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BEAT NOT THE BONES

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Charlotte Jay

Complete and unabridged

"A RICH, WONDROUS, EXCITING STORY"

*Dorothy B. Hughes in
Los Angeles Daily News*

IN the island port of Marapai, where white men tried to rule and often found it difficult, a brave young woman searched for the truth about her husband's mysterious death.

She fought the heat, the insects and the human beings who had been distorted by the tropics, by drink, by fears of themselves and their wretched lives. She struggled through the nightmare maze of the hunt—to find at the end a dark and fearful secret.

BEAT NOT

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THE BONES

Charlotte Jay

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Chapter ONE

IT IS SAID of a young man in a popular song that he had the moon in his pocket. Mr. Alfred Jobe had two moons in his. Sickie moons. Witches' moons. They proved to be moons of terror, madness and death, but Mr. Jobe was not to know this and stroked them lovingly with his fingertips, jangled them joyfully as he walked up the wharf on his way to the town.

No one but a prophet would think of terror and death on such a morning. The little island town of Marapai glittered in the pristine sunlight of the Pacific seas. The southeast wind was lulling off into the two doldrum months that preceded the change of season and now only lightly tossed the gray fringes of the casuarina trees and flapped the faded green blinds back and forth on bungalow verandas. The grass skirts of the native girls fluttered about their calves and the harbor was dotted with the tilted, wedge-shaped sails of fishing canoes.

But though Marapai looked on this morning nothing more than gaudy, feckless and gay, she had her sinister side. Terror and death were not strangers here. The older inhabitants remembered days when they were commonplace and were never particularly surprised when Marapai displayed again her old, immoderate, brutal nature. Such behavior was expected of her, for though she was light-hearted she was also savage. The arrangement by which a collection of white men had gathered here to undertake the taming and development of this wild land had not always worked. There was something now of the white man (unfortunately, some said) in the young Papuan who deserted village life, donned shirt and shorts, played hillbilly tunes on his guitar and gambled into the small hours of the morning. But there appeared to be other sinister and contrary forces at work that led in a very different direction. Frequently it was the white man who was won round.

He found himself developing tastes and traits that he had known nothing of. He found himself capable of acts he had not dreamed of. A latent nature within him burst out and took over

command. People who had known him down south would barely recognize him. It was as if he instinctively realized the futility of following rules of conduct that had come into being in lands where flowers were small and dim, where birds were drab and seas were cold. Some worked out satisfactory substitutes for the discarded life, but the majority ran amuck.

Certainly what happened—beginning that morning with Mr. Jobe and his sickle moons—did not greatly astonish the inhabitants of Marapai. They agreed it was shocking, monstrous, terrible. But they could believe it and understand how it came about for they were always expecting something like this from the country they lived in. The people south when they heard the truth—or that part of the truth that was made known—were completely incredulous. They could not accept the fact that such things could be. They were partly right. What happened could not have happened anywhere else.

To Alfred Jobe, Marapai had particular charms. He had just spent four months in the jungle and this primitive little town with its 1,500 whites was the big city, was Sydney, London, New York—civilization. Here there were cold beer and picture shows and white women. And his spirit flung out its arms in greeting. Good old Marapai! Good old Marapai! But pictures, women and beer must wait. He had more important things to do.

He had reached the end of the jetty, paused and looked around the customs sheds. There were no white men to be seen. A police boy stood aimlessly in the center of the road, and half a dozen natives were squatting down in the shade against one of the sheds. One of them scratched in his enormous mop of hair with a long, pronged comb.

Jobe called out to the police boy: "Heh! You!"

The boy took no notice. He stood with his naked feet planted apart, his hands behind his back, his head turned to the sea.

The blood rushed to Mr. Jobe's tight-skinned, jovial face. He quivered with rage. "Heh! You! You black bastard! Come here when I tell you!"

The boy was not black, he was brown, with a handsome, Malay-type face. He moved hesitantly forward.

What a lot of bloody useless savages they were! A man might be murdered, he might be robbed and they'd just stand and stare. Jobe clenched his fists and swallowed his rage. His instinctive reaction with natives was to hit them. He had been born too late. He belonged to an earlier, less restricted age. Now there was a law against striking natives. One wasn't allowed to hit them even when it was necessary. One wasn't allowed to hit them

at all. It was scandalous the way things were. But he must keep his head, he told himself now. He must be a good boy. He must play his cards carefully. There must be no trouble in Marapai.

"Government office. House paper. Where they put 'im now? Same place?" "House paper" was the pigeon word for office used by the natives of New Guinea, but this Papuan either did not understand or was struck dumb with fear. He only stared and looked blank.

Jobe swore at him and walked glumly on past the customs sheds. Then he remembered how fortunate he was and began to whistle through his teeth. He had not been back to Marapai since the war and noted here and there signs of devastation. Bombed houses had not been cleared up. The wharf was still littered with heaps of rusty junk. The Government offices, he had heard, had all gone up in smoke, which in his opinion was the best thing that could happen to them. There were still, he noted, a lot of natives about. And they were more westernized. The men wore colored cotton ramis, or shorts and shirts, and only the women had kept to their traditional grass skirts. There were more natives than ever, he decided. Mobs of them. It seemed a great pity that more of them hadn't been killed. Seemed all wrong that a lot of decent white men should die and leave all these senseless niggers wandering around the place.

He started off down the port road which led out of town to the other side of the harbor where the Administration offices had been before the war. It seemed reasonable to assume that they would be rebuilt on the same site. The road dropped down to the beach where half a dozen native canoes had been dragged up on the sand. The smell of burning copra drifted toward him. He sniffed and spat. He hailed a jeep, but it rattled past. A few minutes later a car drew up behind him and a white policeman leaned out and said, "Want a lift?"

Instinctively Mr. Jobe recoiled. He felt caught, discovered there in the middle of the road without a house or tree to dodge behind. His hand closed protectively over the treasure in his pocket. Then he squared his shoulders, beamed, stepped forward. He was a good boy, he had nothing to hide from. He was embracing the law. He was skirting trouble for probably the first time in his life. He was tired of trouble and there was no one in the world he would rather drive with than a sub-inspector of police.

"Government offices round this way?" he asked.

"Yes, I can drop you off."

Jobe got in and the jeep moved off. "Place 'as shot up," he

said, looking around him. "'Aven't been back since the war. Must 'ave spread out quite a bit. And kanakas! Place is crawling with them. Kanakas everywhere." He leaned over to spit but thought better of it.

"On the contrary," said the sub-inspector. "The population is decreasing."

"You don't say?" He started to whistle and jangled the contents in his pocket. His spirits lifted. Hear that, my friend? You think that's money, but it's not. You'd be surprised if you knew what that was! And how you'd be surprised! He jangled furiously. Thinks it's money, the silly dumb cop. Thinks it's a bunch of keys.

"This fella Nyall," he said. "That's the bloke I've got to see. What's he like?"

"The Director of Survey?"

"Yea. That's the bloke. What sort of a bloke is 'e? Good sort of bloke? Give you a fair deal, eh?"

"He's well thought of," said the sub-inspector shortly.

They were out of the town by now, still driving along by the water's edge. A bend in the road revealed ahead a group of white buildings dotted about under coconut palms.

"Is that the new Government show?" asked Jobe, pointing.

"That's it."

He started to laugh. "Gawd! Look at it, will you. You'd think they were running Australia instead of a few thousand dirty niggers. Gawd, look at it! Just look at it!" Then he stopped laughing and started to get angry. It always made him angry when he thought of native education, native hospitals, the rebuilding of native villages and all the other wild schemes that had ruined the country and squandered the taxpayer's money. Mr. Jobe was not a taxpayer himself but he was sensitive about the taxpayer's money.

The sub-inspector of police gave him a keen glance. "Haven't I seen you somewhere before?"

Mr. Jobe beamed sweetly. His tight, round, baby face was built for affability and his eyes were so deeply set beneath ragged brows as to remain always an enigmatic feature. "Not that I can recollect. But you more or less can't 'elp it in this place, can you? Being so small. Always rubbing up against people some time or another. Rubbing up against people you don't want to meet too, what's more. Ha! ha!"

Want to drag up the dirt, eh? Well, it won't do you any good, see. I'm having a chat with the Director of Survey, see. All aboveboard, all on the level.

The sub-inspector dropped him at the bottom of the road that led up into the Government buildings and he walked on through the trees, whistling and thinking of Mr. Nyall, the Director of Survey, and how surprised he would be. The road he followed led into a square, round which the Government offices were built. Coconut palms gave way to frangipani trees which dropped their pink and white, cream and lemon flowers on the peeling tin roofs. Wherever the eye turned clusters of blossom and green leaf thrust up between the tin and paper sheds as daisies sprout out of a bombed city and poppies in a battlefield.

The Department of Survey operated from a building on the far side of the square. It was made of timber and paper with an iron roof. The Administration staff had been more than doubled since the war and makeshift paper buildings such as this were all that were at present available to house them. These offices were optimistically known as "temporary" though many of them had acquired the misty patina of antiques.

Mr. Jobe, who had no appointment, was told to wait, and waited for an hour, sitting on a wooden chair in the general office. He did not mind waiting, he was used to it and he had plenty to think about. Every now and again he jangled the contents of his pocket and smiled to himself, because nobody looked up or took any notice. He thought how they would all behave if they knew, and his smile broadened. There he was, sitting among them, quiet as a mouse, and nobody knew, nobody even guessed. The tall, thin fellow with the bright blue eyes had not looked at him again after the first casual glance. Two native clerks rattled away unheeding on their typewriters. Not that it would all convey anything to them. Stupid, that's what they were, *innately* stupid. It was a word he had heard used by a Judge and he thought well of it. He knew it covered much. He began to get angry then, thinking of the innate stupidity of natives and the enormous wages they were earning, typing in offices and ruining the country. Then a young girl with short blond hair came out of an inner office and said, "Come this way, please."

Jobe rose to his feet and followed with a last, defiant jangle. His anger evaporated as quickly as it had been born. Anger had been Jobe's trouble all his life. It spouted up like a geyser. Before he knew where he was he had acted on it and then in the next moment was looking at his handiwork in complete bewilderment, wondering what on earth could have provoked him.

The yellow curls of the typist bobbed up and down just before him. He forgot the natives and their enormous wages and resisted instead a desire to stretch out his hand and stroke this

curly head. It was difficult being a good boy. He liked curly hair.

The Director occupied the southern end of the building, which was partitioned off from the rest by a paper wall. He sat behind a large, littered desk facing a map of the Territory.

Jobe stood in the doorway, summing him up. He was a shrewd man, he could hardly help being so. Shrewdness had been the inevitable product of his erratic mode of life. But about Trevor Nyall he was not sure. He was prepared on almost all counts to approve of him. He had a strong yet good-natured face and arresting eyes, but he was too clean. He might have been a dummy in a Sydney shop window. There was no speck or crease in his shirt or white suit. And he had not taken off his coat and tie, which was absurd. Mr. Jobe distrusted cleanliness. It was a sign, for one thing, of education, and everyone knew that education produced dishonest men. Dishonest, that is, in a big way. No one minded or bothered about little dishonesties. And he always felt that men as clean as this were trying to hide something behind all their well-laundered glory. One was meant to be impressed and look at the suit instead of the man.

But he felt this morning optimistic and was prepared to overlook this fault in Trevor Nyall. He produced what he considered to be his most affable manner. The general effect was of greasy sweetness, but he was not to know this.

"Name's Jobe, Mr. Nyall. Alfred Jobe. Just come down the coast from Kairipi." Kairipi was one of the Government stations about three hundred miles along the coast west of Marapai.

Nyall said nothing and waited.

Jobe's affability increased. He became playful.

"Suppose you think I've come to buy land, eh? Start growing copra down the coast, eh? There's an old washed-up plantation fifty miles east of Kairipi. Nuts rotting on the ground. Let 'em rot. I don't want 'em. Ha! Ha!"

"Well, what do you want?" said Nyall. "Let's hear it. I haven't got all day."

Jobe turned slowly round and pulled up a chair. He was enjoying himself enormously. So you haven't got all day. So you want to be off talking to someone more important than me. Well, there isn't anyone more important than me. You wait. You wait!

He settled himself on the edge of the chair. Then he drew the two moons out of his pocket and placed them on the desk between them. They were about six inches long. Flat, thin, new moons, with holes punched in their horns. They were decorated with a crude design scratched with some sharp instrument. They were made of gold.

The Director's face was completely expressionless. Jobe chuckled to himself. He decided he liked Mr. Nyall.

Nyall stretched out his hand and picked up the gold. He weighed them in his palm. "What are they? Neck ornaments?"

Jobe nodded and leaned forward. The little game was over. Now they would get down to business. "Yea, they were 'em round their necks on a bit of string. Like the pearl shell, you know. You could 'ave knocked me down when I saw 'em. Never seen anything like 'em before."

"There is nothing like them," said Nyall. "There's no native metal work in Papua. Or at least so we believe. These are Stone Age people. They never got that far."

This was education and Mr. Jobe brushed it aside. "There's gold, Mr. Nyall," he began. "I know where it is."

"Where?"

Jobe lowered his eyes, though such a precaution was unnecessary. They never gave out anything but a submerged sparkle. "The Bava Valley."

"And you want to put in a claim?" said Nyall.

Jobe nodded and slapped the palms of his hands down on his knees. "That's right," he said. "That's what it all boils down to, Mr. Nyall." Then his stomach lurched uncomfortably and he rose to his feet. His voice was truculent and querulous. "Heh, now! What's the matter now? I 'aven't done anything illegal like. I found that stuff. There's nothing wrong in that. All fair and aboveboard. Coming to you. That's the law. I'm not breaking the law."

For Nyall had stretched out his hand for the telephone. With the other hand he waved Jobe back in his chair. "Don't worry. You did quite right. But from what I can see there'll be another department concerned in this."

"*Another* department," said Jobe aghast. Even approaching *one* had been strongly against his principles. He was beginning to get angry. Another bloody department. And they were going to fiddle around together and ring each other up and write each other letters while he hung around cooling his heels. These departments! He knew these departments. None of them did any work, none of them did any good.

"What department?"

"The Department of Cultural Development," said Nyall coolly. "It's probable that these neck ornaments have some ceremonial significance. We'll have to find that out before we can consider your claim."

"Cultural Development!" Jobe's face turned scarlet. With a

supreme effort he controlled himself. Steady, boy! Steady! Keep cool! Keep your head! It wasn't Nyall's fault. He was only doing his job. He had to do what he was told. It was the Australian Government. They were the trouble. They'd ruined the place with their native education and tommyrot. But Cultural Development! It was the last straw. Culture was churches and music and theaters. Any fool knew what culture was. And they talked about native culture! Native culture! Dirty coons. Naked too, except for a bit of leaf and string. It was all very well for the Australians. They'd pushed their natives off into the middle of the desert and left them alone. And now they sit back and tell us what to do. Native culture! A man couldn't earn an honest living without getting tied up in native culture.

Nyall was asking for a man called David Warwick.

"Can you come over straight away?" he said.

There was a pause and Jobe heard a faint voice on the phone say, "What's it about?"

"I think," said Nyall, ". . . not over the phone."

"Who's this bloke Warwick?" said Jobe when Nyall had hung up. Warwick . . . Warwick . . . the name rang uncomfortably in his head, but he couldn't place it.

"Haven't you heard of him? He's an anthropologist."

"Oh," said Jobe with profound disgust. He might have known. The whole trouble had started with anthropologists. They should be kept out of the country. It was the anthropologists who had started all this native culture business. And look where it had landed them all.

They waited and he collected and soothed his outraged feelings.

About five minutes later the door opened and Warwick entered. He was a broad-shouldered, thickset man in his forty-ninth year. He had lived in the Territory most of his life and like many Territorians, did not look his age. The climate agreed with him. He was strong, active, clear-skinned and clear-eyed. His name had meant nothing to Jobe, but actually he was one of the island's aristocrats. He had been born in Marapai, a distinction that not many of the older men could boast of, and here the aristocracy were not those of blue blood or noble occupations but merely those who had lived here longest. This, however, was not the end of his achievements. He had half a dozen books to his credit and a reputation for learning and practical ability. To that minute section of humanity who had any interest at all in this primitive island, he was a celebrity.

Even Jobe, who had not known his name, recognized him im-

mediately. And his heart sank. Instinctively he turned away. Well, what rotten luck. What a piece of filthy, rotten luck.

Warwick had not looked at him. He moved into the center of the room and stood hesitantly looking at Nyall. He seemed rather ill at ease and said uncertainly, "Well, Trevor . . ."

"This," said Nyall, waving a hand vaguely, "is Mr. Jobe."

Jobe came boldly forward with an outstretched hand. It was rotten luck all right. But there was nothing to do but brazen it out. After all, that was all over and done with. They couldn't hold it against him. And you couldn't keep these things quiet, not in the Territory. Maybe this fellow wouldn't recognize him. There was just a chance.

It seemed that Warwick had not recognized him. He looked right through him and seemed not to see him at all, or his outstretched hand. He looked vague and worried.

"He's just come back from Kairipi," said Nyall briskly. "He's been up the Bava River—he hasn't told us yet exactly where. And he brought these back with him."

Warwick took the two gold moons from his hand. The look of anxiety passed from his face. It became quiet and absorbed. He turned the moons over and peered at them intently. And then at last he said, "Well, this is most interesting."

"Mr. Jobe," said Nyall with a faint smile, "finds it interesting too."

Warwick looked up and his eyes focused now on Alfred Jobe. Jobe held his breath. He thought he saw for an instant a faint light, a question . . . "Don't I know you? Haven't I seen you before?" beam in Warwick's eyes. "I suppose he would," he said slowly.

Nyall spoke briskly now. "Well, come on, Mr. Jobe. Let's have your story. I'm afraid you'll have to tell us where these things come from, you know."

Jobe had hoped not to tell them but saw that this would be impossible. Frankness was the thing. Openness, frankness. Particularly now that this unfortunate Mr. Warwick had arrived. He'd show them just what a good boy he was. He squared his shoulders and went over to the map. His finger followed the coastline west from Marapai and mounted inland up the Bava River.

"'Ere's the river," he said. "Bava River. 'Ere's Kairipi on the coast. Patrol ends 'ere, place called Maiola. You can take a boat up that far. The D.O. goes up every six months from Kairipi. Eola's about 'ere, three miles west along the river." He tapped his finger on the map.

"Eola," repeated Nyall.

"Outside patrolled Territory," said Warwick.

"Eola," said Jobe again impressively. "I was 'aving a look around these parts, you see. I've got a boat, been doing a bit of pearling up in the north. I took the boat up the Bava River and in one of the villages I came across one of these 'ere ornaments. They said they didn't make them there, and I traced it back to Eola."

He paused. The two men were silent, their eyes turned intently to his face. He went on.

"Eola's a river village. You know the sort of thing . . . twenty or thirty grass 'uts built on the bank of the river. Big long 'ouse in the middle of the place, for the men—no women allowed—you know. Where they do all their 'ocus pocus nonsense. Pretty wild people. Only 'alf a dozen of them 'ad ever seen a white man before. One of them 'ad been down to Kairipi. They get a bit of trade stuff through from Maiola. A couple of them 'ad cotton ramis on, and they 'ad some tins of bully beef."

"Were they at all hostile?" asked Warwick.

Jobe became vague. This was a subject that he did not wish to go into too thoroughly. These Government fellows were always worrying their heads off about the natives and whether they were hostile or not. Wouldn't even let you carry a gun. A man would be a fool to go into the jungle without a gun, but it might frighten the poor little natives.

"Bit nervy at first, you know," he said airily. "Only natural. Not used to white men. Soon got used to me though. Got quite fond of me after a bit, you might say."

"And the gold?" said Nyall.

"There's a lot of the stuff in the village," said Jobe, dropping his voice to a whisper. "Some of the old men wear those things round their necks, like the pearl shell, you know. I'd say they was beaten out nuggets. And they've got a lot of rough stuff stuck away, and one special bit they make a fuss about that would be worth a few thousand on its own. I reckon it's stuff they've picked up. There must be more of it round the place."

"Did you look when you were there?" said Warwick.

Jobe shook his head. This far he would not go.

"Why would they value it!" said Nyall, turning to the anthropologist. "It couldn't have any utilitarian value. And these things are so crudely made they're nothing to look at. The pearl shell is at least ornamental."

Warwick shrugged his shoulders. "There might be a hundred reasons. It's hard to say how these things begin. Take those two

rocks in the middle of the harbor. They're more or less sacred, or used to be with the older generation. There's a legend about them. There'd be magic behind this stuff somewhere. Where do they keep the gold?"

"In the long 'ouse, or whatever you call it. You know, the big 'ut in the middle of the village where I was telling you all the men get together. And dance and eat and 'owl, and God knows what goes on."

"In the long house!" exclaimed Warwick. "How on earth did you get in there? They're always taboo. I had to wait in a village for three months once before they'd even let me look at it."

Jobe shifted uneasily. He had not been prepared for these questions and saw that he was skating on thin ice. That was the trouble with these anthropologist boys, they couldn't bear their poor little natives to be upset. He well knew how taboo the long houses were, in fact it was just there that the trouble had started.

"Well, when I first got to the place," he said. "I saw some of the old men wearing this stuff, you see, these ornaments, and I asked them if they 'ad any more. There was this old bird who'd been to Kairipi and spoke a bit of police motu, and we could more or less understand each other. Well, they was pretty cagey at first and wouldn't say anything, but I managed to break them down. I 'ad some trade goods with me and I 'anded this stuff around to sort of sweeten 'em up. Then one day 'e took me into the long 'ouse and showed me where they 'ad all this stuff 'idden away. Very secret. Very 'ot, it was. This one big nugget, seems to be the prize piece, was all 'idden up under leaves and feathers."

"Did they explain why they kept it?" asked Warwick.

"They seemed to think the big bit looked like a crocodile. It was quite rough. They adn't touched it. But there was a sort of a look about it."

"Would it be a clan totem?" asked Nyall.

"Possibly," said Warwick. "Something like that at any rate. It probably started with the crocodile. Some sorcerer may have found it and made some sort of magic with it and then gradually the material itself—the gold—would be believed to possess the same properties." He turned back to Jobe. "Did you try and take any away?"

Jobe's spirits had bubbled up afresh. Everything was going all right. This fellow Warwick hadn't recognized him. And they were interested, they were quite excited about it all. There was no doubt about it. It paid to put your cards on the table. The Government was all right. It wasn't such a bad show. They

couldn't help it if Australia interfered all the time. It was a major flaw in Jobe's nature to overstep the mark, and now he overstepped the mark of his frankness. "I tried to buy some with trade goods," he said. "But they weren't 'aving any. The old boy sold me one of those ornaments for tobacco. But when the others found out about it they got a bit restive and I 'ad to 'op it. One of them pitched a spear at me."

He extended for their inspection the underside of his arm. Across the delicate, almost feminine flesh was scrawled a shallow, red scar.

Then he saw immediately that he had made a mistake. Warwick looked up at him, faintly narrowed his eyes and glanced across at Nyall.

There was a moment's silence in which the only sound was of Jobe's heavy breathing. Then Warwick put the two gold moons carefully on the desk. "We'll have to talk this over, Mr. Jobe," he said. "And let you know later on. But . . ." he paused. "I don't want to hold out much hope for you."

Nyall nodded and said nothing.

Jobe, looking from one to the other, thought he detected a faint, identical expression of satisfaction on their faces.

"Oh. And why?" he said loudly.

Warwick did not look at him. His voice was soft and tired. "From what you've said, Mr. Jobe, this gold is obviously of considerable value to the natives themselves. The fact that they keep it secreted away in the long house means that it has ceremonial, to them almost sacred, significance. They wouldn't sell it to you, they wouldn't give it to you. . . ." He paused and shrugged his shoulders. "The fact that you value it for a different reason does not give you a right to it."

Jobe's face was crimson. "The natives!" he said. "The natives!" The words choked in his throat. For a moment the probable loss of his gold was a secondary consideration. It was this white man talking about native rights that enraged him.

Warwick looked at him sharply. This time his eyes were curious. He's remembering, thought Jobe. It's coming back. Careful, boy. Careful. He changed his tone, smiled and said sweetly: "It seems to me that we 'aven't always been so mighty 'fussy about the things that natives value."

Warwick still stared at him. "That's true," he said slowly. "But you're speaking of the past. Exploitation has stopped now, at least we're doing all in our power to stop it. But there's more to it than that. If you'd found the gold within patrolled territory we might have had a different answer for you. But these people

have no culture contact whatsoever. They don't know our law. When you take their gold they throw spears at you. The whole enterprise might end in a welter of bloodshed."

"They've 'ad trade contact," said Jobe, still smiling and sweet. "They've bartered trade goods from Kairipi. They're very fond of bully beef."

"A few tins of bully beef," said Warwick coldly, "could hardly be called culture contact."

There was that word again. Culture in the jungle! Music and books and churches. All those high-falutin' words and tommyrot. All this stuff that had ruined the country so a man could hardly scrape up a decent living any more.

"I thought the policy of this Government," he bellowed, "was to encourage private enterprise."

Nyall rose abruptly to his feet and spoke sternly. "The policy of this Administration is also to protect the natives, particularly the primitive and unsophisticated natives of backward areas."

"Protect!" said Jobe, cut to the quick by the implication behind these words. "Protect! Now, Mr. Nyall, I come to you in all good faith. Fair and aboveboard, you might say."

Nyall looked at his watch. "Come back at three o'clock this afternoon when we've had time to think it over. You never know . . ." he ended vaguely. "In the meantime I trust you won't mention this to anyone. We don't like these rumors to get around."

"I'm not such a bloody fool," said Jobe. He threw a baleful glance at Warwick, bowed respectfully to Nyall and left the room.

They waited till his footsteps had died away.

There was a moment's silence and then Warwick said, "You can't let him go, Trevor."

Trevor Nyall turned away. "Why?"

"Well, apart from the obvious reasons that I've been trying to explain to Mr. Jobe—there's the man himself."

"I saw you didn't like him."

"He shouldn't even be here," said Warwick. "He would have been deported, but war broke out and things slackened up a bit. He's been jailed twice. Rabaul before the war—once for nearly killing a boy. Hit him over the head with an oar and nearly beat him to death. Then there was another case when he was tried for peddling spirits in a native village, but he got away with that—insufficient evidence. He's a really nasty type. One of the worst trouble seekers. And makes trouble in the worst way. Why they let these beachcombing types stay here I don't know. They hate

natives, exploit them, and teach them bad habits. They should never be allowed near a country like Papua."

"You seem to know a lot about him. I thought all the Rabaul court records had gone in the war."

"They have, too. It was bad luck for him he happened to run into me. I gave evidence against him. Obviously he struck trouble in Eola too. He would never have come to us except as a last resort. It's my guess they chased him out and he was scared to go back and grab the gold on his own. So he thought he'd try and get Government protection, possibly the help of the District Officer and some police boys. Why else would he come here and tie himself up in Government red tape?"

"Well," said Nyall. "That settles it. Finish Mr. Jobe."

Warwick picked up his hat. "Well, I must get back." He glanced at the door, and back again at Nyall. A little of his old hesitation returned. He waited, as if for permission to leave.

But all Nyall said was, "I have a feeling he won't take it lying down."

He did not.

At three o'clock that afternoon Warwick was sitting at his desk writing a letter to his wife. He faced out through the open louvers of his office a long, open parade ground ending in a belt of coconut palms. The letter he was reading fluttered in the breeze and he picked up a stone adze and placed it on top of the paper to hold it down.

"My dear little chicken," he had written. "Your letter arrived this morning. I am very angry with you. You should not have dismissed your father's nurse without asking me. He is sick and can't know what's best for him. You must consult me, my little one, about these things. Now you will have far too much to do. I am very angry with you. No, I am not angry—how could I be? But I hate the thought of your doing all that work. When you come up here you will have nothing at all to worry your little head about. . . ."

His pen faltered and he looked for inspiration at a framed snapshot on his desk. For some unexamined reason he found it rather difficult writing to his wife. The snapshot showed a young woman in her early twenties, wearing slacks and open-necked shirt, who sat, cross-legged, on a lawn with a spaniel puppy in her lap. She was bareheaded and smiled. He had been married for only two months. The wedding had taken place during his last leave in Australia, but his wife, whose father was ill, had not been able to return with him to Marapai.

The telephone rang. It was on a table behind him and he turned and glanced over his shoulder. His assistant, a young man fifteen years his junior, was sitting on the other side of the room, his chair tilted back and his feet up on the desk. He was pulling the heads off a cluster of frangipani flowers and threading them onto a piece of string. The telephone rang again but he did not move or look up.

Warwick leaned across for the phone, but he hardly heard the voice that said, "Hallo, Mr. Warwick, please." His lips were bitten tight with annoyance. Something will have to be done about him, he thought. It was an awkward situation, but things could not go on as they were.

"Hallo, hallo. Warwick here."

"Is that you, David?" It was Trevor Nyall. What now? he wondered, and a vague, uneasy sensation stirred in the pit of his stomach. Then he remembered Jobe. Of course, it would be about Jobe.

"I thought I'd just ring up and let you know," said Nyall. "I think our friend might pay you a visit. He's not in a pretty mood."

"Oh?" Warwick was barely listening. His eyes were still fixed on the cluster of frangipani flowers and the brown, nimble fingers threading the string. He had never liked those hands. They were long, narrow and smooth, like native hands.

"He seems to think," said Nyall, "that the whole thing is your fault. I keep telling him it isn't but he won't listen. He seems to like me, says I'm a good bloke and would have given him a fair deal. But not you. He thinks you've got your knife into him."

"He must have recognized me," said Warwick, attending now.

"I expect so. My guess is he's now in the pub getting a skinful. And he'll then come and tell you what he thinks of you. So look out."

"Thanks," said Warwick and hung up. He turned round. Jobe did not worry him greatly, but the frangipani flowers did.

"What's the matter, Tony? Nothing to do?" The garland dropped on the desk. The hands were folded.

"Plenty, but this seems the least destructive. This at least I shall not have to answer for. When our brown brothers ask us for excuses and explanations I shall be able to say, 'You've got nothing on me, I only played with flowers.'"

Warwick was not unsympathetic to the younger man. He was perhaps too clever for the Territory. It did not do to be too clever here, one knew too much. He was too clear-sighted and saw too far. He saw not only the good but the inevitable evil

that trailed after all that was done. But he needed rounding up. He worked under direction with a bad grace, doubtless thinking himself better equipped to direct than others.

He said shortly: "We all know it's difficult. We've all made mistakes. Probably it's impossible, but we've got to stick at it. You're neurotic, Tony. You want to pull yourself together."

"Oh, no. I'm not neurotic. I'm normal. Here it's the happy, the successful and the untroubled who are neurotic."

Warwick turned angrily away. Me, I suppose, he thought. He had never allowed native problems to make him feel uncomfortable. It was suicide, he believed, to take the whole show too seriously. He picked up his pen and wrote—not because it could be of any interest to his wife, but to rid himself of irritation—"an interruption . . . words with my difficult assistant. If things weren't so tied up I'd get rid of him. He has a neurotic, jealous nature and doesn't like doing what he's told. . . ."

He was still writing this letter at 3:45. The office now was empty and he sat alone. The rest of the staff had gone home except for one of the native clerks. This boy appeared now in the doorway. He was a tall, well-built native named Sereva who came from a nearby village and had once been Warwick's house-boy. Warwick had become very attached to him, taught him to speak and write English beyond the standard of most natives and after the war took him into the Department. Although he was educated—as far as these people could be called so, he was not superficially westernized and had none of the blind regard for anything imported that was the customary result of native education. He did not despise his village customs and preferred to wear a rami rather than shorts and shirt.

He spoke in a soft, whispering voice. "There is a gentleman to see you, Mr. Warwick."

In the next instant the gentleman, who was Mr. Jobe, had blundered past him, thrust out an arm and sent him spinning backward. "Get out of my way, you filthy savage!"

Sereva, knocked off his balance and crouching on the floor, rose slowly to his feet.

"If Sereva had a vindictive nature," said Warwick quietly, "he could see you in court for that. Are you all right, Sereva?"

The boy nodded. "Yes, taubada." He did not glance at Jobe, but turned and quietly left the room.

"Don't you know," said Warwick, "that it's against the law to strike a native?"

Jobe looked frightened. "I didn't 'it 'im. Only gave 'im a sort of friendly shove." The incident had momentarily knocked the

wind out of his sails and he stood now looking red and sheepish in the center of the room.

"I'm sorry about the gold," said Warwick. "It's bad luck, but there you are."

"Bad luck!" exploded Jobe. "It's a rotten dirty trick, Mr. Warwick. And I'm bloody well not standing for it, see! This fellow Nyall, he's O.K. He's all right. Everything would 'ave gone along fine if it 'adn't been for you." The anger died out of his face, and he smiled and stretched out his hands appealingly. "Now I ask you, Mr. Warwick, is it fair? Throwing up a fella's mistakes at him like this. Dragging up the past when a fella's trying to be honest. Making an honest living as it were. Now is it fair?"

"That had nothing to do with it," said Warwick. "You don't understand the factors involved. If you take this gold from these people you strike at the very roots of their culture, and we don't do that until we're in a position to supply something that we consider better. You might just as reasonably ask for permission to plunder the crucifixes from churches."

Mr. Jobe, who believed in God and damnation, was deeply shocked. "I must say, Mr. Warwick," he said loudly, "that's not a very Christian thing to say."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Jobe," said Warwick curtly, "but that's the way we look at it. You can't have that gold. It belongs to the natives."

"Natives! Natives! You fellas make me sick! You only bother about them when it suits you." The air of ingratiating sweetness had entirely left him. There was a red, wild gleam in his partly submerged eyes. He lurched toward Warwick and crashed his fist down on the desk. "I'm not standing for it!" he shouted.

"Oh? And what are you going to do about it?"

"Think I'm not good enough for you, eh? You dirty snob! I'll get around you, Mr. bloody Warwick, see. What about 'im, 'e'll 'elp me, just to do you in the eye!" He waved an arm at the empty chair, the garland of frangipani flowers still tossed over one arm. "You're not God Almighty in this town, Mr. Warwick, even though you think you are. Plenty of people don't like you. I only 'ad to spend 'alf an hour in the pub to find that out, and this off sider of yours 'ere would be the first to step on your face. If you wasn't 'ere, 'e'd let me 'ave the gold."

"Are you threatening me?" said Warwick quietly.

Jobe's hands fell to his sides. He paused for a moment in the middle of his rage and wondered if he had committed a punishable offense. He was aware that one more punishable offense and he would be out of the islands and probably forced to earn a

living. The thought was a sobering one. He gave Warwick a look intended to be pitiful and said: "I only want me rights, Mr. Warwick. I only want fair play. Came 'ere on the level. Put my cards on the table. It's 'ard for a man like me who's trying to forget the past. And it seems to me, Mr. Warwick, that you presume a lot—I repeat, you *presume* when you say that me going in and getting this gold will necessarily cause trouble. It's this spear. I shouldn't 'ave shown you that. That's what comes of being honest and putting your cards on the table."

"As a matter of fact," said Warwick slowly, "I've been thinking that we might go in and have a look."

Jobe stepped eagerly forward. "What? You and me?"

"No, not you. You can wait here till I come back. I'll take a surveyor with me. Quite apart from your interest in the gold, I'd like to have a look at these people myself. From the point of view of native material culture they are quite extraordinary." His face wore the faraway expression peculiar to those thousands of scholars all over the world for whom life is primarily a scientific problem.

Jobe winced but said nothing.

"If it's found," said Warwick, "that they don't particularly value their gold and would part with it peaceably, then you might be allowed to do something about it. If not now—perhaps later on. If not—you'll just have to forget the whole business."

Mr. Jobe thanked him many times and returned with a lighter heart to the hotel. And Warwick sat down and finished the letter to his wife.

Chapter TWO

THE MAN and woman who occupied the two rear seats of the plane leaned each toward a window and peered down. For a moment their faces wore an almost identical expression, of longing—more than this—of hunger.

The plane was now flying over the coastline. They could see the reefs—long purple bruises under the water—and bands of brilliant turquoise marked the sandy shallows round the islands. Rising almost straight up from the sea the hills banked up, naked some of them, others blotched with patches of forest, until, as they rose higher and higher, forest entirely took over. It was cloudy ahead.

The woman, Emma Warwick, leaned back in her seat, closed her eyes and gripped her hands in her lap, as if this first glimpse of the island had been too much for her. Her actions had the dramatic intensity of one who either does not know or does not care if she is watched. The hostess, thinking she might be ill, moved hesitantly forward, but paused as Emma's eyes opened again. She sat now staring before her and the hunger in her face had given way to an expression of resolution. Then she leaned again toward the window and looked down at the land below.

She had not, up to date, felt much curiosity about the country toward which she was being so swiftly propelled. The flight had been like a dream. She had no picture of the people in the plane or the places they had flown over. She had not wandered around to look at the two northern Australian towns where they had landed, but had sat numbly in the airways offices, her only feeling being anxiety lest she should be left behind, a fear which always attacked her when she traveled alone. But now for the first time she experienced a vague excitement. Here, unrolling before her, was the strange and terrible land she was matching herself against. For she had hopes of finding it hostile, even further hopes, barely admitted to herself, of dying here sometime in the near future.

The plane, which had been following the coastline over the estuary of a river and past a group of small islands, now turned inland and flew straight for the clouded mountains. A light flashed out telling passengers to fasten their safety belts. Emma fancied she could see houses far over to the left, crouched around a group of hills.

"Is that Marapai?" she asked the hostess, who was moving past offering barley sugar.

"Yes, madam," said the hostess, blasé about this, but indulgent. "That's Marapai. We're going to land soon. Will you fasten your belt?"

Emma, who had chosen her own fate and did not wish another to intrude prematurely, fastened her belt.

The hostess, whose name was Miss Smart, had served as a W.A.A.F. during the war and was now, seven years later, a handsome, debonair young woman with somewhat gnarled sensibilities. The bed of her heart had become of necessity stony, yet she found herself unaccountably touched by the sight of Emma's small, clumsy fingers endeavoring to impose upon her safety belt functions never intended for it.

What on earth can she be doing up here? she asked herself as

she bent to help. Never been away from home before, looks like a child at its first party.

"Thank you," said Emma, and lifted her large, beautiful, fanatical eyes.

Disturbed, Miss Smart turned away. No, not a child at her first party, definitely not. Her interest had been aroused and she glanced at the list of passengers that was folded in the pocket of her uniform. She found Emma's name and a suspicion as to who she might be flashed through her mind, but she dismissed it as impossible and turned with her barley sugar to the man in the opposite seat.

He was a big man—not exactly fat, but solid and tight-skinned. It gave him, this tight-skinned look, an air of joviality and self-satisfaction, such as men will sometimes wear after a heavy meal. He refused the barley sugar and Miss Smart passed on up the plane. He folded the paper he had been reading and pushed it away under his seat, and then looked around him with an air of taking stock of a new situation. He, too, like Emma, in a personal and particular way, appeared to have arrived. His eyes traveled along the seats ahead, over which he could see the tops of heads, hats being put on. Emma was the last to suffer his scrutiny.

She leaned her head against the window, gazing down at the land as it rose slowly up to meet them. The sea was behind them, and through a gap in the round, golden hills they had made inland and circled over an air strip. On one side a straight metaled road led presumably back to Marapai, on the other, an enormous bulwark of mountains, their summits lost in cloud, marked the limits of the white man's world. Emma's face was quiet, though pale. She appeared merely to dream. Her short, ruffled hair gave her the look of having just awakened from sleep. In actual fact she felt in that moment suddenly desolate and afraid. All that was before her seemed to rise up like vapor from the earth and fold around her. The doom she had sought breathed in her face, but it was not as she had sought it, clean, violent and somehow comforting, but rotten, moldy, evil and lonely.

Her terrified eyes turned and sought those of the man beside her. His future promised to be rich and brilliant, and he smiled optimistically. Poor kid, he thought, she's been sick. Nasty business. He had been air sick once himself and sympathized with all sufferers. Pretty little thing too. He liked curly hair.

Dimly she felt his friendliness and smiled too. An image of his broad jovial face with its tight, unlined flesh, downy hair and little eyes beneath protuberant rambling brows, was printed now

in her mind and stored away under the label of "friend." She was to forget the circumstances of their meeting and remember only that he was someone who had smiled at her when she was unhappy. Without knowing it, he had strengthened her resolution.

She turned again to the window. The airstrip, rising, rising, slid away beneath the plane. They bumped on the earth, rose and fell once more. The plane had landed. It coasted a little down the strip and stopped before a low, tin-roofed building that was the airways office. A moment later the gangway was brought forward and the door flung open.

Emma did not move. Panic had seized her. It was not the thought of landing into danger that terrified her, but of landing alone. For the first time in her life there was no one to meet her, no one to manage her luggage and drive her to her destination. She was helpless and terrified in the face of those small, practical details that had always been seen to by someone else.

"Are you coming now?" It was Miss Smart who spoke, standing with the door open and smiling at her.

The hot, noonday glare burned down on the ground. The tarred airstrip was warm and sticky under her feet. Curiosity and astonishment which are part of the will to live were not so dead in her as she imagined. She forgot her luggage and the horror of being alone and looked around her in profound surprise at being no longer in Australia.

Natives, brown-skinned, with enormous mops of black hair, and blue-skinned, with heads cropped close and peaked like coconuts, were lifting luggage out of the back of the plane and dumping it onto a carrier. Her own countrymen were dressed in white. The little airways shed was lifted up on stilts, as if dreading the ground. And all around her was a landscape so rugged and majestic, so blue, green and fantastic as to take the breath away from even the broken-hearted. The fierce, poetic hills seemed hardly real, but figments rather of some savage imagination. And against this décor, passengers being greeted by friends, luggage being carried and checked, seemed incongruous, almost frightening, rather than normal and businesslike.

Emma picked up her case and walked across to the office away from the shining eyes, flushed cheeks and tender hands of those who had husbands and lovers. She stood in the doorway looking into an office and waiting room filled with busy people all talking and attending to their own affairs. Panic came back. What was she to do? What would happen now? How would she get to Marapai? There had always been someone who said, "Sit,

wait here till I come back," who found out when the buses left and filled in forms.

Then a girl behind a counter saw her standing, her face wild and dismayed, caught her eye and beckoned.

There was a form to fill in. Her luggage was being taken off the plane, and a bus left for town in half an hour. She had only to wait. With infinite relief she looked up and smiled at the fair, pretty young clerk who had been attending to her. As she turned away the clerk said to Miss Smart, who stood beside her, lighting a cigarette.

"Is she all right? She looks a bit mad."

"She's all right," said Miss Smart, dropping a match on the floor. Her moment of compassion was over. People came, people went, they all had troubles and one had one's own too. Those with any guts kept a brave face. Mysteries, however, were another matter. The Territory fed on them and when it could not find them, invented its own. She bent with an air of conspiracy over the passenger list that was spread open on the desk, and tapped a long, lacquered fingernail over Emma's name.

"Take a look at that! That's an interesting name to be carrying in this country."

The clerk read the name aloud. "Nonsense! Why, what would she be doing here now?" She looked up and smiled. "Yes, sir. Can I help you?"

The man who stood in front of her, the man who had sat next to Emma in the plane, appeared not to hear her. He had turned his head and was staring over into the corner of the room, where Emma sat alone, her legs crossed and her overnight bag on the floor at her feet.

Half an hour later the airways bus left for Marapai. Apart from Miss Smart, the clerk and two of the airways male personnel, Emma was the only passenger. Everyone else had gone off with friends in private cars.

The road wound for a mile or so through low hills covered by small, twisted gum trees, with flat, frilly leaves. They were not gum trees as Emma knew them. They seemed to have gone mad, thrusting out leaf and branch, without reason or design, in all directions. Occasionally they passed natives, walking barefooted on the side of the road, the women wearing grass skirts swinging below their knees.

Emma had seen these people before, standing stiffly in illustrations to anthropological books, or in snapshots fixed into a brown album, but these originals, walking loosely along on

broad, flat feet, the sun striking colored lights from their polished skins, were utterly unexpected and astonishing.

The road mounted and turned. Below them stretched the coast with its scattered islands, green and smooth-backed as lazy whales. The little stunted trees had ceased and tropical vegetation blanketed the hills. Trees with huge serrated leaves, the long, bending trunks of coconut palms and creepers tangled tree with tree. To the right of the plain below and straggling up the low hills were the houses of Marapai.

Miss Smart, who sat in front with the clerk, turned and asked, "Do you want to be put off somewhere?"

Emma, passionately attending to the scene ahead, started and looked at her with vacant eyes.

"Do you want to be dropped?"

"Yes, if you don't mind."

She opened her handbag and fumbled within. She produced at length a notebook, opened it at the back page, which was the only page that was written on, and read, "No. 16, Port Road."

"To the mess?" said Miss Smart. "Are you working for the Administration?"

"I should like," said Emma, "to work for Cultural Development." She had not meant to give herself away to strangers but could not resist the perverse, bitter pleasure to be had from the naming of these words.

Miss Smart nudged her companion and turned toward her eloquent eyes. When she turned around again Emma was sitting bolt upright, staring vacantly before her, her lips curved in a sweet, set smile. There was no life in her face; she might have died smiling.

"Is anyone meeting you?" said Miss Smart sharply.

"No," said Emma, blinking her eyes as if to rid them of dust. "Nobody. Nobody at all." The pleasure had gone. For an instant her loneliness was almost unbearable. But I am not alone, she desperately told herself. I shall have friends, and enemies. It was on the enemy that her thoughts most lovingly lingered.

They had now reached the outskirts of Marapai and drove along the sea front through a long avenue of casuarina trees. Coconut palms reached out over the water's edge as if yearning for other islands. On the other side of the road bungalows were tilted up among green trees and shrubs with variegated leaves, and there were banana trees with huge, floppy leaves, shredded by the wind.

She looked around her at the people they passed, thinking, *He* might be any of these (for she had little information about him

and the picture of him that she held in her mind was purely imaginary). He might be sitting in any of these houses, she said to herself, or driving a jeep along this road, not dreaming that today is different from any other day. Thinking himself secure and safe. She found that these thoughts made her feel less desolate.

They had nearly reached the end of the avenue. The driver tooted violently and an old, crippled native hobbled nimbly out of the way of the car. "Nearly wiped off that savage," he said, and roared with laughter.

A few moments later they drew up by a long, wooden bungalow with an iron roof.

"That's No. 16," said Miss Smart, and opened the door. The driver saw to her luggage. Emma looked at her new home without much interest. It needed painting and looked generally dilapidated. There was a gray, blotched look about the walls, as if they were breaking out here and there into patches of mold. A strip of corrugated iron had been nailed over one window. A front step was broken. She mounted the steps and turned to wave good-by. She heard the engine start up and the car moved away. She was alone once more. There would never again, it seemed to her, be anyone permanently there beside her, only odd strangers who filled in a form, carried a suitcase, or saw one into a car. And then the wheels turned, the dust puffed up and one was alone once more.

She was confronted now with a short passage and three closed doors. The passage was completely bare except for one frayed grass mat. From the door at the far end came the sound of voices. She stared at it. What should she do? Should she knock? Should she go in? Should she wait? There was no one to guide her or advise her, and those who had loved her in the past had, indulging themselves in the enjoyment of her helplessness, failed to equip her for this moment, and left her in panic at the sound of voices behind closed doors.

Then the door opened of itself and a native in a long white skirt came out, leaving it ajar. She could see into the room beyond. Twenty or thirty young women were sitting at long, trestle tables having lunch. They were served by natives, like the one she had just passed in the hall, who were barefooted and wore only white or colored ramis. Some of them wore little black and yellow bands round their forearms and beads in the pierced lobes of their ears.

In the center of the room stood a woman with gray hair who seemed to have authority. Her head flicked back and forth,

watching the native waiters. Emma waited, hesitating against the wall. The girls nearest her were eating cold meat and hot tinned peas which they denounced with ardor, but no one noticed her. Eventually she walked over to the woman in the center of the room.

"Excuse me," she said softly, "I have a room here."

The woman did not look at her. Her eyes, set between narrow lids which she held contracted as if this enabled her to see more keenly, flicked about the room in search of material for correction. "There are no rooms here," she said.

"I arrived today," said Emma, "by plane. I'm working for the Government. I have a letter."

"There are no rooms here," said the woman clearly. "I ought to know. I'm in charge of the place." She looked at Emma now. Her manner was so forthright, her words so direct, that Emma immediately accepted her statement. She had not yet had any cause to question the simple codes of her convent teaching, and felt that no one like this, no one in authority, could possibly be wrong.

"What shall I do?" she cried in despair. This loss of her room seemed like a major disaster. She had had little enough, a letter saying that a room was waiting, a pillow for her head, not till then counted as anything, now seen as last small securities. Now she had nothing.

Then the woman said, "Of course, I remember, you've been moved. You're in Castle Warwick now."

"What?" said Emma, flinching.

"Castle Warwick," said the woman, slowly and carefully. She was evidently very nervous and choked back impatience with considerable effort. "Your room went to someone else and you've been transferred up there."

"Why is it called Castle Warwick?" said Emma faintly.

The woman stared again about the room. Things, she implied, were piling up that needed her attention. "Because somebody called Warwick lived there, of course."

"I won't go there!" said Emma, passionate and terrified. "I won't go there! My letter says I'm to stay here and I won't go there!"

"There are people," said the woman, who was apparently used to this sort of thing, "who have been waiting for this room for months. Why should you get it when you've only just arrived? You'll like Castle Warwick. It's very nice."

"You can't force me to go," cried Emma. "I have a letter saying I'm to stay here. You can't make me go there."

"Your letter," said the woman tersely, and patience seemed pain to her "was written in Australia. This is Papua, and things here are different. Someone has taken your room. You're lucky to have one. Your house is at least made of wood, not paper. There are men living in native police barracks on the other side of the town. What on earth do you expect of this place? I advise you to take possession of your room before someone else does."

She was not unkind, she was well liked but she was tired of complaints she could not rectify and the climate made her nervous.

For a moment Emma felt she could go no farther. The whole thing had proved too much for her. The enemy had the fates on his side. She was struck down before the fight had started.

Then slowly, mounting out of the pain, emerged that servant of life, curiosity. What was it like? There had been of course snapshots in that brown album, but how nullifying, how misleading, snapshots had been proved. There was something in this country, its colors, its trees, its glittering air, its beautiful, silky-skinned people, that evaded all attempts to capture it, to pin it down in snapshots, in words, in writing. Of those things that were familiar and expected—the houses stilted up from the ground, the coast line with its islands, the swinging grass skirts of the native girls—the element recognized was always the element of least importance. There was a drab resemblance, but all that was vital, graceful and mysterious remained uncommunicated.

"How long," she said quietly, "has it been a Government mess?"

"Only a few weeks. Since the owner died. It's been open a fortnight. You take the fork by the hotel and follow the right-hand road up the hill. Ask someone, you can't miss it." She turned toward one of the native boys who was walking past with a pile of dishes. But Emma had risen above the horror of the situation, had even discovered in it a terrible joy, and stood her ground.

"What room shall I have?" she asked.

"Good heavens," said the woman, turning and staring at her, "I don't know. You'll find that out when you get there."

"I have luggage here," said Emma desperately. It seemed that this woman who had said "Castle Warwick" twice in the space of a few moments was more important than any of the shadowy forms that had drifted across her life for the past two months, and she dreaded to let her go.

"Leave it on the veranda. I'll send some of the boys up with it when lunch is over." And she darted off, making her escape from a girl who struck her as being stupid, queer and altogether a nuisance.

They ought to be more careful, she thought, for the twentieth time that week, whom they send up to this place. Good solid girls with heads on their shoulders, girls with strong bodies to withstand the climate and the conditions, and strong heads to withstand the men. Not little pale, tenderly raised, frightened creatures like this.

Emma mounted the steps of her future home. It was built back from the road; the land rose sharply so that the garden was terraced and the steps were long and steep. They were bordered on either side by strange, flat-topped trees, reminiscent of trees in Japanese prints, that were breaking out into red blossom and still carried long, black pods from last season's flowering.

It was very hot, and Emma, slowly climbing under the thin shade, became aware that she was desperately tired. The brilliant sunlight, splashing about on the ground at her feet, dazzled her eyes and made her feel sick and dizzy. So in this dazed and weary state she approached almost without emotion the house ahead. As she climbed higher the garden grew thicker and more ordered; it was composed mainly of the feathery trees with the red flowers, and other trees with round, smooth branches and clusters of white, scented flowers.

Every now and again she paused and looked around her, but it was to gather strength rather than absorb impressions. As the steps mounted higher she could see over the banks of green and flowering trees the bleached tin roofs of the town, the wharf where one large steamer was tied up, and directly below, the back yard of the hotel with piles of amber bottles burning in the sun like huge heaps of resin among a tangled amorphous mass of rusty junk, metal, machinery, wrecked vehicles and wire.

Then, as she reached the door, all this suddenly dropped away out of sight and she was left with a clean view down the coast to the final dim islands and misty peninsulas. A faint breeze fluttered the leaves around her and dried the sweat that broken out on her body. She mounted the steps and looked in through the open door. The sunlight and the feathery shadows of leaves played on the bare floor. At the end of the passage a black and white cat appeared and swayed toward her, lashing its tail.

She felt dimly that the photographs had again entirely misled.

That there was here something utterly unexpected, something to do with the light and the leaves, and the feeling that one was not inside a house at all, but she was too tired to think about it. I want a bed to lie down on, she thought.

She first tried the door on the right. But the room was occupied. Clothes untidily draped bed and chair. Unemptied ashtrays, a bottle of gin and two empty glasses on a table seemed to indicate fairly relaxed discipline. The bed was unmade. She tried the door opposite.

This room was unoccupied. It was small and bright. A bed with a cotton cover, once blue, but faded now to a drained gray, a floral curtain fixed across one corner of the room, a chest of drawers, a small wooden carved table, a woven grass mat on the floor. There were no windows but the top half of the veranda wall opened outward like a flap and was held in position by a long peg of wood. Coarse wire netting had been nailed over the aperture.

Emma, her head and heart now entirely empty, walked across to the bed. An enormous cockroach shot out from under the mat and scuttled across the room.

She lay down on the bed and her limbs seemed to fall apart with weariness. In one corner of the ceiling crouched a little gray lizard. For some reason she did not mind this, though she minded the cockroach. Both had been unexpected. She went to sleep feeling obscurely glad that the lizard was there. It was company. She felt that she had infinitesimally escaped utter loneliness.

Chapter THREE

SHE AWOKE to the sound of scuffling feet and voices on the veranda outside.

She had on opening her eyes no very clear idea of where she was and it was some moments before she could make out what was happening. The room in which she lay burned in a strange, rosy glow. The gray lizard on the ceiling was now pink, as if lit from within. Three natives were carrying her luggage up onto the veranda. She rose, straightened her dress and went out to meet them.

A small, brown-skinned man carrying her hat box addressed her incomprehensibly: "Sinadaba's sometings," he stated.

In the garden behind him a few flowers blazed out like torches in the trees, and his body glowed with red lights as if from the reflection of a fire. The sky was so violently colored it frightened her. She felt she wanted to dive indoors and hide from something which out here in the garden threatened her. She was so oppressed with color she forgot to feel lonely.

She pointed to her room and the three boys took the luggage in and departed single file down the steps to the road, flopping down from step to step on flat, yellow-soled feet. Their bodies heaved from side to side and the red lights shifted across from shoulder to shoulder. The boy who had spoken went last and as they reached the bottom of the garden he thrust up an arm, thin, dark as a serpent, and plucked a flower. A vague, unbidden emotion stirred within Emma as she watched, but suspecting in this sensation the threat of fresh pain she turned her back on the garden and went inside.

The door on the other side of the passage opened and a young woman appeared, lifted her arms, stretched, yawned. She was a tall, dark girl in her late twenties. She wore a black dressing-gown embroidered with scarlet dragons. One sleeve was torn, and her black hair fell in heavy, uncombed locks around her shoulders. She looked rather dirty, but this impression might have been imposed upon her by a glimpse that was afforded of the room behind, which remained as Emma had formerly seen it, the bed unmade, the two unwashed glasses and unemptied ash-tray still on the table, and soiled clothes draping the backs of chairs. But Emma, looking at her face, felt immediately that she rode clear of her soiled and sordid air. Her dirty brocade slippers and the frayed grandeur of her scarlet monsters seemed in no way pointers to a tarnished personality. Emma thought her beautiful. Her face was dignified and calm. Her long, heavy eyes looked incapable of any expression other than a serene gentleness.

"Have you just arrived?" she said, in a smooth, deep voice. Emma nodded.

She blinked her eyes and said vaguely, "So they stuck you up here. You were allotted to No. 16."

"Yes," said Emma. "But somebody took the room."

"It's not liked here." She turned as she spoke, pushing her door farther open, to look at an electric kettle on the floor. "It's the rats. The place is overrun with them. It's falling to bits. They should have patched it up before they let us in it. It may be all right for a mad anthrop. They're a dippy lot and put up with

anything. Still, housing's such a problem. Lucky we're not all in tents."

"Mad anthrop?" said Emma. She looked at the girl with hungry eyes.

"Come in, I'm making tea." She led the way and Emma, drawn by the two words and the look that this young woman had of being kind, followed her inside. "The fellow who used to own this place," she explained. She cleared some clothes off a chair and tossed them on the bed. She did not apologize for the room and probably saw nothing in it to apologize about. "David Warwick. You may have heard of him, he's supposed to be famous. I hadn't but that doesn't mean a thing. There are no limits, I am told, to my ignorance."

She produced from a shelf behind a curtain two cups, a bottle of milk, a teapot and a tin of biscuits, and found places for them among the ashtray, the glasses, and the bottle of gin.

"He committed suicide," she said, and turning, stared at the kettle which was coming to the boil.

Emma too gazed at the steaming kettle. She did not reply. She was as near to happiness as she had been since she left Australia. She forgot the parrot-breasted sky and the hand thrust up to pluck the flower. She lost her sense of strangeness and felt that she had come home.

"Why?" she said quietly.

"Debts. Look at this place, falling to bits. It's one of the biggest houses in town. Prewar. You can always tell the prewar houses, they're big and airy, with verandas. Since the war they put us in boxes, designed one would think for people in snow countries. They think it's progressive, doubtless."

"But did he have such debts?" said Emma.

"It's come out since that he had. Enormous ones. But being a celebrity—a sort of national figure, you know—some of them were wiped out, and he just came out clear. He must have been hopeless with money. Just didn't care about it, and like people who don't care . . ."

"I can't understand," said Emma, "why a man who didn't care about money would kill himself because he didn't have any."

The girl flicked a lock of hair out of the tea she was pouring and handed the cup to Emma. "I entirely agree."

"Do you mean," said Emma tensely, "that you don't believe he killed himself . . ."

"For money? Never." She spoke with gentle emphasis. "And

what's more, a lot of other people don't believe it either. It's just said—well—for something to say."

"Then why? Why?"

The girl stirred her tea. Her lids were lowered. Her face somber. "Some people," she said, "don't seem to need a reason. Just being here is enough."

"Oh, that's *not* enough!" said Emma passionately.

The spoon went round and round. Her lids were still lowered. "Some people," she said, "aren't right for this place. One needs a particular sort of thick skin." She looked up and a lazy smile touched her eyes. "Like mine. I can never see anything to complain about. Plenty of sun. I love the sun, and bathing. I love walking round with practically nothing on all day. But some people get jittery."

"Not *this* one!" cried Emma. "He'd been here for years."

"No," she sipped her tea. If she was surprised at Emma's knowledge, she gave no sign. "Probably not this one."

"Then if people don't believe—about the debts I mean, why don't they *do* something?" She leaned forward. The teacup rattled in its saucer. She put it down and clasped her quivering hands.

"Do? What could they do?" She blinked at Emma over the rising steam. "Why don't you drink your tea?" she said.

"But if they didn't believe it they should find out the truth."

"Why? The facts are enough. The facts are he's dead and we're in his house. What does the truth matter and when does one ever find it? How far does one go?" She put down the cup and began chipping the nail polish off her thumb nail. "All my life I've lived with people who want to find out the truth—about me, about themselves, about anything. I don't give a fig for the truth."

Emma's shining eyes looked straight through the face of the girl before her. "Truth and Justice," she said, "are the only things that matter."

"Do you think so?" She was inspecting a chip of pink lacquer in the palm of her hand. She had lived the last five years of her life among people who either were or tried to be intense, and Emma's un-Australian earnestness did not alarm her. "I don't think they matter so much. When I think at all," she added, "which isn't often, so I'm told, I'm a philistine. I'm against knowledge and against truth. Most definitely I'm against justice. It would be terrible for all the people I like most if we had justice."

Emma picked up her cup again. Her hands had stopped trembling. "Where," she said, "where was he found?"

"In this house. I'll show you later." She threw Emma a brief, searching glance and said, "By the way, my name's Sylvia Hardy. What's yours?"

"I'm Emma Warwick," said Emma, not looking at her. She put down her empty cup.

Sylvia made no comment. "More tea?" she said, holding out her hand.

"No, thank you. I must go now." She stood up and looked at the door. She was reluctant to go. Something desperate and hungry in her nature had already grappled itself upon this chaotic little room and its occupant. "Do you know of a man," she said at length, "named Trevor Nyall?"

Sylvia did not look up. "Yes, everyone knows him. He's one of the great."

"Do you know where he lives?"

"Yes, just up the hill from here. This is where all the big boys live. We're among the elite. You follow the road up the hill. It's third house from the top."

Emma moved to the door. "Don't be late for dinner," said Sylvia, "it's at six-thirty. It's six o'clock now. Is he," she added, "a friend of yours?"

Emma shook her head. "Not exactly." She thought she detected a sign of something ironic and skeptical in Sylvia's eyes and said quickly, "I was told he would help me. He will, won't he?"

"He will probably shower you with kindness," said Sylvia. "It's his reputation."

But Emma left with the uneasy feeling that there was something behind those words that she had not caught.

The road mounted steeply and was bordered on either side by houses set back in thick gardens. Some were built like the house she had just left, bungalows with verandas and walls that opened out like the sides of boxes. Others were more like modern Australian flats, square and boxlike with wire-screened windows. Everywhere the tree with the black pods and feathery leaves was breaking into flower. Two natives, walking toward her down the hill, had stuffed clusters of blossom into their thick mops of hair. As she mounted the road the view down the coast behind her cleared and lengthened, but she did not pause to look back. A sense of anxiety and strangeness had returned, and she walked quickly, without looking about her, as one will hurry through

a wood at twilight, pursued by a vague sense of danger. A lorry passed her, and behind walked a woman wearing a cotton frock and carrying a tennis racket. She stared at Emma but did not smile.

Soon the road sharply turned and narrowed. The vegetation had thinned and she could see ahead three houses, the last of which appeared to crown the hill. There was also a new house being built, only as yet a timber shell, standing like a pile of pink bones on the hill above. She paused at the bottom of some steps and looked up.

The house that Sylvia had recommended was blind-eyed—the sun blazing in its veranda windows—and appeared to reject or ignore her.

She mounted the steps. The exertion of the climb and the knowledge that she had begun—that this was the first step—made her heart thump and caught at her breath.

She had not, since waking, laid a firm grasp on this strange new land, with its huge leaves and burning flowers, and her presence now in this place was something hard to believe in. The garden was not behaving according to laws known to her. The sun had gone from the slopes of the hill, but colors were brighter and denser. Shrubs that she passed with red and yellow leaves seemed about to burst into flame. A vine of apricot bougainvillæa flowering on the veranda ahead touched the senses like a hand on a raw wound.

It struck her that this country had passed the limits of beauty and richness and dived off into some sort of inferno on the other side. She thought vaguely that beyond some extreme point of beauty there could be not only heaven but hell. She was one of those from whom the tropics drew an immediate and passionate response. But to respond with joy at such a time was unthinkable and suggested the frailty of sorrow. She could not deny the fact of having in some way responded, and decided, as so many who feared their own passions had decided before her, that the country was evil. It seemed to her that the flowers around her might have been gorged on blood.

Halfway up to the house she met a native walking down the steps toward her. He might have been a house boy for he wore no ornaments or armbands, only a clean, white cotton rami falling from his waist to his ankles, and embroidered down the front fold with a red "N." His hair was cropped straight across the top like a thistle.

She spoke to him, hardly expecting to be understood. "Is this Mr. Nyall's house?"

He stood aside, stopped, but said nothing. His eyes, black and so soft as to seem not solid, but like some dark, clotted fluid, regarded her straightly with a complete lack of evasion. Then his face broke into a smile. He lifted an arm in a loose, exquisite gesture and waved at the house.

"Mr. Nyall, yes, sinabada."

She went on up to the house. As the inferno dropped away behind and the old, familiar world of houses, rooms and verandas drew nearer, she began to feel nervous. Had she acted rightly? Should she perhaps have written or rung up? Would she offend by landing from the blue like this? She paused at the bottom of the veranda steps and listened.

No sound emerged from the house, at least there were no guests, no party was being given. So she mounted the steps and looked in through the open door.

She could see inside a large, bright room. Actually it seemed hardly a room at all, for the top half of the outside wall was lifted out and propped open, and sprays of green leaves had found their way in from the bushes outside. Long, gauze drapes falling down over open doorways wafted to and fro in a faint wind. There were rugs on the golden floor and the furniture was made of thick gold bamboo. Emma thought it the most beautiful room she had ever seen, and caught unawares, said to herself, "How I should like to live in a house like this."

A man was kneeling on the floor at the far end of the room mending the plug of a reading lamp. She paused in the doorway and studied all she could see of him. He was thin, which she had not expected—she had thought of him as being large, possibly even fat. His arms were as brown, in this light, as those of the native she had passed on the steps. His hair was black, rather long, and untidy.

He switched on the light and stood up. Then he must have felt her there, for he looked round. He still held a screwdriver in his hand. His face was thin and he looked ill. He had a look, not of an important man, but rather of one who avoided importance. He was tall and well built, but stooped, as if feeling that a good physique were in some way a disadvantage and better disguised. He could not have been more than thirty-five and was possibly younger. She had expected someone much older, round about the age of David Warwick, possibly older than that.

"Mr. Nyall . . ." she said.

"I can't see you," he said. "Come in. You're standing against the light."

"I'm sorry." She felt rebuffed. She felt that he should have recognized her instantly.

She moved forward and he watched her intently. He wore glasses and behind these his eyes, already large, were enormously magnified. The lids were purple, almost black, as if stained by some violent illness.

"I don't know you," he said. "Though your face is familiar."

"You might have seen a photograph of me." She had reached one of the minor crises of her pilgrimage and felt that for him too the moment should be similarly illuminated.

He looked away as if she disturbed him and shook his head. "I'm sorry."

"Well, you haven't met me," she said. "I'm Emma Warwick." She waited. It was one of those moments which she had felt would offer happiness. There was still some sort of bitter joy in belonging to David Warwick. She felt herself obscurely reflecting his eminence. She had been, after all, his choice, and something of him rested therefore in her.

But he gave her no acknowledgment. "*You can't be his wife!*" he said.

"I am." She resented his incredulity, but gave no sign of this.

He was staring at her, and then in the very moment that expression seemed about to flood over his face, it was as if he had slammed his doors and locked his house against her. His face became like a mask, with features so vacant and secret as to appear idiotic. And then, as if retaining this mask was agony to him, he jerked around and turned his back on her.

She stared at him, so surprised as to feel nothing. She did not know how to go on. But after a moment he turned around again.

"What are you doing here?" he said.

"I have come to see you."

He brushed this aside, waving a hand from which the screw-driver still dangled. "Here, in this country."

She then saw that something was wrong. "Where else would I go?" she said. "This is my home."

"You've never been here before?"

"I have no other," she said. The tears stung her eyes, for he had brought home to her the pitifulness of her position. "And anyway, where else would I go? His friends were here. This was where he lived and worked. That's so, isn't it?"

"Yes," he muttered, "that's true." But he did not look at her and threw instead a wild glance about the room as if seeking for some way of escape.

Then he said: "You're Australian, aren't you? You have people in Australia?"

She resented suddenly that he should tell her what to do and what not to do when there was so obviously only one choice for her and answered curtly, "I have no people."

He looked away again. A faint sound came from his lips. She thought he had said: "Oh, my God!"

She spoke stiffly now, unwilling to expose to him the more intimate and precious of the motives that had brought her here. "There was no one, there was nowhere else to go, there was nothing else to do. You sound as if I shouldn't be here. Where else should I be? There's no other place possible for me."

"And *this*," he said harshly, "isn't possible for you."

Suddenly she saw his behavior in a new light. She moved eagerly a little nearer, and then restrained herself. "Why?"

"It's a queer place," he said vaguely.

"Is it wicked?" she naïvely asked. It was only four years since she had left the convent where she had been educated—she was not Catholic but her father had believed a convent training best suited for a child who he hoped would turn out gracious, submissive and womanly. The four years following this had been given over almost exclusively to nursing her father and completing a secretarial training. She had had no time or opportunity to formulate any complicated notions of wickedness. Wickedness, she believed, was a quality that one looked for, and instantly recognized, in the faces of disreputable strangers. She had not yet learned to suspect the gentleness of parents or the generosity of friends.

"Not entirely," he said. "But any that there is is likely to come your way."

She moved forward again, her eyes sparkling. "Do you think so? It was dangerous, wasn't it, to come here?"

He looked down at her wild young face. She looked then, with her feverish, hungry eyes, marked down for tragedy.

"Yes, it was stupid, and dangerous."

"Oh thank God!" She clasped her hands. "But you will help me, won't you? I've come here for your help."

He drew back as if in revulsion. "Where are you living?"

"In my husband's house," she said proudly, seeing it now as the best place to be.

"You're mad! Mad! What in God's name are you up to?"

Her voice dropped to a whisper. "I'm looking for a man called Jobe. Do you know where he is?"

He flung up again the hand holding the screwdriver. "I won't

help you. I won't help you in any way whatsoever. I want nothing to do with you."

She drew away from him. The fact that he was her husband's friend had held her, up to date, loyal to the hope that he would help her, but now she felt a rush of anger toward him. She hated him then, not only for having refused to help her, but for some other more obscure and terrible reason. She felt that some new horror had presented itself. She wanted never to see him again. She wanted to forget his face and everything that he had said. And before she left she wanted to wound him.

"I'm sorry. I thought you were his friend. I was told that you'd help me. But I can see you're afraid and don't wish to implicate yourself."

He was frowning. "I've never professed to be your husband's friend," he said dryly, "and I'm quite sure he's never claimed *me* as one. In fact I'm beginning to suspect that you've made a mistake."

"You're not Trevor Nyall," she said.

"No, I'm not." He was moving to the door.

She stood watching him. She was glad he was not Trevor Nyall. It was good to be not entirely friendless. And it was good not to have to change one's mind about someone whom one had theoretically admired. But best of all to know that David had not been wrong. She had never known him to be wrong and it would have subtly injured her memory of him to have found in Trevor a false friend.

"Who are you?" she said, following him out onto the veranda.

But he ran down the steps ahead of her and did not answer. She saw to her surprise that it was almost dark outside. Stars had broken out in the sky and the fires had left the shrubs and trees.

The bougainvillæa twining over the veranda was papery and colorless.

"I'll drive you home," he called back over his shoulder, and disappeared round the corner of the house.

She followed him round the drive to the back where a jeep was parked under a large tree. "I'm not going home," she said. "I'm going to see Mr. Nyall."

He opened the door and stood waiting for her to get in. A light switched on in the back of the house and he turned his head and looked at it anxiously. He slammed the door behind her and hurried round the front of the jeep to the driver's seat.

His movements were urgent, almost desperate, as if he longed to be rid of her as soon as was humanly possible. He started up

the engine and drove along a short drive at the back of the house and out through a gate. Twice he looked back over his shoulder.

"I am not going home!" she said again. "I am going to see Mr. Nyall!"

He did not answer. She knew that he would not take her there, but it did not occur to her to ask herself why she had, therefore, consented to drive with him at all. She was conscious now of a strange new exhilaration. Hostility fluttered like passion between them.

"Isn't Mr. Nyall's house farther up the road?" she said as he turned down the hill. She had known he would turn, but there was a perverse excitement to be had from forcing out of him a declaration of non-assistance. She had taken the right path. She had made her first enemy. And since there could be no love, hatred was what she most yearned for.

"I'm not taking you there," he said. "I'm taking you to your house."

"I'm not going home!" she cried, more in exultation than anger. "I'm going to see Mr. Nyall."

"I don't care. You can do what you like, but I'm not taking you there." He spoke doggedly as if not helping her had become some sort of ideal to him.

"Why won't you take me?" she cried. "Why don't you want me to see Mr. Nyall? Are you afraid he'll help me? Is that it? Are you afraid I might find Mr. Jobe?"

He did not answer and his face told her nothing.

They did not speak again till they reached her house. She sat beside him with her hands clenched in her lap, the little fires of anger and excitement slowly dying down within her. He leaned across her and opened the door, but did not get out. She stood on the roadway, closed the door and faced him.

"Thank you," she said, "for all you've done."

He turned to look at her and his expression questioned, though he said nothing.

"I've always known," she said, "that something was wrong. And you've given me my first proof. Now I shall find the Truth."

"The truth!" He echoed the words, but they broke from his lips like a moan. In the next moment he had gone, the jeep spurting away and raging up the hill. She had the impression that he had fled in terror.

She was late for dinner. She found the dining room, a large, airy room opening onto a veranda, on the other side of the house. There were three tables, at one of which two young girls

sat talking and giggling. The other diners had left and native servants were carrying away the dirty dishes.

She sat by the veranda and looked out over the darkening town. Those who have always known, and suddenly lost, security and comfort, find these evening hours the hardest to endure. Darkness brings with it tenderness. Voices, impatient during the day, are subdued, and hands caress. Emma forgot the man on the hill and thought only of these things.

When she finished dinner it was quite dark. The town below twinkled with lights and only a pale streak along the horizon remained of the sunset. There was no light in the hall outside her room, and she felt her way with one hand along the wall. She paused outside Sylvia's door and hesitated. The picture she held in her mind of the warm, chaotic little room, homely, musty as a burrow, enticed her now. She raised her hand to knock. Then in the next instant the door swung away from her, and a man, evidently in a hurry, lurched out into the passage.

She did not see his face for he collided straight into her. She felt his body quiver. A sound that was almost a scream broke from him. Then he stepped, or rather fell back, and slammed the door in her face.

Chapter FOUR

PHILIP WASHINGTON leaned against the door, pressing his body against it as if fearing invasion from the other side.

"What on earth's the matter?" said Sylvia in her slow voice. She sat on the bed with her legs tucked up beneath a green chiffon skirt, fashionable some years ago, renovated, but still subtly suggesting its departed heyday. A cockroach had eaten a hole in the hem and this she absentmindedly scratched with her fingernail.

"There's a native outside!" He spoke quickly, and his clear, rather high-pitched voice trembled. "Prowling around outside the door."

"Don't be absurd," said Sylvia. "It's the girl in the next room. I heard her close the door."

"I tell you it was a native! Do you think I don't know a native when I see one!" But he had relaxed a little and spoke sharply, not because he was convinced, but because he did not like being contradicted, particularly by Sylvia. "I could smell one a mile

off, a hundred miles off! You want to be careful about boys prowling round up here. If you're not careful you'll all be raped. And you'd be the first too, lounging around with nothing on all day and flashing your legs about the place."

"The whole place is 'boy-proofed,'" said Sylvia mildly. She knew that when Philip was nervous or upset he would invariably take it out on whoever happened to be near, and took no notice of him.

That he was upset now was evident. The blood had come back to his face, but it still looked pinched and strained. He did not go out again, but reached for the gin bottle with a hand that violently trembled. He was, in his calmer moments, a handsome man with a thin, well-featured face and very light-gray eyes. He was tall, spare and graceful, and was looked upon by his rather more husky associates as effeminate. This judgment was only partly due to his appearance. He was interested in native life, particularly native arts, and this was supposed by the average Marapai male to be queer and vaguely indecent.

He sat down in a chair from which Sylvia had removed some but not all of her clothes, slopped a little water into his glass and lifted it unsteadily to his lips.

"You're a pack of nerves, darling," said Sylvia gently. "You really ought to take leave."

"For God's sake stop telling me I ought to be taking leave!" he burst out petulantly. "Of course I ought to be taking leave! Any fool can see that. I tell you I can't get away." He put down the glass and upset the still unemptied ashtray. "Really, Sylvia," he continued coldly, brushing ash from his faultlessly laundered trousers, "you are a slut. You live like a pig. I don't know how you can bear this squalid mess."

"I tidied it," said Sylvia. "And you don't have to come here. I can't think why you did. You always swore you'd never set foot in this house."

Washington, realizing that if he became any more objectionable he would probably have to leave, did not answer, but leaned back and lit a cigarette.

Of course it hadn't been a native, he thought, only a girl with a pale face. He could see it now quite clearly. The other figure—of a naked brown man with a face painted white for dancing—had been, as Sylvia had implied, all purely imagination. The figment of wrought-up nerves, a fortuitous banking of lights and shadows. And yet, imagination—he poured the barely diluted gin down his throat—imagination—where did it in this cursed country begin and end? The longer one stayed the less

sure one became of where the flesh ceased and the phantom began. That a little brown man with a painted face could project his image over miles of jungle—there was nothing strange about this, to a man of imagination. Washington pulled his fingers back through his hair.

This was the house, he remembered, where David Warwick had shot himself. His hands had started to tremble again. Oh, my God! I shouldn't have come here, he thought. Poor Warwick! Poor devil Warwick!

"And speaking of the girl," said Sylvia, "she's an odd little thing, looks like a chicken who's come out of the egg a few days too soon. And oddest of all is her name. Have a guess what it is."

He made an impatient gesture with his hand.

"Warwick," said Sylvia. "Emma Warwick. Could our ghost have a daughter?"

"He was only married a few months," said Washington shortly. "Common enough name."

"She had an introduction to a very dear friend of yours."

"Of mine?" He evinced a little more interest.

"Trevor Nyall," said Sylvia with a faint smile.

Washington did not reply. He worked in the department of which Nyall was Director. He had been interested in his work, but after a few years' promising service had failed to become distinguished or, now, even noticeable. He chose to regard this failure as Nyall's fault. Six months ago a position as Assistant to Nyall had fallen vacant in the Department. Washington had applied for this but his application had been refused and the position had gone to an older man from the south, who was, he liked to believe, a friend of Nyall's, and who had since proved inefficient and troublesome. Since then Washington had built up the idea that Nyall was a man who was afraid of efficiency; who picked the brains of his subordinates but kept them under because he himself could not stand any severe competition. Washington had lost interest in his work. It was, he decided, pointless to work when a power from above was always on the look-out to balk one.

In the tropics decay is as swift and violent as growth. Overnight mold will bristle up on a hat or a shoe, in a few hours a body will rot, in a few weeks a personality will crumble. It was generally said that over the past few months Washington had gone to pieces. He was aware himself of some sort of basic disintegration. He held together just enough to be able to do his work without provoking complaint, for though he hated Nyall

he also feared him, and he was determined to stay where he was for a while yet.

"That," said Sylvia, "made it even odder."

For some reason this attempt on her part to involve the girl across the passage with David Warwick annoyed him. Such a thing would be one more intolerable quirk to an already intolerable situation. He answered sullenly:

"The man has a million acquaintances. *Doing* things for people, *little* things that don't matter, putting people under a sense of obligation . . . that's life to a man like Nyall. And Warwick . . . it's a common name."

"I wouldn't say so."

"*Women*," said Washington acidly, "must always be making situations. They can't see two people having lunch together without packing them off to bed. People must be always connected and complicated. They can't just *be*. Women can't bear it. I suppose it's because they can't bear to just *be* themselves. They must always be clamped on to someone like limpets."

Sylvia leaned forward and replenished his glass. She had worked, after she left school, in Sydney, as an artists's model, and was used to exhibitions of temperament. The artistic nature was, she believed, strange, unaccountable, violent and unpredictable. And it was to be admired and respected. It was the best nature to have—all who laid claim to it had told her so. She, knowing herself to be ordinary, had never tried to be otherwise. She had lived most of her life with those who loved or professed to love, painting, music, poetry, but had failed to cultivate in herself any interest in these various religions. She knew all the jargon but had never contracted the fever. One was born with it, she believed, one came into the world with the print of Apollo's lips on one's forehead. And to these artists, these men of imagination, all reverence was due, all aberrations of behavior were permissible, all wickedness and selfishness forgiven. She had for the past seven years dedicated her life to looking after them. She had lived with three artists who had all seen in her the image of their loved, lost or treacherously remarried mothers. Finally, when the last one left her, she fled in despair to a land where men, she had been told, were made of more solid stuff, only to find her heart drifting back in the old inevitable direction, back to the artistic temperament, back to Philip Washington.

He was, it was true, hardly an artist in the truest sense of the word. His achievements in the creative line were confined to esoteric little poems, whose distressing callowness, Sylvia—awed

by an impressive profusion of native place names—failed to recognize.

There were, of course, fresh ideas and fresh enthusiasms. Not ballet, but native dancing, not Picasso but Sepik masks, not continental cooking but strange exotic, indigestible concoctions of taro and yam. But the old familiar traits were there, rising like the ghosts of her former loves through the bizarre vestments that twelve years of tropical living had imposed—the warm, but so transient affections, the sharp, lively, cruel tongue, the hysterical heights and depths of pleasure and despair, and always—the imagination.

"Here," she said gently, "have another drink." For he was calmer, and therefore, she supposed, must be happier, when half drunk.

He patted her hand, relenting. "Dear little slut."

"I think this place upsets you," she said kindly. "Perhaps you shouldn't have come here. It's only lusty wenches like me that don't mind lying down with dead men."

This pleased him. He was proud of his sensitivity, though of late it had troubled him.

"Where else can I go?" he said sulkily. "You are, in spite of being stupid, about the only sane human being in this incredible town."

Sylvia smiled and blinked her calm eyes. Constant wounding had never toughened her, and almost every word he spoke conjured some painful response. But no flicker of pain showed in her face.

"You used to be happy enough," she said, "to ask people home."

"The place is falling to pieces," he said bitterly. "It's infested with cockroaches. I can hardly sleep at night. They stamp about in the thatch like elephants. And Rei's such a fool he can't even make a cup of tea."

"I told you," said Sylvia, "that you'd regret sacking those two Kerema boys. At least that dirty old devil, the tall one, was a good cook."

"I don't regret it," he cried childishly. "Don't present me with your silly regrets. Only fools regret. I regret nothing!"

He did not mean to hurt her. He believed her for the most part incapable of intense feeling and incapable too of understanding half of what he said. It relieved his feelings to have someone to lash out at. But looking up into her untroubled face, he yearned momentarily for her calm, uncomplicated view of things. He stood up, went across to her, and sinking down at

her feet buried his head in her lap. Sylvia stroked his head and smiled. She could put up with his tantrums for they nearly always ended in this.

She reminded Washington not of his mother, but his sister, who was ten years older than himself, and had always through his childhood and adolescence looked after him. She was a plain woman with an unselfish nature and a twisted foot, who lived in Melbourne and made "artistic" pottery.

It had been his ambition to live with her in a house on the hill among the Administration's most distinguished servants. For though he despised the successful, he yearned for success and wished to cut a figure in the world. But seven years lived extravagantly on a low salary had seen little advancement to these plans. He had no money to build a house of his own and the Government would not provide. Housing was difficult, and the names on priority waiting lists had a way of shifting in favor of high salaries. It was argued by the housing department that he at least had a roof over his head, even if only thatch infested with gekkoes and cockroaches, and boards beneath his feet, rotten and white-anted as they were. He was one of the fortunate, they informed him. Most of the single men lived unspeakably in a mess and almost went off their heads with noise and discomfort.

But for a time he had been fairly happy. He loved the tropics and his house until it began falling to pieces. He had on an average two native servants and sometimes as many as five, and had formed vague and passionate attachments with all of them. They had kept him poor but had amused him. There had always been hope of promotion, and, with it, hope of a house. Then six months ago, these hopes had vanished. The higher position in the Department had gone to someone else. His house was falling to pieces. His clothes were patched, the stores were demanding payment. His sister was still making pottery and had stopped asking for further news of housing in her letters. The Government obviously could not provide and he certainly could not build. People had found him difficult and decided that he was not, after all, so terribly entertaining. This had been the position six months ago. If Washington had been offered a job down south he would have taken it gratefully.

And now . . . now . . . like a frightened puppy he buried his nose deeper into the folds of Sylvia's skirt. She stroked his head.

"I can't sleep," he said, his voice muffled in her dress. "If I could only sleep. I haven't slept for weeks."

"You must take something," she soothed him.

"People prowl around that place at night," he said. "I know they do. I hear them walking around. Somebody came into my house last night."

"Nonsense," she murmured, stroking his hair.

"I tell you somebody was there," he insisted. "I was lying with my eyes closed—not asleep, I never sleep these days. It was a native, I could smell him. I could see him."

"Perhaps it was Rei," said Sylvia.

"I asked him and he said he hadn't been there. Anyway, do you think I wouldn't recognize Rei?"

"Well, he'd lie about it, wouldn't he? If he felt you were accusing him. Of if he'd been in, sneaking after a cigarette or something."

"It wasn't Rei!" he almost shouted at her. "Perhaps it was one of those damned Keremas, and up to no good too." He did not believe that it might have been a Kerema, but this was all he dared say. Actually, until speaking about it, he had not been sure about the thing at all. Had it been a man? Or only a patch of moonlight. It was only thinking about it that made it grow more solid—thinking about it and fearing it. And then there was the smell. That was something he had not made up. He had smelled it then, as he had smelled it out in the passage half an hour ago. It seemed never to leave him. It was as if he carried that odor round with him. He felt he would never lose it as long as he lived.

"What," said Sylvia calmly, "could they be up to?"

He laughed wildly. "Getting their own back because I threw them out. Probably trying a bit of purri purri or something."

"Sorcery!" She lifted her eyebrows and smiled. "Nonsense, I expect you imagined the whole thing." Anticipating another outburst she reached for the only cure she knew and poured him another glass of gin.

"Here, drink this, darling. You're nervy. You don't get enough sleep."

"How can I get enough sleep," he complained, "if damn natives wander round my house all night?"

But the gin was having its effect and he was beginning to feel happier. He began to stroke Sylvia's thighs. She loved him, dear silly, stupid Sylvia. And his sister loved him. And Rei at least was loyal to him, even though he was a bad cook and couldn't be relied upon to keep the dogs away. And then there was the house. Soon he would buy land and build his house. They could all go to the devil. He would snap his fingers at the lot of them. He would snap his fingers at Trevor Nyall. For he would have

his house. And people would respect him and come to his dinner parties. They would be astonished by the magnificence of his hospitality. He would grow orchids. He knew a particular way of serving pawpaw. He would import a Chinese cook. The immigration authorities, having been lavishly entertained, would not raise objections.

He began to work out the menu for his first dinner party. He drew up a list of guests. Trevor Nyall, he decided, would not be included.

It was eleven-thirty when he left Sylvia. The jeep was waiting pulled up by the side of the road, but Rei was nowhere to be seen. Washington, a little unsteady on his feet, but fairly clear-headed, looked up and down the road and whistled. The houses farther up the hill were still lit up, and from somewhere above him came the sound of native voices, but the road was empty.

The wind had dropped and only a faint breeze soughed through the fringes of the casuarina trees. He could smell the scent of frangipani. He paused, enjoying the cool night air. Then he remembered Rei and tooted the horn furiously.

The darkness ahead broke and a vague form appeared, moving hesitantly toward him. It was a police boy. Washington could see his white belt shining in the darkness.

"Oh, go away!" he said impatiently.

He tooted again, sat down in the front seat and lit a cigarette.

Down the side of the opposite hill a loose white blob was hurtling downward. It was all that could at first be seen of Rei. His white rami flapping. He arrived breathless. He had evidently been making a night of it. He was chewing betelnut, wore a hibiscus flower in his hair and had knotted round his neck one of Washington's new dishcloths. Under his arm he carried a guitar decorated with strips of colored paper.

"Where have you been?" said Washington coldly.

"Boyhouse," said Rei, smiling broadly.

"Boyhouse? Whose boyhouse?"

Rei pointed with a vague, sweeping gesture that took in most of the hill.

"What taubada's boyhouse?" said Washington, tapping his foot on the floor of the jeep. The feeling of well-being that Sylvia's body had imparted was already drifting away. He felt suddenly suspicious of Rei, though he did not know why. What had he been doing? Who had he been talking to? He feared . . . he did not know what . . . anything, everything.

Rei did not answer. His smile had died. His face had become

stupid and still, but his eyes seemed to grow larger and brighter. Washington, who could read these signs, knew he was nervous and might now say anything.

"Have you been with any strange boys, any bad boys?" he asked more gently.

"No, taubada." There was no way on earth of telling what might be going on behind those lustrous eyes staring now so straightly into his own.

"All right. Get in and let's go home." They had probably just been gambling. They would naturally not like being questioned. When Rei started up the engine and the jeep moved down the hill, he said, hoping to soothe the boy's ruffled nerves: "Sing to me, Rei. What was that song you were playing up there?"

"I no sing, taubada."

"Why not?"

"Sore head," said Rei, chewing again.

Washington looked away. They were passing along the dock side. A cargo ship was tied up against the jetty. She was still lit up and the lights from her ports tossed and broke as the water lifted and fell. There was no unloading tonight and the jetty was deserted. Only one solitary native squatted on the edge of the wharf, his black, fuzzy head silhouetted like a flower against the sky.

Even Rei, thought Washington, had changed. He had always been a fool, but a gay one. He was always happy. He would bring his friends up to the boyhouse and play his guitar and sing for hours on end—native songs, hillbilly songs, Samoan dances learned from the early Polynesian missionaries. It would seem that he could not help singing. The fact that he was lazy, a bad cook and merciless with laundry was compensated for by his high spirits.

But now he only sang with his own people—as if Washington were a stranger, or an enemy. He went about solemnly now, and quietly, in a manner altogether foreign to his nature. He had ceased to be childlike and had become enigmatic. Sometimes it seemed as if he was hiding something.

All of them, thought Washington—retreating farther and farther away from the comfort of Sylvia's caresses—including Rei who would not sing, had turned against him. And he had been their friend. They had come to him in hordes with their troubles—a piece of old sheet for a sail, iron to patch a roof, a rusty knife, a letter to be written to a friend. He had made speeches at their weddings. But now they no longer came and there was nobody to sing to him. Rei, who wandered round looking enig-

matic and doing things more efficiently than usual, was the only one left. It was as if the whole brown race had smelled him out and no longer trusted him—combined in shunning him, perhaps, God knows, even combined farther than this. He suppressed a shudder.

The road wound round the edge of the water. The tide was out, leaving a few yards of pebbly beach, and half a dozen natives with flashlights were fishing in the shallows. He could see the vague, shadowy outlines of their bodies.

Then the road turned and led back past a long row of paper buildings toward the hills. A wild hillside with only one path threading over its crest loomed ahead. The road turned again and finished in a group of tumbledown iron sheds that had once been Army stores.

"There's no light," said Washington, standing up and peering through the trunks of half a dozen coconut palms. "I told you to leave a light."

"No light," reiterated Rei, and they both stared at the black smudge on the hill ahead that was Washington's house.

"Well, you bloody well go up and light it and come back with my torch."

Rei, who did not like the dark any more than Washington, rolled his eyes.

"Go on! Hurry up! I don't want to wait here all night!"

Rei clambered out of the jeep and started slowly up the path. The darkness swallowed up his head and shoulders, his arms and legs, and left only his white rami floating away like a moth into the gloom. He started to sing.

Why does he sing now? thought Philip. To keep the spirits away? What spirit is he afraid of here in this place? Or did he, without knowing why, merely sense that there was no peace in that decrepit little hut? Had he nosed out the currents of fear in the air?

The white moth of Rei's rami had disappeared but his voice could still be heard, chanting away up the hill. Washington lit a cigarette. In the tangled rubble of the sheds something moved. A door scraped and a piece of tin fell with a clatter to the ground.

"Damn that boy!" he said aloud. He was beginning to feel nervous again and started violently as a flying fox stirred in a pawpaw tree. The leaves scraped and rustled with a dry, papery sound. Then the big, shadowy bat flopped out of the leaves, its heavy wings beating the sky.

His skin had started to prickle. He stared at the path ahead.

What was that boy doing? He tooted furiously on the horn, and in the next moment a light showed in his house. He caught a glimpse of Rei moving across the front door and then the point of torchlight moving toward him down the hill. He watched it approach. It picked out the path in a long, narrow beam.

Then he heard Rei call out: "Wow! Wow!"

Across the beam of torchlight raced a thin, black dog.

Washington sucked his breath between his teeth and clenched his hands in a spasm of rage. For a moment he could not move, then he flung open the door of the jeep and scrambled out onto the road.

"Hold that dog!" he screamed. "Throw the light on that dog!"

The light bobbed up and down wildly, but the dog was almost down to the sheds. Washington clawed about on the ground and picked up a handful of stones. He threw them with wild, inaccurate fury. There was a rattle of struck tin, a faint yelp. The dog, headed off, was streaking his way. He kicked at it as it passed, but it was a gesture of fury rather than an attack, for the dog was at least five feet away. He cursed it savegely and threw another stone, this time taking careful aim. His mind was full of brutal images. He saw his boot crack the dog's skull, he saw the pointed flint pierce its eye. He heard its scream of agony. But it had gone unscathed.

Rei was advancing slowly toward him.

"Where was he?" he said. It was agony not to shout, to speak quietly and reasonably, so as not to frighten Rei.

"Under the house, Taubada."

"Under the house!" In spite of his efforts, his voice rose. "What was it doing?"

"Nothing, taubada. Kaikai."

"Eating? What was it eating?"

"Bone, taubada."

"A bone! A bone! What bone?"

Rei looked nervously away. "Nothing, taubada. Taubada's kaikai. Bone long taubada's kaikai. 'E take 'im long frying pan."

Fear drained away from his body, leaving a feeling of nausea and weakness. "Oh!" He remembered a chop bone lying in a frying pan outside the back door. He started to walk up the hill.

It must have been about three o'clock the next morning when he awoke. He had, after two glasses of almost neat rum, gone immediately to sleep.

It was still and cool. Dawn had not yet come, but the sky outside his window was light and empty as if waiting for the sun.

The wide, serrated leaves of pawpaw trees spread out like hands against the sky. Three glow-worms winked palely in the thatch above his head, their lights blinking on and off like the beating of tiny hearts.

For a moment he lay in peace, as he had done in the old days before there was anything to fear, looking at the glow-worms and the pawpaw leaves. Then, remembering where he was, there rushed forward a consciousness of all that might be waiting for him.

His naked body grew tense beneath the sheet. He lifted the mosquito net and his eyes, wide and wary, began their careful examination of the room. His gaze started at the foot of the bed and slowly moved across to the opposite wall. There were many things which in this dim and eerie hour looked awry and out of shape. His raincoat hooked up on a nail over the front door showed no fold or crease, and might have been the dark, humped shape of a waiting man. But it was a phantom that he had faced before, that he had in fact on a previous evening spoken to and actually flashed his torch upon. Tonight he passed it by and his gaze moved on across the wall. Here a boar's tusk glimmered like a disembodied smile. Three lime gourds set on a shelf had the stark, bone foreheads of human skulls. Tapa cloth moving in the wind rustled like the dry, whispering tread of rats. The only other sound was the faint tinny rattle of a bundle of bamboo jews' harps hanging on the opposite wall.

It was not until his eyes had reached the opposite door that he saw it.

It was standing in the doorway, blocking out what he should have been able to see behind—the hillside, the banana trees, the corner of the boyhouse. None of this was visible, only above its head, a few pale stars. It was a man. A little man, a native. He was not Rei or for that matter any house boy, for he wore no rami. As soon as Washington saw him he could smell him too. It seemed that the whole room stank with the odor of his flesh. Native flesh, unwashed, primitive native flesh. Not the sweet, musty odor of these coastal people who washed and swam in the sea, but the rank stench of a primitive inland man.

Panic seized him. His hand shot out, his fingers clawed up the first thing they touched, which was the half-empty rum bottle on the table beside his bed, and flung it at the open door.

The bottle struck the side of the door and rolled down the steps onto the ground outside. The shadow had gone. It seemed not to step aside, but to fade away, leaving clear the sky with its pricking stars, and the hillside and the long floppy leaves of the

banana trees. There was no sound but the faint drip, drip of the spilt rum, the tankle of the jews' harps and the dry, husky flap of the tapa cloth rustling in the wind.

Sobbing with terror, Washington lay as if chained to his bed.

Chapter FIVE

AT EIGHT-THIRTY the next morning the phone rang on Washington's desk. He let it ring for a few moments, then lifted the receiver and said sulkily, "You're late."

"I'm sorry, darling," said Sylvia, who phoned him every morning at eight-fifteen. "I've only just arrived. I've been round at Staff, looking after a lost lamb. Has anyone come into your office during the past few minutes?"

There was a pause while he looked around. "Only a girl."

"A thin girl with short hair, looking terrified?"

"I wouldn't say terrified. She's talking to Finch."

"She's the girl you bumped into last night," said Sylvia. "An extraordinary creature. She's only just arrived and had to report at Staff this morning. But she was scared to go alone, so I had to go with her." Then she brought out with a certain tone of complaisance: "She's not Warwick's daughter; she's his wife."

There was no answer from Washington and she went on. "What do you suppose she's doing here? It's odd, isn't it? She's so terribly young. I feel sorry for her and yet I wish she wasn't here. She seems in a way—unbalanced. She makes me shiver. I have an odd presentiment about her. . . ."

"How do you know who she is?" said Washington. His voice sounded far away as if his head was turned away from the phone.

"Oh, I know. From things she says. And she's working for your Department. She wanted to get into C.A. where her husband used to be, but Nyall's secretary's on leave, and they've put her in there, relieving. She was upset about not going into C.A., but when she heard about Nyall . . . Hallo!! Hallo! Are you there?"

"Yes, I'm here. I've got to go now."

"You haven't told me how you are. Are you all right?"

"Rotten. I've got a bout of fever coming on, I think. Didn't sleep last night. . . ."

"Darling, you should be home in bed."

"I might go home too. I've been thinking about it."

"I'll come up and cook for you. Poor darling . . . Philip!"
But he had hung up.

It was ten o'clock when Trevor Nyall entered the Department of Survey. Emma, sitting in his office at the far end of the building, heard voices outside saying. "Good morning, Mr. Nyall," and a man's voice heartily replying, "Good morning, good morning."

She waited, staring at the typewriter on the table before her. But he did not immediately appear.

On the big, empty desk in the corner a loose sheet of paper lifted in the air, drifted down and settled on the floor. She did not move to pick it up, but sat, waiting, her hands gripped in her lap.

The door flung open and a gust of wind swept down the length of the building. The paper soared and dived at the window. A file flapped over on the desk and a jam tin tipped water and frangipani flowers on the floor.

The man who had entered shut the door behind him and bent to pick up the paper. It was quite a task for he was very tall and broad and his face, when he straightened, was beaded with sweat. It was a handsome, arresting face. His hair was thick and iron gray, his skin yellow tan, his eyes brilliant and youthful. He had an air, not exactly of complaisance, but of satisfaction. One would gather, to look at him, that he had found life to his liking, that things had turned out his way, that he had not been balked, frustrated or put down, and had managed to make his way in the world without damage to either his conscience or his desires.

Emma had never seen a photograph of him, and his seeming in some way familiar she put down to the fact that he was so exactly as she imagined him. He glanced across at her, smiled and said, "Good morning." His smile was charming. It isn't everyone, she told herself, her heart warming toward him, who would smile at his typist, and she thought of the man on the hill who had not once smiled.

"I'll pick them up," she said.

"Thanks, it's rather a way down for me." His voice was strong and resonant. It might even be called hearty, if this were not a debased word. Emma, bending down beside him to collect the scattered flowers, was beginning to tingle with excitement. He exhaled an air of vigor and optimism that had already infected

her. He would help her, he was strong and confident, he would get things done.

"You must be my new secretary."

She stood up. "I am Emma Warwick," she said.

His thick dark lids, so heavy as to seem reluctant, lifted. His hands had been held clasped together on the desk. They broke apart and lay, fingers curled, palms upward, as if offering something. "No," he said softly and shook his head.

He sat and stared at her as if stunned, then he rose and walked round the desk toward her. He took her hands and looking down at her, said, "Oh, my poor little girl, my poor little child."

Emma's eyes filled with tears. She was happy. She had found a friend. He understood her. He would look after her. He would tell her what to do and how to do it. She need not worry any more.

"What are you doing here?" he said, still holding her hands.

"I came to see you. I wanted your help," she said. "You will help me, won't you?" She fixed on him the wide, dependent, childlike gaze that had so endeared her to her father and her husband.

"Of course I'll help you, my child. Of course I'll do anything I can for you."

"I came to find out," she said, "why my husband was murdered."

He did not start or flinch, but gazed steadily back into her dilated, shining eyes. Then he pulled up a chair and made her sit down. He walked to the door, opened it, looked outside, shut it and turned back. He stopped in front of her, looked down at her and slowly shook his head.

"My child," he said, "your husband was not murdered. He committed suicide."

"No," said Emma. "I'm sorry, Mr. Nyall, you're wrong. He was murdered."

"Now, don't think," he said, smiling down at her, "that I'm surprised that you should think so. You don't like the idea of suicide, do you? You've read in books that it's dishonorable and you know that David was not a dishonorable man."

Emma felt his words did not do justice to what she felt and moved to interrupt him, but he held up his hand and went on, speaking in the gentle, explanatory tone with which people were wont to address her, and which reminded her now of her husband. "But this isn't a story from a book, my child. This is life. *Life*." He beat his fist on the palm of his hand. "It will be hard for you to understand this. This isn't Australia, Emma. People

here behave differently. We are none of us in this country normal, balanced human beings."

She looked at him gravely. She felt she had never seen anyone so normal and balanced. His spirit, she felt, was not starved and crooked, but fat, healthy, and happy.

"Everyone says that David had debts," she began. "I know he was extravagant and he hardly left anything. But debts . . . they say . . ." She paused. "He didn't *care* about money."

He shook his head at her indulgently. "How simple it sounds to you, doesn't it? My child, there comes a time when one just has to care."

"I see no *reason*," she insisted, "why you should think he killed himself."

"If you stayed here for a month or so," he said, "you'd see reason enough." He spoke slowly now, emphasizing each word with a movement of the hand. "This place, Emma, is heartbreaking. Just *heartbreaking*. We have before us an insurmountable problem." He had turned away and was pacing the room, speaking now in a larger way as if addressing a more extensive audience than just Emma. "This is a young, savage, uncultivated land, peopled by natives who are among the most primitive people in the world. I wonder if you understand what that means. We must not only teach them from scratch our particular Western ideas of law and religion, we must drag them, as it were, in a few years, over æons of time. And so much that we have done has been wrong. We have such a responsibility, and so many times we have failed. It is not always our fault, it is because the problem is so immense. And frequently this country attracts the *wrong type*, who just want to make money in any way they can. They make it impossible for us and contact with the white races has proved for the natives in many cases not beneficial, but disastrous." He paused, his eyes returned to Emma's face. His features lost their firm impersonal expression, and he continued, speaking now to her.

"To those of us, Emma, who feel strongly about these matters, the past few years have been heartbreaking. Think of this country as a young child whom we are trying to turn into a respectable adult. People like David have in mind a bright, strong youth, with all our knowledge and none of our corruptions, but what does he find himself producing? Just a cheap, shoddy waster, who isn't an adult and isn't a child. A sort of sly, seedy teen-year-old, who isn't even happy any more. It's terrible for us to see this happening. I tell you it's terrible!"

But Emma, looking up at this tall, upright man, with his clear skin and brilliant untroubled eyes, did not understand.

"There are many ways of committing suicide," announced Trevor, tapping a cigarette on a silver case, "and here you find them all. Sometimes it's drink, sometimes it's gambling, sometimes it's just general moral disintegration, and sometimes, it's the real thing."

He paused and looked at her. "I'm more distressed than I can tell you that you've got this idea in your head. Believe me, it's best to let the whole thing lie; you'll only injure David's reputation. But I'm glad you came of course." His face cleared and he smiled at her. "You must come and stay with us and we'll show you some of the country before you go back. You can have fun here, sailing, golf. . . . Who knows, perhaps you might meet someone here . . . you're young. . . ." He ended optimistically.

Emma smiled vaguely. She had hardly heard him. "It isn't true," she said, "what you said about David."

A faint frown appeared between Trevor Nyall's brows. The corners of his mouth drooped.

"You see . . . David wrote to my father."

"What!" he said sharply.

"He knew he was going to be murdered, and he wrote and told my father. He might even have told him who the murderer was, I don't know, but it doesn't matter, because he told me that. My father received this letter from him two days before we received yours saying that he was dead."

His face had entirely altered. His lips were tight and thin, his eyes had lost their softness. Her heart lifted at these signs in him of firmness and strength. Now he'll help me, she thought.

"What do you mean? Did you see this letter?"

"No," she said. "I didn't see it."

"Did your father tell you what it said?"

She looked away. "No," she said. "He couldn't tell me."

Emma had not heard from her husband for three weeks. He had written to her the day before he left on the trip to Eola and warned her that there might be no word from him for some time. But by the end of a month she had looked forward to news. The postman, like most postmen in suburban streets, had taken an interest in the almost daily correspondence that he had been delivering, and rarely failed to pass remarks concerning the devotion of husbands and the compensations of separation. He had been so concerned over the sudden cessation of letters that she

had found it necessary to explain to him that David was away.

One morning at about ten o'clock she was returning home from the shops at the end of the street, and met him finishing his round. He had just slammed the gate of a house about twelve doors down from her own. He swung his leg over his bicycle, but seeing her, dismounted again and smiled.

"He's back, Mrs. Warwick," he called while she was still some way off.

"A letter for me?"

"Well no, not for you, for your father."

"That's odd, why not for me?"

He was sympathetic and sought for explanation. "Mails are erratic from that place, you know. Planes don't take off, ground mists and things like that. Maybe your letter just didn't get off the ground till later. Seems to be fairly 'appy-go-lucky sort of place."

She nodded and hurried on.

The letters had been collected and she ran up the front steps of the house and in through the door calling her father's name. Since his recovery he had spent his mornings sitting in a room on the east side of the house, which caught the morning sun. She flung open the door of this room, saying, "You've had a letter, Daddy! How is he? Is he back?"

There was no answer. The high back of her father's chair was turned to the door. A fire had been lit, for though it was spring and the plum blossoms outside the window were already falling, the air was sharp, and there had been heavy morning frosts. The room was filled with sun, yet the silence chilled her and she paused. The flames of the fire were weak and pale, as they are in morning sunlight. "Daddy."

Still he did not speak. At first she thought he could not be there. Then his hand moved and dropped listlessly down over the arm of the chair. She moved across the room and round in front of him. She thought he might be asleep. But he was not. He was staring into the fire before him. Emma, still thinking of the letter, did not at first notice the gray pallor of his skin and the loose folds into which his cheeks had fallen, as if life were already shrinking away and leaving the flesh to sag and crumble. She looked at the table beside him, and there was the envelope with its green air mail stamp and its familiar writing. But the envelope was empty.

The letter was not on the table, nor in his hand.

"Daddy, David . . ." she began. Then she looked at him. He had not moved. His eyes were still fixed on the fire. She forgot

the letter, she saw the shriveled horror in his face. It struck her that his eyes were fixed forever upon some point in the fire which held him trapped, bewitched, from which he could never again break free.

"Daddy, what's the matter? Are you sick?"

He spoke slowly, thickly, "I am not well."

She looked around her wildly. She had not been placed in such a position with him when he was ill before. There had been a nurse. She had merely carried out instructions. She felt helpless and terrified. "What can I do? What can I get you?"

His eyes were still fixed on the fire. But he raised a hand and groped in the air. She bent over him and his fingers struck her face. They fumbled on her cheeks and lips, as clumsy and uncontrolled as the hands of a baby.

"Is that you, my little daughter?"

He did not turn his head to look at her and she felt that even if he had he would not have seen her, that his eyes were held to some point of agony that blinded them to all else.

"My poor little one," he said. "You are all alone."

"Oh no, Daddy! No! I'll get a doctor. I'll ring him quickly."

"You are all alone," he said. Tears started into his fixed, terrible eyes, and his fingers, groping up her face, closed over a lock of her hair and dragged her head toward him.

"Let me go, Daddy! I'll ring up the doctor."

She pulled back but his fingers had locked as if in death. The last of his life seemed poured into that clutching, desperate grasp. And when she jerked her head away, strands of her torn hair were still clutched in his hand.

The phone was on the window ledge by the side of the fireplace. She dialed the doctor's number. Her father sat staring into the fire, his eyes wide and unblinking, his hand, still holding the torn strands of hair, dropped slowly to his knee. His mouth was setting into a tight, twisted line. One side of his face was quivering, the other was rigidly, terribly still. She turned her back, she could not bear to look at him.

"May I speak to Dr. Wallace? Please, quickly, it's my father, he's ill. He's terribly ill."

She waited while the nurse went away. The room was silent, only the fire crackled in the hearth. Because she could not look at her father now, she too looked at the white flames.

"Hallo! Hallo!" said a voice on the other end of the phone.

"Dr. Wallace. It's my father, he's ill! He's terribly ill! Can you . . ."

"Murder! Murder!"

The two terrible words struck down like bolts through her own. They were thick and clotted, as if pressed out by some inexorable inner force through a multitude of obstacles and barriers. They reached fulfillment mangled by their tortured progress.

She swung around to look at the chair. Her father sat as before, his hand on his knee, his eyes fixed into a frozen stare. His jaw had dropped like a trap snapping open and now closed again to lock into its final, immovable lines.

He did not speak again, and a week later he died.

Chapter SIX

TREVOR NYALL had walked over to the open louver and was looking out into the harsh sunlight. She sat waiting, but as he said nothing, she spoke on.

"I know everything," she said. "All about the gold, and Eola and Jobe. He wrote and told me everything. How Jobe threatened him . . ."

"Threatened him!" exclaimed Nyall, turning round.

"Yes, he threatened him," she said eagerly. She thrust back the memories that had just been refreshed and fell hungrily upon her hated enemy. "He said that David was standing in his way, that he would get the gold in spite of him. . . ."

"David should never have told you about this," said Nyall firmly. "This matter was highly confidential. There might be irreparable damage done if it were to get around. If all Administration employees confided in their wives . . . ! Gold! Gold! You don't know what that word means in this place!"

She shrank away from his eyes which seemed to accuse her and said, "I know. He told me not to mention it. I wouldn't mention it. But I must find Jobe. Don't you see? He *killed* David. He must have. There is no other explanation. He must have seen him when he returned. David feared what would happen. He wrote to my father. . . ." Her eager voice rose. "I must see him," she cried. "I must speak to him. I must find Jobe!"

She shivered. So one might feel speaking the name of one secretly loved. In a way she did love him. He had given her hope and something to live for.

"Please," he said. "You must speak quietly. These are only paper walls."

Her voice quivered shrilly. "I don't care who hears me!" "You *must*." He spoke harshly as one might to an hysterical child. "You don't know what harm you may be doing."

"I'm sorry," she said humbly. "I can't help it. It's all so terrible."

He looked down at her hands that writhed and clenched in her lap. "Of course," he said shortly. "Of course."

"I must find him," she said, softly, but passionately still. "I must find him. What else can I do? Where else can I go? If I didn't have this to do I should die. I don't mind dying but not in that way." She shivered, remembering the evenings closing in—over no one, over nothing. The terrible weight and pressure of a life that she could not live alone, that she was unequipped for. The only possible direction was the direction she had chosen for which the only equipment needed was desperation.

"My poor child," he said, looking down at her gently. "You have made such a grand game of this, and how will you take what I'm going to say?" He brought out his next words clearly and softly. "Mr. Jobe is not here. He has left the Territory. He left straight after David's death."

Emma stared up at him. She felt cold. She seemed to be huddled over a pile of ashes.

"He was told of David's decision," said Nyall, pacing again back and forth in front of his desk. "Which in case you don't know, was a definite refusal of the claim. He took it quite calmly and philosophically. He had apparently expected it. A few days later I had to get in touch with him about some formality, and I found he'd gone, he'd left for Sydney by air."

"He could be back," said Emma. "He could have gone away while things died down, in case there was any inquiry, or anything like that, and then come back. Perhaps he's here now. Perhaps he's in Eola!" She clenched her fists. The blood had come back to her face as she picked up the thread of life again.

"Why would he kill David?" said Nyall, opening wide his arms and emitting a little hopeless laugh.

"I don't know," she cried excitedly. "Perhaps for revenge, perhaps because he was angry. Perhaps because no one else would think of Eola again and he could go and get the gold without anyone knowing. Perhaps he will put in a claim again later on and it will go through. David had an assistant." She paused as Nyall looked up sharply, and then rushed on, interpreting this keen glance as approval of her idea.

"Perhaps they had come to some agreement. He hated David. David said so; he was jealous of him. Jobe might be back. We

could find out. There are only two ways of coming into this country, by air and sea. You can't sneak in like you can to other cities. We could find out if he's back by checking with the airways and the shipping people."

"My poor child!" Nyall broke in. "Two words of a dying and delirious old man, and you come to this! Go *back* to Australia. This is all madness! It's morbid, it's unhealthy! What *good* will it do you?"

"I don't expect good for me," she said. "I expect the very worst."

He looked at her silently and saw in her face that he was dealing with something it would be useless to reason with. "*Well, now.*" He smiled and patted her shoulder. His manner became playful and gentle. "You've made up your mind now, haven't you? And we can't let you off on your own now, can we? I'm your friend and I must help you."

She looked up at him gratefully. Her moment of passion and exultation was over. She felt tired and very young and was glad to pass on to him now the matters of decision and action.

"Now, I'll tell you what we'll do," he went on. "We'll go to the shipping people and the airways, and we'll find out if Mr. Jobe has returned to the country. If he has, I'll help you to find him. If he hasn't, you're to take my word for it that there's no mystery about poor David's death. And you're to forget all about it and try your best not to grieve for him. Now what do you say to that? Will you shake on it?"

She looked down at the hand he offered. She was not happy about the bargain, but her strength had gone, and he was at that moment so like David himself, spoke so strangely in David's own tender, indulgent phrases, that she could not have refused him. She took his hand. "Yes, I'll do that," she said. "If he's not here, I won't worry you any more. I promise you that."

He picked up his topee from the table. "We'll try the airways first," he said.

The airways office was a little maisonette building in the main street next to the hotel. Nyall drew up his car at the same time as a bus bringing passengers in from the airstrip, and they sat waiting for a few moments while luggage was being carried into the office and passengers in transit drifted off toward the hotel.

Nyall began to talk, and pointed out things of interest. "That's the store down there," he said, pointing to a low building on the right. "And not bad either considering the isolation of the place."

See these fellows here. They're from down the coast. Never have one of those boys for a house boy."

He was pointing to three tall, slim young natives who were walking down the footpath toward them. They wore red ramis, and round their throats necklaces of dogs' teeth and little thin strands of colored beads that were knotted into tight collars and hung down to their belts, swaying to and fro as they walked. Their hair was uncut and stuck about with flowers. They did not smile or look to right or left, but slowly stalked past with an air of truculent arrogance.

"Most unpleasant people in the Territory," said Nyall. "Steal anything. Can't trust them. Now you'll be needing a laundry boy. You'd better come up and see my wife. She'll fix you up. We'll look after you, my dear. We'll see that you get around a bit."

"I'm not interested in the country really," said Emma. "I don't really want to see it, except Eola. I just came to find Jobe."

He smiled and patted her knee. "Of course, of course. And now we'll go and see if he's come back, and then you'll be happier about the whole thing, won't you? You stay here." He was out of the car and had closed the door behind him. "And I'll go and ask." He smiled at her again, turned and crossed the footpath. A fat, native woman with colored paper bows in her hair drew back to let him pass.

Emma waited till he had mounted the steps and then got out and followed him. She stood in the doorway and watched.

A young man in white uniform was weighing luggage on some scales. Behind him, sitting on the edge of a table, was the air hostess. She was smoking and dabbing polish on her nails. She looked up and tried to catch Emma's eye. But Emma, leaning in the doorway staring at Trevor Nyall's wide, white back, was praying. "Let him be there," she prayed. "Let him be back!"

His not being there . . . it did not bear thinking of. What would she do? Where would she go? There would be nothing, nothing.

Trevor Nyall leaned forward. She heard his voice murmuring and the girl on the other side of the desk started turning the pages of a large, thick book in front of her.

Emma heard her say, "I seem to remember the name—quite recently, I think."

She prayed and prayed, though she did not know she was praying. Her hands were held clenched at her sides and her lips moved. Trevor Nyall shifted his heavy body and leaned on the counter. Emma could see the girl's bent, curly head. She turned

the pages slowly. She raised her hand and straightened the collar of her white uniform. She is not looking for his name, thought Emma desperately. She's thinking of her uniform and how nice she looks. She's wondering if her collar is creased. She isn't attending. His name is there and she won't see it.

Then the girl lifted her head and smiled brightly. "Yes, he's here. He arrived yesterday. I'm afraid he left no address."

Emma turned and walked out into the street. A moment later Trevor Nyall came out of the office and walked toward her. He was smiling.

"Well, my dear, and so you see . . ."

"He's here!" she said. "He's here!" She looked up at him. Her face was radiant.

The smile left his face. His brows drew together and his lips drooped. "You followed me, you heard. You shouldn't have done that. I told you to stay here. You were to mind the car. I have important papers in my brief case. They might have been stolen. All these Mekeos prowling about . . ." He glared up and down the street.

"I'm sorry, I didn't understand." In her exultation she hardly noticed his displeasure. "He's here, you see I was right. He's come back. He'll go to Eola. I know he will. We must find him quickly before he goes!"

"Yes, he's back. It doesn't mean anything, of course."

But he seemed disturbed, at a loss. He looked vaguely around him as if not knowing where to turn. He looked less impressive, less handsome than he had before, as if his beauty were made up largely of confidence and could exist only in the knowledge of always being right.

"He came on my plane," said Emma softly, "and I don't remember. I was with him there for twelve hours and I didn't look for him. I don't remember a single face on that plane. Not any one." She turned to him eagerly. "What does he look like? Describe him to me."

"I don't remember him either," said Nyall. He was staring down the street at a little naked child who was squatting in the gutter playing with a paper cap. "Well, we must find him now, I suppose."

He turned to her and fixed her with his most compelling and penetrating glance. "You must be *discreet*," he said. "Do you understand? You should never have heard of this affair at all. And if it should get out . . . why, it will reflect on me and my Department. David is dead and blaming him would not be convincing. I could be thrown out of the service for less. And apart

from that . . . Gold! Gold!" He threw a wild glance around the sky as if imploring heavenly aid. "You don't know what that word means in this place. And Eola's so near. It's so accessible. You must be discreet."

"Yes," said Emma, cowed by his vehemence. "I understand."

"You'd better leave it all to me," he said. "I'll find your Mr. Jobe for you. I can do it without causing comment. You sit tight."

She nodded. "Yes." She wanted to look for Jobe by herself, but she would not have dreamed of disobeying him, at least not now, while under his bright, compelling eye. He was authority, he knew best. He was the inevitable extension of her father and her husband.

"You'd better go back to the mess for lunch now," he said. "You eat in the mess, I suppose?"

She nodded.

"Well, come and have dinner with us tonight, and meet Janet. No, not tonight, I'm going out. Tomorrow."

She thanked him. "Who went with David," she said, "to Eola? Someone went with him. He didn't tell me his name."

Nyall had again turned his head and was looking at the child in the gutter. His attention had apparently wandered, for at first he did not answer. Then he said, "He went alone."

"Alone? But he said he would take somebody with him."

"Only Sereva, his native boy. He went with him everywhere. Good boy," he mused. "Oh, I believe he did intend taking someone, but he decided not to—the less people who knew about it, the better. . . . Must protect the natives," he added obscurely. "That's what we're here for. Must protect the natives."

Chapter SEVEN

WORK IN Marapai stopped at three-thirty. The sun was still strong but past its fiercest hours and the Administration employees scattered to the beaches, to the golf course, to the tennis courts, or disconsolately to lie in their stuffy little ten-by-ten rooms and wonder why they had ever left Australia where the walls were made of brick and not paper and the next-door wireless did not drown your own.

It was at three-thirty that Emma, leaving the Department of Survey, made her way along the little path that crossed the

parade ground. She passed a group of policemen who were saluting the Australian flag, and approached a low, stone wall and a row of ragged trees, behind which, she had been told, was the Department of Cultural Development.

Over to her right by the police barracks—a low green building with a thatched roof—half a dozen natives were kicking a ball around, yelling, shouting and caterwauling with laughter. They had tucked their ramis up between their legs like loin cloths and were kicking the ball furiously with bare feet.

The surrounding offices, after a day in the hot sun with their louvers raised out to suck up any passing winds, were now closing up for the night. Some offices were less punctual to finish than others. Typewriters could still be heard and natives were sweeping out the floors, and stood in doorways urging little clouds of dust onto the ground outside.

The Department of Cultural Development was still open, with its louvers raised, breathing in the afternoon winds, which blew from across the square dust and the scent of frangipani flowers. Casuarinas leaned over it, the shaggy fringes of their foliage hissing on the iron roof.

Emma stood in the doorway and looked around her at the office where her husband had worked.

It was little different from the Department of Survey. Seven-foot paper walls partitioned it off like a milking shed. There was the same office paraphernalia—tables, desks, typewriters and filing cabinets. The strange, long, animal body of Papu and New Guinea pinned on the wall, and a map of the world with the British Empire marked in red and little flags pinned in places round the equatorial belt. An oil painting of a native in a feather headdress was propped up on top of the bookcase, and there was another drawing, which might have been done by a child, pinned on the opposite wall. Littered about the table among the files and wire baskets, were half a dozen tins of bully beef, a round, yellow gourd with a boar's tusk stopper, three little wooden figures and a human skull. Somewhere farther down in one of the smaller offices somebody was using a typewriter.

She looked into the first office, but it was empty, the desk was tidy and the louver behind had been closed. The second office was empty also.

The third office looked and smelled like the basement of a museum. Bundles of spears and arrows had been propped into corners; axes, masks and drums pushed under tables and on the top of the bookcase. And over the large, untidy desk, acting at

times as paper weights for loose sheets of paper, were round, smooth stones.

At a small table in the corner sat a native. He had stopped typing and was studying a child's elementary reader.

He seemed to Emma rather different from any boy she had seen up to date. He wore, with an air of ease and familiarity, khaki shorts and shirt. His hair was parted on one side and cut like a white man's, except that one heavy lock had been left rather long and stuck out like a cockade. His skin was light bronze and his face handsome. He had neither the flat features of the Mekeo, nor the beaked, Semitic-type face of some of the darker-skinned men she had seen in the town. He might have been southern European, but for his thin wrists and long, shadowy hands. He wore sandals, and a wrist watch, and smoked a cigarette.

He stood up promptly when he saw Emma and said, "Good afternoon. Did you want to see Mr. Nyall?"

It seemed to Emma an extraordinary thing for him to say, when Trevor Nyall was at a golf tournament, and when he would not be here anyway, and she blinked at him, puzzled.

"He is not here," continued the boy; "as you can see I am the only one."

She let it pass. "Well, I didn't come to see him." She looked around her. "Perhaps you could help me."

"Would you like to sit down?" He spoke softly and drew up a chair, offering it, and then stepping back. She sat down. No one had yet told her that there was a particular way to behave in front of natives and she was therefore not in the least nervous.

She wondered vaguely why he did not sit down, but remained standing at attention in front of her. "Have you been here long?" she asked.

"Oh yes, a long time," he said. "I work for the Government ever since I was a small boy."

She might be at ease, but he was not. He spoke like a well-brought-up child talking to an adult.

"What is your name?"

"Hitolo, sinabada." It was a name she did not know.

"Perhaps . . ." she began.

"I work for the Government longer than anyone else in the village," he said, and smiled broadly as if she must be glad to hear this.

"Perhaps you knew my husband, Mr. Warwick."

"Oh, yes," Hitolo's grin split wider. "I knew him well. I was his clerk, I used to go with him everywhere. He was a very

great man. He would not go anywhere without taking me with him. He came to my wedding and made a speech. It was a wedding in a church just like white people, and my wife wore a white frock and a veil. Mr. Warwick sat at the end of the table and made a speech." He paused, and then brought out joyously: "We had *sandwiches!*"

She felt a little of the difference in him then, and looked down at his hands, where for some reason this difference seemed most strongly to reside.

"I am Mr. Warwick's wife," she said. It was something that he seemed not to have grasped. But even now it was doubtful if he grasped it.

"How do you do. I am very pleased to meet you." Smiling still, he held out his hand.

She pressed the strange, moist, unfamiliar fingers and drew her hand away.

"Perhaps you can tell me," she said, "where I can find a man named Sereva."

It was then that she found out just how different he was. He did not answer her, but stood looking at her, smiling still. She waited, looking up into his face, and then realized suddenly that though his features had not relaxed, the smile itself had died. The life behind the eyes had gone, and she might have been looking at a human skull. Then his lips drooped and his face became expressionless. He sharply jerked his head around, facing her still, but with his cheek turned toward her and his eyes staring over his shoulder.

She did not know what to say. She had no idea what the gesture meant. It was as if he had flicked back his head to avoid a blow, or had discovered something in her face that he could not bear to look at.

"Do you know him?" she repeated sharply. Something in his attitude—rigidly standing as if paralyzed—disturbed and frightened her.

Then a voice from the main office called out, "Hitolo! Hitolo! Who are you talking to there?"

Still Hitolo did not answer. It might have been death for him to move. Steps sounded in the pasageway and then around the partition of the office appeared the man whom Emma had hoped she might never see again, the man she had mistaken for Trevor Nyall the day before.

Hitolo had moved now. His head turned, he blinked, his face was composed and expectant.

"What are you saying to this boy?"

Emma met his hostile glance defiantly. Now that she *had* met him she experienced a peculiar exhilaration. She felt for him some of the comforting hatred she felt for Jobe. She met his dark-ringed eyes, larger than life behind their glasses, and her pulses beat with the excitement of intense aversion. The sluggish streams of life ran fresher as she braced herself to meet his attack. That he would attack she was certain.

"I was asking him," she said, "where I could find Sereva."

For a moment he did not answer. Then he said, "Sereva is dead." His voice was flat and dry.

"Dead!" she whispered. To those who have lost someone near to them, death, any death, even of an unknown, becomes in some way personal, seems almost a shadowy repetition of their own tragedy. Another man had died. She had not been in the Territory long enough to count the death of a brown man as less than that of a white.

"Hitolo doesn't like to speak about it. He saw it happen and it was not, I believe, very pleasant. They were brothers."

"Oh!" She glanced at Hitolo. He seemed quite composed. But she understood now that his peculiar attitude, neck drawn back and cheek averted, had been a gesture of grief.

"When did it happen?"

"What do you want to know for?" he said sharply.

She looked at him in surprise. He shrugged his shoulders and picking up one of the stones on the desk, held it in the palm of his hand and looked into it as one might gaze into a crystal. "I suppose you'll find out, and doubtless you'll make something enormous out of it. He died in the field with your husband."

"In the field?"

"It's a term meaning outside. This last trip he made into the Bava Valley, Sereva went with him as usual, and he died before they reached the station at Kairipi on the way back."

Emma had forgotten the tragedy of death. She could scent her prey and her eyes shone with hunger. "What did he die of?"

"It's hard to tell. There was no doctor." He put down the stone and looked up. "He was taken suddenly with some sort of convulsion and died a few hours later in great pain. I never thought," he said quietly, "to see such pleasure taken in a man's death."

Emma, who could not know that a fanatical light suffused her face, said angrily, "Pleasure! How could I?"

"I can see," he said bitterly, "that you welcome it. That you see it in some way explaining what you stupidly want to know—

the reason for your husband's suicide. It furthers some mad wish you have."

She forgot her promise to Trevor Niyall and answered coldly, "David did not commit suicide."

He lifted his hands, held them helplessly in the air and then flapped them down to his sides. "Ah! So that's it!" He turned away, his shoulders drooped, he trailed his hand over the desk as if feeling his way like a blind man. Her eyes followed his hand. His fingers fumbled on the smooth, round stones, and closed around a small, black coconut, carved in a white design. He picked it up and looked at it, blinking his eyes as if waking from a fit of abstraction, then turned it over and examined it minutely.

Emma looked about her at the littered table, the thick, anthropological volumes in the bookcase, the bundles of spears, the masks, the round mysterious stones.

"You're David's assistant," she stated. Her discovery was extraordinarily gratifying and her voice rang with triumph.

He smiled faintly. "Is that what he called me?"

Emma, her face glowing, attacked him furiously. "Now I know all about you! You hated him, you were jealous of him! And you don't like me because I'm his wife. You don't like anything connected with him."

She had wanted to make him angry, but he only stood looking at her with an air of helpless sadness. "I forget," he said at last, "that you're so young."

They seemed to Emma the most terrible words that anyone had ever spoken to her. Without considering them, instinctively she felt they threatened the whole basis of her faith. She hated him more than Jobe for destroying her husband and breaking up her life. This man's threat was aimed deeper. He had implied that she was too young to love.

She could only repeat: "You hated him! You hated him! Because he was more successful than you!"

He answered her quietly: "I didn't hate him. I only said I wasn't a particular friend."

She loathed the gentle quietness of his manner. His whole attitude toward her had changed. He seemed to regard her now in the light of some new realization about her. I forget you are so young, he had said. So young and so foolish, so young and so deluded. This was what people meant when they said, "I forget you are so young."

All she could say was, wildly, "Everyone loved him!"

"Some did," he said, "but you aren't among them."

She floundered in the very heart of rage and pain. She could

not speak. His face broke and blurred in the tears that started into her eyes.

His quiet, ruthless voice went on. "You expect the best of him. If you loved him you would accept the worst. You never knew him—how could you? All the sins that composed him you haven't yet been tempted with. So what choice would he have but to hide from you what he was? We must always hide from people who give their hearts to ideas. One day you'll love someone for their sores and scars and merely be glad if anyone else loves them too, not hold this up as something in itself to be loved. Then you'll try and know them, and not protect yourself from ever knowing them."

If I don't love him, she thought, then what am I doing here? Why have I come? Where is the significance in what I'm doing? And where would I go, what would I do, what would become of me?

"You're trying to get rid of me," she said desperately. "You don't want me to find out the truth. You know something that you don't want people to know. You have an agreement with Jobe. You've arranged for him to have the gold. He'll go back to Eola and get the gold and share it with you."

"You don't believe that," he stated drearily.

"What else can I believe? You know something. Why were they killed? What did they find in Eola? David was killed, Sereva was killed. They went to Eola and then they were killed before they could tell what they saw." She stopped. "Hitolo was there," she said. She looked around. Hitolo had gone.

He shook his head.

"But you told me yourself. You *told* me he saw his brother die. You lie so badly I can even catch you out. You *said* he was there."

"He didn't go into the village. Only Sereva and Warwick went. Just the two of them. Nobody else. *Nobody* else. They left the rest of the patrol outside."

"I don't believe you. Hitolo said he went everywhere with David. Hitolo! Hitolo!"

"Hitolo's a liar. He was only trying to be important. He was frightened and stayed behind. He's afraid of sorcery."

"Sorcery?"

"Purri purri. Eola's full of sorcerers—vada men. All the carriers were terrified and wouldn't go near the village. Hitolo was frightened too."

"I don't believe you. He's educated, he wouldn't believe in sorcery."

He laughed dryly. He looked back at the little black object in his hand and stroked it with the pad of his thumb.

"I don't believe you," she said fiercely. "You're only trying to mislead me. Where is Hitolo?"

She brushed past him and ran out into the main office. Hitolo was squatting down on the floor by the bookcase. He looked round quickly and stood up.

"Hitolo, did you go to Eola?"

He smiled. "Yes, sinabada. I went with Mr. Warwick."

"Right into the village?"

"No. I stayed behind to look after the carriers. They were frightened. They don't like the people of Eola. They are only village people and they are frightened. Sereva went into Eola and when he came out he died."

"What made him die?" she said. The soft, quiet voice of the native boy had a steadying effect and she spoke more calmly.

"The people of Eola made him die," said Hitolo. "They're bad people in Eola. They made his food bad and killed him."

"You see." He had followed her into the outer office and leaned now on the walls, one leg crossed over the other. "He thinks the vada men of Eola made purri purri on Sereva."

"Mr. Warwick thought so too," said Hitolo quietly. "He told the boys not to eat any more of the food they brought back out of Eola. He said to the boys that the vada men had made all the food bad and that was what killed Sereva."

Emma, looking over her shoulder, spoke sullenly. "What happened?" she said.

He shrugged his shoulders. It was a gesture she was beginning to expect from him. It contributed to the air he wore of listlessness and weariness. "I'm not sure. Probably just what Hitolo says. Warwick had to say something to the carriers. Sereva's death terrified them. He probably died of food poisoning; one of the tins was bad perhaps. It had nothing to do with the vada men. But the carriers thought it was purri purri and Warwick had to tell them something they would believe and understand. They're only primitive people, right on the border of the controlled area. He told them that the vada men had made magic on the food and as long as they didn't touch it they would be safe. That's the only defense against sorcery, to know you are safe. Once they get it into their heads that they aren't, they're quite likely to just lie down and die." He stopped and his eyes fell on Hitolo. "But you ought to know better," he said. "I thought you'd got over this idea about your brother. You're trained and educated. You're meant to lead these primitive

people, not rush about like a bird or a wild pig at the very mention of a vada man."

"I don't believe in purri purri, taubada," said Hitolo. "I work for the Government. Purri purri isn't true."

Emma turned to the door. She had nothing more to ask, she had every reason to leave and yet she was reluctant. Hitolo was again squatting on the floor, the white man, still watching her, had lit a cigarette. Outside in the bright afternoon sunlight crouched, she knew, all the waiting demons—fear, loneliness, and the knowledge of being unloved and unwanted by any human being in the world. Here in this room she had at least been alive.

She looked back. "Thank you, Hitolo, for what you've told me."

Hitolo stood up again and flashed her a dazzling smile. "I am very glad to help you, sinabada. Mr. Warwick was my boss. He gave me a cigarette case for my wedding."

"I'm sorry about your brother, Hitolo," she said. "I didn't say it before, but I am very sorry."

"One day," said Hitolo, "I shall go back to Eola and find those vada men who killed my brother. One day I shall make payback for my brother."

She went out through the door into the sunlight. Now her anger and hatred had gone. She felt drained of all feeling. Even the weight of grief had lifted. From that hour she could never again believe quite so confidently in her own despair. Faith was shaken not only by the words still echoing in her ears but by Hitolo's averted cheek. She knew that here was something she did not understand. With the desperation of one pursuing a lost cause she fanned the dying ashes. I shall find Jobe, she thought. I shall go to Eola myself and see what happened.

With her eyes bent to the ground she did not see the tall, slim man who walked down the path toward her.

Chapter EIGHT

AND WASHINGTON, his eyes on the open doorway of Cultural Development, did not notice Emma. He walked into the outer office where Hitolo was still kneeling before the bookcase.

"Hallo, Hitolo. Anyone in?"

Hitolo grinned broadly. Washington was popular with the

boys, or had been until lately. He had an easy, friendly manner that was only occasionally condescending, and he was rarely as rude to natives as he was to white men. But he was unfortunately inconsistent and this bewildered them. They liked to know where they stood.

"Mr. Nyall. He's in the office, Mr. Washington."

Washington nodded and walked on down the passage. He found Anthony Nyall, sitting on his desk, staring out of the window and tossing up and catching in his hand a small carved coconut.

"Hallo there," said Washington, in a manner which had in the past won him the reputation of being charming. "Busy or anything? Am I interrupting?"

This he saw immediately was an unfortunate remark and hoped it would not be taken as irony. It was common knowledge that Anthony Nyall was never busy, and that one could not possibly be interrupting anything. This was not exceptionally unusual in Marapai, but Nyall was inclined to be touchy about it. He did not smile, but put down the coconut, slid off the desk, walked round it and sat in his chair.

Washington, who wanted something, tried to restore any possible damage to his cause by comments upon the weather, which had over the past few days been particularly pleasant, with a fresh, cool wind and no mosquitoes.

Anthony Nyall did not respond but stared at him over the top of his glasses. Washington found his intent, serious gaze oddly disturbing. He had never liked him much. Like all men who talked too much he suspected reticence, and Nyall was altogether too quiet.

He interrupted Washington's chatter about the weather with a curt, ungracious "Can I do anything?"

"Well, yes," said Washington, trying to sound casual. "I more or less did come begging. I want to borrow a book."

"What book?" said Nyall, folding his hands. Washington did not meet his eye. Casualness was now imperative. He lit a cigarette, blew out the match, and said, "Williams' *Drama of Oro-kola*."

"Sorry, can't be done."

"Why on earth not?" He was not surprised but put up a fine show of indignation.

"You know quite well," said Nyall tersely, "that this book," and he nodded at the case behind him, "is the only copy in the Territory."

Washington did know it. Most of the anthropological library,

Supreme Court records and District Officer's reports had been destroyed during the war. Officers in charge of what remained guarded their few treasures jealousy. The books in Nyall's case were precious because they were irreplaceable.

"Good God, I won't eat it! I have got some sense of the value of the thing."

"I don't doubt it, but I'm afraid I can't let you have it."

Washington was well aware that Nyall was not being unreasonable, but he chose to be angry. The books, he told himself, would be rotting away. They were probably half-devoured by cockroaches and Nyall would never touch them, that was certain.

"How typical!" he said, raising his eyes and appealing to the heavens. "And we ask ourselves why nothing gets done in this country. You go to Transport for a jeep and you can't have one without filling in fifteen pink forms, by which time you don't want it any more. You go to Housing to get a door for your bathroom and you can't have it because Plan P hasn't any doors and Plan X hasn't any bathrooms. Everywhere you go you're up against some petty regulation made by a doddering old fool in Australia who has never been out of his home town and thinks that a yam is a kind of oyster. And to crown it all, when you try to find out something about the poor innocent brown victims you're slowly killing off with tuberculosis and whooping cough . . ."

He stopped and mentally cursed himself. It had slipped out, he had not meant to say that. He had gone too far. But Anthony Nyall's expression had not changed. There was perhaps the faintest flush in his cheeks but his gaze lost none of its steadiness.

"God knows," ended Washington more quietly, "why we stay here at all. We should have packed up and cleared out years ago."

"Why don't you take your leave, Washington? It's due, isn't it?"

The leave that he could not take always enraged him. He forgot to be discreet and said fretfully, "Why should I take it?" Damn him for preaching at me! he thought. I'll show him, and his fat sleek brother too. He'll be glad to lend me his books. But he kept his temper. "Could I," he said, glancing at the bookcase, "just glance at a reference, under your eye as it were?"

There was no reason why Nyall should refuse this request, but he did not move and only said, "Perhaps I can tell you what you want to know. I'm fairly familiar with the book."

"Well, yes, maybe you can. There's a chapter on . . ."

"Vada men?" said Nyall, raising his disconcerting eyes. "Yes, there is, I know. But then sorcery is such a wide, loose sort of business and you're not to know that the Orokola vada men function in the same way as those in the Bava Valley. The two areas are some distance apart. But as we have no knowledge at all of the Bava Valley, I suppose it's the best you would have to go on."

Washington laughed to hide his consternation. "Now what would give you the idea that I'm interested in Bava Valley sorcery?" he said, and then immediately wished that he had not spoken.

But Nyall did not look at him. He opened a drawer and produced a tin of cigarettes. "Since Warwick's trip . . ." He shrugged his shoulders. "I assume you want to know about the most extreme form of magic, magic to kill." His eyes were fixed across the room, his voice had the cool, impersonal tone of a lecturer. "There are several methods used. There is pointing or stabbing from a distance. The sorcerer hides, or is invisible, stabs at his victim with some sharp instrument which produces a fatal illness and the victim dies. There are various native explanations. Some say that he manages to inject into the victim some foreign matter, others that he drags out the victim's soul. Then there is another specialized type of magic, performed in company. I forget exactly how it goes. One man waylays the victim and shoots him, others come behind, cut him up and extract his soul. Then others come and put him together again. He is brought to life and sent back to his village. He remembers nothing of what has happened, but he has no soul and so he lies down and dies. The victims in these cases would not have actual evidence of sorcery being done. They would either be told about it, or fear that it might happen, or, if they should become ill, assume that it had.

"Then there's the personal leavings magic. You're probably familiar with that; it's fairly common all over the Territory. A substitute for the victim is obtained, something that has been attached to him, something that has been impregnated with the sweat of his body—a discarded arm-band, for instance—or scraps of food he's been eating. This undergoes various treatments and is usually placed in a piece of hollow bamboo in some sort of dirty mixture. When the bamboo blows its stopper . . ." He displayed the palms of his hands in a gesture of finality. "Finish . . . the end."

"I see." Washington threw his butt on the floor and ground

it with his heel. He picked up one of the stones from the desk and inspected it. "Who are the vada men?" he said.

"Oh, just about anyone. There are, of course, notorious sorcerers, but anyone can practice sorcery, providing that he persuades himself that he knows some of the hocus pocus, the charms, the spells, the right sort of mixtures to use—and persuades others, of course. That's even more important."

"And how do they protect themselves? The victims, I mean."

"By counter sorcery. It seems to be the only way. If you are afraid of sorcery, you buy a sorcerer of your own to make counter magic."

"And the dead?" said Washington, staring at the stone he held in his hand.

"The dead? You mean are they afraid of the dead?"

Washington spoke lightly and laughed, though there was nothing to laugh at. "I mean would they fear, for instance, a dead sorcerer—making payback, you know?"

He need not have composed his features into an expression of nonchalance for Nyall did not even glance at his face. Throughout the conversation they had studiously avoided each other's eyes.

"They might. They'll believe just about anything. The whole business is thoroughly elastic and constantly altering. But for the most part natives seem to forget the dead. They revere them a little, they fear them a little, but not as strongly as we do. A live sorcerer would be much more fearful to them. The dead are fairly thin and fairly harmless. The notion of a spirit seeking revenge is more of a European one. With them the living make revenge and death dilutes their power. They have not perhaps such a complicated sense of guilt as we."

Washington did not smile. "Guilt!" he repeated. He put down the stone and picked up the black coconut with the carved face. "But it would be possible, it is heard of?"

"A dead sorcerer making purri purri? Of course it's possible. Anything's possible, providing you're sufficiently credulous."

"I see you don't think much of it all."

"Oh, admittedly, strange things happen. But there isn't much that can't be put down to suggestion."

"Don't you think it's rather childish," said Washington crisply, "to dismiss so scornfully those phenomena that we ourselves may be too insensitive to experience?"

Now Nyall turned his large eyes full upon him. "Childish or not," he said, "it's wise. I only know that in this country you've got to keep your two feet on the ground. Men up here, as you

know, do nothing by halves. They act and think largely. People don't just drink here, they're dipsomaniacs; when they make money, they make fortunes; when they lose money, they go bankrupt. And when they grow fanciful, they end up by going mad," he paused, "or killing themselves."

Washington threw back his head and roared immoderately with laughter. "Like poor Warwick, you mean. Well, that won't happen to me, I assure you. I have far too much to live for. And as for keeping one's feet on the ground, I don't agree with you. This country has been ruined by people with their feet on the ground. It needs men of imagination, and men of vision, not the stuffy, Government clerks with their red tape and carbon copies, or brawny beef-and-muscle men from the bush. What we want are men who'll take the trouble to understand the people, who'll find out how they think, and think in the same way."

"A few years ago I would have agreed with you," said Nyall, "but not now. You'll never understand the Papuan, Washington, and you know it. We're here to guide and guard, not to understand. Only children can understand children, and we aren't children any longer. It may be unfortunate, but it's true. Sometimes we would so like to be, but we can't turn back. We've lost the eyes that see fairies. All our fairies are gone. There are only a few left for drunkards and madmen."

"Oh! And which am I?" said Washington shrilly. A feeling of having been caught out enraged him. He lashed out at what he hoped might be the other man's Achilles' Heel. "Guide and guard! That's pretty good coming from you. Who are you to talk of guiding and guarding?"

He would like to have said more but dared not. The rest was understood between them. "Everyone knows you haven't done a stroke of work for six months. You would have been kicked out months ago if you weren't Trevor's brother. Warwick would never have put up with you, and Trevor won't put up with you much longer."

But Anthony Nyall's expression did not change and all he replied was, "You've been here too long and you need leave."

Washington was thoroughly unnerved. He had an unpleasant feeling of having said too much or not enough, and to rectify the latter error, talked on. He spoke in the sweet, sharp tone that had lost him most of his friends.

"I happen to be one of the few people in this country," he said, "who considers it sufficiently interesting to be studied. I've never lived like the average white man here, carrying up from Australia with me my pub, my racecourse, and my golf course.

When I sail I go in a native canoe, not a yacht. I like these people and I'm interested in them. If there were a few more who made an attempt to understand them instead of imposing on them a few half-baked canons of white conduct, we might get somewhere."

"I believe," said Nyall coolly, "that you've sacked all your boys."

"I won't have thieves!" said Washington passionately. "I'd rather be without boys if I can't trust them."

"Now that's very powerful magic," said Nyall, pointing to the coconut in Washington's hand. "Orokola magic. There are a lot of them used up in the hills, probably in the Bava Valley too. They're mostly harmless, but if you know the right charms and stuff with them with the right herbs, they can do just about anything. If you hang it up on your door, it'll keep the thieves away."

"I'll thank you not to be funny," said Washington frigidly.

Nyall stood up. "Well then, don't ask for information under false pretenses. This is a little town and practically every man's life is public property, particularly a man like you who's always lived unconventionally. The place is getting you down, Washington. You're a pack of nerves. You've quarreled with every boy you've had in your house for the past two months. You've got the wind up and it's time you got out. You know as well as I do what happens to people who stay when they get into your condition. You can't fight this place. Don't be a fool and get out!"

It was all so true there was nothing he could say. He could no longer be angry. He felt exhausted and stripped of his defenses. His body was limp and wet. He thought of Sylvia and momentarily longed to be with her. He slunk from the room, very like a dog with its tail between its legs.

When Anthony Nyall looked back at his desk, the small black coconut had gone.

Chapter NINE

NEXT MORNING Trevor Nyall entered his office ten minutes after Emma. He stopped only five minutes to collect some papers from his desk and put them in a brief case. He patted Emma on the shoulder, inquired kindly after her health, said he would be back before twelve, and left. He did not mention Jobe.

But he did not return at twelve, nor during the afternoon, and Emma worked alone all day. There was only one interruption. At about five to twelve, as she was collecting her hat and bag to return for lunch at the mess, the door of the office opened and a man came in.

He stood, standing in the doorway, with a brief case in his hand, and said, "Mr. Nyall not in?"

Emma smiled at him. There was something about him that instantly made her feel friendly. His little bright eyes sparkled beneath thick, overhanging eyebrows. His face was florid and jovial. She could not remember having seen him before but he reminded her vaguely of some person who had once been kind to her.

"No, he's out," she said. "He's at a conference."

"Conference, eh? Ha! Ha" He rubbed his hands together and his eyes sparkled. "Always at a conference, these Government fellows, eh? Wouldn't be 'appy without a conference. If they didn't talk they might 'ave to work, eh?"

"I don't know," said Emma. "I've only just arrived."

It seemed to her then that he was looking at her closely, though it was impossible to be sure, his eyes were so deeply set, like two little animals in ambush behind the ragged, tobacco-colored brows.

"Well, well. Just arrived, eh? And 'ow do you like it 'ere. Not a bad sort of place? Except for the natives of course," he added. "Used to be all right. Beggars used to work in the old days. But the Government's ruined them with all this new-fangled education stuff. Place 'as gone to the pack. A pretty little thing like you now . . . all alone . . . you want to be careful. Some funny things go on up 'ere, you know."

"I'll be careful," said Emma, smiling.

He walked across to Nyall's desk and put down his hat. A gray, felt hat with a black band soaked in sweat. Emma mused on the strangeness of the fact that such a hat, seen in thousands in the Australian cities, should, in this country, give to its owner an air of disreputableness.

"A pretty little girl like you ought not to be up 'ere on your own," he said. He was frowning and seemed quite worried. "You want to look out for the boys. Steal anything. Can't trust any of them. And don't you go walking around alone at night."

"I must go now," said Emma, "or I'll miss my lunch. Will you wait for Mr. Nyall? He said he'd be back, though it's so late I doubt if he will. I expect he'll go straight from the conference to his lunch."

"I reckon I'll stick around," he said and settled himself into a chair. He held the tattered brief case over his knees.

Emma was to have dinner that night with Trevor and Janet Nyall, and at six-thirty walked once more up the hill in search of their house. The sunset was less brilliant that night than it had been two evenings before. The sky was overcast and the long, purple clouds were fired only on the edges. There was no wind and the air was heavy and oppressive.

When the road turned she saw ahead of her, walking down the hill, a white man, who on seeing her lifted his hand and waved. It was Trevor Nyall.

"I thought you might be lost," he said, as she drew near. "I suppose you don't know the way."

They walked on together side by side. "Have you found out anything about Mr. Jobe?" she asked.

He had taken her arm and now patted her hand. She liked these gestures of his. They made her feel she was being looked after. "Well, not anything much, my dear. Takes time, you know. He's not at the hotel and he's not in the mess. Sometimes these strays sneak a bed in the mess. My guess is he's left already. Now here's where we go up. Quite a climb."

They had left the road and faced the flight of steps that Emma had climbed two nights before. She looked up in surprise. The steps led straight up ahead through the green, flat-topped trees.

"Nice spot, eh?" said Nyall, assisting her with a hand under her elbow. "You wait for a few weeks and these poincianas will be a picture. Round about Christmas time. You must come and spend Christmas with us. There's nothing in the whole world like a Marapai Christmas. The fun never stops. I believe somebody came in to see me today when I was out. Who was it? What did he want?"

He was looking around him at the trees, as if still more interested in the poincianas at Christmas time, and before she had time to answer, said, pointing, "There, look at that one. Isn't that a beauty?"

"It was a man," said Emma. "He didn't leave his name. He said he'd wait. He came at about five to twelve. Didn't you see him?"

"No, I didn't finish up till three-thirty. One of the girls was still there. She told me he'd been in. Didn't leave a name, you say?"

"No. He was an ordinary sort of man."

"And didn't say what he wanted?" He had turned to look at her.

"No."

"Beautiful trees." He smiled around him. "The Grafton people boast about their jacarandas, but there's nothing like the poinciana."

They had nearly reached the top of the steps. "Mr. Nyall," said Emma, "I feel somehow that he isn't the whole answer anymore—Jobe, I mean. I feel that there is more to it all. I've found something out. Sereva is dead."

"Sereva?" he said vaguely. He took a long pace forward that lifted him two steps ahead of her. She had to spring up to keep level with him.

"David's native assistant. They were the only two, he and David, who went into Eola, and Sereva died before they got back to the station. I feel that something happened out there that perhaps we shall never find out from Jobe. I feel too, that that is where he is, that he's gone back to Eola. And that's where I must go. I feel I shall never find out what happened to David unless . . ."

They had reached the bottom of the veranda steps. She had been talking so earnestly that she had hardly noticed they were approaching the same house that she had been turned away from two nights before.

"We'll find Jobe," he said, pushing her up the steps ahead of him. "Don't worry."

But Jobe had become now only a secondary goal. "Oh, I know we shall," she said confidently. "But I must go to Eola, Mr. Nyall."

The steps were narrow and she walked a little ahead of him. She turned to look at him earnestly. His head was just below her shoulder. His eyes raised, looked for a moment fully into her own. Then she was forced to turn around again to watch where she was going. She had, now that the moment of contact was over, a peculiar impression of having looked into nothing, of having turned her gaze, not upon a man's face, not upon eyes and lips, but upon a kind of void.

"Eola," he repeated, speaking behind her. "Now you must go in and meet my wife."

His hand between her shoulder blades pressed her forward, and she entered again the bright, golden room with its drifting draperies, its bamboo furniture and its enchanting air of not being a room at all, but an extension of a garden, or a temple built on a hill. There was a faint breeze, fluttering the hangings in the

doorways and just stirring the green, shiny leaves that reached in from the shrubs outside.

Then she forgot the room and could look only at the woman who came to meet her. She hesitated, afraid of committing a social blunder. Who was she? What was she doing here? She *could* not be, she *could* not be Trevor Nyall's wife. But the woman was coming forward with a hand outstretched and Trevor was saying, "Janet, this is Emma."

She looked some ten years older than Trevor, in spite of her hair, which was cut into a mass of short, frothy golden curls. Beneath this fantastic aureole her little pinched face looked shrunken and wizened. She was small and painfully thin with tiny, white arms that reached out from the sleeves of her frock like the arms of a starved child. Her frock was made of some fine, transparent beige material patterned in green, and fashioned in a wispy style reminiscent of the 1920's. It fluttered like rags against her bony limbs. It seemed to Emma that she had not walked forward but had been picked up by a gust of wind and had drifted across the room like a withered leaf.

Her eyes were large and wide set. They must at one time have been beautiful, but beauty was now entirely submerged in their expression of nervous evasion. Something about her eyes disturbed Emma profoundly, though she did not know why. She did not speak, but pressed Emma's fingers and then drew her hand quickly away and stepped back as if uncertain that she should ever have stepped forward. Then she threw a glance at her husband and waited as if expecting orders.

Emma was no less uncertain of how to behave than she. Janet Nyall did not look actually deranged, but she seemed to have a grip on life so limp and loose as to put all who watched her in constant dread of her suddenly dropping her hold altogether and drifting off on her own. She now moved back across the room, hovering uncertainly from chair to chair as if fearing that the furniture were bewitched, that the walls would suddenly close in and the chairs would slide away as she sat down. She appeared to have a profound distrust of everything around her. For no apparent reason she put out a hand and touched a table, like a blind woman, reassuring herself that she was on the right path. Then a man came forward from the back of the room, took her hand and led her to a chair. Emma, her gaze turned on Janet Nyall, had not seen him before.

"And this," said Trevor, "is my brother, Tony."

He bowed slightly. "*You!*" said Emma. "You are Mr. Nyall's brother."

She could see now how like he was to Trevor Nyall, and why Trevor when she met him had seemed familiar, like someone known years ago and met again, older and changed. But, though Anthony would be a younger brother, in many ways he did not look younger. Experience, suffering, frustration or disappointment had marked his face and left his brother's smooth and clear. Sickness too had possibly attacked him and passed his brother by. But there was more than this to make him seem a shadow of the older man. All that was strongest, richest and happiest in the parents who had produced these men had gone into the making of Trevor Nyall. The younger brother seemed to be battling against the liability of being the last, of being born when the best of life was over. And if one were to judge from his face it was a liability he carried with bitterness.

Emma did not acknowledge his nod, but stared at him coldly, her body rigid with aversion. And the savage, terrible words that she had tried to cleanse from her mind over the past forty-eight hours echoed out from every corner of the room. "You didn't love him . . . you didn't know him. . . ."

"You've met?" said Trevor, looking at her with surprise.

"Yes. I met him in the Department of Cultural Development yesterday afternoon. I know he worked with David, but I didn't know you were brothers."

For some reason this discovery struck her as being enormously significant, but she could not tell why. She looked wildly around her. She had come here for comfort and peace, to be helped by her husband's friend, to be looked after, to be guided and directed as she had always been, but it seemed that the house was stirring with strange uneasy currents. She felt apprehensive and bewildered. She felt she was on the brink of some sinister discovery.

Trevor laughed easily and throwing out a hand thumped it twice on his brother's shoulders. "That was the only reason he would put up with you, eh? Tony? Lounging around all day getting under everyone else's feet. We are a united family, eh? Tony. Always stick together. Stick together at all costs."

Anthony Nyall's reply was a faint smile. Emma had never seen him smile before. She preferred him serious.

"You won't find in the whole of Australia, Emma," Trevor was saying, "a more loyal little family group than this." And he looked from his brother to his wife. Then the smile died from his face and he turned away and went over to a table set out with glasses and drinks. Janet, who had been gazing up into his face,

followed him with her eyes. She half rose to her feet and her wispy little hand extended in a vague, unrealized gesture.

"I'm pouring you a pink gin, Emma, is that all right?" said Trevor from the table. He shook bitters into the bottom of the glass. "You must excuse Janet, she's been sick. Can't take the climate. You've got to be husky in this place. It all looks pretty harmless, but it can be deadly."

He stood with his feet slightly apart, his broad shoulders thrown back. His firm, deep voice rang out loudly. His white teeth and brilliant eyes flashed in the dusky light. He completely dominated the room, and his bitter-faced brother and faded wife looked mean and insignificant beside him.

"You wouldn't believe what the tropics can do to people. Take Janet here," he pointed a hand at his wife, who sat with a fixed, bright smile on her face, "you wouldn't believe it, but six years ago she was a beauty, the loveliest woman in Marapai. You wouldn't believe it but she's only forty-two. Ten years younger than I am. You wouldn't think it, would you?"

"You wouldn't think it, would you?" said Janet, looking up at Emma with the same fixed smile. "It's just as Trevor says; the tropics don't agree with me at all."

"So you see, you'll have to be careful," said Trevor. "You fair-skinned, delicate types don't wear well in the tropics." He threw back his shoulders even a little farther as if conscious of the fact that he was one of those who had worn well.

"I think," said Anthony Nyall quietly, "that on the whole women look exceedingly youthful here."

"No, Tony," said Janet, "you can lose your looks in a day. You heard what Trevor said."

He looked down at her and smiled. It was this time a very different smile.

Emma had been waiting for the right, dramatic moment to bring out her accusation. "Your brother tried to stop me from seeing you, he lied to me, he drove me away." She had been nursing, savoring within herself this delicious moment of retaliation. But in the meantime he had smiled and she knew she could not speak. Her hatred had suddenly left her. She did not know what to think of him. In the moment of pinning him down, he had completely eluded her. This glance, cast toward a sick woman, had thrown dust in her eyes. She saw that an enemy could be tender and she could not battle with tenderness.

"Where's that boy?" said Trevor suddenly. His voice rang with displeasure. "Where's that boy? We want some ice."

Janet immediately began to flutter her hands. Her eyes were

turned to her husband's back. She half stood up and sat down again. "I don't know. I expect he's in the boyhouse."

"Well, he ought to be here," said Trevor crisply. "Kora! Kora!" He raised his voice. "He ought to be in the kitchen from *six o'clock*," he said, addressing his wife, "and not leave it till *after dinner*."

Her eyes watched him frantically, as if hoping for some lead, some hint as to what she should do. There was something about her that Emma found extraordinarily disturbing. She did not know why but she suddenly wanted desperately to leave. She wanted to go away and not see Janet Nyall again. It was as if Janet had touched some chord of memory that revived a forgotten horror in her childhood, as a harmless creature in a crowd may remind us of another who years ago tormented us.

Janet now stood up and made a few uncertain steps about the room. "He's a good boy," she said vaguely. "A nice, polite boy." She peered around her as if he might be lurking in the corner.

"Where *are* you going?" said Trevor in a tone of undisguised exasperation, and then went out calling, "Kora! Kora!"

They waited. Janet was quiet now. She sat on the edge of her chair, her hands in her lap. But she did not speak. Emma, feeling ill at ease, made an attempt at conversation, but was only answered with a vague yes or no.

Anthony still held his stance behind the chair. He did not speak either, but Emma felt his eyes on her face. She stared for the most part out of the open louver at the sky into which the stars were breaking, but once she glanced up and met his eyes. She looked quickly away. She was afraid, not just of Anthony, but of Janet too. They looked to her in that moment withered, twisted and evil. She felt that they were united in some horrible partnership, shared together a secret that cut them off from the normal, healthy world. And it seemed to her that if she looked at them long enough she might know what that secret was. That, in fact, Anthony Nyall, staring at her so fixedly, was attempting to communicate it, was actually trying to draw her, too, into their devastating intimacy. She kept her eyes turned away. She did not want to know what he was saying. He was her enemy. She had forgotten that he had ever smiled.

"You did not love him. . . . You did not know him. . . ."

When Trevor came back with a bucket of ice, she turned to him a face radiant with relief. It seemed that sanity, kindness and normality had taken over from sickness and despair.

"You'll have to be firmer with those boys," he said. "God

knows you ought to be able to manage boys, you've been here long enough."

Janet, too, visibly brightened. "I can't manage boys," she said to Emma. "I should be able to, I've been here long enough."

Trevor dropped a cube of ice in a glass and handed it to Emma. "You're all very quiet," he said. "Emma expects to be entertained."

"Tony's having a new house," said Janet, drawing herself up. "Aren't you, Tony? He's staying with us till it's finished. It's going to be very nice."

"But, of course," said Trevor, "not as big as this." He handed a glass to his wife. She clutched it and held it tightly in her little white hand. She looked at it, raised it to her lips, glanced at her husband and put it down on the table in front of her. She clasped her hands in her lap.

"But that's to be expected, isn't it?" said Anthony.

He's jealous of his brother, too, thought Emma. She fastened hungrily on this fresh reason for despising him. He's jealous of everyone who's done better than he has. No wonder he didn't like David; no wonder he didn't want David to be loved. No one would love him; no wonder he couldn't bear to see anyone loving David.

Trevor laughed heartily. Turning to Emma he waved a loose arm at his brother. "Tony suffers from the disease of all youngest sons," he said. "He thinks he always gets the thin end of the stick. He's the defender of the weak. In every successful man he sees his big elder brother who always had the fattest potato." There was no cut to his words; he spoke charmingly, with the good nature and confidence of the invulnerable, and patted his brother on the shoulder.

Anthony faintly smiled. "You misrepresent me," he said. "I don't quarrel with successful men, only the world that's taken in by them."

Emma forgot her pleasure in finding him out and her old anger rekindled. He's talking of David, she thought, and of me.

"You see, Trevor," he went on, still smiling, "I know so well what it is that goes to make up a successful man. He's composed for the most part of little drops and shreds of the brains and hearts of other people."

Trevor chuckled; his eyes still smiled and his tone was still kindly. "Well now, that doesn't only apply to successful men, does it? After all, we've all of us, haven't we, surely, had our meals off brains and hearts—some of us more immoderately than others."

Emma did not see the expression on Anthony Nyall's face for she was looking at Janet, who had stretched out a slow, almost, one would think, a reluctant hand, and picked up her glass. She lifted it to her lips, tipped it back and put it down on the table. It was nearly empty.

Emma stared at her, and a look of slow horror came over her face. She realized suddenly that Janet Nyall was drunk. She had seen women drunk before, though not often, but she knew instinctively that this was different. That this woman drank all the time. Why? How? When? She asked herself. It seemed to her that there must be some terrible reason. Had she lost a child? Had someone near to her died?

She found now she could hardly bear to sit near her. Mentally and physically she shrank from this spectacle of a deranged life. She left as early as she could without being rude, and as she walked down the hill with Trevor Nyall beside her, it seemed to her that the cool, night air washed a pollution from her body.

She reasoned with herself, feeling that there was some abnormality in the violence of her reaction. But it was useless. At the thought of Janet Nyall her mind and body shrank and shuddered. For Trevor she felt pity, admiration and tenderness. How brave he had been through it all! One would think he did not care. How light-hearted he was when his spirit must be in misery. In consideration of his troubles she did not speak again of her own.

When she reached the house it was only ten-thirty and the light was still burning in Sylvia's room. She knocked on the door and entered. Sylvia was lying on her bed in her black dressing gown, her hair in pins. She was writing a letter.

Emma sat down and stared before her. "I've been to dinner with the Nyalls," she said.

Sylvia threw a glance at her pale, strained face, and faintly smiled. "Oh! Didn't you know what to expect?"

Emma shook her head.

"Don't look so devastated. I assure you it's not so unusual up here. This place is full of drunks, temporary and permanent."

"But why her?" gasped Emma.

Sylvia shrugged her shoulders. "Can one ever find a reason? Philip swears Trevor beats her, but I'm afraid he's not to be relied on. He's got a bee in his bonnet over Trevor. Poor darling, he thinks he was done out of a job. He doesn't realize that no

one in their senses would give him anything important to do. He's very clever, brilliant really, but not in that way."

Emma, who had heard of Philip before but knew of no reason why he should be interesting, was not listening.

"Do you know anything," she said, "about the younger brother . . ." She hesitated over his name and brought it out reluctantly. "Anthony?"

"Not really. Only what everyone knows . . . the big scandal. I've always thought he seemed a decent sort of fellow."

"What scandal?" said Emma eagerly.

"Oh, there was a hullabaloo about a year ago. Anthony made some frightful blunder. He was terribly enthusiastic and up and coming and full of bright ideas—thought everyone else very conservative and rushed around doing things without taking into consideration some of the possible effects of what he was doing. He used to go round screaming that everything was too slow and that if we didn't do something quickly it would be too late. He took some Highland boys—who are quite primitive you know, the country's only just been opened up—down to a school in one of the coastal villages. I think there were about a dozen of them, and they all died in an influenza epidemic. Some natives are like orchids; they just won't stand transplanting. They haven't any resistance. Of course the poor creature didn't anticipate anything like that and was apparently devastated by the whole business. There were some Sydney reporters up here at the time and they got hold of the story and made headlines out of it. Said we were all murdering off the natives for our own foul ends, you know the sort of stuff. Of course things like that happen, you can't help it, but in this case it was just bad luck he happened to get publicity. The Administration was in a spot and I think would have kicked him out if it hadn't been for Trevor. I think he pulled some strings and fixed it so that Anthony was cleared of some of the blame. Anyway, he's still with us."

"I see . . ."

She found that she had hoped for something different; that this, like the smile bent to Janet Nyall's head, served only further to confuse her.

A week passed and Emma could find out nothing further about Jobe. Then one morning Trevor brought her the news that he had traced him. He had left Marapai. He had taken a job as skipper on a small coastal boat and was to trade between New Ireland and the northern mainland. It was not known

when he would return or if he would ever return to Marapai. It was obvious that he was not going to Eola and that he had no interest in Eola gold.

For the first time Emma began to doubt her convictions. Had she been wrong? Those two words of her father's, had they meant anything? Had she heard them, or had she imagined it? Had Sereva, after all, died of food poisoning? And had David committed suicide? They were questions which she had never before asked herself and now they more and more insistently tormented her. She had been in Marapai now for nearly a fortnight and was beginning to realize that suicide was not, after all, impossible. It was not that life here was unbearable, but it was different, it was taut and strange. People changed, they were no longer recognizable as Australians. Aberrations of behavior seemed normal and did not startle one. Little darts of frustration and misfortune which would in the south barely scratch the skin, festered here into wounds and sores, deranged the mind and poisoned the blood. No, suicide was not impossible.

Then another question presented itself and her convictions almost entirely crumbled away. How could she be right and Trevor be wrong? He had known David, he had known the country, he had been involved in the affair with Jobe. And he was older and wiser by some thirty years. He was authority, he could not be wrong.

She woke up one morning to find that she had lost her faith. It was an experience almost as terrible as the loss of her husband, except that by now, being used to loss, she accepted it calmly. There seemed no longer any reason for her staying in Marapai. There was no reason for her being anywhere, but Marapai with its dazzling seas and brilliant flowers was the last place on earth where she wanted to be. She did not think where she would go or what she would do; just to leave was for the moment enough. Once she had made up her mind, her heart slightly lifted. Her sense of urgency was now attached to her departure. It was desperately important to get away as soon as possible. Marapai had become unbearable and she resisted its beauty with a feeling of terror.

She booked a seat on the plane for the following week. Then she met Philip Washington.

Chapter TEN

IT WAS a Thursday evening. Washington left his house at about five-thirty and walked down the hill to the shacks where he kept his jeep. The sea was pink and green and calm as ice. Canoes on their way home to the village hung poised with slack sails barely moving in the faint, intermittent puffs of wind.

He turned the nose of the jeep to face the road and allowed it to run down the hill toward the sea front. He was just swinging out to turn at the bottom of the road when a woman stepped out from the footpath and waved her arms above her head. It was Sylvia. She was dressed in a sleeveless black silk frock with a cluster of white frangipani flowers pinned to one shoulder. Her hair was piled high on top of her head and she wore another cluster of flowers over one ear. This time of the year was particularly humid and her face was shining under its make-up.

Washington drew up the jeep beside her. He was tremendously pleased to see her. Apart from the visit to Anthony Nyall and a trip into the village, he had not been out of his house for nearly a fortnight. He had been in bed most of the time with a slight fever, partly genuine, partly induced, and preferred in times of sickness to be left entirely alone. So Sylvia had been instructed not to visit him. He knew he looked unattractive when he was sick and it wounded his vanity to be seen in such a condition.

He hailed her gaily.

"You're better," she stated, and then looking at him closely, "Oh, but Philip, you look dreadful. You should be in bed."

He brushed this away. "Oh, I'm on the mend. Still can't sleep, that's all. And where have you been, my sweet, all dressed up to kill?"

His moments of sweetness were rare these days and she smiled gratefully. Kindness was never expected from him, or for that matter from any man. She regarded it as a blessing that only occasionally came her way. Washington, in the earlier days of their relationship, had been kinder than most.

"I've been drinking tea with the upper crust," she said. "Mrs. Lane, no less."

Mrs. Lane was the wife of the Controller of Civil Construction. "Good God!" said Washington. "What on earth would

she ask you for?" He had never been to the Lane's house. They had only been in Marapai for a few months and had taken over a new block of flats on the harbor road.

"I met her on the beach and she seemed to like me."

The fact that Sylvia should go to houses where he himself was not entertained could not be accepted without bitterness. It was so ludicrously wrong. Sylvia was a dear but she was hopeless socially. She did not know about clothes, and always, in spite of her beauty, looked a mess.

"Well, she's new to the place," he said sullenly. "And I suppose she just doesn't know any better."

"She's nicer than most," said Sylvia mildly. "She isn't a cat—not yet."

"Not yet, she isn't," said Washington. He had forgotten now his pleasure in seeing Sylvia and looked at her with cold hostility. She went where he was not asked. It seemed a personal slight and he searched for some way of punishing her. "But *really*, an afternoon tea—I thought at least you were going for cocktails, rigged up in that thing with that blue stuff all over your eyes. Haven't you any idea of what's appropriate? She'll never ask you again. And even if it hadn't been afternoon tea, don't you know that you should never wear black in this climate? It looks ghastly. Don't you know what they say about the tropics? Never have anything to do with a man in braces or a woman in black."

Sylvia only smiled and said placidly: "I don't like pale colors. I know I haven't any taste but I dress to please myself."

"Obviously," he said sharply. "You couldn't dress for anyone else. Why don't you watch your boss's wife? She's one of the few women in this town who doesn't look like a trollop. God knows where half of these men find their wives."

Sylvia rarely fought back but this time he had hurt her.

"Why should I watch her? She's a vile woman; no one's safe from her. Not even you."

"What do you mean?" he said immediately. "What's she said about me?"

"She was talking about you this afternoon," said Sylvia, relenting. "It was nothing, really."

"What was it?" he said sharply. "Tell me. I want to know. Don't drop hints and then crawl away like that."

Once again she was hurt and answered him angrily. "She said you couldn't keep boys, that you were too familiar with them. She said it was disgusting the way you went on, and how could you expect to keep boys when you let them wear flowers and play mouth organs and talk to you just like a friend. She said

they were natives and servants and ought to be treated as such and that people like you were ruining the country for others. That it was people like you who had caused the rise in wages and made the natives insolent and dishonest and that you ought to be put out of the country." She stopped and was immediately ashamed. "Oh, the usual stuff. She's just a fool, nobody listens to her. They know they get just as much as soon as they go out of the room."

"Oh God!" he cried passionately. "These women! These fat sows who think they know all about natives?"

"It was Rei," said Sylvia. "He went up to her sister's house and wanted a job as cookboy." She looked up at him and said gently, "Why did you sack Rei, Philip? Heaven knows I don't like natives much. I can't understand them and I'm sure my laundry boy steals my gin, but Rei was a sweet boy. You should have kept him."

Washington stared gloomily ahead. "He's disobedient. I went out for half an hour last week and left him in charge. And when I got back he was talking to someone in the boyhouse and three native dogs were scratching around in the rubbish bin. I won't have dogs in my place. If he can't keep the dogs away he can go. And he prowls round at night. I told him not to prowl round at night."

"You're imagining things again," she said gently. "Rei loved you. I'm sure he wouldn't take anything. You're all on edge."

Was it Rei? he thought. It was Rei, it must have been Rei. If it wasn't Rei, who was it? What was he doing there? It must have been Rei—that man who wore no rami, who stank and who was too small by far for Rei.

"I've got a better boy than Rei." He was feeling a little mean for having been so rude about her frock and said with a charming smile: "Hop in. I'm going down to the village now to pick him up, and then I'll drive you home if you like."

The village was about two miles out of the town. Before the war it had been a typical sea village, a collection of grass and timber huts built upon piles over the water, each house reached by a narrow, rickety jetty stretching out from the land. At low tides the houses on their long stilts were left high and dry, like strange gray birds, crane-legged, standing in the mud. During high tides the water rose up just below the floors of the houses. But this village had been destroyed during the war, and when the rebuilding started the Government decided that it was better for the people if they built on the shore. So the old sea village had gone and the houses were now huddled up on either side of

the main road. The villagers had not rebuilt in the traditional manner with walls of woven sago palm and thatched roofs, for the Government hinted that it would build a model native village with wooden houses, tin roofed, built in the white man's style. Unfortunately there had never been sufficient material for the few houses needed by the Europeans, and of the new model native village only two houses had ever been constructed. The rest of the villagers had built themselves temporary dwellings from old army scrap, pieces of tin, the broken bonnets of trucks, and had covered the holes with odd pieces of sacking. This had all happened in the years immediately after the war and the word "temporary" was now almost forgotten. There was an undeniable air of permanency now about the rusty little town.

But the village still had charms. These were a fishing people and their slender log canoes with outrigger and sail still floated at the water's edge. Their woven nets sewn with white cowrie shells hung from their verandas. Some of the women wore dirty calico and tied up their hair with Christmas paper, cheap plastic clips and diamanté bows, but others squatted in the doorways, their grass ramis swelling up over their knees, and their hair studded with flowers and leaves. They wandered in twos and threes down the village street, carrying wood or yams in long woven baskets, supported from their foreheads and dangling down over their backs. In the evenings round an open fire on the beach the young boys and girls still shuffled their feet and swayed while they sang some half-understood song. And always there were the small, naked, pot-bellied children scampering after the pigs and skinny dogs or crouched in the firelight, their bodies shining and their huge, black goblin eyes ringed in china white.

There was a warmth and vitality about this village that was entirely lacking in the European inhabited town a mile or so away, where people were boisterous but not gay, and suffered always from a sense of strangeness and incongruity, feeling themselves to belong more appropriately somewhere else.

Six months ago Washington had contemplated living here, but he had not dared. Such a step would have been to transgress unforgivably the laws of white conduct. But he always, even now, felt here a sense of relief and peace. It seemed to him that in the white town everyone was poised for departure, was ill at ease, puzzled, bewildered, longing for some other land and resentful of this one. But these village people sprang from the primitive soil and were not entirely separated from it. Knowing no other life they did not question what they had. Conflicts were only just beginning. Satisfaction was only just beginning to wane, and

to the onlooker at least they still seemed almost completely happy. Washington was not worried by the rattle of the rusty tin and the flapping rags; indeed he had long since ceased to see them.

Sylvia, however, saw nothing else. She was still passing through the inevitable stage of mourning for the grass huts.

"I hate this place," she said, as they drew into the center of the village, "It's so drab and filthy and miserable."

"Nonsense," said Washington. "You don't know beauty when you see it. You've got a silly, magazine mind. You're wasted in this place; you ought to be in Honolulu with a lei round your neck. You only look at the sky when there's a red sunset. You wouldn't look up on a gray day. Natives for you have to be under twenty-one, all done up in dog teeth and garnas with hibiscus in their hair—you wouldn't glance twice at a woman in calico. I'll show you someone beautiful. You wait till you see Koibari."

He was waiting for them. Halfway through the village was a large nut tree. Its older leaves had turned to autumnal hues and fluttered in red and orange rosettes around the fresh, green plumes of the new foliage. Around its trunk were collected a group of natives, all with bundles and packages, apparently waiting for some sort of transport to take them away. Village boys in cotton ramis, and strangers from outlying villages wearing the necklaces, feathers and armbands of less sophisticated places. As Washington pulled up his jeep a native rose from the fringe of the group and came slowly toward them.

He was a squat old man who walked with a stiff-jointed shuffle, slightly sideways like a crab. His yellow face was seamed and withered; his lips had disappeared but a few black betel-stained teeth gaped into a grin. He wore a filthy khaki rami hitched about his waist with a piece of string, and as he waddled forward a long black bag that was fettered to his waist, flapped against his thigh. His legs were stained with the purple scars of ulcers. His great bush of fuzzy hair started up from his forehead, and as a hag from the streets will set off her squalor with a young woman's straw hat, he had crowned his monstrous hideousness with a wreath of pink coral flowers.

As he slowly moved toward them the other natives in the waiting group crouched back or slid away, flashing the whites of their eyes.

"Oh, no!" cried Sylvia, lifting her hands in a childish gesture and pressing her fingers to her cheeks.

Washington's face was alert and eager. "Isn't he wonderful!

Isn't he superbly and diabolically evil! Look at his little red mean eyes, like a scheming pig."

"Oh, what do you want him for?" said Sylvia, shuddering. She did not know exactly what filled her with terror. It was not entirely the sight of the old native, who had stopped and stood, chewing and spitting, a little way off. She was more frightened by the look on Philip's face.

"All the people around here are scared of him," he said. "He's a very powerful sorcerer. People pay him to make sorcery against their enemies. See that beastly little black bag he has? That's got all his stuff in it. Bits of old bones and shells and stones and God knows what. It's illegal of course. He's been in jail twice for sorcery. The D.O. got hold of his bag last time and burnt it, but he soon made up another one."

"But what do you want him for?" she cried, thrusting her face forward to look into his.

The excitement died out of his eyes. An expression of recognition and then reticence passed over his face. It was as if he had been jerked suddenly back to earth and wished to disguise the fact that he had ever been away. He smiled.

"I'm only amusing myself. I like these old characters; they interest me. There aren't many of them left, and they're the only ones who can tell you what the old life was like. These boys," he waved a contemptuous arm around him, "they don't even know the songs their fathers knew; they've forgotten the old legends. I know more of their culture than they do. It's just as well there are a few men like me who are willing to talk to the old men and learn a little of the old days before it's too late."

He beckoned to Koibari. The old, wizened man lurched forward with his shuffling, crablike gait. The black bag flapped at his thigh, and his strong, musty odor traveled before him. It seemed to Sylvia like the breath of evil.

She did not look at Philip again but huddled down in the seat beside him. Koibari, with strange, animal grunts, was heaving his bulk into the back.

"Right? All fixed?" said Philip gaily, and started up the engine. The jeep moved off, back along the harbor road. They did not speak, Washington sang, Koibari sucked and grunted. Then as they passed through the main street of the town, Sylvia, who had been leaning out of the window with her head in the wind, straightened, turned and spoke.

"Philip! Take him back! Take him back! I'm frightened!"

"Don't be silly," said Philip, annoyed.

But she went on, leaned across and gripped his knee, and

spoke with intensity quite unlike her. "Philip, why don't you stop all this nonsense and get away? Get out of that house. Living up there on the hill by yourself—it's not healthy. It even gives me the creeps with the fireflies and glow-worms and flying foxes and the damned Keremas beating their drums all night. I'm frightened!"

He took his eyes off the road for a moment to stare at her scornfully. "Oh, and may I ask where would I go?"

"Leave that house and go into a mess where there are other white men around you."

A man in a mess was to Philip the lowest of all creatures. To go to a mess was to lose utterly all distinction and claim to respect. One could not even be thought eccentric in a mess. One became one of those who were not even talked about, whose existence was not noticed. That Sylvia should even think of him in a mess filled him with rage. He swung the car into the gutter and, leaning across her, snapped open the door. She stared at him, round-eyed. He did not at first speak, but there was a pulse jumping in his cheek. When he did speak it was with all the icy contempt of which he was capable and he was capable of much.

"Go to a mess! Live in a ten by ten with a bunch of drunken morons. I'll thank you not to think up such notions for my well-being. If you can't mind your own bloody business you can get out and walk home."

Sylvia got out on to the road. The tears had started into her eyes, but she spoke calmly. "You shouldn't have said that, Philip. I've taken a lot from you, but I've had enough. I don't want to see you again."

Enraged with himself for having lost his only friend, but incapable of contrition, he only threw back at her: "Do you imagine that breaks my heart?"

The jeep swung round and spurted off down the street.

Sylvia stood and watched it go with the tears streaming down her face.

Five minutes later when Emma walked up from the beach on her way home, she was still standing there. Emma recognized her while still some way off, and waved her hand, but Sylvia did not see her. She stood in a peculiarly ungainly attitude, as if she had forgotten her body. Her hands hung limply at her sides and her hair, half an hour ago so immaculately smoothed and piled on her head, hung now in ragged wisps about her shoulders. Emma, approaching nearer, saw her face.

"Why, Sylvia, what's the matter?"

It shocked her profoundly to see Sylvia crying. She was so

collected and debónair, and moved with so much assurance, and it did not seem possible to Emma that a woman like this could cry. She divided her world into the vulnerable and the invulnerable, and Sylvia had obviously belonged to the strong and safe.

Sylvia turned slowly and faced her, blinking long lashes that were gummed together with tears. "I hardly know," she said. "I don't know why I'm crying; he's not worth it, damn him." She spoke with a touch of bravado, but Emma was not deceived.

"Philip?"

Sylvia could only nod.

"Come home," said Emma, "and we'll have a drink. You'll feel better." They turned and walked slowly up the hill.

"If he's unkind to you," said Emma, "why do you have anything to do with him?" Sylvia's emotional life puzzled her. Her own view of such things was beautifully simple. People who were kind like David, her father and Trevor Nyall, one loved. People who were cruel, who went out of their way to wound, like Anthony and apparently, too, like Philip Washington, one hated. She had no notion of the horror of loving a persecutor.

Sylvia, who had never loved anyone who had been kind to her, and had in fact treated such people with the contempt that Washington now meted out to her, stared at Emma in astonishment. "Good heavens! One doesn't love people for their characters."

"I couldn't love someone I didn't respect," said Emma.

The suggestion that Philip might not be worthy of love caused Sylvia immediately to forget her tears. She rushed to his defense. "But I *do* respect him. He's brilliant. That's the trouble with him, he's too brilliant for this place. It's no place," she quoted Philip himself, "for men of imagination. He knows more about the Territory and the natives than anyone else in Marapai and just because he lives rather unconventionally people won't have anything to do with him. The only thing really that they have against him is that he treats the natives like human beings."

"But why is he so mean to you?" said Emma.

"He doesn't mean to be," said Sylvia. "He doesn't know he's mean. He's so much more intelligent than I am. And he's nervy. He needs leave. He's as jumpy as a cat on hot bricks. He hasn't been the same since he came back from the Bava Valley."

"The Bava Valley . . ." said Emma, slowly turning her head and fixing upon Sylvia wide, empty eyes.

Sylvia was never quite sure why she told Emma this. She had promised Washington she would never speak of it, to anyone, particularly not to David Warwick's wife. "I don't want weep-

ing widows falling all over me," he had said. Certainly she had not been careless; she had not forgotten her promise. But Washington had hurt her and this was one of those small acts of spite by which we seek retaliation against those we love. By breaking a promise such as this that she judged to be of no importance, she did not aim to injure him, but merely to state her independence.

But looking now at Emma's face she began to wonder if she might not have gone farther than she had intended.

"What's the matter?" she said sharply.

A wild emotion seemed fixed, arrested in Emma's face. "I didn't know he went to the Bava Valley," she said with stiff lips.

"He went with your husband," said Sylvia. It was the first time that it had been admitted between them that David Warwick was Emma's husband. "I wish he hadn't gone. He's too sensitive. I don't think he's strong enough to do those jungle treks, they must be exhausting. And then of course your husband's death . . . it upset him terribly. He's far too sensitive, he's not like other men."

Chapter ELEVEN

EMMA STRODE up the road to the top of the hill. She had forgotten Sylvia, now dejectedly sitting alone in her room. She burned with indignation and hastened to confront the sinners with their crime.

They had lied to her. Not only Anthony Nyal, who was jealous of her husband and from whom lies were to be expected, but Trevor, her friend and protector. She saw now that he had never helped her, that he had not only refused help but had deliberately tried to impede her search for justice and truth. She was not only angry, but horribly bewildered and dismayed, for she had never before distrusted a friend. That he was a friend there was no doubt, for David had loved and admired him. She felt the anguish of a child who hears it said for the first time that there is no God.

Halfway up the hill she heard a jeep behind her and moved over onto the side of the road to let it pass. The jeep drew alongside and slowed down. The driver was Hitolo. He leaned out and smiled. "Would you like a lift, Mrs. Warwick?"

"Are you going to Mr. Nyall's house?"

He nodded, still smiling, and she got in beside him. "I am going to pick up Mr. Nyall's luggage," he said, "and take it down to the airways. He is going to Rabaul tomorrow. Usually I go with him but not this time. But I make all the arrangements for him. I help him get away."

Emma was not listening. "Hitolo, did Mr. Washington go with you to the Bava Valley?"

"Yes, Mrs. Warwick," he said. "He is a good man, Mr. Washington. He is a friend of mine. He came to my wedding and made a speech."

"Why didn't you tell me?" cried Emma, wringing her hands in her lap. She had a sensation of fighting against time—though she hardly knew why—and nearly a fortnight had been lost. For nearly a fortnight she had known nothing about Washington.

"You didn't ask me," he said, taking his eyes from the road to glance at her. "I think you know."

"Did he go into Eola with Mr. Warwick and Sereva?"

"Yes, Mrs. Warwick. He went into Eola."

He fell silent then and she felt that he would not say anything further. She had once again an extraordinarily acute sense of his grief, though he turned to her as before only an expressionless copper cheek. Then his slim, shadowy hands twisted the wheel a half circle. They drove through the gate and pulled up under the mango tree at the back of the Nyall's house.

Emma did not hesitate. She did not ask herself what David would have done, which door she should enter by, should she knock or ring—but walked deliberately up the front veranda steps. The door was open and she walked in. Trevor, Janet and Anthony were sitting together with a tray and glasses on a table between them.

Janet half rose and then fluttered back against her chair. Anthony and Trevor both stood up and Trevor stepped forward and held out his hands.

"Well," rang out his warm, hearty voice, "how very nice!"

The wonder and excitement of the new discovery meant little at this moment. Emma burned with rage and it was upon Trevor that she most savagely turned.

"You lied to me!" she said. She spoke softly but the words, ejected in little gusts of fury, had the quality of spark and smoke. "You lied! I can see it all now. You don't want to know the truth. You don't want justice for David. You know something happened at Eola but you'd rather not know what it is, and

you're doing everything in your power to stop me from finding out."

"Hey! Hey now! Steady, steady!" Trevor Nyall smiled down. He spoke with the soothing indulgence with which one might address a spirited pony.

"It's no good," she said. "You never tried to help me. I can see that now. You just want me out of the way. And I nearly went. By next week I would have gone. Somebody murdered your greatest friend, but it doesn't matter to you! The truth is too much trouble for you. It might upset the Administration. It might upset the natives. You sit back and let this discredit hang over David's head." She was crying now, but she did not turn away or blink her eyes. They blazed with unabated anger behind the raining tears.

Somebody repeated the word "discredit." It was Anthony. His eyes behind the magnifying circles of glass were staring at her. They were extraordinarily brilliant. She saw his lips move.

Janet was fluttering her hands. They waved about vague and purposeless. "Trevor wouldn't lie," she said. "Trevor's so kind. Listen to her, Trevor. I would never say that you lied. I wouldn't say that."

"I'm not going to take any more notice of you," cried Emma. "I can't believe anything you've said to me any more. I'm going to this man Washington by myself. I'm going to find out what happened. And I'm going to Eola too. I'll find some way. I'll go to the police. I'll go to the Administration, and I don't care if it causes trouble. You haven't considered me; why should I consider you?"

"My child! My child!" Trevor stepped forward and put his two hands on her shoulders. She tried to shake him off but could not. His grip was firm. He pulled her around to face him and looked into her eyes. It was hard to suspect a man who looked like this, straight into your eyes. She was reminded of her father, of the nuns, of her husband, of that procession of adults who had all directed and guided her, who had put their hands on her shoulders and said, "Now, listen to me, Emma . . . now tell me, Emma . . . now, Emma, it is not like that, this is how it is. . . ." And had then died and left her alone. Her will slowly bent before his.

"I see now that you've found out about Philip Washington," he said. "You can't blame me for keeping it from you. It was because I have some sense of responsibility toward you that I did keep it from you. Of course I want to stop you in this mad, mad enterprise of yours. Because I know, I *know* you're only doing

yourself harm. And even if you *are* right, which you're not, I'd still try and stop you and do the investigations myself. I wouldn't let you put yourself in danger."

"Don't you see," said Emma, "that I don't care!" She had whipped herself up into a fresh frenzy of faith. The light of fanaticism burned brighter than ever in her eyes.

Anthony Nyall turned abruptly away from them, strode across to the door, and then came back.

"And *you*," she said, facing him. "Why didn't *you* tell me?"

Trevor seemed to forget her. He too looked at his brother and said musingly: "Yes. Tony, why didn't you tell her?"

There was a faint, derisive smile on Anthony's face. He answered his brother, not Emma. "Oddly enough," he said, "for exactly the reason you have just stated. It's strange, isn't it, that we should have the same motives? We may end up by doing the same things, but no one would imagine us to have the same motives."

Trevor laughed. "Now, no jibes, little brother."

"Now, don't be rude to Trevor, Tony," said Janet. "He's very good to you; he lets you stay in his house."

"You have no cause to protect me," said Emma stiffly. She had forgiven Trevor, but she did not believe that Anthony would ever try to save her from pain. "You did not know him . . . you did not love him . . ." he had said. "Why should you?" she said. "You hated David, you were jealous of him. You don't like anything connected with him."

"It seems to please you to think so," he said quietly. "It isn't true. We disagreed over matters of policy, that's all. We both represent two opposed anthropological points of view. There was no bitterness on my part."

Trevor turned petulantly to a boy who had been hovering in the doorway, trying to catch his eye. "What *is* it?"

"Please, taubada, boy come long taubada's sometings."

"Tell him to wait."

The light was draining out of Emma's face. Her moment had passed. The ecstatic defense of justice and truth was over. She felt tired and numb.

"I'm going to see Washington," she said mechanically. "I'm going to Eola."

"Well, yes," said Trevor. "You must certainly see Washington. You must hear from him what happened. *I* can only give you the briefest details. And if you really want to see him you shall, though I think you'd better wait a few days. He's been sick."

The suggestion of delay refired her enthusiasm. "I can't wait,"

she cried. "I've waited for days—for weeks! I can't wait any longer! Jobe may be at Eola now! He may be gone before we can find him!"

Trevor answered with a touch of sternness: "The man's had fever, he's not at all well. He hasn't been at work for a fortnight. And Jobe is in Rabaul."

But doubt, once admitted, fingers every word and thought. "How do I know he's been ill?" she said. "How do I know you didn't send him away until I had left the country or until you had convinced me, as you nearly did."

Trevor's brows drew together and Anthony smiled.

"I'm going to see him tonight . . . now," she said.

"I'll take you," said Anthony.

She looked at him in surprise. "I think you'd better let me take you," said Trevor and smiled charmingly. "To redeem myself in your favor. I obviously need redemption."

"I'll take her," said Anthony again, in a flat, decided voice, and taking Emma's hand he drew it through his arm.

She found herself moving off with him toward the door. She did not know how it happened that she left with this bitter, wounding man, leaving behind his brother who was kind, who was her husband's friend, who had in his misguided way tried to look after her, and who would never, never have said, "You did not love him."

She seemed to have no choice. She looked back over her shoulder and said, "I'm sorry I was rude. I know you were trying to help me. It's just that I don't want that sort of help."

Trevor said nothing. He had swung his tall body around to watch them go. Beside him sat his wife, her yellow hair burning like a candle, her little white hands dabbing about after a mosquito that had long since decided against her emaciated arms and had settled on the bronze dome of Trevor's forehead. The light was behind him and his features were only a dark blur but there was no doubt of his friendliness toward her, for he lifted his hand and waved.

She was glad. Now that it was all over she could not have borne to quarrel with David's friend.

Still holding her arm linked within his, Anthony led her around to the back of the house. The Nyalls' cookboy was sitting on the back steps talking to Hitolo.

Anthony paused. "My luggage isn't ready, Hitolo, but you can drive us to Mr. Washington's house."

He helped Emma into the front seat and climbed into the back. Hitolo drove; nobody spoke. Emma tried to think of Washington

and the meeting ahead. She tried to assemble the questions she wanted to ask him, but her thoughts kept sliding away and she found herself wondering instead about the man sitting behind her.

She turned round to speak to him. He had been leaning forward in his seat and her head almost knocked against his. She felt his breath on her cheek and caught the faint scent of his body. For an instant his eyes blazed enormously into her own.

One rarely looks for long into the very heart of another's eyes. And Emma had seemed to do more than look, had seemed to plunge, to drown. She had no idea what she had encountered there, but her nerves jangled from contact with the unknown, and she turned her eyes away.

"Why are you taking me?" she said.

He, too, drew a little away from her. "You would go anyway."

"That's not consistent," she said. "I would have met your brother anyway, but you wouldn't help me then." She had wanted to quarrel with him, but found herself speaking quietly.

"I've changed my mind," he said, "about you, since . . ."

"Since the night I came to dinner," she supplied, though she had no idea what she had done then or why he should change his mind. The words rose rather from a subconscious conviction that after that night many things had changed.

He did not confirm her statement, but only said, "You will go on." He spoke without emotion, as if he recognized her course as inexorable.

They were driving now along the seashore. There were no white people about, but they passed numbers of natives walking back to the village. Hitolo called out to several and waved a hand.

"They walk, I drive," he announced.

The road turned in toward the hills past long low paper buildings that hummed with cheap music and past a tangled pile of army scrap that had never been cleared away and rusted beneath the tendrils of slowly encroaching creepers. It was darker here and rather cheerless. Even the natives seemed different. Along the seashore they walked with long, swinging steps, talking, laughing, sometimes singing. The yellow skirts of the native girls swished gaily around their shining calves. But in this valley that the sun had left, some natives had already lit their fires and sat huddled around them. They did not laugh but beat their drums and here and there broke out a monotonous, quavering, "Ba ba ba aa a aa ba aa."

The road came to an end by some empty tin sheds and a

clump of coconut palms. Hitolo swung the wheel around and pointed the jeep back the way they had come. The Government offices were on the left. There seemed to be no houses anywhere. The palm leaves rustled overhead and every now and again creaking, scratching sounds came from the derelict sheds. Anthony Nyall pointed without speaking up the hill and began to climb. Emma and Hitolo followed.

Then she saw the little thatched hut perched above them in a bright garden of frangipani and variegated shrubs. A light was burning in the window. A flight of wooden steps led up between the trees to the overhanging veranda. It was almost overgrown with tall, red shrubs, and Anthony, half-way up the steps, paused and held back the branches for her to follow. The veranda was covered by a creeper with shiny leaves, and there were speckled orchids in hanging pots, their little twisted flowers dipping in the faint breeze.

"Are you there, Washington? May we come in?" called Anthony.

There was a murmur of voices within, a strange, grunting sound and a subdued scuffling. Then a man's voice speaking clearly but softly, native words that Emma could not understand.

They waited. Through the open doorway they could see a dim yellow shape and the outlines of table and chairs. Emma, so as not to appear to pry, turned and looked back the way they had come. The red shrubs were now, with their leaves against the sun, a pale transparent pink. A mosquito whined toward her.

"Just a moment," called the voice. "Who is it?"

"Nyall," said Anthony.

"Oh, you . . . Trevor . . ."

"No, Anthony."

"Oh!" The voice on this exclamation fell away shortly.

Emma looked back at the doorway. The shining laurel green leaves drooped around the open frame. Her eye was arrested by a strange little object fixed to the outside of the door by a piece of string tied round a nail. It was oval in shape, but pointed at both ends. It was black, highly polished and carved in a design of fine, feathered lines slanting in from the sides and joining at the center around two eyes and a mouth. It suggested both a human face and the head of a fish. She had seen it before, or one like it, on the desk of Anthony's office. Anthony was looking at it too.

Then Washington said: "Come in, sorry to keep you waiting."

The room was dimly lit by a single lamp fixed into a large glass bottle that was almost a quarter full of the dead bodies and fallen

wings of flying ants. The lamp threw a soft, golden light on the thatch above. Small pink lizards lay in waiting on the rafters to pounce on the insects that scratched and scuttled there. The walls were festooned with various native weapons; masks and ornaments, axes, spears, arrows, drums, bamboo pipes and long strips of coarse native cloth decorated in bold brown and red designs. Against this barbaric décor Philip Washington presented an incongruously elegant appearance.

He was sitting in a large cane chair with his feet up on a wooden stool. He wore a yellow silk dressing gown with deep black collar and borders to the sleeves, and fanned his dripping face with a Chinese sandalwood fan. On the table beside him was a wooden Balinese head, a glass of rum and an untouched plate of bully beef and hot boiled potatoes. The tin that had contained the bully beef was on the floor at his feet.

She had accused Trevor Nyall of deliberately hiding him, but decided now that she had been unjust. Washington did indeed look ill. It was not exceptionally hot, though the climb up the garden steps had made her skin prickly and moist, but Washington's face ran with sweat. His eyes were pouched as if from lack of sleep and there were sharp, haggard little folds around his lips which did not appear to belong rightly to a face otherwise so young.

As soon as she entered the room she knew he was hiding something. He lay, making no attempt to move, languid as a Yellow Book poet, but she felt that the body under the silk gown was tense and defensive. She felt that he knew who she was and why she had come, and was prepared for her.

"You will excuse me for not getting up, won't you?" He spoke in rather high-pitched, drawling tones, and waved a long, elegant hand at two cane chairs. "This damn fever—leaves me as weak as a chicken. Oh, hallo there, Hitolo. Nice to see you again. Sit down over there, will you?" He pointed to the corner and Hitolo came quietly in and squatted down on his haunches.

Emma, who had no idea that in Marapai it was a breach of etiquette to invite a native into the same room as a white woman, took no notice of this. She sat down too, but Anthony remained standing.

"I've brought Mrs. Warwick to see you, Washington," he said. "She's only just recently learned that you went into the Bava Valley with her husband and wants to ask you some questions." He spoke quickly, almost casually, as if to get this over as soon as possible. His words subtly deprived the meeting of emphasis. Emma did not know whether to be angry or grateful.

Washington had turned toward her his extraordinarily light eyes, and in a manner as elegant as his dressing gown said, "Believe me, Mrs. Warwick, you have my deepest sympathy. I knew you were here, of course, and I was going to get in touch with you. You probably think it unpardonable of me for not having done so. And I should have written but I am one of those poor wretches who go completely *under* in an attack of fever. It just prostrates me. I am useless. I cannot face anyone. You will excuse my not getting up, won't you? Perhaps you would like something to drink. Hitolo, fish around behind that curtain and you'll find a bottle of gin. I have no ice, I'm afraid. The boys used to carry it up from the freezer for me, but, alas, I now have no boys. So you must excuse everything for being in such a mess."

Emma said nothing. She was shocked to find him so charming. There was something light and brittle about the way he spoke that amused her against her inclinations—an inflection to his voice that made everything he said sound witty. She did not like being charmed for she profoundly distrusted him.

"What about Rei?" said Anthony.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, Rei. . . . That's right, Hitolo, and there are glasses there too and water in that jug. Put back the cover or the ants will fall into it."

His voice faded. His eyes had wandered and were fixed now on the darkening doorway. He leaned forward suddenly in his chair and peered outside. Both Emma and Anthony turned too to follow the direction of his glance. The leaves of the creeper formed a sharp, serrated edge around the doorway. Night had fallen quickly and behind the frangipani trees and sky was pricked with stars.

Washington's unblinking eyes probed the dark shapes of the bushes. His face was tense and a small pulse throbbed in his cheek. "Hitolo, be a good boy and just have a look outside, won't you. I think somebody's waiting out there."

Hitolo left the drinks and walked obediently outside. He stood for a moment on the veranda and came back in again. "Nobody there," he said.

Washington leaned back in his chair. His face relaxed.

"We're keeping you from your dinner," said Emma, and struck at a mosquito on her leg.

"Oh, that's nothing. It's inedible anyway. Are the mosquitos troubling you? Hitolo, pass over that switch to Mrs. Warwick."

Hitolo unhooked a long, horsehair switch from the wall and Washington picked up his plate and prodded a potato with a

fork. Emma switched impatiently at her legs. She opened her lips to speak, but Hitolo forestalled her.

"Taubada!" He had moved forward into the center of the room. He was staring at the empty meat tin by Washington's feet. "Mr. Washington, don't eat that food. You no eat it! Mr. Washington, you die!"

Washington lifted his eyes and stared at Hitolo. His lips were half parted to receive the food. Then he, too, glanced down at his feet. When he looked up again his eyes were bright and angry. "Don't talk such dreadful nonsense!" he said sharply. "Go back and sit down this instant!" And digging his fork into the bully beef he scooped up a large piece and thrust it into his mouth.

"No eat 'im, taubada," chanted Hitolo. He appeared not to have heard Washington's rebuke. He stood with his arms hanging limply at his sides, his eyes wide and glazed. There was a strange, whitish flush around his lips.

Emma looked down at the can. Its lid was rolled back round a key. It had a scarlet label with yellow lettering. Washington spoke again. His voice rose, there was a note of hysteria in it now.

"Now do as I tell you! Sit down and be quiet or you can get out!" He ate a little more and pushed his plate away, grimacing.

"There!" he said, with a touch of defiance to Hitolo, who had slunk back into the corner again. "Do I look as if I'm going to die? My God, you're a spoiled crowd. There used to be a time when a piece of smoked magami was good enough for you. Now you scream for tinned meat and fish. And if you strike an off tin that gives you a bellyache you wail about that and want fresh beef from the freezer at five shillings a pound. That's where we've gone wrong with these people," he said to Anthony. "All we've done is to create unnecessary needs without developing a sense of appreciation."

"Mr. Washington!" said Emma desperately.

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Warwick, you were wanting to ask me some questions, weren't you? I'm so sorry I was not more prepared for you. Oh, dear, that doesn't seem to be agreeing with me." He ran his hand over his stomach. "I shouldn't eat with fever. I really never feel as if I can touch a thing."

As he spoke Emma became conscious that the room was becoming filled with more and more tiny flying creatures. The circle of flying ants fluttering about the lamp was slowly thickening. They now seemed obsessed by some frenzy and pelted about like snow. The table all around the glass bottle was lit-

tered with fine, shining wings. They had settled too in the ceiling and scratched and whispered in the thatch. Two or three large cockroaches joined them and flopped about the room. They seemed in the confined space as large as small birds. The lizards waiting on the rafters were darting to and fro, and a lean black cat that Emma had not noticed before was sitting on a rafter directly above her head cracking something between its jaws.

A sudden desperation seized her. Somewhere here, she believed, hidden in this house, in the body and mind of this man, was the truth, the justice she sought, but the whole place was equipped to distract and bewilder her. The masks, the strings of dogs' white teeth and the curved half moons of the boars' tusks caught and mesmerized her eye; the amusing elegant manners of Washington evaded her; Hitolo with his talk of deadly meat had momentarily banished David Warwick from her mind, and now nature itself, the sky with its hordes of winged insects, had rallied to attack her. She felt that her sight, her senses, even her passionate purpose was blurred in the sudden flutter of myriad wings.

"Mr. Washington," she said again, leaning tensely forward. "When you went to Eola . . ."

"Just a moment, Mrs. Warwick. I'm afraid we'll have to turn off the light or we'll have these things in here in hordes. They'll pass over in a moment."

She lashed at her legs with the horsehair switch in a sudden revulsion against the tiny pricking, tickling creatures. Along the arm of her chair they had settled in a thick, wriggling, greasy patch. She looked up and her eyes met Anthony Nyall's. He was staring at her with an expression of grave sadness, Washington put out a hand and snapped off the light.

There was a moment of silence. Or it seemed at first silence. In actual fact the little hut was filled with sound. The flying ants flopped and battered their wings against the lamp; through the open louvers they could be seen, a twirling, spinning multitude against the night sky. The thatch was alive with scraping, cracking, creeping insect life, and from the ceiling above Emma's head swayed a cluster of strange, bamboo objects—some sort of musical instruments, she guessed—that tinkled in the faint breeze like wind bells.

"Who's that?" said Washington sharply, and they heard him move forward in his chair.

"There's no one there," said Anthony in a flat, tired voice. "It's only the flying foxes. There's nothing to be afraid of."

Nothing can come in; you're well protected, you have magic hanging on your door."

Washington laughed. It was a strange high, dry sound. "Oh, so you noticed it. Now don't expect me to be ashamed of myself. I can't help it, you know. All the nicest things I have are pinched. My fingers itch and there's absolutely nothing I can do about it. You're not going to take it away, are you?"

"Not if it gives you any comfort," said Anthony. His voice was soft and it was difficult to tell whether it was menacing or merely gentle.

Emma struck a desperate blow at the mosquitos that were attacking her legs. She was beginning to feel hysterical. The whole evening—this strange, elegant, unstable man, his fantastic house, Hitolo, the flying ants, seemed unreal, dreamlike, insane.

"There is someone there," said Washington tensely.

Now Emma had heard the sound. It was a low, scuffling noise that seemed to come from under the house. Then there was a faint subdued yelp.

Washington had leaped to his feet. She saw his tall body dart across the room to fill the doorway that looked out toward the boyhouse. "Koibari! Koibari! Where are you? You there! There's a dog under this house. Get it away, I tell you! Get it out of here. I won't have dogs scratching around in this place!"

Her first thought was—there's somebody there. And he said there was no one. He's a liar too.

Washington's voice rose almost to a scream. "Get him out of here! Kick him! Stone him! Get him away! I won't have those damned Kerema dogs in this place!" The yelping and scuffling increased and Washington's voice screamed on. "Get him out of here! I won't have those damned dogs on my place!"

He's mad! she thought. The scene had abruptly changed from dream to nightmare. The walls of experience shot back and she found herself glimpsing into regions of the human heart that she had never dreamed existed. There was silence. The flying ants were still thick in the air, brushing her face as they passed. They had poured down the hillside in a thick, united stream, using the house as a tunnel, sucked in through the louvers on one side and out through those on the other. Emma sat motionless in her chair, her hands clenched at her sides and her heart violently beating.

Then a voice spoke quietly in her ear. "Look at the glow-worms," said Anthony Nyall. "Aren't they beautiful?"

She looked up. In the thatch above her head the pale, soft

lights were breathing on and off. They were not sparkling, hard, metallic like the firefly, but bright, soft and tender. She felt an immediate sense of relief and peace. She smiled and instinctively moved to hold out her hand, recollecting herself and drawing it back just in time.

"You must excuse me, Mrs. Warwick," said Washington in a more normal voice. He was feeling his way back to his chair. He flopped into it and fanned himself vigorously. She could smell the faint sour odor of the sandalwood. He was breathing deeply, and though they could only see the outline of his head and one rapidly moving hand beating the fan, there came from him a suggestion of almost desperate exhaustion.

"I'm not at all well," he stated. "Fever always put my nerves on edge and those damn Kerema dogs come over and root up all my vegetables."

"Mr. Washington, when you went to Eola . . ."

"Yes, Mrs. Warwick. What were you wanting to ask me? I'm sorry about all the interruptions."

"I want to know what happened," she said. "Please can you tell me what happened?"

Anthony Nyall spoke now. "Mrs. Warwick believes," he said, "that the trip to Eola might have had some sort of bearing on her husband's suicide."

Emma's lips tightened at the word, "suicide," but she said nothing.

"Oh, nothing at all. I can tell you that," said Washington quickly. "Nothing at all, I'm afraid. It couldn't have. How could it . . .?"

"What happened?" said Emma patiently. Nothing would come from this man, she knew. He did not even seem to be attending to what he said. She had the strongest impression of his thoughts flitting about the room like the flying ants, and only returning now and again to give the briefest check over the words he was speaking, words which sounded forced and mechanical, almost rehearsed. But she was not discouraged. She felt she might learn what she wanted to know, not from what he said, but from what he did not say.

"Well, we went by flying boat to the station at Kairipi. It's on the coast, you know, at the mouth of the Bava River. The D.O. took us up the river about sixty miles in the station boat to Maiola, which is the end of his patrol. Here we picked up a couple of guides and we had eight carriers with us from the station—and Hitolo, of course. . . ."

"And Sereva," said Emma.

"Oh, yes, and Sereva. It was rather a crowd to take, you know, but we were carrying some stuff for the Eolan people, who haven't got much of a reputation for friendliness around those parts. Nobody knew anything much about them, but we were considered rather foolhardy for going in—by the natives that is, of course. So we took some cowries and pearl shells from the coast. We had trouble, too, getting the natives to go with us. As it happened two of them ran away as soon as we got near the village and the others wouldn't go any farther."

"Why were they frightened?" asked Emma.

"Vada, Mrs. Warwick. Vada. Eola has a reputation for vada men." He had lowered his voice and spoke with a new inflection of awe, almost of reverence. "It's a type of sorcery. A very powerful type of sorcery. You've probably heard a little about sorcery but . . ." His voice was low and eager, and Emma, fearing another digression, interrupted:

"What happened then?"

"Well, we were at this village Maiola, which is the end of the patrol. The river narrows here and you can't take a canoe up it, so we struck out on foot, following along its bank."

Emma as she listened was staring outside through the open doorway where the sky was now clear of flying ants and showed a deep, washed blue between the frangipani trees.

Anthony had sat down and lit his pipe and the white smoke moved slowly out through the door.

"I think," she said, "that the flying ants have gone."

"So they have." He stretched out his hand and switched on the light. They blinked at each other in the glare, their faces seeming for the first few moments white and strained, their eyes pinched and drowsy. The cat above Emma's head had disappeared; the lizards had crept gorged into the corners of the rafters. The table was thick with the shining lost wings of the ants, and a single cockroach still banged against the lamp.

Washington had looked first at Emma, but now his eyes surveyed the room. Then his body grew rigid, his hand clutched on the fan, he sharply sucked in his breath.

Emma glanced quickly over into the corner, but she could see only Hitolo squatting on the floor, his long exquisite hands hanging limply down between his knees. There were two white spots of light on his burnished cheeks and his eyes glimmered like jewels.

Washington fluttered his fan. "You startled me, Hitolo," he said with a nervous laugh that broke into a giggle. "I thought you had white paint on your face. I couldn't imagine what you

would be doing with a painted face. Let me see, we went on," he continued, "till we were a half day's march from Eola, and then the two guides decided to run for home. We weren't yet really in Eola country, but fairly near it and they weren't taking any chances. But the carriers, who were mission boys and just one degree less idiotic than the two guides, agreed to go farther. But after a while they got the wind up too, so we went on alone. They made camp and waited for us outside the village. We were right in Eola country and when we came back they were huddled together over a fire, nearly silly with fear, though they hadn't seen a soul. Everyone was in the village at a dance festival."

He paused and mopped his face with a handkerchief. "My God, it's hot, isn't it? Hitolo, pass Mrs. Warwick a fan."

"I don't find the weather any different from Australia," said Emma.

Washington laughed shortly. "You don't at first, nor the country, nor the people. This is a place, Mrs. Warwick, that doesn't give itself away all in the first five minutes. If it did it would be uninhabited, at least by white men. You stick around till it gets its claws into you and then starts spitting in your face. But it's too late then; you're no good for anywhere else."

Emma, fearing from the tense eagerness of his tone that he had arrived on another of his favorite subjects, said, "You went on. Who went with you?"

"Your husband, Sereva, myself."

"And was there any gold?"

He did not seem surprised that she should know about the gold. "Very little that we could see. Just a few neck ornaments, probably traded from some other part of the country."

He's hiding something, thought Emma. She felt intensely alert and curious. She was certain that Washington was lying, but just when he had started lying she could not tell. She felt that the questions she asked now were vitally important. She had a sensation of stalking—a bird, or an animal—creeping slowly up on it, sliding her questions through grasses and bushes noiselessly so as not to disturb the illusive truth within. One wrong step, one cracking twig or fluttering leaf and it would be off and gone. She felt, too, that Washington knew he was being stalked. She could sense his nerves, fingering like antennae in the air around him.

"Like the ones that Jobe brought back," she said. Her heart was beating rapidly. She clasped her hands to stop them trembling. She had lost consciousness of the strange little room where

they sat, the dark, melancholy eyes of Anthony Nyall which never left her face. She had a feeling of power and independence that she had never known in her life before. She saw the situation as important and dangerous, and she was dealing with it herself. No one was telling her what to do. She was actually pitting her wits against an older, and more experienced man. She sat forward in her chair, her eyes shining.

A sharp, flicking glance, like the dart of a snake's tongue, flashed across at her from Washington's pale eyes.

"Yes, like those."

"And was there more gold in the long house?"

"Well, just a little, I believe. It was hard to see, we could only sneak a look. These people are very cagey about their long houses, particularly with strangers. They use them for initiation ceremonies, you know. A lot of harmless nonsense goes on but they put great store by it, and with primitive peoples it's sometimes dangerous to nose around too obviously. Warwick fished about a bit, and then we came back to find Hitolo and the carriers huddled over the fire waiting for the vada men."

"I see. And that was all?"

He waved his fan. "That was all."

"Except that Sereva died."

The fan faltered. He laughed. "Of course, one forgets. How easy it is to fall into the accepted attitude that such things don't matter. He was a good boy, a wonderful boy. Your husband was very distressed about it. I've never seen him so cast down."

"Had you any idea what caused it?"

He waved a hand vaguely as if this didn't matter and was hardly worth inquiring into. "Oh, it might been anything. Fever, bad food . . ."

"But to die so quickly."

"It's not quick for this country. Or for a native. It doesn't take a native long to die. It might have been vada. . . ." His voice dropped.

Emma threw a glance at Hitolo. He sat as before with his hands hanging down over his knees, the light flashing on his blue fingernails. "But you don't believe in vada."

"It doesn't matter whether I believe in it or not," said Washington quickly. "The point is that Sereva would, and that would make it effective." Then with a curt, clipped note to his voice, he said: "It's obvious, Mrs. Warwick, that you've only just arrived in this country. Don't forget that the natives have lived here for thousands of years—or so we assume. Isn't it a little slick and smug of us to laugh at the beliefs that they have built

up through centuries? We're always looking for ways of living in the tropics without going off our heads, but it never occurs to us that *they*—the natives—might have the answer. The fact is, Mrs. Warwick, we've lost all but the last decaying stumps of our senses, and there's nothing for us to do but sneer."

They fell into silence.

"Is there anything else you want to ask?" said Anthony.

"Yes," said Emma. "How long did the trip take—from Mai-ola, that is, when you left the District Officer and the boat?"

"Four days in all—one could do it in three. That's one way of course. It isn't far outside the patrolled area."

"Is it hard going?"

"All jungle travel is hard going," said Washington airily. "But it's easier than most. You don't have to check your direction all the time. The river leads you and the paths are clear. But personally I loathe the whole business. Hot, filthy clothes, unspeakable tinned foods. Though I do like native foods, you know. Yams are most excellent if properly prepared. Mosquitoes, leeches . . . No, I find it all quite horrible."

Then the direction her questions were taking was simultaneously recognized by both men.

"Why?" said Anthony Nyall. The word fell into the stillness with a sharp, explosive sound.

"Because I want to go there," said Emma.

She waited. Anthony did not move. He was looking at Washington. Behind him in the corner Hitolo stirred. Washington beat the air with his fan.

"What for?" he said in a high, aggressive voice.

She only replied, "For many personal reasons."

He appeared not to hear her. "Aren't you satisfied? Don't you believe what I told you?" The fan beat the air like an angry wing. "Ask me anything you like. I'll tell you anything you want to know. Go on! Ask me! Anything!"

"Mrs. Warwick hasn't said that she doesn't believe you," said Anthony Nyall. "She wants to make the journey for sentimental reasons."

Emma, who had almost forgotten that he was her enemy, threw him a look of wild indignation. "Will *you*," she said to Washington, "take me?"

"I?" The fan was still. He stared at her. His eyes seemed blank and colorless. She might have been gazing into white glass. "No," he said. "No. No! No! No!"

Between each word there was a pause and into each pause washed a torrent of new terror. Each word was burdened by a

whole fresh load of fear. The last "No" was almost a scream. He sprang to his feet.

Chapter TWELVE

HE BACKED away as if defending himself from something he saw in her face. She had never seen a man so terrified. Then words babbled from his lips. There were only just reasonable. Emma, almost as frightened as he, felt that he did not know what he said, or even that he spoke at all. His reason seemed to have flashed away and left a delirious, unconscious body behind.

"Back to that filthy jungle! Not on your life! Not back to that filthy jungle with the mosquitoes and the mud and the damn mangroves and the filthy little beasts with their little white faces and the damned rotten tinned food and yams, yams, yams . . . leeches hanging out of your shoes, filthy little blood suckers, slimy beasts sliding along like lizards and eyes, eyes in the leaves and not a sound, only eyes in the leaves and foxes in the trees. Ha! Ha! Foxes in the trees, keeping their fingers clean right out of reach while we crawl around with our bellies in the mud, and sleeping at night in the trees, sleeping and not listening . . ." His voice trailed away, became slower and clearer. "Go back to that rotten little corner of hell?" he quavered. "Not on your life!"

His face was white and dripping with sweat. He passed the back of his hand over his lips. Into his eyes—fixed at Emma but not seeing her—consciousness drained back like water into the dry bed of a pool. For a moment his face was violently expressive, and then closed up with caution. He seemed to have slammed his doors like a man caught turning over his secrets. Languidly he waved his fan and sat down again, arranging the yellow robe over his knees.

"I'm sorry," he said and his voice was now almost under control, "I couldn't possibly go back there. I'm working, you know. They'd never let me go."

"If they would . . ." said Emma.

"Well, you know, I don't much relish these jungle treks. They're so damned uncomfortable. And when you've been in the tropics as long as I have you rather shy off that *Boy's Own Paper* stuff. And I'm not fit, you know," he added, and raised a hand wearily to his forehead, remembering his sickness with the air of one producing a forgotten asset.

"Well, I think we'll leave," said Anthony, standing up. "You don't look well."

Emma rose also, though reluctantly. The man was useless, there was nothing to be learned from him, but she felt herself obscurely bound to him. She felt that there existed between them already some sort of close, passionate relationship. It was not love, hate or friendship, it was something different and beyond all these things. She knew that Washington felt it too. Awareness of what they were to each other had only a moment before shone in his eyes.

He did not wish them to leave either. "Go!" he said, starting up. "Oh, don't go. Have another drink." The asset appeared now in the light of a liability and he discarded it. "I feel better. Really it was good of you to come. Fever is so depressing, particularly when it's getting better. One craves for company so. I wish you'd stay, really I do. You mustn't take any notice of my jitters; they don't mean anything."

"I'm afraid we must go," said Anthony, but as he turned to say good-by he added, "Hitolo will stay with you for a while. He'll get you anything you want. You shouldn't be up here on your own when you're sick."

There was a look of instant relief in Washington's face. "You needn't worry about my luggage, Hitolo. Stay here with Mr. Washington for a while." Anthony nodded briefly.

It was now quite dark outside. Anthony went first down the little flight of wooden steps, and turned to help Emma. They slithered down the rough path to the bottom of the garden. Here the light from the house did not penetrate and they had to feel their way between the frangipani trees. It was quiet, except for the flapping of the flying foxes in the pawpaw trees, and somewhere nearby a tap was running.

Suddenly Anthony stopped. "Who's there?" he said sharply.

There was a low grunting sound and then a figure appeared, brushing aside the leaves, and crouched in the path before them. It was a strange, squat, misshapen body, with a huge bushy black mop of hair. It paused and then waddled off into the shrubs on the other side of the road.

Emma felt an eerie prickling in her skin. She shuddered, and the tremor passed down her fingers into those that held them. Anthony looked quickly over his shoulder.

"It was only a native," he said. "Don't be nervous."

"Is he sick, that man?" she said, looking back at the house. "Is he mad?"

They had reached more even ground now. He still held her

fingers to guide her, but his hand was limp and unresponsive. "He too," he said, "has his obsessions."

"He too! Like me? Is that how I seem to you?"

She could not see his face but felt he was smiling. "Well, it's how I seem to you, isn't it?"

She thought for a moment. "You mean," she said, "in not liking David or your brother." She found herself able to say this without animosity.

His head turned sharply, as if she had shocked him. "My brother? Don't I like him?"

"No," said Emma definitely. "Perhaps it is an obsession. Why do you hate people with houses larger than your own?"

He did not correct her cruel simplification. "Because I know too much of the material that builds them. The average man doesn't make a pretty victim."

"What do you mean?"

"You've seen one tonight," he said. "They aren't humble or submissive; they're savage and dangerous, spiteful and treacherous. But they aren't responsible for themselves. They're man-made monsters."

"How was he victimized?" said Emma curiously, wondering if this explained why, in spite of everything, she had found it impossible to dislike Washington.

Either he did not hear her or chose not to answer. "You can't force mediocrity," he said, "on a man who isn't mediocre. He'll always find some other way of being exceptional. That's what the levelers don't take into consideration, that if they lock the front door they force the spirit into back passages."

"What do you mean?" she said wildly. "Back passages! Do you think this man killed David?"

"I've told you before . . ." he began.

"You told me before!" she cried. She tried to be angry. Anger was their customary form of communication and she was used to it. But now for some reason she could not feel it. Her emotions seemed no longer swift and direct, but wayward and diffused. "You lied to me," she said. "Everyone lies to me."

She stumbled on the road, her foot slipping into a deep rut. He gripped her fingers instantly tighter and then let them go.

"I won't lie to you again," he said surprisingly. "You're right. Everyone lies to you. Why should they? What right have they? Look how they've placed you now, chasing another lie, and God knows where it'll lead you." He spoke as if addressing a third person and there was a ring of indignation in his voice.

Emma, recognizing the direction of his accusation, tried to be

angry again and threw back at him, "You know what happened. You know everything, don't you?"

"I know enough."

"And you won't tell me?"

"No."

"But," she said more quietly, "you aren't stopping me from finding out any more."

"No. I can see now that you'll find out anyway. I couldn't stop you if I tried. I don't want to now. I almost believe," he said, and there was a note of surprise in his voice, "that I want you to go through with it. As you say, enough people have lied to you."

"Why won't you tell me?" she said. He entirely puzzled her. She felt now even more curious about his motives than about the secrets he withheld.

They had reached the jeep now. He paused with his hand on the door and turned to face her. "For one thing," he said, "I haven't any proof, and you would want proof, otherwise you'd never believe what I told you. You'd only hate me for it and find excellent reasons for my having said it." He looked away and spoke more quickly. "You can find out for yourself. I won't help you. You can make your own victims, I've enough of my own. You've probably heard about them."

The twelve men who died, she thought. She saw then clearly how he was not against her any longer or he would never have said this.

"I *don't* understand you."

"You will when it's over, if you survive it." He turned his head again and looked at her. He spoke now quickly and intensely. "Don't you see? *I* can't make victims. I'm not strong enough now, or single-minded enough. It's hard to explain. I don't think *you* could ever understand it. Ever since I've been in this country my power for any sort of dynamic action has grown less and less. It seems to me that every step we make toward the so-called progress of these people is a step toward their destruction. There seems only one thing to do, one reasonable course of action—and that is to do *nothing*."

"But we can't," said Emma, "leave them as they are. It just wouldn't do. . . ." She searched for words. "One just *can't*. They must take their place in the world."

"No," he said flatly, "one can't. There's nothing else to do but what we're doing. Yet I feel more and more that *I* can't do it. I can't contribute. I can't even bring myself to attack what seem obvious evils—sorcery, headhunting, for instance. I can't even

help to remove the terror from native life, for I know what goes with it. Good and evil, beauty and ugliness, if they exist, aren't separate and distinct in these people's lives. If you drag out one thread you tear down the whole house. And why should we? *Why should we?* What incredible arrogance! Any fool can see that there's more dignity and integrity in a Papuan than in the average white man who comes up here from the south because this is the end of the earth where anyone can get a living without earning it." He paused; and in his next words there was a note of pleading.

"That's why I'm so helpless and incapable of doing anything about *this*. Ten years in this country have paralyzed my will. I'm convinced that it's invariably better *not* to act."

She looked up at him, trying to read his face in the dim light. She felt disturbed and excited. No one had ever spoken to her like this before. No one had ever exposed their weaknesses before her. This had always been her part. And he seemed to go farther than this, almost to plead understanding and forgiveness. She had always been the one to be forgiven.

"But this is different," she said. "I only want to know the truth. I only want justice."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Exactly. You're looking for victims. And you'll find them, some of them innocent."

"How could that be? Who?"

"Well, one for certain—yourself!" Startled, she drew a little away, and he continued sharply: "But that's what you want, isn't it? You're bent on self-destruction. Well, I'll not help you. I've enough murder on my hands. We'll make this another suicide." He shook his head. "It's no good; you don't understand me. And anyway you're right. It's better to know the truth. But I would keep myself in the position of being someone you can turn to, afterward."

She did not speak and he went on: "When this is over, Emma, if you survive it, what then? That's something I don't think you've taken into consideration. But I have."

What then? The words had a hollow ring. He was right, though she only now realized it. She had counted on not surviving. All that there had been to survive for would have been finished. She had made no preparation for this.

"I don't think beyond it," she said.

"And you have been counting," he added gently, "on there being no need to think; on not coming through. But you'll want to, when it's too late. You'll see it then as something that wasn't worth your trouble."

It was only then that she caught the meaning of what he had been saying. "You . . ." she stopped.

"I think I could love," he said quietly. "Perhaps I do now. I know I love what you're doing, and I don't think it's only that. It gives you a strange, possessed quality that I can't get out of my mind. I have a picture of your face when you say these terrible, misguided things that just hangs there in front of me and never goes. I know you can't talk about this now because it would be against everything you're after—to think of me, I mean, as anything but an enemy."

Emma said nothing. She was profoundly astonished and confused.

"I've never loved anyone before," he said in a rather puzzled tone, "I can see that quite clearly now. I thought I loved Janet once, but that was only pity and something to do with Trevor. I think I need you," he said, almost grudgingly. "I think what I admired most in you was your madness. That was why you made me so angry, because you were doing what I couldn't do, and what I felt I should do. I wanted to stop it, I still do now, because it's so misguided and destructive, but I admire it because it's dynamic. Perhaps you would be able to teach me to act again. Action is your strong point."

"You need me," Emma murmured.

"Yes," he said. "I didn't realize how much I was in need of help. I didn't want help. I was proud of being the only one who knew that it was better to do nothing. Now I'm ashamed. You might teach me to be single-minded again. You might break up this terrible paralysis I have. I haven't done any work for months, you know. I would have been thrown out months ago if it hadn't been for Trevor. I don't mind one way or another—or rather I didn't mind, I would have enjoyed being sacrificed—but he wouldn't tolerate it. I literally haven't done a thing. I'm afraid to. I'm afraid of the consequences of working. I'm afraid to pay my boy for fear of what he will do with the money. I'm afraid to open a book for fear that I might read something that will tempt me to act. It's terrible. It must be like the sloth of extreme old age when all action seems futile. I feel older than anyone in the world."

"How terrible!" she murmured.

He had stopped speaking and stood now silently in front of her. She did not speak. Words of protest, even of outrage flashed into her mind, but she dismissed them knowing that they would in no way express her real feelings. Those real feelings were too

strong to remain entirely unacknowledged. She was tremendously shaken and very proud.

He opened the front door of the jeep and she got in. They did not speak again for some moments. They drove down past the men's mess and the jangle of voices and wireless sets grew fainter behind them. The road turned along the sea shore. Emma leaned out through the window to catch the breeze in her hair. She felt suddenly tired. Anthony's declaration of love seemed like a burden that had fastened on her spirit. She had never had responsibilities; she had always been, herself, the responsibility of someone else. She realized vaguely that, whatever she said or felt toward him, here was a person she must do something about. She could not just shrug him away; consideration was due to him, she owed it to him. She had never felt this before, even about David. Their relationship had been so simple. She loved him, she admired him, she obeyed him. That was all. She had been able to transfer to him quite naturally the attitude and behavior that had belonged to her father. There had never been any problems, at least not any that she knew about.

But Anthony's wife would not be cherished and looked after. She would not follow a prescribed course of conduct, for none would be plotted out for her. There would be no demands to carry out, and nothing definite or tangible expected of her. Everything would be left to her; no decisions would be made for her. And always there would be problems. Questions that arose would be as much the property of one as the other. She shifted uneasily, conscious of a strange disquietude. It seemed to her that an unrestful, emotionally turbulent and unstable existence was promised for Anthony's wife.

They had reached the town. Cars were drawn up under the palms outside the hotel and women in long frocks could be seen in the foyer.

"What will you do now?" he said, as they turned up the hill. "Go to Eola?"

"I shall try."

"Will you wait till I come back?"

"I don't know." She spoke stiffly, and did not look at him. She was not surprised by his demand, had in fact expected it, and accepted it as the first of many demands that he would make on her. It annoyed her, but she felt no sense of injustice that it should be made. She had recognized the value of love and felt that it should be accepted, no matter how irksome it might appear.

But she was suddenly afraid. He will ask me not to go because

he loves me, she thought. He will corrupt me. I shall be like him. I shall not be able to act. She saw him as an obstacle standing on the near side of justice and said quickly: "I shall do what seems best."

"I shan't be long," he said. "I'll be back on Friday of next week." They had stopped in front of her house. She shrank away from him.

"I don't know. I may not be able to go."

He leaned back as if to spare her from the necessity of shrinking. The movement so touched her, and this emotion was so new and shocking that she said, without thinking: "I'll try."

She asked Trevor next morning if he would help her to get to Eola. He instantly refused.

"I wouldn't take the responsibility for one thing," he said. "And it wouldn't be in my power for another." He did not look at her, but opened and shut the drawers in his desk, looking for papers and files. He was going out again and had not even taken off his hat.

"It would be in your power," said Emma calmly. She had come to realize that people lied to her more often than they did not and examined all Trevor's statements now in the light of this. "You're head of this department. People are always going out in the field. If you wanted to arrange it you could send a surveyor at least as far as Kairipi and from then on nobody need know where they went, or why I went too."

He did not refute this but merely said, scowling into an open drawer, and then closing it with a sharp slap, "You don't know what you're saying."

It was true. She spoke with her old intense determination; her eyes, fastened even more rigidly in one direction, looked neither to right nor left, but Eola might have been a village in a fairy tale. She made her plans as one spends money in a lottery that has not yet been won, without even the realization of Eola's existence.

"If you don't help me," she said, "I shall go to the Administrator and ask his help. Or I shall go to the police, or perhaps I shall go to the District Officer at Kairipi. Perhaps he would go with me if I told him all I know."

This statement was not, as it might have been two days ago, innocent and uncalculated. She knew exactly what she was doing and looked him steadily in the eye as she spoke.

He gave her a faint, tight-lipped smile. "Blackmail, is it? You're trading on my wish to keep this quiet. Either I help you or you shout 'Bava Valley gold' all over the Territory. Not very

fair tactics when it was through David's indiscretion that you learned about it in the first place. The whole responsibility will fall on me and my department, and he isn't here to protect us."

"No," said Emma, "he isn't here. He's been murdered."

He brushed this aside and went on: "And the natives . . . " he began.

"I am beginning to realize," she said, "that people up here only worry about the natives when it suits them."

He was stuffing papers into his brief case, paused and threw her an outraged glance. Displeasure seemed to plunge out and strike from his black, handsome eyes. She felt his antagonism as if it were a physical blow. She lowered her eyes and thought of his wife. One would seek always to please him, she thought. When she looked up, his face had cleared and he was smiling.

"You mustn't assume that is true of us all," he said. It isn't true of me, he had implied, but Emma saw that once again he was lying and that it was exactly of him and his kind that it was true. They could not by any other means remain as clear-browed and bright-eyed as this. Here in this country confidence and serenity were sins.

He came over and touched her on the shoulder. "Wait for a day or so," he said. "I'll have to think about it."

His hand seemed to reach out from the past, might have been her father's or her husband's hand. Her resolution crumpled up before it, and the startling vision she had seen of a new and different Trevor Nyall broke and faded. It was lost. She thought only, He is my friend and I must not offend him.

"I'm sorry," she said. "But I must go. You don't understand. I must. But I'll wait."

"Why do you want to go?" he said. "What on earth do you expect to find out?"

She was silent, unable to answer what she dared not admit to herself. His hand flapped absently on her shoulder and a moment later he was gone.

But Emma was not dismayed. She felt quite confident that she would set off for Eola sometime soon. Indeed it was appearing now not only inevitable, but inescapable. And when that same day Hitolo came to her and asked if he might go too, she listened to him without surprise.

He was waiting for her outside the office, squatting in the thin shade of a clump of casuarinas. She did not see him until he rose and walked hesitantly forward.

"Mrs. Warwick. Excuse me, Mrs. Warwick," he said.

"Hitolo." She stopped and waited.

"You go to Eola, Mrs. Warwick," he stated.

"How do you know?"

He stared at her blankly. He could not know that his knowledge was a prediction and blinked with an air of vague stupidity customary to these people when asked to give account of knowledge that they hold for no reason, instinctively.

Emma understood and said: "Perhaps, sometime soon."

He smiled at her. His eyes were bright, his voice soft and seductive. "Mrs. Warwick, when you go you take me."

"Aren't you afraid of the vada men?"

He smiled again and shook his head. "I am not afraid. Purri purri not true, sinabada."

He waited, watching her. Then he made a vague little movement with his hand. "You take me, Mrs. Warwick, I show the way."

That was all the bargaining he put forward. She nodded. "I'll try, Hitolo."

Chapter THIRTEEN

AT SIX O'CLOCK next morning Washington rolled out of bed. He had hardly closed his eyes all night and felt around for his gown and slippers, weak and dazed with weariness. The room lurched and tottered and he gripped the doorpost to steady himself. The sky was not yet golden, and masks and tapa cloth, dog teeth and lime gourds glowed in an eerie, greenish light. The sweet, cool morning breeze stirred the thatch outside the window. For once he was not afraid. His heart was filled with hatred and there was no room for fear.

"Well it couldn't be worse than this," he muttered. "Koibari! Koibari!"

There was no answer. He went out to the back door and called again, but no sound came from the boyhouse. Koibari had apparently gone walkabout. Washington lit the Primus himself and filled a kettle. His hands trembled with fever and weariness.

"Filthy, stinking savage," he said aloud. Then he attacked himself. It was his own fault. What an insane impulse getting rid of Rei and hiring that old wizard with his bag of tricks. Was the house any less haunted? He had hung coconut magic on the

door, on the trees in the garden tufts of copra tapped in the wind, and Koibari sat on the steps and muttered slogans for safety. But it was useless, there was nothing to do, there was no hope.

He filled up the teapot and carried it back into the house. He hardly knew where he was; his mind was dazed with rage and despair. But the tea revived him a little. After his second cup he was thinking more clearly. He lit a cigarette.

Well, it would be good to get away from here, he thought, looking around him. The house had turned its back. It was no longer friendly. It had gone over to the enemy and no manner of coaxing would win it back. Perhaps what had happened was for the best after all. He would not have been able to go on here much longer. His health was breaking, his nerves were in pieces. But if he survived what was ahead, then this place too would capitulate. If he could survive, then he would have won. There would be nothing else to fear. He could move on then to all that the future had once promised—a home for his sister, a house on the hill, position, wealth, power, a garden full of flowering trees, a view over the sea, and a shoulder shrugged at Trevor Nyall.

He swallowed a third cup of tea and started to dress. His hands had steadied a little and there was a gleam of hope in his heart. The longed-for future seemed a little closer and more possible. It's only a few days, he told himself. It's only a matter of keeping a grip on oneself, only a matter of keeping one's head, maybe for an hour or more. There was the three days' walk of course, but he tried not to think of it and fixed his mind instead on the salvaged future. The trip ahead was a hurdle, an obstacle beyond which lay the better life. It was a risk worth taking.

At eight o'clock he made his way down the hill toward the Department of Survey. He had been shut up in his house for a fortnight now and it was with a sense of immense relief that he now turned his back on it.

Most of the Survey Staff were already seated at their desks when he entered the building.

"Well, hallo!" said a red-haired typist who had set her heart on him and was consistently cheerful in spite of his equally consistent rudeness. "Quite a stranger here."

"Oh, God," he said, "the little ray of sunshine."

He felt better than ever after that. Rudeness was invigorating. It was proof of how little he cared for anyone.

The girl laughed heartily as if he had said something extraor-

dinarily witty, and went on, "You look sick, Philip. You shouldn't have come in, you know."

He ignored her and said to the man behind: "Nyall in?"
"Not yet."

He went down the passage and pushed open the door of Trevor's office. Emma was sitting at her desk, her hands folded in her lap, staring at the map on the wall.

For a moment he forgot that it was better to be leaving Marapai than to be staying behind. Staying behind appeared again comfortable and safe. He saw her as an agent of his enemies and stared at her with hatred. He noted coldly the peeled and unscathed freshness of her face, like a moth fresh from a cocoon, its colors brilliant and untarnished. She wore the look of facing the world for the first time. And he said to himself, his mind filled with sharp visions of calculated cruelty, "You'll learn, you'll grow up. You'll find out."

When he smiled his lips were tight and there was a sparkling brightness in his eyes. But Emma, turning her head and seeing only the dark smudges of sleeplessness on the bridge of his cheeks, did not read in his face that he hated her.

"Good morning," he said, cheerfully. Anyone who knew him, Sylvia for instance, would have detected the irony in his exaggerated sweetness, but Emma accepted it at its face value.

"Good morning, I hope you're better."

"Oh, much better, thank you, much better. The world seems quite a different place." He laughed.

"I'm afraid," she said, "that Mr. Nyall isn't in yet."

"Well, as a matter of fact I'm not here to see Mr. Nyall." He sat down on the edge of the desk and nonchalantly swung one leg. "I came to see you."

She said nothing, but waited, her large, expectant eyes raised to his face. He looked away, his hatred toward her abating a little. It lost, in the face of this book, its sharp edge. He could not help pitying her.

"I've been thinking over," he said, "what we were talking about the other night."

"Yes."

"I've decided," he said, "if it can be arranged, that I'll take you back to Eola."

"You'll take me back to Eola," she repeated. There was not, as there had been the other night, a glow of feverish enthusiasm in her face. She accepted soberly his changed attitude. She looked at the map as if in imagination already halfway there. It struck him that she was not surprised.

"Thank you," she said. That was all. She did not question what must have surely seemed extraordinarily inconsistent behavior. It was almost as if she understood, even more than he did himself, the inevitability of what was happening. He felt a desire to justify his actions in more rational terms.

"I was tremendously upset when you came up on Tuesday night," he said. "I always get a bit silly with fever you know. It makes me lightheaded and hysterical. I must have seemed terribly abrupt. I expect I was very rude. You will forgive me, I hope."

"Of course," said Emma gently. "I don't think we shall be allowed to go. Mr. Nyall seems against it."

"Oh, well, you needn't worry about that," said Washington. "We can talk him around."

He felt suddenly lighthearted. Going to Eola had again become more desirable than not going. He felt a release from tension, even a kind of eagerness to be on their way. "It won't be easy of course, you know," he declared. "It's not a picnic, and you don't look exactly husky."

"I shall stand up to it all right," said Emma. There was the faintest emphasis on the "I" and she looked at him as if she fully understood that he might not. He could not meet her eye and prattled on about leeches, mosquitoes and tinned food.

"I don't think," she interrupted him again, "that Mr. Nyall will let us go."

"Oh, you'll see," said Washington confidently.

But she shook her head. She was convinced that Trevor would do everything in his power to stop them. She did not study this conviction. She was oddly reluctant to do so. But she was wrong. The next day he gave his permission without protest.

The three of them discussed the journey in his office. Now that it was agreed upon, Washington was anxious to start straight away and get it over with. Emma on the other hand hung back. Events were moving too fast and she felt dazed and bewildered. The strong, slow current that had up to date borne her along steadily and in safety had gathered speed and swept her on with new ferocity and ruthlessness. She had a sense of scenes and events flashing past before she could detect their significance.

"I can't go till next week," she said. "Till Friday of next week." Now the reluctant promise made to Anthony was a life-line to cling to.

Both men turned and stared at her. They had found out that the coastal boat was leaving for Kairipi in two days and wanted the party to leave on this. "Why not?"

She did not reply.

"Friday?" repeated Trevor slowly, with an air of examining the day. "I'm afraid we can't wait till that date. It will have to be Thursday of this week or not at all. Washington has other work to do. Don't look your gift horse in the mouth, Emma. You can't expect the whole organization of the Territory to fall out your way. You haven't done so badly for yourself."

He spoke sharply. He did not pretend that he gave in with a good grace and it was plain that they were no longer friends.

She had to agree. "I want to take Hitolo with me," she said.

"He belongs to another department," said Washington quickly. He had forgotten that he had once almost pitied her. She was an enemy and must be stripped of all possible defenses. "What do you want to take him for?"

"He's been there before."

"So have I," said Washington gaily. "I'll look after you, and don't imagine that Hitolo would be any use in an emergency. They're all the same—they panic and run like rabbits. Look what happened the time before. As soon as the carriers started talking about vada men he wouldn't budge another step."

"It would be different this time," said Emma.

"I'll see what can be done," said Trevor. But whatever he did was not effective. Hitolo was not granted permission to leave his work.

They made preparations for departure. Washington worked late during the two remaining nights with half a dozen village boys fencing in his house.

It was Thursday morning, the day of their departure. Emma had collected her equipment on the front veranda ready for it to be taken down to the wharf.

She stood alone in her room looking around her to see if there was anything she had forgotten. She had not yet fully realized what had happened. Arrangements had been made, clothing had been collected, mostly under Washington's direction and with little thought or meditation on her part. She had followed his instructions mechanically, ticking off the items on his neat, penciled list with no thought of the uses to which they would be put. She might have been ordering groceries.

Her gaze moved vaguely around the walls and came to rest in the trees outside the window. Morning sunlight bathed the floor and the faded cover of the bed. The trees were each day breaking into more and more scarlet blossom. She had ceased to think them overdone and had come to regard them as miraculous and

beautiful. She found herself thinking now, as she had on the first night of her arrival, I like this place, I should like to live here.

But her mind had been, over the past few days, subjected to some internal censorship that now immediately came into operation. It might have been composed of a series of closed doors which it was forbidden to enter. Her thoughts fluttered but would not penetrate. And a hundred questions which she might have asked—why am I going? Why is Washington taking me? Why has Hitolo not been allowed to go? What will happen to me? Shall we ever return? How could I break my promise to Anthony?—remained submerged and only faintly stirring in the bottom of her consciousness. There was danger in asking these questions. To ask them would be to abandon the whole enterprise. There was even danger in thinking, I like this town, I should like to live here. And the spirit that guarded her plan for self-destruction snuffed out the wish like a candle flame.

There was still something further to be done, that she had left till the last moment. She picked up a pad and pencil from the dressing table. She had already written the night before the first two words. . . .

"Dear Anthony . . ."

She looked helplessly at the blank page extending beneath. What could one possibly say? She had broken her promise and to Anthony it would seem that she was indifferent and did not care whether she broke it or not. She found that she did care, deeply. Being unable to probe the censored regions of her heart she explained to herself that he was her responsibility and she must act with integrity toward him. She would not tell lies and make dishonest promises as others had to her.

"I am sorry I broke my promise. I had to go." She wrote and signed her name. She put the letter in an envelope, sealed it and wrote his name on the front of it. "Mr. Anthony Nyall, Department of Cultural Development."

She paused and read what she had written. Then meekly obeying an unexamined impulse she underlined the word "Anthony."

She went out of her room across the passage and knocked on Sylvia's door. Sylvia had just finished her breakfast and was standing in front of the mirror powering her face. Her native black hair had not yet torn loose from the knob at the back of her neck. Her frock had not yet sagged at the seams. She looked almost inhumanly fresh and groomed. She glanced around as Emma entered, but did not speak or smile, and went on with her powdering.

"I was wondering," said Emma, "if you would do something for me while I'm away."

Sylvia picked up her lipstick, dragged her lower lip tight across her bottom teeth and swept the lipstick from corner to corner of her mouth.

"I was wondering," said Emma more hesitantly, for there was something stern and ruthless in that movement of Sylvia's hand, "if you would give this letter to Anthony Nyall. He won't be back till next Friday. He's away. Perhaps on Friday you could walk over to Cultural Development and give it to him."

"Why don't you post it?" said Sylvia, clamping her lips together over a red handkerchief.

"I'd rather he received it by hand," said Emma. She did not know why. This, too, was hidden behind the closed doors. It was as if thought went on in these secret departments and only the results of thought were announced to her consciousness. Anthony must receive his letter by hand.

Sylvia slid her tongue around her lips and surveyed them intently. Then she turned and faced Emma. Her lids were narrowed, her eyes as hard and bright as gems.

"Why should I?" she said clearly. "Why should I help you?" Her voice, normally soft and drawling, was pitched higher, and rang stridently. Emma, shocked, caught a glimpse of a child in slum streets, of women shouting at their drunken husbands and starving dogs picking about in gutters.

She did not speak, but her eyes grew wide and frightened.

"Why should I help you?" said Sylvia again. "Do you help me? Do you care about anyone but yourself and your crazy notions?"

"Crazy notions!" cried Emma.

"Oh, as if I don't know where you're going and why," said Sylvia passionately. "And do you think you'll ever come back? You don't care whether you come back or not but *I* care. I want Philip alive, and he'll never come back, he'll never come back!" The hard, diamond brightness of her eyes shimmered into tears. Her face was twisted. "They all die," she sobbed. "Warwick died, Sereva died, and now Philip. Now Philip! And all because of you and your bloody justice!"

"I have to find out," said Emma, in a voice that she did not know as her own. "I have to find out the truth."

It was as if her whole body and mind had been taken over by a controlling monster. She was powerless in the grip of an old dream that was now almost meaningless. Her mind, her strength, her will still doggedly plodded forward in the old

direction, but it seemed that she had left her heart behind long ago, she did not know when, perhaps when Anthony Nyall had said, "You did not love him."

"The truth!" said Sylvia, scornfully. For a moment anger straightened her distorted lips. "Philip's more important than the truth. Why do you want the truth? I don't want it! Why should you want to find out what it is that kills people and terrifies them? Why can't you just leave it alone?" Suddenly her whole body sagged, her lips fell open and she stretched out both her hands in a gesture of appeal. She could not have more completely pleaded if she had sunk to her knees. "Don't go. Please don't go, Emma! It's better not to know!"

For the second time in her life Emma realized in another the fact of love. She knew, as she had known when Hitolo had turned his cheek, that here was a world she had never entered. She felt that the blood had sucked out of her heart and all she could think to say was, "Oh, Sylvia, he's not nearly good enough for you!"

"Oh, good God!" cried Sylvia. "Do you suppose one loves goodness!"

Emma was silent for it was what she had believed.

Sylvia's hands fell to her sides. She turned away. "He used not to be like this," she said. She seemed to have accepted the fact that Emma would not listen to her. She picked up the letter that was lying on the table, glanced at the address and put it in her drawer. "I'll give it to him," he said.

"He'll be all right," said Emma. "We'll be back all right. You'll see."

A faint smile touched the corners of Sylvia's lips. It shivered and died, but the corners of her lips were still lifted. Her face with its tear-stained cheeks was ghastly. Emma turned to the door, feeling her way with an outstretched hand. She believed, then, that they would not come back.

She closed the door and looked down the steps to the road. For a moment, for the first time, she hesitated, understanding what Anthony had meant when he said it was better not to act. Then a transport truck drew up at the gate. A native driver flung open the front door. They had come for her luggage—it was too late.

Chapter FOURTEEN

It was ten-thirty. The skipper had started up the engines. The native crew was unfastening the ropes that still held the little ship to the wharf. Washington had gone into his cabin and closed the door.

Emma stood alone, looking down into the water lapping under the jetty piles. No light fell here and she could see right through the water huge scarlet and white sponges bursting out from the wooden stalks of the jetty. Fish as thin as leaves, violent, improbable colors, flashed about like humming birds. Her mind was dazed and empty. Sylvia had been thrust away behind the locked doors; broken promises had sunk like dregs to the bottom of her heart. There was nothing but the water slapping on the sides of the boat. Patches of colored oil spread out in changing shapes, a swollen, burst cigarette butt dropped by a native on the pier floated by. Someone had spat out a gobbet of betel juice that broke and spread like an opening flower. Beneath this intermittent surface scum the water was clear and pellucid as a jewel. Transparent and blue at depths where it should have been black, it offered to the eye an ocean bed which in temperate lands would have been decently clouded. Huge, hyacinth blue starfish clung to rocks, silver cans winked and flashed, and seaweed waved like bleeding fingers over the obese, shapeless bodies of *bêche-de-mer*.

Emma leaned on the rail, fascinated and vaguely horrified. The churning of the engines went on unheeded. She hardly realized that they were leaving until the marine world quivered and broke with the movement of the ship. The jetty drew slowly away. The water fanned out from the sides of the ship in long corrugated ribbons. She looked back at the town, its bleached tin roofs scattered about like white stones among the poinciana trees.

They were leaving this little ordered outpost. Soon Marapai would be a spot on the map like a tiny ink blot on a page of virgin ferocity. They were striking out into the wilderness. They would be competing with mud, leeches, sea snakes, slugs and crocodiles in the struggle for existence, and were for this no better equipped than they. For here, all the defenses they had drawn on in Marapai would be useless. They must in this

environment discard all they knew and adopt an attitude altogether different. In the jungle, she saw, the rules of the golf club and the public school would no longer apply. One would fall back behind older and less refined defenses. One would instinctively adapt one's behavior to that of the hungry bird and the sea slug. Nothing that her father had taught her, nothing that David had advised was now of any use. She was on her own.

With extraordinary rapidity the wharf grew smaller behind them. With each moment Marapai seemed more and more infinitesimal. An hour ago it had been the whole island, now it was almost swallowed away. As they moved toward the long, primitive coastline stretching ahead, it seemed, too, that something from the land reached out to them, as if in hunger, scenting victims.

Emma turned her back on the sea and faced the hum and bustle of the little ship. She felt shocked, dismayed and lonely. It was not a loneliness of being without husband, without father, a counseling voice or supporting hand, but the loneliness of an insect in a forest or a bird in a desert sky. She dived back onto the hustle of the ship with a feeling of desperation.

They were carrying on the top deck some twenty or thirty native passengers. Women with grass skirts bunched up around their knees, nursing babies at their breasts. Small, owl-eyed children who sat and stared with placid serious acceptance, and old men whose skin hung in purple folds from their shriveled shoulders.

Emma stood looking at them. One of the women shyly smiled but no one else seemed interested in her. Then she noticed a native who stood a little apart from the rest, leaning on the rail of the ship, and threw her occasionally over his shoulder a serious, expectant glance. He wore only a pair of khaki shorts, a wrist watch and a slim string of colored beads round his throat. It was some moments before she recognized him.

"Hitolo!"

Instantly he smiled and came toward her. She was conscious of a profound relief. Something taut and strung seemed to slacken. "What are you doing here?"

He planted himself, smiling and triumphant, in front of her. "I came," he said.

Had Trevor obtained permission for his release, or had Washington arranged it, she asked herself optimistically?

These questions with their implications of well-being and good will the censor permitted.

"I tried to get permission for you, Hitolo, but they wouldn't allow it. They said you belonged to another department and could not leave your work."

"They tell me that, too," he said and his grin split wider. "I came here five o'clock this morning and sit with the women there. They are only natives," he added, explaining the lack of attention given to this.

Her vague hopes sank away. But he had come—it was something. "I'm glad you came," she said. "You will stay close to me, Hitolo, won't you?" She cast a glance at the dense, forested coastline dipping on their right. "I'm frightened."

His eyes seemed to widen and darken, though he still smiled.

"Of the jungle," she said. "I've never been in the jungle. I shall need help. You're used to it, I'm not. Don't leave me alone, Hitolo."

He smiled and nodded. But she felt he had barely understood. Perhaps he had not even heard her. His mind was turned inward, away from her on some purpose of his own no less urgent than hers. She knew what it was and understood that helping her, if he should undertake to do so, would be purely incidental.

They drew in to the wharf at Kairipi at four o'clock on the Friday afternoon. Emma, standing on deck, looked across the diminishing strip of water at a small, wiry man with a lean face, a beaked nose and a ginger mustache, who stood waiting for them on the wharf. Three native policemen stood rigidly at attention behind him.

He made no movement and gave no smile of welcome as if conscious of the fact that they had not yet been introduced. When eventually he lifted his hand and touched the brim of his topee, the salute was so obviously not for her that she turned her head to see whom he was greeting. Washington was standing just behind her.

She had hardly spoken to him since they left Marapai the morning before. He had retired to his cabin and his meals had been taken to him there. The skipper had stated at dinner that he was a bad sailor, but Emma doubted this and felt that he was avoiding her. She saw him later in the evening, leaning over the prow of the ship eating a mango and dropping the rinds into the water. They now exchanged only a few polite words and then the District Officer boarded the ship.

Thomas Seaton was an abrupt, methodical man who had been in the Territory some twenty-five years. He was tough and inarticulate and admired above all else these qualities in others. He distrusted comfort and learning and held in contempt the University-trained patrol officers who came up from the south scientifically prepared for the jungle instead of being cast forth in innocence to learn the hard way.

He drank a glass of beer with the Captain and then left the ship to take his two guests on an inspection of the station.

Kairipi was built on an island. It was safer in the old days, Seaton explained to Emma. Now it was rather inconvenient as they only had two boats and something was always wrong with them. The fools in Mairapai, he said, had no idea about engines. He could manage better himself and he was no mechanic. Just two hands and common sense was all he had.

The island was quite small; it would not be more than a mile all round. It was flap-topped and its steep sides were covered with coconut palms that leaned right out over the sea. The top of the island was like a large garden. An avenue of palms had been planted from end to end and small paths leading to the police barracks, the court, Seaton's house and the patrol officer's house, crossed it at right angles every fifty yards or so. Along every path and under the coconut palms had been planted flowering shrubs and trees—frangipani, crotons, caliphers and hibiscus. Everything that grew in this place seemed larger and more luxuriant than in Marapai, and Emma, who felt that she had seen nature at her most gorged and opulent, looked around her with fresh astonishment. She saw now that Marapai was tamed. It was as if the white culture which had cooled the native blood had in some way reduced the tropical growth and drained the colors of the flowers. Here were the limits of violence and extravagance. Here anything might happen.

They walked slowly. Emma hardly spoke. Occasionally Washington asked a question. Seaton talked in short, clipped sentences and pointed out landmarks with his cane. At five-thirty they had exhausted everything that he considered interesting. They had visited the Courthouse, a new building constructed from sago palm that a dozen prisoners were thatching. One of the police boys had been sent up a palm tree to pick a spray of orchids for Emma. They had taken off their hats (Seaton and Washington) and stood with bowed heads by a scrupulously kept grave where a former illustrious D.O. had been buried. They stood now on a small hill on the landward

side of the island. The D.O. was waving his cane through gaps in the palms, pointing to the mouths of rivers.

Below them the land dropped away to the water below. The bay was sheltered and the water still, bearing on its surface perfect, unbroken images of the land behind. All around as far as the eye could see stretched undulating forested hills. There were mountains behind but the clouds clung low above the forest and flattened the horizon. The land was gray and soft behind a faint mist that seemed to breathe out from the forest.

"And that," said Seaton, waving his stick, "is your river. The Bava River."

The point of the stick quivered, their eyes swung round. Neither spoke.

"There," the point of the stick jabbed at the sky, "round that point—river turns. Bava River."

Emma stared at the break in the gray shore line. Her eyes were fixed like a sleepwalker's, her features rigid and dazed.

Washington cast a glance toward Seaton's profile. Had he guessed what it was all about? Did he know more than he appeared to know? Beneath the ragged ginger mustache, Seaton's lips were closed like the mouth of a trap, holding silence. Washington had a profound distrust of silence. One never knew what went on in the heads of these gruff old boys. Seaton, with all his fads and fancies, was no fool.

Seaton glanced at his watch. "Six o'clock. Time for a drink." He swung abruptly around and marched down the path. Washington fell into step beside him and Emma, her face still calm and dazed, walked a little behind.

"Can you take us up the river?" Washington asked. Seaton kept his eyes fixed purposefully on the path ahead. There was never about him any loose or relaxed movement. He seemed to hold himself in readiness for some emergency ahead. "Could be done. Though it's time the Administration realized that D.O.'s aren't tourist bureaus. We don't sit on our tails all day like these soft, book-fed boys they send up from the south. We have other duties besides carting you fellows around to see the sights."

"I'm sorry," said Washington, trying to be charming. "I don't like it much either. It's orders, you know, and, by the way, confidential. The Director doesn't want it to get around."

"I don't gossip," said Seaton shortly. Just as Washington distrusted silence, he distrusted loquaciousness, and any sign of such a vice in himself was ruthlessly repressed. He had lived in the Territory long enough to know something of the terrible results of indiscretion. As he saw it there was no greater evil than

a gossiping tongue. He never talked of personalities and never made a statement unless absolutely certain of his facts.

They were walking now down the main avenue. The tall, straight trunks of the coconuts formed a deep shaft down which the sunlight drained to the path at their feet.

"Of course not," said Washington. "I was instructed to tell you, that's all."

Seaton grunted and his stride lengthened. "You won't find it easy," he said abruptly, "to get anyone to go with you."

"Why not?"

"Boys seem even less keen about the place than they were before."

Washington was silent. His body had broken out into a slight sweat. He wanted to question further but dared not for fear of what he might learn. And yet it was best to know, he argued; it was best to set off armed with all the information he could gather.

"Do you know why?" he said at last.

Seaton shrugged his shoulders. "Same old thing—vada, vada. Boy dying upset them. Hard to get out of them what it's all about. Funny stories."

"What stories?" said Washington.

"Nonsense, all nonsense," said Seaton, twirling his cane and turning up the path that led to his house. "Bigger and better vada. Say they've learned to fly now, make themselves invisible. Say they walk without footprints."

"Without footprints!" repeated Washington and laughed inanely.

"Everything gets put down to them. Anyone dies. Pigs stolen at Maiola. River floods. People scared to death. I was in Maiola three weeks ago taking the census. If you'd been earlier you could have come with me then. Confounded nuisance going up the river again so soon. Doubt if you'll get those Maiola boys to go nearer than a day's march."

"It won't matter," said Washington, "as long as they can put us on the way." The news cheered him in a way. The sooner the boys dropped out the better. It was all to the good if they refused to go far. He was in a way as dazed as Emma and realized no more than she what was ahead. He dared not even think of Eola. His mind shrank from it, and in dreading this there was no room in him to dread anything further. He had laid his plans but had not yet realized that they must be executed.

Seaton had abruptly stopped, slapping his heels together as if about to salute, and waited for Emma to catch up with them.

They faced the house, a large, low building made from native materials. On a patch of lawn in front of the veranda a flag fluttered from a white pole. Seaton led the way up the steps, calling for his boy.

The house was so austere furnished as to appear uninhabited. There were no curtains on the windows, no cushions on the cane chairs, not even grass mats on the floor. Washington looked around him with vague contempt for the barren soul that was content to live like this. Half a dozen dusty books, their covers gnawed by cockroaches and blotched with mold, sloped in a homemade shelf. A detailed map of the district was pinned on to the wall. On a low wooden table were three hibiscus flowers in a jam tin—a concession to the visitors.

"Sit down," said Seaton, pointing to the chairs.

Emma appeared not to hear and wandered over to the louvers. She stood looking out to sea, the spray of orchids still clasped in her hand. It seemed to Washington that every time he looked at her she appeared younger and more helpless. There was about her an air of dazed acceptance, as if she dimly knew what was before her and would not or could not resist it. She seemed merely to wait.

Seaton was pouring out gin. He half filled a tumbler, slopped a dash of water into it and handed it to Washington, who sipped it with distaste. It was lukewarm. It angered him that a man who could have lived like a king on this flowery island should put up with warm gin. He saw no virtue in schooling the body to accept anything.

"Anyway," said Seaton, swallowing and wiping his mustache, "you won't be wanting as many boys as you had last time I hope. Regular battalion. Can't think what you wanted all those boys for."

"No, this time three would be enough. An interpreter and two carriers."

"Should take a police boy," said Seaton.

"Oh, it wouldn't be necessary," said Washington. "I have a gun."

"Well, you shouldn't have," said Seaton sharply. "You should take a police boy. Generally done."

"But that only means another carrier," said Washington. He did not want a police boy. A good one might be reliable and he did not want reliable boys. "And if you say carriers are going to be hard to come by . . ."

"True," said Seaton, chewing the end of his mustache.

Emma turned around and faced them. She blinked her eyes back into focus. "Hitolo is here," she said vaguely.

"What!" Washington put down his glass with a snap on the table. His voice rose slightly. "He wasn't allowed to come. I made the arrangements myself. He was definitely refused permission."

"He's here," said Emma. "It's too late, he's here now."

"How?" He struggled to hold his features impassive and looked at her through narrowed lids. "Why is he so keen to come?"

She answered without thinking: "It was my fault. I wanted there to be a native boy that I knew and could talk to. I can't speak motu; I can't talk to the carriers and guides. I was keen for him to come, and I think," she looked vaguely away, "I think he must have misunderstood."

The lie was not premeditated, it had come out quite simply. How easy it is to lie, she thought, and sometimes how necessary.

"Misunderstood! Misunderstood!" said Washington sharply. "They understand and misunderstand just what's convenient. I know them. He shouldn't be allowed to go any farther. He should be sent back immediately."

"Oh no," said Emma. "Don't send him back."

"He might as well go with you now that he's here," said Seaton briskly. "And it disposes of one of the carriers."

"He's a clerk," said Emma. "He's not a carrier."

"If he's here without leave," said Seaton, "he loses status. He can carry. We ought to be able to find you two more somewhere."

Washington tipped back his glass and swallowed the rest of the gin. He saw it would be unwise to protest further. The gin made him optimistic. Hitolo's cowardice was well proven. He had caught the fever of terror as quickly as any of the primitive Maiola boys.

He glanced at Emma over the rim of his glass. She had won out there. But how had she managed it? Had she paid him? She must have paid him well; he would not relish the Bava Valley either. And if she had tried to protect herself did she know what was ahead?

Emma came and sat between them. She put down the spray of orchids on the table and picked up her glass. Her eyes met his and she smiled, sweetly, vacantly, as if she had no idea on earth who he was.

Chapter FIFTEEN

IT WAS barely light. A thick mist hung over the river and bound the trees on either bank. The water was black and still and the mist steamed off it like smoke rising from boiling oil. It was deathly still. There was no wind and the water too looked stagnant and without current. The long animal shape of a log rocking slightly just off shore seemed to move through some dim, sluggish pressure of life within itself.

But in the stillness there was a curious tension. One felt that the jungle was sleeping and would move when it wished beyond the accepted limits of plant life. That the huge spreading roots would stretch out clawlike hands in the mud, sucking up some rich, black substance to swell the succulent trunks and the gigantic blades of leaves. That branches could reach out, feeling their way in the air, following scents and sounds, to clutch at life that moved there.

It seemed to Emma that the jungle was more animal than vegetable, that there would be danger in touching a leaf or breaking a twig, that the plant thus assailed would retaliate in some hungry, primordial fashion of its own. As she climbed from the boat onto land she felt she had stepped onto putrid human flesh. Her foot sank into mud—not soft, boggy mud that slid up around the instep, but strange, black rubbery matter that the foot sank into but did not break.

Washington took her hand and helped her up onto firmer land. They stood side by side, looking back at the boat while the natives heaved across the stores. The D.O. had presented them with two boys—one a police boy—who came from a lower Bava River village, and they had picked up one other boy from Maiola when they arrived the night before.

They did not speak, but kept silence as if in fear of waking someone. And even the D.O.—not an imaginative man—gave his orders in a low voice. Some presence whose wish was for silence seemed to reside in the trees. No one examined it. All submitted. To have spoken out loud, laughed or whistled, would have been in the nature of blasphemy and would have seemed to ask for some sort of vengeance. They were all on shore now. Hitolo came last, his dark, silvery body moving like a shadow out of the water. He stood a little way off and the mist folded

around him, shrouding his ankles and wrapping about his shoulders. Emma, looking across at his dim shape, thought. This is how we all look to each other. This is how I look to them. It was as if the process of annihilation had begun. The journey to Eola had already started to blot them out.

It was not a meditation which brought in its train any fear or regret. She had never in her life before had such a loose grip upon reality as she held now. The hour itself was sufficiently dreamlike and the most prosaic creature would at such a time pinch itself to prove waking. But Emma's senses were already thickly befogged. She had lost the power to make all but one decision. Like a swallow beating its wings south by instinct, undismayed by weather, preferring death to retreat, but held doggedly to its course by the knowledge that there was no other choice—so she could only effect those actions and think those thoughts which moved her onward. The past, which now endangered this headlong journey, was forgotten—existed in her mind as only a blank void out of which moved at times strange disturbing sensations which she knew she must not examine. She had even forgotten about David. She was no longer lonely. She did not remember having loved or having lost love—even this was dangerous. She merely stood, dazed, at Washington's side, waiting for the carriers to collect their equipment and the first step forward to be made.

The village, a little ahead and hardly visible under its umbrella of tall palms, was showing signs of life. There were hushed sounds of movement and here and there a figure appeared in the doorways of the little stilted-up, thatched houses. Half a dozen children stood staring at a distance—small, shadowy creatures with enormous, gnomelike heads, appearing at this gray, sunless hour more like jungle goblins than human beings. Maiola was the most northerly point of the Kairipi district and they did not see white men often, or even uniformed native policemen.

Seaton, assisted by two police boys who stood ankle deep in the mud, was coming ashore.

"Well, you're all set, I think," he said in a soft voice. "If you get going straight away you'll have the best part of your day's march over before it gets too hot. You don't want to walk in the afternoon, Mrs. Warwick, if you can help it."

Emma nodded. But the words floated far over her head. As she saw it they would never stop walking. They would go on and on like pilgrims in legends until they reached their destination. It did not seem to her that they would grow hot or tired or

that they would need food and rest. Their bodies only existed to get them to Eola, and would make no demands.

"Might rain—might not," said Seaton. "After noon, of course. Won't rain before noon. Uncertain time of year. Should be all right. Too early for rain. And if you get lost, Mrs. Warwick, you've only got to remember, follow the river. Fact is you can't get lost. Follow the river; it's well tracked on this side, your husband told me. Can't see that anything can happen to me.

Seaton was holding out his hand. "I'll be back for you in a fortnight. If you're not here then you'll just have to get hold of canoes and come down on your own. Unless you like to wait for a couple of months when the P.O.'ll be back."

"Oh, we'll be here by then," said Washington. He spoke at first quite loudly and gaily, but his voice dropped away toward the end of the sentence. He cast a quick, nervous glance at the smoking wall of trees. "How long does this mist hang around?" he asked in a whisper.

"Oh, only a couple of hours. Don't ask for the sun. You won't like it when you get it."

It was not hot now, but there was a steamy moisture in the air. Flesh broke out into a clammy dew. Emma's clasped hands were molded together by a slimy emanation from her skin. She thought of the *bêche-de-mer* that crawled on the sea floor at Marapai.

Seaton was saying good-by to Washington. She did not hear what they said. Their voices rang out like whispers in empty rooms. The echoes hung like living things in the air. There was nowhere for the sounds to drift away for there was no emptiness. The air was thick like a sponge, sucking up their words and the breath they exhaled. As they stood, breathing and speaking, the air around them grew closer and thicker. To move they must press against a soft weight.

"Well, good-by again," said Seaton, lifting his hand in a sharp salute. The engines of the little boat started up. Seaton, sitting now in the stern, was a white shape with a gray, featureless face that might have been a clot of river mud.

Neither Emma nor Washington moved. They waited while the last link that bound them to the law of Marapai, that was the Western world, broke loose and trailed away. Two long, oily ribbons broke out from the stern of the little boat as she moved slowly down stream. The water swirled, seemed to all but reveal monstrous, muddy, submerged life boiling beneath the mist. The little boat disappeared round the bend of the river. Only the sound of its engines still outraged the silence.

Washington turned to face the village. "Well, we might as well be off."

He had attempted joviality but there was a hollow ring in his voice. White faces in this gloom were bloodless and pale and Emma, glancing up at him, wondered if she too wore this ghastly moon pallor.

They walked side by side. "I must say," he said in the same jovial whisper, "I'm all for starting a bit later than this."

"We might as well go on," she said, "since we're awake and ready." She did not know her own voice.

The village was built in a semicircular form, leaving a broad half-moon of mud between the water and the houses. They could see them more clearly now—little squat gray shapes, appearing strangely alive on their stiff wooden legs, the ragged thatched roofs like the drenched plumage of birds. In the center of the village was the huge, downy shape of the men's long house with its curved back swooping up into the sky like the prow of a vast canoe, its tall, conical face shuttered down upon its secrets. No dogs barked, but here and there they crept out from under the houses and slunk back and forth, their mangy hides rippling over their bones. A few of the older men had come out to look at the departing whites. One of the women belonging to the guide followed a little way and then dropped behind. Emma glanced over her shoulder and saw her standing in front of her house, her frayed leaf skirt bunching out from below her hips, one hand dangling at her side, the other held across her swollen belly.

Notions of civilization are only relative and now that the D.O. with his motor boat and his western law had gone, it seemed to Emma that these people, who had seen white men, who lined up for the census, who had a village policeman with a badge on his tunic and whose people had been tried in a court of law, represented order, security, peace. She watched the woman drop behind with a vague sense of loss. Yet civilization had not yet entirely deserted them. Three little children were still following them and two young boys, one armed with a bow and arrows, had crept out of a house and noiselessly joined them as they passed.

Then the mist closed up behind and the village had gone. The path led on into the wall of trees ahead. The mist wept down from their leaves like white slime. Moving forward, they pressed against damp, heavy air, that seemed solid like the congealed breath of the forest.

The children left them first. Emma did not see them go. But glancing behind some quarter of an hour later, she could make

out, following in single file, the two boys from the lower river village, the guide from Maiola and last of all Hitolo with the two village boys. She felt a pang of regret for the little brown children who had gone home to sleep.

They walked for another hour. The jungle was still dim and shrouded in mist. It still seemed that there was a demand for silence. They walked single file, for though the path was well trodden it was narrow and the undergrowth sprang up on either side, gray, rank, chaotic and forbidding. Then the path widened out into a clearing under large trees. Here the undergrowth had been cleared away, for the natives had apparently used this part of the river bank as a landing stage. Three long canoes made roughly from hollowed logs with primitive outriggers were drawn up at the water's edge. The ground all around them writhed with huge, twining roots. They could see out through a gap in the branches to the river, flowing more swiftly here. The steaming emanation of mist had almost gone and only hung thinly among the trees on either bank.

Washington paused and looked back. The natives, who had not straggled much, closed up and stopped also.

"Who are those two boys?" It was the first time he had spoken aloud since they left the village. With the mist gone, speech was possible once more, though he seemed for a moment almost frightened of his own voice and looked quickly around him at the encircling trees as if expecting the jungle to produce an answer.

The two youths stood back shyly from the rest of the group. Side by side, their naked brown bodies and woolly heads almost identical, they looked on, serious and uncomprehending.

"Village boys, taubada," said the police boy in police motu. He was a tall man with a thin, beaked face and distended earlobes that dangled in split strips.

"Tell them to go home."

Emma did not understand the language that Washington was speaking but as the police boy called out there was no doubt as to his meaning.

The two boys turned away, hesitated, looked back, looked at each other, and finally walked off down the path.

She stood watching as they walked away, the outlines of their bodies growing slowly thinner till they were only shadows. Then they were gone. She turned and looked at Washington. His eyes were irresistibly drawn to hers. For no more than an instant they stared at each other and read each other's hearts.

Jobe did not kill my husband, she thought. This man Washington killed him, and now he will kill me.

It was then—as Anthony Nyall had said, too late—that she realized that she did not want to die.

“Are we stopping here?” she said slowly.

He looked away from her and nodded. “Give the carriers a rest.”

She felt that the sudden crystallizing of their relationship had shocked him almost as much as it had shocked her. And yet she had always known it. Through the finally opened doors her thoughts were clear and arranged. It seemed that what she was thinking and feeling now had all been arrived at days ago and set aside ready and waiting for the moment of danger—the glimpse into Washington’s heart.

Washington had sat down on the root of a tree and was lighting a cigarette. The carriers had dropped their loads.

She sat down in front of him. “Why did you send those two boys away?” she said.

He threw her a darting glance. “We have enough. They might hang on for hours and then we’d have to feed them. And they might panic and upset the carriers.”

“Because of the vada men?”

He did not reply.

I must protect myself, she thought. She looked around her and her thoughts were quick and alert. She felt there was something to guard against in the fear of vada men. On the last trip the carriers had panicked and the white men had gone on alone. Even Hitolo had lost his head. It must not happen this time. Possible dangers, possible defenses against them passed clear and cool through her mind. She did not feel afraid—not now—a strange new vitality poured through her and gave her an extraordinary sense of power. It did not occur to her to turn back, though she now saw different reasons for going on. She felt she was a match for Washington. He looked pale and ill, there were circles round his eyes and always his hands faintly trembled. It is not only fever, she thought. He is terrified. And he does not want to kill me; he only does it because he must, because I threaten his safety, or because some other fear compels him. He would do anything on earth to get out of it.

He behaved almost as if it were he who was hunted. His eyes darted about, searching the trees around them. Every now and again he seemed to take a grip on himself and would sit still for a moment and stare at the ground, and then in the next moment

his head would be raised, his eyes searching the trees, the path ahead, the path behind.

She stood up and walked past the carriers to Hitolo. He too was squatting on a tree root, smoking a cigarette.

He looked up at her, but did not stand. She felt he looked strange and suspected that for a moment he did not recognize her.

"Hitolo," she said softly, "do you think these men will stay with us? Will they be frightened?"

"They stay, Mrs. Warwick. Two days maybe."

He was using the short, simplified sentences of the uneducated native and unconsciously she addressed him in the same way. "You find out what they say and you tell me, Hitolo. You do that?"

He nodded, but there was no look of understanding in his face.

"And you stay near me, Hitolo. Don't you hang back at the end. You walk close behind, and you watch all the time and see I don't get hurt."

"Yes, sinabada."

She left him and went back to Washington. He had finished his cigarette and was grinding it into the mud with his heel. She stood looking down at him. She felt for him none of the passionate loathing that had been an offshoot from despair and that she had felt for Jobe. She felt she knew him and understood him. And you cannot hate someone you know, she thought, any more than you can love someone you don't.

For there again Anthony Nyall had been right. She had never known David—this was becoming more and more obvious—and looking back over the past few weeks saw her actions as a wild hysterical protest against never having loved him—her presence here as a final protest. She did not regret the loss of love. She felt alert and lighthearted. The return to Marapai was not now something to dread but something to work for with all her cunning and strength.

"Shall we go now?" she said.

Washington started violently and looked up. Then slowly he rose to his feet and looked down the path ahead.

Chapter SIXTEEN

WASHINGTON LOOKED at his watch. The luminous dial showed the time to be twelve. He could hear no sound outside, and within the hut, only Emma's soft breathing. They had stopped for the night in the first of the river villages where the carrier from Maiola was known. The people had been friendly and had given them for the night the use of an empty hut on the outskirts of the village.

Within the hut it was hot and airless. He had discarded his shirt and lay only in shorts. The sweat on his body pricked and crawled like the feet of insects. He lifted the mosquito net, slid out from beneath it and fixed it back in place before the insects could swarm in. He stood up and looked across to the corner of the hut where Emma was sleeping. The mosquitoes descended upon his naked torso. He flicked them away from his lips and eyes and felt among his clothes for a shirt to throw over his shoulders. There was no movement from Emma. He could not see her clearly, only the faint outline of her body beneath its dim tent of netting. Outside there was no moon but the sky was light. The doorway faced into a wide patch of cleared ground round which the village huts were collected. He could see the tops of trees and a few pale stars.

He moved as quietly as possible to the doorway, sat down on the steps that led to the ground and put on his socks. It was unwise wandering round in these places without shoes, but he did not want to wake the natives. Lastly he put his hand in his shirt pocket and drew out a midget torch and the small carved coconut that he had taken from Anthony Nykall's desk. He waited, listening.

For some reason he was not afraid. That is, not as afraid as he had been in his own hut at Marapai. Emma gave him confidence. She slept so deeply and peacefully in the hut behind him. They had walked nearly eighteen miles that day and she had lain down at nine o'clock and slept almost immediately like an exhausted child. There was something about her attitude that gave him courage. She completely failed to be intimidated by the jungle, or by the people in the village. She accepted the bizarre situation they found themselves in as if it

were nothing out of the ordinary. She had been throughout the day eager, practical, interested. They had not spoken much, but every now and again, glancing back over his shoulder, he had caught her looking about her with a wide-eyed, alert expression. She seemed intensely curious about everything around her and utterly unafraid. The vague uneasiness of the three local carriers had either passed unnoticed, or else failed to impress her.

The irony of this—that Emma should inspire him with confidence—did not pass him by, and he smiled faintly in the darkness. Then he stood up, and flashing the torch on the ladder, climbed carefully down to the ground.

Hitolo and the three local boys were all sleeping under the hut. Ahead the pathway faded off into darkness. Washington threw only a brief glance in this direction. Here the jungle closed in over the sky and he could only see in the foreground a few dim shapes of the larger trees. Behind this the darkness might have been solid. He knew that if he looked long enough he would see receding planes reaching back into the trees, darkness moving, coiling like smoke, clotting into thick shadows and thinning into grayish light, darkness rustling or pricked with light or blinking with the strange orbs of eyes. He knew all the tricks of darkness. Its slow, heaving shapes and darting tongues had displaced sleep now for many weeks, its tiny lights stabbed his eyeballs as he lay in his bed in Marapai. He knew all the dangers of staring too long at a fluttering leaf or a firefly.

But the darkness was there—its presence had been established—and he could not forget it. His feet touched the spongy ground at the base of the ladder. The spot of light from his torch bobbed just ahead like a white moth. He kept his eyes fixed there, and his mind on the possibility of snakes, or scorpions that might endanger unshod feet. But it seemed that this Philip Washington, this cool concentrating man following the bobbing light of his torch and treading cautiously so as not to break a leaf or twig under foot, sheltered within his body another creature, hardly a man, who crouched in a huddled animal state of apprehension, ears pricked and the hair raised on the spine, whose nerves like the hundred hands of a sea anemone reached out and fingered the night ahead.

The darkness behind did not worry him. That was the way they had come; it was the path to Kairipi and to Marapai. The village was wrapped in a warm, inhabited dark, cleansed of evil by the sweat of human bodies, by the breath exhaled from sleeping men and women and the trust of children. The dark-

ness ahead was of a different nature. Anything might reside there. They were only two days' march from Eola.

The path led around the side of the hut and it was here that the natives had built their fire. Down the front, back and one side had been built a ragged brush fence, possibly to form some sort of enclosure for pigs. The dying fire gleamed on the outstretched legs of one of the carriers, who lay with his head under the hut, his legs and thighs stretched out into the footpath. Hitolo and the other boys were well under the hut. He could hear them breathing.

He paused and looked down at them. The little coconut charm was warm and damp in his hand. The village was behind him now and out of sight, hidden by the corner of the hut. He was alone with the four sleeping men and the darkness that closed around them. There was no comfort in them as there had been in Emma. They were not restless, but he knew that they had not surrendered consciousness with the confidence that she had. Their sleep was as uneasy as his own, haunted by vague shapes and flickering tongues of fear, touched at times by feelers of the outside world that reached down from the surrounding dark and dabbled with terrifying fingers over the nerve centers. He knows so well the sleep of terror, the anguish of almost breaking surface, of lying, limbs paralyzed, mind half submerged, with the anesthetic of sleep still fuming in the brain while the voice of the outside world shrieked, Danger! There was no deeper terror than to hear this voice, to carry in the mind a dim horrible consciousness of location and cause for dread, and yet to lie, physically still in sleep, tied and helpless while terror plucked at the roots of the hair.

These thoughts unsteadied him and he bent quickly down beside the fire and ran his fingers over the ground. The soil was damp and slimy but there was no vegetation. He raised the torch and the beam of light lengthened. The pool of its termination settled a little farther ahead. The long, shining trunk of a tree beamed out from the edge of the jungle.

He quickly dipped the light. Something had flashed in the shadows beyond the tree.

He stepped a little farther away from the fire and felt again on the ground. He only wanted grass or a few leaves, but the soil immediately around the hut was hard, trodden by dogs, village pigs and native feet. He hesitated; only a few steps were needed to carry him to the fringe of vegetation, but it seemed that enormous daring was required of him. He felt that he would step over a boundary of safety into an outer atmos-

phere of evil. His gaze was fixed on the ground, but the gray form of the tree was still there, visible to those other watching eyes within that took no heed of these devices against terror, but were always on the lookout, always infusing life into a shadow and movement into a log or stone. These eyes were fixed now on the light that had shone out in the jungle ahead. It no longer flashed like a luminous insect, but seemed to have settled on the ground at the foot of the trees and just behind, and palely beamed like a round, bright eye.

Would it be enough without the grass and leaves? He wondered, fingering the damp polished sides of the coconut in his hand. Would the intention be sufficiently clear? It could be regarded, Anthony Nyall had said, as fairly harmless without the appropriate trappings. There were plenty of charms in the villages hanging about more or less disregarded and forgotten. So he reasoned, stroking the coconut with wet, quivering fingers. And all the time the animal within stared at the soft, bright jungle eye that beamed ahead.

The point of the torch moved on across the ground, showing only the slime of river mud. Not until that tree was reached would the ground yield vegetation. One more step forward and he could resist the drag of his lids no longer. He raised his eyes and suffered one fierce, almost annihilating instant of terror. The jungle eye glowed out from the ground at his feet. It was not gold, but a green, white light, ice light, moon light. It seemed to breathe. It was palpitatingly alive. It pierced through to the very core of his heart and shed its death ray on the horror that was hidden there.

A nerve flicked in his wrist, the torch jerked up and the eyes died away in the circle of torchlight. He was looking at a cluster of gray fungi that sprang up from the roots of the tree.

Luminous jungle fungi! He was almost sick with relief. His wet, quivering body jerked with spasms of silent laughter. For an instant the world was safe and sweet. But the animal within was not confident of safety. Instinctively he knew that what was to be done must be done quickly. He clawed at the ground with his fingers. His hand closed over a piece of dead wood. He lowered the torch and the fungi burned out again just ahead. The next thing his fingers touched was a piece of dead pandanus leaf. He picked it up and went quickly back to the hut and the sleeping men.

He squatted down by the fire, broke off the tip of the pandanus leaf and shredded it with his fingernails. He could hardly control his fingers, they trembled so violently. His eyes did not

move from the shredded leaf but a voice from the jungle ahead spoke incessantly, "Look up, look up." All his will was bent upon not looking up and the shredding of the leaf was an act that he was hardly conscious of.

He tried to stuff the little sheaf of leaf fiber into the mouth of the coconut. But the opening was too small and the sheaf would not stay in position. He felt desperately about on the ground for a small piece of stick to prod the plug into place. But he knew there was nothing, and that he must return to the edge of the jungle.

He squatted there, quivering with rage. He knew he could not go back and that he was defeated by a coconut and a plug of leaves. He forgot that this was merely a small incidental obstacle in the journey ahead. It seemed the goal itself, the end of all doubt and terror and suffering.

Then he remembered the hut. He stood up and went across to the sleeping men, stepping over the legs of the native who lay stretched out with his feet turned to the fire. He broke off a splinter of hard leaf from the side of the hut and rammed it into the mouth of the coconut. It held the plug firmly in place. Little gusts of hysterical laughter were bubbling up inside him. He need not have left the fire at all, he could have used leaf from the hut.

Biting back the gusts of laughter, he twisted the string that was attached to the coconut round a loose splinter jutting out from one of the beams that floored the hut. The little charm dangled now just over the heads of the sleeping boys. They would open their eyes to see it hanging there—the threat of a slow mysterious sickness, perhaps the visit of the vada men who cut out life from the body and left the shell to rot away, the fear of the unknown striking with the inexorable weapons of magic before which only magic was safe.

The little black charm with its sprouting mouth of dead leaf and stick swayed in the faintly stirring air. The thought flashed through Washington's mind that perhaps one of the boys here might die as a result of what he had done. It might need only the knowledge of guilt in one of the susceptible hearts, fear sufficiently intense, despair completely surrendered to, and life might be handed willingly over to the sorcerer.

But this possibility gave him little distress. He genuinely loved the native people, but it did not seem to him that the death of a few of them, or even of a whole community, greatly mattered. As he saw it, death for them was more natural, more likely, followed more closely and inevitably on the heels of life. Death for

a white man was something to shudder at, to resist and protect oneself against. To kill a white man or a white woman was the very last of all human acts to be contemplated, and then only when all other action was impossible. But a native was different. He did not regard them as inferior. On the contrary he felt they were largely more admirable than his own countrymen, but he saw them as nearer to natural law—one with rock, river and tree, bird and fish, and destined therefore for the same relentless struggle and violent extermination. They were hunters still and like all hunters must accept the possibility of being hunted.

So he left the three sleeping innocents with magic dangling over their heads, giving little thought to the results of his act. He steadied the coconut charm gently with his hand and stepped back. It turned slowly on the frayed string and was at last still. The white, incised eyes stared into his own. It looked now, with the equipment of sorcery bristling from its mouth and its victims marked down, subtly animated and malevolent.

He turned quickly away and walked back to the front of the hut. He flashed the torch on the steps. The doorway loomed above him. He mounted the first three steps. He could not hear Emma's breathing. No light penetrated the black interior of the hut. He paused, and an unaccountable feeling of dread held him motionless, waiting. He did not know what for. He listened for some sound, but there was silence. He was desperately afraid. He was afraid to move, to look back at the deserted village, to stay where he was, to flash his torch inside the hut. For a moment his brain swam outside consciousness in a boiling sea of fear.

The last feeble tongues of reason whispered, Do something, do something, you can't stand this. Something will crack and it will be too late. He stepped up onto the rickety veranda at the top of the steps and flashed his torch over the frame of the door.

Hanging from the center of the doorway directly in front of his eyes was a small black coconut with two vivid white eyes that stared into his own and a plug of leaves bristling from its mouth.

He did not scream. He had passed beyond screaming. He stood in a sweat of terror and the malevolent magic poured out and pierced his veins. It seemed that his body was broken and riddled with curses. He knew then that there was no hope for him. He was doomed; his blood was poisoned. He did not wonder how it came to be hanging there. He believed dimly that it was his own coconut with its gifts of thought and flight which had found its way home to its true destination.

He only knew that he had been discovered. The forces of evil

had nosed him out and would track him down till they destroyed him. With a sobbing cry he flung out a hand and plucked at the coconut on the door. His fingers closed on emptiness. The vision faded. There was nothing there.

In a kind of frenzy he clawed at the wood with his nails. The palm of his hand burned with pain.

"What's that? Who is it?" It was Emma speaking from inside the hut. "Is that you, Philip?"

"Yes."

He saw her vague white form drift near and turned toward her, clenching his teeth to strangle the sobs that bubbled in his throat. He forgot for the moment who she was. It seemed that she was his sister Doris who had come to help him and comfort him. He wanted to run into the hut and clutch her in his arms. She would look after him, she would hold evil back. But he only held out his throbbing palm and said querulously: "My hand."

She came nearer. "Your hand? What's the matter with it?" She took it in her own. "You're burning!" she said. "Is it fever? You've cut your hand. It's bleeding. Give me the torch."

She flashed the light on his hand. It was bleeding freely from a long scratch on the palm. He stared down at it and a deep shudder that he was too weak to control passed through his body.

"What's the matter?" said Emma sharply. "Why are you up anyway?"

It struck him that she had changed. That she was no longer silly, deluded and helpless. That the jungle which had robbed him of reason and strength had poured out these very qualities upon her. He had been rejected and she had been accepted.

"I heard something," he said. "Was there anything?"

"No, nothing. You must put some stuff on that cut or it may fester."

He followed her meekly into the hut. I shall not kill her, he thought. She will kill me.

Chapter SEVENTEEN

THEY MADE a later start the next day. Emma slept soundly and was only awakened by the sounds of the village stirring. Washington was already up and was folding his net.

"Why didn't you wake me?" she said.

He looked around. "There's plenty of time." His face shocked her. It was white and strained. He looked like an old man. The skin folded loosely round his throat and chin as if the flesh had shrunk away overnight. His heavy, bloodshot eyes told that he had had no sleep. He had forgotten the anguished sentimental emotions of the night and turned on her a glance of cold hostility.

"Two of the boys are staying here," he said.

"Why?"

He would not meet her eye. "They are afraid," he said, and went on folding the net.

"Which two?"

"Hitolo and the police boy are going on with us. We'll leave some of the food here for when we return."

Emma went to the entrance of the hut and called: "Hitolo! Hitolo!"

The natives were nowhere to be seen. A few silent figures moved about in the village, their legs shrouded up to the calf in the low mist that still hung over the ground. She climbed down the steps. "Hitolo!"

Washington had followed her out onto the veranda and stood looking down at her. "What's the matter? What do you want?" he said sharply. There was a nervous edge to his voice. "You won't be able to persuade them. It's no use. They're terrified. They saw something last night."

"What?" she asked him straightly.

"It doesn't matter what it is," he said. "They were prepared to be afraid and something frightened them. You can't bring reason to bear on native fear. It might have been a bird or a bat."

Hitolo had appeared round the side of the hut. He stood looking up at them. Emma thought that his eyes looked wild. They were set in his head in a peculiarly unfixed way. One expected them at any moment to roll round in their sockets like the broken eyes of a doll.

"What's all this about the boys not coming on?"

"They come now, Mrs. Warwick," he said.

"You mean they've changed their minds?"

"Yes, Mrs. Warwick. They come now. I tell them and they come." A momentary smile of self-congratulation passed over his face but his eyes still looked wild and rolling.

She glanced back at Washington. He was leaning against the door frame. She could not tell whether the expression on his face was anger or relief.

"All right, Hitolo, make breakfast."

He shook his head. "Boys no stop, sinabada. Kai-kai breakfast in bush. No stop here." She noticed how simple and stilted his English had become, almost as if he were forgetting the white man's language.

She looked at Washington again for explanation.

"They're afraid," he said. "They say that a sorcerer was here last night. He might come back and pick up their leavings. We'll have to walk on for an hour and then have breakfast."

A quarter of an hour later they started. The boys still seemed frightened. They huddled together, walking almost on each other's heels, for the path was still only wide enough to allow them to walk in single file. They whispered and grunted among themselves and kept throwing quick, apprehensive glances about them. Washington too kept nearer to the rest of the party and did not stride off in front as he had done the day before. He walked so close to Emma as to fall in alongside her whenever the path widened. Yesterday he had been silent. Today he talked.

At about seven they stopped for breakfast. The boys sat apart and ate like dogs, bolting their food with their eyes on the surrounding trees, as if fearing that at any moment someone or something would leap out from the trees and rob them. When they had finished they scratched a hole on the side of the path and buried the scraps, stamping the earth hard and flat with their feet. They hid the empty tin in the undergrowth and pulled the foliage of the bushes up around it so that it could not be seen from the path. Washington had finished his breakfast and sat watching them.

"Why do they do that?" said Emma.

"It's dangerous to leave scraps around. If a sorcerer finds a piece of food you have been eating it can be just as potently used against you as leavings from the body."

He spoke quietly but there was an undercurrent in his voice of tense eagerness. She had noticed it once before, the first time she met him, when he spoke of the Eola vada men. He believes it all, she thought, watching him curiously, and he welcomes it. There is something here that he dreads but at the same time longs for.

The jungle was lighter now and she could see more clearly his worn, haggard face. A nerve fluttered in his cheek. His eyes did not dart about searching the trees like the eyes of the native boys. They were wide, and haunted. It was as if the terror lived within him now, not in the jungle outside.

She felt she should not pity him, but pity was there, struggling against judgment. Even the wicked, even in the moment of

executing their most monstrous plans, were pitiful. She was not astonished or shocked by this discovery. Discovery now was an hourly event. She no longer dreaded the shattering of illusions, but waited eagerly to find what new paradox the world had to offer.

Free at last from the idea of having loved David, she was free too from those opinions and attitudes of his which she had worn as her own. She felt as if she were looking at the world for the first time and tingled with the excitement of discovery. She thought of Marapai, and of Anthony and Trevor Nyall. What were they really like? About Anthony she felt she knew, about Trevor she had no idea. People had come to her always at second hand, stamped always with the insignia of someone else's approval or disapproval. Why had David liked one and disliked the other? His choice now seemed to her incongruous and she could not understand it. She could not understand David for she had never known him, only his opinions. Perhaps he had never liked Trevor, but merely preferred it to be thought that he did. There was no way of knowing, for opinions could not be trusted, they could be selected and falsified.

It seemed to her that everyone she had ever known had hidden from her, had protected her from the dangers of ever discovering anything for herself because they had enjoyed in her a condition of innocence. That is, all except one, who alone had respected her enough to disclose what he believed to be the worst in himself.

The boys had huddled together on the path and were watching her expectantly. She glanced over her shoulder at Washington to see if he was ready to move. He was squatting down on the path with his back toward her. For a moment she could not see what he was doing. One knee was bent, his head lowered, his elbows jerked backward and forward.

He was scraping the pieces of charred yam from his plate into a hole he had dug in the ground.

She felt her stomach lurch with nausea. She was horribly frightened and revolted as if she had looked on something obscene.

"Don't!" she cried. "Don't!"

He looked around. He crouched still, his head lowered. His muddied hands dabbled like paws on the ground. His eyes were turned in their sockets showing a rim of smoky, bloodshot white. He looked like a cornered dog. She could hear the sharp hiss of his breath.

"That's not for you!" she said. "It's for *them*. It's all right for

them. They manage. They know all the ways out and the loopholes and replies. But you're a Westerner! Don't be a fool!"

He rose slowly to his feet and turned to her, his mud-stained hands hanging at his sides.

"A fool!" he said. His teeth were clenched and he was very white. He lashed back at her as if she had insulted his god. "A fool! You don't know what you're saying. Only fools are safe! Westerner! Westerner! What place has the West here! Good god, this is the tropics, woman! We are only two hundred miles from the equator! Do you suppose it'll snow for us because we've Nordic blood in our veins? *We* must give in."

He stopped abruptly and stamped on the earth he had been digging. She glanced around her. Hitolo and the three carriers were still waiting, gravely watching. They won't stay, she thought, they'll leave us tonight.

Washington did not speak to her for some moments. She realized he was angry for having been caught and rebuked for his furtive digging. But after they had walked about half a mile the track widened into mud flats on the edge of the river and he dropped back and walked alongside her.

"You don't understand," he said. "You've just come here, you haven't been here long enough to realize these things. You can't know them intellectually; they don't bear reasonable examination; you've got to feel them. The fact is that for hundreds of years now white men have been trying to live in the tropics and almost universally they've failed."

He seemed unaware of the half hour of silence that had passed between them and spoke as if in direct continuation of their earlier conversation. "Isn't it possible," he said, "that there is something about this belt that circles the world that demands some other sort of equipment for living?" He spoke now almost in a whisper, and kept looking into the trees on either side as if on the lookout for someone or something that might find the conversation distasteful and descend in retribution.

"In every tropical country," he whispered, "there are native peoples who have survived and built up cultures of their own. And always, always, with these people who survive you find witchcraft, magic, sorcery and a whole complex conglomeration of methods for harnessing and counteracting the forces of evil. They *recognize* evil, you see. They *recognize* it and they survive. But *we* don't survive. The whites, the Westerners as you call them, they don't survive because they won't acknowledge what they can't explain in terms of scientific formula. They think it's

all childish; they won't climb down and admit their own helplessness."

"There could be other reasons for their not surviving," said Emma.

"What other reasons? Why? Why?" His voice was again tense and eager. His own theory seemed to fascinate him. "Why is it that after a year or so up here or in any other tropical country, they lose touch with their own natures? Why do their personalities rot and crumble, why is their work futile and profitless? Why do they end up in suicide and madness, drink and sex and sickness?"

He paused and spoke now more loudly and passionately. "Because they refuse to understand that all the phenomena that they have been brought up to be enlightened about, to be skeptical about, are here *still in existence*. Oh God! What fools!" he said scornfully. "They think a jungle is an English wood. They've never spent a night alone in the jungle as I have. They refuse to live—with their Goddamned superiority—as a native has learned through centuries is the only way to live—cunningly, instinctively, emotionally and acknowledging their own significance!"

Emma did not reply and he rambled on about the instincts, the emotions, the false trails that the intellect followed, the inner eye that the Western world had lost. Every now and again he would stop and glance back over his shoulder and then the natives behind them would stop too and peer wildly about them. It was as if they caught in some way the sense of what he was saying.

They arrived at a village in the mid-afternoon and decided to stop there for the night. They were now a day's march from Eola.

While the other boys were preparing food in the evening Emma tried to talk to Titolo, but she felt that for some reason he had ceased to be frank with her. He seemed wary and on the defensive against her, as if he had withdrawn his allegiance and given his loyalty to some person or principle that opposed her.

"Will the boys come on tomorrow?" she asked. But he only shook his head enigmatically and would not meet her eye.

"If they don't," she went on, "we will leave food here and just take on a little food and the presents for the people at Eola. And we can leave our stretchers and just take our nets."

She hoped to give him confidence by associating him like this with Washington and herself and not with the more fearful members of the party.

"We no take presents," he replied indifferently.

"Why not?"

"Last time," he said, "Eola people send all the presents back again."

"Surely not. Mr. Washington said they took a lot of presents. Pearl shells and cowries. And Mr. Seaton said it too."

He nodded. "Plenty presents. Mr. Washington and Mr. Warwick and my brother bring them all back. The people of Eola bad people." He looked away. "Bad people," he said again.

"What do they say about them here?" asked Emma, pointing a hand to indicate the village.

"Bad people," said Hitolo vaguely. He had become singularly inarticulate as if the jungle silence had made him feel the futility of words.

"Do they ever see them?"

He threw a quick, wild glance around him. "Vada men," he said.

"They must trade with them," she insisted. "They're not more than fifteen or twenty miles away."

"Vada men kill plenty people."

They were no longer able to talk together. Whatever knowledge Hitolo had acquired of white language and customs seemed now muddled and confused. Fear which was his birthright had claimed him. She wondered if he had forgotten his dead brother, or if this memory, too, was lost with all that he had started with. He no longer set himself apart from the other boys, preening himself as an Administration clerk, more white than brown, but walked away from her with, she felt, an air of relief, to the other natives busy around the fire.

The boys did not, as she had half expected, stay behind in the village. She woke very early at about four o'clock and lay for a few moments looking through her net at the gray light outside.

"Are you awake?" she said.

"Yes," Washington answered instantly. Something alert and relieved in his tone suggested that he had been lying awake for hours. She did not speak again for a moment. This is the day, she thought. Today we shall see Eola.

"We should leave as soon as possible. Will you wake the boys?"

He said nothing but got up and left the hut. It was an accepted fact between them now that she should make the decisions. A moment later he returned. Emma was up by now and folding her bed.

"Are they coming?" she said.

"Yes." There was no telling what this meant to him. His tone was flat and expressionless.

They had breakfast and left just as it was growing light. The day before they had walked through open country but now they were in the forest once more. The path was narrow and only visible for a few yards ahead. There seemed to be all around them, not daylight, but a thin dark. Even at high noon it would be dim beneath such trees and undergrowth as this.

Washington tried to make the boys lead. "They might sneak off behind," he explained to Emma. But they refused, so he and Emma went first, walking abreast and continually knocking against each other on the narrow path. She had a feeling that he sought this constant collision of hand, shoulder and knee for comfort in the gloom. More than once she felt his fingers feel toward hers in the unconscious act of clasping her hand. But this statement of bewilderment and loneliness was never completed. Always consciousness intervened just in time and the hand was drawn back.

The boys walked close behind. They did not speak now and they moved so silently there was no way of telling whether they followed or not. Every now and again Washington would stop and glance sharply over his shoulder; then the boys would stop too and peer behind them. This continual checking up on his part agitated them considerably. They caught his anxiety as a horse will sense the fear in his rider's hands.

They spoke only once, when a peculiar, chuckling cry broke out of the jungle head. The party stopped as one man; even Emma froze to a halt. But she was the first to relax.

"It's only a bird," she murmured. Washington, stiff as a terrified dog beside her, said without moving, "I've never heard a bird like that." His eyeballs turned a violent, terrified half circle while his head remained stiff and immobile. It was as if for fear of extermination he dare not turn one inch to either side and thus expose himself from the other.

Then the cry sounded again, a little farther off and sounding this time a little less eerie and more birdlike. The boys shuffled and muttered. They moved on.

But it must have been the cry that decided them. Or perhaps it was not the cry, but a leaf moving, a branch incomprehensibly shuddering in the stillness, a patch of light in the shadows. When Washington turned round again, not more than five minutes later, they had gone.

"They've gone!"

Emma turned sharply around. The path was empty. It led

back about twenty yards and then disappeared round an immense smooth-barked tree.

She started to run. "Hitolo! Hitolo!"

She could hear Washington running close behind her. Another fifty yards past the tree they came on the stores, dumped down on the path. She stopped.

"It's no good," she said. "They would be running too."

She looked down at the stores. They had an air of having been thrown down in panic; not stealthily placed while the carriers slunk away. Yet it could not have happened like this for they had made no sound.

"Hitolo! Hitolo!" She cupped her hands to her mouth and called. Her voice was soaked up in the heavy trees.

Washington had stopped beside her. She felt him standing there, sensed his stillness but did not look at him. Now she was afraid.

"Hitolo! Hitolo!" She called again. There was some sort of relief in calling. It postponed fear though she knew there was no hope of ever receiving an answer. But to Washington her voice was an outrage, a terrible flouting of the law of jungle silence. For a moment he did not move or speak.

Then he broke out hoarsely, "Don't! Don't!"

It was only then that she could look at him. By speaking he had proclaimed that there was in him still some sort of humanity. She turned and they looked into each other's eyes.

Chapter EIGHTEEN

THEY STOOD there staring at each other. Emma's face was composed but her eyes were filled with intelligence of what this moment might mean to her. It had not been sprung on her. It had been all the time a future possibility and she had not closed her eyes to it, but had passed from village to village, point of safety to point of safety, knowing that each rejected fortress brought it nearer. To turn back had all along been impossible. It was one with Eola and must be accepted if Eola was ever to be reached.

Washington was less clearly aware of their arrival than she. There was a dazed, vacant expression in his bloodshot eyes. The sudden terrible fact of finding themselves alone was all that he could at first grasp. His face was set into a goggling idiotic stare.

They have gone, they have gone, a voice whispered again and again. Then the voice ceased and he became aware of the silence.

Emma had heard it too, for her eyes had moved away from his face and were fixed on the path ahead as if searching for whatever it was that could make such silence. It was not merely an absence of sound—a hush in which no leaf stirred and birds were quiet—but a stillness that precedes violent action, as of a storm about to break or a beast about to strike. The whole jungle crouched with breath indrawn. For a moment they actually forgot each other and knew what it was to be alone.

Then Emma turned her head and looked at him again. His angry, helpless eyes stared into hers. He was trapped, it was no good, it was too late. The boys had left too late. He could never destroy the one creature that stood between him and the jungle, and bring about by his own act the most appalling horror of all—to be alone here on Eola land.

She understood and said quietly, "Shall we go on?"

Her words steadied him a little. Suddenly everything was easier and less terrifying. She was not to die. He could not for the moment look ahead and face up to the consequences of her living. He felt only an immense relief. It was unthinkable—he had never even got around to thinking about it. He could never ever have killed her. Even if the boys had left the day before, before they reached Eola land. She was a white woman. He was not capable of destroying her. He had fooled himself all along into thinking that this simple, easy way out was possible. Something else must be done.

His thoughts were quick and eager. They were the last vigorous gusts of life and drenched his spirit in radiance and optimism.

"We can't go on without the boys," he said definitely.

"Why not?" She had already moved down the path, and paused to look back at him. He read behind the young, unformed contours of her face an expression of resolution and his elation died.

"We might need help. It's dangerous."

"You have a gun," she said, pointing to the pistol in his holster.

"One doesn't use guns on natives," he said sharply. It made him feel a little better to be able to put her in her place. "Having a bunch of natives puts one in a position in which it isn't necessary to think of defense."

"They didn't come before," she said mildly. Her clear eyes

were gentle but pitiless. He saw that she exactly read the reasons behind his excuses.

"That was different. We upset them before. We must go carefully. Besides, David was experienced with natives. We aren't—not with primitive ones, that is. And besides . . . the stores . . ." he added.

"We should get there by three," she said. "We can spend the night there. We'll take a few tins and our nets. There seems to be plenty of food. They'll give us yams."

"Spend the night there!" It was all he could do to repress a shudder. "You don't know what you're saying," he muttered.

"We can't go back now," she said. "We can't. It would be unthinkable." She walked back and faced him. "What is it about these people?"

It was the first time that anyone had asked him such a question. Not even Sylvia had dared. Now he saw they were to speak plainly. It had been admitted between them that he was to have killed her and could not. There can be no closer relationship than between hunter and prey and now she could ask him anything.

"They aren't like other people," he muttered, looking away.

Emma did not answer him. She was bending down among the stores. "We'll pick these up," she said, "on the way back. Maybe the people from the village will come out for them. We can't actually be on Eola land yet. You carry your net. I'll carry mine. We'll take the water bottles and a few tins." She was unpacking and repacking one of the small haversacks.

He stood, helplessly watching her. Her large, beautiful eyes, once so wild and fanatic, were clear and determined. Yet he felt that she, too, hardly knew what she was doing, and obeyed like himself—bending down and helping her—some sort of irresistible compulsion. They moved the remainder of the stores into the undergrowth on the edge of the path and slashed the trees to mark the spot. Then Emma hoisted her haversack onto her back and started off down the path. She did not look behind to see if he followed. He stood for a moment dazedly watching her. The sun was up by now but the light in the jungle was still dim and the outline of her body grew hazy as she drew away from him.

Still he stood. His mind would not direct him. The silence drew nearer. A ring of watchers hidden in the trees had taken a step forward. A living band had drawn tighter. With a stifled gasp that was almost a scream he raced after her.

"Wait! Wait!"

She paused and looked around. "You've forgotten your haversack," she said.

He looked at her helplessly and then back along the path to where the haversack lay. He felt he could not bear to leave her. To place even this small distance between them filled him with terror. He felt that if he turned his back on her and once lost sight of her she would be gone forever, swallowed in the jungle. And he would be alone. She sensed his agony and said quietly: "I'll wait while you get it."

Only her command made the act possible and he turned and walked obediently back to the haversack. She did not move on but waited for him to return.

They went on.

The path bent away from the river and turned a little inland. It was hot now, the air was thick and sticky. But they did not feel as hot and tired as they had during the noon hours of the previous days. They had forgotten their bodies and movement was mechanical to both of them.

Every now and again questions would rise to the surface of his mind—What am I going to do? What am I going to say? What explanation shall I give? But they would sink back once more like swamp creatures sucked down into the mud. Mostly he was hardly conscious of the past or the future. His body was not his own. His will had gone. He followed because Emma led and he could not live without her. He was not afraid, for to be afraid was to feel and he was beyond feeling. The jungle slid past like the backcloth of a revolving stage, each stretch of trees and undergrowth repeating what had passed before. Only now and again there would fall like a shadow on his heels the consciousness of that crouching, waiting, avenging silence that only by being with Emma he kept at bay.

Then Emma stopped. He did not know how long they had been walking. It might have been moments or hours. They were in a wide, open glade, entirely roofed in by trees. It appeared to have been at one time cleared right back to the trunks of the trees but now the undergrowth was reaching forward on all sides and only a patch in the center was bare. All around them were fig trees of a straight-trunked variety with long up-sweeping branches that gave an effect of cathedral aisles. And down from the tops of the trees hung the tendrils of creepers, each bearing on its extreme end a single bright round fruit like an orange, so that the whole jungle seemed festooned with Christmas hangings. The undergrowth was thinner, and shining out

among the roots of the trees in sinister purity were tall, white lilies.

"What a beautiful place."

But Washington stared wildly around him. He felt like a sleepwalker who wakes to find himself in the mouth of a tomb.

"What's the matter?" she said.

"I know this place!"

"One would remember it."

"We're only about six miles from the village!"

"That would be about right. It's one o'clock. We should be there by three, though the paths are very overgrown, almost as if they haven't been used for ages."

He did not hear her. He could not believe that their dazed marching had carried them so far and stared about him in horror. A shadow at night by his bed, a coconut face on the door—these were nothing. Even jungle silence was nothing. They were six miles from Eola. This turf had been pressed daily by Eola feet, the leaves touched by Eola hands, the orange fruit, the dazzling lilies were perhaps specific for Eola medicine. The trees and shrubs were bound over to Eola allegiance, the air thick with Eola curses and fanned by the spirits of Eola dead.

"I've been thinking," said Emma, "how strange it is that we haven't met anyone."

He looked at her wildly. "Met anyone?"

"I said before that the paths seemed unused."

By some miracle he picked up the meaning of her words. "They hunt on the other side of the village. They don't like this side."

"That must explain why we haven't run into anyone. The forest seems so empty, so utterly empty."

She stood listening. Then her eyes returned to his face. "Why are you so frightened of this place?" she said softly.

He did not answer her and suddenly she understood. "It was here that Sereva died."

He nodded.

"Is he buried here?"

"Yes." He looked wildly around. He could not see the grave and had no idea now where it was. *That* night he had been almost as dazed and frightened as he was now.

"I see." Her face had grown somber. She seemed to understand a little of the significance of the place.

A hope had risen in his heart that if he told her enough she would not want to go farther. "We camped the night here," he said eagerly, "after we left Eola. And it was here he died. Poor

Warwick, he was heartbroken, heartbroken . . ." His voice died away. Emma had started to move on. He ran after her and caught hold of her arm.

"What's the good," he blurted out, "of going on? There's nothing to see. I tell you there's nothing to see! It's just a village, just like any other village."

Her serious eyes regarded him but she said nothing. She shook his fingers from her arm and moved on. When we get back, he thought, I will kill her. Not for knowing about Eola, but for this. Yet another part of him yearned for her understanding. There was nothing for him to do but follow her. They walked on down the overgrown path into what seemed an ever intensifying and more watchful silence.

The path was too narrow for them to walk abreast, so Emma led the way. Washington behind was almost treading on her heels. Only the front of his body, covered by hers, was in any way sheltered. He felt that his back was naked. He had a sense of something drawing in closer and closer behind him. He did not visualize it as a man, but it passed through his mind in a collection of strange and terrifying images. Sometimes he saw it as a strange, slimy substance crawling along the path at his heels. Sometimes the substance was gray, amorphous, writhing. Sometimes it was featured with only a hole for a mouth, sometimes with a pair of round, lidless eyes. There was never a whole man, but parts of men. A disembodied arm that clutched forward, or a branch that clawed like a hand, a leafy spray infused with malignant humanity. Sometimes there was nothing, only a sense of collected, clotted wind that breathed on the back of his neck.

Sometimes he thought he could smell a faint pungent odor in his nostrils. An odor that hung in the air from no source. This was the most terrifying of all.

At first he tried not to look round, but soon the feeling of something there, stalking just behind, became so strong he could no longer resist the impulse to look back. There was never anything there, but he had a sense always of having turned round just too late and arrived at the end of movement. Something seemed always to have just flashed out of sight. Leaves, though now still, vibrated with the agitation of something that had just disappeared. The path looked vacant as if the air had not yet settled back in the place of some form in that instant sucked from sight. The eye held an indefinite image of what had just been missed but there was no telling what it was.

"Do you know," said Emma, "where we are?"

She had stopped again. He put a hand on her shoulder. Now

that they had stopped, walking was preferable. He looked around him. They might have been anywhere. There were the same tall fig trees, the same tangled undergrowth struggling forward to devour the path. Then he heard the river.

He thought at first that it was only the silence, a little nearer, rushing a little louder, or the violent, hungry growth of the jungle, the roots clutching the mud and the sap swelling the flat, broad leaves. But it was the river. Over on the right through the trees he could see the glimmer of water. They were no more than a quarter of a mile from the village.

"Stop!" he cried. "Stop!"

She was moving on and he reached out and clawed her back toward him. His hands, brutal with frenzy, clamped on her shoulders. "You can't go! You can't go!"

With strength equal to his own, borrowed as his own was from a driving extraneous purpose, she shook herself free. She backed away from him. Her eyes, hard, cautious and pitiless, did not move from his face.

His arms were extended now in helpless yearning. "Don't go. Don't leave me here alone!"

"You'll not come?" she asked tonelessly.

He could not go on, he could not kill her, he could not remain here alone. He could do nothing. The fact of existence was impossible. There was no place left to exist in.

He could only repeat, "Don't go! Don't go!"

"Why?"

"You're nearly there."

"Well?"

He threw away then all that he had worked for—wealth, position, a home for his sister, dinner parties and a Chinese cook. They were all nothing as against the horror of being left unguarded in this place. Even the dearest wish of all that had urged him out on the road to Eola months ago, the wish to snap his fingers in the face of Trevor Nyall, to build a house higher and larger than his, to outshine him in the eyes of Marapai, even this wish sank out of his consciousness.

"I've got the gold," he babbled, "I've got it. You can have half of it! You can have it all if you want it! You can have it! It's yours anyway. You have a right to it. . . . I should have given it to you before . . . you have a right to it!"

"You and David," she said quietly, "came to Eola and robbed these people of their gold. Is that it?"

"That's it," he repeated. "That's it. That's it."

"You came here with that deliberate intention." She had

turned her back on the path ahead and directly faced him. It seemed to Washington that she had rejected the village and a faint hope rekindled in his heart. He answered her eagerly.

"Yes, we planned it all. Nobody knew about it, you see. We only had to refuse Jobe his claim and nobody would come out here perhaps for years. We needed the money—I needed it. I didn't get my promotion. I should have had it. . . . I was the only one, but Trevor was scared to give it to me. Doesn't like brains. Oh, he promised me . . . what he promised me! Something better, he said. But I wasn't going to take it, I was going to walk out and start a business of my own. I *had* to get out, I *had* to get away from him. Never do any good there . . . prefers fools he can shove around, people he can bully and frighten like his poor idiot wife. And David needed it too, he owed Trevor money—a lot of money, and suddenly Trevor started pressing for payment. I was a bit surprised he agreed to it, but it didn't sound so bad in Marapai when he first suggested it." His voice faltered. "It was different here. So we all put our heads together. Decided to come out here and have a look, then take what we could and put in an official report that there wasn't any."

"And was there?"

Mistaking the glow in her face for greed he nodded eagerly. "As much as we could carry back. We put it in the boxes we had brought the presents in. That's why we took so much and so many carriers. Warwick, Sereva and me. We only had to bring it here where the carriers were waiting. It's in my hut. I have it buried underneath. We can't get it out of the country, you see. That's the snag in the thing, getting it out and converting it. But we'll find a way."

There was a long silence. Her eyes searched his face. He met her glance eagerly. Hope bubbled like a spring within him.

Then she said, "Who killed David?" And the hope died away.

He started to cry. "He killed himself," he sobbed.

"Why?" But Washington, sobbing into outspread hands, could not answer her and she went on: "Because it was beyond him? Because he wasn't up to it and saw this—afterward?"

He nodded over his hands. "It's not so much," he said in a stifled voice. He had forgotten her now and spoke to a presence within that had waited these long weeks, patient but insistent, for his defense. "It's no worse than the things we do all day. It's not so bad as giving them money they can't spend, or stopping their festivals or telling them they can't dance. It's not so bad as giving them shirts that get wet and give them pneumonia or

teaching them to value valueless things. We do it all day worse, much worse, every day—not only here but all over the world. We teach them to gamble and drink. We give them our tools and spoil their craftsmanship. We take away their capacity for happiness. We give them our diseases. . . .” He paused and dropped his hands. “We’re shocked by their head hunting and blow them up in our wars. Whenever you have an advanced culture in contact with primitive people’s the same thing happens. They can’t survive—they perish. Look at Anthony Nyall—he tried to help them and he killed them. Diseases—tuberculosis, whooping cough. They die in hundreds, we wipe out whole villages, *whole* villages with tuberculosis and whooping cough!” His eyes glittered and his face was knotted with excitement. “Whole villages, whole villages, with tuberculosis and whooping cough.”

“That’s half the picture,” said Emma. “Good comes out of it. . . . Or it will, one day.”

“One day!” he said. “One day!”

She was still watching him intently but he would not now meet her eye. “How did you get the gold?” she said. “Why did they let you have it? How did you get into the long house? It’s very difficult, isn’t it, to get into a village long house?”

“We frightened them,” he muttered.

“Frightened them? How?”

“With magic. We pretended we knew powerful magic. We told them the gold was bad magic. That it would hurt them if they didn’t give it away.”

She turned and looked on down the path in the direction that the village lay. It seemed to Washington that her body swayed away from him as if pulled by her destination.

“You can’t go!” He broke out again, “You can’t go. It didn’t turn out right. It went wrong! They’ll kill you. They’ll kill us both! We shouldn’t have taken their gold. They’ll be angry. You can’t go. We must go back quickly now, before they find us.”

Not looking at him, she shook her head. “That’s not what you’re afraid of,” she said.

He saw it was hopeless, that she would go.

“Wait for me here,” she said. Her voice was flat and toneless. He felt that she too had surrendered her will, that she was as powerless to stay as he was powerless to go. Some terrible force in the place dragged them apart and she was almost as unwilling to be dragged as he. She could not look at him but without turning her head she went on down the path.

Washington fell to his knees and held out his hands. "Don't go! Don't go! Come back! Don't leave me alone! Come back! Come back! Don't go!"

But the path ahead had turned and Emma had gone. His voice died away and silence began.

Chapter NINETEEN

"DON'T GO! Don't go! Come back! Don't leave me alone!"

The high, quavering voice, pitched almost to a scream, raved on and on, growing fainter and fainter, and then abruptly ceased.

Emma, walking deliberately on, held sensation away from her, pressing it back and back as one would press on a door that threatened to burst open and let in a battalion of enemies.

The path turned slowly left toward the river and grew wider as she advanced. But it was still not as cleared as the entrances to the other villages they had passed through. On both sides of the path the undergrowth pressed forward, and the creepers interlacing the trees trailed down ahead so that she had to step around them or hold them aside and stoop beneath them. It was steamy and hot, for the sun was finding its way through the thinning trees. Mosquitoes and flies with long fine legs steamed up from the undergrowth and settled on her face and hands.

Then the path turned again and widened still farther. On either side here huge, scarlet crotons and clumps of palms with spiky gray leaves. Ahead was the village.

Emma halted. It seemed at first glance entirely unremarkable. It was built on a flat cleared space facing the river—a collection of raised huts made from timber and cane and woven leaves and grasses. In the center was the men's long house, its huge slanting roof thatched in soft gray leaf like the plumage of a gigantic bird. It faced the river, its swooping prow lifting up and up high above the roofs of the other houses.

Sunlight bathed the scene. There was a steamy thickness in the air that hung like mist over the far bank of trees.

There was so much about the place that was normal and unremarkable, that exactly reproduced the other Bava Valley villages, that it was some time before she became aware of what was not normal—what was terrible and strange.

There was no sign of any living creature. There was complete, deathly silence.

The effect of this realization upon Emma was as violent as if someone had screamed. She shrank back into the trees, and panic, an almost unknown emotion, seemed to strain and shift the organs of her body.

She felt that the whole village had known of her coming for hours, perhaps for days and weeks, and had slunk away into their houses leaving the jungle and the village empty, and waited now in the dark doorways, turning upon her their watchful, revenging eyes. They would be capable of anything. Two white men had stolen their treasures.

There was nothing here, Washington had said. Was he right? What was to be learned from this place? What good would it do to step out from the trees, a target for Eola spears? The days of such deeds were not long past, and this was unpatrolled country. The arguments of fear were lucid and reasonable, but Emma could not obey them. To turn back now was unthinkable. She could not stop in the very act of completion. Anthony Nyall had seen in her ability to act some sort of salvation and she felt vaguely that his future well-being in some way depended on her concluding what she had begun, that possibly her own well-being depended on it also. It was bad enough to be as he was, incapable of the beginnings of action. It was bad enough not to begin—not to finish was unthinkable. The tears of Sylvia, the wild, mad hands of Philip clutching for mercy would freeze into unforgettable memories if she could not raise above them the compensation of having arrived at her destination.

She took a quiet, halting step forward, but started back into cover once more. The red crotons beside her had sprung into life. They shuddered into a wild convulsed rustling. She stared in terror at the shaking, shivering tree. Then something slid out onto the path ahead. It paused, looked sharply around and scuttled out into the sunlight.

It was a fat, gray jungle rat.

She stood watching it. It was gross, obese like the sea slug, and ran with a disgusting waddle. It was the only living thing visible and she could not take her eyes off it, but her skin was damp with loathing.

It had reached the open clearing and the village houses. Here it paused again and looked around. It was confident, leisurely, and unafraid.

Suddenly she thought, Not only are there no human beings, there are no pigs or dogs either.

One could hide a man or a woman, even a child, but it would be difficult to hide a dog.

The rat waddled on. It had reached the long house. Beyond were three large huts built in a row, their doorways with short wooden steps leading off the ground, faced directly across to where Emma stood. They were built close up against the trees behind and a long blanket of creeper with large, yellow flowers had fallen over the roof of one of the huts and trailed down over the open doorway. The house looked deserted, the thatch was damp, ragged and moldy, and the creeper draping its door did not fall with the gay, flowery lightness of garden decoration, but like a stifling shroud of cobweb fastened round an empty house that no one enters and no one leaves.

In the very moment that this thought entered her mind the jungle rat scuttled up the steps and disappeared through the front door.

It was then that she knew what had happened at Eola. Why Philip Washington dreaded to return and what had killed her husband. She stepped out into the jungle and followed in the tracks of the jungle rat.

She was perfectly calm. Some defensive partition within her had reared up and held apart her knowledge of what had happened and her emotional realization. She knew now there was nothing to fear and walked confidently. The only danger was in allowing the horror that was in Eola, that draped the village and inhabited the huts, that crawled and rotted on the ground, from invading her own body and mind. But some protective force that guards human beings at such times paralyzed her senses and held her mind at a dumb, idiot level of consciousness.

She did not shirk her inspection. She made sure. She walked across in front of the men's house, looking up at the tall peak of the roof, and then on to the group of houses on the other side. She mounted the little wooden ladder onto the veranda and parting the creepers with her hands looked into the dark room within.

Three people had died there. Their white bones shone in the gloom. She could not see the gray rat but could hear its feet rustling on the floor and the scratch and crackle of insects feeding in the thatch.

The owner of the next house had died outside. He lay under the house on his back with his arms outstretched. A tight, moving patch of ants formed a black smear on the side of his skull. She thought how white and delicate were the bones of his hands. But his feet had gone.

She looked into the next house. It was empty, it did not even

house a pile of bones. But under the house she found a tin. It was of the type that opens by the lid peeling back round a key. It was rusty and the label had gone. She turned it over with her foot. It was empty.

She left the houses and turned back into the center of the village. Here in front of the long house and some way from it was a rough open shelter and stone ovens that still showed the scorch marks of flames. Scattered about among these ovens were more tins. One was still circled by the ragged remains of a red label. It was a tin of bully beef.

She walked on among the empty fireplaces. Some still contained little bowls of ash that had not yet blown away and clung in the crevices of the stones. She found the bones of a child and a dog, and then a tin that had not been opened. She picked it up and turned it over in her hand. She noticed two small black holes in the bottom from which a trail of ants still oozed.

Still holding the tin she looked around her. There was no movement. The leaves of the trees hung limp in the still air like weeds in stagnant water. A piece of thatch dropped from the roof of the shelter to her feet. There was no sound, but she fancied she could hear the village rotting around her—the ants boring their tunnels in the dry wood, the drip of thatch from the decaying ceilings and the dry crumble of ash in the stone ovens. The process of decay seemed so swift and complete that the village appeared almost in a state of visible movement and change. She half expected it to crumble down into dust before her eyes. Only the human beings who had been the first to rot were at peace. Their bones were still and silent.

She stood there, the tin in her hand. She did not move, there was no farther to go. Her husband's murderer had been tracked down. This was his murderer. Yet it was strange that at this moment she did not think of his death, but of her father's. Her eyes filled with tears.

He killed my father too, she thought. He thought me too young and trivial to face up to what he did, and so he killed my father. She dropped the tin on the ground and her heart was filled with bitterness toward him.

But slowly these thoughts left her, and she continued to stand, her hands hanging limply at her sides, her senses dazed and her mind empty. The force that had urged her on to this spot had dropped away and left her. She must move now of her own will or not at all. She felt the horror around her slide slowly nearer. She started to tremble. Still she did not move but her whole body was clutched and shaken with dread. It was as if a circle of

vague, insubstantial hands from which the flesh dripped away, had reached out and touched her.

Then came a scream.

At first she thought the cry was her own, till it came again, sounding from the jungle behind her. It was a wild, terrified sound only just recognizable as human.

She turned and ran. She had reached the long house when the silence split and cracked. When she reached the jungle there was a second shot.

Caution did not occur to her. Something told her that the second shot was final. Neither was she surprised. She saw now that when she left Washington she had not expected to see him alive again.

I killed him, she thought as she ran. I killed Washington. But no emotion followed in the heels of her thought.

Then she stopped. The path had swerved away from the river and opened into the small glade where she had left her companion. He lay sprawled across the path. But he was not alone. A native was crouched over him.

In Marapai she had seen natives from outlying villages who had come in on their canoes, and wandered painted and ornamented about the streets, dog-teeth necklaces round their throats, beads in their ears and flowers and leaves stuffed into the bands round their arms and calves. But she had never seen anyone so strangely and sinisterly daubed and festooned as this.

He was a brown man, slim, lithe and not very tall. He was naked except for a thin strip of bark wound round his waist and drawn between his legs. His body was streaked with brown and white and his face painted in a strange dramatic design. There was a daub of yellow down the bridge of his nose, white lines sprayed out from the corners of his mouth and curled down to converge in a beak on his chin. His arms and hair were decked with green and yellow croton leaves. He looked in some way more like a bird than a man. He carried a bow and arrows.

He stood quite still, staring at her. He did not appear to threaten her, though there was threat and intent for evil undeniably painted on his face. Though he was brilliant and gay and strangely beautiful she knew he was dressed for death. So one got away, she thought. Then she saw the watch on his wrist. It was Hitolo.

They spoke simultaneously.

"Hitolo!"

"Mrs. Warwick!"

He looked back at the man at his feet. The birdlike painting

of his face rendered it expressionless but she saw his eyes flash in their whitened sockets and knew he was terrified. She ran forward and knelt down over Washington. His head was shattered. The pistol had dropped to the ground beside him. She could do no more than glance at him, but there was no need. He could not be alive.

She turned away. "What happened, Hitolo?"

Hitolo shook his head backward and forward. Speech seemed to have deserted him.

"What happened?" she said sharply. "Tell me!"

"He tried to kill me," he brought out. "Mrs. Warwick, he shot himself. I did not shoot him. He shot at me, he shot himself."

"Of course you didn't kill him. I can see that. You have no gun."

"Why did he shoot at me, Mrs. Warwick?" He looked at her helplessly.

"He didn't know you, Hitolo, like that. And he wouldn't expect you to come back. He thought you were afraid."

"I was afraid," he admitted. "I go mad. I run away. Then I remember." She gave him a long glance of admiration, seeing how magnificently according to his own line, he had acted, defying the accumulative force of native panic, and returning like this, dressed for vengeance.

"I called to him," said Hitolo, "and waved my hands."

She was beginning to see just how it had all happened. "And he shot at you and missed you?"

"Yes."

"And so you came on, calling and waving your hands? He did not expect you, you see," she murmured. "He did not expect anyone. There is nobody here, everyone is dead. *He* knew that. He *knew* that everyone was dead. They died at a dance festival dressed up as you are now, for dancing."

Hitolo blinked at her. He did not understand. "Poor Philip," she said.

"They are all dead," he repeated stupidly.

"Yes, there's nobody in the village now. They all died—not all perhaps, some I expect got away, but they would never come back. They died of food poisoning. Bad tins, the same that killed Sereva. He ate a bad tin by mistake. It was an accident, Hitolo. It was not meant for him."

There was no reading his brilliant, birdlike face. I wonder how he feels, she thought. I wonder if it pains him that there is no murderer to chase, no Jobe to hate, no justice to pursue. She did not know that the native mind does not accept the word

"accident," and that Hitolo might feel that his "payback" had been made.

The ground around them was soft and spongy and they managed to dig a shallow grave. It seemed in a way a pointless courtesy to pay him in such a place, but Emma, remembering the little clot of ants on the side of a skull and the fat gray rat, could not bear to leave him uncovered. They worked with sticks but could not dig deep for the whole floor of the jungle was laced with the roots of the trees. They covered his body with soil and heaped the mound with leaves and branches.

It was about four o'clock when they left. Emma was exhausted. She yearned to lie down and sleep, but felt that if she slept now and here she would never wake again.

She remembered nothing of their walk back. Hitolo, quite unafraid, walked ahead and she trailed mechanically behind him. Just before dark they reached the slashed trees where the rest of the stores were hidden. They built a fire and stayed there for the night.

Chapter TWENTY

EMMA HAD very little recollection of the journey back to Maiola. She felt vaguely that if it had been a hundred yards farther away she would never have reached it. As it was, Hitolo all but carried her during the last day's march. She was not in pain but she was weak and dizzy and at times hardly aware of her surroundings. They seemed always to be walking through the same stretch of jungle. The trees were the same, the path was the same and turned round corners to reveal jungle that had just been crossed. They might have been marking time.

When they reached Maiola her strength gave way completely and she could no longer stand. She remembered vaguely stumbling up some steps into an empty hut. She remembered too looking down and seeing with surprise Hitolo's long, shadowy fingers gripping her arms.

Then she slept. It was an uneasy, broken sleep that seemed to go on for a long time. Occasionally she could hear native voices outside. Someone brought her food, but she could not remember if she ate it. Once she opened her eyes and looked into a long, rectangular strip of sky lit with enormous stars. She was filled with a vague yearning, for something, someone, she did not

know what—perhaps her father—and lay for a long time with tears welling up in her eyes and running down her cheeks. She did not move. Her body might have been weighed down with chains.

Then after what seemed a long time she opened her eyes and saw Thomas Seaton's lean face peering over her.

He asked her some questions, but she could not remember having answered him, or even what the questions were.

She went to sleep again and while she slept they carried her outside onto the station launch. When she awoke again she was in bed at Seaton's house at Kairipi.

She knew immediately where she was though she had never seen the room before. She could look out through an open louver down a pathway lined with hibiscus bushes. Two native prisoners were cutting the lawn with pieces of bent hoop iron. Her fever had gone. Her head was clear and her skin dry, but she felt she would never move again.

As she lay there a native girl in a blue calico frock with a gold cross round her neck crept forward from a corner of the room and peered into her face. Then she slid away out of the door, and a few moments later Seaton came in.

"Washington's dead," said Emma quickly. "He shot himself."

He stood stiffly to attention at the end of her bed and nodded. "I know, you told me."

"Did I? I don't remember. Have I been very sick?"

He was obviously not used to sickrooms, particularly with women in them. His eyes were remote and gave the impression of looking at her over a great distance. His head was drawn back as if to aid his withdrawal. He nodded again. "Fever, bad business. Shock, too, I should say. Couldn't move you. Risky. Best to stay here. You're all right now."

"When can I go back to Marapai?"

"Not until you're a bit stronger. Better stay here for a while. I know a bit about fever . . . seen a lot. Better off here."

The vague yearning that had not left her even in sleep suddenly became more urgent and specific. "Do they know at Marapai?" she said.

"Yes," he said curtly. "They know."

"And did no one ask for me? Has no one been to see me?"

"I got through to Nyall."

"Anthony?"

"Trevor. Most concerned. Wanted to fly over but there was no point. Better if you stay quiet for a few days. Had a long

talk. No official report of course till I've been to Eola and had a look around."

Where is he? she thought. What's happened to him? Why doesn't he come and see me when I'm all alone and sick? If he loved me why doesn't he come and look after me?

"Bad show," said Seaton stiffly. He looked for a moment straight into her eyes and the gulf between them shrank. "Bad show. Funny how people break out up here. Never know what they'll do next. People you'd least expect." He straightened his shoulders, lifted his chin and put back on his earlier impersonal expression. "Bad for the Territory," he said somberly, "bad for the Administration."

"Bad for the natives," said Emma and started to laugh. She found that once having started she could not stop. Laughter rippled up her limbs and choked out of her lips. She clenched her teeth but still it came. She was so weak it became pain.

Seaton looked at her and wondered if he should slap her face. She looked too sick to strike, so instead he moved forward, put a hand on her shoulder and shook her sharply. The laughter instantly stopped and he drew his hand quickly away.

"Tough on you . . . plenty of pluck too. People break out, you know. Washington . . . understandable, arty type, no principles. But Warwick . . . He was a good fellow. Can't understand it."

"Was he a good fellow?" said Emma, looking up with enormous, dilated eyes. She found she had no idea what he had been like. Even the opinions could not be trusted, for what had happened was the result of an opinion she had never dreamed of.

Embarrassed, Seaton glanced away. "Oh, yes," he said gruffly. "One of the very best."

"Was it my fault?" said Emma, still looking at him eagerly. "Was it my fault or would it have happened anyway?"

Not following her fleeting, disconnected thoughts he gave her a puzzled glance. "What?"

"Washington? Was he mad? He would have killed himself, wouldn't he, like David? Only it was taking longer. But he would have done it, wouldn't he? He wanted it, didn't he?" Her voice rose and grew shrill. "He would have done it anyway, wouldn't he? It wasn't my fault?"

Where was Anthony? Why did he not come? He knew about Philip, he understood. Why did he not come and tell her that it wasn't her fault, that he was mad and wanted to die?

"It wasn't my fault? It wasn't my fault!"

He gripped her shoulder again and gently shook her. "Go to

sleep. Plenty of rest, that's what you need. Nasty experience. Try not to think about it."

"He killed my father," said Emma and turned her head into the pillow.

A fortnight later she returned to Marapai. The flying boat came to rest on the ruffled blue bay at about three-thirty in the afternoon. There ahead was the town with its white roofs straggling up the gold slopes of the hills. The trees, their flowering nearly over, were breaking into violent green leaf. She looked at it eagerly; then her eyes turned to the wharf where a little group of white figures stood waiting.

One of them would be there, she felt sure. But which? She did not know which emotion was stronger. Dread that it might be one, hope that it might be the other.

The hostess, who knew she had been ill, helped her into the boat. The wharf drew nearer. The brown faces under topees and straw hats gradually acquired features. Then she saw him. It was Anthony and Janet was with him.

He came halfway down the steps to help her up from the boat. They did not speak or smile. The rush of feeling toward him died away as she looked up into his face. She walked up the steps beside him thinking, He won't help me, he won't even comfort me. I am on my own.

She realized that throughout her sickness she had been wanting him to cling to and rest against, that the picture of him as she had reconstructed it had seen her through those terrible weeks. But it was not a true picture. She had forgotten what he was really like. For he would fulfill none of these supporting and protective functions. He was even more lost, distraught and bewildered than she. The weight of twelve deaths still hung around his neck and she only bore the weight of one. His dark, unhappy eyes had looked into hers only for an instant and then turned away.

Janet stood above them on the wharf. The wind blew her frock about her tiny body and she seemed at any moment about to fly away.

Emma pressed her hand and smiled. She no longer shrank from Janet, knowing now what it was she had shrunk from before.

"You're to come and stay with us," said Janet, as they moved off down the wharf. "Trevor insisted. And you're not to work until you're stronger, of course."

Emma thought she was less vague and stupid than she remem-

bered her, but this was perhaps only because her husband was not there.

She glanced at Anthony. "Do you think it's all right?" she said.

He did not meet her eye but shrugged his shoulders. "You'll need a rest. I see no reason why not. It's up to you."

I see no reason why not. She continued to stare at him, wondering if this meant that they were to lie to each other. But he would not be drawn by her glance and gazed ahead.

"Trevor couldn't come to meet you," said Janet. "So I came instead. He was detained. But I expect he'll be home when we get there."

Emma watched her face with its large, unfocused shrinking eyes. She doesn't know, she thought. And Anthony . . . ? Yes, Anthony knew. In spite of "I see no reason why not," he undoubtedly knew and always had.

"Why didn't you come and see me?" she said quietly.

"At Kairipi?" He glanced at her and glanced quickly away again. "I . . . I didn't know what to do. I didn't know what was best. I thought of going, but I didn't know what you would want. Seaton said you were all right. I didn't know what to do."

"So you did nothing."

His lips tightened. "This was your show," he said. "I thought it was best for you to be on your own till the end."

"Here we are," said Janet as they approached Trevor's large, expensive and thoroughly unsuitable car. "Tony, will you drive?"

She looked up and blinked her big, drained eyes. He moved forward. But she held up a hand and her face crumpled with uncertainty. "No, perhaps I should drive. He doesn't like you driving this car, does he, because of your eyes and not being able to see out of the sides of your glasses."

Anthony opened the back door. "I'll drive," he said.

Janet was looking up and down the street as if hoping that Trevor might arrive to resolve the problem. A vague argument followed which ended with her getting into the back and then leaning out again to entreat Anthony to drive carefully.

Emma was not listening. A woman was standing on the opposite side of the road looking at her. She wore no hat and the sun blazed down on her shining black head. She stood with her hands at her sides and her feet together, and something about her suggested that she had been there for a long time, waiting. It was Sylvia.

Their eyes met. Instinctively Emma moved forward and put out a hand. A car drove between them and when it had passed

Sylvia was walking swiftly down the road away from the town. Emma stood gazing after her. Sickness had peeled a protective skin from her senses and any emotion that she experienced was sharp and intense. Her eyes filled with tears.

She got into the car and shut the door. They drove off toward the town. It was four o'clock; the stores were just closing and the streets were filled with people. Trevor was already at home, waiting for them. As they entered through the door Janet and Anthony dropped behind her and she found herself walking ahead as if they had accepted her leadership against a common adversary.

It was a shock to see him standing there, his hand held out to her—tall, handsome smiling. During the past few weeks her memory of him had changed, and it was a face altogether different from this that she had expected. She had made of him such a demon that this real Trevor quite shocked her. Then she looked closer and thought, No, this is just the sort of face he should have.

He felt for her hand, for she had not held it out to him, and gripped her fingers. Because she had been sick and her senses were more responsive than at any time since her father's death, she almost shuddered.

"Well, and so you're back with us, thank God!" he said.

She had meant to be calm and natural, but anger and loathing swept her resolution away. She could not help saying, "It must surprise you; you couldn't have been expecting it."

She stared at him straightly, and because his eyes were clear and guiltless there was no need for him to look away. She began to understand just how much beyond David he was and beyond Philip in the scope of his capabilities.

He put out a hand and patted her shoulder. "I'm afraid later on you'll have to answer some questions, but for the moment we don't want you to even mention it. We want you to forget the whole affair."

"Yes, you would want that," she said, drawing away. She heard an uneasy movement behind her and saw that her words were not touching Trevor, only tormenting Anthony. Her anger died away. She felt she had stated her position and was satisfied. Janet fluttered away, murmuring, "I'll see about tea."

That evening she spoke to Anthony alone. Janet was playing bridge and Trevor had gone to a meeting. It was very hot so they sat on the veranda overlooking the town, to catch the faint breeze. They sat for some moments in silence. It was a taut,

wretched silence, and there was no feeling of communion between them.

Then at last Emma said: "What are we going to do?"

He did not answer but turned to look at her. The light flashed on his glasses and intensified an air he had of nursing secrets.

"About Trevor," she said.

"What about him?"

She remembered the night outside Washington's hut when he had abruptly changed his attitude and had seemed to glory in what she was doing, and realized that he considered what had happened as much his own action as hers. He had permitted it; he had even encouraged it and feared now to face the consequence. He had reason to fear.

"Don't let *us* be dishonest," she said quietly. "He was behind it, he began it. It was his idea."

He looked away from her over the town. His voice was unsurprised but still guarded. "Did Washington tell you that?"

"Not exactly—he was too muddled and excited to be lucid. But he let it out—in several ways. I *knew*—when he told me about it. He said 'we all' and one doesn't say 'we all' for two. But of course he's behind it, it's so obvious. They could never think it up. It wouldn't occur to them. They could only do it and then under compulsion." She shuddered. "He's loathsome; he's a million times worse than they are. They're children, they're babies compared with him. People can do just about anything when they're actually *there*—and out in the jungle, you can see, when you get there—anything might happen. Anyway, I don't believe they meant it to be as wholesale as it was. Perhaps they only wanted to frighten them away, to make a few of them sick. But they misjudged either the strength of the poison they used or the native resistance. I think it got out of hand."

"You let them off lightly."

"Not," she said, "because of anything I feel for David, if that's what you mean. You were right there."

He knew that it had cost her something to say this and let it pass as if he had not heard it. "If you let them off with less terrible intentions," he said, "then you have to let him off too."

"No! No!" she cried. "He tried to kill me! He sent me out there to die. He sent Philip to kill me and he hoped too it would be the end of Philip. Philip would never have worked out *that* solution. He dreaded the place. It was agony for him to go back. And anyway he was incapable of killing me. They were both of them incapable of the whole thing."

"They managed to kill off a whole village," said Anthony tonelessly.

"Yes, they did. But Philip in spite of all his tolerance would see that as less terrible than killing one white woman. Anyway I don't believe they meant to. It was beyond anything they had intended . . . and then Sereva, on top of everything. It was beyond Philip even more than David. Suicide wasn't enough for Philip; he wanted to be punished. But Trevor! He wouldn't care. He would see the destruction of the village as an improvement of the plan. And then he quietly arranged another murder to tidy it all up."

"I think you see him," he murmured, "as larger than life."

"He is," she cried. "He is! He's a monster." Her voice trembled with loathing. "He doesn't know what it's like out there. He didn't even see his own victims. He spills his blood by remote control. The whole thing to him was as passionless as algebra. He wouldn't go mad or commit suicide; he spares himself from the discomfort of such things. He sits behind his desk and thinks up monstrosities, keeps his hands clean and sleeps at night without dreaming. I'm not even afraid of him, though he knows I know. He wouldn't dirty himself with hurting me. He's so *clean*."

For the first time he looked fully at her and smiled. "Don't you know," he said, "that most of the world's major crimes are committed by men who sit behind desks, keep their hands clean and sleep at night without dreaming? And usually when things blow up in their faces, as they sometimes do, they manage to worm out by a back alley, or, as Trevor had done, walk boldly through the front door." He paused and there was an ironic twist to his lips. "Yesterday he made out a detailed report of the whole thing. There's something magnificent in that; one can't help admiring it. I'm afraid you haven't a shred of evidence against him. He's completely in the clear. The gold's been dug up and returned. Possibly his cut has already been disposed of."

He paused and when he spoke again there was a note of anxiety in his voice. "You could of course invent a confession from Washington, but it would hardly cut much ice. You've suppressed it up to date and it would be argued that you had thought it up to clear your husband. You're known," he added, looking away, "as something of a fanatic in that line. But it would of course make things exceedingly uncomfortable for Trevor . . . and others."

"Janet."

"Janet for one."

She burst out, "But, good God, she can't love him! He treats

her like a dog, a fool, and she doesn't even know it. She doesn't even know what he's like." She stopped abruptly, realizing what she had said.

But he let the opportunity for cheap triumph pass by. "She's used to him," he said quietly. "She'd be completely lost without him. She wouldn't know what to do. She's happy enough in a way. She gets a lot of pleasure out of doing what she thinks he wants. Without him she'd be terrified. She hasn't made a decision of her own for years."

Emma waited, hoping that he might say more, but he was silent. At last an overpowering curiosity pressed her to say, "What was she like . . . when she was younger?"

He did not answer, but turned and looked at her. She understood. "And that night when I came to dinner you changed your mind. You decided you'd stop it from happening again; you'd let me find out about David and Trevor, no matter how horrible it was."

"Perhaps," he said. "It was more than I couldn't bear to see someone else being taken in by Trevor."

She felt a sharp stab of disappointment. "I don't understand you. One moment you seem to loathe him—I felt it even then—then in the next you protect him."

"That's what makes it so impossible," he said slowly. "You see, in his way he's been good to me. When we were at school there was a little boy whose father owned a sweet shop. Trevor used to make him steal chocolates. And he always gave half of spoil to me. I don't know what he did but that little boy was terrified of him. When I found out I stopped taking the chocolates, but I could never tell on Trevor. That was the beginning of it; it's always been like that. He's hung on to my job for me; he's housed me and fed me."

"But don't you see," said Emma tensely, "that's his line. That's how he works. That's what he did to David, helped him to an enormous extent. He gave him money and then suddenly turned round and forced him into this. He strangles with obligations. Look at the position he's put you in. You can't hurt him because you ought to feel gratitude, because you've eaten his chocolate and because you have a dead village of your own. He's ruined your life. He certainly doesn't like you."

"I don't know," said Anthony slowly, "what he feels. I certainly didn't know that I hated him until you told me. I disapproved of him, but . . . He feels we should stick together."

"You can't," she said. "It's killing you."

A car was coming up the hill past the house. For a moment its

headlights flashed through the trees and glanced off Anthony's face. He looked pale and tired. He gazed at her with fear and longing.

Impulsively she put out both her hands. She saw in a flash the horror of his position. Her heart went out to him and in that moment she gave herself completely over to seeing him through it.

"You're right," she said. "We can't do anything. It would be quite useless. It would do no good. It would be trouble-making and no more. He'll just have to get away with it."

His face twisted into a spasm of anxiety. "Do you think so? Are you sure? I'm not sure."

"Well, I am. I'm quite sure," she said definitely. "Don't look like that."

She wrenched her hand away and pressed her palm on his brow. "It's terrible that he should get away with it, scot free, no scars, no fears, no bad dreams. But we can't do anything about it. So let's just admit it's terrible and forget it. Don't brood on it. Forget it."

She felt the flesh grow smooth beneath her palm. "I'll leave this house," he said.

Slowly she drew her hand away, but he clutched it back and held it pressed over his eyes.

They did not speak again for some time. Emma was watching the long black beans of the poinciana trees still hanging in the young foliage of the new season. I shall leave too, she thought and go back to the mess. She remembered with pleasure the little room with the faded bed cover and the lizard in the corner of the ceiling. The memory took her back to her first days in Marapai, and a moment later she said aloud, "I wonder what happened to Jobe."

He was at that moment talking to Trevor Nyall.

Nyall, who had not gone to a meeting, was driving slowly along the seafront.

"What else could I do?" he was saying sharply. "Do you think I liked it? Do you imagine it pleased me to see it go?"

Jobe sucked on the damp butt of a cigarette. "Seems to me it was a mistake to ever let this fellow Washington in on it," he said. "Cant think why you did that, Mr. Nyall. Nervous type. You should know about people. You should 'ave picked 'im as a nervous type."

"We had to," said Nyall shortly. He did not explain further. The idea of taking the Eola gold had not occurred to him until

Warwick had completed arrangements for the trip and Washington's services had been enlisted. "I had to send them out there, I had to do *something*—the girl was hysterical. I never dreamed Washington would fall down on it—he's too greedy."

"I'm glad she got back," said Jobe mildly. "Nice little thing, pretty—pretty as paint."

"You're glad," Trevor threw him a brief glance, making no attempt to disguise both surprise and revulsion. The smell of Jobe's body filled the car. The necessity for being even moderately polite to such a creature was as irksome a circumstance as Trevor had ever had to bear with.

"Then don't complain about losing the gold. It's unfortunate but it was the only thing to do. We're lucky to be out of it. We're clear, let's thank our stars for that."

Jobe sucked on the damp brown butt of his cigarette, then dropped it on the floor of the car and crushed it out with his toe. "I 'aven't lost it, Mr. Nyall. You 'ave."

"Well, it amounts to the same thing. If you can think of some way of getting it back from the Administration, you're welcome to it. When I promised you Warwick's share . . ."

"You didn't exactly promise it, Mr. Nyall. Mr. Warwick gave it to me. 'Anded over 'is claim as it were."

Nyall gritted his teeth. He was not given to uncontrollable anger, but he burned with rage whenever he thought of what Warwick had done—those stupid, blundering, sentimental, repentant acts. The weak, hysterical, troublesome fool who was too squeamish to live with his own deeds—a letter to a sick man that had driven them all to this drastic end, a confession to this nasty crooked rogue beside him. And then the weakest act of all, the taking of his own life. Jobe was still speaking.

"Now if I should want to get the gold from the Administration all I would 'ave to do would be to take along Mr. Warwick's letter. That would show them plain enough 'ow it 'ad all 'appened. 'Ow the gold was mine and you and Mr. Warwick and Mr. Washington 'ad 'opped in and grabbed it for yourselves. I think the Administration would probably see that I'd been 'ardly done by and 'and me over the 'ole lot. Not just Mr. Warwick's share."

If Nyall was disturbed by this speech he gave no sign. "They'll probably give it back to the natives or put it into Native Revenue. You can bet your life you won't see any of it," he said.

Jobe did not seem to be upset by the idea of the natives winning in the end.

"Well, it would be worth trying, wouldn't it?" he said mildly.

"The man was mad when he wrote that letter!" said Nyall harshly.

"'E was a little upset. But I can't 'elp feeling 'e knew what 'e was doing. I can't 'elp feeling 'e knew I'd insist on my rights." He turned round and gave Nyall a slow smile. His eyes sparkled in their dark sockets. "I think maybe 'e didn't like the mess you'd got 'im into. I don't think 'e liked you at all. 'E says in 'is letter 'e would never 'ave agreed if 'e 'adn't been so pressed for dough. It was you that was doing the pressing, wasn't it? I can't 'elp feeling 'e thought it wouldn't 'urt much if things was made uncomfortable for you."

There was no longer any denying the direction in which he was pointing the conversation. Nyall faced it without further evasion. "So . . . blackmail," he said calmly. His eyes did not leave the road ahead. It was empty. They were out of the town and the houses were few and scattered.

"I only want my rights," said Jobe plaintively. "I'm only asking for my share."

"It would take me years to pay you," said Nyall. His voice was calm and controlled. His face gave no indication of his feelings.

"I don't mind waiting. You can pay it in installments like."

"How do I know you'll be satisfied when it's paid off?"

Jobe was still smiling. "You'll 'ave to take a chance on that, Mr. Nyall. On my word you know. After all I 'aven't been unreasonable, 'ave I? Another man might 'ave expected the lot. I wouldn't want to be a burden to you, Mr. Nyall. But there is a lot you could do without. This car for instance, bit flashy for this place, don't you reckon? Jeeps are better for the islands. Sydney, that's where this little baby should be." And he patted the door of the car. "And when it's paid up I give you my word I'll send back the original of Warwick's letter. In the meantime . . ." the road was cut into the cliff and he looked pensively over a steep drop to the sea. "It's in the 'ands of a friend of mine who 'as instructions to send it to the Administrator—in the event of my death."

Nyall did not speak. He drew the car to a standstill, backed it into the cliff and turned round. He felt he could not bear the stench of the man's body for a moment longer. They say natives stink, he thought. You could at least keep away from natives. The smell seemed to have soaked into his own clothes, even in through the pores of his skin. He had vague notions of hurrying home and cleansing himself under a shower. Realization of the

larger evil, the more devastating and lasting contact with this man, he still held at arm's length.

"You probably won't place much faith in my word, Mr. Nyall," Jobe was saying cheerfully. He was lighting another cigarette. The big, inappropriate car gathered speed. The road ahead stretched straight into the town.

"You don't like me, Mr. Nyall. I know that. I can feel these things. Sort of instinctive, you know. You think I'm not a gentleman and you think I won't keep my word. Well, I'm telling you, Mr. Nyall, you can trust me. You'll see."

His eyes glittered in the headlights of an approaching car. With laughter? With greed? Or merely with high spirits?

"You'll see," he said again.

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