

BUNGA SUNDAL MALAM

Stepping out onto the verandah Robin could just make out the slender sarong clad figure of Selimah pinning large white flowers into soft black curls which fell around her face. Petals glowed in shimmering movement against a velvety night.

Occasional sheet lighting raged through over the jungle edge beyond, clearly accentuating her sensuous shape.

As he moved, she turned to face him, slender fingers entwining another pair of flowers together. In the soft, moist air a voluptuous perfume, reached out and enveloped him.

Breathing in deeply he could almost taste the smell.

"What the hell's that scent Selima.
Come over here! You look bloody gorgeous in that new sarong."

"These..... Bunga Malam, Tuan.
'Flower of the night',....
You see they're like me, can only come out at night.
By daylight they will have changed and died." Selima replied softly in Malay.



"Don't say that. You knew the Manager was coming this evening with his boring old bag of a wife. So I'm sorry but the company rules have to be kept.

I mean, I know the old man fancies you rotten, always did. It's alright if he drops in for a casual drink and gossip, then he insists you stay within grabbing distance. But tonight it's my official invitation to dinner. You have to be kept out of sight.

Right come on, who've you got to do the serving", Robin asked with a chuckle, "If it's your sister make sure she wears something a bit less sexy than that, I don't want his wife getting the wrong idea and assume I have a harem."

Robin sat on the verandah rail and looked down the steps to the drive and then into the darkness at Selimah, leaning back against the wall. He could just make her out framed by a profusion of leaves in which many more half opened white flowers were scattered.

Her costume fitted like a second skin. In dark green batik painted soft patterns of leaves in reds and yellows, it appeared to grow out of the tropical night, allowing the dazzling white petals of the flowers with their rich yellow centres to illuminate her face like stage lights.. Demure high collared kebaya contrasting with a divided sarong. Gathered pleats one side had fallen back to show the top of her thigh.

His senses heightened by the powerful scent of the flowers, Robin felt a sudden need to hold her and feel her softness, to forget for a moment his inner sense of guilt.

In the distance the rattle and crash of a Land Rover coming towards the house, echoed in the palm trees. Robin stood up, straightened his cravat, preparing himself for the task of small talk about the estate.

"Selimah go on now, before I tell them to bugger off back home and I eat those flowers out of your hair. For gawd's sake make sure your sister is wearing something a bit less provocative than you, try to make her look like a servant, just this once!"

"Remember, Tuan, a Bunga Malam lasts only one night. They turn red and die before the morning. I've put some on the table, watch them. When it's time for your friends to go it's petals will have changed, and then you will return to me. I'll wait for you as usual.
But then I'm only your woman of the night".

"Dont bloody well say that Selimah. You know I don't approve of this farce hiding you in the background,..
Oh hell here they are....."

Sounds of loud voices calling up to him from the drive cut short his pleas, Robin pulled himself forward off the rail, stood up and walked to the top of the steps.

Passing a low table he saw where Selimah had put four flowers to float in a bowl of water. Soft wind spun them slowly round.

The first stains of red, on the edge of the petals, was creeping down as if they had been dipped in blood.

They would not be long changing for her now.

Robin looked round but she had gone, silently as ever, she would be there somewhere in the darkness waiting.....

"Ah good evening sir. Do come in. Lovely to see you both, how are you Madge ?
I suppose you both want the same to drink.....