# Time for a Tiger

## Malayan Trilogy, #1

**by Anthony Burgess, 1917-1993**

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The Malay state of Lanchap and its towns and inhabitants do not really exist.

# 1

“EAST? They wouldn't know the bloody East if they saw it Not if you was to hand it to them on a plate would they know it was the East. That's where the East is, there.” He waved his hand wildly into the black night “Out there, west You wasn't there, so you wouldn't know. Now I was. Palestine Police from the end of the war till we packed up. That was the East You was in India, and that's not the East any more than this is. So you know nothing about it either. So you needn't be talking.”

Nabby Adams, supine on the bed, grunted. It was four o'clock in the morning and he did not want to be talking. He had had a confused coloured dream about Bombay, shot with sharp pangs of unpaid bills. Over it all had brooded thirst, thirst for a warmish bottle of Tiger beer. Or Anchor. Or Carlsberg. He said, “Did you bring any beer back with you?”

Flaherty jerked like a puppet. “What did I tell you? What am I always saying? May God strike me down dead this instant if I wasn't just thinking to myself as I came in that that's the first bloody question you'd ask. Beer, beer, beer. For God's sake, man, haven't you another blessed thought in your head at all but beer? And supposing I had put a few bottles for myself in the fridge, don't you think it would be the same as always? You lumbering downstairs with your great bloody big weight and that dog after you, clanking its bloody anti-rabies medal against the treads of the stairs, and you draining the lot of it before breakfast and leaving the bloody empties on the floor for any self-respecting decent man who keeps Christian hours to trip over. I did not bring any beer back, though those soldiers is generous to a fault and was for plying me with loads of the stuff and as much as you want, they said, any time you like and all at N.A.A.F.I, prices.”

Nabby Adams stirred on his bed and the dog beneath it stirred too, the medal on its collar chinking like money on the floor. Should he get up now and drink water? He shuddered at the thought of the clean, cold, neuter taste. But thirst seemed to grip his whole body like a fever. He levered himself up slowly, six feet eight inches of thirst, ghostlike behind the darned and frayed mosquito-net.

“I'm worried about you, Nabby,” said Police-Lieutenant Flaherty. “Worried to death. I was saying to-night that you're not the person I made you into at the end of your last tour. By God, you're not. By Christ, you're back to the old days in Johore with the towkays round at the end of the month waving their bills round the office and me not able to go into a kedai at all for fear of the big bloody

smarmy smiles on their yellow faces and they saying, 'Where's the big tuan and 'Has the big tuan got his pay yet, tuan and 'The big tuan has a big kira, tuan, and when in the name of God is he going to pay?' Christ, man, I was ashamed of my white skin. You letting the side down like that. And I got you right. I got you clear. I got you on that bloody boat with money in your pocket. And now look at you." Flaherty dithered in a palsy of indignation. "I've covered up for you, by God I have. There was the other day with the C.P.O. round and you on the beer again in that filthy bloody kedai where I'd be ashamed to be seen, boozing away with that corporal of yours. Leading him astray, and he a bloody Muslim."

"You leave him alone," said Nabby Adams. He was on his feet, a little unsteady, a huge hand stained with tobacco-tar seeking support from the dressing-table. Gaunt, yellow-brown, towering, he moved another step. The black bitch came from under the bed and shook herself. Her medal clanked. Her tail stirred as she looked up, happy and worshipping, at the vast man in shrunken dirty pyjamas. "You leave him alone. He's all right"

"Christ, man, I wouldn't touch him with my walking-stick. They're talking, I tell you, about you letting the side down, slinking from kedai to kedai with your bloody corporal at your tail. Why don't you mix a bit more with your own race, man? Some damn good nights in the Club and they're the salt of the earth in the Sergeants' Mess, and that fellow Crabbe was playing the piano the other night, a real good singsong, and all you do is prowl around looking for credit in dirty little kedais."

"I do mix with my own race." Nabby Adams was moving slowly towards the door. The dog stood expectant by the stairhead, waiting to escort him to the refrigerator. Her tail beat dully on the door of the bedroom of Police-Lieutenant Keir. "And you wouldn't speak like that if you wasn't tight."

"Tight! Tight!" Flaherty danced on his bottom, gripping the chair-seat as if he thought it would take off. "Listen who's talking about being tight. Oh, God, man, get wise to yourself. And make up your mind about what bloody race you belong to. One minute it's all about being a farmer's boy in Northamptonshire and the next you're on about the old days in Calcutta and what the British have done to Mother India and the snake-charmers and the bloody temple-bells. Ah, wake up, for God's sake. You're English right enough but you're forgetting how to speak the bloody language, what with traipsing about with Punjabis and Sikhs and God knows what. You talk Hindustani in your sleep, man. Sort it out, for God's sake. If you want to put a loincloth on, get cracking, but don't expect the privileges..." (the word came out in a wet blurr; the needle stuck for a couple of grooves) "the privileges, the privileges..."

Nabby Adams went slowly down the stairs. *Clank, clank, clank* came after him, and a dog's happy panting. He switched on the light in the big, bare, dirty room where he and his brother officers ate and lounged and yawned over the illustrated papers. He opened the refrigerator door. He saw only chill bottles of water. In the deep-freeze compartment was a rich bed of snow with incrustations of month-old ice on the metal walls. He took a bottle of water and gulped down mouthful after mouthful, but the thirst abated not at all, rather the lust for a real drink mounted to an obscene pitch. What day was it? Confused, he wondered whether this was late in the night or early in the morning. Outside the smeared uncurtained

windows was solid black, heavy and humid, and there was not a sound, not even a distant cock-crow. It was near the end of the month, of that he was sure, a day or two off at the most. Must be, because of the petrol returns. But then, what difference did that make? Gloomily he watched bills parade and curtsy before his inward eye.

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|---|---|
| Lim Kean Swee | $395 |
| Ghee Sin Hye | $120 |
| Tan Meng Kwang | $250 |

And these shadowy bills, further back, grown as familiar as a wart or a jagged tooth. And the accounts in the drinking-shops. And the club-bill, three months old. And the letter that blasted swine Hart had written to his boss. Hart, the treasurer, the Field Force major, hail-fellow-well-met with the Sultan's A.D.C., bowing with joined pudgy hands to H.H., well in, the man with the big future. I'll get him,' thought Nabby Adams. I'll get that bloody car of his. I'll have the Land Rover waiting next Friday because he's always at the Club on Fridays and when he drives out I'll give him a nice bloody little nick on his offside mudguard. He can't do that to me.' Proud, tall, unseeing, clutching the belly of the waterbottle, Nabby Adams stood, thinking up revenge, while the dog adored, panting.

"That was the East, man. Palestine. You wasn't there, so you wouldn't know. There was one place I used to go to and there was a bint there who did a bit of the old belly-dancing. You know, you've seen it on the pictures. If you haven't, you're bloody ignorant. You know." Flaherty got up and gyrated clumsily, lifting arms to show sweat-soaked armpits in his off-white shirt. He crooned a sinuous dirge as accompaniment. Then he sat down and watched Nabby Adams move to his bed and fall heavily upon it. With a clank the dog disappeared under the bed. "You know," said Flaherty, "you're not bloody interested. You're not interested in anything, that's your bloody trouble. I've travelled the world and I tell you about this bint and what we did in the back room and you don't take a blind bit of notice. Here." Flaherty took a cigarette from the tin on Nabby Adams's bedside table. "Here. Watch this. And I bet these aren't paid for either. Here." He lit the cigarette and puffed till the end glowed brightly. Then he began to chew. Nabby Adams watched, open-mouthed, as the cigarette disappeared behind the working lips. It all went in, including the red glow, and it did not come out again. "Easy," said Flaherty, "if you're fit, which you're bloody well not. Watch this." He took a tumbler from the table and began to eat that too.

"Oh, no," groaned Nabby Adams, as he heard the brittle crunching. Eyes shut, he saw, white against red:

| | |
|---|---|
| The Happy Coffee Shop | $67 |
| Chop Fatt | $35 |

"Easy." Flaherty spat blood and glass on the floor. "By Christ, it was a good night to-night. You should have been there, Nabby, drinking with decent people, salt of the earth. Laugh? I never laughed so much. Here, listen. There's a Malay sergeant-major there. They call him Tong, see? That's Malay for a barrel, but you

wouldn't know that, being ignorant. I never seen such a beer-belly. Well, he told a story…"

"Oh, go to bloody bed," said Nabby Adams. Eyes closed, he lay as in death, his huge calloused feet projecting beyond the end of the bed, pushing out the mosquito-net.

Flaherty was hurt, dignified in sorrow. "All right," he said. "Gratitude. After all I've done. Gratitude. But I'll show you the act of a gentleman. We still make gentlemen where I come from. Wait. Just wait. I'll make you feel bloody small."

He lurched out to his own room. He lurched back in again. Nabby Adams heard an approaching clink. In wonder and hope he opened his eyes. Flaherty was carrying a carrier-bag covered with Chinese ideograms, and in the bag were three bottles.

"There," said Flaherty. "The things I do for you."

"Oh, thank God, thank God," prayed Nabby Adams. "God bless you, Paddy." He was out of bed, alive, quick in his movements, looking for the opener, must be here somewhere, left it in that drawer. Thank God, thank God. The metal top clinked on the floor, answered by the emerging clank of the dog. Nabby Adams raised to his lips the frothing bottle and drank life. Bliss. His body drank, fresh blood flowed through his arteries, the electric light seemed brighter, what were a few bills anyway?

Flaherty watched indulgently, as a mother watches. "Don't say I don't do anything for you," he repeated.

"Yes, yes," gasped Nabby Adams, breathless after the first draught, his body hungering for the next. "Yes, Paddy." He raised the bottle and drank life to the lees. Now he could afford to sit down, smoke a cigarette, drink the next bottle at leisure. But wait. What time was it? Four forty-five, said the alarm-clock. That meant he would have to go back to bed and sleep for a little. For if he didn't what the hell was he going to do? Three bottles wouldn't last him till it was time to go to the Transport Office. But in any case if he drank another bottle now that would mean only one bottle to wake up with. And no bottle for breakfast. He groaned to himself: there was no end to his troubles.

"Those Japanese tattooists," said Flaherty. "Bloody clever. By God they are. I seen one fellow in Jerusalem, wait, I'm telling a lie, it was in Alex, when I went there for a bit of leave, one fellow with a complete foxhunt on his back. Bloody marvellous. Horses and hounds and huntsmen, and the bloody bugle blowing tally-ho and you could just see the tail of the fox, the bloody brush you know, disappearing up his. What's the bloody matter with you?" He writhed in petulance, his lined frowning face stern and beetled. "In God's name what's the matter? I bring you home food and drink and expect a bit of gratitude and a bit of cheerful company and what do I get? The bloody miseries." He loped round the room, hands clasped behind, head bent, shoulders hunched, in a mime of lively dejection. "Here," he said, straightening, "this won't do. Do you know what the bloody time is? If you can sit up all night I can't. We do a bit of work in Operations. We help to kill the bloody bandits. *Bang bang bang*." He sprayed the room with a sub-machine-gun of air. "*Takka takka takka takka takka*." Stiff-legged he moved over to Nabby Adams and laid a comforting hand on his shoulder. "Never you mind, Nabby my boy, it'll all be the same in a hundred bloody years. As

Shakespeare says. Listen." Eagerly he sat down, leaning forward with crackling eagerness. "Shakespeare. You've never read any, being bloody ignorant. Or Robbie Burns. Drunk as a fiddler's bitch." He leaned back comfortably with closed eyes, singing with wide gestures:

"*Oh, Mary, this London's a wonderful sight,*
*With the people all working by day and by night*"

"You'll wake them up," said Nabby Adams.

"And what if I do," said Flaherty. "What have they ever done for me? That bloody Jock Keir with the money rattling in his pocket. Tack wallah's joy-bells. Saving it up, bloody boat-happy, but he'll down another man's pint as soon as look and with never a word out of him. Have you seen his book at the Club, man? Virgin soil. Three bucks' worth of orange squash in six bloody months. Where is he till I get at him?" Flaherty sent the chair flying and tore raggedly out of the room. On the landing he forgot his mission and could be heard bumping and slithering down the stairs. Nabby Adams listened for the flush of the lavatory, but there was no sound more to be heard. Nothing except the dog truffling for fleas, the tick of the rusty alarm-clock. Nabby Adams went back to bed, the dog rattled her way under it, then he realised he hadn't put out the light. Never mind.

He dozed. Soon the bilal could be heard, calling over the dark. The bilal, old and crotchety, had climbed the worm-gnawed stairs to the minaret, had paused a while at the top, panting, and then intoned his first summons to prayer, the first waktu of the long indifferent day.

"*La ilaha illa'llah. La ilaha illa'llah.*"

There is no God but God, but what did anybody care? Below and about him was dark, and the dark shrouded the bungalow of the District Officer, the two gaudy cinemas, the drinking-shops where the towkays snored on their pallets, the Istana—empty now, for the Sultan was in Bangkok with his latest Chinese dance-hostess, the Raja Perempuan at Singapore for the race-meetings—and the dirty, drying river.

"*La ilaha illa'lah.*"

Like a lonely Rhine-daughter he sang the thin liquids, remembering again the trip to Mecca he had made, out of his own money too, savings helped by judicious bets on tipped horses and a very good piece of advice about rubber given by a Chinese business-man. Gambling indeed was forbidden, haram, but he had wanted to go to Mecca and become a haji. By Allah, he had become a haji, Tuan Haji Mohammed Nasir bin Abdul Talib, and, by Allah, all would be forgiven. Now, having seen the glory of the great mosque at Mecca, the Masjid-ul-Haram, he despised a little his superstitious fellow-countrymen who, ostensibly Muslim, yet clung to their animistic beliefs and left bananas on graves to feed the spirits of the dead. He had it on good authority that Inche Idris bin Zainal, teacher in the school and a big man in the Nationalist Movement, had once ordered eggs and bacon in a restaurant in Tahi Panas. He knew that Inche Jamaluddin drank brandy and that Inche Abu Zakaria sneaked off to small villages during the fasting month so that he might eat and drink without interference from the prowling police.

"*La ilaha illa'lah.*"

God knoweth best. Allahu alam. The nether fires awaited such, a hot house in naraka. Not for them the Garden with the river flowing beneath. He looked down on the blackness, trying to pierce it with his thin voice, seeking to irradiate with the Word the opacity of Kuala Hantu. But the town slept on. The white men turned in their sleep uneasily, dreaming of pints of draught bitter in wintry English hotels. The mems slept in adjoining beds, their dreams oppressed by servants who remained impassive in the face of hard words and feigned not to understand kitchen-Malay made up of Midland vowels. Only in a planter's bungalow was there a dim show of light, but this was out of the town, some miles along the Timah road. The fair-haired young man in the Drainage and Irrigation Department was leaving, sibilating a sweet good-morning to the paunched planter who was his friend. He stole to his little car, turning to wave in the dark at the lighted porch.

"Good-bye, Geoffrey. Tomorrow night, then."

"To-morrow night, Julian. Be good?"

But soon the dawn came up, heaving over the eastern edge like a huge flower in a nature-film. The stage electrician, under notice, slammed his flat hands on the dimmers and there was a swift suffusion of light. The sky was vast over the mountains with their crowns of jungle, over the river and the attap huts. The Malayan dawn, unseen of all save the bilal and the Tamil gardeners, grew and grew and mounted with an obscene tropical swiftness, and morning announced itself as a state, not a process.

At seven o'clock Nabby Adams awoke and reached for the remaining bottle. The dog came from under the bed and stretched with a long groan. Nabby Adams put on yesterday's shirt and slacks and thrust his huge feet into old slippers. Then he went softly down the stairs, followed closely by the clank clank clank of the dog. The Chinese boy, their only servant, was laying the table-a grey-white cloth, plates, cups, two bottles of sauce. Nabby Adams approached him ingratiatingly. Though he had been in the Federation for six years he spoke neither Malay nor Chinese: his languages were Hindustani, Urdu, a little Punjabi, Northamptonshire English. He said:

"Tuan Flaherty he give you money yesterday?"

"Tuan?"

"Wang, wang. You got wang to buy makan? Fat tuan, he give wang?"

"Tuan kasi lima ringgit."

Lima ringgit. That was five dollars. "You give lima ringgit to me."

"Tuan?"

"You give lima ringgit to say a. Say a buy bloody makan."

The squat, ugly, slant-eyed boy hesitated, then pulled from his pocket a five-dollar note.

"Tuan belt sayur? Vegitibubbles?"

"Yes, yes. Leave it to saya."

Nabby Adams went through the dirty stucco portico of the little police mess, out into the tiny kampong. The police mess had formerly been a maternity home for the wives of the Sultans of the state. Faded and tatty, peeling, floorboards eaten and unpolished, its philoprogenitive glory was a memory only. Now the spider had many homes, the chichaks, scuttling up the walls, throve on the many insects,

and tattered calendars showed long-dead months. The cook-boy was not very efficient. His sole qualification for looking after four police-lieutenants was the fact that he had himself been a police-constable, discharged because of bad feet. Now he fed his masters expensively on tinned soups, tinned sausages, tinned milk, tinned cheese, tinned steak-and-kidney pudding, tinned ham. Anything untinned was suspect to him, and bread was rarely served with a meal. The porch was littered with flattened cigarette-ends, and the bath had a coating of immemorial grime. When plaster fell from the ceiling it lay to be trampled by heavy jungle-boots. But nobody cared, for nobody wanted to think of the place as a home. Nabby Adams thirsted for Bombay, Flaherty yearned for Palestine, Keir would soon be back in Glasgow and Vorpal had a Chinese widow in Malacca.

Where, in the old days of many royal confinements, there had been a field and a lane, now straggled a village. Villages were appearing now in the oddest places; the Communist terrorists had forced the Government to move long-established kampong populations to new sites, places where there was no danger of ideological infection, of help given to the terrorists freely or under duress. This newish village, on the hem of the town's skirt, already looked age-old. As Nabby Adams moved like a broken Coriolanus through the heavy morning heat, he saw the signatures of the old Malaya—warm, slummy comfort as permanent as the surrounding mountain-jungle. Naked brown children were sluicing themselves at the pump, an old mottled Chinese nonya champed her gums at the open door, a young Malay father of magnificent physique nursed a new child. His wife, her sarong wound under her armpits, proffered to Nabby Adams a smile of black and gold. Neither he nor his dog responded. They both made straight for the kedai of Guan Moh Chan, where he owed a mere hundred dollars or so. Would this tribute of five soften the hard heart of the towkay? He could feel already the sweat of anxiety more than heat stirring beneath his shin. He needed at least two large bottles.

The shutters were being taken down by the youngest son of the large family—huge planks that fitted into the shop-front like the pieces of a Chinese puzzle. The towkay, in working costume of vest and underpants, grinned, nodded, sucked a black cigar. His head was that of an old idol, shrunken, yellow, painted with a false benignity. Nabby Adams addressed his prayers to it.

“Say a bring wang. Say a bring more wang to-morrow.”

The towkay, happy, chirping laughter, produced a book and pointed to a total with a bone of a finger. “Salatus tujoh puloh linggit lima puloh sen.”

“How much?” He read for himself: $170.50. Christ, as much as that. “Here. Give us a couple of bottles, big ones. Dua. You'll get some more wang to-morrow.”

Clucking happily, the old man took the five-dollar note and handed Nabby Adams a single dusty small bottle of Tiger beer. “You mean old bastard,” he said. “Come on, be a sport.”

It was no good. Nabby Adams went back with the one bottle hidden in his vast hand. He felt, irrationally, cheated. Five dollars. One dollar seventy a big bottle. The bloody old thief. Man and dog entered the mess to find Keir and Vorpal already at breakfast. Keir, in jungle green, sneered up at Nabby Adams, and Nabby felt a sweat of hatred for the Glasgow whine and the smug meanness. Vorpal, eupeptically bubbling greetings, bathed a sausage in a swimming plate of sauce. The cook-boy stood by, anxious, and said:

“Tuan beli vegitibubbles?”

“Yes,” said Nabby Adams, “he's sending them round.” He prepared to mount the stairs with his bottle. Keir said:

“I hope you made enough row in the night. I couldn't get a wink of sleep with your banging around and your drunken singing.”

Nabby Adams felt his neck-muscles tighten. Something in the mere quality of the impure vowels smote at his nerves. He said nothing.

Vorpal had the trick of adding a Malay enclitic to his utterances. This also had power to irritate, especially in the mornings. It irritated Nabby Adams that this should irritate him, but somewhere at the back of his brain was the contempt of the man learned in languages for the silly show-off, jingling the small change of 'wallah' and charpoy. The irritation was exacerbated by Nabby Adams's realisation that Vorpal was not a bad type.” Let the boy have his fun-lah. If you took a wee drappie yourself you'd sleep through it like I do.” He crammed a dripping forkful in his mouth, chewing with appetite. “Old Nabby's quiet enough during the day-lah.”

“Paddy's ill, too,” said Keir. “He can't get up this morning. You might have a bit of consideration for a sick man.”

Nabby Adams turned to reply and saw at that moment a sight that brought a fearful thirst to his throat. His beating blood had dulled his ears to the sound of the approaching car, the car that now slid into the porch and stopped. Next to the Malay police-driver was the Contingent Transport Officer, Hood, who now, tubby and important, slammed the car door and prepared to enter the mess. Nabby fled up the stairs, the dog panting and clanking after him.

With the dry razor on his chin, Nabby Adams listened to salutations below, condescending, servile. The bottle stood on the dressing-table and grinned mockingly at him.

“Adams!”

Adams. Usually it was Nabby. Things must be bad. Nabby Adams called down, “Yes, sir, shan't be a minute, sir,” in the big confident voice, manly but not unrefined, he had learnt as a regimental sergeant-major. He tore into uniform shirt and slacks, cursing the dog as she lovingly got under his feet. He clumped down the stairs, composing his features to calm and welcome, putting on the mask of a man eager for the new day. The unopened bottle sneered at his descending back.

“There you are, Adams.” Hood was standing waiting, a high-polished cap shading his flabby clean face. “We're going to Sawan Lenja.”

“Sir.” Keir and Vorpal were out on the porch, waiting for transport to the police station. “Anything wrong there, sir?”

“Too many vehicles off the road. What's these stories I've been hearing about you?”

“Stories, sir?”

“Don't act daft. You know what I mean. You've been hitting it again. I thought that was all over. Anyway, I’m getting all sorts of tales up at Timah, and Timah's a bloody long way from here. What's going on?”

“Nothing, sir. I have given it up, sir. It's a mug's game. A man in my position can't afford it, sir.”

“I should bloody well think not. Anyway, they tell me they couldn't find you anywhere last week and then they picked you up half-slewed in a shop in Sungai Kajar. Where did that come from?”

“Enemies, sir. There's a lot of Chinese on to me, sir. They want me to fiddle the accident reports and I won't, sir.”

“I should bloody well think not.” His face creased suddenly in a tight pain. “Christ, I'll have to use your lavatory.”

Nabby's face melted in sympathy. “Dysentery, sir?”

“Christ. Where is it?”

When Hood was safely closeted, Nabby Adams wildly hovered between two immediate courses of action—the telephone or the bottle? The bottle would have to wait. He picked up the dusty receiver. Fook Onn was at the other end, and Fook Onn spoke English.

“Alladad Khan? Where the hell is he? Get him, get the lot of them. Get them lined up. Hood's on his way.” Normally the Transport Pool began its operations at nine o'clock or thereabouts; this was a convenient arrangement for everybody. Officially it began to function at eight. The Chinese at the other end of the line was maddeningly urbane and slow. “Get a move on,” urged Nabby Adams. “He's coming now, I tell you.” As he replaced the receiver there was a flushing sound from the water-closet. Nabby recomposed his features as Hood re-entered.

“Better, sir?”

“It's an awful bloody business. Never know when it's going to come.” Hood sat down gingerly.

“What you could do with is a nice strong cup of tea, sir. I'll tell the kuki to make you one.”

“Does it really do any good, Nabby?” (That was better.) “I've tried every damn thing.”

“Perfect, sir. It always puts me right.”

Hood looked at his wrist-watch. “We haven't got much time, you know. I want to go to your place before Sawan Lenja.” That's all right, sir. I think he's got the kettle boiling.” Nabby Adams moved to the stairs, the dog following him.

“I can see your cook out there,” said Hood. “What are you going upstairs for?”

“Oh. I thought he'd gone up to make the beds, sir.” Nabby Adams went to the kitchen and said, “Make some teh for the tuan besar.”

Hood said, “Sit down, Nabby. Why are you running through the petrol so bloody fast? You're fifty-four gallons over and the month isn't ended yet.”

“I've got the file upstairs, sir. I'll bring it down.”

“It doesn't matter. I'll see it later.”

“I'd rather you saw it now, sir.” Nabby Adams moved again to the stairs.

“You're bloody restless, aren't you? Have you got a woman upstairs or something?” At that moment a groan of penitence came from an upper room. It was Flaherty, ill. God's most deep decree bitter would have him taste.

“That's Flaherty, sir. He's got fever. I'll just go up and see if he wants anything.” Nabby Adams made decisively for the stairs. The dog was waiting for him, her paws on the second tread, rere regardant with a happy lolling tongue. Nabby Adams nearly tripped over her. “God blast you,” he said.

“That's no way to speak to an animal,” said Hood. “I've got a dog myself. Come on, old boy.” The dog ignored him, following her master with a hasty *clank clank clank*.

Up in his room Nabby jerked off the bottle-top with trembling hands. The life-giving beer gurgled down his throat. Too soon the stream dried up. He threw the empty botde with disgust on the bed. Then he went down again, feeling a little better, but, into the vacuum made by the removal of his immediate need, there nudged a more extensive, blunter anxiety: the long day, no money, Robin Hood tut-tutting like a bloody parson, the lies, the subterfuges, the towkays wanting their money up in Sawan Lenja.

“So you didn't bring that file down, Nabby?” said Hood.

“No, sir. I thought it was upstairs. It must be in the office, sir.” The tea came, not very strong but very milky, with a flotsam of leaves on its pale surface. “Aren't you having any?” said Hood.

“No, thank you, sir,” said Nabby Adams. “I've had my breakfast.”

Hood was downing the tea too rapidly. Nabby Adams calculated that he would have to give Corporal Alladad Khan at least another fifteen minutes. “Will you have another cup, sir?” he asked.

“I've not finished this one yet. No, I don't think I will have another. Your boy makes bloody awful tea. How much do you pay him?”

“Hundred a month, between the four of us, that is.”

“Too much. Now, when I was in Perak, I got everything done for eighty, including garden and car cleaning.”

“Did you really, sir? That's very cheap, sir.”

“Well, we can't spend all day talking about the cost of labour.” Hood put down his cup and rose slowly. “Christ,” he said. “The bloody guts-ache. That tea wasn't much of an idea, Adams.”

“Give it time, sir. It'll do you the world of good. Just rest for a few minutes.”

“Well.” Hood sat down again. “I suppose we're not worried over a few minutes, are we, Nabby?”

Nabby Adams breathed thanks to an unknown god. “No, sir. Plenty of time. It's only an hour's run.”

“Hour and a half. Christ.” Hood was off again to the toilet. Nabby Adams wiped sweat off his face with a grey handkerchief. He stole noiselessly to the telephone, whispered the number, whispered:

“Is he there yet? Well, get hold of him quick. Get the lot of them. For God's sake get a move on.”

Hood came out amid the sound of rushing water. “On our way,” he said.

“Yes, sir,” said Nabby Adams. “I'll just get my cap.” Slowly he mounted the stairs, passed Flaherty's door and heard him moaning softly. He was gall, he was heartburn. Nabby Adams looked in the mirror, arranging his cap. He saw a bilious-yellow face, enlivened with a razorcut. The body of this death.

There was some difficulty in getting the dog out of the car. At last they were off, she gamely running after down the kampong street. They soon lost her.

“You ought to train that dog properly,” said Hood. “Mine wouldn't do that. You've got to have obedience in animals.”

His heart beating faster, his throat drying, Nabby whispered to the driver, “Not so bloody fast.”

“Tuan?”

“All right, all right.” One of these days he must really get down to the language. There never seemed to be time, somehow.

They passed the Tamil Vernacular School, the town padang, the Anglo-Chinese School, the Government Girls' English School, the Iblis Club, the toddy-shop, the Town Board Offices, the Mosque, a row of Asian clerks' bungalows, and then came the Police Station, and next to it Police Transport, and now Nabby Adams swallowed lump after lump of anxiety, because the place seemed deserted, unopened, desolate, abandoned… They rounded the corner and entered the vehicle park, and there were, thank God, the whole bloody lot of them lined up, calm, been waiting for hours and, as they left the car Corporal Alladad Khan barked, “Ten Shun!” and they came to attention and Nabby Adams, police-lieutenant in charge of transport for the Police Circle, was proud and happy.

Relief brought an aching desire to be sitting in a kedai with a large bottle of Tiger or Anchor or Carlsberg in front of him. That, of course, was impossible. While Robin Hood was using the jamban at the back of the yard, Nabby Adams urgently begged a loan of ten dollars from Corporal Alladad Khan. He spoke clean grammatical Urdu.

“Your wife is away. When she returns you may tell her that you required a new pair of trousers to be made. And then when I pay you back you can buy the pair of trousers.”

“But I do not need a pair of trousers.” Alladad Khan's melting brown eyes were serious over the proud nose, the ample, neat moustache.

“I shall have repaid you by the time she returns, however. So perhaps there will be no need for any story.”

“Wait,” said Alladad Khan. He had a long colloquy in Punjabi with a Sikh constable. He returned with ten dollars. “I have borrowed this from Hari Singh. I shall have to open my wife's saving-box to repay him, because he needs the money to-day. I shall give you this and then you can pay me at the end of the month.”

“Thank you, Alladad Khan.” Hood was returning, saying, “I'll have to get some hard-boiled eggs on the way.”

It was a wearisome, dry morning. They sped along the Timah road, through terrorist country, past regular neat woods of rubber trees. They saw tin-dredgers at work; they saw lorries loaded with latex; they went through villages and one largish town called Sungai Kajar—a wide main street, several drinking-shops, a Cinemascope advertisement-and by the time they got to Sawan Lenja Nabby Adams was near death. But he had to stoop over vehicles, examine engines, castigate inefficient corporal-fitters. At length Robin Hood said it was time for tiffin and they sought the rest house.

Hood ordered a portion of fried fish, a steak with onions and chipped potatoes, a dish of chopped pineapple and tinned cream. Nabby Adams said he would have a small round of cheese sandwiches.

“You ought to eat a good tiffin,” said Hood, “because you need it in this climate. Thank God, I think my dysentery's a bit better. Have a beer if you want it,” he added generously. “I'll have a small Tiger with you.”

“No,” said Nabby Adams. “It's no good starting again. I've finished with it, once and for all. It's better to give it up completely.”

“I'm glad to hear that from your lips, Nabby. You know, all your confidential reports have said the same thing: 'A good man, first-class, but hits the bottle.' ”

“Never again,” said Nabby Adams. “It's a mug's game.”

They ate, Hood sipping his small Tiger genteelly, Nabby Adams gloomily toying with a sandwich of tinned white cheese. They were alone in the single room that served as restaurant and lounge. There was little sound: only the sucking noises that made Hood's every course seem like soup, the slow champing of Nabby's dry mouth, the whirr of the fan, the hoicking of the Chinese boy in the kitchen. Soon Hood belched repletion, picked his teeth and eyed the rattan couch. “It's only ten-past one,” he said. “I'll just have a few minutes. It's been a hard morning.”

“It has, sir.”

“You haven't had this dysentery like I have. It takes it out of you.”

“You've put it back in again, sir.”

“I'll just have a few minutes, Nabby.” He stretched his small tubby form on the couch, crossed hands on his full belly. Nabby Adams watched him with great intensity. The eyes were closed, the breathing seemed relaxed and regular. Nabby Adams tiptoed over to the serving-hatch, watching still, narrowly. Hood sighed, turned, said, “Don't let me oversleep, Nabby.”

“Not likely, sir.” Nabby Adams beckoned the boy sibilantly, went through the motions of pouring, drinking, indicated a large one with huge hands a cubit apart. The boy said, loudly, cheerfully, “Anchor beer.”

“Not so bloody loud, man.” Nabby Adams made a hair-tearing gesture with a pair of gorilla arms, his face a devil's mask. He took the proffered glass and bottle, poured, downed, poured, downed, poured. A sleepy sigh came from the couch. Nabby Adams downed the last of it and tiptoed back, sitting at the table, good as gold.

Hood opened his eyes and said, “How's the time going?”

“Quite all right, sir. Plenty of time. You have a sleep, sir.”

Hood turned over with his fat bottom towards Nabby Adams. Thank God. Nabby Adams tiptoed over again to the serving-hatch, ordered another, downed it. He began to feel a great deal better. After yet another he felt better still. Poor old Robin Hood wasn't a bad type. Stupid, didn't know a gear-box from a spare tyre, but he meant well. The world generally looked better. The sun shone, the palms shook in the faint breeze, a really lovely Malay girl passed by the window. Proud of carriage, in tight baju and rich sarong, she balanced voluptuous haunches. Her blue-black hair had some sort of a flower in it; how-delicate the warm brown of her flat flower-like face.

“What time is it, Nabby?” Nabby Adams gulped down his beer nervously. “This clock says quarter to, sir, but I think it's a bit fast.”

“We're not worrying about five minutes, are we, Nabby?”

“No, sir.” Thank God he didn't turn over. Another bottle would make six dollars eighty. That meant he could finish the day with a bottle of samsu. He didn't like the burnt taste of the rice-spirit, but he didn't worry about the awful tales of the high lead-content. Or he could send the kuki to the toddy-shop, after dark, of course, because it was illegal to consume toddy off the premises. Toddy was cheap

enough. The smell of decay was ghastly, but you could always hold your nose. The taste wasn't so good either: burnt brown paper. Still, it was a drink. Good for you, too. If it wasn't for the smell and the taste it would be a damn good drink.

Nabby Adams drank another bottle. At the end of it he heard Hood stirring with deep sighs, yawns, a creaking of rattan. This was it then. Two o'clock. He moved from the serving-hatch to the dining-room-lounge. Hood was sitting on the edge of the couch, rubbing sleepy eyes, then scratching through scant greying hair.

“On the job again, Nabby.”

“Yes, sir.”

The Chinese boy came in jauntily with a bill for Nabby Adams. Nabby Adams gave him a look of such malevolence that the boy's mouth, open to announce the amount of the bill, clapped, like a rat-trap, shut.

“Here, boy, give me that bill,” said Hood. “I'll pay, Nabby. Your cheese sandwiches won't break me.”

“No, sir.” Nabby Adams grabbed the bill in panic. “On me, sir. I mean, let's pay for our own.”

“I'll pay, Nabby. You deserve something for reforming your bad habits. How much, boy?”

“On me, sir, please,” begged Nabby Adams.

“Well.” Hood yawned widely and long, showing back fillings and a softly rising uvula. “You must be rolling in it now, Nabby, giving it up like you said. You must be saving pots of money. All right, I'll pay next time.”

Ten dollars was far from enough. Nabby Adams told the boy, while Hood was stretching on the veranda, that he’d give him the rest next time. The boy protested. Nabby Adams asserted six feet eight inches of Caucasian manhood and said he could whistle for the five dollars forty. The boy went for the towkay. Nabby Adams hastened Hood to the waiting car.

The mean bastard. Nabby Adams felt ill-used. The afternoon stretched, an arid scrubland of carburettors and oil-gaskets. The night? Nabby Adams groaned in his very stomach. Was ever grief like mine?

## 2

VICTOR CRABBE slept through the bilal's bang (inept Persian word for the faint unheeded call), would sleep till the bang bang (apt Javanese word) of the brontoid dawn brought him tea and bananas. He slept on the second floor of the old Residency, which overlooked the river.

The river Lanchap gives the state its name. It has its source in deep jungle, where it is a watering-place for a hundred or so little negroid people who worship thunder and can count only up to two. They share it with tigers, hamadryads, bootlace-snakes, leeches, pelandoks and the rest of the bewildering fauna of up-stream Malaya. As the Sungai Lanchap winds on, it encounters outposts of a more complex culture: Malay villages where the Koran is known, where the prophets jostle with nymphs and tree-gods in a pantheon of unimaginable variety. Here a

little work in the paddy-fields suffices to maintain a heliotropic, pullulating subsistence. There are fish in the river, guarded, however, by crocodile-gods of fearful malignity; coconuts drop or are hurled down by trained monkeys called beroks; the durian sheds its rich fetid smell in the season of durians. Erotic pantuns and Hindu myths soothe away the depression of an occasional accidia. As the Lanchap approaches the coast a more progressive civilisation appears: the two modern towns of Timah and Tahi Panas, made fat on tin and rubber, supporting large populations of Chinese, Malays, Indians, Eurasians, Arabs, Scots, Christian Brothers, and pale English administrators. The towns echo with trishaw-bells, the horns of smooth, smug American cars, radios blaring sentimental pentatonic Chinese tunes, the morning hawking and spitting of the towkays, the call of the East. Where the Lanchap meets the Sungai Hantu stands the royal town, dominated by an Istana designed by a Los Angeles architect, blessed by a mosqueas bulbous as a clutch of onions, cursed by a lowering sky and high humidity. This is Kuala Hantu.

Victor Crabbe slept soundly, drawn into that dark world where history melts into myth.

The history of the state differs little from that of its great neighbours, Johore and Pahang. A prince of Malacca settled on its river at the time of the Portuguese invasions. He had known the old days of quiet and leisure, the silken girls bringing sherbet, the long, subtle theological debates with visiting Islamic philosophers. The Portuguese, sweating in trunk-hose, brought a niggling concern with commerce and the salvation of pagan souls. Francis Xavier preached about the love of an alien God, tried to fracture the indivisible numen and establish a crude triune structure, set up schools where dreary hymns were sung, and finally condoned the rack and the thumbscrew. Now the royal house of Malacca began to substantiate its old hypothetical claim to overlordship of the entire peninsula. Bendahara Yusuf set up a meagre palace on the swampy shore of the Lanchap and tried to divert the outrageous revenues collected by the chiefs into his own coffers. He bequeathed to his successors an arduous task, made no easier by the bullyings of the Achinese and the ubiquitous Bugis, exacerbated by the ruthless greed of the trumpeting Dutch. The rulers themselves lived unedifying lives. Yahya never moved out of an opium trance; Ahmad died of a surfeit of Persian sweetmeats; Mohammed lashed at least one slave to death every day; Aziz had syphilis and died at the age of eighteen; Hussain had a hundred wives.

Victor Crabbe had been married twice. His second wife breathed and murmured now in deep sleep induced by barbiturates.

At the time of Stamford Raffles's first appointment, while, in the East India Company Offices in Penang, that great Englishman fretted over the decay of Malacca and learned his Malay verbs, then it was that Sultan Iblis—may God be merciful to him—crashed his mighty fist on the table, slaughtered a few Bugis, tortured a few chiefs, reformed the laws of inheritance, centralised the Customs and Excise, affirmed that women had souls, and limited wives to four in number. His name is remembered, his achievements commemorated in numerous institutions: the Iblis Club in the royal town, the Iblis Power Station at Timah, the Iblis Cinema in Tahi Panas, the Iblis Koran School at Bukit Tinggi, Iblis Mineral Waters (Swee Hong & Co., Singapore and Kuala Lumpur).

Victor Crabbe was a member of the Iblis Club but did not drink Iblis Mineral Waters.

After the death of Sultan Iblis there was trouble again. Five chiefs claimed the throne, only one of them—the Crown Prince Mansor—with any right. The bad days of anarchy returned, the kris whistled through the air and lopped innocent heads, there was pillaging and arson in up-river kampongs, the Bugis appeared again—a portent, like the anti-Christ Danes at the time of Bishop Wulfstan—and even the Siamese, who already held Patani, Kelantan and Trengganu, began to be interested. It was now that the British intervened. Mansor fled to Singapore, imploring help from the Governor. Yes, yes, he would most certainly accept a British Resident if he could be guaranteed a safe throne, a permanent bodyguard and a pension of $15,000 a month. And so the wars gradually died down like a wind, though not before some British blood had been spilled on that inhospitable soil. The state began to prosper. Rubber throve, and the Chinese dredged for tin with frantic industry. Sultan Mansor became Anglophile, wore tweeds even in his own palace, was graciously received by Queen Victoria, adopted as his state anthem a Mendelssohnian salon piece composed by the late Prince Consort, frequented the race-meetings in Singapore, and established that tradition of heavy gambling which has ever since been a feature of the royal house of Lanchap.

His successors have been men-of-the-world, cosmopolitan, fond of new cars, insensitive to many of the sanctions of Islam. Pork, indeed, has never appeared at state banquets, and polygamy and concubinage have been practised with traditional piety, but the Istana has a well-stocked cellar and every Sultan has to drink brandy on doctor's orders. The work of governing Lanchap has been carried on quietly and with moderate efficiency by the British Advisers—mostly colourless, uxorious men with a taste for fishing or collecting matchboxes or writing competent monographs on the more accessible Malay village customs.

Victor Crabbe was in the Education Service, a resident master at the Mansor School.

On his first visit to England, Sultan Mansor had been fascinated by the public school system. He had been shown round Eton, Harrow, Winchester, Rugby and Shrewsbury, and one of his dreams had been a public school in his own state, in his own royal town, reproducing many of the features of its English prototypes—cricket, a wall-game, a pancake-scramble on the eve of Puasa, housemasters, prefects, fags, and, of course, a curriculum which should open the doors of European culture to brown little boys in Eton collars and bum-freezers. The limitations he placed on the scheme killed its realisation, however. He was a cosmopolitan when abroad, at ease in the hotels of the Western capitals, but in his own country he was parochial, his vision bounded by his own blood and his own river. He wanted a school for the Malay aristocracy of his own state, but, philoprogenitive and imaginative as he was, he could not but see that his own loins would never produce a sufficient first-form entry in his own lifetime.

Victor Crabbe, though thirty-five years of age, had no children.

Sultan Aladdin preferred Chinese and European mistresses to his own Malay wives, and had love-children of many colours. He found it easy to see that the future of Malaya in general, and of Lanchap in particular, rested not with the Malays alone but with the harmonious working-together of all the component

races. He had few illusions about his own people: amiable, well-favoured, courteous, they loved rest better than industry; through them the peninsula would never advance—rather their function was to remind the toiling Chinese, Indians and British of the ultimate vanity of labour. He saw in the mingling of many cultures the possibility of a unique and aesthetically valuable pattern, and before his early death he had laid out his plan for a Malayan public school in a letter which he sent to all the Sultans. Written in exquisite, courtly Malay, made flavoursome with neologisms drawn from Sanskrit and Arabic, this letter may be found in those anthologies of Malay prose—compiled by scholars like Ashenden, Pink and Inche Redzwan bin Latiff, B.A.—which oppress pupils up and down the Federation.

Actually, it was an Englishman who realised the visionary project, an able Inspector of Schools, F.M.S., called Pocock. He spoke with energy and zeal to the Resident-General, his enthusiasm infected a Residents' Conference, and soon the High Commissioner himself saw the value of an educational establishment which should be a microcosm of the teeming, various world which was Malaya and yet be a symbol too of the calm British governmental process.

And so the Mansor School came into being in Mansor's own royal town. To it came Chinese, Malays, Indians and Eurasians—all of 'good family' (a qualification which, though never defined, had been a Leitmotif in Pocock's original prospectus). Teachers came from England and India and the Straits Settlements. The School grew steadily, established traditions slowly. After some years it was decided that the climate was unsuitable for stiff collars and striped serge trousers, but an adequate school uniform was eventually found in white ducks, striped tie and Harrovian boater. The many buildings of the School represent a whole museum of colonial architecture, ranging from the original attap huts, through stucco palladian, to broiling Corbusier glass-houses on high stilts. All subjects have always been taught in English, and the occidental bias in the curriculum has made many of the alumni despise their own rich cultures, leading them, deracinated, to a yearning for the furthest west of all. Thus, the myths of cinema and syndicated cartoon have served to unite the diverse races far more than the clump of the cricket-ball and the clipped rebukes and laudations of their masters.

Victor Crabbe taught history.

Headmasters came and went, officers in the Education Service who did well or ill, but always moved on to retirement or to less arduous posts. Some ruled as they had been used to when they were form-masters in tough London or Liverpool secondary schools; they were baffled by tears in moustached sixth-formers, by walls of impassivityin the Lower School, by silent conspiracies which nullified the rules. One master was axed and another knifed during one harsh reign, that of the hated Gillespie. Him a local pawang was hired to kill by sympathetic magic, but Gillespie was too tough or insensitive to feel the lethal waves sent out from his pin-pricked image. Headmasters who cooed their love of the Asians found that love was infectious, and that Eros stalked the dormitories in two of his many divine forms. Moreover they were ostracised in the Club, shunned as betrayers of the British Way of Life. Only one headmaster was removed for pederasty and he with regret, for he was a superb cricketer. The problem of rule seemed insuperable. A sort of Malayan unity only appeared when the discipline was tyrannous; when a

laxer humanity prevailed the Chinese warred with the Malays and both warred with the Indians and the Indians warred among themselves. Only one man had ever achieved the compromise of a firm liberalism. This had been Roberts, an Oriental scholar of deep human insight and warm charm. But under him the public school spirit began to evaporate. Cricket ceased to be played because only a few boys seemed able to understand it; two years went by without a Sports Day, and the headmaster was once seen working in a sarong. Roberts was transferred to an obscure post in Kelantan. At times it was thought that an American might be appointed, who, because he would combine the familiar and the exotic and would carry on his breath the magic of the sound-track, might arouse in the boys a strong religious devotion. But an American might introduce rounders. Besides, such an appointment would be a complete betrayal of the ideals on which the Mansor School was based, surrender to a culture which, however inevitable its global spread, must for as long as possible meet a show of resistance. An Australian was once appointed on contract, but he swore too much. And so makeshift and second-best have continued. Victor Crabbe's headmaster was a little man called Boothby with a third-class Durham degree, a paunchy sportsman with a taste for whisky-water and fast cars, who subscribed to a popular book-club and had many long-playing records, who invited people to curry tiffin and said, “Take a pew.” Victor Crabbe was a housemaster.

The difficulties of organising a house-system in a school of this kind had been partly solved through weak compromise. At first it had been proposed to call the houses after major prophets—Nabi Adams, Nabi Idris, Nabi Isa, Nabi Mohammed—but everyone except the Muslims protested. Then it seemed microcosrnically fitting to allot boys to houses bearing the names of their home states. It happened, however, that an obscurantist Sultan and a Union of Chinese Secret Societies in one state forbade, independently of each other, any patronisation of the new educational venture. Thus it fell out that a rich and important territory was represented in the Mansor School by a Eurasian, the son of a Bengali money-lender, a Tamil and a dull but happy Sikh. The pupils themselves, through their prefects, pressed the advantages of a racial division. The Chinese feared that the Malays would run amok in the dormitories and use knives; the Malays said they did not like the smell of the Indians; the various Indian races preferred to conduct vendettas only among themselves. Besides, there was the question of food. The Chinese cried out for pork which, to the Muslims, was haram and disgusting; the Hindus would not eat meat at all, despite the persuasions of the British matron; other Indians demanded burning curries and could not stomach the insipid lauk of the Malays. Finally the houses were given the names of Britons who had helped to build the new Malaya. Allocation to houses was arbitrary—the dormitories buzzed with different prayers in different tongues—and everybody had to eat cold rice with a warmish lauk of buffalo-meat or vegetables. Nobody was satisfied but nobody could think of anything better.

Thus it was that Victor Crabbe had the post of Master of Light House, named after Francis Light, founder of British Penang. The house was not very felicitously titled, said many: it was no academic pharos. Still, Birch House (a sop to the shade of the murdered Perak Resident) had no more than its normal share of flagellation, and Raffles House did not exceed the others in its interest in the

Federation Lottery. Low House (named after the great Hugh) often came high in games and athletics; so, in fine, the names had no paranomastic propriety. All they showed was a lack of imagination on the part of those who had chosen them.

Victor Crabbe, as dawn approached, stirred uneasily, his eyes tighlt closed, his brow creased. He fended something off with his arms.

A centre of culture, Kuala Hantu is also a centre of Communist activity. A man may walk in moderate safety through the town at night, but let him not venture too far out into the scrublands. A grenade was once hurled into a kedai where Home Guards sat drinking; pamphlets calling on Asians to exterminate the white capitalist parasites are found on cafe tables and in long-parked cars. A mile or so out, on the Timah and Tahi Panas roads, there are frequent 'incidents'. On rubber estates the terrorists appear capriciously, at unpredictable intervals, to decapitate tappers or disembowel them—a ceremony followed by harangues about the Brotherhood of Man and the Federation of the World. At Grantham Estate, seven miles outside Kuala Hantu, there have been five new managers in two years. A planter carries a gun not in hope of prevailing against the terrorists, but because he prefers the clean end of a shot to the tearing-out of his intestines. Lanchap, like most other states, is at war. Even outside the smart store of Blackthorn Bros., in Tahi Panas, armour-plated cars may be seen, parked while the summer-frocked mems go shopping. Military convoys trundle down the roads, bombs rattle windows, aeroplanes loom, questing, over the jungle hideouts. The car-driver, hoping yet once more to get away with it, to speed through the bad nine miles and heave, once more, a sigh of gratitude at the end, sees at last the tree-trunk laid across the road and soon the ambushing grinning yellow men emerging. Some think the war will never end. The troops move into the steaming leech-haunted nightmare and emerge now and again with sullen prisoners who have names like Lotus Blossom, Dawn Lily or Elegant Tiger. But there are no decisive engagements, no real victories. It goes on and on, the sniping, the gutting, the garrotting, the thin streams of jungle-green troops, the colossal waste, and the anarchic days of the Bugis and the Achinese seem not so faraway after all.

Victor Crabbe woke up sweating. He had been dreaming about his first wife whom, eight years previously, he had killed. At the inquest he had been exonerated from all blame and the coroner had condoled with him all too eloquently and publicly. The car had skidded on the January road, had become a mad thing, resisting all control, had crashed through the weak bridge-fence and fallen—his stomach fell now, as his sleeping body had fallen time and time again in the nightmare reliving of the nightmare—fallen, it seemed endlessly, till it shattered the ice and the icy water beneath, and sank with loud heavy bubbles. His lungs bursting, he had felt the still body in the passenger-seat, had torn desperately at the driver's door, and risen, suffocating, through what seemed fathom after fathom of icy bubbling lead. It was a long time ago. He had been exonerated from all blame but he knew he was guilty.

He was grateful now for the warmth of the Malayan morning, for the familiar sound of Ibrahim on swift bare feet bringing the rattling tray, set for one, to the veranda. Fenella, his living wife, would sleep on, long, killing the hot morning in sleep. She wanted to go home, but she would not go home without him. She

wanted the two of them to be together. She believed her love was reciprocated. To some extent it was.

“Morden or Surbiton with palm trees. A ramshackle inland Bournemouth. Little suburban minds. Bridge and gossip. Tea and gossip. Tennis and gossip. Red Cross sewing parties and gossip. Look.” She would show, as they sat in the deserted Club, a copy of Country Life. “We could save enough to buy that in three years. If we go steady. Ideal for a private school.”

Or again, flopped in one of the standard-pattern armchairs supplied by the Public Works Department, drinking in the wind of the ceiling-fan, she would gasp, “It's so damned hot.” It had not been so damned hot in that English January. “Doesn't it ever get any cooler?”

“I like the heat.”

“I thought I did. I used to in Italy. It must be the humidity.”

The humidity could be blamed for many things: the need for a siesta, corpulence, the use of the car for a hundred-yard journey, the mildew on the shoes, the sweat-rot in the armpits of dresses, the lost bridge-rubber or tennis-set, the dislike felt for the whole country.

“I quite like the country.”

“But what is there to like? Scabby children, spitting potbellied shopkeepers, terrorists, burglars, scorpions, those blasted flying-beetles. And the noise of the radios and the eternal shouting. Are they all deaf or something? Where is this glamorous East they talk about? It's just a horrible sweating travesty of Europe. And I haven't met a soul I can talk to. All those morons in the Malay Regiment and those louts of planters, and as for the wives…”

“We're together. We can talk to each other.”

“Why should we have to come out here to do that? It was more comfortable in London.”

“The pay's better.”

“It goes nowhere. Have you seen this month's Cold Storage bill? And this dress from Blackthorn's—eighty dollars, and it's going already under the arms.”

“Yes. I see your point.”

Having eaten two bananas and drunk three cups of tea, Victor Crabbe stood naked in the second bathroom, shaving. Between the first and last razor-strokes the morning grew from bud to full flower. Between the louvers of frosted glass Crabbe could see the descending terraces of lawn and the thin, black Tamil gardeners watering away with quarrelling cries. This country was not rich in flowers, but the semi-public garden of the Residency had bougainvillea, hibiscus, frangipani, rain trees and a single banyan. Across the road that bounded the lowest terrace the Hantu met the Lanchap, a meagre confluence now, the water smelling foul with a salty decay, bicycle tyres high and dry and bits of stick and iron lying like bones on rare mud islands.

In a sense, infidelity to one's second wife was an act of homage to one's first. His dead wife was in all women. Pointless to moon about, as his father had done, hugging a memory, putting flowers on the grave, degging them with the brine of self-pity. That was necrophily. He had learned a lot from his father. The body of his own wife had been burnt and dispersed in vapour, had become atoms suspended in air or liquid, breathed in or drained down. A memory had no

significance. History was not memory but a living pattern. Dreams were not memory.

His hands, screwing the safety-razor apart, trembled, and a piece of steel fell into the wash-basin with a resonant clatter. Dreaming, one was not oneself. One was used by something, something stupidly malignant, a lolling idiot with a thousand volts at his command. 'But why do you still have this feeling of guilt? Why won't you swim any more or drive a car again?'

'Nerves,' he answered. 'Something resident in the nerves. I married again to quieten my nerves. I think it was a mistake now, but it was a natural one. Perhaps that's where the sense of guilt is really coming from. It's not been fair to her. The remembered dead wife and the palpable living wife must, to some extent, be identified. Or, at least, those well-worn tracks of the brain identify them. Then one is seeing her with the wrong eyes, judging, weighing, comparing. The dead woman was brought to life, and it was not fair, it was unnatural, to give life to the dead. The dead are fractured, atomised, dust in the sunlight, dregs in the beer. Yet the fact of love remains, and to love the dead is, in the nature of things, impossible. One must love the living, the living fractured and atomised into individual bodies and minds that can never be close, never important. For if one were to mean more than the others, then we should be back again, identifying and, with sudden shocks, contrasting, and bringing the dead back to life. The dead are dead.

'And so spread and atomise that love. But how about her, sleeping there in the big dark bedroom, what does she deserve? It was all a mistake, it should never have happened. She deserves whole wells of pity, tasting and looking like love.'

Victor Crabbe put on clean starched white slacks and a cool, fresh-smelling, white shirt, open at the neck. He did this quietly in their bedroom, having opened one of the shutters to let in some light. The precaution of quiet was unnecessary, a mere habit. She slept a drugged sleep. If anything could wake her, it would be the row of the dormitories, the clatter of the boys to the dining-room, the exhortations of the prefects, the ringing of bicycle-bells and the crunching feet on the gravel of the drive below. She would not wake till midday. He picked up his dispatch-case, mildewed under the buckles, from the desk-chair in the lounge, and walked to the door which led from the flat to the world of boys. The swing-doors which opened on to his dining-room creaked, and Ibrahim said softly, “Tuan.”

“Ibrahim?” (People had said, “I don't know why the hell you keep that boy on. You'll be getting yourself talked about. He was down outside the cinema the other night, wearing women's clothes. It's a good job you're married, you know. He was thrown out of the Officers' Mess for waggling his bottom and upsetting the men. He may be a good cook, and all that, but still... You've got to be careful”)

Ibrahim squirmed and simpered. “Minta belanja, tuan.”

“But it's only three days to the end of the month. What do you do with the money?”

“Tuan?”

“How much do you want?”

“Lima ringgit, tuan.”

“Buy some hair-clips with it,” said Crabbe in English, handing over a five-dollar note. “Mem says you're pinching hers.”

“Tuan?”

“Never mind.”

“Terima kaseh, tuan,” smirked Ibrahim, tucking the note in the waist of his sarong.

“Sama sama.” Victor Crabbe opened the flimsy door that separated him from the boys of Light House, and walked slowly—for fear of slipping on worn treads—down the wide seedy staircase that had once been so imposing. At the bottom the duty prefect waited, Narayanasamy, rich black face vivid above the white shirt and slacks. The entrance-hall was full of boys leaving for the Main School, a counterpoint of colour united by the pedal-note of the snowy uniform.

“Sir, we are trying to work because we are having to take the examination in a very brief time from now, but the younger boys are not realising the importance of our labours and they are creating veritable pandemoniums while we are immersed in our studies. To us who are their lawful and appointed superiors they are giving overmuch insolence, nor are they sufficiently overawed by our frequent threatenings. I would be taking it, sir, as inestimable favour if you would deliver harsh words and verbal punishing to them all, sir, especially the Malay boys, who are severely lacking in due respectfulness and incorrigible to discipline also.”

“Very well,” said Victor Crabbe, “to-night at dinner.” Once a week he dined with the boys. Pursued by respectful salutations he strode down the cracked stone steps, flight after flight, to reach the road leading to the Main School. He alone of the Europeans in Kuala Hantu did not possess a car. By the time he reached the War Memorial damp had soaked through the breasts of his shirt.

The citizens of Kuala Hantu watched him go by. Work-less Malays in worn white trousers squatted on the low wall of the public fountain and discussed him.

“He walks to the School. He has no car. Yet he is rich.”

“He saves money to be richer still. He will go back to England with full pockets and do no more work.”

“That is wise enough. He is no banana-eating child.”

The two old hajis who sat near the door of the coffee-shop spoke together.

“The horn-bill pairs with his own kind, and so does the sparrow. The white men will say it is not seemly for him to walk to work like a labourer.”

“His heart is not swollen. Enter a goat's pen bleating, enter a buffalo's stall bellowing. He believes so. He would be like the ordinary people.”

“That I will believe when cats have horns.”

A wizened hanger-on, hoping to cadge some early-morning coffee, volunteered, “Water in his grasp does not drip.”

The more charitable haji said, “A black fowl flies by night, it is true. But do not measure another's coat on your own body.”

A Chinese shopkeeper's wife, surrounded by quarrelling children, said to her husband in plangent Hokkien:

> “All time he walk.
> On his face sweat.
> Red-haired dogs rich,
> Pay what we ask.
> Yet day by day
> He go on foot.

Car he has not."

Her white-powdered moon-face pondered the small mystery for a short time only. Then in a passion of plucked strings and little cracked bells she let fly at a weeping child, pushed by his fellows into a sugar-bin.

The Indian letter-writers, awaiting clients, fresh paper and carbons rolled into their machines, greeted Victor Crabbe with smiles and waved hands. With them once or twice, in the Coronation and the Jubilee and Fun Hwa's, he had drunk beer and discussed the decay of the times.

Victor Crabbe passed by the pathetic little Paradise Cabaret and swallowed a small lump of guilt that rose in his throat. Here, in search of a drink and an hour's solitude, he had met Rahimah, the sole dance-hostess, who poured beer, changed the records, and shuffled with the customers round the floor. Small, light-brown, shorthaired, wearing a European frock, she was amiable, complaisant, very feminine. She was a divorcee, thrown out by her husband on some thin pretext backed by the grim male force of Islamic law. She had one child, a small boy called Mat. Two unlaborious professions only were open to Malay divorcees, and in practice the higher embraced the lower. A dance-hostess earned little enough in such places as this, and the descent from polygamous wedlock to prostitution seemed a mere stumble. Victor Crabbe liked to believe that she had sold nothing to him, that the ten-dollar notes he hid in her warm uneager hand were gratuitous, a help—"Buy something for Mat." He felt, in her small room, that he was somehow piercing to the heart of the country, of the East itself. Also he was placating that unquiet ghost. But he must not grow too fond of Rahimah. Love must be fractured, pulverised, as that loved body had finally been. Fenella believed that he went off to the School debates, meetings of the Historical Society. He must drop the liaison soon. But there would have to be others.

An aged Sikh, high on his cart of dung, king of two placid oxen, was coiling hanks of grey hair into place, stuffing them beneath his rakish turban. His face, all beard, smiled at Victor Crabbe. Crabbe waved, wiped sweat off his forehead. Little boys, on their way to the Chinese School, looked up at him in that intense wonder which characterises the faces of the Chinese young. Victor Crabbe turned the corner by the Police Barracks. If only the School buildings were not so dispersed, like Oxford Colleges. He must really carry a change of shirt in his dispatch-case. He observed small cats with twisted tails stalking hens from the dry monsoon-drains. His feet trod a litter of palm-tree pods, like segments of blackened bicycle tyre. He was nearing the Main School now.

Corporal Alladad Khan, unaware as yet of the urgent telephone summons that was animating the Transport Office, shaved at leisure, seeing Victor Crabbe walk, too briskly for the climate, to his work. He saw nothing unnatural in this walking. He, Alladad Khan, spent his life now among motor vehicles and sometimes yearned for the old village days in the Punjab. He liked to feel the solid ground under his feet, or, better still, the warm moving Hanks of a horse between his knees. Motor vehicles plagued his dreams, spare parts and indents for spare parts pricked him like mosquitoes. That a man should prefer to have nothing to do with motor engines seemed reasonable and even laudable. But…

Corporal Alladad Khan swept his cut-throat razor across his throat and cut his throat slightly. He swore in English. All the English he knew was: names of cars and car-parts; army terms, including words of command; brands of beer and cigarettes; swear-words. He had been long in the Army in India—he had joined as a boy of thirteen, stating his age wrong. Now, at thirty, he saw another ten years before he could leave the Malayan Police with a pension and return to the Punjab. But…

"Bloody liar!" he said to the razor. "Fock off!" It was behaving badly this morning. He did not really like even the simplest machine. Even a razor had a nasty malicious little soul, squat, grinning at him from the blue shine of metal. "Silly bastard!" He could swear aloud because his wife, who knew some English, was away in Kuala Lumpur, staying with an uncle and an aunt, making lavish and leisurely preparations to have a baby, their first. Alladad Khan did not want any children. He was not a very orthodox Muslim. He had ideas which shocked his wife. He had once said that the thought of eating a pork sausage did not horrify him. He liked beer, though he could not afford much of it. He could afford even less of it now that Adams Sahib insisted on taking him around. He had seen kissing in English and American films and had once suggested to his wife that they try this erotic novelty. She had been horrified, accusing him of perversion and the blackest sensual depravity. She had even threatened to report him to her brother.

He had found the Malay term 'Tida' apa' useful when she spoke like that. 'Tida' apa' meant so much more than 'It doesn't matter' or 'Who cares?'. There was something indefinable and satisfying about it, implying that the universe would carry on, the sun shine, the durians fall whatever she, or anybody else, said or did. Her brother. That was the whole trouble. Her brother, Abdul Khan, was an Officer Commanding a Police District, a big man, unmarried, who had been trained at an English Police College and thought a lot of himself. Her parents, their parents, were dead. It was up to the brother to arrange a marriage for her, and naturally she had to marry a Khan. No matter what he did, no matter what his position in life, so long as he was not a servant (which, naturally, a Khan could not be), she had to have a Khan. Well, she had a Khan, him, Alladad Khan. Shutting his razor with a clack he wished her well of him, Alladad Khan. Alladad Khan laughed grimly into his mirror before he washed the shaving-soap off his face and trimmed his moustache with nail-scissors. He had been a good husband, faithful, careful with money, loving, moderately passionate; what more could she want? Ha! It was not a question of what she wanted but of what he, Alladad Khan, wanted.

In the small living-room he buttoned his shirt, looking sardonically at their wedding photograph. When that photograph was taken he had known her precisely two hours and ten minutes. He had seen her picture before, and she had observed him through a hole in a curtain, but they had never spoken together, held hands or done that terrible erotic thing which was a commonplace of the English and American films. The long gruelling courtship was about to commence. There he was, with a background of photographer's potted palms, awkward in his best suit and a songkok, while she rested an arm confidently on his knee and

showed her long strong nose and cannibal teeth to the Chinese photographer. Allah, she had known all about courtship.

But there was the memsahib, Mrs. Crabbe, very much in his thoughts now. He had never met her, but he had seen her often, sweating in the heat as she walked to the Club or to the shops. He, Crabbe the teacher, might not wish to have a car, but it was not right that his wife should have to walk in the sun, her golden hair darkened at the forehead by sweat, her delicate white face dripping with sweat, the back of her frock stained and defiled by sweat. He had often to stifle the mad desire to run down to her as she walked by the Transport Office, offering her the Land Rover, or the A 70, or the old Ford, or whatever vehicle sweltered in the yard, together with a police driver who would, for once, behave properly and not hawk or belch or lower the driver's window yet further to spit out of it. But shyness held him back. He did not speak English; he did not know whether she spoke Malay. Besides, there was the question of propriety, of morality. Who was he to rush up on clumsy booted feet, stopping before her with a frightful heel-click and a stiff salute to say, “Memsahib, I observe you walking in the heat. You will be struck by the sun. Allow me to provide you with transport to wherever you wish to go,” or words to that effect? It was impossible. But he must meet her, at least see her closely, to examine her blue eyes and appraise her slim form and hear her English voice. Blue-eyed women he believed there were in Kashmir, but here was the mythical Englishry of fair hair as well. He had to meet her. That was where Police-Lieutenant Adams would have to help him. That would be a small return for many small loans whose repayment he did not press. An Englishwoman who walked; that was a barrier down before he started, a barrier of slammed elegant blue or red or green doors, the calmness of one who waits, smugly, to be driven to where she will.

The entrance of a small, elderly Malay driver broke his dreams. Kassim, who had never mastered the philosophy of gears, who dragged mucus into his throat horribly, even on parade, who had undertaken the impossible task of keeping two wives on a driver's pay, Kassim spoke.

“The big man speaks by the telephone. There is the other big man from Timah here. He will inspect the transport now.”

“There is no God but Allah,” said Alladad Khan piously. He rushed out, followed by Kassim. He banged at doors, he cursed and entreated, he sent frantic messages. He dashed to the Transport Office. He smacked two Malay drivers on the cheek to recall them from lethargy, he checked tyres, he checked uniforms, he checked the alignment of the vehicles. Soon he had his men drawn up. Then he heard the approaching car, horrible as Juggernaut. He saw the car enter the park. He called, “Ten Shun!”

There they were, thank God, the whole bloody lot of them lined up, been waiting for hours. As they came to attention Nabby Adams, police-lieutenant in charge of transport for the Police Circle, was proud and happy.

## 3

VICTOR CRABBE stood before his form and knew something was wrong. He scanned the faces, row after row, in a silence churned gently by the two ceiling-fans. The serious, mature faces looked back at him—yellow, gold, sallow-brown, coffee-brown, black. Malay and Indian eyes were wide and luminous, Chinese eyes sunken in a kind of quizzical astonishment. Crabbe saw the empty desk and said:

"Where's Hamidin?"

The boys stirred, some looking over their shoulders to where Chop Toong Cheong was rising. Assured that their form-captain would speak, they veered their heads delicately round towards Victor Crabbe, looking at him seriously, judicially.

"Toong Cheong?"

"Hamidin has been sent home, sir."

"Home? But I saw him yesterday evening on the sports-field."

"He was sent home last night, sir, on the midnight mail-train. He has been expelled, sir."

Expelled! The very word is like a bell. Crabbe felt the old thrill of horror. That horror must also be in the boys' nerves, even though English words carried so few overtones for them. England, mother, sister, honour, cad, decency, empire, expelled. The officer-voice of Henry New-bolt whispered in the fans.

"And why in the name of God has he been expelled?" Crabbe saw the squat brown face of Hamidin, the neat lithe body in soccer-rig. Expulsion had to be confirmed by the Mentri Besar of the boy's own state, but confirmation was always automatic.

Toong Cheong had been brought up a Methodist. His eyes narrowed in embarrassment behind serious thick spectacles. "It is delicate matter, sir. They say he was in house-boy's room with a woman. House-boy also was there with another woman. A prefect found them and reported to Headmaster, sir. Headmaster sent him home at once on midnight mail-train."

"Well." Crabbe did not know what to say. "That's bad luck," he offered, lamely.

"But, sir." Toong Cheong spoke more rapidly now, and urgency and embarrassment reduced his speech to essential semantemes. "We think he was framed, sir. Prefect no friend of his. He did nothing with woman in house-boy's room. Prefect deliberate lie to Headmaster."

"Who was the prefect?"

"Pushpanathan, sir."

"Ah." Crabbe felt that he had to say something significant. He was not quite sure who Pushpanathan was. "Ah," he said again, drawing out the vocable in a falling tone, the tone of complete comprehension.

"We wish you to tell Headmaster, sir, Hamidin wrongly expelled. Injustice, sir. He is member of our form. We must stick by him."

Crabbe was touched. The form had welded itself into a single unity on this issue. Tamils, Bengalis, the one Sikh, the Malays, the one Eurasian, the Chinese had found a loyalty that transcended race. Then, hopelessly, Crabbe saw that this unity was only a common banding against British injustice.

"Well." He began walking up and down, between the window and the open door. He knew he was about to embark on a speech whose indiscretions would sweep the School. "Well." The face of a moustached Malay in the front row glowed with

attention. “Please sit down, Toong Cheong.” The Chinese form-captain sat down. Crabbe turned to the blackboard, observing equations of yesterday in thick yellow chalk. Yellow chalk was a nuisance; it defiled hands and white trousers; one's handkerchief was sickly with it; it stained, like lipstick, the mouth of the teacup at break.

“Hamidin,” he said, “should not have been in the house-boy's room. Those quarters are out-of-bounds. I cannot believe that the meeting of Hamidin and this woman was accidental. I cannot believe that Hamidin would merely want to discuss politics or the differential calculus with this woman. Who was she, anyway?” He stopped his promenade and craned his neck at Toong Cheong.

Toong Cheong stood up. “She is a schoolgirl, sir. From Government English Girls' School.” He sat down again.

“Well.” Crabbe resumed his walk. “Frankly, speaking as a private individual and not as a member of this staff, I would say that, whatever Hamidin was doing in that room with that girl…” He turned again towards Toong Cheong. “What was it alleged that he was doing, by the way?

This time there was a serpentine chorus. “Kissing. Kissing, sir. They said he was kissing her, sir. Pushpanathan alleged they were kissing, sir. Kissing.”

“Oh, kissing.” Crabbe faced them squarely. Toong Cheong sat down, still hissing the word quietly. “All of you here are of marriageable age. Some of you would have been married years ago, perhaps, if the Japanese occupation had not played havoc with your educational careers. I, personally, can see no great crime in a young man of nineteen consorting innocently with a girl. I can see no great crime, frankly, in a young man's kissing a girl. Though I had thought that kissing was not practised by Malays. Still, it seems to me one of the less harmful Western importations.”

He caught shy smiles, delicate as foam.

“I do not, speaking again as a private individual, think that such conduct merits expulsion. Even,” he added, “if it could be proved that such conduct took place. Did Pushpanathan have any witnesses, other than himself? What did the house-boy say?”

“The house-boy was expelled, too,” said Toong Cheong, levering himself up to a half-standing position.

“Dismissed, you mean.”

“Dismissed, sir. He was told to go by Headmaster right away.” Toong Cheong sat down.

“So,” said Crabbe, “it was Pushpanathan's word against Hamidin's. And the Headmaster sent Hamidin home immediately, and Hamidin's career is ruined. Is that the right story?"More quiet hisses, hisses of affirmation.

“Has Hamidin's Housemaster been approached about this matter?”

A thin bright-eyed Tamil stood up to say, “Mr. Crichton said he would do nothing because Headmaster's decision is a right one and it is right that Hamidin should be expelled. That is why we ask you as form-master to tell the Headmaster that it is not right and that grave injustice have been done to the innocent.” He sat down with grace and dignity.

“Well.” Crabbe looked at them all. “It seems possible, probable indeed, that a very hasty decision has been taken, and that an injustice may have been done. Of

course, I don't know the whole story. But expulsion is certainly a terrible thing. It is your wish then that I convey to the Headmaster your dissatisfaction with his summary procedure, his harsh sentence, his decision made on what seems to you insufficient evidence?"

There were eager hisses, a controlled tiny surge, a wind-ripple, of excitement. The class tasted the word 'harsh'. It was the right word, the word they had been looking for. 'Harsh'. Its sound was harsh; it was a harsh word.

"I will see the Headmaster as soon as I can this morning, then," said Victor Crabbe. "And now we must learn a little more about the Industrial Revolution."

They turned obediently to text-books and note-books, the word 'harsh' echoing still through the creaking of desk-lids, the borrowing of a fill of ink. Crabbe realised he had gone too far. Somebody would now tell Crichton or Wallis that Mr. Crabbe had talked about the Headmaster's 'harsh sentence', and Crichton or Wallis would pass this back to the Headmaster, and then there would be talk of loyalty and not letting the side down, and at Christmas an adverse report, perhaps, but certainly more material for Club calumny. "He likes the Asians too much. He tells the Asians too much. Why, he complains about the Europeans on the staff to the Asian kids. What's he after, anyway?"

Tida' apa.

The fact was that Victor Crabbe, after a mere six months in the Federation, had reached that position common among veteran expatriates—he saw that a whiteskin was an abnormality, and that the white man's ways were fundamentally eccentric. In the early days of the war he had been in an Emergency Hospital, a temporary establishment which had taken over a wing of a huge County Mental Hospital. Most of the patients suffered from General Paralysis of the Insane, but the spirocaete, before breaking down the brain completely, seemed to enjoy engendering perverse and useless talents in otherwise moronic minds. Thus, one dribbling patient was able to state the precise day of the week for any given date in history; no ratiocinative process was involved: the coin went in and the answer came out. Another was able to add up correctly the most complicated lists of figures in less time than a comptometer. Yet another found a rare musical talent blossoming shortly before death; he made a swanlike end. The Europeans were rather like these lunatics. The syllogism had been the chancre, the distant fanfare of the disease, and out of it had come eventually the refrigerator and the hydrogen bomb, G.P.L. The Communists in the jungle subscribed, however remotely, to the Hellenic tradition: an abstract desideratum and a dialectical technique. Yet the process of which he, Victor Crabbe, was a part, was an ineluctable process. His being here, in a brown country, sweltering in an alien class-room, was prefigured and ordained by history. For the end of the Western pattern was the conquest of time and space. But out of time and space came point-instants, and out of point-instants came a universe. So it was right that he stood here now, teaching the East about the Industrial Revolution. It was right that these boys too should bellow through loudspeakers, check bomb-loads, judge Shakespeare by the Aristotelian yardstick, hear five-part counterpoint and find it intelligible.

But it was also right that he himself should draw great breaths of refreshment from the East, even out of the winds of garlic and dried fish and turmeric. And it was right that, lying with Rahimah, he should feel like calling on the sun to

drench his pallor in this natural gold, so that he might be accepted by the East. And, if not right, it was at least excusable if he felt more loyalty to these pupils than to the etiolated, ginger-haired slug who yawned inthe Headmaster's office. His indiscretion was based on something better than mere irresponsibility.

"But surely, sir, it was not good if these machines made people have no work, and they were right, sir, if they wished to destroy them." The Malay sat down, awaiting an answer. The West always had an answer.

"You must remember," said Crabbe, "that technological progress has always, in theory, at any rate, sought to serve the end of greater and greater human happiness." The Malay boy nodded vigorously. "Man was not born to work." All the Malays nodded. "He was born to be happy." The solitary Sikh smiled through his sparse beard. "Man needs leisure to cultivate his mind and his senses. A great Italian poet said, 'Consider your origins: you were not formed to live like brutes but to follow virtue and knowledge.' But we cannot follow virtue and knowledge or the pleasures of the senses—which are just as important—if we have little leisure. And so the machines come along and they do more and more of our work for us and give us more leisure."

The Malay boy seemed puzzled. "But, sir, in the kampongs they have no machines but they have a lot of leisure. They sit in the sun and do no work and they are happy. I do not see how machines can give leisure."

"But," said Crabbe, "surely we all want more out of life than a kampong existence can give us. You, Salim, like gramophone records of American singers. Dairianathan here is a photographer and needs cameras. You cannot expect these to fall like coconuts from the trees. Again, you all wear shoes. These have to be made, and making them is work. We have to work to get the things we need. The more things we need the more advanced is our civilisation; that is how the argument runs. If we can get machines to make these things for us, well, we get the best of both worlds. We get many pleasures to feed our souls and our bodies and we get plenty of leisure in which to enjoy them."

"Sir," said Ahmad, a Malay boy with a moustache and a pitted complexion, "we only need to wear shoes because the British built roads which hurt our feet."

"But roads were not built so that your feet might behurt. They were built for transport, so that the things you need could be brought quickly from distant towns."

"But, sir, they could be brought by the railway," said a small Tamil with a radiant smile.

"Or by aeroplane," said Latiff bin Haji Abbas.

"The aeroplane is more expensive than the railway."

"That is not true. It costs thirty dollars less by aeroplane than by railway to come from Alor Star. I know, because I inquired about it." This was a tall, thin Chinese boy named Fang Yong Sheak.

"All right, all right!" Crabbe scotched the argument at birth. "Don't get off the point." But, he realised, they had never been on the point. Again he felt hopeless. This was the East. Logic was a Western importation which, unlike films and refrigerators, had a small market.

The bell sounded. It was a hand-bell, rung by a boy in the next class-room. He rang it early when he was bored with the lesson or thought he was likely to be

asked a question to which he did not know the answer. Very occasionally he rang the bell late. That was when he was dreaming about being a film-star, or the great Malay singer or the leader of U.M.N.O. He did not dare nowadays to extend the mid-morning break by more than ten minutes. Once he had extended it by as much as forty-five minutes. Nobody had minded except the Headmaster, who had given him detention. Just now he was roughly on time.

Crabbe had a free period, so he went straight to the Headmaster's office. He knocked on the swing-door and was told to enter. The Malay Chief Clerk was saying something about estimates. Files were spread on the desk. The swift blades of the ceiling-fan were reflected in the rare naked parts of the glass top, on which Boothby leaned his chubby elbows.

“Dese estimates den we must do six copies of.”

“Awwwww!” Boothby yawned with great vigour. He was fond of yawning. He would yawn at dinner-parties, at staff-meetings, at debates, elocution competitions, sports days. He probably yawned when in bed with his wife. His yawning seemed almost a deliberate physical exercise, involving squaring of the shoulders, bracing of the hands on the chair-arms, throwing back the whole of the upper body. When Crabbe had first seen him yawn in the middle of a passionate speech about religious holidays made by 'Che Jamaluddin at a staff-meeting, he had thought that Boothby was going to sing. “Awwwwww!” The boys had often said, “But, sir, if we go to see him about this he will only yawn at us.” Now Boothby turned to Crabbe, yawned, and said, “Take a pew.” The Malay Chief Clerk went back to the noise of gossip and typewriters.

“This pew seems to have hymn-books on it. May I move them?”

“Those are copies of the new Malayan History for Schools. Cooper at K.L. wrote it. Awwwwww! You'll be using it next year.”

“I don't know whether it's any good yet. Cooper's a woodwork specialist, isn't he?” Crabbe looked at the first chapter. “This Malaya of ours is a very old country. It is a country with a very long history. History is a sort of story. The story of our country is a very interesting story.” Crabbe closed the book quickly.

“What can I do for you, Victor?” Boothby had thinning ginger hair and ginger eyebrows. He had a sulky frog's mouth, perhaps enlarged by much yawning, a potato nose, and pale eyes framed by large reading-glasses.

“It's about Hamidin. The boys in Form Five think he shouldn't have been expelled. They say that there was no real evidence and that the duty prefect had it in for the boy. They talked about injustice.”

“They did, did they? And what do they know about injustice?”

“They asked me to say something to you about this business. I've said something. Perhaps you have something to say to them.”

“Yes. You can tell them to mind their own bloody business. No,” Boothby added with haste, “tell them that I am perfectly satisfied my decision was the right one.”

“It seems a very considerable punishment for a slight offence.”

“You call fornication a slight offence? On School premises, too?”

“Pushpanathan said he was kissing the girl. That may or may not be true. Anyway, you can't call kissing fornication. Otherwise I shall have to admit that I fornicated with your wife last Christmas. Under the mistletoe.”

Boothby killed a yawn at birth. “Eh?”

“Expulsion's a terrible thing.”

“Look here,” said Boothby, “I know the facts and you don't. Their clothes were disarranged. It's obvious what was going to happen. You haven't been here as long as I have. These Wogs are hot-blooded. There was a very bad case in Gill's time. Gill himself was nearly thrown out.”

“I didn't realise that Hamidin was a Wog. I thought he was a Malay.”

“Look here, Victor, I've been here since the end of the war. I tried the bloody sympathy business when I started teaching at Swettenham College in Penang. It doesn't work. They let you down if they think you're soft. You've got to take quick action. Don't worry.” He yawned. “They'll forget about it. Anyway, tell them that from me: I am perfectly satisfied my decision was the right one.” Boothby began to look for a file.

“You've only got Pushpanathan's word for it.”

“I trust Pushpenny. He's a good lad. He's better than most of them.”

“Well, you know how the form feels. You know how I feel. Presumably there's nothing more to be said. Except that I think you're being damned autocratic.”

Boothby was angry. The quick red of the ginger-haired suffused his untanned face. “Wait till you've been in the country a few bloody years longer. You'll learn that you've got to be able to make decisions, and make them quickly. Who the hell do you think you are, anyway, telling me how to run this place? Come back in ten years' time and tell me I'm being damned autocratic.” Crabbe caught a hint of clumsy parody in Boothby's pronunciation of these last two words. Boothby had a Northumberland whine which he rarely took the trouble to mask. He threw Crabbe's words back at him with a jaw-dropping affectation of gentility. Crabbe prepared to leave. As he pushed open the swing-door Boothby called after him, “Oh, by the way!”

“Yes?” “Where's your report-book? It should have been handed in on the 26th.”

“What do you want it for?”

“It's laid down in those rules you got when you came. Twice a term you hand it in to me. I didn't mention it last time because you were new. I must know what the boys are learning and how they're getting on.”

“You get the examination results.”

“I must know what the syllabuses are. I must have some idea of whether the boys are learning anything or not. I want to see their marks for prep, and class work.”

“Well, you know what I'm teaching. English History and Malayan History.”

“Yes, but I want to see how much they're taking in.”

“But, look here, I'm not a probationary teacher. Surely you can leave it to your staff to get on with the work they know best.”

“I can't trust the Wogs on the staff. I've got to know what they're doing.”

“Presumably we're all Wogs, then?”

“That's the rule. Report-books in twice a term. Bring yours in to-day.”

Swing-doors cannot be slammed; they can only swing. This one swung viciously. Crabbe went to the staff-room in a flaming temper. There he found Mr. Raj and Mr. Roper exchanging grievances. Mr. Raj had been lured from Ceylon to train Malayan teachers. He was a man of rich culture of which he would give anybody the benefit in long, slow, rolling, monotonous monologues. He had already spent

two years in the Mansor School, teaching Geography to junior forms. His subjects were Education and Asian History. He complained endlessly in the staff-room about the wrongs that had been done to him. Mr. Roper was a Eurasian, the son of an English planter and Tamil woman of low birth. He could never forgive the English for this act of miscegenation, even though it had produced in him a singular beauty. Tall, muscular, golden-skinned, he ranted bitterly about the injustice done to him pre-natally. Crabbe could hear him now.

"I applied for this increment, but they would not give it to me. And why? Because I am not a white man, an orangputeh. They say I am not well-qualified, but, believe me, they are not thinking of university degrees. I can see what is in their minds. He is not an orang puteh, they are thinking all the time. He is dirt, he must be kept down, the money is for the orang puteh."

And yet he owned a rubber plantation and the finest car in Kuala Hantu. And Crabbe, for one, envied that intense physical beauty, a beauty which was a mark of shame to its possessor. How complicated life was for the Eurasian.

Raj rumbled in reply. The sesquipedalian words flowed in an unintelligible sound-pattern. The calm orgy of bitterness would continue till the bell rang.

Crabbe sat at his table, which was piled with unmarked books, and rested his head in his sweating hands. He could hear Crichton's Australian voice from the far corner, talking about Shykespeare and Bycon. Crichton taught English. Crabbe thought, 'I should want to go home, like Fenella. I should be so tired of the shambles here, the obscurantism, the colour-prejudice, the laziness and ignorance, as to desire nothing better than a headship in a cold stone country school in England. But I love this country. I feel protective towards it. Sometimes, just before dawn breaks, I feel that I somehow enclose it, contain it. I feel that it needs me. This is absurd, because snakes and scorpions are ready to bite me, a drunken Tamil is prepared to knife me, the Chinese in the town would like to spit at me, some day a Malay boy will run amok and try to tear me apart. But it doesn't matter. I want to live here; I want to be wanted. Despite the sweat, the fever, the prickly heat, the mosquitoes, the terrorists, the fools at the bar of the Club, despite Fenella.'

Fenella. The long teaching morning limped towards its end, hot and airless. White shirts were sodden; sweat dripped on to the wet ink of exercise-books and blurred the words; even Tuan Haji Mohamed Noor, the Koran teacher, had to take off his turban the better to wipe his hair-roots. The fans whirred their fastest but they beat the air as impotently as the fists of a fretful child. The bell went early to-day.

Fenella Crabbe got out of bed as soon as she heard the first returning cyclists. The boys were coming back for lunch. Victor would be at least another fifteen minutes, unless someone gave him a lift. He insisted on walking usually. Penance. Fenella had not been sleeping all the time. She had on the bedside table a jug of tepid water which had, an hour ago, been ice. There was also a bottle of gin and a saucer containing sliced limes. She had a slight bout of fever, and gin helped a little. At the foot of the bed was a copy of Persuasion, a volume of John Betjeman's poems and a work of literary criticism by Professor Cleanth Brooks. In her slightly trembling hands she had just been holding the day's issue of the *Timah Gazette*, a badly-printed rag with scare headlines—"Tapper's Eyes Gouged Out by

C.T.'s"; "70-year-old Chinese Convicted Of Rape"; "Singapore Riot Threat". She had been interested to read that a Film Society had just been inaugurated in Timah, and that there would be a meeting once a fortnight. The first films scheduled were: *The Battleship Potemkin*; *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*; *Sang d'un Poete*; *Metropolis*; *Les Visiteurs du Soir*. It was too ridiculous that they hadn't a car and that Victor seemed unwilling to be friendly with any European in the place, for all Europeans—except the Crabbes—had cars. She felt that in Timah there must be people of her own kind, people who would discuss books and ballet and music. If only they could join this Film Society. But what was the use if they hadn't a car? It was about time Victor got over this stupid nonsense of refusing to drive again. She herself could not drive, but why should she have to do what was her husband's job? She should be driven. Perhaps they could afford a driver-say, eighty dollars a month. But Victor was stubborn about buying a car. He was like a man who feared water and would not even sit on the beach. And in a sense that was true also. There was a Swimming Club in Timah. He refused to swim, and that meant that she could not go there. But, in any case, how could she without a car? Without a car life in Malaya was impossible. Life in Malaya was impossible anyway.

She wiped the sweat from her face with a towel. Perhaps if he could be persuaded to buy a car she might learn to drive. But who was there to teach her? And again she was much too nervous a type, much too highly strung. The roads were treacherous with erratic cyclists and trishaw-men. As she made up her face, cursing the sweat that clogged the powder, she was sick for London, coolly making up for a dance in the evening, or for the ballet, or for a concert. Civilisation is only possible in a temperate zone. She had written a poem about that:

*Where sweat starts, nothing starts. True, life runs*
*Round in its way, in rings of dust like Saturn's,*
*But creating is creating arid patterns*
*Whose signatures prove, always, the arid sun's.*

She heard the boys shrilly entering the dining-hall downstairs, not heeding the prefects' unsure barks. The noise made her head throb. Oh God, to have this added to the sheer, damned, uncultured emptiness. Noise from now on, till the games period started. Hearty noise after till dinner-time. Noise before and after prep. Noise in the dormitories. Why didn't Victor control them better?

Victor's feet could be heard, entering the lounge, the feet of a tired man. Fenella, in a dressing-gown, went out to greet him. He kissed her on the cheek, and she felt the sweat of his upper lip. His face dripped with sweat. She said:

"Do change your shirt before lunch, darling. That one's soaked."

"It's bloody warm walking home. It's not too bad in the mornings. Can I have a drink?" He flopped into an armchair.

Ibrahim had heard him come in and a sound of approaching rattling glasses and bottles came from the direction of the distant kitchen. Ibrahim entered, bearing a tray, simpering at his master, dressed in wide-sleeved, wide-trousered silk. He had dyed the front bang of his hair a vivid red.

"For God's sake don't try and look like Boothby," said Crabbe.

“Tuan?”

“But there's no danger of that. Nobody could call Boothby a pretty boy.""Soya ta' erti, tuan.”

“I said that looks pretty. Itu chantek, Ibrahim.”

“Terima kaseh, tuan.” Ibrahim went out, smirking pleasure, waggling his bottom.

“You shouldn't encourage him,” said Fenella. “I don't mind our being a little eccentric, but I don't like it reaching a point where people will laugh at us.”

“Are people laughing at us? Because we keep Ibrahim?” Crabbe drank off a tumbler of lemon squash with a double gin in it. “Are we supposed to get some sour-faced ancient Chinese who swigs the brandy while we're out? I don't know the correct procedure. I'd better consult the D.O. about it.”

“Oh, don't be silly.” Fenella was still shaky. The long drugged sleep always left her exhausted and irritable. The fever would not go.

“I'm sorry, dear.” Hastily he remembered his responsibility to her, the pity she deserved. “It's been a hell of a morning. Boothby got on my nerves rather.”

She did not ask what Boothby had done to get on his nerves. She walked to the veranda which swept, in a huge curve, round the entire flat. “There doesn't seem to be any air,” she said. Crabbe looked at her as she leaned over the stone balustrade, trying to drink in air from the green lawns below. She was tall, elegant in the flowered thin dressing-gown, her yellowish hair hanging almost to her shoulders. The hair was lank and stringy with the wet heat. He put down his refilled glass and walked over to her. He put an arm round her, feeling damp through the thin stuff of the dressing-gown.

“Aren't you feeling any better, dear?”

“I'll feel better in two and a half years' time. When we can get away. For good.”

“If you really want to go home, I can arrange your passage any time you like. You can wait for me there.

*“…I shall not fail*
*To meet you back in Maida Vale.”*

“Oh, don't be so damned heartless all the time.” She turned on him, shaking. “I really think you don't care a bit about what I feel.”

Another little tropical storm brewing. Another classical colonial row between tuan and mem. Crabbe said nothing.

“I want us to be together,” she said. “I wouldn't dream of leaving you here on your own. I thought you felt that way about me.”

“All right, darling. But, in the meantime, we've got to live here. We've got to try and make some sort of life in this country. It's no good fighting against it all the time. You've got to accept that this isn't London, that the climate's tropical, that there aren't concerts and theatres and ballets. But there are other things. The people themselves, the little drinking-shops, the incredible mixture of religions and cultures and languages. That's what we're here for-to absorb the country.” 'Or be absorbed by it,' he said to himself.

“But we're stuck here all the time. The noise is driving me mad. Boys yelling all over the place. And when the boys are on holiday the workmen come in, spitting

and belching, scraping the walls, sawing wood. If only we could get into some decent company for a change, go to Timah a couple of times a week, meet people of our own type."

"Timah's full of hearty planters and Malay Regiment officers."

"All right." She was calmer now, wiping her face with a small handkerchief, turning away from the vista of lawn and mountain and jungle and river. "There must be some reasonable people there because they're starting a Film Society. It's in to-day's paper. They're showing good films, French films."

"Very well, let's join it."

"How do we get in?"

Here it was again, not at all conventional material for a row, most unusual, eccentric—that was her word—in a land where all the white men had cars, where a car was an essential limb, sense, faculty.

"We could use the bus. There's quite a good service."

"And you expect me to sit there, stared at like something in a sideshow, and have garlic breathed on to me, and the sweat, and the dirt…"

"You didn't object to garlic in France. Or in Soho."

"Oh, don't be a fool, Victor. You just can't do that sort of thing. I thought even you would have enough bloody sense to see that…"

"I can't understand your inconsistency. At home you were Bohemian, prided yourself on it, loved being different from everybody else. The buses and tubes were good enough for you then."

"But it's different here." She almost shouted at him, spacing the words out like the announcement of a radio programme. "We were all Europeans in Europe." She shook violently. "We can't live like the Asians…"

"All right, all right." He gripped her by the elbows, then tried to take her in his arms. "We'll find some way."

Ibrahim came in softly, looking with wide, serious eyes, to announce that lunch was ready.

"Makan sudah siap, tuan."

"Baik-lah, Ibrahim."

They went silently into the hot dining-room, fanless, its windows overlooking a final spread of veranda which itself overlooked the boys' lavatories and showers. Ibrahim served chilled tomato juice, seriously, gracefully. Crabbe said:

"You want a car, is that it?"

"We've got to have a car."

"You know I don't want to drive any more. I'm sorry about that, but there it is."

"We could get a driver."

"Can we afford it?" Eighty dollars a month at least, and at the moment he was giving about sixty to Rahimah.

"We can try."

And of course repayment of a Government loan for a car would come to about a hundred and fifty a month. There was some money in the bank, however, the dwindling remnant of their small capital.

"All right. I'll think about it."

"We could get a second-hand one. We've enough money for that." "Yes, just what I was thinking."

Ibrahim had brought in tinned salmon and a salad. As she served him she said, “It will make such a difference. It will almost reconcile me to being here.”

It would bring her the breath of a temperate climate. Him, too, for that matter. The very cold breath of a temperate climate. He began to eat his tinned salmon.

# 4

HIS ears still ringing with the protests of his shut-in dog, Nabby Adams entered the Club. He entered it rather shyly, six feet eight inches of diffidence, though he had as much right to be there as anyone else. More perhaps, for he owed the Club no money. That was more than could be said for those two bastards tee-heeing away over there by the bookshelves. But he felt uncomfortable in the Club; he would much rather have been entering a litde kedai with Alladad Khan. Still it was precisely because this was the only place for miles around where he did not owe money that he was there to-night. Hart, that fat bastard over there, had written a letter about Nabby Adams's bill to the Officer Superintending Police Circle. The O.S.P.C. had been very nice about it. He had told Nabby Adams that he must pay the bill right away, and, to ensure that the bill was paid right away, the O.S.P.C. said he would arrange for a single deduction to be made from Nabby Adams's salary. The deduction had been made and there had been damn near nothing left of Nabby Adams's salary. Still, there was one bill paid, and a bloody big one.

Nabby Adams had told Alladad Khan to go and sit in the servants' yard at the back of the Club. Nabby Adams had promised to send out a large bottle of beer to him. Alladad Khan was to try and make that last as long as possible. Nabby Adams called the Club waiter. To Nabby Adams's trained eye it looked pretty much as if the Club waiter, Hong or Wong or whatever his name was, took opium. He had pin-point pupils. He would not look straight at Nabby Adams, as though he knew that he, Nabby Adams, knew.

“Dua Tiger. One for me and one for him out there.” If Alladad Khan wanted more beer desperately he was to whisde shrilly. Nabby Adams would be able to hear thatfrom the bar.

The beer was too cold. Nabby Adams was used to the exiguous amenities of oil-lamp-lighted drinking-shops, and had, during twenty-odd years in the East, developed a taste for warm beer. A liking for iced beer was effeminate, decadent and American. During his last leave Nabby Adams had met an American in his local pub. This American had had some sort of refrigerating apparatus in the boot of his car. The car had, otherwise, been a lovely job. This American had said, “We sure would appreciate to have a man your size in Texas.” He had insisted on thrusting gracious living on Nabby Adams-a bottle of beer so cold it had felt red-hot. Nabby Adams had been sick after that Arctic, a stringent, tooth-probing draught.

He let his Tiger stand for a time on the bar counter to take the chill off. He smoked a ship's Woodbine from a tin donated by a grateful Chinese race-horse owner whose car he had repaired when it had broken down on the road. Nabby

Adams's huge fingers were so impregnated with tobacco-tar that they looked as if they were painted with iodine or something. They made him feel a little sick whenever he held a sandwich. That was another reason for not eating much.

Nabby Adams did not propose to stay in the Club for the entire evening. Somebody might come in and stand by the bar and Nabby Adams might have to talk to him. Nabby Adams was not very happy about his English lately. He liked to speak a language well, and he was conscious that his English grammar was deteriorating, his vocabulary becoming so weak that he had to eke it out with Indian words, and his pronunciation hardly proper for patrician society. He was content to speak Urdu with Alladad Khan, sitting nice and cosy in one of them little kedais.

He heard Alladad Khan's shrill whistle. He sent him out another bottle, a small one this time. That bugger was drinking faster than he himself, Nabby Adams, was. Getting uppish. Asking to be introduced to memsahibs. And him with a charming wife in silk trousers and sari having a baby in Cooler Lumpur. Nabby Adams always pronounced 'Kuala' as 'Cooler'. He could not take Malay seriously. It was not a real language, not like Urdu or Punjabi.And as for Chinese. Plink plank plonk. Anybody could speak that. It was a bloody hoax.

Nabby Adams was in the Club primarily to see if he could borrow fifty dollars from the old Chinese who ran the place, Ah Hun. It could be put down in his book or Nabby Adams could sign an I.O.U. Nabby Adams would always sign an I.O.U. It was only a bit of paper anyway. Besides, Ah Hun was the richest man in Cooler Hantu. He ran a sort of auxiliary Club for his friends at the back of the real Club. That was pure profit, for all the drink came out of the real Club. The gin and whisky were watered and always short-measured. That was why it was better to drink beer. They couldn't fiddle with that. Ah Hun was a turf commission agent, an opium peddler, an abortionist, a car salesman, a barber, a pimp and a distiller of illicit samsu. He had three wives, too, although he said he was a Christian. That was why he was never in the Club doing his bloody job. He was hard to get hold of. When committee members were present—and there were two of them over there—Ah Hun sometimes came in, busy and brow-lined with bills and accounts and God knows what. Nabby Adams decided to ask this opium-eating sod where his dad was. He didn't want to waste the evening in here.

“Ah Hun,” said Nabby Adams. “Saya want a word with Ah Hun.”

Wong or Hong or whatever his bloody name was gurgled something, his shifty eyes on the counter.

“Where is he?” asked Nabby Adams. “I want to see him.”

The opium-eating sod sidled off, gurgling.

He hadn't understood. Nabby Adams shuddered to think what opium could do to a man if it became a habit. An addict, that was the word. To become an addict was to invite early death.

Nabby Adams heard Alladad Khan's shrill whistle.

Let the bugger wait. Getting too big for his bloody boots. Memsahibs and going out with his superiors in rank. Nabby Adams drank placidly.

Nabby Adams thought for a while about something he rarely thought about nowadays, namely women, wives and whatnot. It did not pain him that desire had fled. It had not pained him for the last fifteen years. Now, at forty-five, he was

safely past all danger. In calm waters. Besides, his vocation involved celibacy. But there had been a time, in the Army in India, there had been a time, working on the railways in India, when it had been very different. Every afternoon, after tiffin, when he climbed on the charpoy for a rest, that little amah had climbed after him. Every afternoon, when he woke for tea, she had brought the tea and it had been left to get too cold to drink. And that other time there had been the major's lady. And back in England, when he had been a sexton, that time with Mrs. Amos on the gravestone. Nabby Adams shook his huge head. His real wife, his houri, his paramour was everywhere waiting, genie-like, in a bottle. The hymeneal gouging-off of the bottle-top, the kiss of the brown bitter yeasty flow, the euphoria far beyond the release of detu-mescence.

But there was this Chinese with three wives, and Alladad Khan with one wife but thirsting randily after a memsahib. And there was Crabbe with this same memsahib but carrying on with a Malay girl in the Paradise Cabaret down the road. He had seen him on his way there tonight. They had spoken together for a while, and Crabbe had said he was on his way to a meeting. Which was true enough, but that wasn't the meeting he had meant, the bloody liar. And he had said that he was looking for a second-hand car. Nabby Adams thought of money wasted on wives and cabaret-girls and second-hand cars.

With surprise and hope Nabby Adams saw Ah Hun come in, shrunken and bespectacled, seriously conning an account-book. “Here,” said Nabby Adams. But at the same time there were booted footsteps approaching the bar. Nabby Adams turned to see Gurney, the O.S.P.C., still in uniform, though it was nearly nine o'clock. Gurney, long and cadaverous and tired-looking. Of all the bloody luck.

Nabby Adams said, “Good evening, sir,” in refined, confident R.S.M. tones.

“Hallo, Nabby. What are you going to have?”

“Thank you, sir. A small beer, sir.”

“And, Nabby, sorry to talk shop, but you mustn't go upto Melawas without an escort. That's the rule, you know. You'll get shot up. Another incident today.”

“To save petrol, sir. Them scout-cars use a lot of petrol, sir.” But the real reason couldn't be given. You can't keep stopping at little kedais with a bloody escort watching every mouthful you drink and blabbing about it when they get back.

“If you use police transport, Nabby, you've got to have an escort. Cheers.”

Hart and the other bloke, Rivers, came to the bar from their colloquy in the far corner.

“Hallo, Nigel.”

“How's it going, Doug?”

“Wotcher, Nigel.”

Nabby Adams felt uncomfortable. He wanted to be out of here. He couldn't stand Hart, and Rivers, the ex-army type planter up the Tahi Panas road, got on his bloody nerves. But he had accepted a Tiger, and the others had accepted drinks too, and Nabby Adams saw, in horror, the prospect of having to stand a round himself. And there was Ah Hun, grinning at everybody, having shown his bloody face, off again, and the opium-eater leering at everybody from the back of the bar.

“Trouble again at Kelapa Estate,” said Gurney.

“Oh God, Kelapa again?” Rivers clutched the right wing of his rank moustache as though it were a talisman.

“Withers shot his way out. They got that Tamil bloke though. Cut his guts out and then sang *The Red Flag* in Chinese.” Gumey sipped his pink gin.

“That's an unlucky estate,” said Hart, nursing a fat bare knee. “There was Roebuck and then Fotheringay and that young assistant, what's-his-name. They'll get Withers.”

“It's bound to be our turn again, any day now,” said Rivers nervously. A tic throbbed under his left eye. “Roll on that bloody boat. Three weeks to go. No, two weeks and five days.”

“There's a big battle-cry going on up there,” said Gurney. “ 'Death to Withers'. What hurts the C.T.'s is that they gave him a chance to pay protection money, but he wouldn't do it.”

“Couldn't do it, I should think,” said Hart. “Debts allover the place.” Nabby Adams listened sympathetically.

Nabby Adams said, by way of making conversation, “Withers and Rivers sounds a bit alike. It might be 'Death to Rivers'.”

Rivers writhed and showed big teeth under the pelmet of the moustache. “If you think that's funny, old man...”

“No,” said Nabby Adams. “I mean, serious, the two names...”

“All right, all right,” said Gurney sofdy. “Let's have another drink.”

“My turn,” said Hart. “Here, boy.”

“Joking on one side,” said Nabby Adams, “the two names...”

They heard a shrill whistle from the servants' yard. Rivers' hand went fast to his holster. They all listened. The whistle, shriller, was repeated.

“Who the hell's that?” said Gurney.

Rivers said, “They're getting out of hand. Bloody Club servants. I'll tan his black hide. I'll put a bullet through him. I'll castrate him. I'll pull out his toe-nails with pincers. Insubordinate bastards. Hey!” he shouted. “Stop that bloody row!”

A softer, more plaintive, whistle could now be heard.

“Do you hear?” raged Rivers. “Diam, you sod, bloody well diaml”

“You mustn't shout at these people,” said Gumey. “They take it as a sign of weakness. Go round and tell him.”

“I'll go,” said Nabby Adams with energy. “I'll tell him, sir.”

“Never mind,” said Hart. “They're shutting him up.” Nabby Adams could hear importunate Hokkien and Allad-ad Khan pleading the rights of man in Punjabi.

“I'll be glad to get away,” brooded Rivers. “Coolies all day long, cretins, bloody morons, and not even here in the Club can you be free of them. I'll be glad if I never see another black skin as long as I live. They give me the shudders. Discipline, that's what they need. When I was in the Army I could handle them all right. Ten days' pay stopped. Round the square with full pack at the double.Try it here on the estates and you get a knife in your back.” He scratched his shoulder-blades petulantly. Prickly heat.

“That was in Africa, wasn't it?” said Gurney. “A bit different, you know.”

“They're all the same,” said Rivers. “Niggers. Black bastards.”

Nabby Adams looked at the arrogant white nose, the scornful nostrils whence the moustache flowed, a cornucopia of hair. He longed to have just one little crack

at it. But he kept his temper, drank the beer that Hart had bought for him, and wondered if he could slip round the back without Gurney getting suspicious. For the lavatory was at the other end of the Club. That bloody Ah Hun was walking round the yard: he could hear him scolding his wives; he could almost hear the crackle of bunches of ten-dollar notes in his pockets. And that damned fool Alladad Khan would start again in a minute. 'Wait,' thought Nabby Adams, 'I'll say good-night, walk out, and then slip round the back.'

Nabby Adams drained his glass and said with a froth-flecked mouth, "Must be going now, sir."

"I'll give you a lift, Nabby," said Gurney.

Oh God, why did these things always happen? "That's very kind, sir. I'm not going back to the mess. Thought I'd have a stroll round."

"Oh well, one for the road then."

"Push the boat out, Adams," said Hart. "Stengah for me."

Nabby Adams saw, in delirium, a vision of Bombay set in a sea of blood. He called the waiter with a single savage bark.

"You'll have to hurry up with that car," said Gurney to Rivers. "When do you go?"

"Two weeks five days."

"How much are you asking for it?"

"Two thousand."

"You won't get it."

There was a discussion about the merits of Rivers's car. Nabby Adams indicated, in urgent pantomime, that Hong or Wong or whatever his bloody name was should takeanother bottle to Alladad Khan and tell him to keep his trap shut. The opium-eater opened the bottle with insolent loudness and clomped out with it, singing. Thank God, the others hadn't noticed.

"There's a chance for you, Nabby," said Gurney. "A '52 Abelard. One thousand eight hundred."

"That's my lowest," said Rivers. "I'm losing money as it is."

"You could take it up to Melawas without an escort," said Gurney, a glint in his eye. "Save petrol for the firm."

"I'll think about it," said Nabby Adams.

Strangely enough, Nabby Adams did think about it. His mind's dark waters were ringed with jumping plans. Soon Gurney went. Soon two officers of the Malay Regiment came in, morbidly eupeptic. One was Major Latiff bin Haji Mahmud, the other Captain Frank Harley. They spoke a facetious mixture of Malay and English which made Nabby Adams shudder.

"Selamat evening."

"Good malam"

"Apa news?"

"What khabar?"

Rivers called to the waiter, "Siap meja."

"Tuan?"

"Get the billiard-table ready. Kita main snooker."

There was a foursome. The billiard-table was screened off from the bar, but the click of the balls and the boyish jeers and shouts made Nabby Adams shake with

nerves. And that bloody fool Rivers had left his gun on the bar. 'Serve him right if I pinch it and flog it to Ah Hun.' Nabby Adams took a sly glance at the debit total in Rivers' bar-book and found, to his grim satisfaction, that Rivers owed the Club $1,347.55. He turned over the pages of Hart's book with a great yellow hand. $942.70. So. There was he, Nabby Adams, owing a mere five hundred odd, and that bastard had reported him. One law for the rich. Right. He would buy that car of Rivers. Or rather Crabbe should buy it. Right.

Nabby Adams tiptoed out of the Club, making the boards creak. Nobody noticed him. Right. Among the potted plants and the hanging coconut-shells full of withering flowers he breathed in the blue Malayan night. The palms swayed in front of the Town Board offices. A swaying Tamil workman tottered from the toddy-shop. A loud radio sang in Hindustani from the Police Barracks. Nabby Adams picked his way through dustbins and bicycle-tyres to the servants' yard behind the Club and found Alladad Khan sitting with an empty glass at a huge dirty table. Doll-like children with straight fringes squabbled around him, and a shapeless young Chinese woman in pyjamas ironed shirts with some vigour.

Nabby Adams spoke in his clean, grammatical Urdu.

“Where is the Chinese man who is in charge of this Club? I wish to borrow money off him.”

“He has gone out, sahib.”

“Another thing. What advantage do you expect to gain from the loud noises you were continually making while I was in there drinking? Surely you realised that the other sahibs in there displayed a considerable measure of anger. Moreover, the O.S.P.C. nearly came out to you. That would undoubtedly have spelt disaster for both of us, but more especially for you.”

“I was tortured with thirst, sahib.”

“Well, next time you're thirsty you can pay for your bloody own,” said Nabby Adams in violent English. “Do you think I'm made of bloody beer?”

“Sahib?”

“Listen.” Nabby Adams returned to Urdu. “We are going to injure a car. We then shall buy it. Then we shall sell it. We shall buy it cheap and sell it dear, as is the way of merchants.”

“I have no money to buy a car. Nor, I think, have you.”

“That is no matter. First we must get the car away from here. It is at the front of the Club. It is an Abelard. Then we shall do what things are meet to be done.”

Nabby Adams and Alladad Khan walked quietly through the dark to the parking area of the Club. The polished Abelard shone ghostly, a vision of the future, in the faint street-lamp. From within the Club came ball-clicks and happy cries. Alladad Khan evinced little enthusiasm for Nabby Adams's plan."It is a simple matter of making the engine seem hard to start and to knock violently also. Wait here.”

Nabby Adams entered the Club again. There were only a few colours left on the table.

“Dalam the hole.”

“Into the lobang.”

The neat Malay major, cat-graceful, sleek with toothed charm, sank the blue.

Nabby Adams said to Rivers, “Can I just try it out?”

“Are you going to buy it?”

“I think I can raise the money.”

Rivers fumbled in his pocket, found the ignition-key and threw it over. It was fixed by a ring to a tiny model of a bulldog. Nabby Adams caught it in huge fielding paws.

“Look after it. Don't be too long.”

Outside the Club Nabby Adams said to Alladad Khan, “First you shall drive to the Paradise Cabaret.”

“Why?”

“To sell the car to Mr. Crabbe.”

“You promised you would introduce me to the memsahib.”

“One thing at a time. There is no call for impatience.”

“How can we sell the car when we have not yet bought it?”

“I will take charge of all that aspect of the matter.”

They drove slowly along Jalan Mansor. Music and light blared from coffee-shops. Trishaw-drivers swerved and sidled with their human burdens. Young Malay bloods cycled many abreast, heedless of Alladad Khan's warning honk.

“The horn is good,” he said.

Crisp, exquisite, the Chinese girls toddled in sororities, their cheongsams split to their thin thighs. A half-naked Tamil carried the corpse of a fish. Chettiars in dhotis waved money-loving arms, talking excitedly with frank smiles. Wrinkled Chinese patriarchs raked their throats for residuary phlegm. A Sikh fortune-teller jabbed repeatedly at a client's palm. Sellers of sateh—pieces of tripe and liver on a skewer—breathed in the fumes of their fires. Soft-drink sellers brooded over blue and green and yellow bottles. In the barber-shops the many customers lay back like the sheeted dead. Over all presided the fetid, exciting reek of durian, for this was the season of durians. Nabby Adams had once been to a durian party. It was like, he thought, eating a sweet raspberry blancmange in the lavatory. Alladad Khan drove slowly.

“The brakes are good,” he said. Calmly he watched the uninjured child crawl back to play in the monsoon-drain. They passed the Queen's Cinema where a huge hoarding announced a Tamil film—squiggles and curlicues three feet high, a fat female face contorted with fear. They passed, with regret, the beer-garden of Kong Huat. Soon they came to the Paradise Cabaret—dim lights and a hoarse record, the manager in evening dress of shorts and singlet and cigar standing, dim—descried, at the curtained door.

“Achcha,” said Nabby Adams. “We will go in here.”

“We have no money.”

“Achcha. Crabbe will pay.”

Crabbe will pay. Crabbe sat in the shadows at a little table with Rahimah. They were sharing a tepid bottle of Anchor beer. Rahimah's charming small face, lost in shadow, Rahimah's charming small body, lost to-night in loose silk pyjamas, Rahimah herself, still, restrained, not yet resigned. Crabbe spoke his slow Malay over a record which, to samba rhythm, recounted in a skirl of grace—notes the principles of religion—“Rukun Islam.”

“If you do not observe all these tenets,
And pray to Allah day and night as well,

Then you may find it much too late for penance,
And a house will await you in Hell."

The record changed. Crabbe went on, weakly, with his one tune.

"Maalum-lah, there are difficulties. People talk. Perhaps I am thrown out of my work."

"We could go from here and live together. We could go to Penang. You could play the piano and I could be a dance-hostess there. We could earn perhaps three hundred dollars a month together."

"But there is the matter of my wife."

"You could enter Islam. Four wives are allowed. But two surely would be enough."

"But that would not do. I dare not lose my present post. That would be the end of me."

"You wish to be rid of me, like Rahman my husband."

"But the difficulties are very great. And I cannot give you money any more. I am becoming a poor man."

She said nothing. Crabbe gloomily drank beer. The record of 'Seven Lonely Nights' stuck and squawked psittacinely. "Seven lo seven lo seven lo." Rahimah went to change it. She came back and held his big white hand in her two small brown ones.

"The money does not matter. You will not leave me. If people talk that is their affair. Tida' apa"

Crabbe heard heavy footsteps and, raising his head, saw with something like relief a huge man approaching him, followed by a moustached Indian in white shirt and black trousers. They came to the table.

"I hope I'm not interrupting you, Mr. tHrabbe." It was a deep voice, apt for much morning coughing. The lines of the huge yellow-brown face came into the lamplight.

"Good evening, memsahib." Alladad Khan bowed, proud of his English.

"Don't be a bloody fool," said Nabby Adams savagely. "Beg your pardon, Mr. Crabbe. He's three parts pissed, that's his trouble. Can't see straight. Do you mind if I join you for a minute?" He sat down on a tiny chair, like father at a dolls' tea-party. Alladad Khan sat down too. He saw, with embarrassment, that Mr. Crabbe had, hidden in the shadows, a woman not his wife. He felt bitter towards Crabbe, who could thus deceive, thus betray, when he had a golden-haired, blue-eyed goddess awaiting him at home in trust and love.

"Dua botol lagi, Rahimah," said Crabbe. Rahimah went obediently to fetch more beer.

"Not out of the fridge," said Nabby Adams. "Tell her that."

"Everything's warm here," said Crabbe.

"You remember you saying about wanting a car?" said Nabby Adams. "I've got a car outside for you, dirt-cheap. An Abelard, '52 model. Only two thousand."

"Miles?"

"Dollars."

"Whose is it?"

"The planter with the tash, the one who's going home. Withers."

“Rivers?”

“That's right. Withers is the one who's going to die.”

“What are you doing with it if it belongs to Rivers?”

“Well, you see.” Nabby Adams leaned closer, showing confidential huge horse-teeth, brown, black, broken. “He wanted two-five, you see, and I wouldn't say as how it's not worth it. But you see, me and him”—he jerked a shoulder towards Alladad Khan, calm, moustache-smoothing—“buggered the works up a bit and I told him this was wrong and that was wrong, so he said two thousand. Licensed and insured till the end of the year.”

“You buggered the works up? For me?”

“For both of us,” said Nabby Adams. I'll do a deal with you. Lend me that car, say, two days a month, and I'll look after it for you. Service it and see to the oil. Petrol I can't manage. Too risky. But everything else.”

Rahimah came back with the beer. Nabby Adams said, “Good health, Mr. Crabbe. Good health, Miss er.” Alladad Khan said, “Shukria, sahib,” and drank thirstily.

“What do you want it twice a month for?” asked Crabbe.

“So I can go up to Melawas without an escort. As it might be yourself, I like the odd bottle, but you can't stop off with them escorts gawping at you when you go into a kedai. Same as yourself, I don't like too many knowing my business.”

“Yes,” said Crabbe. “Let's try the car out.”

“No hurry,” said Nabby Adams. “When we've had another bottle.”

“Shukria, sahib,” said Alladad Khan.

Nabby Adams turned on him in passionate Urdu. “Nobody, to my knowledge, suggested that you should sit here all night drinking at other people's expense. You have had more than enough for one evening. You are already intoxicated.” He turned to Crabbe. “Getting above himself. And drinking's forbidden by his religion, too.”

They had another bottle. Nabby Adams looked round the little dance-hall, empty save for their own party and a couple of fat Chinese business-men in crumpled white. “A nice little place,” he said unconvincingly. “I think I'll open an account here.”

When the three men were outside, having said goodnight to Rahimah, the girl waving her wrist ruefully about, crushed in the bear-hug of Nabby Adams's handshake, Crabbe felt his betrayal of her was complete. There stood the car, gleaming as with blue butter under the fairy-lights in the little garden. A recrudescence of the past, the victory of Fenella over one already long-vanquished, a means of getting out of the Malaya he wanted to know. He climbed into the back of the car.

“You'd better try it yourself,” said Nabby Adams.

“No. I'll never drive again. I'll have to employ a driver.”

“There is your chance,” said Nabby Adams to Alladad Khan. “You can drive for this gentleman and his wife when you are off-duty. Undoubtedly they will pay you.”

“Thank you. I am a Khan. I am no man's servant. But the memsahib I will gladly drive anywhere.”

“I've got a driver for you,” said Nabby Adams to Crabbe.

A bargain was eventually concluded in a little kedai on the Timah road. Here the beer was sun-warmed day-long, and the tepid froth soothed Nabby Adams', bad teeth. Alladad Khan was happy, his eyes shining in the dim light of the oil-lamps. Crabbe, resigned, promised to go to the Treasury the next day, draw out two thousand dollars in cash and hand this over to Nabby Adams in a little kedai near the Mansor School. Nabby Adams would see to everything.

Later in the evening, Nabby Adams and Alladad Khan brought a maimed and coughing car into the Club porch. Alladad Khan was singing softly Punjabi folk-songs about young love in the hay.

“Quiet now,” said Nabby Adams. “I am going in to fetch this man Rivers. He will undoubtedly be astonished by the state of his engine, not realising that all we have done is to adjust a few little wires and things of that sort."Rivers was now very drunk. He tottered about the Club shouting, “Lash them, beat them, nail them to the door, pepper them with hot lead, ha ha. Treat them as they deserve to be treated. Speak to them in the only language they understand. Go through them like a dose of salts, ha ha.” Raja Ahmad, the Sultan's A.D.C., was performing a Spanish jota. At the worn grand piano sat Hart, playing old songs in N.A.A.F.I. style. Raja Azman sat placidly with his latest wife, smiling at vacancy, drinking gin and tonic water. He was very old.

Nabby Adams said, “I've brought it back, Mr. Rivers.”

Rivers said, “Major Rivers to you. I insist on my rights. I insist on my rank being respected. We shall have discipline if it's the last thing we do.” He writhed against the bar as if it were a scratching-post. “One thousand eight hundred. Not a penny less.”

Nabby Adams said, “Come out and see it”

The warm night air made Rivers sway and clutch a porch-pillar for support. “Take me home this instant,” he said. “I insist on my rights. There's no discipline round here.”

“Get in,” said Nabby Adams, “and just you listen to that bloody engine.”

Rivers fell in, sprawling on the cushions, shouting, “Discipline, sir. There is no discipline in this battalion.” At the wheel Alladad Khan sang happily.

“For Christ's sake,” said Nabby Adams. “Like a bloody loony-bin. Here, let me drive.” He snatched the wheel from Alladad Khan, pushing him rudely into the front passenger-seat. Alladad Khan sang of the fulfilment of love, of the spring moon riding like a huge pearl above the marriage-bed. They drove off down the Tahi Panas road.

“You saw what it was like starting,” said Nabby Adams. “Now listen to that knock. Hear it? Tearing its guts out. One thousand five hundred, and that's a fair offer.”

The only response was a loud snore from the back. Rivers was out like a light. Nabby Adams pleaded, “Wake up, listen to that bloody engine. Please listen to that bloody engine.” Rivers snored on.

About half a mile from Jagut Estate they ran out of petrol. Nabby Adams quarrelled petulantly with Alladad Khan.

“It was your responsibility to check the petrol. That is why you carry two stripes. You obviously cannot be trusted to do your work efficiently.”

“This car is no responsibility of mine, sahib.”

“Yes, it is. You're going to drive it, aren't you? It's no good. We'll have to leave it here by the roadside.”

“But the sahib is sleeping inside. The terrorists will get him.”

“That's his bloody funeral.”

“Sahib?”

“All right. We'll push it.”

And so they pushed it, their snoring freight oblivious, stretched on the back cushions in deep rest. Nabby Adams grumbled and cursed and reviled Alladad Khan. Alladad Khan sang in rapture an old ploughing song. Under the glowing moon they laboured up the road. The demons of the half-tamed jungle watched them impassively; a snake reared its head from the grass; the fireflies wove their mocking lights about them. From afar a tiger called. Nabby Adams raged with thirst.

“Fourteen fifty,” he panted. “And not a bloody penny more. And lucky to get that. The bastard,” he added. “The drunken bastard. Not a penny more.”

# 5

“HE he he,” said Inche Kamaruddin, showing his small teeth in a gay smile. “If you make dose stupid mistakes den you cannot hope to pass de examination. If you do dat den you must fail.” He smiled brilliantly, encouragingly.

“Yes,” said Victor Crabbe. “But there don't seem to be any rules.” On the table lay his exercise, a piece of transliteration into Arabic script. The words sprawled, from right to left, in clumsy unco-ordinated curves, sprinkled with dots. It was a warm night, despite the rain that had fallen, and busy with insect life. All around them flying ants were landing, ready to copulate, shed their wings, and die. Flying beetles sang fretfully in the rafters of the veranda, and little bugs and pallid moths had been drinking the sweat from his neck. The hand that held the pen dripped sweat on to the paper. His face, he knew, must look wet and greasy and callow to his Malay teacher. Inche Kamaruddin smiled and smiled, deploring his stupidity in a look of ineffable happiness.

“Dere are no rules,” smiled Inche Kamaruddin. “Dat is de first ting dat you must learn. Every word is different from every oder word. De words must be learnt separately. De English look for rules all de time. But in de East dere are no rules. He he he.” He chortled, rubbing his hands in joy.

“All right,” said Crabbe. “Now let's have a look at these special words for Malay royalty. Though why the hell they should have words different from other people…”

“He he he. Dey have always had dat. Dat is de custom. When de ordinary people go to sleep you must say dat dey tidor. But de sultans always beradu. De root of dat word means dat dere was a singing contest among de concubines. And de one dat won slept wid de sultan. He hehe.” He rubbed his groin in a transport of vicarious concupiscence.

“And does the Sultan of Lanchap have these talent competitions?”

“De present Sultan? Now it is different.” Eagerly Inche Kamaruddin picked up a copy of a Malay newspaper from a pile of books and other teaching aids. “Dere is to-day's news, you see.” Crabbe squinted at the Arabic letters, deciphering slowly. “If you read Jawi fluently den you keep up to date wid de latest scandal. He he he.”

“He's going to marry again? A Chinese?”

“De Sultan lost a lot of money at de Singapore races and de Penang races and de races at Kuala Lumpur. De Sultan owes a lot of money.”

“My amah says he owes some to her father.”

“Dat is quite possible. He he he. Dis Chinese girl is de daughter of a tin miner, de richest tin miner in de State. Dis will be de Sultan's tent wife. He he he.” This was a rich joke. Inche Kamaruddin rocked with glee.

“How you love a bit of scandal.” Crabbe smiled at his teacher tolerantly. Inche Kamaruddin was ecstatic. Soon he became a little more serious and said:

“Dere is more trouble at de Mansor School, I see. De Headmaster had his motor-car scratched and his tyres slashed de oder day.”

“I didn't know that,” said Crabbe. “He didn't mention it to anybody.”

“Of course he did not mention it,” smiled Inche Kamaruddin. “Dat would be to lose face. But he beat tree prefects wid a stick, and now dis is revenge. Dere is worse to come. Dere is going to be a rebellion.”

“They can't do that, you know. That only happens in school stories.”

“Dey will try. Dey are becoming politically-minded. Dey are talking about de white oppressors.” Inche Kamaruddin grinned widely and shook with joy.

“How do you manage to hear these things?”

“He he he. Dere are ways and means. Dere will be big trouble at de Mansor School, noting is more certain dan dat.”

“So. And what do your spies in Kuala Lumpur sayabout the official attitude to the present regime?”

“In de Mansor School? Dey know noting about it. De autorities are very pleased wid de way dat Mr. Boodby is running de School. But dey are not very pleased wid you.” Inche Kamaruddin grinned and shook and sang “He he he he” down the scale.

“Oh?” said Crabbe in disquiet. “And why not?”

“Dey are getting reports about you not doing de tings Mr. Boodby asks you to do. And dere is a story about you being friendly wid de Malay women. But you must not worry about dese tings. U.M.N.O. is quite pleased wid you and when U.M.N.O. is running de country dere will be no difficulty about you getting one of de good jobs. But first,” Inche Kamaruddin tried for a moment to look very grave, “first,” his face gradually lightened, “you must get your examination. Dey will want Englishmen who can speak de language.” Inche Kamaruddin banged the rattan table with his neat brown fist. “Misti lulus. Misti lulus. You must pass de examination. But you will not pass de examination if you make dese stupid mistakes.” He grinned widely and engagingly and then collapsed into quiet mirth.

“All right,” said Crabbe. “Let's read some more of the Hikayat Abdullah.” Inwardly he was disturbed, but it was a cardinal rule in the East not to show one's true feelings. The truth about anything had to be wrapped up and could only be seen and handled after the patient untying of much string and paper. The truth

about one's feelings must be masked in a show of indifference or even the lineaments of a very different emotion. Calmly now he translated the sophisticated Malay of the munshi who had been the protege and friend of Stamford Raffles.

“One day Tuan Raffles said to me, “Tuan, I intend to go home by ship in three days' time, so get together all my books in Malay.” When I heard this my heart beat strongly and my soul had lost its courage. When he told me that he was sailing back to Europe, I could not stand it any longer. I felt that I had lost my father and my mother, and my eyes swam with tears.' ”

“Yes, yes.” Inche Kamaruddin danced up and down on his chair. “You have got de meaning of dat.”

“They felt differently about us then,” said Crabbe."They felt that we had something to give.”

“You still have someting to give,” insisted Inche Kamaruddin, “but in a free Malaya dat shall be ruled by de Malays.“

“And the Chinese? And the Indians, the Eurasians?”

“Dey do not count,” grinned Inche Kamaruddin. “Dey are not de friends of de Malays. Malaya is a country for de Malays.”

The work of translation stopped, and the old political wrangle began again. Crabbe was reasonable, pointing out that the Chinese had made the country economically rich, that the British had brought rule and justice, that the majority of the Malays were Indonesian immigrants. Inche Kamaruddin grew heated, waving excited arms, grinning passionately, finally shouting, “Merdeka! Merdeka! Freedom, independence, self-determination for de Malays!”

“Merdeka itself is a Sanskrit word,” said Crabbe, “a foreign importation.”

From the nearest dormitory a young boy, wakened by the noise, could be heard crying. “We'd better stop now,” said Crabbe. “I've got to do my little prowl round the dormitories.”

Inche Kamaruddin went downstairs to his bicycle, waving his hand in farewell, showing all his teeth in the last big grin of the evening. “On Tursday, den,” he called quietly.

“Thursday,” said Crabbe. “Terima kaseh, inche. Selamat jalan.”

Crabbe began to wander round the still, dark dormitories, thinking of what his teacher had told him. There were few secrets to be kept in Malaya. What he had thought to be a discreet liaison was obviously already stale knowledge round the town, stale knowledge to Boothby. The side had been let down. He had broken the unwritten laws of the white man. He had rejected the world of the Club, the week-end golf, the dinner invitations, the tennis parties. He did not drive a car. He walked round the town, sweating, waving his hand to his Asian friends. He had had an affair with a Malay divorcee. And of course Fenella was no better. She had rejected the white woman's world—mahjong and bridge and coffee parties—for different reasons.

He felt suddenly a stab of anxiety about Fenella. Tonight was the night of the first meeting of the Film Society in Timah. He had refused to go, saying that he could nqt cancel his Malay lesson. She had said it was pointless taking Malay lessons, poindess taking Government examinations when they did not intend to stay in the country. He had said that he did not see why they should not stay in the country. He liked the country and, if she wished to be a dutiful wife, she

should try to like it too. It was up to her to go wherever her husband went. If he had determined on a career in this country, well, her duty was plain. If she did not wish to be a dutiful wife, then she had better not be a wife at all, she had better leave him. He would not have said so much if his nerves had not been on edge with a trying morning in the School. She had cried, said he did not love her, and all the rest of it. He had tried to retract, but she had burst out with the inevitable reference to his first wife. Then he had become hard, cold and stupid. At seven o'clock Alladad Khan had brought round the car and she had gone off to Timah alone; alone, that is, save for Alladad Khan's respectful and discreet presence. He did not expect her back for another hour. Now he worried a little about the possibility of an ambush, the car breaking down miles from anywhere, Fenella afraid in the black night. This, he supposed, was a sort of love. He shrugged it away, refused to think about it further, walking soft-footed between the rows of boys' beds.

From the prefects' room came the light hissing of talk. A blue glow, as of a shaded lamp, showed under the door. Crabbe walked stealthily towards it, stood outside, hardly breathing, listening. He could not understand what was being said; he knew hardly any Chinese. It was evident, however, that this was no ordinary conversation, apt for a dorm-feast; there was too much of one voice. Then came the hint of catechism: the question, the quiet chorused answer. Crabbe opened the door and entered.

Shiu Hung opened a surprised mouth, raising his eyebrows above spectacles which had slipped down his nose. The other boys, all Chinese, looked up from the floors and beds where they sat. All were wearing pyjamas."What's going on?" said Crabbe.

"We are having a meeting, sir," said Shiu Hung. "We have formed a Chinese society."

"Where are the other prefects, Narayanasamy and the rest of them?"

"They lent us the room, sir. They are down below reading in the lavatories."

"You know about the lights-out rule?"

No answer. Crabbe looked at the boys. Two or three were prefects, the rest merely seniors.

"What kind of society is this?" asked Crabbe.

"It is a Chinese society, sir."

"You said that. What does the society propose to do?"

"To discuss things, sir, things of world interest."

"What's that book?" asked Crabbe.

"This, sir?" Shiu Hung handed the thick pamphlet to him. "It is a book on economic theory, sir."

Crabbe looked at the fantastic columns of ideograms. He only knew one or two: the symbols for 'man', 'field', 'light', 'tree', 'house'-pictograms really, straightforward drawings of straightforward things. He suddenly shot a question at one of the crouching boys:

"You. State the doctrine of Surplus Value."

The boy, bewildered, shook his head. Shiu Hung remained suave, impassive.

"Shiu Hung," said Crabbe, "how shall the revolution be accomplished in Malaya?"

“What revolution, sir?”

“Look here,” said Crabbe. “I suspect the worst. I suspect that this is an indoctrination class.”

“I do not know the word, sir,” said Shiu Hung.

“Watch your step,” said Crabbe. “I'm taking this book away. I'll find out what's in it.”

“It is a good book, sir, on economic theory. We are interested in these things and we have a right, sir, to discuss them in our own language. We are given no other opportunity to meet for this purpose. It is either prep, or games or debates in English.”

“You're here to get an English education,” said Crabbe. “Whether that's a good or bad thing is not for me to say. If you want to form a discussion-group ask me about it.And you're breaking the rules by not being in bed by lights-out. I'll have to report this. Now get to bed, all of you.”

Crabbe went back to his flat, much disturbed. He poured himself a large whisky and sat for a time, smoking, looking at the pamphlet. The big garish ideograms on the cover meant nothing to him. He would ask Lee, the mathematics master, what the contents were. But he was certain that Boothby would do nothing. He was also certain that other indoctrination sessions were being held in the other houses. Indoctrination meant victimisation. Also there was the big public school tradition of not sneaking.

He strolled restlessly about the big living-room, stopping at last to examine the tides of books behind the smeared glass of the standard-pattern bookcase. Some of the books dated from his university days—poets like Auden and Spender, novels by Upward, Dos Passes, Andre Malraux. In those days he had himself for a time been a Communist; it was the thing to be, especially at the time of the Spanish War. He remembered the loose-mouthed student of engineering who had the complete works of Lenin and was glib in his application of Dialectical Materialism to all human functions-drinking, love-making, films, literature. He remembered the girls who swore and chain-smoked and cultivated a deliberate lack of allure, the parties where he met them, the songs they sang at the parties:

“*Three, three, the Comintern.*
*Two, two, the opposites,*
*Interpenetrating though.*
*One is Workers' Unity*
*And evermore shall be so.*”

Those memories now had the smell of old apples, they were a dried pressed flower. Were these boys the same as he had been, fired with an adolescent desire really to reform the world, as little to be taken seriously? Shiu Hung was a good student of History. Crabbe wanted him to go to England, to read for a degree there. He had a future before him. Did he really see the ambushes, theeviscerations, the beheadings of the innocent as a wholesome and necessary step to the fulfilment of a freer and happier East? Or did he, young as he was, know what power was and desire it?

Crabbe heard a car singing in a rising scale round the bend of the long drive. His watch said nearly twelve. The car stopped in the porch, he heard brief words and a slammed door, then the car was off again, singing down the riverside road that led to the town. He heard Fenella mounting the stairs. He went to the door to meet her.

"Hallo, darling," he said. She seemed flushed and happy, the afternoon's quarrel forgotten. "Here I am," she said. They kissed.

"Was it a good film?"

"Well." She went ahead of him into the living-room. "Let me have a drink first. Wake up Ibrahim and ask him to fetch some ice."

"Ibrahim's not back yet. He too went to the cinema."

"Never mind. This water seems cold enough." She sat down with a flop of languor and drank some diluted gin.

"Well," she said. "It's rather a long story. We never got to Timah."

"Never got there?"

"Do you know anything about this driver, What's-his-name Khan?"

"Nothing. Why?"

"Well, we broke down on the road. At least, he said we'd broken down. He managed to drive the car into one of the estates-conveniently near, I thought, a bit too convenient. Admittedly the car was coughing a bit, but I think we could have got to Timah. He said he knew some of the Special Constables there and also the estate driver. He said he could get the car repaired."

"He spoke in English?"

"No, Malay. But I could follow him. I really must get down to learning the language, Vie. It's silly not to know Malay when you're living in Malaya."

"Really, my dear. This is quite a new note."

"Well, actually, there was a lot I wanted to find out tonight, but nobody spoke English. Everybody knew some Malay."

"What did you want to find out?"

"Oh, it's a long, long story. We went to this estate and there was a sort of party going on. It was mostly Tamils. There seemed to be some sort of religious ceremony, but it wasn't really religious either. The most incredible things. You've no idea."

"Such as?"

"Well, some of them walked in their bare feet on broken glass and others stuck knives into their cheeks, and one man swallowed a sword. And they sang songs. And we had a foul-smelling drink called toddy."

"Ah."

"Have you ever drunk it?"

"Yes, a little."

"Well, it's all right if you hold your nose. It's quite intoxicating in a gentle sort of way."

"That's true."

"I had quite a lot of that. They kept handing it round. Really, the whole evening was most interesting. Like something out of The Golden Bough."

"But you missed the film."

“Yes, I missed the film. Still, I never much fancied *The Battleship Potemkin*, really. But I mustn't miss the next one.”

Just before she went to sleep Fenella said, “You know, that Khan man, the driver, is rather nice really. Very attentive. I only wish I could understand what he's saying to me. It all sounds quite complimentary. This is like something in a novel, isn't it?” she added. “Like one of those cheap novels about Cairo and what-not.” She giggled a little and then swam off into sleep, snoring very faintly.

While she slept happily two men were happily awake. One was Alladad Khan. He swelled with pride as he took off his shirt before the mirror. He flexed his muscles and examined his teeth. He tried various facial poses, ending with a lascivious leer which, he realised, did not really suit him. He recomposed his face to a quiet dignity much more becoming a Khan. Then to the mirror he spoke some words of English. “Beautiful,” he said. He sought for an adverb to go with it. “Bloody beautiful,” he said. To-morrow he must borrow that little book from Hari Singh. Then he turned to his wife's photograph and sneered dramatically at the strong long nose and the confident arm leaning on his own new-married image. “Silly bastard,” he said. “Bloody liar.” Then, satisfied, he got into bed.

He lay smoking a last cigarette. Smoking in bed was forbidden by his wife, because once he had burnt the sheet. His wife was not here to enforce the law, but, Allah, she would soon be back, complete with a squalling baby. When she returned he would assert his manhood a bit more. Any further mention of her brother and he would use rude language. He might even strike her gently, though hitting a woman was not conduct befitting a Khan.

Tida' apa.

Mrs. Crabbe had, he thought, been given a very good evening, and it had cost nothing. At first she had been frightened, but a pint or so of fresh toddy had soon made that pass. His friends, he thought, had behaved very well. They had neither belched nor spat excessively. They had smiled frequently and encouragingly. She had obviously been interested in the things she had seen. It was a good thing she had not been able to understand the songs she had heard.

Next time he would make the car break down near a kedai, one of the more refined kedais where ice was obtainable. There they could have a good long talk. By then he should know a little English.

“Bloody good,” he said. Then, content, he turned towards the wall and addressed himself to sleep.

The other happy man was Nabby Adams. Old Robin Hood had brought him to Penang. There was to be a conference of Contingent Transport Officers at Butterworth the next day, and Hood needed Nabby Adams's technical advice. Nabby Adams was now sitting in a rather high-class kedai, doing very nicely indeed.

Nabby Adams had arrived in Penang with two dollars. Hood had given him the money for a hotel room but nothing for expenses. The two dollars had to be husbanded carefully. First, a bottle for breakfast had to be bought. This bottle had been bought and then stored carefully in the same cupboard as the chamber-pot. This left one dollar for the evening, one dollar to taste the varied pleasures of a civilised city that has been called the Pearl of the Orient.

Nabby Adams had entered a kedai and ordered himself a small bottle of Anchor. Now, it normally happens that when one has much money in one's pockets that is the time when other drinkers, even strangers, are at their most generous. When one has nothing nothing will come of nothing. On this occasion things went differently. A Chinese jeweller had said, “A drink for the police-lieutenant. It is they who are clearing this country of Communist scum.” Nabby Adams had been bought a large bottle of Tiger. He protested that he had no money to return this generosity. He had been told that that was no matter, that nothing was too good for police-lieutenants. Soon friends of the Chinese jeweller came in and were greeted warmly by the Chinese jeweller. They too were appreciative of expatriate police-lieutenants and they too bought him large bottles of Tiger. It was not long before Nabby Adams had eight unopened large bottles of Tiger on the table before him. Then somebody had said, “The police-lieutenant is drinking very slowly.”

Somebody had said, “Too slowly.”

Somebody had suggested, “Perhaps if the police-lieutenant had a brandy before each bottle of beer it would help him to get them down.”

This was thought to be a good idea. Soon eight glasses of brandy appeared on the table. They helped the beer down considerably. And now Nabby Adams was speaking rapid Urdu to a couple of Bengali business-men who frequently nodded gravely in agreement. Occasionally the Chinese jeweller would sway over to the table and shout:

“More drink for the police-lieutenant. It is only fitting that they should be repaid for their bravery.”

It was, joking on one side, the best bloody evening that Nabby Adams had had for a long time.

Meanwhile Victor Crabbe was dreaming. He was in Boothby's office. This office expanded and contracted like a huge yawning mouth. Boothby was sitting in his chair with Rahimah on his knee. Rahimah was evidently very fond of Boothby for she kissed him frequently, even when he was yawning. Boothby was glancing through a Chinese pamphlet, saying, “If you'd been in this Federation as long as me you'd be able to read this language. All it says is that terrorist activities must be intensified, especially in this School. That's your trouble, Crabbe, you're inexperienced. You can't take orders, you can't exercise discipline, the boys laugh at you behind your back.”

On a ledge, high up near the ceiling, Fenella lay languidly, saying, “Oh, darling, I'm so happy, so happy.” Boothby said, “All right, boys, give him a joy-ride.” The Chief Clerk and the two peons came in, wearing caps marked with the bintang tiga, the three stars. They bundled him into a smart Abelard, into the driving-seat, and said, “You're on your own.” But he was not on his own. The muffled figure in the passenger-seat said, “Oh, darling, I'm so happy, so happy.” Over the bridge-fence they went. “Who ever heard of ice in Malaya?” yawned Boothby. Nabby Adams said, “I can't abide it cold.” Over they went, into the dark January waters.

# 6

“SO I thought you might like to go there,” said Nabby Adams.

“Yes,” said Crabbe. “Let's go and have a few beers.” He was smarting from the day's failures. “Do sit down, Alladad Khan. I mean, sila dudok.”

“Shukria, sahib.” Alladad Khan sat gingerly on one of the four chairs ranged about the table, under the spinning fan, and stroked his moustache, glancing shyly round. So this was where she lived. Fine P.W.D. furniture, and many books in an unknown language, and on the walls coloured pictures. And there on a small table ice in a jug and gin. But where was she?

“I think my wife might quite like it,” said Crabbe. “Have some gin, Nabby.”

“No, thanks,” said Nabby Adams. “No water. I like to taste it as it is.” He drank with no grimace a bulging mouthful of the raw spirit. Alladad Khan accepted shyly the same and burst into a shock of coughing.

“That's his bloody trouble,” said Nabby Adams evenly. “Thinks he can drink and he can't. Go on,” he added, “get it up even if it's only a bucketful.”

It was unfortunate that she should enter just then. He, Alladad Khan, red with coughing under his brown, eyes full of tears, fire in his gullet. He had meant to be calm, gentlemanly, saying in careful English, “Good evening, memsahib. Thank you, memsahib.” She entered, graceful in thin flowery stuff, gracious and solicitous.

“Don't mind about him, Mrs. Crabbe,” said Nabby Adams, remaining calmly seated. “He's only coughing his art up.”

Fenella heard this with appreciation. Coughing his art up. That could apply to any of the tubercular poets. She must use it sometime."There's a big fair up at the Istana,” said Crabbe. “Sideshows, dancing.”

“And two beer-tents,” said Nabby Adams. “It's the Sultan's birthday, you see. To-morrow, that is. And I thought you might like to go to it. You'll be safe with two men. And him,” he added.

“Yes,” said Fenella. “I should like that.”

“There's no hurry,” said Nabby Adams. “Doesn't start till nine.” He looked appreciatively at the bottles on the sideboard. That had been a bloody good idea of Alladad Khan's, to come up here like that with the suggestion. He must come here again. Crabbe probably had beer in the kitchen as well.

Alladad Khan had stopped coughing. Now he said, with careful articulation, “Good evening, memsahib.”

“Oh,” said Fenella. “Good evening.”

“Bit late in the day, aren't you?” said Nabby Adams with contempt. He then launched into long Urdu. Alladad Khan replied in long Urdu, his eyes flashing and melting. Nabby Adams grunted and said, “I'll take one of your cigarettes, if you don't mind, Mr. Crabbe.”

“What was all that about?” asked Fenella.

“He says his heart is heavy that he made a bloody fool of himself like that,” said Nabby Adams. Then he gaped in horror. “I beg your pardon, Mrs. Crabbe. It just slipped out, that did, I didn't mean to say that, not before a lady, I do beg your pardon, really I do.”

Nabby Adams, forgiven, drank more neat gin. Alladad Khan was soothed with some sherry. Allah, that was a good drink. He smacked his lips. Rich, aromatic, sustaining. Allah, he must buy some of that.

"You don't mind me coming in these clothes, do you?" announced Nabby Adams. "I didn't go back to the mess, you see. Me and him had to go out on a job." He looked down at the stained shirt and long, long crumpled trousers. "I didn't get a bath, neither. But I think you can bath too much. No, joking on one side, I think you can. Now, I know some people who bath as much as twice a day. Honest. Keir does. You wouldn't know him, Mrs. Crabbe. Not that you'd want to. Mean? Mean as bl... Mean as dirt. It doesn't cost him any money to have a bath. That's how hepasses the time." Nabby Adams now risked one of his little jokes. "I had a damn good wash on the boat coming over," he said.

"Really?" said Fenella.

"That'll do me till the end of the tour."

Crabbe brooded on the day's humiliations. The Chinese pamphlet had been a catechism on the teaching of Karl Marx. He had taken it in to Boothby, and Boothby had yawned. He had then said:

"I know all about it. This lad—what's his name?—came in to tell me that he was trying to show these younger kids where Communism goes wrong. He said that you weren't very sympathetic about it and that he understood it was the job of the staff to try and teach the youth of Malaya the truth about Communism. Well, now, I don't see what you're bellyaching about. It's down in your syllabus here. Just a minute." He leafed through a file. "Here. *Nineteenth-century political ideas. Utilitarianism. Bentham and Mill. The Co-operative Movement and Robert Owen.* Here it is. *Socialism. Karl Marx and the Economic Interpretation of History.* Well, he was only trying to do what you don't seem to have done."

"We haven't got as far as that yet."

"All right. But don't blame this lad for trying to do your work for you. He's a good lad anyway. You say so yourself in that report I asked for. You said his scholarship should most certainly be renewed."

"I tell you I don't like it. There was too much of the air of a secret society about it. Late at night. Breaking the lights-out rule as well."

"Internal discipline is your own affair. Don't bring it to me."

"Unless it happens to relate to offences of an erotic nature?"

"I don't quite get you."

"Young men talking to girls in a house-boy's room."

"Yes," said Boothby with vigour. "Yes. That reminds me. Mahmud bin What's-his-name in your House. He was seen with a girl in the grounds, arm in arm, love's young dream. You didn't do anything about that, did you?"

"I didn't know anything about it." "There you are," said Boothby in heavy triumph. "But I did. If these lads want to work late for exams and out of general interest and what-not, then you start interfering. Fornication goes on under your nose and you don't see that, oh no. Perhaps because you don't want to see it."

"And what exactly do you mean by that?"

"What I say."

"Look here, Boothby," said Victor Crabbe. "How would you like a nice sharp jab on the nose?"

Boothby looked in astonishment, open-mouthed. Then he grinned, and, as his mouth was already half-way there, thought he might as well yawn. He yawned. “Go on,” he said. “I'll say no more about it. You're new, that's your trouble. You can get away with a lot in this country if you keep it quiet. You'll learn.”

Back in Light House, in the yawning afternoon, Crabbe had had a quiet talk with Shiu Hung. On the veranda the boy had listened politely, responded politely, sipping orange-crush.

“I want you to be honest with me.”

“About what, sir?”

“I want to know what was really going on last night. I promise you that whatever you tell me won't go any further.”

“I told you what was going on, sir.”

“Yes, yes, but you didn't tell me the whole story. I want to know what's really going on in the minds of these boys.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Would it surprise you,” Crabbe had leaned forward conspiratorially, “surprise you to know that I myself am something of a radical in politics?”

“No, sir. You have talked in class of a free Malaya.”

Ah. Crabbe said, “How are we to get a free Malaya?”

“Through representation, sir. Through free elections and a party system.”

“What parties?”

“Parties that represent the people, sir.”

“Does the Malayan Communist Party represent the people?”

“Certainly not, sir. It represents Red China.” “Have you any feelings about Red China?”

“I am a Malayan, sir. I was born here.”

“Shall I tell you, in confidence, what I think? I think that in a free country there should be room for all shades of political opinion, for all political creeds. To make it an offence to belong to a particular party does not seem to me to be consistent with the much-vaunted principle of freedom.”

“You think that the Emergency Regulations should be repealed, sir ?”

“I...” Crabbe looked into the impassive eyes, set tight and slant, as in a perpetual mask of mockery. “I will ask you what you think.”

“They cannot be repealed, sir. The Communists are torturing and killing the innocent. They are holding back all our schemes for social and economic progress. They are evil, sir. They must be destroyed.”

“Would you yourself be willing to destroy them, given the chance?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You are Chinese. Think. If your father or brother or sister were hiding in this jungle torturing and killing, as you say, the innocent, would you be willing to help destroy your own kith and kin?”

“My own...?”

“Kith and kin. Your own flesh and blood.”

“Oh, yes, sir.”

“You would kill, for instance, your sister?”

“Oh, yes, sir.”

“Thank you. That's all I want to know.”

Shiu Hung got up, puzzled. “I can go now, sir?”

“Yes, you can go now.”

Had he really got anything out of the boy? Adolescents will reel off shibboleths they have heard or read, they will be brutal and callous enough in speech. In any case, even if Shiu Hung were running a Communist study-group, did it matter very much? Doctrinaire blather, a pubescent rash. Could they do anything that mattered? Crabbe suddenly saw himself as a witch-hunting little senator, looking for burglars under the bed, listening at keyholes, tapping wires. Was it perhaps not better that boys should stay uplate reading Marx, rather than ingesting the film-myths or breathing heavily over the comic-strips? Crabbe felt vaguely ashamed of himself but still disturbed.

He came to. Ibrahim had entered the room, flaunting red curls, simpering, with faintly swaying hips, at Alladad Khan. Alladad Khan looked embarrassed.

“Makan malam ini, mem?”

“No dinner,” said Fenella. “We're going out.”

Nabby Adams made another little joke. “Ada baik?” he said to Ibrahim.

“Ada baik, tuan.”

“Motor-bike or pedal-bike?” said Nabby Adams. The bottles on the sideboard had put him in a good humour. Ibrahim went out on oiled haunches, simpering finally from the doorway at Alladad Khan. Nabby Adams said, “You get a lot of them like that. When I was in India there was what I thought was a woman in the next washhouse. I was stripped off, see, Mrs. Crabbe, having a swill-down. Needed it, because I was smelling a bit. Well, it seemed to me she had her hair all down her back, so I thought, well, if she's come in here she knows what to expect. Well, I went in there, Mrs. Crabbe, and she turned round and I got the shock of my life, because she had a beard. It was a man really, a Sikh, you see, Mrs. Crabbe, and they're not allowed to have the scissors or the razor touch their body. Well, I said I was sorry and begged his pardon, but he was all for it, if you see what I mean, Mrs. Crabbe. Oh,” he added, “perhaps I shouldn't have started to tell that story.”

When Nabby Adams had finished half a bottle of gin, neat, and Alladad Khan had, absorbed in the wonder of it all, taken three glasses of sherry, it was time for them to go. Alladad Khan drove carefully along streets festive with banners saying “LONG LIVE THE SULTAN”. Inche Sidek, the local Health Inspector, had been round the shops all day selling these banners at exorbitant prices, threatening every towkay with closure on the grounds of inadequate sanitation if he did not buy. Crowds of walkers and cyclists infested the road to the Istana. As the car entered the Istana grounds policemen saluted Nabby Adams. He waved a languid paw at them, lolling in deep cushions."You see,” he said. “They let us through without a murmur.” Other motorists were nosing and inching and sidling into the crammed parking-place outside the gates. “It's useful to have a police officer with you sometimes” he said, remembering the gin he had drunk and the beer he would drink, all at Crabbe's expense.

The grounds were gay with tree-slung fairy-lights, with fire and smoke of food-sellers, noise of show-booths, of Tonggeng music, Chinese opera, Indian drums, brown and yellow faces above best clothes, glistening eyes wide in the shine of the Sultan's treat. The car parked under the stars, the four walked down the main

drive, Nabby Adams huge, a minaret to the upturned eyes of the open-mouthed children. They stopped by the wayang kulit.

“This is a kind of a shadow-play,” explained Nabby Adams unnecessarily. Into the lighted screen swam little heroic figures, fluttering like moths, moustached Indian warriors with swords stiffly upheld, playing-card kings, toy gods, striking a kitten's impotent tiger-terror. The unmoving lips of great cardboard princesses were fed with the showman's rapid epic Malay. All the time the little drums beat and the tiny bells tinkled in water-drops. The crowd gaped, absorbed, all save those at the back; they, sea to Nabby Adams's pharos, gazed in awe at the queer quartet: the golden-haired woman, the white schoolmaster, the brown swaying Indian, the yellowstone rock of Nabby Adams. Perhaps this, too, had been provided by the Sultan?

Like the high, lighted Chinese shows, flanked by huge monolithic picture-writing slogans, where the jugglers juggled with flaming torches and the thin women caterwauled to a single saxophone and thudding drum. Like the Malay play with its stock characters: the comic moneylenders and the father ruined by his prodigal son; the stock descent from decent middle-class house to attap hut, the squeezed-out drop of philosophy: Tida' apa. Like the songs in Hindustani with endless, breathless phrases; like the ronggeng platform where the girls danced without a pause, the grinning young Malay men awaiting their turns to advance and retreat with swaying hips and arms held out as for a tentative embrace."I can do that,” said Nabby Adams. Stern eyes, powered by gin, were on the delicate girls in their best bajus and sarongs, going backwards to the platform's edge, forward again towards the band, moving arms held out to the partners whom they must not touch, who must not touch them. Nabby Adams looked at the waiting queue of slim-waisted, liquid-brown, smiling youth. “When that queue's gone down a bit,” he said, “I'll have a go at that.”

They sought an open-air table by the nearest beer-tent. Around them were the flares and fires of the sateh sellers, the stalls piled with peanuts and coconut slices, rambu-tans, coloured sweets, bananas, warmish yellowish soft drinks. Crabbe bought sateh for all: tiny knobs and wedges of fire-hot meat on wooden skewers, to be dipped in a lukewarm sauce of fire and eaten with slivers of sweet potato and cucumber. The beer came, and with it a saucer of ice, quick to change back to warm water under the sweating night.

“It won't do him any good to drink beer after all that sherry,” said Nabby Adams. “Still, if he thinks he can do it he can try. He'll spew his art up, Mrs. Crabbe,” he said seriously, clinically. “You wait and see.” He entered a long tunnel of rumbling Urdu. Emetic art, thought Fenella. James Joyce? Henry Miller? She was learning a lot from this huge crumpled man. Alladad Khan, not at all crumpled, ironed and starched in white shirt and black trousers, sat close to her. How pink the nails seemed on his brown hand.

To their table came Inche Sidek, fat and wheezy, bubbling rapid approximate English in ever-rising intonation. “My God,” he piped high. “My God, it has been a lot of work, seeing that there is enough lavatories to go round, and that there is properly trenches digged for the dirty water to run away down. My God, I tell you. Lady,” he said, “lady, you will drink a little with me. I will send round a bottle of brandy from my table.”

Nabby Adams said, “They only sell beer.”

“My God,” said Inche Sidek. “Getting into my car I find that there is three bottles of brandy in the back seat. I do not ask questions. There is three bottles. Three star. It is a present, so I do not ask questions.”

“Haram,” said Crabbe.

“My God,” said Inche Sidek. “Who is to know if drinking brandy is haram? I tell you, the Prophet forbid what would intoxicate. Even water will intoxicate. Me nothing will intoxicate, so for me it is not haram.”

From the Malay wayang came *Rukun hlam*, sung chirpily by a hoarse female voice. Crabbe thought with a pang of Rahimah, his betrayal over the scratchy record in the Paradise Cabaret. How was she getting on?

To their table came, grinning through a nodding full beard, a big Sikh. He sat down without invitation, pulling up a chair between Crabbe and Fenella.

“Hari Singh,” said Alladad Khan. Hari Singh shook hands with the lady, the gentleman. Nabby Adams said, “Bloody fool, he is,” quietly, to himself. Hari Singh began to speak grumbling bad monotonous English. Alladad Khan listened jealously.

“Yes,” said Crabbe, uncomprehending.

“I beg your pardon?” said Fenella. Hari Singh pulled his chair closer to her, speaking to her eyes.

“He says it would do his heart good to buy us some beer,” said Nabby Adams. “I wouldn't want to spoil his pleasure.”

Hari Singh rumbled that he would show them a trick. He took off his heavy signet-ring and span it on the table. He asked the lady to try it. The lady tried it and failed. Hari Singh laughed schoolboyishly through the nest of beard. He showed the lady again. The lady tried again and failed. Hari Singh came closer, span the ring to a blurred whizzing. Nabby Adams yawned. Alladad Khan glinted jealously.

Suddenly Fenella was aware of a big bare foot stroking her shod one. She was surprised, and tucked her feet under her chair. Alladad Khan saw and was mad with inner rage. Bloody Sikh, he thought. He would get him, Allah, he would get him. The bloody Sikh slid his foot back into his leather sandal.

“We ought to go in there, really,” said Nabby Adams, looking towards the great Hollywood vision of Baghdad, the vast vulgar floodlit Istana. “Gambling going on. Thousands of dollars changing hands. Them Chinese, mainly. Money no object.”

“It's a mug's game,” said Crabbe.

“That's right,” said Nabby Adams. “When you come to think of it. Like horses. And all the horse-racing's crooked in this country. The jockeys and the trainers is a load of old shit. I said that to them in the Club there, and they said, 'Do you know who that is there, that's Bert Rugby, biggest trainer in the country.' And I said, 'Well then, he must be part of the load of old shit.' “ He sat back, unsmiling, seeing no shame in pure logic.

Alladad Khan made a long passionate speech in Urdu. Nabby Adams listened attentively.

“What does he say?” asked Crabbe.

“He says we ought to get away from here,” said Nabby Adams, “and go somewhere else.”

“My God,” said Crabbe, “he's right.” He saw what he had half-expected to see all evening. Rahimah, holding on to the hand of a small brown boy, was approaching the table, ready to greet and be greeted. She was dressed in Malay costume, walking gravely on high-heeled shoes. Crabbe knew she would greet him lovingly with wide smile and soft words. Fenella's face was hidden by the turban of Hari Singh, who was now reading her palm, bending low over it, squeezing it often. Now, before it was too late…

“I see what you mean,” said Nabby Adams. Crabbe, feigning not to see Rahimah, rushed over to the beer-tent with money for the beer they had drunk. Alladad Khan escorted Fenella quickly away, his hands and lips voluble with apologies. That he should let this happen to her. How could he blame himself enough? A fellow-Punjabi, but to-morrow hell would open for this rascal. His beard should be pulled out, that soapy smile sponged from his mouth by an avenging fist. Allah, brave punishments would be devised for this false Sikh.

“What's all this about?” asked Fenella. “What's going on?”

“He says his heart is heavy that that bloke should have behaved like that,” translated Nabby Adams. “He says he's going to give him what for."This time they entered a beer-tent, secure under canvas from importunate Sikhs, from ghosts of old romances. More beer. Alladad Khan began to feel that he looked green. Allah, he had changed like a traffic-signal this evening. But even here there was no peace for, soon, a slim Bengali from the bazaar appeared, offering whisky from a pocket-flask, eager to tell the lady of new fabrics from exotic America, just now in stock, cheap, so cheap, if the lady would come round and see to-morrow… They were joined by one of the letter-writers, relaxing from the labours of recording others' sorrows, whines, entreaties on a clanking second-hand Oliver. He would talk of the meaning of life with the lady.

“Sister,” he said, “sister. There is much pain and grief in the world, but God sees it all, and God will see that the wicked will be punished. Like, for instance, my father-in-law, who has cheated me but recently of twenty-five dollars. The story is a long one, sister, but you have a sympathetic face and will advise me best of course of action to be taken to put this scheming rogue behind inhospitable bars.”

“Oh God,” moaned Nabby Adams, “look who's here.”

Grinning with mad teeth, a thin brown man in a dhoti had arrived at the table. Without ceremony he made straight for the Bengali from the bazaar, abusing him in careful English.

“And so I find you, cheat that you are, puffing yourself up in the company of the upper classes. And of the money that is rightfully mine you are without doubt not telling these ladies and gentlemen. Yet you would not be the rich man you now are had I not scraped the bottoms of my empty coffers to give help to one who seemed to be a friend. Friend!” He laughed drunkenly, scornfully, theatrically.

“It is best to ignore such,” said the Bengali to Crabbe. “He will soon go away if he is ignored.”

“I will not be ignored. The whole world shall know of moral turpitude of a false friend.”

“I am no friend of drunkards,” said the Bengali with sneering scorn.

“It is you who are drunken bastard too,” danced the other. “And false bastard. And liar. As your father were before you.”

“You will not speak so of my father.”

“And your mother also.”

The Bengali rose. “Oh Christ,” said Nabby Adams. “Out of here quick.”

“Banchoad!”

The final insult. The Bengali's launched punch sent the glasses and bottles flying. Nabby Adams led his party out hurriedly.

“My dress!” screeched Fenella.

“Never mind. Quick, over there, near them dancers. The police will be on the job in a minute.”

They merged with the ronggewg-watchers.

“Better get up on that platform,” said Nabby Adams, “and do a dance. Make out we've been dancing a long time.”

“All of us?” said Crabbe.

“You and me. He's not up to it. Three parts pissed.”

“But I can't.”

An electric-lighted dream-world. The Malays, who awaited their turns to dance, courteously let the two white men go before them. Crabbe saw the sweating faces of the band, rakish songkok over saxophone, a young haji playing the drums. In delirium he saw huge Nabby Adams, tall as a crumpled tower, stiffly backing and advancing, drawing and drawn by his pigmy partner, an invisible cat's-cradle wound on wiggling dancing fingers. The crowd clapped and cheered.

“Victor!” cried Fenella. “Victor! Come down!”

But Crabbe was paralysed, staring with open mouth at Nabby Adams's hip-wagging partner. A red bang of hair, a stylish sarong, a cheerful greeting to Crabbe—“Tabek, tuan”—skilled high-heeled shoes, an undulant bottom. It was Ibrahim.

“Victor! Come down at once!”

Soon, subdued, they sought their car and drove home. Nabby Adams drove. He was excessively careful, old-womanishly apprehensive—“What's this man going to do now? Is he going to turn here or go straight on? I wish that bugger would make up his mind. Is this woman goingto cross or isn't she?”—but soon he steered the Abelard into the lighted porch of Light House. There was a pause. Then Nabby Adams said:

“Do you mind if I come up and have a drink of water? I'm parched.”

They went up. Nabby Adams was given a warm bottle of Tiger beer. Alladad Khan sat meditating, his head in his hands. Nabby Adams spoke long rumbling Urdu to him. Alladad Khan groaned occasional answers. Fenella suddenly burst into tears and ran into the bedroom. Crabbe followed.

“What's the matter, dear?”

“Oh, it's no good, no good,” she wailed. “You try to mix with them and they take, they take…”

“Yes, dear?”

“,,,Advantage. Just because I'm the only white woman there. They think… They think…”

“Yes, dear?”

"…I'm a whore or something. And they start fights." She wailed to the cobwebbed ceiling.

"Never mind, dear." Crabbe held her sweating, shaking body in his arms.

"They wouldn't do it… to the others." She sniffed up tears. "It would be all mem, yes mem, no mem…"

"It doesn't mean anything, dear."

"I'm going home," said Fenella. "I can't stand it. They're all bad… all bad."

"We'll discuss this afterwards, dear," said Crabbe. "Now just wipe your eyes and come and say good-night to these two."

When Crabbe went back to his guests, his guests were no longer there. Or so it seemed. But then he heard pulsing contented snores from the veranda. On the planter's chair Nabby Adams was stretched, overlapping greatly, asleep in crumpled shirt and slacks. He stirred, grunting, aware in his sleep of a presence, opened leathery eyelids and said a little in Urdu. Then he opened his eyes wider and said, "Just five minutes." He closed them again, settled more comfortably to snore. It was the first of many five-minute naps, stretched by the principle of the relativity of time to dawn or near-dawn, he was to take in that house. From the lavatory loud retchings could be heard, prayers, moans, repentance. "Him," said Nabby Adams in his sleep. "His art up."

Fenella came in to say good-night to her guests. She saw and heard.

"Oh, it's too bad," she wailed.

Nabby Adams groaned and requested silence in dream-Urdu.

"Too bad," she cried. "They take advantage all the time. I'm going back on the next boat."

"Never mind, dear," said Crabbe.

In the lavatory Alladad Khan heard; his heart was torn by the tears of beauty in distress. But he could do nothing now, nothing. He rested his sweating head on the cold wall-tiles. That he, a Khan, should have behaved so, should have betrayed his name, his race. And he had meant that to-night should be so different. Laughter and politeness and attentiveness and a few drinks. A few drinks. In agony he retched, bringing his heart up.

# 7

UNDULATING through the market, who so gay as Ibrahim? He, in crepitating silk, hair-clips holding curls in place, basket swinging, fist clutched tightly round two crumpled dollar notes, went to do the morning's shopping.

The market was covered, dark and sweltering. Ibrahim had to mince delicately along foul aisles between rows of ramshackle stalls. Old women crouched over bags of Siamese rice, skeps of red and green peppers, purple eggplants, bristly rambutans, pineapples, durians. Flies buzzed over fish and among the meat bones, ravaged, that lay for the cats to gnaw. Here and there an old man slept on his stall with, for bedfellows, skinny dressed chickens or dried fish-strips. One vendor had pillowed his head on a washbowl full of bruised apples. Thin,

potbellied Chinese blew cigarette-ash on to sheep carcases or tight white cabbages. The air was all smell—curry-stuff, durian, fish and flesh—and the noise was of hoicking and chaffering. Ibrahim loved the market.

Ibrahim greeted his friends gaily, provocatively, argued shrilly about the price of golden bananas and horn bananas, bought chillis and half a coconut for curry. He wondered whether he should buy, as a little surprise for Tuan, a couple of turtle's eggs, or perhaps a small blue bird in a cage or maybe a toy xylophone. Ibrahim liked giving little presents. Moreover he felt it only right that Tuan should get back a bit of the money that he, Ibrahim, regularly stole from Tuan's trousers or from the drawer in the desk. His father had once told him that no good Muslim servant would ever steal from his master. Well, this was not really stealing; it was buying for the house little things that were needed—plastic horses, wax fruit, paper flowers, portraits of film-stars, a brood of ducklings, a tame civet-cat, yellow perfume made in Hong Kong. He, Ibrahim, was entitled to a little commission when he could buy these things more cheaply than his master or mistress. Moreover, Ibrahim often stole things from the School kitchen below. Rice, curry powder and tinned grapes had not cost Tuan a penny in the last month. But, in any case, taking money from Tuan's desk or pocket was really a kind of mild sexual outrage, an act of revenge on Tuan for being married, having a mistress, and remaining unresponsive to the epicene charms of him, Ibrahim bin Mohamed Salleh.

Ibrahim bin Mohamed Salleh thought he would now have a small bottle of Fraser and Neave's Orange Crush at the open-air drinking-shop that adjoined the market. He watched with pleasure the food-sellers swirling the frying mee round in their kualis over primitive charcoal fires. He, Ibrahim, had an electric cooker, a nest of bright aluminium saucepans, a day-long-humming refrigerator. He also had a hundred dollars a month, as well as what he made on the side. He was doing very nicely.

Suddenly a black cloud covered the sun and the orange-crush no longer glistened golden. Ibrahim, watching the swirling mee in the kuali, had suddenly remembered his wife. He blushed, remembering, thinking of how his mother had meant it all for the best, believing that it would make him settle down—settle down! And he then only seventeen years old!—that it would bring his feet to the true one path of Muslim manhood. The marriage had not been a success, naturally. Ibrahim had cried, resisting the rites of the wedding-night. Fatimah, big and heavy-browed, had used the word *nusus* against him, one of the strongest of the Islamic terms of opprobrium, normally applicable only to a woman who refuses cohabitation. Ibrahim had run away from his mother's house and found a post in the Malay Regiment Officers' Mess. Fatimah had tracked him down and tried to hit him with a kuali in the mess kitchen. Ibrahim had screamed. And escaping later to the post of cook in Tuan Crabbe's household he had once again been discovered. He had pleaded, he had prayed, he had begged her to go back to her people in Johore, he would give her her train-fare, he would make her an allowance. Often, at the evening waktu, when heturned towards Mecca, he had voiced a petition to the Deity:

“Allah, merciful Allah,

Please make my wife go back to Johore."

But Allah had not budged. He had allowed Fatimah to chase him with a carving-knife, to scream her wrongs to a cinema queue when he, Ibrahim, was arm-in-arm with a soldier-friend. Only when Ibrahim was at the point of final despair, ready to run amok-that would have been a pity, because he genuinely did not want to kill anybody, especially Tuan Crabbe—only then had she agreed to go to Johore for a short time, to see her parents and tell them of her wrongs. But she had said she would be back. She would be back.

Ibrahim closed his eyes for a minute and prayed, "Allah, make her go down with a dread disease, make the train crash, make her be killed by the Communists. But please, please do not let her return."

When he opened his eyes he started violendy and spilled some of his orange-crush, for standing before him was a woman. Allah, he had thought for a moment it was she, Fatimah. But it was not; it was the mistress of Tuan Crabbe with, clinging to her hand, a small thin finger-sucking boy.

"Peace be with you."

"With you be peace."

"There is a little help you can give me," she said, sitting down, the child on her knee.

"How? What help?"

"Your master has deserted me."

"Oh." Ibrahim crossed his legs, shrugged his shoulders, bunched up his face in a gesture of no sympathy.

"I have lost his love."

"But in that matter I cannot help you, even if I wished to."

"I have here," said Rahimah, opening her handbag, "a thing that will restore that love." She showed Ibrahim a small phial. "I obtained this of 'Che Mat the pawang in Kelapa. It is a powerful medicine for drawing a man backto one's heart."

"I have heard of these things," said Ibrahim indifferently.

"It can be put in drink and has no taste. I ask you to put this in your master's drink. I can pay you a little for this help."

"But how am I to know that it will not kill him?"

"You have my word and the assurance of the pawang. He is a very skilful pawang and I am told this medicine has never yet failed."

"And how much will you give me?"

"Five dollars."

"It is not enough."

"Allah, you can have a man axed or knifed for two dollars fifty. Five dollars is enough, nay it is generous, for so small a piece of help."

Ibrahim fingered the tiny phial. "And if I am discovered and lose my position?"

"You cannot be discovered."

Ibrahim thought for a while, sipping his orange-crush. There was some very good sarong material in the bazaar two dollars a hela. "Make it ten dollars," he said.

"Six."

“Eight.”

“Baik-lah.” She gave him a five-dollar note, two single dollars and a handful of small change. “You will swear to do this?”

“One does not swear.”

“You will promise?”

“I promise.”

She shook his hand and departed. Ibrahim watched the weaving of her small buttocks, watched the finger-sucking child who clung to her. Women, he thought. They will cling to a man like a liana, like a jungle leech. How he hated women. He looked again at the small phial, uncorked it and smelt the viscous potion. There was no smell. Well, he had promised, but the fulfilment of the promise could be postponed. There was no hurry. He did not like meddling with these things. He thought for a moment of the things that magic had accomplished in this very town. The jealous mistress of the Crown Prince whohad made his second wife's hair fall out; the Tamil in the Town Board Offices who had died of a fever induced by image-sticking because he had had a Malay clerk dismissed unfairly; the innumerable wives who had refocillated a dying passion in their husbands; husbands who had regained the love of their wives…

Allah! Ibrahim cringed and began to sweat. Supposing she… But Fatimah would not… Yet she could… Allah Taala, she might. No, no, no. Allah Most High! It was possible. Even now, in Johore, where, it was well known, there were powerful pawangs, she might be brewing something up, something to draw his heart back to hers, to make him want to do that horrible obscene thing… And again. He swallowed dryly, trembled. She too might seek revenge, regard him as one who had wounded her womanhood by rejecting her advances. She might now be sticking pins in a little wax image of him, Ibrahim bin Mohamed Salleh. La ilaha illa'lah!

Ibrahim dropped the deadly phial into the shopping-basket to nest among the red peppers and coconut. Tonight he would go to the small shrine by the servants' quarters and place upon it bananas and lighted candles. Good spirits haunted that spot, a loving couple who, long ago, taking a walk there, had been whisked up to Heaven like the Prophet himself. They assuredly would help one of a sinless heart. Whimpering to himself Ibrahim went back to Light House, there to start cooking lunch for Mem and Tuan.

Already cooking lunch was Fatimah, but not Fatimah binte Razak, wife of Ibrahim bin Mohamed Salleh. This was Fatimah Bibi, wife of Alladad Khan, Police Transport corporal. She had been back a week now, and had found, as she had expected, their quarters in the Police Barracks filthy—floors strewn with cigarette-ends, spiders busy in all corners, sheets that had not been to the dhobi for weeks. She had reviled her husband while, busy with broom, she had restored order and cleanliness to the tiny quarters. What had he been doing, she would like to know, while she had been close to death's door bearing his child. His child, yes, the fruit of his importunity. He had, without doubt, been around the town drinking withhis atheistical friends, he had perhaps even been taking sly mouthfuls of pork and godless bacon. She knew him, let him not think she did not. And he had replied, maddeningly, with that shiftless Malay expression, “Tida' apa.”

Fatimah Bibi let the curry simmer on the charcoal stove. The chapattis need not be started just yet. She went to the cradle in their bedroom and smiled at the fruit of his, Alladad Khan's, importunity. Little Hadijah Bibi lay in milk-fed baby bliss. Fatimah Bibi frowned when she remembered that her husband had said, when she had first fed the child in his presence, that she reminded him of the second Surah of the Koran. She had smiled at first, thinking that perhaps he perceived in her something of the holiness of Muslim motherhood. Then she had recalled the sub-title of the second Surah-Al Baqarah: The Cow. Her strong face, ruddered with a nose that bespoke will in long line and flared nostril, took on an expression that boded no good for him, Alladad Khan. Thank Allah,that the women of the Punjab had been reared in no submissive tradition, unlike their sisters of Malaya and the Arab lands. Alladad Khan must be brought to heel. His spending-money must be strictly rationed; so must the pleasure he sought from her in bed. The withholding of that, the granting of that: therein lay woman's power. And again she could always invoke that paragon, her brother. He had done well, he spoke English, he had a commanding presence, he had the will to succeed. She did not believe Alladad Khan when he told her that Abdul Khan had once been taken home drunk from a party in Sungai Kajar. Nor did she believe the stories of a love affair with an English girl when he had been at the Police College. Abdul Khan would do the right thing always, keeping himself pure till a girl came along who had those qualities he revered in his sister. A girl of the clan, naturally, a good Muslim, demurely beautiful, a good manager, frugal, controlled, intelligent.

Hadijah Bibi began to cry, beating tiny fists, kicking little brown legs ringleted with fat. Fatimah Bibi picked up the child, soothing in Punjabi, crooning in Punjabi, holding to her strong body, her big breasts, the brown mite she had borne for him, Alladad Khan.Who now entered, calling:

“It would seem that this child is like her mother, always complaining.”

Fatimah Bibi turned on him, but. suddenly guilty, remembered that she had not yet cooked the chapattis.

“Here, nurse the child. You should have warned me you would come in early for tiffin. It is not nearly ready.”

“I am no earlier,” said Alladad Khan, “and no later than usual. Heaven forbid that I should so far forget myself as to come home early.”

“Take the child and do not drop her. That,” said Fatimah Bibi, as she handed over the precious brown burden, “is no way to hold a child. You show no love for her. You handle her as you would handle a carburettor.”

“A carburettor is a useful thing. Without it a car will not go.”

“May God punish you for such sayings,” said Fatimah Bibi, as she went to the kitchen.

Alladad Khan, left alone, dandled unhandily his child in unfatherly arms. He wanted to finger his moustache, but could not. Allah, two women in the house now, both, as is the way of women, ready to rule one's last drop of blood. The child cried loudly, and Alladad Khan said to it quietly, “Bloody liar. Bastard.” But no, that last word could not be used in this context. He had discovered its meaning, had found it in Hari Singh's little dictionary. Hari Singh. Alladad Khan's face darkened. Still unpunished, still unrepentant. A fortnight had passed since Hari Singh had committed this unforgivable, filthily libidinous act. Yet how could he,

Alladad Khan, approach the matter directly? For he must give no inkling to his subordinates of his deep self-interest in the ethical issue. He had said to Hari Singh, “It is unseemly for you to behave in that way with a white woman.” And he had replied, “Let us have no hypocrisy, Corporal. You would do the same had you the courage. Are they not women like other women, with this difference however: that, as the cinema shows us, they are much more accessible and, for that matter, much more wanton than our own women are? She did not protest, that is quite certain.”

“That is because she is a lady and would not, as is the way of the English, exhibit her feelings in public. But to me she expressed shame and abhorrence. Indeed, she wept.”

“She wept? In your presence? That argues some degree of intimacy.”

“She was overcome, she could hold back tears no longer. And that added to her shame.”

“It is time that the white man and the white woman wept. God knows that they have many wrongs to repent of, wrongs committed in our country in the name of the British Raj. And even now India is not free, at least the Sikhs are not. If there is Pakistan, why have not we our Sikhistan?” And so on.

Alladad Khan had been harsh in his official dealings with Hari Singh, and Hari Singh had reported Alladad Khan, complaining of injustice and tyranny. Alladad Khan had been gently reprimanded. It was all very difficult. But, Allah, the time would come.

“What are you doing to that poor child to make her cry so?” complained his wife from the kitchen. Indeed, the weeping and howling had not ceased, had increased rather. Alladad Khan realised why; he had been tightening his grip on the child's small body, as on the neck of Hari Singh.

“Be quiet,” said Alladad Khan indifferently. He rocked the child to and fro like a cocktail-shaker. Soon the child, in the middle of a frog-mouthed yell, decided to stop breathing. Alladad Khan became frightened, ran with the baby to the kitchen. His wife took the precious, precious mite as it drank in a pint of air and began screaming again.

“My baby, my jewel, my precious little one. Oh, what a cruel father you have, my sweet one.” The child howled agreement.

“Tida' apa,” said Alladad Khan, and began smoothing his moustache.

The baby quietened and laid again in its cradle, the two sat down to tiffin. Alladad Khan had little appetite. He dutifully broke off a piece of chapatti and bathed it in the rather watery curry. Since that meal at the Crabbes he had begun to fancy more exotic food. Langsheer hodpod, or something like that, had been the name of that dish. Exciting, full of meat, rich in gravy. No rice, no chapattis. He said to his wife:

“Why must we have always, every day, the same food? Bread at midday and rice at night. Always the same. No variety, no surprise.”

Acidly she said, her mouth stained with curry sauce, “I suppose you have developed a taste for pig's flesh while I have been away. I suppose you will not be satisfied till you have for your tiffin a pork chop and a glass of beer, and for your evening meal a piece of fried bacon and a bottle of whisky. God forgive you. I dread to think of the influence you will be having on the child.”

He said evenly, “The menu you suggest lacks variety, but it would perhaps be a little more interesting than the eternal curry and rice, curry and chapattis I seem to be condemned to eat.”

As she was eating with her fingers there was nothing to slam down on the table. But she rose, terrible in her wrath, and reviled him bitterly.

“You were bad enough when I went away, but Allah knows that you are now more like an unclean spirit than a man. You are making my life a hell. You have no love in you, no fatherly feeling, none of the qualities of a husband except an unwholesome lust which has given me more pain than I can describe, the pain of bearing you a child which you will not love, which, it seems, you are even trying to kill. I was a fool to marry you.”

“You had no choice. Nor had I. Your brother was determined to get you off his hands and marry you to the first Khan who came along. You did not think yourself a fool then.” Alladad Khan pointed with a trembling arm to the wedding portrait—the strong nose, the smiling teeth, the arm laid on the knee of the shy bridegroom. “You did not think me then a devil out of hell. Allah knows I did not wish to give up my freedom. I was bludgeoned into marriage, I was told I was betraying the clan if I remained single while you were panting for a husband. And if I had not married you, if I had waited…”

The baby had started crying again. Alladad Khan looked gloomily down at the cold curry, the broken bits of chapatti, while his wife ran into the bedroom, crying soothing words.

Tida' apa. No, that would not do any more. He longed for the evening, longed to be with Victor Crabbe and Fenella Crabbe. Strangely, not just with her, but with both of them. He was beginning to understand certain things now, things that he hoped would clarify themselves in time and, for some reason, with their help.

Alladad Khan composed himself, shrugged, twisted his moustache. He picked up his beret from the chair and buckled on his belt. He then went over to the Police Canteen and sat for half an hour over a cup of coffee and Hari Singh's little book. He mouthed quietly to himself:

“This is a man. He is a big man. Is he a man? Yes, he is a man. Is he a big man?…”

Among the billiards-players and dicers, oblivious of the talk and the rattle of cups, he, Alladad Khan, the student of English, sat alone, proud, indifferent, misunderstood, longing for the evening.

## 8

NABBY ADAMS was by no means of a mean nature; he just lacked the means to be generous. As time passed and he enjoyed more and more of the hospitality of the Crabbes, Nabby Adams began to be tortured by guilt. The gin he had drunk, the bottles of beer, the odd reviving nip of brandy, the meals he had eaten, the cinemas visited, the petrol consumed, all at the expense of Victor Crabbe, began to

clamour—though long vapourised, forgotten or digested—for more substantial return than mere gratitude.

“Thanks very much. You've looked after me and him real good.”

“You've saved my life, really you have. I've stopped shaking now. I think I can go back to the office.”

“You know, that's the only thing I've been craving for in the eating line: a bit of gorgonzola and an onion and a couple of beers.”

“I had a real good sleep there, Mrs. Crabbe. It's funny, I can always sleep in your house, any time of the day or night. I toss and turn all the time when I'm in the Mess.”

“I've been parched for that all morning, Victor. Couldn't do no work for thinking about it.”

No, such expressions of gratitude were not enough. It was time he did something for the Crabbes. Once or twice he had brought a bottle of samsu, or Alladad Khan had purchased a small bottle of gin, and these offerings had been carried through hordes of small schoolboys, wide-eyed with interest, to the flat at the top of the stairs. But debts were growing, and Alladad Khan was finding it more and more difficult to extract money from the savings-box, even though his wife believed that the key had been lost. In the still watches she would stir and wake and ask of the stealthy naked figure that groped underthe bed:

“What are you doing, disturbing me and the child with your noise?”

“I had a dream that someone was trying to steal the money-box. Thank Allah, it is still there.”

No, money must be obtained from somewhere, and legitimately at that. One of Nabby Adams's tasks was to inspect vehicles—whether military, police or civilian—that had been involved in accidents, with a view to establishing material evidence of structural flaw or integrity that could be used in court. The Chinese owners would delicately hint that, if the police-lieutenant could bring himself to state that the brakes were quite in order, he should find that he had a new friend, a true friend, a friend indeed. And it frequently happened that the brakes were in order, and Nabby Adams would say so. Then he would be offered—„Do you smoke, Lieutenant?“—a cigarette-tin crammed with ten-dollar notes, and, groaning, Nabby Adams would have to refuse. Or, more delicate, more diabolic, “I should be glad to maintain an account for you, Lieutenant, in any drinking-shop you care to name.” Oh, the temptation, the temptation. But it was too bloody risky. And now sundry creditors were saying that they would be quite willing to accept payment in police petrol. Nabby Adams had nearly fallen, but six feet eight inches of integrity had reared itself heavenwards just in time. Oh, the suffering, the crucifixion.

How to get some money, legitimately. Nabby Adams had insisted once that they all go to Timah races together. He had had a few hot tips from a grateful Chinese owner-driver. And so, borrowing cards of membership of the Lanchap Turf Club, they had gone, the four of them, to sit in a dilatation of hope, a contraction of despair, a perisys-tole of speculation. And all the bloody horses had gone down the drain, all except those backed by their Chinese neighbours on the crammed stand. They, quacking and chirping with winners' joy, had been reviled by Nabby Adams in deep grumbling Urdu, until Alladad Khan had had to say:

“Ap khuch karab bolta.”

“And I'll say some bloody worse things if these buggers don't keep quiet.”

To make matters worse, it was only Crabbe who had really lost, for neither Alladad Khan nor Nabby Adams had five dollars—the minimum stake—between them. After the gloomy day, money thrown down the drain, they had had to go and have a drink somewhere, and then Mrs. Crabbe had started on Victor Crabbe:

“We haven't got all that much money, you know. Wasting it all on horses and then beer, and then... Oh, it's too bad, too bad.” And then the three men had sat in gloomy silence over their beer while she snivelled into a tiny handkerchief. “It's too bad. I'm going home on the next boat.”

“Well, go home then.”

“I will, I will.”

Nabby Adams had felt very guilty; it had all been his fault.

Nabby Adams bought monthly a lottery ticket, but he had no real hope of winning anything. That first prize—$350,000—was a mere fable, something you pretended to believe in, like them stories in the Bible about the age of Methuselah and what-not, but which you knew deep down didn't really, couldn't really, be true.

In desperation, Nabby Adams had nearly thought of marriage. There was an old Malay woman in the town who wanted desperately to marry, because she believed that spinsters were not accepted in Heaven. She had a nice little sum tucked away. It meant that Nabby Adams would have to embrace the Muslim faith, but that wouldn't have mattered. He could still drink, like Alladad Khan, who was a bloody poor advertisement for the faith, did. But Nabby Adams could see himself as a turbaned haji, turning up shocked eyes at bottles of Tiger and samsu, far more easily than he could see himself as a married man. It was all very difficult.

And yet Nabby Adams continued to accept the hospitality of the Crabbes. A fantastic pattern of sodality began to emerge. When somebody had some money there was drinking in one of them little kedais. There they would sit, over their Tiger or Anchor or Carlsberg, while the flying ants beat against the naked electric bulb and the mosqui-toes took tiny sips of the blood of Mrs. Crabbe. Around them the gawping locals sat, amazed with an amazement that never grew less, drinking in with their syrupy coffee or tepid mineral-water the strange spectacle of the huge rumbling man with the jaundiced complexion, the neat Punjabi fingering his ample moustache, the pale schoolmaster, the film-star woman with the honeyed skin and the golden hair. Three languages rapped, fumbled or rumblingly oozed all the while. At these sessions Nabby Adams spoke only Urdu and English, Alladad Khan only Urdu and Malay, the Crabbes only English and a little Malay. And so it was always, “What did you say then?” “What did he say?” “What did all that mean?”

A question would be put to Alladad Khan through Nabby Adams. Alladad Khan would hurl, expressively, eyes flashing and melting, shoulders emphasising, out of a sincere mouth the long answer. Then Nabby Adams would translate:

“He says he don't know.”

Sometimes they would go to the cinema and, tortured by bugs, watch a long Hindustani film about Baghdad, magic horses that talked and flew, genies in bottles, sword-play, sundered love. Alladad Khan would translate the Hindustani into Malay and Nabby Adams, before he slept, would forget himself and translate

the Hindustani into Urdu. Or perhaps they would go to see an American film and Fenella Crabbe would translate the American into Malay and Nabby Adams would, before he slept, translate what he understood of it into Urdu.

Many an evening they would return to the flat and then Nabby Adams would say, “Just five minutes,” and sleep till dawn on the planter's chair. Crabbe himself, aware of early work next day, would go to bed, leaving Alladad Khan and Fenella alone. The curious thing was that, now, Alladad Khan had no further desire to win the lady's heart. The two would sit on the veranda, talking interminably in broken Malay and broken English, and Alladad Khan began to see at last what was the relationship he desired.

It was rather complicated. He, alone, was seeking others who were alone. He was the only Khan for many states around who had come here, an exile, to live among alien races. His wife was a Malayan, bom in Penang; Abdul Khan had seen England and France, but not the Punjab. Alladad Khan saw in Fenella Crabbe also an exile, cut off from her own country, cut off from the white community—alone, she had walked in the sweating heat, while the insolent cars of Government officers bore languid wives to the Club and the shops in Timah. Something was crystallising in Alladad Khan's mind, and the time had come to unlade the burden, haltingly, though the cranes and hoists of language creaked and broke. And she, Fenella Crabbe, took gently the burden from him, questioning, drawing out.

“Why did you join the Army at thirteen?”

“I ran away from home.”

“Why did you do that?”

“It was my mother's fault. She insisted that I marry this girl, and I did not wish to marry her.”

“But surely thirteen is young to marry?”

“From my earliest days it had been arranged, perhaps even before I was born. The two families were to be united through a marriage. And when I was a small boy I was made to play with this girl, though I hated her. It was always intended that we should marry, but I would have died sooner than marry her. Even now I can say that.”

“Did you not want to marry at all?”

“How can one say at that age? But there was one other girl whom I believed I loved, and now, when it is too late, I am sure I loved her. We were at school together and, even when we were only twelve, we would meet and I would give her small presents. And one day I went and poured my heart out to an aunt, an aunt I thought I could trust. But she told everything to my mother. One day I came home from school and threw my books, as was my custom, into the four corners of the living-room. And, unsuspecting as I was, my mother turned on me, reproaching me, and forbidding me ever to see this other girl again. Then, just as I was, I walked out of the house and went to the recruiting-office, stating my age wrong. Thus I became a soldier.”

“And the girl you loved?” “She said she would wait, for ever if need be. I wrote letters and she answered. We were to marry. Then one letter came from my mother saying that she had married someone else, and that she did not want to hear from me again. And, indeed, no further letters came from her. That was because, I later discovered, they had told a similar story to her. And so I married here in Malaya. A

month after my marriage I got a letter from my brother, telling me the whole story, and also a letter from this one I loved. But then it was all too late. We Punjabis do not divorce like other Muslims. When we have married a wife we cling to her only, remembering our duty." Alladad Khan, at this point, began to cry. Fenella, shocked and overcome with pity, put her arms round him, comforting. Meanwhile Nabby Adams, prone on the planter's chair, snored on. Only those sounds in the still Malayan night: the sobbing, the inadequate words of comfort, the gentle snore of the big broken man.

Fenella Crabbe talked less now about going back to England on the next boat. She had responsibilities. Alladad Khan had opened his heart to her, the great motherless wreck of Nabby Adams had to be helped and, as Fenella was a woman, reformed.

But Nabby Adams appealed to another side of her, the bookish side. He fascinated her, he seemed a walking myth: Prometheus with the eagles of debt and drink pecking at his liver; Adam himself bewildered and Eveless outside the Garden; a Minotaur howling piteously in a labyrinth of money-worries. She treasured each cliche of his, each serious anecdote of his early life, she even thought of compiling his sayings in a book of aphorisms.

"I don't bath very much here, but I had a bloody good wash on the boat coming over."

"I mean, when you've been out with one of them tarts you look at yourself careful for a few days after, don't you, Mrs. Crabbe?"

"Like yourself, Mrs. Crabbe, I'm no angel. But I don't ask much. Like yourself. A couple of dozen bottles of Tiger every day and I'm quite happy. As it might be yourself, Mrs. Crabbe."

"He's nothing but a load of old shit. I mean, what else can you call him, Mrs. Crabbe? There's no other way of putting it, is there?"

"I bet you was dying for that, Mrs. Crabbe." (The first queasy drink of the morning after.)

And the stories about the time when he was an undertaker's assistant. "Well, this one had a wig, see. But I couldn't get it to stick on his head when I was laying him out in his shroud. So I called downstairs, 'Mr. Protheroe, have you got a bit of glue?' And then I said, 'It's all right, I've found a couple of drawing-pins.' " And other stories about Nabby Adams in the Northampton shoe-factory, and Nabby Adams the bookmaker's clerk, and Nabby Adams of India.

But what was Nabby Adams? She could not believe that his first name was really Abel. And the genesis of Nabby Adams. Did he really have an Indian mother, or a Eurasian father? These characters emerged in his stories as salty Northamptonshire rurals. His father had been a sexton, his mother a good hand with pastry and curing a ham. At the core of Nabby Adams lay a mystery never to be solved.

"I'm not one for church, Mrs. Crabbe, but I do like a good im."

"A good...?"

"Im."

Fenella Crabbe submitted Nabby Adams to all kinds of curious experiments. She played Bach to him on the gramophone, and he said:

“That's very clever, Mrs. Crabbe. You can hear five different tunes going on at the same time.”

She read to him and Alladad Khan the whole of Mr. Eliot's The Waste Land, and Nabby Adams said:

“He's got that wrong about the pack of cards, Mrs. Crabbe. There isn't no card called *The Man With Three Staves*. That card what he means is just an ordinary three, like as it may be the three of clubs.”

And when they came to the dark thunder-speaking finale of the poem, Alladad Khan had nodded gravely.

“Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
Shantih. Shantih. Shantih.”

“He says he understands that bit, Mrs. Crabbe. He says that's what the thunder says.”

Inexhaustible. Often Fenella cursed, cried, sent him away in disgrace. As, for instance, when he got up early, stole unbeknown to the drink-cupboard, and finished a whole bottle of gin before breakfast. Or when he fell up the stairs with the shocked boys of Light House looking on, saying:

“I've had it, Mrs. Crabbe. I must have a sleep and a drop of something. I can't go back to the office like this.”

But there was nobody like him. Fenella Crabbe forgot about the Film Society in Timah and she never saw *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Metropolis*, *Les Visiteurs du Soir* or *Sang d'un Poete*. Tida' apa.

## 9

“SHE would insist on coming,” said Nabby Adams. “There wasn't doing nothing with her, yelling the house down. And by the time me and him had put her out of the car three or four times, we thought she might as well come. Although,” said Nabby Adams, “I've got to agree she smells a bit. I hope you don't mind, Mrs. Crabbe. She hasn't had a bath for a month or two. I haven't had a chance to give her one.”

“Did she have a bloody good wash on the boat coming out here?” asked Crabbe.

“Oh, she didn't come out with me,” said Nabby Adams seriously. “She's not my dog at all. She belonged to the bloke before me. I took her over when I took his room over, see.”

“She's a nice-looking dog,” said Fenella, patting the heavy matted black hair. “What do you call her?”

“Her name's Cough,” said Nabby Adams apologetically. “That's all she'll answer to. I suppose the other bloke was always telling her to get from under his feet, or something like that.”

“I don't quite see that,” said Fenella.

Crabbe explained in a quick whisper. Blushing, she saw.

“We'll have to be pushing off now,” said Nabby Adams, “if we're going to get back to-night.” He spoke Urdu to Alladad Khan who sat, bereted and uniformed, in the driver's seat. Alladad Khan produced a revolver from the cubby hole. “Achcha,” said Nabby Adams. “He's got his, anyway.”

“Is it a bad road?” asked Fenella.

“There's a bad stretch,” said Nabby Adams. “About nine miles. I shouldn't let it worry you, Mrs. Crabbe, though.” Nabby Adams sat down with Crabbe on the back seat. The dog crawled all over him, licking, nuzzling, finally subsiding, grunting with content, on his knees. “I reckon what will be will be. It stands to reason. If you don't get a bullet in your guts to-day you'll get run over to-morrow.” Fenella sat next to Alladad Khan.

It was Friday, the Muslim Sabbath and a free day at the School. They were going to Gila, a little town on the State border, where Nabby Adams had to inspect vehicles. Nabby Adams, unable to repay hospitality in any other way, had thought up this treat for the Crabbes. Bandits on the road and a small town whose Malay name meant 'mad'. But there were a few kedais on the way where Nabby Adams owed comparatively small sums. He would buy them a couple of beers. The least he could do.

“Are you sure we can get back to-night?” asked Crabbe. “It's a long way.”

“You'll be back in time to have a good night's rest before your Sports Day,” said Nabby Adams. “Don't you worry about that.”

Lolling back in his commandeered car, Crabbe thought about Sports Day. There was going to be trouble. He sensed that Boothby would not be yawning very much when that day was over. He had been hearing whiskers, catching out boys in conspiratorial nods and glances. The time had, perhaps, come, the full-dress occasion for revenge, for striking back at the tyrannical British. He knew that something was going to happen, but precisely what he could not say. A genuine revolt? The long knives? The cremation of the School buildings?

The morning was dark, heavy-clouded and humid. Alladad Khan spoke to the windscreen a long Urdu speech, Nabby Adams listened contemptuously. “He says he thinks it's going to rain,” he translated. “But what does he know about it, I'd like to know. I know what he really means. He wants to push on, so he can get back to his wife and child to-night. He doesn't want me to start boozing anywhere. Anyway,” said Nabby Adams, “we'll christen the journey, so to speak. That kedai there, just up that road.”

In the kedai, a squalid hut where chickens ran and a goat waved its placid beard, there were some Sikhs, happily drinking from a bottle of high-grade samsu. They begged the newcomers to join their party, smiling fatly behind their beards. But Alladad Khan was stern. One bottle only. Nabby Adams spoke eloquently, protesting, reviling, but Alladad Khan was adamant. They had to push on. He looked out through the dirty window at the dirty sky, clouds moving sluggishly in heavy coils.

“Who does he think he is?” said Nabby Adams. “Ordering his superiors about. Just because he's taken a bit of money out of his wife's saving-box he thinks he can bloody well rule me. Well, he can't.” But, meekly enough, he drank his warm beer, and, as the sky darkened yet further, consented to continue the long journey.

“Are the people really different up there?” asked Fenella. Cool libraries with anthropology sections were in her head. She automatically saw form in her mind the exordium of a stock monograph: “The aborigines of the Upper Lanchap present, ethnologically and culturally, a very different picture from the inhabitants of the coastal areas…”

“You'll see some of them,” said Nabby Adams. “With blowpipes and stark ballock-naked.” Off his guard, trying to stem his dog's elaborate affection, he had let that out. Shocked, he began to apologise, but soon desisted. It was no good. He had no drawing-room talents. He had better shut up. Gloomily he closed his eyes and watched the figures dance and leer at him:

| | |
|---|---|
| Bung Cheong | $157 |
| Heng Seng | $39 |

He dozed liverishly. In his dream he was drinking in Bombay, paying for rounds with ample rupees. So grateful were his drinking companions that they came closer to him, speaking in happy pants their thirsty gratitude, and one black-bearded drinker licked him wetly, juicily, on the nose. With deep grumbles he pushed the dog away. As they rolled on, under the heavy sky, past the rubber trees and squalid villages, Crabbe slept a little too. He had not been sleeping well lately. When, at two or three in the morning, he sank into deep exhausted oblivion he always had to fight his way out from a cold coffin of water, and, waking, seek a cigarette and a book, scared of yielding again to those deceptive arms.

Alladad Khan and Fenella spoke softly together, in slow Malay garnished with a few English words. She was learning fast to understand him, to make herself understood.

“She is wearing me down,” said Alladad Khan. “When I am out late she wants to know where I have been. She will not believe me when I say I have been on duty. Now she is saying that I have been seen with a European woman, and she cries and calls me bad names, and now she is asking her brother to try and arrange for me to be transferred into his district so that he can see what I am doing all the time. It is becoming hell.”

“Be master,” said Fenella. “Tell her you will do what you like. You owe nothing to her. You do not even…”

“But there is the question of responsibility, of duty. I married her, I have to consider her.”

“If she starts whining or complaining again you must try hitting her.”

“A man should not hit a woman.”

“A woman sometimes welcomes a blow. She always knows when it is deserved.”

“You open my eyes,” said Alladad Khan.

The rain, like a football crowd, was waiting to charge and rush at the opening of the gates. The jungle that stood back sullenly and threateningly to let the road go through looked defiled and clotted in the thickening light. Mist rested half-way up the mountains. Soon the rain started in an orchestral roar.

“This will make us late,” said Alladad Khan. “It becomes hard to see and the roads quickly become flooded.” The windscreen wipers swished softly and monotonously, like, thought Alladad Khan, like himself rocking that baby. Left to

right to left to right to left. The car soon seemed islanded in water. The two at the back awoke to heavy wetness on their faces, and all the windows were shut tight. Still the water soaked in and the car floor was thinly flooded. Nabby Adams was monotonous in grumbling Urdu, swinging the deep words from left to right to left to right to left.

“We'll have to stop soon,” he said. “We're not far off Tomcat or whatever it's called.”

“Tongkat?”

“Yes, Tomcat. There's a couple of kedais there. We can wait till the rain stops.” Thirst began to oppress Nabby Adams heavily. The dry mouth after the unrefreshing nap, the heat in the car, airless, the steamed windows fast battened.

Gloom sat at the next table when, the car parked in a rain-pool among jubilant ducks, they rested their elbows on the clammy marbled top and waited for beer. The rain lashed and swished and emptied down, drinking the drab land with a dropsical passion.

“I think,” said Nabby Adams, “we'd all better go into silent prayer.” Suddenly, unbidden, a memory congealed in his mind of himself as sexton's assistant pumping the organ on Good Friday, long ago. The trees had wept, the gravestones sluiced in the spring flood. And all the time himself pumping away and then, in the last chorus of Stainer's *Crucifixion*, he had decided to leave off, to hell with it, and he left the organist stranded in mid-chord, the air groaning out to nothingness, like the air coming out of a corpse in a moan when you lift it to wash its back.

“Father, forgive them,” said Nabby Adams, “for they know not what they do.” The dog came to lick his hand and then, smelling of old tinned peaches, tried to climb on his lap. They drank their flat washy bottled beer, and Nabby Adams felt a twinge of heartburn.

“The bloody price of it,” he said with sudden passion. He thought of India, and forgot that it ever rained in India.

Crabbe looked at the 'NO SPITTING' notice on the wall and his head swam with the absurdity of four languages telling people not to spit, all on the same notice. A thin Chinese bathing girl beckoned from a calendar. From behind her, in the swimming open kitchen, came the noise of painful expectoration.

“Get it up,” said Nabby Adams, “even if it's only a bloody bucketful.”

The gleeful savage rain knifed the road again and again and big-drummed on the tin roof and gargled and choked gaily in the gutters."Sometimes,” said Fenella, “one could wish one were dead.”

Alladad Khan made a speech. They must push on. Nabby Adams felt a twinge of tooth-ache.

“Do you want something to eat first?” asked Crabbe. They looked at the plates ranged temptingly on the table before them, covered with cloudy plastic bells. There were some cakes of a sick pink colour, little red jellies made in tumbler-moulds, pallid round blobs of dough containing a cold core of minced goat's liver. They each peeled in silence a tiny banana, ingesting it like a medicine. Nabby Adams felt further twinges in tooth and duodenum.

The rain pounced on them like a pack of big wet dogs as they sought their islanded car. Push on. The rain became their world; they gaped out from their

windowed tank, swishing through floods, at the drowned jungle and huts and swimming rice-fields. The road was theirs alone. No other vehicle was to be seen as they squelched on to Gila. Perhaps they had missed the announcement? Perhaps the living and the newly-risen dead had all been instructed to report at some great town of stilled factories and parked cars, no more to be used, for there, at the zenith, in the rain of the Last Day, He stood in His glory, flanked by seraphic trumpeters? And they and that witless hoicking towkay had missed it all, swilling beer without relish, the four of them, miles from life and the end of life. They carried guilt, like an extra spare-wheel, in the boot.

Miraculously, in mid-afternoon, they found themselves running out of the rain-belt. They were still twenty miles from Gila. The sky was clearer, the roads dryer, there were people still alive, walking through villages, cycling, even driving an occasional car. Thankfully they wound down the windows. But they must push on, climbing steeply now.

“We're coming to it, now,” said Nabby Adams. 'Just our bloody luck, in a way. The terrorists don't come out much when it's raining. We could have done with rain here, not back there.” Behind them they could almost hear still the fierce sky-flood.

Fenella was feeling sick. Not frightened, just sick. Sick with the car-journey, sick with a little fever. But she couldn't ask them to stop, not now, not just yet. Though, in response to a long piece of Urdu from Nabby Adams, Alladad Khan was stopping...

“Let him handle the gun,” said Nabby Adams. “I'll drive through this stretch.”

Should she ask them to wait a little while, just to allow her to go over there by the side of the road, so that she could...? But they would think she was frightened.

“Doesn't do to stop here really,” said Nabby Adams. “Ambush here the other week. We should have changed over farther back down the road. He should have reminded me. It's his gun. Let him use it, if he has to.”

Fenella felt sicker. They now entered sheer packed jungle, the road winding through in wide curves, almost seeming to double back on itself. Speed was impossible. As Nabby Adams cautiously turned the wheel his dog woke up to the realisation that her place was there, at the front, with him. She fought and squirmed from the holds of Alladad Khan and Crabbe and vaulted clumsily over to lie down at her master's feet, with the brakes and gear-lever. Nabby Adams started violently and, in a flood of violent speech, nearly drove the car into vast jungle clumps of torrid vegetation. She tried to climb on his knee. There was a struggle to remove her. Fenella held her shaking, panting body to her own, her sick nostrils full of dog-smell. Nabby Adams drove on slowly.

“It's a bad patch, this,” he said. “You never know where they'll be. Sometimes they lay a bloody big tree-trunk across the road. Then you know you've had it. Stop it,” he said, as the dog stretched painfully to lick his nose.

Another mile. And another. The jungle was terribly silent. The road ran sluggishly between the deep beds of lianas, hacked out of sweating, breathless, obscene, sunless greenery. The tree-tops could not be seen. The sky was choked by the tangled limbs and fingers of parasite growths which choked and sucked their sky-high hosts. There were no noises. Only a snake wormed across in front of them, then swam like a fish through the green sea of jungle floor. Another mile.

And another. Alladad Khan, his gun ready to aim, suddenly saw himself, Alladad Khan, in a film, his gun ready to aim. Ha! How far away sheseemed, she and her squalling milky brat. Adventure. He heard the atmospheric music of the sound-track.

Another mile. “What's that?” Crabbe rapped. A movement behind a tree, a shaking of parasite leaves.

“A bloody monkey,” said Nabby Adams.

Another mile. Fenella would have to, here and now, never mind what they thought, if only she could get hold of her handkerchief... The dog gave her a gamy kiss.

Another mile. Not a sound, only the engine and the slow tyres and the breathing. Now it was like going into the horrible secret essence of green life, shut in by it, annihilating all that's made...

They turned and came into clearer road. They could see the sky. The jungle was retreating. “We're through now,” said Nabby Adams. “We're all right now. Thank Christ for that. God,” he added, “I'd give my left bloody leg for a nice bottle of Tiger.”

Fenella said, shaken, “Would you mind stopping, just for a minute? I've got to...”

By the side of the road the three men ministered to her, encouraged her.

“Get it up,” said Nabby Adams. “Go on, all up. Think of one of them pink cakes in that shop.”

Behind them the jungle crouched, impotent now, locked in its cage again.

## 10

IBRAHIM was nearly ready to depart. He had the flat to himself to-day and ample leisure to gather together his barang and choose a few keepsakes from the possessions of his master and mistress. Aminah, the amah, had been given two days off to visit a sick aunt in Taiping. So, with only the pounding rain for company, Ibrahim ruled for a few hours the decaying Residency and sensually had his will of it.

It was better that he should go. Worry had been wearing him down to the bone these last few weeks. It was better that he should go and hide himself in a place where his wife could not find him, whose location the Johore pawangs could not fix. He had been lucky to meet the fat planter from down the Timah road. He had met him in the cinema. Ibrahim knew the fat planter well, had often seen him in the company of a fair young man from the Drainage and Irrigation Department. But lately the fair young man had been seen much in the company of a new man, a white-faced Customs officer with innocent glasses on his tiny nose, and Ibrahim surmised that the fat planter was hurt and lonely.—He had told Ibrahim so and offered him the post of cook and friend in his big empty bungalow on the huge estate. No one surely, thought Ibrahim, would ever find him there. There was an estate shop and, three miles away, a small kampong, and, if Ibrahim should wish to taste the pleasures of civilisation, it was easier to get to Tahi Panas than to

Kuala Hantu. And the pay was good: one hundred and twenty dollars a month and all found. It was, undoubtedly, a change for the better.

For worry had been making him a bad servant lately. Twofold worry. He had taken Rahimah's eight dollars and bought himself a lovely new sarong and a few trinkets besides, but that deadly potion lay still in the barang-box under Ibrahim's bed. Ibrahim was convinced that it was a lethal concoction. He had been hearing that Rahimah now hated Tuan Crabbe and hated Mem Crabbe also, and that she wished them both dead. Or, if not dead, maimed, deformed, Mem certainly bereft of her shining hair, Tuan deprived of his potency. He had heard these stories round the bazaar and in the market. And then he had received a nasty letter from Rahimah, written curtly in tiny Jawi script. “Belum lagipegangjanji…” He had not fulfilled the agreement, he agreed, but now he knew what she, with woman's deceit and treachery and downright wickedness, wished him to do. He could not do it. And Rahimah had theatened him with dire punishments. She would get the pawang to stick pins in his image, to raise ghosts which would drive him mad and make him, in screaming desperation, hurl himself from the high balcony.

Two women after him. Ibrahim groaned. But it was well known that they had no power over you if they did not know where you were. The last week or so had been hell. Serving the soup one night he had suddenly screamed and dropped the plates. For a mat by the door of the dining-room had suddenly raised itself, danced a couple of steps nearer to the table, and then stopped. Ibrahim had heard of the demon that disguises itself as a mat, but never before had he seen one. Leaving the mess of steaming broth and broken china on the floor, he had rushed out to his kitchen, there to utter terrified prayer on his knees. And then, one quiet night, washing up the dinner dishes, he had become convinced that there was a hantu dapur lurking behind the refrigerator, ready to do mischief and smash everything up unless appeased with offerings of bananas and rice or an invitation to a party. And, most frightening of all, Ibrahim had been sure that there was a penanggalan floating outside his bedroom window. He almost saw the waving head and neck and the long string of tangled hanging intestines. He almost heard the squeal of '*Siuh, siuh, siuh*'. Thank Allah, these usually only sought houses where there were new babies, thirsting for infant blood. Perhaps the Tamil cleaner in the next quarters, where there was a new baby every year and the annual duty of adding to God's Kingdom had just been fulfilled.And then somebody had told him that a graveyard ghost had been seen tumbling and rolling in its gravesheet over the lawn at the front of the house. No wonder he was getting thin, no wonder he could not do his work properly.

Tuan had been displeased with him lately and called him harsh names. And Mem had kept saying, as she tasted the curry or felt the plates he had forgotten to heat, something that sounded like “Tu bed, tu bed”. Yes, it was as well that he should be going. Ibrahim needed a friend rather than a master, someone who would be kind and loving, even when the curry had too much chilli in it or the mashed potatoes were watery and cold.

Ibrahim now packed his belongings in his box and his imitation-leather attache-case. He packed also his mistress's tortoise-shell combs, two cards of hair-clips, a brassiere and a silk slip. Also a feathery fan he had always liked. He took a packet of Tuan's razor-blades (a gift for his new master) and a couple of tins of cigarettes.

He could also do with some bed-sheets. He knew the drawer where these were kept. Also, of course, he must have money. To his annoyance there was no money in the desk-drawers. There was no money anywhere, except a few worthless coins in a little lacquer jug. Tuan had let him down. Still, he could sell something. There were two unopened bottles of gin which would bring him twenty dollars. The sherry bottle was only half-full; he could not do anything with that.

Ibrahim eventually sat down in one of the arm-chairs in the lounge, drinking a glass of orange-squash, looking again at the deadly phial which Rahimah had entrusted to him. The rain lashed and thundered down still, the river was rising. The trishaw he had ordered would be coming for him soon. This would take him as far as the town's end. Then he could get a bus to Kelapa. Then he could walk to the estate, leaving his box in a kedai to be called back for. He turned and turned the phial over, feeling guilty. He had taken the money and spent it. If it was a deadly poison he could not be blamed. He had acted in all innocence. Perhaps, again, it was not a deadly poison; surely Rahimah would not be so foolish? But love, he thought shuddering, does strange things to a woman. And, in any case, Tuan and Mem had wronged him, Ibrahim bin Mohamed Salleh. Ibrahim tried to feel hard and bitter, but found it difficult. He pondered for a long time, trying to generate resentment. He had done his best to please them, but they had not been grateful. This was too cold and that was too hot, and this had not enough salt in it and that had too much. And they had not even noticed that he had been losing weight and had things on his mind.

When the bell of the trishaw-man could be heard from below, ringing forlornly through the passionate rain, Ibrahim made his decision. He went over to the drinkcup-board and emptied the contents of the phial into the sherry. The colour of the sherry was unchanged, the smell—he sniffed the heady, vinous vapour—the same. Perhaps it was really quite harmless, after all. Besides, thought Ibrahim, the Prophet had forbidden strong drink, and if anything happened to a person who drank strong drink that was perhaps a just punishment. Anyway, he had fulfilled his part of the bargain. Perhaps Allah would reward him for his fidelity to promises, perhaps Allah would ensure that his wife died of fever or of Communists.

Ibrahim felt clean and virtuous. There was only one thing he had to do now. He took a piece of paper from the desk-drawer and a pencil from the desk-top. He began to write, in laborious Romanised Malay, his farewell message.

Tuan. And now what? Saya sudah lepas kerja... True. He had left the job. Sebab saya di-janji kerja yang lebeh baik. He had been offered a better job. Saya tidak mahu gaji sa-bagai kerja di-buat oleh saya bulan ini. He did not want any wages for this month. He had taken his wages in kind. He felt again virtuous and great-hearted because he had given his services and not received any money for them; also he felt deliciously ill-used. He poised the pencil over his scrawl. The trishaw bell rang impatiently through the dismal rain. There seemed nothing further to say. He added Yang benar, Ibrahim bin Mohammed Salleh—yours truly, and, as an afterthought, yang ma'ajkan—who forgives you.

Then, in purity of heart, he took his goods to the door of the flat. It was still raining hard. He wrapped round his shoulders the plastic raincoat of his late

mistress and, in amist of quiet virtue, went out to the trishaw and the beginning of his new life.

## 11

“IT'S no good,” said Nabby Adams. “It's no good even starting to look at them vehicles to-day. I'd never get finished, so there's not much point in getting started. It was the rain and what-not. We'd have managed to get here early if it hadn't been for that rain and Mrs. Crabbe not feeling so good and that puncture. We'll have to stay the night. They can put us up in the police station. There's a nice little lock-up there.”

“I must get back,” said Crabbe. “I'm working tomorrow.”

They were sitting in a kedai on the single street of Gila, acting, it seemed, a sort of play for the entire population of the town and the nearest kampong. Their audience was uncritical and appreciative. Tiny smiling people squatted in rows before their wall-side table, and behind the squatters were others on chairs, and behind those the latecomers who had to stand. The play, after its opening scene, in which Nabby Adams had cracked his head smartly on a hanging oil-lamp, must seem to lack action, thought Crabbe. But the townsfolk and their neighbour villagers had little entertainment in their lives and, presumably, they had to be thankful for a brown man with a gun and a huge liverish rumbling man and a pale wet schoolmaster in sweaty whites and a rather tatty golden-haired goddess. Also there was no lack of sound off-stage. Cough, the dog, was shut up in the car yelling and whining, answered loudly by her own canine audience.

Primitive drama being primarily religious, small brown smiling matrons kept bringing their infants to Fenella to be touched and blessed. Half-naked orang darat, their blowpipes sleeping at their sides, smoked strong local shag wrapped in dried leaves and watched and listened.

“I don't see how you can,” said Nabby Adams. “You won't drive and I need him here to translate for me.”

“It's not a question of 'won't drive',” said Crabbe bitterly and with heat. “There's just something in me that won't let me.”

“I don't fancy sleeping in a prison,” said Fenella. “We ought to get back. Oh, why can't you drive, Victor?”

“Why do you need him here to translate for you?” said Crabbe nastily. “Why don't you speak the bloody language yourself? You've been here long enough.”

“Why don't you drive a bloody car yourself?” asked Nabby Adams.

“That's a different thing.”

“Why is it?”

“Hush, hush,” said Fenella. “Please don't quarrel.”

The audience, pleased with the rough and rapid passage of irritable language, smiled to each other. At the back some newcomers were being given a resume of the plot.

Alladad Khan, seated upstage, gave a lengthy speech. Nabby Adams gave one back. Finally he said, in English, “He says he'll take you back and then get here himself again to-morrow morning. Although that's going to be a bloody nuisance.”

“Why is it?” asked Crabbe.

“What am I going to do, stuck out here on my own?”

“You've got the dog.”

“She's got no money. He has.”

“Here's ten dollars,” said Crabbe.

But Nabby Adams was not to be lonely after all. A new character entered, accompanied by little men wearing clothes and wrist-watches. He was brown and nearly bald and he greeted Nabby Adams in the English of a Cockney Jew.

“Hallo, chum. Still hitting it hard, eh?”

“It's Ranjit Singh,” said Nabby Adams. “He looks after these here Sakais. Get a chair,” he invited.

“You mustn't call them Sakais, chum. They don't like it.” Ranjit Singh, now that his name had been announced, looked strangely beardless to the Crabbes. The clean shave and the naked bald head had a Black Mass quality. Ranjit Singh exhibited his apostasy to the whole world. His wife was a Eurasian Catholic, his children were at aconvent school, he himself, abandoning the faith of the Sikhs, had become a devout agnostic. He held the post of Assistant Protector of Aborigines, and his task was to win the little men over to the true cause and to enlist their specialist jungle-skills in the fight against the terrorists. In fact they were incapable of being corrupted ideologically by the Communists, but they responded strongly to the more intelligible and sensible corruptions with which they were bribed and rewarded out of Government funds. They liked wrist-watches and Player's cigarettes; their wives took quickly to lipstick and brassieres. The ineluctable process which Crabbe was implementing in the class-room was spreading even to the core of the snaky, leechy jungle. The three little men found chairs, accepted beer and joined the play. The introduction of local talent did not, however, please the audience. They wanted the exotic and mythical. Murmurings and spittings of betel juice began to spread through the assembly. Still, they waited. Perhaps the play would end as it had begun—with the big man's cracking his head again and the awful rumble of unintelligible words.

Ranjit Singh now took the desecrated host in the form of a cigarette. As the beer went round and the light thickened and the oil-lamp was lit, Crabbe saw the beginnings of a session burgeoning. He said:

“We must think about going, you know. It's a long way back.”

“Going?” said Ranjit Singh. 'You've got to stay and see the dancing, chum.”

“Dancing?” said Fenella.

“Oh, just a bit of a hop,” said Ranjit Singh. “A bit of a party, really, because I've just got back here from Timah. Any excuse for a party. We'll have to get through a bit of jungle, though. On foot. A car's no good.”

Fenella's first flush of Golden Bough enthusiasm was mitigated somewhat by this. But, still, aboriginal dancing... The monograph droned on: 'The culture-pattern of the orang darat is necessarily limited. The jungle houses them and feeds them and provides them with an anthropomorphic pantheon of the kind which is familiar to us from our observations of primitive life in the Congo, the Amazonand

other centres where a rudimentary civilisation seems to have been arrested at what may be termed the “Bamboo Level”. Morality is simple, government patriarchal, and the practice of the arts confined to primitive and unhandy ornamentation of weapons and cooking utensils… In the dance, however, the orang darat has achieved a considerable standard of rhythmic complexity and a high order of agility…'

One of the orang darat asked Fenella in courteous Malay if she would like some more beer. She came to, startled, and refused with equal courtesy.

“We must get back,” said Crabbe.

“But, darling,” said Fenella, “we must see the dances, we must. We can travel all night, after all.”

“And Alladad Khan?”

“He can get back here by mid-morning. He won't mind.”

The play came to an end. The characters took their bows. Nabby Adams cracked his head again on the hanging lamp. The audience was pleased and, gently, began to go home, chattering with animation, discussing, comparing…

“We ought to have taken the bloody hat round,” said Nabby Adams.

The way through the jungle was lighted by fire-flies and a couple of electric torches. The orang darat went first, sure-footed. A tiger called, far away, and things scuttled under Fenella's feet. Leeches dropped on her and, surfeited, fell off again. It was not long, however, before they saw flares and crude huts in a clearing. There were tiny muscular men in trousers and small women, gaping at the apparition of Fenella, wearing brassieres and almost nothing else. The women chattered eagerly together, discussing her, clicking and sliding in a tongue with many words but no inflections.

It was, to Fenella, a disappointing evening. A toddy jug went round and with it little glutinous rice-cakes. The natives were hospitable. But their dances were nothing more than a happy romp and their songs artless and simple as five-finger exercises. Two drums beat easy rhythms and an old man blew a flute, first with his mouth, thenwith his nose. It was, except for the toddy, a mere jolly Boy Scout evening...

At midnight they saw Nabby Adams and his dog safely bedded down in the lock-up, a beer-bottle filled with already stale toddy safely bedded down beside them. “This will do nicely for my breakfast,” said Nabby Adams. “I'll try and get her a bit offish or something.”

And so the journey back. Fenella went to sleep, stretched on the rear cushions. Alladad Khan and Crabbe, exhilarated by toddy, talked metaphysics in Malay.

“The question is whether a thing is really there if we are not there to see it.”

“You could hear it, or smell it.”

“No, no, I mean… (I wish I could think of the right Malay word.) I mean if we could not be aware of it with our…”

“Senses?”

“Yes, our senses. We could not be sure it existed.”

“So this jungle perhaps exists only in our heads?”

“Perhaps. And this car. And you only exist in my head, too.”

“And my wife only exists in my head? And the child?”

“It is possible.”

“It would be a big relief,” said Alladad Khan, sighing. Slowly, with skill, he steered through the nine-mile stretch of bad land. The toddy put out its tongue and made long noses at the hidden enemies.

It was when they were well past danger, but also well away from even the smallest attap homestead, that the car broke down. Alladad Khan poked and pulled and swore in the dark. Fenella awoke.

“What's the trouble?”

“Something's gone wrong with the engine. Christ knows what. We'll never get back to-night, not unless we can stop somebody and get help.”

“But what are we going to do?”

“We'll have to sleep here.”

“Sleep here?” Fenella wailed. Alladad Khan tugged and fiddled at the car's guts. How he hated engines, how they hated him.

It was no good. They settled for sleep, after half an hour of waiting for a saviour vehicle to appear on that deserted road. They awoke shortly after the first comfortless doze to find that the rain had started again. They wound up the windows and, in suffocating heat, with the rain pounding with a myriad metallic fists on the car-roof, lay, wooing sleep, Crabbe and Fenella now both on the back seat, slouching in the corners, and Alladad Khan in the front.

They pretended to each other to be asleep, each wrapped in his few cubic feet of dark, each with his own pounding private rain. They were all obsessed with the world of dark and the world of spinning thundering water. Everything seemed a long way away, bed and home and anything that could be thought about comfortably. But, each separately, the rain and the blackness had absorbed them, and each seemed strange to the other. Once a lorry swished and hurtled past, lighting each one to the other as a hunched mound of silver and black.

Alladad Khan woke to a strangeness, a lack of noise, after an hour of dreaming. Rain was no longer falling, but the car-floor was flooded. The sky had cleared and the moon shone. Alladad Khan saw that it was near the end of the true, lunar month. Silently he wound down the windows, letting in the strong rank smell of wet grass and trees and earth. Crabbe watched him let the windows down, without speaking or stirring. Fenella was asleep, snoring very faintly. When Alladad Khan seemed asleep again, Crabbe put his arm gently round Fenella's shoulders and let her sleeping weight fall against him. He was filled with a terrible compassion for her and longed for it to be love. Alladad Khan, quietly awake, watched him. The moon moved imperceptibly towards setting.

Alladad Khan woke to the far crying of kampong cocks in the dark. That noise had been the farmyard aubade in the Punjab in his dream. He had been a boy again, sleeping in the same bed as his brother. He would wake soon to breakfast and school. He woke to Malaya and a strange bed, strangers breathing rhythmically behind him. He felt completely alone but curiously confident, as though he understood that aloneness was the answer the philosophers had been looking for.The last awakening was in the grey spreading light. An inquiring Chinese face was peering in at the driver's window, talking, asking. Alladad Khan geared his fumbling brain to the right language. He saw, dimly, a saloon car parked across the road.

“Need help?”

“How far from Tongkat?”

“Nearly ten miles. I am going there.”

“Could you ask the garage to send…?”

“Yes, yes.”

Crabbe and his wife groaned and yawned, hair tangled, eyelids gummied, dirty and exhausted. What a day this was going to be, thought Crabbe. He would never be there in time, and this was the day of the Governors' meeting, the lunch with the Sultan, the School Sports. They would telephone the flat and Ibrahim would say that Tuan had not yet returned. He had no excuse. It had been foolish to suppose that they ever could get back in time. At best, he would arrive when the Sports were nearly finished. A six-hour journey from Tongkat to Kuala Hantu. The work of putting the car right. At very best, he would arrive in the middle of the Sports.

He got out of the car and stretched in the morning that already gathered its heat together. It did not matter. He was too old to worry about things like that. But he was also too old to be nagged by Boothby, too old to permit himself the luxury of smashing Boothby's face in. It was best to conform, best not to cause trouble. And to-day he was sure that there was something that only he could do. He was sure that there was going to be trouble and that only he could handle that trouble.

Alladad Khan was looking sadly into the car-engine, saying something about an oil leak, about engines seizing up. Fenella combed her hair dismally, tried to put her face to rights. It was full day already.

They stamped around, smoking, waiting for the breakdown service of the garage. It was an hour before the cheerful Chinese mechanics arrived to tow them into Tongkat. In Tongkat they were told that the leak could be remedied in about an hour and a half.

“We'll have to get a taxi,” said Crabbe. „A taxi? All the way?” Fenella was indignant. “If you're not back, you're not back, that's all. Ring them up now, tell them you've had a breakdown. Tell them they can expect you when they see you.”

There was a public telephone in the small post office. After much delay Crabbe got through to the School office. He heard the voice of a peon. The Chief Clerk had not yet arrived.

“Yes?”

“Tell them I'm stranded in Tongkat.”

“Yes.”

“The car's broken down.”

“Yes.”

“I'm trying to get back as quickly as I can. Tell them that.”

“Yes.”

“Is that quite clear?”

“Yes.”

Crabbe went back to the kedai where Fenella was drinking black coffee and staring at the bilious pink cakes. “Well, I've done all I can do,” he said. Alladad Khan twisted his moustache, aware of his wet, creased uniform and filthy boots. He said nothing, basking in a curious and unreasonable content.

It was ten o'clock before they were able to leave Tongkat. The car, holding its oil now, sped on in sunlight. Fenella lay at the back, trying to doze away her headache. Alladad Khan and Crabbe spoke metaphysics at the front.

“It is hard to say these things in a language like Malay. But this man Plato believed that all things on earth were a mere copy of a chontoh dalam shurga, a heavenly pattern.”

“So there is one motor-engine in the mind of God, and all others on earth try to imitate it.”

“Yes, something like that.”

“And this motor-engine of God's never breaks down?”

“Oh, no, it cannot. It is perfect.”

“I see.” Alladad Khan drove on past another rubber estate. “But of what use is a motor-engine to God?”

“God knows.”

“That is true. God knoweth best.”

Secure and relaxed, they rolled on. “YOU ARE NOWENTERING A WHITE AREA.” “YOU ARE NOW LEAVING A WHITE AREA.” “Obviously,” said Alladad Khan, “the Communists must be able to read English. They are gentlemen and will keep on the right side of the notice.”

At two o'clock they ate sateh and drank beer in a cheerless kampong where the people were hostile and spat. Crabbe thought, 'Now the Sports are starting; now perhaps the trouble is starting too. And I, being away from the trouble, will undoubtedly be associated with the trouble.'

“Another ninety minutes,” said Alladad Khan, “and we should be back. Oh.” He remembered something. “I have not telephoned to Gila.” He rushed out to the police station.

“How do you feel, dear?” asked Crabbe.

“Oh, fed up, depressed.”

“It's not been much fun, has it?”

“I can't help it,” said Fenella. “I feel terribly homesick. It comes and it goes. I was just thinking of a nice little lunch in that Italian place in Dean Street, and then perhaps a French film at the Curzon or at Studio One. I don't think I'm really cut out for Malaya. When it's not dutt it's uncomfortable. What did we get at the end of our endless journey? Only a few stupid little men doing a silly little dance. And bottles of warm Singapore beer.”

“You're a romantic,” said Crabbe. “You expect too much. Reality's always dull, you know, but when we see that it's all there is, well-it miraculously ceases to be dull.”

“I don't think you know what you're talking about.”

“I think you're right. I'm so tired.”

“So am I.”

It was on the home stretch, on the Timah road, that reality ceased to be dull. Somnolent, off their guard, drugged by the sound of the engine and the endless unrolling of rubber estates and jungle and scrub and rare huts, they hardly took in the significance of the burnt-out car that stood, a deformity of twisted metal, barring the way. Alladad Khan exclaimed at it and swerved to the right. There was room enough to pass if the car could take that grass slope... Crabbe could see

distinctly the yellow men with rifles, could see the serious concentration as they aimed. He then heard the whole world crack and crack again and again. And then Alladad Khan's hands were off the wheel. In an agony of surprise he was clutching his right arm. The car went mad and Fenella screamed. Crabbe reached over and seized the wheel, brought the car into control again.

A breathless half-mile, and Alladad Khan's two feet had jammed down hard. The car stopped. Alladad Khan was panting hard, soaked in sweat, and his rolled-up sleeve was all blood, blood rilling down his arm.

“Take this handkerchief,” said Crabbe, as Alladad Khan tottered into the back. “Make a tourniquet out of it. Stop the blood.” Fenella found a pencil in her bag, wound the handkerchief, thrust the pencil in the knot, began to twist.

Crabbe was at the wheel. “Thank God we're not far from Sungkit Hospital,” he said. “About ten miles.”

“It's gone in,” said Fenella, “really deep. His arm's smashed. The bloody swine,” she added. Alladad Khan groaned. “There, there, my dear,” she said. “You'll be all right soon. It won't be long now.”

Crabbe accelerated, gave the car all speed. It was quite a time before he realised that he was driving again. Driving well, moreover. And really exhilarated. He almost felt like singing.

# 12

“NO,” said Boothby, “don't take a pew. Remain standing.”

“I take it I can stand at ease?” asked Crabbe.

“The time for bloody stupid little jokes is over,” said Boothby. “You've had it now. I don't mind your ruining your own career, but when you try to ruin mine as well…”

“I still don't know what's happened,” said Crabbe. “I admit that I wasn't there for the lunch and the Sports, but I did what I could. I rang up the office. It wasn't my fault if you didn't get the message.”

“The whole point is,” said Boothby, “that you'd made up your mind to be away. You knew what was going to happen.”

“Did you know?”

“Don't be a bloody fool. Only you knew about it, and you knew about it because it was your idea. You instigated it.”

“I still don't know what happened.”

“I'll bloody well tell you what happened. There they all were, the Sultan and the Mentri Besar, the British Adviser, the crowd from K.L., God knows how much royalty from all over the Federation. And they'd played the State anthems and everything was going all right and they announced the first track event.”

“Yes? And what happened?”

“You know damn well what happened. Nothing happened.”

“Nothing?”

“The little bastards just sat there. They damn well refused to take part in any single event. Except the juniors. So all we had was the egg-and-spoon race and the sack race and the bloody hop, step and jump. That was the Sports.”

“And did anybody do anything about it?”

“I screamed myself blue in the face. And then the Mentri Besar appealed to the Malay boys and quoted the Koran at them. And some of them looked a bit bloody sheepish.”

“I see. And who were the ringleaders?”

“How the hell do I know? All I know is that it was your idea.”

“In all seriousness, and keeping my temper, what makes you think so?”

“What makes me think so? I like that. Ever since you've been here you've been encouraging these boys to go against discipline. There was the business of that expulsion. And I was right about that and you damn well know I was right. But you told them I was wrong. I know all about it, don't think I don't. You told them I was a bloody tyrant. And you were behind that protest meeting when I caned those prefects. And when I docked that holiday because of the bad exam, results. It's all come out. One or two of the prefects here had the bloody sense to realise which side their bread was buttered. I've heard all about you. I've heard it all. That lad you were down on, that Chinese lad you said was a bloody Communist, he's told me a few things.”

“Such as?”

“Such as that you're a bloody Communist sympathiser yourself. You had him in your flat and you as good as told him that Communism was right and that the British were wrong in not recognising the Communist Party. Can you deny that?”

“I was trying to draw him out. I still maintain that he is a Communist, and if you look carefully you'll probably find that he's at the root of your trouble. I told you before, but you wouldn't do a thing about it.”

“This Chinese lad proved himself the best bloody prefect I've got. Yesterday it was him who was pleading with them, threatening them even. He was in tears. He said the School had been let down and I'd been let down and the cause of democracy had been let down. There. What have you got to say about that?”

“Only this. That you're too damned innocent to live.”

“Look here,” said Boothby, red and threatening, “I'll tell you what's going to happen to you, Crabbe. You're being transferred, and with a bloody bad report, too. And at the end of this tour I think you'll find yourself out on your ear.”

“You know, Boothby, perhaps I'm really the innocent one. I just don't understand. I've done my best for these boys, I even thought some of these boys liked me. I thought that I was really getting somewhere with them.”

“Oh, you got somewhere with them all right. You staged a nice efficient revolt. You made me and everybody look a pack of bloody fools.”

“Boothby, I want you to believe me when I say that I had nothing to do with that business. Frankly, I've never liked you. I've always thought you were inefficient, autocratic, unsympathetic, the worst possible headmaster for a School like this. But never would I dream of doing anything so disloyal, so…”

“Yes, I know exactly what you've thought about me. And I know exactly what you've been doing, day after day, in the class-room, on the sports field, in the dining-hall, at prefects' meetings. You've been turning them against me, and that

means turning them against everything this school stands for. You've been a traitor. You are a traitor. And you'll get the reward of a bloody traitor, you just wait and see."

"I'm sorry you feel like that, Boothby. Really sorry. You're doing me a very grave injustice."

"You'd better look at this," said Boothby. He handed over a typewritten sheet. "This is a record of what you've been doing. This is a protest from one of the best boys this School's ever had."

Crabbe read:

> dear sir,
>
> "I hope you will forgive my writing to you like this, but I find that I am becoming increasingly disturbed by some of the things that Mr. Crabbe, the History Master, is saying in class, especially about the running of the School. I know I speak for all the boys when I say that he shouldnot say these things. He is speaking as though he should be running the School himself and is always criticising the things that you, sir, do to make the School an efficient and happy School.
>
> "First he said the expulsion of Hamidin was wrong. Then he said it was wrong to cane prefects when they have done wrong. Then he said it was not right to deprive the School of a holiday when, as is well known, it was the only way to make the School realise that they must do better work in the examinations. Then he said that you, sir, did not listen fairly to the things the boys say when they come to see you. Also, I believe that Mr. Crabbe has many wrong political ideas and talks about freedom and independence when he really means Communism.
>
> "One day he called me into his flat and asked me many questions. He seemed annoyed that I was trying to help the younger boys to see how wrong Communism is. He said to me as follows..."

"All right," said Crabbe. "There's the evidence, a load of lies and half-truths. How long will it be, do you think, before my transfer comes through?"

"It's going to be bloody soon," said Boothby. "The sooner the better as far as I'm concerned." At that moment the peon came in with the Sunday newspapers. Boothby scanned the front pages of the *Sunday Gazette* and the *Sunday Bugle* with grim concentration. "There you are," he said. "All over the front page. If I had my way you'd be bloody well shot."

Crabbe went out, feeling not in the least depressed. The thing was so thoroughly absurd; the truth would out, sooner or later. He felt clean with innocence, as though he had just showered. He got into his car and drove slowly back to Light House. To-morrow he must do something about applying for a driving-licence. With keen pleasure he drove through the town, avoiding children and chickens, back to lunch, a lunch that Fenella would be preparing herself. How good people were at letting one down. Well, if he were going on transfer, he would not want to take Ibrahim with him anyway. It was just as well. Still,when one thought of the thefts condoned, the bad meals cheerfully eaten, the complaints unvoiced at fantastic hairstyles and epicene hip-wagging, one felt rather hurt. He thought of

Rivers, violent face contorted above the moustache which grew out of the lean British nose. Rivers now, back home, would be saying, “Lash them, beat them, flay them alive…” Was Rivers right?

No, Rivers was not right. It was best not to wear oneself out with violence. The East would always present that calm face of faint astonishment, unmoved at the anger, not understanding the bitterness. That was why it was pointless to attempt to take any action at all against this young Chinese betrayer, to protest any further to Boothby. A pattern would work itself out.

“I'm being transferred,” he said to Fenella.

“Where to?”

“I've no idea. They think I was behind the strike that was organised at the School Sports yesterday.”

“A strike?”

Crabbe told her everything. Then she said:

“So Othello's occupation will be gone.”

“Meaning?”

“Two people will be sorry to hear we're going.”

“Yes. But still, wherever we go, there's a hell of a lot of helping to be done.”

“I suppose so.”

“How about a drink before lunch?”

“Don't call it lunch. It's just a snack. That wicked boy has denuded the larder of practically everything. He's left us canned soup and a couple of tins of sardines. I always said he was no good.”

“Yes. Look here, I'm sure we had some gin. We can't have drunk all that, surely?”

“You forget the capacity of Nabby Adams.”

“Still… Have some sherry.”

Crabbe poured it out and then switched on the gramophone. A record was ready to play for them, one of the pile skewered on the automatic-change spindle. It started: strings rising from A to a long held F, through E to E flat, when the woodwind came in with their bittersweet chords. Wagner's prolonged orgasm.Languor came late for them that Sunday afternoon. They lay in bed, smoking and sweating and wondering. How strange life was. When life seemed at its worst, then came the astonishing revelation. The annunciation and the epiphany. They slept till long after dark came, not hearing the noise downstairs.

Yawning before dinner, surrounded by his Book Club library, Boothby put down his stengah and went out to the shy peon who waited, still astride his bicycle, outside the open door.

“You're working late,” he said. “What's the matter?”

“Surat, tuan.”

“A letter? Who from?” Boothby looked at the childish handwriting on the cheap envelope. No stamp. “All right, you can go.”

Boothby tore the envelope open and read:

dear sir,

“We hope you will forgive presumption and untimeliness of what follow here. We have heard that Mr. Crabbe is to be expelled from the School where

he has done much good and valuable work, not easily forgotten by boys he has taught. We will say that what happened at Sports yesterday was no fault of Mr. Crabbe's, although Mr. Crichton say it is so to some senior boys, and we would humbly say, sir, that Mr. Crichton should not say like that to pupils but should keep his own council. Well, sir, to bring inordinately long missive to a timely end, what happened yesterday was the work of some boys who said it would be a good idea to do what was done, although some of us said no, it should not be. One of these boys has already been punished, to wit he has been punched on the nose and one eye has been blacked. This is termed summary justice. We beg, in conclusion, that Mr. Crabbe be not expelled but allowed to continue to teach the boys who would otherwise be sorry of his departure. You will understand that it is not fitting to sign this by name but will merely subscribe, with all good wishes,

"Fair Play."

Boothby read it again and yawned. His wife, a scraggy and lank blonde in a faded blue frock, said, "Anything important, dear?"

"Nothing," said Boothby. "Only another of these anonymous letters. That's the only thing to do with them." He accompanied his words with a violent tear across, and another, and another, and then threw the scraps into the waste-paper basket. Then he returned to his stengah.

## 13

ALLADAD KHAN awoke from very refreshing sleep and remembered where he was. He had never before been in a hospital, except to visit Adams Sahib when, falling down in the Veterans' Race at the Police Sports, he had been admitted to Kuala Hantu Hospital with obscure internal injuries. It had been then that Adams Sahib had decided, for a week or more, to go steady and retire to bed immediately after the day's work. Adams Sahib had been given milk to drink three times a day and had been glad to leave the hospital.

Now he, Alladad Khan, was in hospital with an honourable wound. They had dug out the bullet from torn flesh and ligament and bound the arm up. He was to lie here for some days and rest and recover. Alladad Khan surveyed the neat white ward with its open windows, the greenery without and the sun streaming in. In other beds were men sleeping or reading gloomily or looking at the ceiling or into space. An ancient petulant Chinese was being rebuked by a Malay nurse for spitting on the floor. Allah, some men had no manners. The Malay nurse was tiny but she had a good flow of vigorous language. Alladad Khan admired her.

Alladad Khan looked to his left and saw a man dozing in a turban. The man's face was turned away from Alladad Khan. Alladad Khan wondered if he would have visitors to-day. Perhaps now his wife would be penitent and be the better prepared to believe his stories about having to be out late on duty. Though, thought Alladad Khan, there was little connection between being out late on duty

and being hit by bandits in the early afternoon. But women were illogical and could be persuaded of a connection.

The man in the turban groaned, turned and began to sit up in bed. Alladad Khan saw that it was Hari Singh. He wondered for a second if this was a trick of Hari Singh's, to annoy Alladad Khan and retard his recovery. He said, with surprise:

"What, are you here?"

"As you perceive, it is I."

"I understood you were on local leave. Are you accustomed to spend your local leaves in hospital?"

"I was playing football and was injured gravely."

"Ah. I was shot at by the Communists and a great bullet had to be extracted from my arm."

"That, nowadays, would seem to be a common occurrence. I can assure you that this injury I sustained at football was extremely serious. Now, with God's help, it is expected that I shall recover."

"What happened? Did you stub your big toe against the ball?"

"No. I fell and my ankle was damaged and the whole foot also has turned black."

"Ah. Which foot, may I ask?"

"The left one."

"It is as I thought. God is just, of that there can be no doubt."

"I see no justice in this."

"Who are you to speak against the ways of God? You will remember how I rebuked you, and how you laughed me to scorn, how you went crying in your great black beard to the O.C.P.D. to complain of my alleged tyranny. You will remember the crime in question for which you were justly rebuked."

"I dp not apprehend the drift of your somewhat verbose statement."

"The time when you placed, unasked, your great importunate foot on the foot of the memsahib."

"Oh, that? That was nothing."

"You call it nothing, but God remembers and God punishes. Providence has long ears and great eyes and a long avenging arm. Your foot has been mauled by the foot of divine justice."

"I would entreat you to say nothing of this to my wife Preetam and the children. They will be visiting me this morning." "I will say nothing directly to your wife. I will merely hint at the singular appropriateness of your punishment."

"I beg you to be quiet about it. See, I have food here in my locker. There are bananas and chocolate and a small jar of chicken essence. You are welcome to share these things with me."

"I shall have many gifts coming to me from my friends. I do not need your bribes. I am satisfied, however, that justice has been done, and I will say no more about this very distasteful matter."

Preetam and two small children came, two children of indeterminate sex, one wearing a top-knot, the other dribbling in baby Punjabi. Preetam was a little fierce woman in silk trousers and a sari. There were loud and passionate greetings. Hari Singh was given fruit and cakes and a roll of magazines and newspapers. Some of the magazines were Chinese, a language which Hari Singh could not read, but

they were full of photographs of cabaret girls and football stars. For Alladad Khan there were no visitors. He lay indifferently smoking, listening to the voluble family life of Hari Singh. The dribbling child came over to inspect Alladad Khan, leaving a deposit of melted chocolate on the bed-cover. Alladad Khan spoke very quiet English to it and the child went back to its father.

"Here," said Hari Singh in loud generosity, "is a newspaper for you to read. It is in English but, doubtless, that will present no difficulties to one who has many English friends and has studied assiduously a certain book which he has not yet returned to me."

"It shall be returned. Though why one so eloquent with his feet should consider a book of English words important I cannot understand."

Hari Singh laughed loud and false. "He refers to my skill at football," he explained to his wife.

Alladad Khan tried to read the *Timah Gazette*, but he could make out the meanings of very few words. Still, he pretended, for the benefit of Hari Singh, to be absorbed in a long article which was illustrated with the photograph of a large fish. His lips silently spelt imaginary words, and his frowning eyes read swiftly across and down. But, turning the page, he quickly became genuinely absorbed in a briefnews item. There was a photograph of two happy people, one of whom he recognised immediately. Who could mistake the identity of that owner of large teeth, long nose and severe moustache? It was Abdul Khan. Yes, the news item confirmed it: Abdul Khan... Abdul Khan... Officer Commanding Police District... Miss Margaret Tan... Singapore. Alladad Khan could read little else with understanding, but the photograph made all clear. The happy slit-eyes of the middle-aged-looking Chinese woman, her loving proximity to the person of Alladad Khan's brother-in-law. So. He had married at last, so much was evident, and out of his clan. He, Alladad Khan, must do the right thing, must declare the solidarity of that proud house, but Abdul Khan was above such matters of honour, except vicariously, except when it was a question of getting his sister off his hands. Alladad Khan waited patiently till Preetam should make signs of departure. The hospital was a long way from Kuala Hantu, buses were infrequent, perhaps she would stay shrilling around with her chocolate-defiled brats till the rattle of the tiffin-trays. Thankfully, however, he heard her say soon that she had to go. The trade-van of Mohamed Zain, vendor of women's medicines in Kuala Hantu, had come that morning early to Timah, and the driver had promised to stop for her on his way back. Now he, Alladad Khan, could expend a little forgiveness on Hari Singh and permit him to show off his English in a translation of this news item into Punjabi.

The valedictions were as voluble—all the bed-heat and lip-smacking of a marriage dug deep as a den—and nauseatingly exhibitionist as the salutations had been. Preetam was insistent that her husband take his chicken essence and keep up his strength, that he instruct the doctors and nurses to watch out for gangrene, that he demand to be weighed at frequent intervals. The children were kissed and crushed in podgy arms; then the wavings of hands and the heartfelt wishes that she should keep her courage up without him and he without her. Then the ward became quiet again.

Alladad Khan said, “Would you care to translate this for me? There are certain words I cannot clearly make out. My eyes are watering because of the immense pain in myarm.

Hari Singh said, “Courage, brother. Pain comes to all of us at some time or other. No man can escape. Some flying into danger in full awareness, as, for instance, myself; others adventitiously. Let me see what it is you want me to explain to you.” Hari Singh put on large reading glasses and then translated slowly. Alladad Khan lay back, listening. So. A hole-in-the-corner marriage in a registry office in Singapore. No guests. A Chinese Christian, daughter of a man rich in rubber. Allah, he had done well, the swine. Whereas he, Alladad Khan…

“But I knew of this,” said Hari Singh. “I learn these things because I have many influential and well-informed friends. I could have told you before had you cared to ask me of news of your brother-in-law, but you so rarely betray interest in his doings. There is a man who has got on, who has a great future before him. He was good enough to ask me to join some friends of his at a bachelor party he held a week or so before the wedding. I was unable to attend, having family commitments and not being a drinking man. But I understand from one of those present, a Chinese Inspector, that the whisky flowed and that your brother-in-law outdid any there in his ability to imbibe and contain. He is surely a man who will get on.”

Alladad Khan was silent. His resentment began slowly to modulate first into relief, then into elation. At last he had a powerful weapon to wield against his wife. There would be no more talk of the virtues of Abdul Khan, no more threats about transfers to Abdul Khan's district, no more deprecations of God's wrath at his, Alladad Khan's, harmless transgressions and impieties. He, Alladad Khan, could now pose as the injured, the man who had sacrificed wealth for the good of the clan, the man who had been true to the traditions of his fathers. He, Alladad Khan, had not gone whoring after women who worshipped a filthy and uncircumcised God, because of a lust for the things of Mammon. And what if he, Alladad Khan, did drink a little and seek to broaden his mind through intercourse with the cultivated? He deserved something occasionally to soothe the wounds inflicted by the behaviour of one whom he had, previously, been taught to regard as theideal Khan, the Khan in the mind of God. He, Alladad Khan, had been let down. His saint had been revealed as one of the shameful shoddy ikons that the Prophet himself had denounced and cursed at Mecca itself. He, Alladad Khan, had been very ill done to. Shot at by Communists in the pursuit of his duty, the duty that was the means of providing curry and chapattis to sleek her coy body, to convert to milk for her milky brat. Allah, there was no question of it now. He, Alladad Khan, would be master in his own barrack quarters.

He lay back smiling, dreaming of the new life, the life which was to start almost at once, as soon, in fact, as she came to visit him. He tasted, in imagination, her tears of shame and chagrin. He heard the cracked voice of penitence. He heard his own voice, the voice of her master, saying with lordly disdain or kindly condescension:

“I shall be out all night. I may be out all to-morrow night. If I should return drunk you will prepare for me that potent Western medicine called a Prairie Oyster. You will have it waiting for me.”

Or:

“If you cannot learn to behave properly you will be packed off to stay with your relatives in Kuala Lumpur until you have considered sufficiently of the demeanour appropriate to wifely status.”

Or:

“Yes, you have little entertainment, God knows. I propose to invite your brother and sister-in-law to a party in these our quarters. You will please to buy a bottle of whisky for this occasion, for your brother is inordinately fond of that beverage.”

Or:

“Divorce may be uncommon in the Punjab, but we are living at present in Malaya, whose streets are infested with the mendicant wraiths of wives who did not please their husbands. I assure you, I shall not think twice about it when I grow tired of you. Then perhaps I may follow the high example of your brother and instal a rich Chinese woman in my bed.”

Or:

But that would do for the present. A happy time stretched ahead for Alladad Khan. He would now sleep for a while and let Hari Singh rumble on to himself about the rights of Sikhs and the short-sightedness of Promotion Boards.

## 14

“AND if you did say you knew anything about it at all you'd be a bloody liar,” said Flaherty with a kind of epileptic vigour. “See the world, man. Get out into the highways and byways. The East,” he waved and twisted his arms ceilingwards in snake-dance gestures, “the bloody East. And this is no more the East than that bloody boot lying over there.” He pointed with a stiff shaking arm in a soap-box orator's denunciatory gesture. “Now, I know the East. I was in it. Palestine Police from the end of the war till we packed up.”

Nabby Adams groaned from his narrow bed. If only he hadn't annoyed the Crabbes by drinking a whole bottle of gin before breakfast the previous week-end he might now be lying on that hospitable planter's chair on their veranda. As it was, he had to hear Flaherty bum away the hours of sleep in long drunken monologues. It was now nearly four in the morning, and there was nothing to drink.

“Why can't you get to flaming bed?” said Nabby Adams.

“Bed? Bed? Listen who's talking about bed. Never in his bed from one week's end to the other, and just because he decides to honour the bloody establishment with his noble presence for once in a way he thinks he can rule the bloody roost and tell his superiors how to run their own lives. I'm telling you, I'm telling you,” said Flaherty, pointing with the blunt finger of the hell-fire preacher, “I'm telling you that the end isn't far off, not far off at all. I've watched you go down the bloody drain, inch by inch of dirty water. I've looked after you like it might be your own mother, I've rescued the perishing on more occasions than one, I've nursed you and taught you the right road, but what thanks do I ever get? I've tried to educate you,you ignorant sod, telling you about the places I've been and them bints I've

been with, and giving you a bit of intelligent conversation where another man would say, 'Let him stew in his own juice, for ignorance is bliss,' but I've never got as much as a word of gratitude out of your big toothless mouth. I've spent good money on you, I've covered up for you, I've warned you, but you remain what you always were, a big drunken sod who leads good men astray and hasn't an ounce of decency of feeling or of gratitude for the acts of a friend in his whole blasted big body." Flaherty glared from frowning eyes, panting.

"Did you bring any beer back, Paddy?" asked Nabby Adams.

"Beer? Beer?" Flaherty screamed and danced. "I'll take my dying bible that if it was the Day of Judgment itself and the dead coming out of their graves and we all of us lined up for the bloody sentence and He in His awe and majesty as of a flame of fire standing in the clouds of doomsday, all you'd be thinking about would be where you could get a bottle of blasted Tiger. There'll be beer where you're going to at the last," promised Flaherty, dripping with prophetic sweat. "There'll be cases and cases and barrels and barrels of it and it'll all be tasting of the ashes of hell in your mouth, like lava and brimstone, scalding your guts and your stomach, so that you'll be screaming for a drop of cold water from the hands of Lazarus himself, and he in Abraham's bosom on the throne of the righteous."

Nabby Adams was transfixed with a pang of thirst like a Teresan sword. The sharp image of that eschatological drouth made him raise himself groaning from his bed of fire. The dog clanked under the bed, ready for any adventure, stretching herself with a dog's groan as she appeared from behind the tattered slack of the mosquito-net. They plodded downstairs together, pursued by the oracular voice of Flaherty.

"Look at yourself, man. Pains in your back, and your teeth dropping out and your bloody big feet hardly able to touch the floor. And that scabby old mongrel clanking after you like a bloody ball and chain. It's coming, I tell you. The end of the world's coming for you."The raw light of the naked bulb showed dust and boot-mud in the empty living-room, the glacial off-white of the refrigerator's door, dirtied by ten years of lurching drunken shoulders and succour-seeking hands that groped for the lavatory. Nabby Adams drank water from one of the botdes that stood in a chilled huddle. (Neither food nor beer waited in the grid-ironed body of the big icy cupboard.) Nabby Adams gulped, wincing as odd teeth lit up with momentary pain.

| | |
|---|---|
| Lim Kean Swee | $470 |
| Ghee Sin Hye | $276 |
| Wun Fatt Titt | $128 |

Nabby Adams drank his fill, feeling his stomach churn and bubble, feeling the real thirst thirstily return. He plodded upstairs again, his dog after him, and found Flaherty out on the floor, burbling prayers to the Virgin, cluttering up Nabby Adams's bedroom. Nabby Adams looked with contemptuous distaste and decided that Flaherty had better stay there. The dog thought differently. She growled and tried to bite, but Nabby Adams soothed her with: "All right, Cough. Let the lucky bugger alone." Nabby Adams then considered it a good idea to have a look in Flaherty's room. After all, if Flaherty made free with his, Nabby Adams's, room, it

was only fair that he should return the compliment. Nabby Adams did not believe that Flaherty had brought nothing back with him from the Malay Regiment Sergeants' Mess.

Flaherty's room was tidier than that of Nabby Adams. Hair-brushes were arranged carefully on either side of a clean comb, and a pair of recendy pressed trousers lay over a chair-back. On the wall was a picture of Flaherty, made by an Arab artist on a cartographical principle. Grid-lines had been ruled over a passport photograph, and then, square by enlarged square, the face had been transferred in horrid magnification on to a large sheet of cartridge paper. The artist had given Flaherty a preternatural-ly high colour, somehow suggesting a painted corpse, and added, from imagination, sloping shoulders and a big red tie. This portrait smiled without pleasure at Nabby Adamsas he began his search. There was no beer in the wardrobe, nor under the bed, nor in four of the drawers of the dressing-table. But the fifth drawer revealed treasure. Nabby Adams looked, like hungry Gulliver eyeing Lilliputian sirloins, at a neat collection of tiny bottles containing single glassfuls of various liqueurs. There were about a dozen of these bottles, all different, some round, some square, some doubly bulbous, some fluting up from a globular bottom. Nabby Adams surveyed them all with pity. Poor devil, he thought. His litlle collection, saved up as a boy saves up fireworks against Guy Fawkes Night, to be gloated over in solitude, fingered and smoothed lovingly before bedtime. Poor bugger.

Nabby Adams ingested successively Cherry Brandy, Drambuie, Creme de Menthe, Cointreau, John Haig, Benedictine, Three Star, Sloe Gin, Kummel, Kirsch. The terrible thirst abated somewhat, and Nabby Adams soon had leisure to feel shame. So he had come to this: stealing a child's toys, as good as robbing a gollywog money-box, in order to slake his selfish and inordinate hunger. Leaving the bottles stacked neatly in the drawer—they still looked pretty—he returned to his own room, his dog after him. There lay Flaherty, flat out, his face contorted to a mask of deep thought. Nabby Adams found a paper packet of Capstan in Flaherty's shirt-pocket, and, lighting himself a crushed and creased tube, lay again under the mosquito-net, taking stock of himself.

It had, perhaps, not been a very edifying life. On the booze in England, in India, in Malaya. Always owing, often drunk, sometimes incapable. Three times in hospital, three times warned solemnly to cut it out. What had he achieved? He knew nothing of anything really. A bit about motor-engines, army discipline, grave-digging, undertaking, sleeper-laying, boot-and-shoe manufacture, turf clerking, bus-conducting, Urdu grammar, organ-pumping, women, neck massage, but little else. There was this Crabbe, with a lot of books and talking about music and this ology and that ology. And there was he, Nabby Adams, whose only reading was the daily paper, who had only possessed three books in his life. One had been called *The Someth-ing-or-other of the Unconscious* which a bloke called Ennishad left in the guard-room and everybody had said was hot stuff, though it wasn't really; one had been a Hindustani glossary of motor-engine parts; the other had been a funny book called *Three Men in a Boat*. There was nothing to show, nothing. Only moral debts and debts of money, only imagined miles of empties and cigarette-ends.

Nabby Adams heard the bilal calling over the dark, saying that there was no God but Allah. Another day was starting for the faithful. But for the faithless it was better that the night should prolong itself, even into the sunlight of Sunday morning. If he had been at the Crabbes' place he would be stirring gently now in delicious sleep, fully dressed, on the planter's chair. And then that boy of the Crabbes, or, as it was now, that amah of theirs, would bring him a cup of tea in gentle morning light. Unless, of course, Cough happened to be guarding the chair, in which case jealous growls would send the tea back. And then a couple of gins for breakfast and then the first beers of the day in a kedai. Nabby Adams looked back to a week ago as to an innocent childhood. He had been driven out of that Eden as his father had been driven out of his, because of his sinful desire to taste what was forbidden. In his, Nabby Adams's, case, not an apple but the bottom of the solitary bottle of gin. In shame and anger he fell asleep, to lie abounden in a bond of dreams of a happy, coloured India, safe in the far past.

He awoke at first light to hear moans from the floor and growls from under the bed. Flaherty had come to, parched and sick and stiff as a board.

“Oh God, my bloody back. I'm paralysed, man, my face has gone all dead. Oh, why did you leave me here? Why didn't you show the act of a Christian and put me to bed, as you knew was your duty? Oh, I'm going to die.” Flaherty tottered out. Nabby Adams heard a heavy weight collapsing on bed-springs, a groan or two, then silence.

He awoke again when the sun had made the air all lemon-yellow and begun to taint the damp coolness. A figure stood by the bed, stealthily drinking tea. Through glued eyelids Nabby Adams saw Jock Keir, mean as bloody dirt, stealing the cup of tea which the cook-boy had brought for Nabby Adams. Stealing it because he knewthat Nabby Adams rarely touched tea, because, saving heavily, Keir refused to pay anything for messing and preferred to send out for a single day's meal of fifty cents' worth of curry. Nabby Adams closed his eyes again.

At nine o'clock Nabby Adams was fully awake and very thirsty. He lay for a while wondering how to raise the dollar he needed. Vorpal wouldn't lend him one, Keir wouldn't, Flaherty couldn't, not just now. The kuki? No, not again. Nabby Adams put on his trousers and slippers and went downstairs. A week ago he had paid off ten dollars of his debt to the old towkay across the road. Crabbe had lent him the ten dollars. Surely one small bottle was not too much to ask?

In the living-room the cloth had been laid and two bottles of sauce stood near three egg-cups. Nobody had had breakfast yet. The cook-boy stood anxiously by.

“Saya t'ada wang, tuan.”

“I know you've got no bloody money. I wouldn't ask you even if you had.” Proudly man and dog went out and crossed the road.

In the kampong street Sunday was just another day. The kedais had been long open and the Malay children had long since departed for school. Nabby Adams grimly sought the shop of Guan Moh Chan, Cough clanking after him, his upper body's crumpled pyjama stripes proclaiming to all the world the urgency of his quest. The dark shop was full of family. The old man scolded a young shapeless woman who carried one baby and led another by the hand into the black depths of the living quarters. Three sons quacked to each other, sprawled about the single table, one probing his golden mouth with a toothpick. Nabby Adams spoke:

“Satu botol.”

The old wrinkled man chortled regretfully, sorting out the account books.

“I know all about that,” said Nabby Adams. “I'll bring some money next time.”

“Dua latus linggit,” began the old man.

“Dua ratus ringgit. Two hundred bloody dollars. Look here,” said Nabby Adams, “if you give me one bottle now it's not going to make all that difference, is it?” The family listened, uncomprehending, inscrutable. “I mean, if I owe all that bloody much already, one dollar's not going to break anybody's heart.”

The old man said, “Satu botol, satu linggit.”

“But I haven't got a bloody dollar. Look.” Nabby Adams pulled from his trouser-pocket an old wallet, made in India long ago, torn at the seams, holding only an identity-card, a folded letter and a lottery ticket. He looked at the lottery ticket. Not a bloody chance. “Here,” he said, “take this. It cost a dollar. It might be worth three hundred thousand. I'll risk it. A bloody good chance like that for one bottle of Anchor.”

The old man looked carefully at the number of the ticket. His sons came over to look also. One son foolishly registered mild excitement but was quelled with a quack from his father. 'Something about the bloody number,' thought Nabby Adams. The Chinese went in a lot for lucky numbers.

Nabby Adams was given a small dusty bottle of Anchor beer to hide in his hand. He went off with it, hearing quacking from the whole bloody family. Bloody fools. As though there was anything in the lucky number idea. A lucky number for him, Nabby Adams, anyway. He had got a small bottle of beer out of it. That was the most he had ever got out of a lottery ticket.

The Chinese shopkeeper and his family watched the stiff retreating form of Nabby Adams and the wagging rump of his dog. Then they looked again at the number, quacking with great excitement. Ostensibly Christian, they were all profound Taoists in fact, and what excited them now was an arrangement of nine numbers which could easily be resolved into the Magic Square:

492357816

The Noah of China, Emperor Yu, walked along the banks of a tributary of the Yellow River one day after the Great Flood. He saw a tortoise rising from the river with a strange pattern on its back. Miraculously, this pattern resolved itself in his eyes into the Magic Square, the ideal arrangement of the yin-yang digits. Out of this came a planfor reconstructing the world and devising the perfect system of government.

Slowly the third son wrote out the number on Nabby Adams' lottery ticket in the form of a square:

492
357
816

Yes, yes, it was! Whichever way you added up, across or down or diagonally, you got the number 15, symbol of Man Perfected. Their dancing excitement was

succeeded by a feeling of awe. Perhaps this huge yellow man was really a sort of god, perhaps it was their duty to feed him with all the beer he wanted. See how that dog follows him everywhere; he has power over animals. He is bigger than the common run of men; he speaks a strange tongue. And now he gives a piece of paper with the Magic Square telescoped on it.

"We must wait till the result is put in the newspaper. Then when we win we can give him perhaps a chicken or perhaps even a small pig."

"He does not eat."

"Then perhaps six bottles of beer."

"And his bill?"

"He does not know it, but his bill has been paid already. There is a man he has helped with his car which was in a bad accident and he would not take a bribe so this man came to me and said I must send the bills to him. This I have done, but he, the big man, does not know that yet. Nor shall he ever be told by me."

The sons chortled at their old father's cunning. Then one son said:

"Surely to-day is the day of the lottery draw?"

"Find out moonshine." They went to their Chinese calendar. "Yes, it is to-day that the winning numbers are published. The English papers are out now, but the Chinese paper will arrive at noon."

"It is but a short time to wait. How providential that we should be given the winning ticket but three hours before the result is announced. This big man shall most certainly be rewarded with a gift of beer."

The big man had entered the shabby living-room of the mess. Keir was sneering over his Sunday paper, while Vor-pal cracked a boiled egg.

"Can't beat a bit of the old egg-fruit-lah. Though this one's a bit on the high side. Seen better days-lah."

Keir said, "Somebody in Lanchap's got the winning number. Not me, anyway. It's a mug's game. Million-to-one chance. If you don't spend a dollar you know you've got a dollar. That's two-and-fourpence back home, and you can do a lot with two-and-fourpence."

"Somebody in Lanchap?" said Nabby Adams.

"Yes," sneered Keir. "Are you the lucky man?"

But Nabby Adams was off, the bottle still hidden in his vast paw. Breathless, the dog followed after.

In the kedai Nabby Adams said, "Here's your bottle back. Let's have a look at that bloody ticket."

The towkay indicated deep regret. A transaction had been completed, could not be revoked. Nabby Adams was now bloody sure that that was one of the winning tickets, that they had seen the blasted results already, that was why that young bastard had got so bloody excited and the old man had tried to shut his bloody trap for him.

"Look here," said Nabby Adams. "I want that ticket. Here's your beer. You get your beer back; I get my ticket back. You savvy?"

The old man offered Nabby Adams a dollar note. Nabby Adams went wild and his dog barked. "If I don't get that bloody ticket back I'll break the bloody shop up." He threatened, huge, angry. The Chinese family realised that the anger of even a minor god was a thing to be reckoned with. The towkay took down from a

shelf a small bundle of lottery tickets and offered a ticket to Nabby Adams. Nabby Adams looked at it suspiciously.

“Can take beer too,” said the old man.

“This isn't the right ticket,” said Nabby Adams. “You're trying it on. Why are you so bloody eager to give me the bottle of beer as well?”

“Is ticket,” said the towkay.

“Is bloody not,” said Nabby Adams. “Give me the right one or I'll smash it all up, all the bloody lot, beginningwith that bloody shelf of condensed milk there.” A huge flailing arm was ready. The dog barked. The towkay tut-tutted and clucked and, searching carefully through the sheaf of tickets, chose another one which he gave to Nabby Adams.

“Come to your bloody senses,” said Nabby Adams. “That's more like it.” He scanned the number—112673225—and wished to God he could remember whether it was the right one.

“And I'll keep the beer,” said Nabby Adams.

Ten minutes later Nabby Adams sat dumbfounded, the bottle still unopened, over the front page of the Sunday paper. It couldn't be true. It was all a bloody practical joke.

112673225.

Vorpal drank a fourth cup of tea and said, “Something wrong with old Nabby-lah. First time I ever seen him not want any breakfast-lah. Crying out for beer and when he's got it he won't touch it-lah.” Keir sneered and went to suck his empty teeth on the veranda. Nabby Adams closed one eye, opened it, closed the other, and quizzed the number again. There were so many bloody numbers and he couldn't keep the paper steady. Clamped to the paper with his thumb was the ticket.

112673225.

Such a bloody long number. He tried again slowly. 1126. 1126. That was all right. He trembled and blood sang in his ears so that he couldn't hear what Vorpal was saying. Steady now. He breathed in deeply and tried the number from the end. 5223. 5223. Christ, that was all right too. He began to feel very sick. Now the bloody figure in the middle, if he could get that far. But which way to go? From the beginning or the end? He almost closed his eyes and tried to focus on the heart of the trembling number, almost praying that it wouldn't be 7, that there would be no need for palpitations and perhaps fainting and all the new life that this would mean. He wanted to be left alone, in debt, always thirsty. He took a shot at the core of the long number and nearly reeled over.

7.

Oh Christ, it was true. „You don't look so good, Nabby,” said Vorpal with anxiety. Then he moved forward, staring at the prodigy, and Keir came in from the veranda too, as Nabby Adams crumpled and crashed off his chair. The house rumbled seismically at the heavy fall. The dog barked. The two men tried to lift the huge dead weight.

“Leave him there“—he ordered Vorpal. “Get some bloody brandy, quick.”

“There isn't any,” said Keir. “It wouldn't last two minutes if there was, not with him about.”

“Well, get that bloody beer-bottle open,” urged Vorpal. “Pour it down his throat—Come on, man.”

“It's caught up with him at last,” sneered Keir.

Vorpal tipped beer down Nabby Adams's gullet, and the frothy brew spilled over stubbly chin and faded pyjama jacket. All the time the dog danced and barked.

“He's coming round-lah,” said Vorpal. “Speak to me, Nabby. How do you feel ruyw-lah? Christ, you gave us a turn—”

“I've won,” groaned Nabby Adams. “I've won. I've bloody won. I've won, I tell you. I've won the bloody first prize. The first bloody prize. I've won. Oh.” And he passed out again.

The two men, awed as in the presence of imminent death, could only look down on the huge wreck which the dog, whimpering, ranged over, looking for places to lick. The lavish cold tongue, laving his frothy lips, brought Nabby Adams back to life. He groaned.

“I've bloody well won. I've won. The first bloody prize.”

“And, by Christ, he has too.” Vorpal held paper and ticket, scanning, checking, re-checking, confirming.

“There must be a mistake,” said Keir, pale, forgetting to sneer.

“There's no mistake. It's there in black and white. Look, man.”

“I've won. I've won. Oh Christ, I've won.”

“There, there, Nabby,” soothed Vorpal. “You're with friends—You'll feel a bit better in a minute. I'll send the kuki out for some beer.”

“I've won, I've won, I tell you. Oh God.”

“Three hundred and fifty thousand bucks,” said Vorpal. “Settling day one week from now-lah.”

“Three hundred and fifty thou…” Keir sat down, limp as a leaf.

“I've won.” Nabby Adams was calmer now, resigned, pale as death, reconciled to the dread sentence. He sat, wretched, on a chair, and absently patted the dog.

“You've won, boy,” said Vorpal. “Kuki!” he called. “We're going to celebrate-lah. A case of Tiger.”

“Carlsberg,” said Nabby Adams. “It's a bit dearer, but it's a better beer.”

“Carlsberg,” said Vorpal. “Brandy. Champagne-lah. Any bloody thing you like.”

Nabby Adams gloomily scanned the winning ticket, his hands still hardly able to hold it.

'For God's sake don't lose that,” said Vorpal. “I'll look after it for you.”

“No,” said Nabby Adams. “He'll look after it. It's safer with him.”

“Who?”

“Crabbe. Crabbe'll look after it. I'll give it to Crabbe. It'll be all right with him.”

The kuki, staggering back with a clanking case of beer, said that this was a present for the big tuan. On top of the bottles was a skinny chicken, glistening with refrigerator-ice.

“It's always the bloody same,” said Nabby Adams gloomily. “When you've got it you go on getting it. I wish I was bloody dead.”

“You will be,” sneered Keir. “You soon will be.”

Then a strange thing happened. The dog Cough bared her teeth at Keir and with a profound belly-growl advanced on him.

“Take her away! Call her off!” Keir backed on to the porch, Cough's naked teeth ready to lunge. “Bloody dog!” Then Keir ran into the street, Cough, out for blood, after him. Man and dog disappeared, gaining speed. Nabby Adams could see astonished faces of Malays looking offstage. He decapitated a bottle of Carlsberg.

“I've won,” he said, before drinking.

# 15

THE river was rising steadily when term ended. It was still possible to drive through the streets of Kuala Hantu, but dwellers near the river's edge had taken to the roofs and the bazaar had had to close down. Up-stream the rain thundered and soon, in time for Christmas—the birthday of the Prophet Isa—Kuala Hantu would resound to the whip-lashings of the frenzied sky. Then there would be cosy isolation for those who lived up the hill, the boats would ply between the stone and wood islands, and the prices of foodstuffs would mount drunkenly. Meantime there was Crabbe's farewell party at Kong Huat's-five dollars a head for all members of the staff, drink extra, no pork in deference to the Muslims.

It was a tradition in the Mansor School that a departing master should be given a Chinese dinner. Though wives were barred, there was no roystering, no doubtful jokes, little inebriation. It was just another staff-meeting, with Boothby yawning at the head of the table, the agenda consisting of equivocal dishes which were served in no special order, just dumped on the table as they were ready. Thus one could never be sure when the meal had ended. On one occasion chicken legs had appeared during the speeches, on another the ice-cream had come first. Tida' apa.

The staff was very pleased at some news that had just come through, on the very day of the dinner in fact. Boothby also was leaving. He was being transferred to an obscure school somewhere in Pahang. It was providential that the news should have come through when it did, for now one farewell dinner could serve for two people, and everybody had thus saved five dollars.

In the dingy upper room of Kong Huat's Crabbe looked round for the last time at his colleagues: Mr. Raj's sadjowl; the golden sullen Adonis Mr. Roper, looking bitterly at Boothby as though Boothby had fathered him; Gervase Michael, the black Catholic Tamil; Lee, the Chinese mathematician, fingering peanut-shells as though they were the balls of an abacus; Inche Jamaluddin, quizzing over shy spectacles; Tuan Haji Mohamed Noor, who spoke no English and smiled benevolently now, like one who knows he is saved; Crichton, with Australian apple cheeks like a Pommie; MacNeice the Ulsterman; the squirming four Malay probationers; Hung the geographer; Wallis the art man; Inche Abu Zakaria, skilled in woodwork; Solomons the scientist; Gora Singh, huge-bellied, grey-bearded, his turban almost meeting steel spectacles.

“Awwwwwwwww!” And, of course, Boothby.

“You do not like shark's fin soup, Mr. Boothby?” said Gora Singh. “It is very rich and glutinous. It is good for the stomach.”

“Can't stand fish of any kind,” said Boothby. “It brings me out in spots.”

“I have a sister,” said Inche Jamaluddin, “who similarly cannot eat mushrooms. She swells like one who is pregnant almost at the very smell of them. That is one of the reasons why she was married at the age of twelve. The other reason was because of the Japanese. They had some little decency. They would not put married girls into the common soldiers' brothels.”

“Shark's fin soup is aphrodisiacal in its effects,” said Mr. Raj. “The Taoists believe that the duality of yin and yang functions even in diet. Steamed fish and chicken and vegetable soup and even mushrooms are considered to be cooling foods, edible materialisations of the yang, the pure primal air. The yin, or earth element, inheres in fried dishes and especially in shark's fin soup. Am I right, Mr. Lee?”

“You may well be. As an empiricist I am concerned only with the external accidents of the things I eat. And I know nothing of metaphysics.”

“Plenty of jaw-brykers flying around,” said Crichton. “Aphro whatsits and whatnots.”

“You will perceive that Mr. Boothby has no need of aphrodisiacs,” said Gora Singh with heavy humour. “He will not eat his soup. He is a better man than any of us, ha ha.” Gora Singh spooned more of the almost solid soup into his own bowl, poured in soya sauce and added sliced chillis, and then ate with much relish and sucking. His great paunch intervened between him and the table, and fishy gouts kept bespattering beard and shirt on the spoon's long journeys.

After the soup came sweet-and-sour prawns. “A yin dish,” said Mr. Raj. “A heat food.”

“This is most unfortunate for Mr. Boothby,” said Gora Singh with a large smile. “Here is more fish, and fish brings him out in spots. He is, so far, not having a very good dinner.”

“I'm all right,” sulked Boothby. He leaned his elbows on the table and yawned. “Awwwwwwww!”

“I have long wished to know, Mr. Boothby,” said Inche Abu Zakaria, “whether that is perhaps an ailment. I have often felt pity for you because of it. It is perhaps a disease of which I have read called the gapes.”

“That is a disease of poultry,” said Mr. Gervase Michael. “We had chickens which had it badly. I forget now how it was cured. One chicken certainly we lost.”

“Mr. Boothby is no chicken,” said Gora Singh, the life and soul of the party. “Ha ha.” He tore into the sweet-and-sour prawns, taking Boothby's share as well as his own.

“I don't understand what you're talking about,” said Boothby. “Unless perhaps someone's trying to be funny.”

Gora Singh suddenly roared with grey-bearded laughter. He put down his fork and said, “Ha ha ha, a crab is a fish, Mr. Crabbe. I have just thought of it. Ha ha ha. That is very funny. Mr. Boothby will come out in spots, Mr. Crabbe, if he tries to devour you. Ha ha ha, that is very funny.” He explained the joke in Malay to Haji Mohamed Noor. It took a long time, and, when it was evident that the Haji would never grasp the point, the next course had arrived.

“Look here,” said Boothby, “is this a put-up job, or something? Don't I get anything to eat at all?”

“I can assure you, Mr. Boothby,” said Mr. Roper, “that we knew nothing of your being allergic to fish. When Iwas deputed to arrange this dinner I merely told the management here to give us a varied Chinese meal. That they have, so far, done. I am sorry you cannot eat fish.” He then gracefully scooped himself a portion of the ikan merah which lay, covered with cucumber, in a shallow pool of sauce.

'Tin,"said Mr. Raj.

The next dish was an innocuous mess of fried vegetables. Boothby ate greedily and then began to hiccough.

“One should hold the breath and take many sips of water,” suggested Inche Jamaluddin.

“A sudden shock is best,” said Hung. “A blow between the shoulders.”

“Or between the eyes,” said Crabbe, “like this.” He took from his jacket-pocket the winning lottery-ticket. “Examine the number, gentlemen.”

“So it was your ticket! Well!”

“I had heard it was a policeman in the town.”

“A man in Kelapa, I was told.”

“Well, this is most surprising.”

“To think it was Mr. Crabbe.”

“Secretive about it, weren't you?” said Solomons.

“Too right you were.”

“Well.”

“Mr. Crabbe.”

“A very, very rich man.”

It cured Boothby's hiccoughs.

“Now,” said Crabbe, “I can go back to England whenever I like. I can expose many things in the Press. I can perhaps even ruin a few careers. This represents a lot of money. Money is power.”

“You could start a school.”

“On the most scientific pedagogical principles,” said Mr. Raj.

“You could travel the world.”

“You need never work again.”

“Well.”

“To think it was Mr. Crabbe all the time.”

Everybody was too excited to be much interested in the next course. Everybody except Boothby. Boothby banged his fist on the table and said:"The lot of you! The whole bloody lot of you! You've all worked against me! You've all tried to ruin me! But just wait, that's all, just wait. I'll get the whole bloody lot of you if it's the last thing I do. Stop talking!” he yelled to Gora Singh. “When I'm bloody well talking you'll kindly shut up. I'm still Headmaster!”

“I was translating for the Haji's benefit,” said Gora Singh. “And you will not speak to me in that manner.”

“I'll speak as I bloody well like!”

“Boothby,” said Crabbe, “you've had it. Sit down and eat your nice fish.”

Boothby screamed, picked up a large dish of fried rice garnished with shrimps, and then hurled it at Crabbe. He missed and struck a fly-blown picture of Sun Yat Sen.

Then they heard steady chanting from below.

“It's the seniors,” said Mr. Roper, turning round in his chair to look down from the window.

“I'll get them too,” raved Boothby. “They're all in it. Who gave them permission to be out, eh? Who gave them permission?”

“It's end of term,” said Crichton.

The words of the chant were discernible.

“We want Crabbe! We want Crabbe! We want Crabbe!”

Boothby, red hair all anyhow, turned in triumph. “You see, you bastard. You didn't get away with it. They want you. God help you if they get you.”

“We want Crabbe!”

“You see!” Boothby grinned horribly. Then a single voice was raised from below, cutting dearly through the chant:

“Crabbe for Headmaster!”

Raggedly the cry was taken up. There were cheers, and then:

“Crabbe for Head! Crabbe for Head!”

Boothby shook his fists, standing at the stair-head. “Rotten to the core! Treachery and corruption! Just you wait, that's all, just you wait!” Then, gasping for breath, he began to stamp down the stairs. They heard him stumble and swear half-way down. Then he could be heard stamping out the back way, seeking his car. „Now we can finish our dinner,” said Gora Singh. “It was as well he did not stay. The other two courses are also fish. Though, of course, there is ice-cream.”

“Crabbe for Head!”

The noise of angry gears and a fretful engine. Boothby was going home. The car sang into the distance.

“Before you start thinking me mean for not ordering champagne and cigars,” said Crabbe, “I'd better say now that I didn't really win the lottery. It was just a cure for hiccoughs.”

“I thought that was not the winning number.”

“Yes, I know the number well.”

“I knew all the time it was a joke. Ha ha ha.”

“It was very clever.”

“It was obvious,” said Mr. Raj. “You are not the type of person who would ever win a great fortune. You are not a lucky person. It is evident from your face.”

“Crabbe for Head!” A little desultory now, a little liturgical.

“Well, that's a relief,” said Crichton. “If you don't mind my saying so.”

“It made him very angry.”

“That was the intention.”

“Ha ha. A very good joke.”

'So Mr. Crabbe is a poor man again.”

“He will deign to finish this simple fare and wash it down with nothing more Lucullan than beer.”

“Well,” said somebody. “Poor Boothby. Nobody could say he went out like a lamb.”

“He was only an imitation lion,” said Mr. Raj. “His teeth were false and his claws were made of cardboard. I feel very sorry for him.”

“He was not a bad Headmaster,” said Inche Jamaluddin, “as Headmasters go. In twenty years at the Mansor School I have known many far worse.”

"He lost his temper too much."

"He yawned all the time."

"The British," said Mr. Raj, "have done heroic work in the tropics. When one considers how temperate and gentle is their northern island…"

"Islands," corrected MacNeice.

"…one marvels at their fundamental strength of will. The time is coming for them to leave the East. At least, the time is coming for those who will not be absorbed. One cannot fight against the jungle or the sun. To resist is to invite madness. Mr. Boothby is mad. It is a great pity. If he had stayed at home…"

"Crabbe for Head!"

"Close the window," said Crabbe. "We can switch on the other fan."

"They are going now," said Mr. Roper. "Their exuberance does not last very long."

"If he had stayed at home he would have been a decent little schoolmaster. He has had too much power. In a few years he will retire and then he will drag on his empty life, freed by an adequate pension from the need to work. But he will be recognisably mad. People will laugh at him and not wish to play golf or tennis with him. And he will bore people with his unintelligible talk about a country he could never learn to understand. It is a pity. His life has been ruined."

"And will my life be ruined too?" asked Crabbe.

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Raj calmly. "But with you it will not be a pity. The country will absorb you and you will cease to be Victor Crabbe. You will less and less find it possible to do the work for which you were sent here. You I lose function and identity. You will be swallowed up and become another kind of eccentric. You may become a Muslim. You may forget your English, or at least lose your English accent. You may end in a kampong, no longer a foreigner, an old brownish man with many wives and children, one of the elders whom the young will be encouraged to consult on matters of the heart. You will be ruined."

"Crabbe for Head!" A few straggling voices, already losing interest.

"That cry is your death-warrant," said Mr. Raj. "The proletariat is always wrong."

The rain began to come down heavily. The ants flew into the electric lamp. Sweat gleamed on brown and white and yellow foreheads. Mosquitoes began to nip thin-socked or bare ankles. There were no more voices calling from below.

"To-morrow," said Mr. Raj, "we shall awaken to a flooded world.

## 16

SERGEANT ALLADAD KHAN, the three new brass chevrons not glittering at all in the dull rainy light, came back by river from the workshops at Kelapa. He was erect in the stern of the police launch and Kassim was at the wheel, unhandy as ever. Allah, the world was all river now. The river had thirstily engulfed much of the main street, all the dirty lanes by the bazaar, had even climbed up the stone steps of the old Residency, virtually marooning the Crabbes. Tree-tops rose

bushily from the grey sheets of water, and snakes were lodging in the branches. An old Chinese man had stood by his housedoor to pray the flood away from his family; he had been carried off by a crocodile. Old boats had capsized or been sucked down—the seams uncaulked—loaded with household chattels. These were bad but thrilling days. For here was he, Alladad Khan, chugging back to the swilling yard of the Transport Office, riding the flood like the Prophet Noah, lord of the river, granted the freedom of the waters. Allah, there was something more dignified, more befitting a man, about this stately progress than the rasping of brakes and jerking of gears on the dusty jostling road.

Lord of the river but of little more. For she had soon learned, as women will, to adjust herself to her brother's defection and treacherously-acquired prosperity. Was it not evident that his career would be advanced by this cunning marriage? For he was meeting all the best people now, and—as for his wife—obviously so good a Muslim would bring her in time to the true faith. His drinking was a sort of self-elected martyrdom, a mere means to gaining greater strength through the right social contacts. Abdul Khan had told her so himself.

As for her attitude to him, Alladad Khan—well, it was much the same as before. Except that she was quite pleased with his promotion, proud of his wound in the arm, and soothed with the presents he had been able to buy her with money given freely and generously by Adams Sahib. And he, Alladad Khan, had decided that the child was not unlike himself—an unaggressive nose, intelligent forehead, eyes both lively and melting. Th child he dandled now in his arms, singing old songs of the Punjab, and she approved of the fond fatherliness evinced. She let him go out occasionally and did not complain overmuch if he returned with bright eyes and rollin gait. One thing she still would not allow was that horribly erotic act which was a commonplace of American an European films, but she took complaisantly enough no to his other husbandly advances.

It was as well, thought Alladad Khan, that he construe something on which to rejoice, for soon he would be loving his friends. The first week after Christmas the Crabbe would be flying to another State; a month later Adams Sahib would be leaving the Federation for ever. He, Alladad Khan, would be alone. Perhaps, however, he could ensure against being completely alone by cultivating the few roods of garden wished upon him. He would try to love his wife, he would protect and cherish his daughter, he would continue to learn English, he would have a shell of books and a few pictures on the walls. Perhaps some day he would have a son, and, when he retired to the Punjab, there would be a few acres and cows and horses and a vista of progeny carrying in its head, retailing round the winter fire, the legends of him, Alladad Khan—soldier, dreamer, policeman, cosmopolitan, cultivated, free-thinking. It was not much, but it was something.

She would wish the son to be called Abdul Khan, but there he would most definitely put his foot down.

Alladad Khan was interested to note that, in the sparse speedy river traffic, a boat careered gaily along containing a raja and the raja's new mistress. The raja was a young dissipated man in a European suit; Alladad Khan knew him well by sight. The girl he knew even better. She had formerly been the mistress of Victor Crabbe. Now she seemed happy enough with her smart baju and slinky sarong,

her gold-studded handbag, her ear-rings of Kelantan silver, her dissipated but probably virile young raja. Allah, women had no faith.

None except one.

And at Kelapa he had seen that faithless boy, tittering around, the minion of a paunched planter. In the store by the workshops he had seen him, buying food for the bungalow, but also spending wild money on gaudy trinkets and childish toys—a doll's house lavatory, a jack-in-the-box, paper flowers and wax fruit. He had moved provocative girlish shoulders at Alladad Khan and tossed his tinted hair. The world was speedboat-speeding to its final collapse. Friends go and women and boys are faithless and God may not exist. There remains the flat in the Police Barracks, however, and in it a long-nosed wife with cannibal teeth, a baby, a bed, chapattis hissing and jumping on the stove.

And things one likes to remember.

"Kassim!" he shouted. "Bloody fool! Silly bastard!" For Kassim was gloomily steering straight for the yard wall by the Transport Office, speed unslackened, the boat's nose ready for a bullet impact with red brick. Alladad Khan took control.

"Afmta ma'af, Corporal," said Kassim.

"Sergeant," corrected Alladad Khan, "sergeant. Allah, will you never learn? Three stripes is sergeant."

"I have much on my mind." said Kassim. "There is my new wife and the money is difficult. I should be glad to be merely a corporal."

"Promotion comes when one has proved one's ability."

"But that is not fair. You have but one wife and you do not need all the money you have as a sergeant. I have three wives now and it is very hard."

"Hari Singh has been promised the rank of corporal. Admittedly, he has as little ability in matters of transport as yourself, but he at least knows some English and plays football for the Police Circle."

"I never have time for these things, Corporal."

"There is no God but Allah," swore Alladad Khan. "Will you never learn?"

"But I have no opportunity to go to the evening classes. There seems always so much to do in the house."

"We will say no more," said Alladad Khan, alighting to tread some inches of flood-water. "Wait here. The tuan and myself must go out together soon to the big school-house on the hill. You must be ready to take much barang on board. To-day is a big day with the Christians. It is called Christmas Eve. They celebrate the birth of the Prophet Isa."

"That is why there is a free day to-morrow."

"Yes. And the day after. I beseech you to do as little as possible in the house. We shall require you to be fit and eager for the resumption of work. Take your wives for a trip on the river. You are reaching an age when energy must be conserved."

"Yes, Corporal," said Kassim.

## 17

THE evening of the eve of Christmas promised to bloom and fade lovely over the waters. Warm light shot through the rainy western cloud, catching the hair of the jungle and irradiating the misty wreaths on the mountain-tops. Crabbe and his wife stood high above the town, having climbed to the roof of the crumbling watch-tower to look at the streets of water, the huge swollen river, the craft gliding or chuffing upon it. Even below, beyond the highest flight of stone stairs, little boats bobbed and rode. In one of them was a recognisable figure, being rowed home. Crabbe waved and the figure waved back in high laughter that rang faintly over the wet waste.

"Misti lulus! He he he he!"

Then, still waving and tittering, he was borne away to wife and seven children and the roof of his tiny flooded home.

"Christmas Eve," said Fenella. "Cold streets and warm pubs and all the children excited. Camaraderie for a brief unreal space, toasts and back-slappings. For something they don't even understand, let alone believe in. And the carols." She began to sing, unmusically, in a badly pitched key:

"*The holly and the ivy,*
*When they are both full-grown,*
*Of all the trees...*"

Then she put her face in her hands and sobbed. Crabbe comforted her.

"It means nothing here," he said. "This is the land of a later prophet. But, whoever he was, he could have been born here more fittingly than amid fancied winter snow. The towkays hoicking at the kampong couple, the children staring up from the monsoon drains—though that's not possible now, of course—and the search for a room in a Chinese hotel. And then the limbu in the Sikh stable and the birth in the smell of dung."

"I can't help it," said Fenella, wiping her eyes. "It's always the same. Something to do with lost innocence, I suppose."

The swift twilight began to run like a fishing-line off a reel. From below came an approaching chugging and then a hail: "Ahoy!"

Crabbe and Fenella looked down to see a launch mooring by the steps, a huge man talking petulantly in Urdu, several crates, the craft overweighted. "Ahoy!"

"The bloody thing nearly capsized," came a distant grumbling voice. "We had to throw one bloody crate of Anchor overboard."

"I'll come down and help!" shouted Crabbe. It was slow and sweating work lugging crates of beer for Nabby Adams, sherry for Alladad Khan, champagne for the Crabbes up the stairs to the near-denuded flat. House-boys were called from their vacation to help. Nabby Adams dispensed lordly gratuities. "Terima kaseh, tuan." "Terima kaseh." "Terima kaseh banyak, tuan." "Sama sama," said Alladad Khan.

"Samsu samsu," said Nabby Adams. "Who the bloody hell does he think he is, anyway? It's my bloody money, not his."

Nabby Adams, indulgent of the weaknesses of others, had brought cold chickens and pork pies, tins of ham, wedges of cheese, loaves, melting slabs of butter, fruit, marmalade, jars of pickled onions, crackers, Christmas puddings,

slabs of dried fish, pink cakes, botded mushrooms, figs, chocolates, cough-sweets, canned soups, Dutch cigars, potted shrimps, smoked salmon, caviare, tinned pate, hard-boiled eggs, and a hunk of meat for a dripping dog that sprayed the stairs with its happy tail.

"Would insist on coming," said Nabby Adams. "She jumped out of the bloody window and swam after us. So we had to pull her on board."

They sat on coverless arm-chairs in the pictureless, bookless flat. Only a group photograph, delivered that morning by post-boat, had been too late for the crates and boxes.

"It's the Upper School," said Crabbe, "and there's me in the middle of the front row."

"And who's this Chinese kid with the black eye?" asked Nabby Adams.

"He's the musoh dalam selimut" said Crabbe. "The enemy in the blanket. But not here any more. He's going to Singapore. There's more scope there in the Chinese schools."

There was distant gunfire.

"Still at it," said Nabby Adams. "Not even on Christmas Eve can they let up."

Bottle-tops were levered off, drawn, popped. They all drank from beer-glasses.

"So you've made up your mind, Nabby?" said Crabbe.

"Yes. Back to Bombay. I'll settle down there. There's no place like it."

"But what will you do?" asked Fenella.

"Well, nothing really, Mrs. Crabbe. I'll just live there. There's no place like Bombay."

"You can't drink there any more," said Crabbe. "Prohibition's in force."

"Well, I can really," said Nabby Adams. "You see, I've got this." He took from a note-crammed wallet a crumpled letter. Crabbe unfolded it and read:

> "This is to certify that the bearer is a confirmed alcoholic and may be served with intoxicating liquors in any hotel where he requests them.
>
> "P. Vivekananda, M.B., Ch.B., Madras."

"If you want a drink when you're in India, Mrs. Crabbe," said Nabby Adams seriously, "you just get one of them. Then you'll have no trouble."

They drank and ate. Nabby Adams consented to take a little cheese and a small piece of bread. Alladad Khan tore a chicken with his teeth.

"It makes me real sick to see him," said Nabby Adams, "gorging like that. No moderation somehow when he starts anything. And I got him them three bloody stripes before this came through, because I needed the extra money he'd get. And not a bit bloody grateful." He spoke long Urdu. "And he won't come with me to Bombay. Says he'll stay here. Oh," said Nabby Adams, "that reminds me. You two have been real good to me and him. And you held that ticket for me when I would have lost the bloody thing. Well, you're getting ten per cent. That's only fair. Thirty-five thousand. I've put it in the bank for you already."

"We couldn't, really..."

"It's terribly kind, but..."

"You're always saying as how you want to get back home and start a school or a pub or something. Well, here's your chance. What's thirty-five thousand to me?"

“It's awfully kind,” said Fenella, “but really…”

“I don't think she wants to go home now,” said Crabbe. “She wants to stay here.”

“Yes,” said Fenella. “I want to stay here.”

“Well, you keep the money just the same,” said Nabby Adams. “You can have a bloody good piss-up with that.” Then he stared in horror. “I didn't mean that, honest I didn't, it just slipped out like, Mrs. Crabbe, honest, I'm sorry, really I am.”

“Ap khuch karab bolta,” said Alladad Khan.

“And I'll say something a bloody sight worse if you start pulling me up,” said Nabby Adams. “Full of himself since he got his third stripe.” He gave a lengthy speech in Urdu. Alladad Khan worked away at a chicken-leg, indifferent.

They drank and ate.

“Christmas Eve,” said Nabby Adams. “I used to pump the bloody organ for the carols, proper pissed usually…” He began a glazed look of horror.

“Well, what else can you call it?” said Crabbe quickly.

“That's right,” said Nabby Adams with serious warmth. “What else can you call it? Anyway, there was one that I used to like, more of a im really than a Christmas carol.“ Nabby Adams coughed and cleared his throat and began to sing in a graveyard bass:

“*O come, all ye faithful,*
*Joyful and triumphant,*
*O come ye, O come ye*
*To Beth Lee Em.*”

Fenella began to cry, and Alladad Khan made a serious, concerned statement in chiding Urdu. Nabby Adams, disturbed, said:

“I'm sorry, Mrs. Crabbe, I know I've not got much of a voice and you being musical and all, but I didn't think it was that bad it'd make you cry, honest.”

They drank, and the evening poured itself out in a long bubbling or frothing or aromatic stream, and Alladad Khan sang a Punjabi hunting song and addressed the Crabbes seriously in Urdu, and the Crabbes addressed Nabby Adams in Malay, and it became Whitsun more than Christmas, for the Tower of Babel lay with the empty bottles.

At length Nabby Adams looked towards the planter's chair on the veranda, and said:

“Just five minutes.”

Alladad Khan sang quietly to himself, eyes glazed, sherry bottle in hand; Crabbe began to sing a counterpoint, seriously, sonorously:

“*The holly and the ivy,*
*When they are both full-grown,*
*Of all the trees that are in the wood,*
*The holly bears the crown.*”

Alladad Khan left him to sing on his own, pale beneath the warm brown, off to the lavatory. Fenella cried and cried.

“His art up,” said Nabby Adams sleepily. Then he snored gently, the dog clankingly searching for fleas beside the planter's chair, unaware as yet of her booked passage to India.

Fenella sobbed. Crabbe took her in his arms and com-forted her. Then midnight sounded from the halfdrowned town clock. Above the broken meats, the drained bottles, the insect noises, the gunfire, the snores and the retchings he wished her a merry Christmas.