

O C A S O P R E S S : A N O V E L

The Land of Gold



Colin Holcombe

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by Colin Holcombe

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THE LAND OF GOLD

—A NOVEL—

Colin Holcombe

CHAPTER ONE

A mist blotted out the view when Henshall woke the following morning. He pulled on a sweater and sat on the veranda of the guesthouse, ordering a *nasi goreng* when the houseboy appeared under a dripping green umbrella. A couple of women went by with bundles of vegetables on their heads, and there were several of the small dogs of Bali, padding warily past with their usual craven and preoccupied air. The morning grew chilly as he finished his meal, but he packed the motorbike panniers

just the same, tucking the sketchpads into plastic bags, and set off for the interior.

By three he was back at the Kuta Beach Hotel, with the singer of the previous night still large in his thoughts as he joined a group of residents returned from rained-off tours. A weak sun glowed on the metal table. A couple of American women were comparing handicraft prices. Henshall drank his tea slowly, and leafed through the guidebook, wondering who'd advise him on the village festivals so lavishly photographed. When the two left, still complaining about local practices, Henshall continued reading and wasn't sure what the voice had asked, or whether it had asked anything at all. 'You're more than welcome', he said. 'I'm leaving shortly.'

'That's not what I said,' came the voice. Perhaps his surprise showed, for the face gleamed with mischief, the water glistening on the long eyelashes. 'You don't recognize me, but I know you.' Henshall opened his mouth to reply, but she was

already sauntering back to the swimming pool. All that day and the days following, Henshall could see in his mind the extraordinary face with the dark eyes, the features laughing at him, but their owner didn't reappear.

It was at a small village in the hills where he was sketching four of the little girls waiting to receive a sprinkling of holy water before their *Legong* dance, that someone settled beside him and took the pad from his hand. He knew the identity, even before the playful voice said, 'This will get you into trouble, my friend.' Henshall let her flip through the sketchpad, turning the pages round to study them carefully. 'Where am I?' she asked. 'These aren't bad, but what have you done with me?' Henshall explained that her studies were in another pad, a smaller one he kept for social occasions. For spying, she decided: why else would he draw?

'It's harmless enough', said Henshall. 'Trains the eye.'

'It is not harmless to us.'

‘Something to talk about at lunch perhaps?’

‘Oh, that is much too forward’, she said, pouting at him. ‘You must introduce yourself properly when you invite someone out in Bali.’

‘Peter Henshall. Whom do I have the pleasure of addressing?’

‘Hartini Sujono’, replied the woman, now springing to her feet.

When they were sat in a local eating-house, Hartini prodding the old crone into frying some fish and sending off for fresh papaya, Henshall could look more closely at the arrival. Not wholly Javanese, he realized, but taller, a straighter nose and jaw, with a warmer complexion, and an openness that seemed to surround and take possession of what he was saying—when it cared to, and wasn’t holding itself for his inspection and admiration. Henshall brought the conversation back to their surroundings, to the village with its straggle of dusty coconut palms and the rice fields that tow-

ered above them, fresh and green in the afternoon light.

‘Think I was looking for you?’ countered the head, turning on him again.

‘Just wondered how you got here.’

‘Hired a car. You came here yesterday as well, didn’t you?’ She pointed a fork. ‘The young man who makes pictures.’

‘I wouldn’t go on about that. He’s a good bit older than you.’

‘Hartini is twenty-seven.’

‘And Peter is thirty-four.’

The woman whistled. ‘Thirty-four’, she mocked, drawing out the syllables. ‘A man of distinction, of mature years. With many children: *banyak anak-anak?*’

‘I’m not married as it happens. Is that wrong?’

‘It is irresponsible. A man should always marry and have children, even if he doesn’t care for women. Never been tempted?’

'Not for a while', he said, reaching for the papaya.

'Is that a broken heart?' she said, resting chin on hands. 'How romantic.'

'Was it?'

'So what did you expect? Guarantees? Peter Henshall, you're not one to see the world through coloured glass. No castles in the air for our travelled Englishman.' She paused. 'So let's ask what brought you here. Looking for work?'

'Not at the moment.'

'So you won't ask for openings at dinner tonight?'

'With none of the usual admirers?'

'Oh, I think we can make an evening free. Just the once, for our mature Englishman.'

Henshall walked the woman to her car. Bundling equipment on the back of his hired motorbike, he then drove to Kuta and its Beach Hotel, where he checked in without pausing to reflect. Hang the

expense, he muttered as he waited for his call to come through. Frank Norbury, Metax Mining's man in Kuala Lumpur, expressed no surprise, but said, 'Very well, Mr Henshall. I'll see if there's still an opening in the Mapura operation. We'll look forward to hearing from you in a few days.'

A different woman presented herself when Henshall appeared at eight that evening. With a slight inflection of the head, Hartini, now turned out in a short cocktail number, allowed him to escort her over to the far side of the lawn, away from the band and the spotlit dancefloor.

'So what do you think?' he said when she opened her bag and started peering into the make-up mirror. 'Should we get business over with?'

She looked up.

'Just a thought', he said, watching her carefully.

She seemed unconcerned, and only remarked, 'All this amateur psychology comes from reading, does it? Long hours on your own, Mr Henshall?'

'I try to stay abreast of events. To understand this *Suvarnabhumi* of yours.'

'This what?'

'So the old Hindu kingdoms called it.'

'We call it the land of shadows, Mr Henshall. Not the land of gold.'

'Such a beautiful place, and all you think of is shadow puppets, the other side of life.' When there was no response, he added, 'I'd like to know how I could be of service to you.'

'To me, Hartini Sujono?' She shook her head and clicked the bag firmly shut, as though excluding him. 'Well, if you're going to Australia,' she said at last. 'You are, aren't you?'

'I might get a job here.'

'You could take a parcel out for me. I can't take it myself, and it's got to be someone I trust. Would you do that?'

'Just a parcel?'

'It won't weigh you down.'

He glanced at her quickly, and thought he saw an earnestness as the gaze settled and moved on. 'Not drugs or anything?' he said.

'A manuscript. A few hundred pages.'

'Why don't you carry it out yourself?'

'Because I don't have a passport. And anyway they'd search me and take it away.' She shrugged. 'Listen, I'm an undesirable. I did have a passport, with my husband. We travelled a lot: to the States, to Holland, performing. It was a good combination. For a time we were very popular. Are you following me?'

'Yes. Your English is much too good to have been learnt here.'

'I went to school in England, but that's not the point. We were in Jakarta the time of the Sukarno plot. Not communists, just socialist sympathizers, but it didn't make any difference. He was a little man, half Chinese, and not strong. He should have run as I did, or asked for their authority, but he

didn't. I hid in the garden while they took him away.'

'Someone had to work for his release.'

'They shot him at the station, or on the way. Just lined him up, with all the others. The thousands and thousands of them.'

Henshall's look narrowed. 'So,' he said, half knowing the answer, 'what's the manuscript about?'

'The facts. We want people to know what happened.'

'Who's the we?'

'Will you help us do that?'

He stared into the distance, looked at the woman again, and said calmly, 'No doubt a mistake, but for you, Hartini Sujono, I will.'

'You are a good young man', she said, taking his hand for a moment. 'Now you can ask me to dance.'

No more was said of the manuscript, and for the next hour they were an ordinary couple dining out together, a couple who didn't know each other well, as there were long silences, which Henshall mentioned when they walked back to the hotel early, many of the guests still whooping it up around them.

'I think you will honestly try to get the package out', the woman said. 'The rest doesn't matter. I'll be leaving tomorrow anyway.'

Henshall was easy with women, but the news disturbed him. Slowly he followed her down the corridor, where she left him to get the package. 'And the mailing address?' he said as the bulky document was put into his hands. She took his arm and guided him up the stairs to his room, where she paced about while he extracted some ice from the minibar. 'Rather ships in the night', he said, handing the drink over.

Again there was a look he couldn't place, but she was only saying, 'Peter, just promise me some-

thing. Whatever happens, you will deliver the package.'

'Provided it's what you say it is.'

'Oh you men!' she exclaimed. 'Here, take the thing and read it, will you?'

Three independent witnesses affirm that in the Sungei Lantang village some 28 or 29 men, women and children were snatched from their homes on the night of October 2nd and attacked with parangs, their bodies afterwards being thrown into the river. This appears to have been a spontaneous incident, not incited by the military, but no attempt was subsequently made by the police to investigate the matter, nor to recover the property and belongings seized by the villagers responsible . . .

Our estimates for the Province as a whole are therefore in excess of 8,000 persons and perhaps as many as 20,000 . . .

There was much more in this vein, and Henshall finally put the manuscript down in disgust. 'Was it really as bad as this?' he said.

‘Will you take the package, please?’

Henshall had read something of this in his guidebook: the abortive communist coup of 1965, the murder of five generals, the countercoup launched by the army in which large numbers of communists had been killed, the installation of Suharto as the head of the ruling Golkar party. But the words hadn’t meant much. Indonesians were an open and friendly people, indifferent to anything but their families and national sports teams. Now there was a deeper side, he realized. Twenty thousand people in one province alone. Dozens killed in every village. He suddenly felt cold in the air-conditioned room, and went to sit on the balcony wall. The woman followed, seating herself carelessly on a chair facing.

‘You still remember, still think about these events?’ he said.

‘They are still with me. Not so painful, but still there, yes.’

‘But this was nine years ago.’

'I did nothing to help him.'

'What could you do? You were seventeen, just a girl.'

'Eighteen. A wife and entertainer. Everyone hummed our songs.' She got to her feet and leant on the balcony railings, apparently bored with the conversation.

'Punishing yourself won't help,' he ventured.

'Peter, I'm not punishing anyone. I'm acting. It's what singers do.'

Henshall sat down again. It had been an instinctive gesture, protective if anything, but his arms still sensed the aching fullness of the body.

'So where do you perform now?' he said awkwardly as the woman carefully seated herself, though still staring at him.

'I have my own club, or part of it. Of course I do. I've the wrong age, wrong nationality, wrong background. I'd never keep a job if I worked for somebody else.' She paused. 'And someone helps me.'

'Imagine they would.'

'Do you? Do you now? She was on her feet again and angry with him. 'Don't you understand? There's nothing on offer. I've got nothing for you.'

'I should be happy to get to know you better.'

'You can't.'

'If only as a friend.'

'That would be an unkindness to us both. This isn't Europe, where one can have a casual fling and forget about it. Here we pay with our blood. You won't understand, but we do.'

'Does it have to be casual?'

She stared at him angrily. 'Look, here's the mailing address,' she said, opening the handbag and slipping him a note.

'Couldn't you add your own address? I'd like to think of you singing somewhere definite, even if I can't get to it.'

'You already know the place. Mapura. The Kotapalu nightclub.' She smiled at his expression. 'So

I must thank you for a very pleasant evening, and bid you goodnight.' She walked to the door and waited for Henshall to open it.

'If I came back to Kotapalu, if I got a job there, would you see me?'

'Please take the parcel.'

'Why not?'

'Goodnight, my friend.' She freed herself and opened the door. For a moment she laid a hand on his shoulder as if to say more, but then turned away. Henshall watched her walk down the half-lit corridor to the stairs, the steps slowly becoming inaudible. Then he went to bed and stayed awake a long time, sensing the slight honey fragrance that seemed comforting and then disquieting as it filled the closed room.

CHAPTER 2

Henshall booked a flight to Singapore and spent the last day sketching, restlessly drifting from place to place. He patrolled the Kuta Beach Hotel and gardens, but all trace of the woman had vanished. Eventually, late in the evening, Henshall settled down to read what had been left him. He was appalled at the blood-letting, at the thousands of bodies dumped in rivers and shallow graves throughout Java and the other islands. It was obvious why Hartini, or anyone known to harbour anti-government views, would experience difficulties,

but Henshall had no particular worries as he stood waiting early the following morning at Customs with his suitcase, sketchpad and bundles of painting gear.

The officer was a jovial man who was delighted with the sketches. He called a colleague over. 'More? You have more?' he asked, pointing to the suitcase. Henshall shook his head. 'You open please.' Henshall stood negligently by as his belongings were placed on the suitcase lid. 'This yours?' said the officer, picking up the manuscript. He untied the string and flipped through the pages, retying the parcel and motioning the porter to repack the suitcase. Henshall nodded to the man, and reached for the package, but the officer had tucked it under his arm and was now conferring with a superior. Henshall was led to a small room set out with table and chairs, where he waited half an hour. Repeatedly he walked about and stared through the window, watching as other passengers made their way to the aircraft. The last traveller

boarded, and Henshall saw the hostess at the foot of the gangplank talking to one of the airport officials. Then the door opened, and two officers came into the room.

‘No you sit please,’ said one in English, ‘this not take long. Where you get this document?’

‘It’s mine’, said Henshall.

‘You type? Here in Indonesia you type two hundred and twenty pages in . . .’ the officer flicked through Henshall’s passport, ‘in two weeks you here in Bali? Where you get typewriter?’

‘All right’, said Henshall. ‘I brought it into the country, to check something.’

‘You show please.’ He handed the manuscript over.

‘The atmosphere of the place.’

‘You write all this where you before?’ The officer referred to the passport again. ‘Singapore one day. Three days Malaysia. Peru. Our country interest you in Peru?’

Henshall began to look for another approach.

'Where you get document?' said the man again.

'I found it in the bottom of a drawer at a hotel where I was staying in Denpasar. Thought it was interesting, maybe worth publishing.'

'You steal document, and make money by selling it. That your story now?'

'Perhaps I should speak to the British Consul', said Henshall.

'Yes you speak. Sedition is serious matter.'

'I told you that I found it, and where, and there's nothing more I can add.' He stared at the officer, who stared back through dark glasses.

'Well, Mr Henshall, if you choose not to cooperate then we will not detain you further', said the second officer, who had not spoken before. 'You may take your flight.' He gestured to the window.

'What about the document? Can I come back and claim it sometime?'

The voice was still amiable. 'When you have told us this is not your property? No, I don't think another visa could be issued in those circumstances.'

'And if I don't go, what happens then?'

'We investigate the matter properly, which is the correct procedure.'

'You'd keep me in detention?' said Henshall, frowning and resting his strong arms on the table.

'We would hold your passport and ask you to report to the authorities. You could travel around using the receipt.' He conferred with his colleague. 'Yes, that is possible.'

'But not leave the country?'

'Would you decide please?'

Henshall looked out of the window, to the flight that would take him away from these troubles. Stay, he thought. He could always leave afterwards, when he'd explained to Hartini.

The older man got to his feet and walked to the door, giving Henshall an amused glance before going out. Henshall took the form offered him by the first officer and wrote 'I have temporarily and voluntarily given up my passport to officer . . . ' He looked up and wrote down the man's name and number. Then he signed it.

'That is what *Bahasa* says. You go to job soon?'

'In a few days.'

'Please you write company name and address here.' He pointed to the box on the other side of the form. 'Thank you. You collect receipt soon and then you free to go.'

The flight took off. Half an hour later a junior official delivered the receipt with the utmost display of courtesy, and Henshall took a taxi back to the Kuta Beach Hotel. There he mooned about, sometimes on the beach, more often brooding in his room. Several times he thought of trying to contact Hartini, but he didn't have her address, or know if phones weren't tapped. In these gardens, where

the hot sunshine streamed through the hibiscus and frangipani, where the friendly waiters carried beer and iced tea to the guests beneath the trees and Balinese statues, it seemed impossible there could be anything sinister in this land of smiles and warmth. But Customs had been tipped off, and he remembered the incidents reported in the manuscript.

The following day Henshall caught his first glimpse of the island of Mapura. Two hours after leaving Jakarta, he felt the aircraft begin its descent, and looked out to see Kotapalu spread out along the thin coastal plain beneath the towering wall of the Baratung Mountains. The plane came in low, and Henshall found the place tallied with what he'd read: a nondescript relict of the Dutch colonial empire, a tangle of corrugated roofs near the port and the old commercial centre, and then an improbable orderliness of bungalows and gardens as the aircraft flew over the residential area to land at the airport north of the town. Henshall collected his

luggage and was met by a Land Rover from Metax Mining, the logo prominent on the newly painted bodywork.

A boy-scoutish figure got out and introduced himself. 'Bob Woodford. Wasn't here when you came through before.' They shook hands. 'Welcome to Metax Mining.'

'Thank you', said Henshall, putting a placid face on events. The two of them walked through the crush of sellers and porters to the vehicle. 'All sorted now, is it?' said Henshall as he watched the last of innumerable boxes and crates being stowed aboard.

'Should hope so, or Don will want to know why. You've met Don Cullen, the new boss?'

'A Marinus van Ryssen showed me round.'

'Ah right. Marinus is back running one of the camps. Mike's at the other: Mike Posner.'

'Met him briefly', said Henshall, conjuring up the scrawny, crew cut figure.

'Knows his business.'

Henshall laughed. 'I'm sure he does.'

'Then we have twelve Indonesian geologists, three of them rather good. The helicopter pilots are ex-Vietnam. So, with the drivers, field hands, cooks, clerical staff, that's about fifty altogether. Plus the survey ship, in Singapore at the moment, loading up with stores and field items. Rankin's the skipper: one of those grizzled old sea captains. You'll like him.'

'And you're the number two.'

'I am. General dogsbody. Look after public relations, like visiting the Governor, which you'll have to do this afternoon. Takes a keen interest in us.'

It was natural to like this friendly eagerness, but where the man fitted into mineral exploration, Henshall couldn't imagine. Professionals were never welcoming. They sized you up, found out where you'd been, what you'd done, and never gave anything away. But Henshall had signed on, and there was no turning back. He looked at the

small houses through the cramped Land Rover windows, the bustle of brightly dressed pedestrians, the shoals of schoolchildren drifting on bicycles from side to side of the road, and decided to say nothing until the vehicle stopped in the office compound and he was taken across to meet the staff again. The secretaries remembered him, smiling warmly as they extended a hand across their typewriters. Then he went round the labyrinth of rooms that made up the operation's headquarters, looked at the maps, inspected the assay lab, toured the vehicle workshops, and remarked finally, 'Is our boss around?'

'Won't be long', said Woodford, pausing to fling open the door to an empty office. 'Your place. Get some furniture in for you shortly.'

'That's fine,' said Henshall, 'but I think I ought to present myself.' He walked to the door marked Dr Donald Cullen: General Manager, knocked once and went in. A plump figure, balding, with thick glasses and dressed in khaki field gear, was talking

earnestly into the radio. He glanced up in some irritation. 'Peter Henshall reporting', said his visitor.

'Don Cullen working. I'll have you in when it suits me. Now go away.'

Henshall went over to inspect the radio. 'Get much of a range on that?' he said.

Cullen pointed to the door.

'As you like', said Henshall, and strolled out. He folded himself into one of the visitor's chairs in the front office, where a secretary got him coffee. An attractive blonde in her late thirties, neatly turned out in floral dress and high heels, sailed through the office and into Cullen's room, flashing Henshall a business-like smile as she passed. 'Sally Cullen', she said afterwards, giving him the briefest of handshakes. No prizes for guessing who runs this show, thought Henshall, seeing the brassy look and the obsequious fluster of the drivers who came running up as she stepped into the forecourt. A half-hour later Henshall was called into the manager's office, where he found Cullen in a more re-

laxed and confidential mood. 'Take a pew, Henshall,' he said. 'Won't keep you long.'

'Peter', said his visitor.

'Be your job sometime. Requisitions. Always get the paperwork done and the rest sorts itself out.'

Henshall looked at him carefully.

'So let's get down to brass tacks. What do you know of the operation?'

Henshall outlined his understanding of the stream sampling that featured in their mineral search.

'How do you feel about starting straight away? Get your feet wet. Prove yourself and all that. Why I've booked you transport tomorrow.'

'Without the usual familiarization?'

'Sooner you're earning your keep the happier everyone will be. Land Rover leaves at six.'

Henshall went out, bumping into Woodford, who'd been hovering near the door. 'Everything all right?' said the man cautiously.

'Wouldn't mind a talk with you sometime.'

'Bit tied up right now.'

'We could go down to the nightclub, supposing it's not a glorified cathouse.'

'Nothing like that', said Woodford. 'Some hostesses apparently, but they're chaperoned.'

'Just the singer?'

'Yes, she keeps it all very proper, or so they say. I'm married myself.'

'They're not going to eat us', said Henshall. 'Try it?'

Woodford shook his head. 'No thanks. I leave all that to the younger contingent.'

There was no sign of Hartini when Henshall made his way to the club a little after ten, or anyone remotely answering to her description. An overweight Chinese woman crooned into the microphone, and there were short sketches by a stand-up comic that Henshall couldn't understand. Several women drifted in, one of them a striking

Chinese in a white sequined dress slit up to the waist. But the woman simply ran a practised eye over the clientele, and disappeared. Henshall grew bored. The place didn't fill up as the evening wore on, and, though the manager came over to sit with him, Henshall found little to say, indeed could hardly make himself understood. Did he know a Hartini Sujono? Was there a beautiful singer who performed at the club sometimes? 'You no find singer beautiful?' the manager asked, gesturing to the large Chinese woman who had now seated herself at the bar. He laughed uproariously, and was still smiling broadly when his guest turned to the exit.

Van Ryssen's camp was much as Henshall expected: twelve huts laid out by the river, with helicopter pad and fuel store on higher ground. The pilot, a Rick Darrell, was new to the operation and seemed to be taking its measure. Whatever their earlier acquaintance, van Ryssen now treated

Henshall as junior staff, giving him a share of the work and expecting him to get on with it, which he did, easily enough after the first few days.

Henshall began sketching again, using the hour or two of light that remained after the helicopter had stopped flying for the day. Sometimes he worked by the river, and sometimes in the neighbouring *kampong*, where the villagers would often pose, but there was always Sjaripudin, one of the Indonesian geologists, who pestered him with questions and saw no point in the work. 'A photo is just different', said Henshall one afternoon.

'Better I think', said Sjaripudin. 'More accurate.'

'I'm making something of the scene, understanding it in pictorial terms', said Henshall.

'That why you change all the time, I know.'

'Why I adjust the tones, rearrange the composition, remake the scene as the medium allows.'

'Like my map, Mr Peter.'

'Yes, I'd noticed that. From your field-sheets, *pa*'?

'Sjaripudin no need field-sheets. He see, he remember, he write on paper.'

Henshall said nothing, but waylaid van Ryssen on his way back from the shower that evening.

'How will that help?' said the man.

'Sjaripudin hasn't the faintest idea about mapping. Just makes it up.'

'One day only?'

'To begin with. I'll take him through the rudiments of mapping, and then look in occasionally. Keep him busy in the afternoons, anyway.'

'While you paint, which I do not like. Camps are places of work. It does not create a professional attitude.'

'There is nothing wrong with my work.'

'*Ja*', said van Ryssen, and the subject wasn't discussed again, neither Sjaripudin's supervision nor those of the other geologists that Henshall

gradually took under his wing. While van Ryssen got on with the paperwork, Henshall continued with his painting, stacking the work inside the hut he shared with an Indonesian geologist.

‘I have no choice’, said his boss one evening as Henshall leafed through the weekly mail packet. ‘For me it is stupid, but I have to go to this mine, this Tambang Surga.’

‘That’s clear enough’, agreed Henshall. ‘And I’d be sure to cross all the t’s, if I were you.’

‘What does that mean?’

‘It means,’ said the pilot, pulling the last piece of flesh off a chicken leg, ‘that it’s a try-on.’ The men looked at each other across the Mess table. ‘Your boss out to get you, or something?’

‘I make my own orders’, said van Ryssen, taking Cullen’s memo back. ‘I have been longer in exploration than to take instruction like this.’

‘Suit yourself, Marinus, but if you want an offsider, I’d be pleased to come. Do me good to get away from this routine.’

Van Ryssen shook his head. 'No, you must look after the camp, which means you do not go to Kotapalu when my back is turned.'

'I have a few days' leave owing', said Henshall.

'You do not go to meet the woman in your portraits, that is what I am saying.'

'What woman?'

'Hartini Sujono, isn't it?' said van Ryssen. 'She is beautiful, but causes trouble. Perhaps you should not trust her.' Seeing Henshall's look, he shrugged and added, 'That is what I must tell you.'

'I was simply asking for the Land Rover.'

'Ja,' he said. 'I do not give permission, but if the Land Rover is missing for a few days I cannot know. That is best I can do.'

'Much appreciated', said Henshall. He ignored the glances between pilot and engineer, and opened another beer.

Two days after this conversation, when van Ryssen and the last load of supplies had been

helicopter-ferried into Tambang Surga, Henshall set off. He left before sunrise and by lunchtime was two hundred miles on his way. He drove quietly at first, only honking at the market traders and women who obstructed the narrow streets of the villages. At a food stall outside Semarang he took a break, finishing off a large rice cookie and three pickled eggs, but was soon on the road again. For mile after mile, along the central valley, the volcanic cones hung inverted in the reflection of paddy fields as evening approached, but Henshall had no time for these or other thoughts. He passed men carrying paraffin lamps and wandering slowly along the road, who shrank into the shadows and stared as the vehicle hurtled past. But Henshall was in a world of his own in which the road, the trees, the fences, the huts and the odd bridge rushed out at him and which by deft gear change and brake he subdued and shot past. In a small village, however, just as he was turning a sharp corner, a small child ran out, and, in avoiding her, Henshall plunged into the side of a hut. An angry crowd of villagers col-

lected, swarming over the Land Rover and hammering on the windows at the foreigner who sat grimly inside, ignoring a local policeman who forced his way through and blew furiously on his whistle.

CHAPTER 3

‘Where did you say?’ asked Cullen again.

‘Sungei Tuloh’, said his liaison officer. ‘A village that perhaps you have not heard of. It would be eighty miles from here.’

‘Never mind how far it is. What in heaven’s name was Henshall doing on that road?’

‘He wasn’t on the road, as it happens, but in a hut.’ Iskaq looked up from the document to peer over his glasses. ‘Yes, that’s what the report says.’

Cullen’s complexion turned purple.

‘And the injured party was asleep’, continued Iskaq, translating as he went along. ‘It came as a most unwelcome surprise.’

Cullen could feel his eyes bulging. ‘So let us start again, *Pa*’ Iskaq, shall we? First Henshall was driving a Land Rover. Now he’s in a hut. Which was it?’

‘Well both, I imagine, Dr Cullen, or there wouldn’t have been an accident, would there?’

Cullen held his temper. First there had been Sally breezing in to demand four hundred thousand rupiahs in cash for a truckload of handicrafts that were now cluttering his office. Then, for reasons known only to himself, Woodford had broken protocol and told the cook that all three of them were to have lunch in the Mess. Now there was Iskaq with some wretched police report that made no sense at all. Cullen unfolded his arms, and said, ‘This report, it’s reliable, is it? Not some garbled communiqué?’

'Most assuredly not, Dr Cullen. It has been signed by the local Police Chief. A most respected figure.'

'So it's serious.'

'To run over someone who is quietly asleep in a hut in his own village in the middle of the night is not a matter to be taken lightly.'

'So that's it!' exclaimed Cullen. 'Henshall's run into a hut and injured somebody. Why in God's name couldn't you have said so straight away, *Pa* Iskaq?'

The man looked surprised. 'It is in the report', he said, laying it carefully on the table. 'Only you did not wish me to read all of it, I understood.'

'Now look,' said Cullen, 'this is bad news. Does the report say where the Land Rover is?'

'It will have been impounded', said Iskaq, picking up the document again. 'Yes, most certainly.'

'Damn!' said Cullen. 'Another one gone. Two laid up in the workshop, and now one more is out

of service. Don't the authorities realize how difficult it is to operate in this country?'

'The authorities have their job to do', said Iskaq. 'They cannot make exceptions.'

'But how do we get it back? Some money do the trick?'

'You are considering some pecuniary inducement for the authorities to drop the matter?'

'I just want the vehicle back.'

'Which is being impounded as surety for compensation to the victim, and cost of police time. Has that not occurred to you, Dr Cullen?' Iskaq took off his glasses, and looked severely at his boss.

'I leave these matters entirely to your jurisdiction, *pa*'. I do not wish to be troubled with details.'

Iskaq sighed. 'Very well then, Dr Cullen, I should have thought that two hundred thousand rupiahs would settle the matter quite amicably.'

'Two hundred thousand? As much as that?'

‘If I go in person. The family of the unfortunate villager whose leg is broken will be pleased with a small share of that, and of course the police will be only too happy to release Mr Henshall and resume their normal duties.’

‘No, *pa*’. I see no reason why Metax should bend the rules. We’ll compensate the family, of course, and the Land Rover can be towed back, but Henshall can suffer the penalty of his own foolishness. Do him good. Set an example to the other hooligans on this operation. I will not have my instructions flouted in this way.’

‘It does not appear to have been entirely the fault of Mr Henshall, according to the police report’, said Iskaq, resuming his studious air in reading the document.

‘Then they’ll let him go, won’t they?’ said Cullen, interrupting him. ‘If you can get down there today I should be most obliged. Now, if you’ll excuse me, it’s time for the radio scheds.’

Iskaq went out, and the matter remained in abeyance till lunchtime, when Woodford brought up the subject. 'Don't you think we should do something?' he said, after a moment's reflection. 'Can't be too pleasant for Peter down there.'

'Then perhaps he'll reflect on his folly', said Cullen. 'Rules are not made for fun. It is not wise to drive in this country, and that is why we have never applied for out-of-town licences.'

'Of course, Don, I accept that. But shouldn't we go down and show him some moral support? At least find out what trouble he's facing?'

'Iskaq is going this afternoon. No point in having a westerner blundering in.'

'Don is right, you know, Robert dear', added Sally. 'Henshall should not have been driving, no doubt about that. And van Ryssen shouldn't have given him permission to take the Land Rover. Much of the blame can be laid at the door of our Dutch friend, I'm afraid.'

'Who's off the air,' said Cullen, 'conveniently.'

‘Expect he’s out at that mine’, said Woodford.
‘He works pretty hard.’

‘Nice of you to stand up for him,’ said Sally, ‘but there are other issues. Don makes the rules, and everyone has to obey them. There can only be one chief on an operation, and that is something van Ryssen still has to learn.’

‘Of course’, said Woodford pleasantly, in a detached way. He was wondering if he liked Sally. She was great fun to be with—clear head, always decisive—but now it could be serious for van Ryssen, since no one knew what he’d said to Henshall, and this was something Iskaq wouldn’t find out. Woodford began to feel uncomfortable.

He realized the Cullens were looking at him. ‘Everything all right, Robert dear? You looked miles away.’

‘Thinking about something.’

‘Overdoing things’, decided Cullen. ‘Better take some leave shortly, old boy, before you crack up completely.’

As Cullen was accompanying Sally on a tour of local handicraft workshops, Woodford simply left a note on his manager's desk, and threw himself into Iskaq's Land Rover when it left shortly after two.

'Get to know this beautiful country of yours better, *pa*'. Too cut off here in Kotapalu all the time.'

'Quite so, young man', said Iskaq, several rejoinders to this obvious untruth passing across his thoughts.

Though it was not a long trip, Woodford was more used to travelling to the camps by helicopter, and he found the journey extremely taxing. They rattled over ruts and potholes, across ramshackle wooden bridges, through palm-shaded villages where knots of brightly dressed women waved cheerfully, gesturing the vehicle to stop before its occupants came fully into view. Then they left the coastal plain, with its profusion of villages and flat miles of glinting paddy field, and began climbing the Baratung Mountains proper. They plunged into long stretches of shade, the air suddenly becoming

chilly and damp. The gradient steepened; the road looped in endless hairpin bends, and dizzying drops of hundreds of feet to boulder-strewn torrents began to appear on one side and then the other of the road. They crossed cantilever bridges, the ironwork rusting but still serviceable after forty years of neglect. Incredible what the Dutch had achieved in this terrain, thought Woodford, imagining the sweat of working year after year in this hell-hole of a place, without a social life or leave or medical care.

The tropical evening was deepening when the party arrived in Sungei Tuloh. Paraffin lamps had been lit in some of the huts, and the younger generation was out together, walking and laughing on their customary evening stroll. They stared without interest as the Land Rover drew to a halt outside the police station and Iskaq went in. Woodford remained in the vehicle until the usual preliminaries were completed, and was on the point of joining Iskaq when the little man emerged, perplexed and irritated, with

the police chief in attendance. 'Not here', he explained, getting into the vehicle. 'Our friend has gone, it seems.'

'Gone?' said Woodford in alarm. 'Gone where?'

'Seems he's been released.'

'That's wonderful. Thank god for that!' said Woodford. 'Aren't you pleased, *Pa*' Iskaq?'

'Yes,' said the man gloomily, 'but there's a message.' He handed Woodford an envelope on which was printed: For Messrs. Cullen & Woodford.

Woodford slit it open. 'Yes look, *pa*': Regret inconvenience caused. Rejoining operation shortly. Land Rover not badly damaged but will have it returned to Kotapalu ASAP for panel beating. Peter Henshall. PS Please check if injured villager needs hospital treatment. Have taken different route.'

Iskaq reached for the note, turned it over, and read it again. 'Rather a wasted journey', he remarked, motioning the driver to start the engine.

‘At least he’s safe’, said Woodford. ‘I am pleased.’ But when the vehicle came to the edge of the village it occurred to him that they hadn’t completed their mission. Badgered again, Iskaq replied, ‘Very well, let’s see if this man hasn’t mysteriously disappeared too.’ They found the injured party easily enough, however, his leg supported by splints and wrapped in banana leaves, a sight that appalled Woodford. ‘Doesn’t look too good’, he said to Iskaq. ‘Shouldn’t we take him to Kotapalu?’

‘The man does not wish to go. The skin has not been broken so there’s no danger of infection. These people know what they’re doing, and the fracture will heal soon enough.’

‘But what about compensation? Shouldn’t we give him something? I mean, he’ll be off work for some time.’

‘That has already been taken care of’, said Iskaq, getting to his feet. ‘Completely taken care of.’

‘Who by?’ said Woodford in surprise. ‘Henshall, is it?’

'In a manner of speaking', said Iskaq, indicating to the headman that the visit was over.

'I see, or, rather, I don't', said Woodford. 'Why did they decide to let Peter Henshall go?'

'Someone came from Jakarta.'

'That's unusual, isn't it? All in a few days?'

'Very', said Iskaq, now at the hut entrance. 'But perhaps we can return to Kotapalu without further delay.'

'Well, actually, I'm going to leave you here. I'd like to go on south and see the country a bit.'

Iskaq stopped. 'How, young man? You are not thinking of requisitioning this Land Rover, are you?'

'Of course not. I'll take a bus. Could you find out for me?'

For several seconds, lips tightly pursed, Iskaq stared at Woodford. Then he sent the driver away, who came back sheepishly with the information.

'There's one at ten o'clock for Semarang. It will be an uncomfortable trip.'

‘Can’t be helped.’

Iskaq opened his mouth, closed it, and then walked back to the Land Rover, shaking his head. The driver handed Woodford his bag, and the vehicle slowly lumbered off, its headlights catching the sides of the huts as it turned through the narrow track.

Two days passed for Woodford in a delirium of tedium, fatigue and discomfort. Continually, as he sat hunched up on his seat, surrounded by men in grey shirts who puffed quietly at thin cigarettes, by buxom woman on their way to market, by heaps of melons, baskets of vegetables and fruit, wicker-work cages of hens, and, for a time, a couple of inquisitive goats, he asked himself why he had ever thought of the idea. The view through the windows of jungle, paddy-field, *kampong* and long stretches of palm trees, the sun sizzling on their shiny leaves, the blue sky with clouds, and the occasional glimpse of mountains, held his attention only for

the first few hours. At each stopping point he asked the name of the village or town, but his map didn't show the smaller places, and he finally gave up calculating the length of his ordeal.

The bus did not pass van Ryssen's camp, which lay out of town, but a friendly truck-driver gave Woodford a lift, refusing payment. For the whole journey Woodford had been wondering what he would say to van Ryssen, but found only the flight crew in camp.

'Hold your horses', said the pilot. 'We'll do a recce later.'

'I need to talk to Marinus', said Woodford. 'Someone's got to find him before the Cullens do. They're on the warpath.'

'Have a beer', said the pilot.

Though Woodford was tired after his journey, he was also impatient, and watched with annoyance as Darrell and the engineer lounged about after lunch in T-shirts and caps pulled over their faces. But then supplies were stowed aboard, and by mid

afternoon the helicopter was diligently searching Tambang Surga, sweeping across the jungle-clad hills as village, head-frames, adits, and tip-heaps loomed out of the vegetation and disappeared again.

‘Beats me’, said Darrell. ‘What did that Indon say, the big guy strutting around back there?’

‘Captain Mochtar, the police chief? Gone north a week ago.’

‘Mean-looking guy’, reflected the pilot.

‘You think so?’ said Woodford, but then the craft banked steeply to follow an old rail track that glinted at intervals through the trees.

Van Ryssen had heard the helicopter but was thinking of more pressing matters. Here the river meandered quietly under a screen of palms and creepers, but it wasn’t friendly. Of course there are areas of the forest that are difficult for everyone,

but in time you plan routes, skirt difficulties, realize the animals themselves have their haunts and rituals. Van Ryssen had long ago come to feel at home in this great breathing mass of vegetation. Sometimes it was suffocating, but with each morning came scores of brightly coloured birds flitting through the forest canopy. Gibbon colonies whooped softly, sometimes for hours on end, and monkeys would appear, swinging from branch to branch, fighting and chattering and gesticulating. The animals of the forest floor—the tiger, elephant, deer and wild pig—never showed themselves, never interfered.

Something remained, however, something that grew more insistent with experience. At first there was nothing particular about some area, nothing tangible, but the guides approached such places with reluctance, and would never camp anywhere near. Van Ryssen began himself to know that in some places the gloom was a little thicker than elsewhere, the silence more knotted and intense.

Although stories of jungle spirits were apocryphal, you avoided trouble if you could.

But schedules had to be followed. Only reluctantly had van Ryssen changed his plans, and taken the team out of the mine area. No doubt the Dutch had prospected every inch of the hinterland, and the Japanese afterwards, but there was no geochemistry then, no aerial photos. Something could have been uncovered in the rapid erosion of the last forty years, and indeed, after a long search the previous day they'd come across a small lump of vein material in a boulder train. The search had narrowed to a small hill, and then to a wall of lode material exposed in a steep bank. The pyrite had oxidized to a rusty colour that encrusted the surface with ribbon-like swellings, but the rock underneath was hard and fresh. Van Ryssen had looked at a piece he'd hammered out. The pyrite was everywhere, but there were also threads of a warmer-coloured metal. He'd scratched them with his pocket-knife, and peered again. Gold. No doubt

about it. Mapping and sampling and feasibility studies would come next, but this was the genuine article, the one in a thousand chance that every geologist works for.

So why had the atmosphere changed? Van Ryssen had ignored the feeling, directing his men to fan out and look for more showings, but they hadn't obeyed. He'd ordered a return to the river for lunch, where they were camped now, but even this respite, usually so popular, where they could open tins of corned beef and boil their rice, had not been marked with any enthusiasm. Then the worst happened. Tracks appeared: three clear pugmarks and a fainter one. For a mile they had traced their own footprints back, and over their trail were the tiger's. Where they had crossed a stream the animal had also crossed. There was no need to check further, only to think carefully.

When he'd come to Mapura, a country that hadn't seen a European for thirty years, each day had been exciting. He'd called on married staff and

their families in the way usual in small-town Indonesia. He'd organized weekly cinema parties for the single staff—drivers, technicians, office staff—to which he attached himself and paid for refreshments at the interval. He chatted with Lola, the prettiest of the secretaries, and wanted to invite her out, only that wasn't possible, any more than the women he saw bathing in the rivers could be approached or spoken to. Stop the Land Rover, and they would immediately wrap themselves in their sarongs and escape into the bushes, chattering and shrieking with laughter.

Sometimes he'd pictured himself running his own company, settled with a local beauty, even if this was a dream every arriving expatriate indulged in, vaguely, without pursuing it far. But van Ryssen had pursued it, at least for a while. Off and on, he'd visited the daughter of a local businessman who had invited him back for dinner. Somehow it hadn't worked. With the whole family, for whom he'd paid, he'd at last taken Ermita to the Kotapalu nightclub,

where the singer had come over and sat at their table for a few minutes, chatting politely before flashing her eyes at him. Ermita had seen the gesture, and had promptly announced she felt tired. There had been a moment afterwards in the car, when the family had gone into the house, which seemed put aside for van Ryssen, but he'd flunked it: Ermita wouldn't see him again, and then the Cullens arrived.

Van Ryssen had told his staff that Metax Mining was a western company where a Head-Office politician would come to forge links at government level. But the Cullens had changed everything, dismissing what had been achieved in the previous months. Woodford hadn't worked in exploration before, and couldn't see the problems. Only Henshall seemed to know, and not to take the Cullens seriously, but that aloof young man took nothing seriously. It was with real annoyance that van Ryssen had been obliged to assign a whole afternoon to showing the visitor round, even though the

words were pleasant enough. 'An hour would be fine, if you could spare it', Henshall had said, opening a conversation that lasted through the afternoon and late into the evening.

Van Ryssen found there was more behind the distant manner than he'd realized, even moments when he caught Henshall looking at him in good-natured amusement. Always professional, he had fallen in with Henshall's suggestion that they take dinner in town, from which they went to the nightclub, which van Ryssen hadn't visited since the Ermita debacle. 'Would it embarrass you if I took a sketchpad along?' he asked. 'I do a bit of this when I get time.' The drawings were good. Van Ryssen was astounded at the speed by which the man drew the snub noses and sparkling expressions of the girls who came to the microphone in the local talent contest being held there that evening. Each was captured with a few strokes, their looks and defining characteristics. What would he do with the

reigning singer, Hartini Sujono? wondered van Ryssen, but the woman hadn't appeared.

'So what have you decided?' van Ryssen had said as they drove back to the Mess late that night. 'Will you join us?' But Henshall had only laughed, and thanked van Ryssen for a pleasant day. That was insufficient, van Ryssen thought, but he saw his visitor off just the same on the early morning flight.

Van Ryssen's watch said three-thirty, giving them two hours of daylight. There was a single hut they'd passed a mile or two back, perched on stilts near the river, but a tiger would demolish that in a single leap. Their previous campsite was little better, and was five or more hours' walk away, by tracks that often skirted thick foliage and undergrowth. They were better off staying put. No attack tonight, and they'd be safe for the trip. Meanwhile they had to take precautions. There were no caves in this region, van Ryssen explained, and a stockade would take too long to build, even with the

chainsaw. Their best course was to build a large fire and get up an adjacent tree, a high, smooth tree, as tigers were agile, even above ground.

Van Ryssen waited. His speech had made no impression. '*la, Tuan Marinus. Baik-lah*', had said his chief hand, but he hadn't stirred himself, any more than the others, who'd all weighed up van Ryssen with a tense, wary look. Beyond all question of face, van Ryssen had to make a plan, and carry it through.

Over the jungle canopy upstream he could see a tall hardwood that would have provided safety, but he didn't want to venture that distance alone. On the edge of the open ground where several forest giants had fallen was what he wanted, though: a tree that rose straight for thirty feet before opening into an umbrella of branches. Decision made, van Ryssen got his team to arm themselves with spears cut from sharpened bamboo. That done, he walked over and began the slow task of cutting notches in the trunk, heaving himself up

with the field-rope. An hour passed. The gibbons had stopped whooping, and the air was filled with an intense silence. Van Ryssen felt exposed and absurd, but there was no alternative to continuing, and when he finally gained the branches he rested a few minutes before abseiling down to collect the party.

Only the chief hand came at first, but once the fire was going and the soft gloom of evening began to fill the clearing, the other members drifted across. The chainsaw, the heavy sample bags and rucksacks were hoisted aloft, and the men themselves clambered up, away from the comforting warmth of the fire. A primus was wedged into an upper fork, and water put on to boil. Confidence returned, and there was talk of someone going down to cut more timber. But no one volunteered, and van Ryssen couldn't insist. As tea was handed round, however, and van Ryssen reached over, he saw the mug sail upwards as a screeching howl flattened the air.

Nothing had changed, though the sound came again, closer, now punctuated by a sharp, honking cough. Even the crew couldn't believe this was a spirit, could they? The dwindling fire threw out uncertain spreads of light but nothing was moving on the ground. In bewilderment, van Ryssen turned to his chief hand, and found himself looking at a dark shape picking its way through a fallen tree some forty yards away.

Van Ryssen made as though to get up, but found himself rooted to the spot. Again he tried to call out, and heard a strange voice shouting for the facing branches to be cut off. The words were ignored, the men hugging their positions. Uncertainly, van Ryssen got to his feet, and scrambled to the branch nearest. '*Memotong disini!* Cut!' he said. 'Cut here!' He drew out his *parang* and began chopping furiously. From the corner of his eye he could see the animal as it came nearer, the stripes puckering into a frown as the whiskers parted and the tiger slowly unmeshed its teeth. 'Well, do some-

thing with that bamboo, can't you?' he shouted to the nearest hand. '*Godverdomme!*' he exclaimed, and grabbed the weapon. 'Hold it like this,' he said, 'with the end anchored in the tree. Do something, for Christ's sake!' Van Ryssen was fixing the end into a fork when the spear was suddenly knocked from his grasp as the animal landed among them in the branches.

CHAPTER 4

Van Ryssen grabbed at a branch, and hauled himself to his feet. The tree was still swaying, but he couldn't see anything answering to a tiger's shape. It was on the ground, shouted his men, rolling about angrily to knock the spear from its shoulder. Van Ryssen felt the cold sweat of relief, but then his stomach churned again. The animal had got the weapon out, and swung round to face them. Honking and sputtering, it bared its teeth as it spat and clawed at the air. Van Ryssen unsheathed his *parang* to start chopping again, but

more shouts brought him to his senses. The tiger had leapt into the fallen tree again, and then into the branches of their own refuge, gathering strength to spring higher.

Van Ryssen stared in disbelief, the scene hanging in slow motion as his men scrambled into the higher branches. He weighed a rucksack heavy with chainsaw fuel, but then had a better idea. Retrieving a canister, he poured its contents over the head he could see emerging from a fork below. The fuel cascaded on and down the tree, collecting in a dark stain at the roots. Van Ryssen waited, his breath coming painfully. He opened a second canister, and splattered a trail towards the fire. But only when he was opening a third did the petrol catch, and the flames roar into the branches. For several minutes, the tiger hung there, ears flattened, until it slid slowly down, raced across the clearing, and disappeared into the river.

The team spent the rest of the night in the tree, descending cautiously in the late morning. The

return was swift and orderly, a field hand going ahead with bamboo spear and two bringing up the rear. At the single hut his chief hand stopped to draw van Ryssen's attention to the footprints that ringed the ground. Pugmarks and human prints were in equal numbers, and both were lame. 'It is nothing', said van Ryssen dismissively, but was glad when they reached the old mine village late the following day and took one of the abandoned houses for the night.

The morning came with sunlight and the wet smell of vegetation through the broken windows. A village woman cooked breakfast, and two little girls tripped in to collect the washing. Some of their edginess had passed, but van Ryssen left his men at leisure for the day, only on the following morning bringing their attention to the ten-page memo that Cullen had issued. Reluctantly, the men got to it. Cullen's instructions were preposterous, but van Ryssen took a malicious pleasure in following them to the letter. Buildings, railway tracks, shafts and

adits were mapped in. Miles of underground working had existed, and where they had not been cemented off, van Ryssen waded up to his neck in the muddy water, and chip-sampled the rock to textbook precision.

Though his men never liked the place, and found the locals were also loath to venture into much of the area, the friendliness of the villagers began to win them over. Van Ryssen understood that one of the women who did the washing would willingly have acted as temporary wife. She liked him, her father said, and something towards her dowry afterwards would be perfectly acceptable. Henshall toyed with the offer, often chatted with the woman in the afternoons when work was over, but at last decided against it, mindful of entanglements and his status in the place.

Van Ryssen had refused to take a radio, but wrote twice monthly to Kotapalu, receiving vexed enquiries why the operation was being dragged out. But Cullen didn't sanction a withdrawal with

work incomplete, and van Ryssen had no intention of returning without another inspection of the tiger area. The team refused to go, however: point-blank they refused, something extraordinary in his experience. Van Ryssen hoped the local people might act as guides, and was making some progress in this direction, when the village chief called apologetically to say that Captain Mochtar would not allow an extension of the work. Indeed, even the day-labourers would have to be withdrawn, said the old man, accepting a packet of cigarettes as a memento of their association.

Cullen was away on business when the party got back to Kotapalu, and, apart from Bob Woodford, van Ryssen had the office to himself. In his Mess room he carefully stowed the samples from the tiger area, and then split the Tambang Surga material, again storing the duplicates away in his locker. He started on a proper report, reaching the detailed section when his boss returned.

Cullen was affable, calling him into his office immediately correspondence was dealt with. 'Of course, old boy,' he said at the end of van Ryssen's tailored account, 'you've done a first-rate job: much too long, I admit, but clearly detailed and worthwhile. Now you'll need some leave.'

'Ja, well, you had given instructions.'

'Best take it now.'

'I will finish the report first.'

'Nonsense', cajoled Cullen. 'Leave instructions, and we'll do the necessary.' He switched on the radio, and started fiddling with the tuning knob.

'But I cannot explain everything.'

'It'll be perfectly straightforward', said Cullen, turning up the volume. He bent an ear to the loud-speaker.

'If that is so', said van Ryssen, 'then I will go to Java.'

‘Anywhere you like. Should be a flight free in a couple of days, and Iskaq will give you introductions if you need them.’

Van Ryssen continued working through the afternoon before his flight, and then called round at Ermita’s house. The girl was out with friends, her mother said, but he should stay and wait. She stared at van Ryssen’s untouched glass of coffee, telling him that Ermita had understood, they all understood, careers being important in this new Indonesia of theirs, as Ermita had often said. From this halting conversation van Ryssen was rescued by the girl herself, who danced in and took his hand as though they’d parted only yesterday. *Ibu* Hua beamed at the couple, and van Ryssen was dragged, resisting, into the large garden behind the house, where two nieces were playing. Van Ryssen was amused and surprised. ‘Why are you like this?’ he said, smiling.

Ermita opened her eyes, and assumed her most charming expression. 'I am pleased to see you', she began. 'When an old friend does not call for long time then we must worry.'

'I have to work.'

'Three months and no letter.'

'*Ja*, that is unfortunate', said van Ryssen, bending down to pick up a doll one of the nieces had discarded. With an impatient gesture, the girl snatched it back, gazing imperiously at the interloper.

Ermita smiled, and put her arm into van Ryssen's. 'I accept your apology', she said. 'That is how friends must be.'

'We are friends again?'

'That was nothing', she said. 'You think I throw myself at you, but it is parents. They worry about me.'

'That is natural for parents, I think.'

'You understand.' She took his hand. 'I knew you would understand. Life here no good. Why I go Jakarta University to take business studies. For me all right.'

'That is good for you', said van Ryssen. 'I give you my congratulations. But you will come back to Kotapalu sometime, maybe on holidays?'

'Ermita never come back. Kotapalu has nothing for woman who must make her own life.'

She looked at van Ryssen expectantly, who said, 'Then I can see you in Jakarta. Is that so?'

'Where you stay?'

'Hotel Menteng. That is where I stay mostly.' He wondered at the inquisition.

'Because of girls in bar there. You prefer bar girls to Ermita?'

'They are very pretty, but you are different. That is important.'

'I know woman must catch man and keep him, not have marriage arranged by parents only. Ermita understands men.'

'I do not think so.' Talk with Ermita was apt to dart off in dangerous directions, but it didn't amount to much. All the same, perhaps he should have company in that sprawling city, where there was little to do outside the bars and the overpriced shopping malls. 'Where will you stay?' he asked, putting his tongue out at one of the nieces, who now looked affronted and ran off indoors.

Ermita slipped her arm into his again, and swung him round. 'My uncle's. I take you there tomorrow.'

'How do you know I go to Jakarta tomorrow? I may not go. I have a report to finish.'

'You write in Jakarta. Ermita help you.'

Van Ryssen laughed. 'There are samples I must keep an eye on. Security is maybe not good now.'

'You bring here, and father put in godown. No one know that, not even police. You make list so you not think father cheat you.'

'Thank you, Ermita. I think that will be good.'

'That is what friends do', said the girl, tilting her head to smile at him again. 'You need friends to help you, Marinus. Not do everything yourself. That what my father say.'

'Your father is maybe right.'

'Father always right.' She put an arm round his waist, and led him indoors to make his goodbyes.

The two did not sit together on the flight out, and Ermita was met at Jakarta airport by a young Chinese with dark glasses and strong smell of after-shave. 'My uncle's chauffeur', she explained. 'You want him drive your hotel first?'

'I can manage, thank you.'

'But you will phone? This my uncle's number.' She handed over a business card and tripped

away, turning round to wave as the chauffeur lifted the suitcases into the boot. 'Remember', she called out, disappearing into the rear of the large Mercedes. Right, thought van Ryssen: perhaps he would and perhaps he wouldn't. For the first day he was happy with his own company. He bought a few clothes, idled the afternoon away in the only decent bookshop he knew, and found a woman in the hotel bar that evening who reminded him of Tambang Surga. Only the woman came from Sulawesi, she said, and pulled out a much-creased photo of the family back home, identifying each by name. She came to his room without being asked, taking a bottle of whisky from the bar. 'I stay with you,' she said, after van Ryssen offered her the money anyway, 'Where else I go?' Then she poured two drinks, and snuggled up to him. 'You good man. Need someone like me.' Perhaps he did, van Ryssen admitted the following morning, having slept well for the first time in weeks, no tiger disturbing his dreams. He was even sorry when the woman, seeing the extra money and folding it into

her bra, said, 'You no see me again but always I like you. You good man. Only need someone special make you happy.'

'I was happy', said van Ryssen, wondering why the women never spoke *Bahasa* to him. 'You were very nice.' The woman kissed him on the cheek and let herself out, leaving van Ryssen to his own thoughts as he rang down for breakfast.

For much of the day he wandered around Jakarta, aimlessly and out of sorts. The canals stank, the roads were full of potholes and, on each approach of the occasional train into the main station, vast numbers of families shifted belongings from their chosen yard of track. He didn't blame the locals fastening on to him, but he didn't see a future either. No doubt in his blundering, insensitive way, Cullen was right: east is east and west is west. He ate at one of the travellers' stalls near the station, and walked back to the hotel.

It was cooler in the evening, and he spent some time looking through the Tambang Surga field-

notes he'd brought for safe keeping. Then he changed, and went for a beer. It was early, and he was spared the attentions of the girls while he sat in conversation with an Australian journalist, with whom he had little in common, though they exchanged cards and began happily enough. He hesitated before buying another round of drinks, a hesitation that was noted, as the man slapped him on the shoulder in getting up, and said, 'See you around, mate. Give us a call when you're free.'

'I will do that', said van Ryssen and was finishing his beer when someone spoke to him. The décolletage was not so much brazen as awe-inspiring, and it was a moment before he recognized Ermita. Her hair was piled up, and mascara highlighted the large dewdrops of her eyes. She stood there, arms akimbo, and surveyed him with a frown. 'Liar', she said. 'You not telephone me.'

'It is my first day only.'

'Two days now. You not make date tonight.'

'Ja, well, I would have phoned.' He shifted uneasily, and stared at the floor.

'Liar', she repeated. 'You go with Dewi last night, I know. You think I not have tongue in head?'

'That is my affair.'

'You think Ermita not more pretty than other girls?'

Overdone, but undeniably beautiful. Van Ryssen knew her figure was good, but it seemed more so in the tight dress. 'Where would you like to go?' he said at last.

Ermita continued to stare at him, her eyes sparkling with anger. 'That is excuse', she decided. 'You only say that.'

'You can choose.'

'We go Hotel Indonesia.'

Van Ryssen had never been inside the city's most expensive hotel, but he supposed they'd provide a room. Or they could go on from there: anything to be out of the bar. They were turning to-

wards the exit, Ermita striding ahead and he awkwardly ambling behind, when van Ryssen caught a glance from Dewi, sat with a girlfriend and looking at him with a blankness of expression that suddenly made him feel foolish and conscience-stricken.

It was hard to believe that Ermita had not been to the hotel before. She was aloof and resplendent, saying little but treating the waiters and staff in a manner that first amused van Ryssen and then gained his grudging admiration. Young Indonesians obviously did not eat there very often, and from the tourists and businessmen van Ryssen caught several approving glances. He settled the bill, and the couple took coffee sedately on the veranda, afterwards wandering around the spot-lit garden. The conversation petered out, and she turned away coldly when van Ryssen put an arm round. 'So what do you want, Ermita?' he said, confused and irritated.

'You know what I want, but you so slow.'

Van Ryssen grimaced, more at the bitterness than the words themselves. 'You are sure?' he said.

'I am not schoolgirl. You get room now.'

She is certainly making it memorable, thought van Ryssen as the two climbed the stairs to the fifth floor, Ermita taking everything in as they passed the gilded ornaments, the reflecting marble and the chandeliers. As though she stayed every night in grand hotels, Ermita ran a severe eye over the objects in the room, and at once telephoned for champagne. The waiter had to pour for them, and van Ryssen watched, half amused, as she immersed herself in television. At ten she switched off the set, and put her arms round his neck. 'Now, uncle, you must teach me things', she said, and shyly turned her head away.

The two weeks went quickly. He didn't see Ermita every day, and they didn't again take a room together, but, against expectations, van Ryssen found himself thinking more and more of the girl.

He pictured her with the other students, and waited patiently for her in the university coffee bar. He took her to the pictures, and wondered what the figure beside him eating popcorn or chocolates had made of their night together, by which van Ryssen was strangely touched, though her eager and unpractised body had given him little pleasure. He was taken to tea at her uncle's house, and had to chat cautiously to a large sallow-faced man perspiring in a shiny blue suit, who seemed perpetually afraid the large house and swimming pool wouldn't come up to expectations. He took her to the beach with her friends, and to the restaurant with her uncle's family, and for walks in the late afternoon, when the sky filled with pink clouds, and even the traffic seemed contented and half asleep. All the time, when he was with her and when he was not, he saw in his mind's eye the little figure with the full breasts, the legs that tapered into delicate feet with painted toes, the hands which laid themselves so trustingly into his, and he knew that he was now beginning to fall in love in a way that hadn't hap-

pened before. Ermita knew this too, teasing him and saying all the time, 'No, no, we must stay good. Not share room. Not if you don't fall in love with Ermita who lose reputation, and have no one to like her and look after her.'

'Just once, Ermita?' he'd said.

'Next time. We go once. Ermita promise.'

Afterwards they had said nothing more, and she did not come to the airport to see him off, and he sat for the two hours of the flight horribly afraid that she no longer liked him, but had found someone else of her own age, which was sensible and to be expected.

He wouldn't know what to do, he thought, if he met her father at Kotapalu airport, where he was often collecting deliveries for his import business. But Hua came across, and pressed his hand, smiling as always.

'You have good journey, Mr Marinus? Good holiday?'

'That is so.'

'Ah I know. Ermita she ring me. No lose samples for Mr Marinus.'

'Oh *ja*.' Van Ryssen had almost forgotten them.

'You want tonight? You come dinner tonight, and we visit godown later. You want?'

'That will be good, Mr Hua.'

The man scuttled off, catching sight of some boxes escaping into Customs.

Van Ryssen hung around for his luggage, had a few words with Immigration, and then found Bob Woodford outside with the Land Rover.

'You waiting for me?' said van Ryssen.

'Get in, would you?' said Woodford. 'We've got a lot to talk about, and it's not going to be easy. I'd prefer not to go to the office straight away. Would you like a beer at the India Hotel?'

'Is there a problem?'

'You'd better take it', said Woodford, handing van Ryssen a one-page memo when they were on the road. The man read it twice, not saying any-

thing until they were seated at the hotel and into their second beer. Then he said grimly, '*Ja*, well now I have answer.' He took a biro from his shirt pocket. 'Cullen will see he cannot do this.'

'Won't do any good, if that's a reply', said Woodford, taking the memo back. 'Don's already fired the bullet. He wants you out, and I'm to make sure you go. I'm sorry, Marinus, but that's modern exploration for you.'

CHAPTER 5

‘Will that do the trick?’ said Henshall.

‘I think so.’ Van Ryssen read the note again, and grinned. ‘Ja, that is correct.’

‘Should hope so’, said Henshall, and picked up his sketchpad again.

Even here, in the thick shade of the Mess gardens, it was stiflingly hot. Van Ryssen emptied the last of his beer. ‘You have the time to make a study of these people?’ he said.

'You have to make time, Marinus. If it's not something you ache to do every hour of the day you're not going to be an artist, are you?'

'Does Hartini want an artist? I do not think so.' He looked at the sheets littering the grass, and poked his colleague in the ribs.

Henshall didn't respond. He glanced at one of the women passing, and adjusted the fall of the headdress, stroking a little more umber into the shadows, but it was the lakeside rendezvous he was thinking of.

Almost to the minute, Hartini had appeared as promised at the little hotel where the note had told him to wait. Without preamble she had taken his hand, and listened to his account of the interrogation. Then they talked for an hour, slowly, like old friends, until the conversation came naturally to an end, and she announced that she had someone

with her. 'You must be nice to him', she said. 'He is someone I care about.'

Not the same Hartini, he thought, watching the woman stride through the gardens and into the hotel. His passport had been returned, inside a month, with a work permit included. He had been released from custody almost immediately, indeed shown every courtesy, as though the police knew they'd caught someone that could overturn their careers. None of this made sense, but Henshall hadn't pressed for explanations because none were offered, though questions still lingered in his mind.

A stocky, grey-haired figure appeared, dressed casually in slacks and batik shirt. He shook hands, looked at Henshall gravely, and suggested they sit. After the opening civilities—he refused a drink but asked permission to smoke—the two talked of Indonesia's role in the world. A military background, thought Henshall, listening to the directness of the speech, but there was astuteness in the responses

and a wry humour. Henshall began to like the man, and was sorry when he smiled and took his leave. 'He wasn't what I expected', Henshall admitted afterwards.

'Someone younger, with more swagger? He is too intelligent for that.'

'Would have to be.'

'He's fifty-five, with two families, and a heart condition.'

'Families include you?'

'Peter, don't play games. Go down to Tambang Surga. Look at the old property.'

'You don't have to tell me my job, not with the gold price going up all the time.'

'He is saying look at Tambang Surga now.' She settled herself opposite him.

'Which is important?' said Henshall, frowning. 'Why this meeting happened?'

'Everything is important. Trust us.'

‘Us?’ said Henshall. ‘Perhaps I do harbour more hopes than I should, but I’m not a fool.’

The woman shook her head angrily, and put the cigarette out. ‘Peter,’ she said, ‘go back, will you? I will see you sometime. I promise.’ She got up, kissed him quickly on the cheek, and walked out of the garden.

‘I only see Hartini chaperoned’, said Henshall, returning to the present. ‘Which is why I asked you and Bob Woodford to join us for a meal the other night.’

‘You will not marry her?’

‘Marry?’ said Henshall, throwing down his pad. ‘Can you imagine her settled as a dutiful wife?’

‘No affair and no marriage: then you are in trouble.’

‘Why don’t you mind your own business?’

‘With this memo I will. Dismiss me, and they must sack Don Cullen. That is good for you, Peter Henshall.’

‘No one’s stupid enough to want to take over this operation.’

Van Ryssen shrugged his shoulders. ‘That will not happen. Even Bob Woodford will see that.’

‘Yes, our dogsbody’s going to have an uncomfortable time tomorrow’, remarked Henshall as he went back to his sketches.

Sally Cullen showed no emotion on reading the copy Woodford put into her hands. She laid the memo on the bar counter of the Hotel Indonesia where they were meeting, and stirred her cocktail thoughtfully.

‘Why did you let him write this, Robert dear?’ she said.

'Couldn't prevent it', he said. 'Best I could do was to stop him sending it straight away.'

'Well, it is inconvenient. Don's not here at present.'

'I thought we were choosing the new office together.'

'We do the preliminary selection, and leave it to Don and the Toronto Director to make the final choice. You're sure this has not been sent?'

'Of course. Marinus gave me his word.'

'Then I'll call Don in Kuala Lumpur now. If there's been some misunderstanding I'm sure we can sort it out.'

'How the hell do I know?' shouted an exasperated Cullen down the telephone a few minutes later.

'Don't swear at me, Donald, and just think, would you? I'll read it again.'

With reference to your memo of 14th November 1974 demanding my resignation over supposed

misdemeanours and shortcomings in the work at Tambang Surga, I point out. One: The work was carried out as per your instructions and constant monitoring. Two: You expressed satisfaction at all aspects of work to date at our meeting before I departed for local leave. Three: Maps and samples—which form the main substance of your complaints—were delivered to your safe keeping when I took leave. Four: I had taken the precaution of keeping duplicates of all observations and samples so that, contrary to your assertion, my three month's work has not been wasted and can in fact be completed quickly. Five: I do not know why you should want to dismiss me, but cannot see the operation would benefit from my departure. I do not intend to resign, therefore, and am copying this note, your original instructions and your subsequent memo to Kuala Lumpur and Toronto so that the matter can be properly discussed.

You've got all that, have you?'

'Bluff', said Cullen. 'Well all right, Sally, it is standard practice to split samples. Maybe he did hide a duplicate set. Could have done, I suppose.'

'If you'd replaced Woodford none of this would have happened.'

'Not with Mike Posner. His camp's a mess. Rumours all the time of unlogged flights. And Iskaq keeps muttering about some woman he's seeing. One of the worst sort, if you take my meaning. And there's no one else.'

'Yes there is. Just listen, Donald . . . Donald?' Angrily Sally replaced the receiver, and thought for a moment before returning to the bar.

Woodford felt vaguely implicated, though he couldn't see how. Abandoned after lunch, he rang the number left him, and was eventually put through to a soft, friendly voice that arranged to pick him up at three o'clock. Large saloon cars drove smoothly in and out of the hotel entrance as Woodford waited at the appointed time, but he didn't at first con-

nect the amiable voice with the perspiring little man that stood looking intently at him.

An interesting afternoon, surmised Woodford, as they walked over to find the rusting Buick that was to serve their tour of inspection. 'Probably best to have an oldish car in Jakarta, isn't it?' he said, once they'd pulled into the traffic that swerved and honked around them in its rush to a private Armageddon. The man smiled, and shook Woodford's hand again. Under the high forehead and hooked nose, to which a smile seemed to be permanently fixed, Woodford began to detect a note of grim determination. Did the man really expect him to be excited at the suite of modern offices with on-street parking that was their first stop? Rents were five times what they paid at Kotapalu. They drove on, and stopped to clamber through a whole district in the process of construction, or more exactly dereliction, since nothing was happening.

‘They’d take a special offer here, would they?’ said Woodford in a conciliatory gesture. ‘Hard cash or something?’

His guide smiled broadly. ‘You are a businessman, Dr Woodford. That is what Mrs Cullen tell me. Dr Woodford is clever. He knows that special terms through Keshi are always possible.’

You old rogue, thought Woodford, grinning despite himself. They got back into the car, and the journey was resumed in silence. ‘Did Mrs Cullen make any suggestions?’ said Woodford at last. ‘Something to grow into, Mr Keshi? Perhaps for a combined handicraft centre?’ The man’s smile lengthened into a happy grin. ‘Should we look at a range of options, supposing you have the time?’

‘Dr Woodford, I always have time.’ They drew into a shopping precinct, where Keshi ordered drinks from a kerbside stall. ‘You have paper?’ he said. ‘Make notes please.’

Woodford got out his attaché case, and started to list the opportunities given him. None was

cheap, he realized, but Sally's idea made sense, if you overlooked the ethics of course.

'Robert,' concluded Sally after dinner that evening, 'you'd better go on seeing these places, since you're doing so well.'

'But it's supposed to be a combined operation', said Woodford, irritated at Sally's indifference. 'As was the interviewing for manager, I thought.'

'Why don't we leave the last to *Pa' Iskaq*? He'll do a much better job than we can.'

'But it's the ex-pats who'll have to work with him, so I suppose we should be involved. That's what your husband suggested.'

'I don't think we should rush matters, Robert.'

Woodford hadn't expected her to be so stubborn. 'Well, look,' he said, 'I know you're tied up with the handicraft business, but couldn't we sit in on the interviewing later in the week, after *Pa' Iskaq* has sorted out the better candidates?'

‘Agreed, young man’, said Iskaq, stretching a hand in Woodford’s direction. ‘If those are the wishes of our Kotapalu office manager, then of course we shall follow them.’

Woodford excused himself, and went up to his room. He was much put out. Perhaps he wasn’t the world’s most forceful character, but he was Metax’s number two. The cavalier treatment rankled, and on impulse he phoned Singapore, where his wife was some time in answering, though her voice was warm and reassuring, with no hint of sleepiness. Wasn’t there somebody he could get advice from?’ she said. ‘In the Ministry or Survey, perhaps?’

‘Cullen had something about maps on restricted access a week ago’, said Woodford. A Dr Suarpo or someone. You know, Mary, you’re a genius.’

‘Miss you, darling’, she said, and rang off.

‘We could get a taxi, if you like, Mr Keshi,’ said Woodford the following morning, ‘but I thought the

ride out might make a pleasant change. We can talk on the way.'

Dr Suarpo was not the man expected. Nothing of the disorganized scientist showed itself in the gaunt figure who got up to welcome Woodford into a large office that seemed also a museum, its walls lined with cabinets and hand-painted maps. The conversation was cordial, but kept returning to opening civilities as Woodford was taken round the exhibits. Suarpo stopped occasionally to explain the Government's position: Woodford remarked that maps were always available elsewhere.

'You would still need an import licence, noted Suarpo dryly. 'The Survey itself needs permission to transfer maps about the archipelago, even to consult the old mining records.'

Woodford sat himself in front of the orderly desk as Suarpo rang for his assistant, who returned with coffee, and then a bundle of field maps and jottings. Suarpo unrolled the composite, and Woodford was soon engrossed in the geology being

pieced together before his gaze. The conversation moved on, and Suarpo listened with bemused detachment.

‘So,’ concluded Woodford, ‘we want someone who represents us properly: loyal to Metax Mining, but who can work with the Ministry, and I suppose, yourselves. Someone with standing and integrity, since personal qualities are important out here, aren’t they?’

‘Essential, Dr Woodford.’

‘So some local entrepreneur may not fit the bill?’

‘He would be entirely unsuitable, which your management may not realize.’

‘Well, that’s exactly it’, admitted Woodford.

‘No one supposed it was just maps you wanted to discuss. Now, as I’ve said, the Survey would like topographic and geological coverage of the whole country, which will cost hundreds of dollars. Nothing to you, but well outside our limited means. We would also like access to your mapping results before the final report.’

'Well, that's what you would like, Dr Suarpo, yes.'

'I can see no difficulties then. If you would allow me to make a few calls I think I could provide you with several suitable candidates, acceptable to all parties. As for the mapping, I have two, possibly three geologists who would benefit from the experience of working with a western company.'

'That's a splendid idea,' said Woodford, 'but I don't know we have many vacancies at present.'

'Perhaps I have not made myself clear. I am not talking about your Mapura operation, but of extending your field of investigation. The Government is thinking of issuing small exploration licences, did you know that?'

'Are they?' said Woodford, perplexed at the news.

'It is being considered.'

Woodford paused, and said carefully, 'So, instead of being an exploration company peripherally involved in one small corner of the country, Metax

Mining has access to the whole archipelago, with the government contacts necessary to develop any mineral deposits it finds.' That is how he could write the recommendation, and perhaps they would listen for once.

'An arrangement,' Suarpo was saying, 'which you could perhaps use to explore withheld licences inside your concession areas. If you had a need to. Do you have a need, Dr Woodford?'

'Not that I can think of.'

'I wonder if you are keeping up with events. I was referring to Tambang Surga.'

'Tambang Surga isn't withheld.'

'Someone has apparently found an application that pre-dates the issue of your concession. It was lost in the Ministry, but has just come to light.'

Woodford didn't hide his disappointment. 'Well, that's not satisfactory, is it? Not what we expected.'

'Tambang Surga is special.'

‘Was, Dr Suarpo. It’s completely worked out now.’

‘You haven’t heard about the missing gold, I take it, the gold shipment that disappeared? Of course it may be one of the usual stories, but the Japanese were working the property until the end of the war, and they did need hard currency to pay their troops. Perhaps there’s some truth in it.’

‘A lot of gold?’

‘Six months’ production. The Japanese guards were ambushed, and the gold disappeared. It may have been buried locally, perhaps in one of the abandoned workings.’

‘And you want us to find it?’

‘We should like a report of your work there these past few months. A full report. That would be a start.’ Suarpo smiled at Woodford’s surprise. ‘Dr Woodford, this is Indonesia. You must expect us to know what is happening in our own country.’

‘Very well, Dr Suarpo’, said Woodford. ‘I will put your proposals to my management, and see what can be done.’

It was only in the long drive back, out of the Bandung highlands and into the exhaust-laden fumes of Jakarta, that Woodford began to feel the first twinges of doubt. He had changed the whole nature of Metax Mining’s operation. He had acted against the interests of Sally handicrafts. And he hadn’t found a decent office. ‘Nothing going in Bandung, I suppose?’ he remarked on impulse to Keshi a short time later. The man nodded his head, the smile growing positively radiant. ‘Ah, Dr Woodford’, he exclaimed, ‘Mrs Cullen say you clever. You do deal with Survey, want offices in Bandung. Keshi can find. Very good offices.’ He pressed his nose significantly, hugely pleased with himself.

Woodford went along with the idea. The car was swung round and an hour later found itself parked in the large grounds of a colonial-period building. Woodford was impressed. Sally wouldn’t be

pleased, as it was hardly on the tourist beat, but once Hugh Maddocks or whatever the executive's name was—the Toronto Director who'd be out in Jakarta the following week—once he saw it, well, there'd be no argument. All that remained was the money, the rent, on which Keshi was non-committal. 'It is government property,' he explained, 'but Keshi can negotiate with the Institute.'

'The Geological Institute, they own it, do they?' Woodford was beginning to understand why he'd had lunch with so many officials, with such elaborate courtesy. 'Well, that's fantastic, Mr Keshi. Keep me posted, would you?'

Woodford began to enjoy himself. Back at the hotel, still in buoyant mood, he phoned the three names Suarpo had given him. Each listened to the job requirements, and with grave Javanese courtesy assured him of their keenness to provide every satisfaction. Woodford was delighted. The job wasn't so difficult when you went with the flow, whatever Cullen said.

Never a good conversationalist, Woodford nonetheless made a special effort that evening to interest himself in the local crafts and customs. He listened as Iskaq described the batiks that might be worn as a sarong on the various occasions of the Indonesian social calendar, repeating Iskaq's words until he had a clear mental picture. He enthused with Sally over the basket-weaving skills, and agreed that they were indeed an attractive people, producing miracles of craft on such low wages, pittance really. He cleared his throat, and was about to air some views of his own, when Iskaq cut across. 'As for you, young man, how is the office search going? The agent being helpful?'

'Very', said Woodford, recovering himself. 'The matter's almost out of my hands.'

'So we'll soon be able to vet the places, shall we, Robert dear?'

'Pretty well wrapped up. So much so I thought I might come along with you tomorrow and see some of the local handicrafts. Want to get some-

thing individual for Mary. Unless you're interviewing tomorrow?'

'No, young man, that is Friday.'

'Fine. I'll tell my candidates to be ready for Friday.'

'Yours, Robert?' Sally's eyes were now showing their undiminished blue. 'You have found someone?'

'Let's leave my men to speak for themselves.' Woodford smiled at the company, picked up his key, and took himself off to bed.

It was well into the following morning that Sally raised the question again. 'Your agent has been fantastic', said Woodford. 'Once I'd made contact with the Geological Survey at Bandung, and they'd found these offices for us—and you'll like them, Sally, you really will—Keshi's been attending to all the formalities. Real godsend.'

'Offices, Robert? Not at Bandung, I hope.'

‘Rather have to be, but we haven’t finalized anything yet. That’s for Don and Hugh Maddocks when they come out, though Bandung’s only a few hours up the road.’

‘Robert, does Don know about this Survey business?’

‘Just possibilities. You’ve always said we shouldn’t stay cooped up in Mapura. Early days yet, but I think I’ve found a way we can spread our wings. Work with the Survey, and all kinds of doors will open.’

‘I think I’d better see the place’, said Sally.

Iskaq was unusually silent on the journey. He seemed not so much out of his element as out of events altogether. That attitude did not extend to Cullen’s wife, who was smartly dressed in cotton dress and hat, ready for business as always. Woodford hadn’t agreed to her request to meet the Survey officials, however, but quite the contrary. ‘Oh I don’t know that would be wise, unless we

want to sign the lease this afternoon. Let's just see the place, shall we?'

'Right', said Sally, swallowing her annoyance. But even she admitted the long sweep of lawns, the carefully tended beds of flowers, shrubs and bamboos set out on both sides of the avenue that wound up to the colonial mansion was extraordinarily impressive. 'Old colonial's house,' declared Iskaq, 'probably falling down.' Inspection revealed no structural defects, however, only large rooms with blistered paint, enclosed courtyards, and an air of mouldering graciousness.

'So there you are', said Woodford. 'Don and Hugh Maddocks ought to look at it, but we get three large rooms up here for the price of one in town. Don't you see?'

Sally did see, but was deprived of an immediate strategy. 'Is this dependent on choosing one of the Survey's nominations, Robert dear?'

'It's a business proposition.' He put on his smile of happy anticipation.

'You see because, well, Iskaq and I already have a full list of candidates, so I don't know whether we'd get around to interviewing anyone else tomorrow.'

'Don't worry. We'll tack them on to the final selection that Don and Hugh Maddocks are handling.'

'No, what I'm saying, Robert, is that I don't know whether we should include them at all, despite the hard work you've done.'

'Oh, I think we have to. It would be a terrible rebuff to the Survey if we didn't. Put us back years with the authorities, wouldn't it, *Pa*' Iskaq.'

The man sank into his seat. 'Yes, it is possible,' he said with pronounced effort, 'due to the hastiness of this young man, that there could be some difficulties.'

'Which you could iron out, *Pa*' Iskaq?'

'In time. Possibly.'

Sally was not one to fight a hopeless battle. Of Woodford's three candidates, one was easily dis-

posed of, but Sally herself was charmed by the obvious competence of the other two. Her own nominees fared less well: sound businessmen but flashy beside the integrity and good breeding of Woodford's stable. Two were chosen, nonetheless, Woodford agreeing to the need for balance. Then they toured the alternative Jakarta offices, Keshi meekly in attendance.

'Wouldn't be that many people to start with, would there, Sally?'

'But think of the upheavals. Get something a bit larger now, and we're set up properly from the start.'

'Then perhaps we'd better leave it to Don and the Toronto Director to decide?'

'Robert, you're right. We'll do that.'

Some time after breakfast the following day, Cullen returned Sally's call, and asked to be put through to Woodford. 'Just touching base with you, old boy. Sally says you've done a first-rate job.'

‘Well I hope so’, said Woodford. ‘Not exceeding my authority or anything.’

‘Of course not. Important that people show initiative.’

‘Fine’, said Woodford happily. ‘So you’ll be coming over with Hugh Maddocks next week, to make the final choice?’

‘That’s what I’m ringing about. Back to the drawing board, I’m afraid. Our Director’s not coming out for the present. We’ve booked you back to Kotapalu tomorrow.’

Woodford took a moment to absorb the news. ‘But what about the manager? Who’s going to make the selection?’

‘Sally will. You’ve done the legwork, and I think we can safely leave it to Sally to handle the details. Well done, old boy. You’re shaping up admirably.’

‘I am?’ said Woodford.

‘So all you need now is a bit of field experience.’

CHAPTER 6

‘Maybe I’ve taken the money,’ said Posner, ‘but I’m not getting my knickers in a twist for anyone.’

‘Why you cheat us? You tell Laila you manager. You say your boss send Robert Woodford to jungle so you work in Kotapalu. No is true.’

‘Isn’t it?’ jeered Posner. ‘Who’s doing the surveying for our chief draftsman’s house? No one but yours truly. Don’t give that job to everyone.’

‘You say give us information on Tambang Surga but you no give.’

‘Who says I should be here at all? Not when I’m working for Metax.’

But it wasn’t the row with Henshall that morning which had put Posner in a surly mood, but Laila Chow herself. She would come up to him in the office, while he was trying to work out what grades had come from where, and ease that bottom just out of reach. The fabric stretched over a figure that was only a few feet away, and he could see the shimmer on the stockings as she swung her leg negligently from the desk. But then she would smile and remove herself, and go back to the letters and reports in Chinese or Japanese that Posner couldn’t decipher. Once, when the manager was out, he’d grabbed her, and brought that slanting face close to his. But she’d only laughed, the eyes flashing amber under the dark lashes. ‘Mr Posner, Mr Michael Posner, please you do that.’ He could smell the fragrance of the body, and had turned away angrily, releasing her and hearing the softly modulated voice shimmer under the laughter.

Posner went back to the chair, and stuck his feet on the desk. 'Course, you please yourself, Laila Chow, but I reckon you owe yourself a favour. You and Hartini Sujono.'

The woman went on working.

'Yep, I know all about her and Peter Henshall. One word from me and Cullen fires the golden boy. You can count on that.'

'Why you so stupid? They only friends.'

'Tell that to the marines. You start being chummy with me or Cullen gets the dirt.' He grabbed her shoulder, and was swinging her round when the slap caught him across the cheek. 'You bitch!' he exclaimed, reaching for the hand. But she was free in a moment, and stood there poised and angry as the manager's shape loomed behind the glass screen.

True to expectations, Suleiman Hatta, the chief draftsman, turned up at the old harbour site to check the layout of pegs the moment Sjaripudin and Posner had driven them in. They were moved an inch, double-checked, and then entered on plans Suleiman created for the project. Before work every morning, the old man walked over to the plot to talk personally to the builders, an obsession on which Cullen was heard to say, 'Means more to old Suleiman than anything else in the world, that daughter's house of his. Just hope everything goes well.' There was nothing to suggest that building wasn't proceeding smoothly, however. Foundations were dug and filled; timber frames erected; windows pegged into place, and a small garden planted. Relatives turned up with corrugated iron sections for the roof, and Cullen himself wandered around the site, inspecting progress.

'Tell me, *Pa*' Suleiman,' he said one afternoon, 'why is this the only house on the site?'

‘Correction, Dr Cullen. Another house is being built over there, where you see flags.’

‘Very well, *pa*’. But what about the others? There are supposed to be thirty on this site.’

‘We are pioneers’, said Suleiman. ‘Other people will come when facilities are laid down.’

‘Ah, the water and electricity. Where are they?’ Cullen looked around, and then suspiciously at Suleiman.

‘I have spoken to town officials. They are being planned.’

‘Perhaps I’d better check. You leave it to me, *Pa*’ Suleiman: we can’t have a senior member of Metax Mining at the mercy of Kotapalu officialdom.’

‘I have faith in you, Dr Cullen.’

The remark, so uncharacteristic of the old man, rather touched the project chief. Must be worried, he told himself. Iskaq was sent to the authorities the following day, and the day after that, indeed for a whole set of days stretching over several weeks.

‘I have a feeling, *Pa*’ Iskaq,’ said Cullen eventually, ‘you are keeping something from me.’

‘There is nothing to keep from you, Dr Cullen’, said the little man.

‘Then perhaps you could tell me why the town hasn’t installed facilities yet.’ He leant back in his office chair, and adopted an air of benevolent scrutiny.

‘Because it isn’t the responsibility of the town. It is the responsibility of the site owner.’

‘Then why hasn’t the site owner installed them?’ He looked more severely at his liaison officer.

‘Because the owner is waiting for permission from the town authorities.’

‘And why haven’t the town authorities given their permission?’

‘Because the site owner hasn’t applied.’

Cullen’s eyes began to bulge. ‘Then please tell me, *Pa*’ Iskaq, while I still have my sanity, why hasn’t the site owner applied?’

'It is simple. There would be no point. The site owner has told me that the application would not be granted.'

Cullen took the news quietly, but said with some bitterness, 'Now look, *pa*', I have given our Chief Draftsman my word that facilities will be supplied, and now you tell me there is some problem that prevents the two parties acting like rational people, though what the problem is remains entirely unclear to me.'

'It is not a problem yet. It is a potential problem.'

'*Pa*' Iskaq, please do not think that I don't enjoy these conversations of ours. But just at the moment I have an exploration project to run, and I would be grateful if you would spell out firstly the nature of the problem, and secondly what needs to be done. Do I make myself clear?'

'Completely.'

'And?'

'I understand you, Dr. Cullen.'

‘So this problem coming up, or possibly not coming up, is something you are not at liberty to disclose to me.’

‘Dr Cullen, you have grasped the situation masterfully. That is exactly so.’ He gave one of his rare smiles.

‘So let’s simply carry on, and trust the problem won’t appear.’

Iskaq stared at his boss. ‘Dr Cullen, I do not feel you appreciate the situation.’

‘Potential situation, *Pa*’ Iskaq. And we agreed not to ask for explanations. There must be a contract between the site owner and *Pa*’ Suleiman. Tell the owner we expect him to honour it, or we’ll start legal action. That should do it.’

‘It would be a most undiplomatic way of proceeding.’

‘We’ll worry about that when the time comes.’

Iskaq went out shaking his head, but, as the site owner’s contractors turned up the following day to

peg the route of pipes and cables, Cullen congratulated himself on a significant victory. 'Just a matter of cutting the Gordian knot', he explained to a worried Suleiman a few days later. 'Alexander. Greek history', he added.

'I have been to school, Dr Cullen,' said Suleiman stiffly, 'but it is the effects of action that cause my trouble. Why I have been charged for two plots of land.'

Cullen was startled. 'Two plots? Highly illegal. We'll soon put an end to that.'

'It seems the house is built on two plots. Half on my plot and half on another plot.'

'Can't be. We surveyed it in.'

'I did not survey it in. I check only the house plan.'

Cullen glared at him. 'I suppose you wouldn't like to survey in the site position yourself?' he said.

'I did that now.'

Cullen examined the map. 'Very well', he said. 'We know the perpetrators of this stupidity, and you can be sure they'll pay for it. As far as Metax is concerned, you can have the extra plot as a token of appreciation from the Company. Give your daughter a bigger garden or something.'

'That I cannot accept Dr Cullen.'

'*Pa*' Suleiman, you have an order, and that's an end to it.'

'If you say so.'

'Good man.'

Though Suleiman wanted to invite all expatriates to his daughter's wedding, Cullen had made it clear that Posner was not to be included, and certainly not the troublemakers van Ryssen and Henshall.

'Won't be upset, *pa*', will he?' asked Cullen of his liaison officer, a few days before the event. 'Don't want to turn it into an expat affair.'

‘That is considerate,’ said Iskaq, ‘but perhaps another senior member of Metax should attend.’

‘You think so?’ said Cullen irritably. ‘Very well. We’ll see if our new office manager can redeem himself.’

‘*Pa*’ Suleiman will be delighted.’

Cullen put his glasses back on, but Iskaq was not wearing his look of quizzical superiority, and perhaps the reply could be taken at face value. ‘Good’, said Cullen. ‘We’ve done our best, and no doubt actions speak louder than words. Just have to make sure the electricity works on the day, and the band, or whatever they’re having, will make the event go off properly. Quite looking forward to it.’

‘The reception is not being held at the new house’, said Iskaq in a matter-of-fact voice. ‘They are renting a local hotel.’

‘But the electricity has been laid, hasn’t it?’ demanded Cullen. ‘We’ve not been wasting our time these past weeks?’

'*Pa*' Suleiman no longer has the house. The potential problem has unfortunately appeared. The harbour land has been taken back for a dock extension recommended by the World Bank experts.'

'Ye gods', exclaimed Cullen, springing out of his chair. 'What numskull approved that?'

'The Governor. It has been under consideration for some time, but of course Jakarta couldn't ratify the decision immediately.'

'And *Pa*' Suleiman's house?'

Iskaq shrugged his shoulders. 'It is regrettable, but, as I have no doubt mentioned, it does no good to rush matters here.'

'He'll get compensation?'

'There may be some compensation paid to the developer. I do not know if he will want to pass it on.'

Cullen walked round to calm himself. 'What about the contract?' he said.

'Perhaps there will be a force majeure clause. I do not know.' Iskaq looked at his watch.

'Do you mean to say that *Pa*' Suleiman's spent all that money building a house on land that now doesn't belong to him?' Cullen was exasperated beyond measure.

'*Pa*' Suleiman hasn't spent anything. Metax Mining lent him the money.'

'Yes, lent him, *Pa*' Iskaq. Which means we want it back.'

'That may take some time', said Iskaq considerably.

'What! Am I hearing properly?' exclaimed Cullen. 'Where is the man?'

'I think you have forgotten that *Pa*' Suleiman has been given leave to look after the wedding arrangements. But you will see him there, at the reception on Tuesday. I'm sure you will find him obliging.'

'Obliging? I'll say he'll be obliging!'

At this point Iskaq excused himself, leaving Cullen with a problem that grew more intractable as he thought about it. He talked the matter over with Sally on two successive evenings, but realized in the end that Iskaq was right: he'd have to leave it to the wedding.

Though the invitation said seven-thirty, the Cullens found the celebrations well advanced when they drove round with Posner immediately before dinner. 'Shan't stay', explained Cullen. 'Just showing the flag.'

'Okay', said Posner, as the party went through into the garden from which the music was coming. 'Don't want to be roped in either. Know what I mean?'

'Nonsense. You enjoy yourself, Michael. Now where is Suleiman?' He looked round the hotel garden, and was astounded to see Henshall seated at the drums and playing along in earnest. Cullen glared for a few moments until a voice caused him

to turn round. 'Ah, *Pa*' Suleiman', he said. 'Just the man I need to see. I thought we agreed that Henshall would not be invited.'

The old man looked surprised. 'He is not a guest, Dr Cullen. He is a member of the band.'

'Band?'

'Peter Henshall often plays when he is in town. But you knew that, I am sure.'

'I did not, as it happens', said Cullen.

'But we will meet the bride and groom please?'

'Right', said Cullen, finding himself presented to a puppet-like creature got up in rouge, rice powder and heavy gold jewellery. The groom bowed. 'Good,' said Cullen, 'fine.' He introduced Sally, who came up to extend a gracious hand. 'And now,' said Cullen, 'we must have a talk.'

All in good time, the man agreed, taking the two over to meet his other guests. The band had now restarted, and the Cullens stopped to watch Posner be led sheepishly on to the stage for an impromptu

song. It was an unmemorable performance, but the hundred-strong crowd gave him a warm reception. Red in the face and bowing, Posner handed the microphone back and bolted for a group of office staff who continued to clap enthusiastically. The compère was now calling across to Cullen. 'They are asking if you will sing for us', said Suleiman.

'Certainly not', said Cullen.

'Or perhaps you would like to recite something?' persisted Suleiman.

'Heavens no. Don't know anything.' He wasn't going to make a fool of himself like this.

'But you are our guest of honour Dr Cullen. You will have something to say please for the happy couple.'

There was no escape. Flanked by his wife, Cullen climbed the two steps to the stage, waited while the band gave him a roll of honour, and then spoke slowly in English. It was simple enough, but he felt the crowd listening to each word that was slowly translated by Suleiman. Bursts of applause punc-

tuated his remarks, and by the end of his address Cullen felt himself part of an extended family, as indeed he was.

‘So *pa*’, I’m afraid,’ said Cullen a few minutes later, ‘you and I are going to have our little talk.’

‘With pleasure, Dr Cullen.’

‘Now I know the difficulties, and I’m sorry. But that loan will have to be paid back. Eventually.’

Suleiman continued to look at him with interest.

Cullen swallowed hard and said, ‘Perhaps not immediately, you understand. But in the end.’ Suleiman didn’t reply. Cullen looked at the honest face, and felt ashamed. ‘Well, some of it, anyway. All right?’

‘Dr Cullen,’ said Suleiman with dignity, ‘I will repay the money as soon as I return to the office. In full as you wish.’

‘All of it?’ exclaimed Cullen. ‘No, you don’t have to do that. I don’t want you to be financially embar-

rassed, *pa*'. After all, you don't have the house now.'

'The house was never in my name. It had been recorded as a temporary office for Metax Mining.'

'What?'

'Please do not be alarmed. On your behalf I made a present of it to the Kotapalu authorities, to use as they saw fit.'

Cullen glared at the man.

'With the result that they gave in exchange a corner plot on the edge of town, which was surplus to requirements. It came with a small office near the market, which I have managed to sell to a neighbour of yours with some of my archive papers. Mr Hua is a collector of mining memorabilia. I have ready money to pay you.'

Cullen didn't know what to think. 'Well, that's fine', he said eventually. 'Thank you, *Pa*' Suleiman. That is most unexpected.'

Suleiman smiled. 'But you must thank *Pa'* Iskaq. It was through his contacts you see. We are fortunate to have a man like *Pa'* Iskaq on our staff.'

'Aren't we', said Cullen brightly.

'Peter', remarked Hartini the following day. 'A little more expression, if you please. This is not honky-tonk time.'

Henshall played the lines again.

'Can't you understand what the words say? "I gave you my heart. All my hopes, all my happiness." Here, it's this.' Hartini seated herself at the piano, and played the work from the beginning. 'See?' She sang the words, stressing the notes. 'This is the phrase that counts, and this chord here.' She struck the keys several times. 'This is what draws out the soul.'

'Nothing to do with working the audience?'

‘Their hopes, their longings, their loneliness. Nothing escapes me when I’m performing properly. But you have to feel the music.’ She stopped, and said, ‘I’m wasting words with you. Go and ask Fatima to make us some coffee.’

‘I’ll get my cue to go soon enough from that old dragon.’

‘That’s not what I mean. You are spending too much time here.’

‘Not as I see it.’

‘What are you doing with yourself? You’re the best on the operation, everyone says so, but now you’ve got this oaf Michael Posner pushing you around.’

‘Because Woodford upset Cullen over the Jakarta office.’

‘You let it happen.’

‘Bob’s a good man but he knows nothing about exploration. And van Ryssen is a mule: can’t see

two inches in front of his nose. I've given up. Do my hours, and get on with the painting.'

'You don't make real friends, but you're closer to people than they think.'

'Like someone else.'

'That's uncalled for. I'm not in the slightest like you.'

'You're also a stranger here.'

'Less psychology, my friend. When my father died, the Templetons, the rich rubber planters, ceased to exist. Mother returned to her *kampong*, and I finished my schooling abroad.'

'You haven't made much effort to fit in or renew acquaintances.'

'Mixed marriages are an embarrassment.'

'Didn't she know that Hartini Sujono was her daughter?'

'She'd remarried. Why rake up the past?'

'Well I do think you should try. She can't be far away.'

‘Chan was my family. No one else.’

‘Come on, Hartini. The dead are always with us, your father as well as Chan.’

‘My friend, I do not need these homilies. You’re not guiltless. Your mother paid for your art-school education, and then drunk herself to death. You think your father doesn’t understand the reasons?’

‘He goes to the City every day and comes back to that empty house of his, but he won’t admit he worked hard to give his two-bit actress what she never asked for, and didn’t want. That he didn’t talk to her, make her part of his life, doesn’t enter his thinking. The parallels with my own life are perfectly clear, thank you.’

‘You are oversensitive, my friend. You may be quiet, but you understand women. Probably too much.’

‘Hartini, I draw women because they are interesting. Particularly with their local costumes.’

‘All pretty *nonyas*. You draw women because you sympathize with them. And because you like

beautiful things, as your father did. Hartini understands.'

'Well, nothing's happening here, is it?' He picked out a tune slowly on the piano.

'My friend, I have told you. I shall not marry again, and affairs I can't afford. If you need consolation go elsewhere, but don't blab to me about it.'

'I'm not going elsewhere.'

'I should hope not.' She sighed. 'Move over, and we can play the piece together. You sing the bass.'

'Not my strong point.'

'Everyone needs to fail somewhere, especially people like you.' She kissed him. 'Now don't take it badly. From the top, if you please.'

CHAPTER 7

‘Tell me, *pa*,’ said Cullen to his liaison officer later that week, ‘why is Metax Mining so ostracized in this town?’

‘City, Dr Cullen’, said Iskaq. ‘Kotapalu had 34,000 people at the last census.’

‘Never mind that’, interrupted Cullen. ‘Why aren’t we invited out more often?’

‘But you are. Only last week Michael Posner went to an important reception.’

Cullen indulged him. '*Pa*' Iskaq,' he said in his confidentially jovial way, 'you are not answering my question. I am talking of social relations, of making friends here.'

'You must be patient, Dr Cullen. Always I'm telling you it is a virtue to be patient in Indonesia. Matters cannot be rushed.'

'You do tell me, I am patient, and nothing happens.'

Iskaq reflected. He sat on the chair in front of Cullen's desk and let his feet dangle. 'You know,' he said, 'perhaps I should be frank with you. Do you think I should be frank with you?'

Cullen's eyes began to hurt.

'Yes, I will be frank with you', continued Iskaq. 'That is the best policy. Even though we Indonesians make a point of subtlety, of conveying so many shades of meaning in a simple phrase.'

'Tell that to the lads', said Cullen.

'That is sad, so disappointing,' said Iskaq. He had taken off his glasses, and was polishing them dejectedly with his pocket handkerchief. 'Perhaps, do you not think, Dr Cullen, that your staff may not be the best people to judge, if I may say so, with no wish to criticize?'

'I'm just saying what they think, *Pa*' Iskaq.'

'Indeed. What they think. Quite so.' Iskaq stared at the desk for a long time as if summoning inspiration from the wood itself. Then he got to his feet, and started slowly for the door.

Cullen waved him back. 'So why aren't they able to judge, *Pa*' Iskaq? Not complete ignoramus-es.'

'They don't have many social skills, do they?' He smiled sadly. 'Not for Indonesia.'

Cullen wasn't admitting defeat. 'They have jobs to do, *Pa*' Iskaq,' he said, 'but that doesn't preclude the usual social relations, as well you know. We have plenty of contacts, thanks to your friend the

Governor, and I don't see why we shouldn't use them.'

'The Governor was my employer, Dr Cullen. I worked for him once, but now I work for you.'

'And in that capacity you could invite the Governor and his lady wife to a little dinner party with us sometime.'

The colour drained from Iskaq's face. 'Dinner party?' he asked incredulously.

'Or the chief of the army perhaps. Or the police. Seem quite presentable, intelligent chappies.'

Iskaq could not understand how such notions had entered his employer's head.

'They wouldn't come?' said Cullen.

'They have to be most scrupulous in their social connections. They could only attend in their official capacities.'

'Not as potential friends.'

Iskaq shook his head. 'I'm afraid not', he said, getting to his feet again.

‘What about our neighbours?’ continued Cullen.
‘Couldn’t we invite them?’

‘Dr Cullen,’ said Iskaq severely, resting a hand on the desk, ‘you do not know your neighbours.’

‘We have tried. We know the Huas quite well. More because of their daughter, I will admit.’

‘I’m afraid the Huas are not regarded as best society here.’

‘They’re not, eh?’

‘Moreover there were certain misunderstandings, you remember—noise, late hours, drinking, and so forth—which needed considerable efforts to smooth over with the authorities.’

‘Ah yes’, said Cullen, attacked unexpectedly from a new quarter. ‘You did a good job there.’

‘Part of my duties, Dr Cullen. Now on the matter of transport, I do need to go to the port and talk to the officials.’

‘Good of you. Take whatever vehicle you want.’
After Iskaq’s departure he remained at his desk for

several minutes, apparently doing nothing. Then he pressed the buzzer and asked for Posner.

‘Take a pew, Michael. I’ve got a few things to discuss. Things that don’t need to go further than these walls.’

Posner folded his arms.

‘Now I’m proposing to hold a little party, not necessarily lavish, but something to show that we Europeans do know how to behave, that we can mix with decent society. You understand?’

‘Like with the older staff?’ said Posner.

‘Yes, they can come, and Dr Sutopo our medical man, and the Garuda agent round the corner. All with their wives of course.’

‘Good idea.’

‘You think so? Yes, I thought we ought to do something. I’ve just been talking with Iskaq, but you know what an old woman he is. Always raising objections. Naturally, as my office manager I shall

expect you to organize the event. Get out a guest list; liaise with Johari; speak to the lads.'

'Work through Iskaq?' said Posner.

'Let's see what we can do on our own.'

'Just talk to Sally then.'

'Sally's going back to Jakarta shortly. Men can cope by themselves, can't they?'

'Suppose so.'

'Well then, I shall leave everything in your capable hands. Now I wonder where the Mapura Queen is today', he started, switching on the radio. 'Is everything clear, Michael?'

'Right', said Posner, and went out looking thoughtful.

A week passed, and a perceptible hum of excitement began to animate the office, encouraging Cullen to think the best. A fortnight before the event he called Posner in, and listened impatiently to the plan.

'So in the end I decided we'd better invite everyone, field staff included. No point in upsetting people.'

'Quite right. What about our neighbours?'

'Sutopo will come. The Garuda man hasn't replied. I suppose that's it.'

Cullen was grievously disappointed. 'And the lads?' he said. 'Who are they bringing?'

'Probably no one. Women are a problem here.'

'That is precisely why we're having this party. Why I want the lads to show they're not only involved with the undesirable element. Who have we got?'

'Ermita, Mr Hua's daughter, I suppose. She's back from university now.'

'Right, that's Woodford hitched up.'

'Well—' started Posner.

'Van Ryssen can bring Lola. Do him good to forget work for a while. Now what about Henshall? He's got someone, I know.'

‘Yep, the nightclub singer. Or so people say.’

‘Why is that, Michael? You know perfectly well the nightclub is off-limits. It’s one of the things I expect you to supervise.’

‘Henshall said you’d given in.’

‘I have not given in. When that young man makes a fool of himself it’s the operation, or more particularly me, that has to pick up the pieces. What’s this woman like?’

‘Reckoned a stunner.’

‘Would be. Some brazen hussy would appeal to someone like Henshall with artistic pretensions. I think we’d better have that young man in. No, don’t go. I want you around.’

Henshall appeared, and listened with a sardonic expression that Cullen found especially trying. ‘I don’t think so’, he said at last. ‘She works most nights.’

‘Well tell her to give up her clientele for once. Not an unreasonable request.’

'She's not a hostess. She runs the club.'

'Does she, by Jove? Well there you are. Should make our little function go with a swing. Put her on the list, Michael.'

'Could I say something?' remarked Henshall.

'Fire away, old boy', said Cullen going to the window. 'All ears.'

'Well you know that Indonesian society is rather stratified, class-conscious even, particularly in a place like Kotapalu. They don't want us here, but of course Jakarta calls the shots.'

'Following you, old boy', said Cullen. 'Now what's that fool of a driver doing? He's not changing a wheel like that, is he?'

'So we're never going to be accepted, even if we stay here a hundred years. But we do have to follow local customs.'

'Quite right. Tell that driver to come and see me later, would you, Michael?'

'So,' continued Henshall, 'perhaps it's not such a wonderful idea to herd everyone together, however good the intentions.'

'Michael, are we herding people together?'

'Nope. It's going to be a proper do.'

'There you are. Your girl comes. Let's hear no more nonsense about it.'

Giving Cullen a pitying look, Henshall left to get on with his maps. Posner made himself scarce. Plans continued.

The day came. Punctually at seven the first of the taxis arrived, bearing the junior staff and their wives. Each was in local costume, the men in dark tunics, their wives swathed in *sarong* and *kebaya*. At the entrance to the Mess a slim hand was offered, a brief bob made of the heavily jewelled body, and a flash of dark eyes. Cullen was enchanted. 'Certainly know how to behave, these

people', he confided to Posner, who was escorting each couple into the house. 'Absolutely first-rate.' Dr Sutopo was one of the last to arrive, sauntering down the path around eight, his wife chatting with the chief bookkeeper, who had been picked up specially. Cullen was about to go in when Henshall appeared in one of the Metax Land Rovers. Better see who the lad's bringing, he said to himself. He could see a dark figure beside Henshall in the outline of a full dress. Some time passed in getting the occupant out of the vehicle, and Cullen decided he might allow himself to walk over and appear the more welcoming host. But as the woman came into the light from the house her looks struck Cullen so forcibly that speech deserted him. 'I'll take Hartini in, shall I?' said Henshall, passing on from the introductions. The woman nodded to Cullen, took up her dress and swayed regally down the path, smiling to Posner as they passed.

The effect inside was immediate. Cullen heard the conversation dwindle and then die altogether.

'Better go and jolly things along, old boy, if you would', he said to Posner. 'Don't think it's going too well.'

'Bloody Henshall', said Posner on his return. 'Kiss of death, that woman.'

'Get the band to play louder. Take the food round. I'll be there in a moment.'

'Okay.'

None of this had helped when Cullen brought in the last of his guests, Woodford with Ermita, the latter giving the manager such an alluring smile that Cullen momentarily forgot his seniority and forty-three years. But the focus of all present—the men in silent fascination, the women whispering behind their fans—was Hartini, self-absorbed, talking quietly to Henshall, adjusting her dress. Cullen sprang into action. He took plates round, poured drinks, spoke in his pidgin *Bahasa* to all the couples present, and was relieved when slowly the life and chatter returned. 'Johari,' he said to his assistant office manager, 'I'd like to see you younger

people dance a bit.' 'As you wish', said the man, and soon there were half a dozen couples slowly revolving on the floor. He walked over to Henshall and said, 'Ask your girl to dance, won't you? Can't have a beautiful woman like that doing nothing.' Hartini inclined her head, flashed Cullen a grateful smile, and stepped out. Slowly the couples round them stopped dancing and returned to their seats, until Hartini herself took Henshall by the arm and led him to the buffet trolley.

Woodford came up to Cullen. 'You don't think Peter should take his girl home, do you?'

'Certainly not. She's our guest. We invited her, and it's up to us to make her feel welcome.'

'Of course, Don.'

'So we move on to the next part of the evening. What's Posner planned?'

'Planned?' said the man. 'Nothing. Thought we'd let matters take their course.'

‘That won’t do’, decided Cullen. ‘We have a band, so perhaps some of them can sing. Make their own entertainment.’

‘Not sure they’d want to do that.’

‘All right, we’ll leave that for later. Get your projector out, Michael. The lads should have some good footage of their travels. I expect this lot knows next to nothing about this country of theirs.’

‘If you’re sure’, said Woodford. ‘It may not be suitable, the footage I mean. You never know—’

‘They’ll take it in their stride’, decided Cullen. ‘You go and make the announcement, Michael, and I’ll set up the equipment.’

The idea was warmly received. Ermita had already abandoned Woodford to sit with van Ryssen, and around them the party settled on chairs, tables and floor. The lights went out, and the first shots of camp life flickered on the whitewashed wall. There were cries of delight as friends were seen erecting tents, climbing into helicopters, fording rivers. Then came a long footage of Bali, the temple ceremo-

nies, elaborate dances with their haunting gamelan music. A storm of applause greeted scenes of Kotapalu. 'Excellent,' said Cullen, 'what did I tell you?'

Posner was pleased by the obvious success of it all, and stood beaming defiantly at van Ryssen, who'd been talking to Ermita, and wasn't smiling. 'That's about it', he announced at last.

'That's only three reels, what about the others?' demanded Cullen.

'They're odds and sods. Can't be sure what's on them.'

'We'll risk it. Put the next on.'

A local lake appeared, an expanse of blue water with clouds just touching the hills on the far side. Posner and an engineer were seen taking lunch at a wayside cafe, their driver grinning and pointing at them. Then there was a village scene.

'Going a bit fast, isn't it, Michael?' said Cullen as the figures speeded into staccato rhythms. Posner continued to adjust the projector.

'I say, hang on, old boy', shouted Cullen as he got to his feet. There were young women bathing now, frolicking in the water, coyly displaying their charms to the camera. One was just emerging from the water, resplendent in her nakedness, when Cullen got to the projector. The film stopped, the woman's body hung for a second, and then burnt out. There was a gasp, and then nothing. No one said a word.

Cullen could see his guests were shocked. He looked to Woodford, who rolled his eyes. Posner stood his ground. 'Right,' said Cullen firmly, 'there you are.' He was intensely annoyed, at Posner for this foolishness, at himself for not expecting trouble. Desperately he thought to break the silence. 'We'll have some singing,' he decided, 'yes, that's what we'll have.'

Again there was silence. 'Right, Robert, you can start. Anything you like.'

Woodford declined, but Cullen was by now incensed. 'You had a hand in this nonsense, so you make the evening work.'

Grimacing, hunching his shoulders awkwardly, Woodford launched into a current pop song, stumbling, drying up, coming in again on the chorus, and finally standing vacantly in front of his audience.

'Right, thank you', said Cullen, red in the face. 'Michael, it's your turn.'

Posner glared at him.

'We all have to do our bit. I'm insisting on this.' Cullen was beside himself with rage.

'I don't know anything', said Posner defiantly. 'But Ermita does. She sings okay. I've heard her.'

All eyes descended on Ermita, who went pale, and clutched at van Ryssen's arm. 'Ja, well I would say Ermita does not want to sing', said van Ryssen, looking at the girl, who nodded vigorously.

‘I’ll be the judge of that’, declared Cullen. ‘Er-mita?’

‘It is better you ask somebody else’, repeated van Ryssen.

Cullen could feel his blood rising. ‘Look, I warn you . . .’ he started. But then his voice trailed away as he saw Hartini coming to the microphone. With a measured swing of the dress she turned towards them, weighed up the room, and spoke to the bandleader. In a slow rhythm the drum and clarinet started and, cradling the microphone in her hands, Hartini gave herself to the song.

He was no enthusiast of nightclubs, and he couldn’t understand a word of it, but as the song poured out in its rich sadness, the notes hanging in the air with all their vibrant longing, Cullen felt well up in him an extraordinary release of grief and tenderness. On the song flowed, stretching out in front of him, and for a while he didn’t notice the interruptions and bustle that had started up all around. Wives were making ready to go, energeti-

cally fanning themselves, dragging husbands to their feet. Hartini carried on, ignoring the hubbub, but as the crowd bumped round her she stopped, replaced the microphone, and walked out of the room. No one took the slightest notice. Cullen was inundated with goodbyes, smiles, little curtsies, to which he responded with bewildered jollity. There you are, he said to himself, you can never tell. Seems they've had enough. Buoyed up with the thought that perhaps it hadn't been too bad, he returned to the Mess from driving several of his more senior guests home. The room was nearly empty. Woodford had pulled himself a beer, and was sitting down. The kitchen staff were clearing up.

'Bit of an effort, but we made it', remarked Cullen. 'Everyone enjoyed themselves.'

'Sort of, Don . . .' said Woodford.

'Didn't they?'

'Apart from Lola and Ermita, who've had a bust up. I had to take them back separately.'

‘So what’s Posner doing, for god’s sake?’

‘Peter’s still with his girl out back’, continued Woodford. ‘Not too happy, it seems.’

‘Lord in heaven,’ exclaimed Cullen, ‘do I have to do everything myself? All right, I’ll have a word with them.’

He found Henshall in the back garden, staring at the ornamental pool. Hartini, seated beside him, turned her face away as Cullen approached, shifting round so he could hardly make her out. That he was intruding on a private moment was obvious, and a weaker man might have faltered. ‘No good crying over spilt milk’, he said. ‘Just didn’t take to her.’

Henshall’s eyes narrowed.

‘But your girl, whatever her name is, well, I thought she sang pretty well.’ As Henshall made no attempt to translate, Cullen bent down and shook the woman’s arm. ‘You sang very well. Very. . well. . you. . sang’, he repeated.

Hartini turned her head, and to his embarrassment Cullen realized she'd been crying. For a moment he was astonished, more astonished than when he'd first met her, but Cullen's embarrassment turned to guilt, and then to anger. 'Well, this is what happens', he snapped. 'Can't say I'm surprised. Perhaps in future you'll listen to me.'

He was about to elaborate when Henshall took the woman by the arm, walking her down the gravel path and over to the parked Land Rover. They drove off as Cullen returned to the Mess, entering by the back door that led to the kitchen. Here, pinned to the wall by Posner, was van Ryssen, flushed but unresisting. 'So I'll tell you again', said Posner menacingly. 'If I want to do your bird I will do her, and you can't stop me.'

Van Ryssen's eyes were bloodshot, but he spoke calmly. 'I tell you keep away. That is what I say to you.'

'Then I've got just the answer for you', said Posner. He brought his fist up, and gave van Ryssen's chin a quick jab.

'That's enough, said Cullen, stepping forward.

'You do not do that again', warned van Ryssen, twisting his head free.

'Is that so?' said Posner, giving van Ryssen another jab.

'That's enough!' shouted Cullen again, but was thrown aside by a thrust from Posner's arm. Van Ryssen's lip had begun to bleed, and an angry flush darkened his face.

'Like that, did you?' jeered Posner. 'Want some more?'

He brought his fist back, but suddenly doubled up as van Ryssen's knee caught him between the legs. Van Ryssen stepped back, waited till Posner straightened, and then caught him with a right hook that sent the man sprawling over the kitchen tiles.

‘That’s it!’ exclaimed Cullen. ‘Any more of this and you’re fired, both of you!’

Van Ryssen stood staring down at his assailant. Contemptuously he said, ‘That is a start for you, Posner. If you want a fight, you can have a fight any time you like.’ He stalked out of the kitchen into the Mess, and threw himself into a convenient chair.

Cullen went after him. ‘Will someone tell me what’s going on?’ he exclaimed. Van Ryssen shook his head, and picked up a magazine.

‘Marinus van Ryssen, I’m talking to you!’ shouted Cullen, his voice rising in anger. ‘I’m in charge here, and I’m not putting up with this.’

‘You can ask Posner’, said van Ryssen, looking at the man now striding out of the kitchen.

Cullen turned round but was thrown to the floor by Posner, who then grabbed van Ryssen by the neck, turning his head for a determined right fist. The blow grazed van Ryssen’s cheek and landed on a plant-pot, sending shards skittering over the

floor, but van Ryssen was free in an instant. The first jab got Posner in the ribs, and then there were five hard blows in quick succession to the chest and head. Posner staggered and slumped against the armchair. Van Ryssen lifted Posner to his feet, dragged him across the floor, and threw him into the front garden. There was a dull thud, and then nothing. Cullen rushed out to look at the lifeless figure from which blood had begun to dribble. 'Marinus van Ryssen, you're fired', he said. 'Hear that, you're fired!' Breathing heavily, he then stepped forward to see what could be done.

CHAPTER 8

To the crowd around him, Posner seemed barely alive. He lay awkwardly slumped on the ground, the breath rasping through the throat till it splattered out in blood. Woodford dabbed the nose and mouth with his handkerchief, but the blood continued to spill, soaking into his collar and dripping on to the concrete.

‘Well don’t just stand there’, said Cullen, getting to his feet again. ‘Do something, one of you, can’t you?’ As he ran to the Land Rover, soon to be

roaring down the street after his last guest, van Ryssen stepped into the circle, took the man's pulse, and looked cautiously into the mouth. '*Ja*, it is only nosebleed and concussion', he said. He propped up Posner's head with a cushion and instructed that the man should not be moved. The kitchen staff had already phoned the hospital, and Cullen and Dr Sutopo returned to find the patient being lifted into the ambulance, which they followed at some distance, asking the registrar to let them know when results were through.

'More than that, no one could do', explained Cullen over the telephone to Sally the following morning. 'But I've fired van Ryssen. He can serve his month, and then push off.'

'Better get rid of him now,' said his wife, 'before there's any more trouble.'

'A month is usual', said Cullen.

'Not when you've got Toronto coming.'

'What's that?'

'Telegram arrived yesterday, but I thought you had your hands full with the party. Hugh Maddocks and Margaret are coming out two weeks from now.'

'Ye gods!' exclaimed Cullen. 'That's all we need. Can't you put them off?'

'They're already over on a fact-finding tour of Australia, with the exploration chief over there, a Dave Seward or someone.'

'Seybold. "Lead from the front, never ask a man to do what you can't do yourself." Had a bellyful of that at the last Company Conference.'

'You all right, darling? Sound a bit strange. Want me over?'

'Could you, Sally? Some moral support would help at the moment.'

'Provided you get rid of van Ryssen.'

The man didn't argue when the moment came, but simply asked for a month's pay, which Cullen

was obliged to grant. 'Help you get whatever paraphernalia you've collected sent back', added Cullen, disappointed that he'd not been able to deliver the prepared speech.

'I stay here now', said van Ryssen.

'Doing what, may I ask?'

'Ja, well, I work for a new company.'

'There isn't one,' said Cullen, 'and won't be until we relinquish the contract area, which is a good four months off.'

Saying nothing more, van Ryssen went to collect his belongings. Half an hour later he was shaking hands with staff as Cullen kept an eye open for the airport Land Rover. Sally arrived, sailed past van Ryssen, and shut the door of Cullen's office firmly behind them. 'Books,' she said to her distracted husband, 'that's what we have to talk about.'

'Books?' said Cullen, his mind still on van Ryssen's departure. 'What books?'

‘Jakarta’s of course. There are some discrepancies.’

‘Discrepancies?’

‘Donald, don’t keep parroting what I’m saying. I’ve fired the bookkeeper, and told the manager what to say, but there could still be problems.’

‘Hang on Sally. Two people fired in one week is a bit steep.’

‘Why we have to be clear what we’re doing here.’

Cullen leaned on the desk and looked at his wife, who was pacing determinedly around the office. ‘Maddocks in the picture?’

‘Darling, the Canadian audit team is coming out. Mostly for Kuala Lumpur, but they’ll do us as well.’

‘We’ve got nothing to hide.’

‘Jakarta might.’

‘I see’, said Cullen. He looked thoughtful, and went to sit in his chair. ‘So how much money is involved, roughly?’

‘They were just loans, until we got established.’

‘More than we can cover with our own finances?’

‘Why should we? Everything will come good in the end, even the new place in Bali. But at the moment we’re overextended.’

Cullen’s hopes faded. ‘Well, I did wonder’, he said. ‘Jakarta’s bill has been high recently. Even the lads commented on it.’

‘They shouldn’t. It’s nothing to do with them.’

‘Look, Sally, correct me if I’m wrong, but some Metax money has been transferred to the handicrafts side, and not put through the books. Which the manager wouldn’t fix.’

‘Didn’t even try.’

Cullen began to get angry. ‘What do you propose? Fire him as well?’

‘Get the audit team into trouble, that’s what I’m saying.’

'With troupes of dancing girls? Come on, Sally, this isn't you.'

But his wife wasn't listening, and for distraction Cullen stared sullenly out of the window. The Indonesian venture had been different from what he'd expected, and he wasn't sure he was still in the real world. 'There's Henshall', he said at last. 'Seems to be in cahoots with the local nightlife.'

'Posner' said Sally. 'Thought of Mike Posner?'

'Is that wise? The man has his uses, but I'm not sure I'd want to get too close to Posner.'

'I know how to handle Mike Posner.' She began looking in her handbag.

'Sally, we've had disturbing reports on him. Playing some double game.'

She found the address book, and began flicking through.

'Seen coming out of an office of some Chinese shipping agent near the docks', continued Cullen. 'May have slipped away when he was running the

show. Then there are the unlogged flights to Tambang Surga, so far as I can make out. No one's saying anything officially, but still—'

'Even better. Just leave it to me, would you, Donald?'

'Good as done', sighed Cullen as the door slammed behind her. Blankly he turned to the approaching visit, and wondered where to start.

Matters were easier once the men returned to their field duties, and there was just Woodford pottering about the office. Posner emerged from hospital a day later, and proposed a short break in Jakarta. Cullen raised no objections, and Sally took the same flight out. She sent three telexes the day after her arrival in the capital, and followed them with a telephone call that evening. 'All in hand', she said. 'I had a long chat with Margaret, and I know exactly what they want. You look after Dave Seybold, and I'll see to the Maddocks.'

‘That’s the easy part’, grumbled Cullen. ‘Just sightseeing for them.’

‘Hugh wants to learn something of the operation. Keen to see what it’s like out here.’

‘Soon wish he hadn’t.’

‘He’s going to make an expedition, with you and Dave Seybold.’

‘I’m not making an expedition anywhere.’

‘He’s an amateur botanist, remember. It doesn’t have to be anywhere special, only Dave Seybold’s keen on the old Tambang Surga Mine. Thinks it’s got potential.’

‘Only one who does. Well, I suppose we could arrange something. Can’t get into too much trouble if we just fly out for the day.’

‘Three days, darling. Hugh Maddocks is talking about a proper expedition.’

‘Who gave him that damn-fool idea?’

‘I’m just passing on what I’ve been told.’

Cullen slammed down the receiver, and sat drumming his fingers on the table for a while. Then he went round the rooms, failing in the end to turn up either photos or maps of the old mine. Non-plussed and angry, around ten at night, he turned off the lights and went home.

‘They can’t have vanished into thin air’, he said to Woodford the following morning. ‘We keep two sets. Where are they?’

‘Perhaps one of the field teams has them’, said Woodford provisionally.

‘What the hell for? Have you seen them in the field?’

‘I could enquire if you like.’

‘Should damned well think you could. It’s your job to maintain the office properly, and it’s something you’re not doing well. I want that material, and I want it now.’

Fortunately, a call to Posner’s camp at the lunchtime radio schedule brought results, which caused Cullen to phone his wife immediately.

'May be something in the rumours', he said.
'Perhaps Posner really is visiting Tambang Surga.'

'So he can act as guide if he knows the area, can't he, darling?'

'Henshall would be the obvious choice. Same background as Maddocks, so the two should get on.'

'Then send Posner. We don't want our authority sidelined.'

'Ah yes, take your point.'

Cullen was not looking forward to the visit, but he and Sally welcomed the Maddocks and Seybold on the journey back from the airport with an itinerary that had every semblance of a proper investigation. A camp had been prepared for them, and Posner was already in residence. Labour had been arranged through the local police chief, and the authorities had issued permits. Sally took charge of the Kotapalu office when the accountants flew in the following day, and Woodford was asked to confine himself to requisitions. Perhaps it would all

work out for the best, thought Cullen as he, Maddocks and Seybold boarded the helicopter for the mine. These hands-on managers were never as tough as they talked, and Maddocks had no field experience.

It was Cullen, however, who was soon trailing behind the Toronto Director the following morning. Even Posner, who led the way with a local guide, showed an insolent familiarity with the site, which caused Cullen to ask why he'd ever joined the party. All three were unnecessarily hostile, and Cullen resented the patronizing way Seybold kept asking about his duties. 'I get out when I can', he snapped, not only to discourage further questions but because he needed every scrap of energy to avoid falling over. For lunch they could return to camp, he suggested at their midmorning break, since it couldn't be more than a mile away, but to his intense annoyance the party opted to stay put. 'Do a full day in the field when you do get out, don't you, Don?' said Seybold in a voice that was

scarcely pleasant, and Cullen had to agree that indeed he did.

At twelve the guides brewed tea, and then prepared the rice, which the party ate with warmed sardines. Though not an unusual meal, and not something to which he had ever taken exception before, Cullen found the very look repelled him. Even after half an hour's rest, the sweat poured into his eyes, and there were periods of near blackout when he saw objects haloed in shifting lights. A break to this routine was essential, and Cullen therefore proposed some sampling. 'After all,' he declared, 'grades are what's going to be important.'

'I thought your man van Ryssen had done all that', said Maddocks, opening his knapsack to find the report. 'Yes,' he said, 'we're here, number four shaft, and these are his sample lines.' Cullen inwardly cursed the instructions he had given van Ryssen, but suggested that a few check lines would do no harm. There was a long pause. Final-

ly, Posner, with a surly grin, announced that perhaps it wasn't such a bad idea, at which Seybold and Maddocks smiled and agreed.

An hour or so later, as the party scrambled over the tip-heaps with their measuring tapes, Cullen sought to divert Maddocks's attention by pointing to an orchid that could just be seen in the branches high above them, but Maddocks wouldn't be drawn. His face had assumed a grim look of determination, and he was concentrating on marking up the sample bags. Not so tough, are we? thought Cullen. Fortified with this observation, he had hacked his way through to a shaft entrance when Posner appeared and announced that Seybold wanted to get down and have a look inside.

'Does he now?' Cullen could feel the anger boiling up again. 'What with—sky hooks?'

The three men peered through the tangle of vegetation. 'Just a rope I reckon', said Posner.

Maddocks looked at Cullen. 'I think Mike's right. Goes a long way down, but it seems to be dry.'

‘Just how much do you know about sampling old properties?’ said Cullen, struggling to keep his temper. ‘What were you doing when I was sweating it out in the gold reefs of Ghana?’

‘Look,’ said Posner, ‘if you think you won’t make it, I’ll go down. No skin off my nose.’

Cullen was about to retort that Posner could do just that when he saw Maddocks’s hard look fasten on him. ‘No’, he decided. ‘If anyone has to go, I’ll go. Bloody dangerous, but I’ll do it.’

‘Mike will go if you like’, said Maddocks.

‘Just get the rope, would you? We don’t have all day.’

The rope was dragged from where it had been left on the far side of the tip, and Posner tied one end to a nearby tree. Cullen tested the knot and carefully lowered himself through the vegetation until only patches of his khaki clothing could be seen in the shaft. ‘How’s it going?’ shouted Maddocks at the dwindling figure.

‘Tricky,’ shouted back Cullen, ‘not much to get your hands on here.’ He was about to say more when he heard Seybold’s voice talking to the party above, which was followed by Maddocks’s. ‘Take it easy, Don. Just going to see what Mike has found. Be back shortly.’

Thank you very much, thought Cullen. First oblige me to risk life and limb: now abandon me altogether. He continued to lower himself down for a while, taking long rests by bracing himself against the shaft walls. A large shrub appeared. Several times Cullen pushed himself off, swinging over the void, where he could now see the bottom, but each attempt brought him back, scratching his face and arms. He swore loudly, only stopping when he heard movement above. There was no reply to his call for a *parang* to be lowered, and Cullen hauled on the rope to skirt the obstacle. He gave his support another yank, and made a desperate lunge for the bush as the rope went slack. The branches snapped in his hands, and Cullen fell heavily

through, the rope falling lazily after him to the floor of the shaft.

CHAPTER 9

Why Cullen of all people? thought Henshall when the news was given him at the end of the day's sampling. He contacted Kotapalu, and asked Darrell to get through on the aircraft radio, but no one was speaking.

Two days later Maddocks and Seybold arrived at his camp, where Henshall greeted them, provided a brief tour, and left them to their own devices. It was still his camp, he made clear, however, when he found mealtimes had been altered and clothes

put in for laundry. 'Route your requests through me, if you would, gentlemen, and I'll see what can be done.' Maddocks might be a force on the London Board, but here he was a tenderfoot and liability. Seybold's sharp look he ignored. If Sally Cullen continued this way, everyone was wasting their time. The affair with Hartini wasn't going anywhere, and no doubt the holiday they'd booked in Bali would find them with separate rooms.

A strange lull prevailed in Kotapalu. Although there was consternation when news of Cullen's accident was received, and an emergency flight had to be ordered from Singapore, Sally remained calm and sensible throughout. She would join her husband later. He was receiving all possible attention, and there was nothing more to be done at present. Metax had first claim on her loyalties now the auditors had come.

Woodford remained on call, and Sally opened the books for the accountants. They were young men, both on their first tour abroad, who started at eight, went back to the Mess for lunch, and conscientiously applied themselves till five in the afternoon. Only once did they broach the subject of entertainment, what people did with themselves in the evening, but Sally wasn't forthcoming. 'Wouldn't know, Henry', she said to the more outgoing of her investigators. 'Don runs a tight ship. Long hours for everyone.' When the other remarked that it was no doubt easier to get down to work in a small place like Kotapalu, she smiled and fetched the Jakarta office books, stacking five large ledgers on their desks. The men were stupefied, but given no chance to argue.

So far the books were in order, the accountants told her a few days later, but there were some invoices missing. Sally looked surprised, but thought one of the crates of papers she'd ordered hadn't arrived. Yes, that would be it, she told them, and

she'd make enquiries straight away. In the meantime they'd perhaps like to have a break, get together with the lads, as there wasn't much to be done now. She phoned the hospital every day, and Don was out of danger. Both legs were broken, and several ribs, but nothing worse than that. She would go over there shortly, as would Margaret Maddocks.

'The least we can do', the woman told her husband. 'You wouldn't like to be left in a foreign city on your own, would you?'—a comment perhaps on Sally's attitude, which she remarked was difficult to understand.

'There's a lot difficult to understand here', said Maddocks. 'Hardly a happy ship.'

Posner was closely questioned about Cullen's accident, but there was nothing chastened in his manner once back in Kotapalu. He came straight into the room given the accountants, shoved aside several of the ledgers, and sat on the desk. 'You two doing anything this evening?' he said. 'Only I

thought of going down to the local nightclub. Want to give it a whirl?’

‘Possibly’, said one of them, Derek, whose sense of adventure had not exceeded a tour of the local market. ‘Not expensive or dubious, is it?’

‘A thousand rupiahs to get in: about a quid’, replied Posner. ‘Then you pay for drinks.’

‘Most satisfactory’, said Henry. ‘We shall be pleased to accompany you.’

As the two began to make excuses, and experiment with shirts and aftershave, Posner wondered if he’d ever get his new friends down to the place, but eventually, a little after ten, they walked in and secured a small table overlooking the dancefloor. Nothing happened till close on eleven, when the lights dimmed and a woman walked into the spotlight. The band continued to play, until Hartini smiled and took the microphone from its stand. There was an expectant hush, and the woman started to sing, as though to herself, so quietly that heads had to crane forward to catch the words.

The clarinet fell silent and Hartini's smoky voice was all that could be heard. No one moved a muscle until the song drifted away, across the room and out into the warm tropical night. Then the lights went on and there was a roar of applause, which Hartini bowed to, several times, and then quickly left the stage. The audience continued to whistle and clap and stamp their feet, but there was no encore.

The atmosphere had changed. Waiters spun round the room with trays of drinks, the hostesses dragged half-protesting clients on to the dance floor, and everywhere there was an excited bustle of expectation. Even his dour companions were whistling and chattering, their faces wreathed in smiles. 'Wow!' said Henry. 'Where did she come from?' He thumped Derek on the back, and jovially swung round in his chair to start clapping again, one of dozens continuing to do so throughout the room. Posner beamed. 'She'll sing again in a few minutes', he confided to Henry, who nodded his

head and took a beer from a passing waiter, and then two more. Unmasked, Derek bought another round.

Then Hartini was at the microphone again, smiling at her audience, pretending to invite requests. Her dark eyes swept the room, turning from face to face as suggestions were offered. She inclined her head, couldn't hear, couldn't understand. Someone shouted something, a joke perhaps, and she was back with a reply, the smile mocking as the room erupted in laughter. Then she held her hand up, the audience fell silent, and the band started. A great cheer went up as the audience recognized the number, followed by an immense silence. This time the woman's voice paid no attention to the music but assumed a life of its own, swooping on the song and edging the words with a cry so piercing that even Posner felt his stomach contract and every hair stand rigid on the back of his neck. Spellbinding and cathartic, the song rose to its climax and ended. The shock was almost tangible,

and then the applause gathered thunderously and echoed through the room, till everyone was waving their hands in the air, shouting with relief.

Once the hubbub had subsided, Hartini walked between the tables, extending a hand to the many friends who continued to applaud her. To Posner she gave a friendly nod, smiled at his two friends, flicking the long dress behind her as she stepped past. The accountants were astonished. 'You know her, do you?' said Derek, continuing to stare after the woman.

Posner nodded. 'Sure,' he said. 'Goes out with one of the men on the operation.'

'And they . . . I mean these Indonesians like Europeans?' said Derek.

Posner smiled. 'Yep. We know how to treat them. Know what I mean?'

'Treat her all right.' said Henry. 'No trouble there.'

'No trouble at all', agreed Derek, casting an eye round for the hostesses, most of whom were now chatting to the clientele.

'Don't even think about it', said Posner. 'Waste of time these wopsies. Charge you five quid an hour and that's it. Come the end of the evening they disappear. Not even a friendly grope.'

'Had to be a catch somewhere', said Henry. 'Women like that singer don't come cheap.'

'That's where you're wrong, my friend', said Posner. 'The country's full of women like that, sexy women wanting a good time. Married, but . . . you know.'

'Married?' said Derek.

'You don't want some shrinking little thirteen-year old, do you? They marry at fourteen out here.'

'Shameful, ain't it?' said Henry.

'That's why they're fed up, these women', continued Posner. 'Indons are such hypocrites. Woman has to be a virgin at her first marriage, but after

that no one cares. Don't give a toss. Not even the husbands.'

'I know, but married. I mean . . . ' said Derek.

'Wait till you see them', said Posner. 'Don't look like married women, I can tell you.'

'Don't behave like it either', continued Henry. 'You're going to do us a favour, right?'

'Nope. You're going to do me the favour. I've got a friend here, you know . . . ' He gave a confidential wink. 'She's got a couple of friends over from Jakarta staying with her. Every day my friend keeps pestering me to find some company. Can't do anything with them around.'

'You want us to take them off your hands', said Henry. 'Can't be bad, can it, Derek?'

'What you do,' said Posner, cutting across, 'is up to you. If you just want to talk about the beauties of nature, that's all you have to do.' He leant back and beamed happily at his new friends.

'Where do we take them?' said Derek. They won't speak English, and . . . ' He looked wonderingly at his fellow accountant.

'These aren't country bumpkins', said Posner. 'Don't worry about that.'

'I'm not worrying', said Derek, at which the other two burst out laughing.

Whatever misgivings worried him for the rest of the evening, and indeed well into the following day as he saw through the Land Rover windows the respectable women on their way to market or chatting with neighbours in the houses around the Mess, they were nothing to the apprehension with which Derek walked up the garden of the India Hotel shortly after work. Posner and Henry had gone ahead, and were already seated when he arrived. So they're married, he thought, when the awkwardness of introductions was over and he had time to look at the women draping themselves over the metal chairs. They didn't look married, and perhaps not even respectable, though of course he

wasn't to know. One of the women, the one assigned to him, he supposed, took his hand and stroked his fingers, but this only made him feel worse, and he was scarcely aware of the arrangements being made for the evening.

Three of them climbed into one Land Rover and three into the other. Posner's woman slid into the seat between Derek and Posner, extending her smooth legs over the gear stick and revealing bright bikini briefs under a sequined miniskirt. Derek tried to concentrate on the evening ahead, but from time to time looked at the dark mass of hair which escaped luxuriantly from the briefs, and which the woman made no attempt to conceal. He shifted uneasily until the woman caught his glance. With a reproving smile, she took Derek's hand, placed it on her thigh and gave it a sharp smack. After that, pleased and embarrassed, Derek stared out of the window.

The manager of the quayside restaurant pulled out the chairs, pumped up the pressure lamps until

a soft light surrounded the party, and brought them hot flannels to wipe their hands. Even before orders were taken, which Posner organized, a rich smell of cooking came from the kitchen and brought smiles to the happy circle of faces. Derek found he was enjoying himself. Under the table, the woman on his left was resting a hand on his knee, and every so often gave it an encouraging squeeze. On the other side, the woman making up to Henry leant over and exposed her full cleavage, the breasts almost free of their lace bra. Derek stared back, and caught in her eye such a look of conspiracy that it was only another squeeze that brought him into the conversation again. Soup appeared, and as the party occupied itself dipping small china ladles into the noodle-topped bowls, Derek realized with a start how young the women were. Beneath the make-up they were only teenagers, fully developed of course, and no doubt keen to improve themselves, but surely not married women? But what had Posner said? Women got married early

here, as soon as they reached puberty, and these had certainly reached that.

The party found the club much as on the previous night. This time they took a table near the back, out of the glare of the dancefloor. Though the women raised no eyebrows and were served readily enough, Hartini intercepted one of them on a return from the powder room. Taking her aside in full view of the others, she questioned her for several minutes, after which the woman returned to the table with such a vexed and discontented expression that Posner knew they would have to leave. Henry refused, and it was the manager, who had politely returned their entrance fee and waived payment for the drinks, who had to come over eventually and tell them their guests were not welcome.

‘Why’s that?’ said an indignant Henry. ‘Our money not good enough?’

‘House rules’, said Posner.

‘But they’re not bar girls, not competition’, said Derek.

‘Look, you two,’ said Posner, ‘I don’t make the rules. Let’s just go somewhere else.’

‘But we wanted to hear the singer again.’ said Henry.

‘We can come here tomorrow, on our own’, said Posner. ‘Pick the women up later.’

‘So where now?’ asked Henry.

‘India Hotel?’ suggested Derek.

‘Not at those prices’, said Henry. ‘Didn’t you see them?’

‘Look, I’ll talk to the women, and see what they want’, said Posner, throwing a protective arm around the huddle of women and herding them away from the club entrance where they’d been shivering in the night air. He returned a few minutes later. ‘So that’s settled. They’re nice kids. Say they don’t want us to keep throwing our money around. If we get a couple of bottles of something

we can make a party on the beach. It'll be nice down there.'

'At this hour?' exclaimed Derek.

'You're a real bundle of fun, aren't you?' said Henry. 'Let's give it a try. Don't you feel the tiniest bit romantic, Derek, with these beautiful creatures and a whole night of tropical passion stretching in front of you?'

'I feel cold. Expect the girls do too.'

'Then we'll warm them up, won't we?' said Posner, opening the Land Rover door to let his passengers in. 'Come on girls.'

Stopping only to collect a couple of bottles of whisky from a Chinese liquor store, the party headed for the far side of the harbour and then drove along the beach until it ended against tall lava cliffs. There was no one about, and no chink of light from the neighbouring village. The women took off their shoes and ran happily across the sands, which were soft and dry. The men padded after, carrying the bottles and the Land Rover seats that could be

detached. A hundred yards down, where they could hear the sea distinctly, the women stopped in a shallow depression and sprawled out. Seats were scattered and a bottle opened. Derek gallantly refused to take a seat himself, but immediately felt two women nestle up. Who was whose? It was difficult to know now the moon had disappeared, but on his right he again found himself staring down at the pointed breasts he had noticed in the restaurant. The woman nibbled his ear, and brought his hand down inside her dress. Derek awkwardly rebalanced himself, and felt the other woman get up and leave, perhaps to join Henry, who didn't seem to be with them. Posner hauled himself to his feet, picked up the bottle, and gave Derek a cheery nod.

'Well, that's it', said Derek quietly. 'We've lost the others, and the booze, it seems.' The woman rolled over and produced the second bottle. 'Your friend no need drink', she said.

'He may not, but I do', declared Derek, reaching over.

'Mine', said the woman, holding the bottle away.
'Mine now.'

Derek struggled to take the bottle, discovering the small body had now removed its bra and was pressing hard against his open shirt. He reached to undo the fastening of her top, but the woman got to her feet. 'We make game', she said. 'I hide. You search me. Close eyes and count ten. You have drink if you search me.'

'Find, I think you mean', said Derek.

'Find me, find whisky.'

'All right', said Derek good-humouredly. He closed his eyes, counted to ten, and got to his feet. Stumbling over a seat, he struck out in the direction he'd heard the woman go. But it was only the sea he came to, faintly phosphorescent as it rippled and broke in long lines against the beach. He returned, and trod on someone's hand, Henry's he realized, as a familiar voice cursed him. He found his way back to his starting point, and walked towards a clump of small palms. But this held two

figures, he realized, and he had to retrace his steps. He began to feel stupid, and then annoyed. Surely this wasn't the matter-of-fact Derek people knew at home? He jabbed his foot on a sharp piece of driftwood, and began to limp. The moon had reappeared from behind a cloud, but where was the woman? He heard then his name being called, faintly from a low rise of sand, and, shuffling over, saw the woman sitting on a rock, naked and waving the bottle at him. She up-ended it, pouring his precious drink into the sand. He ran over, and saw she had only poured it on herself, over the breasts that impudently offered themselves, and into the dark meeting of the legs. He stared, not knowing what to do, until the woman reached out and pressed his head down on her breasts. He could taste the sharpness of the whisky, and the saltiness of her body, which excited him, so he drank greedily as the woman removed his shirt and then his trousers and underpants. Feeling chilly as the night air whistled over his skin, he buried himself into the slippery breasts, and into the legs as they

closed over his head. Now the two of them were on the sand, squirming about, the sand going everywhere as she struggled and slithered and came in a paroxysm of heaving and gasping and kicking her feet in the air.

Derek was exhausted, and more bruised than satisfied. He lay quiet, watching the woman who was now sitting with her legs drawn up, facing the sea. 'You all right?' he asked. The woman nodded. She got up, gesturing that he should go with her, and walked unsteadily down the beach. The seawater stung his skin, but the shock wasn't unpleasant. The woman sat down and washed herself as the rollers came in and broke against them in ruffles of foam and sand. Then she washed Derek, all over, and pointed up the beach. 'Not go for a swim?' he said, wanting to see the sleek body gleaming like a dolphin in the water. The woman shook her head. 'Dangerous', she said, making a shark's dorsal fin with her hand. Derek smiled, and walked back with

her to the rock where the whisky bottle glinted coolly in the darkness.

As she sat on the rock facing him, waiting to be dry enough to dress, Derek felt a strange affection for the woman, a woman who sat there with a dark pucker for a mouth and a glint of movement in her eyes that he couldn't make out properly—a young, live body breathing in the moonlight and the salt air, just a little girl in truth but at this moment his every embodiment of enchantment. Of course she wasn't beautiful, not like the singer in the nightclub, but she had wanted him, enjoyed him, and wasn't she now resting contentedly in a setting which the lads in the office would never believe, supposing he told them, which he wouldn't, since she was married and then it didn't count. Married, he thought, and shook his head. But Posner was right. Indonesia was a paradise where you could simply take as needed, without all the lying and the unnecessary words he had known back home. The woman stood up and stretched herself, fluffing out

the pubic hair and smoothing her legs. Derek knelt down and rubbed the sand from her feet, from between her toes, which were splayed out he noticed, stubby and muscular. He helped her on with briefs and skirt. She fastened her bra and steadied Derek as he climbed into his clothes, doing up the last buttons on his shirt for him. She gave him her top to hold, signalling that she was still too wet to wear it, and they started back to collect their shoes.

That the others had returned was evident from voices to be heard from the depression that marked their camp. The figures were stretched out on the seats, hardly discernible in the dark, for the moon had gone in again. Derek shuffled forward, looking for his shoes, and stood for a moment confused by the smell of clove cigarettes and the unfamiliar voices. Then it struck him: the boots, uniforms, revolvers in their white holsters. Posner was there, handcuffed to one of the officers. Where was Henry? 'In the police wagon, pal', said Posner, pulling a long face. Derek stood dumbfounded,

watching vacantly as his woman eased on her high heels and sauntered nonchalantly away, the top billowing behind her as she struggled to get her arms into the sleeves. Derek looked despairingly at Posner, but found nothing to say as the handcuffs were slipped over his wrists and clicked shut.

CHAPTER 10

‘Happy now?’

‘Hartini, I’m absurdly happy. You know that.’

‘Then you’re very quiet, my friend, which is not a compliment.’

‘I’m trying to get this thing right’, said Henshall, concentrating on the breakers, which the wind had whipped into threads of silver and green, and at the sky, which hung over in dark tatters of rain cloud. ‘Trying to get beneath appearances, I suppose.’ He held the pad at a distance, and shook his head.

'Peter, just live in it, will you?'

'Maybe landscapes aren't my speciality.'

'Oh you', said Hartini and ruffled his hair. 'Pester some empty-headed little creature to sit for you this afternoon if you must. But talk to me now. Hartini is getting cold.'

'We can go back to the hotel since I'm not doing any good here.' He took a rubber to the clouds and removed some of the grey. 'We'll sit in the café, and I'll draw you a bit.'

'Not when five minutes stretch into one hour, and then another.'

'It takes time to understand the bone structure and get a character.' He held the work out again, and shook his head.

'Is that what I should want?'

Perhaps it was true, he thought. After fifteen months of pursuit and play, Hartini Sujono had finally given the body that he had so long ago imagined. But the reality brought something new—

elation, a deep astonishment, a feeling that she lay around him at the back of his mind, warm and almost tangible in everything he saw. Arriving at the small seaside hotel, Hartini had shown not the slightest hesitation in slipping out of her clothes and stretching out on the bed while Henshall fervently kissed each glowing particle of her. But for long days that was all she had allowed. He had nuzzled her cheek and run dry lips along the neck, the shoulders and the dark aureoles of the breasts. He had kissed and caressed every musculature of the body, the deep cleft of her buttocks, the dry eruption of her sex, each finger and toe, over and over in an eagerness of joy that only grew with the kissing. All this she had suffered happily, closing her eyes and smiling contentedly, as something her due and prerogative. But each attempt to possess had been gently pushed away, with an abrupt sadness he hadn't questioned. Yet last night she had held that beautiful torso over him, and then accepted him with a solicitude that encouraged and finally, even now, smothered and bewildered him.

‘Less brooding, if you please. You don’t have responsibilities. Hartini Sujono knows what she’s about.’

‘Wouldn’t doubt that.’

‘Peter, I’m not going away. You don’t have to worry.’ The smile seemed distant, as though he wasn’t seeing her properly.

‘You’ll be off again, mysterious as ever.’

‘I could still surprise you.’

Henshall put his pad down and looked at her. ‘By living with me, marrying me, something like that?’

‘In the right circumstances.’

‘So it’s trading time again, is it? What do I have to do to get you to say yes?’

‘I am now.’

‘Not a week in Bali. I mean back at Kotapalu.’

‘You’re not in Kotapalu. You’re stuck away in some field camp most of the time, or in the jungle, miles from anywhere.’

'It's the manager's job again. Woman, she is subtle.'

'You could give it a try.'

'Absolutely not.'

'For a few months.'

'No.'

'So after all those sweet words it's still Peter Henshall first.'

'I've seen good men, better geologists than me, come to grief in management. Geology is a full-time job, and painting even more so.'

'Not willing to test yourself? Even for six months?'

'And then another six months, a year—'

'If I live with you.'

Henshall felt the breath leave his body. 'Is that a genuine offer?' he said. 'They haven't offered me the job. Might give it to Posner.'

'Mike Posner's been demoted. He got those accountants deported, and Maddocks sent him packing to the field.'

'There's Woodford. Good fellow, Robert.'

'Talk to Maddocks. They haven't gone back yet.'

'If he was so keen he'd have telexed.'

'They're all piling up at the hotel, and you won't answer them. Invite them here. If you can't get the terms you want, then say no. What's wrong with that?'

'But you would set up house with me, Hartini?'

'I told you.'

Henshall stared at the sea, hearing the breakers falling as though at the far ends of the world. 'Yes, Hartini', he said. 'Please.'

From the moment the two walked through the bar and up to Maddocks and his wife seated at the restaurant table, it was clear that neither party had

come unprepared. Maddocks was initially restrained and formal, addressing her as Mrs Sujono throughout. Hartini gave the expected answers, indicating that for the present she would follow his lead. Maddocks became his Director self, extending compliments to the woman, which were no more than deserved. Her hair, piled high in the Javanese fashion, glowed softly in the light, and showed the small gold-tipped pins that held it in position. Hartini smiled and inclined her head, but then brought to an end any supposition that she was playing the little wife. 'Thank you, Mr Maddocks,' she said, 'I tried not to overdress. You would want to be comfortable, and it gets rather sticky in the evenings now.'

It was the first reproof of the evening, delivered so deftly that Maddocks was obliged to let Henshall descend to the usual commonplaces: the flight over, the hotel, the tours one could take. But even Hartini smiled a little when Maddocks's wife was brought so quickly into the conversation, led on,

her questions turned into comments on the temples, the music, the festivals of the Balinese year. The parties relaxed, and began to enjoy themselves. Maddocks found that he liked this aloof young man who seemed securely at home here. 'That is important', he agreed a few moments later to Henshall's remark. 'The manager is the Company's representative. He projects what the Company wants to be. Margaret, let's talk now', he said, laying a hand on his wife's arm. 'Peter knows why we're over, or he wouldn't have invited us.'

'Hugh, the two of them invited us.'

A shadow of irritation passed over Maddocks's sharp features. 'Let's leave that for the moment. Tell me more of what we discussed at your camp, would you?'

'Which means closer links with the Survey, better representation in Jakarta', concluded Henshall at last.

'Which the Cullens are not furthering?'

'I don't think they see their future here.'

‘Do you?’

‘Mr Maddocks, I am not after the manager’s job. There’s far more interesting work to do. But the staff would support me if I did take the position, and I think Hartini would handle the social side more than adequately.’

‘I thought we’d come to that. Mrs Sujono is a condition?’

‘It’s not an issue’, said Hartini.

‘So we’ll leave it there, shall we?’ said Margaret quickly.

‘I would prefer to discuss it now’, said Henshall. ‘With Hartini present, if you didn’t mind, Mrs Maddocks.’

‘My friend, don’t push it. I will see you.’

‘Possibly not, Mrs Sujono’, said Maddocks. ‘That may not be possible.’

‘Do you have something specific against Hartini?’ said Henshall. ‘That scandal-mongering Iskaq, is it?’

'More Mrs Sujono's husband, wouldn't you think?'

'Mr Maddocks. I'm not married. I lost my husband years ago', said Hartini.

'Misplaced at some point in your singing career?'

'Hugh please!' said his wife, but Hartini's reply came back almost as an afterthought.

'He was murdered. By the army, or their supporters, the men who form the present government.'

'Hartini, we don't need this', said Henshall. 'They'll not understand. And it doesn't matter if they don't.'

'It does to me, my friend.'

'Hugh, should we be having this conversation?'

'Not that I can see. All we ask is for Metax staff to keep their nose out of politics, and get on with their jobs.'

'Like everyone else', said Hartini. 'Who saw nothing wrong. Of course not. Anyone protesting or resisting arrest in 1965 was also in trouble.'

'Hartini,' said Henshall, 'let's talk about something else. They're our guests.'

'As for those who escaped,' continued Hartini softly, turning to the three in turn, 'the lucky ones, who'd once expressed socialist sympathies in some way, but until that moment hadn't been shot or drowned or hacked to death, they were rounded up and imprisoned on the island of Buru. They're still there. There's no evidence against them, so their case can't be heard.'

'I think that's a simplistic account, Mrs Sujono', said Maddocks. 'There were communists, and they did try to overthrow the state.'

'There were many communists in Indonesia, and a few of them did try to stage a coup. Five generals were killed and some scores of people threatened. But the army put down the coup immediately, in a few hours. Most of the communist party

had nothing to do with the affair, didn't know about it, and wouldn't have supported it had they known. Many weren't communists even, but simply had dealings with people who were supposed to be members of the P.K.I., or people disliked for some reason, or had money or property that could be seized.'

'I did read somewhere,' said Margaret, in the strained silence that followed, 'that a lot of people were killed. Hundreds even.'

'A good many more than that', said Hartini.

'Is the figure important to you?'

'Am I still angry, do you mean, Mr Maddocks? Wanting revenge for what happened?'

'Not necessarily.'

'I was angry, for many years. Chan was not simply my husband or business partner. He was the dearest thing I ever had. When he went most of my life went too. All that I had been was simply wiped away, and no one wanted to know. Everyone saw what happened, but they closed their minds,

refused to talk about it, believe their own senses. Those who'd conducted the terror campaign transferred their guilt to us: we had caused the communist coup.'

'Let's not exaggerate matters', said Maddocks. 'It was a brutal experience, but it happens. We ourselves, if this interests you, lost a daughter, Madeleine, our only child, through a car accident. It was a terrible shock, but we have come to terms with it. For months afterwards I couldn't even sit in a vehicle, let alone drive one, but time heals. I don't wish to make light of your troubles, Mrs Sujono, but you will forget.'

'Doesn't do any good to keep dragging up the past, is what my husband means.'

'I mean that it's got nothing to do with the present Government.'

'I don't know that's true', remarked Henshall. 'This lot engineers the bloodletting, and then imposes censorship. That's the difference. You can talk about your daughter to friends, remember her,

place flowers at the grave, but Hartini can't do that. Nor can the millions of other people in this country. That's the crime which hurts.'

'Whatever happened, it's in the past. There's an end to it.'

'Even when the same is happening in East Timor,' said Henshall, 'at this very moment?'

'What are you saying? That we shouldn't make agreements with the present Government', demanded Maddocks angrily. 'Is that what you think, Mrs Sujono?'

'I think foreign partnerships would help. Liberalize, open doors which are shut by history or sectarian interests. But that's only a nightclub singer talking.'

The reproof was gentle this time, perhaps even general in its aim, and the sense of injustice done to so beautiful a creature softened the thoughts of the figures round the table. Hartini was only a few feet from her dinner companions: close and human and vulnerable. For the first time, against his earlier

judgement, Maddocks started to like the woman, this strikingly beautiful woman whom he was now perhaps beginning to understand. There was a quietness now in the restaurant, and the band could be heard playing again.

‘So we understand each another, do we?’ said Henshall after a while. ‘Mr Maddocks?’

‘Let be, I think’, said the man soberly.

‘Yes please, Hugh. We’ll ask Hartini if she’ll sing for us. Would you like to do that, my dear?’

Maddocks watched Hartini come back from talking to the bandleader. The rapport was genuine, he thought, but there was an extra dimension to the woman. Her intelligence was wider, keener than Henshall’s, and she seemed aware of matters that passed him by. But now she was asking, ‘What would you like me to sing, Mr Maddocks?’

‘You’d better sing one of your usual numbers, unless you want to disappoint your fans.’

‘I will sing it for you.’

Maddocks smiled, despite himself: it was difficult not to. 'What do I have to do in return?'

'Call me Hartini', came the reply. 'I'm not known by anything else here.'

Maddocks nodded, and the woman returned to the band.

A dead hush fell on the room, abruptly, as though the volume control had been turned down. There was a sound of chairs being moved, and of glasses being returned to tables, but no one uttered a word. The woman started talking quietly to the audience, casually, without preamble, but Maddocks felt many heads turn in his direction. Then she looked at him and explained. 'This is for you, Mr Maddocks, for your daughter, who died a long time ago. And for everyone else who still remembers someone they lost.' There was no applause, just a sustained silence. The man was annoyed and half exasperated, but the band struck up and Hartini started.

Maddocks was astonished. There was nothing particular about the song, and the words he couldn't understand, but tears came to his eyes and wouldn't stop. He was ashamed and bewildered and didn't know where to look when the song finished and no one applauded. He forced himself to glance at the singer, and then to nod, which she accepted with a slight smile. Maddocks took refuge in his thoughts, the band started again, and his tears were smothered in the approbation with which the audience recognized the next number. Another followed, and Maddocks was gradually left to consider what the woman had meant by the song, or the evening, or perhaps her whole life. The last was a strange conclusion, not warranted, but he was remembering a colleague of his, someone whose unctuous religiosity was a joke about the office, but whose words now seemed apposite. 'We are all God's children, Hugh.' Was that it? Was it this that these young people, infants compared with what he'd seen of the world, were trying to tell him? Beyond all the politics, the scheming, the

timetables, budgets, the getting on, all that now made up his life, there was some twin thread of hope and sorrow common to humanity?

‘Thank heavens for that!’ exclaimed Henshall as the two threw themselves on the bed in their hotel room afterwards. ‘Laid on a bit thick, wasn’t it?’

‘Isn’t it important that people understand me?’

‘Yes of course, darling Hartini, but I don’t know where all the emotion comes from.’

‘I could explain.’

‘Not tonight. Tonight I want not the past, not the others, just you.’

‘Ah that’, said the woman, and kissed him softly before she put out the light.

‘Tell me’, said Henshall carefully at breakfast the following morning, to which they had both come down to at seven, as though by appointment.

'First,' said Maddocks, 'you haven't achieved this position by any skill on your part. Metax needs someone in Kotapalu, and there is no one else available. You have a good reputation as a field-man, but none as a manager. To us you are an unknown quantity. I should personally have preferred an older and wiser head in charge, someone who'll give his full attention to the project, which is why I'm insisting you liaise directly with Frank Norbury. Is that agreed? I do not want to receive letters or reports addressed to me. Understood?'

'Yes.'

'Secondly, your most important assignment is Tambang Surga. As soon as the rights situation is sorted out, and that's something Bob Woodford will do on arriving in Jakarta, I want a proper appraisal of where additional reserves may lie, and the costs of finding them.'

'That would mean going into the old workings, opening them up.'

'Drilling from underground, perhaps. But that's your department.'

'Rather a tall order.'

'There are further difficulties,' continued Maddocks, 'which may hamper the investigation, or make it dangerous. You've heard Woodford's story of the buried gold?'

'Don't know there's much in it.'

'I'm inclined to agree, but other parties may not take so relaxed a view. No doubt the Indonesian authorities will provide protection if need be, since the shipment legally belongs to them, but you do have to be scrupulous with your contacts. Do I need to spell that out?'

'You're talking about Hartini?'

'I'm talking about everyone. Mike Posner, Marinus van Ryssen, office people, camp staff. Keep the Governor in the picture, but no one else. Put everything on a need-to-know basis.'

'Is that necessary?'

‘Thirdly, I want you and Woodford to build bridges to the Geological Survey. See if some deal is possible, but don’t agree anything until Frank Norbury has given written permission. Is that clear?’

‘And the extra staff?’

‘Seybold is sending two of his men.’

‘Already?’

Maddocks’s manner turned colder. ‘Anything else?’

‘The Cullens?’ said Henshall.

‘You’ll have no trouble from them. They’ll be out of the picture for the time being. Six months perhaps.’

‘I can’t turn this operation round in six months. Nor get anything important done in that time at Tambang Surga.’

‘That’s all the time you’re getting. And if your association with Hartini Sujono jeopardizes the

operation, or seems likely to jeopardize it, then I shall act accordingly. You can be sure of that.'

'Through Frank Norbury, I take it?' said Henshall, half smiling.

'Is that agreed?'

'If you will keep to what you've promised, Mr Maddocks, then you will have no cause for complaint from me.'

'Good', said Maddocks, folding the tired look into the note he was starting. 'Now let's get this new sampling strategy of yours on paper.'

CHAPTER 11

A start, thought Henshall after their first dinner party in Kotapalu. The Joharis told funny stories, Woodford recounted his adventures in Jakarta, and Hartini was politely efficient behind the scenes. Only the Iskaqs kept their superior airs, *Ibu* Iskaq insisting they leave shortly after the meal. For others the party broke up around ten, Henshall driving Hartini back to her bungalow and staying till three in the morning.

The office was now a happier place. Henshall worked on his new sampling schedules until Johari put his head round the door and said how much *Ibu* Johari had enjoyed herself last night. She would invite the couple to a special party of her own very shortly. Iskaq didn't appear till late in the morning, but came straight in and sat down uninvited. Henshall put his papers aside and listened politely. A consignment had gone missing. There were difficulties with permits again. The police had impounded another vehicle. 'I'm sorry to hear that', said Henshall.

'It is nothing, young man. The usual irritations. What we cope with every day now.'

'Then I'm sure you'll solve the problems with your usual panache.'

Iskaq looked up quickly and pursed his lips. 'I expect so,' he said, 'but as manager, the new manager here, I thought you might wish to learn more of your responsibilities. Without delay.' He coughed suddenly, not putting his hand up.

‘That is thoughtful of you, *Pa*’ Iskaq, but perhaps unnecessary. I’m always happy to help, but wouldn’t dream of trespassing on what is technically your domain.’

‘It was for your information, Mr Henshall. If you do not wish to learn, that is of course your affair.’ He rose to go, and then paused, adding. ‘There was one other matter.’

‘From my side too. Perhaps I could ask you to hear me out for a moment?’

Iskaq sat down, alert and irritated. ‘Yes?’ he said, spreading his nicotine-stained fingers in the air. ‘You have something on your mind?’

‘I am concerned at the level of administration expenses. It’s in the nature of these little inducements to officials that a proper check cannot be kept on the expenditure, but you can see, totting up the weekly totals’—and here Henshall handed over a hand-drawn graph—‘the levels have increased steadily since we’ve been here.’

Iskaq glanced at the sheet, and pushed it back. 'Obviously,' he said, 'week by week we are spending more on equipment, salaries and so forth.'

'You see,' continued Henshall, 'the levels fall when Mrs Cullen visits. Four weeks ago, for example, the costs of administration were much lower, even though we bent the rules to look after our visitors and get Dr Cullen speedily out of the country.'

Iskaq looked warily malevolent. 'What are you suggesting?' he said.

'Not that there's any impropriety, and we must be realistic. Some little gift or token of esteem is usual for officials, and if a little finds its way into the pockets of the giver, that's to be expected when an hour's flying with the helicopter costs more than we pay our whole office staff in a month.' He paused, gazing amiably at Iskaq, whose expression took on a defiantly dog-eared look.

'Is this taking us somewhere?'

'I'm talking to you because you're the most senior of nationals here, the person I'd want to leave in charge for extended periods.'

'So?'

'With your standing in the town, not to speak of contacts, you will know how to implement a policy that might otherwise cause offence. Which is to keep a note of monies paid out: to whom, and on what understanding.'

'What!' There was no mistaking the anger in the voice. 'Hasn't it occurred to you, Mr Henshall, that if errors can be made in expenses, the same errors might appear in the book?'

'I'm sure they will.'

Iskaq almost exploded. 'So what's the point, young man, apart from causing a great deal of trouble?'

'If the expenses are broken down we shall know if our inducements are good value for money. They'll be less chance of staff being careless with

the amounts if they have to be individually accounted for.'

'Mr Henshall, you have much to learn. As I've said so often to your predecessor, western procedures do not necessarily work out here.'

'Please don't be angry, *Pa*' Iskaq, and do sit down. This particular scheme is not western, but one employed by the Jakarta construction firms, the Indonesian ones. I know because I had one of their managers in here yesterday, looking for work. He would have been ideal, but of course we already have you. I am rather taken by their procedures, however, if only because it inculcates a sense of common purpose and loyalty in the Company. There can be no suspicion that someone is feathering their own nest at our expense.'

'Is this an attempt to dispense with my services?' said Iskaq stiffly. The colour had drained from his skin, leaving an unhealthy tinge to the jowls.

‘Not in the slightest. You have many skills over and above those of manager. But I thought you might like to talk to this man, have him in for a day or two on a consulting basis to get us started.’ Iskaq was slow in accepting the card offered, scowled and then took himself out of the room. As his hand reached for the door handle, Henshall called, ‘Forgive me, wasn’t there something you wished to talk about?’

Iskaq looked at him narrowly. ‘Not for the moment’, he said, and went out.

The counter-offensive was not slow in arriving. Shortly after the mid-morning break the following day, Iskaq appeared with an invitation from the Governor.

‘Does it have to be today, *pa*’?’ said Henshall. ‘We have the end-of-the-month reports to finish.’

‘It is not a summons, Mr Henshall, but a private audience. Quite informal. The Governor would like to know what plans you have for Metax Mining now

you're in charge. So he may provide every assistance.'

Henshall put his pen down. 'Very well. Please tell his office that I shall be delighted to call on the Governor as arranged at three-thirty this afternoon.'

Iskaq nodded, and went out with a notable air of confidence.

A new place, get him to help us find a better office, thought Henshall as he trudged up the sandy path through the great masses of flowering shrubs to the front reception of the Governor's palace. A captain rose from his desk to greet the visitor and conduct him up the three floors of bare concrete to a small antechamber, where he was asked to wait. The door to the Governor's office opened and closed as secretaries and officials came and went, and it was three-thirty on the dot that the Governor appeared to welcome his guest.

'A great pleasure to see you again, Mr Henshall', said the man, guiding his visitor across the corridor to the other side of the building. 'Let us

go out on the veranda. We can be more private there.’ Having installed Henshall in one of the cane armchairs, the Governor put down the bulky dossiers he was carrying, and rang a buzzer. A young man appeared with a tray, poured the tea, and left. Henshall waited for the older man to open the conversation, and found the Governor looking at him keenly.

‘There has been another change of manager, I see. It must be a demanding role.’

‘That I wouldn’t know, sir, having only just taken over.’ Henshall paused, but decided to go cautiously.

‘I was thinking of the Cullens’, said the Governor. ‘Whether I should have the pleasure of seeing them again.’

‘Everyone acknowledges their work here, but it would be to a different role if they returned now.’

‘You are sure of that?’

‘So I’ve been given to understand’, said Henshall. ‘Unless you’ve heard otherwise?’

‘Then we shall see, won’t we?’ said the Governor pleasantly. ‘No doubt depending on whether your changes are effective. Are there many improvements you had in mind?’

‘I’m hoping to decentralize, give more autonomy to field operations.’ Henshall paused, adding, ‘If only to get more time to myself of course.’

‘Your artistic endeavours.’

‘Amongst other things, as I expect you know.’

‘I don’t think I’d take offence, Mr Henshall. You are well liked. Everyone speaks highly of you, and we should be pleased to help in any way possible. Your painting, for example. It occurs to me that you might wish to exhibit in Jogjakarta, or perhaps Surabaya. It is a stated policy of our Government to encourage the arts and, while we must give preference to our own countrymen, I’m sure there would be no harm in stretching a point occasionally. If that interests you I should be happy to put in a good word.’

'That would be kind of you,' said Henshall, 'but not what I had in mind.'

'You are going to tell me about the operation.'

'Our latest report,' said Henshall, 'I don't know whether you'd like to have a preview.' He opened his attaché case.

'No. I don't wish to be impolite, but they're piling up so fast we're beginning to have storage problems. If you will just tell me the latest developments I will make a mental note of anything important.'

'Well, sir, you are familiar with the main objectives of our survey—'

'Mr Henshall, are there any new developments?'

'No.'

'Or any real difficulties?'

'We shall need a larger office shortly.'

'Immediately?'

'In a month or two.'

‘So that is work disposed of. Do drink your tea, won’t you? Have another of these cakes. My wife makes them. You don’t find them too sweet?’

Henshall frowned, but the eyes behind the horn-rimmed spectacles held him steadily. ‘Well, how to start’, said the Governor after a pause. He looked appraisingly at Henshall, and continued, ‘Let me put it on a more personal footing, if I may. How old are you, Mr Henshall?’

‘Thirty-five. About the same age as van Ryssen when he held the job.’

‘You misunderstand me. I’m sure you’ll acquit yourself more than creditably.’ He waved the suggestion aside. ‘I was in fact proposing to give you some advice, on the basis of my own experiences, I hope not too patronizingly.’

‘I should be happy to listen to whatever you have to say,’ said Henshall, ‘though I could give no guarantees as to what I’d do.’

The Governor smiled. ‘I’m not acting as father surrogate. I think we can take it that a man of thirty-

five has seen something of the world. What people say and what people do: those two different things. He is able to exercise judgement in his own affairs, even when they involve matters close to his heart.'

Henshall said nothing.

'I see you can keep your own counsel.'

'Let us hope so.'

'I think you should hear me out. You will recall recent events. Two of your compatriots were deported on my orders. A third was removed from Kotapalu on a request of mine, to which your Mr Maddocks kindly acceded. Anyone who works or lives on this island is bound by the laws of the Republic, which come under my jurisdiction. The orderly running of this Province is something I take seriously.'

'I'm sure you do, sir.'

The Governor's expression tightened. 'I am beginning to see the source of the good reports I have of you', he said. 'Why women find you inter-

esting. There is a good deal of steel behind the quiet manner.'

'I can fight my corner if necessary.'

'Then I personally hope you will not have to. It's a new generation you represent, and I think Indonesia may be the better for it.' The Governor paused. 'But that's not the point at issue.'

'And *Ibu* Sujono is?'

'If you'll allow me, I'll continue in my roundabout way. You have met Colonel Prawoto?'

'Not that I know of.'

'*Ibu* Sujono didn't introduce him at your lakeside rendezvous?'

'In that case, I have.'

'What were your impressions?'

'Pretty experienced and shrewd, I'd have thought, with a good head for detail.'

'Colonel Prawoto played a large part in our struggles with the Dutch. He is a resourceful and

independent man. Many owe their lives to him, as I do.'

'In the war?'

'Did you think a Professor of Jurisprudence would be made Governor unless he'd also taken part in the Liberation?'

'I haven't read much of your history. Perhaps it's not published.'

'It is still being written.'

'Does the abortive coup feature?'

The Governor stopped smiling. 'A place will be found for the communist coup and its aftermath, I imagine. But it will be one that accords with the facts: a sober and properly documented account. Not material for wild speculation in the overseas press.'

'It would be difficult to exaggerate when so many tens or even hundreds of thousands were killed.'

'You have some evidence for those numbers?'

'I did once see a report.'

'You are referring to this?' The Governor opened one of the folders and pulled out a document familiar to Henshall. 'Would you care to look at it again?'

'No', said Henshall, flipping through the pages. 'I don't think so.'

'Please read a little. Tell me which testimonies as a good investigative journalist you have double-checked.'

'My *Bahasa* is not good, and I wouldn't want to get people into trouble.'

'You simply accepted what you read?'

'Clearly the authorities didn't want the information published, or they wouldn't have confiscated the document.'

'Lies are as damaging as truth, wouldn't you say? But let's leave that and review events for a moment. Did you not think your prompt release

after the vehicle accident at Sungei Tuloh somewhat fortuitous?’

‘News travels.’

‘I wish it did, when we’d be spared the bill for our security services. Can you read that?’ He handed over an embossed letter.

‘Some of it’, said Henshall. ‘Says something to the effect that a report on me should be passed through the something channels.’

‘The local channels. Why should this office send out something like that if it already knew, would you think?’

‘So the news got around?’

‘And your friend would get to hear of it, contact Colonel Prawoto, who would call on old loyalties in Jakarta.’ The Governor smiled. ‘I see we’re making progress.’

‘I wouldn’t say so.’

‘Would you care to look at that?’ continued the Governor. ‘You recognize the figure?’

Henshall opened the passport and stared at the photograph as though he were intruding into a life private and closed to him. In some ways he was, for here she looked younger and more trusting. Towards Hartini he felt a sudden surge of tenderness, chaste and protective as though she were his own daughter. He could hardly bear to be parted with the picture, but handed the passport back as casually as he could, avoiding the Governor's eyes, which watched him steadily.

'That is her father's of course. Occupation mining engineer.'

'Yes', said Henshall, verifying the remark.

'Just one more then.'

Henshall picked up the death certificate, and stared. None of this could be true. Not a Captain Templeton, but a plain Frederick Winterton. Not a rubber planter but a mining engineer. Who didn't die in Jakarta, but in Tambang Surga, in 1965, for unspecified reasons.

'An accident, Mr Henshall, in case you were going to ask.'

'Like Don Cullen's?'

'You haven't found out how Dr Cullen came to fall?' said the Governor.

'Why the rope slipped? No.'

'Unless someone helped it to do so?'

Henshall looked vacantly across the gardens to the row of palm trees that fringed the road, through the tangle of buildings that marked the port to the glimpse of sea. He had been a fool, a complete fool. There was a sharp tingling in the back of his neck, and his eyes blurred. No doubt he was colouring, as the Governor was pretending to sort some papers. Mechanically, his gaze travelled from the small buildings, gardens and paddy-field into the jungle-clad slopes of the Baratung Mountains. Another beautiful tropical afternoon, like the countless thousands before it and the thousands to come after. It all seemed pointless: this town, the

Governor's interrogation, these mundane and deceptive lives.

"Hartini Sujono won't be the only party interested", said Henshall, seating himself more firmly in the chair. 'And she would have needed an accomplice, whom you haven't found, or she'd have been arrested.'

'With plans unhatched?' said the Governor. 'Before the gold is found?'

'Look, I have no intention of acting as informer, so perhaps this conversation shouldn't continue.'

'We're asking for your co-operation. We'd like you to explore Tambang Surga, using the information *Ibu* Sujono undoubtedly has from her father.'

'And what happens to *Ibu* Sujono then?'

'We are not stupid. Our only chance is to be honest with you and offer some incentive, some deal for *Ibu* Sujono. Her freedom, if she leaves the country.'

‘She’d do that?’

‘To follow her singing career? Possibly. With the right person she might be persuaded to go.’

Henshall looked angrily at the Governor. ‘I thought I’d been given to understand that Hartini was using me to get at the gold. Isn’t that the case now?’

‘I don’t know motives are always so straightforward.’

‘What happens if I explain everything to Hartini?’

‘It’s important that you do.’

Henshall was silent for a minute or two. ‘And if I don’t co-operate, you’d deport me and arrest Hartini?’ The Governor smiled, but the friendly manner was gone. Henshall turned the matter over in his mind, not finding a solution. ‘Isn’t this all somewhat hypothetical?’ he said.

‘You would find your sudden deportation real enough, but if safety is your main concern, then I’ll

sign the deportation order straight away. No blame need attach itself to your decision.'

Henshall's thinking stopped. 'Rather a one-sided game', he said bitterly.

'Entirely, but you agree?'

'I'll co-operate, as you put it, since I can't see what else is possible. Provided you facilitate matters at Tambang Surga, I'll do my best to find the gold.'

'Thank you.'

'But we should want title to the ground. If we find another ore-body down there, Metax will want to mine it. Is that acceptable?'

'Of course.'

'There are other people I may need the help of.'

'You are thinking of your draftsman, Mohammed Suleiman? No need to look surprised. It occurred to me the position he held during the Japanese occupation might be useful to you. He was Surveyor of Mineral Resources here. Did you know that?'

'I was thinking of Marinus van Ryssen, as it happens.'

'Ah yes.' The Governor got to his feet, and picked up the folders. 'Well, perhaps it will be better to have everything in the open.' He walked to the veranda door. 'You realize he's also an interested party?'

'He's also looking for the gold?'

'His employer, Mr Hua, is. And so is your Michael Posner of course. But you knew that, I'm sure.'

Henshall went to the Mess, and poured himself a stiff whisky. He sat for a while, turning things over in his mind, trying to make sense of the conversation. He took a second glass, and then walked the half-mile to Hartini's bungalow. There was none of the familiar sound of the piano drifting over the garden as he came up the path, and on pushing open the door he found Hartini sat in a chair, glass

in hand and sheet music scattered about. She had made up, unusual for so early in the evening. 'You're drunk', she said sharply as he bent over to kiss her.

'Not enough', said Henshall.

'Come back when you've had a chance to think, my friend. I have a new song to rehearse.'

'The present will do fine.'

The woman glared at him, and Henshall saw a darkness in the eyes he'd only glimpsed before, but which was now fastened on him, with a sharp ring of unhappiness that pierced and unsettled him.

'Now I'm not making any accusations', started Henshall, going to the far side of the room. 'Just a few questions.'

'Not now, my friend.'

'The Governor has shown me various documents which contradict what I'd been led to understand.'

'You'd believe his words rather than mine?'

'Was your father a mining engineer?'

'You take me as you find me.'

'Our meeting in Bali, that was contrived, wasn't it? And getting me to take the manager's job. Another move to get closer to the gold?'

'Get out of my house, Peter Henshall.' The voice was unnervingly quiet.

'Hartini, I'm in love with you. Whatever you might feel about me, doesn't make any difference to that. But I want the truth.' He went up to her. 'Won't you just level with me for once—'

The glass smashed on the ground, and the woman was up in an instant, her face dark with anger. She went to Henshall's portrait, and tore it from the wall. Henshall was appalled as it was also hurled on the floor.

'All right, Hartini', he exclaimed grimly. 'If you want a row, have a row. But not with me!' He walked to the door and threw it open. 'I'll come back when you've recovered your senses.'

‘That will never be’, shouted the woman, adding something he couldn’t understand, in Javanese probably, as Henshall could still hear the harsh syllables as he slammed the door and strode down the path. Wrong, all wrong, said the inner voices, but Henshall paid them no attention as he walked stiffly back to the Mess.

CHAPTER 12

Henshall returned late to the office the following morning, and went round quietly in his usual fashion. Then he sat in his room, attending to requisitions until Johari asked if he wanted lunch brought from the market. The walk would do him good, Henshall replied, and, after a sandwich at the India Hotel, he went on to Hartini's place, finding the bungalow quiet and dark. Henshall knocked again, and tried his key, but the door remained fastened on the mortise. Surprised, he walked over to the nightclub, but the manager wasn't helpful. *Ibu*

Sujono was not in town. No message? asked Henshall. '*Tidak, tuan.*'

It was now two-thirty, and time he went back. What to? Henshall thought aimlessly, now finding himself in the adjoining market. Several shopkeepers recognized him, and called him over, but Henshall didn't buy anything. The air had grown chilly with a coming storm, and Henshall therefore found a small restaurant near the port, ordering tea and a sweet rice cookie. He looked for the sugar, and went to the counter, where he was surprised to find the scrawny figure of Mike Posner behind a partition, deep in conversation with a Chinese couple.

He returned to his table in annoyance. Posner might have leave owing, but Henshall couldn't remember an entry on the office chart. The woman seemed vaguely familiar. The nightclub, he realized: one of the women who occasionally flitted round: a guest, not a hostess, Hartini had once said to his enquiry. A striking creature all the same,

thought Henshall as he looked up to find her standing by his table. At his invitation she drew out a chair and sat down, smoothing her dress behind her. Henshall was amused. How often had he seen that practised gesture in nightspots round the world? He took the matches and lit her cigarette. The woman continued to look at him, rounding her mouth to let the smoke curl slowly out. Henshall waited. His head still hurt, and he was not keen on conversation.

‘You spy on us?’ said the woman.

More than attractive, thought Henshall. ‘You work here?’ he said for want of anything else.

She gave no sign of having heard, but continued to stare coldly at him. Then she leaned forward and remarked, ‘Why no talk before?’

Henshall took the hand offered, surprised to find the handshake firm and protracted. ‘You’re at the nightclub sometimes, aren’t you?’

‘Laila Chow’, came the response, and she blew another smoke ring.

'Well, Miss Chow, now that we have met, what can I do for you?'

'What I do for you. You still see friend?'

'Is it Hartini Sujono you're referring to?'

'Waste time with her. You ask for Laila.'

'I rather thought you were spoken for.' He stirred his tea for a while, waiting. The impudence didn't soften, though there was a hint of mockery in the eyes. When no reply came, he added, 'Where should I ask for Laila?'

Curtly, as though prepared, the woman handed over a business card.

'That's your office, is it?' said Henshall, glancing at the address.

She ignored the remark.

'Where does Mike Posner fit in?'

'You find', said the woman abruptly, and got to her feet. Henshall made a point of not watching her leave, simply transferring the card to his wallet. When he'd finished his tea, however, and gone

round to the partition, the party had disappeared, though Henshall couldn't imagine how.

Ignore them, he decided when he regained the quietness of his office and began to think about Tambang Surga. He went into the drafting office, and began to sort through the map cabinets. 'Are you looking for something, Mr Henshall?' said the chief draftsman, peering up from his work.

'I am', said Henshall, continuing to haul the large maps from their holders and then thread them back.

'Then perhaps I may help you. You will find all the Tambang Surga maps are over there.' The old man pointed to a small cabinet near the door.

'You've reorganized things, have you, *Pa*' Su-leiman? They used to be in the back here.'

'After the visit of Mr Maddocks, the Canadian Director, I took it on myself to have Tambang Surga material placed within easy reach.'

'Did you now. Very sensible.'

'It is the duty of all of us to stay abreast of the Company's needs, is that not correct?'

'Indeed so, *Pa*' Suleiman', said Henshall, beginning his search through the smaller cabinet.

He was halfway through when the old man came over, and stood watching. 'One of my staff will be pleased to help you if you will explain what you are looking for. Underground records is it?'

'Something like that.'

'Then I regret to inform you,' said the old man with transparent satisfaction, 'that you will find nothing of that nature here.'

'Are you sure, *Pa*' Suleiman?'

The man drew himself up. 'We keep a full inventory of maps and plans in this office.' He called one of the drafting boys, who returned with a large ledger. 'Title, date of drafting, draftsman, when borrowed, who by and when returned', he read. 'You may see for yourself.'

Henshall took the ledger and looked through it. 'I'd like to borrow this. Do I need to sign another book to say I've taken it?'

Suleiman drew himself up. 'There is a rule, unfortunately, that this book cannot be taken out of my sight. But I will do a search for you, if you request it.'

'*Pa*' Suleiman. I shall not trespass on your kindness further. But if you would come along to my office you can keep an eye on me while I consult the book.'

Suleiman forgot to smile as he marched behind his new manager and allowed himself to be coaxed into a chair. He sat rigidly throughout the five minutes that Henshall took to go carefully through the entries, his whole appearance speaking indignation, until Henshall silently handed the book back.

'It is as I told you, Mr Henshall. I know my job.'

'You do, *Pa*' Suleiman, and perhaps I should have come to you first. That is what the Governor

suggested. If anyone could track down information on Tambang Surga it would be our chief draftsman, who was Surveyor of Mineral Deposits during the war.'

'During the Japanese occupation, not the war. It was a position forced on me.'

'It was a position you held with every distinction, I understand.'

The old man's expression didn't change. 'I did my best to serve my country, like everyone else.'

'More than most. The Governor knew your credentials immediately.'

'What information were you wanting?' said Su-leiman. He had dropped his irritating 'Mr Henshall', and now looked cautiously interested.

'Maps, sampling plans, production records, assay results. Anything at all.'

'There are records in various places,' said the old man mysteriously, 'which it may be possible to recover. Some may exist as photocopies.'

'That would be very welcome.'

'But they are the property of the Republic. I simply hold them in trust.'

'Naturally. Tambang Surga was the richest mine in Mapura.'

'In Indonesia, to begin with.'

'Then has it not occurred to you that the material deserves something better than preservation? There is a story to tell. Useful lessons to teach, even to mining operations today.'

The old man looked at Henshall through his thick spectacles. 'You are thinking of writing a scientific paper?'

'I am thinking of having a book produced. A handsome edition in *Bahasa* and English. *A History of Gold Mining in Indonesia, with Special Reference to Tambang Surga*.' Suleiman continued to look wary. He was interested, but not yet won over. 'Of course what we write, and I was hoping you might be the senior author,' continued Henshall, 'depends on what material is available. But I'm sure

there'd be a discriminating readership for a proper historical account. How the discovery was made, the struggles to raise capital, sink shafts, process the ore. All properly researched and illustrated with contemporary maps and photographs.'

'I am to write it?' asked Suleiman.

'I should be greatly honoured if you would consider it. With assistance if and as required.'

'My own staff?'

'Your own office, with desk and filing cabinets that could be locked. Plus people to work under you—depending on the size of the task, and how much material there was.'

Henshall looked carefully at the man, and found the proposal had made a deep impression. Suleiman continued to sit silently in his chair, however, giving little away. 'The proposal has been made, *pa*'. It is now your decision.'

'It was a project I had planned for my retirement.'

'Of course, but there would surely be advantages in making a start now. While you still have the energy, and Metax to help you.'

The old routines slowly reasserted themselves. Hartini was always in Henshall's thoughts, and there were long hours when he felt her absence made effort pointless. But slowly the pain sank from sight as Henshall buried himself in the documents that Suleiman brought each day for his inspection, documents that piled up so quickly that another map case and filing cabinet had to be installed in the annexe that Suleiman had chosen as his office. A stencilled sign was fastened to the door: The Tambang Surga Project: Mohammed Suleiman Hatta, Director.

Frank Norbury did not break his journey in Kotapalu, but Woodford phoned early the following week to say the Jakarta visit had been a great success.

'When's title going to be transferred?' said Henshall.

'Soon I expect', said Woodford, his boyish voice bubbling over. 'Frank Norbury was pretty hopeful.'

'We need to know shortly. Couldn't you go round the Ministry and see what other properties may be released?'

'That's not what Frank wanted. Do nothing until the Ministry comes round to our way of thinking. Need us more than we need them.'

'So what's going on now? Those accounts being sorted out?'

'Frank's engaged a couple of bookkeepers.'

'With what instructions?'

'Well, the usual . . .', said Woodford carefully. 'Plus something about avoiding a vendetta. Thinks you may have got it in for the Cullens. That's why there's no investigation of their books, just ours.'

‘It’s our money that’s gone missing.’ Henshall paused. ‘Look, I’ll phone you when I’ve drawn up some expenditure headings.’

‘I don’t think you should, Peter. The Cullens may be coming back. Frank did sort of imply that. Best not create trouble.’

Henshall kept his voice level. ‘I’ll get the details to you shortly.’

So that was it, thought Henshall, putting the receiver down. Frowning, he spent some minutes writing out the message for Johari to phone through, and then took one of the waiting Land Rovers.

He remembered the house when he turned into the street, realizing that a whole year had passed since he’d attended Ermita’s birthday party. The woman herself opened the door, and extended a heavily jewelled hand. ‘Marinus pleased to see you’, she said, and led Henshall through to a room at the back of the house, overlooking the neatly kept garden. The Huas were out, it seemed, and

the two men were spared pleasantries by Ermita going off to make coffee.

‘Set yourself up well’, said Henshall. A shelf was crammed with mining books, and there was a map cabinet by the further wall. Van Ryssen was sitting at a drafting table, adding notes to an overlay in his neat hand. ‘Anything here I shouldn’t see?’

Van Ryssen grinned. ‘Ja’, he said. ‘I have left papers out for you. It is Tambang Surga, no?’

‘Marinus, I’d like to know if you’ll come and work for us on the mine. Consulting.’

Van Ryssen shook his head. ‘That I cannot do. It would be a conflict of loyalties.’ There was still the same stolid expression, but he seemed more approachable.

‘Marinus, there’s nothing you can do with the property.’

‘You do not have title yet’, replied van Ryssen. ‘We must talk about something else. No one has told me the details of Don Cullen’s accident.’

‘Not much to tell’, replied Henshall, turning to Ermita who had emerged carrying a laden tray. ‘Marinus wants to know about Don Cullen, if it wouldn’t bore you?’

Ermita spread her feet in a graceful gesture and smiled as she lowered the tray carefully on to a space van Ryssen cleared for her on the table. ‘Everyone interested’, she said. ‘It is news in town for long time.’

Henshall recounted events as he knew them, and then the circumstances of Posner’s departure. ‘Only I saw him here with a Chinese woman, so he’s also an interested party.’

‘And I work for Mr Hua on Tambang Surga too’, said van Ryssen. ‘That is the problem. He has lodged application for title. Maybe it will not be granted this time, but you will give up the claim eventually, that I know.’

‘Not for years. Wouldn’t it be better to gain more experience of the property first?’

'I cannot give you any material Mr Hua has. Nor tell you anything I may discover while working for him. That would be unethical.' He spoke slowly, translating for Ermita who had drawn her legs up on a nearby chair and was following the conversation carefully. 'You must understand that.'

'Marinus, we've got to get into the old workings, to check the plans, site drill-holes. It'll be dangerous—no one's been there for years—so I need a mining engineer to advise. We're not going to pick your brains, or borrow Mr Hua's information: just ask you to supervise the underground work.'

Van Ryssen shrugged, but said, '*Ja*, well maybe I will talk to Mr Hua.'

Henshall took his leave. Ermita accompanied him to the Land Rover, and asked him to call again. 'Marinus, he need more friends', she said.

'I'd be happy to, Ermita. It's a while since I was here. You'll be having another birthday soon.'

'It is last week, Mr Peter. It also my—how you say?—my engagement party.'

'Engaged, Ermita? Congratulations. Who's the lucky man?'

'You know that. It is not surprise.'

'I'm delighted. Look, can I give you a little present to mark the occasion? It's usual, and I'd like to.'

'That is not necessary', said the woman, smiling. 'But you come and see Marinus please. Be friends with us.'

'Count on it', said Henshall. He drove off, seeing Ermita still waving as he turned the corner.

CHAPTER 13

Two days later Henshall caught up with Posner, and put him on the flight back. 'And that's your last warning', he said, checking the hold fastenings. 'Just get on with the job, Mike.'

The team leader swung the door open to call, 'You'll get yours, Henshall. You hear?'

Henshall closed the door, and gave the pilot the all clear. The helicopter lifted off and headed along the shoreline, rising slowly towards the mountains and the far south where the teams were working.

Seybold's men arrived a week later. Henshall explained the objectives, got Iskaq to hurry through the work permits, and took the men to the field centres, to the camp at Ratau and the Mapura Queen. He spent a week at Ratau, and was dropped back at the ship.

Posner was not aboard when he arrived. 'Working', said Mason, the second pilot, with a knowing air that Henshall didn't like. In fact the whole team was out, explained Rankin, the skipper, as they sat in the mess cabin. 'After the usual panic. You must have put the fear of god in them.'

'Hope so', said Henshall.

Rankin pulled beers from the fridge and the two went up to the foredeck, in the shadow of the helicopter, on which the engineer was working. There was a sharp choppiness to the water, and the clouds half blotted out the Baratung Mountains, which rose over the coastal swamps as a thick line of clouds, blue-grey in the distance. 'Lucky to have made it when you did', said Rankin, knocking his

pipe on the side-rail. 'Better put your feet up, son. No one's doing much today.'

'Where's Posner?'

'Out with the newcomer. Working somewhere over there.' Rankin pointed to the nearby swamps.

'Our good team leader Sjahrul holding his own?'

'Against Posner? The man's a law to himself, take it from me.'

'I had noticed,' said Henshall, 'but at least they're back on schedule. When's the first party in?'

'It's all marked up on the chart, according to your instructions, son.'

'I'll take a look before lunch. Just one point: would you mind not calling me "son"?'

"Governor" suit you?'

"Peter" would do.'

Rankin tipped his cap, and stuck the pipe back in his mouth. He liked this superior young man, but didn't fancy his chances. Guess he'll wise up in

time, he thought, and clambered down to his cabin for the midday radio schedule.

Lunch was a brief affair, just captain, pilot, engineer and Henshall, but it was with some annoyance that Mason finally laid aside his paperback and attended to Henshall's questions.

'How do I know?' he said. 'If it's marked on the map, that's where I dropped them.'

'You couldn't have dropped them in thick jungle, and clearings don't make themselves. Wasn't there a village or something?'

Rankin, who had been following this exchange at some remove, unscrewed the whisky bottle and said, 'Probably some logging company.'

'Wrong type of timber. And you'd never get a road in there.'

'Then it's a mystery', said Rankin. He filled his glass and handed the bottle over.

'Not for me, and especially not for our pilot.'

'What's that?' said Mason.

Henshall took the bottle away. 'I need some flying out of you.'

'The hell you do! Not in this weather.'

'When men are out in the field you'll give it your best shot.'

The two stood facing each other. Rankin was surprised at Henshall's line, and revised his opinion. He shrugged, put the unlit pipe into his mouth, and locked the bottle away. 'We'll have one when you get back. Better go and see what's eating your boss.'

'We'll go when I say we go', said the pilot.

'Some time this afternoon please.'

Mason resumed his reading. Henshall got toggled up and went on deck. Occasionally he glanced up from his report to view the weather, which seemed only to be worsening, though there were still openings for a determined pilot.

Rankin joined him. 'Important to you?' he said at last.

Henshall didn't reply.

'Right you are', said Rankin and relapsed into silence.

'Think I'm making an issue of it?' said Henshall.

'I can't recall anyone else talking to Mason like that. But if that's what you want, that's how it's going to be, though it's nasty ground out there.'

'We came over the swamp as we flew in', said Henshall. 'Tracks everywhere. Elephants from the size of them.'

'Keep Posner on his toes', said Rankin.

'They're not the docile creatures you see in the zoo.'

'Just remember that a ship without Posner is a ship without trouble. No one wants him back in a hurry.'

'Dare say', said Henshall, and went back to his notes.

It was four-thirty before Mason took off, the latest he could leave and still return by dusk. The

helicopter rose awkwardly, hung in the air, and then lurched over waters that were now decidedly choppier. Henshall sat next to the pilot, peering through the rain-spattered bubble; the engineer clung to a large pile of supplies in the rear. Outwardly, for the first twenty minutes, the trip went smoothly, Henshall taking his bearings from the twists in the river that appeared in the cloud gaps below. It was difficult navigation, needing all his concentration, and he knew the pilot was being obstructive. Henshall hung on, repeating instructions, correcting the flight path, returning again and again to the spot marked on the map. Then they saw the clearing: an irregular area of trees uprooted and flattened, with several paths meandering away.

‘Is that it?’ said Henshall over the intercom. ‘Do a low sweep, would you, and see if anything’s moving.’

Mason dived, did a steep roll, and brought the craft up so sharply that the engineer swore as the

rucksacks fell on him. Henshall grabbed the photos and gave a different bearing, repeating it as Mason began another sweep of the area. 'There's nothing down there. Go off north now, about three fifty.'

The helicopter skimmed the tree canopy until Henshall leant over and said, 'Take it up, Mason, you're too low!' The pilot ignored instructions and started instead to weave through the trees.

'Your last warning, Mason. I'll have you fired if you go on like this. Take it up!' Henshall was about to repeat the threat when the branches fell away, and they saw Posner and the Australian on a small island in the river. The two men were waving frantically among yellow smoke from a flare that rolled out of the surrounding undergrowth. As Mason levelled the craft, and started his descent, Henshall marked the position on the photo. The engineer was prodding his shoulder, however, and Henshall looked up to see elephants massed on the far bank and making short forays towards the men.

Mason was swearing into the mike, the veins on his neck swelling as he tried to land the craft on an up-ended tree. The support gave way, held and slipped again as the men ran to the machine, climbing to get in.

‘Get them off!’ shouted Mason.

‘How many can you take?’ said Henshall.

‘Tell them to get the hell off!’

‘Mason, we have to get them out. We’ll jettison the rucksacks.’ He motioned to the engineer, who dropped out the items before Mason tried again.

‘One!’ he shouted. ‘There’s only lift for one.’

‘I’ll get out and let these two in’, said Henshall. ‘You take them on, and then come back for me. If I’m not here I’ll be downstream.’

‘Do it!’

‘Stay with me while I sort through the rucksacks. The noise will keep the elephants back. I’ll give you the thumbs up sign when I’m ready.’

‘Get out!’ shouted Mason.

Henshall lowered himself, helped the two men aboard, and started searching through the rucksacks. The matches he found in a side pocket, but was still looking for the radio and iron rations when the helicopter roared away, spiralling up through the trees. Henshall glanced over. The elephants hadn't moved. Quickly, he poured out the contents of another rucksack, and sorted through. Yes, that was the radio, done up in its polythene bag. He glanced up again, and saw a bull elephant halfway across the river. As Henshall straightened up, the animal gave a sharp whinny and lumbered forward. Henshall cursed, and crawled on his stomach to the water's edge, and slid into the water, which immediately swept him away.

He was swimming, but in difficulties. Behind him, glimpsed at intervals through the muddy water, the first elephant had got to the island and was stamping around. Now there were others, pushing forward as though to head him off. Henshall kept his head down, closing his eyes and holding his

breath until his lungs wouldn't take any more. His head bumped against something solid, which was the bank, he saw, a hundred yards from the animals, which were now all over the river. Henshall remained submerged, checked the radio was still with him, and carefully pushed off.

The trees closed in. The river narrowed and churned more swiftly. In places Henshall was sucked deep into the boiling torrent and he knew that a collision here, the slightest impact against a rock or tree, would be fatal. Exhausted, fighting for breath, he made a determined push for the bank, pulling himself up through the sticky clay. A grotesque tracery of aerial roots hung down over acres of gleaming mud, barring all movement. Henshall stopped, resting against a buttress of roots, and looked into the darkening evening sky. He couldn't hear anything, and his watch said five-thirty, which was late to be flying. The water was rising swiftly. He churned through the mud to make a reconnaissance, but there was no getting past these mon-

strous trees, and the river was too dangerous to risk a second time.

Henshall dragged himself on, hacking with his *parang* through the screens of hanging roots. He could hardly see in the gloom, and soon it would be completely dark. He skirted the water's edge for a while, sinking in places up to his knees, and then found a small tree leaning over the river. Carefully, his boots slipping on the small footholds, he hauled himself a few feet above the river that swirled and brimmed more turbulently than ever. What seemed hours went by. There was little to be seen, except when the moon showed for a few minutes, lighting up a vast mass of brown water that was heaving at his refuge and would soon uproot it. From time to time he saw the dark masses of trees emerge from the darkness and sweep heavily past. Finally, closing his mind to the consequences, Henshall leapt for the next passing shape. He hit the trunk, and hung on desperately as it sank, twisting beneath

him. The tree slowly rolled over, and then carried him on.

At first he was too aware of the danger to think much, but as the hours passed, and he drifted from one side to the other of the river, sometimes spinning round, sometimes being swept into long runs with the current, but remaining afloat and unharmed, he began to take an interest in the journey. Dawn was in its first splendour, and around him the forest loomed up in brilliant washes of colour, each spray transparent or crisply silhouetted. He could see the extent of the flood, the large areas of jungle on either side that glittered in the early light. Several trees swept past, and on one sat a half-drowned monkey, its fur matted, and a sad, woebegone expression in its dark eyes. Henshall whistled, but the animal bared its teeth and turned away. He concentrated on the scenes that widened at each bend in the river, and it gradually became pleasant to drift along in this fashion, the air still

chillier than the water, but beginning to warm up as the sunlight glinted through the trees.

Henshall would need a pick-up place, and as if on cue a log-jam came into view, the trees wedged securely into place. On to this floating platform Henshall clambered, and then sat for several minutes reliving his escape. The *parang* was in its sheath, but the matches were wet and the radio only partly working. He was many miles from the previous landing place, but still in clear view of any passing helicopter. Indeed, shortly after nine, he heard the distant drone, and sat down contentedly, his clothes almost dry, as the helicopter began its search around the landing place. It was a brilliant morning, clear and sunny, and Henshall eventually caught sight of the craft, a tiny coloured speck against the blue sky.

At last Henshall realized it was not coming his way, but heading upstream. That fool Mason, he thought. After an hour or so the drone receded, and Henshall knew the craft had gone back to the ship.

Be out again shortly, he told himself, once the other party had been picked up. The hot sun had now dried the matches, and Henshall made a small fire, heaping wet leaves on the blaze as the welcome sound returned. He smiled thankfully as the helicopter turned downstream and finally came into view. It was unusually high, he noticed, but there was no ignoring the great plume of smoke that rose between the trees. When the craft didn't descend, Henshall tried the radio. There was no reply. Henshall checked his controls and tried again, repeatedly as the machine slowly disappeared. Angrily, Henshall sat down for the return visit. Two hours later, the helicopter reappeared, flying higher than ever, and disappeared for the day.

Henshall now began to think. He couldn't stay on the log-jam, which another flood would turn into a rolling mill, and the adjoining ground was flat and marshy. A tree it would have to be, he decided, and after a short search came across a fallen trunk, the dead branches trailing over the ground. Nearby, on

the logs, he built a shelter and rough platform of branches, connecting his camp to the tree by lianas to guide him in the dark. That done, with his watch showing nearly five, he turned his thoughts to food. The water was still muddy, and, though he prodded the shallows with a sharpened bamboo, nothing came of his efforts. Tired and hungry, he took himself to bed, heaped up the leaves for warmth, and fell asleep.

It was daylight when he woke. Though there was no sound yet of the helicopter, his first concern was to rebuild the fire. Then he tried fishing, successfully at last. The minnows shrivelled over the flames, but were crisp and painfully sharp in his mouth. After that, his limbs aching, Henshall slowly came to life. The helicopter search would be serious now. Yesterday they may have meant to score, but no one would leave a man out for a second night.

Towards evening, after a day almost identical with the last, Henshall accepted the obvious. For a

time the resentment welled up, but then it hardened into determination. He would need a boat or raft, something to take him to the coast but light enough to carry over obstacles. His head full of schemes, Henshall turned in under his makeshift shelter and slept fitfully until dawn, when he felt the trees again shifting uneasily. Another flood, he wondered, but the logs settled as Henshall dressed, caught some fish, and got to work. The helicopter flew over several times without stopping, despite the fire that poured dense smoke into a wide belt of trees, but Henshall hardly looked up. He tried out his raft in the late afternoon, made some adjustments, and embarked the following morning.

The first hours were easy and he didn't need to paddle. The current bore him quietly along, across an unruffled surface mirroring the foliage that reached down to the water's edge. Lianas hung over in knotted clusters and snatched at his hair. Small trees and bushes thrust out their masses of leaves, sometimes with great spikes of flowers,

making short stretches heavy with scent. He floated on for hours, past green thickets that gave off a languid odour of stifling vegetation, across shimmering sheets of water dimpled with rising bubbles and green crusts of algae, to quiet pools where reflections of sky and trunk and foliage lengthened around his craft. He remembered his boyhood, the quiet nature that had caused him to think and make a world for himself. Now that world was returning. He had found his kingdom, with this woman and this operation. He could see a dozen ways to paint the scenes that stretched before him at each bend in the river, and he was happy.

The river slowly widened and, as it meandered closer to the sea, Henshall supposed the channel would deepen and the current quicken. But by afternoon the opposite was happening. The river began to spread lazily into clay-lined channels, or lose itself in ragged screens of mangrove swamp. Sometimes he had to get out and carry the raft over reaches of shining mud, sinking up to his

knees, each step an effort. For these stretches the raft provided a base, and Henshall developed a technique of ten steps and rest, five steps and rest, long rest: start again. Of course it was the tide he had to wait for, and he sat for several hours becalmed in the shallows, watching the grey water roll in.

Night came but Henshall pushed on, resting on the raft for an hour or more at a time. Sometimes he fell asleep, and woke uncertain where he was. The swamps rose and twisted out of sight, heavy with aerial moss and spiky shadow. At times he was staring through the branches at the sky, lying on his back, the soft mud sucking at him, telling him to lie still and give up the struggle. Surrounding and encumbering, it was also Hartini drawing him in, her body extending and melting, clutching at him as the satisfaction came, and then more fully until he lay in the wet collapse of limbs. Then it would be morning, and cold and wretched, where in lucid intervals he stabbed at fish, and ate them raw,

unable to use the matches, if he could now find them in his torn clothes.

He had no fear, only a realization that he was growing weaker. For most of one morning he had to retrace his steps when the channel ended in a tight wall of mangrove. For hours he watched the tide flow, dropping leaves into the water and noting their speed. The water grew saltier, less safe to drink, but deeper at last, the channel wider. Finally he was at the coast, breasting the waves, launching the raft and then floating wherever the current took him. Only he shouldn't be drifting, he realized, not if he wanted a fishing village, and laboriously he turned against the longshore current, away from the muddy estuary waters. Another long day, and Henshall was paddling on into the night, when it was cooler and more mysterious, his strokes leaving threads of phosphorescence in the water. He saw lights, thought himself mistaken and saw them again. Wearily he paddled towards them, stumbled

up the beach, and collapsed as his strength finally gave out.

CHAPTER 14

Three days into Henshall's enforced stay at the village, a police officer called, followed by a military jeep and a small escort. A crowd of villagers saw the *orang putih* off, the children giggling, their parents presenting him with small packets of rice for the journey. The route back to the Ratau base camp was difficult, by steep mountain roads, but news had gone ahead, and a small group made a welcoming party the following morning. Camp staff, the *chamat* and police chief posed for photographs by the unshaven *tuan besar*. Henshall organized

an impromptu lunch, and took the chief pilot aside. 'Just get Mason off the operation as soon as possible, when everyone's in from the field.'

'Need authorisation from Singapore, but that shouldn't be a problem, partner.'

Over dinner that evening Henshall gave a curiously vacant account of the incident. The jungle gets to you, he said: the monotony, the heat, the exhaustion. Darrell didn't interrupt, and only from the new Australian member of the team did Henshall catch a look of disbelief. He wasn't pressed for details, however, and work continued. Henshall, however, grew angrier as the days passed. Out in the field he kept thoughts to himself, but in camp the images of Mason and Posner interfered with his painting, and he walked restlessly about, self-absorbed and resentful.

What action to take was unclear even a week later, when he made his aerial inspection of Tam-

bang Surga. The property emerged from the surrounding jungle just as van Ryssen had described it: the head-shafts, the adits, the tip-heaps. The mine buildings were correctly shown, all of them, though swallowed up by jungle or partly converted into the native village. But what was absent from van Ryssen's map, a striking omission, was the narrow-gauge railway, which showed clearly as it twisted up the valley and into the tree-covered hinterland. Henshall and pilot followed its course until a marshalling yard came into view, from which an ore-chute and overgrown track led to an adit, a small entrance some distance up the hillside. 'Could you land there?' asked Henshall, pointing to an area concreted over.

'No sweat', said Darrell. 'Close down?'

'About a couple of hours.'

'Keep happy', said the pilot and started flicking off the switches.

Henshall walked across the railway line and started up the hillside, finding the going steeper

than he'd expected. He climbed slowly, hauling himself up the ore-chute that ran over his head but supported by a trellis of metalwork. Then he heard the helicopter coughing into life. He hadn't been away that long, only forty minutes, Henshall saw from his watch. Now the helicopter was starting its warm-up routine, and a few minutes later the note dropped as the craft lifted off.

He heard the helicopter go over and hover, no doubt by the old adit, which was still a long way up the hillside. There it waited for several minutes before starting slowly to return. Frowning and annoyed, Henshall clambered up one of the struts, and pulled himself into the chute. Squinting through the down-draught he could just see the pilot's expression as one skid rested on the chute and the main rotor clipped the overhanging foliage. Henshall motioned him to pull away, but again Darrell shook his head. Henshall cursed and climbed forward, painfully over the rusted plates until he could open the helicopter door, and slide in

to a seat. For several minutes he sat there, quietly catching his breath as the craft swung back towards the village. Then he said, 'You trying to do me in?'

Darrell nodded towards the corner of the aircraft bubble. The perspex had cracked, and there were deep scratch marks near the door.

'Handy', said Henshall, still out of sorts.

'That was our furry friend', said the pilot. 'About the largest and meanest-looking critter of a tiger you'd ever want to see.'

Henshall turned to look at the pilot, but he was speaking the truth. Something had certainly put the wind up him.

'Came to save your hide.'

'I guess you did', said Henshall slowly. 'Owe you one.'

'I reckon you do', said the pilot.

Over the weeks that followed, as team members returned to Kotapalu for leave, Henshall had them into the office, one by one, and took statements on the events surrounding his jungle trip. It was clear from the first what had happened, but Henshall carefully checked and double-checked their accounts. Then he deliberated, finally deciding to call Posner in. No hope, said Rankin over the radio. Henshall asked to speak to the man himself, and a few minutes later Posner's surly voice came on. Henshall repeated his instructions. Posner wasn't going anywhere. Henshall repeated his instructions. The man laughed. 'This is your last warning, Mike. Either come now, or you'll be dismissed. Understand?' An obscenity followed. 'Mike Posner, I'm obliged to tell you that you've been fired. I want you off this operation in twenty-four hours.'

Henshall completed his report and sent it to Kuala Lumpur. When no reply came, he phoned Norbury.

‘Got your screed’, said the voice. ‘A note’s in Toronto.’

‘My problem currently is that I can’t get Posner off the ship. I can order the captain to bring the Mapura Queen up to Kotapalu, and have Posner manually ejected by the port officials, but that’s over the top.’

‘No, I wouldn’t do that, my boy. Not for the moment.’

‘Are you saying that you or Head Office won’t ratify my decision?’

In the silence that followed Henshall could almost hear Norbury composing his thoughts. ‘You have rather exceeded your authority, haven’t you?’ said the manager. ‘You didn’t clear it with me—yes, I know the reasons—and we don’t have Toronto’s response.’

‘Are you saying my authority wasn’t on the line?’

‘Only that we should wait. Peter, my directive is to take no further action until I write formally. Is that understood?’

'Perfectly.' Henshall put the phone down and swore under his breath, carrying his bad humour into the evening when he went to the Huas for dinner. Van Ryssen eyed him cautiously as if suspecting something, but left Ermita to explore matters.

'Not that it would be the same tiger that attacked Marinus of course', said Henshall finally.

'There are many tigers in Mapura', said van Ryssen.

'Not that go for you. This one threw itself against the helicopter bubble, and almost got the pilot.'

Van Ryssen seemed unconcerned. 'Tiger stories are like anglers' stories, I think.'

'Then you can lead the party when we go in.'

'That is joke, eh?' said Hua. 'Very good, Mr Peter.'

'I do not play the hero', said van Ryssen. 'It is not a good area, that I know.'

'Is that why you didn't show the railway on your map? Or the area it goes to?'

Van Ryssen went on with his meal.

'Marinus, you weren't in the Surga mine area. That's not where the extra samples came from, the twenty-eight shown on the stubs that didn't go through our lab.'

'I wrote my report and that is all I must say.'

'Ermita, you won't mind me borrowing your fiancé this evening, will you?'

The woman looked at her father, who shrugged his shoulders and reached for the chicken dish, which was rescued by *Ibu* Hua and passed on to Henshall. 'My wife always think you need fattening up', grumbled Hua, taking it back. 'Mr Peter please, why you not spend happy evening here?'

'Because I'm going to commit a cardinal sin and show Marinus some of our work, without that disapproving old cuss *Pa*' Suleiman barring the way.'

Van Ryssen understood, at least partly, when afterwards in his office Henshall took out section after section through the old mine, pointing to the workings and the pattern of grades that was slowly being assembled from the assay returns. 'I did not think you had this information', said the Dutchman when the two were sat staring at the great heap of papers on the drafting table.

'And we'll publish it eventually. Might even get the Indonesian authorities to finance the book.' Henshall's good humour began to return. 'They won't see the pattern that we do.'

'That is so', said van Ryssen.

'Come on, Marinus. We've both been in this business long enough to know what I'm talking about. The grades, the controls on mineralization: figured those out, have you?'

'It is standard', said van Ryssen. 'The best grades are on the acid-basic contacts, where these are cut by north-east trending faults. The Dutch knew that.'

'What else?'

Van Ryssen shrugged and picked up the sections again, turning them around. 'Nothing I can see.'

'Why do you think I had the arsenic done?'

Henshall unlocked a drawer and pulled out several small sections. 'That's the gold on arsenic ratio', he said. See anything?'

'They are different.'

'There are several patterns in fact. You have several phases of mineralization, and the best grades are where they intersect.'

'Maybe that is so.'

'And you can map them, from underground', said Henshall. 'That's why I'm showing you this, why I want you down there.'

'If I do not want to go?'

'Marinus, we've got title. Bob Woodford phoned this morning. Tambang Surga is legally ours.'

'Ja', shrugged van Ryssen. 'Okay, I ask Hua.'

‘Look at it, Marinus’, said Henshall some days later, pointing to the sheets they’d unrolled on the floor of one of the huts at the mine village. ‘Here we have the old Dutch workings, under the hill and stretching to where we are now. That’s about three miles by four. Easy to get to, but no security. Or there’s the Japanese area, another two or three miles further east, along the rail link. We could use the road, and get water in, but this is what the villagers call the tiger area, and the animal means business. So I think we ought to consider the ground between. We could fence off the area, build a decent camp and still have access through the main adit that comes out there.’

‘And for supplies?’

‘The road would have to be extended, and water pumped from the river in several stages. But that would be my choice.’

‘*Ja*, it is a new area.’

'Too much blood in the old mine area. The villagers don't like it, and even old Suleiman won't talk about what happened. No Japanese records, he says.'

'Is that true?'

'That he hasn't got the Japanese material? I don't know. He may have sold a few on. But none of his maps show the Japanese shafts, and there's plenty of those about.'

'And miles of underground working. It will be a big job.'

'If you can suggest which areas are safe, I'll get the Indonesians to map them properly. Remember I don't like it either. I've worked in some rough areas, some grim old sites in Peru and Bolivia, but this is something else.'

'So you know?'

'A job's a job, and at least Captain Mochtar isn't so obnoxious now. Perhaps the Governor's got to him.'

'He is biding his time I think.'

'We'll do things in stages. If Rick will fly us over, we can start marking out the site.'

CHAPTER 15

'The camp is finished, or almost so', said Henshall a few months later. 'Twenty-seven buildings. But we do need security now.'

'To protect what, Mr Henshall?' said the Governor, gazing at the tall figure in field clothes standing out of place in his neat office. 'You haven't found anything.'

'We're making progress. Just a matter of working out which sections were open at the time.'

‘Supposing they didn’t open a closed section and cement it over again?’

‘A few troops would be a wise precaution.’

‘You still have no idea how close you are to the gold?’

‘No, we do not’, said Henshall. ‘Unless you think Hartini Sujono would help.’

‘Is that what you want?’ He smiled at Henshall’s irritation. ‘Well, perhaps it would do no harm. I will give you an invitation.’ He walked over to extract a folder from a white filing cabinet, and then wrote a few words on official notepaper. ‘Just present this when you go in.’

‘The *kraton*, the old palace at Jogjakarta?’ said Henshall frowning. ‘Doesn’t she have a place somewhere?’

‘You wish to cause even more trouble?’ said the Governor as he settled himself behind the desk. He took off his glasses, and leafed through some papers. ‘Still here, I see, Mr Henshall’, he said after a while. He looked up with a bemused expression.

‘Very well. Hotel Asia will be more intimate for you.’ He wrote the address on a slip of paper, and handed it over.

‘Thank you’, said Henshall, keeping his voice level. ‘I expect the flights are rather booked at present, but I’ll get over there shortly.’

The Governor rose to his feet. ‘Your ticket and booking will be with you this afternoon. I wish you a pleasant trip.’ He rang the buzzer, and an official appeared to escort Henshall from the palace.

Henshall brushed aside Johari as he came through the office, and went directly into his room. Neither of his visitors got to their feet, and Henshall was a moment collecting his thoughts.

‘Reckoned we should pay you a visit, since you haven’t taken up Laila’s invitation’, started Posner.

Henshall was furious. He’d had a hard time with the Governor, and now there was the impertinence of these two. ‘Decided to face the music at last, have we, Posner?’

‘Look here, sunshine,’ said the man, placing hands on thighs and grinning, ‘we’ve come to make you an offer. About Tambang Surga, so you’d better listen.’

‘There’s nothing to talk about’, said Henshall.

‘You need to wise up. You find the gold, but who keeps it?’

‘Indonesian Government.’

‘Ten million dollar’s worth? Do us a favour. Met-ax would keep it, or the Japanese would put a claim in. Everyone wants to get their greedy little mitts on it.’

‘Not my concern,’ said Henshall, ‘so if you’ll excuse me—’

‘They kill many people before’, remarked Laila. ‘What difference you make?’

Henshall ignored her.

‘Look pal, think about it’, said Posner. ‘You talk to Hartini Sujono, and come to see us.’

'We wait for you', repeated Laila. 'You see friend tomorrow in Jogjakarta.' She smiled quietly and got to her feet.

In exasperation, Henshall watched Posner follow the woman out, across the forecourt and over to a parked vehicle. Then he closed his office door and sat at his desk, only looking up when Johari came in to hand over his airline ticket. 'Special delivery', said the man.

The flight to Jakarta and on to Jogjakarta was uneventful, and Henshall took a taxi from the airport, reaching the hotel at noon. A matronly woman took his particulars, and got him to sign the register. Henshall ran his eye down the signatures, but there was no sign of Hartini's. He asked if a friend was staying at the hotel, an *Ibu* Hartini Sujono, but the woman didn't understand. '*Tuan mau makan sekarang?*' she said. '*Boleh lihat daftar makanan, ibu?*' replied Henshall politely. But there was no menu, and Henshall opted for soup and noodles at

a street stall. Once he'd found it fascinating—the vendors shouting their wares, the peasant women carrying fruits to market, the dogs and small boys and trishaws energetically bowling along—but those days seemed distant now. On impulse he went into a stationer's, and bought a pad of unlined paper and some pencils. That's what I should be doing now, not this insane management, he thought as he settled in a cheap restaurant. He was out of practice, and from the first sketches turned quickly over and began again. A small girl came over to stare at him, her large eyes motionless as she watched her features taking shape. Henshall grinned, and with a flourish handed over the sketch, which was seized upon with pleasure, the girl running off excitedly to show her friends.

It was not a tourist event, Henshall realized on reading the invitation again, but a formal wedding. He dressed quietly and presented himself to officials, who led him to an inner courtyard where rows of chairs had been set out around a raised plat-

form. His appearance, the only European among the Javanese guests, attracted little interest, and Henshall returned the smiles of people threading past. A half hour went by, and still the nearby seat remained unoccupied. Where was she? Then a small, energetic man sat down and looked at Henshall in irritation.

‘Governor Nogroho,’ he said when introductions were over, ‘he sent you, did he?’

‘Gave me the invitation’, said Henshall.

The man turned round to acknowledge some acquaintances, and then transferred his attention back to Henshall. ‘And what was it you do?’

Henshall explained.

‘Worth it, is it, to have our lives turned upside down for that?’

Henshall smiled politely. ‘We are constrained by Indonesian practices in ways we wouldn’t be anywhere else. I can’t even travel around without reporting to the authorities.’

The man started fanning himself with a newspaper.

‘And we don’t make Government policy,’ added Henshall.

‘Who does?’ said the man. ‘Nogroho sent you?’

‘As I said. But perhaps there’s some message you’d like me to convey to his Excellency?’

‘It is not important’, said the man. He drew himself up and looked at the stage. ‘You can watch now. Interesting for you.’

With a soft drumming the gamelans had started, and Henshall listened to the music that drifted through the small courtyard. Hardly audible at first, each note slowly detached itself from the sultriness of the afternoon, and was collected by the gongs extending and breaking the rhythm. Over the top, hesitantly, but then gathering into a storm of twinkling notes, glimmering and disappearing, came the sharp xylophone sounds, metal on metal, a delicate interlacing that guided the restrained movements of the four dancers who now appeared.

Henshall knew their movements by heart: the shuffle, the turn of the hips, the arms in their graceful gestures, the hands folded back like the petals of a flower. He'd drawn them a hundred times, from every conceivable angle, and could now let his thoughts wander.

Stylised and artificial though they seemed, these languorous marionettes were all that was left of the old Hindu kingdoms, of an Indonesia changing in ways Henshall himself foreshadowed. If there was a land of gold, it was here, in these tightly bound figures that followed their inward rhythms. His neighbour was right: soon all this would disappear, and even now the women were not solely dancers, but worked in offices and banks: part-time, making do. A land of gold, or of shadows? The bridal couple were lifted on to the stage, and nuptial rituals carried out: the vows, the pouring of holy water, the blessings of the priests. Henshall watched, though his thoughts were far away. He turned to his neighbour when the ceremony was

over, but the man only got to his feet and edged away down the row. Henshall looked round, and then joined guests streaming out of the *kraton*. Back through the noisy, exhaust-filled streets he wandered a long time, in a mood of resignation and then of increasing annoyance.

Towards seven, when it was dark, Henshall found his hotel, and walked up the small concrete steps. Had an *Ibu* Sujono checked in? he asked the receptionist, now a young woman, who smiled and said no, '*Tidak disini, tuan.*'

Henshall went into the dining room. Several families paid him no attention, but a sad-faced man looked pointedly in his direction until Henshall motioned him to start eating. There was no choice of dishes, but what he ate was adequate, and Henshall's thoughts were hardly on the food. What was he doing in this run-down, provincial hotel, no doubt one of dozens of Hotel Asia's throughout Java, even Jogjakarta itself?

The thought stopped him. Was there another hotel of this name? he asked the startled receptionist. He ran out and asked a passing police officer, who placed a hand on his holster and didn't reply. He asked in the market, and at an army post he came across, but the reply was the same. The following day he'd get a map of the city and a list of hotels. If Hartini was staying anywhere he'd find her. Returning, Henshall collected his key, ran up the stairs to his room, and had begun stripping for a shower when he saw the figure sitting in the unlit corner of the large room.

'For heaven's sake,' exclaimed Henshall, 'why is there always this cloak-and-dagger stuff with you?'

'Yes, my friend, I am alive', she said, looking at him but scarcely moving.

'Hartini, what's happened to you? exclaimed Henshall, now appalled at the appearance. She was thinner, and the eyes were deeper in their sockets.

Henshall put an arm round, but she shook herself free. 'Leave me alone', she said.

'The Governor's offering us some deal. Your freedom for information. For what you know about the gold at Tambang Surga.'

'Peter,' she said, taking his hands, 'I don't know anything about the gold. You know how it was. Everyone press-ganged into the Japanese engineering corps was half dead with fever, or starvation, or the beatings. My father just pointed out one of the entrances, and said that something had been buried there, in a hurry at the end of the war.'

'Says he'll return your passport if you co-operate.'

'You think so, my friend?'

'Come to Tambang Surga to make the Governor think you're co-operating, and then we'll apply for a passport. Couldn't you?'

'My friend, all that is in the past.'

'Come on.'

‘But it will be enough. Up and down the country people will say: “Ah yes, Hartini Sujono. Nobody remembers her now, but when I was a young man she was famous. One night I went to hear her sing. Just pop songs, but the effect was a revelation. Until that moment I had not been alive, not really alive. I can’t explain to you, but somehow, for a minute or two, I suddenly found myself at one with this beautiful and suffering world.” Just as you do, my friend.’

‘Hartini, will you just collect your thoughts? Let’s get through this wretched gold business, and then go away together. Anywhere you like.’

‘Do you understand what you’re saying?’ She placed his hands on her lap, and stared at him anxiously. ‘Do you?’

‘I earn decent money. Enough to support us.’

She turned away, shaking her head angrily. ‘Peter: you’re thirty-five. If you haven’t married by now, you never will. You’ll always be surrounded by women, always be a favourite with them. They’ll

love you, and fuss over you, and worry about you, and you'll be thinking of other things entirely.'

'It's your life I'm thinking about now.'

'Mine? My future is already decided. I have one short scene and then nothing. Even my friend Laila Chow will tell you that.'

'Laila is not a friend.'

'Because she made a play for you? Of course Laila has, and I think she'd be good for you.'

'I don't want to be shared.'

'Peter, I shall not take up with you again, but I would like to think of you happy with someone.'

'Hartini, I'm happy with you.'

'Which is for you to think about. I shall leave you now.'

'With everything hanging in the air?'

The woman got to her feet and turned unsteadily towards the door. She smiled as Henshall refused to open it, and turned the handle herself. 'We

have been here before, and I shall not be far away.
Think about what I've said.'

'Talk to me, Hartini.'

'Have nothing to do with this.'

'You got me into the manager's role, and I'm not
quitting at the first sign of trouble.'

'Then goodnight to you.' She paused and then
walked out, slamming the door behind her.

CHAPTER 16

'I'd be only too delighted,' said Henshall, 'but in fact I'm booked for Singapore tonight. We still have shipping problems.'

'All in your report, my boy', said the Kuala Lumpur manager, handing over an extra spoon.

'But thank you for the invitation.' Henshall leant back, taking in the view of the old-fashioned hotel with its pergola and seats set out in the small garden.

‘Heard of S.A.I., have you?’ said Norbury suddenly. ‘Operate pretty widely in this part of the world.’

Henshall stared at his boss. ‘As agents? South-east Asia Investments?’

‘Could be just the ticket.’

‘May I ask how you got the name? Sally Cullen didn’t recommend them when she was through?’

‘Might have done. But you could go and look them up, couldn’t you? Tell us what you think.’

Henshall’s voice darkened. ‘Mr Norbury,’ he said, ‘S.A.I. is the company that Mike Posner seems somehow to have got involved with. I thought you knew that.’

‘We’ll leave feelings out of it, shall we? Doesn’t do any good.’

‘Mike Posner was conducting his own investigation into Tambang Surga. Got the auditors deported. Tried to do me in.’

‘Motive and opportunity, Mr Henshall. Who might benefit from Don Cullen’s accident? Or want to blacken Mike Posner’s name? Possibly—I’m not saying you would, of course—but conceivably, hm?’

‘Then there was Mason I asked to be replaced. Nothing has come of that except to upset Rick Darrell. Got a rocket from his people, and is not cooperating much at present.’

‘Is that surprising?’

‘Look, Mr Norbury, you have the testimonials. If they’re not enough, you can come out to Mapura and conduct your own investigation. I’ll arrange for staff to be made available.’

‘What I’ve done is send your report on to Don.’

‘Don Cullen?’

‘And he rather agrees with me. You were an interested party, so you shouldn’t have conducted the investigation.’

‘Anyone else come to mind? Police?’

'So we're going to let the matter drop. Don feels you wouldn't have been abandoned if the operation hadn't been in Indonesian hands.'

'What happened is clear', said Henshall, struggling to keep his voice level. 'Posner should be brought to book.'

'And the Australian, Seybold's man? He didn't take over, insist on a proper search.'

'Because Posner sent him in the motor launch to the wrong river mouth. It's in the report.'

'Overrode the Indonesian team leader, your man. Administrative foul-up, for which you carry the can. That's how the game is played.'

Henshall said nothing for a while. His frown narrowed but outwardly he remained calm. Frank Norbury nodded and said, 'So now we're going to have a sensible talk. Why I suggested we got through the office business this morning, and then had an hour to ourselves. We all need a break sometimes, and it's pleasant up here. You won't change your mind? Do a pretty good tiffin in the evening.'

‘No, sir. Thank you.’

‘I think you should. A little time off won’t do any harm, and might help settle you down, get your priorities sorted out.’

‘Perhaps when the rigs are in, and we’re drilling at the mine.’

‘You’re our great hope over there. If anything happens to you we’re in no end of trouble.’ He called the waiter over, and asked for coffee.

‘Nothing’s going to happen to me, and everyone knows what to do anyway. Part of what you call being Indonesianized.’

‘It isn’t really, is it? Only you don’t see that, not being the usual manager. A point Hugh Maddocks made when I put your name forward.’

‘With the warning about Hartini Sujono?’

‘I’m a bachelor myself, but a married man is preferred. Make yourself into an easy-going, sociable expatriate with the usual recreations, that would be my advice.’

‘Bridge, golf and tennis parties?’

Norbury gave a roguish smile. ‘Be pleased to make the introductions.’

Henshall didn’t reply.

‘Well, let me be blunt with you. Partly for your own good, but more for mine. First, give up this local girl. Never mind how exciting she is, or how much you’re in love with her, or what plans you have. It never works. Ask any expat here. Half of them have someone in their pasts. Some learnt quickly. Others like me were more obstinate. But if you want to get on, marry one of the Europeans.’

Henshall’s smile was without warmth. ‘I may not be seeing Hartini, but that doesn’t mean I’d want to take up with someone else.’

‘You went over to Jogjakarta to meet her. Hardly an affair dead and buried.’ Norbury’s expression softened. ‘I do get the odd intelligence from the Governor, you know.’

'Then he'll have told you about the deal he cooked up. Which Hartini wouldn't agree to because she doesn't know anything.'

'Not what the Governor thinks. Came within an ace of losing his temper with you. You wouldn't co-operate in the slightest.'

'I told him Hartini had nothing to say. And it wasn't his affair, any more than is our work at Tambang Surga if he won't give us troops.'

'There we are again. That's being Indonesianized, is it? Making yourself thoroughly unpopular with everyone.'

'I run a professional operation.'

'You've put everything on red alert. No one can keep up with you, or know what you're going to do next. Hand over for a while.'

'To the Cullens? Is this where the conversation's leading?'

'Sally's in Jakarta now. And Don will take over Kotapalu as soon as he's fit and well.'

'So much for the agreement. Our friend Iskaq, I suppose.'

You've become a workaholic. Get some leave.'

He offered the sugar, and took two lumps himself.

'So who's in charge of Tambang Surga now?' said Henshall.

'I'd move you on, but even the Governor seems keen to have you there.'

'With full authority?' He repeated the request as Norbury seemed not to hear. 'Do I have full authority?'

'Unless you do something stupid, yes.'

'Right', said Henshall. 'Very well.'

But the more he brooded on matters as he took the flight down, or paced round his hotel room that night, the more indignant he became. He toured the Singapore shops the following morning, absorbed in his thoughts, and only took a taxi late in

the afternoon to South-east Asia Investments. Nondescript place, he concluded from the unpainted sheds and lack of any noticeboard. A boy came running out, but Henshall continued through the maze of walkways until he found himself at a small office, waiting while a white-haired Chinese spoke into the telephone. The man broke off to tell Henshall to sit, resuming his conversation until he put the receiver down with a slow, deft movement, and looked carefully at his visitor. Henshall introduced himself. The man studied the card, and lit a cigarette, putting the packet carefully back into his shirt pocket.

‘How I help you, Mr Henshall?’ said the man, lifting his head above the smoke.

‘I’ve come to introduce myself’, said Henshall, ‘and to see something of your business, if I may.’

The man’s composure didn’t change. ‘Why that interest you?’ he said.

‘Anything involving Metax’s affairs in Indonesia is of interest to me.’

'You know terms?' said the man. He reached for the filing cabinet and extracted a specimen contract.

Henshall contented himself with remarking that the document was familiar, standard even. 'Shouldn't we be exploring the guarantees? What happens if shipments do not arrive on time, or arrive with inadequate paperwork? It is to overcome these problems that Kuala Lumpur is considering appointing you.'

'You want talk with Miss Laila?'

'I'm happy to talk to you.'

'You talk with Miss Laila. Where you stay?'

Henshall took another of his business cards, and carefully wrote the hotel, address and telephone number. The man looked at it, and laid it face down on the table. 'Miss Laila come nine o'clock tonight', he said.

Perhaps he shouldn't have accepted, but he was suddenly bored with Metax's affairs. Nothing he'd done had been appreciated, or even accepted. He ate a light snack at the hotel, changed and sat waiting in the foyer. At nine-fifteen a uniformed chauffeur came forward with S.A.I.'s card. The car door was held open, and Henshall found himself seated next to a reclining Laila, the split skirt opening to the hips. Henshall was amused, but the woman ignored him, giving instructions in Chinese, to which the driver muttered something inaudible.

'Good evening, Laila', said Henshall noncommittally. 'What am I being inveigled into this evening?'

Very slowly she turned her head to look at him, remarking, 'Why you dress with suit if you no want go out?'

'Courtesy to you.'

The woman straightened herself, resting a hand briefly on Henshall's arm. She reached in her bag for a cigarette, which Henshall obligingly lit.

'So where are we going?' he said.

Laila didn't reply until they were seated in a small restaurant club where the waiters displayed the attention given important clients. 'Bring all your men here?' said Henshall, closing the menu and ordering a small seafood dish.

'They bring me here. If I nice to them.' The eyes turned and filled with a deep amber-brown as they caught the candlelight.

Henshall gave his good-natured grin. 'I won't ask the obvious.'

The woman examined her nails, waiting submissively for the next remark. Though it was a game, an elaborate game he was being invited to play, the woman was so beguiling, so amusing in an obvious way, that Henshall couldn't be unaffected. 'Of course, what I was hoping to hear,' he said, 'since I'm supposed to be vetting South-east Asia Investments, was that Mr Lee would keep you so busy on Metax affairs that this pretty head had no time for anything else.'

For reply, she rested a hand on his shoulder and said, 'Many things could be surprise if you try.'

Henshall laughed, and removed the hand. 'Laila, this is a business meeting. You're supposed to be telling me why your company is best to deal with our affairs.'

'You know why. Dr Cullen, he give us contract.'

'Would I be right in supposing that Mike Posner spoke to Sally Cullen?'

She shook her head, as though to free herself of the interrogation, the movement transferring itself to the whole body. Then she brought the smiling face close to him again, answering none of his questions, but candid and open to his attention.

'So let's talk about something else', said Henshall. 'You've been with S.A.I. a decent while?'

The head was now so close that Henshall could smell the smoky fragrance of the breath. 'Laila free agent. Work for herself, like you if no stupid.'

'Like our friend Mike Posner?'

'He business partner. Laila want Peter Henshall, no Posner. He stupid pig.'

She brought her head forward again, opening the eyes appealingly.

'Less of that', said Henshall, gently pressing a finger on the lips. 'This is a business meeting.'

'You believe Laila. She no lie to you. Everyone lie but no Laila.'

'Do they?'

'Your company lie. Your boss lie. Hartini she lie to you. She tell long story about death of Chan, eh?'

Henshall frowned and said, 'Can we keep to business?'

'She tell you problems, many, many problems? Ah men always stupid and believe her.' The woman opened her eyes again, and stared at Henshall.

'If you're going to talk about the operation I'll listen. But not a character assassination.'

'You want facts? Laila has facts. Ah, so many facts.'

'Where are we going now?' said Henshall, startled. She had called the waiter over, and was signing the bill. 'Shouldn't I be doing that?'

'Lee pay for this. We go your hotel now?'

'We can talk here. Or in the bar.'

'People see us. This secret.'

It was true, one or two of their neighbours were looking at them oddly. 'All right, Laila, we'll talk in the car outside.'

But there was no alternative to returning to Henshall's room, and the woman said nothing until they were sat in armchairs, a few feet from each other. Laila dimmed the lights, which Henshall turned up again. 'I can hear you perfectly well with the lights on', he said.

She dimmed them again, and moved her chair closer. 'Now we together you believe me.'

'Doubt it', replied Henshall, grinning. The woman lit another cigarette, and playfully stroked his leg with her foot.

'What you want you ask. Laila tell you, or she pay penalty.'

'You can start by telling me where S.A.I. fits into this.'

'We want gold.'

'Supposing the shipment exists. That it's not some wild rumour dreamt up by a reporter on a dull afternoon.'

'Have war reports with surprising news. Japanese colonel he order investigation but no find gold.'

'Why didn't you put a claim in yourself, take out a mining permit before Metax arrived on the scene? Wouldn't have cost that much.'

'We try general as partner, but he cheat us. So we use Posner. Much money but we need.'

'Is that why Don Cullen met with his accident?'

'What you think?'

'I don't think anything. Just want to know.'

'Liar!' She sprang to her feet and started removing Henshall's tie.

'What's this?' said Henshall, struggling to get it back. 'Sort of strip poker?'

'Ah so. Each time you tell lie you take clothes off. That fair. *Sama sama* for Laila. If Laila no answer she take clothes off.'

'Don't think you've got much to play with.'

'Why Laila no tell lies.'

Henshall shook his head. 'Let's try again: who wanted to murder Cullen?'

'We think someone from village. That what we think.'

'And who arranged for our accountants to be caught and then deported, if not Posner?'

She smiled.

'But what did Posner get out of it?'

'Laila not know that.' She eased a shoe off and dropped it at Henshall's feet. Then the other.

Nothing to do with Sally getting S.A.I. appointed as shipping agents, I suppose?' The blouse was coming off when Henshall stopped her. 'An answer would do.'

She slipped the blouse away, and smiled as Henshall stared at the low-cut bra. 'We no trust Posner', she said, arching her body against the chair.

'Didn't stop you using your charms on the man.'

'I tell you. No go with Posner!'

'It doesn't matter.'

'It matter to Laila. You tell when you first sleep with Hartini.'

'That's my affair.'

'You lose for that.'

Henshall sighed as a shoe and sock were removed. 'My fault', he said. 'I apologize.'

'Laila like you when you nice to her.'

‘When you can use me to find the gold.’

‘Is true. Better you work for us and share information. We have all Japanese records. Complete. What you have?’

‘We have the same, only local ones’, said Henshall.

‘We no think so. But exchange. If *sama sama* no problem.’

‘Laila, I didn’t discuss confidential matters with Hartini, and I’m not going to start with you.’

‘You think Hartini love you? Why she trap you?’

‘She didn’t trap me.’

‘Three lies’, said the woman, springing to her feet.

‘That’s enough. I’m not going on with this’, protested Henshall. ‘It’s absurd.’

‘If you no play you no have answers.’

‘So what was the deal with Hartini? There was something, wasn’t there, until you two fell out and went your separate ways?’

‘Laila no tell you.’ She started unbuttoning her skirt, the fingers easing off each button in turn.

‘Why not?’

The final buttons were undone, and she stood to let the skirt slide to the floor. ‘You like?’

Henshall did like. It was impossible not to. Warm and inviting the body looked in the half-light, the breasts hardly constrained by the yielding bra. ‘Does seem a practised routine’, said Henshall, adopting an indifferent air. ‘Do this for lots of men?’

It was too late to call the comment back. The woman straightened, got to her feet, and slowly removed the bra. ‘Now have one question left’, she said, running a finger down the briefs before seating herself. ‘You ask very careful now.’

‘Lots of questions, only it’s . . . difficult.’

The woman pouted mischievously and came to sit on his knee. ‘You no want Laila stay?’

Henshall put his hands on the chair. ‘About Har-tini . . .’

She nestled up to him, and started unbuttoning his shirt.

‘ . . . what do you really know?’

‘Later’, said the woman, kissing him, her eyes smiling. You think Laila cheat? She put a soft arm about his neck and drew him closer. ‘Is true. So sorry, but Laila cheat now.’

CHAPTER 17

Henshall stared glumly at the arrival, now dressed in a business suit, but went on with his breakfast. Laila settled herself, took a cup from a neighbouring table, and poured a coffee.

‘How did you know I’d be here?’ said Henshall when he’d finished off another slice of toast.

‘You try forget what happen. No eat in room.’

‘I thought we agreed not to talk about last night.’

‘Is true. Now must show Mr Peter operations of South-east Asia Investments. Very interesting.’

‘I’ve explained. If Dr Cullen’s appointed you as agents, and Kuala Lumpur’s approved it, there’s nothing to discuss.’

‘But Lee Ong say very important. Make sure Mr Peter know about company. Why you see brochure.’

Henshall took the folder offered him, studied the pages for a while, and handed the document back without comment.

‘Is for you’, said Laila. ‘So you give us more work.’

‘No’, said Henshall.

‘You see yourself Mr Peter. You look very funny now.’

‘If I look annoyed, that’s what I am. Don’t you realize I’m working fourteen hours a day, and still not keeping the ship afloat? No one’s getting on with the job, or keeping their word, or paying the slightest attention to my instructions. Now you come along. The answer’s no, Laila. Definitely not.’

'People say you clever, so we write Peru for reference. Lee Ong he tell me if Mr Peter so good then must get him work for us.'

'Tried it with Posner, and now you're recruiting me.'

'Posner useless. Big mouth but no have brains. We help you kill Posner.'

'You'll do no such thing. I'm the manager here, and I run a good operation on the facts.'

'Why you so stupid? You try make changes but no have happiness. Operation go better, but people prefer old way. Why Dr Cullen come back.'

'Is he?'

'All time you think, but others they no like. Want orders only. That way simple.'

'Not when there's a drilling programme to organize.'

'Laila know that. S.A.I. ship equipment to Philippines. Also work for Longyear.'

‘Indonesia’s not the Philippines. So there’s no point in S.A.I. adding to the tenders.’

‘No adding. How many tenders you have?’

‘Invitations have only just gone out.’

‘You write two months ago but no one want. Big problem for you.’

‘I’m not having a company no one’s heard of in a place like Tambang Surga.’

‘Everyone know us in Philippines. You come see. Three day, four day. Laila go with you.’ She opened her eyes and smiled.

Henshall laughed. ‘You’ll have to do better than that. Look: I’ll not rule it out. If we have no drilling tenders then I’ll seriously consider it. Seem fair to you?’

‘Is right. We go visit operations now. Also Lee Ong have books for you see. You ask any questions and we answer.’

Whatever the surprises of the last few days, the return to Kotapalu brought Henshall back to earth. The Land Rover dropped him at the office forecourt, from which the drivers rushed up to shake his hand. From the typing pool he went straight through to his office, only stopping when Sally Culen's cool gaze rose to meet him from behind the desk.

'You look tired, Peter. Difficult flight?'

Henshall stared at her, not answering the question. 'What's this, Sally? Taken over already?'

'You'll find plenty of accommodation in the back. I've cleared Suleiman out for a start.'

'On whose authority? Until Don gets back, or I'm instructed otherwise, I'm the manager here.'

'Read it.' Sally handed over a note, and went back to her papers, adjusting her glasses with studied indifference. 'Clear, is it?'

There was no mistaking Frank Norbury's note. Henshall was still digesting the words when he came on Suleiman in the old drafting office. '*Sala-*

mat datang', he said gravely, coming up to shake the old man's hand. '*Dimana Tuan Woodford?*' The man pointed, and Henshall joined his former comrade in the Tambang Surga annexe.

'Bit of a turn-around.' he said. 'How long has this been going on?'

Woodford smiled awkwardly. 'I'm sorry', he said, getting up to close the door. 'You were doing a first-rate job. Everyone said so.'

'Did they?'

'Except you upset Iskaq. And the drivers didn't like the new checks. Or the office. But you wanted improvements, and improvements you got.'

'So you're back again?'

'Dogsbody, that's me.'

Henshall shook his head, and went round to look at the information pinned to the wall. 'Has Suleiman got the other charts? Only we'll need everything down at Tambang Surga shortly.'

'Cullen's written you something on that. Better sit down. You're not going to like it.'

Henshall was incredulous, and read the memo again. 'Four months', he exclaimed. 'That fool Cullen wants everything wrapped up in four months.'

'Not possible, you think?' said Woodford anxiously.

'Twenty thousand feet of drilling in four months? Man's out of his mind.'

'I think he means business.'

'Four months! We haven't even got the rigs on site. Haven't even got a tender. When's this pompous fool arriving?'

'Not for a week or two, but says he wants results before that.'

'He'll have results all right. Just book me a flight to Singapore, would you Bob?'

'I'm not sure what Sally would feel about that.'

'I'll do it myself. Send Johari in, and let me have this room for an hour, would you?'

Perhaps she was the smart cookie Lee Ong called her. The last five days with Laila had been an eye-opener. From the moment they'd landed in Manila—Laila gliding along in her smart business outfit, Henshall grim and decided, a man not standing for nonsense—the project had gone better than any Henshall could remember. Each day he filmed operations with his 8mm camera, and questioned personnel using the Dictaphone. But it was soon obvious he wouldn't do better. All that remained were the terms and conditions, which the woman repeatedly put off. 'You see everything first,' she said, 'then talk.'

Laila was unusually spirited on the eve of their return to Singapore, her slanting eyes flashing with amusement as Henshall went slowly through the proposed contracts. The hotel was small, but the woman had changed into evening dress, causing a decided stir in the functional coffee bar where they

sat. Henshall was not to be deflected, however, and after an elaborate charade of bargaining, interspersed with two telephone calls to Mapura, the deal was struck. South-East Asia Investments would supply three drilling crews, rigs and spares, plus the ventilation equipment to work underground. Henshall was delighted, his pleasure spreading in boyish good humour as the evening wore on. The whole business had gone well. Crews would be arriving within the month, provided only Iskaq could get the authorities to issue permits. Laila watched this superior young man relaxing into steady contentment, and then smiled, extended a leg from the evening dress.

‘Sorry’, said Henshall. ‘Not sensible, but that’s how it is.’

‘You no like trouble with Laila?’

‘I did as a matter of fact. But we’ve had a very good trip, thanks to you, and I look forward to seeing you as a business associate.’

The woman burst out laughing. 'You think that? Peter he just friends with me?'

'I'll get you another drink if we make it the last.' He placed the order and watched Laila glide out to the powder room. But she was right, he reflected, in that penetrating way of hers.

'Ah so, you think long long', said Laila, who had returned to her stool and was now stroking his leg with her foot. 'Hartini say Mr Peter artist. No manager. Is true. Managers they *sama sama* other people but more so. You different. We like you.'

'Nothing to do with the gold?'

'That too', said the woman happily. 'You nice to Laila and she help you. Okay? Is deal?'

'No', said Henshall, grinning again.

CHAPTER 18

Henshall was soon back at Tambang Surga, preparing the drill sites and opening the old workings. He joined van Ryssen underground, spending whole days in the half-timbered maze of galleries and crosscuts. He started the Indonesian geologists on their mapping, until all were suddenly recalled to Kotapalu by Sally. He sent field parties to look for further workings deep in the forest, from which they returned saying the tiger was always around, keeping to the undergrowth but still threatening. He led his own parties, and was confronted

with the same chilling silence and scratch marks on the trees. He approached Captain Mochtar, but the police chief smiled behind his dark glasses, and simply suggested a bounty on the animal. Several hunters appeared, but only one accepted the challenge when facts were clear. Through all the hold-ups and difficulties, however, the work went on. The drilling teams arrived, and were joined a few days later by Iskaq, who flew down to talk with local officials.

‘Got the security problems sorted out?’ said Henshall when the liaison officer returned to camp that afternoon.

‘Young man, there are no security problems. Captain Mochtar merely wished to assure himself that certain permits were in order.’

‘Suppose, *Pa*’ Iskaq, we put the past behind us. We haven’t always got on so well, but now there’s the staff to think about.’

‘You are having cold feet, Mr Henshall?’

‘I’m asking for your help. What are these soldiers doing? They’re not the Governor’s, so whose are they?’

Iskaq looked bored. He lit a cigarette and tossed the match on the table. ‘You have other queries, Mr Henshall?’

‘If any of this means a threat to the safety or welfare of my staff then I need to know.’

‘It is not the troops who represent a threat, is it, Mr Henshall? Not the troops.’

‘I am? Is that what you’re saying?’

Iskaq looked at his watch. ‘Perhaps you could order some tea. I usually have my tea at four o’clock.’

The liaison officer flew back the next morning, and the drillers started work. Two rigs were in place the following day, and a third was drilling underground by the week’s end. All went smoothly. The

soldiers kept their distance, and there were no incidents. Nonetheless, Laila Chow turned up a few weeks later, unannounced and alluring even after the long journey down.

'My teams, my responsibility', she said. 'Also in contract.'

'Visit Tambang Surga,' said Henshall, 'but not stay. We don't have the facilities.'

'You no like I stay with you?' She put an arm round, and then took the hand offered.

'There's a guest hut on the far side', said Henshall. 'Supposing we ever have guests.'

'Tomorrow everyone come. You no fool Laila.'

'Yes, but they're Metax staff.'

'And Hartini Sujono. Governor Nograho send her.'

'Is she? Why's that?', said Henshall. He frowned but took the suitcase from the driver. The two walked through the camp, several of the staff looking curiously at the spectacle until Henshall put the

luggage down at the guest hut entrance. He opened the door and said, 'I'll get the camp boss to send someone over to do the bed, and make sure you're comfortable.'

'Laila comfortable with you.'

'See you at dinner. Six forty-five in the Mess.'

It was with some apprehension that Henshall awaited Laila's entrance, but she appeared without drama in khaki slacks and top, taking her place next to Henshall, opposite van Ryssen and the pilot, who looked at her with sudden interest. Henshall did the introductions down the long table, and to each of them the woman gave a cool smile, seemingly preoccupied with her own thoughts. At seven-thirty she got to her feet, and announced she had paperwork to do. Her neat figure picked its way through the room and out into the darkness. All eyes returned to Henshall, but he didn't call her back. 'Wouldn't be forgetting our manners, would we?' drawled the pilot.

'Laila is just passing through.'

'Is that so?' he said, giving van Ryssen a knowing wink.

Henshall frowned and tried to get the conversation going. 'Marinus,' he said, 'can we do a rig inspection? The new site was losing water last time I was over.'

The two struck out across the compound, past the neat rows of huts, and towards the spot-lit perimeter fence. It was a cool night, the heavy rain clouds of the afternoon showing grey against the dark sky. Neither said anything for a while, until the camp entrance was closed and locked behind them, and they were winding through the thick jungle, the wet leaves reflecting brilliantly in the torchlight's beam. Nothing was moving in the tangle of stems and creepers, nor across the sodden carpet of leaves, and they stopped only when a cold barking came eerily out of the darkness.

'Long way off', said Henshall.

'Ja, but I do not enjoy being made example.'

‘Marinus, you’ve been first-rate. I know your fee’s astronomical, but it’s been worth every penny.’

‘You do not sweet-talk me. Tambang Surga is not a place to play games.’

‘The tiger’s never been sighted near the camp. Not its territory.’

‘You do not know that.’

They continued their journey until the hum of the drilling machine could be heard through the trees. The lights came into view, and the men scrambled up to the drilling platform. Henshall started his cine camera, and the crews carried on as usual, familiar with the monitoring. The camera swept slowly about the site, over the men and the cores laid out in the long wooden boxes, where van Ryssen crouched, examining the sections through his hand-lens. ‘You’re on, Marinus’, said Henshall, coming closer.

‘Not much to say’, responded the man. ‘We’re at 320 feet at drill site twelve. The material is argil-

lized rhyolite, with a good deal of pyrite. Will that do?' he said.

'Gripping stuff. Let's hope your journalist friend puts the footage in the bank.' Henshall finished filming, and went to talk to the crew. He listened to the drill, more carefully this time. 'Still problems. Better get them to pull the barrel shortly, before they've completed the run. There'll be a lot missing.'

'I will tell them. You return to the Mess or people will start worrying.'

Henshall strolled back, trying not to lengthen his stride as he left the brightness of the lights. The forest was quiet, and the local hunter was no doubt sitting with the carcass stretched out in front of him. Or perhaps he wasn't. 'It is big trial', the man had told him. 'Either I kill tiger or tiger kill me. But I have strong magic.' Let's hope so, thought Henshall, regaining at last the perimeter fence, where the security guard appeared to give him a friendly

greeting. '*Salamat malam, saudara*', said Henshall, and went over to the Mess.

Henshall came slowly to his senses, the knocking transferring itself to fact. He lurched to the door, and blinked at the dark shape of Laila. 'Oh not you', he said.

'Tiger come to drill rig. Take Enrique.'

Henshall stared at her. 'All right, you stay here. I'll get the guards. Site twelve, is it?'

'I see everything.'

'You were there? What the hell were you doing at the rig this time of night. It's three o'clock in the morning.' Henshall glared at the woman, who burst into tears. 'All right,' continued Henshall, 'I'm sorry.' He untangled himself gently. 'Let's get some help.'

'Laila come too. No sleep now.'

A large party went over, the guards threatening the shadows with their rifles while van Ryssen and Henshall strode carefully on. There was nothing to

see. Three of the crew were huddled next to the machine, jabbering excitedly, and the fourth was missing. Henshall ascertained the facts, told them to shut down the pump and drilling machine, but keep the generator and lights on.

‘You will hunt for Enrique now?’ asked van Ryssen, surveying the scene grimly.

‘Hopeless’, said Henshall. ‘Nothing we could do for him, and I’m not losing anyone else. We can think about it in the morning.’ He put an arm round Laila, and led the way back. The rest of the party followed, a tight huddle, the soldiers still jabbing the shadows with their rifles as the torch-lights flashed wildly into the undergrowth.

The Kotapalu delegation arrived late the following morning. Henshall had conducted a fruitless search for the driller, and returned to camp to meet Cullen, Posner and Hartini, the latter descending from the helicopter with the radiant gravitas of a

visiting Head of State, earlier appearances notwithstanding. Henshall helped her down and made the introductions to the line of staff. To all of them Hartini smiled and said a few words of greeting. Reaching Laila, she put an arm round the woman's waist and the two went off to the Mess where a small buffet had been prepared. Henshall returned to describe for Cullen the programme for the day, a programme of his devising, he repeated, to which Posner was not invited.

'Leave this to me, old boy', snorted Cullen, taking Henshall aside. But his words had made no impression on the man when he returned to lead the party through the camp facilities. To the many objections and criticisms Cullen found to make on what he was shown—location, costs, the months it had taken to build—Henshall maintained an indifferent silence. Sweating after an hour's tramp in the hot sun, and having none of his observations taken seriously, Cullen finally lost patience. 'You,' he shouted in a sudden spasm of exasperation,

'are not in a position to decide anything. Michael Posner will be taking over when I leave, but for the meantime you will follow my orders. Is that clear?'

'Clear but not acceptable. This is my camp, and my operation, and you are simply here as guests. Let's move on.'

Posner's smile spread into disbelief as he heard Cullen struggle for words. 'What!' the enraged man cried at last. 'You dare to talk to me like that? I was in charge of exploration before you were even in the kindergarten.'

'And have mismanaged things ever since, the latest being to relinquish ground on which van Ryssen found something. I wrote to you specifically on the matter, and you have stupidly given it away.'

'How dare you!' shouted Cullen, becoming purple in the face. 'What I choose to do, or not to do, is not for you to question.'

'Maddocks is reading my telex now, as is the Chairman, in case there's any cover up.'

'Are you threatening me?'

'I suggest we round off this tour with an inspection of the core-sheds and then get some lunch.'

'Less of the snooty manner, sunshine', said Posner. 'You're not the boss now, so you can quit pretending. Don's in charge and everyone knows it.'

'Would you like to cancel my instructions and see if the men fall in with you?'

'You'll pay for this!' cried Cullen. 'I'll not be defied by my subordinates!'

'You'll swallow your petulance and behave more like an adult. Marinus is organising an underground tour this afternoon, and he doesn't need a middle-aged buffoon blundering around down there.'

Cullen twitched as though stung by a horsefly, but didn't reply. Posner's grin widened.

'He was subdued', admitted Henshall a few hours later, sat with Hartini and Laila at the long wooden table that served as a bar in the evening.

'Ah so angry', said Laila. 'No eat anything.'

'There will be trouble now, my friend. You should not play with him.'

'Cullen has already got my dismissal from Kuala Lumpur. Marinus is leaving as soon as the underground tour is over.'

'You can fight? Beat Cullen?'

'Doubt it. Of course Toronto may decide for me, but they'd have to demote Cullen, which would mean admitting they were wrong.'

'You work for us', said Laila.

'Only we must prevent Cullen perpetrating some imbecility: organising another search for your man, or changing the drilling plans.'

'No take offer?' said Laila, shaking her head. 'That big pity for you.'

'Of course if Cullen personally organizes another search the men may follow. He's still the *tuan besar*. And should the local hunter drag the carcass in, then I'd have everyone out again looking for Enrique. But I wouldn't count on it.'

'Not with soldiers, eh?'

'Least of all with them. Whoever they take orders from, it's certainly not me.'

'Why look at me, my friend?'

'Because the soldiers respect you, Hartini. They even respect Posner, though I can't think why. Even Mochtar, who struts about as though he owns the place. I'd say we have an army of occupation, or soon will have.'

'Then leave them to it', said Hartini.

'It's my camp, and I give the orders.' He shrugged at the woman's expression, and said, 'If you'll excuse me now, I have some things to get ready.'

At four o'clock the helicopter started up. Cullen glowered in the back as the luggage was stowed away. Van Ryssen walked over with Henshall who was carrying a large bag of assay samples. 'Ja,' he said 'that is why I said you should join us. We can use your camp and it will be good. No problems like this.'

'A tempting offer, Marinus.'

'But I am serious. Hua wants you to work for him.'

'I'll see you in Kotapalu.' Henshall watched van Ryssen clamber aboard, and Darrell take the craft up. The engine roar had hardly faded when Hartini put her arm through Henshall's and took him for a walk. 'Think about it, Peter', she said. 'You don't gain anything by staying.'

'If you and Laila would come, and I could be sure no member of staff was at risk, then I'd move somewhere else. In fact there's a forestry camp only fifteen minutes flying away. In those circumstances, of course I'd go.'

‘Just pride, my friend.’

‘All these months I’ve been manoeuvred and pushed around for something that is about to happen. Posner’s here, and Mason, and Captain Mochtar. No support from my side has come, even though I’ve phoned the Governor’s office and Kuala Lumpur, twice from the village.’

‘This is Indonesia, and you must accept that.’

‘If you’d given the information the Governor wanted, then perhaps none of this would have happened.’

‘You think he’d be satisfied?’ She stopped walking. ‘Peter, I don’t know where the gold is. And you wouldn’t get a mile with it anyway, not with Mochtar’s troops round the camp. Even Laila’s taken off.’

‘Where’s she gone?’

‘Didn’t you expect that? Or is it still these castles in the air?’ She smiled at his expression. ‘Of course I remember. Your sketches. That time in the hills.

Our first evening. You think I don't know how I feel?'

'Even when it's obeying orders?'

'You are not kind, my friend.'

'Hartini, you don't know how I've missed you. Can't you accept the offer? Use the second helicopter to identify which entrance it is, and then fly on to Kotapalu. Go straight to the Governor. What's wrong with that?'

'I thought you wanted the gold.'

'We might not make it, or the Governor could play clever, but it's a chance.'

'Or you'll go poking about in the mine?' She took his hand, letting it drop again. 'All right', she said. 'Maybe it's a mistake, but give me ten minutes to change.'

'Doesn't have to be today.'

'My friend, we must make the flight before Posner gets back from the mine.'

‘You are still under my orders’, said Henshall to the pilot. ‘So let’s be going.’

Mason looked across to Mochtar, and then started his warm-up routine. Henshall could see Hartini talking to the guards that were now beginning to take up positions, but he kept his patience, chatting to the guards who were now standing by the fuel pump. Hartini detached herself, and came over, several large bags being carried by soldiers.

‘What’s all this?’ said Henshall as the hold was opened and the luggage stowed away.

‘Some favours for them. They think we’re going direct to Kotapalu.’

She smiled at Mochtar, and Henshall checked the luggage door. The helicopter lifted off, heading for the Japanese sector as Henshall directed. It flew up and down the whole area, hovered over each adit in turn, and then started again.

‘Can’t you decide’, said Henshall, shouting to make himself heard above the engine whine.

‘It was the last one, I think. Is it safe to land?’

‘Our friend isn’t likely to attack in broad daylight.’

‘The villagers call it the guardian of the place.’

‘It may be dangerous if that was the local hunter’s camp back there, but we’ll deal with it.’ He leant forward. ‘Mason, would you drop us at adit four.’

‘You’re the boss.’

A few minutes later the helicopter made a low pass at an old mine entrance, negotiated a tangle of shrubs and creepers, and edged in between the trees. ‘So,’ said Henshall, ‘if you want to.’

‘You afraid?’

‘I have a healthy apprehension of danger, but Mason’s not going to close down, so at least the noise should keep it at bay.’

The two got out. Henshall picked up the rucksack, and cut a rough path through the dry grass and undergrowth. ‘Wasn’t so difficult’, he said, turning round to smile. He stopped, his stomach contracting as he saw the woman’s expression. ‘What is it, Hartini?’ he said quickly. ‘Where?’

‘It was nothing.’

‘Where’s our friend?’

‘I did not think I would see this. But this is where it starts.’

‘Hartini, is this the right place? Would you tell me so we can get going.’ He was about to say more when there was a sharp explosion, followed by a ragged plume of smoke that darkened as it mushroomed into the air. Hartini put a hand to her mouth, and stared at Henshall. ‘All right,’ he said, ‘let’s get over.’

The flames were already roaring through the undergrowth when they arrived, spreading from the twisted shape that was all that remained of the helicopter. Henshall stared angrily as the inferno consumed itself, the creepers and branches dissolving into ash and letting the shattered fragments of the fuselage fall to the ground. ‘Meant for you as well, the bastards.’ He looked at the woman, who had begun to tremble violently. ‘Hartini,’ he said, holding her tightly, ‘there’s nothing to see.’

‘Peter, I warned you.’

Henshall kicked at a burning fragment. ‘Never much cared for Mason, but why kill us, before we even found the place?’

‘Because we’ve served our purpose, like my father. We must move quickly now.’

CHAPTER 19

‘Shouldn’t we be going’, urged Hartini, tugging at Henshall’s arm as he started to undo one of the rucksack pockets.

‘In a minute’, he said, scanning through the maps. ‘Just have to find the route. It’s going to be difficult through the jungle and we can’t stay here.’ He frowned and looked at the routes again. ‘Have to be the mine. We’re not far from the open sections.’

‘No, Peter, not through the mine.’

‘It’ll be all right.’ He reached for her hand and led the way, chopping at the entangling foliage with his *parang*. At the adit entrance he paused, took out a torch and swung the beam from floor to roof. ‘Rather shaky’, he remarked. ‘Don’t touch any of the timbers, and avoid the areas where the roof’s come down.’

Hartini plunged in after him. For fifty yards or so the tunnel ran straight, rising only slightly. Patches of light appeared from air vents or fallen roof. Then the tunnel took a sharp turn and the gloom was deeper. Henshall eased the pace, helping Hartini climb over the fallen rock. Then he probed the steep recesses a hundred yards ahead, and had the breath knocked out of him. A second flash showed the animal only too clearly as it jerked its head to snarl at them.

Henshall pushed the woman aside to seize a piece of timber, but the animal paused hardly a second as it started towards them. Henshall took a lump of rock and hurled it the thirty yards, but the

tiger, more determined than ever, began negotiating the steep descent, placing one large paw after another on the loose slope. A second projectile ricocheted off a boulder and seemed to strike the animal in the face, but it sprang just the same. Henshall saw the grey and tawny body rise as he flung himself narrowly into an adjacent hollow. Something caught at his rucksack, and then there was only a clatter of loose stones where the animal was gone, falling over itself as it rolled down the tunnel. Some of the timbers groaned ominously, and there was a heavy fall of rock further down.

Shouting to Hartini to go on, Henshall clambered back. Still there, he realized, limping about in the half-light, beginning to climb towards them. Henshall grabbed a timber, hauling it up the rocky slope. It knocked into one of the timber supports, which gave way altogether. There was a long creaking sound followed by a heavy crash of rock. Henshall turned and began to scramble away, stopping to jab and create another collapse. Sev-

eral followed, one after another, and then the whole tunnel was folding away in clouds of dust and falling rock. Henshall seized Hartini's hand and rushed the last few yards to where the timbering ended and the tunnel flattened out. Glancing at the roof above them, which was also beginning to shed fragments, the two ran on through the half-light, only stopping when Hartini's strength gave out and they had to throw themselves on the tunnel floor.

'Where now?' said the woman, breathing heavily.

'This part isn't shown, but the main level must be below us, which we must join somewhere. If we're cool-headed, and mark our progress, we should get there.'

'Yes, but how far, Peter?'

'Just pray the battery holds out.'

Henshall found a new page in his notebook and began his map, sketching their progress and making small arrow-shaped heaps of stones. Hartini followed, her large eyes staring out from a face

streaked with sweat and dust. A half-hour later they came back to their arrows again, and found a further set.

‘Doesn’t your map show we’re going in circles?’

‘We’ll have to get down one of the shafts, tiger or no tiger.’

‘Hartini does not fear the animal. That is not how she will go.’

‘Exhaustion, probably, if we stay here.’

Henshall helped the woman to her feet, and the two walked to the shaft they’d passed. The descent was nearly vertical but, by bracing themselves against the walls, they managed the twenty feet to the workings below. ‘Wasn’t so bad’, he said, sitting on the ground to recover his breath. ‘Spooky place. Nobody’s been here for thirty years.’ He looked around. Passage after passage stretched on dustily in the torchlight.

‘So what’s that?’

Henshall went over. ‘Not tiger tracks, anyway.’

‘Drillers?’

‘We’re a long way from the rigs here, but someone knows his way about.’ He took a bearing. ‘Let’s try this tunnel’ he said, and then looked up as lights appeared. ‘Ah, we’ve got company, I see.’

‘Peter, if they’ve tried once they’ll try again.’ She dragged him into the shadows, and the two crept towards the shaft. But as they were negotiating an open stretch, the flashlight from the approaching party swung the length of the tunnel and caught them full beam. Henshall scrambled to his feet and called out, ‘Who’s that?’

The party had already stopped. One of the flashlights approached and Henshall could make out a familiar outline. ‘What are you up to, Posner? This isn’t your neck of the woods.’

‘Won’t be yours either shortly’, came the reply. He signalled to the guards, who came running up, stopping when they caught sight of Hartini. ‘You can take her as well’, said Posner.

The woman spoke sharply, and the guards fell to order. But they closed on Henshall, and pushed him forward, one of them unsheathing a revolver. Henshall glared at the woman, but she only looked away.

‘Friends of yours?’ he said.

‘I did warn you, Peter.’

‘Yours or Posner’s?’ he demanded, staring ahead at the workmen who were shouldering lengths of canvas hosepipe.

‘Don’t make it worse. I’ll do what I can.’

‘After the gold’s been collected of course.’ He stopped to add something, but a sharp jab from the revolver pushed him on. The party continued in silence for a mile or more, descended a short incline lit by ventilation shafts, and then found itself in a large chamber opening upwards to a shaft of daylight. A tiny patch of blue sky glittered brilliantly on the oily water that filled the central sump. ‘Not even the right entrance!’ thought Henshall bitterly as the men began to kick-start the generator. Then

the canvas hosepipes were attached, and the pumping began. Henshall stared at Hartini, but she was talking to one of the soldiers, who walked over and motioned Henshall to sit where he could be seen. Henshall crouched, realizing the incline was only a few yards away. But the soldier also squatted down, facing him, the revolver loose in his hands.

As the pump groaned steadily on, the party watched the water level fall, minute by minute, leaving a smear on the sump walls that glistened as it dried. Perhaps half an hour went by: the small patch of sky began to fade, and the illumination from the flashlights grew stronger in the chamber. Everyone stared into the yellow water, on which something occasionally floated, a rag or piece of vegetation. More rags were being recovered by the minute, and lay dripping in a heap by the sump. Several of the workmen were talking among themselves, and even the soldiers were fidgeting nervously. Clothes, Henshall realized: rotted fragments

of jackets and uniforms that told them what was waiting below. Henshall watched as his own guard got to his feet and walked over to the sump. Hartini had drawn her legs up and was looking away, withdrawing from the scene. My chance, thought Henshall, soon.

He shifted position, but the guard was back in an instant, levelling the revolver. Henshall nodded, and eased himself back against the wall. Talk started again, and now one of the workmen was shouting and tugging at a neighbour's sleeve. A guard walked over and struck him on the shoulder with the pistol butt, a tight sound, audible above the engine roar. The man collapsed but movement was now general in the chamber. Several workmen had got to their feet and were running into the darkness. Henshall saw his guard straighten and fire. Hartini was on her feet, shouting at Posner. The guard fired again but Henshall was off, sprinting up the incline, dodging from side to side, sliding on the loose floor.

He heard Posner's voice, and a shot ricocheted off the tunnel wall. An intense pain burned into his arm, and there was more shooting below, but Henshall stopped only when he got to the top. He put a hand to the place, feeling the blood ooze through the fingers. He snatched off his shirt and wound it round, peering all the time into the half-illuminated darkness below. Posner was there, one of the soldiers following. Without finishing the knot, Henshall sprinted up the tunnel, tripping over obstacles barely visible in the light. Two more shots sang over his head before he reached a bend, and could take shelter. But the bandage was holding, no more blood spilling on the ground. Henshall sped off again, keeping as best he could to the centre, mixing his steps with those of the previous party, until the tunnel made a fork with an old working.. With a sharp pain in his side, Henshall slowed down, went on a short distance, walked backwards and then stepped carefully into the working, wiping out his footsteps with the shirt trailing from his arm.

Long minutes passed. The footsteps came closer, sometimes walking fast, sometimes stopping. At the junction they stopped. Henshall heard Posner say something. The torch was shone down the branch, throwing shadows past the buttress where Henshall was hiding. 'Gone for the camp', said the voice. The light was flashed away, and the footsteps continued down the main tunnel. Henshall breathed again. But now the steps were returning. The flashlight again shone past his hiding place, and this time someone followed. The figure advanced, stopped, advanced again to within a few feet of Henshall's tensed body. '*Baik-lah*', it said, and the party was again walking away down the tunnel. Henshall waited till he thought everyone had passed, and then started back.

Now he would see what they'd found. The tunnel sloped on, and some ten minutes later Henshall was carefully descending the powdery slope, listening for movement or voices. Taking a flashlight, revolver and holster from a dead guard sprawled

across the entrance, he stepped through into the chamber. Nothing moved. He shone the flashlight on each figure in turn before he put the revolver away and approached Hartini. He hardly dared touch the slumped figure, but peered at the eyes, which looked blankly out. Kneeling down, Henshall took the body into his arms, feeling the warmth and then the stickiness. A long time passed, in which he was scarcely aware of pacing about distractedly. Or of staring at the sump, where the chests were empty, though strewn around were matted bones that twisted into view when the brown slime settled. At last, still numbed by events that belonged somewhere else, Henshall left the chamber and headed for the camp.

Did they know? Henshall asked again, but the drilling crew only shook their heads. Miss Laila they hadn't seen all afternoon. Henshall nodded and walked down the lighted tunnel towards the camp. At the entrance he peered out. The camp wore its usual busy air, the lights just visible at the perime-

ter fence. Henshall took a deep breath, and walked over to the Mess, finding the place deserted. The vehicle board was without keys. Perhaps he should get to the road and flag down one of the vehicles, but as he looked up he saw Captain Mochtar's revolver levelled at his chest, and he slowly removed his hand from the holster. Two guards came forward, and Henshall was marched across camp and into the visitors' quarters. The door closed, and was locked, the chain jangling on the padlock.

He wasn't alone. In one of the rattan chairs sat Posner, or what was left of Posner, his face badly swollen. He glared at Henshall, who dropped on to the sofa and crossed his legs.

'Enjoying yourself?' said Henshall, struggling to keep the anger out of his voice.

Posner turned his head away.

'Just a few loose ends to tie up?' He prodded the man. 'You've got us into this scrape, so you'd better start getting us out. Is Prawoto here?'

'How should I know?'

Henshall went over. 'If things weren't so tricky I'd be amused. But I'm not.' Henshall took sudden hold of Posner's hair and yanked him to his feet. He delivered a short punch to the man's stomach, and sat him down again. 'You'd better start talking.'

Posner lunged out, but Henshall was too quick for him. He smacked the man on the head, the bruised side, and heard Posner yelp. Henshall could see the pain in the bloodshot eyes, and something darker, but he delivered a second blow, hard on target, and strolled over to the far side of the room. 'If you don't want an uncomfortable night, that is.'

'You've bought it.' said Posner vengefully.

'What are they going to do with us?'

'You work it out.'

'I'd like to have your thoughts.' Henshall strolled over, round the back of the chair, and suddenly yanked Posner to his feet again. 'And I'm going to keep on until I get answers.' He whacked the man's face again, and shoved him back into the chair.

Posner raised his arms and began to blubber. 'Leave me alone, will you? I don't know. None of this was supposed to happen.'

'But it has, hasn't it?' Henshall looked at the man for a while, and then went round the other rooms, the kitchen and the two bedrooms. He came back with a couple of knives and a radio, which he placed on the table. 'All we've got', he said. 'You listening, Posner?'

The man looked up.

'So we're going to have to jump them.'

Posner almost recovered. 'With those? Do us a favour.'

'Any better ideas?' Henshall twiddled with the radio, found a station, and strolled over. 'When, Posner?'

'Don't know, pal. I swear I don't know.'

Henshall went over to the window and peered out. 'Probably when they change the guards. Think I'll knock you up a bit. That should bring one of

them in.' He turned down the radio while Posner backed away. 'Or we could try prizing the planks off the wall, quietly, in the back bedroom.'

'Bloody marvellous.'

'You're right. Rough you up a bit.'

Posner reached for a knife. Henshall turned up the volume and pointed to the bedroom.

It was thirty sweaty minutes before the first plank was loosened. Henshall stood on a chair and prized off the top end while Posner strained at the bottom. The second came more easily, and then a third and fourth. But across the gap ran three cross-timbers and beyond these were the outer planks. Henshall swore as he felt the resistance. Dripping with sweat he staggered back to the lounge, where Posner was already stretched out on the sofa. The man's head had begun to bleed again, and Henshall himself felt unsteady. He got up and peered out of the window. The two guards were still there, dark shapes on the ground with the

camp lights now turned off. Better for us, thought Henshall. 'Rest's over, Posner. Let's get back to it.'

But the cross timbers could not be removed without taking off the whole interior panelling, and the two were struggling with the last board when they heard the key turn in the padlock. 'Damn', said Henshall, running back to position himself behind the door. Posner was still stumbling out of the bedroom when a figure came into the hut.

CHAPTER 20

It was Laila, closely followed by one of the guards, who closed the door and lounged against it. Henshall returned to the bedroom to block the view.

Glancing quickly at Posner, she turned to Henshall. 'Peter all right?'

'Having a whale of a time.'

The woman frowned and spoke to the guard. He shook his head and then accepted a second note

before sauntering out, leaving the door open. 'Very sorry', said Laila.

'Everyone's sorry: Posner, you, Hartini. But that didn't stop the double-crossing.'

The woman shook her head. 'Hartini never double-cross. She tell lies, she confuse but she no double-cross Peter.'

'I wish that were true. But she was working for Prawoto, as she admitted before they shot her.'

The remark didn't register for a moment, but then the colour drained from Laila's face.

'Didn't they tell you?' continued Henshall. 'Posner and his mindless butchers. Four workmen. Even a soldier.'

'Hartini no dead!' the woman exclaimed. 'Anwar he say Hartini go back in helicopter.'

'Tried to get the three of us by blowing the thing up, but only killed the pilot. After that it was Hartini shot in the back. Now they want me, and of course you, Posner.' He turned to the man who was lying

out on the sofa, scarcely following events. 'Pleased with the pay-off, are you?'

Laila went up to him. 'This ah true, Michael? You no lie to me.'

'You'll get yours too', he muttered, closing his eyes.

The woman seized Henshall's arm. 'No was plan.'

'Don't suppose it was.'

The grip tightened. 'Maybe I play with guard and you run away.'

'With two of them?' said Henshall, releasing himself. 'I'm not too keen on suicide, thank you.'

The woman went up to Posner, and then walked round the room, staring at the floor. She came back. 'All right, I help you if you look after Laila. You promise?'

'Laila, if you get us out, I'll do everything to help you. Yes, of course.'

The woman looked carefully at him, and nodded. 'Laila call guards. They come, but you stay there.' She indicated the far side of the room. 'When they near I take rifles.'

'Hear that, Posner? Over to the wall please.'

The woman called twice, and still the second guard had to be coaxed into the hut. Laila ordered them to shoot, first Posner, who swore and backed against the wall. 'You shoot him now!' demanded the woman. Neither took her seriously, but one raised his rifle and casually pointed it at the man. As he took a step forward, Laila grabbed his weapon and cannoned into the second. Both had lost their balance when Henshall sprang, and then Posner. The rifle went off, deafening in the small room. But Posner got in a heavy chop to the neck, and Henshall did for the second guard. The men took the rifles and Laila the revolvers, but, on emerging from the hut, all three stopped in their tracks. Coming across the central area, clearly recognizable now the floodlights had been turned

on again, was the man Henshall had met fourteen months ago at the lakeside hotel. 'Prawoto', whispered Laila, and the two backed away, following Posner who had begun to zigzag through the surrounding outbuildings. He was running for the adit, lighted for the drillers working further down the tunnel.

'Only way', shouted Henshall, grabbing Laila's hand as the two of them followed, keeping to the huts and shadows. Across the open ground at the mine entrance they heard several shots ring out, but it wasn't until they gained the adit and had some protection that Henshall looked back. Prawoto was giving orders as his men came up. Ahead of them, down the tunnel, he could see Posner blundering along. They followed hard behind, the noise of the drilling machine beginning to roar in their ears until they turned into an unlit crossway. Posner had taken this way as well, crashing into obstacles and cursing angrily. Laila and Henshall groped after him in a darkness now

beginning to be lit by the flashlights of the party behind. They blundered on, falling over rocks, striking their heads on unseen projections. Henshall lost the rifle when he helped Laila down into another cross-cut, but they quickened their pace, saw a small square of the sky ahead, and were out at last, beyond the illuminated perimeter fence, into safety and the warm tropical night.

Henshall felt awful. There was a stitch in his side, and several hard bruises to his head, all throbbing painfully. Laila's shirt was badly scuffed, and there was a wild look to her eyes, but she grinned at him. 'This way', she said, tugging at his arm. 'No, into the shadows, Laila,' said Henshall quietly. 'Posner's got away, but we won't make it.' The first of the guards had now emerged from the tunnel, and was searching carefully for movement. He fired at random, and two guards fired a volley into the far bushes. Henshall held Laila down, and they crouched for several minutes as the men conferred with Prawoto and stared into the darkness.

The guards didn't venture far, and were beginning to return when Henshall guided Laila along the edge of the clearing, pushing through the wet foliage, stepping over the dark tangle of roots. He knew what Posner was making for—the rough track that looped behind the camp and came out into the old mine village. They followed, walking briskly and then waiting minutes at a time, but there was only the sound of gibbons whooping mournfully and the wind rustling through the branches. In something over an hour they were approaching the village, where they stopped, seeing several soldiers, their rifles carried loosely as they patrolled up and down. The two shrank into the shadows. Presently a jeep turned up, and they could hear instructions being given.

'What are they saying?' asked Henshall quietly.

'Soldiers along road. No let people through', she reported a few minutes later, pushing the long hair out of her face.

'Confining us to the jungle where they can finish us off.'

'Go other way, across Japanese mine?'

'That's tiger country proper, and if our furry friend doesn't get us, the jungle may. It's pretty steep up there, six thousand feet, before it drops down to the coastal flats.'

'No is possible?'

'There is a rough track that might get us into a logging area. I've been over part of it. We'd have a day's start, before Prawoto puts two and two together. But it'll be hard, with no equipment or food.'

'Laila have answer.' She produced the two revolvers, and whirled them round her fingers.

'I think I'd better take one of those.'

'Ah so.'

At dawn the country took on a more familiar aspect, and they walked in short bursts, dodging from cover to cover as the path entered open stretches. After an hour the sun disappeared and it started to

rain, the downpour turning heavy. Henshall took off his shirt and looked at his arm, which had begun to throb painfully. The bullet had only gone through the skin, however, leaving a jagged furrow, which Laila washed in the rain and tried to bind. 'Leave it open', said Henshall. 'Doesn't hurt.' The woman gave him a reproving look and the two moved off, the rain now dwindling and glinting in the weak sunshine. The path climbed steadily and then turned, beginning its loop back through the Japanese workings and out of danger.

'Is good?' said Laila, stopping and seating herself on a nearby boulder. 'We stay short time?'

'As you like. Prawoto won't get here today.'

'No meet tiger?'

'Don't see why we should. If it knows the mine it can surely get into the camp, and they'll be more for it there.'

'If tiger come Laila kill.' She drew out the revolver, firing imaginary shots into the undergrowth.'

‘Just hope it doesn’t. Apart from advertising our position, our chances of hitting it aren’t too good. Rested enough? We’d better be going.’

The woman put the weapon back into her belt and followed Henshall through a tangle of bushes and then up a slope that rose towards the overhanging ridge. ‘No find path?’

‘We’ll have to get over this ridge before we pick up the track, if there’s a track at all. I followed some of it from the helicopter once, but that was much further over, on the other side of the range. Should be over there, somewhere in that direction, that’s where we have to go.’

The woman followed his arm and said, ‘Tomorrow we rest?’

‘Tomorrow’s going to be a good deal worse.’

The woman gave an exasperated grunt, and sat down. ‘Laila rest now.’

Henshall went ahead to check the route, returning to take a short breather himself and help Laila to her feet. ‘Mostly open forest’, he said. ‘Steep

climb but no real obstacles.' Laila shook her head but said nothing as the two resumed their journey.

The first calls had been distant, many miles away, but now the animal was closer.

'A mile maybe.'

'You have plan?'

'Not exactly', admitted Henshall. He looked around. Upwards on all sides the great hardwoods soared into the forest canopy. 'Couldn't really be worse. We'd better go down to the river.'

'Towards tiger?'

'It'll get across, but we need something to cover our backs.'

Giving him an anxious glance, Laila started running, half stumbling down the leaf-covered slope. Henshall caught up with her, and in a few minutes they were both staring at the gorge through which the river churned a hundred feet below.

‘Let’s get down’, said Henshall. He took Laila’s hand and the two scrambled down the steep banks to a thick clump of rattan that marked the gorge edge. Cautiously Henshall peered over, and pointed to a ledge that ran forty feet below them, narrow and wet with spray. ‘Hold on to the rattan and lower yourself slowly. Fall into that water and no one can save you.’ Laila nodded and saw Henshall make his way down. Then she followed, her small boots tucking themselves into the rock and tangle of plant roots. Henshall watched anxiously, and helped her on to the ledge. ‘Now don’t move more than you have to’, he shouted above the roar of the torrent.

‘Is true tiger come?’

‘It’s already here.’ He pointed to odd fragments of soil that were beginning to fall through the leaves. It will try to come down, but not risk a plunge into the river.’

‘We look different ways. Is right?’ She drew her revolver.

‘Wait as long as you can, but don’t let the animal come within springing distance.’

‘Laila know.’

Several minutes went by. Laila stared round ferociously, her eyebrows knitted in concentration. Then she touched Henshall on the shoulder and pointed upwards. Henshall nodded. They pressed themselves to the rock and waited. The foliage shifted and through the tangle they saw the large outline of a paw and then another. ‘Four shots’, whispered Henshall. They fired together. At first there was no response, then a sudden spasm of activity, and finally something large and heavy fell into the bushes alongside. Laila stared in horror as the massive head opened its jaws to show blood-stained teeth. Henshall levelled his revolver, but the animal slipped and then fell into the river, on to the rocks below, where it looked up, bewildered and malevolent until the current lifted it away.

The two held each other until the shaking passed, then retraced their steps. Only an hour of

daylight remained when they reached the top of the ridge, and they were too exhausted to make a proper shelter. Henshall cut some bamboo, collected enough foliage to keep out the rain and, surrounded by dry leaves picked from bushes, the two huddled together and fell asleep.

‘With Laila you sleep well?’ said the woman as they were on their feet again and climbing through the wet foliage that clothed the mountain ridge.

‘Well enough’, said Henshall.

‘Like first people in Bible.’

‘May seem another Eden to you, but it won’t be before the day is out. We’ve got no food, the track we haven’t found, and there’s every chance of running into Prawoto’s men.’

‘Laila feel safe with Peter.’ She gave him a hug, drawing back when he winced. ‘Arm have pain?’

'Infection seems to have got in. We'll check when we get over this mountain, where there should be a stream, and maybe some fish to eat.'

The woman put hands to hip but then strode forward in an exaggerated display of determination. It was midday, however, and five hours after their morning start, before they found a track going in their direction, and only when they saw a thin waterfall above them did Henshall agree to stop. The two scrambled over a train of moss-covered boulders to the fall, under which there was a deep pool, the water clear and cold. Laila washed the wound and then plunged into the water, her sleek body taking on glints of green as she turned over in the water. A mesmerizing sight, thought Henshall as he dropped in after her. Twenty minutes later, more light-headed than rested, the two pushed on again.

The path was largely dry, leaving no footprints, and they could follow it easily as it climbed the side of the valley and began to loop in switchbacks up the steep mountain flank. Laila was bearing up

well, and it was Henshall who now slipped, or caught his hair in overhanging foliage. But he refused to slacken his pace, looking continually at his watch and pulling a face at their progress. 'Certainly taking time.'

'Laila need food.'

'There's nothing to shoot here, and no fire to cook it. Besides, I don't think we want to advertise our whereabouts.' The woman nodded, and after a ten-minute stop they started off again. Two miles on, the path began to level out, but the mountains still towered above them. The slopes steepened, and there were sections of bare rock, collecting sometimes into short cliffs and gullies, but the path was dry and not slippery, a border of shrubs and rattan protecting them from the adjoining drop. Occasionally they stopped, and could see far below them the river twist and foam in its bouldery course. The afternoon was almost spent now, and great shadows filled the gorge, adding to the gloom

of the place. But the two still pressed on until the path ended in a sheet of water.

‘That’s it for today,’ said Henshall. ‘We’ll find a place to sleep.’

They walked back and found a small thicket where, half supported by the dead foliage, they lay down and tried to sleep. Henshall’s arm throbbed, and all his joints ached and protested, but he slept, some of the night, though the dawn took forever to arrive. Whether Laila had slept he didn’t know, but she was wide-awake at first light when they left to reconnoitre the fall.

It seemed unlikely the path went under, but there was no hint of a sidetrack. The two ventured to the water’s edge, and Henshall breasted the untidy curtain of water and slipped in. There was a cavern behind the fall, he told Laila, and the two made their way past the corrugated sheet of water. Once through to the far side they were out into the morning air and again climbing the spray-drenched path that scaled the far side of the gorge. In places

they were only two hundred yards from the previous day's route, and it was overlooking this, at one of their half-hourly stops, that Laila drew Henshall's attention to the movement opposite. They counted four soldiers, and what was probably a guide in front. 'Three hours', said Henshall grimly, when they were safely past. 'That's all the head start we have now.'

'Ah so', said the woman, and got immediately to her feet, setting a pace that Henshall found hard to follow. But he caught up with her, and the two were soon half walking, half running up the narrow path that zigzagged out of the gorge. They pressed on for another hour, when Henshall pointed to a small thicket on the slope above them. Here they waited, hidden in the undergrowth. 'Give it another hour', whispered Henshall. 'Maybe they've turned back at the fall.'

'If no see tracks', said Laila.

'If the guide doesn't let on.'

The hour came and went. They waited a while longer, glad of the rest, and then cautiously descended to the track and continued their journey. What he looked like, Henshall could only imagine, but Laila was clearly all in. She stumbled along, her clothes torn into open rents. 'Me number one girl?' she said. 'You're doing well, Laila. Not many field hands would have kept up this pace.' The woman looked at him, and Henshall realized she was trembling with fatigue, the eyes not focusing properly. He felt strange himself. The arm throbbed even more, and there was a dull pain around his cheeks and temple. Pray god it's not a fever, he thought.

'If you like we could stop for the night,' he said, 'though it would be best to go on. If we can get to the watershed tonight then tomorrow will be all downhill. Difficult but easier than today.'

'Is true?'

‘Only we’re going to be tired, and half-starved, and probably careless. But we ought to get to the top tonight if we can.’

The woman scrambled awkwardly to her feet, helped Henshall up, and the two resumed their climb. It grew colder and gloomier as the evening came on, but still the path looped onward, sometimes flattening out for a while, and then steepening again. Henshall glanced at his watch, shaking his head. ‘That’s it,’ he called out at last, ‘we’ll finish the climb tomorrow.’

‘Peter come see!’

Henshall slowly climbed the last few yards and found Laila gazing out over a vast expanse of jungle that lay steeped in the last glints of twilight. From here the path sloped downwards, through ravines and waterfalls, which they would cross tomorrow, past limestone cliffs that threw great shadows over the jungle flats, but through it, somewhere over there, as Henshall knew on checking the compass reading, was the logging

camp and a place of safety. Smiling with relief, Henshall turned round to Laila, and saw the woman staring at him in horror.

CHAPTER 21

‘Put that down’, said Henshall.

‘Stay away! You tiger-man. No fool Laila!’

‘Laila, you’re delirious. Please put that down.’

Henshall could see the fierce concentration, the eyes turned fish-like in their sockets. Hallucinating, he thought, and the realization brought a sharp jab of fear as he reached to take the revolver. The shot astonished him, whistling past his cheek. Then the weapon clicked and Henshall had a hand to it, pointing it away as he released it from her grasp.

For a moment the woman resisted and then collapsed, sobbing and beating his chest. 'It's all right, Laila', he said gently. 'All over now.'

'But we'd better get going', he said, keeping an arm round the waist. She nodded, clinging to his bad side, where the pain distracted him constantly. The light was fading, and it was difficult to see in the shadows. He stared down to where the path must continue, over the plain below them, to what rose as a column of smoke. Yes, it was smoke, and not far away.

'Better risk it', he said. 'Three days without food. You delirious with exhaustion. My arm badly infected. Anything is worth trying now.' He checked the compass bearing, and took Laila by the hand. The two skidded down slopes, clawed their way up clay banks and brushed through tangles of leaves wet with dew. Sometimes they slipped badly, and once they rolled, both of them, down a long slope, coming to rest in a marshy hollow. Henshall brought out the compass again, and the two scrambled off as

before. Only occasionally could they see the smoke, but the smell of a wood fire was apparent long before they saw the flicker of light through the trees.

Henshall told Laila to wait while he crept carefully forward, squirming on his stomach for the last few yards to a vantage point. There were two of them, camped by a small stream. Hunters, he decided, and went back for Laila, who had crept within hailing distance. The two got to their feet and shouted, their voices thin in the night air. The conversation stopped. '*Salaam malakum*', they shouted again, and now the reply came back, faint and uncertain. Henshall and Laila clambered and tottered down the last hundred yards, and came abruptly to the warmth of the fire.

The men stared at the intruders, only one putting aside his rifle to help the woman. Henshall collapsed beside her, and sat for several minutes saying nothing. A mug of tea was put into his hands, and he saw that Laila too was being helped to drink. Afterwards he lay out on the ground, refus-

ing the rice offered him. The man insisted, and Henshall began slowly to pick at the food. Laila had been placed on a fallen tree, and was now talking as the men nodded their heads and looked carefully at Henshall. One came over and shook his hand. He was a hunter, someone he had hired as a guide some weeks back. Henshall was too tired to remember, but he smiled, and the crinkled face smiled back, revealing blackened stumps of teeth. Henshall tottered awkwardly to his feet and joined Laila on the tree trunk, first sitting next to her and then lying out on the warm ground. Laila stroked his hair, and undid the bandage on his arm, but Henshall was asleep before the wound was dressed.

‘What did they say?’ asked Henshall the following morning, when they had the camp to themselves.

‘Not know Captain Mochtar.’

‘Their stuff is here so they’re coming back. With something for the pot, or the military, that’s the question.’

'Maybe they not know.'

'If they bump into our friends they'll bring them back. Otherwise they'll simply occupy themselves shooting monkeys or birds or whatever they're after.'

'*Babi*. They hunt pig.'

'Not this far from a *kampong*. We'll take some food, and be on our way.'

'No good *adat*.'

'Nor is surrendering a guest.'

Laila nodded, conserving her strength to stumble after Henshall as he led the way down. Here the slopes were thickly draped with small shrubs and creeper. Once he tripped, and Laila could see the handsome face wince as the shoulder smacked into the hard ground. She watched anxiously as Henshall picked himself up, and took a bearing to collect his breath. Then they were off again, willing themselves to overcome the aches and bruises that had become more painful with the night's rest.

They were plagued by flies, and several times had to stop to remove the dark twists of leeches that collected on necks, or crawled up legs and arms. Laila looked carefully at the man's shoulder and arm, now noticeably swollen and beginning to darken ominously. He kept his eyes on his companion's expression, judging when she'd had enough and they must rest. Around midday they came to a small river, where they ate their food, washing the rice down with mouthfuls of cold water. The wound had closed but the upper arm was an angry red, painful to the touch and showing an unhealthy yellow cast to the inflated skin.

'Is bad?' said Laila after washing and retying the bandage.

'Not gangrenous yet.'

They pushed on, the ground still dropping and the forest more open. Small clumps of bamboo and creeper were the only vegetation to break the smooth ground that dropped in long rounded slopes to where a river could be heard roaring

below. Laila leant over the tangle of tree roots that made a seat on one of their now more frequent stops, but Henshall was only staring at a troop of monkeys noisily swinging from branch to branch in the canopy above. 'Has to broaden out and join the main river sometime', he remarked absently. 'We may be only a few miles from the logging camp, but the area is surrounded by limestone cliffs that drop hundreds of feet.'

'For Laila no problem.'

'We've got this far without incident because none of the paths go this way', he continued. 'No paths mean no soldiers, but also something difficult ahead. I keep asking myself why the hunters didn't follow, since scruples are a luxury where Captain Mochtar's concerned, but they've left us because they don't think we'll get through.'

'We try river?'

'If the current's not too fast, and there are no rapids or whirlpools, then I suppose we might manage to cross or swim along with it.'

‘We try now. Laila see way down.’

A half-hour later they were standing knee-deep in the current that swirled past, twisting through the smooth walls of its channel and carrying small white pebbles that glinted and were lost in the green-blue water. Laila clutched at Henshall to steady herself. ‘Take it easy’, he shouted above the deep boom that reverberated between the steep walls. ‘Protect your head. If you lose control, protect your head.’ The woman nodded, and then plunged into the current. Henshall saw the figure streak through the water and quickly turn the corner out of sight. He followed immediately, and was soon turning over as the current swept him along.

He came to the surface, and looked wildly about. There were no rocks or sandbars here, and the water swept remorselessly on, boiling and churning between sheer limestone walls. He turned around, wondering whether to shed his boots, when he saw the dark shape of Laila a few yards behind. The head broke the surface, and she

smiled. Henshall tried to swim towards her, but the water carried him on. Now the channel was narrowing and Henshall could feel the current fastening on his feet and dragging him under.

For long seconds at a time he was sucked deep into the water, but came to the surface again. A mile passed and then another, the channel sometimes widening, sometimes twisting like a narrow corkscrew. In places he could almost reach out and touch the smooth grey walls as he hurtled past, but he knew he had to stay with the current and avoid disturbances. Finally the sky lightened, the gorge widened into a small valley, and the river was threading through shoals and large boulders, a group of which he made for, hauling himself painfully out of the water. He scanned the far bank, and was about to swim over when a voice hailed him from a distance downstream. He plunged into the water, and a few minutes later was sitting beside the woman, the water dripping on to the flat rock she'd chosen. As she flung her head back,

Henshall impulsively kissed her, finding the mouth warm under the wet skin. '*Sama, sama*, Peter', she declared, her eyes sparkling. 'We survive.'

'Might even get to the camp today if the light holds.'

'We look see.'

They slipped back into the water and swam with the current to the far end of the valley, climbing a short distance to get a view of the stretch beyond. Laila insisted on going further, but returned to say the gorge narrowed again. 'That thunder is probably a waterfall then', said Henshall, helping her down with his good arm. 'Don't think we want to push our luck today.'

'We sleep here? Last night together.'

'I'd prefer to concentrate on getting out.'

'The woman stroked his cheek. 'Laila understand.'

'Do you?' said Henshall, taking the hand away. 'I can't think what we're even doing here, or how I managed to misjudge Hartini.'

‘She work for Prawoto because he like uncle to her. Many years they friends. Prawoto know her father during war.’

Henshall looked at the dark river that stretched out in front of them. ‘If I’d asked her to leave Indonesia with me,’ he said carefully, ‘she’d have gone? All this manager business was just testing me?’

‘Laila catch fish now.’

‘We could have made it, the two of us, do you think?’

But the woman concentrated on fashioning a splinter of bamboo into a spear, and didn’t reply.

CHAPTER 22

Night fell quickly and it was soon dark in the gorge. Gradually the jungle, Laila and the events of the last few days became unreal, the cardboard scenery of a stage he didn't understand. Two hours later, when the moon appeared over the lip of the gorge, and its reflection bobbed in the swelling blackness of the river, Henshall remembered the scene at the Kuta Beach Hotel and then other evenings. He clenched his jaw, and slowly settled himself again. Laila too shifted uneasily, easing herself into a comfortable position. When she was quiet, and Henshall could hear her light breathing, he began to take stock of events. He was responsible for Laila now, and for Hartini and the fiasco of Tambang Surga.

Laila shifted again and woke up. 'What Peter thinking?' she said.

'About tomorrow. So far we've done well, but we're going to need every scrap of luck to make it

out tomorrow. The waterfall is not going to be easy.'

'Why we not climb valley?'

'It's almost overhanging, on both sides. Why there are no paths, despite the fish.'

'So what you say now? You like Laila?'

Henshall's head hurt abominably, and throughout his body he felt shaky and unwell. 'Yes, of course, but there's Hartini', he said. 'Ah so', said the woman, and, folding his arm tightly round her, went back to sleep.

It was still fine the following morning, and the blue sky glistened and threaded itself into the torrent that steepened downstream from their stopping place. For the first few hundred yards there was a bank of rough boulders over which it was possible to clamber along the water's edge. But as the channel narrowed until there was only the dark-

corded and back-curling water that rushed headlong between the polished walls. The two held parley on the last boulder, and decided to go over. There would be a deep pool under the waterfall, and they would try to leap clear of the main drop, to avoid being caught in the heavy undercurrent. Henshall would leave first by five minutes, giving him time to recover and help Laila if needed. He gave her a hurried kiss, and slipped in.

Half a minute and he was at the waterfall, where he felt himself weightless until the water hit and swallowed him. Then there was the sheer weight pushing the air out, hurting his eyes and lungs as he hung on, fighting with the down-rush, until he finally came to the surface gasping for breath as the spray roared in his ears. Groggily he took his bearings and swum off towards the ledge of the pool, grasping at a tree root to steady himself. Laila had not appeared, he noted thankfully, as he had hardly the strength to stay afloat. Then something went over, just a darkish streak in the water, which

didn't re-emerge. He swam across but there was nothing to see. He continued round carefully, through the fall to the cavern behind, but whatever it had been wasn't Laila. He swam back for a vantage point, and was thinking that perhaps he'd misread his watch, when he noticed the small body floating on the far side of the pool, spread-eagled and slowly turning in the current.

Henshall recovered the body, and dragged it to the beach. For strenuous minutes he didn't dare think resuscitation stood a chance, for the eyes remained closed and the small mouth wore a strange, petulant expression. Then the face twitched, and an eye half opened. Henshall worked steadily on, ignoring the pain in his lungs and arm until the figure came slowly to life. He lay out beside her, too ill to move, for an hour or more, while he could hear Laila spluttering and breathing hoarsely next to him, feeling close to her, part of her struggle to survive.

Then they set off again. Around them the limestone hills went on, towering over them, but they were able for the next hour to pick their way along one side of the river, sometimes clambering over spreads of boulders, sometimes ploughing through stretches of sand or riverside foliage. The valley widened gradually and then came a small tributary, entering peacefully behind a thicket of tree palms and rattan. Towards midday they stopped, and Henshall tried to empty the water from his compass and take a bearing.

‘Sooner or later we have to’, he said. ‘The main river doesn’t come out at the camp. You feeling better now?’

‘*Sama sama*, Peter.’

Henshall nodded and remembered his own reflections in quiet stretches of the river. The eyes had a hollow look. His clothes were in tatters. And if the arm didn’t throb so much, it was more painful, the skin purple and swollen from shoulder to below the elbow, making movement difficult.

They continued slowly for a couple of hours, until there was a thinning of trees, which Henshall took to be the road, and towards which they cautiously advanced. But it was a river, a small and shallow river, up which they plashed. An hour later, at a bend in the river, they saw the road and then the palisades of a camp. Thank God, thought Henshall as they crept along the road, and then stayed hidden behind foliage for several minutes. No one appeared, and the tire-marks on the road didn't look fresh.

'Have to chance it', said Henshall. 'You stay here.'

'Where Peter go, Laila go.'

Since her near drowning of the morning, the woman had swayed drunkenly along, driving herself to place one foot in front of the other. Uncertainly, the two got to their feet, tidied their appearance, and lurched forward. No one appeared. They went past the entrance and into the central compound. The huts returned a dejected look, the atap

roofs sagging and neglected. Gone, thought Henshall. The logging company had moved on.

CHAPTER 23

For reply the woman pointed to the helicopter half hidden in the trees, from which emerged a crowd of soldiers running towards them, led by an officer waving a revolver in the air. Henshall turned to his companion, but found Laila sitting on the ground, looking at him wearily as she muttered, 'Sama, Peter. Sama sama.'

Henshall also lost connection with events. Laila's limp body was carried into one of the huts as Henshall was helped to his feet, walked over to

an office from which two men seemed to stare back. Rick Darrell sprawled in a chair. A tall figure in air force drill, whom Henshall didn't recognize, said, 'Carrington', in a flat Australian voice. Henshall nodded, and drifted to the table, resting his head in his hands as the pain returned, and with it a retching nausea.

'Just you, partner, is there?' said Darrell.

'And Laila Chow.' Henshall tried to focus as the men conferred. Carrington spoke to an army captain who seemed to have appeared. 'No you wait please', said the man, and went out.

'Friendly lot', Henshall heard himself say. 'From Tambang Surga are they?'

For reply Darrell, turned to one of the soldiers. 'Got a smoke?' he asked, looking at Henshall knowingly when the reply came back in English.

'Rick', Henshall said carefully, at strained intervals. 'Do you think we could get some food into Laila?'

‘Reckon she’d keep it down?’ He enquired of one of the soldiers, who reappeared shortly with the army captain. The man nodded, and through the open door Henshall saw Darrell talking and handing something over. Then his large frame appeared in the doorway carrying the medical chest.

‘Better get this into you, if you want to live.’

‘What about Laila?’ asked Henshall, bracing himself as the needle was pushed through the inflated skin.

‘Say they’ll feed her later.’

Henshall lapsed into semi-consciousness. His arm began to hurt again, and he could feel the sweat pour from his hair and run into his eyes. There was movement, and then voices, and after what seemed an eternity in the drifting heat, the door opened and the army captain pointed Henshall and pilot out to the helicopter. Darrell was shaking his head. ‘Need engineer. Savvy?’

'No engineer', said the captain. 'We go now.' He pointed to the helicopter again, on which Laila could be seen, already strapped in.

'Civil aviation rules. No engineer on board then no flight.' Darrell turned back to the office.

The captain's smile hardened. He spoke to a sergeant, and Carrington picked up his toolbox. In five minutes the engine was warmed up, and the helicopter airborne. Thoughtful, seated next to a slumped-out Laila, and with the army captain's revolver pressed hard against his ribs, Henshall calculated his chances. Fifteen minutes to think of some plan, he reflected as the forestry camp shrank away into a toy model of huts.

The helicopter climbed steeply. Three thousand came up on the altimeter, but his neighbour seemed more fearful than suspicious. Hasn't flown before, Henshall thought, as the aircraft pitched violently forward. 'Just turbulence, folks', drawled the pilot. Then there was another violent judder: the aircraft spun round and was falling, plummeting as

Darrell wrestled with the controls. The engine picked up again, and then sputtered out. The craft spun round, the pilot swore, and there was nothing, no engine whine, just the soft purr of the blades autorotating above them.

Everyone looked at the grey-green jungle fast opening beneath, until Darrell had the craft under control as they headed back, autorotating into a logging area where a brown track snaked across a clearing. The power was on again, but it would be a difficult landing, thought Henshall, as he watched his neighbour close his eyes and the craft land with a heavy thump. Henshall was thrown awkwardly by the impact, but kept his hands on the revolver until Carrington appeared and seemed as though in slow motion to bring his fist down hard on the officer's neck. The two fell out, the army captain folding out into the mud, and Henshall clutching at the arm that now jabbed pain through his body.

Laila was closing her sleepy eyes again as the helicopter turned carefully in the clearing, the cap-

tain sitting on a tree stump he'd been dragged to. Henshall caught a last glimpse of the man, forlorn and angry, as the ground fell away and they turned over the trees. 'Where now?' he shouted. 'Mapura Queen? Got the fuel for that?'

'Where's sleeping beauty getting off?' asked the pilot, looking back over his shoulder.

'Anywhere outside Indonesia. Rick, can you do that?'

'Got her passport, you reckon?'

Henshall woke the woman up. 'Kotapalu', he said.

'Figures', said the pilot.

'So you tell me', said Henshall

The pilot uttered another obscenity, and turned the craft round. The jungle gave way to patchy cultivation, to a road and several small villages, clustered around palm trees and long strips of paddy. They hovered above an open field, and began their descent.

'Telephone where?' asked Henshall, looking at the telegraph poles that skirted the road, 'Rick, speak to me, will you? I'm not liking this any more than you.'

'There's a guy I know happens to own a Cesner. Might just pick you up if he's loafing about one of the airstrips waiting for business. So do something useful. Get the telephone operator.'

'Try again', demanded Darrell an hour later.

'Rick, I've been in twice, but it's Friday prayer time. They're all at the mosque. Couldn't we phone from the airport?'

'If you want to be arrested on the spot. Try them again, would you, partner?'

Henshall set off once more, reappearing fifteen minutes later with a ladder and a white-haired man in tow. The ladder was propped against one of the telegraph poles, and the old man climbed precariously up with his connecting equipment. Henshall and Carrington held the ladder as the pilot clambered up afterwards. Then Darrell was down, his

face wearing a belligerent grin. 'Two hours', he said. 'We just have to stay out of trouble till then.'

'Peter still like Laila?' asked the woman as she put the washed clothes back on, gazing sadly at the torn khaki shirt and slacks.

Henshall smiled, and did the belt up. 'Still look gorgeous to me.'

'Ah so.' She sat down at the edge of the clearing and watched Henshall pull his boots on and smooth back his uncombed hair. 'Last time, eh?'

'Lee Ong will collect you in Singapore.'

She cast a reproachful look, shrugged and tried to smile.

'Look, Laila, we'll sort it out. We'll see each other again, I promise.'

He walked over to Carrington, who was sitting on a fallen tree. 'Like to tell me about Tambang Surga? Three bodies by a burnt-out chopper? One

was Mason; the others were too badly burnt to be recognizable, would that be it?’

Carrington swung himself round. ‘Leave it’, he said. ‘You don’t want to know.’

‘I thought you had a report to write.’

‘Now don’t come all high and mighty with me. You’re bloody lucky to be alive. Which you wouldn’t be if your pal Woodford hadn’t made us poke our noses in. We checked the whole area round the mine this morning, only of course you’d taken some other clever route.’

‘Woodford?’ said Henshall.

‘He insisted we hang around, when the Indons got nasty.’

‘So you understand what’s going on, unofficially?’

‘You’re not with it, are you? We’re getting you out, you and the girlfriend, because you’re one of us. Got that?’

Henshall stared angrily into the distance, and neither men spoke again until it was time to board. The airport came into view some forty minutes later, the Cesner waiting in the area set aside for the local flying school. Darrell kept the rotors turning as Henshall lifted Laila out, and then helped her across the tarmac. The control tower came through quickly, and within fifteen minutes they were airborne again. Laila opened her slanting eyes several times, but was fast asleep when the last shreds of the east coast swamps were left behind and the dark waters of the Malacca Straits loomed up in front them.

CHAPTER 24

‘I know that,’ said Henshall a few weeks later, ‘but my main crime was to survive. That’s about the size of it.’

‘Very likely, my boy’, said Norbury, breaking off to choose a pudding from the list the waiter presented. ‘But I said we’d find some way of sorting this out, and so we have.’

‘Despite the “arrogance, insubordination, lack of responsibility, smug superiority that places other

people's safety at risk", and more comments of that ilk.'

'Irritating, I agree, and perhaps not fair. But you'll understand your boss was extremely angry, as was the Governor. Incidents with the army aren't welcome, and then there was that Boy's Own stuff at the logging camp. Quite unnecessary. Tambang Surga was your camp, and you were being returned there for medical attention.'

'You'll allow me to entertain some doubts on that score', said Henshall.

'Don't. You lost your way with that Filipina supervisor and finally made it to the logging place. That's all you have to sign. If you have other recollections you're simply being asked to keep them to yourself. It's not unreasonable, and it will enable the Indonesian Government to issue you with another permit, should you wish to work for the Huas. Personally, I'd suggest you move on. Metax in Australia would be pleased to employ you, and I

can tell you off the record that Seybold will agree to a pretty decent salary increase. Sound fair to you?’

‘Very,’ said Henshall, ‘and I wonder why I’m reluctant to sign this fabrication.’

‘Summary, I think we might call it. You are the only person who claims to remember certain events that would be inconsistent with the line the Government is taking, and they naturally wish to have your silence. The gold was only a rumour. Michael Posner has disappeared. *Ibu* Sujono is dead. Colonel Prawoto is in hospital with a heart attack and not expected to recover. So, whatever one person’s memory may be, the incident for everyone else is closed. Sign the statement, and get on with your life.’

‘But not with Metax in Indonesia, where I might show what was achieved in Tambang Surga? Films, for example. Something tangible.’

Norbury looked thoughtful for a moment. ‘You’re not going to like this,’ he said, ‘but perhaps I should

mention that certain cine-films didn't get to the bank as intended. These are yours, I take it?'

Henshall stared as his manager took sellotaped labels out of an envelope, and spread them on the tablecloth. 'Gift of the security forces?' he asked.

'So we can move on, can we?'

'After I've spoken to someone.'

'We've been through that.'

'Be wise to agree the story with the other star witness, wouldn't it?'

Norbury put the labels away. 'Very well, phone Laila Chow if you have to. But just phone her, nothing else, and be quick about it.'

'That does not exist either', said van Ryssen as Henshall was seated with him a few days later in the snack-bar of the Singapore Hilton. 'I let myself in with your key, but there was nothing there. No documents or clothes or personal effects.'

'No mention in the papers?' said Henshall.
'Nightclub not know anything?'

'Your friend never existed.'

'What about Metax?'

'I am not welcome to visit them. I hear Don Cullen is back in Kotapalu, and that Robert Woodford is looking after Tambang Surga, but more than that I do not know. I am sorry, Peter: it is over.'

Henshall was silent. 'Been good of you to come', he said finally. 'With all my stuff like this.'

'You work for us, not these toadies.'

'Remember who recommended Metax take your areas?'

'I told Hua it was your job to do that. If Peter Henshall is so professional we will have him, he said to me.'

Henshall grinned. 'They're good, these areas of yours?'

'Ja, that is so, but we will talk more at lunch tomorrow. Now I give you this. Ermita opened the

package because it was addressed to her, but there was another wrapping inside. It is for you. You all right, Peter?’

Henshall wasn't listening. He had opened the package and was staring at the record cover, at the face as he'd known it in Bali, the extraordinary face with the large eyes that seemed now to be looking at him, teasing and laughing and wishing him well. The pain came so unexpectedly that he could only stare at the cover, at the photo and then at the other side, on which was written 'All the time. All the time, my friend' in a hand he recognized and couldn't be parted with, for a long time, until the waiter came to lay supper.

She was thinner than before, and on the arms there were still faint scratches, but Henshall whistled softly as he settled himself opposite and said, 'I see the jungle's done you no harm at all, Laila.' He

shook his head admiringly. 'Never seen you looking so dangerous.'

What did you expect? the body breathed as she leant forward and took Henshall's hand. 'You too, Peter. Everyone look at you. Women jealous of Laila. Ah so jealous.'

Henshall's face softened into humour. 'Should've had this dinner before, I can see that.'

'Is true.' She pouted disconsolately at him. 'Why Peter stay away, tell lies to Laila?'

'Because you're the most determined hussy I know. One look, and any normal male is done for.'

'That right!' She took his hand and bit a finger gently. 'Laila eat you all up. You want that?' Laughing, so the white pearls of her teeth caught the candlelight for a moment, she stared soulfully across the table, Henshall's disapproval notwithstanding. 'You no think me serious? Laila play with you?'

Henshall grinned openly. 'Dear Laila, we have to talk, don't we?'

'Tomorrow. Laila tell everything tomorrow.'

'You have to listen to me now.'

'Laila know all that', she said at the end of Henshall's account. 'It because you fight with boss.'

'For some reason, Norbury doesn't want me to go back. Of course he may be protecting the Company's standing, but if the Government didn't want me they would simply refuse to issue a work permit.'

The woman shrugged her shoulders and lit another cigarette. 'Why Peter go back?'

'There's work with the Huas.'

Henshall watched her carefully. At first there was no response. The smoke ring hung a moment in her mouth, curling backwards, and then drifted off till it reached the updraft from the candle flame, where it dissolved immediately. 'Maybe Marinus cheat you', she suggested. 'Laila not know.'

'Marinus won't cheat me. Nor Hua. And if that vein's as rich as Tambang Surga then the partnership's going to be immensely wealthy, more than one can dream of. But the Government will want its share, and probably turn greedy, so some hitch will no doubt occur.' He shook his head. 'No, there's some unfinished business.'

'Better Peter go Philippines. Laila have ah many contacts there.'

'So you think like that cosseted old fox Norbury. For some reason it's not safe to go back? Something to do with Captain Mochtar?'

'Laila no want Peter go away.'

Henshall smiled. 'But who was Captain Mochtar working for if it wasn't Colonel Prawoto? And who had an understanding with Colonel Prawoto but S.A.I.? Whatever conspiracy there may have been to get rid of Cullen, it's something you would have known about. You knew Captain Mochtar.'

The eyes had gone dark, but still the woman continued to stare at him. 'If Peter no like Laila then she go. No talk like this.'

'Perhaps the plan was just to scare Cullen off, make way for someone who was more thorough and could get the job done. Maybe Norbury and Maddocks weren't sorry that Cullen was out of the picture for a time, but Mochtar is the guilty party.'

'Why that?'

'Who got the pump and generator to the gold? Couldn't have been Posner, not in one afternoon. Mochtar would have brought the equipment in before, while we were planning for Cullen's visit. Posner's use came earlier, in Kotapalu, until he was hoodwinked into helping Sally Cullen by the promise of staying on in town and seeing you.' Henshall looked across and smiled. 'Can't say I blame him. But the Governor sent him packing, which means he'd already served his purpose. You knew by then where the gold was. You just had to wait for muggins to open access, and Mochtar to let you know.'

The woman didn't reply.

'Mochtar's not a police chief', continued Henshall. 'He's intelligence. Stands out a mile, which you knew anyway because you were friendly with him. Led him on a bit, just as you did with Posner.'

'You think Laila call-girl?' The woman snatched at her bag as though to leave.

Henshall held her arm. 'You see, I thought Mochtar was the agent provocateur, setting up Colonel Prawoto so the Governor could embarrass him. Gold seized. Colonel demoted. His Excellency's career enhanced. But it wasn't that. It's taken me a long time to realize what was obvious, and what Hartini kept hinting at. The Governor and Prawoto were working together all the time. And so, willingly or unwillingly, were you and Hartini.'

'No is true.'

'Of course you were. How could you possibly have been friends, hang about the same nightclub, if you were working for different parties? The non-

sense about Colonel Prawoto's people coming from Jakarta to get me out of custody at Sungei Tuloh: that was Captain Mochtar again.'

'You too clever, Peter.'

'What I'd like to know is what you plan to do with the loot, supposing you've still got it. Fund some subversive party, some local independence movement?'

'Hartini she dead now.'

'Not for me.'

'That because you no want her to die. That different.'

'Laila, I'm trying to explain something. Of course I should sign Norbury's statement. If Mochtar and his men were clever enough to arrange the accident, they would have removed the evidence. That's what Carrington knew, and what he accepted, only he didn't want me pointing the finger. But for me it's still important. I need to know why Hartini died.'

'Many people die in Indonesia.'

'Not written off like that.'

'Grandparents, they also die.'

'Hartini was murdered. Don't you see the crime in that?'

'Grandparents just old people in Java. No communists. But they take to river and killed. Heads cut off, like that!' She made a chopping action with her hand. 'Is that right? Old people. Never hurt anyone and they killed like that.'

Henshall looked away.

'No, no, you listen, Mr Peter Henshall. Maybe you no like Laila, but you understand. Many people hate Government, want change, but only do more killing. Anwar Mochtar he tell me he no hurt you, but when Hartini die I see must kill Peter Henshall and maybe Laila too. So run away. No have choice.'

'Then why didn't you say so at the time?'

'We say Peter must leave camp. Hartini and Laila we tell you. But Peter too proud. Too much artist and know best.'

'Clearly I didn't.'

The woman took his hand. 'Be real friend to Laila now. So she look after you?'

So that was it, thought Henshall the following morning as he slipped carefully from the bed, and made his way through the half-light of the hotel bedroom. He took Hartini's record from the dressing table where Laila had propped it, and returned it to the wardrobe. She was accepting life in her own way, as women always did, and he knew why she'd been different this time, not saying anything, but afterwards snuggling close, placing his hands round her body as they fell asleep. Henshall made some coffee on the self-catering equipment, and went outside to sit on the veranda.

The corner of his hotel folded away to his right, row on row of windows aligned the same over the empty street. Along the main road a few cars passed, and he could see men assembling at a nearby construction site. It seemed odd to him, all these people with jobs to go to, occupations that gave them purpose and family and community. Perhaps Hartini had been right: he wouldn't marry. He had always liked women, always sympathized with them, but in the end he moved on, which he had to, while he stayed in exploration.

There were the local costume drawings, which the publishing company had half accepted. Where were they? He went to the corner where he and van Ryssen had stacked the material, selecting one of the smaller bundles. Not bad, he supposed, working his way through the landscapes, sketches of *kampong* life, the streets of Kotapalu bustling with cyclists, boys grinning at him, women on their way to market, river scenes, the *kraton* dances. It all came back to him, brightly coloured and unreal.

Henshall recovered another bundle, finding the costume drawings in the second pad. The editor had been right: they were too loose. He picked up another pad, and found himself staring at the drawings made the first evening at the Kuta Beach Hotel: Hartini with fellow diners, another couple, and then several of Hartini singing. Obvious why he'd been taken by the woman, why he had looked so hard at the face, the affectionate mockery of the gestures, the astonishing eyes.

Henshall closed the sketchpad, and sat looking into the distance, gradually hearing the heavy thump of pile-driving starting at the construction site. Was he really going to Australia, to that empty sky, red earth and gum trees? He went back for some of the larger canvases and unrolled them, stretching them out on the floor. Good, he thought, actually rather good. And not only Hartini's portraits. With so many of the women in the *kampongs*, or the boys fishing by the river, he had got the bone structure right, the airy saunter of the

body, the way the fabric wrapped into the air around. If most were only studies, why not put them all together, paint something large and demanding that would get him noticed?

Why not go to the Philippines with Laila, redo the costume drawings if necessary, raise capital abroad for Hua's mine, but go on painting? Metax could carry on as big companies always did, bullying its staff, moulding them into the docile and time-serving. Cullen would continue in Kotapalu, drawing up requisitions and yearly budgets until Toronto recalled him. Woodford, dear goody two-shoes Woodford, would follow orders at Tambang Surga and get them wrong, be blamed but make out, returning to university life with credit and money and a fund of stories people would enjoy but never believe.

But for Henshall the task was just beginning: to show the world as it deserves to be seen, as Hartini had said long ago when she handed him her hopes. And the woman herself? Henshall could

hardly bring himself to think of the body, no doubt burnt and quickly buried. Who could do justice to that, or to the thousands on thousands of the other Indonesians, loved by their families as fervently as he had loved Hartini? A host of shadows appeared, terrified him, but grew larger as the figures quickened into life. He saw them cycling through the streets, shopping in the markets, walking with their buffalos at the end of the day's ploughing in the fields. He saw Hartini smiling at him, urging him to carry on, to try again where she had failed. The past, which had seemed over and done with, was rolling away in front of him, in drawings and paintings of the scenes the two of them had drawn their strength from, as had all the dead before them. He was tying up the last of the bundles when Laila came sleepily out on to the veranda. 'My friend, good morning', she said, putting down a fresh cup of coffee. 'You paint pictures of me? You promise now?' Henshall kissed her softly, and started carrying the bundles back into the room.