**The Yellow Streak**

W. Somerset Maugham

The two prahus were dropping easily down stream, one a few yards ahead of the other, and in the first sat the two white men. After seven weeks on the rivers they were glad to know that they would lodge that night in a civilised house. To Izzart, who had been in Borneo since the war, the Dyak houses and their feasts were of course an old story; but Campion, though new to the country and at first amused by the strangeness, hankered too now for chairs to sit on and a bed to sleep in. The Dyaks were hospitable, but no one could say that there was much comfort to be found in their houses, and there was a monotony in the entertainment they offered a guest which presently grew somewhat wearisome. Every evening, as the travellers reached the landing-place, the headman, bearing a flag, and the more important members of the household, came down to the river to fetch them. They were led up to the long-house—a village really under one roof, built on piles, to which access was obtained by climbing up the trunk of a tree rudely notched into steps—and to the beating of drums and gongs walked up and down the whole length of it in long procession. On both sides serried throngs of brown people sat on their haunches and stared silently as the white men passed.

Clean mats were unrolled and the guests seated themselves. The headman brought a live chicken and, holding it by the legs, waved it three times over their heads, called the spirits loudly to witness and uttered an in-vocation. Then various persons brought eggs. Arak was drunk. A girl, a very small shy thing with the grace of a flower but with something hieratic in her immobile face, held a cup to the white man’s lips till it was empty and then a great shout arose. The men began to dance, one after the other, each treading his little measure, with his shield and his parang, to the accompaniment of drum and gong. After this had gone on for some time the visitors were taken into one of the rooms that led off the long platform on which was led the common life of the household and found their supper prepared for them. The girls fed them with Chinese spoons. Then everyone grew a little drunk and they all talked till the early hours of the morning.

But now their journey was done and they were on their way to the coast. They had started at dawn. The river then was very shallow and ran clear and bright over a shingly bottom; the trees leaned over it so that above there was only a strip of blue sky; but now it had broadened out, and the men were poling no longer but paddling.

The trees, bamboos, wild sago like huge bunches of ostrich feathers, trees with enormous leaves and trees with feathery foliage like the acacia, coconut trees and areca palms, with their long straight white stems, the trees on the banks were immensely and violently luxuriant.

Here and there, gaunt and naked, was the bare skeleton of a tree struck by lightning or dead of old age, and its whiteness against all that green was vivid. Here and there, rival kings of the forest, tall trees soared above the common level of the jungle. Then there were the parasites; in the fork of two branches great tufts of lush green leaves, or flowering creepers that covered the spreading foliage like a bride’s veil; sometimes they wound round a tall trunk, a sheath of splendour, and threw long flowering arms from branch to branch. There was something thrilling in the passionate wildness of that eager growth; it had the daring abandon of the nomad rioting in the train of the god.

The day wore on, and now the heat was no longer so oppressive. Campion looked at the shabby silver watch on his wrist. It could not be long now before they reached their destination.

“What sort of a chap is Hutchinson?” he asked.

“I don’t know him. I believe he’s a very good sort.” Hutchinson was the Resident in whose house they were to spend the night, and they had sent on a Dyak in a canoe to announce their arrival. “Well, I hope he’s got some whisky. I’ve drunk enough arak to last me a lifetime.”

Campion was a mining engineer whom the Sultan on his way to England had met at Singapore, and finding him at a loose end had commissioned to go to Sembulu and see whether he could discover any mineral which might be profitably worked. He sent Willis, the Resident at Kuala Solor, instructions to afford him every facility, and Willis had put him in the care of Izzart because Izzart spoke both Malay and Dyak like a native. This was the third trip they had made into the interior, and now Campion was to go home with his reports. They were to catch the Sultan Ahmed, which was due to pass the mouth of the river at dawn on the next day but one, and with any luck should reach Kuala Solor on the same afternoon. They were both glad to get back to it. There was tennis and golf there, and the club with its billiard tables, food which was relatively good, and the comforts of civilisation. Izzart was glad, too, that he would have other society than Campion’s. He gave him a sidelong glance. He was a little man with a big, bald head, and though certainly fifty, strong and wiry; he had quick, shining blue eyes and a stubbly, grey moustache. He was seldom without an old briar pipe between his broken and discoloured teeth. He was neither clean nor neat, his khaki shorts were ragged and his singlet torn; he was wearing now a battered topee. He had knocked about the world since he was eighteen and had been in South Africa, in China and in Mexico. He was good company; he could tell a story well, and he was prepared to drink and drink again with any one he met. They had got on very well together, but Izzart had never felt quite at home with him. Though they joked and laughed together, got drunk together, Izzart felt that there was no intimacy between them: for all the cordiality of their relations they remained nothing but acquaintances. He was very sensitive to the impression he made on others, and behind Campion’s joviality he had felt a certain coolness; those shining blue eyes had summed him up; and it vaguely irritated Izzart that Campion had formed an opinion of him, and he did not quite know what it was. He was exasperated by the possibility that this common little man did not think entirely well of him. He desired to be liked and admired.

He wanted to be popular. He wished the people he met to take an inordinate fancy to him, so that he could either reject them or a trifle condescendingly bestow his friendship on them. His inclination was to be familiar with all and sundry, but he was held back by the fear of a rebuff; sometimes he had been uneasily conscious that his effusiveness surprised the persons he lavished it on. By some chance he had never met Hutchinson, though of course he knew all about him just as Hutchinson knew all about him and they would have many common friends to talk of. Hutchinson had been at Winchester, and Izzart was glad that he could tell him that he had been at Harrow … The prahu rounded a bend in the river and suddenly, standing on slight eminence, they saw the bungalow. In a few minutes they caught sight of the landing-stage and on it, among a little group of natives, a figure in white waving to them.

Hutchinson was a tall, stout man with a red face. His appearance led you to expect that he was breezy and self-confident, so that it was not a little surprising to discover quickly that he was diffident and even a trifle shy. When he shook hands with his guests—Izzart introduced himself and then Campion—and led them up the pathway to the bungalow, though he was plainly anxious to be civil it was not hard to see that he found it difficult to make conversation. He took them out on to the verandah and here they found on the table glasses and whisky and soda. They made themselves comfortable on long chairs.

Izzart, conscious of Hutchinson’s slight embarrassment with strangers, expanded; he was very hearty and voluble.

He began to speak of their common acquaintances at Kuala Solor, and he managed very soon to slip in casually the information that he had been at Harrow.

“You were at Winchester, weren’t you?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“I wonder if you knew George Parker. He was in my regiment. He was at Winchester. I daresay he was younger than you.”

Izzart felt that it was a bond between them that they had been at these particular schools, and it excluded Campion, who obviously had enjoyed no such advantage.

They drank two or three whiskies. Izzart in half an hour began to call his host ‘Hutchie’. He talked a good deal about ‘my regiment’ in which he had got his company during the war, and what good fellows his brother officers were. He mentioned two or three names which could hardly be unknown to Hutchinson. They were not the sort of people that Campion was likely to have come across, and he was not sorry to administer to him a neat snub when he claimed acquaintance with someone he spoke of. “Billie Meadows? I knew a fellow called Billie Meadows in Sinaloa many years ago,” said Campion.

“Oh, I shouldn’t think it could be the same,” said Izzart, with a smile. “Billie’s by way of being a peer of the realm. He’s the Lord Meadows who races. Don’t you remember, he owned Spring Carrots?”

Dinner time was approaching, and after a wash and brush-up they drank a couple of gin pahits. They sat down. Hutchinson had not been to Kuala Solor for the best part of a year, and had not seen another white man for three months. He was anxious to make the most of his visitors. He could give them no wine, but there was plenty of whisky and after dinner he brought out a precious bottle of Benedictine. They were very gay. They laughed and talked a great deal. Izzart was getting on famously. He thought he had never liked a fellow more than Hutchinson, and he pressed him to come down to Kuala Solor as soon as he could. They would have a wonderful beano. Campion was left out of the conversation by Izzart with the faintly malicious intention of putting him in his place, and by Hutchinson through shyness; and presently, after yawning a good deal, he said he would go to bed. Hutchinson showed him to his room and when he returned Izzart said to him:

“You don’t want to turn in yet, do you?”

“Not on your life. Let’s have another drink.”

They sat and talked. They both grew a little drunk.

Presently Hutchinson told Izzart that he lived with a Malay girl, and had a couple of children by her. He had told them to keep out of sight while Campion was there.

“I expect she’s asleep now,” said Hutchinson, with a glance at the door which Izzart knew led into his room, “but I’d like you to see the kiddies in the morning.”

Just then a faint wail was heard and Hutchinson with a “Hulloa, the little devil’s awake,” went to the door and opened it. In a moment or two he came out of the room with a child in his arms. A woman followed him.

“He’s cutting his teeth,” said Hutchinson. “It makes him restless.” The woman wore a sarong and a thin white jacket and she was barefoot. She was young, with fine dark eyes, and she gave Izzart when he spoke to her a bright and pleasant smile. She sat down and lit a cigarette. She answered the civil questions Izzart put to her without embarrassment, but also without effusion. Hutchinson asked her if she would have a whisky and soda, but she refused. When the two men began to talk again in English she sat on quite quietly, faintly rocking herself in her chair, and occupied with none could tell what calm thoughts.

“She’s a very good girl,” said Hutchinson. “She looks after the house and she’s no trouble. Of course it’s the only thing to do in a place like this.”

“I shall never do it myself,” said Izzart. “After all, one may want to get married and then it means all sorts of botherations.”

“But who wants to get married? What a life for a white woman. I wouldn’t ask a white woman to live here for anything in the world.”

“Of course it’s a matter of taste. If I have any kiddies I’m going to see that they have a white mother.”

Hutchinson looked down at the little dark-skinned child he held in his arms. He gave a faint smile.

“It’s funny how you get to like them,” he said. “When they’re your own it doesn’t seem to matter that they’ve got a touch of the tar-brush.”

The woman gave the child a look, and getting up said she would take it back to bed.

“I should think we’d better all turn in,” said Hutchinson. “God knows what the time is.” Izzart went to his room and threw open the shutters which his boy Hassan, whom he was travelling with, had closed. Blowing out the candle so that it should not attract the mosquitoes, he sat down at the window and looked at the soft night. The whisky he had drunk made him feel very wide awake, and he was not inclined to go to bed. He took off his ducks, put on a sarong and lit a cheroot. His good-humour was gone. It was the sight of Hutchinson looking fondly at the half-caste child which had upset him.

“They’ve got no right to have them,” he said to himself. “They’ve got no chance in the world. Ever.”

He passed his hands reflectively along his bare and hairy legs. He shuddered a little. Though he had done everything he could to develop the calves, his legs were like broomsticks. He hated them. He was uneasily conscious of them all the time. They were like a native’s. Of course they were the very legs for a top-boot. In his uniform he had looked very well. He was a tall, powerful man, over six feet high, and he had a neat black moustache and neat black hair. His dark eyes were fine and mobile.

He was a good-looking fellow and he knew it, and he dressed well, shabbily when shabbiness was good form, and smartly when the occasion demanded. He had loved the army, and it was a bitter blow to him when, at the end of the war, he could not remain in it. His ambitions were simple. He wanted to have two thousand a year, give smart little dinners, go to parties and wear a uniform.

He hankered after London.

Of course his mother lived there, and his mother cramped his style. He wondered how on earth he could produce her if ever he got engaged to the girl of good family (with a little money) whom he was looking for to make his wife. Because his father had been dead so long and during the later part of his career was stationed in the most remote of the Malay States, Izzart felt fairly sure that no one in Sembulu knew anything about her, but he lived in terror lest someone, running across her in London, should write over to tell people that she was a half-caste. She had been a beautiful creature when Izzart’s father, an engineer in the Government Service, had married her; but now she was a fat old woman with grey hair who sat about all day smoking cigarettes. Izzart was twelve years old when his father died and then he could speak Malay much more fluently than English. An aunt offered to pay for his education and Mrs. Izzart accompanied her son to England. She lived hal ritually in furnished apartments, and her rooms with their Oriental draperies and Malay silver were overheated and stuffy. She was for ever in trouble with her landladies because she would leave cigarette-ends about. Izzart hated the way she made friends with them: she would be shockingly familiar with them for a time, then there would be a falling-out, and after a violent scene she would flounce out of the house.

Her only amusement was the pictures, and to these she went every day in the week. At home she wore an old and tawdry dressing-gown, but when she went out she dressed herself—but, oh, how untidily—in extravagant colours, so that it was a mortification to her dapper son. He quarrelled with her frequently, she made him impatient and he was ashamed of her; and yet he felt for her a deep tenderness; it was almost a physical bond between them, something stronger than the ordinary feeling of mother and son, so that notwithstanding the failings that exasperated him she was the only person in the world with whom he felt entirely at home.

It was owing to his father’s position and his own knowledge of Malay, for his mother always spoke it to him, that after the war, finding himself with nothing to do, he had managed to enter the service of the Sultan of Sembulu. He had been a success. He played games well, he was strong and a good athlete; in the rest-house at Kuala Solor were the cups which he had won at Harrow for running and jumping, and to these he had added since others for golf and tennis. With his abundant fund of small-talk he was an asset at parties and his cheeriness made things go. He ought to have been happy and he was wretched. He wanted so much to be popular, and he had an impression, stronger than ever at this moment, that popularity escaped him. He wondered whether by any chance the men at Kuala Solor with whom he was so hail-fellow-well-met suspected that he had native blood in him. He knew very well what to expect if they ever found out. They wouldn’t say he was gay and friendly then, they would say he was damned familiar; and they would say he was inefficient and careless, as the half-castes were and when he talked of marrying a white woman they would snigger. Oh, it was so unfair! What difference could it make, that drop of native blood in his veins, and yet because of it they would always be on the watch for the expected failure at the critical moment. Everyone knew that you couldn’t rely on Eurasians, sooner or later they would let you down; he knew it too, but now he asked himself whether they didn’t fail because failure was expected of them. They were never given a chance, poor devils. But a cock crew loudly. It must be very late and he was beginning to feel chilly. He got into bed. When Hassan brought him his tea next morning he had a racking headache, and when he went in to breakfast he could not look at the porridge and the bacon and eggs which were set before him. Hutchinson too was feeling none too well. “I fancy we made rather a night of it,” said his host, with a smile to conceal his faint embarrassment.

“I feel like hell,” said Izzart. “I’m going to breakfast off a whisky and soda myself,” added Hutchinson.

Izzart asked for nothing better, and it was with distaste that they watched Campion ear with healthy appetite a substantial meal. Campion chaffed them.

“By God, Izzart, you’re looking green about the gills,” he said. “I never saw such a filthy colour.”

Izzart flushed. His swarthiness was always a sensitive point with him. But he forced himself to give a cheery laugh.

“You see, I had a Spanish grandmother,” he answered, “and when I’m under the weather it always comes out. I remember at Harrow I fought a boy and licked him, because he called me a damned half-caste.”

“You are dark,” said Hutchinson. “Do Malays ever ask you if you have any native blood in you?”

“Yes, damn their impudence.”

A boat with their kit had started early in the morning in order to get to the mouth of the river before them, and tell the skipper of the Sultan Ahmed, if by chance he arrived before he was due, that they were on their way.

Campion and Izzart were to set out immediately after tiffin in order to arrive at the place where they were to spend the night before the Bore passed. A Bore is a tidal wave that, by reason of a peculiarity in the lie of the land, surges up certain rivers, and there happened to be one on the river on which they were travelling. Hutchinson had talked to them of it the night before and Campion, who had never seen such a thing, was much interested. “This is one of the best in Borneo. It’s worth looking at,” said Hutchinson.

He told them how the natives, waiting the moment, rode it and were borne up the river on its crest at a breathless and terrifying speed. He had done it once himself.

“Never no more for me,” he said. “I was scared out of my wits.”

“I should like to try it once,” said Izzart.

“It’s exciting enough, but my word, when you’re in a flimsy dug-out and you know that if the native doesn’t get the right moment you’ll be flung in that seething torrent and you won’t have a chance in a million … . no, it’s not my idea of sport.”

“I’ve shot a good many rapids in my day,” said Campion.

“Rapids be damned. You wait till you see the Bore. It’s one of the most terrifying things I know. D’you know that at least a dozen natives are drowned in it in this river alone every year?”

They lounged about on the verandah most of the morning and Hutchinson showed them the court-house.

Then gin pahits were served. They drank two or three. Izzart began to feel himself, and when at length tiffin was ready he found that he had an excellent appetite. Hutchinson had boasted of his Malay curry and when the steaming, succulent dishes were placed before them they all set to ravenously. Hutchinson pressed them to drink.

“You’ve got nothing to do but sleep. Why shouldn’t you get drunk?”

He could not bear to let them go so soon, it was good after so long to have white men to talk to, and he lingered over the meal. He urged them to eat. They would have a filthy meal that night at the long-house and nothing to drink but Arak. They had better make hay while the sun shone. Campion suggested once or twice that they should start, but Hutchinson, and Izzart too, for now he was feeling very happy and comfortable, assured him there was plenty of time. Hutchinson sent for his precious bottle of Benedictine. They had made a hole in it last night; they might as well finish it before they went.

When at last he walked down with them to the river they were all very merry and none of them was quite steady on his legs. Over the middle of the boat was an attap awning, and under this Hutchinson had had a mattress laid. The crew were prisoners who had been marched down from the jail to row the white men, and they wore dingy sarongs with the prison mark. They waited at their oars. Izzart and Campion shook handswith Hutchinson and threw themselves down on the mattress. The boat pushed off. The turbid river, wide and placid, glistened in the heat of that brilliant afternoon like polished brass. In the distance ahead of them they could see the bank with its tangle of green trees. They felt drowsy, but Izzart at least found a curious enjoyment in resisting for a little while the heaviness that was creeping over him, and he made up his mind that he would not let himself fall asleep till he had finished his cheroot. At last the stub began to burn his fingers and he flung it into the river. “I’m going to have a wonderful snooze,” he said. “What about the Bore?” asked Campion.

“Oh, that’s all right. We needn’t worry about that.” He gave a long and noisy yawn. His limbs felt like lead. He had one moment in which he was conscious of his delicious drowsiness and then he knew nothing more. Suddenly he was awakened by Campion shaking him.

“I say, what’s that?”

“What’s what?”

He spoke irritably, for sleep was still heavy upon him, but with his eyes he followed Campion’s gesture. He could hear nothing, but a good way off he saw two or three white crested waves following one another. They did not look very alarming.

“Oh, I suppose that’s the Bore.”

“What are we going to do about it?” cried Campion.

Izzart was scarcely yet quite awake. He smiled at the concern in Campion’s voice.

“Don’t worry. These fellows know all about it. They know exactly what to do. We may get a bit splashed.”

But while they were saying these few words the Bore came nearer, very quickly, with a roar like the roar of an angry sea, and Izzart saw that the waves were much higher than he had thought. lie did not like the look of them and he tightened his belt so that his shorts should not slip down if the boat were upset. In a moment the waves were upon them. It was a great wall of water that seemed to tower over them, and it might have been ten or twelve feet high, but you could measure it only with your horror.

It was quite plain that no boat could weather it. The first wave dashed over them, drenching them all, half filling the boat with water, and then immediately another wave struck them. The boatmen began to shout. They pulled madly at their oars and the steersman yelled an order. But in that surging torrent they were helpless, and it was frightening to see how soon they lost all control of the boat. The force of the water turned it broadside on and it was carried along, helter-skelter, upon the crest of the Bore. Another great wave dashed over them and the boat began to sink. Izzart and Campion scrambled out of the covered place in which they had been lying and suddenly the boat gave way under their feet and they found themselves struggling in the water. It surged and stormed around them. Izzart’s first impulse was to swim for the shore, but his boy, Hassan, shouted to him to cling to the boat. For a minute or two they all did this. “Are you all right?” Campion shouted to him.

“Yes, enjoying the bath,” said Izzart. He imagined that the waves would pass by as the Bore ascended the river, and in a few minutes at the outside they would find themselves in calm water once more. He forgot that they were being carried along on its crest. The waves dashed over them. They clung to the gunwale and the base of the structure which supported the attap awning. Then a larger wave caught the boat and it turned over, falling upon them so that they lost their hold; there seemed nothing but a slippery bottom to cling to and Izzart’s hands slithered helplessly on the greasy surface. But the boat continued to turn and he made a desperate grab at the gunwale, only to feel it slip out of his hands as the turn went on, then he caught the framework of the awning, and still it turned, turned slowly right round and once more he sought for a hand-hold on the bottom. The boat went round and round with a horrible regularity. He thought this must be because everyone was clinging to one side of it, and he tried to make the crew go round to the other. He could not make them understand. Everyone was shouting and the waves beat against them with a dull and angry roar. Each time the boat rolled over on them Izzart was pushed under water, only to come up again as the gunwale and the framework of the awning gave him something to cling to. The struggle was awful. Presently he began to get terribly out of breath, and he felt his strength leaving him. He knew that he could not hold on much longer, but he did not feel frightened, for his fatigue by now was so great that he did not very much care what happened.

Hassan was by his side and he told him he was growing very tired. He thought the best thing was to make a dash for the shore, it did not look more than sixty yards away, but Hassan begged him not to. Still they were being carried along amid those seething, pounding waves. The boat went round and round and they scrambled over it like squirrels in a cage. Izzart swallowed a lot of water. He felt he was very nearly done. Hassan could not help him, but it was a comfort that he was there, for Izzart knew that his boy, used to the water all his life, was a powerful swimmer. Then, Izzart did not know why, for a minute or two the boat held bottom downwards, so that he was able to hold on to the gunwale. It was a precious thing to be able to get his breath. At that moment two dug-outs, with Malays in them riding the Bore, passed swiftly by them. They shouted for help, but the Malays averted their faces and went on. They saw the white men, and did not want to be concerned in any trouble that might befall them. It was agonising to see them go past, callous and indifferent in their safety. But on a sudden the boat rolled round again, round and round, slowly, and the miserable, exhausting scramble repeated itself. It took the heart out of you. But the short respite had helped Izzart, and he was able to struggle a little longer.

Then once more he found himself so terribly out of breath that he thought his chest would burst. His strength was all gone, and he did not know now whether he had enough to try to swim to the shore. Suddenly he heard a cry. “Izzart, Izzart: Help. Help.”

It was Campion’s voice. It was a scream of agony. It sent a shock all through Izzart’s nerves. Campion, Campion, what did he care for Campion? Fear seized him, a blind animal fear, and it gave him a new strength.

He did not answer. “Help me, quick, quick,” he said to Hassan.

Hassan understood him at once. By a miracle one of the oars was floating quite close to them and he pushed it into Izzart’s reach. He placed a hand under Izzart’s arm and they struck away from the boat. Izzart’s heart was pounding and his breath came with difficulty. He felt horribly weak. The waves beat in his face. The bank looked dreadfully far away. He did not think he could ever reach it. Suddenly the boy cried that he could touch bottom and Izzart put down his legs; but he could feel nothing; he swam a few more exhausted strokes, his eyes fixed on the bank, and then, trying again, felt his feet sink into thick mud. He was thankful. He floundered on and there was the bank within reach of his hands, black mud in which he sank to his knees; he scrambled up, desperate to get out of the cruel water, and when he came to the top he found a little flat with tall rank grass all about it. He and Hassan sank down on it and lay for a while stretched out like dead men. They were so tired that they could not move. They were covered with black mud from head to foot. But presently Izzart’s mind began to work, and a pang of anguish on a sadden shook him. Campion was drowned. It was awful. He did not know how he was going to explain the disaster when he got back to Kuala Solor. They would blame him for it; he ought to have remembered the Bore and told the steersman to make for the bank and tie up the boat when he saw it coming. It wasn’t his fault, it was the steersman’s, he knew the river; why in God’s name hadn’t he had the sense to get into safety? How could he have expected that it was possible to ride that horrible torrent? Izzatt’s limbs shook as he remembered the wall of seething water that rushed down upon them. He must get the body and take it back to Kuala Solor. He wondered whether any of the crew were drowned too. He felt too weak to move, but Hassan now rose and wrang the water out of his sarong; he looked over the river and quickly turned to Izzart. “Tuan, a boat is coming.”

The lalang grass prevented Izzart from seeing anything.

“Shout to them,” he said. Hassan slipped out of view and made his way along the branch of a tree that overhung the water; he cried out and waved. Presently Izzart heard voices. There was a rapid conversation between the boy and the occupants of the boat, and then the boy came back.

“They saw us capsize, Tuan,” he said, “and they came as soon as the Bore passed. There’s a long-house on the other side. If you will cross the river they will give us sarongs and food and we can sleep there.”

Izzart for a moment felt that he could not again trust himself on the face of the treacherous water. “What about the other tuan?” he asked.

“They do not know.”

“If he’s drowned they must find the body.”

“Another boat has gone up stream.”

Izzart did not know what to do. He was numb. Hassan put his arm round his shoulder and raised him to his feet. He made his way through the thick grass to the edge of the water, and there he saw a dug-out with two Dyaks in it. The river now once more was calm and sluggish; the great wave had passed on and no one would have dreamed that so short a while before the placid surface was like a stormy sea. The Dyaks repeated to him what they had already told the boy. Izzart could not bring himself to speak. He felt that if he said a word he would burst out crying. Hassan helped him to get in, and the Dyaks began to pull across. He fearfully wanted something to smoke, but his cigarettes and his matches, both in a hip-pocket, were soaking. The passage of the river seemed endless. The night fell and when they reached the bank the first stars were shining. He stepped ashore and one of the Dyaks took him up to the long-house. But Hassan seized the paddle he had dropped and with the other pushed out into the stream. Two or three men and some children came down to meet Izzart and he climbed to the house amid a babel of conversation. He went up the ladder and was led with greetings and excited comment to the space where the young men slept. Rattan mats were hurriedly laid to make him a couch and he sank down on them. Someone brought him a jar of arak and he took a long drink; it was rough and fiery, burning his throat, but it warmed his heart. He slipped off his shirt and trousers and put on a dry sarong which someone lent him. By chance he caught sight of the yellow new moon lying on her back, and it gave him a keen, almost a sensual, pleasure. He could not help thinking that he might at that moment be a corpse floating up the river with the tide. The moon had never looked to him more lovely.

He began to feel hungry and he asked for rice. One of the women went into a room to prepare it. He was more himself now, and he began to think again of the explanations he would make at Kuala Solor. No one could really blame him because he had gone to sleep; he certainly wasn’t drunk, Hutchinson would bear him out there, and how was he to suspect that the steersman would be such a damned fool? It was just rotten luck. But he couldn’t think of Campion without a shudder. At last a platter of rice was brought him, and he was just about to start eating when a man ran hurriedly along and came up to him.

“The tuan’s come,” he cried. “What tuan?”

He jumped up. There was a commotion about the doorway and he stepped forward. Hassan was coming quickly towards him out of the darkness, and then he heard a voice.

“Izzart. Are you there?”

Campion advanced towards him.

“Well, here we are again. By God, that was a pretty near thing, wasn’t it? You seem to have made yourself nice and comfortable. My heavens, I could do with a drink.”

His dank clothes clung round him, and he was muddy and dishevelled. But he was in excellent spirits.

“I didn’t know where the hell they were bringing me. I’d made up my mind that I should have to spend the night on the bank. I thought you were drowned.”

“Here’s some arak,” said Izzart. Campion put his mouth to the jar and drank and spluttered and drank again.

“Muck, but by God it’s strong.” He looked at Izzart with a grin of his broken and discoloured teeth. “I say, old man, you look as though you’d be all the better for a wash.”

“I’ll wash later.”

“All right, so will I. Tell them to get me a sarong. How did you get out?” He did not wait for an answer. “I thought I was done for. I owe my life to these two sportsmen here.” He indicated with a cheery nod two of the Dyak prisoners whom Izzart vaguely recognised as having been part of their crew. “They were hanging on to that blasted boat on each side of me and somehow they cottoned on to it that I was down and out. I couldn’t have lasted another minute. They made signs to me that we could risk having a shot at getting to the bank, but I didn’t think I had the strength. By George, I’ve never been so blown in all my life. I don’t know how they managed it, but somehow they got hold of the mattress we’d been lying on, and they made it into a roll. They’re sportsmen they are. I don’t know why they didn’t just save themselves without bothering about me. They gave it me. I thought it a damned poor lifebelt, but I saw the force of the proverb about a drowning man clutching at a straw. I caught hold of the damned thing and between them somehow or other they dragged me ashore.

The danger from which he had escaped made Campion excited and voluble; but Izzart hardly listened to what he said. He heard once more, as distinctly as though the words rang now through the air. Campion’s agonized cry for help, and he felt sick with terror. The blind panic raced down his nerves. Campion was talking still, but was he talking to conceal his thoughts? Izzart looked into those bright blue eyes and sought to read the sense behind the flow of words. Was there a hard glint in them or something of cynical mockery? Did he know that Izzart, leaving him to his fate, had cut and run? He flushed deeply. After all, what was there that he could have done? At such a moment it was each for himself and the devil take the hindmost. But what would they say in Kuala Solor if Campion told them that Izzart had deserted him? He ought to have stayed, he wished now with all his heart that he had, but then, then it was stronger than himself, he couldn’t. Could anyone blame him? No one who had seen that fierce and seething torrent. Oh, the water and the exhaustion, so that he could have cried!

“If you’re as hungry as I am you’d better have a tuck in at this rice,” he said. Campion ate voraciously, but when Izzart had taken a mouthful or two he found that he had no appetite.

Campion talked and talked. Izzart listened suspiciously.

He felt that he must be alert and he drank more Arak.

He began to feel a little drunk.

“I shall get into the devil of a row at K. S.” he said tentatively.

“I don’t know why.”

“I was told off to look after you. They won’t think it was very clever of me to let you get nearly drowned.”

“It wasn’t your fault. It was the fault of the damned fool of a steersman. After all, the important thing is that we’re saved. By George, I thought I was finished once. I shouted out to you. I don’t know if you heard me.”

“No, I didn’t hear anything. There was such a devil of a row, wasn’t there?”

“Perhaps you’d got away before. I don’t know exactly when you did get away.”

Izzart looked at him sharply. Was it his fancy that there was an odd look in Campion’s eyes?

“There was such an awful confusion,” he said. “I was just about down and out. My boy threw me over an oar. He gave me to understand you were all right. He told me you’d got ashore.”

The oar! He ought to have given Campion the oar and told Hassan, the strong swimmer, to give him his help. Was it his fancy again that Campion gave him a quick and searching glance?

“I wish I could have been of more use to you,” said Izzart. “Oh, I’m sure you had enough to do to look after yourself,” answered Campion.

The headman brought them cups of arak, and they both drank a great deal. Izzart’s head began to spin and he suggested that they should turn in. Beds had been prepared for them and mosquito nets fixed. They were to set out at dawn on the rest of their journey down the river. Campion’s bed was next to his, and in a few minutes he heard him snoring. He had fallen asleep the moment he lay down. The young men of the long-house and the prisoners of the boat’s crew went on talking late into the night. Izzart’s head now was aching horribly and he could not think. When Hassan roused him as day broke it seemed to him that he had not slept at all. Their clothes had been washed and dried, but they were bedraggled objects as they walked along the narrow pathway to the river where the prahu was waiting for them.

They rowed leisurely. The morning was lovely and the great stretch of placid water gleamed in the early light.

“By George, it’s fine to be alive,” said Campion.

He was grubby and unshaved. He took long breaths, and his twisted mouth was half open with a grin. You could tell that he found the air singularly good to breathe. He was delighted with the blue sky and the sunshine and the greenness of the trees. Izzart hated him. He was sure that this morning there was a difference in his manner. He did not know what to do. He had a mind to throw himself on his mercy. He had behaved like a cad, but he was sorry, he would give anything to have the chance again, but anyone might have done what he did, and if Campion gave him away he was ruined. He could never stay in Sembulu; his name would be mud in Borneo and the Straits Settlements. If he made his confession to Campion he could surely get Campion to promise to hold his tongue. But would he keep his promise? He looked at him, a shifty little man: how could he be relied on? Izzart thought of what he had said the night before.

It wasn’t the truth, of course, but who could know that? At all events who could prove that he hadn’t honestly thought that Campion was safe? Whatever Campion said it was only his word against Izzart’s; he could laugh and shrug his shoulders and say that Campion had lost his head and didn’t know what he was talking about.

Besides, it wasn’t certain that Campion hadn’t accepted his story; in that frightful struggle for life he could be very sure of nothing. He had a temptation to go back to the subject, but was afraid if he did that he would excite suspicion in Campion’s mind. He must hold his tongue.

That was his only chance of safety. And when they got to K. S. he would get in his story first. “I should be completely happy now,” said Campion, “if I only had something to smoke.”

“We shall be able to get some stinkers on board.”

Campion gave a little laugh.

“Human beings are very unreasonable,” he said. “At the first moment I was so glad to be alive that I thought of nothing else, but now I’m beginning to regret the loss of my notes and my photographs and my shaving tackle.”

Izzart formulated the thought which had lurked at the back of his mind, but which all through the night he had refused to admit into his consciousness. “I wish to God he’d been drowned. Then I’d have been safe.’ “There she is,” cried Campion suddenly.

Izzart looked round. They were at the mouth of the river and there was the Sultan Ahmed waiting for them.

Izzart’s heart sank: he had forgotten that she had an English skipper and that he would have to be told the story of their adventure. What would Campion say?

The skipper was calico Bredon, and Izzart had met him often at Kuala Solor. He was a little bluff man, with a black moustache, and a breezy manner. “Hurry up,” he called out to them, as they rowed up, “I’ve been waiting for you since dawn.” But when they climbed on board his face fell. “Hulloa, what’s the matter with you?”

“Give us a drink and you shall hear all about it,” said Campion, with his crooked grin.

“Come along.”

They sat down under the awning. On a table were glasses, a bottle of whisky and soda-water. The skipper gave an order and in a few minutes they were noisily under way.

“We were caught in the Bore,” said Izzart. He felt he must say something. His mouth was horribly dry notwithstanding the drink.

“Were you, by Jove? You’re lucky not to have been drowned. What happened?”

He addressed himself to Izzart because he knew him, but it was Campion who answered. He related the whole incident, accurately, and Izzart listened with strained attention. Campion spoke in the plural when he told the early part of the story, and then, as he came to the moment when they were thrown into the water, changed to the singular. At first it was what they had done and now it was what happened to him. He left Izzart out of it. Izzart did not know whether to be relieved or alarmed. Why did he not mention him? Was it because in that mortal struggle for life he had thought of nothing but himself or—did he know?

“And what happened to you?” said Captain Bredon, turning to Izzart. Izzart was about to answer when Campion spoke.

“Until I got over to the other side of the river I thought he was drowned. I don’t know how he got out. I expect he hardly knows himself.”

“It was touch and go,” said Izzart with a laugh.

Why had Campion said that? He caught his eye. He was sure now that there was a gleam of amusement in it.

It was awful not to be certain. He was frightened. He was ashamed. He wondered if he could not so guide the conversation, either now or later, as to ask Campion whether that was the story he was going to tell in Kuala Solor. There was nothing in it to excite anyone’s suspicions. But if nobody else knew, Campion knew.

He could have killed him.

“Well, I think you’re both of you damned lucky to be alive,” said the skipper.

It was but a short run to Kuala Solor, and as they steamed up the Sembulu River Izzart moodily watched the banks. On each side were the mangroves and the nipahs washed by the water, and behind, the dense green of the jungle; here and there, among fruit trees, were Malay houses on piles. Night fell as they docked. Goring, of the police, came on board and shook hands with them.

He was living at the rest-house just then, and as he set about his work of seeing the native passengers he told them they would find another man, Porter by name, staying there too. They would all meet at dinner. The boys took charge of their kit, and Campion and Izzart strolled along. They bathed and changed, and at half-past eight the four of them assembled in the commonroom for gin pahits.

“I say, what’s this Bredon tells me about your being nearly drowned?” said Goring as he came in. Izzart felt himself flush, but before he could answer Campion broke in, and it seemed certain to Izzart that he spoke in order to give the story as he chose. He felt hot with shame. Not a word was spoken in disparagement of him, not a word was said of him at all; he wondered if those two men who listened, Goring and Porter, thought it strange that he should be left out. He looked at Campion intently as he proceeded with his narration, he told it rather humorously; he did not disguise the danger in which they had been, but he made a joke of it, so that the two listeners laughed at the quandary in which they had found themselves.

“A thing that’s tickled me since,” said Campion, “is that when I got over to the other bank I was black with mud from head to foot. I felt I really ought to jump in the river and have a wash, but you know I felt I’d been in that damned river as much as ever I wanted, and I said to myself: “No, by George, I’ll go dirty’. And when I got into the long-house and saw Izzart as black as I was, I knew he’d felt just like I did.”

They laughed and Izzart forced himself to laugh too. He noticed that Campion had told the story in precisely the same words as he had used when he told it to the skipper of the Sultan Ahmed. There could be only one explanation of that; he knew, he knew everything, and had made up his mind exactly what story to tell. The ingenuity with which Campion gave the facts, and yet left out what must be to Izzart’s discredit was devilish. But why was he holding his hand? It wasn’t in him not to feel contempt and resentment for the man who had callously deserted him in that moment of dreadful peril.

Suddenly, in a flash of inspiration Izzart understood: he was keeping the truth to tell to Willis, the Resident.

Izzart had goose-flesh as he thought of confronting Willis. He could deny, but would his denials serve him? Willis was no fool, and he would get at Hassan; Hassan could not be trusted to be silent; Hassan would give him away.

Then he would be done for. Willis would suggest that he had better go home.

He had a racking headache, and after dinner he went to his room, for he wanted to be alone so that he could devise a plan of action. And then a thought came to him which made him go hot and cold; he knew that the secret which he had guarded so long, was a secret to nobody. He was on a sudden certain of it. Why should he have those bright eyes and that swarthy skin? Why should he speak Malay with such ease and have learned Dyak so quickly? Of course they knew. What a fool he was ever to think that they believed that story of his, about the Spanish grandmother! They must have laughed up their sleeves when he told it, and behind his back they had called him a damned nigger. And now another thought came to him, torturing, and he asked himself whether it was on account of that wretched drop of native blood in him that when he heard Campion cry out his nerve failed him. After all, anyone might at that moment have been seized with panic; and why in God’s name should he sacrifice his life to save a man’s whom he cared nothing for? It was insane. But of course in K. S. they would say it was only what they expected; they would make no allowances.

At last he went to bed, but when, after tossing about recklessly for God knows how long, he fell asleep, he was awakened by a fearful dream; he seemed to be once more in that raging torrent, with the boat turning, turning; and then there was the desperate clutching at the gunwale, and the agony as it slipped out of his hands, and the water that roared over him. He was wide awake before dawn. His only chance was to see Willis and get his story in first; and he thought over carefully what he was going to say, and chose the very words he meant to use. He got up early, and in order not to see Campion went out without breakfast. He walked along the high road till such time as he knew the Resident would be in his office, and then walked back again. He sent in his name and was ushered into Willis’s room. He was a little elderly man with thin grey hair and a long yellow face. “I’m glad to see you back safe and sound,” he said, shaking hands with Izzart. “What’s this I hear about your being nearly drowned?”

Izzart, in clean ducks, his topee spotless, was a fine figure of a man. His black hair was neatly brushed, and his moustache was trimmed. He had an upright and soldierly bearing.

“I thought I’d better come and tell you at once, sir, as you told me to look after Campion.”

“Fire away.”

Izzart told his story. He made light of the danger. He gave Willis to understand that it had not been very great.

They would never have been upset if they had not started so late. “I tried to get Campion away earlier, but he’d had two or three drinks and the fact is, he didn’t want to move.”

“Was he tight?”

“I don’t know about that,” smiled Izzart goodhumouredly. “I shouldn’t say he was cold sober.”

He went on with his story. He managed to insinuate that Campion had lost his head a little. Of course it was a very frightening business to a man who wasn’t a decent swimmer: he, Izzart, had been more concerned for Campion than for himself; he knew the only chance was to keep cool, and the moment they were upset he saw that Campion had got the wind up.

“You can’t blame him for that,” said the Resident.

“Of course I did everything I possibly could for him, sir, but the fact is, there wasn’t anything much I could do.”

“Well, the great thing is that you both escaped. It would have been very awkward for all of us if he’d been drowned.”

“I thought I’d better come and tell you the facts before you saw Campion, sir. I fancy he’s inclined to talk rather wildly about it. There’s no use exaggerating.”

“On the whole your stories agree pretty well,” said Willis, with a little smile. Izzart looked at him blankly.

“Haven’t you seen Campion this morning? I heard from Goring that there been some trouble, and I looked in last night on my way home from the Fort after dinner. You’d already gone to bed.”

Izzart felt himself trembling, and he made a great effort to preserve his composure.

“By the way, you got away first, didn’t you?”

“I don’t really know, sir. You see, there was a lot of confusion.”

“You must have if you got over to the other side before he did.”

“I suppose I did then.”

“Well, thanks for coming to tell me,” said Willis, rising from his chair. As he did so he knocked some books on the floor. They fell with a sudden thud. The unexpected sound made Izzart start violently, and he gave a gasp. The Resident looked at him quickly.

“I say, your nerves are in a pretty state.” Izzart could not control his trembling.

“I’m very sorry, sir,” he murmured.

“I expect it’s been a shock. You’d better take it easy for a few days. Why don’t you get the doctor to give you something?”

“I didn’t sleep very well last night.”

The Resident nodded as though he understood.

Izzart left the room, and as he passed out some man he knew stopped and congratulated him on his escape.

They all knew of it. He walked back to the rest-house.

And as he walked, he repeated to himself the story he had told the Resident. Was it really the same story that Campion had told? He had never suspected that the Resident had already heard it from Campion. What a fool he had been to go to bed! He should never have let Campion out of his sight. Why had the Resident listened without telling him that he already knew? Now Izzart cursed himself for having suggested that Campion was drunk and had lost his head. He had said this in order to discredit him, but he knew now that it was a stupid thing to do. And why had Willis said that about his having got away first? Perhaps he was holding his hand too; perhaps he was going to make enquiries; Willis was very shrewd. But what exactly had Campion said? He must know that; at whatever cost he must know. Izzart’s mind was seething, so that he felt he could hardly keep a hold on his thoughts, but he must keep calm. He felt like a hunted animal. He did not believe that Willis liked him; once or twice in the office he had blamed him because he was careless; perhaps he was just waiting till he got all the facts. Izzart was almost hysterical.

He entered the rest-house and there, sitting on a long chair, with his legs stretched out, was Campion. He was reading the papers which had arrived during their absence in the jungle. Izzart felt a blind rush of hatred well up in him as he looked at the little, shabby man who held him in the hollow of his hand.

“Hulloa,” said Campion, looking up. “Where have you been?”

To Izzart it seemed that there was in his eyes a mocking irony. He clenched his hands, and his breath came fast. “What have you been saying to Willis about me?” he asked abruptly.

The tone in which he put the unexpected question was so harsh that Campion gave him a glance of faint surprise.

“I don’t think I’ve been saying anything very much about you. Why?”

“He came here last night.”

Izzart looked at him intently. His brows were drawn together in an angry frown as he tried to read Campion’s thoughts.

“I told him you’d gone to bed with a headache. He wanted to know about our mishap.”

“I’ve just seen him.”

Izzart walked up and down the large and shaded room; now, though it was still early, the sun was hot and dazzling. He felt himself in a net. He was blind with rage; he could have seized Campion by the throat and strangled him, and yet, because he did not know what he had to fight against, he felt himself powerless. He was tired and ill, and his nerves were shaken. On a sudden the anger which had given him a sort of strength left him, and he was filled with despondency. It was as though water and not blood ran through his veins; his heart sank and his knees seemed to give way. He felt that if he did not take care, he would begin to cry. He was dreadfully sorry for himself.

“Damn you, I wish to God I’d never set eyes on you,” he cried pitifully.

“What on earth’s the matter?” asked Campion, with astonishment.

“Oh, don’t pretend. We’ve been pretending for two days, and I’m fed up with it.” His voice rose shrilly, it sounded odd in that robust and powerful man. “I’m fed up with it. I cut and run. I left you to drown. I know I behaved like a skunk. I couldn’t help it.” Campion rose slowly from his chair. “What are you talking about?”

His tone was so genuinely surprised that it gave Izzart a start. A cold shiver ran down his spine.

“When you called for help I was panic-stricken. I just caught hold of an oar and got Hassan to help me get away.”

“That was the most sensible thing you could do.”

“I couldn’t help you. There wasn’t a thing I could do.”

“Of course not. It was damned silly of me to shout.

It was waste of breath, and breath was the very thing I wanted.”

“Do you mean to say you didn’t know?”

“When those fellows got me the mattress, I thought you were still clinging to the boat. I had an idea that I got away before you did.”

Izzart put both his hands Lo his head, and gave a hoarse cry of despair.

“My God, what a fool I’ve been.”

The two men stood for a while staring at one another.

The silence seemed endless. “What are you going to do now?” asked Izzart at last. “Oh, my dear fellow, don’t worry. I’ve been frightened too often myself to blame anyone who shows the white feather. I’m not going to tell a soul.”

“Yes, but you know.”

“I promise you, you can trust me. Besides, my job’s done here and I’m going home. I want to catch the next boat to Singapore.” There was a pause, and Campion looked for a while reflectively at Izzart. “There’s only one thing I’d like to ask you: I’ve made a good many friends here, and there are one or two things I’m a little sensitive about; when you tell the story of our upset, I should be grateful if you wouldn’t make out that I had behaved badly. I wouldn’t like the fellows here to think that I’d lost my nerve.”

Izzart flushed darkly He remembered what he had said to the Resident. It almost looked as though Campion had been listening over his shoulder. He cleared his throat. “I don’t know why you think I should do that.” Campion chuckled good-naturedly, and his blue eyes were gay with amusement.

“The yellow streak,” he replied, and then, with a grin that showed his broken and discoloured teeth: “Have a cheroot, dear boy.”