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MORE PROFIT THAN GOLD

MORE PROFIT THAN
GOLD

by

JOAN ARBUTHNOT

New York
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1936

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To
Gwen, Rachel and Maurice

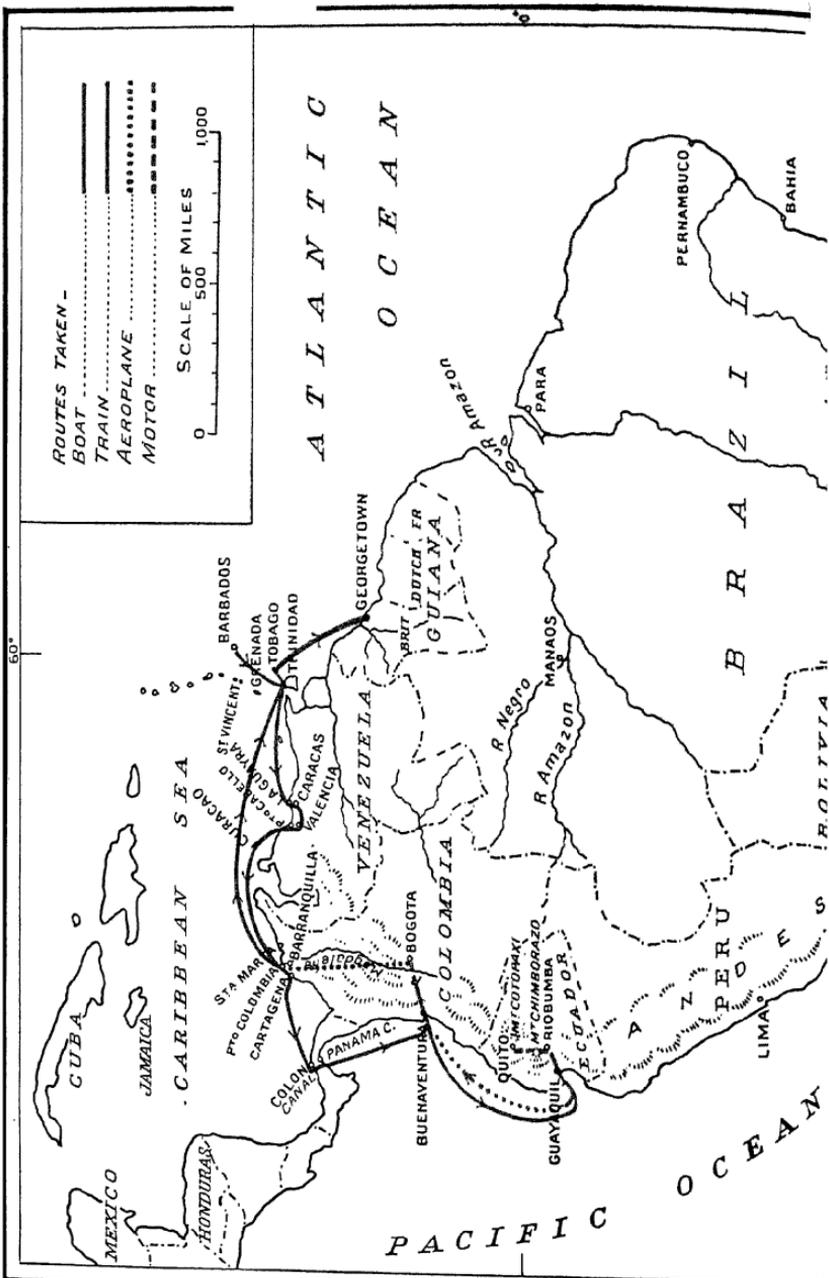
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CHAPTER I

WE SET OUT

‘SOMETHING is going to happen!’

I had felt it all day. ‘. . . And it will be something exciting and important.’

It was an evening in October, and the three of us were seated round the fire in a Corsican inn boiling chestnuts. One was Maurice Blake the proprietor, another was his young wife Gwen, and I was the third. There was a slight feeling of depression in the air because of the growing difficulty of inn-keeping without clients, and the discovery that the cook, procured with great labour from the Continent, was really a postmistress on holiday.

‘What can possibly happen?’ Maurice prodded the chestnuts and sighed in rather an exaggerated manner. He is a vigorous man with a very dominant personality and on the rare occasions when he is despondent he is very despondent indeed.

Gwen hastened to change the trend of thought.

‘The chestnuts are done’, she announced, and went to fetch plates and some butter. Maurice rose from his chair.

‘Let me go’, he said insincerely, but the offer was well timed and she had vanished.

I picked up his scrap book. It was a very large one, I remember, and covered an astonishing range of countries and activities which included the Bar, the

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air force, explorations, voyages before the mast, marriage, and finally inn-keeping.

‘Where were you’, I asked, ‘five years ago?’

‘. . . Five years ago — I was in South America prospecting for diamonds.’

‘With any success?’

‘Not considerable, but I hadn’t enough capital to finance that expedition properly, and towards the end I had to sell most of my diamonds for food. Also there had been a “shout” in the district some years before, and many of the creeks were already worked. But’, he went on, ‘there is a river far away in the interior of British Guiana that has never been worked, and where I am certain there is . . .’ Gwen came in with the plates ‘. . . a fortune to be made,’ she concluded.

Visions began to float through my mind.

‘I’ve got an idea. Let’s go there!’

‘All very well. That is easily said. What about funds? What about the inn?’

‘It is all perfectly simple. You can dismiss the postmistress and close down this unprofitable inn. We will all put up our share of expenses with something over for emergencies. We will select three other suitable persons who will do the same, and we will sail for South America on January 1st.

So the plot was laid.

The next ten days were spent amid a whirl of plans, maps, and excitement. I bought a Corsican peasant’s umbrella of vast dimensions to keep off the equatorial rains. We made out lists of stores with their cost and weight. We pored over an old copy of the mining

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regulations of British Guiana. We talked of the expedition all day. We dreamed of it at night. Our fortunes were already made.

A week later I returned to London. My family disapproved. I knew that they would. They not only disapproved, they ignored. South America might have been wiped off the map for all the notice they took of it. One day I overheard someone asking whether there was any truth in the rumour that I was going to South America. Then my father's voice:

'... Joan's expedition — Oh no! That won't come to anything.'

Meanwhile preparations went on apace. Maurice and Gwen came over from Corsica. We bought camp beds and tents, field boots and revolvers. We became a syndicate and registered ourselves as a Limited Liability Company. Gwen spent her time tasting the contents of sample tins. I drove all over London searching for gold and diamond scales.

But still our numbers remained the same. As a result of a notice in the papers I received a number of letters from people who said that they would like to go with us at a salary in any capacity. One young man enclosed his photograph and said that he had a sunny disposition.

But nobody who had anything more substantial to lose was prepared to risk it. If there is anything in the scheme, they said, why hasn't it been done before? One man said that there was nothing he would enjoy more if he had the time for a prolonged holiday. I wanted to tell him, but didn't because of the futility of telling anyone anything he doesn't want to believe, that with

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such a point of view he was wiser to stay at home. 'You will never,' I imagined myself saying, 'achieve, or reach the heart of anything unless you approach it in a serious and whole-hearted manner, having burnt your boats behind you. There is everything to be said for Boat Burning.' — And much more to the same effect.

We spent many enjoyable evenings lamenting the decline of enterprise among young men, but the outlook was far from bright. Unless more capital could be raised our chances of success were practically reduced to non-existence.

And then I thought of a compatriot, Rachel Leigh-White. She was about the same age as myself, and as far as I knew suitable in every way for expeditions. So I sat down and wrote to her, told her what we were going to do, and asked whether she would care to join us. Two days later I received a telegram from the Free State.

DELIGHTED WITH PLAN CAN I LUNCH TO-MORROW

She crossed from Ireland that night, came to luncheon, heard a few more particulars about the expedition, and without more ado decided to throw in her lot with us. Then she drove off to catch the Irish Mail and I did not see her again until shortly before we sailed.

The clouds were lifting, and when a retired colonel wrote to say that he had heard of the proposed expedition and was anxious to become a member of it, they all rolled away.

Still the family ignored. At last, shortly before Christmas, an appalling headline appeared in the evening paper.

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'Society Gold Rush! Mayfair Girl Tired of Parties!'

Aware that some announcement impended (but never suspecting anything so silly and inaccurate) I had gone out, leaving instructions with my sister to remove the offending page before anyone else saw it. This she had done, and nobody noticed its absence until one of my brothers walked in and picked up the paper.

'What has become of the middle page?' he asked. 'There is a long account on it of Joan's expedition.'

So another copy was sent for and then the talk began.

'The idea is insane,' they told me.

'British Guiana has the worst climate in the world and everyone knows that the forest is The White Man's Grave.'

'If you go up there you will certainly never come down.'

'... Or if you do,' someone else amended, 'you will be riddled with fever and look forty.'

It did not sound a cheerful prospect.

Christmas came and went; many things still remained to be done, and January 1st faded away into the past. But now the end was in sight. Stores and equipment were shipped to Georgetown and we booked our passages.

Maurice and Gwen were to go by a very small boat that did not touch anywhere. Rachel and I decided to sail a fortnight earlier and by a rather larger boat (five thousand instead of two thousand tons) and a different route. We intended to land at the first West Indian island we liked and remain there sun and sea bathing

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until the others should cable from Georgetown that the final preparations were made and the boat built on which we were to sail up river into the interior. The colonel was to come out from England direct to Georgetown by a later boat arriving about the same time as Rachel and myself.

Nearer and nearer drew the day of departure. The expedition was now an accepted fact. My father, seeing that nothing could prevail against my extraordinary folly and obstinacy gave in with a very good grace, and he presented me at parting with a flask of brandy and two evil smelling bottles of disinfectant.

February 15th dawned bleak and cheerless, with snow upon the ground and an icy wind whistling in the chimneys. As I lay in bed, putting off the moment when I must leave its pleasant warmth for the coldness of the outer air, I wondered whether I should ever again lie in so large and comfortable a bed. It was a solemn thought.

We decided to send the luggage on ahead and walk down to Victoria station, and at half-past one a procession might have been seen issuing from the house, each person carrying some important piece of property that had been forgotten until the last minute. Less than fifteen yards from the front door a collision with an omnibus was narrowly avoided. This first peril averted the expedition pursued its way.

The platform was crowded. On either side trains were preparing to leave for Dover, and were rapidly filling. People stood about in groups seeing the last of their friends. They hurried to and from the book-stand armed with newspapers and magazines. Through the

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carriage windows they could be seen placing their lighter belongings in the rack and settling themselves for the journey. Porters wheeling barrows of luggage threaded their way along the platform.

One forty-nine! The whistle blew, and all along the train doors were slammed. The engine came to life with a piercing scream, and then with ever quickening shoots of steam we began to move slowly out of the station. In the carriage the gloom turned to daylight while on the receding platform the crowd became smaller and smaller — and disappeared.

CHAPTER II

THE SPANISH MAIN

THE voyage was like any other voyage. There was a storm during which all normally constituted persons wished they were dead. It was followed by an oily swell. There was the Ship's Bore, the Ship's Scandal, the Ship's Lunatic, and on the night before we landed there was a fancy dress dance at which Rachel appeared in a curious garment she had concocted of green, white and yellow paper, representing the Free State.

The captain's table, at which we sat, had in our honour been decorated with Free State flags. It was a joy to see Rachel sitting there, a large flag among small flags.

But there are disadvantages to paper dresses, a prominent one being their inability to stand wear and tear, and by the time the evening was over Rachel was considerably more in evidence than the Free State, to the delight and unbounded admiration of the Dutch stewards.

'She is the pride of the ship!' they said, and followed her enthusiastically with their eyes.

Next day we landed.

If any reader dislikes wind, glare, clatter, streets that are crowded hot and noisy beyond belief, and a countryside which for the most part is perfectly flat,

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let him not go to Barbados, for it is windy and unattractive, and very soon after we arrived we decided to go away again by the first comfortable boat going in the right direction. However, such was the determined friendliness and hospitality of the English colony that after two days of it we decided to leave by the first boat going in any direction, comfortable or not. And we did.

It took us to Trinidad, a very lovely island, celebrated, amongst other things, for pitch. But we saw neither the loveliness nor the pitch until a much later date for reasons that will soon transpire.

Our ship, the *Lady Ena*, sailed in the evening, and shortly after Barbados had faded away into the distance a bugle call summoned us to dinner.

We discovered our places at the captain's table, and were soon in animated conversation.

We told him about the cable that we had received on our arrival at Barbados. It said that there had been a slight hitch in the business arrangements, and that the rest of the expedition would not be able to leave for another fortnight. As a result of this we had at least six weeks to spend where and how we chose. Had he, we asked, any suggestions to offer?

He thought for a moment and then said, 'Why not take passages to Panama?'

We thought it an excellent idea.

'Almost all ships call at many ports on the way,' he continued; 'you could disembark whenever you found a place that pleased you, and perhaps see something of the interior of Venezuela and Colombia.'

The idea pleased us more and more. We asked him

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whether he knew when the next ship left Trinidad for Panama, and he said that he believed that the S.S. *Berlina* was due to sail the very day we landed.

'You might have time to make the connection, we reach Trinidad early in the morning — wait a minute, I'll send for the list.'

He called the steward, and when the list was brought it was found that the S.S. *Berlina* did indeed sail at noon on the day of our arrival.

The remainder of the evening was spent sorting and repacking our clothes. We would leave the heavy luggage, we decided, at Trinidad, for we could not reach British Guiana without changing ships there on the way back.

We arranged to take a suitcase and a rucksack each, and a kitbag in common which was to hold any indispensable thing that would not fit in anywhere else.

Before we went to bed that night they were packed, and strapped, and ready. We had sternly banished everything that was not strictly necessary, and kept only what might be necessary: tennis racquets, for instance, and a flit gun; most unwillingly we decided to leave the gramophone behind in case there should be difficulties about it at customs. I fell asleep with visions floating through my brain of buccaneers and buried treasure. And so, I am sure, did Rachel.

We spent the greater part of the next day searching in the suitcases for clothes to wear and other necessities, for so great had been our enthusiasm to start off for the Spanish Main that we had quite overlooked the fact that there was yet another day to spend on board before we reached Trinidad.

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In the afternoon we called at Granada, and went ashore, and were shown a wonderful wide sandy shore where the Prince of Wales — they told us — had been, and had highly recommended for bathing purposes.

Next morning we reached Trinidad, and went ashore in a tender. We dashed in a motor to the shipping office and booked passages to Curaçao. Then we dashed back again, and having left the heavy luggage in charge of the customs official, stepped aboard another tender, and were borne away to the S.S. *Berlina* which was lying at anchor some three miles from the shore.

That afternoon we sat on two uncomfortable deck chairs and looked at the sea. In the distance the mountains of Venezuela were faintly visible.

After a while a stout little man came and sat next to us and told us that his name was Mr. Ladd, and that he spent much of his time abroad. From this and from his general appearance we gathered, quite correctly, that he was a commercial traveller.

He said that he knew this part of the world very well, so we told him that we thought of going ashore at La Guayra and driving to Caracas. Did he know where we could hire a car, and what was the Spanish for it?

He told us, and added that he himself was going to Caracas on business, and like ourselves rejoining the ship at Puerta Cabello. Why should we not share a car? It would, he said, be less expensive and more agreeable, and he might be able to smooth the way for us as he had previous experience of South American officials and spoke Spanish fluently.

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‘But no doubt you speak it too?’

We hesitated. I could say Yes and No and Thank you and Good-bye. Rachel had studied a Hugo on the way out from England and could say that she did not speak Spanish.

We said that we did — a little.

Next morning we rose, as one always does in port, far too early, and had to wait a long time before breakfast was ready. We wandered about the deck taking photographs of the view.

La Guayra is a fascinating port. The town is at the edge of the sea. The harbour is dotted with sailing boats and there is a constant stir of life and movement.

It took us five hours to pass with our rucksacks through the customs, and had it not been for Mr. Ladd’s liberal tip to the principal official I doubt whether we should have got through at all.

The drive to Caracas was a lively experience. We had been told that the road was one of the most dangerous and precipitous in the world, so that when we started off, and our driver turned out to be a very reckless man, driving on the wrong side of the road, charging round corners, and generally flinging discretion to the winds, we began to speculate as to the probable end of the trip; we had not gone more than a hundred yards before we overtook a funeral, and after that neither Rachel nor I knew an easy moment.

The hairpin bends, the sheer precipices were sights to wonder at. All the time we were mounting — mounting, and the ships in the harbour at La Guayra became momentarily smaller and less important.

A particularly blind corner revealed an unusual

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sight. At the side of the road stood a stone pillar, and on top of it a wrecked and derelict motor car. Rather a grim joke, we thought. It looked most peculiar; the great barren mountains all around, and this ridiculous relic perched up as a warning. Farther along, the road was fenced with the remains of several more cars that had evidently collided.

At length we reached Caracas, and after repeated and useless questioning discovered the Middleton Hotel.

We lunched, and rested, and shopped (I bought an expensive *bêret*), had tea, and went for a long walk.

Caracas is a delightful city, set like the well-worn jewel in a cup of the mountains. It is three thousand feet above sea-level, and the air is keen and cool. Very refreshing we found it after a morning with the customs.

During the course of our walk we came to a semi-circular mountain of steps leading up to a statue of Simon Bolívar. We climbed them, and sank pantingly to rest at Bolívar's feet, from where we had a magnificent view over Caracas, with its domes and spires, and the red mountains all around it.

We walked up a path through gardens which were in process of construction, saw the zoo (containing a few depressed-looking birds, and fewer monkeys), and a chapel, and more gardens. Then we returned to Bolívar, descended the steps, and walked back through hitherto unknown (to us) parts of the town.

In one street gaudily painted women sat at the windows of their houses and gazed out through the bars, and from every house and little shop came music,

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pianos, real and mechanical, gramophones, concertinas, all playing tangos, all at variance, gay, indifferent, each one separate and distinct, serenely following its appointed course — a fearless, splendid medley! It was extraordinarily exhilarating.

The effect of sound can be very strange, especially a sudden isolated sound. Sometimes, as you hear it, an intense awareness of its beauty and significance pierces through you. You vibrate as a twanged instrument. You are outside the flow of life — at the very source of beauty.

It may be the far peal of a bell, the beat of a horse's hoofs upon the hard road, a distant barrel organ heard through the multitudinous stir of a town, the shedding of rain. In a flash it has happened.

I remember a night in Holland, wide, and flat, and empty, a winter night, and then through the stillness the sudden quacking of ducks. . . .

We continued our walk, and were struck by many strange and interesting things. The policemen, for instance, are exceedingly quaint. They wear baggy brown suits, and English helmets, and I cannot help feeling that they must be under a certain height in order to qualify, for I never saw one who was over five foot five.

A peculiarly small specimen stood on a dais under an umbrella in the most populous part of the town, directing the traffic with magnificent waves of his truncheon, while in the other hand he held and munched a large cream cake. We watched him at it for a long time.

In the evening we were fetched by a man in a motor, to whom Mr. Ladd had an introduction, and were

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driven all over the town, and through El Paraiso, the residential part, so that we might see what it looked like by night.

Rachel and Mr. Ladd sat behind, the man and I in front. He told me many interesting things: that the dictator was over eighty, and half Indian, and that he had more than a hundred children; that the country had no national debt, and no taxation, because the state lotteries paid for everything; that the treatment of offenders, both criminal and political, had not changed since the middle ages; and that if a man wanted, in Latin fashion, to serenade a lady, he had first to procure a police permit.

Next morning we left Caracas. Prior to our departure a council had been held, and it had been decided to hire a car and drive until we had driven enough, then to stop for the night, and continue next day to Puerta Cabello. Mr. Ladd, alarmed at the idea of a wayside Venezuelan inn, tried to persuade us to spend another night in Caracas instead, and drive straight to Puerta Cabello without stopping at all; but we paid no attention to him.

Our car was packed to overflowing, for in addition to ourselves, the luggage, lunch, and Mr. Ladd, we had acquired a passenger. He, too, was English, and was even shorter and stouter than Mr. Ladd. He wore a straw hat perched on the very top of his head, and was the most cheerful and conversational person that it is possible to imagine. His name was Mr. Shaw — ‘of Spain’, he explained, indicating his visiting card, and when we asked ‘Why of Spain?’ he said it was because he had a house at Algeciras.

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We passed through Maracay, where the dictator lives surrounded by his families and the army, and reached Valencia soon after dusk. Here we stopped, and decided to spend the night, for it was Mr. Shaw's destination (he too was a commercial traveller), and we were all blinded by glare and dust and so stiff that we could scarcely move.

We found a charming inn built Spanish-wise round a patio filled with mint and roses, and as it looked clean and had a shower and two large unoccupied rooms, we decided to stay there.

As soon as we had washed and brushed ourselves we all assembled in the patio and set off to inspect the town. There was a square with a band playing in it, and on the far side an imposing café, into which we went, and ordered apéritifs. It was a nice clean place, kept by two bald Germans. An immense Venezuelan strolled in while we were there and burst into song. Then he sat down at the table next to us, and gazed admiringly at Rachel.

'O! Bella! Bella! Bella! Bella!' he repeated over and over again. Rachel was quite embarrassed, and we half thought of getting Mr. Ladd and Mr. Shaw to challenge him to a duel. Finally we solved the difficulty by getting up to go.

'O! Bella! Bella! Bella! Bella!' we heard echoing through the room as we beat a hasty retreat.

Next morning after breakfast we took leave of Mr. Shaw and set off once more in the car.

The road descended and twisted the whole way, and was far more dangerous than the road from La Guayra to Caracas, so we were thankful that our driver was an

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American and not a Venezuelan. All along the road, at intervals of fifty feet, were wayside crosses, marking the place where motorists had been hurled to their death.

We reached Puerto Cabello in the afternoon, and were told by the head steward that after all the ship was not sailing until the following evening. This was annoying, for Puerto Cabello is hot and noisy and uninteresting, and full of flies.

Two days later we reached Curaçao, and were met by a young Dutchman with whom we had made friends on the way out from England.

'Don't stay here,' he said, 'You won't like the hotel, and there is nothing to see once you've seen the oil refinery. I am going on to-night by your boat to Cartagena in Colombia, and I strongly advise you to come too.'

We said that we would, booked our passages, and set off to procure Colombian visas from the consul.

'The importance of personal contacts is well known wherever people of the Spanish race are concerned,' remarks that interesting writer, Salvador de Madriaga. 'Whether the question in debate is a trivial matter or the most important business, a relation from man to man is indispensable if results are to be obtained.'

He is indeed right. At least two days should be allowed for the procuring of a visa for any South American country. It is a Herculean labour at the best of times, and when the consul is an octogenarian, and deaf, and speaks nothing but Spanish, the difficulties of establishing a relation from man to man are wellnigh insuperable.

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But we did it. With the aid of the dictionary, and vouched for by the young Dutchman, whom I will call V.H., we were given certificates of Good Conduct, and when we had had our photographs taken, and had produced the depressing result, together with certificates of Vaccination and Good Health, and various other certificates, the visas were stamped and affixed to our passports, and we went our way rejoicing.

There was just enough time left before the ship sailed to see something of the town. We took a car, and drove up a little hill to the house in which V.H. had been staying. Here we had food and drink and an excellent view of Curaçao. The town is bright and quaint, but not at all beautiful. The rest of the island is arid and treeless. There is a superstition that it never rains in Curaçao, but this is quite unfounded.

On the following day we called at Puerta Colombia, and as the ship was to remain there for twenty-four hours, we decided to drive up to Barranquilla, and spend the night comfortably in the hotel. This we did.

The country between Puerta Colombia and Barranquilla was very burnt up, and I caught sight of a large iguana at the side of the appalling road. The hotel (The Prado) is comfortable and expensive, and the loveliest little jade and turquoise lizards may be seen darting about in the grass outside.

Next morning we drove back to the ship, and after another day at sea, we sailed into Cartagena.

A city by the sea has a glamorous sound, and Cartagena was all that we had hoped of it — and more. Here, you feel, as you walk along the narrow streets, or

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lean over the immense ramparts, is romance, and high adventure! Here splendid pageantry! The spirit of the Conquistadores is abroad . . . anything may happen!

What actually happened on the night of our arrival was that Rachel's hair brush fell out of the window into the street three storeys below. A crowd instantly collected, and from their clamour and excitement we supposed that they must have taken it to be some kind of a bomb.

We began to wonder a little anxiously whether they intended to storm the hotel, when the electric light all over Cartagena fused and we were plunged into profound darkness. By the time the fuse was mended the crowd had dispersed.

We stayed at an hotel with a courtyard, and a dear little monkey in it; and each morning V.H. and Rachel and I, and sometimes V.H. and I without Rachel used to drive out to a wide lonely shore and bathe. There would be no one there at that hour except the pelicans, or an occasional fisherman setting out in his boat to dynamite fish.

At a little distance from the town there stands, at an altitude of six or seven hundred feet, the ruined monastery of La Popa. Long ago, in the days of the buccaneers, it was a convent, and the story goes that when the nuns heard that Sir Francis Drake was sailing in to sack the town they were so indignant and alarmed that they picked up their skirts, and headed by the Mother Superior, jumped one after the other over the parapet.

I visited La Popa twice. It is a desolate, silent spot. There is no one there now but an old man and a

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donkey, and grass grows through the paving of the chapel. As you stand and gaze down at the little stir of life so far below, you feel very free and aloof, very tranquil and safe. It is a perfect place for a convent.

We remained at Cartagena for nearly a week, and left it at last with many regrets. But we had to go, for our time was not unlimited, and we planned to visit either Mexico or a South Sea island.

The next two days were spent at sea in the most uncomfortable little cockleshell of a boat either of us had ever experienced. It called itself a 'freighter with small passenger accommodation', and indeed so small was it that we could barely turn round. There were bunks for twelve and there were fifteen passengers, so the bunkless had to sleep on a small grubby piece of wood that did service as a deck. They cannot have enjoyed it very much for it rained steadily both nights we were at sea.

On the second day we ran into a fog and a thunderstorm, and the fog horn and the claps of thunder coincided with the protestations of a cargo of turkeys which were tied up all over the ship to pieces of rigging.

Colon is an efficiently run, charmless place. The same may be said of Cristobal. Panama, on the other hand, is most interesting, and so many and varied are the races and colours of the people walking in the streets that you realize how aptly it is called the crossroads of the world.

We went there by train on the afternoon of our arrival, having spent the morning at a steamship office, discovering that all our hoped-for connections

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missed each other. Peru as a destination was, for reasons of time and money, quite out of the question. So were Mexico and the South Sea, so was Ecuador; but we were determined to go there. A lot of it, we knew, was high up in the Andes, head hunting tribes still inhabited the mountain fastnesses, and Quito, the capital, was at an altitude of ten thousand feet, and surrounded by large active volcanoes.

To Ecuador, therefore, we would go, but in case we should find, when we got there, that we had to travel on mules, we decided to send the kitbag back to Trinidad. This we did after removing the flit gun.

But all this had happened in the morning. We are now in Panama, and probably wandering about in the rain, hunting for the church with the golden altar, and the church with the flat arch. This last is really not worth seeing, especially not on a rainy day, for as it is a ruin you cannot even shelter in it.

Later on we took a car and drove out to Old Panama, which was most efficiently sacked by Sir Henry Morgan in 1671. Nothing remains of its former splendour but a few sad grey ruins. Like every other tourist who has ever visited it, I took photographs of these ruins from various angles. I also — and this has probably been done less often — took photographs of the Pacific. Rachel sat in the car with her back turned, because she was annoyed at having brought her camera without a film.

We got back to Colon in time for dinner.

Very early next morning we went to the hospital to get more certificates of Good Health, presented them to the Ecuadorian Consul, and before the day was out

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expensive visas had been attached to our passports. We should never have accomplished it in so short a time had it not been for a most helpful young man at the shipping office.

The following day found us on the Pacific, aboard a German ship bound for Guayaquil.

I disliked that ship very much, and I disliked Rachel, because she had given me a cold in the head, and because we were sharing a cabin. The sea was rough enough to prevent our being able to dress in the mornings without hanging on to the bunks, and there weren't enough deck chairs.

We disliked the ship so much that three days later we changed into a little cargo boat which had called — as we had — at a port in Colombia called Buena-ventura.

Oh! The relief of having a cabin of one's own! I was so pleased with it, and with Rachel, and with everything in the wonderful world, that for a long time on that first night I could not sleep. The cabin gave on to the little deck, and I lay in my bunk and gazed through the open door at the moonlight glistening on the sea. It was inexpressibly lovely. I slipped on a coat and a pair of shoes and went forward into the prow.

No one else was there. Indeed there was no one else who could be there except the sailors, who weren't, and Rachel, for we were the only passengers.

A light cool wind blew through my hair, and made the little ship ride along very gallantly over the waves. Behind us summer lightning played in the sky; above, a crescent moon and one brilliant star shone out

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through the rigging. The moonshine on the water made a shimmering pathway.

Later on a mist crept over the sea, and turned to fine rain. I went back to bed, and pulled the bed-clothes close up round my ears, for it had grown cooler. Indeed the nearer we got to the equator the cooler it became. On the night before we crossed it I had a hot water bottle, a blanket, a rug, and a groundsheet, and was still cold.

Each day that passed left us more delighted with the ship. It was very small, and spotlessly clean. There were half a dozen cabins, all on deck; a tiny little saloon where, at meal times, Rachel and I used to sit one on each side of the captain, and an electric gramophone with piles of records. There was also a charming stowaway dog that had come aboard at Panama. The crew was composed of the captain, two other officers, an excellent cook, a steward, and a cabin boy, all Germans; and a number of Indian sailors who were rarely seen. It was a cheerful compact little company.

The great thrill of life aboard was caused by a very novel fishing line which was suspended from a bamboo pole at the side of the ship. It had a bell attached to it, so that when a fish was caught it jerked the bamboo, which rang the bell, and the entire ship's company would run excitedly to the spot. One day a very large fish, about five feet long, was landed, and came careering down the deck, to the consternation of the assembled crowd, who scattered in all directions. The stowaway dog, who had been an interested spectator, gave one look, and vanished like

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a streak of lightning; the fish then slipped through the rails into the sea, and was gone.

When we were not fishing we played the gramophone, or chess, or lay on deck in the sun, and listened to the engineer. He was the most talkative person I ever met, but of this he must have been unaware, for he told us continually that the ambition of his life was to live alone on a desert island.

We crossed the Line one morning at ten. That night — our last at sea — there was a terrific thunderstorm. The crashes were deafening, and the brilliant continuous lightning lit up the sea and the distant Andes.

On Friday we entered the mouth of the wide river Guayas. We steamed slowly up it for nearly five hours, looking with interest at the land on either side, and at the pelicans diving for fish and floating placidly on the calm water. The banks on either side of the river were flat, and dotted with cattle, and an occasional low building. Far behind, the great mountains towered above the clouds. It was strange and thrilling to realize that in a few days we should be up among them — they looked so very lofty and remote. When the captain called to us to come and look at Chimborazo, its snow-covered peak was so high up in the sky that we could not believe that it was really a mountain, and attached to the earth until we had looked at it through his binoculars.

Guayaquil was sighted at sunset. As we drew near, all the buildings were lit up with a crimson glow. It looked a fine and imposing town.

The first thing that happened after we landed was that our passports were taken from us, and we were

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told to call for them later with photographs at the police court.

'But when shall we call for them?' we asked in consternation. 'The train for Quito leaves early tomorrow morning.'

'Oh no! it doesn't,' they said. 'It has changed. It leaves on Monday.'

What a continent! we thought.

The suitcases were passed through the customs without much difficulty, and without much noise, we were surprised to find, for we had a vivid recollection of the custom house at Cartagena with its heat, and squash, and general confusion, everyone yelling at the top of his voice. This one was comparatively calm, chiefly, I think, because there was no one to yell, Rachel and I being the only passengers.

The next thing to do was to find an hotel. We consulted the directory, then asked which was the best one in Guayaquil.

'The Imperial,' answered a miserable looking unshaved individual.

The Imperial had a solid, respectable sound, so we thanked him, and directed the porter to proceed there with the luggage. He set off on foot, and as there was no sign of any conveyance, we did the same. The little rat-like man came too, and tried to engage us in conversation.

'Go away,' we said. But he wouldn't. He clung, metaphorically speaking, like a leech. We were beginning to be really annoyed with him when we reached the hotel and found to our surprise that he was the concierge.

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It was an exceedingly unpretentious house, and we hoped it was clean. The manager showed us to a couple of rooms on the second storey, and the luggage was deposited on the various floors. I looked round, and noticed that a door led from my room to another one which was not Rachel's, and that on my side it was unbolted.

'Lock it, please,' I said. Several people tried to do so, but without any success. The manager mopped his brow.

'The signorita need have no fear,' he said. 'This is a most respectable hotel. The *only* respectable hotel in Guayaquil.'

I said that I was sure it was, but that all the same I liked doors that locked on the inside. So they applied themselves to it with renewed vigour. Not a movement. The bolt was hopelessly rusted. Eventually I became so bored with the hammering and the jabbering in Spanish that I said that it was of no importance.

Again the manager assured me that I need have no fear, for the client on the other side was elderly and law abiding, and had been a friend of his for many years. Small recommendation, I thought, but said no more about it. When he had gone Rachel and I dragged a chest of drawers in front of it and then went down to dinner.

It took place in a large room — bar, office, hall and dining-room combined. We tried all the things on the menu to see what they were in English. Some of them were quite good.

The following morning we went to the shipping office to inquire when a ship was returning to Panama.

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One went a week later, which would have allowed us time to go to Quito, see it, and return to Guayaquil, but it touched at every little port on the way, and did not reach Panama until long after we should have had to leave for Trinidad.

Then we tried the office of the Scadta Air Line, and before we came out of it we had decided to fling discretion and a great deal of money to the winds, to fly along the Pacific from Guayaquil to Buenaventura, to make our way into the interior to Bogota, to remain there for a couple of days, then fly over the northern Andes to the Caribbean coast, and there pick up a ship bound for Trinidad. In this way a large amount of ground could be covered that could not, in any other way, be covered under several months.

We had also made friends with the manager, who put his launch at our disposal, and invited us to come out in it any time that suited us.

‘Could you take us somewhere where we could see a reduced head?’ we asked.

He pulled open the drawer of the table at which he was sitting, and took out a parcel, unwrapped it, and there was a head. All the features were perfect, and the head — that of an old man — was reduced to a quarter its natural size. It was less gruesome and unpleasant than might be supposed, because it did not really give the impression of ever having been part of a person.

I asked how he had come by it, and he said that it had been given to him by a friend who travelled extensively in the interior, and who had procured it from an Indian belonging to one of the head-hunting tribes.

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'Heads are becoming quite expensive nowadays,' he said, 'especially white ones. This friend of mine has seen a very fine specimen of a reduced white missionary. That would be worth a good deal.'

We asked whether these tribes infested any parts of the country through which we were likely to pass on our way to Quito, and he said that they sometimes came to trade at a place called Banös, which could be reached by taking a car from Riobamba to Quito, and making a slight detour. The place, he added, was worth visiting for other reasons, one being that it was beautiful, and another that it had hot springs and a waterfall which eventually turned into the river Amazon. So we determined to go there.

The whole afternoon was devoted to having our photographs taken and retrieving our passports from the police court.

We spent Sunday very pleasantly with an agreeable young man from the shipping office to whom we had a letter of introduction from V.H. He showed us the sights and came out with us in the launch, and in the evening he took us to a cinema and supper. Next morning soon after five he called for us at our hotel and saw us, with our rucksacks (for we had left the suitcases behind), into the train for Quito.

We spent twelve hours in the train which wound its way up into the mountains through the most wonderful country I had ever seen. Great forests, rivers, gorges, plains, volcanoes — the beauty and grandeur of Ecuador defies description, and unlike the majority of people who make use of the expression, I shall not immediately proceed to try and describe it.

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There were two well-dressed South American women in the carriage who were a constant source of interest and astonishment to us, for although they must, by their labels, have been travelling together for some time, they were so engrossed in each other that they never even glanced out of the window at the much more remarkable wonders of nature that were passing before their eyes. Rachel and I thought it extremely odd.

At a station called Riobamba, over nine thousand feet up in the mountains, the train came to a standstill, and disgorged its contents, most of whom found their way into the hotel near the railway station.

We had taken the precaution of wiring for rooms from Guayaquil and were most thankful that we had done so, for people were being turned away by the dozen. While I was standing in the hall, warming myself at the stove, I saw the elder of the two strange women in the train approaching me with the look in her eye that betokens an introduction. No doubt she was one of the unwary ones who had neglected to engage a room, and might even, on the strength of having travelled for twelve hours in a carriage with me, be going to suggest that she shared mine.

This would not do at all, I felt, so I bolted, and remained in the safety of my room until a waiter knocked at the door and presented me with a visiting card, on which was written in Spanish the name of someone I had never heard of in my life.

I went downstairs full of curiosity, and found a young man in the hall. He introduced himself in very good English, and said that his friend of the Air Line

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in Guayaquil had wired to him announcing our arrival, and that he and another friend, who was waiting outside in the car, would be only too delighted to do anything they could to make our stay agreeable.

I went upstairs and fetched Rachel, and he went outside and fetched his friend, and we all had dinner together, and after it was over they took us out in their car to see the sights.

It was exceedingly cold out of doors, and we were unprepared, so when the first young man suggested that we should go to his house and dance to the gramophone, we all thought it an excellent idea.

A short drive brought us there. We went in, and while we rolled up the rugs, and looked through the records, our host disappeared into the kitchen and came back with food and many bottles of drink.

We had a delightful evening. One of the men turned out to be an admirable tango dancer. We danced and danced, and drank each others' healths, and danced again until the clock on the mantelpiece struck three, and we felt that it was time to go home, for we had had a long day in the train and the prospect of a long day on the road. A car had been ordered, and was to be at the hotel at nine o'clock next morning. Our lunch, too, in the form of sandwiches, was to be ready in the hall at the same time.

When the morning came we felt that there was only one really desirable thing on earth, and that was for us to go on being in bed, but we knew that it would not do, so we got up and dressed, put back our night attire and toothbrushes into the rucksacks, and went down to breakfast. After breakfast we paid the bill

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and put new films into the cameras, and then it was time to start.

We started. The young men of the preceding night had come to see us off and to exact promises that we would wire them the date and time of our return. Very soon they vanished in a cloud of dust. So did the hotel. So, after an appreciable time, did Riobamba. The sun streamed down; the sky was unbelievably blue. It was a gorgeous day! And the scenery! Rachel and I sat in our car — rather a grand one, but unfortunately closed — and gasped. Never had we seen anything so exhilaratingly beautiful. We were ten thousand feet up, and still mounting. The light was as clear and as dancingly bright as it always is in high places. Tall eucalyptus trees and crooked telegraph poles lined the roadway; gaily dressed Indians riding on horses, or leading their laden donkeys passed us by, and once we met a very old woman trudging along the road with an immense bundle of brushwood on her back. Her face was lined and impassive. She pursued her way unquestioningly, looking neither to the left nor to the right.

‘Strange,’ I thought as I watched her. ‘I am so intensely aware of you at this moment, with your curious hat, and your worn face, and your bundle of wood. Yet in a few seconds you will be gone . . . You are here . . . and you are not here . . . How can this be? . . .’

I pondered this interesting but insoluble problem until we turned a corner, and Rachel gave evidence that she at any rate was there by prodding me with her elbow.

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'Do look!' she said, pointing straight ahead. 'That must be Chimborazo!'

It was, and we realized that in a short time we should be driving over its slopes. Perhaps, I thought, with some excitement, we shall be able to touch the snow. But Rachel said that she doubted it, and that the lowest point was probably higher than it looked. From previous experience I knew that this was often true.

Quite suddenly we stopped, and the driver began searching anxiously in his pockets and in the pockets of the car. We asked what the matter was.

'I am afraid,' he said, 'that I have left behind in Riobamba a most important key. It has locked the dickey in which are the spare tins of petrol and the tools. I dare not go on without it.'

So back we went to Riobamba, and when we got there the driver found the key in a distant pocket that he had overlooked. Another hour elapsed before we were back at the place where the loss was discovered, and as we had already admired the scenery we now gave our full attention to the Indians we passed on the road.

They were short, and both the men and the women (who were sometimes indistinguishable) looked strong and healthy. The men wore brightly coloured ponchos and sheepskin trousers or long skirts. Many had pigtails hanging down their backs. The women were usually dressed in heavy voluminous skirts, and each one had on several vivid shawls. Both men and women wore curious hats with upturned brims. Whether they were made of straw or felt we were not close enough to ascertain.



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I should like to know the origin of these hats. Did the Incas wear them, and if so, why? Are they designed with these strange brims in order to carry things in them, or for what the Chinese call 'Looksee', or as inverted umbrellas to keep off the rain . . . But this cannot be the reason, we decided, as we reached and passed the place of the lost key, for surely it never rains in Ecuador!

We reached Banös at one, having spent an interesting, but not entirely agreeable hour crossing the slopes of Chimborazo. At this point the road was 14,000 feet high, so the driver told us, and the result of the height was that it became bitterly cold, and all my teeth began separately to ache. An icy wind blew round the car, and the ash and particles of lava from the volcanoes got in through the cracks of the windows and made us choke. We then remembered that our friends in Riobamba had told us that it was on account of this that all the cars are closed.

We saw some Indians road-making. They were all heavily wrapped up, and their houses looked like haystacks. The women and many of the men who were not working on the road walked along carrying and working a kind of distaff. They seemed happy and amiable, and smiled at us as we passed.

Shortly after leaving Chimborazo behind us we turned off the main road to Quito and followed the road to Banös. In spite of having only recently been made, the surface was extremely uneven; however, we were glad of it in any state, for had we wished to reach Banös a few months earlier we should have had to pick our perilous way along a bridle path.

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Some five miles beyond Banös we came to a place called Agoyan, and incidentally, the end of the road. Here we alighted with our parcel of lunch, and sent the car back to Banös, telling the driver to feed himself, and return in an hour's time.

And now for lunch! We selected a convenient place in the sun and out of the wind, sat down on the ground, and opened the lunch parcel. It was a pleasant moment, for we were exceedingly hungry.

First came rolls (not very interesting), then bananas, then two bottles of beer . . . But where were the egg sandwiches?

'Surely,' I said to Rachel, and Rachel to me, 'you remembered to order the egg sandwiches!'

We were quite sure that we had, and we were right, for the rolls, on inspection, were found to have fried eggs wedged into them.

We ate, and when we had eaten our fill, and had lain for a while digesting it, we got up and went to explore the neighbourhood.

The huge fall about which we had heard from the man at the Scadta office was a magnificent sight, dashing headlong into a gorge many hundreds of feet below. We took a number of photographs of it, and of ourselves, and then we continued along the road, and climbed a precipitous path into the mountains to see if we could catch sight of a head hunter. But there wasn't a sign of one. There wasn't a sign of anything but rocks and peaks, and the path was very steep, so we climbed down again, and as we reached the road a little cavalcade of Indians appeared round a bend.

They made a remarkable and beautiful picture, this

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brilliant little crowd, against the sombre background of the mountains, and we would have liked to photograph them, but refrained, in case they should consider it impolite:

Rachel called my attention to the large bales slung athwart the backs of the donkeys.

‘Do you suppose,’ she suggested, ‘that they might contain reduced heads?’

I looked at them with a new interest, and was instantly struck by something else.

‘Rachel,’ I said with some anxiety, ‘do you feel all right?’

‘Perfectly,’ she replied, ‘why?’

‘Well, do I seem to you to be in a normal condition?’

She said with less certainty that I was much as usual.

— ‘But why?’ she asked again, ‘what’s the matter?’

‘Look at those donkeys, and if you don’t see something very peculiar about them, I’ve drunk too much beer.’

‘Good heavens!’ she exclaimed, ‘you are right! . . . There *is* something odd about them. . . . I don’t believe they are donkeys at all . . . They have got woolly coats. . . .’

‘And what a haughty, disagreeable expression!’

‘Perhaps they are young camels . . .’

‘Can’t be. Camels aren’t found in South America, and anyway these creatures haven’t got humps.’

‘What on earth can they be?’

We both felt that we had seen them before — but where?

And then it began to dawn on us . . . Little carts . . . The zoo . . .

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'They're llamas!' we exclaimed simultaneously, 'that's what they are!'

Llamas! This was the most interesting thing that had happened to us since we started out on our travels. Llamas, so to speak, in the raw, and being used, too, quite casually as beasts of burden!

'Did you know that llamas came from South America?'

Rachel admitted that she didn't — 'But I might have,' she said, 'because of the rhyme:

"The llamas that grew on the plains of Peru".'

I repeated it to myself. It didn't sound quite right. However, it wasn't worth arguing about. We watched them until they had passed out of sight, then returned to the luncheon place expecting to find the car waiting for us. But there was nothing there.

Time comes to mean very little in South America, but when two and a half hours had gone by and there was still no sign of the car, we began to think that the driver must have driven over a precipice or be carousing in a bar. Either contingency was unpleasant, for here were we, two lone young females, in a remote mountain pass, surrounded, we felt increasingly sure, by hordes of unpleasant head hunters, who would, as soon as darkness fell, spring out from behind rocks and make a mess of us, and our sole means of protection were the empty beer bottles; we were even bereft of the dictionary, for it had been left in the car. It was a most awkward situation.

'What a pity,' said Rachel, 'that you never managed to finish making that will of yours.'

I was annoyed at this because she had made the

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same joke several times before, and it was never a very good one even before it began to wear thin.

‘And what a pity you didn’t profit by your Girl Guide motto, and remember to take the dictionary out of the car.’

Rachel was annoyed at that because of the way I said ‘Girl Guide’. A silence ensued, which was finally broken by the blessed sound of the horn, and our long lost car dashed round the corner. It was a relief to see it, but rather annoying to be compelled to wait until we had got in and extracted the dictionary from the rucksack before we could mark our displeasure with the driver and inquire why he had remained away for three hours instead of one. He said — probably untruly — that something had gone wrong with the brakes, and that he had had to have it put right.

I cannot remember much about the rest of the way to Quito except that it was all very beautiful and striking — so striking that at one place on a plateau we got out of the car to take photographs of Cotopaxi, which stands, like Fujiyama, grandly apart from its fellows.

‘Do you realize,’ I said to Rachel, ‘that you are looking at one of the highest volcanoes in the world?’

‘Yes,’ she answered, ‘I do, and look what’s behind you.’

I turned, and saw that a crowd of cattle, any one of which might turn out to be a bull, was approaching through a gap in the hedge. So I jumped hastily into the car and told the man to drive on. And that is why the only good photograph of Cotopaxi was taken with Rachel’s camera.

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We reached Quito late that night in a thunder-storm. We were stiff, and rather irritable with tiredness, and longing to see — for a short time at least — the last of one another, so that when we were told that the only accommodation left in the hotel was a double bedroom, I stuck in my heels. I would sleep in the passage or the bath, but I would sleep alone.

Seeing that I was adamant the proprietor promised that a bed should be made up in the sitting-room that adjoined the bedroom. We went in and inspected the rooms. There was only one washing basin. Now if there is one thing about which I feel really strongly it is the necessity for separate washing basins. Sharing is both barbarous and unpleasant. And I said so. Here was a real difficulty. All the basins in the hotel were the kind that are fixed into the wall, and that go with Hot and Cold. At last it was arranged that I should use an unoccupied bathroom farther down the passage.

All this time we were standing arguing in the double room, and Rachel was becoming more and more annoyed. She hasn't the same feeling about basins as I have, and she wanted to rest. At last the matter was settled, and we retired, and when we had rested in our separate rooms, and had had hot baths, and joined again for dinner, peace was re-established.

We spent three delightful days in Quito. On the first day we walked about the town and up and down the narrow crowded streets. Strange looking Indians in ponchos and pigtails were there, and Spanish women in black with pieces of lace on their heads. In many of the streets yards of brightly coloured material were hung outside the shops. Rachel and I entered

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most of these shops in order to try and buy me a coloured handkerchief to tie round my neck. 'Tiene usted un gran pañuelos con todo colores?' I would ask over and over again. But they never had.

We found a church with beautiful cloisters leading out of it and were implored by a monk, who came running towards us, to go away at once, as women were not allowed in the monastery. We saw a Jesuit church, the facade of which is covered with elaborate carving; we saw a beautiful old archway. We became very hot and breathless walking up hills, and then, when the sun set we became so cold that we had to return to our hotel and have hot baths.

The sudden change of temperature after sunset is astonishing if you don't expect it. We knew before we went to Quito that it was on the equator and therefore likely to be hot, but we had overlooked the fact that its great height and proximity to snow-covered mountains were equally likely to make it cold as soon as the sun went down.

Next day I had my hair cut, and it led to important developments, for as I sat in the barber's shop on the ground floor of the hotel with a sheet tied round my neck, a large American strode up and seized me warmly by the hand.

'You are American, of course,' he said.

I replied without emphasis that I wasn't.

'Well, never mind. It's all the same. My name is Clarkson, and I would like to present my friend Mr. Alfonzo Cortez, who is anxious to make your acquaintance. Now I must be off — got to catch the train — so long!'

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He departed in the manner of a whirlwind, and I was left with the young man called Mr. Cortez. He bowed.

'Excuse me, Miss,' he said in very tolerable English, 'I see that you are a foreigner, and I am interested to encourage the visits of tourists. I am a Senator — the youngest Senator in Ecuador. Will you do me the honour to permit me to escort you round Quito, and to show you the most interesting things?'

All this time the barber was shearing the back of my head, and I was anxious to see what he was doing, so thinking that it was the quickest way to freedom, I thanked the senator and said that I should be very pleased to see him later, but that at the moment I was engaged.

'I and my friends will call for you after lunch,' he said, and withdrew.

As soon as the barber had done his worst I raced upstairs to Rachel's room.

'What do you suppose has happened?' I asked.

She was writing a letter. 'That you have had your hair cut,' she replied laconically.

'Not at all. I've caught a senator, and he is coming this afternoon to take us out.'

He came and brought with him no fewer than three other young men, one of whom was an American and most attractive. It was he in the end who saw the most of us, for he had a car and used to take us for drives about the town and the surrounding country. He also had the inestimable advantage of being able to speak and understand English. On our last night he drove us to a hillside behind Quito, on which he

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was building a house. It was a moonlit night; the trees stood out dark and mysterious, and the world about us was bathed in loveliness. Later, we drove back to Quito and went to his flat and danced. Before leaving he gave me an Indian picture, painted on skin, and a tin of mixed biscuits. To Rachel he gave a black and red poncho because she had become very cold sitting in the dickey with the senator.

Next morning at eight we boarded the train with many regrets, and started off on the return journey to Riobamba.

The railway took a different route from the road, and the wild scenery through which we passed was unrivalled in splendour. The train stopped at many little wayside stations, and once it stopped where there wasn't any station at all, only a windswept arid plain and a placard which said that we were at an altitude of 11,653 feet above the sea. In spite of the scorching sun it was bitterly cold, and a merciless gale howled round the train. From behind the closed windows we looked at a couple of haystack huts, and an Indian digging a hole in the ground . . . The train went on and they were gone . . . Then at a station called Ambato, laughing brown girls ran along the platform holding up flowers and baskets of fruit. We bought some strawberries and settled down happily to eat them, and when Rachel had devoured four and I only one, she remembered that she had heard of someone who had died of eating strawberries in Sardinia, so we sadly put the basket under the seat and hoped that the harm was not already done.

We reached Riobamba in the evening in time to

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beautify ourselves before going out to dine with the men we had met on the previous visit. During dinner we were joined by two senators (Ecuador, we thought, seems to swarm with senators) and a barrister. Unfortunately none of them could speak English, so we had to converse by means of signs or through an interpreter. They deplored the absence of tourists and asked whether Rachel and I could suggest any way of attracting them.

‘Remove some of your restrictions for visitors,’ we said. ‘Make it less impossible for them to get in.’

‘Alas!’ they replied, ‘that is the one thing we cannot do, for if we did, revolutionaries might get in too.’

We agreed that this would not do at all.

Next morning we rose most unwillingly at a quarter-past five in order to catch the train at six. We caught it, and descended at Guayaquil in the evening. The following morning we rose again at a quarter-past five, and were transported in a launch to a seaplane which was resting on the river. We climbed aboard on to the wing and into the cabin. It was like a little coupé car, just room for four with a squeeze. We were glad to find that we were the only passengers.

We settled ourselves in comfortably; then the propeller began to revolve, the noise of the engine rose to a roar, and we started to move along the water . . . Faster and faster! . . . We seemed to be going at about a thousand miles a minute . . . We were clear of the water . . . No, there it was again . . . Bump . . . bump . . . bump . . . Now we were racing along at an unbelievable speed; the bumps became rarer . . . ceased

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altogether, and we rose into the air. Higher and higher! Now the harbour and the little town of Guayaquil were far below us. We looked back at the mountains from among which we had come, then forward at the grey wastes of the Pacific, and when we turned again there was nothing whatever to be seen but a white mass of clouds, rising bank upon bank. Ecuador had become a memory.

We flew and flew, for hours and hours. Sometimes we flew low, just above the sea, and the pilot would point out schools of porpoises, their shiny rolling backs visible for a moment before they sank again below the surface; and sometimes we flew high above the clouds, and there was nothing to be seen but ourselves and the sky. On these occasions I usually fell asleep.

Near midday we swooped down, and landed on a river in order to drop papers and pick up petrol. The pilot told us that we should not be leaving for half an hour, so that if we would like to land and have a look at the village there was plenty of time to do so.

I cannot remember much about it except that it was all very sunny, and a crowd of negro and Indian children gazed at us with interest as we passed. In some way we became acquainted with a man, who took us to his house, and gave us biscuits and vermouth, and when we went away he gave us another bottle of it to cheer us on our journey.

We walked back to the river, climbed aboard the plane, got into the cabin, slammed the door, and flew away into the sky.

For the next few hours we kept close to the shore. We saw an oil field, stretching like a blight back from

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the coast. It was strangely incongruous, an ugly grimy thing against the untouched majesty of the surrounding country. I looked down at it with distaste. 'Continue your pathetic little busyness,' I thought. 'The land will remain, a grand, indifferent conqueror, long after you have crumbled into dust, and have been swept away as utterly as though you had never been — you nasty, ugly, stupid little disease.' This gave me considerable satisfaction.

We passed over forests and inlets of the sea, and a wild desolate tract of country with rivers winding across its face. We saw strange Indian dwellings built out on the water on rafts and piles; we saw a little ship sailing on the sea.

At five o'clock we landed on the river at Buenaventura, and stepped ashore with relief, for we had been more than ten hours in the air, and felt stiff and cramped. A dozen young Germans met us on the pier, and escorted us up to the aviation club, where we were given tea, and cocktails, and were danced with, and finally taken across the river in a launch and deposited at the Estacion Hotel. We engaged a couple of rooms and retired to them, and when we came down later to the dining-room we found several of the men waiting for us. I think that Rachel and I were something of a novelty, for Buenaventura has few distractions of any sort, and none in the way of white female society. Certainly nothing could have exceeded the warmth of their welcome. We got to bed with difficulty at half-past twelve, and I got out of it with still more difficulty next morning at five. I dressed and packed, and went along the passage to No. 22, which

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was Rachel's room, to see whether she was ready to come down to breakfast.

There was no reply to my knock, so I called to her through the door and asked whether she was dressed and packed, for the train was due to leave in twenty-five minutes.

'Far from being dressed,' she answered in a sleepy voice, 'I am afraid that I am still in bed, because I was insufficiently called and went to sleep again.'

I controlled my indignation. 'Well, you'd better hurry if you want to catch the train that I am going by.'

'Oh! don't you worry, I'll catch it all right. You go down and order breakfast, and pay the bill, and I'll join you in five minutes.'

The astonishing part of the story is that she did.

The train climbed up into the mountains and we gazed with interest out of the window. The scenery was very magnificent, on a vaster scale than Ecuador, though individual peaks there are higher. But we preferred Ecuador. Indeed the longer we remained in Colombia the more we preferred Ecuador. It was so much stranger there, more colourful, and at least a quarter as expensive. We found that for what we paid a *sucre* (a shilling) in Ecuador we paid a dollar in Colombia.

It was depressing to have to get up at five next morning (the fourth morning running), but there was no avoiding it for the train left at six for a place called Armenia. Here, we were told, we should have to alight, as the train went no farther, and drive across the mountains to Ibague. Nobody knew at what time we should get there.

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At six o'clock, therefore, we were settled in the train, with our luggage in the rack and the luncheon basket under the seat. The carriage, like every other carriage we had been in since we came to South America, was of the Pullman variety. Its uncomfortable wooden seats held two, and it was full of chattering, excited Colombians.

Cali is situated on an apparently illimitable plain. It goes on and on. Hours later we were still on it, and showed no sign of ever getting off. There was nothing to be seen in any direction but more plain. 'The Siberian steppes must be something like this,' I thought, and went on to wonder whether it was inhabited, and if the inhabitants resembled Siberians. 'Poor people,' I decided, 'in any case!'

The train stopped at a wayside station and waited there for nearly an hour, and for no other reason, we felt sure, than to annoy the passengers, for there was not a soul to be seen on the platform, and nobody wanted to get out. Had it not been for a *hacienda* and corral standing a hundred yards back from the railway we should have believed the place to be deserted.

The sun streamed hotly down on the roof of the train and in through the windows; flies buzzed lazily against the panes of glass . . . the passengers slept. . . .

I went to the door of the carriage and looked out at the plain. What tranquillity! What unbounded freedom! A bell clanged faintly; in the distance someone was playing upon a flute. The sounds rose isolated and significantly out of the desolation. It was beautiful — beautiful.

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Once again I felt, as I had felt when I was in the Sahara, an overwhelming sense of rightness — a rapturous consummation. Where the landscape is broken by trees, rocks, hills, the attention is distracted. You admire, or you do not. In either case — unless the admiration is so great as to obscure everything else, you are conscious of an irritation with these details that get between you and the something you must reach. They are small agitating objects, you feel, powerless and unimportant, that you could easily demolish if you were to take the trouble. Only when you are alone on a desert with nothing about you but the flat earth and the sky, do you feel this rightness, and with it a rising exhilaration, a sense of abiding peace, for here at last is the ultimate reality. You have done with refuge and protection, with the fearful hugging of illusion; you are face to face with that which you dreaded as emptiness, and the strange thing is that you are not appalled at its immensity; you are not even afraid, for rising strong over everything else is the knowledge of its essential rightness, and of the rightness of the relation between you and it.

The train gave a lurch, and we were off again, and when we had left the plain behind us and had wandered up into the mountains for a couple of hours, the railway line reached its conclusion and we got out.

My recollections of Armenia are hazy. The principal things that stand out are oxen toiling up the street; a house with a dark steep staircase, where we had lunch, and a proprietress who astonishingly spoke German.

After lunch we entered the car, and started to climb

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higher into the mountains. The scenery was more magnificent than ever; vast mountain sides covered with forests; valleys and ravines so profound that you could barely see to the bottom. At one part of the drive we went very high indeed and were conscious of a feeling of pride, but on consideration I do not think that it can have been as high as the slopes of Chimborazo, because my teeth did not ache. We reached Ibague after dark, and that night an appalling thing happened — we discovered that we had lost the suitcases.

It happened in this way. At Armenia there were very few cars and a great many people to go in them. Rachel and I secured places for ourselves, but there was no room for the luggage. 'Never mind,' said the driver, 'I will put them in the van' (he indicated it) 'and they will reach Ibague as soon as we do.' He put them in, and that was the last we saw of them. At dinner they had still not arrived. We agreed as to a puncture and refused to be agitated. A young American came up while we were eating and said that he had been in the train — or trains — with us ever since Buenaventura, and introduced himself on the strength of it. After dinner we all three went to the cinema to see a South American film, because we thought that it might take our minds off the suitcases and because I had heard that South American films were sometimes very improper. But this one wasn't. It was the dullest and most expurgated film I ever saw, and we left in disgust at midnight, long before the end.

On the way back to the hotel we asked our new

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acquaintance whether we were right in supposing that the train left for Bogota next morning at six. He said that it did, and we sighed resignedly. Did he think that the suitcases would be at the hotel when we got back? ('Half a crown,' I promised St. Anthony, 'if they are.')

But they weren't, and now our agitation knew no bounds. Fools that we had been, we thought (each thinking that the other had been a greater fool), to have left them out of our sight in so savage a country as Colombia! If we went to Bogota next morning without them we should certainly never see them again. If, on the other hand, we waited for the next train (days later), we should miss the aeroplane, and miss the boat, and heaven only knew when we should reach civilization. (By this time we thought of British Guiana as civilization.) The situation was as bad as it could be. Rachel and I were agreed as to that. We sat on the edge of my bed, and so great was our perturbation that we consumed the whole tin of mixed biscuits that the American in Quito had given me without even noticing that we were eating them. I was in a worse case than Rachel, for I had no pyjamas and no sponge bag; nothing, in fact, but my diary and the flit gun. We vowed that if we got the suitcases back we would never let them out of our sight for a single second, and I privately raised St. Anthony another two and six, making the offer five shillings in all.

At last we went miserably to bed, and, though we did not expect it, to sleep, for the next thing I knew was that I was being wakened by the vigorous calling of the

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maid. I woke to a poisoned world — something disagreeable had happened — what could it be? And then I remembered, and immediately sat bolt upright in bed.

‘Rachel!’ I called through the wall, ‘I can’t remember the word for suitcase. Ask if they have arrived.’

There was a pause, then conversation, then another pause. Presumably the maid had gone to find out. A few minutes later she returned with the joyful news that the suitcases had come and were standing in the hall.

It was a most blessed relief. We rushed across the patio to make sure that they were there. They were. We roused the porter but elicited very little information from him. They had been left, he said crossly, by a man. No explanation was given and to this day we do not know how and where they spent the night, or in what company. It was enough for us that the locks had evidently withstood any assaults that might have been made on them by persons with dishonourable intentions. There is a lot, we decided, to be said for locks.

Twelve hours later we were in Bogota.

‘What shall we do to-morrow?’ we asked each other as we parted for the night.

‘We won’t get up at five o’clock,’ we answered in unison; nor did we.

It is strange that details should stick in the memory and important matters fade away like a dream. I have looked Bogota up in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and I see that it has ‘handsomely laid out plazas ornamented with gardens and statuary’, and that

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'streams of cool fresh water from the mountains run through its streets'. But I do not remember a thing about it except that there was a most amusing South American family, man, wife and daughter, in our hotel, who sat near us in the dining-room and afforded us the liveliest entertainment.

The wife and husband were elderly, she dark and stout and beetle-browed, he melancholy and down-trodden. The daughter was quiescent because she was extremely young, but showed signs of taking after her mother in later life.

I have read somewhere that in Latin countries — particularly Spain and Italy — women never question male supremacy. It may be so, but the more I see of elderly Latin women the harder I find it to believe. In this particular case the woman did not question her husband's supremacy. She simply took her own for granted. The wretched man could barely call his soul his own. He was browbeaten and bullied, ordered here and there, told what he must eat and what he could not. On one occasion she whisked a dish away from under his very nose and he looked as if he were going to cry.

On the evening before our departure (we remained in Bogota three days) we received notices from the police requesting our passports and two photographs apiece. It was altogether too annoying. We had already been pestered at Cartagena and had wasted a great many hours on tiresome officials. In addition to this I had mislaid the spare photographs, so we decided to risk imprisonment and run away; and this we did by train on the following afternoon.

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In the evening we reached an odious, pestiferous little hole on the Magdalena river and spent there one of the most unpleasant nights of my life. The hotel was dark, airless, and dirty, and the heat was intense. I did not attempt to get into bed that night — it was far too risky — so I spread my ground sheet on the floor and lay on that. Very early next morning we paid the bill and thankfully departed.

The aeroplane was waiting for us, but before we climbed into it our two small suitcases and rucksacks were weighed and we were asked to pay seventy-four *pesos* (nearly sixteen pounds) on excess weight. Considering the fact that we had already paid twenty-five pounds each for our tickets, this last extortion was altogether and in every sense too much. But there was nothing for it but to pay, for on one side lay last night's hotel, and on the other Bogota and the police.

At exactly six o'clock we soared up into the air. As usual Rachel and I were the only passengers, and glad we were of it, for very soon after we had started it began to be bumpy and I was afraid that I was going to be sick. I told the pilot so and asked whether he could do anything about it.

'I will fly higher,' he shouted over his shoulder; did so, and all was well.

That flight was dearly bought, but it was certainly a wonderful experience. The sun came up over the Andes while we flew above them. Beneath us stretched the wildest and most desolate country imaginable.

During the morning we landed on the river and changed into a smaller plane. Then up we flew again, higher and higher. The earth lay far beneath us, with

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innumerable rivers winding over its face. Soon after one o'clock we sighted Barranquilla, and in the distance the Caribbean Sea; and dropped practically straight down from over seven thousand feet to sea level. As we came down I put my hand out of the window and felt the cold air becoming warm and then hot as we swooped on to the water and finally came to rest near the pier.

We climbed out of the aeroplane in a dazed condition. We were stiff, and for the first few minutes completely deaf, but we soon recovered. V.H. had come to meet us and escorted us up to the hotel, where we spent the remainder of the day resting and telling each other of all the adventures that had befallen us since last we met. (Rachel and I were annoyed to learn that we had only just missed a little revolution, which had been happening in Barranquilla until the day before our arrival. Guns had gone off, and the streets, if not exactly swimming in blood, were at least highly unsafe for walking purposes.)

The ensuing week had its moments, but they were rare and almost entirely spoilt by the fact that I suddenly developed a violent cold in the head and felt exceedingly ill and bad tempered.

On Tuesday morning we rose at four-thirty and flew down to Santa Marta on the coast. It is the oldest town in South America, and no doubt I should have found it interesting if I had been able to do anything but lie miserably on a hard, shiny, horsehair sofa in the little hotel, while Rachel and V.H. went to the shipping office and bought our tickets to Trinidad.

The ship sailed in the afternoon. We went aboard,

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and stood for a while on deck and watched the bananas being shipped until the siren gave a warning blow, and V.H. went ashore and stood solitarily on the pier, waving his handkerchief until we disappeared into the horizon.

It is sometimes said of banana boats that the only passengers who receive any attention are the bananas, but I found this to be quite untrue. The ship could not have been better run or more comfortable, and the steward and stewardess, who, fortunately, had both been hospital nurses, were unusually kind and attentive.

My cold became worse and worse. My head throbbed, my eyes stung, my throat was sore, I felt sick, and deaf, and every bone in my body ached. I doubted whether I should live. However, after three days at sea, and in bed, I began to feel a little better, and when we reached Trinidad on the afternoon of the fourth day, I got up, and found that the cold had gone.

It was strange to see the harbour of Trinidad once more, remembering all the places we had seen since we left it, and it was with a certain melancholy that we realized as we stepped ashore that our experiences on the Spanish Main had come to an end.

CHAPTER III

THE ISLANDS

WE landed; and when we had collected the heavy luggage from the customs, we put it on a donkey cart, and proceeded to the office of the Dutch Line. Here we found the kit bag, which we put on the donkey cart with the luggage, and went on to the bank, where we found a cable from Georgetown saying that a good deal still remained to be done in the matter of fixing up the expedition, and that there was no need for us to hurry. There were also a number of letters for both of us, including a writ for Rachel. We stuffed them into our pockets and continued up the main street, out of the town and on to the Savannah, and looked about us. It was our first really tropical looking island, and we were both delighted with it.

The sun shone out of a cloudless sky; palm trees swayed gently in the light wind, birds with brilliant plumage chattered gaily among the branches, and the world was bright with oleanders, hibiscus, poncianas and pride of Barbados.

'This,' we thought, 'is heaven! Why does anyone ever live anywhere but in the tropics?' which brought to our minds the more or less important fact that we, at the moment, had nowhere at all to live, as every hotel was full.

We searched directories, and discovered that a certain Mrs. Sparrow kept a boarding house. Accordingly I rang her up on the telephone.

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A voice, obviously belonging to a coloured person, answered.

‘Are you Mrs. Sparrow?’ I asked.

‘No,’ it replied, ‘I am Mrs. Sparrow’s mother.’

‘And you keep a boarding house?’

‘Ye-es,’ rather hesitatingly.

‘Well, do you happen to have two single rooms disengaged?’

She said she had, so off we went, followed by the donkey cart piled high with our twenty pieces of luggage.

The car stopped in front of a charming house set in a garden. We got out and rang the bell. No answer, so we rang again, and as there was still no answer we entered. There in the dining-room sat an invalid lady. We asked politely whether Mrs. Sparrow was at home.

She looked at us with suspicion, and said that Mrs. Sparrow was out.

‘Is Mrs. Sparrow’s mother in?’

She looked at us with increasing suspicion and said ‘No.’

‘Odd! I have just been speaking to her on the telephone, and she told me that she had two single rooms free. Is this by any chance a boarding house?’

Yes, it was a boarding house, the lady replied, and added that she could not understand how Mrs. Sparrow could have said that she had two single rooms free, as she, the lady, knew for a positive fact that she, Mrs. Sparrow, had not. There were only six rooms altogether, and they were all full of people who were quite likely to remain there for ever.’

I was amazed, and so was Rachel.

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The lady had meanwhile decided that we were knowable, and became full of helpful suggestions. She told us that Mrs. Sparrow had gone into the town to buy vegetables. We therefore looked out, and rang up every vegetable shop in Port of Spain, and at last we tracked her down.

This time an entirely different voice answered. It claimed, however, to belong to Mrs. Sparrow. She said that she could not understand the situation as she had no vacant rooms, but that she would return immediately. So we sat down and waited.

In a short time she appeared, young, charming, and no more coloured than I am. We shook hands.

'You say that I spoke to you on the telephone and told you that I had two rooms vacant?' she asked.

'No,' I replied, 'it was your mother . . .'

'But I have no mother,' she said, completely mystified, 'and I assure you that I have spoken to nobody about rooms this morning.'

We were all amazed. But undoubtedly she was speaking the truth, and there was her veranda literally stacked with our luggage. To further complicate matters, Rachel's bottle of coco-nut oil had leaked all through Clemenceau's autobiography on to the floor.

Everyone was full of apologies, she for not having rooms, we for the oil, the luggage, and for causing a disturbance. Then we all said, 'Not at all,' and relapsed into a gloomy silence. Really the idea of starting out all over again in the grilling sunshine to search for rooms was too fatiguing. By now it was the middle of the day, and everyone knows that there is only one

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thing to be done with the middle of a tropical day, and that is to go to sleep and forget all about it.

Mrs. Sparrow had an idea.

'Look here,' she suggested, 'why don't you go back to the Palace Hotel and see whether they have any rooms now. The ship has been in well over three hours, and some of the people who booked rooms may not have turned up. But if they have, I have got a room here without any furniture in it. If you could procure a couple of camp beds we could easily put them up there.'

We thanked her, and went back to the hotel. Sure enough several persons had not turned up, and the manager produced two dingy and depressing rooms at the back. Their disadvantages were instantly apparent, but not all their disadvantages. There was a steam laundry opposite that roared as it washed, and poured a cloud of smuts in through the open window (if you shut it you stifled), there was a turkey farm immediately below, and my mosquito curtain had holes in it.

But it was the turkeys that finally drove us out. All day long they kept up a ceaseless gobbling. Before many days had passed I had learned one fact about turkeys. It is this. Their ardour does not, in common with other warm blooded creatures, rise in the evening. It is at its height at five-thirty a.m. They prove it regularly, conclusively, and all together, and the uproar must be heard to be believed.

Rachel strolled into my room a few mornings after our arrival.

'Noticed the turkeys?' she asked.

'Oh no! Have you got a map of the world?'

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She, who always has everything, had one, so we spread it out on the floor. We discovered Trinidad, then a dot in the ocean to the north of it.

Inquiries showed it to be an island called Tobago. A boat, so we were told by those who should know, sailed to it once a week, on Saturdays, and came back once in days, sometimes on Mondays, and sometimes not.

It was believed by many to be the island on which Robinson Crusoe was stranded. Nobody much else seemed to have been there, but it was said to have excellent bathing, and to be uninfested, at any rate with tourists.

So there we went, and I strongly advise anyone in search of a quiet, little visited, and very charming island to go there too. But before going let him make very sure that the Saturday on which he proposes to leave Trinidad is the one on which the boat goes direct, because it only does this on alternate weeks. On those that are not alternate it goes a way that is very indirect indeed.

More by good luck than good management we started off on the right Saturday, and reached Tobago many hours later in a battered condition.

The instant we landed we were surrounded by a crowd of vociferating natives with cars for hire, each one shouting that he and his car were cheaper, more reliable, and generally superior to the car and person of his neighbour.

We selected the quietest, and started off for our destination, which was a place called Speyside on the north of the island.

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Very soon all memories of past distress were forgotten in delight at our surroundings. Through groves of coco-nut palms we went, past little native villages basking contentedly in the sunshine, by unfrequented coves, up into the mountains. The road twisted and turned, and at each turn a new and still more marvellous view burst upon our astonished gaze. Far below lay the sea, crystal clear, serenely smiling, and looking for all the world as though it did not know what it was to be anything else.

Our enthusiasm began to know no bounds, and if either of us had been addicted to clutching we would certainly have clutched.

‘If Trinidad,’ we exclaimed, ‘was Heaven (till it was marred by the turkeys), what can this be?’

The question was never decided, for at that moment the car came to a standstill and the driver got out.

‘What is the matter?’ we asked.

‘Speyside,’ he replied, being a man of few words, and indicating a very steep hill before us which appeared to go on for ever.

‘Couldn’t you drive a bit nearer the house?’

He was busy unstrapping the luggage.

‘No,’ he replied. ‘Path too narrow, no place to turn.’

Then he blew two piercing blasts on the horn and started off on foot up the hill with a suitcase in either hand. As we had no other choice but to remain sitting in the car, and this plan seemed likely to lead nowhere, we got out and followed him.

An unexpected bend in the path revealed the house — we were relieved — and a woman hurrying towards us.

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We explained that we had arrived and hoped that she had received the wire asking for rooms.

Yes, she had received the wire all right, but being unable to ascertain from it whether we were men or women had taken it that we were men and put us in the 'bachelors' quarters'.

The bachelors' quarters, she said, pointing acutely down hill, were there. Did we mind sleeping out of the main house, and by ourselves.

Of course we didn't mind. We were delighted; and when we saw the bachelors' quarters we were more delighted still.

A large shed had been slightly glorified, and partitioned off into several rooms, the doors of which opened on to a wide veranda. In it was a hammock, a large table, chairs, and a gramophone. Beyond it lay the sea, so close that in the mornings very early I used to roll straight out of bed into it, and I always had an uncomfortable feeling that some fine day an enterprising shark might roll straight out of it into my bed, which would have been disconcerting for both of us, particularly for me. But I anticipate. We are still being shown into our rooms by Miss Johnson the manageress. She indicates the way the shutters work, tells us that dinner in the main house is at eight, and breakfast in the shed whenever we want it. Then trusting that we will be comfortable, departs. I have noticed that one room is slightly larger than the other, and has two windows, so placing my hat, bag, and walking stick firmly on the bed I nobly offer the room to Rachel, which she, with even greater nobility, declines. Our driver is paid and dismissed, and we go

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outside to explore. From the shed there is a pathway leading down through the palm trees to a delightful little beach. We pick our way through fallen coco-nuts on to the silver sand, strewn about with tropical shells. The late afternoon sun striking the sea makes myriads of diamonds. Little waves wash gently on the shore.

‘Let us instantly,’ we exclaim, ‘bathe! — Or rather let us have tea first, and then bathe.’

So we had tea, and bathed, and rested, and dressed, and went up to dinner; and on the way I encountered two frogs of vast dimension that squatted in the middle of the path, and would not move. They reminded me of the fairy tale about the Frog Prince. Indeed it was all very like a fairy tale. The night was alive with unaccustomed sounds, and odorous with unaccustomed scents. Fireflies darted about like jewels, and the full moon shone down on a silver world.

I lay awake for hours that night, perhaps because of the strangeness of hearing the sea breaking on the shore. From the other side of the partition came a smothered exclamation.

‘Are you awake, Rachel?’ I called gently.

‘Yes,’ she answered, ‘I am, and there is an army of ants walking across my pillow.’

I suggested some remedy which presumably she found successful for there was silence once more.

Outside the wind sighed in the trees; the frogs croaked their last and were still. I lay and thought of a number of things, grave and gay — turned from one side to the other — and the hours went by. It was really too bad that everyone but me should be sleeping — unfair.

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'I say, Rachel!' I called out through the partition. 'Are you awake?'

She slept. I heard her sleep.

Time went on passing until the sky began to pale in the east. Clearly something drastic must be done. I decided to go for a walk, so I slipped on a pair of tennis shoes and went out into the night. I walked several times round the shed, then down to the deserted beach, and stood there for a long time listening to the surf breaking endlessly on the shore, while the stars became fainter and fainter, and another day began to spread gradually over the world.

Strange, that greyness of the early dawn — the utter stillness. In the far distance a cock crows.

I returned to the shed in an awed and subdued frame of mind and decided to make my will. To this end a pencil and several sheets of foolscap paper were procured, and I sat down at the table on the veranda.

'This is the last will and testament of —' How hard and uncomfortable the chair was! I might just as well make my will in the hammock. Into the hammock I went; and was awakened some time later by the entrance of Suzannah, the black maid, bearing on her head something that looked like a small coffin. The sun streamed in through every chink and cranny of the shed. Suzannah deposited the coffin, removed the lid, and out came scrambled eggs, coffee, toast, butter, marmalade, and a bunch of freshly picked bananas.

'Wake up Rachel!' I called out 'It is morning! I am up! And breakfast is on the table!'

One day we were told that an island near by had Birds of Paradise on it.

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We therefore ordered that a rowing boat should be manned and ready shortly after lunch, and down we went, at the appointed time, with cameras, to the shore.

The sea was rough, and the boat could not come close to the shore because it would, if it had, have been swamped by waves. Instead, a large black pirate stood waiting with arms akimbo, and announced that he would carry us (one by one) to the boat.

We told him that we did not think that he would enjoy it, as neither of us were feather weights, but he assured us that on the contrary he would enjoy it very much indeed, and that as far as weight was concerned, he was the strongest man — throwing out his chest — on the island, and frequently carried fat elderly men; from which I gathered that the Bird of Paradise Island had been visited before, and that the sea between it and us was often rough, for although I knew that strange things happen, I could hardly believe that he carried fat elderly men about for fun.

Rough to-day it certainly was. Mountainous waves towered on every side, portions of them soaking us to the skin. I was furious, because I felt sick, and quite sure that we would be drowned. A fierce and swift current successfully prevented the boat from progressing more than an inch an hour.

However we did at last reach the island, and stopped, as we had started, some ten yards from the shore.

The pirate stepped into the water, and waited with outstretched arms to receive us, but as it was impossible to become any wetter than we already were, and as the



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mild aversion to being touched which I have at the best of times is magnified a thousandfold when times are not of the best, I declined his offer and waded ashore by myself. Rachel, I believe, did the same, but as I did not look back, I cannot be certain.

The voyage out had been unpleasant enough, but that which came after was so unutterably more unpleasant that everything else by comparison faded into insignificance.

The Bird of Paradise Island rose a sheer thousand feet out of the sea, and was covered all over with dense tropical vegetation, each separate bit being covered all over with thorns.

The pirate led the way, pretending to clear a path with his machette. Rachel followed, then me.

Up, and up, and up we charged and stumbled. Every time I started ordering him to stop while I breathed, he merely put his finger to his lips.

'Sh!' he whispered, 'you will frighten the birds!'

At last we reached the top. I was outraged, exhausted, and hotter than I had ever been in my life. And were we rewarded by a sight of these birds? We were not. There was nothing whatever to be seen but more bushes with thorns on them, trees, and a little patch of distant sky.

'Well,' I asked bitterly, 'where are your birds?'

'Wait,' he said, 'they will come.'

We waited, and in about half an hour's time he clutched my arm.

'Look!' he breathed into my ear, 'the *birds!*'

I looked, and saw nothing but what I had seen before: bushes with thorns on them, trees, and a little

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patch of distant sky. He pointed to the top of a high tree, the branches of which appeared to be rustling. A very small patch of colour might have been a tail feather. 'Do you mean That?' I asked, forgetting in my contempt to whisper, and startled at the unaccustomed sound, they all flew away.

The pirate looked reproachful, but there was nothing to be done. The birds had flown, and were most unlikely to come back again for some time. Anyway neither Rachel nor I wished to remain there any longer, so in silence we went back by the way we had come, only this time it was less painful, because the climb, instead of being up, was down, and the wind and tide — once we were back on the sea — instead of being against us were with us. So that in a comparatively short space of time we were on the mainland once more, tired, torn, but at rest. And that, we observed, thinking of the first two states, is what comes of climbing tropical mountains on a tropical afternoon.

The day's surprises were by no means over. Suzannah met us at the shed and handed me a cable. It was from Georgetown.

STARTING INTERIOR SUNDAY COME AT ONCE URGENT was what it said.

Rachel and I looked at each other in consternation. One thing was quite certain. We could not possibly be in British Guiana on Sunday. To-day was Friday, no boat left Tobago till Sunday, and even if we could have managed to reach Trinidad our difficulties were far from being at an end, for we had to find another boat going from Trinidad to Georgetown. Having found it, the voyage took two days.

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We hurried up to the main house in order to send a cable explaining this unfortunate circumstance, and to find out whether there was not some way of avoiding the long sea journey all round the coast of Trinidad. We found that there was. The boat called at Toco, on the north side of the island, and only three hours from Tobago. By ordering a car from Port of Spain to meet us there, the journey could be made at great cost, but in much less time.

We searched through the newspaper, and discovered in a hidden corner of the shipping list that a ship bound for British Guiana was due to call at Trinidad on Tuesday. It would, unless anything unforeseen occurred, reach Georgetown on Thursday morning.

We dispatched the cable.

That night we sat up late in our shed discussing the situation. Rachel read the cards and saw change, disagreeable journeys across water, a tall fair man, and a surprise. I continued making my will. The forest had suddenly loomed very close.

Very little remains to be told of our stay in the West Indies. We packed on Saturday, sailed on Sunday, shopped on Monday, sailed on Tuesday, were seasick on Wednesday, and on Thursday morning we stood on the deck of the *Eastern Star*, and gazed in the silence at the vast continent stretching before us as far as eye could reach.

South America! we thought, quite forgetting that we had seen it before—mysterious, dark, unconquered, with its mountains, its jungles, its danger, and its hidden wealth!

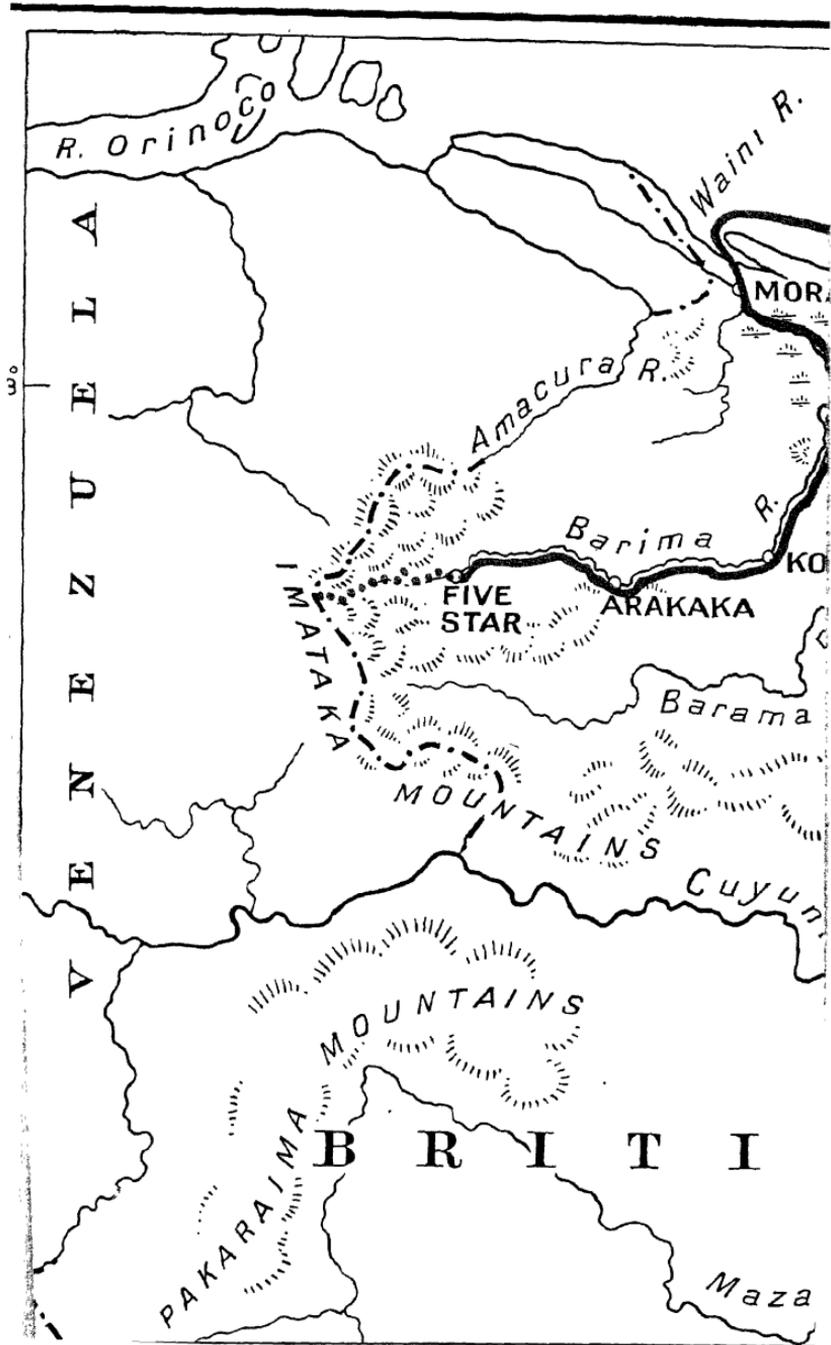
Nearer and nearer! Now we were almost alongside.

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A confusion of voices, breaking into the silence, rose from the waiting crowd on the pier.

Georgetown at last! Down went the gangway, and we stepped ashore.

The prelude was over; the adventure had begun.



CHAPTER IV
WE ALL MEET

March 24th. Georgetown

It seems strange to be actually in Georgetown! We have talked of it and pictured it so often, and as often happens when you picture before seeing, the picture is quite unlike the reality.

Broad and flat, that is the first impression of the real Georgetown, with flowering trees at intervals and sunlight everywhere. The streets — there are two principal ones, Water Street and Main Street, Main Street being the lesser — are wide, and thronged with people of every race and colour. Chinese and Whites, Negroes and East Indians, they all mingle and pass along their way. And there is romance here. Through all the gay inconsequent life, through the chattering and laughter, and the rattling of carts in the street, you seem to hear, deep and persistent, the vast slow murmur of the forest.

Gwen and Maurice met us this morning at the boat. At first they seemed a little acid, I suppose because we had not been able to arrive sooner. We asked whether the Colonel had arrived.

‘Not only has he not arrived,’ they said, ‘he is on his way back to England. He was taken seriously ill on the way out, and had to go straight back from Barbados. We had made all arrangements to leave for the interior last Sunday, and when, naturally expecting

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to find you all on it, we met the last boat, there was nobody at all.'

This time there was no doubt about their tone. It was bitter. However, in the heat and squash and extreme discomfort of the custom house everything else was forgotten, and after a great deal of conversation with officials about permits for guns, we emerged amiably and reunited into the sunshine.

This afternoon we walked two miles to the Botanical Gardens. In the centre of the gardens is a pond, and in the pond are a number of manatees. These creatures, which are exceedingly repulsive, are said to be what mariners saw when they say they saw mermaids. It is a little difficult to believe when you look at a manatee and think of a mermaid, but I am quite prepared to make the attempt, knowing what even a limited experience of life on the sea can do to one.

'And now,' said Maurice, when footsore and weary we were back at Trent House, 'let us stroll up to the sea wall, and watch the children playing on the sand. There is a delicious breeze there, and the sunset is certain to be magnificent.'

So we strolled to the sea wall — a mile, and back again, another mile — and that is one reason why I am now gasping under a mosquito net instead of being at the cinema where the others have gone to watch an Indian princess doing strange things with knives.

March 25th. Trent House

We eat at unusual hours here. Breakfast is at six, lunch at ten, and dinner, more normally at half-past

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seven. As tea is hardly more than a figure of speech the unaccustomed naturally feel very hungry round about five.

So this afternoon, when lunch was a thing of the past, and dinner too distantly in the future to be of any consolation, I went out into the town to buy a bun.

On my return I heard voices coming from the sitting-room and entering, found two black men in animated conversation with the others. Their names, I discovered, were Moses Solomon and Alexander Soo. They had been with Maurice on a previous expedition.

Solomon was very black indeed — a dull black. His face was deeply lined and furrowed; many teeth were missing. He looked hard and weather-beaten and had an expression of great seriousness and integrity. He had one eye.

Soo was a different type altogether. A good deal less black than Solomon, there were high lights on his face. He seemed to be dramatic, voluble, and quick-witted, and gave the impression of slickness. Although I cannot be certain I imagine that he had slim hands with long supple fingers. Both were smartly dressed, and Soo carried a bottle under his arm in which was a snake.

The introductions effected I sat down and soon gathered that these two would accompany us on the expedition.

Both are pork-knockers, as the gold and diamond miners out here are called, and Solomon, until he lost his eye, was a practising and experienced river captain. Soo's mother was a Duika, or bush negro, from Surinam. Originally runaway slaves who

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escaped into the bush, their descendants have lived ever since in an independant state, and almost entirely cut off from the world. They are a curious people; little is known about them, and they are credited with strange powers and practices.

Soo's peculiarity is snakes. He is very fond of them and can call them when he wants them, and will even put them in his mouth.

Many years ago Maurice had the 'Snake Cut' in its simplest form. No snake will harm him, but he is not content with this and wishes to be able to call them. So Soo, who gave him the original 'Cut', is going to initiate him into the final mysteries. He has promised, for a consideration, to give the rest of us the first snake 'cut', and is coming round to-morrow morning to perform the operation.

Our plans, by the way, have changed. Instead of looking for diamonds in the southern part of the forest, we are going to look for gold in the north-west.

We are also contemplating setting up as store-keepers on the Venezuelan frontier. The real originator of this notion is a man who for the best of reasons I will call Juan. Neither Rachel nor I have met him, but he was staying here until a few days ago. From all accounts he seems to be an astonishing man; he has been in all the most uninhabitable parts of the world, and has had the strangest adventures in them. Some of the adventures seem to have been wives. However, he is apparently unencumbered at present, and all his attention is concentrated on starting a bush store on the north-west frontier, and he suggests that we enter into partnership with him.

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The plan really seems quite feasible. The country is said to be rich. It cannot, however, be worked to any great extent as there is no bush store nearer than a place called Five Stars on the British Guiana side, which is by way of being a fifty mile walk through impassable and impenetrable bush, or Tumeremo on the Venezuelan side, which is a hundred.

'If,' he told the others, 'we have a store on the frontier all the pork-knockers from Arakaka and Five Stars will flock up, to say nothing of the Venezuelans over the border, where prices are very high. For that matter we could — for the land is very rich — charge what we like for stores, for no pork-knocker with a claim full of gold cares what he pays for his rations so long as he can get them on the spot. We could easily,' he concluded with great enthusiasm, 'dispose of fur coats and grand pianos if we wished!'

And if the stories of successful pork-knockers who come down country are true, I can quite believe it.

The situation then is this. Juan assures us that the land is extremely rich, and says that he has already built a shop on the frontier, that he has taken up two lots of stores, and has sold them most profitably. Maurice and Gwen have made inquiries about him, but have learnt nothing more than they already knew, which is that he is plausible, attractive, and full of boundless enthusiasm. Nobody knows who he is or where he comes from.

On the face of it, therefore, it would seem strange that we should place any credence on what he tells us and it would be as strange as it sounds were it not that he is backed and in partnership with a well-

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known and apparently respected business man in Georgetown. Another question arises. If this bush store is such a profitable concern, why should he wish to enter into partnership with us, and so reduce his profits? The answer is that it is obviously impossible for one man to run the store and bring up fresh consignments from Georgetown single-handed, and that therefore a partner or partners on whom he could rely would be a great advantage, for although the profits would certainly have to be divided there would probably be more profits to divide. An honest partner in South America is rare as the aloe that blooms once in a hundred years, and considerably more difficult to find, so that when Juan met Maurice he probably realized his luck.

From our point of view the scheme has advantages. The north-west district, though distant, is yet less distant than our original destination. Gold, if found, is a better proposition than diamonds, and store-keeping, if there is anyone to buy the stores, is a better proposition than either—and Juan, if he is as entertaining as he sounds, might turn out to be the best proposition of the lot.

So we are all agreed that there might be something in it, and are giving the project serious consideration, especially as it would in no way interfere with our original plan to prospect.

Meanwhile Juan has darted off to the Orinoco River, where he has an alligator farm. It seems that this is the breeding season, and he is naturally anxious to see that no mistakes are made. He has said that he will be back in Georgetown at the end of next week,

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and I am looking forward with very considerable interest to meeting him.

In the fullness of time Solomon and Soo took their departure, and a few minutes later there was a knock at the door.

'Come in,' we said, and the head of Bertha the black maid appeared round it.

'Dere is a gentleman to see you,' she announced in an impressive whisper.

'Where is he?' we asked.

'Here,' she answered, and produced him on the instant, because he was standing close behind her.

Benjamin Smith was, like the two who had just left, a pork-knocker — a fine strapping black man with magnificent teeth, which he showed continually in a broad grin.

He told us that he had discovered a creek in the Potaro district which was fabulously rich. Positively it glittered with diamonds, and the nuggets of gold were as big as turkeys' eggs; and to this creek he would, for a substantial consideration, lead us.

We told him that we would think the matter over, and at last he went away, and was instantly replaced by another one. From five until half-past seven there was a continual stream of callers with Eldorados for sale.

It has been such a lovely day, such brilliant sunshine, and no breath of wind to break the serenity.

In the evening I went down to the waterside and sat there on a timber log watching the ships. A schooner came sailing in, its masts and rigging sil-

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houetted against the pale green of the sky; on the quay fishermen lounged about, chatting and smoking their pipes.

I sat there until the first star came out, and I would have sat there much longer had not the mosquitoes come out too, and driven me in. It is late now. Long ago Maurice devoured his nightly mango and went to bed. The deepest silence reigns. Outside my window I can clearly see the long strip of grass on which it is so much wiser not to walk because of the *bête rouge* that live in it. The stillness is wonderful, only broken by the whistling frogs, and the incessant shrilling of the cicadas.

March 26th. Trent House

This has been a day full of incident. We began it by having the snake 'Cut'. Soo came round very early with several bottles containing snakes, one of which, by the way, has remained behind with Maurice. It is a Hymarali, and is small, but of a particularly virulent nature.

Maurice and Soo and the snakes went into the sitting-room, and remained there for a long time. Not a sound could we hear, although we knew that behind the closed doors the final and most secret initiation was taking place. It was all very mysterious.

Our conjectures were finally brought to a conclusion by the opening of the sitting-room door, and we were invited to enter in order to watch Maurice being bitten by three deadly poisonous snakes. We went in, and took up our positions at a discreet distance; Gwen stood by anxiously grasping a bottle of snake serum.

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Maurice held a snake in either hand, and although Soo rapped them smartly with a twig nothing would induce them to bite. He then told Maurice to put one of the snakes in his mouth, which he did. It was a most unpleasant sight.

My turn came next, and all but Maurice, Soo and I left the room.

The 'Cut' took some time, too long to describe in detail. There was a good deal of ritual. A number of needles were tied together, and eventually broken, and thrown one by one out of the window. I burnt something which looked like a piece of charcoal; my arm was scratched, which was exceedingly painful, in a number of places until blood was drawn. Then some liquid was rubbed into the wound, I was given some High Wine to drink, and told that in future no snake would bite me, and that even if it did there would be no ill-effects. Then Gwen and Rachel were given the 'Cut', and after that we went down to lunch, the hour being late, and we hungry.

As neither the food nor the conversation were worthy of note I will pass in silence over the lunch until shortly before the conclusion, for in the middle of the conclusion, which was custard, there were exclamations of astonishment from Maurice and Gwen. I turned and saw that a tall fair man had entered the dining-room and was coming over to our table.

It was Juan! Juan whom we had believed to be somewhere in the interior of Venezuela, supervising his alligators!

In rapid and peculiar English he explained that he had returned sooner than he expected for various

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reasons, one of them being that a Venezuelan whom he had previously regarded as a friend had tried to do away with him by sending him up the Orinoco in a leaking boat. His men, who were in the pay of the treacherous friend, deserted him, and he had spent several days being marooned on a small island, from which he was at length rescued by some Indians passing down the river in their canoes. When he reached the coast he took an aeroplane and flew back to British Guiana.

I asked him why he had not procured a boat that did not leak and returned to give his friend hell. He shrugged his shoulders.

'I was fed up, hein,' he replied shortly, and I appreciated his point of view.

All the afternoon we talked, and listened, and discussed, and the result of it is that we have definitely decided to join forces with him.

The arrangement is this.

We are to enter into an agreement with him. He has twenty thousand pounds weight of stores which are to re-stock his bush store on the Venezuelan frontier. We are to help run the shop and will receive a share of the profits. In consideration of this we agree to pay for the transport of the stores to the shop on the frontier, but are in no way responsible for their cost. (We made a particular point of this.)

He has asked for a clause to be inserted to the effect that while we are in partnership with him all gold or claims located belong to the syndicate, of which he is now a member.

He is certainly a most unusual man. I have never

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met anyone in the least like him. He is quick, very amusing, and has amazing vitality. In appearance he is much as I expected, except that he is younger and better looking.

So now all that remains to be done is to pack, and be inoculated against typhoid. Our boat is built and called the *Golden Hind*.

A coastal steamer leaves Georgetown in a few days for the north-west, and on this, if all goes well, we intend to sail. The voyage takes rather longer than eighteen hours, and I believe the steamer is very small. If this is indeed the case, and the sea is rough, the eighteen hours are likely to be exceedingly disagreeable.

March 31st. Trent House

Nothing of importance has happened since I last wrote. This morning the Hymarali got out of its bottle and darted under the bed in Maurice's room. He was rather afraid that it might escape into the passage and into some uninitiated person's room, which would have alarmed them. In spite of the immunity rendered by the 'Cut', Gwen jumped on to a chair, while Maurice crawled about on hands and knees under the bed. Eventually he managed to catch hold of the Hymarali by the tail. It swelled up with anger, but made no attempt to bite him. No sooner had he induced it to go back into its bottle than out it darted again, and there was another chase. At last, much to everyone's relief, it was captured.

He is worried because it seems to be rather off its food, and has not eaten any of the grains of rice which

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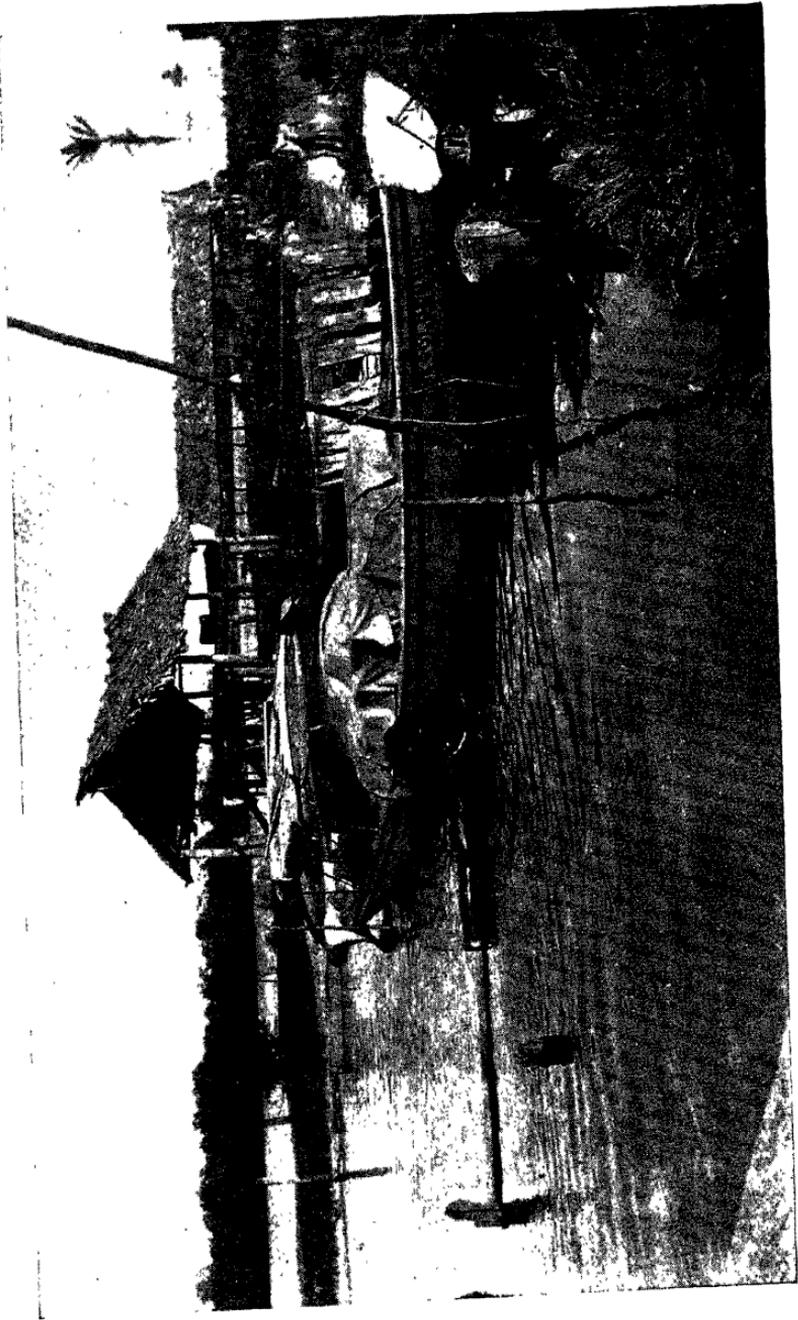
it is supposed to like. Twice a day it is fed and the water in the bottle is changed. A hundred times a day it is taken out and played with, and on one occasion it went to a cocktail party. We call it 'Baby' because it is such a nuisance, and because of the way Maurice plays nursemaid to it.

This is our last night in civilization. To-morrow afternoon we leave for the interior. Everything is ready; the sacks and the packing cases of stores are down at the dock waiting to be shipped, and all that remains for me to do is to buy another hundred rounds of ammunition, an extra pair of socks, and have my bush knife sharpened.

April 1st. At Sea. Aboard the Tarpon

And so, on what I have just realized is not a very auspicious date, we have really started! The long line that was Georgetown has faded into the distance, and there is nothing to be seen any more but the grey expanse of sea and sky; no sound but the monotonous throb of the engines.

Already the old life in civilization, with its tumult and clatter, has passed, and become only a memory — something in which I have no longer any part. Through this silence, which is like the pregnant silence before dawn, we shall presently burst upon a new world. Never before have I known so wonderful a sensation of freedom — such a wild excitement! I feel like stout Cortez. More accurately, I have felt since we sailed away, and until a few moments ago like stout Cortez. But nothing is more certain than that one cannot remain indefinitely on a peak, however



'THE GOLDEN HIND' AT MORAWHANNA

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exalted, and one of the things that brought me off mine was a suspicion that the sea, till now so beautifully calm, was resolving itself into shapes that I knew only too well. The deck is deserted, so my suspicion is probably shared.

Our departure from Georgetown was delayed, first because everything in South America is always delayed, and secondly because of a cow, which was unwilling to come on board. Thirdly because of the *Golden Hind*. It is almost as large as the *Tarpon*; more precisely the *Tarpon* is almost as small as the *Golden Hind*, so when they tried to haul it out of the water on to the ship the fun began. It snapped the ropes that held it. It swung round unexpectedly, and knocked one man senseless. It swept another one into the sea. It slipped, it struggled, it groaned. It seemed, in short, to have become possessed of a devil. So, for that matter, did the cow, but this was more understandable.

For more than an hour the efforts of everyone on board were unavailing, but at last they were crowned with success, and both the cow and the *Golden Hind* are now at rest on that part of the ship which is above the hold. I can see them from here, and the cow is contentedly munching hay.

Alas! there is no longer any doubt about the sea. It is becoming rougher every minute. I will go to bed and try and sleep until we reach Morawhanna in the morning.

April 2nd. Morawhanna

We landed this morning at eleven, after a horrible night on the *Tarpon*. The last two hours of the voyage

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were fortunately passed in the calm waters of the river. So eventually I emerged and joined the others on deck. They were all dressed, as I was, in bush clothes, i.e. shirts, and trousers tucked into field boots; all, that is, except Juan, who wore the same as he had worn the day before, with the addition of a pair of brown patent leather shoes.

The river was wide, and the forest on either side fringed with mangrove swamps. We gazed about us with intense interest. From among the trees rose a number of brilliant birds. We watched them flying in a long line across the river. They were Scarlet Ibis. A sudden bend revealed Morawhanna — a few straggling huts basking in the bright tropical sunlight.

Juan pointed out a building superior to the others in that it had two storeys and a corrugated iron roof.

‘That,’ he said, ‘is where we stay.’

We went ashore in a coreal, as the Indian canoes are called, and walked up the stelling to the house with two storeys, and it is there, in an upper room, that I am at present sitting, on a sack of flour, surrounded by an incredible number of other sacks, containing such of the twenty thousand pounds of stores as have already come ashore. The *Tarpon* is busy unloading the rest. Maurice is down at the stelling, no doubt directing operations. Gwen is making a list. Rachel is sitting on a roll of bedding trying to restrain a most unattractive mongrel of Juan’s called Whisky. Juan himself is wandering about the village, talking volubly, I suppose he must get rid of his surplus vitality in some way, though why anyone should bestir him or

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herself in this grilling sunshine is more than I can understand.

Every now and then a black man staggers up the stairs with a sack, or a case, or a roll.

‘Where you want it, Mistress?’ he asks.

Without much hope I look for an unoccupied piece of floor, the load is deposited, and he goes out mopping his brow, to fetch another one.

The house, which is also a shop, has a placard on the door ‘Ho Shoo’s Tavern’, but it seems that Ho Shoo is long since dead, and the house is now occupied by a certain Mrs. Jones and her family. She herself is East Indian, the family is of various races, and they all live together on the ground floor. The upper one, which consists of a small barn with a half-way partition in the middle, is occupied by us. Considering the lack of space, and the indescribable confusion which reigns, I cannot imagine where or how we shall sleep. But no doubt we will arrange it somehow.

April 3rd. Morawhanna

We did. Gradually the chaos was reduced to something approaching order. We cleared all the stores from one room into the other, and Gwen, Rachel and I put up our camp beds in it. Maurice and Juan at first thought of occupying the other room, but when we had put everything we didn’t want into it, they decided to sleep downstairs in the shop.

At one end of the room in which they decided not to sleep there is a narrow table and a bench. We have swept what was on it off on to the floor and it serves admirably as a dining, reading and writing table. It

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the evening, when the brief tropical twilight has turned to darkness, we stand the hurricane lamps on it, and by the dim uncertain light (because as yet they do not seem to have properly absorbed the kerosene) the room looks quite romantic.

It is evening now. Maurice, disgusted with the lamp which keeps on going out, is writing his diary by the light of a flickering candle. The rest are occupied in ways interesting only to themselves, and Whisky is mercifully sleeping.

Morawhanna is a fascinating little settlement. Nearly all the houses are on the edge of the river and each is surrounded by a moat with a bridge over it. The advantage of the moat is that it prevents some of the surrounding swamp from coming in. The disadvantage (from the passer's point of view) is that it serves as a general refuse heap. But the inhabitants do not seem to mind this. They are principally negroes. There are few Indians, and a small upper class which is Chinese. I believe that there is a Jesuit mission here somewhere, but as yet I have seen no white people.

This afternoon we went into the Manicold forest to look for snakes. In order to do this we had to cross a bottomless swamp of horrible glutinous mud, by means of a *tacuba* or fallen tree, no wider than a billiard cue at its narrow end. I looked at it in some trepidation, but as the others had already shown their mettle by crossing, I could do no less than make the attempt.

The manicold forest is dense and steaming, and smells exactly like a hot house. You have only to shut your eyes and you see rows of pots on shelves. The richness and mysteriousness of it are extraordinary, a

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fitting setting for every kind of strange creature. It is easy to imagine jaguar slipping through the undergrowth, or giant snakes twisting among the boughs and trunks of the trees

In spite of the Cut I kept a sharp look out, for I only had on tennis shoes, and how could I feel sure that the snakes in the forest knew that I had had the Cut in Georgetown?

Soo walked in front whistling softly, having previously rubbed some liquid from a bottle over his face, neck, and arms. Greatly to my relief, no snake answered, and he was exceedingly disgusted. But on the way back, when we reached the swamp (he was still whistling) a snake slid out of the mud straight into his hand. It was the most extraordinary sight. Then he told Maurice to whistle, because, he said, the snake's mate must be somewhere near. He did so, and immediately there came a snake from either side of the swamp. On their way to him, however, they paused to eat some flies that were swarming on the face of the mud.

'Call more strong, Major,' said Soo. 'Show dem you is dere master.'

Maurice did so, and the snakes continued with their meal. So Soo, handing the first snake to Maurice, rolled up his trousers and waded into the mud, which came well above his knees. He went over to the snakes, picked one of them up and brought it back. Then he and Maurice washed them in the creek in order to remove the mud. Soo rolled one of them into a ball in the palm of his hand, then put it in his cap, and the cap back on to his head, and handed the other one to

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Maurice, instructing him to carry it by the middle instead of by the neck, which is the usual way of carrying poisonous snakes. This he did, and we set off triumphantly homewards. Gwen, Rachel and I keeping at a respectful distance. Soon after we had started Soo's snake poked its head out from under his cap, so he took it out and scolded it, then replaced it in the cap, and after that it made no further appearance.

Maurice's snake had more spirit, and as we proceeded along the path by the river it lashed its tail and reared and hissed at passers-by, who shrank back in alarm, for it was a deadly poisonous water labaria. In this way we came home, and the snakes were placed in rum bottles.

It is all very interesting, but I am becoming a little tired of snakes. The number of things that can be said about them seems to be endless, and wherever you look there is sure to be a deadly poisonous reptile curled up in a bottle. Besides it is dangerous, with the lamps giving such an uncertain light. It would be too horrible if we mistook the bottles . . . Doesn't bear thinking about! . . .

April 4th. Morawahanna

As usual our departure is being delayed, this time because of an accident, for when Juan, who has an outboard motor, tried it on the *Golden Hind*, it (the motor) blew up. Exactly why it blew up I am uncertain, because the ways of outboard motors are so unfathomable, but blow up it did, and unless Juan manages to secure another one from somebody over



JOAN AND RACHEL START FOR THE INTERIOR

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whom he mysteriously says that he has a hold, we will have to wait here for another fortnight while spare parts are sent for from Georgetown. He has gone off to see what can be done, and we are sitting about in the room waiting. . . .

We waited for three hours, and then he returned with another motor, of considerably lower horse-power than the first, but it has been attached to the *Golden Hind* and seems to be working all right. We propose to start to-morrow morning before dawn.

April 5th. Morawhanna

Juan was to have called me this morning at three, but rather fortunately something happened to the engine, and we are still here. Everyone but me is standing about in the broiling sunshine, either tinkering with it, or watching it being tinkered with. Through the window I can see Juan striding off along the path, so perhaps there is someone else over whom he has a hold.

The river looks so cool and lovely. A number of cedar logs are floating near the bank; two powerful black men are sawing though one on land, and the quiet, regular sound of it drifts in through the open window; careless of alligators, boys are swimming about among the coreals near the stelling. Down below in the shop someone is playing a mandoline.

CHAPTER V
THE RIVER

'We penetrated further and further into the heart of darkness. It was very quiet there.'

April 7th. On the River. Morning

IT is almost impossible to realize that barely twenty-four hours have passed since we left Morawhanna, or indeed that there was ever a time when we were not, in one position or another, aboard the *Golden Hind*. So that it is with something of an effort that I cast my mind back into the distances and events of yesterday.

There were many false alarms before we finally got away. 'We have discovered what was the matter with the engine. It is all right now, and we are starting in a few minutes, so you had better come down.' And down I would go, only to find that the tide had fallen, and the *Golden Hind* stuck in the mud, so we would all return to the shade of the house to wait until the tide turned again.

However, we got off at last, having first been inspected by the local authorities, who had to see that our five-ton boat was no deeper in the water than for safety's sake it should be. The result was satisfactory, and this was astonishing, for in addition to the fifteen thousand pounds of stores, our five selves, Solomon, Soo, and Whisky, a captain, an engineer, and a bowman, there are eleven large, fierce-looking men on

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board. One of them is less large and not at all fierce, but that is because he is a Portuguese.

Juan explained that they are pork-knockers working their way to a mine in Venezuela. We inquired in what manner they are working their way in our boat, and he replied that they will be generally useful, helping to haul it up rapids, and to paddle in the event of anything happening to the engines. I say 'engines' advisedly, for there are no fewer than three on board, a twelve, an eight, and a two horse power. At present the two horse power is the only one that is working. In return for a passage the black men will do anything that is required of them.

The names of everyone on board were then taken. Those of the new black crew are Paris, Blackman, Bob, Ross, Stout, Santos — I forget the rest. The bowman, an Indian, is called John de la Cruz.

The formalities concluded, we shoved off from the bank, the engine was started, and amidst the cheers of the populace we began our long journey into the unknown.

For awhile Morawhanna and the waving crowd on the stelling remained in sight, then came a bend and they were gone. We were alone on the river.

The water was still as glass, and the sunset threw long shadows upon it. On either side the forest spread like an impenetrable wall — over everything a feeling of 'unbrokenness'. It is hard to describe, or even to explain exactly what I mean, but I have felt it ever since we left Morawhanna. It is not silence, but rather sounds within silence, intensely real, yet like a dream. As we passed along close to the bank, from among the

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mangrove trees, with their curious twisted roots growing through the water, there came a strange music, like the notes of an organ. Startled by our approach a kingfisher rose from its perch and skimmed rapidly along the surface of the water, occasionally touching it with a wing tip. Screaming harshly, parrots winged their agitated flight two by two overhead.

But no words, no mere recital of the sights and sounds can give any notion of the loveliness and wonder of the river, and of gliding up it in that strange evening light. It is all so still, and remote, and untroubled.

About eight we had a delicious dinner of corned beef and onions, and drank large quantities of tea, which is the most refreshing and sustaining drink, hot or cold, that exists. About nine the 'chug-chug' of the engine suddenly ceased. After an interval it started again — and stopped, and started, and stopped, and finally went dumb altogether, so the black crew paddled. About ten they were still paddling, and as the mangrove swamps prevented our landing and making a camp, we composed ourselves for sleep.

We lay anywhere, in places that a fly would have scorned, and when I say we, I include not only Solomon and Soo, Whisky, and the engineer, but all those of the crew who were not paddling. The congestion was extreme; wherever, whenever you moved it was on to somebody. Rachel informed us triumphantly that she had found a most comfortable bed on a sack of rice. On this she proceeded to fall asleep and wakened some time later because the largest and fiercest of the black crew was getting cramp.

I shared the edge of a packing case, but it was very

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far from satisfactory, so leaving the other sharer in undisputed possession, I climbed down and picking my way carefully over huddled forms, went and sat in the bows, covering myself with an edge of tarpaulin to keep off the dew.

Peace reigned; like a shining pathway the river gleamed beneath the regnant moon. The forest loomed black and dangerous on either side, and as we passed by, each moment taking us farther and farther out of the world, a myriad eyes, strange and hostile, watched us from the bank among the trees. The rhythmical dip of the paddles, a sudden splash as some giant fish leapt out of the water, and the faint persistent stirring in the forest served only to make the silence seem more profound.

Surely an age of trouble would be more than requited by an instant's vision of such exceeding beauty. At first the wonder of it is almost unbearable, and sends stabs of pain through you, and then, as though a veil were suddenly lifted, the gulf, the feeling of discrepancy has gone, and you know beyond any need of telling that you are utterly at one with the trees and the sky and all the wonder. There is no break, no pause between you and it; you are no emanation of life, you are life itself. Here, at last, is utter peace, utter comprehension.

In the early hours of the morning we reached Fraser's landing, a patch of reclaimed swamp on which a hut had been built. We found a coréal moored near by, and perilously dropping into it, pushed our way through mangroves to the shore.

We inspected the place to see whether there was

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any fairly level and solid ground on which a camp bed could be put up. The only place was in the hut, and as this was already full of hammocks, Indians, and a variety of animals, we decided to remain on board. The fourteen men were sent ashore, for we were determined to have a few hours' uncramped rest.

Gwen and Rachel spread their kapok mattresses on top of the stores, and while I was wandering about trying to find a more comfortable place, they decided without consulting me that I should sleep in what we call the cabin, because of four slender rods supporting an adjustable roof. It also has a narrow bench, on which, if you are extremely small and well covered, you can sit in comparative comfort for ten minutes. On the floor are planks inadequately covering the bilge water. Just behind is the engine.

I began by being furious at this arrangement, but on examination I saw that the cabin, in spite of the slight smell of petrol, might be made more comfortable than the stores, and that in the event of rain I should be in a stronger and drier position than the others, so I said very little more about it, and unrolling my valise, spread it along the bench and lay down.

Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed, and the smell of petrol became more and more noticeable. Soon the whole cabin reeked of it. Suffocating fumes rose into the air, and floated round me in clouds. I fanned myself with my hat, I stuck my head outside, nothing did the smallest good. It was outrageous that I should have been forced into such a situation! Without a doubt Gwen had known about the petrol and had,

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at Rachel's instigation, done it on purpose. Choking with fumes and indignation I dragged the valise upon the roof.

'Lock out!' called a voice from the shore. 'There are vampire bats about!'

Gwen and Rachel, dreaming on top of the stores, did not stir. I considered, remembered the cabin, and decided not to wake them. With a final glance to make sure that my feet were properly covered, I put my head under the rug and soon fell sound asleep.

Morning came all too soon. It was still grey, and the dew heavy on the trees when Juan came out in the coreal and woke us. We roused ourselves unwillingly, collected washing tackle and ingredients for breakfast, and started to go ashore. And then, as we were about to land, someone remembered the kettle, and wondered anxiously whether it was in the coreal. It was not, and nobody had seen it. We returned to the *Golden Hind*, but it did not appear to be there either. We searched carefully and then frantically about the boat because a kettle is important, and the idea that it might have fallen overboard or been left behind was not one that could be borne with equanimity. However, just when our fears were greatest, it was discovered floating in the bilge water, and was rescued, together with a couple of spoons and a dishcloth. All being well we re-entered the coreal and were soon on land.

The hut presented a very different appearance from that of the night before. The hammocks, the dogs, and many of the Indians had vanished. At one end was a fire, and round it some girls and women,

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probably relations of the owner, sat cooking something in a large pot or cauldron.

Here, I thought, are people living a strange and apparently very primitive life far from civilization. Surely they must have an unusual and therefore interesting point of view.

So I ventured a few remarks, hoping to draw them into revealing conversation, but nothing that I could say or do elicited anything but a grunt or a sheepish grin, so finally I gave up the attempt, and leaving them to their point of view followed the others down the path, where they had gone with the enamel basins and a bucket of muddy looking water from the river. We secreted ourselves in various dripping bushes and succeeded in having quite adequate baths. Then, feeling very clean and refreshed, we had our breakfast, and after a pause, during which somebody cleared up, we returned to the boat and started off again up the river.

April 7th. On the River. Night.

All day long we pursued our way in the grilling sunshine. Nothing very noteworthy occurred except that the engine elected to work again, so we made very good headway, and I played a game of chess with Rachel and won it. The third event, which took place during our stop for lunch, was that poor Juan was badly stung in the eye by a maribunta. I am not sure what a maribunta is, but imagine it to be some kind of a bee. Anyway his eyelid swelled to an enormous size, and must have been very painful. Afterwards we sat on top of the stores under my big Corsican um-

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rella, and he told me about his wives, and of all the trouble he had with them.

In the evening we reached Mount Everhart, and it is the most desolate spot I have ever seen. A stelling leads through long soaking grass to the remains of a hut. The hut is in ruins, and the floor planks, with gaping darkness beneath — for the hut is on piles — are few and rotten, and very far between.

The way from the stelling to the hut is fraught with danger, firstly because of the snakes in the long grass, and secondly because if you walk anywhere but on the invisible path, you walk into a swamp. In addition to this the place is said to be swarming with tiger (as the jaguar of South America is called) and is haunted, so the men say, by duppies. And so I am glad, all things considered, that I am not the men, who have been sent ashore to sleep as best they can in the ruined, haunted hut.

It is almost midnight now, and I am writing by the light of the magnificent new electric torch that I bought in Georgetown.

A disaster nearly occurred half an hour ago when Whisky, with his usual lack of intelligence, elected to leave the *Golden Hind* and wander about among the snakes and tigers on land. He jumped ashore and was fast disappearing when Rachel noticed what was happening and set off in hot pursuit. She caught him and returned to the boat. It was then that I heard an exclamation of horror and, looking up, saw Rachel with Whisky in her arms, one foot on the boat and the other on the fast receding stelling, and she, apparently, exactly balanced between the two. It was an awful

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moment. I was right away at the other end of the boat, and even if I could possibly have reached her in time it would have been useless, for I was suddenly seized with an uncontrollable fit of laughter and was rooted to the spot. Most fortunately Gwen appeared from the shadows and pulled her on board.

Silence reigns on the *Golden Hind*; silence on the river. Only in the strange tumultuous forest the frogs are croaking incessantly and calling to each other across the creeks.

Koriabo. April 9th

We reached Koriabo yesterday and are staying at the rest house. It is a real house, with walls and a palm-thatched roof. We are overcome by such luxury and magnificence. There are two rooms, and a large veranda on which we all sleep. I have put my bed up at one end — the end that has the best view — but no one else seems to want it very passionately, so I have remained there. On one side is an immense clump of bamboos, and down to the left I can see the river glinting through the trees.

The house, like every other house in the country, is built on piles, and the crew have slung their hammocks below, so that we get the full benefit of their conversation. To-night Soo was delivering an oration on what he called Heavenly Love. The other men were inclined to be facetious at first and kept on interrupting the flow of his discourse with flippant interjections, but his persistence finally wore them down and they listened in silence.

‘I know,’ he said, ‘everything about love. Why, if



CLEARING A PASSAGE UP THE RIVER

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I have a plantain seed, do you tink I keep it to myself? No! I give it to my fellow man because I know dat so my Heavenly Father will give me twice as much to-morrow.'

Sometimes they sing, and every now and then groans rise into the air from a wretched man who is down with fever. We have done all that is possible for him, but he is feeling very ill and sorry for himself. And that reminds me of a really joyful event, which is that the little snake that Soo caught at Morawhanna has died, so at least there will only be one bottle to carry about. Secretly and fervently we hoped that Baby would pine and die, too, but the death of its fellow has had quite the opposite effect, and it has perked up and eaten all its rice.

Maurice and Soo went off into the forest this morning to call more snakes, but most fortunately they returned empty handed.

After lunch we had the second typhoid injection, administered well but rather painfully by Rachel. I think the needle must have been a bit rusty. Some little Indian children — there is an encampment near by — came and watched the operation with great interest. They are attractive little things, with their straight black hair, and their solemn brown eyes. At first they were very shy, but after awhile they gained confidence and came up on the veranda.

In front of the house there is a bush covered with orange-coloured flowers, and to this bush come the loveliest little humming birds. Like flashing lights they dart from flower to flower, pausing shimmeringly for a few seconds at each as they suck the honey. The

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butterflies, too, are marvellously beautiful, particularly the Morphos. They are larger than any butterfly I have seen, with rather a clumsy flight, and of a blue so intense that they positively seem to give off light. Then there are the orange butterflies that settle on the humming bird bush and are barely distinguishable from the flowers; and a host of others.

This evening I went, for the first time by myself, out alone into the forest. There is a trail leading to an Indian Field (a space cleared for cultivation) at about half an hour's distance from the rest house, and it was along this trail that I set off after tea, followed by injunctions not to leave it without blazing the trees.

It was wonderful out there alone in the forest. Hardly a sound, as I passed along the trail, stepping over twisting, spreading roots and rotten tacubas, except for the crackling of dead leaves beneath my feet, an occasional tapping, which I suppose must have been some kind of a woodpecker, or the sudden strange call of a hidden bird. Butterflies floated noiselessly by, and once a small creature, unrecognizable because of its swiftness, scuttled across the trail and vanished into the undergrowth.

I sat down on a tacuba and gazed about me. Just now the silence was unbroken — profound. I felt that I was in an immense cathedral, so strong was the impression of spaciousness, and this in spite of the fact that actually I could not see more than ten or fifteen yards in any direction. But the feeling of space and distance persisted, and I cannot account for it unless it is that the intertwining branches high above me gave the illusion of arches, and the shafts of sunlight

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that occasionally pierced their way through the dense mass of foliage were like the beams that strike through a stained glass window, illumining the inner darkness. One such beam, penetrating the deep green gloom, lit upon a large brown leaf which was hanging from one of the lower branches. This leaf was behaving in the most extraordinary manner, twisting, and waving violently to and fro, as though blown by an imperceptible wind. I examined it carefully but could not discover any cause. Maurice tells me that he has frequently seen the same thing, but has never heard an explanation.

It was almost dark when I got in, and the fireflies were beginning to appear among the trees like points of fire. Strange how with the oncoming of night the whole forest seems to wake, to become so dangerously alert and alive! A myriad different sounds are heard, a myriad eyes seem to watch you as you speed along the trail with ever quickening steps, fearful lest the faint remaining light should vanish before you reach home. It would indeed be terrifying to lose one's way in the forest at night. It is so huge, so sinister, and above all so overmasteringly strong.

I was relieved to find myself safely back in the rest house with the others. They were sitting round the table playing pelman patience. Two hurricane lamps and a candle stuck on to the lid of a tobacco tin made a small circle of light and showed up the worried, concentrated look on the faces of the players.

I lit another lamp, fetched some hot water from the kettle on the fire, had a bath, and changed into a clean shirt and trousers. Then feeling very refreshed I went

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on to the veranda and watched the others at their game. They were completely absorbed in it, and no sound broke the silence save an occasional expletive as a wrong card was turned. I looked at them, and then in the curious way that things previously taken for granted suddenly become visible I saw them objectively. Maurice with his lined face, massive forehead, keen blue eyes, attractive hands, and general air of unshakable determination. A fighter. Beside Juan, who sat swinging his long legs over the edge of the veranda and flashing his new electric torch among the trees—Juan the tortuous, the fantastic—he seemed a very caricature of masculinity and masculine strength. Not that J. lacks strength and purpose, but his methods are less direct.

Rachel, too, had become visible. She has grey eyes, I noticed. She is kind and candid. She knows her own well-stocked mind and is fairly quiet about it. She has a superficial and deceptive air of calmness, but is really possessed of an immense nervous force which drives her into perpetual and often quite incomprehensible motion. She is intelligent and independent, and as usual her shirt is coming out at the back.

Gwen, I thought, as I looked at her, is like a small mountain stream running over pebbles in the sun. She is morning—early morning; Maurice is morning, too, but later, and with the weather uncertain. Rachel is a warm October afternoon, and Juan is the very middle of a brilliant tropical night. And having come to these conclusions I went inside to fetch my torch because I wanted to be sure that it is more powerful than Juan's. It is.

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Santos (one of the crew) caught some fish in the river to-day, which we had for dinner. Very delicious. We also had three eggs buttered. They were brought by an Indian.

'Me have eggs to sell, Mistress,' he said.

Gwen asked how much they cost, and the answer was 'Nothing'. It seemed an odd transaction. We gave him some tobacco and he went away looking pleased.

These Indians are a curious looking people. They are, as a rule, small, with beautiful slender limbs and immensely powerful chests and shoulders. This gives a peculiar effect as the upper part of the body is developed out of all proportion to the lower part. No doubt it is due to the fact that so much of their life is spent felling trees, paddling their canoes and woodskins, and carrying their belongings from one place to another. They must surely be of Mongolian origin. They have the same lank coarse black hair, and the wide prominent cheek-bones. Somebody once told me that almost every Mongolian child has at its birth a blue mark at the base of the spine. Having had no ocular proof I cannot vouch for the truth of this story, but if I see evidences of it while I am living among the Indians, and if, at a future date, I see it among the Chinese, I shall consider it proof positive that the South American Indian is of Mongolian origin.

He is a beautiful pale copper colour, and wears only a scanty red loin cloth — a most sensible dress for this hot climate. The women wear a single sack-like garment reaching to the knee. None of those I have seen could be described as anything but exceedingly plain,

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but I believe that the tribes vary a good deal, so perhaps we shall see more attractive specimens when we get farther up the river.

Juan is going back to Morawhanna in the *Golden Hind*. He is leaving it there for the present, and bringing up the remainder of the stores in a smaller boat. Reports say that the river farther up is so dry that only a very small shallow boat can get up it until the rains start again and the river rises. So Juan is going to try and procure another boat, and will come up in it to Koriabo.

Everyone is rather cross to-night, probably the result of the typhoid injection. Until now my arm was all right, but it is beginning to feel stiff and painful, so I will stop writing and follow the others to bed.

April 10th. Koriabo

Late last night, just as we were finishing dinner, we were electrified by the unmistakable throb of a motor boat coming up the river. We rushed down to the water's edge, but could see nothing, so after waiting for a time we decided that the throb was no more than yet another species of frog, and returned to the house. We had not been there ten minutes before a sound of voices rose from down below on the stelling, and Whisky ran out to see and annoy whatever it was that has arrived. We followed with flashlights and found that the voices belonged to the Commissioner and another official who were on their way to Arakaka from Mabaruma, the government compound some ten miles across the river from Morawhanna.

So we had another and festive dinner preceded by

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swizzles (the British Guiana cocktail). After dinner we smoked and talked and danced, and talked and danced and smoked again, and when at last everyone was in bed or hammock, the veranda looked exactly like a hospital ward.

The events of to-day are not worth chronicling, because there weren't any to speak of. The arms of everyone were stiff and sore all the morning, and we slept most of the afternoon.

This morning the Commissioner and his assistant continued on their way to Arakaka, where I think one of the periodical courts is being held. They have left behind them a precious ham. Whether this was by accident or gracious design we do not know. But at any rate the ham is excellent and has been the cause of much pleasant conversation.

Soon after they had gone Rachel and I began to contemplate bathing in the river. We were still contemplating it when we heard that one of the men had caught a pirai. A pirai is a fish from four to six inches long, with a large head and a great number of sharp teeth. It travels in a shoal, and if the shoal attacks you, which I believe it often does, you are completely devoured before you can do anything about it. So when we heard that a pirai had been caught in home waters we decided not to bathe. Instead, I went off into the bush and had a most interesting and delightful time hunting for potential walking sticks, until the wretched Whisky followed and found me out. And then he went quite mad, rushing round me, leaping into the air, and barking hysterically until I consented to turn back. Perhaps he sensed danger, knew that

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somewhere near a tiger was lurking in the shadows, watching, waiting for an opportunity to spring. But it is far more probable that he was animated, not by any protective feeling, but merely by his usual determination to annoy.

Meanwhile the others had decided to prospect for gold on the other side of the river. So armed with picks and shovels, batelles (an iron pan in which the gravel is washed), and, of course, bush knives, they set out, and having crossed the river in a coreal, pushed and fought their way through what seems to have been a dense mass of prickly undergrowth until they came to a creek. Here they dug and washed with great vigour for some considerable time, but eventually came back without any gold.

Juan, by the way, has returned with another boat and a further supply of stores, so we are starting off to-morrow at dawn. This place is lovely, but there is not really enough to do and we are all glad to be moving on.

April 13th. On the River

Last night we camped for the first time in raw bush. For the first time I pitched my tent, and slept in it.

We left Koriabo yesterday morning not more than an hour later than we had intended, taking with us as much of the stores as could be packed into the boat. Quite a large dump remains at Koriabo, and we have left a couple of men in charge. As soon as we reach Arakaka the boat will be sent down for it. The rest of the men are either in the boat with us or in the coreal alongside. This coreal is something of a mystery, for

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nobody seems to know where it came from or who it belongs to. Juan says that as a coreal was an absolute necessity he 'made arrangements', and when we ask what the arrangements were, he explains in such peculiar English that nobody can understand. However it is certainly very useful.

About five miles from Koriabo the river became full of tacubas, principally submerged ones, on which we constantly stuck. It poured with rain, we sat in pools of water while more water dripped down the back of our necks. Altogether I began, after enduring it for nine or ten hours, to suspect that life in the wilds was not entirely unmixed delight. Juan showed signs of wanting us to go on all night, and sleep in the bottom of the boat, but we spotted a place where it was quite possible to make a landing, which we did about five-thirty, just before it got dark.

We cut a clearing, put up the tents and beds, and within an hour of landing we were all sitting in Rachel's and my tents (temporarily combined to make a dining-room), eating a most delicious dinner of tinned salmon, marmite, pears and tea. Before dinner Juan, who had got over his disappointment at our refusal to sleep in the boat, made swizzles, which were excellent and most cheering. After dinner we talked and played the gramophone, and after congratulating ourselves on our comfortable, dry and generally enviable situation, went to bed. At least the others did. I went outside and spent some time helping Juan to sling his hammock. The camp looked very romantic all lit up, for there was still a lamp in every tent, and down on the shore the crew had a fire

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burning beside their hammocks. The rain had stopped and the forest was alive with fireflies.

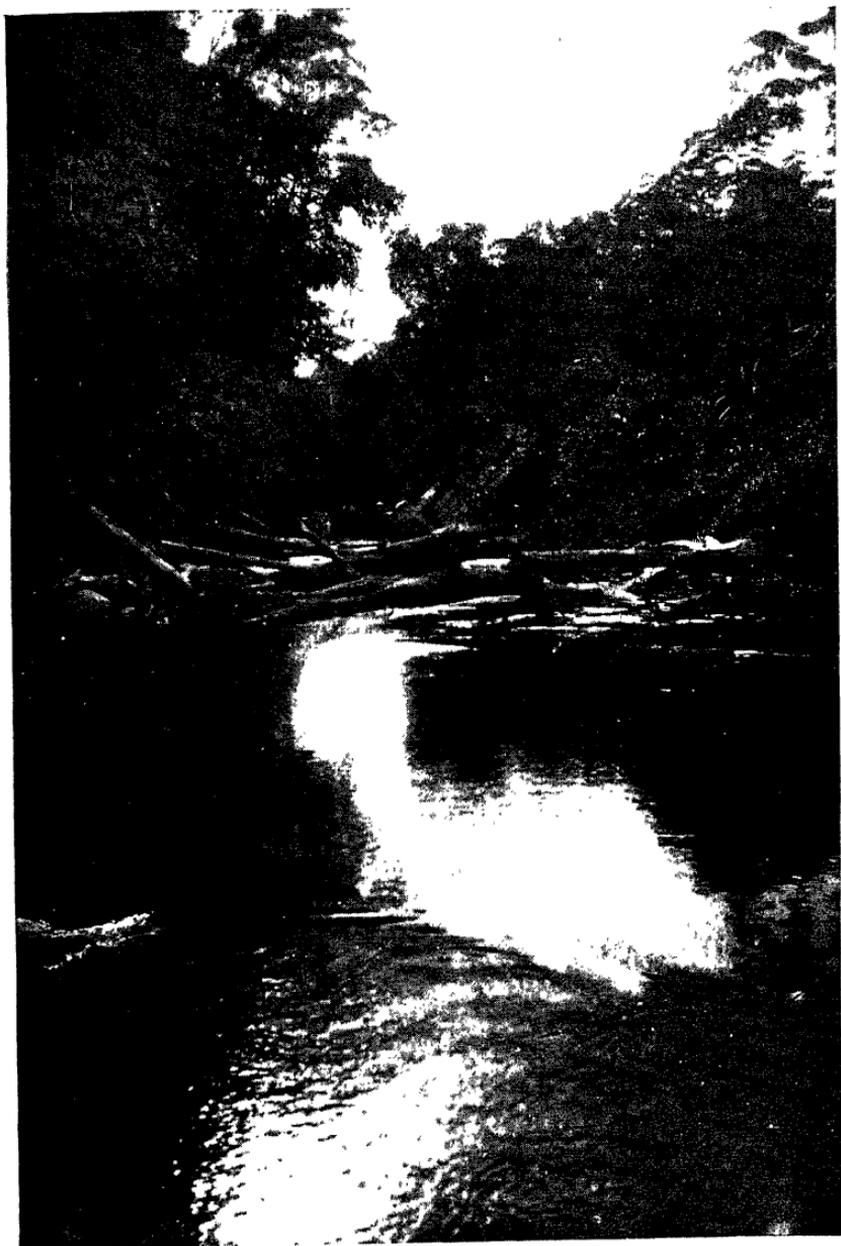
Rather unwillingly I went into my tent, but I was soon in bed and asleep, for sitting all day in a cramped position either in the blazing sun or in rain is very exhausting.

Juan called me this morning at half-past five with a cup of strong black coffee, which he makes exceedingly well. He tells me that he can also cook, and I know for a fact that he can sew, because he mended the lining of my hat. Altogether a man of parts, and one to be seriously considered. But this is digressing. We dressed and had some food. Then the camp was broken up, the bedding put back into the boat, and by seven o'clock we were on the river again and last night's camp was a thing of the past.

Early morning on the river! If only I could capture the magical beauty of it and keep it with me always! The gracious cool, pristine, inviolate; the stillness, the enchanted light, and clear, clear springing freshness! Giant trees hung with serpentine lianes mirrored in the glassy water, their overhanging branches covered with life plants and orchids. Our boat slips round a bend in the river and then, slowly, the sun comes up.

So, I think, must the whole world have been at the beginning of time, after the darkness of creation had rolled away and the first morning dawned upon the earth.

Soon after eleven we stopped on a sand patch at the side of the river, and had what everyone but me calls breakfast, in spite of the obvious fact that it is lunch. By now it was grillingly hot, an endless variety of



OBSTRUCTIONS IN THE RIVER

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insects bit, stung, and got into the food, and every three minutes it rained. Not with any violence. Rather as a reminder that the rainy season is upon us. We took the warning and pulled the cape groundsheets that Rachel and I wear, and Maurice and Gwen's mackintoshes out of the bedding (Juan gets wet), and the result is that it has'nt rained once since lunch.

There was one bad rapid to be crossed this afternoon. We got out on to a rock, the crew jumped into the water, and with the aid of a rope, the engine, and a great deal of shouting and excitement, the boat was hauled over in a little less than an hour.

The river is now much 'cleaner' than it was farther back, and we have not stuck on more than six tacubas since lunch. The captain, optimistic man, thinks that we shall reach Arakaka before nightfall if no more serious obstacles are encountered.

April 14th. Arakaka

Long ago in Georgetown we first heard of Arakaka. An odd attractive name, we thought, and for some time it remained just that — an odd attractive name. Then, as plans were made, and the day of departure drew near, Arakaka, though distant, became a reality. At Morawhanna it began to take definite shape. At Mount Everhart it was a large and flourishing town, and by the time we reached Koriabo it had attained gigantic proportions. It was a city, a very centre of light and learning. We all felt that our lives had been spent with one great end in view — to get to Arakaka. And yesterday evening, as the moon was rising, we got there.

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From the river bank there is a long pathway leading to the government rest house, which I will presently describe. Having left us there, the path continues up a slight hill to Arakaka proper. First comes the police station with the black corporal inside sitting busily at his table. Then past several more huts to The People's Store, kept by no other person than the Chinaman Chee a Fat, about whom we have heard from Juan, and among ourselves talked so much and with such lively interest. He seems to keep everything in the world in his shop, so perhaps I shall be able to buy a greatly needed pair of sock suspenders there.

Next to The People's Store there is an empty boarded-up hut called Sproston's. Once, it too was a store, but that was in Arakaka's dog days, when it was a mining centre and had more than a hundred inhabitants. Now Sproston has gone, and his store has nothing in it but a ghost.

There is very little more of Arakaka. The path goes down a short steep hill covered with hard but slippery mud, and vanishes into the river.

I believe that there are a few more huts farther back towards the forest, and there is a fine, broad, grassy trail which is very important to look at, but it leads nowhere. At least we do not think that it does. One fine day when we are feeling really energetic, Rachel and I are going to see what happens at the other end.

Meanwhile here we are most comfortably ensconced in the rest house. We have been here a whole night and the better part of a day, and we are still being astonished at its comfort and magnificence. It is even larger than the one at Koriabo, having two verandas

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and three rooms, counting the bathroom. There are wooden steps leading up to it in front, and down again at the back. There is a kitchen range, a pump, and a shower which, depending on the pump, works; and on the front veranda are chairs and a table at which I am writing. One of the chairs is exceedingly comfortable, and has arms and movable extensions on which you can put your feet. I have never seen a chair of this kind before. It is certainly an excellent invention and the only pity is that there should be but one specimen on the veranda, for the occupier's enjoyment is just slightly marred because of what the others on less comfortable chairs may be thinking.

A quiet, lovely afternoon! All the clothes have been washed and are hanging out to dry. Profiting by the sunshine Gwen and Rachel have washed their hair as well, and that, too, is hanging out to dry. Nothing could be more peaceful.

Sitting here in this high sunlit clearing it is hardly possible to realize that we were ever part of the seething, clamorous masses back in the world. Towns, traffic, railway stations, the South of France, going to parties, people I knew — how utterly remote and unreal they seem! Something remembered at a great distance, and after many years. And it is not even the feeling that we are living in a far away part of the world, but rather that we are on some other planet. My mind, as the black men say, tells me that there was once a time when the four of us, shadowed by Solomon, Soo, and the snakes, were not walking, talking, eating, and up to a point sleeping together. When Juan had never been heard of, when meals were

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not a matter of paramount importance, when there were no strings of onions hanging over the fire, no dishes to be washed up, no insects that bit. When, to continue, Gwen was not permanently occupied with the packing or unpacking of chop boxes, and we did not know about Maurice's diary. When, in conclusion, I was not trying to teach Rachel (*a*) to refrain from flicking her cigarette ash on to the floor, (*b*) not to pass biscuits in her fingers instead of handing me the tin, and (*c*) to speak distinctly. At first I used to retaliate by speaking aggressively loudly and with quite unnecessary distinctness, but this had no effect, so now I mumble and gabble, so that she cannot hear either, and continually has to say 'What?' Our inter-course is something like this:

RACHEL: 'Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm.'

ME: 'What do you say?'

RACHEL: 'Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm.'

ME: 'I am very sorry, Rachel, but I haven't the faintest idea what you are talking about.'

She shouts it.

Pause.

ME: 'Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm.'

RACHEL: 'What?'

ME: 'Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm.'

RACHEL: 'What did you say, Joan?'

I shout it.

The result of this game is general irritation. But to return to the beginning of this long, long paragraph, my mind may tell me that there was a time when none of these things were, but I cannot believe it. Nor do I wish to do so. I love the life; it is satisfying and healthy

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and sensible, and in spite of ash on the floor and mumbled conversation, I like the people. The forest is wonderful beyond all telling, and although the ridiculous happenings of everyday life certainly take a much larger and more prominent place than they did, yet there is always the undercurrent of excitement and adventure. Pleasant companionship, beautiful surroundings, food and leisure for thought, and an attractive person willing to mend one's hat — what more could anyone desire? 'The world is too much with us', Wordsworth wrote, and he knew what he was writing about.

April 15th. Arakaka

Another lovely, serene day. Outside the rest house the whole world is smiling. Alas that inside it the smiles and serenity should so conspicuously be lacking! Everyone is unsociable, preoccupied, and in a bad temper. And why? — Because through no fault of mine a wretched fish got sent away.

It happened in the earlier part of the afternoon when they were all sleeping or pretending to sleep. A woman came down the path carrying a basket in which was a large dead uncooked fish, very unpleasant looking. She started showing off its points and offering it for sale, so I told her to go round to the back door and show it to the Mistress (Gwen), as I had nothing to do with the food. She disappeared and I returned to my book.

At tea time I remembered the fish and asked whether it had been bought.

'What fish?'

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I explained how the woman had come with it and how, very properly, I had sent her on to higher quarters.

'Well,' said Gwen in conclusion, 'now there will only be Yam for supper.' Hence the general gloom and disapproval.

There has been a slight change of plan. We had intended, at one time, to walk from here to Five Stars (forty miles), but fortunately one of us has changed our minds, and we are going to continue up the river, if a suitably light boat can be acquired. In order to save weight we have sent most of the baggage on ahead by coreal. As it includes all my personal belongings and attire I hope very sincerely that the coreals do not come to grief in the rapids.

Something very important must have happened recently in Rachel's life, for she has come on to the veranda with her diary and is writing in it. This diary is an intermittent business. I think the last time she wrote in it was shortly after our departure from Dover, and it is so illegible that even she cannot read any entry but the one she is writing — I wonder what it can be now — probably something uncomplimentary about me because of that infernal fish.

April 16th. Arakaka

There has been a crime, an attempt upon our lives and property.

Yesterday evening we were invited by Chee a Fat to come round to his house. So we dressed up in our best clothes, and soon after dinner we started off through the trees, and in ten minutes time we reached the house, which is close to the river.

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Chee a Fat met us at the door, escorted us inside, and offered us drinks. We remained there talking for some time, and then got up to leave.

On our return to the rest house we were informed excitedly by one of the crew called Jackson that half an hour after our departure for Chee a Fat's a large sun blind at the end of the veranda suddenly caught fire. He and Tilla, a half-Indian half-negro girl who cooks, were sitting in the kitchen and were, he said, 'notified of the fact' by the barking of Whisky. They rushed out, Jackson managed to pull down the blind, threw it over the veranda on to the ground and flung buckets of water over it. It was by the merest chance that the thatched roof did not catch, in which case the whole place would have been razed to the ground in a few minutes, together with our personal luggage and the stores — a death blow to the expedition. The incendiary, evidently someone anxious that we should not start our bush store on the frontier, found out when the rest house would be empty and chose that time to set it alight, not allowing for the presence of Jackson, Tilla, and Whisky.

Juan and I went down to the river, he armed to the teeth, and sure enough there were marks on the damp muddy ground of small rubber-soled shoes, and a coreal which was moored there before dinner had vanished. I did not see these evidences myself because, for one thing, the river bank is dangerously slippery, and for another I did not want to make my only pair of dry shoes unnecessarily wet. But Juan saw them, and we went back to the rest house convinced that the assailant had waited until we were safely at Chee a

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Fat's with drinks in our hands and the light of conversation in our eyes, then darted to the rest house, set fire to the blind, and escaped by way of the river.

Juan and Maurice went up to the police station and after a long time succeeded in waking the corporal, who indignantly denied that he had ever been anything but entirely awake.

'De police', he said, 'never sleep.'

He donned his uniform and his hat, which is like the kind worn by very important Girl Guides, and came down with a note-book in his hand to the rest house. First he took the evidence of Jackson and Tilla, who told their stories simultaneously and with a great deal of gesture. Then he returned to the veranda.

'Did you,' he asked Maurice, 'observe any uneasiness on the part of anyone who might have perpetrated the crime?'

We opened a bottle of rum and suggested that he should help us to drink it, which he did, at first with diffidence and then with undisguised enjoyment. After he had gone we examined the remains of the blind again, and discovered on the ground below where it had hung a piece of charred faggot. Then we went to bed.

This morning I woke with the sun and saw the corporal and his assistant creeping about the dew-drenched bush looking for footprints. Later Chee a Fat came round to inspect the scene of the crime, and we all consulted together as to who could have done it. Chee a Fat suggested Jackson. 'That boy,' he said, 'has a rascal face.'

I fetched my camera and got several good photo-

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graphs of him and of us and of the two black policemen examining the blind.

Good Friday. On the River

Gwen, Rachel, Maurice and I left Arakaka yesterday in Chee a Fat's boat, which is a hundred times smaller and more uncomfortable than the *Golden Hind*.

Juan remained behind so that he might receive and bring up the stores that were left at Koriabo, but most unfortunately the wretched 'Whiskydorg', as he calls it, is with us, and I would never have believed it possible that a dog could be so idiotic and annoying. It paddles about in the mud when we stop to have our lunch, then walks on the food. It jumps ashore when we are in the middle of a rapid, the men straining every nerve to prevent the boat being swept backwards, and then we have to go back and rescue it. This morning it fell into the water, and on being thrown back into the boat — we were all balancing on a partially submerged log while the two Indians axed and sawed their way through a barricade of fallen trees — it darted forward and lay on my cushion, which is now soaking wet. For sheer idiocy that dog is unequalled. It ought to be in a museum.

We camped last night at Eclipse Falls. They are a mile long and very rapid, and at the beginning the river is almost dammed up by an immense deposit of huge flat rocks. The boat had to be unloaded, and everything in it carried round (a mile) by land. However, as it was evening by the time we reached the falls, we decided to make camp at once and leave the droghing until the morning.

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The bush about these parts is particularly raw, and we became very hot making a clearing. There was a regular tangle of bush rope and undergrowth to be cut away. Strange how camps vary! Actually the surroundings are exactly the same: darkness, dead leaves on the ground, ants, croaking of frogs, and so on, but one camp could no more be mistaken for another than London for Constantinople. Our first camp was delightful, this one felt dangerous and unfriendly. I had an unpleasant feeling all the time and was glad to leave it.

This morning everything was droghed across to the topside of the falls by way of the wide trail that runs from one end to the other. The men started working very early, but by the time the boat had been hauled over the rapids and was reloaded, it was past eleven, so we had lunch before starting, two sardines each, tea, and a nasty fruit called a Soursop, which was a present from one of the Indians.

The river is far more beautiful than it was. It twists and turns continuously, and has narrowed so much that in places it is hardly wider than a creek. Gigantic overhanging trees throw deep shadows upon the water, and sometimes an orchid or a brilliant flower falls from the topmost branches, and floats quietly away down stream.

All day long the silence on the river and in the forest is almost unbroken. At present it is entirely unbroken, even the engine is silent, for the river is so shallow that the two Indians are poling the boat along. Rachel, athwart a roll of bedding, is immersed in a Spanish grammar. Maurice and Gwen are asleep,

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she beside me on a hard wooden seat six inches wide, he on the chop box which has nails sticking out of it. The amount they sleep is phenomenal, especially Gwen. I am sure that it is fattening to sleep so much, and have suggested this, but it was received with indifference.

At Ascot, where I was once at school, all the statues in the chapel are draped to-day in black and nobody is allowed to speak until midday. Then, as there are perpetual services during the remainder of the day, they are further prevented. I remember that we always had boiled eggs for breakfast on Good Friday, and the odd noise that a hundred eggs made being cracked in the silence. We have stuck on a submerged tacuba, and are going round in circles. It has started to rain.

Easter Sunday. Camp

On Friday night we, having found a suitable place to camp, camped there. On Saturday we continued struggling up the river. It is becoming drier and drier, and we have to stop every five minutes and spend an hour hacking through tacubas. We have given up climbing out on to logs on these occasions and just step overboard into the river, which is usually not more than a couple of feet deep. Certain care in doing this is required, for after rain the water is clouded, so that you do not know whether you may not be going to tread on an alligator, a stingray, or into a hole.

The camping ground last night was in a beautiful position near a creek, but I had a most uncomfortable

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bad night, and feel exceedingly tired to-day in consequence. That fool Whisky disappeared into the forest soon after dinner, and we all thought he was done for, but soon after midnight I was awakened by something knocking against the leg of my camp bed. Thinking that it was a tiger, I seized my knife, but it turned out to be Whisky. I felt cold and stifled by the mosquito net, and the head of my bed had managed to get considerably lower than the foot. About two o'clock I was wakened again by Gwen wandering about the camp with a hurricane lamp, hunting for the bottle of ammonia to put on her mosquito bites, and at five we got up, dressed in the dark, rolled up the tents, and got off at six-thirty.

We had not gone more than fifteen yards before we rounded a bend and found that the river was entirely blocked by three immense trees that had fallen straight across it. When we started chopping our way through them it was still cool and pleasant, but by the time we had finished the sun was high in the heavens and streaming down for all its equatorial worth. It is bearable until midday, and then it is not. The Indians, however, do not appear to mind it in the least. But then they never appear to mind anything. Their impassivity is amazing. They never move a muscle of their faces, even when we are crossing a rapid or sticking on a submerged tacuba. Nor do they pay the slightest attention when we speak to them. All day long they stand there in the bows, wielding their poles made of a light strong wood called yari-yari, and when the boat runs aground on a sandbank, they jump out and lift it (and us) over without the smallest difficulty.

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Early in the afternoon we encountered the highest and fiercest rapid I have yet seen. There were two sheer drops, each one seven or eight feet high, and a rushing torrent of water. The contents of the boat were unloaded on to the bank and carried round. We landed on a rock, and while attempting to jump from it to another one, I unfortunately fell into part of the rapid, severely damaging the funny bone of my right elbow. Also I got very wet.

Meanwhile the boat at the foot of the rapid was giving trouble. The face of the river was dotted about with men, some swimming, some up to their waists and shoulders in water, grasping a rope attached to the boat, which was doing its utmost to return to Arakaka. However, it was eventually drawn to the foot of the rapid and then slowly, bit by bit, hauled up. It was most exciting to watch. The others helped to haul it up the second drop. I sat in soaking garments on a rock, and nursed my elbow. The whole thing was over in less than an hour, which was a real feat on the part of the captain and men.

Once more in still waters we slipped silently along in the sunshine and I lay out on the bedding in varying attitudes trying to dry. At one place we passed a sand-bank on which a host of green and yellow butterflies had settled, while many more fluttered in the air above them. The effect was extraordinarily lovely, a fairy encampment, a miniature Field of the Cloth of Gold.

Farther on we came upon a succession of small rapids, so leaving the men to get the boat over, we clambered ashore by way of a fallen tree, for the bank

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was quite unscalable, and cut our way across a peninsula and through a deserted Indian field. At the other side we met with the river again, and climbing down another precipitous bank, rejoined the waiting boat.

We made camp soon after sunset and, as usual, became very hot making a clearing for the tents. Several buckets of water were brought up from the river by Santos, the Portuguese boy, who has become our personal attendant, and we all had hot baths before dinner.

I have heard two most interesting things to-day. First, the Six-o'clock Bee, which whistles at six o'clock. Hence its name. And then, as night was falling, I heard the Howlers.

There was a roaring in the far distance. Swiftly it neared and swelled in volume until it was close upon us, and the uproar resounded through the darkness. Never can I forget the primeval strength and savagery of that sound. Full of wonder I stood rooted to the spot, suddenly intensely aware of the mysteriousness and danger of the forest.

It is almost unbelievable that this astounding volume of sound, ferocious as that in the lion house at feeding time, should be made by a few monkeys no more than eighteen inches high. The howling baboons, as they are inaccurately termed, for there are no baboons in South America, have orange and black hair and a curious goitre-like construction in the throat with which they make the roaring. They must have come fairly close, for the noise was tremendous, and then it faded away.

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The day before yesterday we met the three coreals we had sent up to Five Stars with cases, on their way back to Arakaka. They spent the night in the camp, and the forest was unrecognizable because of the talking and the laughter of the negroes after the silent Indians. Down on the shore where they had slung their hammocks there was a constant flow of life and movement.

They went on early next morning, and last night there was silence once more except that all night long I heard faint drums being beaten in some distant Indian encampment.

And now it is ten o'clock. The camp is in darkness save for the dying embers of the fire on which we cooked our dinner. The tents are full of sleeping people. Apart from the chorus of frogs and cicadas, the only sound is that of Santos singing himself to sleep.

Monday

We started off again very early this morning, for there were only three more points — so the captain said — to Five Stars. We went on and on, turning bend after bend.

'How much farther?' someone would ask.

'Another point.' — And the inquirer would spend half an hour wondering exactly what it could be that constituted a point, for apparently it has nothing whatever to do with a bend.

All of a sudden we stopped, and for no apparent reason. It was not a rapid, the tacubas were no worse than usual, and surely it was too early for luncheon

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camp! And then the explanation dawned upon us, for there on the bank stood a very black person in spectacles, dressed in a curious flannel garment. He made us a deep bow.

'Good morning, Ladies, Gentlemen, Captain, and Crew!'

We answered him in kind, unstiffened ourselves with difficulty, stepped out on to a log, and so ashore.

Our river journey was over.



top: MR. COOK'S SHOP AT FIVE STARS
bottom: AUTHOR ON BOARD 'THE GOLDEN HIND'

CHAPTER VI

THE JOURNEY THROUGH THE FOREST

Tuesday evening. Five Stars

WE climbed the steep bank at the top of which stands Cook's shop — Cook being the person who had greeted us — and there we waited until the boat was unloaded. This done, we started off with the chop box to look for somewhere to live. Somebody's house was suggested, so away we went in the direction of it, and tramped for a long twenty minutes up and down hills, through plantain groves and fields of sugar cane until at last we came upon a hut with a palm-thatched roof, and a hard mud floor. It had no doors, and was already fully occupied by the owner and his relations, and the whole place was overrun with fowls, and half-witted Indians who squatted on the ground and stared. The heat was terrific, for it was in the very centre of the clearing, and there was not a tree anywhere.

So we turned sadly away and resumed our search.

At half-past one we were still searching. There did not appear to be a single place in Five Stars near water and in the shade where we could pitch our tents.

'Well, at any rate let's have lunch,' we said.

But for some reason best known to himself, Maurice vetoed this excellent plan, and on we went, for anything was better than argument in that heat. Weary,

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hungry, and very hot, we trailed miserably from one impossible place to another.

At last, when life was very low indeed, an unattractive hollow on the edge of the forest was selected, principally because it was in the shade, and had a creek near by with a small quantity of dangerously still-looking water in it. The undergrowth was cleared away, and at last we had lunch, which was greatly appreciated, as we had had nothing to eat since six o'clock in the morning.

The remainder of the afternoon and evening was spent watching the loads being brought into the camp. I went to bed early because it seemed the most sensible thing to do.

This morning we explored Five Stars, but the memory of yesterday's exploration is still present, and my impression remains the same; a high hot place, with a number of confusing paths leading nowhere.

Lunch was a silent meal, broken only by an acrimonious argument as to the superiority of field boots or light shoes for walking trails. Relations, in every sense, are a little strained. The latter part of the river journey was beautiful and interesting, but it was also rather trying being cooped up at such close quarters in such uncomfortable positions for so many hot hours on end. And now that we are here in this dark, hot, fly-ridden and unpleasant hole, there is nothing whatever to do but to wait for Juan and the stores, and argue.

Santos went down to the river this morning to wash clothes, but returned shortly after his departure, looking very crestfallen. We asked what the matter

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This complicates matters, as I have only two pairs of khaki trousers, and both are not being washed by him . . . A funny little Indian boy has appeared with nothing on but a hat.

Thursday. Five Stars

Juan turned up yesterday, having walked up through the forest from Arakaka. He looked like a tramp, with very little on, and a heavy load on his back. He explained that the Indian who had been carrying it had got tired, so he had taken it from him. Soo, who had also remained at Arakaka, arrived an hour later, full of conversation and exclamations over J.'s prowess as a walker. I was delighted to see him (J., not Soo), especially when he had had a bath, and shaved, and put on his patent leather shoes.

Dinner was a most cheerful meal, and after dinner was cheerful too. There is a great deal to be said for fresh blood — everything, when it is lively, and so very enterprising.

He called me this morning with the usual black coffee, and after breakfast we emptied and re-packed my canister, hunting for a cigarette case, which was eventually discovered in my pocket.

Later in the morning Gwen and I had words. Rather, she told me about my shortcomings, which

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seem to have no end. However, on my pleading guilty to all sorts of unjust accusations, and apologizing for innumerable crimes I had never committed, peace was re-established, and we went down quite amicably to the river to wash such of our clothes as had not been washed by Santos. While doing this the soap fell into the river, and in the effort to retrieve it I took an involuntary bath. Gwen took one too, but hers was on purpose, and more or less under an umbrella.

A crowd of Indians has just appeared in the camp and they are squatting on the ground looking at us. They inspected the insides of the tents, and were hugely amused by Rachel's mosquito boots. One of the babies has started to wail, which is unfortunate, as they will almost certainly remain here all day.

The black crew, by the way, became mutinous and discontented, so we got rid of them, and they will have to make their own way through to Venezuela. Santos and Jackson also came whining, and complaining that they had had no breakfast the day before yesterday, so we got rid of them too. Juan has produced a large fierce-looking Indian who says he will be our 'chef'. Like all Indians he is perfectly silent. As a matter of fact he can't very well be anything else, for he only understands Carib and a little Spanish, and we only speak English and French. We believe that his name is Daniel.

Last night we tried the planchette. It wrote 'Ask Juan what he did with the two men at the creek'. So we asked him, and he told us that the last time he was up in the forest he left a couple of men at his camp

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with a fortnight's provisions, and that they disappeared
and were never heard of again. Ominous tale!

To-morrow we start off through the forest, and
intend to go fifteen miles to a certain Pepe's Creek,
where we will stop for a few days and prospect for
gold while waiting for the stores to follow us up. There
are so many stores and so few Indians willing to carry
them that several journeys will have to be made.

We have discovered that Daniel's name is not Daniel,
but Karakel; and Baby (the Hymarali) has died, so at
the moment we are blessedly snakeless. To-morrow is
my birthday.

This concludes the list of topical events.

Saturday, April 25th. Pepe's Creek

Yesterday morning — it hardly seems possible that
yesterday morning we were in the remotely distant
Five Stars — we rose at half-past five, pulled the camp
to pieces, rolled it up into loads, and started off into
the forest with nine Indian droghers soon after seven.

The Indians vanished immediately. We too vanished
soon after crossing the long and extremely dangerous
tacuba at Five Stars, because we lost the trail, and
went for what in miles corresponds to an hour's
charge in the wrong direction, following a hunting
trail. Eventually we were pursued by three small
Indian boys who led us to a distant place, where we
found Juan and more Indians sitting round a tree
waiting for us.

Once more we started off, and at an even greater
pace than before. Juan in front, looking like a wild

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man of the woods, with his fair hair on end, a heavy pack containing his hammock and the rest of his belongings on his back, and nothing on the rest of him but a pair of sandals and some trousers. He never lifted his eyes from the ground, and sped along at about ten miles an hour. Gwen followed, then Maurice, Rachel, and finally me.

The trail was muddy, precipitous, and far too narrow for anyone to walk along. Frequently it was altogether invisible, and then we had to hunt about for signs of cutting or blazed trees. On and on, faster and faster we went. Obstructing branches hit me in the face. I was completely out of breath and had a dreadful stitch.

'Would you mind,' I said to Juan as icily as circumstances permitted, 'going at a more reasonable pace.'

'Of course,' he replied. 'We go slow.' And he would slacken the pace to five miles an hour for five minutes, and then career off faster than before.

I felt bitter, and began having imaginary conversations with myself.

'It is perfectly ridiculous,' I said furiously, 'to go at this unheard-of pace. If we were only going a few miles I should not mind in the least, but on a long journey one must naturally conserve one's strength. Anyone with a glimmering of intelligence would realize this.' I tripped over a spreading root. 'God damn these bloody trees! — And to think,' I continued with growing bitterness, 'that I have actually *paid* to experience this hell! — and that it is my birthday!' This last thought nearly reduced me to tears.

We stopped for a few blessed moments in order to hunt for the trail, and when it was found Gwen said

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that she was going to lead for a bit. I heaved a sigh of relief. At last we would go at a sensible rate. But to my horror and amazement she darted away through the trees even faster than Juan had done, detecting the trail where none was visible, racing up perpendicular hills, through swamps and creeks, o'er crag and torrent, etc. I was utterly confounded as well as outraged. Could this be Gwen whom I imagined I had known with all her possibilities for so many years? She was developing in the strangest way. — Quite like Rima, I thought, as she vanished round a distant bend, but — with my heart pounding against my ribs — much, much less attractive.

Later on someone else took her place, but there was very little alleviation. At half-past one we stopped for lunch by a creek, and lapped up the muddy-looking water as though it were nectar. I was hotter than I had ever been in my life, and quite speechless from hunger and exhaustion. We all flung ourselves down on the ground, which was damp mud, and no bed ever felt more wonderful. Gwen too, I noticed with something approaching satisfaction, was feeling rather less bright than when we started.

However, when we had sucked limes we began to recover, and when we had drunk several cups of strong black coffee, eaten, and rested, we all felt completely refreshed, and set off again with the lightest of hearts.

Nearly an hour must have passed when we noticed that the forest was becoming darker and darker, and was unnaturally still, as though it were waiting — listening. And then far away in the distance we heard a strange rushing noise, which grew louder every

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moment. It was as though a host of invisible people, talking, laughing, and singing, was sweeping rapidly towards us. Nearer and nearer they came, and the forest grew dark as night. Then, when they were almost upon us, there was a sudden swift stirring in the trees — a pause — and down came the rain.

It was not rain as we know it in Europe, but a solid sheet of water. The noise of it beating through the leaves and on to the ground was deafening, and in a minute we were drenched to the skin, which was deliciously cooling. Then came a clap of thunder, and the rain poured down with added vehemence. We paid no attention to it except that the sudden relief from heat and the excitement caused by the thunder made us quicken our pace, and we arrived here at Pepe's Creek half an hour before the Indians. We must have made an odd procession, four indomitable rain-drenched midgets striding along one behind the other through the tall forest, and the thunder rolling all around us.

This is a delightful place. The creek water is clear and delicious, and the ground is sandy, so we shall not have to paddle about the camp in a sea of mud.

While waiting for the droghers to arrive we busied ourselves making clearings for the tents, and later, when they were up, we stripped off our wet clothes, and had hot baths in basins, for the tin tub has not yet arrived, and the ground is too rough and uneven for my rubber bath, which is very collapsible.

In the fullness of time, when we were clean and dry and full of well-being, the risotto was cooked, and we sat round a smoky fire in a deserted logie, and had

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dinner. A logie is a shelter made by running four forked poles or saplings into the ground, adding several more as cross bars, and laying palm leaves over the top of it. The Indians put them up in less than half an hour, and with their families live in them in the utmost discomfort.

This particular logie must have been erected some time ago, for it is in a very bad state of repair, and the rain pours through it in some places and drips in others. Still, we enjoyed our dinner, and after we had finished it Juan produced a bottle of port, in which my health was drunk. Conversation followed, punctuated by general posts in order to avoid holes in the roof.

Soon after ten the expedition retired for the night. One by one the lights in the tents were blown out, and I fell asleep to the sound of frogs and cicadas, and the endless drip of rain falling from the trees. So ended the strangest birthday I have yet had.

Monday. Pepe's Creek

A camp on sandy soil is a snare and a delusion. It is far, far better to wade about in mud than to be tormented, as we all are, by hordes of sandflies. They are so small that they can get through any mosquito net without the slightest difficulty, and they are unbelievably savage. If it weren't for the ammonia life really wouldn't be worth living. Karakel as a chef is another delusion. Far from cooking for us we have to cook for him, while all he does is to lurk in the shadows near the logie, and listen to our conversation, or vanish into the forest with Juan, who says that he has second sight, that he is going to marshal the tribes over the Border,

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stir up a revolution, and make himself King of the Forest, and that he is a very interesting man; still, we'd rather have had a cook.

It was still raining when we woke this morning, but cleared towards noon. Maurice insisted on moving the stores from the logie in case the ex-crew who are expected to pass through the camp on their way to Venezuela should steal anything. Endless tins of tea, the chop box, and strings of garlic were flung into the nearest tents, which were Rachel's and mine. As soon as this was done we took refuge from the rain in our now chaotic tents, and tried to restore a little order, and while Rachel was restoring it in hers she discovered that the lid of the golden syrup tin had come off, and the contents emptied themselves all over everything else. It was a depressing sight.

Last night a curious thing happened. The others went to bed early, but I was talking to Juan, and did not put my light out until shortly before midnight. Then I lay in bed idly watching the glowing remains of the camp fire, and listening to the incessant croaking of the frogs. How alive the forest was; and yet, strangely, how quiet! There was a sudden crackling as a dead leaf fell on the fire; a little flame leapt up, flickered on the trunks of the nearer trees, and died down again. And then with startling suddenness the silence was shattered.

'Look out!' someone called urgently.

I ran outside, but the camp was in darkness. The three tents showed dimly amongst the trees; everyone seemed to be sleeping. Then I noticed that Rachel was sitting up in bed.

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'Is anything the matter?' I asked. She was still half asleep, and did not appear to understand, so I flashed my torch on to her, and repeated the question more loudly. As I did so there was a great slow crash in the distance — some giant tree falling. By now she was quite awake, and said that she had dreamt that some huge thing was falling and would crush us. The tree must actually have crashed as she called out, for it was some considerable way off.

To-day, Juan, who has been boasting that he would be the first one of us to find gold, set off to prospect. He dug an enormous pit just across the creek. Instantly it filled with water, and Rachel was employed to help bail it out. After several hours' labour he came upon a large slab of immovable stone, so the pit had to be abandoned. But as he came to the surface he discovered a speck of gold resting on his shoulder. At least he swears that that is where he found it. I expect he chipped it off one of the nuggets he used to wear in Georgetown on his watch chain.

I have discovered an excellent new way of washing clothes. Having removed your belt, knife and revolver, and anything of value from your pockets, you jump into the creek fully dressed. First you cover yourself with soap, then scrub, submerge, repeat the process, splashing and swimming about until the rinsing is complete, and finally emerge, clean, exercised, and cool. I did this most of the afternoon with three pairs of trousers and four shirts.

We had the remains of the golden syrup for tea, and some of the murderous bread made by Blackman

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before he mutinied. It is as tough as leather, and immensely heavy, but for some reason we all like it. After tea Juan and I went out to track an animal that has been prowling round the camp for several days, and also to collect palm leaves with which to carpet the floor of our combined kitchen-dining-and-drawing-room. In both quests we were unsuccessful. But we had an amusing time.

An enormous toad about a foot square has appeared in the camp, and fixed on Rachel's tent as its headquarters. She dislikes it quite violently, and we have tried every means short of murder to induce it to go away, but without success. It just squats there and blinks. I thought just now that a tiger was sniffing round, but it was the toad hopping. It makes as much noise as a man.

Darkness has fallen. We have all had hot baths, and changed for dinner into clean dry clothes — a pleasant feeling. Maurice is in his tent writing his diary. I am writing mine. Rachel, on hands and knees, is blowing up the fire. Gwen is cooking at it. Juan, who spent last night in the leaking logie, has decided to try the store tent, as he has no tent of his own, and is busy hanging his hammock there. Whether he finds it satisfactory remains to be seen, for it smells foully of salt fish. Over the way Solomon and Soo are singing an endless religious chant.

A peaceful, pleasant scene, made all the more pleasant by the realization that only a few yards away, outside the small safe circle of light, the forest, dark, and full of danger, stretches in all directions.

Swarms of flying ants have appeared, and are the

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greatest nuisance, dropping their wings all over the place; and a beautiful firefly that has been darting round for some time has most unfortunately flown into the soup, which is in process of being made.

We heard a curious new bird to-day, and on asking Soo what kind of a bird it was, he replied, 'It is called Mr. Tomkins.' — Many new bites. I am devoured. The smoke from the fire is the only thing that discourages these infernal sandflies, and that has its drawbacks. Dinner seems to be ready.

Thursday. Pepe's Creek

The ex-crew turned up a couple of days ago, and spent the night less than fifteen yards from our camp. They are in an unenviable position, for their supplies are running short, and as none of them are experienced bushmen and the rains have started, they will have all their work cut out to reach Venezuela, especially as none of them know the trail. And even if they did, to the initiated the trail is almost non-existent. We also knew that they knew that to the nine of them there are five of us, and that we have cases of stores. Juan assured us that they would almost certainly creep over in the night, cut our throats, and steal the stores. It was a disturbing idea, and I felt slightly uneasy in my mind as my tent was the outside one, and nearest to the ex-crew. Juan rigged up an entanglement of bush rope and plates between us and them, and persuaded me to sleep with a loaded revolver under my pillow, which worried me almost more than the idea of being assassinated by the ex-crew. However, they were far too exhausted after a day on the trail to assassinate anything, and we

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woke the following morning to find ourselves and our stores in the same place and condition as they were the night before.

The crew are making for a certain Dead Man's Creek, not far over the border. Juan tells us that it got this sinister name because of the sharp practices of a party of Venezuelans working the gravel there.

They engaged a number of pork-knockers at a high rate of pay. The work came to an end and the pork-knockers were paid off. They packed their few belongings, and set off along the trail — and were followed by their late employers till they reached the creek now known as Dead Man's. As they descended the slope leading down to the water the Venezuelans shot them all dead, took back the wages they had paid them, and returned.

It has suddenly been decided that we pack up and start off again at crack of dawn to-morrow, and there is a tremendous amount of business connected with the sorting and packing of the chop boxes going on, principally on the part of Gwen, who rends any interrupter.

The rainy season has started in grim earnest since we came here, and turned the forest into one vast swamp, so the going is not likely to be easy. Rachel and I went out for a walk along the Five Stars trail yesterday in order to get into training, and when we came back she in particular could scarcely be seen for mud. Even her face was splashed with it.

Determined to have exercise, we forged ahead, making no attempt to avoid the worst places. We slid

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down muddy banks, strode carelessly through the
creeks, and had, altogether, a grand time.

There is something curiously satisfactory about
becoming thoroughly and completely filthy. It seems
to give one a quite particular sense of freedom — a
relic, I suppose, of days when one was told not to
walk in the puddles.

We passed trees with huge excrescences on the trunks
which on inquiry, not examination (for examination
might prove painful), turned out to be wood ants'
nests; and on the way back I collected quantities of
beautiful leaves, red, rose pink, and flame coloured,
and the loveliest shower of pale grey ones hanging
unexpectedly among them. The larger leaves I stuck
into my belt, the smaller into my hat and five pockets,
and so came home, and now they are adorning the
tarpaulin-covered shelter (for the logie became
impossible) in which we have most of our being.

Soo's game cock, which has been brought up all the
way from civilization in order to train it to fight, is
becoming increasingly sociable, and wanders about
quite unperturbed among the tents. Whisky is worse
than ever, and nothing, neither fair words nor foul,
will keep him out of my tent. I spent hours making an
entanglement all round it of pointed sticks, but he
pays absolutely no attention to it, and a dozen times
to-day I have found him under my bed. The only
effect of the entanglement is to trip me up when I go
into the tent in the dark. He is a miserable dog without
any pride.

Rachel and I were both given the Scorpion Bena
to-day. It is a good deal simpler than the Snake Cut,

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and consists, roughly, in scratching the arm until blood is drawn with the tail of a dead scorpion, then rubbing the poison into the wound. The next thing to be done is to pick up a live scorpion, and see what happens. Rachel, intrepid woman, is even now grubbing about the floor of the logie looking for one. Personally I shall wait until one turns up of its own accord.

Friday. Pepe's Creek

A day full of incident? We were to have started early this morning, but when we woke at five-thirty we found that it had been raining all night, and showed no signs of abating. Juan predicted that none of the Indians who were due to arrive with loads from Five Stars would turn up, and that after all it would be impossible to leave, which very considerably put Gwen out. In the early afternoon, however, they appeared, but by that time it was too late to start, and anyway they were tired, and declined to droghe any farther.

We then learnt that a barrel containing all sorts of important things had been mislaid somewhere between Arakaka and Five Stars, also Juan's case of private stores. So everyone became very excited and furious with each other. The argument as to who was responsible was in full swing when an Indian produced a letter from Mr. Cook at Five Stars.

'Dear Major and Circle', it ran. 'I think it advisable to give you warning that if these present rains continue, Pepe's Creek will rise and flood the surrounding country. Trusting that you are enjoying the best of health, I am, Sir, Yours respectfully, Cook.'

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As the rainy season has only just started, and is bound to continue for at least three months, we had visions of ourselves taking to the trees.

Immediately following this staggering piece of information there was a cry of excitement from Soo in his logie.

'Earthquake!'

We all burst out laughing. It was really too funny on top of all the other catastrophes. The earthquake, which was a slight one, very soon passed off.

A continual ripple of conversation rose from the Indians who were squatting on the ground. Gwen selected one of them to be our hunter. He is a most attractive Pan-like creature called Frederick, and he will go out daily into the forest with a bow and arrow or a gun, and bring back what Juan calls Porc.

These wild boar or peccary are probably the most dangerous animals in the forest, for they travel in a herd and attack at sight. There are two different species, one very much fiercer than the other, and the only difference between them is that the fiercer kind have a V of white hair on the chest. At first sight, however, the V is barely perceptible, so that until the creatures are almost upon you you cannot be sure whether they are the more or the less dangerous kind. The most sensible thing when you smell them — and you can do this from a long way off — is to try and climb a tree. I say 'try' advisedly.

After resting for a while the Indians departed to fetch their wives and cassava, without which they decline to go any farther. Soo went back with them to Five Stars to see whether his friend from Arakaka,

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whom he has summoned to be our cook, has arrived there.

Once more quietness descended upon the camp. Gwen and Maurice retired to their tents and slept. I washed some handkerchiefs in the creek, which is terrifically swollen, swift, and discoloured; and then the heat, which has been unbearable all day, reached its climax. There was a clap of thunder, and torrential rain. The first force of it lasted only a short time, but it cleared the air. Gwen and Maurice must have slept all through the storm, for there is not a sound coming from either of the tents.

Rachel is lying on her bed learning Spanish. 'La iglesia tiene un altar', I hear murmured, and 'Quien ha tomado la tinta'. Juan is squatting in the logie making an enormous list, the thunder is growling away in the distance, and all the trees dripping rain. — A strange life!

Monday. Pepe's Creek

Soo had a glorious 'drunk' in Five Stars, and came back shaking all over. He admits that he cannot, never could, and never will be able to resist rum, and says in his own way that he would not exchange a bottle of it for the most beautiful woman in Georgetown.

With him came his friend, now our cook. His name is Alfred Alfonso Gibson.

Coloured people certainly have a talent for choosing remarkable names for their children. Venuses and Aphrodites are common occurrences, and I have heard on unimpeachable authority of a 'Princess-of-Wales-Beatrice-Smith' and a 'Queen-Victoria-broke-her-

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Coronation-Oath'. But perhaps the happiest of all is one that came to light a short time ago when we were at Five Stars. A person of various races called Wagner — the first syllable being pronounced like the action of a dog's tail, not like the German (about this he was most particular)— came into the camp one day to pay us a call. During the course of conversation he told us a very long story about the theft and recapture of a Union Jack. The story was a strange one, and difficult to follow, so at the end of it we asked who had been the rightful owner of the Union Jack.

'It belonged,' he said, 'to a black man called Apple.'

To return to Gibson. He had walked up through the forest from Arakaka to Five Stars but could go no farther for some time because the river was so high that the tacuba by which we had crossed it was several yards under rushing water. When first he walked into the camp, having spent a heavy day on the trail, he looked ragged and travel-stained, which was surprising. An odd little figure, very black, with bare feet, a *warrashi* on his back, and on his head a most peculiar cap.

As soon as he arrived he darted behind a tree, and emerged ten minutes later in all the glory of a starched white shirt and trousers. How he managed it is beyond understanding, for in addition to the swamps that had to be negotiated, and the rivers to be swum, it had rained practically all day long. But managed it he had, and trotting briskly into the camp, addressed himself to Gwen.

'At what hour you desire dinner, Mistress?' he asked. We were quite overcome.

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A few of the Indian droghers who went to fetch their wives have returned with them, and have brought loads from the store dump at Five Stars, so we have decided to start to-morrow morning. In preparation for this the chop box has been re-packed.

It was the first time that I had seen an Indian family *en route*, and the sight is remarkable, for when an Indian woman moves from one place to another she carries most of the household in the *warrashi* on her back. Cooking utensils, slabs of cassava, gesticulating cocks and hens and a baby or two stick out in all directions. With one hand she leads an older child, with the other grasps a bush knife or line stick, while a couple of Indian cur dogs trail dejectedly behind. Poor creatures, they are a depressing sight. Always painfully thin, they are mostly bald as well, because of a habit they have of lying and rolling in the hot embers of the fire. I suppose that they do this in an attempt to discourage some of the innumerable creatures that bite up here in the forest.

All are now encamped on the other side of the creek, where they have built themselves logies.

Gwen's three hens that she ordered from Five Stars have also arrived. Two of them are dark, and the other one fair. They look strong and cheerful enough, but unfortunately, they seem to be a kind that doesn't lay. However, they make most vigorously the noise that usually heralds an egg, so perhaps one of these days we shall find one.

The camp is becoming like a farmyard. In addition to the hens there is a little warracabra, a maroodie, Soo's game cock, and Whisky, and they all rise their

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various voices at daybreak regularly every morning.

The rainy season is upon us with a vengeance, and the trees never cease dripping, although we usually have brief spells of sunshine during the morning or the afternoon. Instantly the camp is transformed into a laundry, every bush covered with socks and shirts and trousers hanging out to dry. Sometimes they succeed before the warning roar of approaching rain causes us to dash out and collect them; more often not.

It was fine all this afternoon, and the others went to prospect a creek about an hour away. I stayed behind, tidied my tent, and washed an immense number of plates, mugs, knives, forks and spoons, and arranged them in neat piles. Washing up is like ploughing the sand. This is the second time to-day I have done it. The amount of crockery used by the five of us at each meal is astonishing.

Juan came back before the others, and told me, amongst other things, about a beautiful Russian actress who accompanied him on an expedition into the interior of Paraguay, and hated it, and eventually him, so much that she tried to commit suicide fourteen times. For six months, he told me, she refused to speak a word to him, although they necessarily saw a good deal of each other. They even shared a hammock, he said, but I do not believe this. If you hated anyone so much that you remained silent for six months rather than speak to him, I am sure you wouldn't share his hammock. But possibly Russians are different.

Gwen and Maurice and Rachel came back as dusk was falling, They were very hot, and almost invisible for mud, and instantly retired to their tents to have

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hot baths. Soon after, we heard the most heart-rending wails, unmistakably those of Whisky, who, as that he is, had gone off alone into the forest. Quite certain that such an uproar could only mean that he had been bitten by a snake, Maurice rushed to his tent for the bottle of snake charm, Soo hastily flung on some trousers over the gaudy red and white striped pyjamas that he wears from time to time, and we all flew about trying to locate the place that the cries were coming from. Five minutes later Whisky walked into the camp perfectly unharmed, having done no more than lose the trail.

Frederick is an excellent hunter. He brought in a creature called an accouri to-day, which we are going to have for supper. It will be a pleasant change after the tinned foods we have been eating for so long.

According to my watch, the Six-o'clock Bee went off a few minutes late this evening. I wonder where we shall be when we hear it to-morrow evening?

Wednesday. Pepe's Creek

There seems to be a fate against our leaving Pepe's Creek, and we could not start yesterday morning after all because during the night Rachel was stricken with an attack of malaria. Seeing a light in Gwen's tent she went along to get the quinine. Then Maurice woke, and very soon the camp was set in motion. I woke to find people running about in pyjamas, and the place ablaze with light. Poor Rachel had a soaring temperature, and was shaking all over. Maurice was talking in low but excited tones about the folly of

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walking in the rain without a mackintosh. Finally he said that he would make some tea. After a long time the fire burnt up, and the water boiled. And when the tea was made it was discovered that he had filled the kettle with water from the washing-up bucket, so it had to be done all over again.

Next morning he went off with Gibson the cook and some Indians to Cedar Creek, which is said by them to be twelve miles farther on, but they have a very vague idea of distance. Rachel was pretty bad all day, but recovered a little towards the evening, and we had a swizzle party in her tent, and played advertisementsnap. No one even suggested Pelman patience. Then we had more swizzles, and Juan told us astonishing stories, which are probably untrue, about his past life; and Gwen, who is more quickly affected by drink than anyone I know, held forth on the supreme value and desirability of peace.

‘Golden Peace!’ (She said this several times.) ‘That is the only true happiness! – With the mind calm and untroubled, and a clear eye that can see things without distortion, and can get on with making the most of the good things it has got! Why,’ she said, warming to her subject, ‘who wants Youth? Riotous, unhappy youth, that cannot really appreciate or get anything sensible done because it is too busy being agitated!’

I said that I did, and that she was getting mixed, but she paid no attention, and continued in the same strain until Juan, who does not like listening to monologues unless they are his own, lifted up his hand.

‘Swizzles first,’ he said. ‘Peace afterwards.’

So we had more swizzles.

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Eventually Rachel felt faint, so we left her, and continued the party out in the logie, but it had lost its buoyancy, and we soon went sleepily to bed.

Rachel is much better to-day, so if the Indians turn up with the last batch of stores from Five Stars, we intend to leave to-morrow and join Maurice at Cedar Creek.

Thursday. Pepe's Creek

Not an Indian appeared. It rained fiercely and steadily all night, so the trail is probably impassable. It is the greatest nuisance being held up like this, especially as none of the nearer creeks show any indications of gold.

Friday. Pepe's Creek

That wretched game cock crowed unceasingly all night. Also I had a dreadful nightmare which kept waking me, and each time I woke I found Whisky under the bed. After chasing him out for the fifth or sixth time I went and talked to Soo, who was baking bread. It is a great ceremony, this baking of bread, and has for some strange reason to be done at dead of night.

Soo's conversation had the desired effect of banishing the horrid feeling of the nightmare, and I returned to my tent and slept till I was wakened by that infernal cock, and by an all-pervading reek of garlic that had been put near the fire to dry. I shut the flaps of the tent and slept again till I was wakened by a fly that kept settling on my face; by Whisky jumping over the

THE JOURNEY THROUGH THE FOREST entanglement; by the hens, the cock, and lastly by Juan with the cup of early morning coffee.

Frederick brought back a bird called a powise to-day, and we had it for supper. It was good, but exceedingly tough, and my shoulder and jaws ached for hours afterwards. — A lovely fine day. The Indians turned up in force, Rachel swears that she is quite equal to walking twenty or thirty miles, the chop boxes are packed, so perhaps . . .

Sunday. Pepe's Creek.

Juan is ill — has been for several days, and we are still here. All day long he lies miserably in his hammock, and never moves except when he opens his mouth to have his temperature taken. Yesterday it was alarmingly high, but I believe that with malaria you can almost crack the thermometer and yet not die.

After one night with the salt fish in the store tent he decided to sleep in the new logie, and used, after we had all gone to bed, to sling his hammock from one corner to the other. This was all very well as long as he was only there during the night, and had the logie to himself, but now that he is there all the time it is quite another matter, and the congestion is indescribable, what with packing cases, clothes hanging up to dry, the rest of us cooking and eating meals, and Juan in the hammock on top of it all.

To-day being Sunday, Solomon and Soo have been singing hymns since early morning, and their logie sounded just like a prayer meeting. Soo played the tunes on a comb — a dreadful accomplishment of

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which he is very proud — and Solomon sang. I had no idea that 'Abide with me' had so many verses.

It is very late indeed now. Long ago the singing was stilled, and the lights in the tents blown out, but I could not sleep, and have been wandering about the silent camp.

The night is indescribably lovely — so lovely that it is almost unbearable. A young moon is shining; it makes a silver haze among the trees, and the water is all glistening. The forest is alive with the noise of the frogs, and away on the other side of the creek I can see through the trees the Indian fires glowing beside their hammocks.

What a miraculous night! It is worth anything, *anything* to know such supreme loveliness! You stand entranced. The earth fades. You are uplifted — freed — borne away. Aware of everything. . . .

Strange indeed that through sight and sound should come such revelation.

Tuesday. Cedar Creek

And that, after all, was the last night at Pepe's Creek, for when the morning came Juan's temperature had fallen, and although he was still very weak there was no longer any danger. So leaving a couple of Indians to look after him until he should be well enough to follow us, we started off for Cedar Creek immediately after lunch.

The trail was certainly muddy, and a great deal of it was up and down hill, but it seemed the merest child's play compared with the Five Stars' trail; possibly this was partly because we are all in much better training now than we were.

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On the way Gwen had an encounter with a huge snake that was lying curled up on the trail. It struck at her leg, but providentially she had on field boots, and these, or perhaps the Cut deterred it. Anyway it slipped off to the side, then turned and hissed, and vanished into the undergrowth. A villainous looking creature! It must have been at least eight or nine feet long.

The other day I picked up a large scorpion, and although I let it crawl over my hand and arm it made no attempt to sting. Soo captured a young Bushmaster (they are the most dangerous snakes in the forest) about the same time, and wanted me to handle that too, but I felt that I had been daring enough for one day, and decided to test the Cut on something less deadly.

We had expected the trail to be much longer than it turned out to be, and it was with a pleasant feeling of astonishment that we came upon Cedar Creek after less than three hours on the trail.

Maurice was asleep in his tent. He had been kept awake all night by poisoned bites and wounds on his hands and arms, and the pain seems to have been very severe. He must have caught some infection in the creek water. One of the principal dangers of the forest is that cuts are very liable to become septic. I always carry an iodine pencil in my pocket, and in spite of jeers apply it to the most insignificant looking scratch.

In the evening a consultation was held. Maurice and Gwen decided to push straight on next day to the frontier, as so much time has already been spent on the journey. Rachel and I will remain here for the present

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in order to receive the rest of the stores from Pepe's Creek, and to send the Indians on every morning with loads from the dump here. It ought not to take many days, for we have fourteen Indians.

Gwen and Maurice went off soon after seven this morning. Heaven knows when they will arrive, for the frontier is said to be a long way off, and nobody knows anything about the trail. After they had gone Rachel and I heated up the porridge and had a second breakfast.

This camp is very unlike the last. It is on the side of a hill, and there is a steep slope leading down to the creek. This is an advantage, for when it rains, the water, instead of sinking straight into the ground and turning to mud, runs down hill and swells the creek. The trees are larger than they were, and the undergrowth therefore sparser, and as we penetrate farther and farther into the forest the green gloom becomes ever more profound. There are fewer birds here, and I have not heard the Howlers once since we came. Only the everlasting frogs, as soon as night falls, are noisy as ever. . . . I hope poor Juan is better.

Wednesday. Cedar Creek

We are no longer alone. This morning broke fine and clear, and after the loads had been weighed, apportioned, and the droghers dispatched, Rachel said that she was going to walk back to Pepe's Creek to fetch some tobacco, and to see how Juan was getting on. I told her that it was misguided to walk eighteen (there and back) unnecessary miles, and that she would

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almost certainly lose the trail and never be heard of again, but she continued pulling on her boots, buckled on her belt and knife, and set off in a most determined manner.

Left to myself, I considered how a long delicious day should be filled. Obviously the first thing to do was to collect the forty odd tins of Lipton's tea from beneath the place where Maurice's bed had been, and put them in the store tent. This I did with the aid of two charming little Indians, Sweetman and Joshua. They are not droghing to-day because they are supposed to be ill. Then I talked to Gibson, or, rather, Gibson talked to me. He was full of complaints about Soo, who he says has a detestable nature. While he talked I mixed some flour and water into paste and got out my album and a packet of photographs I have been meaning to stick in for years.

There are photographs of Corsica (dozens of them), of my family waving good-bye; of the last sight of England, the first of South America. Photographs of coral islands and palm-fringed beaches; of the Pitch Lake at Trinidad; of me as I thought I should look in the forest, and a wonderful one of Rachel and the captain of one of the ships we sailed on, who admired her so much that she won the ship's sweepstake every day for a week.

I was enjoying myself very much, and thinking with pleasure of the delightful solitary day in front of me when all of a sudden a voice called out 'Hullo!' — And there was Rachel walking into the camp closely followed by something that turned out to be Juan.

He said that he had been abandoned by the Indians,

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and felt so ill that he determined to try and struggle over here. Rachel met him about three-quarters of the way along the trail to Pepe's Creek. He was lying full length in the mud, having, as he said, a rest. When he arrived he looked as though he might die at any moment, but instead of getting out of his soaking clothes, he was suddenly seized with a fever of energy, fell upon the store tent, and started to move it from one side of the camp to the other, where he said the ground was drier.

For an hour he and Rachel struggled and carted and heaved like navvies. When it was done, he sat down and made an enormous list, then jumped into the creek to get cool, and finally collapsed on to a bed, and wrapping his head up in a towel, lay there for hours, looking like death.

In the late evening he recovered a little, and slung his hammock in the store tent. It was a considerable relief to find that he was well enough to move, because two beds among three people is rarely an advantage. Rachel and I both subscribed a blanket, so at any rate he won't catch another chill.

The droghers trailed wearily into the camp soon after sunset. They say that it is too far to go and come back from the frontier in a day, and that they can only droghe to a place they call Esperanza Creek. This is a great nuisance, and we shall have to arrange about sending someone there to guard the stores.

Gibson declares that he is ill; has fever, and a headache, and various other complaints that he described with an embarrassing lack of reserve, and in conclusion announced that he could not possibly cook the dinner.

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So we have decided to send him on to the frontier to-morrow, and are relying on Karakel to do some of the fetching and carrying about the camp. One of the things that Gibson said he had was a stiff neck, so we gave him the Elliman's Embrocation to rub himself with, and when we emerged from the tents a little later we were astonished to see him standing sorrowfully in the middle of the camp, slowly pouring the contents of the bottle over his head. Hastily we rescued the remains.

Nearly all the Indians have severe colds in the head. They lie around in their hammocks coughing and sneezing in the most unrestrained manner, and the camp is becoming like a hospital ward.

This is the forty-fifth day since we left Georgetown.

Thursday. Cedar Creek

The Indians' colds have turned to 'flu, and in spite of hot rum, aspirin, quinine, and gargling hourly with peroxide and permanganate of potash, I have caught it too. My temperature was definitely above normal this afternoon, and if I could only remember where I put the thermometer I know that it would prove by now to be soaring. For Juan and I have had a violent quarrel, and his really outrageous behaviour has put me in a greater rage than I have been in for years.

The evening began quite amicably. We played the gramophone to any Indians who were well enough to appreciate it (one poor man called Chimbo, and his wife — name unknown — are very bad indeed), and Juan cooked some bakes for dinner. During dinner we discussed business in general and store-keeping in

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particular, and then, after we had finished eating, and were drinking coffee, he suddenly took leave of his senses and accused me of implying by a wink to Rachel that he either had, or intended, to steal our private stores.

At first I thought he was joking, then, seeing that he was actually serious, I told him that he was making a ridiculous mistake, and gave him my solemn word of honour that I had neither winked nor implied anything. He refused to believe me. Properly indignant at having my honour flouted, I said that unless he instantly apologized I would probably never speak to him again. He said that he was hopefully prepared to risk it, that I had winked, had implied that he was a thief, and nothing, nothing, NOTHING would ever convince him to the contrary!

'I cannot make a mistake!' he shouted. (We were both shouting by this time.) 'Not for nothing was I the cleverest spy in the war! I have only to look at you and I know everything that you are thinking! If you tell something in Chinese or Bulgarian I watch you and I understand all! If ever I found that I was wrong in anything I should be ill for a month!'

Acidly I told him that he was likely to have rather a severe illness one of these days, and that personally I had better things to do than bandy words with something that was obviously not in its right mind, and didn't Rachel agree with me? — But Rachel had vanished.

I discovered her in her tent; she was lying fully dressed on the bed with her boots on. I told her about Juan until she fell asleep from exhaustion. Then I left her.

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It certainly is a nice sort of position that we are in! Three-quarters of the Indians down with influenza and unable to droghe, the remainder showing signs of sickening. We still have quantities of stuff here, more at Pepe's Creek; and Maurice and Gwen are eighteen miles away on the frontier with very few stores, and the rains making the trail more and more impassable. We are all completely marooned, and everyone ill. Juan is not only ill, but mad. Rachel's temperature went up again to-day, mine is at boiling point; Chimbo and his wife are not expected to live till morning, and if any of us ever get back to civilization alive I shall be exceedingly surprised. Thank goodness it is not raining.

Friday. Cedar Creek

Before going to bed last night I changed the front door of my tent to the other end, because I did not feel inclined to be gazed at any longer by Juan, who always slings his hammock immediately opposite. (Now that I come to think of it, of course that is why he moved the store tent!) I see this morning that by way of retort he has hung a perfectly transparent Union Jack in front of his hammock. The Ass!

Affairs in general look brighter to-day. I felt pretty bad when I woke, and ached all over, but am better this evening, and so are the Indians. Even Chimbo and his wife seem to have taken on a new lease of life. Two or three of the Indian women are now droghing, and we have sent Karakel off into the forest to collect as many more droghers as he can, offering him a shilling for each one he produces. Juan, who is

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certainly full of ingenuity, has betted him a dollar that he cannot carry two hundred pounds in one journey up from Pepe's Creek. 'Only a *very* strong man,' he said, 'could carry so great a weight!' So we will see what happens.

Before the quarrel, he (Juan, not Karakel) and I were on the friendliest of terms, and he spent hours carving 'JOAN' in huge letters on the tree to which his hammock is tied. So now it is a perpetual source of irritation to him, being the first thing he sees in the morning, and the last at night. His only way out is to cut the tree down, and Rachel and I have a bet on as to whether he will or will not do it.

There is a rumour that whenever the moon is full the Indians have a feast, and drink so heavily for three or four days that they spend the next ten being ill. As it is getting on for being full moon, we are anxiously doing all we can to distract their attention, and are hoping against hope that the gramophone may prove a rival attraction. Never having experienced so strange and wonderful a thing before, it naturally fills them with astonishment. Caruso singing quite a serious love song reduces them to fits of helpless laughter.

A letter came from Gwen to-day. She sent it, together with a portion of smoked accouri, to Esperanza by Soo, who is guarding the stores there, and an Indian called Playting brought it on here.

She writes that Gibson is still ill, that Frederick has two poisoned feet, and Maurice poisoned wounds all over him, but that all are gradually recovering. The trail to the frontier is worse, she says, and more exhausting than can possibly be described.

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We had the accouri for dinner, and Rachel made some cakes with the remains of the porridge; they were fairly good.

Five hundred pig are said by one of the men to have been seen near the camp to-day.

Saturday. Cedar Creek

The man who saw the pig is on the sick list to-day. So is Rachel, with a badly poisoned leg; so is practically everybody; so am I. This epidemic is running right through the camp like wildfire.

Juan claims to know all about Rachel's leg, which he says is quite common in the bush, and usually results in amputation, if not death, unless it is instantly bandaged with gunpowder. She has decided to wait until to-morrow before submitting to this unpleasant alternative.

The worst of Juan is that one never knows whether he is stating a sober fact or having a flight of fancy. He had one to-day, a most peculiar one, which took the form of his spending at least three hours digging a very deep pit.

'Are you looking for gold indications?' I asked politely. (We are very polite to each other since the night before last.)

But it wasn't gold he was after. It was exercise.

'It must be satisfactory to see the pit getting deeper and deeper.'

'It is not the pit I like, it is to make a huge mound of earth,' he said. The strange creature! I left him at it.

Rachel's voice calling my name woke me last night.

'Yes, what is the matter?'

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'I have just found your umbrella in my bed.'

I was prepared to believe it, but astonished that she had not noticed it before, as it is several yards long, and bulky in proportion. A few minutes later she announced that it had vanished.

'It had a yellow handle,' she murmured sleepily, from which I gathered that she was having what I hope was a nice dream.

At two I woke again with a start to hear a heavy tread outside my tent. It was stealthy and deliberate, and there was a strange feeling of danger in the air. After considering the matter for some time I burrowed about under the pillow, grasped the revolver, and crept out into the night. I flashed the light all round, but could see nothing. Whatever it had been must have slunk off into the bushes. I woke several times with this unpleasant feeling of something very secret and dangerous about, but neither saw nor heard anything. This morning I told the others about it, and the Indians say that it must have been a tiger prowling round. Circumstantial evidence that all unknown to me the dog Whisky was sleeping under my bed.

Nothing very interesting happened to-day. We tried to make an omelette of Bird's custard powder, but it was not much of a success. Juan went on enlarging his mound of earth.

CHAPTER VII

THE FRONTIER

The Frontier. Two days later

THE long journey is over; our destination is reached. For to-day, just fifty days since we sailed away from Georgetown, we walked into this camp on the Venezuelan frontier.

Somehow I imagined that the fact of its being the frontier would make it different from other parts of the forest. There would be a cleared space, I thought, something like Arakaka, only larger; a high bare hill on the crest of which our shop would stand overlooking Venezuela, and far away in the distance I rather think I expected to see the domes and spires of Caracas.

But the frontier is not in the least like that. It is exactly like any other part of the forest except that it seems darker. The trees are immense, some of them gnarled, with great buttresses, and hung with bush rope as thick as a man; others tall and slender. There is a hill, it is true, which for obvious reasons we call the Venezuelan Hill, but it is neither high nor bare; and as for the shop, which Juan definitely gave us to understand was already built, it is merely another of his flights. I don't think anyone has ever been here before.

The camp itself is beautiful; dark and flat and spacious, shadowed by imminent hills. There is no

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tangle of undergrowth, for Maurice and Gwen, prepared for a long stay, have had it all cleared away, and the great trees stand about the camp solitary and untrammelled; a stately place.

The creek runs round two sides of it, and from the farther bank rises a most precipitous hill. Beyond it — if you flew for a very long way as the crow flies — lies Brazil. I shall climb the hill to-morrow. There is light between the trees at the top, and it looks interesting. No knowing what I may find there!

And now back over the trail to Cedar Creek, and the reasons that led us to leave it so much sooner than we intended.

Three hungry Venezuelans passing through the camp consented to droghe. Three new Indians appeared with Karakel from Five Stars, and seven invalids recovered. So that altogether the droghers mustered fifteen instead of two, and when they had departed with their loads, and we saw that the store tent was almost empty, Rachel and I decided to go too, while the going was good.

All this happened yesterday. This morning at six I woke with a start to find my tent being taken down over my head.

'What the blazes do you think you are doing?' I shouted angrily at what I knew must be Juan, for Rachel, with all her faults, would never do a thing like that.

Juan it was, and the three Venezuelans.

'You said you wanted to start at seven, and it is already late,' he said sulkily, as another guy rope was loosened, and a side of the tent fell in on to my head.

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'Please go away. You can't have the tent until I have finished dressing.'

He went. I was very annoyed at being wakened so early, and both Rachel and I felt ill. Her leg, with which Juan had had his way, and treated with gunpowder, was very sore and painful. I had a sore throat, a heavy cold, and felt weak as the result of 'flu. So breakfast was not a hilarious meal, especially as Juan was peevish, and looked far from his best. He has never been the same since an Indian cut his hair with a bush knife.

Before starting, Rachel and I swallowed a little rum, and cantered off into the forest at a great rate, but after a time the effects wore off. Pauses had to be made every now and then in order that Rachel might rewind the bandage, which kept slipping round her ankle, and it was well before midday before we reached Esperanza.

We found Soo there. He was dressed in the Pyjamas, and was lying in his hammock playing with the maroodie. It is the dearest little bird. He picked it up on the trail, and carried it to the frontier in his cap, since when it has adopted him as its mother. The other maroodie that we had at Pepe's Creek unfortunately died.

'Some tea, please Soo, and is there any milk?'

'Milk! What an idea! — How could he, Soo, have anything to do with milk? Did I not know that if he were to touch so much as a drop of it he would instantly and for ever lose all power over snakes!' — and he started off on what promised to be an endless dissertation on snakes.

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'We are tired, Soo, hungry and thirsty, and totally uninterested in the effect milk has on you or on snakes. So please concentrate your attention on the kettle and see that it boils as quicky as possible.'

I hunted among the stores that he was guarding, and found a tin of Klim (powdered milk) and drank, for by now the tea was made, seven mugs of it straight off. Half an hour later, fortified by lunch and the rest, we started off along the trail once more, and reached the frontier in the late afternoon.

Camp on the Venezuelan Frontier

We have been here a week. One hundred and seventy-two hours waking and sleeping, noting, and getting accustomed; we have been here for ever.

Each morning I wake to see the rough trunk of the tree to which my tent is tied, and stretch, and yawn, and look at my watch, and call to Gibson for water. He trots in with a bucket.

'Good morning, Miss Arbut.'

'Good morning, Gibson.'

'Good morning, Miss Arbut.'

And out he goes again, back to his kitchen, as he calls it, a palm-thatched logie next to ours.

I pull out a shirt and a pair of khaki trousers from under the pillow, and in due course am seated in the logie before a plate of porridge.

The others are already assembled. We bid one another good morning, and settle down to the business on hand.

'Sugar, please Rachel.'

'Oh!' says Maurice, as though he had not seen me do

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it a thousand times before, 'Do you take sugar with your porridge? I (in a tone of pride) always take salt.'

'I know. Butter, please Rachel, and milk, and the tin of biscuits, and don't' — as she forgets it — 'forget the tin of biscuits.'

Someone calls our attention to a frog or a lizard, or a peculiar insect; someone else asks whether we heard the terrific rain during the night; and so the conversation wanders lightly on in unimportant ways until breakfast is over. We make our beds, and pull on our boots, and set off, followed by Solomon and Soo, with picks, shovels, and batelles, to prospect a promising-looking creek some two miles from the camp.

We work there till midday, then leaving Maurice to eat his sandwiches and drink his cold tea beside the pit, Rachel and I wend our way back to the camp, where the lunch is hot, and much more adequate.

At lunch to-day the conversation turned on the vexed question of female emancipation. Gwen was very wrong-headed and reactionary, and Rachel, because she wanted to be in opposition to me, was wrong-headed too. I said what I thought at great length, and with, I considered, some force, but all to very little purpose, except to give me a sore throat.

'Well,' said Gwen, as I hastily swallowed some tea, 'what do you think about it, Gibson? Is man superior to woman?'

Gibson said that he undoubtedly was, and gave several texts showing that God first created man. Gwen suggested that perhaps He was not satisfied with the result, and reserved His masterpiece. But Gibson brushed this aside.

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'Female,' he announced, 'is the best piece of furniture in a gentleman's house.'

That was that. Amid rounds of applause the luncheon broke up. Gwen returned to her tent to continue the play she is writing, Rachel and I went back to the pit.

We found Soo at the water's edge washing a batelle full of earth. It looked the easiest thing in the world. We seized a couple of batelles, piled them high with stones and clay and gravel from the pit, and staggered down (for a loaded batelle is a heavy thing) to the creek.

The first thing to be done when you are washing for gold is to place yourself and your batelle in the creek. This we did with comparative ease. Then you wash the stones perfectly clean before throwing them away, taking care to do it over the batelle so that any specks of gold in the earth clinging to them are not lost.

The difficulty begins when you try to twist the batelle round in the proper manner so that the water runs in at one side, washes thoroughly through the gravel, and washes it gradually out on the other side. When there is nothing left in the batelle but a little black sand, any gold that there is there will be seen glistening in it. At least so I gather from watching Soo.

What actually happen if you are a novice is either that the gravel swirls round and round in the approved manner, but never becomes less, or else the water comes in with a rush, and tips the batelle out of your hands; I haven't found any gold yet.

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Frederick the Hunter's feet are still poisoned, so that instead of going out to hunt he carpenters instead, and has made a very fine babricot table, which is the greatest comfort and convenience. We eat at it, and read and write at it, and everything stands on it, including the gramophone and records. He is going to make us another table. He is also making a chair for Rachel, because hers, which was cheap and weak, broke, and for several days she has had to sit on a packing case.

Poor Rachel has had rather a bad time lately. The first thing she did when she arrived was to get a high temperature. Then she had a bout of fever which sent it up still higher, and a dreadful earache. Finally her chair broke. But I know no one who can pick themselves up after such blows of fortune more quickly than Rachel, and as soon as she was strong enough to set one foot before the other, off she went to the pit, and has spent the greater part of every succeeding day there, getting herself into an inconceivably messy condition looking for gold.

It has rained almost without intermission since we came here, and the camp, indeed the whole forest, is yards deep in mud. Gibson complains bitterly about it, and trails unhappily about the camp in a very long waterproof belonging to me which he has appropriated, Gwen's goloshes tied on with bush rope, and my Corsican umbrella held up over his head. He says that it is beyond his understanding that a 'delicate fine lady' such as myself should leave a comfortable house, and come and live in — with unutterable contempt — 'dis Bush'. I am a delicate fine lady only when he is in

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a good temper with me. Yesterday he said that nobody would take me for a girl.

‘What else would they take me for, Gibson?’

‘Dey would take you for a smart young fellow.’

‘. . . and Miss Rachel, is she a smart young fellow?’

‘Yes, Miss Rachel is a smart young fellow too . . .’

‘How about the Mistress?’

This made him laugh very much. — ‘Oh! no! De Mistress is not a young fellow atarl. De Mistress is Powerful!’

‘In what way is she powerful?’

But I never heard, because at that moment she called out to him to stop talking, and to get on with the cooking.

There are the quaintest little frogs in this part of the forest. Some are black with bright geometrical orange or yellow markings, others dark green or dark blue and jade, and when they squat motionless on the ground and stare at you with glassy unblinking eyes, or hop up and down the tree trunks, they look for all the world like funny little old men.

The frogs in the forest must be as the sands of the sea, and their variety endless. There are large frogs, small frogs, frogs of every colour, voice, and description. As soon as darkness falls their croaking is by far the most dominant sound. Somehow it makes you so strongly aware of the vastness, the solitude, and the existence of strange hidden things. It is only familiarity with the forest that brings real recognition of it. At first you do not realize that it is other than an immense and apparently endless wood. Only after a long time, when you have forgotten any other life than life in the forest

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and look forward to nothing but more forest, do you begin to be aware of its personality, its inhuman strangeness, its significance, and its unassailable strength.

Years hence, when I have forgotten many things because of the distance, surely I shall remember the frogs, and remembering, be swept back on the instant into the forest, into this present life. I shall smell the damp earth, see the great trunks of the trees, and know once more the vastness, and the wonderful living silence.

Juan sent up a note by an Indian from Cedar Creek to say that he has urgent business in Venezuela to do with his alligators, but will come up here first with the last batch of stores. This has given rise to a good deal of conversation, and the upshot of it is that we have decided — or rather the others decided, and as usual I agreed with them, that he has no business to go running off to his alligators until the shop is set on its feet, and that we are very much annoyed with him.

We are debating whether we will not declare our contract with him null and void, on the grounds that we were induced into it on false pretences, a prominent one being that he clearly gave us to understand that he had brought up two lots of stores before, and built a shop on the frontier, and sold the stores at substantial profit, when the truth of the matter is that there has never been a shop here before in the history of man.

As far as we can gather of what actually happened, it is this. At some past date he landed on the shores of Venezuela and travelled into the Interior, and then,

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probably because he had made Venezuela too hot to hold him, decided to make his way through the forest to British Guiana.

He set off with a supply of stores and a couple of horses. These were not intended to carry either him or the stores, but were to be sold at Georgetown, if he ever got there, at great profit. Eventually, after three months' journey he reached Arakaka, and sold the remainder of the stores to Chee a Fat. The greater part of the three months had been spent hunting about the bush for a certain kind of palm, which is the only thing in it that a horse can eat. But in spite of the palm one of the horses died *en route*, and the other one died as soon as it reached Arakaka and had a vision of green grass.

Possibly it was this food question that gave Juan the idea of setting up a Bush store on the frontier. The idea is certainly a good one if (a) there is anyone within an immeasurable radius who is likely to buy at it, and (b) if the surrounding country is rich enough in gold to warrant, when we begin to find it, a gold rush. Time alone will show. But it is really rather jesuitical of Juan to have said, and he said it too with endless lists and statistics, that he had already brought up large quantities of stores, successfully sold them, and had built a shop in this particularly virgin bit of forest.

Late last night I lay awake in my tent. Finally I reached under the pillow for the box of matches. It had been drying in front of the fire during the evening, so the matches struck without any difficulty. I lit the little improvised lamp made of a tobacco tin and a

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piece of wick dipped in kerosene, and went over to the logie to look for something to eat.

I found Maurice doing the same. We sat there for some time talking in undertones, and occasionally taking biscuits from the tin — with extreme care in case Gwen should hear the tell-tale crackle of the tin foil.

He is anxious that in the event of the shop proving unsuccessful, we should trek across part of Venezuela and down to the River Wenamu. Having discussed the pros of this scheme for a little while, we returned to our beds, and in the privacy of my tent I pictured the expedition uprooted once more, and dragging its weary, footsore, aching and interminable way through leagues and leagues of mud-soaked forest. The vision was so lowering that I sank away into a dreamless sleep.

This morning the prospect is less alarming and more distant, for to-day we had our first customer. He came over the Venezuelan hill, a ragged, villainous-looking fellow of very mixed race. He produced a grubby bit of rag from his pocket, untied it with care, and took from it a small amount of gold. We weighed it and took it, and gave him the equivalent in flour and rice, which was what he wanted. Then we saluted one another in Spanish, and off he went.

I think that it must be spring in the forest now, for the other day when I was out prospecting for straight sticks with which to floor my tent I came upon the loveliest little flowers. They were pale mauve and star-shaped, with five petals and a delicious sweet

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scent. I had seen no flowers in the forest before except for the blossoms that fell from the tops of the trees on to the water, and they were rich and gorgeously coloured, and in keeping with the exotic tropical vegetation. So it was strange and very exciting to find these exquisite little flowers.

There were some white ones too, growing round a huge rotting tree trunk. They were so lovely, like miniature meadow-sweet, and seemed very incongruous in the midst of the teeming rampant life of the jungle.

I brought the flowers back and gave them to Gwen, and they are before me in an egg cup (alas, it is the only use we have for egg cups) adorning the logie table.

Later

Another week has passed, and it is more than ever impossible to realize that we have not been here all our lives. Can there ever have been a time when I did not know by heart every stick and stone about the camp? Know where lay the worst and deepest patches of mud, the shape and size and position of every tree? There is the tree at the foot of my tent with fine flexible bush rope wound round the trunk and hanging from the boughs. There seems to be an unending supply. I have already pulled off yards of it to use for fastening things, and still more remains.

Then there is the tall straight tree near Rachel's tent, that from a short distance looks flat and unreal, like a painted tree upon a stage. On Sundays we pin pieces of paper to it, and practice shooting. We shot with such success last Sunday that the target was soon riddled with holes. After a time we paused in order to

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assist Gwen in a feverish search for a valuable list of stores, and we were all equally surprised when it was discovered that our target was — or had been — her list.

The greatest tree in the camp is the one near the logie. It has a huge trunk that divides about twenty feet from the ground, and the strangest thing about it is that one of the divisions then takes a twist and grows right through the other. We call it the Gungersucker Tree, because numbers of these curious poisonous lizards appear to live in it. Some are large, some small, and all have flat, wicked-looking heads rather like those of snakes. Every now and then we catch sight of one running up the trunk, or peeping at us round a corner with its cold unfriendly eye, or clinging so immovably to the tree that it seems to be part of it.

Apart from lizards, frogs, ants, and an occasional snake, one sees very few creatures in the forest, which seems strange, considering their great number and variety. As a matter of fact it is difficult to see anything at all in the forest but leaves and trees. At ten yards' distance even an Indian with his bright red loin cloth melts away into the surrounding foliage.

Sometimes when I am out alone I sit motionless for a long time by a creek, hoping half-heartedly to see a tiger come down to the water's edge to drink, or to catch sight of an alligator lying asleep on the bank. But so far I have seen nothing but a couple of monkeys high up in a tree, and that most peculiar of all creatures, a sloth.

One wonders about sloths. They seem so very languid and indifferent. Do they realize, as they bask,

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or court, or consume a particularly luscious morsel of whatever it is that they do consume, that they are having about twenty times as much fun as anyone else?

The other night we heard an alligator barking in the creek that runs round the camp, but a subsequent search with a flash lamp failed to show it up.

I was writing a letter at the time, I remember, which will probably never get posted, to someone far away in the south of Ireland, and so completely was I transported, that the quiet barking of the alligator brought me back to the present with a start of surprise. It was very strange to look up and see the tree trunks looming near, the guttering candle before me slightly illuminating the darkness, and to realize that I was sitting under a tarpaulin in the heart of an equatorial forest.

Gibson is becoming more and more conversational. He hovers about the logie when we are having meals so that he can dart into the conversation at the first opportunity. In common with others of his race he loves using long and imposing words, and the result is sometimes astonishing. To-day, during lunch, he told us a story by way of illustrating the character of the 'Spagnols', as he calls anyone who cannot speak English.

Two men were working together in a pit. One spat, accidentally, on to the foot of the other one, who retaliated by instantly shooting him dead. 'Dat', said Gibson contemptuously, 'was a crude and insignificant ting to do.'

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When there is no one else within range he talks to himself, and each morning when he comes over from his logie to the kitchen, he bids everything good morning. One day I came into the empty camp and heard him having an animated conversation all by himself. I asked who he was talking to.

‘I am talking to my saucepan, my dear lady.’

‘What are you telling it?’

‘I am complaining dat de fire will not burn, and my lady wanting tea,’ etc. etc.

In course of time the conversation drifted on to the subject of the end of the world. Gibson assured me confidently that at any rate it would not come for a year or two as God would never spring such a surprise on us up here in the Bush; but, he went on, if He did so far forget what was suitable . . .

‘What would you do, Gibson?’

‘I would climb a tree, my dear lady. And now,’ he concluded rising slowly to his feet, ‘I am going to take a little *re-creation*. If de Mistress wants me, I’m *out*.’

And suiting the action to the word, he marched off to his logie, and lay flat on his back, with his pipe sticking straight up out of his mouth.

Juan has come and gone. We were prepared to be very cold to him, and determined to stand no nonsense, but as usual he was so very winning, and apparently amenable to reason, that the iron melted in our souls. He assures us that he won’t go off to the Colombian borders after his alligators, and that he will be back from Georgetown in a month’s time with the last consignment of stores from Arakaka, and any mail

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that may be lying in the bank at Georgetown for us. And he brought with him from Cedar Creek a valuable pair of pyjamas that I seem to have left behind.

I am sorry he has gone. Life is not so amusing without him. It is true that Gibson makes it amusing too, but then Juan has points and possibilities that Gibson has not. Besides, it is such a comfort to have someone there who, even if he does not go so far as to take my part, can at least be relied upon to hold my hand when Gwen goes for me for going for Rachel.

The creek we were prospecting last week has been abandoned, and we are trying another one over the hill, which we hope will prove more successful than the last. We erected a 'Tom' there after a good deal of trouble and delay caused by some misguided person having used as firewood the precious planks that we had carted up all the way from Georgetown to make it with. But at last it was set up, and hopes ran high. All day long we worked in turns, carting, hoeing, and washing earth through the Tom, and in the evening, when the result was put on the gold scales, it was found to weigh exactly a hundredth part of a pennyweight.

The gloom at dinner that night was unbounded, and was heightened by the discovery that Juan had given as rations to the Indians several tins of our own, private, best sardines that we had brought out from England.

That was one of Juan's most irritating peculiarities, a complete lack of the sense of possession. The way he made free with bath towels, hair brushes, and tents not his own was really astonishing. But all this I bore with fortitude, and finally with resignation, and did not

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feel in any way bitterly towards him until his behaviour with the sardines came to light. That was too much. He might just as well have taken the tinned salmon, and no one would have minded because it is not very nice. Or a few of the unending tins of that disgusting *Julienne* (tinned vegetables), and we would positively have thanked him. But no, he had to take the one thing that we all love.

After dinner was cleared away I suggested a nice game of advertisement snap, thinking that it might lighten the atmosphere, but the suggestion was received with contumely. So we talked instead; first about Juan's monstrous behaviour, then about the mining regulations, and finally about modern art, and on this subject Maurice holds the strongest views. He was busy — I was going to say airing them, but airing is not descriptive of what he was doing, stating is better, when there was a crack and a crash, and his chair collapsed in all directions to the ground; and that ended the discussion on modern art.

Later

One of Gwen's hens, the fair one, has LAID AN EGG! Solomon found it over in the clearing near his logie. We have left it there so that the hen may be encouraged to continue, and I started a sonnet, the last line of which was to be 'The fair and eldest hen has laid an egg'. But as a sonnet has to end with a couplet, and as the only words that rhyme with egg are leg, beg, or meg, I am frustrated, and the paper remains virgin except for the heading: 'The fair hen lays an egg'.

Gwen, on the other hand, is in a literary way what

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rabbits are eugenically. She produces act after act, play after play. How she does it is an amazement to me. It is so extraordinarily difficult to write up here in the forest. Life, the rampant, uncontrollable life of the jungle is too close, too insistent to allow of retirement into the quiet detached state that for me at least is so necessary for any creative work. It isn't that I haven't tried. I have. And the sum total of many sleepless nights spent gnawing the end of a pencil is this:

In gloom and damp we made our camp,
With only one indifferent lamp.
The other one got dropped, and cracked
Because of grace that Rachel lacked.

Incidentally, the story of the lamp is not entirely true. Rachel did break the lamp, and the lamp was the one I used, but three more remain, and one of the three must instantly be taken to pieces and cleaned because it is becoming dark in the forest, and unless something drastic is done to the lamp we shall have no light.

It is done! Now let the daylight fade, the night come on apace. We are prepared.

All to-day I worked hard out in the forest while the others were washing gravel down at the new workings. I cut a great many sticks with which to continue flooring my tent. This took many hours, as perfectly straight sticks and branches are rare and difficult to find. Then I dug a trench round my tent, and paved it with stones from the creek bed, and made a channel down from the tent to the creek. During

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these operations a large parrot snake slid out from the undergrowth near my foot. It was a greenish colour and about five feet long.

We called that irritating Soo. He dawdled over from the clearing, and when he eventually reached the snake and began charming it, it paid no attention whatsoever, but glided away and disappeared into a hole exceedingly near my tent. When we told Soo to call it out he said that it had gone to sleep and could not be disturbed. My faith in Soo's powers would have been rudely shaken if I had not seen him do remarkable things with snakes on other occasions. Gwen tells me that he says he cannot call snakes on a Friday, and it is quite true that when a Hymarali appeared in the pit this morning Soo did not attempt to move, but after asking the day of the week he paid no more attention to it. All very strange!

During the afternoon a black man arrived in the camp. He had come up all the way from Arakaka to ask for work, but unfortunately we have neither work for him to do, nor money to pay him with if we had. So the poor man will have to go all the way back again.

He gave us the cheering news that the people of Arakaka are only waiting until we set up our shop to come and work the surrounding creeks. Heaven send that it is true, because if it isn't I shall be at my wits' end how to make money. Of course there is another alternative. I could remain up here in the forest! After all, what is success? Is it so greatly to be admired when those who achieve it so often do so owing to the least admirable qualities? Ruthlessness, greed, narrowness, vanity, lust for power — one if not all these

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deplorable characteristics can usually be found, together with a lack of sensitiveness, and of the intelligence to perceive that wisdom is as likely to be found in the ability to stand, occasionally, and stare, as in the blind pursuit of a goal; and that the means are vastly more important than the end.

So why should I not remain up in the forest? Here money is superfluous, and ambition nothing but a foolish dream. Here life could be lived plainly and simply, as God, no doubt, intended. An Indian field would, if it yielded nothing else, yield yams. An egg a day, and possibly more, would surely be produced by a dozen chickens, and if I had them properly assorted, say six of one sex and half a dozen of the other, there is no end to what might happen in the way of more eggs, more chickens, more eggs, and so on, *ad nauseam*.

I would build myself a pleasant logie, and make my camp gay with leaves and orchids. In short I would seek peace and ensue it. And when I became too old to work in the creeks for gold or cut any more wood, I suppose that I would lay me down upon the good earth, and without the aid of doctors, quietly, contentedly, die.

It sounds a happy life, and yet — and yet — what is it, I wonder, that draws one towards that which is most difficult, potentially most wounding? . . . However, there is no need at present to think of all that. Civilization, with its attendant worries, bills, telephone calls, dresses, making plans, arranging one's life, is still, thank goodness, very far away. All we are concerned with at the moment is the immediate future,



INDIAN SHOOTING FISH



BUSH ROPE

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and the immediate future holds only two questions of paramount importance — whether there will be any gold in the new creek, and what we are going to have for dinner. I am dreadfully afraid that it will be venison. We had it for lunch yesterday, for dinner last night, for lunch to-day, and we are almost certain to have it in some form to-morrow. Sometimes I wish that Frederick were not quite such an efficient hunter.

Later

This is an auspicious occasion. To-day I found my first gold! We were working by the side of the creek just beyond Frederick's logie. I had been washing a batelle for nearly an hour, very back-breaking work, and almost at the very end, when I had practically given up hope, there among the gravel shone a very good-sized piece of coarse gold. It was an exciting moment! By this time it was five o'clock in the afternoon, and as it was raining hard, and my back ached too much to start another batelle, I came back to the camp, had a cup of tea, and played the gramophone to Frederick's wife and Loelia, a little Indian girl about ten years old, although she is so small that she looks younger. They were appreciative in grunts. Gibson came and listened too.

'Dey Bucks,' he said, indicating Frederick's wife and Loelia contemptuously with his thumb, 'never see a gramophone before.'

Loelia is a most remarkable child. When we first came here, and a dump of stores remained at Esperanza, she used to go off, entirely of her own accord with a little *warrashi* on her back, and droghe the

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stores over to the camp. Esperenza is well over three miles away, and she sometimes did the journey three times a day, roughly twenty miles.

An enormous black man called Peter Wilson, who has been with us since Five Stars, droghed too, and the two of them looked very odd coming into the camp together with their loads, Wilson huge and black and fierce-looking, Loelia so very small that she could barely be seen at all. I think that she must be some relation of Frederick, because she lives in his logie. All Frederick's relations seem to live in his logie, and there are swarms of them.

After I had played three or four records a dreadful thing happened. The gramophone suddenly gurgled, and died down. Feverishly I wound it up, but all to no purpose. Nothing would keep it in the right key. It would start off with a flourish, and then fade miserably away. What we shall do without it I cannot imagine. It gives so much pleasure, and saves so much strife. Unfortunately we have no tools small enough to deal with it. Even my nail file has temporarily vanished. So after watching me tinkering with the now silent gramophone for some time Frederick's wife and Loelia trailed off, and I went away up the hill to look for a yari-yari tree. This tree has a great number of out-jutting branches, and when they are cut short the tree serves admirably as a hat stand, which is a thing that I badly need.

I cut two young trees, and staggered down the hill with some difficulty, because it is very steep, and the lower part is covered with extremely slippery red mud. Gibson viewed my arrival with strong disapproval.

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'Who told you to go out in de rain, my lady?' he asked severely.

'Well, never mind that. I want some hot water for my bath — and I want it' — as he dawdled irritatingly round the table — 'at once.'

'Dere ain't no more hot water. De Major take it all for his bath and his tea.'

'Are you *sure* there isn't any, Gibson? I am wet through, and I absolutely must have a hot bath before dinner.'

He looked in the cauldron.

'Dere's half a pint.'

'Well, bring that.' And when he brought it, it turned out to be the cauldron full.

The fair hen has laid another egg, so we had swizzles before dinner as the egg was not sufficient to make an omelette. At the conclusion of dinner we had some Sowarri nuts, found by Soo, which were quite delicious. In taste they were a little like Brazil nuts, but much fresher and greatly superior. They are considerably larger, and the shell is so hard that it has to be cracked with an axe.

Everyone was very cheerful to-night as the result of satisfactory findings in the creek, and I rashly consented to play Pelman patience. As might have been expected, I came in a magnificent last without a single pair. Rachel was as efficient as she always is, so I came to bed, and am absolutely determined never to touch the odious game again as long as I live . . . I have just been looking under the flap of the tent, and they are still playing. It is such an unsociable game

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too; witticisms pass unheeded, and if I, who originally introduced the game, address so much as a remark to Gwen, she bites my head off for distracting her.

Gibson is asleep in his logie — has been since sundown. Beside him glimmers the little lamp that every black man in the bush burns at night to keep off vampire bats, and duppies and bush devils. The Indians keep their fires burning.

At one o'clock he will wake, and smoke a pipe, and go to sleep again when the pipe is finished. I know this because I rarely go to bed before one. It is then that I write my diary, or sit and meditate over a cup of tea. The camp is so fascinating at night when everyone is in bed and asleep, and only I am awake with the forest. Some nights the frogs are positively tumultuous. From all sides comes the croaking, and then — this is a strange thing — all of a sudden every sound will cease, there will be an unbroken silence for a few seconds, then as though the message 'All is well' had gone round, the croaking starts up again even louder than before.

Later

The event of to-day was that the gramophone, after more than a week's silence, suddenly started to play. Great were the rejoicings. We played all the records through one after the other. Really, it is the most capricious and unaccountable machine, silent one day, working perfectly the next. And then its likes and dislikes! If I have tried it once during the past week I have tried it fifty times, and without the smallest result, whereas Rachel has only to wind it up,

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put on a record, and it starts at once. Odd! . . . Perhaps it is affected by the weather, which is certainly quite bad enough to affect anything. The dampness is all-pervading. It mildews your clothes, and unsticks everything except envelopes, which it sticks up, and then, if you want to use one, you have to spend half an hour steaming it open over the spout of the kettle, while clouds of smoke from the fire pour into your eyes. The difficulties of letter writing in the forest are stupendous.

The diary has lain neglected and unwritten for quite a week. In the first place, someone, with malice aforethought (because I sing when I write) removed the ink. Next day a wave of enthusiasm for gold caused me to sit for five hours in the creek looking for it (gold). It rained the whole time, so that I was soaked all over, from the waist downwards by the creek, and upwards by the rain, and so cold and stiff that I could only straighten myself with difficulty after working each batelle.

When the darkness began to fall I gathered up my belongings, counted my few pieces of gold with pride, hid the batelle under a tree, and came home.

I had a hot bath, and drank the last delicious drops from my brandy flask, but all in vain. Next morning I awoke feeling very ill indeed, and spent the following five days in bed with an internal chill, realizing how far, far better it would be to be comfortably dead. And that is why the diary has remained unwritten for so long.

In the meantime many things have happened. They are always happening. That is what is so

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strange about this supposedly simple life in the wilds. It may be a creature seen out in the forest, a successful day at the workings, the finding of a shower of beautiful silvery leaves (which Gibson says 'is like a string of fishes'); each day that passes has something special and eventful about it. One feels in closer touch with life here than one does, except on rare occasions, in civilization. Why this should be I do not know, unless it is that an instinct of self-preservation in a clamorous crowd makes one retire to a little distance, whereas here there is room, and infinite quietness.

The two principal events of the week have been the building of the shop over in the clearing by Wilson and a couple of Indians, and the new trail that Maurice and Rachel are making to the nearest point of the river — a matter of ten miles or so. This will enable us to bring the boat with stores within easy distance of the camp, and will save the great expense and delay of having to employ droghers to bring everything from Five Stars. *En route* we will prospect any creeks that we pass, and as this part of the forest has never been tracked there is every chance of our striking it rich. Maurice and Rachel have been working there for three days now. It must be exceedingly arduous. They cut by compass, and both swamps and precipitous hills have to be negotiated. As soon as I am well enough I shall join them, but until to-day I have not had the strength of a fly, and could barely walk as far as the clearing. Any illness, however trivial, certainly pulls you down far more quickly and thoroughly up here than in colder climates, and in this, no doubt, lies the danger of

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chronic malaria. Gradually your powers of resistance become less and less, and finally you die. Depressing thought.

Frederick has made a splendid new addition to the logie, of most elaborate leaf work. It is an enormous improvement, and I no longer have to eat with the rain almost dripping down the back of my neck. He has also made another table, on which the gramophone and records stand. We have hung several orchids from the roof, unusual leaves, collected by me, stand about in jam jars, and altogether the logie is a thing of beauty. Rachel's contribution to the camp is a fern garden at the foot of the Gungersucker tree, Gwen's is a plot of wabie beans and some radishes. Maurice has a parrot. Thank heaven the day of snakes in bottles seems to have passed. And that reminds me that this morning we had an encounter with one.

It was before lunch. Gwen was in her tent. I was in mine reading Proust when the silence was suddenly shattered by the voice of Gibson calling out urgently, 'Miss Arbut! Miss Arbut!' I ran out of the tent, and there, emerging from beneath the dining table in the logie, was a large black and yellow Jackman snake, six or seven feet long. I called Gwen, who touched its tail with a line stick, whereupon it turned, reared up its head, put out its tongue and hissed. A most pugnacious and malicious-looking creature. When Gibson saw Gwen do this he stepped forward and said, 'Mistress, dat is not atarl de proper procedure.' With which he advanced towards the snake with a large stick, waving it violently in the air. However

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we stopped him, and Gwen went to get her revolver. Hearing this, the snake slithered off into the undergrowth between the camp and the clearing, and was seen no more.

Rachel came back to lunch to-day. She really came to fetch another batelle, but as it was already past twelve she decided to remain for lunch in the camp. During the meal we had an argument on the subject of tolerance. It went on for a long time, and was most interesting and enjoyable until Gwen and Rachel became personal, and accused me, who was upholding tolerance, of being intolerant. So I closed the subject in disgust, and went off for a walk in Venezuela by myself.

I had not been gone more than a quarter of an hour before I heard the Howlers making a great roaring in the direction of the camp, so I turned and careered back to try and catch sight of them.

Sure enough there were a number of them beyond Gwen's tent, swinging about in the trees overhead. I watched them walking along the branches from one tree to another. After a time the roaring became fainter, and at last one of them — probably the leader — gave a final grunt, and there was silence. Soon after this they all departed, and did not come back to the camp any more, although later I heard them roaring faintly in the distance.

Later

Yesterday was Gwen's birthday. She celebrated it by having her hair cut (by me), but she was a bad, fidgety subject, and the result was not what it might

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have been. In the evening we had swizzles, which would have been greatly improved if there had been an egg with which to make them. But there wasn't, and we had to fall back on Bird's custard powder.

To-day was Maurice's birthday, which astonished those of us who did not expect it. Two birthdays running in one family seemed a bit excessive, we thought. Again we had swizzles, and they were considerably more palatable than last night's, because the fair hen had obligingly produced an egg.

Gwen and Maurice and Frederick spent the afternoon felling trees at the top of the Brazilian hill. This gives a pleasant impression, as you look up from the camp, of clear open spaces just over the crest of the hill.

Before I came up to the forest I used to think of it, and wonder whether the perpetual living in semi-darkness, roofed and walled in by trees, would induce claustrophobia, the horror of which can only be appreciated by those who have experienced it. Most fortunately this is not the case. Perhaps the fact of the attention being so constantly focused upon interesting details precludes it; or perhaps again it is the outdoor life and the manual labour that does away with any morbid strains.

A sickening incident occurred this morning. I rose as usual, dressed, strapped on my field boots, and went out to the logie for breakfast. Suddenly I became aware of a curious tickling sensation just above my right knee. Mosquitoes again, I thought, and decided that I must recommence putting my mosquito net up at night. The tickling continued. Some-

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how it did not feel quite like a mosquito bite. I retired to my tent, removed the boot and the trousers, and there, crawling up my leg, was an immense centipede. It was at least four inches long, substantially built, and had millions of legs. A most repulsive creature! I flung it away in disgust, and it was not until later that I realized how lucky and astonishing it was that it had not stung me. Then I remembered that when I was given the scorpion cut I had been told by Soo that it also rendered immunity to the stings of centipedes, and some other insect that I cannot remember at the moment. No doubt it will come back to me when I have an encounter with one, and it fails to sting.

The centipede must have been lurking in my boot — unpleasant thought. It might just as easily have been a little snake. In future I shall make a most particular point of shaking everything out thoroughly before putting it on.

A quadrille bird came and sang in the camp to-day. We listened to it spell-bound. It had eleven separate flute-like notes, clear, cool, distinct, and they fell through the darkness like shining drops of rain. It is the crowning wonder of the forest, this strange unearthly music. I think that Hudson must have had it in mind when he wrote of Rima singing.

CHAPTER VIII

STILL NO GOLD

Later

THERE is no denying that the forest teems, positively teems with things that bite. If it isn't mosquitoes it is *bête rouge*, and if it isn't *bête rouge* it is quite certain to be mypouri, as these vile bush ticks are called. They are so small that you cannot see in order to slay them, and they are far more ferocious than lions — more powerful too, for what can you do against an armed, invisible foe? It is quite impossible to defend oneself against their onslaughts. I have covered myself with ammonia, with corrosive sublimate, with germicidal soap, but they seem to like it. None of these things are the smallest use until after the event, and then they only serve to allay the irritation in a slight degree. Now that I come to think of it, I remember that Juan, in the days before his Fall, once told me that it is a good idea to smear oneself all over with kerosene, as mypouri are really discouraged by it — but then I should be discouraged too.

The subject, the question of mypouri, is very much on my mind at present, for the very good reason that I am devoured by them, completely covered with bites. I suppose that I must have brushed against a nest of them on my way back from the workings this afternoon. All the same, as I stand here with an expression, no doubt, of torment on my face, and rub

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myself against the post of the logie as a cow rubs itself against those peculiar stones that sometimes stand in fields, I would not change places with anyone in the world, nor would I be anywhere but where I am, up here in this stupendous, insect-ridden forest.

The shop is built and ready for use. Row upon row stand the tins and the sacks, waiting to be bought. We hope — we hope — but the dream I used to have of queues of customers streaming in from the four quarters of the globe, grows faint.

We have been here a month now, and have had two customers, the ragged man I mentioned before, and a Venezuelan colonel who bought a very small quantity of sugar. A Venezuelan colonel sounds a grand and strange thing to meet in the forest, but it is neither as grand or as strange as it sounds, because all Venezuelans whatever their class and colour, seem to be colonels, and any one that finds his way up here does so because he is a fugitive from justice.

This particular colonel was grubby and unshaven, but more or less white, and he understood a little English. I remember him sitting in the logie talking to Maurice and telling him about a rich creek that he had discovered over the border, and Gibson chiming in:

‘Don’t believe him, Major. He lies. All Spagnols lie.’

I remember also that he had the loveliest pair of lavender-coloured trousers which I passionately coveted; were the store exclusively mine I should have insisted on being paid for the sugar in kind, but as it isn’t, and as none of the others saw the matter in a proper and sensible light (because they would have

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had far more than a dollar's worth of pleasure out of seeing me in them), I am still going dismally about in mud-coloured khaki. The alternative is a pair of Corsican fisherman's blue trousers, but they are too long in the leg and too large in the waist, so that when they are not falling off, they are trailing in the mud, which, as I have said before, is yards deep all over the forest. Another of their disadvantages is that if the rain catches me when I am in them, the dye comes off, and turns me, from the waist downwards, into an ancient Briton. So now I only wear them for dinner, held up with a gaudy blue and gold necktie that I bought for the purpose in Georgetown.

Solomon and Soo are not on speaking terms, and Gibson told Gwen who told me that it is because Soo used bad language in Solomon's presence, and 'blasphemed his Maker'. So Solomon, who is a very particular man, is having nothing more to do with him.

An uproar arose in the clearing the other night. We pictured all sorts of dreadful happenings: Solomon and Soo going for each other with bush knives; the running amok of Big Black Wilson; the sudden descent of a tribe of hostile Indians, or of marauding Spagnols, or a hungry tiger. While we were lying in bed wondering what had better be done about it, the uproar died down as swiftly as it had started.

Next day we made inquiries, and were told by Soo that he had had a vision, in which he heard his wife (who is far away in Georgetown) calling him. So he was very much perturbed until the vision changed,

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and he saw her sitting on the edge of her bed smoking a cigar. Then he knew that all was well.

Poor Rachel had an attack of fever last night and was therefore unable to go out cutting with Maurice this morning, so Gwen reluctantly laid down the pen for the ploughshare, so to speak, and took her place. I decided to remain at home because the effects of the chill are still with me, and I had promised myself a pleasant morning in the camp, cutting and washing my hair.

They set off with lunch in a haversack soon after breakfast.

The new trail is almost completed. Rachel and Maurice have worked like Trojans, but unfortunately none of the creeks they prospected *en route* have been very satisfactory. Gold mining is a discouraging business. You work so hard, with such persistent optimism, and the end of it all, if not exactly dust and ashes, is so often extremely slight. If all the gold the expedition has found up to date were sent floating down the river on a leaf, it would hardly sink the leaf. Still, one never knows what will happen. That is the unending charm of it. At any moment, in any creek, a fortune may be found. Some years ago a pork-knocker working in a pit not ten miles from Five Stars picked up a nugget weighing 333 ounces. Any one of us might do the same.

With this in mind I gave up the certain pleasure of cutting my hair, and went to gamble in the pit near Frederick's logie. It has been abandoned by the others, but it is still full of promising looking clay and gravel.

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I worked till lunch. I tore my hands; I broke my finger nails, because I had overlooked the possibility that the men might have taken away the pick axe, and I washed batelle after batelle without the smallest success. Suddenly an enormous nut, of even greater size and weight than the nugget I had in view, fell from a great height with a crash to the ground a few yards away. If it had fallen on my head I should have been killed instantly.

I turned the second batelle upside down, and put it on my head like a tin helmet in case another nut should fall, and continued washing. But it was heavy and uncomfortable and kept slipping off, and when the batelle I was working was finished, and the result was only one miserable 'eye', I decided that gold-digging was a fool's game, and returned in a bad temper to the camp.

We had a delicious stew for lunch, which was most enjoyable, and Rachel and I made the most of a free occasion and put butter in the bovril.

After lunch I cut my hair, and washed it, and sat out on a log among Gwen's wabie beans, and let it dry.

No sooner was this done than the forest grew dark, and yet darker, we heard the warning roar in the distance, and then came the rain. It was a regular cloudburst. In a few minutes the camp was like a creek, water running in all directions, notably through the kitchen, which made Gibson very disgruntled. It also poured in a fine ceaseless stream through the roof of our logie where the tarpaulin joins the thatch, and I had to move my chair.

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The first force of the storm only lasted for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, but it was still raining hard and steadily when Maurice and Gwen, looking like drowned rats, came in. They had hot baths and tea, and then they played Pelman patience, and I looked on with a superior expression. After dinner they played Pelman patience again, and so to bed.

Later

I have had a most dreadful experience, and am still almost too exhausted by it to write it down in my diary. It all came of attempting the impossible too soon after being ill.

Since I have been up in the forest I have collected a number of remarkable spiral sticks. The spiral is caused by bush rope having wound itself round the tree or bough; in course of time it falls and leaves these grooves. It is quite a common experience to see crooked spiral sticks, but perfectly straight ones are very rare and difficult to find. I am proud of my collection, and have for some time past been anxious to stain them with stain from some forest tree.

One morning I spent a considerable amount of time boiling some red bark in an old butter tin, but the result was not satisfactory. So that when Maurice said last night at dinner that he had noticed on the new trail a wild mangrove tree, the bark of which is often used for staining, and asked whether I would care to go out with him next day and collect it, I assented eagerly, and we set off immediately after breakfast this morning.

We trudged for miles and miles, to the very end of the detestable trail, but the wild mangrove tree had

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vanished, and there was nothing for it but to turn and come back empty-handed.

In the whole course of my life I have never felt so sick with exhaustion as I did on that return journey. The first part of the trek from Five Stars to Pepe's Creek was the merest child's play by comparison. I felt that I would die, and was quite certain that I would be sick, but I just managed to reach the camp without collapsing. Once in my tent I looked at myself in the looking glass, and was shocked, but not in the least surprised, at the peculiar blotched appearance of my face. For some time after that I felt too ill to eat, and brandy had no effect, but at last I recovered sufficiently to nibble a biscuit, and gradually returned to life.

It was a truly awful experience, and I hope that I shall never have to endure such torture again. The mud, the swamps, the desolation, and the mountains on that trail must be seen to be believed. It would be heavy going at the best of times, and it was sheer madness to attempt it so soon after being ill.

I find difficulty in thinking of anything but the Walk, but the diary would be incomplete if I were to omit two important events that occurred to-day. The other hens have started laying, and the little maroodie died this afternoon. We put it in a basket near the fire, and gave it brandy, but this only served to revive it temporarily, and it died soon after.

Later

Torrential rain all last night, and to-day the creek is a torrent, and the stepping-stones by which we cross it to get to the hill deep under water.

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I set off very early on the usual search for saplings with which to continue flooring my tent, waded through the swiftly flowing creek with some difficulty, and climbed the hill. It was not until I had got to the very top of it that I discovered that I had come without my bush knife. So I had to turn and go all the way back again. It was very annoying.

The camp was deserted except for Gibson, who was wandering about reciting the Commandments. I told him about the knife, and he evinced shocked disapproval at the folly and danger of going out into the bush without it.

'Miss Arbut, my dear lady,' he said, 'I see dat you is not a tough gold digger.'

I was annoyed at this, and told him to stop talking nonsense, and help find my knife. We searched. It was not in the tent, nor was it in the logie. I began to be worried. We have only one knife apiece, and without a knife in the forest you simply cannot exist. I was overjoyed when it was discovered sticking into the ground near the Gungersucker tree, but could not imagine how it had got there till I remembered that I had been practising throwing it like a Mexican yesterday evening.

The sun was filtering through the trees, so I took my camera out of the canister and slung it on my shoulder in case I should come upon a beautiful creek where there was enough light to take a time exposure.

Once more I set out, waded through the creek, and climbed the hill. It was wonderfully still. All I heard was the call of the bird that will always, as long as I live, remind me of the forest. It is more a whistle

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than a song; two notes with an upward inflection, then a third note, sweeping down.

I walked on, stopping occasionally to cut a good stick.

Some time later an insect crawled down the back of my neck. I removed the camera, and tore off the shirt, shook it out, and was in the act of putting it on again when I noticed a little yellow flower a few yards away that I had never seen before. I crawled after it, picked it, and saw another one a little farther on . . . Much later I missed my camera, remembered taking it off when the insect crawled down my neck, and tried to retrace my steps. But I had been so deeply absorbed looking for the flowers that I had wandered a long way without noticing in what direction I was going, and had neglected to take the precaution of blazing the trees.

I sped anxiously in the direction from which I thought I had come, but the way was soon blocked by an impassable barrier of fallen trees, and a tangle of undergrowth. I tried in another direction, thinking with a brief flare of hope that I recognized a landmark in a huge wood ants' nest bulging from the trunk of a tree. But this took me to a collection of large stones that I knew I had not passed before.

I stood and gazed helplessly about me . . . Which way had I come? . . . What was the best course to take? . . .

There was a rumble of thunder, and great drops of rain commenced to fall. Darkness gathered in the forest. Then came torrential rain, and obliterated everything. The last hope had gone; I was lost.

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A change had come over the forest. Until now it had seemed friendly and beautiful, and I had passed along barely conscious of its identity. Now it was alien and threatening — a malignant, relentless force. I felt that it was intensely alive and aware of me — had been so, no doubt, ever since I set out from the camp. But it had charmed me with its air of beauty, and by placing the flowers in my path had lured me to destruction. Now that its purpose was almost accomplished it had let fall the mask. It had returned to itself.

The darkness, the silence beyond the rain was charged with danger . . . It was closing in on me — suffocating me! I started to run wildly among the trees. Roots tripped me up, a thousand strangling fingers were stretching out to grasp me! . . . Panic began to pour through me in waves . . . This would never do. I pulled myself together, sat down on a tacuba, and tried to survey the situation calmly. Obviously the thing to do was to think out a plan of action. I thought one out. I would start from this point, walk for half an hour, blazing the trees as I went. If this led nowhere I would return to the starting point, and try in another direction. The new trail to the Barima must be somewhere in the vicinity, and if only I could strike it before nightfall all would be well.

By this time the thunder was fainter, and the fury of the rain had abated, but it was still coming down in a steady downpour, and the desolation of the scene could hardly be exceeded. Plastered with mud, and with the rain streaming from my depressed person,

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I must have fitted in so well as to be almost indistinguishable from the surrounding vegetation.

I set off, and after I had walked for what seemed like a great many miles and was about to turn back — I hit the trail.

It was a moment of most blessed relief, and an extraordinary stroke of luck that I should have come upon it. A trail is the hardest thing in the world to detect if you have once lost it, and if a white person were blindfolded and taken half a dozen yards off it the chances are a hundred to one against his ever finding it again, even if the blindfolding were removed.

So I thanked my stars, and set off joyfully along the trail, but I had not gone very far before I stopped to wonder whether I was going in the right direction. Was I going towards the camp, or towards the river? — Here was a new predicament. Supposing that I were half-way along the trail, and going away from the camp, it would be dark long before I could rectify my mistake, and my plight would be little better than before. For the first time I regretted that I had not helped to make the miserable trail.

As there was no manner of discovering which was the right way and which the wrong, I continued along the way I had started, and nearly wept with joy when I came to the crest of a hill, and heard the homely voice of the game cock. No sound had ever seemed more beautiful. I staggered — for I was very tired — down the hill and through the creek, and in a few minutes I was at home once more, surrounded by the tents and the hens, and the blessed sight of Gibson

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cooking the dinner, and the rest of the expedition playing Pelman patience.

Later

The rainy season must be at its height. We have had downpours of rain every day this week, and the mud in the camp is appalling, and beginning to smell very unpleasant, especially near the logie. We cannot imagine what the cause of this can be, for all rubbish is burnt, and the old tins are thrown into a deep pit that was dug for the purpose.

Each day I have been up the Brazilian hill, and hunted everywhere for my camera, but the place of the insect seems to have vanished into thin air. The camera was in a leather case much the same colour as the ground, so I am afraid that there is small chance of finding it. I am very sorry indeed to have lost it, for I have had it for a great many years, and used it in strange and interesting circumstances.

Gibson has a new expression. 'Believe me de Fader!' he says, when he wishes to be very exclamatory. The first time I heard him use it was some days ago, when, after great provocation, I suggested that he was lazy. He was most indignant.

'In all me life, Miss Arbut, you is de first person to call me lazy, believe me de Fader!'

He no longer brings me water in the mornings in the bucket, but uses an empty lard tin instead, because it holds, he says, exactly the right amount of water. He looks very comic entering the tent, bearing the lard tin carefully in case any water should spill, and he be forced to the exertion of getting more, and dressed in a

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most peculiar garment that he has fashioned for himself out of an old flour sack. All he did was to make a hole for his head to go through, and two more holes for his arms. We call it the Harvest Queen, because it is indelibly stamped on it, back and front.

I asked him one day whether he wore the Harvest Queen for the sake of its beauty or its comfort. At first he would not deign to reply. Then he said:

‘Never since I know myself did I hear a lady humbug me like Miss Arbut,’ and sighed deeply.

In reply to a request made by Gwen this morning he answered, ‘Dear lady, all being well, and God willing, I will wash de chutney bottle to-morrow’. We get a lot of fun out of Gibson.

A reef has been located between four and five miles from the camp, and we have great hopes of it, for the indications were good. Sometimes I go and work there with the others, but more often I go down to the abandoned workings beyond Frederick’s logie, and wash the gravel there by myself. Each batelle yields a certain amount of gold. Twenty minutes before lunch Gwen rings a bell; faintly through the trees I hear it sounding, put down my batelle, and and return to the camp.

Soo brought in a live turtle the other day, which was supposed to lay edible eggs. During our lunch hour on the following day we went and looked at it in its box, and the poor creature had such a depressed air that we took it out and put it instead in an improvised hutch which we made by leaning a batelle against the hollow between two buttresses of a tree. When it was done we stood and watched the turtle

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for a while, but it did not so much as wink, so we went away, and when we returned half an hour later the batelle was flat on the ground, and the turtle flown.

Frederick has a charming little new puppy. It lives in his logie, together with all his friends and relations. I stopped there this evening on my way back from the pit, and saw it being played with by Loelia. It is the dearest little creature, and wears a necklace of beads. 'Dat girl', as Frederick calls his wife, was squatting on the ground, feeding a little marm bird with insects. All Indian women have pets, and their main occupation in life seems to be hunting for insects with which to feed them.

We smiled at each other, the Girl and I, further intercourse being impossible, because I speak no Carib, and she no English — and is stupid into the bargain. Frederick was lying in his hammock resting after the day's hunting, and he addressed the few remarks at his disposal to me in the soft, plaintive voice that he has in common with all his race.

It is strange to realize that the Caribs (almost all the Indians with whom we have come in contact are Caribs) were once the fiercest and most warlike tribe in South America, and were reputed to be cannibals as well. Indeed, the word cannibal is said to be a derivation of Carib. Judging by the manner in which they went down like ninepins before the onslaught of influenza at Pepe's Creek, I imagine that physically they are no longer what they were, although why this should be is hard to ascertain, for they lead — apart from Casseri drinking parties — a healthy life, and there has been no contact with white men to vitiate

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them. The only other denizens of the forest here are a handful of pork-knockers, not more than a couple of dozen all told, who are concentrated at Arakaka and Five Stars. There is a certain amount of mingling between these and the Indians, and the result — Bovianders, as they are called — are stronger and healthier than pure-blooded Indians. The children are exceedingly attractive, with the bronze skin and straight features of the Indian, and curling hair.

Gibson says that a Boviander child is always the favourite in an Indian family, and an object of pride, but this is a little hard to believe, for surely a Boviander child in an Indian family implies a lapse on somebody's part. But perhaps Indians are not particular.

On my return to the camp I found a huge frog sitting in my bath, which was folded up on top of the canister, and on the bed the little lizard that fell into Rachel's permanganate bath last week. She dried it, put it out in the sunshine, but it has never really recovered from the shock, and is always lying about the camp in a sleepy condition.

Last night I had an escape from a mureri ant. They vary in length from an inch to an inch and a half, and are fat and black, with a very pronounced waist. Their sting causes acute pain, and is as much feared as the bite of a snake. So when I entered my tent, and saw a very large specimen crawling on the ceiling of the tent just above my bed, I was horrified, and called to the others to come and help me get rid of it. They came, armed with bush knives and a flash lamp. Maurice stalked it for some time, and finally flicked it with a dish rag into the open canister, which

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was not what he had meant to do. Gwen, who was tired of the hunt, immediately shut the lid, telling me to go to bed and empty the canister in the morning. So this morning I opened it in some trepidation and shook out all the clothes, using a long stick as a pitchfork. To my amazement the muneri had vanished. It is inexplicable! I saw it fall into the canister; I saw the lid closed; and I can swear that nobody entered my tent during the night.

Juan, by the way, is back in the forest, encamped near Five Stars. An Indian brought a letter from him yesterday evening, in which he writes that he has 'a lady with him who is the fiancée of his friend, Mr. Constant Himmelblau, who will shortly come from over the Venezuelan border with three mules and some cash, and will buy many stores.

There came to the camp to-day a black man from Martinique — at least he originally came from Martinique. To-day he came from Five Stars. He is called Josef Moscou, is tall and slender, and speaks the most elegant French. The greater part of his life has been spent working gold in the Guianas. — '*Il y a un endroit*', he begins, leaning with his elbow on his knee, and a far-away look in his eye — and we draw near and listen with bated breath while he tells us of hidden creeks where gold is to be found in profusion, and diamonds glitter in every sieve. He also tells us that Juan has an East Indian coolie girl with him, and that '*ils sont dans une tente*'.

Our disapproval of Juan's methods and peculiarities has been growing steadily ever since he went away, and this last piece of information has, so to speak, put

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the lid on it, and we have sent back a note stating in no uncertain tones our astonishment at his various inaccuracies that have come to light, and saying that he and his friend had better keep to themselves, as we have no room in the camp for other than members of the expedition. We are waiting with some interest to see what his next move will be. It is certain to be something surprising, if I know Juan.

Later

Three days have passed since we sent the note to Juan, and there is still no sign of life from him. In the meantime so many momentous happenings have occurred that I am beginning to lose interest in him.

In the first place I found my camera; and I put down its recovery to a little white feather that I found lying among the dead leaves when I started off up the hill on my usual search. I stuck it into the ground and wished that I might find the camera before the day was out, then put the matter out of my mind, and concentrated on looking for sticks and flowers, in the hope that by putting myself in the same frame of mind as on that disastrous day I might follow the same course, and so come upon the camera.

Half an hour later I stopped to wonder where on earth it could be, looked down, and there it lay at my feet. I brought it back in triumph to the camp, and am surprised and delighted to find that the leather case seems to have acted as an effectual protection against the torrential rain. And apropos of astonishing things happening in the rain, Solomon made a bonfire of dead leaves this morning, because we thought that

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they might be contributing towards the mysterious smell near the logie. It rained continuously all day, and this evening we were amazed to see a flame leaping up from what we had imagined to be a sodden heap.

Gibson is getting above himself. Gwen overheard him ordering Frederick to leave his work and re-thatch the kitchen roof.

‘Certainly, Mr. Gibson,’ responded Frederick.

Gwen, who intended him to go out and hunt, immediately countermanded the order.

We discovered later that Gibson had been bribing him with large quantities of lard from our private store.

The next thing he did was done, we are sure, with malicious intent, for he is certainly not stupid.

Gwen instructed him some time ago to cool the fruit salad (tinned) by standing it in a shallow part of the creek. He waited to do so until yesterday, when the creek was in flood, and a roaring torrent, with the obvious result that the fruit salad was swept away.

In the afternoon she gave him several pairs of trousers and some shirts, and told him to take the tin bath down to the creek and wash them in it.

I watched him going down with a scowl on his face, and watched him coming back later with a still worse one.

‘Well, Gibson,’ I said to him, ‘I hope you washed the clothes nicely.’

He looked viciously at the wet bundle in the bath.

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'De next time de Mistress tells me to wash dey pants,' he muttered, 'I'll beat de life out of dem.'

To-day his laziness and general ill-humour reached their climax, and Gwen blew him up. He had been working up for a row all the morning, protesting, when she told him to wash a basin, that it was not his work, and a little later, when he was told to sweep the logie floor which was covered with leaves, and peelings from my sticks, he did it exceedingly slowly and unwillingly.

'I is a tough gold digger,' he said, thrusting out his chin pugnaciously. 'What you want is a housemaid.'

Finally he shoved the tinned salmon, which he had been told to heat up slowly, into the very depths of the blazing fire, with the result that it was ruined.

It was then that Gwen blew him up. She told him exactly what she thought of him, and gave him notice several times over.

'Whenever there is anything to be done you are always in your logie, smoking your disgusting pipe!' (We had to banish it from the kitchen.) 'Well, you can go and smoke it now. I have had more than enough of you!'

'But I don't want to smoke my pipe!' he protested weakly. However she said that she did not wish to see him again, and the enemy retired, routed and discomfited.

During the afternoon, Solomon, who is confined to camp on account of a badly poisoned foot, went and talked reprovingly to him, with the result that when he appeared in the logie at tea time he was most humble and apologetic, and quite staggeringly help-

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ful. By this time Gwen was in the happiest and most amiable of moods, having successfully concluded the first act of her play, and was prepared to forgive anyone anything.

After tea she and Rachel and Gibson and I mended a leak in the kitchen roof with fresh palm leaves. We had barely finished it when it began to grow dark, and a tremendous wind uprose. The trees swayed in a most alarming manner, and many branches crashed; the low rumble of thunder came nearer, a solitary baboon roared a warning from over the creek, and we flew out to collect the clothes which had been drying on logs. No sooner were they all in than down came the rain. It was the most torrential that I have seen, and after it was over we were proud to find that our thatching had kept it out.

After tea we had a tremendous hen hunt in the clearing.

The hens all lay occasionally, but they are not to be relied upon, and we thought that by putting them into a fine coop with a run that Solomon has made, they might lay more regularly.

We surrounded, and closed in upon them, but they managed to escape several times in spite of the fact that the ring was composed of a dozen people: Solomon, Soo, Wilson, Gibson, Moscou, Frederick, three other Indians, Gwen, Rachel, and myself. It usually happened that we would corner them one by one behind the cases in the shop. Half a dozen of us would guard each end, and then advance slowly upon the agitated hen, who, at the last moment, would fly tempestuously out over our heads and escape into the

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rawest bit of bush it could find, where, no doubt, it hoped to remain, and lay an egg that nobody could possibly discover.

Eventually, however, all the hens were captured, and conveyed, squawking violently, to the hen house.

To-day being Sunday we got up late, and spent a pleasant morning doing nothing of importance. Rachel made herself happily grubby improving the fern garden; Gwen sewed; Maurice cleaned his revolver; I made a miniature golf course, and played on it with a round nut and one of my sticks. Gibson in his logie sang hymns. Sunlight glinted through the trees.

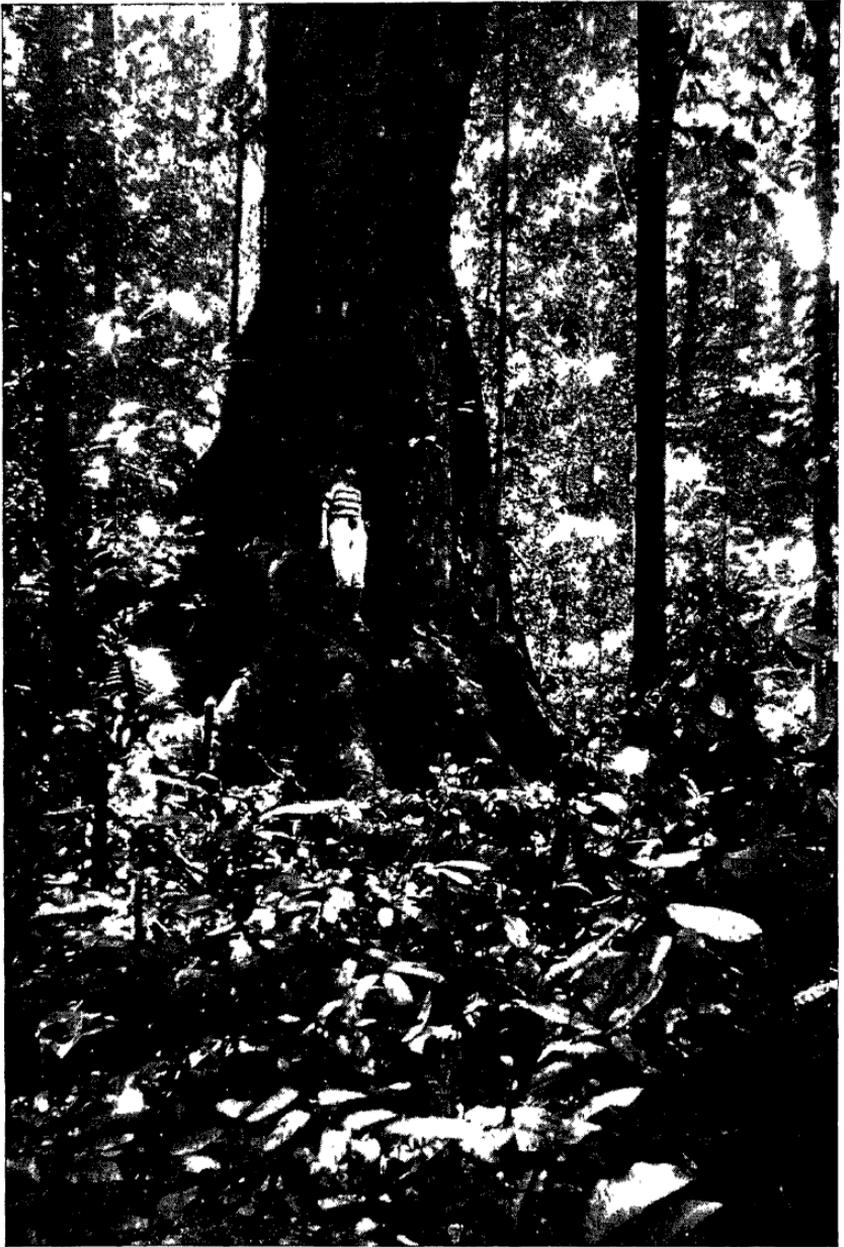
In the afternoon Gwen, Rachel and I went out 'perusing the bush', as Gibson calls it, for rare orchids. Orchid-hunting is a difficult and exciting occupation, difficult because the orchids which are not among the tree tops, and therefore inaccessible, are usually to be found among fallen rotten tacubas, and to reach them you have to push and hack your way through a tangled wilderness of undergrowth like that which sprang up round the palace of the Sleeping Beauty. It is exciting because of snakes, who seem to prefer such places to any others. Rachel almost put her hand on a black and brown one this afternoon that was lying curled up on a log. If it were not for the immunity which rightly or wrongly I believe to be rendered by the Cut, I think I should leave orchids alone, and stick to gold.

This afternoon's quest was not very successful. I struck off by myself so that the others and I should

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not catch sight of the same orchid at the same time, and they get it first. Occasionally I would hear exclamations of pleasure as they succeeded in their search, but I could not see a sign of an orchid anywhere. At last I spied a magnificent large one — or rather its root, growing on a tree at the junction of the trunk and a branch. The root was impossible to reach, so I cut a very long stick, and after a great deal of effort succeeded in dislodging it, and my orchid fell to the ground. I picked it up and took it to Gwen that she might put it in the haversack, but when she saw it she said that it was only an ordinary life plant. After that I gave up looking for orchids, and concentrated on leaves instead, and was fortunate enough to find a soft grey spray, and some remarkable green ones backed with purple.

On the way back we passed an immense mora. It was one of the largest of its kind that I have seen, and made all the other trees look puny beside it. I had nothing with me with which to measure its girth except a pocket handkerchief, and this would have taken too long, but it must have been of an unusual circumference, for the divisions between the buttresses were as large as fair-sized rooms. In one of them lay a broken marm's egg. It was pale blue, and about as large as a hen's egg. Cables of bush ropes as thick as a man had wound themselves round the vast trunk of the mora up the top, and hung down in great festoons. I hacked off a piece of one of the more slender bush ropes, and brought it back as a specimen. It was spiral in form, and although it appeared on first sight to be soft and springy, it was, in reality,



GWEN AND INDIAN BOY ON GIANT TREE

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exceedingly tough and hard to sever; but no doubt this was partly due to the fact that it is always harder to cut a swinging pendulous piece of wood than one on a more solid foundation.

We had tea as soon as we returned, and after tea I suggested that we should play advertisement snap, but as usual nothing came of it. Gwen decided that she must go to her tent and read. Maurice and Rachel also found that they had important things to do, so I went up the Brazilian Hill by myself, skirted round the creek, and from the far side had a very good view of Gwen in her tent. As I expected, she was lying on her bed, fast asleep.

Later

Juan's reply has come. It arrived this afternoon by the only form of post in the forest — an Indian. He neither denies nor alludes to the accusations levelled against him except to say 'No doubt your friends (R. and I.) are disgusted that they do not find gold and diamonds in the camp, and that this is the reason that you are discouraged'.

Maurice has gone to his tent to compose a scathing reply, which the Indian will take back early to-morrow morning. Gwen and Rachel are feverishly trying to write letters, and the necessity of getting them done in a limited amount of time seems to have driven anything that might be said out of their heads. Even when there is no hurry it is almost impossible to write letters up here in the forest. Our life is so utterly different and removed from the lives of those to whom we write. Who, in a world that teems with hens, is

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likely to understand our enthusiasm over the laying of an egg, or to share our delight in the utterances of Gibson when they have never seen, and could not possibly imagine? If letter writing is to be at all profitable there must be a shared understanding between the writer and the reader, and people seem to be astonishingly incapable of being interested in things out of their own horizon.

When the time comes for me to return to civilization, and people meet me, they will probably say:

'I hear you have been living in a jungle! Do tell me what it is like, and what you did there.' And I, being of an ingenuous disposition, and inclined to commit before considering, will probably embark upon a description and will continue until I glance at my listener and see in his or her eye the glazed and wandering look that betrays the utmost boredom.

Gwen and Rachel, with this foreknowledge no doubt at the back of their minds, are racking their brains, and, metaphorically at least, tearing their hair. I am not attempting to get a letter written this evening, because I know that I couldn't do it, and because I know too that sooner or later Juan will send up a reply to Maurice's letter, and Maurice will send down a reply to Juan's letter, and my letter can go by the same Indian at the same time. At Five Stars he will pass it on to some other Indian who happens to be going down river in his coréal, and in this way it will pass from hand to hand until it reaches Arakaka, where it will probably wait for several months until there is a boat going down to Morawhanna. At

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Morawhanna it will board the *Tarpon*, and be conveyed to Georgetown, and so home, across the Atlantic. If our letters ever reach their destination they ought to be framed.

Soo and Gibson had a terrific fight yesterday afternoon. It started in the store tent, where Gwen was counting the tins with Gibson, and seeing what we have left. Soo came over from the clearing and asked if he could have some currants to put in a sweet loaf that he is making for us, and Gwen told Gibson to give them to him.

‘How many shall I give him, Mistress?’ he asked.

‘Oh! I don’t know,’ said Gwen, preoccupied. ‘Give him the tin, and he can bring back what he doesn’t use.’

‘I shouldn’t do dat, Mistress,’ answered Gibson, in spite of the fact that Soo was standing beside him. ‘You can’t trust de man atarl. He is capable of taking de whole tin for himself, and den telling you he has put dem all in your loaf. De man is a tief.’

Soo listened to this unprovoked attack with a look of growing fury spreading over his face. Then he said, very quietly, and with deadly import:

‘Dis man, Gibson, Mistress, is a black-hearted devil. When you back is turned he takes all your best food and eats it himself, and he’ll do worse if you don’t watch him.’

Gibson became pale and speechless with rage, and Soo continued in a voice of withering scorn:

‘Your property at Arakaka is nothing but a dirty little mud hut, wid one yam and two sweet potatoes in

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de garden. Why if you saw a motor car you would faint!

This was too much to be borne, and Gibson advanced towards his detractor with clenched fists and flashing eye.

'Liar!' he hissed. 'Snake! Tief!'

'Bush Bat!' hurled Soo, as he backed across the camp, stopping every other moment to fling a fresh insult.

It was fortunate that neither of them had on knives, for murder would certainly have been done.

At last Soo disappeared among the trees, and Gibson returned to the kitchen, and wandered about it, muttering unprintable things.

Rachel and I both had interesting experiences to-day, for she caught a lovely little golden beetle in the morning, and in the afternoon a coral snake nearly caught me. Here I must pause, and admit — because a diary must be truthful — that accuracy has been sacrificed to neatness. The snake had no designs on me at all. It did not even see me, for as I came along the trail it was slithering into its hole at the side, and its head, and what would correspond to its shoulders, had already disappeared by the time I saw it.

These coral snakes are curious unreal-looking creatures, striped black and orange. They are not very long, nor any thicker than a thick thumb, but they are extremely deadly. Solomon tells me that if a coral snake is found in a gold pit it is a sure sign of luck. He, by the way, had an extraordinary stroke of luck yesterday, for he fell into the shaft, which is now eleven

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feet deep, and was not even bruised. The only casualty was Soo, whom he hit on the head with his spade while falling.

Later in the day I watched Solomon cutting down a tree. In spite of having only one eye he is a magnificent axe man, and never misses his aim. 'Oh! Mama dead!' he exclaims from time to time, as he swings his axe. The reason and meaning of this expression is a mystery, and it is no use asking him to explain it because his English is quite incomprehensible.

We have let the hens out of the coop, because they did not seem to like it, and once more they wander at their own sweet will about the bush. They actually have the intelligence to lay in the clearing, so that we have no difficulty in finding the eggs. Indeed, the difficulty is no longer to find the eggs, but to collect them when found, for the black hen is determined to hatch them into chickens, and sits immovably on the nest. I do not know much about such matters, but imagine that she must have been having dealings with the game cock. That wretched bird is becoming noisier and more objectionable every day. Perhaps it is the result of having three wives, though surely this should have the effect of subduing him. But no; he struts up and down in the lordliest manner, and every time one of the hens lays an egg he crows and cackles just as if he had done it himself — and so do both the other hens.

I went over to the clearing just now to collect the eggs, and found that as usual the black hen was sitting on them. So I approached my hand to the nest in some trepidation, fearing that she might peck at me,

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but after I had stroked her head, and given her a little push, she rose off the eggs and allowed me to take them.

On the way back we nearly measured our length in an appalling patch of mud that lies between the camp and the clearing. However, after a tortured minute of uncertainty I managed to regain my balance. We are going to have the eggs buttered for dinner with fried onions, and some of the bread that Gibson baked this morning.

This baking of bread is an even greater ceremony with Gibson than it is with Soo, and he dresses himself up in the most astonishing manner for it, with a dish rag tied round his waist on top of the Harvest Queen, another round his neck, and a third on his head under his cap, so that it hangs down all round.

While he baked I sat on the log that runs along one side of the kitchen, and he told me the story of the celebrated Madame Pepe (from whom, no doubt, Pepe's Creek gets its name) who lived in the forest about Five Stars many years ago, and worked gold there with her husband.

'She was very fierce,' said Gibson, 'and gave out dat de bush belonged to her, and if a pork-knocker wished to go along de trail she would not let him pass unless he paid her.'

'... But supposing he refused to pay?'

'She took away his clothes,' he answered. 'You couldn't escape her.'

'... But she couldn't have been everywhere at once.'

'She had policemen,' he said. 'Dey might be black men or Indians. You never knew who might be her

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policemen. Dat is what made it so difficult. — She caught me once,' he added ruminatingly.

'And did you pay?'

'I did,' he answered. 'Dere was no help for it.'

I asked whether her husband had approved of these high-handed ways.

'I cannot say, my dear lady,' answered Gibson. 'He had to do what she said.'

So much — I thought — for the subjection of the Latin woman.

'What happened to her?' I asked. 'Where is she now?'

'She went back to Venezuela,' said Gibson. 'Colonel Pepe became a judge.'

A giant tree crashed during the night, and woke everyone up. It may have been several trees, for they are so intertwined with bush rope that when a heavy tree falls it often pulls half a dozen others down with it.

The floor of my tent is now completed, and is the greatest comfort and convenience, especially when I have my bath, which is very much inclined to tip up on an uneven surface, and before I made the floor I had great difficulty in avoiding spikes, which sprung up through the earth as fast as I cut them down; and while I am on the subject of springing up, I notice that a stick which I cut the other day and stuck into the ground in order to fasten one of the guy ropes to it, has sprouted. The irrepressible way in which life persists, and the quickness with which it appears in the forest is almost horrifying. Throw a twig on the ground one day, and a tree is growing there the next day. The

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radishes that Gwen planted are no exception to the rule, for they shot up so rapidly that they jumped right out of the earth, and are lying about the plot on their sides in a most disastrous and disordered manner.

A dweller in jungles once told me that he had cut and stripped some wood, and made a table with it, and that within a week it was covered with leaves, and had grown several inches. But I must admit that the tale does not ring quite true. Still, it is true in essence if not in fact.

Three of my senses tell me that dinner is ready, and I must go and prove it with the other two.

Three hours later

The buttered eggs and the fried onions were perfectly delicious, and at the end of dinner we had Sowarri nuts, quite fairly divided by Gwen.

Later

Rachel is becoming quite a credit to me. She hardly ever passes biscuits in her fingers nowadays, and a few moments ago I saw her placing her cigarette ash on a log instead of flicking it on to the floor — or what would be the floor if we were living in a house instead of a jungle. And apropos of cigarettes, Gibson excelled himself in the matter of cheekiness the other day.

Long ago I gave up smoking, because it is so impossible to smoke what you roll, and that is what we have had to do since the last tin of cigarettes was finished soon after we left Arakaka. Either you pack it tightly, and lick it up so well that it won't draw, or you don't, and the result is a miserable, weedy-looking

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object with dismal strings of tobacco falling out at either end. The other day, fired by Rachel's success, I determined to make a good one. So I rolled it, and stuck it, and put it into a holder in order to keep it together.

Gibson watched me puffing at it, vainly trying to keep it alight.

'... A fine big cigarette,' he observed, 'for a nice little boy.'

To be called 'a nice little boy' by one's cook, even so unusual a cook as Gibson, was an experience I had never had before, and I did not know how to deal with it in a dignified manner. So I pretended that I had not heard, and shall make a point of peeling the remainder of my sticks in the logie so that he has to sweep up the resultant debris.

Business is much as usual. That is to say there isn't any. Not a customer has appeared since the Colonel with the Trousers; and as we expected, Mr. Constant Himmelbeau was merely one of Juan's flights. Our store of gold remains depressingly small, and the reef is suspected of not being a reef at all. As a result of all these misfortunes dinner is usually a gloomy meal, and I am beginning to be positively thankful for Pelman patience, for at least it is better than unending conversation about Juan's iniquities and mining. When you have mined unsuccessfully all day you don't want to talk about unsuccessful mining all night.

Solomon Indian (as he is called to differentiate him from black Solomon) killed an alligator near the hen house yesterday. No wonder the hens felt so uneasy there, and were so anxious to get out! Wilson killed

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another one farther along the creek near Frederick's logie. He says that 'Alligators are very good to eat, but you must first remove their instincts'.

It has been a lovely day, with no rain until this evening. As I came out of my tent this morning I heard Gwen making use of one of the most dishonest devices employed by women for saving themselves trouble.

Gibson was showing disinclination for some manual labour — I think it was to go and collect palm leaves for the roof — and Gwen was spurring him on by pandering to his masculine vanity.

'If I, a weak woman,' she said, 'can mend the roof, surely you, a Man, can do it.'

When he had gone I expressed my disapproval. 'How long, I wondered in conclusion, 'would men, poor blinded creatures, continue to be tricked by this fiction of feminine weakness . . .'

'They like it. It makes them feel strong.'

'Don't interrupt. I hadn't finished . . . Where was I? Oh! yes! . . . and so led by the nose wherever the stronger sex (by virtue of its superior wisdom) would have them go? Do you deny,' I concluded, 'that every woman, unless she is even more than usually stupid, knows perfectly well that it is she who calls the tune?'

'I am neither denying or affirming anything,' Gwen said with a sigh, 'but as I see that you are determined at all costs to air your opinions, and as I know from past experience that the forest is neither wide nor secret enough to hide me from them, I bow to the inevitable,

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and suggest that you analyse this superior wisdom of women.

‘Certainly, with the greatest pleasure; I had every intention of doing so. They have greater quickness of perception, greater logical powers (witness the proverbially feminine intuition), more common sense. They are less egotistical, less arrogant, less vain, less blind, less prejudiced — less boring.’

She glanced at me quizzically.

‘... Less boring,’ I continued firmly. ‘Cast back your mind and think of the number of times you have been buttonholed by some dull, elderly, unappetizing man, and made to listen by the hour to the recital of his soporific experiences.’

‘Yes,’ she admitted. ‘That’s true. I have.’

‘Does he,’ I went on, invigorated by this slight victory, ‘trouble to ascertain whether you are in the least interested? Does he, in fact, consider you at all except as a kind of elegant waste-paper basket?’

‘Perhaps not, but don’t you find such simplicity rather touching?’

‘Touching perhaps for five minutes. After that it is excruciating. Think’ — I went on, memories crowding upon me — ‘how much more often men try to instruct you than women. Think particularly of political men, and how they boom at you, and even, in advanced cases, pursue you with pamphlets.’

‘They are not trying to instruct you,’ Gwen said. ‘If they thought about it at all they would probably consider you uninstructions. They are merely enjoying the sound of their voices, and at the same time getting rid of surplus vitality.’

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I could think of far pleasanter ways of getting rid of surplus vitality, but did not say so.

'... But how is it,' she added, 'that you seem to prefer the society of the miserable male to that of your own superior sex?'

'Because, like all the best people, I have in me some qualities of the opposite sex. One of them is vanity, and I find that men pay more attention to me than women.'

'Well I never!' she exclaimed. 'Haven't I been listening to you for the last half hour?'

'You listened to me because you had to, not because you admired me.'

'Not at all, my dear Joan,' she said soothingly, 'I admire you very much. Now you run out and play in the forest. You'll probably find your friend Gibson mooning about somewhere looking for a palm. You and he can talk to your hearts' content.'

'I shall do nothing of the sort,' I said, slightly nettled at the way she had said 'play in the forest'. 'I am going down to the pit to work, and I shall remain there till the evening.'

She laughed. 'Well, you'd better hurry, or you won't get there till the evening.'

I went off without paying any further attention to her.

On the way to the workings I almost saw a tiger. I was walking along the trail, admiring the way the sunlight filtered through the trees, and thinking, while I kept a wary eye for rare leaves, and bark that might stain my sticks, of one thing and another; that the perpetual green twilight and the obscuring trees gave

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to the forest a mystery that open country lacked; that forests were therefore better for living purposes than deserts, mystery being more stimulating than certainty — which was tantamount to saying that ignorance was better than knowledge. — But was ignorance better than knowledge? . . . A sudden rustling, and then an alarming ‘Ough!’ between a cough and a growl, broke in upon my musings. ‘Tiger’, flashed through my mind, and I looked round hastily for a tree to climb. There wasn’t one in sight. The lowest branches were at least twenty feet from the ground. There was not even a hanging coil of bush rope up which I might have been able to swarm. Nothing for it but to trust that the creature was not on a hunting expedition, and that the wind, from my point of view, was in the right direction.

I stood stock still and very frightened for a few minutes, but nothing happened, and the silence remained undisturbed, so at last I summoned up courage to move, and grasping my knife more firmly, continued along the trail.

But now all pleasure in my surroundings had gone. The sunlight might still be flecking the leaves and quivering upon some dark patch of earth — I did not see it. The perpetual stirring of the forest that lies behind its silence might still be making a music more lovely than anything on earth — I could not hear it. Nor did I care whether ignorance or knowledge were the happier state, for my mind was intent on tigers. Visionary tigers were all about me. On stealthy padded feet they followed me along the trail, pausing when I paused, continuing when I continued. I

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remembered a story I had heard of a tiger who had stalked a man along a trail in this way for nearly an hour. Then the following footsteps quickened, and came nearer. The man stood still, and a large tiger flashed by, almost touching him as it passed. He heaved an astonished sigh of relief, and continued along the trail. Farther on there came a bend. He rounded it, and as he did so, the tiger, who had been lying in wait, leapt upon him. A terrible fight ensued, but finally the man thrust his knife into some vital part of the tiger, and so won the day. He was discovered much later in a horribly mutilated condition, but lived to tell the tale.

This, then, was the story that kept running through my head, only instead of the man, it was I who was being stalked, and finally attacked . . . I had rounded the bend in the trail, and the tiger had sprung . . . it tore at me with its claws . . . it snarled horribly as we closed in mortal combat . . . I must strike quickly and strike home! . . . I prepared to do so, and remembered that in the story the man had not specified where home was. Could it be behind the ear? — Or was I thinking of elephants? It was a most awkward situation, and I was still trying to decide where to strike when the pit loomed into view, and for a short time drove the tiger out of my head. But only temporarily, for when I had loosened some earth from the pit, had loaded the batelle with it, and was sitting at the edge of the creek, the tiger came back, and I thought of Selina.

A foreword about Selina. She is the most remarkable — indeed the only remarkable woman I have met

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in the forest. Married to a Chinaman called Chung, she herself is three parts Indian and one part Venezuelan. She works gold, which no other Indian does, and carries immense loads, once straining herself through carrying one hundred and fifty pounds' weight. She is strong-minded, intelligent, and rather attractive.

A tiger, she says, once came into her camp and chased her up a tree, where she spent a great many unpleasant hours while the tiger, for some reason best known to itself, prowled growling round the base of it, instead of following her. Eventually it departed, and she commenced climbing down. Instantly it leapt back into the camp, and it was not until the evening, when Chung and his fellows returned, that the tiger, intimidated perhaps by the sound of voices, slunk off, and Selina was able to come to earth.

These two stories proved that tigers were capable of attacking without provocation, and that they were tricky as well. For all I knew, the growl I had heard on the trail might even now be lurking behind a tree trunk, watching me. It was a most uncomfortable sensation. I washed a few batelles, which yielded even fewer specks of gold, then the lunch bell sounded faintly through the trees, and I made my way back to the camp.

'I thought you were going to remain at the pit till the evening,' Gwen said as I sat down at the table.

She is as full of guile as a tiger, I thought, remembering the ringing of the lunch bell.

Rachel and Maurice came back at half-past five, having had an unsuccessful day at the workings. They are now in their tents, having hot baths. Torrential

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rain has started, and although the gramophone is playing less than two yards away I cannot hear it for the beating of the rain upon the leaves. Thunder has been — not rumbling — but exploding round for some time. It is like a distant bombardment . . . Blast this rain! It is coming through the roof again. It is becoming colder every minute, but I cannot go to my tent to get my leather jacket because the waterproof is there too, and I do not want to spend the remainder of the evening in soaking clothes.

This part of the week has been pleasant but uneventful, apart from the increasingly abusive letters from Maurice (as prospection continues to show poor results) and the imperviously amiable ones from Juan that pass backwards and forwards between this camp and Five Stars. An Indian messenger is perpetually in the camp, either leaving or arriving. One came to-day who says that his name is Kaiser William, and I know another called Baden Powell. Baden Powell and Kaiser William! Could anything be more unsuitable? Indians should have the names usually associated with them: Swift Arrow; Drifting Leaf; Roaring Water, and so on. It is, of course, quite possible that they have, for at its birth every Indian child is given by its parents a name which is kept a profound secret for the rest of its life. This seems odd, but perhaps the reason for it is a very proper respect for personal privacy. By the same token one Indian will never stare at another, even though it happens to be his own child. I remember being struck by this as we came up river, and Indians in their corbals passed us by. It is extremely doubtful whether white men had ever been seen by them before,

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and certain that white women had not, yet they never appeared to take the slightest notice of us. Chung says that 'Indians are very strong for etiquette'.

It must be nearly dinner time, for Gibson is laying the table. I wonder what it will be? . . . Pork, probably. Two having been shot, and they large, we shall almost certainly be afflicted with pork (smoked) for the next month . . . Pork it is!

Later

Still no gold, and no business, and the situation is really becoming serious. A considerable amount of time has passed, and our small capital, principally in the form of stores, is dwindling. The many ridiculous things which are continually happening, and which, no doubt, happen on all expeditions, and the intense interest and pleasure of our life up here in the forest tend to obscure — for me at any rate — the seriousness of the venture. We have all put everything we could lay hands on into financing the expedition, and to more than one of us its success is of the very first importance. Maurice is a magnificent worker. He never spares himself. It makes me feel quite tired to think of him. Last month, when he was covered with bush sores — an appallingly painful complaint — he still went out working every day. And Rachel too is indomitable. She trudges out every day to the pit and stays there till the evening. She has brought up a number of excellent books, and reads them after her bath and before her dinner; she plays that detestable Pelman patience almost every evening and wins each

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game, and when she is not doing any of these things or having a bout of fever she can usually be seen in the least elegant of attitudes blowing up the kitchen fire.

But it is on Gwen that the principal burdens of the expedition fall, and on her, ultimately, that we all depend, for she is the organizer, packer, and purveyor of stores, the binder of wounds, the oil upon the waters. She inspires, encourages, and consoles, in fact does all that the Holy Ghost is supposed to do, and in her case it is really very estimable because if there is one thing she dislikes more than stores it is wounds, and if there is anything she detests more than either it is being oil upon the waters.

All this, however, is by the way. Back, therefore to business, which, as I said before, is about as bad as it could be. The poverty of the creeks along the new trail was a great disappointment, and all our hopes are now centred on Wilson's Hill.

He discovered it, he says, last year, when he was up in these parts working alone. The indications were exceedingly good, but he had to give up before long owing to lack of water. However, now that the rainy season is at its height there will be water in abundance in the creek, which is a couple of hundred yards from the hill.

We are starting work there to-morrow.

Next evening

We rose particularly early this morning, and had set off on the hour's walk well before nine o'clock. When we arrived we found a large pit about fourteen feet deep and ten feet wide among the trees on top of a hill. To one side lay a huge mound of earth.

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Solomon and Soo let themselves down into the shaft, and after a short examination showed that it was only necessary to dig a foot lower than the existing depth before we would penetrate through the clay to gravel.

We cut a rough trail from the hill to the creek, and spent the morning carting buckets of gravel to the water's edge. In the early afternoon the pile was sufficiently high, and we prepared to wash through the gravel to see what it would yield.

Soo, Solomon and Wilson crouched at the edge of the creek with loaded batelles in their hands; they were chattering with excitement and enthusiasm, and arguing as to which batelle would yield the biggest nugget.

'He tink he hide,' Soo exclaimed, referring to the nugget. 'But dis time I catch he!' and Solomon's expectations, though incomprehensible, were equally obvious. Their enthusiasm was catching, and hopes ran very high indeed. We began to see ourselves carrying home the gold in the kerosene tins that we used for baking bread.

One, two, three batelles were washed, and as each one yielded no more than a few miserable eyes our hopes began to fade, and the excited chattering of the men lessened and finally died away. We worked in silence. . . .

This evening we returned dejectedly to the camp. Perhaps we shall strike a richer patch of gravel tomorrow.

Next day

Worked the hill gravel all to-day. Most disappointing.

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The day after

Still no results.

Later

News! An Indian appeared in the camp to-day with a letter for Maurice which had somehow reached Five Stars and had been sent on by Mr. Cook.

It was from the well-known and respected business man in Georgetown.

'Dear Sir,' it said.

'In March of this year Mr. Juan A. obtained from me twenty thousand pounds' weight of stores for the purpose of re-stocking a bush store on the Venezuelan frontier.

'He agreed to send the equivalent value in gold as soon as the stores were sold.

'He informed me that he was in partnership with your syndicate, and as I have received no news of Mr. Juan A., and am unable to get in touch with him, I should be glad to know what your syndicate proposes to do in the matter. — I am, sir,' etc.

So now, as the stores are presumably not yet paid for, and as we have no intention of being held responsible for them, we have sent word to Juan that we have severed connection with him and asking what he wishes done with the store. Thank goodness we made a point of specifying in the agreement that we accepted no responsibility for the purchasing and cost of the stores.

Two days later

His answer came to-day. It commenced severely 'Sir', but although it was very short, simply stating

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that he wished the store to be handed into the keeping of a rascally Venezuelan borderer called Commandante, he had at the end forgotten his formal beginning and ended: 'I am, dear Major,' etc. etc. There was a postscript: 'For Mr. Wilson I have no work, as I have discovered him to be a person of two faces.'

We cannot imagine why he should make this assertion about Wilson unless perhaps he has heard that Wilson showed us the Hill, which Juan wished to acquire for himself, though indeed he would mind less if he knew how little the acquisition would have profited him. We worked all through the gravel there but the results were negligible. We are now trying farther along the banks of the creek.

Gwen, Maurice and Rachel went out prospecting this morning and I was left to guard the camp. Soon after they had gone Commandante and two other half-breed ruffians — friends of his who have taken up their abode in the shop — strolled into the camp and demanded rations, saying that they had nothing to eat. They looked very surly and unpleasant, and I regretted that I had left my revolver under the mattress.

'Why did you not come and ask half an hour ago when you knew the Mistress was in the camp?' I asked. 'You must have seen her going through the clearing, and you know perfectly well that I have nothing to do with the stores. If you want anything you can come back later when she returns.'

They went off looking very sullen. A little while later Gibson reappeared and I told him what had happened.

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'You was quite right, my dear lady,' he said. 'I have no doubt in me mind dat it was a bloody trick.'

Then he sat down in Maurice's chair leaning his head in his hand, and looking very depressed.

'What is the matter, Gibson?' I asked. 'Aren't you feeling well?'

'No, my lady, I am not feeling well because I have a toothache.'

'Poor Gibson! I am so sorry. How long have you had it?'

'For twenty years, my lady,' he said, and my sympathy instantly dropped several degrees. You can put up with almost anything, I reflected, after twenty years. Wives with tiresome husbands; tiresome husbands with tiresome wives; all manner of annoyances. Even a twenty-year-old toothache probably attains a certain dignity.

'You see, Miss Arbut,' Gibson went on, 'because I am a poor man I cannot afford to have my teeth extracted. Now if I were a rich lady, I would take forty dollars from my pocket and buy some new ones.'

I gave him some aspirin and some Bunter's Nervine, and promised to give him a fine new set as soon as I had made a fortune, and he went off to his logie looking more contented.

Frederick went to Five Stars a few days ago, and returned this evening in a pair of blue trousers and a khaki shirt like mine. He walked into the camp looking rather self-conscious. We congratulated him upon his smart appearance, but as a matter of fact he was far more beguiling in his former state of undress.

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Wilson also went to Five Stars, but has not yet returned. It has rained incessantly for several days. The result of the latest prospection is about as bad as it could be. And now Rachel is in bed with another bout of fever. The gloom at dinner to-night was unbounded, and reached its apex in Maurice, who kept heaving immense sighs, and would not even play Pelman patience.

We have had what solicitors call 'an extraordinary meeting of directors' and have decided to move to another district as soon as the gravel we are at present working is worked to what will probably be its bitter conclusion.

This projected move is rather a nuisance, just when I have at last succeeded in making my tent really habitable, with all sorts of labour-saving devices, and have continued the corduroy flooring half way to the logie. I had intended to floor the whole camp in time, for the mud is really a great trial, but I suppose that the others are right, and that the only sensible thing to do is to try our luck somewhere else as it so conspicuously doesn't seem to be here. Still, I shall be sorry to leave . . . the lid of my canister has broken, so it will have to be tied on with bush rope.

Later

The shop is becoming a sort of pork-knockers' club, presided over by Commandante, who spends the whole of every day and night lying there in his hammock. He says that of course nobody will buy the stores because they are too dear — even if there were anyone to buy them, and that if Juan does not pay

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him for guarding them he will pay himself with rations.

I went into the clearing just now to collect the eggs (the hens now lay, and lay, and lay), and saw Commandante in his hammock surrounded by no fewer than four strange black men. Evidently he was regaling them with choice morsels of conversation, for every now and then grunts of approval or a guffaw of laughter would rise from his audience. I was astonished, because Commandante as a wit was an idea that had never occurred to me. He has always seemed much more like a malevolent slug than anything else.

Now that I come to think of it, one of the four men was probably Juan's new employee. Gwen told us at lunch that as she went through the clearing this morning she noticed a more than usually disreputable looking individual, who, when asked his business, said that Juan had sent him up to assist Commandante to look after the shop, that his name was Secretary, and that his orders were that no British person was to be allowed to cross the threshold of the shop. Really, Juan is a gem!

We continued the discussion on emancipation and the suffrage this morning after breakfast. Gwen was more sensible to-day, and agreed with almost everything I said.

'A man likes his wife to know enough to be able to agree intelligently with him,' she concluded cynically.

Gibson, who as usual was hovering near, and waiting for an opportunity to join in the conversation, did not quite know what to make of Gwen's remark. I watched him turning it over in his mind.

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When both parties are in agreement, conversation is soon brought to a full stop, so I switched on to another subject: moral versus aesthetic beauty. It did. The argument waxed fast and furious. Gwen and Rachel taking one side, I the other, and continued until Gwen suddenly realized that the morning was passing, and that nobody but Maurice who had gone down long ago to that disappointing pit, was doing anything but talk. This annoyed her.

'The trouble with you, Joan,' she said, looking unamiably at me, 'is that you never want to do anything but talk, and talking is almost always a waste of time.'

I would have liked to analyse this last assertion, but I was swept aside.

'Hamlet,' she continued, 'was perfectly right when he said that:

"The native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought;
And enterprises of great pith and moment,
With this regard, their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action."

That's what you are, — "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought", and not very elevated thought at that. One of these days you will realize that you have spent the whole of your life talking — and that has even less to be said for it than thinking, because it makes more noise.' And with this parting shot she retired to her tent.

'De Mistress is too wise for you, Miss Arbut,' said Gibson, who is always impressed by quotations, 'and

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you do wrong to prefer a beautiful physiog to a kind heart.'

I denied having said that I preferred it, but he paid no attention.

Rachel is feeling weak to-day, as a result of Dover Powder and quinine, and did not come down to the pit. I worked there for several hours, and found a few fair-sized pieces of gold, but nothing worth making a song about. In the afternoon I went up the hill on the other side of the creek to collect wood, and found a very good spiral stick, and some black-eyed Suzans. They were very large ones, almost as big as broad beans, and would serve splendidly as counters if the others could be induced to play poker one evening instead of Pelman patience.

I also found several orchids, a 'monkey gobble' and another smaller kind with spotted petals. This I bore home with some pride and showed it to the others, who said that it was not an orchid at all, but I do not believe them.

Later

Somebody once said — or did I read it in a book? — that prisoners and those who live in the wilds have this in common: They are both still. Somewhere, out of sight and sound, the hum of the world's life is going on, but they are utterly removed from it — still. This is probably quite true. A moment ago I saw how true it was. But now that I come to write it down it seems to have lost its significance, to be, in fact, without any particular point. That is the worst of reducing vague perceptions to words. You don't crystallize them. You

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lose them. You end, nine times out of ten, and to put it metaphorically, by being unable to see the wood for the trees, which is a pity, provided, of course, that there was ever any wood to see. I feel sure that there was some sort of a word about being still in wilds and prisons.

Someone else said — and this time I remember who it was — that man's ordeal is in society. This is true too. If it were not so late, and the lamp showing signs of going out, I could dilate at great length upon the theme, and show as conclusively as the easy untroubled passing of the days up here has shown me, how true it is.

This forest; what is it? What likeness has its spirit — a lowering Titan, or a Rima of young leaves? Is it kindly or malignant, harsh or fair, young or old? It is all these things — and none of them. It is utterly non-human, beyond the encompassing of words. It inspires the most diverse emotions — hatred, love, fear, contentment. It is aware of you, yet leaves you free; and you are aware of it, always, all the time, even though you may be occupied with the absorbing incidents of everyday life; suddenly you look up and seem to catch it watching you. Conrad says that 'its stillness is that of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention', and that is probably the last word that should be said. But it can be very lovely too, and throws a binding enchantment. Above all it is entirely satisfying, because it demands no adjustment. To meet it you must be utterly free, utterly true . . . Now the lamp is going out. I knew it would. That ass Gibson seems to be incapable of trimming and filling it. I must remember to tell him to-morrow that he is a foolish virgin. That is sure to get a good rise.

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It is worrying to have to go to bed with unexpressed and unpleasant pictures chasing one another through one's mind. There are gossip writers (even male gossip writers), social climbers, business men getting the better of each other — all manner of waste, greed, blindness, folly, and vexation of spirit. And over it all a perpetual meaningless clatter. There's a lot to be said for jungles.

Next day

Looking back to yesterday's entry I see that it does not contain one item of news. As a matter of fact there wasn't much to record. Silence from Juan, no gold from the pit. Maurice, who is quite the most determined and indomitable man I ever met, goes off early every morning with Solomon and Soo, and Rachel, when she is not having fever, goes too. Each morning after breakfast Gwen is to be seen at the logie table preparing their lunch. It is always the same, powise or marm sandwiches, a piece of chocolate, and the inevitable tea. There is a brief period of commotion during which line sticks, lunch, hats and knives are being collected, then off they go, and once more peace descends upon the camp, and the silence is unbroken save for Gibson singing as he washes up the breakfast things.

To-day, however, the procedure has been different, and from my point of view a complete waste of time. It was Gwen's fault, the outcome of an acrimonious argument that took place as we walked down to the pit yesterday afternoon.

'Rachel looks stronger than you,' she said, and

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instantly my blood began to boil — ‘and she is also far more energetic. Doesn’t she go and work all day long at the pit — and does it every day too. Good Heavens! she exerts herself ten times as much as you do!’

At this my indignation knew no bounds, because I could not deny that Rachel shows a livelier interest than I do, and does go off religiously to the pit every morning. Long ago I discovered that unless there is something definite to do there, such as washing or digging, it is much more interesting and profitable to wander about the forest collecting curious specimens, and to return to the camp for lunch. I told her so with some heat, and added that if she were not so attached to the inside of her tent she would be aware that I was always out and on my feet from ten till lunch, and from lunch till six.

‘I know why you are annoyed,’ she said. ‘It is because I said that Rachel looks stronger than you — though why you should care I cannot imagine. It is too childish.’

I did not bother to reply, but vowed to myself that in future I would march out to the pit regularly every morning, and spend the entire day there working like a galley slave. That would teach her.

So this morning very early indeed I buckled on my knife, revolver, and field boots, pulled in my belt, and set off with some biscuits and a piece of cold bird in one pocket, and a brandy flask in the other.

There was nothing whatever to do at the pit except to examine stones through a microscopic magnifying-glass in order to see whether they contained seams of gold. They never did, and it is a detestable work. One eye has to be permanently screwed up, and the focus

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altered every second owing to the irregular surface of the stone. Maurice was in the kind of mood that makes the world seem like the Slough of Despond, and we started arguing as to the superiority of Australian or Venezuelan gold pans (one has a groove and the other hasn't). The argument went on for a long time, and I began to wish that I had not come down to the pit at all.

Then all of a sudden the long-lost Wilson turned up with a couple of piratical-looking black men dressed in bright red cummerbunds, and the air cleared.

Wilson, who has been at Five Stars, was full of interesting information about Juan. Apparently, he (J.) told Wilson that he was going off to Tumeremo, guided by Commandante. Wilson assured him that Commandante was not likely to lead anyone to Tumeremo because he was a fugitive from its justice. However, they started off in this direction next morning, but reappeared in four days' time with a story of having been lost in the bush.

'What!' said Wilson, unpleasantly, 'lost on your own line!' (Juan says that he made the trail to the frontier.) I expect that what really happened was that he came up here and scouted round the camp in order to find out what was happening.

He has spread all round Five Stars the story of the rupture between himself and us, and the stories that he has probably spread about me, whom he seems to regard as the principal mischief-maker, simply don't bear thinking about.

'Why don't you go up to the camp and settle things with them?' asked Wilson.

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But nothing would induce him to do so.

'The Major and the ladies are all armed,' he said.

'But white people fight only with the pen,' said Wilson. However J. was not persuaded of this, and is sure that if he shows himself in the camp he will instantly be greeted with a volley. Poor Juan! He cannot believe that everyone does not think and react in his own South American manner — not that he is a South American, but he is very like one. As a matter of fact our sentiments towards him are perfectly friendly; we only deplore his riotous imagination, and his business methods.

At twelve-thirty we stopped stone gazing, and prepared to have lunch. Solomon and Soo came up out of the pit where they had been shovelling, and settled down to eat the mess of rice, prepared by themselves, which they had brought out with them in old lard tins. Before eating, Solomon spent some time carving a spoon. Maurice says that he makes a fresh one every day. It seems rather a waste of effort.

Rachel and I played a game of poker to-night before dinner, using my black-eyed Suzans as counters. But poker is not really much fun with two players, and we soon gave it up.

During dinner (smoked pork) we discussed affairs of state, and it has been decided that Maurice and Wilson are to go off to-morrow for a fortnight to prospect a possible reef that Wilson knows of about forty miles away, in the direction of Five Stars. In the meantime the rest of us will remain up here and finish prospecting any creeks that have not already been prospected, and then, unless Maurice comes back with

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something really startling up his sleeve, we shall pack up and move, I suppose to another district.

A week later

These last days have been exceedingly pleasant. Tolerable weather, everyone in a good temper, and no fewer than three games of advertisement snap. And we had swizzles one night in honour of ten eggs being discovered in an unexpected part of the clearing. Some of the eggs were certainly not in their prime, but that wasn't the hens' fault.

Gibson was very ingenious this morning. It started to rain very suddenly just before lunch, and Gwen darted out of the logie to rescue the clothes, which, as usual, were drying on logs and bushes. Gibson stood and watched, making no attempt to move.

'Why didn't you go and take in the Mistress's clothes when you heard the rain coming?' asked Rachel.

'Dear Lady,' he replied, quick as lightning, 'haven't you heard dat it is not proper for a man to touch a lady's garments?'

Last night I could not sleep. Over-excitement, perhaps, caused by the advertisement snap; and after a time I gave up trying, and decided to read. It took some time to light the lamp. The matches were damp. But at last I succeeded, and started reading *Hamlet*. I read it all through, and then after I had thrown the book to the end of the bed I looked out through the flap of the tent, and saw that the dawn was breaking, and the first faint light shining on the wet forest leaves. It was incredibly lovely . . . I shall never forget it.

CHAPTER IX

GOLD!

Five days later

MAURICE is back! We were astonished to see him walking into the camp this evening, looking exceedingly hot and rather threadbare, but with a cheerful expression on his face, and it has every reason to be there, for the potential reef which he went to prospect with Wilson turns out to be a genuine one, and promises to be really rich. Outcrops of gold-bearing quartz have been found over a large area. The reef is within easy reach of the river, and he has already staked several claims and cut the lines. We are naturally delighted with this news, and had a swizzle party before dinner in honour of it.

After dinner we had another 'extraordinary meeting of directors', and it has been decided that we break up the camp and go down country to Georgetown as soon as possible to register the new claims as concessions and equip another expedition — the expedition which is to open up and develop the new reef.

They have all gone to bed now, and suddenly, for no accountable reason, I feel most desperately depressed. Something has happened . . . is happening. Something is coming to an end. At various times during my life I have had this feeling, this consciousness that the threads of life are drawing together. For a long time nothing happens, or rather, things happen only as you

MORE PROFIT THAN GOLD

have intended. Cause and effect. And you exist easily, lightly, secure in the belief that your will imposes, that you are the master of your fate. And then suddenly comes this realization that all the time forces were working in the darkness, and that the moment has come for their inevitable unfolding.

I feel this to-night — or think I do. It is probably all imagination, the natural reaction after a riotous evening. More probably still it is fear. Our departure has certainly been discussed before, but I have never really visualized it. Now it has become a fact, and I am afraid — afraid that if I leave the forest something may happen to prevent my coming back.

It has turned chilly. I must stop writing, and go and put the kettle on for my hot-water bottle . . . The frogs are very noisy to-night. The noise they make is like the hoarse quacking of ducks.

A week later

We are still here, and the date of departure is not yet fixed. Droghers are expensive and difficult to find, and it is hard to arrange matters so that we may catch the *Tarpon*, which leaves Morawhanna on an unknown date.

Gibson left Maurice's boots too near the fire the other day, and then went off to take his usual 're-creation', with the result that a large hole was burnt in the sole. Maurice was very much annoyed and told him that he was a lazy careless little beast — the laziest little beast he had ever come across.

'All right, Major,' said G. humbly. 'You say I is lazy. Well, I is not contradicting you.'



INDIAN DROGHERS

GOLD!

'De Major did quite right to be angry,' he told me later. 'How can he go around wid only one boot?'

I hoped that this very proper sentiment meant that he would be more careful in future, but the very next day he did the same thing with my shoe. He is hopeless.

A very large baboon spider appeared in the store tent this evening, so we are giving the store tent a wide berth. These spiders are perfectly repulsive; they are extremely large, covered with long black hair, and they have pink feet. They move from one place to another by jumps, and their sting is agonizingly painful.

Freddy has just come into the camp with his hair parted! We are most impressed. He is becoming smarter and smarter. Gwen and Rachel both think that they are the reason, but I know that they are wrong.

No news of Juan. I suppose he is still in his camp near Five Stars, entertaining the fiancée of Mr. Constant Himmelblau.

Three days later

Droghers are beginning to arrive in the camp. They appear through the trees in their ones and twos, ragged black men from Five Stars, Indians in loin cloths. A very odd-looking individual turned up yesterday, a friend of Gibson. He slung his hammock in Gibson's logie, and we heard them talking and singing far into the night. To-day he has been very busy, carrying water, washing up, and generally doing all Gibson's work.

MORE PROFIT THAN GOLD

'Willikit (that is his name) is a good friend to you, Gibson,' I said.

'Oh! him —' replied Gibson in an offhand manner, — 'He is my slave. He has to do everything I tell him.'

Commandante has gone to Five Stars to fetch tobacco, and Secretary, it seems, has gone too, to demand wages. In the meantime half a dozen other cut-throats are taking stores 'on credit'.

We heard another not very surprising piece of news to-day, which is that the Colonel with the Trousers is a fugitive from justice, and is wanted by the Venezuelan authorities on a charge of embezzlement involving large sums of money; and that by his own showing he is not a colonel at all, but a mere captain.

The canisters have all gone, the store tent disappeared, and already the camp has a changed aspect. How desolate it will be the day after to-morrow when we are gone, and nothing remains but the corduroy path I started to make, the skeleton of the logie and kitchen, a couple of tables, and forked sticks showing where the tents stood, and Rachel's fern garden — an attempt at civilization. I can't believe that we are really going. We seem to have been here for ever.

This afternoon Gwen, Rachel and I went out for a last walk along the reef trail, but I left them after half an hour, and went off by myself. On the way home I collected some very beautiful leaves, and uprooted a dozen young palm trees which I am going to plant round the place where my tent was — or rather still is.

GOLD!

Freddy went off early this morning with his wife, Loelia, Spenser (a deaf and dumb relation), the little dog, two baby hogs, six hens, a cock and a maroodie. I think that Freddy is coming down country with us. He has never been out of the forest in his life, so it will be interesting to see what he makes of Georgetown.

We saw a most remarkable insect to-day near Maurice's tent. It was a species of beetle, about three-quarters of an inch long, with two long antennae sticking straight up from its back, and at the end of them two orange specks. Maurice and I were in favour of taking it down country, but Gwen was against it . . . More of that dreadful hog for dinner — in stew this time. We had it cold for lunch, at least the others did. Gwen let me have sardines instead, and I ate so many that I have temporarily lost my appetite for them . . . It has been a lovely rainless day, but exceedingly hot . . . Along the trail this afternoon I heard a very odd sound, just like those paper things in crackers that unfold as you blow into them. I suppose it must have been some kind of a bird.

Next day

The camp is in the wildest state of excitement! A pork-knocker ran into the camp to-day with the news that our new claims at the reef that Maurice located the week before last have been jumped! Our board has been taken down, and the name of an entirely unknown person has been put up in place of it. That such a person does not exist is beyond any question. It is obviously someone with a very good

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knowledge of the district, and from the insinuations of the men we gather that they have as good an idea as we have as to the real name of the Person. If He has already gone down country to Georgetown and registered the claims we stand very little chance of establishing our rights. Everything depends on the *Tarpon* which leaves Morawhanna once a fortnight on an unknown date. If it sails this week and the Person catches it he will reach Georgetown a fortnight before we do and it will be too late. We are packing feverishly. . . .

Next day. Monday

So this is the last day. We are off to-morrow at some horribly early hour. Everything is packed; almost everything has gone, and the atmosphere of the camp has entirely changed. I shall be glad to get off. This feeling of being only half here is worrying and unpleasant. You can't settle down to anything.

We made a bonfire of old papers this morning, and after that we had a final hen hunt. Two of the hens were caught fairly easily and put into the coop, where they will remain until the droghers are ready to collect them to-morrow morning. The black hen, however, evaded all attempts at capture, and is still at large, and wandering about the bush. Gibson says that he is going to catch her to-night, but I think that he will have his work cut out, for she is an agile bird.

I have planted the palm trees all round my tent, and put a young swizzle tree at the head, so perhaps some day one of its twigs may serve to stir the swizzle of a celebrating traveller.

GOLD!

The heat is terrific. I expect that when the rain comes it will be very heavy indeed.

Six p.m., same day

It seems that we are going to walk the *whole way* to Pepe's Creek to-morrow, which will certainly not be less than twenty odd miles. I shouldn't have thought that it was humanly possible, with the trail in its present condition. It is an idiotic idea, and I am sure Rachel suggested it.

Gibson (who has not yet caught the black hen) has just darted over to the logie and taken a large dollop of the precious butter to put in the stew. I protested, but in vain. Gwen would be very angry if she knew, but there is no denying that stew is greatly improved by butter.

CHAPTER X

THE JOURNEY BACK

Pepe's Creek. Next day. Tuesday

SUCH a strenuous day! I woke, on the frontier this morning, very early indeed, and seeing a light in one of the tents, concluded that it was time to get up. Fortunately I glanced at my watch before doing anything rash, and discovered that I could go back to sleep for another two hours; which I did.

At five o'clock we all woke, and found that it was pouring with rain. It continued while we dressed, packed, took down the tents, and had breakfast. It continued, indeed, all day long, but more of that later.

After breakfast the loads were weighed, and as each drogher put on his *warrashi* he went off along the trail and disappeared into the forest.

Towards the end of the weighing and apportioning a certain amount of excitement reigned, because it was discovered that we were short of a drogher. What on earth should we do? . . . We could not carry the remaining heavy load ourselves, and we could not leave it behind . . . However, a solution was finally reached. The droghers who had not already gone were induced to add what was left to their loads, and off they went.

We made a last survey of the now derelict camp,

THE JOURNEY BACK

and having satisfied ourselves that nothing of importance had been left behind, we took our departure.

The trail was inches, often yards, deep in mud, and it was very heavy going, but the continuous rain kept us cool, and we walked along at a very good pace, soon passing the droghers.

At Esperanza Creek we overtook Gibson, who had nipped out of the camp very early in case anyone should ask him to carry anything. He was dressed in the Harvest Queen, and had on the peculiar little convict cap he wears for travelling. On his back was a large *warrashi* containing all his belongings, and over his head he carried my Corsican umbrella, which brushed against the trees as he trotted along through the forest.

The effect was very funny, and I burst out laughing.

'All right, Miss Arbut, I see you laughing at me,' he called. 'Hope you fall down in de mud.'

And no sooner were the words out of his mouth than his foot slipped, and down he went, flat on his back, with his feet in the air. It was perfectly timed.

On we went to Boulder Camp, where we had arranged to have lunch. Half an hour later the lunch arrived, borne by a certain Goring Thomas. Maurice, who had walked with him so as to help him up the hills, arrived at the same time. It was so chilly sitting waiting in soaking clothes that we had to run up and down, and swing our arms like cabmen to keep ourselves warm. It seemed odd in an equatorial jungle. I imagined, before I came here, that jungles were like hot houses, and that if you complained of anything it was of heat. One lives and learns.

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We lunched, and an hour later we were on the trail once more. Nothing happened for several hours. Then we had an adventure.

We were walking along — naturally in single file, Gwen in front, then Rachel, then me — when I gradually became aware of an unmistakable scent.

‘Look out!’ I called urgently. ‘Pig!’

‘Pig — nonsense!’ said Gwen, and assured me that what I thought I was smelling was nothing more dangerous than mud.

‘Well, have it your own way,’ said I, and said nothing more, and we continued along the trail, the scent growing stronger every minute. Still no one seemed to notice it, until suddenly, through the shedding of the rain, we heard a close, clear grunt.

Without a moment’s hesitation we threw down whatever we were carrying (in Gwen’s case it was a mackintosh, in mine a stick) and took to the trees. Most of them were quite unscalable. However, we spied one with a fairly low bough, and lost no time in climbing on to it. An eternity elapsed while we clung to the bough and waited for the pig to appear.

‘There’s an orchid a bit farther up the tree,’ said Gwen in a whisper. ‘I think I can get it.’

‘Don’t you dare move!’ I whispered, amazed at her detachment, and aware that the smallest jolt would knock me off my perch.

Still we waited, then looked down extremely anxiously as a rustling was heard on the trail behind us. ‘Here they are!’ we thought — ‘at last!’ and prepared for an onslaught. But it was only Gibson coming

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round the corner, the rustling being caused by the umbrella, which he still held up over his head.

We warned him that we were probably surrounded by a herd of pig, and advised him to follow our example and climb a tree.

He looked contemplatively at the trees, and evidently decided that the climbing of them would entail too much effort, so pulling a bush knife out of his pack he advanced with it in one hand and with the umbrella in the other.

'Are they really so dangerous, Gibson?' we asked, for we were astonished at his temerity.

'Yes, indeed, dear ladies,' he replied. 'Dey is very ferocious, and will all attack at sight.'

This was not very cheering news, but we felt that we could not be outdone in stoutness of heart by our cook, so we descended from the tree and continued gingerly along the trail.

Gradually the scent became fainter, and finally went altogether. Evidently the pig had passed off. Later on I smelt them again, but not so overpoweringly, and we decided to wait for the sight of the bushes moving before climbing another tree.

At Cedar Creek we paused, and as we sat down on a log to rest Gwen remembered that she had left her bunch of keys behind on the frontier. We were busy deploring this contretemps when Chung appeared bearing the keys in his hand. He had passed through the camp on his way from Venezuela shortly after our departure, and seeing the keys had brought them along with him.

We discussed this forgetting and recovery of the

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keys for a few more minutes, then jumped to our feet and set off again.

From now on progress became increasingly difficult, for the trail was in an indescribably unpleasant condition, mud up to the knees, bad swampy patches, and innumerable hills. The hills were particularly disagreeable, for they were so steep and so muddy that for every step you mounted you slipped back two. Added to these trials my left hip gave out as a result of prolonged walking over the side of my boot, and was exceedingly painful.

We reached Pepe's Creek shortly before nightfall, and sank exhausted to the ground.

The place has changed astonishingly since we were last here, and is hardly recognizable; the creek so swollen that it is almost on a level with the ground, and a tangle of undergrowth sprung up where we cut the clearing for our tents.

In course of time a couple of droghers arrived with Gwen's and Rachel's tents, but there was no sign of mine. It had probably, I decided, fallen by the wayside. However, it did eventually arrive, and I have pitched it where Juan used to sleep with his revolting salt fish. I would have preferred my original site, but a large tree has fallen across it, and I feel that after months of uninterrupted rain the place must be purified.

We waited until after dark for the drogher who was bringing the chop box, but he never turned up, so we had to dine off the remains of lunch — biscuits, and a little cheese. It was not very satisfying.

THE JOURNEY BACK

Wednesday. Five Stars

We have arrived, and Juan has gone — vanished! All that is known is that he left his camp very suddenly last week accompanied by the fiancée of Mr. Constant Himmelblau. All the black men here are out for his blood and swear they will have it if he comes back to Five Stars, for, they say, there is not one among them who he has not ‘humbugged’. Juan was always more popular with Indians than with black people.

It has been a long, full, and extremely trying day. I started it by having a heated altercation with Maurice on the subject of tent rolling. Then I lost my knife and could not find it for a long time. By ten o'clock the droghers had gone with the tents, and we appeared to be going too. We started off and a more tortured five hours I have never spent.

The mud was awful, and the trail far steeper and more unfit for transit than yesterday's. Half an hour after we had started my other leg seemed to slip out of joint too, and as the chop box had never turned up we had nothing to sustain us on that appalling fifteen mile struggle but two biscuits apiece and some dried figs which we shared with Goring Thomas.

‘They are the staple food of certain Mediterranean people,’ Maurice told him by way of encouragement. But he did not seem to be impressed.

We walked, we walked, we walked, and at last, after an eternity of pain, we came out of the forest into a sunlit clearing with a couple of huts. Half a dozen Indians squatted on the ground, sucking sugar cane.

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Solomon Indian was among them, and in answer to our inquiry as to the whereabouts of the river he said that we would have to go back into the forest, follow a trail to the left for a mile or so, and then we would come to it.

Go back into that forest! . . . It was almost more than I could bear. I felt that I would rather die. We all had sore feet; the inside of my right knee had the skin rubbed off, and both hip-bones hurt abominably every time I lifted my feet. And we were famished and faint for want of food.

But there was no help for it, so back we trailed miserably into the darkness, to the serpentine lianes, the groping roots that tripped us up, the mud. God! that mud! Slimy, squelching, primeval mud. How I loathed it! . . . At last we came out again into the sunshine, into a field of sugar cane, and then to tall cutting grass, shoulder high. We pushed our way through it, and came to the river, which was flowing past very swiftly. Almost immediately opposite stood Mr. Cook's shop.

A canoe was sent across to fetch us; we dropped into it, and were conveyed across to the farther shore. We landed, clambered up the steep bank, and stumbled into the back room of the shop. Here Mr. Cook brought us some bread, sugar apple, and bananas; and a little later we were pleased to see Gibson coming towards us with a kettle of tea.

At first we were too dazed and exhausted to speak or think; we just listened dully, while Cook, in the front of the shop, played his gramophone for our benefit. He seemed to have nothing but old war

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tunes: 'Tipperary' — 'Pack up your troubles' — 'There's a long, long trail a-winding' . . . Poor dim echoes . . . In our state of utter weakness they were so heart-rending as to be almost unbearable.

Soon, however, the tea began to have its usual strengthening effect, and we rose and made our way across the clearing to our present abode — a small dark hut belonging to someone called Mr. Liverpool. Who or what Mr. Liverpool is I do not know. But he must be a black man because Indians are never Misterys, nor, as a rule, do they live in huts.

This one has a very uneven mud floor and a thatched roof. There are two rooms, an inner and an outer. Gwen is in one, and Rachel is in the other. Maurice and I have pitched out tents outside.

The moon is full to-night, and riding serenely across the sky. Raindrops are hanging from the bushes, and the moonlight striking them makes a myriad points of light. I am *delighted* to be out of the forest, and able to see the sky again. The sudden feeling of freedom goes to one's head like wine . . . How could I ever have disliked Five Stars! The place is as lovely as its name. From where I am sitting I can see a solitary forest tree which has been left standing at the other end of the clearing. It looks an immense height, silhouetted against the sky . . . Odd not to hear the frogs . . . Their place is taken by the cicadas, and the night is teeming with sound.

Thursday. Five Stars

Grillingly hot. I have to wear a hat even in my tent. Gwen is really very exacting. Not only did she

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retire to rest immediately after lunch at twelve, but insisted on silence, because, she said, she wanted to read, which means sleep, for an hour. So I had a boring afternoon, and could not even talk to Gibson. It was certainly too hot to do anything but flop and gasp. I removed my clothes except for the hat, and read a few pages of the *Martyrdom of Man*.

During the afternoon it thundered and rained. Now it is five-thirty. We have had tea, and Gwen has gone back under her mosquito net again. Maurice and Mr. Cook are sitting in the outer room talking about gold. The incessant drone of their conversation is rather pleasant and soothing at this distance. He (Maurice) went out to the new reef to-day to tear down the poacher's location board. Ours is now up again in its rightful place. Gibson is fiddling about the shed opposite which he uses as a kitchen, and Rachel, I suppose, must have gone for a walk, though where she is walking I cannot imagine, for the clearing seems to be surrounded on all sides by deep and impassable creeks over which nobody has troubled to throw a bridge.

In spite of the place being delightful there is absolutely nothing to do. This, of course, is partly due to the terrific heat, which makes exertion impossible — even if there was anything to exert oneself about, which there isn't. My foot still feels as though a large steam roller had passed slowly over it, and so, I believe, does Gwen's . . . Went up to the shop this morning to get another pair of pyjamas and a shirt out of my canister. I stood on the bank for some time and looked at the river. It is very wide and swift, and quite unrecognizable.

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We have sent a coreal down to Arakaka to fetch Chee a Fat's boat. The *Tarpon* leaves Morawhanna in a week's time, and I doubt very much whether we shall be able to make the connection. There is some talk of going down by coreal if the boat does not arrive, and I can imagine nothing more detestable. Coreals tip up if you so much as wink. There is only a narrow plank to sit on; all day long the sun would blaze down upon us, and as the river is so terrifically swift and swollen, and full of tacubas, we should be quite certain to tip up and drown . . . No coreals for me! I would rather spend the remainder of my life at Five Stars.

Willikit slaved for Gibson all to-day. He spent the morning fetching buckets of water from the river, which is quite a long way away. After lunch Gibson called him.

'Willikit,' he said, 'I have no wood for my fire,' and away Willikit trotted into the forest, to cut, collect, and bring some back. I remarked again that he was really a very good and unusual friend.

'Yes,' said Gibson, 'we have been friends for years. If I have a shilling I give him half a bit. Dis morning he helped (!) me bring water from the river.'

Gibson is one of those people who always manage to get someone to do things for them. He induced Kaiser William to carry my Corsican umbrella from Pepe's Creek, it having been too much damaged *en route* from the frontier to be of any further use to him. I believe that he has since made a present of it to some other coveting Indian. If he has I shall be very much annoyed, because I wanted to keep it as a souvenir.

MORE PROFIT THAN GOLD

Saturday. Five Stars

I did not write in the diary last night because nothing happened during the day, except that we were all bitten by small detestable flies.

It is blazingly hot again to-day, but thanks to the plantain leaves which I have laid over the roof of my tent the heat inside is much less intolerable than it was.

Rachel and I spent a most amusing morning in the shop playing the gramophone, and talking to Cook, Gibson, and some Indians. Cook has one record which is apparently a great favourite, for it is so worn that it constantly sticks, and repeats itself over and over again. It is a sermon on Love by some clergyman or other. He played it several times this morning, the black men standing round in rapt attention, interjecting remarks such as 'Very true!' and 'Dat is so!' Gibson turned up the whites of his eyes, and declared that it was as beautiful as if the Bishop had come to Five Stars. Then he glanced surreptitiously at me to see whether I was laughing.

He is having the time of his life, and is in the wildest spirits at finding himself back in the whirl of civilization. He, Frederick, Frederick's family, Solomon, Soo, and some friends are living near by in a hut that used to be a store, and from the unending flow of conversation and song that goes on night and day we gather that they are enjoying themselves.

I went into the forest this afternoon, and found the cool and shade very refreshing. It is certainly a great deal better for living purposes than a clearing, and we are all beginning to wish that we were back in it.

THE JOURNEY BACK

... No sign of the boat. It is very irritating to be kept waiting like this when every moment is of such importance.

Sunday. Five Stars

The boat has arrived, but without an engine, so we shall have to paddle. However, as the river is so very swift — and swift too in the right direction — it won't make very much difference, and if we start at dawn we might make even Arakaka by nightfall. The river has risen about fourteen feet since we were here last, and I hear that the rapid into which I inadvertently jumped is almost invisible. We leave to-morrow as soon as it is light. The boat is being loaded to-night.

Since we have been here we have heard some interesting news about Juan and his extraordinary doings and sayings. He certainly is a curious man. It is fortunate that nobody believes a word he says, for he has said some startling things — particularly about me.

Gibson is messing about the kitchen singing 'May Jesu's name be praised'. He was exceedingly disgruntled this morning presumably because Rachel had given the remains of breakfast to a poor thin dog, for when the dog turned up again at lunch he called out sarcastically:

'Miss Leigh-White, your dog is waiting for his porridge.'

After lunch was over conversation drifted to the Wanna Creek. It is wide, deep, and swift, and the only means of crossing it is by way of a tacuba thrown from one bank to the other. Like all other tacubas

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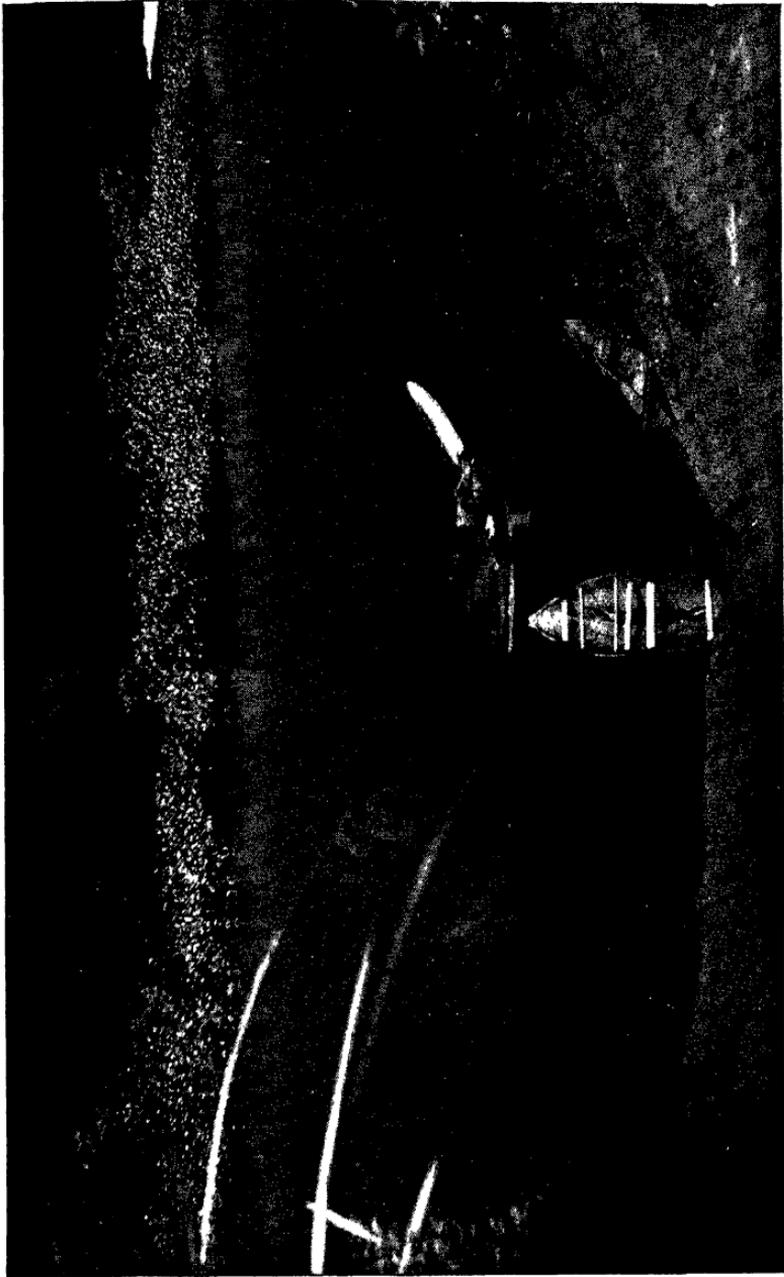
it is round, narrow, and slippery. Twenty feet below the river swirls by. Gwen said that nothing would induce her to cross it. She would rather, she said, have a rope attached to her and be hauled through the water by Maurice from the farther bank. Here Gibson broke in:

‘To do that, dear lady,’ he said, ‘would entail some knowledge of swiminology.’

A most unpleasant thing happened this evening. I was changing for dinner into the white trousers I had made out of a flour sack, and having put them on, noticed something bulky in the pocket, so thinking that it might be a valuable specimen, I turned the pocket inside out on to the bed — and out fell a hundred thousand ants that swarmed instantly in every direction — all over the mattress, the pillow, the bedclothes. I shook everything out, including myself, but when I came to bed to-night at ten-thirty there were dozens of the revolting creatures still crawling about. There are disadvantages to life in the tropics.

Monday night. Secura Landing

We are spending the night with some Indians in their clearing near the river bank. There are three or four logies, and the owners of the largest have very politely moved out and lent it to us. Rachel has put her bed up at one end of it, and I have put mine up at the extremely other end. Maurice and Gwen have elected to sleep in their tents, probably because they consider it more private. Certainly nothing could well be less private than life among the Indians, for their



THE RIVER

THE JOURNEY BACK

logies have no walls, and are so close to each other that it is like being in one large room.

This morning at ten we left Five Stars in the smallest, most uncomfortable boat we have yet experienced. Nothing but a coreal could have been worse, we decided, as we lay hour after hour in an entangled heap in what was grandly known as The Tent — a piece of tarpaulin covering very little more than a square yard in the centre of the boat, and with side curtains that rolled up or down according to the weather. They were down during the incident I am about to relate, and the rain was driving against the roof and on to the river with even greater force than usual.

Silence reigned in the tent. I do not know what the others were thinking about, but I was making a calculation as to the number of palm trees I had planted round my tent on the frontier when the boat suddenly gave a lurch and a shudder, and water began to pour in over the side.

We lost no time in rolling up the curtains and discovered that we had descended a small rapid into a *kiamu* or whirlpool, and as the boat was already very low in the water it straightway began to fill. However, by the time we found this out it had been extricated by the captain, and we were continuing easily upon our way.

Nothing else of a startling nature occurred during the day, and we landed here shortly before nightfall.

The moon is full to-night, and the moonlight so brilliant that even inside the tents one can read the smallest print with ease.

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We had risotto (with plenty of onion in it) for supper, and an excellent pawpaw which was presented to us by the owner of the logie. Very soon after supper we followed the example of the Indians and came to bed. That was hours ago. The brilliant moonlight and the novelty of being with the Indians make it hard to go to sleep. I have been lying here listening for the thousandth time to the perpetual croaking of the frogs. How insistently they emphasize the vaulted darkness of the forest night! In the other logies the Indians are lying and presumably sleeping in their mean, uncomfortable hammocks. An old woman is squatting on the ground by them near the low fire, talking in a quiet unending monotone. Perhaps she is telling a story . . . The croaking of the frogs, a tapping on some tree trunk, a faint stirring down by the water, the droning monotonous voice of the old woman, the cool night air on my face — the solitude. I am realizing them all in their presentness, drinking them in, so that they may always remain with me. The two tents are gleaming like pale moths against the bushes . . . A splash as a fish leaps in the river . . . Silence.

Tuesday night. Arakaka

Back in the rest house! We arrived late this evening, having spent a long, hot, and exceedingly uncomfortable day on the river. Lord! I was stiff when we landed! We all were.

‘Has Mr. Juan been seen?’ we asked as soon as we landed.

The corporal tightened his face.

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'No indeed, Major,' he said, 'and I do not presume dat he will return to Arakaka. All de people here has been humbugged by him, and I hear dat some white gentlemen in Georgetown is very irate wid he. He has departed over de Border into Venezuela, and I do not tink we shall hear ob dat gentleman again.'

'How do you know he has gone over into Venezuela?'

'Because, Major, one buck, Kaiser William, was up on de border, and saw he beetling across wid a coloured lady. Kaiser William had words wid he.'

'What did he say?'

'He say, "Hallo Kaiser William, I going to start bush store in Venezuela. You like to come droghe for me hein? I give you plenty money." But Kaiser William no want to droghe.'

'Did he say how he looked?'

'He say he very light and frolicsome.'

And that, no doubt, is the last we shall hear of Juan.

After an appreciable time the boat was unloaded, and the bedding and the chop box followed us up to the rest house, where we were sitting waiting for them on the veranda.

The customary bustle ensued while the beds were identified by their various owners, and were untied, and erected. Rachel and I have put ours up on the veranda, but Gwen is going to sleep in the room, because she says that there are a number of things that she likes doing by the light of the moon, but that sleeping isn't one of them.

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We stopped for breakfast camp this morning at a deserted Indian village. It lay ten or fifteen yards back from the river, and we had to clamber up the steep slippery bank to get to it. There were half a dozen logies there, all empty except for a couple of the long wicker tubes that the Indian women use for draining the cassava which were tied to the ceiling, and also some parrot's feathers and a miniature paddle, beautifully carved. Several huge gourds lay on the ground outside. Everything was just as it must have been when it was inhabited, and we wondered why the owners had left it, until we pushed our way through the encroaching undergrowth beyond the logies, and came upon a grave. So this was why the village was deserted! Indians will never remain in a place where someone has died, for fear of the spirit.

The grave was marked out with stones, and by the side of it stood a rough table on which had been placed all the worldly possessions of the dead person — a pathetic collection. A line of bush rope had been tied above the table, and from it hung a few tattered rags. The whole place was desolate and silent, and the long grass was beginning to grow up among the logies. We were glad to leave.

It seems strange to be back in Arakaka, and to find everything exactly as it was when we were here before, except that the shower doesn't seem to work quite as well as it did. All the inhabitants of Arakaka have been to pay their respects. Someone has given us some old illustrated society papers. I suppose that they must have been left here by the Commissioner the last time he held a court here. Gibson is cooking our

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supper for the last time, and after it is done he will go up the hill to his house, and indulge, no doubt, in an all-night party to celebrate his return home, and talk about us and our curious doings and sayings to his friends and relations. We leave to-morrow morning appallingly early. And I think that that is all there is to relate except that Rachel has forgotten to bring her mosquito net. *Tant pis pour elle!*

Wednesday afternoon. On the river

The remainder of the night was unforgettable, and no description can convey what I went through. After a very short time the mosquitoes became so intolerable that I felt impelled to share — or at least to offer to share — my net with Rachel. She demurred once or twice, but finally accepted, so I pulled the head of my bed to the foot of hers at right angles, and with great difficulty managed to draw a small amount of net over both pillows. The result was that although neither she nor I could get into bed without an immense struggle, or breathe once we were there, the mosquitoes got in without any struggle at all — and in such hordes that when I looked at Rachel this morning and she looked at me, we were more horrified than astonished.

We rose before light, and although we were down at the stelling by seven o'clock the boat did not leave till fully three-quarters of an hour later.

The entire population of Arakaka was there to see us off; the corporal and his assistant with their khaki shorts and hats turned up on one side, a lady friend of Gibson's who had no fewer than three hats perched on

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her woolly black head, and many others. Altogether there must have been a couple of dozen people there.

It was sad saying good-bye to Gibson.

‘What shall I bring you when I come back?’ I called to him as the boat was shoved off from the stelling and we started off down the river.

‘A sports cap, and some burn mouth (drink), dear lady,’ he sang out, and that was the last I heard of him, for the boat swung round a bend, and Arakaka was blotted from our view.

We stared placidly about us; at the moving banks, the high woods beyond them — at the water. I felt desperately tired, and rather hostile towards Rachel because I suspected her of having secured a less uncomfortable seat than mine. Pieces of driftwood floated silently down stream, and we gazed dully at them. The river was narrow and shadowed by the branches of the trees, so that the vegetation above the banks was sparse, and we could often see into the dark spaciousness of the forest beyond. How still it was! And although no creature stirred or was ever seen, how inhabited!

I thought of our changed attitude towards it. When we came up the river it was new and strange and breath-taking, and all the time there was the perpetual shock of discovery. Now we were familiar with it, and although we saw it even more keenly, for one’s senses sharpen in the forest, and looked about us with just as lively an interest and if possible an added appreciation, it was from another view-point — that of acceptance and familiarity.

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'Where are we going to stop for the night?' we asked, and were told that we were not going to stop at all, but would travel all night so as to make certain of catching the *Tarpon* at Morawhanna. So I expect that the next twelve hours will be extraordinarily uncomfortable, for the boat is small, and has on it, besides our four selves and the baggage, Fraser, the Boviander captain, a bowman, six black passengers, Solomon, Soo, and Soo's detestable game cock, which has crowed persistently ever since we left Arakaka this morning.

It is really very pleasant now that the great heat has gone out of the sun, and the evening light makes the river lovelier and more spell-bound than ever . . . Had a look at the illustrated papers, and was struck anew by their vulgarity. So were the others. These are the first papers we have seen since we left Georgetown.

We were lucky enough to see several animals this morning, an ant bear nosing about on the bank, a sloth hanging on to an overhanging branch, a bush cow, an alligator, and something swimming under water, which I think must have been a water dog. It was most unusual to see so many creatures — almost more than we have seen the whole time in the forest.

It is so still now that it is difficult to believe that we really saw them. Yet in a short while, when night comes on, the forest will wake. The chorus of frogs will start up, and every shadow will seem to hold a breathing, watching creature.

Evening is the quietest time on the river.

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Wednesday. Morawhanna

Reached Morawhanna this morning. That unspeakable game cock crowed all through the night in spite of being covered up with a piece of tarpaulin, and in spite too of Maurice's vitriolic abuse. Finally, at about 3 a.m., he tapped it on the head with his line stick, and after that it crowed more vigorously than ever, and as we chugged down the river, and passed Indian settlements along the banks, it was answered triumphantly by other cocks.

We had dinner in the dark, because Fraser, who had fever, poor man, could not see to steer the boat when the lamp was lit. With some difficulty a tin of sardines was opened, and because I could not see what I was eating I ate too much, and spent a long time hunting for the bottle of iodine. (A few drops in water are excellent as a restorative.) Soon afterwards we composed ourselves for sleep, and strangely enough slept very well — all but Maurice, who was too angry with the game cock. It just shows what a little tiredness and an easy conscience will do. Or perhaps it was the monotonous throb of the engine. Anyway, we slept. There were one or two diversions, as, for instance, when the gramophone fell on to Rachel's head, and when we were startled into consciousness by Maurice's muttered but venomous conversation with the game cock.

Morning came at last, and with it Morawhanna.

We rose, and went ashore to Ho Shoo's Tavern, which is much as it was. None of us will mind leaving it.

This evening Gwen and I went for a stroll along the

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path which runs by the side of the river. A number of land crabs scuttled out of the way and popped into their holes as we approached them. They are very ridiculous creatures.

We walked to the end of the far stelling, and sat on the steps leading down to the water. After a little while a star came out in the pale sky. It was all exceedingly calm and lovely, and I would have liked to remain out there until the moon rose had it not been for a crowd of very malicious mosquitoes which appeared with the star. So we came in and after a certain interval had supper (fish).

Thursday. Midday

A lovely brilliant day, without a cloud in the sky. We have been discussing the new reef. Opinion amongst the pork-knockers at Arakaka and Five Stars is unanimous as to its richness. It seems that for years they have been accustomed to go there to collect and crush the loose pieces of quartz on the surface and extracting the gold. I wish that we could have started working there at once, without having to go down to Georgetown. The *Tarpon* has just been sighted. I can see it through the window. It has rounded the bend, and is steaming up the river towards us. It looks enormous.

Thursday evening. Morawhanna

I walked down to the stelling to watch the *Tarpon* being unloaded. One of the first things to be brought ashore was the mail bag. In it, among the packet of

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letters for us, was one for me. I read it through several times but there was no escape, no getting away from the fact. I must return to Europe.

So this is the end. I shall never see Gibson again, or the river, or hear the frogs croaking in the darkness. All gone. . . .

Friday. On board the Tarpon

Evening again. The last one, for to-morrow we land at Georgetown, and the expedition — as far as I am concerned — will be over.

‘The expedition will be over.’ It is hardly conceivable. We have been together for so long, the sole inhabitants in a world apart, and it has made a bond between us that years of intercourse in civilization would not have formed. Before we came people assured us that at the end of the expedition none of us would be on speaking terms, so virulently would we detest each other. It would be the inevitable result, they said, of living at such close quarters and without outside distraction. Well, they were wrong. Better companions than Maurice, Gwen and Rachel would be impossible to find, and I could not contemplate future expeditions without them.

This morning I went into the manicold forest to have a last look at it, but it is quite unlike the real forest in the interior, and gave me no familiar feeling. In place of the cool green light and vaulted spaciousness it is low and damp and tangled, and altogether rather pestilential, so after a short time I returned to the village as I had come, by way of the perilous tacuba over the swamp, and rejoined the others at Ho Shoo’s.

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They were preoccupied, and very busy packing and dispatching the baggage. An unattractive grubby little black boy called Desmond kept running in and out of the room and was rather a nuisance. Nothing else happened until lunch.

We sailed in the afternoon, and I have been sitting here on deck ever since. A flock of ibis flew in a long line over the river a short while ago. I remember that the last time I saw them was when we were approaching Morawhanna at the beginning of the expedition . . . It seems a very long time ago.

We have been through the Mora Pass, through the Waini Passage. With each mile that we progress the river becomes wider, and the forest along the distant banks smaller and less imminent. Soon we shall reach the open sea.

Morawhanna is gone. Gone too are Koriabo, Arakaka, Five Stars, our life in the forest. Imperceptibly a boundary has been crossed. It is almost as if we had wakened from a dream, and the sights and sounds and everything that happened within it are as remote and for ever intangible as reflections in a mirror . . . A wind is rising.

