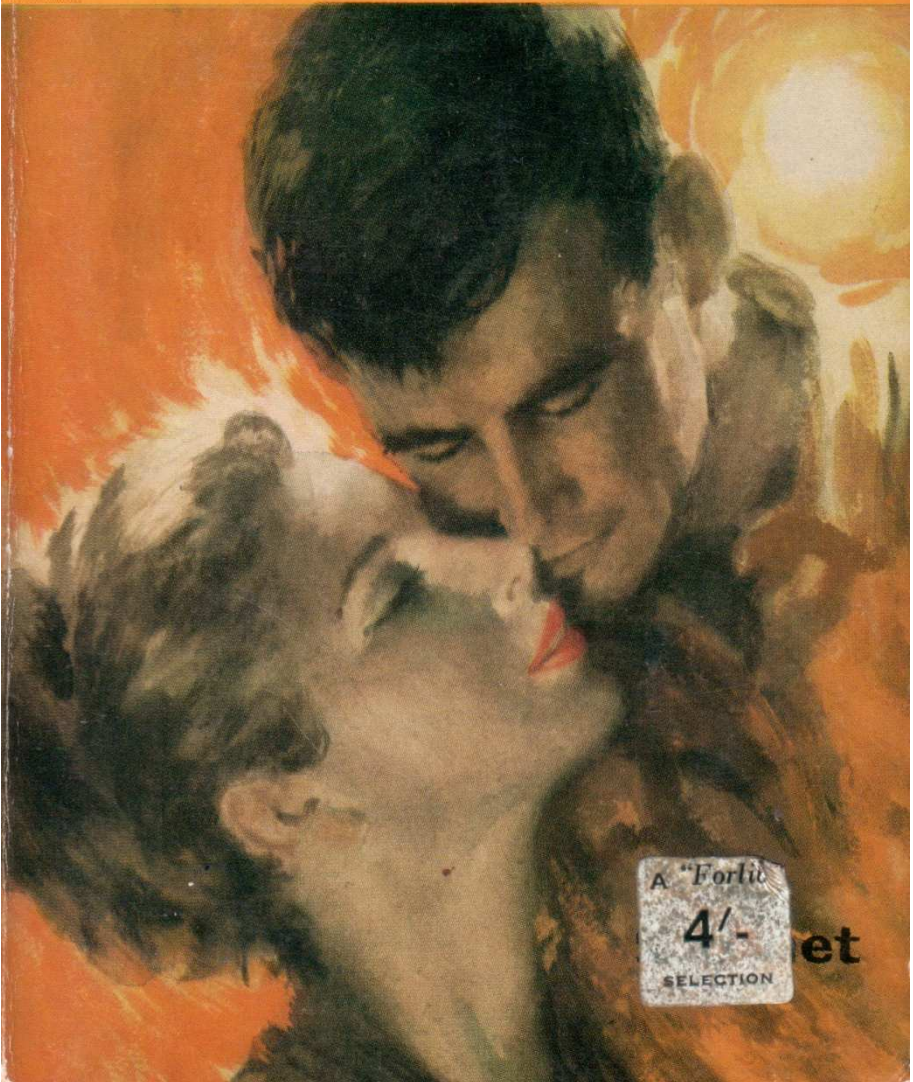


**Mills & Boon**

**THREE WEEKS IN EDEN**

**Anne Weale**



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Andrea was used to roaming all over the world with her brother, and the prospect of a three-week trip into the Malayan jungle with him held no terrors for her. But James Ferguson the doctor who was to act as guide to the expedition was adamant that he would not have her along. This was a decision that Andrea had no intention of taking lying down, and she managed to follow the party and join them after all. But in the primitive conditions of jungle life she was to see Doctor Ferguson in quite a different light...

## CHAPTER I

It was five o'clock when the airliner landed at Singapore, and they stepped into brilliant sunshine, and a temperature up in the nineties.

Two hours later, by the time they had settled in their hotel and were dining in the lofty fan-cooled restaurant, the brief green dusklight of the tropics had merged into early nightfall.

'Shall we have a look round?' Andrea suggested, over coffee.

Refreshed by a cold shower and a change of clothes, she was eager to go out and see the sights. For weeks she had been looking forward to this moment, the culmination of so much planning and preparation.

Singapore ... the Gateway to the East. *Singa-pura . . . The Lion City.*

When she had first learned the meaning of the name, Andrea had felt a tingle of excitement. It sounded so exotic and mysterious ... so different from the depressing greyness of London in early January, with all the coldest weeks of winter ahead. But now, at last, the waiting was over, and the rain and smog were eight thousand miles behind them.

Her brother glanced up from the book he had been reading throughout the meal. 'Not tonight, Andy. I want to finish this. There may not be time tomorrow.'

Andrea looked hopefully at their companion, a lanky fair-haired man in his early thirties.

'You'll come for a walk, won't you, Guy?'

Guy Ramsey sipped his second brandy and soda. 'I'm not in an energetic mood, honey. Let's take it easy tonight, huh?'

She laughed. 'Oh, Guy, you're hopeless! We've been taking it easy all day. We need some exercise. Do come.'

But Guy was not to be persuaded. He had passed the time on the long flight from London drinking double whiskies and flirting with a pretty red-haired air stewardess. Tonight, his handsome face looked even more dissipated than usual.

'Oh well, I'll go by myself,' Andrea said equably.

'Better not. You might get lost or abducted or something. This isn't Europe, honey. This is the Mysterious Orient,' Guy warned her teasingly. But in the past three years, Andrea had travelled many thousands of miles about the world. Strange places held no fears for her.

'I won't go far,' she assured him.

'You won't go anywhere,' her brother intervened firmly.

'Oh, Peter . . . why not?' she protested.

'Because I'm pretty sure European women don't go out alone here at night. You'll have to wait till the morning, Andy.'

Andrea sighed, but she did not argue with him.

Although he had been trying not to show it, for several days Peter had been under a considerable emotional strain. Andrea did not know the full facts, but she did know that he had recently had a serious rift with the girl he had been hoping to marry.

'All right,' she said amenably. 'In that case I may as well go and wash out my smalls. I'll see you both at breakfast. 'Night.'

The two men rose to their feet as she left the table, and Guy turned to watch her leave the restaurant. For a moment, he looked as if he were about to change his mind and offer to go out with her. Then, with a slight shrug, he resumed his seat and tossed back the rest of the brandy.

The people sitting about on sofas in the spacious marble-paved entrance lounge also watched Andrea as she strolled towards the lift.

They were mostly Americans and Australians, and they did not recognize her as the majority of English people would have done.

But her honey-blonde hair, tall lissom figure and beautiful legs attracted attention everywhere. She was not conventionally pretty, like the red-headed stewardess on the plane. But somehow the combination of her long-lashed hazel-green eyes, short nose and square boyish chin was far more arresting than many a prettier face.

In her room on the first floor, Andrea rinsed out a drip-dry blouse and a pair of nylons. Then she draped them over the towel rail, and wandered aimlessly about, longing to explore the busy streets she had glimpsed during the drive from the airport.

Was it true that girls could not go out on their own? she wondered restlessly. Or was Peter simply being stuffy and over-protective?

Even though she was twenty now, he still had a tendency to treat her as his youthful teenage sister. In fact, without Guy's support, she would not be in Singapore at all.

She had been seventeen, and an unenthusiastic student at a London secretarial college, when Peter, a zoologist, and Guy, a television cameraman, had managed to raise the money to make a freelance film about wild life and primitive 'bush' medicine in the Bahamas Islands. Andrea had begged to go with them in the role of general dogsbody, but Guy had suggested that they might use her in the film.

'She's not a bad-looking kid, Pete, and a spot of glamour helps to sell anything,' he pointed out. 'With those legs, and in a snazzy bikini, she might become another Lotte Haas or Michaela Denis.'

Peter, less commercially-minded than Guy, had dismissed this idea as nonsense, but in the end he had agreed to let Andrea accompany them.

That first film, made on a shoe-string budget and with -Andrea appearing in only one short sequence, had had a success exceeding even their highest hopes for it.

First screened by a regional company, it had later won an international award, and sold to several European networks. But the most important outcome had been a contract to make a series of six thirty-minute films. Now, three years later, the film of their last expedition to Basutoland was being screened at a peak-viewing hour. And tonight they were on the eve of another expedition.

This time their objective was to find and film some caves deep in the Malayan jungle—caves which, it was hoped, might contain some of the most remarkable primitive rock drawings ever to be discovered in south-east Asia.

\* \* \*

At half-past eight, unable to concentrate on a book, and disinclined to join Guy in the bar, Andrea decided she would never be able to sleep until she had stretched her legs. After all, she had not made any promises. Surely there could not be any harm in slipping out on her own for half an hour, as long as she kept to the main streets?

Having changed her high heels for a pair of flatties, and with a silk scarf covering her hair, she locked the door of her room and left the hotel by a side entrance to avoid passing the cocktail bar.

Outside, the temperature had dropped by about twenty degrees, and a slight breeze stirred the fronds of the palm trees in the hotel grounds. The sky was cloudless, and brilliant with southern stars.

At the main gateway, a passing *trisha* boy swung his pedal cab close to the kerb to solicit her custom. Andrea smiled and shook her head.

Although the big Western-style stores were closed now, most of the Chinese shops were still open, and the city was as lively and noisy as during the daytime.

Fascinated by the babel of sing-song Cantonese voices, the acrid scent of smouldering joss sticks, and all the curious things for sale—long scarlet wax ceremonial candles, sacks full of pungent dried fish and gaily patterned *batik* sarongs—Andrea strolled along the colonnaded pavements which sheltered shoppers from any sudden tropical downpour. But evidently it had not rained for some days, as the deep monsoon drains were dry and littered with refuse.

In the doorway of a bank, a grey-bearded turbaned Sikh watchman was already snoring soundly on his *charpoy*. Andrea wondered how he managed to sleep amid the staccato rattle of mah-jongg counters, the cries of street vendors and the blare of radios.

Presently, she found herself on the waterfront. The harbour was crowded with sampans, on some of which women were cooking supper over glowing charcoal braziers. Other people were buying ready-cooked meals from the *satay* stalls along the quayside. Tempted by the appetizing aromas mingling with the salt tang of the sea, Andrea waited her turn at a stall where fried chicken skewered on wooden sticks was being sold.

She was opening her bag to take out her purse when, behind her, someone said sharply, 'I wouldn't, if I were you.'

Startled, Andrea swung round.



She found herself looking up at a man who, although he was a stranger, immediately reminded her of someone. Black-haired and brown-skinned, he could, in profile, have been easily mistaken for an Indian. But his eyes were grey, his deep voice unmistakably English.

'Why not?' she asked blankly.

'Because nobody does,' he informed her.

'Nobody?' She glanced at the people round the stall.

'No Europeans.'

'Oh . . . I see. You mean it isn't " done ", I suppose?' she said, with the slightest of shrugs.

Andrea had no time for people whose lives were governed by a long list of pettifogging rules about what was ' done ' or ' not done '. She preferred to set her own standards.

The man's eyes narrowed. ' I mean that if you eat that stuff it will probably make you sick—perhaps seriously ill,' he said flatly.

'But it looks delicious.'

'It may be,' he agreed, without expression. ' But do you see that opening in the wall? Do you know why it's there?'

Andrea looked where he indicated. At the foot of the wall of the building behind the street stall, there was what looked like a small cupboard door. She had not noticed it before.

'Behind that door there's a lavatory,' the man said bluntly. ' Any time now, the night soil collectors will come along and open it. And if *that* doesn't deter you, take a good look at the stall-keeper. His clothes are

clean enough, but he may not have washed his hands for a couple of days.'

Andrea swallowed, suddenly feeling slightly queasy. Then, hastily recovering her composure, she said lightly, ' Well, thank you for warning me. But you needn't have worried, because I've just realized I haven't any local money anyway.' She gave him a smiling nod, and walked away.

But she had gone only a few yards when the man fell into step beside her. ' I'll see you back to your hotel,' he said decisively.

'I know the way, thank you,' she said politely.

He must have heard, but he did not even glance at her.

Andrea flushed, and walked faster. But she knew she could not hope to throw him off. His long legs could easily outstride her.

It was not that she was nervous of the man. In fact there was something about him which made her wonder if he might be a plain-clothes police officer. But she resented his austere, superior manner. He could have warned her about the food stall without making her feel such a fool; and he could have offered his escort, instead of simply imposing himself.

At the junction of two main roads, he put his hand under her elbow to steer her across the busy thoroughfare. But as soon as they reached the far side, he dropped his arm.

In sight of the hotel, Andrea halted. ' I'll be quite safe now,' she said firmly.

The man looked down at her, his grey eyes cold and impersonal. ' Are you alone in Singapore?'

'No, I'm not. I'm travelling with my brother.'

'I'd better have a word with him. Evidently he doesn't realize that this is not a place where young girls go' out alone at night,' the man said, in his clipped expressionless voice.

Andrea squared her shoulders and said frostily, 'I think that's a matter of opinion. I happen to be accustomed to going about by myself.'

'So you may be—in England. But this is a foreign seaport, with some fairly unsavoury inhabitants.'

Andrea's temper began to simmer. 'I daresay there are, but I never intended to wander about in the back streets. In any case, I've seen several British sailors around. I'm sure they would have helped if I had been in any difficulty.'

'That's beside the point,' he said evenly. 'It would be wiser not to put yourself in the position of needing help.'

'Oh, really! I'm not a half-baked schoolgirl, you know,' Andrea retorted hotly. 'Do you always make it your business to lecture unaccompanied women on the dangers of taking a harmless evening stroll?'

'Most women don't need to be lectured,' he answered impassively. 'Is that your hotel across the square?'

'Yes, it is,' she said furiously. 'And I'm perfectly capable of going the rest of the way by myself. So please leave me alone!'

'Very well,' he said, shrugging. 'Goodnight.' But he did not turn away, and for a moment Andrea did not move either. Then, with a muttered 'Goodnight!' she swung on her heel and hurried off.

But all the way across the public square, she was conscious of his eyes on her back, and when she reached the hotel gates, and glanced swiftly over her shoulder, he was still there under the street lamp, waiting and watching.

As she made her way to the side door by which she had left the hotel, she was mortifyingly conscious that she had dealt with the situation with a galling lack of aplomb.

Andrea found it hard to get to sleep that night. Her bedroom was not air-conditioned, and although the Whirling blades of the ceiling fan did alleviate the heat to some extent, the atmosphere was still too oppressive for comfort.

But it was not only the heat and the unfamiliar surroundings which kept her awake. Lying on her back in the darkness, with only a thin sheet covering her, she found herself thinking about the man she had met on the waterfront, and trying to pinpoint his likeness to someone she had met, or seen, somewhere else.

Considering that she had never had a particularly good memory for faces, it was strange how sharply every detail of his appearance was imprinted in her mind. In spite of the brevity of their encounter, she knew that she would recognize him anywhere—not only by his dark arresting face, but merely by his walk or the back of his head.

And suddenly, wondering how long he must have lived in the tropics to acquire that Indian-brown sunburn, she realized why he had seemed vaguely familiar. The key to the puzzle was in a book of photographic portraits which belonged to Guy, and which she had browsed through one afternoon in his London flat while he and Peter were planning this expedition. All the photographs had been studies of people of different nationalities, ranging from a wrinkled Sicilian peasant woman to a tattooed Dyak head-hunter. But the picture she

remembered most clearly was of a fierce-eyed Pathan tribesman from the wild mountainous region along the north-west frontier of India.

So *that* was why the man she had met tonight had reminded her of an Indian. He was not at all like the Indians in Singapore—the plump, indolent, full-lipped Sikhs, or the short, skinny, wavy-haired Tamils.

But, because of his darkly bronzed skin, and high-bridged nose and lean cheeks, he did bear a striking resemblance to the tough fighting men of Afghanistan.

She remembered Guy telling her that they sometimes had blue or grey eyes, and that they were famous for their pride and courage, and also—in the old days—for their ruthless treatment of their captives.

\* \* \*

Andrea's early morning tea was brought by a smiling Chinese youth. She had to tip him with English money, but evidently this was quite acceptable as he bowed himself out of the room as if she were royalty. Instead of the customary *petit beurre* biscuits, there was a bowl of pineapple on the tray, and several small fat bananas, no longer than a man's forefinger and sweeter than the kind imported to England. The fresh pineapple, too, was juicier and much more delicious than tinned fruit.

'How did you sleep?' Guy asked, when she joined him and Peter for breakfast.

Andrea spread a table napkin over the skirt of her primrose cotton sun-dress. Her brother, after saying good morning to her, was already absorbed in his newspaper again.

'Oh, not too badly,' she said, in response to Guy's enquiry. 'How about you?'

Guy grimaced. 'Badly,' he said succinctly. 'Six months in this climate would finish me. Black coffee—no, nothing to eat, thanks'—this to the waiter who had come to take their order.

After studying the menu, Andrea asked for some more fresh pineapple and scrambled eggs on toast.

'Mind if I smoke?' Guy asked.

She shook her head, and he slit open a fresh pack of his favourite brand. By the end of the day he would have smoked his way through two more packs. Watching him light up and inhale, Andrea felt a spasm of irritation at the way he was steadily, heedlessly ruining his health.

She had often wondered what made him the way he was, but there seemed to be nothing in his past which would account for his feckless way of life. She liked him—everyone did—and he was undoubtedly a brilliant photographer. But his playboy attitude to the rest of his life made her angry and impatient. He seemed incapable of resisting a pretty face or another drink or a bet. He never took anything seriously. Yet he was so unfailingly good-humoured, and often so kind and generous, that it was impossible to write him off as a complete waster.

Before they had finished breakfast, Peter was called to the telephone.

'That was Ferguson,' he told them, when he returned. 'He rang up to check that we had arrived on schedule. He says he's tied up with various appointments all day, but he'll come round this evening. I suggested he had dinner with us.'

'What did he sound like?' Andrea asked, with interest.

Doctor Ferguson was the man who was going to guide them to the remote northern valley where the caves were said to be found.

Her brother shrugged. ' You can't tell much from a few minutes' talk on the phone. But he seems to have everything laid on. We'll be setting out first thing tomorrow morning.'

He had got in touch with Doctor Ferguson through the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. But all they knew about their guide was that he was a pathologist specializing in the study of obscure tropical diseases. For the past two years he had been engaged in field research in Malaya, and apparently he was one of the few white men who had ever seen the valley they wanted to explore, and who was also well acquainted with the tribes of aborigines inhabiting the region.

'I should think he's a typical boffin,' Guy speculated idly. ' Probably spends half his time with one eye 'glued to a microscope, and the other half writing abstruse theses on the cause and cure of beri-beri, or what have you. Still, it takes all sorts. . .

During the morning a Chinese reporter from the *Straits Times* came to interview them, and then Guy and Andrea went shopping for an hour.

Not yet acclimatized to the intense noonday heat, none of them could manage more than a sandwich and a long iced drink at lunchtime. Andrea spent the afternoon in the hotel's air-conditioned beauty salon, which was run by three beautiful black- haired Chinese girls in high-collared white nylon *cheongsams*.

When she joined the two men for tea in the lounge, her hair was pinned up in a sophisticated French pleat, and her finger and toe nails were painted with frosted rose lacquer.

Peter, brother-like, did not notice either her hair or her nails.

But Guy did.

'Very nice,' he said appreciatively. 'Who are you out to stun? This Ferguson fellow?'

Andrea laughed and shook her head. 'I'm not out to stun anyone in particular. I just felt like cutting a dash on our last night in civilization, that's all. Who knows? ... we might never come back.'

'That's an encouraging thought,' Guy said wryly. 'What are you expecting to happen to us?'

'I'm not *expecting* anything. But there's always an outside chance of something going wrong. We might lose our way, or fall ill. Our camp might be trampled by elephants. There are a hundred and one possibilities,' Andrea answered cheerfully.

After tea, she went to her room and re-packed most of her belongings, to save time in the morning. Strictly speaking, it had been an extravagance to have a manicure, because tomorrow, or the day after, she would have to take off the lacquer and cut her nails short. But on the other hand she might as well look her best until the last possible moment. Heaven knew what state she would be in after two or three weeks in the jungle.

At a quarter to seven—fifteen minutes before Doctor Ferguson was due—she wriggled into a simple white Tricel shift dress with no sleeves and very little back. The fabric looked like matt silk, but it was cool and virtually uncrushable, and as the dress was fully lined it was not necessary to wear anything but a bra and briefs underneath it.

Thankful that she had no need to wear a tight girdle, Andrea slid her bare feet into a pair of gold kid Indian-style sandals and clipped a turquoise bracelet round one wrist. Then, having checked her bag and unwrapped the filigree ivory fan she had bought in one of the curio shops, she was ready.



Peter and Guy were already seated at a table in the entrance lounge when she stepped out of the lift. But it was not quite seven o'clock, and Doctor Ferguson had not arrived yet.

'What would you like to drink?' Guy asked, as Andrea settled herself in one of the comfortable cane chairs.

'Pineapple juice, please.'

'Nothing stronger? I thought you were cutting a dash tonight.'

'Not that sort of dash.' Andrea turned to watch an Indian couple—the woman wearing a gorgeous peacock silk sari—stroll out to a waiting taxi.

Then, as she was about to return her attention to Guy, a man came up the steps outside the main entrance. Recognizing his tall broad-shouldered figure, Andrea stiffened. He was the stranger who had insisted on escorting her last night. Hastily opening her fan, and using it to screen her face, she watched him cross the lounge to the reception desk. Tonight he was wearing a white sharkskin dinner jacket and narrowly cut black dress trousers.

Had he called to collect someone?—Or was he dining at the hotel? she wondered anxiously.

Would he recognize her? Would he show that he recognized her? If he did, she would have to tell Peter that she had been out last night.

She was not kept in suspense for long. After exchanging a few words with the Chinese desk clerk, the man turned and came straight towards their table. With an indrawn breath of dismay, Andrea suddenly realized who he must be.

'Mr Fleming? I'm Ferguson.' His deep voice as clipped and incisive as it had been the night before, the stranger introduced himself to Peter.

They shook hands, and then Peter said, ' This is my sister, Andrea . . . and my colleague, Guy Ramsey.'

Obligated to look up and face him, Andrea managed a tepid smile. ' How do you do,' she said nervously.

Doctor Ferguson bowed. ' Good evening.' Then he turned and offered his hand to Guy. There had been no flicker of recognition in his cold grey eyes.

As the three men sat down, Peter signalled to a waiter, and asked their guest what he would like to drink. Andrea saw Guy raise an eyebrow when the doctor asked for a tonic water and declined his offer of a cigarette.

Staring at the gilded thongs of her sandals, she wondered if it was possible that he really did not recognize her. But it seemed unlikely that he could already have forgotten their encounter. And even in another dress and without a scarf over her hair, she did not look so very different tonight. Her consternation gave place to uneasy puzzlement.

At their table in the restaurant, Doctor Ferguson sat opposite her. But although she could not resist stealing several covert glances at him, he never once caught her eye. Indeed he seemed to be deliberately ignoring her. All his attention was given to Peter and Guy.

As she finished her ice cream and fruit salad, Andrea realized that she had not said a word since they sat down.

They had coffee out of doors on a lantern-lit terrace furnished with glass-topped tables and comfortable bent cane armchairs. But, although he sat next to her, Andrea had the impression that, as far as Doctor Ferguson was concerned, her chair might as well have been empty.

She was trying to think of some appropriate remark which would force him to acknowledge her presence, when he suddenly asked Peter if they had friends in Singapore.

'No, we don't know anyone out here,' her brother told him.

Doctor Ferguson raised one dark eyebrow. 'Do you think it's wise to leave your sister alone here while we're up-country?' he enquired.

It was Guy who answered him. 'Andrea won't be alone. She's part of our outfit.'

'You mean you propose to take her with us?'

'Have you any objection, Doctor Ferguson?' Andrea asked mildly.

For the first time since his arrival, his cold grey eyes met hers.

'I have every objection,' he said crisply.

Andrea stiffened. 'What do you mean?'

'The jungle is no place for a woman, Miss Fleming. There can be no question of your accompanying us.'

There was a moment of silence.

'But that's absurd!' Andrea exclaimed indignantly. 'Of course I'm going with you. Why else do you think I'm here? I'm part of the team. It's my job.'

He looked at Peter. 'I'm sorry, Fleming. I had no idea your party included a woman. If I'd known, I would have informed you at once that the idea was not feasible.'

'Why?—why isn't it feasible?' Andrea demanded. 'I've been all over the place with Peter and Guy. No one has ever objected to me before.'

'Have you ever been in a Malayan rain forest before?' Doctor Ferguson asked her dispassionately.

'No, I haven't. But I've been in the bush in Africa.'

'The African bush is a pleasure garden compared with the jungle out here,' he told her, with a shrug. 'I presume that, in Africa, your gear was carried by porters, or you went by jeep most of the way. We shall be travelling on foot, and without any porters. It's hard going for a man. A woman wouldn't stand the pace for a day.'

'My sister is reasonably tough, Ferguson. She knows it won't be a picnic,' Peter put in.

Doctor Ferguson looked at Andrea, deliberately appraising every detail down to her slender ankles and rose-painted toe-nails. His expression remained as impersonal as if he were examining a slide under a microscope, but nevertheless Andrea felt a tide of uncontrollable colour sweeping up from her throat to her forehead. Her hands clenched with the effort of restraining her anger. Suddenly, and for the first time in her life, she understood what it must have been like to be a woman before emancipation—to be governed by the decrees of some arrogant, adamant male. It was an insight which filled her with fierce resentment.

But before she could speak, Doctor Ferguson had turned to her brother again.

'I'm sorry,' he repeated, 'but I can't possibly accept the responsibility of taking your sister on this trip. You will have to accept my judgment on this. However, rather than leave her alone in Singapore, I suggest she stays with some friends of mine up-country. They will be glad to

put her up, and if the expedition should take longer than we anticipate, you won't have to worry about her well-being.'

He glanced at his watch, and stood up. 'I don't think there's any more to discuss. Will you excuse me, please? I have another appointment at ten o'clock. I'll collect you at seven tomorrow. Goodnight.'

With a nod to Guy, and a formal half bow to Andrea, he turned and strode swiftly away.

'Well, that puts you in your place, honey,' Guy said quizzically, after Ferguson had gone. 'Steady on now: don't have hysterics. I daresay we can talk the chap round.'

Her eyes very bright, her soft mouth tightly compressed, Andrea looked at her brother.

'You're not going to let him get away with this, are you?' she asked, her voice carefully controlled.

Peter knocked out his pipe and frowned. 'It's a darned awkward situation,' he said worriedly. 'If Ferguson wants to put his foot down, there's not very much we can do about it, Andy. It wasn't too easy to get him to agree to guide us in the first place. Without him, none of us can go.'

'Oh, Peter—how can you take his part!'

'I'm not. I'm simply facing the facts,' her brother said, rubbing his jaw. 'He's put us over a barrel. You must see that.'

'But he is being pretty unreasonable, Pete,' Guy said, taking Andrea's side. 'After all, I'm not exactly the rugged pioneering type. If I can stick it out, Andy can. It won't be the first time she's roughed it.'

'I know. But as Ferguson says, this type of terrain is quite new to us. Maybe he's right. Maybe it will be too rough for her,' Peter said doubtfully. 'Look, I'll try to talk him round in the morning. Perhaps I can make him change his mind.'

'And if you can't?' Andrea queried.

Peter hesitated. 'Let's cross that bridge when we come to it.' He rose from his chair and stuck his pipe in his pocket. 'I'm going for a stroll for half an hour. Do you want to come?'

Both Andrea and Guy shook their heads.

'Oh, that insufferable man!' Andrea said fiercely, when her brother had disappeared indoors. 'I'm sure Peter will never be able to budge him. He's made up his mind, and that's that.'

Guy finished his brandy, and grinned at her.

'You shouldn't have put on that backless dress, honey. He may feel your presence would take his mind off his work.'

'I certainly didn't distract him during dinner. He completely ignored me.'

'Yes, he didn't take much notice of you, did he? I wonder why not?' Guy said speculatively.

Andrea debated whether to tell him about the events of the previous evening, but decided against it.

'He obviously doesn't like women,' she answered cautiously.

Guy looked amused. 'That must make life difficult for him.'

'What do you mean?' Andrea asked.

His blue eyes glinted. ' Well, I don't claim to fathom all the quirks of the female mentality, but from what I know of women I'd say he was the type they can't resist. Don't tell me it escaped your notice that he has more than brains to recommend him?' -

'I would hardly describe him as handsome,' Andrea said coldly. ' And his manner is downright churlish.'

'Oh, I wouldn't say that exactly,' Guy replied mildly. ' He's not a smooth-tongued character like me, but he seemed quite civil. I think you're piqued because—apart from this last-minute bust-up—he didn't pay much attention to you. The one thing women can't stand is male indifference.'

For an instant, Andrea almost rose to the bait. But then she realized he was only teasing, and her mouth curved into a reluctant smile.

'What a beast you are, Guy. You wouldn't take it so lightly if you were the one he had a down on.'

'I daresay I'll be on his black list before this jaunt is over,' Guy said wryly. ' I've met blokes like Ferguson before. They don't smoke, they don't drink, and they haven't much time for weaker mortals. I' ll bet you five dollars our friend leaps out of bed at six a.m. and does twenty press-ups before breakfast. He'll probably run this trip like a Commando assault course. You may be well out of it, sweetie.'

'But he's only our guide. Peter will be in charge of the expedition,' Andrea objected.

'In theory, yes. But Ferguson has already started laying down the law. It's my guess he'll carry on that way.'

Andrea sat abstractedly twisting her bracelet for some minutes. Then she sighed, and said, ' Oh, well, we'll just have to wait and see, I suppose. It's been a long day. I think I'll go to bed, Guy.'

Guy glanced at his empty glass, then rose to his feet.

'Yes, I'd better turn in too, as we have to be up early. Have you got your room key?'

Andrea's bedroom was at the opposite end of the corridor from the one shared by the two men.

Guy accompanied her to her door and unlocked it for her.

'Don't worry, Andy. I expect Peter and I will be able to make Ferguson see reason,' he said encouragingly.

'I hope so,' Andrea said doubtfully. 'Goodnight, Guy.'

'Goodnight. Sleep tight.'

Unexpectedly, he put his hands lightly on her shoulders and kissed her cheek.

Then, before she had recovered from her surprise, he turned and walked off down the corridor.



## CHAPTER II

Andrea went down to breakfast the following morning in a crisp cotton shirt, denim trousers and rope- soled Spanish *espadrilles*.

But as the shirt was a vivid sherbet-pink, the trousers pale blue and fashionably tapered, and the *espadrilles* scarlet, the outfit was as gay as it was practical.

She had also changed her fragile marcasite cocktail watch for a larger, cheaper one with a serviceable white webbing strap, and taken the precaution of rubbing her heels with methylated spirit and shaking plenty of talc into her shoes. But she had not yet removed her nail varnish, and was wearing her usual day-time make-up and some of the expensive French scent which Guy had given her for Christmas. Her hair, unpinned and with last night's lacquer brushed out, was held back by an elasticated bandeau to match her shirt.

'I wonder what the roads are like up-country?' Guy said, while they were eating.

Peter glanced over his newspaper. ' Pretty good, I believe. Ferguson said we ought to reach Sungei Musapg about three o'clock.'

'I think we would have done better to have flown up,' Guy said, frowning. ' An eight-hour run in this climate won't be a joy-ride, particularly in some rattletrap old jeep.'

'Oh, it may not be too bad if the roads are tarred. At least we shall see more of the country than we would from the air,' Andrea pointed out.

He grinned at her. ' And you'll have the pleasure of sitting next to Doctor Ferguson all day! That's a prospect which would thrill any girl.'

She made a face at him. ' Not this girl. I'd rather sit in the back with you.'

At precisely seven o'clock, Doctor Ferguson arrived to pick them up—not in ' some rattletrap old jeep'.

'I say, what a beauty!' Guy murmured in surprise, as they saw the sleek, coffee-coloured convertible which was parked outside the hotel's main entrance.

It was not necessary for Andrea to decline her entitlement to the front passenger seat because it was not offered. Instead, Doctor Ferguson opened the rear door for her. Clearly, he had as little desire for her company as she had for his.

Both Peter and Guy were in the khaki drill slacks and sun-bleached bush shirts they always wore on location. But, apart from the fact that he was not wearing a tie, Doctor Ferguson might have been on his way to work in an air-conditioned laboratory. His white shirt and shorts appeared to have come straight from the best hand laundry in Singapore. His knee stockings were equally immaculate, and his brown calf shoes shone with polish. Unlike the two other men, whose shirts were already clinging . to their backs, he looked as cool as if he had just stepped out of a shower. And whereas they had still the unattractive winter pallor of Europeans newly arrived in a tropical climate, the doctor's forearms and knees were as deeply bronzed as his face.

They crossed the causeway linking Singapore with the mainland behind a Chinese lorry loaded with reeking fish manure. The Straits of Johore glittered in the bright morning sunlight, the sky was a clear lapis blue, and it was impossible not to feel in an exhilarated holiday mood.

Beyond the town of Johore Bahru, Doctor Ferguson put his foot down on the throttle. The speedometer needle flickered up to seventy, and the cool slipstream from the windscreen counteracted the heat of the dark green leather upholstery.

But although the doctor drove fast, he was not reckless. Over his shoulder, Andrea could see his lean brown hands resting lightly on the wheel in the approved ten-to-two position, and he used his gears in preference to his brakes, never taking a bend too fast and scorching the treads of his tyres in Guy's reckless style.

At eleven, he stopped the car on a straight stretch of road beside the dim orderly groves of a rubber estate.

'If you care to stretch your legs for five minutes, I'll get the lunch basket out,' he said briefly.

Peter strolled off in one direction, and Guy and Andrea went the other way.

'Still fuming?' Guy asked, when they were out of earshot of the car.

Andrea shrugged. 'Fuming won't help. Unless Peter digs his heels in, there's not much I can do.'

'Oh, I wouldn't say that. You haven't tried turning on the charm yet.'

'Doctor Ferguson is not the impressionable type,' Andrea said dryly, thrusting her hands into her pockets.

'Who can say? That stiff-necked manner may be only a facade. Under the surface . . .' Guy made an expressive gesture.

Andrea looked sceptical. 'I doubt it. He strikes me as being hard as granite all through.'

'Maybe . . . maybe not. But there aren't many men who can resist an attractive girl if she really sets her mind to winning 'em over. Take me, for example. I'm not the impressionable type either— except on a strictly short-term basis. But I wouldn't bet on being proof against you, honey.'

Andrea smiled at him. ' What are you trying to do—boost my shattered morale?'

'No, I mean it,' Guy said lightly.

She flashed an uncertain glance at him, suddenly reminded of his kiss the night before. Preoccupied by Doctor Ferguson's ultimatum, she had not attached much significance to that kiss. But now . . . 'Given some encouragement, I could fall for you in a big way,' Guy went on.

Andrea stopped and stared at him. ' Oh, Guy, don't tease. Why, all the way out on the plane you were flirting like mad with the stewardess.'

'Yes . . . but not with my usual enthusiasm. And that was before I had diagnosed my condition, so to speak. I guess I've been feeling off form for quite a while. But it wasn't until last night that I realized why.'

Andrea did not know what to say. Surely he could not be serious?

'When you first joined up with us, Pete warned me that if I ever made a pass at you he'd tear me apart,' Guy commented. 'Not that I would have done anyway, because even I draw the line at fooling with kids of seventeen. But the situation has changed now. I'm not fooling, and you've grown up. So think about it, will you?'

At this point a whistle from Peter summoned them back to the car where the other two had already begun to eat the excellent packed lunch Doctor Ferguson had provided.

Andrea was so shattered by Guy's extraordinary revelation that she took no part in the conversation.

What exactly had he meant? she wondered perplexedly. What he had *said* was: *Given some encouragement, I could jail for you in a big way.* But such an equivocal statement could be taken in any number of ways.

On the second lap of the drive, Guy sat in front with Doctor Ferguson and Peter joined his sister in the back of the car. Sometimes the road ran straight through fairly open countryside with rubber plantations or rice fields on either side. Sometimes it wound its way up steep hills among evergreen rain forest so dense that no gleam of sunlight could penetrate the canopy of foliage high overhead.

They reached the small northern town of Sungei Musang in the middle of the afternoon. The State- owned Rest House, where they were to spend the next few days, was a one-storey timber building constructed on thick concrete piers, and with a wide verandah running all the way round it. As the car turned in through the gateway, a Chinese houseboy came out to help with the luggage.

But as he was about to lift Andrea's suitcase from the boot, Doctor Ferguson stopped him.

'No, not that one, Lim.' He turned to Andrea. 'If you're going to stay with the Baxters while we're in the interior, Miss Fleming, you may as well move in with them at once. I suggest we drive round there now.'

'But I would rather stay here,' she protested. 'I can't possibly impose myself on people I don't know from Adam. I should feel most uncomfortable.'

'Malaya is not like England, Miss Fleming,' he answered briskly. 'You will find that Europeans out here are generally much more

hospitable than they would be in their own countries. Most of them are only too pleased to have visitors—particularly in these smaller out-of-the-way places where newcomers are rare.'

'All the same, I would prefer to stay here at the Rest House,' Andrea persisted. She looked appealingly at Peter for support.

'Is there any reason why she shouldn't stay here, Ferguson?' her brother asked.

The doctor shrugged his broad shoulders. 'Not while you're here with her—but I wouldn't recommend it after we leave.'

'Why not?' Guy asked him. 'I thought these places were much the same as hotels.'

'Yes, they are,' the doctor agreed. 'But they are used mainly as night-stops by men who are passing through. The chances are that Miss Fleming would either be alone here most of the time, or there would be a good deal of hard drinking and poker going on.'

'That wouldn't worry her. She's used to my decadent ways,' Guy said flippantly.

Andrea hesitated. Then, quietly but firmly, she said, 'I'm sorry . . . but I refuse. It's bad enough having to stay behind while the rest of you go into the jungle. But it's really too much to expect me to inflict myself on strangers. It's not as if it were only for a day or two. You'll be away at least three weeks? If I can't stay here at the Rest House, I'd sooner go back to England. I mean it, Peter.'

'And I agree with her,' Guy added. 'Hang it all, Pete, she isn't a kid any more. I still don't see why she can't come along on the trip.'

'I think my sister has a point, Ferguson,' Peter said, after thinking it over for some moments. 'As she says, we shall be gone quite a time, and it's always uncomfortable to feel under an obligation.'

'Very well. But I shall certainly ask the Baxters to keep an eye on her,' the doctor said curtly.

After they had unpacked and changed their clothes, he drove them the short distance to his friends' bungalow where they were all expected for dinner that night.

In the well-kept garden, a woman in a floral print dress was talking to an Indian *kebun*. Hearing the car, she turned and waved, then came to greet them.

'You're back early. We weren't expecting you until sundown. Did you have a good trip?' she asked.

'Yes, thanks, Margaret. How are you?'

For the first time, Andrea saw Doctor Ferguson smile, and it gave her an odd little shock. Suddenly, with that friendly light in his grey eyes, and his stern mouth lifting at the corners, he looked totally different.

Miss Baxter—who looked in her late twenties— was of medium height, with a trim athletic figure and regular features. But her thick brown hair was drawn into an unbecoming knot at the nape of her neck, and she obviously had very little dress sense.

After the introduction, she said pleasantly, 'Come into the house. I expect you'd like a drink. Tea ... or something cold?'

For a time conversation was general. But, after tea had been served by a Chinese *amah* in black sateen trousers and a starched white cotton tunic, the three men fell into a discussion about the expedition, and Miss Baxter turned to Andrea.

'What part of England do you come from, Miss Fleming?'

'London,' Andrea told her.

'Oh dear, I'm afraid you'll find Sungei Musang very dull compared with London. The only amusements we can offer are the swimming club and one cinema.'

'Do you find it dull?' Andrea asked.

'No—but I was born in Malaya,' the older girl explained. She glanced at Doctor Ferguson. 'So was James.'

'Oh, really ? So you've known him all your life?'

Miss Baxter shook her head. ' No, James was born in Pahang, and he was at school in England when the war broke out. We managed to escape to Australia. Although my father knew his father, I didn't know James until he came back to Malaya on this research project. But of course we have a great deal in common. We both have our roots in the Far East, and we both come from medical families. My father, is a doctor too, you know. I had hoped to qualify myself, but after my mother died I felt it was my duty to look after him.'

At this point Doctor Ferguson announced that he was taking Peter and Guy for a drive round town before the light failed. But he did not invite Andrea to accompany them.

Soon after the men had gone out, Miss Baxter excused herself in order to supervise the preparation of dinner. So it happened that Andrea was alone when she met Doctor Baxter.

He arrived in a shabby estate car while she was sitting outside on the verandah.



'Miss Fleming? I'm Robert Baxter.' With a friendly smile, he held out his hand to her.

'How do you know my name?' Andrea asked, in surprise.

'James told us about you when he rang up from Singapore last night. If he had mentioned how pretty you are, I would have come home earlier,' Doctor Baxter said, with a twinkle.

Andrea laughed. 'Oh, I see.' She wondered how Doctor Ferguson had described her.

The Chinese *amah* appeared, and Doctor Baxter asked her to bring a Carlsberg for him, and an iced lime juice for Andrea.

'So you're a television actress?' he said, as they sat down on a cane garden couch.

'Not an actress exactly.'

Andrea explained her occupation. She found it very easy to talk to him. Unlike Doctor Ferguson, he did not eye her with reserve and more than a hint of disparagement.

Doctor Baxter's face was full of warmth and interest, and the network of lines round his eyes were probably as much the result of frequent laughter as of living in a country of brilliant sunlight.

The sun had almost set now, and the garden was bathed in the strange green light that heralded nightfall.

Suddenly, glancing up at the sky, Andrea saw a great flock of what looked like large birds flying over.

'What are they?' she asked, unable to identify them.

'They're flying foxes,' the doctor explained. ' They're really a species of bat. They sleep in the forest all day, and come out at dusk in search of fruit. I'll fetch a pair of field glasses and you can take a closer look at them.'

But before he could do so, the *amah* came back with their drinks, followed by Miss Baxter.

'Oh, you're home, Father. I didn't hear the car.' She had changed her cotton frock for a printed silk one which, in Andrea's view, was more suited to a matron. ' You'd better have your bath right away. The others will be back soon,' she advised him.

'Oh, very well, dear.' The doctor excused himself, and took his beer with him.

Miss Baxter sat down and unrolled a damask napkin containing some needlework.

'What are you making?' Andrea asked politely.

The *amah* lit an oil lamp, and Miss Baxter held up a baby's cotton nightgown.

'I do a great deal of needlework for the Salvation Army orphanage,' she explained. ' Do you care for sewing, Miss Fleming?'

'I've made a few beach suits, but I'm not very skilful. I buy most of my things. Is there a dress shop in Sungei Musang, or do you have to send away to Singapore?'

'No, I have my clothes made up by an Indian tailor.' Miss Baxter's glance rested briefly on Andrea's smooth bare legs. Her own dress had a calf-length skirt which she had pulled well down as she seated herself. Perhaps it was not intentional, but she-made Andrea feel that exposing one's knees was not in good taste.

There was a period of constrained silence until, to Andrea's relief, the three men returned.

About ten o'clock, while Miss Baxter had gone to fetch something from her room, and Peter and the two doctors were earnestly discussing Malayan politics, Guy touched Andrea's arm.

'Shall we take a stroll round the garden ?'

She nodded, impatient to know if her brother had tackled Doctor Ferguson about taking her with them into the jungle. But when she asked him, Guy shook his head. 'No luck, I'm afraid. Peter did bring the subject up, but Ferguson was adamant. In fact I think he's convinced Peter that it would be folly to take you along.'

'Oh, what an obnoxious man he is,' Andrea exclaimed vexedly. 'I wonder if I can get Doctor Baxter on my side?'

'You certainly won't get much support from Miss B.,' Guy said, with a grin in his voice. 'She hasn't taken to you, honey.'

'It's mutual,' Andrea said frankly. 'I find her heavy going, and she obviously regards me as the feather-brained butterfly type.'

'That's probably what worries her. She's afraid your eye appeal may outshine her sterling character.'

'What do you mean?' Andrea asked, not following him.

Guy slid his arm through hers. 'You're not very observant tonight. Miss B. has her sights on Ferguson.'

'You think she's in love with him?'

'No, I wouldn't say that precisely. I don't think she's lost her heart to him. She just wants a husband,' Guy answered.

'Well, I should think they're ideally suited,' Andrea said, after a moment's reflection. ' But I don't see why I should worry her. Doctor Ferguson couldn't be more offhand with me.'

Guy steered her towards some deck chairs under a casuarina tree at the end of the garden.

'Ah, but who can say what might happen if you were alone together in the jungle?' he said, pulling two of the chairs close together. ' Propinquity often has unexpected effects on people.'

'Do you think it might have an unexpected effect on you if you were alone in the jungle with Miss Baxter?' Andrea queried teasingly.

'Heaven forbid!' Guy said piously. ' I can't stand serious-minded women.'

'Are you implying that I'm not?' she asked, laughing.

He reached for one of her hands. ' Far from it, sweetie. I think you're rather brighter than most. But if a girl has brains, she should also have the sense to keep them under a crazy hat.'

Andrea turned her head to watch a firefly hovering among the branches of a near-by shrub. She was not sure that she wanted Guy to hold her hand, but his" clasp was too firm for her to disengage it casually. She said lightly, ' Perhaps we ought to go back. They may think us rude to wander off like this.'

'I don't suppose they noticed we've gone.' Guy lifted her hand and rubbed it softly against his cheek. ' Have you thought about what I said to you this morning?'

Before she could answer there was a jingle of coins from behind them, and they turned to find Doctor Ferguson standing a few feet

away. Coming across the lawn in rubber-soled shoes, he had given no warning of his approach until he was up to them.

Instinctively, Andrea jerked her hand free. And, although it would not show in the moonlight, she was chagrined to feel her face reddening.

'We're leaving now, Miss Fleming,' the doctor informed her.

'Oh . . . are we?' Andrea jumped to her feet and began to walk towards the bungalow.

In a way she was glad of his interruption. At the same time she was irked by her nervous, almost guilty, reaction to it. She had not been doing anything wrong, yet she had jumped like a startled thief.

Back at the Rest House, Guy suggested they should all have a nightcap. But Andrea said goodnight and went to her room.

She had undressed and creamed her face when she heard her brother and Guy saying goodnight in the hallway. But although she waited, listening, for some time, there was no sound of Doctor Ferguson retiring to the room adjoining hers.

Thinking he might be taking a stroll round the garden, she slipped a tailored silk dressing-gown over her short voile nightdress, and stepped into her mules. Then she opened the bedroom door and walked softly down the hall.

The lamp was still burning on the verandah. Doctor Ferguson was leaning against the balustrade, his hands on the wooden rail, his tall figure slightly inclined, a stance which accentuated the narrowness of his hips in proportion to his wide powerful shoulders.

'May I speak to you for a minute?' Andrea said quietly..

He straightened and turned to face her. For a moment they stared at each other across the top of the lamp. Then with a slight inclination of his head, he gestured for her to sit down. Andrea did so, wondering rather belatedly if she ought to have dressed again. In Sungei Musang, it might be considered indecorous to converse with a man in one's dressing-gown. But, accustomed as she was to Guy and her brother's other friends dropping in at the flat at all hours of the day and night, such a thought had not previously occurred to her.

Hoping that this oversight would not increase his disapproval of her, she said, 'I feel I owe you an apology, Doctor Ferguson. I'm afraid I wasn't very polite the first time we met.'

He did not answer her immediately, and Andrea thought she had never met anyone whose reactions were so unreadable.

Then, in a tone devoid of any expression, he said, 'I shouldn't let it worry you, Miss Fleming.'

'But it does. I—I feel that we got off on the wrong foot . . . that perhaps that is partly why you don't want me with you. Please . . . won't you reconsider your decision?'

'I'm sorry—no,' he said curtly.

'But why not?' she protested appealingly. 'Women have been in the jungle. What about the Chinese terrorists during the Emergency? Some of them were women, and they lived in the jungle for years.'

'They had no choice,' he said briefly.

'Well, what about the women who have explored South America?' She smiled at him. 'At least there are no head-hunters in Malaya.'

'There are plenty of other hazards,' he answered dampingly. 'In any case, you can hardly compare yourself with professional explorers,

Miss Fleming. If you were a qualified scientist, the position would be different. But, as I understand it, your function is purely decorative.'

Andrea stiffened, but this time she was determined not to lose her temper.

'But this is not a scientific project, Doctor Ferguson,' she pointed out pleasantly. ' We make our films to entertain people—and to earn a living. The air fare from London to Singapore is very expensive. The cost of my fare will be wasted if I don't take any part in this new film.'

'If you do, it will probably result in an even greater waste of money,' he said dryly.

'What do you mean?'

'I mean that either we should have to lose time bringing you back after a couple of days, or—if you somehow managed to keep up with us—you would almost certainly finish the trip as a hospital case.'

'But I'm as strong as a horse. I've never been ill in my life,' she protested.

Suddenly, from the rafters overhead, something fell to-the floor near her feet. Not unnaturally, Andrea jumped.

It was a tiny bright-eyed lizard. Momentarily stunned by its fall, it lay splayed on the mat, its throat pulsating. Then, faster than a mouse, it streaked away.

'It was only a *chichak*. They're perfectly harmless,' the doctor informed her sardonically. ' You would need stronger nerves in the jungle, Miss Fleming. Now I suggest you go to bed. I've ordered breakfast at seven. Goodnight.'

The following afternoon, Andrea and her brother sat in the shade of a garden umbrella at the Sungei Musang Club, watching Miss Baxter and Doctor Ferguson playing tennis in the full glare of the sun.

'How the devil do they stick it?' Peter said wonderingly, as the ball shot back and forth across the net and the two white-clad players darted energetically about the dusty hard court.

He mopped his neck with a handkerchief. Even though he was relaxing in a deck chair, and wearing only swimming trunks and sandals, it was so hot that rivulets of moisture were trickling down his chest, and his face was flushed and shiny.

'I say, what a backhand!' he exclaimed, as Miss Baxter slammed the ball back to her opponent.

Andrea sipped a glass of lemonade. 'So you're definitely going to leave me behind?' she said, in a low voice.

It was the first opportunity she had had to talk to her brother alone because the three men had spent all morning checking their equipment and she had had to go shopping with Margaret Baxter.

'I'm afraid so, Andy.' Peter looked rather uncomfortable. 'I did try to get Ferguson to change his mind, but he wouldn't even consider the idea. And now that we've had a taste of this climate, I'm inclined to think he's right.'

'But I don't feel the heat as much as you do,' she pointed out. 'And Doctor Baxter doesn't seem to think there's any objection to my going along. I saw him this morning and asked him. The fact of the matter is that Doctor Ferguson doesn't like me. It's as simple as that.'

'Oh, that's ridiculous, Andy,' her brother said, smiling. 'I'm sure there's nothing personal in his attitude. How could there be? You



hardly know each other. No, I think he honestly believes this trip would be too much for you.'

'But you've just said yourself that he doesn't know me,' Andrea persisted. 'So how can he possibly judge? I may not look very tough, but I've never been a liability before, have I?'

'That isn't the point, Andy. What you don't seem to realize is that, if I insist on your coming, Ferguson may ditch the whole project. He more or less said so when I brought the subject up yesterday.' ,,

'Well, isn't there anyone else who could guide us?'

'I doubt it—anyway it's too late to change our plans now. I'm sorry, old girl—but it's just one of those things.'

A few yards behind them, Guy heaved himself out of the Club's blue-tiled swimming pool.

'Aren't you going to swim?' he asked, strolling across the grass to join them.

'Yes, in a minute. Oh, here are the others,' Peter said. He rose to his feet as Miss Baxter and the doctor came towards them.

'Would any of you like a game? You're welcome to borrow our racquets.' Margaret Baxter dropped on to a bent cane lounger and blotted her glistening face with her bathing towel.

The tailored simplicity of her white cotton shirt and short pleated skirt suited her sturdy athletic figure much better than her fussy dresses did. Her legs, although not slim, were firm and well proportioned.

'I'm afraid we haven't your stamina,' Peter said ruefully. 'You're a very good player, Miss Baxter.'

She shrugged. 'One must keep fit. Too many Europeans out here let themselves go to seed. Do you play, Miss Fleming?'

Andrea shook her head. 'I'm afraid not. I did learn at school, but I was never any good. You would trounce me off the court with one service.'

'I'll give you some coaching if you like,' the older girl offered. 'It will be something for you to do while the men are away.'

'It's very kind of you, but I really don't think I have any aptitude for tennis,' Andrea said hurriedly.

'Never mind, sweetie, you have plenty of other talents,' Guy said lazily. He crushed out his cigarette. 'I'm going into the water again. Come and submerge with me.'

'All right.' Andrea stood up and unbuttoned her turquoise cotton beach shift. Under it she was wearing a matching nylon swimsuit. It was not a particularly brief suit, but the thin stretchy fabric did cling fairly tightly to her figure. And, as she pulled on her white petalled cap, she sensed that the others were watching her. Absurdly, she felt herself colouring.

The water in the pool was lukewarm and strongly chlorinated. Surfacing from her header into the deep end, Andrea saw Guy plunging in after her. He came up an arm's length away, and they both struck out towards the shallows.

'You may be a rabbit on the tennis court, but you're no slouch in the water,' Guy said, grinning, as he reached the handrail nearly a length behind her.

Andrea laughed. 'You weren't really trying. You can beat me easily when you want to.'

'Maybe . . . but only over one length. I'm not up to any marathons these days.'

'You should lead a more abstemious life,' she said lightly.

He pulled a face. 'I shall have to, once we get started. As far as I can make out, we're going to live on canned beef and vitamin pills.'

'I expect you'll survive.' Andrea turned on her back and swam away.

She had always loved the water, and swimming both soothed and invigorated her. Presently, drawing in her breath, she ducked under the surface and glided down to skim the tiling. For a while, playing about in the centre of the pool, she was able to forget all her problems in the sheer physical enjoyment of exploring the dim golden depths and kicking up great showers of sparkling spray.

Presently, moving into deeper water, but keeping clear of the diving board, she spotted a coin on the bottom. But she had not been in the water for several months, and at eight feet down the pressure made her ears sing. Twisting over, she rose towards the surface again.

Above her, a man's spreadeagled body blotted out the sunlight. She could see he was wearing dark shorts, and she took him for Peter, floating. An instant later, amused by the thought of his startled shout, she grabbed one of his ankles and pulled. It was a harmless trick they had often played on each other, and it usually ended with a strenuous chase across the pool and a good-humoured tussle in the shallows.

But this time, before she could escape, Andrea found herself caught firmly round the waist, and being swept down into the depths again.

If it had been her brother holding her, she would not have resisted. But she knew at once that the hands on her waist were not Peter's, and a queer kind of panic seized her. Blindly, at the limit of her breath, she struggled to wrench herself free.

Then she felt a sharp pain in her chest and the water seemed to go black. The next thing she knew was that they were up at the surface once more, and she was gasping in the air and clinging to her captor like a limpet.

'Feeling better?' James Ferguson asked coolly, when, a few minutes later, they were sitting on the end of the springboard, and Andrea was beginning to breathe normally again.

She nodded. 'I—I'm sorry. I thought you were Peter,' she said unsteadily. Her heart was still pounding, and her legs felt weak.

'Yes, I gathered that,' he said dryly. 'Much as you dislike me, Miss Fleming, I'm sure you have more finesse than to try to drown me in public.'

Andrea tugged off her cap. 'It was you who nearly drowned me,' she said indignantly.

'Perhaps it will teach you to be more careful in future. That kind of horseplay can have serious consequences if the victim is a poor swimmer.'

'I wouldn't have done it to a poor swimmer. I've told you, I mistook you for Peter. He can swim like a fish. It wouldn't have scared him.'

Doctor Ferguson arched one dark eyebrow. 'You swim well yourself, but you were frightened.'

'Yes, because it was you,' she said unthinkingly.

At that, both his eyebrows shot up.

'You may not like me, Miss Fleming, but I wouldn't have thought you had any reason to fear me.'

'I—I didn't mean that exactly,' Andrea stammered.

'What exactly did you mean?'

He sat there, watching her, waiting for her to answer. His broad brown shoulders glistened in the sunlight. There was a small metal identity tag on a chain round his neck. Somehow the fine silver chain seemed to emphasize the disciplined hardness of his body.

'Well. . . you startled me,' Andrea said lamely. ' I hate being held down. Most people do.'

'And you more than most,' he said dryly.

She smoothed back a loose swathe of hair, avoiding his eyes. ' What is that supposed to mean?' she asked stiffly.

He reached for her wrist, and felt her still quickened pulse beat. ' I have the impression that you resent any form of restraint, Miss Fleming. However, I'm sorry if I alarmed you. It was not intentional. Now I suggest you sit in the shade and rest for ten minutes. I'll ask the steward to bring you a pot of tea.'

Was it a suggestion or an order? If she had not taken off her bathing cap, Andrea would have been tempted to jump straight back into the water.

'Thank you, but please don't bother. I'm perfectly all right now.' She stood up and strolled away, her back very straight.

A few minutes later, sitting under the umbrella once more, she was joined by Guy.

'Hey, what was all that about?' he enquired.

Andrea rummaged in her beach bag. ' All what?' she said airily.

'Oh, come off it, honey—I mean that touching little scene at the deep end, of course. I just happened to look round and there you were in a clinch with Doctor Livingstone. Then he hauled you up the steps for a tete-a-tete on the springboard.'

Briefly, she explained what had happened. 'Where is Peter anyway?' she asked.

'He's in the Club House, looking for some newspapers. Ah, here comes the Amazon.'

Guy nodded towards the women's changing room on the far side of the pool. Andrea turned her head and saw Margaret Baxter walk briskly towards the diving board. She was wearing a serviceable black suit, but no cap. As intently as if she were taking part in a contest, she mounted to the second platform, poised for a moment, and dived. Then with a strong rhythmic crawl, she came steaming up the length of the pool.

'One must keep fit,' Guy murmured solemnly.

Andrea laughed and relaxed a little. 'Dear Guy . . . thank goodness for you,' she said impulsively.

He gave her a quizzical glance. 'What brought that on?'

Andrea uncapped a bottle of suntan lotion and began smoothing it on her arms. 'Oh, you're such a restful person. Those two make me feel defensive all the time.' She moved her chair out of the shade, and unhooked the straps of her swimsuit so that her shoulders would tan evenly. Already her arms and legs were lightly browned by three days of constant sunlight.

'Shall I do your back?' Guy offered presently, coming to sit beside her.

Her mind still fretted by the incident in the water, Andrea handed over the bottle and put on her dark glasses.

She leaned forward, her elbows on her knees, her chin on her cupped hands, while Guy dribbled lotion on her back and spread it with his fingertips.

A steward came out of the Club House, bearing a tea tray. He was followed by Doctor Ferguson, who walked over to the diving boards. On the top platform, he paused for a moment, looking at something beyond the low-pitched roof of the Club building.

Suddenly, remembering how, minutes ago, he had held her captive under the water, Andrea shivered. Behind her, Guy said something. Quickly, she turned her face to him. 'I'm sorry . . . what did you say?'

He smiled. 'I asked you if you liked it.'

'Liked what?' she asked blankly.

'My doing this.' Slowly, caressingly, he ran his fingers down her spine to her waist, then up to the nape of her neck again.

'Ah. . .tea! Would you like some ?' Andrea jumped up to take the tray from the approaching steward.

'No, thanks.' Guy waited until she had settled in another chair and filled a cup. Then he said, 'I haven't finished your back.'

Andrea undid a wrapped cube of sugar. 'It only needs a very thin film.'

He stood up and moved his chair close to hers again.

'Please, Guy--'

'Don't flap. I won't touch you if you don't want me to,' he assured her, looking amused.

She flushed. ' You don't understand.'

'Don't I?' His tone was teasing.

Andrea bit her lip. ' It . . .it wasn't what you thought. It was just someone walking over my grave. I—I didn't even realize what you were doing.

His mouth twitched. ' You must have been very deep in thought.' Obviously he did not believe her.

Then, to her relief, Peter came back. But for the rest of the afternoon, every time she looked at Guy there was a glint of mockery in his eyes, and she knew that he had no intention of letting her off so lightly.

\* \* \*

That night, they dined with the Baxters again. Afterwards Doctor Ferguson fixed up a screen and projected some colour slides of photographs he had taken on a previous trip into the jungle.

Andrea sat next to Guy on the sofa, keeping her arms crossed in case he took it into his head to try to hold her hand. Certainly he looked at her more than at the screen. She could feel him watching her most of the time the room was in semi-darkness, but she kept her own eyes fixed on the screen and forced herself to concentrate on Doctor Ferguson's explanation of the pictures.

A number of them were shots of aborigine women and children bathing in a stretch of river where giant boulders formed shallow pools and sparkling cascades.



'Paradise Lost,' Doctor Baxter murmured, as they looked at a slide showing a black-haired Temiar girl, naked but for a clinging wet saffron sarong tied at her waist, rinsing another sarong at the river bank.

'What a lovely spot. Will you be going there on this trip?' Andrea asked. Doctor Ferguson looked at her. 'Yes. But don't imagine that picture is typical of life in the jungle.' He removed the slide from the projector, spent some moments searching through his box for a replacement, and finally inserted one which made Peter give a low shocked whistle.

This time the photograph was of a Negrito woman whose nose and forehead had been hideously disfigured by some appalling disease.

'A bad case of yaws,' the doctor said grimly, in answer to a question from Peter. But he glanced at Andrea again as he added, 'It's contagious.'

She had a feeling he had shown the picture with the deliberate intention of shocking her.

Andrea spent the following morning alone on the Rest House verandah. The others had gone to see a tin mine on the outskirts of town. But, in his usual arbitrary manner, Doctor Ferguson had decided that she would find the excursion both tiring and dull.

Shortly before lunch-time, Guy returned in a *trisha* pedalled by a wizened old Chinese wearing a tattered singlet and shorts and an ancient topee.

'Where are the others?' Andrea asked, as Guy came up the steps and flung himself down on a lounge. ^,

'They're lunching in town at some Indian place. I'm not crazy for curry, so I came back to keep you company. Whew, this heat! How do you manage to look so cool ?'

'The houseboy gave me this fan.' Andrea stirred the tepid air with a fan made of coloured woven rattan.

Guy rang the bell and, when the boy appeared, ordered a fruit juice for Andrea and a lager for himself.

'I've been hoping to get you alone,' he said. Then, grinning, 'Don't panic. I'm not going to make love to you. Later perhaps—but first I've got something to tell you.'

He waited until the boy returned with their drinks. 'Are you still keen to come with us? Or did that picture last night put you off?'

'The one of the woman with yaws? No, I daresay it was intended to—but it didn't,' Andrea said dryly.

'Well, in that case I think we can wangle it.'

'Wangle it? What do you mean?'

Guy lit a cigarette before he answered. 'I mean I've thought of a way to force Ferguson's hand—to put him in a spot which doesn't give him any choice but to take you. Mind you, it's a pretty mad idea, and you may not be prepared to do it. But I spent half the night thinking it out, and it's your only alternative to staying behind.'

'What is? I still haven't a clue what you're talking about,' Andrea said, mystified. 'Oh, Guy, don't keep hedging. Tell me!'

He glanced over his shoulder to make sure the houseboy was not hovering. Then he took a long draught of beer, and leaned towards her.

'Okay, I'll explain. But don't say it's crazy till you've heard me out.'

## CHAPTER III

Very early the next morning, outside the Baxters' bungalow, Andrea gave her brother a farewell hug.

'Goodbye. Have a good trip. Take care of yourself.'

'Goodbye, Andy. I'm sorry you can't come with us.' Peter kissed her cheek, then climbed into the back of Doctor Baxter's estate car.

He was driving the three younger men the five miles out of town to the small Malay *kampong* near where they would enter the jungle.

'Goodbye, Doctor. Good luck.' Andrea held out her hand to James Ferguson.

This morning he was dressed in the jungle green cotton uniform and high-laced canvas boots which the men of the British Security Forces had worn during the Emergency. He had also managed to procure similar second-hand uniforms for Peter and Guy, as in his opinion their usual expedition kit was unsuitable for this particular terrain.

'Goodbye, Miss Fleming.' His fingers closed firmly over hers, but he did not return her smile.

She had hoped the smile would surprise him: that he would have expected her attitude to be frigidly resentful. But, as usual, his expression remained impassive. It was only when he turned to take leave of Margaret Baxter that his hard eyes showed any warmth.

Guy touched Andrea's arm. 'Still game?' he asked, in an undertone.

She nodded, offering her hand.

But Guy had other ideas. 'So long, Andy. Be a good girl,' he said, winking.

And then, taking her by surprise, and in full view of the others, he put his hands on her waist, drew her against him, and kissed her.

'Come in and have some coffee,' Margaret Baxter invited, after the car had disappeared down the road. She called the *amah*, gave an order, and returned to her place at the breakfast table. 'Now: what would you like to do this morning?'

'Oh, I think I'll go back to the Rest House and wash my hair,' Andrea said abstractedly. She could still feel the brief warm pressure of Guy's lips on hers, and involuntarily her hand went up to her mouth, as if to erase a visible imprint.

'Yes, you look tired. You'd better take things easily today. Tomorrow we might drive over to Ipoh and do some shopping,' Margaret suggested.

When she returned to the Rest House, Andrea stared at her reflection in the mirror on the bedroom wall, and wondered if she had been mad to agree to Guy's wild scheme. However, it was too late now to change her mind. If she failed to go through with it, he would think there had been an accident and raise the alarm.

But as the morning passed her misgivings increased and, as she wrote an explanatory letter to Doctor Baxter, she was strongly tempted to go down to his surgery in the town, and blurt out the whole reckless enterprise and ask his advice.

No, I can't shift the responsibility on to him. It wouldn't be fair, she thought, frowning. This way, if anything goes wrong I'll be the only one to blame. And if I keep my head and don't panic, nothing *will* go wrong.

There was no one else staying at the Rest House, and after serving her lunch the houseboys retired to their own quarters at the back of the compound. Even the *chichaks* disappeared into the crevices of the

raftete. The whole neighbourhood was drowsing in the oppressive heat of early afternoon.

Andrea locked the suitcase containing the things she was leaving behind. She put her letter to Doctor Baxter on the table in the hallway. Then, at two- fifteen, she shouldered her rucksack and hurried down the road to the rendezvous Guy had arranged for her.

In order not to attract attention, she was still wearing her sundress and everyday sandals. But as it turned out, there was no one about to notice her. Then, turning a corner, she saw a dilapidated taxi parked about fifty yards away. Near it, in the shade of a tree, a young Malay was squatting on his haunches, smoking a cigarette. He rose as she approached, and they eyed each other rather warily.

Andrea's impression of him was reassuring. Although several inches shorter than herself, he was well built and intelligent-looking, and his gaudy beach shirt and khaki trousers were spotlessly clean.

'*Tabek, mem.*' He gave her the customary Malay greeting, and held out his hand for her rucksack.

Relieved by his trustworthy appearance, Andrea smiled. '*Tabek.*'

He ushered her into the back of his cab. The seat was covered by a clean piece of flowered cloth. Then he dumped her rucksack on the front passenger seat and ran round to climb behind the steering wheel. As he started the engine, Andrea drew a deep breath and relaxed slightly. For better or worse, she was on her way.

\* \* \*

She spent the night in an *atap* hut in a small waterside *kampong* about a mile from the larger village where, early that morning, the men had set out ahead of her.

Lying in the darkness on a rough pallet stuffed with dried ferns, she could hear the river lapping softly against its banks about twenty yards away. From closer at hand came another sound. Immediately outside her door—which consisted of a piece of sacking nailed to the lintel—Ismail, her guide, was asleep and snoring gently.

He had left his taxi at the larger village, where they both changed their clothes. Andrea's sundress and sandals were now in the possession of Ismail's pretty sister, Zakaria.

They had reached their present stopping place by way of a narrow winding track through secondary jungle. Ismail had led the way, armed with a villainous-looking *parang* with which to hack at obstructive undergrowth. But as the others had used the same track only a few hours earlier, he had not much need of it. Even so, it had been almost dark when they had at last heard the river ahead of them.

The headman of the riverside village was related to Ismail by marriage. He spoke no English, but his attitude was obviously friendly, and his three dark-eyed wives had been delighted with the small gifts Andrea had presented to them.

Nevertheless, although she felt perfectly at home among these simple hospitable people, Andrea found it hard to get to sleep.

\* \* \*

Guy had already paid Ismail for his services, but, when she said goodbye to him the next morning, Andrea tucked a small bonus into his palm. She was sorry to part from him as he had a fair command of English, and from now on she would be dependent on her own very limited Malay, supplemented by sign language.

With Ismail gone, she was in the charge of the headman's youngest son, Saleh, who was to take her down river to another more remote encampment.

All that day Andrea sat in the prow of a long narrow boat, while behind her Saleh wielded a rough home-made paddle. He was a powerful youth and showed no sign of flagging in the broiling sun. But Andrea was soon soaked with perspiration, and thankful for her sunglasses which filtered the dazzling lights on the surface of the water.

In contrast to the sparkling brilliance of the wide river, hardly any light seemed to penetrate the interwoven branches of the deep jungle on either bank.

For most of the way, the river was fairly sluggish. But there was one stretch where it gathered speed and swirled over a series of miniature rapids. Andrea gripped the sides of the boat, half expecting to be flung into the churning water. But, arms flailing, Saleh skilfully manoeuvred his frail craft through a central channel, and soon they were in calm water again.

Although they were much further from civilization and might never have seen a white woman before, the people of the next *kampong* greeted Andrea with the same innate courtesy as her hosts of the previous night:-

With elaborate gesticulations, they intimated that the three Englishmen had left them at sunrise to tackle the high ridge to the east. By now they should have reached the valley on the other side.

Guy had said that, on the second and third day out, he would do what he could to slow down the others so that Andrea could gain on them. But she knew she would have to maintain a punishing pace to catch up with them by the following nightfall.

So it was barely light when, next morning, she and Saleh set out to climb the ridge. It was past noon when they struggled up to the summit, and although Saleh had been carrying her pack for her,



Andrea felt exhausted and longed to rest. But after a fifteen- minute break to eat, she forced herself to her feet again.

Downhill, the going was slightly easier. But near the top of the ridge the air had been comparatively cool. Now, at every step, the heat and humidity increased until the atmosphere was once again as close and enervating as that of a Turkish bath.

Knowing that in the jungle it grew dark long before the sun had set on the open countryside, Andrea refused to admit that her legs were leaden with fatigue and the band of her slacks was chafing a sore place round her waist. Hot, tired and thirsty, she trudged doggedly on through the dim green wilderness.

She felt a little better after they had stopped to drink at a stream. Saleh, whose bare brown torso glistened with sweat, splashed water over his chest and rinsed his feet. He wore nothing but a tattered pair of shorts and some ancient tennis shoes with the toes cut out. But he seemed to have no fear of being bitten by snakes or poisonous insects.

Crossing the stream, they continued to follow the path hacked out by the men the previous day. But it was late afternoon, and growing alarmingly dusky, when Saleh suddenly halted and signalled to her to listen. Andrea could hear nothing but the muffled screech of a bird somewhere up in the tree- tops, seventy feet above them. But evidently Saleh's more sensitive ears had caught another sound. From his gestures, she gathered that they had not much further to go.

Then, fifty yards further on, they suddenly emerged on to a plateau of sun-baked rock with a stream gushing down a steep cliff to their right.

Motioning Andrea not to speak, Saleh led her to the edge of the plateau which formed the top of another escarpment. And there, below them, bathing himself in a rock pool, was Guy.

Andrea was so relieved to see him that she felt like bursting into tears. But instead, she thanked Saleh warmly for his help—hoping he would understand her tone, if not her words—and gave him her wrist-watch as well as a roll of dollar notes.

Delighted with this unforeseen bonus, Selah shook his head at her gestured invitation to have some food and spend the night with them, then disappeared into the jungle again. It seemed unlikely that he could retrace their journey before dark, so perhaps there was another settlement near by.

Apparently Guy was on his own, and after taking another look to make sure, Andrea whistled down to him. At the sight of her peering over the edge of the escarpment, he scrambled out of his pool, retrieved a pair of sandals from a rock, and came clambering up to the plateau.

'You've made it! Good girl—well done!'

Looking as relieved to see her as she was to see him, Guy seized her in his arms and gave her a vigorous hug.

'Where are the others?' Andrea asked perplexedly, when they drew apart.

'Oh, they've gone off to try and catch some fish. They won't be back until sundown. I say, you look whacked, poor sweet. Have you had one hell of a time? Where's the chap who brought you?' Guy asked)

'He's gone. But I'll tell you everything later. Right now I must get myself cleaned up before Doctor Ferguson comes back. Can you cope with my rucksack ?'

Itching to strip off her sweat-soaked clothes and wallow in Guy's clear cool rock pool, Andrea began to climb down the cliff. At the bottom, she asked Guy to rummage for her towel and soap while she

unlaced her boots. They were a small pair of American baseball boots which she had managed to buy in town the day before as the next best thing to proper jungle boots.

'It's just as well I knew you were coming, or I shouldn't have had these on,' Guy said, indicating his bathing trunks. 'To tell the truth, I rather had the wind up about you. There aren't many girls who could stick what you've just been through. I found it pretty tough going myself.'

Andrea eased off her boots and removed her sodden socks. Her feet were swollen but unblistered. Presently, immersed in the pool, she found that there was an ugly red weal all round her waist. But no doubt it would soon recover if she kept it well powdered, and it did not show. By the time the others came back, she wanted to look as cool and composed as if she had landed by helicopter.

While she was bathing and changing and rinsing her soiled clothes, Guy had been brewing coffee on a Primus stove. Filling a tin mug for her, he insisted on lacing it with a shot of brandy from his hip flask.

'Go on, drink it. It will perk you up—and you may need some Dutch courage when Ferguson comes back,' he said, grimacing.

Andrea felt a faint tremor inside her. 'I wonder what he'll say?'

Guy shrugged. 'Something pretty withering, no doubt. But he can't *do* anything, honey.'

'I'm not so sure. Supposing he insists on my going back?'

'He can't send you back on your own, and to take you himself would muck up the whole expedition. No, you're here, and that's that. Here you stay.'

A few moments later they heard voices downstream, and then her brother and the doctor appeared round an outcrop of rocks. They were

wading against the current, the water up to their knees. Doctor Ferguson was carrying a keep-net with several sizeable fish in it.

The light was falling fast now, and they did not see her until they were actually splashing ashore. Then, with a look of rather comical amazement, Peter stopped dead.

'My God!—*Andrea!*'

'Hello, how are you?' she said gaily. But, inwardly, she was quaking. And she dared not look at his companion.

'Don't pass out. You aren't seeing things,' Guy assured him, as Peter continued to gape at her. 'She turned up about half an hour ago.'

'But how? I don't understand. How did you *get* here?' her brother demanded.

'It was simple. I followed your tracks.' Andrea forced herself to look at James Ferguson. 'You see, a woman *can* survive the jungle, Doctor. In fact, so far, I've been thoroughly enjoying myself.'

He did not answer her. But, for a fraction of a second, his eyes were brilliant with anger, and he looked so fierce and intimidating that, had they been alone, she would instinctively have shrunk from him.

'Well, that's more than I can say.' Guy moved a step closer and put his arm lightly round her.

But the protective gesture was unnecessary. The doctor had already turned away.

'I'll gut these fish,' he said curtly, over his shoulder.

They watched him walk across to the edge of the jungle where he broke some giant leaves off a branch. Then he returned, spread the

leaves on the ground, took the fish from the net, and unsheathed the knife on his belt.

'Would you light the lamp, please, Ramsey.' As he glanced up at Guy his face was unreadable again.

'But look here, you couldn't possibly have come all this way on your own,' Peter said to his sister, as Guy knelt to pump a Tilley lamp.

'No, of course not. I had a guide. A nice Malay boy called Saleh.'

'How did you get hold of him? What on earth possessed you to do such a crazy thing?'

It was the doctor who answered. 'I imagine Ramsey had a hand in it,' he said, still busy with the fish.

'Did you, Guy?' Peter asked.

Guy balanced the lamp on a boulder and turned to face them.

'Yes, I did, as a matter of fact. I fixed the whole thing. Any objections?'

Peter's mouth compressed and his hands clenched into fists. 'You fool! I could break your stupid neck.'

But as he seemed about to implement this threat, the doctor stood up and intervened.

'That won't do much good,' he said grimly. 'Let's get on with the supper, shall we?'

It was not a convivial meal. The fish was delicious, but they ate it in constrained silence.

'Did you bring anything to sleep on?' the doctor asked Andrea, as he gave her a mug of black coffee.

'Yes, I have exactly the same equipment as the rest of you. The same provisions, too,' she told him quietly.

'Were there any leeches on you when you arrived ?'

She shook her head. ' No . . . none.'

But the band of chafed skin round her waist was beginning to itch and smart, and she hoped she would have a chance to powder it again before bedtime.

Bedtime, it seemed, was immediately after supper—in order to conserve the lamp oil. Not that a lamp was necessary once the moon and stars were out. Had they been camping in the jungle, they would have had to sling their sleeping bags like hammocks to escape from the multitude of ants. But, here in the moonlit clearing, the flat slabs of rock provided insect-free beds.

Worn out by her exertions during the day, Andrea fell asleep almost immediately.

She awoke very early in the morning, when the clearing was still half in shadow. Peter and Guy were still asleep, but the doctor's khaki bag was empty. Wriggling out of her own bag, Andrea found that she was extremely stiff. She was also quite hungry again.

After she had washed and combed her hair, she lit the Primus stove to make some coffee. While she was waiting for the water to boil, she saw James Ferguson climbing down the face of the highest escarpment.

'Good morning,' she said warily, when he joined her.

'Good morning.'

Evidently he had been up for some time, as he was already shaved and dressed for the day's journey.

Conscious of his eyes on her, Andrea made the coffee and filled two mugs.

'I'll wake the others,' she said hurriedly.

'No, leave them for a moment. I want to look at that mark on your left arm.'

'What mark? Oh . . . this scratch. But it's nothing.'

'Perhaps, but sometimes scratches can be dangerous. Come here and let me look,' he insisted firmly.

With a slight shrug, Andrea obeyed.

'Hm ... it doesn't look much, but we may as well be on the safe side.' Bending to open his pack, he produced a tube of ointment. 'Rub a little of this in,' he told her.

Again, she did as she was told.

'Right: now hitch up your shirt,' he instructed.

She stiffened and stepped back. 'What for?'

'I want to see if you've got any prickly heat.'

'Well, I haven't,' she answered shortly.

'Don't argue—just hitch up your shirt.'

'But I've told you--' she began, in protest.

'And I want to make sure,' he cut in. ' You may not realize it, but neglected heat rashes can easily become infected. I've already had to treat your brother and Ramsey. I am a doctor, you know.'

'Yes, but not *my* doctor,' she retorted. ' When I need your professional attention, I'll ask for it, Doctor.' She turned to move away, but he caught hold of her wrist and held her fast.

'Since you've elected to come with us, you'll do as you're told, my girl,' he informed her crisply. 'If you don't, I can very easily make you.'

For a moment she was tempted to defy him. Then, quivering with suppressed rebellion, she tugged her shirt out of her trousers and lifted it up above her midriff.

At the sight of her sore, reddened waistline, he drew in an exasperated breath. But he did not give vent to the scalding condemnation she expected.

'How did this happen?' he asked.

'I don't know. I suppose my waistband must have shrunk,' she muttered furiously.

'Well, you'll have to make it looser. Stand still, please.'

With deft, practised fingers he applied a thin coating of salve all round her waist, then cut and pinned in place a belt of bandage.

'Have you anything else wrong with you ?'

Andrea shook her head, her cheeks hot.



This time he took her word for it. But he had not finished with her.' I don't know why you lied to me, Miss Fleming, but you'd better get it into your head that the jungle is no place for excessive modesty,' he said sternly. 'If you have any injuries—no matter how slight— I must be told immediately. Do you understand? *Immediately.*'

'Very well, if you insist,' she said brusquely.

'Certainly I insist. In a climate like this there's no such thing as a trivial ailment. Now, go and get your coffee. We have some other things to discuss.'

She fetched her mug and sat on the boulder he indicated. The others were still asleep more than twenty yards away. 'Do the Baxters know where you are?' he asked her quietly.

'Of course ... I left a note.'

'Yes: to say where you were going. But how are they to know you've reached us? Don't you care about worrying people? Don't their feelings matter to you?'

'It depends who they are,' she answered stiffly. 'As far as the Baxters are concerned, I hardly know them.' She paused, then thrust out her chin. 'I certainly don't think you're in a position to lecture me about consideration, Doctor Ferguson. You obviously couldn't care less about anyone's feelings.'

'By which you mean yours, I suppose.' His tone was dry. 'What would you like from me, Miss Fleming? An approach like Ramsey's? Or merely unlimited concessions?'

She flushed to the roots of her hair, but she held his gaze. 'So far you've made no concessions at all,' she said, in a goaded voice.

He finished his coffee, and set the mug on the ground. Then he glanced at his watch and stood up.

'You think not, Miss Fleming?' The slant of his mouth was sardonic. 'If you knew me better you would realize that, so far, I have dealt extremely lightly with you. But from now on you'll get what you've asked for. And I don't think you're going to like it.' And, leaving her to digest this cryptic and faintly menacing parting shot, he strode off to rouse the others.

\* \* \*

At two o'clock in the afternoon—an hour when, had she stayed behind, she would have been resting in her room with a fan blowing over her—Andrea found herself wading thigh-deep through a swamp.

Before they set out that morning, Doctor Ferguson had made her turn out her rucksack. Then, ignoring her protests, he had selected most of the heavier contents and given some to her brother, some to Guy, and added some to his own pack.

But it had not been chivalry which had prompted him to lighten her load. Quite clearly, his intention had been to make her feel a burdensome passenger. And, since Guy had already been complaining of the weight of the gear they had to carry, she had felt as he intended her to feel.

Nevertheless, as they splashed through the stinking muddy water, she was glad that her pack was not full. The bed of the swamp was uneven and treacherously slippery. Each slow squelching step was fraught with the risk of falling.

With Guy cursing under his breath a few feet behind her, and the Doctor and Peter ahead, Andrea wondered if they had really been obliged to come this way, or if James Ferguson had deliberately re-routed the day's journey to punish her for daring to defy him. She

was positive that, when they had arrived at the edge of the swamp, he had looked at her with a glint of malicious amusement in his eyes.

*Well, it will take more than this to bring me to my knees, Doctor Ferguson,* she thought, as she struggled forward.

The swamp seemed endless: a fantastic nightmare world of misshapen mangrove trees festooned with drooping mosses. Their passage through the viscid stagnant water brought pockets of fetid gas bubbling up to the surface. A sickening miasma of decay hung over the whole eerie place. But at last they reached firm ground again, and presently the doctor called a halt and said they could take a ten-minute rest break.

Shedding her pack, Andrea turned to help Guy unhitch his heavier one.

'Thanks, sweetie.' He dumped it on the ground and flexed his shoulders. His legs, like hers, were coated with mud and slime. The taint of the swamp still clung to them.

'Ugh, this smell! Isn't it vile?' she murmured distastefully.

'Yes . . . worse than rotten eggs,' Guy agreed. He frowned at her sodden trousers. 'You shouldn't be here. He was right. It's no place for a girl.'

'Oh, nonsense,' Andrea said lightly. 'This stuff will wash off. I don't mind it.'

'Oh, God!' Guy looked suddenly horrified. He pointed. 'Look . . . your arm. There's a leech on it!'

For a moment, looking down and seeing the thing on her mud-splashed forearm, Andrea felt sick. She had always had a loathing of slugs, and the leech was like a black bloated slug.

Then Guy called to the doctor, and forced her to control her revulsion. She braced herself to pluck the creature off.

'No—never do that!' James Ferguson said sharply. Then, surprisingly: 'Light a cigarette, will you, Ramsey.'

Guy fumbled with the button on his shirt pocket. When he had lit up, the doctor took the cigarette from him. He applied the burning tip to the leech. It fell off instantly, leaving a trickle of blood behind it.

'If you pull the things off, they leave their heads in your skin,' the doctor explained, returning Guy's cigarette to him.

While he was swabbing the place with antiseptic, and then treating it with penicillin powder, both Guy and Peter found that they too had leeches gorging on them.

'You'll probably find some more when you strip off tonight,' James Ferguson said casually. He glanced at Andrea as he spoke.

But, although her skin crawled, she managed to keep her expression unconcerned.

About a mile further on, they came upon a large open space. Over nearly two acres of ground, all the trees had been felled and the foliage and ferns burned down.

The doctor explained that this was a newly prepared *ladang* or cultivation area. Somewhere near they would find a Temiar longhouse.

The Temiar were aborigines, and markedly different from the Malay people. The men wore only loin-cloths, and some had a porcupine quill pushed through the cartilage between their nostrils. The women wore lengths of *batik* cotton bound round their hips, and some of the

young girls had painted patterns on their faces and bunches of flowers in the large holes in their ear lobes.

After some initial reserve, they became very friendly, and seemed fascinated by Andrea's blonde hair. They insisted on their visitors sharing a meal with them in the longhouse, and afterwards the headman and Doctor Ferguson became involved in some kind of argument. The old man kept pointing at Andrea, and Peter asked what he was saying.

'He's offering us his own bed for the night. It's the custom,' the doctor explained. 'If we refuse, he'll be offended.'

'Well, you can count me out. I prefer a spot of fresh air.' Guy blinked and rubbed his bloodshot eyes.

As the entire tribe lived and cooked in the long- house, the rafters were blackened with soot, and the atmosphere was acrid with smoke.

'By " us " I meant myself and Miss Fleming,' James Ferguson said, without expression.

They stared at him, momentarily dumbfounded.

'The *penghulu* is under the impression that Miss Fleming is my wife,' the doctor said, looking at Andrea. Perhaps it was only a trick of the flickering firelight, but it seemed to her that now there was a faint glint of mockery in his eyes.

'Well, tell him he's mistaken,' Peter said shortly.

'I have—but he isn't convinced. He thinks we don't want to inconvenience him.'

The *penghulu* touched Andrea's arm and gesticulated. Clearly, he was urging her to persuade her ' husband ' to accept the offer of his bed.

Scarlet, she shook her head. Then she had an idea. In mime, without speaking, she indicated that it was Peter, not the doctor, to whom she belonged.

For a moment it seemed the old man did not believe her. Then, apparently highly diverted by his mistake, he burst into a raucous cackle of laughter. The joke passed round the longhouse and everyone seemed to find it hilariously funny. Even Andrea managed to put on a passable smile. But her heart was beating absurdly fast considering that what had occurred was really a fairly minor *contretemps*.

Later, sharing the *penghulu's* bed with her brother —Guy and the doctor were sleeping in a rough *atap* shelter outside the longhouse—she wondered what would have happened if she had not resolved the situation herself.

Next morning, before they set out, the doctor held a clinic. Many of the men of the tribe suffered from *tinea imbricata*, a scaly skin disease similar to ringworm. The women did not seem to be affected by it, but several of them had hoarse tubercular coughs, and nearly everyone had an infected leech bite, or a boil or ulcer to be treated.

Sitting on the ramp of the longhouse, Andrea watched the doctor examining the children and coaxing them to take multi-vitamin pills. He had a way with them that surprised her. Indeed his attitude to all the jungle people was quite different from his manner towards his white companions.

With the Temiar, he seemed to relax. He never looked-'at them with the critical detachment with which he regarded her. He appeared to have a genuine affection and respect for them.

'A penny for them?' Guy said, startling her.

Andrea started. ' Oh, hello. Where have you been?'

'Some of the men have been giving me a blowpipe demonstration. They're pretty good shots. I must ask Ferguson about the poison they use on their darts. I gather it's fatal.'

At this point the doctor, having dealt with the last of his patients, came over to join them. ' Yes, it's deadly,' he confirmed, in answer to Guy's question. ' They tap it, like latex, from the Ipoh tree and a creeper. They mix it in various strengths, and the strongest is fatal in a matter of five or six minutes.'

'But how can they eat what they kill if the poison is so potent?' Andrea asked.

'Because the poison percolates the bloodstream, but it doesn't contaminate the flesh,' he told her. ' Incidentally, I've arranged for one of their men to carry a message that you're safe back to the *kam- pong* by the river. With any luck, it should be relayed to the Baxters some time tomorrow. The Temiar travel much faster than we do. Now, are you ready to push on?'

They spent the next night at another Temiar encampment close by a river, arriving there quite early in the afternoon, so that there was time for a leisurely swim while the sun was still high.

'I wonder how far we are from civilization?' Guy said lazily, as he and Andrea sat on a sandspit in the middle of the river.

'Not very far as the crow flies, I shouldn't think.' She turned her head to watch her brother swimming across to the far bank. Doctor Ferguson was up at the longhouse, talking to the headman.

'Alone at last!' Guy put a hand on her shoulder and gently pressed it. 'You're getting a wonderful tan. How smooth your skin is.'

'Of course—I always use Camay,' she answered lightly.

Guy edged closer. 'Look at me, Andrea.'

'Oh, Guy, this is hardly the place to start . . . making advances!'

'Why not? Nobody's looking.' He laughed and slid his arm round her waist. ' " Making advances "—what a prim way of putting it!'

She tried to keep her tone casual. 'I'm rather a prim person, I think.'

Unexpectedly, he let her go again. 'I doubt if you know what you are,' he said, with a smile. 'Tell me something. The boys you've dated in London . . . have you ever taken them seriously? Have you ever been really involved?'

'If by that you mean " in love "—no, I haven't. But what on earth has that got to do with it?'

Guy leaned on one elbow, studying her. 'Everything, honey. It's precisely what I meant when I said you didn't know yourself yet. Tell me something else. Do you find me attractive?'

Andrea wished that her brother would come and join them. But now he was swimming back to the villagers' rude landing stage.

'I don't find you repulsive,' she said flippantly.

'That's evading the issue. I want a straight "yes" or "no".'

She shrugged. 'Then I suppose it's "yes".'

'So we're mutually attracted . . . right?'



Andrea felt that was putting the case too strongly, but before she could qualify his statement, he said, ' Now presumably you won't deny that you know I want to kiss you. Well, you've already admitted it. But will you admit that you also want to be kissed?'

'I'm not sure,' she said cautiously. ' I haven't really thought about it.'

He grinned and lifted an eyebrow. ' You're evading the question again. My bet is that part of you wants to be kissed, and part of you is scared. Am I right?'

'Why should I be scared?' she asked uneasily. ' I've told you—I've been kissed before now.'

'Yes, but not in the way I would kiss you. This time it would be different, and you know it. I don't count that farewell peck the other morning.'

Andrea said nothing. She knew that she could easily postpone the conversation by the simple expedient of diving back into the river. But sooner or later Guy would get her alone again. And, to be honest, what he had told her was true. A part of her did want to be kissed. But another part—so far, the stronger—hung back.

Guy marked a pattern in the sand with his forefinger. He said, ' There are two kinds of girls in this world, honey. There are the good-time girls and the serious ones. The good-timers aren't necessarily bad girls. In the end they mostly settle down in the usual semi-detached with the usual quota of kids. But they're realists. They know they're going to wind up washing nappies, so they make the most of their freedom in the meantime. Maybe a few of them go off the rails and get in a mess, but mostly they just enjoy life with no harm done.'

He paused to rub out his doodle and start afresh. Again, Andrea said nothing. She had never known Guy to philosophize before, and she was curious to hear more.

'Then there are the serious types—including you,' he went on. ' Serious girls don't take life as it comes. They're idealists . . . dreamers. Their big dream is that one day some superman will come along and —Bingo!—they'll be in love with a capital L.'

His tone was edged with cynicism, and Andrea frowned and said quickly, ' Well, what's wrong with that, may I ask?'

Guy flicked an amused glance at her. ' There's nothing specifically wrong with it, sweetie. But like a lot of theories, it doesn't necessarily work out.'

'What do you mean?'

'Simply that—as supermen are in rather short supply—most of the dreamers finally have to settle for the same ordinary blokes as anyone else.'

Andrea lay down on her back, her forearms crossed over her face to shield her closed eyes from the glare.

She said, ' I should think, if you fall in love with someone, they seem wonderful to you even if they strike everyone else as being totally insignificant.'

'Maybe . . . maybe not. My guess is that a heck of a lot of marriages go wrong because girls suddenly get in a panic about being left on the shelf,' Guy said. ' They marry an ordinary bloke, but they go on dreaming about their superman.'

'So? I still don't see what this has to do with me.'

'Ah, I'm coming to that now.'

She heard him move. He did not touch her, but, without opening her eyes, she knew he was bending over her.

'The odd thing about you day-dreaming types is that when you're offered a chance of putting your wishful thinking into practice, you invariably get cold feet.'

'You're talking in riddles,' she said.

'All right, I'll be more explicit. Isn't it true that you've often imagined yourself in a terrific clinch with someone . . . being kissed till you don't know whether you're on your head or your heels?'

She managed a laugh, but her cheeks were suddenly hot.

'It may have crossed my mind,' she conceded.

'Well, now you don't have to imagine it any longer,' Guy said softly. 'Now's your chance to try the real thing.'

Andrea lay very still. Her throat felt tight. She swallowed. Then, swiftly, she dropped her arms to push herself upright.

But Guy was too quick for her. Before she could sit up, he had pinioned her arms and held her down. There was no real force in his hold, but it was enough to keep her where she was unless she squirmed free. But Andrea did not move. Nor did she ask him to let her go.

Lying there, with his gay good-looking face close above her, she realized that this was probably the only way to release the tension between them and to resolve her own uncertain feelings about him.

She had no time to change her mind. Smiling, Guy leaned down and kissed her.

It was—as he had promised—a very different kiss from any she had received before. Not that her experience was extensive, because she had always avoided casual embraces—especially those hateful

tussles in the home-going taxis. But there had been a few young men who had neither dithered nor pounced, and whom she remembered with affection.

Guy's lips caressed her smooth cheek. ' Well . . . ?' he murmured, close to her ear. ' Was it up to your- expectations ?'

For a moment she lay quiescent, her eyes still closed. Then, gently, she freed herself to sit up again.

'What is it? What's the matter?' he asked swiftly.

Andrea bit her lip. ' Nothing . . . nothing's the matter.'

How could she explain an emotion which she did not fully understand?

'Are you angry?' he persisted concernedly. ' Did you really not want me to do that?'

She flashed him a rather shaky smile. 'No, I'm just a little . . . confused.'

He smoothed back a strand of her hair. There was a tenderness in his eyes which she had never seen before. ' You're a lovely girl,' he said softly.

His tone and his look brought new colour into her face. She said awkwardly, ' We'll fry if we stay here much longer. We'd better submerge again.'

And then, as she scrambled to her feet, her eyes widened. A pang of dismay shot through her.

Doctor Ferguson was standing on the landing stage. He was in his swimming trunks. A moment after she spotted him, he dived cleanly into the river.

But she felt sure he had been watching them.

\* \* \*

There was to be dancing in the longhouse that night.

All afternoon, hunks of wild pork had been roasting on bamboo spits. Towards sundown, the headman's wife presented the men visitors with *menkuang* headdresses, made specially for the occasion. All the Temiar women were wearing their best sarongs, with fresh posies in the holes in their ears.

The children had helped each other to paint their faces, and fixed flowers in their wavy dark hair. Everyone was in an excited happy mood, and there was much laughter and raucous badinage as the final preparations were completed.

Andrea had one blouse in her pack. It was a simple sleeveless top of pleated coral Tricel which weighed practically nothing and could be stuffed into a plastic bag without becoming crumpled. She decided to put it on, with one of the sarongs she had brought for sleeping in.

While she was changing in the privacy of a small *atap* shelter some way from the longhouse, she heard someone coming.

'Miss Fleming?'

At the sound of the deep, clipped voice, Andrea dropped the orange stick with which she had been manicuring her nails—now cut short and unpainted. Feeling rather self-conscious in the gaily patterned sarong, she emerged from the shelter.

'I hope it's all right to wear this. I thought it would be more comfortable,' she said diffidently.

'Yes, certainly. Have you fastened it securely?'

'I think so.' She lifted the bottom of her blouse to show him how she had pinned the cloth at her waist.

He nodded. 'Yes, that will do, but later on I'll ask one of the women to show you how it should be fastened. I came to bring you this, as they haven't made a headdress for you.'

She had not noticed that he was carrying a circlet of flowers. They were wild orchids, amber with flecks of brown. In a London florist's, they would have cost half a guinea each, if not more.

'Thank you . . . they're beautiful.' She hesitated. 'Did you make this?'

'Yes, the stems are tough. They're easy to twine together.'

Andrea touched the tawny waxen petals. Between each flower he had fixed a frond of fern. The effect was charming, fit for a bridal coronet.

'Doctor Ferguson . . . couldn't we be friends?'

The appeal was quite spontaneous. She had not planned to make it. The words simply came out, before she could check them.

'Do you feel we've been enemies, Miss Fleming?'

As usual, his expression was unreadable, but it seemed to her that his tone was slightly less brisk.

'Not enemies exactly . . . but we haven't got on very well. I—I know I've displeased you,' she said, avoiding his eyes.

'Does my displeasure worry you?'

'Well, it's never very pleasant to be on bad terms with someone.' Andrea was already regretting her impulsive attempt to end the antipathy between them. He might at least meet her halfway.

A moment later, he did. 'Very well, Miss Fleming. We'll call a truce,' he said evenly.

But although he offered his hand, he did not smile. 'While I'm here, I'd better have a look at your waist,' he suggested. 'I should have examined it this morning.'

'Oh, it's very much better now. In fact I've taken the bandage off.'

She hitched up her blouse to show him. Whatever it was that he had applied the day before, it had certainly been effective. Now, only a slight discoloration showed where the place had been.

'You're lucky. You must have a strong resistance to infection,' he said, after making her turn round so that he could see her back. 'That reminds me, you'd better start taking these.'

He unbuttoned his shirt pocket and handed her a glass phial full of small white pills.

'What are they?'

'Salt tablets. Even if you don't normally take salt, you'll need them out here. They'll prevent you from getting cramps. Take one every morning.'

Andrea nodded. 'Well, thank you again for the flowers. I shan't be long.'

He turned to go, then halted. ' There is just one other thing, Miss Fleming.'

'Oh, please—won't you call me Andrea now?'

'Very well, if you wish,' he agreed.

From the other side of the *ladang* came the high plaintive notes of a flute—a summons to the feasting, perhaps.

Anxious to put on the coronet before it grew too dim for her to see her reflection in her mirror, Andrea waited for James Ferguson to continue.

'I was going to say that there are certain aboriginal laws which it's advisable for even outsiders to observe,' he told her. ' The Temiar are a highly moral people, with some very rigid codes of behaviour. Anyone who breaks a taboo is severely punished. That doesn't apply to us, of course. But, even so, it's wiser not to offend them.'

He paused, and she thought he was going to explain some points of etiquette to do with the coming feast.

Instead he said evenly, ' Your relationship with Ramsey is entirely your own affair. But it was fortunate that none of the tribe were near the river earlier this afternoon. They're forbidden to make love while the sun is up. After dark, you can do what you like.'

Then he walked away, leaving Andrea staring after him, as shaken as if he had slapped her.

So he *had* seen Guy kiss her! Well? He said himself it was none of his business. But somehow this thought did not ease her mortification.

'Oh, what does it matter? Why should I care what he thinks?' she muttered aloud, as she turned back into the shelter.



But it did matter. Suddenly—alarmingly—she did care.

## CHAPTER IV

The next day's journey was by raft. For a payment of fish hooks, nails and coloured balloons, the Temiar headman delegated four of his men to pole the party down river to the far end of the valley.

This was a distance which would probably have taken them two or more days on foot. But travelling by water, though quicker and much less tiring, had certain disadvantages.

The hot noon sun did not penetrate the deep jungle. But, as Andrea had found on her first day out, the heat on the open river was gruelling.

Peter and Guy went on the first raft; Guy filming the passing scene, and Peter recording a commentary on tape. Andrea accompanied James Ferguson on the second raft, an arrangement which added mental tension to the physical discomfort she was already suffering.

Normally, she had an excellent digestion. But the tough greasy roast pork she had eaten the night before had given her tummy-ache. She did not relish the prospect of having to ask for the raft to be stopped so that she could retire into the underbrush.

Both rafts were constructed of about fifteen lengths of hollow bamboo, lashed together with *liana* creeper. There was a raised platform in the centre for passengers or cargo, and the aborigines stood at either end to propel the raft along or, where the river ran swiftly, to guide its course.

In spite of the glare, James Ferguson was not wearing a shirt. The highest temperature did not seem to affect him, and he was browner than some of the Temiar.

'When should we reach the valley where the caves are?' Andrea asked, after they had been sitting in silence for nearly an hour.

'In a couple of days. But it may be a wild goose chase. I'm still not convinced there are any caves in the valley,' he said, with a negligent shrug.

He was whittling a small block of wood, the blade of his knife glinting in the sun.

Her eyes on his long lean fingers, Andrea said, 'I get the impression you don't really approve of this trip, Doctor Ferguson.'

He glanced at her. 'I thought we had dispensed with formality.'

Andrea pretended to be staring at something on the bank. It was ridiculous, but she was not sure she could bring herself to use his first name.

'No, you're right—I don't approve,' he went on, in answer to her question. 'Whether or not the caves exist is not my concern. But I've always believed that the aborigines are best left undisturbed. Apart from medical aid, civilization has nothing of value to offer them. In fact when they are forced into contact with the outside world—as they were during the Emergency—it invariably does them great harm. It's the same with all primitive people. As soon as the missionaries arrive, the rot sets in.'

'If you feel like that, why did you agree to guide us?'

'Your brother is paying me a fee. I need the money. My research funds aren't enough for all the medicines these people need.'

'Oh, I see. What exactly are you researching?'

'I'm trying to find out if various aboriginal remedies may have a wider application. Most laymen don't realize it, but many of our so-called modern drugs were first used by tribal witch doctors.'

'You mean like *curare*?' she suggested.

'Yes—although the original purpose of *curare* was to kill, not to save life.'

'The poison that the Temiar use on their blowpipe darts—has that been investigated?' Andrea asked.

'Yes: it's similar to *curare*. At the moment I'm working on a plant called *petai*. The aborigines use it as a remedy for diabetes, and so do the Chinese and Malays. It could prove extremely valuable.'

Before Andrea could ask any more questions— and she could not help being interested—the Temiar behind them said something.

James Ferguson glanced over his shoulder and nodded. He seemed to be fluent in the aborigines' *ofd* staccato dialect, but it was quite unlike Malay and Andrea could not understand a word of it.

'There are some rapids ahead,' he explained to her.

'Do the others know?' she asked anxiously. 'It would be disastrous if they lost their gear.'

'Yes, I warned them before we started.'

The leading raft had already disappeared round a bend in the river, and, as they neared the corner themselves Andrea heard the roar of tumbling water. Evidently these rapids were higher than those she had shot in Saleh's little boat.

The river began to surge with treacherous crosscurrents, and the raft tilted and swerved.

'You'd better hang on to me,' he directed.

As they were swept round the bend, the doctor put his arm round her waist and drew her firmly against him.

If Andrea had first seen the rapids from a distance, she would have thought it impossible for any craft—let alone a bamboo raft—to survive the precipitous torrent which now confronted them. As it was, there was no time to be afraid. Like a straw flung into a whirlpool, the raft swirled dizzily over the brink of the falls and was caught in a churning maelstrom of rocks and spray.

When they were through—soaked to the skin but, miraculously, unscathed—she found herself clinging to James like a drowning woman. It was not that she had panicked. It was simply that, in the circumstances, it had been instinctive to grab what hold she could.

But as soon as the danger was past, that instinct subsided. Wet, breathless and scarlet with embarrassment, she quickly drew away from him.

'I'm sorry,' she said, in confusion, drawing away. 'I—I thought we might be flung off.' She pushed back a swathe of wet hair and sat very straight. 'You were talking about your research work,' she reminded him.

James stared at her for a moment. Then he leaned forward with his elbows on his knees and his face hidden in his hands. After a moment's bewilderment, Andrea realized he was shaking with silent laughter.

'Is something funny?' she asked stiffly.

He began to laugh openly then, and after a moment the Temiar raftsmen joined in. They laughed so loudly that the sound of their guffaws echoed back from the jungle on either side and the whole river rang with merriment.

With no idea what it was all about—except that she was somehow the cause of their mirth—Andrea sat even straighter and waited for them to control themselves.

'I'm sorry about that.' Still grinning and breathing hard, James made a gesture of apology.

'Can I share the joke?' she asked distantly.

That almost started him off again, but he managed to sober himself, though the Temiar were still both convulsed. 'Don't mind them. They're just being sociable,' he explained.

'And you?' she prompted frostily.

He studied her for a moment, his expression serious once more.

'I was wrong about you, wasn't I?' His tone and expression were rueful. 'I'm afraid I judged by appearances—and that's always a mistake.'

'I don't understand,' she said blankly.

'Unfortunately there was nothing in your appearance to suggest what a redoubtable young woman you are,' he went on. 'Frankly, I thought when you saw the rapids you'd probably scream your head off. I certainly can't think of any other girl who would treat them as a minor interruption in an earnest conversation about research work.'

'Oh . . . I see,' she said, disconcerted.

It was the first time he had ever really smiled at her, and it sent a strange tremor through her.

'We'd better catch up with the others,' he said, more briskly. Below the rapids, there was another bend. A little way beyond it, the leading raft was moored under some overhanging trees.

'Now we know how it feels to go over Niagara in a barrel,' Guy said, grimacing, as the second raft came alongside.

'Is your gear all right?' James asked him.

'Yes, the boys gave us plenty of warning and we wrapped it in groundsheets and lashed it to the seat. But it was a damned near thing. I thought we were going to be smashed to smithereens. Are there any more rapids ahead of us?' James shook his head. 'No, it's easy going from now on.' He glanced at Andrea's brother. 'Are you all right, Fleming?'

'You haven't got any dyspepsia tablets, have you? My stomach is playing up a bit. I must have eaten too much last night,' Peter said wryly.

'Yes, sure. I'll get something for you. Is your tummy all right, Andrea?' James asked her.

'It is now. I had a bit of a pain earlier on.'

'What I need is a drink,' Guy put in. 'Is it safe to drink this river water?'

'No, I wouldn't advise it.' James spoke to the Temiar and one of them produced a length of bamboo, plugged at either end, and filled with the sweet pure water from the fast-running stream near the *ladang*.

'What was in that stew they gave us last night?' Guy asked, when he had slaked his thirst. 'Did you try some, Andrea? I couldn't place it.'

'No, I only had the pork and some sweet corn.' Andrea took out her pocket comb and began to tidy her wet tangled hair.

'Did you like the stew?' James asked Guy.

'Yes, I thought it was rather tasty. Much better than feat darned tough pork.'

'It was monkey,' James said casually.

Guy blanched. 'You're kidding! You must be.'

'No, I'm not. All the aborigines eat monkeys.'

'Ye gods! You might have warned me,' Guy said indignantly.

'But you just said you liked it, Guy,' Andrea reminded him teasingly.

To her amazement, he glared at her with real anger in his eyes. 'Oh, very funny. Ha-ha!'

'I'm sorry,' she said, taken aback.

'Forget it.' His mouth set hard, he moved away to hand out cigarettes to the Temiar.

Half an hour later, when they were on their way again, the sky became overcast and heavy drops of rain began to fall. Within minutes they were being lashed by a torrential downpour. For nearly an hour, Andrea sat hunched under a groundsheet while the raftsmen poled steadily on through the teeming deluge.

Then, quite suddenly, as if a tap had been turned off, the rain stopped and the sun came out again.



'You'll have to change. It isn't a good thing to let clothes dry on you,' James told her, after instructing the Temiar to steer to the bank.

So Andrea unpacked her second outfit, and quickly wriggled out of her steaming garments behind a thicket.

'I've just realized something—I haven't seen a single snake yet,' she said, as she clambered aboard again.

'I doubt if you will,' he said. ' There are plenty of them about, but they keep well out of our way. They're far more frightened of us than we are of them. In fact the jungle isn't really dangerous at all, if you stick to a few simple rules.'

'Then why were you so against my coming with you?'

His mouth twitched slightly at the corners. ' Chiefly because I underestimated you—as I've already admitted. But to say that the jungle isn't dangerous doesn't mean that it holds no hazards. What I meant was that most people have a false conception of the type of risk involved.'

'You mean like my being surprised at not seeing any snakes?'

'Exactly. The fact is that the chance of being killed by a snake or a tiger or a crocodile is a good deal less than the chance of being knocked down by a car in Singapore.'

'What are the real dangers, then?' she asked.

'Well, I should say the most common causes of death in the jungle are pneumonia and septicaemia. We're still not much above sea-level here. But up in the hills, the nights can be very cold. The cold and the damp can soon cause a serious chill.'

'Yes, I suppose so—though pneumonia is about the last illness one associates with this climate,' Andrea said thoughtfully.

Before she could ask him any more questions, the Temiar behind them called for a light for his homemade cigarette. James went aft and stayed there chatting to the man.

After a while, Andrea began to feel drowsy. It had been past midnight when she and the others had left the festivities in the longhouse. But the aborigines had gone on dancing until about three in the morning, so she had not had much sleep.

Presently she decided to lie down and take a nap. And soon, lulled by the murmur of the river and the swaying motion of the raft, she was fast asleep with her head pillowed on her pack.

\* \* \*

That night, for the first time, they had to lash their sleeping-bags between the trees like hammocks. Next morning, Andrea was woken by the mournful hooting of a troop of gibbons somewhere up in the high tree-tops.

From seven until noon, they struggled up a steep hillside track which had not been in use recently and was largely overgrown with tall ferns. But although it was such hard going that they had to take a ten-minute break every half hour, their exertions proved amply worthwhile when they reached the top. For now, in another smaller valley enclosed by a crescent-shaped ridge, they found themselves in jungle of an entirely different character from the dank, gloomy rain forest through which they had passed so far. Whereas the lower-lying jungle had a somewhat sinister ambience, here the impression was of tropical nature at its most luxuriant.

They were even more cheered when, after following the sound of running water, they came out into a large clearing with a series of

waterfalls cascading down sun-baked rocks into several shallow pools.' We'll spend the rest of the day here,' James said, as the other three sank wearily on to a fallen mossy tree trunk. ' But I wouldn't sit there, if I were you. There may be scorpions around.'

'Hell! Never a minute's peace,' Guy said crossly, under his breath.

But Andrea could not see that he had much cause for complaint, since it had been James who had taken the brunt of their recent ascent. Most of the way up the track he had to use his *parang* to slash down the tangled ferns.

To conserve their tinned foods, they lunched on boiled taro root and bamboo shoots which made a substantial meal, if not a particularly appetizing one.

Again, Guy muttered resentfully, and Andrea began to feel thoroughly irritated by him. He had been in a foul mood ever since the previous evening. But after lunch when, wrapped in a sarong, she was sitting on a rock and swishing her feet about in one of the pools, he came over and apologized.

'I'm sorry I snarled at you yesterday, Andy. The fact is that I'd already had one row with Ferguson, and that business about the stew really got my back up. Still, that was no reason to take it out on you.'

'What did you have a row about?' she asked, rather tensely, thinking that it might have been over Guy kissing her on the sandbank.

'Oh, he gave me a long spiel about not calling the aborigines *sakai*. It's what the Malays call them. But apparently the literal meaning is " low-caste outsider" or something. So he finds it offensive.'

'Well, he's fond of these people,' she pointed out.

'Yes, he's a queer fish altogether.' Guy lit a cigarette. 'How did you like being stuck on a raft with him all day yesterday?'

'He told me about his research work. It was very interesting.'

'I see,' Guy said, in an odd tone.

She glanced at him, slightly puzzled.

'Oh? What do you see?' she asked blankly.

Guy shrugged. 'I gathered relations were improving when he started calling you Andrea.'

'Have you any objection?' she said lightly.

'No . . . but I wouldn't like it if you got too cosy.'

She stared at him. Slowly—because the mere idea was so completely preposterous—it dawned on her that he was jealous.

'Oh, Guy, what utter nonsense,' she said, half laughing. 'Good heavens! Just because I'm no longer at daggers drawn with the man--'

He cut her short. 'If it's nonsense, then why have you been avoiding me?'

'But I haven't,' she protested.

'Yes, you have. You haven't spoken a word to me all day.'

'Well, most of this morning I was too short of breath to speak to anyone,' she said reasonably.

'Anyway, I thought you were still annoyed with me.'

Guy did not answer. He was smoking his cigarette in short irritable puffs and scowling at their reflections in the pool.

Andrea was amazed. This was a side of his character she had never even glimpsed before. As long as she had known him, he had always been unfailingly gay and lighthearted; a charming, amusing philanderer who never took anything seriously.

Now, all at once—and inspired by a jealousy that was not only completely unfounded but totally irrational—he was behaving like a sulky, touchy youth in the throes of impassioned calf love.

'I knew this would happen,' he flung at her. 'Women are such darned masochists. The more a man treats them like dirt, the better they like it!'

Andrea began to get angry. 'Well, you should know. You've treated some pretty badly in your time.'

'I've never treated you badly.'

'Until we came out here, you hardly noticed me. I was just Peter's kid sister . . . part of the outfit. It can't be more than three months since you packed up a big affair with that model . . . Sara Thingummy.'

Guy crushed out his cigarette with two savage jabs.

'All right, so I've played around,' he countered brusquely. 'What else do you expect? I'm not a boy. If it comes to that, I don't expect Ferguson's past has been exactly monastic.'

Her eyes sparkled, but her voice was low and controlled as she said, 'You're being ridiculous, Guy. I don't know what's the matter with you.'

'I'm in love with you, that's what's the matter!' he told her fiercely. Then, abruptly, his anger subsided. 'Oh, God . . . don't let's fight any more. Look, we can't talk here. The others may be back in a minute. Let's go for a walk and simmer down.'

'I can't. I'm not dressed.' Andrea slid off her rock and stood knee-deep in the pool with her back to him. Choosing her words carefully, she said, 'I'm tired, Guy. We had a hard morning, and to be honest, I'm finding the whole trip a bit more than I bargained for.' She turned to face him. 'Please . . . don't rush me. With all this physical exertion, I just can't cope with . . . emotional problems at the moment. I'm all mixed up, as they say.'

His expression softened. 'Poor kid—I suppose it is hard on you. But you never complain, so we tend to forget you're not as tough as we are.'

'I can't complain,' she said wryly. 'I was warned it wouldn't be a picnic.'

A dragonfly with brilliant azure wings came darting across the clearing to hover near them. But Guy barely glanced at the beautiful shimmering insect. He was watching Andrea with an intensity which, when she noticed it, made her feel oddly restive.' A sarong suits you,' he said. 'Particularly that one.'

A slight flush rose in her cheeks. She glanced down at the thin *batik* cotton which was patterned with strange flowers and long-tailed birds. Considering it had only cost her a few dollars, the colours were lovely—sienna, topaz and cream, with splashes of rich dull gold. 'Yes, I must buy some more before we go home. I can have them made up into shifts,' she said uncomfortably.

Then, to her relief, Guy said, 'Stay where you are. I'm going to get my Leica and take some colour stills.'

As he hurried away, Andrea's eyes were troubled. If only she had not let him kiss her! But how could she have known that Guy—Guy, of all men! —would take a single kiss as some kind of commitment?

While he was loading his camera, the others came back. They lounged on the rocks and watched Guy directing her to take up various poses.

'It's a pity your hair isn't longer,' he said critically. His appraisal was purely professional now. ' I wonder if there are any flowers about. What you need is a garland, like the one you made up for the dance-last night.'

It was on the tip of her tongue to say, ' I didn't make it—James did.' But she decided to keep silent.

'We came past some flowers just now. Shall I go back and pick some?' Peter offered.

'Yes . . . would you?' Guy clambered up the rocks beside the waterfall to try the effect of an angle shot.

'What are these pictures for?' James asked.

'They're for magazine features,' Andrea explained. ' Now that we're pretty well known, we have quite a few irons in the fire. We've even had an offer from an advertising agency. They wanted to use us in a promotion campaign for a new type of tanning lotion. But Peter turned them down.'

'God knows why—we could have made a nice little packet out of it,' Guy put in, from above them. ' You could make a small fortune, Andy. " *Glamorous explorer Andrea Fleming always uses Goo face cream to preserve her youthful radiance. Even in the torrid Malayan jungle, Goo kept her skin satin- smooth.* " '

Andrea laughed. ' " Footsore Miss Fleming used fifty packets of our famous corn plasters " would be more appropriate.'

'Are your feet painful?' James asked quickly.

She shook her head. ' Not really ... I was joking. But I must admit boots aren't my favourite form of footwear. My feet do get dreadfully itchy by the end of the day.'

A slight frown contracted his straight dark eyebrows. ' You may have picked up *tinea*. Let me have a look at your feet.'

Andrea climbed out of the pool, and perched on the rock next to his. Why was it that she no longer resented his authoritative manner? she wondered. Because resentment had proved to be futile? No: it wasn't as simple as that.

James took one of her slim wet feet in his hands, and gently parted her toes.

'No, you're all right so far—but watch out for any sign of flaking,' he said, when he had examined the other foot.

At this point Peter returned with several flowers.

'Will these do?' he asked.

'Yes . . . just the job.' Guy came down from his perch. ' Stick one behind each ear, will you, Andy?'

But as Peter was about to hand the blossoms to his sister, James intervened.

'Wait a moment—have you shaken them out? There may be insects in the petals.'



He took the flowers, shook them, and turned to Andrea and carefully inserted the stems above her ears. As he did so, the edge of his hand glanced lightly against her cheek.

A thought popped into her head, but she quickly dismissed it.

\* \* \*

During the night, both Andrea and Peter were woken by a hoarse coughing sound from somewhere close by. The others had slept undisturbed, but next morning James said the noise they had heard must have been made by a tiger on his way to drink from the rock pool. If they looked, they would probably find pug marks to confirm this.

'I thought tigers were almost extinct in Malaya,' said Peter, as he sliced tinned meat for their breakfast.

'There aren't many of them left,' James agreed. 'We certainly aren't likely to see one during the daytime. It would hear us coming and sheer off.'

'What would we do if we *did* come across one?' Andrea asked. 'Shin up the nearest tree, I suppose?'

'No, the best course is to stand your ground and shoo it away,' he said casually. 'Most tigers aren't as savage as they're made out to be. But of course they'll chase you if you run. That's an instinct common to all felines.'

'Well, I'm afraid *my* instinct would be to run like mad,' she answered laughingly. But as she watched him mending a rent in the sleeve of his bush shirt—his long brown fingers as competent with a sewing needle as they were with a hypodermic syringe—she realized that she was not really afraid of anything as long as he was with them.

It was a discovery which brought a faint tinge of colour to her cheeks, and made her turn quickly away to busy herself with the task of threading new laces in her boots.

Later, when they were packing their gear in readiness to move on, Guy said, ' You didn't swallow that line Ferguson was shooting, did you?'

'What line?' she asked blankly.

He kept his voice down so that the others would not overhear. ' All that cock and bull stuff about shooing off tigers. You didn't believe it?'

'Yes, I believed it. Why not?'

'For Pete's sake, Andrea, how gullible can you get? He was out to impress us.'

Andrea hesitated. ' Do you think so?' she asked, without expression. ' I would have said he couldn't care less what we think of him.'

Guy foraged in his rucksack and brought out a round cigarette tin. Stripping off the tape sealing the lid, he said, ' You are impressed, aren't you? You're beginning to think he's a pretty rugged type.'

Andrea tied the strings of her wet pack. ' Well, isn't he?'

'Oho, so you admit it!' Guy grinned, but there was no amusement in his eyes.

'Admit what?' she asked evenly.

'That you're changing your mind about him.'

'I don't still bear him a grudge, if that's what you mean. What would be the point?'

'What indeed? After all, you never know when you might need him to rescue you from the perils of the wild-:' There was a sharp edge of sarcasm in Guy's tone.

\* \* \*

Three days later, when it seemed as if their quest was to be in vain, they came upon a small tribe of Negritos. Much shorter in stature than the Temiar, and of strikingly negroid physiognomy, they were at first very shy of the Europeans. But their initial timidity gradually gave place to friendliness, and they became extremely interested in Guy's photographic equipment, and in the 'magic box' which recorded their guttural voices.

However, in response to James's questions about the existence of caves in the area, they shook their frizzy heads.

'Don't worry: this isn't conclusive,' James told the others. 'These people are nomads. They may not have been here before.'

'Poor little devils. They're no better off than animals;' Guy remarked later, in the evening.

For because of their wandering life, the Negritos had no cultivated food, like the Temiar. They appeared to live entirely on edible roots and wild fruit, and this particular tribe did not even have blowpipes. Their only weapons and means of hunting were crude bows and arrows.

Peter knocked out his pipe. 'Oh, I wouldn't say that. They seem happy enough.'

Guy shrugged. 'Only because they don't know what they're missing.'

This led to an argument which eventually became so heated that it verged on an outright row, and ended with Peter stamping off to his hammock, and Guy disappearing into the jungle.

Like Andrea, James had taken no part in the wrangle, being occupied with checking his medical supplies. Now, locking the worn canvas case and pocketing the small notebook in which he recorded all treatments, he said dryly, 'Don't worry. They'll have cooled off by the morning.'

'I hope so. I've never known them to quarrel like that before,' she answered uneasily.

He shrugged. 'Emotions always run high in the jungle.'

'Do they? Yours don't seem to,' she said unguardedly.

He made an adjustment to the Tilley lamp. 'I'm used to these conditions.'

Andrea stared at his strong dark face and found herself wondering what stresses, if any, would affect him. At first she had thought he had no emotions at all. Now she had come to the conclusion that his apparent detachment was a kind of mental equivalent of his physical self-discipline. Certainly he was capable of tenderness with the aborigine infants and younger children, and he did not lack humour. But beyond that she could only speculate.

Alone with him in the lamplight, she was reminded of the night on the Rest House verandah, when she had failed to persuade him to let her join the expedition. Now, although there was no longer a current of antagonism between them, she could not honestly say she felt at ease with him.

A moth darted out of the darkness and blundered against the shade of the lamp. A moment later, panicked by its contact with the hot metal, it was enmeshed in Andrea's hair.

She tried to free it, but could not.

'Oh, can you get it out, please?' She crouched down by James and bent her head forward.

It took him some seconds to disentangle the insect without damaging its delicate wings.

'All right, it's out now.'

As Andrea raised her head, he opened his cupped hands and she saw the moth, spread out on his palm, its pale grey wings exquisitely veined with black.

'Is it hurt?' she asked.

He did not answer and, glancing up, she found he was looking not at the moth but at her.

For an instant, nothing happened. Their eyes met and held, but the moment seemed to have no more significance than any ordinary exchange of attention. Then, all at once, Andrea was pierced by a sensation which—even if it was not wholly unfamiliar—had certainly never thrown her off balance before. She drew in a sharp shaken breath, every nerve in her body stretched taut.

And then the moth suddenly fluttered and flew off, and James looked away . . . and it was over.

'Time you were in bed,' he said evenly.

Andrea rose from her crouching position, feeling curiously weak at the knees.

'Yes ... I suppose it is,' she said huskily.

'Have you got your torch ?'

'Yes. Well . . . goodnight.'

He rose and looked at her again. ' Goodnight, Andrea.' But this time his eyes were impersonal.

Quickly, she turned and walked away to her sleeping shelter.

While she was undressing, there was a muffled screech from somewhere out in the dark labyrinth of the jungle. Andrea started and shivered, knowing that the sound had been the death cry of a small night creature caught by some soft-footed prowler.

But it was not nervousness which kept her awake long after she had settled in her hammock and pulled down the protective shroud of netting. Restlessly shifting her position—so that twice she was almost pitched out—she wondered if what had happened had been all her imagination.

But even if she had imagined that look on James's face, there had been nothing illusory about her own reactions. In all her life she had never felt such a wild upsurging excitement as when, for those few tense seconds, his narrowed grey eyes had held hers.

Merely thinking about it set her pulses racing again. If he could do that to her with one look, what on earth would happen if he kissed her?

The blood burned hotly in her cheeks, and her heart seemed to lurch against her ribs.

I'm in love with him, she thought, with a tremor.

\* \* \*

The sun was already slanting into the clearing when Andrea was roused by someone rocking her hammock. It was Peter. He had already flung back her mosquito net, and was holding a mug of coffee in his right hand. 'I gave you a shake half an hour ago, but you were out like a light. Do you want a cuppa to bring you round?' he asked, smiling.

Andrea shielded her eyes from the bright morning sun. 'What time is it?' she asked muzzily.

'Eight o'clock. Look, I think you'd better get up to drink this. It's straight from the pot, and we don't want you scalding yourself.'

Blinking, she rolled out of the hammock. 'Thanks, Pete. I shan't be long.'

'No hurry. We all overslept this morning. I haven't shaved yet.'

He left her to sip the hot black coffee, her brain still blurred by the sudden awakening from sleep. At first she was only hazily aware that today was different, that something portentous had happened. Then, abruptly, memory came back and she choked on a mouthful of coffee.

James was lacing his boots when she joined the others ten minutes later. He acknowledged her good morning with a preoccupied nod, and presently went off to seek out the leader of the Negritos.

Helped by several of the tribesmen, they spent all that day searching the crescent-shaped valley. But although they came across several massive outcrops of limestone, there was no sign of any caves.

The second day's search was equally unsuccessful, and Peter and Guy returned to camp so exhausted and disheartened that, after swallowing some food, they both went straight to their hammocks.

On James's order, Andrea had stayed with the Negrito women and children all day.

'Were you nervous being on your own here?' he asked, when the others had left them.

Andrea shook her head. ' I like these people. There's nothing frightening about them.' She passed him another mug of coffee. ' It seems you were right. We have come on a wild goose chase.'

He lifted an eyebrow at her. ' Do you always give up so easily?'

A week ago that tone of voice would have stung her. But now she ruffled less easily.

'Have you changed your mind, then? Do you think there are some caves?'

'Who knows?' he said, with a shrug. 'But if there are, they must be at the north end of the valley. We haven't tackled that area yet.'

'Well, I suppose that failing any caves, we shall just have to make do with the film we've taken so far,' Andrea said reflectively.

When she got up next morning, her brother and Guy were still asleep. A note pinned to James's hammock said that he had gone hunting with the Negritos, and might not be back until noon.

'That's a great help,' Guy remarked sourly, when Andrea showed the note to him.



'I expect he thought it would do you two good to have a rest this morning.'

'Oh, sure—he's the thoughtful type,' Guy said sarcastically.

Peter was equally irritable; not because he resented James's absence, but because his hands were badly blistered from hours of wielding a *parang* the previous day.

'You should have told James last night,' Andrea scolded, as she did what she could to soothe the painful red welts across his palms.

By two o'clock, the hunting party was still somewhere out in the jungle.

'You don't think anything could have happened to them, do you?' Andrea asked worriedly.

'What?—with Superman in charge?' Guy quipped acidly.

Andrea ignored this, and looked questioningly at her brother.

'No, I shouldn't think so,' Peter said reassuringly. 'Perhaps they didn't come across any game this morning.'

But although Andrea told herself it was absurd to be anxious about anyone as tough and experienced as James, she could not quite quash her concern.

It was after three, and the others were dozing in their hammocks, when at last she heard the hunters coming back. But her relief was short-lived, for when James appeared in the clearing his tunic was torn and blood-stained and his face and hands were filthy.

Instinctively, she ran to him. 'Oh, James, you're hurt! Oh, I *knew* there was something wrong,' she exclaimed in alarm.

He glanced at the rent in his tunic which laid bare his powerful brown shoulder. 'It's only a scratch,' he said calmly.

'What happened? Why are you so late? We've been worried,' she said, without thinking.

'Have you?' His glance shifted to the two recumbent figures on the other side of the clearing.

Andrea flushed. 'Well, perhaps not worried, exactly. But you did say you'd be back by twelve. Shall I heat up the stew?'

'Yes, I could do with something to eat. But first I must go and clean up.'

While he was away at the pool lower down the hillside, Andrea roused the others and set about making a meal for him. But although she was outwardly composed, she still felt shaken and upset.

'Well, I've found the caves,' James said casually, when he reappeared. 'They're right up at the north end of the valley in some pretty dense jungle. But we've hacked out a fairly good track, and tomorrow we'll all move up there.'

'So they do exist after all,' Peter exclaimed elatedly.

Even Guy looked pleased. 'What about the drawings? Are they there too?' he asked swiftly.

'At first I didn't think so. There are three caves, and the two smaller ones don't appear to be of any interest at all,' James explained. 'But the central cave is a vast place with a colony of bats living in it. The walls are so coated with droppings that you can't tell what's underneath. We shall have to rig up some lights and scrape the stuff off.'

When Andrea first entered the great gloomy cavern, its roof clustered with hundreds of bats and its atmosphere strangely chill after the steamy heat of the jungle, a shudder of revulsion went through her. It was not the bats which frightened her, for she knew it was a myth that they were likely to become entangled in her hair. But there was something intensely eerie about the place, and she was not surprised that the superstitious Negritos refused to set foot inside it.

Scraping away the thick crust of hardened bat droppings was slow, unpleasant work, but she insisted on doing her share. And, late in the afternoon, when they were all as filthy as James had been the day before, their efforts were rewarded. With a sudden shout of excitement, Peter called them to the part where he was working.

'Look!—d'you see? There *are* some drawings underneath,' he exclaimed triumphantly.

And there on the bared rock face, crude but recognizable, was the outline of a tusked boar.

Next morning they uncovered a whole frieze of similar drawings, and Guy began to unpack his Hash-lamps in readiness to photograph them.

While the others were still busy scraping, Andrea escaped into the sunlight. Apart from the foul odour from the droppings, there was still something about the cave which gave her the shivers. She would not have admitted it, but she was longing to get away from the place.

Presently James emerged and found her sitting on the ground, her back against a boulder, eyes closed.

'Is anything wrong?' he asked sharply.

She scrambled to her feet and brushed down her grimy slacks. 'No, I just came out for some fresh air,' she answered lightly.

'You look pale. Let me see your tongue.'

Obediently, she put out a clean pink tongue for his inspection, although it made her feel rather foolish.

'Are you taking your salt tablets?'

Before she could answer, he had cupped her chin in one palm and was examining her lower eyelids.

At his touch, her bones seemed to melt.

'Yes, I am,' she answered unsteadily.

James released her chin and, with the tips of his fingers, gently probed the sides of her neck.

Andrea held her breath and stood very still. And then/-for one heart-stopping moment, it seemed to her that his touch on her throat was no longer that of a doctor.

'Constipated?' he asked crisply.

She gasped and jerked quickly back.

'No, I'm not.' Her cheeks were scarlet.

'My dear girl, don't be so childish.' His tone made her feel about sixteen. 'If you have any tummy trouble, I want to know about it.'

'Well, I haven't,' she answered brusquely.

James lifted an eyebrow and shrugged. ' All the same, I think I'll give you a dose of something this evening.' He turned and disappeared into the cave.

\* \* \*

They spent their last day with the Negritos at the camp lower down the valley.

Andrea did not say so, and no one seemed to notice it, but she had woken up feeling slightly off colour and listless.

After the noon meal, she went downstream to bathe and shampoo her hair. Then, wrapped in a sarong, she sat on a rock and combed out the tangles, watched by a large bright-eyed lizard.

This time tomorrow, they would be on their way back to Sungei Musang. In five or six days the expedition would be over.

For once the prospect of returning to civilization did not cheer her. Usually, after a week or two of roughing it, she looked forward to living comfortably again. But this time the thought of sleeping in a proper bed and wearing a dress and having her hair cut left her curiously unmoved. In fact it increased her depression. When the expedition was over, their connection with James would come to an end. She would probably never see him again. And, from the way things were going, it seemed highly unlikely that there would be any drastic change in their relationship within less than a week.

Once, and only once, he had looked at her in a way that might have meant something. And even that could have been a trick of lamplight.

The irony of it was that now—too late! —she had come to understand that the very qualities she had at first so intensely disliked in him were the ones which had made her fall in love with him.

The trouble was that while, deep down, she wanted the man she loved to be strong and forceful, it wasn't so easy to take in the present circumstances.

I should have tried to be more docile ... I shouldn't have crossed swords with him so often, she thought unhappily.

Absorbed in her thoughts, she did not notice that the lizard had taken fright and darted away. When Guy appeared through the bushes, she stared at him with the faraway look of someone profoundly preoccupied.

'Have you finished? I could do with a tub myself,' he said, slumping down on a rock, and mopping his face with the end of the towel slung round his neck.

Four days earlier, he had decided to try growing a beard, and now the rough stubble on his chin and his long and tousled fair hair reminded Andrea of the unkempt youths who sprawled about the coffee bars along the King's Road in Chelsea.

'It seems hotter than ever, doesn't it?' she said, collecting her toilet things together. 'Even the water in the pool is tepid.'

'Don't go. I want to talk to you.'

'The others may want some tea.'

'They don't need you to wait on them.' As she moved to pass him, Guy caught hold of her wrist.

'Please, Guy . . .' Andrea stopped short, controlling an instinct to jerk away. She had sensed him watching her all morning, and now there was something in his manner which made her feel uneasy and defensive.

'Please, Guy . . . what?' he prompted.

She bit her lip. 'What do you want to talk about?'

'Sit down and I'll tell you.'

'No, I can't just now. I want to change,' she said uneasily. 'We can talk after supper.'

'After supper you'll make some other excuse.' He attempted to draw her down beside him, but she resisted.

'I'm sorry, Guy—I just don't want to discuss anything until this trip is finished.'

'It may be too late then. Perhaps it's already too late.'

'What do you mean?' she asked tensely.

He let go of her wrist and stood up. 'You've got a thing about Ferguson, haven't you? You started out hating him . . . and now you're halfway infatuated.'

'You're being ridiculous!' she said sharply.

'Am I? I don't think I am. Why do you watch him all the time? You try not to, I agree. But you can hardly keep your eyes off him. And when he isn't around, you think about him. You were off in a dream about him when I arrived.'

'Of course I wasn't. I—I was thinking about London,' she stammered. 'Really, Guy, I don't know what's got into you.'

'If it isn't true, why are you angry?' he asked silkily.

'Because it's absurd,' she retorted.

"The lady doth protest too much", he murmured derisively. Then his blue eyes kindled with sudden exasperation. 'You're being a fool,' he told her roughly. 'He's not your type, and he isn't interested either.'

Andrea tried to brush past him, but this time Guy caught her by the shoulders and his grip hurt.

'No, we'll have this out right now.'

'There's nothing to have out. It's all your imagination. Please let me go,' she said coldly.

'No, I'm damned if I will,' he said thickly. 'I want to know where I stand.'

The pressure of his fingers made her wince. 'Please . . . you're hurting me.'

Guy slid his hands down her forearms, drawing her closer.

'You wouldn't mind if it was Ferguson holding you,' he said bitterly. 'That would be different, wouldn't it? He's the cave-man type. If *he* was rough, you'd enjoy it.'

'Well, I'm not enjoying it from you,' she flared, getting angry.

For a moment they glared at each other in taut silence. Then, with a stifled expletive, Guy pulled her hard against him, pinioned her arms behind her back and attempted to kiss her.

If she had been wearing shoes, Andrea would have dealt with the situation by the crude but effective expedient of kicking him on the shins. Being barefoot, she was at a disadvantage.

Nevertheless she was able to evade his lips by jerking her head from side to side, and straining backwards. But the way he was holding her,



and the rasp of his beard against her cheeks, sent an involuntary shudder of revulsion through her.

Guy must have felt it, and seemed to unleash an even wilder anger in him. Releasing her arms for an instant, he clamped her round the waist and used his other hand to hold her head still.

Andrea closed her eyes, and braced herself to endure the hot hungry pressure of his lips. Then, all at once, she was free.

He let her go so suddenly that she overbalanced and fell sideways against the rocks, hurting herself. But it was not pain which made her draw in a sharp anguished breath. It was the sight of James, and of the look on his lean dark face as he stood over Guy, who had also lost his footing. 'What the hell are you playing at?' Scrambling upright, Guy lost the last shred of his control and took a wild swing at the other man.

James parried the blow with his left forearm and, for one ghastly moment, Andrea thought he was going to knock Guy flat on his back. But although he grabbed Guy's shirt, and his right hand was clenched, he only shoved him away with a look of contempt.

'Being in the jungle is no excuse for behaving like a savage, Ramsey,' he said, with a lash in his voice. 'Get back to camp and cool off.'

For an instant, Guy's face was murderous. But although he was as tall as James, he lacked the other man's powerful disciplined physique. And, enraged as he was, he obviously realized what would happen if he defied that curt dismissal. Abruptly, without even glancing at Andrea, he turned and lurched off through the bushes.

'Are you all right?' James held out his hand to help Andrea up.

'Yes, thank you.' Her voice was low and unsteady, her cheeks scarlet. The skirmish with Guy had loosened the knot of her sarong. Her fingers shook' and she tugged it tight again.

'You've scraped your leg. Sit down. I'll clean it up.'

James took the towel which had fallen from her shoulders during the tussle, and dipped one end in the water. As he bent to attend to the graze on her right shin, Andrea felt an almost overwhelming impulse to stretch out her hand and touch his crisp dark hair.

'What about your hands?' he asked.

She swallowed. 'My hands?' she said blankly.

'Did you scrape them too?'

'Oh . . .no. No, I didn't.'

Suddenly, because he was so close to her—and because he was always so percipient of other people's emotions, while revealing none of his own—she was terrified that he would sense how she felt about him.

'Look . . . please . . . don't blame Guy,' she stammered hurriedly. 'He—he didn't mean to behave like that. He just lost his head for a minute.'

James finished cleaning the graze in unreadable silence. Then he rinsed the towel and wrung it out.

'Is that supposed to be an excuse?' he asked, at length.

'Well, no . . . not exactly that. But I've known him for ages—he isn't really like that. I expect he'll apologize later.'

'And will you apologize to him ?' he enquired coolly.

She stared at him. ' I don't understand.'

James folded his arms across his chest, and regarded her with the cold sardonic expression she had seen so often before.

'People don't usually lose their heads, as you put it, without some provocation.'

'You mean you blame me?' she protested. 'But that isn't fair. It wasn't my fault at all.'

'Are you sure?' His tone was sceptical.

'Of course I'm sure,' she exclaimed. ' He just suddenly grabbed me.'

'Not for the first time,' he said dryly.

She flushed and bit her lip. ' That was different,' she said, in a low voice.

James lifted an eyebrow. ' I see.'

'No, you don't—you only see what you want to see,' Andrea burst out impetuously. ' Well, if you think I encouraged him, you're wrong.'

He shrugged. ' Very well, if you say so.'

'But you don't believe me, do you? You think I did,' she flared at him.

'Does it matter what I think?' he asked evenly.

And then, without waiting for her answer, he swung on his heel and left her alone by the pool.

## CHAPTER V

Early the following morning they said goodbye to the aborigines, and began the journey back to civilization.

At noon they stopped for lunch in a clearing below a small waterfall. It was a delightful spot, and the sight and sound of the cascading water seemed to relieve the heat a little, for it was an exceptionally hot, muggy day—even in the deeper parts of the jungle where the sunlight could not penetrate the dense canopy of foliage high overhead.

However, in spite of the pleasant surroundings, it was not a convivial meal. Guy sat in sullen silence, and James and Peter exchanged only a few desultory remarks.

Andrea was quiet because—apart from the fact that she had nothing to say—it took her all her time to swallow her share of the boiled rice and heavily salted squirrel meat which were their rations for the day.

Shortly before they set out that morning, she had had to retire into the jungle to be sick. Now she felt queasy again. But she could not forgo her lunch without causing comment, so she forced herself to eat about half of it, and stealthily disposed of the remainder in a convenient clump of undergrowth.

During the afternoon the track they were following led past the top of a thirty-foot escarpment. James said it would save them about an hour's travelling to climb down the rock face.

'Can you manage it, do you think?' he asked Andrea.

It was the first time he had looked directly at her since the episode by the pool the previous afternoon.

'I expect so,' she answered stiffly.

'I'll take your pack.' He held out a hand for it.

She gave it to him without argument, and he slung it over one shoulder.

'I'll go down first, then I can break your fall if necessary.'

Actually the descent was not as tricky as it appeared. The rock face offered plenty of hand and footholds, and as Andrea was not troubled by heights she followed him down without difficulty.

Guy came down next, then Peter. But as her brother was nearly at the bottom, a narrow ledge crumbled under his weight and he fell the last six feet. Although it was not a long drop, he landed awkwardly, toppling backwards and hitting his head against the rock with a force that knocked him out.

'*Peter!*' With a cry of alarm, Andrea darted forward and crouched down.

'Ye gods, that's done it!' The second exclamation came from Guy.

James said nothing. He simply sloughed off the packs he was carrying, shoved Andrea unceremoniously out of his way, and dropped on one knee by Peter's inert body.

'He isn't dead, is he?' Guy asked bluntly, after James had pulled down Peter's eyelids and was feeling his pulse.

James gave him a brief glacial glance, but did not reply. He began to unlace one of Peter's jungle boots.

He had just eased the boot off, when Peter moaned and stirred. James peeled off his sock, and made a swift experienced examination of his ankle.

'Sprained,' he said succinctly. ' We'll need a stretcher, Ramsey. Take my *parang* and cut a couple of saplings and a bundle of *liana* vine.' Then, to Andrea: ' Get all our blankets out, and something to put under his head.'

Guy was away nearly a quarter of an hour, and when he returned—dragging a couple of young trees, but no *liana*—blood was soaking a handkerchief bound round his left hand.

'I've damn nearly cut my hand off,' he said furiously, flinging the *parang* on the ground. ' That thing is so sharp it's lethal.'

James's mouth set into a grim line, but he only said, ' Let me have a look.'

By this time Peter was fully conscious again, but when he attempted to sit up James sharply ordered him to lie still.

The slash on the back of Guy's hand was not as bad as he had made out, although it was bleeding profusely. James gave him an injection, applied a sterile dressing and told Andrea to bind it up temporarily while he went to get the *liana* for the stretcher.

'We can't camp here. We need running water. The nearest stream shouldn't be too far away,' he said curtly, before he went off.

Guy submitted to Andrea's ministrations, but he did not look at her or speak. As soon as she had pinned the bandage in place, he moved away and lit up a cigarette.

When James returned with a load of *liana*, he immediately set about constructing a rough but serviceable stretcher. Watching him weaving the supple but extremely strong creeper into a lattice pattern, Andrea wondered if her brother would have to be carried all the way back to Sungei Musarig. If so, the rest of the journey would take them at least twice as long.

As soon as the stretcher was ready, James ordered Guy to help him lift Peter on it. And with Andrea bringing up the rear, they set off in search of the nearest stream. They had not gone far when the track became so overgrown with undergrowth that it was virtually impassable.

James halted.

'I shall have to go ahead and hack out a path. If your pack goes on the stretcher, do you think you could manage to help carry it for a time, Andrea?' he called back to her.

To Andrea's surprise, Guy said angrily, 'Of course she can't. Do you want to knock her up too?'

'Oh, I think I can manage it, Guy,' she intervened quickly.

'You'll have to try or we'll be stuck here all day,' James said briskly. 'Let her take the back, Ramsey. You come up front.'

Although Peter weighed about eleven stone, in ordinary circumstances Andrea could have helped to carry him without difficulty. But as she was already feeling off colour, the effort required to manoeuvre the stretcher along the narrow track was much greater than the others realized.

But although, in less than five minutes, her clothes were drenched and her shoulders ached with the strain, the sight of her brother lying with closed eyes and looking alarmingly grey kept her trudging doggedly on.

At last—after what seemed like hours but was probably no more than forty minutes—the undergrowth thinned out, and they came to a stretch of track which appeared to be in fairly frequent use.

'Right: we'll take a five-minute break,' James said, gesturing for them to put the stretcher down.

Andrea eased her painful muscles, and wiped a sticky film of sweat from her face and neck.

'Is he unconscious again?' she asked in a low voice, as James bent over Peter.

But her brother must have heard her, for he opened his eyes and blinked hazily at his surroundings. 'Sorry to be such a nuisance . . . got a splitting head ... be better soon,' he said hoarsely.

'Not to worry, old chap. We'll soon have you comfortable.' James stood up and glanced at his watch. Then he looked across at Andrea. 'Are you all right?'

She nodded. 'Have you been this way before? Are we near a river?'

He shook his head. 'No, the nearest river is two or three hours from here. We can't reach it today. But there's bound to be a stream in the area.'

'Oh, sure.' Guy's tone was sharp with sarcasm. 'The point is where? It's all right for you. But lugging the stretcher is playing merry hell with my hand. If you ask me, we should never have come down that blasted cliff. Some short-cut!'

James ignored him, but Andrea saw the muscles at his jaw harden.

It was almost dusk when at last they heard the sound of running water. By this time Andrea was so exhausted that all she wanted was to lie down on the ground and not move till the sun came up again. But before any of them could relax, there was kindling for a fire to be found, and more rice to be boiled, and the hammocks to be slung.



James did most of the work, and while Guy and Andrea were sitting down, sipping hot sweet tea, he applied cold compresses to Peter's sprained ankle and then strapped it with a crepe bandage.

'It's only a slight sprain. He may be able to walk on it tomorrow. If not, we'll head for the nearest Temiar village and hire a couple of helpers,' he said, when he had finished.

Presently, when Peter seemed to have dozed off, and Guy had disappeared for a few minutes, Andrea said, 'What about his head? He gave it a terrible crack. How can you be sure it isn't fractured?'

'I can't,' he said evenly. 'But I don't think it's likely. There's certainly no point in worrying about it.'

She was glad he had not lied to her. She knew as well as he did that, in any other circumstances, he would have had Peter X-rayed by now. As things were, they could only hope for the best. At least her own tummy upset seemed to have passed off, which was something to be thankful for.

\* \* \*

When she woke in the morning, the fire was still burning and James was sitting near it on the box containing the recording gear. His arms were folded, his chin sunk into his chest. He was asleep.

He roused the instant she touched his shoulder, and his first and almost immediate action was to spring up and go and look at her brother.

'You've been up all night,' she said, shocked, when he came back to the fire.

James ran a hand over the stubble on his chin. His eyes were bloodshot with fatigue.' Yes, I thought I'd better keep an eye on him.

If there had been any subdural damage, it would almost certainly have shown by now. But his pulse and respirations haven't fallen, and he's sleeping quite normally.'

'Oh, what a relief! But you must be exhausted. Why don't you go to bed for a couple of hours?'

He shook his head. 'We'll have to make as early a start as possible. It's going to be a tough day.'

When he had gone to the stream to clean up, Andrea dressed and combed her tousled hair. It felt lank and sticky, but there wasn't time to wash it. She collected her towel, soap and toothbrush, woke Guy, and took the water can to the stream.

James was rinsing his razor when she joined him. He was stripped to the waist, his discarded shirt already washed and wrung out.

Watching him for a moment before he noticed her, Andrea suddenly realized how she would have felt if it had been he, instead of Peter, who had been injured—with none of them knowing what to do for him.

When Peter woke up, he seemed to be completely recovered. And, after testing his sprained ankle, he announced that he was perfectly capable of walking on it and had no intention of allowing them to carry him.

Fortunately the going was mostly downhill that morning, and every half hour James called a halt for five minutes. He anticipated that they would reach the river about midday, and then another hour or so would bring them to a Temiar encampment.

During the morning, Andrea was walking along— thinking how much she would like a tall glass of fresh iced lime juice—when she was suddenly attacked by a strange giddiness. It lasted only a moment

or two, and none of the others noticed her stumble and sway. But it left her with the peculiar sensation that she was moving about an inch above the ground; a sensation which very much alarmed her because she had experienced it once before when it had been the forerunner of a bad bout of food poisoning.

The river, when they reached it, was a broad slow- running, surge of muddy brown water. James consulted his map and compass, and said he thought they would have to cross it immediately as—if he was judging their position correctly—the river was presently joined by another tributary which would make it too deep to ford.

'You three wait here. I'd better go over first and see how deep it is at this point,' he said.

They watched him wade cautiously across, the water coming up to the top of his legs. That meant it would be nearly at waist level on Andrea. She hoped she would not get another dizzy spell halfway across.

James came back and made two more crossings with their baggage. Then he returned for the third time.

'You give Fleming a hand, Ramsey, and I'll see Andrea over.' He snapped open his clasp-knife and bent to impale a leech which was humping blindly up the side of his boot.

'Ugh ... to think doctors used to *put* those things on people!' Andrea said, with an involuntary shudder.

'I thought you didn't mind them?' he said, looking up. 'You were very casual about the one you had on your arm the day we came through the swamp.'

Andrea shrugged. 'Well, if they're on you, they're on you—but I can't say I like them.'

His glance travelled over her, and she guessed he was thinking how different she looked from the girl he had first met in Singapore. No doubt it gave him a good deal of satisfaction to see her like this—her hair dull, her shirt and slacks crumpled, even her lipstick forgotten today.

'Is the jungle beginning to get you down?'

Was there a note of derision in his voice?

'Not particularly, but I think we could all do with a change of diet.'

She turned to clamber down from the river bank. The other two were already out in midstream.

'No, wait!' James moved past her, stepped down into the water and held out his hand.

She thought he was only going to help her from the bank, and was quite unprepared for being caught round the waist and lifted into his arms.

'What are you doing? Put me down!' she exclaimed.

'We still have some way to go. There's no point in your getting wet unnecessarily,' he said coolly. 'Don't worry, I won't drop you.'

Once before he had held her in his arms—that afternoon at the Sungei Musang swimming pool. Even then, when she had known him for only a few days, the contact had upset her. Now the effect of his nearness was paralysing. He shifted his hold on her slightly. 'It would help if you put your arms round my neck.'

His voice was expressionless, but as she did as he suggested, Andrea was almost certain that the glance he slanted at her had a gleam of derision in it.

She had known he was strong, but for a man who had not slept for thirty hours, he carried her as effortlessly as if she were no heavier than his pack. Nevertheless it took him several minutes to cross to the far bank; and those minutes were the longest Andrea had ever experienced.

'Thank you,' she said stiffly, as he set her on her feet where the others were waiting.

James removed his arm from her waist and used an overhanging branch to swing himself easily up out of the water. Without acknowledging her thanks, he shouldered his pack and led them on their way.

\* \* \*

In the early hours of the following morning, Andrea woke up shivering with cold and feeling sick again. She knew then that her previous bouts of sickness, and yesterday's giddy spells, could no longer be dismissed as the unpleasant but not serious results of an indigestible diet and general fatigue. She was now definitely ill. By sunrise, an hour or so later, instead of feeling cold, she was burning. When she climbed out of her hammock, the ground seemed to tilt under her feet and she thought she was going to pass out.

I shall have to tell James, she thought miserably. And then: No ... I can't be ill now . . . not in the jungle.

By the time she had managed to dress herself, she felt a little better. But she knew that her temperature must be well above normal and, as there was no way of disguising her flushed cheeks and unnaturally bright eyes, it seemed certain that James would detect that something was wrong.

However, as it turned out, James had other matters to preoccupy him that morning. Among the group of Temiar with whom they had spent

the night, there was an old woman with an infected leg ulcer and a number of sick children who needed treatment.

It was mid-morning when they set out again, accompanied by three wiry young Temiar who had agreed "to act as bearers for the remainder of the journey.

For Andrea, those last thirty-six hours in the jungle were an incessant conflict between body and will. Having no idea what was wrong with her— and terrified that it might be something serious, possibly fatal—she somehow managed to hide her condition from the others. Her one thought was that she had to stick it out until they were back at the Sungei Musang; that, no matter what it cost, she was going to leave the jungle on her own two feet.

They arrived at the Baxters' bungalow in the later afternoon, and both Doctor Baxter and his daughter were sitting on the verandah as the taxi, picked up on the outskirts of the town, entered the gateway.

'Just in time for a meal! Did you have a good trip? I expect you could all do with a stiff drink,' Doctor Baxter said genially, as he came down the steps to greet them.

Andrea was the last to climb out of the taxi. She stood for a moment, holding on to the door, her temples throbbing, her vision queerly blurred. She saw Doctor Baxter hold out his hand and smile at her.

'So James has been proved wrong, Miss Fleming?'

Andrea licked her dry lips, and tried to answer him. Then, as she let go of the door, the whole world began to spin and she felt herself falling.

When she opened her eyes, she was lying in a dimly lit room, and there was a sound and a smell which puzzled her. After a few

minutes, she identified the sound as the soft whirr of an electric fan. The smell was disinfectant.

'Feeling better, my dear?' It was Doctor Baxter's voice and, when she turned her head, she found he was sitting by the bed. She frowned, trying to remember why she was in bed and why she felt so weak. But before she could recollect anything, he said, 'You've been ill. But don't worry about it. We'll soon have you up and about again. Now try to go to sleep, there's a good girl.'

The next time she woke, the room was still dim, but there was no one in the chair beside her bed. And quite suddenly, she remembered what had happened . . . how they had returned from the jungle and she had collapsed in the drive.

At the sound of voices in the passage, she instinctively closed her eyes and feigned sleep. Then the door opened, and she heard footsteps and knew that someone was looking down at her.

'She's still asleep. Well, it's the best thing for her now. She may not wake up till tomorrow,' Doctor Baxter said in an undertone.

There was a pause. Andrea wondered who was with him. His daughter? Peter?

'What still beats me is how she kept up as long as she did,' he went on softly. 'A fever like that doesn't come on in a matter of minutes. She must have been feeling ill for several days, poor child. I wonder why she didn't let on about it?'

'Yes, that's something I'd like to know.'

*James.*

Under the pillow, Andrea's left hand clenched.

Somewhere in the bungalow a telephone began to ring. Then a floorboard creaked as the footsteps returned to the door. As it closed behind them, she let out a long sighing breath.

For a time she lay still, wondering what she was going to say when James put that question to her. Presently she realized she was thirsty. Perhaps there would be some water on the table. She opened her eyes and rolled over on to her back.

'Sorry, did I scare you?'

James moved to the window and adjusted the blinds to admit a little more sunlight. Then he came back to the bedside.

Did he know she had been awake all the time? Had he stayed behind deliberately?—to catch her out? Was he going to tackle her *now*? Andrea wondered, appalled.

'I expect you're thirsty. Would you like something to drink?' Without waiting for her assent, James removed an upturned glass from the carafe on the bed-table.

It wasn't until she tried to sit up that Andrea discovered how weak she was. If James hadn't slipped a strong arm behind her, the effort would have been beyond her.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, he supported her back and held the glass to her lips.' Don't worry about the limp feeling. It will soon go off when you're eating again,' he said, as she sipped the water.

'How long have I been in bed?' Her voice came out husky.

'Three days.' He replaced the glass on the table and helped her to lie down again. Then he reversed his position and faced her. *Here it comes*, she thought, with a thrust of panic.



But although he studied her face with that disconcerting shrewdness for several seconds, he did not ask the question she was dreading.

Instead he said quietly, 'I should try to go to sleep again now. It's only three o'clock. By this evening you may feel up to eating something.' And then he put out his hand and gently smoothed back the lock of hair which had fallen across her forehead.

Andrea was so shattered by this extraordinary action that it was some time after he had left the room before she realized she had not asked about Peter and Guy, or even discovered what had been the matter with her.

\* \* \*

By the following day she was sufficiently recovered to eat a light breakfast. During the morning Doctor Baxter came in to check her temperature and give her an injection.

'It is good of you and your daughter to have me here, Doctor Baxter,' Andrea said awkwardly. 'I'm afraid it must be making an awful lot of extra work. I feel most guilty about it—particularly after my vanishing act. You ought to be furious with me,' she ended penitently.

'I must admit we were rather concerned about you until James's messenger arrived—but I can't pretend that your disappearance was entirely unexpected,' the doctor said, with a twinkle. 'I could see you didn't take kindly to James's arbitrary attitude over the matter. I must say I'd like to have seen his reaction when you joined them.'

'Still, he's had the last laugh, hasn't he?' Andrea said ruefully.

'Because you've been ill, you mean? Well, that has nothing to do with your sex, my dear. Where this type of jungle fever is concerned, anyone can be laid low. If the bug happened to bite him, James himself would have no more resistance than you had. Indeed, I'd

venture to say that if any of the other three had been affected, they would probably have succumbed a great deal sooner than you did. You've remarkable stamina, young woman.'

Later in the morning, Margaret Baxter and the *amah* gave Andrea a blanket bath. She felt much better when she was clean, and wearing a fresh nightdress, and presently Peter came to see her. But he stayed only a few minutes, because the exertion of getting out of bed while her sheets were changed had made Andrea tired again, and Miss Baxter said she must nap before lunch.

About four in the afternoon, when the bungalow was so quiet that she thought everyone must be out, Andrea slid out of bed.

In spite of the chicken and egg custard she had had for lunch, she still felt oddly hollow inside. But she managed to put on her dressing gown and pad softly along the passage to the bathroom. While she was there, she stepped on the Baxters' scales and discovered that she had lost eight pounds since the last time she had weighed herself. Her reflection in the mirror over the basin was even more depressing. Her hair, unwashed for more than a week, was dull and lifeless, and there were shadows as dark as bruises under her eyes.

She was back in the bedroom, and about to do what she could to improve this wan appearance, when there was a tap at the door. Before she could scuttle back into bed, James came in.

At the sight of her sitting at the dressing table, his eyebrows went up.

'Did Doctor Baxter say you could get up today?' he asked.

'Well, no . . . but I'm feeling so much better.'

James crossed the room and laid the back of his hand against her forehead.

'I thought as much—your temperature is up again. How long have you been out of bed?'

'Only a few minutes. I just wanted to brush my hair.' "

'I'll do it for you,' he said briskly.

She gave him a startled glance. 'Oh, no, please ... it doesn't matter. I'll ask Ah Kim to do it this evening.'

'It's no trouble.' He picked up her white plastic hairbrush and waited while she climbed back into bed.

As soon as she was settled, he sat down beside her, took her chin in his left hand, and began to brush her hair with long firm strokes.

'There ... is that better?' he asked, after a few minutes.

'Yes, thank you very much.'

Andrea knew it was absurd to feel embarrassed, but nevertheless her cheeks were uncomfortably hot. James tossed the brush back on to the dressing table, and moved a cane chair to the bedside.

'I'm afraid you'll have to stay in bed until your temperature has been down for at least forty-eight hours,' he said, sitting down, and evidently intending to stay for a while.

Andrea lay back against her pillows. 'How long will that be?'

'Three or four days, probably. Even then you'll have to take things quietly for a time. It will be at least a fortnight before you're fit to travel.'

'But that's impossible,' she protested. 'The others are waiting to go home.'

He shrugged. ' They'll just have to wait. Jungle fever can have some unpleasant after-effects if it isn't treated properly.'

Andrea did not argue. She knew it would be a waste of breath. Besides, deep down, she did not want to return to England. Even if it was only prolonging the agony, every day in Malaya was a reprieve from the black despair of knowing that she would never see him again.

After a pause, she said, ' How are the others? Peter looked in for a moment just before lunch and he said he felt fine. Does he really?'

'Yes, I ran him over to the hospital at Ipoh and had him X-rayed. Ramsey's hand isn't completely healed yet, but that's not unusual in this climate.'

There was a pause while Andrea tried to think up some innocuous small talk. Finally she decided that, instead of waiting for him to bring up the subject on her mind, it might be best to broach it herself.

'Are you very annoyed because I didn't tell you I was beginning to feel ill?' she asked, without looking at him.

'Did you hope I would be?' he asked.

'No, of course not! That wasn't the reason at all,' she said quickly.

'Then I must be very obtuse. I can't think of any other.'

Andrea bit her lip. ' I—I just didn't want to be a nuisance, that's all. Peter was still pretty groggy, and Guy kept complaining about his hand. It seemed best to try and hang on till the trip was over.'

'I see,' he said dryly. ' What did you think was wrong with you?'

'I didn't know. I just hoped it wasn't infectious.'

'Didn't it occur to you that I might have been able to check it before it developed ?'

'Could you have done?' she asked gravely, looking up at him.

For a moment his expression remained unreadable. Then reluctant amusement lit his lean dark face. ' Not entirely, perhaps—but I could have staved off the worst of it.'

His smile made her heart turn over. Since that afternoon at the pool when he had found her struggling in Guy's arms, and had practically accused her of wilfully precipitating the incident, she had thought he would never smile at her again. But now, all at once, his attitude seemed to have changed. Or was it only because she had been ill?

'After all the trouble we've given you, I expect you'll be glad to see the back of us,' she said lightly.

James glanced at his watch, then rose to his feet. She had grown so accustomed to seeing him in jungle green Army kit that she could not quite get used to his being back in his immaculate whites again.

'Oh, I wouldn't say that,' he answered equivocally. ' Now you'd better try to sleep again. The more you rest, the sooner you'll be on your feet.'

\* \* \*

That evening, after supper, her brother came to sit with her for an hour. And he had not been in the room more than five minutes when Andrea realized that he had something on his mind.

'You seem very preoccupied. What's up?' she asked bluntly, when it appeared he was not going to volunteer any information.

Peter hesitated, and for a moment it seemed that he was going to evade the question. Then, looking rather sheepish, he said, ' Well, as a matter of fact I had a letter from Nina this morning. She's changed her mind.'

'What about?' Andrea asked blankly.

She had been under the impression that her brother's relationship with Nina Sheridan had come to a stormy end a few days before the start of this trip.

'Well, I didn't tell you, but the reason we had such a bust-up was that I asked her to marry me and she said no,' Peter explained. ' She wanted to carry on working, you see, and I wouldn't have it. I told her she could either pack up her job, or we might as well call the whole thing off.'

'That was very assertive of you,' Andrea said, smiling slightly. Somehow she had never thought of her brother in the role of a masterful lover before--

'It was common sense,' he said, shrugging. ' It isn't as if we need her salary to help us make ends meet, and I can't see the point of getting married if we're going to be separated every time I have to come abroad.'

'But what about when you have children? She'll have to stay behind then,' Andrea pointed out.

'Well, we'll cross that bridge when we come to it. For the time being I want her with me,' he said firmly. ' Anyway, I've sent her a cable explaining that we're held up here till you're fit again, and asking her to fix all the wedding details. We've been going about for over a year. There's no point in a long engagement.'

He grinned—and it was the first time he had looked really happy and carefree since before they left London. ' Besides, she might change her mind again. You women are such illogical creatures,' he added cheerfully.

'Oh, Peter, I'm so glad it's worked out. I've always liked Nina,' Andrea said sincerely. Then an idea occurred to her. ' Look, I'm sure you must be dying to get back to her. Why don't you go on ahead? There's really no need for you to wait for me. And there's certainly no point in Guy hanging about,' she added, as an afterthought.

'As a matter of fact the idea had already occurred to me,' Peter admitted. Then he frowned and shook his head. ' No, we couldn't leave you behind. It wouldn't be right.'

'Why on earth not? James says it may be as much as a fortnight before I can travel. As far as you're concerned, it's just a pure waste of time when you could be helping Nina fix the wedding. There'll be an awful lot to do, you know.'

Peter was clearly tempted. ' But what about the long flight back? You may still be feeling a bit groggy-'

'Oh, nonsense. By this time next week, I'll be as fit as a fiddle again,' Andrea said confidently. ' And even if I am still a bit weak on my pins, there'll be plenty of airline staff to give me a hand. I think it's the obvious thing to do.'

'Well, I'll think about it,' he temporized.

\* \* \*

Next morning, a few minutes after Doctor Baxter had visited Andrea, there was another knock at her door.

Hoping it might be James, she called, 'Come in.'

But it was Guy who opened the door, and he was the last person she had expected to see. Something of her surprise and dismay must have shown on her face, because he did not advance beyond the threshold. 'May I see you for a few minutes?' he asked quietly.

'Why, yes . . . yes, of course. Come in and sit down,' she said quickly.

Since she had last seen him, Guy had changed. He had shaved off his half-grown beard, and had his hair cut. Outwardly at least he was as he had been before they entered the jungle.

'I hear your hand isn't healed yet. Is it painful?' she asked, when he had closed the door and sat down.

Guy glanced at his bandaged hand and shook his head. 'No . . . just itchy. How are you feeling?'

'Oh, much better, thanks.'

There was a brief awkward silence between them. Then Guy cleared his throat.

'Andrea ... I don't quite know how to say this,' he began uncomfortably. 'Maybe there's not much point in saying anything. But . . . well, I'm sorry about what happened that afternoon.'

Andrea studied her short unvarnished fingernails. 'That's all right, Guy,' she answered steadily. 'I—we were all rather strung up by the end of the trip. Let's forget it, shall we?'

'Can you forget it?' he asked, his voice very low.

Andrea looked at him then, and the pain and humiliation in his blue eyes made her heart ache for him.



But she deliberately kept her tone casual as she said, ' It's forgotten already. Oh, by the way, has Peter mentioned my suggestion that you two. should go back to England before me?'

Guy nodded. 'Yes, he told me last night, but I don't think he's too happy about the idea.'

'Well, I asked Doctor Baxter and he has no objection. If Peter rings up the airport in Singapore, it's possible they might have a couple of spare seats on a flight tomorrow. You tell him you think it's a good idea, will you ?'

Guy hesitated, and she could see that he was torn by indecision, and dangerously close to another emotional outburst. But, after a moment, he braced his shoulders and managed a crooked smile.

'Yes, okay—I'll speak to him now,' he agreed, getting up.

At the door, he turned and looked at her. ' Take care of yourself, Andy.' His voice was husky.

Then, without waiting for a reply, he left the room.

\* \* \*

Andrea was creaming her thin brown hands when James came to see her late in the afternoon. He was carrying a laboratory jar with several sprigs of foliage stuck in it.

'I thought you might like something to keep you company,' he said, setting the jar down on the bed- table.

The large insect perched among the leaves was so well camouflaged that it was a moment or two before Andrea realized what he meant.

'It's a praying mantis,' James explained. Very gently, he removed it from its hiding place and set it on the palm of his left hand. ' If you don't like the look of it, I'll take it away again. But it's perfectly harmless, and I think they're rather engaging little creatures.'

'Oh . . . thank you very much,' she said uncertainly.

At first sight, she could not honestly say that the insect appealed to her greatly. It was about seven inches long, with a thin green stick-like body, four legs, and a small triangular head. And then, as she stared at it rather dubiously, the mantis turned its head and looked at her. And the movement of its head, and the expression on its small green face, were so uncannily like those of a human being that she had the feeling that it was actually summing her up.

James put the mantis down on the counterpane, and sat on the edge of the bed.

'I hear the others are going home without you,' he said, in a noncommittal tone.

Andrea reached for a tissue to wipe her hands. ' Yes, there are two cancellations on a flight leaving Singapore tomorrow evening. So they're catching the morning train from Ipoh. You don't disapprove, do you?'

'Not if you don't mind being left behind.'

'My only worry is about being such a nuisance to the Baxters,' she said, with a troubled expression.

At that point the Chinese *amah* came in with Andrea's tea tray, and James asked her to fetch a second cup.

'How is your appetite?' he asked presently.

'Oh, not too bad. I can't expect to feel very hungry when I'm not using up any energy.'

'No, but you must still try to eat as much as possible. At the moment you're far too skinny,' he said unflatteringly.

Andréa laughed. 'I suppose you'd like me to bulge like a well-stuffed cushion?'

'Not at all. Overweight is just as unhealthy as underweight. When you first came out here you had a very attractive figure.'

Andrea swallowed, and carefully folded a thin slice of bread and butter.

'Well, thank you,' she said lightly. But her pulses were racing, and she was intensely aware of his nearness, and of the silence and stillness which lay over the rest of the bungalow.'

'You sound faintly surprised,' he said, in a dry tone. 'Were you under the impression that, being a doctor, I only register people's medical condition?'

Glancing up at him, Andrea saw that his eyes were narrowed and amused.

'You must admit you haven't been in the habit of paying me compliments,' she countered, trying to sound flippant.

His firm mouth curved at one corner. 'No, I haven't, have I?' he said smoothly. And then with a curiously deliberate action he put his cup and saucer on the bed-table. 'Have you wanted me to?' he asked her.

It was an impossible question, and he knew it. But Andrea was saved from having to answer it by a tap at the door.

'James! I didn't know you were back.' Margaret Baxter raised her eyebrows in surprise.

James rose from the side of the bed, and turned to face her. ' Yes, I decided to knock off early today. I've just been having some tea with Andrea. Shall I go and get a cup for you?'

'No, thank you. I had mine at the mission. I'm going to the pool for an hour. Are you coming too?'

'Yes, I think I will.' James bent to recapture the mantis. ' Shall I leave this with you, or not?' he asked Andrea.

'Yes, I'd like to have it. Thank you,' she said, rather faintly.

'We'll see you later, then.' With a casual nod, James followed Margaret Baxter out of the room.

\* \* \*

Early next day, James drove Peter and Guy to Ipoh to catch the train to Singapore. They were accompanied by Margaret, who had some shopping to do.

About half an hour after their departure, Andrea climbed out of bed and found that her legs were almost back to normal. So she went along to the bathroom and washed her hair.

Doctor Baxter came home for lunch, but the others did not return till after supper, and during the hours she was alone Andrea lay watching the activities of the mantis and wondering what would have happened if Margaret had not interrupted James's visit the previous afternoon. Merely thinking about it made her heart thud against her ribs. But she could not rid herself of the uneasy suspicion that he might have been only playing with her.

By the end of the week, she was allowed to spend most of the day lying on a lounge on the verandah. But they still insisted on packing her off to bed at seven o'clock, and she never saw James alone. He knew that she sat up reading until ten o'clock, and he could easily have found some pretext for looking in on her. But he never did, and as her health improved her confusion and depression increased.

On Monday, she persuaded Doctor Baxter to let her stroll into town to have her hair cut and set at a Chinese salon. It was a fairly primitive establishment by English standards, but the woman who ran it was quite as skilful as the average London stylist, and Andrea emerged with her hair shining again and her morale much improved.

At supper time, she changed into a cool blue and white shift, which she had not worn in Malaya before, and spent fifteen minutes on her face.

Margaret was sewing on the verandah when she went outside.

'The mantis has disappeared. Have you seen it anywhere?' Andrea asked.

'It may have been eaten by a lizard,' Margaret replied curtly. She put aside her needlework. 'The others won't be back for half an hour. I want to talk to you.'

Andrea had been aware of the older woman's veiled hostility ever since she recovered from the fever. But tonight there was open animosity in Margaret's expression and tone of voice.

'Don't you think it's time you went back to England?' she demanded, without any preamble.

Andrea moved to the balustrade and leaned against the handrail. 'That's up to your father and James,' she said mildly. 'At the moment they say I'm still not fit to travel.'

'They can't force you to stay,' Margaret snapped.

'No, that's true. But it would be a poor return for their kindness if I went off without permission, don't you think?'

'You did it before—but that was different, of course. Last time it suited you, didn't it? This time you're determined to hang on as long as possible.'

'What makes you say that?' Andrea asked.

Margaret's thin lips curled in a sneer as she looked her guest up and down.

'You must think I'm blind,' she said bitterly. 'I know why you're all dressed up tonight. I know what you want. You're after James.'

It seemed to Andrea that there was no point in prevaricating. 'I'm in love with him,' she said quietly.

Her unruffled admission seemed to take the other woman by surprise. Then she gave a short mirthless laugh.

'Well, it's very obvious he doesn't care for you,' she answered unpleasantly.

'Is it? How do you know?'

Margaret flashed her an angry glance and shrugged her shoulders. 'Oh, he may be temporarily attracted,' she conceded. 'All men are the same when a girl like you plays up to them. But you can't seriously imagine he'd marry you.'

Andrea turned her head to watch a chevron of flying foxes winging south. Soon the green glow of dusk would fall.

'Why not?' she asked over her shoulder. Strangely, she felt very calm and self-possessed.

'You've nothing in common with him,' Margaret said tartly. 'James is a dedicated man. His work will always be the centre of his life. You wouldn't accept that. You'd expect him to put you first.'

'What you're really saying is that you want him for yourself.' Andrea turned to face her again. 'But are you in love with him?'

Margaret flushed, and her thin lips compressed. 'I regard that question as impertinent. I do not care to advertise *my* emotions.'

Andrea felt a sudden surge of impatience with her. 'Well, there's not much point in discussing this, really, is there? It's what James feels that matters.'

*And I don't know that any more than you do,* she added silently.

Margaret sat glowering at the floor, her nostrils quivering. Then, all at once, her bitterness boiled over.

'Oh, why don't you go away? Can't you see you're not wanted?' She sprang to her feet, her voice high pitched and unsteady. 'James is mine, do you hear? He's mine. He doesn't want you. He told me himself you were just a spoilt little flirt.'

It was at this point that Doctor Baxter's car swung in through the gateway.

Realizing that the older woman was on the brink of hysteria, Andrea said sharply, 'They're here. You must pull yourself together, Margaret.'

For a second she thought that Margaret was going to strike her. Then the car doors slammed and the sound seemed to curb her outburst. With a choking sob, she collapsed in her chair in tears.

James took the verandah steps in one lithe spring. He did not look at Andrea. He went straight to Margaret Baxter.

'What's happened, Maggie? What's wrong?' He knelt by the chair, his hands on her shaking shoulders.

His touch seemed momentarily to calm her, though she kept her hands over her face.

'What on earth has upset her?' her father murmured incredulously to Andrea.

But before she could reply, his daughter buried her head against James's broad shoulder and began to sob again.



## CHAPTER VI

Within seconds of Margaret's redoubled outburst of weeping, an Indian boy came tearing up the driveway. Panting for breath, he gasped out a message in Tamil.

'There's been an accident at the crossroads. I'll have to go at once. See to things here, will you, James?' Doctor Baxter hurried back to the car.

As he drove away, James lifted Margaret in his arms, and carried her inside the bungalow.

It was a quarter of an hour before he returned. 'I've given her a sedative. Now I'd better go and see if Baxter needs any help,' he said curtly.

And with that, he sprang down the steps and disappeared round the side of the house to get out his own car.

It was ten o'clock, and Andrea was still restlessly pacing the verandah, when the two men returned. As he came into the circle of lamplight, she saw that Doctor Baxter's trousers were smeared with blood and dirt.

'One dead, and one seriously injured,' he said heavily, in answer to her unspoken question. 'These damned young fools on their motorbikes . . .'

James had already strode straight through to Margaret's bedroom.

'I suppose I'd better clean up. Tell Ah Kim we're back, will you, my dear?' Doctor Baxter seemed to have forgotten his daughter's hysterical outburst. His lined face was haggard with fatigue.

Andrea nodded, and went through the bungalow and across the back garden to the cook-house. She had eaten her own supper earlier—although with little appetite—and asked the *amah* to have something kept hot for the *tuans*.

Returning to the bungalow, she wondered if it would be best for her to retire to her room. But presumably the men would want to question her about what had happened earlier, so she decided to stay up. '

Wandering uneasily about the living-room, she wondered how she could possibly account for Margaret's extraordinary breakdown without giving away the true cause of it.

As she had feared, James was the first to join her. His dark hair was wet. Evidently he had had a quick shower before changing into a clean shirt and shorts.

'Your supper is just coming. Shall I pour you a drink?' she asked quickly, as he paused in the living-room doorway.

'No, I haven't eaten since lunch, and we may be called out again.' He gave her a single brief glance, then crossed to the dining table and sat down. Andrea hovered uncertainly by the window. She was relieved when Ah Kim bustled in with a bowl of hot soup.

It was a strange meal. Andrea sat at her usual place and toyed with biscuits and cheese, and the two men ate their way through three courses, and discussed possible complications in the condition of the injured motor-cyclist. Neither of them made any reference to Margaret.

'I think I'll run over to the Clinic again before I turn in,' Doctor Baxter said, as he finished his second cup of coffee. 'No need for you to come, James. We may both be needed before morning.' Too preoccupied to remember to say goodnight to Andrea, he pushed back his chair and left the room.

After he had gone, James refilled his own coffee cup and shifted his position so that he could cross his long legs. Half turned from Andrea, he seemed also to have forgotten her presence.

Presently, Ah Kim came to clear the table. She touched his shoulder. ' You like more coffee, *tuan* ?'

James roused from his frowning abstraction. ' Oh . . . yes, please, Ah Kim. And would you make up a bed for me. I'll be staying here tonight.' He noticed Andrea sitting quietly at the other end of the table. ' You Should be in bed,' he said flatly.

Andrea didn't know what to think. Knowing James, she had expected him to start cross-questioning her the-moment he entered the room. But now it seemed that he intended to ignore the whole episode. It just didn't make sense.

'Yes, I suppose I should,' she said uncertainly. ' Well, I'll say goodnight, then.'

She rose, and he also stood up. ' Goodnight,' he said, without looking at her.

About half an hour later, Andrea heard the telephone ring. It was answered immediately, and a few minutes later there came the sound of a motor starting up.

For a long time afterwards, she lay awake in the darkness, unable to sleep. She could not blot out a mental picture of that moment when James had knelt by Margaret's chair and held her, weeping, in his arms.

\* \* \*

There was no one about when Andrea came out of her bedroom the following morning. And although the estate car was standing in front

of the bungalow, the double car-port was empty. Apparently James was still at the clinic.

The hours between dawn and breakfast time were the most pleasant part of the day. The grass was spangled with dew, the air still cool. In the distance, the jungle-clad hills were wreathed in white mist.

But as Andrea wandered about the garden, her mind was not on her physical surroundings. Her sleep had been troubled by strange unhappy dreams, and she had woken with a sense of impending crisis.

It was half past seven, and Ah Kim was laying the breakfast table on the verandah, when she heard a car approaching. She knew before she saw it that it was James's car, and had a fleeting impulse to hurry back to the bungalow. But instead she crossed the grass towards the car-port.

James had switched off the engine and climbed out before she reached him. He had a towel slung round his neck, and as she approached he unlocked the boot and took out a pair of wet swimming trunks.

'Good morning. How is your patient?' she asked.

He slung the trunks over a line at the back of the car-port.

'We nearly lost him last night, but I think he'll do now. There's an ambulance coming to move him to Ipoh. I've been for a swim to clear my head.'

Andrea walked to the verandah with him. 'Haven't you had any sleep at all?'

He shook his head. 'I'll get in a couple of hours after breakfast.'

'You like food now, *tuan*?' Ah Kim enquired. ' *Tuan* Doctor and Missy not up yet.'

'Yes, Miss Fleming and I will have ours now, Ah Kim. Don't disturb *Tuan* Doctor, but if Missy Margaret is awake you can tell her I want her to have breakfast in bed this morning. I'll come and see her presently.'

After the *amah* had gone, Andrea drew in her breath and braced herself. ' James . . . about Margaret--' she began.

He cut her short. ' Margaret needs a change. This afternoon I'm going to drive her to Penang to stay with some friends for a few days.' His tanned face was masked and unfathomable.

Andrea stared at him bewilderedly. Had he made this up on the spur of the moment? Or had it been planned with her father during the night?

But, if so, what did they imagine was wrong with Margaret? They were both doctors. Surely they couldn't believe that she was merely run down and depressed.

Beyond exchanging a few words with the *Kebun* who passed the verandah on his way to clip the hedge, James ate his pineapple and eggs in silence. In spite of his all-night vigil at the clinic, he did not look particularly tired, and Andrea was reminded of the other time he had gone without sleep—the day he had carried her across the river.

'I think it's time I left here,' she said abruptly. 'I'm sure I'm well enough to travel now.'

He was buttering toast, and did not look up.

'Yes, I think you are,' he agreed. 'I'll run you down to Singapore when I get back from Penang. Excuse me, will you?'

And with the toast in one hand and a cup of tea in the other, he rose from the table and disappeared into the bungalow.

Andrea spent all morning in her room. She was now more confused than before, because she could not understand why, when his whole manner was so chillingly brisk and detached, he had offered to drive her south.

Perhaps I'm being over-sensitive, she thought anxiously. He was tired and worried. He may not have meant to sound so brusque.

Towards noon the sky began to cloud over, and looking from her window Andrea saw Ah Kim run across the garden and hurriedly unpeg the linen from the laundry lines. The *amah* had barely reached the shelter of the servants' quarters before there was a tremendous roll of thunder and the heavens opened.

It was the first really violent rainstorm Andrea had experienced in Malaya, and it soon became clear why such deep monsoon drains were necessary in the towns. Within seconds, the garden was awash, every flower bed a wrecked morass.

The centre of the storm seemed to be immediately over the bungalow; and apart from the crashes of thunder, the noise of the rain on the corrugated roof was like the deafening rattle of machine guns.

With her hands over her ears, Andrea watched water cascading over the gutters above the verandah, and flooding the ground about the swirling gulleys.

She did not hear the rap on her bedroom door. And it was not until James touched her on the shoulder that she realized she was no longer alone in the room.

'Are you all right?'

Another mighty clash of thunder drowned his voice, but Andrea knew what he had said from the movement of his lips.

She nodded, miming her amazement at the scene outside the window. He shrugged, tapped his watch, and indicated that the torrent would not last long.

It did not. There were a few more rumbles from the sky, each one progressively further away, and then, quite suddenly, the rain stopped and the din subsided.

'Heavens, what a deluge!' Andrea exclaimed. 'Thank goodness it never poured like that in the jungle.' She turned to him, venturing a smile. 'Thank you for coming in, but I was more surprised than alarmed.'

'I thought you might have been asleep. It can be a bit unnerving to wake up and think the roof is coming down on you.' His glance went to the bed.

She had already begun some packing, and the coverlet was scattered with flimsy bits of underwear.

'There's no hurry about getting your things together. I'll have to stay in Penang overnight, so we won't be starting out until Thursday morning.'

'Oh, I thought you'd be coming back today.'

'No, we won't get there till dinner time, and I don't want another late night. The Conways will give me a bed. I'll be back here about two o'clock.'

Andrea picked up a blouse which had slipped off a chair, and put it on a hanger.

'It's funny, I feel as if I'd been in Malaya for months instead of weeks. Do you remember that first night in Singapore when you told me off for wandering about alone?'

'Yes, I remember,' he said dryly.

She knew what she was going to do, and a tremor began inside her.

'It wasn't a very good start, was it? And the next night was even worse. You made me feel about twelve,' she said lightly.

He let that pass without comment, and stood there, watching her. His expression had never been more enigmatic.

For a second her resolve weakened. Then she thought: *Well, I'm leaving ... so what does it matter?*

She smiled at him. 'I'm sorry, James. I mean I'm sorry I was such a thorn in your side at the beginning.'

Then she took a step towards him, put her hands on his shoulders, and quickly kissed his lean brown cheek.

The instant she had done it, she was appalled. How could she have been so incredibly transparent?

Then, before she had time to wish she could sink through the floor, she was in his arms and his mouth was pressed fiercely on hers. He kissed her long and hard; and by the time he had finished Andrea had discovered instincts she never knew she had, and James had proved very conclusively that his air of cool detachment went no deeper than his Indian- dark tan.

He released her slowly, holding her steady on her feet until she opened her eyes. His own eyes were oddly brilliant, but they held no warmth or tenderness. His expression was coldly sardonic.



'I'm not going to apologize for that, because I think you asked for it,' he said evenly. 'Is your curiosity satisfied?'

*'James!'* she whispered, aghast.

He removed his hands from her waist and stepped away.

'It must be time for lunch. In the circumstances I imagine you'd prefer to have yours in here. I'll explain that you have a headache. Ah Kim will bring you a tray.'

And with that, he walked out of the room.

\* \* \*

Andrea was lying on the bed when she heard the car leave. A long shudder went through her body, and she turned her face into the pillow.

Presently she heard Doctor Baxter coming along the passage to her door. She pretended to be asleep, and after removing her untouched lunch tray he went away again. She heard him tell Ah Kim not to disturb her.

About half-past three, when the servants would all be dozing in their quarters, she telephoned Singapore Airport and learnt there was a spare seat on a flight to London at noon the following day. She asked them to reserve it for her. Then she got through to the station at Ipoh and was told that there would be a night train south passing through at half- past nine. Finally she arranged for a local cab driver to come to the bungalow at seven o'clock. Her bags were packed and she was dressed for travelling when Doctor Baxter came home.

She explained the arrangements she had made.

'You see there won't be another spare seat for at least a week, and I really can't impose on you any longer,' she ended, knowing he would forgive her the white lie if he knew the reason for it.

Somewhat to her surprise, he accepted her abrupt departure without protest.

'Very well, my dear—if you're sure you feel fit for the journey,' he agreed kindly. He paused to light his customary evening cheroot. 'I don't know that James would approve,' he went on, as he shook out the match. 'But travelling by night is certainly not as tiring as the day journey, and I daresay you'll be able to sleep most of the way.'

Something in his tone made Andrea wonder if perhaps he knew, or suspected, more than she thought.

'Yes, I expect I shall,' she said awkwardly. 'I only wish I knew how to thank you for all your kindness to me. Believe me, I do appreciate it. No one in England would be, so good to a complete stranger. If I'd known what a nuisance I would be, I would never have come on this trip.'

'Oh, nonsense, my dear, we've been very glad to have you,' he said, patting her shoulder. 'And don't worry about a recurrence of the fever. It's not like malaria, you understand. It's not an intermittent type of infection.'

Before she left, Andrea said goodbye to Ah Kim and tucked a roll of dollars into her hand. Then, knowing that it would be offensive to offer the doctor any money for her board and lodging, she put nearly all her remaining Malayan currency into an envelope, and asked him if he would pass it on to the Salvation Army mission.

Then her taxi arrived and it was time to go.

The train reached Singapore very early in the morning, and with five hours to kill before the flight, Andrea took a taxi to the hotel where they had stayed on the outward journey.

There she was able to hire a room for an hour, so that she could shower, change her crumpled suit, and have breakfast. After forcing herself to eat a reasonable meal, she paid the bill, left her belongings in the care of the luggage porter, and went out for a walk. She wandered aimlessly along, too dazed with misery to notice where she was going. And then, as a narrow crowded street led out on to the open waterfront, she realized she was only a few yards from the *satay* stall where James had first spoken to her.

*'I wouldn't, if I were you.'* The memory of that clipped admonition made her draw in a sharp breath of pain. Beyond the moored sampans, the sea glittered in the sunlight. But in her mind's eye, Andrea saw the quay as it had been that night weeks ago ... the stalls lit by hissing naphtha torches, the air fragrant with spices and cooking oils, and a tall grey-eyed stranger looking down at her.

'Oh, James . . .' she whispered aloud.

And then the anguish became unendurable, and she scrambled into a *trisha* and told the driver to take her back to the hotel.

But the worst time was the last hour in the airport lounge. She was certain that James some time last night would have telephoned Doctor Baxter to tell him that he and Margaret had arrived in Penang safely. And the doctor would undoubtedly have informed him of her departure.

And although she knew she was only torturing herself, she couldn't stifle the faint futile hope that, at the very last moment, the voice on the tannoy would announce that there was an urgent telephone call for Miss Andrea Fleming.

But no call came, and a few minutes before midday Andrea boarded the airliner. She did not look out of the window as the great jet rose into the sky.

A chapter of her life was closed for ever.

\* \* \*

Peter Fleming was married to Nina Sheridan on the first blustery day of March. As the bridegroom, the best man and the bridesmaid were all well known to television viewers, shots of the wedding and reception were shown at the end of the News the same evening, and Andrea saw them as she was changing to go out to dinner.

How gay I look, she thought ironically, as she watched herself smiling and sipping champagne under the eye of the camera at the reception. Not a care in the world, and a hat that cost twenty guineas.

And then the News came to an end and she switched off the set, and went through to her bedroom to put on a sophisticated black chiffon dinner dress.

She was stepping into her evening shoes when Guy rang the doorbell, and she told him to help himself to a drink while she finished getting ready.

Instead of the bracelet or brooch customarily given by the bridegroom to the bridesmaid, Peter had surprised her with the present of a pale mink stole.

'You deserve some, compensation for giving up your share of this flat and going to live in that rather grim bed-sitter,' he had said, when Andrea protested that it was far too lavish a present.

'I suppose the happy pair will have reached their destination by now.' Guy came to the bedroom door with a glass in his hand. ' Though I

must say a honeymoon in Scotland wouldn't appeal to me, particularly at this time of year.'

'Nor to me,' Andrea agreed, fastening her ear-clips.

He leaned against the door jamb. 'When are you moving to your new place?'

'Tomorrow morning. Otherwise there won't be time for the decorators to finish here before Peter and Nina come back. If you've nothing better to do, you could help me cart the rest of my belongings over. Everything is packed. It wouldn't take more than half an hour.'

'Yes, sure . . . it'll be a pleasure.' Guy put his glass on top of her chest of drawers, and lit a cigarette. 'If you're ready, I'll phone the rank for a taxi.'

He used the extension by her bed, and watching his reflection in the looking glass, Andrea wondered if it had been a mistake to agree to have dinner with him tonight. It would be the first time they had been alone together since her return to England. But in the past few weeks he had been so much his old self with her that it seemed silly to refuse his invitation. Besides, she knew he was currently dating a spectacular bottle blonde.

They dined and danced in a newly opened club in Soho, and although the floor was small and crowded, Guy did not attempt to hold her close. Indeed more than once she saw his eyes straying appreciatively to some of the other girls present. Soon after eleven, he suggested it was time to take her home.

After the over-heated atmosphere of the club, it was cold in the back of the taxi. Andrea shivered and snuggled her stole closer about her.

'This weather! I wish the spring would hurry up,' she said forlornly, looking out of the window at the dark wet streets.

'Yes, it is pretty nippy tonight. I think that spell in Malaya must have thinned our blood or something,' Guy agreed casually.

The taxi drew up outside the flats, and he helped her out and turned to pay the driver. It had stopped raining, so she waited for him, feeling in her bag for her latch key.

The ring of footsteps on the pavement made her glance up. A tall man in a raincoat was striding swiftly towards her. For one second her heart leapt.

'A cup of coffee would be welcome,' Guy said, when they reached her door.

Andrea nodded, and let him follow her inside. She was no longer aware of being physically cold— only of a queer dull ache deep inside her.

'You sit down and get warm. I'll brew up.' Guy switched on the electric fire and disappeared into the kitchen. When he returned Andrea had taken off her wrap, and was sitting staring at nothing.

'I spotted a drop of whisky in the cupboard, so I thought we'd have Irish coffee and really give our corpuscles a treat,' Guy said cheerfully. 'What time shall I come round tomorrow? Will ten be too early?'

'Oh . . . that would be fine,' she said vaguely.

Guy put the tray on a low table, and settled himself comfortably at the other end of the three-seater sofa. Then he lit the inevitable cigarette.

'Andy, don't you think it might be a good idea to talk about it?' he said suddenly.

Andrea looked at him, startled. But before she could pretend that she failed to understand the question, Guy stopped her with a gesture.

'Yes, I know you've been trying to pretend that it never happened,' he said wryly. ' But it's quite a while since you got back, and yet when that chap walked past outside you looked as if you'd seen a ghost. And, apart from his height, he wasn't even remotely like Ferguson.'

For some seconds she stayed very still. Then she sighed and reached for her coffee. ' No, he wasn't, was he?' she said flatly. She gave him a twisted smile. ' I read somewhere that the average Englishman is only five feet seven. It's odd how many tall men there are in London.'

'Tell me,' Guy said gently. ' What happened?'

She shrugged. ' There's nothing to tell. I think he was . . . attracted to me, but that was as far as it went. He's probably engaged to Margaret Baxter by now.'

'He must be out of his mind,' Guy said, with a scowl.

'Oh, -no—she probably suits him very well.' Andrea's voice shook slightly. ' Look, it's after twelve,' she went on hurriedly. ' I really must turn you out now, Guy. The other tenants know Peter is away. I don't want to scandalize them.'

He did not argue. But, at the door, he paused. ' All right, I won't bring this up again. But remember, if you ever want to let your hair down, I'll be around.' He bent and crushed a light kiss on her cheek. ' Goodnight.'

Later, lying in bed, Andrea knew that what he had said was true. The long dragging weeks since her homecoming had not dulled the edge of her wretchedness. As Guy had witnessed, she had only to see a tall dark man in the street and the pain was as raw as the day she had left Singapore.

Each morning she woke up with the same empty sense of loss and desolation. And there were nights when she was tormented by the memory of those moments in James's arms, and the wild heart-thudding response he had aroused in her.

But it can't last for ever—it *can't*, she told herself.

\* \* \*

Next day, after helping her move her belongings to the new bed-sitter, Guy stayed to share a pot luck lunch.

'This place isn't too bad really,' he said, looking round the large high-ceilinged attic which was at the top of the solidly-built Victorian mansion and overlooked a pleasant walled garden.

'No. I would have preferred my own bathroom, but it could be a lot worse, and at least I can decorate it as I please.'

Andrea, dressed in ancient slacks and a sweater, was beating eggs for a Spanish omelette.

'I'm going to fix up divider units to make three separate areas,' she explained. 'The sitting part where you are by the windows; a bedroom section over there; and a cooking corner here. As I'm the only one who's got to live in it, I'm going to paint one wall brilliant yellow and have one of those huge blown-up murals.'

'I'll give you a hand, if you like,' Guy offered. 'I rather like slapping on paint. What's in here?' He tapped his foot against a long cardboard carton on the floor.

'Supports for bookshelves. I can screw them up myself, I think.'

Andrea poured olive oil into the pan on the rather antiquated cooker, and lit the gas jets.



'How about seeing a film tonight?' Guy suggested, when she had washed up the dishes in the old-fashioned Belfast sink, and he had finished drying them.

'Oh, not tonight, Guy. I want to get all this chaos sorted out.' She slanted a curious glance at him. 'Anyway, I thought you had other interests at the moment.'

He grinned. 'I never believe in chasing too hard,' he said carelessly.

He left about three, and after he had gone Andrea rolled up her sleeves and started sorting out her heterogenous collection of belongings.

She could not make up her mind whether Guy had really resumed his former way of life, or whether he still wanted her, and was only pretending that what had occurred in the jungle had been a temporary aberration. He's so nice in some ways. I wish I *could* grow to care for him, she thought unhappily. Oh, what a muddle life is.

At seven o'clock she made herself a pot of tea and some toast. As yet, there were no curtains at the windows, and the single naked bulb dangling from a flex in the centre of the ceiling cast a hard light over the room. Even though she knew it would look quite different when she had finished doing it up, Andrea was suddenly filled with depression at the thought of living alone there ... of the solitary evenings with only the shadow-people on the television screen for company.

She was making up her bed, and hoping the water would be hot in the bathroom on the lower landing, when someone knocked at the door. It was not locked and, thinking she was about to receive a visit from her landlady, she quickly finished smoothing the bedspread, and called 'Come in!'

It was raining outside, and the shoulders of James's grey tweed coat glistened with moisture as he stood there in the doorway, looking at her. She had never seen him in winter clothes, and he looked so different from her memory of him that, at first, she thought she was having some kind of hallucination.

He glanced round the room and closed the door behind him.

'Hello, Andrea,' he said quietly.

The shock of seeing him was so immense that she couldn't answer. She felt paralysed and dumb.

'I got this address from the porter at your brother's flat.' James took out a handkerchief and wiped away the rain on his face. 'May I take off my coat?'

She began to come to life again. 'Oh . . . yes . . . yes, of course,' she stammered.

He took it off and looked round for somewhere to put it. Then he hung it on the peg behind the door.

'I gather you've just moved here,' he said.

'Yes . . . this morning.' She brushed back a loose swathe of hair. 'W-what are you doing in London?'

'Passing through. I've finished my stint in Malaya. Now I'm going to Brazil for two years.'

'Oh . . . I see.'

There was a silence while they stared at each other. The only sound was the scatter of rain on the panes.

It was raining the last time, she thought, and her throat felt tight.

'Would you like a cup of coffee? I—I'm sorry the place is such a mess. It looks better in the daytime. There's quite a nice view, too. I was lucky to get it.' All at once, words began to pour out of her.

Stop it! she told herself fiercely. Don't let him see . . . don't let him know . . .

'I'll put the kettle on.' She turned and moved quickly towards the cooker. But her hands were trembling so violently that she couldn't even get out a match.

Behind her, James said clearly, 'I love you.'

The box slipped out of her hands, and the matches scattered on the floor. Blindly, she reached out and gripped the rim of the cooker.

Then James's hands were strong and warm on her shoulders, and he was turning her round to face him, and holding her chin so that she had to look up at him.

'I love you,' he said again. And his eyes and his voice were unbelievably tender.

And then—quite absurdly, because she had never known such piercing relief and happiness—she was in his arms and crying all over the front of his clean white shirt.

After a while, he gave her his handkerchief, and she blew her nose and let out a long shuddering sigh, and then gently disengaged herself.

'I'm sorry,' she said, in a new kind of confusion. 'I don't ... it was just . . . oh, *James!*'

'Please, darling, don't cry again. Look, come and sit down.' He steered her towards the bed. 'Have you got any brandy around? You need a pick-me-up.'

'No, there's only Chianti,' she said, sniffing. 'That's better than nothing, I suppose. Where is it?' She pointed out the bottle, and he fetched it and filled a plastic beaker. 'Now drink that up, and you'll feel better.'

She did as he told her, but her hand was still so shaky that he had to steady it for her. When she had taken a few sips, he put the beaker on the floor, and took both her hands in his warm ones.

'Will you marry me, Andrea? Will you come to Brazil with me?'

'You know I will,' she said unsteadily.

His fingers tightened on hers, and the muscles tensed at the angle of his firm brown jaw. Incredulously, she realized that he had not been sure of her answer.

'Oh, God—these last weeks!' he said huskily.

'But *why*?—why didn't you tell me in Malaya? That last awful day ... I don't understand. You said--' She stopped as he let go of her hands and stood up suddenly.

He thrust his hands into his pockets and moved away. 'I know—I was a brute to you, wasn't I?' he said, with his back to her. 'But I thought I was doing the right thing.'

He parsed, and she said, 'Please, James, don't go away from me. I still can't believe you're really here.'

He swung to face her, his dark brows drawn together. But as Andrea smiled at him, his expression softened.

'If I come over there I shan't want to talk,' he said, with a glint in his eyes.

She laughed and coloured slightly. 'All right, then you'd better stay there.'

After a moment, he said, 'You see, I knew you were attracted to me, and I—well, I'll go into that later. But even after you'd shown such guts in the jungle, I still couldn't see you living permanently in the wilds. I kept reminding myself of the way you looked that first night at the hotel in Singapore.' His voice deepened. 'That dress, and your beautiful back.'

'I thought you'd disapprove of that dress. You looked as if you did.'

A glimmer of amusement crossed his face. Then his eyes grew serious again. 'Well, apart from the dress, there was your whole background, and your career.'

'But if you knew I loved you--'

'Love isn't always enough, Andrea,' he said sombrely. 'I love you very much, but I can't give up my work—not even for you. And if you come with me, there are so many things you'll have to sacrifice.'

'Well, this isn't exactly a luxury penthouse,' she said, with a rueful glance round the disordered attic.

'It's better than a tent in the jungle.'

She rose from the bed and went to him. 'Is it, James?' she asked softly. 'But if you don't take me with you, what shall I do? I shan't ever fall in love with anyone else.'

He caught her hand, and his lips pressed hard into her palm. 'Are you sure? Are you certain, Andrea?'

She slid her free arm round his neck and felt him tense. ' Darling James, please kiss me . . . please hold me. If you knew how wretched I've been.'

Some minutes later, he picked her up and carried her back to the bed.

'I think I'd better make that cup of coffee. You stay there and try not to distract me.'

Andrea fished her pillow out from under the bedspread, plumped it against the wall and curled up comfortably.

'How long have we got?—before you have to be in Brazil, I mean?'

James had taken off his jacket, and was spooning instant coffee powder into cups. ' About three weeks. Do you want a formal wedding, or can we do it right away by special licence?'

'I think a special licence would be best,' she said dreamily. ' I can still have a white dress, can't I?'

He smiled at her over his shoulder. ' Anything you want, my love.'

When the coffee was ready and he came across the room, she said, ' When did you know I was attracted to you ?'

He sat on the edge of the bed, and his eyes were teasing. ' The day we all went to the Sungei Musang swimming pool. When I hauled you out of the water, your pulse was racing. I don't think it was because you'd had a ducking.'

'Oh, nonsense,' she said indignantly. ' I still quite disliked you then.'

'Did you, sweetheart?' He leaned across and kissed her close to her mouth.

'Well . . . perhaps not *disliked*,' she conceded.

James laughed, and pinched her cheek, and drank some coffee. It occurred to her suddenly how rarely she had seen him laugh before, and then only with the Temiar and the Negritos.

'What about you?' she enquired.

'I thought *that* question was coming.' He pretended to frown and ponder his answer.

'Oh, James, don't be maddening!' she exclaimed. He finished his coffee and slid an arm round her waist.

'The day I left for Penang, you asked me if I remembered the first night we met? I do . . . very well. What I remember most clearly is that you told me to please leave you alone, and then marched off across the hotel square. I think I knew then.'

'But you can't have done! I was so rude to you.'

'Well, I must have had some reason for following you into the hotel and finding out your name and how long you were staying.'

'You didn't! Oh, so *that's* why you weren't surprised when you met me properly. But if you were interested, why were you so adamant that I couldn't go into the jungle with you?'

'For the reasons I gave. I honestly didn't think you could stand the pace.'

'I probably wouldn't have done if I hadn't been so determined to prove you wrong,' she admitted wryly. 'Do you know the real reason why I didn't tell you I was feeling ill? I was terrified of becoming delirious and babbling how much I loved you. I wish I had now.'

'You're spilling your coffee.' James took the cup away from her and put it on the floor.

A long time later, Andrea stirred in his arms.

'You must go, James. Supposing my landlady came up. She'd have a fit.'

'Does it matter, since you won't be staying here anyway?' he asked lazily. 'All right, I'm going. Don't worry.'

She watched him shrug into his jacket, and straighten his tie. 'Where are you staying?'

'At a small hotel. Can I come and have breakfast with you? We've got a lot to do tomorrow. How will your brother react to my carrying you off?'

'I shouldn't think he'll object very strenuously. I'm not really essential to the team. Probably Nina will take my place.'

James raked his fingers through his ruffled dark hair. 'Do you still see Ramsey?'

'Yes. But there was never any real reason for you to dislike him, you know.'

He lifted one dark eyebrow at her. 'I didn't dislike him. I wanted to kick his teeth in.'

'What about you and Margaret Baxter?'

'Yes, that was tricky,' he said, frowning.

'You knew how she felt about you?'



'I knew she wanted a husband, and I was the only available man around. The difficulty was that I got on very well with her father, and I didn't realize that, under the stolid exterior, she was actually rather neurotic. What really happened that night she made a scene?'

'She accused me of having designs on you and told me to get out.'

'I thought as much. Anyway, she's fixed up now with a hearty type in Penang. I should think they'll deal very well together.' He glanced at his watch. 'It's early, only nine o'clock. Is there somewhere round here where we could get a meal?'

'There's a rather scruffy Italian place about five minutes' walk away.'

'Right: we'll go and eat spaghetti and hold hands under the tablecloth.'

Andrea combed her hair and put on a fleece-lined anorak.

'Hadn't you better change those flimsy slippers? It's wet outside,' James reminded her. 'I notice you're still a bit thin. I shall have to fatten you up. From now on, Miss Fleming, I'm going to take very good care of you.'

They switched out the light, and locked the door, and went down into the street. The night was chilly and starless, but it seemed to Andrea that now the sharp damp air held the first faint promise of spring.

She slid her hand into James's. 'I've always wanted to go to Brazil. Will we have a chance to look round Rio de Janeiro?'

'I don't see why not. We could spend part of our honeymoon there, if you like.'

Andrea smiled to herself. Malaya . . . Brazil . . . Burma . . . anywhere James had to go was where she wanted to be.