felt sad. 'I'm so sorry to hear that, admiral.'

'That's all right. It's Allah's will. At least it made into what I am today. If I was not been arrested and even castrated, I wouldn't be an admiral in charge of the 'Treasure Fleet of the Western Seas' of the Chinese imperial government, and stand here with you in Melaka. So there is some good to what had happened to me...so I am not totally disappointed. Allah is great!'

'Indeed, indeed. It's called *karma*.'

'Yes. We call it *takdir*.'



This was Zheng-he's first trip to Melaka. He had heard so much about the country from Yin-ching who was the first envoy from the court of imperial China to pay a visit here. He had given a lengthy report to the supreme Emperor Yong-le and all the other important state dignitaries upon his return. They were greatly impressed with what he had described, and the presents that Parameswara had given him. Yin-ching had also brought many samples of fruit trees, plants and other interesting tropical flowers that they tried to grow in the compounds of the royal palace in Nanjing. Unfortunately, none of them survived. The climate in China was vastly different than in Melaka where the sun shone brightly almost everyday without fail, except during the rainy seasons when some areas were flooded. Because of that, Zheng-he was able to get first-hand knowledge of Melaka. Therefore, when he arrived there, he already had a good idea of what to expect. He also had learnt how to sit cross-legged like the Malays without feeling uncomfortable. Yin-ching and his men, too, were able to sit cross-legged much like the Malays in Melaka by the time they returned to China. He even gave a demonstration before Yong-le and the senior court officials. They thought it was funny for anybody to sit like that. He also told of how he had learnt to eat the betel leaves that made his saliva turn red like blood. He did not have any betel leaves to show to the emperor.

However, being a Muslim, Zheng-he, had learnt how to sit in that posture since he was small and started to pray with his parents. Therefore, he did not have to strain himself like Yin-ching did...the same with the custom of having to remove shoes before entering a house or palace. Zheng-he had learnt how to do it, because it was the practice of the Muslims to remove their shoes before they entered a mosque. He was also informed that Parameswara and his family, including those in the states were Hindus. So, he decided to pray towards the Holy Kaabah in the Arabian Peninsula discreetly, lest they would be offended. He was Muslim, like his ancestors in China before him who had embraced Islam which came to China by land from the Arabian peninsula eight hundred years before, or about two hundred years after it was introduced in Arabia. All his relatives were devout Muslims who observed all the tenets of Islam.

Now in Melaka, Zheng-he decided it was not civil if he prayed five times a day and facing the Holy Kaabah in full view of his guests and the others in the palace. How devout were they, he could not tell, since he had not seen any of them praying at the temples. Those who went there were mostly the laborers and the lower class, and some senior and junior palace officials and their families. They had so much more to pray and hope for, compared to the wealthy people in Melaka who were so engrossed with their material success

that they saw less need to pray and be grateful to their gods and deities. Many of them were simply blinded by their financial success.

Parameswara found the Chinese ambassador quite an affable person. They got attracted to each other the first time they met in the palace, when the Melaka palace officials brought him before him. He became interested in his religion, too, but he did not wish to make further inquiries. He just liked to observe how he and the other Chinese-Muslims performed their ablution at the well and pray five times a day without fail. As always, Zheng-he became the *Imam* or leader of the congregation. He stood alone in front of everybody. He bowed, bent forward and sat on the floor and repeated the position few times, before sitting cross-legged on the small prayer mat and opened both his palms and recited something quietly, an additional private prayer. The others followed him. The movements were well synchronized that they looked pleasant to look at. Parameswara was intrigued. The rituals were totally different from theirs. There was also a book. It was very thick that Zheng-he liked to carry with him everywhere he went. When he had the time, he would flick open the pages and read it silently, to himself, as if he was meditating. After he was finished, he closed the book, touched it on his forehead, and kissed it. He repeated the ritual three times.

One evening, Parameswara asked Zheng-he to accompany him for a walk around the garden near the palace, after he had performed his late afternoon, *asar* prayers. Zheng-he felt it was an honor to be invited to go on such a walk privately with Parameswara. By now he was able to speak in Malay very well, and was able to converse with Parameswara or anybody in Melaka as though he was one of them. Sometimes he even wore Malay clothes.

'May be you should consider making a trip to China. Our emperor is longing to meet your majesty,' said Zheng-he.

Parameswara pondered. Zheng-he looked at him. He felt awkward walking with his guest in such an informal fashion like that, he being the ruler of Melaka, while Zheng-he was just an admiral and an official ambassador of the imperial court of China. So how could both of them walk and talk on the same level like that? Nevertheless, it was Parameswara's wish that they were engaged in some informal talk. Other than that, he hoped that Parameswara would be more inquisitive about his religion, Islam. He seemed to be fascinated with it. Nevertheless, he was still reluctant to ask Zheng-he.

'We will send an envoy to come along with you, dear admiral,' said Parameswara after pondering over Zheng-he's question for a while. 'Why you come along, too? Our emperor is longing to set eyes on your majesty.'

Parameswara thought seriously. 'Not yet, dear admiral; it is not the right time yet. Our high priest and prime minister have not agreed, as the dates are still not too auspicious. The timing must be done according to some cosmic calculations that I do not know much about, except the high priests. We must let more time to pass by and some more water flow under the Melaka Bridge before we embark on that first journey to China. However, as it is, our relations have been put on a strong pedestal. Therefore, what is there for us to worry about?'

Zheng-he nodded in agreement; he thought it was a good idea, too. 'We shall be returning to China in a few days' time.'

'But, but...'

'I have been in Melaka for more than four years already. This is the longest time I have ever spent in any one country.'

'Really? It is that long? ...See, how time flies when we're having fun?' Parameswara was surprised that so much time had passed since he set foot in Melaka - four years. He did not believe it until Zheng-he said so. Zheng-he was now dark, due to the exposure to the sun, looking like a Malay man. He was pale when he first step foot at Melaka.

'No wonder you are able to speak Malay well. If you wear our clothes, I'm sure you will even pass for a Malay man yourself.'

'And with my dark skin. Thank you, for your kind remarks. Yes, I do have a fascination for the people of Melaka especially the Malays. They are very humble. Everywhere I go they receive me warmly, like I'm their long-lost cousin, even though I'm Chinese and a Muslim and not Malay and Hindu like all of them. All the Chinese who have stayed here feel free to move about; they do not feel frightened or afraid of going anywhere, because they know the Malays or anyone, won't harm them. In fact, many of the Chinese boys whom I have brought with me don't want to return to their homeland; they really like this place so much. Some have secretly converted to Islam and got married to your Malay girls! Amazing! They have decided to *masuk Melayu* (become Malays.)'

'Really? Wonderful. Is that so? They told you that, admiral?'

'Yes, your majesty.'

'Well, let them stay then. You, too can stay, admiral.'

'I'm afraid I have to return home. His supreme Emperor Yong-le expects me anytime now. His majesty wishes for me to present an official report on my current trip although some of my men can remain here; but I can't.'

'Ah, but you can come here again, anytime. I will be happy to receive you. This is your home, too.'

'I hope so too.'

'May be we will see each other again. May be the Chinese who stay can get to know our people better. Mostly, they can teach us how to cook those noodles. I like it more when they are long.'

They laughed.

'That's perfectly okay with us. It means that our people will be able to interrelate even more. We like your food ourselves except that it is too hot. It's like eating fire.'

They laughed.

'Very well, admiral, we can't hold you much longer. I do understand that you have you duties to perform. I am sure Emperor Yong-le longs to see you. I do hope you can take our envoy with you. He has a letter for your supreme emperor that I want to deliver personally to your emperor. It's not nice or proper to ask you to hand it to your emperor on my behalf.'

'I will be glad to accommodate him in our ship.'

'Tell your emperor, I can't pay him an official visit yet at this time. Who knows may be in the near future, I can.'

'Very well.'

Perpatih Besar walked along the corridors and went to Parameswara's study, as he normally did almost every night before returning home. He had to get the final report. He saw him sitting alone behind a low writing table and greeted, 'Good evening, your majesty.' Actually, the prime minister was shocked to hear that Parameswara had changed his mind about going to China. This was what he had wanted to discuss with him. Other than that, he was beginning to worry since Parameswara was spending too much time with Zheng-he and talking about Islam.

Parameswara stopped writing when he heard footsteps. He turned around and saw Perpatih Besar standing at the door. 'Good evening, *bendahara*. Why are you in such great haste? Isn't it still early for the late night prayers? Do you have other appointments?'

'Good evening,' replied Perpatih Putih. He then entered the study and shook Parameswara's hand and sat cross-legged near his low writing desk. 'Not really. I see that you had spent a long time with the admiral in the gardens. In that case, I did not wish to disturb both of you.'

'He's leaving Melaka soon.'

'Really? Is it true that the admiral is returning to China?'

'Yes, it's true. And he has taken leave from us. He has been in Melaka for four years already. Surely, he will need to return someday. As much as, I regret

for allowing him to leave so soon. But I can't hold him back any longer as it's not proper, for he has a family and country to return to.'

'Indeed.'

'I am beginning to be fond of him. He has been telling me about his religion, Islam, which I find to be fascinating.'

'Islam? What is that?' Perpatih Putih pretended to be ignorant.

'It is the religion of the Arabs. Even the Malays in Pasai in North Sumatra have converted to the religion, I am told. Some of our people, too, had done so.'

'The Malays? How could that happen?'

'Yes, but it seems that some of our own people, too, had converted. They did it quietly, so as not to create problems for themselves. They have also married some of our own girls and they, too, had converted to Islam.'

'It is unfortunate. The gods and deities won't like that. I am disappointed with them myself. How could I sleep tonight? They should not do what their ruler does not like. What else did the admiral tell you about Islam?'

'Not much, except that in China, there is a sizable group of Chinese who have converted to the religion. How could a religion appeal to so many people of different races?'

'Even the Chinese had converted to Islam? How could this be possible? They should be the last people who would want to do that! What has happened to all these people? Are they sick in the head? Those Arab devils just cannot be trusted anymore!'

'That was what I asked myself, too, prime minister. But, it was true. Zheng-he is a Muslim, and he is an admiral. He is a very important person in the imperial court of China. His supreme emperor doesn't seem to mind it. So why can't the other Chinese convert, too? Let our people decide what's best for them. I was informed by the admiral that his supreme majesty Emperor Yong-le, also gave the Muslims there special privileges so they could build their own mosques and conduct their lives according to their religious requirements.'

'Really? That is certainly news to me.' Perpatih Besar gave up. He wanted to change the subject as it was starting to annoy him. He felt sorry for the others who had denounced the religion of their ancestors and converted to Islam. However, there was nothing that he could, as it was their wish since they were matured enough to decide what was good for them. 'I don't think your majesty should care listen to him about Islam anymore.'

'Why?'

The prime minister kept quiet. Parameswara waited for his explanation.

'Sooner or later, they have a way of eating into your majesty's system. You will be influenced by whatever they said, however atrocious it may be. Has he cast a spell on you? It's good, therefore, that he's leaving Melaka. We just don't know what else he has in mind of doing. This cannot surely be his mission, to spread Islam to our people.'

Parameswara smiled. The prime minister was disappointed.

'Why did you say that?'

'Because it's not good for any of us to hear about it.'

'Yes, indeed.' Parameswara then changed the subject. 'And why have you come to see us today? Surely, you've something else in mind besides lecturing to me about that.'

'Is it true that you want to follow the admiral?'

Parameswara pondered. 'Yes, it's true. I think it will be good if I follow him back to China. In this way, I can meet the emperor. It's not nice to send his envoys home alone.'

Perpatih Besar was surprised. He thought the admiral was returning to China alone and Parameswara was not keen to go on the trip with him. 'Your majesty...'

'I meant exactly as I have said. I'm leaving for China with the admiral.'

'If that's the case, we'll prepare. May be you can discuss with Emperor Yong-le about the Siamese...'

'And what about them?'

'It's about the continued Siamese aggression on us. They haven't stopped harassing us even when they know we have been receiving the Chinese. May be this is their way of showing their utmost contempt of us.'

'And what exactly do you want me to tell the Chinese emperor now? Be specific. What do we expect from the Chinese?'

'We are not equipped enough to contain them. Ours is a small country; we do not have a large navy, or army to defend our country. Because of that, we will have to require the Chinese emperor's help. Who knows what holds in the future when Melaka becomes more successful and developed? Surely, there'll be some people from the region or elsewhere from the 'land above the wind' or 'land below the wind' who might want to attack and capture us. Even now the Siamese have such evil designs on us; and we haven't become such a great country, yet they've seen it fit to do such things.'

Parameswara was surprised with the prime minister's revelation. He did not know that the Siamese were that adventurous and had such evil intentions. He remembered how the Siamese had driven him out of Temasik many years before. He thought they had learnt their valuable lessons from the episode,

and did not want to engage in such adventures anymore. But, he was wrong. 'Yes, I remember Temasik and what we did there when we were much younger. I thought they had given up the idea of dominating other Malay states. It's been quite sometime since we learnt about them, prime minister. I thought they were fully preoccupied with their own international affairs that they simply do not have any time to worry about our own personal problems which are insignificant compared to what they are facing.'

'Yes. Your majesty cannot say if the others are not greedy like us. It is greed that's compelling them to do such things. They were driven by the devils that are inhibiting in them.'

'Do you want me to ask the Chinese emperor to send a battalion of soldiers to defend Melaka then?'

'Not really. We can request his supreme Emperor Yong-le to send an envoy to Siam first?'

Parameswara did not get the point. He pondered over the suggestion. 'Just what precisely do you have in mind, prime minister? Why must we ask the Chinese emperor to do that? Let's make this perfectly clear and not be vague. The Chinese emperor must not be misled.'

'We need to warn the Siamese ruler; should he provoke us again, we will make sure the Chinese attack and destroy their nation. We do not want to bring the war to Melaka. It hurts us more than them, even if we were to win. We need to contain the Siamese before they commit more serious unprovoked attacks on us.'

Parameswara thought. 'Why didn't you tell us about this earlier, then?'

'I thought the Siamese should have withdrawn on their own accord by now, without us having to urge them to do so. But, the situation has turned for the worse recently. They may even attack us and topple your majesty's government.'

'Will they want to do that? They are so far away up in the north.'

'They have done it before. Remember: They are still in full control of Pahang and Temasik and they were the ones who drove your majesty from Temasik. They have put many Malay states around us under the direct control. Do we want to allow them to dominate us and worse, give them the opportunity to do that?'

'Oh, yes, I remember Tamogi very well and the Siamese crown prince Sailutha who stared at me as we rowed across the Straits of Tebrau. You were there; you too saw how he clenched a long sword in his fist and trusted it in my face. But, then we were on the run, prime minister. We now rule a country. How could they just invade us without expecting any retaliation? What more

now that we are having such a wonderful and cordial relationship with China. I'm sure the supreme emperor of China won't want to see Melaka being invaded by any other country, least of all by Siam!

'They don't want to invade, just to subjugate us, so that we're under their domination, and we have to pay homage to them.'

'It's the same, isn't it?'

'In many ways, your majesty.'

Parameswara thought. 'Thank you for telling me that. I appreciate it. I will take a note and highlight this matter so that he will know the severity of the problem we are facing here. Do remind me again when we get there. If indeed the Chinese emperor genuinely wishes to promote strong bilateral relations with us, he will have to do something to safeguard us. We will then leave everything to him to decide on this. He has his prime minister and senior palace officials to advise him, I'm sure.'

The prime minister nodded.

'Well, prepare our men, prime minister. We'll be leaving with Admiral Zheng-he as soon as the winds blow up north.'

'Very well.'

The City of Nanjing in China in 1411 CE or 813 AH, in the year of the rabbit or *mao* in 4109. This was the seat of the imperial government of the supreme emperor of China of the Ming dynasty.

Parameswara and his entourage headed towards the palace. They were being greeted warmly by the people of Nanjing who lined both sides of the street. The Chinese people were delighted to see him, as they had not seen any important dignitary from outside of China visiting them in a long time. They thought Parameswara was a very important foreign dignitary, who had come with so many people, and who had crossed the wide sea to pay their emperor a state visit. Those who had come to China earlier only had one thing in mind - to attack and capture it. But, the sultan of Melaka did not have such evil intentions. He had come to establish cordial ties with them.

Parameswara had chosen to leave his royal carriage to walk when he got to the city center so he could be closer with the people although it was cold. The others in his entourage followed suit.

The whole of the capital city of Nanjing came to a standstill that day. All of its inhabitants stopped work to line the streets where Parameswara and his entourage were passing hours before the entourage finally passed by their neighborhood. They were so eager to catch a glimpse of it so that they could remember this important event and relate it to their grandchildren later. As the



custom, they put up dragon dance performances before the royal entourage to entertain them. Firecrackers, too, were lit and they cracked continuously for hours on end. This made a loud noise that frightened the younger members of the Melaka royal family, especially when the musicians clanged the brass cymbals and hit the gong hard simultaneously with the beating of the large drums. It was not only to ward off evil spirits, but also to cheer up the foreign guests. The young children quickly hugged their parents or nannies. Then the *gongfu* boys and girls appeared. They put up another show that thrilled Parameswara immensely. He saw how the boys and girls jumped until they got to the roofs. He shook his head in amazement and said excitedly, 'Amazing. What's this?'

'It's called, *gongfu*,' explained the Chinese official.

'*Gongfu*. Very interesting.'

'It's as old as China itself. It is for self-defense, and to ward off attack from our enemies.'

'Long live Melaka ruler! Long live Melaka ruler! Long live Melaka ruler!' the people shouted in Mandarin, a language which he was familiar with. Teachers who had come to Melaka with Admiral Zheng-he had taught him the language so that he could converse in it with the Chinese emperor. Parameswara and his consort Dewi Puteri smiled; they waved back at the crowd. Perpatih Besar was with them.

Firecrackers were lit. They made a loud noise that went on and on.

'Why are they firing guns from strings like that? Won't it hurt?' asked Dewi Puteri in all innocence.

'They're not firing guns,' explained a Melaka official.

'Then what else do you call them?'

'They're called firecrackers, my dear,' chipped in Parameswara.

'Firecrackers?' asked his queen.

'Yes.'

'May be we can bring some back to show to the people.'

'May be not,' chipped in Perpatih Besar.

'Why not? They won't harm anyone. On the other hand, they can even entertain our people,' said Dewi Puteri.

'We'll think about it.'

The members of Parameswara's entourage then presented a game called the *sepak raga bulatan* or the rattan ball game for the Chinese public to watch. The men of five stood in a circle and kicked, headed or knocked the ball with their shoulders and tried to keep it in the air for as long as they could. It was the first time then the crowd were seeing this sort of sport. They counted until

the ball fell to the ground. They then clapped their hands and were immensely thrilled.

'How enthralled the Chinese are with our *sepak raga bulatan* game,' remarked Parameswara. 'It's a game as much as it is a performance.'

'We certainly haven't seen anything like this before,' said a Chinese official who was near Parameswara.

'Certainly not.'

'It's called, *sepak raga bulatan*.'

'*See-pak laga-boolatan*,' said the Chinese official repeated. Parameswara and the others in his royal entourage from Melaka laughed.

'Yes, something like that.'

The *silat* boys then picked up the ball and continued to play, as the Chinese clapped their hands and cheered them on. One of the boys then purposely kicked the ball astray. It hit on the head of a Chinese man. It was so hard; he felt like a brick had landed on his head. He rubbed the huge red round lump that had appeared on it with both hands as his friends laughed. '*Aiyak*, it's so hard like a stone! My head is cracked!' he screamed. He thought the ball was soft because he had seen it easily bounce off the feet, shoulders and heads of the Melaka men that didn't seem to hurt them the least. Another Chinese man picked up the rattan ball and hurled it back to the Malay boys who resumed with the game.

'Welcome to Nanjing and our land,' said Yong-le in Mandarin as Parameswara arrived at the Chinese palace.

'Thank you, your supreme Emperor Yong-le,' said Parameswara, also in Mandarin.

'You speak excellent Mandarin; I'm surprised.'

'Not at all, your supreme emperor. I learnt a bit from two of your supreme emperor's envoys when they were in Melaka. But, I'm sure my Mandarin isn't really that good.'

Yong-le feigned surprised. 'Really?'

'Indeed, your supreme emperor.'

'On the contrary, it is excellent.'

'I still have a lot to learn. May be on this trip I can learn more words, and speak better. Remember: Interior minister Yin-ching and Admiral Zheng-he, and most of the Chinese who came to Melaka also studied Malay while they were there. They spoke in the language excellently like the Malays themselves.'

'Yes, yes, I remember them. Whatever it is, my dear son, I am very happy to see you here, my dear Sri Parameswara. It is fortunate that your majesty could come and visit us. How fortunate indeed it is for me as I have been

looking forward to see you with my own very eyes before they become blur and I get older. I did not get to know you that well from the way my envoys had described you,' said Yong-le. 'I hope your majesty will be able to stay with us for a long time, one or two years, at the very least.'

'I have been looking forward to visit your supreme emperor earlier, but the gods ruled otherwise. My high priests make all the plans for me. And my interests in China were intrigued beyond measure. I felt that the good Admiral Zheng-he had actually convinced me to come to here. He also described in details about his seven expeditions to the 'land above the wind' that made me more intrigued. I could not believe that the world was so wide, it seems endless... The admiral was good enough to explain to me about the compass or the 'south-pointing needle' that he had used to guide him there.'

'Admiral Zheng-he had actually visited thirty countries on his expeditions on behalf of the imperial government of China. And we're delighted with the results.'

'Very true, your supreme emperor. And he often took me onboard the admiral's junk and stayed there for days on end. He also took him on a cruise to the other islands. It was amazing how your people and workers could build junks or ships like that; they are bigger than our ports, so we asked them to dock them offshore, and they are rowed on smaller boats to the shore.'

They laughed.

'I will personally take you to the port where they build all our ships, so you can see for yourself how it is done. Would you like that?'

'Oh, yes, certainly. Where is the shipyard?'

'Here in Nanjing. I'm so sorry to hear that you couldn't make it here earlier with Envoy Yin-ching earlier,' said Yong-le. 'But I am glad that I am now seeing your face with my own eyes. My envoys have described me in detail about your features and your good self. How true their description was.'

They laughed.

After the pomp and gaiety of the royal welcome ceremony, and the sumptuous state banquet in the Fien-Tian throne room, Yong-le and Besar Muda walked along the corridor to his study later that day for some private discussions.

'I'm sure you feel more comfortable sitting in here. We can talk like two old men, one Malay and the other Chinese,' said Yong-le.

They smiled.

'Very true, your supreme emperor.'

'We will have some tea. It will help to warm up your blood. Has the weather here affected you?'

'A lot, your supreme emperor. I did not expect the weather to be so harsh. It's so cold. It is worse than dipping in the Melaka River in the morning. I could have frozen while coming here just now. Fortunately, the warm welcome that your honorable citizens had shown us, had made all of us feel warm and fresh.'

'I'm sure you will quickly find it comfortable once your body had become acclimatized to the weather.'

They sipped some Chinese tea.

'And what else can I do for you, my dear, sultan? You said earlier that you had something to tell me in private. What is it? Tell me.'

Parameswara kept quiet. He felt embarrassed. Yong-le stared at him and waited for his response; he could read from his face that Parameswara was not feeling easy as if he was tormented by a problem. 'If you're not comfortable here in the presence of so many dignitaries, why don't I order all of them to leave us?' he asked.

Parameswara felt a slight relief. 'That's all right, your supreme emperor,' he said.

'Why don't you come with me to the garden? There is more privacy there. No, it's much too cold there at this time of day. Besides, there won't be any birds there to chirp and sing for us. Let's then go to my study, right here; come. Come; this way, my dear Parameswara.' Yong-le led him out of the study. Their officers followed behind. The emperor stopped and turned around. 'No, all of you stay where you are. We'd like to have some privacy together.'

'Yes, your supreme majesty.'

'Are you all right?' Perpatih Besar asked Parameswara in Malay.

'Yes, prime minister, I'm fine.'

Yong-le then led Parameswara into his library. The others turned to look at each other's faces, not knowing that they were doing. Yong-le and Parameswara sat on two expensive-looking wooden chairs that were lacquered thickly and laid with expensive pieces of mother-of-pearl that formed the shape of flowers and birds. All the furniture in the space room was of wood. Many books were neatly arranged on the shelves at all the four-corners of the spacious room. 'Let's have more tea or *chai*, as we call it here, my dear, son,' said Yong-le. He poured two small cups and offered one to Besar Muda. 'You know how my envoys told me the first time you drank tea you first stared at it before you actually took a sip of it? You remember how you thought it was like drinking gold water?'

'Yes, that's true,' said Parameswara. 'Your envoys brought to Melaka many boxes of tea and we drank it every day there. They always insisted that we drank tea - *chai*, and nothing else. My children and grandchildren like it so much, drinking gold water. We consumed all the tea that they brought to Melaka, in the fifty huge boxes!'

'Yes, I will make sure you'll bring more tea in chests for your own drinking pleasure. You can take as many as you like. We have plenty of it here.'

'Thank you, your supreme emperor. We certainly have nothing of that sort in Melaka.'

'But, didn't Envoy Yin-ching and Admiral Zheng-he tell you about their experience eating *durians* for the first time?'

'*Ab*, those fruits, the king of fruits, as you called them in Melaka. Sure.'

They laughed. Yong-le liked it now that the two of them were in the privacy of his library and away from the prying eyes of their handlers. They began to loosen up. He noticed that Besar Muda was not feeling relaxed with the conversation on tea and *durian*.

'Do they smell awful, my dear ruler?'

'Only to those who don't have a nose for them, your supreme emperor. But, after tasting a mere morsel, both Yin-ching and Zheng-he became crazy with them. They are simply delicious. Just too bad, your majesty could not plant the fruit here in China, because the weather here is not the same to ours in Melaka.'

'I can guess it. But, too bad, all the seeds they brought home couldn't survive.'

'The weather here is not suitable for *durian* trees, your supreme emperor. The same with the orange seeds that my ancestors had brought home... They, too, couldn't grow into trees, let alone bear fruits. Hardly a shoot sprouted from the ground where they planted the seeds in - not even a tiny bit'

There was a long pause. Parameswara wanted to thank the emperor for the dinner and other meals that he had served him. He particularly liked the *cincau* - wheatgrass drink, foods of various kinds that used all types of mushroom, *taufu* - bean curd, bird's nest and the array of vegetables that the royal kitchen staff had dutifully prepared. He was informed that many of them, including the sweets that were produced afterwards were specially prepared for him and they were only served to important visiting dignitaries. These took many days to prepare, since they required many items that were not readily available.

'We have so much things in common, between the Malays and Chinese. We even use the lunar calendar, unlike those people in the 'lands above the wind' who use their own style which was not accurate at all. Our experts in the study

of the sun and moon and the universe knew all along, since few thousands of years ago...that the moon was a better guide for the study of the night and day, and hence, the months and years. And we knew that the earth was round like a ball, long before them. Some of them are still insisting that the earth is flat like a mattress,' said Yong-le in order to continue with their discussion.

They laughed.

'Very true, your supreme emperor.'

'And what about this food called *sambal*? The food that has fire in it!'

'Ah, did they also tell about it, your supreme emperor?'

'Certainly. The first time, they thought they had eaten acid; they were worried their noses and mouth had spewed fire and smoke. Fortunately they didn't. They had to rush to the well and wash their mouth and munch some sweet cookies called *kuib* that was meant for dessert.'

They laughed. There was another impasse; this time it was much longer as the two men pondered. None of them knew what the other was thinking of. Parameswara wanted to inform the emperor of his fears of the Siamese who were still harassing Melaka; but he was worried to say it.

Yong-le, however, decided to break the ice again. 'Now, tell me, my dear friend; let's not be shy. I understand the Malay people are extremely shy people. But, we are alone here now. Say whatever that is in your heart. If you feel sad, I will feel ten times sadder. If you feel happy, I will be ten times happier. Now tell me, my son.'

Parameswara was relieved. 'The Siamese haven't stopped harassing us, your supreme emperor.'

Yong-le was surprised. His face immediately became contorted. Parameswara felt sorry for making him so worried. Yong-le took many deep breaths to regain his composure. He did not realize that it was what Parameswara had in mind was that serious and he felt sorry for him. Yong-le felt it was also his fault that the Siamese was still treating Melaka so shabbily. 'Is that so? How come I wasn't informed of it earlier?'

'There has been no communication between us since your majesty's Envoy Yong-le and I did not inform Admiral Zheng-he when he was in Melaka because it was not his duty to listen to our problems. That was why I had decided to come here with him.'

'The Siamese ruler must be thickheaded. Didn't I warn him not to harass Melaka and your people anymore? What does he want now? Didn't he get my message? Didn't I put it to him loud and clear? If he wants trouble, we'll give him double trouble to distract him. If he wants us to attack them, we'll do that.' The emperor's voice raised slightly.

'Nobody knows for certain, your supreme emperor. The Siamese ruler and his officials are very secretive people. They hardly tell anyone what their true intentions are.'

'What do you want me to do then? Tell us! I'm greatly distressed by what you have just said to me. I won't be able to sleep and eat tonight if you do not tell me what I can do to help clear this mess. I am very annoyed that the Siamese ruler is not taking heed of my advice. Or does he expect me to issue a warning instead? Is he making fun of me?'

'May be. What does your supreme emperor propose? I will agree to whatever your majesty says.'

Yong-le thought. Parameswara waited; he looked anxious and nervous.

'We will issue them another warning; this time it will be sterner, so that he knows that we mean business. He should be aware that we do not write letters unless if it is absolutely necessary. We will personally send the Siamese ruler another letter. This time I will make sure it sounds harsh and direct. I will not mince my word. If they persist in their aggression and harassment, we won't hesitate to attack them. When that happens, they will know how badly it will affect them. What do you say, my dear sultan? I will get Admiral Zheng-he to deliver personally it to the king of Siam Tammaraja II, so he gets the message. Zheng-he normally doesn't do such things; it's not his official duty to do so.'

'This will make me very happy, your supreme emperor.'

Yong-le stood up. Parameswara followed suit. They stood by the windows and stared outside at the garden.

'My dear son, you haven't seen much of the countryside. How about going on a trip with me?' asked Yong-le. He hoped to relax a little now that they had settled the problem.

'When? Is your supreme emperor allowed to leave the palace?'

'I can sneak out. Now, come; our carriage is ready. I have not told any of my senior officials about this. They will be mad if they come to know about our escapade. I have been held virtual prisoner in my own palace, you know. I cannot leave this place although I am the supreme emperor of the imperial court of China of the Ming dynasty. Isn't that strange? I'm the most powerful person in the whole of China, yet I have been barred from leaving my own palace! You're lucky, you can decide where you can go, and where you cannot go to.'

They left the room and continued to walk along few corridors. The palace officials moved to the side to allow them to pass by. They nodded at them. The two rulers walked down few more corridors and hallways before arriving

at the main entrance of the palace. It was such a huge palace. The other palace officials stood in attention as both of them passed in front of them.

'My ancestors loved to live in grand buildings, they just could not settle with a small house to live in. They wanted everything to be extra big, and extra large,' explained Yong-le, sounding like he was complaining and certainly not bragging. 'The only things that they want to have are small problems. They don't like big problems, but small, tiny ones; the smaller the better.'

They both laughed like two buddies, who grew up in the same village together. The Chinese and Malay court officials were surprised to see that both their rulers had clicked instantly and had now become inseparable. They were more surprised to see how their emperor could put aside palace protocol and behaved like ordinary mortals. They stepped out of the front door. Prime minister Perpatih Besar and prime minister Hai Shou who were following closely from behind were confused and nervous. They did not know what the two rulers were going to do next. Where were they going to riding in the carriage? Everything they did was a surprise, a serious breach of protocol. There was no palace precedence. Yong-le had not behaved in this manner with other rulers who had paid him official visits in the past. He only became casual, informal, and more cheerful when the ruler from Melaka came. But then, Yong-le was now well in his early eighties so they always gave that as an excuse for his sudden change of mood or personal indiscretion or *faux pas*.

'Your supreme majesty,' said Hai Shou. He was shocked. He had not seen the emperor acting like that and brushing aside protocol that had been established long before all of them were born. Yong-le's ancestors made sure that palace protocol were adhered religiously. Because of that, everything that moved in the imperial palace in Nanjing required different sets of behavior and norm. Even clothes, or officials to attend to and everything there moved with clockwork precision and timing. The emperor's time was carefully determined and measured so much so he did not have to remain unattended for more than a minute at the most. He had to be attended and catered to by a host of palace officials, attendants and other assistants who each had a specific role to play to make the emperor's life to be as comfortable as possible. He was not supposed to touch anything. Everything had to be taken care of by his handlers. Even his food was first tested by the food-testers to determine if they were not spiked or contaminated, before the emperor could take them.

But, the officials from the Chinese palace did not want to admit that their emperor's behavior had changed because of the presence of the Melaka ruler. They were fully aware that Yong-le had now become old and frail. His mind wasn't as clear as before, and he had his ups and down. They thought he could



also be senile. Because of that, the royal medicine men dared not try to control him, lest he would go out of hand and behaved more erratically.

'Is everything all right?' asked Perpatih Besar. 'Does your majesty want me to come along?'

'That's okay, *bendabara* and prime minister. I am taking his majesty on a trip to the city and countryside,' said Yong-le in a cheerful voice that surprised his officials. They knew was moody and unreasonable for the past week before Parameswara arrived at the palace. Now, suddenly he was very much alive and feeling cheerful and young again. He was very weak and could hardly walk long distance just a week earlier. Even inside the palace he had to be carried in a palanquin so he did not strain his knees. Now, he was out of bed, walking long distances and exerting himself physically like his weak heart didn't matter. Did the ruler from Melaka give him a special potion that awakened their emperor, thought the Chinese officials. They looked at each other and could not find the answer.

'When will your supreme majesty return to the palace? We...?' Hai Shou asked. But he stopped in mid-sentence. 'May be some of our officials can come along, your supreme emperor.'

'Never mind. I'm fine,' replied Yong-le.

Both the *bendabara* and prime minister stood outside the royal carriage. There was not much that they could do besides. They could not even shake their heads. If they did that, they could be cited for contempt. The only penalty being death by hanging in the public square. So, they kept quiet. They just hoped that their rulers were away from any physical harm.

'Before dinner,' replied Yong-le. 'Next week!' He joked.

'Your majesty,' said Perpatih Besar.

'Never mind, *bendabara*. I'm perfectly okay,' said Parameswara to his *bendabara* in Malay. They then entered the carriage.

'Go!' ordered Yong-le to his rider. Four sturdy horses pulled it ahead. It took the only main road out of the palace and headed on and on. The officials waited at the front door of the palace until they lost sight of the royal carriage, until the dust that the carriage left in its wake had disappeared into thin air.

'I want you to show something,' said Yong-le as the carriage traveled through a narrow road when it reached at the edge of the city and was about to enter the countryside. Here the view was breathtaking. He had wanted Besar Muda to see with his own eyes how scenic the Yangtze River and Xuanwu Lake looked like.

'I am sure Melaka looks very different from Nanjing, my dear sultan. My envoys told me so. They were amazed as to how totally different both our

countries are. Even our food and costumes are different; and our languages, too. But, our differences do not come in the way of our special and brotherly relationship.

'You do not know how I'm so fond of you. I take you as my own son. Your presence has made me want to go on living and to serve my country. I do hope that the gods in Heavens will grant me with a long and prosperous life, so I can embark on a return trip to Melaka and see you there.

'My ambassador, Yin-ching made me promise to come to Melaka, but I didn't get to do it then. The royal *sinehs* did not allow me. But, again, our emperors don't leave the palace, so what chance is there for me to leave imperial China? I'm only dreaming, my dear son. I am only dreaming of going on a trip to Melaka.

'I am even forbidden to leave even my own palace! So that is why I am especially delighted that you came and pay me a visit before I die and join all my ancestors in Heavens.' He raised his right hand and pointed above.

Parameswara was touched with Yong-le's revelation. He felt sad that the emperor's life was so confined to the palace like a prisoner. He was glad that he had come to visit him in Nanjing, and for accepting him as his own son.

'His excellency interior minister was right. But, Melaka is small and it's not too ancient like Nanjing. We have ample space in the hinterland, but nobody seems to be interested to go there to farm or live. The jungles are still not cultivated and there might be wild animals and beasts in there, too.

'So, basically our activities are confined around the palace and the port and the nearby hills. There's another hill which we have given to the Chinese who're in Melaka to bury the dead while waiting for the Easterly winds to take them back to China for their final burial. In the meantime, they are buried there.'

'Really? What's the name of the hills?'

'Chinese Hills, your supreme majesty. The Malays call it *Bukit Cina*. This hill was given by me to the Chinese who had come to Melaka to bury their dead, so that the corpses could later be sent back her to China to be buried, when the northerly winds come.'

'Of course. I have also heard that there are many of our sailors who were now in Melaka had also married your women. How nice... They must be extremely lucky to have found a life partner in a foreign country. That is amazing! I will look funny if I were to wear your clothes. I do hope they treat their wives well.'

'Very true, your supreme emperor.'

'Do they speak your language? How do they communicate with their Malay wives then? I'm curious.'

'Oh, they have learnt the language over time, and they are now able to speak in Malay well, although their accent is somewhat strange-sounding. They like to speak in a certain melody and use words that rhyme. On top of that, they like to intersperse their speech with Chinese words!'

'Really? Ah, that's interesting. How about that?'

'That's right. Even the Malays in Melaka are now using the Chinese words as though they are their own words. They seem to fit well with the Malay language.'

'I do find the Malay language to be pleasant to the ear. What do you think of Mandarin?'

'I thought it sounded like birds chirping. The people do not seem to know where to stop or pause. I'm sure it's like the Chinese noodles or...like they haven't been cut into pieces.'

They laughed. Yong-le laughed until he almost lost his head. He liked the way Parameswara described it.

'I'm sorry for describing your language like that,' said Parameswara after he had managed to control himself.

'No, not at all.'

'And they are slowly beginning to enjoy our hot and spicy food. I especially like the cookies that you have given us. They are delicious and sweet. We even have a whole section for the Chinese so that they can meet each other regularly, and that they can cook their own food.'

'Really?'

'And you will not be able to tell if you are in China or Melaka. Everything there is Chinese. They have their dragon dances almost every day, and they fire the crackers when they feel like it. All the houses have temples in them and they lit the joss-sticks everyday.'

'Why did they have to do that? Are there that many devils and demons lurking in Melaka?'

'What does your supreme majesty mean?'

'I mean, the crackers are usually fired to ward off evil spirits and the devils.'

'Oh, really? I'm not aware of that, your supreme majesty. May be they're doing just to attract attention to themselves.'

There was a lull. Both the rulers were exhausted from all the talking, laughing and joking. The carriage continued to move ahead towards the countryside.

'I am already old. We will not survive the arduous trip. How long did you take to get here?'

'Three weeks.'

'That's too long for me. My body will not be able to withstand the long and arduous trip. Besides, at this time, I'm much needed by my people here. China is such a vast country. I will never be able to see all of it, even if I have a thousand eyes. That is why no Chinese emperor has been allowed to leave the country. We are held as virtual prisoners in our palaces!'

The people waved at the rulers and they waved back at them. It was now evening. The carriage was now traveling slowly in the countryside. It stopped. Yong-le and Parameswara got out to admire at the scenery that spread as far as the eye could see. Beyond it were the hills that reached all the way to the sky with the thick white clouds hanging precariously in the clear blue skies and the sun peeping through them and making the whole scenery a joy to see. It was so different from the scenery in Melaka.

'Your countryside is very beautiful. It's so peaceful, heavenly.'

'But, Admiral Zheng-he and our Envoy Yin-ching told us that your countryside is also very beautiful. There are more trees and plants everywhere. Everything is green. He particularly enjoyed staring at the jungles; they are so thick that one can lose one's way if one gets inside them without an assistant. Is it true?'

'Very true. We are indeed blessed with good warm weather throughout the year. It is so cold here. I understand you often experience different seasons - four in all, if I'm not mistaken. And at times ice falls from the skies it seems.'

'Yes, the gods must be so indecisive; he couldn't decide what to offer us, and keep changing their mind all the time. We're confused as a result.'

They laughed.

'It is very cold now and yet it is sunny. But, will it change later? In Melaka when it is sunny, the weather will usually be hot. And when it gets cloudy or during the rainy seasons, the temperature drops drastically.'

'No wonder, your gods, too, are crazy, as much as our gods.'

They laughed.

'I am sorry, your majesty, if I have offended your religion. I didn't mean it.'

'That's okay, your supreme majesty.'

'I see. Yes. In a few months' time, the weather will be less severe, and you will see all the flowers sprouting out. They are sleeping now. And much later, it will get very hot. During that time, we will have to go to our summer capital up in the hills where the temperature's cooler and more pleasant.'

One of the things that amazed Parameswara was acupuncture. He squirmed each time he saw the Chinese doctor known as the *sinseh* planted thin needles into the body of his patient. One day, Yong-le suggested that he tried it because Parameswara had sprained his back. Reluctantly, he offered himself to the *sinseh* who was summoned to the guest palace called Hui Tong that was in the compound of the royal Chinese palace. He immediately set out to work. He planted scores of needles into Parameswara's back and at other parts of his body, where the nerve points or nodes were. He was surprised that the pricking didn't hurt him. On the contrary, they soothed his body. All the aches he had been experiencing for days disappeared with the few pins that had been stuck in his body.

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*Parameswara and his entourage returned to Melaka after spending two years in China. The Chinese Emperor Yong-le later gave a ship for him to sail back to Melaka. He filled it up with presents that included an official chop and seal, yellow cloth and umbrellas, as a token gesture of his admiration for him. Apart from that he also received jade, silk cloths, furniture, dividers, mosquito nets made of fine silk materials, paper money and gold and silver coins; also as a mark of the Chinese Emperor's acceptance of Parameswara as a king. He visited many mosques in China and found out there were many Chinese who had converted to Islam and was greatly impressed by it.*

*Parameswara died in 1414 CE or 817 AH in 4112 of the Chinese calendar. He was succeeded by his son, Besar Muda. Parameswara's body was cremated on the banks of the Melaka River where he had once stood, where a mystical white mousedeer had kicked his dog, that inspired him to found his new country and called it Melaka. The whole of Melaka was at a standstill. Everybody was there wearing white, the official color of mourning as they witnessed Parameswara's pyre burnt to ashes. The high priest chanted continuously until the ashes had been sprinkled in the river.*

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The high priest was conducting a prayer service at the temple in the palace grounds. Their usual prayer session was held every week for the royal family. Besar Muda's children, their families, and the senior palace officials were there. But, Besar Muda was nowhere around. The others looked around with each trying to guess if they knew where he could be at that time. He had been acting strange lately, i.e. since Admiral Zheng-he visited and stayed in Melaka. The

many times both of them talked with each other in private had made Besar Muda change a lot. His beliefs too changed drastically as a result. He prayed in the temples less now than he did before. Once, he even chided his children from spending too much time at the temples when they should be elsewhere. He had on few occasions refused to put the powder on his forehead and arms, as any pious man would.

The high priest felt disappointed that Besar Muda, as the ruler of Melaka hadn't turned up for the special prayers. But, there was nothing that he could do to force him to attend the prayers. He hoped that the ruler had not become senile, or that his age had not started to catch up with him. Kechil Besar turned around. He looked at his young brother, Kechil Muda and queen mother, Dewi Puteri and his wife, Kamarul Ajaib.

'Where's brother' asked Kechil Besar.

'No idea,' replied Kechil Muda.

'May be he's still in the bedroom. Does he know that we're having a prayer service today?' asked Dewi Puteri.

'I'm sure he does, mother,' replied Kechil Besar. 'How could he forget?'

Kechil Besar's grandson, Tengah, sisters-in-law, and other relatives were anxiously waiting for him to come. But, he was nowhere to be seen. The prayers should have been done and over with if he had come in time. They could have all returned to the palace to resume with their work.

'Why don't I go and find out,' said Kechil Muda.

'Let's just wait here. He'll definitely come out anytime now,' said Dewi Puteri.

The high priest was getting restless. He suspected that Besar Muda had become complacent with his religious duties recently. He noticed that he had become less interested in his religion. He worried that the Chinese admiral, Zheng-he might have influenced him on Islam. He had seen both the men talking by themselves in the garden and at the *bendul* for long hours. He was also fond of observing how the admiral prayed in the room that was prepared especially for him.

'Shall we all wait for his majesty?' asked the high priest.

'I'll find out,' said Kechil Muda. He immediately stood up and rushed to the palace. Before his mother could stop him, he was already halfway there. They waited for him to return. A while later, Kechil Muda alighted from the palace. He went to the temple in the compound.

'Is your brother in? Is he joining us?' asked Dewi Puteri.

'Brother says that we shall proceed without his presence.'

The high priest was shocked. He felt disappointed. He felt his fears were real; Besar Muda had deserted them and their religion. He was also horrified that Melaka, which was the center of their religion, was on the verge of collapse because of this. The other high priests just kept quiet. Many states collapsed because their rulers deserted their religion. Worse, he feared that he might denounce his religion, the religion of his ancestors. But, there was nothing that even he as the state high priest could do. He was just a priest with no control over Besar Muda who was now in the sixties and old enough to know what was good for own self.

'Did his majesty say that?' asked the high priest. He hoped that his ears had deceived him.

'Yes, high priest,' said Kechil Muda.

'Very well.'

'Let's proceed high priest,' said Dewi Puteri. 'I'll settle this matter with my husband later.'

The high priest proceeded to conduct the service, but less enthusiastically. He rang his bell and offered blessings in Sanskrit. He threw petals and other items in front of the gods and deities. The others clasped their palms and held them near their chest.

Besar Muda sat in the verandah alone. He had heard that his uncle the *paduka seri mabarajah* or the fifth ruler of Palembang had also converted to Islam and that Palembang was no more the center of Mahayana. Most of the people there had also converted to the religion by the Pasai men who had visited Palembang. In fact, he, too, had visited Pasai on numerous occasions and decided to become a Muslim himself. Because of that, he did not want to pursue Besar who he knew had absconded to Melaka. He had wanted Besar Muda and his family and followers to start life anew there.

Besar Muda continued to stare outside into nothingness. His wife, Kamarul Ajaib went to him. She walked across the verandah slowly so that the stamping of her feet on the wooden floor did not awaken him. She did not know what her husband was thinking or was worried about. She knew the mind of a ruler was very difficult to delve into. His seemed to be far away. He seemed to be looking too far ahead, and there were too many things that he was occupied with. His family was just one of his preoccupation; there were many others. Only his body was sitting in the chair. But, his eyes were wide open and staring into void. What was he seeing in his mind's eye, wondered Dewi Puteri.

'What's the matter, dear? You've not been attending services at the temple for months now,' said Dewi Puteri when she got close to her son.

Besar Muda woke up. He turned around. He recognized the voice. Her voice was sweet and welcoming as ever. It was so gentle. 'Are you all right? Do you want me to get the medicine man?'

'That's okay. I'm not sick, I was just thinking.'

'What about?'

'I had a dream. There is an old man. He looks like someone from the Arabian peninsula... He wears a long flowing robe and turban. He advises me to convert to Islam,' said Besar Muda. His voice sounded animated. His mother knew this did not sound like the son she had known all his life. He behaved as though he was possessed by a strong desire, a passion like he had discovered something new that could change his whole life and outlook of the world. He had formed a new worldview of himself and the world around him and was looking at things differently than he did before. She was shocked. She did not know what her son was exactly saying. He sounded like a very sick man, like he was experiencing a delusion. Maybe some evil spirits put him in a spell, wondered Dewi Puteri to herself.

'My goodness! You must do something about it fast, or the evil spirits will continue to haunt you. I'll get the high priest now. Are you sure you're not remembering the Chinese admiral?'

'No, he's Chinese, but the man in my dream is an Arab.'

Dewi Puteri moved away. 'No, come back. Where are you going?'

'I'm getting the high priest, dear.'

'There's no need for that. I must seek the advice of the Muslim holy men from Pasai.' He stood up. He removed the white powder marks on his forehead with his right hand, which was a sign of his piety and adherence to his original religion. His wife was shocked. 'What are you doing, dear?'

Besar Muda did not answer. He proceeded to remove the bangles from his hands and arms. He then threw them aside. His wife was more shocked. She froze and almost fell to the floor. 'What's the meaning of this?'

Besar Muda still did not answer. He moved ahead like he was being possessed. There was a certain glow in his face.

'Where are you going?'

'To the beach. They're praying at the direction of the East, towards the Holy Kaabah in Mekkah at about this time,' replied Besar Muda. 'I must see them.'

'What are you talking about, dear? I...I...I...don't quite understand what you're saying,' pleaded his wife, as her voice choked.

'The Muslims from Pasai in North Sumatra. I must see them; I must talk to them then.' Besar Muda continued to walk towards the front door. He slipped



on his leather sandals and walked out of the compound of the palace. Guards who were standing on duty at the sentry immediately stood in attention when they saw him. They were shocked to see him walking alone, with no guards or senior palace officials in attendance. There was nobody to carry an umbrella above him. Dewi Puteri rushed to the windows. She looked outside and saw her son walking away from it, alone. 'You must not go; you will fall in their trap!' she shouted.

'No, I must follow what my heart desires,' said Besar Muda, without turning to look at his mother. He continued to walk under the sun without a bearer holding a yellow umbrella over his head. He did not stop at the garden, but went beyond it until he stepped out of the compound and into the streets. The few people, who happened to be outside of the palace, were equally shocked.

'Go and tell the *bendabara*,' said one of the guards to his colleague. His friend did as told and rushed towards the palace.

'*Asalamulaikum* - greetings, your majesty,' some of the Melaka men said as he walked passed by them.

Besar Muda did not hear them. He continued to walk.

'Greetings, your majesty,' said the others.

He just nodded and continued to walk until he arrived at the beach. He stared at the few Pasai Muslims who were praying on the beach in front of an empty space with no deities whatsoever. He immediately felt in awe of them; they looked calm and contented like they were confronting their god, wherever He may be. Few other Melaka people were also staring at them from different parts of the beach. They did not know what was happening. They found it strange for the small group of people wearing robes and thick round turbans performing their prayers in the open like that. They knelt down and lied prostrate on the ground. They then woke up again, and repeated the same movements and positions before sitting on their prayer mats and reciting some verses in Arabic. They then turned to the right and then to the left. They then shook hands with each other. The Melaka men smiled. They did not know what the men from Pasai were doing. They thought they were just exercising or performing some sort of a dance. Parameswara went to them, after they had finished their prayers. 'Excuse me, gentlemen,' he said.

'My goodness, it's his majesty,' exclaimed the Pasai holy man, known just as Abdul Aziz. He was actually from Arabia. But he had gone to Pasai and lived there before he came to Melaka, after he found out about the new country. He and his friend quickly sprang on their feet. They shuffled their crumpled robes and shook Besar Muda's hand with both hands.

'Never mind; please convert me to Islam. I want to be a good Muslim, like all of you.' He said as though he had been practicing the line all the time he was walking from the palace to the beach.

The Pasai and Arab men were shocked. They were dumbfounded. They did not expect such a person to be interested in Islam. They knew who he was, the ruler of Melaka. More shocking was that he was not with his guards, but alone! Was Besar Muda out of his mind, they thought.

'What did your majesty say?' asked Abdul Aziz.

'I want to be a Muslim, just like all of you gentlemen.'

He then held Besar Muda's hand while his friends watched. The other Melaka people crowded around them. More people came and stood there. They did not know what was happening.

'Well then, repeat after me. I will recite it slowly. *Asbadu allabillah baillab, washadu anna Mubammadarasullulab.* (I testify that there is no God but Allah, and that Prophet Muhammad is His Messenger,' said Abdul Aziz in Arabic and later repeated it in Malay so Parameswara knew what the verse meant.

'*Asbadu allabillah baillab, washadu anna Mubammadarasullulab,*' repeated Besar Muda.

Abdul Aziz turned to look at his friends who were the witnesses to Besar Muda's conversion to Islam. They nodded. They had heard his reaffirming his conviction to Islam.

'You are now a Muslim. Welcome to the family, the *Ummah,*' said Abdul Aziz.

'And what name shall I call myself?'

'Megat Iskandar Shah. This name befits your majesty as the ruler of Melaka. And this is the name that you will be called from now on. It is also the name of your ancestor, Iskandar Zulkarnain - Alexander the Great! Many of your ancestors who are in Persia have all converted to Islam long ago, your majesty.'

'Yes, that is what I have been told, that the most of Persia have been Islamized long ago. And I like the name given to me, too.'

He then turned around and addressed the men who had assembled there. 'Listen all of you, from now onwards, I shall be called Megat Iskandar Shah. I shall cease to be called by my earlier name. I am no more Parameswara. Do you hear? I'm now known as Megat Iskandar Shah.'

'Very well, your majesty Megat Iskandar Shah,' said the people in unison.

Iskandar then hugged all the Pasai men. Abdul Aziz looked different from the others around him. He wore a long flowing robe and wore a thick turban. He had a long beard and sideburns and thick mustache. He was in the mid-

sixties and was holding a rosary, which the Muslims called *tasbeeh* in his right hand that he fiddled with his fingers all the time.

'Now gentlemen; will you be kind enough and cut my hair?' asked Iskandar. One of them men then produced a knife. He then immediately cut off Iskandar's hair that had been tied to the back until it was short. Being a ruler, he, like the high priests had to keep his hair long and wore earrings made of gold and studded with tiny precious stones. Iskandar then removed his earrings and hurled them into the sea.

'Sir, I want to become a Muslim too,' said a Malay man.

'Me, too,' said another.

'And me,' added their friend.

'*Alhamdulillah*,' said Abdul Aziz.

Iskandar then witnessed the other Melaka men who were reciting their affirmation to Islam. They had to recite the *syahadah* like Iskandar did just now. After the simple ceremony, Abdul Aziz then proceeded to cut the hair of the men since they were also long. They then removed their bangles and earrings and rub off the white lines on their foreheads.

'Let's give blessings to Allah,' suggested Abdul Aziz.

The men opened their palms as Abdul Aziz recited a *doa* or supplication in Arabic. After it was over, they wiped their faces with their palms. They then hugged each other again.

'I shall go to the sea and clean myself now, Syed, sir,' said Iskandar. 'I want to clean my body. I want to start my life anew, now as a Muslim; so that when I alight from the sea, I will be a new man.' He then walked to the sea and dipped in the water. The other newly converted Muslims followed suit and washed themselves off the trappings of their original religion. Abdul Aziz felt that his prayers were answered. However, he did not expect even for the ruler of Melaka, Iskandar himself to convert to Islam.

It was in 1414 CE or 816 AH, in the year of the horse in 4112, Besar Muda decided to convert to Islam with the name of Iskandar Shah, following the death of his father. This allowed him to freely chose the religion of his choice. His late father had disapproved of his plan to convert to Islam when he was alive.

Iskandar had spent few years before that in wilderness. Fears, anxieties and the fear of the unknown had tormented him for many years. But, he did not know what actually was troubling him. His wife, children and Perpatih Besar and the senior palace officials were not able to see what he was experiencing deep in his heart. The high priest and the other priests thought nothing about

his problems. They went on their daily religious duties as best as they could. But he had kept his problems to himself. Whereas, a small number of Malays especially those who were living in the villages in the hinterland had secretly converted to Islam. They did not dare to announce it for fear of a rebuke from Iskandar or the other senior officials. They were mostly Malay traders and sailors who had traveled to the north of Sumatra, where the people had accepted Islam long before Melaka was founded.

When it became known that Iskandar had converted to Islam, the Malay Muslims were delighted. They then openly announced that they had been Muslims for a long time. They were delighted to hear of their conversions. Iskandar quickly demolished the temple that was erected in the compound of his palace. He built a mosque on its site between his palace and the Melaka River so the people could get a steady supply of water for their ablution. The other people from Melaka were surprised to see that their ruler was demolishing the temple like he was being possessed. He continued to break all the idols and deities to pieces. He was now wearing the Arab robe and a turban to suit and looking like a Muslim holy man.

'What does he think he's doing?' asked a Malay man.

'May be his majesty wants to construct a bigger temple,' replied his friend confidently.

The high priest and his colleagues were very disappointed with Megat Iskandar whom they still referred to as Parameswara. They knew there was nothing that they could do about it. He, being the ruler of Melaka had all the power and authority to do whatever he liked in the state. The high priests knew that their presence was not required at the palace or anywhere in Melaka anymore. One day, he and the other high priests met secretly, on the pretext of studying some holy text.

'What do we do, gentlemen?' asked the high priest. 'I suggest that we leave Melaka, since our services are not needed anymore by the ruler. Now, all of his highness' children, except the crown Raja Kechil Besar and wife and mother, Dewi Puteri have converted to Islam and most of the senior palace and state officials have followed suit. What more can we expect to happen in Melaka now? Most of the temples have also been demolished.'

'I feel sad, your holiness,' remarked a high priest. 'How could they simply reject the religion of their ancestors? At least his highness crown prince Kechil Besar has refused to convert to the new religion. May be we can rally behind him, so that when he ascends to the throne after his majesty Megat Iskandar ...or whatever that he wants to call himself now, dies, crown Raja Kechil Besar can revert the sultanate back to Hinduism.'

The senior high priest had a lot of reservations to this proposal. 'I doubt it if we can do that, my friends.'

'Why not?'

'It'll be just a matter of time before his highness crown Raja Kechil Besar converts. He will be pressured to do so once he gets to the point of becoming the second ruler of Melaka. Besides, Megat Iskandar will never allow him to succeed him if he is not a Muslim, too.'

The others nodded.

'Everybody in the palace, and all his brothers and their wives and mother, have converted. So, they will surely want the next ruler of Melaka to stick to Islam, too.'

The other high priests keep quiet.

'This must be the work of the devils and no other,' said the high priest. 'But, what's more saddening is that most of the people and rulers in the other Malay states in this region, too, have done the same. All the temples in these countries, too, have been demolished. New mosques were built in its place. It's so disheartening.'

The high priests were shocked. They shook their heads in utter disbelief.

'If that's the case there's no point for us to remain in Melaka any longer since we are not needed here anymore. I want to go to Java, where they are still many staunch Hindus there,' said another high priest.

'That's a good idea,' said the high priest. 'But, I'll return to India and devote whatever time that I still have there in the service of our religion.'

'I'm shocked that they could transform the whole region without even bothering to set up missionary schools. Just who is responsible for this?'

'No idea,' said one of the junior high priests.

'They don't seem to have a specific mission to spread Islam, your holiness,' added another junior high priest. 'The religion simply spread like wildfire. What's worse, the people readily accepted it with no compulsion whatsoever. There was no force applied on them. They took to the new religion like fish to water.'

The high priest kept quiet. He was confused. 'And now I hear his majesty Megat Iskandar had also instructed young Muslim children be taught to read the Koran and to read and write in Arabic!'

'Indeed.'

'Now, shall we pray, your holiness, before this temple is demolished, too?' someone suggested.

The high priest then led the others priests for a final prayer service at the only temple in the whole of Melaka that was still standing. It was deep in the

hinterlands and stood near a tall tree. It was well hidden from everybody. Most likely, the temple would be left unattended for a long time to decay until grass and undergrowth to cover and hide it from everybody. Many decades or centuries later, it would be rediscovered but in a despicable and sorry state - if it ever would!

'This must have been fated,' said one of the junior priests. The others just ignored him. It was obvious, but they would rather that he did not say it. Whatever that had happened in Melaka had saddened them already as it was. There was no need to put the blame on fate! Each of them would rather take it personally and blamed themselves for the failure to impress upon Megat Iskandar to stick to his original religion before it was too late.

Very early next morning even before dawn, and the land and sea were still covered with thick fog that had formed the night before. The high priests set sail in few boats and left Melaka. They felt ashamed that their departure from the state was in such fashion, looking stealthily like the foxes who had been hounded by other animals or more exactly, by their own shadows. They split into few small groups and headed towards different parts of the region. Some sailed to Java Island and the other states in the north and east. The high priest and his assistants headed towards India where he wanted to offer his services to the Mother Temple there. He had badly missed the sight of the holy river.

Megat Iskandar had only been a Muslim for just two years, but the changes that had happened throughout Melaka were remarkable. It had been turned into a new country, with new mosques everywhere. The muezzin would call the Faithful to pray at different times, five times a day. The clothes the men, women and children wore also changed. Before, they were wearing mostly white with a lot of ornaments even for the men; now they were wearing clothes that covered more of their bodies, and hardly any gold on them as it was forbidden in Islam.

Megat Iskandar walked out of the palace and went to the mosque. He wore the Arab robe, green in color, a large white turban together with a pair of leather sandals. He had a long-flowing beard with a thick mustache. His eyebrows too had grown thicker. He now looked more like a Muslim warrior. His younger brothers, Kechil Tengah, Kechil Besar and Kechil Muda who were now in the forties and their children soon followed him. They also converted to Islam and now called themselves by their new Muslim names. They entered the mosque. The muezzin who cried out the *azan* calling the Faithful to pray was heard in the background. He was a tall and lanky Arab man who also wore a long robe and thick turban like Megat Iskandar and his

sons and grandchildren. He also had thick beard and mustache that covered almost his whole face. He had studied the religion when he was in the Arabian peninsula, and followed his relatives to Melaka when he heard that Melaka had become an Islamic state.

Megat Iskandar prayed with the congregation in the main hall of the mosque. Hundreds more had to pray outside in the compound since the mosque was too small to accommodate all of them. Many people in Melaka had by now converted to Islam, including all in Megat Iskandar's immediate and extended families and the state officials. Even those who lived deep in the hinterland and rural villages also made the decision to convert.

All the temples were demolished, and the statues of deities and idols thrown into the river or sea. Many more were burnt down or smashed to pieces. Soon the landscape of the state change. Interestingly, this religious phenomenon did not just happen only in Melaka, but throughout the Southeast Asian region. Many Islamic schools were set up in the states, and the children were taught how to read the Koran and literate in Arabic. Megat Iskandar even ordered that all future reports and orders had to be written in the Arabic text although the language was still Malay. He even toyed with the idea of getting someone who was good in writing Malay in the Arabic text to start writing the story of his personal exploits, especially the founding of Melaka. He consulted Abdul Aziz who was appointed the state religious officer or the grand *mufti* of the state of Melaka.

'It's forbidden in Islam for anyone to highlight one's own image in this manner,' advised Abdul Aziz politely.

With this explanation, Megat Iskandar immediately dropped the idea. This was the first time he had to take an advice from another person, although as the ruler of Melaka, he could overrule anyone in the state. Since the advice concerned a religious issue, he decided to obey the advice from the grand *mufti* who was more learned in Islam than he was, being a new convert himself. Megat Iskandar quickly realized the logic and did not argue further with him. Despite his advanced age, he learnt fast. He could manage to learn the Arabic language and how to read the Holy Koran from the beginning to the end. 'But, there's one more thing that I wish to do before I die, *Haji*,' he said.

'What is it?' asked Abdul Aziz.

'I wish that I could go to Mekkah, to perform the *Haj*. If possible, I wish to remain there for the rest of my life. My first son, Iskandar Shah shall take over from me as the ruler of Melaka. I wish to be close to my Creator, now that I have found him.

'When Admiral Zheng-he was here he talked to me about how he went on a pilgrimage to the holy land, where he met hundreds of thousands of Muslims from all over the world. They were not all Arabs, you know; many were non-Arabs, like me. They congregated at the Holy Kaabah and did the *tawaf* or file in a group around the construction. He also related how he felt small and inferior when he was in the House of God there and at the Prophet's Mosque in Madinnah. I cannot forget how he said he also had to walk briskly or gallop from the foot of the Safa and Marwah Hills and later threw stones at the 'devils' in the Arafah Desert. How I wish I could be there to do the same as he did.'

'Yes. I have been there on two occasions, too. I don't see how your majesty can't do that.'

'You're lucky; you're young. You can still go there again if you like. But, I'm already too old. How could I survive the long trip? I hear that the sea near India and the Arabian Peninsula is very rough. I hope to visit the Chinese emperor in China in the near future, but it'll have to depend on what my envoys and ambassadors think, whether I can survive the trip or not.'

'You have come a long way, from Palembang to Melaka.'

'Oh, Palembang. Yes, I remember Palembang. How I wish I could return for just one last time, before I go, to see my relatives and my people and former country.'

Suddenly the name Palembang evoked so much emotions that Megat Iskandar found himself being transported back to his younger days: He remembered leaving Palembang when he was forty-seven years, as a young man.

'Twenty-nine years ago I left Palembang in such great haste that I practically didn't bring any of my personal belongings with me. I only managed to grab whatever that was close to me, my *keris*, other personal items and belongings. The rest were left behind. I sailed to Majapahit and later to Temasik, before arriving in Bertam Village. You know this place was just a small fishing village when I first got here. I changed the name to Melaka when I decided to establish my new country here. You know how I got the name, Melaka?'

'Not really, your majesty,' replied Abdul Aziz.

'It was the name of the tree my father was sitting under. His dog, a huge dog and a fierce one, was kicked by a white mousedeer that appeared unexpectedly, from the bushes. It was hurled in the air and into the river. He thought it was a good omen, so he decided to stay put and establish my new country, this one here, and call it Melaka, after the tree.'



'A white mousedeer?'

'Yes, precisely; it was a white mousedeer... I would not have believed it if I did not see it with my own eyes. All my officers saw it too, so how could anyone say I was daydreaming? The mousedeer was so tiny; its legs so thin. How could it kick my huge dog until it fell into the Bertam River like that? This is the story of how I founded Melaka. Whether it will be relayed to everyone, I'm not sure. But, I do hope that the people of Melaka will always remember this story.'

'I'm sure it will be passed on and on by the people by word of mouth so that it will remain with the people of Melaka in the future.'

'I hope so, I do hope so, *Haji*.'

'Melaka was named after Bertam Village and the river, Bertam River became the Melaka River. There were so few people then. They wore hardly anything except bark-skin and some leaves that they wove and put around them. Their houses were wooden huts that mostly clung onto the riverbanks,' continued Megat Iskandar.

Abdul Aziz listened to Megat Iskandar as he related the early history of Melaka. He was impressed. He did not expect for a man like him to have founded a new country from scratch. Melaka now looked like a well-developed country and certainly not a small fishing village like what it was before as described by him. Abdul Aziz was confident that Melaka was destined for greatness.

Megat Iskandar, however, did not make it to Mekkah, much to his chagrin, since he was already old and in poor health. If he was younger, he would not think twice about taking the once in a lifetime trip, as it is one of the most important tasks that any Muslim had to do. In fact, it is one of the five Pillars of Islam.

Megat Iskandar spent his last years virtually locked either in his study in the palace or he would be at the mosque alone. Sometimes he would sit with Abdul Aziz there, who taught him how to read the Holy Koran and the Prophet Muhammad's *sunnahs* or sayings. He also told him stories of the Prophet's companions and their heroic deeds, in the service of Allah. He became a holy man himself, an *alim*. He would read and the Holy Koran repeatedly, either by himself in his bedroom or in the mosque until late at night. He knew that his time was near, and he was hearing God asking him to come and see him. Each time he read the Holy Koran, he discovered something new and that life on earth was but temporary, only life in the hereafter was permanent.

Despite his advanced age he was alert and was constantly on the lookout to get new ideas from China. He was given many interesting presents of silk and brocades by Yong-le. But he and his wife refused to use them for their clothes. They were too old to wear them, they said. But, they liked to see their children and their wives using the materials for themselves. The women also started to wear diamond-laid gold jewelry around their necks, fingers, toes, wrists, in the ears, even around their ankles. So that in time, the wives of the titled men in Melaka were well adorned with precious metals and stones. He felt at his advanced age, there was no need for him to wear beautifully. He very much preferred to wear the ordinary batik materials for his clothes. So did his wife. He was more concerned with his health and his relationship with Allah and became alive when the month of *Ramadan* came. He fasted from sunrise to sunset, with his family. During the whole of the fasting month, he read the Holy Koran in the mosque and prayed with the congregation that included senior palace officials. In all Megat Iskandar fasted through the ten *Ramadan* months since he converted to Islam.

While standing in the rostrum or *mimbar* of the state mosque when giving a sermon or *khatbah* for Friday prayers, Megat Iskandar expressed his personal sentiments and feelings about the new Melaka that he had envisioned for the people. He stood before a congregation of a few hundred in the main hall and a few thousands hundred more outside, since the mosque was not able to accommodate the huge flock. He promoted tolerance and understanding of each other's beliefs, cultures and traditions as a way of making and enlightening not just the country but the entire Malay race. It was his aim to promote the usage of Malay as the lingua franca of the region, and enhanced the Malay race, as a dominant race in the world. This could only be done through greater assimilation and cross-cultural contacts and experiences amongst his people and those of the neighboring countries and elsewhere. He encouraged the infusion of words and phrases from other races. Even in his own sermon, he sprinkled it with many Arabic, Chinese and Indian and those words or flowery phrases from the other Malay dialects so that the new Malay language took a new meaning. This was how he helped to develop the Malay language, until it became so complex and nice to hear. Above all, he strongly urged them to live in peace and promote mutual understanding and coexistence amongst the non-Malays who had come to settle in Melaka. He often stressed that nobody should be forced to convert to Islam if they refused to do so. He repeatedly said so that his followers did not forget that it was all up to the individuals to choose Islam. There should not be any compulsion on such matters, except those that were dictated by the religion. All Muslims must

dutifully follow and agree especially those edicts which were enshrined in the 'Five Pillars of Islam' (*Rukun Islam*) and 'The Six Pillars of Faith' (*Rukun Iman*.)

The people were impressed with Megat Iskandar's sermon that they started to follow his orders. They then started to weave new non-Malay words and phrases into their daily conversation until they became a totally new language altogether. It became so complex. They were now able to express themselves better and in the sophisticated way - by expressing their personal sentiments and emotions that were earlier inhibited or subdued because of their limited vocabulary that they used to have in the past.

When news of Megat Iskandar's announcement spread throughout the Malay Peninsula and the Southeast Asian region, many people came to Melaka. Soon, there were many more *pedagang* (traders), *saudagar* (merchants), *biduan* and *biduanda* (men of letters and culture) who came to live there. Melaka, thus became such a lively place to live in where trade and commerce flourished together with culture and the arts. He also set up a musical group to entertain his guests and his subjects. The craftsmen and painters began to create beautiful works of art, especially calligraphy called *kebat*, by using the Arab characters that they had learnt from the Arabs. Previously, they did not write, so they had to relate stories or send letters by oral tradition.

Megat Iskandar's lifeless body was wrapped in a simple seamless white piece of cloth made of cotton, as dictated by Islam. He was later buried in an unmarked grave in the south of the foot of the Melaka Hill, with his face turning towards the Holy Kaabah in Mekkah. It was west of his official palace that stood on the peak of the hill. It was later designated as the royal mausoleum complex where all the future sultans of Melaka were to be laid at their final resting-place. Earlier it was placed in the middle of the verandah for a while for his subjects to pay their last homage. After this, they took it to the mosque for the special prayers for the dead conducted by the senior religious official or *mufti besar*.

Everybody knew Megat Iskandar was happy to see the people of all races living in peaceful coexistence with each other. The sight of them mingling at the bazaars and the city melted his heart. He did not expect this to happen during his lifetime, but it did. He thanked Allah profusely each time he prayed in the state mosque or in his private *surau* in the palace.

## CHAPTER 4: THE ROYAL FUED

The year was 1419 CE or 821 AH, in the Chinese calendar year of the boar or *bai* in 4117.

There was an unusual calm in the Siamese capital of Ayutthaya. But, this calmness and peace was about to be stirred. King Tammaraja II was being carried on an elephant-carriage back to his palace ahead of his entourage that numbered in the hundreds. His officers wore the official court costumes with pointed hats and pants that were baggy. They walked beside the elephant as it passed through the wide paddy fields, where the farmers were toiling in the land. They all stopped to lay kowtow before their ruler and they remained in the position until the royal entourage had passed by. They did not dare to stare at the face of the ruler for it was considered sacrilegious.

Tammaraja II walked briskly along the corridor with his prime minister walking behind a few steps as protocol and custom dictated it. 'Who sent a letter for me, prime minister?' demanded the king. He knew an urgent letter usually brought along unnecessary anxiety and much discomfort. He also knew that such letters these days could only come from the Chinese Emperor Yongle whom he despised immensely. What more did he want, thought the king.

'An envoy from the Chinese Emperor Xuan Zong,' said the prime minister. 'He speaks excellent Mandarin; so remember his majesty is not to say anything that will hurt the feelings of his supreme emperor in China because he understands every word we say. So, don't ever underestimate him. It was good, though, that they announced this; otherwise, we would be speaking to ourselves without realizing that he too knew what we're saying.'

Tammaraja II ignored the advice. He did not care if the Chinese envoy could speak Siamese or not. He would speak up. Most probably, it was good that the envoy could speak Siamese, so that he could give him an earful, he thought. 'Again?' he remarked. 'And what does he want this time? Why must he be standing in our way? We haven't done anything to them, so why must they bother with what we are doing? Don't they know we are an independent state too? What we do in Melaka and the other Malay states are our own business. We have the right to demand gold from them! Forty *taels* of it aren't too much. Surely, the Melaka ruler can pay!'

The prime minister kept quiet. He did not think so, but he did not want to have to tell the ruler about Melaka's newly acquired might and close fraternity with China, because he refused to hear of it. He knew that eventually, the ruler

of Melaka would be reluctant to pay forty *taels* - or even a *tael* of gold to the Siamese ruler every year as *uffi* or tax. Melaka did not want to be dominated by Siam anymore as it had grown into a full-fledged country like Siam, too! In fact, many neighboring Malay states were now looking up to Melaka.

'Doesn't he have anything better to do, other than to check on what we are doing? What we're doing is our own business!'

'Very true, very true.'

'And where's the dreadful letter? I hate receiving letters from...Yong-le. He does not seem to have anything nice to say to me! His words are never pleasant to hear - always harsh and rude. The Chinese people are not rude, but their rulers are. They sound the same - warnings, warnings and more warnings. They are simply arrogant. No, they are atrocious, weird even. May be the emperor is now senile. How old is he?'

'The same age as your majesty's grandmother.'

'That old? No wonder he sounds like he's already senile.'

'In the late seventies or early eighties.'

They continued to walk towards the study.

'The Chinese envoy is waiting in the study, your majesty,' reminded the prime minister.

'I don't care about his personal feelings or those of his emperor. Why must I care about their feelings? Why don't they start to care about my feelings for a change?'

The prime minister kept quiet. They then entered the study. The Chinese envoy, Admiral Zheng-he waited obediently inside it. With him were few of his assistants, all wearing colorful robes. They immediately sprung onto their feet and waited. They did not observe the Siamese royal custom and palace protocol by kowtowing prostrate on the floor, on seeing the king entering the room. Zheng-he had purposely asked that none of his officers did that before the Siamese king. He wanted to torment the king and let him know clearly, that the Chinese were happy with his conduct, vis-à-vis Melaka. He handed the letter to the prime minister.

Tammaraja II took a seat behind his desk without glancing at Zheng-he. He tried hard to conceal his contempt for him for not respecting him as the king of Siam. Zheng-he could feel the cold treatment that the ruler was giving him the minute he entered the room. But this did not bother him the least.

The prime minister handed the letter to Tammaraja II by offering it with both hands that were stretched as far as they could go. 'Here's a letter from his supreme majesty, the emperor of China.'

Tammaraja II took the letter. He ripped it open and quickly read it. He then tore it into two and dropped it in the waste paper basket by the side of his desk. 'He wants us to stop harassing Melaka. Who's harassing Melaka? We are only exercising our rights over it.' He looked away from Zheng-he who put on a stone face.

'What does his majesty want to do next?' asked the prime minister.

'His supreme Emperor Xuan Zong wishes to receive a swift reply from your majesty,' said Zheng-he in excellent Siamese. He made the statement although he was not asked to do so because he wanted the ruler to hear him speak in Siamese.

'I know. He said it in his letter and I've read it!' said the ruler tersely. He then pulled out a piece of paper and started to write. He then signed and chopped it with his official seal and handed it to the prime minister who then handed it to Zheng-he.

'Here, I hope this will make your emperor happy,' said Tammaraja II.

'I hope so, too. And thank you very much for your kind attention,' said Zheng-he. He then moved backwards a few steps before turning around and leaving the room. The king then turned around and caught Zheng-he and his officers as they left the room. 'And who was that again?'

'He was the celebrated Admiral Zheng-he.'

The king was shocked. 'Why did the Chinese emperor have to send such a person just to deliver a simple letter?'

The prime minister kept quiet; he knew that the king could guess what was the answer to his own question. 'Admiral Zheng-he, Admiral of the Western Seas and Commander of the Treasure Fleet. Hmmm...'

Tammaraja II nodded. 'I know. I have two letters I want you to deliver to our representatives in Pahang and Pattani,' he said after the envoy had left the study. 'Get a horseman. I want him to deliver them right away. He can deliver both letters on this one trip so there's no need for two horsemen. After Pattani, he can then rush to Pahang.'

'Yes, your majesty,' said the prime minister.

Tammaraja II pulled two pieces of paper and wrote the letters. After he had finished, he signed and chopped it with his official seal. He stamped it on the letter until his desk shook. 'I command Pahang and Pattani to stop embarking on any adventures in Melaka,' said the ruler. 'They are to wait further actions until I say so.'

'Why?'

'We have been given a stern warning from the Chinese emperor in Nanjing. He has informed us that Melaka is under their protection now. How did that happen? How did Melaka come under their protection?'

The prime minister kept quiet.

'Don't you have the answer, prime minister?'

'The sultan of Melaka made few visits to China, and they asked the Chinese emperor to protect them, and the emperor agreed.'

Tamaraja II shook his head. He cast a glance at the prime minister who took the letter from the king and the other senior officials waited. He then said that he would send sixty men to pay homage to the Xuan Zong. One of the senior officials who were in the room, a warrior by the name of Chau Pandan was aghast. 'What do we do, your majesty?'

'Nothing,' replied the king.

Chau Pandan was shocked.

'Well, what do you want me to do, Chau Pandan?'

'We attack Melaka!'

The Siamese king was shocked. 'I'll have none of it.'

Few days later, Chau Pandan was found dead by a soldier who stumbled upon it in the woods near his official residence not far away from the royal palace. His death was mysterious, after he tried to rebel against the king. He wanted to provoke the king to launch an attack on Melaka. But the king would not have any of it. The prime minister did not offer any opinion since the king had already made his decision earlier. He thought Chau Pandan was being brash for no reason. No wonder he suffered.

The Chinese prime minister was driven in his official horse-carriage to the palace in Nanjing. He wiped sweat on his forehead and felt uncomfortable sitting in the carriage. It stopped at the front entrance. He alighted and entered the palace. He then walked in long brisk strides along the many corridors that made his long robes flutter as he made each step.

'Where're you heading for, prime minister?' asked a senior court official in bewilderment. He was surprised to see the Hai Shou walking alone in the corridors since he did not have a prior appointment. As far as he knew the prime minister did not have any business to be there at that time, otherwise he would have known or been informed of it. Surely, Hai Shou just could not barge in the palace and demand to see Emperor Ying Zong who had succeeded his father, Xuan Zong.

'I have something urgent to discuss with his supreme emperor. Where is he? What is his majesty doing?' said the prime minister. He did not have to tell

him because it was not his business; it was between him and the emperor as it was a private matter.

'His supreme majesty is working in his study. Nobody may disturb him,' said the senior court official. 'His majesty wishes to be alone.'

Hai Shou went straight to the emperor's study. He had to brave himself; he knew the emperor did not like to hear what his prime minister had to say. But the he had a choice; he just had to do it regardless of how the emperor might react it. He never felt so scared for his life before until now. He prayed everything to be fine.

'I've received strict orders, your excellency!' the official reminded again as a desperate attempt to halt the prime minister.

'I am the prime minister, officer. I have certain rights. Besides, I do not simply interrupt his supreme majesty's work unless it's of utmost importance to his majesty and the country or to the people.'

The officer froze. The prime minister continued to walk towards the study. The officer just stared at him as he walked towards the end of the corridor, feeling helpless. 'You go at your own peril, prime minister. You can't say that I didn't warn you; you surely know how his supreme majesty feels about such rudeness and transgression.'

'Yes, I do, my friend and it won't stop me from performing my official duties, as his majesty's prime minister. I know what rights I have, too. Besides, if I do as you obeyed, the whole of China will be in peril! It is better if I alone suffer than the whole of China!'

The officer did not know what that exactly meant. 'Can't you just wait a little until his supreme majesty has finished with his work?'

'No, I'm afraid not. This matter simply cannot wait. It must get his supreme majesty's personal attention now, this very moment!' He continued to walk until he got to the door of the study. He took a deep breath and knocked. Emperor Ying Zong was writing at his desk inside the study. He stopped and looked at the door. He did not feel irritated, not even slightly, just curious. Who could that be, he thought. Something must be important enough that he had to disturb him. It could not be his prime minister, because he never came without an appointment. 'Who's so brave enough to disturb me at this time? Show yourself,' he asked.

The prime minister opened the door and peeped in the moment he heard the emperor's invitation. 'Please forgive me, your supreme majesty.' He was sweating; he wiped his face and neck with a handkerchief.

'And why are you sweating like that for? It'd better be very important.'



'It is, your supreme majesty; or I won't be here at this time. I don't plan to disrupt whatever your majesty is doing. But, I do have something that requires your personal and immediate attention.'

Ying Zong did not know what he was talking about. He froze in his seat. 'I wonder what could that be? Please, do come in and close the door. Hurry and be with it.'

The prime minister entered and closed the door behind him; he did not want anybody to hear him.

'Sit down. Tea?'

The prime minister sat in front of the desk. 'Thank you, your supreme majesty.'

'Now what is it, prime minister? Take it off your chest. I can take whatever that you have to tell me.'

He thought Ying Zong was joking except that he did not smile; he just sat like a statue. 'We are in no position to send anymore envoy to Nanyang, the Southern Ocean Lands, your supreme majesty.'

Ying Zong was shocked. 'Why is that so? Haven't our envoys and ambassadors been doing a good job?'

'Yes, they all have.'

'And haven't we benefited from the trips there? All the large countries have been put under our dominance and they pay homage to us.'

'Very true, your supreme majesty.'

'Why then do we need to change our international policy, especially for the states in Nanyang or the Southern Ocean Lands?'

The prime minister kept quiet. He felt reluctant to explain, as it was not an easy job to do. The emperor waited anxiously wondering if he had done anything that had resulted in the need to change their policy. 'What is it, prime minister? Hurry, tell me; I do not have all day, you know. Don't put me in unnecessary suspense; get straight to the point. And do be at ease, relax; you are not in the throne room, but here in my private study. I can accept some breach in protocol a little, prime minister.'

He nodded and took in a chest full of air. 'We must concentrate on our own country. We must pay more attention to what's happening here in our own backyard. A lot of our resources and energy have been spent on such trips. We have been sending our armadas to sail the high seas for thirty years, since 1403 CE or 805 AH or 4001 of the Chinese calendar. It is high time we stop doing so.'

'We could use our limited financial resources for our own good, for a change. Admiral Zheng-he has been on so many trips overseas, six in all, if I'm

not mistaken, and he's now being replaced by Admirals Heng-bao and Zhao-man, who have followed in his tradition and crossed the oceans far away from us. But, what do they bring back?'

'Haven't they been fruitful? Haven't they brought in wealth to the kingdom? Haven't they all brought respect, prestige and honor to our country?'

'Yes, your supreme majesty. But, those were the times when we could afford it. Now, we are very much pressed. Besides, our people are starting to show discontent. There is a rumor that our enemies in the north are embarking on a plan to attack us. 'Many of our ships were wrecked while at sea and as a result we suffered a great deal from those expeditions.

'There are also murmurs from the ordinary people who're demanding for the reformation of the political system in this country of ours, your supreme emperor. The Ming dynasty can be destabilized as a result, if we ignore this problem and do not act speedily to overcome it, before it spreads through the length and breadth of our imperial China. On top of that, we have the Mongols in the north to worry about... We do not know what our enemies are capable of doing these days anymore.'

Ying Zong froze. He was shocked with the revelation. This was the first time he was hearing this and he simply could not believe his ears. He was naturally horrified at such possibility however remote it may seem to him then. He then turned around, looked at the other side and said: 'What do you exactly mean? Tell me! How can we be destabilized? I am the Lord of Heavens, am I not, prime minister? The Lords in Heavens protect us all the times, especially in the times of need. Our position is firm and well entrenched in imperial China till eternity,' he said, sounding defiance. His voice was loud. 'Is it also because of what happened to the ships that Admiral Zheng-he had brought to the faraway land that crashed into the reefs?'

The prime minister looked down. He did not dare to look at the emperor's face that had turned red with anger. He felt guilty, but there was no way that he could withhold this unpleasant information to the emperor any longer. 'True, your supreme majesty. This is one of the reasons, too. But, imperial China today isn't like it was before. The Ming dynasty cannot be put in a vulnerable position for too long without it breaking apart all over. As it is, the dynasty's already showing signs that there are cracks at various parts,' he explained. 'We're more vulnerable now than we were before!'

Emperor Ying Zong kept quiet.

'I was reluctant to say this in the past. But, I'm now forcing myself to do so, for the sake of our country and the imperial dynasty, and your majesty.'

'Why haven't I been told about this earlier? Don't hide anything from me; it's treason!' shouted Ying Zong. He was getting annoyed, impatient and worried for once in his life. No, his imperial empire would not collapse in any circumstances, he thought.

'Do forgive me, your supreme majesty. I thought that the situation would recover. But...'

The emperor stood up and went to the windows. He peeped outside like he wanted to see how the situation was like. There was nothing that he could see from there, except for a part of the palace compound. The nearest private house to the palace was five miles away. It was too far from his view. But, he could see some of his horses and the royal carriages in the sheds. Other than that, he also saw some of the soldiers were guarding the palace at different parts of the compound. And yes, he caught sight of a few birds were flying about in the air outside the windows. 'Everybody and everything looked fine to me the last time I ventured out secretly of this palace. No officer has told me anything like what you are saying here. I'm shocked!'

The prime minister stood up as a sign of respect. He realized that he could not be sitting while his emperor was standing for he could be chided for that. 'Melaka and the other Malay states in Nanyang are not of strategic importance to us anymore, your supreme majesty.'

The emperor turned around and said: 'If that's the case, we'll order all ships from going on missions to Nanyang with immediate effect. This is an imperial order. Inform the state department and the relevant agencies.'

'Very well, your supreme majesty.'

'How strange, we were just contemplating on a trip to Melaka, in defiance of our ancient traditions that bar emperors from making such a trip out of the country. I was also embarking on my personal mission to reform the system, from within, and that was the reason why I was eager to go to there and make my first trip out of China.

'We've heard so much about it from our father, the late Emperor Xuan Zong. I would sit on his laps and hear stories about a country far away from ours, called Melaka. He told me about the stories his envoys and ambassadors had related to him. And of how many of our men had married the local girls and fully assimilated with the people there and 'became Malays' like them, too. However, there are another group of our men and women who had similarly decided to remain there. They still practice our religion and observe our way of life.

'And I told him, should the gods choose me as an emperor, I'd make it a point to visit Melaka. But, it's not to be. I'm very disappointed and distressed.

What bad luck has fallen into my laps today just when I was starting to feel elated with myself.'

'I'm sorry for spoiling your supreme majesty's plans. I am also fond of your supreme majesty's great-great grandfather, the late majesty Emperor Yong-le who is now with the gods in Heavens. May be, if the situation changes for the better, your supreme majesty can still go there. And we can renew our special and cordial relationship with the ruler of Melaka and its people and strengthen our friendly ties with them like we have done in the past.

'We've always maintained that Melaka is of utmost importance to our dominance over the other Malay states in Nanyang. They had treated us with utmost respect and admiration, too. Their first ruler, the late Megat Iskandar Shah had even paid us two visits and received our envoys and ambassadors with open arms, like long-lost relatives.

'Many of us can still remember the way they charmed us with their presence and exquisite demeanor. They had so much poise and how they'd weave words in such a way that they could easily soften even a lion's heart.'

'But, we also need to use whatever resources we have to complete the Great Wall in the north. Only a third of it has so far been completed. We will be in serious trouble if the wall project is left incomplete. This should be our priority, too, your supreme majesty, and not Melaka.'

'Yes, the wall has always been of utmost importance to us. They are the reason why we are still here. And yes, things have to change in Melaka, too. I hope it will be soon. I fear for the sultan of Melaka. Who is he now? Who succeeded the throne after the death of the late Megat Iskandar Shah?'

'His name is Sultan Muhammad Shah, your supreme majesty. He's young, but able and in full control of the state and his people. They admire him as much as his late brother and father.

'I hope he can manage his country without our help. I shall pray for his well-being and personal safety.'

'If we work at it, your supreme majesty, we can help to turn things around.'

'What do you think I'm doing now?'

'I'm sorry, your supreme majesty for bringing such awful news on a beautiful day such as this. I hope it'll not spoil your supreme majesty's mood.'

The emperor shook his head violently as the prime minister waited for further instructions from him. 'Very well, prime minister, is there anything else that you'd like to tell me?'

'No, your supreme majesty; that is all.'

'I guess so. How could an emperor take in so much grief and bad tidings in a single day?'

'I beg your leave, your supreme majesty.'

Ying Zong nodded. The prime minister walked towards the door. Ying Zong remembered something. 'Er... What's going to happen to our men who're now in Melaka, prime minister?' he asked. The prime minister froze. He turned around. 'I'm not too sure. But, they are the citizens of Melaka now, so we have to leave it to the sultan of Melaka himself to deal them. There is nothing that we can do for them now. It is too late. Besides, they have 'become Malays', too. So, there's no need for us to worry about them.'

'Right. But, they are still Chinese like us, no matter how long they have lived in Melaka. They are still our own people! They are no different than any of us.'

'Yes, but, it was their own fault; they insisted on remaining in Melaka despite our pleas to ask them to return home. Your majesty can't be faulted for this.'

'May be you're right, prime minister. You may leave now.'

'Thank you.' He bowed deeply and walked to the door. He then stopped and turned around.

'Anything else, prime minister?'

'Er... yes, your supreme majesty.'

'Well, what is it?'

'Don't your supreme majesty think it'd be better for your supreme majesty to write an imperial edict so that we can keep it as a record. Also for everybody to see?'

Ying Zong thought while his prime minister waited. 'Hmmm... That will be a good idea. When do you want the scroll?'

'How about now? We only require a brief note. Therefore, your majesty shouldn't take too long to write and chop it.'

The emperor nodded. He then went to the low table and sat. He started to write on a fresh scroll, as the prime minister waited. When it was finished, he stamped it with an imperial seal. 'This should do it,' remarked Ying Zong. He then handed it to the prime minister. 'Read it.'

The prime minister read the scroll and nodded. 'This will be good, your supreme majesty.'

'Very well, get going, prime minister.'

The prime minister rolled up the scroll, tied it with a yellow ribbon, and said: 'Have a good day, your supreme majesty.'

Ying Zong sensed a tinge of sarcasm in his prime minister's voice, but he chose to ignore it. 'Thank you. You, too, prime minister.'

The prime minister bowed until he was half bent. He then stood up and walked backwards until he reached the door. He bowed again, turned around, closed the door behind him, and walked away. The senior official was still standing outside of the room. Hai Shou walked in front of him but the official remained frozen; he did not care to comment.

The emperor turned and went to the windows and continued to stare outside. He saw the prime minister's carriage leaving the palace.

Emperor Ying Zong could not sleep that night. He paced the corridor from one end to the other. One of the palace officials stood outside of the room, just in case he needed any assistance. The emperor then stopped. He opened the door quietly so as not to wake up the empress. He peeped out of the room and looked at the official. 'Come here, I want you to get me the prime minister.'

The official went to the emperor. 'Very well, your supreme majesty,' he said.

The prime minister rushed to the palace in the dead of night, expecting the worse. But he was relieved to see the emperor standing by the windows at the end of the corridor, looking calm but tired. He went to him. 'Your loyal prime minister at your supreme majesty's services.'

Ying Zong did not turn around and said: 'Since we're severing our diplomatic relations with Melaka, it pains me to see that they are left in such a vulnerable position. I say, we give them some gunpowder and other weapons so that they can defend themselves in case the Siamese ruler decides to attack them again. And make them promise that these weapons are not to be used to attack or hurt anyone. They are for defensive purpose only.'

'Yes, your supreme majesty.'

'Send them few shiploads.'

'Very well, your supreme majesty.'

The next day, the prime minister ordered the admiral of the imperial fleet to prepare few ships to be loaded with gunpowder and the latest weapons that they had. He wanted them to be sent immediately to Melaka, as the Southerly winds were about to blow in a few days' time. Ying Zong personally went to the port to see the ships take off. He met the prime minister there. 'I hope Melaka and its sultan will not be separated. They have been put to test so many times in the past, that I fear something might happen to them when word got to their enemies that we are deserting them. But, I'm sure we'll become friends again in the near future. Is that so, prime minister?'

'Yes, indeed, your supreme majesty; when things improve on our side. In the event of such an occasion, there will not be any harm for us to do so.

Melaka will be able to fend for herself, now that she is able and standing on her own two feet. Besides, the ruler of Melaka is a wise and able man himself.'

The emperor was delighted to hear the assurance from his prime minister although deep inside him he felt like he would not be around to see the day.

'Indeed.'

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*From 1433 CE or 836 AH of the Muslim calendar, the Chinese Empire began to change its policy and ceased to send missions to the southern region. This resulted in Melaka becoming isolated and vulnerable to foreign threats or internal disturbances.*

*Sultan Muhammad Shah died in 1446 CE or 848 Hijriah or 4143 of the Chinese calendar and was succeeded by Raja Ibrahim, his young son with his second wife, Raja Rokan. She was the daughter of an Indian-Muslim merchant. He was officially known as Sultan Abu Syahid Shah. The second Prime Minister of Melaka, Seri Amar diRaja too had died earlier and the third Prime Minister was Tun Perpatih Sandang Sedang, the eldest son of Tun Perpatih Besar and nephew of the second Prime Minister of Melaka.*

*But, it was Raja Rokan who wielded real power over Melaka instead of the Sultan himself. She was his mother and second wife of his father who had come to stay in Melaka during the reign of Sultan Muhammad Shah. Raja Rokan changed the official name of Sultan Abu Syahid Shah to Sri Parameswara Dewa Shah, as a way of taking back the Melaka Sultanate to the old Hindu ways. This made the other palace and senior officials angry. However, his reign only lasted for two years after his ascension. He was killed in a palace rebellion led by Raja Kassim and other Malay senior officials who feared that the Sultanate was reverting to Hinduism.*

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Soldiers pulled Sultan Muhammad Shah's hearse along the streets in Melaka. It was a solemn procession, which started from the state mosque to the royal cemetery. Many of the people from all walks of life had tears flowing down to their cheeks. Raja Ibrahim, her mother, Raja Rokan and the other members of the Melaka royalty were there, including Raja Kassim, the son of the late sultan and Ibrahim's elder stepbrother. The whole of Melaka was in mourning. The people wore white clothes and they lined the sides of the roads to watch the royal cortege pass ten deep. Many of them cried openly, although they were not supposed to because the soul of the dead would not be at ease. Few were wailing and had to be pacified by their relatives. One or two of them fainted

and had to be carried away to be revived by good Samaritans who knew how to handle such cases.

'I'm sure my mother, Raja Rokan will do something to make sure Raja Kassim is appointed the next sultan,' said Ibrahim softly to Seri Nara diRaja Tun Ali so that nobody could hear them. Prime Minister Seri Amar diRaja kept quiet; he did not want to interrupt, as it was not his business.

'If it happens, the court of Melaka will turn upside down,' said Ali. 'There will be chaos and bloodshed. And Melaka River will flow with blood.'

'I shall make it sure that you succeed your father. Raja Kassim is just your stepbrother. He has no right to ascend the throne,' said Raja Rokan to her son, Raja Ibrahim who was walking a distance away from Ali.

'Yes, mother,' said Ibrahim.

They continued to walk slowly behind the royal cortege as it headed towards the royal mausoleum, where all the past sultans of Melaka were buried. It was not too far away from the palace, but the officials decided to take the cortege on a longer trip to allow the ordinary citizens of Melaka to see it pass by them.

Muhammad's body was laid to rest. The grand *mufti* praised the late sultan sky-high. He hoped that the soul of the late sultan would be placed amongst the Faithful in Heaven.

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*Because of the scheming Raja Rokan, senior officials of the Court of Melaka disliked her. She prohibited Raja Kassim the Sultan's younger stepbrother to stay at the palace. He was forced to seek his livelihood as a fisherman in a remote fishing village after Raja Ibrahim was appointed the next Sultan of Melaka by her. She also started to reintroduce Hindu ways in the palace and all official functions were conducted according to its traditions. This was the last straw that broke the camel's back. The Melaka officials could not take it anymore and they pledged to destroy her, before she destroyed Melaka and the Muslim Malay sultanate. They were aghast that Raja Rokan had officially announced that Sultan Abu Syabid Shab be called Sri Parameswara Dewa Shab instead and got the Palace Criers to make this announcement all over the state.*

*Many of the Malays were angry with her. But, there was nothing that they could do as she was in total control of the palace and hence, Melaka.*

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The Melaka port now saw less activity; there were few ships and boats. Some men were sitting in the coffee shops to waste the time away, while the others idled their time on the piers and banks of the river. More so, in the evenings, there were still fewer people working. Normally, the place was alive with all sorts of nocturnal activities till late at night, when the port was lit with colorful and bright lanterns that the Chinese had taught the Malays to hang and illuminate the place. Previously torches that gave out a lot of smoke lit it.

'The port looks deserted since Sultan Muhammad Shah's death. I fear if nothing happens, Melaka will lose its glamour and attraction as an important port of call,' commented a Malay trader. 'As it is, most of the traders have all gone elsewhere, to the other ports in the region. The uncertainty here since the demise of Sultan Muhammad Shah made all the traders and merchants decide not to come here. Besides, with the severing of ties with China has made Melaka's position worse.'

His friend, a Chinese trader was smoking opium the Malays called *madat* and *candu* from his bamboo smoking utensil that he held with both hands, one at the top and the other hand in the middle of the stick. His mind was floating aimlessly away into the sky. Those who were sitting near him did not know where the Chinese man was now. His body might be in Melaka but his mind might be back in China or high in the skies.

'The opium could do wonders to one's mind,' remarked one of the Malay men. Those who heard his joke laughed. But, the Chinese man did not, and he continued to smoke heavily. His eyes were glazed and they looked like the still eyes of the many statues that were brought with them from China. He inhaled hard until his bare chest showed his ribs bulging out like his whole rib cage would snap open at any time. He then let the opium smoke remain in his chest while all the poison seeped into his veins. He then exhaled the smoke. It was dark and dirty. Worse, it was smelly. If a person was not a drug addict, the poisonous second-hand smoke could knock him off his feet right away.

'Raja Rokan's presence in Melaka has brought nothing but despair to all of us,' remarked his Chinese friend in between exhaling and inhaling smoke. He mostly spoke Malay, but his accent was so thick, like the smoke that he exhaled from his mouth. It smelled foul. Although hallucinated, what he was saying had meaning. He was not unaware of the happenings in Melaka, after all.

The Malays who were sitting near him got a rude shock. They thought opium-smoker was not aware of what was happening there, but he turned to life suddenly. They felt like he had returned from the dead. How could he descend down from floating in the skies so fast, they thought. He was now

back to earth, but, his eyes were still glazed and he was still in a state of daze. He smoked that day to drown his own sorrows. He was desperate that their Emperor Ying Zong had deserted all of them and they were now stranded in Melaka. Their relationship with the Motherland China had now been permanently severed as a result of what happened in China and the change in their foreign policy, especially the one that related to its relationship with Melaka. The Chinese boys had not come to Melaka to remain here permanently. They just wanted to live and work here and returned with the junks that occasionally came from China. Now, this possibility had disappeared with an imperial decree. What future did they all have in Melaka, they thought.

'Hush, not so loud. She will have you thrown into the sea if someone hears you talk about Raja Rokan. She is amazing. She has ears everywhere, even here,' said the Malay man.

'I'm telling the truth,' said the Chinese man.

'I know, too that Raja Kassim is the rightful heir to the throne. It is common knowledge. You don't have to repeat it.'

'Where's Raja Kassim now? He hasn't been seen in Melaka since the funeral of his late father, Sultan Muhammad Shah. Has he been arrested; hanged?'

'He's somewhere in a remote fishing village.'

'What on earth is he doing there?' asked another Malay man. 'He doesn't belong there. He belongs right here in Melaka and in the palace!'

'Where else can he be? Surely, he can't show his face anywhere in Melaka for everybody to see.'

At the other end of the port, some Chinese men carried a wooden casket on a horse-cart since it was so heavy to carry barehanded. It was so thick and bulky. It was made with a tree trunk that was cut hollow in the middle and shaped to look like a boat. It was awesome. An old wealthy Chinese man had died, and his body was placed in the casket and temporarily buried in the Chinese Hills together with the others who had died earlier. Now few hundred graves were littered all over the hill. The best side was the one facing the sea. The Chinese preferred to bury the dead on this side. When the Northerly winds blew, they quickly dug up the caskets and sent them to China where they were reburied in their villages side by side with their relatives and friends. However, the casket did not contain just the corpse of the wealthy Chinese man; it also held gold and other priceless items. His relatives were using this opportunity to smuggle them out to evade tax. This, too couldn't happen if they hadn't given pocket money to corrupt the Malay port authorities who closed both eyes, to allow them to leave the port unchecked, to be sent on the

Chinese junk to China. A lot of gold and money were smuggled out of Melaka this way. Even at this time, corruption was rampant. Many Melaka senior and junior officials too were engaged in it. No wonder many of the wives of these lower-ranking state and palace officials could be seen being carried in palanquins and driven in horse-carriages, when they could least afford to own them. They wore gold ornaments on all parts of their body. Even their teeth were gold-capped.

Kassim's hut sat in the middle of a fishing village in the hinterlands. It was isolated and well hidden in the bushes. His men were surrounding it - all were armed with *kerises* and spears looking like they were ready for battle. He stood by the windows and looked at all the trees in front of him while his supporters sat cross-legged on the wooden floor that creaked each time they walked or moved their bodies to change their seating positions. They had been sitting for too long and were getting restless. They were mostly senior officers from the palace. The new Prime Minister Seri Amar diRaja Tun Perpatih Sandang Sedang was there, too. He was the eldest son of the first prime minister of Melaka, Seri Wak Raja II the Tun Perpatih Besar.

'I am Raja Kassim, the younger brother of Sultan Abu Syahid Shah, and the sultan of Melaka. How can I live and see with my own eyes the way my own brother, the sultan who is now officially called Sri Parameswara Dewa Shah being treated by my stepmother, Raja Rokan? She now controls not only the sultan himself, but also the whole of Melaka! And he's wearing clothes of our ancestors and adhering to our former religion! On top of that, he's forbidden from praying at the mosque with the congregation on Friday. In fact, a Hindu shrine had also been built within the palace compound for them to pray at. There is also a high priest who has been appointed the official religious officer of the palace!' said Kassim. 'Do the people of Melaka know of this? Do they allow this sort of uncivilized treatment to their ruler? I say, let's overthrow him! Let's bring down Raja Rokan and bring an end to this anarchy that she had created in our state!

'We deserve better than this. The palace of Melaka must be restored to its former glory, and Melaka must be brought back from its economic slumber. Look at the port, it's dead. The foreign merchants and traders have all stopped coming to Melaka to trade by bringing their goods and exchanging them with other traders. Therefore, I ask you, my uncle, Tun Ali to help me. Help me to restore the Melaka sultanate. We have a duty to our ancestors, Megat Iskandar Shah, Sultan Muhammad Shah and now Sultan Abu Syahid Shah. I ask all of you who are assembled in my humble hut in this remote fishing village to

pledge your loyalty to the Sultan Abu Syahid Shah and to help restore his majesty's reign over Melaka.'

The others kept quiet. They were very angry about what they had been told. None of them had any idea of what Rokan had done to Abu Syahid. They did not expect her to reject Islam and want to revert to Hinduism. One of the officers quickly stood up. He rushed to the windows. Everybody watched; they did not know what was happening. He vomited outside of the windows. The revelation by Kassim had made him nauseous. The others were shocked. They wiped his mouth with a handkerchief. The man turned around. 'Please forgive me, your highness, gentlemen, I was so angry about what I've been told. I am certain Raja Rokan is destined to go to Hell for what she is doing to the sultan, the palace and Melaka. Whatever she is doing cannot be tolerated. And I'm willing to sacrifice my life if necessary so that the evil princess' ambitions are stopped.'

Ali who was Kassim's uncle thought hard. Kassim and the rest glanced at him. The prime minister turned his gaze at Ali. Although part Indian himself, he was also not fascinated with the idea of turning Melaka back to Hinduism. And because of that, he chose side with Kassim.

'What do you say, uncle?'

'Why did you have to wait seventeen months before doing this, my nephew Raja Kassim?' asked Ali.

'Seventeen months is long enough for us to see if there might be reformation in the palace and the whole administration of the sultanate. ...Or, if there might be remorse in Raja Rokan's soul? But, no! There hasn't been any - at least from what I've seen or been told about.'

'How do you know that there hasn't been any? You've been here all the time since you were banished from the palace by Raja Rokan.'

'Oh, no, I've been to Melaka and I've seen with my own eyes how the situation in the palace and Melaka had been allowed to deteriorate.'

'How? Tell us.'

'I've visited Melaka few times, and I impersonated the local people. I wore robes. Nobody noticed me. I knew how to mingle with them. They informed me of what is happening in the palace and the whole of Melaka. Therefore, Raja Rokan must be removed from the palace and her influence is diminished altogether. Sultan Abu Syahid Shah must be restored to the throne. He shouldn't be allowed to remain a puppet for the evil Raja Rokan.'

Ali and the rest kept quiet. Kassim waited.

'What's there to think? We must not delay. We must act fast before the situation gets worse. We must talk together, both of us, between an uncle and a nephew.'

'Very well.'

Kassim and Ali went to the garden and stood there while the other senior officers sat inside the hut.

'What exactly do you have in mind, my son? What do you intend to do next?' asked Ali.

'We must attack the sultan's palace and murder Raja Rokan.'

'Does the *bendahara* know about this? And why is he here?'

'Yes. Is he on our side?'

'I've tricked him to come here on the pretext of discussing the future of the sultanate.'

'Will he agree to our plan?'

'I'm sure he will.'

'How sure are you?'

'He hasn't said anything. This is his way of agreeing. He normally voiced out his disagreement if he feels what we've said is against his principles.'

Ali nodded. 'We do it, once and for all. The sultanate of Melaka must be restored fully. But, I wish that you take over the palace as sultan, over Abu Syahid Shah.'

Kassim was shocked. 'Why? What's wrong with my elder brother, Abu Syahid Shah?'

'He has no leadership quality; he's weak. No wonder it was easy for Raja Rokan to dominate him. If he hadn't been so meek and soft, surely Raja Rokan wouldn't have dared to outwit him.'

'I'm surprised that the...'

'Actually, I've discussed this matter privately with the *bendahara*, and he too agrees that you be the next sultan of Melaka.'

'How popular is Raja Rokan with the palace officials?'

'Not at all. On the contrary, none of the senior officials likes her. She rules over the sultan and the palace like a dictator. Nothing is passed without her approval.'

'How could my stepmother wield so much power over everybody in the palace?'

'She's an evil woman. Everything has turned upside down since she came to Melaka.'

The two men froze. There was a long lull. They tried to think of an alternative but there was none. The only recourse was to destroy Rokan and if she had to die, then she had to. Because this was what she had wanted...

Abu Syahid was playing with the palace girls in the garden. They chased him around the trees and bushes. He then hid behind the trees.

'Come out of the bush, Your Majesty Sultan Abu Syahid Shah,' said one of the girls.

'Catch me if you can,' said Abu Syahid.

The girls went to the bush. The Boy Sultan as he was called alighted and ran. They quickly gave chase.

'Not too far, your majesty,' said another girl.

'Oh, yes, I can run as far as I want to. I'm the sultan, am I not?'

'Yes, your majesty,' replied the girls. They then giggled.

'Then come and try to get me, if you can.'

The girls rushed to him. The sultan hid in the bushes.

Rokan appeared. She looked serious and mean as always. Everybody in the palace was afraid of her. They did not know what she was capable of doing. She could be nice and cheerful in one moment and in the next she could be planning another devious scheme and looking like a ghost. No wonder secretly, the people in the palace and Melaka described her as such. She clapped her hands once, to attract their attention. She then held her arms akimbo, as it was her fashion. All she had to do was to clap her hands just once and everybody froze. They did not dare to turn around and looked at her. The sight of her face sent shivers down everybody's spine. 'Time's up!' she said with a stern and animated voice that was a trademark.

The sultan alighted from the bushes. He looked scared. He immediately stood stiff. He dared not look directly at Rokan's face. The girls stopped playing; they turned around. They got frightened because the princess had a no-nonsense demeanor and did not like to be talked back to, unless if they were asked. 'Beg your pardon, your highness Raja Rokan,' said all the girls in unison in order to pacify her.

'You haven't been a good boy, Sultan Abu Syahid Shah,' said Rokan to her son.

'I'm sorry, mother,' said the sultan.

'The game's over, son. Let's return to the palace.'

The girls filed one by one back to the palace without saying a word. They were utterly disappointed that their game had been aborted, but none dared to show it.

Abu Syahid sat in a rocking chair in his bedroom in the palace. He looked dejected. He stared into void, and felt very angry that the game had to be terminated when he was having so much fun.

Rokan walked along the corridor in the palace. The palace officials stepped aside in attention, and nodded at her. She instinctively knocked one of them on the head with her fan - just for fun. The guards had been placed there to ensure that the Boy Sultan did not loiter all over the palace. She made it sure that his movements were restricted to his own bedroom that there shall be no guests for him to receive. All the things that he could do had to be approved by her first. In the palace, she reigned supreme, and the Boy Sultan was a mere puppet. She wielded immense power and became the 'shadow sultanah' and all orders from the young sultan had to come from her. The people of Melaka knew this, but they were helpless and could not do anything. Even the palace officials and senior government officers were aware of what was happening in the palace, but they, too, couldn't do anything either.

Abu Syahid Shah, who was called the Boy Sultan, was her own son and he executed everything she ordered without question. So, there was no way that they could disagree with his command, although it was not his own command but his mother's.

'Where's my baby, Sultan Abu Syahid Shah? Has he already been fed?' asked Rokan.

'Yes, your highness Raja Rokan. His majesty is resting in his bedroom,' said one of the court officials at the door.

She then opened the door, entered the room and stood with her arms akimbo. 'Why are you looking dejected, Sultan Abu Syahid Shah? Cheer up,' she said.

'Nothing.'

'And don't sulk.'

'I'm not sulking, mother.'

'Just be glad that you are the sultan of Melaka. Without me, you would not have survived even one day as sultan. Your evil elder stepbrother, Raja Kassim had to be gotten rid of, otherwise he will cause trouble in this palace and seize the throne from you and the whole of Melaka won't be peaceful.'

'Thank you, dear mother.'

'I shall go now. Do call me if you should need anything. And please remember you are not to go anywhere without getting my approval first. You hear?'

'I do remember, dear mother.'

'I don't want you out of my sight. The evil Raja Kassim and his uncle, Seri Nara diRaja Tun Ali might want to harm you.'

'Why do they want to harm me? Am I not their relative? Besides, Kassim is my own stepbrother.'

'Precisely. And because of that, he might want to seize the throne from you. But don't worry about this. Just leave everything to me. Good night, Son.'

'Good night, mother.'

Abu Syahid nodded. Her mother walked out of the room. He then continued to rock his chair.

Kassim's men converged around the palace at all sides. They crept stealthily in under the cloak of darkness. They all wore black and blended well in the pitch darkness of the moonless night to launch what they had hoped and prayed to be their fatal strike on Rokan. They then overwhelmed the guards who were placed around the palace, one by one, quietly without attracting the attention of their colleagues. They had only meant to disarm and disable them, but many of them were killed when they tried to resist and retaliate.

Kassim's men then entered the palace. They barged inside from all sides, including below the building and from the roof. More palace guards and soldiers were disabled, tied up and locked in the rooms. Some were even killed.

Rokan woke up from her sleep because she felt like the whole palace was shaking. 'What's happening? Why all the noise? Can't I have some peace here in this palace?'

Her aides went to her. 'The palace is being attacked, her highness,' said one of her female aides.

'Are you serious? By whom?'

'We have no time! We have to leave the palace now!'

Rokan rushed through the corridor with her aides. 'And where's Sultan Abu Syahid Shah?'

'His majesty is being bundled out of the palace, your highness,' said one of them.

'Who's behind all this?'

Just then, few of Kassim's men entered the corridor. They slashed the aides. They died. Rokan was shocked. 'Who are you? Show your faces like a man!' she demanded, sounding defiant. Even while being surrounded, she did not fear for her life. She remained solid as a rock, obstinate, and rude. The men ignored her.

'Where's Sultan Abu Syahid Shah?' asked one of the men.

'You can't harm him! He is the sultan of Melaka. Cross over my dead body.' She drew out a small *keni* that she had hid in her waist. She then tried to attack



the men, but she was killed instead after a brief struggle. She fell to the floor. The men did not have any pity for her. They didn't think twice about killing her. They didn't have any mercy because they knew who she was, and they were ordered to kill her anyway. Now, they were given the chance, and they took it. They were relieved that Rokan had been disposed of so quickly, as planned.

Abu Syahid appeared in the corridor. He had his *keris* drawn. The men went for him. They continued to fight. In the end someone stabbed from behind the sultan. The sultan died. He was just a small boy. Some of Kassim's men took pity for him. They wrapped his body and took it outside where they planned to give him a decent burial. They knew he was not aware of what was happening in Melaka then. His mother was the one who had used him.

News of the assault of the Melaka palace spread like wildfire throughout the state. Few days later when everything had settled down in the palace, the people of Melaka assembled in the courtyard of the palace to find out what had happened there. They could see traces of dried blood everywhere and they knew that many people had been killed.

Ali, Perpatih Sandang Sedang and other senior officials of the palace stood in the verandah with Kassim standing in between them.

'Ladies and gentlemen and people of Melaka. I, Seri Nara diRaja Tun Ali wish to announce that the evil Raja Rokan has been killed. And Sultan Abu Syahid Shah had died in the struggle that took place in this very palace over the last few days.

'I ensure all of you that the situation has returned to normal, and Melaka now has a new sultan. I present my nephew, Raja Kassim. Raja Kassim is the son of the late Sultan Muhammad and Sultanah Wati, and younger stepbrother of the late Sultan Syahid Shah.

'His majesty will be installed as the new sultan of Melaka and his majesty will be called henceforth, Sultan Muzaffar Shah the fifth ruler of Melaka,' announced Ali.

The people shouted. They were relieved that Abu Syahid and his mother Rokan had been disposed off. They were not interested to know how they were killed, whether poisoned, slashed at their throat, or simply stuck with daggers in their abdomen; they only cared to know that they had died. Melaka had returned to normal and in the safe hands of more capable people. Thus, the chaos and uncertainties that the state and its people had to endure for the past two years had ended. The Melaka sultanate had now fallen back in the hands of the Malay-Muslim faction. As for the disgraced late sultan and his equally evil mother, the late Rokan, nobody knew where or how their corpses

were disposed off. Most likely, they were hurled into the crocodile infested river upstream, at a spot where nobody would dare to come. In this way, no grave would be built for them in the royal cemetery. They simply did not deserve to be buried there. This was where the founder of Melaka, Parameswara a.k.a. Megat Iskandar Shah and his successors who were his sons and grandsons were laid.

'Long live Sultan Muzaffar Shah! Long live Sultan Muzaffar Shah! *Allabukbbar! Allabukbbar!*' shouted Tun Ali. Or, 'God is Great!'

'Long live Sultan Muzaffar Shah! Long live Sultan Muzaffar Shah! Long live Sultan Muzaffar Shah! Long live Sultan Muzaffar Shah! *Allabukbbar! Allabukbbar!*' repeated the people loudly.

Sultan Muzaffar then turned around and entered the palace. Perpatih Sandang Sedang stood there, but the sultan completely ignored him. The prime minister did not know if indeed the sultan did it on purpose, or if he was just absent-minded or too engrossed with other things. He could even be overwhelmed by what was happening then. May be he was ignorant of the adulation from the people and did not know how to handle it. Nevertheless, Perpatih Sandang Sedang, being an old man, felt strongly about it. He feared that his time as prime minister in the court of Melaka had come to an inglorious end. The new sultan might not need his services anymore. He was not like his father or grandfather and great-grandfather, Parameswara. He was different. He did not have to suffer like his ancestors did.

The prime minister felt sorry for himself. He also felt sorry for Melaka, especially the sultanate. But he chose to keep quiet and watched the sultan and the sultanah or the *raja perempuan* disappear inside the palace. The other senior palace and state officials followed him. They, too, did not notice the old prime minister anymore like he was part of the wall decoration. They were all caught up in all the excitement of the grand occasion that followed the announcement of their new sultan. He held onto his walking stick and entered the palace alone. He felt useless and not wanted. Although officially he was still the prime minister of Melaka, but now he felt useless like an old piece of rag. Now old and fragile, he knew that his services were not needed anymore.

The late Sultan Abu Syahid's plan to make a visit to China did not materialize despite his eagerness to undertake the trip and some preparations that he had made. He had studied Mandarin from some Chinese men so that he could converse with the Chinese emperor in Nanjing. He even had requested the Chinese emperor to construct a special ship for him to use to sail to China and back. He did not want to get one that was as huge as those that their shipyards were building in Nanjing were. They wanted a small one

that could fit fewer passengers, which could be docked in the port. This could just fit nicely in the dock that he had ordered his men to construct at the mouth of the Melaka River. It was completed but the sultan was killed in a palace intrigue, barely one year and five months after ascending to the throne. To his supporters who were from the Hindu faction this was shocking news. Many of the Indian traders and merchants who professed the Hindu religion quietly took flight and left Melaka to return to India where they had originally come from. Many of them were second or third generation Indians whose parents had come to Melaka to trade and lived many decades before. They had become comfortable living in Melaka, having properties and acquired immense wealth. Now they had to dispose of them cheaply to those who were not planning to leave. However, for the Malay-Muslim faction, the death of Abu Syahid was welcome news indeed; this was what they had prayed for to happen. They did not want the sultan to succeed. It was disastrous for the sultan to revert to their original religions. The whole country could be turned upside down. The people were right in launching a popular revolt. Nobody in the right mind would want to allow their sultan to revert to Hinduism after they had denounced it. All of them were happy living as Muslims and observing the rules and regulations that were expected of them.

The death of Abu Syahid had at least brought down whatever insubordination that the state had experienced in recent times. This they thought they could do without. The Indian-Muslim traders, merchants and ordinary citizens of Melaka felt a relief as Kassim who succeeded as the fourth sultan of Melaka in 1446 CE or 849 AH, in the year of the tiger or *yin* in 4144. He called himself Sultan Muzaffar Shah. But the people did not blame the Boy Sultan for his own misfortunes. They put the blame on his mother, Rokan who wielded so much power and authority over his teenage son ruler that the boy simply did not know what was happening. Given the chance, Abu Syahid could easily excel at his post and taken Melaka to greater heights for his had come from a long line of rulers, all of whom were dedicated to their duties.

## CHAPTER 5: THE SIAMESE ATTACKS

The royal Melaka palace experienced an exceptionally long period of tranquility and peace following the death of Sultan Abu Syahid Shah. The fruit

seasons bore unusually large harvest much to the delight of the new Sultan Muzaffar Shah and his subjects. They gobbled them with relish. They particularly liked the *durian*, *rambutan*, *manggis*, *ciku*, *duku*, *nangka*, *cepedak* and other tropical fruits that grew in abundance in the jungles around the city. Even though the *durian* smelled pungent, but they still took it because it was the most delicious compared to the other fruits. The people tore open the thorny fruits and dug in with their fingers and at the flesh, after which they licked their fingers of every morsel that was left on them. Everywhere the people squatted by the roadside and shared the fruits with everybody - strangers and friends alike for the fruits had come from the jungles that nobody owned in the true spirit of camaraderie.

However, the calmness in the palace of the sultan of Melaka was soon to be agitated again. The people of Melaka would be held in suspense for a while, as the sultanate grappled with yet another palace crisis the like which had never experienced before. This time around, it did not involve any attack by a foreign country or by one of its warriors running amok, but the clash of the generations. It was between an aging second prime minister of Melaka, Perpatih Sandang Sedang and the current sultan who was the fourth that the state ever had.

A month passed since Muzaffar was installed the new sultan, yet the prime minister had not seen anything changed in the personal relationship between him and the sultan. His treatment of his prime minister was cold and detached. The prime minister felt slighted even more now than he did before when the sultan first ignored him on the day of his installation as the new sultan of Melaka. In one occasion in the palace, the sultan completely ignored him. He felt like the sultan did not consider him important enough to seek his views anymore like all the previous sultans did. He didn't even glance at the old man, who sat alone by the wall like he was part of the architecture as the sultan held court and talked and even joked with the other senior palace and state officials.

The prime minister was now quite old and frail; he was a faint shadow of his former self. He was once full of poise was now emaciated. In fact, he looked pitiful. He had stood by the sultan, especially in his time of need. The least he expected was to be treated badly. He walked out of the palace propped by two assistants to his carriage that was parked in the compound. He wore a dark brown batik *sarong* with a tunic, waist belt that was thick and shoulder-scarf like all the prime ministers before him. But his headdress looked crumpled slightly. It did not sit well on his head anymore. He looked disappointed. The wrinkles made his face beyond recognition. He was in intense pain and his feelings were hurt. He stepped inside his carriage and just

wanted to leave the palace to return to his house. He cursed his bad luck. The told himself repeatedly that sultan had never treated him like that before, like he was just an old piece of rag that could be discarded at the side or trampled upon. The former Sultan Muhammad Shah treated him well and cordially and he knew the history of Melaka by heart. Above all, he had a lot of admiration for all the sultans that his ancestors since Parameswara, until now under the new Muzaffar Shah, the fourth sultan of Melaka. He knew about their adventures; he was a baby when Parameswara founded Melaka and became its first ruler. He knew his successors, Sultan Iskandar Shah and Sultan Muhammad Shah equally well, when he was a young boy. But, Muzaffar was different, he thought. He was very young and brash, and certainly had no need for an old prime minister like him. But, he was kind enough not to show his displeasure and just sack him from office or to make fun of him in front of everybody. He also knew that he was not what he used to be anymore. His body had shrunk beyond recognition. He did not look gallant or powerful like a prime minister would. He knew he could not demand attention from anyone anymore like he used to wherever he went; and when his views were easily sought and when they were given, they were readily accepted. Many a time he was called to settle personal and state disputes. Now, everywhere he walked, especially in the streets, the people simply ignored him. So, it wasn't just the sultan who had ignored him but the people too. He felt the state of Melaka had now deserted him. 'How long could he be able to withstand this,' he asked himself. 'Is this what I deserve, after all the years that I had stayed loyal to the sultans of Melaka?' He would ask himself this same question repeatedly, all the time he was awake.

'Who's that old man who's walking towards the carriage?' asked Limah to her friends who were toiling in the fields. They turned and looked saw a carriage - *usungan*.

'He looks like someone important, from the way he ties his headgear and sitting in the palanquin like that,' replied Saniah. 'But who on earth is he?'

'I haven't the faintest idea; your guess is as good as mine.'

They shook their heads. They then turned and resumed their work. Fortunately, they were too far for the prime minister to hear what they were saying, otherwise, he would feel more offended. Even if he had heard their conversations, he would excuse them for being naïve; they were young girls, who did not know much about life or the goings-on in the Melaka Palace. There were many times when Muzaffar and the other senior officials of the state snubbed him. Therefore, he felt neglected. He felt useless. He thought the new young sultan did not have any use for him for he was already an old

man. He said this repeated like a *mantra*, until he reached his carriage that was parked outside of the palace, and at the side, instead of the front where he used to park it.

'To the house,' said the prime minister.

'Yes, your excellency,' said the rider.

The carriage went off in the direction of his house in the Prime Minister's Village not too far away from the palace. He stared outside, but the people did not turn around to wave their hands at him like they always did before. They continued to work in their farms, or talked amongst themselves like the prime minister was not around. He cupped his face with both hands. He knew he was not only useless to the sultan, but also the to people of Melaka.

His carriage was taken through the village until it stopped outside his house. Now, even his own house looked menacing to him like he was no longer welcome there. His assistants propped him up, and they took him to the front of the house. They then took the carriage to the back and parked it there.

Perpatih Sandang Sedang sat in the verandah alone that night. He could not eat much these days for he had lost all appetite. His anxieties were taking a heavy toll on him. He was still sad and feeling miserable and heartbroken. He let the soft breeze hit his face and caressed it gently to lull himself away from his immediate problems. He tried to think of better times in order to calm himself, but he could not remember any. He knew his memories had failed him; he felt useless. He was looking forward to returning home; but now here, he was beginning to feel more restless. He then looked up to glance at the moon although he had no joy in seeing it like he always did before. It could not be seen as it was late in the month when the nights were dark. Besides, he had also lost the track of time.

The prime minister's face became just a silhouette or more like an apparition. In the past when he was on the run with his father who followed Parameswara a.k.a. Megat Iskandar Shah, he always stared at the moon. The sight of it always took his worries away from his mind. 'How could he ignore me just like that, after what I had done to help restore him to the throne,' he mumbled to himself. He then heard footsteps coming from inside the house. He knew his wife was approaching the front of their house, which was the verandah. The wooden floor made a loud creaking noise as she walked barefooted on it. He knew his wife was coming to look for him. She had not seen her husband since he returned from the palace late afternoon. Besides, it was now past dinnertime. Food that her helpers had prepared in the dining

room was sitting under the covers; it was already cold and still untouched; soon it would get stale.

Perpatih Sandang Sedang's wife sat on a wooden chair in the verandah to rest her tired legs. She stared at her husband who was leaning on the wall while sitting cross-legged on the floor. She was confused; she did not know what her husband was saying or meant. He sounded like he was grumbling or mumbling something incoherent. She realized that lately her husband had become too sensitive with petty issues. It was more of a sign of dementia due to old age that had begun to creep into his personality and affected his behavior and daily activities. Her husband had changed so much that she, too, had difficulty in comprehending what he was saying most of the time.

'What do you mean, dear? Who? Who ignored you? Where?' asked his wife, quizzically.

'Sultan Muzaffar Shah.'

His wife was shocked. She did not know what had transpired between the two of them. Now at such an advanced age, surely, the prime minister shouldn't start to find faults with anyone; much less the sultan himself who was much younger than he was, she thought. Muzaffar was much younger than their youngest son was. He could even pass for the prime minister's grandson, because he was that young.

'What did he do to you?'

'I went to the palace to pay homage to him, but he completely ignored me. I stood there like a statue, a complete fool. He didn't even glance at me, even for a brief moment. I felt like a complete idiot. I am still the prime minister of Melaka, his trusted and loyal aide. My ancestors have been the prime ministers, from the first sultan of this country, since his majesty Parameswara or Megat Iskandar Shah.'

'Just forget about it, dear. He must be thinking of many other important things. He is the sultan of Melaka and he can do no wrong. Just forgive him. Besides, he's much younger than you are. He could pass for your own grandson. Even our youngest son is much older than he is. I will not worry about it if I were you. Just do whatever his majesty commands. If he doesn't ask you to do anything, most likely, it's a sign of his respect for you, that he does not want to exert yourself. He surely can see for himself that you're not as young as you were before.'

The prime minister kept quiet. His wife stood up to re-enter the house. He knew his wife had a good point there. She then turned around, looked at her husband, and said, 'dinner is getting cold, dear.'

The prime minister did not answer; he just nodded slightly. All his wife saw was just his silhouette. Just then, their daughter, Tun Kudu and her younger brothers, Tun Perak and Tun Perpatih Putih rushed out of the house.

'It's already late. Come back, all three of you!' said their mother, Isteri Bendahara from inside the house. Her voice was strong and loud that it was difficult for them not to hear it.

'We won't be far, dear mother,' said Perak.

The children slipped on their slippers, ran off on their horses, and rode off in the dark. The prime minister's wife went to the door. She shook her head, but gave up now that her children were already speeding on their horses away in front of the compound of their house. 'Don't stay out too long!' she shouted at them. But, it was too late. The children had disappeared.

'Where are they going to?' asked the prime minister.

'For their Koran studies. But looks like they're going to have fun on the side,' replied his wife. 'Don't they know it's now late and it's dark out there.' She then re-entered the house.

The prime minister then went to the stairs, put on his slippers and went out of the house. He was quickly swallowed by the darkness; only his footsteps could be heard. They were slow and soft. He went to the garden like he already knew what he was going to do next. He took a box and climbed on it. He tied a rope on a branch and hung himself at the neck by using the *pelikat* cloth that he usually had with him that he put on his shoulders.

Muzaffar was distraught and shaken. He shook his head violently. 'Why, why did he have to resort to such a thing? It's so shocking for an old man of his stature to do such a thing!' asked the sultan. 'Surely, if indeed he did have personal problems, couldn't he come to see me, so we could have discussed them together?'

Isteri Bendahara cried. Sultanah Melaka held her shoulder to comfort her. 'He thought the sultan had snubbed him, when my husband came to the palace to pay homage to his majesty,' she explained in between sobs.

'Did the late *bendahara* tell you that?'

'Yes. But, I did not expect him to resort to doing such a nasty thing. I hope Allah will forgive him for that. It should be very difficult for me, too, for I must also share the blame.'

'Why didn't you stop him?'

'I didn't expect that he'd do such a stupid thing. After we spoke about our children, I re-entered the house and thought nothing of what he had said. But, I did advise him not to think much about it, and left him alone with his



thoughts, because he didn't seem to be talkative that night. I took it to mean that he wanted to be left alone. I remember telling him that your majesty might be too busy to notice him. I then left him alone in the verandah. Later I retired to bed.

'The next day, I noticed that he was not in the room. So I checked the whole house, but could not find a trace of him, not even the slippers which he was wearing that day. Then somebody outside shouted. I was shocked when told that my husband's body was hanging from the branch of a tree in our garden.'

Muzaffar shook his head. Ali rushed inside the palace. 'What's all the crying about? Forgive my ignorance. What's happening here?' He noticed Perpatih Sandang Sedang's wife crying. 'What's the matter, madam? Is the *bendabara* okay?'

She kept quiet and did not reply.

'He committed suicide by hanging himself from the branch of a tree, my Uncle Tun Ali!' exclaimed in the sultan. He seemed to be at a loss. How could a respectable person like the *bendabara* do such a silly thing as that, he thought.

Ali was speechless. He felt limp and dropped on his knees. 'Oh, my God! Ya, Allah! Why did he do that? Allah will curse him for doing that! It's totally sinful. If he did that to himself, he shall not go to Heaven. God's laws are clear on this! There shall be no mercy for any Muslim who takes his own life for whatever reason there is...'

Muzaffar turned to his wife. 'Please take madam inside, dear.'

'Very well. This way, madam,' said the sultanah. 'Let's go inside.' The sultanah picked up Isteri Bendahara, and they entered the adjacent room.

Ali continued to shake his head; he then felt guilty for avoiding him lately. He thought being an old man, Perpatih Sandang Sedang wanted to be left alone to be with his own private thoughts. He could not believe that the late prime minister could do such a thing in all his wisdom. He was a hero of Melaka, a wise man. How could he do it? 'Why did he have to resort to that?' asked Ali.

Muzaffar shook his head. He had no answer.

'And where is his body now, his majesty?'

'In the mosque.'

'When is he going to be buried?'

'This afternoon, after *asar* prayers. We are going to give him a state funeral that befits his status as prime minister,' said the sultan. 'He died as the *bendabara* of Melaka, and the third we've ever had so far.'

'But, is that be appropriate?'

'He died when he was still our *bendabara*. Besides he had been prime minister for a very long time, under two sultans; surely, we can do that for him. It's not much to ask for. Besides, the people of Melaka expect he'd be given a fitting state burial.'

'I can understand it if he had died of old age. But he committed suicide! It is unforgivable and awful in Islam, our beloved religion. Surely, your majesty knows that. Does the *mufti* also know about this yet?'

'No.'

'Your majesty can be assured that he will object to the idea of a state burial for the late Tun Perpatih Sandang Sedang.'

'We leave that to Allah. But, as far as I'm concerned, he served me and all my ancestors, the people and the state of Melaka well. He deserves to be given a state funeral, no matter what had happened. Make all the preparations, and I shall appoint someone suitable as his successor. It's all been fated by Allah. Besides, if the late prime minister is not given a proper state burial, what will the people say? What will they suspect?'

'What, your majesty?'

'They will all think that something bad had happened.'

'Like what?'

'Like he was poisoned, or hanged himself.'

'How could they possibly think so? Wasn't the *bendabara* already an old man? He could hardly walk and he had to be propped by his assistants wherever he went.'

'Very true. But, we still must accord him with the highest honor that this state can offer a man of his stature. He had served the sultanate well. He was the prime minister of Melaka. He was close to my great-great-grandfather, Parameswara, Megat Iskandar Shah, when he was just a baby. And his grandfather, Tun Perpatih Besar was his close confidante especially in his times of need and utmost desperation and our first prime minister.'

'My great-great-grandfather was so fond of him. He treated him like his own grandson. Even before he left Palembang to live in exile, they had been close friends. The late prime minister, Tun Perpatih Sandang Sedang, was the son of a titled officer in the court of Palembang. Till today, his relatives are still serving my relatives there in Sumatra although we don't contact each other anymore after what Parameswara had done to them.'

'Very well, what can I say? You are the sultan of Melaka and I am just your old uncle? I have different ways of handling this than you. Please do as you please, as it will also please me.'

Muzaffar was relieved that their argument had thus ended, and he could make inquires on other personal matters, related to the late prime minister.

'How many children had he?'

'Three, your majesty, one daughter, known as Tun Kudu and two sons, Tun Perak and Tun Perpatih Putih. But they are all very young.'

'It'd have been better if his eldest son is older; otherwise, I won't mind appointing him to take over his late father's place and be our new prime minister. Besides, it is a good practice to appoint the eldest son of the prime minister to take over from their father, because he has been brought up in the most exquisite manner, and could easily follow in his footsteps.'

'Tun Perak will make an excellent *bendahara* for the state of Melaka and me. He's got the energy that we can make full use of, especially at this time. And the people of Melaka will be delighted that the memories of the late Tun Perpatih Besar will be carried forward in the form of his grandson. The people will definitely like him.'

Ali nodded in agreement. 'It's so true.'

'Very well, my uncle, let's move on. We've got a lot to do for the preparations of the state funeral.'

'This way, your majesty.'

Perpatih Sandang Sedang was being given a state funeral befitting his status. His cortege was paraded through the streets in Melaka and thousands of people of all races lined both sides of the road ten deep. They were seen wiping back tears. And they were all wearing white as a sign of mourning. None of them was aware of how he died. They thought he had died of old age. The sultan and his uncle, Ali had made sure that the story surrounding his sudden death did not leave the palace walls. How long could they keep that a secret from everybody in Melaka? They feared that somebody in the palace might break the secret, just to torment the late prime minister's family, especially his widow and three children. His eldest son, Perak surely had more enemies, since being the eldest son of the late prime minister of Melaka; he stood the best chance of succeeding him. Besides, there are few other senior palace officials were eyeing for the post. They could be the ones who wanted to tarnish the late prime minister's good name, and hence his eldest son's possibility of succeeding him as the next prime minister of Melaka.

Muzaffar and his wife and the late prime minister's widow walked behind the hearse, together with her children, Kudu, Perak and Perpatih Putih, the person who had the most potential to be the new prime minister. He was called Seri Nara diRaja Tun Ali.

Kudu, Perak and Perpatih Putih recited the Koran together with some village folks, in the verandah of the late prime minister's house later after the funeral. The sultanah of Melaka's carriage arrived in the compound. She got out and went to the house. Isteri Bendahara greeted her. They hugged. 'I do hope that you will be calm. God is testing your resilience,' advised the sultanah.

'This is god's will,' said Isteri Bendahara.

They broke the embrace.

'His majesty the sultan cannot make it today. He will come tomorrow and everyday until the official mourning period of forty days is over.'

'That's okay. Besides, the sultan must be very busy as always. I have now come to terms with my personal tragedy and can handle it myself.'

'His majesty has not yet decided on whom to appoint the new prime minister. Your sons, Tun Perak and Tun Perpatih Putih are much too young, otherwise, it would be nice if one of them can succeed their father. Of the two, Tun Perak stands the better chance since he is your eldest son.'

'Thank you, your majesty for your kind words. Let's go inside.'

'But, I am sure his majesty will think of something for them to do. My husband is especially fond of your children, you know, Tun Perak, Tun Kudu and Tun Perpatih Putih; they are nice children. You're lucky to have them.'

'My children are young adults. Amazing how within the last few days I noticed that they all had grown up into full-bloom adults. The death of their father must have made them realize the uncertainty of human existence and their own destiny now rests in their own hands; they cannot depend on their father anymore, or me, their mother. What can a woman like me do?'

'I am sure they will grow up and become responsible citizens. And I'm sure the sultan will consider them for important posts should there be a vacancy when they grow older.'

'I hope so. However, I do hope the sultan will not feel pressured. My late husband said he did not expect that his eldest son take over from him should he die. He preferred the best person in Melaka to be appointed to replace him when the time came.'

'I'm sure Tun Perak, especially has good leadership quality. I have seen him grow up since he was a baby. I remember how he once wet on my clothes in full view of many people. But, I was not embarrassed. I felt it was a blessing to be wet by such a charming baby. Besides, baby's urine is more like perfume - it's clean and sweet.'

They entered the house, and sat in the verandah together with the Koran-rectors. And as if on cue, the reciters stopped reading at the end of the

passage. They were reading it to offer blessings to the soul of the late prime minister. The food-handlers carried the trays of food from the kitchen to the verandah by crossing the middle of the house where there were more reciters. Food was placed on the floor before them.

'Let's eat, your majesty,' said Isteri Bendahara.

'Please,' said the sultanah.

Isteri Bendahara then poured water on the sultanah's hand to clean it. And the rest followed suit. They then started to eat quietly.

Isteri Bendahara, Kudu, Perak and Perpatih Putih visited the late prime minister's grave. They held their palms opened and offered prayers quietly. They then threw flower petals and poured water on it. After they were finished, they walked away as quietly as they had come. None of them had overcome their grief at the loss of their father.

'Your father was a great man. He was the prime minister of Melaka, a loyal officer of the sultan of Melaka whose ancestors had been the prime minister under five sultans, including Sultan Muzaffar Shah. You all know that don't you?' said Isteri Bendahara.

The children nodded.

'I want the three of you to promise me this.'

'What is it, dear mother?' asked Perak.

'You must at all times remain loyal to the sultan. And you must safeguard your family name.'

'Yes, mother,' said Kudu.

Isteri Bendahara looked at her two sons.

'Yes, mother,' said both of them in unison.

'Very good. Your late father, Prime Minister Tun Perpatih Sandang Sedang will be proud of you all. Now, I want all of you to cheer up. Don't feel sad. Your father has met his Creator, Allah and it's not good of his family to feel sad, because his soul will not rest in peace in the Hereafter. Let us hope and pray that he is placed together with the other Faithful and that his soul be spared from the fires of Hell.'

The three children nodded. Kudu pulled her headscarf to cover her hair that had been blown by the wind.

Perak sat at the edge of the verandah alone, at the *bendul*, his most favorite spot of his late father, the late prime minister. His late father took all his problems there to ponder or reflect over and left it after coming to a decision. And he made many wise decisions on how to settle them there. Perak looked sad. His mother went to him. 'Why are you looking so sad, Perak, my son. Dear...' she asked.

'I cannot but feel guilty about what happened to father. Why did he have to resort to that? He should have at least discussed the matter with you. He should not have done that. It is so embarrassing! He should know that what he had done was totally unacceptable and sinful,' said Perak.

His mother froze. Perak started to cry. He had been trying to control himself since the death of his father, but now after everything was done, with his father having been buried, he felt shattered. He knew there was nobody else there except him and his mother, so he allowed himself to be emotional.

'Don't ever bring this matter again, my dear son. Consider it closed forever and let it just be a memory. I still haven't gone over it myself, my son. Believe me, as his widow, I will also have to carry the guilt with me for all my life. It's not going to be easy. And I'm sorry that you have to suffer this way, too. Now stop crying.'

Perak wiped tears with the ends of his shirtsleeve. 'What do I do now, mother?'

'Just try and remember all the good things that he had done for the sultan and people of Melaka and the many nice moments that you had with him when he was alive. Above all, remember all the good advice he had given you that has now made you into a man that you are.'

'Why? Why?' Perak was still not convinced.

'It must have been hard on him to realize that the sultan ignored him. But, I'm sure it wasn't the main intention of the sultan to do that. Just that the sultan being young and had just ascended to the throne, he was not familiar with palace intrigues and knew how to deal with an old man like your late father.'

'Surely, father's presence in the palace will attract the sultan's attention. He had such a commanding presence. Father simply couldn't be cast aside just like that, like an old piece of rag to be discarded after they had no use for it.'

'No, son, no. Don't worry; nobody in Melaka knows about it except the sultan, his consort and Ali. I don't want you to tell anyone, you hear?'

'Why should I?' He then stood up, walked down the stairs, and climbed on his horse. His mother turned around and asked: 'Where are you going?'

'I just want to ride on.'

'Will you be back for lunch? Don't go too far.'

'May be.' Perak then kicked the sides of the horse and it sped off. His mother stared at her son until she lost sight of him. He rode his horse on the Chinese Hills, alone. He slashed the leaves with a long stick. Then in the far distance he saw a group of three Malay boys riding their horses. They stopped and stared at him. They were children of middle-ranking officers; all had Arab

or Muslim names because it was the trend these days in Melaka. Only those who were from poor families from the villages had Malay names. The officials in the court of Melaka were especially fond of giving their children such names as opposed to the Malay ones that did not have meaning and sounded gibberish. Some of them were beginning to sound quite idiotic and embarrassing, too.

'Look who's here,' said Ahmad.

'Tun Perak, who else?' said Kamal.

'Why, let's go to him,' said Osman.

They then went to Perak.

'*Asalamualaikum*, my dear, Tun Perak,' said Ahmad.

'*Mulaikum salam*, my friends, Ahmad, Kamal, Rashid and Osman,' replied Perak almost in unison.

'What brings you here on this Chinese Hills at this time of the day? Shouldn't you be elsewhere together with your own friends?'

'Nothing. I'm just trying to get something off my chest.'

'Like what?' asked Kamal.

'Never mind, Kamal,' chipped in Ahmad.

Kamal ignored him. 'Like...how on earth did your late father have to go like that?'

Perak was surprised that the boys knew how his late father had died. He became angry, but he tried to control himself. May be they were just guessing, he thought. The boys laughed and sounded like they wanted teasing and making fun of him. Besides, this was not the proper way to treat somebody whose father had just died and was still grieving. His father was no less the former prime minister of Melaka was, at that.

'Are you trying to have fun at my expense, my dear friends?' asked Perak. He was still controlling himself. He did not want to get angry with them; they were just kids - spoilt kids, he thought. 'Don't you know everybody in Melaka including the sultan is still in mourning. The forty-day period is not over yet.'

They laughed.

'Kamal is just joking, my dear Tun Perak,' said Ahmad. 'Don't take him seriously! It is just his bad nature to laugh.'

'How did you all know about it? Only the sultan and Seri Nara diRaja Tun Ali...'

'We are not ordinary boys, you know, Tun Perak. We are children of titled men ourselves. How large is Melaka, anyway?' said Kamal. 'Over there, look, is the palace of the sultan, and further up, the port. Melaka is this large. So, don't expect any news not to reach us quickly. Besides, we have ears everywhere.'

Even without the winds, we will bound to know what is happening anywhere in the state, the palace and even in your own bedroom.'

Perak tried very hard to keep his cool. He knew it was not the time to be swayed over by his emotions. It was a trying time for him as it was... These sons of titled men of Melaka had nothing better to do, except to have some fun at another person's expense, he thought.

'Word gets around very fast in Melaka, Tun Perak,' added Ahmad with a chuckle. '...Especially those that are sensitive and controversial ones. Know what I mean, my dear friends?'

They laughed. In the far distance, Perpatih Putih appeared with his horse. He saw his brother and him.

'Okay, guys, let's get going. Let's not bother with Tun Perak anymore. He has been through a lot of problems lately. Have a pity on him,' interrupted Osman when he caught sight of Perak's young brother heading their way.

Perak kept quiet. The three boys sped off on their horses when Perpatih Putih came to them. Perak stared at them, gritted his teeth and tried to control himself. He felt like clobbering the three boys if his younger brother did not appear in the scene.

'What's wrong, my dear brother?' asked Perpatih Putih.

'Nothing,' replied Perak. 'Nothing.'

'Mother has asked me to bring you home for lunch. Food is getting cold.'

'Very well.'

They then galloped home.

The muezzin cried out the *azan* in his usual melodious voice for the Faithful to perform the evening prayers. It was not too loud, just soothing to the ears. The cry was repeated instantaneously in all the mosques that were in all districts and villages. It resounded throughout the state. The state mosque was near the palace.

Muzaffar prayed together with the men who stood behind the *imam*. After it was finished, he shook their hands and hugged them. He then walked out of the mosque. He walked out of the mosque and returned to the palace together with his son, Raja Abdullah. His consort, Sultanah Melaka stood on the verandah to wait for them to return. 'Did you get any Divine inspiration, dear?' she asked.

The sultan climbed up the stairs and entered the palace. 'Not yet, dear. It's not easy trying to get a replacement to somebody like the late Prime Minister Tun Perpatih Sandang Sedang. His shoes are simply too large for anybody in Melaka to fill. He was truly exceptional in many ways.



'Melaka could not have been what it is today without his guidance. If he had not died, Melaka could have recovered fully by now.'

They walked along the corridors to the dining room. Muzaffar, his consort and their son, Abdullah washed their hands and began to eat. Many dishes were laid on the low table. The palace-helpers stood to cater to them.

'I'm left with not much choice. Seri Nara diRaja Tun Ali is the only candidate. He is the most senior official. I can't ignore him. If I appoint somebody else, he might feel slighted,' said Muzaffar. 'Furthermore, he's our uncle.'

'But, what can he do? It's all up to you, dear,' said the sultanah.

'True. But, he has his followers; even if Seri Nara could take it, his followers might not; they can cause havoc and chaos in Melaka. I don't want this to happen. We have seen much chaos happened in Melaka in the past and I don't want to see one more happening especially during my reign as sultan. If it happens again, it will paralyze the whole state. We must avoid that from happening at all costs.'

'Has he sounded to you?' asked the sultanah.

'Who?'

'Seri Nara.'

'Not really, but he has made insinuations. He will not like it if he is not chosen.'

'Don't let anybody pressure you, dear.'

'Why should they want to do that? I'm in full control of this palace.'

'How about Tun Perak?'

'Who?'

'The late *bendabara's* eldest son.'

'He's much too young. If he is older by five years, I am sure, he would be just the right candidate for the post. But, I have something else in mind for him to do. It'll be such a waste of talent if Tun Perak, and for that matter his younger brother, Tun Perpatih Putih and sister, Tun Kudu are ignored.'

The sultanah kept quiet. They then began to eat. The helpers waited patiently at the sides.

Sultanah Melaka was fast asleep. Meanwhile, Muzaffar stirred in bed. He was restless. His mind was spinning like a top. He then got out of bed and sat on a chair by the windows. He wiped sweat that had formed on his forehead with a towel.

The next day, he walked along the corridors, went to the verandah, and stood there. Outside was a large crowd of people of all races. They had assembled there since early morning to hear an important announcement from

their sultan. They had been summoned by the palace officials to come to the palace because Muzaffar had something important to announce. The official mourning period for Perpatih Sandang Sedang's death were over few days ago and the people were expecting the sultan to name his successor as the new prime minister of Melaka as it was the tradition in Melaka. He was the second such person to become the prime minister of the state and naturally, everybody was excited. The men and women were now wearing colorful clothes like those that they were wearing before the death of the late prime minister.

'My fellow countrymen, his majesty Sultan Muzaffar Shah has a very important announcement to make. Please listen carefully,' said the lord chamberlain. 'His majesty Sultan Muzaffar Shah.'

The sultan stepped forward and went to the railings. In front of him in the courtyard were few thousand men and women of all races including the Chinese and Indians who had now become citizens of the state. 'My dear countrymen, today, I'm appointing, my uncle, his excellency Seri Nara diRaja Tun Ali as my new prime minister of the state of Melaka. We haven't had a *bendahara* since the untimely demise of our beloved Prime Minister Tun Perpatih Sandang Sedang few months ago,' announced the sultan. He too, had matured over the last few months, especially since the death of his former prime minister, and was now looking more confident and forceful.

The people were relieved. Ali who was standing beside the sultan broke out a wide smile. The crowd then broke out into a loud applause. All of them had expected Ali to be the next prime minister, so it did not come to them as a surprise. They then shouted and the sultan was relieved. 'Long live Tun Ali! Long live Tun Ali!'

'And I want all of you, my countrymen to respect and honor him, as much as you had respected and honored the late Prime Minister Tun Perpatih Sandang Sedang when he was alive.

'We are indeed very sad that the late Tun Perpatih Sandang Sedang died when his services to the state were still needed. He had so much going for him. Although he was already old and frail, yet he insisted on with his task of helping us. But, it is Allah who knew better - who wanted to take him from us. Now, I present Seri Nara diRaja Tun Ali,' added the sultan.

Everybody clapped hands. After the shouting stopped, Ali stepped forward. 'Please say something, my dear uncle, the new prime minister of Melaka,' said Muzaffar.

'Thank you, your majesty. First, I must acknowledge my gratitude to his majesty Sultan Muzaffar for appointing me as the new prime minister of Melaka. It is a very difficult task to carry.

'We all know that the late Tun Perpatih Sandang Sedang was very much part of our lives. He had contributed a great deal to the state. Therefore, it will be difficult for anyone to step into his shoes.

'But, I swear to God that I will carry the burden that has been entrusted on me with full dignity and honor. And I shall always uphold the Muslim sultanate of Melaka and the wishes of our beloved Sultan Muzaffar, and all of you, the people of Melaka.

'And I thank Allah the Almighty for this day and the days ahead that He may want to grant me. And may He bless our beloved sultan, sultanah, and crown Raja Abdullah and accord them with long life. God bless all of you,' said Ali.

They clapped their hands loudly. 'Long live Tun Ali! Long live Tun Ali!' shouted the people.

Just then rain fell. Muzaffar was surprised. 'Ab, it's a sign of approval by Allah,' he remarked.

'Certainly, your majesty,' said Ali. 'This is indeed a good omen. There were no dark clouds just now, but suddenly it rains. How else can we explain this wonderful phenomenon except that it's a blessing from Allah the Almighty, Allah the All-Knowing, the All-Seeing and the All-Caring?'

'Indeed, my Uncle.'

The men and women continued to stand in the courtyard until they were all soaked to the skin. None moved back to hide under the shades.

'*Allabukhbbar! Allabukhbbar!*' shouted the men.

Kudu was drying clothes at the line behind the house. Her mother alighted from the door in the kitchen and went to her. 'Let me do it, dear. Why don't you return to the house?' said Isteri Bendahara. 'Besides, the rays of the harsh sun are not good for your tender skin. You can get it burnt. Who'd want a girl who's tanned beyond recognition until she's as dark as charcoal?'

'Don't say that mother. Do not ever look at any person from the color of their skin. It is against Islam, you know.'

Isteri Bendahara was taken aback. She knew her daughter had a valid point there. She then tried to take the cloth Kudu was holding in her hands. 'I don't mean that, dear. I look at it from the medical point of view and not just aesthetics, as beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Furthermore, in the eyes of god, every living thing is beautiful.'

'Indeed, dear mother.'

'Here, let me have this.'

'But, why mother, I've been doing this since I was big enough to do it.'

'But, you're a big girl now, Kudu; go home.'

Kudu was confused. Her mother took the wet clothes from the basket and dried them herself while waited at her side.

'Go on, I said.'

Kudu sat on the floor in the house. Her mother entered and put aside the basket. She then sat with her.

'You are a big girl now, Kudu, dear. I've been approached by the sultan's people that the sultan desires to have you as his wife,' said her mother in a voice, which was unsteady. It was unlike her, and Kudu was surprised at the way her mother behaved. She was shocked. 'But, hasn't the sultan already have a wife? No, I do not want to be his second wife.'

'Yes, you will. Do as I say! I am your mother, remember? You are a big girl. You are at the ripe age for marriage. You must marry someday and cannot remain an unmarried woman all your life. What will they say if you are not married? I will also be blamed. Besides, good girls marry at an early age...'

'But, why him? Cannot there other men, who are much younger that you could choose to be my husband?'

'It's fated, girl.'

'No, I don't agree. We decide on what will happen to us. Fate only comes in when we cannot decide for ourselves what's best for us. God helps those who help themselves first.'

'But, he is the sultan of Melaka! We can't simply say 'no' to him. We will be cursed. We must obey the wishes of the sultan. His majesty's wish is a royal command. Do not let him stress that to us because it's as if we did not know. Your late father always asked us to do as the sultan pleases. ...And now that the sultan has wished that you be his second wife. Don't deny him this wish, my dear girl.'

Kudu stood up. She went upstairs to her room and cried. She threw herself on the bed and felt angry at the sudden change in her fortunes. Her mother entered. 'Stop crying; you're going to be the second sultanah of Melaka,' she said.

'He's old enough to be my uncle.'

'Don't say that. It's not a nice thing to say that to any man who is not your own uncle.'

'No, I will not marry him. I do not want to be the second sultanah of Melaka. We already have a sultanah of Melaka. Besides, he's old enough to be my uncle or my grandfather.'

'Don't say that I said! Watch your mouth!'

Kudu rushed out of the room. His immediately mother gave chase. She then stood by the flowers in the garden. His mother went to her. 'Enough of this, Kudu. Please behave like an adult! You must marry the sultan. This is his command; please understand this. Your late father was loyal to him, and we must stay loyal to him, too.'

'What would father have said if he were alive? He would not have agreed to such a proposal. It is simply ridiculous if not obscene! I want an end to this talk! I want to be able to make my own decisions on which man will be my husband.'

'I know your father better than you do. I was his wife. He would certainly agree to the sultan's wishes.'

They froze.

Muzaffar sat on his throne. Prime Minister Seri Nara diRaja Tun Ali sat before him together with the other state dignitaries, the *temenggong*, and their wives. They all wore colorful clothes and had gold ornaments on their arms, legs and all over their body and even in the hair.

'What tidings do you hear me, my dear Uncle Tun Ali?' asked Muzaffar.

'The traders from overseas are slowly coming back to Melaka, since your majesty's...' replied Ali.

'I don't mean that! I mean, about Tun Kudu.'

'I am afraid, we still do not have any news to convey at this moment. We're still waiting for the good word from her mother.'

The sultan was angry. He raised his voice: 'Why can't you do such a simple job like that, *bendahara*?'

'As you can see, Tun Kudu must surely be surprised that your majesty has chosen her as your majesty's new consort. Surely, she will have to take sometime to let the shock settle in. She won't say, no!'

'Oh, really? Is that so, my dear *temenggong*?'

'She's still a bud that has not been touched by a handsome bee.'

The sultan smiled.

'Yes, your majesty,' added the *temenggong*.

'We should give her a little bit more time. I am sure she will not disappoint your majesty; after all, she is the late prime minister's own daughter. So, how could she say no to your majesty's wish?' said Ali.

The sultan smiled.

'I guess you are right, my dear *bendahara*. And do forgive me for being harsh on you.'

'Not at all, your majesty,' said Ali.

'Now I shall rest. Good day, gentlemen and *asalamulaikum*.'

'*Mulaikum salam*,' they replied in unison.

The sultan stood up and immediately left the throne room. Everybody rose to their feet and looked at him until he disappeared into the adjacent room. The prime minister looked at the *temenggong*. Both hoped that they could pester Isteri Bendahara to make her daughter, Kudu accept the sultan as her husband. Although she was still young, but her heart was tough. However, this was only revealed under unusual circumstances. Nobody knew that she was a strong-willed girl despite her soft demeanor. Above all, she felt that she was not at all ready for marriage.

Ali walked along the corridor with the *temenggong*. 'Thanks for saving my neck just now, dear *temenggong*. If not for your wisdom, I would have got it from his majesty,' said Ali. 'He is putting me to a test, I know. But, I won't fail him.'

'You must apply some pressure on her mother. The sultan has been waiting for a long time for the marriage,' said the *temenggong*. 'There must be a decision on this soon.'

'Yes, your excellency.'

After much pleading and persuasion, Kudu finally decided to marry Muzaffar. The wedding took place in the palace with all the state dignitaries present. The people of Melaka of all races were ecstatic. The whole city was lit with gaily-decorated bunting, flags and other assortments of decorations. At night oil-lamps and candles lighted the whole city, especially around the palace. Firecrackers were let out together with fireworks that lit up the skies above. The merriment continued for days as everybody in Melaka celebrated this wonderful occasion. Many personal disputes between the traders and ordinary men and women in Melaka were thus settled, as they put aside their differences as a mark of respect to their beloved sultan. They thought that now with the sultan having married the late Perpatih Sandang Sedang's eldest daughter, Kudu, the prime minister would continue to be remembered fondly by everyone in the palace and by every citizen of the state. They remembered his wisdom and the personal attention he showed to solve all the problems that the state had faced. Above all, they remembered his manners; they were exquisite. Despite his status, he still mingled with the lowly laborers and even

tried to speak a few words in their foreign languages, much to the enjoyment of the Chinese, Indians and Arabs.

Muzaffar sat on the throne with Kudu with their palms placed on their knees and looking innocent and demure like all brides and grooms. It had been turned into a bridal dais that had been decorated with fresh flowers that were brought down from the hills and from out of state. The throne room therefore, looked like some scene in fantasyland and it smelled like it was a perfume shop. The *mufti* who acted as the *kadi* married them. State dignitaries and other guests were there in full force together with their wives who wore their finest silk and brocade clothes and jewelry that they could hang from every possible part of their body. After the official ceremony, all the state dignitaries showered them with rice and scented water one by one, with the eldest and most senior members of the royal family doing it first followed by the state dignitaries.

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*Melaka continued to prosper under Sultan Muzaffar Shah's reign. This prompted the King of Siam Tammaraja III, the former Crown Prince Sailutha who succeeded his late father, King Tammaraja II to force Melaka to pay obeisance to him, thinking that the Chinese Emperor was not protecting them now. However, Sultan Muzaffar Shah refused any of his demands. However, soon afterwards, Sukhotai was placed under the control of Ayutthaya, thus King Tammaraja III's control over Melaka seized and he was reduced to become just the Governor of Sukhotai. The Ruler of Ayutthaya now was King Intharacha. He ascended to the throne in 1409 CE or 812 AH or 4107 of the Chinese calendar, when his father, King Ramaracha who was the grandson of King Ramathibodi who founded the Ayutthaya Dynasty in 1350 CE or 751 AH or 4048 of the Chinese calendar, died.*

*King Intharacha then sent Okya Chakra to attack Melaka by way of Pahang, which was still under the control of Siam. However, Melaka with the assistance of the people of Klang under Tun Perak, now the brother-in-law of Sultan Muzaffar Shah and the other dependencies of Melaka managed to defeat them.*

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The Siamese forces attacked Melaka with unusual ferocity. They were intent on destroying Melaka and put it under their political and cultural domination. However, they had expected to be swiftly repulsed. The sultanate of Melaka, despite its internal turmoil and unending palace intrigues, could still depend on the loyalty of its officers and people. They quickly settled whatever problems

they had, to gang up to face their common enemy, which was bent on destroying them. The people did not want to let any foreign invader walk to Melaka without experiencing some form of discomfort and final defeat. Hopefully, when they finally returned to their country, they would feel more reluctant to embark on such a trip to Melaka again. The Siamese did not know this unusual highly characteristic that was imbued in all Melaka men, women and children - young and old alike.

They were duly informed by their own spies that Melaka was in the midst of another political turmoil, so they decided to take advantage of the situation to exert their might, thinking that they would not be repelled. They hoped to put Melaka under their political and economic dominance and take full advantage of whatever that they could get from it; also, because they saw Melaka's potential as a port. It stood at the most congruous place in the region, where the Northerly and Southerly winds blew in each direction at different times of the year, yet the port was spared. It was well hidden by the small islands that stood near the river-mouth and by the hills that were standing close by the banks. This was the best place for trade to be carried out. The traders, merchants and sailors could also rest fully before they sailed off with the new winds that took them to all corners of the world, carrying with them the goods that they had come to purchase and barter. Many other Malay rulers in the peninsula that were under their control paid homage to the Siamese ruler. In some Malay states, he had even sent his personal relatives and other Siamese royalties to rule them, especially in Malay states that were not under the control of any Malay ruler, such as Pahang.

'Attack! Attack! We shall invade Melaka and put it under Siamese control! Long Live King Intharacha! Long live King Intharacha!' shouted Okya Chakra, the leader of the Siamese forces.

'Long live King Intharacha! Long live King Intharacha!' replied his men loudly.

The Siamese soldiers served with added vitality and energy. They hoped that this was going to be their final assault on Melaka. So that the royal scribes in the court of Intharacha could write the final chapter on Melaka and opened a new one on their rule in that state. They were confident now than ever before, for Melaka to fall into their hands; more so when Malay soldiers from the Malay states that were under their control were aiding them. Their uniforms distinguished between them. Together they formed a formidable army, fully equipped with the latest weapons that their workers could produce then. They did not think they would fail this time like that did before. They thought they had learnt from their past mistakes and knew how to handle the



Melaka forces they thought were now fragmented as a result of the death of Perpatih Sandang Sedang and the appointment of Ali who succeeded him as prime minister. This was perhaps their tenth encounter with Melaka and most likely the last.

In the initial assault, many Melaka soldiers were killed mercilessly. They were all taken by complete surprise, as the Siamese did not give any advance warning of their impending attack. This was in total breach of their common law of attack, which gave the onus on any country which wanted to launch an attack on another to firstly hand a request to fight like what the Siamese did before. But, now they decided to break away with the rule and immediately attacked the Melaka forces.

The Siamese soldiers appeared from nowhere. The Melaka forces realized that they were being attacked, so they quickly set up positions and retaliated. They managed to kill few of the Siamese soldiers, while suffering more casualties themselves, because they were not fully armed like the Siamese; they were just on jungle patrol.

The Siamese moved forward with gusto. They were encouraged by the success of their first assault and were confident that they could achieve success that their king would be proud of. And they were going to arrive at the palace of the sultan of Melaka in no time.

'We shall make it the palace of the sultan soon and fly our flag! Attack!' shouted Okya Chakra confidently as he raised his bloodstained sword. Attack! Attack!

They continued to kill more Melaka soldiers who were caught unawares.

'We move north, Okya Chakra, sir,' said the Pahang captain.

'Attack! We will not return until Melaka has fallen to the Siamese! We promise this to our beloved king of Siam!'

The Melaka soldiers who patrolled the jungles quickly defended their territory. Those who were stationed at other posts quickly rushed to the defense of their comrades. Horsemen rushed back to the palace to alert the sultan and the palace officials. Muzaffar was alarmed. He immediately dispatched Perak from Kelang where he was based at to the border to lead their forces. He then immediately set out to defend Melaka from further Siamese attack. He and his men managed to contain their aggression. This resulted in the Siamese with their Pahang colleagues having difficulty in proceeding forward towards Melaka as what they had hoped to happen. They were in a precarious position with their movements restricted. The Siamese forces and Okya Chakra were cornered. They looked around, and saw no one. Not a single Melaka soul was in sight. All around them were trees. They

suspected something amiss. They realized that they were trapped in a valley with hills surrounding them and no road that they could take to go out of it. They had been misled to enter the valley without realizing that it was a death trap. Okya Chakra and his officers started to panic.

Perak and his officers and men stood parched on a hill like a hawk, looking down at a band of Siamese soldiers and their Pahang allies who were Malays like the Melaka men. He planned a few strategies with his men; one of which was to launch a deadly assault on their enemies from all possible angles. He wanted to be sure that this should leave the Siamese with no recourse for retaliation or counter attack.

'What do we do, my Tun Perak?' asked Mahmuddin, an officer with the Melaka force. 'It looks like the Siamese and Pahang forces have fallen into our trap. They're confused now.'

'Look at them. Let all of them pass by and fall into our trap and we will then attack. We give them our best. Remember; we fight in the name of Islam, in the name of our beloved Sultan Muzaffar. Allah is with us,' said Perak. He held his sword in a tight grip with his *keris* still stuck to the scabbard or *sarong keris*.

'Very well, my Tun Perak, I'll relay your message, sir.' Mahmuddin went off to the garrison leaders and relayed the message.

The Siamese soldiers tried to march forward despite the fact that they had been cornered on all sides. They also did not know that they were being spied on. They were elated with their success in defeating a small group of Melaka men earlier and were happily relating their experiences to each other.

Perak continued to stare at them from where he was perched on a hill, hidden behind the trees. He clenched his teeth. He then waved his hand. His men started to shoot arrows at them from all angles. Thousands of arrows that had been dipped in tanks of poison and they could kill instantaneously those who were struck at its tips. Many hit their targets and many of the Siamese and Pahang soldiers died instantly. Even those who were hit slightly were not spared although they took much longer time to finally collapse and die. They suffered more than their colleagues who were hit direct on their chests that hit the most vital organs where the poison acted quickly to paralyze them. Those who were struck at other parts had to suffer intense agony as the poison had to take some time to travel through their blood before the poison could get to these vital organs. They usually rolled on the ground and groaned in pain. But, there was nothing that their colleagues could do to help or save them. They, too, had to look for cover for their own safety, lest the arrow would strike them.

The Siamese did not know where the arrows were coming from. They rained down on them from everywhere. And there was nowhere for them to hide. They and their Pahang allies were in a vulnerable position. There were no trees or boulders that they could use to protect themselves from being easy targets. Worse, they were surrounded from all sides by the Melaka forces, which made sure that the Siamese and their allies became open targets with no chance of ever escaping the tight dragnet.

'Now, they know who we are. Melaka will not surrender even a single inch of its land to the Siamese or any foreign country,' said Perak to himself. Some of the officers who stood near him heard him.

Hundreds, thousands more bamboo arrows continued to rain on the Siamese and Pahang soldiers and their officers, from all angles. Many got to their targets and hit the Siamese soldiers and officers in their bodies. The arrows continued to rain mercilessly on them. The men from Siam and Pahang were trapped. They could not hide behind anything to shelter themselves from the deadly arrows. Many of their officers died. Only a few of them were left to defend whatever territory they thought they had captured from Melaka. They only managed to survive because they were able to hide behind the heap of the dead Siamese soldiers and their other allies. Many pretended to be dead. They lay stiff on the ground hoping that no one noticed them there.

Okya Chakra was sad and disappointed. 'What went wrong?' he asked himself. 'We were on the verge of success, damned it!' He was furious. The others around him heard him mutter, but there was nothing that they could do, except to feel sorry for him.

Later that night, he sat with his officials and tried to assess the damage that had been inflicted on his men. He was informed that many of his men had died; many more were seriously wounded. But, they could not assess just how many. They tried to make a calculated guess by distracting the number from those who were still alive.

Okya Chakra realized his mission to capture Melaka failed. His officer, Maman went to him. He was sorry for what happened. Being a soldier from Pahang, he did not feel bad, as the failure was purely the failure of the Siamese alone. As a soldier from their vassal state of Pahang, his duty was just to help his Siamese colleagues. May be he even secretly thought it'd be better if the Siamese were totally defeated, so that Pahang, like any other Malay state would be set free from their dominance. Many Pahang soldiers did not fight wholeheartedly, however. They did not think it was right for them to kill their fellow Malays from Melaka who were also Muslims like them. It was also not the strategy of the Melaka forces to kill the Pahang soldiers and they tried as

much as possible to avoid hitting them. Therefore, many Pahang men were spared; only few were killed. This made Okya Chakra suspicious, but he did not express his feelings about the loyalty of the Pahang men and officers. He just hoped that they did not launch a revolt from within his side. Still his suspicions made him uneasy with the presence of the Pahang men.

'What do we have to do next, your excellency Okya Chakra, sir? Many of our men have been killed,' said Maman.

'I know, I know, but, we must... We must not withdraw. We are so close to the port-city. And when the palace falls, the whole country will fall,' said Okya Chakra, his voice faltering with anger and shame. He knew what his ruler would say if he was informed of their defeat by Melaka. They had all along looked down on the might of the Malays whom they thought could not defend Melaka. But, they were shocked to see the damage that the Melaka forces had done onto his men. The strategy that the Melaka forces had adopted proved to be fatal to them. They trapped the Siamese and then they fired arrows. This was the first time the Melaka forces had used arrows that had been laced with poison. If there was no poison, surely, many Siamese and Pahang soldiers could have survived, but badly wounded. They died because of the poison that arrested their vital organs. Most importantly, none other than Perak led the Melaka forces. This was the first time he had been ordered to lead the Melaka forces to defend the state. And he had done an excellent job, and proved his capabilities as an able leader, worthy of some official recognition by the sultan him and the people. He showed his mettle and leadership in the battle. No wonder, he was the eldest son of the late Perpatih Sandang Sedang, the late prime minister of Melaka.

'But...' said Maman.

'No, 'buts', my friend! This is a war! We must never lose. We have never lost any war before, and we are not going to lose this one. Do remember the real battle; the war is just part of it. We are interested in the battle, not just the war. Even if we lose today, it does not mean that we will not want to engage them in the near future. Capturing Melaka and the port is our long-term goal. It's not just an adventure that we're trying to seek; it's the complete domination of the whole region.'

'Very well, as you say. I agree with you wholeheartedly, sir.'

Okya Chakra stood. He went to the shrine and prayed. He burnt incense, nodded before the idols and deities, and murmured sacred words in Siamese. The Siamese soldiers who were mostly Buddhists then lay prostrate on the ground before them. They hoped that they could be saved from being

massacred by the Melaka forces. They had given up any hope of ever destroying the Melaka forces. They did not know where they were.

The Melaka forces continued to hide in the woods and bushes and aimed their arrows at their targets from there. They were also smart and sly as foxes; they did not want to be engaged in direct confrontation, but chose to attack from the distance and out of sight of the Siamese forces. Obviously, they knew their own territory better, and used it to their fullest advantage. They did not want to engage the Siamese in the valley where it was open where they were more vulnerable and became easy targets. Perak was an intelligent leader; he knew where the strength and weaknesses of his men were and he exploited them.

Their Pahang allies who were Malays and therefore Muslims just looked at their Siamese friends from the distance. Their leader offered prayers in Arabic and Malay. They prayed that the Siamese forces would fail in their quest to destroy Melaka, a Muslim state and therefore, their relatives.

Perak sat with his top officers near a campfire during the impasse.

'How dare the Siamese attack us, when Melaka was beginning to attract traders from foreign lands. They want us to pay obeisance to the Siamese ruler. We are not under any foreign dominance. We are a sovereign state. You pay for your mistake, Okya Chakra!' he said to himself. 'But, we learnt that the Pahang soldiers are not with them, heart and soul. They had no choice but to follow them, because they were under the dominance of Siam.

'Therefore, I ask all of you to spare our Pahang brothers and sisters. They are not our enemy. Our enemies are the Siamese. The Pahang men were forced to join the Siamese because their lackeys in Pahang had ordered them to fight us against their own free will.'

The Melaka soldiers and men crowded around him. Perak stood up and cried on top of his voice. 'May Allah be with all of us! May Allah save Melaka! Malay Allah save Sultan Muzaffar Shah! Long live Sultan Muzaffar Shah! Long live Sultan Muzaffar Shah!'

His men repeated him. 'Long live Sultan Muzaffar Shah! Long live Sultan Muzaffar Shah!' repeated his men.

*'Allahukbbar! Allahukbbar!'*

*'Allahukbbar! Allahukbbar!'*

The war resumed early next morning. And Tun Perak's men were again at the upper hand. Perak joined the battle this time. He rode his favorite horse. He killed many Siamese with his long sword.

Okya Chakra noticed Perak. He rode towards him and they fought on their horses while their men, some of whom were on foot fought with each other. Many Siamese soldiers were killed in this encounter.

'So you're the famous Malay warrior, Tun Perak?' asked Okya Chakra.

'Yes, indeed, I am. But, how can I be famous? I'm just an ordinary man. And you must be Okya Chakra. How do you do, sir?' asked Perak. 'Pleased to meet you.'

'Very well, sir, I'm pleased to meet you, too.'

'Very well, same here.'

'Let's fight then since we have done away with the greetings.'

They continued to fight with each other after exchanging pleasantries. Their men were locked in battle with each other elsewhere. Many Siamese and Pahang soldiers were killed. They fell to the ground in pools of blood. Few screamed in pain because they were seriously wounded, with parts of their heads having been sliced off and their limbs fallen on the ground and trampled upon by the fighting men from both sides, and the horses.

Okya Chakra fell off his horse in his struggle with Perak. Just then, someone shot an arrow, which hit his right hand as he tried to *swish* his long sword at Perak. He was badly injured and Tun Perak's life was thus spared. It would have been disastrous if one of his men had not shot the arrow that was stuck in Okya Chakra's thigh. 'Help! Help!' he cried.

Perak stood above him. He wanted to slash his head but changed his mind. It was enough for him to see Okya Chakra fell to the ground as his dignity had been shaken. This was more than he had ever wanted to see happened to him. It also shook his pride. 'I am going to spare you this time, Okya Chakra. I want you to send this message, that the Siamese ruler must not come and harass Melaka ever again, or we will march all the way to Siam, and destroy the Siamese kingdom and take your ruler under our custody. We will smear him and his kingdom until nobody knew it ever existed on the face of this earth. Understand?

'Now, you can either leave peacefully, in one piece, or in a wooden box, as a corpse. Or if you would prefer that we mince your body until it's not recognizable and rejected even by the dogs. Now you decide to choose which ever you want now,' said Perak.

'We will withdraw!' Okya Chakra did not have much of a choice. This was the only option he chose to take in order to save the lives of his the men he still had then - and his own, too!

'Good. I will not take your promise for granted. We will continue to monitor from the hills. Should you dare to return, we will complete your

massacre and none of you will be spared this time! I will not see your face here again, ever again. Understand? If you do not understand Malay, I shall repeat what I have just said in Siamese.'

'That won't be necessary, Tun Perak,' said Okya Chakra. 'It was kind of you to offer us some consolation. I decide that we leave.' He froze in his position. Perak then sped off. Okya Chakra's men immediately rushed to his aid. He knew Perak was serious. If he did not answer in the positive, he was certain Perak would have swished his sword at his neck and severed his head right in front of everybody. He had no choice, but to comply with Perak's demands.

'Withdraw, withdraw! Ask our men to withdraw!' shouted Okya Chakra to his men in Siamese. He then repeated his command in Malay for the benefit of the Pahang soldiers many of whom were not familiar with the Siamese language although they were all trained to follow military orders in Siamese. In times like these, Okya Chakra decided not to take chances. He had to repeat his command, lest the Pahang men did not fully understand him.

'Very well, sir,' replied his man who was standing near him.

He went to the soldiers. From there, he saw Perak riding away, together with his men in victory. Many dead bodies of the Siamese soldiers lay on the ground, with few Malay casualties. They were mostly those from Pahang.

'Withdraw, withdraw all of you! Withdraw now!' cried Okya Chakra.

The other Siamese soldiers stopped fighting and started to withdraw. Some men carried Okya Chakra to a safe place. Two men, a Siamese and Malay were locked with no one having an upper hand. They held each other's hand and tried to clobber the other with their weapons. They froze upon hearing the instructions. The Malay soldier then let loose his hand, and the Siamese lowered his. The Malay soldier then let the Siamese soldier go away.

Perak stood on his horse and looked at the battlefield from a strategic position on a hill. He did not realize that such a beautiful and pristine place could be the place where many men had died and where blood flowed freely from the dead bodies. This was god's given land; it should be used for better purpose and certainly not for a battle.

'The Siamese are withdrawing. They are heading north towards Muar,' said Perak. He then led his men to the palace. The people of Melaka of all races lined both sides of the road to welcome them. They had returned in triumph after successfully defeating the Siamese. The whole mission took two weeks to settle, but it was quite brief by normal standards. All the men now sported beards and mustaches and were unkempt but looking very much like the heroes they were.

A dragon dance was performed and firecrackers were let out. And confetti was thrown from above. It rained on them. Everybody was feeling exuberant and encouraged with the victory that they had all hoped for to happen. The wealthy Chinese men or *towkays* rushed out of the shops and joined in the excitement. They stood to lose the most should Melaka fall to the Siamese, as their business would be severely disrupted. Worse, the Siamese forces, as a revenge for their emperor's harassment on the ruler, would persecute them.

'Long live Tun Perak! Long live Tun Perak!' the people shouted on top of the voices.

Perak smiled. He waved back at them and they continued to march to the palace. He got off his horse and hugged his brother-in-law, Muzaffar. His new consort, Kudu who was his younger sister smiled. She then kissed Perak's hand like any younger sister would.

'You have brought glory to Melaka, my brother, Tun Perak. Come,' said Muzaffar. He then took Perak to the verandah while the people waited outside in the compound. 'My fellow countrymen; my brother-in-law, Tun Perak has brought glory to the state of Melaka! And we are delighted to receive him and his men back from the battlefields.

'The Siamese forces under Okya Chakra, with the assistance of Pahang, have completely withdrawn to Muar. We can rest assure all of you that they're not going to return to Melaka in a long time, may be as traders and tourists and not as invaders or mortal enemies,' said Muzaffar to his people below.'

The people laughed at the joke.

'We are not going to feel complacent. We will continue to be vigilant and safeguard Melaka. Do we need them or anyone as our enemies?' added the sultan.

'No!' the people answered loudly.

'We need them as our trading partners. And here I'd like to announce that Tun Perak is being appointed as the new *memanda* that carries the title *paduka raja*.'

The people clapped their hands loudly. Ali smiled. He patted Perak's back. But, he was beginning to feel worried. Perak was now known as Paduka Raja Tun Perak, and his stature had increased as a result of his successful mission to defend Melaka. So what does that leave him with, thought Prime Minister Tun Ali because eventually, Perak was going to threaten even his position. He was uneasy with the full support that the people of Melaka were showing him. He feared that even Muzaffar - his own nephew would want to sideline him like what he had done to Perpatih Sandang Sedang before.



'And he shall be of equal rank as the Prime Minister Seri Nara diRaja Tun Ali. This means that Tun Perak will remain here with all of us in Melaka. And will cease from becoming our representative in Klang.'

Ali was shocked that he now had Perak in his company and they were equal status in the court of the Melaka. He glanced at the *temenggong* and the other senior officials. He knew the sultan now wanted to slowly replace him from his post. Perak would certainly be appointed prime minister to replace him and he felt fearful of his future.

Muzaffar then put a gold-colored sash around Perak's neck and gave him a new *keris* that was made of silver because his name Perak meant 'silver' in Malay.

Perak was born in the afternoon. At that time his father, Prime Minister Tun Perpatih Sandang Sedang was sitting outside and staring at the skies. It was cloudy. And when the *mak bidan* or midwife announced to him that his wife had given birth to a baby boy, and wanted to know what name he was going to give him, he spontaneously exclaimed *Perak*. The name just came out of his mouth. He did not ponder or thought about it. It just came out through his lips, just like that. That was how Perak got its name. Other stories had it that Perpatih Sandang Sedang's wife was fond of keeping silverware, so much so that when she gave birth to their first son, she made her husband promise that he be called Perak which means 'silver' in Malay. Therefore, there were two versions to this story and both were plausible. When he grew older, his friends started to ask about it. Perak told him about the first version.

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*With this appointment, the Malays in Melaka were now divided into two groups, one favoring Tun Perak and the other Seri Nara diRaja Tun Ali. This made many palace officials worried. They feared trouble was brewing in the state, i.e. between two of the most powerful men in Melaka, one was the uncle to the Sultan of Melaka and the other, the eldest son of the late Prime Minister Tun Perpatih Sandang Sedang.*

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Ali sat in his garden with the *temenggong* and other relatives. He looked worried. His face crumpled like an old piece of rag. He felt awful inside of him like he had eaten something bad that was now giving him constipation.

'We are with you, my Tun Ali,' said Suara.

'Thank you, my men,' replied Ali.

'Melaka now is divided again, my Tun Ali,' said the *temenggong*.

'I know, but, what's there for me to do? The sultan doesn't seem to realize that with his action, Melaka is divided again. He should have realized his mistake. By making Tun Perak a *memanda* that carries the title of *paduka raja*, what he is doing is to belittle me in the eyes of the people. His majesty should have observed some discretion and not to be swayed by popular emotions at that time.'

'There'll be bloodshed again in Melaka, if the people continue to be divided between your followers and those of Tun Perak,' said Suara.

'I hope not, my friend. It will be tragic if this happens. I don't want to see Melaka and its people divided.'

'What do you plan to do now, my Tun Ali?' asked the *temenggong*.

'I shall withdraw. I am already old. Tun Perak is much younger than I am and he had just returned from battle. He has just proven his worth as a leader. And he's the eldest son of the late Tun Perpatih Sandang Sedang, one of our beloved prime ministers Melaka.

'Therefore, I must seek a way out of this mess that I'm in, as peacefully and friendly way as possible. I will not stir up any discontent from anybody, least of all the supporters of Tun Perak and the sultan and me.'

'What will the sultan say?'

'I haven't the slightest idea of what the sultan will say. I just hope that he'll agree to relinquish me of my present post on the grounds that I'm too old to be the prime minister of Melaka now that Tun Perak has grown up into such a fine man and leader.'

Muzaffar caught wind of the animosity that now existed between the followers of Ali and Perak. He was disappointed. His second wife, Kudu went to him. 'What on earth is happening, dear?' The sultan shook his head. 'It wasn't my intention to create friction between the two men. I only wanted to appoint Tun Perak, because he deserved it. He has served the people well, and the people like him. I did not aim to belittle Tun Ali, my own uncle in front of everybody. If this is what he thinks, then he's wrong. How could I do that to my own uncle?'

'Do something, dear, before the country gets into another turmoil. It would be ironic if another tragedy happens in the country, and without foreign intervention. The Siamese will surely take advantage again like they always did in the past. They'll probably be laughing now if they know about this.'

'What can I do, dear?'

Kudu thought. She did not have any idea however hard she tried to think of one. The sultan then walked away. 'Where are you going, dear?' asked Kudu.

'To Tun Ali's house.'

Muzaffar's carriage stopped in the compound of Tun Ali's house. Ali was shocked to see it. The sultan had arrived unannounced. But, he suspected that it was of the friction that had broken out between him and Perak. Ali quickly rushed out of the house to greet him and said: 'What brings your majesty to our humble abode? Do come in.'

They entered the house. Muzaffar sat cross-legged on the wooden floor with Ali and they chewed betel leaves while sitting cross-legged on the wooden floor.

'What's this I hear that you and Tun Perak are only not on speaking terms, but are at loggerheads with each other,' said Muzaffar after he had spat red saliva into a spittoon. 'Is trouble breaking between your supporters?'

'No!' said Ali.

Muzaffar ignored his answer. 'I've come here to seek an amicable solution to his. There is no need to prolong this enmity. We have been through enough already. The people of Melaka deserves better,' said he without mincing his words.

'But, your majesty...'

The sultan did not give Ali, his own uncle any chance to distract him from saying his piece. 'I've a just solution to this. Accept or reject it, it's your wish, Tun Ali. I shall leave it to your wisdom to decide.'

Ali waited.

'I shall divorce my first wife and you shall marry her. In this way - both, you and Tun Perak will be brothers-in-law as Tun Perak is my brother-in-law, too.'

Ali was pleasantly shocked. He did not expect the sultan to be so gallant as to want to divorce his first wife and offer her to him. It was also a wise move.

'What do you say, Tun Ali?'

'What can I say? I'm speechless. But, I don't know what is your majesty's strategy.'

'Do brothers-in-law quarrel for whatever reason, Tun Ali?'

Ali now knew what the sultan had in mind. 'Definitely not, definitely not.'

'Do I take it that you agree to this proposal to mend the rift between you and Tun Ali?'

Ali nodded. The sultan smiled. 'Very well, I shall take my leave now. Do I consider the problem solved then?'

'With me it is. But, I don't know what Tun Perak thinks.'

'Don't worry about him, I'll see him right away and inform him of this development. I'm sure he'll be delighted to know that you now have no negative thoughts about him.'

They went out of the house. Muzaffar went to his carriage. Ali waited near it. 'Er...' He stopped without saying anything. He was not sure of what to say.

'Yes, Tun Ali?'

'There's one more thing which I'd like to ask.'

'Yes, what is it?'

'Would it be possible for your majesty to appoint Tun Perak as prime minister to replace me?'

'How nice of you, Tun Ali. But, why?'

'I'm already old and I believe a much younger man should be allowed to replace me so that your majesty will be better served. The people of Melaka deserve a much younger prime minister instead of me.'

'Very well, as you say. I shall appoint Tun Perak as the new prime minister. This means that he can succeed his late father, the former Prime Minister Tun Perpatih Sandang Sedang. But I will do it not because he is my brother-in-law but because he has shown his leadership capabilities. All of us have seen it, haven't we?'

'Yes. Your majesty is indeed a wise ruler.'

'*Asalamualaikum,*' said the sultan.

'*Mulaiikum salam.*'

The sultan entered the carriage and went off with the belief that he had settled the problem once and for all.

The Siamese fleet of ten ships and few thousand men and officers headed for Melaka in a formation that spelt that they were not going there to trade or visit, but to be engaged in an attack. They had come this time with more venom. Intharacha was very angry with the defeat of their forces. He was now more determined than ever of defeating Melaka. He wanted to spare any chance on this assault and ordered ten ships loaded with all the biggest weapons that they had in their armory, and as many men as they could possibly afford to take on those ships. This time, they wanted to try their luck by launching a naval attack on Melaka instead since a land war was out of the question, especially after what had happened when they tried to attack the last time. They were driven back to Muar with their hopes dashed and hundreds of their most able men dead. They had seen how powerful the Melaka land forces were. Now, they wanted to test their naval strength. They knew from informed sources that Melaka did not have a strong naval force. On top of that,

Intharacha was informed that there was a split in loyalty of the people in Melaka between the followers of Perak and Ali. But, he was not aware that the problem had been solved amicably with the swift intervention of the sultan. Melaka now had Perak as its prime minister and the country and people were reunited as they were before.

They started to attack Melaka ships that were anchored offshore the minute they arrived unannounced at the port. They didn't have the courtesy of issuing an advanced warning to the Melaka Palace official to start a war as the norm of civilized countries to do at that time. This was the second time they did not bother to show such courtesy. They had wanted to surprise the Melaka forces and create havoc and panic amongst its people...fortunately, the Melaka navy, which was on constant alert, managed to repulse them. The Melaka ships and soldiers had been placed at strategic locations in the straits of Melaka and along the beach when Muzaffar first sensed trouble brewing between Perak and Ali. He knew better how to safeguard the security of his country at this time and ensure that their most staunch enemies, the Siamese or any other foreign powers could not simply walk in and attack Melaka without suffering defeat and humiliation.

The war immediately spread to the mouth of the Melaka River, where more merchant ships were berthed. Many of them were destroyed and they quickly sank into the riverbed, carrying with them goods that they had wanted to take to shore. Many Siamese ships too sank and their sailors killed or drowned.

Okya Tejo led the Siamese admiral. He was a man of unusual tenacity to withstand pressure yet looked immaculate in his colorful uniform despite the strong heat from the sun above him. Okya Chakra who led the Siamese ground forces replaced him. He was replaced because of the Siamese king was displeased and disappointed at his failure to capture Melaka by land. He was now almost a persona non grata in the kingdom of Siam, because he had brought disgrace to their king.

He stepped on the deck and surveyed the sea from his ship that was anchored offshore. He surveyed the damage that his ships had incurred, with eagle eyes. He shook his head violently at the sight of the many ships in the mouth of the famous Melaka River that were destroyed or were still burning. Thick black smoke bellowed above Melaka, and turned the day into night. This was the first time he had seen something that was so shocking. He cursed himself that it could live to see it happen right before his very eyes. Many of the Siamese ships had either sunk or damaged severely; it was useless to salvage them and bring them back to Siam. He certainly did not expect them

to suffer many casualties. He realized that the Siamese forces had lost the war again. He was greatly disappointed. He knew the king of Siam would be equally disappointed if he came to know about. He had to console himself by saying that the battle had not ended; it had only started. He then turned around and looked at his men. 'We retreat to Batu Pahat!'

'Very well, sir,' replied the Siamese captain.

The Siamese ships that were still unscathed in the war turned and they sailed south to Batu Pahat, with the ships from Melaka pursuing closely behind. Okya Tejo wanted to temporarily withdraw from the port of Melaka and assess the situation before launching a second round of attack.

More cannons were fired in the direction of the Siamese fleet by the Melaka ships. One Siamese ship was struck. It limped slowly behind the other ships. When the ships were on course, with the Melaka forces having left them to proceed with their journey, Okya Tejo immediately rushed back to his cabin. He rushed in such great haste that he almost stumbled at the stairs. Some petty officers were surprised to see him acting like that. They feared Okya Tejo was in some kind of stress. He entered his cabin. He stood before a huge portrait of the king of Siam. For once in his life, he cried; he dropped on his knees and cried before the portrait of his king. He begged for his forgiveness, as though the king was standing right before him. He knew despite his defiance, the Siamese naval attack had proved to be a failure. Okya Tejo continued to cry. Then there was a knock on the door. He quickly dried the tears that had flowed down his cheeks. He did not want anybody to see him crying like that. They all knew his reputation for being a tough officer of the court of Siam. Now, he was a wreck, and it was not his purpose to let himself be reduced to such a state. He knew he felt awful deep inside. Mostly, he felt sorry for Intharacha for failing him. 'In a minute,' he said. He quickly stood up, straightened his uniform and wiped his tears. He then glanced at himself in the mirror; he saw that his uniform was straight and there was no tear in his eyes. And he did not look awful. He then opened the door. There was an officer standing outside. 'Yes, officer?'

'Dinner's ready, your excellency,' replied the officer.

'Very well, I'll be there shortly. Is everybody there?'

'Yes, your excellency.'

'Very well then, come let's go.'

He then left the room and closed the door behind him.

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*The Siamese were pursued until they reached the island of Singapura. From here, they retreated to Siam, by sailing in the South China Sea, after they had failed to defeat Melaka the second time. Soon after the war, Sultan Muza'ffar Shah died and was succeeded by Raja Abdullab who became known as Sultan Mansur Shah in 1456 CE or 869 AH - 4154 of the Chinese calendar.*

## CHAPTER 6: THE MALAY WARRIORS

The royal Melaka palace was now larger than the one, which was originally by Parameswara that sat at the foot of the Melaka Hill. It was expanded over the years to reflect the bigger role the state was playing in the region. The land around it was cleared and the trees chopped so there was a bigger garden and few more houses where the sultan's extended relatives could stay. More flower trees were planted around it, especially in the front where there was a large garden, which was in full bloom. Flowers of all colors and types bloomed at the same time; thus giving the palace compound a cheerful look like it was all dress up for a festival. It looked magical especially at night when all the lamps and lanterns were lit.

The people of Melaka were extremely delighted to have both of them as their Sultan Mansur Shah as their ruler and Sultanah Nur Puallam as his consort. He married the daughter of Seri Nara diRaja Tun Ali, Tun Nur Pualam, and they had few sons and daughters. He also had another son, Raja Hussain, from his marriage to the sister of Prime Minister Tun Perak. They were compatible with each other, with each complimenting each other's personality. Over the years, they managed to endear themselves to the people of Melaka who had by now brought the sense of security to the state.

A traditional Melaka musical performance was held in the courtyard of the palace with the sultan and sultanah and other state dignitaries in attendance. They had a good reason to be merry. The state was experiencing an unusual bliss, after a tumultuous period and the sultan wanted his subjects entertained. Delicious food was served and almost everybody in Melaka turned out for the important cultural event. They wore their best. They crowded around the palace and watched the proceedings from every possible angle. The sultan had earlier ordered the guards to fling open all the gates of the palace so that the people of Melaka could enter its compound unhindered. A popular female

singer in Melaka belted out a song in her melodious voice as the musicians hit their traditional music instruments. Everybody was captivated.

'What a lovely voice she has,' commented Sultanah Nur Pualam.

'Certainly, my dear. They're the best the country has ever had,' remarked Mansur.

The songstress ended his song, and a dance group took the stage and performed for everybody there. They clapped their hands and shook their body. Mansur and the sultanah then joined the dancers, and the other dignitaries started join them. The celebrations continued well into the early morning. The royal couple was good at dancing. This thrilled the senior palace and state officials and the people of Melaka. It was also the first time they danced in public. The sultan then invited everybody to join them. The party lasted until the wee hours of next morning. None of the state dignitaries and ordinary folks in Melaka had ever remembered such a party held in the compound of the sultan's palace before. This was the first time. It reflected the changed mood they were experiencing in the state, one, which was easy-going and carefree. Melaka had returned to normal after years of conflict with foreign powers who were envious of it's success and economic development, despite it being a relatively new country compared to many others in the region and elsewhere. Most of these ancient states sadly, were less developed or known, compared to Melaka. Even Palembang, where Mansur's ancestors had come from was still not as developed as Melaka. It's empire started to decline following the political upheaval it experienced in 1405 CE or 806 AH or 4103 of the Chinese calendar, or five years after Parameswara founded Melaka. Worse, when a rogue Chinese emissary who later became a defector with the name of Liang Tai-ming who had lived in Palembang for a long time, tried to dominate the state. Together with hundreds of his men, he had tried to impose an imperial commissioner but it failed. He figured since he was well verse in Malay, could speak in the Palembang dialect, and had the support of many people in the state, he could impose his will, but this was not to be.

The fifth ruler of Palembang, as it turned out, did not become a popular figure amongst the Malay rulers in the region following the palace upheaval. It resulted in Parameswara's flight out of the state in 1389 CE or 790 AH or 4087 of the Chinese calendar. As a result, Palembang hardly received foreign guests or trade, let alone rulers. Of all the Malay rulers in the region, only those from Melaka had made state visits to the imperial court of the Chinese emperors. The sultans of Melaka had made such trips on numerous occasions.

Later the next day, Mansur walked along the corridor. He woke late that day, after spending the entire night at the party with his officials and other



ordinary folks. His mother, queen mother Kudu, accosted him. She had been trying to see him for days but did not get the opportunity, because the sultan was engaged in many official duties. This was her only chance of catching her son. She was worried for him. 'What is my son thinking of these days?'

'Do you remember the state up north that has always given us trouble, mother dear?' asked Mansur.

'Siam?'

'No, but, they used to be allies of this state. It's a Malay state like us.'

'Pattani?'

Mansur stopped. His mother waited.

'No.'

'You mean, Pahang?'

'Yes, that's right. But, aren't they called Pura?'

'Yes, Pura, Pahang, they're the same. Why does it suddenly worry you, my son? You were too small when Okya Chakra and Okya Tejo tried to invade us. Do you remember them?'

'I'm afraid not, mother.'

'Fortunately, your uncle, Bendahara Tun Perak was able to thwart them. He was a hero then, as he is now, my son. And everybody in Melaka loved him like he was their own son.'

'The state of Pahang, I hear is very wealthy.'

'But, they're still very much under the influence of the Siamese. What are you driving at?'

He continued to walk to the verandah. Mansur then slipped on his sandals at the bottom of the stairs and walked out of the palace. He then went to his carriage. Kudu stood in the verandah and stared at her son.

'Why? Do you plan to pay them a visit?'

'No, mother. I plan to launch a surprise attack on them.' Mansur turned around and looked at his mother. He stood near the carriage while an assistant held the door.

Kudu was shocked. 'But why?'

'I need to pay revenge to Pahang for helping the king of Siam to attack us before, dear mother.'

'Just forget them, my son. Pahang is just a vassal state of Siam. They won't do anything unless if they are forced by king of Siam, King Intharacha.'

'But, they have a Siamese ruler in Pahang now, King Dewa Surya. They are not a vassal state anymore. They are more like part of the Siamese kingdom, mother. We must launch on a preemptive action, so that they will know how serious we are in combating their menace.'

'We just can't go on letting them attack us when they feel like it. Now, we are going on the offensive, and let them defend their territory for a change. If we are lucky, we will be able to drive the Siamese out of Pahang so that the Malays will rule Pahang again like they did before. Surely, there are enough Malay princes who can rule Pahang?' He entered the carriage and he directed the rider to go off and said to the rider: 'To Tun Perak's house.'

Mansur sat in the carriage and pondered over the plan until it arrived at the Prime Minister's Village. It stopped outside the prime minister's house and he stepped out. His uncle, Perak and Seri Bija diRaja who had been there much earlier immediately greeted him. Mansur made it known how angry he was with the Siamese who failed to comply with the agreement that they both had agreed on, not to harass Melaka. Actually, what the sultan had neglected to take into account was that the Ming Emperor Xuan Zong had died long ago. Because of that, Intharacha did not take his demands seriously anymore. The Siamese quickly changed their policy and began to embark on an expansion program. Their idea was to dominate the whole of the Malay Peninsula and possibly drive their rulers into the sea, or chase them to other parts of the Malay world. In this way, the Siamese kingdom would extent from all the way to Singapura. Mansur, however, hoped that the new Chinese emperor would take up on the issue and checked the advancement of the Siamese so that they could halt their program immediately. In the meantime, he just had to do something before the Siamese came knocking on his door in Melaka and wreck havoc on the state and people. It wasn't going to be a war between the Siamese and the Malays, but between their religions too, he thought. Because of this, he had many sleepless nights. Finally, he realized that he simply had to do something drastic, although it was not his idea to do it. It was more of a preemptive strike than an offensive action. He remembered how his ancestors, Megat Iskandar Shah had reminded his children and grandchildren not to engage in war with anyone, unless their position was threatened. He also hoped to send an ambassador to the court of imperial China to have an audience with the present emperor to voice out their concern when the time came. In the meantime, he had to do something to defend the sovereignty of Melaka and the sultanate. Their first action was to contain the Siamese in Pahang before they moved up north to attack Melaka. This was their strategy.

'This way,' said Perak.

'Are we ready?' asked the sultan.

'Yes, your majesty,' replied the count.

They then went to a shed where it was comfortable and sat there. Perak opened a map and explained. 'This is Pahang, and we are here. It should take up to two days by sea to get to the mouth of the Pahang River.'

'Are the forts well-manned?'

'No, your majesty. The Pahang and Siamese forces are quite complacent these days.'

'That should work to our good advantage; I suppose we can try to invade them for a change. Can't we, dear Uncle Perak? What do you think Seri Bija?'

'I guess we can; it could at least help to impose our will on them for a change.'

'How many boats do we need?'

'We need two hundred boats to travel to Pahang and launch a surprise assault at Pahang River at dawn,' said Bija diRaja.

'Do we have enough men to take there, dear count?'

'Yes, your majesty. We have more than that; but, we need to place them here,' replied the prime minister.

Mansur stepped out of the hut, he thought hard. Perak and Bija diRaja waited. 'We attack. We must teach the Siamese a lesson that they are not going to forget all their lives. I want Tun Perak and Seri Bija diRaja to lead our forces this time. Agreed?'

'Yes, your majesty,' said Bija diRaja.

'Yes,' said Perak. 'We'll go there when the water level rises so that our boats can flow with the tide. This also means if the enemy wants to get at us, they would have to flow against the tide, which will be very difficult, if not impossible for them to do.'

'Does it mean during the full moon?'

'Precisely. It's useful to know a little bit about the study of the sun and moon.'

Perak and Bija diRaja led a few thousand men from Melaka. They sailed in two hundred boats. This was strategy: By taking their men in many small boats instead of just a few large ships, they were able to distribute their men so that if they were attacked, they could form formations and retaliate.

They continued to sail towards Pahang in the straits of Melaka. But first they had to head for Temasik in the south where they were to rest for a day and to replenish themselves before moving on. From there, they sailed northwards in the South China Sea along the coast of the Malay Peninsula, until they arrived in Kuala Pahang at dawn. There were few boats docked in the mouth of the river, which was much wider than the mouth of the Melaka

River. They thought Pahang had wanted to form a blockade. But as it turned out most of the boats were privately owned and not by the state. They were small and mostly used for recreation and fishing.

After confirming that these boats were harmless and they did not carry heavy weapons, Perak immediately ordered a surprise attack on the Pahang sailors. They were caught by surprise. They were not aware of the impending attack by Melaka, as there was no advanced warning. The people of Pahang had become too complacent with their position. They did not think that Melaka or any other Malay state was daring to attack them, simply because they were ruled by a Siamese puppet, King Dewa Surya. He was assigned by Intharacha to be based in Kuala Pahang after the early Siamese forces under Okya Chakra and Okya Tejo were pushed back by Melaka. He decided to send Dewa Surya, a close relative of his to ensure that Pahang remained a strong vassal state. This was also to show the importance that they had placed on Pahang. The state was of utmost importance to the country because it acted as a buffer state that could be used to sustain any attack by Melaka so that they would not push forward to the north until they reached Siam. It had to be protected by another enemy state at all costs. Thus far, Pahang had served the Siamese well. With the installation of Dewa Surya as the official ruler of Pahang, he thought that their position in the Malay peninsula was secured. But, it still was not. It did not distract the Melaka forces from planning a strategy to overpower them. It even forced Melaka to seek for the expulsion of any Siamese element in Pahang. It could be returned to Malay rule now with Melaka playing a more prominent role in the regional politics, especially with the ascension to the throne of Sultan Mansur Shah. The action by the Siamese had in fact, made Melaka more adventurous. They had never in the history of the state sent their army or navy to attack a foreign power, which was far too superior to them before, unless it was to drive out foreign forces that had attacked them first. The thinking of the Malay rulers of Melaka had changed drastically since Perak became prime minister. He now finally realized that the party Mansur held in the compound of his palace in Melaka was just a charade. It was just to fool the Siamese into thinking that their sultan was not a serious person, but one who only liked to have fun. How wrong they were, thought Perak. It was really a strategy, which Mansur did not discuss with Perak or the other dignitaries.

A Pahang coast guard, Mahzan ran towards the palace of Dewa Surya after he caught sight of the ships from Melaka heading towards the river-mouth with his heart pounding mercilessly in his chest. His clothes were drenched in his own sweat, not from being physical exhaustion, but fear. He had never

seen a foreign navy in the waters of the Pahang River like that before, looking menacing. He was sitting on the beach when he saw them. Soon afterwards, he arrived at the palace, panting heavily, with his clothes soaked in his own sweat.

'What's the big rush, Mahzan?' asked the guard who knew him.

'We're being attacked, my friend! I am going to inform his majesty about it. Ask no more. Please let me through now!'

'His majesty King Dewa Surya's resting in the garden, my friend. Go ahead then.'

'Thank you.' Mahzan continued to rush to the garden. He saw Dewa Surya sitting there with some senior Malay and Siamese officials. They looked like they were discussing something.

'Excuse me for the intrusion, your majesty, sirs. There's something urgent, which I must relay. The Melaka forces that had come in two hundred boats from Melaka are attacking us. Many of our boats and men have perished.'

Dewa Surya and the senior officials were shocked. They turned around to look at each other in bewilderment. 'What's the meaning of this? Are you sure you're not making a serious mistake?'

'No, your majesty.'

'But, there's no warning from them. How uncivilized of them! Don't the people from Melaka know that they should issue an advance warning to invite us to fight in a war first?' demanded Dewa Surya. He was shocked. He turned to look at the prime minister who was also Siamese like him. 'I command you to send more reinforcement. We must not allow Melaka to do this to us. We must destroy them or at least drive them out of Pahang. We stop them before they get on land or we will be in serious trouble.'

'Very well,' replied the prime minister in Siamese.

'Thank you, my man.'

'Not at all, your majesty.'

'You can go now. We'll take over from here.'

'Very well, your majesty.' Mahzan moved back and rushed out of the garden.

The prime minister then rushed to his carriage and left the palace compound in such great haste.

'How dare Sultan Mansur Shah does this to us,' cried out Dewa Surya. He did not say it to anyone in particular; he was just venting his anger to himself as a commentary. 'I hope this is not his revenge.'

By noon, the Melaka men had finally managed to overpower the Pahang men at the port. The attack went on smoothly as planned. There was no real resistance from the Pahang forces and Melaka hardly suffered any serious

casualty. The Pahang soldiers had in fact not tried to put up any resistance. They had in fact, allowed the Melaka forces to walk through the state unopposed. They welcomed the presence of the Melaka forces. In this way, they thought the Siamese could be driven out of Pahang. They were not popular with the Malays in Pahang right from the beginning. The Malays lived in fear under the Siamese rule and they took it that Perak had come to save them from further discrimination and persecution.

'We march to the palace and arrest King Dewa Surya!' shouted Perak. His confidence was boosted by the initial success of their attack. He, Bija diRaja, and their men marched to the palace. A small group of Pahang men who comprised mostly of Siamese tried to attack them, but they were quickly overpowered. Many of them were killed. Their bodies and limbs were strewn all over the place.

Dewa Surya rushed down the stairs of his palace in Kuala Pahang. He went to the royal carriage. It sped off in a convoy of few other carriages, bearing other members of his immediate family when word got to him that the Melaka forces were marching towards their palace there. His carriage passed a lonely road, deep in the woods. It was a secret passage for him to use in the advent of any emergency. He hoped to rush further north and cross the Siamese border where there were more Siamese forces. He would feel safer here.

Perak and Bija diRaja and their men were told about this secret passage. So they waited at one end of the road. The Pahang Malays had told them about the existence of this escape route. Perak and his men quickly took it and waited patiently for the king to appear. They stopped the carriage. Dewa Surya noticed the Melaka men blocking his carriage at the end of the road. His rider pulled it to a stop. He was shocked. 'Damned it! Somebody must have told them about this road,' he cried. 'Try the other road.' The rider heard the order. He quick made a diversion, but the Melaka men blocked them before they could rush towards the other direction. Now Dewa Surya's carriage and encourage were blocked at both ends. Perak went to the carriage that carried Dewa Surya. 'You are under arrest King Dewa Surya,' he said.

'You can't do this. I am the ruler of Pura,' demanded the king.

'That's exactly why we want you. Because you are the king no less! What use is it for us to seize a lesser person?'

Dewa Surya felt irritated by that question. He knew Perak had meant to belittle him. Some Melaka men pulled open the door of the carriage. One of them grabbed the king by the collar and pulled him out of the carriage. He fell onto the ground. 'What do you want from us?' demanded Dewa Surya. This time he chose to speak in Malay, but his Siamese accent was thick.

Perak stood above him. 'We want you take you to Melaka.'

'You'll be in trouble, Prime Minister Tun Perak.'

'I've been in trouble ever since your forces tried to invade Melaka. Now, the tables have been turned around. Come on, we don't have all day. Besides, I do not fear trouble. Come.' He pulled the king by the collars. His men then tied him up. He then peeped inside the other carriage to see who else were in them. 'Ab, Puteri Wanang Seri is here. You, too, princess,' said Perak. 'Come this way with me.'

'No, not her. Leave her alone,' pleaded the king. 'She's got nothing to do with all this.'

Perak pulled Wanang Seri out of the carriage and took her away. 'Turn around, return to the palace. I'm taking both of them to Melaka,' he ordered his men. The Pahang men did as ordered. They escorted the king and the princess back to the mouth of the Pahang River.

Perak walked on the deck of his ship later that night after he had completed his mission in Pahang with Dewa Surya and Wanang Sari in tow. He went to Bija diRaja who was leaning on the railings. It was pitch dark and the ship was swaying as it headed south to Temasik in the South China Sea. From here, it would then sail northwards around the island-state and entered the straits of Melaka before they could arrive in Melaka.

'What are they doing now, Tun Perak?' asked Bija diRaja.

'I've locked them in a cabin. They should be comfortable in there,' replied the prime minister.

'Why do you want to take them to Melaka? Did the sultan order for them to be presented before his majesty?'

'No, it's just my own initiative.'

'What's the strategy this time? I'm not too sure. Please explain to me.'

'Simple, my dear Seri Bija diRaja.'

'How? I still don't understand.'

'I want the sultan to marry Puteri Wanang Seri. In this way, the Siamese ruler in Ayutthaya won't harass Melaka ever again. Will the Siamese attack a state where the ruler's daughter is the sultanah?'

'Ah, now I am beginning to get the picture, my Tun Perak.'

They laughed. Seri Bija diRaja thought Perak's move was brilliant. 'And what do you plan to do with her father, King Dewa Surya? I'm sure by now news of his arrest has reached the Siamese capital.'

'Easy. With King Dewa Surya in Melaka, the Siamese ruler in Siam will know how powerful Melaka is. They just can't harass us anymore like they did before. This is the first time we are taking a Siamese ruler to Melaka. We

wanted to be nice to them in the past but that did not seem to work. Now, we have to be sterner, and show the Siamese that we are serious.'

'And...'

'And, this is the first time Melaka is subjugating another state, Pahang to them. It is now under our direct control. The Siamese have lost it to us. Our stature will rise because of that in the eyes of the other states in the region.'

Bija diRaja smiled. 'You're brilliant. I didn't think of it.'

'I shall return to my cabin, Seri Bija diRaja.' Perak walked away and went to his cabin.

'His majesty Sultan Mansur Shah will be delighted to hear this, my lord.'

'I'm sure he will,' said Perak, without turning back.

Dewa Surya sat on a chair with his hands tied behind him with his daughter, Wanang Seri sitting in another chair. She was crying and in a state of shock.

'Stop crying, my dear Puteri Wanang Sari,' demanded her father.

'I don't want to go to Melaka.' She dried her tears with a handkerchief.

'We have no choice. At least they're not harming us. By now news must have reached our ruler, and I'm sure his majesty will send men to save us. Just be patient. Perak will learn a lesson he won't ever forget all his life.'

Just then, Perak opened the door. He entered the cabin. They quickly kept quiet. 'I'm taking both of you to see Sultan Mansur Shah. And I'm proposing that you marry him and be his wife, Puteri Wanang Seri,' he said.

Dewa Surya and Wanang Sari were shocked. 'You can't do that. My daughter is already engaged to a Siamese prince. I'm certain her fiancé will be very mad if he hears of this.'

'The engagement can be broken anytime. In this war situation, nothing is permanent.'

Wanang Seri cried again.

'Stop crying! You should count yourself lucky to be the wife of the sultan of Melaka,' said Perak.

The princess ignored him. She continued to cry.

'I disagree. We have no business to be in Melaka. I demand that you return both of us to Pura where we belong,' said Dewa Surya.

'Do you have a choice, King Dewa Surya? No, you don't. I'll be back,' said Perak. He turned to Wanang Seri and said: 'And stop crying. It's good for you that you are marrying the sultan of Melaka; you will be taken good care of all your life.'

Dewa Surya decided it would be futile to argue with Perak anymore, as there was absolutely no chance whatsoever for him to convince him. His mind



was fixed. Besides surely, he would not be saying such things if the sultan himself had not ordered him to seek her daughter's hand in marriage. He knew here in Melaka, whatever the sultan desired, he would surely get it, by hook or by crook. Now he had expressed his desire to take his daughter and have her as his new wife.

Perak then left the cabin. Wanang Seri immediately stopped crying. She wiped her tears with a handkerchief.

'Untie me,' said Dewa Surya.

She stood up and untied her father's hand. 'What do I do, Father?'

'Just take it easy, my dear. He might just be joking. For how could you a Buddhist princess from Siam marry the sultan who is a Muslim and the ruler of this country? The people of Melaka will not like it. Their religious elders, the *imams* will not hear of it!'

'I'm willing to convert to Islam,' said Wanang Seri. She thought may be it was not a bad idea after all if she converted to Islam and married the sultan. It could be her fate that she be his second wife. Dewa Surya was shocked, but there was no way that he could disapprove of her decision. It was her personal choice. He knew his daughter was not forced to denounce the religion of her birth and embrace Islam. She had done it without any compulsion by anyone, least of all Perak or Mansur himself.

'Surely, you cannot be serious, my dear,' said the king.

'I am, dear father.'

Dewa Surya kept quiet. He realized that his daughter had grown old enough to know what was good for her life. However, deep inside his heart, he was deeply hurt. He was greatly hurt, because she was not an ordinary Siamese girl, but a princess. Fortunately, they were not in Siam. They were heading towards Melaka, where news traveled slowly compared to Pahang when they could just rush a messenger to the Siamese palace and in no time, the whole of the country would know what was happening to them.

Mansur was being married to Wanang Seri. Some of the Siamese in Pahang were pacified by this act while it made the few others angry. The royal bride couple sat on the throne, looking regal. The distinguished guests offered their blessings in the Melaka style in a ceremony that was elaborate; it had both Muslim as well as Hindu and Buddhist elements that didn't run counter to Islamic principles. Although the Melaka sultans and the people had been Muslim for years, yet they still observed some Hindu traditions, that were difficult to be discarded.

Dewa Surya sat in the front row with the senior court and palace officials with his head looking down on the floor. He looked dejected. His daughter,

Wanang Sari having converted at her own free will was now called Puteri Lela Wangsa, a name given by the sultan. He just sat there looking still and frozen like a statue, feeling numb.

After the formal ceremony in the throne room was over, Mansur and his bride were taken to the verandah where they were presented to the people who had been waiting there all morning to see them. They were happy to see Lela Wangsa wearing the gold-threaded silk clothes called *songket* looking demure. She looked down as all the Malay brides did. Her head had been bedecked with the Chinese-style headgear the Malays called *sanggul lintang* that were brought back by the sultan's ancestors that had become part of the royal heirloom. All the tips of her fingers and toes had been carefully colored with *benna* that made them look golden. Even Mansur's fingers and toes were colored in similar fashion. He had a wide smile on his face that spread from one ear to the other. He did not care if the princess was young and could even pass for his daughter. He simply had to make her his wife.

Later next day, Mansur walked along the corridor, in slow strides for he was in no hurry. He went straight to Dewa Surya's room. He knocked on the door and entered it. He had now become his father-in-law. He stood while Dewa Surya continued to sit in a chair. He stared without blinking out of the window and refused to look eyes with his new son-in-law the sultan of Melaka. Although he was now taking up a comfortable room in the palace that was normally reserved for important guests to the state, yet he felt like he was still in prison. He had no joy in being the father-in-law of the sultan. He still could not get over the fact that he was kidnapped from Pahang. He was still worried for his personal safety, even despite getting assurances that he was to be treated cordially, now that he was related by marriage of his daughter to the sultan.

'Yes, what do you want?' he asked in a terse voice.

'You're now my father-in-law,' said Mansur.

That fact did not thrill Dewa Surya at all.

'Now that you have married my daughter, please let me go. I want to be with my people, in Pura. How could you force her to denounce our religion, and convert to Islam, sultan?'

'I didn't force her to do that. Besides, it is sinful for anyone to force a person of another religion to convert to Islam. Surely, you know that, don't you, my father-in-law King Dewa Surya?'

'Er...'

'I will let you go. But, I'd rather that you don't return to Pura.'

Dewa Surya turned. 'Why not? Am I not King Dewa Surya, ruler of Pahang when your men and Tun Perak came and kidnapped me and brought me here? I am the ruler appointed by the Siamese ruler, King Intharacha to be his majesty's official representative there. I must therefore, be returned to Pura. Your officers took me from there to come here. Therefore, I demand that to be sent there, where I rightly belong. My presence in Melaka is unnecessary now that you have married my daughter. What more do you want from me now?' He raised his voice but tried very hard not to sound angry. Mansur kept his cool.

'I have something else in mind.'

'What is it?'

'I want to send our envoys to the court of King Intharacha.'

'Whatever for? There's absolutely no reason for you to do that.'

'Oh, yes, there is.'

'What is it?'

'I want to ensure that they are not harmed and because of that I want you to go along with them, so that you can guarantee their personal safety.'

'What do your envoys want to get from his majesty King Intharacha?'

'We want to offer peace with the kingdom of Siam. We have been at war for too long now, my dear father-in-law. It's time to put that aside, for the benefit of our children and their children and the future of both our countries.'

Dewa Surya thought hard. Mansur waited and then asked: 'What do you say?'

'What about my daughter? Is she coming along?'

'No. She is my wife, and she will remain here with me. Besides, I want to take her on my trips overseas.'

Few ships from Melaka sailed to Siam not too long later. Dewa Surya and some officials from the court of Melaka were on their way to the Siamese capital of Ayutthaya to meet Intharacha. They finally arrived in the Siamese capital after a week by sailing in the South China Sea. They passed by Pahang earlier, but only docked ashore to allow the men to sail to shore to get refreshment. Not a Siamese soldier was in sight. The local Malays waved at the Melaka ships as they sailed by. Dewa Surya stepped out of his cabin and stared at Pahang. From there, they sailed in the Gulf of Siam and up the Chao Praya River before arriving in Ayutthaya. They were greeted warmly by the Siamese officials from the palace who were informed in advance that a delegation from Melaka was coming, together with Dewa Surya. However, none of the officials knew what to expect.

King Intharacha sat on his elevated throne in his palace in Ayutthaya in South Siam. Dewa Surya and the Melaka envoy and other officials from both countries sat cross-legged on the floor before him.

'Is this what the sultan of Melaka wants?' he asked without showing any emotion or sounding angry. He was just annoyed, but he did not want to show it. He was shocked that Mansur had the temerity of sending Dewa Surya to his palace in this manner. He did not want to say it explicitly, but he appreciated it. This proved to him that the Melaka sultan was not uncivilized after all, he thought.

'Yes, your majesty,' replied Dewa Surya, also in Siamese.

The Malay officials who were on the trip could not understand a word of what they were saying. They hoped that Dewa Surya would explain everything that transpired between him and the Siamese ruler.

Intharacha thought hard. The request came unexpectedly. He had never been given such an ultimatum before. Therefore, it required some serious thinking. 'Very well, we shall decide on what course of action that we can take. In the meantime, let the delegation from Melaka rest in the guest palace. We will get back to them when the time comes. I shall confer with my officials and then inform you of any decision that I have made.' He then turned to his lord chamberlain. 'Treat our guests from Melaka well.'

'Yes, your majesty,' replied the lord chamberlain.

'Very well,' replied Dewa Surya.

Intharacha got down from his throne. He then went to the adjacent room with his prime minister trailing behind him. He stood by the window of his study while the prime minister waited.

'You mean to say that Melaka is now so powerful that they didn't have second thoughts about making those unreasonable demands? How dare they sent a fleet of ships together his majesty King Dewa Surya and literally forced me to accept their demands?' asked the Siamese ruler. His eyes turned red with anger. He was embarrassed and felt humiliated.

'Yes. Melaka has developed into a full-fledge state. It is very powerful and influential in the region.'

'Did China help them in any way?'

'No, your majesty. China had not sent any emissary to the country for a long time. Melaka is now standing on its own footing. And Melaka now has a lot of influence on the other Malay states, especially their rulers.'

'What was the reason for that?'

'Islam.'

Intharacha turned. He was confused. 'Islam? What do you mean? How? What is Islam?'

'It's a different religion. Indian traders brought it in from the Arab countries. Now Melaka is spreading the religion to all the countries in the Southeast Asian region, by way of trade and personal contact. Melaka is now the center for the spread of Islam.'

'Islam.'

'Yes, your majesty.'

'Why didn't the other rulers resist instead of falling in the trap laid by the Melaka forces? How come they took in Islam whereas they also had their own religion that their ancestors had held on to for ages?'

'I can't explain that; only a Malay will know. But, from what I was told, the Malay rulers and the people were attracted to the religion on their own free will.'

'Why?'

'Simply because it's simple and not restrictive. The best part being that it allows everybody to be at par with each other and everybody is subjected to the same religious laws and regulations unlike other religions that divide the people in the different castes and social groups.'

'What else do I need to know?'

'Their rulers didn't force the others to convert to Islam either.'

Intharacha cupped his face with both hands and shook his head left and right. 'I still don't understand. How could the people who had been Hindus all their lives, for eight hundred years, suddenly denounced it and readily accepted Islam, which was alien to all of them?'

'The traders who go to Melaka bring home with them the religion. There was no force or compulsion. The people of Melaka and the other Malay states took to Islam like fish to water. There's no compulsion or force applied on them.'

'Just like that?'

'Therefore, as your loyal prime minister it is prudent that that you accept their offer of peace. It is for our own good, too. Besides, we won't know what he'll do if we refused his offer.'

Intharacha nodded. 'And what do they want from me now?'

'His majesty the sultan of Melaka wishes to receive a letter of acknowledgment from your majesty.'

'What sort of letter will that be?'

'They want your majesty to put in words, saying that Siam will not embark on any adventure in Melaka or the other Malay states.'

'That's all?'

The prime minister nodded.

The ruler pulled a piece of paper and started to write. When he was finished writing, he gave it to his prime minister who later handed it to Dewa Surya to be given to Mansur was pleased to receive it.

Soon afterwards, Mansur led a delegation in a few ships on his first foreign trip; it was to take to the kingdom of Majapahit on Java Island. The empire was now ruled by King Bhre Kertabhumi after the death of King Girishawardhana. He knew Melaka was safe from any Siamese attack now that they had given their written assurance. However, his real reason for wanting to make an official visit to Majapahit was not made known to all. Actually, he wanted to go there because he was fascinated with a Javanese princess with the name of Raja Chandra Kirana and wanted to woo her. However, some people tried to make him believe that the princess was a legendary character much like the princess of Mount Ledang, whom he had once tried to marry, who had died one hundred years ago. Tuah and some men were sent to Mount Ledang in the district of Asahan in the neighboring state of Johor, south of Melaka. However, he did not go too far and soon returned with unusual excuses that had befuddled the sultan who finally gave up. However Mansur persisted and he eventually found and married her. Chandra Kirana was the daughter of King Sang Aji-ningrat and Queen Raden Galoh Dewi Kusuma.

Mansur and his entourage that included his wife, Sultanah Lela Wangsa were paraded through the streets in Majapahit so that the people could see them. The Javanese lined both sides of the road leading to the *Kraton Majapahit* or Majapahit Palace where the ruler resided and where he held court. Lela Wangsa walked beside the sultan looking resplendent and radiant in her Malay clothes. The rulers of Indragiri, Palembang, Jambi, Lingga and Tungkal also accompanied him. Mansur wanted the ruler of Majapahit or the *betara majapahit* or Kertabhumi to be impressed with his official delegation that included the other Malay rulers from the neighboring countries.

Suddenly a group of Javanese men stepped in front of the delegation. Tuah and the others from Melaka were not told to expect a martial arts performance. May be this was a surprise, thought Mansur and his delegates. They showed off their martial arts skills known as *silat*.

Mansur turned to Perak and asked: 'What's this, *paduka raja*?'

'This is the Javanese way of entertaining us.'

'I see. I thought they were inviting us to go to war with them.'

They smiled and turned to look at Hang Tuah and his nine brother-warriors. Tuah was the eldest son of Hang Mahmud and Dang Merduwati.

Hang Jebat whispered at Tuah's ear and said: 'If they dare harm our sultan, I will make sure their heads are severed, Hang Tuah.'

'Not so loud, Jebat. These Javanese warriors are just showing respect to our sultan. They don't mean any harm to any of us,' said Tuah.

After the *silat* performance was over, Jebat pulled Tuah and the others into the square. They then started to show their skills. The Javanese crowd was excited with it because their style was totally different than the Javanese. The Javanese warriors looked in envy at their more superior martial arts skilled. Their leader was Taming Sari. And in his hand was the magical *keris*. They took this as an affront to them that the warriors from Melaka had meant to humiliate them in front of the very eyes of their own people.

The sultan and his entourage continued with their journey thinking nothing about what they had just seen. The Javanese *silat* boys whispered amongst themselves like they were seeking for revenge, but the time was not right.

Kertabhumi waited with his officials for the sultan of Melaka to enter the compound. He then hugged Mansur. '*Asalamulaiikum*, my dear Sultan Mansur Shah. It's been so long since your great-great-grandfather, Parameswara was here, in Majapahit, my dear Sultan Mansur Shah. Melaka is named after a tree, whereas Majapahit is named after a fruit.'

The two monarchs smiled. Kertabhumi had wanted to mention this to Mansur since he first heard that he has finally arrived in Majapahit.

'*Mulaikum salam*, my dear Brother Kertabhumi. Those were in the Hindu times. And we are now all brothers in Islam. Thank God.'

'Thank God.'

'We see a mosque of different shapes and sizes in every village here. How is everybody taking to Islam?'

'*Alhamdulillah*, (Praise be to god), my dear Sultan Mansur Shah. It looks like a great majority of us have converted, thanks to the effort of the *Wali Solongo* the nine saints, and the others. However, there are still a small number of them who refused. This is their right. They have fled and grouped themselves on an island in East Java, called Bali.'

'*Alhamdulillah*. And let me introduce you, the rulers of Indragiri, Palembang, Jambi, Lingga and Tungkal who have come with me on this trip. I'm sure they are also equally delighted to see your majesty here in Majapahit.'

'*Asalamulaiikum*, my dear brother rulers. Welcome to Majapahit,' said the ruler of Majapahit.

'*Mulaikum salam*, dear ruler of Majapahit,' they replied almost in unison. Kertabhumi shook their hands and hugged each of them.

'And my officers... Here are Perak, Bija diRaja, *temenggong*,' said Mansur.

The ruler of Majapahit shook their hands and hugged them. '*Asalamulaikum*, and welcome to Majapahit,' he said.

The royal guests from Melaka were later entertained to a state luncheon in the palace. A *gamelan* group performed light music in the background, and it was accompanied by a dance performance. The guests were thrilled. Tuah sat with his brother-warriors near their sultan. They were keeping a close watch on everybody to ensure that nobody attacked their ruler. Tuah still remembered vividly how Parameswara had killed their early ruler, Hayam Wuruk and escaped to Temasik. And he feared that some of the people in Majapahit would want to seek revenge on his behalf. But fortunately this did not happen; the *kerises* that they had brought along with them were not used to kill or hurt anyone. In fact, the *betara* was so impressed with the calmness that Tuah and his brother-warriors had shown that before the Melaka delegation returned home, he presented Tuah with a *keris* called *Taming Sari*. It looked like any ordinary *keris*, with seven curves or *laks*. The only difference is that it was supposed to be magical and supernatural powers as well as potent. Tuah thought with it he could use it to defend the sultan of Melaka and the state. But the rumors that were circulated in Melaka said he had taken it from a Majapahit warrior whom he had killed in a fierce duel. This had heightened Tuah's stature amongst the people, who began to see him as a larger than life hero. Jebat was not jealous of this. On the contrary, he felt awed with his brother-warrior and admired him more now.

Kertabhumi and Mansur walked along the corridor and entered the conference room of the Kraton Majapahit. It was the official residence and center of authority of the ruler of Majapahit.

'It's good for you to bring along the other rulers from the Malay states. It's time for all of us Malay brother-rulers to get to know each other so that there will be no more animosity amongst us. We must learn from the past and not to repeat it. We, as Muslims and Malay rulers must set a good example for our people to follow. Only in this way Allah will guide us to happiness and *taqwa* or god consciousness,' said Kertabhumi.

'That is why I have asked them to follow me here to see you, my dear brother-ruler,' said Mansur.

'I do wish that I will be able to go Melaka to see for myself how your country and people look like.'



'You are welcome anytime; I'm sure everybody in Melaka will be excited to see your majesty.'

*'Insyallah - if God wills.'*

Tuah and his brothers walked in the square. They wanted to see the sights and meet the local Javanese people who were of the same racial stock as them, except that their languages were different. Tuah and his brother-warriors did not understand Javanese and they did not understand Malay. But, the Javanese were getting interested to learn Malay so they could use the language to unite the Javanese people with the others on Java Island who were speaking in different dialects.

'The people of Majapahit are very friendly. But, I doubt if their warriors are happy with our presence here in Majapahit. What are they thinking? What do they expect from us?' asked Tuah.

'They must be thinking that we are going to invade their country, Hang Tuah,' said Jebat.

'Why do they think so?'

'Remember, how his majesty Parameswara, had come to Majapahit and caused mischief here?'

'Ah, that was a long time ago. Besides, we were not Muslims then. How could Muslims fight with each other with whatever reason? Allah will curse all of us if we do such a thing.'

'They only do so if they have been provoked by the devils and satan.'

Then suddenly a group of Javanese warriors stepped in front them.

'Let's play with us, my dear warriors from Melaka,' said one of them. 'We want to see how good all of you are.'

'I'm sorry. We have come here to see the countryside. We do not wish to fight with anyone here. Besides, we aren't allowed to remove our *keris* from the scabbard, because once if we do that, our *kerises* will demand your blood,' said Tuah.

The Javanese men were shocked. 'Why not? Just for fun. We want to see just how good you are.'

'Make your first move then,' chipped in Jebat. Unlike Tuah, Jebat could not stand provocation. Tuah stopped him just as he was trying to make his first move. 'No, he doesn't mean it,' said Tuah.

'Okay, how about this?' He then showed a stance while his friends got ready. Tuah remained calm. The other Malay warriors got ready, too. The other people moved back and create a space; also for their personal safety. The Javanese warriors then started to attack Jebat, and they fought. The fight continued. Many of the Javanese warriors were injured. Tuah and his friends

were at the upper hand. Jebat was engaged in a fight with the Javanese warrior; it dragged on until the Javanese warrior was subdued. Jebat held his *keris* to his neck. 'I'll save you for now, my dear friend. But, next time, I can't ensure your safety.'

The Javanese warrior dropped his *keris* to signify his surrender. Jebat let go off him. The Javanese warrior stood up and remarked to Jebat: 'You're good.'

'Our *silat* is purely for self-defense,' said Tuah.

'I see.'

Tuah took his men away. 'Come.'

They went off. The Javanese warriors stood up. Some of them had to be propped by their friends because they were hurt, but not too badly.

Mansur and his entourage returned to Melaka after making a brief but successful visit to Majapahit. He was happy that during that time he was able to establish cordial relations with Kertabhumi. He was glad that their past animosity was forgotten. He was delighted to see that the people of Majapahit and its rulers and other members of the royalty were fervent believers in Islam. He was told that the religion had come by way of marriage between a princess from Champa who was responsible for conversion of the ruler of Majapahit and consequently the others as well. She also had links to the *Wali Songo* - the Nine Saints of Java. These were pious Muslim men who were solely responsible for the spread of Islam throughout the island in the fifteenth and sixteen the century.

Not too long later, something happened in Melaka that involved Tuah; it made him depressed and distrustful of him. His faith and trust in Tuah collapsed to pieces. All the heroic deeds that he had shown to the state and the sultan were erased from his memory. Being a pious person, Mansur did not expect him to behave in such a rash manner. How could he do it, asked the sultan to himself repeatedly.

Mansur prayed together with the congregation one day for the afternoon *zohor* prayers. Soon, it was over. The others left the main hall of the mosque, while the sultan remained seated. He opened his palms and recited a private pray. He asked Allah to give him guidance on how to deal with the problem he was facing, *vis-à-vis* Tuah.

Perak and Bija diRaja and the *temenggong* waited for the sultan to be finished with his private prayers. They sat cross-legged beside him. They did not know what was the sultan praying for that was holding him back. The sultan then stopped reciting. He turned around and stood up. He then shook the hands of his top officials and hugged them, as it was the custom. He walked out of the

mosque. The others followed him. He crossed the garden and returned to the palace. His officials trailed behind him. Not a word was spoken. They were all waiting for their sultan to open his mouth first. Mansur went to the verandah and sat alone at his favorite spot called the *bendul*. Bija diRaja went to him and said: 'Pardon me.' He then sat near the sultan.

'Yes, Seri Bija diRaja.'

'Pardon me. May I ask what is your majesty worried about? For the past few days, I have noticed that your majesty has been keeping quiet. Prime Minister Tun Perak and the *temenggong*, too, have noticed it. They have asked that I seek your majesty's answer.'

'Hang Tuah.' Perak did not know what the sultan meant.

'Hang Tuah? What about Hang Tuah?'

Mansur stood. Bija diRaja followed suit, as it was not proper for him to sit when the sultan was standing. 'Hang Tuah has done something that I find to be unforgivable. How could he do this to me?'

'What does your majesty mean, exactly?'

'Hang Tuah was fooling around with some of the girls in my own palace - in this very palace which is my official residence, and the seat of Islam in Melaka.'

Bija diRaja was shocked.

'My face has been blackened by his actions. I feel ashamed. Why must he humiliate me like that? Melaka's now at peace with itself, finally, and yet this is happening.'

'But, why didn't it come to my hearing? And what do you plan to do about it? Need I remind that Hang Tuah is an important warrior in Melaka.'

'The law applies to all, Seri Bija diRaja. Tuah is certainly not above the law. Islamic laws dictate us on what we can do. We do not invent any law; we only follow the Divine laws that have been brought down by Allah as stated in the Holy Koran and the Prophet's *sunnahs*.'

'Certainly, your majesty.'

'We now operate under Islamic laws. We don't do as we please; we follow the dictates of Islam. I had such a high regard for Tuah, but...' Mansur cried. The count felt sorry and sad.

'We all do, too, your majesty.'

'What can I do, Seri?'

Bija diRaja was lost for words. He did not know what to say.

'What do I do in these circumstances? He's like my own arm. I feel the pain, if he is hurt.'

'I suggest that you ask Seri Nara diRaja Tun Ali for his wise advice.'

'Seri Nara diRaja Tun Ali?'

'Yes. As an old man, surely, he can offer your majesty a wise decision.'

'Seri Nara diRaja Tun Ali, my uncle? Yes, yes; do bring him over.'

'Yes, your majesty. I shall go to his house and bring him now.'

Bija diRaja excused himself and walked out of the palace. He entered his carriage and went off. Mansur stopped crying. He wiped tears with a piece of handkerchief. The other senior officials looked down. They were also feeling sorry for their sultan. They did not know what to do next. But, they hoped that the matter could be solved amicably.

Tuah and his brother-warriors were exercising in the woods. They performed the *silat* practice amongst the nine of them. 'Why do we all feel jaded today and tired? I want everybody to stop and take a rest,' said Tuah. They stopped.

'What's wrong, Hang Tuah?' asked Jebat.

'Why is everybody moving about like little girls today?'

Tuah sat on the ground. The others followed suit.

'That's because we are not in the mood to do the *silat*,' said Jebat, jokingly.

'What then are you all in the good mood for?' asked Tuah.

'How about relaxing a little, and enjoy some good music?'

'And dance a little.'

'Dance? This is not the time for entertainment. We have a mission. The sultan of Melaka depends on us to safeguard Melaka.'

'Surely, the sultan will understand that we, too, need to have some form of relaxation. Besides, dancing is a good exercise, too.'

They laughed.

'Okay, time's up. Let us dance the *silat* now. Up, up everybody,' joked Tuah.

The eight others reluctantly stood up. They then started to practice the *silat* amongst themselves, as Tuah watched from the side.

Mansur was with Ali that night. They sat in the verandah as it was breezy there and certainly more comfortable. They had eaten a few betel leaves between them and their nerves were calmed considerably. They were now ready to speak. Ali pulled the spittoon and spat some saliva in it. He then wiped his lips with a handkerchief. 'And what does your majesty plan to do with it?' asked Ali.

'I sentence that Tuah be killed, for his crime is too abhorrent to me. I didn't expect for a person like Tuah, a well-known and respected warrior in Melaka whom I have always held in high regard could contemplate to do such a thing, and with a female staff in my palace at that.'

Ali was shocked. He froze in his position. The betel leaf he was chewing choked in his throat. He quickly grabbed a glass of water and gulped it down. 'I beg your pardon. Did your majesty call him to get his confession and ask that he expressed his deepest regret and remorse at what he had done? Or was it just hearsay?'

'Why should it be? Someone whom I respected told me - and I do not doubt him. Don't ask me his name. Why must he create such stories on Tuah? What does he stand to gain?'

'Who, your majesty? Who is this person?'

'It's my secret. I promise that I shall keep his identity a secret till the day I die, or the skies will fall over me.'

'This is not the Islamic way.'

Mansur was shocked. 'Isn't under Islamic law, any person who commits such a serious crime is punished according to the severity of his crime?'

'Yes, it's true, your majesty. But...'

Mansur walked away. 'Enough, Tun Ali. I have made my decision. Tuah must be sentenced to death!'

Ali trailed the sultan as he walked along the corridors. He tried to plead with him. 'Please give me an opportunity to explain myself,' pleaded Ali.

Mansur stopped. 'Hurry, I don't have much time. What is it that you want to tell me?' said the sultan.

'I'm an old man. I served your majesty's father, grandfather and great-grandfather. I beg you to spare his life. Tuah is a young man. He has an exciting future ahead of him. Above all, you might need his skills and expertise in the future. He's your loyal servant. Surely, your majesty can give him a lesser sentence.'

Mansur thought. Ali waited. 'What sentence do you suggest that I should impose on him then?'

'Banish him from this state, so he may not return to Melaka! In this way, the people of Melaka will think that your majesty had ordered him killed. It won't make any difference whatsoever if Tuah is killed or not; he has then become non-existence in the hearts and minds of the people of Melaka. Only you and I will know about what actually happened to him. Not even his own wife, or children will know...'

The sultan thought. 'Is that's what you think I should do? You must be an idiot, Seri Nara diRaja Tun Ali! How dare you make such a ridiculous proposal! Are you trying to make me look like a fool, Seri Nara?'

'No, your majesty. I won't dare do such a thing.'

'I shall order you to carry my order to have Tuah executed. And do bring back his heart so that I can see if my orders had indeed been executed or not. Now go!' Mansur then walked off and left Ali standing by himself in the corridor with his own thoughts. He shook his head and felt sorry for Tuah.

'Very well, your majesty.'

Tuah walked dejectedly in the woods, alone. He had gone there to be quiet. Ali and some men accosted him. They looked sad. They did not feel any joy in seeing Tuah again after so long despite the close relationship that they had established between them. '*Asalamulaikum*, dear Hang Tuah,' said Ali. His voice was cold; he was trying hard to hide his sadness.

'*Mulaiikum salam*, my dear Seri Nara diRaja Tun Ali. What brings you here?' said Tuah.

Ali decided to get straight to the point. 'I've been ordered to have you executed.'

Tuah was shocked. How could it be? He thought he was hearing things. 'Beg your pardon, my lord. Is there a mistake? Did I hear you right?'

'I have been ordered by the sultan to have you executed,' Ali repeated the statement to prove that he did not make any mistake at all. How could he make such a mistake?

Tuah stood there, frozen. 'But, but... How could this be? What did I do wrong? Explain to me, Seri Nara. Tell me Seri Nara! You just can't come here and spring a surprise like that! It's my life that you want to take away, damned it! Surely I need to know why do I have to be executed!'

'You have been charged for having an affair with one of the girls working in the palace.'

Tuah was shocked. He was shocked beyond belief. His voice choked and it held back what he wanted else to say. He took a deep breath and tried to remain calm and collected. 'I strongly deny that,' said Tuah after he had regained his composure. He wiped sweat that had formed on his forehead with the ends of his shirtsleeve on his right hand while Ali and his men waited. He studied Ali's face carefully to see if he was enjoying what he was ordered to do, but could not see any trace of it. Ali did not seem to be enjoying his task. His men did not dare look directly at Tuah's face; they bowed their heads. Tears were rolling down the eyes of one of them.

'Don't cry, young man,' said Tuah.

The soldier immediately wiped his tears with the back of his right hand.

'I shall have you executed, Hang Tuah. I shall also bring your heart to the sultan as proof that I have executed his majesty's command. And don't think

that I am enjoying this, Hang Tuah. The truth is, I am not. It is as difficult for me to do it, as it is for you to accept it. But the sultan's command is a command, and like all of his majesty's commands, it has to be executed. So, please understand me. I'm in a fix myself, Hang Tuah, believe me. You should know how I feel about having to do this.'

'Why then did you accept this task?'

'Do I have a choice?'

Tuah kept quiet. He knew very well, no official in the court of the sultan of Melaka could do much if they were ordered to do anything at the command of the sultan. Even if they had to execute their own wives or children, they would still do it without question.

Everybody froze. Now few more soldiers cried. One of them became uncontrollable. He quickly rushed to the bushes to hide his face. Tuah and Ali could hear him sobbing because it was loud. They ignored him. He was a very young lad, hardly in the late teens. How could he be witness to such a heinous crime? He thought, going to the woods, in Hulu Melaka, at Tuah's hideout was a good experience. It was the first time that he and the other soldiers were going to meet Tuah face-to-face. They all had known about his reputation, since they were babies. Now, the reason for them to be there in Hulu Melaka was not to glorify their hero but to see how their hero was going to be condemned to death! It was just too much for the boys. The young boy continued to sob until he managed to control himself. He alighted from the bushes and returned to the fold. He still did not dare to look at Tuah's face; he bowed deeply down.

'Are you serious? Are you going to do that, Tun Ali, your excellency? With due respect, are you out of your mind?' asked Tuah.

'I have been left with no choice, Tuah. Please forgive me. I'm fond of you as much as everybody else in Melaka, but I have orders from the sultan and no other,' replied Ali. 'On the other hand, if someone of lesser standing and stature than mine ordered me, I could easily scoff at it. In fact, I could even punish him for daring to suggest something as atrocious and repugnant, simply because I have the authority to do so. But, what can I do because the sultan has not left me with any option, other than to carry the command expeditiously. But who'd dare give such commands, other than the sultan?'

'Very well, Seri Nara. I shall obey the sultan's command then. I won't use this against you. Please do so, if this is what you must do! And do it now!'

Tuah threw his *keris* that was the magical Taming Sari. 'Give my Taming Sari *keris* to Jebat. It now belongs to him. He is the rightful owner of this

magical dagger. I have promised him, should anything happen to me, he will own it.'

Ali picked up the weapon and stuck it in his belt. 'This way, Tuah.' He led Tuah to the bushes. His men followed, but he stopped them. 'All of you stay where you are.' They stopped and waited as ordered. Nobody moved even for an inch. They held their breath and waited, frozen in their position, not knowing what to expect next. A long later, Ali alighted from the woods. His *keris* was stained with fresh blood. He held a heart that was also soaked with blood. The men were shocked. They did not expect Ali to kill Tuah with his own hands, even if the sultan ordered him, but this was what exactly what Ali had done. 'Give me a piece of cloth.'

A man handed a piece of cloth to Ali. He took the cloth and wrapped the heart with it. Someone then took a large leaf and wrapped it so that the blood did not spill and stain their hands. 'Let's return to the palace. I must produce this for the sultan to see. I hope the sultan will now be fully satisfied when he sees this.' He gritted his teeth as he said it, pretending to be serious. He did not glance at his men. All of them were shivering. They did not feel comfortable at seeing the fresh heart that once belonged to Tuah, their hero, the Hero of Melaka. He sat in his carriage as his men took him back to Melaka where he had an appointment with the sultan. One of the men was now holding the heart, which was now wrapped in a piece of leaf.

## CHAPTER 7: THE CHINESE 'PRINCESS'

The sixth Ming Emperor Ying Zong of China sat in a pagoda-shaped gazebo in the royal summer palace near the Xuanwu Lake where the cool winds blew in from all directions, because it was strategically built on a higher elevation. From here, he could survey around the place as far as his eyes could see, unhindered. It was much cooler here than in the palace in the summer. In the daytime, he preferred to sit here to do some of his official duties and to reflect. The whole surrounding had a meditative quality about it. The stillness and occasional sounds of the birds chirping was music to his ears. Around it, a well-tended garden spread as far as the eye could see. There was a huge lake where the royal barge was anchored and ready for use by the emperor to sail



around it. It was at a time when the lotus flowers were in full bloom. And swans were swimming about them.

Ying Zong's muscles easily ached from too much sitting and lazing around. Sometimes he preferred to walk about outside in the garden in the royal summer palace. His ancestors built it years ago so they could escape the heat and the boredom they often experienced while being holed in the main palace for too long. Here he felt he could breathe a little bit more fresh air and set his eyes at the trees and flowers that were blooming. He often stared at the surface of the lake, when the winds created ripples on its surface of the water. Few palace assistants stood by at the ready to cater to his every demands and expectations. Four female nurses were there to see their emperor's personal comfort and to give him a light massage especially at the shoulders. They stood there like stone and remained in this position as long as the emperor did not require their services. All it needed was for him to clap his hands lightly or hit the table to bring all of them back to life like puppets. They would then immediately rush to the emperor's feet and await his next royal command. He might want to drink tea, or be given a light massage on the legs or shoulders. All of them took the orders as though they were also god's commands.

Ying Zong was now old and weak. He looked frail. He hardly ever spoke these days. His gait was also slow; he walked with a slow, weak step at a time that it seemed so laborious to him. He liked to think hard, but nobody knew what he was thinking. Nobody could guess that he was thinking of sending his men off to sea in search of new countries to dominate. He was just too old for such exploits, which his ancestor Yong-le would gladly do when he was emperor. Yong-le would send thousands of his men off to sea, on the spur of the moment, without even reflecting on their necessity and importance to the country.

His lord chamberlain went to him with Perpatih Putih of Melaka, the younger brother of Perak. Some of the officials from Melaka were there too. They walked in a tidy row with the lord chamberlain walking in front, with his long-flowing robes wiping the dried leaves on the ground as he walked. As they got closer, with their steps making a crunching sound that alerted the emperor. He knew there were people coming his way. From the sound, he could guess they were quite a substantial group. He turned around, but could still not see them as the trees and branches hid them. In a short while later, they started to appear from behind them, until the emperor noticed them. He was delighted to receive his lord chamberlain and the foreign visitors. He waited patiently for them to kowtow before him. The officials from Melaka

wore costumes that seemed to be out of place with the environment; they were much too plain and less elaborate.

The lord chamberlain went up to Ying Zong and prostrated before him together with the other Chinese officials, while the Melaka officials just nodded their heads. They were not familiar with prostrating like the Chinese, as it was not their custom to do so before their ruler.

'An envoy from Melaka is presenting before your supreme majesty,' announced the lord chamberlain in a voice that seemed loud, but not too disrespectful because the emperor was hard on hearing. Despite that, he hardly heard what the lord chamberlain had just said. Perpatih Putih nodded. The lord chamberlain and prime minister waited. 'The envoy has a letter from his majesty, the sultan of Melaka, Sultan Mansur,' he continued.

'It's true, your supreme emperor,' said Perpatih Putih.

'What's the name of the new sultan of Melaka?' asked Ying Zong. He did not hear the lord chamberlain mentioning the new sultan's name.

'His majesty Sultan Mansur Shah,' replied the lord chamberlain, this time with a voice that was much louder. He wanted to make sure that he did not seem like he was shouting.

Ying Zong cupped his right ear with a hand and nodded. His nurse then bowed and whispered the name in his ear. 'His majesty Sultan Mansur Shah, your supreme majesty,' she said in her tender voice that sounded like a bird chirping. It thrilled the emperor.

'Yes, yes,' said the emperor. 'Sultan Mansur Shah, is his name; now I hear.'

'And his majesty Sultan Mansur Shah has sent a special envoy, Tun Perpatih Putih to have an audience with your supreme majesty. And his excellency has a letter from his majesty the sultan,' added the lord chamberlain.

'I know, I know. Very well, let me have it then. It has been quite sometime since we had heard about Melaka. How is Sultan Muhammad Shah?' said Ying Zong.

The Melaka envoy was surprised. He quickly realized that the Chinese emperor had not been in touch with what was happening in Melaka since he severed diplomatic relations with the state many years ago.

'The late Sultan Muhammad Shah had died, your supreme emperor. His majesty's successor is his eldest son, Sultan Mansur Shah who is the new sultan of Melaka,' explained the envoy in a polite manner.

Ying Zong was surprised. 'I see. Do forgive me, for I am not as young as I used to be and my hearing is not too good either. Other than that, I am fine, as you can see, I can walk around like a young man could. Do you know how old I am, Tun Perpatih Putih?'

'No, your supreme emperor.'

'I'm as old as those hills over there,' said the emperor. He looked at the hills, as the others followed his gaze. They froze in that position until the emperor turned around. 'Now you know how old I am.'

'Yes, your supreme emperor,' replied Perpatih Putih. He then handed the letter with both hands that he stretched towards the emperor, who took the letter, put it close to his eyes, and read it. 'It is written in our language, Mandarin. Interesting!' he exclaimed. 'How did they do it?'

'There are many of our own people in Melaka now, your supreme majesty.'  
'How is that so?'

'They went to Melaka with Admiral Zheng-he, and stayed back. Many of them married Malay women, and they are now able to speak Malay well. However, they have not forgotten to speak and write in Mandarin, too. Some of them are working in the royal palace in Melaka as translators. That's the reason why his majesty Sultan Mansur Shah has sent a letter written in Mandarin.'

'I see, I see. Very thoughtful of him.'

'What does it say, your supreme majesty?' interrupted the Chinese prime minister.

'The sultan of Melaka, Sultan Mansur Shah now wants to re-establish cordial ties with our imperial government of China that were severed for so many years,' said Ying Zong. He then looked up and turned to see the prime minister who was standing beside the lord chamberlain. He did not know what to expect from the emperor. He just waited like everybody else who were there, and put an expressionless face. 'What do you think I should do my loyal prime minister? You tell me.'

'Yes, your supreme emperor. His majesty Sultan Mansur Shah wishes to receive a delegation from China to Melaka, so that his majesty can have an audience with them personally,' said the lord chamberlain.

'It is a good proposal, Tun Perpatih Putih. We will make sure a large delegation will go to Melaka. Because your sultan has sent a senior minister to the court of China, we'll make sure we too will accord similar importance to our relations,' said the emperor to Perpatih Putih.

'Thank you, your supreme emperor. His majesty Sultan Mansur Shah will be extremely delighted to hear this.'

'And we will make sure that his majesty Sultan Mansur Shah will be delighted to receive a special delegation from China, too. We will send five hundred men and women from here together with a senior minister and not just an envoy this time.'

'The relationship between our two great countries has now taken for the better and we must act accordingly. I'm extremely happy that after all these years, your dear sultan has seen it fit to send a large delegation to our court and your excellency as his majesty's special envoy to see us here.'

Perpatih Putih smiled. Ying Zong handed the letter to the lord chamberlain for safekeeping.

'It is a very good idea, your supreme majesty. This should augur well for our two great countries. your supreme majesty's father and grandfather and great-grandfather had established cordial relations with Melaka; it's time for your supreme majesty to follow in their footsteps,' said the Chinese prime minister.

'Very well,' said Ying Zong. He then turned to Perpatih Putih. 'I hope you will have a pleasant time here in Nanjing. I wish to invite you to a state dinner this evening. There is something I would like to show you personally. I'm sure you'll like it.'

'Thank you very much, your supreme emperor. I'm sure I will enjoy it.'

The emperor stood up. He went to the royal horse-carriage. The prime minister and lord chamberlain followed. 'Very well, what your supreme majesty?' asked the prime minister.

'We will send an envoy to the court of the Sultan Mansur Shah. Find a suitable person, prime minister. Ask him to prepare for the trip immediately.'

'Very well, your supreme majesty.'

Ying Zong entered the carriage and it took him back to the palace. Later that night, he entertained Perpatih Putih to a cultural performance. A group of musicians accompanied Hang Li Po who gave an excellent performance. She sang a love song that had patriotic and nationalistic fervor. Her voice sounded like a bird chirping. It was accompanied with the wailing from the bamboo flute played by a musician. It then rose to a sharp and high pitch with the tinkling of the *er-bu* and other string equipment. Those who came from Melaka did not know a word of what she was singing about, except the few Melaka-born Chinese officials who could understand Chinese. They whispered in the ears of the Melaka friends including Perpatih Putih what the singer was describing in her son. It was about how beautiful the scenery in China was.

'Do you like music, Tun Perpatih Putih?' asked Ying Zong.

'Yes, your supreme emperor,' replied Perpatih Putih.

'Is she beautiful?'

'Who, your supreme emperor?'

'The singer. She is Princess Li Po.'

Perpatih Putih turned. 'Yes, your supreme emperor. And she has very good voice, too. And she's a princess?'

'Yes; and I want her to go to Melaka together with the Chinese delegation, so that she can marry your sultan.'

Perpatih Putih was surprised. 'His majesty Sultan Mansur Shah will be extremely delighted to have her as his consort, your supreme emperor.'

'Very well. You surely know how your sultan feels. I'm sure, he will not mind having another wife. I understand Muslim men can marry up to four wives. Is it true?'

'Very true, your supreme emperor.'

'How many wives do you have?'

'Just two.'

'I have one official wife, the empress. But, I have a hundred concubines, may be more; I have lost count on them. Most of them I get to see only once, or at the most two times. But, now I'm old, I don't have any need for them, all of them, except for my children.' He laughed. Perpatih Putih did not know what the emperor meant. He looked at him quizzically. 'Concubines?'

'They're women whom I keep or my personal pleasure.'

'Your supreme emperor is extremely lucky.'

They laughed.

'May be. May be not.'

Perpatih Putih was later reminded that it was the emperor was the one who had recommended that they stopped sending emissaries to Melaka when he was much younger by his prime minister, because they were becoming weary about sending their men out of China. No wonder, the emperor was delighted to re-establish cordial ties with us, thought Perpatih Putih. But, he did not wish to remind the emperor that because he was already too old that he might not be able to remember that incident. He was happy that Melaka was safe all this while that they were not communicating with each other; that the Chinese who lived in Melaka were well fed, and assimilated with the Malays there. Perpatih Putih had to remind the emperor that Melaka managed to maintain its dignity although the Siamese still gave them problems sometimes. Fortunately, they were able to defeat them. He remembered how the Siamese had tried to invade Melaka by land, but was repulsed and driven further back to Kuala Muar. This made the emperor furious. 'Did they do that?' he asked.

'Yes, your supreme emperor,' replied Perpatih Putih. 'But, we were able to repulse them. Later they tried to invade us again by sea, but our navy was able to destroy their ships and forced them to return to their country. From then on, the Siamese finally stopped harassing us.'

Ying Zong shook his head violently. He was very angry with the Siamese. He did not realize what they were up to in Melaka this whole while. 'What are they up to now, the Siamese? Why do they want to be mischievous knowing fully well that they will be retaliated accordingly? I am surprised - shocked by their action!'

'They are keeping things to themselves now. May be they have learnt a valuable lesson from all the nasty tricks that they had done in the past that didn't seem to work for them at all!'

'That's good. Didn't I send few letters for the king in Siam and warned that we'd attack them should they continue to harass Melaka?'

'Yes, you did, your supreme emperor.'

'Why then did they continue to harass Melaka?'

'I haven't the faintest idea.'

'But, I'm glad this episode is finally over now. I do hope Sultan Mansur Shah and his people will now be able to live in peace.'

Li Po was helping in the royal kitchen as one of the many helpers and cooks. They were busy preparing food for the imperial family. Many dishes were cooked and each took hours to prepare. They had to be at the ready round the clock, in case the emperor would require something. He was known to have strange dietary habits that required exotic animals or vegetables sometimes.

The lord chamberlain entered the room and called out of her. 'Is her highness Princess Li Po here?'

Li Po turned. 'Yes, your excellency.'

'Come this way, please. I want to have a word with you.'

Li Po put down a book, wiped her hands with her hands with a handkerchief, went out of her room, and stood in the corridor. She didn't want to be seen with anyone in her bedroom, much less a man.

'His supreme majesty wants you to go with the delegation to Melaka, and marry the sultan of Melaka. Do you agree?'

'Do I have to cook, your excellency?'

The lord chamberlain smiled. Li Po was confused. 'Why is the lord chamberlain smiling?'

'You've been asked by his supreme majesty to go to Melaka to be married to his majesty the sultan of Melaka,' replied the lord chamberlain. Li Po was shocked. 'I beg your pardon, your excellency.'

'You are to go to Melaka to be married to the sultan of Melaka. His supreme majesty Emperor Ying Zong is offering you to the Melaka sultan as his wife, as a present from our country. What do you say, her highness?'

Li Po was lost for words. After a long pause she said: 'What can I say, your excellency? I agree your excellency. How can I ever refuse the orders of our supreme majesty?' Actually she did not have much to ponder on; she could accept the offer, however outrageous it may be. However, she pretended to think about it so that she did not look so desperate. All the princesses living in the palace were desperate to find men who could take them out of their dreary lives in complete seclusion within the palace walls. But what was offered to Li Po was simply outstanding. She never dreamt that her wishes turned out in this way.

'Very well, good girl. Now, you go off for the day, and start to prepare for your trip. Your clothes have all been prepared. They will be sent to your room. Remember: You are a princess from China and you are to act accordingly. Show less excitement and be naïve and dignified. Clear?'

'Me, a princess from the imperial court of China?'

'Everybody in the delegation knows your true identity. They will be ordered to show you with respect as though you are still in China. Moreover, soon, everybody in Melaka will know about it either, including the sultan himself. With a pretty girl like you, he'd even think that you were a fairy.'

'I see.' She still could not understand why she was chosen to undertake the task. However, she accepted it just the same, as it allowed her to leave the palace. She, like many of the princesses always dreamt of going on an adventure, and away from their usual dreary life that they had been leading all these years. It was a possibility that she did not expect to happen, but it happened anyway. Dreams do come true, she said to herself.

'I shall leave you here now as I have things to do, too. You may return to your room and start to make preparations. Good luck, your highness.'

'Thank you, your excellency.'

The lord chamberlain walked away, leaving Li Po alone in the corridor. She felt numb and apprehensive with fright. She was later dressed up in formal costumes of a princess. Few palace girls helped her to put on the dress that had many layers all made of fine silk, bright red in color. Over her face, they put a veil with tiny pearls that hung at the edges. After it was finished, she went to the mirror and looked at herself in it. This was the first time she saw herself in the mirror looking like a real Chinese princess. The other girls waited. None of them knew she was going to be the lucky princess chosen by the emperor himself. They waited for her reaction. She now looked bulky in her new dress and certainly more presentable - like a real princess that she was. Now she looked ten years younger than her true age - twenty-eight - especially

with all the makeup on her face and nice clothes and jewelry that they had heaped on her.

'You look magnificent, your highness,' remarked one of the girls. She knew she was not supposed to say this, but she did, thinking that the princess would not mind.

'Thank you.' Her voice was now different; it sounded sweet, like the voices of the other princess whom she had heard before. She did not look at anybody's face and stared into void. The girls, too, did not dare to stare at her face and talked when asked.

Later, they gave her a manicure and pedicure so that her fingers on her hands and toes were trimmed. And that night before she retired in her bedroom, she was given a massage all over her body so that her body became more luscious and silky. Over the next few days, she was put on a strict diet of vegetables, soup and boiled fish so that her figure could be trimmed to a more respectable shape that it was. She was quite plum before the lord chamberlain went to her and asked her to be a princess.

Li Po sat at the edge of her bed in the new bedroom feeling lost. It never occurred to her that soon she would be sharing a bedroom with a man, her husband.

Emperor Ying Zong sat on a chair and sipped tea. His empress went and sat beside him. 'What's the idea of sending a princess to Melaka, dear?' she asked. 'Why can't we send one of our own daughters over instead?' She should know better because none her daughters, nieces and granddaughters were interested to be a secondary wife of a foreign ruler or his concubine.

'Why should we send one of our maids? The sultan will bound to find out,' replied the emperor. 'Melaka is such a small country. Can't you see how tiny it is in the map? It's so tiny, I can't even see it with my own naked eyes.'

They smiled.

'Precisely.'

'This is a token of our appreciation for him. The sultan of Melaka is not going to marry his first wife! Besides, he is already too old to be marrying a virgin! Li Po is just going to be his secondary wife! There in Melaka every man is allowed to marry four wives.'

'I see.'

'I'd send a real Chinese princess to Melaka to marry the sultan if he's still a bachelor.'

'Good idea, my dear.'

Before Perpathi Putih and his entourage returned to Melaka together with Li Po, he made a visit to the grave of the famous Admiral Zheng-he outside of



Nanjing. When he died at age sixty-four in 1435 CE or 838 AH, or in 4133 of the year of the rabbit or 兔年, he was already a legend in China. He was one of the most prominent Chinese-Muslim personalities in China. China found it fitting to build a large cemetery for him in the Muslim style, although it still had strong Chinese influences. Emperor Yong-le, however died nine years earlier in 1424 CE or 827 AH or in the year of the dragon in 4122, at the relatively young age of only twenty-six! It was three years after he had moved to Beijing - one year after the imperial palace that he had spent fourteen years building was completed. One year after he stayed in the palace, it was hit by a bolt of lightning, and he took it as a bad omen. He was holding court in the Hall of the Heavenly Mandate when it happened. His favorite consort died in the freak accident. This made Zheng-he feel lonely because they were both close to each other. Despite that, he refused advice from his senior officials to move the capital back to Nanjing.

His successor Emperor Xuan Zong who was Ying Zong's father and the fifth emperor, didn't have much fascination for sea adventures, so Zheng-he's future was put on hold, feeling not wanted by anyone.

Perpatih Putih stood near the grave and offered blessings and *Al-Fatihah*. His grave stood above the others because did not look like the graves of other prominent Chinese figures that were wide. Zheng-he's grave looked like other graves of other prominent Muslims everywhere, like a rectangular box that was slanted so that the left side faced in the direction of Mekkah. Perpatih Putih felt sad when told that Haji Zheng-he had lived a miserable life from the time China stopped sending him to sail the seas. He knew Zheng-he was feeling miserable now that the Chinese capital had been moved from Nanjing to Beijing, thus severing his ties with the emperor and senior officials of the palace. He was given a lowly post of harbormaster of the port of Nanjing which he held a while before he decided to retreat in his seventy-two-room mansion and was virtually locked in until his death. For more than a decade after he stopped to sail, he lived mostly as a recluse. Only the Holy Koran was his best companion, and he would delve deeper and deeper into the verses. Worse, when he realized that his achievements had all been destroyed, especially all the records that his scribes that jotted his every move. All the ships that he had sailed in including those that went along with him were destroyed on the orders of the emperor. In all Zheng-he had built one thousand six hundred and twenty-two ships, none, however, survived. Zheng-he remembered how, at one time, he led three hundred ships to sail the seas together with almost thirty thousand men in huge ships. His own flagship was more than four hundred feet long! No wonder, no records of Zheng-he's

achievement and contribution to China and the world ever existed. Xuan Zong was xenophobic and this caused the Chinese to suffer from pangs of guilt on the naval adventures that did not bear fruits as they had expected. He ordered that large ships were not to be built anymore; only smaller ones were constructed for sailing within the region. They were now concentrating more on internal matters and problems more than they did before.

On the way back to the official guest residence, Perpatih Putih made one last visit to the Muslim quarters in the old section of Nanjing. Here he mingled with the people and prayed with them at the main mosque. The people were delighted when he offered to give a sermon or *khotbah* in Mandarin. In his sermon, he encouraged greater interaction between the Muslim communities in China, especially Nanjing with the Chinese of the other religions.

Few days later he returned to Melaka. After sailing for two weeks, the Melaka ships arrived at the port. Perpatih Putih immediately went out of his cabin. 'No, don't dock at the port; we drop anchor here.'

*Nakhoda* or Captain Ahad was surprised. 'But, why your excellency? There is a lot of space in the port for our ships to drop anchor. Besides, it's high tide and we can dock in the port right away.'

'You don't understand. I have a special guest in my ship. I want to get ashore by boat from here, and invite his majesty Sultan Mansur Shah to come onboard and meet personally, Hang Li Po and take her to shore.'

'Ah, I see, very well then. I'll get the men to prepare the boat so that your excellency can get to the shore then.'

'Very good, *Nakhoda* Ahad.'

The captain went to the sailor and instructed them. Perpatih Putih waited. 'Lower a boat and take his excellency, Tun Perpatih Putih to shore,' he ordered his men.

'Aye, aye, *Nakhoda* Ahad,' said the sailors. The men went to the side of the ship and lowered a boat. Perpatih Putih then climbed down the steps and the sailors paddled the boat to shore. Not long later, the boat arrived at the banks of the Melaka River. Perpatih Putih was immediately whisked away in a carriage and sent to the royal palace where Mansur was waiting. He was happy to see Perpatih Putih again after so long and was delighted that the trip he had just made to China proved successful as well as fruitful. After the initial pleasantries had been exchanged and news on the well being of the Chinese emperor were reported, Perpatih Putih related the offer of the Chinese Emperor Ying Zong for the sultan to marry a Chinese princess. But, what Perpatih himself did not know was that she was just a mere kitchen-helper in the Chinese palace in Nanjing. It took the sultan by complete surprise. He did

not realize there was a special present waiting for him in the form of a young Chinese girl. He almost choked. He had to pause for a long time, to gulp some air, while Perpatih Putih stared at his face to see it blush. What was he thinking of, thought Perpatih Putih.

'Unbelievable,' said the sultan. 'Just incredible.'

'Why, your majesty?' asked the lord.

'I was taken by complete surprise. How on earth could the Chinese emperor think of giving me such a beautiful present?'

'Why?' asked the Lord again, in a tone that was similar to his earlier question. He was worried that the sultan was slighted or embarrassed by such an unusual offer. 'If your majesty does not feel like it.'

'Who says so?' Mansur quickly snapped back. Perpatih Putih was surprised at his sudden outburst. He then stepped a few steps forward and whispered into the sultan's ear. 'She's very beautiful. And she is a princess. I was told she is very much a virgin. What do you say?'

The other senior officials waited. They could not hear what Perpatih Putih was whispering to the sultan.

'I will go with you to the ship and see with my own eyes. And then I will decide.'

Mansur was taken by boat from the port to Perpatih Putih's ship that was anchored in the straits. 'I've asked Hang Li Po to remain in her cabin, so your majesty will be the first to see her and to take her onshore,' said Perpatih Putih.

Mansur smiled. 'That what she's called?'

'Hang Li Po.'

'I like her name, Li Po. Hang Li Po.'

Mansur opened the veil over Li Po's face. Her eyes were not round like all the Malay women, but almond shaped. They were sharp especially when she closed her eyelids and looked down. 'Open your eyes, my beautiful princess, look at me,' said the sultan. Li Po did not understand what he was saying. She kept quiet as the sultan waited for her response. He then realized that she did not speak Malay, so he told her in Mandarin. Li Po looked up. She opened her eyes and stared at him. This was the first time she had ever set eyes on Mansur. She tried not to look disappointed that the sultan was much too old for her. But, he was still a sultan and she had no choice but to marry her, i.e. if the sultan wished to take her as his wife.

'You're very beautiful,' said Mansur in Mandarin. He then turned to Perpatih Putih and spoke in Malay. 'Yes, I will marry her and make her my wife. And how old is she?'

'Eighteen.' Perpatih Putih was not aware that he was lying, because he had been told that Li Po was just eighteen and not twenty-eight, by the Chinese lord chamberlain. Perpatih Putih smiled. Li Po was relieved that the sultan did not suspect anything amiss. He was indeed convinced that she was a true princess and was only eighteen years old.

'And what about the five hundred men and women?' asked the sultan.

'His supreme emperor has said that they wanted to convert to Islam and marry local Malay men and women,' said Perpatih Putih.

'What's the idea behind it?'

'Oh, the supreme emperor of China just wanted to encourage greater interaction between our two peoples.'

'I see. Very well, find each of them a partner then. Emperor Ying Zong is such a wise man.'

'Shall we?' asked Perpatih Putih.

'Yes, yes, come my princess, this way.'

They went out of the cabin. Mansur then took Li Po to shore in his boat. Perpatih Putih and the delegates from Melaka and China took the other boats. However, in the excitement of the impending marriage of Mansur and Li Po, they completely forgot that the emperor had agreed to renew their diplomatic relations. It was a week later when Perpatih Putih remembered it, and he immediately requested an audience with Mansur to inform him of this exciting development, to deliver the letter that the emperor had written to him. Mansur was happy that the Chinese emperor had considered Melaka as an important country again.

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*Sultan Mansur Shah married a Chinese princess by the name of Hang Li Po. She had come with the five hundred Chinese men and women who embraced Islam, and soon they were married to Malay men and women. She wore a colorful headgear with a lot of diamonds and pearls sown to it.*

*This was the first time the people in Melaka saw a Chinese woman marrying a Melaka sultan; they were delighted. Li Po looked demure. They remarked how fair she looked. From then on, all the other Malay women who were married, copied the headgear like the one she was wearing together with her costume, and soon it became accepted as part of the Melaka Malay wedding costume for the women.*

*He had earlier married a Javanese Raden Galoh Chandra Kirana, the daughter of the Majapahit Ruler, King Sang Aji-ningrat and Queen Raden Galoh Dewi Kusuma.*

*In the meantime, a close friend of Hang Tuah, Hang Jebat learnt that Tuah was killed on the orders of the Sultan. He became very angry. Jebat retaliated by molesting a housemaid in the palace. He then ran amok and took over the palace of the Sultan of Melaka causing misery to the people of Melaka.*

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Jebat ran amok one night. Because it happened so suddenly, everybody was taken by complete surprise. Nobody knew why he did it. They knew he became erratic when news of Tuah's death was spread all over Melaka. Besides, just a day earlier, he seemed normal and even joked with everyone he met. This was something he never did before and would never do, since his life was devoted towards safeguarding the sultanate and the people of Melaka. Now he had become a changed man, a traitor (*derhaka*) in the eyes of everybody in Melaka - a deranged person! Nobody thought it could happen so quickly. He was normally a person who had such a cool disposition. He hardly spoke to anyone, except to Tuah whom he had a special bonding with. They were like twins who knew each other's feelings. But all this changed when he heard Tuah had been killed and his heart was produced before Mansur. If Ali himself had not brought it to the palace, Jebat would have doubted it if Tuah was killed.

The people did not know why Jebat had suddenly acted strange and ran amok. Although he had behaved erratically for the past few weeks, none of them had expected him to take control of the whole palace, and created havoc throughout Melaka. The state came to a complete standstill because of his action. The traders who were starting to return in droves to Melaka to trade took their goods away for fear of being robbed and their ships burnt. Nobody knew that he could go to that extent of causing untold damage to the state. He was in fact, challenging the institution of the sultan itself something that they tried to defend with their lives in the past. The people thought it was treacherous! It was serious indiscretion, whose only punishment was public beheading, should he be caught alive! How on earth did he go to this extent? Jebat, was the most faithful friend of Tuah's; they were inseparable, like twins. There was no advance warning from him like he was slowly going mad or sick. Jebat just went to the palace, overcame the guards, and killed those who stood in his way. He then killed all the soldiers, guards, and rushed inside the palace. They were shocked; they did not know that Jebat had wanted to wrest control

of the palace; otherwise, they would have stopped him to enter it. As a brother warrior and one of the five decorated heroes of Melaka and close confidante of Tuah, Jebat could move about freely in the palace and the whole of Melaka. He had a good reputation. No one doubted his sincerity to the sultan and the state. What more since he and Tuah had repeatedly showed their loyalty to the sultan and state, and had shown heroic deeds that would be remembered by the younger generations to come. Both their names were synonymous; they would be mentioned in all the history books on Melaka. Because of that, nobody in the palace and Melaka expected Jebat to act so irrationally and to run amok in the palace. Was he possessed by the devil? Many of the people in Melaka thought so. They discussed amongst themselves of this possibility. Few said that Jebat might be suffering mentally while fighting from the many wars he had taken part in. Others claimed that they knew Jebat was forced to do such a thing, because he was distressed by what had happened to Tuah. The sultan had sentenced that Tuah be executed and that was what made Jebat go mad. This was what everybody in the palace and the whole of Melaka thought. They could not think of other excuses or reasons for Jebat's sudden lapse of judgment. He lost his balance and his sense of reasoning. He could have easily taken over Tuah's place in the palace and be the new state hero, but he decided to fight back. He wanted to avenge his anger at the sultan for personally ordering Tuah's execution. Jebat's loyalty was to Tuah and to no one else. If he had been more religious, he would not have resorted to harming anyone, even if his close brother, Tuah was so treated. What happened to Tuah had stirred the hatred, jealousy and humiliation that he had been enduring quietly all this while. He knew he had been cast in the shadows of Tuah for far too long. Now was the opportunity for him to prove to everybody, especially Mansur that he, too, had integrity and could stand the test of time and that he was the master of his own destiny.

'Get out of my way! Go, go, I said! I am Jebat! Yes, I am Jebat the traitor!' he shouted. The men continued to attack. Jebat killed many more men in few short swish of his magical Taming Sari. They fell in a pool of blood clutching their stomach and groaning in intense pain. Jebat knew exactly to slash them, at the thickest veins and nerves. He made sure those he killed died instantly; he did not want any of them to die slowly. He hardly looked at those who attacked them; he only used his sixth sense to fight anyone who had come in his path. He was swift; he made sure nobody suffered unnecessarily; if possible, with the least flow of blood, because he did not want the palace to be bath in the blood of the Malays. Even despite that blood still flowed and soon the whole palace and its compound had bloodstains all over, some in puddles;

others in large drops. They all died in one stroke of his *keris*. But, he had no choice; he would let their blood flow elsewhere so that the floors in the palace were not covered in it. The whole compound of the palace too was covered with blood that quickly dried in the hot sun, thus a rancid stench the people could smell it from far. This made many of them vomit. They immediately rushed back as far away from the palace as they could.

Jebat went to the throne room. More guards rushed into the palace. They tried to get at him, but they were all killed instantly. He then rushed to the sultan's bedroom and locked himself. He hurled the bed sheets and pillows on the floor. Fortunately, the sultan was not in the palace at that time, otherwise, he would have been slaughtered, too, by Jebat, or at the very least been held ransom. He had an ax to grind with the sultan. A palace girl who had been hiding behind the cupboards in there screamed. It shocked Jebat. 'Don't scream!' shouted Jebat. 'Shut up!' He put his hand on her mouth. She tried to calm herself down, but could not. The sight of Jebat made her feel scared for her life what more now that he had his hand on her mouth.

'Don't harm me, Hang Jebat,' she pleaded for her dear life.

'I'm not going to harm you. Why should I harm you, you sweet little thing?' He then pushed her to the bed.

After he had his share of fun, he returned to the throne room to sleep, feeling exhausted, tired and worn-out. He let the girl slip out of the bedroom to go to the kitchen where few other palace girls were hiding.

Next morning, the palace guards knocked on the doors and windows. They wanted to try to break them down, but they had all been fastened from inside and held with thick wooden beams or spears that Jebat had pulled from the walls where they hung as decorations. Jebat awoke up. 'Shut up!' he shouted with his voice breaking and sounding coarse. 'Get out of here! I am the new lord of this palace! Just leave me alone!'

'Open the door!' shouted the guards from outside the palace.

Jebat went to the window and opened it. He saw many palace guards and village folks in the compound. They were not trying to get at him. They were just spectators who were curious at what was happening in the palace. Jebat picked a spear from the wall and hurled it at them. They rushed back. Fortunately, the spear missed its target. It was stuck deep in the ground. This showed how hard Jebat had thrown the spear. If it had struck a target, the spear could have easily gone through the person's chest and the man would have died in an instant.

Jebat grabbed more spears and hurled them outside at random. 'Go away! I am invincible! I have this magical Taming Sari in my hands. Here.' He held the weapon in the air.

The men gasped, they were horrified at the sight of Jebat now looking awful and the magical Taming Sari *keris*. They knew Jebat could not be killed because he had the magical weapon in his hand. Everybody in Melaka of all walks of life knew how magical the *keris* was, too. They were told repeatedly that this particular weapon was responsible for Tuah to defeat all the enemies of the state. Melaka would have gone down to the enemies long ago if he did not possess the magical and mystical Taming Sari.

'I'm doing this as revenge against Mansur for ordering the execution of my Hang Tuah! Now, I want all of you to go to your own homes and mind your own business. I don't want to harm any of you. Get out of my sight, hear? You've got nothing to do with this!'

Some guards tried to get at him, but they were pushed back. They fell to the ground, but unhurt.

'Idiots! Haven't I warned all of you enough?' shouted Jebat. He saw many guards and soldiers lying dead there. They had all gone down in his hands, but Jebat did not feel any guilt or remorse. He then slammed the windows and went the kitchen. He saw more soldiers lay dead in pools of blood in the corridors; they too had died in his hands. There were few palace girls in the kitchen. They were frightened and looked pale when they saw him enter the kitchen. They clung together. 'Make me some coffee. I'll be in the bedroom,' said Jebat, before he barged out of the kitchen.

'Yes, Hang Jebat,' said the girls. 'Anything you say.' They were relieved that Jebat hardly glanced at them. They quickly made some coffee and sent it to him.

The second palace or royal retreat of Mansur was hidden deep in the woods in the hinterland in Hulu Bertam where Parameswara had built and it was inaccessible to all. He called it the Bertam Palace. It was well hidden that no one could see it from a distance. There were roadblocks at many places along the Melaka River leading to the palace. It was virtually impossible for strangers to get to there, unless if they had any business with the sultan. This was the sultan's retreat. He normally went there to get away from his official duties. Here, he could be a normal person, tending to his farm and garden. Occasionally, he went hunting in the woods or to fish or sail in the nearby stream. After he felt refreshed, he returned to Melaka and resided in the official palace to continue with his official duties



Mansur looked angry. He stood in the verandah and felt like he wanted to strangle the imaginary Jebat that was appearing in his vision. He hit the wooden beam above him and the whole palace shook. He shook his head violently, in order to remove the image of Jebat from his mind. He was disappointed that not all his men were capable of arresting one person, Jebat.

'What do we do now?' asked the Perak. 'Many of our men have fallen at his feet. He is invincible.'

'Can't our men subdue him? Is he alone? Don't tell me that hundreds of our soldiers all fully armed cannot bring him down or destroy him? Is he with his other brother-warriors as well?'

'No. Jebat is alone. He's more dangerous alone than if he's in the company of his brother-warriors.'

'Why? Can't all our men tire, outwit and defeat him?'

'Because his brother-warriors could put some sense in him...'

'Why then can't the soldiers and guards subdue and kill him, too? Send more to the palace until Jebat the traitor is killed.'

'It's impossible to do that, your majesty.'

'Why can't two thousand men tackle him alone?'

'He's in possession of the magical Taming Sari.'

The sultan was shocked. 'What? Didn't Seri Nara diRaja Tun Ali take it from Tuah before he was killed?'

'He did, but Tuah gave strict instructions that the *keris* be handed to Jebat; it's for him to use to safeguard your majesty and the state. But now he's turned around and used it against us.'

The sultan shook his head. The prime minister waited.

'What about Lekir, Lekiu, Kasturi and his other brother-warriors? Can't they be enlisted and subdue Jebat? Have you asked them?'

'Yes, your majesty.'

'And what did they say?'

'They said that none of them could do it. They have gone to the palace, but were rebuked by Jebat.'

Mansur cupped his face with both hands. 'How can I face my people? What will they say about this? Surely, we can do something to outwit, overpower, and destroy Jebat. Why did he suddenly run amok like that and take over my palace? What sin have I committed in his eyes?'

'Jebat is angry your majesty had ordered the execution of Tuah.'

'Is that so?'

The prime minister nodded. 'And he wants to seek revenge? Hasn't he killed enough people already? Does he want my head, too?'

'Yes, your majesty.'

'Did he say that?'

'Not in exact words.'

Mansur dropped on his knees. 'Why, why? Why did I order the execution of Tuah? If Tuah is still with us, I'm sure he can tame Jebat.'

The prime minister went to the sultan and helped to prop him up. 'What's done is done.'

'Why didn't I just give Tuah a warning not to repeat his mistakes and spare his life? Why did I have to be so mean to him, dear *bendabara*? It must have been influenced by the devil to do it. I didn't mean it! I didn't mean it! The sultan almost broke down. He shivered and sweat-beats formed on his forehead, face and neck.

'It's Allah's will.' This was all that the prime minister could say to relieve the sultan who was still anguished and tormented by his personal indiscretion and high-handedness.

'What can I do now, *bendabara*? I'm at wit's ends.'

'We can wait until Jebat is exhausted.'

'It will be too late then; there will many more deaths. Where is Tun Ali?'

'Probably at his home.'

'Get him.'

'Very well, your majesty.' The prime minister went out of the palace. He entered his carriage and went off.

Jebat sat in bed with few palace girls that night. They fed him with fresh fruits and tried to be as calm as possible although they still feared for their own lives. The usual cheerful look that these girls used to have had now disappeared. They looked scared, pale, haggard due to the lack of sleep, and fearful of the uncertain condition that they were all in at that time.

Then suddenly a soldier broke open the windows and tried to get inside. Jebat stretched his left hand, picked a dagger, and hurled it at him without even turning his head to look at him. The dagger hit the poor soldier at his chest. He fell to the ground and died in a pool of blood with his spear still clutching his hand. The others who were waiting in the compound quickly grabbed him. They were shocked. They immediately took him away, and hoped his life could be saved. But it was useless; he had died even before they managed to grab him.

'Send him to the medicine man,' suggested another soldier. Few soldiers rushed the injured soldier away.

Jebat then went to the window and stared outside. 'Go away! Go away, all of you!' he shouted on top of his voice. 'Go away, all of you, animals!'

The soldiers and villagers moved back a few steps. Jebat continued to stare, and they moved back a few more steps until they were out of his sight. Jebat then closed the windows.

Mansur left the bedroom and went to the verandah of the Bertam Palace, which was built by Parameswara as his hideout. Ali was standing there with Perak. Perak had told him what the sultan wanted from him to do, so he already knew why he was there now.

'My dear, Seri Nara diRaja Tun Ali. What can we do? Please tell me. You are a wise man. Hang Jebat has taken over my palace for weeks now. And he is not showing any signs that he is about to give up and desert it,' said Mansur. Ali and Perak who were there felt sorry for him. They had never seen Mansur look so haggard and helpless like that before. The problem had indeed taken a toll on him. 'I'm helpless. If we do not contain him fast, the foreign enemies will take advantage of the situation and attack us. May be Jebat had become a foreign agent.'

Ali realized that Mansur himself had become crazy. His mind had become groggy with his hair disheveled and unkempt for lack of sleep and worrying too much. He also felt sorry for his new Chinese wife, Li Po who had just come to Melaka to be away from her Motherland China, only to be accorded with this kind of shabby treatment. She was held a virtual prisoner in the palace in Hulu Bertam.

'Why have all the soldiers and villagers not been able to outwit him?' Ali asked Mansur.

'No, Jebat has in his possession the magical Taming Sari.'

'I see. Because of that, he is invincible! How nice!'

'Why didn't you take it from Tuah? If Tuah is still alive, I'm sure he can do something to overcome Jebat. Tuah is more powerful than Jebat in many ways.'

'But, still Tuah needs the magical *kenis*, for without it, he can't do anything to Jebat. Jebat will still have the upper hand.'

'What do we do? I wish Tuah were still alive and well.'

Ali thought. He did not know if it was prudent if he broke the secret of Tuah's existence. Would the sultan get angry with him? Ali was confused. He then decided to take a risk. He just stood there as Mansur waited.

'Well, say something, Ali.'

'He is, your majesty.'

'What do you mean? Didn't you execute him in the woods?'

'No.'

'But, didn't you bring his heart to the palace to show to me?'

'I do hope your majesty will forgive me. I didn't execute Tuah!'

Mansur was shocked. He stammered; he could not believe what he was hearing. He felt cheated, but he forgave Ali for his disobedience. He wanted to thank him profusely, but he had to maintain his composure and dignity. He told himself mentally that whatever it was he was still the sultan of Melaka and Sultan Mansur Shah was his name. He said this in order he could maintain his decorum and composure. 'Then, what? I mean... Hurry; don't keep me in suspense. Already you have made me feel and look like a complete idiot!'

'I spared his life, and asked that he remained where he is now in Hulu Melaka. I brought back the heart of a goat to the palace.'

Mansur did not know what to say now that the secret on Tuah had now become known. Ali and Perak waited to see if he was going to get angry. Perak and Ali exchanged furtive glances. Perak then touched Ali's hand to assure that everything was all right.

'In that case will you then bring him back here immediately, so I can hug him and seek his forgiveness for mistreating him?' said Mansur, excitedly. He knew his problems were now over.

'I'm not sure,' said Ali.

Mansur shoulders suddenly dropped. 'Why? This is a royal command!'

'He might feel angry.'

'Tell him I feel sorry for mistreating him like that. He did not deserve to be so treated.'

'I'll try and pester him, but, I can't promise.'

'You do your best; I'm counting on you.'

Some soldiers tried to get to the palace. They were shocked when Jebat suddenly flung open the front door. They jumped off the stairs and ran for their lives. Jebat rushed at them. Few of them were immediately killed while the others managed to escape in the nick of time. They prayed to Allah for protecting them. 'Don't you dare to come back here again!' he screamed at them. Few men rushed and attacked Jebat. But, he was quick with his moves and as such, he was able to evade their attacks. Despite not having proper sleep, he was able to stay awake and alert to face all of them. Some men threw spears from afar, but Jebat managed to stay clear of them. They then shot arrows. Again, Jebat avoided all of them. They were stuck all over on the palace walls. The others hurled stones on the roofs to make noise in order to disturb Jebat's concentration - to annoy him and to create some psychological disorder in his mind. When it was getting unbearable, Jebat decided to give chase. The men ran for their lives. He then rushed to the throne room and

threw himself on the throne of the sultan with one of his legs sitting on the side.

The palace girls appeared with food and they fed him with their bare hands.

Tuah was fishing alone in the river. He had adapted well to life in the woods, away from the limelight of public office. He was feeling contented with his new lifestyle that of a fisherman. The people of Melaka now realized that he did not exist anymore although this was the least of his problems. To all of them, including the sultan, Tuah was dead. His body must have decayed, and what remained of him were just bones. His grave was also not marked. Nobody knew where it was. Most likely, they thought, Tuah was not even given a decent burial. His body was just thrown in the jungles to be devoured by wild animals. However, unknown to many, Tuah was very much alive. His only concern now was to maintain his family, and son-in-law Brother Nadim, whom he wanted to groom into a warrior like himself.

Ali's carriage stopped near the river. He alighted and looked around and saw Tuah and called, 'My dear Hang Tuah.'

Tuah was shocked to hear his name. He turned. Ali went to the banks. He was surprised that Ali would lower his stature to pay him a visit, after what he had done to him. 'Yes, my dear Seri Nara Tun Ali. What brings you here? Are Melaka and the sultan now better off without me? I bet they are, for how could they be if Tuah was still alive?'

Ali ignored Tuah's insinuations. He knew Tuah was not aware of what was happening in Melaka then. 'I wish to have a word with you.'

'No, you can't do that, because I'm supposed to be dead,' said Tuah jokingly. 'You're now meeting a spirit.' Tuah paddled his boat to the banks. He shook Ali's hand. 'Let's sit over there,' suggested Tuah. They went to the wooden bench and sat together.

'Jebat has run amok and he has seized the sultan's palace. Many of our men and guards have been killed,' explained Ali.

Tuah was shocked. 'Did Jebat actually do that, Tun Ali? I just can't believe it. What pushed him to that extent? And what can I do besides?'

'You must return to Melaka and outwit him. Many of our men have died in his hand. He's just too good for all of them. Only you can handle him; you know his every move.'

'But.'

'Sultan Mansur Shah knows everything and he regrets his past actions. He has asked me to come here to get you to return to the palace.'

Tuah stood up. He thought hard as Ali waited impatiently. He considered it a betrayal to the sultan if he could not convince Tuah to return to Melaka and pay the sultan a visit at the Bertam palace where he was now hiding and feeling frightened like a mouse. 'But, Jebat is not an easy person to outwit; he knows my every move. You know we grew up together. On top of that, he is now in the possession of the magical Taming Sari. So, what use is for me to handle him?'

'We really have no choice. Hundreds of our men have been killed, and hundreds more badly injured. None of them was a match for Jebat. How could he sustain for so long? His intense hatred is what's driving him crazy. We thought he would tire himself in a few days and we could just get him while he is worn out.'

'But, no, he is still as strong as when he first barged into the palace like a crazy elephant. He trampled everything that stood in his way. He showed mercy to no one, including the sultan himself. That was weeks ago. Only now, he looks shabby... You might not recognize him at all if you see him again.'

'Don't expect him to look like the last time you set your eyes on him. He hasn't cut his hair, beard, sideburns and mustache! He can pass for an evil monster. At least you can match his skills. Surely, you can tame him, even without having the *keris*. Give it a chance.'

'I, I...'

'Please, Tuah, the sultan and the whole of Melaka are counting on you.'

Tuah thought and then said: 'Prepare, and we can return to Melaka right this minute. We have no time to waste.'

Ali was relieved; he knew he could count on Tuah. Tuah, too, knew the tragedy of the state had preceded his personal strategy so he was more than willing to forsake his dignity and confront Jebat, so that the people of Melaka were safe from harm by him. His priority for the sultan was secondary to the security of the people.

Tuah walked down the stairs of his house. His son-in-law, Nadim followed behind him. Ali stood near his carriage and was ready to enter it. His wife and three children, including Nadim's wife were not around. They had gone elsewhere that day. Thus, the task of having to explain to them of his impending trip to Melaka was now left with Nadim alone for there was no one else who was there at the house.

'Where are you going father?' asked Nadim.

'I am going to Melaka, my dear son-in-law. I have some work to do there. I will be back soon. Tell your mother that your dear father will be away for a few days. And don't worry about me.'

Nadim kissed Ali's hand and hugged him.

'So, this is your son-in-law, Tuah? He looks like a warrior, too. Do you know how to do the *silat* son?' said Ali.

'A little, sir,' replied Nadim.

'Show me some.'

Nadim then showed some *silat* moves; they were impressive and skillful.

'My, you're good; very good.'

'Okay, son; now, return to the house, and inform your mother-in-law and wife that I will be away in Melaka for a while, will you?' said Tuah.

'Very well, father,' said Nadim. He stood in the compound and looked at his father-in-law entering the carriage with Ali. He waved at them, as the carriage took off with both of them inside. They were heading towards Melaka.

'Your son-in-law looks exactly like you, Tuah, a warrior,' said Ali. 'He will definitely make a good warrior like you, too, I'm sure of that.'

'I hope he'll grow up and be a useful person,' said Tuah. 'My prayers will be answered if this happens. I'm counting on him more than my own son, Tun Biajid. He's my only son, and other than that I have two daughter, Sang Sirah who is Nadim's wife and Sang Sabariah.'

'I'm sure he will.'

'I want him to serve the sultan like his father does.'

Li Po walked to the garden with the girls-in-waiting. She was wearing Malay clothes with a *selendang* or shawl over her head that made her look like a Malay woman. She looked worried. Her two sons, Paduka Seri Cina and Paduka Mimat were playing in the gardens with boys his age. Their parents wanted them to be aloof of what was happening in Melaka then. They were probably thinking that they were brought there to the second palace for a long holiday.

'Why is this happening, my dear maids? Isn't Melaka supposed to be a peaceful place, an abode of peace as they say?' asked Li Po. She spoke in Malay but with a very thick Chinese accent.

Mansur appeared. He overheard her. 'It is, my dear.'

Li Po and the girls were surprised to hear the sultan's voice. They turned. The girls then bowed and walked away so the royal couple could be alone. Mansur went to Li Po and looked at her straight in her eyes. 'Why are you so worried about, dear?'

'There's no peace in Melaka.'

'Peace will return soon, I promise you. These are trying times, but I assure you everything will return to normal and we can resume our lives.'

'Why all the discord and misunderstanding? Aren't Melaka supposed to have disposed all of its enemies?'

'There was some misunderstanding. Unfortunately, the enemies are now from within the state, and this is horrible. It's a small matter; it will be solved expeditiously. Hang Tuah will return to Melaka and he can help us to turn things around so we can return to the palace in no time.'

'Hang Tuah? Who is he?'

'He is a Malay warrior who had once served me. Now, he is hiding in Hulu Melaka. But, the Seri Nara diRaja Tun Ali is bringing him back to serve me. He can overcome Jebat.'

'I hope so.'

She then went to the swing and sat. The sultan pushed it gently. Li Po let the winds caress her face.

'Are you homesick, dear?' asked Mansur.

'A little.'

'We can make a trip together to China when the right time comes so that I can get to meet your parents. We cannot leave Melaka until it is safe to return.'

Li Po was shocked. She quickly cut in. 'My parents have died.'

'Oh, really? I did not know that.'

'When?'

Li Po quickly changed the subject. 'I better return to the palace, dear. I'm getting under the weather.'

'Very well, I'll see you later at lunch.'

Mansur then stopped the swing. Li Po immediately rushed to the palace with all the girls-in-waiting trailing behind her. Mansur kept quiet and looked at her until she disappeared into the palace. He felt guilty for not making her life in Melaka a happy one.

Jebat rested on the throne with both his legs resting on its sides, looking menacing as ever. He was in a mess. His clothes were soaked in sweat, and he had not changed them for days. Moreover, he stank like a skunk; worse, he looked like a person who had been possessed by the devil.

'Hey, Jebat, open the door, so I can see your face!' shouted Tuah from outside the palace.

Jebat recognized the voice. But, he thought he was just dreaming. How could Tuah return from the dead? May be he was Tuah's ghost who had returned to see him or somebody who was impersonating him.

Tuah decided to return to Melaka, although he had made a personal vow not to do so. He went directly to the village where he lived as a child in Duyong where he was born and grew up at. In the middle of the village was a



well that he had helped to dig. He went there to clean himself up, prayed for divine guidance, and put himself in a trance. His brother-warriors - Kasturi, Lekir and Lekiu stood beside him and provided company. Tuah did not like what he was going to do, but he had no choice. Jebat had done something that was so horrendous that made Tuah furious. This was the first time Tuah was so angry that he wanted to eliminate even his own brother-warrior.

After a day of meditation and preparation, Tuah set off to palace of the sultan of Melaka. He left Duyong Village late at night so that he could arrive in Melaka early next morning. He did not want the people of Melaka to know that he had returned.

'Who are you?' asked Jebat tersely. He was angry because he was rudely awoken from his slumber.

'Hang Tuah, your brother,' replied Tuah.

'No, he's dead. The idiot sultan executed him. What is his name? Do I really care who his name is now?'

'You remember my voice; I am standing outside. Open the door so you can see my face! I'm not a ghost! If I were a ghost I'd be hovering all over you now and not be standing outside of this palace!'

Jebat pushed the palace-girls aside. They fell to the floor on top of each other. They immediately picked themselves up and rushed to the adjacent room. Jebat stood up and opened the window to allow some fresh air to come in. He also wanted to see for himself who the person outside was, whether he was Tuah or some impersonator who sounded like him. His voice sounded similar; Jebat recognized it immediately, even when Tuah was shouting on top of his voice. Tuah had never shouted like that before. He must be very mad; otherwise, he would not have shouted like a man possessed himself, thought Jebat.

'Where are you?' said Jebat, as he surveyed the compound of the palace. It was bare and quiet. He glanced around. Tuah stepped a few steps forward and showed himself. He looked clean and immaculate, unlike Jebat who was messy and dirty. Jebat was shocked; it was indeed Tuah, he was not seeing a ghost or an apparition either. Tuah had worn his favorite clothes so Jebat could recognize him immediately. Nobody in the whole of Melaka had such fine clothes and headgear that he alone knew how to tie around his forehead. He also noticed how Tuah stood, with both legs slightly apart at the ready. His own *kerris* was stuck in his waistband. He wore the leather sandals the type that he alone possessed in Melaka. The design, pattern and shape were distinct. They were also Tuah's favorite sandals compared to the others that he usually wore. So, Jebat knew he could not be mistaking Tuah for anyone other than

Tuah himself. Tuah did not die after all, thought Jebat. Ali did not execute him!

'Indeed, it is you, Tuah. How did you return from the dead? What brings you here? Or are you a ghost who had returned from Hell?'

'I'm here to throw you out of the palace; you have become a traitor, Jebat! Open the door, I said so that we can talk some more in comfort and in peace,' said Tuah. 'Let me in so we can talk like two adults, two old friends. Surely, we have so much to talk about after all these months.'

Jebat went to the front door and opened it slightly. He saw Tuah climbing up the stairs after removing his sandals at the bottom of the stairs. He entered the palace and walked pass Jebat. Jebat tried to shake his hand, but Tuah pushed it aside.

'There's no need for that, you traitor!' said Tuah. 'How could you do this to the sultan and Melaka? He did not do anything to harm you! How dare you to bring misery to the people of Melaka and put everybody to ransom like this? Even the foreign traders and merchants have fled the port; it will take a long time before they are convinced that Melaka has returned to normalcy. Why didn't you think about all this before you start to wreck havoc on the palace and the lives of the people of Melaka and the foreigners who now live here? How could you do that? Don't you have any human feelings in your heart that you could use to stop you from ever thinking about doing such nasty things? Answer me, Jebat! Answer me now!'

Jebat kept quiet; he felt guilty. Tuah had given him a mouthful, and it had softened his heart a little. Just a little. But it was all too late; everything had been done; many people of Melaka had also been killed. Could he turn the clock back and pretend that nothing of this sort had ever happened? No way!

'I'm doing all this because of you, my dear Hang Tuah.'

'No, you didn't do it for me; you were doing it for yourself. You wanted to get even with me. Now you are getting the attention, but unfortunately, it's for the wrong reasons.'

Tuah entered the throne room where Jebat had gone. Tuah started to move a few steps forward. He wanted to get closer to Jebat who moved a few steps back. And they moved together like in a dance with each other checking their every move. Jebat held his magical Taming Sari tightly as a show of defiance with his right hand stretched out. Tuah noticed it and thought he had no chance if they fought. He wondered how he could grab it from him. Tuah did not pull his *keris* from the scabbard and let it stick in the waistband, to show that he was not fearful of Jebat despite him having the magical *keris*.

'What do you want from me now?' asked Jebat. His voice was now coarse. Tuah aimed to hypnotize Jebat and distract him from the *keris*. He knew Jebat was dead tired. Soon he would be too exhausted to stand on his own feet. Tuah wanted to tire him further, and he wanted to do it by acting on his psychology. He also wanted Jebat to feel slightly guilty so his attention was distracted. He knew Jebat's weaknesses, but now it was not right to exploit them. Tuah who was always the smarter than Jebat, knew when it was ripe to attack. It was not yet time. Tuah moved around and around Jebat to make him feel dizzy.

'I'm here to seek revenge on behalf of the sultan. Let's fight,' Tuah proposed.

'I'm not going to fight with you. I don't want to hurt you, Tuah. We are on the same side, remember?'

'Not anymore, not anymore. Prepare yourself now! Fight!' Tuah started to challenge Jebat and raised his voice. He had not raised his voice at Jebat like that before the whole time they were together. This took Jebat by surprise. Tuah was not angry with Jebat; all that he wanted to do was to weaken his inner strength by doing this. Tuah could see that Jebat was taken aback; his concentration was slightly distracted. Tuah was still not holding his *keris*. Both his arms are free of any weapons. He held them wide. Jebat, on the other hand, drooped. Both his shoulders dropped thus making his body looked smaller than it was. His right hand that held the Taming Sari fell loosely to his side; even his grip on the *keris* was weak. He was a pathetic sight for Tuah to behold. He had never seen Jebat in this condition before.

'No!' screamed Jebat. He did not want to fight with Tuah. He still felt that both of them were on the same side. But, how could Jebat explain that to Tuah now that Tuah had taken the side of the sultan?

'Fight with me, I said!' insisted Tuah.

'No, I'm not going to fight with you!'

Tuah stepped a few steps forward until he was close to Jebat. He then pushed him. He fell back. 'Fight, I said!' shouted Tuah.

Jebat got annoyed. He held out his *keris* and tried to get at Tuah. And they started to fight. Tuah immediately pulled his *keris* from the scabbard and they both started to fight it out. Tuah showed their immense skill at *silat*. However, he found it difficult to overpower Jebat. After a long while, both were tired. They stopped and stood at both ends of the wide throne room, panting and catching their breath. Tuah had never panted like this before. He and Jebat were soaked to the skin and the floor was wet with their sweat. In the past, all that he needed to do was to make a few moves and his enemies fell to the

ground. However, this time, the person he was opposing was none other than Jebat himself so he could not take him for granted. Jebat proved to be a strong opponent to him than he had thought. All the preplanning and steps that he had taken did not help much. It had even made Tuah slightly groggy, from all the moving around and around Jebat that he had to make.

'Are you crazy, Tuah? You know as long as I am in the possession of this magical Taming Sari *keris*, nobody, including yourself can't harm me!' shouted Jebat.

Tuah froze in fright; he knew what Jebat said was the most correct. He too had depended on the magical weapon for his personal protection on numerous incidents when they were in Majapahit and during the many battles that Melaka had fought against their invaders. Without the weapon, Melaka would have fallen in their hands by now.

'We'll see. Let's resume fighting.' Tuah went to Jebat and they fought it out again. Jebat ran to the corridor. They continued to fight there. Men started to pierce long spears and swords from below the raised floor of the throne room. Tuah and Jebat quickly pulled the thick bronze trays from the wall and dropped them on the floor so the spears could not prick their feet. Tuah then went to the windows and shouted to the men outside, 'Move to the back you fools! Let us fight here by ourselves! This is between the two of us!' He then threatened to jump out of the window by climbing onto its ledge. The men rushed few hundred feet backwards. 'Go away, or I'll get all of you!'

Jebat then closed the door while Tuah helped to close all the windows. They then resumed to fight till night fell, until they became so tired. Tuah had to seek permission from Jebat to leave the palace to rest. Jebat too suggested that they cancel the fight until they were well rested. Tuah then left the palace and this impasse allowed Jebat to sleep on the throne, alone. Next day, when Tuah had refreshed himself, he returned to the palace. He wore new clothes and looked fresh, feeling more eager to defeat Jebat. He knocked down the door. Jebat immediately woke up. He went to the front door and opened it. Tuah asked Jebat to resume fighting, as was the habit of warriors before they start to fight.

Tuah jumped at Jebat and they continued to fight. In the long struggle that lasted for hours, Tuah finally managed to grab the magical Taming Sari from Jebat's hand. Jebat knew he was now in great trouble. He knew once he had lost his magical *keris* he would not be safe anymore, his end was near. Tuah then trusted the *keris* in Jebat's abdomen the moment he got the opportunity. But it was Jebat who deliberately gave him that opportunity by not protecting himself. If he had continued to defend himself, Tuah would need many more

hours of fighting before he could eventually kill Jebat during which time, it was Tuah who would end up as the victim and not Jebat. Jebat wanted to give up, but not to surrender. So, he just let Tuah grab his magical *keris* so he could die in Tuah's hands.

Tuah immediately felt regret. He knew he did not mean to kill Jebat, but he had to as he was on a higher command, from the sultan of Melaka. What more, Tuah felt that since Jebat had killed so many innocent people, he deserved to die, too. So now, Tuah felt less remorseful. He started to feel it was his duty to eliminate Jebat.

Tuah turned around. He did not dare to look at Jebat with all the blood oozing from the gushing wound in his abdomen. He turned around and walked down the stair. He did not tell anyone that he had stabbed Jebat, so no one knew if Jebat was injured or killed.

The men and villagers were relieved to see Tuah walking down the stairs. They knew Jebat had been killed, otherwise he would not have left the palace with the Taming Sari in his hand. It had bloodstains on it - blood that surely belonged to Jebat. But none of them had seen him, or his corpse. So, they were still worried, if what they had heard was a rumor or a hoax. So, they decided to stay clear of the palace until news that is more positive was forthcoming.

*'Allabukbbar! Allabukbbar!* they shouted on top of their voices.

Tuah continued to walk away from the palace with the bloodstained Taming Sari in his hands and returned to Hulu Melaka to be with himself to console his guilt. He was never seen or heard of again, since then.

Jebat quickly recovered from his wound. It was a gashing wound, but it did not instantly kill him. Tuah did not actually stab his abdomen hard, but it was fatal. It did not kill Jebat. On the other hand, it made Jebat more furious. He stood up and ran to the side-room of the palace. He grabbed a piece of cloth and tied it around his stomach to prevent more blood from oozing out of his wounds. The cloth like his clothes soon turned red as his blood sipped to it. He closed all the doors and windows and sat on the floor in darkness.

The people who were still standing outside were shocked. They could see clearly that Jebat was badly wounded when he was shutting all the windows and doors. He was not dead yet. There was still life in him. None of them knew just how badly injured he was. There was no way for any of them to find out. From the looks of it, they felt Jebat was very much alive and strong, otherwise, he would not be standing on his feet to close all the windows and doors of the palace. Fortunately, he did not have in his possession the magical *keris*. They knew he was not invincible anymore. He was now vulnerable like

anyone. During the confusion, many of the palace girls took the opportunity to sneak out of the palace when Jebat was confronting Tuah in the throne room and when they realized that Jebat was injured. All of them escaped via the back doors.

Jebat was now left alone in the palace with nobody to cater to him. He remained in the palace for few more days because he did not know what to do next as his health further deteriorated. He cursed Tuah for not killing him altogether instead when he had the opportunity to do so.

The Melaka soldiers did not rush into the palace to get him because they wanted to let him die slowly and painfully alone by himself. They wanted to let him suffer in humiliation with everybody looking and staring at him as his body wilted away, until only his carcass remained. Despite that, they were aware Jebat was still very dangerous. Even without the magical *keris*, he was still powerful; he could easily kill few more people with his bare hands and feet. He posed a greater danger to everybody in Melaka now than he did before - as a wounded tiger, he did not have much to lose. He still had some life left in his body that he could still use to inflict damage to the country or anyone who would dare confront him. What did he want to do next? Jebat was confused. The blood in his body had depleted considerably and it affected his reasoning. He felt like fainting, but he still tried to resist such temptations. He recited few verses that he had memorized in order to awaken his body. He was now using his spare energy, that the amulets that he wore around his neck, waist and wrists could provide him. He believed in the magical powers of the amulets or *tangkal*. However, one that was supposed to protect him from being stabbed by a dagger or spear or any other sharp object, apparently had failed him.

Few days later, Jebat decided to leave the palace. He opened the front doors and stepped down the stairs. The men guarding outside the palace were shocked. They immediately rushed off, dropping their weapons. Jebat was now pale and sickly. His eyes were black and glazed. He stared into void in a fixed gaze. Some of the Melaka men fainted upon setting eyes with him. He then started to attack the men who were still there. Many were killed because they could not flee in time. The others ran in all directions and were thus safe from Jebat's attack. Few of them fell in the wells or bushes.

Jebat rushed to the public square nearby and continued to run amok. There were many people of all races doing about their business at that time. They were all shocked to see Jebat loitering around with a *keris* in his hand there. It was soaked in blood. He looked more like a devil than a human being. His hatred and the pain he was suffering as a result of stab in his abdomen had

completely contorted his face beyond recognition. Because of that, he looked pale due to all the blood that had left his body. He continued to kill anybody who came in his way, including women and children. He showed no mercy. Even at his very end, he still had the power to inflict damage and maim more people who stood in his way. He then went to the nearby village and killed more people. By noon, he was too tired and exhausted because much of his remaining energy and power was spent at the square. The hot weather helped to weaken him further. He tried to get some water from the well, but fell in a loud thud. He died with his face slumped onto the ground.

The people started to crowd around him. However, none was brave enough to touch his body. They feared Jebat might suddenly wake up. He could still be alive, they thought. After a few hours, a man who braved himself went to him. He lifted Jebat's right hand. It was limp. Jebat had died. 'He's dead. *Allabukbbbar!*' cried out the man excitedly.

The others rushed to crowd around him. They then dragged him by the hand out of the village, like a useless carcass. 'Get this animal out of here!' a man shouted.

Other men and women, who were hiding behind the walls of their locked houses, peeped through small cracks in between the planks. They then realized that Jebat was dead. They saw the villagers dragging his body and his face had turned blue. They immediately flung open all their windows and doors that were sealed with wood. They rushed outside to follow the small group of men who were taking Jebat's body away from the marketplace. They shouted with joy that alas, Jebat was defeated. They knew Tuah had gone to the palace to confront Jebat. Now Tuah had triumphed over him, and Melaka was again at peace.

Soon, the procession became large. More and more people from other villages joined them. They brought out gongs, symbols and drums and they hit them in joy and merriment. They continued to march all the way to the beach, where they left Jebat's body there to rot in the hot sun. They hoped some wild beast would come out of the bushes to eat whatever that was left of his body. Such was their hatred for him. They had no compassion for him after what he had done over the past few weeks. He terrorized and traumatized everybody in the state and did not listen to anyone, including the high-ranking palace officials who respected in the past. He was so obsessed with the destruction of the sultan that he lost whatever reason that he once had.

It would take a long time for the pains the people of Melaka had experienced over the past few months, to heal. Many of them had friends and relatives who had perished in the hands of Jebat, the devil. Now they were

happy that he was dead. Melaka and their lives had returned to normal. Everybody was relieved.

Jebat's body continued to decay on the beach until his skeletons started to show. The intense heat of the sun had hastened the drying up of his skin and flesh. Some monkeys picked at his flesh and ran off with samples of it into the nearby jungles in the bushes and hills. Unfortunately, there were no lions or tigers in there; otherwise, they would gorge at Jebat's carcass with glee like it was a feast. Fortunately, too, it was far away from the nearest village, or the stench would be unbearable for everybody.

It was one week later that some good Samaritans appeared. They picked Jebat's remains and brought it to *Kampung Lapan* or the Eighth Village in the Bachang district by boat. They wanted to give him a decent burial but changed their mind because the village was too far away from the river. These people were mostly from *Kampung Lapan* and they were low ranking officials. They were more sympathetic to Jebat than the others. In fact, *Kampung Lapan* was the village was created just for these junior officials of the state. Other villages that the sultanate had created were *Kampung Ampat*, *Kampung Lima*, *Kampung Enam* and *Kampung Tujub* or the Fourth, Fifth, Sixty and Seventh Village that were in the *Trangkerab* and *Bachang* areas.

Jebat's supporters did it when everybody in Melaka was busy with their lives. Some were nursing their wounds. And the traders and foreign merchants were slowly returning and dumping their goods at the port. The people of Melaka continued to celebrate by hitting brass gongs, cymbals and whatever that they could lay their hands on. They made loud noises everywhere for weeks as Jebat's body lay on the beach before it was picked up unceremoniously by his relatives and friends. There was nobody there, except his close relatives, brothers, and sisters; all had discreetly gone there to pay their last respect. The women made sure they wore an extra *sarong* over their faces to hide them. They chose to bury him in a vacant space by the Melaka River and across from the Javanese Village and covered it with shrubs so no one noticed it. The grave did not have a tombstone for a long time, so that it's existence was known only to a few close friends of the late warrior. This area was also close to a Chinese village and because of that, they thought it was safer to bury him there. Much later, more and more Chinese *towns* and moneylenders started to take over the land from the Malays in this village that it finally became a Chinese area.

Jebat's relatives could never consider burying Jebat in a Malay village such as *Kampung Hulu* nearby because many of the people there had lost some friends or relatives in the hands of Jebat. Those who were still angry with him



might vandalize his grave. In fact, some of Jebat's own relatives, too, had died when they tried to stop him from inflicting further damage to the others who were still in the palace and to those who were bent on attacking and subduing him. They knew Jebat was possessed by the devils and it was not he who was responsible for the carnage. So they just couldn't care a hoot about what he had done; what more when they also came to know about the sultan's personal misdeeds and indiscretion and betrayal of the people who had put their full faith in. To him, they were all the same. But because they did not come out in full support of Jebat. The sultan did not see it fit that they, too, were punished, after the whole episode ended with the death of Jebat. Because of that his remaining relatives were not charged for collusion, since some of their own relatives, too were killed in trying to put to a stop Jebat's futile amok. Some of them even pitied Jebat's relatives because they had to carry the stigma of being his relatives all their lives.

Later, a few of them decided to leave Melaka and start life anew elsewhere, where nobody knew them. Others remained in Melaka, and away from the limelight. Once when they were proud to be related to Jebat, now they were less so. However, to some of elders in Melaka, they knew very well that something of this magnitude would happen to Jebat some day. But none of them had expected him to run amok like he did. He had often shown his tantrums and bouts of schizophrenia and was always easily agitated when he was young, but this was still not a good reason for him to behave so rashly. Jebat could still control himself even when he was under severe pressure or mental strain. He still had his other brother-warriors - Kasturi, Lekir and Lekiu to depend on for advice. The rapport that Jebat had developed with Tuah could not be the reason for his stubbornness. It so happened that because Tuah was much older and wiser than Jebat that Tuah could provide him support for Jebat in his training. This should explain why now with Tuah executed, Jebat felt alone and useless. But, the least that they had expected him to do was to run amok and chase even the sultan of Melaka out of his palace. They, like everybody in Melaka - more so the sultan and the other palace and senior officials just could not understand how a renowned warrior in Melaka like Jebat could be tempted by the devils and satan to do such an unimaginable thing like that. If he was a lowly soldier, they would have understood it. But, Jebat surely had enough wisdom that could stop him from being influenced by the devil and satan or anyone, especially when he was in his prime! He had a glorious future ahead of him. Surely, there were other ways that he could resort to than to use his magical Taming Sari to inflict damage on lives and property. Without the *keris*, he would not run amok. Many people in Melaka thought

that if Jebat was not in the possession of the magical *keris* he would not be so tempted to act rashly. Some even blamed Tuah for leaving the *keris* in the hands of Jebat.

Much later, when the dust had finally settled on the issue, it became more aware that the real reason why Jebat ran amok was because he was unhappy and disgusted with the way Mansur had conducted himself in the palace. He had kept a large harem of beautiful girls from many Malay states. Many of them were from China. Many of the senior officials, too, were on the take and were totally corrupt to the core. They ignored the people's well being. The sultan shirked his religious duty and was not especially pious. This irked Jebat; did not expect for a sultan and the senior officials of Melaka to behave like animals, for they failure to conduct themselves according to the teachings of Islam. The palace had become a vice den and a place of sin! Because of that, he decided to run amok so that it could help to clean the palace and Melaka.

Tuah's incarceration and later, execution only helped to provide him with the excuse to run amok. Many scribes had noted this fact, but they were not brave enough to write it down for fear of being chastised and even executed by the sultan. This explains why the real reason why Jebat run amok wasn't revealed to the public in Melaka as well as in the other neighboring Malay states whose leaders were also shocked with what happened. It even escaped Tuah's knowledge because he was away from the country. He was quickly appointed the *laksamana* or admiral of Melaka with the title *Tun* and was called Laksamana Tun Tuah. He was sent to sail the seas to visit distant lands, as soon as he had finished contemplating in the woods. However, many suspected that this was not so. Tuah never sailed the seas as what the palace criers had claimed. He immediately went into hiding at a place that nobody in Melaka knew, except for Ali. There was no record of Tuah's exploits overseas and he did not bring back presents or foreign envoys to prove that he had indeed traveled far and wide. Tuah also did not know that Jebat did not favor Mansur marrying a Chinese princess and for showing favors to many Chinese traders and merchants. They brought him expensive and wonderful presents, and in exchange, they received kickbacks in the form of land around the mouth of the Melaka River and other properties, which should rightly be given to the Malays who were more deserving. Corruption amongst the senior and junior palace officials was also rampant. Jebat saw it all, right before his very eyes, and he was distressed by it all. But, it took Tuah's 'death' at the order of the sultan to push Jebat to do the unthinkable. He had wanted to cleanse the palace and the sultanate of rogue officials, all of whom were Malays. Above all, he wanted the sanctity of Islam upheld. Then he realized that the reason why

the Chinese emperor had sent a young Chinese girl to Melaka to be married to the sultan was to soften the sultan's heart. No wonder, after his marriage to the Chinese girl whom Jebat thought was just a kitchen-helper, and not a princess as what everybody in Melaka had thought she was, Mansur changed drastically. He showed more favors to the wealthy Chinese traders and merchants. They came to the palace anytime they wished. They even barged in the middle of the sultan's meetings with his senior officials. On few occasions, Jebat too, witnessed it and it made him furious. When it happened, his face would be severely distorted. He looked more like a tiger that had gone on with food or drinks for days or weeks. Those around him did not dare come close to him for fear of receiving the brunt of his anger. How could the sultan treat the foreigners when his loyal Malay subjects were living in bare existence? This was how the Eighth Village was taken over by the Chinese. The Chinese knew how to manipulate the sultan. His main weakness was women. So they provided him with a host of beautiful Chinese women where they spent together at secluded places; often in the huge mansions of the rich Chinese *toukays*, and drinking Chinese beer and even smoking opium called *madat*. Jebat was furious because of this. It was not so much as he had wanted to seek revenge for the 'execution' of Tuah.

Those scribes who knew exactly what actually happened to Jebat hoped that when the story behind him running amok was related, his name could thus be seen in better light. They knew he would be seen by many, not as a traitor of the state of Melaka, but as a real hero of the people. They feared Tuah had not been dutifully informed of the happenings in the palace whilst he was away, presumably dead in Hulu Melaka.

Some of Jebat's close relatives could not get in touch with him. All of them had thought that Tuah had died because he was also badly injured. They were certain if Tuah knew why Jebat had ran amok, he'd be angry, too, with the sultan of Melaka for shirking his duties and for neglecting his religious obligations to the people of Melaka and the state. Even before Mansur returned to Melaka following the death of Jebat in Tuah's hand, his men and palace criers had gone throughout the length and breadth of the state, all the villages and market and other public squares to spread lies about Jebat's sins. They had unabashedly described every conceivable detail, however preposterous and unlikely about Jebat's so-called folly. Most of them were outright lies that they had concocted in order for Jebat to defame without being given the opportunity to defend himself. They purposely wanted to misinform the people of Melaka including those foreigners and permanent residents of the state especially those Chinese whom the sultan had shown

favors in the past. And the people believed in everything they heard from the criers. The sultan tried to convince the people, especially those foreign traders that the situation in Melaka had returned to normal soon. But despite his pleas, many took the first available junk back to China. Fortunately, the Northerly winds were blowing so many of them took whatever that they had and returned to their homeland. They wanted to see if the situation changed before they decided to return to Melaka to resume their business. The whole port at the mouth of the Melaka River was at a standstill. Even the other Malay traders who had returned to Melaka turned around and returned to their own lands, for the same reason that Melaka wasn't a safe place to be at. Some locals fled upstream in their boats; they took their horse and bullock-carts and fled to the woods where they lived in their secondary homes. Only much later, after Jebat's death that these Chinese and Indian traders returned to Melaka. First, they sent their assistants and spies to determine if it was indeed safe for them to return.

Jebat was defamed even in death. And from then on, the Taming Sari *keris* was handed to the sultan for safekeeping; also, to ensure of his own divinity.

## CHAPTER 8: THE ATTACK ON KAMPAR

Sultan Mansur Shah returned to Melaka from his hiding place, with a heavy heart. He took the royal barge from his hiding place upstream in Hulu Bertam where he had been holed in his palace for many months. This was the place where his ancestor, Parameswara had built as his first palace. Although he was relieved and was able to return to Melaka, still he felt guilty and remorseful with what he had done in the past to earn Jebat's ire. He promised to mend his ways and become a better ruler and person. Nevertheless, he was happy for his wife, Li Po who sat beside him in his royal carriage. This was the last thing she had expected to see in Melaka, after what she had been told of the state as being peaceful and serene. His first wife, the sultanah sat on his other side. He turned around and saw that she was smiling. She was equally relieved that they were able to leave their hiding place and returned to the palace.

Mansur was not certain if they could return directly to the palace because it had been turned upside down and it was not a welcome sight. Everywhere he looked at it, he saw images of Jebat lurking. He knew he was returning to his

palace in Melaka with a lot of reluctance, but he had to because his people were expecting him there now that Jebat had been obliterated. He pitied his people who had to bear with Jebat's tantrums. Many of them had died an unnecessary death. They were mostly the young and able, who had many years ahead of them to serve the state and their families. The bodies were taken away by their relatives and friends to be given a decent burial. They died as heroes of Melaka. Jebat was the last thing that was on his mind now.

Mansur did not want to think of him anymore. He was relieved that Tuah had re-appeared from the 'dead' and destroyed Jebat. It must have been such a traumatic experience for him to have to do that. Tuah had no choice. With all the damage that Jebat had inflicted on the palace and the people, he did not deserve any sympathy. Whatever good deeds he had shown to the sultan and people of Melaka in the past were erased completely from everybody's memory.

Mansur and his two wives were paraded in the streets. The people welcomed them warmly. They felt sorry that he had been so treated by Jebat. But the sultan decided not to stay in his main palace, but another smaller one on the hill. He did not like the idea of returning to the palace he believed was haunted. So, he decided to build a new palace for himself. The old one where he and his ancestors had stayed since Parameswara built at the foot of the Melaka Hill was now haunted, because of Jebat's exploits there. He feared his life would be constantly disturbed if he continued to remain in the old palace. Furthermore, the wood had deteriorated as a result of all the weathering and beatings that it had managed to endure all these years; especially with Jebat's folly and with all the men dying in the palace in his hands. This made the sultan weary about returning to that palace. It had become haunted that nobody wanted to come near it. Nobody knew just how many people had died there in Jebat's hands. They were simply too many. Surely, there were too many restless souls lurking in every room in the palace. Nobody knew when they were going to strike and in what form. Every night the people could hear sounds of men and women screaming! It was haunted. Even the shamans and *bomohs* from the state and those who had been brought in from elsewhere could not pacify their souls.

One day the rice they were cooking mysteriously turned red like blood; then the next day, somebody would go in a trance and pranced about in the palace like he was possessed by some evil spirits or hallucinated. They spoke a language that was not Malay or any of the dialects in the Southeast Asian region; nor was it Chinese, Indian or Arabic. Nobody dared to pass by the old palace even in bright daylight for fear of being accosted by these lost souls.

Even the tall trees that grew around the palace now looked like huge creatures which were eager to pounce on anybody who dared to come close. The Chinese leaders in Melaka offered to appease the evil spirits that might inhabit in the palace and its spacious compound and chased them to the sea, but Mansur rejected the idea. He thought it was against Islam for a palace of a Muslim ruler to be subjected to such a practice. However, they still conducted special prayers within the confines of their temples and tried to ward off the spirits.

Mansur was right when he ordered that the old palace demolished and a new one built in its place at the foot of the Melaka Hill. This was where all his ancestors had lived in, where the state was government. It commanded a view of the straits, but hidden so that enemies could not attack it from sea by the tall trees. It could even bring added stature to the sultanate and the state itself. On top of that, it gave all the artisans and workers jobs to perform and some income as well so that they could use it for the welfare of their families. Most of all, he wanted it to signify the start of his life in an era of peace and stability in Melaka.

In the meantime, Tuah had gone into hiding again. However, this time, he was not hiding from the sultan or anyone. Only his children, son-in-law and wife knew where he was, but they were not about to tell anyone where it was. He just wanted to be alone in the hinterlands so he could be at peace with himself again, now that he had destroyed Jebat and was able to reappear in public. He wanted to keep peace with himself. And for that, he just wanted to be left alone. He wanted to meditate and perform his religious obligations and prayed alone. Even his own wife and son were not allowed to come near him. Only later did he relent.

However, just after Mansur's new palace was completed it mysteriously caught fire and burnt. The sultan and his family had just started to move in and slowly getting used to the new surrounding. He was shocked. He thought it was not a good omen. Such a building could suddenly light by itself and razed to the ground. Nobody knew how it happened. It caught fire one night and it spread too fast with the strong sea breeze, before anybody could raise an alarm. May be it was a Divine way of cleansing Melaka which had just seen a blood bath like they had never seen before. Even the Melaka River flowed with blood, the blood of it's own people and not their enemies.

Word later filtered to the ordinary folks in Melaka that the kitchen first caught fire and it spread quickly throughout the palace. The men who first saw the first sparks could not do much to kill it. They then shouted on top of their voices. More men rushed to the palace to try to douse it with water that they

collected from the nearby Melaka River and sea. They formed a long human chain and carried tins of water from one man to the other from the nearby sea and Melaka River, until they got to the palace. But, it was to no avail. The fire was too strong for them. Fortunately, Mansur and his family, including those who lived in the palace were alerted just as the fire started to happen. They quickly rushed out of the palace to safety. They were grateful that nobody perished in the fire or was injured. Fortunately, the sultan's personal belongings and treasures were also not yet transferred to this new palace, otherwise, they, too, would have perished in the fire. Some of them were priceless manuscripts that the royal scribes had written on the history of Melaka. Many were manuscripts of literature or *bikayat* that told of stories and adventures of legendary and mystical personalities in Melaka and the other Malay states, such as *Hikayat Panji Semarang*, *Hikayat Malim Kundang* and so on. And this did not include those stories that were brought by the Arab and Persian traders to Melaka and so on. They were all written on cow or goatskin and were bound together and kept in stacks in the huge wooden or metal trunks in the sultan's private study, where he would read them repeatedly.

The sultan thanked Allah the Almighty profusely for saving him and his family and those who lived in the palace. He then offered prayers, incantations and meditation for a whole week as a special devotion to Allah for keeping them from harm, while fasting from sunrise to sunset. Feasts were held so the people did not have to cook in their houses. In this way they could also prepare their houses and start a new life. Consequently, the people grew more attached to the sultan now than they did before. They pitied him more now because of the string of calamities that had befallen Melaka and to him personally. It must be distressing for him to have to deal with such problems. Just when Melaka was starting to return to some form of normalcy and the people were starting to return to their daily routine after what they had gone through. Above all, he realized his folly and he promised to Allah that he would mend his wayward ways so that he could serve the people of Melaka, especially the Malays and his religion more diligently in the future. 'There must be a good lesson from all this,' he remarked. 'In Islam it's called *iktibar* or lesson.'

'Indeed, your majesty,' replied the prime minister.

'*Iktibar*. Melaka will be better off now,' said the sultan. 'We've learnt many valuable lessons from Jebat's amok and the fire on my palace.'

The people agreed.

Mansur hoped a new episode in the Melaka sultanate and his reign would open. Those Chinese traders and merchants and other individuals who had let

him astray, found it necessary to flee from the state. They fled the country when Jebat started to run amok; they feared if they stayed, Jebat would eventually get them. They knew how much Jebat hated all of them. Now, the sultan began to surround himself with many pious men and be more religious. He wanted to show a good example to all of them. He had learnt his past mistakes and did not want to repeat them. But, he still regretted that he did not realize that earlier, so that lives could thus be saved and Jebat would not be so tempted to inflict damage to the palace and state. He regretted how he had ordered Tuah's extermination, although he was later relieved that he was not executed after all.

Mansur stood in the compound of his old palace that was razed to the ground feeling relieved that nobody was hurt. He just stood there with his eyes fixed on whatever that remained of the palace. He never thought he could get the opportunity to see the palace burnt down in his lifetime, but it did. It had stood since his ancestor, Parameswara, built it till now. He regretted that he had to be the sultan to witness this. He then turned around and looked at his officials. They had been waiting patiently for his commands.

'We shall build new palace at another place,' said Mansur after the palace had been razed completely to the ground and the last roof had collapsed to the ground in a puff of dust clouds. What remained now before his very eyes were charred remains in black - of the poles, beams and other assorted parts of the former palace. Those who had worked hard on its architecture stood in silence. They felt sorry to see all the laborious work they had put for many months could be demolished in a matter of days. Mansur stared at the charred remains of the former palace, as though his life was unfolding before him. How frail was human existence, he thought. Human beings plan, but it was God who decides, thought him. Mansur began to feel his position, too, was as frail as the palace. He did not know how long the sultanate of Melaka would remain intact, as it was if indeed it could last forever and ever. He walked towards what was formerly the main entrance of the palace, with his officials and the ordinary citizens of all races - the hoi polloi - crowding around him. He was eternally grateful to all of them for bearing with him and for remaining loyal to him despite the many problems that he had faced in the past. He admired them a lot more now for sticking with him through the thick and thin.

'We will build a new palace that will be much bigger than the one that had got burnt,' announced the sultan as if the others around him had not heard him say it earlier. 'We want it to be built by the beach over there.'

The men and women of all races who were standing in front of him clapped their hands. 'Long live Sultan Mansur Shah! Long live Sultan Mansur



Shah!' they shouted on to of their voices. They knew what their sultan was thinking of. He wanted his new palace at a new place away from the old one. The palace would be on the banks of the Straits of Melaka. They knew he was not afraid of foreign attacks anymore, because Melaka was not strong and able to withstand any attack that came from the sea.

This was the first time in its history, Melaka had a palace that not only sat at the foot of the Melaka Hill, but on a beach facing the straits, too. However, what the people did not know was that Mansur wanted to live in a palace by the beach so that he could see what was going on at the port. From the palace, he could see every ship, junk and boat arriving and leaving the port, twenty-fours a day. In this way, he could check corruption and under the counter dealings that his port officials were known to be engaged in. And that all ships leaving for China or elsewhere were taxed accordingly. He deliberately didn't want to inform any of his four *syahbandars* or harbormaster about this strategy less they would feel slighted, although the sultan knew that they were on the take.

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*After the death of Hang Jebat, Melaka continued to experience peace again and it began to prosper with Sultan Mansur Shah surrounding himself with pious men who acted as his close confidante.*

*Not too long afterwards, Seri Nara diRaja Tun Ali died and Tun Mutabir was appointed Chief Treasurer or Bendabari with the same title as his father.*

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Sultan Mansur Shah's new palace was completed after few months during which time hundreds of workers, artisans and carvers worked tirelessly around the clock. He brought them from many neighboring states such as Johor, Jambi, Kampar, Bengkalis, Karimun, Bentan, Muar and few others. Because of that, the new palace had many features from these countries. He his family moved in without further delay. They had stayed in the Bertam palace for too long, while his men and officers worked on the new palace. They only stopped briefly to eat and perform their prayers or to have a brief rest. Mansur visited the site and offered encouragement. He also occasionally helped to carry beams of wood and other items. Once, he even carried a pole together with the other workers and artisans. This often made the workers feel uneasy.

Mansur ordered his men to build a secret chamber in the ground of the palace, just below his bedroom where he wanted to keep the priceless manuscripts and other items. They were safe there, he thought. On many lonely days, he would open the secret door in his bedroom, entered the secret chamber, and read the manuscripts. There were also many gold items and priceless treasures in the royal regalia and family heirlooms that he had wanted to pass on to his eldest son, Ahmad, the crown prince of Melaka. He was destined to ascend to the throne in the event of his demise. Other than the sultan, only Ahmad knew where the treasures were hidden in the grounds of the palace. He made his son to promise that should anything happen to Melaka or the palace, the first thing that he would have to do was to collect the treasures and take them away, before they were stolen or destroyed. The most prized item was the mystical Taming Sari *keris*.

'I promise, father that I'll keep them,' said Ahmad.

'Do remember always, son, these treasures and gold do not belong to you or our family. They belong to the people of Melaka.'

'Yes, father.'

When he had finally settled down, Mansur immediately set out to chart out his plans to invade Kampar in Sumatra. He called his senior officers to the verandah of the palace. They sat cross-legged on the wooden floor and over betel leaves, discussed the possibility of exerting the might over Kampar and bring back Melaka's to its former glory. Its image had suffered, especially with the turmoil, which was due in most part by the folly of just one person, Jebat. Because of him, the foreign merchants and traders were not attracted to visit Melaka to bring their goods as they did before. They were fearful that the turmoil would cost them greatly. Only some small traders returned, but they did so almost reluctantly. Mostly, they returned because they had some unfinished business to settle with the local traders, whereas the more established traders and merchants were reluctant to take the risks. They decided to sail elsewhere with their goods and traded with other people in the region. Melaka's image and importance as an entreport suffered as a result. Despite whatever that the sultan had done to enhance his image and the prestige of Melaka as an important port, the traders and merchants refused to return.

'What do we do?' asked Mansur. He sounded desperate.

There was no answer. His senior officials could not think of anything to say. Mansur thought seriously. After much reflection, he saw it fit to try to bring back glory to the state. There was only one way that he could do that, by attacking some other neighboring state and bringing their leaders down to

their knees, and dominate them. He was confident that it could help to turn things around in Melaka. Its fortunes could be changed as a result, he figured. His officials sat cross-legged and chewed more the betel leaves. They were confused with the sultan's new proposal, unsure if it would work.

'Do you gentlemen agree with me?' asked Mansur, after he had described to them his plans.

The prime minister looked at the *temenggong* and the other senior officers. They nodded. They had no choice. The sultan had described his plans in detail that they simply could not disagree with him more - not that they could, given the circumstances and his personal insistence. He glanced at all of them; he knew his men were behind him. They thought the idea was feasible and most appropriate for the moment.

'Yes, your majesty,' replied Mutahir.

'If that's the case I shall appoint you, Tun Mutahir to lead our men to invade Kampar in Sumatra,' said the sultan. 'And I want you to take Khoja Hassan with you so both of you can combine your experiences together and bring glory to the state.'

Mutahir turned to look at Khoja Hassan. He smiled and said: 'Very well.' He welcomed any adventures outside of Melaka, especially on smaller and weaker Malay states in the immediate precinct of Melaka, for he saw the potential of taking his cut and making his booty from them. Such was the person known as Mutahir. He had secretly hoarded his fortunes from such adventures and from the foreign traders and merchants on the side, while performing his official duties. He had also saved so much wealth that nobody knew how much he was worth. He did not let anybody know of his secret desire to take control of Melaka. He thought, if Parameswara could come all the way from Palembang and turned a small and relatively unknown fishing village at the mouth of the former Bertam River into what it was now, surely, he too, could become it's next ruler. Nobody knew he was this ambitious or was aware of his devilish and secret intentions. No wonder Mutahir hardly smiled at anyone and pretended to bow lower before the sultan than anyone.

Mansur was pleased. He was relieved that there was not a single dissenting voice from his officials. He then turned to Khoja Hassan and asked: 'What do you say, Khoja Hassan?'

'Your wish is my command, your majesty,' replied Khoja Hassan. Mutahir smiled sheepishly.

'Very well, we attack Kampar, and after that we will send another group to Stak. This time I want to send Seri Udani as the leader for a chance so that

both Mutahir and Khoja Hassan can rest,' Mansur then turned to Udani. 'What do you say, Seri Udani?'

'I agree, your majesty.'

A fleet of ships from Melaka immediately sailed to Kampar in Sumatra as the winds were blowing that way. The journey by sea should take one-and-a-half day. Kampar stood just across the straits from Melaka. Mutahir led the Melaka forces. He decided against sending his admiral or a much bigger fleet. He thought that since Kampar was just a small state, it still had its wealth and royal heirloom that they could take. It should be worth all the trouble and risks that they had to take, although they were insignificant considering the better-equipped forces from Melaka. Since Kampar had a poorly-equipped army and navy he decided to send in a small fleet that could do the job equally well without bringing harm to the Melaka men. He expected his men, to just walk through Kampar unhindered without experiencing any retaliation from the Siak forces. Mansur's spies had earlier brought back information that said that the Siak forces were fragmented and broken up in small groups and distributed throughout the state, and disillusioned. They were in no position to launch a counter attack.

Mutahir stepped out of his cabin to get some fresh air. He went to the deck and stared at the distance, towards Sumatra Island. Khoja Baba went to him and said: 'Excuse me, my Tun Seri Nara diRaja Tun Mutahir.'

'Yes, Khoja Baba.'

'We will arrive in Kampar by dawn, sir.'

'Very well, are our men ready to launch a surprise attack on Kampar?'

'I'm sure our men are. And they're eager to fight, sir.'

'Who is the leader of Kampar now?'

'King Jaya, sir. Demang is his prime minister. Its capital is known as Old Town or *Pekan Tua*.'

'How far is Old Town from the sea?'

Khoja Baba was not too sure. He turned to the Captain Dol. 'How far is it, Captain Dol?' asked Khoja Baba.

'About half a day's walk, sir.'

Mutahir nodded. 'Very well, we will set up base by the beach, and at night we walk to Old Town so we will arrive there by dawn. We will then launch the surprise attack on them just before the people in Old Town wakes up.'

'Very well, sir.'

'I want you to bring all the officers to my cabin tonight. I wish to have a word with all of them. I want to coordinate our moves so that the launch will

be brief. I do not want to turn it into a mess. Remember: It is the wish of his majesty Sultan Mansur Shah that we defeat Kampar.'

'Very well, sir.'

That night, Mutahir sat in front of a table in his cabin. Around it were Khoja Baba and the other officers. There was a rough map of Sumatra drawn on goatskin. Kampar stood in the middle of the island not too far away from the sea.

'I'm afraid that we cannot just march to Old Town at night, your excellency,' said Officer Mamat.

'Why do you say that, Mamat?' asked Mutahir.

'Our men need to rest. If we march on without resting, we will arrive there feeling tired and we will not be able to fight properly. Besides, nobody has gone there, by taking the shortest route to Pekan Tua. And if we need to retreat, we don't know which roads that are available to us that we could take.'

'So, what are you suggesting now?'

'I would suggest that we set up base on the beach, as what your excellency had suggested and send an advance party to investigate. Some of our men can then go to Old Town and spy on them. We don't know how strong the King Jaya's forces are, and where are stationed.'

Mutahir thought. 'Good suggestion. What do you say to that, Khoja Baba?'

'I agree, your excellency.'

Mutahir looked at the map on the table.

'Why don't you choose a few men for yourself and you lead the reconnaissance team to Old Town and report to me on your return, Mamat?'

'I'll do it, your excellency.'

'Very good.'

The men stood up. They then hugged Mutahir and filed out of the cabin.

Mamat walked through the woods with four men the same night they managed to arrive in Kampar, feeling exhausted with the bodies aching all over. They had to slash their way through the bushes and thick undergrowth, because there was no road that they could use to go to Old Town. Each of them held a torch to illuminate the place so that they could walk on.

'This place is not occupied. It'll be very difficult for our men to pass through without hurting themselves,' said Mamat.

'It's a good thing that you suggested that we trek all the way to Old Town,' said Sayu.

'It won't be as bad if we had trekked in the day,' added Rahman.

'I am tired. What do you say if we take a rest here?' asked Mamat.

'Good idea, sir,' said Sayu.

They then found a spot and rested. Mamat and his men rested near a tree in order to protect them from being attack by wild animals. They sat around a campfire where a goat was being burnt at the stakes. 'Come, let's have something to eat,' he said. They cut the goat and started to tear it with both hands. They then cut open some coconuts and drank the water. They felt fresh and stronger now.

'I am afraid we won't be able to make it to Old Town by dawn, sir,' said Sayu.

'I think so too. Why don't we trek on for a while before putting up the night?' said Mamat.

After they had fully rested, they continued with their trekking. They carried torches that lit up the woods.

Mutahir left his tent the next morning and went to Khoja Baba's tent. They had camped on the beach while Mamat and the others trekked to the Old Town. He was surprised that Mamat had not returned from the Old Town.

'Khoja Baba,' called Mutahir.

Khoja Baba immediately got out of his tent. He was still in his pajamas and looking worried. 'Morning, your excellency,' said Khoja Baba.

'Where is Officer Mamat? I'm worried for him. I could not sleep well the whole night thinking of what possible misadventure that they might experience while we are safe and sound here.'

'Hasn't he and his men returned, your excellency? He might be delayed.'

'What do we do? Are they safe? Were they killed?'

'I'm not sure, your excellency. Only God knows. Why don't your excellency relax and wait until he returns with the men? There's nothing that we can do, besides.'

Mutahir nodded. 'Very well, I will be in my tent. Let me know if there is news from them. I'm anxious of their personal safety. I hope the Kampar people had not caught them.'

'Very well, sir.'

Mutahir returned to his tent.

Later in the day, Mamat alighted from the bushes with the four men. They were drenched to the skin and looked dead tired. They had not rested or eaten. They had to keep walking through the torrential rain until they finally returned to the Melaka base. They decided to return as fast as they could, so their leaders and friends would not be unduly worried for their personal safety. They went to Mutahir who was sitting with Khoja Baba and some men. The other soldiers were sitting among themselves everywhere on the beach. Some were tending to the boats and weapons.

'*Asalamulaikum*, your excellencies,' said Mamat.

Mutahir turned around and saw Mamat and his four men. He was relieved. He immediately stood up. '*Mulaikum salam*,' said Mutahir and the other men. Mamat went to him.

'Have a sit.'

Mamat sat. 'The jungle is thick, your excellency. We lost our way few times but we managed to get to the Old Town. I'm afraid we're going to have to take more than a day to get there.'

'Very well, we prepare now, and we will march to the Old Town by late evening. Why don't the five of you go to your tents, rest and fill your stomach? Have plenty of food and drinks; all of you look dehydrated.'

'Yes, your excellency.'

Mamat and the men went away.

Later that night, the Melaka forces marched to Old Town. Mutahir was carried in a palanquin. They decided to go there later that night so that they could arrive in Kampar by the time the sun rose the next day. They wanted to march there as stealthy as the foxes, and be as furtive as possible without creating a stir that could alarm the Kampar men. Furthermore, they wanted to hide under the cover of darkness, lest their enemies would know their every move. They did not wish to take any chances, although they knew that the Kampar forces were not a serious threat to them.

They finally arrived at the Old Town just before dawn. The first rays of light from the sun had just appeared in between the leaves and twigs from the East. The Old Town was still hidden in a thick veil of morning mist. They could not see it clearly yet. The people had hardly awoken from sleep, and the palace was still quiet and lifeless. Around the city were the paddy fields.

Mutahir held a conference with his top officers and they decided to surround the city, the Old Town. The men then immediately surrounded the palace and waited for their instructions. After they had settled down, Mutahir gave the signal and they started to attack from all sides. Many Kampar men were killed. Many others rushed back inside the palace. The Melaka men continued to subdue them. They then rushed inside the palace. The king of Kampar, Jaya had just got out of bed to prepare for his early morning prayers, when he heard the commotion. 'What's the noise out there? Guards!' called Jaya. One guard barged inside the throne room looking anxious and worried. He shouted, 'We're being attacked, your majesty!'

Jaya was shocked. Who could be attacking them, he wondered. They had not had any enemies for ages. 'By whom?'

'By the people of the sultan of Melaka, Sultan Mansur Shah.'

'Damned it!' Jaya then rushed to hide in the throne room together with his relatives and palace officials. Just then, the Melaka men entered the room and surrounded Jaya and his officials. Mutahir stepped inside.

'Who are you? What do you want? Leave us alone,' demanded Jaya. 'I am King Jaya, the ruler of Kampar. Do have some manners and introduce yourself! We are a peaceful people. Why come and attack us? Don't you have better things to do in your own country?'

'I am Tun Mutahir from Melaka.'

More Kampar men entered the throne room brandishing their weapons and stood at the ready to strike. They surrounded Jaya with their weapons at the ready. They glanced around and saw the Melaka men standing there. They froze.

'Don't you dare! Make your first move and you are dead. Your palace and country have been surrounded. Drop all your weapons. Kampar is now under the full control and dominance of Melaka,' said Mamat.

They froze. Jaya glanced at his men. He knew he had no chance to retaliate. The Melaka men had surrounded them. They then dropped their weapons and immediately raised their hands in the air to surrender. 'Do as you're told and do not resist,' advised Jaya to his men.

His men and officers dropped their weapons on the floor. It was disastrous for them if they tried to resist. They were surrounded the men from Melaka who had taken over the palace. Hundreds, if not thousands, of the Kampar soldiers were killed. Kampar had fallen in the hands of the Melaka forces.

Mansur went to the throne room upon being told that his men had just returned in triumph from their excursion in Kampar. He was delighted to hear the good news. He walked along the corridors and headed towards the throne room, with a smile that stretched from ear to ear. He patted all the guards who were manning inside the corridor. Mutahir, Khoja Baba and Mamat waited impatiently for the sultan's appearance.

'His majesty Sultan Mansur Shah,' announced the palace official that stood guard at the entrance to the room.

Everybody stood up erect in attention, as the sultan entered. He went inside and sat on the throne. The others nodded at him and sat cross-legged on the left and right side of the room with their back facing the wall.

'What tidings do you bear me, gentlemen?' asked Mansur.

'We have defeated Kampar, your majesty,' said Mutahir.

'Good, good. This is what I have been waiting to hear. Well done, my men, the brave heroes of Melaka.' He hugged all of them. He then pulled from a



tray some gold coins. He then gave each of the officers a coin. It was inscribed with his name and title on one side and his royal emblem on the other, as a token of appreciation for the success and glory that they had brought to Melaka. 'Take these coins as a token appreciation from the people of Melaka and me, gentlemen,' he said. 'I wish all of you could return later at night so that we can have a feast. I am aware that all of you are dead tired and exhausted. You have also not been eating well and are longing to return to your respective homes to be with your wives, children and families. Therefore, you gentlemen can return to your homes and be with them now.'

The men were happy.

'I will now want to send another sixty boats to Siak. But, I want Seri Udani to lead our forces on this mission. King Permaisura and his Prime Minister Tun Jana Pakaibul will soon know who I am. We want all the Malay states in the region be put under our control, so that their rulers will pay homage to us. I want Melaka to return to its former glory and all the foreign traders and merchants to return here like they did in the past, before Melaka was turned upside down by Jebat, the traitor!'

'Long live Sultan Mansur Shah! Long live Sultan Mansur Shah!' they shouted.

The sultan smiled.

Not long later, Melaka sent another fleet to Siak in Sumatra with the Melaka forces being led by Udani. They immediately attacked the Siak soldiers. Many of them were killed. The others rushed back to the palace. The palace guards were shocked to see their colleagues rushing back to the palace in the state of shock. 'What's wrong? What's the matter?' asked the guards.

'We are under attack! Close the doors! Close the windows and lock all the doors! Where is his majesty King Permaisura?' said a Siak soldier.

The guards immediately closed the doors and windows. 'Get inside the palace! The sultan is in his bedroom. Guard his majesty. Don't let his majesty be in any harm,' ordered the guard. The Siak soldier rushed inside. Permaisura just got out of bed. He did not know what was happening. He heard a lot of noise outside. He went to the door, opened it, and inquired. 'What's the commotion outside, guards?'

'We are being attacked, your majesty King Permaisura,' said one of his men.

'By whom?'

'By forces under the sultan of Melaka. Follow me, this way.'

Permaisura took his *keris*. 'I'll get the neck of whoever dares to come near me,' he said.

'Come on, your majesty, they will be here in any minute now.'

'You go. I will wait for them to come. Go, I said!'

The soldier rushed off. Many palace officials rushed out of the palace. A little while later, Udani appeared in the bedroom.

'Who are you? Are you ready to die, young man?' asked Permaisura.

'Surrender, drop your *keris*! Your palace and country have been taken over!' said Udani.

'No, I won't surrender; over my dead body!' Permaisura then lurched at Udani, and they started to fight. It was a long fight. In the end, Udani managed to trust his *keris* in Permaisura's stomach. He stumbled along the corridor with his blood stained *keris* in his hand. Few of his men stared at him. He then fell and died.

'King Permaisura is dead,' announced Udani.

There was a sound coming from the attic above. Somebody was hiding in it. Udani turned around and looked up. 'What is that? Go and check,' he said.

The men went to the attic. There, Samad saw Permaisura's son, Raja Kudu hiding behind bales of cloths, wooden chests and *mengkuang* mats. 'Who are you? Come out and show yourself.'

Kudu then alighted.

'Who are you?'

'Raja Kudu, son of King Permaisura.'

Samad took Kudu to the throne room. Udani was resting on the throne like he owned it. He was just trying to take a good rest. He quickly woke up when he heard people were coming into the throne room.

'We found this man, your excellency. He is Raja Kudu,' said Samad.

'Who are you?' asked Udani.

'I'm the son of King Permaisura,' replied Kudu.

'Very well, we shall have to take him with us to Melaka. I want you to find Tun Jana Pakaibul.'

'Very well, your excellency.'

Samad went off.

'You stay here, Raja Kudu,' said Udani.

Samad with few other Melaka men then went to Jana Pakaibul's house. They found it was quiet. 'Look around, he must be here somewhere,' said Samad. His men went inside the house; it was empty. A little while later they went back to Samad. 'Well?' asked Samad.

'There's nobody there, sir,' said Wan Osman, a man from a state north of the Malay Peninsula who had come to Melaka.

Samad thought. His men waited. 'He really cannot be anywhere. Have you tried to look around the house?'

Then they heard a carriage taking off with the horse-hoofs stamping on the ground furiously like it was possessed. They turned and saw Jana Pakaibul speeding on a horse-carriage away from the palace.

'There he is! Chase him,' ordered Samad.

Samad's men jumped onto the horses and quickly gave chase. Jana Pakaibul sped on as Samad's men chased from behind. They were slowly catching up. Jana Pakaibul hit both sides of his horse with both legs furiously. 'Hurry, hurry,' said Jana Pakaibul.

After a long ride through the narrow jungle path, he got to the river. He thought Samad's men had now lost him. He then crossed the river. But to his horror as he looked up, he saw Samad's men sitting on their horses on the other side of the river, waiting for him. They smiled. There was no way that he could turn around and flee from them. He turned and was shocked to see another group of Melaka men, who were chasing him earlier, were standing now there. Samad was there too. 'Just where do you think you're going, Tun Jana Pakaibul?' asked Samad.

They froze.

Udani and his men walked through the streets of Melaka from the port with Kudu and Jana Pakaibul. They were tied at the wrists. The people of Melaka of all races rushed to the streets to stare at them. They knew that the Melaka soldiers under Udani had returned from an excursion in Siak with a big catch and the two men who were important people from Siak judging from the clothes they were wearing. They cheered the Melaka soldiers and officers as they passed before them. Udani and his officers and men waved at them. They threw confetti in the air and flower petals that had been dipped in scented water at their feet as they walked to the palace. A Chinese dragon dance performed in front of them, and crackers were fired. The Malay men brought out their *kompang* and *rebana* drums and hit them as hard as they could. Kudu and Jana Pakaibul walked with their heads bent down. They could not bear to see the huge crowd of people who had come to stare at them in disgust.

Udani arrived at the palace. Mansur alighted from inside. He saw the Melaka men standing in the compound of the palace. 'Who have you brought with you, Seri Udani?' asked Mansur.

'We have Raja Kudu, the son of King Permaisura and Tun Jana Pakaibul, his prime minister.'

'I see. Do bring them inside.'

Udani and his men brought Kudu and Jana Pakaibul to the verandah. Mansur sat cross-legged with the men. He tried to make them feel at ease.

'Untie them,' he said. 'They are not criminals; they are our guests now. And we will threaten them well.'

The men untied Kudu and Jana Pakaibul's hand.

'Welcome to Melaka, Kudu and Jana Pakaibul,' said Mansur without sounding condescending or intimidating.

The two men kept quiet. They did not turn to look at the sultan and stared elsewhere. This irked the sultan.

'Very well. Throw them in the cell,' ordered the sultan. He then stood and entered the palace while his men took Kudu and Jana Pakaibul away. 'Call me when these men are ready to talk, Seri Udani. How could they behave like this in front of me?' said Mansur.

'Very well.'

The men took Kudu and Jana Pakaibul along the corridor.

'Let me go! Let me go!' demanded Kudu in the Siak dialect.

'Keep quiet, your highness,' said Jana Pakaibul in the Siak dialect.

'How do you expect me to keep quiet? Is this the way for the sultan of Melaka to treat the crown prince of Siak, another Malay state and a fellow Muslim? Doesn't he have any sense and self-respect left in him, prime minister?'

Jana Pakaibul kept quiet.

'We will be released in due time, your highness; I assure you.'

'What are you saying? Stop speaking amongst yourself in your dialect. Speak in Malay,' chipped in the guard.

'We will not,' said Kudu. 'Why should I speak in Malay? We are from Siak.'

'Enough, your highness,' said Jana Pakaibul to Kudu.

'Is there a chance for our men to come and help save us, prime minister? Will my father come to our aid?'

'I'm afraid not.'

The guard glanced at them. He could not understand a word of what they were saying.

'What has happened to my father?' asked Kudu.

'I am afraid your father, his majesty King Permaisura is dead, your highness,' said Jana Pakaibul.

'What?'

'He was killed in the struggle. But he died a brave man. He was still clutching his *keris* when he was killed.'

The Melaka men untied Kudu and Jana Pakaibul, and pushed them in a cell and walked away. Kudu cried. 'Why did they have to kill my father? What

wrong had he done to Melaka and the sultan?' said Kudu. He then went to the windows. It was already night. 'Get me out of here! Let me go!' he shouted.

'Keep quiet, your highness. Be calm,' said Jana Pakaibul.

Kudu then kept quiet. The guards rushed to the cell. 'Shut up, Kudu,' demanded one of them in Malay. Kudu pretended not to understand what they had just said. 'I don't understand what you're saying.'

'Oh, yes, you do.'

Udani's carriage entered the compound that night. He got out and went to the house. He could see Mutahir sitting in the verandah. Mutahir greeted him, '*Asalamulaikeum.*' Ab, Seri Udani, come in.'

'*Mulaikeum salam.*'

Udani climbed the stairs and entered the verandah. He shook Mutahir's hand.

'Have some betel leaves,' offered Mutahir.

'That's okay. I will not take too much of your time,' said Udani.

A palace assistant unfolded the mat and they then sat cross-legged on the floor.

'I hear that you did a magnificent job in Siak and you brought back the crown prince and prime minister,' said Mutahir.

'It was a collective job, Tun Mutahir, sir. I could not possibly have done it all by myself,' said Udani.

'Did the sultan order you to bring them to Melaka?'

'No.'

'Ah, it was just your own initiative. How ingenious! And now Siak is without a ruler and prime minister, with both of them already dead.'

'Actually, I've come to seek some advice from you, my lord.'

'Advice? What sort of advice can I offer you?'

'I feel guilty for bringing the crown Raja Kudu and Prime Minister Tun Jana Pakaibul of Siak to Melaka. Don't you think we can offer a suggestion to the sultan on what's best to do with them? The two men are important people in Siak, and surely, we can use them.'

'Like what?'

'I don't know. That's why I'm here, to seek your advise.'

Mutahir thought. 'Doesn't the sultan have a princess by the name of Puteri Maha Seri?'

'Yes.'

'May be his majesty can make the crown Raja Kudu her husband so that he could be sent back to Siak and claim the throne as its new ruler? In this way

Siak will be under Melaka's control what more with the sultan of Siak as his majesty's son-in-law, and his majesty's own daughter as the sultanah of Siak.'

'Interesting. And what about Tun Jana Pakaibul?'

'He can follow the crown prince and his wife back to Siak and be his prime minister.'

Udani smiled.

'I think it is a brilliant suggestion, your excellency. I shall inform the sultan the first thing tomorrow morning. His majesty has asked me to find something that he could do to the two reluctant and difficult guests from Siak. Very well, my lord, I shall now beg my leave,' said Udani. He then stood up. He shook Mutahir's hand, and walked down the stairs. He entered his carriage and went off.

Puteri Maha Seri, the daughter of Mansur alighted from the carriage with her mother, the sultanah of Melaka, the former Puteri Wanang Seri. They then walked towards the palace. Mansur and Udani were both were sitting cross-legged in the verandah of the royal mosque nearby. They looked at them.

'She will surely look beautiful as the wife of Raja Kudu, your majesty. In addition, she will be a sultanah herself in Siak,' said Udani.

'I think so too. But, will the crown prince accept my daughter as his wife?' said Mansur. 'Especially what you've done to his father?'

'We'll have to ask. He would definitely be happy. It's just fate.'

'I don't know; I feel embarrassed if I have to ask him myself. Can you do it, for my princess?'

'I'm afraid, it won't be good.'

'Why?'

'Because his father died by these very hands.'

'Who then can do it?'

'Seri Nara diRaja Tun Mutahir.'

Mansur nodded. He walked to the dining room for dinner. The sultanah and Maha Seri and their other children were already sitting behind the low table. He sat.

'Why are you looking so depressed these days, dear?' asked the sultanah.

The palace aides served them and they started to eat with their bare hands.

'Maha Seri, dear. Father thinks it is good if you get married...'

Maha Seri fumbled and froze.

'What has gotten into you? She's just a young girl,' said the sultanah.

'She's not. She's old enough to be somebody's wife.'

'It depends on whom you have in mind. Just whom do you have in mind?'

'The crown prince of Siak, Raja Kudu.'

'But isn't he your prisoner? How could a prisoner marry one of your own daughters?'

'Yes, but he's still a crown prince.'

Maha Seri stopped eating. She washed her hands and rushed off, trying to avert any possible confrontation with her parents. Mansur and the sultanah turned to look at her as she disappeared in the adjacent room. She had lost her appetite to eat, although food that was prepared was her favorite. It was what she had asked the kitchen staff to serve that day. She quickly washed her hand and trailed her daughter. 'Look what you've done,' she said without looking back at her husband. The sultan was confused.

Maha Seri threw herself on the bed. She cried. Her mother entered the room and sat at the side of the bed. 'Stop crying, my baby. Your father is not forcing you to marry, if your heart says you are not ready to be somebody's wife. I know this must come to you as a shock, just like what I felt when I was told by my father that I was going to be married to your father,' said the sultanah.

Maha Seri stopped crying. She got up and faced her mother.

'Do you want to marry him?'

'I don't know, mother.'

'I think you should. He is a nice boy and he is the crown prince of Siak. You'll be a sultanah yourself someday.'

'I don't know.'

Mutahir walked along the corridor and went to the cell. The guards stood in attention. 'Why, your excellency. Why are you here, sir?' asked the guard.

'I want to speak with the crown prince of Siak alone. Please open the door,' said Mutahir.

'Very well, sir.' The guard opened the door.

Kudu was surprised to see Mutahir there. He entered the cell and shook Kudu's hand. Jana Pakaibul went to them, and shook Mutahir's hand. They were surprised at the courtesy shown by Mutahir. Were they going to be released unconditionally and sent home to Siak, they thought.

'Listen, I have been ordered by the sultan of Melaka, Sultan Mansur Shah to ask if you would marry his daughter, Puteri Maha Seri.'

'What do you mean, Seri Nara, sir?' asked Kudu.

'That's exactly what I mean, your highness: The sultan wishes to have you as his son-in-law.'

'Are you serious? Here we are in his cell, and now you are telling us that the sultan of Melaka wants to ask the crown prince of Siak to marry his daughter? What joke is this?'

'It's not a joke. Besides, I will not be here if I have not been ordered by his majesty the sultan himself.'

'But, why didn't the sultan himself ask me? Why you?' asked Jana Pakaibul.

'Yes, why didn't the sultan come here?' asked Kudu.

'Firstly, his majesty isn't too sure if you will agree. Secondly, his majesty feels guilty for sending you both here. It was not him who brought both of you to Melaka,' replied Mutahir.

'But, he must bear full responsibility for the attack on Siak, and for our presence here in Melaka,' said Kudu.

There was a lull.

'His majesty feels that this is the best way out of this mess that we're all in so that both you men could continue to serve your people and Siak.'

'What do you mean?' asked Jana Pakaibul.

'Because his majesty does not feel it right to keep you here too long,' said Mutahir.

Jana Pakaibul turned to Kudu. 'What do you say, your highness?' asked Jana Pakaibul in the Siak dialect.

Kudu kept quiet. 'I'm not too sure, Tun Jana,' said Kudu in the Siak dialect.

Mutahir felt uneasy because could not understand what they were saying.

'Please speak in Malay so I may know what you both are saying.'

Jana Pakaibul turned to Mutahir. 'His highness says he's not sure, your excellency,' said Jana Pakaibul.

'Very well, we shall give his highness more time to think it over. And I shall return later in the day.'

'Very well, your excellency.'

Mutahir then turned back and walked out of the cell. Jana Pakaibul turned to Kudu. 'Your highness must accept the offer. Mansur's daughter, Maha Seri is a very beautiful girl. Besides, she is most suitable for your highness,' said Jana Pakaibul.

'I've not even set eyes on her,' said Kudu. 'How could I make a decision like that without setting eyes of my future wife. I must be given at least a glance of her.'

'Your highness will surely like her. You can take it from me because I have seen her with my own eyes.'

'I was brought here as a prisoner of Melaka, and will return to Siak as a sultan.'

'And the son-in-law of the sultan of Melaka.'

'Very well.'



After much cajoling, Kudu decided to marry Maha Seri, not that he had much choice. They sat on the throne with his bride Maha Seri. Mansur, the sultanah, Jana Pakaibul and other state dignitaries offered their blessings. The royal couple was then brought to the verandah of the palace to wave at the people who have gathered outside to greet them. A group of men from the percussion and singing group were hitting the drums known as the *kompangs* to celebrate the happy occasion.

'Long live Raja Kudu and Puteri Maha Seri! Long live Raja Kudu and Puteri Maha Seri!' the people shouted on top of their voices.

A Malay couple in the crowd commented: 'Don't they look beautiful, don't they dear?' asked the husband.

'He's destined to be a king like his father,' replied his wife.

'I should think so.'

'We're blessed with their presence.'

Kudu and Maha Seri were then paraded through the streets of Melaka so the people could see them at a closer range. Thousands of people lined both sides of the road; and they threw petals at their feet. The percussion and singing group walked ahead of them. They continued to hit the *kompang* loudly and sang dirges to celebrate the wedding of the royal couple. They told of how happy they were with the wedding of Maha Seri to Kudu.

'Long live Raja Kudu and Puteri Maha Seri! Long live Raja Kudu and Puteri Maha Seri!' they shouted on top of their voices. The Chinese fired crackers. And a group performed the dragon dance before the parade. Kudu was shocked to hear the loud noise. 'What's happening? Why are they firing shots like that?' He whispered to his aide who was walking near him. Kudu was aware as a groom he was not supposed to say anything. Nevertheless, he decided to open his mouth and whispered. The loud sounds of the firecrackers shook him out of his concentration. He almost jumped when some crackers fell close to his feet. But his assistants were quick to assure him that they were harmless. Kudu was relieved.

'They are happy, your highness. This is the Chinese way of celebrating happy occasions,' explained the aide. 'The louder, the better; and more prosperous will we be.'

'Is that so? I see; but why are there many Chinese and Indians, and Arabs here, too? Aren't they too far away from their own countries?' asked Kudu.

'It's a long story, your highness. Melaka is an important port of call for merchants from many countries. Melaka once had strong and cordial relations with the court of China. They had even brought in many Chinese men and

women who later decided not to return to China and remained here, where they married the local Malay and other women.'

'I see. No wonder I see there are some Malays who had lighter skin than the others. They also had small eyes.'

The dragon dance was over. The entourage moved on. Jana Pakaibul walked towards the palace with Udani and Ali. They entered the palace and went to the verandah. Mansur greeted them. 'Welcome, welcome, my friends,' said Mansur gladly. He shook their hands. 'Let's sit over there. It is much breezier there.'

They went to the other end of the verandah and sat cross-legged. A palace aide handed the sultan the betel leaf apparatus. He chewed a betel leaf, and offered some to each of them. 'Raja Kudu and Puteri Maha Seri are now honeymooning in Hulu Melaka. It has been a week now. They should be back by next week,' said Mansur.

The men smiled.

'What else does your majesty wish to do with us?' chipped in Jana Pakaibul.

'Ah, this is what I want to discuss with you, Tun Jana.'

'Yes, what is it?'

'We want to send Raja Kudu and his wife back to Siak, so he can be installed the sultan of Siak. He shall be called Sultan Ibrahim. And you, Tun Jana can return too and be his prime minister. This is my proposal. What do you think, my dear Tun Jana?'

'Why Sultan Ibrahim and not Sultan Kudu?'

'Simply, your excellency. We want him to have a real Muslim name. It brings in good luck and Allah will bless him and his state.'

Jana Pakaibul thought. The other men waited.

'What else is there to think of, Tun Jana?' said Mutahir.

'What does his highness Raja Kudu think about this? Have you discussed this matter with his highness Raja Kudu himself?' asked Jana Pakaibul.

'No, not really. But, I shall inform him of this decision when he returns from Hulu Melaka. Let him and his wife spend more time there. It is their honeymoon.'

'Will he agree? What if his highness doesn't agree?'

'I suppose so, Seri Nara. Why should he disagree? I'm sure his heart is still in Siak, although he may be here in Melaka with his wife.'

'What do you think, Tun Jana?'

'I will have to wait for his highness Raja Kudu to decide. This is not for me to say. I'm sure you'll understand,' said Jana Pakaibul. 'I am just a prime

minister under his highness Raja Kudu's late father, King Permaisura. It won't be proper if I make a decision on behalf of his highness Raja Kudu.'

'Why don't you go to Bertam Hulu then and discuss this matter with him, Tun Jana?' suggested the sultan.

'That's a good idea, your majesty,' said Mutahir.

Jana Pakaibul nodded.

'More *sireh* anyone?' suggested the sultan as a way of suggesting that the decision had been reached.

Kudu opened the window of their palace. It sat deep in the woods in the hinterland of Melaka. He was surprised to see Jana Pakaibul's carriage in the compound. What was he doing her at this time, during his honeymoon? He quickly spat it into a spittoon and cleaned his mouth. He wiped it with a towel. Jana Pakaibul alighted from the carriage.

'Tun Jana Pakaibul?' called Kudu. 'What brings you here at this time of day?' He rushed out of the palace and greeted Jana Pakaibul. He kissed Kudu's hand.

'What brings you here, Tun Jana?'

'I have an important message from the sultan.'

'You have?'

Jana Pakaibul nodded.

'Come, let's sit over there.'

Kudu then led Jana Pakaibul to the bench and they both sat. It was cozy with the breeze flying in from the river and hitting their faces. They felt more comfortable here with the trees and flowers blooming; they provided them with a good shade that cut off the harsh rays of the sun above them. The palace guards stood by at a safe distance. They could not hear a word of what Kudu and Jana Pakaibul was saying anyway since they spoke in the Siak dialect. 'The sultan of Melaka wants to send your highnesses back to Siak, to be installed sultan and sultanah of Siak. What does your highness think of this proposal? Your highness shall be called Sultan Ibrahim. Do your highness agree or not?'

Kudu did not expect that this was what Jana Pakaibul was going to tell to him. It was a pleasant surprise. Jana Pakaibul waited for his reaction and comments. Kudu thought. His face contorted slightly as he thought hard for an answer. What was he thinking, thought Jana Pakaibul. He knew Kudu really did not have any other answer except a 'yes.' He should know if his father-in-law, the sultan had asked Jana Pakaibul to ask Kudu, it was not really a request, but a command. Asking Kudu was a mere formality. Wrinkles formed on Kudu's clear forehead like it always did each time he thought hard. The

proposal had come to him as a surprise, just when he was trying to settle down in Melaka with his new wife.

'My heart is still very much in Siak, prime minister.'

Jana Pakaibul smiled. He could guess what Kudu's formal answer was from the tone of his voice.

'I agree, but on one condition.'

'Yes, what is it, your highness? Anything's the matter?'

'No.'

'Then what is it, your highness.'

'I wish that you come along with me.'

Jana Pakaibul was surprised. 'What purpose will I serve your highness in Siak?'

'I want you to be my prime minister. After all, the sultan of Siak needs to have senior officials around him, don't you think?'

Jana Pakaibul nodded.

'There's no one who's better than my lord who can be my prime minister?'

Jana Pakaibul was relieved. He was thinking of something else that Kudu had wanted of him. 'The sultan has agreed to that too, your highness.'

'If that's the case, then I fully agree. But, I will also have to inform my dear wife about it.'

They stood up.

'If that's the case, I'll return to Melaka and inform this wonderful new to his majesty Sultan Mansur Shah.'

'Please. Tell him that his daughter, Puteri Maha Seri is being well looked after by me here.'

'And when shall I say that both your majesties will return to Melaka?'

'Tell him, both of us will be in Melaka in a few days' time.'

'Very well. I shall go now.'

Jana Pakaibul kissed Kudu's hand. He went to his carriage and left the place.

Kudu went to the bedroom as his wife was preparing the bed. She removed the covers and put them aside. She turned around. Kudu stood there at the door. Maha Seri felt awkward because her husband was acting strange. He had never stood like a statue like that before. What was he thinking of, thought her. 'What did the prime minister want dear?' asked Puteri Maha Seri; in order to break the impasse.

Kudu smiled widely. His wife looked at him and felt funny. Why was he smiling about?

'Why are you smiling like that for?' asked his wife.

'Guess what?'

'What?'

'My father-in-law, the sultan of Melaka wants to send me back to Siak so that I can be installed the sultan of Siak with the name of Sultan Ibrahim. And that you, my dear, will be my sultanah. How about that? Would you like to go to Siak, dear?'

'I am your wife. I'll go wherever you take me.'

The people of Siak were excited that their prince had returned to Siak. He was now married to the daughter of the sultan of Melaka and now they had a new sultanah to grace the throne. What more; he was going to be installed the new sultan of Siak. It never occurred to him that he would be installed the sultan. They were grateful for the sudden turn of events. It was something that just came unexpectedly. They realized that it was all Allah's will, and they accepted it as such. They rushed to the Siak palace and crowded around it, waiting for Kudu to re-appear as their new Sultan Ibrahim at the verandah after the formal installation ceremony that was going on in the throne room. Many horse-carriages and palanquins belonging to the other members of the Siak royal family and senior state dignitaries were parked outside of the palace with their personal guards and other helpers standing by. They all looked resplendent in their colorful and fresh costumes. The senior army officers especially looked gallant with their decorations and the weapons that they held in their hands, and those beautifully designed *kerises* that had been stuck in their belts.

In the throne room, Kudu was being installed Sultan Ibrahim in a ceremony that was solemn as it was regal. The state had not seen this ceremony being performed in the state for a long time. The last one took place when Kudu's father was installed the ruler of Siak.

Kudu sat on the throne with his wife, Maha Seri and waited for the installation ceremony to proceed. The whole process was elaborate. Everybody sat cross-legged on the floor of the throne room with only good thoughts. They prayed in secret for Allah to grant him and his consort long life; and that the state of Melaka would experience unusual bliss and good fortune - the same blessing that they had offered to his predecessors.

The state *mufli*, who was the highest-ranking religious head in Siak stood and offered the sultan a copy of the Holy Koran that was written in gold ink and whose covers were laid with precious stones. He wore a long-flowing Arabian robe and a huge turban. Although a Malay, he looked very much like an Arab man. His piety made his face glow. There was a dark spot on his forehead was the symbol of the piety of men who had been performing their

religious duties diligently. The constant touching of the forehead on the prayer mat five times a day and during the obligatory prayers that these men performed mostly caused it.

Ibrahim took the Holy Koran. He held it with both hands, kissed and touched it on his forehead. He repeated it three times. He then put the Holy Koran on its special stand on a small table called *rebal* at in between him and his consort.

'*Al-Fatihah*,' said the *mufti*.

They then proceed to read the first *surab* or verse of the Holy Koran with the *mufti* leading. He read it in Arabic, while everybody held their palms opened before them. 'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Praise be to Allah - Lord of the Universe, The Gracious, the Merciful, Master of the Day of Judgment. You alone we worship. You alone we implore for help. Guide us unto the straight path - the path of those whom You have blessed - those who have not incurred Your displeasure, and those who have not gone astray. *Amin*.'

The *mufti* then proceeded to give blessing in Malay. After he was finished, the men and women wiped their faces with their palms. He then returned to his seat and let the installation ceremony of the new sultan to proceed.

Jana Pakaibul went to him and offered an official *keris* that was made of solid gold whose holder was inlaid with diamonds and other precious stones. The *keris* had been passed down by his ancestors, from the first sultan of Siak to his successor. Now it had come to his possession. Ibrahim took the *keris*. He held it in his right hand and trusted it in front of him. The state officials waited.

'*Bismillah hirahman nirahim*,' said the sultan. (In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.) He then kissed the *keris*. The people in the throne room then shouted.

'*Daulat Tuanku! Daulat Tuanku!*' shouted everybody. (Long live Sultan Ibrahim! Long live Sultan Ibrahim!)

Outside, the people who had been waiting for the new sultan to alight overheard the proclamation. And they too shouted on top of their voices.

'*Daulat Tuanku! Daulat Tuanku!*'

Then a while later, Ibrahim alighted from the palace. He went to the verandah with his wife, Sultanah Maha Seri. They waved at the crowd.

'Long live Sultan Ibrahim and Sultanah Maha Seri! Long live Sultan Ibrahim and Sultanah Maha Seri!' the people shouted on top of their voices.

## CHAPTER 9: SEPAK RAGA BULATAN

Prime Minister Tun Perak's son, Tun Besar was playing *sepak raga bulatan* - a rattan ball game that was popular with the boys - in the Prime Minister's Village, with some of his mates who were mostly his cousins and other relatives. They were of the same age. They were mostly between the late teens and mid-twenties. They were refined kids, mostly sons of titled men, but not members of the Melaka royalty as such. Besar was destined to succeed their father and became the next prime minister of Melaka in the event of the demise of his father, Perak. It was the tradition for the eldest sons of senior officials to take the place of their fathers should they die or suffer serious physical or mental disabilities.

It was like in normal days when the boys would gather in the spacious compound not too far away from Perak's house, to have some fun amongst themselves. This was the only physical activity that they could do that did not involve many preparations. Sometimes, if they had the time, they would ride in the woods to hunt. But today they decided not to hunt. Because they had not played *sepak raga* for a long while, they decided to play the game that involved the kicking of the rattan ball so that it did not touch the earth.

Strips of rattan were woven until they formed a round ball that had holes between them. This gave the ball bounce when the boys who stood in a circle kicked them around. They kicked the ball and made sure that it remained in the air. The longer the ball remained in the air, the better. In this way, they knew if they were good players or not. They competed this way with each other, as a group. The group that could kick the rattan ball the most number of times was the winners. They were also allowed to hit the ball with the heads and other parts of the body, the shoulders, knee and even body. But, they were not allowed to use their hands to hit the ball. They only used their hand to throw the ball to start a new game.

Actually, the rattan ball game was mostly for exercise, for their *silat* and for recreation. It was also as a way to form a bonding with other boys or men in the similar social and political class in Melaka. Surely, those who were from the villagers and were the sons of low-ranking officers could not be playing with sons of the higher-ranking officers.

'My legs are weak; they're shaking,' said Besar. 'I have not been playing *sepak raga* for a long while now. Please forgive me if the ball goes astray. Besides, I am no match to all of you.' Besar sounded disinterested. He wanted

to discourage his friends from inviting him to play. However, they were not taken in by his excuses.

'We should play more often, then, huh, Besar?' said Hashim. 'Sitting all day in the house won't do you any good. You need to heat up your blood, so it doesn't get cold. You could easily get sick if it does.'

Khalid agreed. 'Yes, it is a good idea, I know. Let's stop hunting for a while, pity those animals in the woods,' he said. 'Let them grow bigger so that they can run faster and do not be an easy target for us.'

Besar did not say anything; he did not feel enthusiastic about doing anything that day because he felt so lazy like there was no life left in him. He only wanted to laze around in the house. But it was his friends' idea that they did something outside together. If he had his way, he would rather be at home resting in the house helping to clean the compound or sharpening his many *kerises*, or to read.

'Okay, let's play,' said Besar suddenly, much to everybody's surprise. Suddenly, Besar was eager to play the game. May be he was just trying to please them so that they did not consider him to be a weakling. 'Let's get a better tally this time, boys. Okay, throw the ball.'

One of the boys threw the ball and they started to kick it in the air.

'One, two, three, four, five, six, seven...' they counted.

The ball flew to somebody who was standing there. He kicked it and it went astray and fell onto the ground.

'Sorry,' said the boy.

'Just seven,' remarked Besar. 'That's all right.'

Someone picked the ball and wiped the earth that had stuck to with his bare hands.

'Okay, let's do better this time,' said Besar. He threw the ball again and they resumed the game. They started to count.

'One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten...'

Besar was not happy with the tally and the way his friends were kicking the ball. He realized that they had not been playing it for quite some time and the moves and actions had become weak. But he kept quiet and considered it just an exercise and no more.

Raja Muhammad walked out of the palace. He climbed on his horse and went off with his friends who were mostly sons of titled men, who were senior officials in the palace. His father, Sultan Mansur went to the verandah to call him, but his son had already left on his horse. 'Take care, son. And do not hurt yourself,' was what Mansur could say.



Muhammad heard him. He turned. 'I won't, father,' said he. 'We are just going to the open-fields to ride. We will be back soon. We're just going for a ride up to *Pengkalan Lama*, and not any further than that.'

'*Pengkalan Lama Tengah?* ...*Pengkalan Lama Pantai?* What is there that you wish to see? That place is just full shrubs with some *duku* and *langsat* trees.'

'I've gone to *Bukit Katil*, *Gajah Berang* and *Kampung Jawa* and *Kampung Hulu*, so we decided to go to *Pengkalan Lama*, and see what we can find there.'

'I see.'

'Maybe, I'll try and visit other areas, such as *Bukit Katil*, *Bukit Piatu*, *Bukit Serindit*, and even *Kelebang*.'

'Melaka is surely expanding nicely, my son. There are people in these places. Few years ago, it was just a jungle. Nobody wants to go there, let alone set up their huts there to live with their families. Now there is even a jetty in *Pengkalan Lama Pantai*. Imagine.'

'Indeed, father.'

'But do not venture further up to *Bukit Beruang* or Bear Hill. There are many wild bears there. You must bring the guards if you wish to go there and take a look at the bears.'

'No, father, *Bukit Beruang* is much too far. I'll be back too late if I were to go there.'

'Very well, my son, have fun.'

'Thank you, father. *Asalamualaikum*.'

'*Mulaikum salam*,' said the sultan. 'Do care whom you mix with. And you are not to loiter away from the area around the palace. The farthest that you can go is to the hills and not beyond them; understand?'

Muhammad nodded. 'I do.'

Mansur smiled. Muhammad rode off with his friends and went to the woods. Their horses trotted slowly in the fields without knowing what to do. They did not want to hunt or pluck fruits that were in season. The *rambutan* fruits were hanging in many bunches in the trees, but they were not hungry. Many mangoes were hanging in the trees; they were ripe for eating.

'Where are we going, Raja Muhammad?' asked Raja Malek.

'Let's have some fruits to eat,' suggested Raja Ali Sham.

'No, I'm not hungry,' said Muhammad.

'What do you want to do then?'

'I have no idea. Why don't we go to Prime Minister's Village,' suggested Muhammad. 'Who knows what we might find there.'

'What is there in the village at this time?' asked Raja Umar.

'Nothing special. I have not been there for quite a while. Let's find out.'

'I understand that there are many beautiful girls there,' said Ali Sham jokingly.

'That's not what I have in mind, Ali. But, we will go there still as I haven't been to the Prime Minister's Village for a long time that I have forgotten the way there. So which way do we take now?'

'Over there,' said Umar.

They turned around and galloped ahead. Not long later, they arrived at the village that stood about four miles away from the palace. It was near a beach up north; from there they could hear the sounds of boys counting their game in between the sounds of waves hitting the beach and the laughter and merriment.

'Ab, the boys are playing *sepak raga bulatan*,' commented Ali Sham. 'They seem to have all the time in the world to play ball.'

Besar and his friends continued to kick the ball in the open space not too far away from his house.

'One thousand and one, one thousand and two, one thousand and three, one thousand and four...' they counted.

Then someone kicked the ball and it went astray. It hit Muhammad just as he and his friends were passing near them, at his headgear with such a force that it gave him a shock. He was thrown off balance and his headgear called *setanjak* fell off his head. Muhammad tried to grab it with both hands, but he too lost his balance. He fell off his horse and to the ground. Fortunately, he was not hurt, but he was very angry just the same. He felt humiliated. He thought the boys were trying to make fun of him like someone had deliberately kicked the ball wide on purpose.

Ali Sham immediately got off his horse. He reached for Muhammad's headgear and tapped the dust off it. Besar went to Muhammad; he felt sorry for what had happened. He knew it was his duty to beg for forgiveness since he was the one who had kicked the ball in the prince's direction that toppled him off his horse.

Muhammad realized that he was the eldest son of Perak, the prime minister of his father, the sultan.

'Forgive me, your highness, Raja Muhammad,' said Besar. He hoped Muhammad was a nice guy and would forgive him and end the matter there and then. His friends helped to pick Muhammad up. Ali Sham then reached for the prince's headgear and handed it to him.

'Who did it?' demanded Muhammad. He glanced around. Besar's friends stood there frozen like statues. None dared to admit it was Besar who had kicked the ball that knocked the prince off his horse.

'I did, your highness,' said Besar. He did not want to keep the suspense any longer and owned up to settle the matter. He thought Muhammad was friendly enough to accept it as an accident.

'We didn't do it on purpose, your highness,' said Imran, Besar's friend.

'Very well.'

'I'm sorry, sir,' said Besar. 'I'm terribly sorry; it was a mistake.' He quickly offered his hand to Muhammad to shake. Muhammad took it and pulled close to him. He then instinctively drew his *keris* out of the scabbard and thrust it in Besar's abdomen. The boys were shocked. It happened so fast they nobody could do anything to stop Muhammad. He then threw Besar to the ground and he fell. He showed the bloodstained *keris* to them. Fresh blood slipped off the *keris*; some spilled onto the ground. He quickly stepped on it and rubbed it in the sand in order to clear the ground of any blood. 'Nobody shall smear me in public like this,' said Muhammad. 'I am Raja Muhammad, the son of Sultan Mansur Shah, the sultan of Melaka.'

Besar's friend froze; they were speechless. They were shocked. This was the first time all of them had personally encountered the crown prince, so they did not know what to expect from him. From what they had heard, Muhammad was a kind-hearted fellow, but now they did not think it was so. They were shocked with his behavior and the way he wanted to carry his weight around.

'Ya, Allah! your highness,' shrieked Malek. 'What have you done to him? He's the eldest son of Tun Perak.'

Muhammad ignored Malek's outburst. 'I don't care if he's the son of the prime minister! What he had done was unforgivable! Come, let's go!' He wiped the blood on his *keris* on Imran's sleeve and got on his horse much to Imran's annoyance. He then went off with his friends.

Malek was still in a daze. He did not know what had gotten into Muhammad's head.

'What do we do now, Iran?' asked one of Besar's boys after Muhammad and his friends had left.

'Let's bring Tun Besar back to his house,' said Imran.

'Get the medicine man fast!' said someone else. 'May be he can be saved. Come.'

Imran touched Besar's chest. It was still and cold. His face was starting to look blue. His eyes were wide opened. Imran rubbed his right palm over his face to close them. They knew he had already died and there was nothing that they could do to revive him. 'Tun Besar is already dead, my friends,' said Imran. 'I'm worried what his father will do now when he comes to know about this.'

'Do something, Imran,' said one of his friends.

Imran tried to stir Besar, but he was already dead. 'Wake up, Tun Besar, wake up Besar!' Besar's body shook gently, but he remained. He was now a corpse.

The boys then Besar over their shoulders and took him to his parent's house a short distance away. The passersby stopped to watch them.

'What's happened to Tun Besar?' asked one of the elder villagers.

'Tun Besar's been killed by Raja Muhammad, uncle,' replied Imran.

'*Masyallah, apa dah jadi?*' he said. (My goodness, what has happened?)

The villagers shook their heads in disbelief. They froze in their position and watched Imran and his friends carry Besar's body back to his parents' house. When they got there, they put it in the low wooden platform or *pangkin* outside of the house.

'*Asalamulaikum*, Prime Minister Tun Perak, sir,' called Salleh. He peeped outside of the window when he heard his name being called. He saw Besar's friends in the compound. 'What's the matter, sons?' he asked.

'Tun Besar is dead, your excellency,' said Salleh.

Perak was shocked. '*Ya, Rabbi!* (Oh, my God!) He immediately rushed down the wooden stairs and went out of the house while tightening his *sarong*. It looked like he was having an afternoon siesta when he was awoken up. His hair was disheveled, and he did not have any time to comb it. He slipped on his leather sandals and went to the compound of the house where the pangkin or wooden platform was.

'We were playing *sepak raga* in the village, and the ball strayed. It hit Raja Muhammad. And he just killed Tun Besar, sir,' explained Imran. 'It happened so fast that none of us could stop him. Nobody expected that he'd resort to doing such a thing.'

Perak shook his head. 'I knew Raja Muhammad has bad tempers, but didn't expect for him to act like this,' he said. He then turned to the boys. 'Did my son ask for forgiveness from him?'

'Yes, indeed, sir, he did. Raja Muhammad offered his hand and Tun Besar tried to kiss it. But, the prince just pulled out his *keris* and trusted it in Tun Besar's stomach,' said Imran.

'Take my son inside the house. We shall give him the last rites so that his soul will be in peace. And we shall deal with Raja Muhammad later.'

The boys carried Besar's body and took it inside the house.

Besar's body was laid to rest on the same day he died, as it was the Islamic tradition.

Perak walked away from the cemetery after the burial service together with his followers, without saying a word. He took what had happened as God's will. They waited for him to say something, but he just kept quiet. Perak was a much older man now, so he tended to be patient to the extreme. Even when his son was mercilessly killed in cold-blood, he refused to seek revenge. What more when the person who had inflicted the damage was none other than the eldest son of the sultan himself was. So, being a loyal servant of the sultan, how could he possibly retaliate then? He took what happened to his son, as something that was fated by Allah - for he knew why it had to happen. He took it that Allah loved his late son more than he did, and He wanted to have him closer to Him. He knew his late son, Besar was a good son. He had no enemies. Because of his stature as the son of the prime minister, he was not encouraged to be on friendly terms with Muhammad who was destined to ascend to the throne in the event of his father's death. But, Besar was not too sure if he was going to replace his father and be the next prime minister of Melaka should his father die. It was not automatic that sons of the prime minister took over the post since it was not a hereditary title. If indeed Besar took over from Perak as the next prime minister of Melaka, it would be at the pleasure of the sultan, be it, the current ruler of Melaka, Mansur or his successor, Muhammad, who was his eldest son and the crown prince.

'What do you plan to do, my Tun Perak, sir?' asked Hashim, one of Perak's staunch followers. From the way he asked the question, it looked as if he was suggesting that Perak tried to seek revenge.

'Not here, my friend,' replied Perak. He quickly tried to calm him down. 'We are still in mourning. Besides, the burial ceremony is not over yet. Let's proceed to the house where we can recite the Holy Koran and pray to Allah so that the late Tun Besar's soul be at peace with itself, and he may be placed amongst the pious.'

'But, we must seek revenge; we just cannot let Raja Muhammad go off scot-free. He may be the crown prince of Melaka, but now he is a murderer, a criminal. In Islam, nobody is above the law. We should not allow him to get away from his crime. Rulers must set good examples for the people to follow; they shouldn't take advantage of their unusual position in the society.'

'Not here. We are still in the cemetery. We must make at least forty steps away from my son's grave before we can even talk.'

'Leave us alone, Hashim. I hope you'll understand how Tun Perak feels,' said Perak's wife who was with them.

'I'm sorry, madam,' said Hashim. 'What I am asking for is allowed for by our religion. Besides, if Raja Muhammad could do it to Tun Besar, what assurance is there that he couldn't do it to anybody else?'

Sensing that there was no reaction from either Perak or his wife, Hashim walked away with his friends.

Perak sat in the verandah alone that night after the late night *iyak* prayers. He felt hopeless. He felt like his world had collapsed around him. But, he had accepted the death of his eldest son as something that was fated by Allah and he wanted to leave it at that. He spent a lot more time at prayers this time, by offering special blessings to the soul of his late son. He thought his late son had so much going for him. His future looked bright, but Allah knew that it was to be. Perak was almost engulfed in the darkness. And he was still mourning.

A group of men had their *silat* practice deep in the woods somewhere in *Bukit Baru*, a hilly area not too far away from the city. The place was secluded and away from the authority's attention. Hashim and his friends went to the *silat* leader, Haji Omar. It was late at night, and torches that were placed all over the compound, lit the whole place.

'Can I have a word with you, Haji Omar,' said Hashim.

The *silat* boys stopped to rest and drink. Haji Omar sat with Hashim at one corner away from their hearing range. 'I can get my boys. Does Tun Perak know about your plan, Hashim?' he said.

'No, but, I'm sure he'll agree.'

'Okay, what do you plan to do now?'

'We want to seek revenge.'

'How?'

'Let's have Raja Muhammad killed. He took a life, and now his life must be terminated in exchange for Tun Besar's life.'

Haji Omar looked at Hashim's friend, Khalid. 'We agree, *Haji*,' said Khalid.

'Okay, how many men do you require? I have a hundred just here. But, I can easily get more than that if one hundred men aren't enough.'

'We do not need too many, *Haji*. What we can do is to seek Raja Muhammad while he is riding alone in the woods, and we can execute him,' said Hashim. 'We do not need to attack the palace and kill him there. The sultan and the palace have nothing to do with it, just Raja Muhammad.'

'That won't be difficult to do, I suppose if your main aim is just to get him. I'm relieved that you're not talking about attacking him at the palace.'

'Yes, I can do it myself. But, I need some people to come with me, just in case if the sultan comes to know about this. He can seek for my neck. If I am

alone, surely, he won't be tempted to act harshly. On the other hand, if he knows I'm with, say, a thousand *silat* men, surely, he will be cautious and won't retaliate,' said Hashim. 'What do you say?'

'Whatever it is, Hashim, I have to discuss this matter with Tun Perak himself.'

'Why?'

'Tun Besar is his son. Tun Perak himself has the right to seek revenge. You are just his followers. You cannot seek revenge, unless if he says so. If he disagrees then there's nothing that we can do, Hashim. It's entirely up to him to decide.'

Hashim and Haji Omar and their men marched to Perak's house the next day. They numbered a thousand men. All of them were fully armed and eager to seek revenge on behalf of their leader.

'*Asalamulaikum*,' Prime Minister Tun Perak, sir,' greeted Hashim when they arrived at Perak's house.

Perak appeared at the windows. He was shocked to see all the men in his compound as if they were ready to go to war. '*Mulaiikum salam*. What on earth are you doing here? Why is everybody here, fully armed, like you are going to war?' he asked. 'Come to your senses quickly before they go haywire!'

'Yes, we're going to war, Tun Perak,' said Hashim.

'Against whom, may I ask? Melaka isn't at war with anyone; that's as far as I know.'

'Against the murderer, Raja Muhammad.'

Perak was shocked. 'Ya, Allah! Are you all out of your mind?' he asked. 'Recite your affirmation to god, all of you. Recite your *syabadah!* Don't do anything that you'll regret later.'

'Why, sir? Haven't you forgotten that it was Raja Muhammad who had killed your son, Tun Besar? Have we to remind you of that, Your excellency?' said Hashim.

'No, I haven't. I'm still in mourning. As you can see, I haven't left the house for the last one month.'

'We seek revenge on the behalf of your late son, my lord.'

'No, I said no! And how dare for you to say that I don't feel sad with my eldest son's death!'

'But, sir.'

Perak came down and confronted Hashim. 'I won't allow you to seek revenge on my son's behalf! Or on my behalf!' He raised his voice and cried.

'But, why?' asked Hashim.

'A Malay subject never rebels against his ruler. I am the loyal prime minister of his majesty Sultan Mansur Shah.'

'But, but...what can we do besides?'

'Let's not have this prince, the crown prince Muhammad be our ruler then so that we don't have to be loyal to him.'

The men kept quiet.

'It pains me and my heart aches badly now that my son's gone. But, I will never rebel against the sultan. Now, why not all of you go home to respective families? I'll deal this matter personally with the sultan,' said Perak. He continued to cry. If it were not Raja Muhammad, Tun Perak would know what to do with him, but Raja Muhammad was the son of the sultan of Melaka. What was there for him to do? Besar's friends were just kids. Their blood was hot, and they did not know how a person like Perak felt in such circumstances. He simply could not betray the sultan of Melaka, no matter what. This was his position - a Malay subject never rebels against his ruler!

The men went away feeling disappointed with Perak's stand.

'His son had been mercilessly killed by Raja Muhammad,' shouted Khalid when they got inside the jungles. 'How could he not want to seek revenge. Even if it's not revenge, surely, he should expect to get some justice. We are talking about justice here, and not just revenge.'

'We can still do something, Khalid,' said Hashim.

'How?'

'Come this way.'

Muhammad rode in the woods with his friends, oblivious to the scheme that had been hatched by Hashim and Khalid. They went about their daily activities as though what had happened was totally forgotten by the others, especially Hashim and Khalid. Least of all Muhammad did not expect for any of Besar's friend to act so rashly. He knew Perak did not dare to seek revenge, since he was the son of the sultan, and Perak was too loyal to his father, the sultan to do anything mischievous. But, he did not realize that the late Besar's friends were not like Perak. They thought differently than him. Being much younger and whose blood was much 'hotter', Hashim and Khalid could not let Muhammad go away scot-free, for killing their friend, Besar. They sneaked behind the woods, which were so thick that nobody could see them from where they were hiding. They carried with them bows and arrows and a bottle of poison that they wanted use to dip the points of the arrows before firing them. The poison was so potent. If anyone who was struck with an arrow that had been dipped in it, he would die immediately.



'Well, Raja Ali, why don't all of you rest here. I'm going inside the bushes to relieve myself,' said Muhammad. He got off his horse, went to the bushes to relieve himself near some bushes, and away from the view of his friends while his friend waited.

Hashim and Khalid changed positions so that they could see Muhammad better and unhindered. Hashim aimed his arrow at Muhammad's back. He pulled the string to as far as he could stretch it and held it there. He was sure if he released the arrow, it would fly straight to Muhammad's back at his heart. If that were to happen, he would immediately drop dead. On the other hand, if let his arrow shoot harder, most likely, Muhammad's body would stick to the tree with the arrow sticking through it.

'Wait, don't,' whispered Khalid in Hashim's ear.

'What do you mean? Nobody would know it was us who did it!' whispered Hashim in surprise. 'Don't worry; have no fear, everything will be all right.'

'No, I said.'

'What's taking you so long, Muhammad?' asked Khalid from the other side of the bushes.

'I'm finished now,' said Muhammad. He then tied up his pants and returned to his friends.

Hashim's concentration was disrupted. He was still holding onto his bow and arrow. He froze in the position, not knowing what to do next. He then let the off the arrow, and it hit a tree where Muhammad was standing earlier. He was now riding away with his friends. He was not at all aware of what had happened or that he was being spied on. He only heard a light thud. He ignored it. He thought it was a fruit that had just fallen from the tree. Little did he realize that he was being targeted, and he could very well be dead just now.

Hashim still did not know why Khalid suddenly had a change of heart and decided to take pity for Muhammad. 'Why didn't you let me do it? He would have been finished,' said Hashim. 'Are you crazy? We could have got him just now before he left!'

'I believe Prime Minister Tun Perak was right. A Malay shall not rebel against the sultan,' said Khalid.

'What sort of a Malay is that?'

Khalid kept quiet.

'We are not rebelling against the sultan himself! We are just trying to seek revenge over Tun Besar's death. Raja Muhammad had committed a serious crime, and there are witnesses. What we want is to demand that the late Tun Besar be given justice!'

'Tun Perak is right.'

'No, he's not right,' demanded Hashim. 'Raja Muhammad is a criminal and therefore, we must make him pay for his misdeeds!'

Khalid kept quiet.

'Now, what do we do next?'

'Let's return to the Prime Minister's Village.'

Hashim was disappointed. He just did not know what to say. Khalid started to walk while Hashim remain frozen in his position. 'Damned it, Khalid!' Hashim then threw down his bow and arrows on the grass.

Muhammad returned to the palace late in the evening after the sun had disappeared in the horizon. Night was slowly engulfing the land and the skies were starting to darken. They were the last rays of the sun; it made the skies look reddish; the whole land was in half-light and it was slowly dimming. Soon it would be dark. The muezzin cried out the *azan* calling the Faithful to pray, dutifully as he did every day without fail. This was the chore that he relished doing five times a day, at different times to awaken and announce them to perform their religious duty.

Muhammad walked along the corridor. His father, Mansur accosted him.

'Where have you been the whole day, my son?'

'Just riding and riding with my friends,' replied Muhammad, almost nonchalantly as though the murder that he had committed on Tun Besar was too insignificant that he did not have the need to mention it. May be he felt as if he had just slapped a fly that was trying to draw blood from his arm. 'We didn't realize that the day had turned to evening, father.'

'Very well, don't get in harm's way. You are the crown prince of Melaka. Someday you will take over the throne. Get inside your room and change clothes; we're about to start the evening prayers at the mosque.'

'I fully understand that, father. As crown prince of Melaka, I am aware of who I am.'

'Very well, go and change your clothes and get ready. We will to the mosque together. It's been quite sometime while since we prayed together.'

'Very well, father.'

Mansur walked away. Muhammad stared at him from the back. He then walked along the corridor and entered his room.

Mansur and Muhammad prayed together with some palace and state officials that day. After it was over he shook their hands and hugged them as the custom dictated it. They then walked out of the mosque. He looked around. 'Where is Prime Minister Tun Perak, my prime minister, by the way? I have not seen him for quite sometime. Is he all right?' asked Mansur. 'I hope his knees aren't holding him back.'

The men looked at each other. Muhammad kept quiet.

'Why are you looking like that? Tell me. Is he all right?'

'Yes...er...not quite your majesty,' said Udani.

'What are you trying to say, Seri Udani? Is he all right or not? There's no such a thing as - not quite!' 'Not quite' what exactly, in simple Malay? Don't ever play with words with me! Now which is which? I demand that you tell me now!'

'Pardon me, your majesty. Tun Perak's son has died, four weeks ago,' said the *temenggong*.

Mansur was shocked. He froze in his position. 'What? How come I didn't know about it?'

'Prime Minister Tun Perak didn't want your majesty to be unduly worried about it,' said the *temenggong*.

'He should have told me, so I could relieve him of his official duties and I'd know what he's feeling or doing. I could offer some help, too. He is my prime minister, damned it! He's not an ordinary citizen of this country where he can do as he pleases.'

The men kept quiet. Muhammad froze and started to feel worried that the secret might be exposed and his own misdeeds known by his father. Now he was beginning to feel scared for once; he feared that his father might seek justice on behalf of Besar and Perak.

'How did his son die? Did he meet with an accident? Did he fall off his horse, or what?'

'He was killed!' said Udani.

'Killed?'

The men kept quiet. Muhammad tried to walk away.

'Wait a second, Muhammad,' called out Mansur.

His son stopped and waited.

'Just where are you going? We'll walk home together.'

'Very well, father, I'll wait at the stairs then.' Muhammad walked to the stairs, slipped on his sandals, and waited impatiently. Beads of sweat started to form on his forehead. He quickly wiped it with the ends of his sleeves.

'Ya, Allah. How could that possibly happen? Who did it?' asked Mansur.

The men kept quiet.

'Tell me. I demand to know.'

Everybody kept quiet. They glanced at each other's face.

'He was playing *sepak raga bulatan* with his friends, when...' said Mutahir. He stopped in mid-sentence and kept quiet. He was reluctant to reveal the identity of the murderer, because the sultan might not like to know who did it.

'And what?' asked Mansur. 'Go ahead, you can tell me.'

'He was stabbed by prince,' said Mutahir.

'Which prince? There are so many princes in Melaka. Tell me which one.'

Muhammad felt guilty. He excused himself. 'Do forgive me father and dear gentlemen. I think I want to return to the palace now.' He then walked briskly towards the palace.

'Who killed him?' asked Mansur.

'Raja Muhammad.'

'My son?'

The men nodded. Mansur was shocked. He shook his head in disbelief. 'I don't believe this. It's impossible. How could my own son do it? There must be a grave mistake. Could they be mistaken? Why must my own son do it?'

The men kept quiet.

'Never mind, I will ask him,' said Mansur. 'Thank you for your revelation. This is definitely a bad day for me. As I see it, Raja Muhammad deserves to be punished!' Mansur gritted his teeth and walked along the corridor. He immediately went to his son's room. He knocked on it. There was no answer. A palace guard went to the sultan. Mansur turned around. 'Where's Raja Muhammad? Is he in?'

'Pardon me. His highness Raja Muhammad is not in his room,' said the guard.

'Where is he? Where did he go?' asked Mansur. 'He said he was returning to the palace from the mosque.'

'His highness didn't say where he was going.'

Mansur shook his head. He then walked down the corridor and entered his bedroom. He changed his clothes. The sultanah of Melaka was resting on a chair and fanning herself frantically as though she was on fire. It was especially hot and the heat was unbearably sticky; it made her uncomfortable. She felt dehydrated. An empty jar stood on a side table near her. The sultan noticed her fanning herself. He went to the windows and opened them. The breeze blew inside and it cooled down the room slightly.

'Why is it so hot today?' asked the sultanah of Melaka.

Her husband ignored her comments and asked: 'Where is our son, Raja Muhammad?'

'Isn't he in his own room? Or may be he'd left the palace to ride on the beach with his friends as it was his usual thing to do especially in the evening, when it's hot like today. Why? What's the matter? Do you really have a need to see him, dear?'

'He killed Tun Besar, son of Tun Perak, our dear prime minister.'

Sultanah Melaka was shocked. The fan she was holding fell off her hand. She immediately bent down and picked it up. She stood up and faced her husband in disbelief. 'What are you saying?' she asked. She Chinese closed the Chinese fan aside and closed it.

'Raja Muhammad had killed Tun Besar four weeks ago, and no one told me about it until I inquired with the people at the mosque just now. Seri Udani broke the secret.'

'Where is Raja Muhammad. We must ask him. We mustn't hear from the third party; they might have a different interpretation of what happened to Tun Besar.'

'How could he do that? Doesn't he know that Tun Besar is the son of Tun Perak, a famous nobleman of Melaka?'

Mansur shook his head. 'How could I possibly sleep tonight like this? I must settle this problem before dinner or I won't have the appetite to eat anything.'

'I hope you won't be too harsh on him.'

'He is my successor to the throne! He has brought me a lot of shame! I will see Tun Perak the first thing tomorrow morning. I have to talk to him. I must convey my sincere apologies and seek his forgiveness on behalf of Raja Muhammad. How could he treat a dear, old man like Tun Perak like this?' Mansur lay in bed. He had lost his appetite to eat that night. And Muhammad had not returned to the palace. The sultanah fell asleep at his side.

Few hours later, he heard footsteps coming from the corridor. The steps were soft. Muhammad walked stealthily in the corridor. He went to his room and opened the door. Mansur alighted from his bedroom when he heard the footsteps and door creaking softly. He had not been able to sleep; his mind told him to do something. He had to be firm, even if the person who had committed the murder was his son. He was in a dilemma; what should he do in such circumstances?

'Son,' called out Mansur.

Muhammad turned. He was surprised to see his father standing near him at such an ungodly hour. But he knew what his father had in mind to say. 'Yes, father.'

Mansur went to his son. 'I wish to have a word with you.'

'Can't we do that tomorrow? Besides, it's already late, father. Shouldn't you be in bed now?'

The sultan ignored him. 'Did you kill Tun Besar?'

Muhammad was not shocked. He had expected his father to bring this matter up. He had managed to delay this from happening for a while, but

surely, he could not expect his father to ignore it altogether like it did not happen. He felt sorry for his father for having to bear with his problem. Muhammad hoped that his father was not going to be too harsh on him. For the first time, he began to feel guilty for what he had done to Besar. And for the first time, too, he started to feel remorse.

'How could I ever do that, father?' asked Muhammad.

'Tell me truthfully. Don't play with words with me. Did you or didn't you kill him?'

'He hit a rattan ball at my headgear and it fell to the ground together with me. I felt humiliated. And he came to me. My *keris* was drawn, and he went straight into it. It was a mistake. I did not do it, father; trust me, this is the truth. It happened so fast; I thought he was trying to get at me. If you don't believe me, ask Raja Malek, Ali. They were there. We were riding in the Prime Minister's Village and enjoying ourselves and had nothing to do with Tun Besar or any of his friends.'

'I am going to see Tun Perak tomorrow morning. And I do not want you to leave the palace until I return. Understand?'

Muhammad kept quiet.

'Now go to sleep. I must settle this matter amicably. I do not want to make the poor lord feel sad and not wanted by his sultan. Our sultanate survived until this day because of him. We will not be where we're today without him. He's important to us as much as to the state and the people. He is a state hero! Tun Besar, too, had so much going for him; he has a future waiting ahead of him. For all you know, he might even become the prime minister of Melaka should his father die. Your prime minister! I thought both of you could click and get along well, so that when I leave this earth together with Tun Perak, the state will be secure, in the hands of both of you. Therefore, you must realize how disappointed I am with your actions, son.'

Muhammad kept quiet. There was nothing else that he could say to defend himself. He looked down on the floor. His father returned to his bedroom and Muhammad entered his and closed the door behind them.

His father could not sleep that night; he wanted to go to the prime minister's house that night, but was held back because it was too late. So early next morning, he went there, but he was told by the prime minister's wife that Perak had gone to the grave of his son, Besar to offer some prayers. So, the sultan re-entered his carriage and turned around. He ordered his men to head straight to the cemetery where he hoped he could find Perak. His royal carriage stopped at the cemetery. He got out and saw Perak alone at his son's grave, praying. He was sitting cross-legged on the ground and holding a copy

of the Holy Koran in his hands. It was still dawn and light was shining from the East; it cast a long shadow of Perak on the ground while one side of his face glowed. After he was finished, he turned and saw the sultan's dark shadow entering his vision like an apparition. The sultan was still far away, but his shadow was present and they hit the tombstone of Besar's grave. Mansur continued to walk towards Perak. He stood up and kissed the Holy Koran. The sultan then hugged him.

'I am sorry, Tun Perak; my son was guilty. I have reprimanded him for what he had done to your dear son, Tun Besar. May Allah grant him a place in Heaven,' said Mansur. He sounded sad and so sorry. 'This is all that I can do at this time, Tun Perak, unless if there's something else that you want me to do besides.'

'Thank you for your condolence,' said Perak. 'No, I do not think there is anything else that can be done. It's fated. Allah sure knows better than any of us. He is the Lord of the Universe. Besides, dying is very much a part of living, too.'

'Where are you going now?'

'Going back home.'

'I'll give you a lift so we can talk some more.'

They walked to the entrance of the cemetery together where the sultan's carriage was waiting with his assistants. Nearby was Perak's carriage and rider. The sultan went to him and said: 'Prime Minister Tun Perak will come with me. You follow us.'

'Very well, your majesty,' said Perak's rider.

Mansur and Perak entered the carriage and it took off, with Perak's carriage trailing closely behind it. Perak stared out of the window at the trees passing by outside. Mansur sat beside him. 'I'm sorry, Tun Perak, for what my son had done to Besar. I was fond of your son. He could have succeeded you, as prime minister of Melaka. Is there anything that I can do to relieve your pain?' said Mansur.

'No, your majesty. It was all Allah's will. It was all God's fate,' said Perak. 'Besides, what's done is done! And no matter what is done now, it still wouldn't bring my son back to this earth.'

'Please tell me, if there's anything I can do to help relieve the pain you're feeling. Anything, anything at all... I am feeling guilty, too, for what my son had done to your son. And I will continue to feel guilty until I'm able to compensate for your son's loss.'

'A Malay man never rebels against his sultan. I was brought up to be loyal to your majesty as I had been to your late father and grandfather whom I had

the honor to serve as prime minister and ordinary citizen. I shall leave it for your majesty to decide what sort of action that your majesty so desires.'

Mansur pondered over the comment. Perak did not specifically request for the sultan to do anything; but from the look of it, he wanted Muhammad to pay for his misdeeds - his crime against Besar that had caused his untimely death.

'I will not appoint Raja Muhammad as my successor then. I hope this punishment is severe enough so that he'll learn that he, too, is equal in Islam, the religion that we all love.'

Perak was shocked; it was something that he had in mind. 'You can't do that.'

'Oh, yes, I can. As the sultan of Melaka, I can do anything I like; I have the authority. Besides, bestowing the title of crown prince and my successor is my personal prerogative and nobody in Melaka can challenge me on that.

'The post of the crown prince of Melaka does not automatically result in his succession to the throne. It is incumbent on his good behavior and nature. And every single day is a test for him to prove his worth as the future sultan.

'The appointment is not a license for him to commit anything that pleases him - what more murdering anyone. My son, Raja Muhammad had disappointed me a great deal. I am truly sorry for what he had done. He has disappointed me and above all, he's made me and my wife, his mother, very sad.'

Perak kept quiet. He was relieved that Muhammad was going to be punished in this way, although he did not expect that it to be so severe.

'I will appoint my second son, Raja Hussain as my successor to replace Raja Muhammad instead. He will be appointed crown prince soon. The official ceremony will take place once you have recovered from your grief. Please do convey my personal condolences to your wife, and on behalf of my wife, too.'

'But, his highness Raja Hussain is much too young to be appointed crown prince.'

'I know. But, he will have time to catch up now that he knows he is the crown prince. I'm sure with what is happening to Raja Muhammad, Raja Hussain will definitely have to look at his every step, so that he won't be carried away with himself like what his elder brother, Muhammad had done. When the time come for Allah to take me away, Hussain will be ready to be the next sultan of Melaka.'

'I am too old now to serve you well. I hope I will be able to see the day when Raja Hussain becomes sultan.'



'I am not that young myself, too, Tun Perak. Let's leave this to Allah. We are basically two human beings on this vast earth and no one is above or below the others. We're all equal in Allah's eyes and under Islamic law.'

A royal crier went to the middle of the square together with his assistants. They hit a gong furiously. It attracted everybody's attention. They stopped everything they were doing at that time and crowded around them. The people knew from past experiences that there was going to be a very important message from the sultan that they needed to know of.

'Hear, hear! His majesty Sultan Mansur has announced that his highness Raja Muhammad is no longer the crown prince of Melaka. His majesty has appointed and proclaimed his majesty's second son, his highness Raja Hussain as the new crown prince of the state of Melaka as of this very moment. And his highness Raja Hussain will ascend to the throne, in the advent of the untimely demise of his majesty!' announced the crier.

Everybody was shocked. They looked at each other.

'What happened?' asked a Chinese man to his friend. 'Is Raja Muhammad dead?'

'No idea,' replied his Malay friend.

'What's happening in Melaka?' asked an Arab man. 'Is it safe to trade in Melaka now?'

The royal crier and his assistants went away. The people were in the state of shock. The news that they were given was not adequate. They helped to fuel a lot of speculation and intense debate amongst themselves. The coffee shops and food stalls throughout the state buzzed with gossips on what had happened in the palace. Some guessed Muhammad had died, or he had poisoned himself because his father did not approve his relationship with a Chinese girl. They thought it was strange for the sultan to do that since he, too, had taken a Chinese princess as his second wife. But, the Chinese girl Muhammad had wanted to marry, was just a kitchen-helper in a Chinese restaurant.

'What's wrong with a Chinese kitchen-helper?' asked Musa. 'If they're both in love, let them marry then.' So the gossips went on for weeks.

The royal crier and his assistants also went to the port where there were mostly foreign traders and merchants. They were equally anxious at what was happening in the state, as their actions were dictated by what was taking place in the Melaka palace.

More people crowded around them. They knew that there was something important that the sultan of Melaka wanted to announce. All the foreign merchants and traders froze. They stared at the crier from wherever they were.

'Hear, hear: His majesty Sultan Mansur Shah has announced that his highness Raja Muhammad is no longer the crown prince of Melaka. His majesty has appointed and proclaimed his majesty's second son, Raja Hussain as the new crown prince, and his highness Raja Hussain will ascend to the throne, in the advent of the untimely demise of his majesty,' announced the crier.

He and his friends then went off. The people looked at each other in total surprise. More gossips were created as a result of this brief formal announcement. It even fueled speculation that Melaka was on the verge of bankruptcy and the sultanate was breaking to pieces. Some of the traders felt that their future in Melaka was not secure now as it did before. They felt they were in a period full of uncertainty. The replacement of Muhammad as the crown prince of Melaka was a premonition of more bad things to come to the state.

Muhammad sat by the window, and stared into void. It was dark outside. The night was still. He felt his future was bleak now that he was no more the crown prince. The only consolation that he could get was that the real story behind the death of Besar had not been made known to the public. If this were to happen, many people who were sympathetic to Perak would want to seek revenge or go on a rampage. Muhammad's personal safety would not be secure. Many of them still remembered Perak's deeds to Melaka, especially when the state was being attacked by foreign powers, particularly the Siamese who were bent on capturing the state. Melaka was in mourning, not because of Muhammad's demotion as crown prince, but Besar's death.

Ali and Malek sneaked into the compound of the palace and went to the window of Muhammad's bedroom where he was sitting at. Ali called, 'Muhammad.'

Muhammad looked at him. 'What? Go away,' he said. 'I cannot join you anymore. Look! What you've done to me?'

'Come, let's go for a ride; it will make you feel better. And do not sulk like a baby. Think positive. It's not the end of the world, you know, Muhammad.'

'How can I? I'm not supposed to leave the palace. Go away. Can't you see that I'm in pain.'

'Climb down the windows, hurry,' urged Malek.

Muhammad thought it was a good idea to sneak out of the palace. He had been holed in it for two weeks now. He climbed out of the palace through the windows and rode on Ali's horse in the dark. 'Where are you taking me? What's there to see at this time? Don't you think it is already too late?'

'You have been locked in the palace for two weeks now. We are worried that you might go crazy. I am sorry about what had happened to you. Your father should not been so harsh on you,' said Ali. 'You're still his eldest son; didn't he know that?'

'How could your brother, Hussain handle it? He's so young and immature,' said Malek.

'That's what I'm worried about. Where are you two taking me now? I must return to the palace soon, before anyone realizes I'm gone,' said Muhammad. 'I don't want them to think that I'm still defiant.'

'We'll ride for a while; we'll send you back after you're fresh,' said Ali. 'Clear all your worries.'

'All right.'

Mansur walked with Hussain, the new crown prince in the garden of the palace. It was morning and the sun was not harsh. This was a good time for him to take his son for some quality time together. Hussain was barely ten years old but was already aware of himself and what he was destined to be, the next sultan of Melaka. Mansur had told him so each time they were together at times like these.

'Listen father, can I go with my friends to the port?' asked Hussain.

'Why do you have to go there, my dear son?' asked Mansur.

'I like to look at the ships, boats and all the strange-looking people there. They don't look like Malays, don't they? How come they don't speaking in Malay or Arabic like us?'

'Very well, son, I will let the guards know and they will take you there. Those people are not from here; they are from elsewhere, India, China and throughout this region. They may be Malays, but they have their own languages that they use to speak with each other.

'But, they are slowly learning how to speak in Malay. Some day, the Malay language will be the lingua franca of this region. The Malays have now become one race. Unlike in the past when they were all splintered with each group speaking in their different dialects and behaving and thinking differently.

'Great-great-great grandfather Parameswara or Megat Iskandar Shah was the one who had brought all these people together here in Melaka, the womb of the unique Malay race. He had also created the unique Malay language that is used by many people here as well as throughout the region. Melaka will be fondly remembered by our people, son.' Mansur rambled on, as his son tried to figure out what he was talking about. It was too advanced for him to understand.

'What is *lingua franca*, father?'

'Language.'

'Father, may I ask you something?'

'What is it, my son?'

'What is a crown prince?'

'A crown prince is the deputy to the sultan. In case I pass away, you'll be the next sultan of Melaka, since you're the crown prince of Melaka and I'm the sultan.'

'Does everybody in Melaka know I am the crown prince?'

'Yes, they do.'

'But, I don't want to be sultan of Melaka.'

'Why?'

'Because I don't want you to die.'

'Oh, everybody dies, my son, including the sultans.'

'But, Raja Muhammad is the eldest in the family; why was his appointment as crown prince canceled?'

'He had done something that displeased me, so I had no choice but to replace me. If I don't do it, the people of Melaka will hate us. And if they hate us, the whole of the sultanate will collapse. I think I did not make a mistake. You, too, can be a good sultan, if not better than I can. May be you are fated to be the next sultan of Melaka and not your elder brother, Muhammad.'

'How can I be a sultan when I am still young? How do I make all those difficult decisions?'

'The prime minister and the other palace and state officials will help you with that, son. But, I don't think you should worry much, you won't be a sultan for quite a while more because I don't intend to leave you or mother anytime soon.'

'Good.'

Sultanah Melaka stood at the end of the walkway. She was waiting for her son, Hussain so that they could go for a ride to the beach. 'Come, my son, Raja Hussain,' said the sultanah when she saw him coming towards the palace. Hussain went to her.

'Where are you going, dear?' asked Mansur.

'To *Kelebang*.'

'On the way back, take him to the port.'

'Why?'

'He wants to see the ships and boats.'

'All right,' said the sultanah. She then turned to Hussain. 'Do you want to see them, son?'

'Yes, mother,' answered Hussain.

'Come. Let's go.' She then took her son away. They went to the carriage that had been waiting there.

Hussain went with her mother until they got to *Kampung Keling* or Keling Village. Suddenly, a man appeared from behind the bushes. He ambushed the royal carriage. The man who wore black stabbed Hussain in the stomach before fleeing off, leaving him lying in the carriage in a pool of blood. The sultanah screamed on top of her voice. The rider turned around and was shocked to see that Hussain was stabbed. He then sped back to the palace. Fortunately, the prince was saved, as his injury was not serious. But, his father, Mansur took this as a lesson that his eldest son, Muhammad's life might be in danger.

Later that day Mansur called the entire senior palace and state officials for a meeting at the throne room. All of them sat cross-legged and ate betel leaves while waiting for the sultan to appear. He stepped inside the verandah. Mutahir, the *temenggong*, Perak, and the other officials stood up and kissed the sultan's hand.

'Sit down, gentlemen. What are we discussing today? Why are you all here?' asked Mansur.

The men looked at each other.

'Your majesty called us to have an audience here today,' said Mutahir.

'I did? Really?' The sultan then remembered. 'Ab, it is about what I want to do with Raja Muhammad. I fear if he remains here, his life will be in grave danger, like what happened to his younger brother, Raja Hussain in Keling Village recently.'

'I'm sorry to hear that,' said the prime minister.

'What about?' asked the *temenggong*.

'That's exactly what I want to find out from all of you.'

'I don't understand it.'

'Now that Raja Muhammad is no more the crown prince, don't you think I should ask him to do something?'

'Right,' said the *temenggong*.

'Any ideas on what I can do to him so that he can at least have something else to do besides?' asked the sultan. 'He can't be staying in the palace and doing nothing except to ride all day.'

'We have no idea,' said Mutahir. 'That's why we are here to inquire with your majesty.'

'If that's the case, I'll appoint him the sultan of Pahang,' said Mansur.

'Pahang?' asked the *temenggong*.

'Pahang does not have a sultan as yet. It is under our dominance. Therefore, I'd like to send Raja Muhammad over to be installed the sultan of Pahang,' said Mansur. 'We have neglected Pahang for too long. It is time that we did something to help improve the economy of the state. Who knows Raja Muhammad, as the sultan, can help to turn things around there.'

The men looked at each other. They were quite pleased, especially, Perak who thought by sending Muhammad to Pahang, he would be away from his sight and hence, mind, too. The sight of him still made him feel angry.

'Well, Tun Perak, you've been keeping quiet, do you have any opinions?' asked the sultan.

'No, your majesty.'

'I want to recall our viceroy in Pahang, Seri Bija and send Raja Muhammad to Pahang to be installed the sultan. And he will be called Sultan Muhammad Shah. I want to appoint your son, Tun Perak, Tun Hamzah as his prime minister with the title of Seri Amar diRaja.

'What do you say to this suggestion, Tun Perak? It will be good for Raja Muhammad to 'inspect the sea' or *melihat laut* so that he could grow up into a wise man and ruler. Besides, Pahang is not too far away from us here in Melaka. We can check on him anytime so he does not go astray again. He is such a difficult son to calm let alone control, my dear prime minister. He has so much energy in him. He can be careless sometimes. He has shown his lack of discretion once too often. I could tame a wild horse anytime, but not my son.'

Perak did not know exactly what the reason for Mansur to appoint his second son, Hamzah as the prime minister of Pahang and be under Sultan Muhammad. Was this a trick? Or was Sultan Mansur trying to make fun of him?

'I'm sure my son will be honored,' was all that Perak could say at that time.

'Very good. I want Sultan Muhammad Shah to take over the residence of the former King Dewa Surya. In this way, we will ensure that the Siamese will not find any excuse whatsoever to invade Pahang, now that this state has a sultan and a prime minister. And we shall leave it to Sultan Muhammad Shah to appoint whoever he might feel good enough to fill the other posts for the state.'

'Brilliant,' said the *temenggong*.

'Thank you.'

Muhammad rowed his boat. Ali and Malek were with him in the same boat.

'What can I do? There's no way that I can say no to my father,' said Muhammad. 'Looks like he wants to banish me to Pahang. It is as far away

from Melaka that one can get. Why does he hate me so much? Has he not done enough to punish me by removing me as the crown prince of Melaka? At his age, I did not expect him to be so shrewd and conniving.'

'When is he going to send you there? And who is going to be your prime minister?' said Ali.

'Tun Hamzah,' said Muhammad.

'Who is he?' asked Malek.

'He is the second son of Tun Perak. He will be given the title of Seri Amar diRaja. And he looks exactly like his late brother, Tun Besar. This is my father's idea of a sick joke!'

'Sounds like you're going to have some fun in Pahang,' said Ali jokingly. 'And your prime minister is no other than the younger brother of the person whom you had killed.'

They laughed, but Muhammad remained serious. He knew his friends were just teasing. They like to do that when something happened that surprised them. 'Don't make fun of me,' said Muhammad. 'This is serious business.'

'We are not making fun of you. We're serious, too, see,' said Malek.

The two princes laughed even louder.

'Okay, okay, let's go to the banks,' said Muhammad.

'Please do remember, once I have become sultan, you aren't allowed to make fun of me anymore, understand.'

'Why?'

'If you do, I shall punish you by making you stand in the sun all day. Or if you would prefer, I can order that you be beheaded in the public square. Which do you prefer?'

'Are you serious?'

'Yes, I am.'

Malek and Ali froze. They continued to row to the banks and got off the boat. The three princes went inside the woods. They plucked some fruits and ate them to their delight.

'Melaka will not be the same if you're gone, Muhammad,' said Ali seriously.

'It's true,' added Malek.

'But, you two can come to Pahang and see me anytime you like. I will be there. It is just two days by boat. Don't go by land. You will take twice as much time. Nobody knows if you will arrive in once piece or not. They are wild beasts in the jungles,' said Muhammad in a serious tone. Then he changed his mood and joked. 'The wild bears in Bukit Beruang, Bukit Katil and Musai and Peringgat are nothing compared to them.'

'I hate seeing any one of you with something missing,' Muhammad then laughed at his own joke. The two princes smiled.

'Now, you're making fun of us,' said Ali.

'Oh, I see. When you make fun of me, it is okay. When I try to be funny, you say, it's not fair,' said Muhammad. 'How cute.'

Malek threw some fruits at Muhammad. 'Here.' Muhammad caught the fruits and ate it.

The royal crier from Melaka and his assistants went to the center of the village in Pahang. One of their assistants hit a gong. The villagers crowded around them.

'Hear, hear! I am the royal crier from Melaka palace. I have been ordered by his majesty Sultan Mansur to come to Pahang and make this announcement. His majesty Sultan Mansur Shah wants all of you to know that his majesty has appointed his highness Raja Muhammad, the eldest son of the sultan, to be the first Sultan of Pahang. And his majesty will be officially called His majesty Sultan Muhammad Shah. And his majesty Sultan Muhammad Shah has appointed Tun Hamzah, son of Prime Minister Tun Perak as prime minister with the title of Seri Amar diRaja. Thank you for your attention,' announced the royal crier. He and his assistants went away. They had few other places to go to in Pahang to make similar announcements.

All the villagers were surprised. They looked and talked to each other. But, they were delighted just the same that they were going to have a new sultan and a prime minister. It should augur well for the state of Pahang.

Muhammad, now Sultan Muhammad walked to the port with his entourage. His ten ships had just been stocked with his personal belongings. He looked resplendent in the formal costumes of the first sultan of Pahang, bedecked with medals on his chest. His headgear looked different from the one worn by the sultan of Melaka. He had deliberately wanted it to be so, in order to distinguish it from those worn by royalty from Melaka. The other Malay rulers and their children, too, had created their own designs that looked different from the others. This was to ensure that he had a new identity of his own. Even his *sampin* that was wrapped around his waist was different. Mansur had ordered a special *keris* for Muhammad to have as his official keris as his symbol of authority and power. He and the other state and palace dignitaries were sending him off there so that he could assume his royal duties. A huge crowd of people was present to witness the important event. It was not often that such a ceremony was held at the port, i.e. to see a sultan leave Melaka.

'Please take good care of yourself, son,' advised Mansur.



'I will, father,' said Muhammad.

'Remember always, you are now the sultan of Pahang. And you have a responsibility to protect the honor of the sultanate, and the safety and well being of the people. Lastly, if the Siamese try to be funny and want to invade Pahang again, I will send men from Melaka immediately. They would probably want to test your resilience and want to bully you, too, simply because you have been appointed the sultan there; also because you are young. Lastly, remember that I am not sending you to Pahang to banish you. Take this as a service to the state of Melaka, since Pahang is part of Melaka.'

'Thank you, father.'

'Take good care of yourself, son,' said Sultanah Melaka. She wiped tears that flowed down her eyes with a small handkerchief.

'I will, mother,' said Muhammad.

'Do pay us a visit sometime, Brother Muhammad,' said Hussain.

'I will my dear little Brother Hussain, I will. You too can visit me in Pahang anytime so I can take you around my country,' said Sultan Muhammad. 'And thank you, dear father, for giving me a country for myself.'

'Not at all, my dear son.'

Muhammad turned and saw Perak and his wife; he immediately went to them. Both of them bent down and kissed the sultan's hand. Muhammad hugged Perak. 'Farewell,' said Perak. 'Hope your majesty will have a pleasant stay in Pahang.' He was still cordial towards Sultan Muhammad despite what he had done to his eldest son few months earlier. Being an old man and loyal to the sultan, Perak's thinking was different from those who were younger than him. Nobody knew why he behaved so atrociously and did not demand that sultan Muhammad sentenced to death for killing his eldest son, Besar. They thought he was being selfish and wanted to cling onto the sultan for his personal well being despite experiencing grave injustice being done to him.

'Goodbye, *ya* Prime Minister Tun Perak,' said Muhammad.

The state religious officer then offered blessings, until it was finished. Everybody wiped their hands on the faces.

'*Asalamulaiikum*,' said Muhammad.

'*Mulaiikum salam*,' everybody replied.

Muhammad then went to the ship that was berthed by the banks. He and Prime Minister Seri Amar diRaja Tun Hamzah waved at them when they got to the deck. His ship sailed away from the banks of the river. Those who were left behind waited on the docks and waved at them, until they had reached the mouth of the river and disappeared from sight as the winds took it away.

Muhammad stood by the railings and wondered what the future laid before him as the sight of Melaka slowly disappeared before him in the horizons. Some questions raced in his mind: Was he being banished? Would he be able to return to Melaka? These questions began to confuse him.

Hamzah went to him. The sun was now setting in the horizons and the rays of light were casting a golden glow on the sultan and the whole scenery. The atmosphere made the Muhammad more sentimental.

'Pardon me. What is your majesty thinking of?' said Hamzah.

'Yes, my prime minister, nothing! I'm just thinking, how fast time flies. I was just a small boy and now I realized that I've grown up into a man!' said Muhammad. 'All this while I expected to be the sultan of Melaka, but now, I have become the sultan of Pahang instead. This is all Allah's will.'

'Indeed, your majesty.'

'And looking at the wide sea, one can feel how small one is.'

'Yes, indeed. I feel the same way, too. At least your majesty was destined to be sultan. But, as for me, it didn't occur to me at all that I would be a prime minister. At the most I'd be just a junior official in your majesty's palace.'

'It's fated. It's Allah's will, too.'

'Certainly, your majesty. I do believe in fate, and Allah's will like any loyal Muslim.'

'I'm worried though.'

'What about, if I may ask?'

'My father is already old. I hope I will be able to see him sometime before he leaves this earth forever. I won't be able to bear it if I'm not there by his side at his deathbed, like all obedient sons.'

'Why? Certainly, your majesty can see his majesty Sultan Mansur Shah. Your majesty can return to Melaka to see his majesty Sultan Mansur Shah in Melaka anytime after we have settled down in Pahang.'

'I hope so; I do hope so, Tun Hamzah.'

Muhammad then turned and started to walk to his cabin. His assistants hovered around him just in case should he required anything. But their services were not needed. The sultan knew they were all exhausted and tired; they needed to rest to. So he quickly decided to retire so his men could do the same, too.

'I'll retire now, prime minister. We'll see each other again at dinner. There's something else that I want to discuss with you about,' said Muhammad. 'And if there're things that you'd wish to bring out and discuss, bring them then. I'll rest my tired ears for a while, and you do a favor to yours, too.'

'Very well, your majesty.'

The sultan entered his cabin. The men were relieved. They turned to look at each other's face. They then walked to their own cabins to be with their wives and children for the night as the ship headed towards their destination and into what still seemed to be an uncertain future ahead of them leaving Hamzah behind. He was still leaning on the railings. He continued to stare at the horizon in the distance.

## CHAPTER 10: THE BOY SULTAN

Raja Hussain was now eleven years old. He was tall and lanky, an exact duplicate of his father when he was his age. He was Mansur's second son, and younger brother of Muhammad who was now the first sultan of Pahang, a vassal state of Melaka, which the Siamese used to call Pura when it was under their rule.

He played with few princes his age in the compound of the palace. They ran behind the bushes and trees and played hide-and-seek with each other, unaware of his status. This was the only place where he was allowed to play with his friends. If he wanted to leave the palace compound, he had to be escorted by the handlers. More so now that he had become the crown prince. Hussain preferred to play with his friends in the compound of the palace, because this way they were able to run anywhere without being escorted by his handlers and guards. He felt free to do what he liked here. Even when he was not wearing his formal costumes and in the company of his parents, the sultan and sultanah, he stood out from the other kids his age who were as tall and as fair as he was. He had presence, leadership quality and above all, stature. Because of that, he stood way above the rest of his buddies.

They ran around in the garden, under the watchful eyes of some palace assistants who were constantly alert; their duty was to ensure all the princes, especially Hussain was not hurt. He was the crown prince of Melaka now and he should be treated accordingly, despite his young age especially so at the time when Mansur was now old and frail. He could die anytime. If this were to happen, Hussain would automatically ascend the throne and be the sixth sultan of Melaka, however young he may be.

'Try and get me,' said Hussain in his small voice that sounded more like a shrill.

'Not so fast, Raja Hussain,' said Raja Rosli who was slightly much older than his friend.

'Try and get me.'

'I give up, I give up; you're just too fast for me; you're like a horse.'

Rosli stopped. He panted. The other princes went to him. They did not want to pressure him. Even at such a young age, they knew who he was - the crown prince of Melaka. Because of that, they knew where they stood and how far they could conduct their relationship with him. Sometimes when the boys became rough, Hussain would stand erect and said loudly: 'I am the crown prince of Melaka, my dear friends!' When this happened, all the boys would stand still, stopped talking loudly, and behaved themselves.

'Anything's the matter, Raja Rosli?' asked Raja Hanif.

'No, I'm just too exhausted, that's all. Don't be alarmed, I said. Don't you get exhausted sometime, yourself?' answered Rosli.

Hussain stopped and looked at them. 'What's the matter all of you? He said he's just exhausted, that's all. Beside, he's no match for all of you; he doesn't exert himself physically like the rest of us do. How about a game of checkers then?'

'He's exhausted. Let's call the game over,' said Hussain.

'All right.'

Rosli went to them. Hussain saw him coming and said: 'Sit, Rosli.'

They went to the bench and sat there. The palace assistants followed them and waited for their orders. They knew when the princes had stopped playing, they required their drinks be brought over, without being ordered to do so; if not, they might be shirking in their duties.

'Anything's the matter, your highness?' asked one of the assistants to Raja Aman Nor.

'He's just exhausted,' said Hussain.

'I'll get some refreshments then.'

'That'll be good. Do make it snappy; we're all exhausted and thirsty.'

The chief palace assistant went to the palace and brought out some drinks in two jars. He handed a cup to Kassim and then the others. They drank and felt better now.

'Why, Rosli?' asked Hussain.

'I'm just too exhausted, that's all. I've got to go now. See you all tomorrow.' Rosli then rushed off. He went to his carriage and it took him away to his home.

'I've got to get going, too, Hussain. See you tomorrow,' said Hanif.

'Me too,' said Rajas Rashid, Manan and Aman Nor, one after another. They all went off, and left Hussain alone in the compound. He then walked to the palace followed by the assistants. He stopped at the bottom of the staircase where his assistants washed his feet and wiped them with a piece of cloth. He then climbed the concrete stairs and entered the palace. Some of the guards remained outside while the others followed him. He walked along the corridor on the first floor of the palace. He stopped and turned at the guards. 'I'm okay; you can go now,' said Hussain in a most childish way. But the guards took it as a command and acted swiftly.

'Very well, his highness,' said the guards. They moved back and left Hussain alone in the corridor thinking that he was safe now that he was in their private family quarters. Hussain turned around and immediately went to his father's room. He knocked and opened the door and entered the room. He looked around but saw no one there. It was quiet in there; the stillness made him worried. He never felt like this before like his spine was tingling. He did not know why, but he was worried. 'Father, father,' he called. There was no answer. He walked around and looked at other places, but there was not a single soul in sight. Where could everybody be, he thought to himself. 'Father, father.' He then went to other parts of the room. Hussain was shocked to see his father lying on the floor besides the bed thinking that he was just having a nap. No wonder he was hidden from everybody's view. He went to him and shook his body gently. 'Father, why are you lying there?' He shook his father's body again; he still did not move. 'Wake up, father, wake up. It's I, Hussain. Father...'

Hussain started to cry. He knew there was something wrong with his father. He then stood back. His mother, the sultanah immediately rushed along the corridor. And within seconds, she had appeared at the door when she heard her son's voice from outside. 'What's the matter, son? Why are you crying?' she asked.

Hussain grabbed his mother and cried louder. She was shocked. 'What's the matter, my son? Tell me!'

'Why is father not waking up.'

'Where is he?'

'Behind the bed, lying on the floor.'

She went there and was shocked to see her husband lying at his side. Foam had already appeared in his mouth that was gaped open like he was trying to breathe hard. 'Ya, Allah!' screamed the sultanah. 'Guards, guards! *Pengawal, pengawal!*'

Few guards rushed to the bedroom from different parts of the palace. Some even came in from outside of the palace, where they were standing guard near the sultan's bedroom. They saw the sultanah was a state of shock. They then went to the sultan. 'Yes, your majesty?' asked one of the palace guards.

'Carry his majesty and put him on the bed,' said the sultanah.

The guards did as ordered. The sultan remained stiff. He had died quite sometime ago and his face was turning blue. The guards were aware of what had happened to the sultan, but none dared to say it. They preferred to keep quiet, as it was not their duty to talk or ask the sultanah or Hussain. Hussain held onto his mother's thigh and he started to cry.

'Get the prime minister,' said the sultanah.

'Yes, your majesty,' said one of the guards.

A guard rushed out of the room while the others waited. They did not know what to do next. Initially, they thought an intruder had tried to break into the palace, or the least that they could guess was their sultan had collapsed to the ground and had injured himself.

Mansur's body lay in the throne room. He was given a state burial and everybody in Melaka was mourning. Shop houses and private residences flew the flags at half-mast. The port was unusually quiet as trading stopped. The streets were empty. The gaiety and excitement the traders and merchants had experienced at the port, whilst being engaged in their usual pursuit, i.e. to sell or buy goods from each other, subsided or died completely. Even the chirping of the birds was not heard much. The waves hit the banks of the Melaka River less furiously. The breeze flew gently now like they, too, were less enthusiastic. In the Javanese Bazaar near the banks of the Melaka River, all shops were closed as a sign of respect. The whole of Melaka was in mourning. Their sultan had died. In the villages, the Malays recited the Holy Koran and *Surab Yassin* in the mosques and their private homes.

Mansur's body was put on a low platform and it was covered with the flag of Melaka. All the dignitaries sat cross-legged around it; they all wore white with their black *songkok* felt caps laced with a thick white line; those who wore their official headgear had a white line around them. They, together with the members of the Melaka royalty read verses from the Holy Koran, led by the state religious leaders or *imams* and *mufitis*. Incense was burnt; it gave out a sweet smell and thick smoke that filled the whole room.

The late sultan's eldest son, Muhammad Shah, the sultan of Pahang entered the room and sat. He was handed a copy of the Holy Koran and he immediately opened a chapter and read it quietly. He had rushed from Pahang

the moment the special messenger from Melaka handed him the note that informed of his father's demise.

The hearse that carried his body was paraded across Melaka town on its way to the royal cemetery. Thousands of people of all races lined the streets; they cried and threw scented flower petals before the carriage. Hussain and the widow of the late sultan, the sultanah of Melaka and members of their family were there, too. Later the same day, Mansur's body was buried in the royal cemetery. He was laid beside the cemetery of his father, Sultan Muzaffar near his other ancestors.

After the funeral was over, the formal installation ceremony of Hussain as the new sixth sultan of Melaka took place. He sat on the throne. His eyes were still wet. Occasionally an assistant wiped tears that had flowed down to his cheeks. Those who were in the throne room felt very sad for him. Perak handed him a royal *keris*, as it was his duty. Hussain was now installed as Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah. He stood up. He took the *keris* and kissed it.

'Long live Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah!' said Perak. This was the formal name of the new sultan of Melaka, the sixth that the sultanate ever had.

'Long live Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah!' repeated the people. They comprised of senior palace officials and relatives of the sultan. Perak repeated it six times, to signify that his majesty was the sixth sultan of Melaka. He then went to the verandah with Alauddin Riayat, together with his elder brother, Muhammad and other members of the royal household and state dignitaries. Outside thousands of people were cranking their neck to look at their new sultan.

'Hear, hear! his highness Raja Hussain has been installed the new sultan of Melaka to succeed the late his majesty Sultan Mansur Shah. And his majesty shall be called Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah. Long live Sultan Riayat Shah! Long live Sultan Riayat Shah, the Sixth Sultan of Melaka!' announced Perak. *'Daulat tuanku! Daulat tuanku!'*

'Long live Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah! Long live Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah!' repeated the people. *'Daulat tuanku! Daulat tuanku!'*

'Because his majesty Sultan Alauddin Riayat is still in mourning, we ask that everybody refrain from celebrating his majesty's ascension to the throne, until the formal mourning period of forty-four days is officially over,' added Perak. 'In the meantime, citizens of Melaka and guests who are Muslims are encouraged to offer their blessings so that the late Sultan Mansur Shah shall be given a rightful place in Heavens by Allah.'

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*Raja Hussain was a young boy of eleven years of age when he succeeded his father, the late Sultan Mansur Shah upon his untimely demise in 1477 CE or 881AH. He was called Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah.*

*After many years on the throne, he got married to two women who bore him three children. Under His Majesty's sultanate, Melaka began to see its past glory and prosperity. However, the calm and tranquility of the state was soon stirred by the presence of petty thieves who tried to take advantage of the peaceful situation.*

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Hitam broke in the house of Merchant Kutty one night. His two friends, Kelabu and Belang followed him. They went to the living room and broke open the chests that was stuck to the wall and stole all the jewelry and expensive items in it. He and his gang of thieves carried the stolen goods in bundles along the street at night. They saw some guards and hid themselves. Their black clothes made them almost invisible in the dark alleyways.

'Guards! That way!' said Hitam softly so as not to wake up the whole neighborhood.

They crossed the street quietly and walked behind another building. The guards did not see them because it was pitch dark. The thieves were smart enough not to make any noise when they were walking or running. This was something that they had perfected over the many years they were in this dubious business. When they got to their hideout, Hitam opened the bundle. He showed the expensive jewelry and other items to his friends. He smiled widely, and felt contented that the day's catch was substantial than the previous night.

The prosperity that the state had experienced under the former Sultan Mansur had created many wealthy people. They were mostly the traders, merchants and other industrialists who started to venture into the production of many unusual products and goods that the majority of the people of Melaka desired for their everyday use. Many of these wealthy foreign traders and merchants decided to remain in Melaka where they got married to the local girls. Created a small group of wealthy Malays, as compared to the many Muslims and non-Muslim Indians and Chinese who had been economically well off long before them.

'We're rich, my friends. What do you have?' said Hitam proudly.

His friends opened their bundles and produced more priceless jewelry and items. They smiled widely. Hitam went to the side and poured himself a cup of



coffee. 'Coffee anyone?' he asked. 'It's time to celebrate a little. These Melaka merchants are extremely wealthy; just where did they get all their wealth from?'

Both his friends nodded. Hitam poured two more cups and gave them a cupful each. It was still hot, so they just held the cups to let the coffee cool down a little; otherwise, they would burn their lips and mouths.

'Now, listen to me; there's a very wealthy Arab merchant - Kiyai Tarambulus is his name. Funny name, but he's very wealthy, just the same. He could very well be the wealthiest man in Melaka. We really don't care about their names, just their wealth.'

His friends laughed at Kelabu's joke.

'Wealthy people seem to have long and funny names. This Kiyai fellow owns a large house in Bandar Hilir. Want to try his house next?' continued Kelabu.

They laughed but not too loudly.

'Now?' asked Hitam.

'No, not today.'

'Tomorrow,' suggested Belang.

'Tomorrow then. I'll spy the house in the day, to see the entry points,' said Hitam. 'So we don't have to fumble like we did the last time. The Kiyai's house is very large; it surely has many doors that we can use to sneak out should we be trapped.'

'I'll follow you,' said Kelabu.

They continued to drink.

Kiyai's wife, Begum Zaitoon walked out of her bedroom. She went to the safe to take out some jewelry to wear for the day. She was shocked to see its door was left ajar. The way it was opened it did not appear like her husband had absent-mindedly forgotten to close it. It looked more like someone had broken into their house and cracked open the safe with a piece of iron rod because it left a big scar at the side of the safe. 'Goodness, goodness me! Kalsum, Kalsum,' she cried, sounding almost hysterical.

Her daughter, Kalsum rushed to the room. 'What is it, mother?' she asked.

'Someone broke into the house. Look, the safe's been broken into.'

'Anything missing, mother?'

'All our jewelry, and the expensive items are not there.'

'What do we do, mother?'

'Get Kamal.'

Kalsum rushed out of the living room and returned with her younger brother, Kamal.

'Yes, mother,' said Kamal.

'I want you to go to the port and ask your father to return home immediately.'

'Why, anything's the matter?'

'We've been burgled, hurry!'

'Yes, mother.' Kamal rushed out of the house in Bandar Kaba - a wealthy neighborhood and ran out of the coconut grove where the house stood. He ran as fast as he could through the streets of Melaka heading towards the port. He knocked a few people who stood along his way. 'Excuse me, sir. Sorry.' He rushed off. They turned around and excused him. They knew who he was, the son of Kiyai Tarambulus.

'Take it easy, sonny. What's the big rush?' they asked.

'Our house has been burgled,' replied Kamal.

'Really?' They were shocked.

'Do take care of your precious items and jewelry, too.'

'I will surely do that, son.'

The men looked at each other. This was the first time they were hearing of anybody in Melaka who had been robbed. Melaka had not known of such incidents before.

'What has happened to Melaka now?' asked a Malay man.

His friends around him did not answer. They froze.

'Times have changed for the worse now.'

Kiyai was busy dealing with his friends, two traders from China, Traders Wong and Ah Seng. They were sitting in their favorite coffee shop near the port. From there, they could see the ships and boats in the port, and the thousands of people milling and doing their business. Even from there, they could hear the shouting and screaming of the people at the port. It was a normal scene and they had got used to it.

'Well, Mr. Wong, Mr. Ah Seng, I will have to order more of the produce from India. But, you both have to wait until new shipment arrives at the port in three months' time,' said Kiyai.

'Why so long, Mr. Kiyai? I can't hold my ship much longer. We are bound by the dictates of the winds. If we missed them, we'll have to wait out for few months before we could sail out with the next wind,' said Wong. 'What do we do if we have to wait in Melaka for three months or so for the next Northerly winds to blow? Just smoke more opium or get drunk!'

Kiyai shook his head and shrugged. He thought they should know better because that was what they normally did anyway.

'Can't we get them in less time than that?' asked Ah Seng.

'There's a drought in India; the plants have been damaged.'

Wong and Ah Seng shook their heads. They cursed their bad luck, but stopped short of blaming it on Kutty.

'Drought? This is the first time I'm hearing about it,' said Ah Seng.

'It happens all the time in India, sirs. Please bear with me. Who doesn't want to trade, my friends? Don't you think I would be silly for withholding my produce? I stand to lose too, in which case.'

'Is it because of the drought or something else, Mr. Kutty?'

'What do you mean?'

'The thieves for instance.'

The two Chinese traders kept quiet.

'I've to go now, my friends. But do remember this: I enjoy doing business with you though,' said Kiyai. He changed his mind. 'Ah, let's have some tea. Yes, it's partly because of the thieves that I'm not willing to bring in too much. Melaka is losing many merchants and traders because of them. I'm so sorry to have to say that, but this is the truth. And I'm not the only trader who's saying this, but everybody. Just ask around, if you think I'm bluffing you.'

'Never mind, Mr. Kiyai, we've other things to do,' said Wong.

'Very well, good day gentlemen.'

'Good day,' said both the Chinese traders almost in unison and went off.

Kiyai sat at a table. He held his cup and took a big sip of coffee. His son, Kamal rushed to him just as he put down the cup. Kamal was panting and he looked like some wild animals were chasing him. 'Father, father,' he called as soon as he saw his father had put down the cup. He was sweating profusely. His father had not seen him looking like that before, like he was possessed or was chased by the devils, like they would always say. That's what they always said when somebody seemed to be in any kind of rush.

'What's the matter, son?' asked Kiyai. 'Are you being chased by the devil? This can't be; the devils are not out in bright daylight.'

'Nothing of that sort, father.' He wiped the sweat on his face, neck and hands.

'Then what is it?'

'Mother wants you back at the house.'

'I'll return shortly; tell your mother that.'

'No, she wants you home now,' insisted Kamal.

Kiyai was confused. What could possibly be the problem? He did not want to ask a direct question because there were strangers there. He thought there might be some family problems. He got up on his feet and took the last sip from his cup. He put down the empty cup on the table; it hit with a thud. Few customers briefly turned around to look at the source of the sound. They then

resumed with their own affairs when they saw what happened - Kiyai, a regular customer at the coffee shop had hit his cup on the table and then asked: 'What about?'

'We've been robbed,' said his son. He turned around to see if any of the customers had overheard him; none did. They were too busy with their own affairs. Many were covered with thick smoke from their tobacco.

Kiyai was shocked. 'What do you mean? Where? Who did it?'

His son shook his head.

'Burgled?'

Kiyai immediately picked up his notebooks and other personal items from the desk. He went to the counter, put a coin on the counter to pay for his drinks and went off with his son. He continued to walk with his son in long brisk strides. He was almost running. 'How did it happen?'

'The thieves broke into the house at night.'

'Damned those thieves!' said Kiyai. 'How could they break into our house when it is so secured with padlocks and chains, Kamal?'

Kamal did not answer his father. They continued to walk briskly towards their house. They immediately entered it. His wife, Begum Zaitoon and daughter, Kalsum were standing near the safe. Kiyai shook his head when he saw the safe that was ripped open. He knew how much was stolen, a lot because he had a good idea of what he had in it. Now, all that he could see were only few items that were left. They were mostly items that did not have much value. All the expensive ones were stolen. He shook his head. The thieves were sure of what they wanted; they chose only those they were valuable, and left those they were not.

'I just don't believe this. All our prized possessions have been stolen. It'll take us years before we can collect something like that,' said Kiyai.

'What do we do now?' asked his wife.

Kiyai shook his head in disbelief. Everybody froze there.

Hitam and Kelabu loitered around Kiyai's house again the following night hoping to break into it. They were not happy with what they had stolen, so now they had returned to grab more. They wore black clothes so that they could not be seen in the dark, as it was the uniform of thieves. Even the people who were mourning did not wear black, but white. They looked at all the windows and doors. Hitam, the leader of the group turned around and looked at his friends. 'This house isn't easy to break in, but, I think there's a way. From the top,' he said.

A Malay man passed by them.

'*Asalamulaikum*,' my friends,' greeted the Malay man.

'*Mulaiikum salam,*' answered Hitam and his friends almost in unison, in a tone that made them sounded like they were pious men.

'Be careful, my friends, thieves are everywhere. Lock up all your doors and windows.'

'Thank you, sir. We sure will,' said Hitam. 'We sure will.'

The Malay man walked away. Hitam and Kelabu smiled. They felt relieved.

Alauddin Riayat sat at the edge of his bed. He was now an adult, and a happily married man. All the time since he was installed the sultan of Melaka, his reign was plain sailing; not a crime was committed. Now, suddenly things had changed. And he was worried. The reports his security officers gave to him did not make him happy at all. He pitied those traders and merchants whose houses had been broken into and whose jewelry and other properties stolen. Sometimes, the thieves discovered that the safes they had broken into were empty. The traders had removed them for fear of being stolen so the thieves had the audacity to vandalize their houses instead. They ransacked these house, as a way of showing their displeasure for failing to steal anything from these houses after spending so much time planning the heist that came to naught.

Alauddin Riayat's wife, the sultanah of Melaka went to the make-up table and removed the powder on her face with a piece of wet towel. 'What are you thinking off, dear?' she asked.

'Thieves,' replied Alauddin Riayat.

'Thieves?'

'They are causing me to have sleepless nights these days.'

'Can't the guards do something about it? Get more guards to look after the state then.'

'I must do something about it; can't let the guards alone to do it. They have been negligent in performing their duties. Some of them might even be related to these thieves, nobody knows.'

'How?'

Alauddin Riayat stood up. The sultanah looked up. 'What are you doing?'

'I'm going out to seize them myself. Don't they ever get their necks in my hands; I'll strangle them with these bare hands myself.' He opened the door and saw the guard who was standing on duty outside. 'Guard, please get Brother Isap and Brother Siak for me, now!' said Alauddin Riayat.

'Very well, your majesty.'

The guard went off.

Alauddin Riayat entered his study. He wore black. Isap and Siak were already waiting for him there. 'I want both of you to come with me; we have work to do. Come.'

'Yes your majesty,' said both of them.

They went off.

Alauddin Riayat and the two soldiers, Isap and Siak wandered the streets and all the back lanes in Melaka and observed the people. They covered all the streets, especially the bazaar that stood on the banks of the Melaka River. They also went to the new streets that were constructed as the city expanded over the years, especially in the Chinese quarters. It was just across the Malay bazaar. They then crossed the wooden bridge that linked both sides of the river in the north and south of the city. It was built when Parameswara founded Melaka. This could be the place where the thieves might target since they were stocked with goods and many other valuable items, thought Alauddin Riayat.

Hitam, Kelabu and Belang broke into a house from the roof. They entered from an opening in the room that they had broken. They then entered the house through it and went straight to the safe that was stuck to the wall in the living room. It was pitch dark, yet they could see the safe and made their way to it without knocking anything. They had cat's eyes. They then opened the safe, removed a chest, and then bundled the other expensive items into sacks before leaving the house through the back door.

Alauddin Riayat continued to patrol the streets and back lanes, not knowing about the burglary that had just taken place elsewhere. A cat fell from the roof of a building. It then quickly ran away. 'What was that?' he asked.

They turned and saw a cat running away.

'A cat, your majesty,' said Isap.

'Don't 'your majesty' me, Isap. Just call me Alauddin.'

'Yes, Alauddin.'

Siak nodded. 'Yes, Alauddin, since you insist. Nothing seems to be happening, Alauddin.'

'Good. Do you want to see something happen, Siak?'

'Not really, Alauddin.'

'I hope it's not their day off,' said Isap.

They smiled.

'Yes, thieves too must have their day off. They can't be working every day, or night,' said the sultan.

They smiled.

Alauddin Riayat and his two followers were now at another part of Melaka. Meanwhile at another part of the city, Hitam, Kelabu, Belang and two other men, continued to carry the chests with them. Kelabu slipped his chest and it fell down. It made a loud thud. They received a rude shock. They were sure somebody might have heard it too. They froze and looked around to see if there might be people staring out of their windows. There was none. They were relieved.

'Stop doing that, Kelabu. You're going to wake up the whole city,' said Hitam.

'Sorry, Hitam,' said Kelabu. He quickly picked up his chest and they went off to their hideout in cave in the Chinese Hills.

Alauddin Riayat and his two followers sat behind some boxes to rest. Everything was quiet. Then they saw five people walking at the other end of the street.

'There they are,' whispered Isap.

'Who?' asked the sultan.

'The five thieves.'

Alauddin Riayat stood up. He looked at the other end of the street. 'Yes, they're thieves all right. Come, let's surprise them.' He and his followers went the other direction. They then stood at the end of the back lane. Hitam and his friends walked to them. They were shocked to see people standing there. They, too, were wearing black like them. 'Stop! Where do you think you're going, gentlemen of the night?' asked the sultan.

Hitam was shocked. 'Who, who, are you? Get out of our way. Find other houses to rob. There, there,' he said. He pointed at the direction of the house at random.

'No, no; you're wrong; we're not thieves. We are thief-catchers. Prepare for your death, gentlemen.'

'Don't be ridiculous; are you joking? Get out of our way.' Hitam smiled, still thinking it was a joke. Alauddin and his friends were serious. Then Hitam drew his *keris* and started to attack Alauddin Riayat. They fought. After a brief struggle, Alauddin Riayat managed to kill him. Hitam's friends who had dropped the chest and bundles ran off. Alauddin Riayat gave chase. After catching up, he killed three of them. The last one ran off in another direction and thus his neck was saved, but not for long. Siak chased him. After a while, he managed to catch up with him. They fought. Soon, the last thief was killed. He and his friends were no match for Isap, Siak or the sultan who could use their weapons well. Alauddin Riayat thought they were just petty thieves, a nuisance not only to themselves but also to everybody in Melaka.

'What do we do with their bodies, Alauddin?' asked Isap.

'Leave them behind for everybody to see tomorrow. Take the chest and bundles. Let's return to the palace,' said Alauddin Riayat.

They went off.

Early next morning, Alauddin Riayat presided over a meeting with his senior officials. All of them were unaware of what had happened. The sultan gave them a brief lecture on the state of the country, initially sounding casual and like the previous reports that he had given before. Later he began to sound serious and related about the theft that took place the night before asking a question: 'Is there anything else that anybody wishes to report today, gentlemen? Tell me now.' He sounded casual, because he did not want to sound suspicious.

'No, your majesty,' replied Mutahir.

'Really?'

'Everything is safe.'

'Has there been any theft?'

'No, not that I know of.'

'Sure?'

'I'm certain, your majesty. I'd be the first to know if a theft had been committed anywhere in Melaka.'

Alauddin Riayat thought. The others waited. What was the sultan up to, they wondered.

'Do you gentlemen know that there were five people who were killed last night in the back lanes over there, near the place where the traders in Melaka live?'

The officials were shocked. This was the first time they were hearing of this.

'Five people, your majesty?' asked Mutahir.

'They're all thieves.'

Mutahir was embarrassed. The others kept their heads down. How could the sultan know, they asked themselves.

'Yes, five men were killed last night while carting their goods away. Their bodies are now still lying in the back lane. I'm sure the people will discover them by now when they wake from their sleep.'

'What have you gentlemen been doing the whole of last night? Aren't all of you supposed to keep an eye on the safety of the city and people? Seri Nara diRaja Tun Mutahir, isn't this your duty?'

'Yes, it is,' said Mutahir.

'You are in charge of internal security, is that it?'



'Yes, your majesty.' He almost choked on the betel leaf he was chewing. He quickly threw it in the spittoon and wiped the red saliva that remained on his lips with a handkerchief, and quickly hid it in his shirt pocket.

'Do you also know that a chest full of jewelry and some bundles have already been found?'

'No, your majesty.'

Isap and Siak were sitting there. The sultan looked at them. 'Brother Isap, please tell all the gentlemen here what actually happened.'

'Very well, Alauddin. Er... Your majesty,' said Isap.

The men were shocked at Isap's error. But, they were surprised that the sultan did not take offense to the gaff. It was partly his own fault for insisting that Isap didn't call him by his official title, but by his first name when they were out looking for the thieves. But, he hoped that Isap would not repeat the same mistake again, because it might make everybody suspicious of the relationship with the sultan.

'I'm sorry, your majesty,' said Isap.

Alauddin Riayat smiled.

'That's okay, Brother Isap. Proceed.'

'Thank you, your majesty, gentlemen. His majesty and the two of us, sneaked out of the palace, with his majesty wearing ordinary and shabby clothes. The three of us patrolled the streets. After some time passed we found five men carrying a chest and some bundles. We stopped them just before they managed to get to their hideout in Chinese Hills, south of here. They tried to get at us, but his majesty managed to kill all four of them. One tried to escape, but I ran after him and killed him.'

'Thanks, Brother Isap. Have you found out the real owner of the chest?'

'Yes. It belongs to an Arab merchant by the name of Kiyai Tarambulus.'

All the dignitaries who were there were clearly shocked and embarrassed. They kept their heads down. They did not expect that the sultan to personally go to the streets late at night and apprehend the thieves who was responsible for causing havoc to the city.

'Well, Brother Isap I want you to deliver the chest and bundles to Kiyai Tarambulus. I'm sure he's not fully aware of what had happened, otherwise, he would have lodged a complain with us.'

'Very well, your majesty. I will do so now.'

Isap stood up.

'You, Brother Siak, help Brother Isap,' said the sultan.

'Yes, your majesty,' said Siak.

Isap and Siak went off.

Alauddin Riayat walked along the corridor. Mutahir gave chase. 'Pardon me, your majesty.'

Alauddin Riayat stopped and turned. 'Yes, Seri Nara? Anything's the matter?'

'Is there anything that your majesty wants me to do now?'

'Use your own head, Seri Nara. Thieves are loitering in the streets every night. They're taking advantage of the development that's taking place in the city. Traders and merchants have started to return with business, and there are many rich people in Melaka now. We just cannot to make them leave the city.'

'This is the main reason why there are more thieves who are out to take advantage of the situation. What shall you do? These businessmen must be protected or else they'd run away with their wealth. What will Melaka be without trading activities and the traders and merchants' confidence eroded?'

'I will ensure that more men are deployed to patrol the streets every night.'

'Brilliant idea, Tun Mutahir. Do whatever is necessary to ensure that Melaka and its people are safe. Remember always: The foreign merchants won't come and trade here if the state isn't safe for them to trade and bring their goods; and for them to keep their wealth and stay peacefully in their own homes.'

'Certainly, your majesty, certainly.'

The sultan then walked off, leaving Mutahir alone in the corridor with his thoughts. Now he knew what sort of a ruler Alauddin Riayat was. He was a sultan with no pretensions.

Kiyai sat in his living room. He counted his money that was laid on the table. His wife, Begum Zaitoon went to him with some snacks. 'Won't you take some rest, dear,' she said. The *azan* was heard in the background.

'Ah, it's the *azan*,' remarked Kiyai. 'How melodious; how melodious indeed it is each time it is sounded. The sound of it always soothes my frayed nerves and put me at such ease that I cannot help but want to forget my life's problems, however big and huge they are. It makes me realize how small and unimportant my life is. And how necessary money and wealth are.'

'I like it when it reverberates and echoes throughout the land, from one mosque to another. Time to stop and rest now. That's what it means,' Kiyai said almost to himself, and sounding more like a poet than a dreamer. 'Time to stop thinking of money, trading, and relax. We mustn't leave Allah away from our thoughts at any time. Because once we do that, we're lost in the maze of life that only leads to destruction.' He threw himself at the back of his chair and took in a deep breath. At that moment, his mind was not on the thieves who had stolen his properties, but on his religious duties that he had to

perform without fail. He forgave those who had broken into his house and stole his goods.

'Please do take extra precaution; there're thieves everywhere. Many traders and merchants have been robbed. Just this morning I saw five dead bodies lying on the street. They were thieves,' reminded his wife.

'Really?' He gulped down the coffee and went off.

'Please take good care, dear,' she advised again as though he had not heard her.

'I always do that, dear. If I didn't surely by now we'd be left with just clothes on our backs with no money for ourselves and to give to charity.' He then went to the barrel of water and had his ablution. After he had finished, he went to the prayer room at the side of the living room.

Kiyai prayed alone. When he was almost over, his other daughter, Rasheedah went to the prayer room. She waited by the door to allow her father to finish with his prayer. He then stood up with his prayer beads in one hand. He squeezed each of the beads as he stood up; it was something that he could do even without thinking, like it was second nature to him.

'There's someone waiting for you in the living room,' said Rasheedah.

'Who?' asked Kiyai.

He turned around. He then went to the living room. Kiyai was shocked to see his chest that was reported to be stolen was now sitting on the floor and some bundles that contained other good and personal items. 'Where did you get all these?' he asked in surprise. He had given up all hopes of ever seeing them again. Now they are all back in his house like they never left it in the first place. He had even resigned to the fact that he was not going to recover any of his stolen properties, and thought nothing about them.

'We took them back from the five thieves, Kiyai, sir. His majesty Sultan Alauddin Riayat wants us to return them to you. Are you the rightful owner, sir?' asked Isap.

'Yes, indeed.'

'We must go now, sir, madam. *Asalamulaikum!*

'*Mulaiikum salam.*' He then went out of the house with Siak who had accompanied him to there.

Mutahir wore shabby clothes the following night. He patrolled the streets together with some guards. He wanted to see for himself how the state looked like at night. Since the sultan could wear shabby clothes and patrolled the streets at night, surely, he could do the same, thought he.

Because of the extra security precautions that they had taken, Melaka became a safer place. More ships were anchored at the port and many others

berthed in the straits of Melaka. Foreign traders returned in droves when they heard that peace had returned to Melaka because of the swift action of the sultan. They were now feeling more comfortable that Melaka was as safe as before. All the thieves were apprehended; many were killed when they tried to resist arrest. Now the jails were full with them. Because of this, the other minor thieves who mostly stole cheaper goods decided to stay away from the streets at night. They quickly found themselves other professions that did not require them to commit crime or steal from other people's houses and shops or stores. Others repented; they became pious and studied the religion more vigorously.

Kiyai went to some Chinese traders.

'Good morning, Kiyai,' greeted Trader Heng.

'Good morning, Trader Heng, and Trader Lee. It's nice to see you're back in Melaka,' replied Kiyai.

'It's good to know that Melaka has returned to some form of normalcy. No more thieves.'

'What's the point of trading at a port where there are so many thieves?' asked Lee.

'I'm sure the sultan is aware of that and he has taken steps to get rid of the menace,' said Kiyai.

'Shall we sit and have some tea, Kiyai, sir?' said Heng. 'Or do you prefer other drinks like beer? I've some wonderful Chinese beer, if you like.'

'No, thanks. My religion forbids me from consuming those drinks. Please forgive me. Tea will be okay, if you don't mind.'

'I'm sorry. Please forgive me for my ignorance.'

Kiyai, Lee and Heng entered the coffee shop. They took up a vacant table by the windows overlooking the port. From there, they could see the many ships, junks and other boats and *sampans* in the river. Hundreds or possibly thousands of workers and traders were milling there, trying to do their daily chores and make deals. Goods were being loaded and unloaded from the ships and boats. Piles of bales of cloth and other good were also dumped at the port and many deals were struck between them. Some of the traders hugged each other after striking a deal. Others just cursed and spat on the ground, feeling angry that they did not manage to strike a good bargain from each other. Everything was decided there and then, with no middlemen. Mostly the trading was done by barter trading, where money did not change hands. They were still not familiar with the currency that their countries were using. So they insisted on exchanging goods with each other.

'I hear that even the Seri Nara diRaja Tun Mutahir is patrolling the streets these days,' said Kiyai.

Really?' asked Lee.

'Although Melaka's fine now, he still wants to make sure that Melaka is safe from thieves. Thieves have a knack of returning to the scene when they smell that the situation had rotted like before.'

'I'm sure it won't return to its former situation, as long as our sultan is around.'

Mutahir sat at the next table. He sipped coffee. He overheard what the three gentlemen were saying. He was passing himself as an Arab trader by wearing Arab robes. In this way, he could conceal his identity. No one recognized him or realized that he was there. He then stood up and went off.

'*Asalamulaiikum, ya, Sheikh?*' greeted Kiyai, because it was the habit of Muslims to greet a fellow Brethren when they bump into each other.

'*Mulaiikum salam,*' replied Mutahir. He walked out of the coffee shop.

'We have tea and other goods that you might be interested in. How about raw unprocessed opium - *madat?*' asked Lee. 'We have lots of it ready to be transferred from our ships to shore.'

'I'm afraid I don't deal in opium, sir,' said Kiyai. 'I hope I'm not disappointing you.'

'That's okay.'

'You can make good money, Kiyai.'

'That's okay. But, I know someone who might be interested.'

The very same day, Kiyai went to the gambling den in the Chinese quarters in the city. He saw Trader Lim playing *mahjong* with his friends. They mostly used gold and silver coins issued by the sultanate that bore the sultan's seal. Even those currencies that were issued by the reigning sultan's predecessors were still used. The place was filled with smoke. Some men were even smoking opium from bamboo poles that they held with both hands, the top end were stuck to their mouths and they inhaled smoke until the bones in their bare chest were seen. At the back, all the deities were placed on a table with candles and other joss sticks lit.

'Lim,' called Kiyai.

Lim turned. He stood up and went to him.

'Here're some traders from China. They have something you might be interested in,' said Kiyai in Malay. Lim was a local born Chinese man. His ancestors had come to Melaka much earlier, presumably with the official delegation of the emperor China in the fifteenth century. He was able to speak Malay well, but he still had a strong Chinese accent. He conversed in the

language with Kiyai. The other two Chinese traders did not know a word of what they were saying. They stood there frozen like statues. Heng and Lee waited at the side.

'This way. I want you to meet Trader Heng, and over there, Trader Lee,' said Kiyai.

Lim greeted them.

'I'll leave the three of you here. I will go now. I'm sure you can speak with each other better without me around.'

'Thank you, Kiyai,' said Lim.

Kiyai nodded and walked to his carriage. The driver shook the strap and the horse moved forward.

Lim took Heng and Lee to the back room where they could get some privacy to discuss their personal matters. They passed the gambling room and went to the back. Here it was quiet and away from the din created by the gamblers. Thick smoke hung in the room. It also made the room so smelly. The smell was so thick that it was stuck to one's clothes. It stayed there for days until they were washed by soap.

'Have a seat,' said Lim in Chinese, the dialect was Hokkien, as most of the Chinese who came to Melaka were most from the Fukien province in South China. Very few of them spoke Cantonese and least of all, Mandarin. People who spoke in this dialect were from elsewhere in China, mostly in the north.

They sat down on some wooden stools. Lim poured hot tea from the clay-pot and was left there since early morning for every to help themselves. They drank in few short loud sips. In this way, they could drink the hot tea without having to wait until it got cold.

'Yes, I'm interested in *madat*. ...And what about women and coolies?' asked Lim. 'Can you ensure a steady supply?'

Lee and Heng smiled. They knew Lim as the kind of businessman whom they were looking for. Lim was direct. Both the Chinese traders did not have much time for pleasantries or insinuations or preferred to use words that had double meanings. They wanted to get to the point and strike a deal with anybody in Melaka who was willing to do business with them with the littlest of problems and hassles.

'Good. Why are you smiling, gentlemen?' asked Lim.

'Looks like we're in good company. Yes, we have that, too, since you asked,' replied Heng. 'A lot of it, too, if that's what you want to know.'

The two Chinese traders laughed.

'Good, very good indeed.'

Suddenly, a fight broke out in the adjacent gambling room. Tables were overturned. It spoilt their discussion; they cursed whoever started the fighting. But, they completely ignored them and continued with their discussion like it did not happen.

'Get out of here, Ah Wei - Little Sheep! You're not welcome here anymore!' shouted a Chinese woman in the gambling room.

'I have been cheated! All of you are cheats!' shouted Ah Wei. He was a man in the early twenties. They called him 'Little Sheep' because he had a tattoo in the shape of a sheep on his left arm. His name in Chinese was Ah Wei. It was also because he was born in the year of the sheep or *wei*.

Lim shook his head. Ah Wei rushed through the room and immediately left by the backdoor by passing behind the three traders. They laughed thinking nothing much of it.

'Okay, let's get back to business. Where were we?' asked Lee.

'Opium and women,' said Lim. '...and more supplies. This was where we were.'

Despite the relative calm and peace in Melaka, Alauddin Riayat decided not to take things for granted. He, Isap and Siak continued to patrol the streets again. He continued to wear shabby clothes and pretended to be an ordinary guard. They were relieved that everything looked calm and safe everywhere they went. 'The foreign traders are back to Melaka. And they have returned by the hundreds. I'm pleased with that,' said the sultan.

'The timely intervention by your majesty...er...you, has made Melaka safe,' said Isap.

'Yes, Alauddin,' said Siak.

'I understand that Tun Mutahir is also patrolling the streets wearing a disguise. He is taking the cue from you. Good for him.'

'Really?' said Siak. He was not actually surprised, but pretended to be.

'One of his men told me about it. I hope we will not bump into him,' remarked the sultan.

They continued to walk.

The bazaar in the morning was crowded with people of all races - Chinese, Indians or Kelings, Arabs, Persians, Javanese, Sumatran, Siamese, Gujeratis, Bataks, Ghors, Champas, Burmese and those the Ryuku Islanders. Although the majority were Muslims, but some were the *kafirs* or infidels. Many of them were *orang perantau* or *orang luar* or foreigners. They spoke 84 dialects between them. However, most could speak a common language that they called the Malay Language or *Bahasa Melayu*, which was a language that had a mixture of words from all these dialects. It was like this everyday in Melaka now. They

argued, bargained, badgered and haggled in all languages. It was hot, very hot and humid. All the women carried Chinese paper umbrellas and fans that could be folded until they looked more like chopsticks; they were made of some kind of wood that gave out a sweet smell. As they fanned in front of their chests, the fans gave out a fragrant odor. Despite that, they were still sweating. The wealthy women were fortunate because they did not have to walk; they were driven in their private carriages; they had maids and handlers who did the menial jobs for them.

An Arab trader, Hamed checked his stock of cloth in his store. Heads of sweat stuck on his forehead. He wiped them occasionally with the sleeves of his Arabian robe. 'We need to get more orders, or we will not have much more to sell,' he said to his wife, Bunga who was in the bedroom. She alighted from the back room. 'There are quite a lot more inside,' she said. Her name is a Malay word, which means 'flowers.'

'Where?'

'In the store, at the back.'

'It's still not enough. Never mind, I'll go to the port and see the Chinese merchants. I understand many junks have just arrived from China. I have to go there fast. I'm sure the others were there now to snap the goods.'

'Don't be late for lunch.'

'You go ahead. I might be back late. Don't let the food get cold like the last time. You know how's it like at the port. The longer I stay and haggle with them, the better price I can get. So, don't expect me to return soon.'

Hamed took his white skullcap called *ketayap* and went out of the shop. He put it on his head as he walked. He waded through the crowd in the bazaar. It was noisy. In one corner, a group of Chinese men was performing a dragon dance. A Chinese businessman wanted his shop to be blessed so he decided to invite a dragon group to perform in front of it to ensure his business thrived. Some Chinese men were smoking opium openly by the roadside; they were trying to clear their heads of all their worries. Two of them were lying on the curb close to where the people were walking. Two others staggered away by the side of the road; others were already too 'high', and could hardly move. Someone called Hamed, 'Ya, Hamed, won't you come in and have some coffee?' It was Sharif, an old friend.

Hamed turned and saw his friend waving his hand at him. '*Asalamulaikum, ya, Sharif.*'

'*Mulaiikum salam, ya Hamed.*'

'I'm afraid I have to rush, my friend. I have to go to the port to get some cloth. We'll meet up again sometime.'



'Do drop by on your way home then. There's something that I wish to talk to you about.'

'Anything urgent, my friend?'

'No, nothing of that sort; I just want to sit down over coffee and talk with you. But don't let me stop you with whatever that you have to do. We'll talk later then.'

'*Insyallah*, if God wills.' Hamed passed in front of an Indian moneylender's shop. He went inside and sat cross-legged in front of an elderly Indian moneylender known as the Chettiars. They all wore white. But they did not have the white *pottu* dots on their foreheads. Instead, they had three white lines on them and on their bare upper arms, like all of them there. On a wall was a prayer altar where bronze and iron statues of deities were placed. Before them incense was burning. It let out a pleasant smell that filled the whole room.

'How much money do you need to borrow, Hamed?' asked one of the Chettiars like he could read what Hamed was thinking.

'...Only fifty silver coins this time, Chitty. Business is picking up, otherwise, I don't think I would be here...'

'I've noticed it. It's so crowded at the port these days. You must be making a lot of profits.'

'Not really. I must be fast, or I won't be able to get new supplies of cloth from China. The Muslim religious festivals are coming soon after the *Ramadan*.'

'Very well, I'll give you a loan of fifty silvers; but, you must return me seventy in two weeks' time. Do you agree?'

'It's a good bargain.' Hamed nodded. He thought it was a good deal. He had expected to be charged slightly more than day, say about eighty coins. Chitty pulled out a drawer and got the money. He counted in front of Hamed. 'Here you are, fifty. Best of luck, Hamed.'

'Thank you.' Hamed took the money and went out of the shop. Other men entered and sat cross-legged in front of the rows of Chettiars who were eagerly waiting for them.

Hamed quickly rushed to the port. He made sure the *sarong* he was wearing did not slip down. He held the large belt he had around his waist to ensure that it was fastened. He also had his right hand on the belt all the time, because it also held a wallet. It was now thick with silver coins that he had managed to borrow from the moneylenders just now.

There were many Chinese merchants there at the port. Malay traders were crowding them. Merchant Ah Meng calculated with a black wooden abacus that they called the *sampo* by flicking his fingers on the small beads. It made a lot of clicking noise. It was music to him. In between his lips was a tobacco

that gave out thick smoke. He squinted as he counted. The Malays did not realize that he was cheating them. He often gave them a higher price, so when they bargained, he would pretend to lower it to the price that he had wanted to offer in the first place. Therefore, this was how the Chinese traders and merchants operated. In this way, they made a lot of profit from the Malays and other purchasers and businessmen in Melaka and elsewhere who had converged at the port to trade with them. No wonder all the Chinese traders and merchants from China became very wealthy very quickly. The traders and merchants from India also conducted their business in a similar fashion.

'One hundred and one silver coins, or three gold pieces, sir. Agreed?' asked Ah Meng. He spoke Malay in a thick Chinese accent. He must have been in Melaka for quite sometime that he was now able to converse in the language without having to engage a translator.

'Yes, I agree,' said a Malay trader. He pulled out the coins from his pocket and handed it to Ah Meng. 'Here you are, sir.'

Ah Meng merchant took the money. He then turned around and packed up the bales of fine silk cloths. He handed them to the Malay trader. He immediately took them, went to his cart, and pushed them away heading towards his store in the bazaar by the Melaka River. Hamed who was standing behind the man in the queue stepped forward. He was relieved that his turn had come for he had been waiting for quite a considerable period of time while the Ah Meng was clinching a deal with the Malay trader.

'What can I do for you, Hamed?' asked Ah Meng. Hamed understood him; he was familiar with this accent and they way the merchant spoke.

'I wish to buy some cloths.'

'How much for?'

'Fifty silver coins.'

'Is that all?'

'Yes, that's all for now. But I will return for more cloth later.'

'Very well, choose the cloths you want and I'll wrap them up for you, sir. We have cotton and silk here.' He showed the bales and bales of cloths that had just arrived from China. 'These have just arrived, sir.' He picked a bale and showed it to Hamed. 'Look.'

'I prefer to choose an assortment of colors and designs.'

'If that's the case, then do take your time, sir. Who's next?'

Hamed went to the side and checked the cloths while Ah Meng busied himself with other customers. Hamed became so confused with the many different types and colors of cloths that were available and did not know which to choose.

'If you want, you can go inside to the back,' said Ah Meng. 'There's more there.'

'I'm feeling dizzy already, looking at all these wonderful cloths, Meng.' He continued to turn the cloths and spread it a little to see the pattern on it.

'Here, I'm next,' called another Malay trader, Abdul Sidek. He was a much younger person than Hamed or Ah Meng. He looked like he was from out of state. He had wanted to buy cloths to be brought to his country to sell to the people there. Hamed could tell it from the way he spoke; his Malay accent sounded totally different. And he often used words that Hamed was not familiar with. Hamed did not wish to distract him and let him deal with Ah Meng. They were whispering, because Ah Meng wanted to strike a very good deal that Ah Meng normally did not give to the other customers. But they really did not have to whisper, thought Hamed, because they spoke in Hokkien, a Chinese dialect that nobody in the store knew like him and Abdul Sidek and the other Melaka Malay traders. There were also many people like Abdul Sidek who had come from the neighboring countries to buy cloths and other goods that they brought back to their own countries to sell there. They always brought with them to Melaka other goods that they produced to sell here.

Ah Meng turned and saw his old friend, Abdul Sidek. 'Ah, Mr. Abdul Sidek, what can I do for you? Have you eaten?'

Alauddin Riayat wanted to drop by at the port to see how everybody was conducting their daily business and social activities there. He smiled to himself and continued to chew the betel leaf in his mouth. With him were Mutahir and Perak. They were also chewing betel leaves as it was the habit of the royalty and titled men in Melaka to do, especially when they were at their own free time in the palace. They were sitting at the verandah of the palace.

'I see our people are happy. Business is picking up, and foreign traders especially those from China and India are back in droves,' said Alauddin Riayat.

'It's true. And it is through your effort to make Melaka a peaceful place that they came in droves,' said Mutahir. 'I'm sure they will return and tell it to their friends, so that they will also want to come here.'

'It's true,' added the *temenggong*.

'I'm sure, both of you, too, have contributed a great deal to make Melaka safe,' said the sultan.

They smiled. Alauddin Riayat stood up. The others followed suit. They did not know what the sultan was up to. Maybe he wanted to retire inside the palace, they thought.

'Would you both like to join me for a walk around the bazaar?' offered the sultan.

'Why, certainly,' said Mutahir. 'It will be my pleasure.'

They then went out of the palace with their personal escorts, guards and handlers trailing them. They carried huge yellow-colored umbrellas over the heads of the sultan and smaller white-colored ones over the other senior officers. Alauddin Riayat, Mutahir and Perak mingled with the crowd. The people were surprised to see them there. They turned and nodded at him. He smiled and shook their hands.

'Everybody seems very happy,' said Mutahir. 'They are smiling from ear to ear. And everybody's wearing a lot more jewelry now than ever before.'

'I can see that. I hope Melaka will continue to prosper and that it will become an important port of call for foreign ships and our people will be happy. If they're happy, I am happy, too,' said the sultan. 'It's good that I'm here with them so I can see if they are happy or sad.'

'Looks to me like they are very happy.'

'I should think so.'

The people stopped doing what they were doing to look at them. They smiled and nodded at them. All of them clasped both hands and put them near their forehead, as a sign of respect for a Sultan.

'*Daulat tuanku!*' they said as the sultan passed before them. (Long live the King!)

Alauddin Riayat also so delighted to notice the many types of ships and boats in the port. They were of many different types, shapes and sizes. Some had tall masts, while others short. There were those that were colorful, that the masts looked like they were flags of different colors and shapes that represented the different states they had come from. Many were docked in the port while the others anchored offshore. Many smaller boats were plying around them with passengers and goods in them.

## CHAPTER 11: THE BATTLE OF HARU

The sultan of Haru in northern Sumatra met with his state and palace officials in the verandah of his palace. It was their normal weekly discussion to talk about state matters. They normally sat here especially on many hot and humid

afternoons. They sat cross-legged and chewed beetle-leaves as all Malays did. But, the sultan had something else in mind to discuss with them that day. He looked like he was game for some foreign adventure from the way he opened his speech and explained his rationale to his officers.

'I believe that Melaka will not be in any position to defend Tanjong Tuan and Jugra. I propose we launch an attack on these two islands and see how far we can go from there. If Melaka does not retaliate and these two islands fall in our hands, then we will be in a very strong position to attack Melaka and defeat it. In this way, we can turn the table against them. They've been attacking Malay states in Sumatra without impunity, but there's not a single state in Sumatra that is strong enough to resist them.' He paused briefly because his throat choked on the betel leaf he was chewing with relish. An assistant quickly handed him a glass of water and he took a sip. He then took the glass from him and sat.

'I say it is time we weaken their position amongst the Malay states. It is time we take up the mantle of leadership of the Malays in Southeast Asia. What do you say, admiral?' added the sultan. 'I expect for you to agree with me.'

The officials were surprised with the sultan's proposal. His prime minister and Admiral Haru thought. The other state officials were also shocked with the sultan's proposal. They did not know how he had become brave and daring so suddenly. Haru was not exactly a large state; it did not have a strong army or navy. It was in the northern part of Sumatra and could not possibly pose any serious threat to Melaka. Besides, it had never at any time embarked on any military missions in Melaka or Sumatra before. So, naturally they were shocked. This was the first time they were hearing the sultan saying like that especially when Haru had never had any previous experiences of ever being attacked by Melaka. They feared such an adventure could prove to be futile if not disastrous to the state. This made the state officials extremely worried. They were apprehensive and scared even. They were not too sure if Haru was in any position or capability to launch an attack on anybody. What was their sultan trying to prove? As it was, they could hardly defend themselves should the sultan of Melaka decide to attack them.

Sultan Haru waited for their response. He glanced at the faces of his officials. 'What do you say, prime minister, admiral and gentlemen?'

'We can take over Tanjong Tuan and Jugra with ease, your majesty,' said Admiral Haru confidently. He knew he couldn't say otherwise; he feared he'd be reprimand by the sultan, although secretly he was worried that Haru could suffer more than Melaka, should the sultan of Melaka catch wind of their intention to attack it. Even before the Haru forces could even make the

necessary preparations, the Melaka forces would be in their country and cause untold havoc. It could spell the end of the sultanate of Haru itself. The admiral knew his private thoughts did not matter to the sultan, only his official position did. Therefore, officially, he decided to agree with the Sultan of Haru. If the admiral agreed, how could the other senior officials disagree?

'Yes, your majesty. It is time we let Melaka know who we are. They've been on many such adventures in Sumatra in the past and put many states under their dominance,' added the prime minister. 'I say it is time for us to put a stop to that. Haru can become the next prominent Malay power in this region.'

The sultan was elated. He knew he could count on their support. 'Very well, gentlemen. Thank you for your comments. Admiral, I want you to prepare our ships and men. We will first attack Tanjong Tuan and Jugra and hope for the best,' said the sultan.

'Yes, your majesty,' said the admiral.

Soon word on the sultan's intention filtered down to some of his subjects. Some of them thought it was just a rumor, but *Sandagar* or Merchant Halid knew it was not so. He immediately sailed his small ship out of Haru. He took two days before arrived at the port in Melaka where he docked his ship at the side of the banks of the famous Melaka River. There were many other ships there; they all had different designs. He saw men wearing multifarious types of clothes and headgear were loitering around the port. They spoke in different languages, most of which Halid didn't understand; he only spoke in his own Haru dialect and Malay which he'd learnt from his many trips to Melaka. Halid heard them talking loudly amongst them, but did not think that they were quarreling. This was just their way of speaking with each other, with strong arms gestures and facial expressions. Just as he thought the others looked odd in their national costumes, they, too felt the same with Halid's own clothes that was no less striking and colorful than any of theirs. Even after paying the port of Melaka numerous visits, he still felt overwhelmed each time he got here. The place took a totally different mood each time he was here; it even looked different at different times of the day. In the afternoon, it was very busy and noisy. Late evening, especially just before the evening prayers, it's mood changed drastically. It now looked demure, silent and at peace with itself, especially with the sun setting slowly in the horizons in the West. It's warm red rays bathing the whole port in golden colors making all the ships and boats and other junks look mystical with their masts sticking in the air in a silhouette. The port became quite. Only then could one begin to hear the sounds of the waves hitting the banks and shores or the birds chipping away as they flew in all directions, as if blown by the strong evening winds. May be

they were creating some formations, just for self-enjoyment and fun. Occasionally, one could even hear a lone sailor or seaman, hidden in the darkness, playing his flute. The music that he created with a piece of bamboo was sentimental and soothing to the ear. To him, the music made him long for his homeland, which he had not seen for weeks, may be months.

So, despite their strong and tough exterior, the foreign seamen were soft like jelly inside. Once in a while, too, one could see young Chinese and Malay girls from outside of Melaka being brought to the ships, to entertain the captains and high officials who were by now drunk and were craving for some fun. Many seamen also left their ships to go to the city to drink until they were drunk and to enjoy themselves in the many social clubs that had sprouted in the Chinese quarters, usually unknown to the Melaka authorities. The owners had inadvertently paid the some officials of the palace to close both eyes on their illegal establishment.

But, Halid did not wish to do such things; he hardly had much time in Melaka on this particular trip. His only mission that day was to rush to the palace of the sultan of Melaka, whose name he hardly knew. He wanted to forewarn the sultan about the impending attack by Haru on Melaka. Although from Haru, Halid felt it was not wise for the sultan of Haru to embark on such a scheme because Melaka was also a Malay state like Haru. There was absolutely no reason why must Haru and Melaka be fighting with each other.

'I want you to wait here, I am going to the palace. I will be back shortly, do not go away, or do anything I would not do,' he said in one breath to his men who had followed him from Haru. His men nodded. He then got off, and immediately rushed down the gangplank and went to the shore. The sounds of the *azan* were heard in the background calling the Faithful to pray. He continued to run around the hill and headed towards the new Melaka Palace that stood behind it. By the time he arrived there, his clothes were soaked to the skin and he was panting heavily. He stopped few times to catch his breath. Alauddin Riayat, like all of his subjects and officials, was praying together with a small congregation in the mosque in the palace compound.

Halid arrived at the mosque and waited. He felt guilty for not being able to join them, but he forgave himself by saying that he was a traveler or *musafir*, and in Islam, travelers are forgiven if they did not so wish to pray. But, they could only do so if they were in one place in less than three days. Furthermore, Halid thought he wasn't clean, his clothes were soaked in sweat and he had not taken a good bath to clean the grime that he had collected on the trip from Haru to Melaka under the hot sun.

He saw the sultan praying inside together with few men who were mostly his close relatives or senior palace officials. One of them was the lord chamberlain, since he always accompanied the sultan for prayers.

The prayers were soon over. The sultan shook everybody's hands and walked out of the mosque without saying a word. He then put on his slippers and walked back to the palace nearby. Halid went to him. 'Excuse me, your majesty.'

The sultan stopped. He did not know who the man was. He was sure the man was not from Melaka but elsewhere judging from the way he wore his clothes and cap.

'Yes, indeed you look like a total stranger to my eyes,' said Alauddin Riayat. 'What brings you to Melaka, my dear traveler? Are you in need of a temporary place to stay so that you can rest? Or are you in need of some financial assistance? Tell me which.'

'Yes, your majesty. I am from Haru in Sumatra. It is quite a long way from here. Do forgive me for being shabbily dressed, for I've just arrived at the port,' said Halid with respect.

'That's perfectly okay with me.'

'I've got a very important message for your majesty.'

'Very well, let's go to the palace then so we can sit in comfort and perhaps have a bit of betel leaves. I assume the people of Haru, too, like to chew them too.'

'Indeed, your majesty. Not eating betel leaves is like living through a day in total darkness, without light.'

They went to the palace, which was a short distance away from the mosque and sat cross-legged in the verandah.

'Now tell me what you have in mind,' said the sultan.

'The sultan of Haru intends to attack Melaka, your majesty,' said Halid.

'Is that so?' The sultan was shocked.

'That's right, your majesty. What's the use for me to lie like that, for I'm a man from Haru myself, just that I do not wish for Melaka to be at war again with Haru or any other Malay state, ever. Why must Malays fight with each other? Are we all of us not Muslims, too?'

'But, why must the sultan of Haru want to do this to us? We hardly know him or Haru. In fact, we've never attacked them before.'

'The sultan of Haru wants to test your majesty's resilience and perhaps the invincibility of Melaka that has made it a legend in this region and Malay world, your majesty. I do not see any other valid reason for the sultan of Haru



to want to embark on this ridiculous plan. Er... Forgive me for using harsh words, your majesty.'

'That's all right.'

Alauddin Riayat pondered hard over what the merchant had just told him. He believed him. Why would he lie to me, he thought.

'Very well, I thank you, my friend. I will do whatever that's necessary in order to protect Melaka and its people. I'm certain the sultan of Haru will be in for some surprise if he proceeds with his plans. It's probably good for Melaka too, as we have not been to war for quite some time. Our men are always eager to defend our country and have some adventure; this will give our men some exercise to do. Besides, their *kerises* have not tasted blood for quite some time.' The sultan smiled. He was grateful to Halid for the warning that he had passed to him.

'I shall then get going now, your majesty,' said Halid. He kissed the sultan's hand and readied to go off.

'Why, don't you want to stay for dinner? This is the least that I can offer you in exchange for your kind help.'

'Thanks a lot, your majesty. I really have to get going; it is getting late now. Besides, I have some friends who I had asked to wait for my return at the boat in the river. If I do not leave the port now, it will soon be dark. And I hate to sail in the dark when the sea is rough and full of uncertainties.'

'Very well. Are you going to be staying in Melaka for a while?'

'I have to sail on southwards with the winds. But I do hope to be able to return here in Melaka on my way to Haru. I am a trader, and I have to deliver some goods here and there. It's always nice to be able to come to Melaka, see the hive of activities at the port and the exciting life in the city anytime, your majesty.'

'Very well, do drop by and see me the next time you are here in Melaka. Don't let the guards stop you. Just say you have an appointment to see me, and they will take you to see me immediately. I shall inform my guards should someone from Haru of your size, shape and appearance comes to the main entrance of this palace, they won't hold you any longer.'

'Certainly, that is very kind of you, your majesty. I do appreciate that.'

'But, one last question: Why are you doing this? Don't they think you're a traitor for being a mole like this?'

'...Because I have a wife in Melaka and I think you are the best ruler to unite the Malays and spread Islam throughout the region, like what your majesty and your ancestors in the past had been doing all along. My ancestors, too, converted to Islam because of your late great-grandfather. Besides, it pains

me to see the Malays fight with each other anymore. This unnecessary enmity between Malays and people who share the same fate has to stop!

'Thank you, my man, may Allah grant you good health,' said the sultan. He was surprised to be given such a pleasant compliment. 'What you're saying is very correct.'

Halid walked out of the palace. He rushed towards the port by running around the same hill, the same way he took to get to the palace, only in the other direction.

The sultan shook his head in disbelief. Just as he thought that he could at last get some peace of mind, then this happened. But, was it for real, or was the stranger from Haru, was just a joker, thought he.

Not too long later, twenty ships from Haru set sail in the straits of Melaka. They were heading for Tanjong Tuan and Jugra, north of Melaka. The ships made sure they sailed away from the shores of Melaka, so that the Melaka navy could not detect them. It would be disastrous if they are sighted because the Melaka navy might immediately launch an attack on sight. No foreign naval ship had passed through the straits unnoticed, especially if they sailed too close to the shore and within the vision of the Melaka people.

Admiral Haru sat behind a desk together with his officers. A map was laid before him so that he knew where he was heading. He looked confident.

'We can launch a surprise attack. The Melaka forces are not aware of our presence here. So, that'll make it easy for us to undertake our mission,' he said. He then pointed at the map. 'Here, this is Tanjong Tuan and Jugra. They are slightly to the north of Melaka. We will be passing near Melaka in the night and can arrive at Tanjong Tuan and Jugra by evening. We will rest and attack them next morning after we have refreshed ourselves. This is my plan. By late evening, we can land in both places to claim them for Haru. Next morning, I'll return to Haru to inform his majesty of our successes in Tanjong Tuan and Jugra.'

Someone knocked on the door.

'Yes,' said Admiral Haru.

Shorty or *Kerdil* opened the door from outside the cabin.

'Yes, Shorty.'

Everybody smiled. Shorty had a way of cheering everybody with his presence; he did not have to do anything, just his face was enough to make everybody laugh. His small stature and funny character made him look like a clown, especially with his baggy shirt and pants and large cap, which he always wore, side ways. 'Pardon me, sir. There are ships approaching our way,' he said.

'How many of them? One, two or more?'

'About thirty, sir.'

'Thirty? Where are they from? Do they have a flag?'

'You must come to the deck, sir.'

'What the hell are they up to?'

'No idea, sir.'

Admiral Haru pondered. 'Ah, maybe they're just passing by,' said the admiral. 'But, let's check.' He then stood up and went out of the cabin. He stood on the deck and stared at the ships with his officers. 'They are from Melaka, look at their flags. Damned it! How did they find out about us?' cursed the admiral.

'May be they're just passing by,' commented a senior officer who was standing near him.

Then suddenly one of the Melaka ships fired a cannon without giving any advance warning. It missed Admiral Haru's ship by inches and landed in the sea. He and the men near him were shocked but relieved just the same. 'My goodness, they are firing at us! Soldiers, get into positions and prepare! Retaliate!' shouted the admiral. 'Everybody, at your positions!'

'Yes, sir,' cried the officers.

'Prepare to fire! Get ready! Men! Attack those ships!' ordered the senior officer.

The Melaka ships continued to attack the ships from Haru with cannons in quick succession; it did not give the Haru forces any moment to retaliate. Some Haru ships received a direct hit and they sank in the sea. The men managed to jump ship and they quickly swam to the other Haru ships to safety. Their friends threw floats, and they rushed to cling onto them. They were relieved that they were not hurt. More cannons were fired from both sides. Two Melaka ships were struck. They sank in the sea. The men managed to escape by swimming in the sea. Few drowned.

Admiral Melaka met his officers in his cabin later that evening when the cease-fire. It was now quiet; there was a cessation, although it was not formally agreed. Both sides were tired and they needed to rest. No cannon was being fired from both sides now. There was no point since all the ships from both sides were not lit and they could not be seen by anyone. All of them were enveloped in the darkness. Not a star was seen, and thick clouds that hung in the skies hid the moon. It was pitch dark. He had to discuss in darkness, too. They did not dare light even one small candle for fear that their location could be detected, and if they had to communicate they had to lower their voices and speak in whispers.

'We are on a winning streak. I do not how those people from Haru can sustain further damages. How many of their ships have been hit officer?' reported Admiral Melaka.

'Twenty, sir,' replied his senior officer.

'How about ours?'

'Just two. Even then they were old ships anyway that we use as decoys.'

'What do we do next, sir?' asked another senior officer.

'We will wait for dawn to arrive and see if they are willing to surrender or not. If they do not, we'll make sure all their remaining ships are completely destroyed,' replied the admiral.

'Very well, sir.'

Next morning, even before dawn broke, the Melaka men were already up. They stood on the decks of their ships at the ready. They were surprised to see that all the ten enemy ships were clustered around each other near the much larger ship of their admiral. All of them had the white flags raised on its flat pole; they fluttered in the strong early morning wind. Admiral Melaka went to the railings with his senior officers after his men informed him about their surrender. He was amazed at what he saw. 'They have surrendered.'

Admiral Haru climbed onto the ship together with some of his senior officers to pay respects to Admiral Melaka. The shook his hands.

'Well, what do you have in mind, your excellency Admiral Haru, sir? Do you wish to proceed with the battle, or surrender?' asked Admiral Melaka.

'We want to surrender, sir, your excellency Admiral Melaka,' replied Admiral Haru.

'Very well, let's go over to Pengkalan Dungun so we can discuss this surrender in a more peaceful surrounding.'

The two admirals sat under a tent that was erected in the middle of a jungle clearing in Pengkalan Dungun. Their men stood erect behind them as the two admirals discussed their peace treaty.

'Very well, admiral, I will inform his majesty Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah about your suggestion. We will get back to you soon. But, I believe his majesty will agree that both our countries establish cordial relations,' said Admiral Melaka. 'Melaka does not wish to fight with any Malay state, for whatever reason there may be. Hasn't enough Malay blood been spilled in this region already? Do we need to spill even more, until none of us stands?'

'Yes, admiral, sir,' said Admiral Haru.

The two admirals stood. They then hugged each other.

'Long live Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah!' cried a senior officer from Melaka.

'Long live Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah!' echoed the Melaka men.

The people from Haru kept quiet and continued to look down in shame at their defeat.

Admiral Haru met his sultan at the palace. He hoped the sultan was not angry with him for failing him. He looked down. 'What happened, admiral?' asked the sultan.

'We were not match for them. Please forgive me for failing your majesty,' said Admiral Haru.

Sultan of Haru then slapped the admiral's face. 'I sent twenty ships and few hundred men, yet you're unable to attack them.'

'We were stopped near the Arang-Arang Island, your majesty. They did not give any advance notice that they were going to attack us. They intercepted us even before we got there.'

The sultan shook his head in disbelief. He then barged out of the room leaving his officers standing in the throne room by themselves. They knew the sultan was very angry. If he had stayed, most likely he would have ordered their heads be chopped off in the public square for everybody in Haru to see. 'Useless, useless,' he uttered to himself. But it was loud enough for everybody there to hear him.

The officers stood there. They felt lucky that the sultan did not curse them, as he normally would do under normal circumstances. He knew it was his mistake for demanding to launch an attack on Tanjong Tuan and Jugra. Fortunately for the admiral, the sultan realized his own folly soon; otherwise, he and his officers would have got it from him.

The sultan then withdrew and lived quietly with his subjects. Any intentions to subjugate other lands were quickly squashed; more so when his naval force were reduced in stature as a result of the destruction that it had experienced in the hands of the more superior naval force from Melaka.

After the Battle of Arang-Arang, peace reigned in Melaka and the region. The people of Melaka welcomed the respite because they had been in the state of uncertainty and chaos for a long time; they all hoped for peace in Melaka to remain permanently. They prayed in all the mosques and *madrassahs* and their homes for Allah to bestow upon them the tranquil life that they had hoped for.

The port of Melaka again became a hive of activities. Many more foreign ships and junks were docked in the river-mouth; others were berthed in the sea. Others were anchored offshore. In between were hundreds of smaller ships and boats and *sampans*. Traders from many countries were doing brisk business there bringing with them all sorts of goods and produce. They eagerly

exchanged them with each other, before returning to the countries from where they had come from, feeling satisfied with what they had just acquired.

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*After the unsuccessful attack on Tanjong Tuan and Jugra by the forces from Haru in Sumatra, Melaka prospered. Many traders and merchants from foreign countries came to do trade there.*

*Seri Bija diRaja Tun Hamzah who was also known as Lord Bongkek died and he was succeeded by his son Lord Terutup. During this time, many rulers from the region come to Melaka to pay homage to Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah.*

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The ruler of Maluku (*Moluccas*) walked with his small entourage. He saw a group of Malay kids playing the *sepak raga* and became excited. This was the first time he was seeing a game like that being played. He went to the boys out of curiosity. 'They are good, very good indeed. I've not seen anybody playing and kicking the rattan ball like them before,' he remarked. 'What is the name of this game?'

'*Sepak raga*, your majesty,' said one of the boys.

The boys continued to kick the rattan ball high in the air until it rose to the same level as the trees around the compound. The ruler was amazed so he decided to join them and kicked the ball just when he got to the group. The boys turned around and welcomed him. They were excited; they were surprised to see the ruler joining them in the game. The people who were passing by stopped to look at the ruler. They cheered them on by counting their kicks. 'Hundred and two, hundred and three, hundred and four...' shouted the men. After a long while the number increased to five hundred. Then someone missed his step and kicked the ball astray; it fell to the ground. Everybody clapped. It was a good score, they thought.

'All of you are good. I'll join all of you later,' said the ruler.

'Very well, your majesty,' said the boys in unison.

The ruler went off with his entourage.

'Who is he? He looks like a ruler to me,' said Munir, after the ruler had left and was far ahead that he was outside of his hearing range.

'Don't you know that he's the ruler of Maluku,' said Isnin.

The boys walked back to their houses later that evening after they had finished playing. Isnin held the rattan ball in his hand.

'Don't you know that many Malay rulers have come to pay homage to our sultan?' asked Isnin.

'Why?' asked Munir.

'Because our sultan is a great ruler, and all the other Malay rulers from the region want to pay homage to him. Melaka is a great country, you know. Many foreign ships and merchants are coming here to do trading. More and more strange-looking people are here now. They are wearing strange-looking clothes; some have their hat covering their entire face; others had colorful clothes on. It's amazing,' said Isnin. 'Just listen closely to the way they speak; it's not Malay at all, but some strange languages that we know not a word of. I particularly like the way they sound when they get angry.' He laughed at his own joke.

'Really? Is that so?'

'Hey, how about drinking some coconut water now? I feel thirsty and dehydrated. The sun is especially harsh today. My lips have cracked and blistered.'

'Good idea,' said the boys.

Isnin then hurled the rattan ball at Munir. He climbed a coconut tree. When he got to the top, he threw some coconuts to the ground and his friends started to break them open. They then drank the juice and ate the flesh by scrapping it with a piece of coconut shell that was now their spoon. Some drank the coconut water in one gulp because they were too thirsty. Isnin then climbed down the tree and joined them. 'Hey, leave some for me!' he shrieked.

'Oh, yes, there're a few more for you,' said Munir.

Alauddin Riayat sat on the throne, looking happy and contented with the state of his country. Before him was the ruler of Maluku. 'Yes. I have come from Maluku to pay homage to your majesty, and to seek protection,' said the ruler.

'Very well. We are indeed happy to see you here, and we ensure that should any alien country attack Maluku. We will immediately send forces from Melaka to thwart it. We shall retaliate and fight with full force until they have to beg mercy from us. We will then make them promise that they did not repeat their stupid mistake ever again. This is our promise to you and the people of Maluku,' said Alauddin Riayat. 'But, I hear not everybody in your country has converted to Islam. Is this true?'

'Very true. Only those in the urban areas, around the palaces are now Muslims. But those who live in the interiors are still following their animistic way of life as they always did. It's hard to penetrate this area, your majesty.'

'Very well, but don't ever force anyone to convert to Islam. It's against the teachings of our religion if we do that.'

'Very true, your majesty, and thank you once again.'

Alauddin Riayat then stood up and hugged the ruler of Maluku. He then gave him a *keris* as a present and a symbol of their friendship. This was their way of showing whatever that had been agreed upon earlier was now a formal contract for the words of the rulers were law.

'Well, thank you, your majesty for your assurances and gifts,' said the ruler of Maluku. He then handed the sultan of Melaka a parting present.

'What can it be?' asked Alauddin Riayat after he had taken the present.

'Open the box, your majesty.'

Alauddin Riayat opened the box and pulled out a gold belt that had an intricate Maluku design. 'My goodness, how beautiful.'

The ruler then helped the sultan to wear it around his waist. Their officials looked on. But the belt kept on slipping off his waist, until the ruler of Maluku locked it at the hinge. This was the first time the sultan had worn such a gold belt. Before this, it was not the tradition or custom in Melaka for the sultans to wear such an ornament around their waists. Furthermore, what intrigued the sultan of Melaka was how close the name, Maluku to it. Perak who whispered in his ear brought this to his personal attention. 'Ah, this is interesting, Tun Perak, I did not think of it myself. And thanks for bringing it to my attention.'

'What is it?' asked the ruler.

'Nothing. But, I'm excited to learn that the names of both our countries do sound similar, Melaka and Maluku!'

'Ah, very well indeed, your majesty.'

'Is your country named after a tree, too?'

'Not really, your majesty.'

'Why; if you don't already know, Melaka was named after a tree, the *melaka* tree.'

'Really?'

'My ancestor, Parameswara sat under one such tree; just then his fierce dog was chased by a white mousedeer. And the poor, tiny deer kicked the dog until it fell into the Bertam River. It later prompted Parameswara to found his new country there, and named it after the tree he was sitting under.'

'Brilliant. His majesty Parameswara, was simply brilliant.'

'He sure is. For without his brilliance, I would not be here today. And thanks to the poor mousedeer, too.'

They laughed.

'Poor dog.'



'Oh, deer!'

They laughed and their respective officials joined them. If the royal scribes in Melaka were to describe what happened in the palace of the sultan of Melaka in their writings, they would say that the palace shook violently until the throne room almost tumbled to the side.

Alauddin Riayat walked along the corridor with his *temenggong*. He felt at ease with himself because he was in the company of the sultan whom he had not met in a long time. And whatever differences they had in the past were duly settled.

'Are there news from our other brother rulers, my dear *temenggong*?' asked the sultan.

'Indeed there are. The rulers of Rokan, Trengganu and few other Malay states have indicated that they'd like to come here to pay homage to your majesty,' said the *temenggong*.

'They have? Good.'

'Yes, your majesty.'

'Don't you think our attack on the Haru forces in the Arang-Arang Islands has resulted in many Malay rulers wanting to come to Melaka to seek homage from us?'

'Indeed, your majesty. Therefore, the attack by Haru was a blessing in disguise then, since it was they who initiated it and not us.'

'It was indeed, *temenggong*.'

'They now know they just couldn't mess around with us anymore unless if they want to be humiliated by us.'

Alauddin Riayat laughed. 'You have an uncanny way of describing their true feelings, *temenggong*.'

'It's a fact; I'm not making this up just to please you.'

'I know; but the way you had described it, sounds as though they were all bent on attacking us here in Melaka.'

'It was that obvious, your majesty.'

'What good will it do to them, if they were to attack us? They would be destroyed, anyway. We always have a good advantage since we are on home grounds. They had to sail long distances. By the time, they get here, half their energies and resources were spent. So, how could they fight with us, if they are in this bad condition? I say is true or not?'

'Exactly, your majesty. Their rulers will also feel the pressure. Especially when they see that half of their fleet had returned home with the others destroyed by us with their men who are still alive and many badly wounded

and have to be carried and propped up by their colleagues. Which ruler will not want to cry at this sight?

'But, they are still few foolish rulers who will not care so much for their own people, but themselves, your majesty. Their expansionist policies will not work for them. They think by capturing Melaka, they'll be able to capture all the other states around this region, as most of the Malays are now beholden to us for their protection and prosperity.'

'It's like knocking the head, and the body will die.'

'Very true, very true indeed. Like what I've said earlier, you always have an uncanny way of describing things.'

They continued to walk along the corridor.

Alauddin Riayat was having a picnic in the woods together with his family not too far away from the palace. They had gone there in few horse-carriages that were now parked at a distance from them. The eldest grandson of the *telanai* or the governor of Trengganu and his small entourage appeared together with two of his younger brothers. He got off his carriage and went to him. The others followed him.

'Pardon me, the grandson of the *telanai* is here,' said the *temenggong*.

Alauddin Riayat turned. He stood, greeted, and hugged him. 'Welcome to Melaka, my son. How is your grandfather, the governor of Trengganu? Have a seat. Is he called the *telanai* or the governor of Trengganu?' said Sultan Alauddin Riayat.

'Yes, your majesty. The governors of Trengganu have all been called the *telanai* for ages. They look after the districts in the state.'

They sat.

'What brings you to Melaka then; tell me? Are you here for leisure or is there something else that you wish to discuss with me?'

'My grandfather, the ruler has been killed, your majesty,' said Raja Trengganu, sounding very sad and disappointed.

'Oh, I'm sorry. How did it happen? Did he die of old age?'

'He was killed by Seri Akar diRaja of Pahang.'

'The Seri Akar diRaja did it? How did he happen? Tell me who ordered it? Do you know? And when did it happen?'

'The sultan of Pahang gave the orders, I was told.'

Alauddin Riayat was shocked. 'But, the sultan of Pahang, Sultan Muhammad Shah is my elder brother! He was called Raja Muhammad before he became the first sultan of Pahang and called himself Sultan Muhammad Shah. How could he do that and for what reason? Did your grandfather, the *telanai* do anything nasty to him?'

'My grandfather knew his life was in grave danger, but he didn't expect for the sultan of Pahang to be so vicious and wanted to order his execution.'

The sultan stood up. He thought hard. The three children waited. He then turned around and looked at them. 'What was the reason that made the Sultan of Pahang so angry with your grandfather, son?'

'My grandfather had earlier come to Melaka.'

'Was that the reason?'

'Because he did not inform the Sultan Muhammad Shah of his intentions to pay Melaka a visit. This made his majesty Sultan Muhammad Shah angry with him.'

'I see, I see. Now, I know why Sultan Muhammad Shah was so angry with your late grandfather, but that's not a valid reason to order his killing.'

'Please help us in anyway you can. You're the only ruler whom we can turn to now because your majesty is the ruler of a brave country that believes in upholding the laws of Islam.'

'Don't you worry, son. I will think about it. Why don't the three of you return to the guest palace and rest? You have come from very far and you must be aching all over. Do rest until you are completely refreshed.'

'Very well.'

The three young boys stood up. They went to Alauddin Riayat and kissed his hands. They then went to the carriage and left the woods together with the assistants.

Alauddin Riayat turned to the *temenggong*. 'How could my brother, Muhammad does such a thing? Is he trying to say something to me? Remember how he had killed Tun Besar, son of Tun Perak many years ago? Does he think we've forgotten about this incident?'

'Yes. The incident is still fresh in my mind. Because of that your father, his majesty Sultan Mansur Shah was very angry with him. His majesty Sultan Muhammad Shah who was known then as Raja Muhammad was sent to Pahang to be installed its first sultan there,' said the *temenggong*.

'Now, he's back with his old ways. What shall I do *temenggong*?'

The *temenggong* did not have the answer.

Sultan Muhammad of Pahang became very angry. He was fuming. His Prime Minister Lord Terutup listened attentively; he did not know what to expect from him these days. The sultan had become erratic lately; it was very difficult for the prime minister to read his mind anymore like he could before. The sultan had become less dependent on him. And this made the prime minister jittery each time he requested to have an audience with Muhammad because he

simply did not know what to expect. The problems the sultan was facing had taken a severe toll on him. This could be seen in the way he'd pace the length and breadth of the palace, with his mind shut tightly, with no chance for any of his senior officers to second-guess what he was thinking of. The prime minister, however, hoped that the sultan would not do anything erratic that would put him in ridicule or contempt of the people.

He and the other senior officials of the palace waited impatiently, as Muhammad paced in the palace. Already he had ordered Akar diRaja to kill the *telanai* of Trengganu; what else would he do, thought Terutup. The sultan then stopped and stamped his right foot on the wooden floor; it sounded like somebody had dropped a bomb. The prime minister got a rude shock. The other senior officers too, were shocked. They stared at the sultan's face. He looked very angry.

'I will order my elephants to trample the palace of the sultan of Melaka! How dare he agreed to receive the visit of the ruler of Trengganu?' said Muhammad. He knew very well that he did not have an army to attack Melaka. However, he did have a herd of elephants that he could use at his disposal. Melaka at that time did not own any elephant. The elephants were brought to Pahang. They were for the personal use of the former Siamese representative, King Dewa Surya and his senior officials for official functions and trips to the interiors where horse-carriages were not accessible and had to trek through the thick jungles. After Dewa Surya was captured by Tuah and brought to Melaka, all the elephants were left behind on their own with nobody to look after them. Therefore, when Muhammad came to Pahang, he immediately ordered his men to gather these elephants for his personal use, for leisure as well as for military purposes, lest they would trample the villagers' huts and even palace.

'His majesty Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah is innocent,' said Terutup. 'He had nothing to do with it. His majesty Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah was just playing the good host, as it is his style.'

'How could he be so innocent? Didn't my brother, Alauddin know that the *telanai* of Trengganu was beholden to me?'

'It is the tradition of the sultans in Melaka to receive any Malay ruler accordingly without question, your majesty. Unless, if they had gone to Melaka to seek assistance in order to attack another Malay state, such as Pahang.'

'Clearly, the ruler of Trengganu did not do this. His majesty the *telanai* was just made a courtesy visit. Many other Malay rulers had done the same. Melaka is a powerful Malay state, so it's not a surprise that they'd want to pay the sultan of Melaka, Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah, who is your majesty's younger brother a visit, too.'

'How do you know about the royal traditions of Melaka? You were small when your late father, Prime Minister Tun Perak was the prime minister of Melaka.'

'I'm sorry, your majesty.'

Alauddin Riayat conferred with Perak who was the father of Terutup. He was formerly called Tun Hamzah, the younger brother of Besar whom Muhammad, as Raja Muhammad had killed during a *sepak raga* game in the Prime Minister's Village in Melaka few years ago. Perak was distraught that his eldest son was killed in this manner. It took him a long while to recover from the incident. Many people in Melaka and the palace said Perak never actually recovered from it. He blamed Muhammad for his son's death. He had never actually forgiven him for what ever he had done to his son. Perak only hoped Muhammad would receive just punishment from Allah the Almighty, and not from him. He only wanted retribution for Muhammad's crime on his son to come from Allah and no other.

'His majesty Sultan Muhammad Shah of Pahang is the eldest brother of your majesty's,' said Perak. 'His majesty the sultan therefore felt slighted and snubbed by the *telanai*. Trengganu being a neighbor of Pahang in the north and had no business to be in Melaka,' said Perak.

'But, he's now sultan of another state. If that state now wants to do mischief to us, surely, we must do something,' said Alauddin Riayat. 'Let's forget that he is my elder brother. If he had also thought of us as his younger brother, surely this problem would not have happened in the first place. So, if he can ignore the fact that I'm his younger brother; and he, my elder brother; surely, I can reciprocate the warm and brotherly feelings he has of me.'

'Whatever it is. As the prime minister, my advise is for you to have a cool head in this and don't let the better of your majesty be distracted from the wider picture.'

'Are you suggesting that I am mad, Tun Perak and I should ignore whatever Sultan Muhammad Shah had done to the *telanai*?'

'No, definitely not. It was the last thing for me to say. Please forgive me if I have said something that displeased your majesty. It was not my intention to do so.'

'My decision is final: We attack Pahang! I do not want the people of Melaka to think that I am acting soft on the state, just because the sultan happens to be my eldest brother, Muhammad. Remember how much they despised Muhammad when they found out he had killed your son, Tun Besar? Therefore, we must teach my brother, Muhammad a lesson so that he will not behave like a small boy anymore. It is better to teach him now before it is too

late, before he gets any worse. And if he has forgotten about what he did to your eldest son, many years ago, we shall remind him again. I shall send you over to Pahang to deal with him. The mere sight of you will make him limp.'

'There's no need to go to war with Pahang. We can just send Hang Tuah to settle this matter. Tuah is excellent in patching up differences between the Malays. He has a way with words, which I do not have. Besides, it is not proper for me to handle this matter with his majesty Sultan Muhammad Shah whom I still have a score to settle with. Hang Tuah is perfect for this particular job. He can turn a hungry tiger into a kitten in no time. And right now his majesty Sultan Muhammad Shah is a hungry tiger that needs to be turned into a kitten, so he will know his exact size.'

'Hang Tuah?'

'Yes, your majesty.'

'What exactly do you want him to do in Pahang?'

'The only out is for your majesty to command Hang Tuah to demand his majesty Sultan Muhammad Shah to send a personal letter to you majesty. This letter will then be read in front of everybody in the palace in Pahang to diffuse the problem. In this way everybody in Pahang will hear of his majesty's commitment to this problem, so that his majesty won't have to repeat it in the future.'

Alauddin Riayat thought. 'Very well, write me the letter and have it delivered to me; I will sign and give it my seal of approval. And say in it too, that I wish to get a reply from him. Tuah can deliver it personally to Muhammad. I hope this strategy works. Do inform Tuah of this mission.' He then barged out of the room.

Tuah went to his brother-warriors on the deck of his ship. This was their mission together after the last one when they accompanied Mansur on his official visit to Majapahit. But, this time, they were without Jebat. They sailed for few days in the South China Sea, before they finally arrived near Kuala Pahang.

'How much longer do we have, my brothers?' asked Tuah.

'We'll arrive at the mouth of the Pahang River by dawn, Hang Tuah,' said Kasturi.

'Very well, I shall retire now.'

Tuah returned to his cabin. And by dawn, as expected, Tuah's fleet of ships arrived at the port. He immediately went to the palace. He stood before Muhammad in the throne room. All the state dignitaries were present including Akar diRaja. His cousin, Count Kayu sat beside him. Muhammad proceeded to open the scroll with both hands, feeling anxious. He read the

letter written by Alauddin Riayat. Akar diRaja looked down. He did not dare to look or even catch a furtive glance of Tuah, because he knew so much about his reputation. He feared that Tuah might want to clobber him for what he had done to the *telanai* of Trengganu.

'My dear brother, Sultan Muhammad, may you be blessed by Allah the Almighty. You are always in my heart. I wish to assert here that the reason why I am sending my warrior Hang Tuah to have an audience before you is that I believe we need to exchange ideas on a recent issue that involves both our states. Although we are still brothers because we share the same father, Sultan Mansur Shah, but we are still rulers of our different states of Melaka and Pahang. I am saying this so that we are able to communicate better. I am sure you are fully aware of what I have in mind. And I wish to reiterate here that I do not wish to extend it any further as it can strain our brotherly relations,' said Muhammad as he read the scroll he was holding with both hands. 'Lastly, I wish to get a swift reply from you so that the letter can be brought to me by my emissary Hang Tuah.'

Tuah glanced at Akar diRaja who felt uneasy. He averted Tuah's gaze because it was sharp as the tip of an arrow that had been laced with poison. Akar diRaja felt guilty for killing the *telanai* of Trengganu even if his sultan had ordered him.

Muhammad handed the letter to his Terutup. He was not too pleased with its content that he had just read. He was still annoyed with what the ruler of Trengganu had done, i.e. to visit his younger brother in Melaka. But, what choice did he have? He did not want to provoke his younger brother anymore, unless if he wanted to be attacked by Melaka. He realized the words written by Alauddin Riayat's were personal as well as sharp and venomous. He did not say it exactly in words, but it should be clear to Muhammad and his senior officials that he was serious. By sending Tuah to deliver to him in Pahang, it was as good as giving an ultimatum.

'Well, Lord Terutup, have my letter of reply ready soon so that I can hand it to Hang Tuah,' said Muhammad after he had pondered over the issues. 'Do use kind words to my younger brother, his majesty Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah. Don't let harsh words get to his majesty's ears, for he had also taken a lot of trouble to use cool words in his personal letter to me.' He then turned to Tuah. 'And with this, I bid you farewell, Hang Tuah. It's nice to meet you again. Everybody in Pahang still remembers all your heroic deeds, especially for kidnapping the former Siamese ruler of Pahang or Pura as they called it then, King Dewa Surya. You also brought my late father, Sultan Mansur Shah a lot of joy by producing King Dewa Surya's daughter, Puteri

Wanang Seri to be married to him as his second wife. My wife and I hope that we can meet each other again, either in Pahang or in Melaka.'

'Indeed.'

'Very well. My brother, Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah surely knows how to write by using beautiful verses; they have left me paralyzed in awe. Well, I am sure, my younger brother, Alauddin and I can settle this matter amicably, can't we, Hang Tuah? This is a family problem, is it not?'

'Yes, definitely.'

'Very well, I do hope you will enjoy your stay here in Pahang, Hang Tuah.'

'We surely will.'

Muhammad stood. Tuah kissed his hand and the sultan walked away to the adjacent room. Tuah glanced at Akar diRaja menacingly. He quickly walked away; he feared that Tuah might pounce on him after Muhammad had left the throne room. The other Pahang officials and men continued to stare at Tuah in defiance. They tried to size him up. They also stared at the magical Taming Sari that they all knew had magical powers. Tuah held onto his *keris* and ignored them. He walked out of the palace and held his *keris* tightly.

That night, after the dinner with Muhammad and the other state dignitaries, Tuah returned to his bedroom in the guest palace. He lay on the floor with Kasturi. 'Did you notice how Seri Akar diRaja stared at the ceiling or on the floor each time I gazed at him?' asked Tuah.

'Yes, Hang Tuah. If Hang Jebat is still around, I'm sure, he'd have Count Akar's head clobbered in full view of everybody,' said Kasturi.

'Hang Jebat acted differently than all of us. He could not stand pressure.'

'What do you plan to do next, Hang Tuah? We've done our part in handing the letter to the sultan.'

'Did you notice Count Akar's cousin just now? Count Kayu.'

'Not really. Which one is he?'

'He's the one who sat beside Count Akar.'

Kasturi sat up and asked: 'What do you plan to do with him?'

'I want to have him killed.'

'You mean...'

'In this way, we will be able to tell the sultan of Pahang we are serious. We just cannot allow anybody in Pahang to do whatever he or she likes. Somebody must pay for the *telanai's* death.'

'Won't the sultan be angry?'

'Which sultan? Ours?'

'Both the sultans of Pahang and Melaka.'

'Let them.'



Tuah sneaked inside the palace compound that night. He caught sight of Kayu walking alone. Tuah then accosted him and asked politely, 'Are you Count Kayu, cousin of Count Akar diRaja?'

'Yes, sir, and you must be Hang Tuah. What can I do for you, sir?' said Count Kayu. 'I have noticed that since you arrived in Pahang, you have been trying to communicate with me. I could read your face, that you have some bad intentions on me. Is this true?'

'Very true. I've come to kill you, to avenge the death of the *telanai* of Trengganu!'

Kayu was shocked. 'But... Surely, you cannot be serious?'

'Yes, I am.'

'Help, help!' Kayu screamed. He tried to run for his dear life. Tuah then trusted his *keris* into his stomach. He died instantly and lay in a pool of blood on the ground. Soon the place nearest him was spilled with his blood. Tuah immediately ran off and disappeared in the darkness. A palace guard rushed to his aid on hearing the screaming, but it was too late. Tuah was certain that no one saw him because he had made sure that he accosted the count when he was alone and in the dark.

'Stop, stop!' shouted the guard at Tuah as he rushed to the count's aid. But, it was too late; Kayu was already sprawled on the ground. He was lifeless. Foam appeared from his mouth with blood oozing out of it and the nostrils and ears. Tuah's stab was so powerful that it killed him instantly, because the dagger he had used was the mystical Taming Sari.

Muhammad was very furious. He paced the floor up and down while the palace guard waited. He hoped the sultan did not blame him too for Count Kayu's death. 'Are you certain it's Hang Tuah himself who did it?'

'Yes, your majesty. Who could've mistaken Hang Tuah for he wore differently than everybody else,' said the guard.

'Thank you, guard. You may return to your post now.'

'Thank you, your majesty.' He was relieved when he was asked to go away by the sultan, without being reprimanded by him. The guard went off. The Prime Minister Lord Terutup who was with them waited for the sultan's next move. 'What do we do next? We can seek justice by demanding Tuah's execution,' asked the prime minister. 'I thought everything was settled yesterday afternoon, but now this.'

'Get him now.'

'Very well, your majesty.'

Terutup went off.

Muhammad sat on his throne that night. Tuah and Terutup stood before him. The sultan tried hard to contain his anger. If it was somebody else who did it and not Tuah, he would have ordered his execution immediately. He knew whatever Tuah had done surely had the full backing and support of the sultan of Melaka. Otherwise, he would not have dared to do it.

'I killed Count Kayu to seek justice, for the death of the *telanai*,' admitted Tuah. He did not show any remorse; he wanted to face the sultan head on without trying to deny his actions. This was how furious he was with what the sultan had done to the late *telanai*.

'The late Count Kayu did not kill the ruler of Trengganu. I was the one who had ordered Seri Akar diRaja to kill him!' said Muhammad.

Tuah was not shocked, because he already knew about it. The sultan only helped to confirm it; so there were no more suspicions on who actually ordered the killing of the *telanai*.

'But, why? Why couldn't the *telanai* of Trengganu pay homage to the sultan of Melaka?'

'I did not fear him paying homage to my Brother Alauddin in Melaka. But what I was angry about was not just because the *telanai* had visited Melaka, but because he was rude to relate the weakness of Melaka to the other rulers after he had left the state. Why did he have to do it?'

Tuah was shocked. He did not realize that Muhammad still had a soft spot for his younger brother and Melaka. Now, he felt a tinge of regret. He had thought wrongly of Muhammad. Still, he did not believe it was right for the sultan to order Akar diRaja to kill the *telanai*.

'Now tell this to my Brother Alauddin so that he knows the true situation. I did it for him and for Melaka.'

'Yes, your majesty, I'll do that.'

'You may go now, Hang Tuah. I will spare your life for killing Count Kayu. But make yourself scarce; I don't want to see your face by dawn in Pahang.'

Tuah kept quiet. He kissed the sultan's hand and walked out of the throne room with his brother-warriors.

Tuah walked dejectedly with his brother-warriors in the village. The villagers stopped and stared at them. They all knew who Tuah and his brother-warriors were. They smiled and waved their hands at them. Tuah and his brothers smiled and waved back. Few men stepped forward and hugged them. Tuah returned their friendly gesture by kissing the hands of the elder men and women. 'How are you all my friends?'

'Fine, Hang Tuah,' they replied in unison.

'Good.'

Tuah and his brothers walked on.

'What are you going to do next, Hang Tuah?' asked Lekir.

'We pack up, and leave Pahang,' said Tuah. 'This is the sultan of Pahang's orders! What else can we do?'

'Does the sultan know that Hang Tuah was ordered to act as such by his majesty Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah?' said Kasturi.

'I am sure Sultan Muhammad Shah knows that, because he knows very well that whatever we do here must be under the direct orders of our sultan himself. Because of that Sultan Muhammad Shah could not retaliate against me. We're now even!'

'If Hang Jebat is still alive, he'd have clobbered Sultan Muhammad Shah's neck in full view of everybody; such was his nature,' said Kasturi.

'I am sure he would have done it; he was a bad-tempered man. Too bad that he couldn't control his anxieties, otherwise, he'd have become an important warrior today.'

Tuah sailed backed to Melaka with his brother-warriors that night as ordered by the sultan of Pahang. He did not dare stay longer, as he did not know what the sultan would do to him or to any of his brothers if they had remained after sunrise. Nevertheless, they still believed that they had done an excellent job in Pahang and their sultan ought to be pleased. It was not a difficult mission, and they undertook it with flair. Those in Pahang who did not know what happened to Kayu were impressed with Tuah and his brother-warriors. Many of them were originally from Melaka, too. They had come to Pahang with Muhammad when he was installed the first sultan of the state.

Kayu's wife, Intan Kayu and his children requested an audience with Muhammad in order to get his advice. He was the only person in Pahang who could help her. They were still mourning over the death of their loved one. She had wanted to lodge a formal complain with him; she hoped that the sultan could do something to avenge the death of her husband. However, she was greatly disappointed when she realized that the sultan had already forgiven Tuah and had even ordered that he and his brothers left Pahang before dawn tomorrow.

'Please. I must seek your majesty's help. Therefore, I beseech your majesty. How could Tuah be allowed to leave Pahang freely and scot-free like that after he has taken the life of an innocent man, my husband, and the father of these young children? He must pay for the death of my husband, Kayu. I will not rest until he is executed,' pleaded Intan Kayu.

'There's no way that I can do that, madam. Hang Tuah is invincible. He is in possession of the magical Taming Sari *keris*. Anybody who has it in his

possession shall never be hurt. Because of that I did not do as what you had suggested.'

'Hang Tuah and his three brother-warriors could cause havoc in Pahang, and even the collapse of our new sultanate. And because of that too, I decided to order him to leave Pahang immediately before they ran amok. I told him I did not want to see their faces by dawn the following day. They have now left Pahang in the same ships that brought them here last week,' said Muhammad. 'This is the best that I could do madam. I assure you: If it not Tuah who did but somebody else, I would have easily sentenced him to death by hanging in the public square for everybody here in Pahang to see. My younger brother, Alauddin in Melaka cannot do anything. Tuah was smart to undertake the task himself.'

'Had it been Kasturi Lekir or Lekiu, I'd know how to handle them personally.'

Intan Kayu was in the state of shocked and froze in her seat. Her children stared at her. One of them touched her shoulder to wake her up. 'Mother, mother,' said her eldest daughter. Intan Kayu woke up. The sultan looked at her and felt pity for her and her children. He hoped that whatever that he had said was enough to console the pain she felt inside her heart and treated the matter as closed.

'Can't your majesty think of something else?' asked Muhammad.

'I'm afraid not, madam. If I could, I'd have done it before Hang Tuah left Pahang, even before you came here to plead with me.'

Intan Kayu then started to cry again. She quickly pulled out a handkerchief and dabbed her eyes with it. 'I'm sorry, your majesty.'

'The only thing that I can do is to relieve your pain by making sure you and your children are well looked after.'

'Thank you.'

'My assistant will deliver some compensation from me. Now, please return to your house and try to be calm. Please bear in mind that your husband did not die a useless death. He died in the name of the country.'

'Yes. I do hope his soul will rest in peace, as I'd done my level best to ensure that he receives justice.'

'You have been a good wife. He was lucky to have you as his wife, madam.'

She then kissed the sultan's hand and walked off with her children.

Akar diRaja and his wife, Isteri Akar sat with Intan Kayu in her house. They looked distraught. What Intan Kayu had just said was too horrendous for them to hear. She had described to them in detail on what transpired in her discussion with Muhammad yesterday.

'Is that all what the sultan had to say?' asked Isteri Akar.

Intan Kayu nodded. She was still holding the handkerchief that she had taken to the palace; it was now damp with her tears.

'Hang Tuah is invincible; didn't the sultan tell you that he's in possession of the magical Taming Sari?' asked Isteri Akar.

'Yes, he did, my dear cousin.'

'If we cannot get Tuah, how about the sultan of Melaka himself? Surely, he is not invincible like Tuah.'

Intan Kayu and Akar diRaja were surprised at the proposition and the possibility of retaliation. They thought, it was the least that they were going to do.

'But, how could we? The sultan of Melaka is the younger brother of our Sultan Muhammad Shah,' said Intan Kayu.

'Precisely. In this way, we can show two things. One which is to pay revenge for what they did to your late husband, Count Kayu, and the other to instigate Sultan Muhammad Shah to sever Pahang's already fragile and flimsy relations with Sultan Alauddin Riayat and hence, Melaka.

'Wasn't it Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah who ordered Tuah to kill Count Kayu? Otherwise would he dare to do it? The reason why Sultan Alauddin wanted Tuah to do was not only to seek revenge but also to prove that Melaka is still very much in control over Pahang.

'Sultan Muhammad Shah can also exert his independence from Melaka, especially from his younger brother, Alauddin. For how could a younger brother tell his elder brother what to do? Or can they, my dear cousin?'

Akar diRaja smiled. Now he got the point made by the wife of his younger brother. He was greatly relieved. He did not realize that she was intelligent. 'Brilliant idea, my dear,' said Akar diRaja. He then turned to his wife. 'What do you think, my dear wife?'

Isteri Akar kept quiet.

'Well, if this is decided, then I will do something about it,' said Seri Akar diRaja excitedly.

'Do it fast, before somebody gets wind of what you are planning to do, dear,' said his wife, Isteri Akar.

'Oh, yes, I will, dear.'

A female kitchen staff of the Melaka palace kitchen by the name of Endah took some cookies and drinks. She then put them on a tray to prepare for the Alauddin Riayat's late night snacks. The sultan and his entourage had gone to

Pagoh on the Muar River for a holiday where they had stayed at the palace there.

Endah looked around to see if there was anyone there in the kitchen. She made sure she was alone. She acted furtively like a sly fox, with her eyes looking at every direction, while pretending to be without any evil intention in her heart. It was not an easy thing to do, but she was able to do it. She then pulled a small packet from her pockets and poured the white poisonous powder in the coffee. She then stirred the cup until it had fully blended with the water. She then took the tray out of the kitchen.

'Where are you going, Endah?' asked another kitchen-helper, an elderly Malay woman who was washing dishes there, not too far away from the kitchen stove.

Endah got a rude fright; she did not realize the woman was there but she pretended to act casual. She almost let lose of the things that she was carrying.

'To the sultan's room to deliver his majesty's late night snacks as always.'

'Will you come back and give me a hand here?'

'I sure will, excuse me.'

The women did not know what Endah was up to. She stood up, went to the kitchen, and blew wind through a pipe to light up the fire.

Endah then walked out of the kitchen, feeling relieved that her deeds were not exposed. She did not look at the other women, because she did not want her to see her face that had been contorted by her evil thoughts that she was thinking. She was paid by some Pahang agents a handsome amount of money to spike the sultan's food. They had given her a small packet of poison in the form of powder that could render the sultan dead in a few weeks. They purposely wanted him not to die instantly, but slowly, so that he would suffer and died in great pain. She walked slowly along the corridor with the tray. She went straight to the sultan's study. She did not make any sound. She made sure her step were soft and didn't trample on the wooden floor that might stir the others who were in the adjacent rooms and the guards who were always on standing frozen in their positions. They only stirred to life when there is a commotion - even a slight one.

Alauddin Riayat was writing on a low table in his study. His wife, the sultanah of Melaka went to the study and sat. Just then, the palace assistant appeared in the study. Endah put down the tray and walked out. The sultanah poured the coffee into a gold cup. 'Here are some drinks and snacks. What are you doing, dear?'

'I've put down in my will that Raja Mahmud shall ascend to the throne and be the next sultan of Melaka in the advent of my demise, or if I'm

incapacitated by illness or injury. He shall be called Sultan Mahmud Shah,' said her husband.

The sultanah was shocked. 'What on earth are you up to?' she asked. 'Don't you have other better things to do? What nonsense are you saying? Pray for good health and not for a short life and worse, your own death!'

'It's not customary that sultans of Melaka to write down in their will, dear. I'm doing it just in case should there be any disagreements amongst my sons. I have seen many Malay sultanates collapsing after the death of their rulers. And because of that I don't wish for the same thing to happen to Melaka.'

'It is obvious that Raja Mahmud shall succeed you dear for he is your eldest son. The prime minister and everybody in Melaka know that.'

'I know and I am fully aware of it. But, it won't hurt to have it in black-and-white and in my own handwriting. The goatskin on which my will is written on will last for a very long time, as a testament to my personal wish. I have seen enough bloodshed in other states when their rulers died. Their sons and other relatives fought with each other to grab the throne.'

The sultanah kept quiet. He husband took a gulp of coffee and continued with his writing. The strong coffee had made him fresh considerably; he felt very much awake than he did before.

Later that day Alauddin Riayat walked out of the mosque with Mahmud to return to the palace after he had performed the afternoon prayers. He felt weak. His steps were slow. He then felt something pounding hard in his chest. It was sharp, as it was sudden and hard. It shook so violently and suddenly that he felt like his heart was going to pop out of his chest right then. He held his chest with both hands. Sweat began to seep out of his body and soon his clothes were drenched in sweat. His face was wet like he had just alighted from the river. Sweat flowed down from his head, and his hair was soaked. Mahmud stopped to look at his father. He did not know what he was doing. 'What's wrong, dear father?'

Alauddin Riayat did not answer. He started to gasp for air. Mahmud began to panic. He turned to the guards and shouted, 'Father, father! Guards, guards!'

Some guards turned around. They saw the sultan and his son, Mahmud in the garden. They suspected that the sultan was in some difficulty. They rushed to his aid. The sultan then fell to the ground, smacked on his face. He lost consciousness and fainted. The guards then propped up the sultan and took him to the palace. Mahmud cried. He followed them to the palace. He was not aware what was happening.

Alauddin Riayat lay in bed. He was very sick but conscious. The sultanah looked worried; she feared for her husband's life. Perak and the *temenggong* entered the room.

'Tun Perak, my prime minister. I want you to hear me. I have written a will. Should I die, I want you to execute it. Understand?' said Alauddin Riayat, his voice soft and weak. He looked pale and sickly.

'Yes. But, your majesty must not say that.'

The sultan ignored him. 'My eldest son, Raja Mahmud will succeed me.'

Perak nodded. Mahmud felt sad. Alauddin Riayat coughed some blood. An assistant held a gold spittoon that the Ming Emperor Xiang Zong had given his late father, Mansur when he made a trip to the imperial Chinese empire, and let him vomit the blood into it.

'Mahmud, son, come here,' called the sultan.

Mahmud went to his father.

'Mahmud, listen to me. I want you to succeed me, and promise that you will treat the people of Melaka with kindness and be gentle to them. Listen to them, and help them in any way you can. Understand?'

'Yes, father.'

'Do remember always, without the people, the sultanate of Melaka is nothing. We are nothing, and you, too, will be nothing. Don't ever think that you are descendants of some beings who had fallen down from the sky.

'We are ordinary humans, too. Just that the people have given to us their full faith and trust us with their future destiny. You, like me, and your grandfather great-great-grand-daddy Parameswara or Megat Iskandar Shah were all ordinary human beings. The people had entrusted us with the tasks to lead them.

'Remember that, son, and remember that always: we the direct descendants of the ancient Sailendra rulers of Java. Sailendra means 'Kings of the Mountains,' if you don't know. It was during the eighth century that our ancestors built the Borobudur and other mother temples throughout Java.'

'Do you know what is the Borobudur, son?'

Mahmud shook his head. 'No, I'm afraid not, dear father.'

'Never mind. It's a huge temple complex built by our ancestors. However, since we became Muslims and our people followed suit, the temple was neglected. With the religious leaders and priests gone, and the religion was not popular with the people anymore. The whole complex, therefore, became useless. It did not serve any purpose anymore. It is now a total wreck. Vegetation, trees, and grass now cover it. Nobody will ever discover it. Even if somebody else does, he will not be able to find it in its original condition. Most



likely, he will find a mount of stones and boulders with heads and limbs of the many statues of the deities broken or severed.' He coughed hard; it sounded empty. 'You know we are Muslims now, so there's no need for us to feel proud of the temple anymore.'

'Yes, father, I know.'

'Most importantly, use your position to promote Islamic values in the people and spread Islam. This is your mission in life. I do not want to see any drop of blood flowing in the Melaka River, ever!'

'Yes, father.'

Alauddin Riayat's condition turned for the worse.

'Say the *syabadab*, your affirmation to Allah, father. I testify that there is no God but Allah, and Prophet Mohammed is His Messenger,' said Mahmud in his father's ear.

Alauddin Riayat whispered the *syabadab* softly with his last breath. He opened his mouth wide and tried to gasp for air. This was all the energy that he had had left and he wanted to spend it on the *syabadab* in order that he died a Muslim. He then died. Mahmud cried. The dignitaries offered silent prayers.

Mahmud went to the verandah and continued to cry there. Perak went to him to give him some comfort and company and a shoulder to cry on. He was especially fond of Mahmud. He had known him since he was a baby. In fact, Perak took personal interest in his development. His father, the sultan gave him his blessings and a freehand on how best to ensure that the young prince be given the proper religious education and the art of war. It would be useful to him since he was destined to become the future sultan of Melaka. But, even then, it did not prepare Mahmud to handle tragedy that involved his father, in that fashion. It was a blow to his dignity and an affront to his religious conviction. Mahmud felt that it was not right for somebody to poison his late father, Alauddin Riayat like he did. Nobody knew who did it; it could be the work of one person, or a group of people. Mahmud dared not think about it, because the more he did that, the more he became nauseous and sick. Therefore, he took the incident as something that was fated by Allah. How could anybody want to poison such a fine sultan as him, he wondered. His main mission now was to take over the throne of Melaka and be the next sultan, in the best way he possibly could, just like what his father had advised him on his deathbed.

'It is Allah's will. Your majesty's late, father, Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah died knowing that he had left Melaka in the safe hands,' said Perak.

'He was truly a remarkable man, prime minister.'

'Yes, certainly. The late his majesty Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah will surely be missed by the people.'

'Was he poisoned? Who would dare to do it?'

'It appeared like he was, your majesty.'

'Poisoned?'

'The late Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah was a very young and strong man. He never had any disease before; so, how could anybody not want to speculate that he wasn't poisoned.'

'Who could have done it? I need a confirmation; I do not want a guess. I do not want to charge anyone and punish him because whoever the person is; he might turn out to be totally innocent later. Haven't we all learnt from the Jebat episode? I don't want to repeat it; it was a lesson that we cannot forget.'

'No idea, Your majesty.'

'He was so young, and had full of energy. Melaka has lost such a fine ruler.'

'Very true, your highness.'

Mahmud and Perak froze.

Not long later, Mahmud was installed the seventh sultan of Melaka in a ceremony that was less elaborate than those that his predecessors had experienced. He was called Sultan Mahmud Shah. He had requested that the palace and people to do away with all the fun and gaiety that normally related to the installation of a new sultan, as a sign of respect for his late father. The people and senior officials fully understood the new sultan's concerns. Besides, it was improper to have a celebration immediately in the wake of the death of their sultan even before the official forty-day mourning period was over. Even the newly installed Sultan Mahmud just was not in the mood to celebrate.

## CHAPTER 12: THE QUEEN MOTHER

Seri Bija diRaja Tun Kerutup walked to his house with some officers. He hoped that things had changed for the better in Melaka. He had just arrived from Singapura where he was stationed as the sultan of Melaka's representative there. He had the feeling as though his returned was not welcome; he felt a cold reception waiting for him at the port. There was no senior official from the palace to greet him, as it was the tradition for the sultan's representatives

to be received when they returned to Melaka after a stint abroad. He felt slighted; he felt like his presence was not appreciated.

'Welcome back to Melaka, your excellency,' said Mr. Samah, a colleague who did not hold any official position in the Melaka palace, but a friend. He was just a good friend of Kerutup who happened to be there. He alone seemed delighted with the Lord's return to Melaka, but not everyone else. Many others who were at the airport only gave a glance; they did not bother to stop work to look or nod at him, although they knew he was a high official from the clothes he wore.

'Thank you, Mr. Samah. What's new in Melaka? Has anything changed since I left for Singapura? I did not receive any news from here the whole time I was there,' said Kerutup in a casual fashion. 'I'm anxious to know the latest news if you've any; I shall be happy to hear them from you, for you're the only person in the whole of Melaka whom I trust.'

'The top news must be that Melaka now has a new sultan.'

Kerutup was surprised. 'Oh!'

'His majesty Sultan Mahmud Shah is now the new sultan of Melaka, my Lord.'

'What happened to Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah?'

'He died under mysterious circumstances, my Lord.'

Kerutup was shocked. 'What do you mean by that? This is the most shocking piece of news I have ever heard - and on my very first day here in Melaka! Do I smell any palace intrigue, Mr. Samah?'

'Looks like it, your excellency.'

'Who? Who did it? What exactly happened?'

'The palace officials suspected his majesty was poisoned.'

'By whom? He can't just die like that; he was so young.'

Samah kept quiet. He did not have the answer. Kerutup froze; he could not believe what he had just heard. This was the first time that a sultan of Melaka had ever been poisoned. 'Who'd want to do that?'

'Nobody knows, my Lord. Only Allah the Almighty knows. May be it was fated that he had to die that way.'

'But wasn't Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah a kind-hearted sultan and well-loved by his subjects?'

'Some officials suspected the Pahang people might be behind it, my Lord.'

'Pahang? How could that be possible? Isn't the sultan of Pahang, Sultan Muhammad Shah, his majesty's elder brother?'

'It's a long story, my Lord.'

'If that's the case, come to my house and explain to me everything, Samah. I want to know everything - to the minute detail.'

Kerutup sat cross-legged in the verandah of his house with Samah and his officers. They chewed betel leaves, as was the norm, and sat until night began to fall and the bright outdoors changed to darkness. He then turned around to look at his guests. 'It seems even among brothers, enmity is not impossible to happen. We don't know what drives such men to commit despicable acts on their own close blood relatives. Even amongst sultans...' he said.

'Yes, indeed, sir,' said Samah.

'Thank you, Samah for telling me all this. The palace is getting more intriguing and controversial than ever. I can tell you that I am also not especially pleased with the ascension of Sultan Mahmud Shah. He's such a small boy, hardly eleven. So, how could such a young boy be the sultan of Melaka? Melaka will never be stable. In any case, we will all be vulnerable to foreign attacks and intimidation. Do we deserve this after what we've been through?'

Samah stood up and readied to leave; he preferred not to get into the controversy, so, he decided to cut short what the count had to say. 'I shall take my leave now, my Lord. Please do not take this as an affront; just that it's getting late,' he said. 'You know where I'm headed is dark and dangerous. The wild beasts might loiter and my neck will suffer. Not that I haven't been clawed by them before. Here look.' He pulled up the right sleeve on his right hand. There was a scar. So, everybody thought he did not make up the story.

Kerutup pulled out a piece of cloth from the cupboards in the verandah and turned around. 'Here, I do have some souvenirs from Singapura for you.' He threw it at Samah, who caught it with both hands. 'What is it, sir?'

'A piece of fine silk cloth from China; for your wife.'

'Well, thank you, sir.'

Samah walked down the stairs, slipped on his sandals, went off, and immediately disappeared in the darkness.

'*Asalamulaikum,*' said Kerutup.

'*Mulaikum salam,*' replied Samah.

'I won't show my allegiance to Sultan Mahmud Shah,' said Kerutup to himself, after Samah had walked away, and he was now not within his hearing distance. The officers kept quiet. 'He is such a young and immature kid. What does he know how to govern the state?'

Mahmud sat with Tun Perak, *temenggong*, Tuah and other senior palace officials in the verandah of the palace. Although young, he exhibited confidence. His

ascension to the throne of Melaka suddenly made him look more matured, despite his young age. His senior officials knew he was in full control; he could not be taken for granted. Mahmud had grown much into an adult now with the responsibility that rested on his delicate shoulders. The death of his father and the responsibilities that he had to bear as the new seventh sultan of Melaka had toughened him. The state officials knew they could not bully him. Mahmud knew about his rights as sultan, and he knew how to govern the state and deal with problems. On top of that, he also knew all the people of Melaka respected him.

'Is he coming or not? He's been back from Singapura for two weeks now,' said Mahmud. Although his voice was soft and tender, but the way it spoke, he sounded firm and serious.

'Who?' asked Tuah.

'Seri Bija diRaja Lord Terutup.'

Tuah turned to one of the officials. 'Does he know we have a meeting today and his presence is needed?' he asked.

'Yes, your excellency, Hang Tuah,' said the senior official.

Mahmud looked angry. He knew the count had deliberately refrained from coming to the palace, because he had wanted to snub him; he did not like the idea of a young boy as the sultan of Melaka. Terutup had made it known that a royal council should be established, so that a group of senior officials and top members of the royal family could govern Melaka while Mahmud grew up. Only then, he would be allowed to perform the role of sultan. This meant that the council of which Terutup was going to be a member would make all major decisions. But, he had no time for such nonsense as his mind was already fixed. He still felt slighted that his return from Singapura was not welcomed and his presence in Melaka was not taken seriously by anyone. Being a much older person compared to the other state officials, he had expected his presence to be acknowledged.

'Why don't we proceed. He will come anytime,' suggested Perak.

Mahmud stood up. 'No, I'm not proceeding with this meeting. I know why he is not showing his face here. He's unhappy with me, that I have become sultan of Melaka; because he thinks I'm so young and inexperienced; that I don't deserved to be the seventh sultan of Melaka!'

Everybody was shocked to see the sultan getting angry like that. They kept quiet and did not attempt to stop him. They looked down on the mat.

'Lord Kerutup is my officer; he must come and attend this meeting! He has no choice; he cannot give any excuse! If he is really sick or disabled, I will excuse him. I will even offer my personal medicine man to treat him so he can

fully recover soon. As it is, he has just returned from Singapura and is well and in excellent health. I will not allow any of my officers to treat me like this. I am not a child anymore. The death of my father has made me into a matured adult. I am in full command in Melaka! I am the sultan of Melaka! I will not allow any dissension especially by any of my senior officials. He knows he's committing *lese majesty* by not producing himself to this meeting.'

There was silence. The sultan shook his head. He put his hands to his back and stared outside, just like what his late father did each time he got angry.

'Don't say that, your majesty. Lord Kerutup has just returned from Singapura. He might not be feeling well,' said Tuah in order to break the impasse. The sultan ignored Tuah and went off. Tuah turned to Officer Mamat and asked: 'Can you rush to Seri Bija's house and inform him of this meeting?'

'Yes, your excellency,' replied the officer. The officer went off.

Mahmud stood by the windows in the palace, looking sad and mad with what had happened earlier. Perak slowly walked to him.

'I know Seri Bija diRaja Tun Kerutup doesn't recognize me as the seventh sultan of Melaka. That is why he hasn't come to the palace to have an audience with me and to show his allegiance. Why? Does he think that I do not deserve to succeed my late father and be sultan? Am I too young? Am I too soft?' asked Mahmud. 'Why is he doing this? Just what is he trying to prove?'

'I beg to differ, your majesty. Seri Bija diRaja Tun Kerutup was loyal to the late Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah; and he's also loyal to you,' said Perak. 'He must have a good and valid reason for not being here. I don't suppose he will want to do.'

Mahmud chipped in before Perak could complete his sentence. 'His behavior is making me sick. I shall rest in my room. The meeting is canceled.' He then walked away leaving the prime minister alone at the windows. 'Very well.'

Mamat went to the house. '*Asalamulaiikum*, Seri Bija.'

Instead of Kerutup, his wife, Tun Bija diRaja appeared at the windows instead. '*Mulaiikum salam*, Yes, Officer Mamat,' she said.

'Where is his excellency, Seri Bija, madam?'

'He is at the pond. Why?'

'He was expected at the meeting in the palace, but he didn't turn up. And the sultan was furious.'

'My goodness! Go to the pond over there. May be he had slipped off from his mind. It has happened before...so I won't be surprised if it happened again.'

'Thank you, madam.' The officer went to the pond that was at a short distance from there. He saw Kerutup sitting alone on the wooden bench. He was staring into void. The officer approached him. 'Excuse me, your excellency.'

Kerutup turned around. He saw Mamat standing near him. He knew what the officer had in mind. 'It was not a mistake officer. I purposely did not want to go to there because I did not want to pay allegiance to Sultan Mahmud Shah,' said Kerutup even before the officer had asked him. The officer was shocked. 'Why is that so, sir?'

'That's none of your business, officer. Just turn around and go back to the palace now.'

'Very well, your excellency, if that's you say.' The officer went off.

The medicine man or *Bomob* walked briskly towards the palace. Perak was waiting at the entrance. It was dark outside and the sounds of the leaves rustling being blown by the soft breeze were heard. Occasionally sounds of the dogs barking could be heard, too. Melaka now had a sizable number of Chinese men, women and children as its citizen. They liked to rear dogs as a pet and to safeguard their houses and properties.

'Hurry, sir, hurry, his majesty is in such great pain,' urged Perak.

'I'll do whatever I can, prime minister,' said the medicine man.

They entered the palace and walked along the corridor.

'Where is his majesty?' asked the medicine man.

'This way, follow me.'

Mahmud held his stomach; he felt it was churning. He twisted and turned over in his bed. The medicine man and Perak entered the room. 'My stomach is churning. Am I going to die and see my Creator, Tun Perak?' said the sultan.

'No. Your majesty is having diarrhea,' said the medicine man.

'Diarrhea? What did I eat?'

'Never mind. I'm going to prescribe some medicines and your majesty will be back on the feet by morning, *insyallah*, if God wills.'

'Good.'

'Let me go out to the garden and get some shoots, leaves and herbs. I need to brew the right potion for his majesty.'

'I'll come with you,' said Perak.

The medicine man picked some leaves as Perak stood beside him. 'Was he poisoned?' asked Perak.

'No, he wasn't,' replied the medicine man.

'His late father, Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah died under mysterious circumstances; it was said that he was poisoned.'

'Really, is that so? I must be too young then, otherwise, I would have heard about it. It must have shocked the entire nation.'

'Yes, sir.'

'If that's the case, well, may be, somebody was trying to give the sultan a taste of what's to come.'

'What do you mean?'

'May be there is somebody in Melaka who wants him to experience some discomfort. His condition is not serious. And whoever had contaminated the sultan's food or drinks, doesn't want his majesty to die.'

'Who in the palace would want to do that? I can think of no one.'

'I have no idea, your excellency. My job as the medicine man for the sultan is to provide the potions to his majesty's illness. This is precisely what I'm doing.' He then took the leaves, shoots and herbs and returned to the palace. He gave Mahmud a cup of the potion that he had brewed. The sultan immediately gulped it down so that the bitter taste did not linger on his tongue and whole mouth. 'It tastes bitter. Don't you have anything that tastes less awful? Don't you have something special that you can do for a sultan?' asked Mahmud as he winced.

'I'm afraid not. All medicines taste the same; they come in one taste,' said the medicine man.

'Here, give me some water.'

The sultan handed the cup to the medicine man. He then poured some water in it. The sultan immediately drank it so that the aftertaste was washed from his mouth but it didn't. The taste stayed a little longer in his mouth; it made his face shrink and distorted. 'Will I be better by dawn as you have promised, medicine man?' asked the sultan.

'If Allah wills,' replied the medicine man. 'I am just the medicine man. All that I can do is to try and help like what I have always done; more than that will be Allah's wills.'

'Why don't your majesty take a good rest,' suggested Perak.

The sultan threw himself on the bed. Perak pulled a blanket and covered his body.

Mahmud's step-grandmother, the queen mother or Raja Tua's carriage stopped outside of the palace. She alighted together with few royal relatives and went to the palace. They walked along the corridor and headed straight to sultan's bedroom where Perak was standing there. He greeted them, 'Good day, your highness the queen mother,' greeted Perak, in the most polite tone he could offer.



'Good day. May I come in?' replied the queen mother. Her reply was terse. She did not even glance to look at him. Such was her contempt for the prime minister.

'I have strict orders that the sultan can't be disturbed.'

The queen mother was shocked that she was not allowed to visit to his stepson, the sultan. 'Is my stepson, okay?'

'Yes, indeed your highness the queen mother.'

'I'd like to see him then now, so I know how well or unwell he is.'

'I'm afraid, that's not possible, your highness.'

'Why not; and who says so? Don't you know that I am his majesty's step-grandmother, the queen mother? If he is okay, why then am I not allowed to see him? Here are my relatives, and we have come from very far to pay respect to him and to comfort him. May be his majesty is lonely. Our presence might help him to recover faster. Besides, this is a family matter, you shouldn't stand in our way.'

'I do, your highness. It's true. But please forgive me, because I have strict orders from the medicine man and the sultan to disallow anyone from entering his majesty's bedroom.'

'But, I'm the queen mother!' She was getting impatient; she rose her voice slightly to register her intense displeasure. But, Perak was undeterred by it; he knew the queen mother was a devious old woman who did not favor Mahmud's ascension to the throne. She preferred her other grandson to be the sultan of Melaka although legally, he did not have the right to the throne because he was just the son of the late Sultan Alauddin Riayat and his second wife.

'I am sorry about that, your highness. The matter of his majesty is not debatable. Just be patient; his majesty will recover in due time, and your highness can see his majesty then.'

The queen mother pondered over the suggestion, but she was not impressed with the explanation. 'Very well, Prime Minister Tun Perak, I am very disappointed with you. It is obvious you do not have even the littlest respect for me whatsoever. Despite knowing I am the queen mother, you still wanted to play a fool with me. How inconsiderate of you, Tun Perak! I'm disappointed with you.'

Perak scoffed her rebuke. To him Mahmud was more important than she was. She then walked off. 'Come,' she said to her relatives. Tuah went to Tun Perak after queen mother and her relatives had left the corridor near the sultan's bedroom. 'Why didn't your Lordship allow them to see the sultan?' he wondered.

'Never! She is an evil woman! She wants to prop the sultan over and to further aggravate his illness and suffocate him!' said Perak. 'What else can you expect from an evil woman like that?'

'We know she doesn't like the sultan that much.'

'She wants to see the sultan dead. May be she was the one who spiked the sultan's food. May be she was responsible for poisoning the late Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah, too. She's capable of doing such things. I have many other reasons for not liking her.'

'Yes, we do know that she hates her step-grandson. Surely, she will not go to the extent of wanting to see him dead! How could an old woman like her have such evil thoughts?'

'We don't know to what extent evil people are capable of doing. Besides, it's quite a well-known secret that the queen mother wants to see her other grandson, Raja Munawar become sultan of Melaka.'

The sultan coughed. Tuah and Perak immediately rushed inside the room.

'How is your majesty feeling?' asked Tuah.

'Slightly better, but still weak, I'm afraid,' replied Mahmud.

'The medicine man will be here shortly,' assured Perak.

The queen mother returned to her palace not too far away from the palace of the sultan of Melaka. She sat in the verandah, looking angry. Her face had distorted and it made her look evil. Her assistants stood by in case she needed to order any food or drinks.

'Why couldn't they allow me to see my own stepson? I am his majesty's stepmother!' said the queen mother. She spoke almost to herself, since there was nobody there who would be in any position to converse with her. Her relatives had entered the house leaving her alone in the verandah where she wanted to let the soft breeze cool her down. She was feeling uncomfortable because the weather was so hot and humid. She pulled out a small fan and started to fan herself. One of her assistants took it that she was feeling hot, so she went inside, produced a larger fan, and fanned over the queen mother.

'Thank you, my dear, girl,' she said. 'It feels better now.' She continued to stare into void. Her lips moved as though she was speaking to herself. Nobody heard her. This was how she released her anger when nobody was around. 'I just can't let that poor sod, Perak have his way,' she said to herself. 'He is just a senior officer. How could an old man like that treat me without any respect at all? I must do something. I must do something fast before the royal palace turns upside down.' She continued to stare into void as her lips moved briskly. She then gritted her teeth and spat saliva into a spittoon. It was red, as she had

been eating betel leaves. She then stood up. The assistants waited. They did not know what she was going to do next.

'I wish to have a bath. I'm feeling so sticky.'

The queen mother sat in a pool in the gardens while the female assistants poured water that had been scented with petals from seven different flowers that were in full bloom in the garden, over her back. It helped to soothe her body, but did not do anything to cool her temper. An assistant tied hair tied in a bun. She sat still and staring into void with her lips trembling as though she was chewing on her words. They were not kind words; they were harsh words - sharp and pointed and laced with poison, like *tuju-tuju* - all directed at Perak. Although her voice was not heard, but her assistants knew she was still angry with Perak. No, she was furious or mad!

The assistants washed her. She hardly lifted a finger. When it was over, she stood up and went to the bench, where the assistants dried her hair and body. After they were through, the queen mother returned to the palace, looking clean and smelling good like a bunch of fresh flowers. Her assistants waited for more orders. Normally she would require some drinks to quench her thirst after a bath and massage. This was to replenish her body and soothe her dried throat that was making her voice rough - from all the shouting and screaming that she liked to do often. However, none of the assistants dared to inquire with her; they would rather wait for her to order them.

She continued to walk towards her palace with the assistants trailing a few steps behind. 'Please send me some drinks in my bedroom,' said the queen mother.

'Yes, your highness the queen mother,' said the palace girls, in unison.

Few days later, the queen mother and her royal relatives returned to the palace of the sultan. This time they hoped their fortunes would be better. Perak saw them coming into the palace compound so he immediately waited in the corridor and accosted them there as they tried to barge their way to the sultan's bedroom without observing any royal protocol. Mahmud was still not fully recovered from his illness. He was getting better now and was able to move about on his feet without being propped up by his assistants like they did before. His stomach had stopped churning, but he still felt too weak to leave the bedroom and to resume his official duties as sultan.

'I demand that I see my step-grandson! I'm sure he's feeling much better now,' insisted the queen mother. She was getting more desperate now than before. She wanted to exert some pressure this time hoping this strategy would

be more effective this time, thought Perak to himself. 'No, your highness, you shall not see his majesty yet,' said Perak.

The queen mother pushed Perak aside. He almost stumbled to the ground. Perak quickly sprang onto his feet. Despite his old age, he was still full of energy. He drew his *keris* out of the scabbard; he trusted it to the side with his right hand held outstretched. He then pulled up his *sampin* with his other hand slightly and struck a *silat* pose that looked like he was ready to attack anyone. The queen mother looked at him and was shocked. She stared at the blade of the *keris* and remained calm. She knew Perak were serious.

'Don't move! Don't you dare enter the sultan's bedroom!' shouted Perak. He was shocked that the queen mother was so desperate and still wanted to resort to such desperate methods. He refused to give in. He held his *keris* tightly in his grips so she could see for herself how serious he was. This made the queen mother and her relatives shocked. They had not seen the prime minister acting like that before despite being old. They froze in the positions.

'If you move one more step forward, I will run amok this minute, and your life will be the first to be terminated! Don't tempt me!' cried Perak.

'What can you do?' the queen mother challenged. 'I am the queen mother.'

'I do not know what I'll do. But, should I run amok, heads will roll and Melaka will be bathed in blood - yours, for the start. Now, please do not proceed any further, I beg of you, your highnesses. Just move back.'

She got scared. She knew the prime minister was dead serious. She then started to move back. 'Come, we will come back at another time. I'm going back to Singapura. I'm not going to step my feet in Melaka ever again,' cried the queen mother. She pushed the *sentil* against her teeth. She then spat a mouthful of red saliva in a spittoon that was held by one of her relatives. They went away.

Perak continued to stare at the queen mother and her relatives as they walked away from the palace. They then entered their carriages and left.

Mahmud felt much better after a few days later; he did not know what transpired in the palace during that time. Perak did not want to tell him in order not to make him feel worried unnecessarily that would affect his full recuperation.

He walked in the garden, but his steps were weak and slow. He had put on a bit of weight and was looking healthier than he did before. Perak and Tuah accompanied him; they were happy to see that the sultan had recovered.

'Your majesty looks good,' Perak.

'Thank you, Prime Minister Tun Perak, and Hang Tuah. I must say that both of you are responsible for my quick recovery. And where is the queen mother?' asked Mahmud.

'Her highness has returned to Singapura.'

'Why did she want to see me so desperately? Did she leave any word you for me?'

'She must have something in mind to tell your majesty.'

'Like what?'

'She's bent on installing his highness Raja Munawar on the throne, your majesty.'

'Oh, yes, so that she can become the shadow sultanah of Melaka? How cunning, how shrewd and how brilliant,' Mahmud laughed. 'Surely, she can't be so dumb as to want to dig her own shallow grave?'

'Surely not, your majesty.'

'And because of you both, she didn't get her way. I shall therefore, award you with a palanquin for both of you to use, with four sturdy carriers to take wherever you wish to go. They will be at your service day and night, rain or shine.'

Perak was surprised, but secretly he felt the offer was long overdue. The sultan had already awarded junior officials for lesser deeds. But he was happy just the same. He felt it was better late than ever...

'I hope they can help to ease you from the burden of having to travel throughout the state to perform your official duties, or to use it for leisure. I do not want any of you to stress yourself unnecessarily so that you two will remain healthy and strong,' continued the sultan.

'Well, thank you. My knees are not like they were before; they are weak and I can hardly walk for more than paces before immense pain will overwhelm me. Surely, the *usungan* will come in handy. Thank you, for your majesty's kind offer.'

'You deserve it, Tun Perak; you have served me and Melaka well.'

Perak sat in a palanquin as it traveled through the streets in Melaka. Two burly Malay men of a neighboring country carried it at both ends. They were most probably Javanese or Bugis because they were stocky and strongly built and had a dark complexion. This was the first time Perak was traveling in this mode of transport that was normally given to those senior palace officials who had done the sultan or the state a service. He felt awkward, but tried not to show his discomfort. He did not expect the young sultan to reward him. In fact, he did not expect anything in return to all the deeds that he had shown

the state and royal family. He passed by the Melaka people who turned to look at him. They smiled because they felt that Perak deserved to receive the reward. Some of them, however felt it was too late in coming though.

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*Prime Minister Tun Perak died in 1498 CE or 903 AH or 4196 of the Chinese calendar, after serving Sultan Mahmud Shah for ten years and was succeeded by his brother Tun Perpatih Putih. He was known as Prime Minister Lord Putih.*

*Few years later, Sultan Mahmud Shah married Tun Wati who became Sultanah Wati as it was expected him to have a consort.*

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Seri Bija diRaja Tun Kerutup sat in the verandah of his house with some minor officials. He was returning to Singapura because he could not see how he could fit in Melaka especially with Sultan Mahmud Shah as its sultan. 'I'm still very angry with Mahmud Shah for refusing to listen to my explanation regarding the misunderstanding,' he said.

'What do you plan to do, sir?' asked Si Leman, his assistant.

'I hope with the *Hari Raya Puasa* Muslim religious festivals finally over, he'll be in a better position to be realistic.'

'What if his majesty still refuses to listen?'

'We'll see, we'll see then.'

Mahmud was very angry. He thumped his right fist on the low table in his study. 'Let him return to Singapura! I will not see Kerutup! He refused to have an audience with me when he was here last and he fled to Singapura without getting official permission from me either. And now, I will refuse to see or listen to him anymore.'

'What do you now want me to tell him?' asked Prime Minister Lord Putih.

'I want to have him executed.'

The prime minister was shocked. 'Beg your pardon, your majesty?'

'I want Seri Bija diRaja Tun Kerutup executed. I want to get rid of him from my life so that he will not continue to haunt me anymore. I've had enough of him and his pranks and mischief.'

Putih was speechless; he felt a lump in his throat.

'I want Master Setia Titayang, the great-grandson of the late Seri Bija diRaja Tun Hamzah also known as Datuk Bongek to replace him. And his official duty is also to look after Singapura on my behalf.'

Putih froze in his position looking dazed. He did not believe what he had just heard.

'Prime minister,' said Mahmud.

Putih woke up. 'Yes, your majesty?'

'This is my royal command. Execute it now!'

'Yes.'

'Now I said!'

Putih nodded. He then went out of the study.

Kurutup was having lunch with his wife, Tun Seri Bija in the dining room in house. His wife felt scared. 'Why are you so stubborn? He is our sultan. He shall do no wrong. Go to the palace and beg forgiveness from his majesty,' she pestered.

'No, I won't. I'll wait for the sultan's next step,' said Kerutup. 'Will a small boy harm an old man like me?'

'He can do a lot of harm to you.'

'Like what, for instance? Tell me.'

Suddenly, there was a commotion outside the house. Tun Seri Bija stood up and looked out of the window. 'Looks like the Prime Minister Lord Putih is here. What does he want?'

'Yes, what does he want?'

Putih stepped out of his carriage and greeted. '*Asalamulaikum, ya, Seri Bija diRaja Tun Kerutup.*'

Kerutup stopped eating. He cleaned his hand and went to the window. He knew who had come to pay him a visit from the voice that he had just heard. 'Yes, prime minister? What brings you here to my humble abode?' he asked. 'Are you on official duty, or you're here for leisure?'

'May be the sultan wants to see you,' chipped in Tun Seri Bija.

'Can I please have word with you out here, in private?'

'Just say it. I'm just with my wife.'

'No, we'd better speak alone. Please.'

'Very well, since you insist.'

Kerutup went out of the house and walked with Putih.

'This way, Seri Bija,' said Putih.

They went to a secluded spot in the garden. Kerutup's wife observed from the window. After a while, Kerutup returned to his house. He looked defiant. His wife sensed something amiss and gravely wrong. It made her worried because she did not know what her husband had discussed with Putih. 'What does the sultan want, dear?' she asked.

'The sultan has ordered my execution,' replied Kerutup. He did not exhibit any regret; he sounded casual, to the surprise of his wife.

'What? Is he out of his mind?' asked his wife. She was shocked.

Kerutup walked to the door but his wife quickly stopped him. 'No, you will not leave this house.'

'Please go away,' said Kerutup.

'No, you don't leave this house unless I say so.'

He then pushed his wife aside. She fell to the ground and started to cry. She immediately got up and rushed out. Kerutup stepped inside the carriage. His wife grabbed him by his legs. 'No, don't go, don't go!' shouted Isteri Seri Bija. She then cried. Putih held her.

'It's the sultan's orders, madam,' said Putih.

Tun Seri Bija pushed the prime minister. He almost fell to the ground. 'Don't go. Don't go!' she cried. Kerutup then pushed her aside. She fell to the ground. The carriage then took him away with Putih. She got up and ran after the carriage; she tried to get it, but failed. She cried. Kerutup turned and looked at the back and saw his wife crying.

'Do forgive me, your excellency. I tried to persuade his majesty, to spare your life, but to no avail,' said Putih to Kerutup.

'It's not your fault, prime minister; it is all willed by Allah.'

'Indeed, your excellency.'

'And who will succeed me?'

'Master Setia Titayang.'

'Who is he?'

'He is the great-grandson of the late Tun Hamzah. Master Setia Titayang will also be sent to Singapura to look after the state on behalf of his majesty Sultan Mahmud Shah, like your excellency had done. His majesty wants to replace you as his representative there.'

'I see.'

'I'm sorry, your excellency for putting you through all this. I am still new as prime minister. And our sultan does not have much faith in me. If Tun Perak, my predecessor is still prime minister, I'm sure, the sultan will listen to him, thus your life will be spared.'

'Don't worry about me, prime minister. I have resigned to the fact that I am going to be executed. Just pray that my soul be placed amongst the pious. I testify that there is no God but Allah and Prophet Mohammed is His Messenger.'

The carriage moved on.



The people gathered in the square. But they were not sure who was going to be executed. They looked puzzled; they just stared at each other, looking confused especially now when Melaka was peaceful and tranquil. At the most, they were expecting some convicts to be brought to the gallows to be hanged in public. Or, there might be some important announcement that the palace had wanted to make. But, it was not a place for such official palace announcements, but for hanging of convicts!

'What's happening? Is there going to be an announcement from the palace?' asked Ah Keng, a Chinese man. He looked shocked.

'May be somebody's going to get married,' Muthu, the Indian man tried to joke. Those around him laughed.

The soldiers constructed a makeshift gallows. The people were surprised.

'Who's going to be executed today?' asked Ah Keng, now that they were clearer of what was happening.

'No idea,' said Muthu.

A carriage arrived. Kerutup alighted with his hands tied to the back. The people were shocked. They all recognized him, a high official. He was brought to the platform by the guards.

'My god, it's the Seri Bija diRaja Tun Kerutup! I know him!' shrieked Ah Keng.

'My god, what did he do?' said Muthu.

A guard stood on the platform and announced, 'Ladies and gentlemen, Sultan Mahmud has ordered the execution of Seri Bija diRaja Tun Kerutup. May God bless his soul.'

A noose was tied around Kerutup's neck. Many women took their children away. It was not a sight that they wanted their children to see. Kerutup was then executed. The people gasped. His body hung from the pole. The guards left the count's body hanging from the beam to let the people see it so that it could serve as a lesson to the others.

Mahmud stood in the verandah on the night of Kerutup's execution. Lord Putih's carriage pulled in the compound. He got out with Tuah and they went to the verandah.

'Has my order been executed, prime minister?' asked the sultan.

'Yes, your majesty,' replied Putih.

'Did he try to put up a struggle?'

'No, your majesty; he followed me willingly. He did not attempt to resist. The late Lord Kerutup accepted it as his fate and Allah's will.'

'Very well, have a seat, and have a betel leaf.'

They sat on the floor. Putih and Tuah chewed betel leaves because it was not proper to refuse the sultan's offer.

'I simply cannot have a person like that in my palace. Because of him alone, the whole palace and state can turn upside-down. But, the main reason why I am calling both of you here is not to discuss about the late Seri Bija. May his soul rest in peace and be placed amongst the pious.'

'What is it then that your majesty wishes to discuss this evening?' asked Tuah.

'We want to launch an attack on Manjong. I want you to lead our forces.'

'It's an honor, for your majesty to choose me to lead the Melaka forces.'

'And after that we want you to take our men and immediately proceed to Kelantan. We want both these Malay states to be placed under our custody. They have been under the influence of the Siamese for too long. How could the Siamese be allowed to dominate this Malay states?

'They practice a different religion than ours. If we do not do it, surely the people of Manjong and Kelantan will be less Islamic. It is our duty to save them. I want you to prepare our men, and sail to Manjong soon, Hang Tuah.'

'Very well.'

'Remember, Hang Tuah, this is not an ordinary mission. It's a religious mission.'

'Yes, your majesty.'

'I have been told repeatedly, too, that some Malays in Kelantan had converted to the other religion. I can't tolerate it anymore. We fight in the name of Allah!'

'We fight in the name of Allah the Almighty, your majesty!' said Tuah.

Tuah led his men in a final exercise to horn their fighting skills. Many of them had not fought in any war for quite sometime. He feared that their skills had deteriorated somewhat so he asked that they do some workout in the open-fields amongst themselves to toughen their muscles because most of them had put on a bit of weight especially around the waist. Few thousand men were assembled in the field. They made many *silat* moves. Tuah and his brother-warriors, Kasturi, Lekir and Lekiu were pleased with the level of their expertise. First, they did exercises, and then they started to fight in unarmed combat with each other. Later, they used weapons and fought with each other. None was hurt. Tuah was pleased at the high level of fighting skills that they had exhibited. He was confident that they had met with successful in Manjong as well as Kelantan.

'They're good,' remarked Kasturi.

'We can take over Manjong and Kelantan anytime,' said Tuah.

'Yes, my dear Hang Tuah.'

Tuah raised his hand. The men stopped. They were all soaked with their own sweat and were panting heavily. 'We have a mission, which is to attack Manjong in Perak, after which we will proceed to take over Kelantan. Is everybody ready? Are you all prepared?' asked Tuah.

'Yes!' shouted the men.

'Long live Sultan Mahmud Shah! Long live Sultan Mahmud Shah!'

'Long live Sultan Mahmud Shah! Long live Sultan Mahmud Shah!'

'Now, let's proceed to the beach. Our ships are waiting to take us to Manjong. After that we will all march by land to Kelantan and wrest it from the Siamese and chase out their representative there! Remember, we fight in the name of Allah.'

'Yes, Hang Tuah!' the men shouted.

'*Allahukhbar! Allahukhbar!*' shouted Tuah. '*Ya, Mansur! Ya, Mansur!*' (We will be victorious!)

'*Allahukhbar! Allahukhbar!*' shouted the men. They then rushed to the beach in a neat formation. They boarded the twenty ships and sailed to Manjong north of the peninsula. In all they took less than two days to get there as the winds were not strong. By nightfall, they arrived at the beach near there. They immediately set up a base on the beach and erected their tents that camouflaged with the jungle. Tuah ordered them to rest so that by next morning, they could all march to Manjong and arrive there by noon, after which they were to launch the attack. Tuah expected them to capture Manjong by late evening with a fight. This could give them time to rest for the night and to nurse the wounds that they might have inflicted during the fighting.

The Melaka forces marched to Manjong after they had their breakfast the next day. They trekked through the woods before finally arriving there. Tuah then immediately gave a signal and the Melaka men started to attack Manjong. He was not surprised to see that Manjong was not well defended. Their soldiers small in numbers, and they were not actually manning the borders. 'Attack! Attack!' His men rushed and killed all the Manjong men who appeared. They could only managed to give a token resistance to try to defend their state. They were no match for the more superior and better equipped Melaka forces. The Manjong chiefs were immediately alerted. They quickly issued an order to defend their state. 'Defend Manjong to the last drop of our blood!' shouted the senior Manjong chief to his men.

'Long live the ruler of Manjong!' shouted his men.

Meanwhile, at the Melaka camp, Tuah was leading his men for the assault. 'Attack!' he shouted.

'Attack! Attack!' the Melaka men shouted.

The war continued in intensity, and it became ferocious when the Manjong forces started to adopt an offensive strategy. Both sides refused to withdraw; both were intent on destroying each other. And after a long drawn battle, the Melaka men finally managed to overwhelm the Manjong forces. Many of the Manjong men were killed, while the rest retreated. They fled to the neighboring state where Tuah did not want to enter. Mahmud had strictly forbidden him to enter the territory and their mission was just to defeat Manjong.

Soon night fell and the whole place was enveloped in total darkness. Everybody rested. Some of the Melaka men continued to guard the camp while the others rested or nursed the bruises on their bodies. Kasturi went out of his tent. He went to Tuah who was with his other brother-warriors. The other Melaka men sat at different parts where they had set their camp. They were eating and resting. Hundreds of goats were caught and they were roasted in a fire to be fed to the hungry men. Tuah made sure that his men got plenty of good food so that they could have enough energy to fight later.

'Manjong has now come under Melaka. We shall now proceed to Kelantan. We must not withdraw; we must capture Kelantan. Do remember Kelantan is under the dominance and protection of the fifth Siamese King Tralok of the Ayutthaya dynasty. But that shouldn't deter us from capturing the state. We must free Kelantan from foreign dominance,' said Hang Tuah. He then raised his voice. 'Long live Sultan Mahmud Shah!'

'Long live Sultan Mahmud Shah!' shouted his men loudly.

Tuah and his men danced around a fire with the other men, as they were no women there to collaborate with. But, they were not disappointed. They wanted to dance to loosen up their tired muscles. Few Melaka men were injured, and they were attended to by the medicine men also came with the group. They were expected to recover by dawn, so that they could join the others on their march to Kelantan that bordered another Malay state called Pattani, which was also under the dominance of Siam. Kelantan was more Siamese than Malay. This was because they had been under the cultural, social and political dominance of the kingdom of Siam for too long that they had acquired their identity. Only those who lived in the villages spoke Malay, but with a thick Siamese accent. They were unlike those who lived in the palace area who spoke Siamese like the ruler of Kelantan and his immediate families, and the senior court officials and their families, too.

The war with Kelantan started the day after the Melaka men arrived there, after they had fully rested. Tuah's men started to attack the Kelantan forces.

Many of the enemies were killed while the others fled in all directions to save their lives. A Kelantan officer, Wak Seri rushed to the palace. 'We're being attacked!'

The Siamese representative of Kelantan stood on the verandah. He was shocked. 'What is happening, Wak Seri? Looks like you've been chased by the devil,' he asked.

'Forces from Melaka attacked our men at the border.'

'Who's leading them? The sultan himself?'

'Hang Tuah, your majesty.'

'Oh, my goodness! Are they making any progress? Are our men holding them back?'

'No! They are fast approaching the palace. Your majesty must prepare and desert the palace before they get here.'

The Siamese representative thought. Wak Seri waited. 'I'll order the prime minister to get more reinforcements from Siam.'

'We don't have the time, your majesty,' said Wak Seri.

The Siamese representative then entered the palace. Wak Seri stood in the compound, not knowing what to do looking lost and speechless. He never expected the forces from Melaka to be right at his doorsteps. He was informed that they continued to do battle with the Kelantan forces. And looked like they were on a winning streak. Many more Kelantan men were killed. Many of their houses were burnt and razed to the ground. Dead bodies lay on the ground in pools of blood with huge gaping wounds. But the Kelantan villagers were spared. They were allowed to remain where they were. Tuah had ordered that these people were to be spared because they were not the persons whom they had wanted to go after, but the rulers and their lackeys. 'Spare all the villagers,' he reminded them as he rode on his horse. 'Do not hurt or harm any of the villagers.'

Few Kelantan soldiers tried to get at him, but Tuah managed to avoid their attacks. He slashed with his magical Taming Sari *keris*, and they died instantly.

The Siamese representative, his consort and children fled on their horse-carriages to Siam, together with his senior officials, in the dead of the night. They could not wait for morning, as the Melaka forces were fast approaching the palace.

More Kelantan territories were expected to fall to the Melaka forces, and they were expected to reach the palace by dawn.

'We'll go to Siam and live in exile there,' said the ruler of Kelantan. 'I do not regret making this move. I know the Melaka people will only be able to

hold on for a brief period. We'll return with a much bigger force, and recapture Kelantan.'

The Siamese representative of Kelantan sat with his men at their base camp later in the afternoon, after they had trekked through the woods for half a day. They were all exhausted. They rested at their camp for a short while before crossing the border and went to Pattani where they felt safe. They did not think that Tuah dared to cross over to Pattani.

Wak Seri rode horse and went to him. He was panting heavily. The ruler turned around and asked: 'What's the situation in Kelantan now, Wak Seri?'

'Very bad, your majesty. The Melaka forces have taken over Kelantan and they are now in the palace,' replied Wak Seri.

The representative sighed. 'Are our men still resisting them?'

'They have all fled for their lives. Many of our men have been killed. The villages razed to the ground but the houses were not destroyed. Surprisingly, they have spared the villagers.'

He shook his head in disbelief. 'How could this happen? What is their strategy?'

No one dared to answer this question; they thought it was so obvious that it did not require an answer. The truth was that the Kelantan people were not fully equipped to challenge the foreign forces. This was because they were given the impression that the king of Siam and his representatives from other Siamese states in the south could immediately rush to their aid in any attack. Therefore, they had grown weary about the need to equip themselves, with weapons, or saw the need to train. Worse, the people had simply refused to fight them; they were eager to see the people from Melaka push away the rulers of Kelantan because they were mostly foreigners, and Siamese.

'Are the people supporting them?' asked the ruler.

'Yes, it seems like it.'

The Siamese representative of Kelantan shook his head. He then cursed in Siamese.

Tuah rode his horse together with his brother-warriors, and the Melaka men. Only a small group of them was injured. They went to the palace in Melaka after succeeding in their mission in Kelantan. They lined on both sides of the road to welcome their heroes. It was not often that they could see Tuah and his brother-warriors at the same time like that, especially after they had returned from battle in foreign lands.

'It's nice to return home and be greeted like this,' said Tuah.

'Yes, indeed, Hang Tuah,' said Kasturi.

'News sure travels fast, especially good news,' said Lekir.

'Oh, I've sent a messenger to inform his majesty of our triumphant return,' said Tuah.

'Long live Hang Tuah! Long live Hang Tuah!' shouted the people on top of their voices.

Tuah and his brother-warriors waved their hands at them. Few men went to Tuah and his brother-warriors. They hung garlands around their necks, hugged them, and sprinkled scented flower petals over them.

'Long live Hang Tuah! Long live Hang Tuah!' shouted the people.

Mahmud ran down the stairs and greeted Tuah and his brother-warriors as they dismounted from their horses. They kissed the sultan's hand.

'Congratulations, Hang Tuah. You have brought glory to Melaka,' said Sultan Mahmud.

'Your majesty was the guiding force behind our successes in Manjong and Kelantan,' said Tuah.

Later that night, a musical group performed in the verandah to entertain the sultan and the men who had just returned from battle. Mahmud sat with Tuah and his brother-warriors and they ate with their hands. The other state dignitaries were also present. The people of Melaka came in droves to the palace to celebrate the return of Tuah and his brothers to Melaka with the success of their mission.

'It did not take too long to capture Manjong. We did not expect Manjong to fall so fast. We literally walked through Manjong without much effort,' explained Tuah.

'Very good, Hang Tuah,' said Mahmud.

'We suffered few casualties in Manjong, but, all our men recovered fully by dawn. And they too joined us to march to Kelantan.'

'How about the fighting in Kelantan?'

'The same, your majesty. However, when we arrived at the palace the ruler of Kelantan had deserted it. He must have fled to Pattani, another Malay state that was under Siamese control.'

'Can we proceed to Pattani then? We must save the Malays there, like what we did to Kelantan,' said Mahmud.

'May be not, your majesty.'

'And why not?'

'Pattani is too deep inside the Siamese territory, and they wanted to use the state as a buffer zone to dispel the Malays from charging into Siam. Therefore, the Siamese will do their level best to defend it like the survival of their kingdom depended on it.'

Mahmud pondered. Tuah and his brothers and other state officials waited. They did not know what Mahmud was going to say next.

'What about Kelantan?'

'They were willing to sacrifice Kelantan, but not Pattani, or the other Malay states which are now within their territory.'

'Why is that so?'

'They know that their hold on Kelantan is very weak. Besides, the people of Kelantan are Malays like us, not Siamese! The only difference is that they speak in a Malay dialect that is different from the way we do. And the people there have no fascination at all for the Siamese, who are mostly Buddhist, unlike the Kelantanese who are Muslims like us.'

'Anyway, I am still very happy that you have brought glory to Melaka. The people of Melaka are indeed happy with all of you. Congratulations once again to you and your men.'

### CHAPTER 13: TUN TEJA

Sultan Mahmud Shah's first wife, Sultanah Wati was buried at the royal cemetery in Melaka. She died after a brief illness. Her death was a blow to the sultan and their two adult children, Rajas Ahmad and Muzaffar Shah who were in the early twenties. All the state dignitaries were there, together with the people; they wore white since the State was in official mourning for forty days, during which time there were not allowed to have any adventures or entertainment.

One night, three months after she died, Mahmud woke up in the middle of his sleep. He had not been able to sleep well for the past few days; he stirred left and right. He had a dream. His body was wet with sweat. Next morning, after breakfast he summoned his trusted aides - Tuah, *Sang* or Master Setia Titayang and Lord Mamat - whom he normally confided to discuss his personal problems, to the palace. He took them to the verandah and sat with them there where it was more windy and comfortable. It was so hot outside that the people were sweating profusely. Even the stray dogs and cats were nowhere to be seen; they all hid themselves under the shades of the trees or in the boxes and stopped barking or running around the people's feet and trees or bushes.



'Last night I had a dream that there was a beautiful princess living in Mount Ledang in the district of Asahan in the state of Johor,' said Mahmud. 'Don't know the name or who she is. I only saw her image, a face of a young woman. Her beauty entranced me. She reminded me very much of my late wife, Wati.'

Tuah knew immediately who the sultan was talking about.

'Is this a dream or a sign from above?' asked Mahmud.

Tuah knew the sultan was indeed dreaming.

'What is her name? Find out for me, Tuah.'

'She has no name, your majesty.'

'Oh!'

'She is only called or referred to as the princess of Mount Ledang,' Tuah knew his sultan was pining for a new wife because he was feeling lonely since the death of his first wife, Sultanah Wati.

'Oh, yes, yes, the princess of Mount Ledang. She is very beautiful. Will you be able to go there to Mount Ledang and ask for her hand in marriage on my behalf, Hang Tuah? I'm sure you can. You have never failed me.'

Tuah was not sure. 'Er...But...she's just a legendary and mystical princess; she might not exist.'

'How could you say that? Many people know that she exists.'

'But, but...'

'No 'buts,' understand? I order you to go to Mount Ledang and meet her. Ask if she would like to marry me and be my wife. You'll be amply rewarded should you succeed in this mission.'

Tuah glanced at his friends. They were also uncertain. They were not aware of the real surrounding the princess like Tuah did.

'Go with Master Setia Titayang and Lord Mamat. The three of you can make good company. Do not come back if you have not found her. I will be disappointed if she refuses to marry me. She should know who I am. Tell her I am the sultan of Melaka, Sultan Mahmud Shah the seventh sultan of Melaka.'

Tuah was sure; he was confident that the princess never existed, but he had no choice but to comply with the sultan's wishes, however preposterous it may be. He could find a way out of this, he thought. 'Er... I can't promise that we could find her, but we could at least try again.'

'Try again? What do you mean by that, Tuah?'

Tuah did not know how to break the bad news; it will surely disappoint the sultan. He was still a baby when his grandfather, Sultan Mansur Shah was smitten by her, too. He had been to Mount Ledang once before, at the behest of the besotted Mansur. He too, had wanted to woo her. But Tuah returned to

Melaka from there with a host of excuses and demands from the 'princess' until the sultan who had been smitten by her finally gave up.

Tuah found out that there was no such a thing as the 'princess of Mount Ledang.' It was just an imaginary character concocted by some creative scribes to warm the hearts of the men in Melaka.

'Very well, Hang Tuah, do get going. My wife has been dead for three months now, Tuah. You surely know how lonely life in this palace can be even for a sultan.'

'I'm sure, your majesty. We go now.'

Tuah and his two friends stood up. They kissed the sultan's hand and walked out of the verandah. But the next day, Tuah returned to the palace and revealed everything. He had to do it because he did not want to disappoint the sultan by going all the way to Mount Ledang and returning empty-handed knowing very well that the princess was non-existent. Besides, Tuah was now well into the late sixties and not as active or healthy as he was before. He could not go on a trek for days, weeks to get to the mountain to find something that did not actually exist.

Sultan Mahmud was naturally disappointed. But he was relieved. At least Tuah was being frank. To be certain, he decided to go to the cellar. He wanted to read the manuscripts that written by the royal scribes on this particular episode which happened during the time of his grandfather, Sultan Mansur Shah more than a fifty years ago. He read the story, from beginning to the end that described in detail how his late grandfather, Mansur, too was smitten by the natural beauty of the mystical princess who was said to have lived at Mount Ledang. And he had wanted to make her his wife. And it was Tuah who was sent there to try to bring her to Melaka.

Tuah also remembered the incident related to the mystical princess. Or was she a fairy - *bunian*? May be she could even be a *nenek kebayan* - a witch who lived in the jungles at the foot of the mountain. He remembered how he had to trek for days in the jungle with his son Lord Mamat and Master Setia Titayang. He also brought along a few guards with them because the area they were going to was inhospitable and had not been trampled upon by anyone. They had to cut their way through the thick natural vegetation and slept for many nights under the moon before they could even see the peak of Mount Ledang from the distance. A low cloud hung near it hiding its peak from view. How could anyone live in such a place, thought Tuah. He had to ask himself this questions few times before he became more convinced that the story surrounding the princess of untold beauty to be a mere fabrication of somebody else's creative mind.

One night, while lying under a shady tree at a place where they thought was safe from wild animals, he turned his gaze at his son, Tun Mamat and commented: 'The story of the existence of the princess of Mount Ledang is pure fabrication, my son.' It was not his idea to shock his son, but he had to let the truth out.

Mamat did not quite get what his father was getting at.

'But, his majesty doesn't know this. He thinks that she's real. Isn't she in everyone's wild fantasies and imagination, too?' asked Tuah. 'She was created by the story-tellers the *penglipur-laras* who liked to tease the boys while making the girls feel envious of her beauty. I doubted the first time I heard about her when I was much younger and not married to your mother.' Tuah did not tell his son that he did not have a secret desire for her, but Sultan Mansur Shah at that time did. Now her beauty and naiveté had infatuated his grandson, Sultan Mahmud Shah.

'If she was alive, she could easily be more than two hundred years! Imagine a two hundred-year old woman; how beautiful and appealing can she be?'

'What do we do then, Tuah, now that the sultan's longing for her?' asked Setia Titayang. He was lying beside Mamat. He overheard what the two men were saying and decided to chip in. He, too, had been wondering if indeed the princess was a true person or just an imaginary character, but he did not want to tell Tuah what his feelings then were.

'I don't know. I have to think of something,' said Tuah.

'Let's think of something,' said Mamat.

'Like what? There's no point in going all the way up to the peak, she won't be there waiting for us.'

'Let's rest here then. We can decide our next course of action.'

The guards were stationed around them. They were also sleeping, but their hands were holding their spears and swords. They had to be vigilant despite being asleep. They could wake up with the lightest stir.

'I can make up a story and tell it to the sultan. It will be something preposterous that the princess is asking for things that the sultan could not provide. In this way the sultan won't be able to marry her, not because she doesn't exist, but simply because he cannot meet all her weird and funny demands,' said Tuah.

'Like what?' asked Mamat.

'You'll see.'

Setia Titayang and Mamat smiled.

'Brilliant, Lord Tuah, brilliant,' said Setia Titayang.

'Yes, brilliant, father. So, we can now turn and return to Melaka soon?' said Mamat.

'No, we need to stay here for a few weeks just to show that we have been trekking the jungles and trying to meet the princess.'

'If that's the case, let's put up the night here,' suggested Mamat.

Lord Hassan walked alone heading towards the palace. He was in the early twenties, and still single. He wore Malay clothes that were loose that shook as he walked in his bouncy gait. The boys and girls looked at him; they admired his fashion. This was the first time they were seeing someone who wore clothes differently than everybody else in the state. He looked like he was a prince from another friendly Malay State, but they all knew who he was not. He was the son of a local Malay aristocrat. He looked totally different compared to all the men from respectable families in Melaka; while all the men normally sported beards and a mustache, he did not. His face was clean-shaven. He always looked neat and tidy, and he smelled nice, unlike the other boys or young men his age that looked rough and had bodies that were darker and muscular. Because of this, many of the girls were attracted to him.

'Hey, look at Lord Hassan. Don't you think he looks good wearing the *baju Melayu* in this style? I surely want to loosen up my clothes, and wear a *sampin* cloth around his waist like that, too,' said a Malay boy.

'Yes, you are right. I suppose it'll become fashionable with the men in no time,' said his friend.

Hassan continued to walk. He passed few Malay girls. They giggled as they passed by him looking confident. The girls in Melaka knew his reputation, but Hassan was not the kind of person to take advantage of his position. But, he enjoyed attracting attention, especially from the girls. Even the boys admired him for his self-confidence and personal style. He knew how to wear good clothes. He would change clothes often; sometimes two or three times a day, and each time he would put on something totally different and more colorful and stylish than the other. No wonder he always stood out in the crowd. The others wore clothes that were mostly black and dark in color and they did not have any style; they all looked the same, so nobody could be distinguished from each other in their social status or rank.

'*Selamat pagi, ya, Tun Hassan,*' greeted a Malay girl. (Good morning, Lord Hassan.)

'Good morning, miss,' replied Hassan.

The other girls giggled.

'He's so fashionable,' said another Malay girl. Her voice was quite loud; Hassan could hear it and the giggles that the girls gave out.

Hassan entered the palace compound of the palace. None of the guards stopped him as they were aware of who he was. He then went front entrance and removed his leather sandals. He stepped on the staircase and went inside the palace. There he saw Mahmud sitting all by himself at the *bendul*. This was the place where he would go to when he needed to ponder over his problems. This was also the place where he was at ease with himself and Hassan preferred to meet the sultan here than elsewhere in the palace.

'*Asalamulaikum*,' your majesty,' said Hassan.

Sultan Mahmud turned around. He was awakened from his daydreaming. A tray of betel leaves sitting near him was left untouched.

'*Mulaiikum salam*,' Have a seat, my dear son, Lord Hassan. You sure look handsome today. I'm sure all the girls will fall for you,' said Mahmud. 'Have a *sireh*.'

'Thank you. I hope I have not come at the wrong time. I thought your majesty seemed to be pondering hard.'

'Not at all. Have a seat. It's always nice to see you looking cheerful as always. And you look especially fashionable these days.'

'What do you think of my fashion, your majesty? Are the colors too loud?'

'Hardly. I think it's very beautiful. I'm sure it will become trendy not only with the young, but for old people like me, too. Let me have a closer look. Is it something that you've brought back from a trip abroad?'

'Not really. I made it myself.'

'Really? I see.'

Mahmud looked around Hassan and commented, 'Interesting. How did you do it?'

'Simple. All I did was to loosen my clothes and pants, and lower the hem and sleeves. I use a *songket* material for my *sampin* like this. It's better this way. It's easier to walk around, dance, and it can be designed in many styles. The women, too, can lower their hemlines the sleeves and *sarong* a little and they will look gorgeous. They'll look better this way, instead of having to wear their clothes short.'

'It's true. And I like the way you wrap the cloth around your head. It can help distinguish the people according to their ranks. I want to make sure my clothes will look like yours, too. This will make you more popular with the girls, Lord Hassan.'

Hassan was delighted with the compliments from the sultan.

'Anyway, where are you heading?'

'Just passing by. In fact, I was looking for Hang Tuah. Did he come by today?'

'I've not seen him today. He's probably at his house.'

'Thank you.'

'I'd better get going now.'

Hassan walked out of the palace and went on his way.

The Melaka people were now wearing the *baju Melayu* in the style of Hassan and the women, too, were starting to lower the hemlines of their clothes and *sarong* which they called *baju kurong*. They were more colorful and varied with each man and woman showing their own fashion unlike the tight-fitting clothes they had worn before which were drab and mostly in plain colors. They smiled at each other as they walked. Mahmud walked on the streets with his official minders and other palace aides who were all at his beck and call. And they too were wearing new and fashionable clothes.

Mahmud became restless because Tuah and his two friends had not returned from Pahang. What could have happened to them asked the sultan to himself. He did not have a good night since he had the dream. He longed for the princess and wanted her badly. She had kept him awake at night and he did not know when she was going to come into his arms.

Meanwhile, Tuah's son-in-law, Nadim's ship tumbled as it sailed in the middle of a fierce thunderstorm in the Bay of Bengal. The ship swayed violently in all directions. It floated like a tin can in the ocean and was at the mercy of the elements, in the dead of night. There was no prospect whatsoever of any ship passing by that could help them. Pandemonium broke out and everybody started to panic. They were shouting loudly on top of their voices.

'Bring down the sails! Bring down the sails!' shouted Nadim.

'Yes, sir!' said a sailor. He went to the mast, grabbed the ropes and brought down the sails so that the strong winds did not tumble the ship to the side and sink it into the bay. Despite doing that the ship continued to sway violently.

'The ship is sinking! The ship is sinking! Do something!' cried Nadim. He went to a safety raft. The water splashed onto him. 'Everybody, abandon the ship! Abandon the ship!'

'Aye, aye, sir!' shouted the men.

None of them could see each other, as it was pitch dark with water splashing everywhere. They could only hear the sounds of the waves hitting the ship and splashing of water; winds were blowing in all directions. Everywhere was pitch dark. Nadim threw a raft into the sea and jumped off the ship. The ship started to sink in the sea taking with it the men who were

stuck there and the goods that it was holding. He continued to cling onto the raft. He tried to grab and hold it tightly, but his hands slipped off the raft. He was forced to swim. He prayed to Allah the Compassionate to help save him. He was at wit's ends now; only Allah could help to save him from being swallowed into the bowels of the ocean. He caught of a piece of wood floating towards him. He quickly swam towards it. In the darkness, his hands managed to grab a piece of wood. He clung onto it. He was happy that he was save for now. It knew it was by Allah's grace that he had managed to grab at the wood; otherwise, he would surely have drowned in the ocean. Because eventually, he would be tired and both his hands would not be able to hold onto anything, much less a piece of driftwood. He said a prayer quietly to calm himself down. He did not know how his friends were doing; some of them had drowned, others were washed away. He did not see any of them. Occasionally he heard their voices calling for help. They then disappeared. He thanked Allah profusely for saving his life. But, his battles with the ocean were not over yet. He still did not know when he was going to be saved, if ever. He just hoped that a passing ship would notice him and take him aboard, or, the tide would push him to the beach so he could land and find his way back to Melaka. From where he was at, Nadim thought he could land either in India or the northern part of Sumatra, near Pasai where the people from Aceh could save him and take him back to Melaka in one of their boats.

Mahmud sat behind his low working desk in his study. Tuah, Setia Titayang and Mamat sat in front of him.

'She is demanding a few things from your majesty,' said Tuah.

'Like what?' asked Mahmud. 'Surely, it won't be much of a problem for a sultan to provide.'

'She's demanding your majesty provides her with a bowl of mosquito blood and a barrel of Raja Ahmad's blood.'

Mahmud was shocked. He knew it would be impossible for him even as sultan to meet with such an outrageous demand. The others waited. Tuah glanced at his friends; they knew he was just playing a game with the sultan, but pretended to be serious.

'How could I possibly provide her with those things? It is impossible. How could I get a bowl of my own son's blood? Can't she ask for something else that I can offer, like a ton of gold and silver?'

'But she's already got all those, being a princess herself.'

'If that's the case, then it's better for me not to think of her.'

'Does this mean...?'

'This means that I'm not interested in her anymore, Hang Tuah.'

'Very well, your majesty.'

Tuah and his friends stood up. 'We beg to take our leave now, your majesty,' said Tuah.

The sultan nodded. Tuah and his friends nodded and left the study. They continued to walk along the corridor. 'That did it! And I don't want any of you to break the secret, remember?' said Tuah after they were away from the sultan hearing and sight.

'Yes, Tuah, sir,' promised Setia Titayang.

Hassan passed by. Tuah turned and looked at him. He greeted him. 'Yes, Lord Hassan, good morning.'

Hassan turned and looked at Tuah. 'Good morning, Hang Tuah.'

'I understand that you're the one who's been responsible for the fashion everybody in Melaka is crazy about these days.'

'I hope it doesn't offend your mores, my dear Hang Tuah.'

'On the contrary, even an old man like me finds it interesting. I buy it, for it gives everybody individuality and style. I will make sure I get my tailors to sew my new clothes in your fashion, too. Even the sultan has been converted, I see.'

'I'm pleased, brother. And where is the sultan, by the way? I've brought his majesty's new clothes, look.' Hassan showed the clothes.

'His majesty is in the study,' said Tuah.

'Very well, my dear brother; we'll see each other again. And by the way, where's Nadim? I haven't seen him in ages.'

'He's at sea, heading towards India.'

'I see.' Hassan walked away.

Nadim managed to swim to dry land after swimming or paddling on makeshift bamboo rafts and stepping foot on the Nicobar and Andaman islands and Sumatra along the way. Many months after his ship sank, he landed on a beach somewhere in Melaka. He fainted as soon as he landed on the sandy beach. It was still very early in the morning. The sun had not yet arisen, everywhere was shrouded in semi-darkness and the tall trees were looking as apparitions and took the form of humans especially with their long branches that looked like hands. He was unsure if was going to be discovered by anyone, if ever. He knew he was very far away from and village or anyone. This was at an isolated part of Melaka where people did not normally go. He did not know where he was either. He could be anywhere. He did not know what had happened to his men in the ship; he hoped they all survived the shipwreck and the ordeal and had landed on the shore like he did.



Later in the day, a small group of fishermen walked on the beach. One of them, Nayan, saw a body. He went to it. 'Is that somebody lying on the beach? Who could it be?' he asked.

They went to him.

'My goodness, it's Nadim, Hang Tuah's son. My god, let's carry him to shore,' said his friend.

They carried Nadim and put him under a tree. Nayan slapped water on his face. He woke up. 'Where am I? Lower the sails! Lower the sails!' shouted Nadim. He was still groggy, and did not know where he was. He thought he was still on the ship because of the splashing of the water on his face that he had just experienced.

'You are in Melaka, sir,' said Nayan.

'Melaka? Good.' He woke up and looked around. Nayan and his friends stared at him.

'Who are you?'

'We are fishermen,' said Nayan.

Nadim kept quiet. 'Thank you, gentlemen. I must return home.' He stood up and walked away. After he had rested at his house, Nadim immediately went to the palace to report what had happened to him and his crew to the sultan. Mahmud walked with Nadim along the corridor. He was now feeling much better and had changed clothes and shaved and looking pleasant although slightly tanned.

'How could it happen?' asked the sultan.

'The storm was too strong, your majesty,' said Nadim.

'But, our boats were built to withstand any storm!'

He and Nadim went to the verandah. He rested on the railings. Nadim waited hoping that the sultan was considerate.

'I am very angry with you, Nadim. If you're not Tuah's eldest son-in-law, I would have thrown you into the sea with my own hands right this minute!' said Mahmud angrily.

Nadim felt regret. But, what was he to do, the winds were so strong; and the ship he was sailing in tumbled like a piece of wood. There was no chance for him and his men to proceed with the journey; they had to flee from the ship to save their lives. He was glad that Allah had saved him. He could have perished and swallowed by the Indian Ocean. At that time, he still did not know if the others survived. 'I'm sorry, your majesty, it was entirely beyond my means to fight the storm.'

'How many of your men survived?'

'I'm not sure.'

The sultan shook his head in disbelief. How could Nadim fail in this mission to bring some *kain selasab* for his majesty? It is a special cloth that could only be found in India. 'I sent you on a simple errand, to go to India and bring me cloths, but you have failed me, Nadim. How could I ever entrust you with other more difficult jobs? I'm so disappointed with you. Remember, you're the eldest son of our state warrior, Lord Tuah.'

Nadim kept quiet. He walked dejectedly towards his house after the sultan had dismissed him. He was fortunate though that the sultan did not choose to punish him severely other than by giving a reprimand.

Tuah waited in the verandah as he had been expecting his son-in-law since late afternoon. Nadim then went to the bench in the garden and sat. They stared at the sun setting in the horizons. Tuah saw him, walked down the stairs, and sat beside him.

'The sultan's mad with me,' said Nadim.

'It was not your fault, son. There was nothing that you or even I could do,' said his father-in-law, Tuah.

'Have I disappointed you, my father?'

'No, my son. No!'

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*Not long later, Admiral Tuah died of old age while he was reciting the Holy Koran in the state mosque. By now his other brother-warriors had died, leaving him alone. In recognition for his service to the Sultan and state, Sultan Mahmud Shah gave him a state funeral befitting a royal. He was buried in Hulu Melaka, about twenty miles north of the city, at a secluded spot called Tanjong Keling so that no one would desecrate the grave or turn it into a shrine or keramat. Many people in Melaka, however, believed that Tuah was buried in Hulu Melaka on an island far north of the Malay Peninsula, because the authorities wanted to mislead them.*

*Tuah's cortege was paraded through all the streets in Melaka so that the people could view it for the last time. They had waited on both sides of the roads, four to five deep, all wearing white. Many were crying; others just stood there feeling sad that their hero had died. Tuah died when he was in the late seventies. He was quite old when he died, and long enough to see how the state had grown and became respected by many others in the region.*

*Many people still remembered how the former Sultan Mansur Shah had discovered the late Tuah and his four brothers when they were still young. The Sultan took them as their personal bodyguards. They later endeared themselves to the people of Melaka because it was mostly because of them that Melaka remained peaceful; no foreign attackers were able to*

*dominate the state. The story of their heroism and gallantry was related by word of mouth and later put down on goatskin by the scribes for the future generation to know.*

*Secretly, many people felt that the future of Melaka was uncertain with the passing of their hero...*

*Khoja Hassan succeeded him instead of his son-in-law, Brother Nadim. This disappointed Nadim a great deal. He knew the Sultan was so furious of him for failing him.*

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Nadim sat on the bench with Hassan, his close buddy, feeling distraught. Events of recent times had drawn them closer together more so now when their future was linked together. Hassan who had come to know about this disheartening news from some palace felt sorry for Nadim. This dealt a double blow for Nadim. He immediately rushed to meet Nadim.

'The sultan was very angry with me for failing him. Now he has appointed Khoja Hassan, a Persian trader who was so influential in Melaka and not me to succeed my late father-in-law as the new Admiral of Melaka. It's disgraceful for the eldest son not to succeed his father,' was all that Nadim could say.

'The sultan has his reasons, my friend. May be you are still too young. I will not worry about if I were you. This means that you can still be yourself for a while longer,' said Hassan, jokingly, hoping that this would help to cheer his friend. After all, there was nothing that any of them could do now that the appointment of Khoja Hassan had been officially confirmed.

'Oh, yes, I know what you mean; so, I can be like you and flirt with all the girls in Melaka. No wonder you are always wearing fashionable clothes, just to attract their attention. What can I do if I tend to attract their attention?'

'Change your clothes, for a change,' said Hassan in jest.

Nadim was not amused.

'Or change your hairstyle.'

Mutahir and his son, Lord Umar met Mahmud in the palace. 'What news have you brought back for me from Pahang?' asked Mahmud.

'There's a very beautiful daughter of the Seri Amar diRaja named Tun Teja. Her full name is Tun Teja Ratna Benggala. However, she is engaged to the sultan of Pahang, Sultan Muhammad Shah,' said Mutahir in his usual devious self. The only reason why he wanted to do this favor to the sultan was that he wanted to endear himself to him. He knew Mahmud was desperate to have another wife. And he needed somebody young to be his official sultanah. Mutahir felt Teja would certainly make a good match for the sultan.

'Really?'

'Yes, your majesty.'

'I want to marry her and make her my new wife, not a sultanah. My second wife, Sultannah Fatimah is still very much alive. I can't dispose off her.'

'But then, she's already engaged to the sultan of Pahang,' said Mutahir - as if he did not already know. He pretended to be slightly surprised. He wanted to provoke the sultan even more since Teja now officially belonged to the sultan of Pahang. It would surely make Mahmud even more desperate to have her as his wife so that he could provoke the sultan of Pahang even more. What more since the sultan was Sultan Muhammad's nephew!

'I don't care. I must get her. I will pardon and offer amnesty to anyone for whatever offense he or she might have committed, if the person can bring Tun Teja to Melaka. I want her to be my new wife, not sultanah.'

'I don't think I know who can do the job,' said Mutahir.

'You mean there's nobody in the whole of Melaka who can go to Pahang and bring her back for me?'

'Yes, your majesty.'

'How absurd and preposterous; how idiotic, Tun Mutahir! You are my chief treasurer, surely you can think of something! Use your head a bit more! Besides this is an order, a royal command, if you don't already know how one is given!'

'I do apologize. Very well, your majesty, I will do as commanded.'

Hassan ran through the woods and headed towards Tuah's house as in frenzy as if he was being pursued by a devil and he was fearful for his life. Fortunately, he was not carrying a dagger or *keris*, otherwise, those who saw him rushing like that would think he was running amok and was after Nadim's neck. Hassan knew he could find him there. He had disappeared from public view seen in public since he felt that the sultan had snubbed him. He knew the sultan was angry and because of that, he did not appoint him admiral to succeed his late father-in-law, Tuah. 'Brother Nadim, Brother Nadim, where are you?' he shouted.

Nadim heard his name being called. He realized whose voice was it. He was fishing by the banks. He turned and looked at the direction of the voice. 'Over here, by the river.'

Hassan heard him. He then changed direction and headed for the river.

'Why are you in such a rush?' asked Nadim.

Hassan panted and tried to catch his breath. 'I've got good news for you, my friend. Here, let's go over there and sit.'

They went to the wooden bench and sat.

'The sultan now wants to marry Tun Teja, the daughter of the Seri Amar diRaja of Pahang. Whoever can bring her back shall be pardoned for whatever crime he might have committed.'

'Is that so?'

Nadim stood up, and smiled. 'Do you like to come with me to Pahang, Lord Hassan?'

'It's not possible. I have to remain in Melaka.'

'If that's the case, I will go alone. I think there's a way for me to do it.'

'How?'

Nadim rode his horse through the jungles headed towards Pahang. He was confident that he could get Teja to come to Melaka. If he could do this, his relations with the sultan of Melaka would be normalized. He rode for three days, passing through some of the uncharted roads in the thick woods. He wanted to arrive in Pahang as soon as possible before somebody else did. He did not know who else from Melaka was coming to Pahang to try to bring Teja to Melaka. Because of that he had to go there fast before anyone got there.

Teja was playing with her maids in the garden. They tried to catch her. She hid in the bushes. Yes, she was beautiful. She stood above the other girls, who looked plain. Teja looked stylish and beautiful without much make-up. Her hair was long and she let it hang loose from her head. It swayed as she ran.

'Catch me if you can,' said Teja in her voice that was soft and gentle; it almost sounded like a bird chirping.

'Your excellency, Tun Teja; perhaps it's better if we stopped playing in the bushes? It's getting late. The spirits and demons will roam soon and they might snatch you. Let's play the *congkak*,' suggested her maid Munah.

Teja played the *congkak* with another maid on a wooden platform. Munah went to the prime minister's house. Nadim spied on them from behind the bushes. Mahmud was right. Teja was as beautiful as he had imagined her to be. He could identify her as soon as he set eyes on her. She stood above the other girls, who were clearly her maids or childhood friends. Munah later went shopping with two other maids. 'We will need some fruits as well. Teja has asked us to buy *rambutans*, and mangosteens. Where can we get these fruits? They're not in season at this time here, I'm told, yet she insisted on getting them,' said Munah.

'It is true, it's impossible. Would Tun Teja prefer some other fruits? We have papayas and mangoes,' said the stall-owner.

'No, she hates them.'

'I'm afraid I don't have the fruits she wants.'

Nadim overheard them. He went to Munah.

'But, we have them in great abundance in Melaka. It's the fruit season there,' chipped in Nadim.

Munah turned and saw him. She did not know who he was. 'But, who are you, sir? You look different than the men here.'

'I'm from Melaka, miss.'

'Would you be kind enough then to get those fruits for Tun Teja?'

'Not right away, I have to return to Melaka and bring them with me. It'll take a week on the horse.'

'Oh, no, that's too long for her to wait.'

'May be it would be better for her to come to Melaka then.'

The maids smiled at Nadim, thinking that it was a joke.

'Where does she live?' asked Nadim.

'Over there with her father, the Seri Amar diRaja of Pahang.'

'I see.'

'But, she plays in the garden almost all evening.'

'Good, I'll see you around.' He climbed onto his horse and went off. Nadim went to the bushes that evening hoping to catch another glimpse of Tun Teja from there. But she and the girls were not there. He stood there for a little while longer. Then Teja appeared; she was by herself. He went behind her and grabbed her waist.

'*Tolong, tolong!* Help, help!' shouted Teja. 'Somebody, help!'

Nadim closed her mouth to shut her up. Fortunately, nobody was around to hear her cries. 'We're going to Melaka to get those fruits, Tun Teja, dear.' Nadim took her on his horse and rode off.

'Help, help!' shouted Teja, but nobody heard her.

Nadim continued to ride through the woods with Teja behind him.

'Help, help!'

'You can shout as loud as you wish, Tun Teja. Nobody can listen to you from here. We are already deep in the jungles; only the gorillas can hear you. But they won't be able to help you. Or do you wish to be left here alone with them?'

'Let's not joke about this, mister. I'm serious! Don't you know that I am engaged to the sultan of Pahang? He will be mad if he knows that you have kidnapped me. You will be in deep trouble yourself.'

'He won't know, Tun Teja. I'm taking you to Melaka and you'll be married to the sultan of Melaka.'

'What? I'm not going to marry him.'

'Yes, you are, Tun Teja. Now, shut up and enjoy the ride, we are going to have lots of fresh *rambutans* there, too'

'Help, help!' screamed Teja.

Nadim laughed.

The sultan of Pahang, Sultan Muhammad Shah was being carried in a carriage. He was distressed with the kidnapping of his fiancée, Teja. Two Pahang horsemen went to him. 'Beg your pardon, your majesty. It's true that the sultan of Melaka, Sultan Mahmud Shah has married her excellency Tun Teja and has now made her his new consort?' said one of the horsemen.

'Tun Teja?'

'Yes, your majesty.'

'Very well, if this is what Sultan Mahmud Shah wants, we'll give it to him,' said Muhammad.

Teja's father, Seri Amar diRaja Pahang looked angry, but he tried to contain his anger. 'I'm sorry for not looking after my own daughter well. How could they kidnap your majesty's fiancée?' said Amar diRaja when he went to the carriage and met with Muhammad. 'What does his majesty want to do next?'

'I will send my elephants to trample the palace of the sultan of Melaka. If I don't do it, I'm not Sultan Muhammad Shah. Mark my word!' said Muhammad. He then waved at the guards. 'Turn back. I want to return to the palace. I'm not in the mood to visit the village. Tell the villagers I'll come back later when I'm in a better mood.' He looked at another horseman. 'You go to Kuantan and inform the chief that I'm not coming. Tell him that something important has turned up.'

'Very well, your majesty,' said the horseman. He then rode off. Muhammad's carriage turned around and returned to the palace. He looked sad. He continued to stare out of the window. He thought of Teja a lot and imagined she being married to her, if she was not kidnapped. But it was not to be.

That night, Mahmud conferred with his officials. They sat in the verandah as always and chewed betel leaves. 'He's declaring war on Melaka. But, I want to make sure that it was what he meant. Now I order you, Admiral Khoja Hassan to go to Pahang and inquire with Sultan Muhammad if he wants to go to war with us,' said Mahmud.

'Very well, your majesty,' said Khoja Hassan.

'If the sultan of Pahang says that he wants to attack us in Melaka, then tell them to give us some time to prepare. We will defend Melaka vigorously. Or if his majesty says that Pahang doesn't have such plans, very well, tell them that we're happy.'

'Very well, your majesty, I will do as commanded.'

The sultan turned to his officials and asked: 'What do you think, gentlemen? Will Pahang attack us?'

'I really don't think so, your majesty,' replied the *temenggong*.

'Why not?'

'They're a small country, and they don't have the means to attack us or anyone.'

'I see.'

'They'll suffer more if they attack us,' said Khoja Hassan.

'Besides, the Pahang people will not support the sultan, as they were not against us as a people. The issue is between Sultan Muhammad Shah and your majesty over Tun Teja,' added the *temenggong*.

'Very true,' said Mutahir.

'I think, all of you gentlemen are absolutely right. But, why don't Admiral Khoja Hassan go to Pahang and find out for certain,' said Mahmud.

'Very well, your majesty,' said Khoja Hassan.

Khoja Hassan set sail to Pahang in five ships. He brought two hundred men just to show to the sultan of Pahang that he meant business. Two days later he arrived at the mouth of the Pahang River. He then went to the palace of the sultan of Pahang and had an audience with him. He stood before the sultan and waited for his comments. The sultan did not know what Khoja Hassan had in mind. He was surely surprised to see him at his palace despite what had happened between him and the sultan of Melaka, his nephew.

'His majesty Sultan Mahmud Shah has asked that I inquired with if your majesty wants to attack Melaka,' said Khoja Hassan.

'No, it is not our intention to let our elephants trample the palace of my nephew his majesty Sultan Mahmud Shah. There is a misunderstanding. Tell your sultan this was not what I meant,' said Muhammad.

'Very well, I shall do that,' said Khoja Hassan. 'His majesty Sultan Mahmud Shah wanted to know from your majesty personally, so that should Pahang decide to attack Melaka, his majesty Sultan Mahmud Shah will require some time from your majesty for Melaka to prepare the men to defend Melaka.'

The sultan of Pahang was shocked. 'No, no, we don't have any intentions of attacking Melaka.'

'Very well. If that's the case, I'm sure his majesty Sultan Mahmud Shah will be delighted.'

Khoja Hassan walked with his men through a village as soon as he had landed in Pahang. He saw some elephants. 'These must be the sultan's elephants. I want to bring all of them back to Melaka. We steal them tonight,



just before we return home. We must humiliate Sultan Muhammad Shah further,' said Khoja Hassan.

'Very well, admiral,' said a soldier.

Later that night, Khoja Hassan and his men returned to the village near the palace of the sultan of Pahang. 'Take them,' ordered Khoja Hassan. The soldiers started to round up all the elephants and guided them towards the river-mouth, where they were herded into the ships. They then sailed towards Melaka. The people at the port of Melaka were pleasantly surprised to see Khoja Hassan riding an elephant out of his ship. There were more elephants in other ships that were berthed at the port. Many of them had not seen an elephant all their lives before, especially the Chinese and Arabs who were there. They went to the elephants and touched them. '*Aiyah*, so plenty elephants, *ab?*' said Ah Leng in his broken Malay that made those Malays around laugh. 'If like this, I feel very scared, one!' The others continued to laugh.

'If like this cannot go near, wait it will strike me,' continued Ah Kheng in his broken Malay.

'Very big, very big,' remarked Murugan, his Indian friend who was standing near him, also in his broken Malay.

Khoja Hassan rode an elephant and headed out of the port. His men rode the other elephants and trailed behind. They formed a long procession. They passed through the streets of Melaka heading towards the palace. The people in Melaka stared at them; they had not seen so many elephants in Melaka before.

Muhammad looked at the paddock; he shook his head. 'What's the meaning of this? The admiral of Melaka had stolen all our elephants. Did he intend to further humiliate me?' he asked.

'I believe so, your majesty,' said the prime minister. 'That is his main intention.'

The sultan walked away in disgust with the prime minister trailing closely behind him.

'I feel so disheartened with his action and I want to abdicate the throne,' said Muhammad. 'How can I ever face my subjects like this? How much public humiliation can a sultan take in a week, prime minister? The Admiral Khoja Hassan had come all the way to Melaka to humiliate me. My feelings are hurt. My reputation has been badly damaged in the eyes of my subjects. For how could the admiral of the Sultan Mahmud Shah of Melaka, my own nephew, do this to me?'

'But, your majesty...' said the prime minister.

'Where can I hide my face, prime minister. I feel like my face has been blackened with soot. The people from Melaka came all the way here and humiliated me. What will the Pahang people say?'

'It's a minor incident. We can find more elephants in the jungles to replace those that he had taken away.'

'How could you say it is a minor incident? First, they kidnapped your own daughter, Tun Teja who was engaged to me. Now, they stole all my elephants. These are not minor incidents, prime minister,' chipped in the sultan.

'No, they're not.'

'I shall leave the palace immediately then,' said Muhammad.

'Where do you want to go to?'

'I shall live in seclusion in Lubuk Pahang.'

'Lubuk Pahang?'

'Yes, and I do not want anybody come and pay homage to me. I want to be left alone and live off the land by myself. I shall appoint my first son, the crown prince Mansur Shah that the people of Pahang have known and love to succeed me. He shall be known as Sultan Mansur Shah. I hereby abdicate the throne.'

'Yes, your majesty.'

The sultan walked towards the palace and entered it. The prime minister froze; he did not know what to do, but to obey the royal command. If he had the opportunity, he would request that the sultan remained on the throne for his services were still needed by the people. It was not proper or right to descend from the throne, especially at this trying time, thought the prime minister. Alas, it was too late; he did not bother to ask for his opinions. His decision was firm. He had been thinking about it for days, and surely, he would not wish for anybody in Melaka to dissuade him from coming to this decision. It was not a pleasant decision, where as far as he was concerned, but he had to make it. The sultan had felt so humiliated that no amount of advice was able to change his mind. He never felt so humiliated in all his life before, especially not by someone who had come all the way from Melaka and innocently tricked him. He, in his innocence, trusted Khoja Hassan and whatever that he had said. But, little did he know that he had other motives.

Meanwhile, in Melaka, Mahmud stood in front of his throne. All the state dignitaries, their wives, and the senior officials of the state were there. The prime minister sat cross-legged closest to the sultan, as it was his rightful place in the throne room for any official occasion. The throne room was quiet. Everybody was annoyed, because he wanted Muhammad's second son, Raja Abdul Jamil to succeed him. The officials and people of Melaka saw this as a

potent that could brew some messy conflict between the two states, Melaka and Pahang in the near future. And if it were to happen, it could be very messy.

'I hereby appoint Raja Abdul Jamil, second son of the late Sultan Muhammad Shah to succeed him. And he will be called Sultan Abdul Jamil,' said Mahmud. He then handed the *keris* to Abdul Jamil. He took the *keris* and kissed it as was the custom and tradition, which signified the acceptance of the royal appointment.

'Long live Sultan Abdul Jamil! Long live Sultan Abdul Jamil!' shouted the people.

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*Just before his abdication from the throne of Pahang, Sultan Mubammad Shah appointed his son, Raja Mansur Shah as his successor. This resulted in Pahang having two sultans, Sultan Abdul Jamil Shah who was appointed by Sultan Mahmud Shah of Melaka and Sultan Mansur Shah who was appointed by his father, Sultan Mubammad Shah.*

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A Melaka horseman rushed to Mahmud who was riding an elephant carriage with Teja, his fourth wife. His consort, Sultanah Fatimah was at the palace. They were on a private visit to a village in the Pengkalan Lama Pantai to meet her subjects. It was near the Melaka River, about five miles away from the river-mouth or palace. The horseman approached the sultan.

'Who's that rushing like the wind?' asked Mahmud. 'Why are you in such great haste? Are you being possessed by the devils?'

The palace officials did not answer; they did not know what had happened to the horseman. He stopped near the royal carriage. 'Beg your pardon, your majesty,' said the horseman.

'What's the rush, my son?'

'Pahang has been attacked.'

'By whom? Who dares to attack Pahang? Don't they know that Pahang is under our control?'

'The king of Siam had ordered Raja Ligor to attack Pahang.'

'Raja Ligor? Who the hell is he now, with a name like that?'

'He's a Malay ruler, a puppet, whose state is under the Siamese.'

'Thank you, my man. How dare the king of Siam do that?' He then turned to his rider. 'Rider, send me back to the palace.'

'Very well, your majesty,' said the rider.

The sultan then turned to the horseman. 'Ask Tun Mutahir, *temengong* and Nadim to come and see me at the palace immediately.'

'Very well, your majesty,' replied the horseman. He turned his horse around and rode off as quickly as he arrived leaving in his wake dust that floated in the air.

Mahmud was visibly angry. 'I want you, Tun Mutahir and Khoja Hassan to defend Pahang. Pahang's territory is our territory.'

'Very well, your majesty,' said Mutahir.

'We must quickly build the Fortress of Pahang at the mouth of the Pahang River so that we can repulse any Siamese attack. From there, we can launch a counter attack on Raja Ligor's forces. We know your majesty; Raja Ligor's forces have not made any real progress. Therefore, if we act fast, we can thwart and repel them,' said Khoja Hassan.

'Whatever it is, Raja Ligor must not be allowed to step foot in Pahang. If he does so, we will chop it off. The king of Siam must be taught a lesson that he will not easily forget all his life. How dare he tries to take advantage while we're trying to solve the confusion and uncertainty that was created by the proclamation of Sultan Abdul Jamil Shah and Sultan Mansur Shah to succeed their father, Sultan Muhammad Shah?'

The Melaka men immediately set out to construct a fort in Kota Pahang. Khoja Hassan went to Mutahir. 'Looks like it's coming.'

'It should be ready in a few days, admiral. I'm sure it'll be withstand any attack,' said the prime minister.

'We shall start to launch a counter attack soon. Raja Ligor's men are showing signs of battle fatigue. Their morale is falling.'

'Good.'

Not long later, the Melaka forces started to attack Ligor's forces at the camps that they had set up around Pahang. They were not able to enter Pahang because they were held back by the Pahang forces. Many of the prince's men were killed were mostly Siamese. Some were Malays from Pahang although they made sure that none of the Malays from Pahang got hurt! In fact, many of the Malays from Pahang retreated and declined to fight on behalf of the Siamese, and this made it easier for the Melaka forces to overwhelm the Siamese. Even some Pahang Malays became turncoats and fought with the Melaka forces instead. They took along with them food and weapons that were useful for the Melaka warriors.

'Attack, attack! *Allahukhbbar!*' shouted Khoja Hassan.

*'Allahukbbar! Allahukbbar!* shouted the Melaka men. They continued to attack Ligor's men. Many more were killed or maimed. Melaka suffered few casualties and was on a winning streak. The fighting started to recede when night fell. Both sides decided to cease fighting, as they could not see each other in the darkness. Khoja Hassan went to Mutahir's tent. 'Looks like the Siamese are no match for us, my Lord,' said the admiral.

The Melaka men sat outside around the campfires that they had set to keep them warm and to ward off the mosquitoes. Some were being tended for their wounds.

'Good, we can overwhelm Raja Ligor's men in no time,' said Mutahir.

'Yes, definitely.'

Meanwhile at the Siamese camp, Ligor sat with his senior officers, some of whom were Malays from their vassal state of Pahang. 'We are in bad shape. What do we do? I don't want to surrender,' he said confidently although he knew very well that it was not so. He simply had to do it in order to encourage his men not to surrender. 'We still have a good chance of destroying them.'

'I'm afraid, your highness, we must take up that option or else we will all perish. The Melaka forces are just too strong for us,' said a senior Siamese officer.

'Yes, Your Highness Raja Ligor. We don't mean to belittle your highness' leadership, but our men were battle weary when they started to launch the offensive,' added a Malay officer.

Ligor shook his head. 'If that's what you gentlemen feel, we withdraw,' said the prince. 'Let's clear the camps before dawn.'

The officers kept quiet; they were relieved. They then ordered their men to leave their camps so they could return to the state of Ligor and carry with them their injured colleagues. Those who had died were accorded with a simple burial there, as it did not make sense for their bodies to be carried all the way to Ligor.

A Siamese ruler, Chaya Tu Kruh Mahajana also known as Chau Seri Bangsa, the ruler of Kota Mahligai in north of the Malay Peninsula arrived in Melaka with few ships for a friendly visit. Everybody at the port was surprised to see him. They did not know who he was. He wore clothes that they were not familiar with. They did not like the Chinese either because of they had done to them earlier.

'Who's he?' asked a Malay man to his friend. 'What does he want?'

'Looks like he is a Siamese ruler, definitely not Chinese,' said his Chinese friend. 'Chinese rulers don't wear such clothes.'

A Siamese officer went to them and asked: 'Excuse me, gentlemen; where is the palace of his majesty the sultan of Melaka?' He spoke in a different style of Malay that was mostly spoken by the Malays in the north.

'That way, sir, you won't miss it. It has a tall roof and gates,' said the Malay man. 'There is also a large mosque beside it. Take this road and it'll take you there.'

'Thank you, sir.'

'You're welcome. By the way, where are you all from, sir?'

'His majesty is called Chaya Tu Kruh Mahajana and also known as Chau Seri Bangsa, and we're from Kota Mahligai in the north of this peninsula.'

'Ah, good, good. Are you Siamese?'

The Siamese officer nodded and smiled.

'Good,' said the Malay man.

The Siamese officer returned to Chaya Tu Kruh Mahajana and said something to him in Siamese. He and his entourage then went in the direction of the palace. The Melaka people continued to stare at them.

Mahmud sat on his throne with Teja by his side. Chaya Tu Kruh Mahajana and his senior officials had finally arrived at the palace. They were received warmly by him. The Siamese ruler stood before them in attention. Sultan Mahmud noticed that Chaya Tu Kruh Mahajana was not carrying any weapons; so did all his officials. It signaled that they had come in peace and meant no harm to anyone in Melaka.

'We have come from Kota Mahligai to pay homage to your majesty. We've come in peace, and we aim not to create anymore enmity between the Siamese and Malays,' said Chaya Tu Kruh Mahajana. 'We aim to let the past episode be closed so that a new and exciting one be opened so that our future generation can live in eternal peace with each other.'

'Very well, since you have come in peace, we will accept you with open arms. The ruler of Kedah, Sultan Ata'ullah Muhammad Shah in the north too has voiced his majesty's desire to come to Melaka and pay homage to us. I shall also welcome him, too, gladly with open arms,' said Mahmud. 'In fact we shall welcome any ruler who comes to Melaka to pay homage to us with the promise to lay down arms and start a new episode in our relations with each other.' He then stood and hugged the Siamese ruler tightly. The officers from both countries smiled. They then shook each other's hand and hugged.

'I hope you and your people will have a good stay in Melaka. We will provide a guest palace for your majesty and your officials to stay at. You will

like the view as it overlooks the straits of Melaka to one side and the hills on the other.

'But please don't allow your men to loiter too far because we cannot guarantee your safety, unless you go there with our escorts who knew the place well. There are demons and restless spirits lurking in every tree and hill in Melaka, even wild animals sometimes.'

'Well, thank you. I'll make sure my men will do as your majesty has advised.'

The Siamese ruler and his delegation then left the room. Not long later, Sultan Ata'ullah Muhammad Shah of Kedah entered the room with his senior officers.

'His majesty, the ruler of Kedah,' announced the lord chamberlain.

Ata'ullah Muhammad entered the throne room and went to Mahmud and shook his hand. 'Welcome to Melaka, my dear brother ruler of Kedah. What is your majesty's request?' asked Mahmud.

'I beg forgiveness from your majesty Sultan Mahmud Shah. It is my intention to pay homage to you, so that the state of Kedah will be away from harm and unnecessary harassment. If you agree, I also wish to be officially recognized the rightful ruler of Kedah. And in doing so get full protection from your majesty, if this is not too much for me to ask,' said the sultan without mincing his words or hiding his desires.

Mahmud glanced at his prime minister and other high ranking officials who were sitting cross-legged to the left and right. They nodded. Ata'ullah Muhammad turned to see their reactions and was happy with their response.

'Thank you for your request. I will have to confer with my officials. We have to see whether we can officially recognize you as the rightful ruler of Kedah. Who else are bidding for the sultanate of Kedah? If we consider your state to be friendly towards us, we will accord you with all the respects that are generally accorded to the other Malay rulers in the region who have come to pay homage before us.'

'Nobody, your majesty. I am the only rightful ruler of the state.'

'Hmmm... That will make it easier for us to come to a decision. But, let us confer among ourselves, and we will inform you accordingly. In the meantime, I hope you will enjoy your stay here. And if you wish, we can go to the jungles and hunt together, to stretch out of arms and breathe in the fresh jungle air. As for the letters, we will make sure they are ready before you departure from here.'

'That'll be fine, your majesty.'

Mahmud conferred with his officials that night while Ata'ullah Muhammad rested in the guest palace at the edge of town alone with his consort. He was anxious to get the answer from Mahmud who was at that time meeting with his officials in the palace not too far away from the guest palace.

The prime minister, *temenggong* and the senior officials of the court of Sultan Mahmud knew the outcome was going to be positive, yet they still met to discuss the matter, as a mere formality. No Malay ruler who had personally come to Melaka to pay homage to Mahmud was ever denied the recognition and official acceptance that they had come from so far to seek.

'I see no reason why we cannot recognize his majesty as the ruler of Kedah. Are there any objections to this?' asked Mahmud. He then turned around to look at prime minister and the *temenggong*. 'Bendahara, *temenggong*?'

'No, your majesty,' said Mutahir.

'No,' said the *temenggong*.

'Very well, we will officially recognize his majesty as the ruler of Kedah then. Please convey this to his majesty, prime minister,' said Mahmud.

'Yes, your majesty.'

'And do write an official letter so his majesty can bring it back to Kedah to show to his people.'

'Certainly.'

Mahmud stood. The others followed suit.

'And do inform his majesty Sultan Ata'ullah Muhammad Shah if his majesty wishes, we can hunt together tomorrow afternoon since we do not have anything to do.'

'Very well, your majesty.'

Mahmud then walked away and entered the adjacent room. The men then walked down the stairs to return to their own homes in their official carriages. It was already late so none stayed behind. They were happy now that any Malay rulers in the region had come to pay homage to the sultan of Melaka. This proved to all that Melaka's position, as the premier center of the spread of Islam, Malay language and culture. And no one would ever dispute or question it. What this meant was that Melaka would continue to become the center of trade and commerce, too, as it was getting a lot of attention following the official visits of the other Malay rulers to the country. Although Melaka did not seek to dominate the other states through the act of war and subjugation - with the exception of a few neighboring Malay states - yet its political, social, cultural and religious influence spread throughout the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra Island and few other places in the Southeast Asian region.



This was achieved mostly through personal contacts of the people who came to trade in Melaka.

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*By now, Melaka had become a busy port where trade and commerce flourished with merchants from many countries bringing their goods to trade and live there. The city of Melaka had expanded considerably; it had houses and marketplaces that stretched from the mouth of the Melaka River to Kuala Penajis and all the way to Jugra in Selangor. And its population had also grown to ten thousand compared to just a few hundred barely five years ago. It was less than 30 people when it was founded in 1396 CE or 798 AH or 4094 of the Chinese calendar, by Parameswara. Most of them were foreigners who had come to live in Melaka, from the neighboring Malay states mostly in Sumatra or other states in the Malay Peninsula.*

*But, the future of Melaka was soon to be changed, as the ruler from a far away land, in the 'land above the wind' was embarking on a sea expedition to the Far East, with dominating Melaka in mind.*

## CHAPTER 14: D'ALBUQUERQUE

The City of Lisbon sat on seven hills - Castelo, Graca, Monte, Penha de Franha, S Pedro de Alcantara, Santa Catarina and Estrela. It was the capital of Portugal in 1509 CE or 914 AH, or 4207 of the Chinese calendar year of the snake.

*Dom* or King Manuel's coach passed through a street and headed toward the royal palace. Many Portuguese lined on both sides; they waved and cheered him and his consort, Queen Sophia. They waved back. The people felt a strong empathy and attraction for the young king and his queen. They admired him because he exhibited a youthful exuberance that was unknown in Portugal before. Ever since he ascended to the throne after the death of King John II, he attracted their attention wherever he went. Each time he ventured out of the palace, crowds of people from all walks of life lined the streets to greet him. He did not expect to ascend the throne, as he was the ninth son of the late John II. A turn of events suddenly elevated his status, and he found that he had become king of Portugal. Although he was not prepared to be king, he

quickly learnt the ropes and became such an influential king of Portugal. It was during his reign when the country saw many adventures and excursions to the Far East that was not previously undertaken by his predecessors. Now he had been king of Portugal for fourteen years having ascended to the throne since 1495 CE or 900 AH or 4193 of the Chinese calendar. Whatever he introduced or did had made his people like and admired him even more.

'*Manuel por munito tempo vivo do dom! Manuel por munito tempo vivo do dom!*' (Long live Dom Manuel! Long live Dom Manuel! Long live Dom Manuel! Long live Dom Manuel!) shouted the people, as they waved their flags.

Manuel and Sophia sat in the coach. They waved at the people outside. The coach arrived at the porch in front of the royal palace. Manuel and Sophia alighted from the coach feeling relieved that they had returned to the palace after almost half a day with the people. The *chamberlain do senbo* or the lord chamberlain and other palace officials greeted them.

'Have they come?' asked the king.

'*Sim. Estao no estudo,*' replied the lord chamberlain. Yes. (They are in the study.)

They then entered the palace. Manuel walked to the study accompanied by the palace officials while Sophia went to their living quarters one floor above followed by her ladies-in-waiting who were ready at her command.

Manuel arrived at the study and entered it. His senior officials who were anxiously waiting for him there greeted him. 'Good day, your majesty,' they said, almost in unison.

'Good day, gentlemen,' replied Manuel. He immediately went to the globe and studied the map carefully. His senior officials waited. He turned the globe and stopped it until he saw Melaka. 'Here, this is what they call Melaka. The sultans there have turned this city into an important entreport that had attracted spice traders and merchants from the Far East, India, the Middle East and China. This is our next adventure, gentlemen. We must capture it, before the Spaniards or Dutch hear of it. The locals will not be able to counter our attack because they lack modern weaponry like what we have in our arsenal.

'Our *armada* can surround Melaka and within days the entire city will suffocate and the people be starved with the sultan fleeing the city. Therefore, we can quite easily capture Melaka.' Manuel turned around to look at the officers. 'What do you say, gentlemen?'

The *ministro principal* or prime minister and other senior officials were surprised. They kept quiet. None of them knew what to expect when they were summoned to the palace that day. They had thought Manuel had wanted

them to prepare for their birthday celebrations that were due soon. But, the king had other more important things in mind. Because they did not have any sea adventures for so long, they did not know where to start. Christopher Columbus's sea adventures to South America on behalf of the Spanish government under King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, which the Europeans mistook as the Far East. It was twenty-one years ago were now stale news in 1511 CE or 917 AH, in the year of the sheep or *wei* in 4209, especially in Portugal. Besides, he had by now been totally forgotten and ignored by everyone. When he died on Twentieth of May 1506 CE nobody took notice of it. So the king needed to create more adventures so that his people will be encouraged to better themselves. Also, so that they could spread their religion to this part of the world. Now that they realized their folly and found the real route to the Far East, they decided to embark on new adventures there. The route that Columbus took in 1492 CE or 897 AH, in the year of the rat or *zi* in 4190. He was said to have founded the New World on twelfth of October of that year turned out to be another continent that some African Muslims warriors from Mali had discovered five hundred years before. King Abu Bakari II of Mali had gone there; so did other African warriors. So, what Columbus did was to land on this continent five hundred years too late! Most probably, the first word Columbus said when he landed in what was now South America was *Asalamulaikum!* He thought he had arrived in India, which at that time was under the Mughal rulers, who were Muslims. In fact, Columbus was said to have brought an Arab translator if he needed to communicate with the Mughal ruler or other senior officials in India.

Manuel was fully aware of this; that was why he wanted badly to send somebody to the true Far East. What Columbus did was a farce. It was embarrassing. Now he had the opportunity to send his men to the Far East. Their real mission was to go to Melaka since they had heard so much about it from other sailors who were there. Well, not really. They had gone to the Arabian Peninsula, India and met traders, and merchant, who had actually gone to Melaka to trade. Goa in India was a Portuguese colony.

'It was embarrassing; Columbus thought he had arrived in the Far East,' said Manuel. He smiled sheepishly. 'Everybody thought he had discovered the Far East and landed in India. It later turned out he didn't step foot in India at all, but further away from it, to a new land which the Muslims from Mali had visited many times before! How embarrassing can that be? No wonder Columbus has not been seen or heard anymore these days. Where can he hide his face now?'

'Well, your majesty,' said the prime minister. 'Can we afford to?'

'Yes, we definitely can, prime minister; we can afford it too. And I command that you find someone to lead our naval fleet to go there in a not too distant a future. Besides, it'll be good to boost the morale of our people here.'

'Who do you have in mind?'

'Nobody. We want to go to Melaka to attack and capture it. What we need is somebody in the navy, an officer who can direct our naval fleet and sailors and men to conquer Melaka.'

'Very well, your majesty King Manuel, I promise that I'll find someone most suitable in no time. I'm sure we can capture Melaka and put it under our political, economic and religious domination. I will discuss this matter with Alfonso d'Albuquerque once he returns from Goa where he is the governor there. He had been there since he conquered it and placed it under the control of the Portuguese on Twenty-fifth of November 1510 CE or 917 AH in the year of the horse in 4208. And there's a *Capitao* Diego Lopez de Sequeira who I believe can be sent to Melaka if the *admirante* isn't available.'

'Who?'

'Captain Diego Lopez de Sequeira.'

'Where is he now? The admiral?'

'The admiral is at sea, on another mission.'

'When is he expected to be back in Portugal?'

'I'm afraid he won't be back anytime soon.'

'Very well, if that's the case, you do whatever is necessary and send whoever you believe can bring in the desired results. I shall leave this matter entirely to you, prime minister.'

'Thank you, your majesty.'

'Cordoba, and the whole of Al-Andalusia fell in 1492 CE or 897 AH or 4190 of the Chinese calendar,' said Manuel. 'Surely, we can also trounce the Malays and Muslims in Melaka, the city that is fast becoming the center for the spread of Islam in that region. No wonder they call it 'The fabulous Eastern Empire, a wonder of the Golden Chersonese and the city where the winds meet.' Therefore, we must endeavor to stop them before their virus spreads far and wide.'

'If Cordoba and Al-Andalusia can fall to us, surely, Melaka can too; after all, Al-Andalusia were under the control of the Muslim Caliphate for seven hundred years; yet despite that we trounced them. We thank our warriors for that; otherwise, we wouldn't be here now, and Ferdinand and Isabella be sitting on the throne they are now.'

'Indeed,' said the prime minister.

'If Cordoba, Alhambra, Valencia and all the important cities, towns and villages can be seized from under their carpet, surely, we can do the same in Melaka. And if the pious Muslim men and even their *imams* there can be converted, surely, the other ordinary Malays can, too.'

'And what about Admiral Vasco da Gama or Pedro Alvares Cabral?'

Manuel thought, while the others waited. 'No, not Vasco or Pedro.'

'Why, your majesty?'

'I have other plans for them. I want Vasco to embark on a mission to go to the south, to a continent where the people are dark. As for Pedro, I want him to go to Brazil. Get me somebody to lead the mission to Melaka then.'

'Very well.'

*'Consequentemente, nos devemos esforçar se para espalha-los antes que sen vírus espable distante e largamente.'* (Therefore, we must endeavor to stop them before their virus spreads far and wide.)

The prime minister walked with Captain Diego Lopez de Sequeira in the port. Few ships were being constructed. They were now looking more like skeletons of giant fish with no skin or flesh. Only their ribs were sticking from the ground up. Hundreds or thousands of men and artisans were working frantically, day and night to complete them. They were given strict orders to work diligently throughout the clock now that the king had commanded that a Portuguese mission be sent to the Far East for the specific reason which was to attack Melaka and capture it. It was not an easy mission. Therefore, they had to quickly redesign the ships and galleons in our armada and incorporate instruments that were just been developed. The admiral wanted to have more cannons on each ship so that they could be used to attack Melaka or to defend the ships from enemy attacks. These ships were going to be the most modern in Europe. No other country in Europe had such a modern fleet of ships that carried the latest weapons; their living quarters and cargo space were able to carry more men and ammunition as well as food for traveling long distances. They were sure the ships they were constructing in the dock could sail non-stop for months.

'What else do you require to make the journey, captain?' asked the prime minister.

'We have everything that we need, prime minister. I must thank his majesty for having faith in me. New ships are being built and once they have been christened, we will let them sail the seas,' said Diego Lopez.

'I know you won't let us down. Go to Melaka, captain. A change of air will do you a lot of good. The whole of Portugal and all our people are anxiously

waiting for your success in capturing Melaka on behalf of his majesty King Manuel and our beloved country, Portugal and most importantly, our religion.'

The prime minister and Captain de Sequeira stood on the deck of an unfinished ship that was still being constructed by hundreds of craftsmen. They looked at the other ships and the men who were working diligently to complete them.

'Certainly, prime minister. These ships and those that are being constructed have special features; they can withstand stronger storms and can carry more men and bigger weapons and sail longer distances.'

'Very good, captain.' The prime minister walked down with Diego Lopez feeling satisfied with what he had just seen. He went to his carriage and stood there while Diego Lopez waited. 'I shall report back to his majesty on what I have just seen, captain. I'm sure his majesty will see you before you sail to Melaka.'

'I will be greatly honored, your excellency,' said Diego Lopez.

The prime minister entered his carriage. 'Have a good day, Captain.'

'Likewise, prime minister.'

The carriage went off.

Ten Portuguese ships carrying hundreds of men sailed the seas heading towards Melaka. Each of them flew few Portuguese flags that had a large cross, red in color in the middle of a white background. They fluttered in the wind. The ships in the fleet were much larger than all those that had stopped at Melaka, except those from China that went there more than a century ago. After spending few weeks in the Atlantic Ocean, they entered the Indian Ocean where the waters were rougher and the winds stronger.

The ships swayed in the sea, but they were able to withstand them. Some Portuguese soldiers and officers vomited; they were not prepared for the arduous journey that took them to some of the roughest seas in the world. The Atlantic Ocean was no comparison to the larger Indian Ocean. They did not see land for weeks on end and the horizons spread far ahead; it did not seem to end.

After few weeks at sea, some of them became disillusioned; they had to be calmed down, lest they would jump into the ocean and take their miseries away with them to the bottom of the ocean. One or two of the seamen thought they heard voices especially at night when they were lying in their bunks, while their colleagues were on duty. One even wanted to jump off the railings, but their colleagues who happened to be around quickly saved him. He was distraught

and in pain. The long journey took a heavy toll on him. He was just a young boy but because he had cheated his age so he could join the ship and see foreign lands badly, the authorities in Lisbon allowed him. Now, they did not know what to do with him when they found out he was just eleven years old. He was tall by Portuguese size. The captain decided to send him to the kitchen to help the cooks there, as it was a less burdensome job, unlike that of a seaman whose duties he was hardly equipped to perform.

The ships stopped at Goa in India, a Portuguese colony in the Indian subcontinent. Diego Lopez surveyed all the ships and the men whom had come with him. They were all fine. They only had to do a little bit of servicing here and there. He saw a fort that stood by the river-mouth, and all the Portuguese flags flying on it. Those people at the port remarked how impressive the ships were. This was the first time they were seeing multi-masted ships in their port. They looked awesome, and stood above the coconut trees near the port. The people of Goa had not seen anything like them before.

Diego Lopez was delighted with the ships' performance on their maiden voyage. He and his men stayed in Goa for a few days to rest stretch out and replenish their food stocks before resuming their journey to their destination, Melaka. They expected this second stretch to take three weeks at the most. It was less torturous since the ocean in the Bay of Bengal was relatively calm compared to the Arabian Ocean on the west of the Indian subcontinent where Goa stood.

Not long later, they arrived in Melaka. Diego Lopez surveyed the city with his monocle when their ships finally arrived there in the night. He wanted to wait until dawn to catch sight of the city which he had heard so much of before. He was now in Melaka, finally, thought he. He saw the lights that lit all the houses and ships and thought that Melaka was indeed unusual. It was fully developed and was an important port of call of many foreign merchants and traders, much like what Manuel had described. He figured Melaka did not have sufficient facilities to defend itself if they were attacked. Its shores were not guarded and there was no fort in sight. He was sure the Portuguese were able to overrun the people of Melaka easily and fly their flag above the hills in no time.

'Just perfect for a port,' said Diego Lopez. 'The mouth of the Melaka river is wide enough for our ships to sail into the city. And there are hills. We can construct a fort around the port to ensure that no alien force dares to attack us once we have captured Melaka. In this way, we can retain Melaka forever.'

'Indeed, captain,' said Jaime Texeira, an officer who was standing beside him. 'Surprisingly, it looks like the port in Goa, with a river-mouth that extends to the straits. And there are hills on the eastern side and beyond that a large valley. Fruits must be plentiful in those jungles.'

'Listen, Jaime, I want you to go ashore and present the sultan of Melaka gifts from his majesty King Manuel. This is the standard practice for foreigners who have pay homage to the rulers of the countries they have arrived at. I suppose this is how he would think too. This is also how we indicate to them that we have come here in peace. And we don't mean to inflict them with any harm. And while you are in his company, do use the proper language,' Diego Lopez then turned to De Souza. 'What is the names of the sultan and prime minister, De Souza?'

'Sultan Mahmud Shah, captain,' said De Souza.

'Right, *Malayo Rey*.' (Sultan of Melaka.)

'The prime minister?'

'Prime Minister Tun Mutahir.'

'Very well, captain,' said Jaime.

Jaime arrived by boat at the port the following day. It was now busy with people mingling and doing about their business. It suddenly sprang to life just when dawn broke. The muezzins called the Faithful to pray. Captain de Sequeira and Jaime were surprised; they did not expect Islam to have arrived here in Melaka.

'They must be Muslims,' said Diego Lopez.

'Looks like it, sir,' replied Jaime. 'Are you surprised, captain?'

'I'm more than surprised; I'm shocked. How did it arrive here? Who brought it to the people? Is the ruler also a Muslim? Find out, Jaime.'

'Yes, captain; I sure will. I'm equally shocked as you are.'

'This will make it more difficult.'

The port was noisy. The people were speaking in all sorts of languages. Jaime was amazed to see many people of different races there. He was confused, at one part he thought he was in India, then at another, he felt like he was in China. Then after walking few more steps, he felt like he had arrived in Arabia. There was a large group of Arab men who wore robes and turbans. They spoke excitedly in Arabic. He tried to eavesdrop on their conversation, but he knew not a word of what they were saying. The other foreign traders and merchants stared at him. He and his Portuguese friends had not seen anybody like him before. Even in Goa, the scene was totally different. At least there were no Arabs or Chinese, only Indians there. Most of them were Catholics, like the Portuguese. There were many chapels and churches the



Portuguese authorities in Goa had built since they began to control the place. Many locals, too, had converted to Christianity. Here in Melaka, all that Jaime Teixeira could see were mosques. They were everywhere; some of them were bigger than the rest.

'Good day, gentlemen,' said a Malay man in his language.

Jaime and the other Portuguese men did not understand what he was saying. They just nodded and walked away.

'Where is he from? He is not Malay. Look at his clothes. I hear he speaks in a different language, totally different from ours. I do not know a single word of what they are saying. Is he making fun of us? What language is it?' asked Ah Meng to his Malay friend, Kamil.

'He must be European; no, may be he's Indian. But, why does he look pale?' said Kamil. 'They are not unlike the Bengalis even with their turbans and height.'

'White Bengalis,' remarked his friend.

They laughed.

'Shhh... Don't let them hear what you're saying.'

Krishnan, an Indian trader overheard them and chipped in. 'They're Portuguese, my friends,' he said. 'They are from this 'land above the wind' called Portugal.'

'Really? Portuguese! And where does he come from?' asked Ah Meng.

'Why, Portugal! And they have a king and queen too like what we have here in Melaka.'

'How come you know that?' asked Kamil.

'Some friends of mine from India, told me about their presence in Goa and Cochin in India.'

'Really?' asked Kamil. He and his other friends were still confused.

Krishnan went off with his goods. Jaime and his friends returned to the banks where he saw more people milling there. He stopped Kudin. 'Which is the way to the sultan's palace, my friends?' asked Jaime.

'That way sir. Go around that hill there, and you'll see it,' said Kudin.

'Thank you, sir, for your kind assistance.'

'Not at all.'

Jaime and his friends walked towards the palace. They carried with them the presents in many chests that they wanted to give to Sultan Mahmud. They looked at the people; they were busy with their work and were carrying huge boxes on their bare backs; they stopped to look at them and smiled. The Portuguese smiled back.

'The people here are of many different kinds and they wear different clothes, too,' said de Souza. 'I'm confused. I have not seen so many people in different colors as this. Aren't everybody supposed to be fair like us? Why are there people who are brown and the others very dark like charcoal? I don't understand it.'

'May be some of them were born in bright sunlight; so their skin turned dark, while those who were born at night, were fairer.'

They laughed.

'Are you serious, de Lima?' Someone asked.

'Melaka must be very popular with traders from all over the world. Look at how busy everybody is,' said de Lima. He and his friends continued to walk to the palace. They were welcome inside. They sat in the verandah with Sultan Mahmud and some senior palace officials. Tun Mutahir listened attentively.

'Yes, you are welcome to trade, as much as the others who had come before you,' said the sultan. 'As you can see for yourself there are many people of all races there. Can you see how happy everybody is? They won't be here if they are not comfortable with the place or if we are hostile.'

'Yes, very true. This is what his majesty King Manuel desires, that we establish cordial relations between our two countries,' explained Jaime.

'You have indeed come a very long way, my friend.'

'Indeed. But, we were able to do so because our future are intertwined.'

'Why don't you tell your captain that he and his officials can drop anchor at the port and have a look in Melaka and meet the people. Talk to them, and ask for their views. Don't just listen to our officials and us. If you think Melaka is not suitable for you, you are free to leave. We will not detain you any further.'

'I certainly will. But do talk to the foreign traders at the port and ask why they're happy to be here.'

Jaime and de Souza returned to their ships by boat the same day feeling relieved and excited with what they had seen in Melaka. They knew the city was a good place for them to fly their flags. They informed Captain Diego Lopez de Sequeira of what they had discussed with Mahmud. Diego Lopez was impressed with what Mahmud had said. The captain thought for a while. He then ordered a top Portuguese official, Ruy de Araujo to go to Melaka with some men, to see how the port and country looked like and to explore other areas where they could launch their attack. The captain wanted to assess the strength and weakness of the forces in Melaka.

Next day, a top Portuguese official with the name of Ruy left the ships. He and eighteen men left took two boats and paddled to the port. They walked on the gangplank and landed ashore. The other foreign traders stared at them. De

Araujo together with Alfonso Pesseo, Alberto and his men loitered in the streets. They went to the bazaars where they were more people of all races there. They were surprised to see the amount and variety of goods that exchanged hands. Everything seemed to be in order and worked with clockwork precision.

'I'm surprised that the shops are selling all those goods,' said Ruy to his men. 'I haven't seen any of them in my whole life.'

They agreed. They then stopped at a store and looked at some of the goods that were on sale there. The owner, an Arab man, alighted from the shop and greeted: '*Asalamulaikum.*' May I help you, gentlemen?'

'We are just browsing, sir,' said Ruy.

'Oh, that's okay. Browse and much as you like; browsing is free. Only after you have decided to purchase anything, let me know. I have a special price for you.' The Arab man re-entered his shop and left his goods unprotected.

A few Punjabi Indians wearing thick turbans walked passed by the Portuguese men. They, like the Portuguese men had long beards, sideburns and mustaches. They stared at them. 'Are you from Punjab, too, sir?' asked one of the Punjabi men.

Ruy and his men turned. 'No, we are not from Punjab, but from Portugal, sir,' he replied.

'Sorry, I thought you had also come from Punjab, like me.'

'No.'

'That's okay.' The Punjabi men then walked away.

The presence of the Portuguese in Melaka invariably made some Indian-Muslim traders from Gujerat in India feel jealous. Their leader, Mr. Ninacatu and a few others immediately went to Mutahir as he stepped out of his carriage and walked with him to his house. They looked worried. 'Why did your excellency welcome those foreign devils? They have not come to trade, but to stir hatred amongst the people,' said Ninacatu. 'They have not sold or bought anything since they landed here in Melaka.'

The prime minister did not know what they were talking about. 'Who? Who are you referring to, my friends?'

'The Portuguese.'

'They have come a long way, my friend. Why worry about them? Their country is so far away: surely, they can't do any harm. You've been trading with the Chinese, Javanese, Bugis and others, why, you surely can do the same with them, too,' said Mutahir. 'Who knows if they might have goods that none of you possesses.'

'But, they are not here to trade. They want to stir hatred of the sultan! They want to capture Melaka! Look at what they did to Macau in China!'

'What did they do there, my friend? Tell me.'

'They want to invade the city and claim it as their own.'

The prime minister was shocked.

'Is it so?'

'Yes, your excellency. We certainly do not like to have them as our competitors. My friends in India say that the Portuguese had taken over Goa and Cochin and claimed the cities for their ruler, King Manuel. Even their flags are now flying over these two cities there. These two are port cities much like Melaka. It looks to me like the Portuguese prefer port cities to capture than just any ordinary city. And Melaka's one that is already well-known by many traders and merchants.'

'Never mind, my friends, you go home and I'll see what I can do. Are you sure they're not Bengalis from India?'

'No, your excellency. They are not Bengalis or Punjabis. They may look like them, but they are Portuguese. And they have come from their base in Goa, India. Their religion is totally different, your excellency.'

'How so?'

'They pray before the statues and the cross that has the statue of a man with long hair stuck to it.' He said in all naiveté.

'Is that so? I'll do what is necessary, my friend.'

'Thank you, your excellency.'

'I'll take care of the 'White Bengalis'. Don't you worry.'

Ninacatu and his friends walked away.

Ruy de Araujo and his eighteen men looked around the in the bazaar. They looked at the goods that were being sold in the bazaars. They were totally oblivious to the scheme that was being hatched by Ninacatu and his men to have de Araujo and his men arrested.

Many people were just loitering in the bazaar. They wore their traditional clothes in different designs and colors. It was noisy. People spoke in all languages and shouted on top of their voices. Ruy stopped at a shop operated by an Arab trader and asked: 'These are beautiful. Where're they from, sir?'

'From Arabia, sir,' said the Arab trader.

'So, you are from there, too?'

'Yes, sir. And you?'

'I'm from Portugal.'

'I see. Have a pleasant stay in Melaka, sir.'

'Thank you.'

A dragon dance was being performed at another part of the bazaar. Ruy and his friends were shocked to hear the loud noise. He turned around and looked at it. 'What's the noise?' he asked.

'The Chinese are performing the dragon dance, sir,' said the Arab trader. 'There's nothing to worry about.'

'A dragon dance? What is it for? Do they have dragons in the jungles in Melaka, or did they bring them here from China?'

'Go over there and see for yourself. These dragons are just mystical creatures. They do not exist either here or in China.'

Ruy was relieved. 'I sure will. Excuse me.' He and his friends went to the other part of the bazaar and found a spot behind the crowd. Many people comprising all races crowded around the dance troupe. Some Melaka soldiers went to the bazaar, but today their duty was different; they had come to arrest the Portuguese. 'There they are, the 'White Bengalis'. Hurry, before they disappear in the crowd,' said the Malay officer. They then went to Ruy de Araujo and his friends and asked: 'Excuse me, gentlemen. You're all under arrest.' The soldiers immediately surrounded Ruy and his eighteen men. They were shocked. They did not know what was happening. Alberto was agitated, but tried to keep his cool.

'Release us. We have come to trade. Besides, your sultan allowed us to land,' pleaded Ruy. 'And his majesty suggested that we see the port and bazaars. This is what we are doing precisely. Or have we done anything that seems to have broken your state law?'

'All of you are under arrest. Shut up, and follow me! I shall not hear anything from you.'

'Let us go or harm will befall you and everybody else in Melaka. This much I can tell you.'

The Melaka soldiers laughed, as they dragged the Portuguese away. The dragon dance continued. The people were oblivious to what was happening to the Portuguese as they were at the other side of the bazaar and hidden by the huge crowd of people who had gathered around the dragon.

'We're guests of the sultan!' shouted Ruy.

'Your arrest have been issued by the prime minister,' said the officer.

'We demand to see him then. Please take us there!'

Diego Lopez was furious when he heard of Ruy's arrest together with his eighteen men. He could not sleep that night. He paced in his cabin. Jaime felt guilty. 'Why couldn't the sultan do anything to secure the release of Ruy de Araujo and the eighteen men? Didn't the sultan allow us to land and trade?'

'Yes, captain, but, it was the prime minister who ordered the arrest of our men, sir, and not the sultan,' said Jaime.

'We must continue to negotiate with them. What did they say, Jaime?'

'The prime minister was adamant. He refused to release our men, sir, despite our pleadings and offer of gold and silver. He seems to be so incorruptible and did not seem to cave in to temptations.'

'And what else did he say?'

'He said that he'd order our ships be attacked should we do anything nasty.'

'What does that mean?'

'No idea, sir. He spoke by using imageries and double meanings; it was very difficult to understand him.'

'I fear for our safety. We must turn around and leave for Portugal. We must report immediately to King Manuel. But, let me land in the morning to try to persuade Tun Mutahir to release our men for one more time. May be my personal involvement in this will make him change his mind.'

Diego Lopez sat with the prime minister alone in his house in the Prime Minister's Village as his men waited outside. Unbeknownst to them, some of his capture colleagues were tortured, especially Alberto who made a scene in the dungeon.

'We won't release them, captain. They must remain here as our guests,' said the prime minister. 'Don't get me wrong. They aren't under arrest, they're our guests.'

'But, they are our men, your excellency. They haven't done anything wrong; they were just visiting the bazaar and seeing the dragon dance,' said Diego Lopez. 'What's wrong with that, your excellency, prime minister?'

'They were spying on us!'

'They are visitors, and they were invited by Sultan Mahmud Shah to stay here and to look around to their heart's content. Melaka is such a beautiful place, your excellency, surely, they are many things in your country where they will be interested to visit and see. It is not often that we get to come here.'

'That's not the point.'

'We demand to see the sultan then.'

'His majesty is hunting, and doesn't wish to be disturbed in any case.'

'But, it was the sultan himself who invited us to stay, therefore, we must see his majesty.'

'I've received strict orders for his majesty not to be disturbed.'

'You don't know whom you're dealing with, prime minister!' Diego Lopez stood up. He then walked down the stairs and went off with his men with excusing himself.

'Is this a warning, captain?'

The captain did not respond. He went out of the compound with his friends. He tried to think of something to teach the people of Melaka. Later that night, the Portuguese burnt two of their own ships. They then returned to their ship. The fire quickly spread to the other ships. It became furious. It lit the night sky.

'Fire, fire, fire, fire! Our ships are on fire!' shouted the men.

Some men rushed to their aid. They collected water from the river and doused it on the burning ships. Diego Lopez stood by the railings and saw the two ships burning. 'Well done, well done.'

'Why did you order the burning of two of our own ships, captain? We should've burnt down theirs,' said a Portuguese sailor.

'For a simple reason so that we can put the blame on the Melaka people. They will not expect us to burn our own ships, won't they?' said Diego Mendes de Sequeira.

They laughed.

Mutahir went to the verandah. He saw Ninacatu standing in the compound and said: 'Well, come in, my friend, Ninacatu.' He climbed up the wooden stairs and sat in the verandah with him.

'I believe you have something urgent and of utmost importance to tell me, Mr. Ninacatu. Otherwise, you wouldn't be showing your face here at my house unannounced, would you?' said the prime minister. 'This is rather unexpected, too, I should say.'

'Indeed, prime minister,' said Ninacatu.

'Have some betel leaves.'

The prime minister ate a betel leaf and made one for Ninacatu. He then gave it to him. Ninacatu ate it.

'It's not proper for us to meet like this without eating betel leaves,' said the prime minister.

'Very true, your excellency. Your betel leaves are always delicious to eat. Where did you get them?'

'I grow them in my garden. Over there. You can pick some before you go home afterwards.'

'Well, thank you, prime minister.'

'Now, what is it that you wish to inform me? Say so now.'

'I've just received information from my friends who've arrived from India, sir.'

'What about? Did they bring better goods?'

'It's regarding the Portuguese, Sir.'

'What about them?'

'The Portuguese forces have captured Goa in India, your excellency. I fear if you do not release Ruy de Araujo and the eighteen Portuguese men, they will invade Melaka.'

'Really? His majesty's fears are not totally unfounded then.'

'All right, I shall order the immediate release of the Portuguese, and I shall provide them with a house to stay at. In this way, we can watch their every move. We simply cannot allow them to go about freely, as they might have some devious desires in mind.'

'That's a good idea, your excellency.'

The prime minister picked some betel leaves and handed them to Ninacatu. 'Here you are, Ninacatu; have another one, so soothe your mind.'

He took it. 'Very well, thank you, your excellency.'

'Don't worry, Ninacatu, I'll do whatever is necessary. And thanks for your information, it's very useful indeed.'

'Do not make them angry, or they will be ruthless and attack Melaka. Who will suffer? It'll be all of us and we won't be able to trade like before.'

'Yes, indeed, Mr. Ninacatu.'

The Melaka guards walked along the corridors. They went to the cells where the Portuguese were being held and flung open the doors and said: 'You're allowed to go now, gentlemen.'

The Portuguese men who were inside got a rude shock. Their leader, de Araujo stood up and asked: 'Who ordered this, officer?'

'His excellency, the prime minister himself.'

'We'll return to our ship then.'

'That won't be possible, Mr. Ruy de Araujo.'

'Why?'

'Captain Diego Lopez de Sequeira has left Melaka with all the ships.'

'But, where are we to stay?'

Ruy got another shock. He turned to look at his friends.

'Don't worry, the prime minister's kind enough to provide all of you with a house to stay at in Bandar Hilir near here. You do not need to take a carriage. You can walk and get there in minutes. And you will be allowed to move around as you please. You're free to go now!' said the Malay officer. Ruy and his friends were relieved. 'Thank you, officer. And thank the prime minister for us, too.'

'I will.'

They then went off.



Ruy ate dinner with his men at the house provided by the sultan. He was surprised and sad that Captain de Sequeira had left them in Melaka with no one to look after their welfare but themselves. Now they were stranded in Melaka and they did not know for how long they had to remain there? ...Or if their captain was returning to fetch them. Although they were released from prison by the Melaka authorities, yet, they did not feel free; anything could happen to them, thought Ruy. They could be re-arrested on other trumped up charges and be incarcerated in seclusion in jail again. 'Why are they suddenly being nice to all of us?'

'There must be something fishy,' said Jaime.

'Well, we will act normal, and go about with out activities. We will not stay put here.'

Ruy and his men walked about the town. He saw many Chinese men smoking opium. He turned around and saw that some Melaka soldiers who trailed behind them were watching them. 'We are being watched, so, do not do anything that is suspicious.'

'Yes, sir,' said Emmanuel.

'I must inform our *Admirante* Alfonso d'Albuquerque in Goa that we cannot attack Melaka yet. He needs to send more ships and men and weapons, or we will be defeated.'

'Certainly, captain.'

Ruy turned to catch a furtive glance at the Melaka soldiers, but he pretended to look elsewhere.

'Come, let's go that way.'

He and his men stood by the banks. They saw two of their ships that had been burnt until they looked like skeletons lying on their sides by the banks. They were destroyed beyond repairs.

'Where are the other ships? What has happened to them? And where's Captain de Sequeira?' asked Ruy.

The other Portuguese men were shocked. An Indian man passed by and de Araujo quickly accosted him and asked: 'Excuse me, sir.'

'Yes, sir?' replied the Indian man.

'Do you know where have the Portuguese ships gone to?'

'Oh, those ships? It seems that they have slipped out of the port in the night, few days ago, sir.'

'Do you know for what reason did they sail off for?'

'Forgive me, sir, I am just a trader from India. From what I've heard, all the Portuguese ships have gone to Goa in India; I do not know for what reason. Excuse me, sir.'

'Thank you, sir.'

'Not at all, sir.' The Indian man went off with his goods. Ruy de Araujo looked at his friends' face. 'Are you guessing what I'm guessing?'

The men froze.

'I must write a letter and smuggle it out.'

They then went off.

Ruy quickly wrote a long letter that night. After finishing it, he handed it to Xavier. 'I want you to send this to the Indian captain who is returning to India. Tell him to deliver personally it to our admiral in Goa. And from there he can get somebody to take it to his majesty King Manuel.'

'Very well, *capitao*,' said Xavier. Xavier quickly put on a scarf to masquerade as an Arab. In this way, nobody in Melaka would know what he was up to. He went out of the house and headed for the port.

Diego Lopez had arrived in Lisbon, Portugal with the message that he had when he was in Goa. He stood before King Manuel in the royal palace in Lisbon, Portugal. The prime minister and other state dignitaries were present including Captain Jorge de Albuquerque. The king was sad when told that one of their captains, Antonio de Noronho had died in Melaka. 'If what you had just said is true, Captain de Sequeira, then I will immediately send Captain Diego Mendes Vasconcelos to launch an attack on Melaka. If we could capture Macau and Goa, surely, we can repeat our success in Melaka. Besides, China and India are far bigger countries compared to Melaka. What do you say to that, Captain Diego Mendes Vasconcelos?' said the king.

'Very well, your majesty, I will do as commanded,' said Diego Mendes.

'Now prepare your men and ships and sail to Melaka; but, do stop at Goa for discussions with our governor and refresh yourselves. Take along plenty of food so you do not have to starve in Melaka if the war drags on.'

'Very well; I will do as commanded.'

A small fleet of Portuguese ships sailed towards Goa, the Portuguese colony in India. Captain Vasconcelos as ordered by Manuel headed it. Immediately after arriving there, he went to the Portuguese headquarters. He entered it and walked along the many corridors that stretched on and on before he was shown to the Alfonso's office. He saw the admiral, and they hugged each other.

'What brings you to Goa, *capitao*? Come in my room,' asked Alfonso. 'To tell you the truth, I was not informed of your impending visit and your subsequent journey to Melaka. What you have told me therefore is news. This is the first time I'm hearing about it, captain.'

'His majesty King Manuel has ordered me to attack and capture Melaka,' said Diego Mendes.

'Is that necessary, captain?'

'It is his majesty's command; and I must do as ordered.'

'I have just received a letter from Captain de Araujo, which was smuggled out of Melaka and he has described how Melaka is flourishing in trade. Many foreign traders and merchant come to Melaka. Because of that his majesty felt before the Spanish or Dutch got there, it would be prudent that we capture it first; what more now that our men are already there and in Goa, India.'

Alfonso and Diego Mendes sat. The admiral poured some whiskey and offered him a glass. The clinked their glasses and took a sip. He received assurance from Vasconcelos not to proceed to Melaka, but he was adamant. He wanted him to assist the admiral in his effort to capture Goa.

'We must not disturb the peace there. If we need to attack Melaka, we would need a much bigger fleet, more men and weapons than what you have brought from Lisbon. Ruy, who is still there, warns of severe repercussions if we are not equipped with sufficient men or weapons to attack Melaka. Here it is,' said Alfonso. He handed the letter to Diego Mendes who took it and read. He then put it down on the table after he was through with it. The letter was long but the message was straight and simple. It did not take too long for them to understand it. 'What then do you propose to do, admiral?' asked Diego Mendes.

'I will have to write to his majesty King Manuel to explain the latest on the situation and request that his majesty sends in more ships, men and weapons. And I will personally lead our armada to Melaka to attack it.'

'Very well, admiral, I'll deliver it personally to his majesty.'

Alfonso pulled out a piece of paper and wrote the letter. 'If those requests are met, then I will personally lead our forces and navy to go to Melaka and attack them, captain. Please write it down in your letter, captain.'

'Very well, governor.'

However, despite the promise that he had given to the admiral, Diego Mendes quietly slipped out of Goa and sailed to Melaka. Alfonso did not like it when told of this. He immediately sent some of his men in pursuit of the captain. He was severely reprimanded by the authorities, before Alfonso bundled him back to Portugal, where he was treated with utter contempt, for going against the commands of the governor of Goa.

Meanwhile, Alfonso d'Albuquerque arrived in Pidir in the northern tip of Sumatra Island, with a large fleet of ships and men. They docked there at night.

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*On the Twentieth of April in 1511 CE, or twelfth of Mubarram of 917 AH of the Muslim calendar or 4209 of the Chinese calendar, Alfonso d'Albuquerque led a large armada of eighteen ships, eight hundred Portuguese soldiers and six hundred Indian soldiers. They sailed from Goa in India and arrived in Melaka three months later with Admiral Alfonso d'Albuquerque sailing in his flagship, the 'Flor de la Mar' and arrived at Pidir near Melaka. There he met the eight Portuguese men who had managed to escape from Melaka. They told him everything that they had experienced in the hands of the Melaka soldiers.*

*Tun Mutahir, the seventh Prime Minister of Melaka tried to seize the throne so that he could install himself as the next Sultan of Melaka. He wanted to start a new line of sultans of Melaka who were of Indian-Muslim descents like him. He and his followers tried to attack Sultan Mahmud Shah, but failed. Instead the Sultan's men quickly jumped into action and immediately killed him. He was branded a traitor or 'pembelot' and hanged in the public square for everybody to see. He was succeeded by Prime Minister Paduka Tuan, the eldest son of Tun Perak, son of Lord Sandang Sedang who was the fifth Prime Minister of Melaka.*

*Sultan Mahmud Shah then decided to abdicate and his eldest son, Raja Ahmad Shah succeeded him as Sultan Ahmad Shah, although Sultan Mahmud still retained most of the authority in the state and continued to be called Sultan.*

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Captain Diego Lopez de Souza sat with Alfonso d'Albuquerque, in his spacious cabin, looking pensive and a little worried if their mission would be met with success. It was still too early to tell and they were not too sure of what to expect from the Malays in Melaka. Behind him was King Manuel's portrait. With them was the captain of the *Flor de la Mar*, Captain Duarte de Silva. It means 'Flower of the sea.' They had arrived in Melaka on Twentieth of April 1511 or 907 AH or 4209 of the Chinese calendar. They quickly sounded the trumpets and fired their guns in the air that lasted for thirty minutes. This was their way of announcing their arrival; also to scare the people of Melaka; more so, the sultan into submission. Some of the foreign merchants, especially those from the neighboring Malay states wanted to flee from the port, but the Portuguese soldiers barred them from doing so. With them was a young captain called Ferdinand Magellan and his nephew, Jorge and Ruy de Brito Patadim. Alfonso wished to appoint de Albuquerque the

Captain of Melaka and de Brito Patadim as his deputy, and Alfonso Lopes de Costa the third in line. The other captains included Vasco Fernandes Continho, Nuno Vaz de Castelbianco, Villabos, Captain Duarte de Silva, and Fernao Gomes de Lemos, Joao Serrao, Joao de Souza, Aires Pereira, Bastiao de Miranda, Jorge Nunes de Leao, Dinis Fernandes, Gasper de Paiva, Francis Serrao and Joao de Lima. They had gathered there to listen to the admiral's latest plan.

As was his duty to do so, Tome Pires was there to take down notes of what transpired and who said what and where or when and why... He was actually the druggist for the mission who worked closely with the physician with the name of Elicio. He also passed as the scribe, because he liked to take notes on what transpired on the trip. He was extra keen to study the history of how Melaka was founded and who its first ruler was. All that he knew was his name was Parameswara, the Sang Aji of Palembang in Sumatra that they had passed by on the way to Melaka few days earlier. He had befriended a man from Palembang who told him about how his ancestor were Sang Sapurba, known as Prince Charming or *Bichitran* was the founder of the Palembang dynasty. He was married to Wan Sandari. When he died his eldest son, the crown prince Sang Nila Utama succeeded him as the second ruler of Palembang. He was married to Sang Seri Beni. He started to call himself with the pompous title of Sri Tri-Buana. And the third ruler was his son, Sri Rana Wikrama. The fourth ruler was *paduka seri maharajah* who was Sang Nila Utama who ruled Temasik for a while before he was bundled out of the island by Tamogi. He ruled the island for a while before Parameswara killed him.

However, Parameswara did not get to become the fifth ruler of Palembang because he was taken over by his elder brother. Parameswara was only the prince consort and not the rightful heir to the throne. No wonder he was angry. So, he decided to leave Palembang after his unsuccessfully attempt to dethrone his elder brother before he became the fifth ruler with the title of *paduka seri maharajah*. His father, Damia Raja did not favor Parameswara to succeed him for reasons best known to him. This episode was written in details by Camoens who his *Lusiads*.

'Captain Ruy de Araujo is still alive, admiral,' said Diego Lopez. 'The eight of us managed to escape when the Melaka soldiers were resting. Sultan Mahmud Shah is very much aware of our intention of attacking Melaka. He will surely be prepared for it.'

'Yes, Captain de Souza, I'll make sure we are fully prepared before we attack them. Thank you for your information. We need to consider also Ruy

de Araujo's safety as much as the other ten men who are with him. Are they staying in the same house in Banda Hilir?'

'I'm afraid they have been dumped back into the prison, admiral.'

'This will make it the more difficult for us to attack Melaka without risking their lives. We must undertake to secure their release before we can attack Melaka.'

Not long later, the *Flor de la Mar* arrived at Melaka together with the other Portuguese ships. The people of Melaka were amazed at the size and number of ships that were berthed in the sea. Sultan Mahmud and Prime Minister Paduka Tuan knew they had to do something because the Portuguese fleet had arrived, and they surely had venom in their blood.

Mahmud immediately ordered the harbormaster or *syabbandar* or *tuan bandar*, the port authority officer to be sent to meet with the Portuguese admiral. He took a boat and rowed to the *Flor de la mar* that he guessed was the admiral's ship, because it was the largest of all them that he could see in the sea with the others surrounding it. The Portuguese sailors who immediately took him to meet Alfonso welcomed him. He was accorded with utmost respect.

'His majesty Sultan Mahmud Shah wishes to inform you, admiral, that the Prime Minister Tun Mutahir who was responsible for the arrest of the Portuguese has been killed for his actions,' said the harbormaster.

Alfonso was shocked. 'Regardless of that, my friend, I demand compensation for the sufferings my men and officers had to face for one year since their detention and for the loss of ships, before we can consider to establish friendly relations with Melaka.'

The harbormaster kept quiet. 'I'm in no position to negotiate on behalf of his majesty, sir. I hope you understand my situation. If your excellency can write a letter, I'll be happy to pass it on to his majesty Sultan Mahmud Shah.'

'I know you are not in any position to agree to this, but I'm sure you can relay my message back to Sultan Mahmud Shah, my friend. There's no need for me to write a letter, just inform Sultan Mahmud Shah of what I've just said.'

'Certainly, admiral, sir; I'll let you know the outcome in due course.'

'If we don't receive compensation, we will attack Melaka.'

The harbormaster kept quiet. He then returned to the shore in a small boat. Alfonso saw him sitting in the boat as it headed back to shore not knowing what to expect next. He then returned to his cabin and sat behind his desk. Someone knocked on the door. 'Come in.' Captain Aires Miranda entered and said: 'Here's another letter which have just received from Ruy, admiral.'

Alfonso took it and immediately tore open the envelope and read the letter.

'What does it say, admiral?'

'Ruy de Araujo explains that the prime minister was not executed because he had ordered the arrests of our men. The real reason was because he had tried to revolt against the sultan.' Alfonso was shocked. 'He was beheaded?'

'Beg your pardon, admiral?'

'I can understand why the sultan did that. It's treachery and the prime minister rightly deserved to be beheaded in public. Surely, Sultan Mahmud Shah would not have ordered to have him executed simply for ordering the arrests of our men.'

'Interestingly, it was the Indian-Muslim traders from Gujerati who've been instigating the sultan not to initiate peace moves with us.'

'Why? What pleasure do they get from this?'

'Because they fear they will get a stiff competition from us. They are also helping to strengthen the Melaka forces.'

'Indeed. Is that so?'

'What do you plan to do then, admiral?'

'We'll attack Melaka and we will attack with venom that turn Melaka upside down. We want to expel the sultan from the state. We claim Melaka as our own territory like Macau in China, and Goa in India.'

'But, don't you think we should give them some time to reply to our demands, admiral?'

'We give them one week, not one day more or one day less, only one week.'

The harbormaster stepped offshore and rushed to the palace. He sat on the mat before Mahmud in the verandah.

'Did he demand compensation? Never, never! We'll never pay them any compensation. We were not responsible for the fire that caused their two ships to be razed,' said Mahmud looking annoyed with what Alfonso had told him.

'True, your majesty, we shouldn't show to them that we're weak,' said Nadim who was with them.

The sultan turned to look at him. 'Are our men at the ready, Nadim?'

'Yes, your majesty.'

Mahmud's eldest son, Sultan Ahmad Shah chipped in and said: 'Yes, father, we must be weary of their tricks; they're so good with them. We just don't know what else do they have up their sleeves, those 'White Bengalis.' For all we know they are just faking up their feelings and emotions and pretending to be friendly with us. Why can't they just come here and trade like everybody else?'

'It's very difficult for me to say son. These people are from a very faraway land; they do not follow our religion; their cultural, social and moral values are

totally alien to us, so is their way of thinking. We just can't expect them to behave like normal people. They're brute, ill-mannered and they don't show any respect to us.'

'...So is everybody who has come here, father. They too have come from faraway lands, yet they all know how to behave themselves once they have here. Some of them were equally brute, rude and uncivilized. Yet despite that, we were able to tame them. All of them are now well mannered and knew how to behave themselves and live peacefully with everybody else.'

'They are not Malays like us, but something else.'

Ahmad kept quiet. 'What do you suggest we ought to do then?' Mahmud pondered. The others waited impatiently. 'Tell me, son. I see that you are showing good leadership here, and I am very proud of you. Decide for me then.'

'Thank you, father. I am still aware that I'm just the crown prince, and you are the sultan.'

'Never mind, I'm asking for your opinion now; tell me.'

'Very well, father, if we give them compensation, what more will they ask from us later? They are foreigners and visitors to Melaka; they cannot expect to be treated like one of us. Surely, they can't expect that we obey them. They are the ones who should obey us.'

Mahmud inspected the elephants and horses. Thousands of his soldiers stood in a formation and were ready to defend Melaka. Nadim went to him and said: 'We are ready.'

'Should the Portuguese attack us, I will lead our forces with Nadim, father,' added Ahmad.

'I will also go to war, my son,' said Mahmud. 'Our sultanate is threatened and everybody in Melaka must help to defend it.'

Mahmud rode a horse and inspected his men to boost their morale. All that the sultan wanted to do was to give a brief speech and as it would do the trick. In fact, his presence at the camp was enough to soothe their tired bodies. Some of them were jaded and lacked the spirit to fight and if they were not encouraged, they might feel exhausted and give up. He stood in front of them. Ahmad and Nadim were beside him.

'Listen here, all of my men, my warriors. We are under the threat from an evil empire from 'the land above the wind' - known as Portugal. Their evil Dom Manuel wants to engage us in a war. We must not allow them to do that! We must defend Melaka, to our last drop of blood! We must all defend Melaka and what it stands for! We are not only defending Melaka, but also our race, and more importantly, our religion, Islam!



'And do remember: If Melaka falls, all the years that we have spent to develop it will go to down to waste. Do we want this to happen?' said Mahmud.

'No, your majesty!' shouted his men.

'Do we want to see them trample us?'

'No, your majesty!'

'*Allabukhbbar! Allabukhbbar! Allabukhbbar!*

Ruy woke up. The noise of the people shouting outside was too loud for him; it was unbearable to him. He thought there were thousands of them outside, shouting above their voice. It was not Malay, as he knew it, but something that sounded gibberish to him. Could it be Chinese, Indian or Siamese? Or could it be Arabic? He stood up and immediately went to the windows and peeped outside. To his horror, he saw thousands of Malay men and women, and even children. They were assembled in the courtyard of the palace of the sultan of Melaka. They were all well armed. All of them were brandishing all sorts of weapons; they were mostly *kerises* but some had spears and other strange-looking weapons made of wood, or bamboo.

'*Allabukhbbar! Allabukhbbar!*

'*Allabukhbbar! Allabukhbbar!*

'They have assembled their men. If the war breaks out, we must flee immediately from this place, or our lives will be in grave danger,' announced Ruy. His voice was low because he did not want the Malay soldiers who were guarding outside to hear him. But all his friends heard him.

'Right, sir,' said De Souza.

Ruy returned to the window and stared outside. 'Look, they're everywhere. All the men are wearing their uniforms as though they are ready for battle. Look at the weapons they are carrying with them; these are not ceremonial weapons. Those *kerises* and arrows have been dipped in poison!' His friends went to the windows and they peeped outside.

'No, the *kerises* and arrows are not going to get anywhere near us, my friend,' said Diego Lopez.

Ruy turned around. 'What do we do now, sir?'

Diego Lopez looked at him. 'What do you think?'

'We will have to inform the admiral about whatever we have seen here so he will know what he could do on his own.'

'That's a very good idea, sir.'

Ruy went to the chair and sat. His friends crowded around him. 'Hmmm... I should say that our incarceration here in this house in Melaka has turned out to be a blessing in disguise.'

His friends did not know what he was talking about. What blessing in disguise, they were wondering secretly. All that they had experienced looked like they were cursed. Now their captain had the audacity to think of them as 'blessings!'

'What do you mean, sir?' asked Diego Lopez.

'By being here, we are able to take note of what is happening in Melaka. And in this way, we can pass on the information to our admiral and he can then assess the whole situation; for without this sort of information, we won't be able to act.'

His friends smiled now that they were fully aware of what their leader was talking about.

'Very true, sir; very true,' said Diego Lopez.

Sounds of horse hoofs hitting the pavement were heard. Ruy and his men quickly hushed down. They did not want to attract the attention of the Melaka soldiers who were passing outside the house where they were locked in.

'Shhh!' said Ruy. He put a finger on his lips and everybody stopped doing what they were doing and kept quiet.

## CHAPTER 15: THE PORTUGUESE ATTACK

The port of Melaka in the month of July in 1511 CE or the month of *Rabiulakhir* of 917 *Hijriah* or 4209 of the Chinese calendar was not as busy as it was before. It was unusually quiet and deserted. The stillness was only broken by the sound of the birds chirping or the waves hitting on the banks of the river and beach. The people caught wind that the Portuguese were bent on attacking Melaka so many fled to the own states or went to other neighboring countries where they thought were safer. They wanted to lie low for a while until the war was over. Such things happened few times before in the past, and they were used to it. Some took the respite as a badly needed break from trading; it was a good excuse to return to their families and children whom they had not seen for months, if not years. The foreign traders and merchants, too, decided to make themselves scarce. They knew Melaka was going to be turned upside down. The presence of the Portuguese soldiers was bad omen. From what they had seen over the last few weeks, especially with the arrest of

some of them by the Melaka forces, they knew the future of Melaka was in the balance.

Melaka was barely equipped to defend itself should the Portuguese launch an attack. They were now engaged in delaying tactics. The Portuguese sent word to their regional headquarters in Goa in India and to their ruler, Dom Manuel in Lisbon in Portugal, to find out what they wanted them to do in Melaka. It was also for them to get more supplies of weapons and men. Even despite their small fleet that was anchored off Melaka, in the straits, they still could cause havoc, just by being there because the foreign traders and merchants had already deserted Melaka. This had resulted in the trade that Melaka had been depending all these years, to cease to exist. Trading in the port of Melaka stopped altogether and Melaka's glamour and prestige in the eyes of the other states in the region suffered. Worse, its income too was greatly affected.

A Bugis trader walked along the banks of the Melaka River. He was holding few sacks that contained some produce. Looked like he was all ready to leave the port. 'I am leaving for home. I believe the presence of the Portuguese ships in the straits is a cause of concern for all of us. It is not just to the sultan and people of Melaka,' he said to his friend from Aceh in North Sumatra who surprisingly was not equally anxious as he was.

'Ab, you need not feel that way. The Portuguese ships are here to trade, just like all of us. They don't mean any harm,' said his friend.

'You cannot say that.'

'Why must they harm us? They know we're not from Melaka, but elsewhere.'

'You think they take that into consideration if there are in a war with Melaka?'

'A war? Stop joking here, my friend.'

The Bugis trader ignored his friend from Aceh.

'Why have I not seen them do that? They are just waiting for the right moment to attack Melaka. I must get out of here fast before it's too late.'

The Achehnese trader laughed; he thought his friend was joking. The Bugis trader climbed onboard his ship, raised his sails and drifted along with the winds. An Arab trader went to the Achehnese trader and asked: 'Where is he going?'

'He's leaving for home. He fears the Portuguese might attack Melaka.'

They laughed as the Bugis trader's boat sailed off heading towards the sea.

'My god, why did he think so? There's no need to feel jittery. The Portuguese are small in numbers and they are only in ten ships. How could they harm anybody in Melaka?'

They continued to laugh. The Arab trader then went off to do his job.

Alfonso pulled out his monocle and stared at the port. It was unusually quiet, he thought. 'The port is quiet. Many ships have left Melaka, only few ships are docked in the port.'

'Seven days have passed, admiral. What do we do now?' said Aires Miranda. 'Do we still have to wait?'

'We attack Melaka tomorrow at dawn, on the Twenty-fifth of July 1511 the year of our lord,' said Alfonso.

The Portuguese could not wait much longer. They had been holed in their ships and the soldiers especially were feeling jittery. Fortunately, the time they had spent in meditation and prayer helped to relieve them of their stress. One or two of them had started to feel nauseated and wanted to jump into the river, but was held back by their colleagues. Alfonso was aware of this. He called Ruy de Brito Patadim and another captain, Ferdinand Magellan to his office and asked them to pacify them. Ruy then suggested: 'We must attack Melaka and occupy the bridge.'

'Why?' asked Alfonso.

'The occupation of the bridge might decide victory or at least deal a heavy blow at the enemy.'

'Really? Are you confident?'

'The bridge was obviously the key to the strategy, for its capture would cut the sultan's army in two, and so make their final defeat easier.' Ruy was confident because he had been to Melaka and saw with his own eyes how the city was divided into parts, the north and south of the Melaka River. Both needed each other's support, failing which they would become vulnerable and weak.

Alfonso pondered over the suggestion. He thought hard as the officers waited. They had been waiting impatiently since they arrived offshore in Melaka and could not wait any longer. The captains of the other ships joined them there. They included, Duarte de Silva, Fernao Gomes de Lemos, Joao Serrao, Joao de Souza, Vasco Fernandes Continho, Nuno Vaz de Castelbianco, and a few others. Tome Pires took down notes so that he could present his report to King Manuel who had wanted to be informed in every possible detail of what transpired in Melaka.

'Let me show you, admiral,' said Ruy. He then took a pointer and went to the map of Melaka on the wall of the admiral's cabin. 'If we succeed in

capturing the bridge that spans the Melaka River, over here, admiral, we can divide our forces into two and attack them from two fronts.'

Alfonso nodded. The other captains agreed. 'I shall lead the first group then. And we will make a landing in Upeh Island and capture the northern end of the bridge, while the second group will land near the royal palace and the mosque, and capture its southern end.

Ruy and the other senior officers agreed.

'I have chosen the Twenty-fifth of July of the year of our lord for the attack because it the day of the feast of St. James, to whom I have a special devotion, unless any of you have other suggestions.' Alfonso turned around and looked at the faces of his men. They were stone-faced.

'What do you say, Ferdinand?'

'Very well, admiral.'

He then turned to de Patadim.

'Excellent, admiral, brilliant.'

'If that's the case, we will immediately prepare for our first assault on Melaka. Later tonight after dinner, we will all proceed to the chapel and seek Divine blessings, before we launch our attack. I'm sure we'll be rewarded by our lord, as we are doing this on his behalf actually, come to think of it.'

'Indeed, your excellency,' said Ruy.

The men agreed. Immediately, after the meeting, the officers returned to their respective ships. They informed their men to prepare for the war. They were then divided into groups to launch the attack on the date that was been chosen by their admiral. All of them agreed it was an auspicious time to do so. They waited for the day and moment to arrive with a lot of anticipation. In the next morning of the Twenty-fifth of July, or exactly two hours before dawn on that day, all the captains of the ships and men assembled onboard the large and spacious flagship, *Flor de la Mar*. There, their admiral gave them last minute advice. As dawn slowly broke, they stared at Melaka and saw how peaceful and serene it was. None of the Melaka soldiers knew what they were up to. They secretly hoped for the Portuguese ships to turn around and return to Lisbon by way of Goa on their own accord.

Alfonso stood on the deck with a rosary in his right hand. He gave the signal before daylight lit up the whole city. 'Now, go!' he ordered.

Small boats were lowered from all the ships with men that included Belugano, Lopo, Macedo, Julio, Lionel, Botelho, Dinis, Emirem, Feliciano, Gastao, Gerardo, Mateus and Valerio. They slowly rowed to the beaches stealthily to make sure they were not seen by anyone in Melaka. The city was

still very much asleep; the muezzin had not yet sounded out the *azan* calling the Faithful to pray.

Alfonso and his senior officials stood on the deck. They hoped that the Melaka soldiers were not stirred by what they were doing.

'So far so good,' commented Ruy.

Just then, a cannon shot was fired in the direction of the Portuguese soldiers who were in the boats. Alfonso and his officers were shocked. They did not know from where it had come from. 'Lord all-Mighty!' he shrieked. 'Where did that come from?'

The Portuguese soldiers continued to row toward the beach and they made a landing. There was no way for them to turn back. Few of them died in the attack, while some were injured. The others quickly landed on the beach and were all safe and unhurt. The battle ensued between men from the two countries. The Melaka soldiers managed to put up a brave resistance because they had the upperhand. The battle took few hours with both parties refusing to relent. Alfonso and his officers were worried for their men who were now stranded in Melaka. 'Will they be able to make it, captain?'

Ruy and the other officers kept quiet. They panicked and stood there like statues. Initially, the Melaka forces were getting the upper hand, but soon, it became clear that the Portuguese soldiers managed to retaliate and fight back. Later still, they managed to capture both sides of the bridge. More Portuguese men sailed by boat to the shore. They then hurled torches at the *attap* and wooden houses that stood along the beach in the north of the river. Many houses in the coconut grove were burnt down. The strong sea winds helped to spread the fire and there was no way that the people of Melaka whose houses were burnt to do anything. All the water that they could manage to get from the nearby river and sea was no help either. Their houses quickly razed to the ground. The Portuguese then started to burn all the houses in the south part of the river. Thick black smoke bellowed above Melaka. By now, it was already close to noon. The thick smoke, however, turned Melaka into night. In such a short period, all the houses on both sides of the river were completely razed; this included houses of the members of the royal family. The fire had even burnt down the chariot that was built for the wedding of Mahmud's daughter and the Sultan of Pahang. It had thirty wheels each about ten feet lined with silk and inlaid with gold. Fortunately, the mosque was spared.

'Fire, fire! Help, help! *Api, api! Tolong, tolong!*' shouted the Melaka men as they fled out of their houses.

'Oh, my god, what's happening outside?' shouted other men.

'My house is on fire! Help! God, please help me!' screamed a Malay woman as she rushed out of her burnt house. Her clothes caught fire and she just rolled on the damp ground. She was thus saved from a sure death. Other men and women of all races rushed out of their houses. They were all Malays. Some were from outside of Melaka who had settled there. They scooped water from the sea and dowsed it on their houses, but to no avail; the fire was too strong; it was aided by the strong sea breeze that blew. The Portuguese men then went to the port and burnt down the ships.

'Burn down only the Malay ships, and spare the Chinese junks and Indian ships! This is the admiral's orders!' shouted a Portuguese officer.

'Fire, fire! Help, help!' shouted the Malay sailors from the ships that were burnt. They rushed off their ships. Few jumped into the river. A Bugis trader rushed out of his ship. 'My God, my ship's on fire! Help, help!'

An Arab trader rushed out of his ship crying, 'Fire, fire! Help, help! *Ya, Allah!*'

They all rushed out of their ships and tried to kill the fire, but to no avail. The Portuguese men burned more ships until the situation at the port became chaotic. The owners of the ships became angry. They started to shout curses at the Portuguese, in all languages. It became coarser as the fire grew in intensity and the damage greater.

Mahmud was rudely awoken from his sleep. The noise of the people shouting outside of the palace was too loud; it sounded like they were in a desperate situation, like their lives were in danger. 'What's all the noise?' He woke up and went to the windows. He flung open them and looked outside. He saw many men and women running all over the place. Some fell to the ground. They were quickly picked up by their friends and other strangers. Children were crying. 'Help! Help! Fire! Fire!' they all shouted on top of the voice in all languages.

*'Tolong, tolong! Help, help!'*

The battle continued until two in the afternoon, with no stop. The Portuguese soldiers especially fought continuously since dawn and they did not even stop to eat or drink. They knew their lives were in grave danger should they pause even to relieve themselves. The captains who were with them refused to allow any soldier to return to the ships to collect the food, because they were under continuous fire from the Melaka forces. Although they were having the upper hand, yet their fortunes could change within seconds. Alfonso was worried for his men who were in Melaka. He had not heard from them. He feared they had suffered many casualties. He prayed and hoped it was not so. Shots from poisoned arrows had wounded some of the

Portuguese. On last count, seventy Portuguese soldiers and officers were wounded with one dead.

Soon it was night. Yet, the Portuguese were finding it impossible to complete the blockade on the bridge. Alfonso gave the order to withdraw, so that they could rest. There was no way that they could hold onto their positions anymore as they had gone without food or drinks for one whole day. Some of them fainted due to exhaustion.

As the Portuguese soldiers retreated to their ships, they were subjected to a volley of bullets and poisoned arrows from the Melaka forces. They then took up various positions and returned fire. This caused some casualties on the Melaka side, while some of the Portuguese soldiers were injured.

Alfonso sat with his officers in his cabin to chart out their next move. They now realized that the Melaka forces were not weak as they had thought. They had achieved limited success in their first attack on Melaka, but they had learnt a lot about their enemies. 'We had the bridge in our hands, gentlemen,' he said. 'But, we won't be able to hold onto it. We have burnt down all the houses on both sides of the river, including those that belonged to the royal family. And the Melaka forces were quick to change their strategy and outwit us. We need to change our ways. Nevertheless, it was still a big victory for us. I'm sure if we continue to attack them, they will have to surrender.'

'What's happening? What's going on out there in the port?' asked Mahmud to his men in the palace.

'Some houses on the beach have caught fire, your majesty,' said a Malay man.

'What?'

Teja was rudely awakened from sleep by all the noise. 'What's all the noise, dear?'

'Some houses are on fire. Stay where you are, let me find out. Stay here.'

She could not move much; she had been weak lately. She stared at her husband rushing out of the room tying his *sarong* tightly around his waist with both hands. He continued to rush down the corridor. 'What's all the noise?'

'The houses along the beach have caught fire, and some ships in the port have been burnt down to ashes,' said the guard.

'Who did it? Was it an accident?'

'Nobody knows, your majesty.'

The sultan went to the verandah. He saw many Melaka men rushing out to try to help fight the fire at the port and on the beach. 'What's happening in here?'



'Some houses across the river have caught fire,' said another Malay man as he rushed to offer help.

'My goodness.' Mahmud then rushed down the stairs with his guards trailing closely behind him. He tied his *sarong* again; this time more tightly with both hands, slipped on his leather sandals and rushed to the port.

'Your *keris*, your majesty,' said the guard.

'No, I don't need it. Some houses have been burnt. We aren't at war with anyone.'

'Very well, your majesty.'

'Get me the prime minister.'

'Very well.' The guard rushed out of the palace, jumped onto a horse, and sped in the direction of the Prime Minister's Village. He was dutifully informed. Prime Minister Paduka Tuan rushed to the river-mouth on a palanquin and met the sultan there. Many houses were razed to the ground. More Melaka men and women frantically tried to kill the fire. But, the fire was too big for them to handle; there was no way that they could save their houses or ships.

After inflicting severe damage on Melaka, the Portuguese men returned to their ships. They felt elated with all the damage that they had inflicted on the innocent people of Melaka. They turned to look at the beach and saw the houses are still burning. They laughed. They especially liked to see how the Malays panicked and ran about as though it was the end of the world. Alfonso and his senior officers, too, watched from the railings of the *Flor de la Mar* as the houses and ships were burnt. They could hear the cries and shouting from the ships at the port in the river-mouth. 'Good work, good work. Long live King Manuel and Portugal!' he shouted on top of his voice.

'Long live King Manuel and Portugal!' shouted all the Portuguese men on board.

'For Portugal!'

'For Portugal!'

The admiral then went to his cabin followed by the senior officers. He studied the map of Melaka that his men had just sketched for him. It was laid on his desk. 'These are the houses that have been burnt, and here is the sultan's palace. And this where his elephants, horses and men are stationed,' he said as he pointed to the place he mentioned.

'When do we go ashore, admiral?' asked Aires Miranda.

'We'll wait for the sultan's next action. Now that he knows we are serious, he will have to do some serious thinking. What must he be thinking of? I hope he doesn't think it was an accident that the houses were burnt down.'

'May be, admiral.'

They laughed.

A Chinese merchant Mr. Taiko, or Big Brother, entered Alfonso's cabin in the *Flor de la Mar*. He had sneaked into the ship when the people of Melaka were busy fighting the fire that burnt their houses. He smiled widely. He was the Chinese *Kapitan* (Captain) in Melaka, a representative for the small Chinese community that the sultan had appointment to represent their interests.

'Ah, Taiko; thanks for all your valuable information, sir,' said Alfonso. 'Does anybody in Melaka know you're here?'

'I don't think so, admiral. How could they? I move like the fox, stealthily. I can be at two different places at any one time.'

They laughed. The admiral like the way Taiko joked; it helped to distract him from his problems. 'Right, good.' The admiral went to him and hugged Taiko tightly.

'What I am doing is insignificant, admiral,' said Taiko.

'No, don't underestimate yourself, Mr. Taiko, you are a great help. The information you have been giving all along was been useful for us. Without it, we will never know where to start. Let's toast. And thanks for smuggling Ruy de Araujo's letter to us, too.'

'Well, I'm just doing a small favor to you, admiral.'

'Someday, we'll reward you for your assistance.'

'Thank you, admiral. We prefer to do business with the Portuguese than them anytime.'

'We have more in common with each other, Mr. Taiko, being foreigners in Melaka, for one.'

Alfonso took a few clean glasses and poured wine in them. He gave them to the senior officers who were also there with Taiko. They raised their glasses. 'To King Manuel and Portugal! And to victory over Melaka!' said the admiral.

'To King Manuel and Portugal! And to victory over Melaka!' said all the men.

'To King Manuel and Portugal! Victory over Melaka!' said Taiko.

Mahmud toured the village on his horse. He looked disappointed when he saw many charred remains of the houses. The Melaka men and women were crying.

'Where are we to go, your majesty? Our houses have been burnt down. Fortunately, nobody in my family perished in the fire,' said Mrs. Endah.

'I shall see it that new houses be raised again, and on the same spot. I ask you not to worry for this is Allah's will. It's fated,' said Mahmud.

'Yes.'

The sultan turned to the *temenggong*. The prime minister waited for his commands. 'Please ensure that these men and women are looked after, *temenggong*.'

'Yes.'

'How did it happen? Was it an accident or was it arson?' asked the sultan.

'I saw some Portuguese men arriving in three boats from the ships that way. They just hurled their torches on the *attap* roofs. There was nothing that we could do as the fire spread so quickly,' said Mr. Awang.

The sultan turned and stared at the Portuguese ships in the straits. More Malay men and women gathered around him.

'My house too has been burnt down, your majesty. What shall I do?' asked a Malay man.

'Your house will also be rebuilt. Don't you worry, I will rebuild all the houses that had been burnt.'

'Thank you. May Allah bless you.'

Mahmud and his men went to the wooden bridge and stood there. He looked at the damage on the port and shook his head. He looked angry. 'I am horrified. Why didn't our men do something to frustrate the Portuguese and expel them from the straits of Melaka?'

'They came in the night, your majesty. We were given no advance warning. The Portuguese should have at least warned us, so that we were prepared. What they did was totally uncivilized,' said Nadim. 'But we did offer resistance, otherwise, it would be much more worse than this.'

'From now on, I want you to ensure that all our men are prepared. Station them at all strategic locations so that we know what to do if the enemies decide to attack us again. Enlist all able-bodied men and women, of all races.'

'Yes, your majesty.'

The Chinese merchant, Taiko passed the bridge on a rickshaw few days later. Mahmud was still there to oversee the evacuation of those whose houses had been burnt down. 'Good day, your majesty,' said Taiko as his rickshaw passed by the sultan, sounding cordial and smiling widely.

'Good day, Taiko. Please take good care of yourself. The Portuguese are attacking us. Do be careful,' advised the sultan.

'Yes, your majesty. The Portuguese are evil people. Look at what they've done to our people?'

'Precisely.'

'Good day, your majesty.'

'Good day, Taiko.'

Taiko moved on. His other Chinese friend, Ah Lek, also a *towkay* and as young as he was, trailed beside him in his rickshaw. A Chinese coolie pulled each of the rickshaws. Their pigtails or *tokchang* fell down to his waist from a round patch of hair on top of his head. They only wore pair of black pants that ran just below his knees. They were bare-cheated and looked like an exact copy of the other. In fact, all of these coolies looked similar. The *towkays* were smoking opium called *madat* from a long bamboo utensil. They laughed. Black opium smoke emitted out of their mouths and nostrils as they laughed; it trailed their rickshaws before it disappeared in the air. Some of the passersby who were Chinese coolies took in a whiff of the smoke; they turned around and nodded, while the Malays started to feel groggy.

'*Mak-datuk, apakah benda dia hisap tu?*' asked Hassan. (What the hell is he smoking?)

'*Entah, baunya busuk, macam tong sampah, bangkai!*' remarked his friend, Ismail. (It smells like the garbage bin, a carcass!) They closed their noses and walked away. Hassan spat on the ground.

Both Taiko and Ah Lek were childhood friends from South China. They were already doing trading there, but they mostly concentrated on local trade within their province. When they grew older and more confident, also when their business started to grow and both of them became wealthier, they decided to trade outside of China. The only place where they could think of was Melaka that was the focus of everybody's attention then. This was how they became two of the wealthiest Chinese *towkays* in Melaka. Between them, they owned few hundred Chinese coolies and other prostitutes who served the clients in the Chinese quarters. They owned half of the gambling and prostitution dens, too. Their only competitor was Towkay Leong. However, he was a newcomer to the scene and had only managed to create a small dent in the vice trade there. Their relationship was not cordial, with each trying not to get in each other's way. Taiko and Ah Lek were reluctant to come to friendly terms with Lam because he was of a different racial group as they were. They were from the Fukien Province, whereas Lam was from another province. And they spoke in different Chinese dialects. Therefore, when they had to communicate with each other over some personal issues, they spoke in pidgin Malay.

Mahmud went to the port with a small retinue of senior and junior officers and soldiers; one was a tough Malay man named Captain Sang Sura. He shook his head violently at the sight of all the damage that the Portuguese had inflicted on the ships that had been moored or docked at the port and the straits. 'Most of the ships have been burnt. But, why have the Chinese junks

and Indian ships been spared?' asked the sultan in bewilderment. He began to suspect something amiss. Were they the Portuguese lackeys?

Ahmad looked at Nadim. The officers did not have the answer. They were also surprised.

'It looks like the Portuguese are serious. However, why must they hurt the people, merchants and traders? How mean can they be? Do they have a secret pack with the Chinese merchants and traders, your majesty?' said Nadim.

'Ah, do not be crazy, Nadim,' said the sultan.

Taiko continued on his journey. His friend, Ah Lek rode his rickshaw beside his. 'How innocent the sultan and the Malays can be? We cheat them right before their eyes, and they do not even know it,' said Taiko.

They laughed.

'Why are the Portuguese keeping quiet? Have you sent them more information, Taiko?' asked his friend, Ah Lek.

'Yes, I have. I know the Portuguese admiral is cunning. He only acts when the time comes. He does not attack for the sake of attacking.'

'We will be much better off if Melaka falls to the Portuguese than under the sultan. We can do more business with them than the Malays.'

'Indeed, we can then bring in more people from China to trade and live here if the Portuguese are our rulers.'

They laughed. They continued to smoke opium as their coolies pulled their rickshaws ahead.

Jorge looked into his monocle and saw Mahmud at the port with his men around him. 'Get the admiral, quick!' he ordered.

A Portuguese sailor rushed to the admiral's cabin. Alfonso immediately alighted from it, went to the deck, and met his nephew there.

'Here, uncle. The sultan is touring the port,' said Jorge.

Alfonso peeped through the monocle. 'Is that him?'

'Yes, uncle.'

'We'll meet again, sultan.'

They laughed. Mahmud looked at the admiral's direction. He quickly put down the monocle.

'Why, uncle?' Alfonso asked the admiral.

'He has eyes of a hawk. I can see that he has hatred in his heart. But, what can a small goat do?'

They laughed.

Mahmud sat on his throne. Fortunately, his palace stood on the other side of the Melaka Hill away from the war-theater. Nadim and the *temenggong* stood by.

The day was so hot and humid; they were all sweating. Even the palace assistants who waved the fan on Mahmud's left and right could not bring down the temperature. So, they had to fling open all the windows to allow the soft sea breeze in.

'What shall we do next, dear father?' asked Ahmad.

Mahmud kept quiet. He was still thinking; he had not decided what to do next. This was the first time he was ever challenged like this and he simply did not know what to do. However, he showed an unexpected obstinacy. Some businessmen, especially the Indian and Chinese merchants who had remained in Melaka were trapped. They pleaded with him to relent and seek peace with the Portuguese but he could not agree with them; as it meant having to surrender the sovereignty of Melaka to them. His sons, Ahmad, Kassim, Alauddin and Raden Ali stood by to await his command.

'I refuse to allow Melaka to be a vassal state of the Portuguese king, whatever his name is,' said Mahmud defiantly. 'We will show dignity and fight them as much as we can.'

'What about the pleas by the merchants, father?' asked Ahmad.

Mahmud kept quiet. The prime minister, *temenggong* and his senior officials waited patiently.

'These merchants are only interested in their business and profits that they make. Whereas, we have to bear in mind our sultanate, religion and above all, our dignity. They have pleaded with me to press for peace. Who does not want peace? We did not create all this mess. Them! They have come all the way from the 'land above the wind' not to make friends with us as the others did in the past, but to sow hatred and to destroy us!' Mahmud was furious. His two sons and the other senior officials were taken aback. Nadim, too, was surprised with the sultan's action; this was the first time he had seen it, because under normal circumstances the sultan was a collected person. But, he quickly realized that this was not a normal situation.

Unbeknownst to the sultan, a well-known Indian-Muslim, Utimutiraja met secretly with the Portuguese. He and the other Indian and Chinese traders and merchants were afraid if the Portuguese won they would be expelled from the city. He was already eighty years old yet he was still intent on pursuing a dangerous course of action whose prospect was uncertain. He did not make it known to anyone how he held a desire to take over Melaka so that he could be installed the next sultan by the Portuguese, however preposterous he idea might be. The Portuguese thought him as a stooge who thought that his services were important to them. So Utimutiraja sent an assistant to Alfonso to deliver a present of sandalwood to him. He did this while he was also sending

his people to help the defenders build new palisades and barricades. He did this so that if either of the parties won the war, his position was still secure, either way. He considered it a wise move to be on friendly terms with both sides. Even the other Chinese merchants, too, did similar action that seemed to please the Portuguese, because they were not aware of what the businessmen were doing behind their backs. But what Utimutiraja failed to realize was he could be trampled on by both sides and suffer either way, too, since he could be branded a traitor by either of the two sides he was dealing with.

'I'm forced to release the remaining Portuguese captives and agree to pay an indemnity for the property seized from Captain de Sequeira's fleet. The crew from the Chinese junk is helping the Portuguese by giving information regarding Melaka,' said Mahmud to his men. 'But, we doubt that the Portuguese could defeat Melaka that is fully equipped, unless they starve the population by stopping food supplies from Java. Therefore, I want you, Nadim to release the remaining Portuguese men.'

His sons and men were taken aback.

'Yes, your majesty,' said Nadim.

Mahmud walked with the *temenggong*. 'I'm very disappointed with the Chinese. We gave them a place to stay, still they decided to work against us. How could we trust them now? I want you to spy on their leaders, their captains especially.'

'Yes, your majesty,' said the *temenggong*.

The Malays in Melaka, however, insisted that Mahmud continued to push on with the fortifications of the bridge and the whole of the city, in expectation of a new attack.

'The Portuguese will not want to be seen as the loser,' said Nadim.

'Very well, we will fortify Melaka,' said Mahmud. 'And I want you to direct the men to do it.'

'Very well, your majesty.'

Nadim immediately set out to work. He directed the Melaka soldiers to mount at least one hundred bombards on the bridge to add to the palisades that were already constructed there. On both sides of the bridge, more guns were mounted. This was to ensure that if the Portuguese entered the area, they would be fired at upon sight. The Melaka forces knew that the Portuguese had hid themselves on Upeh Island and they would be coming from here if they wanted to launch their second attack on the bridge as well as the mosque.

'We must launch an all out attack. Only a convincing victory will ensure us full control of the city,' said Alfonso when he met with his senior officers in

the *Flor de la Mar*. 'But, these are some of problems and hardship that we have to face. The Malays are not as dumb as we had expected; they are smart. They know the place whereas we are strangers in town. So, we have to be diligent at all times. Nobody knows what they had laid in the river, on the beach and in the buildings and the other houses.'

His captains and senior officers were all feeling frustrated as they had been holed in the ships for too long now. They also had word that the soldiers who were ensconced on Upeh Island were also feeling restless. They hoped that the admiral could make up his mind soon, so that they could take swift follow-up action. Some of them had also suggested that they returned to Goa and give up their plans to invade Melaka and take control of it. They feared Alfonso just did not want to attack Melaka and drive out the sultan and his followers, but planned to remain in Melaka for a long time. He had told his officers he wanted to build a fort around the Melaka Hill once they got full control of the city. They feared if the Portuguese won the war, most likely, they would have to remain there forever. This prospect did not appeal to some of them because they had wives and families in Lisbon and Portugal that they wanted to see.

'The conquest of Melaka was absolutely necessary, since this alone could give them a complete monopoly of the pepper trade,' explained Alfonso. 'We stand to lose a lot of income from the traders since they are able to dodge our fleet we have stationed in the Indian Ocean. In this way the Arab traders are able to smuggle vast quantities of pepper and spices to Kaherah and Iskandariah in Mesir and Venice in Italy direct from Melaka via Bab-el-Mandeb.' He went on to point out that, the capture of Melaka by the Portuguese would be a great blow to their enemies, the Muslims or the Moors as they called it. 'This is the main reason why we insist on capturing Melaka,' he added. 'It will be such a pity if we cannot do it now that we are right here. In fact, we have even managed to capture their bridge and some parts of the city on our first attack on them.'

His men looked at each other. Now, they were able to picture what sort of a plan that the admiral had for wanting to capture Melaka. It was also not just for the sake of collecting taxes and controlling the spice trade, but more than that.

'The two Islamic centers in the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula - Kaherah and Mekkah will be entirely ruined. No spice will be delivered to Venice except from us.'

Diego Mendes nodded. Alfonso turned around and looked at the face of each officer who was in his room.



'I am confident when the locals, especially the Malays who are predominantly Muslims begin to live under our control, they will like our brand of justice and business-like dealing. All traders and merchants from the region and elsewhere will also continue to reside in Melaka where they can make their walls of gold.' He smiled.

After the explanation, all the captains began to see his strategy in better light. Therefore, they decided to launch a second attack on Melaka. This time they hoped to be more successful. They then set out to chart their strategy. Ruy then pointed at the map of Melaka and said. 'The damage that has been inflicted on Melaka has been severe, admiral. The Malays are demoralized, and the sultan is suspicious of the Chinese and Indians, who are siding with us. Their soldiers are monitoring their movements. Most likely they've been arrested or placed in house detention.'

Nadim directed his men to place cannons at all strategic locations along the beach. 'I want all of you to remain beside the cannons. Hear?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Remember you are to fire at any Portuguese boat or ship that tries to land on our shores. This is my order. Do not wait for any orders, just fire if you catch sight of them approaching our beach.'

'Yes, sir.'

Nadim then rode his horse and visited the other men. He and his senior officers then inspected those who were stationed on the beach and on the hills at night.

Alfonso conferred with his men in his cabin. He looked at his nephew and asked: 'What are you thinking, Jorge?'

'Why are we still waiting, admiral? I thought you had decided to attack them again. It has been ten days since we burnt the houses and ships,' replied de Albuquerque.

'We let the Melaka forces feel complacent. According to the information provided by Taiko's men, the sultan has placed his soldiers along the beach and on the hills. All their canons are trained at the sea, toward us,' said Alfonso.

'What do we do then, admiral?'

'We will wait until the morale of their soldiers weakens further. There's no need to rush. We have ample food in our ships. I want to send a representative to meet the sultan.'

The Portuguese immediately launched another attack. This time, Alfonso had a different idea. Their first strategy to seize the bridge ended up in failure.

Although they managed to capture it for a while and burn all the houses on both sides of the river, yet they were forced to withdraw when the Melaka forces started to gain ground. He wanted his men to do something else. His new strategy was to use a very tall ship as a kind of fortified siege ladder. He wanted his men to sail it to the river-mouth towards the bridge. Once there the ship was to ram the bridge. He feared that the Melaka forces would start to fire at them from their strategic positions on both sides of the river and this could cause damage to them or their boats. They then decided to land in northern Melaka this time as they thought it was the least guarded place in Melaka.

The Melaka forces were taken unawares until the Portuguese boats had reached the beach. A Melaka soldier noticed them as they crept in the darkness. The sun had hardly appeared in the horizons when the Portuguese tried to land on the shores.

'The Portuguese. The Portuguese! Fire, fire! Captain, they're landing!' shouted the soldier. He sounded frightened but eager to defend Melaka just the same. If he had to die in this battle, so be it, he thought. He had said his private prayers quietly; that even should he die he hoped that Melaka would not fall in the hands of the enemies.

Other Melaka soldiers and men woke up. They then started to fire cannons but the Portuguese managed to overcome them and landed ashore. Both sides continued to fire cannons and guns at each other as more Portuguese soldiers tried to land. More Portuguese boats carrying the soldiers approached the beach and made a landing there. A Melaka soldier noticed them. 'The Portuguese, the Portuguese!' shouted the soldier.

'Where, where?' asked a Melaka officer.

'Over there.'

The officer turned and saw the boats. 'Fire at them! Fire!'

The Melaka soldiers started to fire at the boats.

While everybody was busy at the beach, the Portuguese managed to land at the river-mouth.

'Seize the bridge!' said Aires Pereira.

Unfortunately, the Portuguese found that their plan did not work as expected. This was because their ship was stuck in the river, as the water was too shallow. So, the second attack had to be postponed so they could re-float the ship and sailed it further down the river to where the bridge was. Aires Miranda returned to the *Flor de la Mar* where conferred with Alfonso and the other senior officers.

'What went wrong, captain?' asked Alfonso.

'The ship got stuck in the river as the water-level is too low.'

Alfonso cursed himself. 'What do we do next?'

The captains and senior officers kept quiet.

'We must wait till the tide rises,' was all that Aires could say.

Mahmud and his men surveyed the river-mouth and saw the tall ship that had been stuck in the mud further down the river. 'It's amazing,' he said. 'What did they think they were doing? Didn't they know that the ship is too tall and big for the river? What sort of strategy is this?'

The others kept quiet.

'But, father,' interrupted Ahmad. Mahmud turned and looked at his son, Ahmad. 'Yes, my son.'

'It seems like the Portuguese want to ram the bridge by using the ship. They failed to do so the first time. Their idea is to cut off the city into two, so they can launch their attack on us.'

'It's true, my son.'

'What do we do next?' asked Nadim.

'We destroy the ship!'

The Melaka soldiers started to send boats and to try to burn down the ship. '*Allahuakbar! Allahuakbar!*' they shouted.

The Portuguese saw what they were doing, and Alfonso immediately sent his men go defend the boat and drive the Malays away from the river-mouth again. They managed to re-float the ship and started to pound the city during the night of 9 August 1511 CE or fifth of *Jamadalawal* of 917 AH or 4209 of the Chinese calendar.

On the next day, the real assault began. Alfonso, who had earlier posted gun-boats on both sides of the attacking boats, made his way to the north part of the city where. The Malays continued to pound on them by firing all sorts of guns, pistols and other weapons, but this failed to stop their enemies from advancing. After a brief but fierce struggle, they succeeded in making a landing on both sides of the Melaka River. They were encouraged by the turn of events. While the Melaka forces was forced to retreat slightly as their position on the banks of the river had become untenable; their lives were in grave danger now that their enemies were already on the banks.

Meanwhile Antonio d'Abreu had managed to steer the ship to the bridge. His men contained the fire as the ship made its way to the bridge. They hid themselves behind palisades that they had constructed between the bridge and the mosque. But the fierce and continuous fire from the Portuguese soon forced them to retreat to the mosque on the banks of the river in the south.

Alfonso who was already on the banks saw the Malays retreating to the mosque. 'Burn down the mosque!' he ordered.

His soldiers turned and started to fire in the direction of the mosque where hundreds of the Melaka soldiers were hiding inside. They threw torches on the *attap* roof and it caught fire. Soon the mosque was razed to the ground and nothing was left out of it. Unfortunately, Aires Miranda was killed when a straw arrow hit him in his chest coming from the woods nearby. He fell to the ground and died. His men saw him, pulled him away, and took him back to the ship, where the chaplain gave him a sea burial.

In no time, the whole of Melaka was engulfed in a thick pile of smoke that hovered continuously in the skies. This turned the day to night. The noise from the fighting was loud, with the sounds of swords and *kerises* clanging loudly creating sparks, and of people shouting in pain. Few Portuguese soldiers jumped into the river to douse the fire that had caught their clothes. Few of them managed to surface. The others drowned and died, or were clobbered by the Malays who were guarding the ships.

'Retreat! Retreat back to the mosque!' shouted the Melaka officer.

The Melaka forces and officers retreated. The Portuguese marched on.

After a fierce battle near the Mosque, the Melaka men were forced to retreat further inland, before the area around mosque was captured.

'Retreat! Retreat further!' shouted the Melaka officer. '*Undur, undur!*'

A hand-to-hand fight followed that resulted in more deaths on the Melaka forces. The others retreated towards the woods leaving the city at the mercy of the Portuguese. They then went to the shop houses, broke down the doors and killed more Melaka men and women. They ransacked the premises and burnt some of them. The Melaka men and women fled for their lives. They immediately evacuated the city and rushed southwards by running around the Melaka Hill. The Portuguese soldiers pursued them. Captain de Lima led the Portuguese forces. They were not aware that the Melaka forces were hiding behind the trees. Suddenly de Lima's troops found themselves staring in the face with the Malay soldiers. They had managed to get fresh reinforcements this time under the command of Sultan Mahmud Shah and his son, Ahmad who had rushed from the palace. In the group were twenty fighting elephants. They immediately charged at the Portuguese. Mahmud and his son, Ahmad rushed on their elephants to the beach. Many Portuguese were killed as they landed there.

'The Portuguese had taken over the bridge. Many of their soldiers were Indians from Goa who were had come with Alfonso,' remarked Ahmad to Nadim.

More Portuguese soldiers landed ashore. They took position at strategic locations. The Malays fired their cannons but many went wide and fell in the sea in loud thuds. Nadim turned and saw them and shouted, 'They're taking over the bridge! Fire at them! Fire at them!'

His soldiers turned their cannons at the other direction and started to fire.

The Portuguese tried to defend the bridge, but many of them were killed in the process. The Melaka forces marched forward, together with Mahmud and Ahmad who were on their elephants. Nadim rode his horse and killed some Portuguese soldiers with his long sword. The others soldiers fled. Others carried their wounded friends to safety. The Portuguese fought on gallantly. De Lima managed to pierce the leading elephant in the eye with his spear. This caused it to become groggy. The maddened elephant turned in the narrow road and fled from the scene.

The Melaka soldiers split into small groups; they continued to chase the other animals; many too fled for their lives. Some horses rushed so fast that those Malay soldiers who were mounting on them fell to the ground. Mahmud and Ahmad were worried for their safety. The Portuguese's hold on the bridge was now firm. Although they faced fierce attack from the Melaka forces, yet they were able to hold on to it from falling back to the Malays.

Darkness soon fell. It enveloped the whole city in gloom. Strong odor of smoke and spent cannon and gunshots could be smelled. Both parties took up their position on either side of the bridge. It was now heavily defended by hundreds of Portuguese soldiers, while the Melaka forces hid in the jungles. The Portuguese set strong barricades at both ends; these were made out of barrels of sand and wood that they had brought with them in the two of their ships. Apart from that, they also placed a wide sail that they tied firmly down at each end in order to cut off the intense heat from the sun during daytime. However, the Portuguese did not spare any effort and continued to fire their guns at the city and kept the roads clear to ensure that the Melaka soldiers did not congregate there. Alfonso tried to keep the morale of his men high. Some twenty-eight of them were killed and many injured in their second encounter with the Melaka forces. He spent the night visiting and encouraging those who were wounded. 'Twenty-eight of our able men were killed,' he said. 'This is sad. But they died as heroes.'

There was a respite. Both sides took the opportunity to rest and tend to their colleagues who were injured. The dead was given a decent burial by both sides. Alfonso waited and thought seriously. His officers waited for his next instruction. He felt it was time for him to take the opportunity to negotiate

with Mahmud. He hoped that the sultan had become wiser now that the city had fallen to the Portuguese.

The *azan* was heard coming from on top of the nearby Melaka Hill. Mahmud led his men and officers for the *ishak* or late night prayers and took a respite from the battle. The Portuguese did not know what it was and where the voice was coming from. They did not know where it was coming. Then someone in the Portuguese camp said it was the sound of the *azan*, the Muslim calling the Faithful to pray. After the prayers were over, Mahmud, Ahmad, Alauddin, Kassim, Raden Ali and Nadim visited the war zone. Many Portuguese soldiers lay dead everywhere. The Melaka soldiers carried the dead bodies and dumped them in a hole their men dug in the woods. They saw many houses and buildings in the city were burnt.

'Well done, my men, well done. All of you have done a good job. Now, the Portuguese know who we are. Should they dare to attack us again, we will make sure their ships will be destroyed and sink into the sea,' said Mahmud to his men. He considered that the position of the Portuguese was still shaky and that they could be trounced if they continued to be mischievous.

'Indeed. I hope they will not try to attack us again. They have suffered many casualties. How many more can they sacrifice?' said Nadim.

'I see many of them are Indians, too.'

'Yes. These are the soldiers that were brought from Goa in India.'

'Goa? What are they doing there?'

'They have captured Goa many years earlier.'

'And now they want to capture Melaka?'

'Precisely.'

'I pity the Indian soldiers; they are fighting a war that they don't have a part in. What do they stand to gain from all this?'

The injured Portuguese and Indian soldiers were given treatment in the ward in the camp that they had set up north of the river. Alfonso went there to see his nephew Jorge to find out about how their injured comrades were going. He was informed that they were being tended to.

'How are you, my dear captain?'

'Fine, uncle. It's almost two weeks now since our last attack. I'm sorry, admiral for failing you,' said Jorge.

'Don't worry, captain, this is just a war. The battle is not been lost. I'm sending Captain Antonio d'Abreu to lead our men to attack Melaka this time. You are to take a rest.'

'What will be our chances of capturing Melaka now, admiral? I'm worried. I didn't expect them to be so forceful. Mahmud Shah is adept with his *keris*. He

seemed to be holding a hundred of them. Many of our men died in his hand, admiral.'

'Really?'

'Yes, admiral.'

'We know where our weaknesses and their strength are. Now I have a better strategy to capture Melaka, captain.'

'Long live King Manuel and Portugal!'

'Yes, Long live King Manuel and Portugal! For Portugal!'

'For Portugal!' shouted the men in the ward. Although injured they were still passionate with their cause.

Alfonso sat with his officers and men around a campfire at night for a breather. 'I want to send a request to Mahmud to allow us to erect a stone fortress in Melaka to indicate our victory over Melaka. Can you send the message to him, captain?' he said. 'I want to get permission from the sultan to allow us to erect a fortress around the city and I want him to offer a booty to our forces for our victory over them.'

'Yes, admiral,' said Diego Lopez. 'If the sultan is interested in peace, he won't have any reason not to accept your excellency's kind offer.'

'I shall write a letter. Please deliver it to him. However, I don't expect him to acquiesce to our demands for the sultan is an old and stubborn man. He's a wounded tiger licking his wounds.'

Diego Lopez went to the Melaka camp on the other side of the Melaka Hill with some men, but they were stopped when they got there by some soldiers. 'What business do you have here, captain? Please remember we're still at war and your personal safety isn't guaranteed,' asked a Malay guard.

'I'm fully aware of that, my friend. But, there's a lull now. My admiral has asked that I send this letter to Sultan Mahmud Shah for his personal attention.'

'What does the letter say, captain?'

'I'm not able to say it, my friend. It's for the sultan and not anyone. You surely know that.'

'Very well then, please follow me. This way; I'll take you first to Captain Sang Sura and he will take you to his majesty.'

Diego Lopez and his men followed the Melaka soldier.

Mahmud sat with Nadim and Ahmad in their camp. The other Melaka soldiers sat in small groups everywhere around the palace. *Paduka tuan* felt sorry for himself. He had become the eighth prime minister of Melaka for just a few months and now he was on the run with the sultan and his followers. They were chased out of Melaka. He cursed his bad luck for possibly being the last prime minister of Melaka. He knew that there was no way that the Melaka

forces could outwit the Portuguese. He knew that the Javanese, Chinese and Indians who were in Melaka were siding with the Portuguese. Even the Sea-People or *Orang Laut* had deserted the sultan in his time of need. On top of that, he knew all along that his predecessor, Mutahir was a corrupt prime minister. He had one thousand *baharas* or gold all stacked up; all these he had managed to acquire from illegal business dealings with the Chinese, Indian and Javanese traders and merchants. Unfortunately, Mutahir was beheaded in public and Mahmud seized all the wealth that he had accumulated. Not all his children knew how much their father was worth, as most of his illegal loot was secretly hidden in the woods. Some said that Mutahir hid his treasures somewhere in the south, at the foothills of Mount Lédang. He brought them in a convoy of scores of horse-carriages and his men dug holes deep in the ground where he hid them. None of the men knew of its whereabouts as Mutahir made them walk around and around until they got to as far as the district Asahan before they made their way back to Melaka.

'Pardon me, your majesty. I present Captain de Sequeira from the Portuguese camp. He has asked to be brought to your majesty,' said Sang Sura.

'Now just what does he want? Doesn't he know that we're still at war?' asked the sultan.

'He is, your majesty.'

'I've brought a letter from Admiral Alfonso d'Albuquerque, your majesty,' interrupted Diego Lopez. He handed the letter to the sultan. The sultan took the letter and read it.

'What does it say?' asked Nadim.

'The Portuguese admiral wants to erect a fort around in the city to indicate that they have captured Melaka,' said Mahmud. 'And your majesty is to offer a booty to our forces for our victory over Melaka.'

The sultan and all the Melaka officers and men laughed.

'How incredible for the good admiral to make such a request, when the war still hasn't been decided yet? This is just a lull; things can turn around in our favor. Besides, your stay here is but temporary. Surely, you don't expect us to flee without putting a fight.'

'May be, your majesty,' said Diego Lopez. He was blushing, but he tried not to be angry.

'True. Tomorrow we will be able to push all of them back into the sea,' said Nadim.

Diego Lopez ignored Nadim. 'Well, what's your response?'

'My response is...this.' Mahmud tore the letter. The Portuguese captain and his men remained quiet. They tried not to feel humiliated.



'Why don't you return to your camp, captain. We'll continue with our battle tomorrow,' advised the sultan. 'Do tell that to your admiral.'

'Very well, if this is what you say. And have a pleasant day, your majesty.'

'Same to you, captain. And do send my kind regards to your admiral. What's his name?'

'Admiral Alfonso d'Albuquerque.'

'Yes, whatever.'

Diego Lopez and his men turned around. He tried to keep his cool. He and his men returned to their camp near the bridge that their forces had captured from the Malays. The Melaka officers and men continued to laugh.

'How could the admiral even thought of such a preposterous idea?' said Ahmad.

'True, my son.'

Alfonso was angry. Diego Lopez and the other Portuguese soldiers and officers waited. 'We'll see, who will be driven into the sea, the Portuguese or the Malays.'

After a lull, the Portuguese forces decided to launch another massive attack after resting for more than ten days. On the Twenty-fourth of August 1511 CE or fourth of *Jamadilawal* 917 AH their troops started to march six abreast through the streets in the city. They swept aside all resistance from the Melaka forces that were stationed on both sides of the streets. The Portuguese butchered all those who had tried to oppose them. Alfonso then gave orders for the city to be sacked, but they were warned not rob the shops or harm the people. All the goods that were seized were to be distributed equally amongst the soldiers and officers. The sailors were the first to collect their share since their job was so vital to the war effort. Then other soldiers collected theirs that they had dutifully brought with them to the beach near the spot where their admiral stood. The whole operation took one day.

The Portuguese officers were amazed of the amount of treasures that were accumulated. They included bars of gold, jars of gold dust, jewels, priceless silks, rare perfumes and scented woods. However, they estimated that two-thirds of the great city's wealth remained in the hands of the palace officials and the sultan and his family. Some of the Portuguese officers were in favor of destroying Melaka before they returned to Goa after completing their mission here.

Unfortunately, before they could do so, many of the Portuguese soldiers were grabbing the goods and this received the personal ire of their admiral who felt disappointed at the greed that his men had shown. He quickly took

back the goods from everybody and shared them equally with his men. Having settled this, the admiral hoped his men were now more anxious to capture Melaka and drive the sultan out of the city. He began to see the strategic importance of Melaka to the kingdom of Portugal. He did not wish the city to be ruined completely as what he had wanted to do before. Instead, he was most anxious to re-establish its trade as soon as possible so that Melaka was able to attract foreign traders and merchants all of whom had fled the city in haste. Of the bounty that was seized from Melaka, Alfonso had chosen to keep for himself Noadabegea's bracelet and six large bronze lions that he'd wanted for his own tomb.

'Why don't we cause the total destruction of Melaka, so that it will be flattened? In this way, we can rebuild it,' proposed a Portuguese officer.

'No, I fully oppose the idea. We aim to remain here in Melaka. Our main mission is not just to teach the sultan a lesson. We must not return to India just yet,' said Alfonso.

The Portuguese officer and the other men froze.

'I propose we remain here and claim it for the Kingdom of Portugal,' said Alfonso.

When calm finally returned to Melaka, the Portuguese realized that they were having an upper hand and were on a winning streak. This gave them a boost. They were confident that Melaka had finally now fallen to them. Alfonso decided to take a well-earned rest and to check the state, especially in the area near the river-mouth. He took a ride on a horse and went to the Chinese captain's house. It was situated in the Chinese quarters. It was a huge bungalow that stood on the banks of the Melaka River and could be accessed by a road that led to the front of the house or from the river, by boat. He saw that many of the traders among them Ninachatu was among those whose house was adorned with flags. This was to help Portuguese soldiers to identify who had seek for protection during the attack of the city so that their properties and personal belongings were saved. They were mostly the foreign traders and merchants who were sympathetic to the Portuguese.

The admiral's horse stopped in front of the house. He tied it to a pole and went to the door. Taiko was already standing by the door. He welcomed him with open arms and smiling widely. 'Welcome, admiral,' greeted Taiko. He could guess why the admiral was there to visit him. From where he lived, he could see some smoke rising in the skies above Melaka, near the river-mouth. But that didn't bother him. He was still confident that calm had finally descended on the city, and the Portuguese were now the masters of the country, with Mahmud and his forces fleeing for their lives in the woods. This

was what Taiko was praying to happen. Before the admiral's visit, he knelt on his knees and prayed before the gods and deities on the altar in his house as few Portuguese soldiers stood guard in front of his house. If things did not go as he had hoped for, his boat was at the ready to take him to sea, where he could sail back to China. Fortunately, this precaution turned out to be unnecessary.

Taiko hugged the admiral. They went inside and sat. 'Congratulations on your success, admiral.'

'Melaka is now under our control, Taiko,' said Alfonso.

'Good, good. That is what I have been waiting to hear. Come, let's have some drink, you must be tired.'

He went to the bar and prepared some drinks. They raised their glasses and toasted to each other. 'To the king and Portugal!' said Taiko.

'To the king and Portugal!'

Taiko then moved to the rooftop of his three-storey house that stood by the banks of the Melaka River. Alfonso stood at the railings beside him. Both still had a full glass of beer in their hand.

'We are happy to have come to Melaka,' said Alfonso. 'We trounced the Muslims in Al-Andalusia, and turned the whole of Portugal and Spain into Catholic countries. Now we intend to do what we have managed to do there, in Melaka, the seat of their religious center in this region. We hope that your people, too, will join us, Taiko. We want to stop them before they spread their influence throughout the region.'

Taiko didn't know exactly what the admiral meant. 'What exactly does your excellency mean by that? I don't fully understand.'

The admiral laughed. 'Never mind.' He continued to laugh. Taiko was lost. The admiral held his glass. 'Come, let's drink.'

Taiko held his glass and the admiral knocked it against his. 'To the king and queen of Portugal!' said Alfonso.

'Yes, to the king and queen of Portugal!'

The *azan* was heard faintly in the background. The admiral turned around to find the source of the sound. 'What's that noise?'

'The Muslims calling the Faithful to pray, your excellency.'

'Oh!' remarked Alfonso. 'That should be the last of it.'

They laughed.

After spending about an hour with Taiko, Alfonso returned to his cabin in his flagship the *Flor de la Mar*. He lay in bed and wondered if it was better if he had met Mahmud himself. He had caught sight of the sultan and his son, Ahmad few times before, but did not get close to them. What would he say if

they met? Alfonso remembered how his last encounter with the sultan during the fighting happened:

'So, you are Alfonso, the admiral?' asked Mahmud.

'Yes, I am, your majesty. I'm happy to meet you at last,' replied Alfonso.

'Likewise. But do remember this: We're not going to let you capture Melaka so easily, my dear admiral.'

'Yes, I should think that you'd fight till the last drop of blood as this is the way a sultan feels.'

'Very true, admiral. I'm sorry I couldn't pronounce your name; it's so long.'

'That's all right. It's my pleasure to be locked in battle personally with your majesty.'

'Thank you.'

Both these leaders continued to fight by using their daggers and *kerises*. Even despite their intense hostility, they found it necessary to treat each other cordially. All this was happening as they continued to swish their swords and kerises while riding on their elephants. Mahmud lost his balance. He fell to the side and slumped to the ground. He quickly stood up. Alfonso jumped off his elephant and started to fight hand-to-hand with him. Nadim saw the sultan who was in trouble. He quickly killed a Portuguese soldier whom he was entangled with and rushed to the sultan's aid. He lurched himself in between the sultan and the admiral.

'Move away, you, Nadim, this is between the sultan and me,' said Mahmud.

'No, you have to get at me first before you can get his majesty,' said Nadim.

Nadim tried to get at Alfonso with his *keris*, but he missed it. Alfonso then trusted his dagger and it hit Nadim's shoulder. Ahmad then pulled Mahmud on his elephant and they ran off. Alfonso stood above Nadim, with his dagger. But, he decided to let him go free.

'I shall let you go this time, Nadim,' said Alfonso.

Nadim stood up and ran away. Seeing that the sultan and his son and Nadim were running away, the Melaka men and soldiers who were still standing stop. They retreated. Then the Portuguese soldiers and officers followed suit.

'Melaka has fallen to the Portuguese! Long live King Manuel and the kingdom of Portugal!' shouted Alfonso.

'Long live King Manuel and the Kingdom of Portugal!' shouted the Portuguese soldiers and officers.

'For Portugal!'

'For Portugal!'

He then knelt down and kissed the ground. Everybody clapped their hands and hugged each other. They then crossed their body and offered blessings to their gods.

Alfonso opened his eyes. He then woke up and sat at the side of his bed. Now that he had managed to capture Melaka for Portugal and his King Manuel, it was his duty and responsibility now to defend it from possible attacks by the sultan. He knew Mahmud did not want to leave Melaka without launching further attacks from outside of Melaka. He was sad that many of his senior men - Antonio, Mendo, Mulias, Nontel, Velerio and Velozo - were killed. They had come to seek adventure and to serve their King Manuel. Unfortunately, they didn't live long enough to see that they had indeed capture Melaka and the land now belonged to their king.

One day, the Peguan community in Melaka came to meet with Alfonso. They were there to seek pardon from him. They were immediately given. The Javanese, Chinese and Indians later followed suit when they heard that they were pardoned by the Portuguese. Alfonso pardoned them so they could become loyal citizens under the new Portuguese administration. However, there were also some Chinese traders who were not particularly happy with the presence of the Portuguese. 'Drive the Portuguese to the sea; they won't be able to survive for long. They will die like fish in the sand,' remarked one of them.

Alfonso stood on the peak of St. Paul's Hill and surveyed the land around it. He could see on the left where the St. John's Hill was. He felt satisfied that the Portuguese were now secure in Melaka and they were thus safe from harm. There was just one more thing that he wanted to do. 'There's something that we've to do.'

'What is it, admiral?' asked Jorge.

Alfonso looked around the peak of the Melaka Hill that they had now renamed St. Paul's Hill in honor of their patron saint. The others wait. 'I believe we should construct a fort around the city in order to secure ourselves here. And a new chapel could be built here, on this very spot of the palace of the sultan that we have burnt down on this very hill where we are now, the St. Paul's Hill,' he said. 'Melaka won't be complete if we do not have a chapel. Demolish the old palace, but spare the new one at the other side of the hills. Those we already have are mostly small chapels. I envisage that the population of the Portuguese will grow in due course, so we must prepare them with enough chapels where they could pray in peace.'

The other men were relieved.

'Indeed, admiral. It's a good idea,' said Jorge.

The other Portuguese senior officers agreed with the admiral. And he quickly contemplated on the need to build a fort that had wanted to build around the city where their administrative center would be. The idea was to encircle the whole of the St. Paul's Hill. There were going to be seven entrances in all at different parts, and these were the only way that people could either enter or leave the city-center. In this way, too, the Portuguese thought their position in Melaka was secure, for no invaders were be able to penetrate the fortress and overwhelm the Portuguese. There would be cannons on the top of the fort and soldiers guarding it round the clock.

'What about the river, admiral?' asked someone.

'Ah, let it flow.' He laughed. 'The river is so long, it goes all the way to the Alor Gajah district. But, mostly the river is shallow, so it does not present a threat to us. All that we need to do is to construct a gate further upstream so whoever tries to invade us from the river will be thwarted.'

As for the laborers, Alfonso said many of the Malays would be enlisted to help build the fortress. Many more from other Malay states could also be brought in. If necessary, they could also bring in Indian laborers from India by the thousands together with other Portuguese technicians and engineers who could come in from Lisbon in Portugal or Goa in India to supervise them. Few other parts of the city were also renamed such as the hills that stood south of the city which was now called, the St. John's Hill. The Malays, however, called it *Bukit Senjuang*, because they could not pronounce the Portuguese name properly. A new district would be constructed near *Kampung Cina* where the Chinese lived, and it was called *Kampung Portugis* or Portuguese Village. This was where most of their soldiers would live. Further up the Tranquerah district would be created.

Later, when the population of the Portuguese in Melaka increased, the villages expanded accordingly. Most of the Portuguese men who married the local women were non-Muslims from elsewhere. Their offspring became traders who did trading in Melaka, Penang, which was still known as *Pulan Pinang* then, and Kedah. This new generation of Melaka-born Portuguese took to Malay ways and even used Malay as their mother tongue while still retaining their Catholic religion. No wonder they were called *Nasrani* or *Serani* in short by the Malays. They were names of the biblical City of Nazareth and it's inhabitants called Nazarene the original name of the Christians at that time. Some of them also married Malay women and converted to Islam; they assimilated in the Malay society. Many Portuguese men, however, married local women from the jungles who did not have any religion; they were animists who prayed to the sun, large trees and boulders, thinking that they were gods

to be feared. After their marriage, these women were brought to the city where they were exposed to modern culture. Here they began to speak in the more recognizable Malay language that had become the lingua franca of the whole Southeast Asian region called the *Nusantara Melayu*, or the Malay World. It started out as bazaar Malay used by the people of all races who traded and lived in Melaka then. They used words from their own languages so much so that they became accepted into the mainstream Malay language, thus transforming the language into a more international medium of communication and business dealings. No wonder the Malay language was sprinkled with Chinese, Indian, Arab and Portuguese words, including those from the other Malay dialects.

These women wore Malay clothes and were interested in Malay music and culture. While the first generation of Portuguese spoke in their native language, their offspring spoke Malay or a mixture of Malay and Portuguese and their native language. It was so mixed up it became a patois of its own, only known by their small community, but not to the others. The Prime Minister's Village north of Melaka in the Upeh district was designated as the Tranquerah district. This took the name of the ramparts which the Portuguese had constructed there called *tranqueira*.

'And let the Melaka Bazaar or Bazar de Laos stay,' ordered Alfonso. 'The Javanese have come to us and promised to be loyal to us. In this way, we can easily check their activities, since they are so close to us.'

So insistent were the Portuguese in wanting to stamp their presence in Melaka that it soon dawned on the Malays and Mahmud that they were really not going to willingly leave the country. They were keen to keep it forever, till eternity. This made both Mahmud and his eldest son, Ahmad feel anxious and distressed. They became desperate. They thought they had to do something before the Portuguese position became too entrenched there. They had many sleepless nights in Batu Hampar worrying about how to fight the Portuguese and recapture Melaka. The Portuguese had to be pushed back to the sea, or they would never leave the city. Melaka had to be free from these evil people, they thought. There was a consensus.

Over the next few days Mahmud and his sons, relatives and other followers spent time in meditation and fasting. They sought Divine guidance to help give them a boost, for they had come to their wit's end and didn't have much energy left in them to fight their common enemies. The Portuguese were not only the enemies of the Melaka people, but the Malays as well and of Islam, too!

## CHAPTER 16: THE BERTAM FORT

Sultan Mahmud Shah, his wives - Sultanah Fatimah, Tun Teja and Tun Kudu; his six sons and eight daughter including Rajas Ahmad, Alauddin, Kassim and Raden Ali, Raja Amra Dewi, officials and followers fled further south to Batu Hampar, immediately after the fall of Melaka to the Portuguese. They went together with the senior officials of the palace and Brother Nadim and Captain Sang Sura, the leader of the Melaka soldiers. Teja was now sickly. She had to be carried in a special carriage called the *tandu* Sang Sura and his men had constructed. She looked pale and sickly. Her daughter-in-law, the *raja puan muda* or crown princess, wife of Ahmad looked after her.

There was only one direction that they could take to get there - southwards - by land so they could be out of sight of the Portuguese. If they fled by sea, the Portuguese could see them. This was what Mahmud did not want to happen. They could not go up north as all the Malay states were under the direct or indirect dominance of the Siamese. After what they had done to them, surely, those Malay states were more than happy to see Mahmud and his men run as far away from them as possible. But he was not disheartened. He took everything in great strides and made sure that his supporters and men were not demoralized. He gave them encouragement and provided leadership so they did not go astray. He did not shirk his duties. He was happy that none of his followers betrayed him all this while. They stood with each other through thick and thin. They realized that their ancestors were warriors who too had to flee from Palembang in Sumatra, at the end of the fourteenth century. Their succeeding ancestors had told them about their exploits.

'Please bear with us for a little while more, my dear followers. The Portuguese have driven us out of our own state. It's not anyone's fault that we are here. I assure you that we will recapture our beloved country from them and rebuild it together,' said Mahmud. 'Their stay in Melaka is only temporary. They will soon tire of the weather and hostile environment from all round them.'

His followers nodded. They trekked on. The sultan got out of his palanquin and walked with them to show his solidarity with everybody. Some of them were injured, and their colleagues propped them up.

'It'd be better if your majesty rides in the palanquin,' suggested Nadim.

'I am much better now, Nadim. And where are your brother-warriors?' asked the sultan.



'They're with the men.'

Mahmud nodded and continued to walk. They stopped at Batu Hampar where they erected their tents there to rest and replenish themselves with the food that grew in abundance in the jungles. There was ample supply of goats and fish. There were many coconut trees they could pluck and drink the juice. Some of the men boiled the coconut milk until it turned black and oily. They then wiped their bodies with it. They then took the swords and slashed their limbs, but it did not hurt any of them. Their *silat* masters put every man in a trance and recited some holy verses to ensure that the men were safe from harm.

Two small children ran in the fields oblivious to what was happening. They laughed amongst themselves. 'Try and catch me, Hamid,' said Amran.

'How can I? You are much older than I am. Surely, I can't catch up with you.'

'Try.'

'I give up.'

Mahmud sat outside of his tent. He stared at the children and envied them. They were life and had so much future ahead of them. But, it was now uncertain. He felt sorry for not being able to provide them with a permanent home where they could play and run about to the delight of their hearts. Ahmad went to him and sat beside the sultan.

'We must recapture Melaka, so that those boys there can have a place to stay in. I can't bear to see them running about like that,' said Mahmud.

'Yes, father,' said Ahmad. 'It is our duty to fight back. Sooner or later, the Portuguese will be battle weary and disillusioned, and this will leave them vulnerable.'

'And it is my duty to recapture Melaka so that you will be its next sultan after me. I shall fail in my duties if I cannot do that. I ascended to the throne after my father; you will ascend to the throne of Melaka after me. This is my promise to you and our people.'

Ahmad kept quiet. He was touched by what his father had just said, but he was not sure if his plans could happen.

'I'm putting up camp here in Batu Hampar, son. I want you to proceed to Bertam. In this way, we can launch an attack on the Portuguese from two sides.'

'Very well, father, I will go to Bertam as ordered. I promise that we will recapture Melaka from the Portuguese. *Insyallah*.'

'If God wills, son. *Insyallah*.' The sultan hugged his son. They then broke the embrace. Mahmud opened his palms and offered a short prayer. The

others opened their palms. 'Oh, god, please give us our strength to stand the suffering we are experiencing now.'

'*Amin*,' said his men.

'The enemies of Islam are at our doors. They will inflict damage and destroy the sultanate that we have built all these years by our great-great grandfather, Parameswara. It will be difficult for us to overthrow them. They came from the 'land above the wind', and they did so with just one intention, to destroy our country, people and faith. Please give us strength so we may fight them and that we can one day be able to recapture Melaka, our beloved country. So, help us, *ya*, Allah. *Amin*.'

'*Amin*.'

The men hugged each other.

'We fight in the name of Allah! We fight in the name of Allah!' shouted Mahmud.

'We fight in the name of Allah! We fight in the name of Allah!' shouted his men on top of their voice.

The Melaka forces then proceeded to go to Bertam Hulu about fifteen miles from Melaka. They had trekked for days through the thick jungles. They also realized that Parameswara, too, had stopped here in Bertam Hulu some one hundred and eleven years ago. He fled from Temasik, before he moved forward to Bertam and founded Melaka. They set up camp and rested here. Some nursed their bruised body. Others gave each other a massage while a few others repaired their weapons and sharpened their *kerises* and spears that had been blunted due to its constant use. Some of them still had traces of blood - Portuguese blood! Others repaired their sandals and horse-carts or tended to the wounds that they had inflicted. The few who did not survive the more serious wounds that they suffered, died. They were buried there in unmarked graves, after a simple ritual. Those whose limbs or bones were broken were attended to, and within minutes, they were back on their feet again. The *bomobs* had learnt how to do this from the Chinese *sinseb* whose ancestors came to Melaka with Parameswara long ago.

They were now a long way from Melaka and the Portuguese. They felt safe here. They knew the Portuguese would not dare to look for them here, as they were not familiar with the terrain. They never dared to venture outside of the city-center. Even then, when their officers wanted to go somewhere, they were heavily escorted with men who wore armored costume and safety helmets. And they only ventured out in the daytime.

The women, too, took time off pound rice to make rice power which they applied on their faces and skin to cleanse them. Others concocted herbs to

soothe the tired muscles of their men, children and themselves. They went to the nearby stream and washed their babies whom had not touched water for sometime. They seemed to enjoy the respite. They had never had the opportunity to wear their *sarung* up to their shoulders in a *kemban* for a long time because they were always prepared to move or defend themselves, if necessary. Few men went deep in the jungle and brought out more fruits including *nangka*, *cepedak*, *durian* and starfruits that they ate together with their bare hands.

This was also what Mahmud's loyal followers were doing now, just like what his ancestor Parameswara's men did, except they didn't have to confront the Portuguese then like Mahmud's men were now faced with.

It was an irony: Parameswara spent most of his life trying to found Melaka, whereas his descendants, Mahmud and his son, Ahmad were trying to recapture it from the Portuguese. Both were difficult tasks. Mahmud hoped that he would be as successful as his ancestor, Parameswara who went to Melaka in 1396 CE or 798 AH or 4094 of the Chinese calendar and stayed with his people there.

Ahmad rode his horse through the woods with his followers. Nadim rode beside him. 'I'm sure the Portuguese have left Melaka by now,' he said confidently, although it was not the case.

'Do we return and see, your highness?' said Nadim.

'Give them a little more time, Nadim. They might want some time to look around.'

They laughed.

'I'm sure they'll want to see the beautiful sights in Melaka before they return to their drab world in the 'land above the wind.'

'And they might want to see our beautiful girls, too.'

They laughed.

Ahmad, Nadim and the men rested under a shady tree together with Kasturi, Lekir and Lekiu. They ate.

'Nadim and I will proceed on to Melaka,' he told them. 'And I want all of you to remain here until we return. Hear? We want to see what they are doing there. Are you ready to go Nadim?'

'Yes, your highness.'

'Good, come, let's go.'

They got on their horses and rode off in the direction of Melaka in the north. When they arrived in Melaka, they started to dress like the Arab traders with their scarves covering their faces. Alauddin could not come because he had after his father.

Ahmad and Nadim noticed that the people looked less cheerful than before. Many of the stores were still not opened yet. It was still very early in the morning about eight-thirty and the people were not patronizing the bazaar yet. There was less noise and chaos. This was the first time both these men were in Melaka since it fell to the Portuguese. They had wanted to see how the place looked like. Most importantly, they wanted to gauge the mood of the people, whether they were happy to be living under the control and dominance of those Portuguese who were described as the 'White Bengalis' or not. Most likely, the Malays and other Muslims despised them, but not the Chinese or Indians and other non-Muslims who seemed to be doing about their business more confidently. The Chinese traders mostly walked with their shoulders opened wide, in their long flowing robes. Many were seen being driven in horse-carriages, much to Ahmad and Nadim's chagrin.

'They are still here. My God, don't they want to go home,' whispered Ahmad in Nadim's ear when he saw the Portuguese soldiers loitering in the bazaar.

'Yes, your highness,' whispered Nadim back.

A small group of Portuguese soldiers walked in front of the shops. They kicked the goods from the shops and laughed amongst themselves.

'Look at them; how uncivilized they are!' said Ahmad.

A Malay shop owner rushed out of his shop. He was angry but not furious. He knew at such times, he could not afford to lose his head. 'You're not supposed to do that, sir,' he said as he rushed to pick up his goods that had fallen on the ground.

'Oh, yes, we can do whatever we like in Melaka. We own it!' replied the Portuguese soldier, with a lot of arrogance. He then went to the Malay shop owner and strangled his neck. Times had changed, thought the Malay shop owner. The Portuguese, when they first stepped foot in Melaka, were extremely polite. Now they resembled animals. They did not have human feelings or knew how to treat other humans cordially, especially those who were not like them. Worse, the people did not profess the same religious faith as theirs. Those who did were given better treatment and were respected. The newly converted Catholics, the faith of the Portuguese were welcome into the society and offered all assistance so that their lives were more pleasant than those who were of the other faiths. Many of the stores and houses once owned by the Malays were now in the hands of the foreigners. Many of the Malay traders had fled for their lives back to the jungles where they thought they were safer, and away from the Portuguese who were erratic and moody. One day they smiled widely, and the next they would return to seek somebody's blood.

Some of them looked as though they were badly dehydrated and weak with their thick black untrimmed beards, sideburns and mustache. They smelled bad from the sweating and liquor that they had consumed by the barrels, to drown their sorrows. Some looked like they were on the verge of emotional collapse. The men they didn't expect to be taken away from their families at such tender age to live in a totally alien land.

'I can squeeze your neck until you die, if I want to. But, no, I'm going to spare you this time. Please behave yourself,' said the soldier.

'Yes, sir, yes, sir.'

The soldier let off the Malay shop-owner; he was just an innocent man. He picked up his goods and immediately entered his shop and locked himself inside it. He knew there would be no point in dealing with them. In Melaka, they were the law!

The Portuguese soldier walked away feeling indifferent to the people and the surroundings. His friends laughed. They seemed to enjoy what they had done to the Malay shop owner. They wanted to humiliate him for what his sultan and other Malay officers had done to them during the battle for Melaka, for which many of their men had died.

Taiko climbed down from the first floor of his house in such great haste when he saw Diego Lopez approaching towards it. He waited in the living room for his house-help to open the door and let the captain inside. 'What brings you here, captain? The Melaka forces were no match to the might of the Portuguese, captain,' asked Taiko, as he adjusted his cap and long robe.

'Certainly, Taiko. I'm just passing by. How are you these days?' asked Diego Lopez. 'Are you happy under us than the Malay sultans?'

'Definitely, your excellency. Life has been good. How are you and the admiral doing these days? I'm sure you both are busy with work now that you have to administer Melaka and at the same time ensure that the sultan's forces don't continue to cause problems. I'm sure they will still want to attack you here in Melaka. How could they just leave Melaka without wanting to recapture it?'

'Yes, we are worried that Sultan Mahmud Shah might attack us anytime, and there are many things to do in Melaka. Other than that, I'm fine, Taiko.'

'I do hope the admiral will drop by for a drink sometime. I'll present a special dragon dance performance for him if he steps foot here.'

'He will surely like that. But, he is very busy these days, busier than I am. Otherwise, I won't be able to come here myself.'

Ahmad and Nadim passed in front of Taiko's house. They hid behind the shops. They saw the captain's carriage in front of the house and wondered

what they were up to. 'Look, it's the captain's carriage,' said Ahmad. 'And there he is inside the house. Now we know who Taiko is. He is a spy for the Portuguese. I am sure he is now getting his share. He will want to get more land from the Portuguese and expand his business. Do you know he is in the illegal gambling and women businesses.'

'Really? No, I didn't know that.'

'Now, I bet it's the best time for him to clean up his dirty money, and enter the business like a clean and good businessman.'

'Let's go from here. Look, over there,' said Nadim.

They turned, and to their horror, saw more Portuguese soldiers loitering in the bazaar and taking whatever they liked. They were drinking beer and some were already drunk. They stumbled and fell to the ground. One of them tried to grab a Chinese girl but his elder brother quickly hit his hand with an umbrella he was carrying. The Portuguese soldier fell to the ground.

'This is how the Portuguese behave. Look, they are trying to touch other women. Disgusting!' said Nadim.

The Portuguese soldiers then tried to grab some Malay women, but they pushed them aside. They fell. The other Portuguese soldiers laughed.

'Come, let's go,' said Ahmad.

'Idiots! We must help them. They are our women, and the Portuguese can't do that to them,' said Nadim.

'No, we'll be in trouble. Besides, she will be fine.'

Nadim and Ahmad walked away feeling disgusted with what they had seen. They felt sorry for those Melaka people who had no choice but to remain there.

Taiko and Diego Lopez rode in two rickshaws, and they passed by Ahmad and Nadim without realizing who they were.

'There are some pieces of land which I'd like the admiral to give to me to develop, captain,' said Taiko. 'You'll get your share, captain, if you can help me secure it. All I need is for the admiral to approve it. It's a lousy piece of land by the Melaka River. That is of not much use to the Portuguese anyway.'

'I'm sure the admiral will agree to that, Taiko, after all the help that you've given us,' said Diego Lopez.

'Sure, you can help me?'

'I believe it won't be difficult since there're a lot of land in Melaka.'

'Ah, thank you, captain, thank you. I knew I could count on you.'

Ahmad and Nadim stared at Taiko and the captain until they disappeared from their sight. They then turned to look at each other's face. They could read what each other was thinking. They also realized that Melaka had

deteriorated so much, foreign people like Taiko and the other *towkays* were now wealthy people. Most of the properties in the city were in the hands of the foreigners. They had started to build concrete houses that stretched from end of the road to the other and divided the properties amongst themselves. They then went to the beach. They saw more Portuguese soldiers and men there. They were directing the Malay and Indian workers to build a fortress.

'Ya, Allah, what on earth are they doing?' asked Ahmad.

'They are building a concrete fortress, your highness,' said Nadim.

'Concrete fortress? Looks like they are planning to stay here for a long while. I fear that they will change the religion of our people to theirs, too!'

'Looks like it, your highness.'

'And where are they getting those stones to build the fortress?'

'They're digging them from the island; there were a lot of them there.'

'The islands? Upeh Island and the others?'

'Yes.'

'They're also going to enclose the palace.'

Mahmud finally arrived in Bertam. He knew the distance between here and Melaka was too vast; he did not think that he could return. His son, Ahmad and Nadim went to him and kissed his hand. They could tell that the sultan had not had proper sleep. This was also the first time they noticed that he had been less particular about his personal appearance. His clothes were shabby and hair not combed. It did not matter anymore how he looked. Life on the run had affected his thinking, too. He didn't sound precise anymore like always did in the past when he held court in his palace on the peak of the Melaka Hill that the invaders and infidels had now been renamed the St. Paul's Hill. He did not like the sound of it. He hoped that someday the name would be reverted to Melaka Hill. Ahmad and Nadim agreed. They thought it did not serve the memory Parameswara who founded Melaka if the name that the invaders had given it remained. He was Ahmad and Mahmud's progenitor. They were sad and angry, however, that the Portuguese had demolished his mausoleum and those of his other ancestors. None of them remained. And on it's site were now the graves of the Portuguese who had died. Both of them waited for the sultan to shift his gaze at them.

'What did you see in Melaka, my son? Are we able to return to Melaka? Have the Portuguese left?' asked the sultan. He did not turn around; he continued to look in the direction of the sea towards Melaka, although it was few hundred miles from where he was.

'No, father, they are still there. In addition, they have started to build a fortress near our palace, made of concrete and stone,' replied Ahmad.

Mahmud was shocked. 'How could they do that?'

'Yes, it's true,' said Nadim.

'What does that mean?' asked Mahmud.

'It just means that the Portuguese are planning to stay permanently in Melaka. All of my fears have come true, my dear father; what do we do now?' Mahmud kept quiet. He felt sad with the turn of events. He had hoped for the Portuguese to leave Melaka after they had captured it from them. 'What use do they have of Melaka?'

'I say, let's erect a fortress here in Bertam and put wooden and bamboo caltrops across the Melaka River to prevent boats belonging to them from reaching us. I'll remain here with my son, Raja Ahmad and we will together plan to attack the Portuguese when we're ready and better equipped,' said Mahmud.

'Good idea, father.'

'Very well. I'll direct the men to work on it now,' said Nadim. He immediately oversaw his men constructing the fortress. Many of them cut down wood and bamboo sticks to prop up the fortress. They worked day and night. It quickly took shape. The sultan was happy with the results. They felt that the fortress could safeguard their position in Bertam should the Portuguese try to attack them there. It may not be of stone or concrete, but wood; but it should work as well.

Mahmud rested and threw himself on the bed. Teja took a glass of water and slowly walked to him. The sultan quickly rushed and got it from her. He drank it in one gulp and felt better. He had felt so dehydrated from standing outside under the sun. And he had a dark tan ever since he started to live on the run as an exile. Teja took back the empty glass from her husband and put it aside.

'I can't promise if ever we will be able to return to Melaka, my dear wife. All we can do is to pray to Allah for his guidance. We will not surrender easily to the evil Portuguese forces. Sooner or later, we will destroy them and push all of them back into the sea where they belong,' said Mahmud confidently. 'If we can stop the Siamese from attacking us, surely we can do the same to the Portuguese.'

'I hope so, dear. I pray day and night for peace to return to Melaka,' said Teja. 'So that our people will have a sultan and their future be more secure than it is now.'



'Nadim says the Portuguese has turned the city upside down. The Malays especially are suffering more than the other races are. Those who converted to their religion were given priority.'

Teja shook her head. Her twenty-year old daughter, Amra Dewi rushed to her and she hugged her mother. She was born one year after their parents were married in 1488 CE or 893 AH or 4186 of the Chinese calendar. She could tell that there were problems in Melaka from the looks of her father's face. She knew what she had to do. She wore a warrior's clothes and was ready for battle. She wanted to be with her elder half-brothers, Ahmad, Alauddin, Kassim and Raden Ali in defending Melaka. As far as they were concerned, Melaka had not been lost to the Portuguese.

Nadim went to Ahmad who was sitting on a tree trunk. In front was the newly built Bertam Fort. They admired it. They were surprised that their men could build it in a short period. 'What do you think, your highness?'

'I think this fortress is very beautiful and strong. It should serve us well,' said Ahmad. '...With our people are all behind us. We will retake Melaka and drive the Portuguese and their cronies into the straits of Melaka so they become food for the sharks!'

Mahmud approached them. He was happy that many women had joined the men, too. They were all inspired to serve in the army by Teja who constantly gave encouragement to them, especially in times of danger. She often visited when they were training in the woods, when she was healthier. She was happy her only daughter Amra Dewi was with them; she was adept at the art of war called the *silat*; she was agile and brave. She was an inspiration to the other women in Melaka.

'Let our men rest for a while longer. We'll launch a surprise attack on the Portuguese soon,' announced Mahmud. 'We shall not give them peace of mind as long as they are in Melaka. And we must always tell them that their stay is not welcomed.'

Ahmad and Nadim were surprised.

'Very well. I will instruct our men and women on the art of war, so they are better prepared. I have also asked them to build many bamboo cannons that we can use to fire at our enemies,' said Nadim. 'We still have some gunpowder in our stock that we can use.'

'Very good, Nadim. If your late father-in-law, the legendary Hang Tuah is here with us, I am sure the Portuguese will not dare to do harm onto us all.'

'Yes, father,' chipped in Ahmad.

'Come, let's have something to eat, I'm sure everybody's hungry as I am,' said Mahmud.

They went away.

There was a bamboo grove not too far away from their camp where the Melaka men resumed work after they had rested and eaten. They cut the bamboo and turned them into cannons. Fortunately, they had amply supply of carbide they could use to hurl the iron cannon balls out of the bamboo sticks. The women used the leftover bamboo sticks to cook glutinous rice in it that they ate it with *rendang*, a beef stew that they cooked until meat became dry. Sometimes when bamboo sticks were not available, the women used coconut leaves and wove them until they became packets. They stuffed rice inside and left them in the boil until the rice became hard. In this way, they could carry cooked rice called *ketupat* with them for days on end without having to cook. Normally they cooked such boiled rice in this fashion for the religious festivals. But since it was convenient, they did it when they were on the road. When coconut leaves were not available, the men cut bamboo poles and the women would then stuff them with glutinous rice and put it on the fire until the rice was cooked. In this way, they began to cook what they called *lemang*. This too was eaten together with *rendang* that was nutritious as well as convenient. Besides, it could be brought along and still fresh for many days, together with salted fish that lasted forever and rice porridge called *bubur lambuk*. The Malays learnt how to prepare the drying and salting of fish from the Chinese.

The founder of Melaka, Parameswara a.k.a. Megat Iskandar Shah - when he went on his first official visit to pay homage to the Chinese Emperor Yong-le liked eating salted fish. When he returned to Melaka, he brought crates of it upon his return to Melaka. He encouraged his people to eat it and learn how to prepare them. Now more than a century later, his great-great-great-great grandson, Mahmud and his followers were still surviving on it. The sultan made sure they were stocked with ample supply of fried and salted fish of all kinds in many crates that they could eat while they were on the run.

The Malays who were fleeing Melaka together with Mahmud and the royal family had to make use of whatever that they could lay their hands on for their own survival. Saving time on the preparation of food was a good strategy so that the men as well as women could stay alert at all times, while still maintaining their alertness and energy.

'Go away from there, we're test-firing a cannon,' shouted Kadir to the men who were resting in front of his cannon.

The men moved away and waited. Kadir lit up the fuse and it fired. It worked. The men cheered.

'*Allabukbbar! Allabukbbar!*' shouted the men.

Mahmud was shocked to hear the sound of the cannon in the background. He thought the Portuguese was attacking them again. 'What's that noise? And where is it coming from? It's louder than a thunder,' he remarked. He grabbed his *keris* and realized that his men were just test-firing a new cannon they had made from bamboo. He was relieved. 'My god, don't ever scare me like that. I thought they were here.'

'No, your majesties. It's our men test-firing the cannons,' said Nadim.

The sultan and his son were relieved. He was delighted with the ingenuity of his men. 'In that case, let's watch.' They washed their hands and went out of the tent. Mahmud, Ahmad and Nadim walked out of the tent and went to the men in the woods.

'His majesty wants to see the cannons fire. Show us,' said Nadim.

'Very well, sir,' replied Kadir. He fired the cannon and it hit a tree, it broke in the center in a puff of smoke. Everybody cheered loudly. They were confident more than ever that they could trounce the Portuguese with the new weapons that they now possessed.

Alfonso stood in his room in their temporary headquarters, which was at the foot of the St. Paul's Hill. With him were few other officials that included his nephew, Jorge. They were summoned to the admiral's office to listen to his next strategy. 'Like I've said two months ago I want to build a fort around the city, and build it with bricks and stone, not wood,' he said. 'Come, I want to show all you gentlemen the design that we've drawn.'

He took them to the side of his room where there a rough hand drawing of the city was laid on the large table; it showed the city center near the mouth of the Melaka River. He then took a pointer and pointed at the places as he explained to his officers. 'I want the fort called *Porta de Santiago*. I want it to be built from here and all around the hill, so that we can ensure our safety from any outside threat, not only from the Melaka forces, but also from the other neighboring Malay states. We just can't assume that the other Malay rulers won't sympathize with Mahmud and won't want to give us trouble. Here on this St. Paul's Hill, I want a chapel to be constructed called 'Our Lady of Annunciation Chapel' or *Annuciada*. On the St. John's hill, 'Our Lady's Hill', over here, another fort. Our cannons will be trained at the sea so the invading naval forces coming from the south will get it even before they arrive on the beach. They are also to defend us from invaders who might want to attack us by land. And I want to build a secret tunnel that stretches from the *Porta de Santiago* fortress to the fort there,' said Alfonso. 'Let's build two hospitals, one

for the paupers and the other for us; they are to be called the Pauper Hospital and Royal Hospital. While the jail will be built by the side of the sea.

'The mosquitoes are not kind to us. They have killed many of our men, and I feel sad that they died not in battle, but during peacetime. Lastly, I want the bishop's palace to be within the fortress.'

Alfonso's second-in-command, Francisco Serrao stood by. He was impressed with the admiral's suggestion. Tome took down notes and smiled.

'And what else, admiral?' asked Pero. 'I shall convey it to the designer.'

'Ah, I want another chapel called the *Madre de Deus* be built at the foot of the Chinese Hills. I want to bring in a priest to be the bishop of Melaka so he can conduct services for us.'

'Very well, admiral.'

Pero took down notes and made a rough sketch of what Alfonso had ordered. He then turned to Pero. 'And I want you to draw me the proper full-scale design of the fort on paper and show it to me. I want it soon so we can start work on its construction. You can use the design of the forts that we have in Portugal as an example. Make sure there is an underground passage where we can use to escape if the fort is broken into. The longer we wait the worse for me here. Now can you do that, Pero? Only after we have discussed the plan, you can proceed to construct with the scale model in clay. You can get lots of clay from the riverbanks and stones from Upeh Island to build the fort.'

'Yes, your excellency,' replied Pero. 'I'll get some of the boys to collect the clay and I will start work immediately.'

Alfonso turned to the other senior officers. 'What do you gentlemen say to this idea?'

'Brilliant, admiral,' said Jorge who stood to be the first captain of Melaka. 'In this way, the Malays will know that we're here permanently and not just visiting.'

They laughed.

'Yes, we intend to remain here till the end of time,' remarked Alfonso.

'Indeed,' said de Albuquerque.

'And I want to bring the map of new Melaka to show to his majesty in Lisbon, so his majesty will know how much we have changed Melaka. Can you do it fast, Pero?'

Pero thought for a while as the others waited. He studied the plan. 'I should say that it could be done, admiral. I see no problem at all. I was worried about the materials, whether we had enough of them or not. Yes, now, I think we do.'

'When can you show me the design of the fort and the new map of Melaka?'

'Give us two weeks, admiral. But, admiral, sir, where are we to get the materials to build the fortress?'

Alfonso was shocked; he had not thought of this problem. He kept quiet. 'I haven't the faintest idea.' He turned around. The faces of his men were blank.

'We need men to build it, too.'

'We will use all the Melaka soldiers and men whom we have captured. If this isn't enough, we'll bring in more Indians from Goa.'

'And what about the materials, stones, wood...'

'Let me think, Pero.'

'Very well, your excellency.'

Alfonso returned to his cabin and thought hard. He met his scribe, Pires who said: 'I have a suggestion, admiral.'

'What is it, Tome?'

'We can demolish the tombs of the Melaka sultans that are on the south side of the Melaka Hill, er...St. Paul's Hill. And we can use them as stone blocks for the new fortress.'

Alfonso was excited. 'And...'

'To get more stones, we can go to Upeh Island where there are iron stones that we can cut down to blocks.'

The admiral was excited. He smiled widely. 'Brilliant, Tome, brilliant.'

'But, you are more brilliant, your excellency; you have captured Melaka on behalf of his majesty King Manuel the First. Your name will surely be on the lips of all Portuguese. You are the great *conquistadore* or conqueror.'

Few months later, work on the fort was in full swing. Hundreds of men were brought from the other Malay States. They worked twenty-four hours a day to complete the construction of the fort and other buildings that were located within the fort as well as outside of it.

Alfonso walked near the first phase of new concrete Fort of Melaka, which was fully completed. In it was his official residence and administrative building that overlooked the straits of Melaka. Nearby was the prison block. It was made by piling blocks of stones one over the other until the wall stood at about thirty feet high and ten feet thick. These walls were then covered with white cement made from crushed shells of chicken eggs. However, many of the men who worked on the construction of the fortress succumbed to malaria, tuberculosis and other tropical diseases. The Malays whom the Portuguese captured during their attack on Melaka quickly replaced them.

They mostly comprised of the soldiers and other able men. The Malays thought the Portuguese had used eggshell and crushed them until it became cement. No wonder, the wall was as hard as chicken shell, they thought. Many Portuguese and Indian soldiers patrolled the fort. They carried guns and pistols. Cannons were placed on the top of the fort with a spacing of ten feet between each other. Iron cannon balls and boxes of carbide were placed near them, at the ready to be used to fire off the cannons.

More Indian laborers were brought in from ships from India, where they landed in a cape which the Malays called *Tanjong Keling* since most of them were from Kalingga in India. The others thought the name was derived from the sound of the chains they wore around their ankles that made the *keling-keling* sound.

Initially, however, the people of Melaka did not know what the Portuguese were doing. They had never seen any stone building being erected in the state before. This was also the first time they saw brick buildings being built for the officials to stay in. Many shops and houses of the private citizens were also being built in the city.

Even with the first phase of the Fort of Melaka almost completed Alfonso was still nervous of more attacks by the Melaka forces. He stood out of his new office and saw the fort surrounding the St. Paul's Hill. In the far distance stood the new St. John's Hill Fort, perched high on the peak of the hill. Both the forts of Melaka and the St. John's Hills Fort were white. The St. John's Fort could be seen from the sea with the cannons sticking out at the top of the fort. Portuguese soldiers manned it round the clock to ensure of the safety of the small Portuguese community who were housed within the thick concrete walls. Some of them felt like they were actually prisoners of their own success, with a huge hostile population surrounding them. They did not know when they were going to be attacked and by whom. The Portuguese officers hardly ever stepped outside of the fort. When they ventured out of the fort, they were always escorted by a group of soldiers. Even this could only be done in bright daylight when they thought it was much safer. At night, poisonous arrows could come raining down on them from anywhere. They knew the Melaka forces were adept at using these arrows, sharp spears and the flying *kerises*.

'Is it true that I hear Sultan Mahmud Shah and his men are still intent on attacking us and they've produced many cannons from bamboo sticks that they could get in the jungles?' asked Alfonso. He sounded worried despite being holed in the solid fortress.

'True, admiral; this is what I have heard too. What do we do with them this time?' asked Diego Lopez. 'Where did they get the strength to fight us?'

'They must be joking if they think we can be pushed back into the sea. But, let's not be contented. Sultan Mahmud Shah has fully recovered from his injury, and he's a wounded tiger. He has absolutely nothing to lose.'

'That's right, admiral.'

'I have to think. I can't decide on what course of action that we can and must take.'

'Indeed, admiral.'

They walked around the fort and were impressed with it. It was sturdy, and could withstand any attack by the Malays, even fires by bamboo cannons.

Alfonso sat with the congregation in the newly built chapel on the peak of the St. Paul's Hill that situated within the compounds of the fort for a Sunday service. A Portuguese priest, The bishop of Melaka, an elderly man who wore a white robe, led it by crossing his body by first touching his right hand on his forehead, then his left and right shoulders. The others followed as it did. He had come from Goa in India to be the chief preacher in Melaka. He stood behind the pulpit in front of the chapel and spoke in Portuguese because most of the congregation was Portuguese. There was also a small group of Chinese and Indians who had converted to the religion amongst them. They were mostly women who had married to the Portuguese soldiers. After the service, Alfonso walked with Jorge and Diego Lopez to the chapel together with the other Portuguese men, women and children and the other local citizens. Some Malay men who stared at them from the distance did not know what they were seeing. They were woken up when the chapel bell rang. They did not know why the bell was pealing endlessly. It was loud that everybody in the city and its outlying areas in every direction could hear it. They went out of their houses and looked at the chapel. They saw a group of Portuguese officers and soldiers and some Indians and Chinese entering the building that looked different; on top of its spire was a wooden cross. They had never seen a building like that in Melaka before, so they were curious and amazed. Each of those people who attended the Sunday service carried a small black book in their hands. The women wore a black scarf over their head. The Malays stood there until the service was over. They could hear the congregation singing hymns together. They stood, sat and stood again and sang few songs.

The congregation filed out of the building. Now they were seeing a 'white Bengali' priest, the bishop of Melaka wearing a white robe.

'He dresses like an Arab, but he is not an Arab or Muslim,' remarked Abu Simbel, a Malay man in his mid-thirties.

'Sure, he's a Catholic priest,' said his friend, Jamal. 'Shhh... Not so loud, or they'll hear us.'

'Catholic?' asked Osman.

'That's the religion of the Portuguese.'

Osman was confused.

The men then kept quiet and continued to observe Alfonso and the bishop walked away together.

'We must go on the offensive. We just cannot wait here in Melaka until they come and attack us. A better strategy is for us to attack them instead so they're at the receiving end and not us,' said Alfonso. 'We just cannot sit here in Melaka and allow them to attack us. If we do, we will stand to lose more than they do. Our properties will be destroyed. They can return to the jungles and hide themselves there, while we have to tend to our injured men and women, and rebuild our houses and buildings. Even this chapel will not be spared. They will surely make this new chapel of our Lord be their main target, because it will send a strong message to our flock. Look, how easy for this chapel to be attacked and destroyed.'

'Our men have reported that the sultan has assembled his men in Bertam and they have built a fort there,' added Deigo Lopez.

'Really, is that so?'

'Yes, admiral.'

'If that's the case, we're left with no option, but to attack them there, before they hound us here instead.'

The Portuguese community in Melaka celebrated the *Fiesta de San Pedro* or the festival of St. Peter, the patron saint of the fishermen. A procession was held in Melaka where boats were decorated. The whole of Melaka was alive. This was the first time they were seeing such a festival. Even the Malays who were Muslims came to see the show. Actually, the Portuguese authorities wanted Mahmud and the Melaka forces into believing that Melaka was peaceful under them and the people had learnt to live with them. Little did they know that the Portuguese were secretly planning to launch an offensive on them. Soon after the festival, the Portuguese men marched through the woods and headed for Bertam, south of Melaka. They positioned themselves around the fort that the Melaka forces had constructed. They stared at the Melaka soldiers who were manning it.

'We must surround the fort, and when I give the signal, we attack,' said Diego Lopez who led the Portuguese forces.

They saw many Melaka men guarding around the fort. Many more were stationed everywhere. None of them could see the Portuguese because they were well hidden in the jungles. One of the Melaka soldiers suddenly fainted



due to heat exhaustion. He had to be propped up by his colleagues who quickly took him inside the ward where he was treated.

'Is the sultan inside the fort?' asked Jorge.

'I don't see the flag. May be he's out hunting. He can't be staying in the fort all day, can he?'

They laughed. Then suddenly, Mahmud appeared with his officers and men. One hundred men escorted him as he rode on his elephant. The door of the fort swung open and he entered the fort. The door was immediately closed.

'My goodness, there he is. What do we do now, captain?' asked Diego Lopez. 'They are so many of them.'

'What else is there for us to do? There's only one thing - we attack. I want our men to disperse and spread out. Go over there...and there.'

The Portuguese soldiers took up their positions closer to the fort. They crept in the bushes and waited there. Diego Lopez looked around. He raised his hand and brought it down. They then started to attack.

'Attack, attack! Down with Sultan Mahmud Shah! Down with the Malays! Down with Melaka!' the Portuguese soldiers shouted on top of their voice, in frenzy. Even the wild animals nearby ran for their lives. They had not heard noise so loud as this before in the jungles.

The Portuguese and their Indian mercenaries started to fire their cannons at the fort killing many Malays instantly. The Melaka men retaliated. Some Portuguese and Indian soldiers died or were badly injured. It was very noisy, with the firing of guns, cannons and the clanking of weapons and the stamping of boots.

'Attack, attack!' shouted Diego Lopez.

The Portuguese soldiers surged forward. They broke down the door and rushed inside. Mahmud rushed to the top of the fort. He surveyed the surrounding area and saw that the Portuguese had surrounded while his men were trying to defend it. Some of them had even entered the fort through the main entrance.

'Defend the fort! Defend the fort! Do not retreat!' shouted Mahmud.

Ahmad and Nadim rushed to him. 'We have to flee, father, they're everywhere. Many of our men have been killed,' said Ahmad.

'No, we fight!'

Two Portuguese soldiers suddenly appeared on the top of the fort with their long guns in their hands. They tried to attack Mahmud. But Nadim, who happened to be near, quickly attacked the Portuguese soldiers. They were

killed. He then flung their bodies off the fort and they landed on the ground outside the fort close to their friends. They were shocked.

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*In the month of September 1511 CE or sixth day of the month of Jamadilakhir of 917 Hijriah, Admiral Alfonso d'Albuquerque sent his men to attack Sultan Mahmud Shah's men at Bertam Fort. After a brief fight, they managed to defeat them. Mahmud and Raja Ahmad were forced to retreat further up to Hulu Muar. From there they sailed to Pagoh on the banks of the Muar River and remained there for a while, before moving on to Bentan Island where they erected a fortress. They thought it was a lot safer to hide on an island than on land, where they could see in full view anyone who was approaching them.*

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Mahmud, Ahmad, Alauddin, Kassim and Raden Ali and Nadim and their followers fled to Hulu Muar. By then, Teja was very weak and sickly. She looked pale. Fortunately her daughter, Amra Dewi was with her. Despite that she and the royal medicine Men called *bomohs* and *pawangs* could not do much. Her health had deteriorated so much and she had to be carried on the *tandu*, all the way from Melaka by crossing the twelve rivers. It took a huge toll on her. To make matters worse the *paduka tuan* who was now an invalid after suffering a stroke. He had to be carried on a palanquin when he had to travel outside, and carried by two men if he was inside the palace or his house. No wonder he was called the Invalid Prime Minister or *Bendahara Tepuk*. He was destined to be the last prime minister of Melaka. When they arrived at *Kampung Sempang* in Merlimau, twenty-six miles from Melaka, Teja died. Mahmud was devastated. She was a young woman, hardly forty years yet she had to succumb to the disease she was suffering from for a while for unknown reasons. She looked healthy just a few months before, yet she became almost a disabled person by the time the Portuguese showed their faces in Melaka. He now had two other wives Sultannah Fatimah who was the sultannah of Melaka and Kudu. His second wife, Raja Unang Kening had died earlier. He and his men spent three days to prepare for her burial, and after consultations with his officers, they decided to bury her there. It made Mahmud feel so sad; he thought he had no more reason to live.

'We rest for a day at Hulu Muar before we proceed to Pagoh. I wish to erect a fortress there. We will decide on what course of action that we can and must take. The Portuguese must be eliminated from Melaka!' said Mahmud

defiantly, after the burial ceremony for his wife was done with although the zinc in his voice had somewhat dampened.

The men started to cut down the trees and constructed the Pagoh Fort. Inside of it were huts for the sultan and his followers to stay at, while the soldiers, especially those who were not married slept in the tents that were camouflaged with the trees and bushes. As soon as they were completed, heavy rain poured down. Mahmud thought Allah had blessed them. He remarked that they were lucky to have completed the fort so everybody could stay dry in the huts and tents. He also knew when it poured, the Portuguese would not dare to proceed because it was dangerous to trek on the muddy ground that often had puddles of water. Worse, the rain often created a thick mist around the area thus restricting their vision. In this way, the Melaka forces were protected.

Diego Lopez and Jorge walked along the corridor in the Fort of Melaka with Alfonso feeling elated with their success in Bertam. The Melaka forces were trounced and pushed far away from Melaka. There was no prospect for them to launch an attack with their limited resources. Now there was no way that they could launch another attack as it was too difficult; it would take too much time and energy for them to do so.

'Congratulations, gentlemen. Now, Mahmud and Ahmad will have greater difficulty in attacking us,' said Alfonso excitedly. He then remembered something. 'Er...how many of them have been converted to our faith?'

'I'm pleased to say, quite a few, admiral,' said Diego Lopez.

'Never mind those who refuse; they are hardheaded people. Concentrate on the other races.'

'Yes, admiral, some of the Chinese, Indians and jungle people have joined us,' said Jorge.

'Praise our Lord!' said Alfonso.

An Indian-Muslim merchant, Utimutiraja passed by them. He overheard what the two Portuguese officials were saying. The admiral turned around and saw him. He remarked, 'A very good day to you, Mr. Utimutiraja.' The admiral greeted, in his usual veiled contemptuous tone for any non-Portuguese although he knew very well that Utimutiraja was one of the richest, if not the richest man in Melaka then. But what he did not know was what a devious mind he had. Despite his advanced age, Utimutiraja still secretly harbored evil intentions; this was what probably made him feel strong and energetic. He could still walk briskly for long distances without the aid of a walking stick like

many men his age did. God certainly had blessed him with good health, but unfortunately, he returned the favor by planning more evil deeds.

'Good day, admiral. Congratulations on the success of destroying Bertam,' said Utimutiraja. His face was contorted as if he was trying hard to hide his deceptive excitement.

'Thank you, sir. How's business these days?'

'It's definitely a lot better than under the Malay Sultans, sir. They're certainly not good for anybody here.'

'Really? Is that so?'

'Certainly, admiral, and the people of Melaka are happy to be under Portuguese rule.'

'Thank you, Utimutiraja.'

'Thank you, sir. May god bless you.'

They then started to walk in different directions. Alfonso then stopped. He turned and called, 'Mr. Utimutiraja.'

Utimutiraja stopped and turned. 'Yes, admiral.'

'Will I be able to see you at the chapel this Sunday for our service?'

'Er...er... I'm afraid not, admiral.'

'What is your religion?'

'Muslim, sir.'

Alfonso was startled with the revelation; he thought Utimutiraja was a Hindu, because he was Indian.

'Why, sir?'

'Never mind. Do come sometime.'

Utimutiraja nodded. Alfonso and his men walked away.

Pagoh Fort, September 1511 CE or the month of *Jamadalakhir* of 917 AH or 4209 of the Chinese calendar. Mahmud sat in front of a campfire inside the fort with his senior officers. They look distraught at the loss of Bertam fort some months earlier. But, they were happy that many of their men and women were not injured. They prayed for their dead friends, whose bodies were left behind when they fled Bertam fort. The sultan was sorry for not being able to give them a decent Muslim burial. He hoped Allah would forgive him for that. There was no way for them to carry their dead friends and give them a Muslim burial. The sultan hoped the Portuguese were not mean enough to dump all of them in a shallow grave or let their bodies lie until they were devoured by the insects, ants or wild animals. He tried not to worry about them. He only wanted to focus his attention on their future and to look ahead. It was Allah's will that they had to die there that manner, he thought. They must be in

Heaven now, because they were martyrs; and martyrs were certain to find a place there, and amongst the pious.

'We must immediately prepare plans to launch another attack the Portuguese in Melaka! We must not allow too much time to pass,' said Mahmud. He said it almost as an afterthought. His men were taken by surprised. Despite many losses, he still wanted to pursue the Portuguese.

There was a knock on the front door; it turned everybody's attention from their private conversation. A guard opened it. Utimutiraja entered. The sultan turned and saw his good friend walking towards him. He feared if someone had followed him there.

'Ah, Utimutiraja, what do you have for us from Melaka?' asked the sultan.

Utimutiraja went to the sultan and said: 'The Portuguese are not strong or stable, your majesty.'

'Is that so?'

'Many of their men have died, and many more were wounded in their attack on Bertam and earlier on Melaka. If your majesty had stood ground a little longer, Melaka or Bertam Fort would not have fallen.'

Mahmud and his officers were surprised.

'This is what I have to say your majesty. This is the best time to attack Melaka. The Portuguese are now complacent. They think your majesty's men were demoralized and were not in any position to launch another attack.'

Mahmud thought. His men waited. They were delighted to hear the news. He turned to look at them. 'What do you think?' asked the sultan.

'We must prepare ourselves first, father,' said Ahmad.

'Certainly. We must group all our men and ask them to prepare for an all-out assault on Melaka,' said Mahmud. He turned to Utimutiraja.

'Thank you, sir.'

'I shall return to Melaka now. I don't want them to feel suspicious of me for disappearing from Melaka so long.'

'Do they know you are here?'

'Not really.'

The sultan hugged Utimutiraja. He then walked away to the front door with some assistants. The guards opened the door and they went outside together.

Few days later, the Portuguese forces attacked the fort. There were four hundred Portuguese, six hundred Javanese and three hundred Burmese soldiers. They broke down the doors and barged inside. The Melaka soldiers tried to retaliate, but they were immediately overwhelmed. Mahmud, Ahmad and Nadim managed to kill some Portuguese soldiers. After a long-drawn

battle, it turned out that the Melaka forces were losing. Many of the Malays were killed.

A Portuguese soldier cut down the flagpole and Pagoh Fort officially fell to the Portuguese. This forced Mahmud, his wives, children, Ahmad, Alauddin, Kassim, Raden Ali, Dewi Amra and Nadim and Sang Sura to flee with their followers. They followed the river by rowing in boats. The others walked along the banks; they trailed and kept up with them. Mahmud was shocked because the Portuguese forces had appeared in Pagoh just before he launched an attack on them.

'Look at their track marks. They must be heading that way,' said Diego Lopez. He led his men to track down the Malays. Soon, they noticed them and they started to attack the Malays again. Another round of war broke out. More Malays died. The Portuguese suffered few casualties but they were able to bear their sufferings. They marched on. Mahmud, Ahmad and Nadim ran off in the woods with his small group of followers.

'Run, run!' shouted Mahmud.

Alfonso was angry. He paced in his office and stamped his feet on the floor. He was furious like he had never been before. If Utimutiraja was there in person and standing before him then, he would definitely be strangled with his bare hands. A Portuguese soldier had informed him that Utimutiraja was a spy for the Malays. But there was another story about a Chinese merchant who was envious of him; he lied to Alfonso about Utimutiraja being a spy for Sultan Mahmud. In this way, he could get rid of Utimutiraja as a business rival in Melaka.

'Get Mr. Utimutiraja, now!' shouted Alfonso.

'Yes, admiral,' said the Portuguese guard. He went out of the room. Alfonso turned to his officers. 'How dare he communicate with the sultan and gives him all our secrets. Utimutiraja must be executed! But, I must see his face first before I order his execution.'

His officers remained quiet.

'I want more reinforcement from Java and Burma. Bring me more men so we can defend Melaka should he attack us here.'

'Very well, admiral, I shall go to Java and Burma right away and get the men, sir,' said Jorge.

'Very well, captain.'

The captain stood up. He shook the admiral's hand and walked out of the room. Not long later, the guard returned to the room with Utimutiraja. His hands were tied behind his back.

'Good day, Mr. Utimutiraja,' said Alfonso. He greeted Utimutiraja in a pleasant tone that hid his contempt of him. Utimutiraja kept quiet. He did not know why the admiral wanted to see him that day. He had never done so. He tried to study the admiral's face. He knew Alfonso was angry. Utimutiraja hoped it was not due to him. The admiral turned and looked at him. He looked like a lion about to pounce on him. For the first time, Utimutiraja felt insecure. He feared for his life. Then he pretended to be ignorant and be friendly. He put out a smile.

'Is it true that you transmitted our secrets to Sultan Mahmud Shah?' asked the admiral. His tone was strong; it shook Utimutiraja. He tried to remain calm, but the small beads of sweat that started to form on his forehead belied the innocence that he tried to show. He quickly wiped off the smile from his face; he froze. It turned pale. He heard his heart beating faster; it pounded in his chest and his hands were trembling slightly. 'No, admiral; why do I want to do that?' he asked. He knew he was lying.

'You tell me! Is it true?'

Utimutiraja kept quiet. He looked down at the floor remained calm. He could not afford to falter or stammer.

'I will spare your life if you tell me the truth. Or, I shall have you hung in public, so that it will be a lesson to all.'

'No, admiral!'

'Liar! Hang him!'

The guard took Utimutiraja out of the room.

'Release me, admiral, I'm not guilty!' screamed Utimutiraja as he was pulled by the arm by the guard who was well armed with a pistol. If he tried to run, he would shoot him. This was the order that his superior had given him. His left hand was at the ready to draw it from the holster should the Indian merchant try to flee or overpower him. May be it was better if Utimutiraja tried to run as the matter with him could be settled there and then, without having to make him climb onto the platform in the middle of the square and he be hanged. It helped to save a lot of everybody's time. Alfonso looked at the other way; he did not want to do with Utimutiraja anymore and thought that he had settled the matter. An assistant closed the door. He stood up and went to the window. He saw Utimutiraja being made to stand on a platform. They had difficulty to do so because he had become limp by the time he got there. He felt pity for him. He deserved it, he thought. The people of Melaka crowded around it. The guards then covered his face with a piece of black cloth. They then pulled the cover under his feet and his body hung on a rope. His neck snapped. The sound was so loud that those who stood near the

platform could hear it. The people gasped. Nadim and Ahmad moved forward and mingled with the people there. They were wearing Arab robes to conceal their identities. They were shocked to see Utimutiraja being hung that day.

'No wonder he hadn't been seen in public for a long time,' whispered Nadim in Ahmad's ear.

Ahmad nodded.

'I'm sorry for him. He was a good man,' said Nadim.

A Portuguese officer stood on the platform, looking menacing. 'Listen all of you! Let this be a lesson to all of you. Should any of you betray the Portuguese authorities, you will also suffer the same fate as Mr. Utimutiraja, today on the seventh day in the month of December, 1511 in the year of our lord or the seventh day of the month of *Ramadan* of 917 *Hijriah*.'

The people kept quiet. They shook their heads. How could the Portuguese hang anybody in the middle of the month of *Ramadan* when all the Muslims were fasting from sunrise to sunset, they thought.

'*Portugis tak ada bati-perut!*' said one of the Malay men who were in the crowd. (The Portuguese are inhuman!) Fortunately for him, there was no Portuguese soldier or any of their local spies nearby. He would surely be detained for uttering such comments if any of them were there.

Later that night, Nadim and Ahmad rode their horses and returned to their camp. They had been riding through the woods throughout most of the day, after the execution of Utimutiraja. They could not wait to inform the sultan about what they had seen at the square. They got off the horse when they arrived at their secret hideout.

'Where's my father?' demanded Ahmad.

'In his majesty's tent, your highness,' replied a soldier.

'Thank you, sir,' said Ahmad. He turned to Nadim. 'Let me tell him.'

'Very well, your highness.'

Ahmad walked to his father's tent. Mahmud sat on a chair. He looked distraught and he shook his head in disbelief. How could the Portuguese be so mean, he wondered.

'I'm sorry for Mr. Utimutiraja, he was a kind man. How could they ever find it out that he had been supplying us with information?' said Mahmud.

'I'm not sure, father. The Portuguese surely must have their eyes and ears everywhere. He was executed as a reminder to the others in Melaka, father,' said Ahmad.

'Yes, I'm sure it was what the admiral wanted to prove to everybody there. This means that our plan to attack Melaka is put on hold for the moment.'



A Chinese dragon dance was performing in front of the house. Many people crowded to see it. Firecrackers were let out that made a loud noise and gave out a thick pile of smoke as the crackers broke into smithereens spilling out tiny pieces of red paper in all directions. The ground was soon covered with a thick pile of pieces of red paper.

Taiko stood beside Alfonso looking happy and contented. The Chinese quarters were now much larger and there were more people. The new temples and spirit houses they had built beside all the roads spewed a lot of smoke from the incense that they lit throughout the day. Occasionally, sounds of the bells being hit were heard coming from the temples. And there were many coffee shops where the Chinese people would eat. They still preferred to squat on the wooden stools that were provided. Some chose to sit under the shade away from the scorching sun. They slurped the noodles or *mee* that had meatballs, salted eggs or *telur asin* and pork with chopsticks from the bowls that they hold in the left hand making loud sounds. The day was hot and humid and everybody was sweating profusely. The prickly heat had also deterred the women from taking their children on walks, so they kept them in cribs or cages at home. Only those children from the wealthy families who were well catered for could stay outside of their house because were surrounded with trees that gave them shade. They could play *teng-teng*, the hop-skip-and-jump, or other Chinese traditional games of their choice to their heart's content.

After the show, Taiko and the admiral went inside the house for some refreshment. He was surprised to see that the front room of the Taiko's house was red in color. It looked more like the temples that he had seen on his way there. This was the first time he ever stepped inside the house of a Chinese man. There were many large deities, all made of porcelain. They were colorful with one who had an extra-long beard that rested up to his knees when he sat. One even had a black face and the other was female, white in color. Smoke from the incense sticks filled up the room. Fortunately, he did not suffer from any allergy or else the thick smoke would definitely knock him down. Taiko was such a religious man, thought Alfonso. He then followed him to an adjacent room where only wooden Chinese chairs and side-tables were available. Taiko produced a Chinese beer bottle from the cabinets he had brought from China. He poured two glasses, one for him and the other for his guest.

'That was some show, Taiko,' said Alfonso. 'I had never seen anything like that before.'

'I hope you liked it,' said Taiko.

'I did, except that the sound was so loud. It could break my eardrums,'  
'Now we can have some quiet moments together, admiral.' He then raised his glass. 'Here's to a more prosperous Melaka.'

'Yes, to Melaka.'

They knocked their glasses and drank.

'And here's also to his majesty King Manuel and Portugal,' added Taiko.

'To his majesty King Manuel and Portugal!'

They knocked their glasses again and took another sip.

'I believe Melaka will be more prosperous under the Portuguese, than the Malays, dear admiral.'

'I believe so, Taiko. Haven't you seen the many Chinese junks and ships from India and everywhere lately?' asked the admiral.

'Yes, I do. And because of that, I am getting a lot of business. Thanks to you, admiral. Look what I've got for you.' Taiko stood up. He went to the cabinet and staggered; he was almost drunk. The admiral looked at him and smiled at his friend's antics. 'And why are you dancing like that?'

'I'm not dancing.'

'What are you trying to show me? Never mind, some other time. We have all the time in the world. Melaka is ours.'

Taiko pulled out a present from the cabinet. He turned around and showed it to the admiral. 'Here's something, which I had brought back from China. It's a present from me to you, admiral.'

Alfonso took the present. 'What is it, Taiko?'

'It is a Chinese dagger, gold-studded with diamonds and other precious stones. An emperor in China formerly owned it.'

'Really?'

The admiral pulled out the dagger from the scabbard and cut the air. Taiko laughed.

'Why are you giving this to me? You should keep it for yourself and your children.'

'It's a 'thank you' gift, admiral.'

'Thank you? We are grateful to you, Mr. Taiko, for all the help that you have given us. The kingdom of Portugal and I.'

'It's for giving me the land by the banks of the river and the beach near the river-mouth, sir.'

'Ah, but, that was a small token of appreciation from us, for all the help that you had given us, Mr. Taiko.'

'Never mind, just take it as a friendly gift from me, Mr. Taiko.'

Alfonso nodded.

Mahmud sat on a chair and thought hard. Actually, he was fearful of what he could expect ahead of him. Each time he closed his eyes tightly, so he could get to 'see' a vision of what lay ahead of him like a premonition, all the he saw was emptiness, darkness and stillness. He continued to stay there until he was almost engulfed in the darkness as the last rays of light dimmed and then disappeared. Night fell and he was now engulfed in total darkness.

Ahmad and Nadim waited anxiously; they did not want to stir Mahmud. After what seemed like an eternity, the sultan woke up on his sown. He slowly opened his eyes then broke the news that the prime minister had died when they were in Segamat. He told his son and Nadim now they both of them had to bear the sole responsibility of leading the men with the prime minister gone. He was already old and an invalid. The sultan had delegated some of his duties to both these young men. They only referred matters to the late prime minister if they were serious ones that required a policy change. Because of the uncertainties they were experiencing, Mahmud refused to appoint the *paduka tuan's* successor. He hoped one day when they had recaptured Melaka from the Portuguese and returned to the palace at the foothills of Melaka Hill he would only then appoint one. His most likely successor would be Nadim for he had shown fortitude and leadership through the time they were on the run, and not because he was the son-in-law of the late Admiral Tuah. He and Ahmad would certainly make a formidable team especially when Ahmad ascended to the throne. The sultan also told his son, in the presence of Nadim this was his plan. He had thought about it for a long while. The sultan, too, felt he was already old, in the early seventies now; he thought he could not last much longer.

'No, don't say that, father,' Ahmad was quickly to advise. 'It's not proper to assume that that is God's will.'

'No, I don't mean it, my dear son,' said Mahmud. 'But, if we are able to retain Melaka and push our enemies from the devils, it would be better if I step down from the throne so you can be the next sultan of Melaka. Brother Nadim your trusted prime minister. In this way the people of Melaka will be encouraged; their energies will be revitalized by the presence of two young and energetic men like both of you.'

'Thank you, for your faith in my capabilities,' said Nadim. 'But, there are many other more experienced men who have been with your majesty through the thick and thin.'

'It is my personal desire to have you succeed *paduka tuan*,' chipped the sultan. The way he cut in and said it made Nadim and Ahmad fearful of

further repercussions. He knew the sultan was dead serious and he did not brook any nonsense, especially when he had made up his mind and decided on this issue. Both the men thought that they had better keep quiet about the issue.

'I have also discussed it with the late *paduka tuan* and he also agreed with my decision,' explained Mahmud. 'The late prime minister told me not to consider any of his sons for the post because they did not show any leadership qualities. I agreed. I thought it was time for the sultanate to see some drastic change. Only the persons best suited to whatever post are allowed to take the posts available. We must do away with tradition if it doesn't bring in any benefit. In this way, Melaka will benefit from their involvement in the administration of the state. Melaka has seen tremendous changes as of late - I don't mean with the attack by the Portuguese and their subsequent takeover of our country. What I mean is that Melaka has developed beyond recognition. If our founder, Parameswara, also known as, Megat Iskandar Shah and his Prime Minister Seri Wak Raja were to come back to life and see with their own eyes, they'd be shocked.

'I have much faith in our men. We can retake Melaka from the people from the land of the devils and Satan! Believe me. It's just a matter of time before they are trounced.'

'I'm sure we can, dear father,' said Ahmad. 'For this to happen, we still require your leadership to lead us to achieve that goal.' Mahmud nodded.

'The people of Melaka who are still there are also certain that their sultan will return to the state one day soon,' added Nadim.

Mahmud nodded again.

'We must not let them down, dear father.'

'What else have I not done, my son? I've done everything that I could possibly do. Yet, we are not able to defeat them. They are simply too powerful for us,' said the sultan looking at the faces of the two men who were sitting before him. He fixed his gaze into the dark open space that spread before him like he was soliloquizing a narration he had prepared a long time ago that only now he had the opportunity to recite. 'I have done my level best. I looked after the well being of my people, the Malays, Chinese, Indians, Arabs; Muslims and non-Muslims. Everybody was happy that they had food on their tables at every meal and their children were able to grow in a congenial climate that our ancestor, Parameswara had created way back when.

'Did I hear any voice of discontentment coming from them? No. I don't think I had not heard even stirs of discomfort coming from their hearts. If

there were, I would surely have heard them. I could tell if a person is in discomfort or in pain. I need only to go on a walkabout in the bazaars and see their faces to know if their smiles were genuine or fake. All of them seemed to be very happy to be in Melaka. Scores of thousands of traders and other ordinary folks still continued to come to Melaka, to trade, work or lived in Melaka right to the time before the people from the 'land of the devils' came.

'These people came, not to share their joy and compassion, but to create confusion and stir hatred amongst a small section of our people, especially the Chinese, Indian and Javanese traders. These people can never be contented with whatever that they have; they want more and more trade and make money. Haven't they realized that they had surrendered their souls to the devil? The devils have dominated their minds and souls! They live as human beings, but actually, they are worse than the devils themselves! They are the devil personified!' He spat on the ground. 'Damned Portuguese devils! Is this what their religion tells them to do? Is this what their fathers and mothers tell them to do?'

'We must not give up, father, we must not disappoint our staunch followers; they need our guidance and leadership,' said Ahmad.

'What else can we do, my son, Nadim?'

'We must consolidate our energy and chart out a different strategy. 'We've tried to attack by land, but failed.'

'So, what are you suggesting, my friend?' asked Ahmad.

'We have attacked the Portuguese by land, but it did not work. We need to change our tactics. Our enemies have been misled into thinking that our only recourse was to attack by land. We must surprise them this time.'

Mahmud and his son froze. Nadim waited. 'What do the two of you say?'

'We attack them by sea.'

'That's brilliant, Nadim.' The sultan then turned to look at his son, 'What do you think, son?'

'I think it's brilliant, father.'

Mahmud turned to Nadim. 'What do you say, Nadim?'

'It's a good strategy. This is another reason why your majesty's leadership is still required.'

'Let's go out and I wish to speak to my men,' said Mahmud. He stood. The two men followed suit. He then walked with Ahmad and Nadim in the woods.

'But, don't you think we should at least wait until the admiral leaves for India? I just hate the sight of him. Have you stared at his face? Have you seen another person who looked more evil than him before? The last time I was locked in battle with him, I noticed how evil his eyes were,' said Mahmud.

'No. There is nobody else who looks like the Portuguese admiral. And yes, without the admiral's leadership, the Portuguese forces will surely be less dangerous,' said Nadim. 'All our other enemies have been respectable people who knew the art of war and engagement. None of them came to Melaka with a wide smile, but with a rotten heart - rotten to the core!'

'If that's the case, we need to prepare our men. They've not had sea experience for quite some time,' said Mahmud. 'The art of attack from land requires a different sort of training and discipline compared to the art of attack by sea. We have to make clear to our men and officers. Even their spouses and children, too, need to understand this so that they know what to expect. If necessary, all the women must be armed with the small female *keris*, which they can hide in the waist of their *sarong*. They can use them when necessary. I expect the Portuguese soldiers who are young and hungry for love and affection - because they have been away from their families and wives too long - will want to take full advantage of our women. Our women are some of the most beautiful in this region, I must say. If the Portuguese men dare to force themselves on our women, they'd better be prepared to be sent to Hell!'

'It's true,' said Nadim. 'I will make sure all our women are equipped with the small female *keris*.'

'We will make more of them soon, father,' added Ahmad.

The men saw Mahmud coming their way. They immediately stood in attention.

'Listen here, my men, his majesty Sultan Mahmud Shah has something to say to all of you,' announced Nadim.

The sultan stepped forward. 'I want all of you to listen to me very carefully. We have lost few wars with the Portuguese, but it does not mean that we have lost the battle. Far from it! As long as we still have the fighting spirit in all of us, they can't defeat us. They may have taken Melaka from us, but it does not mean that they own it. Melaka can revert to our own rule. And we can defeat the Portuguese. *Allabukhbbar! Allabukhbbar!* shouted the sultan.

*'Allabukhbbar! Allabukhbbar!* shouted his men. *'Ya, Mansur!*

Alfonso inspected the part of the fort that was still being built around the town. Diego Lopez rode with him on a horse-carriage. 'How much longer does it have to take before the whole fort is completed, captain?' asked Jorge.

'I'd say in about six to seven more months for the first phase to be completed. We must complete it by then or we'll be delayed by the torrential rain,' replied Diego Lopez.

'That means somewhere in June or July, 1522 or the month of *Syaaban* of 928 *Hijriah* or one month before the fasting month of *Ramadan*?'

'Yes, admiral; that is right.'

'I will remain in Melaka until it is completed then. I will not leave Melaka before it is completed. And how long will the other phases be completed?'

'That will have to take many years, admiral. Where do you intend to go to next, admiral? Back to Lisbon? I'm sure your wife and children are longing to see you again, admiral.'

'No. I have to go to Goa to find out if another mission awaits me there. After that I'll return to Lisbon.'

'I'm sure Sultan Mahmud Shah won't be in any condition to attack us here, admiral, with the completion of this fort.'

'I should think so, captain. But, nobody knows what he's capable of doing these days. Therefore, I urge that you to keep on your toes. He can still attack us anytime. He can have his other Malay rulers to come to his aid.'

'Certainly, admiral.'

'We mustn't rest until we know that the sultan had been totally defeated, and are no more a threat to Melaka.'

'Yes, your excellency.'

Mahmud and his followers sailed in few ships to Pagoh at night so that the Portuguese spies could not detect them. Even amongst the Malays there were people who were willing to help them spy on Mahmud's forces. He could not sleep well last night. He then woke up and left his cabin. He went to the railings and stared at the horizon from the deck as the first rays of light were appearing for the beginning of the new dawn. Ahmad went to him. Because he was not on dry land, he could not hear the *azan* calling the Faithful to pray.

'What're you thinking, father?' asked Ahmad.

'Will you be disappointed if I fail again to recapture Melaka on this mission?' asked the sultan.

'No. If that's Allah's fate.'

'It will be a pity if you cannot become the eighth sultan of Melaka. I think you'll be a great ruler of Melaka.'

'Let's leave that to Allah, for He alone knows if I shall be installed the eighth sultan of Melaka or not.'

'True, son, very true.'

They then went to the chairs and sat. Nadim went to them and immediately announced, 'We expect to arrive in Bentan Island within two to three days, your majesties.'

'Very well, Nadim, won't you sit down,' said Mahmud.

'Thank you. But, I have to see the captain. I'll be back shortly, your majesty.'

'Very well.'

Nadim went off.

'We are lucky that the legendary Hang Tuah is son-in-law is with us. We are much better off with him around anytime. He is our source of strength and courage. He knows no fear. And his contempt for the infidels is well known by us all.'

'And not forgetting his brother-warriors,' said Ahmad.

Mahmud nodded and continued to stare at the horizon. By now, the day was brighter, and the early morning lights were casting a golden glow on them.

Alfonso was driven in a horse-carriage around the fort. A group of Portuguese soldiers trailed behind to escort him. They were still fearful of any attack from the Malays. The Portuguese did not want anything of this sort to happen, especially on the day of the admiral's departure to Lisbon. He had wanted to see the whole city for one last time before he return to Lisbon via Goa where he was the governor. The admiral was pleased with what he was seeing. Melaka had changed since they took over from the Malays. In his hands, were a new map of Melaka that showed the newly constructed buildings and streets. He wanted to bring the map with him so he could produce it before King Manuel. He was sure their ruler would be happy to know that Melaka was now under his control and it was developing well.

After visiting the bazaars for the last time, where he saw the local citizens doing about their business, he was driven to the port. The top Portuguese officials were waiting to see him off on his ship the *Flor de la Mar* for his return journey to Lisbon. From the bazaars, Alfonso asked the Indian rider, also a Catholic like him to drive along the Melaka River. He wanted to see the river again, because he did not know if he would ever be in Melaka again; this was his last opportunity to see the river flow. It reminded him of his childhood in Portugal. His house stood near the banks of the river there, and it gave him opportunities to swim. When he got older, he decided to join the Portuguese Navy so he could sail the high sea. Now he was in Melaka, and he felt sad about the prospect of having to leave this city. He also wanted to pass by a new chapel that the Portuguese had constructed on the banks of the river in the *Kampung Bunga Raya* or Hibiscus Village area, east of the fort. This was where many hibiscus trees grew, and because of that, the Malays called that area the Hibiscus Village when they wanted to open the area.

Alfonso was entertained the night before, to a party in the official residence of the governor of Melaka, where many Portuguese and local girls danced with the Portuguese men. All the local girls, however, were non-Malays. The party



lasted the whole of the night and ended when the chapel bells tolled at dawn. He and the top officials of the Portuguese administration danced the Portuguese traditional dance, called *branyo* which the Malays called *ronggeng* by the Malays, with the local girls. Some of them fell to the floor, drunk. Beer flowed like the Melaka River, slowly but with a steady gush that made all the Portuguese men and women dead drunk. By now, the local folks were able to speak a little Portuguese and the Portuguese in turn were able to speak Malay. They used a smattering of Portuguese words in the Malay language, thus helping it to expand. Now the Malay language not only had such words, but also Chinese, Indian and Arabs. Most of the words in the Malay language were those that did not exist in the language.

Alfonso walked with Diego Lopez and Jorge to the ship, the *Flor de la Mar*. His nephew, Jorge stood by. He was appointed the captain of Melaka and was certain that he was going to have to bear some heavy responsibilities. Fortunately, his uncle, the admiral had taught him how to handle the task.

His flagship was laden with ample food that should last through their journey. They also brought with them more priceless treasures that they had seized from the palace of the sultan of Melaka and the residences of the senior Malay officials as well as other priceless artifacts, as presents for their King Manuel.

'I'm sure Melaka will be in safe hands, captain,' said Alfonso. He hugged the officers and lastly his nephew. 'We'll see each other again, either in Melaka, Goa or Lisbon. Goodbye, captain, Diego Lopez, Jorge.'

'Goodbye, your excellency,' said the captain and Jorge almost in unison.

'You take good care of Melaka for his majesty King Manuel, my dear nephew, Jorge,' said Alfonso.

'I will, uncle.'

'Goodbye, captain,' said Diego Lopez.

Alfonso and his nephew and their men stood by the dock. 'Remember, Diego Lopez, we are not deserting you,' said the admiral. 'We will return with more men and weapons and priests, to ensure that Melaka will be for us to keep. I do hope that you will look after Melaka well.'

'Yes, admiral, I assure you that we'll remain in Melaka to ensure that Sultan Mahmud Shah won't launch any surprise attack on us,' said Diego Lopez. 'He is like a wounded lion now. He can do anything, for he has nothing to lose anymore. He's not got any reputation or dignity left in him. He's been humiliated for too much that he won't mind making a fool of himself anymore, by attacking us from wherever he may be now. God knows when will he give up Melaka for good.'

'Very well, Diego Lopez; if that is the case, shall we make a move now? Sultan Mahmud Shah will learn his lesson in due course.'

'I bid you a pleasant journey back to Portugal. May your journey be smooth and an eventful one. My warmest regards to his excellency the governor of Goa and his majesties, King Manuel and our queen. Do bring all the love from the people of the Portuguese colony of Melaka.'

'I shall convey your messages, Diego Lopez. Goodbye.'

'Goodbye, admiral.' Diego Lopez then saluted the admiral who hugged him. They then walked to his ship that was berthed by the banks of the river. It then sailed off with the winds and headed south towards Singapura for a good rest on land, and to stock up their food stocks. The admiral's flagship the *Flor de la Mar* was escorted by two other ships that carried the treasures and some men including those who were disabled by physical injury. Alfonso had to return to Portugal with just three ships as the others were sent to Maluku or had sunk near Ceylon on their way from Portugal via Goa few years earlier. He stood at the railings on the deck when his ship had left Melaka harbor and was a distance away from it. He stared at the panorama of the city and looked at the new fort that surrounded the entire St. Paul's Hill. On them, he could see most of the chapel as all the trees near it had been cut down. What was he thinking of? He feared for the safety of the men he had left behind. He did not know if he was going to be able to return to Melaka now that his mission was completed with the capture of the state. Mahmud may not be in Melaka anymore, but he was still intent on taking it over. Which sultan doesn't want to fight his enemies?

Pero de Faria, the draftsman sat at another part of the deck. He was busy drawing the illustration of Melaka, but this time on its new skyline with many ships and boats in the straits. The whole project would take few decades.

Alfonso, however, he didn't feel any remorse that he had trounced the Muslim sultanate of Melaka despite the fact of the rumor that said his own ancestors, too, were Muslims. They had to convert to Catholicism when Portugal and Spain fell to the Catholics. Their surname was Al-Bukari. They were a clan that was well known for their bravery, and they held high office in Portugal when it was under Muslim rule. They quickly changed their name to Albuquerque. Thus their lives were spared and their status quo maintained. However, some of the other high officials were not so lucky; they were persecuted during the Inquisition because they refused to denounce Islam. Some of their family members fled to Turkey or other Muslim countries. Those who did not have the time to flee were arrested and thrown into prison.

The others who gave in to demands, converted, while the others perished because they stood firm with their religious convictions.

Alfonso went to him. 'How's it going, Pero?'

'It's coming along, sir,' replied Pero.

The admiral went closer to him and peeked at the new drawing of Melaka. It showed the fort of Melaka that surrounded the St. Paul's Hill, and on its peak was the St. Paul's Chapel. The Portuguese flag with the design of a thick cross, red in color, on white background were everywhere. The admiral's last command was to demolish the brick mosque that stood near the hill built by Parameswara, the founder of the Melaka sultanate more than a century ago. It had an unusual design, which he fashioned from the Chinese pagodas he had seen on his trips to China.

'This looks good. We will destroy the palace on the hill and at the foot of it and then the royal mausoleum. We'll take over the whole hill.'

'It should be ready soon, your excellency. And the governor's mansion will be at the foot of the St. Paul's Hill.'

'Good, I'd like to present it before his majesty King Manuel to show him how Melaka looks just before we left the city-state.'

'His majesty will surely be delighted to know what your excellency had done. We have succeeded in our main mission, but we have more territories to conquer in Southeast Asia and elsewhere.'

'Oh, I do hope so.'

After sailing smoothly through the straits of Melaka southwards, they turned west and let the southerly winds take them to Goa. This was their second stop where they rested and replenished their food stocks, before proceeding to Lisbon in Portugal. Goa was a Portuguese colony, where they were welcome by the governor and the people. Alfonso believed Mahmud and the remnants of his army could not stand any chance whatsoever, should they decide to launch an attack on the Portuguese forces that he had left to guard Melaka. He had full faith in the officers and men he left behind together with a battalion of Portuguese officers and other soldiers that also included Indian mercenaries they had brought from Goa.

However, just as the *Flor de la Mar* sailed along the straits of Melaka, a strong storm broke out. The ship and the two others began to tumble like cardboard in the wild sea. The water swallowed few small fishing boats that were sailing near them. Alfonso feared for his three ships. He was certain his own flagship could not bear it since it was already too old and hazardous. It was deemed not sea-worthy. Despite that, he insisted on sailing it all the way from Portugal to Melaka. The battering that it experienced during the attack

on Melaka had made it worse. Sometimes they could hear wooden beams and planks creaking.

'A storm has broken up, admiral!' shouted one of his men.

'Lower the masts!' Alfonso shouted back from inside the cabin. He then heard footsteps and people shouting outside. The masts were lowered and the sails fell down in a loud thud. It sounded like a thunder clapping. He quickly shouted for his men to control the other two ships that were trailing behind his. 'Order the other two ships to lower their masts!'

'Aye, aye, admiral,' someone shouted. Only his voice could be heard. It came from many of the men who were running in all directions on the deck. Some of them fell to the floor as the ship tumbled in the rough sea and with the strong winds blowing in all directions. If they had not cut the ropes in time to bring all the masts, all the three ships could have toppled to the side, thus drowning all of them. Fortunately, this did not happen. The *Flor de la Mar* seemed to be suffering the worse, since it was the oldest and least safe to sail in. The admiral opened the door and stepped outside of his cabin and shouted, 'Try and steer close to any island!' Part of a mast fell to the side, into the sea. Water splashed onto his face.

'There're no islands around here, admiral!' shouted a voice from amongst his men who were all drenched and looking fearful of their lives.

Alfonso kept quiet; he did not bother to look at the person who said to him. He went to the railings and held his hands tightly on them. He glanced outside but could not see any island he could steer his ship to hide it from the winds. He crossed his body and prayed that they would be saved by some divine intervention. The other Portuguese sailors followed suit and crossed their bodies twice. A few fell of them onto their knees and recited a pray quietly. The winds grew stronger. The admiral hoped that the *Flor de la Mar* could withstand the strong winds. However, his hopes were dashed when it started to creak loudly at different parts. The wooden floor started to give way. He realized that it was an old ship and it stood no chance of surviving the strong storm. Now the ship was being put to test in the worst possible condition. A strong storm was the least that the admiral had expected in the straits of Melaka that had never seen a storm in such intensity before. It looked like it was not going to stand long. The *Flor de la Mar* began to tilt to the side. The masts started to break in the middle and they tumbled into the sea with the floor starting to open. Alfonso rushed to other places on the deck and ordered his men to lower the boats when the ship started to sink slowly. He then ordered all of them to desert the ship. 'Get out, everybody! Get out!

Abandon the ship!' he shouted on top of his voice. 'Lower the boats! Lower the boat! We must leave the ship!'

The men immediately started to lower the small boats to the sea. They jumped into them and rowed to the shore. He was the last to get into the boat because it was his responsibility to see that his men were safe. The men quickly rowed the boats to the other two ships, to their safety. They immediately knelt down on their knees and crossed their bodies. They recited short prayers and thanked god for their safety. Alfonso turned around. He saw the two smaller boats had disappeared completely from view; the water had swallowed them.

The *Flor de la Mar* was seen half-submerged in water with the mast-poles sticking from it. The admiral continued to stare at it until it completely disappeared in the water. He cried. The other captains and men who survived the ordeal also cried upon seeing that their admiral and captains breaking. What the admiral regretted the mostly was the treasures and manuscripts that he had taken out of Melaka with him in the *Flor de la Mar* that also disappeared with it. There were thousands and thousands of Ming dynasty porcelain that he had taken from the palace of Sultan Mahmud that now lay in the seabed. He hoped that King Manuel would not be mad with him because of that. The two ships that survived the storm limped their way to Goa in India. He only managed to grab whatever that he could lay his hands on that were kept in his own cabin, such as the maps of Melaka and some gold *kerises*. The other treasures went down with his ship. It was not a glorious end for the ship that had taken him to all corners of the earth in many of his sea adventures. He did not expect it to come down this way on his return journey from Melaka where he had earlier triumphantly conquered on behalf of his king and country. He felt embarrassed, but held his cool. His only wish now was to be able to survive the immediate ordeal and arrive in Goa. He had no time to feel despair. Instincts told him if he did that, soon he would be consumed by guilt. If that happened, it would spell the end of him with his mind being clouded and he'd make graver mistakes that could even threatened his own life and those of his officers and men.

However, what actually happened was the sultan of Haru had attacked the *Flor de la Mar* that caused it to wreck and sink in the sea. Alfonso's diarist who was onboard also escaped to the other ship. He did not write in his report about this because it would make his admiral look silly in the eyes of those Portuguese officers in Goa, and Lisbon. The admiral had wanted to put a false front and blamed the weather and not to some Haru men. In this way, too, he could account for the loss of all the things, goods and manuscripts that he had taken on his ship to Lisbon to be presented before King Manuel. Thousand

pieces of Ming dynasty china were given to all the sultans of Melaka from the time of its first ruler, Parameswara or Megat Iskandar Shah, and those they brought back from their trips to China. It mostly comprised of plates, cups, saucers, and other utensils. They were lost with the ship. They all now lay on the seabed. But, rumors also said that thousands of gold ingots that they took also went down with the ship. The sultan of Haru knew when the Northerly winds were blowing; it was the best time for them to attack. He was delighted when told that the Portuguese admiral's flagship had sunk although he survived. He, however, let Alfonso and some of his men to leave Haru and sailed on to India so that they could relate what happened to their superiors. In this way, they could reassess their position in Melaka; hopefully they could go elsewhere and leave the region where they were not welcome by the Malays.

## CHAPTER 17: TO BENTAN ISLAND

Sultan Mahmud Shah sailed in the straits of Melaka through thick foggy night. It was unusually cold. He held his hands over his chest and shivered slightly. He looked old, frail and not spirited. An assistant quickly brought out a shawl and gave it to him. 'Ah, thank you, Kamal, son.'

'It's very chilly and windy outside,' said Kamal, politely. 'Perhaps it would be better if your majesty get inside where it's warmer and more comfortable.'

'That's all right, I'll stay here for a little while more. Why don't you get inside yourself?'

'Very well.'

Kamal walked backwards a few steps like he always did, before he turned around and returned to his cabin. The ships in the sultan's convoy did not stop anywhere even after sailing for few days; they continue since they still had a lot of food and refreshments for everyone in all the ten ships. The ship in front was the largest, and it carried Mahmud and his family, including Ahmad, Alauddin, Kassim, Raden Ali and Nadim. The winds were especially slow and lazy that day, so the ships did not move quickly as they had hoped for, considering their eagerness to leave Pagoh. If the winds did not change, they feared that the Portuguese might catch up with them.

'The winds are so slow, father,' commented Ahmad. 'The ships are hardly moving. If this continues, we will not be at our destination in time.'

'I fear the Portuguese might catch up with us,' added the sultan.  
'What shall we do then?'

'What else is there to do? Let's just hope and pray that the winds will get stronger and the Portuguese will not notice us here. Hopefully, by daybreak, we will be too far away from the Portuguese. At least now we can still hide under the cover of darkness. In the day, we are exposed from all sides. This can be dangerous for us all.'

'I'll talk to the captain to see if he can do something about it.'  
'Yes, you do that.'

Ahmad then went off leaving his father alone. He continued to stare ahead as his ship sailed forward. It continued to sail throughout the day until the sun started to dim. He was relieved because the Portuguese were nowhere there. He felt safer now. Later in the evening, they arrived at Pagoh. The sun was casting a warm golden glow on the land. Mahmud and his followers got off their ships. They then waded through the water and landed on the beach together with his men. He surveyed the land while his men waited. 'Here in Pagoh; I want to plan my next move to attack the Portuguese in Melaka,' he announced. They then went to the open-fields.

'Set up tent here.'  
His men quickly did as ordered.

'We set up our temporary camp here and plan our next move. I want everybody to rest completely and replenish themselves. We have a whole day ahead of us tomorrow. And tend to all your wounds.'

'Yes, your majesty,' said Nadim.  
'Is everybody all right, Nadim?'

'Yes. Why don't your majesty take a rest? Your tent has been erected.'  
'That's a good idea. My legs are tired.'

They then went to the tent nearby.  
'Should you need me, I'll be over there.'

'Why don't you take a rest yourself, Nadim.'  
'Certainly, your majesty.'

Mahmud entered his tent. His daughter, Amra Dewi was resting inside and reading the Koran quietly to herself. She was still mourning over her mother's death. 'How long are we going to be here, dear father? Are we going to remain in Pagoh?' she asked. She closed the Koran and kissed it three times before touching it on her forehead.

'Definitely not. I will plan our next attack on the Portuguese. I'm sure we'll be able to recapture Melaka this time,' said Mahmud.

'Where is Ahmad and Raja Alauddin?'

'In the woods, with the boys.'

'I feel sorry for Brother Ahmad for not being able to become sultan like his father, grandfather, great-grandfather and those before him till Parameswara.'

'Don't say that. We stand a good chance of recapturing Melaka. The Portuguese can't remain in Melaka forever. I'm sure they will find even the weather to be disagreeable to their body. I heard many of them have died of malaria and other tropical diseases that we could take for granted. I do hope that the people of Melaka will launch some sort of revolt from inside. If that happens, we can rush to their aid and we will together push the Portuguese into the sea where they belong. Those devils from the faraway land cannot remain in Melaka for long.'

Mahmud was surprised with his daughter's spirit. His daughter, Amra Dewi kept quiet. But she was not sure if the people of Melaka were willing to do that, because they did not have anybody who could lead them. The Portuguese were intent on staying in Melaka because they saw many opportunities that were available. Already, few non-Malays had converted to their religion. They were other natives from the jungles who had also been tempted to convert. The Portuguese knew how to deal with them. They married these women and converted them too since none of their women came with them. She feared for the safety of the women in Melaka who might be forced to marry them.

Mahmud later went to the fields and stood at one side. He held his official *keris* in his tight grips like he was saying to himself that one day he'd be back in Melaka to assume his leadership of the country. Ahmad, Alauddin and Sang Sura watched the men practicing the *silat* to tone their muscles and hone their fighting skills; and mostly, to relieve themselves of the stress they were experiencing. Nadim stood dutifully beside him and he observed with a hawk eye. He was greatly impressed. If he had more of men like these, they could easily outwit and outsmart the Portuguese and drive them out of Melaka in no time, thought Ahmad.

His father went to there. He could not stay in the tent for his mind was wandering. He was worried and feeling fearful. He simply had to go out of his tent to stay outside. Staying in the tent too long always made him feel claustrophobic. He loved the outdoors; he liked to be in a wide space and not in an enclosed one like inside a tent or a cave. He normally returned to the tent when he was tired and needed to rest or sleep. Otherwise, he would be outside of the tent, sitting on a chair. It was the same when he was in the palace; he always sat in the verandah where he stared out of the windows and observed the people doing about their business.



'My sons and daughters. I promise to do my level best to recapture Melaka so that our ancestors will have a home and country. The Portuguese will not remain in Melaka forever. With Allah's will, we can recapture Melaka.

'And I want to launch an attack on the Portuguese in six months' time. This will give us ample time to prepare ourselves, and make more weapons. We will allow the Portuguese to remain complacent and lazy. So when we attack them, they won't be able to retaliate. We'll attack Melaka six months after their admiral leaves Melaka to go to Goa in India. Now his nephew is the captain of the fort of Melaka. We can take him! Long live Melaka! Long live Melaka!' shouted Mahmud.

'Long live Melaka! Long live Melaka!' shouted the men.

'Long live Sultan Mahmud Shah! Long live Sultan Mahmud Shah!' shouted Nadim.

'Long live Sultan Mahmud Shah! Long live Sultan Mahmud Shah!' shouted the men.

The sultan's fleet sailed to Melaka. Nadim led it.

An Indian horseman appeared from one end of the street and rode through the city of Melaka in such great haste. Everybody knew who he was; he worked for the Portuguese. He left behind him a cloud of dust. He did not care if the local people, even the Malays were annoyed with his actions. He felt he was the authority, too, and he could do whatever he liked. More so now that he was on an official errand for the Portuguese. Some shopkeepers tried to scold him - they were almost choked, but kept quiet when they realized that the Indian horseman was on an errand on behalf of the Portuguese. Furthermore, they thought it was useless since he could not speak Chinese, being an Indian from Goa. But one of two of them did pour scorn on him, in Chinese in the least polite way imaginable. By the time they had finished the first sentence, the Indian horseman was far ahead and was hidden by the buildings in the bazaar. He continued to pass through the bazaar, almost sending everybody who stood in his way scurrying for their dear lives. The children were especially frightened; they hid behind their parents and clung onto their *sarongs*. One woman almost had her *sarong* pulled down. Fortunately, she was able to hold onto it with both her hands. This was done at the expense of the marketing basket that she had to let go, thus pouring all its contents onto the street that included fish, vegetables and some fruits and meat. Everybody thought the Indian man was crazy, but there was nothing that could do. They all knew he was a messenger for the Portuguese officials. So everybody simply had to make way for him to pass through.

'Hey, slow down, you're going to hurt someone!' shouted a Malay man as he walked by the side of the road. *Ya, Allah*, what's happening to that Indian man?'

'What's the big rush?' asked another Malay man.

'He seems to be in a rush, like he was being chased by the devils. He's one of them, too.'

They laughed. The horseman continued with his journey. The others turned to look at him. He then tied his horse, and immediately went inside the Portuguese administration building and went straight to Fernao Peres de Andrade's office by climbing up the stairs. He had to walk few more corridors before he arrived outside of his office. His assistant motion for the horseman to stop. He then opened the door and said something to Fernao Perez, before gesturing the horseman to enter the room. Not a word was spoken between the assistant and the horseman, as they were not speaking each other's language. The assistant only spoke in Portuguese while the Indian, only Tamil. He stood before Fernao Peres and waited for his next instruction.

'Is that so, my man?' asked Fernao Peres in the heavily accented Indian language, a language he had learnt when he was stationed in Goa, India for few years. His command of the language was not excellent, but enough to strike a conversation with any Indian.

'It is, your excellency; I've just returned from Pagoh, and I personally saw the sultan's man practicing the art of war called *silat* moves and steps diligently. And I overheard the sultan himself saying that he would attack us,' said the horseman.

'Hmmm... Did he really say that?' Fernao Peres was not shocked. He had somewhat expected the sultan to embark on this campaign. He knew the Malays were a tough people; they would not easily surrender, more so when they have friends and relatives in other Malay states throughout the region, especially in Sumatra. Didn't a runaway prince from Palembang in Sumatra found the Melaka sultanate, thought he. He had learnt of this bit of the early history of Melaka and as such, he was able to create a psychological profile of the sultan and the other officials around him, and the Malays as a whole. And he concluded that the Malays, especially under Mahmud would continue to embark on a campaign to evict the Portuguese as long as they lived. Because they were now without any other preoccupation other than to fight the Portuguese... This was their only ambition now. The horseman nodded. Fernao Peres stood and went to the globe at the corner of his room. He studied the map of the Malay Peninsula. 'This is Pagoh, and we're here,' he said. 'When did the sultan say he was going to attack us?'

'He has already sent a fleet of ships, your excellency.'

'I see, thank you. You may go now. And could you please send in Goncalo Pereira.'

'Yes, your excellency.'

The horseman left the room. And in a short while later, Goncalo entered and greeted. 'Good day, your excellency. Did you call for me, your excellency?'

He did not answer and went straight to the point. 'A fleet of ships from Mahmud's camp is heading our way. I want you to lead our fleet and surprise them at Kuala Muar. If we leave here the first thing tomorrow morning with our fleet, we will get to there by the time they get there. I do not want them to come to Melaka and create havoc here. Finish them off there, understand?'

'Very well, your excellency. Do you want me to come along?'

'That's not necessary, captain, you remain here and look after our office.'

'Very well, your excellency.'

Portuguese ships from Melaka arrived at Kuala Muar in Johor, another Malay State south of Melaka after traveling south with the wind for five hours. They did not know what to expect. This was the first time they were sailing south of Melaka. The place looked inhabitable. They feared the Melaka forces might attack from anywhere, in the sea or from the land. Fernao Peres looked in his monocle and surveyed the sea and Kuala Muar. It looked pristine and peaceful. For a brief while he was attracted to it. But there could be danger lurking from every corner, tree or bush. Then he turned his monocle to the right. He was shocked to see ten ships sailing away. 'There they are, ten of them. Let them come into our trap,' he said.

'When do we fire?' asked his officer who was standing beside him.

Fernao Peres put down the monocle and grinned. He took a gulp of beer and hurled the empty bottle into the sea. His face was now flushed red. 'We will wait until they come within our range and we will fire. We'll fire with our might and end their revenge on us.'

The Melaka ships continued to sail ahead of the Portuguese ships. Nadim and Ahmad stood with him on the deck and let the winds blow on their faces. They turned around and were shocked to see the Portuguese ships trailing them from behind now. There were about a dozen of them. They stared at the Portuguese ships, and were surprised that they were trailing behind their fleet even when they were sailing away from Melaka.

'Who told them we're heading for Melaka?' wondered Nadim.

'There must be a spy from amongst our men,' said Ahmad.

'...Or were they prepared for us?'

'What do we do next?'

'We wait for them to make the first move.'

Nadim turned around.

'All cannons must face our enemy ships!' shouted Nadim.

The men turned the cannons to face the Portuguese ships. They stood by them. A pile of cannon balls sat near each of the cannons. They recited some prayers quietly and hoped that Allah would protect them.

'In the name of Allah and the Prophets, peace be upon him, and the people of Melaka and the entire Malay race, we fight them!' shouted Ahmad. 'We fight till the last drop of our blood!'

Their ships stopped at a distance from the Portuguese ships. Both sides waited for each other's move. There was a stalemate.

'What do we do now?' asked Ahmad.

'We wait,' said Nadim.

Then suddenly, the Portuguese ships started to fire their cannons, without giving any signal or warning. The Malays were shocked. 'My god, they are attacking us! Men, return fire!' shouted Ahmad. 'Fire, fire! *Allahuakbbar, Allahuakbbar!*'

The Malays started to fire at the Portuguese ships. Many cannon balls flew across the sky from both sides. One Melaka ship was hit. The men on it jumped off-board and swam to the other ships. Few of them died.

'Throw the floats!' shouted Ahmad. 'Save our men! Bring them to safety!'

The men threw the floats and their colleagues swam towards them. They grabbed the floats and swam to the other Melaka ships to safety.

'Fire, fire!' shouted Nadim.

One more Melaka ship was hit and it immediately caught fire. The men quickly doused it. The sail was burnt. More cannons were fired from both sides and the battle at sea became more ferocious. Fernao Peres looked at the Melaka ships. He was elated that one of them had sunk in the sea. Only half of it was left floating in the sea. It soon slipped down and disappeared for good, to be buried in the seabed. Some of the Malays who were onboard that fatal ship could not flee and they sunk with the ship and drowned.

'One of their ships has sunk and another one is hit,' said Fernao Peres to his officers who were standing beside him on the deck.

'Will they surrender, captain?' asked one of his officers.

'I doubt it. They might turn around and return to Pagoh.'

'What do we do then?'

'We'll give chase and get them in Pagoh.'

The officer turned around.

'Fire! Fire!' shouted the officer.

More cannons were fired from both sides. Then suddenly, the Melaka ships started to turn around and headed for Pagoh.

'They're returning to Pagoh,' said Fernao Peres. He then turned to his men. 'Give chase.'

'Aye, aye, captain,' said his officers.

The Portuguese ships followed the Melaka ships but they managed to avert them by changing course.

By late evening, the Portuguese had managed to sail behind the smaller islands and hid themselves there. They were afraid that they might be ambushed instead, since they were not familiar with the area and did not know where to run for cover. They decided to stop as it was already night. They could not see much, except the flickering lights that came from the Melaka ships. Furthermore, by now the winds had stopped blowing and they could not sail much.

Nadim, Ahmad, and their men landed on the beach the next morning. They immediately set up position in the bushes near the beach.

'Aim our cannons on them!' ordered Nadim. 'Be prepared!'

The men placed their cannons on the beach and aimed at the Portuguese ships that were still there. They had indeed fallen in the trap set up by the Malays who had wanted them to be stuck in that area that did not offer them any prospect for a swift exit.

'Fire, fire!' shouted Nadim.

They started to fire at the Portuguese ships that were anchored in the sea. Many were short. They fell in the sea much to their horror. They felt disappointed that their cannon balls could not reach the Portuguese ships, although they had shown themselves in full view of the Melaka forces, and could become easy targets for them.

'They are smart. Our cannons cannot reach their ships. Now, what do we do?' said Nadim.

The Portuguese men started to get into their boats. They then rowed towards the beach.

'My god, they are coming our way! Fire, fire!' screamed Ahmad.

The men fired more cannons. But, most of them missed their targets. The Portuguese boats started to arrive on the beach. The Portuguese men landed ashore and started to fire their guns. The Malays returned fire. Nadim and Ahmad retreated and hid behind tall trees and bushes. They saw many dead bodies of their colleagues lying on the ground when fires broke out.

'They're smart to land at night, Nadim,' said Ahmad.

'Certainly. They could hide better in the darkness,' said Nadim.

'Fire, fire!'

More shots were fired from both sides. Many of the Malays were shot. Many died while others were injured. By dawn, the situation had become calm. Not a shot was fired. Nadim woke up from behind the bushes. He stirred Ahmad who was sleeping beside him. The others were lying everywhere in the bushes, the fields and under trees. 'Have they left?' whispered Nadim.

'Don't move!' said Ahmad.

Suddenly, the Portuguese men started to alight from behind the trees and bushes. They started to fire. The Malays were shocked. They sprung onto their feet, grabbed their weapons, and returned fire.

'Fire, fire!' shouted Fernao Peres.

His men started to fire and the Malays immediately retaliated. Many rushed to their cannons and fired in the direction of the Portuguese. But it turned out that the Malays were overwhelmed. The Portuguese who were able to make swift moves during the night cornered them from all sides. They had managed to shift their position and had surrounded the Malays. They did not sleep throughout the night but only stopped firing. This made the Malays think that they had ceased firing at them and was calling for a truce, or retreated. This forced Mahmud and his men to retreat to Kopak in Bentan. The soldiers carried those who were injured with them and whatever that they could bring along.

'Let's rest here in Kopak. The Portuguese won't dare to come near here. They're not familiar with this territory or its rough terrain,' said Mahmud.

'What do we do next, father?' asked Ahmad.

'We rest here, so that our men can recover from their wounds. In the meantime, I want to launch a food blockade in Melaka. The Portuguese will have no food supplies to sustain them. We want the people of Melaka to starve too so that they will revolt against the Portuguese. In this way, we can get resistance from within. When that happens, we can attack from without.'

'Very well. I'll personally see to it that the food chain is cut,' said Nadim.

'We'll wait until the food supplies to Melaka have become critical before we attack them in Melaka.'

Ahmad and Nadim smiled. They thought the new strategy could work. It was brilliant move that had served the Malay forces well.

Jorge looked out of the window. He looked worried with the turn of events. He did not expect the Melaka forces to be so intent on seeking revenge despite its size having decreased considerably; they persisted with their mission. When

will they finally surrender, thought Fernao Peres. He and Garcia de Sa waited. They shook their heads violently. They were at their wit's ends now, not knowing what to expect from Mahmud. He went to the cupboard, opened it, and pulled out an empty bottle of whiskey.

'Even our supplies of whiskey has run out,' said Jorge. 'They have cut our food supplies. Many of our own men and the Melaka people are starving. What do we do now, gentlemen? If we don't act fast, the people of Melaka will revolt against us.'

'Are they going to attack us?' asked Pereira.

'May be. This is what Sultan Mahmud wants - to encourage the people of Melaka to revolt against us from inside the state. You do not know what hungry people are capable of doing.'

'If that's the case, then I'll lead a fleet to Melaka. We cannot let our people stave us to death by Sultan Mahmud's actions.'

'No. I want Fernao Peres to lead our men. You, Garcia shall remain here; I've got something else for you to do.'

'Good, captain,' said Fernao Peres.

Then suddenly they heard a commotion outside. The men were shocked. Jorge immediately peeped out of his cabin and asked: 'Now what the hell is that?'

They quickly rushed to the windows and flung them wide open.

'My god!' shrieked Fernao Peres. 'There are few Malay men who are causing a riot outside in the square.'

'What the hell!' retorted Jorge.

'What do we do with them, captain?'

Jorge was speechless. This was the last thing that he had expected from the people of Melaka to do. They must have come back from the dead, he thought.

The small group of Melaka men rushed to the windows at the room where the Portuguese officers were at and stood there. They were holding cans in their hands. 'Our food supplies are depleted, sir!' shouted one of them men in Malay. They did not care if the Portuguese officials understood them or not. They did. By now, they had learnt how to speak and write in Malay to enable them to understand the grouses that the Malays had. It was also to better communicate with them since they were the rulers of Melaka now. It was not proper to expect for all of the locals to learn how to speak Portuguese since they did not have proper teachers or schools. Besides, the Malays especially were skeptical of what they wanted to teach - their foreign religion! They had

yet to establish a school to teach the children there, as they were busy warding off attacks by Mahmud's forces.

The two Portuguese officials just stood by the windows above.

'We want food! We want food!' cried some of the Malay men.

'Let's rampage!' suggested one of the men.

'Come, come,' cried the other Malay man.

They then went away and started to break everything that stood in their way.

'What do we do, captain?' asked Jorge. 'They are running amok! I cannot imagine that this was the place where Jebat ran amok many years ago.'

The Portuguese officers were shocked that the people of Melaka were beginning to revolt.

'We must arrest them before they start to instigate everybody else,' said Jorge. 'Get our men and arrest them immediately!'

'Very well, sir,' said Fernao Peres.

A group of Portuguese soldiers appeared in the scene. In front of them were a small band of Malays who were destroying public property. They wanted to vent their anger at the Portuguese and at the Chinese traders who were hoarding goods. They broke into a godown belonging to some Chinese traders and tried to grab food that were stored in it. None of the Chinese traders dared to retaliate for fear of being killed or maimed. They hid themselves in the attic quietly and let the Malays stole whatever food they wanted.

'Stop, stop that!' warned Fernao Peres.

The Malays did not respond. The captain then realized that the Malays could not understand Portuguese so he immediately switched to Malay. '*Berbenti! Berbenti sekarang!*' (Stop! Stop now!)

The Malay men were shocked.

'*Kami mahu makan! Makan!*' said one of them called Rustam Khan, who appeared to be the leader of this informal group. (We want food.)

'*Tidak ada makan sini! Pergi! Pergi sekarang juga, saya kata!*' (There is no food here! Go! Go now, I say!) Fernao Peres had to speak in Malay although it was fractured.

'Drop everything, and return to your own homes, now! This is my order, understand! If you resist, all of you will be arrested!'

One of the Malay men picked a stone that fitted nicely in his palm and hurled it at him. He managed to avert it just in time as it passed by his face. The stone flew onwards and hit the forehead of a Portuguese soldier. He fell



to the ground. Blood immediately appeared on his forehead. His colleagues quickly tried to revive him.

'*Portugis bodob! Bengali Putih bodob!*' shouted the man. (Stupid Portuguese! Stupid 'White Bengalis')

'Bloody idiot! You think I do not know what you're saying!' said Jorge. 'Soldiers, fire!'

The Portuguese soldiers started to fire at the Malays who immediately dropped everything down and rushed off in all directions. They gave chase, but by then the Malays had already managed to hide themselves behind the houses. One even managed to jump into the river and crossed it to safety. He hid there in the bushes and continued to stare at the Portuguese soldiers who fired some shots in the water each time there was a commotion. But it turned out that some crocodiles had alighted to the surface. One of them was shot dead. In retaliation, de Albuquerque ordered the people of Melaka be kept inside their houses or shops. He imposed a strict morning-till-dawn curfew in order to curtail the daily activities of the people. In this way, none of them could do any mischief. If it wasn't controlled, it could lead to bigger chaos that the Portuguese could hardly deal with, considering the small number of their soldiers who were stationed there, now that Alfonso had taken a number of them back to Lisbon. For the first time since he arrived in Melaka, Jorge feared that the war could take place not deep in the jungles, but right where they were, in the city.

A Portuguese officer and some assistants rode on horses. He shouted in Malay as he passed by the streets. 'The Portuguese authorities are imposing a curfew in Melaka. Get inside your shops and houses now!'

The people stopped doing what they were doing. They stared at the officer and were shocked to hear the announcement. They turned around and looked at their friends. They, too, were shocked. This was the first time such a curfew was imposed in Melaka by the Portuguese. The officer stared at them. 'Close your shops! Get inside! *Masuk! Masuk dalam rumah!* There is a curfew throughout Melaka! Anyone of who is caught in the streets will be dealt with severely, by hanging!'

The people of Melaka got scared. They quickly bolted the doors of their shops and houses. Those who were living in the villages fled on their horses, carts and ran for their lives. One Portuguese soldier fired his gun in the air to threaten the people further. Soon, the whole of Melaka was deserted. Rustam and his friends huddled behind some boxes. He spat on the ground. 'Those Portuguese idiots!' A gunshot was fired, and they hushed down. Rustam and his friends then moved back and disappeared in the bushes.

When the situation turned for the better, Jorge thought it was safe for him to go for a ride. He wanted to go to the beach in Kelebang about five miles from his office, for a swim or to dip himself in the sea. He also planned to sit on the beach to rest and to get some tan, since his body had become pale from lack of sun. He thought he would give himself some much-needed rest, after the trouble he had been through lately. Then suddenly out of the bushes, a group of Malay men appeared; they all wore black. He got a rude shock. The Malays started to attack the carriage; they hurled stones and spears. Few of them hit the carriage and few others went astray and hit the trees near it. Two of his soldiers were hit directly in the chest. They fell to the ground and died in a pool of blood. Jorge peeped through the window and commanded the rider to speed. 'Run, run!' The rider sped ahead as fast as he could. The Malays continued to hurl stones and spears. One of them entered through the back window and missed hitting Jorge's left shoulder by a hair. He cursed them in Portuguese. The horse-carriage continued to speed ahead, and soon the Malays were left behind.

Jorge felt very luck to have been saved from the attack. And because of that, all the Portuguese soldiers were put on alert. Because of the attack on him, the people had to remain in their homes and the streets were still. None dared to venture out. Now the people of Melaka were ordered not to leave the house. Melaka was now in the state of curfew, this time for twenty-four hours. The Portuguese decided not to take any chance as they were still some hot-blooded Malays who were still intent on inflicting damage to the Portuguese. Fernao Peres thought it was the job of Rustam Khan and no other.

Rustam, the *silat* master decided to remain in the city. He did not want to follow Mahmud because he wanted to consolidate his friends and other Malays who were there and create a force to act from within the city, as opposed to outside of it. He managed to meet some of his friends discreetly where they discussed their next strategy.

'What do we do next, Rustam Khan?' ask Kadir.

'We remain low, keep quiet,' replied Rustam. 'There's nothing that we can do. The Portuguese have ordered a curfew on the state.'

Fernao Peres was told where Rustam lived. He took some of his men and walked towards the house. Few of them were Indians. They were all armed to the teeth.

'Here, this is his house, sir,' said one of the Indian soldiers.

'Are you sure? Are you certain?'

'Yes, sir, I'm definite, sir.'

'Very well.'

Fernao Peres then knocked on the door. There was no answer. Rustam and his friends quickly shut up. Their heartbeat started to pound and beads of sweat started to form on their foreheads and necks. Soon, they were all soaked in their own sweat.

'They're here, Rustam Khan,' whispered Kadir. 'What do we do now?'

'Sheesh... Keep quiet, Kadir; they may hear us,' whispered Rustam. 'Those 'White Bengalis' have strong ears, the size of an elephant's. They can even hear what we're thinking!'

His friends immediately kept quiet. They looked at each other's face. They were all blank. Some of their faces were pale with fright. They knew that the end was near. One of them by the name of Rashid stood up, went to the window, and peeped outside. 'There's no one here.'

'Good, you stay where you are, Rashid,' said Kadir.

'I want all of you to leave this house by the back door, now!' said Rustam.

'You?' asked Rahim.

'I stay behind.'

The men refused to budge.

'Go, I said!' demanded Rustam. 'This is my house, the Portuguese will come here sooner or later. I do not want them to find all of you here. They do not expect any of you here, but me.'

Rashid became anxious. He saw more Portuguese and Indian soldiers walking towards the house. 'They're here, the idiots!' he said softly in a whispering voice.

Rustam and his friends turned to look at Rashid. 'Who?'

'The Portuguese and Fernao.'

Rustam then turned around and looked at his friends. 'Now go, leave me alone!' he said. He turned around and looked at Rashid. 'You too, Rashid!'

'Will you be all right?' asked Kadir.

'God knows, only god knows...'

The men stood up and started to walk to the back. They opened the door and slipped outside. Rustam quickly went to the wooden stairs and climbed to the attic.

'Rustam Khan, open the door, you have been surrounded!' cried Fernao Peres from outside of the house. 'I know you're inside!'

There was no answer. Fernao Peres continued to pound on the door. 'Open, open!' There was still no answer. He then signaled to his men and they kicked the door. It broke apart after few hard kicks. They barged inside the house and kicked all the doors of the rooms, but could not find anyone in there. There was some leftover food on the low table. Fernao Peres entered

the house. 'Look in every room!' he shouted. 'He can't be elsewhere. He must be somewhere in this house.'

Something creaked above them. Everybody looked upwards.

'Look in the attic!'

One of the soldiers climbed up the wooden stairs and went to the attic. He saw Rustam hiding behind some gunny sacks of rice. He was shocked to see him there. He looked pale. He knew there was no way for him to run out of the place since it was all enclosed; there was no opening, except for a small window at both ends. But, they had grills. Besides, the soldier already had his gun aimed at him. Rustam feared if he were to make an unnecessary move, the soldier would pull the trigger and he would be dead. His finger was already at the ready to shoot. 'Here he is, sir,' cried out the soldier, triumphantly.

Fernao Peres and the other soldiers froze. They turned around and looked at their colleague who was standing on the stairs. 'Bring him down immediately,' he said.

The soldier then brought Rustam down. He looked frightened. He stood before Fernao Peres and stared unblinkingly at his eyes in total defiance.

*'Jadi kau rupanya! Seperti yang disangkakan!'* remarked Fernao Peres in Malay. (So, you are the one, huh! Just as what I had expected!)

'The Portuguese don't belong here!' replied Rustam in Malay, in defiance. He knew there was no way that he could escape this time. His end was near so it would not hurt if he continued to be tough. 'This is a Malay country. Your people have no right to be here and dictate what we can do!'

'Enough of this nonsense, Rustam Khan! You have given us enough trouble already. You should count yourself lucky for being alive for so long.'

'Get out of this house!'

Fernao Peres laughed. The other soldiers smiled. They thought it was a joke. He then became very angry. He slapped Rustam's face. Rustam fell to the ground. Fernao Peres stepped on him with his right leg repeatedly until he fainted. 'Animal! You lousy animal!' he cried until Rustam became limp. Rustam tried to retaliate and ward off the attack, but he was held back by the other soldiers who were all much bigger than he was. He then died. The other Portuguese soldiers were shocked to see their captain acting like that and showing no mercy. 'Drag him out. I want everybody in Melaka to see him.'

The Portuguese soldiers dragged the corpse of Rustam in the streets. The people hid in their shops and houses and peeped through holes in the walls and windows of their houses or shops. None dared to step forward.

'This is Rustam Khan!' cried Fernao Peres as he walked with his soldiers. 'He tried to go against the Portuguese; how clever! Now look at him. He's dead!'

The soldiers continued to drag Rustam's body. They headed towards the public square by the Melaka River. The people of Melaka continued to stare from their houses. They did not know what was happening outside. They continued to peep until they saw Rustam's body being dragged by the soldiers. They were shocked. Some of the older women vomited there and then; the others turned their gaze away. The sight was too frightening for them to look at. When they finally arrived at the public square they tied his neck with a thick rope and hung him on a pole in the center of the square for everybody to see.

Jorge appeared at the windows when he heard the commotion outside his office and he knew what to expect. He smiled at the sight of the leader of the small group of Malays who had revolted just now, now hanging lifeless on the pole in the square. By now, some people of Melaka who were mostly non-Malays had gathered in the square because the Portuguese wanted them to see with their own eyes how they had captured Rustam. Fernao Peres turned around and shouted, 'If there is anyone of you here who thinks that you can revolt against the Portuguese, it is better if you think twice. Look at Rustam, look at what has happened to him.'

The men remained quiet. They froze in their positions. Fernao Peres then walked away towards the administrative building. He met Jorge in his office. They hugged each other.

'Well done, captain,' said Jorge. 'We are happy for what you have done. This will put a stop to any revolt by the Malays.'

A week later, more Malays were ferreted out of their houses. Some of them were sleeping with their wives. They were pulled apart with their wives screaming into the night. They showed no mercy for them. They kicked the Malay women and pulled out their husbands from their embrace. Some tried to resist, but they were outnumbered. Some of the Portuguese soldiers returned to the houses and raped the women before dumping them after they were finished. Those who tried to resist were immediately arrested. They were later executed when they tried to run away. Those who did not resist were dragged like dogs in the streets. This created a loud commotion. The non-Malays who lived in the houses fronting the streets were distracted from their sleep. They woke up. But, they were too frightened to switch on the lights for fear of being targeted by the Portuguese soldiers. They only peeped through the cracks in the wooden plans of their houses. The Malay men were tied to wooden poles in the public square. They were about a dozen of them. They

were the ones who had tried to cause chaos in Melaka together with Rustam whose body was now a skeleton with most of his flesh having been dried up by the sun. It had been left to dry for a week until the stench had disappeared. Next day, those who were arrested the night earlier were hung on the poles near Rustam's body. The people of Melaka who had gathered in the square could not do anything. The Malays and other Indian Muslims, Chinese and others, could only offer their prayers quietly. The Muslims hoped that those who were persecuted, died as martyrs or *Syahid*; that they had all died in the defense of the honor and dignity of Islam, the Malays and Melaka. They had not died in vain; they had died as heroes, as *syahids* or martyrs, and their soul would go to Heaven - or *Jannab* in Arabic or *Syurga* in Malay.

Jorge stood at the windows and witnessed the event. He showed contempt for all those who had tried to give him a hard time. Fernao Peres went to him and patted his shoulders.

'The king and queen of Portugal will be delighted to hear of this, Fernao,' said Jorge. 'I'll make sure his majesty the king will come to know of this.'

'But, this is all your idea, sir.'

Jorge ignored Fernao Peres's compliment.

'I will immediately write a letter to his majesty King Manuel and have it delivered on the next available ship to Goa and on to Lisbon.'

'But, but...'

'No 'buts,' captain; you deserve some form of recognition from Portugal. What you have done is not a small feat. It has helped to squash potential revolt against us here in Melaka. Many of our lives and properties were saved as a result of your fast action.'

From that day on, the people of Melaka became more fearful of the Portuguese. They were able to contain this situation and only concentrated on the war front with Mahmud as their main nemesis. He was a tough man to deal with; he was a warrior. His eldest son, Ahmad wasn't an ordinary prince either for he had heroic qualities and could take over his father's place and lead the Melaka forces that could still pose grave threats to the Portuguese.

But, Jorge was relieved that he was now able to contain the situation in Melaka so that the enemies from within could not pose any threat to their presence in Melaka. He immediately assigned Fernao Peres to lead the mission to attack Mahmud in Pagoh - or wherever he might be. He knew the sultan was as sly as a fox, and he could be anywhere where they least expected him to be. He wanted to finish off the Melaka forces before they could return to Melaka and cause untold damage to it. As long as they kept them away from Melaka the better as this would give the Portuguese a sense of security and

stability. The people would not know what was happening elsewhere, whether the Portuguese were at the losing end of not, as long as the war happened far away from them.

Jorge slept that night, but he stirred left and right. He was troubled by the memories he had of the old Malay manuscript. Pages and pages fell on him until they covered him. He was panting and was suffocating. He tried to push all the paper with both hand, but he was too weak. The paper had totally covered him and soon its weight would crash on him. He tried harder; he pushed the paper. Suddenly there was an opening; he managed to clear some paper until he could get some fresh air. He was relieved. He was not going to suffocate and die after all, he thought. He then pushed open the hole until it was big enough for him to leave it. He stepped out of the huge pile of paper. But to his horror, he saw an image of Mahmud, his nemesis standing there. He held his *keris* in one hand and on the other hand, was the severed head that looked like his. Jorge was shocked. He did not believe what he was seeing. He rubbed his eyes. Mahmud laughed. He then screamed on top of his voice: 'Don't harm me!'

Jorge then woke up. He was sweating profusely. His breath was heavy, and his heart pounded so heavy that he feared that it might pop out of his chest. He looked around in his room. There was no one there but himself. He turned around some more and caught sight of his face in the huge mirror. He got a rude shock. When he realized that he was still in his room, he felt a relief. He now knew he was dreaming. It was such an awful dream. How could he dream the old Malay manuscripts come piling down on him, and Mahmud standing there staring at him, looking pale and lifeless, like a puppet, he thought. What did it mean? He quickly tried to find an answer, but his mind was blank. It was the first time he ever had such a nasty and bizarre dream like that in his whole life. May be the place where his room was situated in the fort was haunted.

Next day, after a late breakfast that Abraham's wife had cooked, Jorge made a decision to destroy the former palace of the sultans of Melaka that sat on the foot of the hills. It was the palace Mahmud's predecessor, Mansur had built where Jebat later took over it when he ran amok many years ago and desecrated it. The present palace sat on the beach facing the straits; it commanded a grand view of the sea and port. And the last ruler of Melaka, Mahmud, his family and senior officers left it when the country fell in the hands of the Portuguese in 1511 CE or 917 AH or 4209 of the Chinese calendar. They were not able to retrieve everything from the palace. They took only whatever they could lay their hands on. Many priceless royal treasures

were left behind. Most of the gold and silverware, however, were hidden deep in the ground below the palace. This information was not known to anyone, except Ahmad, who was informed of it when he was installed the crown prince of Melaka by his father, Mahmud, as it was the tradition of the state. Nobody knew how priceless the treasures were. They were brought down from the time of the rule of Parameswara. They hoped that the Portuguese did not know about the priceless treasures that were hidden there. In fact, one of the main reasons why Mahmud and Ahmad were intent on overthrowing the Portuguese was to reclaim these treasures. The remains of the palace had become haunted, because they did not serve the Portuguese any purpose. The palace had become the playing ground for many Portuguese soldiers. They liked to rip off the ornate carvings that were found in the throne room until it was bare. And within a year of the collapse of the sultanate, the palace had become dilapidated with gaping holes in the roof that let in water when it rained.

'I want to demolish the palace,' said Jorge.

Fernao Peres was speechless. 'Why sir? Can't we just leave it alone?'

'It's one of the main reasons why the sultan and his eldest son, the crown prince Ahmad are intent on seeking revenge and overthrowing us here in Melaka.'

'How's that?'

'The palace is symbolic of the power they used to have in the past. With the palace gone, so too will their strongest symbols that they had left behind in Melaka.'

Fernao Peres now saw his logic; he nodded. 'You've got a strong point, sir. I personally didn't think of that myself.'

'I shall then order the destruction of the palace of the sultan of Melaka. Will you see it done, captain?'

'Yes, indeed, sir. It will be an honor.'

'Do it soon, tomorrow if you can.'

The next day, Fernao Peres brought a group of Portuguese and Indian soldiers to the palace. They brought with them oil and torches that they wanted to use to burn down the palace. Some of the people of Melaka who happened to be there looked at them; they did not know what else were these Portuguese going to do. They thought they were trying to renovate the palace. But they were wrong.

'Wait here,' said Fernao Peres when he got to the entrance of the palace. The grass had grown tall and the whole place looked unkempt like it was haunted. The stillness of the place and an eerie feeling made his hair stand on



ends. He braved himself. It was still the palace and the largest residence built in Melaka by the Malays. The walls were well decorated with woodcarvings and the windows especially were of the same size and shape.

Parameswara or Megat Iskandar Shah had gone on his first trip to China in 1416 CE or 816 AH or 4114 of the Chinese calendar. There he saw how the Chinese palaces in Nanjing looked like. He liked the stone carvings. So, he inquired with the Chinese emperor who dutifully sent a whole group of artisans and carvers him on his return trip to Melaka. They immediately set to work and produced woodcarvings that they fixed to the walls and windows of his palace.

'Wait here and let me check inside,' said Fernao Peres.

His men waited. They held the torches and cans of oil in their hands and saw the captain entering the palace alone. He stepped inside the throne room. He saw the ornate carvings had been chipped and the whole room looked dirty, with dust covering the walls. He scratched the wooden wall and saw the thick dust on his finger. He quickly wiped it with a handkerchief. He then entered the middle section of the palace and saw the rooms where the sultan and his sons and daughters slept. He turned and saw a large door and kicked it open with his right leg. He entered the room and saw the huge bedroom, which once belonged to the sultan. He looked around the spacious room. This was the first time he entered the sultan of Melaka's bedroom. He then stood in the center of the room, not knowing what to expect. He then stared at himself in the huge mirror. Then he remembered something. He bent down and looked below the bed. He thought he saw something. He then lay down and saw a handle. He immediately pulled it and it creaked open. He knew instinctively that the door led to a secret cellar. He entered the door and walked down the stairs that led to the cellar that was dug in the ground below the bedroom. It was dark; so, he lit a torch. To his horror, he saw trunks and trunks being stacked on top of each other. He guessed these trunks held treasures and the royal regalia. He kicked the padlock of one of the trunks and saw the gold items in it. 'Oh, my god!' he exclaimed. He had not seen anything like them before. They were shining brightly, almost blinding him. They were gold items of all kinds of shapes and sizes. He then opened the other trunks at random and each of them held more golden items that belonged to the sultan. The royal couple often wore these priceless items during official functions.

Fernao Peres stood there for what seemed ages. He fixed his gaze at the opened trunks and the gold items before him. Then he ordered his men to bring out the trunks. There must have been about one hundred such trunks. They were so heavy they had to bring in the horse-carriages in order to take all

the trunks from the old palace to the Portuguese and military administrative headquarters.

Jorge was dutifully informed of what they had seen in the palace. He rushed to his office and saw the treasures. He was greatly pleased. He thought this would make the best present for their ruler, Manuel and their country, Portugal. They spent the whole day removing all the treasures, before all the trunks were carted away. Some of them had literary works written by the royal scribes. They were commissioned by all the eight Sultans of Melaka, from the time of Parameswara until Mahmud. Their only job was to write everything that happened in Melaka and around the royal families. There were hundreds, if not thousands of pages of goat or cow skin that they used to write the story of Melaka. Now they had fallen in the hands of the Portuguese.

Kadir, Rashid and Ibrahim who had sneaked to the palace watched the carting away of the trunks and literary works. They were worried the Portuguese were going to send them to Goa in India and later to Lisbon in Portugal to be presented to the king of Portugal. They were lucky to escape the Portuguese when they barged in the houses to ferret those who had caused trouble in the city. They were now sporting hair all over their faces to change their identities.

After Fernao Peres was fully satisfied that he had removed all the trunks from the secret underground cellar, he ordered his men to burn down the palace. They poured oil and lit the palace by hurling the torches at different parts of the building. Fire soon enveloped it razing it to the ground. Thick black smoke was seen rising above Melaka.

The people were shocked to see such thick black smoke coming in the direction of the old palace of their sultan. They immediately dropped whatever that they were doing and rushed to there, hoping to help douse it down. But, alas, it was not what they had expected to do. They saw de Andrade and many Portuguese and Indian soldiers standing by and looking at the palace razing to the ground. It took more than two days before the whole palace was turned to ashes. Whatever that remained were some of the larger pillars that had by now turned dark and become charcoal.

Kadir was informed by one of his friends how he had seen the Portuguese carting the treasures and manuscripts few days earlier. He shook his head in disbelief. He did not know why the Portuguese had to burn down the palace. He could understand it if they wanted to steal the priceless treasures that their sultan used to own. But why burn the palace?

King Manuel stood in his study of his royal palace in Lisbon. He stared unblinkingly at the treasures his men had brought for him all the way from Melaka. Alfonso stood at the side; he smiled widely. He watched how the king was admiring each item carefully. He knew the king had not seen anything like that before.

'Wonderful, wonderful,' said Manuel. 'How could those Malays be so clever? These items are priceless. They are of high quality. I doubt it if any of craftsmen could reproduce these.'

'What shall we do with them?'

'We shall keep all these in the cellar, and they're not to be seen by anyone.'

'What about the manuscripts?'

'Yes, let me see them.'

A palace aide opened one of the trunks. He pulled a manuscript and handed it to king. He opened it and was surprised to see the Arabic characters on it. 'It's in Arabic!'

'Indeed, very true, very true indeed!' explained Alfonso. It was animated, the way he said it, as if he had forced himself to agree.

'Why is that so? Don't they write in Malay?'

'The Malays did not have a writing tradition. They only started to write when the Arabs came.'

'What does this manuscript say? Do you read Malay, admiral?'

'Yes, a little, your majesty.'

'I'm sure you do with the many years you were there. Come and try to read this page for me. What does it say? I want to know.'

Manuel handed the manuscript to Alfonso. He then took a seat. The other palace aides stood still like statues with no expression on their faces.

'Read.'

'And so the story goes, his majesty Sultan Muhammad Shah was now the second sultan of Melaka. Sultan Muhammad succeeded his father, Megat Iskandar Shah who was known previously as Raja Parameswara, after his majesty died in on the fifth of October 1424 CE or Third of *Zulhijjab*, 827 *Hijriah* or 4122 of the Chinese year of the dragon - ten years after his majesty had converted to Islam. The Chinese especially thought it was auspicious and their ruler had lived a long and eventful life; he would be remembered for centuries to come. They knew that he had founded Melaka twenty-four year ago in the year of the dragon and he had died in the same year.

'It was also twenty-four years after his majesty founded Melaka. His majesty's eldest son, who was called Raja Muhammad Shah after his majesty's own conversion, was the first ruler of Melaka to call himself sultan. It was a

more fitting title since by now Melaka had become a prosperous state with a population that was large. It comprised of people of many races.

'His majesty Megat Iskandar Shah hadn't given it a serious thought because his majesty was reluctant to call himself sultan since his majesty felt that Melaka then, wasn't yet worthy of having a sultan as its ruler.

'Megat Iskandar Shah and his majesty's entourage headed towards the palace where they were greeted warmly by the people of Nanjing. They lined both sides of the street to greet him. They were delighted to see the ruler from Melaka because no important dignitary from outside of China had paid the country in a long time. His majesty came with so many people who had crossed the wide sea to pay their emperor a state visit.

'Those who had come to China earlier only had one thing in mind that was to attack and capture it. But the sultan of Melaka did not have such evil intentions in mind. In fact, his majesty had come to establish cordial ties with them,' read Alfonso.

'Stop!' interrupted Manuel. He held his right hand in the air as was his habit. 'Did the manuscript say that, admiral?'

'Yes, indeed.'

Alfonso waited. He held the manuscript in his hands and was ready to proceed. 'Can I proceed now, your majesty?'

'No, don't.' Manuel stood up. 'How could the Malays write such beautiful stories? They are not backward people as we thought they were. Put the manuscript back in the trunk, admiral.'

Alfonso did as ordered. Manuel then closed the lid. The sound was loud that he made the admiral and those who were in the room shocked.

Earlier he had described how Parameswara was a direct descendant of Iskandar Zulkarnain (Alexander the Great), the Persian warrior who had conquered India in 326 BCE where he married an Indian princess called Raja Shahrul Baria. Many generations later, their ancestor, Raja Suran who married Princess Mahtabulbahri sent their three sons, Nila Pahlawan and Krishna Pendita and Sang Nila Utama was sent to Palembang to be their rulers. Sang Nila Utama married the daughter of a local district chief Demang Lebar Daun.

Manuel became awed with this information. He didn't realize that the royal lineage of the sultan of Melaka extended so far behind. It was much longer than his own was. They were not the savage beasts whom he had thought they were. 'Alexander the Great, huh?' he remarked. 'That far? My ancestors were not around yet then, whereas his had existed. Yes, I have read so much about the exploits of Alexander the Great. Who hasn't? Have you?'

Alfonso nodded.

'I want all these manuscripts locked up as state secrets. I do not want any record of the stories seen by anyone here in Portugal; they are now state secrets. Even our senior officials shall not set their eyes on them.'

'Very well.'

'Take them away.'

The palace assistants carried the trunks out of the room. Manuel then went to the table where some maps of Melaka were laid. Alfonso walked with him. 'Are these the maps of Melaka, admiral?'

'Indeed, they are.'

Manuel studied each of them very carefully. 'They are very good. I thought they were maps of our port cities. This is Melaka?'

'Yes, your majesty.'

'What are these? Tell me.'

Alfonso went closer. He took a pointer and pointed at the places on the map. 'This is the fort of Melaka that our men constructed. It circles the entire city. In this way, we are safe from any intrusion from our enemies. We have renamed Melaka Hill, the St. Paul's Hill after our patron saint. And over here, is St. John's Hills. We also have erected a fort there where our cannons are trained towards the sea. From this elevation, we can see the whole of the straits. In this way the enemies can be sighted from a very far distance.'

Manuel nodded. 'Is there anything else that you wish to tell me?'

'We've also constructed a chapel on St. Paul's Hill and in few other places throughout Melaka.'

'Have the locals taken to our religion?'

'Only the non-Malays. The Malays are very difficult to convince.'

Manuel kept quiet. He was deep in thought. Alfonso waited. 'What shall your majesty's new orders be? Shall we proceed and attack the other Malay states and put them under our dominance?'

'That's doesn't sound like a good idea, admiral.'

'Why is that? We have done a good job in Melaka. It's now ours.'

'Very true, but at what costs? We're still defending it. Nobody knows for how long will be able to keep it.'

'But, the other Malay states are easier to control.'

'I say, enough. We stop at Melaka and try to keep it as long as we possibly can. I want you to forget about the other Malay states. Besides, they are not significant to us; they are poor and less developed. They're also not strategically located, unlike Melaka and Macau in China and Goa in India.'

Alfonso was shocked.

'The Malays are tough people. We are lucky to be able to take Melaka. They are not like the Arab Muslims here in Portugal and Spain who could be easily cowed. Remember; Portugal and Spain were two very powerful Muslim countries, yet we were able to push them back to where they belonged, in the Middle East. There is no way for us to colonize the whole of the Malay World. They're simply too large and fractured unlike Portugal and Spain.'

A white parrot with spots at the sides flew from Hulu Melaka. It was a smart bird. Kadir had trained him to do this difficult of sending and receiving letters from his friends. It headed towards Pagoh. It carried a note that was tied to one of its feet. Because it was flying in the same direction as the wind, it finally arrived near Pagoh, by late evening. If the wind blew head on, he could only arrive there one day later.

Nadim, who had been waiting for the bird to arrive, became excited as well as anxious when he caught sight of the bird because he did not know what to expect in the letter, bad news or good. He knew it was the bird, from the red spot its head. 'There it is,' he remarked.

Ahmad turned around. 'What? What? What are you saying, Nadim?'

'The bird. It has a message for us.'

The parrot flew directly towards Nadim who immediately held his right arm wide. The bird flew and stood on it. Ahmad watched as Nadim removed the note from the bird's leg.

'What does it say? And who sent had it?'

'Kadir. He wanted to leave behind with Rustam and some of our friends, Rashid and the rest of the *silat* group.'

'I hope everybody is all right.'

Nadim opened the note. He then shook his head in disgust.

'Why?' asked Ahmad.

Nadim handed the note to Ahmad who took and immediately read it. He crumpled the note and threw it on the ground. Few of the men who were there did not know what was written in the note.

'How could they do it?' asked Nadim. He kissed the bird. A man came to him and took the bird away. 'Give it something to eat,' he said to the man. 'Let it rest and allow it to leave when it's ready.'

'Very well, sir.' The man took the bird and went away with it.

That night Ahmad went to his father's tent. Mahmud had just finished performing his late night *iyak* prayer. He sat cross-legged on the mat. His father turned around and hugged his son's hand. 'Yes, son,' said Mahmud, as a

way to open a conversation. 'I saw a bird flying towards Nadim. What did our people in Melaka say?'

'Kadir says that the palace has been razed to the ground.'

'How did it catch fire?'

'The Portuguese decided to burn it down, father.'

Mahmud was shocked. 'Why can't they just leave the palace alone.'

'But before they did that, the Captain Fernao entered the palace and took out all the trunks that had been hidden in the secret cellar.'

'How did he find it?'

'He must have the nose of a dog.'

'Sure, being a dog himself, I won't be surprised. Did they take everything?'

'Only the trunks.'

'What about the gold?'

'I doubt it if they know about it.'

Mahmud became worried. 'They are our state treasures, my son. And they belonged to the people of Melaka.'

'Don't worry, father, I'll do my level best to recapture Melaka so that we can get all the gold. Nobody knows about it.'

'Have you told anybody about it?'

'No.'

'Not even to Nadim and Kadir?'

'No, my dear father. It's our secret, the secret of the sultans of Melaka and the crown prince. I shall keep it to myself and won't divulge it to anyone, even to my younger brother. I will only let my eldest son know, for he'll one day succeed me.'

Mahmud had told his son, Ahmad about the gold stockpile that the sultans of Melaka kept in the secret underground compartment further up the cellar where they stored the trunks. They guessed whoever discovered and unearthed the first cellar would not be bothered to dig any further, for they would be too satisfied with what they could find that they would not want to dig on. Mahmud's ancestors had devised this strategy when they decided to build the royal palace there. Ahmad was told about this stock when he was installed the crown prince of Melaka because he would one day succeed his father, Mahmud. It was his duty to know about such things.

He spent the next few days in wilderness. He could not sleep. He was angry that the Portuguese took among other things the manuscripts that the royal scribes wrote since the first sultan of Melaka to him. There must have been thousands and thousands of pages of text written by many generations of royal scribes. They wrote in detail about what the sultans did and the visits they

made to foreign lands, particularly to China, Siam and Majapahit and Sumatra; and their rulers' return visits to the court of Melaka. Now they were all lost.

He met with the royal scribe, Encik Tulis. He was a descendant of the line of royal scribes who had served since his ancestor, Parameswara, founder of the Melaka sultanate and it's first ruler. He was very much younger than the sultan was. Tulis was the eldest son of the earlier royal scribe who died just before the arrival of the Portuguese in Melaka. Now it was his duty to write the story of Melaka and the sultan so that future generations knew about what happened to them. And because of his special duty, Tulis was able to get first-hand knowledge of the goings-on in the Melaka Palace. Often many official functions could not start without his presence, because he had to be there to be the eyewitness to the important events. However, on some occasions, when he was not able to attend the palace functions, due mostly to illness, the sultan later had to describe what had happened so that he did not have to leave the episode from the manuscript. Tulis normally sat at Mahmud's feet with his writing materials in his hands ready to write anything he said. The sultan wanted to inform him about the manuscripts that were carted out by the Portuguese from the palace cellars. So, Tulis quickly came to pay homage to him. 'Yes, your majesty,' he said respectfully.

'I have bad news from Melaka, my dear scribe,' said Mahmud. 'But try to remain calm.'

'What do you mean?' He became anxious, not knowing what to expect.

'The Portuguese ransacked the palace and found out about the secret opening of the cell below our bed. They opened it and discovered the trunks of our royal treasures, and they confiscated all of them. They then took with them to Portugal to be presented before their king.'

Tulis was shocked. He felt like all his life was taken from his body leaving just a carcass.

'That's horrible.'

'But what irks me mostly was that also took all the writings which you and your ancestors had dutifully written on goat and cow skin, for posterity.'

Tulis shook his head. He felt like crying. All his life's work had now fallen in the hands of their enemies, the Portuguese. Surely, he could guess what the Portuguese would want to do with them. They surely could not understand a word of Malay. So they wanted to destroy all the manuscripts so that the history of Melaka could not be brought down to the next generation. He froze in his seat not knowing what to say or do. He kept quiet and felt distraught with what the sultan had told him.



'All your life's work is now in the hands of our enemies,' said Mahmud. He shook his head. 'I feel sorry for you and your ancestors. All of you, since the time of my ancestors, Parameswara or Megat Iskandar Shah had done a wonderful job.'

Tulis kept quiet as he listened to Mahmud relate on the times when he had those manuscripts in his hands. He would stare at the carefully written words in Malay, but in the Arabic characters, of how his ancestors spent their time in the palace and with their people. He especially liked the story on how Parameswara first founded Melaka. It always made him laugh and cry at the same time. 'You know, Encik Tulis, each time you paid me a visit at the palace in Melaka, with new manuscripts to keep, I was delighted. It always made my day. Even when I was having a splitting headache, more like a migraine, I still had time to read everything you had written. The stories you and your ancestors wrote soothed my head and they helped me keep my balance.'

'Even my father was excited with them, as much as his father and grandfather were. I would go to the secret cellar where we kept all the manuscripts and read them during our free time.'

'But, just too bad, they are all in the hands of the Portuguese, our archenemies.'

'The writings are for our future generation. And they are about what you and your majesty's ancestors did in the past.'

'I don't mind at all if they just wanted to steal the gold, silver and the royal regalia, because they can be replaced. But, how do you replace a writing that had record our history?'

Tulis was at a loss for words. The pen he was holding on his right hand slipped and it fell down on the floor. He left it there. He was too weak to bend and pick it up. Mahmud felt sorry for him. He reached out his hand, picked it up, and handed it to Tulis.

'Thank you, your majesty.'

'I was shocked, beyond belief myself.'

'I don't know, your majesty,' said Tulis. 'I feel like some members of my own family had died. I grew up with them.'

'I used to read them during free time at the palace. I liked to go into the underground cellar and spend a lot of time there, alone, much to the chagrin of the officials who were looking for me. The episode I liked the most was my late great-great-great grandfather's founding of Melaka,' said the sultan. 'How brilliant was he to use the name of the *melaka* tree he was sitting under as the name of his new country. I also liked the episode that deals with Tuah and

Jebat. The way your ancestors had described two heroes it was as though they were invincible and could jump hundreds of feet in the air.

'Tuah was said to be so dashing that all the women in Melaka then would throw themselves at him. And he was able to fight with hundreds and hundreds of heavily armed Majapahit warriors; that with a swish of his dagger, he could have them killed. Well, I personally thought it was funny the way your ancestors had described him.'

'But, that was the way they described the characters then,' explained Tulis.

'Indeed, indeed. But, I'm sure there must be few copies of the writings with some of the people.'

'Yes, there may be. Can't we get them before they are destroyed too?'

'What do you mean? How? Is there anything that you would like to suggest that we do, Encik Tulis?'

'We can try and contact those people who might have them in Melaka.'

'How we can go about doing this?'

Tulis pondered over the question. Mahmud waited. He thought it was a wonderful idea. In this way, he could have the story of Melaka rewritten and saved for posterity.

'Yes, can send somebody there and find them in the villages where they live.'

'Won't that be too difficult? Is there any other way that we can reproduce new copies of it? I really don't wish to put pressure on you, but isn't there anybody else who can rewrite the story of Melaka again, from the very beginning up till now?'

'Do you mean, if we could get somebody to rewrite the whole story?'

Mahmud nodded.

'It's possible. There may not be that many people who still remember what happened then. But they are also in Melaka and most probably hiding.'

'Why are they so scared of the Portuguese?'

'The Portuguese might want to engage them to be their scribes, too.'

'Ah! So this means that it's virtually impossible for us to engage them, then?'

'It's true, your majesty.'

The sultan then kept quiet. He was disappointed, but he did not blame Tulis for the misfortunes that had befallen him and Melaka. He was just a scribe.

'Has the Portuguese sent the treasure and works to their faraway land?'

'I'm not too sure. Most probably not as they are too engrossed with the defense of Melaka from out attacks. Most probably not.'

'If that's the case, then, why can't we launch an attack on them, right in Melaka where they are? We haven't done that in a long time. Surely, they won't think we will want to do it anymore. If we are successful, *Insyallah* (God willing), we can seize all our treasures and most importantly, our works from them. I don't think they understand a word of what is written since they are all in the Arabic text. This is the only way that we can do to get our works back from them.'

'Attack the Portuguese and grab the writings from them?'

Tulis nodded.

'I shall discuss this with my son, Ahmad and Nadim and ask for their opinions. But, I would prefer that we rewrite the story should our mission in Melaka fails. Why don't you do it, Encik Tulis?'

'Hmmm... I can try to rewrite whatever I can still remember.'

Mahmud was relieved. 'Really, you can do that?'

'I don't want to make any promises, but I will try to do it. I'll try my level best.'

The sultan was speechless. 'Let me have a look when you're ready, no I don't mean the whole story, only the first chapter that deals with the founding of Melaka first.'

'Just write whatever that you feel comfortable the most.'

'Very well, your majesty.'

The royal scribe returned to his tent. His walk was more brisk now that the sultan had given him a task to perform. A while ago, he was feeling depressed and sickly. Now he felt like god had given him a new lease of life. He thanked god profusely and recited the verses in the Holy Koran that he had memorized by heart and felt fortunate to be alive. He felt like the sultan needed him again. To a royal scribe, this was all that mattered. As a writer, he felt such a task was always welcome. It was just the right potion that he needed to fight the bout of despair he had been experiencing for a while now.

Tulis set out to collect enough goatskin from the people who were cooking for the sultan and his followers. He put it under the sun so it became taut and flat. He then cut them into square pieces of equal sizes until there were stacks of them. He thought this should be enough for him to write the entire history of Melaka since its founding in 1396 CE or 798 AH or 4094 of the Chinese calendar, by Parameswara. It was too long to tell and writing it would take years. But, he was not daunted. He hoped that he could write from the very beginning and continued for as long as he could stand it. Hopefully, when his time came, he could transfer the task to somebody else.

After much preparation, he started to write whatever that he remembered of the incident where Parameswara founded Melaka. But, he could not start writing immediately. Something was troubling him. He stared at the goatskin and thought hard on what to write as his first sentence. He wanted to see in his mind's eye an image he had retained in his mind that he could describe in words. He decided to call the story: 'The story of how Parameswara founded Melaka.' (*Cheritera Parameswara dan bagaimana baginda buka negeri Melaka.*) He then proceeded to write the introduction. He hoped he could write as much as possible. He soon found out that his hands were not steady as before. He feared he could only write at the most a few chapters.

Tulis actually pondered for a very long time on the story before he actually put his pen on the goatskin. He thought of how his ancestors, the first royal scribe wrote the story, which he, too, had read on countless occasions. Mahmud's father had given him the manuscripts to read so that he could follow the same style for his own writings. So, he started with just a poem that he wanted to use as guide.

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THE STORY OF PARAMESWARA  
AND HOW HIS HIGHNESS  
FOUNDED MELAKA...

Hundreds of years ago, from the dawn of time,  
A prince consort fled Palembang in Sumatra.  
He appeared one day in Bertam Village.  
So entranced was he that he decided to found his new state.  
And never did he return to his own homeland, ever again.

Melaka was the name he chose as the name of his new country.

It was after the tree, he was sitting under,  
where his dog was kicked by a mystical white mousedeer.  
So strong was he that it hurled the dog into the river.

Melaka swiftly developed and prospered.  
Many traders and merchants from far and wide  
were attracted to come with ships laden with goods

blown by the winds that came from the South and North.

And soon, Melaka became well known and famous.

It's rulers, full of wisdom and foresight,  
for they provided the people and country  
with prosperity, peace and harmony  
for many generations to come.

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Tulis then stopped; it was much for him to bear. He stared at the goatskin, at the Arabic characters that he had written, from left to right. He gave the first few pages of his writing to Mahmud. The sultan read it and cried. He then requested Tulis to continue with his work.

'It's not a story-book,' exclaimed Mahmud.

'Yes, indeed,' said Tulis. 'I couldn't write the book; it was tedious. Therefore, I hope your majesty will be happy with just a poem, a *syair*. This is the best that I can do.'

Mahmud was not disappointed - just surprised. 'That's okay, Encik Tulis, you're brilliant. All that we want is to have the story written; it doesn't have to be a story-book or *bikayat*; a poem will do as well, for our future generation to know what we have been through.'

Tulis was relieved. So, he set out to continue from where he had left. Unfortunately, he couldn't do so. He suffered a massive heart attack as he was walking back to his house. The sultan was so distraught with his death that he considered Tulis' suggestion they launched a massive attack on the Portuguese in Melaka. He hoped to seize whatever writings the Portuguese had stolen from the royal palace. He blamed himself for chiding about his poem. Being an old man, Mahmud should know better how his scribes feel if they were told that their work wasn't what he had expected. For days, the sultan couldn't sleep well. He kept staring at the poem that Tulis had written.

He was given a simple burial at an unmarked cemetery and only a stone was put on his grave. Mahmud then called his son, Ahmad later that night. 'I want to launch a surprise attack on the Portuguese, son.'

'Where, father?'

'In Melaka. I want to shock them. They must be so distracted with the royal regalia and gold and our priceless literary works they had stolen from our palace, that they wouldn't be able to retaliate. What do you think? Besides, we're doing it for Encik Tulis!'

'But, its very difficult now, father.'

'At the very least we can snatch the writings they now possessed so these can remain forever with us. Who knows what they might do to them. Most likely, they'll throw them into the sea on their way back to Portugal.'

Ahmad thought hard.

'If you've some reservations, I'll appoint Nadim to lead our forces then. What do you say?'

'Is it a wise idea, father?'

'What choice do we have? What do we stand to lose? If we're lucky, we might chase the Portuguese away from our land before they take away our royal and state treasures. We must stop them on their tracks,' said Mahmud.

Few days later, twenty ships of the Melaka forces arrived at the port at dawn, before the sun rose. They sailed from Pagoh the whole night to avoid being detected by the Portuguese. Nadim led them because Ahmad had other equally important tasks to perform. Because of that, they couldn't be together on this particular mission.

Unfortunately, the Portuguese caught wind of their actions and their naval force led by Pereira accosted them. Cannons were fired from both sides off the port of Melaka. It was a long battle that stretched for a few days. Everything stood still. The shops were closed. The people of Melaka were locked inside their house because the Portuguese authorities feared they would come to their aid. Few Melaka ships were hit; they sunk in the sea. The Malays swam to safety and went to the other ships. Kadir and his friends, too, couldn't do anything from inside Melaka; they were locked inside their respective houses.

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*Sultan Mahmud Shah then sent Nadim again to attack the Portuguese in Melaka thinking that their forces were demoralized due to the shortage of food. But, he was surprised when a Portuguese fleet led by Goncalo Pereira met them off Melaka near the Large Island or Pulau Besar, which was formerly called Pulau Air.*

*Nadim failed to defeat the Portuguese.*

*In 1519 CE or 924 AH or 4217 of the Chinese calendar, Sultan Mahmud Shah decided to return from Bentan to Muar. He immediately set to prepare his forces in Pagoh and Kuala Muar for another round of attack on the Portuguese.*

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Mahmud sat on a wooden chair in the open-fields. His sons, Ahmad, Kasim, Alauddin, Raden Ali, Nadim and other senior officers sat in front of him. He cupped his face with both hands. He wanted to cry, but no tears appeared. 'Oh, god, what bad luck has befallen me? We have launched many attacks on the 'White Bengalis' but each time we were met with stiff resistance. We've tried our level best, yet, we haven't been awarded with any success. Please help us, God. We pray to you to help us recapture Melaka.' He then cried. The others felt sorry for him. They knew he had tried his best to recapture Melaka but to no avail. Now, he was blaming himself for his own failure. He hoped that Melaka would not go in the way of the Islamic Caliphate of Al-Andalusia in the 'land above the winds.' An Arab sheikh who had come to the mosque one day to pray told him about it. Mahmud was shocked. He couldn't believe it when he was told that the invading Catholic forces in 1492 CE or 897 AH or 4190 of the Chinese calendar could extinguish the caliphate that had in existence for seven hundred years. Many of their leaders had to flee to Turkey or the other Muslim countries. Those who remained behind were tortured. They were only relieved of their pain and sufferings if they relented and denounced their original religion. The new rulers pillaged all the important Islamic cities, towns and villages. They were all given new names that they spelled in their own way. Qurtuba became Cordoba, Sarakusta became Zaragoza, Tulaytula became Toledo, Balansiya became Valencia, Al-Mariya became Almeria, and Al-Hama became Alhambra and so on. In fact, some of the *Imams* and other pious Muslims too succumbed to temptation and rejected Islam.

'How sad!' remarked Mahmud. 'If the *imams* could be tempted, what more other mortals like us?' And because of that he had to fight the Portuguese; he could not surrender. He pledged to his people that they would not allow the Portuguese to trample on Melaka. 'The people of Melaka will blame me for this,' wailed the sultan. 'They won't forgive me.'

Ahmad went to his father and hugged him. 'It's fated, father. There must be a reason why it had to happen that way...'

Mahmud kept quiet. Yes, he knew it was fated. As a good and pious Muslim, he believed in fate. He knew it was fated that Melaka should fall to the 'White Bengalis'. But what he didn't know was why did it have to happen? What good would it do if Melaka fell?

'There must be a lesson that we can learn from all this, father.'

'Yes; I'm sure there is, my son. I'm sorry that you won't be able to become the next sultan of Melaka, son.'

'That's okay, father, that's okay. Actually, I'm more worried about your well being than my own. I can handle my personal misfortunes. But, I do not know if you can handle yours.'

Mahmud didn't say anything. He just stared into void. He couldn't see anything in his view; everything was dark and bleak. He remembered how he used to experience a long streak of good fortunes. Then suddenly the Portuguese came. They changed everything upside down for him.

'I want you to go and take some men and be the sultan of Perak, while your younger brother, Alauddin becomes the next sultan of Pahang.'

Ahmad was surprised. Alauddin who was with them stood there and listened attentively; he was surprised, too, because as the second son of Mahmud, he didn't expect to be a sultan himself. Muzaffar remained quiet being the third son, the possibility of him ascending to the throne was too remote for him to think about. So, he was not unduly worried, since it was fated that he wouldn't become a sultan.

'Do you agree, my sons?'

'Yes, dear father,' said Alauddin.

Ahmad stood there, frozen. He did not expect that he would be installed a sultan before, but now it seemed that it was his fate that he became one himself.

Jorge was so angry with Mahmud for his latest attack on Melaka. He decided to burn the manuscripts in the public square in retaliation, so that everybody in Melaka could see it with their own eyes. In this way, the sultan or anyone wouldn't have any more valid reason for wanting to attack them again, because his forces attacked the Portuguese in Melaka purely for the purpose of obtaining the writings.

A huge crowd of people of all races gathered at the public square in front of the Portuguese administrative buildings that stood by the Melaka River. Then some Portuguese soldiers appeared from inside the buildings. They pushed about ten carts all stacked with old Malay manuscripts. They dumped them up in the middle of the square, while the people of Melaka gathered around it. Jorge then alighted from the same building. Two of his soldiers then poured oil over the stack of manuscripts, and he lit it with a torch. It immediately caught fire. The smoke bellowed sky-high. Everybody was aghast at the way the Portuguese was treating those books. But, they couldn't do anything except to feel angrier with them.

Kadir and some of his friends managed to sneak behind the buildings when everybody's attention was on the burning of the books. He entered the



storeroom and grabbed whatever manuscripts they could lay their hands on. When they returned to their hiding place in *Bukit Serindit*, they counted that there were fifty manuscripts. They were mostly stories from Persia, India and China that were written by earlier royal scribes who were at the service of the sultans of Melaka. 'We shall keep these manuscripts as though they are our lives, Rashid,' said Kadir. 'Let no one get anywhere near them.'

'Where do we keep them now?'

'You keep half and I keep half. In this way, should any of us get into trouble, half of what we have will be saved. Do keep them well, Rashid.'

'I will, Kadir. Don't worry, I will. Trust me. They are much a part of my own existence as well as yours, too.'

After the burning of the so-called Malay manuscripts that turned out to be waste paper that the Portuguese wanted to dispose of anyway, Jorge ordered his men to carry the original Malay manuscripts to their ships, late at night. They wanted to trick the people of Melaka and Mahmud into thinking they had indeed destroyed the old manuscripts, when in fact they were not the real ones. All the original Malay manuscripts and other treasures from the palace of Mahmud were later sent to Goa, India in another batch, with the Southerly winds on their way to Lisbon, Portugal, to be presented to their King Manuel. Jorge didn't want to take any more chances by keeping them in his office in Melaka, because they would attract the attention of the sultan's men.

'How stupid of the Malays,' said Jorge. 'They believed what they saw.'

'They're simple-minded people, your excellency,' replied Duarte. 'They don't talk or think like we do.'

'Couldn't they guess that the so-called manuscripts we took in carts to the square yesterday were all waste paper?'

They laughed.

'The Southerly winds will be blowing in a few days' time; so the Melaka treasures and priceless manuscripts will be on their way, first to Goa and later to Lisbon, to be presented to his majesty King Manuel.'

'Good, your excellency.'

'This will be our present for his majesty. I didn't imagine how intricate their designs were until I set eyes on their brassware, gold and silver jewelry until I set eyes on them.'

Jorge then went to the cupboards. He pulled out all of the manuscripts that he decided not to send to Lisbon. 'Here, take a look at this manuscript; it's written in Arabic, not a word of it I understand. But look at the writing, it's so fine.'

'Indeed, your excellency. The verses are so intricately woven. The Malays simply know how to weave words and added shades, until the whole story becomes a tapestry. Gosh! Where did they learn how to write such stories this way?'

Jorge continued to stare on the manuscript. 'And what does his majesty intend to do with these?'

'It's up to his majesty King Manuel. His majesty normally keeps them as state secrets so that nobody will know of their existence.'

Jorge turned them one by one and was entranced by it. 'How could we say that the Melaka people are uncivilized and uncultured? Look at this?' He then put the manuscript on the stack of other manuscripts in the cupboard. He then turned around and looked at Duerte. 'Is there anything else that your excellency wishes for me to do?'

'Yes, I now want to attack the sultan's forces in Pagoh. I know they are stuck there.'

'Very well, your excellency, I shall prepare my men immediately.'

Few days later, after Duerte had prepared his men, they marched to Pagoh on a mission to eliminate Mahmud and his men. Then suddenly, out of nowhere, the Melaka forces started to attack them from all directions. The Portuguese were taken by complete surprise; they didn't know where the Melaka men were firing from; they came from all directions. Many Portuguese men and officers were killed even before they were able to pull out their pistols from the holsters.

'Where are they? Where are they? Fire, fire!' shouted Duerte on top of his voice. He panicked because he didn't know where to fire. Around him were trees and bushes. His men couldn't retaliate either; they had no idea where to aim their guns or cannons. He saw more of his men died before his very eyes. He was shocked tremendously. He hadn't seen anything like this before in his whole life. He feared that his forces would be further decimated. He even feared for his personal safety and he might not return to Melaka in one piece. Then he decided to retreat. It was useless to fight an enemy who could not be detected.

The Melaka men had tied ropes in the jungles, and when the Portuguese soldiers hit them, a hail of arrows and bamboo spears shot at them from all directions, without any advanced warning. Most of the arrows were dipped in poison; they directly hit most of the Portuguese who were in front. They died instantly, while those who were shot in less critical parts of their body rolled on the ground in intense pain. The rest who survived the initial onslaught managed to flee. They fell in the many holes that the Melaka men had dug and

covered with grass and leaves. At the bottom of the holes were spikes with pointed ends. Many of the Portuguese soldiers and the Indian mercenaries fell inside the holes and were stuck in the poles. The Portuguese officers were angry because they didn't see any Malay men in this attack. They'd rather die fighting them than being killed mercilessly without confronting their enemies.

The Malays were now very smart. Where did they learn this new offensive technique, thought Duarte. This was the first time they were attacked in this fashion. They were deliberately misled by marks that the Melaka men had left on the trees and made false tracks, which they dutifully followed that led them to their massacre. Being early morning, the fog didn't help either. What more; the Malays purposely burnt damp grass and leaves which gave out thick smoke. This made the Portuguese forces lose their way even more. They only realized later it was just not fog that covered them, but smoke because of the smell. What was worse was that the Portuguese and their Indian mercenaries also swore they saw swords flying in all directions heading towards their neck and limbs. Many of their colleagues died of serious wounds. Some had their heads and other limbs severed. They just didn't know where the swords or *pedang terbang* came from; they just kept flying from all directions. The Malays had engaged some shamans known as the *bomohs* and *pawang*s to conduct special prayer sessions and offered blessings to the holy spirits. In this way they could make the swords fly towards their enemies. Only a few of them went astray and were lodged in the tree trunks or branches.

The Portuguese and their Indian mercenaries and the other Portuguese officers wouldn't believe it if they hadn't seen it with their own eyes. They were amazed that such a thing could happen. Many other Portuguese soldiers were seriously wounded. Duarte was fortunate because he didn't walk in the front of the convoy, but at the back. He knew that something fishy when the Melaka forces were nowhere to be seen despite being holed in this region. Where else could they be if not there, he thought. His misjudgment had caused the defeat of his forces and the death of so many of his men. What irked him the most was when the Melaka forces hung meat on the trees that attracted the wild tigers and lions. They devoured his men who were killed or badly injured as a result.

He turned around and saw his men being torn to pieces this way. 'Retreat, retreat!' shouted Duarte. He knew he had no chance of retaliating. He couldn't see his enemies who were hiding themselves in many trenches at strategic parts. They also hid in the bushes and woods and behind boulders. Yet, the cannon balls rained from above in all directions. They had come down from the sky. It was a divine intervention that the Melaka forces were hoping for to

happen, for they had been at the losing streak for far too long that god decided to offer a helping hand in some mysterious ways, thought Duerte. They seemed to be everywhere. Gunshots, cannon shots and bullets were being fired from all directions.

The Portuguese men retreated. They took along some of their injured friends with them and left those who had died. They even managed to wound some Malay men whom they took with them. Unlike in the past, they wouldn't allow any wounded Melaka man to live. But this time Duerte asked his men to bring a few back to their headquarters in the Fort of Melaka as hostages. He was furious with what had happened. He feared that Jorge would be angry for his failure to destroy Mahmud's forces.

He and his men who survived trekked through the same jungle and returned to Melaka. Even on the journey, some of them succumbed to the injuries they were suffering. Few died due to malaria, as they were scantily prepared for jungle trekking with their thin clothes.

Later that night, Duerte tortured the Malays whom he had brought back from the war-front with them. They forced the Malays who were already badly wounded and not receiving any treatment, to reveal the details of the whereabouts of Mahmud and his men. The Malays refused to reveal anything and preferred to withstand torture until they became lifeless and fainted with slash marks all over the body. They were willing to die in the defense of their sultan and religion. Such was their conviction.

Duerte was disappointed that the Malays refused to divulge any secrets and preferred die. He felt a lot better now that he had tortured the Malay soldiers. But, his sleep didn't come easy. He rolled left and right. He was seeing images of his men being shot by vicious arrows and spears, while he stood frozen behind them. He kept hearing the screaming and shouting. He felt helpless as they were already massacred and there was no way that he could do except to force his men to retreat. He thought what happened in the jungles was his worse nightmare that he had experienced, except that it happened in real life, and right before his very eyes.

He woke up, wiped the sweat that had made his pajamas damp. He went to the chapel and knelt down on both knees, with both his palms clasped, and prayed. He closed his eyes tightly to try to pray, but his concentration was disturbed by the recurrent images that didn't want to leave his mind. He closed his eyes even harder and more tightly, still it didn't work. In the end, he just decided to remain in this position, frozen with fear and fright, until the first light of dawn broke. It appeared initially as a fine line that had seeped through the windows. Then it became larger and larger until the soft morning light hit

the right side of Duarte. The chapel bells tolled, and he woke up. He opened his eyes and was shocked that it was now early morning. And he was still kneeling on both his knees and clasping his palms that were now moist with sweat. He stared up and looked at the face of the statue of Jesus Christ.

'Food supplies are reduced further with constant attack by the Malay forces. What do we do Garcia?' asked Duarte when Gracia came to his office. He didn't tell Garcia about the dream he had the previous night, because he didn't want to feel embarrassed by it. He just wanted to forget about it - after all, it was just a dream, he told himself repeatedly. Despite that, he still kept thinking about it. The more he thought about the dream, the angrier he became. Now he wanted to punish the people of Melaka, too.

'I will go to Burma and seek additional food supplies, sir,' replied Garcia.

'In the meantime, I will order an attack on Pagoh. The Malays are too much; how could they cut our food supplies. Can't they just stick to fighting? We must make sure the sultan won't be able to cut our food supplies to Melaka.'

The Portuguese forces started to go on the offensive. They attacked a band of men from Melaka who were patrolling the jungles. Many of them were killed. They were taken by complete surprise. They didn't expect the Portuguese forces to be so close.

Nadim rode his horse and got off near the sultan's tent to relay the latest news from the warfront. 'Our men have been attacked, your majesty.'

'Get our men to defend Pagoh!' ordered Mahmud without hesitation.

'Yes, your majesty.'

Nadim got on his horse and went off.

The Portuguese continued to attack the Melaka forces. Fierce fighting ensued. Many Melaka men were killed, with the Portuguese suffering few casualties.

'Attack, attack!' shouted Duarte. He then crossed his body and prayed softly hoping that his men would not be killed.

The Portuguese continued to attack and more Melaka men died. Nadim looked at his men who had died around him. He was disappointed with the turn of events. He thought they were having an upper hand and if they could maintain their position, most likely, the Portuguese would be trounced in Pagoh. In this way, their position in Melaka would be further weakened. The next venture would take them right in the city. Unfortunately, the Portuguese had rounded his men in Melaka and because of that they were not able to

revolt and cause havoc and trouble in the city and distract the Portuguese who had remained there.

'Retreat, retreat!' shouted Nadim. He had no choice. He didn't want more of his men to be sacrificed in the Battle of Pagoh. But he was glad that the Portuguese side, too, suffered many casualties. This was the worse experience for them ever since the war started in July of 1511 CE or the month of *Rabiulawal* of 917 AH when they first attacked Mahmud's forces near the mouth of the Melaka River. The Portuguese didn't expect this massacre to happen when they had already captured Melaka and held it for quite a while.

Mahmud, Ahmad, Nadim, and the men retreated away from Pagoh.

'*Allabukhbbar! Allabukhbbar!*' shouted Ahmad.

The others echoed him. '*Allabukhbbar! Allabukhbbar!*'

'There's no way that we can defend Pagoh,' said Nadim.

Mahmud pondered. The others waited. He then looked up and turned at his son. 'Let's go on to Bentan Island. They won't get us there,' said the sultan.

They continued to retreat. There was no way that they could maintain their position and fight the Portuguese during the *Ramadan*. The Portuguese saw the Melaka forces retreating from a hill and changed their positions.

'There they are! They're retreating to the hills!' said Duarte.

'We have captured Pagoh, sir,' said Garcia. 'And what do we do next? Do we proceed? Looks like they are not going to return to Melaka.'

'Yes, but this doesn't mean we have won the battle. They still pose a threat to us. Nobody knows what they're up to. It's very difficult to think how Mahmud and the Malays think. They know how to lock up their thoughts to themselves. The way they speak in Malay among themselves, it's always tricky for us to understand what they are saying. They sound like they are using a coded language, full of imagery and double meanings that is so difficult for us to make any sense of. I bet they'll lie low for a while before they do something. This is their strategy.'

Mahmud sat in front of a campfire in their hideout with his men deep in the jungles in Bentan Island. 'We'll rest here in Bentan and fast quietly until the end of the *Ramadan* month. In the meantime, we'll arm ourselves and we'll attack Melaka after *Ramadan*. We will go by sea and by land. We'll surprise them. We'll seize the fort of and recapture Melaka. We'll attack them in the month of *Syawal!*'

'*Syawal!*' asked Ahmad.

'Yes. Because the Portuguese thinks we will be celebrating *Hari Raya Puasa* and we won't be in the mood to fight. We surprise them!'

'*Allabukhbbar! Allabukhbbar!*' said Mahmud.

'*Allabukhbbar! Allabukhbbar!*' shouted his men.

Many ships from the Melaka forces sailed to Melaka in the dead of night. They hoped to launch a surprise attack on the Portuguese a second time. They knew that the Portuguese were now complacent, thinking that they had defeated the Melaka forces. Mahmud wanted to surprise them by sending fleet of ships to Melaka and attack them from the sea for the first time.

Meanwhile, another group of Melaka men trekked through the woods. Nadim was leading them. Their aimed to attack the Portuguese from two fronts, the sea and from land. The ships belonging to the Melaka force arrived at the port. The situation there was calm. The Malays quickly stationed themselves in the outskirts of the city. Nadim rode his horse and went to his men to find out how they were doing. 'Our ships have arrived at the port. We'll wait for instructions. Get ready, we're about to attack Melaka from both sides,' he said.

All their cannons were facing the city from the ships. Ahmad stood on the deck and waited for the right moment to issue an instruction to his men to start attacking the Portuguese. He glanced at them men. They were ready. They were all waiting for him to order them to fire. Ahmad then lowered his hand. His men knew what the signal meant. 'Fire, fire! *Allabukhbbar! Allabukhbbar!*'

The men started to fire cannons at the port and city in quick successions. Nadim heard the cannons being fired and took it as a cue.

'Attack, attack, attack in the name of Sultan Mahmud Shah and Melaka! *Allabukhbbar! Allabukhbbar!*' shouted Nadim.

The men rushed on their horses and on foot and started to attack mercilessly as if they were possessed. The men had taken the 'oil bath' in a special ceremony that was conducted just before the attack. They felt they were invincible and could withstand being slashed or shot at. Many Portuguese soldiers were killed.

Taking the 'oil bath' or *mandi minyak* was a ritual which many Malay warriors did. It involved the men having to rub his body with hot coconut oil that had been boiled. In this way, they believed that their body and limbs would not be harmed should they were attacked by the enemies' swords, spears or the *keris*. They thought they were invincible and protected by Allah. They were also given amulets called *tangkal* that they wore around their waist or the arm to protect them from calamities and physical attacks. Some of the men and women warriors also used the *susuk* that comprised of small precious stones or metal objects such as gold. They were inserted at different parts of

their limbs. They believed that these would make them more powerful and less likely to be hurt by weapons including bullets. Apart from that they recited holy verses from the Holy Koran and performed the *zikir* until they fell in a trance as a way of making stronger and braver. Their *silat* or martial arts masters often conducted tests on his exponents and warriors to prove their invincibility. They'd get some of his men at random and ask them to stand or lie on a low table. They'd then slash their stomach or arms with a sword. This bizarre attempt to prove one's invincibility or *kekebalan* as the Malays would describe it, made the Melaka soldiers feel more confident with themselves. It helped to fortify their inner strength they had badly wanted to supplement the rigors of the art of war they had all experienced that made them into the warriors that they were. Despite that, they thought they could do with further assistance together with the protection that the oil bath and amulets or *tangkal* they were using. The shamans, who also often passed for the medicine men followed them wherever they went, gave these. They were called either the *bomoh* or *pawang*. They often meditated for long periods in caves and invoked the holy spirits and chanted verses called *jampi-serapah* and sprinkled holy scented water on them. And to top it off, they were given holy water to drink.

The shop-owners closed their shops and the others fled for their safety and placed wooden beams across the doors and windows. The Melaka forces continued to fire cannons at the port. Many Portuguese ships were hit. The Melaka men went on rampage in the city and bazaars. The Portuguese soldiers who were there, tried to put up a stiff resistance, but they were killed. More Portuguese soldiers tried to resist, but the Melaka forces overwhelmed them. The Malays then rushed to the fort to try to overtake it. This was the first time they had stepped foot in Melaka, and were so close to recapturing the state from the Portuguese. They felt elated and encouraged by the latest development and turn of events. All the officers and soldiers thought if they could maintain their position and winning streak and kept their pace, morale and fighting spirit high, they could eliminate the Portuguese and forced them back to the sea!

The Portuguese didn't expect for the Melaka forces to be so daring and wanted to launch a surprise attack on them from the sea. All this while they had turned their backs and faced the other directions, thinking that Mahmud couldn't afford to launch any attack from the sea; all his attacks were done from the land. They also thought that Mahmud had retreated too far away from Melaka, there was no way that they could find they way back.

The Melaka men rushed to the fort. They fired more cannons and guns at the Portuguese soldiers who were guarding the fort at various places. They fled



for their lives leaving the fort bare. The Malays forced their way by breaking down the wooden doors of the fort called the *Porta de Santiago* that was closest to the site of the Melaka Palace.

Cannons were also fired from the Melaka ships that were berthed in the straits to cover those who had entered the fort and other parts of Melaka. Some of the Malays sneaked into the tunnels below the fort. They surprised the Portuguese soldiers who did not expect anybody to intrude this secret and highly guarded place that was only known by senior Portuguese officials. Unbeknownst to them, some of the Malays who had worked in the construction of the secret passage had related the secret to Nadim. That was why the Melaka soldiers knew about this passage.

Duerte and Garcia went to the top of the fort. He saw more Melaka men surrounding it and they were advancing towards it. Few were already inside of it. They were disappointed that the fort of Melaka wasn't invincible after all. It was so easy for the Malays to barge into their fort.

'They're like foxes. Fire, fire at them!' shouted Duerte.

Many Melaka men were hit. They died instantaneously with gaping wounds in their heads and body. The Portuguese soldiers continued to fire from the top of the fort. Many Malays died because they were easy targets. Portuguese soldiers were standing at a high level where they could see very clearly the Malays who didn't have any protection and were in an open space in the courtyard. There was nowhere for them to hide themselves. So they became easy targets for the Portuguese sharpshooters who used the guns with long or narrow barrels whose bullets could even penetrate concrete walls. They fired cannons at the Melaka ships, non-stop for hours on end. Some of them were hit, and they sunk.

'How could they reach here at this very fort? Our men must have been lagging in their duties. Fire, fire!' shouted Garcia. 'Aren't the fort supposed to be invincible?'

The Melaka men tried to ram down the other doors of the fort, but the Portuguese who barricaded them from inside prevented them from breaking in. The Malays continued to ram the doors, but they did not give way. They continued to fire from above, and many more Malays were killed. Then a door broke down. Few Melaka men managed to enter the fort, but they were immediately massacred in a hail of bullets that came from everywhere. One of the Malays managed to aim his gun at Duerte, but it didn't fire. He threw his gun, pulled out his *keris*, and tried to attack Duerte instead so that he could suffer a slow death. In this way his men could see with their own eyes blood

flowing out of their captain's body. He was relieved. He could have died if the Melaka soldier had pulled the trigger.

Now both of them were engaged in a hand-to-hand combat. A Portuguese soldier appeared and he shot the Melaka man from the end of the roof. Duarte pushed him over the fort; but he'd died long before his body touched the pavement. The impact smashed his face, body, and blood splattered all over. It was an eerie sight to behold.

The attack on the Portuguese fort of Melaka took few days. At night, all the streetlights were left unlit. The workers who dutifully lit up the oil-lamps with a long stick when night fell were told not to do so. They didn't want to light up Melaka that night. Because of this the attack from the Melaka forces ceased. They only resumed fighting at the break of dawn when Melaka was bathed again in light. Thick black smoke was bellowing above the city. It hovered and refused to go.

Ahmad and Nadim continued to hold secret meetings in the Chinese Hills or *Bukit Cina*. They couldn't go to *Kampung Jawa* or the other Malay villages because the Portuguese had sealed them. They didn't allow any the Malays to leave their houses, because they feared that they could cause trouble and helped the Melaka forces. The Malays who were in Melaka conducted private prayers in their houses hoping for the Melaka forces to trounce the Portuguese, so that Melaka could come under the rule Mahmud again. They hoped that the sultanate that was in existence for one hundred and eleven years could be saved. They didn't realize how viscous the Portuguese could be. How could they sustain their position in Melaka all this while, they thought. Where did they get their resources? The answer that they could think of was the devils and satan! They were the ones who had helped the Portuguese all this while. They also recited poems as a mantra that they recited all the time to declare their support for the sultan.

*'Kalau roboh Kota Melaka,  
Papan di Jawa saya dirikan;  
Kalau sungguh bagai dikata,  
Badan dan nyawa kami serahkan!'*

(If the Fort of Melaka should fall,  
We'll replace it with wood from Java;  
If my patriotism and nationalism is called,  
I shall declare my love for Melaka!')

Kadir and his men joined forces with Nadim. They hoped their combined effort would prove fatal to their enemies.

'We'll attack the fort. The Portuguese position is now weak. We can destroy it in few days,' said Ahmad. 'I will personally enter the fort and break them from inside.'

'You have to be very careful, your highness, for the fort has many tunnels and secret passages. You can easily get lost in the maze, if you are not careful,' warned Kadir.

'How do you know?'

'My friends who worked as laborers during the construction of the fort told me so.'

'I'll be very careful then.'

Ahmad then led his men and they launched another round of attack on the fort. The Portuguese were taken by complete surprise. The Melaka forces surrounded the main entrance of the fort and broke the door. They barged in and killed a few hundred Portuguese soldiers and Indian mercenaries. He was intent on entering the tunnels. He wanted to retrieve more treasures, especially the old manuscripts. Then in one tunnel, some Portuguese appeared brandishing their weapons. They stopped him. Ahmad tried to remain calm. He looked around to see if there was a way out. He tried to turn around. Unfortunately he was stopped again by another group of soldiers who suddenly appeared. He gave up. He dropped his weapons and held both hands up. The Portuguese soldiers approached him.

'Welcome to Melaka, Ahmad,' said Duarte who appeared from one of the doors in the tunnel.

Ahmad and the Portuguese soldiers turned. 'Thank you, your excellency.'

'Send him to the dungeons,' said Duarte. 'We will inform Sultan Mahmud Shah that we have his son. In this way, we can make them stop attacking us.'

'Yes, your excellency,' said one of the soldiers.

Duarte then walked off. The Portuguese soldiers then took Ahmad away. They passed few more tunnels in the fort. Just then Nadim and some of his men appeared. They clobbered and attacked the Portuguese soldiers. Nadim threw a weapon at Ahmad and he started to attack the Portuguese men. However, the Malay men managed to outwit the Portuguese soldiers and freed Ahmad in the process. They fled from the scene to safety. Ahmad felt so lucky that Nadim had appeared from out of the blue.

Despite that, the Melaka forces still lost.

Mahmud sat on a chair. He felt horrified at the failure to defeat the Portuguese and drive them out of Melaka. His men stood in front of him,

looking sad. The sultan was greatly disappointed. They were so close to complete victory. His men had in fact entered Melaka and the fort, while some had actually broken into the secret tunnel, yet they were trounced. It just was not their fate to destroy the Portuguese forces that day. They were fated to lose again, thought the sultan. 'We managed to get to the fort, and we were almost able to recapture Melaka. Just what went wrong this time?' he asked. 'Tell me!'

The men kept quiet. They knew that they could have recaptured Melaka and defeated the Portuguese, but luck was not on their side. This was the first time the Melaka forces were able to confront them there. They had managed to go right up to the fort, and even entered it. They succeeded in killing many Portuguese soldiers including their Indian mercenaries and seriously wounding scores of their colleagues.

'Just not our luck, your majesty,' said Nadim. This was all that he could tell the sultan. They had done their level best, yet they lost again. If they were lucky, they could have trounced the Portuguese and their lackeys and recaptured Melaka from them.

'It has nothing to do with luck, Nadim. Our strategy was wrong,' said Sultan Mahmud. 'We attacked them from few fronts, whereas we should have done from all possible fronts so that our enemies didn't have anywhere to flee.'

Nadim agreed. So did Ahmad.

'Now what do we do next, father,' said Ahmad. He preferred that his father, Sultan Mahmud Shah didn't dwell on why they had lost in their last battle with the Portuguese, but rather thought about how they could maintain their soldiers' morale. It had been boosted with the success that they had managed to get. 'What they need now is to be given more encouragement. Therefore, there was no need to find faults.'

'We must rest here. And let me think of the next course of action that we can take,' said Mahmud, after his son had given his opinions on the matter. Now they only wanted to look ahead, to the final and ultimate victory. They were now more confident than ever before of recapturing Melaka from the Portuguese.

'They suffered many casualties, too. Their fort is not invincible after all,' said Nadim. 'If it was made of wood, surely we could have burnt it down, but it was made of stone and concrete: How could we inflict damage to it?'

'Now at least we know that they are not that powerful as we had thought all along. They can be beat; we can recapture Melaka,' cried the sultan.

'Yes, your majesty.'

Mahmud stood up. He got ready to leave. 'I will be writing letters to our Malay rulers, and ask them to help us fight the Portuguese,' he said. 'I'll inform them of our success in getting close to recapturing Melaka, and if they could send reinforcement, Melaka will be ours again.'

The men were surprised. Nadim looked at Ahmad. He was not sure if the other Malay rulers in the region were willing to help. Didn't they have problems of their own, to mind ours, thought he.

'But, will they help us, father?' said Ahmad.

'I don't see why not; many of them came here when they needed us, so now is the time for us to seek their assistance for a change. I think it's fair.'

'What have they got to gain for helping us?' asked Nadim.

'The question is; what do they stand to lose if we fall to the Portuguese? I will let the Malay rulers know that should we stop giving resistance, the Portuguese will get all of them next.'

'We need to frighten them. We need to tell them that the Portuguese won't stop at Melaka. They will proceed to the other Malay countries and capture them. Their main aim is to capture the whole of the Malay region like they did to Spain and Portugal, which were Muslim countries before.'

'They won't be happy by capturing only Melaka. Palembang, Kampar, Siak, Indragiri, Riau in Sumatra and Singapura and all the other Malay countries are in grave danger of being attacked and captured the Portuguese, too. Even Pasai in the far north of Sumatra, which is the verandah of Mekkah, isn't completely safe, I can tell you that!'

Ahmad and Nadim were shocked.

'Indeed, your majesty,' remarked Nadim. 'The devils won't know where to stop once they are on a rampage. They thrive on adventure and killing people and displacing them like they are possessed.'

'I will write the letter, and I want some men to deliver them,' added Mahmud. He then walked away. Nadim looked at Ahmad. 'Now the Portuguese will know who the Malays are. They can never displace us, for the Malays will not perish from the earth!'

'The Malays will not perish from the earth,' repeated Ahmad. '*Takkan Melayu hilang di dunia!*'

Jorge, Duarte and Garcia inspected the Portuguese soldiers who were killed. They were disgusted at the sight of so many dead bodies lay motionlessly on the pavement and the field. It was such a pitiful sight. They then went to those who were wounded; among them were some senior and junior officers.

None of them had seen anything like that before, least of all within the confines of the fort proper. How could this happen? They had no answer.

The partially completed Fort of Melaka that encircled the Portuguese political and military headquarters in Melaka was not invincible after all. Mahmud proved to be a tough leader of the Malays. For once, the Portuguese realized that their position in Melaka was fluid - anything could happen and all of them could be thrown out of Melaka into the sea at any time. So, they decided to be more vigilant. Mahmud and his forces simply couldn't be taken for granted anymore. From then on, they stopped telling jokes about his weakness and lacking in leadership. Or about how slow the Malays in Melaka were in their thinking.

'Throw all the Melaka men in the hole! And give our own men a decent burial. Get the bishop of Melaka,' said Duarte.

'Yes, your excellency,' said one of the Portuguese soldiers who were there.

The soldier went to his horse and rushed off to bishop's residence a short distance away. He could have run, but since a horse was already standing by, he decided to jump on it. Within minutes, he arrived in front of the priest's residence.

The bishop of Melaka performed the last rites for the dead Portuguese men. They were some non-Portuguese soldiers who had died, too. Their bodies were laid on the ground. All wore their full army uniform. He recited verses in Portuguese and crossed in the air in front of him. He then repeated the act over every one of the dead bodies, before they were laid in the hole in the cemetery near the fort.

Jorge, Duarte and Garcia were there together with other Portuguese officers to pay their last respects. They were sad to see some of their closest friends had also perished. Some of them had a huge slash across their faces, while the others had bullet wounds that hit at their forehead. They died in the defense of Melaka and the might of the king of Portugal, said Jorge to himself. He became more at peace with himself now, thinking that their death was not a waste for they had died in the name of King Manuel of Portugal and in the name of their religion.

After the bishop had finished reading the prayers, those present crossed their body.

Melaka in 1521 CE or 1023 AH, in the Chinese year of the snake in 4219. It was now very much a Portuguese colonial city in many ways. After ten years, they had stamped their indelible mark everywhere. Signboards were mostly in Portuguese with some in Malay. It was ten years after the Portuguese first

arrived in Melaka. The situation looked like was under control. Future attacks by Mahmud and the Malay forces were unlikely, as they had been driven too far away from Melaka with their resources depleted and morale destroyed. He had by now given up any hope of recapturing Melaka. He was resigned to the fact that he had lost it to the Portuguese forever. Age had caught up on him. Now his attention was on how to find peace with himself and a decent place for his followers to stay at, so that they didn't have to live in exile all their lives. Some of the young children had grown into adults now. Even those babies who were born when Melaka fell to the Portuguese were now old enough to carry their weapons or hurl curses at the 'White Bengalis'.

The Portuguese position in Melaka was now so entrenched that they were able to go about doing their everyday activities without any fear or worry. They began to behave as though they owned the whole of Melaka. There did not feel threaten by the people of Melaka whatsoever. The people of Melaka were afraid of them that they bowed deeply when there saw any Portuguese soldier passing by. None dared to stare at them or looked in their eyes. They did not like it; they took it as an affront to them. Those who dared to do so were immediately hit with the sides of the long swords that they normally carried on their rounds. Sometimes, they would flick out their guns and threatened to fire at them. This often made the Malays and other local men run for their lives. Many ran inside their shops or houses if they could so they did not have to bow. They did not know what to expect from the Portuguese soldiers who often loitered in the streets looking for some fun. They would stop at the bars and drank few glasses of beer without paying. Many of them seemed to be drunk most of the time. They would sing loudly Portuguese songs. It was such a pitiful sight. Although the locals didn't understand a word of what they were saying, but they could tell that some of the younger Portuguese soldiers were homesick. They were posted away from their native country for too long, that they started to long for it. These Portuguese smelled bad because they did not like to bathe or change clothes very much. The locals couldn't stand them. Because of the intense heat, they tended to sweat a lot more than the locals did. Mostly, they drank cheap local beer called *tuak* or rice beer called *samsu*. Even then they seldom paid. The owners of the illegal bars and other brothels that sprouted in Melaka, especially in the Chinese quarters gave them all the drinks and women these Portuguese officers and soldiers wanted. This was the only way that they could do in order to make them happy. In exchange, these Chinese businessmen could get their favors, by not ordering their illegal establishments be shut down. When the Portuguese officers and soldiers were drunk, they often behaved much worse than wild beasts.

The Malays especially had not seen anybody behaving like that. They never knew that people could actually lose their heads while drinking from the bottle. The young Malay women especially those who were not married, hid themselves in the houses for fear of being molested or even raped. When they had to leave the house, they made sure that they covered their faces with an extra piece of *sarong*, and were always in the company of some women and men. In this way, the Portuguese would think that they were old women from the way they dressed, or somebody else's wives.

The Malay men clobbered one or two of the Portuguese soldiers, until they died because they had teased and tried to fondle their wives. Their bodies were bundled in gunnysacks and thrown in the hills nearby until they rotted. The corpses were eaten by wild animals and never found. The Portuguese authorities only discovered those that were floating in the Melaka River the next day. Others, became food for the crocodiles.

The Portuguese officer who was in charge of Melaka was still de Albuquerque. His term was supposed to have expired. He was due to be sent home, but the Portuguese authorities in Goa recommended that he stayed for few more years, to oversee the further development of Melaka, now that he had succeeded in trouncing Mahmud. He sat in a carriage, as it traveled through the streets in Melaka. Duarte sat beside him. The Malay men did not turn to look at them; they despise both of them. Only the non-Muslims or non-Malays liked them a lot for obvious reasons. The Portuguese officials knew it, but they remained aloof to their feelings. The Malays were beginning to blame the foreign invaders for their miseries were experiencing now. Their land was confiscated and properties seized. They were given to foreigners who had remained here, or sold to them dirt cheap, simply because some of the Portuguese officers were taking money on the side.

'What are you thinking now, your excellency?' asked Duarte.

'I want to send eighteen ships and six hundred soldiers to attack the sultan of Melaka's forces in Bentan. That is where they are hiding now. We must not allow them to come near us here. Didn't you see the extent of the damage that they had inflicted on us? They are now getting better with their strategy and know how to launch surprise attacks on us.

'But, they will fail! We are far more superior to them! They're now launching an assault on two fronts, the land and sea; unlike before when they only attacked us by land. But, we're going to stop them before they can become any smarter. How could Sultan Mahmud Shah and the Malays outwit us, Portuguese?' said Jorge.

They smiled.



'Certainly, your excellency. But, I thought you said they posed no threat whatsoever to us.'

'Indeed, but it doesn't hurt to finish them up, to mop the last dirt, so to speak. I order you to lead the forces this time, since you know the place well.'

'I see that you've now become good with words, just like the Malays do.'

'It doesn't hurt to speak by using imageries, my friend.'

They laughed.

A fleet of eighteen ships and six hundred Portuguese and Indian soldiers and scores of officers set sail for Bentan Island. It was led by Duarte. Unbeknownst to them, one of Mahmud's spies in Melaka, a Malay man by the name of Kojal who worked in Melaka as a sweeper at the main square in the city center heard about their plans. He rode on his horse frantically through the woods, as soon as he heard about the Portuguese last exploits and wanted to warn him about it. After trekking for many days non-stop, except to stop for meals and to relieve himself or to rest, he finally managed to arrive at the Melaka camp, which was hidden deep in the jungles. He dismounted his horse and went to Mahmud. Nadim and Ahmad were with him, too. There were also some leaders from other Malay states. A large group of Malay soldiers from other Malay states was assembled there. They were ordered by their sultans to support to the Melaka forces. Their rulers feared if the Portuguese were not contained in Melaka, most likely they would want to seek adventures elsewhere. Eventually, the other neighboring Malay states in the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra would be targeted for their action. But, fortunately for some of these states, they were not attractive enough for the Portuguese because their location wasn't suitable to open a new port, and they didn't have natural resources that they could take advantage of. And because of that, they had spared these Malay states. No doubt, after a while even some of the Malay rulers felt reluctant to help Sultan Mahmud because they knew that the Portuguese would not harm them.

'Why, Kojal?' asked Nadim, as he approached them.

'The Portuguese ships, eighteen of them are heading for Bentan, your majesty,' said Kojal.

Mahmud was surprised but not shocked. He thought the Portuguese, after staying in Melaka for the last ten years, would not want to seek anymore adventures. But, he was wrong. Despite the fact that they had solidified their position in Melaka were still insistent on destroying Sultan Mahmud and his forces that were now hiding in Bentan Island. They knew the sultan was still very much alive, but old and frail.

'Where?' asked the sultan. He was shocked. He was getting used to living in exile in Bentan Island with no plans to launch further attacks on the Portuguese; now he was invited to go to war with them, with the Portuguese calling the first shot.

'They're heading this way,' said Kojal. 'To Bentan.'

'Good. We shall welcome them warmly. He then turned to the Malay officers. 'They are here. They have now fallen right in our trap. We shall welcome them with open arms.'

The Portuguese ships sailed smoothly near the coast with the strong winds heading towards Bentan Island. Then suddenly, the Melaka forces started to fire cannons from all directions, from the shores. Cannons hit few of the Portuguese ships, while many just went wide and hit the water. One of their ships sunk into the sea. Many Portuguese soldiers jumped off-board before the water swallowed it. Few others died instantly. The whole area around Bentan Island became chaotic. The noises were loud with cannon shots and gunfire. Smoke emitted from the ships that were hit. There was smoke emitting from the jungles in the islands. The Portuguese tried to aim at these spots. They were tricked because the Melaka forces had purposely lit fire at some of these places to fool them.

'Attack, attack!' shouted Nadim.

The battle raged on for a long while, with the Portuguese suffering severe casualties. This was the third time they were on the receiving end, first in Pagoh and second in Melaka and now here. They did not realize that they had sailed directly into a trap was set up by the Melaka forces.

Pedro shook his head. How could this happen, he thought. He felt that the Portuguese forces were so superior that they simply could not be hurt. But, little did they realize that the Melaka forces had succeeded to take advantage of the many places where they hid their ships and men around the islands. Worse, the Melaka forces had planted spikes in the sea and dropped boulders so that the larger Portuguese ships could not pass through. Many of them sank or became limp and open targets for attacks. Therefore many of the ships were wrecked and razed with the Portuguese suffering high casualties.

The islands near Bentan Island were small and the sea between them was narrow; this was where the Portuguese were misled into thinking that there was a safe passage. This was the first time that they had come to these parts, and they had made a huge mistake that they were going to regret all their lives. This one incident had seriously dented their reputation. It could even prove disastrous to them in the long-term. This place turned out to be the best place for the Melaka forces to launch their ambush on the Portuguese ships.

Mahmud's strategy worked again this time. He was greatly delighted to see the results of their labor. Their enemies' ships were hit one after another and they sank. Few hundred Portuguese soldiers and their Indian mercenaries they brought with them died in this battle near Bentan Island. The sultan was certain the Portuguese would remember this 'Battle of Bentan' for a long time, and it'd be written in the annals of their adventures in Melaka; only perhaps in their writings, they would describe it differently. Perhaps, only one of their ships had gone down with a handful dying or wounded.

'We can't see them. They're well hidden in the woods,' said Duarte. 'Retreat, retreat! Return to Melaka immediately!'

The Portuguese ships turned around and returned to Melaka in a convoy. Some of them limped and had to be towed by other ships. This time they made sure they sailed further away from the shores in order to avoid the cannon balls from hitting them.

The Melaka forces continued to fire more cannons, but they fell short. They were then ordered to stop firing in order to save the balls for future use. Thus, the land around Bentan Island returned to normal.

Nadim and Ahmad saw the Portuguese ships retreating. They were relieved. They had not seen anything of that sort happening before. Their ships must have suffered a lot of damage, otherwise they would not have turned around so suddenly and fled for their lives. They wondered if the Portuguese had suffered too many casualties. How many of them died? They could not tell, because the battle was fought at sea from a long distance. They could hardly see each other's face.

'They are retreating! Stop your fire! Stop your fire!' shouted Nadim excitedly.

'The Portuguese are retreating! Save your bullets!'

The Melaka men cheered and hugged each other. This was the first time they had won a battle at sea with the Portuguese. Their officers heard their laughter, but they could not see where the Melaka men were. Their laughter echoed from everywhere. It was eerie, like they were hearing sounds that came down from the skies.

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*The Portuguese were forced to return to Melaka. However, they soon returned to Bentan Island with more power, but still failed to defeat the Malays there in the two attacks they made in 1523 and 1524 CE or 1025 AH and 1026 Hijriah or 4221 and 4222 of the Chinese calendar.*

A young Indian manservant who was in the mid-twenties walked in the garden of Jorge's official residence in the fort in Melaka. He deposited a tray of drinks - the usual drinks they always took that always made them dizzy. He was a born-again Catholic who came with them from Goa. After he was injured in one of the skirmishes against the Malays, he was given a lighter job to do. He walked with a slight limp. Because of that he agreed to convert to their religion and he was given a job as a servant in the residence. The Portuguese did not trust a local who was not a Catholic to work with them for the fear that they might want to harm them. So, Abraham had to convert out of necessity more than any other reason because he had badly wanted a job. Being an Indian who had just arrived from India, he had not much choice. Furthermore, he could not speak Malay and did not know how to mix well. As a house-help, he practically did not have to say anything. Worse, the Malays and other local people despised him for being a Portuguese lackey. Even the Melaka-born Indians whose ancestors had come here many decades earlier hated him.

'Thank you, Abraham. And that will be all,' said Jorge.

Abraham nodded and returned to the house. Jorge looked dejected. Duerte and Garcia sat with him and they, too, were not feeling happy about what had happened to their naval forces earlier. And without any provocation, he grabbed his glass and hurled it on the ground at the other end of the garden where it hit a brick wall. It broke into tiny pieces. The two men were shocked, but they could not do anything, because he was their superior. They understood why he felt that way. He must have taken the defeat personally. It was his defeat, more than the defeat of the Portuguese forces in Melaka. And he was going to be held accountable for what happened. His superiors in Goa or Lisbon would want to question him on why they were not able to defeat the Malays on Bentan Island and he had no explanation. He could not blame anyone but himself for his sudden change in fortunes. Hundreds of his men died. This was their worst defeat in Melaka or anywhere outside of Portugal. However, he decided to put aside the letter that he had wanted to write to Lisbon to say that the situation in Melaka was now stable and whatever threat Mahmud and his forces had in the past, was diminished completely. He was glad he did not write the letter, although he had the words already written mentally in his head.

'I shall return to Goa and get more men and weapons. The Malays are becoming worse. I must teach Sultan Mahmud Shah a lesson he is not going to

forget all his remaining life,' said Jorge, defiantly. 'He's a fool if he thinks we're not going to retaliate until he's totally defeated and eliminated, this Sultan Mahmud Shah.'

'He's truly cunning and shrewd and sly like a fox.'

The men kept quiet.

Jorge finally managed to write a report on what he had experienced in Bentan Island. The report was titled, 'The Battle for Bentan Island' was however, not correct. It did not report everything. He told his officers in Goa that their soldiers and other Indian mercenaries had fought gallantly, but luck was not on their side. A freak gale wrecked havoc on their ships. This resulted in many of them sinking in the sea. Hundreds of their men perished with them.

Not surprisingly, the senior Portuguese officers and governor of Goa agreed and accepted everything that was written in the report. They felt sorry for Jorge for their bad luck. They then approved more ships and men to be sent immediately to Melaka to replace those that were destroyed.

A carriage rolled towards the Portuguese headquarters in Goa, India in 1526 CE or 1028 AH, in the Chinese year of the dog or *xu* in 4224. It stopped in front of the entrance of the Portuguese headquarters. Jorge stepped out and few Indian soldiers who were standing at the door immediately stood still and saluted him. He then walked inside the building and headed straight for the governor's office on the first floor. The Portuguese governor of Goa paced his room while Jorge waited. 'How could you not want to defend Melaka? The number of Malays has been reduced. They have suffered badly. So, how could you not overpower them, once and for all?' asked the governor of Goa. 'Remember this insurgency by the Melaka forces have been going on for more than a decade now. Surely, it must end. How old is this Sultan Mahmud Shah now?'

'He's about your age, your excellency.'

'Can't we just let nature take its course?'

'But, he has a son, Raja Ahmad who's also an able ruler.'

The governor of Goa shook his head. 'There'll be more trouble then.'

'They're like cats, your excellency; they've more than nine lives.'

'How could you drag on this for so long? You should have trounced Sultan Mahmud Shah's forces long ago. What have you all been doing there in Melaka? Even if they were like cats with nine of ninety lives, surely, all of their lives would have been spent by now. Nine lives isn't that many.'

Jorge kept quiet. The governor returned to his seat and sat. He looked at Jorge direct in his face. 'I want you to destroy Sultan Mahmud leaving him without a trace. Drive him away as far as you can. Above all, I do not want to see you coming here all the way from Melaka and say that the Malays are like cats with nine or ten lives anymore. Hear? All that I want to know is Mahmud and his men are eliminated from the face of this earth!

'That's what I'd like to hear from you the next time you produce yourself before me here, Jorge. I shall therefore allow six hundred more Portuguese and Indian men and ten ships to be sent to Melaka. I have read your report. I'm sorry for what happened in Bentan, though. I offer my personal condolences to the families of those who had died.'

'Thank you, your excellency. But...'

'This is all that I can spare, Jorge. I hope you will understand our situation here in Goa. This is the best that we can do at this time unless if we receive more reinforcement from Lisbon, we are unable to offer you much. We too are vulnerable here in Goa.'

'Hostile religious fanatics who do not favor having us around are surrounding us. It's as if India is too small to accommodate us. Therefore, we too have to be on our toes at all times. If necessary and if the situation demands it, we might even withdrawal some of the men in Melaka to assist us in defending Goa where they are needed. Goa is more important to us strategically compared to Melaka or even Macau.'

With that, Jorge gave up.

'Count yourself lucky, Jorge.'

'Very well, Governor.'

'You shall go now.'

'Thank you, your excellency.' Jorge stood up. He saluted the governor and left the room. The governor stood up and went to the globe. He turned it around and stopped it when it saw the Southeast Asian region. He stared at Melaka. He stared at it for a long time. He did not know what he was thinking of. He knew very well, despite what he had said to Jorge about Melaka as being strategically less important compared to Goa, but deep in his hearts, he still believed that it was not so. Melaka was also of utmost importance to the Portuguese, as much as Goa or Macau and they were not about to lose even an inch of their territories.

1526 AH or 1028 AH or 4224 of the Chinese calendar.

Few Portuguese ships left the port in Melaka late at night and soon arrived in Bentan two days later at dawn and just in time for them to start a new day

and adventure. This time they were led by a young Captain Pedro Mascarenhas who has just arrived from Goa. He had studied the strategies that his colleagues had undertaken and perfected them. He was confident that he would succeed this time.

It was before the first rays of the morning sun peeped from the horizons in the East. They quickly took up positions at strategic locations and in no time, they had surrounded all the major islands. They immediately fired cannons at the Melaka forces even before the Malays had woken up from sleep. The attack lasted for a long time and it did not give the Malays much time to retaliate. The attack on them came as a complete surprise.

The Portuguese soldiers then rowed in boats to island after they sensed that the Melaka forces were not responding.

'Fire, fire!' shouted Pedro.

Portuguese soldiers landed on the beach and they moved into the woods. They killed many Malay soldiers. Mahmud and his men retreated from where they were stationed earlier while the Portuguese pursued them. He and his men rowed in boats and went to their ships. They then sailed away to avoid suffering more damage. The Malays had now become fewer and weaker. They were in no position to repulse any attack.

The Portuguese continued to fire at Mahmud's ships from the beach while few of their ships trailed from behind. However, Mahmud's ship managed to hide behind other small islands and was thus safe. He stood on the deck and said to his men who were there with him. 'We must seek refuge in Riau.'

'Yes, the Portuguese are getting more desperate this time,' said Nadim.

The Portuguese ships trailed behind the Melaka ships, but gave up when they went too far. They had lost sight of the Melaka ships. Furthermore, they were not ordered to pursue the Melaka ships because they had fulfilled their mission, which was to drive the Melaka forces away from Bentan Island.

Pedro peeped out of his monocle from the deck of his ship. 'We've lost sight of them,' he said.

'What next, captain?' asked the Portuguese officer who was standing beside him.

'We have strict orders to pursue them, until they have been destroyed. We pursue them. I believe they're headed for Riau in Sumatra.'

Mahmud and his men set up camp in Bulang Island in Riau. They did not pass by the island of Singapura because they were not going to Riau-Lingga, but Riau which on Sumatra Island. The sultan of Riau got onboard Mahmud's ship and sat with him, Ahmad, and Nadim in his cabin.

'We rest here,' said Mahmud.

A soldier sighted the Portuguese ships. He rushed to the sultan. 'Pardon me, your majesty, the Portuguese ships are sighted in the sea,' he said as he panted.

Sultan of Riau stood up. He was annoyed. 'How dare they come to Riau!'

Mahmud shook his head. 'They're bent on destroying us, your highness.'

'But, they can't take their adventures here. This is Riau, not the Malay Peninsula!'

The Portuguese started to fire cannons at the Melaka forces. The Melaka forces retaliated and fired cannons and guns at them, but they all missed their targets. They got off their ships and rowed their boats to the shore. Hundreds of Portuguese and Indian soldiers landed on the island. They continued to attack the Melaka forces. However, they could only give a token resistance. Many of them were shot and killed. Many more were seriously injured. Nadim turned to Ahmad. They were demoralized and did not know what to do next.

'What do we do, your highness?'

'We are overwhelmed,' said Ahmad.

They had no choice but to retreat further into the woods. In this way, they would be hidden from their enemies. Everybody hushed down and kept quiet. They killed all the fire and covered their tracks with leaves and twigs. The women cupped their babies' mouths with their bare hands to silence them. The men got out their *kerises*, spears and arrows at the ready.

The Portuguese forces marched forward and killed any Malay soldier who tried to offer any resistance.

Mahmud and sultan of Riau ran with a small group of followers. They did not turn around. They continued to hear more cannon and gunshots being fired in the background. The noises they made were deafening. He and the sultan of Riau and the others got into boats. Nadim and Ahmad got into another boat with more men. They then rowed away.

'Where are we heading to, Raja Ahmad?' asked one of the men.

'We go to Riau, your majesty,' suggested the sultan of Riau. He knew Mahmud had no choice to make. He definitely could not return to Melaka now that he was already approaching Riau, the only place where he could go to now. They could not go anywhere because route by sea was blocked by the Portuguese armada at every possible entrance or exit to the straits of Melaka.

Mahmud kept quiet. He had nothing to say and no excuses to make this time. He continued to ponder over sultan of Riau's suggestion. He tried to offer another answer, possibly a counter proposal, but his mind was a blank. He was beginning to realize the futility of his effort to expel the Portuguese. They were so powerful, while the Melaka forces were less agile than they were



before; they were now a faint cry from what they used to be. Only if Tuah and his bother warriors were around things would not be as bad, thought Mahmud. Most likely, the Portuguese would not dare to launch any attack on Melaka like they did. But, Tuah was long gone; only the memories of his heroism and heroic deeds remained in the minds of Mahmud and the others. In fact, the stories of Tuah's heroic deeds had become too ordinary, that some people even started to think that he was not a real person, but the creation of somebody's imagination.

'Wherever, wherever, your highness; wherever, as long as we don't have to be hunted like animals. We have been running for too long. It's time for us to stay put,' said Mahmud finally. He fixed his eyes at the horizons.

'But, your majesty, we mustn't give up,' assured the sultan of Riau. He tried to give hope to the sultan so that he would not be in total despair. He knew the sultan was a strong person and leader; he had never let his people down. He knew the attack by the Portuguese was just an episode in the drama of Melaka and they had seen countless attacks and reprisals before; Melaka and its people could withstand whatever punishment was inflicted on them. The sultan nodded.

The Portuguese soldiers stood on the beach. They continued to fire cannons, but they fell short of their target. They did that just to scare the Melaka forces and to make them flee as far away from Melaka as possible. The Melaka boats continued to sail ahead. Nadim's boat approached the sultan's boat. 'Is your majesty all right?' asked Nadim.

'Yes, Nadim.'

'Are you sure, father?' asked Ahmad.

Mahmud threw himself to the side of the boat. He cried. Nadim turned to look at Ahmad. Both of them felt sad. They knew what the sultan had gone through. They felt bad for him for having to bear with the thought that he had failed his people and his ancestor, Parameswara, a.k.a. Megat Iskandar Shah. Worse of all he had failed his religion.

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*The Portuguese finally managed to capture Bentan Island in 1526 CE or 1028 AH or 4224 of the Chinese calendar with aid from Goa in India. They launched a massive attack on the Melaka forces by destroying Bengkalis and Bulang Island controlled by Sultan Mahmud Shah. Fierce battles were also fought at Kota Kara and Kampar, the two fortresses on Bentan Island.*

*An unfortunate incident occurred while Mahmud and his followers were in Bentan Island; Raja Ahmad, the eldest son of Mahmud was murdered. Everybody was shocked to see his dead body lying on the ground. Nobody knew that his death was at the instigation of his father, the Sultan himself. And from then on his second son, Raja Alauddin Shah took the mantle and became the new Crown Prince of Melaka.*

## CHAPTER 18: THE REFUGE IN KAMPAR

Sultan Mahmud Shah sat alone on the deck of his ship. He looked sad with the death of his eldest son, Sultan Ahmad Shah in Melaka. He was installed the Sultan of Melaka to after his father decided to abdicate in 1511 CE or 915 AH or 4209 of the Chinese calendar because he thought he was already old. So he decided to abdicate. But he was not disappointed because Ahmad had died in the defense of Melaka. The Portuguese were ruthless. Nadim, too, was distraught. But there was nothing that he could do except to pray that his soul be placed amongst the pious in the Hereafter.

It happened just before they were to sail again although they did not know where they were heading for this time and Ahmad had gone to Melaka with Nadim and some men to launch an attack on the Portuguese there. This was the second tragedy that had befallen Mahmud. The second being, the sudden death of Ahmad, who was appointed to succeed Mahmud. Nobody knew why he had died so suddenly.

In fact, many of his officials suspected that Mahmud had personally poisoned his own son, Sultan Ahmad fifteen years whom Mansur had installed when he decided to abdicate from the throne of Melaka when the state fell to the Portuguese. But none of them knew what was the reason for the sultan to do that to his own son. The prince who was going to take over from him should Melaka be returned to the Malays. They could not find any answer despite having spent many weeks pondering over the issue. Ahmad had died, and they accepted it as something that was fated by Allah the Almighty. None of them, however, dared to confront the sultan to seek clarification over the issue.

Nadim was speechless and could not eat for days after the death became known, although he did not know as yet as to how this could possibly have happened. If his best friend had died in battle, he would have understood it.

The mystery surrounding his sudden death, at such a young age, when he was healthy, made him feel thoroughly devastated. He suspected that a Portuguese spy or mole in their group did it at the behest of their Portuguese masters. Now he was destined to be buddies with Ahmad's younger brother, Alauddin whom he did not have warm relations before. He was now certain that it would be Alauddin who would ascend to the throne in Perak and his younger brother, Muzaffar who would be the next sultan of Pahang.

Now circumstances had brought Nadim and Alauddin together. He busied himself by surveying the straits of Melaka as his ship sailed in the straits of Melaka.

Mahmud decided against going to Riau with sultan. He wanted to go to Kampar in Sumatra instead where he had some relatives who lived there. In Riau, he was a complete stranger, with nobody to turn to. He stood at the railings on the deck. Around him was just the sea and beyond it the horizons all round. He was not sure if he was ever going to return to Melaka. His future as a sultan of Melaka looked bleaker now than it was before he left Bentan Island. Whatever chances he had of ever regaining Melaka from the Portuguese were diminished as he headed for Kampar which was a trip of no return... By crossing the straits of Melaka, he was in fact, severing his physical ties with the Malay Peninsula and Melaka. It was too difficult for him to launch any attack on the Portuguese, now that he was away from the peninsula. The only way available to him was to embark on a naval attack. This was impossible since his navy was crippled and he hardly had any large ship to move his men in great numbers anymore, like he could before. They were mostly for the transportation of his followers. On top of that, Mahmud was now too jaded and old to exert himself and take on the Portuguese. The Portuguese were now too entrenched Melaka. It was too difficult to attack them, especially with more and more soldiers that they were stationing there. Most of whom were shipped in from Goa in India where they had a colony that they ruled.

The last images that Mahmud saw and retained in his mind's eye were those of houses and buildings on fire, including his own palace that was the center of political, cultural, social, religious and economic activities in Melaka. Melaka could have become the most important state in Southeast Asia, if not the whole world, if the Portuguese had not attacked it and drove him out of the country, thought the sultan.

Nadim and Alauddin went to him. 'Where are we headed, dear father?' asked Alauddin.

'We're near Sumatra,' chipped in Nadim.

'Take me to Kampar,' ordered Mahmud.

Alauddin and Nadim were surprised.

'What can we find there in Kampar?' asked Mahmud.

'Kampar? But, but... What can we find there, dear father?' asked Alauddin, looking puzzled.

'I want to seek refuge there.'

'Will we be safe there?' asked Nadim.

'The sultan of Kampar Sultan Munawar Shah, is my half-brother. He is Sultan Munawar Shah ibni Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah.'

Nadim and Alauddin were relieved. They didn't know that Mahmud had a relative and a half-brother before, in Kampar. At least they thought the sultan had a valid reason for wanting to go there.

Kampar was not too far away. By sea, they would have to take few days to get there. Besides, they could take an alternative route and be out of the sight and hearing of the Portuguese. They decided to sail close to the coast of Sumatra Island in the straits of Melaka so they did not have to pass by Melaka again. It would be dangerous if the Portuguese sighted them. They had stationed their ships near Melaka so that they could instantly recognize any ship or boat that passed by. Mahmud was fortunate, however, as it started to rain heavily. They were thus hidden in the rain and fog. The Portuguese could not see them as they inched their way to wards Kampar. His choice to sail at night was a wise one. He knew this way; he and his men would be safe from future Portuguese attacks there.

'Very well, if that's the case,' said Nadim.

'I'm sure we can launch an attack on the Portuguese from here, father,' said Alauddin.

'Well, may be, may be,' said the sultan. 'I'm too old now, son. It will be up to you to do whatever is necessary to recapture Melaka from the evil forces of the Portuguese. I am relieving myself from this task. It is now in your hands.'

Nadim and Alauddin stared at the sultan. 'With Brother Nadim, we will recapture Melaka, father.'

Mahmud did not say anything. He stared into void. 'This will be very difficult, my dear son.'

'Why?'

'The Sea-People, the *Orang Laut* have deserted us! No wonder the Portuguese had it so easy. I didn't expect for the Sea-People to do this to us. Why must they side with the Portuguese? Aren't they Muslims, too?'

Alauddin and Nadim were shocked.

'I didn't realize they were dissatisfied with your rule, father...'

'There may be some of them, but they are mostly those who didn't bother to covert to Islam. But the damage has been done.'

'The Sea-People.'

A messenger from Kampar rushed on his horse, and headed towards the palace. The guards opened the gates when they recognize who was. The messenger waved his left hand at them and they knew what it meant, that he had an urgent message for the sultan. It was 1526 CE or 1028 AH or 4224 of the Chinese calendar.

Munawar was meeting with his senior officials in the verandah of his palace. They were sitting around in a small circle with the *sireh* or betel nut utensils sitting in the middle. It was an informal occasion and there was much laughter. The men devoured many betel leaves and they spat reddish saliva in the spittoons that were placed near them, while the betel leaves handlers waited patiently. They folded some leaves and put in all the condiments.

'Your majesty! Your majesty!' shouted the messenger.

The sultan and the officers turned to look at him. They thought they had heard a commotion had happened outside the palace. Then they realized that it was just a palace messenger and were relieved. 'What's happened to him?'

The messenger went to the sultan.

'Yes, my man. Have you been possessed by the devil?'

'His majesty Sultan Mahmud Shah of Melaka is here. And his majesty is seeking your invitation to land in Kampar.'

Munawar was pleasantly surprised. He smiled. His officials looked at him. 'Sultan Mahmud Shah of Melaka?' he asked. 'My half-brother, Sultan Mahmud Shah? Are you sure you're not seeing things, my man?'

'Definitely not, your majesty. Here.' The messenger handed the sultan, Sultan Mahmud's *keris*. He immediately took it and recognized it as Mahmud's *keris* of authority. 'Yes, this *keris* belongs to Sultan Mahmud Shah.'

The senior officials were relieved.

'Return to the beach immediately. Inform his majesty Sultan Mahmud Shah, I shall be there to welcome him personally. Ask him to wait for me to come,' said the sultan to the messenger.

'Very well.' The messenger turned and rode away. Munawar then walked down the stairs. The prime minister and the other senior officials followed him. They stepped out of the palace and walked on towards the beach. 'I haven't seen him for so long. I hope he has not changed.'

'We're indeed honored with his majesty's presence,' said the prime minister.

'Indeed. He's a great sultan. And Melaka is a great country. I hope he's not changed much since the last time I saw him.'

'I hope so, too, your majesty.'

Munawar finally arrived at the beach with his men. He saw Mahmud standing there with Nadim, Alauddin, Muzaffar and few other men and greeted them.

'*Asalamulaikum*, my dear brother.'

'*Mulaikum salam*,' replied Mahmud.

They hugged each other. Mahmud then cried. Munawar was surprised.

'Anything's the matter, my brother?' asked Munawar.

'We've been chased out of our own country.'

'By whom?'

'The Portuguese.'

'Let's go to the palace and rest. We can talk there some more. And who are these people?'

'This is my eldest son, Raja Alauddin Shah and my wife; Raja Muzaffar Shah... And this is Nadim, eldest son of the late Hang Tuah.'

Munawar shook their hands. He then introduced his officials. 'And this is my prime minister and *temenggong*.'

Mahmud shook their hands.

'Welcome to Kampar, everybody.'

Munawar sat in the verandah with Mahmud that night. The other senior officials from both sides were present. Mahmud explained the circumstances that he and his men were in. This was the first time Munawar heard the story about the Portuguese attack on Melaka. He thought the Melaka forces could contain them. News that he had received from there were sketchy; they were not much of a help at all. They were not so depressing as what Mahmud himself had related; it made Munawar feel shocked. He shook his head violently. 'I'm so sorry to hear of your predicament, my Hang Mahmud. Melaka was once such a great country. Traders from all over the 'land below the wind' and the 'land above the wind' came to Melaka with plenty of goods and interesting items.'

'They still do, my brother. The only difference is that Melaka now is not under the Malays, but the Portuguese! They have a totally different religion. They don't pray in the mosques. Their houses of worship are called *igreja*, which the Malays called *gereja*. On top of each of the roofs, there is a wooden cross. This makes the Malays curious. They even notice how the priests and many Portuguese soldiers or *soldadu* also wear a chain around their neck with a cross at the bottom of it. There is a small statue of a man wearing loin whom

they don't recognize. And in their houses of worship, they notice many candles lit when they prayed.

'The people of Melaka, especially the Malays and even the Chinese are amazed at the way they conducted their prayer service.'

'What is a *gereja*?' asked Munawar.

'It's their place of worship.'

'I see.'

'Don't worry, my brother, for Allah is testing you. He knows what's best for you.'

'Yes, my brother.'

'Allah won't desert you, my brother.'

'May be your majesties can consider attacking them from here,' suggested the prime minister of Kampar.

'Does my brother agree to the suggestion by our prime minister?' asked Munawar.

Mahmud thought. Alauddin and Nadim waited.

'What do you think, father?' asked Alauddin.

'Yes, your majesty,' said Nadim.

'Yes, what do you think, my brother?' asked Munawar.

Mahmud shook his head.

'But, why dear father?' asked Alauddin.

'With our combined forces, we can easily overpower them.'

'No, no. We don't want to force our men to attack them. The position of the Portuguese in Melaka is more entrenched now than before. There's no way that we can even come close to Melaka. Their strategy now is to attack us where we are. I'm sure they already know that we are here. I don't want to inflict damage to Kampar,' said Mahmud. 'They trailed us even when we got to Riau earlier. I thought we would be safe in Bulang Island, but they still pursued us there. That's why we had to rush to this place.'

'Don't worry about that, brother,' said Munawar.

'We have seen enough of our men die. And I don't want to see one more of our men die in front of my eyes. Enough! Enough I say.'

'But, father... ' said Alauddin.

'No, no. I said no. I've had enough of it already. I want to seek refuge here in Kampar and live here quietly!' shouted Mahmud on top of his voice.

Everybody kept quiet. They were taken by surprise with the sultan's sudden outburst. He had never shouted like that before, even when they were in battle; he always kept his cool. However, nobody could blame him from shouting like that.

Sultanah Fatimah sat with her cousin, Sultanah Kampar in the dining room. They sat on the floor by sitting sideways, or *bertempub*, that was how decent Malay women, more so the royalty sat. This was different from the way the men sat - they sat cross-legged. Few palace girls were waiting to cater to them.

'This is our fate, my dear sister. Only Allah knows when we will be able to return to Melaka, if ever, we do,' said Fatimah.

'Don't worry, my sister. Allah will look after you and Hang Mahmud and everybody in Melaka,' said Sultanah Kampar. 'The people of Melaka are all made of steel; they can withstand whatever responsibility Allah has put on them. After all everything is fated by Him.'

'We are not young as we used to be,' said Fatimah.

'We'll see through this together, with Allah's help,' said Sultanah Kampar. She comforted Fatimah with a hug. She then wiped tears on Fatimah's face with a handkerchief.

Many Portuguese and Indian soldiers were manning the fort that had by now covered the whole of the city. Many more were stationed nearby. The people of all races were doing about their business as usual at the bazaars. There was merriment. They talked, bargained and haggled on top of their voices. Some of them, especially the non-Malays and non-Muslims were happy now that the sultan of Melaka had fled out of their region. The Portuguese told them that Mahmud was defeated. The last time they saw him was in Riau.

Jorge even had the cheek to tell them that Mahmud had conceded defeat and promised not to attack or harass them anymore. This made the Chinese, Indians and other foreigners in Melaka excited. They thought that they could now do business more briskly again like they did before.

'Well, sir, you can bargain for half the price if you want. And I'm willing to offer you a good deal,' said an Indian trader.

The Chinese man stopped and returned to the shop. 'In that case, I'll have four *katties*.'

'Very well.'

The Indian Trader wrapped the goods and handed it to the Chinese Man. 'Here you are, sir.' The Chinese Man took the good, and handed the money.

'Thanks; have a good day.' He went off. He saw a group of Portuguese and Indian soldiers patrolling the bazaar. He greeted them, 'Good day, gentlemen.'

'Good day, sir,' replied one of the Portuguese soldiers.

They walked away in different directions.



The port was busy as usual. Many ships, Chinese junks, and other smaller boats were anchored in the river-mouth or sea. The traders and merchants of all races did their business.

'I shall give you ten rolls of silk. And you give me ten boxes of your tea. How about that?' asked a Chinese merchant.

'Well, how about twelve rolls of silk for ten boxes of tea, sir?' said the Indian merchant.

The Chinese merchant thought. 'Very well. I agree.'

They shook hands.

Jorge looked out of the window of his office. From his view, he could see the people doing about their daily business and social activities. 'The people of Melaka seem to be very happy to live under us. Have you heard of any discontentment, captain sir?'

'No, sir, not even a whisper of discontent that I've heard of,' said Duarte who was with him in the room.

'Have you heard anything from Mr. Taiko?'

'Not yet, sir.'

'Why don't you pay him a visit, and see.'

'Yes, sir. I'll do that.'

Jorge turned around. 'Sultan Mahmud Shah has been quiet for the past two years. Where can he be now? What is he up to?'

'I'm sure he's given up all hope of recapturing Melaka from us, your excellency.'

'Do you know where he's gone to now?'

'From what I've heard, he's now gone to Mekkah.'

They laughed.

'I can't trust him. He behaves like the fox; he can disappear from sight for many months and when he reappears, he has turned into a tiger. But, his claws, unfortunately have been filed. What use are such claws?'

They laughed even louder.

'May be he's turned into a limping tiger, your excellency.' He's so old now, your excellency, about seventy-six. He could be carrying a walking stick, if not two,' added Duarte.

They smiled.

'You're right. But, seriously, do you know where he's now, Duarte?'

'The last I heard of him was that he was in Riau, then Kampar.'

'Kampar? That's in Sumatra!' Jorge was surprised. 'But, that's just across the straits! It's not too far away from Melaka, for Heaven's sake! What is he

doing there in Kampar? How did he get there? Did he pass through the straits?’

‘No, your excellency; he took the route close to Sumatra Island so we could not detect him.’

‘Ah, very cunning. I see; there is still some brain in his head left. But, why must he go to Kampar then?’

‘He has a half-brother, Sultan Munawar Shah, the Ruler of Kampar, sir, if I’m not mistaken.’

‘Really? I see. But, he must be quite old by now and perhaps battle-weary, too. He can’t be fighting us all his life, can he?’

‘Definitely not, sir.’

Jorde kept quiet.

‘I shall take my leave now, your excellency.’ Duerte shook Jorge’s hand and went out of the room.

Mahmud went hunting with Munawar in the woods. His hair looked disheveled and did not look like his usual self. He was still wearing the clothes he had been wearing for the last three days! He was usually immaculately dressed, but now he could not care less about what he wore as long as it was proper and not too untidy. He only wore plain clothes, which made him look more like a farmer than a sultan. He was worried more about Melaka and his people more than he was. Munawar forgave him for not taking good care of his own self. He knew his half-brother had been on the run too long and he was a broken man. His legs were tired and his hair uncut until it now rested on his backs and not his shoulders where it should be especially for sultans and high-ranking officers of the palace.

‘What are you thinking of, my Hang Mahmud? Please tell me,’ asked Munawar.

‘Melaka, Melaka, Melaka and nothing but Melaka. I think of Melaka in the morning. I think of it in the afternoon, at night and even in my sleep,’ replied Mahmud. He was still staring into void, like he was seeing Melaka and the smiling faces of the people there.

‘I see. Can we try at least once and attack the Portuguese?’

Mahmud shook his head. ‘It’s not going to be very easy, especially when I am at this age. It would be totally different if I am younger.’

Munawar was surprised that Mahmud was not excited about his proposal. ‘But, your own state had been captured by those people from the ‘land above the wind’ and yet you’re not interested to fight them and to recapture your lost land?’

'Not that I haven't done it, my dear Brother Munawar. Yes, I have done that many times, my brother, but each time we were driven further away from Melaka. Now we are here. Your forces, too tried to attack the Portuguese, but failed. And I understand that your predecessor, Sultan Abdullah, too, failed. He had to make a pact with the Portuguese devils in 1512. I couldn't believe my eyes that Abdullah could do it. Where did he hide his face thereafter?'

'He wanted to save his skin, my dear Hang Mahmud.'

'Yes. Did he have to accept the offer from the Portuguese to be the new prime minister of Melaka?'

'It was not the prime minister of Melaka! How could he lower himself and be the prime minister of your sultanate? He was appointed to be the captain of the Malays in Melaka. The Portuguese wanted to use a Malay name, so he called him *bendabara* so they thought the people could be confused into thinking that the Portuguese rule has been endorsed by the sultan!'

'You know, a Javanese merchant in Melaka, Ninacatu committed suicide when he heard Abdullah had become a lackey of the Portuguese and a mortal enemy of the Malays?'

Munawar was shocked.

'No, I didn't know that. Why did he have to do such a stupid thing like that? Allah will be angry with him.'

There was silence.

'Let's forget about him. Whatever he did in the past was done,' said Munawar. 'Whatever it is, I'm happy to see you here, my Hang Mahmud.'

They kept quiet and thought for while.

'You must know that Patih Unus of Aceh too, had attacked Melaka in 918 *Hijriah*, but failed. Patih Kadir, a wealthy Javanese merchant in Melaka, with the other Javanese, too, had tried to rebel against the Portuguese in Melaka, but they were easily thwarted. And because of that, Utimutiraja was executed by beheading in the public square. Some Indians, too died, such as Rajoo,' said Mahmud to break the silence.

Munawar kept quiet. He thought for a while. Mahmud continued to stare into void. He then went to a tree and rested his hand on it. Munawar went to him with another proposal. 'An Indian-Muslim called Abdullah, too, had come all the way from Cochin in India with some men to fight the Portuguese but were unsuccessful. See; we have many friends and strangers who wanted to help us defeat the Portuguese, but we still failed. We've tried our level best, my brother.'

'Yes, you surely have. We too tried, but luck wasn't on our side,' said Munawar. 'But don't despair. We still can do something.'

'Like what?'

'Why don't we send a spy to find out how the people are doing. May be afterwards we can decide if we should attack Melaka or not.'

Mahmud shook his head. 'No, no, no!'

Munawar knew that Mahmud was a defeated person. All the youthful energy that once had that became legendary to all the kids even as far as Sumatra had been seeped out of his body. He was now a faint shadow of his former self. He hoped that his nephew, Alauddin was in a better position to launch attacks on the Portuguese instead. Being young and brash, he should find it worthwhile to recapture Melaka, so he could be next sultan, should he be able to evict the Portuguese from Melaka and the sultanate of Melaka could continue to exist on this earth.

Duerte's carriage passed by few streets in Melaka. It went on and passed the bazaar. He saw many people milling there and doing their daily activities. Some of the Malays and other Melaka folks who happened to look at him passing by nodded; but it was not because they respected them; they mostly feared him. The horse-carriage continued its way until it got to the Chinese quarters. It stopped in front of Taiko's house. Taiko immediately opened the door and welcomed him. He knew Duerte was coming to his house, because a messenger had sent word that he would be there at about this time.

Taiko was delighted to have him as his guest. This was the second time a top Portuguese official had ever come to pay him a visit. The first was Jorge who came immediately after they had succeeded in capturing Melaka and drove Mahmud and his forces out of the state.

'My dear Mr. de Mello. What brings you here? Come in. Come in,' said Taiko excitedly.

They shook hands and Taiko took his guest inside where he brought a glass of whiskey. He handed it to Duerte and sat beside him. 'To the Portuguese!' said Taiko.

'To the Portuguese!'

They knocked their glasses and drank.

'What brings you to my humble abode, captain?' asked Taiko. He took a sip and put down the glass. He waited and retained the smile that broke in his face the minute he saw Duerte earlier.

'The Portuguese governor of Melaka wants me to ask you some questions, Taiko.'

'Oh, what are they? How's his excellency the governor? I've not seen his face for a long time.'

'He's fine. Are the people in Melaka happy, Taiko? Where is Sultan Mahmud; what is he up to these days?'

Taiko was relieved. 'Definitely, definitely. All the people of Melaka are happy, captain, to be under the Portuguese.'

'Are you sure?'

'Sure, I'm sure. I'm the Chinese captain of Melaka; surely, I know that all of them are happy, otherwise, they'd be the first to tell me.'

'Indeed, Mr. Taiko; indeed.'

'My men and friends have told me that Sultan Mahmud is not feeling well. He is sick these days - under the weather because of moving too much. At his age, it is not good for him. Looks like he's given up any hope of attacking us here in Melaka, sir.'

'Really?' The captain was surprised.

'Even a tiger has to give up on his victim, your excellency. The Portuguese are much stronger and cleverer than the Malays.'

They laughed.

'I won't worry about the sultan, if I were you, sir.'

Duerte nodded. 'Thanks for your valuable information, Taiko. I must get going now.'

He stood up.

'Not at all, sir.'

They went to the front door.

'If you are free, there's a party tomorrow night. We have Portuguese music, food and wine. Please come, Taiko. Your presence will certainly add to the revelry and merriment. After all we are celebrating the success of our mission for which you, too, had contributed considerably; for without your help, we would not be in a good position to launch our attack and drove away the Malays from Melaka.'

'Where is it going to be held?'

'At the governor's residence in the fort. It's also some sort of an open house for his excellency's guest and friends to pay his official residence a visit. You'll be served with the best Portuguese wine and food, too.'

'Certainly, your excellency. What's the occasion, if I may ask again?'

'His majesty King Manuel's birthday.'

'Ah, his majesty's birthday.'

Duerte entered his carriage and went off. Taiko closed the door and smiled to himself.

Jorge and the senior Portuguese officials were dancing in the living room with Portuguese women. A group of Portuguese musicians was providing the music. Garcia went to Duarte. 'Where's Taiko? Didn't he say he was coming?'

'Isn't he here yet? I'm sure he'll come anytime soon.'

'How about a drink?'

He went to the bar and got two glasses. He gave one to Duarte. Just then, Taiko appeared at the door. Duarte turned and saw him and smiled. 'Ah, here he is.' He and Garcia went to Taiko.

'Welcome, welcome. Why the wife is not here, too?' said Garcia.

'She's not into this, my friends. She only enjoys Chinese operas. Besides, she doesn't speak Portuguese or Malay,' said Taiko. 'You know, she's not the social type. She's a typical Chinese woman who hardly ever leaves the house at night.'

'Are her feet bound?'

'Yes.'

'Hmmm... That's explains. How about a drink?' asked Duarte.

Taiko nodded. Duarte got a glass and handed it to him.

'Thanks. Who are these people? I haven't seen so many Portuguese people in Melaka. Did they come from Macau and Goa?'

'No, they are all local staff. They are mostly in the administration. They hardly mix around.'

'I see.'

Taiko sat with Duarte at the verandah. From there, they could see the straits with all the ships whose lights flickered. Jorge walked to them with a glass in his hand. Duarte noticed him. Both he and Taiko stood up. Duarte then introduced the governor to Taiko. 'This is Taiko, the Chinese captain, your excellency.'

'Good evening, your excellency,' said Taiko.

They shook hands and sat.

'How are you, Taiko? You are a good friend of the Portuguese people. I'm happy to meet you this evening. I hope we can meet again sometime. There's something that I'd like to discuss with you,' said Jorge.

'Like what, your excellency? You can say it here,' said Taiko.

'I wish to propose to his majesty King Manuel to decorate you with a special state award in recognition to all your help. Without you, we would not have managed to capture Melaka, much less put it under our control.'

'What do you mean? What award?' Taiko was surprised.

'Like the one I have on my chest here. Look. It is given to people who have contributed to the good of Portugal. Our King Manuel offers awards like these

on his majesty's birthday, which is due soon. Are you agreeable, Taiko?' said Jorge. He pulled a medal from his pocket and showed it to Taiko.

'Well, well... What can I say, governor, sir?'

'That's what I've been hoping that you'd say, Mr. Taiko.'

Jorge turned to Duarte and said in Portuguese. 'I have to go now. I must see some people inside. Please entertain him. He is a very important person in Melaka to us.'

'Yes, your excellency,' said Duarte in Portuguese.

Jorge stood up. He shook Mr. Taiko's hand. 'I must leave you here, Taiko. Enjoy yourself.'

'Thank you, sir.'

Jorge went off.

The dancing continued. Everybody seemed to be merry. Some were already drunk. One Portuguese man who was leaning on the railings suddenly fell to the floor, but it didn't distract the others who were equally tipsy if not drunk like him. To make matters worse, Taiko was wearing the new pair of leather shoes that Duarte had given him. He chose this pair over the others he had because he wanted to impress his Portuguese friends; but Taiko was still not familiar with them and he walked clumsily in them and couldn't walk properly. Besides, the shoes were a size too small for his feet, and he had worn them on different feet!

Few of his friends helped to carry him to the side.

Taiko's carriage arrived at the front of his house early the next day after he had spent a good few hours at the governor's residence. He got out of the carriage and staggered to the door. He was drunk.

'*Wah, wah!* The Portuguese people are going to give me a medal. What do I do with it? Can I eat it? No, I can only pin it on my chest. What for?' said Taiko mumbled in Chinese. His assistants tried to prop him up and walked with him. They opened the door and entered the house with him.

'Okay, okay, leave me here. You can return to your homes,' said Taiko. 'It's already late.'

'Yes, Mr. Taiko,' said one of his assistants, and Indian man. He and the others then returned to the carriage and drove off.

Taiko went to the bedroom. His wife woke up when she heard her husband's voice. She realized that her husband was drunk. She quickly put on her small shoes that Chinese women with bound feet wore so that she could walk properly. They were so tiny, like they are shoes for young girls or dolls. 'Drunk again?' she said.

Taiko walked and fell to the ground. His wife helped to pick him up. 'Why must you go drink, drink and drink? Can't you drink just a little, just a little? Now look at you.' She put her husband on the bed, removed his shoes and untied his clothes.

'The governor of Melaka wants to ask the Portuguese king to give me an award,' said Taiko.

'Stop talking nonsense, dear. Why do they want to do that?'

'Because they say I'm a good friend of the Portuguese and the whole of Portugal. They couldn't have captured Melaka without my help. That's what they said. I'm not bluffing you. I swear.'

'Ah, you are drunk! You don't know what you're saying. Go to sleep.'

However, not long later, Taiko's fortune changed dramatically. Duarte did not go to his house in the Chinese quarters simply to pay him a visit. He went there to see for himself all the wealth he had amassed. He was shocked to find that Taiko could be so wealthy within just a short period of time; he even took him around the house and showed him all the gold and diamonds that he had collected. What he did not realize was that the Portuguese officers had spied his men who were digging the caskets in the Chinese Hills. They also followed these men taking them to a godown near the Melaka River, where they opened the lid, put all the gold, diamonds, and silver in them. Few days later, they sent the caskets to the port to be taken away on the Chinese junks to be sent to China. The Portuguese knew very well of how Taiko had paid two Chinese men, Ah Heng and Ah Chai to dig up the caskets for him. They were just in the early twenties and looking sickly because they had been smoking opium that day. Both had *tokchangs* on the heads. They were summoned by Taiko to visit him one night. They knew what it was for because they were summoned there at such an ungodly hour many times in the past.

'Yes, Mr. Taiko, sir,' said Ah Heng, as if he did not know what Taiko had wanted for him to do.

'Good evening, Mr. Taiko,' said Ah Chai.

'I want you to dig three caskets from the Chinese Hills,' said Taiko. 'Do remember; nobody is to see what you are doing. Let this be a secret between us. You'll be paid handsomely with opium, women and silver coins.'

Ah Heng looked at Ah Chai. They then turned and looked at Taiko.

'Yes, indeed, Mr. Taiko,' said Ah Heng.

Taiko dug into his shirt pocket, pulled out some silver coins and threw two pieces of silver to Ah Heng who caught them. Taiko then threw two more pieces to Ah Chai who caught them. Both of them smiled widely, baring their blackened teeth. 'Now go,' said Taiko.



Ah Heng and Ah Chai nodded.

'Wait!' called out Taiko.

The two men stopped. They turned around. Taiko pulled few more silver coins and threw at them. Ah Heng caught the coins and wondered whom they were for.

'These are for your friends. Remember; ask them to keep quiet about it. And the opium will be delivered once you have deposited the caskets in the godown.'

Ah Heng and Ah Chai nodded. Taiko then waved his left hand and the two men fled out of the house. He then walked to the door, closed it and smiled. Ah Heng and Ah Chai then immediately went to the wharf and got four more Chinese men. They went to the Chinese Hills where they dug out three caskets. It was a laborious task. After they were through, they made sure the holes were dumped with soil until they were completely leveled so they would not make anyone suspect something amiss. The six of the men then put the bulky caskets on three horse-carts.

'Okay, now bring them to the godown,' ordered Ah Heng.

They then left the Chinese Hills by taking a quiet road away from the palace and the full view of the Portuguese and Indian guards and the others. Soon, they arrived at the godown near the port. It was still early in the morning when the whole city was asleep. They immediately transferred the three caskets into the godown and closed the doors and left. Ah Heng and Ah Chai wanted to go to the brothel to spend the night there, now that they had money to spend. The others preferred to drink or smoke opium.

'Very well, my friends, we split here,' reminded Ah Heng. 'But do be careful; do not tell this to anyone. Hear?'

The men nodded.

'Go.'

The four men pulled the two empty horse-carts away, while Ah Heng and Ah Chai smiled. They then went the other way towards the Chinese quarters where some beautiful Chinese girls were waiting to comfort them.

Taiko went to the godown early the next morning. He opened the door while his assistants waited. He entered it and saw three huge wooden caskets were sitting in the middle. He smiled and then nodded. His assistants knew what they had to do next. They immediately opened the lids, removed the gold and other priceless items, and put them in the caskets under the remains of the people who were kept in them. Taiko stood by and observed from a distance for a while with his arms folded over his chest and smiling. He did not want to see the shrunken faces of the Chinese men who were now sleeping in the

caskets. They were his friends who had died more than five month ago. Instead, he sat on a wooden chair and entertained himself to some Chinese wine to warm his body from the cool winds that came from the sea. After two hours, they were finally finished.

'We're finished, sir,' said a Chinese man.

Taiko stood up and went to the caskets. He looked inside each of them for a final look and nodded. The men then closed the lid.

'The junks will be leaving for China in two days,' said Taiko. 'I want you to send these caskets to them later in the day. Do bring along some people in their funeral garb and make them cry as they escort the caskets to the port. And don't forget to bring along a musical group to accompany them.'

'Yes, sir.'

Taiko left the godown. He sat on his horse-carriage and returned to his house. He passed by few Portuguese soldiers along the way. They smiled at him. Taiko hurled few silver coins and they grabbed them with both hands.

'Thank you, sir,' said the Portuguese soldiers in unison.

The Portuguese authorities had spied on Taiko's activities for a long time. They had long suspected he was up to something illegal. Not long after Duarte's visit, some Portuguese soldiers arrested him. They came to his house early one morning when the city was asleep. Only the front light of his house was lit. The Indian guard who stood outside the house was dozing in his hut. The Portuguese broke into Taiko's house and bundled him in a horse-carriage. He was blindfolded and taken around and around the city so that he was disorientated and confused, and did not know where his whereabouts. His guard tried to stop them, but he was quickly overwhelmed. His wife rushed to try to plead with the soldiers, but to no avail. She tumbled to the side and fell to the ground because her small baby-sized bound feet could not carry her weight. After they had left, the Indian guard fled for his life and refused to return to serve Taiko or his wife.

Taiko was immediately taken to the Portuguese headquarters within the fort. He was interrogated extensively by a group of Portuguese officers in the dungeon that was hidden from public view below ground. They demanded how much gold and other priceless items had he smuggled out of Melaka to China. He tried to cheat his way out by pretending he did not know anything. He pretended to be startled with the allegations. But the Portuguese officers refused to play along with him. They then produced the two Chinese men who had worked for him all this while. They confessed that Taiko had paid them to dig the caskets and took them to the godown near the river. He knew his

future was bleak. There was no way he could get himself out if this mess with the two men's damning testimonies.

'There must be a serious mistake!' pleaded Taiko.

'There's no mistake, at all, Mr. Taiko,' said the Portuguese officer. 'We have strict orders to arrest you.'

'I demand to see Mr. Duarte de Mello!'

'Yes, you'll be seeing Mr. Duarte de Mello in due course when he's finished with some official business in his office, with Towkay Leong.'

'Good.'

The Portuguese soldiers and officers laughed. Taiko was confused. Then he began to suspect something. Could it be Lam who had spilled the beans on him? He knew both he and the *towkay* were like cats and dogs; they simply could not see eye-to-eye on anything. His suspicions grew when he realized how Lam was now brave to visit the Portuguese at their headquarters. He never did this before. He cursed Lam and his family, relatives and all his ancestors for what he had done to him.

'Why are you laughing?' asked Taiko.

'It is in fact, Mr. Duarte de Mello who had ordered your arrest, Taiko.'

Taiko was shocked. 'But, but, he was in my house just last week!'

'Yes, he was. He was spying on you. He wanted to see for himself all the wealth you have collected. You even had the gall to show all your priceless possessions by taking him to the first and second floors of your house where you proudly showed him more of the treasures you had stored in the chests, trunks and the safes. How careless of you, Taiko.'

They then left Taiko in a room by himself. It was dark. There was just a low light that came from the only opening in the room at the right. It made him look like a devil. He sat on a wooden stool with both his hands tied to the back. Then he heard footsteps. He knew somebody was coming, but he did not know who it was. From there he could hear sounds of men being tortured. Their voices were faint. After a while, they stopped altogether. Other noises were heard.

'No, no!' The sound died.

'*Jangan, tolong jangan tuan!*' cried out a Malay man. (Don't sir, please don't!)

Taiko feared that he would be tortured also like those men in the other cells in the dungeon. Then he heard footsteps; they sounded louder and louder. The sound of the sole of the leather shoes had rolled over the floor was familiar. Only Duarte walked like that, thought Taiko. He was relieved that his good friend had come to save him.

Someone twisted the knob of the door of the cell he was in. It creaked opened. Taiko looked and saw a silhouette. He could not tell who was standing at the door although the person was of the same height as Duarte. He had to squint tightly his eyes because the harsh light came and attacked them ferociously. After they had adjusted to the light, he saw a man standing by the door.

'Who are you? Please let me go! I'm the friend of the Portuguese!' pleaded Taiko. He spoke in Portuguese.

Duarte entered the room. He was still hidden in the shadows. But Taiko could guess who he was - Duarte de Mello. He recognized his height and shape of his body, and the way he walked and the sounds his footsteps made with his leather boots; and especially the way he coughed. He flung open the only window in the room and more light entered it. Taiko was shocked to see that it was his good friend, no doubt! Now, he was not smiling anymore. He was serious and looked of a hungry and angry tiger. Taiko immediately sprung onto his feet hoping that by showing some respect for the Portuguese official, his problems would be less burdensome. He felt relieved; thinking that Duarte had come to release him from custody.

'Ah, Mr. Duarte de Mello. How do you do, sir?' asked Taiko in a friendly tone. He tried to melt Duarte's heart.

'Very well, Mr. Taiko,' replied Duarte. He then stepped forward and hugged Taiko although his face was still stern. Taiko thought it was a strange look. Men wearing uniform always looked stern, he thought. He felt relieved; he thought his friend had come to release him at last. His prayers were answered and soon he would be free.

'I'm sure glad to see you, your excellency.'

Duarte broke the embrace. He cleaned his face off the weak smile that he was forced to show out of courtesy.

'Please Mr. Duarte de Mello.'

'Did you do it, or not?' said Duarte in a mechanical voice devoid of any emotion. It made Taiko freeze momentarily. His excitement at seeing his good friend immediately subsided. Now he began to tremble slightly; he did not know what to expect from him next. The prospects of being released from custody now seemed bleaker. His good friend had come not to release him from the dungeon, but to interrogate him. But he still tried to be optimistic. 'Did what, your excellency?' he pretended not to know of the reasons why he was brought there.

'That you've been smuggling gold and other priceless items out of Melaka in the caskets.'

'My god, Mr. Duarte de Mello; surely, you don't believe what they say, don't you?'

'Yes, I'm afraid I do.'

Taiko was speechless. His throat choked on his saliva and he became groggy slightly.

'Did you or didn't you?'

Taiko kept quiet. He tried to think of something, a way out of this mess. He was feeling uncomfortable, but he tried to remain calm and collected so he could hide his guilt. 'May be we can discuss over this quietly over some Chinese beer, Mr. Duarte de Mello.'

'What's there to discuss?'

'May be, I can offer you something, too.'

Duarte turned and went to Taiko. He stood so close to him that Taiko could smell his breath; it smelled of the fresh beer that he had downed just before he came to the cell. It was the same type of beer Taiko, too, drank in the party at the Portuguese governor's official residence in the fort where the dungeon was also situated, near the sea. The residence was on the side facing the Chinese Hills. 'You mean to say, you want to bribe me, like you did to the others?'

'No, no, I don't mean bribe. I just want you to receive a present from me.'

'Isn't that bribery?'

Taiko kept quiet.

'Your future is of your own doing, Mr. Taiko. The Portuguese had so much trust and faith in you, yet you chose to betray us right in front of our very eyes. How could you do that? You know we need to collect all our taxes so we can maintain our keep here. But, because you had smuggled out gold and other priceless items without paying any taxes, we are not able to collect all the taxes that are due to us. And because of that, our services to the people of Melaka were disrupted. We suffered, and the people of Melaka suffered, too.'

'Give me just one more chance, Mr. Duarte de Mello.'

'We have already given you too many chances, Mr. Taiko. There's absolutely nothing else I can do for you now. I have received the governor's orders that I must execute. Good day.' Duarte turned around and left the room.

'Mr. Duarte de Mello, sir. You can't leave me in here! This is no place for me!'

Taiko tried to plead, but it was a futile exercise. Duarte had already left the cell and was on his way to Jorge's office to report to him of what he had gathered from Taiko just now. In desperation, his wife tried to enlist the help

of the other top Chinese merchants in Melaka whom she thought knew some top Portuguese officials. But none of them agreed to help for fear of being branded a traitor by the Portuguese. All of them tried to distance themselves from Taiko or any of his friends, other associates and family members, including his wife who was known as Ginger, a name that was given by the Portuguese officers that stuck.

Actually, it all started with the food that Taiko's wife had prepared that had ginger. The Portuguese officers who came to their house for lunch liked the taste and described the Taiko's wife as 'ginger' because she was sweet as ginger! And the name stuck. All of them had earlier called her, Mrs. Taiko although initially they had thought she was his daughter. She was much too young to be his wife because of the vast difference in their age and appearances - Taiko's face was coarse like gunny sack while her face was smooth like silk.

'Please help me, sir,' pleaded Ginger to Ah Leong, a good friend of her husband's - so she thought.

Ah Leong sat on a wooden chair in his house, in the Chinese quarters, looking regal like the photo of his ancestors that were placed on the altar. Fortunately Ah Leong didn't have a desire for her, otherwise, he would have taken the advantage of her; what more when it was she who had come to see him at his house, being more interested in money than women. Women were not his vice, but opium was. He was smoking opium and was exhaling thick gray smoke that filled the whole room. 'There's nothing that I can do, madam,' he replied. 'I have told your husband not to do it, but he ignored me.'

Ginger dropped to the floor and lay kowtow before him. She nodded few times and even touched her forehead at Ah Leong's feet. He ignored the gesture of obedience and deep respect.

'Can't you talk to the governor?' pleaded Ginger.

'If I do that, I'll be a suspect myself, madam.'

'No, just see him on the pretext of wanting to do something else, and mention my husband.'

Ah Leong thought of the suggestion but decided not to agree with it. 'No, I'm afraid, I have to clean my hands off this problem. This is your husband's problem, not mine.'

'What, what can I do now, sir?'

'I suggest you pack up, take the first available junk and sail back to China. You'll be safer there. For as long as the Portuguese are our rulers, you won't be happy living here. They will make life miserable for you, your family, and everyone whom you are in contact with every day. Soon, nobody in the whole

of Melaka will want to see and talk with you. I hear even your Indian guard has left your service.'

She kept quiet and started to cry. She wailed and pleaded at the same time. Ah Leong just ignored her pleadings; he just stood and went to the adjacent room. When she looked up, she was shocked to see that he had disappeared from the room. She fell to the side and stayed there until her female assistants rushed to prop her up. They then took her and left Ah Leong's house.

Ginger returned to her house. She had no other place to go. She had to take heed of Ah Leong's advice however unpleasant it was to leave Melaka as soon as possible, and take with her whatever she could. Her presence here was not tenable anymore now that the Portuguese authorities had condemned her husband. It was just a matter of time before he was executed. They would definitely come to get her next. Although legally she might not have done anything illegal, they still could charge her for a host of other crimes, like being in the possession of illegal wealth and properties. The Portuguese were good at coming up with trumped up charges against just about anyone they despised or hated, simply because they were the authority and the law. And in the absence of the judiciary, their senior officials acted as judges. Besides, Ginger was very young. She was twenty years younger than her husband. She had a good future ahead of her. She was also beautiful and had good features. Some said she was Taiko's wife in Melaka. His first wife was in China and she was a year or two younger than he was. She was worried that one of these days some Portuguese junior officers could just appear unannounced one night and rape her or force her to become their mistress. The other remarkable difference between the first wife and his second wife is that the elder woman's feet were bound whereas Ginger's feet were not. Her fears could not be repressed or subdued even a little, even if she was advised by some of her women friends who were Chinese like her. These women had their husbands who were all in the good books of the Portuguese. And they had their sons, daughters and other relatives with them in Melaka. Ginger was all by herself with no immediate family members around her, except for her man and woman servants and some guard dogs to look after her. She knew she could become an easy target of some virile Portuguese soldiers who were out to take advantage of her vulnerable position, what more now that the Portuguese officers had disposed her husband. If she refused, they could kill her, dumped her body in the Melaka River, and pretended that she had committed suicide. Many Chinese women and even men had committed suicide this way. They had to resort to this action as the only way out of their miseries, however despicable and repulsive it may sound to the others. Many women resorted to becoming

prostitutes to earn a living when they first came here. But when they grew older and became less appealing, they did not have anything else to do. So they jumped into the river. Many young Chinese men, too, could not stand the pressure of being separated from their families in China and they decided to exterminate their lives by jumping off the bridge across the river. The problem became so bad that the Portuguese port authorities had to engage few men to clear the river off the dead bodies, lest the boat and other ships rammed them.

But, what Ginger did not realize earlier was that Ah Leong was her late husband's business enemy. Because of that, he could not offer her any assistance. He wanted to distance himself with Taiko and Ah Lek and remained in the good books of the Portuguese. Ah Lek, who was Taiko's good friend and confidante, suspected it was Ah Leong who did him in. It had resulted in his friend to be branded a traitor by the Portuguese and charged for smuggling gold and other priceless treasures out of Melaka in the caskets of the dead Chinese people.

In the meantime, Ah Lek too was preparing to slip out of Melaka. He started to feel the heat now with his good friend's arrest. His business had failed because they normally worked together and both shared the profits they made on any deal.

'What can I do?' asked Ah Lek to his wife, Nyonya Wong. 'We have to leave Melaka, for our own good. I don't feel at all comfortable living here anymore with Taiko gone.'

'But, you haven't done anything illegal here!' insisted his wife.

'To you, yes, but not to the Portuguese. They might think just because I was close to him, I was also involved in his illegal trade.'

'They all know you.'

'They knew Mr. Taiko, too.'

Nyonya Wong kept quiet. She knew there was no use for her to continue arguing with her husband.

He stayed in bed with his wife in their bedroom. It was on the first floor of their three-storey house, which was in the Chinese quarters that night feeling anxious and scared for their lives. He did not wish to argue with his wife because she was not fully aware of what he was actually doing. She only knew him a well-known trader in Melaka. Other than that, she did not know much especially about the illegal activities that he and Taiko had done together, and their personal rivalry with Ah Leong.

'So, what do you want me to do now?' asked Nyonya Wong after a long silence.



'I want you to pack up all the gold and ornaments and the other things. Wear more jewelry on yourself and make sure you wear an extra layer of cloth. I have made some secret pockets in my pants and coat where I'll hide more. Stop visiting your friends for the *mahjong* sessions.'

Ah Lek stood up. He went to the windows and stared outside. He was surprised to see Ginger being carried in a horse-carriage. With her was a small group of assistants and coolies who were in three other carriages that carried ten crates in all.

'There she is,' commented Ah Lek.

Nyonya Wong turned. 'Who?'

'Ginger.' She went to her husband and stood beside him by the windows. She looked down at the streets and saw Ginger's carriages being driven by the horses towards the port.

'They're fleeing the country,' said Ah Lek.

Nyonya Wong kept quiet. Ah Lek turned around and closed the windows. He went to the cupboards, pulled out a shirt and put it on. His wife stared at him. 'Where are you going?'

'I've got to see someone.' Ah Lek then left the room, leaving his wife alone.

One week later, Taiko was produced before the public at the square. He looked thin and frail. The whole week he was held indoors with no light touching his skin made his yellow skin turn pale. He looked sickly. His legs were limped with no strength left. His body had emaciated so much that he looked like a skeleton with some flesh clinging onto it. And he had to be propped up by two Portuguese soldiers and dragged across the square and taken onto a wooden platform, lest he would fall. His knees were too weak to carry his own weight. This was platform they had constructed to hang Ninacatu many years ago. But since then it had become a permanent feature in the square since the Portuguese authorities thought it could create a fear amongst the people of Melaka with the sight of the wooden structure. This could force them to behave.

'This is Taiko, a well-known Chinese merchants in Melaka!' shouted the Portuguese official on top of his voice. He spoke in Malay.

'What is his crime?' a Chinese man whispered in his friend's ear.

'Don't know,' his friend whispered back. 'Shhh!'

'He smuggled gold, silver and priceless items out of Melaka by putting them in the caskets of other dead people. He pretended to send the embalmed corpses of his relatives back to China for their final burial,' explained the officer, as if he heard the two Chinese men.

There was a long gasp. The people who were standing around the platform looked at each other's face in disbelief.

'I have the governor's order to execute Taiko for being a traitor to the Portuguese. We simply can't allow a person like him to live in our midst. He has denied the Portuguese government of Melaka a lot of tax that we could use to develop Melaka. Now he's not only robbed us, but also all of you, who are the people of Melaka of whatever services that we have to offer you.'

A soldier then covered Taiko's face with a black hood. A noose was tied around his neck. The officer then gave the signal and the soldier released the lock, and the floor below Taiko's feet opened. There was a loud snap. Taiko's neck broke as he fell into the hole. He was now hanging on the rope, limped and dead. Both his legs tried to kick until they become limp and froze. He had wanted to protest with the last ounce of life that he still had. The crowd gasped. The Chinese women and children turned around while the Malay women and young girls quickly covered their faces with the *sarong* they had on their heads. Taiko was now hanging by the neck on the noose. The winds blew it sideways as the Portuguese officials left the platform.

However, even before Taiko was hanged, his wife returned to China on the first available junk. She took whatever she had and left the house vacant. Since then, no Chinese merchant dared to smuggle gold or priceless items in the caskets of the dead. And the practice of sending the dead on Chinese junks back to China ceased. The wealthy Chinese traders and merchants who died, were quickly embalmed and locked in thick wooden caskets and sent on the first available junk back to China for their final burial. Those burial lots that they had booked in the Chinese Hills were left empty. Only their tombs were constructed, but there was no tombstone or casket inside of them.

Ginger quietly slipped out of Melaka quietly on the very day her husband was dragged out of their house in the Chinese quarters and in full view of everybody who were there. They purposely chose the day when the Chinese quarters were full of people to arrest her husband. They wanted to show they were serious in dealing with criminals. She did not dare to look at it the square that was just across the banks of the Melaka River at the right where all the public hangings took place, because she might think that she could 'see' him there! She could still remember how her husband was dragged out of their house and how some people were hanged earlier at the same platform in the square. It was an eerie sight. She took all her priceless possession and with a retinue of ten servants and sneaked to the port and boarded a Chinese junk. She took along with her ten crates full of her personal belongings. Her three children followed her. She was so anxious and nervous that she vomited few

times she was in the junk. She felt so uncomfortable and scared that the Portuguese would still want to hound her. She was finally relieved when the anchor was raised and the junk started to sail out of the port and was close to Singapura.

For three days, she remained in her cabin and refused to go out because she was so distraught. Her assistants had to pacify her and forced her to go out to the deck to get some fresh air and sunlight. They gave her a full body massage. Despite that, she was still uncomfortable. They had to get help from a Chinese doctor or *sinsab* on board the ship. He gave her a head massage that finally helped to relieve her of her persistent headache - a migraine she had never experienced before. She finally agreed to go to the deck and stared at coast of the Melaka Peninsula in the straits of Melaka just before the junk arrived in Singapura to collect more passengers and goods. She vomited into the sea and had to be carried back to her cabin. After a few days there, the junk continued to sail northwards in the South China Sea and headed for China. A week later, she arrived at the port near Guangzhou and closed her chapter on her life in Melaka for good.

Ah Lek secretly met some Chinese friends who were close to the top Portuguese officers at the guild house. He was told his stay in Melaka was not safe anymore. So he quickly made a decision to flee Melaka. He and his wife took the next junk with their possessions and returned to China. True enough, the Portuguese rushed to his house and banged on the front door. There was no answer. They then knocked it down and rushed inside. Ah Lek and his wife had left. All the rooms were empty save for the deities who were still sitting on the altars. Candles lit their faces and smoke filled the rooms.

'Damned it!' shouted a senior Portuguese officer in Portuguese. 'Have you checked the other rooms on the top floor?'

'Yes, sir,' replied the soldier who barged into the ground floor room where the officer was.

'Come, let's go to the port; he might be there.'

They rushed out of the house and went to the port. The people there told them Ah Lek had left the port in a junk two days ago. So according to their calculations and the study of the winds, they figured that he would be in Singapura later in the day. The Portuguese officers cursed themselves for not acting swiftly on Ah Lek.

One month later, Nadim and Alauddin sneaked into the city. Muzaffar did not join them. They suggested that he stayed behind with his father, Mahmud.

They went to the fort when they heard the Portuguese were still constructing something that looked awesome. The people of Melaka had earlier seen the construction of the fort of Melaka, but they did not know what else the Portuguese wanted to build next. They were amazed and bewildered. Both of them wore Arabian robes to conceal their identity. They had become so dark that nobody could recognize who they were even if they were not wearing the costume; more so now that they were sporting thick beards and mustache.

Many Portuguese and Indian soldiers were manning the fort and around it and they just could not take any chances. Alauddin was shocked to see that the former palace had disappeared. On its spot were the ugly remains of beams and walls that were blackened by the fire. The mosque that once stood to its right side was flattened. Alauddin and Nadim were shocked. The places that were affected the worse were those that stood near the mouth of the Melaka River. However, those villages further up such as *Kampung Bunga Raya* or Hibiscus Village were spared because they stood away from the city center.

'How could they do this?' shrieked Alauddin. 'Even the state mosque was not spared. I hear many of the mosques and *madrassah*, too have been leveled by the Portuguese to make way for shop houses. The Chinese who built their houses near it had also encroached into the land around Hang Jebat's grave by the Melaka River across from the Javanese Village or *Kampung Jawa*. What more, Hang Kasturi, Lekir and Lekir's graves in *Kampung Gajah Berang* or Cranky Elephant Village, too were taken over; they have all disappeared. Our men who lived in *Kampung Lapan* had to desert the village when the Portuguese attacked Melaka. Many of them are with us. The Chinese took the opportunity to seize all the vacant land and build their houses and shops there.

'Fortunately, they had buried Hang Tuah far away from Melaka, in *Tanjong Keling*, so nobody will have any use to desecrate it. Many young men would like to possess his organs and use them for the amulets because they thought it would ensure them of their invincibility. It is so well hidden that nobody now knows where it is. Hopefully, in future year, the people of Melaka will rediscover the grave. Do you want to pay a visit to Hang Jebat's grave in *Kampung Lapan*?'

Nadim pondered over the question. Just then, three tall Portuguese soldiers walked passed by them. They looked menacing. Alauddin and Nadim tried to remain calm.

'Good day, Habib,' greeted one of them.

'Ya, good day, my friend,' replied Nadim in Portuguese.

The Portuguese soldier walked away with his friends. They were excited that the Malays were starting to speak in their language.

'That certainly was close,' said Alauddin. 'He was one rare Portuguese who was friendly.'

'They are everywhere now. I'm impressed that you're able to speak in their language, Alauddin.'

'Just a few words; mostly everyday pleasantries.'

'That must have saved our lives just now'

They continued to walk.

'There's no way that we can attack them here, your highness,' said Nadim.

'I think so. We have to give up Melaka for good, Nadim.'

Nadim kept quiet. He and Alauddin then walked towards the bazaar, thus canceling their visit to Jebat's grave that was just a stone's throw away from where they were. Many people were wandering and doing about their business. The shopkeepers were mostly Malays from different countries, mostly from Java. They were now conducting business by using Portuguese coins instead of those that were issued by Mahmud. Many silver and some gold coins exchanged hands.

They were surprised to see the many people there. The city had grown by leaps and bounds with a total population that stood between twenty to thirty thousand people of all races and religions. Most of the Malay men were now wearing long *kain pelikat* or *sarong* instead of just the pants like they did before. They look more stylish. But, most were still Muslims, although a small number of the others were Catholics, Hindus, Buddhist or Taoists. They could also notice the many Malay merchants from other states who remained in Melaka despite the country being under Portuguese rule. They were mostly Javanese, as they could be distinguished from the way they wore their batik *sarong* and caps. The other Indian-Muslim traders, too, had boycotted Melaka and went to Pasai or Palembang instead to do their trading there. This resulted in Melaka losing its luster as an important port of call in the Southeast Asian region. The Portuguese knew this but there was nothing that they could do to force anyone to come to Melaka and trade. They just hoped that the Malays would not continue to launch attacks on them and let them live in Melaka peacefully. They also realized that it was difficult for them to spread their religions especially amongst the Malays who were staunch Muslims.

In many ways, their mission to dominate and control Melaka and turned it into the center for the spread of their religion, language and culture failed miserably even before they tried to do anything. But what the Portuguese didn't realize was that the whole of the Southeast Asian region were Islamized for the last one hundred years before they first came to there. The religion had spread like wildfire even when they were attacking Melaka. Now enemies

surrounded it and there was no way that they could spread their influence elsewhere in the region. The spread of Islam in this region, was partly the result of the Portuguese presence in Melaka. The takeover of the state had resulted in many Malay princes and princesses who had lived in Melaka to return to their own states. They brought with them the religion like what the Malay traders and merchants did when they fled out of Melaka.

It was hot. Many of the people were sweating profusely. The women-folks had to use the Chinese paper umbrellas, while the Malay women had to bring their scarves or extra *sarong* over their heads to cover themselves from the harsh sun. The Chinese women wore the wooden clogs that made a sound as they walk on the pavement. Chinese Holy Men in their bright yellow robes walked along the streets. Joss sticks burnt in front of the houses of the Chinese. A lone Chinese man blew a thin bamboo flute a song that sounded sentimental; he was thinking of his village in China or his girlfriend whom he had left behind. Some Chinese shopkeepers were weighing some goods with a Chinese machine called the *dacing* and counting by using the abacus. They held one finger on one side of the gadget. However, unknown to the Malay customers these shopkeepers were cheating them. Some Malay children played the hop-skip-and-jump or skipping with the Chinese and Indian children at one corner at the end of the street, oblivious to what were happening elsewhere. A Chinese monk, with a bowl in his hand walked bare-footed and begged for alms or food. Some Chinese men gladly offered him some coins and food as a mark of their respect. Many Malay were seen patting the backs of their Chinese and Indian friends. Some were even hugging each other or drinking *cendol*, and eating *roti canai* and *rojak* sold by the Indian Muslims.

Many Malay children of mixed marriages ran about; they looked odd, with their small eyes and clear complexion compared to other Malay kids who were darker and had big, round eyes. They never failed to attract attention from anyone wherever they went. Their Chinese fathers carried tiffin containers called *bakul siab* to carry food. Although Chinese, they have *masuk Melayu* or 'become Malays.' Many of them also wore Malay clothes. Many, however, still retained their Chinese identity; they are the *Babas* and *Nyonyas*. Other than that, a new generation of Malays was created from the multifarious cross-cultural contacts between the people whose parents had transmigrated from the Malay Peninsula. Many had immigrated from the other Malay states in the Southeast Asian region, known as the Malay World. They also never failed to attract attention, because their looks were totally different from the kids who had Malay parents, who normally looked darker and shorter. The Chinese shops were now stocked with all sorts of goods, foods, fruit, fish,

sweets and cookie, and other goods. The Indian shops were stocked mostly all varieties of spices that they brought in from India including Indian cloths that were different than those Chinese cloths that were normally made of silk and brocade. The Malay women especially had such a difficult time trying to decide which things to buy for themselves or their children. The Malay shops were mostly sold a host of things that they had brought from the Chinese and Indians. There were, however, few of them who were cobblers who made leather sandals or footwear and the felt and skullcaps called the *songkok* and *ketayap* that the Malay men wore. There were shop selling foods such as the *belacan* and *cincaluk* shrimp paste that the Malays made. This was one of the favorite condiments that the Malays used to cook their food. And it could be used in all sorts of ways and foods.

Alauddin and Nadim observed their behavior; it looked as though Melaka had not changed since Mahmud was driven out of the state. But, deep inside them, Alauddin and Nadim felt that they were fearful of the Portuguese. They were just trying to get by as peacefully with each other as possible, so that they could resume their normal lives. They were not comfortable living under the Portuguese as they did under the Malay sultans.

At the far end of street in the Javanese Village or *Kampung Jawa*, across the Melaka River from the Chinese quarters, two burly Portuguese soldiers who seemed to be dead drunk. One of them kicked a Malay man without any provocation. The old Malay did not dare fight back; he was too shocked to retaliate. He became limp and lifeless with some blood coming out of his nose and mouth. His fingers on both hands shook for a while, before they became stiff. Those who were walking around fled in all directions. None dared to confront the soldiers. Their body odor was enough to drive everybody away from them. Never mind their stern faces that made everybody in the bazaar frightful of them. Equally ugly was the way they behaved in the bazaars: they usually entertained themselves to whatever they liked without paying a coin! Nobody dared to demand payment or lodge a complaint with the Portuguese officers at the fort for fear of severe punishment. They felt sorry for them for having been placed in Melaka, away from their homeland halfway across the world at such a young age. Not many of them had any prospect of returning to their homeland; most were destined to be in Melaka for a long, long while.

Alauddin and Nadim quickly hid themselves. They did not like what they had just seen. They looked from behind some shelves how the Malay man was now dead body was cast into the nearby river. It floated for a while before some crocodiles quickly grabbed it in their mouth. It then broke into pieces. The soldiers just walked away as though nothing ever happened. They seemed

to be cheerful. Alauddin and Nadim were totally aghast with what they had seen. They shook their heads. They also saw that the water in the river was now become dirty with all the garbage that was thrown into it, and the silting. There were many objects floating in it - wood, pieces of garbage and other waste that the people who lived in the houses on the banks of the river had discarded. The water in the Melaka River was not clean anymore like it used to. Sometimes there were also human excreta floating in the river.

The murdered man's wife, Khatijah pleaded with the village chief known as Penghulu Majid one night in the village of *Gajah Berang* where they lived. It was a short walk from *Kampung Jawa* where he had worked before, and where he was killed. But, the chief could not offer any help, despite her pleadings. She even brought all her seven young children with her, but to no avail.

'What can we do, my dear girl?' asked Majid. 'We are now under the Portuguese. They can do whatever they like here. We are not under our sultan anymore. If we were still under the sultan, we can file a complain and the sultan will ensure that justice will be swift.'

'But, surely, the Portuguese can also give me justice,' said Khatijah.

'I'm not sure about that, since the murderer was one of their kind.'

'What then shall I do, sir?'

'There's really no way that you can seek justice from the Portuguese. You just have to accept it as something that is fated by Allah. Allah will give your husband what he deserves in Heaven.'

There was really nothing that Majid could do. Earlier there was a case of a drunk Portuguese soldier who raped a Malay girl. He tried to lodge a formal complain with the Portuguese authorities only to be laughed at and rebuked.

'We cannot do anything, Mr. Majid,' was all that the Portuguese sergeant said. He laughed.

Majid met Kadir and told him what happened to the girl who was raped. Kadir and his friends met and discussed the matter and decided to seek justice. They tracked the Portuguese soldier when he was bathing on the beach at *Kelebang*. They hid behind the huge boulders. When nobody was around, they dipped his head in the water until he drowned. The Portuguese officers thought he had drowned on his own, so they did not seek revenge on any one. This was the only way that the Malays could seek justice from the Portuguese who had committed a crime in Melaka.

*Kampung Jawa* or Javanese Village was the Javanese Quarters. There, they opened shops and stores as their population increased. Nearby the river were many godowns where they stored their goods.



'If anyone of you dare provoke us, he'll get it!' one of the Portuguese soldiers shouted.

It was clear that they were dead drunk. They walked unsteadily. One of them dropped to the ground while his colleague quickly grabbed and propped him up.

When the coast was clear, Alauddin and Nadim stepped out of the hiding and walked away towards *Kampung Hulu*, the Malay village where they thought they were safe.

'Now, they are behaving like we are their slaves! Nadim,' remarked Alauddin. 'Like we're beholden to them!'

'So, in the eyes, we are the bad guys, whereas Melaka is our land, our country! They now dare to turn around and point their fingers at us. How ironic! How sad!' said Nadim.

Both of them felt sorry for what was happening in Melaka now with the Portuguese now acting like they were the rulers and the people of Melaka, especially the Malays as slaves.

'I'm sorry, your highness,' said Nadim.

'That's fated, Nadim. I have resigned to the fact that I will not be sultan of Melaka long ago. But, my father was insistent that we should recaptured Melaka at all costs so that I can succeed him,' said Alauddin. He tried not to sound angry. He had to control himself. He did not know what Nadim was thinking of.

'I worry for the Malays here,' said Nadim. He continued to stare into void.

'Fortunately, there are many Malay states around here, that we can count on. No, the Malays will never perish from the earth, Nadim. Melaka was the center of Malay civilization and the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia. However, with the collapse of the Melaka sultanate, another Malay country somewhere in the region will have to take over the role. And another Malay sultan will become its leader. No, our struggle to uphold the dignity of the Malays and spread Islam will continue. It will not stop with the downfall of Melaka. Islam will spread more rapidly until one day the whole region will be Islamized!'

'There must be a good reason why Allah is doing this. Are we being punished, Nadim? But, hasn't my ancestors been doing a good job in spreading Islam? There are many more Muslims in Melaka and the whole of the Malay Peninsula and all over the Southeast Asian region. Malay has become the lingua franca of this region.'

'There might be, Alauddin.'

'Like what?'

Nadim was reluctant to explain. Alauddin pestered him.

'Go ahead, I hear take it.'

'Corruption!'

Alauddin was shocked. This was the first time he was hearing this although he had heard of many rumors about his officials who were engaged in it.

'How? What do you mean?'

'Many senior, junior and even low-ranking officials were on the take. They had been on the take for too long, even during the time of your great-grandfather, Sultan Muzaffar Shah, and Sultan Alauddin Riayat. It was worse during the reign of Sultan Mansur Shah, after he got married to the Chinese whom everybody in Melaka thought was a princess. But, she was just a kitchen-helper.'

'Kitchen-helper?' asked Nadim in shock. 'That was what made Hang Jebat furious. Sultan Mansur Shah was duped into marrying, not a Chinese princess, but a kitchen-helper! The reason why the Chinese emperor did it was he wanted the sultan to be eternally grateful to the Chinese and to give those who were in Melaka then, especially the traders and merchants a lot of favor.'

'True enough, Sultan Mansur Shah lost his head and failed to look after the Malays and their interests. He even smoked what they called *madat* or opium with them, and when his mind was groggy, he gave parcels of land in the prime areas in Melaka to them.'

Nadim and Alauddin were shocked. But the foodstall-owner had more.

'Even Sultan Mahmud Shah, the present sultan smoked *madat* with the Chinese traders and merchants and *tokays*. And because of that he was not in touch with what was happening in Melaka, and the Portuguese were able to stay in the sea for a long time while their superiors planned their attack on Melaka.'

'Sultan Mansur Shah gave too many favors to the Chinese traders and merchants. They got a lot of land around the mouth of the Melaka River. You can see it for yourself now. Otherwise, how do you explain the foreigners could easily get land, and bring more of their relatives to Melaka? The land they had were all prime land, beside the Melaka River. And do you know that some of the caskets that the Chinese had brought to their homeland were sometimes filled with gold and other valuables.'

'These Chinese traders and merchants smuggled out money and evaded taxes that should have gone to the state to be used to make more weapons to fight the enemy. And they are not using the currency issued by our sultans anymore, but their own.'

'Really? The Portuguese have issued their own coins?'

The foodstall-owner pulled out a few coins and showed them to Alauddin and Nadim. They could not read a word of what was written on them; they were in the Portuguese language with their kind's name on one side. Alauddin was shocked. He shook his head. But, worse news was to come.

'Not enough with giving Sultan Mahmud Shah opium or *madat* the Chinese traders and merchants even brought young Chinese women to the palace, when his sultanah and children were away. Because of that the sultan was distracted, while Tun Mutahir, the seventh prime minister who was later replaced by *paduka tuan* was the most corrupt prime minister in the Melaka sultanate. He had one thousand *babaras* of gold, more than anybody else in the whole of Melaka, including the sultan himself did! Where did he get all of them? And he had two hundred slaves and few holiday or pleasure houses when he was not entitled to own any. How could he afford to have them?' added the foodstall-owner.

Alauddin kept quiet. He and Nadim then returned the coins back to the foodstall-owner. Nadim glanced at Alauddin and felt sorry for him.

'Some of the unscrupulous Chinese wealthy men kept their dead relatives in the thick wooden caskets and buried them temporarily in the Chinese Hills. But, when the Northerly winds blew, they took the caskets to the junks and sent them to their villages to be given their final burial. The Portuguese finally caught some of them and hanged them at the public square.'

'Yes, that was what I was told of.'

'Not all of it, your highness. Their relatives opened the lid of the caskets and put in all the gold and other valuables and money. In this way, they could smuggle them to China! No wonder it takes few men to carry each casket, because it was laden with goods.'

'Why did they want to do that?'

'To evade tax! Because of this the sultanate wasn't able to enlist more young and able Malays from the other Malay states in the region to join our forces, and to make more weapons.'

Alauddin was shocked. He was speechless. He didn't realize the rot that had eaten up from inside the system that had made the sultanate weak for a long time, even before the Portuguese appeared in the straits of Melaka.

'Did the prime minister know of this? *Paduka tuan*.'

'He did, your highness. The poor prime minister was too old and frail at that time so he decided to close one eye. Then when he got much older and became almost an invalid, and had to be carried everywhere, he closed both eyes. He was such a fine man. He took pity on those officials, and because of that he didn't want to take any action.'

'But the very least that he could do was to inform the sultans, and my father!'

'Its too late now, Alauddin.'

'How do you explain the wives of the senior, junior and low-ranking officials who moved about in the palanquins and carried by the burly men from Java that they could ill afford? They wore thick bangles, thick chains, bracelets, anklets, pendants, brooch called *kerosang*, medallions, earrings studded with precious stones and tiaras and on every conceivable part of their body? And some were even driven in horse-carts, when they were not entitled to use this mode of transportation that was reserved to royalty and those who had served the sultan? Tell me!'

Alauddin was speechless. He realized the people - especially the women and the wealthy had become more discerning in their tastes for jewelry and clothes. They were conscious with how they look especially when they were in public. Their houses, too, had shown remarkable styles that reflected their different social status and class. But what had happened was beyond his comprehension. Now, the more he thought of it, the more he realized that what Nadim had just said was true.

'Yes, even their children were carrying gold coins in their pockets in large numbers. Where did they get them? Some of these brothels and gambling dens are owned by the wealthy Malays. They got the permits from the authorities, but they always used their Chinese friends' name in order not to be detected, since the Malays are not suppose to operate such businesses. These unscrupulous Malays live off the commission they collect from the Chinese every month.'

'The foreigners often bribe those officials for personal favors.'

'This explains now why they were reluctant to join my father on his exile. Where are they now?'

'What else, counting their money. But some have fled to other Malay states for their personal safety, while a small number of them are still working for the Portuguese!'

'So, now you know why they're not with us.'

'They have all gone to the other Malay states to live there quietly.'

Alauddin was shocked tremendously.

'Ya Allah! May they be cursed in the Hereafter! May their souls burn in Hell-fire! And may they rot in their graves!' Alauddin was furious. 'I can't imagine how any Malay would want to side with the Portuguese, much less a former senior or even junior official of the palace!'

Alauddin and Nadim walked pass the small *surau*, a small mosque or some sort of chapel where they saw many Javanese men praying or doing their ablution. Muslims were not allowed to build another mosque in the same area, and there was another huge mosque in *Kampung Hulu*. So, they built a small mosque instead for their personal convenience, to perform their daily prayers. However, for their mandatory Friday prayers, they still had to go to the bigger mosques so that the congregation could be grouped together. They went across the wooden bridge that crossed the Melaka River that linked *Kampung Jawa* and *Kampung Lapan* and got on their horses. Few *sampans* and boats plied along the river below the bridge as they crossed it.

The Chinese quarters were different now; there were so many colorful lanterns that the Chinese owners of the shops hung in front of their houses. They had a dual purpose - for decoration as well as for lighting. But, during certain times of the year, especially the Chinese New Year that spread for fifteen days, until the last day they called *Chap Gob Meh* the whole area was lit with lanterns. The children especially took delight in carrying their lanterns that were tied to bamboo sticks. They would go everywhere with their lanterns that looked like the twelve different animals in the Chinese lunar calendar cycle, until they became tired. During these fifteen-day celebrations, there were many *wayang* shows where theater groups from China were brought in to perform dramas that depict early Chinese stories on their well-known legends. This lasted throughout the festival season and lasted until early in the morning. Alauddin and Nadim for the first time caught sight of some pigs and piglets, pink in color. They were held in cages.

'*Apa benda tu?*' shrieked Nadim. (What is that?)

'*Alamak! Babi,*' replied Nadim. (My goodness, pigs!)

They quickly made a detour. The other Malays who were walking by, too, walked away from them. They shuddered at the sight of these animals that were considered to be *baram* or strictly forbidden to Muslims.

Then one piglet got loose. It ran out of the cage and on the streets. It chased the Malays. They looked around and screamed.

'*Tolong, tolong!*' (Help, help!)

Everybody turned around. They thought they were in grave danger. Alauddin and Nadim turned. They touched their daggers, at the ready. Few of the Chinese men who were nearby also turned around to find out what had caused the commotion. They were amused to see the Malays running as if they were in grave danger.

'*Alamak! Babi, babi!*' they continued to scream.

One of the Chinese men then rushed and picked up the piglet. The Malays were relieved. Alauddin and Nadim smiled at the funny side of the incident. Because of that incident, the Portuguese authorities ordered that all pigs and piglets were kept in the cages in the Chinese quarters. They were not allowed to be let loose so that they would not touch the Malays who found them be forbidden. Each time these animals touched the Malays, they had to wash the affected parts with mud and offer blessings to cleanse their bodies so they could be pure again. Such was their abhorrence of the creature. And because of that, they preferred to stay away from them as much as possible. Even the sight of the piglets was enough to strike fear in them. For that matter, even the dogs were at a distance from them and were always in a leash.

The Chinese quarters were always more riotous with all sorts of economic activities. There were artisans working on metal and wooden objects, tailors sewing new clothes, cobblers repairing shoes and so on. And there were old Chinese men who looked at the palms of other Chinese men and women, to study their future, if it held any prospect for wealth or poverty. Those who were told that they didn't have any future in Melaka or the prospect of making money felt distraught that they were faced with a bleak future with no prospects whatsoever. Sometimes these fortune-tellers would spread out playing cards and all sorts of cards on the table and read them like they held the future of those people who had come to know their fortune.

Although the Malays sometimes went here, the Chinese quarters now were most out of bounds for the Malays and even Indians, as they were many gangster groups who controlled different parts of the quarters. There, they operated their illegal gambling and prostitution dens. Once in a while young Malays, Indians and even Portuguese would patronize these outlets. These Chinese gangsters mostly consist of young men who did not care for law and order, for they thought they were the law and order here. They looked mean with tattoos in the shape of dragons, tigers and lions all over the body. But, what made Alauddin and Nadim very sad was at sight of the many Portuguese soldiers and their Indian mercenaries who were injured. Some limped on one foot, while the others crept on the ground and begged money and food from passersby. There were some who had their arms or legs amputated, while the others were blind. They did not realize that the Portuguese forces suffered many casualties in the many skirmishes that they had with the Melaka forces. The land where the Portuguese authorities had put aside for their graveyard was not almost filled up.

A Portuguese soldier talked to himself. He kept on saluting as he marched up and down the streets, much to the amazement to the local people who knew he was insane.

'To Portugal, to his majesty King Manuel!' he would say in his native language which nobody understood. It was a pitiful sight, thought Alauddin. Nadim shook his head in total disbelief, even though he was their enemy. He came to Alauddin and said: 'Hey, you look exactly like Alauddin, the son of the former sultan of Melaka, Sultan Mahmud Shah.'

Alauddin was shocked. Few people turned around to look at him. Alauddin had not seen or met any of them before. May be they were familiar with the sultan's family and had seen him before. He hoped they were mistaken by his identity.

'I do?' remarked Alauddin. 'That's what my wife thought so too.' He faked a laugh. He knew he had no choice but to play along and sounding equally astonished. The others laughed as the Portuguese soldier marched on. He saluted everyone who stood along his way. Not only the Portuguese were feeling homesick, the Chinese, too. Many of them who came to Melaka were young boys. Many of them were also involved in criminal activities in China or were being hounded by the authorities. Because of that, they could not return to China. Being young and alone, most of them took to drugs and the bottle. They drank and smoked opium to lull their senses. Many of them could be seen sleeping on the streets and in the back lanes. Few died of overdose or sickness. Alauddin and Nadim were relieved that nothing untoward had happened. Alauddin especially was fortunate that he was not wearing regally, but in ordinary clothes that made him blend well with the locals there, although if they had inspected his person carefully, they could see that he had a royal stature.

Alauddin and Nadim went away as soon as the Portuguese soldiers had gone. They then made their way to the city and headed to the Chinese quarters where they passed in front of Taiko's house. They were surprised to see that it was locked. A wooden beam had been nailed on it.

'What's wrong with him?' asked Alauddin.

'Isn't he spying for the Portuguese? He should be amply rewarded with land and permits and licenses,' remarked Nadim.

'Did his fortunes change that badly?'

Nadim shook his head. They did not know what had happened to Taiko. They then left Taiko's house in a hurry thinking that some Portuguese senior officers might inhabit it. They passed by a few streets, and at the end of one

closest the Melaka River, they saw one particular Chinese boy whom they knew before, because he was helping at another Chinese man's store.

Now, he was sitting alone on the bridge and singing to himself, very loudly. He was so homesick that he refused to eat or work. His body became too bereft of any life. He also did not wash himself although the Melaka River was just in front of him. Alauddin and Nadim pitied him. All it took was for him to take a dip and he would alight from the surface looking clean and fresh.

'What's the matter, Ah Meng?' asked Alauddin in Chinese.

'Nothing, sir,' replied Ah Meng in Malay.

'*Ciak-pung lian? Lu bului-bob? Lai, wah bo lu tampok, ai mai?*' said Alauddin in Hokkien. (Have you eaten? Do you have any money? Let me give you some money. Do you want?) He then switched to Malay when he learnt that Ah Meng preferred to speak in this language.

'No.'

'You want some coins?'

'That's all right.'

'Sure?'

Ah Meng nodded.

'What's wrong with you, Ah Meng?'

'Nothing.'

'Are you homesick?'

'Yes.'

Alauddin kept quiet. He felt sorry for him.

'Do you need any help?'

'That's okay.'

'Sure?'

Ah Meng kept quiet.

'Why don't you go away. The Portuguese soldiers are now spying on everybody here.'

'No, they're not around.'

Alauddin dug a silver coin from his pocket and gave it to Ah Meng.

'Here are some coins for you to buy something to eat. Go and get yourself some hot noodles.'

Ah Meng took the coin.

'I've got to go now. Bye'

Alauddin and Nadim walked away and left Ah Meng to sing alone. They wanted to have a rendezvous with Kadir and Rashid, two of their friends who had remained in Melaka to spy on the Portuguese.



Two 'Arab' men walked passed Alauddin. Nadim was ahead of him. He was admiring some goods at a Chinese shop.

'*Asalamulaikum*' greeted one of the men.

Alauddin turned to look at him. '*Mulaikum salam,*' he replied.

The two Arabs grinned. Alauddin felt something amiss. Nadim stopped fondling the toy. He looked at Alauddin. Then suddenly, one of the 'Arabs' produced a knife; he wanted to stab Alauddin.

'Welcome to Melaka, Alauddin,' said one of the 'Arab' men. He tried to stab Alauddin. He quickly pushed his hand and ran away. The two 'Arab' men turned out to be Portuguese soldiers who wore Arab robes. They had been trailing Alauddin for a while.

Alauddin continued to run. Nadim remained still. When the two Portuguese soldiers passed by him, he held out his leg and both of them tumbled on the road. One of them had a serious wound on his head. He fainted. The other tried to stand, but Nadim quickly kicked him near his stomach. He fell to the ground. Few Chinese men and women stood at where they were to stare at them. Nadim then rushed off together with Alauddin. They climbed on their horses and sped off.

Kadir and Rashid hid at the other end of the bazaar. They saw what happened. Too bad that they didn't get to meet their friends. They hid themselves so that the Portuguese didn't see them.

'What do we do?' Kadir asked Rashid.

'What else can we do, Kadir?' said Rashid.

'Alauddin and Nadim have left.'

'We see them in Ujong Pasir then. I know they usually go to a foodstall there, before they ride further south. Come.'

Alauddin and Nadim left Melaka feeling scared, but relieved that they were safe from harm. They didn't know what happened to the two Portuguese soldiers they had left behind. They didn't realize that they were being followed. Despite putting on a charade, the Portuguese could still recognize them. They were disappointed that they did not get to meet Alauddin and Nadim.

'Looks like we're not going to get the manuscripts they promised us,' said Alauddin.

'That's okay. I'm sure they'll keep them,' said Nadim.

They continued to ride until they were far away from the city. They stopped at a Malay village called *Ujong Pasir* by way of the *Bukit Serindit* around the Chinese Hills, about three miles from the fort or five miles from *Kampung Lapan*. They had to take this route because there were no Portuguese soldiers stationed there.

'That was close, Nadim. Thanks for saving me,' said Alauddin.

'You're welcome,' replied Nadim.

'Someday, I'll repay you for this.'

Nadim and Alauddin rode to the edge of the city near Semabok where the sight of any Portuguese soldiers was a rarity. None of them dared to venture this far. The Malays here were not beholden to them. Two of the Portuguese soldiers were killed sometime ago when they lost their way here. After resting here, they wanted to proceed further south, to Kandang. Now they badly need to eat; they were hungry. They did not want to eat at the Malay stalls in *Kampung Jawa* because they feared they might see Portuguese soldiers or their Indian mercenaries in them. They tied their horses to a tree and went to a foodstall for a late dinner. They sat on the wooden chairs. There were few customers there and they were talking amongst themselves. The stall-owner went to get their orders.

'What will you gentlemen have?' asked the stall-owner.

'I'll have some fried noodles or *mee*. Is that the food that the Chinese taught us to eat?' said Nadim.

'Yes, but I'm not good at it. I'll try my best. And drinks?'

'Coffee tends to keep me awake. How about you my friend?'

'I'll have coffee and the Chinese food, fried noodles, which they call *mee*. How does it taste? I've not tried it before,' said Alauddin.

'Not bad. It's like a bunch of thick hair or string cooked with chilly sauce. You'll like it. It'll keep your stomach full for many hours.'

They laughed.

'Do we have to use the two sticks that the Chinese use? What are they called?'

'Chopsticks, your highness. Err...'

The shop owner laughed.

'Yes, yes, it is the food of the kings, your highness. Very well, your highness. Er... Are you two gentlemen from the city?' asked the stall owner in jest. 'You both look like you don't belong here. There's a mosque where you can perform your prayers and rest.'

'Yes we are,' replied Nadim. 'But we're not travelers.'

'I see.'

'Watch your mouth, Nadim. Stop your-highness-ing me, Nadim,' whispered Alauddin to Nadim.

Nadim forced a laugh. The stall-owner went inside. A while later he brought out the orders and put them on the table.

'Thank you,' said Nadim.

'What are the chances for the sultan to recapture Melaka from them, sir? Have you any idea?' asked the stall-owner.

'What? Oh, I see. Well, I...'

'It's difficult to say, sir; they're everywhere,' said Alauddin.

'Does this mean the sultan won't be returning to rule Melaka?'

'I'm afraid not, sir.'

'Serves him right.'

Nadim and Alauddin were surprised.

'What do you mean, sir?' asked Nadim.

'Well, for one, the sultan was to be blamed.'

'But, why was the sultan to be blamed? Wasn't he a great ruler?' said Alauddin.

'Yes, he was. But, he wasn't aware of what was happening in the palace.'

'What happened, sir?' asked Nadim.

'He was not aware of all the corruption that was going on. The senior officials in the palace were all on the take, they were all corrupt.'

Alauddin glanced at Nadim. 'Really?'

'Yes, because of that the sultanate collapsed. The Portuguese had it easy because they were able to pay them, and the foreign merchants too, betrayed the sultan. Do you know the Chinese captain or *Kapitan Cina* whom they call Mr. Taiko - Big Brother? He is a big guy. Even the other Chinese *towns* are afraid of him.'

'Not really...' said Nadim. 'What about him?'

Alauddin nodded. He had heard about him, but did not know him personally.

'He was the mole. He gave the state's entire secret to the Portuguese in exchange for rewards. He got many parcels of land, mostly near the banks of the Melaka River. You know how expensive the land there, don't you? And he was also given special permits to bring their relatives from their villages. And don't ever show any coins issued by his majesty Sultan Mahmud Shah's government. The Portuguese won't like it.'

Alauddin glanced at Nadim. They had some of the coins that bore the signatures of Sultan Mahmud Shah written in Malay, but in the Arabic characters. They made sure that they brought along some of the coins that the Portuguese invaders and terrorists - as they called them, should they need to pay for their food. This proved to be a wise move.

'Why was his house sealed then?'

'Didn't you pass by his house just now?'

'Yes, we did. But, it was sealed,' said Alauddin. 'Why was it sealed?'

'You mean you don't know? You city folks should know more than we villagers do.'

'What do we know, sir? We're just ordinary people trying to earn a decent living,' said Nadim.

'Mr. Taiko was caught smuggling gold and silver in the casket of his relatives who died,' said the foodstall-owner. 'Most likely, too, he did not give some Portuguese officers their share. Most of the coins were those that Sultan Mahmud Shah had issued. They are gold, and therefore had more value than those Portuguese coins that are made of metal. Here.' He produced some of the Portuguese coins. Alauddin and Nadim looked at the coins. They were shocked with what the Chinese had done behind their backs. They both thought, the sultan would be mad at them, if he had known about their evil deeds. But it was already too late, as 'rice had turned to porridge' as the Malays would say...

'He was what?' asked Alauddin, like he didn't hear what the man had said earlier.

'He was hanged in the public square.'

Alauddin turned to look at Nadim.

'I saw it with my own eyes. I saw how the Portuguese dragged him to the square and hung him,' said the foodstall-owner. 'You know, I worked in the palace as a gardener under his majesty Sultan Mahmud Shah. I should know.'

'Therefore, what I'm telling you isn't hearsay. God forbid if I'm telling lies. What do I stand to gain for telling you two strangers all these? I am now a petty stall-owner of this small foodstall. I'm already too old to venture into bigger businesses. I'm happy and contented that the Portuguese don't cause me problems here. I'm too far away from them.'

'Once in a while they do come here, but most of the time they were in a big group. Remember, how two of their men were ambushed when they lost their way here sometime ago?'

Alauddin and Nadim shook their heads.

'This is news to me,' said Nadim.

'Me, too,' said Alauddin.

'I pity the sultan and his eldest son though, Alauddin for he'll never be eighth sultan of Melaka. The Melaka sultanate has gone a long way, and done wonders since its founding by Parameswara in 1396 CE or 798 AH in the Chinese year of 4088. But all this now goes in vain. He'll roll in his grave if he knows of what is happening to his beloved people and state.'

'I hope what you're saying will not be true, sir,' said Alauddin.

'You can count on my word, son. Alauddin will live in exile all his life, now with his elder brother, Ahmad dead. But, I hope he won't feel miserable and accept it as fate. Human beings plan, but Allah wills everything, only He can decide. We're all at his mercy.'

Nadim and Alauddin kept quiet.

'I'd better go to the back. Excuse me.'

Nadim stared at Alauddin. They started to eat quietly. After they had finished they washed their hands and paid up a silver coin.

'Good food, sir,' said Alauddin.

'Do come again,' said the foodstall-owner. 'If you go to the city again, make sure you do not carry any weapons.'

'We sure will. But why, sir? Don't all Malay men carry weapons?'

'Keep them to yourselves and should you venture near the fort, leave them behind.'

Alauddin and Nadim did not know what the old man meant.

'But, why, sir?' asked Alauddin.

'The Portuguese soldiers often carry something that can detect weapons, even if you hide them in your clothes.'

'Ah, they use magnets, *besi berani*.'

'Yes, that's the word.'

'Don't worry, sir, we'll be careful.' Alauddin and Nadim then went to their horses. Just then, Rashid and Kadir alighted from inside the bushes. They rode to them and stopped.

'*Asalamulaikum*,' my friends,' said Kadir.

Alauddin and Nadim turned around. They were relieved that it was Kadir. He and Rashid dismounted their horses and they hugged each other. They were relieved that they could meet again after all.

'Where were you?' asked Alauddin.

'We saw what happened in the Javanese Village,' said Kadir.

Nadim turned around. 'Shhh! There are people over there.'

'That's okay, they're so far away,' said Alauddin. 'Do you have them?'

Kadir produced a package. 'Here. There are few manuscripts, which I want you to keep. I'm keeping some just in case.'

Kadir then handed the manuscripts to Alauddin.

'Thanks, Kadir,' said Alauddin.

'I hope you will be happy to get these back. Unfortunately, we weren't able to get all from the Portuguese officer's office,' said Kadir.

'You better get going. It's already getting dark and soon night will fall. We'll meet again,' said Kadir. 'Did you hear about Mr. Taiko?'

'Yes, the old man over there told us. So, it's true then, huh?'

'Yes, he was hanged.'

They then shook hands and hugged each other.

'*Asalamulaiikum*, my dear brothers,' said Alauddin.

'*Mulaiikum salam*,' his highness,' replied Kadir.

Rashid nodded. Alauddin and Nadim mounted on their horses and sped into the jungles and disappeared from sight. They continued to gallop throughout the night. They passed through a narrow jungle path. Many times, they could hear sounds of monkeys yelping in the background. They hoped that tigers or other wild animals along the way would not accost them. Many times, they saw these wild beasts sitting motionlessly in their paths. They had to wait until they moved on and disappeared in the jungles before proceeding with their journey. They did not stir them, lest they got angry. Worse, there might be more of them hiding in the thick bushes ready to pounce on them. Both of them recited verses that they hoped would make the wild beasts feel calm. They didn't realize that their young Chinese friend, Ah Meng had jumped into the Melaka River, late that evening. He couldn't take it anymore. He was alone in Melaka and all his relatives and friends were in China. He couldn't bear to live away from them anymore. His body floated in the river, and it was only discovered next morning when it got itself stuck to an anchor. A sailor wanted to lift his anchor but found it was stuck. To his horror, he saw the dead body of a young Chinese boy at the anchor. In his hand was a silver coin. The sailor opened his grip and took the silver coin Alauddin had given him, before calling the port authorities to retrieve the body and throw it in a hole in the Chinese Hills.

Ah Meng was not the only Chinese who had committed suicide in Melaka. There were many other young Chinese boys and men who had failed to in their effort to seek their wealth in the 'Mountain of Gold.' Even Portuguese soldiers jumped into the Melaka River or over from the Chinese Hills, because they could not stand living in Melaka and because they have been away from their families for too long. They knew the people in Melaka did not want them; every day was torture to them. On top of that, they found the weather not conducive to them. The sea adventure that they were seeking had turned out to be a nightmare for all of them.

'Is it true?' asked Nadim, to break the silence.

'May be. How could my father look after his senior officials? They were supposed to look after the sultan and the country,' said Alauddin.

'There may be some truth in what the stall-owner had said,' said Alauddin.

'If it wasn't true, the Portuguese wouldn't have been able to take over Melaka so easily.'

'Well, Nadim, what can we do with that now. What happened has happened.'

'Right, your highness.'

Alauddin and Nadim rested on the beach the next morning. Nadim especially took the respite to soothe his tired bones. His muscles were aching from all the riding. He knew he had been forcing himself to ride, despite his age. He was more than sixty years now, and old enough to be Alauddin's father, or uncle.

They cleaned their horses and let them rest, too. After swimming in the sea, both of them sat under the shade of a tree, where it was cool. In front of them laid the straits of Melaka. It was so wide, as wide as the eye could see. Fortunately, there was no boat or ship in sight since the traders from the region had avoided Melaka, now that the Portuguese were there.

Both of them had never admired its beauty until now. The horizons offered them the promise of an uncertain future. Alauddin opened the manuscripts and read the first few pages. They were beautifully written in Arabic calligraphy on goatskin. 'Here, take a look at his.'

Nadim went to him. 'My goodness, they're great.'

They then read the other pages.

'I'm sure my great-great-great-great grandfather, Parameswara must have sat on beaches like this on many occasions on his way from Palembang to Majapahit and to Temasik which is now called Singapura. Then he had to move again and trekked through the Malay Peninsula before he arrived in Bertam.

'I can imagine how he must have felt now. He had a trusted assistant, Tun Perpatih Besar whom he had known all his life. The count was a young man then, while Parameswara was in his late forties. I'm now as old as he was then and you are my trusted aide, Nadim. Will history repeat itself?'

'What do you mean, Alauddin?'

'Will I be the eighth sultan of Melaka, and you be my prime minister, like what happened with Parameswara and Tun Perpatih Besar?'

'If God wills.'

Alauddin then stretched his hand and picked a piece of twig that had just fallen near him. Nadim watched as he started to draw in the sand.

'What are you writing, Alauddin?'

'I'm not writing anything. I'm just trying to draw an illustration of my ancestors, great-great-great-great granddaddy Parameswara and his

queen. They are being driven across the valleys, plains and thick jungles, and being escorted by one thousand of his followers and other officials.

'Here, look at it. They were brave people who were willing to endure untold hardship. They didn't care for their personal comforts, and continued to trek on until they founded Melaka. If the high priest had his way, Melaka could have been called *Amalaki* instead. But Parameswara wanted a Malay name and not Sanskrit.'

'*Amalaki?*'

'This is the name of the tree the Sanskrit language.

'I see. Melaka was just called Bertam Village at that time. Yes, but the Siamese said they had control of the village, which they called Five Islets. The Chinese, however, called it *Wushu*. Is this true?'

'Hardly. You know the Siamese, they like to make claims on anything including Melaka which they said was theirs.'

'Five Islets,' said Nadim.

'Imagine, how the twenty or thirty people living in Bertam Village could be under the dominance of the king of Siam, and they had to pay obeisance by giving gold coins.

'Where do you think they could get the gold? They hardly had anything to eat. Their food was based on fish. And they could not cultivate rice. They only learnt how to plant and harvest rice when Parameswara brought in people and experts from Sumatra to teach the people in Melaka.'

Nadim laughed.

'And what about the allegation that Parameswara had paid forty *taels* of gold to the king of Siam?'

'A joke.'

They laughed.

'Melaka doesn't have any natural resources in the ground, so where do you think the gold could have come from?'

'So how could people who could not plant rice dig for gold?'

'Exactly. Parameswara also encouraged his people and those who had followed him from Palembang, Java and Temasik to plant other crops such as sugarcane and tapioca in order that they could diversify their daily activities. He also encouraged them to cultivate the vast land away from the river and sea. In this way Melaka expanded and the land at the mouth of the Melaka River was not congested.'

They laughed.



'Only much later when Megat Iskandar developed Melaka did the Siamese started to attack the state hoping to put it under their political and economic dominance.

'They had come at a wrong time. Melaka and the whole of the Malay World were by then already Muslim, so none of the Malay rulers was willing to allow the Siamese who were Buddhists to wreck on their lives. They were trounced.'

'You know what the Javanese called Megat Iskandar?'

Nadim shook his head.

'The bravest man. Yes, despite what he had done to their king, they still called him that. I'm truly amazed. Most probably, the Javanese were indebted to him for showing them their way to Islam.'

'And worse of all, the royal treasures that my ancestors had kept for the people and state were taken away by Alfonso. They wanted to take the back to Portugal, but unfortunately for them, their ships sank off Haru in Sumatra.'

Nadim looked at the drawing in the sand. It showed something that looked like two human beings who were sitting on the elephants and by the side were other smaller figures.

'I'm not a good artist. This is all that I can do.' Alauddin then wiped the drawing. He then turned around. 'Ah, look what do we have here? A *melaka* tree! Let's go and see it. Have you seen a *melaka* tree before, Nadim?'

'Not in my life. Come. Which one is it?'

They went to the tree and absent-mindedly left the manuscripts on the sand under the tree. Alauddin fondled the tiny leaves and small buds.

'I'm surprised to see that it's a small tree, almost insignificant and indistinguishable compared to all the trees around it. Look.'

'This was the tree that Parameswara, as he was still called then, sat under when his favorite dog was kicked by a mystical white mousedeer, one hundred twenty over years ago, before the 'White Bengalis' came to our land, Nadim.'

'Yes, I know the story well. So, do all the Malays in Melaka. I'm not sure about the non-Malays though. I was not fully aware that your ancestors, especially Parameswara, or Megat Iskandar Shah had actually united the Malays in Melaka and created the Malay language that we are using now. Both didn't actually exist in their present form. More importantly, he had caused the spread of Islam throughout the region and beyond it. His own conversion had spurred the spread, although he was not the first person in Melaka to do so.'

Alauddin nodded. 'It's such an old story, how could the foreigners know about this story? The manuscripts were hidden in the palace. Nobody knows that my grandfather was called Damia Raja, the third ruler of Palembang.' He

then sat cross-legged under the tree where it was shady. 'It's shady under this tree. Come here and join me, Nadim.'

Nadim did as asked. And both of them sat under the tree until they were fully rested. Alauddin then decided to recite a *pantun* that he created on spontaneously:

*Putera Palembang bertedur di bawah pokok melaka.  
Anjingnya ditendang kancil putih berseri;  
Maka bertitablak baginda negeri baru dibuka,  
Diberi pula nama sempena pokok tadi.*

Nadim was impressed. He could see that his friend was visibly touched. Alauddin stared at an unseen object. 'Why don't you found a new country yourself like what Megat Iskandar did, Alauddin?' asked Nadim. 'You can start from scratch, like Megat Iskandar.'

Alauddin was surprised with the suggestion. He did not know how to react to it because it came unexpectedly. It was an interesting and thought-provoking idea. It was certainly the last thing he was contemplating at that time, and bearing the circumstances, he and his family were in. Just then, a few mousedeer rushed near the bushes in front of them.

'Look, mousedeer!' exclaimed Nadim.

Alauddin turned around and managed to see them before they disappeared in the bushes.

'What do you think? Isn't this a good omen too, that you must be accosted by mousedeer?'

'They were not the white mousedeer that Parameswara had seen but brown ones. They thought it was a white mousedeer, when in fact it could have fallen into mud. There is no such a thing as a white mousedeer. Well, it was different during his time.'

'How so?'

'Many places were not under the control of Malay rulers then, unlike now. It is therefore, more difficult if we were to just enter a country and claim it for ourselves. Surely, a sultan or local village chief would be possessing it. We will be chased out as soon as we stepped foot in their territory. What more if they know we are from Melaka. The last place we should go to is Palembang.'

'I know life on the run, as exiles, is difficult for us; more so for the elderly and women and children. It's been few years that we have been on the run. Some of them have died. The others felt jaded and disillusioned. Fortunately,

none of our men had deserted us. They are still sticking with us, despite the hardship that they had to endure. And you, too, Nadim.'

'Think about it, Alauddin. Discuss it with your brother. Who knows he might be keen on the idea? Amazing, how history repeats itself.'

'How so?'

'Your father, Sultan Mahmud Shah is as old as your great-great-great-great grandfather, Megat Iskandar Shah was when he was on the run in the early days. Did he realize that the name he chose was after his ancestor, Iskandar Zulkarnain?'

'Oh, yes. That's true. He knew all about Iskandar Zulkarnain's exploits in Asia especially India. My later ancestors later ruled Palembang and it was Parameswara who founded Melaka, where as my father is trying to claim back from the Portuguese.'

'In many ways it is the same.'

'Yes.'

Alauddin then kept quiet. He stared at the leaves in the *melaka* tree above him. Shards of light penetrated through them.

'I'm married to Melaka. Melaka is my life! So, how can I just leave her? I may not be the official eighth sultan of Melaka, but I try to behave like I am.'

'You're a pretender to the throne, Alauddin.'

'I am, and so will I be until the day I die. So, how do you expect to desert our beloved Melaka and found another country like Melaka did not exist?'

'The people of Melaka, especially the Malays who are now trapped there will not forgive us. I'm sorry that they have to live under the Portuguese. Nobody knows if they are being persecuted everyday and forced to denounce their religion. But, I do hope that they are able to perform their religious duties. May be all the mosques have been torn down.'

'Some. Only some that stood near the palace and river-mouth and in Bandar Kaba which was too close to the Portuguese administrative building. Some were demolished because they stood in the way of the fort that they wanted to build.'

Nadim kept quiet. He felt sad and sorry with what Alauddin had just told him.

'But do discuss it with your brother, Muzaffar,' insisted Nadim. 'Who knows he might find the idea intriguing.'

'I'll try, but I won't be sure if he will agree to the suggestion. He might even find it repulsive. How could a reigning sultan just desert his country and people like that? If only the legendary Hang Tuah was still with us...'

'No, my father-in-law, could not do much even if he were around at his prime.'

Alauddin was surprised. 'Why do you say that? Are you not proud to be his first son-in-law?'

'Yes, I am.'

'Well, then: why did you say that? I have read many good deeds that he and his brother warriors, Jebat, Kasturi, Lekir and Lekiu had done for the sultans, my predecessors.'

Nadim shook his head as Alauddin observed. 'My late father-in-law, the late, *Almarhum* Admiral Tuah, was not what everybody had thought him to be. He was just an ordinary warrior, an admiral. He wasn't as heroic and fearless as everybody now thinks. He was just colorful, that's all and he appeared at a time when Melaka was searching for a hero. He had his style and grace and was quite adept at the *silat* and the art of self-defense and diplomacy. That's all... He left behind the supposedly magical Taming Sari *keris* with your ancestors. I suppose, your father, his majesty Sultan Mahmud Shah has it now.'

'Indeed. My ancestors did not keep the *keris*. Sultan Mansur Shah had taken it away from my father-in-law after he had outwitted and killed Jebat. In this way, the sultan thought he could be safe from harm.'

'Even then, we are unable to do much to outwit the Portuguese devils. If indeed the *keris* is magical, why can't we use its magic forces to drive them out to the sea where they rightly belong? And what do you think of the duel between Tuah and Jebat?'

'It was unnecessary. It didn't do anybody in Melaka any good.'

'Who could have done that? Karmawijaya?'

'There were people in Melaka who were bent in breaking up the bond between Tuah and Jebat, and they were successful. Only if Tuah had known better; only if Jebat had been less angry...'

'Only if...'

'I'm sure in years to come, the people of Melaka and the Malays, generally will assume that Tuah was more loyal to the sultan than to his friend. However, little would they know that the real issue was not about loyalty, but deceit. There were no winners; all were losers.'

Alauddin was disappointed at what he had just been told by Nadim. He just stared at his friend; he knew what his friend had said was right. Nadim now looked less gallant than he was before. He looked his age, around sixty. He was as old as Alauddin's father, Sultan Mahmud Shah himself. There was a long lull. Nadim kept quiet. He knew Alauddin was right. Alauddin then pulled out a copy of the Holy Koran and read a verse, quietly. It was the Verse or *Surah*

*Al-Baqarah* Megat Iskandar Shah was reading in the mosque when he died. He was eighty-four years. He read softly. His voice sounded melodious. Nadim was entranced. When he was finished reading the Holy Koran, he closed the book and kissed it. That was what he thought, although Parameswara might not have converted to Islam.

'Do you know that this was the verse that Megat Iskandar Shah read on the day he died? After he had finished the verse, he slumped to the side and died,' said Alauddin. 'It was good that he died just after reading god's words. But, he'd prefer if he had died in Mekkah.'

'Really?'

'My grandfather who related the story to my father told this to me, so I can carry it on to the next generation. This is how the story is passed down through the ages this way, through the word of mouth mostly. That's why I read it again and again, when I get every available opportunity. It gives me a lot of strength and confidence to continue to lead my people. He also encouraged the people to call themselves *Orang Melayu* (Malays) and use *Bahasa Melayu* (Malay language) and not known by their different ethnic backgrounds or used dialects - *Orang* and *Bahasa Palembang, Bugis, Minangkabau, Kampar, Jawa, Aceh* and so on. Now we are just *Orang* and *Bahasa Melayu*.'

'Yes, he was the one who 'created' the Malay race and language, Nadim. I'm sure he will be recognized for this. For without him the Malay race and language would not have evolved till today. And Melaka will be known for these more than the mercantile activities or political intrigues.'

'I hope so.' Alauddin stood up. Nadim looked up.

'And where're you going to?'

'I want to have my ablution at the stream, over there,' said Alauddin. 'Are you praying with me?'

'You go ahead first, Alauddin. We cannot pray together. I will pray after you have finished with yours. I have to keep an eye on each other.'

'Oh, yes, that's true.'

Alauddin went to a small stream in the bushes. He did not realize that he had left the manuscripts under the tree unattended. He poured his hands with water and recited the verses. He then turned around to see if Nadim was all right. Just then, two Portuguese soldiers appeared in the scene. They tried to creep closer to where Nadim was sitting. He stopped cleaning himself. He grabbed his *keris* and waited until one of the Portuguese soldiers was in full view. He then hurled the *keris* at his direction. It hit him in his chest.

'Nadim, watch out!' cried Alauddin. He immediately turned around. One of the Portuguese soldiers fell on the ground near him and died. He saw another

Portuguese soldier who was about to lurch at him. Nadim immediately moved aside. The sword was stuck on the tree. He then pulled his *keris* and stabbed it in his back instead. He fell on the ground in a pool of blood. Alauddin quickly rushed to Nadim's aid, but it was not necessary anymore as one of the two Portuguese soldiers had already died.

'That was close, too, Alauddin. Thanks,' said Nadim.

'You're welcome,' replied Alauddin.

'Looks like this place, too, is not safe. Come, let's go from here.'

'Come.'

They got on their horses and fled off. In their haste, they left the manuscripts under the tree. A third Portuguese soldier appeared in the scene after both Alauddin and Nadim had left. He cursed himself for allowing them to escape. He then saw the manuscripts and went to get them. He took a glance at the manuscripts and tore them to pieces with a sharp knife. Meanwhile, Alauddin and Nadim continued to rush on their horses through the woods. Alauddin then remembered something. He stopped.

'What's the matter?' asked Nadim.

'I left the manuscripts behind. I want to turn around and get them.'

'No! They might still be there!'

Alauddin turned his horse around. But, Nadim stopped it before it could move ahead.

'Stay here, Alauddin. It's very dangerous to return to the place. There might be hundreds of them by now. You know how the Portuguese behave, if their men had died.'

Alauddin thought hard. 'But, the manuscripts are all that we have now.'

'We can get the royal scribes to re-write them. Your life is more precious than the manuscripts.'

Alauddin kept quiet. He just shook his head. Nadim patted his back.

'We'll get new manuscripts.'

'They won't be the same.'

'As long as you have the stories in your head, the royal scribes will be able to write them. Come, let's go.'

They then sped off.

'The Portuguese will never get whatever they are hoping to get in Melaka, Nadim,' said Alauddin as they sped off.

'Why?'

'We, the Malays are not that dumb as what they thought. Islam will spread like wildfire throughout this region and they won't be able to convert any Malay and turn Melaka into the center of their religion.'

Nadim and Alauddin sped off on their horses heading towards their new hiding place where Mahmud, his men and followers were. They only stopped at a secluded place in the jungle to pray. They did not get the opportunity to do it at the beach because the Portuguese soldiers hounded them. Therefore, they had to make do by having their ablution by using clean earth in the *tayammum* style instead of clean water, as it Islam allowed it, bearing the circumstances. Mahmud and his men, too, often had to make do with clean earth to clean themselves before they prayed when they were deep in the jungles where there was no stream, river or lakes.

Munawar, the sultan of Kampar visited the villagers who lived in the villages around the palace, as was his habit. Every week he would visit a new village, just to get to know them better and to find out their problems. Nadim walked briskly and went to him. He couldn't wait for the sultan to return to the palace to inform him of the news on Melaka.

'Well, Nadim, what have you brought for me from there?' asked Munawar.

'It's impossible now,' said Nadim.

'Why is that so?'

'The Portuguese are so securely established now. They're everywhere. And they have fortified themselves within the solid fort. But, they look more like prisoners than victors do. What's worse, many of the people of Melaka have begun to accept them, especially the non-Malays and the other non-Muslims, your majesty, however much they hate them.

'Can't blame them for behaving like that; they just don't want to get in trouble with the Portuguese. They're huge, like giants, your majesty, and they're mean; they hardly smile. The people in Melaka are very frightened of them. The sight of the Portuguese soldiers walking down the street is enough to frighten them. The young kids cry when they see them.'

Munawar thought. Nadim waited. He was sure he had given the sultan the latest picture of what was happening in Melaka based on what they personally had seen with their own eyes the last time they were there. The situation could be worse now. He thought it was difficult for any ruler to command his army to rush to Melaka to try to defeat the Portuguese. Nadim's description of the situation in Melaka made it Sultan Munawar think how impossible for him to try to engage the Portuguese in battle anymore. He knew his military resources were not sufficient to defeat them.

'And where is Raja Alauddin?' said Munawar.

'With his father, his majesty Sultan Mahmud Shah,' said Nadim.

'I'll have to confer with my brother, Munawar. I've a new proposal to make. I hope he'll agree to it.'

'What is it, your majesty?'

'I can't tell you right away. I'll have to discuss it with him first.'

'Very well, do let me know as soon as it is possible.'

'I surely will.'

The villagers greeted their sultan and shouted repeatedly, 'Long live Sultan Munawar Shah! Long live Sultan Munawar Shah!'

Munawar shook their hands. His carriage continued on its journey back to the palace. It then stopped in the compound. He got out. Fatimah appeared at the door. She was surprised to see the sultan there unannounced. He had never visited them at their palace so early that day. Surely, he had something very important to discuss with her husband, she thought. '*Asalamulaikum*'. Yes, my dear brother.'

'*Mulaikum salam*. Is my dear Hang Mahmud in?' asked Munawar.

'He's at the mosque over there, my dear Brother Munawar.'

'Very well, I'll go and see him there then.'

Fatimah nodded. Munawar returned to his carriage and it took him to the mosque.

Mahmud finished his prayers. He was alone in the mosque. Munawar went to main hall and sat beside Mahmud. He turned and saw Munawar there. He shook Munawar's hand.

'I've received news from Nadim and your son regarding the situation in Melaka, my dear brother,' said Munawar.

'I have, too,' said Mahmud. 'And I'm greatly distressed because what they'd told me.'

'Don't give up, my dear brother. I'm wondering if you would like me to inquire with our brother sultans in other states.'

'What about, my Brother Munawar?'

'They might be able to help us defeat the Portuguese. They...'

'I doubt it.'

'But, let me write to them and see.'

Mahmud stood up; he walked to the door. Munawar followed him.

The sultan of Siak read the letter and shook his head. The prime minister of Kampar waited. 'I'm afraid we can't commit ourselves in the war between Sultan Mahmud Shah and the Portuguese. Firstly, we have nothing against the Portuguese, and secondly, the Portuguese aren't a threat to us. They're too far away from us here in Siak. Unless, if they've said that they're going to attack



us, too; then we've a good reason to help Sultan Mahmud Shah since we've been dragged in. As it is, we prefer to let Sultan Mahmud Shah settle the problem himself with the Portuguese. We can only hope and pray that he and his men will be successful this time, for Allah helps those who help themselves.'

'Yes, indeed, but...' said the prime minister of Kampar.

'I'm sorry, prime minister. You just have to return to Kampar empty-handed. Inform Sultan Munawar Shah of our position. Besides, my other relatives still remember vividly how his majesty's soldiers had come from Melaka to this country once before and destroyed it. It took us so many years to recover from the loss of our ruler. We now prefer to be on our own and hopefully, be away from any harm.'

'Very well; if that's the case, I will leave your majesty. I thank you for the time, just the same. I shall proceed to Palembang now.'

'Very well.'

The sultan of Palembang read the letter, stone-faced, without showing any expression. The prime minister of Kampar waited. He didn't show what to expect from him. But, he could guess what he was thinking of. His answer would be similar to the sultan of Siak's.

'I'm afraid, we won't agree to be drawn in the personal war between Sultan Mahmud Shah and the people from 'the land above wind'. We agree that Sultan Mahmud Shah is a direct descendant of our earlier sultans here in Palembang. But, we simply can't poke our noses in other people's affairs, lest we'll suffer,' said the sultan of Palembang. Besides, our family ties were severed for so long. Many of us still remembered how Megat Iskandar fled Palembang and because of that we weren't thrilled to learn long ago that he had founded for himself a new country called Melaka.'

'Very well, your majesty,' said the prime minister of Kampar. He was utterly disappointed with the reaction.

He then walked with his prime minister along the corridor of the palace. The guards who were standing there stood erect when they approached. 'Good day, your majesty,' they said. The two gentlemen nodded. 'At ease, my brave men,' said the sultan. The guards then moved their position and stood at ease.

'This should serve him right; Sultan Mahmud Shah must be taught a lesson. It was fortunate that the Portuguese were able to defeat him and chase him out of Melaka, so that we won't have to pay homage to him,' said the sultan of Palembang to the prime minister.

'True, your majesty. We are not beholden to anyone. Furthermore, the Portuguese have said that they had no designs on us, or any other Malay state in the region, they only wanted to capture Melaka,' said the prime minister.

Munawar sat cross-legged in the verandah. His prime minister sat near him at the ready to receive any orders from him. 'I'm disappointed in all my brother sultans. Couldn't they look at the greater issues here? We are a Malay race, and Islam is our common religion. Can't they see that those foreigners are out to undermine our race and religion?' he said. 'They don't seem to be able to see the wider picture.'

'I have tried to reason with them, your majesty, but, they were not willing to listen,' said the prime minister. 'They were firm with their decisions. It was so solid, it was difficult to bend it, even slightly.'

Munawar shook his head. His prime minister just kept quiet. There was nothing that he could do. Munawar continued to shake his head feeling greatly disappointed. No words could describe his frustration.

Mahmud sat with his cousin, Munawar, at the Kampar palace later that night. Before them was a tray of betel leaves box. They helped themselves to the *sireh* that were stuck in it. It was quite late at night, but they were not sleepy.

'What do you say if we recite some poetry or *pantun*, my dear Brother Mahmud. It's been such a long time when we last exchanged the *pantun*.' He wanted to cheer up Mahmud because he looked crestfallen and dispirited since he first stepped foot at Kampar. Fortunately, he didn't put the blame on god, but his sheer bad luck and on himself alone. There was a lesson to be learnt from all this, thought Mahmud.

'Go ahead,' replied Mahmud. 'But do excuse me if my words do not flow like water like they used to.'

'Oh, don't underestimate yourself; you were good.'

'My mind now is not sharp and focused like it used to be, my brother.'

'Shall we proceed now? I'll start off. Sultan Mahmud nodded. Munawar paused to find the right opening imagery and the message that he wanted to convey to his cousin. He then said:

'Two tigers are running with the wind,  
Never do they realize how cruel life can be;  
Today my dear brother is here with me,  
What do you now expect to see?'

Mahmud pondered over the opening stanza. He then replied:

Two tigers run and they tumble,  
They stand up and rush in a grove;  
Here I am feeling grateful and humbled,  
By my brother's support and warm love.'

Munawar pondered and smiled. He didn't know how to reply. Mahmud waited impatiently. Mahmud remembered something and then said:

'What if the tigers stop to rush?  
And they drink until they're stable?  
What if I, your brother were to ask?  
Stay here, a piece of land is available.'

Mahmud now knew what his cousin had wanted to tell him. He replied thus:

'I profusely thank my Brother Munawar,  
For his majesty's kind and gracious offer;  
Melaka's still the one and no other,  
My heart is with her, forever and ever!'

Munawar then stopped. He stared at his stepbrother. He knew he couldn't tempt him anymore. He knew he couldn't convince Mahmud to change his mind, ever. 'Do accept my kind offer, my Brother Mahmud; a piece of land is available for you and your followers to stay. We can build a new palace for you. And if you'd prefer, it'll be the exact replica as the one you had in Melaka and a bigger one and in a space as wide and land as bountiful, if not more. You can rule over the people in the surrounding areas. They will all be delighted to be under your command. We've the artisans and workers who can copy to the smallest details of your former palace. There's even a river, and its mouth that extends to the straits of Melaka, just like Melaka. There might even be a rare white mousedeer in the jungles. And like Megat Iskandar, you can found your own country here. And you can call it Melaka, too. Let the Portuguese keep old Melaka while you open a new one. You can find a new spot on the banks of the straits of Melaka, too.'

Mahmud kept quiet. 'I'm grateful for your kind help, my dear brother, but I won't be doing my people a service if I accept your offer. My mission now is not to find peace for me. I have to get it for my people, too. My is what my heart says.'

'Think about it, my dear Hang Mahmud; take your time. This is all that I can do for you while you and your followers are here with us. We have so much land, besides. And we can work together to make Kampar a prosperous country.

'We are not in any position to distress the Portuguese, or they will come after us. We don't have any means to defend ourselves if attacked by them.'

Mahmud nodded. 'My dear son, whose name is also Alauddin, had also suggested it to me. He said Nadim had asked me to think about it. This is the only way out of our problems, he says, but I just could not do it. And my son, Alauddin now feels the same way, too. I'm glad he agreed with me, or I will be in a dilemma.'

Munawar kept quiet. He just stared at his cousin, Mahmud and felt sorry for him.

'My men have been staying loyal to my son and me. So how could I just put them aside and found another country? They had stood beside me, and we together fought our main enemy, the Portuguese, the 'White Bengalis', as we call them. We fought hard, but luck wasn't on our side.

'You know, Brother Munawar, we even fought through the holy month of *Ramadan*. When Muslims everywhere in this region and here were fasting and performing their religious obligations, we were in the jungles, fighting. We fasted. None of our men skipped even a day of fasting except of course, some women and the young children. We fought and fought. We used whatever that we could lay our hands on, arrows, *tombak* (spears), *buluh rencong* (sharpened bamboo sticks, *perisai* (shields) and what have you.

'But, what else could we do? Luck wasn't on our side. May be there were some useful lessons that we could learn from our mistake. We Malays and Muslims call it, *iktibar* or valuable lesson.

'May be it was good that the sultanate of Melaka collapse, so that Islam will continue to triumph and the Malays will be united through our grief and the destruction of Melaka. The infidels may have captured Melaka, but they won't be able to spread their influence throughout the Malay World. The Malays will triumph and they will continue to be faithful to Islam!'

Munawar nodded. 'I can't agree with you more, my brother. It's happening even now as we are sitting here in Kampar. Our Malay brothers and sisters will resist if they dare to go to other states. Besides, Melaka is already well known that even the straits that lie between Sumatra Island and the Malay Peninsula is called the straits of Melaka.'

Mahmud cried. He pulled out a handkerchief from his shirt pocket and wiped the tears. He continued to grab the Taming Sari *keris* he had been holding since he left Melaka.

'How could we fight the Portuguese? They wear leather shoes and use deadly firearms the kinds we had not seen before, while we only wear sandals - *capals*. Many of my men had to walk about barefooted and we carry weapons that have been obsolete? The *keris* and spears and even arrows are no match for them! Even his Taming Sari *keris* is not helpful. It is supposed to be magical and those who possess it won't be harmed. This is the only property that I have with me and I shall give it to one of my sons so he may hand it down to his children. Taming Sari *keris*.'

Munawar just sat there looking like a statue and feeling more sorry for him.

'They wear metal *songkok*s and clothes, while my men only wear cotton clothes and headgear...'

'God is on your side, my Hang Mahmud.'

'There were some of the *tangkays* and Malays who 'stabbed' me behind my back. They are a traitor - *pembelot*!'

Munawar patted Mahmud's back. Mahmud nodded. He was defeated. His age didn't make him any better. If he was ten years younger, he would be willing to take all risks. But, he was now close to his 'term on this earth', as he would say it. 'Yes, but it's fated - fated by god, by Allah the Mighty, for He alone knows what is good for me and all of us. My ancestors since Megat Iskandar had founded and developed Melaka. The whole sea in front of it is called the Straits of Melaka. The sea is not called the Straits of Sumatra or another state, but the Straits of Melaka.

'But why is it me who has to see the fall of the state? I feel bad for my ancestors - all of them. I hope they will forgive me. The Portuguese had demolished the mosque and palace that Megat Iskandar Shah built. And they had also totally desecrated and demolished the royal mausoleum where all my ancestors are buried and lying in their eternal bliss.

'Now I am beginning to feel that the Portuguese had attacked and capture Melaka with only one aim.'

'Oh, what is it?'

'They want to break our resolve to spread Islam throughout the region and elsewhere. They will fail. Our people will contain them only in Melaka -- in the fort that they are building for themselves. No, they won't be able to extend their influence and destroy the faith of our people!'

'Yes, I am sure. Even now, they are not able to come to Sumatra.' Munawar feared for him. His cousin now looked sickly. His body had emaciated even

further and he could see the difference. He knew Mahmud was on the verge of self-destruction and there was no strength left in him. All the traveling and fighting had left him paralyzed. Living in forced exile had its disadvantages, especially to a man his age. He was not used to living in such an unpredictable exilic state, especially at a time when he should be spending his last few years with his grandchildren and at pray and meditation in the mosque.

That night, Mahmud went to the mosque, as he would always do after the late night *isyak* prayers. Being an old man, he didn't have much need for sleep early. Besides, he was restless about what was happening to Melaka. He could even be said to be suffering from insomnia. He read the Holy Koran. It was also the same verse his great-great-great grandfather, Megat Iskandar had read when he stumbled to the side and died, at age eighty-four in 1424 CE or 827 AH or 4122 of the Chinese calendar. The lord chamberlain was shocked to see him lying on the floor. He looked at the page and saw the verse he was reading. He continued to read the verse until the last sentence. He then closed the Holy Koran and remembered what he had discussed with Munawar earlier, after their *pantun* session. Munawar had asked if Mahmud was willing to negotiate with the Portuguese to see if they were willing to surrender unconditionally. Alternatively, if this failed to impress them, they could negotiate some sort of agreement that would allow Mahmud to return to Melaka. He could then be allowed to live in the hinterland with his followers; and he had to promise that he would not harm the Portuguese.

Mahmud vehemently disagreed with such a proposal because he believed that Melaka wasn't an issue that could be negotiated. 'Melaka is my country, my dear brother,' demanded he.

'I know, but you're now at no position to bargain. The best that you can do is to negotiate with them,' said Munawar.

'No way, my brother.'

'Why not?'

Mahmud didn't answer. And Munawar kept quiet. He knew Mahmud wasn't particular happy with the proposal. Furthermore, he felt the Portuguese wouldn't even want to deal with them anymore as they felt that they had now owned the whole of Melaka. So, why must they negotiate? He walked down the stairs thinking about the question. He was feeling so weak. Both his legs were wobbling slightly. Fortunately, he had a walking stick; otherwise, he could have fallen.

Last night he couldn't sleep. He stared at the ceiling above and thought about Melaka, his people whom had left there. He thought of Megat Iskandar or Parameswara, of the *melaka* tree, of the Bertam Village and Bertam River

where his ancestors had stopped. Little did they realize that the small fishing village that they saw, could now become a large city. Megat Iskandar would be delighted tremendously if he knew how much Melaka had changed. But, alas the country that he and his successors, all seven of them, including Mahmud, had now fallen in foreign hands. How could they come from so far and invade a country that was already with a ruler? What civilization did they say they were that allowed them to invade another country and claimed for themselves, and their rulers?

Mahmud rolled to the left and then right. He stirred in bed; his mind became groggier; sometimes he dreamt that he was Megat Iskandar. Whatever that he had read in the manuscripts he had stored in the underground dungeon below his palace in Melaka returned to haunt him. He recalled incident that appeared in many brief vignettes. They came and went. He began to sweat. Soon his clothes were soaked. He became more restless. 'Please forgive me, great-great-great-great-grandpa Parameswara - er, Megat Iskandar Shah!' he shouted.

Fatimah rushed to his bedroom. She opened the door and stood inside the room near the door. She saw her husband sitting cross-legged on his bed like he was in a trance. He was sweating all over. 'Were you dreaming, dear?'

The sultan didn't answer. He just sat and stared into void. 'I dreamt of great-great-great-grandfather Megat Iskandar coming to see me. He was so angry with me that he slapped my face.'

Fatimah entered the bedroom and sat on the side of the bed. She then went to the windows and flung them open to allow cool air from outside to enter the room. She stared outside of the window and gulped a lung's full of fresh air to freshen himself up. She then turned around and went to her husband. 'Say the *syabadah*, the affirmation to Allah, my dear husband,' she suggested. 'Do you want me to get the Holy Men to come and give you some holy water, so the devils will not haunt you?'

'I'm not being haunted, my dear wife. I just had a nasty dream that's all.'

'Yes, my dear. Now please return to sleep. You haven't had a good night sleep for a long time, since we left Melaka.'

Mahmud lay on the bed.

'Are you sure?' asked Fatimah.

Mahmud didn't answer.

'Call me should you need me.'

Mahmud nodded. Fatimah went away and closed the door. Mahmud closed his eyes, but he still couldn't fall asleep.

Next day, Fatimah saw her husband, Mahmud walking away from the guest palace. She stood at the verandah and let both her hands dangled at the side. Mahmud turned and saw his son, now crown prince of Melaka, Alauddin walking in the compound. What did he want, asked Mahmud to himself. 'Did you call him, my dear?' the sultan asked his wife.

'Yes, I did, my dear husband,' said Fatimah. 'I want him to accompany you on your walk.' She then turned to look at Alauddin. 'Would you be kind and walk with your father, my dear son Alauddin?'

'Sure, dear mother,' said Alauddin. 'I'll be happy to walk with father, so we can talk together. It's been so long since we sat together.'

'Come then. It is a good and fine day, isn't it, son?'

'Yes, father, it sure is.'

They walked together. Fatimah looked from the house. She felt sorry for the two men, her husband for being expelled from Melaka and for their eldest son, and crown prince of Melaka, for not being able to succeed him as the eighth sultan of Melaka. Most of all she felt sorry for the people who were still in Melaka who had to face severe persecution under their new rulers, the Portuguese. She knew her husband was distraught. He was told by Nadim few days earlier how the Portuguese not only had burnt down the mosque that sat by the side of the Melaka River Megat Iskandar had built. They had also destroyed the palace on the Melaka Hill that they now called the St. Paul's Hill. Worse, when they also had completely destroyed the royal mausoleum where Megat Iskandar and all the succeeding sultans of Melaka had laid in their eternal rest. Mahmud couldn't sleep or eat for days upon hearing this. It made him very weak and lifeless. It made him feel sad.

They continued to walk together. A Malay man greeted them when they got to the other end of the village path.

'*Asalamulaikum*, Your Majesties Sultan Mahmud, Raja Alauddin,' said the Malay man.

'*Mulaikum salam*,' said Mahmud.

'*Mulaikum salam*,' said Alauddin.

The man kissed their hand and walked away.

'Listen son, I want you to remember always that Melaka was a great country. Our ancestors found it and turned a small fishing village into an important port. Many foreign traders from as far as China, India and Arabia came to trade there.

But, all was lost when the Portuguese came and captured it. And that is why we are here in Kampar, living in exile. Promise me this: I want you to do whatever is necessary to recapture Melaka and chase the Portuguese out of the



Malay World once and for all. You must be the next sultan of Melaka,' said Mahmud.

'Yes, father,' said Alauddin. He feared that his father's mind was getting groggy with age. And being on the run at his advanced age only managed to make his health worse by the day. He hoped his father was well and in good health. He prayed to Allah that his father would live long enough to see that the Portuguese were trounced and sent back to where they had come from.

'Good, good,' was all that Mahmud could say. He coughed. It sounded hollow. He walked to the mosque. He had his ablution at the tap with his son. They then went to the mosque proper then removed their slippers and climbed on the stairs and entered the main hall. He went to the front of the hall. He stood and got ready to pray. He collapsed and died. Alauddin stopped praying. He turned around and was shocked. It was in 1528 CE or 1030 AH, in the Chinese calendar year of the rat or *zi* in 4226, two years after he arrived in Kampar.

The new scribe, Tun Sri Lanang who wrote 'The Malay Annals' or *Sejarah Melayu (Sulalatus Salatin)*, seven years after the sultan's death, later described his demise in great detail. Now the responsibilities of carrying out the campaign to wrest Melaka from the Portuguese had fallen on shoulders of Alauddin who would soon be known as Sultan Muzaffar Shah, the pretender to the throne of the Melaka sultanate. He succeeded his late brother, Sultan Ahmad Shah who died two years earlier under mysterious circumstances.

Mahmud's body was wrapped in a simple white piece of cloth. It was carried over the shoulders of his son, Alauddin and close male relatives. They passed few streets in Kampar, not for a parade, but because they had to pass that way to go to the patch of land near the fringes of the jungles. This was where Mahmud had asked for him to be buried. He did not want to have a fanciful grave either. So, they buried him in a simple hole and covered it with earth. This was how he wanted to be buried. Mahmud didn't want to be accorded with a royal burial, despite being a sultan. He felt he didn't deserved to be treated as one since he did not have a country.

Regardless of his feelings, thousands of people still lined both sides of the road to pay their last respects to him. They called him Marhum Kampar. Many were crying. They scented threw flower petals before the cortege, led by Fatimah and Mahmud's other wife, Kudu and eldest son, Sultan Muzaffar Shah, the pretender to the throne of Melaka, his consort Sultanah Tenang, Amra Dewi and Munawar and his sultanah. They were all wearing white.

Mahmud's body was laid to rest. Munawar, the state dignitaries stood in total silence near the freshly dug grave surrounded by hundreds of his followers who had come from Melaka with him.

Nadim went to Alauddin. He was sitting on a wooden bench alone. He pondered over his future. It was now more uncertain than before, now that his father had died. He was now alone, with practically nobody to turn to. His claim to the throne of Melaka had now become the furthest thing in his mind. With his father alive, there was still a glimmer of hope that they could recapture Melaka, and hence be able to ascend to the throne as his father's successor as sultan of Melaka, Sultan Alauddin, the eighth sultan of Melaka. He also felt sorry for Nadim, who'd otherwise be appointed his prime minister.

'I'm sorry, your majesty,' said Nadim.

'That's okay, Nadim. I'm just sorry that my late father could not return to Melaka. He'd be much happier if he could die there and be buried in the royal cemetery,' said Alauddin. 'But, I'm really not a real sultan of Melaka, just the pretender to the throne of Melaka.'

'But, you will one day be a real sultan.'

'Oh'

'His majesty Sultan Munawar wants to install you as the new sultan of Melaka. And he has asked me to inform you about this. Are you agreeable to this proposal?'

'I'm afraid not, my dear Nadim; how could I ever be installed the sultan of Melaka when I'm not in Melaka and now with the people?'

'Why not?'

'I must be installed in the palace and in the full view of the state dignitaries, and be paraded throughout the state for everybody to see. This is our tradition. You surely know that.'

'Yes, I do, but, you is now living in exile in Kampar. Your installation as the next sultan of Melaka will give encouragement to the people in Melaka. They won't feel like you have deserted them like the do now.'

'No, Nadim, I've given it a serious thought. I've spent many sleepless nights pondering over this matter. I'll only agree to be the sultan of Melaka if and when Melaka is recaptured and that I'm in Melaka with my own people. I will be the next sultan of Perak. I will be called Sultan Muzaffar Shah. This was what my late father had wanted me to do. And I shall go to Perak soon to be the first sultan of that state. And I will be taking along the Taming Sari *keris* that was given to me by my late father to take care. This is the only possession that I have from the sultanate. And I shall treasure it as it was the only thing

that I had got from my late father, the Almahrum Kampar, a name that the people of Kampar had given him.'

'What about your younger brothers?'

'He'll do as what my late father had ordered - to go to Pahang and Johor later where they will be installed the sultan there. And as for my sisters, they will have to follow their husbands wherever they choose to live at.'

'I see.'

Nadim kept quiet. He knew that there was no way for him to convince Alauddin. The sultanate of Melaka that his ancestors had founded which had lasted for more than one hundred and eleven years was on the verge of collapse. There was no way that anybody could do to change what had been fated. Nadim said he believed in fate. He believed in Allah and the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. Deep inside him, he knew that the fate of Melaka had been sealed. Alauddin was destined not to be the next sultan of Melaka. However difficult and painful it was for him to accept what had happened, yet he still accepted it as something that had been fated by Allah.

'I will go on now, back to Perak and my younger brother will go to Pahang where my brother-in-law, Sultan Muhammad Shah of Pahang needs him. My younger brother, Raja Zainal Abidin, too, will go to Pahang,' said Alauddin. 'Sultan Muhammad Shah is the elder brother of my wife, Sultanah Tenang. May be from Pahang, I can chart out any plan to capture Melaka from the Portuguese, with my brother-in-law's help.'

Alauddin prayed that the people of Melaka would live in peace; and that the Portuguese would treat them kindly. This was all that he could do. He then dropped onto both his knees, he cupped his face and cried. Nadim stood there and watched. He felt sorry for him, for Melaka and its people. He felt most sorry for the late Ahmad, for being killed mercilessly at the instigation of his own father, Mahmud. But, Nadim wasn't interested to tell Alauddin about what indeed had happened. He found out that Ahmad had a huge row with his father over the sultan's involvement with un-Islamic activities. Unknown to many, the sultan had frolicked with Chinese women in the palace and smoking opium or *madat* that the Chinese traders and merchants had brought to the palace. They in turn received many parcels of land and could invade duties and smuggled their goods and gold back to China in caskets. As a result, the sultanate became almost bankrupt. Mahmud was shocked to hear of this and ordered his son's execution. If his grandfather, Mansur had done similar deed, by ordering the execution of Hang Tuah, surely, he could do similar things and ordered the execution of his own son, the crown prince. Nobody in Kampar, including Sultan Munawar of Kampar knew about this. Nadim kept the secret

to himself. He had given serious thought about running amok and destroying Mahmud following the death of Ahmad, but he realized quickly that it wasn't the right thing to do. He didn't want to repeat what Jebat, who was his late father Tuah's best friend had done, and learnt a valuable lesson from this episode. Nadim just prayed that Muzaffar and Tenang would be accorded respect and be able to live peacefully. They hoped, one day he could also become sultan.

Alauddin, his consort, Tenang, Nadim, his senior officials and followers sailed to Perak, by way of Siak and Kelang. Lord Saban, one of the chiefs from Perak was with them. He was delighted with the prospect of his state having its first sultan and was happy to be returning there with Alauddin. Sultan Mahmud Shah had earlier agreed to his request to send Alauddin to Perak.

His uncle, Munawar of Kampar and elder brother, Muzaffar and their families and other state officials sent him off after they had paid a visit to the grave of the late Mahmud to pay their respects. Alauddin was crying softly; he knew he was leaving everyone behind, with a heavy heart. He wiped his tears with a handkerchief his wife gave him. He felt reluctant to leave Kampar and his elder brother and mother behind. But, he had to go to Pahang, as he had a better chance of being appointed a sultan there. Everybody who was there was emotional; they too, cried on seeing how sad the sultan was. Even Tenang couldn't stand and she too shed some tears. Alauddin would be heading for Perak where he hoped both of them could launch more attacks on the Portuguese from there.

After the Kampar state *mufti* had recited some prayers, Alauddin and his entourage left the royal cemetery. He immediately went to the riverbanks where his ship was ready to take him to Siak. He hugged his uncle, Munawar tightly. Both didn't know when they would be able to see each other again. Munawar prayed that his nephew be protected by Allah the Almighty. The state *mufti* then offered Alauddin, his followers and officials blessings before he stepped foot in his new ship that would take him across the Straits of Melaka to Siak, to his new country. From here, he was to proceed to Kelang in the Malay Peninsula where a new future awaited him.

The captain had discussed the journey and told the sultan that he would be avoiding Melaka as much as possible. This was the best route that they could take in order to avoid detection by the Portuguese. Their ships, boats and spies were placed at strategic places in the straits; there was no way for any ship, especially the one that was flying the flag of Alauddin could pass through without it being detected. It would be dangerous if this were to happen. Alauddin did not take too long to accept the proposal. And as an added

precaution, the captain also suggested that some Melaka men were placed along the coast of the island so as to further ensure that the Portuguese wouldn't go there by land to surprise them. This was agreed to unanimously. He thought it was a brilliant idea. In no time, few boats took a hundred men from Kampar in Sumatra to go to Perak in the northern part of the Malay Peninsula. They immediately stationed themselves along the coast where their sultan's ship would be passing by. They did not wear their uniform, but used ordinary clothes of the locals so that they didn't attract attention to their presence there. They mingled with the local folks and pretended to be fishing or sitting by the beach and swimming in the sea like anybody there would do. Fortunately, no untoward incident happened the whole time they were stationed there; Alauddin's ship was able to sail unhindered until it finally made their way to their destination.

Now that was quickly decided, they decided to set sail north along the coast of Sumatra Island in the straits of Melaka. In this way, the Portuguese who were in Melaka would not notice them. The Portuguese men and spies had been duped into thinking that the sultan and his men would sneak into the straits by this way. In this way, Alauddin's men didn't have to bring down the sultan's flag and royal colors and let them flutter gloriously in the winds like it always did. Their ships plied in the straits with the men keeping a lookout for the any ships, especially those belonging to Muzaffar.

Meanwhile, Alauddin's younger brothers and their entourage sailed from Kampar and arrived in Pahang and Johor respectively where the local chiefs received them gladly. They were happy to see them. Alauddin was installed the first sultan of Perak as it was his late father's wish, and was called Sultan Muzaffar Shah, his grandfather's namesake. The sultan was especially close to his late grandfather when he was a child until his grandfather's death in 1488 CE or 893 AH or 4186 of the Chinese calendar.

Not long afterwards, after he had settled down in Perak, Muzaffar immediately started to launch numerous land and naval attacks on the Portuguese. He felt that as a sultan he had the backing of his own country and people. He did not want to wait any longer; he wanted to surprise the Portuguese who were still in Melaka. He was doing it for his late father, Mahmud and the people of Melaka. They had come with him to Kampar and later came to Perak where he was now. Mostly, he was doing it for his followers and supporters who were still in Melaka. They could not run away and were stranded in Melaka. He wanted to save all of them and wrest control

of Melaka from the Portuguese. Unfortunately, the Portuguese who were now fully entrenched in Melaka managed to repel his forces.

## EPILOGUE

It was 1530 CE or 1032 AH, in the year of the tiger in 4228. Melaka had been under the Portuguese for nineteen years now. How fast time has flown! It was one hundred and thirty years after Melaka was founded on the very banks of the Melaka River where Mr. Salleh was standing. It was called the Bertam River then, but now hardly anyone knew its former name anymore; it had been erased from everybody's memory. The peninsula was known as *Semenanjung Tanah Melayu* or the Malay Peninsula. It was originally called *Hujung Tanah* or literally, 'the ends of the earth.' He had heard stories of what his ancestors had believed then. They were fearful of the loud thunder each time it clapped or lightning flashed. And they would chant, 'Please unknown spirits of the jungles and water, save us! Please unknown spirits of the jungles and water, save us!' endlessly like their lives depended on it.

The name Melayu or Malay had now become more accepted and the people called the Malays or *Bangsa Melayu* were dominant, had also been accepted as a race. Their language called the Malay language or *Bahasa Melayu*. Many attributed the 'creation' of the Malay race and language or *Bangsa dan Bahasa Melayu* to Parameswara who founded the state and hence helped to develop them. This language was being widely used, not just by the traders but by the ordinary folks. New words were added from the foreigners who had come to Melaka either to trade or to attack it. It had now become known by many people both in the 'lands above the wind' and 'lands below the wind' and the Malay World of Southeast Asia. And at the same spot where he was sitting, was the exact place where his great-great-great-grandfather, Samun had probably squatted together with his friends. They had come here to stare at 'the eye of the sun' or *matahari* as they called the sun then, as they still did now.

But, Salleh's fascination with the sun was not the same as that of his ancestors and their friends in ancient Bertam Village. Salleh knew that the sun rose at dawn and disappeared at dusk. It was not an unusual phenomenon; it was a daily occurrence, an act of god. He and his friends were not unusually distracted by it. Worse of all, they did not pray to it and to seek its blessings.

Now, they were seeking their blessings only from Allah. They now had a religion and they were wearing clothes that covered more of their body than their ancestors were. They could also speak in Malay, but in rhymes, and their sentences were longer and more structured, with few foreign words that they had learnt from the Chinese, Indian, Arabs and Portuguese. This does not discount the many words that they had incorporated from the other Malay dialects in the Southeast Asian region.

Salleh like all the Muslims in Melaka had studied and understood the Holy Koran diligently for hours each day. Some of his friends and other relatives and ancestors, too, had gone on the pilgrimage to Mekkah in the Arabian Peninsula where they performed the *Haj* together with people from all parts of the world. They spoke not a word of Malay and who looked entirely different from them.

*Portugis dah memerintah Melaka sekian lama, hampir tiga puluh tahun, tapi apakah yang mereka telah lakukan?*' asked Salleh. (The Portuguese are in Melaka for so long, almost thirty years; what have they done?)

*'Ab, apa yang mereka boleh lakukan, Salleh?'* asked Kamaruddin. (Ah, what can they do Salleh?)

*Tau apa sebabnya?* (Do you know why?)

His friends kept quiet.

*'Sebab Portugis tak ada kuasa nak langgar negeri-negeri Melayu lain di Nusantara, dan mereka tak boleh tarik pedagang ke pelabuhan di Melaka seperti dalam zaman Kesultanan Melayu dulu, dan mereka juga tidak boleh sebar dakyah agama mereka diantara orang kita! Itulah sebabnya!'* (Because the Portuguese could not attack the other Malay states in the Southeast Asian region, and they cannot attract the traders to come here unlike during the sultanate years, and they are also unable to spread their religion amongst us, that's why!)

*'Itulah juga sebabnya kenapa Portugis suka adakan rancangan tarian dan nyanyian dalam kota mereka...supaya askar mereka boleh berhibur dan lupakan kesengsaraan mereka tinggal di perantauan!'* added Salleh. (This is the reason why the Portuguese like to organize dance and singing shows in their fort...so that their soldiers can be entertained and made to forget about their frustrations at having to live abroad!)

It was true; the Portuguese were unable to develop Melaka. The country's economic growth was stunted, and they were also unable to turn Melaka into their center for the spread of their religion especially amongst the Malays who were already staunch Muslims. Few attempts were made at converting them, but each time they were met by an angry people who persecuted the Portuguese soldiers. After a few of their soldiers had been slaughtered and

their bodies dumped into the Melaka River by the Malay men in the villages, the Portuguese authorities stopped this effort and left the Malays on their own.

There were now many Malays who were of mixed marriages, between the Malays and Bugis, Achehnese, Javanese, Maluku, Siamese, Chinese, the Sea-People or *Orang Laut*, Indians. This was how the population of the Malays increased, mostly because they professed the same religion, Islam and spoke the Malay language. And with it, they managed to harmonize their cultural, social and culinary experiences, tastes and preferences that somehow developed into the mainstream Malay life and identity. Even the traditional Malay music now included influences from all the cultures that they had encountered ever since Melaka became a reality, although the Malays did not take to using chopsticks when eating, as it hindered their eating style. They still preferred to eat with their right hands. The Portuguese influenced even the art of the *pantun* and *ronggeng* dance steps.

After his conversion to Islam and the trip to China, Megat Iskandar introduced a policy of accommodation. He encouraged the interaction between the local Malays and the non-Malays particularly the Chinese and other Malays from the neighboring states such as the Javanese, Bugis, Achehnese, Maluku and so on. This helped to infuse Chinese and Indian, Arab, Portuguese cultural and linguistic elements in the Malay culture, traditions and even language. This was how Melaka became the bastion of the Malay culture, traditions and language in the region. This helped to influence the other Malay states into adopting the Malay language as their own national language. This encouraged the Malays from different dialect groups to unite to form a formidable race that dominate the Southeast Asian region known as the Malay World or *Nusantara Melayu*.

But, the Malays, Indians and Arabs liked to look at the way the Chinese men and women used them. They were surprised that they put the rice in a small round bowl, which they hold on the left hand and use the two chopsticks to flick some rice and eat it. They then took vegetables and other foods with the same chopsticks and put them in their mouth and chewed. All this while they squatted on the wooden chairs in the food stalls. They thought it was amazing the way they ate. Even the small Chinese boys and girls were adept at using the chopsticks. Sometimes, they tried to eat Malay or Indian foods, but their faces quickly turned red. This often made the Malays, Indians and Arabs laughed. They found out that the Chinese did not eat hot and spicy food; their food was bland and tasteless to their palate. On the other hand, the Malays had also started to fancy Chinese food and cookies that did not contain pork.



The Malay children of mixed marriages attracted a lot of attention for obvious reasons. They looked cute, like puppets or dolls. Although they were Malays and Muslims and wore Malay clothes like their parents, grandparents and uncles and aunts, yet their skin was less dark. This made them stand out; more so with their small and narrow eyes which were unlike the eyes of the other girls and boys their age which were round. While, those who had Indian or Arab parentage looked taller than the other kids; and they had thick and pointed noses. They all spoke Malay but with so many Chinese, Indian and Arabic words, phrases or expressions that over time these words were accepted into the Malay Language vocabulary. Thus, in this way, the language became more expressive, and it started to form its own grammatical style, which was unlike the style of the Portuguese language. And the Chinese who had married Malay men were assimilated, and over time, they took Malay as their mother tongue. The only difference is that they spoke Malay in a very melodious way and often very lyrical like they were reciting poetry. The women especially took to wearing the Malay *sarong* and not the Chinese *cheong-sam* that looked more like the Arabian robes that the men wore. Some of the Chinese women had bound feet and because of that, they walked very slowly, lest they would fall. The Chinese men wore black pants that ended just below the knee, and they were mostly bare chested. And they mostly had long *tokchang*, although the wealthier Chinese merchants and traders also robes, like the Arabs did, except that the material they used were of silk or brocade that had intricate designs.

The Chinese who were born in Melaka were called the straits-born Chinese or the *Babas* and *Nyonyas* or basically, aunts and uncles. They were cultured people who liked to engage themselves in cultural pursuits and were very hardworking businessmen. They stood in the topmost notch in the Chinese society in Melaka. They were the ones who owned most of the big stores and shops. Most of them could not speak any of the Chinese dialects. Their grandparents or parents had come to Melaka and settled here that their grandchildren or children had totally severed their cultural ties to Motherland China.

Salleh sat on the banks of the Melaka River, but he was not setting his gaze at the sun. He was seeing an unseen object and into void. His worries wasn't for not being able to get a good catch, but more than that; he was worried with the situation in Melaka as a whole. Melaka was under the glorious Melaka sultanate, but now it was under the Portuguese, a strange group of people who would come from a distant land and who had now become their rulers. What would Melaka be now, Salleh wondered. He had no answer. He knew that it

was originally called Bertam River, before a runaway prince from Palembang by the name of Parameswara had come with his followers to found his country that he called Melaka. And he was aware that the name was the name of a tree with that name that did not bear any fruit. It was basically a small tree or more exactly a big plant whose leaves were small and branches thin.

But, it was shady. It was one hundred and thirty years ago or one hundred-and-forty-one years since Parameswara fled Palembang following a failed coup. The tree was so rare now even in Melaka. In fact, Salleh had never seen it before. He wailed at the destruction of the city that had grown from a small fishing village. This was where his great-great-great-great-great-great grandfather called, Samun had lived with a few other fishermen and their wives in 1380 CE or 781 AH or 4078 of the Chinese calendar. They were mostly animists, who did not pray to any particular god. They ate anything they could find in the river and jungles, to sustain themselves.

Basically, they were fearless people who did not speak Malay properly. Their language, as well as food was minimal. As they were not that adventurous, they did not trek too deep into the jungles. Otherwise, they would have seen some strange-looking creatures or trees and converted them into their object of admiration before which they would lay prostrate for mercy, comfort and security. And they looked cleaner and more presentable now compared to their ancestors who had stood on these bank in 1396 CE or 798 AH or 4094 of the Chinese calendar, when Parameswara founded Melaka. Their hair was much longer and well trimmed and not as long as the Malay warriors or officials of the palace and Sultan who had by now learnt how to keep their hair short. The few people who lived in the village in the mouth of Bertam River then, being fishermen only celebrated any season that affected their fishing. During the rainy seasons, they offered food to the 'gods', by throwing the extra rice that their wives had cook.

Now, Salleh, a seventh descendant of Samun wondered to himself if Melaka would survive. Samun, was a pirate. He decided to mend his way when age crept on him and after he finally settled down with a young girl of ten, whom he found loitering alone on the beach. How she got there, he did not know. So, he took her and stayed as a couple. He, on the other hand had been a Muslim since his ancestors had embraced the religion immediately after Parameswara who called himself Megat Iskandar Shah. Samun then changed his name and called himself, Mr. Samad, too. He chose this name because it sounded like Samun although both had contrasting meanings; one, a pirate and the other a pious Muslim man.

Salleh feared for his religion. Being a devout Muslim like all the other Malays, fishermen and all, he did not know how long the Portuguese would stay there. Already they were in their second year as masters of the city. What made him sad though was the sight of the many Malays who were now begging for food by the roadside. This was not seen before the Portuguese arrived. Now it was a common sight. There was not much that he could do except to offer some help. Other than that, he hoped that colonialists would be evicted from Melaka, so that they could live peacefully under Malay rule, like before.

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*Sultan Muzaffar Shah ibni al-Marhum Sultan Mahmud Shah became the eighth Sultan of Pahang. He succeeded on the death of his father in 1530 CE or 1032 AH. He was, however, killed in 1540 CE or 1033 AH, for committing adultery with the wife of Khoja Zainal of Brunei. His younger brother who became known as Sultan Zainal Abidin Shah succeeded him.*

*The Portuguese quickly established Melaka as their new trading base, as well as political center for the purpose of perpetuating their political dominance over the other Malay states in Southeast Asia. They also managed to establish other trading posts in Palembang, Sumatra and forced the Malay rulers in the region to pay homage to them. Also, as a way of showing their might to the other Malay rulers who might have plans to launch attacks on them in Melaka. They knew that the other Malay rulers viewed them with repugnance as they were bent on reshaping their identity by introducing an alien religion on their people.*

*The Achehnese became the first Malay forces from outside Melaka to attack the Portuguese in 1537 CE or 943 AH of the Muslim calendar. But they failed to drive them from Melaka. Other Malay forces from Johor, Japara, Perak, Damak, Kampar and Java, too, launched attacks on the Portuguese. They did this independently of each other, earlier and in 1551 CE or 957 AH or 4649 of the Chinese calendar and managed to hold them under siege for three months, before they were driven back.*

*Other major incursions by the Johor and Achehnese forces took place in 1567 CE or 974 AH of the Muslim calendar and 1568 CE or 1070 AH but they were repelled by the Portuguese or as in 1571 CE or 1073 AH when they were foiled by a storm. Johor and Japara forces continue to attack Melaka in 1575 CE or 982 AH and 1585 CE or 1087 AH and 1586 CE or 1088 AH respectively. In 1597 CE or 1099 AH, the Dutch launched their first attack on the Portuguese in Melaka but failed to capture the state. However, the Dutch returned with a much bigger force with the assistance from Johor in 1606 CE or 1014 AH, but reinforcement from Goa saved the Portuguese.*

*In 1615 CE or 1015 AH, the Acehnese tried their luck again, but failed. This followed by another attack that took place in 1628 CE or 1049 AH and 1629 CE or 1050 AH when they managed to hold Melaka for eight months before they were forced to withdraw.*

*The Dutch returned again in 1636 CE or 1057 AH and they managed to destroy many Portuguese ships in the harbor. They finally conceded defeat in 1642 CE or 1062 AH after the Dutch launched another massive attack on them in Melaka. This time their allies from Johor assisted them. They were forced to surrender, after one hundred and thirty years in Melaka.*

The end.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE:

This novel is the most massive and tiring one I have ever written. It is based on historical facts. However, I have taken the liberty of writing the story in a way that I thought was as close as I could get to the real story, while maintaining its essence. The most important thing to bear in mind is how to maintain and sustain the essence of the whole story. May be it is just sheer foolhardiness and brashness that made me want to go away from popular conventions in dealing with the opening of Melaka and how the runaway prince from Palembang by the name of Parameswara.

Writing the first few chapters, however, proved to be the most daunting as they relate to the main character of this story which is Parameswara, i.e. if there is one. His background, activities and the characters that were involved have been clouded in mystery and they are many conflicting views on them. I do hope that they do not come in the way of the real essence of the story; more so when the names of the principle characters, too, were different. Therefore, the more I tried to investigate Parameswara's background and activities, the more I get confused. Hopefully, the confusion that is found in this novel will instigate better qualified historians to come up with a more comprehensive book on the true history of the Melaka sultanate so that all the issues can be determined, once and for all.

This novel, however, is only one of the sixty that I have written. They are of different sizes, shapes, emphasis, purpose and content. Most, however, were novels in Malay and English and collections of film reviews, essays, travel features, photographic books and an anthology of stylized Japanese haiku. Most of my novels are set in Melaka or are on stories related to Melaka, the Malays and the Muslim communities elsewhere. I find this interesting because there are many interesting stories on Melaka and the Muslim communities that have not been either written as novels or produced as television drama series, plays or films. Moreover, I wish to exploit them as a way of introducing the uniqueness of these communities and its history and bring the words and image to the rest of the world.

This novel is based on historical documents on the history of Melaka. However, it is not a history book. It is a work of fiction. The story happened more than six hundred years ago. It spreads over one hundred and thirty years and involves all the eight sultans of Melaka from Parameswara to Sultan Mahmud Shah and his sons, Sultan Ahmad Shah, Sultan Alauddin Shah and Prince Kassim Shah. And this is my most massive novel at more than seven hundred pages thick! Initially I thought I would just have a five-hundred-page novel that would be excruciatingly difficult to write. But as I started to work on the first chapter, new stories and characters forced their way in until I finally decided to stop at more than seven hundred pages. In fact, if I were to continue writing, I could very well get more than a thousand pages if not two thousand! It was difficult to stop writing this novel as the energy and motivation came from many unlikely sources and inspirations.

The real story behind the founding and development of Melaka and its collapse has not been researched thoroughly by anyone before. What I have found out are vignettes of it. Some of the facts are not conclusive, especially on how Parameswara actually 'founded' Melaka. There are some versions of this; but for this novel I chose my own over the others and start the story when he is in Palembang.

It is simply impossible to get the real picture and the whole truth to it. There are simply too many characters, incidents and stories to deal with. Historians of the respective courts did not write down most of the facts. Even those that were written by historians in the court of China and accounts written by the Portuguese, for instance, have glaring differences and contradictions.

Imagine the amount of time that was spread over more than one hundred and thirty years. Surely, any one part of the whole story will introduce problems in terms of their accuracy and relevance or importance. There are many characters and intrigues, all of which have not been described or analyzed before by historians. Therefore, I had to hazard a guess on what they had done and to put words in the mouths of the characters. I also had to introduce fictitious minor characters so that the flow of the story could be maintained. Most importantly, I had to create dialogue for the characters so that they could express their feelings on the issues; otherwise, these issues and intrigues could only remain as descriptions by the author. Even then, I still had to resort to using a male narrator who describes the events as they unfolded. In this way, I could do away with having to repeat identical scenes or those that could not be presented as an incident.

And for the purpose of this edition in English, I decided to retain the original titles. Except those that are well known such as *sultan*, as they were hereditary titles that did not have a comparison in the English language. As for the Chinese names such as Admiral Cheng Ho is spelled in the new spelling style. I also hyphenated the names for easy identification to be Admiral Zheng-he.

I was fortunate, because I was born in Melaka and grew up there. And I was familiar with the general history of Melaka and all the major places of action were all familiar to me. What more, I had visited countries that were important to the Melaka sultanate such as Thailand or Siam, Indonesia, India, Portugal and China as a casual visitor had. At that time it did not occur to me that, I was going to write this book; otherwise, I would have made it a point to spend time to research on the story from the local perspective. Despite the strong historical importance that the story has, I prefer to describe this book as a novel and not a history book. Because I did not want people to think that I have not been faithful to the established facts. Also because I had used the main story to build drama and intrigues into on it, and had also introduced incidents that might have happened during those times.

This book is roughly ninety-percent history, and ten-percent fiction. The main story and all the major characters and scenes are all based on facts. The fictitious aspect only came in when there were 'story holes' that had to be filled in.

Some writers consider this a creative license whereby he or she can use to further the cause of the story he or she is writing. With more time and resources, I suppose I could have discovered the real situation so that I did not have to invent any fictitious character or incident, and deal only with factual ones. Who knows if there might be other books on this subject written by other historians in other countries that I have not managed to read?

Since this is a private effort, I insist that I have the right to do whatever I please with this book and create a story that I personally believe in. I did not have the advantage of a strong financial backing to conduct additional research out of the country, especially Portugal, Indonesia, India, Thailand and China where many of the important scenes in the story happened. If I did, I am sure the teleplay and novel could become a real history book and be accepted as an authoritative account of what really happened then. It could even be used as textbooks in the schools and universities.

If there were discrepancies in the teleplay and book, the readers and historians must therefore accept it as something that is unavoidable. And I decided to write this book quietly without mentioning it to anyone let alone the authorities, such as the Melaka state government, etc. I would rather that they look at the whole picture than some of the factual inaccuracies alone in order to judge this book. So, I decided to proceed with my plan until I had fully satisfied that I had come up with this book, which I believe is the most comprehensive book or novel on the history of Melaka. To me this is a personal triumph. Mostly, I did not have the luxury of time. This effort would have been better if it was a doctorate thesis, where I would have three years to conduct a research on it. But, it was not a rush job. Even though the writing process took a short period of time, the gestation period and the time I took to research on the story took more than that.

The whole book grew over the years since 1985 CE or 1405 AH when I first jotted down the brief outline of what I had wanted to include in the book.

Surprisingly though, the story of Melaka is rather straightforward and the fact that the sultanate had collapsed made it easier to explore. It was, therefore, very easy for me to write the book and in such a short period. The story on the founding and development of the Melaka sultanate and its collapse have been written by many writers in the past, including those in China and Portugal. I am sure they could have been many more books or essays or descriptions that have not yet been discovered by our historians or researchers. All these stories or descriptions, I am sure, will reveal different versions of what actually happened in Melaka. Even the date or the year of the founding of Melaka is still open to debate. Some chose 1396 CE or 798 AH, others preferred 1398 CE or 800 AH, but I chose 1400 CE or 802 AH because it was more logical. The Melaka state government chose the year 1396 CE as the year of the founding of Melaka. And they celebrated the six hundredth anniversary of the founding of the state in 1996 CE or 1417 AH.

Interestingly enough, a book written by a Chinese historian that I had managed to read mentioned specifically stated the year of the founding of Melaka to be in 4098 of their calendar or 1400 CE or 802 AH. Few other books that I had read also said similar things. Now this helped to convince me more than the others because he had put this year against some important incidents that directed towards 1400 CE or 802 AH and no other year.

Lastly, there are many versions to what happened in Melaka in the late fourteenth century and early fifteenth century in Melaka written by historians from Malaysia, Indonesia, India, China and Portugal. They introduced new angles for people today to view the whole picture. But, I suppose it would not be absurd if I try to introduce yet another one. After all, the story of the Melaka sultanate is still open to debate. Nothing is quite definite, except for the overall picture.

#### BANGSA MELAYU: INTERMARRIAGE AND THE CREATION OF THE MODERN MALAY RACE AND LANGUAGE.

Has anyone wondered that the Malays are one of the unique races in the world, if not the most unique? There is no other race in the world where intermarriage between peoples of different races and racial groups in the same Malay stock has created this unusual race called the Malays or Bangsa Melayu.

Historically speaking, the Malays were not supposed to look like what they are today; even the language that they now call their own evolved through time and started only as grunts with few syllables that were hard to decipher.

Most original Malay words had only one or two syllables! They sound more like baby-speak. The word *makan* evolved from *ma* and *kan*, for example. And the first Malay words mostly for everyday survival that describes food. Only much later when the Malays words started to stretch longer and longer to include many more tongue twisting syllables. These words describe more complex imageries and meanings as the worldview and political thoughts and culture. They expanded with the times.

The Malays in the time of the Melaka sultanate were one of the most open-minded people on earth. They took not only the cultures and traditions of foreign countries and other races, but used them even in the construction of their mosques. This explains why the old mosques in Melaka have Chinese pagodas as their minarets.

Parameswara had built the first mosque in Melaka at the foothills of the St. Paul's Hill (originally known as the Melaka Hill, a name given by Parameswara) in the fashion of the early mosques that he had seen in Pasai. He only converted to Islam at the age of 74 in 1414 CE or 816 AH after a trip he had made to Pasai in North Sumatra where he had met with the king of Pasai or Raja Pasai.

The Portuguese attacked the mosque and burnt it to ashes - as part of their first mission in Melaka in 1511 CE or 917 AH or 4209 of the Chinese calendar to destabilize the city-state. It was at that time, the center for the spread of Islam and the



Malay culture in the region. They then proceeded to destroy the palace of the sultan that stood on the Melaka Hill where the St. Paul's Church now stands. A crude replica of the palace was constructed at the foothills of the St. Paul's Hills by the Melaka state government.

But later after Parameswara's first visit to the imperial court of China, he adopted a totally different style and use bricks and concrete instead of wood. It is seen as a symbol of his special bonding with the Chinese Emperor Yong-le and the Chinese people who had been providing him with protection from the Siamese and others in the region. They were bent on destroying what he had built in Melaka as the most important entreport in the region.

When Parameswara died at the age of 84 in 1424 CE or 827 AH or 4122 of the Chinese calendar he was wearing the Arabian turbans and long-flowing robes light green in color and wearing sandals. But his palace officials and subjects were wearing colorful clothes that infused mostly Chinese and Indian designs with Arabic elements as an obligation to fulfill the requirements of the *aurat*.

No wonder the syllables in the Malay language today sound totally different from those of other languages. The early Malays did not have their own set of alphabets so most of the stories were stored in the memories of earlier sages who took with them to their unmarked graves. Only when Islam came was the Arabic text used and this started the writing tradition of the Malays. Only after that, the old Malay stories started to be written and stored for posterity. Many of which are fortunately in our possession today, although many of the original manuscripts written on goatskin and kept in libraries and universities in Europe and England.

The Malays are therefore unlike the other races such as the Indians and Chinese who had a writing tradition that dates back few thousand years before. Even the ancient Egyptian of the Pharonic times had a way of storing their stories and folklore and history. They carved on stones and the walls although this was an extension of the artistic skills in sculpture and drawing on walls and papyrus and their fascination with all sorts of tools and ancient gadgets.

The creation of the glorious Melaka Muslim sultanate had resulted in the actual creation of the Malay race and Malay language or Bahasa Melayu in the form that we see today. So it is not wrong for historians today to describe the founder of Melaka, Parameswara (which means prince consort) who later converted to Islam and called himself Megat Iskandar Shah as the true founder of the Melaka race!

Originally, the Malay language only existed in the form of a dialect used mostly by the ruling class, but through the intermingling of the different Malay dialectical groups, another more superior language which is now more internationally accepted was created. Today the Malay language can boast of a vocabulary of eight hundred thousand (800,000) words; most of these were fashioned or borrowed from the other dominant languages, especially from the invading forces from the East and the West. Many of these modern Malay words and phrases were created artificially by using a set formula devised by the language experts at Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (D.B.P.) and

the universities. Most of the early Malay words, however, originated from the Sanskrit language when the Malay world was under the influence of Hinduism.

The vocabulary was given a boost with the coming of Islam in the Fourteenth Century which resulted in the infusion of many Arab words that are used mostly in the many religious rituals and practices. This forms the backbone of the Malay language. Subsequent visits and domination from forces from Siam, China, Portugal and finally England further expanded the vocabulary of the Malay language.

Modern Malay language as we know now is the direct result of government intervention. It had set up a linguistic and cultural body known officially as DBP was formed to see to the needs to further modernize the language and make it more prominent and applicable in all levels of society and disciplines. The final aim is to make Bahasa Melayu as an international language and an official language at the United Nations together with English, French, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese and Arabic. In many ways the Malay language can already be considered an international language, although its usage is now widespread outside the borders of the Malay world.

Therefore, if we are to believe in some basic arguments on science and genetics, then we can safely say that the Malays then ought to be the most brilliant people on earth because of this intermarriage! This is as opposed to the other races that, mostly, marry only within their own racial groups, although not necessarily in the same clan as the Chinese used to forbid. The reason for this was that marriages within the same clans often resulted in offspring who are said to be less intelligent or healthy. The intermarriage between Malays of the same racial stock, i.e. between the Javanese and Sumatran is what forms the basis for the creation of the Malay race or Bangsa Melayu that we know of today. Historically, the Malays in Malaysia are of the Sumatran and Javanese ancestry. Many of these people stayed in Melaka for long periods of time where they married with the local women and produced a new generation of Malays.

The early history of Melaka saw the creation of the glorious Malay-Muslim sultanate of Melaka with the founding of Melaka on the banks of the Bertam River. This was renamed Melaka River by Parameswara when he founded the state in 1400 CE or 802 AH or 4098 of the Chinese calendar. He was a colorful renegade and an exile prince from Palembang in Sumatra called Parameswara. It had 'produced' a new stock of people called simply as the Malays, although they could be officially considered Melakans. Many people and adventurers and traders from all parts of Southeast Asia were attracted to the newly created city-state called Melaka. It was the name of the tree, which Parameswara had sat under. They came in droves from all over the Southeast Asian region to seek a livelihood without realizing that they were the early mothers and fathers of the modern Malay race and promoter of the Malay language.

And by the time, Melaka fell in the hands of the Portuguese in 1511 CE or 917 AH or 4209 of the Chinese calendar, thousands of the new generation of Malays had been created. They had features and intellect and creativity that their parents and

grandparents didn't have. And this new generation of Malays all have ancestors of all the races of people whom had visited and lived in Melaka such as the other groups of Malays in Sumatra, Java, Siamese, Kalimantan, China, India, the Portuguese and Arabs.

No wonder the Malay face is unique for no two Malays are alike in shape, form or in the color of their skin and even height! Maybe we Malays and our non-Malay friends have this fact or observation taken for granted; but the next time we look at the next Malay guy or girl we will see that he or she is different from the others. This is unlike the other dominant world races such as the Chinese, Indians, Japanese or English and Americans all of whom look similar and are quite homogeneous.

Therefore, the Malays as we know today must truly be the most unique in the world in this regard, that they have many different strains of genes of the other dominant races to form a totally new Malay racial stock.

Therefore, theoretically, the Malays can be the most brilliant people on earth because of the intermarriage that the people had experienced throughout the history, especially from 1400 CE or 823 AH onwards.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Mansor bin Puteh had his primary and secondary education at the St. Francis' Institution in Jalan Parameswara (Parameswara Road or formerly Jalan Bandar Kaba) in Melaka, right smack in the center of the historical drama of Melaka. It's just a stone's throw from the mouth of the Melaka River and the administrative center of the Melaka sultanate where most of the action took place.

He went to Petaling Jaya to do his Form Six, after which he enrolled at the Mara Institute of Technology in Shah Alam (now the Mara University of Technology). He graduated with a Diploma in Mass Communications with a major in Advertising. He worked as a reporter with *Utusan Melayu* for one year before doing a graduate program in film at Columbia University in New York City.

Upon his return from America, he started out as a film critic and essayist as a freelancer for the major Malay and English newspapers and magazines published in Kuala Lumpur. He also appeared on many television entertainment programs. He wrote travel features and other human-interest stories. Later he started to write scripts for television dramas and films before finally working on play scripts and finally novels, as the extension to his earlier interests in writing.

## THE SULTANS OF MELAKA.

- |   |  |                                    |
|---|--|------------------------------------|
| 1 | Parameswara/Iskandar Shah.   | 1396-1414 CE/<br>808-817 AH.       |
| 2 | Megat Iskandar Shah.<br>(Formerly Raja Besar Muda.)  | from 1414-1424 CE/<br>817-827 AH.) |
| 3 | Sultan Muhammad Shah.<br>(a.k.a. Paduka Seri Maharajah,<br>formerly Raja Kechil Besar,<br>son of Parameswara.)                               | 1424-1444 CE/<br>827-847 AH.       |
| 4 | Sultan Abu Syahid.<br>(Formerly Raja Ibrahim<br>a.k.a. Sri Parameswara Dewa<br>Shah or The Martyred Sultan,<br>son of Sultan Muhammad Shah.) | 1444-1446 CE/<br>847-849 AH.       |
| 5 | Sultan Muzaffar Shah.<br>(Formerly Raja Kassim,<br>son of Sultan Muhammad Shah.)   | 1446-1456 CE/<br>849-860 AH.       |
| 6 | Sultan Mansur Shah.<br>(Formerly Raja Abdullah,<br>son of Sultan Muzaffar Shah.)   | 1456-1477 CE/<br>869-881 AH.       |
| 7 | Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah I.<br>(Formerly Raja Hussain,<br>son of Sultan Mansur Shah.)   | 1477-1488 CE/<br>881- 893 AH.      |
| 8 | Sultan Mahmud Shah.<br>(Formerly Raja Mahmud,<br>son of Sultan Alauddin Riayat<br>Shah.)   | 1488-1510 CE/<br>893-917 AH.       |
| 9 | Sultan Ahmad Shah.<br>(Formerly Raja Ahmad Shah)   | 1510-1526 CE/<br>917-932 AH.       |

#### THE PRIME MINISTERS OF MELAKA:

- 1 Seri Wak Raja I, Tun Perpatih Besar.
- 2 Seri Amar diRaja, Tun Perpatih Sandang Sedang.
- 3 Seri Wak Raja II - son of Tun Perpatih Besar.
- 4 Seri Maharajah Tun Ali Sri Nara diRaja.
- 5 Paduka Raja Tun Perak - son of Lord Sandang Sedang.
- 6 Tun Perpatih Putih - younger brother of Tun Perak.
- 7 Tun Mutahir - son of Tun Ali.
- 8 Paduka Tuan - son of Tun Perak.  
(a.k.a. *Bendahara Tepuk* or the Invalid Prime Minister.)

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Mansor taking shade under the melaka tree in Jalan Parameswara (road) in Malaka.