Neil Macadam

W. Somerset Maugham

CAPTAIN BREDON was good-natured. When Angus Munro, the Curator of the museum at Kuala Solor, told him that he had advised Neil MacAdam, his new assistant, on his arrival at Singapore to put up at the Van Dyke Hotel, and asked him to see that the lad got into no mischief during the few days he must spend there, he said he would do his best. Captain Bredon commanded the Sultan Ahmed, and when he was at Singapore always stayed at the Van Dyke. He had a Japanese wife and kept a room there. It was his home. When he got back after his fortnight’s trip along the coast of Borneo the Dutch manager told him that Neil had been there for two days. The boy was sitting in the little dusty garden of the hotel reading old numbers of The Straits Times. Captain Bredon took a look at him first and then went up.

“You’re MacAdam, aren’t you?”

Neil rose to his feet, flushed to the roots of his hair, and answered shyly: “I am.”

“My name’s Bredon. I’m skipper of the Sultan Ahmed. You’re sailing with me next Tuesday. Munro asked me to look after you. What about a stengah? I suppose you’ve learned what that means by now.”

“Thank you very much, but I don’t drink.”

He spoke with a broad Scots accent.

“I don’t blame you. Drink’s been the ruin of many a good man in this country.”

He called the Chinese boy and ordered himself a double whisky and a small soda.

“What have you been doing with yourself since you got in?”

“Walking about.”

“There’s nothing much to see in Singapore.”

“I’ve found plenty.”

Of course the first thing he had done was to go to the museum. There was little that he had not seen at home, but the fact that those beasts and birds, those reptiles, moths, butterflies, and insects were native to the country excited him. There was one section devoted to that part of Borneo of which Kuala Solor was the capital, and since these were the creatures that for the next three years would chiefly concern him, he examined them with attention. But it was outside, in the streets, that it was most thrilling, and except that he was a grave and sober young man he would have laughed aloud with joy. Everything was new to him. He walked till he was footsore. He stood at the corner of a busy street and wondered at the long line of rickshaws and the little men between the shafts running with dogged steps. He stood on a bridge over a canal and looked at the sampans wedged up against one another like sardines in a tin. He peered into the Chinese shops in Victoria Road where so many strange things were sold. Bombay merchants, fat and exuberant, stood at their shop doors and sought to sell him silks and tinsel jewellery. He watched the Tamils, pensive and forlorn, who walked with a sinister grace, and the bearded Arabs, in white skull-caps, who bore themselves with scornful dignity. The sun shone upon the varied scene with hard, acrid brilliance. He was confused. He thought it would take him years to find his bearings in this multi-coloured and excessive world.

After dinner that night Captain Bredon asked him if he would like to go round the town.

“You ought to see a bit of life while you’re here,” he said.

They stepped into rickshaws and drove to the Chinese quarter. The Captain, who never drank at sea, had been making up for his abstinence during the day. He was feeling good. The rickshaws stopped at a house in a side street and they knocked at the door. It was opened and they passed through a narrow passage into a large room with benches all round it covered with red plush. A number of women were sitting about-French, Italian, and American. A mechanical piano was grinding out harsh music and a few couples were dancing. Captain Bredon ordered drinks. Two or three women, waiting for an invitation, gave them inviting glances.

“Well, young feller, is there anyone you fancy here?” the Captain asked facetiously.

“To sleep with, d’you mean? No.”

“No white girls where you’re going, you know.”

“Oh, well.”

“Like to go an’ see some natives?”

“I don’t mind.”

The Captain paid for the drinks and they strolled on. They went to another house. Here the girls were Chinese, small and dainty, with tiny feet and hands like flowers, and they wore suits of flowered silk. But their painted faces were like masks. They looked at the strangers with black derisive eyes. They were strangely inhuman.

“I brought you here because I thought you ought to see the place,” said Captain Bredon, with the air of a man doing his bounden duty, “but just look-see is all. They don’t like us for some reason. In some of these Chinese joints they won’t even let a white man in. Fact is, they say we stink. Funny, ain’t it? They say we smell of corpses.”

“We?”

“Give me Japs,” said the Captain. “They’re fine. My wife’s a Jap, you know.

You come along with me and I’ll take you to a place where they have Japanese girls, and if you don’t see something you like there I’m a Dutchman.”

Their rickshaws were waiting and they stepped into them. Captain Bredon gave a direction and the boys started off. They were let into the house by a stout middle-aged Japanese woman, who bowed low as they entered. She took them into a neat, clean room furnished only with mats on the floor; they sat down and presently a little girl came in with a tray on which were two bowls of pale tea. With a shy bow she handed one to each of them. The Captain spoke to the middle-aged woman and she looked at Neil and giggled. She said something to the child, who went out, and presently four girls tripped in. They were sweet in their kimonos, with the shining black hair artfully dressed; they were small and plump, with round faces and laughing eyes. They bowed low as they came in and with good manners murmured polite greetings. Their speech sounded like the twittering of birds. Then they knelt, one on each side of the two men, and charmingly flirted with them. Captain Bredon soon had his arms round two slim waists. They all talked nineteen to the dozen. They were very gay. It seemed to Neil that the Captain’s girls were mocking him, for their gleaming eyes were mischievously turned towards him, and he blushed. But the other two cuddled up to him, smiling, and spoke in Japanese as though he understood every word they said. They seemed so happy and guileless that he laughed. They were very attentive. They handed him the bowl so that he should drink his tea, and then took it from him so that he should not have the trouble of holding it. They lit his cigarette for him and one put out a small, delicate hand to take the ash so that it should not fall on his clothes. They stroked his smooth face and looked with curiosity at his large young hands. They were as playful as kittens.

“Well, which is it to be?” said the Captain after a while. “Made your choice yet?”

“What d’you mean?”

“I’ll just wait and see you settled and then I’ll fix myself up.”

“Oh, I don’t want either of them. I’m going home to bed.”

“Why, what’s the matter? You’re not scared, are you?”

“No, I just don’t fancy it. But don’t let me stand in your way. I’ll get back to the hotel all right.”

“Oh, if you’re not going to do anything I won’t either. I only wanted to be matey.”

He spoke to the middle-aged woman and what he said caused the girls to look at Neil with sudden surprise. She answered and the Captain shrugged his shoulders. Then one of the girls made a remark that set them all laughing.

“What does she say?” asked Neil.

“She’s pulling your leg,” replied the Captain, smiling.

But he gave Neil a curious look. The girl, having made them laugh once, now said something directly to Neil. He could not understand, but the mockery of her eyes made him blush and frown. He did not like to be made fun of. Then she laughed outright and throwing her arm round his neck lightly kissed him.

“Come on, let’s be going,” said the Captain.

When they dismissed their rickshaws and walked into the hotel Neil asked him:

“What was it that girl said that made them all laugh?”

“She said you were a virgin.”

“I don’t see anything to laugh at in that,” said Neil, with his slow Scots accent.

“Is it true?”

“I suppose it is.”

“How old are you?”

“Twenty-two.”

“What are you waiting for?”

“Till I marry.”

The Captain was silent. At the top of the stairs he held out his hand. There was a twinkle in his eyes when he bade the lad good night, but Neil met it with a level, candid, and untroubled gaze.

Three days later they sailed. Neil was the only white passenger. When the Captain was busy he read. He was reading again Wallace’s Malay Archipelago. He had read it as a boy, but now it had a new and absorbing interest for him. When the Captain was at leisure they played cribbage or sat in long chairs on the deck, smoking, and talked. Neil was the son of a country doctor, and he could not remember when he had not been interested in natural history. When he had done with school he went to the University of Edinburgh and there took a B.Sc. with Honours. He was looking out for a job as demonstrator in biology when he chanced to see in Nature an advertisement for an assistant curator of the museum at Kuala Solor. The Curator, Angus Munro, had been at Edinburgh with his uncle, a Glasgow merchant, and his uncle wrote to ask him if he would give the boy a trial. Though Neil was especially interested in entomology he was a trained taxidermist, which the advertisement said was essential; he enclosed certificates from Neil’s old teachers; he added that Neil had played football for his university. In a few weeks a cable arrived engaging him and a fortnight later he sailed.

“What’s Mr Munro like?” asked Neil.

“Good fellow. Everybody likes him.”

“I looked out his papers in the scientific journals. He had one in the last number of The Ibis on the Gymnathids.”

“I don’t know anything about that. I know he’s got a Russian wife. They don’t like her much.”

“I got a letter from him at Singapore saying they’d put me up for a bit till I could look round and see what I wanted to do.”

Now they were steaming up the river. At the mouth was a straggling fishermen’s village standing on piles on the water; on the bank grew thickly nipah palm and the tortured mangrove; beyond stretched the dense green of the virgin forest. In the distance, darkly silhouetted against the blue sky, was the rugged outline of a mountain. Neil, his heart beating with the excitement that possessed him, devoured the scene with eager eyes. He was surprised. He knew his Conrad almost by heart and he was expecting a land of brooding mystery. He was not prepared for the blue milky sky. Little white clouds on the horizon, like sailing boats becalmed, shone in the sun. The green trees of the forest glittered in the brilliant light. Here and there, on the banks, were Malay houses with thatched roofs, and they nestled cosily among fruit trees. Natives in dugouts rowed, standing, up the river. Neil had no feeling of being shut in, nor, in that radiant morning, of gloom, but of space and freedom. The country offered him a gracious welcome. He knew he was going to be happy in it. Captain Bredon from the bridge threw a friendly glance at the lad standing below him. He had taken quite a fancy to him during the four days the journey had lasted. It was true he did not drink, and when you made a joke he was as likely as not to take you seriously, but there was something very taking in his seriousness; everything was interesting and important to him-that, of course, was why he did not find your jokes amusing; but even though he didn’t see them he laughed, because he felt you expected it. He laughed because life was grand. He was grateful for every little thing you told him. He was very polite. He never asked you to pass him anything without saying “please’ and always said “thank you’ when you gave it. And he was a good-looking fellow, no one could deny that. Neil was standing with his hands on the rail, bare-headed, looking at the passing bank. He was tall, six foot two, with long, loose limbs, broad shoulders, and narrow hips; there was something charmingly coltish about him, so that you expected him at any moment to break into a caper. He had brown curly hair with a peculiar shine in it; sometimes when the light caught it, it glittered like gold. His eyes, large and very blue, shone with good-humour. They reflected his happy disposition. His nose was short and blunt and his mouth big, his chin determined; his face was rather broad. But his most striking feature was his skin; it was very white and smooth, with a lovely patch of red on either cheek. It would have been a beautiful skin even for a woman. Captain Bredon made the same joke to him every morning.

“Well, my lad, have you shaved today?”

Neil passed his hand over his chin.

“No, d’you think I need it?”

The Captain always laughed at this.

“Need it? Why, you’ve got a face like a baby’s bottom.”

And invariably Neil reddened to the roots of his hair.

“I shave once a week,” he retorted.

But it wasn’t only his looks that made you like him. It was his ingenuousness, his candour, and the freshness with which he confronted the world. For all his intentness and the solemn way in which he took everything, and his inclination to argue upon every point that came up, there was something strangely simple in him that gave you quite an odd feeling. The Captain couldn’t make it out.

“I wonder if it’s because he’s never had a woman,” he said to himself. “Funny. I should have thought the girls never left him alone. With a complexion like that.”

But the Sultan Ahmed was nearing the bend after rounding which Kuala Solor would be in sight and the Captain’s reflections were interrupted by the necessities of his work. He rang down to the engine room. The ship slackened to half speed. Kuala Solor straggled along the left bank of the river, a white, neat, and trim little town, and on the right on a hill were the fort and the Sultan’s palace. There was a breeze and the Sultan’s flag, at the top of a tall staff, waved bravely against the sky. They anchored in mid-stream. The doctor and a police officer came on board in the government launch. They were accompanied by a tall thin man in white ducks. The Captain stood at the head of the gangway and shook hands with them. Then he turned to the last comer.

“Well, I’ve brought you your young hopeful safe and sound.” And a glance at Neil: “This is Munro.”

The tall thin man held out his hand and gave Neil an appraising look. Neil flushed a little and smiled. He had beautiful teeth.

“How do you do, sir?”

Munro did not smile with his lips, but faintly with his grey eyes. His cheeks were hollow and he had a thin aquiline nose and pale lips. He was deeply sunburned. His face looked tired, but his expression was very gentle, and Neil immediately felt confidence in him. The Captain introduced him to the doctor and the policeman and suggested that they should have a drink. When they sat down and the boy brought bottles of beer Munro took off his topee. Neil saw that he had close-cropped brown hair turning grey. He was a man of forty, quiet, self-possessed in manner, with an intellectual air that distinguished him from the brisk little doctor and the heavy swaggering police officer.

“MacAdam doesn’t drink,” said the Captain when the boy poured out four glasses of beer.”

“All the better,” said Munro. “I hope you haven’t been trying to lure him into evil ways.”

“I tried to in Singapore,” returned the Captain, with a twinkle in his eyes, “but there was nothing doing.”

When he had finished his beer Munro turned to Neil.

“Well, we’ll be getting ashore, shall we?”

Neil’s baggage was put in charge of Munro’s boy and the two men got into a sampan. They landed.

“Do you want to go straight up to the bungalow or would you like to have a look round first? We’ve got a couple of hours before tiffin.”

“Couldn’t we go to the museum?” said Neil.

Munro’s eyes smiled gently. He was pleased. Neil was shy and Munro not by nature talkative, so they walked in silence. By the river were the native huts, and here, living their immemorial lives, dwelt the Malays. They were busy, but without haste, and you were conscious of a happy, normal activity. There was a sense of the rhythm of life of which the pattern was birth and death, love, and the affairs common to mankind. They came to the bazaars, narrow streets with arcades, where the teeming Chinese, working and eating, noisily talking, as is their way, indefatigably strove with eternity.

“It’s not much after Singapore,” said Munro, “but I always think it’s rather picturesque.”

He spoke with an accent less broad than Neil’s but the Scots burr was there and it put Neil at his ease. He could never quite get it out of his head that the English of English people was affected.

The museum was a handsome stone building and as they entered its portals Munro instinctively straightened himself. The attendant at the door saluted and Munro spoke to him in Malay, evidently explaining who Neil was, for the attendant gave him a smile and saluted again. It was cool in there in comparison with the heat without and the light was pleasant after the glare of the street.

“I’m afraid you’ll be disappointed,” said Munro. “We haven’t got half the things we ought to have, but up to now we’ve been handicapped by lack of money. We’ve had to do the best we could. So you must make allowances.”

Neil stepped in like a swimmer diving confidently into a summer sea. The specimens were admirably arranged. Munro had sought to please as well as to instruct, and birds and beasts and reptiles were presented, as far as possible in their natural surroundings, in such a way as to give a vivid impression of life. Neil lost his shyness and began with boyish enthusiasm to talk of this and that. He asked an infinity of questions. He was excited. Neither of them was conscious of the passage of time, and when Munro glanced at his watch he was surprised to see what the hour was. They got into rickshaws and drove to the bungalow.

Munro led the young man into a drawing-room. A woman was lying on a sofa reading a book and as they came in she slowly rose.

“This is my wife. I’m afraid we’re dreadfully late, Darya.”

“What does it matter?” she smiled. “What is more unimportant than time?”

She held out her hand, a rather large hand, to Neil and gave him a long, reflective, but friendly look.

“I suppose you’ve been showing him the museum.”

She was a woman of five-and-thirty, of medium height, with a pale brown face of a uniform colour and pale blue eyes. Her hair, parted in the middle and wound into a knot on the nape of her neck, was untidy; it had a moth-like quality and was of a curious pale brown. Her face was broad, with high cheekbones, and she had a rather fleshy nose. She was not a pretty woman, but there was in her slow movements a sensual grace and in her manner as it were a physical casualness that only very dull people could have failed to find interesting. She wore a frock of green cotton. She spoke English perfectly, but with a slight accent.

They sat down to tiffin. Neil was overcome once more with shyness, but Darya did not seem to notice it. She talked freely and easily. She asked him about his journey and what he had thought of Singapore. She told him about the people he would have to meet. That afternoon Munro was to take him to call on the Resident, the Sultan being away, and later they would go to the club. There he would see everybody.

“You will be popular,” she said, her pale blue eyes resting on him with attention. A man less ingenuous than Neil might have noticed that she took stock of his size and youthful virility, his shiny curling hair and his lovely skin. “They don’t think much of us.”

“Oh, nonsense, Darya. You’re too sensitive. They’re English, that’s all.”

“They think it’s rather funny of Angus to be a scientist and they think it’s rather vulgar of me to be a Russian. I don’t care. They’re fools. They’re the most commonplace, the most narrow-minded, the most conventional people it has ever been my misfortune to live amongst.”

“Don’t put MacAdam off the moment he arrives. He’ll find them kind and hospitable.”

“What is your first name?” she asked the boy.

“Neil.”

“I shall call you by it. And you must call me Darya. I hate being called Mrs Munro. It makes me feel like a minister’s wife.”

Neil blushed. He was embarrassed that she should ask him so soon to be so familiar. She went on.

“Some of the men are not bad.”

“They do their job competently and that’s what they’re here for,” said Munro.

“They shoot. They play football and tennis and cricket. I get on with them quite well. The women are intolerable. They are jealous and spiteful and lazy. They can talk of nothing. If you introduce an intellectual subject they look down their noses as though you were indecent. What can they talk about now? They’re interested in nothing. If you speak of the body they think you improper, and if you speak of the soul they think you priggish.”

“You mustn’t take what my wife says too literally,” smiled Munro, in his gentle, tolerant way. “The community here is just like any other in the East, neither very clever, nor very stupid, but amiable and kindly. And that’s a good deal.”

“I don’t want people to be amiable and kindly. I want them to be vital and passionate. I want them to be interested in mankind. I want them to attach more importance to the things of the spirit than to a gin pahit or a curry tiffin. I want art to matter to them, and literature.” She addressed herself abruptly to Neil: “Have you got a soul?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I don’t know exactly what you mean.”

“Why do you blush when I ask you? Why should you be ashamed of your soul? It is what is important in you. Tell me about it. I am interested in you and I want to know.”

It seemed very awkward to Neil to be tackled in this way by a perfect stranger. He had never met anyone like this. But he was a serious young man and when he was asked a question straight out he did his best to answer it. It was Munro’s presence that embarrassed him.

“I don’t know what you mean by the soul. If you mean an immaterial or spiritual entity, separately produced by the creator, in temporary conjunction with the material body, then my answer is in the negative. It seems to me that such a radically dualistic view of human personality cannot be defended by anyone who is able to take a calm view of the evidence. If, on the other hand, you mean by soul the aggregate of psychic elements which form what we know as the personality of the individual, then, of course, I have.”

“You’re very sweet and you’re wonderfully handsome,” she said, smiling. “No, I mean the heart with its longings and the body with its desires and the infinite in us. Tell me, what did you read on the journey, or did you only play deck tennis?”

Neil was taken aback at the inconsequence of her reply. He would have been a little affronted except for the good-humour in her eyes and the naturalness in her manner. Munro smiled quietly at the young man’s bewilderment, when he smiled the lines that ran from the wings of his nostrils to the corners of his mouth became deep furrows.

“I read a lot of Conrad.”

“For pleasure or to improve your mind?”

“Both. I admire him awfully.”

Darya threw up her arms in an extravagant gesture of protest.

“That Pole,” she cried. “How can you English ever have let yourselves be taken in by that wordy mountebank? He was all the superficiality of his countrymen. That stream of words, those involved sentences, the showy rhetoric, that affection of profundity: when you get through all that to the thought at the bottom, what do you find but a trivial commonplace? He was like a second-rate actor who puts on a romantic dress and declaims a play by Victor Hugo. For five minutes you say this is heroic, and then your whole soul revolts and you cry, no, this is false, false, false.”

She spoke with a passion that Neil had never known anyone show when speaking of art or literature. Her cheeks, usually colourless, flushed and her pale eyes glowed.

“There’s no one who got atmosphere like Conrad,” said Neil. “I can smell and see and feel the East when I read him.”

“Nonsense. What do you know about the East? Everyone will tell you that he made the grossest blunders. Ask Angus.”

“Of course he was not always accurate,” said Munro, in his measured, reflective way. “The Borneo he described is not the Borneo we know. He saw it from the deck of a merchant-vessel and he was not an acute observer even of what he saw. But does it matter? I don’t know why fiction should be hampered by fact. I don’t think it’s a mean achievement to have created a country, a dark, sinister, romantic, and heroic country of the soul.”

“You’re a sentimentalist, my poor Angus.” And then again to Neil: “You must read Turgenev, you must read Tolstoy, you must read Dostoyevsky.”

Neil did not in the least know what to make of Darya Munro. She skipped over the first stages of acquaintance and treated him at once like someone she had known intimately all her life. It puzzled him. It seemed so reckless. When he met anyone his own instinct was to go cautiously. He was amiable, but he did not like to step too far before he saw his way before him. He did not want to give anyone his confidence before he thought himself justified. But with Darya you could not help yourself; she forced your confidence. She poured out the feelings and thoughts that most people keep to themselves like a prodigal flinging gold pieces to a scrambling crowd. She did not talk, she did not act, like anyone he had ever known. She did not mind what she said. She would speak of the natural functions of the human animal in a way that brought the blushes coursing to his cheeks. They excited her ridicule.

“Oh, what a prig you are! What is there indecent in it? When I’m going to take a purge, why shouldn’t I say so, and when I think you want one, why shouldn’t I tell you?”

“Theoretically I dare say you’re right,” said Neil, always judicious and reasonable.

She made him tell her of his father and mother, his brothers, his life at school and at the university. She told him about herself. Her father was a general killed in the war and her mother a Princess Lutchkov. They were in Eastern Russia when the Bolsheviks seized power, and fled to Yokohama. Here they had subsisted miserably on the sale of their jewels and such objects of art as they had been able to save, and here she married a fellow-exile. She was unhappy with him and in two years divorced him. Her mother died and, penniless, she was driven to earn her living as best she could. She was employed by an American relief organization. She taught in a mission school. She worked in a hospital. She made Neil’s blood boil, and at the same time embarrassed him very much, when she spoke of the men who tried to take advantage of her defencelessness and her poverty. She spared him no details.

“Brutes,” he said.

“Oh, all men are like that,” she replied, with a shrug of her shoulders.

She told him how once she protected her virtue at the point of her revolver.

“I swore I’d kill him if he took another step, and if he had I’d have shot him like a dog.”

“Gosh!” said Neil.

It was at Yokohama that she met Angus. He was spending his leave in Japan. She was captivated by his straightforwardness, the decency which was so obvious in him, his tenderness and his consideration. He was not a business man; he was a scientist, and science is milk-brother to art. He offered her peace. He offered her security. And she was tired of Japan. Borneo was a land of mystery. They had been married for five years.

She gave Neil the Russian novelists to read. She gave him Fathers and Sons, Anna Karenina, and The Brothers Karamazov.

“Those are the three peaks of our literature. Read them. They are the greatest novels the world has ever seen.”

Like many of her countrymen she talked as though no other literature counted, and as though a few novels and stories, some indifferent poetry, and half a dozen good plays had made whatever else the world has produced negligible. Neil was fascinated and overwhelmed.

“You’re rather like Alyosha yourself, Neil,” she said, looking at him with eyes that were now so soft and tender, “an Alyosha with a Scotch dourness, suspicious and prudent, that will not let the soul in you, the spiritual beauty, come out.”

“I’m not a bit like Alyosha,” he answered self-consciously.

“You don’t know what you’re like. You don’t know anything about yourself. Why are you a naturalist? Is it for money? You could have made much more money by going into your uncle’s office in Glasgow. I feel in you something strange and unearthly. I could bow down at your feet as Father Zossima did to Dimitri.”

“Please don’t,” he said, smiling, but flushing a little too.

But the novels he read made her seem a little less strange to him. They gave her an environment and he recognized in her traits which, however unusual in the women he knew in Scotland, his mother and the daughters of his uncle in Glasgow, were common to many of the characters in Russian fiction. He no longer wondered that she should like to sit up so late, drinking innumerable cups of tea, and lie on the sofa nearly all day long reading and incessantly smoking cigarettes. She could do nothing at all for days on end without being bored. She had a curious mixture of languor and zest. She often said, with a shrug of her shoulders, that she was an Oriental, and a European only by chance. She had a feline grace that indeed suggested the Oriental. She was immensely untidy and it did not seem to affect her that cigarette-ends, old papers, and empty tins should lie about their living-room. But he thought she had something of Anna Karenina in her and he transferred to her the sympathy he felt for that pathetic creature. He understood her arrogance. It was not unnatural that she despised the women of the community, whose acquaintance little by little he made; they were commonplace; her mind was quicker than theirs, she had a wider culture, and she had above all a sort of tremulous sensitiveness that made them extraordinarily colourless. She certainly took no pains to conciliate them. Though at home she slopped about in a sarong and baju, when she and Angus went out to dinner she dressed with a splendour that was somewhat out of place. She liked to display her ample bosom and her shapely back. She painted her cheeks and made up her eyes like an actress for the footlights. Though it made Neil angry to see the amused or outraged glances that her appearance provoked, he could not in his heart but think it a pity that she should make such an object of herself. She looked grand, of course, but if you hadn’t known who she was you would have thought she wasn’t respectable. There were things about her that he could never get over. She had an enormous appetite and it fashed him that she ate more than he and Angus together. He could never quite get used to the bluntness with which she discussed sexual matters. She took it for granted that at home and in Edinburgh he had had affairs with a host of women. She pressed him for details of his adventures. His Scotch pawkiness helped him to parry her thrusts and he evaded her questions with native caution. She laughed at his reticence.

Sometimes she shocked him. He grew accustomed to the frankness with which she admired his looks, and when she told him that he was as beautiful as a young Norse god he did not turn a hair. Flattery fell off him like water from a duck’s back. But he did not like it when she ran her hand, though large, very soft, with caressing fingers, through his curly hair or, a smile on her lips, stroked his smooth face. He couldn’t bear being mussed about. One day she wanted a drink of tonic water and began pouring some out in a glass that stood on the table.

“That’s my glass,” he said quickly. I’ve just been drinking out of it.”

“Well, what of it? You haven’t got syphilis, have you?”

“I hate drinking out of other people’s glasses myself.”

She was funny about cigarettes too. Once, when he hadn’t been there very long, he had just lit one, when she passed and said:

“I want that.”

She took it out of his mouth and began to smoke it. After two or three puffs, she said she did not want any more and handed it back to him. The end she had had in her mouth was red from the rouge on her lips, and he didn’t want to go on smoking it at all. But he was afraid she would think it rude if he threw it away. It somewhat disgusted him. Often she would ask him for a cigarette and when he handed it to her, say:

“Oh, light it for me, will you?”

When he did so, and held it out to her, she opened her mouth so that he should put it in. He hadn’t been able to help wetting the end a little. He wondered she could bear to put it in her mouth after it had been in his. The whole thing seemed to him awfully familiar. He was sure Munro wouldn’t like it. She had even done this once or twice at the club. Neil had felt himself go purple. He wished she hadn’t got these rather unpleasant habits, but he supposed that they were Russian, and one couldn’t deny that she was wonderfully good company. Her conversation was very stimulating. It was like champagne (which Neil had tasted once and thought wretched stuff), “metaphorically speaking’. There was nothing she couldn’t talk about. She didn’t talk like a man; with a man you generally knew what he would say next, but with her you never did; her intuition was quite remarkable. She gave you ideas. She enlarged your mind and excited your imagination. Neil felt alive as he had never felt alive before. He seemed to walk on mountain peaks, and the horizons of the spirit were unbounded. Neil felt a certain complacency when he stopped to reflect on what an exalted plane his mind communed with hers. Such conversations made very small beer of the vaunted pleasure of sense. She was in many ways (he was of a cautious nature and seldom made a statement even to himself that he did not qualify) the most intelligent woman he had ever met. And besides, she was Angus Munro’s wife.

For, whatever Neil’s reservations were about Darya, he had none about Munro, and she would have had to be a much less remarkable woman not to profit by the enormous admiration he conceived for her husband. With him Neil let himself go. He felt for him what he had never felt for anyone before. He was so sane, so balanced, so tolerant. This was the sort of man he would himself like to be when he was older. He talked little, but when he did, with good sense. He was wise. He had a dry humour that Neil understood. It made the hearty English fun of the men at the club seem inane. He was kind and patient. He had a dignity that made it impossible to conceive anyone taking a liberty with him, but he was neither pompous nor solemn. He was honest and absolutely truthful. But Neil admired him no less as a scientist than as a man. He had imagination. He was careful and painstaking. Though his interest was in research he did the routine work of the museum conscientiously. He was just then much interested in stick-insects and intended to write a paper on their powers of parthenogenetic reproduction. An incident occurred in connexion with the experiments he was making that made a great impression on Neil. One day, a little captive gibbon escaped from its chain and ate up all the larvae and so destroyed the whole of Munro’s evidence. Neil nearly cried. Angus Munro took the gibbon in his arms and, smiling, stroked it.

“Diamond, Diamond,” he said, quoting Sir Isaac Newton, “you little know the damage you have done.”

He was also studying mimicry and instilled into Neil his absorbed interest in this controversial subject. They had interminable talks about it. Neil was astonished at the Curator’s wonderful knowledge. It was encyclopaedic, and he was abashed at his own ignorance. But it was when Munro spoke of the trips into the country to collect specimens that his enthusiasm was most contagious. That was the perfect life, a life of hardship, difficulty, often of privation and sometimes of danger, but rewarded by the thrill of finding a rare, or even a new, species, by the beauty of the scenery, and the intimate observation of nature, and above all the sense of freedom from every tie. It was for this part of the work that Neil had been chiefly engaged. Munro was occupied in research work that made it difficult for him to be away from home for several weeks at a time, and Darya had always refused to accompany him. She had an unreasoning fear of the jungle. She was terrified of wild beasts, snakes, and venomous insects. Though Munro had told her over and over again that no animal hurt you unless you molested or frightened it, she could not get over her instinctive horror. He did not like leaving her. She cared little for the local society and with him away he realized that life for her must be intolerably dull. But the Sultan was keenly interested in natural history and was anxious that the museum should be completely representative of the country’s fauna. One expedition Munro and Neil were to make together, so that Neil should learn how to go to work, and the plans for this were discussed by them for months. Neil looked forward to it as he had never looked forward to anything in his life.

Meanwhile he learned Malay and acquired a smattering of the dialects that would be useful to him on future journeys. He played tennis and football. He soon knew everyone in the community. On the football field he threw off his absorption in science and his interest in Russian fiction and gave himself up to the pleasure of the game. He was strong, quick, and active. After it was all over it was grand to have a sluice down and a long tonic with a slice of lemon and go over it all with the other fellows. It had never been intended that Neil should live permanently with the Munros. There was a roomy rest-house at Kuala Solor, but the rule was that no one should stay in it for more than a fortnight and such of the bachelors as had no official quarters clubbed together and took a house between them. When Neil arrived it so happened that there was no vacancy in any of these messes. One evening, however, when he had been about four months in the colony, two men, Waring and Jonson, when they were sitting together after a game of tennis, told him that one member of their mess was going home and if he would like to join them they would be glad to have him. They were young fellows of his own age, in the football team, and Neil liked them both. Waring was in the Customs and Jonson in the police. He jumped at the suggestion. They told him how much it would cost and fixed a day, a fortnight later, when it would be convenient for him to move in.

At dinner he told the Munros.

“It’s been awfully good of you to let me stay so long. It’s made me very uncomfortable planting myself on you like this, I’ve been quite ashamed, but now there’s no excuse for me.”

“But we like having you here,” said Darya. “You don’t need an excuse.”

“I can hardly go on staying here indefinitely.”

“Why not? Your salary’s miserable, what’s the use of wasting it on board and lodging? You’d be bored stiff with Jonson and Waring. Stupids. They haven’t an idea in their heads outside playing the gramophone and knocking balls about.”

It was true that it had been very convenient to live free of cost. He had saved the greater part of his salary. He had a thrifty soul and had never been used to spending money when it wasn’t necessary, but he was proud. He could not go on living at other people’s expense. Darya looked at him with her quiet, observant eyes.

“Angus and I have got used to you now. I think we’d miss you. If you like, you can pay us for your board. You don’t cost anything, but if it’ll make you easier I’ll find out exactly what difference you make in cookie’s book and you can pay that.”

“It must be an awful nuisance having a stranger in the house,” he answered uncertainly.

“It’ll be miserable for you there. Good heavens, the filth they eat.”

It was true also that at the Munros you ate better than anywhere else at Kuala Solor. He had dined out now and then, and even at the Resident’s you didn’t get a very good dinner. Darya liked her food and kept the cook up to the mark. He made Russian dishes which were a fair treat. That cabbage soup of Darya’s was worth walking five miles for. But Munro hadn’t said anything.

“I’d be glad if you’d stay here,” he said now. “It’s very convenient to have you on the spot. If anything comes up we can talk it over there and then. Waring and Jonson are very good fellows, but I dare say you’d find them rather limited after a bit.”

“Oh, well, then I’ll be very pleased. Heaven knows, I couldn’t want anything better than this. I was only afraid I was in the way.”

Next day it was raining cats and dogs and it was impossible to play tennis or football, but towards six Neil put on a mackintosh and went to the club. It was empty but for the Resident, who was sitting in an arm-chair reading The Fortnightly. His name was Trevelyan, and he claimed to be related to the friend of Byron. He was a tall fat man, with close-cropped white hair and the large red face of a comic actor. He was fond of amateur theatricals and specialized in cynical dukes and facetious butlers. He was a bachelor, but generally supposed to be fond of the girls, and he liked his gin pahit before dinner. He owed his position to the Sultan’s friendship. He was a slack, complacent man, a great talker, not very fond of work, who wanted everything to go smoothly and no one to give trouble. Though not considered especially competent he was popular in the community because he was easy-going and hospitable, and he certainly made life more comfortable than if he had been energetic and efficient. He nodded to Neil.

“Well, young fellow, how are bugs today?”

“Feeling the weather, sir,” said Neil gravely.

“Hi-hi.”

In a few minutes Waring, Jonson, and another man, called Bishop, came in. He was in the Civil Service. Neil did not play bridge, so Bishop went up to the Resident.

“Would you care to make a fourth, sir?” he asked him. “There’s nobody much in the club today.”

The Resident gave the others a glance.

“All right. I’ll just finish this article and join you. Cut for me and deal. I shall only be five minutes.”

Neil went up to the three men.

“Oh, I say, Waring, thanks awfully, but I can’t move over to you after all. The Munros have asked me to stay on with them for good.”

A broad smile broke on Waring’s face.

“Fancy that.”

“It’s awfully nice of them, isn’t it? They made rather a point of it. I couldn’t very well refuse.”

“What did I tell you?” said Bishop.

“I don’t blame the boy,” said Waring.

There was something in their manner that Neil did not like. They seemed to be amused. He flushed.

“What the hell are you talking about?” he cried.

“Oh, come off it,” said Bishop. “We know our Darya. You’re not the first good-looking young fellow she’s had a romp with, and you won’t be the last.”

The words were hardly out of his mouth before Neil’s clenched fist shot out like a flash. He hit Bishop on the face and he fell heavily to the floor. Jonson sprang at Neil and seized him round the middle, for he was beside himself.

“Let me go,” he shouted. “If he doesn’t withdraw that I’ll kill him.”

The Resident, startled by the commotion, looked up and rose to his feet. He walked heavily towards them.

“What’s this? What’s this? What the hell are you boys playing at?”

They were taken aback. They had forgotten him. He was their master. Jonson let go of Neil and Bishop picked himself up. The Resident, a frown on his face, spoke to Neil sharply.

“What’s the meaning of this? Did you hit Bishop?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Why?”

“He made a foul suggestion reflecting on a woman’s honour,” said Neil, very haughtily, and still white with rage.

The Resident’s eyes twinkled, but he kept a grave face.

“What woman?”

“I refuse to answer,” said Neil, throwing back his head and drawing himself up to his full imposing height.

It would have been more effective if the Resident hadn’t been a good two inches taller, and very much stouter.

“Don’t be a damned young fool.”

“Darya Munro,” said Jonson.

“What did you say, Bishop?”

“I forget the exact words I used. I said she’d hopped into bed with a good many young chaps here, and I supposed she hadn’t missed the chance of doing the same with MacAdam.”

“It was a most offensive suggestion. Will you be so good as to apologize and shake hands. Both of you.”

“I’ve had a hell of a biff, sir. My eye’s going to look like the devil. I’m damned if I apologize for telling the truth.”

“You’re old enough to know that the fact that your statement is true only makes it more offensive, and as far as your eye is concerned I’m told that a raw beef-steak is very efficacious in these circumstances. Though I put my desire that you should apologize in the form of a request out of politeness, it is in point of fact an order.”

There was a moment’s silence. The Resident looked bland.

“I apologize for what I said, sir,” Bishop said sulkily.

“Now then, MacAdam.”

“I’m sorry I hit him, sir. I apologize, too.”

“Shake hands.”

The two young men solemnly did so.

“I shouldn’t like this to go any further. It wouldn’t be nice for Munro, whom I think we all like. Can I count on you all holding your tongues?”

They nodded.

“Now be off with you. You stay, MacAdam, I want to have a few words with you.”

When the two of them were left alone, the Resident sat down and lit himself a cheroot. He offered one to Neil, but he only smoked cigarettes.

“You’re a very violent young man,” said the Resident, with a smile. “I don’t like my officers to make scenes in a public place like this.”

“Mrs Munro is a great friend of mine. She’s been kindness itself to me. I won’t hear a word said against her.”

“Then I’m afraid you’ll have your job cut out for you if you stay here much longer.”

Neil was silent for a moment. He stood, tall and slim, before the Resident, and his grave young face was guileless. He flung back his head defiantly. His emotion made him speak in broader Scots even than usual.

“I’ve lived with the Munros for four months, and I give you my word of honour that so far as I am concerned there is not an iota of truth in what that beast said. Mrs Munro has never treated me with anything that you could call undue familiarity. She’s never by word or deed given me the smallest hint that she had an improper idea in her head. She’s been like a mother to me or an elder sister.”

The Resident watched him with ironical eyes.

“I’m very glad to hear it. That’s the best thing I’ve heard about her for a long time.”

“You believe me, sir, don’t you?”

“Of course. Perhaps you’ve reformed her.” He called out, “Boy. Bring me a gin pahit.” And then to Neil. “That’ll do. You can go now if you want to. But no more fighting, mind you, or you’ll get the order of the boot.”

When Neil walked back to the Munros’ bungalow the rain had stopped and the velvet sky was bright with stars. In the garden the fire-flies were flitting here and there. From the earth rose a scented warmth and you felt that if you stopped you would hear the growth of that luxuriant vegetation. A white flower of the night gave forth an overwhelming perfume. In the veranda Munro was typing some notes, and Darya, lying at full length on a long chair, was reading. The lamp behind her lit her smoky hair so that it shone like an aureole. She looked up at Neil and, putting down her book, smiled. Her smile was very friendly.

“Where have you been, Neil?”

“At the club.”

“Anybody there?”

The scene was so cosy and domestic, Darya’s manner so peaceful and quietly assured, that it was impossible not to be touched. The two of them there, each occupied with his own concerns, seemed so united, their intimacy so natural, that no one could have conceived that they were not perfectly happy in one another. Neil did not believe a single word of what Bishop had said and the

Resident had hinted. It was incredible. After all, he knew that what they had suspected of him was untrue, so what reason was there to think that the rest was any truer? They had dirty minds, all those people; because they were a lot of swine they thought everyone else as bad as they were. His knuckle hurt him a little. He was glad he had hit Bishop. He wished he knew who had started that filthy story. He’d wring his neck.

But now Munro fixed a date for the expedition that they had so much discussed, and in his careful way began to make preparations so that at the last moment nothing should be forgotten. The plan was to go as far up the river as possible and then make their way through the jungle and hunt for specimens on the little-known Mount Hitam. They expected to be away two months. As the day on which they were to start grew nearer Munro’s spirits rose, and though he did not say very much, though he remained quiet and self-controlled, you could tell by the light in his eyes and the jauntiness of his step how much he looked forward to it. One morning, at the museum, he was almost sprightly.

“I’ve got some good news for you,” he said suddenly to Neil, after they had been looking at some experiments they were making. “Darya’s coming with us.”

“Is she? That’s grand.”

Neil was delighted. That made it perfect.

“It’s the first time I’ve ever been able to induce her to accompany me. I told her she’d enjoy it, but she would never listen to me. Queer cattle, women, I’d given it up and never thought of asking her to come this time, and suddenly, last night, out of a blue sky she said she’d like to.”

“I’m awfully glad,” said Neil.

“I didn’t much like the idea of leaving her by herself so long; now we can stay just as long as we want to.”

They started early one morning in four prahus, manned by Malays, and besides themselves the party consisted of their servants and four Dyak hunters. The three of them lay on cushions side by side, under an awning; in the other boats were the Chinese servants and the Dyaks. They carried bags of rice for the whole party, provisions for themselves, clothes, books, and all that was necessary for their work. It was heavenly to leave civilization behind them and they were all excited. They talked. They smoked. They read. The motion of the river was exquisitely soothing. They lunched on a grassy bank. Dusk fell and they moored for the night. They slept at a long house and their Dyak hosts celebrated their visit with arrak, eloquence, and a fantastic dance. Next day the river, narrowing, gave them more definitely the feeling that they were adventuring into the unknown, and the exotic vegetation that crowded the banks to the water’s edge, like an excited mob pushed from behind by a multitude, caused Neil a breathless ravishment. O wonder and delight! On the third day, because the water was shallower and the stream more rapid, they changed into lighter boats, and soon it grew so strong that the boatmen could paddle no longer, and they poled against the current with powerful and magnificent gestures. Now and then they came to rapids and had to disembark, unload, and haul the boats through a rock-strewn passage. After five days they reached a point beyond which they could go no further. There was a government bungalow there, and they settled in for a couple of nights while Munro made arrangements for their excursion into the interior. He wanted bearers for their baggage, and men to build a house for them when they reached Mount Hitam. It was necessary for Munro to see the headman of a village in the vicinity, and thinking it would save time if he went himself rather than let the headman come to him, the day after they arrived he set out at dawn with a guide and a couple of Dyaks. He expected to be back in a few hours. When he had seen him off Neil thought he would have a bathe. There was a pool a little way from the bungalow, and the water was so clear that you saw every grain of the sandy bottom. The river was so narrow there that the trees over-arched it. It was a lovely spot. It reminded Neil of the pools in Scotch streams he had bathed in as a boy, and yet it was strangely different. It had an air of romance, a feeling of virgin nature, that filled him with sensations that he found hard to analyse. He tried, of course, but older heads than his have found it difficult to anatomize happiness. A kingfisher was sitting on an overhanging branch and its vivid blue was reflected as bluely in the crystal stream. It flew away with a flashing glitter of jewelled wings when Neil, slipping off his sarong and baju, scrambled down into the water. It was fresh without being cold. He splashed and tumbled about. He enjoyed the movement of his strong limbs. He floated and looked at the blue sky peeping through the leaves and the sun that here and there gilded the water. Suddenly he heard a voice.

“How white your body is, Neil.”

With a gasp he let himself sink and turning round saw Darya standing on the bank.

“I say, I haven’t got any clothes on.”

“So I saw. It’s much nicer bathing without. Wait a minute, I’ll come in, it looks lovely.”

She also was wearing a sarong and a baju. He turned away his head quickly, for he saw that she was taking them off. He heard her splash into the water. He gave two or three strokes in order that she should have room to swim about at a good distance from him, but she swam up to him.

“Isn’t the feel of the water on one’s body lovely?” she said.

She laughed and opening her hand splashed water in his face. He was so embarrassed he did not know which way to look. In that limpid water it was impossible not to see that she was stark naked. It was not so bad now, but he could not help thinking how difficult it would be to get out. She seemed to be having a grand time.

“I don’t care if I do get my hair wet,” she said.

She turned over on her back and with strong strokes swam round the pool. When she wanted to get out, he thought, the best thing would be if he turned his back and when she was dressed she could go and he would get out later. She seemed quite unconscious of the awkwardness of the situation. He was vexed with her. It really was rather tactless to behave like that. She kept on talking to him just as if they were on dry land and properly dressed. She even called his attention to herself.

“Does my hair look awful? It’s so fine it gets like rat tails when it’s wet. Hold me under the shoulders a moment while I try to screw it up.”

“Oh, it’s all right,” he said. “You’d better leave it now.”

“I’m getting frightfully hungry,” she said presently. “What about breakfast?”

“If you’ll get out first and put on your things, I’ll follow you in a minute.”

“All right.”

She swam the two strokes needed to bring her to the side, and he modestly looked away so that he should not see her get out nude from the water.

“I can’t get up,” she cried.

“You’ll have to help me.”

It had been easy enough to get in, but the bank overhung the water and one had to lift oneself up by the branch of a tree.

“I can’t. I haven’t got a stitch of clothing on.”

“I know that. Don’t be so Scotch. Get up on the bank and give me a hand.”

There was no help for it. Neil swung himself up and pulled her after him. She had left her sarong beside his. She took it up unconcernedly and began to dry herself with it. There was nothing for him but do to the same, but for decency’s sake he turned his back on her.

“You really have a most lovely skin,” she said. “It’s as smooth and white as a woman’s. It’s funny on such a manly virile figure. And you haven’t got a hair on your chest.”

Neil wrapped the sarong round him and slipped his arms into the baju.

“Are you ready?”

She had porridge for breakfast, and eggs and bacon, cold meat, and marmalade. Neil was a trifle sulky. She was really almost too Russian. It was stupid of her to behave like that; of course there was no harm in it, but it was just the sort of thing that made people think the things they did about her. The worst of it was that you couldn’t give her a hint. She’d only laugh at you. But the fact was that if any of those men at Kuala Solor had seen them bathing like that together, stark naked, nothing would have persuaded them that something improper hadn’t happened. In his judicious way Neil admitted to himself that you could hardly blame them. It was too bad of her. She had no right to put a fellow in such a position. He had felt such a fool. And say what you liked, it was indecent.

Next morning, having seen their carriers on the way, a long procession in single file, each man carrying his load in a creel on his back, with their servants, guides, and hunters, they started to walk. The path ran over the foothills of the mountain, through scrub and tall grass, and now and then they came to narrow streams which they crossed by rickety bridges of bamboo. The sun beat on them fiercely. In the afternoon they reached the shade of a bamboo forest, grateful after the glare, and the bamboos in their slender elegance rose to incredible heights, and the green light was like the light under the sea. At last they reached the primeval forest, huge trees swathed in luxuriant creepers, an inextricable tangle, and awe descended upon them. They cut their way through the undergrowth. They walked in twilight and only now and then caught through the dense foliage above them a glimpse of sunshine. They saw neither man nor beast, for the denizens of the jungle are shy and at the first sound of footsteps vanish from sight. They heard birds up high in the tall trees, but saw none save the twittering sunbirds that flew in the underwoods and delicately coquetted with the wild flowers. They halted for the night. The carriers made a floor of branches and on this spread waterproof sheets. The Chinese cook made them their dinner and then they turned in.

It was the first night Neil had ever spent in the jungle and he could not sleep. The darkness was profound. The noise was deafening of innumerable insects, but like the roar of traffic in a great city it was so constant that in a little while it was like an impenetrable silence, and when on a sudden he heard the shriek of a monkey seized by a snake or the scream of a night-bird he nearly jumped out of his skin. He had a mysterious sensation that all around creatures were watching them. Over there, beyond the camp-fires, savage warfare was waged and they three on their bed of branches were defenceless and alone in face of the horror of nature. By his side Munro was breathing quietly in his deep sleep.

“Are you awake, Neil?” Darya whispered.

“Yes. Is anything the matter?”

“I’m terrified.”

“It’s all right. There’s nothing to be afraid of.”

“The silence is so awful. I wish I hadn’t come.”

She lit a cigarette.

Neil, having at last dozed off, was awakened by the hammering of a woodpecker, and its complacent laugh as it flew from one tree to another seemed to mock the sluggards. A hurried breakfast, and the caravan started. The gibbons swung from branch to branch, gathering in the dawn dew from the leaves, and their strange cry was like the call of a bird. The light had driven away Darya’s fears, and notwithstanding a sleepless night she was alert and gay. They continued to climb. In the afternoon they reached the spot that the guides had told them would be a good camping place, and here Munro decided to build a house. The men set to work. With their long knives they cut palm leaves and saplings and soon had erected a two-roomed hut raised on piles from the ground. It was neat and fresh and green. It smelt good.

The Munros, he from old habit, she because she had for years wandered about the world and had a catlike knack of making herself comfortable wherever she went, were at home anywhere. In a day they had arranged everything and settled down. Their routine was invariable. Every morning Neil and Munro started out separately, collecting. The afternoon was devoted to pinning insects in boxes, placing butterflies between sheets of paper and skinning birds. When dusk came they caught moths. Darya busied herself with the hut and the servants, sewed and read and smoked innumerable cigarettes. The days passed very pleasantly, monotonous but eventful. Neil was enraptured. He explored the mountain in all directions. One day, to his pride, he found a new species of stick-insect. Munro named it Cuniculina MacAdami. This was fame. Neil (at twenty-two) realized that he had not lived in vain. But another day he only just escaped being bitten by a viper. Owing to its green colour he had not seen it and was only saved from lurching against it by the Dyak hunter who was with him. They killed it and brought it back to camp. Darya shuddered at the sight of it. She had a terror of the wild creatures of the jungle and was almost hysterical. She would never go more than a few yards from the camp for fear of being lost.

“Has Angus ever told you how he was lost?” she asked Neil one evening when they were sitting quietly together after dinner.

“It wasn’t a very pleasant experience,” he smiled.

“Tell him, Angus.”

He hesitated a little. It was not a thing he liked to recall.

“It was some years ago, I’d gone out with my butterfly net and I’d been very lucky. I’d got several rare specimens that I’d been looking for a long time. After a while I thought I was getting hungry so I turned back. I walked for some time and it struck me I’d come a good deal farther than I knew. Suddenly I caught sight of an empty match-box. I’d thrown it away when I started to come back; I’d been walking in a circle and was exactly where I was an hour before. I was not pleased. But I had a look round and set off again. It was fearfully hot and I was simply dripping with sweat. I knew more or less the direction the camp was in and I looked about for traces of my passage to see if I had come that way. I thought I found one or two and went on hopefully. I was frightfully thirsty. I walked on and on, picking my way over snags and trailing plants, and suddenly I knew I was lost. I couldn’t have gone so far in the right direction without hitting the camp. I can tell you I was startled. I knew I must keep my head, so I sat down and thought the situation over. I was tortured by thirst. It was long past midday and in three or four hours it would be dark. I didn’t like the idea of spending a night in the jungle at all. The only thing I could think of was to try and find a stream; if I followed its course, it would eventually bring me to a larger stream and sooner or later to the river. But of course it might take a couple of days. I cursed myself for being such a fool, but there was nothing better to do and I began walking. At all events if I found a stream I should be able to get a drink. I couldn’t find a trickle of water anywhere, not the smallest brook that might lead to something like a stream. I began to be alarmed. I saw myself wandering on till at last I fell exhausted. I knew there was a lot of game in the forest and if I came upon a rhino I was done for. The maddening thing was I knew I couldn’t be more than ten miles from my camp. I forced myself to keep my head. The day was waning and in the depths of the jungle it was growing dark already. If I’d brought a gun I could have fired it. In the camp they must have realized I was lost and would be looking for me. The undergrowth was so thick that I couldn’t see six feet into it and presently, I don’t know if it was nerves or not, I had the sensation that some animal was walking stealthily beside me. I stopped and it stopped too. I went on and it went on. I couldn’t see it. I could see no movement in the undergrowth. I didn’t even hear the breaking of a twig or the brushing of a body through leaves, but I knew how silently those beasts could move, and I was positive something was stalking me. My heart beat so violently against my ribs that I thought it would break. I was scared out of my wits. It was only by the exercise of all the self-control I had that I prevented myself from breaking into a run. I knew if I did that I was lost. I should be tripped up before I had gone twenty yards by a tangle root and when I was down it would spring on me. And if I started to run God knew where I should get to. And I had to husband my strength. I felt very like crying. And that intolerable thirst. I’ve never been so frightened in my life. Believe me, if I’d had a revolver I think I’d have blown my brains out. It was so awful I just wanted to finish with it. I was so exhausted I could hardly stagger. If I had an enemy who’d done me a deadly injury I wouldn’t wish him the agony I endured then. Suddenly I heard two shots. My heart stood still. They were looking for me. Then I did lose my head. I ran in the direction of the sound, screaming at the top of my voice. I fell, I picked myself up again. I ran on, I shouted till I thought my lungs would burst, there was another shot, nearer, I shouted again, I heard answering shouts; there was a scramble of men in the undergrowth. In a minute I was surrounded by Dyak hunters. They wrung and kissed my hands. They laughed and cried. I very nearly cried too. I was down and out, but they gave me a drink. We were only three miles from the camp. It was pitch dark when we got back. By God, it was a near thing.”

A convulsive shudder passed through Darya.

“Believe me, I don’t want to be lost in the jungle again.”

“What would have happened if you hadn’t been found?”

“I can tell you. I should have gone mad. If I hadn’t been stung by a snake or attacked by a rhino I should have gone on blindly till I fell exhausted. I should have starved to death. I should have died of thirst. Wild beasts would have eaten my body and ants cleaned my bones.”

Silence fell upon them.

Then it happened, when they had spent nearly a month on Mount Hitam, that Neil, notwithstanding the quinine Munro had made him take regularly, was stricken with fever. It was not a bad attack, but he felt very sorry for himself

and was obliged to stay in bed. Darya nursed him. He was ashamed to give her so much trouble, but she would not listen to his protests. She was certainly very capable. He resigned himself to letting her do things for him that one of the Chinese boys could have done just as well. He was touched. She waited on him hand and foot. But when the fever was at its height and she sponged him all over with cold water, though the comfort was indescribable, he was excessively embarrassed. She insisted on washing him night and morning.

“I wasn’t in the British hospital at Yokohama for six months without learning at least the routine of nursing,” she said, smiling.

She kissed him on the lips each time after she had finished. It was friendly and sweet of her. He rather liked it, but attached no importance to it; he even went so far, a rare thing for him, as to be facetious on the subject.

“Did you always kiss your patients at the hospital?” he asked her.

“Don’t you like me to kiss you?” she smiled.

“It doesn’t do me any harm.”

“It may even hasten your recovery,” she mocked.

One night he dreamt of her. He awoke with a start. He was sweating profusely. The relief was wonderful, and he knew that his temperature had fallen; he was well. He did not care. For what he had dreamt filled him with shame. He was horrified. That he should have such thoughts, even in his sleep, made him feel awful. He must be a monster of depravity. Day was breaking, and he heard Munro getting up in the room next door that he occupied with Darya. She slept late, and he took care not to disturb her. When he passed through Neil’s room, Neil in a low voice called him.

“Hullo, are you awake?”

“Yes, I’ve had the crisis. I’m all right now.”

“Good. You’d better stay in bed today. Tomorrow you’ll be as fit as a fiddle.”

“Send Ah Tan to me when you’ve had your breakfast, will you?”

“Right-ho.”

He heard Munro start out. The Chinese boy came and asked him what he wanted. An hour later Darya awoke. She came in to bid him good morning. He could hardly look at her.

“I’ll just have my breakfast and then I’ll come in and wash you,” she said.

“I’m washed. I got Ah Tan to do it.”

“Why?”

“I wanted to spare you the trouble.”

“It isn’t a trouble. I like doing it.”

She came over to the bed and bent down to kiss him, but he turned away his head.

“Oh, don’t.”

“Why not?”

“It’s silly.”

She looked at him for a moment, surprised, and then with a slight shrug of the shoulders left him. A little later she came back to see if there was anything he wanted. He pretended to be asleep. She very gently stroked his cheek.

“For God’s sake don’t do that,” he cried.

“I thought you were sleeping. What’s the matter with you today?”

“Nothing.”

“Why are you being horrid to me? Have I done anything to offend you?”

“No.”

“Tell me what it is.”

She sat down on the bed and took his hand. He turned his face to the wall. He was so ashamed he could hardly speak.

“You seem to forget I’m a man. You treat me as if I was a boy of twelve.”

“Oh?”

He was blushing furiously. He was angry with himself and vexed with her. She really should be more tactful. He plucked nervously at the sheet.

“I know it means nothing to you and it ought not to mean anything to me. It doesn’t when I’m well and up and about. One can’t help one’s dreams, but they are an indication of what is going on in the subconscious.”

“Have you been dreaming about me? Well, I don’t think there’s any harm in that.”

He turned his head and looked at her. Her eyes were gleaming, but his were sombre with remorse.

“You don’t know men,” he said.

She gave a little burble of laughter. She bent down and threw her arms round his neck. She had nothing on but her sarong and baju.

“You darling,” she cried. “Tell me, what did you dream?”

He was startled out of his wits. He pushed her violently aside.

“What are you doing? You’re crazy.”

He jumped half out of bed.

“Don’t you know that I’m madly in love with you?” she said.

“What are you talking about?”

He sat down on the side of the bed. He was frankly bewildered. She chuckled.

“Why do you suppose I came up to this horrible place? To be with you, ducky. Don’t you know I’m scared stiff of the jungle? Even in here I’m frightened there’ll be snakes or scorpions or something. I adore you.”

“You have no right to speak to me like that,” he said sternly.

“Oh, don’t be so prim,” she smiled.

“Let’s get out of here.”

He walked out on to the veranda and she followed him. He threw himself into a chair. She knelt by his side and tried to take his hands, but he withdrew them.

“I think you must be mad. I hope to God you don’t mean what you say.”

“I do. Every word of it,” she smiled.

It exasperated him that she seemed unconscious of the frightfulness of her confession.

“Have you forgotten your husband?”

“Oh, what does he matter?”

“Darya.”

“I can’t be bothered about Angus now.”

“I’m afraid you’re a very wicked woman,” he said slowly, a frown darkening his smooth brow.

She giggled.

“Because I’ve fallen in love with you? Darling, you shouldn’t be so absurdly good-looking.”

“For God’s sake don’t laugh.”

“I can’t help it; you’re comic-but still adorable. I love your white skin and your shining curly hair. I love you because you’re so prim and Scotch and humourless. I love your strength. I love your youth.”

Her eyes glowed and her breath came quickly. She stooped and kissed his naked feet. He drew them away quickly, with a cry of protest, and in the agitation of his gesture nearly overthrew the rickety chair.

“Woman, you’re insane. Have you no shame?”

“No.”

“What do you want of me?” he asked fiercely.

“Love.”

“What sort of man do you take me for?”

“A man like any other,” she replied calmly.

“Do you think after all that Angus Munro has done for me I could be such a damned beast as to play about with his wife? I admire him more than any man I’ve ever known. He’s grand. He’s worth a dozen of me and you put together. I’d sooner kill myself than betray him. I don’t know how you can think me capable of such a dastardly act.”

“Oh, my dear, don’t talk such bilge. What harm is it going to do him? You mustn’t take that sort of thing so tragically. After all, life is very short; we’re fools if we don’t take what pleasure we can out of it.”

“You can’t make wrong right by talking about it.”

“I don’t know about that. I think that’s a very controvertible statement.”

He looked at her with amazement. She was sitting at his feet, cool to all appearance and collected, and she seemed to be enjoying the situation. She seemed quite unconscious of its seriousness.

“Do you know that I knocked a fellow down at the club because he made an insulting remark about you?”

“Who?”

“Bishop.”

“Dirty dog. What did he say?”

“He said you’d had affairs with men.”

“I don’t know why people won’t mind their own business. Anyhow, who cares what they say? I love you. I’ve never loved anyone like you. I’m absolutely sick with love for you.”

“Be quiet. Be quiet.”

“Listen, tonight when Angus is asleep I’ll slip into your room. He sleeps like a rock. There’s no risk.”

“You mustn’t do that.”

“Why not?”

“No, no, no.”

He was frightened out of his wits. Suddenly she sprang to her feet and went into the house.

Munro came back at noon, and in the afternoon they busied themselves as usual. Darya, as she sometimes did, worked with them. She was in high spirits. She was so gay that Munro suggested that she was beginning to enjoy the life.

“It’s not so bad,” she admitted. “I’m feeling happy today.”

She teased Neil. She seemed not to notice that he was silent and kept his eyes averted from her.

“Neil’s very quiet,” said Munro. “I suppose you’re feeling a bit weak still.”

“No. I just don’t feel very talkative.”

He was harassed. He was convinced that Darya was capable of anything. He remembered the hysterical frenzy of Nastasya Filipovna in The Idiot, and felt that she too could behave with that unfortunate lack of balance. He had seen her more than once fly into a temper with one of the Chinese servants and he knew how completely she could lose her self-control. Resistance only exasperated her. If she did not immediately get what she wanted she would go almost insane with rage. Fortunately she lost interest in a thing with the same suddenness with which she hankered for it, and if you could distract her attention for a minute she forgot all about it. It was in such situations that Neil had most admired Munro’s tact. He had often been slyly amused to see with what a pawky and yet tender cunning he appeased her feminine tantrums. It was on Munro’s account that Neil’s indignation was so great. Munro was a saint, and from what a state of humiliation and penury and random shifts had he not taken her to make her his wife! She owed everything to him. His name protected her. She had respectability. The commonest gratitude should have made it impossible for her to harbour such thoughts as she had that morning expressed. It was all very well for men to make advances, that was what men did, but for women to do so was disgusting. His modesty was outraged. The passion he had seen in her face, and the indelicacy of her gestures, scandalized him.

He wondered whether she would really carry out her threat to come to his room. He didn’t think she would dare. But when night came and they all went to bed, he was so terrified that he could not sleep. He lay there listening anxiously. The silence was broken only by the repeated and monotonous cry of an owl. Through the thin wall of woven palm leaves he heard Munro’s steady breathing. Suddenly he was conscious that someone was stealthily creeping into his room. He had already made up his mind what to do.

“Is that you, Mr Munro?” he called in a loud voice.

Darya stopped suddenly. Munro awoke.

“There’s someone in my room. I thought it was you.”

“It’s all right,” said Darya. “It’s only me, I couldn’t sleep, so I thought I’d go and smoke a cigarette on the veranda.”

“Oh, is that all?” said Munro. “Don’t catch cold.”

She walked through Neil’s room and out. He saw her light a cigarette. Presently she went back and he heard her get into bed.

He did not see her next morning, for he started out collecting before she was up, and he took care not to get in till he was pretty sure Munro would be back. He avoided being alone with her till it was dark and Munro went down for a few minutes to arrange the moth-traps.

“Why did you wake Angus last night?” she said in a low angry whisper.

He shrugged his shoulders and going on with his work did not answer.

“Were you frightened?”

“I have a certain sense of decency.”

“Oh, don’t be such a prig.”

“I’d rather be a prig than a dirty swine.”

“I hate you.”

“Then leave me alone.”

She did not answer, but with her open hand smartly slapped his face. He flushed, but did not speak. Munro returned and they pretended to be intent on whatever they were doing.

For the next few days Darya, except at meal-times and in the evenings, never spoke to Neil. Without prearrangement they exerted themselves to conceal from Munro that their relations were strained. But the effort with which Darya roused herself from a brooding silence would have been obvious to anyone more suspicious than Angus, and sometimes she could not help herself from being a trifle sharp with Neil. She chaffed him, but in her chaff was a sting. She knew how to wound and caught him on the raw, but he took care not to let her see it. He had an inkling that the good-humour he affected infuriated her.

Then one day when Neil came back from collecting, though he had delayed till the last possible minute before tiffin, he was surprised to find that Munro had not yet returned. Darya was lying on a mattress on the veranda, sipping a gin pahit and smoking. She did not speak to him when he passed through to wash. In a minute the Chinese boy came into his room and told him that tiffin was ready. He walked out.

“Where’s Mr Munro?” he asked.

“He’s not coming,” said Darya. “He sent a message to say that the place he’s at is so good he won’t come down till night.”

Munro had set out that morning for the summit of the mountain. The lower levels had yielded poor results in the way of mammals, and Munro’s idea was, if he could find a good place higher up, with a supply of water, to transfer the camp. Neil and Darya ate their meal in silence. After they had finished he went into the house and came out again with his topee and his collecting gear. It was unusual for him to go out in the afternoon.

“Where are you going?” she asked abruptly.

“Out.”

“Why?”

“I don’t feel tired. I’ve got nothing much else to do this afternoon.”

Suddenly she burst into tears.

“How can you be so unkind to me?” she sobbed. “Oh, it is cruel to treat me like this.”

He looked down at her from his great height, his handsome, somewhat stolid face bearing a harassed look. “What have I done?”

“You’ve been beastly to me. Bad as I am I haven’t deserved to suffer like this. I’ve done everything in the world for you. Tell me one single little thing I could do that I haven’t done gladly. I’m so terribly unhappy.”

He moved on his feet uneasily. It was horrible to hear her say that. He loathed and feared her, but he had still the respect for her that he had always felt, not only because she was a woman, but because she was Angus Munro’s wife. She wept uncontrollably. Fortunately the Dyak hunters had gone that morning with Munro. There was no one about the camp but the three Chinese servants and they, after tiffin, were asleep in their own quarters fifty yards away. They were alone.

“I don’t want to make you unhappy. It’s all so silly. It’s absurd of a woman like you to fall in love with a fellow like me. It makes me look such a fool. Haven’t you got any self-control?”

“Oh, God. Self-control!”

“I mean, if you really cared for me you couldn’t want me to be such a cad. Doesn’t it mean anything to you that your husband trusts us implicitly? The mere fact of his leaving us alone like this puts us on our honour. He’s a man who would never hurt a fly. I should never respect myself again if I betrayed his confidence.”

She looked up suddenly.

“What makes you think he would never hurt a fly? Why, all those bottles and cases are full of the harmless animals he’s killed.”

“In the interests of science. That’s quite another thing.”

“Oh, you fool, you fool.”

“Well, if I am a fool I can’t help it. Why do you bother about me?”

“Do you think I wanted to fall in love with you?”

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself.”

“Ashamed? How stupid! My God, what have I done that I should eat my heart out for such a pretentious ass?”

“You talk about what you’ve done for me. What has Munro done for you?”

“Munro bores me to death. I’m sick of him. Sick to death of him.”

“Then I’m not the first?”

Ever since her amazing avowal he had been tortured by the suspicion that what those men at Kuala Solor had said of her was true. He had refused to believe a word of it, and even now he could not bring himself to think that she could be such a monster of depravity. It was frightful to think that Angus Munro, so trusting and tender, should have lived in a fool’s paradise. She could not be as bad as that. But she misunderstood him. She smiled through her tears.

“Of course not. How can you be so silly? Oh, darling, don’t be so desperately serious. I love you.”

Then it was true. He had sought to persuade himself that what she felt for him was exceptional, a madness that together they could contend with and vanquish. But she was simply promiscuous.

“Aren’t you afraid Munro will find out?”

She was not crying any more. She adored talking about herself, and she had a feeling that she was inveigling Neil into a new interest in her.

“I sometimes wonder if he doesn’t know, if not with his mind, then with his heart. He’s got the intuition of a woman and a woman’s sensitiveness. Sometimes I’ve been certain he suspected and in his anguish I’ve sensed a strange, spiritual exaltation. I’ve wondered if in his pain he didn’t find an infinitely subtle pleasure. There are souls, you know, that feel a voluptuous joy in laceration.”

“How horrible!” Neil had no patience with these conceits. “The only excuse for you is that you’re insane.”

She was now much more sure of herself. She gave him a bold look.

“Don’t you think I’m attractive? A good many men have. You must have had dozens of women in Scotland who weren’t so well made as I am.”

She looked down at her shapely, sensual figure with calm pride.

“I’ve never had a woman,” he said gravely.

“Why not?”

She was so surprised that she sprang to her feet. He shrugged his shoulders. He could not bring himself to tell her how disgusting the idea of such a thing was to him, and how vile he had thought the haphazard amours of his fellow-students at Edinburgh. He took a mystical joy in his purity. Love was sacred. The sexual act horrified him. Its excuse was the procreation of children and its sanctification marriage. But Darya, her whole body rigid, stared at him, panting; and suddenly, with a sobbing cry in which there was exultation and at the same time wild desire, she flung herself on her knees and seizing his hand passionately kissed it.

“Alyosha,” she gasped. “Alyosha.”

And then, crying and laughing, she crumpled up in a heap at his feet. Strange, hardly human sounds issued from her throat and convulsive tremors passed through her body so that you would have thought she was receiving one electric shock after another. Neil did not know if it was an attack of hysteria or an epileptic fit.

“Stop it,” he cried. “Stop it.”

He took her up in his strong arms and laid her in the chair. But when he tried to leave her she would not let him. She flung her arms round his neck and held him. She covered his face with kisses. He struggled. He turned his face away. He put his hand between her face and his to protect himself. Suddenly she dug her teeth into it. The pain was so great that, without thinking, he gave her a great swinging blow.

“You devil,” he cried.

His violent gesture had forced her to release him. He held his hand and looked at it. She had caught him by the fleshy part on the side, and it was bleeding. Her eyes blazed. She was feeling alert and active.

“I’ve had enough of this. I’m going out,” he said.

She sprang to her feet.

“I’ll come with you.”

He put on his topee and, snatching up his collecting gear without a word, turned on his heel. With one stride he leaped down the three steps that led from the floor of the house to the ground. She followed him.

“I’m going into the jungle,” he said.

“I don’t care.”

In the ravening desire that possessed her she forgot her morbid fear of the jungle. She recked nothing of snakes and wild beasts. She did not mind the branches that hit her face or the creepers that entangled her feet. For a month Neil had explored all that part of the forest and he knew every yard of it. He told himself grimly that he’d teach her to come with him. He forced his way through the undergrowth with rapid strides; she followed him, stumbling but determined; he crashed on, blind with rage, and she crashed after him. She talked; he did not listen to what she said. She besought him to have pity on her. She bemoaned her fate. She made herself humble. She wept and wrung her hands. She tried to cajole him. The words poured from her lips in an unceasing stream. She was like a mad woman. At last in a little clearing he stopped suddenly and turning round faced her.

“This is impossible,” he cried. “I’m fed up. When Angus comes back I must tell him I’ve got to go. I shall go back to Kuala Solor tomorrow morning and go home.”

“He won’t let you go, he wants you. He finds you invaluable.”

“I don’t care. I’ll fake up something.”

“What?”

He mistook her.

“Oh, you needn’t be frightened, I shan’t tell him the truth. You can break his heart if you want to; I’m not going to.”

“You worship him, don’t you? That dull, phlegmatic man.”

“He’s worth a hundred of you.”

“It would be rather funny if I told him you’d gone because I wouldn’t yield to your advances.”

He gave a slight start and looked at her to see if she was serious.

“Don’t be such a fool. You don’t think he’d believe that, do you? He knows it would never occur to me.”

“Don’t be too sure.”

She had spoken carelessly, with no particular intention other than to continue the argument, but she saw that he was frightened and some instinct of cruelty made her press the advantage.

“Do you expect mercy from me? You’ve humiliated me beyond endurance. You’ve treated me like dirt. I swear that if you make any suggestion of going I shall go straight to Angus and say that you took advantage of his absence to try and assault me.”

“I can deny it. After all it’s only your word against mine.”

“Yes, but my word’ll count. I can prove what I say.”

“What do you mean?”

“I bruise easily. I can show him the bruise where you struck me. And look at your hand.” He turned and gave it a sudden glance. “How did those teeth marks get there?”

He stared at her stupidly. He had gone quite pale. How could he explain that bruise and that scar? If he was forced to in self-defence he could tell the truth, but was it likely that Angus would believe it? He worshipped Darya. He would take her word against anyone’s. What monstrous ingratitude it would seem for all Munro’s kindness and what treachery in return for so much confidence! He would think him a filthy skunk and from his standpoint with justice. That was what shattered him, the thought that Munro, for whom he would willingly have laid down his life, should think ill of him. He was so unhappy that tears, unmanly tears that he hated, came to his eyes. Darya saw that he was broken. She exulted. She was paying him back for the misery he had made her suffer. She held him now. He was in her power. She savoured her triumph, and in the midst of her anguish laughed in her heart because he was such a fool. At that moment she did not know whether she loved or despised him.

“Now will you be good?” she said.

He gave a sob and blindly, with a sudden instinct of escape from that abominable woman, took to his heels and ran as hard as he could. He plunged through the jungle, like a wounded animal, not looking where he was going, till he was out of breath. Then, panting, he stopped. He took out his handkerchief and wiped away the sweat that was pouring into his eyes and blinding him. He was exhausted and he sat down to rest.

“I must take care I don’t get lost,” he said to himself.

That was the least of his troubles, but all the same he was glad that he had a pocket compass, and he knew in which direction he must go. He heaved a deep sigh and rose wearily to his feet. He started walking. He watched his way and with another part of his mind miserably asked himself what he should do. He was convinced that Darya would do what she had threatened. They were to be another three weeks in that accursed place. He dared not go; he dared not stay. His mind was in a whirl. The only thing was to get back to camp and think it out quietly. In about a quarter of an hour he came to a spot that he recognized. In an hour he was back. He flung himself miserably into a chair. And it was Angus who filled his thoughts. His heart bled for him. Neil saw now all sorts of things that before had been dark to him. They were revealed to him in a flash of bitter insight. He knew why the women at Kuala Solor were so hostile to Darya and why they looked at Angus so strangely. They treated him with a sort of affectionate levity. Neil thought it was because Angus was a man of science and so in their foolish eyes somewhat absurd. He knew now it was because they were sorry for him and at the same time found him ridiculous. Darya had made him the laughing-stock of the community. If ever there was a man who hadn’t deserved ill usage at a woman’s hands it was he. Suddenly Neil gasped and began to tremble all over. It had suddenly occurred to him that Darya did not know her way through the jungle; in his anguish he had hardly been conscious of where they went. Supposing she could not find her way home?

She would be terrified. He remembered the ghastly story Angus had told them of being lost in the forest. His first instinct was to go back and find her, and he sprang to his feet. Then a fierce anger seized him. No, let her shift for herself. She had gone of her own free will. Let her find her own way back. She was an abominable woman and deserved all that might come to her. Neil threw back his head defiantly, a frown of indignation on his smooth young brow, and clenched his hands. Courage. He made up his mind. It would be better for Angus if she never returned. He sat down and began trying to mount a skin of a Mountain Trogon. But the Trogon has a skin like wet tissue-paper and his hands trembled. He tried to apply his mind to the work he was doing, but his thoughts fluttered desperately, like moths in a trap, and he could not control them. What was happening over there in the jungle? What had she done when he suddenly bolted? Every now and then, against his will, he looked up. At any moment she might appear in the clearing and walk calmly up to the house. He was not to blame. It was the hand of God. He shuddered. Storm clouds were gathering in the sky and night fell quickly.

Just after dusk Munro arrived.

“Just in time,” he said. “There’s going to be a hell of a storm.”

He was in great spirits. He had come upon a fine plateau, with lots of water, from which there was a magnificent view to the sea. He had found two or three rare butterflies and a flying squirrel. He was full of plans to move the camp to his new place. All about it he had seen abundant evidence of animal life. Presently he went into the house to take off his heavy walking boots. He came out at once.

“Where’s Darya?”

Neil stiffened himself to behave with naturalness.

“Isn’t she in her room?”

“No. Perhaps she’s gone down to the servants’ quarters for something.”

He walked down the steps and strolled a few yards.

“Darya,” he called. “Darya.” There was no answer. “Boy.”

A Chinese servant came running up and Angus asked him where his mistress was. He did not know. He had not seen her since tiffin.

“Where can she be?” asked Munro, coming back, puzzled.

He went to the back of the house and shouted.

“She can’t have gone out. There’s nowhere to go. When did you see her last, Neil?”

“I went out collecting after tiffin. I’d had a rather unsatisfactory morning and I thought I’d try my luck again.”

“Strange.”

They hunted everywhere round the camp. Munro thought she might have made herself comfortable somewhere and gone to sleep.

“It’s too bad of her to frighten one like this.”

The whole party joined in the search. Munro began to grow alarmed.

“It’s not possible that she should have gone for a stroll in the jungle and lost her way. She’s never moved more than a hundred yards from the house to the best of my knowledge since we’ve been here.”

Neil saw the fear in Munro’s eyes and looked down.

“We’d better get everyone along and start hunting. There’s one thing, she can’t be far. She knows that if you get lost the best thing is to stay where you are and wait for people to come and find you. She’ll be scared out of her wits, poor thing.”

He called out the Dyak hunters and told the Chinese servants to bring lanterns. He fired his gun as a signal. They separated into two parties, one under Munro, the other under Neil, and went down the two rough paths that in the course of the month they had made in their comings and goings. It was arranged that whoever found Darya should fire three shots in quick succession. Neil walked with his face stern and set. His conscience was clear. He seemed to bear in his hands the decree of immanent justice. He knew that Darya would never be found. The two parties met. It was not necessary to look at Munro’s face. He was distracted. Neil felt like a surgeon who is forced to perform a dangerous operation without assistance or appliances to save the life of someone he loves. It behoved him to be firm.

“She could never have got so far as this,” said Munro. “We must go back and beat the jungle within the radius of a mile from the house inch by inch. The only explanation is that she was frightened by something or fainted or was stung by a snake.”

Neil did not answer. They started out again and, making lines, combed the undergrowth. They shouted. Every now and then they fired a gun and listened for a faint call in answer. Birds of the night flew with a whirring of wings, frightened, as they advanced with their lanterns; and now and then they half saw, half guessed at an animal, deer, boar, or rhino, that fled at their approach. The storm broke suddenly. A great wind blew and then the lightning rent the darkness, like a scream of a woman in pain, and the tortured flashes, quick, quick, one on the heels of the other, like demon dancers in a frantic reel, wriggled down the night. The horror of the forest was revealed in an unearthly day. The thunder crashed down the sky in huge rollers, peal upon peal, like vast, primeval waves dashing against the shores of eternity. That fearful din hurtled through space as though sound had size and weight. The rain pelted in fierce torrents. Rocks and gigantic trees came tumbling down the mountain. The tumult was awful. The Dyak hunters cowered, gibbering in terror of the angry spirits who spoke in the storm, but Munro urged them on. The rain fell all night, with lightning and thunder, and did not cease till dawn. Wet through and shivering they returned to the camp. They were exhausted. When they had eaten Munro meant to resume the desperate search. But he knew that it was hopeless. They would never see her alive again. He flung himself down wearily. His face was tired and white and anguished.

“Poor child. Poor child.”