BAGABONE, HEM 'I DIE NOW

BY

MELPOMENE

$6.95

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by Melpomene

Bagabone, Hem 'I Die Now (the title is in the Pidgin English of the South Seas) is a haunting, exotic novel set in the largest of the "Talisman Islands," an archipelago in the South Pacific. There a strange group of people–British, French, and American expatriates, as well as native islanders–try to work out their destinies. For some, like Margery Hariman and Maurice Gillou, destiny lies in sensuality, in the exchange of bed (and marriage) partners. Others look for deeper meaning: thus, Margery's husband, a doctor, finds himself in a mysterious clinic in the interior of the island, caring for the strange American who had founded it after the bloody days of World War II. As others are drawn into the story, *Bagabone, Hem 'I Die Now* spins a strange, fascinating web of passion, compassion, and tragedy, reminiscent of the best work of authors like Joseph Conrad and Graham Greene.

And yet–as astounding, as unbelievable as it may seem–the *Melpomene,* identified as the author of the novel, is a *computer.* (Yes, a computer–and for some details, see "about the author" on the back flap.)

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'Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
T. S. Eliot

Best Wishes
Ted Hughes.

BAGABONE
HEM 'I DIE NOW

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ONE

Margery Hariman looked at herself in the full-length mirror of her dressing table in the main bedroom of The Rise, Jansoon Crescent, Suviara, and sighed. Suviara is the capital of the Talisman Islands, an archipelago in the South Pacific, east of New Guinea, and through the louver windows, the mirror reflected the lights of the main island, Santabala. She was not interested in the lights of Suviara Bay; only in the curves of her own reflection. She saw a well-proportioned body; lovely, soft, round limbs; a slender waist; and firm, slightly pendulous breasts; a graceful, golden, athletic figure, with elegant legs and intelligent ankles. Dark, almond eyes looked back at her curiously and appraisingly. The eyebrows and long lashes, the short, straight, black hair, matched those eyes perfectly. The pale, oval face and delicate chin gave her a doll-like "come hitherness," faintly oriental.

I'm still a girl, she thought, *and at forty I'll be the same.*

She was right on the first count. The mirror did not lie. Her exterior was desirable, exquisite. She noticed the perspiration on her golden-brown skin and carefully groomed tufts of hair.

"They don't detract," she complimented herself, "they enhance."

Here again she was right. The moisture did not spoil the velvet sheen of her skin; the dark patches titillated.

I'm not exactly a bird in a golden cage she mused. *I'm really more like a golden sovereign in a perspex case. All the shops are shut, so nobody can spend me.*

She knew that obliquely or directly, all men peeped covetously into her transparent aura. Doctor Hariman's wife had a reputation at Suviara clubs and swimming-pools. She reminded the old men of Diana Dors and the younger old men of Brigitte Bardot. A potent symbol! In Suviara there were few like her.

She did not hurry with her toilet. It was pleasant to be alone in the bedroom, even though the humid heat was already robbing her of the benefit of her shower. On Santabala it is normal to sweat within minutes of taking a cold shower.

It was agreeable to make a comparison of her own figure, in its athletic nakedness, with that of her rival, Brenda Gillou. No sign that either of them had borne children, corroborated the mental mirror reflecting her friend. The fact could only be detected by doctors—one of the disadvantages of being a doctor's wife—but whereas she, Madge, had only had one child, a girl, eleven years ago, Brenda had two girls five years and two years ago. All girls! Could it be that having girls was less ruinous to the figure?

We both look virginal when the children aren't with us, she reflected. *I suppose I could give Brenda five years, but nobody would take her for the younger. Chestnut hair can betray age, but she's so English with it—pink against my sallowness. But that's not everything! She leaves too much of her hair on. She looks all right in a bathing costume, but she doesn't suit a bikini as I do. Her eyes should have been hazel, not blue, and her breasts are thrusting. They're like a man's chest when they're covered, but, of course, she doesn't make the mistake of wearing high necklines very often.*

She managed to get the external, "Madge" mirror, and the internal, "Brenda" mirror side by side, and rejoiced that Brenda's lips were not so finely chiseled as her own. They were slightly protruding, pouting, and this, with the blue eyes, snub nose, and freckles, gave Brenda something of the appearance of a healthy boy. The nose was less shapely, and when it came to figure (Madge rippled the muscles of her

body seductively), Brenda had clever legs, chic proportions, but just that bit too plump!

Dressing is a problem for women on Santabala. Dr. Hariman came into the bedroom and was not surprised to see his wife unclothed. He himself looked cool and smart in a white tunic-shirt open at the neck, and well-shaped, well-creased trousers.

"It's turned half-past," he observed. "We don't want to be late." He would have gone out of the room again, but she had crossed to the wardrobe and was sorting through dresses, grumbling that she had nothing to wear. She selected a full-length, cotton evening dress, pulled it on over her head, and ordered him to zip it up. It was a sort of burnt-gold color. He knew the accessories would take time, so he went out into the lounge, where he read *Punch*. By a quarter to eight she had put on shoes, a necklace, earrings, bracelets and rings, made herself up to kill, sorted out her vanity bag, and was ready to go.

"You look very nice," her husband said through clenched teeth as he locked the front door. "Half past seven was the time! It's nearly eight o'clock."

It was, in fact, five to eight as he drove the Japanese Mazda out of Jansoon Crescent. The lights of the ships in the port and along the quayside sparkled against the tropical velvet of the night. It was good to have escaped before the telephone rang, even though he didn't care much for official receptions.

When they got to Talisman House, the governor was still at the entrance, welcoming late arrivals. He wore a cummerbund; his mustache drooped benignly. His wife wore a sari-style mauve dress and flashed jewelry. She beamed a welcome, but could not resist eyeing them from head to foot and back again.

"I'm so glad you were able to come, Doctor Hariman," she warbled.

"I'm sure a doctor's hours must be very trying. Now, would you like a drink? A sherry perhaps?"

They both smiled and said, "Oh, yes please," at the same time. A dark servant in white shirt and shorts took over and brought a "sweet" for the wife and a "dry" for the husband. They mingled with the guests, exchanging greetings. From time to time there were introductions. A young woman materialized. It was Brenda Gillou. Her long, rich, auburn hair rippled round her dainty chin before cascading down over the pink perfection of her bosom, itself accentuated by the severe cut of a dark-green bodice and a sort of jewelled neckerchief which *would* keep slipping aside, foiling the three-pronged bid for modesty of hair, neckband, and neckline. Her blue eyes shone like stars.

"Maurice, this is Doctor Wingfield Hariman and his wife Margery. I've known them for so long and wanted you to meet them."

They shook hands. Hariman discovered that Gillou was permanent secretary in the Ministry of Supply. The women chatted amiably. The men sipped their drinks and exchanged civilities. Then they went in to dinner and found themselves at a long table, the doctor next to Brenda Gillou, Madge Hariman sitting by Maurice Gillou. This was Friday, 18 October 198—, when the moon was at its full.

TWO

Some of the friendships initiated at the governor's dinner ripened in the months which followed, including the relationship between Mrs. Gillou and Dr. Hariman. "Falling in love is wonderful," a song affirms, or rather, "They say that" it is, implying some doubt on the part of the songwriter. More than one couple felt an exciting flame burning inside them after that dinner. "There's another *being* I'd like to be with right now; to be with all the time. I haven't felt like this since . . . . I'd love to be with . . . . all the time! In the company of that *being* I'm so ha—pp—y! This is the state I ought to live in all the time, this delicious ache!" Heartache? Chest ache? Where exactly does it ache? Not easy to diagnose, even if you happen to be a surgeon-specialist like Hariman. Not so easy to cut out! Anyway, it's all so innocent between married couples if all four fall again at the same time! It is *love*, pure *love*, in spite of the dilemma of being already married. How well another pop song expresses that human dilemma: "It must be ri—ight. It can't be wro—ong!"

In Gillou, Mrs. Hariman saw the good points her husband lacked. He was delightfully witty and extroverted. Polished! He didn't take life seriously, or perhaps the lighter side of life was as important to him as his duty. Problems did not worry him because he was so competent. He told Madge of the teasers a permanent secretary has to face, but in a jocular way so that it was obvious he knew the solution. And socially he was such a success. He said outrageous things so lightheartedly that everybody laughed. He was handsome in a

"college" sort of way; he wore glasses with easy nonchalance; he was a genial diplomat; his hair always in place; his eyes with their indefinable color, watchful, yet merry. He had good reason to be amused at the dullness of those round him. When Madge was with him, she felt her own vivacious nature warming into life as never before. She dared to say shocking things, as he did; she dared to *do* shocking things. They danced cheek-to-cheek at the Club. He stroked and caressed her in public. As they danced, he sweated freely, and she did not mind his sweat. She got a kick out of putting her hands on his buttocks and almost as much out of being seen doing so. She had sensations she had never known before. They were living!

Gillou felt that he was savoring a better vintage than ever before; older, with a fuller flavor, more intoxicating. She was not just personable. She was sophisticatedly desirable: "good tune on an old fiddle," if you liked. She had what it takes. None of the callow rawness of the virgins. A kind of warmth emanated from Madge. Like himself, she loved life. And it was so easy for them to be together. Her husband was always on duty. People at the Club sympathized with the neglected wife of a doctor, getting consolation from a debonair escort. It was natural.

Nobody considered that Brenda Gillou was wronged. She'd always preferred to stay at home in the evenings. For her, the Club meant swimming pool in the daytime with drinks brought out from the bar on a tray. Two little girls drinking orange squash, crunching rice-cheese crumpies, or splashing in the water. Brenda, always attractive to men, with two or three gallants around her! There were women satellites, too, mostly plain, cashing in on the appetites that were whetted but unsatisfied. Often they could not conceal their desperate need. After a few drinks, the men helped them out. But for hours on end the groups sat around like respectable families; shaggy Australian Apollos, bearded Yanks in flowery bathing trunks, goggle-eyed English greenhorns. They came from the government, from commerce, from the banks,

schools, and training-colleges. Beasts from the human zoo, enjoying the temporary release from captivity.

These anthropoids were uninhibited in their behavior, accepting one another as if they'd grown up together. Nobody worried about bodies, cheesy and flabby or tanned and athletic; Chinese and Talanesians lolled on the grass in the shade alongside white women. Amazons hot from the tennis courts flopped into basket chairs opposite pigeon-chested, little, fuzzy men. Nothing was perfect about anything or anyone—with the possible exception of Brenda Gillou—yet everybody exploited some attractive feature; curly hair, high cheekbones, or wide hips. Some of the plainer wives made up for lack of umph by way-out garments or foul language; an uplift jungle-bra or an earthquake T-shirt. Nobody was critical of another's freakishness. Nobody bossed anybody about. The little children mostly ran about "garden-of-eden."

Brenda's attractiveness was intensified by her naturalness. Sometimes, watching Tina in the children's pool, she would drop her skirt like a theatre curtain and stand with it round her ankles, a triumph of female fecundity; a triangular turquoise jewel topped by two turquoise cups, all set off against pinkness and a chestnut mane. Lips forward like a child giving a kiss; hips rhythmic and hypnotically casual. She would get any of the men to rub suntan lotion on her soft, round shoulders, unaware that parts of the turquoise bikini had disappeared into valleys and she was displaying a mock bra of untanned convexity and pink-skin panties where the sun had not yet browned her.

Five-year-old Tracey and two-year-old Tina had limbs that reflected credit upon their mother's calisthenics. The older girl ran about and plunged into the big pool with boys older than herself. She had inherited an auburn tinge, but she had green eyes. Tina delighted to totter round the edge of the pool with all eyes upon her. She had fair hair and curiously blank blue eyes.

At weekends, Madge Hariman sometimes joined one or

other of the groups at the swimming pool. She had stopped going there during the week. She was restless, and, after a chat with Brenda, would sit on a table, hugging her knees, in a black bikini with the white lace across the bosom. Her eyes followed men, some of whom wore their hair as long as Brenda Gillou's. The coarseness and ugliness of their faces seemed to give her pleasure. At other times she seemed to dote on some pudgy twenty-five-year-old with a black, curly wig, like a judge's. They fetched drinks for her, looking at her with unsmiling faces, their eyes deadpan, as if something were gnawing inside them. Their mouths were set in straight lines with slightly parted lips and expressions not unlike goldfish. It was difficult, when their tops were covered, to know whether they were men or ugly women, but Madge seemed to know.

She took as much interest in Tracey and Tina as in the men. She delighted in their femininity. Mentally she compared them with her own daughter, eleven-year-old Deirdre, due back from her first year at boarding school in England. Leaving the group, Madge would cross over to the shallow pool and sit on the edge, getting sun to her body for a few minutes while the children played. She wanted to be a mother in the true sense; mother of children like these two.

She brooded about Deirdre. Even as a tot in her perambulator, she had not given pleasure as Tracy and Tina did. In Deirdre's case, the Child had always been Mother of the Woman, manifesting intelligent self-reliance, and compensating for adult incompetence and negligence. It had been a relief to get her away to school; she was growing gawky, and, far from rejuvenating her mother, as Brenda's children did, she had become an irksome reminder of the eternal altruism expected from a woman "tied" to a doctor.

Each of the two mothers was aware of what had transpired at the governor's dinner. Outwardly, neither bore any grudge. They were as helpful to each other as sisters.

"Tracey's got a boil on the back of her leg," Brenda said one day at the pool.

"So she has, poor little thing, it's a sore from a bite," Madge agreed.

"Take her straight to see Wingfield at Arimathea."

"I couldn't do that. I'm supposed to see a Talanesian doctor first."

"Darling! I can arrange for you to go straight to Wingfield." In spite of her friend's exhortations, Brenda Gillou hesitated. It ended up with both children being regularly treated for minor afflictions at The Rise, in the surgeon's free time. But when Brenda needed help herself, in connection with a gynecological irregularity, she went to see Dr. Chiata, who was not very well equipped to deal with the problem.

Madge Hariman spent more and more time at the Gillou's home, The Ridge. Whenever Brenda went to the hospital, she looked after the children, or rather, she supervised the maid, Betty, who really looked after them. When the diplomat was engaged in evening sessions, and Brenda wanted to go to cultural activities, Madge came in and baby-watched. The time-schedule was perfect. To the servants, Madge became as much a part of the household as the mistress or the master.

There was a change in both women. Inside her perspex, the gold coin that had been Mrs. Hariman was slightly tarnished. Admirers shut their eyes to it and gloated over the intrinsic value of the coin. Brenda-worshippers sometimes detected bewilderment in the puckered lips, defensiveness in the pretty blue eyes. Could it be that their darling had been hurt? Had she been crying? It would have been bad manners in any of the groups to ask questions, but everyone knew the answers. An article in the Suviara *Tom-Tom* said that two new customs had been introduced into Suviara: they were "wife-swapping and couples living together without being legally married." The article explained to "don't knows" of what wife-swapping meant that "it was when couples swayed [sic] wives for sexual purposes."

The *Tom-Tom* said that wife-swapping was confined

to expatriates and the "activity" was "confined to less than half a dozen couples." The activity of couples living together without legal marriage was practiced by both expatriates and Talanesians. It commented that wife-swapping might not be a new thing to expatriates, but it was "a new development in the Talisman social scene." Living together without a legal marriage by Talanesians was the result of them becoming more sophisticated and becoming less religious. The Embassy Yacht Club and "other few social areas" had been blamed, the article continued, for "both of the new trends." The Club was also said to be responsible for the current increased number of marriage breakups in Suviara. Recently wives of some senior government officials cried after their husbands began having affairs with other women.

It was Mrs. Gillou's maid, Betty, who had told reporters that her mistress was getting the worst end of the stick: "Missis, hem 'i no gatem any something bulong hem. Suppose Mrs. Hariman hem want something, hem take em. Mrs. Hariman, hem want em boss. Hem like em picannini, hem like em house too. Hem takem place, Mrs. Gillou, hem act all same small sheep. Hem 'i tink Mrs. Hariman hem friend." ("Mrs. Gillou hadn't got anything left to call her own. If a woman like Mrs. Hariman wanted something, she took it. She wanted the boss, she liked the children and the house. She was taking over and Mrs. Gillou behaved like a lamb, thinking Mrs. Hariman was her friend.")

Wilfred, the reporter, had whistled and then asked: "Wasever Boss hem 'i sleep one time by Mrs. Hariman?"

"Iss!" Betty replied. "Suppose husban bulong hem go work long night! Himselva go work long night plenti time!"

Wilfred whistled louder and commented: "Boss, hem 'i commitim adultery! Pay bulong dis fella sin ja bei cuttim long knife."

But neither Margery Hariman nor Maurice Gillou were beheaded as they would have been in Talanesian custom. After all, the other two partners could do the same if they felt like it.

THREE

Hariman tiptoed along the corridor of The Rise in search of a drink of water. He had been sleeping at the end of a telephone with a muted bell in a small room well away from the main bedroom monopolized by his wife. But he had to pass his daughter's room and he did not want to waken her after her long, tiring journey from England. The corridor louvers were all ajar in the hope that a breath of air might traverse the fly-screens, and the slightest sound carried on the baffle of coral beneath the house. Turning his eyes to the right, he glimpsed the moonlight vegetation. Paw-paw and banana trees glowed faintly in the last quarter of the moon. He could distinguish the kapok trees behind, and his nose detected the sickly vapors from frangipani and morning glory.

He had woken from a troubled sleep. In a dream, row after row of patients waited to be rubber-stamped, the queue never getting any shorter. A card index on his desk in the dream turned into a musical score, the libretto into a tropical symphony; gecko lizards making clicking noises like coins on a glass surface; cicadas sizzling like high-tension cables in rain; bullfrogs barking in coloratura contralto, and a strange suprano descant: "Doh doh tee—eeh! Lah lah—so—ol! "Doh doh tee—eeh! Lah lah—so—ol!"

Was it a bird? He turned his watch sideways to catch the light from the window. It was twenty past three. With-

out switching on the light he softly opened the end section of a glass-panelled door. He stepped out on to the veranda and stood listening.

"C C B—! A A G—! C C B—! A A G—!"

Ten seconds? Fifteen? A regular interval. Clockwork timing like a radio call sign. Deirdre's transistor? He laughed softly to himself. A radio call sign on Santabala at twenty past three on Sunday morning. The transmitter would be dead asleep. All the radios dead! Yet there it came again, oddly human and yet calliophonic; birdlike and mechanical.

The humidity of the air was overwhelming. His pajamas were soaked with sweat. The heat might dry them out a little. He stood silent, listening. And there the call went again, repeated. From the bush outside! He resumed his speculations.

The only persons between him and the seashore, with the exception of Tate's houseboy, were Tate and Eve themselves in the bungalow below. Tate wouldn't whistle in the small hours of the morning. Neither would Eve! He pictured Tate, sleeping naked, perspiring fiercely, Eve steaming alongside him in a shortie nightie. She wore it when she had a temperature of 105 degrees a few weeks previously.

Should Eve Tate have been allowed to die? Santabala was a graveyard in the tropical night. Alongside the men stretched their women, or, he reflected wrily, somebody else's. There was suffering written on the faces of most of the women, even in sleep. Children younger than Deirdre, like Tracey and Christine, itched and fretted, unaware of the causes of their misery. The heat and that other heat; paradise is hell while we have bodies.

The nocturnal crescendo was now disguising all its individual instruments except the leitmotif: "Would awaken the dead, would awaken the dead, would awaken the dead."

The words from the popular English hunting song "D'ye ken John Peele?" fitted the rhythm perfectly. A mosquito flew past the surgeon's ear, the malaria death-dealer with the collapsible undercarriage—the female, no doubt, gorged with blood and bearing its load of sickness. Here was one of the

real enemies of mankind, yet they spent their time fighting one another like animals.

A dog barked in the distance: "Yak yak. Yak yak yak. Yak yak yak yak yak yak yak!"

And there was rabies—the canine madness on the up again. These two enemies alone would be enough to unite all the Talanesians and all the expatriates on Santabala in a common fight.

In spite of his complexion, yellowed by repeated doses of Valoquin against the former of these enemies of mankind, in the feeble moonlight, at thirty-nine, Hariman was handsome. There was a strong, Roman look about his features, and if he had held a fiddle, he might have been Nero watching Suviara burn. He had an aura of several of the Romans: Julius before Pompei; Agricola, and Hadrian, building walls. In the pale light of the topical night, the kittenish blue eyes inherited by Deirdre were well disguised. In the yellowness he looked like the shadow of an emperor; stonily muscular, not tall, but pleasingly upright.

Gazing at the canopy of stars beyond the balcony, he retreated into the void of his own loneliness.

It can't be true, his thought ran, *and yet it is true. Life in these islands has become nothingness. I'm a greater fraud than the Custom witch-doctor—I'm a one-time adulterer, not only in imagination now, but people believe it's a regular occurrence. My patients don't trust me, don't accept me, unless they're helpless or too weak to avoid me.*

Mockingly, ironically, it seemed, came the strange call out of the bush. It had pathos, like the sounds and sights of the island; cockatoos cackling over rusting tanks and guns or the flimsy skeletons of crashed airplanes; shipwrecks, the crippled playthings of departed giants, corroded and immovable.

The rhythm was the reverse of a dactyl, dramatic, like the "V" for victory of morse-code, with one "di" missing; "Di di da—ah, di di da—ah! Di di da—ah di di da—ah!"

It seemed to the lonely man to echo some era when man

had trust in man, before the world deteriorated into this morass of backbiting and selfishness, in which mankind everywhere was heading back to barbarity; the law of the jungle; murder and head-shrinking; rape and rapacity.

A shooting-star fizzed into stillness across the sky like a rocket.

It's too easy to die, his thoughts ran on. *Brenda came my way like a whiff of oxygen, not to relieve my suffering, but to keep me alive at the point of death. Self-pity, of the kind I'm indulging in at the moment, is alien to her nature; she knows Madge lacerates me daily, and she longs to offer herself as a poultice. But can't she see that it can never work? What do either of them understand of discipline? Of the stoicism of those years of study? What can they know about the work of healing? If only I could have met Brenda first! Why does Madge hate me? Because it was an accident that I ever met her! She should not have crossed my path; Deirdre ought not to have been dragged into this world.*

Came a faint, child's cough from his daughter's room. Could she hear his thoughts?

I love Deirdre; I can no longer love Madge because she detests my profession, my career. She thinks I'm a fool to make life so hard for all three of us. And she has no feeling for the sick. For her, they're dirty and unpleasant. She has more respect for the houseboy than for me. And now she has the right to despise me. Who can blame her? I can't contemplate the baseness of myself.

Suddenly the young surgeon stiffened and froze into a statue. His eyes reported that at the other end of the verandah there was a man, like a turkish-bath attendant, with dark flesh, holding something, a machete or a bush-knife. The man's hair was frizzy, piled up on top, Talanesian fashion. The doctor could discern bright eyes, hear heavy breathing. He decided to step back into the lounge. Could it be the houseboy? Too tall! His heart pounded. Remembering his student ju-jitsu training, he waited, watching for the weak spot, flexing his muscles.

"Hem OK, boss," said a pleasant, deep voice, softly.
"Who is it?"
"Fox!"
"What Fox?"
"Randolph."
"The Union leader?"
"Hem right. Me fella like tok one time you."
"Why are you carrying a bush knife?"
"For cuttim grass."

The ingenuousness of the Talanesian disarmed the doctor.

"OK. You, fella, better sit down."

"Wait for lelebiti time, boss!" The visitor crept down the steps and round the side of the bungalow. He gave a low whistle: "Doh doh tee—eeh! Lah lah so—ol!"

An answering signal came from the bush. He waited for a few seconds. Then he mounted the steps and sat down. So quietly that the basket chair did not creak! The two men conversed in low voices, in English and in Pidgin. For the first time on that verandah, drinks were offered by the visitor and accepted by the host. Dr. Hariman ought to have known better than to allow convention to be flouted by accepting a whiskey from a Talanesian's hip flask.

FOUR

"Deirdre! Deirdre!" Mrs. Hariman shouted, rushing into the lounge where her daughter sat reading. "Your father's been hijacked!"

"He's been *what*, mother?"

The startled girl jumped up from the sofa and grabbed a note her mother was holding out to her. It was in Pidgin and took some time to decipher.

"Oh, you frightened me. You mean kidnapped! But this note isn't asking for money. It just says daddy's gone on an errand of mercy, and we're to keep quiet about his absence. He'll be on leave anyway, so there's nothing to get excited about. I suppose he didn't want to wake us up. He *says* we're not to worry."

The teenager's acceptance of the note at its face value reassured her mother, but then she noticed the pallor of the child's face. Her fears came back again. Her voice rose in a crescendo: "That note must have been written under blackmail. Or he wasn't in his right mind. He wouldn't dare to go off and leave us if they hadn't got him ambushed. Why doesn't he say where he's gone? Errand of mercy—the idiot's got himself kidnapped for money, I'm sure. He gets so familiar with these Talanesians. You'll see, we'll get another note demanding money. I'm going straight to the police."

"Listen, mother, the note says we're not to report his absence. It doesn't make threats and says we're not to worry. He'll be back before long!"

"He's going to leave *me* to organize the whole of Christmas," Mrs. Hariman wailed. "Errand of mercy!" she added savagely. "I'll check at the airport and I'll find out what women passengers have gone out too!"

"What do you mean?" asked Deirdre, startled.

"Oh, never mind! What are we to do?"

Tears of rage welled up in the dark eyes. The mother felt a stab of hatred for the child staring at her. So unnaturally mature! So self-contained! It was a female Wingfield, sitting there so composed. A mother should decide what was to be done, not a chit of a schoolgirl! And the conceited thing just went on rationalizing—"Daddy gets on with the Talanesians; the note's written in Pidgin because he trusts them and they respond to his trust. One of them must have volunteered to scribble it for him, and he hadn't given the matter a second thought. He never did when . . ."

"Don't be so silly, Deirdre," Mrs. Hariman burst out. "You'll have to invent a better defense than that for him. If he wasn't at gunpoint, all he had to do was to scribble a note himself. He may not have *wanted* to commit himself, of course. There's always *that possibility*."

"I just don't understand what you mean!"

"Oh, well, never mind. Notes can be useful in law cases. But I suppose you're right. He's always the same when the Talanesians suck up to him. A doting fool! It's only his family that doesn't matter!"

"I've just remembered . . . I heard daddy talking to somebody in the night."

"A woman?"

"No, mother, it was a man."

"Just as I said. Why didn't you shout? Or wake me up? You'll see. We shall have to pay. They'll blackmail us. I'm going straight to the governor. Why didn't you wake me?"

"I wasn't even sure it was real. It was very quiet. I thought they were talking medicine. I thought you might be with them but now I think of it, I'm sure it was early morning. I must have gone off to sleep again. Why not tell

Mr. Tate? 'Bigfella' means the authorities—it wouldn't include just friends."

"No, we can't tell Edgar. He's a fool in a crisis. He'd shout it around. We'll have to tell Mr. Gillou. You're right. The note doesn't mean we're not to tell *anybody*, does it?"

"But mother, daddy wouldn't have said that if it wasn't very confidential. It would be wrong to tell Mr. Gillou. A permanent secretary's certainly 'bigfella.' "

"Well, then, we'll have to keep it to ourselves and not tell *anybody*."

Fred, the houseboy, came into the lounge and stood waiting to make an announcement. Mother and daughter stared at him as if they had never seen him before.

"Mr. Gillou, hem stay long door," Fred said.

"I didn't hear his car," Mrs. Hariman muttered and called out: "Come in, Maurice! For God's sake, why are you standing on ceremony?" She went along the corridor, welcoming him effusively. As soon as he got into the lounge, she inquired: "Would you like a drink? Whiskey?"

Ignoring Deirdre, who had turned to look out into the garden, Gillou replied: "I wouldn't mind some coffee."

She nodded and bawled along the corridor to the servant: "Coffee, Fred!"

She stared hard at Gillou. His appearance did not betray the fact that he was part French. He looked beefily Anglo-Saxon. But she knew that he had more than half French blood in his veins. He was the son of an English doctor whose own mother had been French. Gillou was born in Montpellier, where his French mother still lived.

The servant nodded his head and smiled from the corridor to confirm that he was making the coffee.

"Thank God you came, Maurice," said Mrs. Hariman, handing Gillou the note. "Read that!"

Still ignoring Deirdre, who was standing on the verandah, the government official went over to the chair in which Fox had so recently sat talking to Hariman. Swinging the wicker chair forward, Gillou plonked into it. He took off his glasses

and began wiping them, straining his eyes to read.

Fred came in with a trolley, and the doctor's wife supplied coffee, moving close to Gillou as she set it down. She remained beside him, looking down at the note. She wore a scanty wrap with a white border. Her eyes, dark and anxious, darted between Deirdre, Gillou, and the piece of paper. Her bosom was only partly covered and her thighs exposed to view. She exuded fragrances expensively distilled in New York, Paris, and Rome.

"Quaint!" Gillou remarked stirring his coffee. "You've been to the police, of course? He didn't write the note himself!"

"*I said* we should have gone to the police—no, of course he didn't write it. It's in Pidgin. He didn't write anything himself. Not a word! We don't know who wrote it."

"Quaint. Haven't you seen him this morning? When did you last see him?"

"Last night, he went to bed as usual."

"What time was it you left the Club?"

"It must have been about half past eleven."

"Oh, yes! Brenda went home without me. I was in the middle of a game. Did she go with you?"

"Wingfield dropped her at The Ridge."

"I got too much sun on the surf cat. You were right to stay ashore."

"Is Brenda at home?"

Gillou hesitated for a moment, then said guardedly: "She sleeps in on Sundays. Did you cook your kingfish?"

"You don't think I cook in the middle of the night, do you? Give me a chance. Didn't you have enough at the Club?" Throughout the conversation, Deirdre had been standing on the verandah, gazing at some red and green parrots in the cherry tree. Their faces wore grave expressions like senators in ritual robes, concealing amused irony. They rotated perkily and did solemn marches along the branches.

"Deirdre says she heard Wingfield talking to a man in the night. Here on the balcony. A Talanesian."

Gillou looked hard at the girl, a quizzical expression on his florid features. He chose to give undivided attention to her mother. "Did she hear anything that was said?"

The child turned towards him reluctantly, her chin thrust forward. She still did not speak.

"She says they seemed to be talking medicine. Then she went to sleep."

Gillou's eyes were serious, but an ironical smile flickered round his lips. He rose and pirouetted round the basket-chair, as if half intending to go. Then he strutted a few paces across the verandah, stopped abruptly and pronounced: "I don't think we need to do *anything!*"

Mrs. Hariman appeared greatly relieved. She looked appealingly at her daughter, who had turned to study the parrots again.

"Deirdre!" she said, "there's a beach-barbecue on at the Magellan. Your father might be there. I haven't got much in for lunch. I'll give you ten dollars so that you can take Rosemary or Linda with you to keep a lookout. I'll try the hospital. Maurice, would you try the Club? We'll all meet here for tea."

The child accepted with alacrity. She went out, and in less than a minute, reappeared in a beach dress, carrying her bikini and a towel. As she rode off on her bicycle, Gillou smirked complacently. "That was smart, Madge," he remarked and attempted to take her in his arms.

She disengaged herself, protesting in a husky voice: "The houseboy's hanging around. Wait till he's got clear. What do you think Wingfield's up to?"

"Don't know," Gillou replied. "Don't care either, do you?"

She laughed. "Naughty Maurice. Oh, by the way, I almost forgot to thank you for my new fridge. It really is a nice Christmas present." She laughed again. "At government expense!"

"Well, there's no point in being right at the top if you can't help your friends, is there? Some people get their houses

decorated, some get refrigerators. Some, like you, get both!" He looked round the lounge complacently, and added: "But you know, most people have eight-year-old ice boxes that leak, and undecorated walls—grimy, undecorated houses."

"That last fridge you sent wasn't what I wanted at all."

"It was brand new. It's the fifth you've had." He grinned.

"It would have been too small for Christmas if I want to do any entertaining."

"OK, then. If the money's there, I spend it. But when they've got what they want, most wives forget that it was thanks to Maurice Gillou!"

"Oh, Maurice! I'll tell Fred he can have the rest of the day off. Come into the kitchen and have a look."

She tripped into the kitchen, twirling her wrap with the expertise of a striptease artist. Gillou's eyes followed her. When he glanced out of the window, he saw Fred on his way to a boyhouse discreetly placed in a hollow so that it did not affect the privacy of The Rise, yet convenient if the boy needed to be summoned urgently. She called from the kitchen: "Come and have a look."

He went through and pretended to be admiring the refrigerator. It was an expensive model from New Zealand, complete with deep freeze. She opened everything to show him. All sections were crammed full. She had enough in store for a siege. Gillou, like a dog going about its meat, kissed her face and neck. She abandoned herself with professional voluptuousness.

"Come into the bedroom," she coaxed, laughing, "and I'll thank you properly. You didn't leave your car near the house, did you?"

"It's on the coral. I thought Wingfield would be in. Shall I bring it into the drive?"

"Oh, well! Why bother?"

She locked the kitchen door and the front door and got him to pull the sliding doors to close off the verandah. It was a heavy task; the sections groaned as he complied. Madge

was thinking to herself: *Deirdre hasn't got a key, and if she comes back, what of it? It's time we stopped pretending. She has to face up to the facts of life some time. As for Wingfield, if he comes back, I'll tell him Maurice stayed because I was so upset, which is true! Let him get on with his errand of mercy. I'll get on with mine.*

FIVE

Hariman's nose reported along its tactual as well as its olfactory system: "Rough curtain flapping past my tip: odors include brine, perfume, antiseptic and faint body smell, characteristic but not unpleasant."

His eyes reported that they could confirm nothing: "Tightly closed: occasional stars in the blackness; distant mechanism of recall."

But the ocular region was tactually aware. "Uncomfortable tug on eyebrows; pressure on eyeballs," it protested. The brain correctly interpreted this as "elastoplast."

Tactile reports flooded in from other areas. Resting on hard surface: swaying through about six inches—this from back of head, shoulders and buttocks. Confirmed by heels: "In close and enforced contact with each other: cannot separate from inside the ankles, knees and wrists."

"Very hot: slippers on, uncomfortable, otherwise OK," from feet.

The doctor's brain, not used to such reports, either on duty or off, did its best to diagnose. There was a degree of urgency, as in hospital diagnoses. The boat was pitching and tossing. The off-duty sector of his mind kept bringing up an irrelevant image of Gulliver, tied down by Liliputians. Reports tentatively pointed to his captor as a gargantuan woman.

Central Control to tip of nose: "Could the curtain be a skirt? Just how rough is that cloth?"

"Fine weave material. Smooth, not heavy. Sometimes covers me."

"For God's sake, report accurately. Why did you say rough?"

"Not used to things flapping over me. There's fish alongside of the antiseptic and the perfume."

"Concentrate on the body smell" (somewhat irritably). "You said: 'Not unpleasant.' It doesn't sound like a man's breeches rubbing against you. Is it perspiration? Sweat?"

"Can't define it as either of those!"

"Look! Does it smell like onions, for example?"

"Nothing like onions! Like marzipan or vanilla, but human!"

"Are you sure there's perfume over and above this?"

"Definitely."

"Good perfume?"

"Well, it's not just fried violets."

"Don't be facetious. I'm trying to sort out a serious situation. Have you ever encountered it before?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Where?"

"At the perfume counter of Lewis's, or perhaps on a boulevarde in Paris."

It was a relief to have made this much progress. Clearly in the bottom of a boat, a smack, some kind of fishing smack. Wind! The whine of the breeze! All tactile reports had exaggerated; the theory that it was a Talanesian man in overalls was finally exploded. A woman in a long skirt, a nurse or even a nun, sitting on a side seat.

Freed from the threat of immediate danger, the doctor permitted more freedom to his mechanism of recall. He must still be in the Talisman Islands, but sailing away from Santabala. Ears helped very little. Creaking, as part of the motion of the boat. Some symptoms in the mind of aphasia. Sense of deep time, slowly returning chronology. When did the brain go into its profound sleep?

"The last time I was in Arimathea Hospital was . . . a

Saturday morning. I was trying to catch up . . ."

Flash from Control to left wrist, unintentionally transmitted to both wrists: "Is my watch still on?"

"Straps round us" from all wrist areas. "Feel like broad watchstraps. Pulling hairs. Pores can't breathe properly. Please unclasp."

"Idiots!" growled Central Control. "That long-skirted female must be an elastoplast-spinning spider. Now, think of that little date square on the watch. Saturday. Yes. Saturday . . . December . . . working until nearly one-thirty. Lunch at the Embassy Yacht Club. They forgot to order for me. The hatch was closed. They'd finished serving. Got cheese rolls at the bar. Then out on surf cat with Brenda and Gillou. He caught a kingfish. It was pursued by a hammerhead shark. Am I rambling? Now, was Madge with us? Madge!"

Hariman's guts contracted, nauseated by the thought of his wife, and by the swaying, which latest reports indicated were exceeding one foot. Guilt! Fear!

Central Control reasserted itself. "Was there any question of swimming and getting attacked by sharks? Are any limbs missing? Is there any pain?"

Urgent signal to all sub-stations: "Repeat, any limbs missing? Any pain?"

"All present and correct."

"Any fingers missing?"

"One, two, three, four, five. Fixed by the accursed elastoplast. Six, seven, eight, nine, ten. All correct."

"Neck, throat, voice?"

"Try it!"

"Mm — mmmm — mmmmmmmmm! Mm — mmmm — mmmmmmmmmmmmm!"

"Vibrating all right?"

Urgent report from nose: "Cloth gone over me."

Urgent report from front of forehead (exact location, roots of hair): "Something touching me. Gentle, delicate, soothing."

"Fingers?"

"Mm — mmm!"

The most recent series of voiced bilabial nasals was intended to represent a back diphthong followed by a voiceless palatal affricate, an emergency action-stations report having come in from the upper arm. The noise should have emerged as "Ouch!" but it failed to take shape. There was no time to attempt a repetition. Though apparently freed from the elastic bands, Hariman's lips reported themselves as moving tombstones.

"Oooooo—o the hell . . .?"

Limbo! Graveyard of tombstones under a surgeon's chisel. Darkness! Pentathol peace.

SIX

When Hariman recovered consciousness for the second time he established that he was no longer in a boat. He felt cosy, benign, and unafraid, though the "intensive care ward" flitted across his mind. He looked round in a half light, hoping to see Deirdre. Then he remembered the unlikelihood of his wish being fulfilled. There were screens round the bed, and through a gap he detected Talanesians moving purposefully. The ceiling shadows suggested a room as big as a hospital ward, but dark, the only light coming from a storm lantern, the only ventilation through a wicker shutter held open by a pole at the bottom. No glass! No fly-screens! There was a muslin-thin sheet over him and a feather pillow under his head.

He checked his body for signs of pain. Nothing! He had a feeling of "the morning after the night before," pleasantly tipsy. What did it matter if there were Talanesians in the shadows? They wore some kind of overalls and moved with the assurance of hospital workers. But this was definitely not Arimathea. Where could it be? There was no other hospital in Suviara or even on Santabala.

"Get up and find out!" one voice prompted.

"Lie still and wait for news!" countered another. The slothful feeling of well-being triumphed. He closed his eyes, reminiscing.

I am Wingfield Hariman of The Rise, Jansoon Crescent, Suviara, a doctor at Arimathea Hospital. I'm supposed to be

a surgeon-specialist, but I spend a lot of time messing around on silly, bureaucratic jobs instead of doing my proper work. I was ordered to have ten days complete rest over Christmas because . . . Why was I to have ten days' holiday? I've worked for fifteen years with breaks of never more than two weeks at a time and the odd day here and there. I'm entitled to four days' U.K. leave for every month I serve in Suviara, but I shan't . . . So why? . . . They don't trust me to operate!

Memories rushed back now. *Valoquin! In my early days on Santabala I got plenty of experience of that. Bombarding oneself with the "quins" didn't appeal to me. Was it the almighty Skit who ordered me to rest? I hate to leave when there's work to be done. But I almost blacked out. I felt fine on Friday. The trouble must have been Friday afternoon. Or was it Saturday morning? Let's see . . . twelve Talanesian women with sick children, one woman with anemia, pernicious . . . one admin man with hemorrhoids . . . Talanesian man with dislocated jaw . . . also male shoulder . . . I made all my recommendations. . . . Ah, Richardson was the hemhorroid's name . . . to see Skit! Three gynecologicals for January . . . left notes for Evans. Fifteen in all. I had cheese rolls at the Yacht Club. About two o'clock Madge had already had her lunch. Brenda joined me. Then we went sailing. Madge didn't come. Gillou caught that kingfish, and a hammerhead shark nearly got it. He yanked it on board just in the nick of time. Good supper at the Club. They barbecued the fish. Then what? We sat around drinking. Did the whiskey hit me?*

Along with the memory of a confused scene by the side of the ocean came back snatches of conversation. He did not want to remember them. He had been expansive under the off-duty mellowing, had a lot of drink thrust on to him, talked about things without his usual reticence. Who had been present? *The usuals—Clynch, with those fatheads Tate and Hacket and Eve Tate. And Mona Lynch . . . Clynch! They said Janet Richardson had gone off with the kids to New Zealand . . . Jean Hacket . . . and Brenda Gillou.*

Brenda Gillou, giving the greenest of green lights . . . Gillou playing snooker, treating her as if . . . Oh, God, No! This is a dream. A nightmare! It couldn't have been me! On the beach, like adolescents, like dogs? What was Madge doing? She seemed to be getting drinks all the time, pushing us, encouraging us. We all went on that stroll along the beach. Along the coral! It was so innocent. How can one think about love with another man's wife? I must have been blotto. Did I take the initiative? Oh, the shame . . .

Counsel for the defense speaking: "The youth of today think nothing of such things. They are regarded as natural. There's no need to hurt yourself."

It was natural, all right. Christ! Did either of us have the sense of take precautions? Me, a doctor, a surgeon, and I didn't even ask her. Brenda would be sensible . . . on the Pill. . . . Oh, my God, I'm like a woman with alcoholic remorse. What's done is done . . . But what if Brenda got pregnant and couldn't get a divorce. Part of me, over to that rat, Gillou. It would serve me right! And I've betrayed my profession. Lord, have mercy on me. I'm finished. Lord, let me sleep . . . the sleep of death. I'll never be able to look another patient in the face. My God, why did we do it? I must sleep.

Hariman did not recall the events of later that evening—the switching of places in the basket chairs around the drink-laden table; the laughter, the crude jokes, the scandal gossiped by the groups, the couples drifting off without caring much who went with whom; how he himself had left soberly at about quarter to twelve, feeling as though he had been cleansed with divine fire; dropping Brenda, a radiant Brenda, at The Ridge. He did not remember how happy Madge had seemed. He looked under the thin bed sheet and suddenly realized that wherever he might be, he had on his primrose colored pajamas with the brown facings!

Could it be that he had done something else even more stupid? Landed up in an Alcoholics Anonymous? There was such an institute on Santabala—some of the senators, even

the attorney general, had been known to pop in there from time to time. But who was that dark character he remembered dimly on the verandah? What was the name? *Fox?* What was it he'd talked about . . . an expatriate who'd been living out in the bush since 1942; a surgeon like himself . . . longing to see a white man because he was a white man himself . . . wanted to see a *wantok* . . . man of the same blood or kin. And he, Hariman, had fallen for the story! He remembered Fox getting him to promise secrecy . . . Fox writing a note for Madge and Deirdre. Nobody was to know about the journey to . . . what was that name? Kabali? And what was that strange name Fox had used for the expatriate? . . . Not a real name at all . . . Bagger . . . Baggers . . . something! Not even his wife was to know the secret!

I remember thinking, not this baby; *then I can't remember anything else.*

Hariman fell into a deep sleep.

SEVEN

Nobody knows who reported Dr. Hariman's disappearance to Suviara Police. But by midday on Sunday (when only Talanesian officers were on duty), they knew that he had "departed." They also knew of the existence of a note, and sufficient of its contents to suspect *Kavali.*

The word, in the Maoman language, originally meant "a cure," but for Talisman Islanders in Suviara it conjures up the idea of a bush clinic said to exist (nobody knows where) somewhere in the islands. It is reputed to be superior to Arimathea Hospital, curing leprosy, tuberculosis, infantile paralysis, and malaria—in fact, any illness—with the greatest of ease. All sorts of horrors are reported to have been remedied there: mincemeat from shark attacks sewn together; eyes popped back into sockets after bush fights; still-born babies respirated into life.

Stories of Kavali "miracles" are legion. Whenever there is an accident or a serious illness, the saying goes: "If only we could get him, or her, or even a pet, *to Kavali!*" Over the years, the expression, in Maoman, has come to be the equivalent of "he's (she's, it's) had his (her, its) chips!" If only one could get there. *If only*, that was the problem.

The mountains of Santabala are covered with dense rain forest and rise to nine thousand feet in many places. Perpetual rain at the sources of the rivers makes it impossible to cross them, so that slopes appearing a stone's throw from

the capital are totally inaccessible. Suviara Police accept this, and never attempt operations beyond a recognized limit. They are aware that beyond the river, neither jeep, tractor, truck, bulldozer, nor party on foot can hope to pass. From Suviara, such parts as are accessible have to be reached by sea.

Coexistent with the reputation of Kavali for miracle cures, a legend circulated which had puzzled the authorities and the police since a few years after the war, when rumors spread that there was a white doctor in the bush, running the Kavali clinic. He was supposed to have landed with the forces; in some accounts, as a missionary, in others, a padre with the American forces at Blood Bay. One story said that he was a Frenchman, a Catholic with divine powers of healing; another that he was a Japanese surgeon who had converted a field-station into this clinic. All versions mentioned something about the doctor's condemnation of "civilization" and a quarrel with compatriots, who were said to have beaten him up.

The police kept records of a clandestine movement called "The Union," connected with Kavali. At headquarters there were files on the subject, dating back as far as 1946. The Union was classed as subversive, but its organization spared the police the expense of many hazardous journeys and operations. It dealt on the spot with local emergencies, such as earthquake, cyclone, and flood damage. The only thing the police had against it politically was that it was an unknown quantity. Traditionally, its leaders were descendants of an old plantation family called Fox, expatriates who over the generations had intermarried with the locals.

The police should not be given too much credit for the efficiency of their intelligence service, or for immediately associating Hariman's disappearance with The Union. Suviara methods are based on muddling through, taught them by their expatriate superiors. They rely largely on intuition. The Talisman Island policemen on duty that Sunday decided that as long as the matter had not been officially reported, no

action could be taken. It was impossible to discuss such matters with expatriate superiors, who had "set" ideas, and did not understand "custom," or the Talanesian way of doing things.

EIGHT

"Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God!"

Hariman sat bolt upright in bed as he heard the cry from the other side of the screen. The voice was that of an old man; the anguish, to the doctor's trained ear, unmistakable. He leapt out of bed and rushed round the screen. The room was part ward, part library; bookshelves, a big desk, and a huge white-enamel bed on which lay the bulk of a man, stirring restlessly. Some Talanesians, men and women, had approached the bed, but they fled before the yellow-pajamaed apparition. The sick man's head moved from side to side, as if he were in great pain. His cry was repeated, all in one breath: "Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God! God!"

He seemed unaware that there was anyone present. Hariman shifted an oil lamp on to the desk so that it threw a better light. It illuminated the sufferer's face. The hair was pure white, a full head of hair, neatly trimmed and brushed. A long man, heavy limbed, lying back on the bed with one of his legs supported by pillows. His head rolled from side to side in irregular, jerky movements as he fought for breath. His eyes were tightly closed. In spite of his agony, which compressed his lips into a thin line, he looked handsome. An Eisenhower of a man, was Hariman's first impression.

The young doctor's fingers reached for the patient's neck, where there was some kind of fastening. To his dismay, he found it tight, refusing to unloosen. It was an old-fashioned

collar stud. Wrestling hard, he had to pull the shirt neck tighter before he could twist the end of the stud sideways and allow it to slip through the slit of the buttonhole. The shirtneck catapulted open; the doctor turned to look for the Talanesians, but they had all disappeared. The door was closed. He reopened it, expecting to find them waiting outside, but the dark corridor was empty. There was a box filled with sand which he used to fix back the wicker door. A cooling draught stirred like a phantom from window to door.

The sick man went on twisting his head from side to side but his eyes had opened and the jerks grew less violent. Every few seconds, he continued to cry: "Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God!"

The English surgeon placed a stool where he could sit and take the old man's wrist. The pulse scarcely registered. The eyes were open; blue, remote, uncomprehending. They did not change with each utterance, and the doctor began to wonder whether the old man was reliving some horror of the past. In the heat of the evening the hand felt cold, like that of a corpse. But with a slight reflex, it responded to Hariman's touch. The head movements ceased for a moment. The blue eyes stared vacantly.

"Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God!" The young doctor glanced up from the bed and saw a woman's figure framed in the doorway. She had a long blue skirt down to her ankles, olive-brown features, and the headgear of a nun or nurse. She tiptoed across the room, murmuring: "Thank you too mas, doctor, because you come. And thank you, God." She stood by the bedside, wringing her hands and repeating the last phrase.

Hariman did not reply. With his own hand, he gave a squeeze to the hand he was holding, followed by a second, more deliberate squeeze. At last the head movements were beginning to slow down. The cries ceased. The eyes remained open, and the flicker of a smile passed across the features. The old man's hand, when released, attempted playfully to pat the young doctor's cheek. Then it crept down over the thin

sheet, seeking the left leg below the groin. The splendid head fell back, eyes closed. He did not move.

Hariman had noticed a stethoscope on the desk. He seized it and returned to the bedside. But it seemed that the spirit had fled from the big body away to some distant region, leaving only a waxwork dummy; fiberglass hair, complexion yellow in the glare of the lantern. Now, like a dawn, blood began tinting the cheeks and the massive brow. Hariman massaged the region of the heart; the victim began awakening from the dead. The well-formed eyebrows and the downy stubble on cheeks and chin grew whiter against the pink flush. "He must have been shaved only this morning," the Englishman said to himself. The face was almost free from wrinkles or lines, like a boy's. Moving his stethoscope, Hariman noted quieter, steadier breathing. He turned to the nurse.

"Whose patient is this?"

"Hem not lukim custom doctor. Hem cuttim doctor hemseleva."

"Has he complained of pain in his left leg?"

"Iss! Hem gatem soar inside left leg bulong hem."

"How long has he had that pain?"

"Hem dess gatim pain today long this fella morning no more."

"Just here?" Beginning at the groin, Hariman ran his fingers down thin, white, cotton trousers covering the leg. He looked round for scissors. Guessing his intention, the woman supplied a pair, which were rusty, but pointed. They served their purpose. After cutting the cloth, Hariman located the trouble. He diagnosed a blood clot which must be dispersed with the correct drugs as soon as possible. Trypto-sperse! The latest miracle from B.P.H. which had recently saved hundreds of lives. Inwardly he cursed. He should have come equipped. Why did the Talisman Islanders go about things so crudely? He rearranged the cushions to give maximum support, then, speaking to the patient, he inquired slowly and distinctly: "Is there a dispensary anwhere near here?"

The eyes flickered open, very blue against the pink now that the blood had returned. A wry smile, amused, sardonic, flitted over the handsome features. He did not attempt to answer. He could not formulate thought. The nurse hovered about, apparently in awe of the old man. She whispered: "Hem not likem alketer doctor. Hem tok no guti long alketer."

Hariman understoood that the sick man disapproved of doctors. The patient sighed, but his eyes had brightened at the sound of the young woman's voice.

Hariman summed up that the neural machinery was intact: the reflex squeeze, the effort to pat his face, the movement of the patient's hand towards his groin. Was there anything functioning in the receiver domain of the brain? Ears perhaps? The lips and voice had functioned in the transmitter domain, but mechanically. The hand gesture and a glimmer in the blue eyes gave a sign of hope.

He looked round at the hooded woman—more a girl, he decided. She had walked over to the big desk to hide her face, and something in the droop of her shoulders told the young doctor that she was weeping. She wheeled round suddenly, and for the first time, he realized her as a person. She was darker than a sun-tanned European; her coloring suggested nut brown or honey. The pupils of her eyes were hazel against a bluish-white background; profound, without the opaqueness of Talanesian eyes. There was conflict in her expression, an incongruous mobility; classical nose and chin of the local brand; round, girlish cheeks; full, well-shaped lips parting to reveal rows of irregular pearls; high forehead, at loggerheads with the coif and fuzzy hair.

She turned back towards the desk, hesitated for a moment, and picked up an object lying somewhere by the books on the shelf. It looked like a dufflebag with drumsticks in it. Before Hariman had time to react, she had crossed to the sick man's bed and deposited it. There was a clicking of ratchets, as she sat him up, using an in-built mechanism. She took the patient's hands and rested them on the instrument.

Like a little girl, wheedling, she stood waiting for something to happen.

To Hariman's astonishment, as if involuntarily, the large hands strayed to the doodlesack and the sick man placed a mouthpiece to his lips. The thick fingers ran over the stops, testing them, as a little air inflated the sack. The patient's lower arms squeezed the sack, and a noise startled the silence. It reverberated through the room, a falling, one-bar melody, repeated challengingly: "would awaken the dead: would a-wa-ken the dead!" As the sound of the pipes died away, there was a cheer from the rooms on the other side of the leaf walls–like the shout of a crowd at a football match. Many voices rose as if the favorite team had scored.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

The sound was repeated, scarcely diminishing in volume, into the distance. Then, silence! Hariman began to wonder if it had been a hallucination. The old man lay on his pillow, eyes closed. The doodlebag had sagged; the instrument had collapsed like a dying thing. The nurse picked the object up and put it back on the shelf. Gently, she lowered the bed-head. The patient did not stir. He had fallen asleep. After about a minute had passed, the woman spoke softly: "Bie me showem you this fella room for swim, doctor. Hamuch now alketer go swim, time me mekem kai kai."

Hariman was too stunned to grasp that this was an invitation to use the bathroom while she prepared some food for him. But he followed her in his banana pajamas, along a dark corridor, to be introduced to his new life at Kavali.

NINE

Realizing that he had not understood her Pidgin, Hariman's hostess pushed him through a door marked "Room for Swim" and left him. To his relief he found satisfactory, if somewhat novel, appointments in a natural setting. From a wall that was part of a cliff, water flowed into two massive barrels, one from a hot spring, steaming, the other from the cliff face, quite cold. It was not possible to lock or tie the door, but he went gratefully ahead with his ablutions. On shelves hewn into the rock face there were towels and soap. As the doctor was drying himself, he heard voices outside and hastily wrapped himself in his towel.

"Doctor trousers and short for sleep, long there, Irene! Takem come for wash and puttim alketer calico."

"Hem spoilem custom bulong me long holdem calico bulong man, Laurah!"

"Me fella savvy holdem calico bulong Bagabone, true now?"

"Hem different long doctor?"

"Iss! Takem pajama quick time!"

Hariman smiled at the part of this conversation he had understood. One of the girls (the voice sounded like the girl he had already met) thought it was improper for her to handle a man's clothes. The other, who sounded like an older woman, had persuaded her that it was different with doctors.

Hearing their laughter as they retreated along the corridor, Hariman emerged from behind the larger of the two barrels. His pajamas had disappeared, replaced on the stool by clean white pants, shirt, and shorts. He dressed hurriedly and found them a very good fit, lighter and more comfortable than his Suviara outfit. He felt refreshed—transformed. He made his way along a dark corridor, conscious that there was soft grass caressing his feet. He arrived at a sort of *kibbutz* dining room, lit by oil lamps. The floor here was still natural, cool to his feet. There was nobody in the room, but a large table was laid for a dozen or so people. The wicker surface looked elegant, laid with wooden bowls and forks. There were flowers in places, nestling in small dishes. While he was admiring this layout, the young nurse came in and smiled at him.

"Alketer givem name bulong hem Irene," she said.

Realizing that she was introducing herself, Hariman shyly mumbled his own name and proffered his hand as if they had not yet met.

Without giving offense, she ignored the outstretched hand and said quickly: "Me sori i fella pasalom eye bulong you, bodi bulong you."

He knew she was apologizing for having tied him up and blindfolded his eyes. He was tempted to ask questions but to cover up his embarrassment he demanded roughly: "Where's the dispensary?"

To his surprise she immediately led him across a yard to a hut standing detached from the main building which he now saw was extensive. In the moonlight, Kavali looked like a native village with superior houses and bamboo gables. Lights peeped out everywhere from the corners. The night was filled with bush noises and occasionally human voices or the cry of a child. In general, the place was peaceful and quiet. The inside of the hut was very different from the buildings he had seen. It was well lit by oil lamps; it looked like the inside of a tank, lined with riveted sheets of metal and well ventilated. It was as well equipped and stocked as

the dispensary at Arimathea. The system of classification was a modern one and without assistance he located the Tryptosperse he had not really expected to find there. He told Irene he would administer the drug as soon as the old man awoke and could eat. He tried to explain that a light diet was necessary but he could not be sure whether she had understood.

Back in the kibbutz, Hariman found himself alone again, looking down the table and speculating who the guests would be. At each place there was a cup made from a coconut shell, so finely finished that its humble origins were disguised. The flowers were heads only, floating in shallow bowls and attractively arranged.

Irene came in, followed by an older woman dressed in the same manner. The doctor discovered that the name which "belonged to her" was Laurah. He could not follow the younger woman's explanations about who Laurah was and what she did at the clinic. Hariman was struck by the likeness between the two women, but could not tell whether it was a mother-daughter or older sister relationship. Laurah's skin was darker than Irene's, but equally smooth and femnine. She had a pleasant face and a neat, round figure not disguised by her long dress. In the brighter light of the dining room, the coifs worn by the two women looked less formal; little more than a means of fixing the dome of hair like dandelions in seed, dark underneath, blond on the frizzy surface. In spite of their robes, they were mobile and athletic, their eyes very vivacious. They did everything they could to make the visitor feel at home.

Before long a bearded man came in, dressed in a cassock and carrying a sort of gladstone bag. He looked darker than either of the women, but his features were not Talanesian; Indian perhaps or even European. He looked to have come from a long, hard journey, and the way he moved suggested an invalid determined not to give in. Laurah made introductions.

"You me gatem one fella visitor. Dr. Camus. Name bulong hem Dr. Hariman"

The bearded man drifted, balloonlike, towards Hariman. He held out his hand.

"*Vous parlez francais, Monsieur?*" he said unexpectedly.

"*Un tout petit peu,* Monsieur Camus," replied the Englishman, laughing, as he shook hands. "*Etes vous français?*"

"*Mais non, Monsieur. Je suis Anglais.*"

"Well, why are we speaking French then?"

"Me nothing tok long English this time, Dr. Hariman. Me mixim English and Pidgin. Wasway you savvy lettim me for tok long Pidgin, you mind?"

Hariman gathered that he did not want to speak English because he was out of practice, so he replied: "Not at all. But I doubt if I'll understand much of your Pidgin."

"*Alors,* Monsieur Hariman, *permettez-moi de parler un peu le francais. Vous êtes etonné de trouver nous autres medeçins ici dans la Brousse?*"

"*Oui, Monsieur Camus. Mais vôtre nom est un nom français.*"

"*Bien sûr que c'est un nom français. J'ai adopté le nom de ma mère qui est française.* Name bulong me, Williams. *Mais je vous prie de ne pas signaller aux autorités ma présence ici.*"

"*Vous êtes ici illégallement?*"

"*Pas tout à fait. Légion Étrangére! Déserteur. Vous savez ce que ça veut dire?*" He gave a weary smile. Then as if to escape from memories, made another attempt to speak English. "They tell me you've examined Bagabone. How is he?"

Hariman gave an account of his findings. Camus replied again in French.

"*Oui oui, mais il va quand même mourir.* He's going to die. He hates me, and he refuses to see me. But he needs me now. His daughter will give him your prescriptions. But he will die. His time's come."

Hariman did not comment. Camus's mind returned to the problem that had troubled him earlier. "*Eh bien, Docteur*

Hariman, puis-je vous faire confiance? You won't give me away?"

"No, of course not. How long have you been here?"

"Just after the War. *C'est la première fois que je rencontre un Européen à Santabala. Bagabone est Américain, vous savez!*"

The Suviara surgeon did his best to quiz his peculiar compatriot about Kavali and the events leading to his own arrival there. "Can you tell me where I am? I promise I won't ever give away the secret."

"You're beyond the Betsi, from Suviara and you're beyond the Stiks. They may have sailed you round. But you're not as far as the Jossan, where Bagabone tried to cross."

The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a number of Talanesians, whom Laurah introduced. She presented two handsome-looking boys in khaki shorts and shirts as Benias and Matthias. Two huge women were introduced as "Midwives Amazon Anne and Rough Rachel."

There was a buzz of excited conversation among the new arrivals, partly in the Maoman tongue and partly in Pidgin. Before long, Laurah and Irene came in carrying food and drink, and for the first time, Hariman realized how hungry he was. He was placed at the head of the table with Irene on his left and Laurah on his right. Next to them came Benias on the left and Matthias on the right. Then Rough Rachel on the left with Amazon Anne opposite her. Camus sat at the bottom end of the table, where he seemed to enjoy the company of the midwives. It was impossible for Hariman to elicit any further information about his whereabouts.

There was a minute of silence before the meal, when the Bush doctor said Grace. It was a simple prayer in Pidgin, in which he gave thanks not only for *kai kai* ("food") but for the presence of a visitor who had brought "*good taim*" to the Clinic. Although he did not guess that the expression meant "peace," Hariman felt touched by the prayer.

He felt better, and the simply cooked rice and fish were

appetizing. In spite of the language barrier, the women were good hostesses. They plied everybody with food and supplied cool drinking water in coconut shells. The Talisman Islanders were as much at ease as a family.

In the course of the conversation, Hariman figured that Laurah was apologizing for having brought him out into the bush so suddenly and in such a rough manner. She explained that Bagabone had been showing signs of his illness for a long time and had repeatedly hinted at the need to see a doctor who was one of his *wantok*. But he had gone on working, up to sixteen hours a day. He enjoyed being teased, and to amuse him, they pretended he was a hypochrondriac. Until Saturday morning, none of them had had an inkling of how serious the illness was. Dr. Camus was generally out on tour, and in any case, Bagabone would have refused to see him. There was nobody to give a diagnosis.

As the voices of the women rose and fell melodramatically, the Englishman found himself understanding through intonation, more than semantics. The "man elephant," it appeared, had begun to choke, sitting in his armchair, but shooed them away like fruit bats when they tried to help him. None of the quack doctors were to come near him, he said. He had charged around with his doodlesack, pointing it at them, pretending it was a machine gun, laughing and crying at the same time.

Laurah gave an imitation which would have done credit to the theatre. "Hem i cry 'tsak tsak tsak; tsak tsak tsak! Hem 'i tok: lil yellow baskets! Want to poison me fella. Me fella drank evri wan poison, no go died go finish. Me gatem plenti patient selva."

"Hem 'i alway thinkim alketer sick people," Irene interposed, "hem i no savvy happy suppose hem no work no read."

Laurah resumed. She enlivened the narrative with picturesque whoops. "Hem i get dressed when me fella say hem no can get up. Hem savvy cross to mass, wheeeeeeeeeee, suppose alketer woman go close up long hem." She examined Hariman's features for signs of understanding and continued:

"But me fella mas go long hem for takem paper for medicine."

Hariman had followed most of the conversation. It appeared that Bagabone was always thinking about sick people and was not happy if he was not working or reading. He had insisted on getting up when they ordered him to stay in bed. When he was sick, he got very cross if women went near him. But they had to go to him when they needed prescriptions.

"Suppose hem i got sick," Laurah explained, "mind bulong hem savvy tink tink go back long fight long Blood Beach, long 1942."

Irene interpreted this into what she thought was simpler Pidgin, and the table guest gathered that when the old man was sick, his mind went back to the Battle of Blood Beach in 1942. Hariman tried to experiment in Pidgin and asked why the patient was called "Bagabone." Laurah said that it was too long a story to tell at table but explained that the name had been handed down. When he was first brought to Kavali, the surgeon was, in fact, just a bag of bones. He refused to be called doctor. He liked the name Bagabone and did not wish to be called anything else even by his children.

For a time, Hariman sat wondering about the relationships of the people present, listening to the confused buzz of conversation at both ends of the table. The term "Papa" was used by both Laurah and Irene referring to Bagabone and also by the two "outriders," Benias and Matthias. The former reminisced in Pidgin about the brilliant surgical exploits of the chief. He ran his fingers down scars on his face and neck and stood up in order better to demonstrate how his head had been right inside the jaws of a shark. It was not difficult to understand the mime accompanying the Pidgin narrative: he had succeeded in using his spear to keep the jaws apart, until in the end, the creature had released him. But when they carried him to Bagabone, his head was almost severed from his body. From all these factors put together, Hariman began to deduce that to be "children" was a most coveted promotion.

Camus was bolting his food with a speed evidently born of long practice. It was obvious that he had duties to perform from the way he kept looking at a watch, not on his own wrist, but hanging on one of the midwives. The others, too, began to look as if they could not afford to spend much of Sunday evening eating and talking. They gobbled and gabbled at the same time! One after another they rose and excused themselves to the visitor, taking pieces of fruit and coconut with them, swilling down the remains of the repast with coconut milk or water. But Laurah and Irene, who remained till the last, made it clear that Hariman was expected to go back to his bed behind the screens. They did not ask him, but showed him a pair of pajamas, Laurah holding the tops, Irene the bottoms. They enticed him back to the study ward, where Bagabone lay sleeping peacefully and continued to do so throughout that night.

TEN

Margery Harriman knocked on the door of an office in Suviara at ten o'clock in the morning, and asked to see Mr. Roger Richardson, administrative ombudsman for British expatriates in the Talisman Islands. The official could scarcely believe his luck. He hastily sent for another cup of tea in one of the elegant cups. He knew of the "scandal" and guessed she had come for advice. He himself had always been a sober family man, but the previous day his wife had flown to her people in New Zealand for Christmas, taking the children with her, leaving Roger to the mercy of the Club or hotels. He was feeling a void, and he wanted company—congenial company!

He sat his visitor in a swivel chair, determined, like Pablo Picasso, not to miss the full variety of facets of the female form. The lady now had the opportunity to deploy her personable exterior as well as reveal the chasms of her psyche. Behind his big desk, Richardson prepared to mobilize the full reserves of his latent, indulgent masculinity.

The "customer" did not beat about the bush. She said she knew that he, Mr. Richardson, was the man who had the last word on expatriate domestic arrangements in the Talisman Islands, and that when difficulties arose, it was more important to get them sorted out with him in confidence than to get involved with the governor, or bodies such as the legal system or the Church. As far as she was concerned, if *he* approved something, all those institutions would follow suit.

Richardson was taken aback. Until he knew the exact nature of what he was to approve, he decided to be careful. With wife Janet away in New Zealand and nobody to make decisions in the lunch hour, it was prudent to disclaim the powers attributed to him until Tate and Hacket could be jointly involved. He replied compassionately: "Tell me all about it, Mrs. Hariman."

She told the truth as she saw it. "You may not know, Mr. Richardson, that my husband has been giving treatment to Mrs. Gillou, wife of the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Supply. He seems to have grown very fond of her, and for quite some time, he's been giving free treatment to her and her children in our home, The Rise. And for quite a long time he's been absenting himself from home at nights."

She waited for this information to sink in, before continuing: "It's quite some time since we shared our bedroom. You know, it causes a woman distress when her husband's indifferent to her."

The look Mrs. Hariman threw at the official captivated him so effortlessly that his face expressed great tenderness. Her own almond eyes filled with tears; he was such a nice man, as helpless as a teddy bear in the clutch of a child. The kind of man who appreciated nice things; good clothes, jewelry, well proportioned bodies, slender waists, soft round limbs! *It's not going to be difficult to talk to him about the intimate things*, she thought to herself.

"I'm glad to be able to talk to a married man about these things Mr. Richardson. You see, I'm quite healthy and it's hard for me to be—er"—she looked down at her shoes—"to be . . . deprived. I mean . . . I mean . . . the *physical side*," she blurted out. "As I said, I'm not old, and I'm quite healthy."

The ombudsman did not seem disposed to dispute this claim, so she resumed: "It's for Deirdre's sake, our daughter, we've remained together. But she's more like her father than me. She's got something from him . . . how can I put it? A kind of . . . frigidness. She went off to boarding school, and I was very lonely . . . would have been, except for friends

at the Club and people who understand, like yourself." Again she lowered her gaze to her feet.

Richardson felt that he must assist her to overcome her shyness.

"I quite understand, Mrs. Hariman. I quite understand."

She looked up, reassured by his friendly tone, and confessed: "I've tried to fight it. I know it's a weakness and I ought to have stopped him in the early stages—when he first started treating the children, but I was thinking of them."

Richardson was touched, in spite of his professional detachment. "Of course you were, Madge. Of course you were!"

The accidental, spontaneous (not in the least calculated) use of his client's Christian name again served to reassure, and she continued. "They're darling little girls—five, and three—I often look after them while their mother's. . . ." She hesitated.

"Gadding around?"

She nodded gratefully. "It's not much fun for me, with their father so fond of them too, and me acting as a kind of Cinderella nursemaid. To somebody else's children! But somebody's got to do it and my husband's got very fond of their mother, poor things."

Richardson would have appreciated some clarification of the exact point she was making, but he decided it was better not to intervene while she was under obvious emotional strain. She mastered her anguish: "Yes, I've got to face up to it; he's got very fond of her, and they're sleeping together."

Richardson looked so shocked and angry that she hastily resumed: "I hope you don't mind me mentioning such things. It's only so you can be able to judge better. We're all trying to put things right, you see. All four of us! Not everybody understands like you do, Mr. Richardson. I've told them we must try to do things on a basis of comradeship and friendship —that was my idea and they're all coming to accept it."

The official smiled approval and encouragement. His mind had been pursuing the problem of deprivation she had

mentioned earlier, and he was vaguely wondering whether, at some point, it would be helpful to reveal certain aspects of his own aching void. Professional etiquette triumphed.

"Could you explain your idea a bit more fully, Mrs. Hariman?"

"Well, all three children have got used to the . . . er . . . the . . . well, exchanges between The Rise and The Ridge, although it was a bit confusing for the little ones at first. I've come to you, Mr. Richardson, because I think it would be better to make things official. It would mean I'd go permanently to The Ridge to look after the little girls, and when *he* comes back, Brenda Gillou can live at The Rise with him. Wingfield can keep Deirdre, and then everything can be made official."

Had the ombudsman not been in possession of some unofficial background (Club) knowledge, he might have been at a loss to understand this. On his desk pad he had casually jotted down "when *he* comes back," meaning the note to be a reminder for a query. As he read and reread these four words, he was (perhaps subconsciously) contemplating the possibility of an alternative solution to the one she was proposing, but he was too delicate to attempt to put such an idea forward at this early stage. He was impressed by his client's succinctness. She was as down-to-earth as a two-year-old or an undertaker, so natural, in fact, that he felt ashamed of his own sexual cowardice and the squalor of his marital situation. The thought had often occurred to him that women should be down to earth. The idea sometimes haunted him, obsessed him. But prudence necessitated one step at a time. He swallowed hard. It would not do to let her guess that he had problems himself. She would despise him. She belonged, he decided, to a new generation of young women coming into existence for whom the basic need and functional "hi-fi" with a man mattered most. Such women, biologically right, professional animals, could function incisively, as this doctor's wife did, precisely because of their "unhumbugability." Just as he, Richardson, was seeking an outlet, so

was she, but for the moment, she must not be allowed to suspect the ecstatic nausea invading him at the thought.

"How long have you been married, Mrs. Hariman?"

"Twelve years."

"Your husband is older than you, I believe?"

"Nine years."

"And the Gillous? How long have they been married?"

"Six years."

In the mirror of his officialdom, Richardson caught a glimpse of himself in the he-man roll of the future: fulfilled, confident, masterful. "It's when one of the parties gets hurt that the authorities tend to oppose divorce," he added soothingly; then in a burst of decisiveness: "I see no official reason why you should not change quarters."

A shiver ran down the hollow where his spine should have been as he heard his own words. He really ought to have cleared it with Tate and Hacket; he was gambling high stakes. He must go on. "Are your houses in the same grade?"

"The Ridge is Grade One; Wingfield's is only Grade Three."

"Is Mrs. Gillou willing to accept—er—Grade Three status? The house has only two bedrooms and one bathroom, I believe?"

"She won't mind. She'll only have Deirdre. And only in the holidays."

"Of course. Quite so. Well, we must discuss things with the legal chappies. The best thing would be for us to get round a table."

"Can it be arranged before Christmas?" she inquired. She looked like a schoolgirl asking about a library book.

"We shall do our best, Mrs. Hariman. Can you come in tomorrow at, say, fifteen hundred hours. *All* of you, I mean. That's the drill! *All* of you."

She looked puzzled, hesitated for a few seconds, then said, "All of us in Suviara who . . . who . . . who do it?"

It was the ombudsman's turn for perplexity, but he caught on and added quickly: "No, no! I don't mean every-

body who . . . er. I mean, not all the er . . . the . . . exchanges in Suviara. These cases have to be dealt with er . . . er . . . individually. I meant the four of you involved in this particular . . ."

"Three of us could," she cut in. "Not my . . . er. Not Dr. Hariman."

"Oh, I see! Yes, of course, he's at the hospital." (He had forgotten about the note on his pad). "Are you sure that he will agree to what you propose and sign to that effect?"

"Quite sure!"

"All right, Madge. Tuesday, 16 December, at fifteen hundred. Can I leave it to you to summon Mr. and Mrs. Gillou and to keep your . . . er . . . Dr. Hariman informed? It won't work unless we have all present, and all agreed."

"He will be present in principle," she reassured him.

What *was* it, Richardson kept wondering, he had intended to check? She had stood up abruptly and was looking at him with affectionate contempt. He had the same glass eyes as a teddy-bear. She longed to yank him about instead of playing this little game of pretending. Didn't he understand that he'd already had his quid pro quo?

"All right, Madge," he was saying humbly.

"Thank you . . . Roger!"

She left with a burden lifted from her shoulders. She tripped off umphily down the stairs. But the burden had nothing to do with what she had discussed with the ombudsman. It was just that, sometimes, if you remained too long on exhibit and didn't get the chance to try out your powers of purchase, you began to have doubts about your ability to keep passing rapidly across the counters.

ELEVEN

On the morning following his arrival at Kavali, Hariman did not contemplate flight. He felt free, as if a burden had been lifted from his shoulders. He got up early and took a bath in the familiar bathtubs.

In the morning light, the clinic looked unreal, like a forgotten Holywood set. The buildings stretched out of sight, angular but regular, constructed in bamboo and woven materials, glossy and spanking new. There was no sign of the sea, but among the gigantic forest trees, here and there was a palm or coconut tree. The morning was cooler and fresher than it would have been in Suviara and, reckoning a degree for every 300 feet, Hariman guessed the forest must be several thousand feet above sea level.

The settlement was dominated on one side by an escarpment covered with yellow and pink vegetation, almost a complete spectrum. It had the beauty of mother-of-pearl. In the other direction, the sky was a fleecy blanket; long, low clouds caressed the horizon where the outline of the mountains was sharp against their backcloth. Overhead the sky was a deep cobalt blue; the birds seemed to the young doctor to be burlesquing an English dawn with their exaggerated tropical warblings.

In Hariman's mind the words *Suviara* and *Deirdre* had become synonymously uppermost. It was through his daughter's eyes that he saw the fresh wonders around him. If only

she could have been there! She would have taken such a delight in the morning freshness and would have wanted to help with the sick surgeon. It would have done the old man's heart good to see her; she was so . . . what was the word he was looking for? . . . so . . . sane! She had, in herself, that mysterious serenity that could turn the absurd into sanity—instantly. And it seemed to be inborn, inherent; she took religion in the same way: *Credo quia absurdum;* I believe, because it's impossible! Strange how the Latin word for impossible had come to mean absurd! The whole of Kavali was impossible; yet it was far from being absurd. His thoughts returned to the screened bed in Bagabone's study where he had slept so soundly.

He had left his patient sleeping equally silently when he came out. He had left instructions that as soon as the old man woke up, he was to be coaxed into eating. The Trypto-sperse, in carefully regulated doses, along with meals, would work wonders. Extraordinary that the surgeon had not remembered they had it in the dispensary! But of course, he had probably never been in a position to diagnose his own condition. Or perhaps, subconsciously, he rejected the claims of the manufacturers of miracle drugs; they would certainly put the surgeons out of business if they did what was claimed for them.

Returning to his cubicle, Hariman found his bed made, and clean, white clothes laid out for him, presumably by Matthias, who had greeted him in the corridor. He had just finished dressing when there came a tap, rattling like a xylophone, on one of the bamboo poles of the screen.

"Come in!" he said softly, thinking it would be Matthias. It was Laurah, bearing a wooden tray. She set it down on a locker, and he saw corn-on-the-cobs still smoking from the fire, and a big goblet of fruit juice. The nurse prattled cheerfully in Pidgin, explaining that if he wished to, Hariman could sit out on the patio, where there were tables, to eat his breakfast. She was going to give the Chief his breakfast and his medicine; then, when they had washed him, they would

prepare him for "doctor inspection." The Englishman thanked her and followed her out to one of the tables. He asked her to skip formalities with the patient but to do her utmost to get him to take liquid as well as a little solid food, and at all costs to get the Tryptosperse down him. The treatment must not be delayed.

The patio was subtly placed between gables, or sloping walls without windows, except the French window from the ward: it looked out over the garden and towards the mountains. Hariman sat down gratefully and began to gnaw his corn. He could hear Laurah's voice faintly and guessed that the old man had woken up. He could even make out what she was saying: "Me fella takem bottle for you."

To Hariman's astonishment, Bagabone replied in a deep, strong voice, scarcely recognizable as that of the sick old man of the previous day. "I don't want a bottle at present, thank you."

"Me fella by takem one fella bedpan!"

"No, I don't require a bedpan either, thank you!"

Glancing in through the door-window, Hariman was alarmed to see the patient out of bed. He rushed indoors and stared at the big man, swaying from side to side, grinning like a genial dinosaur. The neatly trimmed hair was startlingly white in the daylight. Blue eyes twinkled from the rubicund complexion, so unusual in the tropics.

"You sick too mas, Papa," Laurah was pleading. "You mas sleep long bed."

The big man tried to chuck her under the chin and was asking for his dressing gown. He tottered. Hariman was round the screen in a flash, catching the massive bulk and steering it so that, instead of crashing to the ground, it thumped down on to the bed, sideways across the mattress. Bagabone lay on his back like a beetle. He was breathing heavily, but the grin had not disappeared from his face. Hariman was angry.

"Do you want to kill yourself before we have a chance to begin your treatment?" he asked.

The helpless surgeon rocked his shoulders and tugged at his pajamas, struggling to get a good look at the speaker. In vain! He sighed and closed his eyes. His knee joints were just on to the mattress; his legs projected horizontally, but as he lay slightly diagonally, the left leg began to droop. The young doctor seized it and supported it with both hands. "Hoist!" he said to Laurah.

She stared uncomprehendingly. Fortunately at that moment, another woman came in through the ward entrance. Bagabone had raised his head and opened his eyes. He saw and recognized her. "Git me up from here, Anne," he moaned.

Amazon Anne went promptly to the other side of the bed and tried to pull him up by his armpits. Even her enormous strength was unequal to the task. Hariman ordered her to wait a moment while he explained the correct way to do a lift. The women seemed astonished at the ease with which they were now able to resore the patient to his proper position. Remembering the mechanism Irene had used the previous day, Hariman propped the old man up. The women covered him over with a sheet. His left leg moved restlessly underneath it. He was in pain, but still grinning, he held out his right hand.

"I don't think I've had the pleasure," he said to Hariman.

The younger man had no intention of humoring a troublesome patient. "We met yesterday," he said coldly. (The women had gone out.)

"Yesterday? But you're an Englishman, I guess?"

"That's correct. I'm the doctor who attended to you yesterday."

"Oh, come on, give us your hand. I haven't seen a white man since 1942 apart from that semilimey Camus."

The genial smile was irresistible. Hariman softened and took the outstretched hand. The patient had no recollection of the last time he had held it.

"Wingfield Hariman."

"My name's . . . Bagabone!" The old man held on to his

visitor's hand. His eyes were moist, but he was smiling. His face lit up as he looked towards the door, and, turning as he gave a final squeeze to the heavy hand, Hariman saw that Irene had come in. Perplexity clouded the patient's brow for a moment. The hand-squeeze had found some echo in the sick surgeon's distant consciousness. But he had eyes only for the girl.

"Yesterday, you play one fella song long bagpipes bulong hem," she said. She put something down on the desk.

"Did I now? Did I?" He looked pleased but incredulous. The girl went out.

"You're an American, aren't you, sir?" Hariman inquired.

"No, sir! I *was* an American. What am I now? I guess I'm . . . just a bag of bones."

"They tell me you're a surgeon, sir . . . like me!"

"Oh, sure, I'm a sawbones. So you're an operator too?"

"Leeds, Heidelberg, and St. Thomas. Oh, and the Royal College!"

"Well, well! I was Harvard and the Federal Surgical. It's very good of you to come. I might . . ." He had closed his eyes. The leg was giving him pain.

"Well, Bagabone, sir, we'll have a talk when you're stronger. Now I believe you want to pump ship?"

The American opened his eyes and stared. "Oh, sure! I have a . . . gadget. The nurses will get it." He looked round for Irene, but she had disappeared. "Laurah'll be back in half a jiff." He closed his eyes.

Hariman could not resist the temptation to ask: "Is Laurah your wife and Irene your daughter?"

The big man opened his eyes and laughed out loud. "We don't have wives at Kavali. And besides, I'm an anchorite." After a pause he added reflectively. "Come to think of it, Laurah does all the things wives do . . . except one. And Irene's more than a daughter. She had a depressed fracture of the cranium when I first met her! You'll find my sanibox under the desk, if you wouldn't mind. And maybe

you'd stand guard. I can manage the rest. We'll have a talk this afternoon, OK.?"

"Well, don't lower that leg until the trouble's dispersed. Otherwise I may have to amputate to stop a clot getting into White House, see? I want you to start on Tryptosperse right now."

"OK., you win! Are you going to take over the clinic?" The intonation puzzled the Englishman. It contained nothing of impatience or querulousness; rather, mild surprise, acceptance of the inevitable, with possibly a shade (the faintest shade) of scepticism.

"Certainly, if you wish me to. I'll do my best."

"You won't find many serious cases here. We're mostly concerned with surgery of the spirit; that's our most difficult assignment. We're expecting a few new cases—it seems I may be spared to take care of them myself."

As he made his way to look for Irene, Hariman pondered over the old man's words and his relationship to Irene and Laurah. Was the old boy rambling? "Surgery of the spirit?" . . . "spared to take care of them myself?" Hariman felt sure there was no actual damage to the brain cells, yet he could not help feeling uneasy.

TWELVE

At ten o'clock in the morning, the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Supply, Suviara, had just become established at his desk when his Talanesian understudy, George Temata, knocked on the office door and entered. He knew that if he waited for Gillou to reply he would never gain access.

"Good morning, Maurice," he said diffidently. Gillou did not reply. He was absorbed in his files. A full minute elapsed before he clapped a book to, melodramatically, and flashed a "what-can-I-do-for-you" smile.

"Morning, George."

Gillou found the tradition of using first names distasteful and succeeded in making "George" sound more like a surname. The Talisman Islander wondered what the white man was doing with all those files. As if reading his thoughts, Gillou became confidential, expansive: "They're pornographic pictures, George. I have to use them because I can get no satisfaction from the real thing."

The Talanesian's English was excellent, but his aural comprehension weak. "We are extremely fortunate," he observed at random.

"It's excruciating, George. My testes are giving me jip. Can you imagine, you're famished one Sunday morning and you order a succulent shish kebab—garnished—I mean with everything you really dig. You start to tuck in and you find the whole repast inside you in ten seconds, turned into confetti, or at best, candy floss."

"That must be disturbing. There is a need for audit," George hazarded.

"Perhaps if you could just . . ."

Gillou's eyes had opened wider. A dark girl, not his own secretary, had come into the office with a steno pad. "Excuse me, George. I'll have a look at them, if you'll be so good as to leave them. Miss Dimbi is going to take some letters."

"Very well," Temata growled, picking up his briefcase and glaring at the stenographer. He deposited a shabby file in the permanent secretary's in-tray and went out fuming. He was beginning to suspect that audacity was the real name for the aplomb the Talanesians admired in their white superiors. Would the system really break down, as the expatriates claimed it would, when they were knocked off their perches? The snag about independence was that the Gillous had already trained up fifty or so "big daddies" as thick skinned as themselves.

Gillou, meanwhile, was grinning at the girl with a familiarity that did not disconcert her. She hovered near his desk while he eyed her up and down. Her skin was darker than that of the Talanesians; instead of the typical ball of frizzy hair, she had long, silky, black hair. She was pretty in a monkeyish way; wide nostrils, full lips, and large, strong white teeth. Her eyes were black and insolent.

Behind their glasses, Gillou's eyes had changed. Their greeny greyness had assumed a quality not unlike the fever of a malaria patient. He drank in the neat figure, enhanced, in his eyes, by a pink dress, short and plain. He liked the small, firm breasts which made her look pubescent. Desire had smouldered in his viscera since the previous day, reminding him of a pop song on the radio: "Ah can't get no sa-tis-fac-tion!"

His physical relationship with Margery Hariman had ended up in a frustration he had not yet experienced. She was too keen! Bodily! Not that Gillou was troubled by conscience; the inexorable association of ideas that troubles some adulterers meant nothing to him. He believed in sex as

people believe in food: the idea that one should diet did not occur to him. But Madge! Like picking strawberries, where you had carte blanche to eat them until they made you sick!

He was not to know that Dimbi was experiencing something similar. She was excited by the piggy eyes in the lobster cushion of his face, the fleshy bounciness of the white man below her. As he leaned back, animal and assertive, she noticed the sweat under his armpits. This man with so much official power was basically just an animal like herself. Why had she repelled him before, when, in this very office, he had tried to explore her? Urges came and went! Why not yield, now when she felt like it? She, too, could get "no satisfaction."

The permanent secretary asked her to place a notice outside the door: DO NOT DISTURB.

After closing the door, she turned the key in the lock.

It is strange how even the best laid plans of mice and men go awry. It will hardly be believed that half an hour's dictation did nothing to mitigate the mutual frustration obnoxiously expressed in the pop song. Like gecko and spider, they were afraid of each other. The telephone kept ringing. Each time, Gillou answered in an oddly high-pitched voice. The girl sniggered nervously when he finally took off the receiver but clung defensively to her steno pad and pencil. From time to time there were heavy footsteps in the corridor as if the chief minister himself were about to burst in. And the sound of Jenny Kao's typewriter in the anteroom was not conducive to intensive mating. But by twelve o'clock, when Dimbi softly unlocked the door and slipped out, an adequate basis of petting had convinced them both that there could be dynamite when they met up again the following day.

THIRTEEN

If the locals get to think they are as clever as we are, brooded Roger Richardson, *they will throw us out!* Such had not been the case, in the end, that afternoon. He could congratulate himself on the proceedings, which had been as much a training session for the Talanesian minister of supply as a proof that, in a democratic society, with good will on the part of all concerned, a solution can be found to even the most delicate of human poblems. The issue had been primarily one of expatriate welfare, so that the five-to-one proportion of solicitor general, deputy governor, Administrator Tate, Legal Secretary Hacket, and Ombudsman Richardson against Minister of Supply Lilata had been fair.

Richardson shook his head over the bluntness of the Talisman Minister: "Condoning immorality, adultery twice—twice over, punishable with death by the sword in custom!" And then that monologue about Moses and the Ten Commandments! What was it he had said? "Thou shalt not commit adultery" and "still the basis of all decent civilization." The Talanesians were culturally in the Stone Age, and had so much to learn about the progress of civilization! Here one had two couples, perfectly happy to change partners, and a Talisman Islander opposed "legalization" on grounds of out-of-date custom! And so much to learn about diplomacy! Minister Lilata's stubbornness had merely served to unite Clynch, Tate, and Hacket in favor of the proposal; even the

solicitor-general had been stung into supporting it. Here was a personal triumph for the ombudsman without "yackety yack" from wife Janet. Everybody had congratulated him on his common sense. How much happier Christmas would be for all parties!

"Neither do I condemn thee!" In his thoughts, Richardson constantly quoted Christ's absolution (forgetting the command accompanying it), in an attempt to efface his feeling of guilt from the previous day, the result of his lustful thoughts of Madge Hariman and *quid pro quo*. He knew that he never would sleep with her, any more than the Archbishop of Talanesia would, so he might as well dismiss temptation and feel really Christlike. Perhaps he never would graduate to the incisive generation he admired, but at least he had scored a diplomatic success. He, Roger Richardson, had not condemned, had given a fallen woman (four fallen persons, in fact) a new hope!

If only it were not so difficult writing the minutes: "As chairman, the deputy governor called upon Mr. Roger Richardson to explain the purpose of the meeting"; and "Mr. Richardson explained that in his capacity of ombudsman, he had been approached by four persons." Yes, that was all right. "The solicitor-general pointed out" (crossed out). "The solicitor-general alleged" (crossed out). "The solicitor-general suggested" (better!) "that they, as an ombudsgroup . . ."—the solicitor-general had not really used that term. It was his own! And was it wise to hint at the idea of "group" with the possibility of undermining the status of "man"? On the whole, the solicitor-general was likely to be pleased with the cleverness of such a neologism attributed to him! ". . . that the ombudsgroup was being called upon to authorize" (crossed out)—"sanction" (crossed out)—"being called upon to approve" . . . "conduct" . . . and this was without its competence ("without" crossed out: they might not understand that it meant *outside*)—"outside its competence" (all crossed out) "—not part of its terms of reference."

Did any of this matter, since the outcome had been a personal triumph? He must get *it* down or it would get him down! Cut out the drivel! Were there any snags? They couldn't *all* have been wrong! The minutes could be left, temporarily, while he wrote to Janet with a clear conscience. The compilation of the minutes was not urgent! Tate and Hacket knew what they were doing. They would not have risked their careers. The main thing was to *record* what each of the quartet (or was it a trio?) had *undertaken* and *signed!* Just scribble down notes: Gillou, financial responsibility for Mrs. Margery Hariman and Miss Deirdre Hariman (in capacity as guardian) up to age of twenty-one!

Richardson sat back and thought it over. That was generous of Gillou—everybody had thought so. Except the nigger in the woodpile, Lilata, who had brought up the question of whether she could renounce the guardianship at the age of eighteen. That had not been cleared up, but why should she want to? Gillou had *signed* his financial responsibility. That was the main thing! In the presence of witnesses, he had also signed that he would "provide" for his own two children, and in the absence of Dr. Hariman, Mrs. Hariman had *signed* that she would make no financial claims on him. That was amazingly honorable. And it had been his, Roger's, achievement. Why should he feel troubled about the absent member of the foursome, the young surgeon-specialist at Arimathea Hospital, the one who had removed his, Roger's, hemorrhoids? Was it because he had consistently forgotten about that note on his pad? Why had it surfaced after the meeting when everybody had gone? Nobody seemed much concerned where the poor fellow was. And pink little Mrs. Gillou, a rose without a thorn! On behalf of Hariman, Mrs. *Hariman* had accepted full financial responsibility for *her*, and she had *signed* in lieu of her legal husband. That hard woman! Progressively, Mrs. Hariman had revealed herself to be as hard as nails. What would wife Janet say to such selphorisms as: "The sooner Deirdre gets packed off to boarding-school again, the better" or "I need *babies* round

me, not *teenagers*" or, "Deirdre's old toys will do for Tracy and Tina to pull to pieces!"

Richardson felt he had done a good day's work. It would have been better to get more down on paper while it was still fresh in his mind, but at least he had made a start. He hadn't begun the letter he had promised Janet, but he had the excuse (genuine this time!) of pressure of work and some interesting news to put in when he did get down to writing a letter. He locked away the confidential papers with considerable satisfaction, locked his office door, and drove to the Magellan. It was there that he met Brenda Gillou with her two children. In an orange-and-blue short dress, she looked almost sedate. Richardson wished to demonstrate his concern for the children. Trying to be jovial with Tina, he knelt down to be at her level, feeling even more Christlike than he had in the office. "Suffer little children to come unto Richardson!" Gently he inquired: "And who's going to be your mummy all the time? All the time?" Who did that blankness and contempt in the stare of the child remind him of? Gillou? In certain moods? It was as if he had looked into the eye of a viper, and he rose, muttering hypocritically: "You are a sweetie, aren't you?"

The child gazed before her like an old, old woman who has lost her link with the Cosmos. Then, with an abrupt gesture, she pulled down her panties, yanked them off, and stood accusing him with all the power of her nakedness. Then, as if he had ceased to exist for her, she ran away to play in the shallow part of the children's swimming pool.

FOURTEEN

Hariman's work kept him busy. On Monday and Tuesday he got involved with everything from umbilical cords (with Rough Rachel) to hernias, carried in by the outriders. In the theatre, well equipped with obsolete equipment, he rectified a "strangulation"; in the surgery he combated anemia. Back in the operating room, he removed wens from a patient who had been troubled with them for years. Everywhere he got to know picturesquely named workers, both male and female, got to know the rooms and wards. He decided that many of the illnesses were monuments to ignorance, like the wens, which at one time could have been prevented by the clearance of an oil gland.

Conditions at Kavali compared favorably with Arimathea. The nurses (Hariman still thought of them more as nuns!) compensated for lack of education and training by their zeal and cleanliness. Over 100 patients were receiving some kind of attention, including leprosy cases in isolation. There was a special home for children of leprosy patients, who were kept separated from their parents. Irene told him that the disease had been arrested in all cases. Some who had crawled to the clinic on their hands and knees, had been fitted with surgical boots to cure foot ulcers, the main cause of their distress. It was Camus who fitted special footwear and often went to find caves in the forest to treat them himself. The outriders were also skilled shoemakers.

On the previous afternoon, when Hariman went to keep his appointment with Bagabone, he had been horrified to find

the old man with his false teeth out, being fed by Amazon Anne, with a spoon, like a baby. The old surgeon had not finished his "pobs," but he was vainly trying to chew down the Tryptosperse tablets. His mouth was very dry. The tablets had left a messy, pink ring round his lips and were sticking to his gums. The young Englishman felt a flame of compassion but hardened his heart when he was told the patient had been difficult: he had spat the tablets out, tried to get out of bed again, and developed a cough. He was very feeble. His leg was as restless as ever, in spite of the treatment begun early in the morning. On this occasion, Hariman decided that conversation was out of the question.

But on the Tuesday afternoon he seemed very glad to see Hariman. His teeth had been restored, his face shaved and sponged, his great bulk tidily arranged in the bed. He looked quite different and seemed anxious to talk. As he talked, his American accent grew thicker.

He told Hariman about his birthplace in Texas. He eulogized Dallas, a city which he claimed was vastly superior to New York. His father had had a ranch in Texas with several thousand head of cattle; he himself had started by wanting to become a vet; and ended up at the age of thirty-two as surgeon specialist in the city he disliked so much. He got engaged to the most perfect girl in the world, a nurse from Dallas, shortly before he volunteered for Uncle Sam's Army in 1941. In 1942, waiting on a troop-carrier, off the coast of Santabala, ready to land with the Marines, he learned from a radio telegram that his fiancée, Bernie, had been killed in a road accident.

"If there had been a surgeon with a grain of wit left in that city," he said, "her life could have been saved. I read the post mortem report. Lacerations and contusions that made her unrecognizable—what of it? And what did she die of? Liver! Her liver was damaged, and they weren't smart enough to deal with it!"

There was an awkward pause. Hariman did not know what to say. The old man went on: "Don't think I often

indulge in small talk. But before I cross the Stiks again, there are things I have to tell you."

"Of course," Hariman replied. "I'm interested. Please go ahead."

"Well then, you may have guessed that this clinic was a Japanese job. It was 21 August, 1942, that I recovered consciousness here, surrounded by slant-eyed yellow men. The hot springs were here then, but no buildings. Just tents and shelters. If I'd been the Emperor Tojo, those crafty bastards couldn't have treated me better."

"I expect as a surgeon specialist you held a pretty high rank?"

"Not particularly! Colonel! It wasn't my rank that impressed them. There were two reasons. They needed a sawbones and they'd seen my insignia. Second, without knowing it, I'd done 'em a very great service."

"Professionally?"

"Not on your nelly. I said 'without knowing it.' I was the biggest sucker that ever limped."

"To the Japanese?"

"I was a sucker to them, all right. I'll tell you how it happened, and this is official. For New York and Tokyo, if you like! There were just two of us, Marine sawbones, landed Blood Beach, eighth of August, 1942. Task: Take a bunch of grannies southwest by the compass; set up a field-station behind Group B. We got settled in, but that lot left no casualties so we figured they were OK. Settled down in a dried-up tank and started setting up shop."

"Had you already landed tanks at that stage?"

"Hell, no! A tank! A dried-up water hole. Kind 'o gave us cover. Then there was one hell of a foul-up ahead. Our Marines began to crawfish!"

"Crawfish?"

"Beat it, as you might say. Ran back! Retreated! And us stuck there with the stretchers and the chew-gum, myself, Sid Barnes, a surgeon from New Zealand, one seabee, and the grannies. I never found out who blackjacked us."

"Were any of you wounded?"

"All killed, except me! Right there in that hollow. I had to bury the lot. The whole damned caboodle. Fourteen days I was in that hole doing honors for Sid and the rest and picking lead out of my pony."

"Pony?"

"My pony! Legs, if you like. Built a cenotaph; should 'a put my own name on it. I calculate it was the tweny-first I set off back, northeast, carrying a white flag. Making fifty yards an hour in blazing sun. After midnight and still as hot as an oven I got to the outposts on Alleluia airstrip, the one our Marines had yanked back from the Nips. I was just going to shout 'Uncle Sam's Sawbones' when there was an almighty shrieking behind me and a barrage sebastopol. Right behind me! The yellow men came in, fixed bayonets up my arse, screaming, and firing from the hip with tommies. They didn't bother to poop me. I'd been a good stooge. But our guys saw my white flag; thought I was a double-crosser; bopped me with their butts . . . Next I knew, I was waking up the first time in Manambola, like I said. Japanese Headquarters on Santabala. All the bowing and scraping! Th . . . thhhh!" He gave an imitation of the Japanese mannerism. Hariman laughed.

"Did they bring you from there to Kavali?"

"Sure did! And they had a reason! Izumi Dan, Commander Operation K.A., was there on a stretcher, like me! Nips were playing Boston on who'd check out first. . . ."

He found it hard to continue. Then he said slowly: "History books say Izumi burned his regimental flag and shot himself. It's bunkum. He died from . . . wounds in the head."

Again it had become difficult for him to speak. He mastered his emotions: "If he hadn't 'a had pineapple in his pericranium he'd 'ev given me the Imperial Star of Nippon. Bright little guy, all forehead and slit eyes. Spoke good English! Told me that till that night he'd figured Nippon was going to liberate us Yankees. But he'd cottoned it was

horsefeathers . . . That little guy didn't shoot himself. All he could *think* of was the next putsch. He was hopping mad about the airstrip and wanted it back. And he was livid with Tokyo High Command for forgetting to send sawbones. . . . I dug the bits out of his cranium—out of the pericranium in places. I wasn't in a fit state . . . on crutches . . . I was clumsy . . . He'd 'ev died anyway."

An enigmatic smile played about the American surgeon's lips. The glory and the horror of the campaign were at war in his features. It went on till Hariman could not bear to look. He felt he was intruding on a private conflict indelibly stamped on the quick of the old man's being. The patient was all in. There was nothing appropriate the younger man could say. He rearranged the pillow so that it was more comfortable and whispered: "You did your best. Couldn't do more than that!"

"I guess not."

"I'm going to prescribe something new for that cough. I'll send it along right away."

He walked out of the ward in silence, thinking about his own hippocratic oath and the strain it sometimes placed upon him. Had the old surgeon condemned himself as coward and traitor over the years for keeping it, for keeping that sacred oath? Or had he meant something quite different? "I was clumsy. . . . He'd 'ev died anyway." Categoric? Considered? Judicial? Dispassionate? What was the meaning conveyed by the falling American intonation? Dispassionateness, he decided, shading away a little into withdrawal or even impatience. Who could have blamed him if he'd let the chief brain cell of the Japanese Command in the Talismans find its way into oblivion?

FIFTEEN

Tracey and Tina Gillou were playing with toy boats in a swimming pool behind The Ridge. Cube root of the cube root of the cube root of "Ironbottom Pond," an expanse of sea visible from the garden; the strait had been given the name by American forces in 1942 after it had witnessed some of the most terrible naval battles in history, including the sinking of aircraft carriers, cruisers, and troopships.

To the east, there sparkled a bay known as Blood Bay, where Marines had fought their way on shore to capture Alleluia airstrip, built by Talisman Islanders under Japanese compulsion, captured and used by the Americans to smash the oppressor's naval supremacy in the Pacific. To the north, seventeen miles away, rose the ghost of the island of Ngato, where a volcano, dormant since 1859, still hissed and steamed.

Shimmering in the sunshine, The Sleeve, as Ironbottom Pond is officially named on the maps, gives no hint of its depth; thousands of fathoms in some places, yet shallow in comparison with the oceans of evil into which the whole of humanity or any individual can plunge from time to time. Worse than disease-bearing sandflies and mosquitoes, more brutal than attacks of sharks and crocodiles, more deadly than bushfires, earthquakes, cyclones or volcanoes, the flood of iniquity keeps pounding against the dams that have been made to contain it.

After an absence of several nights, Maurice Gillou came home to lunch. He was surprised to see places laid at a table

on the verandah and wondered whether Hariman was back. His wife seldom entertained now; his sneers about English cooking had killed her enthusiasm.

But really, she does lunches well, Gillou mused. *If I'm* "de trop" *I'll push off to the Magellan.* He slunk towards the bathroom, embers of his nonchannelled physical desire still smoldering in his bulk, like lava. Along the corridor, in the main bedroom, he caught a glimpse of pink negligee reflected in a mirror. His wife's perfume tickled his nostrils, alluring in the few seconds it remained dissociated from the idea of domesticity and responsibility. Domesticity! It made the fragrance lose its magic, turn musty and stale; cheap English scent.

Cela fait passer l'envie, he brooded. *It's off-putting!* In the corridor, his wife intercepted him. She wore a short yellow dress that revealed her thighs. She startled him by giving him a peck on the cheek, which he had no choice but to accept.

"Lunch—is—rea-dy!" she said, separating the syllables, and she went out of the lounge on to the balcony. Confused, Gillou rushed into the loo. Shortly afterwards, without having showered, he emerged into the lounge again. He went to the sideboard and took a long time pouring out drinks. He brought his wife Cinzano, which he referred to as "your usual." Before bringing it out to her, he had swallowed more than a tot of Scotch to steady his nerves. She accepted the aperitif with a Gioconda smile.

What's she up to? he wondered.

Gillou chose to speak in French. He wanted to reconstruct the old image of himself as genial, gay top dog. He launched into an account of imaginary nights at Wickers, home of the minister of finance, and how the minister had given him the lowdown on the Talisman economy. Sitting opposite him, inarticulate and submissive, his wife watched him, listening to the flow of educated French that had once made her believe she was in love with him. Satisfying, plausible, spontaneous! Even in English, she would not have been able to keep up her end. The effortless torrent of false-

hoods swept everything before it. The most devious of politicians could not have diverted or stemmed it. Certainly not a woman!

She was lying back on her chair, planning her campaign; white panties and pink thighs winked up at Gillou; she had accidentally hitched her dress well over her knees. Her breasts she directed provocatively towards him, pulling down the lower part of her brassiere as if to cool the moist valley; thrusting her image, lush auburn, white, pink, primrose, and provocative, on to his retina, into his subconscious. She was avenging herself for his attempts to be rid of her; remembering how he had bundled her and the children on to planes, labelled like parcels; consigned them to relatives in England or France; once to a doss-house in Geneva. She had come back like a kitten, rubbing round the legs that kicked her, allowed him to use and abuse her. But now he had finally kicked too hard. It was time for him to pay the bill. He was going to know what he was throwing away.

"Madge came in this morning," she said. "She sorted out your clothes from The Rise."

He tried to carry on unperturbed, but streams of consciousness conflicted: the tissue of lies he was weaving; the memory of Madge Hariman's attempt to introduce novelty into lovemaking; the fascination of the kitten before him turning into a sex cat. He mumbled something in reply, got up, and went to his usual place at the table, thinking she would join him. But she was in no hurry. She lolled back like a baby in a pram in full view, deliberately exercising her shapely legs.

"Help yourself, if you like!" she murmured huskily. "Madge may be coming back at any moment."

He set his whiskey down in front of him, shoveled something on to his plate, and began to appease the lesser of his appetites.

"I had a long talk with Madge," his wife added, deploying herself to the full. "I think she's trying to find out what makes you tick."

"*Vraiment*? Did you tell her?"

Brenda stood up without replying and pulled down her frock like a small girl reproved. She sat down opposite him, leaning forward to allow the air from the fan to play over her bosom. The low neckline was designed for coolness. Gillou gabbled on in French; diplomatic stories in which he generally figured as Robin Hood; George Temata, incongruously as Sancho Panza. He picked at his food, wondering whether anyone was coming or not. Brenda ate daintily, without either interrupting or encouraging him, still mobilizing the maximum caliber of her "umph." Gillou was sweating in an agony of lubricity. He mopped his brow with his table napkin. His discomfort was not alleviated in the slightest until they went into the lounge to drink coffee. He felt that he had given a good image of himself as top diplomat! He relaxed, lit a cigar, and switched into English. He began to launch a counter-offensive. "Madge doesn't accept that note of Hariman's, does she? She doesn't believe in his so-called errand of mercy! She reckons he's pushed off to Australia."

"She's entitled to believe what she likes. It's not the kind of thing she discusses with me. She's more interested in your clothes—and how to deal with you in bed!"

He squirmed, but managed a wry grin. "What do you mean? I do the dealing!"

"You mean you *did*. Perhaps she needs more preliminary petting. It must be because she's so old. Or maybe she's got one of those complex things. What do you call it? Transvestism! She was very odd about your clothes, I must say. I think they mean more to her than you do!"

The thrust went home. He glared and growled: "Why don't you mind your own bloody business?"

"It is my business. Don't forget that our arrangement's based on friendship and comradeship. It was her idea, not mine. I'm just trying to help you both. It's the kind of thing we can't discuss with Richardson, isn't it?"

At this moment, Tracey and Tina tripped into the

lounge. They carried themselves defiantly, without looking at their parents, and pulled out toys from secret hiding-places. In an autistic world of their own, they made noises like animals. Gillou smiled a bleary welcome, caught hold of Tina, and began to pet her in a manner irritating to her mother.

Meanwhile, Tracey, shamming guilelessness, announced: "Our new mummy gives us plenty presents." Then, stalking back into the corridor, she chanted:

"We don't get any presents from our daddy!"

Brenda tried to seize Tina. Gillou sat her down, rose to his feet, and moving from side to side like a great bear, pretended to be protecting her. Brenda attempted to push past him, and Tina, turning on the maximum volume of her howling apparatus, ran after her sister into the kitchen.

Laughing, Gillou caught hold of his wife's wrists and pulled her towards him. Lecherously he looked down at her breasts, struggling to kiss her lips, which she averted, turning her neck and fighting him. She wrenched hard, desperately, for she divined his intention. He was mumbling something unintelligible about "last thresh" and covering her mouth to prevent her from screaming. But he had to free her right arm, and she smacked his head, sending his glasses flying. Again and again she smacked at the brilliantined straw on his head. As though enjoying the punishment, he clutched her in a bear hug with his left arm, pressing her face to his chest so that she could not open her mouth. Thrusting with his lips, he began to propel her towards the chair he had sat in. Her neck was wet from his drooling efforts to kiss her. She began to use her fist on his skull with little effect, but as she lowered her hand, it happened to touch the ashtray on the arm of the chair. Her fingers closed round the remains of his cigar. The thought occurred to her that she might use it as a weapon, but when she tried to raise it, her courage failed her. A cruel smile distorted Gillou's lips. Ignoring her screams now, he took the cigar and held it in his own hand. She ducked defensively to protect her face, and the gesture maddened

him. He had an idea! Slowly and deliberately, like a branding iron, he stubbed the lighted end on her forehead; not heavily; just enough to leave a mark. Then abruptly, he let her go. Framed in the entry to the corridor, he had caught a glimpse of a white-faced Madge, vanishing like a ghost. Brenda Gillou fled, sobbing, across the verandah, round the house. Among the hibiscus bushes in the heat of the burning sun she stood trembling with horror and humiliation, in terror lest he should follow her. But after a few seconds she heard the sound of a starter motor and the swish of tires on the coral rubble.

The utter, sweating misery of her in her crumpled apparel, with her red-brown hair drooping dishevelled over her bosom, the anguished pressing of her hand to her forehead, were witnessed by the flowers, the sky, and the Talanesian gardener, who held her up, saying, "Missus, Missus," over and over again. He half carried her across the verandah, along the corridor to the bedroom, where she collapsed, sobbing, on to the double bed. The gardener muttered one last "Missus!" and ran off to look for help, afraid he might encounter the other missus who had run away, and praying that his sister, Betty, would soon come back from her walk with the children.

SIXTEEN

Between the sick surgeon and Dr. Hariman, friendship grew apace. The old man hated being a patient and detested his preferential treatment. He was fed, washed, and groomed as if by invisible hands. The blood clot in his leg had rapidly begun to clear; his cough was under control. He spent most of his time perusing medical journals, which appeared by magic at his bedside.

The Englishman spent more time with him than was warranted by professional duty or administrative necessity. He was amazed at the old doctor's efficiency; he remembered every case in the clinic and took a lively interest in the progress of patients.

Yet there were times when Hariman wondered whether Bagabone's mind was rambling. He often spoke of "The Union" as if alluding to a vast organization outside Talanesia, especially in the U.S.A., capable of delivering supplies and medicaments to Kavali. Whenever Hariman asked about a drug, the Chief told him to "stick in" an indent and give it to Benias. Every attempt to quiz about how supplies to the dispensary were procured was treated in the same way as attempts to find out about the location of Kavali, either gracefully evaded or ignored. Yet the clinic functioned. The dispensary had medicaments from countries as remotely separated as France and Red China.

Bagabone often seemed to be in conversation with staff

about philosophical subjects such as the relationship between morality and morale. It was a little awkward if Hariman happened to be in his cubicle, but however hard he coughed, no one seemed to mind his overhearing in the slightest. In the end he found himself actually listening in, trying to draw some conclusions about the state of the patient's mental health. The kind of thing he heard can be judged from the following conversation with Rough Rachel and Matthias.

Matthias was speaking in Pidgin, and Hariman had to listen carefully: "Picinini hem shutem eye bulong hem long stone wantime silining bulong wanfella man hem stap by hemself. Me no savvy why now hem shutem long silining."

The eavesdropper was astonished how easily he had understood what Matthias was saying. He had learned all the vocabulary while he had been treating the eye of the "picinini" in question a few hours previously. The child had been hit under the eye by a stone from the catapult of a hermit ("man hem stap by hemself")! Matthias said he didn't understand why the hermit had to go around shooting.

It was Bagabone's reply that Hariman found most intriguing. The Pidgin, as far as it can be rendered in translation ran as follows: "Our world's insistence on the virtue of chastity sometimes brings about an improvement in 'morale.' But often there are 'plug-ugly' " (Hariman could not be quite sure, afterwards whether this was a Pidgin word) "side effects. Triggermen, torpedoes, missiles!"

Then Hariman heard his own name mentioned by Rough Rachel: "Doctor Hariman hem say eye bulong picinini by hem good. Hem accident now!"

It was quite true, the young doctor thought to himself. *I did say the child's eye would be all right. And I did say it must have been an accident.*

He listened attentively as the old surgeon resumed: "Men must learn that McCluhan extensions are not confined to legs, ears, and eyes. . . ."

The speaker's Pidgin was so fluent that the Englishman was soon out of his depth. Matthias seemed to be asking more

about this "insistence on the virtue of chastity." Did Bagabone think that the insistence on the virtue of chastity in the Christian world was the reason that young people turned to the Orient for their religion? The cogency of the old surgeon's reply cannot be fully preserved in translation: "Christ didn't sit and contemplate his belly-button! He held his eyes and hands wide away from his private parts and embraced the Cosmos. He embraces it tenderly, but instead of following His example, men and women abuse themselves and each other and believe it's right. *They* embrace Chaos! They have become the ejaculatory generation, the generation of triggermen, missilemen—*insensitive* and with no sense of sacrifice."

As he listened, spellbound, Hariman heard Bagabone describing nuclear explosions as "the McCluhan collective orgasms" of "narcissists and erotomaniacs." He said they could not occur but for the perversions of millions of individuals. When Matthias and Benias objected that what Bagabone called "triggermen" sometimes used weapons in self-defense, or for the purpose of policing the world, the old man would have none of it. He insisted that it was "hot-blooded" sexual greed, or lust, which led to "cold-blooded mercenary greed," typified by hired assassins on both sides in Northern Ireland or by profit-making abortion clinics in England. The perverts, he claimed, rendered themselves so *insensitive* that they had no concept of what *death* really is.

In reply to an awed query from Matthias, Bagabone patiently explained that for the wicked, *death* was very different from the series of "recessions" the majority of mortals undergo. "If you try to remember the worst pain you ever had—toothache, for example, or a burn—that pain affected relatively few among the millions of your nerves. The Creator does not allow very much pain to those He loves, and He has shown that He loves His Creation. But He hates the muggers, the terrorists, the torturers, the sadists, and the abortionists. If they could become sensitive and experience for a split second what is in store for them for Eternity, they would instantly call a halt to their activities. But they think God is

dead and that all will die with them when they 'die.' They think the Father gave His son so that they could get away with unlimited sin. Have they ever seen a father defend his assaulted, violated child? A white-hot poker into every one of those millions of nerves, and *still with the consciousness of themselves—me Adolf*, a *person*, *me Amin*, a *person*, *me Meinhof*, a *person!* A-a-a-a-a-a-a-a—Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God!" Overhearing these snatches of conversation, Hariman had no reason to question Bagabone's sanity. In philosophy as in medicine and surgery, he acknowledged himself outclassed. What he had once ascribed to senility in the sick surgeon made good sense now: misunderstood, perhaps, in the first place because of his own limitations. It was all the more painful, after having tried every device he could think of to disclose his presence in the cubicle, to have to hear some of the Chief's comments on things that affected him personally. "The British were once. . . ."

But he did not catch the termination of this pronouncement and was left angrily curious. He resolved to find an opportunity to get the old man's views on Britain, preferably not in Pidgin. He was not to know that at the crucial moment, one of the midwives had pushed a thermometer into the speaker's mouth, an action typical of Kavalian humor. But when the instrument was removed, the topic had become localized. It was about a group of people at the Embassy Yacht Club in Suviara, and the wife-swapping that went on there. It was too near the bone. Hariman swished the curtain aside and strode out of the ward. Was it fancy, or was his exit followed by peals of laughter? He went to the dispensary.

He had just unlocked the door and entered when Rough Rachel came in. It was clear that she had followed him from the ward. She was gabbling away in Pidgin, and, as much from the expression on her face as from what she said, he gathered that she was apologizing for having offended him. They had been joking when they talked about Suviara. At this moment, Irene, who, it appeared, must have been in on the joke, also arrived at the dispensary.

He grinned, in spite of himself. Now she looked solemn and begged him to go in again and talk to the old man.

The Englishman did not comply immediately. He completed the job he was doing and went on his round of the clinic. When he finally got back to the ward-study, he found Bagabone reading and, at the same time, running his fingers over the stops of his beloved instrument. He looked well, but as he laid aside his medical journal, something about his eyes told Hariman that he was still suffering. He looked a little crestfallen.

"Please sit down, sir!" he said unexpectedly. "There's something I have to tell you. A kind of advance notice. We've got an emergency case coming in, and I've asked Camus to deal with it all on his own."

Hariman did not realize that Camus had come back from the bush. He could not help bristling. "Very well, sir! Would it be indiscreet to ask why?"

"I have my reasons. No reflection on you. I want you to rest up."

"Is the casualty male?"

"Female!" A mischievous look crossed the older man's features.

"Does Camus know about this yet?"

"Benias has told him. My sons are in the forest, bringing in the patient."

"Do we at least know what's the trouble?"

"Poisoning! With complications."

"Are we ready? Emetics? Antidotes?"

"I want you to keep right out of this one!" He saw the younger man's face fall, and his big hand reached out.

"It's *you* I'm concerned about, son. Just *you!*"

The voice was full of compassion. It soothed Hariman's ruffled sensibility. On his pipes, the old man played softly: "would a-wa-ken the dead; would a-wa-ken the dead."

Outside a bird called: "Di di da—ah! Di di da—ah!"

"OK.," said Hariman. "I'll do as you wish."

SEVENTEEN

Gillou brought Salome to The Ridge to replace the departed Brenda. Same children, same housegirl, same dog, same cat, same furniture, same crockery and cutlery—different woman! And why not? Suviara society, when it is flabbergasted, either turns away or accepts the outrageous without demur! And don't forget that if Gillou's wife hadn't left him, she would have been going out of the house *officially!* Don't forget that it was important to have a woman to look after the children until Madge Hariman came (if, in the new circumstances, she came at all!). By leaving Gillou, his wife had made things easier all around.

At first, Salome felt self-conscious, surrounded by a luxury she had always coveted but never known. It had happened so quickly, without the negotiation that would have been required by custom. It was no concern of Salome's that *he* was a married man. It was lucky that the *woman* had chosen the right moment to go off with another man. A doctor! And she had left a note, resigning claims to property. It was a short note, giving no assignment of the children. By custom, they would go to their uncle. *Maurice* would know how to transfer them to their *wantok*. She, Salome, had no intention of claiming them.

Throughout the first day, stony-faced expatriate men kept calling at The Ridge while *he* was out. They seemed surprised to see her, but none of them got angry or kicked her out. Temata would not even be able to evict her. *He* was

more powerful! Then, just after she had unpacked her things, two policemen came to the door, but they acknowledged her status. There was no trouble. They drove off. She decided not to mention these visits to *him*.

She ordered Betty to clear the dresses out of the main bedroom and pack them in cases. One or two she laid aside for an emergency. She would wear them if *he* was not about. After ordering Betty to play with the children in the swimming pool, she sorted out the trinkets and valuables. Obviously, the *woman* had not needed these things. Salome put them into her suitcase and locked them up. Just in case! She hid the suitcase under a curtain in a cupboard. Then she called Betty in to scrub out the wardrobe.

She was rather scared of the children. She wanted them to stay outside and asked Betty to ask the gardener to mind them. She spent the time indoors, opening drawers and cuboards. She was pleased. In a white, metal cupboard in the kitchen, she found some frozen prawns and ham. The fish were hard and hurt her teeth, so she ate the pig meat.

When she heard Gillou's car, she began to panic, but she was relieved to see that Betty had laid out dishes and plates. She ran and put on a pink dress he admired. He came in, looking bad-tempered and worried. He smiled, however, as if he still wanted her. That was important. By custom, the *man* could force her immediately. It was normal. With the *white man* it was best to play for time. From his clumsy love-making in the office, she feared he might get out of control. She feared his strength. Now that she had tried the house, she wanted to keep it! Until you tried anything, you could not be sure! You could *see* that the house was all right: fans, soft furniture, good food. But you couldn't *see* with a man. Men always hurt women in different ways. Some savaged, so that you didn't know what was happening, then grew as tender as a mother. Others tried desperately to get something from you they couldn't find; grew cruel, so that you had to escape. How could you know? What if he hurt her now, and she had to run?

She needn't have worried. Weighed down with problems, Gillou gave her a superficial kiss and went to the sideboard in search of a drink. She watched him closely. He was red, not white! Now that he didn't seem to want her, he seemed desirable. He gave her a glass of what he called "usual" and had whiskey himself. He sprawled in a chair, sipping. She tried to sip as he did. He paid no attention to her, opening letters and devouring their contents.

The drink tasted scenty but it warmed her inside and stirred up memories in her head. The other kind of house belonging to her father in the swamps of Nnangata. Ragged clothes out to dry! The pig-run; a big, pink pig, rearing up behind the black sow; she could hear grunts and snarls. It was suddenly very hot; she felt moist. She got up and went into the kitchen. She was glad to see that Betty had gone. There were two plates, stacked with different kinds of meat: pork, ham, beef, and chicken. There were tomatoes in slices, rings of green and red pepper, carrot and cabbage salads, cooked and uncooked onions, and potato chips. She carried one of the plates to *him* on the verandah. He looked amused. He took a roll from the side of the plate. He told her to ask Betty to bring him a knife and fork; by the time she had found Betty he had stuffed the meats into a sandwich and was eating greedily. Salome fetched the other plate and picked at the delicacies. She did not feel hungry. Only a kind of emptiness she could not explain.

She went over to *him* and positioned her hips as near to his head as she could get them. She fingered the grease on his hair. He reacted slowly, took off his glasses and stroked her thin leg under the pink mini dress. She liked this. But a bell rang in the house, and he stood up as if she were not there. She could hear him speaking in the hall.

"Gillou speaking . . . I told you . . . I'll ring you if I hear anything. . . . She won't come back here! She's got plenty of friends, and she knows her own . . . I don't think there's any reason to search. The note says she's gone. . . . Why did I report it? Well, legally, she's bound to leave here. We've

got an official arrangement. Yes, *official.* Oh, of course . . . she may be trying to pull my leg, sergeant. You'll understand why I don't want any publicity. . . . No, no connection at all. . . . She doesn't even know where he is . . . unless she's smarter than we thought. No, she can't have got very far. . . . Of course, I will. . . . You will? Thank you, sergeant! Good-bye."

He returned to his chair with a fresh tumbler of whiskey. He made no attempt to explain anything to Dimbi. She was still nibbling food. He resumed his letter-reading, but looked up unexpectedly and asked: "Hariman, hem i bugger off searchim man hem 'i sick. You fella tink tink hem 'i teikim Missis bulong me?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Me fella no savy no more!"

She again took up a position close to him. When he did not react, she reached out and pinched him hard on his right ear. He yelped and knocked over his tumbler. Scowling, he rubbed his ear and mopped the whiskey off his shorts. He grinned ruefully. She had taken his mind off his problems. But he was uneasy. A woman had hurt him physically! The real pain was in his chest and his viscera, spreading like a venom. He had underestimated this creature with the eyes of a mantis. Over her dark face, split-second smiles flitted like the twitching of a moth's wings. There was something insect about her. Rhinocerous beetle? Pincer—armor—crablike—vicious. He got up to go. He embraced her and felt wet flesh against his own, like clay. It felt uncooperative; her perfume was bitter. She stiffened like a cat, and he remembered her claws. He let her go, mumbling a farewell. His libido ached numbly.

She heard him say something to the housegirl in the kitchen, something about the children, but she was jealous and said to herself: "Housegirl, hem mas go away so me takem one fella boy." ("The housegirl must be replaced by a man.") She stood at the window and listened to him in the distance making jokes with the children but did not attempt to go after him. She drummed on the surface of a table with

her thin fingers. What was he doing now? She heard the sound of a starter motor and the clumsy revving of an engine, the skid of tires and the swish of wheels on the gravel. She laughed and carried on with her inventory.

EIGHTEEN

The Embassy Yacht Club enjoys a privileged position on the stretch of north-facing coast in the center of Santabala Island. When not directly overhead, the sun slants in from the sea slightly, giving a special blue to the water. Along the shore, heap after heap of broken coral in the ferocious sun, gives the illusion of golden sand. There is a wide, semi-circular bay, fringed with coconut trees. The headland, called Parrot Point, is overgrown with luxurious green foliage. Occasional steamer at the point! One or two yachts dreaming near the Club. Reef in the distance, white against deep cobalt tinted with cerulean. Steamy Paradise under a burning-glass of sky.

The human body swelters and frizzles in the humid heat. The skin is attacked by sandflies, mosquitoes, and fungus. Hordes of insects hostile to man thrive in the dried-up coral; right and left is a Disneyland of underwater coral teeming with beautiful fish and creatures hostile to man. To the west from here lie the villas of expatriates, shaded by trees, each with its coral beach; further along, copra plantations, making the sea inaccessible because of barbed wire fences, except where Talisman villages have their foreshore of volcanic sand, grey sludge, and black rocks. The beaches at the river mouths form custom toilets; stagnant swamps, smelly and infested with mosquitoes; roaring torrents when deluges of rain flush them out. Such downpours occur all the year round, often at night. The air becomes water even in Suviara, where rainfall is only one quarter of the island's average.

Privileged position of the Yacht Club! Privileged position *at* the Yacht Club. What does it amount to? The question begins to frame itself in the minds of most expatriates after they have been here for a few months. They can play tennis in an oven or golf on the brown; they can swim and snorkel at their peril, play bowls, fish, sail, or travel by boat to other islands. Why do all these turn sour in the humid heat? The answer is to be found in any good book on human physiology. The human skin is an organ, not merely a wrapper.

With mixed feelings about the possibility of seeing Gillou, Mrs. Hariman brought her daughter to the Club at four-thirty in the afternoon. At Gillou's request, the "arrangement" had been suspended; he had requested her not to go to The Ridge at all for the time being, and on the phone, when he rang to say that Brenda had left him, had been even more adamant. So mother and daughter sat at a table by the water's edge. When the waiter came, Mrs. Hariman did not order tea. For herself, double scotch with ice. For her daughter, a bushlime! Everybody in Suviara was talking about Brenda Gillou's disappearance. Deirdre spoke in a whisper: "Do you think she might have gone looking for daddy?"

Mrs. Hariman stared at the child and repressed a shudder. She made the philosophy "just *live*" difficult to implement. That age-old, timeless expression! That look she inherited from Wingfield! The incongruous mixture of perspicacity and naiveté irritated the mother. She swallowed her "not-too-watered-down" spirit and averted her eyes. She looked at the ocean, far away, where nothing mattered. Like him, like his daugher, it was deep! She herself was shallow. She couldn't help it. Deirdre was too deep. Thousands of fathoms beyond her own reach.

"The sooner I get Tracey and Tina, and *she* gets back to school, the better," a voice in her mind whispered.

How she resented the prodigy sitting there in a basket chair, especially those kittenish blue eyes! The child never commented on her mother's conduct, but there was something

expressive in those eyes; a kind of permanent dumb insolence. She just went on sucking that bushlime, looking up and mocking her mother! She knew all the facts of life; you never knew what experiences she might have had with men. She seemed to be on the other side of good and evil.

Deirdre had not even protested when she was put in the picture about the proposed changeover. But she had stopped addressing her mother as "mummy." That was typical of her kind of insolence. Her continued use of "daddy" was all part of it—it must show either her lack of tact or deliberate mischievousness, the mother decided. And she had no reason—less reason than she had herself, if it came to that—to resent Maurice. Hadn't he guaranteed to be her financial backer as well as guardian? Wouldn't she be much better off, both at boarding school and here in the Talismans?

Mrs. Hariman remembered how much Deirdre had liked Maurice when she first met him. Hadn't she herself been jealous of the teenager's success with the prosperous man-of-the-world? The swappings had been so light-hearted at first, she'd often wondered whether the cagey creature might be in on it. There must be an explanation of her coolness on her present vacation. What had Maurcie *done* to her? But the irksome thought still persisted: *Am I a fool to try to make things regular? She may be right about him, and it's me that's made the mistake!*

She sat brooding, trying to convince herself that Brenda Gillou had deserved all she got. Edgar Tate, the administrative officer, came and squatted on the coral, "at the feet of the goddess," as he put it. Martin Tate, looking stupid but cheerful, invited Deirdre to go for a swim.

"Come on, Didders! Let's go out on the reef!"

As soon as they had gone, Tate spoke in an earnest voice.

"I've only just heard about the Moke being found."

"What Moke?" Mrs. Hariman queried, alarmed by his tone.

"Haven't you heard? Brenda Gillou's Moke's been found."

"I only knew she'd gone off in it. Hasn't *she* been found!"

"No. That's just it! You know the gardener who tried to stop her at the gate said she had a can on the passenger seat. We thought it was for spare petrol. It was fly-spray! Bel-elzi Tox!"

Mrs. Hariman's sallow features had turned very white. "What do you mean?"

"Just a minute, old girl," he muttered. "Let me get you another. I need one myself."

He hurried into the bar, leaving her in suspense. At that moment, the deputy governor, Clynch, resolved to grace the table with his presence. In shorts and white stockings, he was a mature Lord Fauntleroy. He sat in Deirdre's chair and announced: "I hear there are complications, Mrs. Hariman."

She did not reply. He continued, unperturbed: "It's strange that Hariman's not been traced. And now Mrs. Gillou. Just got to be together! Prearranged! But how have they got out of the country? Couldn't still be on Santabala!"

He hadn't heard! The whole of Suviara was buzzing with the story of the ditched Moke, and the deputy governor hadn't heard. "Mrs. Gillou's car has been found, Mr. Clynch!"

"What? Has it? Where?"

Edgar Tate set a tumbler of iced whiskey down before Mrs. Hariman and politely inquired what the deputy governor would like to drink. "It's all right, old man. Look, am I barging in? Thanks very much then, scotch on the rocks'll be fine. The waiter'll be round in a moment."

The waiter did in fact appear and Tate ordered, "Scotch for the deputy governor, iced!" expressing it that way.

"Mrs. Hariman tells me Mrs. Gillou's car has been found."

"Yes, the car, but not the Valoquin. The housegirl says she took a whole bottle with her; about a hundred tablets."

Clynch gave a knowing smile. "She must have known she wouldn't get to the pharmacy for some time, eh?"

Tate considered this statement and pronounced dramati-

cally: "They say if you take twenty, it's enough to kill you."

At last Brenda Gillou's friend found her voice. "Where was the car found?"

"On the other side of the Betsi Bridge," Tate replied. "There's a track goes off to the left. You can only drive about four hundred yards along it and that's as far as she'd got."

"I know the place," said Clynch. "Ends up in a forest track!"

"The Talanesians found the Moke. You know the gardener'd tried to stop her at the gate of The Ridge. She was in a bit of a state! He saw a gallon can on the front seat. We all thought she was going to get extra petrol and go out to Kandel Bay, but it was Bel-elzi Tox."

"Did she take any camping kit with her?" Clynch asked, determined to be cheerful.

"For goodness sake, Mr. Clynch," Mrs. Hariman burst out. "You heard where the car was found!"

The waiter placed a whiskey before the deputy governor, and Tate paid with money he had at the ready. Meanwhile he went on. "The car was found upended in a ditch. The cap was off the can, *and*" (with the strongest possible stress) "*and* she'd the Valoquin tablets too. They've not been found. The search is still going on."

"It might all be a cover-up," Clynch suggested. "She may have joined—er—Mrs. Hariman . . . er . . . Mrs. Hariman's ex!"

"Excuse me," Mrs. Hariman exclaimed, rising, "I'm going inside. I'm getting bitten by mosquitoes. Bring my glass in, will you, Edgar." She took a few paces towards the Club lounge, turned and remarked tartly: "I'll leave you to the mosquitoes, Mr. Clynch."

The two men had risen simultaneously, not out of courtesy to the lady, but to look towards the sea. Round the corner of the betel-nut tree, unusual shouts were echoing from the reef. "Hey! Hey! Was way you lukem any girl?"

Panic cries came from native huts along the beach. The expatriates decided it must be a "locals" fight. Clynch sat

down again. The cries continued: "Me lukem two fella. *Sark! Sark! Sark!*"

Tate had started to carry the tumblers into the lounge but the Pidgin for "shark" penetrated his consciousness. He wheeled round. Mrs. Hariman had also stopped in her tracks and turned. The pair of them stood like statues of frozen horror. Amid a babble of alarmed yells, two fishermen came round the tree, carrying something. "They've caught a big shark," they all tried to kid themselves.

It was not a fish they dumped in the coral where Tate had sat at Mrs. Hariman's feet. The body was that of a boy. It was a ghastly-white Martin Tate, with blood gushing from gashes on torn arms and legs. His bathing trunks were ripped apart, his buttocks lacerated, sinews exposed in the lower limbs. His head had fallen sideways. He couldn't possibly be alive! The Talanesians crowded round the mangled body, so that the frantic father couldn't get near.

"Get the doctor," he screamed at Mrs. Hariman. She stood as if rooted to the spot.

"Where's Deirdre?" was all she said.

Fortunately Skit, the senior doctor from Arimathea Hospital, had butted his way through the crowd as Clynch was pushing them back. Tate began to punch them back savagely. They ran off towards the water. The Club manager arrived with a first-aid box, and Skit applied bandages and a tourniquet. An ambulance was already blaring its siren in the yard. They carried the boy without a stretcher.

Mrs. Hariman had run down to the water's edge. She ran with the locals into the shallow water over coral and uneven rock, almost overbalancing in her heeled shoes. She stood still, petrified, waves wetting her dress, almost knocking her over. The shouts continued unabated. There were now hundreds of islanders in the shallow water and along the shore, staring fascinated out to sea. Further out there were dinghies and canoes paddling round; a motor launch steered round and round in circles while three or four great, black fins cut, like sails, nonchalantly across the surface of the bay.

Like menacing black sails they skimmed past the boats. The shouts died into a hush as they neared the frail canoes and paddles were held aloft.

Long before they told her, Mrs. Hariman knew what it was all about! It was *her* daughter, Deirdre, they were looking for. *Her* daughter, Deirdre! *And it was just!* It was *right* that it should be so! She, Margery Hariman, must not allow herself to *feel* anything. Then, she *would* not feel anything. Close her ears to the shouts. Prevent the smell of the sea getting into her nostrils. It was a *missing girl* they were gabbling about, nothing to do with *Margery Hariman.* The warm water was licking round her groin like an animal; there were black animals all around watching *her.* She was watching black fins, jerking away from a boat. Why were the people watching *her? She* had to watch, *had* to watch. But thought must not formulate. Suppress them. Stem them. Sharks swimming round in an aquarium. Nothing to do with *her* or Deirdre. Deirdre's gone *home.* Change the *thought* if you can't arrest the flow!

The men from the Club are holding me up. Deirdre went snorkeling with Martin Tate. He got hurt, but Deirdre's gone home. My legs are in the sea. The men keep tugging me to go inside. I could fall over and lose consciousness in the water—drown myself. But I couldn't stay under the water long enough. They're tugging me to the coral. The sharks are still circling. Cheeky things! There's a man with a spear and another with a gun. Would they dare? . . . Why don't they? . . . I'm being incontinent. Wingfield would give me something. I'm retching, r-r-retching. The men from the Club are hauling me away. I'm being incontinent again. I'm vomiting now on to the coral. They're trying to tug me past our table. Police! Army! Why did Deirdre leave her towel? All right then, I will go inside. Just a minute! When she went home, why did she leave her towel? That's Deirdre's bushlime! She hasn't drunk much. Ugh! I'm altogether incontinent. It's thought that does it. Why do they all stare like that? They say they'll give her something. That's me

they mean. I will go inside now. Shut me in a room, please, in the toilet. No! Don't leave me alone. Give me something! Give me something!

It was in a room in the manager's flat that they gave her something. She was still babbling incoherently when the doctor gave her the shot: "I'm the only one who knows, Maurice. They don't know that I deserve it—the surgery, I mean. It *had* to be amputated. No right to *have* it in the first place. I didn't know any surgeon could do it, Maurice. Clean! So clean! Just cut right away in seconds. It's *just*. It's *right*, I admit that. The surgeons cut themselves—Wingfield, I mean. He'll have to be told, of course. The men said . . . the men said . . . If they caught the shark they'd *cut* . . . Ugh!" (She began retching violently again.) "Open . . . open! Thank goodness she's gone back to school."

Deirdre Hariman had disappeared without a trace. Both sharks made off nonchalantly through a breach in the net, then through a gap in the reef. The police and the army went on looking for them late into the evening with harpoons and rifles. What did they hope to do? Find evidence? Get revenge for the inhuman apotheosis of a human being? They could only add to the horror. That same day, Martin Tate's leg was amputated. He would not be going back to school after Christmas. Neither would Deirdre Hariman.

NINETEEN

Few things can bring home a man's isolation more than the discovery that catastrophes happen to beings intimately connected without his even knowing it. When Gillou decided not to go to the Yacht Club, but to close his doors at The Ridge, fate dealt with him like the opponent at chess who leaves the threatened queen untaken and moves a harmless pawn. But Gillou did not see life as a game against a powerful opponent. He was used to winning without effort.

Not that his life had not had its hard side. The pathos of the painful portion had its roots in his birth; it could not be better symbolized than by one of his most treasured possessions, a memento of the talented English father he had never known. It was a cuff link, given to him by his mother, Annette Gillou, to play with, with an ironical injunction to preserve it. For Maurice, from the age of five, the quality of its silver, the maroon and green enamel, and, above all, the design, epitomized the gentility of that unknown parent. It represented a serpent, twining round a rod; symbol of the medical profession, for Gillou's half-French father had qualified as a doctor at Leeds University in 1944, passing with distinction at his first attempt. To get on to the register he ought have completed a year's probation. Instead he joined the forces and got himself sent to Montpellier in France. There he sowed wild oats too long in abeyance.

From places as widely separated as Madagascar and Indo-China, Annette received regular letters and sums of money to enable the son to be educated. Maurice was an intelligent child; the money enabled him to go to Lycée and the Sorbonne. In 1970 he took an M.A. in history at Cambridge.

Meanwhile, in Montpellier, where she owned an hotel, Annette prospered.

Gillou was not thinking of his parents. On arriving at The Ridge at about half past four, he removed the telephone receiver, dismissed the housegirl with the two children in her sole care, locked himself in. Himself and Salome. He knew nothing of the events in Suviara. He did not want to know. Betty had been ordered to prepare a cold buffet: chicken, ham, roast beef, and salads; fruits, flans, and ice cream to follow.

Maurice and Salome sat on the sofa together, under the fans, nibbling and drinking cocktails. He made genuine efforts to understand her Pidgin and made her laugh by crude accounts in his own version of Pidgin, of booze-ups by ministers out on Whale Beach. He told her about his career and his initial posting to the New Hebrides. Salome began to feel quite at home with the *man*. She enjoyed the hors d'oeuvres and waited for the entrée. The meat dishes crowned the repast. Sweets, ice creams, chocolates, and liqueurs in abundance. Gillou made coffee himself, and they went on sipping and nibbling long after the dessert. Then he showed her a game called "Get Me Out." He won every game, but not easily, and winning seemed to put him into a good mood. They played, on and off, for about an hour. Then, abruptly, he snapped the cards together and put them away into the box.

"Let's get to bed," he proposed.

Neither of them bothered to wash, shower, or clean their teeth. They went into the bedroom, where Salome pulled off her dress as though about to dive into a river. Maurice undressed more slowly, and by the time he had folded his shorts, she was under the thin sheet. He climbed in beside her and took her in his arms. Her flesh confirmed the sensations of his earlier reconnaissances, moist, cold, clay —repellent. But his heart beat furiously. It was a moment he had long anticipated. The lust was inside *him*. The deadness and the darkness of her stirred him to madness. He ran

ahead of his own sensations and scarcely knew what he was doing.

For her part, she was swooning with fear. She knew he was out of control and would get worse. He was not hurting her, but she had not had time to get ready. He constrained her and made her feel afraid. She turned her mouth away from his hot breath, his ravenous lips. She was afraid he would bite her. He tormented her long neck with voluptuous kisses, digging stubby fingers into the clay of her back. She felt the first pain shatter her, as he thrust into her. Her fingers acted defensively to protect the sensitive region. He mistook the gesture for encouragement and groaned aloud in the ecstasy of his sensations. His hold on her now was a vise, and she cried out in pain. He again thought it was acknowledgment of the pleasure he was giving her; his hands rubbed up and down her limbs. She quivered in an anguish that was turning to bliss, but suddenly he gave her pain in her breast and shoulders, which he was torturing, and in her shins, as she convulsed. There was pain where she was attempting to stop him, pain where she was not ready. The weight of him bore on her like a sack of lead. She was flattened into the mattress. He was pinning her wrists and knees. Whenever he let go, she would twist to avoid him. He was cruel and clumsy. She heard herself shriek: "Stop hem! You fella, stop hem!"

The cry penetrated the frenzy of his gratified libido. He relaxed his hold and shifted his weight, but when she tried to slip away, he restrained her, groaning, "Darling, Darling," in a thick, inhuman voice. It was better for her now. She lay panting. Everything began to float in a sea of redness, of readiness. The crushed little body no longer belonged to her. It was all *him*, throbbing and pulsing rhythmically. She was working with him, dancing, her hips writhing away into nothingness, mastering as they had been mastered. Then he would stop for a moment. They would both float away. She could hear his agonies; he was shouting in Pidgin: "You fella lovely! You fella lovely!"

Now it was *she*, working on the muscles of his back, using her nails. His fingers scratched her own back, searing her; she did not mind now; they were in a state of suspension; whirling and floating, their hearts hammering in unison; nothing mattered; nothing, nothing, nothing! The sensations must go on; clay and flesh, flesh and clay, *one;* it must never stop; gripping, squeezing, crushing, biting; biting gently with moans and groans of "sa-tis-fac-tion."

"Oh! Oh! Aaah! Aaah!" The cries came from both. Keep still now! Keep still! Swing up! Up! Bliss! Bliss! Suspended, suspended! Their hearts were sledgehammers; their breathing, gasps. It was unbearable, unbearable.

Salome's child-image of the porker drifted across her consciousness. The pink porker! The black sow. Her limbs thrashed and writhed, still without mastering him. For a moment, another body, heavier, less agile, tried to possess him, disturbing. Brenda! But he hurled the torso aside and resumed his attack. He kissed the black breasts, drooling saliva over them, stroking her thighs desperately from beneath. She was fully open now, guiding him, pulling him, demanding, insisting. "Come," she pleaded. "Come!" He vibrated, gasping as he caught her fragrances; she threw them at him; a great potency assailed him, anesthetizing: fading, fading, fainting; death in preorgasm, dying, dying of pleasure. She lay still, submissive, jerking with him in the quick of her, swooning, swooning.

"You, pink fella, come!" she shrieked at the porker. And he obeyed. In a great surge, he went; she could feel the invasion into her oblivion; delicious death as an ocean burst over her, flooding her with wave upon wave of gratification. He was laughing now. She was laughing.

"It was beautiful!" he giggled.

"Oooooooooooooooooooooh!" she sighed.

Two or three more sighs. Then he pulled the pillow from his side of the bed, put it under her head, and eased his weight on her by bending his knees. She lay back, her eyes glowing in the faint light, abandoned, non-existent. They

lay for several minutes before he withdrew and lay on his side.

"Darling, darling!" he whispered..

"Pig fella darling!" she replied.

They fell into a deep sleep, exhausted. But they woke again, and the act of "love" was repeated! The peaks were less breath-taking, the storms less violent, but everything ended in "sa-tis-fac-tion!"

There was no embarrassment for the honeymooners at breakfast. Betty had got the children well out of the way and had prepared an English breakfast. The couple ate with gusto. Salome revelled in the "no-need-to-go-to-work" feeling, the food, and the triumph of her union with a man. She felt certain she would produce a child, something intuitively she had always thought to be impossible. She had never known the "periods" women talked about, and though, in sporadic, jellyfish yieldings, she had been a doormat to many men, there had never been any question of pregnancy.

Gillou felt so much on top of the world that he dismissed all nagging doubts about the telephone, still off the hook. He was doing what he had always believed to be right; living from moment to moment, without introspection. The cat rubbed affectionately against Salome's legs. A little more reluctantly, perhaps, the dog accepted the food she gave it. Life was like that. The cat, the dog, the maid! Easy enough to find a new gardener! And the Suviara community would accept like the inmates of The Ridge. It was *right*. Life and its follies were for enjoyment. Life was spelt with a capital L!

Over breakfast, the permanent secretary tried to tell the retired lower-case "secretary" in Pidgin about his boyhood; the congenial life in Montpellier at the expense of a gullible, absent father. He said he was going to write to his mother, tell her about his rupture with the other woman and his rapture with the new one. He took Salome's hand.

"I'll tell mother bulong me long wedding night!" he said.

He got up, went to a drawer, and took out a little box. Her eyes lit up. She thought he was going to give her a present. But he snapped the box open without giving it to her and shook something out on to the table mat. It was a single, expensive, cuff link, individually worked in Limoges enamel. She stared at the rod and snake design, disappointed.

"Me no like em because hem jewel, bulong man."

Her dissatisfaction was apparent. Realizing his mistake, he rushed back to the drawer, pretending he had confused the boxes. He took out another package and gave it to her ostentatiously and solicitiously. The dark, thin, fingers, pink on the inside, ripped at the cellophane wrapping. He was explaining how the cuff link had belonged to his father, a doctor of medicine who had joined the Foreign Legion and had been separated from his mother for many years.

Salome was not listening. "Sam ting i smell." Pleased with her perfume, she dabbed some behind her ears and turned to kiss him. But they both looked up, startled by a noise from outside: "Doh doh tee—eeh! Lah lah so—ol! Doh doh tee—eeh; Lah lah—so—ol!"

There were heavy footsteps in the hall and the sound of voices. The door burst open and a group of Talisman Islanders burst into the room. The lovers stared up like frightened children. Gillou stuffed the cuff link into the pocket of his shorts. Dimbi tried to hide her scent. But Rough Rachel's eyes were looking down at the package. An ironical smile played about her lips. She looked like a policewoman about to make an arrest. Amazon Anne stood beside her, also noting the domestic scene with interest. It was Randolph Fox who spoke: "Your deliverers, Mister Gillou. Your deliverers, Tumpa Dimbi." At the title "Tumpa," Salome had turned yellow white under her blackness. In Soroan, it was an ironical "Miss," implying violation of convention, or custom. But stealing a sideways glance at Gillou, Salome stared back insolently at the intruders. "You no can takem me," she protested.

Rough Rachel and Amazon Anne moved forward. Anne took Dimbi's right hand as if to shake it.

"You go long papa bulong you," Anne announced.

Instead of shaking Dimbi's hand, the midwife raised it behind its owner's back up to the shoulder. She stood up, grimacing. Gillou made no move to help her, so she tried to escape by spinning round. She found her other arm pivoted at the elbow over Rachel's strong right arm. She began to whine. "Ow—aaaah! Ow—aaaah!" Rachel intensified the pressure on the reluctant fulcrum. Dimbi now rose as high as she could on her toes. The persuasive techniques employed by the midwives had convinced her of the need for stoicism. So she hissed, instead of howling. Gillou's red face had blanched, but he tried similar tactics to Salome's.

"Where now you fella tink takem me fella?" he demanded.

"You fella tink tink where now by you fella takem me go!" Fox corrected him. Gillou banged his fist down on to the table. He was surprised to find that it would not come up again. Another hand, bigger than his own, was flattening it into the top of the table. Benias gradually increased the pressure. Matthias pulled Gillou's collar tight round his neck. "You go long one fella funeral," he growled.

From the corridor, Betty watched, smiling. She had received advance warning from Kavali that her assistance would be required. She also knew that "missus" had been brought there, because she was seriously ill. But she could not help laughing at Gillou. He looked so funny with his leg tied to that of her *Wantok*, and so did the crocodile missus as she was bundled into a van, on the way back to her father in Soroa.

Listening to the muffled sound of the starter motors and the subdued revving of separate engines, Betty continued to smile. The vehicles glided away primly, like a funeral cortege. The tires made hardly any sound on the coral of The Ridge drive. At last, now, Tracey and Tina would be free to come into the lounge to play with their toys.

TWENTY

In the rare moments that he was not on duty, Hariman made a number of attempts to find out where the clinic was in relationship to Suviara. He had little desire to go back to the capital. He felt much more fulfilled and happy than at Arimathea Hospital. But Christmas was at hand; he longed to see Deirdre and, yes, he had to admit it to himself, Brenda. At Kavali, apart from Camus and the sick chief, there was no one he could talk to in English. The swarthy bush doctor was mostly away on his rounds, so conversation with him was not possible. He intended to avail himself of the first opportunity to pump Camus. He had already discovered that Camus spoke English better even than he did French—his Frenchness was part of a pose.

From Laurah, Hariman gleaned a few more facts about Bagabone and Camus. They had been traditional enemies for more than twenty years. Each knew of the valuable work done by the other, yet Bagabone referred to his colleague as "Witch Doctor" and Camus called the old man "The Ripper." The origins of the quarrel were rooted in the past, but there were good reasons why the animosity persisted. Camus was very fond of Irene, and "Papa" was a little jealous. The two doctors never met in a social atmosphere; always in trying or even exasperating circumstances.

In December, Bagabone's study began to fill up with strange objects: model boats, carved ebony heads with grinning pearl teeth, fishing rods, carved spears and walking

sticks, goblets, pictures of huts and trees; all the bric-a-brac the islanders had given to try to express their gratitude to a sick friend at Christmas. If it had been gold, frankincense, and myrrh, it could not have been more courteously accepted as Laurah and Irene brought it in. The old man insisted on seeing the people who brought the gifts, examining each object with interest, but afterwards he lay back exhausted. His leg had stopped its restless movements. He lay back with his head propped on his pillow, eyes closed, medical journals fallen to the ground. He listened to the voices of the forest; the chirping of birds and insects, the crackle of dry leaves in the breeze.

Late in the afternoon the patient gave a rasping cough, partly to clear his bronchial tubes, but partly to test how interested the nurses would be in the performance. Voices could be heard from time to time in competition with the familiar background noises. Nobody took any notice of one extra sound. The nurses were busy covering up some of the larger Christmas presents to prevent them from getting wet if the rain came.

Bagabone had heard them mentioning the "intake," the "female poisoning" he had been expecting. He was angry because her arrival had not been reported to him, and even more so when he overheard talk of Dr. Camus's unsuccessful gastric wash. He sat up, spat venomously into his sputum mug, and lowered his legs over the side of the bed. Keeping both hands flat on the table, he steadied himself and stood as if deep in prayer. In fact he was saying a prayer of St. Ignatius, which ran: "Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me. To Thee, O Lord, I return it. All is Thine. Dispose of it wholly according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and Thy grace, for this is sufficient unto me."

Then, borne by an unseen power, he strode to a curtain on the wall and took his dressing gown from behind it. He put it on and, without bending, managed to get his feet into

slippers. The tall, majestic spectre walked past Hariman's cubicle, past the piles of presents, without risking a side glance, out into the corridors he knew so well. He opened the door to the theatre as he had done hundreds of times. Nobody in there! He closed it and went into the ante-room. It, too, was deserted. He refastened the door, went down a small, narrow, side corridor, and found his way to a small door marked "OUT QUICK TAIM." He slipped through it and closed it softly behind him.

The mortuary was a big one. He could stand in the shadows, away from the candles, without being seen. Near the main entrance he saw a woman lying on a trolley with her face uncovered, a Tussaud waxwork; yellow white face and ginger hair; stillborn adult, bloated, patchy, and smeared. The features were scratched and lined. There was a septic blotch on the forehead. She was a shell, not a human being. Hariman entered through the main door and instantly seized the wrist of the corpse.

"Who now keepim this fella woman?" he demanded peremptorily.

Irene's voice replied, "Hem patient bulong Dr. Camus."

"Was where Dr. Camus now hem tellim for take em come long here?"

The nurse's call to somebody along the corridor, asking whether Camus had ordered the patient to be brought there, was cut short by Hariman's urgent: "Get Camus! This patient's not dead."

"Go tellim Camus hem mas come quick taim because woman hem no die go finish." Irene's voice echoed along the corridor. The tail end of her appeal was drowned in a babble of voices.

Framed in the main doorway of the mortuary, with dark custodians on each side of him, stood Maurice Gillou. At first he did not recognize the motionless figure on the trolley. Then, suddenly, in horror, he cried out: "*Non!*"—and repeated several times more softly, "*Non, non, non!*"

Hariman glowered at Gillou, thunderstruck. Up to that moment, professional detachment had hoodwinked him. He had not identified the patient. As the flash of insight ran to earth, a rasping wheeze came from the mouth of the casualty. The jaw had gaped wide open, but Gillou had neither heard, nor seen. He had turned and fled, his escorts making no attempt to follow. Hariman had placed his hand under the neck of the suffocating woman and was trying to clear the obstruction. The rattle and the convulsions intensified. Irene took over the head so that he could use both hands on the swollen throat.

Nobody noticed Bagabone's approach. He had glanced at the chart at the bottom of the trolley and cried out tersely: "Tracheotomy! Hariman. Benias!"

"Theatre?" gasped Benias.

"No more!"

They moved into action. The huge surgeon began the operation. It was as simple as a thrust with the carving-knife, and it saved Brenda Gillou's life. One thrust into the front of the neck and the insertion of a small tube! Only the field surgeon knew the history of that tracheostomy tube in his dressing-gown pocket, the drama of his prognosis, and the dispensation that had allowed him to make it.

Hariman and the nurses remained there, watchful; but refusing all offers of support, the old man tottered back to bed. The tracheotomy patient, transferred to an intensive care ward, was soon breathing steadily. Her heartbeats returned to normal. Hariman found it impossible to tear himself away. He knew he ought to search for Gillou. He did not do so. He consoled himself with the thought that Benias and Matthias were the best custodians, and at last went back to the ward—to attend to his duties and his most important patient.

TWENTY-ONE

Meanwhile, when Gillou rushed out from the mortuary, he opened the door opposite, into a corridor leading to an annex to the dispensary. In the gloom, he fell on his knees, without noticing that there was a plump man in a cassock standing by the wicker hatch. The bush doctor, waiting for the results of an analysis of the vomit from his patient's stomach, could not get any service. The evidence had pointed to Valoquin poisoning; there was the half-empty bottle, then the way she had fallen indicated impairment of her vision. In clearing her via the food passage, what was it that had gone wrong?

At the outset of the pumping, the doctor's condition was very bad. He had long suffered from a heart condition, manifest in little yellow streaks in the corners of his eyes and his puffy cheeks. He was utterly enervated by his latest tour in the humid heat of the forest. At short notice, Bagabone had ordered him to take charge of the emergency, stressing that the full responsibility was to be his.

Camus's only assistant was a young nurse called Mild Mildred, untrained, inexperienced, and terrified by the sight of a white woman with ginger hair. She became a liability herself. The clinic seemed deserted. Camus was left to his own devices at a time when he felt sick and incompetent. He had been warned that a shock might be fatal to his life, and that morning he had sustained a shock, in itself trivial enough, but sufficient to throw him off balance just when he

needed to be at his best. Half an hour before Camus was summoned to the Chief, Benias, returning from a trip to Suviara had excused himself and handed to Camus an object he had found on the floor of the boat; he said he guessed it must belong to Dr. Camus because it had an inscription in French on the back, "*Travail à main, Andre Zede, Limoges.*" It was a cuff link, finely wrought in silver and enamel, with a snake twining round a rod as its emblem.

Camus might have put it away without a second thought, but he was puzzled. How did the link come to be on the floor of Benias's boat? True, he was sometimes a passenger himself, but the link he had kept in a trinket box ever since he had lost its fellow in his student days in France. The box was locked in his desk! He tried to get Benias back to his hut with him, but the outrider was summoned to Reception. To his astonishment, once inside the hut, the bush doctor discovered that he had a pair of cuff links; the identical pair!

His color changed dramatically. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. He rushed after Benias with all sorts of questions to ask, but at that precise moment, Mild Mildred called him to the Chief. It was not until long after, when he was waiting in the annex, that he had the opportunity to think about the links again, take them out of his pocket, and examine them.

This case-hardened medical man was so upset that he felt incapable of carrying out his duties. He sent Mild Mildred to look for help; this at least would get her out of the way. But during her absence, try as he would, he failed to bring about any improvement in his patient's condition. He had done the wash efficiently, that he knew, yet the heartbeats and the respiration were deteriorating all the time. Returning with Anne and Rachel, Mildred found the doctor at his wits' end and very ill himself. The woman patient's heart had several times threatened to stop beating.

The midwives tried resuscitation techniques in a bid to save her life and his reputation, but soon decided it was of no avail. Camus rushed in search of Hariman, only to find he

had gone out for a walk. By now, he was all in. Should he call Bagabone? The idea was unthinkable. The patient would be dead by now. In fact, meeting him on the way back, the midwives told him they had transferred the corpse to the mortuary. Dejectedly, the suffering bush doctor went into the annex to see whether the analysis would throw any light on his failure. His hand, in the pocket of his overalls, closed on the objects that had caused him so much distress.

Now, as he rapped on the closed hatch with his knuckles, a dozen hypotheses computerized in his mind; yet each time he had to clear the memory button. Nothing added up. Those cuff links had not been a pair since 1947. Over and over again he had been on the point of giving away the one, useless object, yet, along with gold fountain-pen nibs, collar stiffeners, torch bulbs, screws, and paper clips, it had survived, recalling, once in a while, the oak beams of Montpellier, tarnished memories of a duvet eiderdown; Annette in a pink nightie, guileless as a kitten, subtle as a serpent.

He knew exactly which of the links was his—in fact they were both his—rather, he could distinguish the newcomer. Made by hand by André Zede—it was in better condition, not tarnished. How was it possible?

The weary burden of the doctor's unhappy private life crushed down on him like the cross before Calvary. Pretty, dumb Annette, who had claimed his body as a right; after all these years his heart hammered at the thought of her. It was she, in fact, who had appointed him to this never-ending task of healing the sick. What a penalty they had paid for those guilty hours of bliss! Why hadn't it been possible to acknowledge the child, to see and to love the child she had borne. A great longing to see his son filled the doctor's heart.

"*Pere, aie pitié de nous, aie pitié de nous!*"

Camus heard a voice behind him. He wheeled round and saw a young man grovelling on his knees and praying aloud: "Father, have pity on me! Have pity on her! Have pity on us!" The cry was piteous, heartrending. The cuff

links fell from Camus's shaking hands to the ground like falling tears. Had Gillou's eyes been open, he would have seen them. But they were closed to shut out the nightmare he had witnessed in the mortuary. At length, when he did open them, it was to look up and see a man he took to be a priest, clutching his side and sighing: "*Mon fils, mon pauvre fils, pardonnez moi!*"

Camus, alias Dr. Tony Williams, had put one and one together. He had recognized his own likeness. But Gillou was at a disadvantage. He could not understand why the ecclesiast should be crying to him for pardon. He lowered his eyes, and they fell on the cuff links, with their distinctive pattern, symbolic of healing. He caught his breath and grew silent. In his mind he saw the piece of paper on which his mother had written: "*Trouve le jumeau; tu aura donc ton père!*" The priest was no longer holding his side. His arms were outstretched. He was begging the supplicant to stand up. Gillou rose, picking up the cuff links as he did so. He put one into his own left hand and gave the other to the man standing before him. He had realized that this must be his father. The two men looked at each other; then they embraced. For a long time, neither spoke. It was the bush doctor, in the end, who broke the silence. His voice gave no hint of the dual agony he was experiencing: physical pain searing his chest and right arm; mental anguish flooding the whole of his being. Father and son sat down on a bench.

"Maurice, forgive me, I am not well."

The doctor took a box from his pocket, took out a tablet and swallowed it, murmuring apologetically: "I think you only just made it in time." He took the younger man's hand and added quickly: "No, don't try to speak." Again there was silence. He resumed: "You must have wanted to know me, to have found me at the end of the world."

A pause. Then: "Where is your mother?"

Gillou found it hard to master the conflict of his emotions. At length he replied: "In Montpellier."

"Is she well? Did she ever marry?"

A long silence. Then Gillou answered.

"Maman never married I'm still . . . a bastard!"

"Maurice, I'm sorry. For your sake, I ought to have married her. Are *you* married? Your mother never wrote . . ."

Gillou took in a deep breath. His retina was still trying to rid itself of the ghastly image of Brenda in the mortuary. What could he say?

"I *was* married," he muttered bitterly. "I've *killed* her." He nodded his head towards the door. "I drove her to suicide." He began to sob like a child.

The expression in his eyes as he had indicated the door and the corridor had given the doctor the first inkling that there was a connection between the woman with the red hair and his son. Mercilessly the flood of realization pounded against the jagged rocks of his suffering. He groaned, covering his eyes.

"*Pauvre Maurice!*" was all he managed to say before the angina began to rend him apart. Gillou held his father in his arms. He knew that life was ebbing away; the moment had become precious. The frail bundle of suffering in his arms had become the link with eternity, with the perfection of what might have been. It was a poignant moment in deep time.

The outriders, Benias and Matthias, were used to dealing with such moments. They are used to harrowing scenes. Gently they explain to Maurice that his father has passed away; that the soul of the faithful little bush doctor is at peace on the other side of the Jossan where malice cannot touch him. Dr. Williams will be buried in the forest without any disturbance to the routine of the Clinic, in accordance with wishes expressed long ago. Perhaps he will accompany them to the place designated by the doctor as his final resting-place. Then, since Kavali at present is no place for him, as a free man he will be allowed to make his way—back to Suviara.

TWENTY-TWO

As the small party bearing the remains of the deceased doctor made their way into the bush, they halted for a moment, as they heard a familiar call. It was the sound of the pipes, coming from the clinic.

"C C B—A A G ! Doh doh tee—eeh! Lah lah—so—ol!"

It sounded like a last farewell tribute from the old surgeon still lying on his sickbed in the clinic. The news of Camus's departure had gone the rounds. Nobody could believe that the familiar figure—on his feet for hours on end, examining ears, eyes, limbs, skin, extremities, or torso—would no longer be there. But hearing the sound of the pipes, the nurses and the midwives and all the staff of the clinic were consoled.

The miraculous recovery of the expatriate woman, given up for dead, seemed to promise that the powers of the Chief, taken for granted for so many years, were fully restored. But how was the news of Camus's death to be broken to Bagabone? How would he take it?

"Dr. Hariman mas say Bagabone Camus hem 'i die go finish," Laurah whispered at table. Hariman understood that the privilege of telling the old man was to be his, but he chose not to comment. Clearly, although there had been an improvement in the Chief's condition which could only be described as miraculous, it would not be wise for him to go to the funeral. His sons would be back the following day. It would be better for them to break the news later. Actually, Hariman felt sure the old man did not need to be told. He had an uncanny sixth sense which somehow kept him aware of

everything that happened. Most probably he knew and was laughing up his sleeve at the whole lot of them!

But the nursing staff took a different view of the matter. In the absence of the outriders, they elected the analyst, a Talanesian known as Hard Henry, to follow custom and break the news poetically, in stages. Only Irene disagreed with the consensus of opinion. She could not imagine the Chief shedding tears for his departed colleague:

"Bagabone, by hem throwem Camus go long kai kai for sharks."

Hard Henry wore a hearing-aid and lived in a world of his own. When his services were required, it was sometimes difficult to call him back from that world of physical chemistry he loved in the latest books on the subject brought to Kavali from the outer world. But having been briefed, he entered the old surgeon's room and stood by the bedside with his poetic speech at the ready.

The old man got in first and bellowed: "Wonem now you fella doing long analysis vomit throw out bulong white missis?"

Nonplussed, Henry replied: "Me fella find em Doctor Camus long house leaf bulong hem. Hem 'i no stop long Clinic. Me fella lukem ebri place quick time. Hem 'i go walkabout long forest. Me fella tink tink hem go crossem water long Ribber Jossan."

Bagabone laughed. "You fella talk true! I guess you're right, Henry. Now you fella tellem me about this fella analysis."

Henry's voice rose and fell like the wind round bamboo. What did the white woman eat for breakfast? What did she eat for lunch? Wonem she pour into food passage, go down long reticulum? Not corn, not coconut! Starch, tanine, chemicals to make the Ngato volcano erupt. Never, so many things came out of one stomach. And Valoquin, twenty grains, no more. But the Chief would never guess what else.

"Dichlorovinyl dimethyl phosphate?"

Henry uttered a whoop. His face registered incredulity

not unmixed with disappointment. "Hem true! How now you savvy?"

"Pyrethrins?"

In the conflicting emotions in the analyst's face, pleasure at his Chief's cleverness dominated. Such unbelievable discernment! All the chemistry he knew he had learnt from this tutor. But this was staggering! "Hem true! Me findim pyrethrins. You know hem no more I tink, more yet plenti?"

"Peryperonyl butoxide?"

Henry slapped his thigh and did a dance so that his hearing-aid fell from his ear. He looked like a delighted quiz-master. But as he posed his next question, his voice fell away to a whisper. Why, he wanted to know, did white missuses have such chemicals in their insides?

The surgeon replied. "You fella savvy wonem this fella mixture?"

"Me fella no savvy, no more."

"Bel-elzi tox! Hem 'i makem flies go die finish alkete!"

Henry stared unbelievingly, uncertain whether his Chief was pulling his leg. He adjusted his deaf-aid, in case he should not be hearing properly. Then he inquired slowly: "Missis, hem 'i gatem flies long stomach bulong hem?"

The surgeon laughed so much that he began to cough. Behind the door, a delegation of islanders who were listening to see how Henry got on with his solemn task could not believe their ears. The old man tried to modify his laughter by turning it into a wheeze and spitting into his sputum mug. The attack lasted so long that Hard Henry was about to go and get help.

"It's all right, Henry! All right! All right, thank you!" Another fit of ill-concealed, expectorating hilarity shook the old man's timbers. "Oh dear, oh dear, Henry! You fella makem me fella cry! No, white missus, hem 'i no gatem fly long stomach bulong hem. Hem 'i lukem one fella doctor long Kavali, makem plenti work long you me!"

The look on Henry's face amused the old man so much that he almost fell out of bed. Fortunately, Hariman arrived

on the scene, and even he could not help being infected by the old man's mirth.

Henry got up, politely excused himself, and left the ward. Hariman checked Bagabone's pulse. It was beating fast, but it was strong. The breathing was heavy and slightly wheezing but otherwise satisfactory. The younger man grinned and asked what was the cause of the merriment. Only a twitch at the sides of the firm lips now betrayed the mischievous sense of humor.

"Henry, hem 'i say white missis swallow Bel-elzi-tox for killim die go finish flies long abdomen bulong her." Then he added: "Camus should have gotten it out through her arse with paraffin oil and sodium sulphate. He fetched the stuff up and burnt her trachea. How's she doing?"

"She'll live!" Hariman replied coldly.

"Well, *de mortuis, nil nisi bonum*," said Bagabone enigmatically. As he continued his rounds, the Englishman kept wondering what he meant. "Nothing except good about the dead!" Was he referring to Brenda, or did he know about Camus's death? He shuddered as he remembered how close to death Brenda had been. And Gillou had apparently left the clinic without even learning of her recovery. His own feelings about meeting her again as a person were strangely mixed. He was torn between longing to be able to comfort her when she recovered consciousness, and fear that it would be a shock to her to see him.

It was Bagabone who, without consultation, solved this problem for him. He arranged for the nurses to slip the exhausted young doctor a sleeping draught in his bedtime drink. It was in the small hours of the morning that Brenda regained her consciousness. The old man, in his dressing-gown, was there to comfort her and to reassure her about the tube in her throat. She asked no questions, but when she was told that a young doctor friend of hers was on the staff of the clinic, she seemed happy to be alive. The old man's kindly blue eyes, his benign smile, and his quiet confidence had filled her with new hope.

TWENTY-THREE

For all his deafness, Henry was no fool. He had absorbed an enormous amount of knowledge from the chief, and over and above his work in the pharmacy he coped with fractures, burns, cuts, and other injuries with great skill. He was a competent administrator; and knew all the available drugs and how to procure them quickly through the Union links with Alleluia Airfield. But above all, he watched over the staff, making sure that they all got proper rest and replacement, often by standing in for them himself. With a quiet smile he sometimes reminded Hariman that he *would* be off duty for the next three hours.

Hariman had still not been able to bring himself to visit Brenda either personally or professionally. His feelings were numb. He found it difficult to analyze them. It was the thought of his daughter Deirdre, that haunted him most, and he longed to find out from Brenda how she was. But he felt that this was unfair. It seemed to diminish the regard he felt for Brenda herself. By now, the memory of his wife, Margery, had almost ceased to exist for him. If he thought of her at all, it was with acute pain.

He availed himself of the opportunity to go for a walk, the first he had had since his arrival at Kavali. But he soon found himself hotter and more uncomfortable than he had felt while working. The trees around the clinic were cleverly arranged to give maximum shade; the leaf roofs gave excellent insulation against the harsh sun. In the open, the air was

unbearably hot. He determined to press on, taking advantage of all available shade. He passed a few woven-leaf houses where there was hardly anybody to be seen. The few children he saw watched him without curiosity and with complete trust. They were evidently used to seeing a white uniform and were not afraid of a European. The variety of the scenery astonished him; in the distance, hill after hill thickly covered with rain forest. Yet in other parts there were prairies. The escarpment gave protection to the clinic, making it difficult to get any clue about direction from the sky. In places there was grey on top of the clouds, as if they were lit from beneath; in others, great billows of golden fleece tumbled over a stark blue backcloth.

As he inspected these incongruities, the young surgeon had a sudden feeling of unreality. The earth was moving violently beneath his feet. He stopped in his tracks and tried to stand still. He felt waves below him, saw them rolling along the path; waves of grass and earth! One of Santabala's frequent earth tremors, about Force Five, he guessed. His body was shivering, in spite of the heat; internal impressions miming external events. How long since he had last taken his Valoquin tablets? He hadn't even thought about them at Kavali! Was his malaria starting up again? The outside rumble had ceased; his own body was quaking violently. He walked on determinedly.

Suddenly, there was no more path. He pushed through tufts of bush and coarse grass like reeds. In the air there was a tang suggestive of water. In the brushwood, lizards scampered, insects scurried or crawled; a blue black butterfly fluttered past. Orchids swarmed over the trunks of long-dead trees like delicate insects; every few yards brought adventure. He had been cooped up for so long that the freedom overwhelmed his senses, reminding him of student experiments with LSD, heightening his sensibility. The bush grew denser. There were cockatoos flapping from tree to tree cackling crazy warning: "Kak, kak kak kak, kwaw, kak kak kak, kwaw!" They resented the intrusion. He

threaded his way for about half a mile, always with the presentiment of something unexpected ahead, an open glade perhaps, or a stretch of river. He was confident he could remember the bush signposts, the broken branches, the patches of bare earth where ants labored, the variegated leaves. Fresh fragrances greeted his nostrils: peppery, spicy, perfumed, musty, sickly, where lilies, white and magenta, thrust themselves up, their heads closed against the sun, from a stagnant pool. Murky realm of tadpoles and toads; breeding ground for flies and mosquitoes! No human sounds; only the monotonous symphony of the jungle. An authoritative voice inside Hariman said: "Turn right and make your way through that tunnel in the undergrowth."

He obeyed, and after a difficult thirty paces, stopped short. In the middle of a clearing an unusual sight met his gaze. There was a tombstone, rudely constructed in cement, looking new, as if placed there in the last few days. A thick tangle of tendrils round the base belied the brand-newness. Evidently rinsings by torrential rains guaranteed it immaculacy. Yet it looked like liquid concrete. The inscription, done with a knife point, slashed like a fresh wound:

U.S. Flying Officer Alec B. Forrester
Age 24
Hem 'i die go finish so you me stop long good time
September, 1942

Remembering "good time" from the grace said by Dr. Camus on his first arrival at Kavali, Hariman translated correctly: "He died that we might live in peace."

He felt a stab of sympathy for the bereaved mother, a longing to transmit to her his actual experience. In the bright sunlight, the plaque was ethereal, immortal. He wanted to burst out of the dark cage of himself into that golden freedom. But a voice, unexpectedly terrestial, suddenly gate-crashed the privacy of his awareness. In the bush, beyond the plaque! A voice with an American accent.

He almost turned and ran. He did not feel like making

the acquaintance of tourists. Tourists at Kavali? No! Most likely they would be anthropologists or Peace Corps research-workers; the kind of Americans who always pop up in the unspoiled regions. He felt embarrassed and shy. He dodged to one side and hid in a drapery of hanging leaves. The foliage smacked his face; he tripped over tendrils. He was glad to have escaped. He could hear the voices clearly now. They were within a few yards of the monument but still out of sight.

"Boy oh boy!" (It was a man's voice.) "Did Santabala look grim? Our carrier came in to watch the barrage and the amphibious op. Just after sunset! Seventh of August, 1942. The headland on the right was like a rat swimming out to fight *our* rat. The one we were hiding behind! The island's called Ngato. Jansoon must have seen it like we did in the seventeenth century. I guess if I'd been Jansoon, I'd have turned back. It looked like a continent; great, long continent with streaks of white mist along the green-black mountains. We were looking north, of course, but the dying sun felt like it was behind you, like say you were looking north at home. That light was sinister enough even before we started the fireworks. We could pinpoint where the Nips were making Alleluia airstrip. There was a long, white finger of fog pointing straight at it. The Marines had landed on Blood Beach, we were told. Over to the east it got blacker and blacker. We were itching to take off and fulgurate it. . . ."

The cry of a megapod drowned the last few words: "Doh doh tee—eeh! Lah lah so—ol!"

A girl's voice rang out, clear as crystal. "What does *fulgurate* mean?"

The reply was inaudible. The speakers were walking away. But there were peals of girlish laughter. Deirdre's voice! Deirdre's laughter! And another strange voice, another bird cry: "Dee—eep Slee—eep! Dee—eep Slee—eep!" The doctor stumbled out from his hiding place. He ran into the bush after the fading voices. But the speakers were walking quickly. Deirdre would be able to keep that pace up easily.

She was good at bush-walking. Too late! By the time he had got past the plaque and penetrated into the scrub they had gone. They must have run; it was a large clearing he was coming into. And what he saw took his breath away. Like a huge moth, staring down at him, there was an aircraft at rest. He bellowed after the visitors, "Hello there, hello!" He had framed Deirdre's name with his lips but could not shout it. How could his daughter be in this outlandish corner of the bush? Could it be a search-party looking for him? He shouted again, frantically, "Hello! Hello!"

But the only answer was the mocking laughter of the cockatoos: "Kak kak kak kark a tim, kark a tim! Kak kak kak, kark a tim!"

He was startled by a grotesque piece of sculpture ten yards in front of the plane. The propeller and engine of an obsolete bomber. Uppermost was a rusting nose cap; two propeller blades curved inwards and one outwards, like dropping leaves. The fluted cylinder blocks were complete with wire leads and spark plugs.

"Remove tappets before pulling nose section," announced a strip of metal at the base.

The aluminum body of the plane was almost intact, gleaming with hundreds of bright rivets in the sunlight. Hariman had looked up, expecting to see the pilot—the cockpit was wide open; he could see a joystick and a broad foot pedal, cogs and pulleys undamaged. The altimeter and a microphone still looked functional. But in places the aluminum of the wings was ripped; the red and green perspex covers over the lights were cracked open, revealing undamaged bulbs. Once more the doctor listened for the voices. In vain! Only the noises of the jungle. Useless to shout again.

The body and the tail of the plane were complete. A long, thin leg with a hook at the end had acted as a brake in the creepers. Fascinated, Hariman stared at a patch of oil where the leg pivoted on a split-pin. After all these years! From a flap, dangled a second, smaller hook. Then, through a gap in the fuselage he spotted the fins of a bomb. Instinc-

tively he hurried away, back to the wings to look at rows of steel bobbins, gleaming untarnished through the gashes. The rivets had withstood the impact of tree trunks and foliage, but the V tubes that had linked the engine to the body drooped forward like macabre antenae. On another little plate was the maker's name: Curtiss Wright, Paterson, New Jersey.

"Douglas Dauntless, 1942!" said a well-known voice behind him. He wheeled round to see Bagabone, impeccably dressed in white shorts, white shirt, long white stockings, and matching boots. He looked as fit as a fiddle. Like a guide, conducting visitors, he gestured towards the aircraft: "Dorsal column unscathed. Lower vertebrae, slight contusions. Womb and ovaries as right as a trivet, with at least one bioblast intact. But you haven't got your ticket yet! You've got a very bad fever. You'd better come back to the clinic so that we can get you to bed."

The Englishman stared blankly. Inside his head, his daughter's voice kept repeating: "What does *fulgurate* mean? What does *fulgurate* mean?" Had he been contemplating suicide? Was that what the old man meant?

"I thought I heard voices," he said, raising his hand to his forehead. "An American talking to a girl. I thought it was my daughter. But what are you doing out of bed so soon? Are you all right?"

Bagabone ignored the question. "People come from across the Jossan," he commented. "That Dauntless seems to intrigue them. It carries somebody's number. Did you feel that tremor about half an hour ago?"

"I wasn't sure whether it was outside or inside," Hariman replied.

Bagabone began to lead the way back. His leg did not seem to trouble him. The younger man followed. He was shuddering violently. The Chief turned and looked hard at the concrete slab, radiant in sunlight taintlessness. He did not comment, but after a while he said: "That 'egg' in the Dauntless is still alive. A Force Six tremor would detonate it.

So you were minus Force One and twenty minutes late. We keep a close watch on the plane. Things have to be timed to a fraction of a second. A split second may be crucial."

Hariman did not understand what he was saying. He felt too ill to pursue the matter. All he said was: "Do you often come this way?"

"Nobody's been along here, to my knowledge, for thirty years or so." After a few seconds, he added, as if in explanation: "When I said we, I meant The Union."

Again, Hariman could not muster the strength to press for clarification. "Excuse me," he said, "I just want to . . ."

"Pump ship!" the American teased as he followed Hariman into the bushes where he had hidden earlier. "Guess I feel the same urge!"

As the two surgeons passed water in the cobwebbed green recess, they felt a strange bond. A sense of comradeship transcended the humiliation of frail bodies.

"I'm worried about my daughter, Deidre," the Englishman said, at length, as they continued their route. "I am enjoying life here, and I don't really want to go back to Suviara. But as I said . . ."

"You're asking me if I'm well enough to take over again. Well, thanks to you, I am. Camus is gone, but Henry's a useful boy and we're training up others. And that girl, Brave Brenda they've called her, wants to stay on and train as a nurse."

Following along in the tree tops the cockatoos screamed ironically: "Kak kak kak, killim killim. Kak kak kak, krr oo si fie, killim!"

The men walked on in silence. They were side by side. They were passing the orchids. The tang of fresh water came from the tall grasses on the right. They could see the distant hills sharply defined on the horizon. The clouds gave an immense perspective to the sky.

"You'll excuse me mentioning it," said the Englishman. "The other day, I heard you talking about Britain. I'd like to ask you, what *do* you think of us?"

"Sweltering, isn't it?" the Chief said, mopping his brow with a spotless white handkerchief. "No, I don't mean the British are sweltering," he added. "Britain's sick, and you'll recognize the symptoms. When you peed just now, did you notice the color of your water?"

"Can't say I did! Was there anything wrong with it?"

"Very dark! Same with Britain. The fever's the same too. And the yellow in the corners of the eyes."

"Have I got yellow in my eyes?"

"And how! Your cheeks are yellow. Do you feel hungry?"

At the idea of food, Hariman almost vomited.

"How about some boiled ham?"

The earthquake in Hariman's entrails touched Force Eight. He was retching internally. He tugged his cheek with his fingers and looked down from aching eyes. He could see the yellow where there ought to have been pink. He *felt* yellow. The old man's voice went on, inexorable: "You know the symptoms as well as I do. The virus gets into the liver. It started with a television program called 'TW TW TW.' Fortunately the liver's a resilient organ. We shall soon get you better."

They walked on slowly. The patches of prairie in the distance reminded Hariman of the freshness, the pure greenness of the English countryside. He felt very sick. He wanted to ask more questions but he feared that he would vomit. "That Was the Week That Was." He remembered the program. The virus that started the disease. But how had Bagabone heard about it in this remote island? He knew the answer as soon as he had framed the question. The Union.

"Britain's been a major exporter for years. You export the worst as well as the best: pornography and filth, homosexual permissiveness, licensed strip-clubs, prostitution and brothels, licentiousness, wife-swapping, and abortion. All made in Britain."

Hariman tried to protest, but his stomach heaved and he had to keep quiet. The old surgeon had not finished.

"It's the attitude towards the virus that's the worst evil. My own country suffers from venereal diseases as well as hepatitis. The arms industry's a great, rotten penis! And the USA's got scabies, the CIA!"

They were passing a pond. The lilies hung their closed heads over the foul-smelling ooze. The Chief added ruminatively: "There is a cure for all these things. They can be eradicated in a few months if the healthy parts of the body hit back. The virus doesn't recognize the existence of anything outside itself. It breeds and multiplies, saps the morale of the constitution."

Hariman tried to speak in defense of David Frost and Millicent Martin, who in the past had many a time given him a good laugh. But he had to step hurriedly into the bushes and rid his stomach of half digested paw-paw and dried corn.

The surgeon resumed: "Diseased cells have to be removed or destroyed. They fight to protect their own kind and try to take over completely. There are false humanitarians who live by the penis and the clitoris alone. They set them on a little altar and worship them. Seekers of Sex for its own sake. They satiate themselves and become utterly insensitive. Triggermen, highjackers, terrorists; an ejaculatory generation; perverts! Their preoccupation with guns, missiles, and explosives is a depraved form of sexuality. Small boys with guns are already in need of treatment. A healthy society has to discard its sick cells. Mercifully but systematically. Surgery is the only answer."

He laughed as he looked at the younger man's yellow features. "I'm not getting at you personally. We shan't have to use the scalpel to cure *your* hepatitis. But you're ill, and and you'll have to go to bed. I know all about your personal dilemma. And it was I who arranged for the operations. That girl, Brenda, will make a good nurse. Don't look so tragic!" (They had reached the leaf houses on the fringe of the clinic, and there were friendly waves from islanders.) "As a matter of fact, it's often inside the so-called 'normal' marriage that the worst sickness exists. It's not the accidental

moment of passion that's so appalling. It's the absence of reverence before the Creator; the people who, day after day, put their lusts before God."

Hariman did not comment. When they reached the ward he washed, changed into his pajamas, and got into bed. Shortly afterwards Laurah came to see him. She laughed to see his face as yellow as the pajamas, but not unkindly. She prattled away in Pidgin. "You me mas katem brans bulong olketa tree wea hem roten finis ia."

Hariman lay back, closed his eyes, and groaned. It was something about pruning she was saying—about cutting away the deadwood. He was too ill to take it in. His temperature was now dangerously high. As Laurah wrote out his case sheet, she did not laugh. In her long career she had seen few patients still alive with the temperature she had to write down.

TWENTY-FOUR

Bagabone ordered everything possible to be done to bring that temperature down. Returning from the burial, Benias and Matthias had no opportunity to report on events before they were caught up in fixing apparatus and a drip feed. Bagabone resumed responsibility for the running of the clinic. The energies and skills of Laurah, Irene, Amazon Anne, and Rough Racel were all directed towards saving the English doctor, whose body seemed on fire. His eyes were mostly open, horrible to look at, inhuman in their xanthocroia.

In his delirium the doctor began to cry, as if in heart-rending sadness. In the burning fever of his body, his mind seemed constantly to return to the death of his mother; then it disintegrated into sensations of hardness and weight or impressions of distorted sound. A great steel plate pressed down on him, rattling like stage-effect thunder. He pushed the plate, heaved it up, but it only bore down with greater force. He heard a droning of motorbikes and saw riders in steel helmets doing figure eights round a massive cross. He was witnessing a crucifixion; not one of the vain portrayals of art, music, and literature; the real one, *the* Crucifixion. There was a splendidly made human body, twitching in agony; blood running down from rusty nails; blood smearing the face; a noble face, pure white, fiber-glass hair, white stubble on the blood-stained chin. A paragon of a man, smiling through it all. A scalpel made neat incisions and

letters appeared along the slashed flesh; *He died that we might live in peace;* the blood gushed out of the letters and the man went on smiling. *From His Mother.* He was speaking with an American accent: "Don't hold it against them! They've just got out of control for the moment. They've no idea what they're doing."

The riders increased their speed, circling closer. The steel plate was turning to lead. Harmian heaved and the cross reared up against a harsh blue sky, lurching and distorting.

"They just got out of control. Don't hold it against them." The cross formed the focal point of the figure-eights, when suddenly: *Wham!*

Two riders collided in a burst of flame. The figure on the cross was miraculously untouched. He was calling out reproachfully from the cross: "When I asked you why you had forsaken me, I didn't mean for myself! I begged you not to hurt them and you *did!* That was forsaking me, Father. That was forsaking me! They don't even know *what* you can do to them. They think they have *you* in their pockets. They don't *know* that you are the storm, the thunder, and lightning, the earthquake and the volcano, the disaster, the catastrophe, the agony and the anguish. They think they can get away with it. Let me still stand between them and . . ."

The head drooped and a melodious voice cried: "It's all over now, and I'm coming to you!"

It was a woman's voice. He could see her, but he could not communicate with her. It was too late. She was standing there, small and frail; her hair showed auburn beneath her nurse's cap. Her eyes were blue as the sky. She was wearing a slate-blue dress; she was bending down and holding the thin white lead plate off him. She had the strength of a giantess.

"It's me, Brenda! Can you hear me? Wingfield! Can you hear me?" He could, but he was unable to do anything that would tell her. He felt her hand caress his brow and saw the haven of her bosom. His bark was utterly becalmed. He could not move or breathe. A ringlet of her hair!

"Not wind enough to twirl the one red leaf."

He could not acknowledge her presence. His lips moved. "Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God!"

Bagabone drew Brenda to one side.

"He's seen you now, and he knows you."

"Is he dying?"

"It would be possible to keep him here if I operated. But he wants to go to his daughter. Shall I let him go?"

"Let him go? Where?"

"On!"

She shuddered. "Why on? He loves his daughter. But she's back in Suviara. Help him to go back there if you can."

"The Union have already taken her across the Jossan. She's waiting for him there."

She gasped. Dimly she understood. She covered her eyes with a little, slate-blue sleeve and sobbed. But she regained her self-control and said: "Whatever you think best. But isn't it *wrong?*"

"We are judged by our intentions. If we do things out of love, we are never wrong."

She looked hard at him. "I love him."

"Then you want to help him?"

"How can I help him?"

"You'll have to give him an injection. It will end his suffering."

"But hepatitis can be cured! You said you could cure him."

"I said I could keep him here. He has something else that I can't cure."

"I don't know what to say. I love him. I want him to get better."

"You want him for yourself. That's the reason you're here. He isn't yours to keep, is he?"

"No, I see that."

"You haven't changed your mind about training here?"

"No."

"Well then?"

"I've only given one injection in my life. Is it intravenous?"

"Subcutaneous. It's very easy. Will you do it?"

"What will happen after he's had the shot?"

"Benias and Matthias will take him in the ambulance."

"To his daughter? To Deirdre?"

"That's right."

"Then I'll do it. I love him too much to keep him in suffering."

Her face was radiant and she did not flinch when he gave her the syringe. He withdrew and pulled the curtain behind him. She unbuttoned the yellow pajama jacket and slipped the sleeve over his left shoulder. He lay still and did not stir. Brave Brenda.

Some will condemn her as a heartless hussy, so infatuated with the "other man" that she bartered away her own children. The truth is different.

TWENTY-FIVE

Not many of the people who went into Arimathea Hospital, Suviara, on Christmas Eve knew they would be going there. Yet most of them were in control of their actions until the unexpected happened: boiling fat took charge or Dengue fever took over. It doesn't occur to individuals involved that accidents are part of a process. There *will* be a number of limbs requiring operations this December. Doctors will be needed to cope.

In the reception area there were dusky forms stretched out on the benches, waiting for attention; emergency cases every half hour, to the despair of those waiting. Blood on the platform, blood along the corridor. Overhead, balloons, trimmings, and tinsel; blood on the floor. Young girls coping all on their own. The nurses didn't hurry, didn't boss anybody about. They put on dressings and plasters, felt pulses, took notes. A blackboard announced that Tafatu was physician on duty, Skit the duty surgeon; the X-ray nurse, Rebecca. But where *were* they? Enjoying festivities, decided relatives accompanying a rupture case. Behind the scenes the staff were fighting for a life, a boy fished out of the river.

Taking advantage of a lull and using an improvised mop, one of the reception nurses began sponging up bloody footprints. In a cubicle, a patient with a hole in his foot (trod on an electric light bulb) refused to allow the nurse to stitch him. *Side bulong you, Charlie. If you refuse treatment it's your affair.* There was alcohol in the blood along

the corridor. The liquid dried in the heat and stuck. It was difficult to remove.

Sudden excitement along the verandah! An ambulance drew up and two policemen in khaki uniforms, wearing shorts, jackboots, and shinpads, flung the back of the vehicle open and lifted out a stretcher. They set it down so that all could have a look. A white man, with hair like greasy straw, eyes open, green in the neon brightness. On his head a ring bandage! The men took up the stretcher and hurried along the corridor, their hobnailed boots scratching the wet tiles. "Who is it, Fred? Who's the white man?" The driver didn't know.

A male attendant in white shorts and shirt appeared from nowhere. (Why hadn't he shown up for Talanesian Lucy with the "thing" in her ear?) The nurse had just called him. He was in the cubicle getting a piece of metal out of a leg.

The attendant pointed to a high couch. A girl in a pink dress and white cap steadied the head as the bulk was heaved on to it. There was a gash on the forehead, over the right eye. She extended the head, and the Adam's apple stuck up like a knuckle. The police withdrew apologetically; backed away, nodding. "We'll bring you some more." They excused themselves shyly and departed. Two walking casualties forgot their injuries, watching what would happen. One had a horseshoe gash under his eye, neat and clean now, like a monocle, caused by a beer bottle flung from a joker's taxi. The nurse delayed his eye dressing so that he could watch.

The white man's head lolled from side to side. His eyes, very glassy, were wide open. A girl, looking amused, kept checking his pulse. She took the ring bandage off the top of his head. The greasy straw was matted with blood. There was a deep hole in the head. She began to write notes: "Brought in by police. Said to have fallen over a cliff."

The orderly came up and looked at the sticky thatch, intrigued by the hole. He picked up the charts with the notes on it, wondering why the police hadn't given the

man's name. Not a scratch on feet, ankles, legs, knees, hands, or arms; no injury on any other part of the body. Pulse weak. *It will be a long time till he sees the surgeon.* Where are his *Wantok*, his friends? The orderly turned to the nurse. "Hem gatem paper long name bulong hem?"

The girl laughed and pointed to some objects lying on the locker. The man picked them up and examined them curiously. A pair of quality cuff links; on each, a cunningly designed serpent twining round a rod. The orderly fought back a wave of covetousness. He put the trinkets back on the locker.

Then the victim's *Wantok* came in. They were led by an islander called Betty. An expatriate man and woman trailed behind her. They stared at the scene in the ward, not recognizing anybody. The male expatriate wore a gaudy shirt and long, checked trousers, bell bottomed, over leather sandals. He was bleary-eyed; looked as if he had come from a party. The woman had dark hair and eyes; she wore a dark dress down to her ankles. A gold pendant round her neck set off gilt flowers on the dress. She was stunning in her sadness.

There was confusion now. Another group of people came in, a replica of the former group, except that they were islanders. They were headed by a woman of about the same age as Betty. Behind her came a drunken Talanesian in long trousers, and a dignified female in rags. She led one little girl by the hand; another traipsed behind. The drunk solicited the attention of all present and managed to get it. He was proud of the taller of his daughters, Eritrea. He explained to the unconscious expatriate on the couch that she had a cough and a pain in her chest. Meanwhile she stood back abashed, erect against the wall. There was suffering in her eyes and those of the ragged mother. A nurse sat them on a bench in the corridor while the drunk reiterated Eritrea's symptoms to the wall.

It was half past six when Gillou was brought into Arimathea on Christmas Eve. It was quarter past eleven

before Skit could deal with him. The male nurse had had the head X-rayed; the plates were drying over the desk. Skit first examined the permanent secretary in a cubicle. He recognized Gillou, and his face set hard. He looked at the negatives, shook his head, and ordered the patient to be transferred to the theatre. Tracey *felt* that it was a "daddy" being wheeled along the corridor but Tina did not care. She had struck up friendship with Eritrea. The drunken father, having sobered up in the presence of the surgeon, began lamenting about all the doctors being off duty on Christmas Eve.

As a result of his lamentations, questions were later to be asked in the Assembly. The leader of the Opposition drew attention to the fact that out of sixteen people operated on on Christmas Eve, nine died. The *Tom-Tom* published exact statistics supplied by the Hospital. Of twenty-three cases involving operations in the months of November and December, it said, *only* six had died. The paper did not mention that one of these six was the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Supply, Maurice Gillou. It is to be assumed that Skit did his best.

TWENTY-SIX

Talanesians don't expect logic in relationships between expatriates, but they are conscious of cause and effect; of the wages of sin. The permanent secretary's death and the squalid burial on the hill would have passed unnoticed, except for a person referred to ironically as "the widow." If getting burned is the result of playing with fire, and Gillou's death the natural punishment for his adultery, how did Margery Hariman get away with it without being punished too?

According to Fred, without Dr. Hariman, The Rise was an evil place. Its closed shutters winked at nights; there were parties and revelries, though other accommodations had been provided for missus by the hospital. She seemed to prefer her own place, and to flout conventions, enjoying the best of both worlds.

In Suviara, when "the widow" went into a shop, the assistants fled to the rear of the premises. In little knots, they whispered: "Hem now, long there, hem wearim black dress!"

If there was a newcomer from a bush village or from the islands, it was explained all over again what wife-swapping meant, and the story was told of her husband's disappearance; her daughter getting eaten by sharks; her boyfriend falling over a cliff; her newest boyfriend.

Fred defended his former employer against the charge of adultery, of running off with a red-headed woman (the

wife of the man who had fallen over a cliff). He claimed that the doctor and the pretty redhead had gone separately to the ancestors, to ask for assistance in the fight against "the widow"; they would return to Santabala to stop her spinning webs and draping them over the walls of The Rise. Her webs they said, extended into most of the expatriate corners of Suviara.

In the full-length mirror of a room overlooking the sea at the Magellan Hotel, Margery Hariman, the black widow of Fred's narrative, looked at herself and took stock of her situation. Her pregnancy was not obvious as yet. The proportions of her body had not changed much. Her limbs were thinner, perhaps, but still soft and round; her waist as slender as ever. Her bust had firmed up properly (she repressed a comparison that might have been improper)—figure still athletic, though tummy enlarging, rounding! Legs and ankles as intelligent as ever; skin, never so satin since her first pregnancy; hair, jet-black and blossoming against the sheen of her body.

I'm certainly not a bird in a gilded cage, she reflected without bitterness, *though I may have to be before long. I shall have the proceeds from two cars; that should be about $6,000 and the hospital goes on paying Wingfield's salary for a full year.* She caressed her silken hair with a nylon brush.

And I'm not a gold coin in a perspex case any longer. She smiled at herself in the mirror. *I'm spent!*

She was on top of her problems. She had arranged for Gillou's children to be air-hostessed to their grandma in Montpellier, with Mrs. Clynch as mother on the journey. What an idea of the deputy governor's, to expect her, in her bereavement, to go with them! Mrs. Clynch would enjoy the role of mother to orphaned children, and even more, the visit to France.

There remained only the question of Janet Richardson. At all costs that woman had to be prevented from returning from New Zealand to Santabala. Roger would have to fix

it. He could remind her of the importance of the children's education; tell her of the dangers of riots and rebellions. By all accounts, Janet would not take much convincing. She was a simple woman; hated the heat and the humidity!

But could Roger support two wives? Ultimately, of course, he would get a divorce. His salary ought to be better than Wingfield's because of his "inducement" allowance; not so good as Maurice's would have been!

"As soon as Wingfield can be presumed dead," she consoled herself, "I shall be well off in my own right. He's left me provided for."

She reckoned her pregnancy would not be noticed for another month. By that time, Roger would be eating out of her hands. She giggled. Really it would be the other way round!

"And what about the wedding? In time to make things legal?"

Who cares these days? she deliberated. *They'll be glad to turn a blind eye, Roger most of all. He'll be compensated!* She inspected herself critically in the looking-glass.

I'm still a girl, she thought, *and at forty I'll be the same!* Some people would consider Margery Hariman to be a vain woman, living for the moment, without any deeper philosophy of life and without any religion. But at that moment, her mind was turning to spiritual things.

When I think of God, she ruminated. *I see him as a surgeon—a bit like Wingfield, but big, tall, handsome, and rather old, with white hair and blue eyes, kind but very severe. Why do people think of him as dead, or say that he's dying? He's operated on me—taking Deirdre away—and Wingfield! But he knows I'm only flesh—good flesh! I'd rather be that than spirit, like Deirdre when she came from school, or like Wingfield. Really, when I last saw him he was getting to be A BAG OF BONES!*

She decided that if the "Gillou children" got away all right on Saturday, with Mrs. Clynch, she'd persuade Roger to take her to Sunday morning service at the cathedral.

I'll look best in one of my new black dresses, she mused. *They do something for me; set off my eyes and lashes. There must be a God, to help me work things out so easily and so perfectly. I thank him for making me—shallow!*

But her plan to pin her pregnancy on Richardson failed. Through no fault of her own! Could she have known that her confinement, when it came, would not be, as she anticipated, at Arimathea Nursing Home, but in the intensive care ward of the only other hospital available on the Islands? Margery Hariman was deeper than she thought; as deep as the malignant growth inside her she believed to be her child. From the date Skit posted off his test sample, it took three weeks for confirmation to come from Australia.

When she was told, at first she could not believe it. She could not make up her mind whether to tell Roger. Then, after she *had* told him, she wished she hadn't. He sat grinning fatuously, trying to pretend it wasn't true. How could a woman with a perfect exterior have something wrong inside her? Then he thought of mushrooms on the golf course he sometimes tapped with his stick. All rotten and maggoty inside! Could it be like that?

Richardson had begun to have physical problems of his own, more serious than the hemorrhoids that had troubled him a few weeks earlier. The shock of Skit's revelations paralyzed all thoughts of eroticism in him; he never would get round to sleeping with Madge; she would remain for him, perpetually, a tantalizing phantom.

They looked at each other, and neither could find a word of joy, hope, comfort, or compassion to give to the other. In the grounds of the Magellan Hotel, a megapod sang ruefully: "Di di da—ah! Di di da—ah! Di di da—ah! Di di da—ah!"

And from the distance, a crooner bird replied: "Dee—eep Sleep! De—eep Sleep! Dee—eep Sleep!"

About the Author

Can a computer write a novel? To find out, some experts in literature, linguistics, and computers at the Institute of Science and Technology, Jagiellonian University, Krakow, programmed a computer, Melpomene, with English verb patterns and semantic (i.e., meaning) units drawn from twentieth-century women writers, as well as D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, and some "angry young men" of the 1960s. Then they added some patterns and units from Pidgin English and French, and the astounding result is *Bagabone, Hem 'I Die Now*. Melpomene, which is the name of the Greek muse of tradegy, picked the title; translated from Pidgin English, it means, "Bagabone (a character in the novel) is dying."