

THE JUNGLE SHIP

A Tale of the Amazon River



Richard A. Bermann
(1883-1939)

Translated by C. D. Godwin

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Das Urwaldschiff was first published by the Volksverband der Bücherfreunde, Berlin, in 1927, with 8 full-page watercolour illustrations by Franz Heckendorf.

An English translation published by Putnam in 1930 appears to be quite unavailable now.

I believe this work is in the public domain, since the author died more than 70 years ago.

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PART ONE

DOCTOR SCHWARZ FROM LEITMERITZ

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Ah, it is hard to speak of what it was,
that savage forest, dense and difficult,
which even in recall renews my fear:
so bitter – death is hardly more severe!

Dante, *Inferno* I
tr. Allen Mandelbaum

DEDICATION

TO CURUPIRA

Now that I am to tell of the Amazonian forest and its great mystery, of that enormous realm of green twilight, of heavy shadows and burning rays of sun; of the puzzles made by myriad forest streams, the maze of overgrown paths – to tell of this overflowing vitality, this rustling, skittering, flitting, whirring amid dark green foliage – now it is to you, O Curupira, spirit of this great jungle, that I stretch out my hands! Do not confuse my tongue, great misguiding spirit of the arboreal wilderness, allow me to see my path between trunks and murderous vines that cling, let me not on obscured waterways lose the way between the monstrous plates of Victoria lilies! Take pity on my stumblings and tumblings, for it is of your world I wish to tell, Curupira, Curupira!

Greek gods, lovely, serene, smiling – they would be lost in Amazon jungle undergrowth. Even he, the sprite Puck, forest wanderer of the northern isles, would last not long in these hot wild forests. Fairy-dance in a forest clearing, by night? The Amazonian Indians know that no sprites could dance in a forest clearing: the jaguar would eat them, and the black puma, cruelly aiming for the victim's jugular. No, Amazonian sprites dance out on the water, on the big round floating leaves of *Victoria amazonica*, and the giant serpent Anaconda coils about them to protect the dance from wicked demons, from the terrible night-ghost Yurupari, and the horrid lame dwarf Maty-taperé, from the thing that shrieks like a raucous bird in the darkness ...

Blond northern sprites are too delicate for this vast, vast forest. Yet it is filled with a mysterious divinity; those Indians know it, who live free even now with bow and spear along the rivers; and even those in big riverbank towns, half-Indian Mamelucos, half-negro Cafusos, even they tell their tawny and dusky children, at evening outside the hut, that the river belongs to the Mother of Waters, and the forest belongs to Curupira.

Water, endlessly streaming standing water that oozes through the Amazonian forest, here flowing wide as a sea and bronze yellow, here tearing deep and blue-black, here green, here multi-coloured, the colours unblended; past mangrove roots, stands of palm, straight past the tangle of islands, the water of the one great freshwater sea – half a dozen Rhines, fifty Elbes, a hundred Thameses, five hundred Inns – that flows through dense black forest, full of fish, caimans, turtles, snakes – this water that is life and danger, mother and death, personified by Amazonian Indians in the divine form of Mae d'agua, great Mother of Waters. She is the Lorelei, the Melusine, the mermaid of the Amazon River; in the night her enchanting song rings out from the dense undergrowth that lines the *igarapés*, those narrow boatways meandering through the jungle. And anyone who hears their song grows mad with longing, and leaps laughing madly into the river ...

From the riverbank come the tittering murmurs of the Yaras, river sirens who serve the Mother of Waters.

The forest belongs to Curupira. This Amazonian bogie – a relative of our Saxon Rübezahl¹ – is half-Indian, half tree monkey or jaguar, a ghost that climbs. When he shows himself in his true shape, you see that his toes are set backwards on his feet, or it may be he has only one foot like a human's, the other is like a giant jaguar paw. He has but one eyebrow in the middle

¹ Rübezahl: capricious spirit of the Giant Mountains between Bohemia and Silesia.

of his forehead, his teeth are blue. But he usually shows himself to the wanderer in the forest in enchanted disguise; a man thinks he sees a lovely woman, a woman a lovely strong warrior. To tease and confuse is Curupira's greatest delight.

Maybe the curious big silent bronze-brown person I encountered in the forest back then was – Curupira. I spoke to him, he smiled, and was at once gone; and then that ridiculous embarrassing incident with the hellishly biting fire ants.

And as I sat on the fallen trunk, intoxicated by the glittering colours of fluttering butterflies and dazzling birds – that dull knocking in the forest is no woodpecker, it's Curupira, going about and sounding old trees with his enormous axe of turtleshell to see if they'll withstand the next storm ...

He is good and evil, comical or frightful, friend or enemy, generous or cruel, grateful and a great avenger, he is like the forest itself, that teases and confuses, yields treasures, sustenance, and a thousand deaths ...

Maybe Curupira is merely (forgive me, Curupira) a big monkey, one not yet catalogued by the naturalists. What do naturalists know of the Amazonian forest! They know not one tenth of it. They claim that in this monstrous greenhouse, life has not yet blossomed to its highest stages of development; the exuberant fantastically rich fauna have brought it no farther than little clambering monkeys; no hominid apes, and the human being himself seems here an alien, a visitor from other continents, Polynesia, Oceania, before the influx from Europe and Africa.

Is Curupira, known to every Indian in Brazil, not perhaps the big upright ape of whom the naturalists know nothing, a putative ancestor of the future truly human peoples of America?

Legends tell of Curupira inquisitive as a monkey. The rubber tapper scared of losing his way in the forest squats quickly down and weaves from the stems of certain plants a complicated meshwork, and leaves it lying. Curupira, peeping out between slender assai-palms, sees the game, and he'll at once begin to unweave the mesh. While the curious fellow is thus busied, the spell he has cast on the victim weakens, his confused eyes see clearly again, he recognises the forest path ...

Oh, if only I had known what plants they were, and had woven such a mesh when Curupira treated me so ungraciously and confused my path through life in the Amazonian forest, during those strange days of the Amazonian operetta revolution!

Curupira – unspeakable tangle of thickets, branches that whip maliciously, tree-wasps and ants that sting, roots that trip, but, too, the gentler teasing of dragonflies flitting fire-red and green, of leaves grown transparent and ruby-red in sunshine, towards which I stumbled breathless through clumps of bamboo because I thought them some kind of fairy treasure, carbuncles or rubies – Curupira, it's the scurrying in branches, the rustling behind the wall of vegetation, the swish of great lizards amid leaves, the perfumed heat of the ineffable endless Amazonian jungle of which I have seen too much and not enough for my felicity, this mysterious, twilight-bright, twilight-dark, buzzing, murmuring, green, dark, dreadful, teasing, wonderful, ghostly magic, magic, magic ...

CHAPTER ONE

The packet-boat RMS *Hildebrand* of the Booth Line, Liverpool, entered the mouth of the enormous river on the morning of 30 July 1924. That morning not even the most feather-brained young passengers formed a deck-golf party. Some on board were unable to sleep in their excited anticipation, and emerged on deck at the very first grey of dawn in pyjamas, to watch the pilot from Salina Station come aboard. They were happily elated by the adorably romantic sail of his skiff, crimson, triangular, curved like a new moon.

An elderly German from Czechoslovakia, Dr Schwarz, was one of these early risers or insomniacs, then the English doctor Carson, the French grammar-school boy René, and remarkably enough also Lord Athill, former British government minister. Lord Athill's sleep must have been disturbed by the sudden increase of heat, or by an attack of his affliction, for no one ascribed to his limp figure the same powerful yearning that deprived the others of their rest on this morning of arrival and fulfilment. Of course, now even the dullest and most blasé among the passengers were on deck, armed with heavy binoculars or a long telescope; there was so much to see, so many wonders.

And if all there was to see was water: it was water seemingly made of dull gold, or very pale copper-bronze, but with a fairytale scatter of blue pearlescent reflections of bright sky. At first it was still like a golden sea, with somewhere on the horizon a silvery strip of shoreline sand, and above it an indistinct green-black line, until you could make out treetops, a wall of crowns, none other than the edge of the endless Amazonian jungle – and now you can see you're in a river, amid numerous forested islands; and then the incredible invasion began, the first great onslaught of exuberant tropical Nature: all of a sudden every deck on the *Hildebrand*, the smoking room, every cabin, was a-flutter with dazzling butterflies, you could go mad watching them. Some were big, their wings like enamelled fans, some were tiny moths, living emeralds and sapphires; some were a single patch of vivid colour, others multicoloured with delicately traced designs. It was a mad kaleidoscope of wings, a scene from a dream free of reality's gravity; and so was everything, this golden morning.

No more real than the butterflies were the fantastical boats on the water – so, so many. The sails were sky-blue or flaming red; men brown and dark-skinned stood upright, some stark naked under an enormous hat, dropping nets into the water or stabbing with spears, and you could see how they constantly hauled glistening fish from the river with net or spear, some small, others monstrously big. These colourful rocking boats that looked like butterflies were everywhere, far into the distance. They emerged from little bays along the shore, where you could see curious huts or sheds on stilts, constructed of a few palm trunks and palm-leaf matting. Or boats sped trimly from the dark shadow of a channel between two dark-green islets; they seemed to emerge directly from deep forest, for apart from the sun-glinting golden water in which blue reflections magically sparkled, there was nothing but forest, forest, forest; it was black, green and bluish all at once, wrapped in an indefinable darkly fuzzy haze that gave to colours and shapes a magical edging; at first all you saw was a single entity, a dense menacing mass of vegetation, a wall without end or openings; then the spyglass revealed the crazy multiplicity of the entity, the jagged line of crowns, tangle of trunks; individual tree-monsters soared here, there, rising high over the surroundings. One big tree looked like a pink flame, no leaves visible, only flowers. There were huge fans, umbrellas, splayed hands, green rockets shooting into the sky. But all this was merely outline, contour, the eye had no way to penetrate into the forest's interior. The tiniest little islet seemed totally closed, mysterious. Right behind this impenetrable wall a dense darkness must begin, filled with riddles, terrors; treasures maybe; certainly perils. The whole scene was in the most incredible way bathed in an enchanted fluid, it was quite unlike any earthly landscape ...

The *Hildebrand's* passengers, all on deck, men in fresh tropical suits, the women bright and festive, had pushed their deckchairs close to the railing the better to see, or strolled up and down silent on the rubber soles of their flat canvas shoes. After the long voyage it was good to feel no more rocking, to steam upriver safe between banks. In many of them this arrival, this attaining of a goal, wound their eagerness up to fidgety impatience. Others, less sensitive, before even setting foot in the Promised Land already had a premonition that it would be all too much: they complained loudly of the hot humidity, which admittedly was no small matter, but bearable in the shade of the promenade deck, in a deckchair, while stewards brought around little portions of sweet ice in paper cups, and in the smoking room iced ginger ale and lemon squash appeared.

Still, there was a clique of jaded characters, who amid all the tropical splendour noticed only the heat. There's Lord Athill, lying in the big yellow deckchair of complicated wickerwork that the elderly statesman had purchased in Madeira, complete with foot and arm rests. He alone of the passengers even today still wore black, though his comfortable suit was made of the lightest of shiny fabrics. There he lay, a tired white-haired old gentleman, with a face rendered noble by suffering. The steel-rimmed spectacles lent a hardness to the eyes; his best part was the hand with a big formal signet ring. Beside his chair lay another equally luxurious Madeira deckchair, in front of which was Lady Athill's work basket. It was the size of an office wastepaper basket, and had a handle like a bucket. Lady Athill was not seated there; she was taking a stroll with Mrs Craig, twenty-four laps of the promenade deck added up to one English mile, which had to be covered several times a day. Edith Lady Athill was a very tall lady, very erect, and in her frigid old age still very prim and pretty, which pleased her greatly. She wore an airy but high-buttoned dress, and was the only one of the ladies to have a hat on her head and a violet veil covering her face, to avoid tanning. She wore gloves and alarmingly high heels. Since he knew her from elsewhere, Dr Carson had sat down beside his lordship; he had little time for her ladyship because of her hearty braying laugh. Dr Carson was always reading books on Saxon and Danish antiquity in England; he was interested in Athill, among other reasons, because the family was probably descended from Edward the Confessor.

"But when I hear her ladyship laugh," Carson had once confessed to the globetrotter Hilary, "I have no doubt she's a direct descendant of the old Anglo-Saxon chieftains Hengist and Horsa, and of what else that has a horse in its coat of arms." Carson himself could have played an ancient Danish Jarl, there was nothing of the Celt in him, only Germanic directness, deliberation, Nordicly chilled. An old bachelor, country doctor somewhere in Cornwall, now on his first excursion abroad since the War.

The two old men lay at full stretch; they could see the water from their chairs, and the Indian fishing boats, and the fantastical shore. They smoked, Carson his pipe, Athill one of the long slender oriental cigarettes made especially for him. They hardly spoke, but when they did their voices were low and intense. The lord was even limper than usual, perhaps because thoughts of landfall in Pará² agitated him a little. The doctor, a simple tourist in comfortable holiday mood, was enjoying a pleasant situation without a care in the world. It was fun lying here watching the lateen sails.

It was fun to think they would make landfall sometime today, an interesting exotic country, and tomorrow, according to the tour programme, they would take a tour of Pará before steaming on, two days later, "a thousand miles up the Amazon River," as Dr Carson had read again and again on the second page of notices in *The Times*. The temptation ate into his brain, and he decided he would not spend this summer fishing in Scotland, but travel up the

² i.e. Belém.

Amazon, a thousand miles, to the town of Manaus, and back again via Madeira, Lisbon and Leirosa to Liverpool, for one hundred pounds sterling all inclusive. The first third of his hundred pounds and six weeks holiday were already spent, to his satisfaction. The present moment seemed to him “very comfortable indeed”, and with a small drily complacent gesture he drew Lord Athill’s attention to the ecstatic enthusiast nearby, a lean body pressed hard against the brass railing, the dangling arms actually seeming to stretch out in tremendous yearning to the land at last attained: Schwarz, Bernhard Schwarz, Doctor Schwarz from Leitmeritz in Bohemia, retired high school teacher – the only male German aboard the vessel, although Hilary, the globetrotter, was vaguely suspected of belonging to that still somewhat ostracised nation. Actually both those men spoke a purer English than several of their English fellow passengers. Understandably on Hilary’s part, for no one doubted that at a pinch he could produce pure Polynesian; Dr Schwarz’s English was a little slow and inhibited, learned at school and later taught in schools; everyone on board knew this was the elderly man’s first big trip; he spoke of nothing but what was to him such an exciting fact. Others might be spending their holidays on the ship, or convalescing, or taking themselves off to Brazil; but Bernhard Schwarz was living his life here, finally, his real life, after fifty eight years.

There he was, tall, bony, on the brink of turning grey and old, but not yet grey and not yet actually old, seemingly in limbo. As long as the big endeavour was not yet concluded, he was unable to embark on any definitive action, but the big endeavour was precisely this, the incredible dreamlike voyage up the River Amazon – first planned in his early youth, after reading a book by Jules Verne;³ a youthful dream, grown later into a daydream, an inflated notion, the Meaning of Life. Everything beforehand, the thirty-three years in his profession, were but a preparation for this journey, an interval that had to be endured ...

Now he was standing there, tall, bony, awkward. He wore a tropical suit, but not of finely-tailored well-pressed raw silk or linen, like those worn by the young Englishmen who played deck-golf; nothing of the sort: it was a romantic khaki outfit for the densest jungle, leather spats to protect against snakes, pockets for compasses, pockets for revolvers, the only pith helmet on the whole ship ... It was ridiculous if you knew the prospectus for the *Hildebrand’s* pleasure cruise: ices in the café of the Hotel Grande in Pará, fruit juices with soda in the Café Flores in Manaus, and a boat trip to view the *Victoria regia* waterlilies ...

This Doctor Schwarz, standing there with the khaki pith helmet askew on hair that was still black and on jutting temporal bones, looked grotesquely comical until you noticed the eyes. The eyes were too serious. Eyes possessed by the dream, ravenous and greedy, happy and filled with the happy man’s great fear of losing his good luck; these eyes, and the long yellow hands that reached over the railing as if to seize, to hold fast, were touching and pathetic; the rest was tragi-comic: an old schoolmaster of the desiccated sort, dressed up like a jungle explorer ...

Who can know whether Dr Carson, at the moment he drew Lord Athill’s attention to the man, noticed the tragic element in the apparition or only the comedy of the enraptured gestures, the bent back, the immoderately wide straps of the binocular case that ran over this back like a romantic sword-belt, and the big blue shimmering butterfly that had settled teasingly on the rather slanting shoulder. But Lord Athill, with finer nerves than the doctor, and the great politician’s instinctive knowledge of humanity, seemed to understand. He smiled fleetingly and said in his low weary voice: “He’s so happy. I’m glad he’s happy. He told me yesterday evening so nicely what it all means to him.”

³ *Eight Hundred Leagues on the Amazon* (1881).

He heaved a silent sigh. Nothing in the whole world meant much to Lord Athill. He was making the voyage because his doctor had recommended sea air, rest, and a warm climate.

Now Bernhard Schwarz, the high school teacher in khaki, suddenly turned around, embarrassed and a little annoyed. A young lady had stepped up to him and spoken in German: Fräulein Pedersen from Lübeck. She was blonde and aqueous, and spoke Hanseatic German, very s-sibilant. She wasn't with the tourists, the "Cruisers" as they were known aboard ship, intent on a pleasure-cruise up and back down the Amazon, "a thousand miles up the Amazon", six weeks for a hundred pounds. Oh, not for pleasure. Serious business. True love and so on. She was heading for San Cristóbal in Bolivia to marry a German trader who was waiting for her there. That is, if she made it alive. Which was quite improbable. Only when she had the six hundred kilometres to Manaus on the *Hildebrand* behind her would her real journey begin. What would come then was a long, long voyage on some vague mysterious South American river steamer through thickest jungle all the way up the Madeira River. Then all of a sudden she would be on a train that started in some inexplicable way right in the middle of the jungle and stopped in the middle of the jungle, on the banks of the Rio Mamoré, then she would have to climb aboard another steamer and continue on for weeks through who knew what frightfulness ...

She already found the sturdy *Hildebrand* with the electric ventilators and English beefsteaks incredibly romantic and a little suspect, for anything was suspect that was not as in Lübeck. The dear girl spoke not a word of any language other than her s-sibilant Hanseatic, she wept for hours from homesickness, no doubt all night in her cabin and certainly all day long when sympathisers were nearby: Mrs Barnes, who understood German a little; Mrs Berglund from Sweden, who had been with her little girl in Dalarna and was travelling back to her husband in Pará, and especially Dr Schwarz.

Dr Schwarz had confided to half the ship's company, in English, his detestation of this weepy creature; but what good did it do? She claimed her compatriot as her fatherly friend, and poured her heart out to him, hour after hour. She couldn't understand how anyone could travel of their own volition to such a horrible country, "so hot, no? And the coloured servants are s-slovenly, and the conditions generally!"

The poor teacher, whose whole life had been spent dreaming of this country, had to lend a patient ear, hour after hour, with the bashful stiff gallantry of an elderly gentleman simply defenceless against a confiding young lady. That she can't leave him in peace even at this first supreme moment of arrival and fulfilment, it's really too much ...

He actually plucked up the courage to break free after several minutes of her wailing (and now the heat's really awful, isn't it, and I wonder if there'll be a message from my fiancé waiting for me in Pará?); he muttered something about the ship's doctor, had to ask him whether ... and he stalked off with big steps to the open-air veranda café at the stern, where the ship's doctor was sitting, a fat ruddy giant baby in tropical uniform with gold buttons, and four gold pips on the epaulettes, and a white sailor's cap. He was sitting there with a big poison vial killing butterflies delivered eagerly to him by the elderly Miss McPherson. The elderly Miss McPherson, a sensitive and teasing soul, had been running about since early morning with a violet butterfly net, catching butterflies, mostly the kind that settled on the clothing of male passengers. "Oh please keep still a moment – I'd hate to hurt the poor thing, but I *must* have it, it's *such* a beauty ... There, put this one in your horrid flask, how *can* you be so cruel!"

In the intervals when Miss McPherson was off hunting, the fat ship's doctor expatiated on the Amazon River to a veritable garland of passengers– he was the top authority on the

Amazon River, this was his twenty-third voyage, always up to Manaus, and before the war all the way to Iquitos. He was personally acquainted with every sandbank and every alligator, and always mispronounced the Portuguese names of riverside places.

When Bernhard Schwarz, the man with the great yearning for the Amazon River, approached his table, the ship's doctor was peering with rather protuberant eyes through the glass of his vial, in which a little mother-of-pearl coloured butterfly twitched its last, and declaiming: "On the second day of our stop at Manaus, those who've signed up will board a flat-bottomed river steamer, bringing along a cold lunch. It goes a few miles up the Rio Negro, then along a little tributary until the steamer can make no more progress through the jungle trees. Then you climb into dinghies – no, it's not dangerous, Mrs Barnes – and then comes the bit you've been told about on page 24 of the illustrated prospectus, through the flooded jungle, right through the big twilit forest. You'll climb ashore at a certain point; Indian guides stand ready, under reliable European supervision, of course. Then comes the real thing, the real McCoy, you know. You'll press on into the densest jungle, oh, an easy half hour or so. Through the marvellous wilderness you'll come at last to the roaring Taruma Falls ..."

The ship's doctor paused for effect, and at last: "The Taruma Falls are not shown on any map!" He said this in a low voice, reverently. Bernhard Schwarz looked quickly around to see if Fräulein Pedersen was watching; she wasn't, so he didn't stay – he found the doctor's spoken excursion prospectus detestable – but went on down the narrow side of the vessel. He stood for a moment looking down onto the steerage deck. Not much was to be seen, for big canvas sunscreens were stretched across, but through the gaps you could see Portuguese emigrants making ready to land, packing up big bundles and preparing their canary bird cages. Schwarz observed the tawny people for a moment, then proceeded on his circuit down the starboard side of the promenade deck. It was sunnier than the other side and therefore relatively deserted. Only Brazilian families, content to avoid the other passengers and not afraid of a little heat, had settled down here: attractive women, languid in clothes brought from Paris, hair in Parisian bobs, cheeks painted with Parisian rouge, but beneath was the golden skin of their mixed race, the bright blood that no amount of makeup could conceal; they were very charming, very lethargic, and a little stupid; they huddled together like parrots on a perch. Lots of well-dressed healthy children played nearby, half-savage girls with the shy gestures of little Indian maidens; two black maids kept an eye on them. The men of this group were excessively elegant. They clearly found the white linen suits of their gringo fellow passengers indecent, and always wore black heedless of the heat, with starched linen and pointed patent leather shoes. They wore too much gold jewellery. Several of these caballeros crowded around Dr Chéron, who had evidently just read them something interesting from a newspaper.

A solitary non-Brazilian stood by their side. He belonged to every nation and to none: Mr Hilary, the man everyone on board called the Globetrotter. He was past forty, tall, burly, with a penchant for checked clothing; even the silk tropical suit he was now wearing was discreetly chequered. No one on board knew who or what this man really was: it comforted them to assume he was a writer on his travels, but there was no evidence to back this up. He was – and this was certain – the Globetrotter. This trip up the Amazon – for Dr Schwarz the big event of a long life, and even for the younger Miss McPherson, prize-winning shimmy dancer, something romantic to brag about – it was nothing at all to the Globetrotter: look around the region yet again, visit old acquaintances in Manaus, drink a Guaraná and soda in the famous Indian café! No one knew why he was really on this voyage; he never said, though he spoke at length of his other travels, but always by the way and apologetically. Inevitably the mere lighting of a pipe would recall Siam, or Abyssinia during a game of bridge. He mentioned these lands as one might mention a head cold – perhaps not in the best of taste to speak of it ... He

irritated the others a little, it was hard to put on a romantic pose in his presence; even the ship's doctor was loath to discourse on the Amazon when he was around. Now he stood there, solid and not in the least bit blasé, taking it all in his stride, a fellow who sails all the time into the mouths of huge tropical rivers and knows all about the sapphire-blue butterflies that fly around in Brazil. There was no telling if this courteous reserved man was indifferent to the butterflies, or if they were the sole reason he was here. The fact was that now he stood in the midst of the mobile throng of Brazilians, commenting with them on a sheet of newsprint in their special version of Portuguese ...

Dr Bernhard Schwarz, striding past the group, restless, driven by an urge to be on both sides of the vessel at once, to gaze on both riverbanks at the same time. Bernhard Schwarz would probably have coped more easily with a heavy menacing blow, had he realised in good time that this sheet of newsprint was not the old copy passed around in the smoking room ever since Madeira, and from hand to hand among the Portuguese speaking passengers; but today's paper, *O Estado de Pará*, brought on board by the pilot. If only he had asked, in his book-learnt semi-Portuguese, what news there was from Pará! He did not ask, but hurried past the group, not even feel the intense stare burning into his back, directed at him by the Globetrotter from a serious face. A stare that might have said: "Yes indeed, that poor fellow ..."

*

The high school teacher with the yearning ran as if on burning soles around the ship, dashing past Lady Athill, who with plump Mrs Craig passed him at the bows, tall, slender, triumphantly erect, gracious through her violet veil and intent on her healthful circuits, twenty-four to an English mile. He dashed past the captain descending somewhat grumpily from the bridge (Oh this damnable heat!), crossed to the shady side along the covered promenade deck, past the windows of the ladies' salon where the ten o'clock concert was playing, on to the dense cluster of deckchairs, Lord Athill, Dr Carson, people with binoculars. He himself never paused for a moment, gazing at this Amazon that was now his; he sensed that something wonderful was about to happen, something quite out of the ordinary. Shooting past the ship's doctor (now standing with a yard-long telescope rather in the pose of Nelson at Trafalgar) he declined to be shown the island of Mosqueiro (with the sea-baths of Chapeu Virado that we shall be visiting, gentlemen!), he evaded the clutches of Fräulein Pedersen as she veered tearfully towards him by bursting headlong through the doorway of the smoking room, where every ventilator fan was in operation and it was cooler than outside, but there was no one there apart from old Mr Smith, the octogenarian, even now so youthfully fresh that he still made an ocean cruise every summer, partly for pleasure and partly to be able to drink his "bottle of Bass" at precisely measured intervals. It was now ten o'clock, so Mr Smith was sitting at his corner table drinking his bottle, and it tasted as good as ever, God be praised, Amazon or no Amazon!

Dr Schwarz did not take a seat near him. He ordered a glass of lemonade from the steward – they put a lot of ice in the lemon squash, and you can add more water from the bottle – and then stood somewhat breathless before the telegraph notice board; but yesterday's messages were still pinned up. Once the ship entered Brazilian waters, in accordance with some regulation it was forbidden to pick up any news. The teacher had already read yesterday's messages a dozen times: three sheets of utterly uninteresting commentary on a baseball game somewhere in Virginia; and the latest on the rebellion in the state of Sao Paolo: loyal troops, decisive victory (same as yesterday, the day before, the whole week); the rebels had suffered terrible losses; the dreadnought *Minas Geraes* ...

As had become his habit, Dr Schwarz cast a quick glance at the big map that hung above the notice board, reassuring himself for the thousandth time with the consoling fact that Sao Paolo lay a very great distance from the Amazon, almost in another continent; Brazil is so big! And then stayed gazing at the map, entranced by the red line that marked the route of the *Hildebrand*. From Pará on past the island of Marajó into the famous narrows; through a fantastic maze of a thousand forested islands to the apex of the great delta, then ever westward, westward, more or less along the Equator, on, on, always through densest jungle, wonderful big river, lovely jungle ship!

Reverently he read the names of riverside settlements: Gurupá, Oteiras, Prainha, Santarem, Obidos, Parintins, Itacoatiara; then his eye continued on beyond the line of the cruise to the southeast and northwest, where the map bore a magnificent precious miracle: each region a white patch marked with the legend: UNEXPLORED! These unexplored white places on the map made him happy, they lent a shimmer to the utterly vanished years of his life; he could hardly take his eyes from the white patches and the letter U, N, E, X. But then, as had to be, he resumed the regular river voyage: from Itacoatiara another 120 miles to Manaus, slap bang in the middle of the enormous South American continent. To this point, as improbable as it was true, the steamer *Hildebrand* would bring him an incredible dreamlike thousand miles through Brazilian jungle, on this golden stream that he would also see green and blue-black, filled with dark islands, and then back, back along the whole wonderful route ...

Here the gaze of Dr Schwarz from Leitmeritz lost itself in vague dreams, for a clear conception of this *back, back* was forbidden him by the imperious veto of his subconscious soul; before that point something will surely happen to him, something inevitable, amazing ... The childlike old dreamer gazed again at the white patches on the map: unexplored! He sensed that his path lay *there*, not back to Leitmeritz. He was quite incapable of seeing himself where he stood: an elderly gentleman in not too good health, in a flapping Wild West costume, Don Quixote of Leitmeritz, in the smoking room of a perfectly ordinary mid-sized steamer that plied four times a year from Liverpool to Pará and Manaus to take on rubber and carry cruise passengers as a sideline on a bargain-price round trip "a thousand miles up the Amazon", six swift weeks there and back, for only one hundred pounds ... He saw himself not on the plain cosy Booth Line steamer, but young and feisty on the romantic *Jangarda* of Jules Verne, with Joam Dacosta, Yaquita and the mulatto woman Lina. What had he experienced in childhood to make this book so important to him, so central, so fate-sealing? Maybe the raft on the Amazon, the *Jangarda* of his dreams, though he would not admit it did not look quite like the steamer *Hildebrand* of the Booth Line, Liverpool, and maybe the river looked not quite the same as the one the *Jangarda* travelled, but Bernhard Schwarz was not yet far along enough to notice this, he was still in the first joyous tumult of attainment and arrival.

The entire voyage up till now became as nothing to him, an unavoidable waste of time, an imposition that ate up the weeks – even though he had seen the Douro near Porto, and Lisbon, and the gardens of Cintra, and Madeira, wine-red and palm-green in a shimmering blue – he had seen flying fish, and that one sunset, fantastical, packed with islands of gold, – nothing, nothing, all nothing, a tiresome mountain of cake that had all to be eaten; a cake, yes, but it blocked the way to Cloud-cuckoo Land ...

Old Mr Smith, looking up from his bottle of Bass, watched his German fellow traveller as he stood before the map, and chuckled into his rather greenish white beard. Mr Smith was very short, stocky, he looked like an English version of Kasperl Larifari:⁴ smug, wise, alcoholic. Already eighty, and another bottle of Bass every two hours! On the Amazon River! In the

⁴ Popular German puppet character, roughly Charlie Chatterbox.

happy feeling of a life-goal fully attained, Mr Smith was inclined to sympathise with the man at the map, so he suddenly called out from behind him: "What's yours, Mister Swart?" It was the sacred formula, the overt meaning being: Shall I order a bottle of Bass for you? Or no, a bottle of lager, since you're German, after all? The covert meaning was: Old chum, come sit yourself here, drown your sorrows along with me, I don't mind you!

It was as if Mister Smith had clapped Mister Swart on his lean, rather bent back, for he whirled around as if shocked by a blow. It took him some moments to comprehend the fact of Mister Smith and incorporate it into his dream, but then he gladly accepted the offer of a bottle of lager and sat down by the old fellow. Of the hundred cabin passengers on the *Hildebrand* only these two were at this moment in the smoking salon, which offered no view of the surroundings: Mister Smith, completely uninterested in the Amazon, and his friend Mister Swart, through whose life he now floated so overbearingly. Mister Smith drank his bottle of Bass, which said of him: I'm over eighty, hey, and still a merry old Englishman, what? I can enjoy the strong ale brewed by Messrs Guinness any time, oh yes. Amazon? I'm over eighty now, but another bottle of Bass tastes just as good on the Amazon! He was very merry. Beneath the taut golden watch chain lay his soul, but it was a complacent and simple soul. Mister Swart, on the other hand, with his bottle of lager, was able to forego a view of the Amazon from the promenade deck, because the real Amazon was here with him in the smoking salon, it flowed across the map, between the two wonderful blank patches marked "unexplored".

Mister Swart had prudently seated himself so he could keep an eye on the map. Thus instead of standing outside at the rail gazing at the island of Mosqueiro, he had a view of the whole river, the whole vast mysterious jungle land. The island of Mosqueiro was not enough! A too insignificant phenomenon! Merely one isle in the golden stream, fringed by a strip of silver-white sand. The people out on the promenade deck, to whom at this very moment the ship's doctor was describing the island of Mosqueiro as if tomorrow's bathing excursion were not to take place – what could they see? A great green wall with a bright yellow fleck; the green wall was made of trees, the yellow fleck was also a tree, covered in yellow blossom. They saw a long landing stage with two half-naked boys on it, they had just caught a fish, a kind of catfish, longer than the smaller of the two boys, they held it upright between them, displayed it proudly to the people on the big steamer. They could see as well the little country cabins and bathing huts of Pará's well to do bourgeoisie. It is true that above the tops of the tall mango trees there played a quite wonderful shimmer of luminous heated air; that on the sand beside the landing stage a swarm of big black birds had settled, and that the sweep of dragonflies and butterflies over the mirror of waters was fantastically pretty; nevertheless the pretty island of Mosqueiro that Bernhard Schwarz could have gazed at but did not see was hardly to be compared to the myriad other jungle islands currently out of his sight and yet to be seen on the big map in the smoking salon.

Something held him fast here – maybe some sort of reality-phobia, fear of the ultimate fulfilment of a lifelong dream. For all his capacity to dream he was after all an elderly schoolmaster, and the printed map was to him the holiest of objects. While the vessel was already in Amazon waters, riding over dolphins, or manatees, or piranha devil-fish; while he could easily have spotted the giant turtle paddling at this moment towards the beach of Mosqueiro Island; during all this the printed Amazon on the map affected him in the most curious manner; a paean sounded in his soul, and he could not help conveying it to old Mister Smith, in a manner not very dithyrambic, rather a bit bashful and hesitant, with pauses for gulps of lager.

Old Mister Smith listened attentively, he liked it when someone talked a lot as he drank his bottle of Bass, it was so nice and companionable. "Mister Swart" had no cause to offer such an awkwardly bashful apology for delivering a lecture: "Really, when you think about it, this Amazon River ..." "Really, when you think about it, this Amazon River, so splendid, so vast, such earthly majesty! River? Rather an elongated sea, South America's freshwater Mediterranean! Not the world's longest river, but by far its mightiest! Two hundred big tributaries come flowing out of thick jungle, some as big as the Rhine or the Danube, and European schoolchildren hardly know of them! Every hour the Amazon pours a quarter of a million cubic meters of water into the sea, and has done for millennia after millennia; Columbus, before he ever saw South American land, noticed the ocean change colour, the great river turned the sea yellow, across several days' sailing! A river too big to bear just one name, so it has many: Marañon, Solimões, Amazon ... A river that flows across an entire continent, for it rises not far from the Pacific coast and debouches into the Atlantic. Another river, not much smaller, keeps it company, the Orinoco, you can reach the Amazon by boat from the Orinoco, and from tributaries of the Amazon to those of the River Plate ...

"Do you know how many kilometres of the Amazonian river system are navigable?" Bernhard Schwarz asked, gazing triumphantly at the map. Mister Smith had no idea, and couldn't care less, but didn't show it.

"Sixty thousand!" Bernhard Schwarz cried. "Sixty thousand kilometres that one can travel by river steamer! And five thousand by big ocean-going vessels!"

This fact seemed somehow to make the fellow happy. Of course the man was happy to be able to travel from Liverpool here to the Amazon, all that great distance, and it cost only two thousand Rentenmark,⁵ and he'd managed to pull them together, rescued from war and inflation, and now the Amazon River, such a *long* one, and people can travel upriver, Bernhard Schwarz, D.Phil., from Leitmeritz in Bohemia, can travel upriver, and will travel upriver, he's paid, he's already here, already heading upriver, nothing stands in his way, a life has achieved success ...

Lord Athill came into the salon. He had climbed out of his deckchair especially to look for Dr Schwarz: he wanted to watch him arrive. Perhaps the elderly peer was the only one on board to understand this oddball; Carson in his phlegmatic way had at most an inkling of the seething heat in that soul. Ever since the last time Schwarz had dashed past, the two men had been speaking of him, in terms a little ironic but very benign. Lord Athill, much too tired for any yearning, relished the yearnings of others.

"Please come, Schwarz," he said as he entered. Mr Smith gave him a friendly smile, ready to order up a bottle of Bass for his lordship, firstly out of a general benevolence, secondly because a lord, as everyone knows, is a lord.

"Please come, Mr Schwarz, you really should not miss it. Pará has been in view for some minutes already!"

They could see Pará already. In the distance, on the left bank, there were lots of white houses amid clumps of dark trees; a few horrid factory chimneys and other unpleasant technological things beside a sundrenched quay; nearby a provisionally romantic riverside suburb, huts and houses made of reeds and mud, and an obscure tributary that broke out of dense jungle to flow right through the middle of the suburb; it gave a sense of crocodiles and giant turtles, and out from its green muddy mouth came a native dugout canoe with naked

⁵ Temporary currency introduced in 1923 to stabilise the hyperinflated Mark.

copper-brown children in it. But a few minutes later the passengers could witness an electric tramcar heading along the shore towards this very suburb.

The river, hemmed in by islands so that you thought you could see both banks (but you saw only one, the one on which the town lay) – the river was here no longer the sunny playground of fishing dinghies and lateen sails; big flat-bottomed paddle steamers rode up and down, each with its yellow and green flags with the painted heavenly orb and the motto: *Ordem e Progresso*. It seemed that this land of Brazil was enjoying a great deal of progress, and an especially great deal of order.

Why all these river steamers steamed so agitatedly up and down, and the many noisy motor launches, tenders, boats, *Ordem e Progresso* upriver, *Ordem e Progresso* downriver, was not easy at first to comprehend. It might have been noticed that some of these steamers carried at the stern a small cannon or machine-gun. A keener observer might have found the quay too immobile and silent, lacking the normal business of a great trading harbour, swinging cranes, thudding bales, screeching winches. Not to mention that behind the big customs shed made of sacking a kind of redoubt had been constructed around a big cannon with a polished gleaming steel shield.

If anyone aboard the *Hildebrand* had noticed these curious clues, then that *anyone* kept quiet about it. Nothing would disturb the passengers' picnic mood; before the vessel had even come alongside the quay they emerged from their cabins with their Panama hat, walking stick, parasol, handbag. The prospectus envisaged that the Cruisers would, if they so wished, spend two and a half days on terra firma in Pará, lodging at the Grande Hotel at the shipping company's expense. When the two and a half days were up the *Hildebrand* would depart from Pará and resume its voyage, those famous thousand miles up the Amazon River through endless jungle. Today was a free day; the strict observance of official sightseeings would not begin until tomorrow: cathedral, governor's palace, zoological gardens and the rest ... circular tour of the electric tramway in a special car, visit to an orphanage and a rubber factory ...

Most of those opting for the guided tours had decided to stay three nights in the hotel; the cabins would probably be too hot and humid. So everyone had brought their little suitcase on deck, while the Brazilian families returning from Europe and disembarking at Pará filled every passageway and deck with a noisy bustle and astonishing mountains of enormous trunks bearing colourful stickers from hotels in Paris and on the Riviera; the many golden-hued children jumped around on the trunks; negro maids chased after the children; mothers, strangely exotic in their Parisian dresses, gathered about the gangways like a swarm of colourful birds before a great migration; the elegant men stood as always in a separate group, whispering; clearly they had something to whisper, for they at least had observed the cannon, and knew what it signified.

Meanwhile the sunshade awning that had rendered the lower third class deck almost invisible for the entire voyage was furled, and only now could the more distinguished passengers see their travelling companions from steerage: a seething mass of dark-skinned Portuguese proletarians from Porto and Lisbon, among them a few peasants with black pointed hats, several mulattos from Madeira, and a puzzlingly large contingent of Chinese coolies whose presence on the vessel had until now remained completely unknown. Women, children; and the wildest profusion of boxes, bundles, wooden cases, woven Madeira baskets, canaries and parrots in cages; all these people, emigrants in steerage, rich Brazilians in first class, and English Cruisers, were dressed and equipped for disembarkation, ready and waiting near the gangway, holding objects and cumbersome raincoats in their arms as if they would be venturing onto land the very next minute.

But this was as yet out of the question. The vessel had only just hoisted the yellow quarantine flag, and was waiting with its engines shut down for the harbour medical officer to make his visitation. When he saw the boat approaching, the ship's doctor, in a brand new white uniform with much gold on the epaulettes, went with great formality to the gangway to welcome his colleague. The Brazilian medic was a mulatto. He ascended the steps, disappeared with the ship's doctor into the sick bay; a while later the passengers watched the yellow quarantine flag descend from the masthead. Now two motor launches came speeding up, one with the green-yellow Brazilian flag, *Ordem e Progresso*, packed to the gills with armed harbour police and Customs officers, coloured men in fantastical uniforms; the second launch, at the stern a white flag with a red St Andrew's Cross, the company flag of the Booth Line, brought the company's agent. Once on board he quickly shook the captain's hand and uttered a few excited words; they both climbed to the bridge and there paced up and down, up and down; the captain wiped sweat from his flushed face.

Dr Bernhard Schwarz stood close to the gangway, kitted out for disembarkation like the others. Disembarkation? No, for an immediate life of adventure in densest jungle, wrestling with an anaconda, sleeping in the top of a palm tree! His khaki linen suit was martially laden with all kinds of belts and cross-straps; whole tiers of big pockets bulged mightily, concealing who knew what romantic items, compasses, folding knives, electric lanterns and matches – everything one might possibly need in the Grande Hotel and on the round trip by tram. On his left arm was a big waterproof coat, or maybe it was a bivouac sheet, it rather looked like one. On his head was his khaki brown pith helmet, a military helmet from India he had been talked into buying in Liverpool. It was much too heavy, no other passenger had tropical headgear, there was no need on the Amazon, where sunstroke, strangely enough, was unknown. His gold-rimmed glasses were covered by a second pair, dark tinted; a Leitmeritzian version of Tartarin,⁶ they lent him a comical and slightly pathetic appearance.

The man was impatience personified. He obstructed the gangway as the harbour police came on board, and a junior ship's officer had to ask him to please step aside. He made a neurotic attempt to climb into the agent's launch, and was prevented by a negro of the Customs squad; he had no idea what to do to satisfy his impatience. In this predicament he suffered the event he could tolerate least of all in the world: the German Fräulein Pedersen (in her Lübeck Sunday best) clung frantically to him: had the post been brought aboard, was there a message from her fiancé in Bolivia, would he please please ask the chief s-steward or the captain or the negro policeman or somebody ...

Bernhard Schwarz seized the excuse with both hands and went off to ask the chief steward, disappearing through the nearest door which was the one leading to the vestibule to the ladies' salon and the midships stairs, but as soon as he was alone he did not go downstairs, where he would have come to the chief steward's office, but sat exhausted in the vestibule in a deep basket chair. He took off the helmet, which he found oppressive, and stared ahead. This spot was one of his favourite boltholes, for on the wall was a chart: the chart on which every day the ship's course and distance covered were noted. Every noontime the deck steward came to record the miles on the chart; during the crossing it was the day's high point of excitement, for an hour beforehand a wager grid had been chalked on the promenade deck, with a tin box placed beside it. The passengers told the steward how many miles they thought the ship had covered, and dropped a shilling in the box, and the steward wrote the final digit of the stated number in chalk on the grid; around eleven passengers laid a bet on the mileage ending with an eight; seven were more for the number three; so when punctually at noon the exact

⁶ Cf. Daudet's 1872 novel *Tartarin de Tarascon*, about a gullible middle-aged provincial.

number was made known, the collected shillings were divided among those who had guessed the correct number, less a ten per cent deduction for the widows of unfortunate seamen. This part-humanitarian, part spirited and stimulating activity provided the English passengers with endless conversational material. Now the chart on which these fateful numbers were entered hung on the wall of the vestibule to the ladies' salon, beneath a collection of postcards in a frame, available for purchase from the deck steward (the RMS *Hildebrand* entering the harbour of Leirões, sunset on the Amazon, Victoria regia lilies in bloom). The postcards hung above the length of the chart, and below it was the ship's message board, to which every notice intended for the passengers was pinned: *Enamelled brooch showing a cloverleaf, lost on deck during yesterday's dance evening; Ship's Doctor will today deliver a lecture on the Amazon River, with numerous lantern slides ...*

Bernhard Schwarz ignored the message board; he gazed only at the chart, mechanically, by force of habit. This chart too showed the Amazon, though at a smaller scale. Bernhard Schwarz caressed it a little with his eyes, like a miser his treasure. He had no idea that this very minute he would be seeing the Amazon River, *his* Amazon, for the very last time – this strange, unreal, dream-born phantom of his strange life. He sat there for a little respite from his impatience, and from Fräulein Pedersen; but at this very moment of catching his breath and wiping his sweat the sense of happiness was so vivid within him; later he thought how happy he still was, just then ...

At that very moment, Dr Carson and the Globetrotter passed by outside on the promenade deck. Only a thin wall separated them from the place where Schwarz sat, they didn't know this, nor did he know they were passing by; he couldn't hear their friendly voices. They were talking about him.

"It'll be hard on him," the doctor said. "I've no idea how he'll take it. He was looking forward so tremendously to arriving!"

"He would never have arrived," said Hilary. "Do you not see that he *cannot* ever arrive? To arrive at your goal, when your goal is a *fata morgana*! I really don't know if this situation won't have spared him an even bigger disappointment. Believe me, I know something about travel. You never arrive; the place you arrive at is never the place you intended. Especially for these monomaniacs with their wanderlust, like him and to some extent myself – I mean, I already know along the way that one can never arrive, it's worse for me than for him ..."

"That's philosophy," said Dr Carson; "not my field. But I've been observing him as a doctor. He should never have been allowed to undertake a tropical journey; the public health officer who issued his certificate of health was a criminal, or maybe took too much pity on him. Now a big psychological depression, it's too much. I have a bad feeling. Would you come with me please to Lord Athill, we must have a confab, perhaps the first fateful blow can be moderated, I mean if Lord Athill in his calm way can prepare him for the unpleasant surprise ..." They continued on.

At that moment the chief steward came from his office up the stairs that led to the ladies' salon. In his hand was a sheet of white paper. The *Hildebrand's* chief steward was a stocky man with a black Van Dyke beard and a cold official face. He wore the uniform of a ship's officer, but with no insignia of rank; he was not really an officer, but in some respects had more power than the captain.

Here he comes, herald of Fate, up the stairs, his face an icy official scowl intended to keep excitable passengers in their place. The chief steward suffered much from passengers, year in, year out. The gentleman sitting at this moment opposite the message board belonged

eminently to the category of excitable passenger; in any case the chief steward regarded him with stern courtesy, greeted him not without formality, and set about affixing the white sheet of paper to the message board with a drawing pin, right below the chart where the passenger's dreamed-of Amazon flowed, irrevocably for the very last time.

The very well manicured hands of the chief steward skilfully unfolded the sheet of paper, and with all the professional energy that could be desired made it fast with the drawing pin. Something was written on the sheet of paper, in blue ink, in the English and Portuguese languages:

IN THE LIGHT OF POLITICAL EVENTS
IN THE STATE OF AMAZONAS
THE RMS *HILDEBRAND* SHALL REMAIN
UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE
IN PARÁ.
ONWARD TRAVEL UNCERTAIN.

Bernhard Schwarz rose from his basket chair, and read what was written on the paper. The chief steward assumed a proactively dissuasive expression; the correct degree of firmness was required when dealing with such a passenger.

But the gentleman said not a word after he read of the collapse of his journey. He read it just once more, carefully, picked up the ridiculous pith helmet from the chair, and his comical raincoat (or bivouac sheet), and went slowly out onto the promenade deck into the full glare of the midday sun.

CHAPTER TWO

Next morning Dr Carson, an habitual early riser, sat soon after sunrise outside the entrance to the Grande Hotel, at one of the little wrought iron tables beneath the mango trees on the Largo da Polvora. The wide boulevard was almost completely deserted at this hour, apart from a tribe of little shoeshine boys running about, little negroes or half-Indians. Dr Carson allowed his shoes to be shined; they hadn't been cleaned by the hotel, precisely because of all the shoeshine boys outside. He kept himself patiently immobile in his iron garden chair as the ragged mulatto urchin buffed away; then he paid, or at least held out a handful of grubby milreis notes, with no idea how much they were in English money. Clearly he had made the urchin rich, for every other shoeshine boy in Pará at once wanted to polish and brush Dr Carson's shoes, right now and all at the same time.

A few words in Portuguese from the hotel entrance brought relief to the besieged doctor. His liberator was the Globetrotter, emerging dressed in a white but discreetly checked tropical suit, with a whole rack of newspapers under his arm. He sat down next to Carson and lit a big cigar. "At last – a Legítimo again!" he said with passion.

The two men sat for a considerable while in silence. Carson's hat was on his knee; in the morning sunlight his hair was completely silver, but the face beneath was youthful, only marred and disguised somewhat by a pince nez. Hilary at his side, shaded by a big flat Panama hat, seemed massive, chequered; if the doctor had about him something of a greyhound's delicacy, the Globetrotter more resembled a bulldog. So there they sat, side by side experiencing the tropical morning: the ineffable purity of the light over the jungle treetops, visible even from this Parisian-style boulevard; the bright colours of the park opposite, by the Opera House; a pair of fantastical birds flying over this big urban street as if it were part of the

jungle; and the already sundrenched but still wonderfully cool air, which in a few minutes would be permeated by the heat but was now still to be savoured, with its scent of the tropical night and unknown flowers.

You could actually see the Globetrotter sucking in this air together with the smoke from his black cigar, which belonged with it. But with the blissful exhalation came a curious reaction: a furtive anxiety at being caught in the act of being sensitive. The Globetrotter hastily unfolded a newspaper – *O Estado de Pará* – and began reading as if nothing else interested him. Then he began to translate the news for the doctor. There was not much there; one could discern behind the articles the iron hand of military censorship. This much was clear: the mutiny by the 26th Rifle Brigade in Pará had been bloodily suppressed by police troops and a detachment of Marines. This had happened two days before, a day and night before the *Hildebrand's* arrival. The Globetrotter was able to supplement the scanty news reports with information supplied by a Brazilian acquaintance he had looked up the previous evening. It seemed that some of the 26th Brigade were to have been conveyed by steamer to fight rebels in far-off Sao Paulo. Those soldiers, and especially officers, who enjoyed special favour from above were to remain in the garrison. The soldiers who were to head for the front began to mutiny; the uprising must have been well planned, for despatches came at once from the neighbouring state of Amazonas, where revolution had also broken out. There the rebels won almost without a fight, and set up a revolutionary government consisting of fourteen young first lieutenants. In Pará (as Hilary's acquaintance had reported in a whisper) the federal military had for the longest time got along poorly with the other armed units, the provincial police and the Marines. This hostility among the various units had the practical effect that the 26th Rifle Brigade was supported only by a few irregulars from the population, and was confronted by police and Marines and even federal cavalry. Street fighting lasted a whole day and night, then the rebels were besieged in their barracks and had to surrender, while scattered bands here and there on the edge of the town continued to assert themselves or started to fade into the surrounding jungle. Hilary had enquired in vain about the practical and social significance of the rebellion; it seemed to have been nothing more than a purposeless mutiny by troops led by the obscure ambitions of a very young officer.

"One thing is certain," said Hilary. "The very first consequence will be a civil war between the states of Pará and Amazonas. According to the *Folha do Norte*, the Governor of Pará has forbidden any vessel to leave port until further notice. Of course, any steamer falling into the hands of the *revoltosos* in Amazonas would be used by them as a warship. Out of the question that the *Hildebrand* will be allowed to continue its voyage. It doesn't bother me so much, I'm in no hurry and have no specific goal – unlike our Dr Schwarz, who believed that a journey leads to a goal and that attaining the goal will in some mysterious way make you happy ..."

"He's bearing up better than we feared," said Dr Carson. "You didn't dine at the hotel last night, or you'd have seen how relaxed and talkative he was. Perhaps he showed off a little in the amount of Collares wine he drank, but that was all. I think he believed our boat will after all set off again in a day or two. Peace seems to have been restored, in Pará at least; our tram tour can go ahead on schedule – the special car will come by at eight. Will you join? Of course not, you know Pará too well. Most of our fellow passengers stayed on board last night; the ladies were afraid of the revolution. Even Athill hasn't stepped ashore yet – you know her ladyship. Well then, there were only a few of us men here in the hotel last night, old Smith for example. But he went back to the ship early this morning, the beer in the hotel wasn't to his taste; they have only a locally brewed Pilsner, no English ale. The old man is too accustomed to his bottle of Bass; it might end badly. Our Schwarz, as I said, was very composed, just a little pale, perhaps he's not at all the damned fool that Athill and I thought; or maybe

everything will sort itself out and the revolution will come to an end. As far as I'm concerned I'm on holiday, and it makes little odds whether I spend it in Pará or in Manaus. I just hope I make it back home in time, so my locum can take his holiday. Do you think I should look up the local hospital, lend a hand with the wounded? And me not knowing a word of the lingo!"

"And of course you're on holiday," said the Globetrotter with the smallest of smiles. He took a couple of drags, and then began to talk about Schwarz again: "Still, be a little bit careful with that fellow! Undoubtedly a manic type; that remarkably pleasant expression is up to some wicked game ... Hello! Take a look at this!"

A truck came racing along the street, heading for the harbour. A machine gun was mounted up front, and the truck was overloaded with armed men, hardly a white among them. Some wore khaki uniform, others blue cotton shirts, all had cartridge belts and a martial air; all had a cigarette between the lips, even the three shackled prisoners in the middle of the pack. Beside the driver was a soldier with a yard-long telescope that he kept putting to his eye to sweep the street, on which nothing moved but an old Negress in a red cotton dress.

The truck sped quickly past, and Carson followed it thoughtfully with his eyes.

"Don't take a South American revolution too seriously," said Hilary. "It means nothing, and nothing's happening. Those fellows in the truck have arrested somebody and want to put the prisoners on board a steamer – it's called the *Santarem*, it's berthed next to the *Hildebrand*."

"And?" Carson asked.

The Globetrotter shrugged. "Shoot them tonight, or make generals of them tomorrow morning, for all I know. It's getting warm, try a glass of guaraná! ... Moco!" This to a curiously red-brown waiter with pointed faun-ears.

The waiter approached, received an order in Portuguese, brought a bottle and two glasses, into which he poured a foaming liquid. Carson sipped suspiciously; it was a brownish lemonade with a special taste rather like sour chocolate with iced mineral water.

"Guaraná is one reason I wanted to see Brazil again," said the Globetrotter. "A nerve poison from the jungle, a kind of palm fruit that contains a lot of theobromine. It's as addictive as coffee or cigarettes. A glass of guaraná and one of these black Legitimos – it's the whole dark poisonous blissful aroma of this vast country."

It had suddenly grown very hot. The leaves of the huge mango trees cast dark violet shadows on the sundrenched street. The plaza, just now almost empty, was now heaving with people, suddenly appearing after the military truck raced by, fussily-dressed darkskinned flaneurs; ragged Indians; middle-class negroes respectable and a little grotesque; white-uniformed chauffeurs squatting a bit like monkeys on the running board or driving noisily up and down, always the same chauffeurs and cars; and down the middle of the road, past the Opera House, an almost uninterrupted line of tramcars pushed through – a Parisian boulevard had suddenly appeared, on the small side, a little shabby, piercingly high-summery – and strangely ruled over by the crazy cardinal red of an enormous wall of Bougainvillea flowers around the Statue of Liberty in the park opposite. The statue, an actual Marianne on a plinth, with Phrygian cap, sword and laurel, it too was Paris. A large flame-red bird flapped past the statue. Pará, seen from this coffee terrace, was a curious Pará-Paris. If you stood up from the coffee table, you could see the tops of jungle trees close by. An urchin cried "*Estado de Pará!*" From far off came a bang: a backfiring car, or a shot, who could tell.

Promptly at nine, two special tramcars of the Pará Electric Railways and Lighting Co. Ltd came up from the harbour, filled with Cruisers from the *Hildebrand*. Revolution or no, the

sights of Pará had to be seen. The two tramcars halted outside the hotel. Dr Carson stood, ready to join the other passengers. At that moment Bernhard Schwarz appeared at the hotel entrance, not in his absurd khaki linen costume, not carrying his raincoat that might have been a bivouac sheet, not with his pith helmet, but wearing a grey long-tailed summer suit too heavy for this climate, and on his head a little stiff lacquered straw hat, coarsely woven and with a monstrous quantity of meadow from the back of beyond threaded in. One could see at first glance that this must be the man's normal dress, his unromantic civilian garb. In place of the bivouac-raincoat he carried a poorly furled umbrella. His face was damp with sweat, but very pale; dark sunglasses hid the eyes; a kind of smile played around the mouth, lifeless and unchanging.

Hilary, who had stood up to bid Carson adieu, watched as the German clambered clumsily aboard the tramcar.

"Keep a gentle eye on him, doctor ..."

*

On this same day, all Hell broke loose in Pará. A revolution had failed; in the jargon of the victorious power, violence was "good order", a state of emergency was "legality", martial law was "justice", reprisals were "measures". Rifles were fired from behind hedges; bodies were flung into water. The big colourful town trembled and whispered; the barefoot shoeshine boys who yesterday had constructed barricades, today betrayed the last scattered *revoltosos* to the police. Shopkeepers decided to mount a big demonstration in honour of His Excellency the victorious governor. His Excellency thanked them for the sentiment, banned the parade, and had an extra machine gun posted on the roof of the Government Palace, just in case. A few desperate rebels were still holding out with shotguns in the gardens of the suburb Nazareth; government troops approached their foxholes with extreme caution. Armed patrols were everywhere on the streets, military vehicles, squads marching. The Governor had drafted everyone of serviceable age; fathers of middle-class families were transformed into sabre-rattling lieutenants, while mobilised stevedores simply strapped a cartridge belt over the blue cotton shirt. Improvised gunships steamed up and down the river, flying the green and yellow battle flag: *Ordem e Progresso*. A special edition of the *Folha do Norte*, heavily censored, reported that actual warships had departed Sao Paulo, the renowned modern destroyers of our glorious Navy. Behind very tightly shut doors, citizens calculated in murmurs: at least fourteen days before the torpedo boats arrive – if in fact they've set out yet; the *revoltosos* from Amazonia can be here in three days! Clearly everyone must remain loyal, for the next three days at least ...

On the golden yellow river lay the big river steamer *Santarem*, loaded with prisoners and guards. Prisoners and guards could be seen eating farinha together out of wooden bowls, all squatting side by side, coloured men of the tropics, phlegmatic after a great volcanic eruption of temperament. They might murder each other again, or live on in brotherly fashion ...

On this day the sun shone over the equatorial town; all of a sudden black clouds gathered and it began to rain, turning streets into torrents; three minutes later they were dry and hot. On this day two special cars of the Pará Electric Railways carried Cruisers from the *Hildebrand* through the town – the revolution had not managed to disrupt the sightseeing programme. A tour group of sardines viewing the sights of a disturbed ants' nest could not have strolled more coolly through the general excitement.

The State Governor's palace in Pará is famous for its lovely inlaid floors of rare Brazilian woods. So the special tramcars of the Pará Electric stop outside the palace. There's a nest of

sandbags in front of the palace; negro soldiers lie on their stomachs behind it with guns at the ready; a slender field-gun barrel pokes from the barricaded doorway; a lieutenant leans against it in an absolutely unearned heroic pose, arms crossed, the *revoltosos* (who aren't there) will never shake his iron resolve ... A big black lock of hair falls over his pale forehead, tumbling forth from under a khaki cap. The tour guide who guides the tourists from the English ship speaks to the lieutenant, meanwhile the tourists alight, gentlemen in Panama hats, ladies with teasing parasols, to form a motile herd facing the barricaded door, the heroic lieutenant; they're a little disgruntled, impatient: why don't the tour organisers sort out the nonsense!

The tour organisers do in fact exercise a mysterious control over the government of the state of Pará. At least they see the lieutenant disappear at once from the doorway: he's going straight to the Senhor Gobernador.

The Senhor Gobernador, His Excellency Senhor Doutor Antonino Emiliano da Souza Castro, sits in the room with the famous flooring; the floor is enormously widened and long, the room is huge, and in one corner there's a dear little writing desk, and on the desk, facing the Senhor Gobernador, lie some files – death sentences probably, no? Senhor Gobernador is just about to start writing, with tragical resolve: he has received a very insistent despatch from the President of the Republic; the President has enough to do with *revoltosos* in the south, the north must be restored to order, *Ordem e Progresso* ... Senhor Gobernador starts to write, resolved in favour of order and progress, and now the lieutenant appears: the English tourists would like to view the renowned inlaid floor. Senhor Gobernador, for the sake of Progress, interrupts the restoration of Order a little, and retires gracefully with his files into a non-inlaid antechamber; behind him the voice of the tour guide is already ringing out: "Ladies and gentlemen, this floor is made of the rarest and most noble woods to be found in the jungles of the State of Pará. This one is sandalwood, this tulipwood, this satinwood, and this ivory-wood. The red strips in between are the flame-coloured Brazil-wood that gave to this country its name ... The big painting on the wall represents the founder of Pará, Castello Branco, with Indian caciques at the mouth of the Rio Pará, concluding the first treaty ..."

The Cruisers stomp along behind the tour guide over the famous inlaid flooring. They go out through the door of the Governor's Palace, where the lieutenant, his heroism matched by his courtesy, has had the field-gun pushed a little to the side. At the tail end of the Cruisers is Bernhard Schwarz, today he is always the laggard, a few paces behind the rest. Dr Carson now and then casts a furtive glance his way.

The Cruisers proceed in the special tramcars to the cathedral; it's three hundred years old and beautiful and baroque; and high up on one of the two towers there's abruptly a palm tree; and as the tramcars with the Cruisers approach the cathedral the two drivers have to ring their bells like mad to clear the track: there's a big sombre funeral procession in the way, a thousand men and women, mostly brown folk of the lower class, barefoot, in cotton smocks following a bier covered in a big Brazilian flag: *Ordem e Progresso!* can be read at the spot where the corpse's face must lie concealed. The dead man is the young captain Assis Vasconcelos, who had led the revolutionaries, and fell at their head.

The rebel leader's coffin is quickly carried clear of the tram track, so that the English tourists can make their way through.

*

The tracks of the Pará Electric criss-cross the big hot town, down streets that blend Paris with Timbuktu. City of culture, negro village, wigwams three paces from the boulevard ... On this corner is the shop of Madame Hélène, Robes et Modes; truly robes et modes from Paris;

Madame Hélène is chocolate brown. Now at this corner the track turns down a side street, where a whole flock of urubú vultures sits on a dead animal; they look like black turkeys, and alongside them naked children splash in mud. Here the track curves again, the olive-green driver rings his bell, the urubú vultures flap into the air, and the car with the Cruisers is at once on the Rua João Alfredo, the main shopping street, filled with the treasures of civilisation. If one had the time and did not have a programme to complete, in the shops along this street one could hold in the hand a big diamond, as yet uncut, just arrived from the interior, or cut by Dutch diamond-cutters, set by Parisian jewellers, or clumps of gold-bearing dirt, Indian poison darts, turtleshell; and booths half open to the street offer the finest London shirts.

An elegant cocotte can purchase in Pará a dress from the Rue de la Paix; and a cannibal chieftain from somewhere in the Amazonian jungle can find feather crown, arm-ring, skirt, and bow. This town is very wild and very civilised, and over the banalities of its everyday life lies a delightful alien fragrance out of the monstrous forest, whose dark treetops can be seen from almost everywhere behind houses, huts.

The Cruisers on the narrow little benches of the tramway car, lined up nicely one behind the other, travel down the Rua João Alfredo without alighting. In the printed illustrated brochure studied by everyone aboard the *Hildebrand*, the Rua João Alfredo makes no appearance, but on the other hand the brochure points to the colourful and exotic life and bustle at the so-called Ver-o-Peso-Dock and the big market hall next door. The Cruisers (already a little stiff from sitting) leave the tram, as the Pará Electric intended, for a five minute inspection of this exotic life, and another five minutes for the bustle.

For the Ver-o-Peso, the small boat harbour, is where canoes with the garish sails lie, just returned from the wilderness with their balls of latex that only yesterday bronzed forest people had tapped from trees and smoked over palm-nut fires. An Indian, poling into the main current from a side stream, brings a boatload of turtle eggs or *eryngo* (ivory vegetable), or a freshly trapped tapir. And those there in the boat with the blue, the purple triangle of sail, half-naked fishermen, they're bringing the giant fish piracá. They shot it with bow and arrows, or balancing on the narrow raft they speared the mansized monster. Or else they caught in their nets some of the thousands and thousands of fish species seething there in the depths, incredible, so many different kinds. And in one canoe, hollowed with axe and fire from who knows what giant of the forest, paddled across during the night from the island of Marajó, lies a trussed crocodile; a black urchin is bringing it alive to market, Heaven knows why. Oh such a colourful bustle at the Ver-o-Peso, sails, poles, rags, flags, curious objects, and the people, more colourful than anything, Mestizos from the riverbanks: Curiboca, from a union of Whites and Indians; Mamelucos with more White blood, pale of face, lethargic as creoles; and Cafuzos of a dark aspect, negroid and Indian at the same time; and Caboclos, who are true Indians, but tamed, subdued, tucked into the trousers of civilisation, and negro people of every description, milk chocolate to tar, a plethora of races, types, faces beneath big straw hats, and the women cheerful and colourful in printed cottons, and baskets and loads ...

Five minutes the Cruisers are allowed for the Ver-o-Peso, five for the market, to which a lifetime might be dedicated. In the great hall with its iron pillars, what profusion of treasures! All the riches of the vast hot forest are there. This one has brought turtles to market, big beasts and juicy little ones, and their eggs from which oil is pressed; he found in riverbank sand the track of a mother-turtle, and he dug, and he found the eggs, hundreds and hundreds ... That one brings tobacco, incredibly good tobacco, in huge rolled garlands. And another brings fruit, wild, from the forest, and still others from the garden outside their hut: thick short Amazonian bananas that taste a little sour; and white pineapples that also have a trace of delightful sourness; and yellow pineapples, perfectly sweet, and oranges, big, green as

emerald, the inside a little fibrous, and *sapotihas* that look like grey-green bird's eggs, and taste like a dough of honey and flour, and the big tree-melons called here *mamões*, their taste a premonition of paradise; and purple abacates oozing thick juice, and mango-plums with their enormous stone, like a bone; and palm nuts, a thousand kinds, some that contain a milky juice, and some from which a finely scented oil can be pressed, and soapy fat; and some that can be lit to burn like a candle; and nuts of the ivory-palm whose sap hardens to resemble ivory; and *mirity*-nuts from which buttons are made; and a yellow powder obtained from the leaves of the carnauba tree, that can be boiled in water to make wax.

And a true bronzed Indian from the great forest, from a tribe that still lives free, has shot brightly coloured birds through a big blowpipe, using poisoned darts; he has brought to market in Pará a boatload of feathers of a silky sheen, to exchange for steel machetes that can hack a path through thick jungle, snow-white egret plumes and feathers the colour of precious stones, the myriad colours of a tropical flower garden and new-fallen dew sparkling in the sun.

And there are orchids in this market, and tortoises and gourd-shells lacquered black and painted barbarously; these are for drinking from. And odd porous ceramic vessels that keep water cool, and tobacco, tobacco to make a smoker drunk just by looking, and Indian pipes with garish stems, and little live monkeys, parrots and jaguar pelts, and the skins of snakes, alligators, so much ... so much ...

The Cruisers saw it all, in their five minutes.

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The two Pará Electric tramcars halted at the entrance to a park. The entrance was closed; a few soldiers lounged in the shade of a tree. The tour guide, who had managed to chase the Governor from his inlaid office without further ado, had no such luck here. He could be seen engaging with a Negro-Indian junior officer, and then rushing back: "Ladies and gentlemen, the Bosque Rodrigues Alves is closed by order, please take your seats again at once, we shall proceed to the Zoological Garden ..."

A murmuring arose from the Cruisers. The Bosque Rodrigues Alves, Pará's famous town park, had pride of place in the illustrated brochure: jungle reservation right in the middle of the town! In one pond was a live Manatee sea-cow, quite tame, lets tourists feed him! A tuffaceous grotto in which thousands of bats flit about! On board the *Hildebrand* they had bought picture postcards: the very same sea-cow being fed by tourists, and the bat grotto (from outside). It was hard to be deprived of a visit to the Town Park ...

In this park, in a tall bamboo grove to which the *Hildebrand's* prospectus also gave prominence, at this moment the body of a young rebel lay, being consumed by ants ...

Before the tramcars set off again, the tour guide hastily describes the district: The tram line will head now to the terminus by the water tower, the jungle begins right behind the tower. A visit to the jungle this morning is not possible, we still have the Zoological Garden to tick off our list ...

Only Dr Carson is interested in the Zoological Garden. His travelling companions have had their fill of jaguars, tapirs, and parrot aviaries, and sit cool and comfortable at the open-air restaurant beneath shady trees. There's a delightful little snack: iced drinks with a fantastic fruit salad, papayas, alligator pears, white pineapple and a kind of banana that's especially thick and had a slightly sharp taste ...

Meanwhile Carson stood by himself at a low wire-mesh cage enclosing a huge *sukurujú* snake, a dreadful water-boar: a little black hen had been placed in the cage as feed. The snake

seemed lethargic, its stomach full, it ignored the hen, and the hen seemed not in the least concerned as it pecked at insects.

Berhard Schwarz was not among the company.

Carson strolled through the whole zoo and did not see him. He went into the museum in the middle of the gardens; it had a butterfly collection, minerals, snakes in spirits, and a large assortment of Indian potshards from Marajó island.

Dr Schwarz was not in the museum either. Now others among the Cruisers realised he was missing; elderly Miss McPherson thought she recalled that he had not been on the tram since the stop at the Town Park.

CHAPTER THREE

Outside the shuttered entrance to the Town Park, Bernhard Schwarz had suddenly become overwhelmed by despair. He had traipsed all morning subdued and silent along with the Cruisers, harbouring an obscure notion of somehow salvaging what he could of his Amazonian fever-dream. The radiant magical adventure for which he had spent his whole life yearning was melting away in the heat of this tropical day, until nothing was left but this grotesque herd of tourists parading through the foreign town, or rather passing it by, past its true nature, past the feverish reality jouncing and bouncing within it at this very moment. This man, driven to the Amazon by an incurable inclination to the romantic, was now utterly incapable of realising how romantic it all actually was, the revolution, the repressed passion of this curious multi-coloured town. All the Brazilian romance now actually presented to him he felt as nothing more than an annoying and detestable interruption of his dreams, the funeral parade of the heroic rebel leader merely a traffic obstruction on the way to the jungle ...

And yet the ridiculous tram trip with the Cruisers did signify for him the way to the jungle. That the jungle they were scheduled to visit was a town park, with a music pavilion and a cement pool for the town sea-cow, Bernhard Schwarz never properly thought through. The noise of their chatter, the tour guide's busy officiousness, all the hoopla, the strolling and riding in a gaggle of others – all this had diverted (O bliss!) his proper attention; he went around like a worker who has trapped his hand in a machine and the machine has amputated it; he senses a dull discomfort but does not realise what has happened, he has not yet caught sight of his stump, and only when he's seen it will he suddenly feel the full onset of pain and the impotent despair of a cripple.

This sudden moment of agonizing full consciousness had now arrived for Schwarz, as the party was refused entry to the park. His subconscious must still have hoped somehow that the park would be more than a miserable surrogate for the great jungle nature he was now unable to visit; or else this new and actually rather trivial disappointment all at once brought the big, the real one clearly into view. Whatever the reason, only at the barred entrance to the Bosque Rodrigues Alves was the mental rigidity broken which since yesterday had mercifully prevented this shattered dreamer from screaming, raging, going mad. Elderly Miss McPherson, the last of the Cruisers to see Bernhard Schwarz at the entrance to the park, must have been a poor judge of human character not to notice the man's hopeless despair. If he refrained from doing something crazy even in front of all these people, throwing himself to the ground, screaming, weeping, he was saved only by a passionate desire to distance himself quickly from these indifferent strangers. He could tolerate their presence only for as long as they were a means to the all-important end. Now the overpowering imperative in his mind was to disappear at once, not stay a moment longer in a company that had lost all meaning. A sharp

eye could have spotted him while the two tramcars were still there, hiding behind the wooden fruit stall by the park entrance; from there he could hear what the tour guide said about the jungle: its edge lay very close, behind the next tram stop, by the tall water tower you see rising behind the nearest treetops ...

To this Bernhard Schwarz headed, as soon as his companions left. The soldiers at the entrance grinned after the bespectacled gringo, striding like a madman through the midday heat, not on the shady side of the road but wheezing and stumbling along the sundrenched sandy rim of the storm drain in the middle. He ran brandishing a big badly furled umbrella ahead of him, coattails flapping against his legs. He was already breathless and exhausted when he arrived at the water tower, a tall iron structure that pumped water from a jungle stream to supply the town's water mains.

Here the road came to a sudden end, having remained urban and civilised right up to this spot. It at once became a narrow sandy path between primitive huts of woven palm, a few small gardens with breadfruit trees, banana clumps, rows of manioc. Here the fleshy luxuriant green of cultivated plants became the harder, darker green of wild vegetation; gardens separated from the path by fences lost themselves in unending indeterminacy.

A heavy relentless heat lay over the path. It was exactly noon, noon at the equator, sun at its very zenith; trees gave no shade. A few darkskinned children squatting outside the palm huts goggled at the foreigner dashing past. Physical exhaustion at last forced a slower pace. He had left behind the path between gardens, and arrived at a big building that stood in a clearing of tall grass. Behind it soared the dark green wall of the jungle vastness. This was Pará's waterworks building, which caught and filtered one of the hundred thousand jungle streams, leading it through mechanical works into the pipes of the big hybrid town in the jungle. Behind this technical building, glowing within with electric lights, where wheels revolved and chemists tested the water – there behind it, beginning at the first assai palm, was the grandiose wilderness of green forest that stretched across the entire South American continent, a world of jaguars and alligators, human civilisation represented by a handful of rubber-tapping savages, and behind them, beside them in the bush nothing more than tribes of naked hunters, ignorant of metal, who killed their prey – and their enemies – with poisoned darts blown through a tube ...

The tangle behind the Pará waterworks was the sudden abrupt beginning of this enormous and mysterious primeval world. In this jungle, hardly yet explored, lurked every secret, every adventure, every treasure, every peril. You could ride to the very edge in a car of the Pará Electric Railways, the fare four hundred reis from the Grande Hotel, from Madame Hélène's fashion salon, from shops where you could buy the latest Parisian perfumes; a conductor dressed in white clips the ticket; then out you climb, and suddenly there's the huge jungle; an ichthyosaurus swimming in the next forest pool would hardly be a surprise ...

So it was here, at the very edge of the settled urban world, that Bernhard Schwarz from Leitmeritz found himself all of a sudden, he who was just now in despair because he was forbidden entry to a tropical town park with a music pavilion and gravelled paths – the whole problem turned out to be so amazingly simple: the jungle of his dreams, it's right here, here it is, unmistakable, physical, a real thing that you can touch with your hands ...

The man had dreamed of just this jungle his whole life. Half an hour ago he was in despair because they wouldn't let him into the park. Now here he was at the edge of the jungle, and ...

Aboard the *Hildebrand*, Bernhard Schwarz had gone around in a khaki suit with leather spats about his legs because of poisonous snakes, and a compass in his pocket. He had needed

these things, for his dream ... Once you're in the jungle – and not just on an excursion trailing behind a tour guide – perhaps you might somehow ... not come out, perhaps? Embark on an expedition on one's own account; there are blank spots on the map ...

Now, about to plunge into the great forest, Bernhard Schwarz was dressed in a jacket with long tails, not even a knife in his pockets. Still in his lifelong dream, still in the illusions of days past, he had cast aside yesterday's boundless disappointment, its vulgar reality – wearing garb suited to that reality. And so now he hurled himself at once with both feet into the great adventure; he began to push on into the boundless Amazonian forest, alone, without a guide, dressed like a North European high school teacher, lacking provisions, quinine and gun. For the elderly man standing behind the Pará waterworks with eyes aglow and straggles of stubble, standing at the boundary line of this tree-continent, in the merciless Amazonian noontime – with his two bare trembling hands this man grasped heroically for the ungraspable, the endless! A pathetic schoolmaster, who had saved up his whole life for this journey – possibly! A fool, chasing after a chimera – probably! A child that must have its toy – evidently! But there can be no doubt that the pensioned schoolmaster from Leitmeritz was at this moment intent, prepared and all set to cross the Hylaea⁷ of the Amazonian Basin on foot, always straight ahead, through those regions marked on the map as blank spots, past jaguars, anacondas and Indian headhunters, through alligator pools and fever swamps.

As he stood there, his rather weary back turned on the whole of civilisation – not just the municipal waterworks of Pará and the Grande Hotel, where at this moment his fellow Cruisers, wearied from all the sights, were sitting down to the most exotic of all lunches: turtle steaks and manioc; his back turned not only on the Pará Electric Railways tram stop, and the entire town of Pará, but turned also on the distant town of Leitmeritz and a long, long, respectable life; as he stood there, gazing at the first jungle tree, a delicately feathered assai-palm with a whitish trunk, as he stood there with his tail-coat, umbrella and comical board-stiff straw hat from the back of beyond, he was – even if a little ridiculous – above all quite heroic: one who truly had the courage of his dreams, one who, disappointed of some miserable town park, had found in his soul a great jungle-courage; a heroic deserter from respectable life; one who stood facing the first jungle tree prepared if necessary to clamber to the top and stay there, a homesick returnee, a romantic conquistador.

So there he stood, and gazed perhaps on the fabulous land of El Dorado, and perhaps on the curious country of the Amazon women, and perhaps on an as yet undiscovered world, somewhere amid the swamps, populated by dinosaurs; and perhaps on huge lumps of diamond, caves full of emeralds – anything was possible in this mysterious infinity of green. But one thing was certain: he stepped into this fairytale like a fairytale hero, without guile or fear, driven by impulses from his distant youth, from that Jules Verne book he had read as a child: how Lina follows the great liana, always onward, ever on⁸ ...

An old man who behaves like a boy lives the one true life!

*

Bernhard Schwarz was clearly prepared to throttle with his bare hands any jaguar lurking just behind the next tree, but the adventure that awaited him was quite different. Behind the first assai-palm there came at first an open and easy path. A shallow stream flowed here out of the forest, heading towards the great river in the distance. It was the waters of this stream that were filtered in that big building, and delivered to the town's mains. The riverbank had been

⁷ Humboldt's term for the Amazon-Orinoco forests (from Gk *hyla*: forest).

⁸ Jules Verne: *Eight Hundred Leagues on the Amazon*, ch. VII.

prettily laid for some distance with stone flags, for the benefit of the two Indian workers who patrolled several times a day, each with a net on a long bamboo pole. With these they fished from the stream any floating bits of vegetation and small dead animals – anything that came floating out of the jungle thickets. When the stone flags ended, the stream bank became immediately so overgrown that pushing through without a machete was impossible. But even a schoolmaster in a tailcoat could make his way comfortably enough up to that point, truly through some genuine, unfaked jungle.

This stretch of path Bernhard Schwarz now trod quite slowly, with the light step and reverential deliberateness of a child entering a Christmas drawing room: he walked in a solemn daze. Everything around him was more beautiful and sublime even than in his dream-jungle; he seemed to be walking down a huge, shady and yet brightly lit arcade, alongside the clear stream where strange fishes played; to right and left were stage sets of improbably dark green forest, a single, closed, grandiose mass and yet of unparalleled kaleidoscopic multiplicity. Walls made of spears, fans, plates, ropes, grotesque lattice-work in a thousand nuances of green, grey, silver. The European eye needed time to grasp something of this forest; it was no forest but a battle, to be enjoyed not lyrically like the pale forests back home, but as a cruel and twisted epic, a momentous vegetative drama. This tall mauritia-palm soaring from undergrowth into sunlight is the victor of a bloody struggle, overmastering weaker contestants with grim violence to win a place through the thicket's turmoil. Now there it stands, victorious, gorgeously adorned by a mighty garland of vine that clothes the naked trunk like a feast-day cloak – but is nothing other than a malicious enemy of the palm, its last and most decisive, a plant-snake that will slowly but surely throttle the tree. If one understood it rightly, it was a vision of life, struggle and death, sensed in a hundred thousand repetitions all around, a tumult of creation, thriving and ruin in one single green confusion; the whole meaning of living and dying Creation symbolised in one enormous unfathomable green ornament. The eye, unadjusted to this mystical world, would see nothing beyond the bewilderingly baroque architecture of the wall of foliage and the roof it made over the little stream, and sharply flickering spots of light and black shadow.

Bernhard Schwarz, an intruder into this jungle antechamber, showed by his demeanour that his great yearning could have been no mere folly; he who had stormed in like a berserker became after the first few steps ever calmer, quieter, more deliberate, until he came softly, softly to the very end of the stone path where there was a wide tree stump on which one might sit – and Curupira, unpredictable mischievous spirit of the Amazonian wilderness, had selected precisely this tree stump to be free of human-tormenting insects. The jungle spirit wanted to provide the yearning human with an hour of total joy, so that he would sit with his tailcoat on this tree stump as if on a bench, and his soul would sprout aerial roots to dig their way into this yearned-for soil.

As he sat there so peacefully, and gradually even his breathing became quite, quite silent – as the beating of his poor old heart quietened and his gaze grew kindly and mild, he began to notice more of his surroundings than just the stage sets of light and shade on either side of a glittering stream. First, dragonflies came flitting over the water like little aeroplanes, but they glittered, emerald green and scarlet. Then all at once the dance of butterflies, a fantastic aerial ballet as if sunbeams had materialised, as if all the colours of the prism had gathered to form flying surfaces – until now a true miracle happens: suddenly a winged sapphire has appeared from somewhere, a brilliant blue morpheus butterfly with shimmering reflectors on wings big as a human hand, with a quite unreal melding of colours. This butterfly, approaching over the sunny forest stream, fluttered, came to rest here on a palm leaf, there on a liana, slowly steadily nearer, right to the tree stump where Dr Bernhard Schwarz from Leitmeritz sat, and

settled with the gentlest matter-of-factness onto the man's hand; so blessed he felt, so calmed, so totally without anxieties, ripe for any miracle, any fable.

The magical butterfly rested on the unmoving hand, and it seemed that by this delightful contact all at once everything was made different: where up till now there had been only rigid vegetation and the dance of sunlight sparkling amidst deep shadows, all at once the man in the jungle saw an abundance of conscious life: he had inadvertently discovered the tree with the weaver-birds. It was an unattractive whitish trunk, seemingly plucked bare, with many branches; and from the branches hung long nests like cucumbers, but much bigger than the biggest cucumber. This giant cucumber – but it was woven from plant stuff, withered and brown, like the material of a coarse straw hat – it had several holes leading to the interior. The tall bare tree hosted several dozen such nests, it was a bird-town, and when Bernhard Schwarz looked more closely he saw fabulous brightly-coloured birds flying about the nests or perching on twigs, fantastically coloured birds of the finch family, but some almost as big as a pigeon, a red, green, yellow sparrow-tribe, fidgety, constantly busy with the nest and with each other, in either love or quarrel.

The eye, having so suddenly learned to spy flitting birds, now discovered in the treetops a delightful fluttering, swooping, flashing of fantastical colours. There were big birds. And others very small and hard to distinguish from big butterflies; they flashed in the sun like winged jewels. On a big urucury-palm, heavy with nuts, an entire tribe of parrots had settled, the source of a discordant din. Only now, as the intruding human sat quite still, was the air perceived to be filled with noises. A woodpecker hidden behind a tree trunk hammered rhythmically; and from somewhere came an unknown and slightly eerie sound, like the cutting edge of a mysterious scythe.

These sounds, and even a single note of shrill song high in a nearby treetop, could be heard emerging from the general symphony. Otherwise all was a vague indefinite weave from grass and thickets, a sound-fabric of strange and distant noises that seemed always to be swelling; the forest, at first discerned as lonely and frozen, was filled with sound and movement; from the undergrowth came a constant rustling; a pool of stagnant water, glimpsed shimmering through the dense tracery of branches, was constantly disturbed by splashes and plops, and circles of ripples expanded meaningfully across the glittering surface.

By his right toecap Bernhard Schwarz suddenly spotted something strange and exciting: two big grey-green lizards that looked like miniaturised primeval dragons had each bitten into the other and were silently fighting in deadly enmity. The murderous fury of the creatures was so great that they paid no attention to the monster-man right beside them. But the man shrank back from this tragic conflict at his feet, and made the fateful movement that cost him the blessed trust of the lovely big butterfly: it flew up from the hand that twitched so suddenly; once again the great wings flashed like big star sapphires between the fan-ribs of a palm leaf, and the lovely little miracle had disappeared, and with it the delightful hour of peace. From this moment on the jungle was as if bewitched, unfriendly and menacing, whether because of the coal-black cloud that began to hide the sun, or for some other more secret causes.

It was enough: if up till now everything in the forest had seemed a jolly idyll, now the bleak contest between the two demonic little dragon-beings seemed to destroy the deceptive calm; amid the general indistinct buzz from the undergrowth came menacing noises, or so it seemed to the eavesdropper; he realised, shocked to his core, what he had known but not understood: that he was here not in a charming paradisiacal garden, but in the biggest and most terrible murderer's lair in all of Nature, a vast organisation of ubiquitous devouring by plant and creature; each one of these trees had grown tall by murder, and in the same ruthless

way that it had choked other plant life, was now itself being choked by vines; parasites gnawed away at it, and the fungi of moist putrefaction. Still it lifted its crown towards light's salvation; it bore flowers to perpetuate the business of procreation, produced fruits and seeds. But all this was food for even mightier beings, from the leaf-bug and the louse to the ants running up the trunk on their own account, bees seeking pollen, beetles gnawing into bark. Little birds – those very same delightful winged jewels – came to catch ants or beetles; and big birds chased the little birds, and fish in the stream waited for the insect falling from a twig into water, and big fish waited for the little fish, and if the big fish came to the big watercourse, there the caiman lay waiting for it – and at the very last, in branches and on the ground, the jaguar lay in wait for everything that did not swim underwater, for the turtle, for the monkey with the human face. The jaguar's stomach and the crocodile's stomach took final stock of all life in the jungle. Only the human, in some mysterious way evading these forces of the forest, knew how to combat them, and prevail. A naked Indian with a blowpipe and a few poisoned darts was lord of the jungle, and could eat anything edible; in him the glorious pinnacle of evolution was achieved, the final great triumph attained ...

Such a train of thought might have brought to consciousness in the school teacher from Leitmeritz, as he sat there on his tree stump, a fact that until now he had somewhat deliberately ignored: that though he had brought his umbrella with him into the jungle, he had no blowpipe or poisoned darts; that dressed in the tailcoat of civilisation he might not be exactly the equal of a naked Indian. A long way from being able to devour the whole jungle, he was at risk of being devoured himself, even if maybe not in this spot a few paces behind the municipal waterworks. But now, in an inwardness filled with the noblest of yearnings, it was impossible to mistake the fact that in him, in the romantic inwardness of the high school teacher Bernhard Schwarz, there was an absence of the midday meal that his fellow Cruisers had just enjoyed at the Grande Hotel, and declared outstanding. No juicy fruit hung mouth-wateringly before the European sitting here at the very edge of the great wilderness; and no deer approached to offer itself for a roast. Possibly the jungle was full of treasures, of tasty nourishment. The tree Bernhard Schwarz was sitting beside might be the renowned cow-tree; and if he had not left his pocket knife behind at the hotel along with all the other implements in the pockets of his khaki suit, and if it really was a cow-tree, and if he had known how to make the right kind of incision in the bark – oh, without doubt a wonderful fatty milk-sap would have oozed from the tree, sweet and nutritious as the best cream! So long, that is, as it was not a kind of poison sap that looks the same, or milky latex that turns to rubber in the stomach ...

Be that as it may, an entire jungle filled with cow-trees that he could not milk meant as little to Dr Bernhard Schwarz as a forest of ironwood trees, whose wood is hard, or pequi trees, whose wood is yellow, or the massaranduba-tree, whose wood is red, or the satinwood-tree, or the rosewood-tree, or the palm whose sap hardens to ivory, or the otter-tree, or even the Brazil-nut tree, for palm nuts, while they still hung high up on a palm swaying in the wind, were of no significance to him. In a word, he was more or less the only entity in the whole voracious jungle who could find absolutely nothing to eat, so high had he been elevated by a stupendous urban civilisation above such instinct-driven beings as climbing monkeys and naked Indians. The enormous yearning that had driven him back into this lost forest home had failed to equip him with either a prehensile tail or the skill to blow a dart from a big blowpipe, or (to be sure) to hit anything ...

See how he rises from his tree stump, at the end of the glorious deceiving hour of bliss that Curupira, mischievous spirit of this vast tangle of vegetation, has granted him. The morning's mad heroism has not yet completely ebbed away, nor the Conquistador resolve: So this is the

jungle, the jungle so often dreamed of, now one must take it to oneself, something has to happen, but what? In the human heart that lies, alas, so close to the stomach, a wonderful irrationality battles continually with a growing awareness that a dream is a dream, and an assured lunch is a lunch; so now the poor heart seeks a compromise, no? It might be a laborious matter to conquer the entire oversized forest, but perhaps a manageable little piece, a sort of symbol?

Now Bernhard Schwarz leaves the paved path – yes, this he does – and presses his tall elderly form on into the bush, pushes powerfully on in, maybe hoping to reach the blank spot on the map, the marvellous land of Unexplored, maybe only to reach that wonderful golden-red flower seen glowing in the foliage a few meters away, high up in the delicate feather-leaves of the unknown tree bending over the water. This lone red and gold orchid, a Vanda or a Cattleya, freeloading up there on a branch, sprouting gloriously from the horrid confused tangle of its rootwork; this one triumphant patch of colour in all the thousand shades of green is what caught the eye of an indecisive being, much as the hypnotist's shiny object captures the tired gaze: to pluck this orchid, hold it in one's hand, ah, for what? – it seemed at this moment the most important – the only – meaning in an elapsed life.

Let no one assume too readily to know the deepest secrets of a human heart; at this moment everything is still possible, everything; if Bernhard Schwarz touches this flaming flower, this fabulously crystallised piece of jungle, who know how the evil magic of an orchid will work – these the most tempting of flowers! Perhaps, once he has the flower, he will head farther on into the jungle, on and on, and a cabin on the *Hildebrand* will become vacant, one in the economy class. The mere sight of this orange-red and fire-red and glowing gold amid the green lacquered leaves, the curious jaggedness of the flower-shape, and the waxy shimmer from within it are enough to re-awaken all the foolish instincts in this man; he crashes against unyielding vegetation, is snagged by one of his coattails, pulls angrily free, receives a whiplash from a twig on his spectacle lenses, cares not a whit, forces his way through with energy and even some skill in his powerful act of willfulness. And now he halts, sweating a little and breathless, beneath the overhanging branch in the fork of which the miracle flower is growing.

This last happy moment of pause and relieved sigh will be recalled even much later as something consolingly sweet: there are heavy scents in the hot damp air, it smells of vanilla, or maybe it's already the scent of this big orchid, what magic may lurk within it, what enchantment, what madness ...

Now, at this very moment, Bernhard Schwarz may be at the point of most momentous decision; it is still plausible and possible that he will cast everything aside – his impossible straw hat from the back of beyond, and his stupid tail-coat, and his schoolmaster's spectacles, and above all the grotesque cotton umbrella with the bent handle – and will quite simply clamber up this jungle tree, up to the orchid – and then stay there grown completely mad and completely happy, at home amid these branches for which at bottom we all of us yearn even if we don't always want to know it. Somewhere in the tangle of the Amazonian jungle the sylvan spirit Curupira pricks up his pointy faun-ears; they quiver in anticipation. Who knows what bliss the capricious spirit would have it in him to grant a human who is now surrendering unreservedly to his old instincts? Curupira would present to the panting intruder the glowing jungle flower, the great intoxication of its scent, and then ...

Oh my tamed civilised God! Does he intrude farther, this Dr Bernhard Schwartz? He does not clamber up the tree, on which may lurk his greatest joy or maybe a huge anaconda snake; he does not surrender wholly, his little bit of common sense holds him back from this overreach that might have been the commonsensical move; he means to compromise with Curupira! He

will use his umbrella to hook the symbolic flower of temptation from its fork! There he stands, fishing with the bent handle wildly in the air, on the tips of his worn-out shoes – thus will he attain the golden fire-orchid! And there, hidden behind a tree trunk, mischievous Curupira grins and grants the bold man his wish: the most unlikely thing happens: the umbrella handle catches the right spot in the fork of the right branch, the schoolmaster in delight lends his whole weight to the umbrella and tugs and tugs, until suddenly the branch whips up into the air taking the umbrella with it, who knows where to ...



But the umbrella handle has already loosened the root-clump of the parasitic plant, down it comes through the foliage with a pattering rustle, straight down, into the pair of shocked hands from which the umbrella has flown. Curupira laughs out loud in the thicket, the human has his yearned-for glowing miracle flower, there it is, he holds it in his cupped hands ...

... and with a sudden shriek he drops the flower, it splashes into the stream, the orchid floats away, it looks so gorgeous, and Bernhard Schwarz, the man of great yearning, shrieks like a whipped child and squats at the stream's edge frantically dipping both hands in the water, not to retrieve the receding miracle flower of his dreams, oh no, not that, far, far from it: he plunges his poor hands in the water because they hurt like anything, tormented by hot biting fires, because along with the great golden orchid a couple of little ants have fallen onto each hand, the terrible dark red kind called fire-ants, because their bite is not like a bite, more like the flames of Hell.

There he lies stretched on the ground, the Conquistador, exactly eleven paces from the cleared and paved path of the municipal waterworks; he lies there holding his tormented hands in water that's about to be filtered and directed to Pará, to the Grande Hotel where the

Cruisers are enjoying their afternoon snooze; but the water – won't it be made hot by this flaming agony? A few tears fall into the stream; the old man howls, howls, and perhaps not only because of the ant bites. As he lies there on the bank of the jungle stream, watching the big golden orchid drift slowly away towards the grill of the filter bed, and a couple of tiny ants too, that fishes snap at – may they do you good, fishes! – as he lies there crying, his hands in the water, the rosy golden meaning of his entire life floats away with them, and all the scents that enticed him into fantasies, and all the joys of tomfoolery; what's left is a pensioned pedagogue, who has treated himself to a pleasure cruise far beyond his means, and *this* is what pleasure means, and in the state of Amazonas some stupid revolution has won the day, and it's already almost certain that the *Hildebrand* won't be able to go on, and the shipping company has no obligation to reimburse any of the fare.

And the umbrella hangs out of reach in the tree, and tropical rain begins to fall, relentless, frightful, sweeping everything away.

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A remarkably bedraggled unsteady gringo this afternoon provides a great deal of fun for the yellow, olive-green and chocolate-brown urchins of the last lanes of huts, although they merely titter gently behind his back after he has tottered by through clinging mud and dirt. The rain has stopped, big drops hang from the blue-green leaves of breadfruit trees in the little gardens, the manioc fields are wonderfully wet, the earth radiates hot mists, the sky appears blanched, pure and merciless. Bernhard Schwarz from Leitmeritz stumbles swiftly on, and behind his back all the little naked tummies distended by farinha begin to wobble merrily. A grey-haired old witch with a grey-black face scrabbles at the hanging mat and peeps from the doorway of the palm-leaf hut; she has a maize-cob pipe in her ghastly mouth, she calls out to the hurrying man, not in Portuguese but in Tupi-Guarani.

He does not see her, continues on, dripping and grotesque, in shoes that slop with water. Somehow he reaches the market hall, the comical little tram station, the villas of the Rua Nazareth, and at last, somehow, to the hotel.

CHAPTER FOUR

Next day the *Hildebrand* left her berth at the quayside and sailed some distance downriver, to a little round forested island. There she dropped anchor again, and a big flat-bottomed river steamer tied up alongside. All day long cranes clanked as they lowered cargo from the big ship onto the deck of the smaller vessel. The amiable ship's doctor explained to the passengers that these were actually goods destined for Pará; but the chief steward had let slip that bales the *Hildebrand* was supposed to take upriver to Manaus were also being unloaded. No one could now reasonably doubt that the voyage was thwarted, and would end here. There were still optimists on board who hoped for a continuation: might not the beastly revolution in the state of Amazonas suddenly collapse?

Meanwhile the revolution appeared to be spreading; a rebel assault on the state and town of Pará might occur at any moment. It was for this reason the *Hildebrand* had been brought to this quiet corner, nearer to the river mouth and open sea. Once or twice a day a little tender flying an ensign with the slanting red cross of the Booth Line rode back and forth between the *Hildebrand* and the town, and passengers had the option of a few hours on dry land.

Very few made use of the opportunity, for who could be sure the *Hildebrand* would still be there when they returned? The few daredevils who nevertheless spent an afternoon in Pará

were admired as demi-heroes on their return, bearing souvenirs amassed in haste: big polished turtle shells, a boa-skin, jaguar pelts, little boxes and cigarette cases of rare Brazilian woods, white egret plumes, Indian headdresses of gay toucan feathers, and painted Indian arrows that no Indian could ever have let fly. In addition these emissaries flew back to the Ark with newspapers, from which no real information could be gleaned, and with rumours whispered into their ears at the Grande Hotel and in shops: the fleet of the *revoltosos*, a mysterious and very mighty fleet, had long since passed the fort at Obidos, no, it lay already in the narrows, among the many islands, no, it had already slipped by some mysterious means right up to the town, and lay concealed, an enormous army was about to come ashore, no, had already landed, tonight a great massacre would begin ... No, armoured government vessels were already on their way, fishermen near Salinas had seen them enter the river ...

That the authorities in Pará were arming like mad, calling up reservists, setting up gun emplacements at the harbour, converting the most decrepit river steamers into gunboats – these might be taken as facts.

Most of the *Hildebrand's* passengers passed the sultry day lethargic in deckchairs. A few especially energetic exemplars of the British nation had, despite the heat, initiated a deck-golf competition, with pretty prizes. An absurd proposal from the ship's doctor, that since as good as nothing would be seen of the Amazon River, a lecture by him in the dining hall, with lantern slides, would be at least some consolation, was surprisingly well received. All were anyway consoling themselves in their own way: the elderly Miss McPherson spent all day pinning butterflies; Mr Smith, who had found the Grande Hotel's Pilsner not to his taste, enjoyed his frequently applied bottle of Bass ...

The less patient, or less obtuse, among them felt free to curse (unless ladies were around) and pace furiously up and down the promenade deck, and Lady Athill, whose smiling calm nothing could disturb, completed her prescribed number of miles while his lordship sat in weary silence in his big chair of white Madeira wickerwork, alongside white-haired Dr Carson, who continued indomitably to enjoy his holiday. Hilary often joined their little company, settling himself in her ladyship's chair at his lordship's right hand. The three of them spoke low and earnestly of Bernhard Schwarz. He sat nearly all day in dull silence in the smoking room, mostly beside Mr Smith and his bottle of Bass, letting the old man's chatter wash over him; he had not ventured ashore again. Sometimes he could be seen on the sunny side of the ship that was avoided by all other passengers, staring across at the little jungle island so close by, or farther out to the glimmering expanses of water that disappeared behind other islands – entry point to the famous narrows so poetically depicted in the illustrated brochure, the narrow strait where the carefully steered vessel would almost slide against jungle trees. At times in the day when this side lay in shadow, the other passengers also gazed much in that direction, on account of the big *revoltosos* fleet. More than one had suddenly seen a smoke-banner rise into the sky, yes, seen flashes reflecting off their guns, quite apart from the continual thunder of their canon – when no one else was nearby. At night mysterious fires were seen flaring in the jungle. Maybe insurgents lurked in a clearing, maybe it was a mestizo, smoking rubber-tree latex.

All this time Bernhard Schwarz, out of mechanical habit, sat all day in the smoking room facing the big map that now meant nothing to him. Or he lay on the narrow bunk in his cabin. He would have preferred to lie there forever, alone in the half-dark, but too little air entered the cabin through the mosquito net that covered the porthole. Bernhard Schwarz was tired, weak, visibly older. He no longer disported himself like an idiot, but walked about dressed as a normal old man, respectable as any Englishman. Mr Smith liked him better this way. They often drank a bottle of ale together.

At the end of one of these vacant days, the sun at last went down, the golden brown water turned copper-red, blood-red, violet; to the west, in the glory of the sinking solar globe, the fantastical outlines of distant objects could be seen, golden islands whose existence had gone unsuspected. A group of passengers who gathered at the bow identified once again with a delicious shudder the smoke of the rebel fleet, this time there was no doubting it. The assault would happen tonight. And a little dance evening had been arranged for this evening on deck. What else could one do?

Lord Athill lay in his chair of white wickerwork. Above his fine head a tasteless rubric was woven into the back of the chair: *Madeira 1924*. Athill lay there, limp as always, in a dark grey suit of shiny material and silk shirt; his narrow lined face was pale. Beside him lay Dr Carson, his hair much whiter, but he was still full of strength and blood, harbouring within a great deal of serene wisdom and good beefsteaks. He had put on dark glasses to watch the setting sun. Lord Athill too watched the sun, his eyes, clouded and old, needed no glasses.

"Good," said Dr Carson, "I'll go and have a word with him!" He stood up with a sigh of indolence overridden, but his joints were in good order, his muscles elastic. He gave his lordship a quarter-bow, because he was after all a lord, and nodded to him as a valued friend who had just now earned a claim to respect between men; for the mission Dr Carson was about to undertake on Lord Athill's behalf was a rather remarkable one.

"All right, I'll go," said the doctor.

"All right," said his lordship, wearily. He saw nothing but the dreamily pretty colours of the sunset. Such a wonderful end! Such a light at the uttermost edge of darkness! Not every sunset was as lovely, as colourful as this ...

Eric Lord Athill had lost his only son in the War. Ever since, there was not much left of him apart from a tormented brain, numbed nerves, and a somewhat dull and tolerant benevolence. He was more concerned than Dr Carson with the fate of this German, this Mr Schwarz. Lord Athill knew what it is when one suddenly finds that life no longer has meaning.

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Dr Carson found Schwarz nowhere on deck: the man couldn't bear to watch the sunset – distant jungle islands haloed in gold and purple, it was too much; he crept from such glory into his cabin.

He occupied pretty much the smallest and worst cabin on the ship. The single porthole offered a view of the forward part of the vessel, and all its noises: at night every sound from the crew made its way into the cabin: the bosun piping, sailors stomping. Ever since they began taking on even at night, the cabin had become a regular Inferno. The tiny space, hot and stifling, though underway in cooler seas it would be airy enough, seemed even smaller, packed as it was with the jungle dreamer's romantic bivouac-sheets and leather spats; the occupant of course had no big hanging wardrobe to put them in. There was just enough room for him on the narrow bunk; there he lay in shirtsleeves, staring at the white ceiling divided in two by a steel joist. On the edges of this steel beam a mass of butterflies was clustered, big grey moths and little moths; it was funny how they made their way in, for the porthole was blocked by wire mesh against mosquitoes, in the same way as another wire mesh took the place of door panels not needed in this climate. There were actually no flies in the cabin; but the butterflies found their way by some mysterious means into every space on the ship.

Dr Carson came along the narrow passage to the cabin door, and looked through the wire mesh. Something in the expression of the man lying on the bunk advised him neither to knock

nor to announce his presence in other ways, but simply to unlatch the door, which was not bolted. He entered without a word, and with a few energetic motions made a space for himself on the only available seat – a cushioned bench under the round porthole. The jumble that covered the bench Dr Carson placed calmly and matter-of-factly onto a trunk, laying on top the white linen jacket he had just taken off, as the cabin was almost unbearably hot. Then he sat and watched the man on the bunk attentively for a while. Carson's narrow Anglo-Saxon head, shaped like an axe becoming sharper at the front, looked at this moment benign and trustworthy. The forehead beneath the head of white hair glowed ruddily of youth and soap; the eyes behind the excessively gold-rimmed pince-nez were perhaps somewhat cold, but their gaze was not unfriendly; the mouth, unrestrained by whiskers, seemed fine and tender; rude energy resided in the chin. He entered not like a visitor to a stranger's room, but like a doctor to a sickbed, and the patient understood at once and took on the attitude of a feverish invalid in a bad mood. He flounced about a little on the bunk and looked at the doctor, but said not a word, made no attempt to stand or do the honours of a host, nothing of the sort. Only a friend, or a doctor, could be thus received. In his look was something of the child's complaint: Help me, you can't help me in the least!

Dr Carson said: "Well, Mr Schwarz ..."

He sat on the uncomfortably narrow bench with knees spread, the very image of self-confidence. Underneath he was shy and even a little embarrassed. Having said "Well ..." he kept silent, cleared his throat, but it sounded fake, and said again, "Well, Mr Schwarz ..."

Then, with a sudden burst of energy: "Now look here, it's pointless taking the matter so seriously. There are other people on the ship who would love to know the Amazon River a bit better, Lord Athill for example ..."

(Now came what Athill had discussed earlier with Carson; he brought it out in a rush of rather stiff words, which were meant to be light and plausible.)

"Look here, Athill's health is not good, the climate's bad for him, it wasn't very clever of him to undertake this voyage, he won't do it a second time. But it's quite possible I shall spend my holidays like this again next year. Would you not care to repeat the trip next summer? Or even in the spring?"

Schwarz twisted his face into a horrible grimace, dribble trickled into his beard, he muttered something disdainful.

Dr Carson took no notice, but continued: "I think, since the voyage means so much to you, it might be made possible. Lord Athill takes an interest – I mean he would very much like to know your impressions of the next stretch; and I, as the doctor ..." He was fluffing his lines horribly; he gave a brief smile, then forged a path through the thicket of his pious lies: "In a word, Schwarz, Lord Athill feels for you, you must have noticed, he's a rich man – well, to be plain, if you need money in order to take the trip again next year, Lord Athill would be pleased to advance it to you – he'd have told you himself, but I thought it better if I –"

He paused, waited for a response. Ever since Dr Carson entered the cabin, Bernhard Schwarz had said not a single intelligible word. Now he slowly sat up, his narrow hairy chest heaved under the open shirt, he had lost all control of his face, which was strangely twisted, he twitched, seemed to smile tears and weep laughter.

"Stop," he said in a voice that sounded quite calm, but unnaturally deep, "stop! I know his lordship means well, and you too, and Mr Hilary – but you don't understand – it's not a matter of money, not any more!"

He sat on the edge of the bunk. It became ever more evident that Carson's words, Athill's kindly offer had profoundly gratified and consoled him, he had lost his childish plaintive expression, there was a veritable melting in his face, an ice-drift of feelings. He choked and swallowed a little before he could speak, and now it came, a stream still obstructed by floes, but ever faster, ever more free. The oddball character that had attached itself to him was as if swept away, and now here was simply an unhappy person, a very manly old man, speaking heartfelt words to a friend:

"Dr Carson, the thing is – did you actually know that I'm married? Did you think me an old bachelor, what? Well, no. I have a wife, grown-up children ... I don't know if you can grasp it at all, but I think you will understand ... So, a person grows old as a solid citizen, in a boring little town, in a profession that ... Married to not quite the right woman, even now, but no, there's no point complaining about her, she can't help it in the least, she too suffers enough from the situation ... The best thing a person can do in such circumstances is perhaps give in, grow old, and in the end die, it's not such a big deal. Maybe he should have collected postage stamps, a person has to hang his private heart on something, on a game if not on another person, or an idea ... So no, it grew so strangely in me, the thought of this particular voyage, I really don't know, it all seems so strange today, whether it was the Amazon River, exactly; I read a book about it as a boy, and have yearned for it ever since, for the distant, the broad expanses, the freedom ... Then later, you see, Dr Carson, if you have a feeling that you must run away, hide yourself, never able to return, you see how a man might start to dream of the densest jungle? In those secret hours when a chap can commune with himself? I should have collected postage stamps, it would have been the clever thing to do, but I collected illustrated tour brochures from travel agencies, decade after decade ... You must see the picture rightly: a completely normal high school teacher, husband, father, maybe a little shy and, at bottom, alone. We never even had money worries, maybe it was really all good ... No, I always had a little money of my own, not a great deal; if I were to translate it to English pounds, you'd only laugh. But it allowed me to retire early, after the change of government when the Czechs closed down our German high school. I didn't agree to be relocated, it was like a sign from Fate. Do you know, I never left Leitmeritz for almost twenty years, at most went to Prague once, to the provincial education board? My wife has always accused me of having no taste for travel, she has an idealistic disposition and enthuses about beautiful regions, especially the Riesengebirge!⁹ My eldest boy, after passing his Matura, took a trip to Venice, and came back speaking of ossified Philistines always crouching behind the stove. And all this time I was planning a trip to the Amazon! When I sat in my room and my wife thought I was correcting student essays, I was calculating fares and routes ..."

Bernhard Schwarz fell silent, hunted around for a handkerchief, wiped sweat, looked across at the Englishman perched awkwardly on the little narrow bench, his knees apart. He looked grave and attentive.

"Please believe me," said Bernhard Schwartz, "the whole time my family knew only so much ... Not once did I tell my wife of my grand plan. Once I wanted to, one night when our daughter lay sick ... We seemed somehow to have grown closer ... No, I told her nothing even then, though tempted to. You understand? I could not tell her how much I dreamed of going away. And then the money. I had to save up what I needed for the trip, without my wife finding out, or I'd have to find some other way to raise it. There was no point mentioning it ahead of time, there'd have been hell to pay. At first of course take care of the usual things, the family, I wasn't imprudent or crazy. Whatever else I was. I used to speculate all year round,

⁹ The Giant Mountains, on the Polish-Czech border.

not in a very daring way, but all the time. When the War came I already had sufficient funds, lots, more than I needed, I no longer thought of a short trip in the summer holidays, but of an actual expedition, using some scientific excuse, a year's sabbatical to study the peculiarities of the Portuguese dialect in Brazil: you know I'm a Romance philologist. In the first years of the War the money still seemed to grow, fantastically so. I don't believe there was a man in Europe who longed as I did for an early end to the War. I wasn't called up, I was no longer young and not very strong. Those were terrible years: I had the money to go travelling, but was blockaded in Central Europe, unable even to collect my favourite travel agency brochures. I think it was this that drove my daydreaming to the level of a real passion ... Then all of a sudden I discovered that as my pile of Austro-Hungarian krone grew, my assets were shrinking. I shall spare you the financial details. I doubt that someone from Central Europe could ever make clear to an Englishman what it was really like then: the years of hunger and distress, the way money went up and down. As for me – it had not as much to do with my case as you might think, as Lord Athill thinks. I don't know if I have a talent for money business, it was strange enough, or whether it was only a sleepwalker's sense of balance; the fact remains that during those wild years of the financial crisis I never came to any lasting harm, even though I'm just a high school teacher in a provincial backwater in German Bohemia, with an ever so tiny amount of capital. Nevertheless, I more than once thought I'd lost everything. You know, that would come as something of a relief? Basically I was afraid of the moment when I'd have to talk to my wife about my trip ...”

Dr Carson nodded gravely: “People are always afraid of being held to their dreams!”

Schwarz stared at him: “How did you know? That's the story of my life in recent years! As if some grinning demon had secretly hitched itself to me to make my longed-for trip come true ... With every success I saw behind it the malicious grinning devilish visage, you see! The money I thought I'd lost with the crash of the old krone was salvaged, and more besides. After the change of government, the new Czech authority closed my German school and pensioned me off early; I don't need to work now. My wife is from Leitmeritz, and so deeply rooted in the comings and goings and the gossip of the small town that she never urged me to look for a job at another school in some remote spot, perhaps Slovakia or somewhere. And there are the children to consider. But after his Matura my lad landed up straightaway in the frenzied years of speculation, refused further studies, went to a bank in Prague. Then my wife found a husband for our daughter. This daughter I always ... she is ... was ... well, you always have a favourite among your children, try what you will. So, for our daughter, no need for details, my wife found a match, not far from Leitmeritz in Bohemian-Leipa, a merchant of some sort, a type I detest and my daughter could never love, a puffed-up counter-jumper with dance-hall manners and money and years. Greased hair, you know, and bags under the eyes. Why am I telling you this? Ah. If my daughter had set her mind against it, all would have been well. Big fight with my wife, no doubt, we'd all have had our say, and maybe ... But my daughter ... she'd never had to face a challenge. Now we'll find out if she is still mine or if I'm all alone ...”

Schwarz paused, clutched nervously at his dry beard. “In a word,” he said, “I was alone. The lass had no strength, basically just a provincial miss, just good enough for the fellow in Leipa ... She accepted him right away. To do her justice, she didn't have the pleasantest of parental houses. But I always thought ... Enough!

“There was no quarrel with my wife,” Dr Schwarz said, whose face had suddenly flushed bright red; he seemed ready for a fight. “Mutual understanding, truce, wedding ... The night following the wedding I told my wife for the first time that I wanted to travel to the Amazon. She understood at once why. But she acted as if she thought me mad. You English, with your brothers and cousins in Africa or New Zealand, you could never understand what a crazy

notion it is, that a pensioned high school teacher from Leitmeritz should set off on a trip up the Amazon. A lesser eccentricity could put a man in the lunatic asylum! What annoyed my wife most was that I had the money. No more than necessary, but I had it, even after our daughter's dowry. Lord Athill has the right idea: I couldn't manage this trip again from my own means. But that's not at all the point, you see? Would it be a trip? It would be an escape! Not from my poor inconsequential ageing wife! From ... from everything. I don't know how to explain it to you. The truth is, I had a secret plantation in this Amazonian jungle and wanted at last to go and find it. My life as a high school teacher, husband, father, Leitmeritzer was always just a game; my real life I had planted in the great forest, secretly, as close as could be to the romantic city of El Dorado. I think something like it comes to everyone before old age sets definitively in, the moment when he simply has to head off, look for El Dorado, the youth he planted in the wild tangled forest of his dreams! Oh, we all thirst for the fruit of this our secret tree! You find it, or don't find it, you'll probably never find it, but of course you understand, Dr Carson, that one can go in search of it only once, even if a great lord should be so kind as to cover a poor devil's costs for a second trip ... I wouldn't be able to help His Lordship if he wanted to go in search of his fountain of youth, everyone has to make the journey alone, without help."

Dr Carson looked curiously at the Leitmeritzer, a deep furrow over the frame of his pince-nez. "Mr Schwarz," he said, "you're quite right. Everyone must embark somehow alone on this last journey in pursuit of the will o' the wisp, and probably only once, apart from the odd incurable fool who tries again and again. But, excuse me for saying this, you're no fool, you're even too clever for me, you know too much about yourself. So what brought on this behaviour these past few days? Did you know we were all worried about you – Athill, Hilary, I myself?"

"Let the poor beast go a little wild," said Schwarz, "when it notices the bars of the cage!"

"And now?" asked Carson.

"And now," said Schwarz, quite calmly, "go home, grow old, die, maybe put together a stamp collection first, a chap needs a secret passion. Do you think it's possible to go ashore one last time? I'd like to bring my wife a jaguar pelt – as a bedside rug."

He said this almost cheerfully. The doctor, who had studied him closely the whole time, thought: he'll not have much time to build up a stamp collection.

*

That evening on the *Hildebrand* they danced, despite the heat. The promenade deck was covered in bunting, the little piano in the ladies' salon was brought outside, with the stand for the three ship's musicians beside it. They played shimmies and blues. Beyond lay the Amazonian night, dense black, sticky, until one of the silent lightning storms came down, long thunderless flashes and a rain beyond all European imagining. The promenade deck, though covered over, had to be evacuated in haste, and the bunting became very wet and looked horribly bedraggled as the dancers returned, for the storm was soon over, and the night became clear and starry, and relatively cool.

As the music started up again, overhead on the upper boat deck under the tropical stars sat a pair of elderly gentlemen, deserters from the fray. The boat deck was a working area for the crew, but a big square enclosure had been marked out for first class passengers with metal barriers, a kind of lofty lookout equipped with a couple of benches. Here, at around ten o'clock that evening, sat Athill, Carson, Hilary, and Schwarz: four dark silhouettes with concave white-shirted chests. They were smoking, and beside them was an ice-bucket with soda water and a bottle of whisky.

They had collected here without prior arrangement, or else led by a common inarticulate sense. They scarcely spoke. These were not people who make small talk about the beauties of the night. The night certainly was wonderful. Not hot, no mosquitoes. If you stood and went to the rail, on one side you could see in the far distance some of Pará's harbour lights, and over them the indistinct glow that hangs over big cities by night. On the port side, where the forested shore must lie, big fantastical flames flared up. Some passengers, having noticed these already during dinner, had nervously assumed they were campfires of advancing revolutionaries, but they were only forest fires lit deliberately to make a clearing, fierce enough to withstand even the dreadful downpour. Now they began to flare up brighter than ever, lovely and mysterious.

On the other side you could see the murky shadowed outline of a little island, and behind it a sense of innumerable other river-islands. On this side the first suggestion of a moon, not yet risen, could be sensed. Here lay the narrow passage that threaded its way past the maze of islands to the main branch of the river, and on into the interior of the vast jungle country. Somewhere in this direction there no doubt lay the gunboats of the *revoltosos*, their lanterns darkened as they lurked in some little bay.

Lord Athill, who had got to his feet for a while and was standing at the rail, smoking one of his slender cigarettes, thought he heard a dull faraway thud from somewhere near the horizon, another, then the rat-tat-tat of a machine-gun. But a lot of strange noises came from that direction, there was the nocturnal forest that is never silent, but screams and howls. Whether his ears had deceived him or not, it provided Lord Athill with a reason, or even an excuse, to ask Hilary with a low call to join him.

The Globetrotter, on his head a broad-brimmed hat of dark felt, and in his mouth a massive wooden pipe, stepped slowly over from the bench to join Athill. He was invited to listen out for cannon-fire, and heard absolutely nothing. They both kept silent a moment, then Athill said softly:

"I'd like to ask you to tell this story. Carson says all the man needs now is reassurance, and further reflection. I think it would be a sort of psychoanalytical convalescence for our German friend. Carson says he shouldn't be left alone too much to brood on it, better to talk it over with him if we don't want him to fall ill suddenly. What you told me earlier seems like just the thing. After all, you're the famous Globetrotter, talk to him about the trip, in a general sort of way, tell your marvellous tale, the night is long and tomorrow we'll have another day confined to the ship, just lolling about. You told me once you knew a story better than any bromide for this enthusiast, the story that led to a lust for travel *ad absurdum*. So tell it to him, tell us all this anti-travel story!"

"It's not an anti-*travel* story," the Globetrotter said. "It's an anti-*arrival* story. As long as a journey does not arrive at its destination, it's all good. One must travel. *Navigare necesse*. But one should never arrive."

"Please, Herr Hilary," said his lordship with a trace of superiority in his tired voice, "please don't say it in a whisper to one who knows it all too well, but out loud to the man we want to help complete his journey. Have another quick whisky and soda, and begin, Scheherazade!"

*

This is the tale of the vast Amazon River, a tale against the attaining of yearned-for goals, that the globetrotter Hilary began to tell this night on the boat deck of RMS *Hildebrand* beneath smouldering stars and the great Southern Cross, and then beneath the enormous tropical Moon that at once extinguished every star; this night when somewhere on the river between

Obidos and Pará the armed paddle-steamer of the revolutionary troops from Amazonas State became engaged in a wearisome and unbloody fight with gunboats of the legitimate government in Pará; yes, this very night; but you could hardly hear the cannon fire, because the sea breeze blew upriver: this night full of mystery and fear, as the citizens of Pará trembled in their hammocks, this night which after all was but one of all the many jungle nights – all are filled with noises and battles and slaughter, where monkeys howl and the jaguar glides soundless along lofty branches and the caiman catches a little deer as it drinks.

On this night the Globetrotter, settled back in a corner of his bench with a whisky glass in reach and his pipe in his mouth, began to tell the long tale of the jungle ship of the knight Francisco de Orellana, the tale of the Land of Cinnamon, the land of the great Dorado, and of the empire of the Amazon, and tired Lord Athill listened, leaning forward, hands clasped about his knees, you couldn't tell if he was asleep or praying or what he was thinking or if he liked people or despised them, and the English doctor Carson too was listening, a diligent and very manly medical man who had to take his holidays somewhere, did he not, so why not on this bench attending to this long tale, and Dr Bernhard Schwarz was listening, high school teacher from Leitmeritz in Czechoslovakia, for whose benefit the tale was really being told. And he listened, calm and grave, like a child listening to a lovely but rather sad fairytale. It sounded to him like an epilogue to his life as it drew to a close, but inside he was quite at peace and consoled, and one of the things he said provided a new support: the old defiant motto: You have to travel. You don't have to live.

“NAVIGARE NECESSE EST, VIVERE NON NECESSE”

PART TWO

ORELLANA

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Penthesilea

Where now the tribe of Amazons holds sway
There lived once, subject to the gods,
A tribe of Scythians, free and bellicose,
Just like every other earthly race.
These claimed, through row on row of centuries,
The Caucasus and those fertile orchards theirs,
When Vexoris, the Ethiopian king,
To the foothills came. His men at once –
Those blood-pledged warriors – swept on
Into the valleys; old men and youths
Who met their brandished blades were slain,
This race, the glory of the world, wiped out.
The victors settled, in barbarian fashion,
Most insolently in our huts, and fed
On every fruit of our most fruitful fields.
And so that we could taste in full our shame
They wrung from us avowals of our love:
From husbands' graves they tore away
Our women to their own vile beds.

Kleist (1808). Tr. CDG

CHAPTER FIVE

I came back this summer to the Amazon, the Globetrotter said, because I want to write a book about this 'Jungle Ship', a topic that's been gnawing away at me – all I wanted to do, after various other episodes, was refresh my impressions of this magnificent landscape: this golden water, this sultry and vehement sky, this silhouette of damp forests. It actually bothers me not at all that the revolution renders our trip impossible; I'll arrive home to my writing desk a little early; what I'm going to write I already know!

Maybe it's not what one should write about this country. My book will of course be yet another tome about human beings and human fates, but you do no justice to this vast jungle realm if you regard it as solely a human concern. What we have here is not a land of humans; humans do not really belong here. This enormous creative cornucopia of arboreal Nature, this great dispenser of teeming life, has in this huge hot damp greenhouse multiplied species and genera a thousandfold. Everything that swims or flies or crawls or climbs thrives monstrously in this wet forest world. Seven thousand different species of butterfly have been collected by a naturalist in Pará and the surrounding region. The Amazon River contains twice as many species of fish as the Mediterranean, and there's a swamp in this region in which one thousand two hundred different kinds of freshwater fish live. In all the rivers of Europe there are perhaps one hundred and fifty species in all.

But this land of insects, snakes, fish, birds, lizards, climbing things is too densely overgrown for big quadrupeds. It's as if Nature here has become caught up in her own thickets. Did she try here to create that big jungle pathbreaker, the elephant? She managed nothing better than the tapir – that, and those small but fierce peccaries, and now and then a deer, or a giant rodent – beyond these, nothing wanders through the underbrush of this jungle, amid the branches where jaguars lurk and maybe ten different kinds of wildcat.

And there are none of those tailless apes that live on terra firma and walk upright. Nothing comparable to the orang-utan or chimpanzee, only a rabble of funny or melancholy nimble long-tailed little monkeys, often with frighteningly human features in the bearded little face. I once saw a small cebid monkey in captivity ... But anyway, for all that is known of the Amazonian jungle (but does anyone know it?), there are no big upright apes.

Even less, it seems, have humans managed to establish themselves here. This land does not want humans, and they do not yet possess it; all they do is creep rather helplessly at the forest margins, along rivers and creeks. They gad about everywhere in steamboats, but still cannot get to grips with the jungle. Where the steamers come there are, to be sure, some big towns, teeming with termite mounds. But where only the canoe can navigate a forest creek, there even now are found only naked Indians, no tribe very numerous, and their struggle against the jungle is feeble and hopeless; all they ask is that their poisoned darts kill enough monkeys or turtles or fish to fill their bellies – and enough pumas, jaguars that they do not all fall prey to them. Wherever it is they may have come from, the four hundred Amazonian tribes known so far, the Parintims and Parintintims, the Passes, Maues, the savage Mudas, the cudgel-bearing Ubirajares and the Caupanas, who are dwarves, and the Coitas who are said to have tails, and the pale-faced Andoques said to have been discovered on the border of Colombia – wherever they may have come from, there is no evidence that their first ancestors lived in the jungle, no monument is known, no ancient works of human hand. Humans have not been very long in this jungle, the fate of the human race is not yet so closely tied to this boggy arboreal desert as in other lands of the human world.

Anyone who wants to write the real novel about this jungle should not choose a human for the hero, but at best a tree: I've been thinking for a couple of weeks of calling my heroine

Mauritia, meaning *Mauritia flexuosa*, she should be the Buriti-palm, some palm of the tragic thicket, how she leaps from the nut, how she braves the thousand adventures of her budding youth in dark undergrowth, and how she then emerges through heroic struggles up into the light, strong and ruthless, up over a hundred plant-corpses, until at last her wonderful fan of leaves looms high over the tangled forest, up towards the sun. The heroic life of this palm, and her tragic end in the embrace of a handsome parasite – what a theme for an epic! But who could do justice to the tree's struggle, her hunger for sunlight, and the thousandfold world of creatures whose existence is bound with hers, from the ants running up her trunk to the giant snakes that twine about her! But I fear it is too hard to hymn a single tree as she deserves, one would have to be content with a depiction of the whole forest – that would be easier. And then of course I need something against which to measure the vastness of the forest, hence a human heart, for without the usual human accessories in a book, you'll have a hard time of it. But who might come into conflict with the great forest? Someone weak, I think, whose horror can reflect the whole dreadful vastness of the menacing landscape; or else someone very strong, who overcomes every obstacle; or a fugitive; or perhaps a Conquistador.

My thoughts were occupied a long while by a woman I had read about. Of all white people, probably none had experienced the Amazon jungle as fully as she did. I mean Madame Godin des Odonais, whose husband accompanied La Condamine on his famous scientific expedition in the mid-18th century. Godin, to cut a long story short, had to leave his wife and children in Quito, and travel on to Cayenne without them. Many years passed, and the couple had no way to be reunited. At last some vague news reached the wife: her husband had supposedly travelled up to the Marañon, the upper reaches of the Amazon, to rejoin her. This rumour caused her to up and leave with a great retinue: her children came along, her brother in law, and a French doctor, and several native servants of both sexes. The journey out of Ecuador across the Cordillera to the interior of Brazil would be a dreadful prospect for a woman today; how must it have been back then! You must imagine a well-born French lady of the time, in hooped skirts, spoiled and delicate, and not at all prepared for such a strenuous journey by her life among the Creoles of Quito. Be that as it may, Madame Godin and her family make it over the mountains without particular incident, and reach the Pastaza, part of the Amazon river system. They travel down it by canoe, to an Indian mission, where they were supposed to meet people sent by her husband to meet her. They find a village where all have died from smallpox, not a living soul; and now begin the usual rigours of a poorly organised tropical expedition. Boatmen and guides desert, the poorly manned boat springs a leak on the Bobonasa river, they have to let it sink as they escape to shore, eight people stand there at the edge of almost impenetrable forest, bewildered, no food, no weapons, not knowing rightly where they are ...

That, said the Globetrotter, is what I planned to write about, the dreadful end of these helpless people, their hopeless struggle with the vast forest, how they had no means to build a raft, how the doctor and the negro plunge heroically into the forest to find food, never again to be seen by human eye; and how the others try desperately to find a path through the arboreal waste, over innumerable swamps and watercourses where snakes and caimans lurk, straight through every danger and difficulty. And how one after the other they remain lying there, until Madame Godin, a Niobe of the jungle, has to bury her children with her own hands – and the brother in law, and maidservants, all of them – until she remains all alone at the end of this line of badly dug graves ... It was with the historical figure of this cultivated woman, this delicate hoop-skirted rococo lady, solitary in the midst of the vast perilous jungle, that I hoped to depict with justice this great Nature's antihuman majesty.

The book I meant to write was to be called *The Nine Days of Madame Godin*. For she was lost in the tangles for nine days, nine endless days; and then by a miracle she found again the

banks of the Bobonasa, and by a second miracle some Indian tribe or other as it trekked through the jungle – doe-eyed half-beasts, who might occasionally have eaten the heart of an enemy, or shrunk his head and hung it around the neck as an ornament, but who would never dream of insulting a guest. The Indians whom Madame Godin encountered took her down-river in their palm-leaf canopied dugout canoe, and finally, improbable as it sounds, they arrived at Pará and her husband, from whom she had been separated nineteen years. What a story: how the mother who has buried her children side by side in the jungle remains yet a wife and goes through Hell to seek and find her husband, just as the little female jaguar, driven by the same urge, will find the ever so distant straying male ...

That's the story I wanted to write at first; or maybe rather the epic of the heroic Jesuit missionary Father Raymundo de Santa Cruz, who around 1650 converted the Cocomas Indians on the Huallaga; he was a great explorer, and later, cross in hand, he drowned in the selfsame Bobonasa river where Madame Godin's boat came to grief. Or there was that Father Heinrich Richter from Czaslau in Bohemia, naked and barefoot apostle to the Jeberos and Ucayali, apostle and martyr, for his head ended up on a savage's girdle ... That was in 1695; and there was another Bohemian German, Father Samuel Fritz, apostle to the Omaguas, who was an artist and built wooden chapels in the jungle and decorated them with wonderful images of saints. And other German missionaries from the 18th century, Wilhelm von Tres, Heinrich Franzen, Franz Rhen, Karl Bretan, Adam Wittman, Adam Scheffen, Leonhard Deubler ... Curious, isn't it, so many German Jesuits who came to this distant, distant jungle that must have a magical attraction for German people; the German has always had this yearning for woodlands, right back to the Teutoburg Forest. Wherever in the world a really dense dark forest is to be found, that's where the German tries to go, lured by secret memories of the soul. And in the Amazonian forest-spirit Curupira he has no trouble identifying his own homely capricious Rübezahle ...

These grand epic legends of the German missionaries seemed a very worthwhile topic for a book, I know only good and lovely things about them. They always protected the poor Indians as best they could from the cruelties of the Portuguese colonial power; it was not enough for them just to raise the cross, meaning the material piece of timber with the cross-piece. As you must know, the Portuguese authorities had a wooden cross erected in every Indian settlement, and if it fell over one day, the Indians were sold into slavery for their blasphemy ...

Then I was obsessed for months by a different topic: the fantastic expedition by the Navarrese Don Pedro de Ursua, who in 1560 reached the Amazon from Peru in search of the City of Gold rumoured to lie in the country of the flat-headed Omaguas. A German adventurer, called Felipe de Utre in Spanish sources (who knows what he was really called) had seen this Omagua El Dorado ... But the tale would have to be told by a Stevenson: a horde of the most savage bandits that ever assembled under the flag of Castile, and in among them a beautiful and noble lady, Inez de Atienza, Ursua's mistress. The long journey by boat would have to be described, the difficulties, the disappointments, and how the presence of the woman led to strife and made a conspirator and mutineer of the young Ensign Fernando de Guzman. Behind him stood a real devil, the Biscayan Lope de Aguirre, lame, ugly, filled with hate. This person turned young Guzman half mad with his whisperings. The expedition's leader, Ursua, was awakened one night near the village of Machiparo by a voice calling through his sleep: *Pedro de Ursua, Governor of Omagua and El Dorado, may God have mercy on you!* Next day the conspirators murdered him; they chose Guzman to be their general, but this was not enough for him. Soon they huddled together again and decided – this band of adventurers in the middle of the jungle on the Marañon – to depose the king of Spain, the mighty and terrible Philipp II, and declare war on him. And they chose Ensign Fernando de Guzman to be their

new king, and they called their new nation Marañones, after the great river they were travelling down. No, of this fantastical journey, which really happened, I would never be able to tell as it deserves – the voyage of this floating robber kingdom, madness, spilled blood ... From the start the real leader was not “King” Guzman but cruel Lope de Aguirre; one after the other he kills all his companions who seem insufficiently submissive; finally he has even the king murdered, and himself elevated to commander.¹⁰ Lovely Doña Ines de Atienza is murdered by a Mestizo named “Carrion”; he is rewarded with the title Chief Judge of the realm. But there are other women in the boats, among them a daughter of the tyrant Aguirre, whom he loves dearly ... He is known only as “the tyrant Aguirre”; South Americans to this day call him nothing else ... This half-crazed horde keeps on and on; they plunder Indian riverside hamlets left and right, commit unimaginable atrocities.

Nevertheless this tyrant army has the same luck which, centuries later, Baron Humboldt enjoyed: they find the route that leads from the Marañon via the Rio Negro to the Casiquiare, the river that so curiously links the Amazon with that other great river system, the Orinoco. In Venezuela, the wandering kingdom of the Marañones comes into the severest conflict with the authorities of that same Philipp II whose allegiance the adventurers have renounced. At every riverside place they kill the Spanish governor. From the town of Burburata the tyrant Aguirre issues an actual declaration of war on King Philipp. We have the text from Alexander von Humboldt:

I, Lope de Aguirre, your Vassal, a Christian, born of poor but Noble parents, and domiciled in the town of Oñate in Biscay, I came over very young to Peru to strive there, lance in hand. I fought for your Fame; but this I advise you: to be more just towards your good Vassals that You have in this Land, for I and my People, weary of the cruel Injustices that your Viceroy and your Governors and Judges inflict in Your name, we have decided, as befits men, to obey You no more. No more do we want to be regarded as Spaniards. We wage a dreadful War against You, because we your Servants can no longer tolerate it. Know that I am lame, from two shots of an Arquebus. I received them when I fought against Francisco Hernandez Giron when he was in Rebellion against You. And now I am likewise, and shall be so unto Eternity. For ever since your Viceroy who represents You, the Marquis de Cañete, a Coward we call him, hanged his bravest soldiers, our Comrades, ever since that Hour I pay no more mind to Your royal Mercy or Pardon than to the books of the arch-heretic Martin Luther ... Eleven months we were aboard Ship, before we reached the mouth of the great River. More than fifteen hundred Leagues did we sail, and God alone knows how we made it through the great Multitude of these Waters. I advise you, great King, never to send a Spanish fleet into this cursed River, and bethink Yourself, King Philipp, that you have no right to extract Interest or Taxes from this land, for it was won at no risk to Yourself.

What a wonderful letter, said the Globetrotter. Everything is there: the cripple's hatred of the king for whom he suffered; and the hatred of the soldier who must forever be conquering for others. These deserters were at once expelled from their nation. Such a romantic rebellion has its grandeur ... How did it end? As every rebellion of the common rabble has ended for centuries past, until finally one succeeded: on the wheel and the gallows!

In the Venezuelan interior the plundering horde of Marañones encounters a disciplined army. At the moment of defeat Lope de Aguirre strangles his daughter, “for she shall not be called daughter of a traitor,” he cries; and witnessing this two of his own Marañones hack him

¹⁰ Werner Herzog's film *Aguirre Wrath of God* brilliantly recreates the story to this point.

down. It's a regular tragedy of horrors. They display the head of the tyrant Aguirre in an iron cage. He was the first forerunner of Bolivar, Washington, author of the first American Declaration of Independence, and his wild and tragic life is an ideal plot line for a theatre play or historical novel. And that's why I turned away from it, for it does not suit my purpose.

No, my book about the Amazon River, as I intend it, should be placed in the colourful old days of the Conquista, for the presence today of these ridiculous towns with their electric tramways and ice factories and Pilsen beer and all the steamers, telegraph lines, canons, and the incompletely fermented race of half-castes ... all of it falsifies the nature of this region but is unable to prevail against it; in this Amazonia the present is more than elsewhere a transitional stage, a chaos of fumes in a chemical retort, an unsuitable example. As I muse that an intention to reflect this overwhelming and immeasurable landscape in a book is too reckless, what I want most of all is to remove everything human, or if I can't after all write a simple novel about a jungle tree, then what I want, and oh, if only I can do it, is to depict this Amazonian forest and its wild creatures prior to the incursion of this hybrid civilisation, which in the end will reduce to newspaper pulp every last one of the Earth's primal forests, and to cellulose every last little secret, fable, miracle. Or no, depicting even this has a melancholy attraction, the first incursion of this technical calamity, this mighty European civilisation into the untouched primal river-world: how one day three or four clumsy thunderboxes were there, packed with sulphur and saltpetre, and a few bits of armour that mere wooden arrows could not penetrate – and how this little bit of chemistry, metallurgy, mechanics at once begins to render the forest impotent, to subjugate it – to represent the first beginnings of the great Conquista of the jungle by European humans, I say, seems to me a goal and a purpose, but I would much rather write the forest than a historical novel.

Among all the many colourful and fantastical tales of the Amazon River that could be told in new words, there is one, the oldest, first, most important – the one that best deserves this. It's one of those symbolic anecdotes that history sometimes rustles up when it wants to say something in brief, to sum up a long and tedious development in a powerful conclusion; or perhaps, as is the case here, to hint at such a development, something in the future, an emblematic occurrence told in advance: such true events seem a little improbable, mythical and fantastic.

One such is the tale of the Jungle Ship of the knight Francisco de Orellana, of the first voyage by white men down the Amazon from the Cordillera to the Atlantic Ocean, in the year of Our Lord 1542. This voyage by fifty Conquistadors out of defeated and plundered Peru into new and fantastical regions, and the curious yearning dreams of things yet more distant and more unreal that the minds of these greedy young men conjure up – this voyage, in which the mightiest river and maybe the richest land in the world are discovered and then abandoned by the blithe explorers, all for a dream, the dream of the country of the Amazons and El Dorado the city of gold, not more fantastical than reality but only yearned for, hoped for, and thereby yet more lovely ...

This voyage seems to me absolutely the truest symbol of travel, my dear Doctor Schwarz, and thus worthy of attention, a significant memento for this time of ours which, however much – too much! – is discovered and unravelled and almost at the end, it seems, of the vast human journey into the unknown jungle of the universe, will still need a little bit of a dream, a little bit of yearning, of fever, in a word Orellana's great lie of El Dorado. If I want to tell this tale – later on in my book, and now in this hot, fragrant, shimmering starlit Amazonian night, told to you, my travelling companions, and to you, Doctor Schwarz, in your great disappointment at not being able to travel up the Amazon – it is because I want to show that one can always find El Dorado in one's own heart, and in one's own dreaming brain. How

could I demonstrate this better than by the image of these men fleeing from Inca treasures, from the temple filled to its lofty ceiling with Atahualpa's ransom gold – running from this gold-saturated reality towards mosquitoes, anacondas, jaguars, firstly because they heard rumours of the cinnamon tree, then of a cacique in golden armour in a town paved in gold? And if they had found it, this great Dorado, the fabled town of Paititi, the lake of gold – if they had not rashly flogged a few Indians until they were fed a story of some other city of gold, even deeper in the jungle, even harder to reach, amid even bigger dangers, worse hunger? Oh, one can never attain the true Dorado, even if one at last by luck treads golden pavements. Believe a man who all his life has wanted nothing but to travel: you never arrive; not yet arriving is called living.

That is what the tale of the knight Francisco de Orellana seems to mean, and I would like to tell it like the fairytale it is, even though it's true, attested by the parchment-bound volumes of the historian, Philipp II's grave court historiographer Antonio de Herrera, and the fantasist Garcilaso de Vega, whose mother was an Inca princess; attested above all in the travelogue of Brother Gaspar de Carvajal, who was Orellana's field chaplain. By a great stroke of luck, all these people, even the Dominican, tell the tale in summary and in broad outline, and I have no need to turn my fairytale into a "historical" novel stuffed full of names and dates. The few that appear will be accurate, but in the book I mean to write I would rather depict correctly the feathered foliage of an assai-palm than any mouldy piece of repertory theatre ... It may be that Don Francisco de Orellana did not travel through the Amazonian forest with one ship, but with two. But the second brigantine that history's dogmatists have him build is a superfluous replication that I find annoying; this is one of those rare occasions when a little less reality makes for more truth in a story ...

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Now that I speak of it, said the Globetrotter, I think I shall never write this book. Does it not terrify, the prospect of sitting in a room filled with books and papers, at a desk, dribbling ink onto sheets of paper about this dreamer of whom I dream, Francisco de Orellana: he *was*, he *thought*, he *had* – Ah, if it were possible to tell the story of the whole world like the one I'm about to tell you, this night beneath the Southern Cross, while on the shore across from us a fire burns in the Amazonian forest and there's the scent of unknown things, and unknown sounds come from the forest nearest to us, and the splashing in the water down there might equally well be a passing turtle or the devil-fish, the piranha; and here we sit smoking this mud-black tobacco, which is the real aroma par excellence of the Brazilian lands, naked Indians smoked it even before Orellana's white face came along, so here we sit in this hot starry darkness and know that there before us is the vast forest, which thank God we civilized men still do not know end to end, now, four hundred years after Francisco de Orellana; and that in this hot green darkness there dwells yet a smidgeon of dreams and mystery ...

It's nicer to tell my fairytale right here to you, to three people who are here and yet are filled with yearning for this land, to tell it you in my own spoken words, not a book but merely the material for a book I may never write, for, believe me, with writing it's the same as with travelling: you never arrive.

CHAPTER SIX

Out of recently conquered Peru, said the Globetrotter, comes a Spanish army. It's led by Gonzalo Pizarro, one of the heroic and criminal brothers who crushed Atahualpa's empire and burned the king at the stake – Gonzalo Pizarro, not so coarse or greedy as his older and

crueller brother Francisco. In the Inca's jail he watches as the king's ransom first covers the floor, then fills the room right up to the line drawn by the prisoner's fettered hands. From the emerald-encrusted temple vessels, the golden discs that represent the Sun and the silver discs that resemble the Moon – from these riches Gonzalo Pizarro follows the trail of a shimmering chimera. He's the Emperor's vice-regent in Quito, this man born illegitimate, he could have held court like a prince. But the bold soldier, just thirty-five years old, thinks little of comforts and peace, for does not his province of Peru lie on the borders of the Unknown, of the Remote, of the dreamily Possible?

Hardly is he made overlord in Quito when he gathers an army, two hundred and twenty Spanish freebooters. From the stinking cellars of the town, the sheds of brown-skinned human livestock, he fetches four thousand Indians: they shall haul baggage until they drop and die at the wayside! More valuable it seems are the swine that by the general's forethought are driven with them into the mountains, the llamas, the two thousand big bloodhounds he takes along to hunt down Indians in the jungle – *aperrear* is the correct technical term: dog-coursing. To the Indians the baying of this dreadful pack is more terrible than the crack of an arquebus, the hiss of crossbow bolts; and in a land lacking iron, the swords and armour of the Spanish army are invincible enough. But that's by the way, who gives a fig for savages and their bows and stone-tipped lances? Icy winds from the bare Cordillera are the real enemy, the repellent rawness of mountains that are so cold and yet filled with inner fires, so hard and yet shattered by a sudden shock, enveloped in fogs and sulphurous fumes. Frost gnaws dreadfully at the very marrow of these Mediterranean people; and then on the far side, on the eastern slopes of the Sierra there comes at once the damp heavy heat of the rainy season, huge thunderstorms that blow no refreshing breath for tortured lungs, gouts of rain that persist for days and days, weeks; through wet montane forests, through swamps and rushing spates the army staggers on, hungry already, suffering, its numbers reduced. "Rain baptises the soul," say the Spaniards, shivering with fever in their dripping clothes. Clothes? Beneath the knight's cuirass fabrics fall apart, leather collars moulder to soft jelly. On it goes, cheerlessly, ceaselessly, and to right and left along the way livestock falls dead: Indian slaves, llamas, pigs. The Spanish caballeros begin to slaughter hounds, and eat them. The Indian bearers have long since seen no more of their dried maize kernels; they search for roots in the forest.

In the midst of their travails, a travesty of success comes to Pizarro: he finds what he set out to look for. Indians from the borderlands, brought to him in Quito as captives and questioned under torture, told him of precious spices in the eastern forests: the primary goal of his venture is to secure the Land of Cinnamon, La Canela, for Castile. What an intoxicating thought back then: a fabulous land! All the spices of the Orient found again here in the New World of the west, what a triumph, what rich winnings! Now all of a sudden the Spaniards have cinnamon trees, cinnamon forests filled with their strong aroma. Damn! say the caballeros, if only it was maize, if only it was the batato-knobs these Indians love to guzzle! In this wasteland, in this rain, in this forest that grows ever thicker and more dreadful, anything would be good and useful, just not ... cinnamon! What use are all the spices of the Moluccas and Ceylon if there's no food to go with the seasoning? Oh, if only we had corn, and fruit, and good meat! They want to find corn and meat ... and gold.

Gonzalo Pizarro sends out scouts to locate natives of the forest. They find a village, palm-leaf roofs on a few piles, they surround it by night, take the inhabitants captive. These are not the well-nourished and well-clothed Indians of the Inca realm, who live in fine stone cities, wealthy villages, held by their superiors to a strict regimen of work but preserved from every hardship, everyone compensated equally from the common produce of their labour, and so gay and happy that it could only be a Satanic deception; a heathen parody of earthly Paradise,

to be eradicated in blood, cleansed in fire, is supposed to save the souls of these poor heathen from even fiercer flames! The forest people here go naked, you can count the ribs, the cacique has a necklace of little monkey finger-bones, but his lower lip is pierced and in it is a slim disc of gold! The rest are too useless, too wretched to serve as bearers, they are thrown, women, children, men, back into the burning huts or fed to the last of the bloodhounds. Meanwhile Gonzalo Pizarro's quartermaster, Don Antonio de Ribiera, he's actually in charge of this raid, keeps saying Our Fathers as long as it lasts ... They had neglected to bring with them from the camp a pious priest, who could have baptised the poor heathen before they were killed, as befitted Spanish Christians in their mercy. Anyway, to the greater glory of God they manage to baptise the cacique, after he's been bound hand and foot and brought back to camp. Through holy baptism he receives the name Luis, and dies an hour later, his feet turned to charcoal, for either he doesn't understand the interpreter's questions, or his heathen obstinacy is intractable. For when asked where the great land of gold is to be found, and the province with the full granaries, he provides no information, but only groans, and from his lips (the gold disc has been extracted) blood trickles instead of words. In vain does the interpreter Miguelito keep on at him, in the Tupi language understood by all the other headhunter savages this side of the Andes. Pedro de Solis, the expedition's scribe, reads the questions out to the cacique, while the executioner holds a firebrand to his feet. The interpreter, a young brown man with the features of the Son of the Sun but in Castilian costume, translates the questions: how many miles away is the capital city of the great lord and head cacique they call the Golden Man on account of his splendour; item: whether he would be inclined to acknowledge the suzerainty of the Roman Emperor Charles the Fifth. All the cacique does is wheeze and not answer, so the scribe reads out another question: whether horses might be introduced into this land of El Dorado? Where is there maize? Where do the llamas graze? The interpreter Miguelito, his face expressionless, says it in the Tupi language. The cacique gives a sigh, the thin body tattooed with many black lines suddenly gives a ghastly heave; he dies. Don Pedro de Solis, the scribe, says contemptuously: In this hungry and accursed land, the Indians have no stamina; the fellow on whose back I ride since my poor horse died will soon be all used up.

For many days after the cacique's death they find no more natives, but at night drums beat through the jungle in which the Spaniards become ever more deeply entangled. The last of the horses can make no more progress, a welcome excuse to slaughter them. Trees grow ever more densely packed, the swamps are in many places deeper, a path is hacked with the axe, slashed with the sword. Even officers go on foot, Gonzalo Pizarro himself and his deputy, who calls himself the Teniente-general: Francisco de Orellana. Those two, and the other colonels – the Mestre de Campo Don Antonio de Ribera, and Captain Sancho de Carvajal – still wear a cuirass over their rags, but hardly any burden can be tolerated in the humid heat of this gloomy forest. At last, after many days, they come to a river that has broken through the foothills of the great Sierra; for the first time it not just an insignificant mountain stream; the river is too deep to wade across; the Spaniards stand impatient on the bank, for they see several big huts on the other side, a village where there is surely food, for there are canoes on the water, and in them naked fishermen fishing with bow and arrows. They try for a long time to lure Indians across; but the secret jungle telegraph has told how greatly these white gods are to be feared. Finally, as Don Gonzalo loses patience, the interpreter Miguelito fells a tree, clambers on and paddles over the rushing water to negotiate with the Indians. He brings three iron knives as a present, and many fine promises from his general.

The man who climbs ashore on the other side, naked, wearing only a narrow loincloth in which the three knives are stuck, is a quite other being than the Miguelito the Spaniards know, accustomed to see him almost as one of their own because he is one of the three young Incas

whom fourteen years ago Francisco Pizarro, on his second voyage of discovery along the Peruvian coast, took on board his ship at the town of Tumbes and carried back to Panama, and then back to Spain itself, where they would learn the language so they can serve him as interpreters. Now he is called Miguelito, and wears trousers; but since he is naked as he climbs from the river, the symbol of the Sun incised in his chest can be seen, and the cacique of the Indian village falls trembling to the ground before him, for even in these forests they know of the mighty Incas.

Miguelito speaks to the savages in the Tupi language, and so great is the reverence of cacique Delicola for the symbol of the Sun that, hesitantly enough, he has the tribe's canoes loaded up with food: manioc roots, dried monkey flesh, parrots shot yesterday by the tribe's hunters, and giant turtles. This, and fruits of the forest: blue-violet berries of the assai-palm, and fat andiroba nuts; and two piraracú fish each as big as a man, all are piled into dugouts and paddled across.

That evening there's a feast in the Spanish camp. The Indian paddlers listen shyly from the river to the bellowed songs, the uninhibited rhythms of a seguidilla. These people are short, muddy, long hair hangs down over the face and back, so the Spaniards call them Hairies, Encabellados. Pizarro's adventurers would have liked to find out if their women too have long hair or short, but the general has strictly enjoined them not to molest the people or set foot in the village across the river. He realises that the army will go hungry if the Indians run away.

Now he sits outside the hut they've built for him in the style of the country: big forked branches rammed into the earth, a pole laid across, and the frame then covered with palm leaves. His Excellency the Governor sits in an armchair that his Indian slaves have hauled all the way from Quito, so he can be more respectably ensconced. Miguelito squats at his feet, now very christianly Spanish in trousers and shirt, and behind him the three senior officers sit on chests and bales the bearers have bought along. The Escribano is there again, the official scribe Pedro de Solis; he has plucked the scroll of questions from his belt. Two of Pizarro's slaves hold big smoking torches, and cacique Delicola glances anxiously at the flames. But there is no torture; Delicola's almost inaudible replies, rendered by Miguelito into the king's good Castilian, sound satisfactory, and more.

This good Indian says everything the Spaniards want to hear. Yes, there's some fine country or other nearby. Food, lots of food. Not far, a few marches only. In the land of the Omaguas, whose foreheads are flattened. Bordering this country is the other one, where there is yellow gold, much. Very much.

"Ask him if there are emeralds too in that country!" Pizarro commands.

Yes, emeralds too, the cacique of the Encabellados quickly replies, or at least that's what Miguelito says in Spanish, very big emeralds, in heaps.

The scribe reads slowly and thoroughly down his list of questions, sparing the informant not one item: he must also declare that every chieftain and principal person of this province is ready, willing, and inclined from the heart to acknowledge the suzerainty of Emperor Charles the Fifth; furthermore he, Delicola, is eager to be instructed by good Father Gaspar de Carvajal, Vicar-general of the Province of Lima and Almoner of this Catholic armada, in the truths of the Christian faith, and to receive baptism forthwith.

To this question, translated by Miguelito with an expressionless face, the cacique Delicola makes some sort of reply, and the interpreter says it means yes. Whereupon the governor orders him to be manacled, but gently, and kept under guard by the baggage: he is to serve the expedition as guide on their further journey, since he clearly has excellent knowledge of the

wonderful country of El Dorado. Father Gaspar de Carvajal can instruct him in Christian doctrine along the way.

So gracious is Gonzalo Pizarro to this clever and biddable cacique that he orders some of the foodstuffs he himself brought across to be shoved between his manacled hands. But the savage wants none, and sits stolidly there until next morning a soldier hitches him to a rope and pulls him along, though he is not hit overmuch; the general has forbidden it.

So on they all march, along the river, until it tumbles into dreadful gorges and once again they have to cut a path through tangled forest. The provisions from the village are all consumed, food is again lacking, and the Indian bearers collapse gasping beneath their loads; those brought from Quito are already almost all dead, *gastados* is the technical term employed by the Spanish Conquistadors: "used up". Already Spanish hidalgos can be seen carrying loads.

In a narrow gorge, suddenly there are hostile Indians who shoot arrows with bone points at the approaching train; but that's nothing, all they need is time to ram the fork-rest into the ground and open fire; then the path is clear; a few heathen are pursued with crossbows. It was nothing; if only there was more to eat in the little hamlets of these savages! They lie in a grassy clearing through which the mountain stream flows, only to lose itself again in dense dark green forest on the other side.

Here Pizarro sets up camp, sends out a fifty man advance party under his friend and Teniente Francisco de Orellana. He gives him the interpreter Miguelito, and the captive cacique Delicola as their guide. They are to penetrate some days' journey into the wilderness, and if they find something, food, or a path, they are to return to camp. The cacique Delicola, when asked what lies ahead, says: "Omagua". This seems to be the name of an Indian nation, maybe it's rich in gold or precious stones. Francisco de Orellana and his companions vanish into the trees.

Contemporary witnesses, says the Globetrotter, describe this Orellana as a man of thirty years, originating like the Pizarros from the town of Trujillo in Estremadura; he is, it seems, related to them, but on the good – the noble – side; it's possible that as a boy he felt superior to the bastard of Colonel Pizarro. Now, after a decade roaming about the new Indian realms as a trusted officer of Francisco Pizarro and his brother Gonzalo, his youthful pretensions to nobility may have evaporated, or clothed themselves in some other sentiment.

He certainly owes the Pizarros gratitude; his services in the conquest of Peru have brought rich rewards in gold, estates and honours. He has been assigned the province of Culata to the north of Lima as a sub-prefecture, with the titles Captain-general and Vice-governor; many thousands of Indians constitute his *repartimiento*, his share of the enormous plunder in land and slaves. With them he has populated a newly-founded town, Santiago de Guayaquil; here he might achieve a dignified old age, create something new, or enjoy his treasures in peace. But available documents reveal the young hidalgo as ambitious and restless. Is his soul moved by a desire to be the equal of the lowborn Pizarros? A letter he sent to the court at Madrid is known: he wants the title of actual governor, and so lays complaints in Madrid against the notables of Guayaquil; this happens shortly after his friend Gonzalo Pizarro is appointed his superior, as governor of the province of Quito. Be that as it may: Gonzalo prepares an expedition to the Land of Cinnamon, and Francesco de Orellana at once joins him, filled with yearning dreams – a fig for what he already has! He joins the governor's staff as Teniente-general and first officer. The Pizarros always keep people from Trujillo close about them, they love being surrounded by witnesses to their miserable childhoods. Even the senior spiritual adviser to the Christian army, Vicar-general Gaspar de Carvajal, is from Trujillo.

Francesco de Orellana, at the head of the advance party pressing into unknown expanses, can heave a sigh of relief: now there's no other human will between him and every possibility. This new forest country he has entered, might it not hold every wonder, treasures of every kind? During these days, and in the evenings when they camp somewhere in the thickets, the captain seeks the company of interpreter Miguelito, who at first is taciturn; and when he speaks, his coldly formulated words evince a humbleness at odds with his face and demeanour; he expresses himself like a Spanish Christian, knows that he serves an hidalgo of ancient lineage, and that his brown skin makes him of lesser worth; he must be ready to take every slap in the face with arms folded. But when Orellana hurries on into the lonely forest ahead of his men, as he loves to do, accompanied only by Miguelito, the Peruvian's conduct changes.

In the sultry silence of the forest he suddenly begins to whisper; he says strange enticing things he has never said to Pizarro. He seems to know more of this mysterious unknown land than he was willing to admit before. On one occasion he lets slip that, before the Spanish arrived in Peru, he had already travelled across the Andes: how else could he know the languages of the forest tribes? And then he mentions a big river they will soon reach, much bigger than Tagus or Guadalquivir; but this river is only a small tributary of a vast boundless stream along which all secrets lie, countries of incomparable wealth. If one had a vessel, a brigantine or caravel, one might journey down this great stream as far as the northern sea, and head back to Spain in a ship filled with gold and emeralds; or one might stay in the country, and take for the crown of Castile yet another western realm, bigger than the New Castile of Hernando Cortes, richer than Francisco Pizarro's Peru. Once when the two men are resting all alone in a little clearing, occupied with good fruit that Miguelito knows to find everywhere, he says with sudden daring: Should all the glory go to Gonzalo Pizarro? For myself, Miguelito, my gracious master Don Francisco de Orellano is more close; how much can I do for him! ... Orellano hears this, jumps up with a curse, reminds the shameless Indian of his duty; he is to serve His Excellency the Governor truly, or he'll have a bad time at the end of the provost's lash! At once Miguelito humbles himself with slavish words, he has been misunderstood, this he swears by Our Lady of Guadalupe, and crosses himself piously as he utters the name.

Francisco de Orellana remains all day in a black pondering mood. Miguelito, roughly repulsed by the hidalgo, keeps more with the soldiers. They are happy to talk to him: ever since he and the long-haired cacique Delicola have been their guides, they seldom lack sufficient food. For this smaller band of fifty men the forest provides enough, as long as you know what to look for; the bigger clumsier mob of hundreds, Miguelito perceives, will be hard to provide for. Then why are so many needed, when the native savages are nothing but timid beasts incapable of standing against the good steel of Castilian Christians? Smaller numbers need fear no attack; all those others do is reduce a soldier's rations and his share of the booty, should there be any. Will they actually find plunder in this desperate country? Yes, with a swift advance by a small party of manageable size, like our advance party here, which goes so much better with the bold and affable caballero, Francisco de Orellana, as leader! Press on with him, swiftly, and then when they come to the predicted big river, best to ... a raft, a small boat ... There is for sure a new Peru to be discovered, a new Mexico, gold and emeralds, all you could want; and winning it for yourself, these haughty Pizarros should not have it all!

Such were the discussions Miguelito engaged in with the fifty soldiers of fortune in the advance party, when he had them at his side one by one or in a small group, at evening by the fire, which he knew to make horribly smoky against the damnable mosquitoes, and in daytime when he took one or other of them off hunting in the forest, on a parallel track to the tightly marching column following the river. The two Indians, Miguelito and the long-haired cacique, are the best hunters of the party. The Spanish soldiers, laden with complicated weaponry and

with leather boots on their feet, scare away the game with their trampling and wheezing, or fail to see it, or see it and don't know how to kill it, whereas the two brown men achieve wonders with the simplest of bows, and their arrows that hardly have a point, or only a bit of splintered bone; but Delicola knows how to poison the tip with sap from certain lianas, so that birds, monkeys, aguti hares fall dead at once at even the slightest nick. How wonderful that the flesh of these creatures can nevertheless be eaten! Of the two, Miguelito is by far the least skilled and less experienced, but the other man treats him with a timid reverence that the Spaniards hardly notice; for them Miguelito is a kind of lower being, no old Christian, something like a baptised Morisco or suspicious half-Jewish Marrano, still he's a clever lad and a good comrade, you can't be picky about your society here in the thickest of jungles. The other fellow is still a heathen and a dirty beast, useful as a bloodhound with a good nose; he's thanked with kicks.

When the advance party has marched for a week, they arrive at a spot where the mountain stream joins a big fast-flowing river. Francisco de Orellana is the first to spy this dark water from a little elevation; a delicate sunny mist lies upon it, the eye can follow the rippling water for a short stretch before it vanishes in a distant haze. But a bright strip in the great uniformity of tree-crowns continues on; the river seems to flow more in the sky than on earth. As the caballero stands wide-eyed, hand on his sword grip, all of a sudden there is Miguelito, saying, with an urging in his voice: "That is the Napo River of the Omaguas. It enters the big river that flows through half the world, into the sea where Spain lies." Francisco de Orellana does not respond, slowly he lifts both arms, stretches them out towards this great promise. At last he asks, his voice tight: "What is it called, the big river which this one joins?"

"If you will, it is called Rio Orellana," the tempter replies.

There is an Indian village on the riverbank, and other villages lie further downstream, big irregular clumps of spacious huts amid green crops. The inhabitants flee in their canoes when they notice white people approaching, and Miguelito has a job to persuade some to turn back. These are no longer naked half-beasts of the forest, they wear woven cloth and have carefully wrought utensils. But their appearance is strange and ghostlike, because they have flat-pressed foreheads and no longer look human. In one hut the soldiers find a newborn child with its head bound between two boards: the upper presses the little forehead flat, the other is bigger, the infant lies on it as in a cradle. Buried in the floor of another hut they find a big pot decorated with wavy lines. They smash it, thinking it might hold treasure, and inside they find a crouched body, completely dried and well preserved; on the mummy's head, flat as a hand and swelling at the sides like a bishop's mitre, is a tall crown of gaudy toucan feathers.

The Teniente-general charges his troops sternly to treat the natives well, and via Miguelito sends little presents to the cacique, who has fled in a big war-canoe to an island in the middle of the river. Francisco de Orellana has decided to wait for Gonzalo Pizarro here, where there is food. He sends some men back to him with a message, and meanwhile tries hard to gain the confidence of the Omaguas.

During these days when they wait idly for their comrades, Orellana is tight-lipped and unfriendly. On just one evening he has a long talk with Miguelito.

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The troops of Governor Gonzalo Pizarro follow the advance party, weary, half-starved, it goes worse in the forest for them than for the smaller band that has Miguelito to do the hunting. They stumble morosely on, loaded down with guns, ammunition and equipment. The Peruvian Indians brought along as bearers have almost all been used up along the way; they

were people from the cold highlands, they couldn't survive in this damp heat, damn the delicate beasts! Now old Christians, blue-blooded hidalgos even, have to haul demeaning loads on an empty stomach; and even if they were bars of purest gold, they couldn't have stood it much longer. This gold, the reason why we tolerate all this hunger and exertion, where is it? A couple of flakes ripped from the bloody nose of some naked chieftain is all. But if all the treasures from the big oracle temple of Pachacamac that the Inca priests concealed – they'd tucked it away somewhere before Hernando Pizarro's arrival – what good is even Peru's most monstrous trove of treasure here, where there's no way to carry it off and there's nothing to eat but monkeys and snakes?

This great army, from the general down to the cook, is weary of these terrible marches, the heat and the torrents of rain, and trees that all grow into one another so you have to hack a path, and thick vines you have to chop to pieces, and big wasps whose nests hit you in the face as you do so, and ants that the exhausted man sits upon, the little snakes you step on in the undergrowth, and the big ones that several men have to tackle together, and iridescent swamps with rotting tree trunks that suddenly move and snap open big stinking jaws, and the deep, black watercourses where little fishes play harmlessly, but if you dare put your foot in, or slide off the slippery trunk that bridges the water, then the little herring rips chunks out of your flesh, like a raging shark. You're tired of rustling leaves and the thousand mysterious noises in the undergrowth, and the deep howling in the sleepless nights when you toss and turn about, tormented by beastly midges and little flies that leave round bleeding bites, tired of all the monsters of Hell, and of the red strong-smelling earth you tread, and the sticky black mud, all this unrestrained and undefeated Nature in which the proud lord of the world, the soldier of the fifth Charles, is no stronger or mightier than any animal caught in the jungle growth, able to move only one limb, breaking laboriously through the bush, eating what it can and then being eaten in its turn.

Thus filled with the glowering fury of the travel-weary, Pizarro's people arrive at the bank of the great river where they are awaited by their comrades of the advance party, Orellana's company. But when they see the Omagua villages, cleared fields with stands of maize, fruit trees, canoes full of fish, the soldiers lose all restraint; hungry locusts would have been easier to keep from the fields. So by the time the officers have restored discipline, much has already been despoiled and destroyed, and the Omaguas, with good reason, have become wary if not hostile, though to their women the pretty white strangers are a dream. General Pizarro has only reluctantly tolerated his men's debaucheries, even though these Indians are heathens, suspected of witchcraft with their flattened foreheads; and the Spanish soldier does have his rights after so much deprivation. But in the mind of the commander, a grand plan formed at the moment he saw the glinting waters of this broad deep stream, a plan that might force him to spend several weeks here, living off what is at hand, and as far as possible dealing with the Indians in good faith. His companions' impetuousness disturbs him, their crude hungry haste.

On the third day after his arrival, the Governor calls a council of war in the chief's big hut where he lodges, the quarters that Francesco de Orellana cleared for him as he arrived in the village. A hut on bamboo piles out over the riverbank, astonishingly well constructed and spacious; these Omaguas are more skilled and industrious than the wandering tribes they have met along the way. In one of the big colourful hammocks, knotted together not without artistry from cotton threads, the Governor lies a little feverish, for having shared the rigours of the march as much as the last soldier, he has arrived sick and haggard. Low stools have been set out for the other officers, covered with matting, and there's a kind of desk for the escribano, who is to minute the council of war. That they are here tucked away in deepest jungle, their plight extreme, is by far not sufficient grounds for discarding the ponderous formalities of a

pedantic age and of a nation much given to ceremony. Sick he may be, but Gonzalo Pizarro wears a black silk doublet from the last salvaged chest, and around his neck the golden chain with the big round coat of arms of Castile. The jangling sentry at the doorway announces each arriving officer, as if receiving them at the palace.

They enter according to rank, not at any price yielding an iota of privilege to a comrade.

Francisco de Orellana is there, stately in his ragged and repaired clothes; the grey felt hat he uses in place of the intolerably heavy helmet – it dangles casually now from a hand – is adorned with lovely white feathers from a royal egret shot for him by Miguelito; the caballero has even managed to preserve bright silk ribbons for the knees of his hose.

In he steps now, past comrades who ceremoniously make way for the Teniente-general; he makes a deep bow to the Señor Gobernador, the fine oval face below the full head of brown hair is pale and unsmiling. Behind him come the other officers: alférez, mestre de campo, escribano, meaning: ensign, quartermaster, staff scribe; then Captain Sancho de Carvajal, and two or three others.

After all the soldiers have entered, the matting that serves as a door-curtain lifts once again for a man in black, Friar Gaspar de Carvajal, of the Order of Saint Dominic, Episcopal Vicar-general in Lima; he is one of the clerical Fathers who accompany the expedition, highest in rank, and the shrewdest. Now he steps forward, his hand on the golden crucifix that he wears around his neck, and slowly and solemnly utters a loud prayer.

Now the Council of War commences with the appropriate formality. It is hot in the room, even though a fierce rain is pounding the earth outside. Behind the Governor's hammock stands a thin Indian woman in a bright cotton cloak; she has lines tattooed on her chin, and is fanning away flies. The other caballeros make do with slaps and scratching. Old Antonio de Ribera has pulled from his pocket the clay tube that the Indians of the New World use to suck smoke from their curative herb; slowly and surely, with the aid of a flint and a piece of lint, he lights up his pipe; the Spaniards have long since developed an affection for this little habit, and it helps against the flies.

In a voice that waves of fever soon render feeble and hoarse, and then lively and expressive, Gonzalo Pizarro begins to orate from his hammock. The situation of the army is not favourable, he says, it cannot continue in the same way as hitherto, the pains and deprivations we have suffered are worse than those of Balboa on his march to the Pacific Ocean, and of the rebel Almagro down to Chile. We have endured these in the service of God and His Imperial Majesty, and nothing is more certain than that we shall soon arrive at an end to such miseries ... For did not every Indian chief, every Indian, whom we questioned through the interpreter Miguelito, report the proximity of a rich and populated land well cultivated with maize, yucca, batatoes and Indian millet, item, with manioc root and fruits of every kind, and big open savannah where flocks of Peruvian sheep graze, and the precious vicuña? The Indians were as one in such reports, they spoke it both freely and on the torture rack. It is certain that, with the help of God and Our Lady of Guadalupe, following this Napo River through the country of the flat-headed Omegas, we shall arrive at the kingdom of the Great Cacique Aparia, where already there is a lot of gold. From there to the farthest boundary of this wearisome forest is but a few days' journey, and then begins the fertile plain along the great river of which the Indians report, on which lies the Land of Gold called Paititi, richer than Peru once was before we Spaniards came. In Peru we caparisoned our horses in silver, and so shall we in golden Paititi ...

Here the fever threatens to lure Pizarro into wild dreams, but he pulls himself wonderfully together, drags himself by sheer force of will to a practical view of the present and its military exigencies. However near this longed-for land may lie, he continues in a weaker voice, pressing on to it will be difficult, nay impossible, unless we find a way to convey our baggage through the jungle, our heavy iron equipment, ammunition for our arquebuses, and then there are the sick, of who so many lie in our camp, from yellow swamp miasmas.

What could be better, the general says, than to convey it all down this navigable river that we have reached? We have found several canoes in the villages, but it would be unwise to scatter our forces in these, we need a real ship ...

He is ready, he continues, to build one, and that is why he has summoned this Council of War. Whether there will be enough food to sustain them during the weeks of construction is admittedly not certain, but if they wait longer, then weakened soldiers will no longer be able to haul axes, ironwork and all the necessary equipment, and no vessel will ever be built ...

Gonzalo Pizarro falls silent, exhausted. The Indian woman gives him water. As he gulps greedily, Francisco de Orellana rises from his seat, excited and vehement. Passionately he argues against the shipbuilding plan. It's simply not feasible in this savage wilderness. Where are the skilled carpenters, who knows anything of oakum, where will they find tar? The other officers stare in amazement: when did he ever show himself so small-minded? To all of them the Governor's plan seems sensible, indeed the only possible; each of them has thought of it in silent contemplation, or at least mentioned it. But Orellana remains strangely obdurate, his companions' contradictions he finds insulting, he stammers out short phrases, always the same: impossible to forge enough nails! Where to find tar for caulking? A ship big enough to carry us all can never be built here. We'll all have starved before even a small vessel is finished!

Meanwhile the Governor lies in his hammock, the lids of his closed eyes are red, no one can tell if he's in his right mind and listening. All at once he begins in a clear fresh voice to speak courteously to his companions in arms, but in the tone of a commander more used to issuing orders than taking advice. A smallish vessel can be built easily enough, he says, we have enough iron, we can set up a field forge. For sure this barque or brigantine or whatever won't be able to carry the whole army, but would it not be fully satisfactory if something like the advance party that has performed so outstandingly under our bold friend Orellana were to sail on ahead of us on this ship, with all our sick and all the baggage apart from the most essential weapons, while the remainder of the army marches along the riverbank, unburdened, until evening, when the ship can anchor close to our campsite? And since the land nearby is so well cultivated, such a ship, as soon as it is finished, can be sent out to collect foodstuffs, instead of marching, an exhausted armada, on through this jungle ...

The officers at the Council of War express loud agreement. Once again Orellana objects, on weak grounds but in an almost feverish tone. No shipbuilding! Anything but that! The caballero Sanchez de Vargas, the most junior member of the Council, tries in a low voice to persuade Orellana, whom he considers ill and not in his right mind. Suddenly Gonzalo Pizarro sits half up in his hammock, his golden chain clinks, and all can see how closely in this moment of decision he resembles his brother, the great Marques Francisco.

"Minute the opinion of this Council, and my order," he says to the escribano. "For the better service of God and His Majesty, a barque shall be built here at this place. The work shall be supervised by our Lieutenant-general Francisco de Orellana. This village shall be named in eternal memory: Barco. The Council of War is dismissed."

CHAPTER SEVEN

The historical record, says the Globetrotter, shows that Orellana first strives to prevent the shipbuilding, but is then observed driving the work, once it starts, with a passionate zeal. It's not his fault the ship is being built. But since it is being built, he manages the task himself, keeping all others at a distance in a kind of jealousy. Since Pizarro lies for many weeks in a fever, Orellana as his deputy has to take all the decisions. He sends comrades out to the Indian villages, they forage, fight with Indians, bring back anything edible, at first it's not much, and grows ever less. As builders Orellana gives preference to men of his own troop, the seasoned advance party. More than one among the hardened soldiers, the adventurers, know what a ship should look like, even if all their knowledge was gleaned in the king's galleys. A sailor, Juan de Alcántara, once commanded ships; Andrés Duran used to be a carpenter, and shows his comrades how to wield an axe. But soon it is another, who knows nothing of axes or ships, who becomes the master builder, whose advice all follow.

What they need above all is forged iron, for nails and cramps. A smithy is set up in a forest hut, and Perucho from Biscay is a skilled smith. But above all they must obtain charcoal, and Orellana has woodpiles built and appoints a couple of men as charcoal burners – no happy occupation in this hot weather. Observing the men's reluctance, the Teniente-general himself appears one day at a woodpile and begins lighting it, as if it must be. That how he is: wherever things are most difficult, he sets to with a will himself.

At the evening campfire he watches young Diego Meria use a sharpened charcoal twig on a pale strip of tree bark to sketch a little ship, a brigantine: that's what the mast footing looks like, this is how the topmast sits. His comrades look on grinning; they know he was apprenticed in Seville to a copper engraver, before he ran away to seek Indian gold. The whole camp knows how he kneads a saint out of clay, models tapirs and turtles; they laugh about it, and about the gargoyle faces he scratches with his knife into trees. But Francesco de Orellana does not laugh at the sketch of the ship. He has the strip of bark brought to him for a closer look, examines it carefully. Next day Meria is released from charcoal duty and sits in the hut drafting various plans and sketches. Before long the Teniente does nothing without first asking Meria. This half-boy can do anything. He tells the carpenter which of the trees in the forest is best suited to make planking, which should be used for the keel, and which the mast. He shows the woodcutters the likely best direction for felling the big palm; and the smith how to make a good bellows from the skin of the big tapir creature. All day long the three of them are seen together: Francisco de Orellana, Diego Meria, and Miguelito, for the brown Peruvian too is indispensable. Orellana's energy, Meria's ingenuity, and Miguelito's knowledge of the forest together build this ship.

The river the brigantine is to sail down, and the mighty stream into which it debouches, have never been ravelled by a ship, if one ignores a hollowed-out lump of timber such as the natives know, a sort of light canoe, maybe a clumsily constructed raft; and yet the riches of the forest allow one to build vessels bigger than a Castile galleon. To effect the miracle that this first ship will appear as to the most navigable river in the world, the united efforts of these three are required: the soldier, the artist, and the third who knows the great forest. And so, from the untouched primal forest they build the forest ship that will conquer it.

Orellana is tireless, all day at the boatyard and in the forest; woodcutters suddenly notice he is there, he tests nails at the smithy, and in the shed where they weave mats from the bast of the tucuma palm as a substitute for sail canvas, he stands for hours and urges haste. Wherever he turns up, the harried soldier has no rest in the hot midday. "Make my ship ready," is the watchword that comes always from his lips, he always calls the brigantine, whose hull is

now taking shape on big wooden rollers, “my ship”, and he will not tolerate the presence near it of any of the other commanders. Young Sanchez de Vargas keeps coming by, begs to be allowed to help; Francisco de Orellana sends him to round up the Omagua village that is said to lie in the forest two days march to the west. “He loves the ship like it’s a woman,” sick Pizarro says with a smile to someone who tells him of that curious jealousy. The whole camp repeats the witticism. Does Orellana not have the pallor of the lovelorn? Has the ship bewitched him, or has he let an Indian tattoo his mouth blue and stick a plate in his lip? Pranksters want to know, they ask black Pedro, Orellana’s slave. The giant from Senegambia, the first negro to join the whites in this country – where the blood of his race will now flow forever – Pedro twists his pockmarked face to a grin. “Master in love with ship, him, yes, yes, not sleep, not eat ...”

Another is just as sleepless: Meria. Day after day the most active, his clever head no less zealous than his skilful hands. How to construct a lever for heavy logs – he thinks it out; and then with axe and saw he builds the device himself. No one planes as well as he; and he works out the best way to weave a mat while he forges stronger iron brackets. Even by night a light gleams in the little hut where he lodges by himself. A lamp filled with nut oil illuminates his solitary efforts. From the hard ironwood of the white cedar he carefully cuts and chisels and pokerworks a winged figure with opened pinions.

Miguelito too is tireless. His hands, long and slender as those of any Gothic-blood hidalgo, are never seen to hold a tool; but he disappears with longhaired cacique Delicola into the jungle, and is away a long time. Then they step out into the clearing, and Delicola, wheezing, carries on his back a load of tough vines that can be turned into good rigging. Or it might be a roped bundle of cotton wool, gathered in the forest; this can be used for caulking. Delicola follows the interpreter everywhere, he’s his slave, reveres him as a god. Intercourse with whites had changed not a thing in the mind of this savage, even though the good Dominican Carvajal down at the river one day splashed the sign of the cross over his brow in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. They named him Juan in honour of the Baptist; he can’t pronounce the name, won’t respond to it, he stands by Delicola. He stands by his narrow pelt loincloth, he despises even the cotton cloaks of the Omagua. But he has hung a sliver of glass on a string about his neck, a piece from one of the Governor’s goblets smashed when an exhausted bearer collapsed. When Delicola is by himself he keeps looking at this treasure, he lets it sparkle in the sunshine, and then he sets up a strange long drawn out howl, which might be a song. He avoids the Spanish soldiers whenever he can, they strike out at him because his naked skinny body invites it, and because it’s easy to grab a handful of his long greasy hair. A man who had set a trap in the forest told how he saw Miguelito and Delicola together: the cacique lay in front of the interpreter, whose foot was on his neck.

The hull is completed, but the sailor Juan de Alcántara looks worried and shakes his head: how will the crude shell stay afloat without tar and caulking? For three days no one knows what to do; Francisco de Orellana almost expires from impatience, he rages, because not even Miguelito has any advice to offer, and even Diego Meria’s inventive skills fail him.

On the third day after Miguelito began slowly and patiently to speak to him of the matter, there glimmered in the clouded brain of the savage Delicola an inkling of what mysterious thing the cruel white gods want this time. From the thicket he brings out big sticky lumps of all kinds of resin, wrapped in leaves. The shipbuilders smear it on the planking, stop up every chink with resin and cotton wool. Orellana feels relief, he details men to go out with the two Indians to gather quantities of the stuff.

The Spaniards are surprised when Delicola hauls a big empty turtle shell with him into the jungle; it hangs down over his shoulders, and every soldier gives it a great slap so that it rings. The cacique comes to a stop at a tall tree with smooth pale bark, he uses gestures to demand the axe carried by a Spaniard. He makes a slanting cut into the bark and places the turtle shell beneath it. At once a white liquid drips from the tree. The soldier crosses himself, murmurs the name of the ever-helpful Mother of God – is it milk that spurts from the tree, milk, by heathen witchcraft? Then the hungry man holds a hand under it, begins greedily to lick. It tastes good and fatty, like Andalusian goat's milk! Miguelito indicates, as always by humble words that accord not at all with his proud brow, that this sweet milk is not for drinking. The soldier hears with gritted teeth that not everything in this forest that seems edible should be enjoyed; tells of sad experiences. They move on, leaving the shell where it is; later, as they return, the cacique retrieves it; it's full of white cream.

Delicola carefully carries the full turtle shell back to camp, to Orellana. "Ca-outchou!" he says, pointing, "ca-outchou!" And since Orellana does not know what it means, the cacique takes a scrap of cotton cloth, soaks it in the milk and hangs it in smoke from the charcoal burners' woodpile. The substance congeals, becomes grey and solid, and now the Indian makes a bag of the cloth, goes to the brook, fills it with water – and none leaks out! Woven matting dipped in caoutchou juice becomes waterproof: what a miracle. Now Delicola must fill many vessels with the milk from this tree; he smokes it in smoke from the urucuri nut, which is inedible. It seals every chink and gap in the planking, better than tar.

The ship is finished; never back home in the shipyard of San Lucas has a carvel been built so quickly; but for the impatient army and its general distress, it's still too slow. Weeks pass, and whatever food was available is all gone. Indians have long since deserted their riverside villages; only by night are the menacing wooden drumbeats of Omaguas heard; they hide in the jungle, filled with dread and hatred. Any who venture alone into the jungle must expect an arrow at any moment. In the forest all game has been chased away; in the river all the fish. The only nourishment comes from nuts; a giant snake that crawled one night into camp was killed and at once roasted over the fire: a veritable feast. Gonzalo Pizarro, cured of his fever, eats roasted giant snake along with the men; he won't accept better morsels offered him, the little of maize they still have goes to the sick. And these receive grains doled out one by one.

Keeping them going is just one hope: the brigantine! It floats already on the river, and from the saddlecloth that once adorned the Governor's horse (long since eaten), they make the golden flag of Castile; it flutters from the tall mast. Finally the copper engraver Meria bears a covered thing ceremoniously from his hut: during the nights he has carved for the ship a big figurehead: Victoria, pagan Goddess of Victory; how she will fly on great white wings ahead of the ship to those golden lands, to Paititi ... When he pulls away the rush matting they see how lovely it is, how splendid; the Florentine Michelangelo, painting away this same year in the Vatican chapel, would not have disdained such a young pupil. The Goddess of Victory, carved from a hard log from the forest, is admittedly not like Samothracian Nike who flies like a Hellenic swan: this one is a big jungle bird, brightly coloured and a little barbaric. Where did the artist in his banana-leaf hut find the colours, where the varnish? Maybe Miguelito knows, maybe the cacique, he knows the coloured timbers, and the tree from which wax grows ...

In a little bag under his shoulder this Diego Meria has carried with him up till now a little trove from an Inca temple, or some plundered place: a couple of turquoises, and gold dust in quills. The artist has dedicated it all to his creation: the two big turquoises, the beautiful blue-green of sky seen through jungle foliage, form the eyes of the winged figure, and the globe on which she stands is thickly gilded. The Spanish soldiers stand astonished at Diego's work, and are happy; the warrior likes to play with images of the longed-for victory. Field chaplain

Gaspar de Carvajal, however, makes an unfriendly face when he sees the figure: no heathen deity should be fixed by Catholic Christians to the bow of their ship! But Diego Meria carries the beloved load, his winged goddess, quickly on board; a vigorous hammering can be heard, and next morning the bright bird Nike floats over the darkly flowing waters of the forest river.

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Now comes the chapter, said the Globetrotter, removing the pipe from his mouth, where Pizarro is to assemble his men on the rise behind the camp, the hill from which Orellana first glimpsed the Rio Napo and suspected the presence of a greater, a Great River. Never, I know, shall I be able to paint this scene properly, the majestically melancholy landscape, the freshness of the deep colours in early morning, the river below that loses itself in blue-grey forest, and the big black turkey buzzards that circle over the brigantine; then, halfway up the rise, the ranks of Spanish adventurers, pale from hunger, yellow from fever, but still among them some who strode on that night of terror with Cortez across the lake, by the light of dreadful sacrificial flames to Huitzilopochtli's bloody altar, and others who starved with Francisco Pizarro on the Isla de Gallo, and those who on the triangular plaza of Cajamarca broke ranks at the sound of trumpets from the big bare stone palaces to storm Atahualpa's peaceful ceremonial procession, and who behind the feathered headdresses of the great of his court suddenly caught sight of the Inca's palanquin swaying, and they dragged him out with their profane hands, and tore the scarlet band of kingship from his forehead; and others who were present when the king of a mighty and talented people suffered execution, throttled by the vulgar garrotte like some Spanish thief ...

And there are some who with Belalcazar conquered Quito, and some who were in Chile with Almagro; they hungered and thirsted in the wilderness, when they weren't drinking fermented maize beer from the Inca's golden goblets and slaughtering many precious vicuñas, mighty flocks, merely for the tasty brains, not for their wool. There they stand, mass murderers, robbers, heroes and devout pious children, loyal to their king and rebellious against their governor; hidalgos with the blue blood of the Goths, and sons of whores picked from the gutter; there they stand, imposing still with their helmets that otherwise served for kettles hanging over the fire, today they are polished to a gleam and adorned with big multi-coloured feathers. This one wears the skin of a big wildcat instead of the doublet that rain has stripped from him, but over it the armour of a cuirassier; he has no trousers, but still has the big yellow riding boots, the soles tied on with bark. But none of the warriors is without his weapons, the long swords are freshly sharpened, the little round shields on the left arm, arquebusiers carry gun and fork-rest, crossbowmen the crossbow; there they all stand, with the flags of Castile and Leon, and at the top of the hill the pennant of the House of Pizarro flutters, with its new coat of arms permitted to sport the double-headed eagle of Habsburg, Castilian towers, and a llama as an emblem of Peru, and an Indian town to which a ship with swelling sails is heading ...

But high above all the banners is a wooden cross; the general stands beneath it with the five monks who accompany him. He wears the splendid chasuble that has been brought all the way to the heart of the wilderness, he's about to raise up the host to the gaze of his army. The solemn service that Gonzalo Pizarro has ordained to celebrate completion of the great work begins right away. There he stands, the great Governor of Quito, splendid in his damascened armour, around his neck a chain of big unpolished emeralds; he's taller than the officers around him, stately in the gaudy decorations he so loves. At his side, in a tattered doublet, Francisco de Orellana, with the egret plume in his felt hat; they knew each other as young urchins, nobleman's son and swineherd; now the former swineherd is lord of the hidalgos, but it hasn't granted him the nobleman's slender grace, his neck is still short and thick even when

he dangles fist-sized emeralds from it. How he stands there in black silk beneath shining armour, carved staff in his hand, even in the wilderness loaded down with pomp, one of those bastard brothers, all of Trujillo used to point the finger at them! He is Francisco de Orellana's benefactor, his brother in arms, a good friend! A crass parvenu. No, a hero, he's done wonderful deeds.

What is happening in Orellana's heart? Now Gonzalo Pizarro turns with a gesture that will have momentous consequences: he stretches his field-marshal's baton away from him and points out to his army the ship that lies down there on the sun-sparkling river, imposing to look at with its high stern and sails that catch the breeze, this jungle ship created piece by piece from the blood and bone of this great forest, Francisco de Orellana's jungle ship, whose completion is due to him alone, only him, and the comrades closest to him. And now Gonzalo Pizarro's baton of command points to this lovely ship as *his* triumph, as if he had lifted the ship from his new-minted coat of arms and placed it with his own two hands onto this river, and indicates the Victory who seems to be flying ahead of the ship on her white wings, towards the mysterious lands of their great yearning, lands that lie downstream from here, in the golden mists that lies on this river of promises; and now Gonzalo Pizarro uses his symbolic baton to demonstrate his power over this yearning dream that is the dream of Don Francisco de Orellana, the torment of his nights and his whole life's meaning; there, with a single brief gesture, he opens the rift that has long lurked in Orellana's heart; and with a single prideful glance he loses his friend.

Yet he doesn't know this. Gonzalo Pizarro points out to the army the ship that is to bring them bread, that they shall soon load up with plunder, with all the plate of the Golden King, El Dorado, enthroned in the castle of Manoa on the golden lake, not much farther on from here, in the land of Paititi where gold is as common as the silver in Gonzalo Pizarro's own mineworks at Potosì ... Bread and gold, shouts the commander down the slope, to his hungry iron men who listen motionless, this ship will bring us bread and gold, good corn, yellow cobs of maize that await us downstream, just a few miles from here, so easily reached by our ship, when we would suffer hardships to attain this blessing had we not the ship! First bread, then gold, first the bread without which we cannot by our victory secure the gold; but who, now that we have the lovely ship, can doubt our victory? The emblem of Spanish glory, of bright and happy victory, flies visibly ahead of the ship, whose name shall be – *Victory!*

The commander falls silent, but the shrill blare of trumpets chimes in, heard for the first time in this wild forest; and arquebusiers fire powder into the morning air. "Victory!" the soldiers cry, "Victory!" Now they're silent, the priest will commence Mass, the Te Deum of this joyful day; but a curious sound comes through the air, an almost ghostly howl from the forest. There, where the jungle borders on open savannah, brown people have crept up, their heads strangely flattened, they wear bright woven cotton cloaks, women with brown breasts, tightly bound hair, shocked eyes protrude over broad cheekbones, and they stare at the god-business their spies have told them of, and at the canoe in which the Sun floats on the river, for they know the golden ball beneath Nike's feet is the globe of the Sun, and that the wicked white demons will carry the Sun away from the land of the Omagua on their great magic canoe, down to the realm of the Great River from which no one ever returns alive. The tribe's Paje has preached this for weeks, he who knows secret medicines and every magic. The desire to see this miraculous work is stronger even than their terror of it, and of the strangers. There they lurk now, lurking in the last of the forest shadows, Omagua warriors, and now the thunder of arquebuses, the incomprehensible song of trumpets speaks horribly and mysteriously to them of the white man's magic, of the unfathomably dreadful marvel of his willpower, and now all of a sudden the Omagua fling themselves and their flat heads to the ground, begin to howl, a

drawn-out loud and so so feeble scream of horrified impotence, the forest that was forced to produce this ship seems to whimper, and this ship will in the end conquer the forest ...

One man stands apart from the iron-clanking ranks of the white man's army, aside from the savages lying there with their impotent lamenting. Miguelito, in a Spanish smock, stands silent and alone and stares towards the ship *Victory* that is his work more than anyone else's. As his long nobleman's hand shades his eyes, his face loses its expression of forced humility, his gaze over the Indian hawk-nose grows sharp and clear, and his mouth mumbles words that no Castilian ear would ever understand. Then, suddenly, Miguelito assumes the old mask again, he sinks to his knees, an obedient child of the Catholic Church; the Mass has begun.

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When Father Gaspar de Carvajal has concluded the High Mass, the escribano steps up to join him at the altar and proclaims to the assembled army the orders of the General and Governor: Today rest; tomorrow the brigantine shall be loaded; next day the advance party shall set sail under the command of Don Francisco de Orellana; Don Hernan Sanchez de Varga shall go with them as alférez of the colours; Juan de Alcántara as pilot, and the Reverend Father Gaspar de Carvajal as ship's chaplain, so that the Indians of the fertile lands downstream may remain not one day longer than necessary deprived of Christian instruction. The army shall remain here in Barco until Orellana's mission sends news that he has discovered the good region of which the Indian chiefs speak, or, better, until he returns with the brigantine fully laden, with foodstuffs on board that we all so desperately need. So decided and so ordered, to the better service of God and the Castilian Crown ...

Two days later the troops crowd together at the shore, hungry but full of hope, to watch the ship speed swiftly with billowed sail away from there, into a land of abundance where hunger is unknown. At the bow, by the feet of the winged Goddess of Victory, stands Orellana, drawn up to his full height; he looks pale and grim. Behind him Miguelito mutters in his ear as the ship *Victoria* disappears around a bend in the river from the sight of the troops – and of Gonzalo Pizarro, his golden helmet visible from the ship to the very last moment as it glints in the first rays of the early morning sun.

Day after day the brigantine drifts, nowhere does the forest that presses against both banks open up; the ship dashes over roaring rapids. So certain were they of fertile fields nearby that they departed Pizarro's camp almost without provisions; now the priest doles out flour that he brought along to bake Communion wafers. They begin to despair; the river rushes ever more madly; a tree trunk half sunk in water almost shatters the vessel. One day, unexpectedly, a valley opens up: enormous, immense, glittering beneath a glowing blue sky is a monstrous stream, flocks of water-fowl swirl about the ship as it emerges from the smaller river into the shining waters of the larger.

"Mar dulce!" cry the Spanish soldiers thronging the deck. "Freshwater sea!"

"Marañon!" cries cacique Delicola.

Miguelito is at the captain's side. "Is this river called Marañon?" the captain asks.

"It is called Rio Orellana, if only you are bold enough," says Miguelito.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Gentlemen, says the Globetrotter, you no doubt already know the outlines of the tale, you know that Francisco de Orellana will never see Gonzalo Pizarro and his men again, and that

historians still exercise themselves with the contentious question: was it the blackest treason a soldier could commit against his comrade the General and all his other comrades; or did the rapids render a return voyage to the expedition's camp impossible, even if he had stumbled on the longed-for land of abundance, of food that he could have carried back to them? The scholarly controversy has lasted four centuries already: was the discoverer of the Amazon a hero or a villain? I, who consider him one of the great yearning souls, and shall so depict him, I have no need to paint him innocent: why should his passion not have led him to the point of criminality? And if it were true that Gonzalo Pizarro's treasures were aboard the brigantine, his gold, his emeralds, and that Orellana was not just a traitor but a thief too! And for Gonzalo Pizarro I no longer care a fig, not his long fruitless wait, and his rage at the failure of the ship to return; I have no need to depict the dreadful retreat of this man back to Quito, nor his further fate when he finds his brother, executioner of the Inca, dead, murdered during a civil war that started up just then to shake the America of the Spanish conquerors, and in which Gonzalo Pizarro too would lose his head, tragically, on the executioner's block, as the leader of a rebellion, having briefly held full power in his hands as ruler of Peru.

But I shall probably need to include in my book how Orellana, a Spanish hidalgo, still impassioned, still formally a criminal, at once legalised his position at an assembly of his full crew, somewhere on a sandbank where the river forked, and how he allowed himself to be pressed and persuaded before making himself Captain, formally renouncing his rank as Gonzalo Pizarro's Teniente general "in order to be more pleasing," it says in a document, "in the service of God and His Majesty, and in order to serve them." This formal document, as I said, still exists, with forty-nine signatures of Orellana's companions, whereby they

beg Your Grace in the name of God and the King not to commence a voyage back upstream, in which the lives of so many good men would be at risk, it being also the opinion of the experienced sailors here with us in the bark and the boats, that we find ourselves here two hundred leagues or more distant by land from the camp of Lord Governor Pizarro, and these two hundred leagues utterly without paths or villages, and furthermore the terrible mountains we ourselves saw by experience and with our own eyes as we descended the river in the said bark and canoes, suffering great tribulations and also hunger ... Wherefore we now beg Your Grace and implore and require that you not make us return upriver, and issue no such order, for such would be occasion for us to refuse obedience to Your Grace ...

Oh, there are documents enough, said the Globetrotter; maybe I shall write a triple-decker historical novel; the third volume will contain the author's notes, the dear reader has no need at all to read them. There I would cite the other petition, submitted by "Francisco de Isásaga, Escribano of Your Majesty", for naturally Orellana's rebellion begins with the appointment of a scribe, to keep a proper record. So: Isásaga, Escribano of His Majesty in Orellana's armada, hereby makes known that the noble gentleman Francisco de Orellana no longer wishes to be Teniente-general of the noble gentleman Gonzalo Pizarro, Governor and Captain-general of the Province of Quito and of a Land of Cinnamon to be discovered, but that the knights, hidalgos, comrades and good fellows of this present armed mission request, implore and desire of him that he be accounted their Captain, and no longer return upstream, and in so doing shall prove his service to God our Lord and to His Majesty; "and to us a blessing," they said. "And forthwith," the document continues gravely, "in respect of said petition, and to the glory of God our Lord, and of His Majesty the King, and their better service, the said Señor Captain Francisco de Orellana declared that he accepts it, and accepted it in the name of His Majesty and subscribed to it his name: Francisco Dorellana. In the presence of myself, Francisco de Isásaga, Escribano of the said army ... And thereupon, all that had subscribed

thus laid hands on the Missal and swore with all formality by God and the Holy Virgin and by the sign of the Cross, by the four holy evangelists, to stand by said Captain Francisco de Orellana as Captain and to remain obedient to him as such in every thing, as was so ordered in the name of His Majesty. Witnessed by Father Friar Gaspar de Carvajal and Father Friar Gonzalo de Vera. All this as it proceeded before me, the said Escribano. Francisco de Isásaga, Escribano of the Army.”

Oh, said the Globetrotter, I would have material enough for a volume of scholarly notes to this solemn “historical” novel about the romantic tale of yearning I shall never write ... Or should I perhaps? Should I write the terrible scene where the young hidalgo that Gonzalo Pizarro gave to Orellana as his Ensign, Don Hernán Sanchez de Vargas, all alone set himself against treachery and made a fine speech, perhaps in iambic meter: Ha, traitor, never shall I fall For all thy finest words! Loyal I remain – so tremble, tyrant! This minor tragic episode, how cruel Orellana then abandons loyal Sanchez all by himself in the untamed wilderness between the two rivers and the terrible mountains – and how this loyal young man (for virtue triumphs in the end) was nevertheless saved when Governor Gonzalo Pizarro came marching in his desperation a little way into the jungle in search of the absconding brigantine ... And Sanchez de Varga tells him of Orellana’s treachery ...

This, said the Globetrotter, I would write with all due solemnity, in the book I would like to write when I think of such official episodes; and then perhaps too the scene, elevating for Spanish patriots and patriots of every kind, when Captain Francisco de Orellana “takes possession” the document says, of eleven caciques, in “the said village of Aparia, and the said taking of possession occurred without any objection, and these caciques appeared in peace and served food to the Christians, and the names of the caciques who declare that they are caciques are: Aparia, Hirimara, Parayta, Dimara, Aguare, Piriata, Ayniana, Hurumara, Maluyana, Guaricota, Mapiare ...”

This provides me with a splendid scene for my novel, said the Globetrotter; the Castilian flag greeted humbly by the caciques as it is hoisted majestically on the brigantine’s mast ... Maybe I could compose a fine paragraph on Orellana’s thrilling oration, which makes much of atoning for his guilt and his people cry “Hurrah!” or maybe “Castile and Santiago de Compostella!” ... I don’t know, I shall have to think it over ...

But then, believe me, I shall soon enough throw a little of this historical and historico-cultural ballast overboard from the brigantine and rather seek out the skin beneath Francisco de Orellana’s lovely Renaissance armour, and the heart that lies beneath the skin ... Is it, by the way, conceivable that these conquistadors stomped iron-cuirassed through the tropical forest, in the sunny midday, in heavy metal helmets? If I could conceive it then perhaps I would write this great historical novel of the Conquista; but since I can’t, should I not rather attempt to tell of what does not appear so exhaustively in the chronicles of Vicar-general Gaspar de Carvajal, or even between the lines, something of this mighty river, this dreadful, wonderful forest, and young human hearts?

*

Francisco de Orellana, says the Globetrotter, drifted on the great stream, in this jungle ship that he had built, onward to meet his yearning – and the goal of his desire disappears. He has to reach the lands he dreamed of, it is the punishment for his deed.

Through a country of endless forest the brigantine sails, downstream, on wide expanses of water, and then again into a confusion of islands. There is no end to the river; from the deep damp forest on every side come flowing brooks, rivers big and small. Thousands of these

gateways lead into the great wall of trees, into dark dense thickets where secrets lie, dangers perhaps, and perhaps gold and treasures of every kind. Day after day the eye sees nothing but the jagged outline of green tops, and low sandbanks where a brook flows in, and on them, stiff and horrible, big lizards lie like rotting tree trunks, disgusting armoured creatures of fable. The gloomy forest that seems to spill from the innards of the vast plain into the great river, dipping a myriad tangled roots into the water, squeezing out onto the waves a myriad dead trunks, the pilot's bane, everywhere is forest, it covers the islands, and clumps of it, uncanny to watch, float downriver. The sailor in the crow's nest sees woodland and water, water and woodland; where the channel narrows, the ship comes near enough that menacing arms seem to reach out to the oarsmen. Often it is quite silent, seemingly dead; it lurks, waits soundlessly, then when the sun has set it fills with mysterious voices, deep roaring that jolts every heart, and the whetting of a giant scythe that seems to hang invisible overhead, to be sharpened anew every night. Who sharpens a scythe in this deep forest? Oh, those nights when silent storms suddenly pour down, lightning without thunder, and huge torrents from an abruptly veiled heavens!

This is the country, alien, frightful. It is filled with life; big birds glide over the ship; bright parrots quarrel in the branches there's a rustling, crackling in the undergrowth; sometimes you see monkeys making faces; the air is filled with flying pestilence, swarms of midges. Big fins flash in the water; born of the scorching heavens, the creature swirls a thousandfold, and in the midst of this abundance lurks hunger. These white men from a distant other land, drifting through this landscape like alien creatures of fable in their big crude ship that has no knowledge of the great stream's course, its shallows, its sunken rocks, the myriad dangers from floating trunks, the floating islands that suddenly appear – this big outrageous machine from other latitudes, the brigantine, the monster, scares away all game as it approaches, these armoured men with their booted feet drive away with their stomping the prey they seek when they come ashore; the arquebuses they have to drag through rustling undergrowth and set laboriously on the fork-rest rammed into the ground, and touch a piece of gun cotton to it, how is it supposed to bring a monkey down from its branch? Even the crossbow is too crude and slow. The men stomp alien and helpless through the forest that they hate and that hates them, and they have no idea how to catch the fish that swim. For one thing only are they suited: war. Something new has entered this primal jungle world: jaguar and jacaré, cat and caiman, have up till now known how to kill every other creature, and the Indians, naked brown forest people, with their blowpipe, arrow and stone-tipped spear, have killed jaguar and jacaré, cat and caiman. Now there is something new in the forest, a new predator, the strongest: a beast that can kill Indians, can ward off his poisoned dart, and shatter his stone with its iron. It is as if all of a sudden, into this land of jaguars, lions have come swimming over the ocean, a small pride, insuperable. They gaze around bewildered at this forest that is not theirs; they know how to hunt zebra, but not the tapir. Then suddenly they crouch for a leap; they've scented a village of Indians. That's how Orellana's Spaniards hunt Indians.

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Here and there along the banks of the great stream are huts of the brown people. Omaguas and Ticunas, Juri and Coniboa, who can tell the difference? This tribe goes naked, that one weaves flapping cloaks of tree-cotton. The Juri tattoo a circle about the mouth, the Ticuna an oval with lines up to the ears; and the Passe prick marks under the eyes, and their women are fine and slim, and the Carcaua are dwarves, the Curiguere are giant-sized. They speak many languages. These ones eat the hearts of enemies, and shrink the head, sew up the lips; they hang this horrible thing about the neck. These others are mild and gentle, they know many of the arts of peace, maize and manioc grow about their huts. Others again are fishermen, who

know how to catch big fish with their spears; at evening young hunters bring parrots back to the village, turkeys and peccaries; in these clearings you can find distilled drink, and ponds where they keep giant turtles, and shy brown women. All of it belongs by right to the Spaniard; he knows this. Did not the Captain take formal possession from the caciques, beneath an unfurled flag, in the name of the king? The escribano wrote it all down!

At first all goes well. The tribes of the upper course, Omaguas and Irimaraes, are gentle and pliable, their villages are full of good vittles. They have heard of the great Inca who dwells beyond the mountains, and they believe that the strangers are sons of the Sun. They bring them turtles, parrots, maize meal, and intoxicating drinks that their women brew from manioc, they chew the root and let the spittle ferment. One chief is called Aparía, or that's the name of his tribe; to the Spaniards he seems some kind of mighty prince, they call him Great Aparía, he becomes the friend and a good vassal of the king, and in his village the priest erects a cross. They rest here a week, and their skin fills out again, full and taut. On Sunday the Dominican preaches a sermon.

Francisco de Orellana grants his soldiers their rest; he himself is all impatience, would like to move on. On, on; now he's here, here everything is real and commonplace, a little farther on is the marvel, the dream, the land of gold, soon, around the next bend in the river, for sure, where the next tributary enters the stream! Orellana can already question the Indians himself, he has learnt some words of the Tupi language that many of the forest tribes can understand. Yes, says Aparía, yes, say Parayta, Dimara, there is a fine country, a few days farther on ... Yes, there is a yellow stone like the one the son of the Sun wears on his finger, you can find it, there's a lot in that country! They say yes and would have said yes if asked about golden elephants, or if the Great Mogul of India resides on the next river.

Sometimes Orellana may have doubts, as he might suddenly doubt what Miguelito says, sometimes. Then he lies back languidly in his hammock between two shady trees, and Aparía squats on the ground beside him like a Moor or a Turk; Aparía is tall, he wears a gaudy crown of feathers that seem more precious than jewels, and a shirt of jaguar-skin, and rings of monkey-bone at every knuckle, but in his hand he holds an iron axe, a gift from Orellana, he will not be parted from this treasure, which is imbued with great and mighty magic. There he squats, smeared with bright colours, and speaks, all at once, unprompted, speaks of the big big village over there in the forest, inhabited by people of magic who are themselves sons of the Sun, their faces quite white, and mischievous Curupira has shown them treasures that lie in the big swamp; their turtles are very fat, their manioc roots are thick as an arm ... Now the Captain jumps up from his hammock. He wants to know the name of this big town of gold, and where is it! Great Aparía stretches out an arm, the bony bracelets clatter: downstream, so many suns, as many as fingers, and more. Where a black river enters the great stream and the waters do not mix. Many suns. Big village, fat turtles. The name of the village is – Manoa.

This day Orellana is happy. He orders that the ship diligently be made ready to set sail; he details crews for three big canoes that are to proceed ahead, to scout for information and identify shallows, rocks and whirlpools. He commandeers for himself Aparía's big boat with its hut of palm ribs, he must stand at the prow, he must be the first to spy the golden land, the first fame and first danger are his due.

When the Spaniards set off, Aparía accompanies them to the last village downstream that belongs to his tribe. He gives them maize, and pots of honey from wild forest bees. To the last they see him standing in his canoe with the iron stance that has made him rich and powerful, and his warriors sing out: White man good cousin, Aparía love white man!

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And then again days come that are nothing but water and forest, hostile wilderness, hard toil at the oars when the wind is contrary, the sail becomes useless and the current sluggish. Hunger is again serious; the last few grains at the bottom of the chest are counted out, they eat what they find here and there in the forest, roots, leaves. Then one evening they hear the drumming that announces a village is nearby; at daybreak it is sighted, but a sudden hail of poisoned darts breaks loose, unexpected, after a rainy night has dampened the powder in the arquebuses. Alonso de Robles, the hidalgo named by Orellana to be alférez and his deputy, storms the village with drawn sword, takes prisoner those old women who have not managed to flee, they name the cacique who has dared to rebel against His Majesty: Machiparo. Machiparo is as big and powerful as Apiara, Machiparo keeps turtles in a big unfenced pond, Captain Orellana sends Cristobal Maldonado of Segovia out of the conquered village to look for the turtles, and for maize cobs in the fields, he assigns a dozen men to go with him: they find the turtle pond, thousands of turtles swimming and crawling about, great water birds with beaks like shovels stand gravely atop them. The Spaniards, starved as wolves, butcher like wolves more than they need; they overturn big turtles, kill them, a hundred, a thousand, who keeps count. Then all of a sudden, like a humming swarm of hornets, a cloud of darts comes flying from the reeds; Cristobal Maldonado is wounded, every one of his men is bleeding, they withdraw in great difficulty, but all drag a few turtles back to the village. They find the village besieged, two thousand Indians caper howling around it, no one has ever seen naked savages fight like this. One soldier leaps gallantly into the fray, Blas de Medina does this, with steel sword and round shield he hacks at dozens of naked bodies; crossbows send heavy bolts through their shields of woven withies and alligator skins; their weapons are made of wood, stone and bone; nevertheless they fight like heroes for their houses, no Spaniard remains unwounded, this one takes an arrow, that one a long fish-harpoon with a barbed bone point. Then wood and hard stone and horribly pointed animal bones are defeated by the steel of Spanish swords, the rest is a slaughter, disgusting and cruel. In vain does Father Gaspar in such cases plead for the lives of prisoners.

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This Friar Gaspar de Carvajal, said the Globetrotter, who wrote the only authentic account of the first discovery of the Amazon River, must have been a good monk, quite unlike that other Dominican, the fearsome Friar Vicente de Valverde, bishop of Cuzco, whom we spy standing unmoved beside the dying Inca Atahualpa, and in every place where Pizarro's crimes against the people of Peru are committed. Friar Gaspar's writings seem to show him as a good and gentle man, a friend and advocate for the Indians like the famous Las Casas, and with it personally courageous in every danger; twice during the journey he was wounded, he lost an eye to an arrow. A true Christian, a noble priest, only as a chronicler was he not quite first-rate. When he suffered hunger along with his companions, he describes it in detail; after all these centuries we know exactly on what day they had only leaves to eat, and when they had a little maize, and when a turtle; the exact date is known, the priest writes it down conscientiously, and so we find in his account passages like this:

Wednesday on the eve of Corpus Christi, seventh day of June, the captain ordered a mooring to be sought in a little place standing above said river, and it was taken with no armed opposition, where we found much to eat, especially fish, for of these we found so many and in such abundance that we could have loaded up the brigantine, but the Indians had them to dry, in order to carry them inland to sell.

This he notes with great care, and every skirmish, who was wounded, who died, we know the names of the Spaniards who fell in battle here or there, and who died of fever, we know them, all fourteen names ...

Only there where the riddle begins, the mystery, does this man of faith grow terse and obscure. Six lines report how they captured an Indian woman on an island, and that she was comely, and “of good understanding, and said that inland from here were many Christians like us, and a chief has hold of them who brought them downriver, and she told us that two white women were among them, and the others had Indian women and sons of them ...”

That this island also had parrots and many peacocks and turtles in great abundance (praise be to the Saviour); this the priest narrates in exhaustive detail. The Indian woman, the prisoner, comes into the tale a couple of times later on, the priest mentions her, but diffidently ... So is it every time when his report should veer away from the everyday, from the dangers of the voyage, food, and all those skirmishes in some riverbank village or other, and how the Indians pursued the brigantine in many canoes and the captain drew his sword to fend them off: Follow me, Spanish caballeros! ... It's as if the good father want to maintain silence about certain things; has he perhaps made a promise to his companions, to Orellana, who is thinking of returning later with stronger forces in order to solve the riddle, dig up the treasure in the jungle, find the island of white slaves and the realm of the Amazons, the golden city hidden in the obscure corner between the Amazon and the Rio Negro, which is unknown even to us today?

In the book I would like to write, said the Globetrotter Hilary, I must not fail to speak of things mentioned only fleetingly in the monk's chronicle, of this pretty Indian prisoner of Orellana's. She is called Coniapuyara, the name is passed down in source materials, it means Great Lady. This woman, who fell into Spanish hands during a skirmish, along with her bow and arrows, her light brown body almost naked apart from a jaguar pelt, the thick long hair in braids about her head, adorned like a glittering crown with feathers of the toucan and little jewel-bright honeybirds, the Amazon woman Coniapuyara, she's not my invention, there she stands in the Dominican's yellowed parchment.

Does Orellana love her? Does he take her? The monk leaves us in the dark, slides shyly away from the topic, and little does he say of what follows, of the great battle of Spaniards versus Amazons in the year of Our Lord 1542, “on the day of the blessed John the Baptist, Christ's forerunner”, at a bend in the river where they are meant to come upon the island inhabited by white Christians, slaves of a cacique, or maybe of a female chieftain, could it be the “great lady” herself, Coniapuyara? How the battle proceeded, this is related by Orellana's military chaplain, he writes pages and pages! How the Indians attack in dark swarms to the throbbing of war drums, with horrible cries, and everywhere led by women fighters: “to the Indians these are as captains,” says Father de Carvajal, “and the harm done by each to us was more than by ten other Indians.” ... He tells of one whose arrow buried itself “deep as a hand's breadth” in the brigantine's planks, followed by so many others that “the brigantine was as bristled as the back of a porcupine.” And we see Orellana's war party flee before these naked Amazons like the army of Achilles before Penthesilea's horde; they do not set foot on the island, they do not free the white Christian slaves, “for to fetch these away from where they find themselves, the time will surely come.” The priest's words are terse and secretive, and he tells much of other villages downstream that the fleeing brigantine passes by with rapid oar strokes while on every side flotillas of splashing expertly-manned pirogues approach, filled with big naked Indians, Muras, who shoot with longbows. They look like giants as they sit paddling; when they stand to shoot an arrow you are amazed how short their legs are. Longhaired people; they stick wild boar teeth through holes in their lips; to the Spaniards, this is the work of demons.

The bodies of the Muras are broad and dark; the skin of the Amazons distributed among them here and there in the boats stands out paler: slim, elegantly shaped women quite unlike

the dirty savages they fight alongside. They carry the big Mura longbow, six feet long, and with loud cries send arrow after arrow flying; and others have long dark tubes from which they blow little darts a long distance. They strike the Spanish ship like raindrops in a shower.

Orellana's ship – a giant among the small frail canoes with its proud bulwarks, sconces and tall masts, a ship filled with iron and steel – drifts into this flotilla of naked bodies, wooden weapons. On board are three arquebuses, tubes that thunder and lighten and spew out hot metal. There it floats, the proud brigantine, and at the masthead flies the golden flag of the emperor on whose realms the sun never sets. Little forest men and furious women in hollowed logs take on the mighty vessel, howling.

Suddenly it turns to flight; the panicked oarsmen row like mad, so that the brigantine races downstream. Just so does the forest ranger flee through jungle thickets, when he accidentally steps into a nest of juturi-ants: the ant is tiny, powerless, easy to stamp on, but their poisonous bites hurt. An arquebus shot fired into one of the pirogues causes it to sink, and little devilish devour many corpses; and yet the ship, called *Victoria*, is seen to flee from these savages, from these women who spurt darts from blowpipes and arrows from bamboo bows, tipped with a thorn, a point of bone. At the bow where the figurehead is, the goddess with spread wings, Diego Mería stands grimly determined to protect his handiwork with his little round metal shield. In vain; wooden Nike is already pricked with arrows, they stick in her breast and wings, and one, a big long arrow, brightly feathered, has pierced the goddess's radiant brow between the two flashing jewels of eyes ...

Diego Mería screams as if he himself has been hit, then he drops the shield and sets a bolt to his crossbow, coolly and carefully, and cranks the string, and shoots, and a big Indian painted in red and white stripes drops groaning into the river: the bolt sits in his brow between the eyes. Oars grow heavy with arrows before the Spanish oarsmen, straining every muscle, pull the ship free downstream past mud huts, past villages throbbing with drumbeats, tree trunks hollowed and clad in manatee skin; and ever and again they see naked painted people dancing the war dance, and others who hide behind ghostly masks; they seem like giants, shaggy monsters, scraps of jaguar, boar and tapir are piled high over the hidden head, and antlers and the heads of devils that dwell in the dark forest. This one looks like a crane, that one a stork, and they dance, a club in their claws, howling, menacing, the Spaniards tremble as they observe the evil magic. And elsewhere it is again war in place of war dance, boats glide quick as lightning through the reeds, and like a dense swarm of vicious mosquitoes here come the arrows, until a bend in the river suddenly brings the horror to an end. Just as the wind wafts mosquitoes away, and the wanderer heaves a sigh, relieved and refreshed, just so does the swish of arrows cease.

A vast, lonely and welcome silence envelopes the harried vessel; only one burst of laughter shrills out behind them: the cry of the trumpet-bird that nests in reeds. The men dress the many light scratches that burn like hell, and Diego Mería, ignoring his own wounds, tenderly pulls arrows from his beloved winged goddess, only the brightly coloured arrow between the eyes does he leave where it is, deep in the tight hard wood. Victory shall bleed from the wound until the shame of this hour is avenged in the blood of the Amazon.

At the stern, unwounded in steel armour, stands Don Francisco de Orellana, gazing back filled with anger and grief, back to the riddle he was unable to solve, to that island where the great secret lies, to the women whose fury forced him to flee ...

Then he goes into his hut on the deck, where Coniapuyara lies tied up on a cot, the captive Amazon. He cuts the rope around her arms with his dagger, begins to talk to her in the Tupi

language he learnt from Miguelito. He has to know more about the Amazons, who they are, their customs; he shall defeat them once more, only then may he die ...

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This battle with the Amazons, said the Globetrotter, was not invented by me in order to make the novel I may perhaps write more romantic. It stands there in the dry report of the voyage made by Vicar-general Gaspar de Carvajal. That somewhere in the jungle, along the great unknown stream, there lies a curious realm of warlike women – this had already reached the ears even of Gonzalo Pizarro's companions on the other side of the Andes, writes the Vicar-general. And he adds, quite calmly and matter-of-factly, how he saw these women: tall and slender, pudenda covered by an animal pelt, hair braided on the head, and how they led Indians boldly into battle. And the Dominican monk also notes what their prisoner had told them, Coniapuyara, and what an old Indian knew next day: that these women did not dwell on the banks of the Great River, but had come in their big war-pirogues when news of the approach of the white men reached them. Their realm lies inland, in the great fork of the two rivers, yellow and black; but they are allies of the Mura tribe, the people of the long bow, that dwells here on the riverbank ...

The Globetrotter fell silent for a while ... Strange, he said then, if it was only a fairytale, as most researchers believe, strange how the fairytale outlives the fact, how this legend of the Land of the Amazons has obscured the memory of Orellana's epic expedition! The river to which the conquistador wanted to give his name – Rio Orellana – what does our sober present day call it? The Amazon! And where Francisco de Orellana sought the town of *Manoa*, now lies the town *Manaus*, glittering with electric lights, sparks flying from electric trams along the streets, with its opera and cinema and wireless telegraphy: there now lies Manaus, the conquistador could never have imagined his dream-town Manoa so opulent, so filled with wonders, with incomprehensible magic treasures ...

As the ship of Francisco de Orellana nears the mouth of the Rio Negro, and Orellana sees the rippling water of the tributary roll into the yellow current of the main river – mysterious blue-black water that for a long distance does not merge with the other – I see Orellana one evening gazing into the big round sun as it sinks in purple-violet glory that fills the universe with magic, and dream-pictures emerge from the glowing orb, from the golden glowing clouds in which you see islands and cities and big gilded domes, fantastical battlements – what is Orellana the dreamer gazing at? The city of the Dorados, Manoa, capital of the Paititi! He has no inkling of a ferro-concrete opera house, an electric arc lamp, a hospital where people are rejuvenated with monkey hormones; if he had such an inkling, he would scoff at the dream, he dares to dream of Manoa, but never of Manaus.

My dear Doctor Schwarz, said the Globetrotter Hilary, that's how it goes on this improbable Earth with the wonders that we so long for.

CHAPTER NINE

In the report of Gaspar de Carvajal, said Hilary, between the skirmish with the Indians and a foraging party, an episode is outlined in which one of the boats that travel ahead of the brigantine to sound the channel becomes lost one morning among islands, and remains missing for several days. In this boat I see the leader, Francisco de Orellana, push away from the ship. Ever since the big archery-battle with the Amazons he seems to me no longer the same man. That hot evening after the encounter, what did the captive Indian woman Coniapuyara whisper in his ear?

He no longer sleeps, no longer eats, the ship has grown intolerable, and intolerable the coarseness of his noisy comrades; he even avoids the one who would have understood him best, the copper engraver Mería, who sits now morosely on deck, sketching with a stick of charcoal on a piece of hide slender women drawing longbows. Ensign Alonso de Robles has the command on board; Orellana, the leader, hastens ahead in the boat with feverish impatience, gnawed by voracious longing, almost alone, there is no friend to stand by him, only people of a different colour: Miguelito, and Delicola the longhaired savage from the mountain forest, and Pedro the pockmarked negro slave, who follows Orellana like a dog and loves him as a dog loves its master. And she is there too, the Indian woman, Coniapuyara.

A barrel-shaped roof of woven bamboo and palm leaves shelters within its arc the stern half of the boat, protecting the white man from the sun. He lies at full stretch, shirt opened over the heaving chest. Coniapuyara, sitting at his feet in the open, in strong sunlight, holds his helmet in her lap as she polishes it carefully to a shine. She is filled with childish joy, for the inlaid steel sparkles so nicely. She sits and rubs at the helmet and sings an Indian song, a teasing song sung by women as they squeeze poisonous juice from the manioc root and grate it to flour:

Se manicu Francisco,
Se putia pura,
Se manu açara ...

She sings it again and again, always from the beginning when it comes to an end, bent over the helmet so that her hips stand out. She sings it with the gestures of the slave who rubs the root on the grating stone, sings the singsong again and again, the little mocking verse in which she has inserted the name Francisco, the tune is jaunty enough, the singer's face stays solemn and veiled. "Our master," she sings,

Our master Francisco
The kettle's boiling already,
But the manioc flour
He forgot to put in ...

The jolly little tune keeps on, the rhythm advances by little jerks, and the Indian woman's light brown body actually dances along, to right, to left, her hands on the helmet mime the grating of flour. Francisco de Orellana listens quietly, eyes half-closed, the glint of the helmet stabs them; he is strangely weary, his head is not clear, he wants to rest yet is filled with impatience, the heat in his veins hardly allows him to breathe. As he lies there listening to the girl's singing, he suddenly recognises in her a sweetheart from his youth, to whom he never made known his love, and with half-opened lips he says softly: "Doña Ana!"

Then he starts up in shock from his daydream, she's gone, the one he called to, Ana de Ayala, he sees in front of him the Indian woman, and beyond her the paddlers Pedro and Delicola. Miguelito is out of sight, he's behind him, behind the shade roof at the tiller, and he's just pulling his wide woven hat more tightly down over his forehead, the better to observe the harsh glare of the current from shaded eyes. He glances towards the brigantine hidden somewhere among small dark islands, back there in the haze. He can't see the ship, nods his head gravely, and suddenly shifts the tiller so the boat shoots sideways. As the pirogue turns, the negro Pedro looks up in surprise from his paddler's bench, seeking his master's face, but finds there only vacancy and dreaming instead of a commanding will. So again he plunges the round carved blade of the Indian paddle into the water, and flexes his mighty muscles to a steady rhythm.

“Our lord and master Francisco,” Coniapuyara sings, “forgot to put in the manioc flour ...”

The boat turns, leaves the great yellow main current, it turns to the black stream that the brigantine will not sail. Is Francisco de Orellana abandoning his ship’s company, as he abandoned Gonzalo Pizarro? And does he know what Miguelito is up to? He lies quietly mumbling, maybe talking to Doña Ana de Ayala, who is in Seville. Then he forces himself back to wakefulness, groans a little, demands a drink of water. Pedro turns his woolly head in concern: can his master be ill?

Suddenly the Indian woman Coniapuyara flings the gleaming Spanish helmet from her, it clangs against the hull, and she bends over the caballero and from a gaily painted gourd gives him to drink of the pure blackish water of the river they now float on. Orellana takes a long drink, a long one. The water seems so delicious. Did Coniapuyara perhaps add some juice from the assai fruit, that causes ineradicable yearning to flow in the veins?

*

Then in the hot damp night a fever breaks out in Orellana and reality becomes very pale, evaporates into wild faces, wild dreams of a heated brain. Now flames of the abyss play about him, hellfires have him fast; then again he stands, shivering and naked, on icy Cordilleran peaks, dreadful frost penetrates to his very soul, now his never-attained love, his Doña Ana de Ayala, wraps her soft warm cloak about his trembling limbs, no, it’s Coniapuyara leaning over him, her long long hair envelopes him, he’s enfolded in delightful warmth, then suddenly he chokes again, he must have cool air, the heavy eternal rain of the cinnamon forest pours down on him, no, it’s his own scalding sweat, no, it’s the blood of the Inca Atahualpa, so Miguelito tells him, standing like a giant sprouting the Goddess Victory’s wings ... And then again he sees Gonzalo Pizarro in his steel armour, and green flames blaze from the emeralds at his throat, so hot, so cold! No, they’re Coniapuyara’s arrows. Miguelito’s wings flap, the horrible thing rises, flies, how uncanny – shoot, shoot at it with your bow, Coniapuyara! Shoot, nail him to our ship with your arrow, so he can fly on ahead on outspread wings, we sail and sail and sail for Paititi! We sail on the river that flows through my veins, it’s called Rio de Orellana, can’t you see how yellow it is, liquid steaming gold, all of it!

The fever-image stays, will not fade. Gold, an endless flowing stream of molten gold. The sick man reaches for the gold, the glittering waves, and suddenly, as he makes a dash for the side of the pirogue, a piece of reality breaks in on the nightmare, the pockmarked face of the negro Pedro is there, the eyes kindly, shocked, and a friendly hand pulls him quickly back, gently but with force. The cloud in Orellana’s brain billows large and small, now the river is molten gold, plunder from Paititi, now it is again water, water, delightfully cool water, thirsty lips part ready to swallow the river, it pours and pours into the mouth and not a drop falls from the licking tongue. Water! the tongue wants to say, but can’t, it stammers of gold, of Paititi and Pizarro’s emeralds, they’re as green as good water trickling from a forest spring, a strong precious ray of light amid branches, palm branches that are outspread hands, her hands, Coniapuyara’s, she is Doña Ana, do you not know this? Doña Ana’s hands come closer and closer to the hot face, slender, strong, light brown lady’s hands, they hold a bowl, and now, joy! a drop of the golden river touches the dry tongue, into every pore of the burning body a rush of cool sweet gold, and the cloud lifts, Orellana is awake, he knows – from a far, far distance he knows – that this Indian woman – he recognises her, yes – she’s holding the gourd to his lips, there’s drink in it, cool and sweet and good, it’s the Inca Atahualpa’s golden chalice. Francisco de Orellana pushes himself up again, tries to fend off the dreadful tortured murdered Inca, it has Miguelito’s face, then the drink from the gourd brings him peace and comfort and a good sleep, only from afar does he hear the song: “... he forgot the manioc flour ...”

Francisco de Orellana sleeps, and deep in his sleep he hears Miguelito's voice saying the strangest things, obscure solemn menacing words of sorcery; their meaning is a secret.

Is it the fever that is still in him, subdued as if fettered, but always there, surging, receding, at any hour, by day, in every ghost-ridden night? Is it the fever, or what is it that Coniapuyara puts in the drink, magic herbs from the forest, juice of what terrible fruit? Is it the powerful words spoken by Miguelito, heathen witchcraft on full moon nights on the black river, in the smoothly gliding boat around which strange big wings seem to flutter?

Francisco de Orellana wakes and then sleeps again, his eyes see when they are closed, and when they're open they can't penetrate the slight mist; days pass him by, whether millennia or minutes he knows not, will never know. He sees shapes, hears voices, images of the world shift about him, he sees himself lying there and sitting and taking unsteady steps, perceives his voice speaking calmly and clearly, but from far off in the hazy distance in which he drifts concealed, it is he and is someone quite different, a shadow-being in a dream-born forest. Sometimes, but seldom, he sees the negro's faithful eyes, the benign friendly clumsy big figure; it never invades his dreams, is always real, something from another life, and then it vanishes again, is gone a long while; and with it also disappears the real world, that other existence.

*

In his sick mind's twilight, Orellana sees himself going through forest, he doesn't know how long for. There's no more great stream and no more black river, the canoe twists and turns along narrow channels through the green-gold light-dark of a great dense wilderness of vegetation; huge white egrets flap high, shocking the sick man's tired brain; later their soaring wings beat through his memory, and there's the play of a myriad butterflies too, seen through half-closed eyes and never forgotten.

Then everything vanishes from his sight before a new vision; the stupefying scent of ten thousand strange blooms wafts through his dream-day; they are – he knows not how – in a mighty forest where there is no earth, no ground, water reaches to the branches of the trees, the boat glides so easily here, as if lifted up to the sky, high amid treetops; and as the boat glides along on a straight course between bushes looming from the water, Francisco de Orellana sees the whole marvel strangely reflected, tightly entwined crowns, the dark forest brook, and the ornamentation of dangling branches, ferns and moss drooping down into the water, wispy aerial roots in their myriad entanglements, and all the confused rigging of the many vines; he sees it all reflected, and a huge red fish, a monster, churns the clear pale-brown mirror of standing water, and the whole scene shivers.

Coniapuyara is there, she stands leaning, her bare arm swings back the spear, she's going to stab the big fish. Francisco de Orellana sees her, how the brown body tenses, the fearsome glint in the eyes, then consciousness takes the image away. And it comes again, the forest scent is stronger, treetops bend closer, and as they seek the sick man's sad eyes, he sees why they bend. How heavy they are with blooms of the magic forest, strong-scented orchids, so unreal! They're like predators, or evil garish witches, they seem to lurk in wait for everything with their little tooth-filled jaws, they're too pretty and their scent too sweet, and as the boat winds among treetops the flowery tendrils reach for him, grab at Orellana, he hears himself scream, then he sees Coniapuyara, she's smiling, her arms are buried in a heap of flowers, she smiles and spreads the flowers over the decking, it's covered and tendrilled with magic flowers, and never again in all the years afterwards can the caballero recall anything other than the heavy scent clinging to this name, to this figure from the blooming water-forest: Coniapuyara.

This vision he sees of the flooded forest, palm tops almost in the water, there are strange flowers in them like brightly coloured creatures, menacing as beautiful women, and other flowers, gentler, that suddenly twitch into the air and are little birds with long delicate beaks for sucking honey, red, steel blue, emerald green, golden. And again Francisco de Orellana's fever dreams tie these bright strange little birds in some curious way to Coniapuyara's being. She's the scent of this water-forest, she's the marvellous birds and the marvellous flowers, as lovely and uncanny as this unreal world. Francisco de Orellana, a long way from himself, hears himself feebly murmuring a quick prayer: "Deliver us from evil!" Now Malefica laughs, and the witch's laughter echoes through the silent bottomless forest, the forest of hanging flowers.

*

Then he's lying in a hammock, it's made of woven grass, decorated all over with precious feathers from brightly coloured little jungle birds; two Indians shoulder the bamboo poles from which the hammock is suspended. Who are these Indians, where are they from, where's the flower-decked boat? Francisco de Orellana has no idea, he's too tired to ask, he lies in the gently rocking hammock and stares at the bearer behind him, he's small and naked, the body pallid, the colour of those who dwell far from light; and around his neck he wears on a woven string a something ... a human head, shrunken and miniaturised by some hellish art, you can see the features as if the face were still alive, and long hair straggles all around the tiny head. But the lips, sewn together with thread hung with long tassels, are ghastly in their silence, their muteness a loud complaining cry.

Francisco de Orellana in his swaying hammock sees this horrid head dangling around the dwarf's neck. He is not repelled, not astonished. He regards it and then closes his eyes, the dream will pass.

On and on, along narrow winding paths through the forest. It lasts for hours, maybe; and maybe weeks; he has no idea. The bearers are not the same, others have come, all of a sudden there they are, he's not puzzled. The big greenish twilight enwraps him so completely, and he is tired and sick unto death.

Then all has changed again, his thirsting lips sense bitterness in a warm drink, he sleeps, and when he awakes reality is all around: in a clearing, a hut on piles, his hammock under a shade awning, before it, on the grass, on the shore of a glittering lake, a low fire is burning, Pedro squats by a kettle poking the flames. And Delicola is just stepping out from the forest, he's dragging a peccary behind him, he killed it with his throwing stick. And Pedro glances up, sees clear light in his master's eyes, he shouts for joy, runs and kneels before Orellana, tries to kiss his feet. He sobs and stammers, tries to speak and can't find the Spanish words, what's he trying to say, it's like a lament and a warning ...

Then suddenly Miguelito is there, wearing a Spanish doublet, and the wide straw hat sits deep on the gloomy forehead, the eyes are in shadow. He makes a deep bow, his arms crossed in such a humble way, he names the Saviour and Our Blessed Lady, praise be to them, the Captain is cured! Then he stands there in his humility and there's a lurking in his look. Suddenly Francisco de Orellana gives a start, mistrust has gripped his heart, he wants to leave, quit the camp, he's too weak, he feels faint, he sinks limply back, closes his eyes again.

But then the warrior's iron will asserts itself once more, he asks, his voice tired: "Where am I, where are the rest of the men? The brigantine?"

"You shall learn of it, Señor Don Francisco," said Miguelito, tonelessly, eyes downcast. "First you must regain your health ..."

"The brigantine!" he groans, "the brigantine! What am I doing here?"

"You shall learn of it!" says Miguelito firmly, and he stands up, seems to grow very tall.

Don Francisco in his feeble state submits to the powerful gaze; he lies back helpless and stiff, a sick child chided by the doctor. Miguelito the other, Miguelito without the mask, stares long and brooding into his face, then he goes to fetch Coniapuyara, and when she comes the negro stops whimpering, he still tries to speak, he seems scared of her, he trembles, squats by the kettle subdued, fearful. But she comes nearer, Francisco de Orellana can smell the heavy poisonous perfume of orchids, and then it is as if a spell has lifted, he sees her with sober eyes, a heathen woman with prominent hips, almost ugly in her barbaric nudity. She smiles at him, but her eyes are hard and cruel, she looked like this when she swung her spear to skewer the fish. She comes close, says not a word, again she's holding the decorated bowl, she gives him a drink, and as she bends over him he's overwhelmed by the savage scent of flower and female, the magic of secret herbs and roots; he drinks, and as he drinks he thinks he hears Pedro cry out, and Miguelito laughs loud and menacing, and everything sinks away ...

*

Then he knows that the woman bending over him is his boyhood sweetheart, she's Ana. For the first time she tells him she loves him, she says so in hot hasty words, in the Tupi language of the forest Indians. So he feels calm and safe, all is well, his breathing eases in this female presence, like that of a feverish child who senses mother is near. Then he smells orchids, sits up with a start: it's not Ana, it's someone else, a woman who skewers fish with a spear, he knows, it's someone else ... He stares, and now he knows her: Coniapuyara!

He shudders, he fears her, then he sees her friendly look, her worried face.

"Francisco!" she says, "Francisco!"

Now it's easier, the mists fade, for brief moments he's no longer a sick child, he's Francisco de Orellana, captain, hidalgo of ancient blood ... She sees the light now shining from his eyes, and all at once with an awkward gesture stretches her arms to the helpless invalid, as if seeking his protection.

"Francisco," she says, "wake up, Francisco. You must stand up, Francisco! ... Francisco!" She actually shakes him: "You must flee, Francisco! Flee from Chasca!"

Then, through eyes that have lost their brightness, he sees her again, and his lips attempt that awkward word she spoke: "Chasca!"

Then he knows nothing.

*

Francisco is now recovered and free and light, so light he feels no firm ground. He stands quite upright in helmet and armour; they lack all weight, they sparkle in the light of the huge full moon that has just risen over the water. He has his sword at his side, and the crossguard juts out, a trusty support for his hand. He stands on the shore of the moon-bright lake, all by himself; and he looks into the magical night where big fireflies swirl like dancing sparks. The lake is calm, no breath ruffles the surface, and huge flowers float there, like lily-buds from a land of giants, they seem to him big as ships, and he sees the tight buds slowly open.

All is quiet, only crickets sing, entrancing. Then they suddenly fall silent, and back in the forest, whose dark outline the eye hardly detects, an oppressive hammering begins, gentle at first, then louder, then a roar, filling all the universe with its rhythm. The hammering is like a blunt club striking a tree, and then it's an enormous heartbeat.

And then, as if the axe's hammering had suddenly startled him and nudged every horror back into life, the noises of the nocturnal jungle strike up, the croaking of enormous frogs, a *hu!* and *drum-drum!* and *uhu!* – and the tapir's whistling *phwitt!* A big creature in the nearest tree, black in the moonlight, sets up a ghostly coughing; and now, alarmed by the presence of the big cat, monkeys start to howl, hundreds, hundreds; little howler monkeys, fear-trembling creatures of the night; but it sounds like Satan herding lions, so deep-toned is their howling. From every treetop the shriek of wakened birds is mixed in. The billowing uproar of nocturnal voices crescendos and surges, but within the fury of noises the sweet entrancing chirp of crickets can be heard, and then that dull ghostly hammering that nothing can drown out, monstrous blows of an invisible axe, the forest's seething pulsebeat.

There Francisco de Orellana stands, in moonlight that silvers his armour; he turns his back on the din, he hears it without surprise, he just looks into the water of the lake where lilies drift big as ships, like leaf-pad islands – there, where the biggest of the lilies blooms a magical white in the moonlight, ripples flash, golden circles expand into shadowy darkness. And in the forest mighty strokes resound ever faster, and in the water golden ripples glint ever faster, now it's a giant snake of gold with green shining eyes, it writhes to the beat of the booming strokes and swims about the waterlilies, scales shimmering. The caballero leans longingly forward, without fear, nothing can scare him; the big ghostly beat drummed in the forest by this axe does not make him shiver, he has no fear of the monstrous snake in the water; he lifts his hand from the crossguard of his sword and holds it out into emptiness, towards the golden shimmer, the snake.

And suddenly the forest resounds with laughter, jolly and mocking, and every voice falls silent at this laughter, only the crickets' chirping continues; and the magic snake in the water stops circling and stretches itself long, a living spear, and shoots towards the shore like lightning through the dark water. The laughter grows louder, spooky, no natural sound; Orellana stands full height on the shore, the snake closes in. And as it approaches it's transformed; it's only a woman, her gold-brown skin sprinkled with moonlight.

"You hear that laughter, Francisco?" Coniapuraya asks as she climbs from the water and shakes off shining drops that splash and spray ...

"You hear that laughter, Francisco? The lame one, the dwarf, is laughing! The night is filled with scent of pioçaca lilies, and on this night, when the flower of the great lily of the lake spreads open, it is permitted ..." She stops, presses close to the caballero. "See!" she says, pointing to the ground.

In the sand he sees by the moonlight strange tracks, two footprints outlined very clearly in the sand, a track made by two feet on which some creature has walked here, from the forest to the water: one bare human footprint, and the paw print of a jaguar.

"Who is that?" Don Francisco asks in a loud voice. "Who goes here by night, with one human foot and a jaguar's paw?"

"Hush, hush!" Coniapuraya at his side whispers. "Do you not hear axe in the forest? Axe made of giant shell of the First Turtle? It's him, hairy creature, trampling through the forest, he's angry, for sure he can smell white men, hide, he's coming, Curupira!"

His hand is on the crossguard of his sword. "I am a Christian, an hidalgo of ancient blood, I fear no demon of this forest!"

"Hush," she says, "he hears you, I see him there in the dark, he's lying on a branch ready to jump, they all hate you and fear you! Did you never see Curupira as he crept after you through

the forest? Do you not hear the scurry, the rustle and rattle in the thicket? You don't see Strangefoot who lies always in wait, you don't scatter a circle of guaruma stalks behind you, so he follows and follows ... Do you not know how they all hate you? They hate you, the hidden ones, terrible ones! He, Maty-Taperé, lame one who laughs, dreadful dwarf, and he whose eyes gleam in the swamp, all the blackest, most frightful, most nighttime, he, Yurupari! And the forest fire-snake, Mboitata, he hates your white skin. You don't see them? Don't hear them? Glowing eyes at forest edge? The hammering, laughing, hissing? You not frightened at all?"

"Hell has no power," said Francisco de Orellana. "The wraiths of the forest creep whimpering before this Cross."

He stands gleaming in the moonlight, his armour sparkles. Coniapuraya, very dark, cuddles up to him, he smells forest orchids, no, it's the scent of big floating lilies, and water drips from her hair ...

"Hush!" she says. "Don't be scared, river-women protect you, Yaras, they splash, and she, River-snake with shiny green eyes, great Mother of Waters ..."

She laughs, he shudders.

"You were swimming in the lake," he says. "I saw a snake swimming!"

"Hush," she says, "I dived in moonlight. In big moon-mirror lake, fed by forest stream, lies Muyrakya's stone, only in moonlight can we find it!" And she opens her hand, a tiny snake of bright green stone lies there, curled. "Take," says Coniapuraya. "Big River-snake protects you, because you built ship. Muyrakya's Amazon stone, found by moonlight in moon-mirror lake, it protects you, shipbuilder! Secret rulers of the wild forests, they have no power against gleaming sign of River-snake! For River-snake is Mother of Forest, Mother of Waters, who gave birth to everything!"

She holds out the little green snake, he takes it. "Now no more need the magic rosary," she says. "Circle of guaruma stalks will protect you from Curupira! Who has the sign of River-snake, he won't lose the path, the Path-confuser has no power! Mother of Waters is stronger than forest spirit!"

She says this, and as he touches the stone the forest groans once more from an axe-stroke that shakes the Earth. Then all is silent, only the sweet chirping of crickets can be heard, the moon has disappeared. And Coniapuraya's hand that had held the stone is strangely cold, a coil of the huge snake that is suddenly there; with a start, Francisco flings himself back from her, and he feels himself stagger and sway. The fever-sick man's hammock rocks.

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Now bat-wings brush against him, ghostly. He screams, and touches his bleeding forehead. A big vampire bat flutters slowly up; it has sucked blood from the wound. Francisco de Orellana flies up, the bat slips away. The night is dark, it is the hour of cold rain, dawn is approaching. The Indian interpreter Miguelito stands there in a strange black gown.

"Señor Don Francisco de Orellana!" he calls.

Orellana is awake, wider awake than ever. He asks: "What do you want?" The sound of his strong voice in the deep silent night startles him.

"Stand up!" says Miguelito. "Stand up, Señor Capitán. It is time to begin the journey. Morning is near! The day of happenings is breaking. We begin the journey."

"To where?" asks Orellana.

The voice of the man in the dark cloak chimes like a great bell: "So you don't know? We go to Paititi." The arms hidden under the poncho Miguelito now stretches out, they look like bat-wings. "Across the lake," he says, "across the lake of Paititi, to the city of gold, to Manoa!"

CHAPTER TEN

Miguelito goes slowly ahead down to the lake shore. Don Francisco follows, freezing in his armour. There's a vessel on the lake, no hollowed tree trunk, it's no boat made by savage natives of the vast riverine forest, but a raft of logs lashed together, a Peruvian balsa of a kind Francisco de Orellana has long been familiar with. Two poles in the middle hold up the square sail. A dark figure squatting on the raft is waiting for them.

Orellana recognises the Indian woman warrior Coniapuyara. Her bow lies beside her, she's smoking a thick roll of the Indian herb, and she too is wrapped in a dark cloak. She stays silent, squatting, and the burning weed flares in the darkness. Miguelito jumps onto the raft. The caballero follows, his armour clinking slightly. In the sky the morning star is shining.

Miguelito looks up to the star. "Chasca shining already," he says, "little brother precedes the Sun, young servant prepares the way for master!"

Don Francisco is puzzled; Miguelito had not spoken Castilian, but the Quechua language of the Inca Empire; Francisco de Orellana understands it well, he helped conquer Peru. His brow is furrowed. What did he say about the Sun God? He's a baptised Catholic Christian, converted long ago, why does he speak of heathen gods? How spine-chillingly cold this night is! Miguelito pushes off, and the sails catch the cool breeze.

On they go. The raft sits low in the water. A layer of rushes covers the logs. Miguelito steers. A curious scent assails Francisco – he knows what it is; he leans over and spits into the water, and again sees the huge open plates of floating lilies, he starts, furtively his eyes seek out Coniapuyara. She's squatting on her heels, stolid and silent, leaning forward, huffing smoke. In the grey of dawn Orellana knows the outline of the dark-wrapped figure: a forest woman with taut muscles, half child, half timid animal. In vain he seeks in her features the heated images of the moonlit night. But the silence is oppressive; he stands, looks at the dark forest along the lakeshore, sees giant flowers on the water, motionless, pale and green and quite dark inside; their scent is so powerful as the raft shoots past. It floats quite noiselessly, not a sound from all of Nature, not a splash, not a chirp; just deep silent shadows and drifting mists; cloudy sky so far away, only one star shines through, the morning star Chasca, herald of the heathen god ...

Francisco de Orellana has to speak, must hear his voice. He asks: "What is this lake called?"

"Lake of Paititi," Miguelito says softly. "The golden hills are near, have patience, Spaniard!" His hand is on the steering oar, the wind blows more briskly, the raft sweeps over the waves. Francisco de Orellana lays a hand to his brow, there's a nasty little wound. It's all so alien, and very strange.

"Who are you?" Orellana suddenly asks the man in the dark cloak.

"An Inca," says Miguelito.

"What is your name?" asks Orellana.

"Same as that star," he replies: "Chasca!"

They fall silent.

Francisco de Orellana is slow of thought, his head is leaden. Then he remembers, he knows who he is and what it is that a hidalgo, a Christian caballero, must do. His right hand finds the crossguard, his tongue the old haughty phrases. "The words of a heathen and a dog!" he says. "A Lutheran! A Morisco, adherent of Mohammed! Once we're back with the army, you maroon, I'll teach you to be apostate, an Inca, worshipper of idols! Is this why your teacher of Spanish taught you the Christian language? He spared your brown pelt too much of the whip. Now you speak like a regular rebel against His Imperial Majesty, the Castilian crown and the Christian faith!"

In his menacing glare the fires of the Holy Inquisition flicker; the first light of morning lies cold on his steel armour; his hand is on the steel sword, and his helmet is made of steel, and nowhere in this enormous forest is there any other weapon of iron; maybe this is what gives him this powerful sense, this boldness of domineering tone; when he talks to the brown man of the whip, the sword-grip in his fingers fills him with confidence.

At the moment when the brown man, the Indian, dares to lift his head, he encounters, dream or no dream, the hardness of a Spanish gentleman, of blood that believes itself more noble, the heart filled with pride; but he – not the humble interpreter Miguelito, Indian at the Spanish court, the slave who crosses himself and who has bowed down; rather Chasca, an Inca of Manco Capac's divine sun-blood – now he rises up stark and sheer to face the man from white Europe; and as he stands there facing steel armour in his dark cloak of vicuña wool, bareheaded, beardless, broad cheekbones prominent in the red-brown face, now his eyes are much more free, for the first time in all the years of servitude they can face down a Spanish eye without blinking, this mouth no longer interprets, it speaks, there is no longer Miguelito, this man is entirely Chasca.

"On this lake," he says slowly and quietly in the Quechua tongue, "on this lake, Habsburg does not rule, and here Jesus Christ does not rule, here your brigantine does not sail, this is the lake of the great Mother of Waters, and on the shore the Inca prays to Inti. Speak of your emperor over there where he rules, of your beliefs over there where they are believed, but here you shall today see the Sun, and his divine offspring the Inca!"

He points to the east, where the first glimmer of the coming day of sun can be seen, across a hilly shore. "This," he says, "this is the day that Chasca has wished for, the Sun that he has wished for is coming, Inti! Inti! Chasca has wished it, Miguelito has done this deed, Chasca hidden in Miguelito. So says Inca Chasca from Manco Capac's House of the Sun: there shall be a haven where the Inca rules and not the white overlord, where Inti rules and not the white Saviour, this has Miguelito done. So says the Inca Chasca: The Great-Canoe-Like-a-Thousand-Canoes sails the stream of the great Mother of Waters, but where is Gonzalo Pizarro? Chasca cannot see him, he cannot see his great army, he cannot see his thunder-tubes, he cannot see his horses, he cannot see his thousand man-eating hounds, where are they, they should all come to Paititi! So says Inca Chasca: The Great-Canoe-Like-a-Thousand-Canoes is not on the lake of pioçaca lilies, it has not found the way here, why does it not come, it should carry away the gold of Manoa, the temple ornaments, and the golden images of the great Inca! Why do they not come to plunder the golden city, and drink the Inca's maize beer, and drag the brides of the Sun out from the House of the Sun? They speak: Is there no gold in Manoa? Do we not want the emeralds of Paititi? Are the brides of the Sun too few to serve us in our tents? So says Inca Chasca: A whipped slave did not want this, Miguelito! Baptised apostate did not want this, Miguelito! Who divided the army, who let Gonzalo Pizarro go hungry in the Cinnamon Forest? Who spoke the right words into Orellana's ear? Here he is, alone, and his big canoe is not here, it will never be loaded up with gold from the golden city! Well did the slave Miguelito learn the lying words, the words of Spaniards! The words of the white turtle he whispered in

Orellana's ear! So says Orellana: A slave deceived me, he told me lying words in Spanish. – So says Inca Chasca: The race of the Inca is weak, it lacks the iron of the Spanish strangers, it lacks the thunder-tubes of the strangers, and the little sticks that flash lightning; it lacks the bloodthirsty hounds, but the magic of lying words has one of the sons of the Sun learned well, patiently he learned them, a varlet, a menial, Miguelito!"

Suddenly, in the solemn slow flow of his Indian oration, Chasco – no, Miguelito – reverts to the Castilian tongue, and unconsciously adopts the demeanour, the mask, of interpreter:

"Si, si, señor mio, beso la mano a Usted, caballero! El ilustrísimo señor Marqués, Don Francisco Pizarro, in the year of Our Lord one thousand five hundred and twenty seven, when he came ashore at the harbour of Tumbes and saw that the land was good, the people gentle, full of trust, there he decided to conquer the land, as soon as he could amass enough robbers, murderers and rapists ... But the Ilustrísimo is clever, and very cautious: he realises at once he has no one who understands well enough the Indian tongue to make known to peaceful people the lying words of Spanish. And so His Grace ordered two Indian boys to be taken on board his ship and carried across the sea to Castile, the better to serve God and His Majesty, and to save the souls of the two boys, so they can be instructed to obedience in the Christian Catholic faith, and learn the language of good Christian people, so that, should Pizarro return to Peru with even greater forces, they shall be present as interpreters, tractable in everything ... One boy was called – after his holy baptism – Felipillo; the other – Miguelito.

"Felipillo!" says Miguelito, no, Chasca, and anger contorts his features: "Felipillo, a lowborn lout, a naked barbarian, no Inca, filled with hatred for the House of Manco Capac ... At the interrogation of our divine lord Atahualpa, the traitor twisted the words Pizarro's executioner wanted to hear, said not by Atahualpa, but by Felipillo. Si, señor mio, I too was present, I, Miguelito, who am Chasca, of the House of the Sun, of the race of the first couple, Manco Capac and Mama Ocllo, who were sprouted from the Sun and who at the beginning of the first times carried from Lake Titicaca the golden staff of power to the valley of Cuzco ... I was present, and took note of Felipillo's hate-filled lies and wanted to cry out the truth. But the lord who must be obeyed, Atahualpa, forbade me to do so. In the presence of Pizarro's Spanish judges he spoke at length to me, not in Quechua, a language Felipillo understood, no, in the holy language of Inca lips, which only we Sun-born know. Felipillo stood grinning, upright before the Exalted One, and told Spanish lies: "Inca Atahualpa confesses to stealing the crown and murdering his brother Huascar. Item, he is guilty of idolatry, of polygamy, and of rebellious agitation against the Emperor Carolus" ... But he, Atahualpa, said not a word to the judges, not a word more to Felipillo: his words were for me, Felipillo could not understand them. I, Chasca, understood, and now I convey the final command of the Exalted One, I convey it to the land of final refuge, to Paititi ..."

Francisco de Orellana listens with the cold sneer of a Spanish victor. Miguelito, who is Chasca, suddenly draws something from under his poncho, a big belt, no, a string with a thousand tangled tassels, he has worn it against his bare skin, he unfurls it like a banner. The hidalgo recognises the knotted cords, multi-coloured threads: it's the secret knot-script, quipu.

"This," says Chasca, shaking the string so that the knotted threads and hanging tassels flutter in the breeze, "this is the message of the dying Inca Atahualpa ... I, Chasca, a quipu-camayú, who know how to knot quipu threads, I entwined the threads, red threads of war, and white threads of peace, and yellow threads of the Sun, and I knotted the word-knots and the number-knots, at the proper intervals, in the way I learned from wise men."

He squats down on the raft like a Moor or a Turk, and his hands roam solemnly over the knots, slowly, as he reads the quipu writing.

"This," he says, "is the testament of Inca Atahualpa to the land of final refuge, to Paititi: There was once the Empire of the Sun; who now knows its name: Tawantinsuyu! So says Inca Atahualpa: Even the name of the land is extinguished. For a lowly drover in the baggage train of the white robber army failed to understand one word – the name of the river Birú – and so the Land of the Sun is now for ever named Peru. So says Inca Atahualpa: Our empire is erased, extinguished and stamped out, the Great Temple desecrated, temple furnishings hacked apart and melted down, the House of Manco Capac dies beneath the executioner's hand; a starving race of slaves and yellow half-breeds cries out under the lash; it languishes deep in mine-workings, hides away in the ice-world of the Andes. The Great Road of Inca messengers falls into ruin; lofty mountain bridges collapse; terraces are overlain with rubble; fields become infertile ... So says the great Inca, King of the Four World Quarters, Atahualpa: There was once the Empire Tiwantsuyu, where no one suffered hunger. This is the Great Law of the First Inca Manco Capac: toil tirelessly, all together on ground that belongs to all; live fraternally, for you shall be protected paternally by the Sun and His image the Great Inca. From the produce of the land you shall pay a tax to the Inca and to the Sun. The Inca feeds you when you are hungry, he feeds your father once he is old, he clothes your children in wool from the great herds of llamas that are tended in common for everyone. Be without cares, for the Sun takes care of you, and the Great Inca and those glorious rays that surround him, the clan of the House of Manco Capac, they take care of you. So says Inca Atahualpa: There was an Empire without hunger and without idleness, an Empire of a calm peaceful race, of old people without cares. It has been destroyed, its name is forgotten, the land's new name is Peru, and Hunger, and Misery. And therefore, says Inca Atahualpa, shall you, Chasca, knot the laws of Manco Capac in quipu knots and carry its great testament to the land of refuge, to Paititi, and guard it well so that the white robbers do not find it, in the Secret City, in the Last Temple, in the Castle of Female Archers, Virgins of the Sun; and let no Spaniard come to Manoa!"

Bent over the quipu, feeling the knots, Chasca falls silent, his fingers palpate the coloured threads. But Francisco de Orellana raises a hand: "Now then, Miguelito my friend. On this raft a Spaniard is heading for Manoa! By the Holy Mother of Guadalupe, I shall today hoist the Emperor's golden banner, and raise a Cross in the heathen temple."

"A Spaniard rides on the raft towards Manoa," the other replies, "and at the steering oar stands Chasca!" Then he falls silent, and from the deck he lifts an oar, a beautifully carved pagaie, and attaches to it the quipu string so that it flutters like a banner.

"But you," says Orellana, "I admonish by your holy baptism and your oath of vassalage to have done with your rebellious talk and your heathenish delusions. A raft is heading for Paititi, on it is a Christian knight, his trusty sword is at his side, and you are at the tiller. Hence you convey the Cross and the flag of Castile to Paititi, do you not see, Miguelito? If you can't see it, if you haven't thought about it, why do you bring me to Manoa?"

"*That*," Chasca tells him, waving the bright weave of knots in the morning breeze, "that will be told to you this very day, in Manoa the Golden."

And Coniapuraya, who has up till now kept so silent, suddenly joins in the Hymn of the Sun: "Inti! Inti!" She brandishes her bow, sets a white-feathered arrow to the string, and shoots it eastward into the rising sun.

The hidalgo Francisco de Orellana crosses himself. He would like to cry out, interrupt the heathen song the others are singing, he cannot, his vision is under a spell, he follows the white arrow as it flies east, into the golden glow along the lake strand; and all at once, into the Inca hymn "Inti! Inti!" is injected a cry from the astonished warrior.

High above the dark forest on the shore he sees a golden shimmer; a city of stone appears in the dawn light, and there are flashes of gold, gold, gold, the summit of the big hill glows golden; gold-roofed palaces, a temple with golden friezes, all slide and flicker; a golden blaze illuminates the whole world; there it is, the dream, it's there, the goal, Paititi, Paititi, Manoa, Manoa! But Miguelito stares gravely into the golden glare and raises towards it the oar from which the secret flutters, the knotted strings, the great law of the dying Inca, his last testament. Thus does he greet the land of refuge, Paititi, Paititi, and the golden temple high on Manoa's hill.



*

Golden-yellow mists waft about Don Francisco, they sink, rise, he sees nothing but gold, his senses float adrift in a sea of gold, drown in golden waves, choke in golden spume, he knows nothing, feels nothing, sees nothing but gold, gold, gold! Then he awakens abruptly from this golden stupor to an almost painful clarity, and now, with sober eyes that see what is real, he spies gold, gold, gold!

He is now – but he doesn't know how – in a lofty hall, built of Cyclopean stone blocks. It is half-dark; only from the roof does a mysterious scanty light seep in; it's chilly here, an odour of strong herbs wafts through the musty air, and then the gaze encounters the dazzling beam that crawls along the wall, and follows it, and stares into the blazing image of the Sun, a radiant gold disc on the hall's cross-wall that sends a magical glow into the darkness; a strip of gold runs all around the walls, made of hammered plates; but below, on big golden chairs, sit silent figures, gold-gleaming, decked in golden adornments, age-old cadavers with horribly shrunk faces; the leathery cadaver-brows are wound about with the multi-coloured ribbons of the Inca llautu-headband, and scarlet tassels droop over dead staring eyes. There they sit, in bright vicuña cloaks, sprayed all over in gold, on golden thrones, the crossed arms seem

dreadfully alive, Incas to the right of the glittering Sun-image, to the left the queens, sisters of the Inca clan who once shared both throne and bed with their brothers; there they sit in gay cloaks of feather-weave, dripping with gold jewellery and big turquoises.

There they are! Orellana knows this endlessly sought treasure, dead Incas that plundering Spaniards failed to find in the temple at Cuzco; tortured Indians spoke of this hidden trove, cellar vaults were dug up, caves were searched, all in vain. There they are, the kings, they look regal, arouse fear. They stare at the Spaniard, he cannot bear their gaze, he utters a cry, then he's terrified when it echoes eerily from the golden walls. Out, out, into fresh air, to the living!

Francisco de Orellana starts to run past the long row of enthroned dead, it never ends, it stretches to infinity. Panting he arrives at the exit from the gloomy golden hall. Air! Light! Life!

He flings himself to the ground, hears himself weeping in a big fragrant silent garden. Then he pulls himself together, stands, looks about. He's within mighty walls with gold friezes, in a blooming garden filled with flowers and ripe fruit; his dry lips lust after these: pineapples, avocados, juicy tree-melons; bunches of bananas draw him on, his hands reach for them, but then suddenly he forgets his greed, his tormenting thirst, the temptation of fruit, for amid the green of this garden all the colourful blooming is gold, planted in the earth are trees of gold, beds filled with golden flowers, there's an entire field of maize with big silvery leaves that half-conceal cobs of precious gold, skilfully formed with their tassel of silvery silk ...

There he stands, Orellana, and instead of reaching for the living fruit he is avid for the golden. He bends down, a golden cob of maize is in his hands, he hangs it at his belt in a childish fit of thievery.

But then, breathing deeply, he begins to think. So here they are, the fabled Inca treasures, the gold that Hernando Pizarro sought in the temple of the terrible heathen god Pachacamac, but the priests had hidden it, gold from the temple of Tampu, and all the buried gold the Inca offered as his ransom in addition to the gleaming heap that filled his prison cell to the height of a man. They've brought it here, to the great forest, this water-girdled wilderness! Here now are the gardens of gold still told of in legend in the long-plundered land of Peru, and the huge walls lined with golden plates, heavy artefacts; here is the gold, the silver, the glittering stones, here are the hidden treasures, much richer than all Pizarro's loot from back then.

And yet in the midst of his golden dream, the unutterably gleaming garden, a cool feeling comes over Orellana. Only this? Only reality? After all the great yearning that has just been stilled, now he begins most painfully to yearn! He has a great yearning for Manoa, for Paititi! Now that he has it he yearns doubly for it, and never, never shall he find the dreamland, he is already here, it is here, a land without marvels.

As Francisco stands sated already in the midst of the strongest appetite, he sees coming through the green-gold shimmer of the lovely garden all at once the figure of Coniapuyara, she is coming towards him, splendid as a wonderful bird in a cloak woven of downy feathers; her head is covered by a shining crown of feathers and precious stones; in her hand is a longbow of ipe-wood and at her golden girdle is a quiver. Here she comes slowly towards him, her eyes grave. "Do you know, Francisco," she says, "what kind of arrow it was that I shot towards the Sun? An arrow that carries prayers, an arrow with the feathers of the urubu-tinga. The gods love the white river-cormorant, its flight leads to them. I sent a message to the Secret Ones. My prayer reached the Sun ..."

She stands before the man, he sees how heavily she breathes beneath her lovely cloak. "Francisco," she says, "Francisco ..." She falls silent,

"Where am I?" he demands roughly.

"With the Brides of the Sun," she says. "We guard the Silent Ones, the Enthroned. We guard the garden of gold. We fight with black arrows, with feathers of the black vulture, the messenger of evil. I shot a white arrow of prayer to the Sun, who grants gifts. You know it, Francisco!"

Francisco de Orellano stays silent; now he understands the riddle of the fighting women. Brides of the Sun! Francisco de Orellana knows Satan's wiles, the cunning with which he mimics the holy usages of the Christian Catholic Church. He knows the Raimi festival, that heathen horror where the Inca priest passes out bread and maize wine as if our Saviour's blood and blessed body; he knows that they confess, and atone, and lock their virgins up in convents to serve the Sun-Satan. He knows it, and how the Christian army in Peru cannot bear to see such mockery of the holy faith, he knows it ... He knows the fate of the heathen Brides of the Sun in the convent at Cuzco ... Grimly he recalls what happened there ... And so those furious women, the female archers who assailed the brigantine, are Sun Brides of the secret city, daughters of the forest, dedicated to the service of Inca idols?

As he ponders this, he feels rage rise up in him; the grandchild of religious warriors, foes of the Moor, heathen-haters, could do no less. He wants to draw his sword, turn the heathen temple to rubble. Then suddenly the imploring gaze of this woman holds him fast.

"Francisco," she says, "Francisco –" She stops, in her eyes are love, and a warning. She looks at him and dares not speak. Suddenly, with the fluid motion of a forest creature, she sits down in the field of golden maize like a huge jungle bird glowing with colour, come to peck at the golden grain. She squats on her knees, gazes long into his eyes with a helpless enamoured look that dares not speak. All at once "Se manicu Francisco" she sings:

Our master Francisco
The kettle is boiling already,
But the manioc flour
He forgot to put in ...

She sings in a quivering voice poorly matched to the jolly song, the jiggling rhythm. And as she sings of the kettle boiling already, she reaches slowly for her bow; she sets an arrow to it, a black one, and aims at the hidalgo's heart.

But he smiles. Just let the hellish kettle boil on!

Abruptly she flings the bow from her, jumps up, coils about him. A wildcat must love like this. He understands that she has warned him against Death, and she wants to save him, and have him; he knows what the white-feathered arrow asked of the gods. But he wears at his chest the cuirass of a Spanish warrior, and as she clings to him there is steel between them. Does he not know the hour? Does he not understand what she is offering him? That she brings him the miracle he has lacked, that does not lie in these golden marvels of Paititi, the final and true meaning of this goal, this attainment one can never attain?

There he stands, in a golden garden of dreams, not daring to emerge from the dream. Maybe, if he were to embrace this savage forest woman with a true love's desire, maybe, maybe he could avert Fate. This great river that Francisco de Orellana has discovered, this forest where no white man before him has trod, this Land of Gold at the lakeside, this City of Gold, Manoa – what better way to win them than through his love for Coniapuyara the brown-skinned protectress, wild graceful forest creature? If only his armour would melt away, if only he could warm this bright precious jungle bird at his human heart, if only white and brown

could unite here in love, then Paititi would really be attained, for him and for the white people and then his children ...

He can still avert the dream, willpower can avert dreams; but the fateful hour finds him armoured, filled with defiant pride in his Spanish blood. The girl's warm body says nothing to him; suddenly the long-loved half-forgotten sweetheart Doña Ana has returned. Only of her does he think, and it is her children that should rule here. He does not spurn Coniapuyara, he takes her to him, embraces her roughly, he the master of slaves, just as he plucked the golden corn. But she understands without asking what is happening, and abruptly tears free of his arms, edgy as a predator of the great forest, a glowering hissing wildcat of the dark thicket. She leaps for her bow there on the ground, in the field of golden maize, draws an arrow from the quiver fletched with black feathers of the bad-luck bird; now she take aim, this time in deadly earnest, an Amazon defending herself.

Francisco de Orellana smiles the same smile as before. She may warn, she may threaten, he always has the smile of the overlord, the Spaniard. He stands trusting to his steel armour and his victor's feelings, and she with the taut bowstring, blazing eyes, bare arms bending the bow mightily. He smiles, she rages, and between them as they stand dumbly is the great hatred of the sexes, and abhorrence of the other race. The savage woman's eyes can say what her tongue would never know how to utter: I wanted a son from you, but not a bastard!

She lifts the bow slightly – his heart lies higher. But he averts his gaze contemptuously from the danger, to the high wall around the golden garden. Behind it there has long come a buzzing, the noise of a crowd, and shrill music, and the heavy thud of hidden drums.

Coniapuyara sees Don Francisco look at the wall; now she too becomes aware of the clamour. She lowers the bow, very slowly, wakening from her fury, and says quite calmly in a toneless voice: "The Golden One is proceeding to the Temple of the Sun. They call for you, Francisco. The kettle is boiling ..."

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Now Francisco de Orellana loses the garden scene, and finds himself, as he stands in a throng and yet all alone, once more amid big palaces and walls and gigantic staircases that lead up, up to the shining platform of the great Temple. The walls around the plaza are crudely built of enormous dark blocks piled in layers, with a frieze of stone-carved grimacing idols running beneath light roofs of pale straw. But the Temple high over the less dazzling plaza blazes with the sundrenched gold of huge hammered plates, friezes and sills.

Noon is near, the sun stands high over the plaza, there are no shadows, the blazing gold is hard to bear. In the harsh glare a crowd of dark people sends up great shouts to the gleaming gold Temple of the divinity: *Inti! Inti!* Francisco de Orellana, caught in the throng, sees naked bodies, painted faces, sees plugs in broad lips, and flat noses. Peoples of the great forest have assembled here singing, dancing, howling: *Inti!* A skirl of muffled wooden drums, flutes made of human bone, pebbles in gourds, leaping warriors in bright feathers, masked dancers who look like animals, and every dark spirit of the great forest – on his dreadful feet, half-human half jaguar, there's hideous *Curupira*, or *Jurupary* as they say here – a whirl of noises, a round-dance of bodies fills the sunny golden plaza, and *Inti! Inti!* the great rhythm of the hymn to the Sun – and then all of a sudden everything falls deathly silent, and from the heights of the Temple platform figures appear, armed brown women in gleaming cloaks, holding long bows – there's an old Inca priest among them, over his head a brightly coloured baldachin sways.

The eyes of Francisco de Orellana search among the massed warrior-women for one – then the throng shoves him aside; from the doors of the big low palace to the foot of the Temple

stairs a path suddenly opens, and out through the doors comes a procession, Francisco saw it once before, in Cajamarca, that day of violence when Pizarro's mob of soldiers dragged the peacefully arriving guest, prince of this foreign land, out of his palanquin, trampled the bearers to the ground, butchered the defenceless people, and placed the Inca in chains ...

Francisco de Orellana knows the sweepers who clear the ground before Atahualpa's train, he knows the shrill song of triumph: Hailli, hailli. Then he sees the Inca's great men, in white cloaks with red squares like the chessboard game of the Moors, and others in whose hands are mystical hammers of copper and gold, and others all in blue and in gold with heavy pendants in elongated ears: "ear-people" the Spanish called them, they're a kind of Inca chivalric order. And high over all these heads and those of the watching throng is again the open palanquin, gilded, silvered, edged with wonderful radiant feathers of every colour, and feathered parasols – high over the heads the Inca's palanquin sways, but in it is a being that lives and yet seems made of gold, in a cloak all of gold, the grim face is powdered with gold ...

"The Golden Man!" Francisco whispers. "The Golden Man! El Dorado!"

Then he glances again at the gold-dusted face and sees Miguelito, Miguelito frozen to a golden idol, his golden brow quite rigid beneath the fringe of royal tassels, beneath the waving feathers of the coraquenque bird, the sacred bird of the Incas that appears only once, at the coming of a new legitimate king. And Miguelito passes by in his palanquin.

All at once Francisco de Orellana has to call to mind that other procession and that other golden palanquin: thus did Atahualpa once pass by, in the plaza of a stone city ... and a priest suddenly stepped out to him, the Dominican Valverde, and held up a cross to the heathen ... and demanded in the name of the Cross and in the name of the foreign emperor obedience and submission from this king; but inside the stone buildings Spanish slow-matches were already lit, swords unsheathed, crossbows armed, bloodhounds strained at the leash ... this scene Francisco sees before his eyes, the emeralds at the Inca's throat, white waving plumes ...

And then he, Orellana, is standing there where he saw the black-cowled man, he in his steel armour, helmet on his head, and he holds up his sword: In the name of the Saviour! In the name of the Emperor! In the name of the Pope, the Holy Father, who has gifted these new lands to his Catholic children, half to the King of Portugal, half to the Spanish King!

"In the name of Charles the Fifth," Orellana hears himself say in a resounding voice, "the Holy Roman Emperor, Imperatoris Augusti, increaser of the realm, King of Castile and of Aragon, of Leon and Galicia, lord of Granada and Tangier, Archduke in Austria, Duke of Milan and King of the Two Sicilies, lord of Brabant and the Netherlands, of Jerusalem King ...

In the name of the Emperor Orellana takes possession of the city, the land, of Manoa and Paititi, all by himself, amid the dark throng of savages, before this golden Inca in his palanquin, before this golden temple, this platform where armed women surround the ancient priest, all alone in a world of heathens and brown people, he alone with his sword of Spanish steel of which the grip is a Cross ... there he stands and cries out the names of countries that belong to his Emperor – Sicily! Granada! – up to the Inca's palanquin.

He, however, maintaining in his golden face a stony calm, unfurled a scroll of threads and knots, quipu-script with the laws of Atahualpa; his gilded fingers felt over the knots, his glittering hands read them, and the golden lips said: "So says the Inca Atahualpa: Let you, Chasca, knot the laws of Manco Capac in quipu-knots, and deliver the great testament to the land of final refuge, to Paititi, and guard it well so that the white robbers do not find it, in the Secret City, the Last Temple, in the castle of the Female Archers, the Virgins of the Sun; and let no Spaniard come to Manoa!"

“But here,” says Francisco de Orellana now, and his voice echoes with strange force through the shimmering dream-city, “here stands Don Francisco de Orellana, in the name of the Emperor and King, his representative as Captain-general and Adelantado in the discovered regions, and, sword and Cross in hand, he admonishes you, Miguelito, baptised Catholic Christian and vassal of the Emperor, to descend from this palanquin, and kneel humbly to renew your oath! Wherever a Spanish knight’s foot treads is Spanish ground! If you did not know this and were not mindful of it, why did you bring me here to Manoa?”

He falls silent, and the Inca is silent, around them both is a dull murmur, the throng is waiting. The Inca’s long golden fingers feel over the quipu-knots. Now he speaks: “So says the Inca Atahualpa: On the day of the joyous festival, on the day when the great law comes home to Manoa, then shall you bring to the Sun an offering of blood ...”

Francisco de Orellana is thirsty, thirsty; he longs for the fruits in the garden. The heat! Heat! No, he shivers with cold ...

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Now again he sees: up there on the glittering platform, with a golden shimmer all around, she is standing, the Indian woman Coniapuyara, drawing her huge bow.

Now Orellana is afraid, he screams and screams ... A naked man is at his side, club raised, he recognises the savage, the cacique Delicola ...

It is hot, he is thirsty, shivering; an arrow flies whistling towards him, black-fledged, an endless arrow; Coniapuraya has sent it, she is great, she is terrible, he loves her, yearns for her lips; the arrow comes flying, so slow, so visible ...

Abruptly the pockmarked face of the negro Pedro inserts itself between, big as a black full moon, and with a horrible whistle the arrow pierces his cheek.

Francisco screams, a frightened child, weak and helpless, and everything dissolves into a flickering golden yellow sun-drenched mist.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Gentlemen, said the Globetrotter, slowly and with great attention to detail lighting a new pipe, I think that at this point in my book, if I ever get around to writing it, I should depict a quite different scene, Orellana’s comrades at their camp. The ugly bunch have halted here not because they think to see their leader again, now he’s disappeared with the boat along with Pedro, the captive Indian woman, and Miguelito, and the cacique Delicola ... No, it’s simply because a couple of malevolent tree trunks in the river have somehow damaged the brigantine’s hull, or wrecked the tiller, or something of the sort; at all events they have to repair the damage before they can think of heading on downriver, down to the sea that must lie there eventually at the end, if human experience is anything to go by; and assuming, as some Spaniards are beginning obstinately to assert (conveying the wisdom of captured and interrogated – meaning vilely tortured – Indians), assuming this damned river does actually have an end, and does actually debouche into some civilised Christian sea, instead of straight down into the gurgling jaws of Hell.

Meanwhile, before they’re eventually swallowed by those gurgling jaws, the caballeros by the sweat of their brow have rammed big tree trunks under the keel of the damaged brigantine and hauled it over these rollers up onto a sandbank. Diego Merià, the artist, again makes himself useful as marine engineer, and in due course the work is at last completed.

Fortunately the savage Indians have completely ceased their raiding; they're there in the forest, their presence can be felt, sometimes at night a feeble fire can be seen, a drummed signal heard, hunters find a dead armadillo with a poisoned dart from a blowpipe sticking out of its armour. There are narrow paths in the undergrowth, hacked through the vegetation by stone knives. But not one Indian is ever seen, there's no trace of any village. So the Spaniards lack maize and manioc; for some days they live on a stroke of luck: Diego Merià, skilful as ever, has killed a fat monster with his arquebus: a river cow, or manatee as the Indians call it.

So for days they all drip with a greenish oil, they roast fat chunks on wooden skewers. It's almost a feast, but the strong smell and dripping oil attracts swarms of insects, a pestilence of flies and midges, and frightful armies of ants; they scratch and curse and are caked in blood; and the fat roast that tastes like pork lacks something: a draught of Alicante, caramba!

Then it's all gone, devoured, a small supply of smoked manatee meat is eaten by ants, they need a new source – and then Fortune shows favour (as do the saints, Fray Gaspar de Carvajal reminds them): Cristobal Palacios, trying without success to fish from the lonely sandbank, stumbles and falls and as he scrambles to his feet unearths a nest of turtle eggs buried in the sand. He looks around and finds hundreds more, hundreds; this is where turtles come at night to bury their eggs. In some eggs there are live turtles, which taste good. The Spaniards gather eggs, they trample the leather shells to a curious kind of fat that they can eat. And so they live on. Often the watchword of the day is Hunger, and the war-cry, Misery.

Gradually the ship is made ready, they can roll it down into deeper water. But the alférez, Alonso de Robles, who has been in command since Orellana disappeared, orders a big fishing expedition before they set off, so that they can take with them at least some provisions. They man the canoes; in the best one, along with Diego Bermudez and Lorenzo Muñoz, is the copper engraver Merià. Being the clever fellow he is, he has observed Indian skill with the harpoon, and intends to catch a pirarucú, the giant red fish of this freshwater sea. The three comrades paddle upstream. As well as his harpoon, Diego Merià has brought his gun along; there are only three on the whole brigantine, and no one understands this newfangled thing, the arquebus, as well as Diego Merià. So on they go, heat lies heavy on the water, little black piuma flies bite like crazy, Diego Bermudez swears under his breath, Lorenzo Muñoz screws up his jaundiced face and mutters prayers; Merià stands at the prow with his harpoon, staring into yellow water ready to run out his line. The left bank is in sight, a tangle of whitish roots dangles in water. Diego Merià calls out curtly to keep close to the bank, clear of the long swampy island; big fish may lurk beneath those roots. The boat changes direction, and now, as they approach nearer and nearer to the bank, Diego notices a crude lurching canoe speeding towards them, paddled as if by a drunkard. They close in, Diego quickly readies his arquebus, this is the first Indian canoe they've seen in a long time; the intentions of the riverbank dwellers are unknown.

Suddenly, as he lifts a hand to shade his eyes, Muñoz shouts out: he knows the man in the little canoe: it's Pedro, who went off with Orellana!

They bring the boat close in to the smaller canoe, which dances and rocks and spins about: is the negro drunk? He squats at the stern, big and black, quite naked, scratched to pieces, and clings tight to the paddle without paddling. The trio shout across, hurl questions. The negro stares dumbly at them, he's alive but doesn't speak. Now they see how emaciated he is, dreadfully weakened.

With a mighty leap that almost overturns the boat, Diego Merià springs across and lands in the negro's dugout. Pedro pulls himself painfully together, stands, takes a wobbling step forward to where a bundle is lying, covered in big leaves and an animal skin. Diego Merià sees

a horrible sight: the slave's pox-scarred cheek is pierced by a huge arrow that has transfixed the tongue as well, so the negro can no longer speak. The big black man raises his skinny arms in despair and points to the shapeless bundle; then suddenly he breaks down, collapses to the bottom of the canoe.

Diego Merià lifts the coverings, and finds Francisco de Orellana. He lies half unconscious in a fever, mumbles confused words; his head is on fire, the eyes bulge, the hands are clamped like claws around shiny objects. Before lifting him tenderly, Merià tries to loosen the hands; they clutch a golden jewel in the form of a cob of maize, and a curious snake of green stone. Merià has to let the feverish man keep hold of them.

They lift the two men into the boat. The negro will never speak again, and Orellana speaks too much, he rants and mumbles dreadfully. Then they must all neglect their leader: Indians come, and attack in swarms. It's as if they have pursued Orellana's canoe and are now intent on snatching their prey from this boat, whatever the cost and however hard the fight. They're not scared off by the Sticks-that-Speak. How lucky that the brigantine is afloat again, how lucky there's a following wind. Alonso de Robles, once his captain is safely on board, waits no longer and sails away downstream, pursued by the war-canoes.

On the third day, Francisco de Orellana awakes from his dreams, and the fever is suddenly gone. At first he says puzzling things about Incas and big snakes, then he falls silent and lies quite limp in the hammock under the shady awning. His bloodless hands play with a big lump of gold shaped like a corncob, and a little snake of green stone. Father Carvajal, who comes to tend him, admonishes him to cast aside this heathen sorcery, and places a rosary between his fingers. But before Orellana can conceal the amulets, everyone on board has glimpsed them; in the evenings they often sit together and talk. Who spoke of a land of gold, of inexhaustible mines and emeralds deep in the bed of a great lake? Not Orellana, he's pale and keeps silent. Not Pedro the negro, whose tongue is forever stilled; all he does is squat beside the hammock gazing at his master. And yet the whole ship is abuzz with golden fairytales. But these people are so wearied of their endless journey, the hunger, whizzing arrows, the heat, the flies, that none has any desire to go in search of the land of gold ...

They are already a long way from the spot where they came upon Francisco de Orellana when his will to live returns. His first order, delivered in a barely audible tone, is: "Turn the ship! We sail for Paititi!"

Ensign Alonso de Robles shrugs. Impossible! No food on board, the crew too feeble to row, the Indians hostile.

Francisco allows himself to be persuaded by his friend's firm stance, and acquiesces. From this moment on he becomes fiercely impatient, the ship is moving too slow, the sea must be near, they must sail to Castile, request an army from the Emperor, and then back, conquer this land, range through the forest ...

In vain do the men here who are closest to him – Alonso de Robles, Diego Merià – ask about his experiences. Where was he? Where is Miguelito? The Indian woman Coniapuyara? The savage cacique?

Francisco de Orellan gives scanty and imprecise responses. He stares ahead, and sometimes strokes Pedro. Only one of them, for certain, knows more: Father Gaspar, for Orellana has confessed. The worthy father seems strangely annoyed, but of course can say nothing. Neither does he write anything on the sheet of parchment where otherwise every event is recorded. And yet: every last sailor on board speaks in hushed tones of what the caballero has seen. He was in Manoa. The city's streets are paved with gold. The golden king

reigns over the land: El Dorado! They know more and more about this land the farther they are from it. Here they are, those who headed out from the riches of Peru to find treasures. All they found was hunger, and dark forests, and venomous flies, and arrows and wounds and fever and a laborious daily chore at the tiller. No, no, they're happy again, a golden dream is on board ... Just make haste to the sea, and home, and a new band of comrades assembled, an army of bold lads, and swiftly back here, it lies in the forests and beyond the swamps, this land of warrior women, the golden land of promise ...

So on they go, and starve, and fight Indians. A few die, horribly tormented by poisoned arrows. They die, and as they die they sigh: Mother! And: Paititi!

*

But this, says the Globetrotter Hilary, is recorded by the Dominican Father Gaspar de Carvajal down to the last detail in his chronicle, even though certain matters are glossed over coyly enough, with the reserve of one in the know who may not speak. Otherwise he conscientiously records every event during this voyage on the lower Amazon River, every Indian village and every skirmish for a handful of maize. I think I shall cite in my book a couple of passages from the conclusion of the Father's chronicle, they match so well in their sobriety the weary emotions of my singular hero, who flees confused and defeated from the dreams of his desire, and has nothing else in mind but to chase once again after these dreams: quick, away from Paititi, quick, down to the sea, anywhere, to Spain, fit out more ships, then back to Paititi!

If ever I write the book I imagine myself writing, I only hope the people who read it will keep in view, between the skirmishes with Indians in this chapter, the figure of Francisco de Orellana as it paces back and forth on deck, goaded by impatience, infuriated by every delay, angered by the great stream that flows through the secret desires of his soul, surreptitiously fingering the little snake of strange green stone that he keeps beneath his clothes ...

"And so," writes good Father Gaspar, "we set off again in our usual fashion,

but it was not long before we saw on the left hand an extensive province and settlements in the most pleasant and handsome landscape that we had ever seen and discovered along said river, for the land was raised up with hills, the valleys filled with people; from which said province a great swarm of pirogues came towards us to assail and make war on us. These people are as tall as a very tall man, and taller, and they came all smeared black with soot, for which reason we called this the Province of Blacks. We took none of these villages, as the Captain would not grant leave on account of the great numbers arrayed against us.

We made way downriver, and after two days we came by a little village where the Indians defended themselves against us; but we destroyed said village, and took food from the Indians, and so onwards to another village nearby, that was larger. Here the Indians defended and fought for the span of half an hour, so well and with such spirit that they killed one of our comrades in the brigantine, called Antonio de Carranza, he was a native of Burgos. In this village the Indians had a poisonous plant, which was recognised in the said wound; and when twenty-four hours had passed he gave up his soul to God. To return to our intentions, I will say that we conquered said village and took all the maize; but since we knew said plant, we decided from now on not to set foot on land in any village, unless in dire emergency ...

We continued in great haste, avoiding settlements, and one day we made halt for the night at a grove of trees by the mouth of a river that entered on the right

hand, and was one league wide. The captain gave orders to cross over and sleep on land, for there seemed to be no dwellings on the banks of said river, and so we believed we could sleep without cares or unease. And here the captain ordered a kind of breastwork to be made about the brigantine, to protect us from arrows; and this was of no little benefit to us. We remained a day and a half at this camp, and thought to stay longer. But now something occurred of no little terror and astonishment to us when we observed it; it was at the hour of Vespers, when on the tree under which we sat a bird perched, and said Hui! And said this three times, insistently. And be it known that this bird had appeared constantly along our way, whenever we came close to a human settlement, ever since the village where we forged for ourselves some nails; and so it spoke to us in the greying dawn in this manner: Hui! And this many times. Normally when this bird appeared we were pleased, especially when we were in need of food, but on this occasion we took flight, wishing to avoid any village ...

But here we observed that we were not far from the sea, for a flood tide rose beneath us, whereat we were not a little joyful, for we knew we must come soon to the sea.

And as we went on we discovered a little branch river from which came two flotillas of war-pirogues with loud noise and shouting, and they began to assail us, and were it not for the breastwork, we should have emerged from this skirmish much reduced in numbers; but with the breastwork and the damage inflicted by our arquebuses and crossbows, and the aid given by Our Saviour, we came away, not without damage, for they killed one comrade, Garcia de Soria, native of Logroño; and in truth the arrow penetrated not half a finger's depth, yet because it was poisoned he gave his soul up to the Saviour before twenty four hours had elapsed. And so we fought on into the night; the river was filled with pirogues, this being a most populous country, and the king's name was Nurandaluguaraburabara.

Once this was over, the captain ordered a course to avoid villages on the left bank. Now here we left behind the good land and the savannah and high ground, and began to come to a low country with many islands. These were inhabited, but not so much as the country upstream. And here the captain left the mainland and went onto islands, where we took food when we could. And as the islands are very numerous and very big, we had no need to set foot on the mainland, until we arrived at the sea.

Being now on our way as usual, very empty and in a severe state of hunger, we went to take a village standing on a sandbank. At the hour of highest tide the captain ordered an approach, the helmsman failed to see a pile concealed in the water, and the ship collided in such a way that a plank was broken to pieces, and so the ship began to sink. We now found ourselves in dire straits, and all thought we were done for, for Fate assailed us on every side. For as soon as our companions leapt ashore they encountered Indians, and made them run away, and began to gather food. The Indians, being many, turned against our companions, and proved such a handful that these fled back to the brigantine; but here was little safety, since the brigantine was sinking. And so the captain ordered the company divided: one half to fight the Indians, the other half to save the brigantine. Our Saviour Jesus Christ deigned to aid us and bestow His favour, as He has always done during this voyage; and with his ineffable benevolence and providence we were able to

save the brigantine by nailing a plank over the hole, and in the three hours needed to complete said work, the fighting never ceased.

Our Lord showed further solicitude for us sinners in our great distress, for one day towards evening a dead tapir was seen floating in the river, big as a mule; and seeing this the captain ordered certain of the crew to take a canoe and haul it in; and they brought it in and shared it among all the company such that all had something to eat for five days or six, which was no small matter. The tapir was but recently dead, for it was still warm and had no wounds.

On the day of the Blessed Saviour, being the day of the Ascension of Our Redeemer Jesus Christ, we found a beach such as we had been seeking in order to restore the brigantine to seaworthy condition, and made tackle from plant matter and ropes for seafaring and sails from the blankets in which we slept. And fourteen days were needed for these tasks, days of constant and habitual penance by reason of our great hunger and lack of food, for we ate only what could be gathered from the water, be it only a few snails and little red crabs the size of a frog, and half the crew went in search of these while the others worked.

We quit this place on the eighth day of August, stocked well or ill given our limited possibilities, for we lacked many things. From this point we sailed with a sea breeze, tacking from one shore to the other, and were in no little danger amid the numerous islands when it was necessary to await a wind; for having no anchor we were held fast by stones. As God willed, disregarding our sins, we were freed from such dangers, and He would not allow us to die of hunger or suffer shipwreck, which we were often like to do when we sat on sandbanks or many of us already stood in water, crying for mercy; and given the many times we sprang a leak one can only believe that God in his absolute power wished to free us, so that we might improve ourselves or be preserved for some other mystery of His Divine Majesty.

We travelled always past villages, where we provided ourselves with some food, albeit but little; but the Indians had certain roots that they called *inanes*; without these we would all have starved to death. In every village the Indians received us without weapons, for they are a very tame people, and they signed to us that they had seen other Christian people. These Indians are already at the mouth of the river from which we emerged; and there we took on water, each man a pottery jar, and one and a half bushels of roasted maize, some with less, and others with roots, and in such fashion we came to a condition fit to sail the sea, to wherever fate should carry us and deposit us, for we had no pilot, nor compass, nor any chart. In place of all these things was Our Lord and Redeemer, whom we took as our true pilot, trusting in His Sacred Majesty to bring us to a Christian land.

On the sixth and twentieth day of August, Saint Louis' day, we sailed forth from the mouth of said great stream out onto the sea ...

I, Brother Gaspar de Carvajal, least of the monks of the Order of our Father Saint Benedict, have assumed the trivial task of recording our journey and our navigation and attest to the truth of all this. And there is truth in all I have said and related, and for all that prolixity engenders tedium, I have reported in brief all that happened to Captain Francisco de Orellana and the hidalgos of his company and the men as we set out with the army of Gonzalo Pizarro, brother of Don Francisco Pizarro, Marquis and Governor of Peru. Praise be to the Eternal. Amen.

*

Here ends the report of Father Carvajal, said the Globetrotter. But I shall have to describe the hour when Francisco de Orellana sees the last of the jungle islands disappear from view, and can barely make out the last fringe of palm trees on a coast he can now merely imagine, and now even that is gone, and he is on the boundless sea, but it still has the pale gold colour of the great stream, about him is still a tiny little trace of Paititi's gold, and for many days to come he is surrounded on the brigantine's deck by the delightful bright butterflies of the forest lands, until one morning even these are gone, blown away by the sea breeze. I see Francisco de Orellana standing there on the gently rocking ship, not at the prow where winged Victoria flies towards Spanish lands, but at the stern, on the poop deck. He gazes back, and in his hand is a little snake of green stone, it reminds him of his river, and deep in his dark heart, deep beneath the Christianity that is in it, he believes, perhaps, in the magic of the little snake: will it not protect him from the impish misleader Curupira, who confuses every path and hinders the journey home? Often, during those dreadful days on the lower river, Francisco's hand has felt furtively for this snake; he has no idea where it came from, or what the wild dreams that it sends him mean. But hidden deep in his Christian Catholic Castilian heart is this belief, that the green snake is his surety for salvation and homecoming, that all the lurking witchcraft of the wilderness, of the jungle, will be rendered harmless by this friendly magic, by this snake of the Mother of Waters, symbol of the river that is his, the Rio de Orellana, as he believes, until the end of time.

Once, starting up from a dream, Francisco de Orellana finds that he has pressed the little green snake firmly and with yearning to his lips – and he even perceives a slight scent, perhaps of jungle orchids or of white and purple waterlilies, big as ships, that open suddenly on moonlit nights. When Orellana realises this, he reddens, and quickly conceals the little snake in his pocket; for one very brief moment he considered throwing it overboard. He cannot; but as the homeward days pass, the scent of orchids and Coniapuyara grows ever fainter in his memory, and ever more clearly does the image of Doña Ana de Ayala appear to him. Thus does his yearning return home from Paititi, from the heavy-scented sultriness of the forest and from the monstrous golden vision of a more ardent heathen joy; Francisco de Orellana thinks again of Doña Ana, who is blonde and pale-skinned, and proud, and very Christian. He plans to make her queen of a new Andalusia, she, and not the Indian woman Coniapuyara, shall bear him children who shall rule forever over the forest lands; and the river shall be named forever not after the Amazons, but after Orellana.

Thus does Francisco de Orellana voyage home from Paititi, and believes he will one day return. Somewhere in a tangled thicket of trees, there on the coast which is now out of sight, Curupira stands, and laughs after the ship.

*

Well then, says the Globetrotter standing and stretching his long legs, I shall of course have to mention that the vessel *Victoria* with Don Francisco de Orellana and forty half-starved and naked companions in furthering the orderly progress of world history arrived on 11th September in the year 1542 in the harbour of the newly founded Spanish settlement of Nueva Cádiz on the West Indian island of Cubagua. Thus ended, says the historian Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo, this journey that began with no goal in mind, and gradually became one of the greatest events ever encountered by humankind.

CHAPTER TWELVE

When the notice-board on the postal steamer *Hildebrand* displayed the definitive announcement of what had long been expected – because of conditions in the State of Amazonas, onward travel is perforce cancelled, and the steamer will begin its return journey tomorrow – most of the Cruisers were basically quite happy, though for form's sake they all sighed or swore a little.

A radio message from the Booth Line Steamship Company to its agent in Pará authorised the captain of the *Hildebrand* to compensate the passengers somewhat for the disruption to their programme, by calling in on the homeward voyage, contrary to custom, at an interesting West Indian port, and an extra day will be allowed in Lisbon, including museum visits.

The Cruisers – most shared Dr Carson's view that a holiday has to be spent somehow – declared themselves content, and the happiest atmosphere reigned on board. Though the gunboats of the *revoltosos* had not appeared off Pará, and the town's newspapers proclaimed in enormous letters the imminent crushing of the ruthless rebellion in Amazonas State, almost no one demanded that the ship proceed upstream and find out if it was all actually true.

The only passenger who remained disconsolate was Fräulein Pedersen from Lübeck, who had to transfer to the town and wait there in a boarding house until the opportunity arose to travel on to Manaus by another steamer, and from there up the Rio Madeira, and then the Rio Mamoré, all the way to San Cristóbal in Bolivia and the arms of her betrothed, who, one might assume, had for some time been growing rather impatient – indeed, Fräulein Pedersen implied, he was standing in despair at the landing stage with the Bolivian marriage registrar, or was it the German vice-consul, who would unite the couple immediately upon her arrival – of course immediately, if only for decency's sake. The good lady wept her tears of parting and climbed with her luggage into the tender and off to the Customs House, waving her damp handkerchief for a very long while.

It was the last tender that would go to the town and then back to the ship. Those passengers who had not acquired sufficient souvenirs and small gifts made use of this last chance to go ashore on the hunt for Indian pipes, stuffed crocodile embryos, and those little bowls of ivory-wood from which the inhabitants of Pará serve their midday manioc mash.

The younger Miss Macpherson searched in every shop on the Rua João Alfredo for a specific brand of English tennis racket, and finally found it at the Café Franco beneath a pile of armadillo shells and little figures of monkeys and turtles made of chocolate-brown guaraná paste. Since the ship would call for two days at the very British island of Barbados, whose Lawn Tennis Club enjoyed the highest reputation, the younger Miss Macpherson, being the lady champion of the County of Surrey, had no wish to land there without her usual racket, thereby losing valuable time. She complained only of the lack of proper training facilities on board; for what, to a tennis specialist, was the big deck-golf competition that would be held on the promenade deck en route to Barbados?

Other passengers – most of them – spent the last afternoon of the *Hildebrand's* sojourn off Pará quietly on board, in deck chairs, and with a certain grim pleasure let the heat wash over them: tomorrow when we're steaming along there'll be a cooler breeze. Meanwhile they felt no obligation to head for the blazing heat of the town, or do anything at all.

Only Lady Athill showed herself not the slightest mercy, but made her circuits of the vessel, twenty-four times around the promenade deck, in her high-necked dress, wearing gloves and a hat with a violet veil. The little fat pug-dog Mrs Craig hurried along at her side,

red in the face and panting, though no one knew why: was she slimming? or just eager to promenade with a lady descendant of Hengist and Horsa (and who looked it).

Mister Smith sat all by himself in the smoking room with his bottle of Bass; he looked a little dilapidated, and Dr Carson was just saying to Lord Athill that it's time the old man came away from this climate; though he seems made of iron he's over eighty, and drinks far too much alcohol.

Lord Athill, Carson and Hilary sat together in their usual corner near the entrance to the music room, where the Globetrotter Hilary had that morning narrated more of his book, for the tale begun last night on the boat deck was not yet finished.

Directly after lunch, Dr Bernhard Schwarz had retired to his cabin, and was no doubt reclining on the narrow bunk; the doctor had visited him on some excuse, and now told his two fellow travellers that he didn't much like the look of the man; he's not suffering from anything in particular, but you never know, he might have picked something up on his mad expedition into the jungle; he did of course run back from there through a horrendous tropical downpour, and returned to the hotel soaked and exhausted; it would have made a stronger man ill.

Hilary maintained a thoughtful silence, and waggled the tip of a white canvas shoe. He knew the risks of this climate.

Lord Athill lay in his barbarously decorated wicker chair of Madeira-weave, no more limp than usual but with a curious expression in his fine pale face; his veined eyelids drooped. Suddenly he said: "Would it be so terrible, if – I mean, if someone is done with life, should he not rather die, than aimlessly ..." His voice broke, he gave a tight smile, the other two understood that the old statesman was thinking of his dead son, and the historical lineage whose name would disappear, maybe too of Edith, Lady Athill; but he at once pulled himself together, and in a weary voice confided to the Globetrotter Hilary a comment about his long story and the book he meant to write: "I think it must have consoled our friend Schwarz," he said; "one must always try to show a chap who's sick with yearning that El Dorado only has actual value as long as you never reach it ... What use would it be if you did arrive? And if the arrow of our yearning managed actually to hit the rigid wall of reality, it would rebound right back!" He fell silent for a moment. "For this reason," he said, "I would almost rather that Schwarz had not accepted my offer, and that he won't attempt to go up the Amazon again next year."

Dr Carson shook his head of youthfully full hair, and a brief twitch ran across the sharp features of his Anglo-Saxon face. "It's more likely the man will be sailing up the Acheron within the next year," he said curtly. "And Hilary, I must say I don't know if it's a good idea to tell him how your book about Francisco de Orellana ends. Of course I know the historical events; but don't tell the story to someone likely to expire all too soon!"

For a while the three men gazed across silently at the riverbank opposite. There was a big house, distempered a dirty white, in a dense garden of banana groves and breadfruit trees, and some dark brown negroid children, their stomachs bare and unnaturally distended, leaping about in a leaky canoe in the muddy bankside water.

"I don't know," Hilary said quietly; "one should always tell the tale to the end. We can't make death dead in this world by keeping silent." He felt, with unnecessary vigour, in the pocket of his faintly checked linen jacket for tobacco. "It's like this," he said with a bark of laughter that was meant to be cynical; "every novel ends conclusively, and it's always the same ending."

"We never tell our patients that," said Dr Carson.

"If you object in your capacity as doctor," Globetrotter Hilary replied, "then of course I shan't tell him how the story ends. But I'm opposed to keeping mum, and advocate for speaking out."

"Oh please," said Carson, a little stiffly, "Herr Schwarz is neither seriously ill, nor has he placed himself in my care." He was thinking – and one could see the thought in his axe-sharp features: you can never stop an author from sharing his material!

Lord Athill raised his almost transparent hand with the big ring: "I think our globetrotter is right. How Francisco de Orellana's adventure ended, Mister Schwarz can learn if he so wishes from any encyclopaedia. There's no point trying to conceal it from him. But a lot depends on how it's presented. I find that Hilary's tale holds some consolation for a weary man. Ah, here he comes!"

Dr Bernhard Schwarz emerged through the door to the music room, untidily dressed, his cravat knotted in haste, his face grey. But the eyes looked calm, and he was smiling. "I've come to ask Herr Hilary for the conclusion to his tale," he said while still some distance away. I –." His smile widened: "I simply can't keep to my cabin for curiosity. So, how did it go for Francisco de Orellana after all that?"

Bernhard Schwarz looked amiably and a little sadly straight at Lord Athill. "Well then, how did it go? Did the noble-minded Spanish grandees perhaps furnish him with the means to fit out a second expedition to the Amazon River, and was he happy in Manoa on that occasion, and contented, and settled? Did he finally win her, the Indian woman Coniapuyara, with all the treasures of Paititi as her dowry? I'm so eager to know, so curious!"

He smiled at each of the three travellers in turn, and they could see it was a quite unforced calm smile, but they could also see that his eyes were bloodshot, and that he had hardly enough strength to pull a deck chair across to the little group.

Dr Carson cast a swift sideways glance at the Globetrotter, who understood that he should *not* tell his story and so replied, in the tone of one trying to evade a patient's query about the state of his illness: "The end of my nice story? My nice story about the conquest of Amazonia by white people – or what at the present time must serve as a provisional ending – you can find in the newspaper. Here!" He drew a carefully folded copy of the *Estado de Pará* from his breast pocket, and opened it out. Huge letters all the way across the front page proclaimed:

WHAT HAS BEEN GOING ON IN AMAZONAS

Details of the Movement in Manaus

Underneath was a poorly reproduced picture of the Legislative Assembly building in Manaus.

The Globetrotter began to translate a few items from the newspaper for the others. It transpired that three river steamers, the *Jupiter*, the *Walter*, and the *Lobão*, had arrived at Pará the day before, from various places in the neighbouring state of Amazonas, bringing the first authentic accounts of the revolution there. On the evening of 23rd July, all troops and officers of the garrison at Manaus and on the gunboats moored at the town had mutinied, and seized the headquarters of the State Police. The police had defended themselves for fifteen minutes or so with more or less vigour, mostly less, and had then surrendered. The mutineers had arrested the governor of the state, Dr Turiano Meira, and named in his place First Lieutenant Alfredo Augusto Ribeiro as revolutionary governor, and issued a proclamation to the people of Amazonia, signed by a captain, the regimental medical officer, and fourteen first lieutenants of the 27th Light Infantry Battalion. What the bold rebels actually wanted, apart of course from

the vaults of the Bank of Brazil and the other banks, could not easily be discerned from what the fourteen lieutenants proclaimed. It was, it seemed, more a revolution for national salvation, with no particular programme to follow on. But what excitement, when on 27th July a squad under the command of Captain José Carlos Dubois set off with the intention of capturing Pará! The *Estado de Pará* cited an excerpt from the official revolutionary sheet, the *Jornal do Povo*, depicting the embarkation of troops on the steamer *Bahia* of the Lloyd Brasileiro Line. "The people of Manaus," declared this paean,

have today participated in the most edifying spectacle that ever unfurled before their gaze: the embarkation of national armed forces of land and water to whom the salvation of the nation is entrusted. Some ten thousand gathered on the Praça Oswaldo Cruz, and every street was loud with throngs of people of every class, from the wealthiest citizens to simple proletarians; all eager to bestow the applause of their Hurrahs on the heroic soldiers who at this moment have staked their lives for the freedom of the public.

"Oh, I can visualise the scene," said the Globetrotter, glancing up from the paper. "They all shout Hurrah! Every class, forsooth, from the richest, meaning the big rubber barons of Manaus, of course they shout Hurrah when power is in the hands of people who are clearly not joking; and the simple proletariat, meaning the Indians to whom this land once belonged, and to whom a wonderful democratic constitution grants every right to shout Hurrah. The truth is, the white people have not brought that much salvation to the Amazonian forest Indians, and the civilisation of the whites and half-whites has not in the last four centuries learned a terribly great deal about what to do with these forest lands. What is this town of Manaus, where an uprising now reigns over public freedoms? A grotesque modern city in whose suburbs howler monkeys scream and jaguars prowl; it was built at a smart rate in just a few years, when the rubber markets were favourable, and now, when inferior rubber from plantations on Ceylon is brought cheaper to the world market, it's not at all out of the question that the town will fall into ruin and the howler monkeys will soon be giving concerts in the big Opera House. The enormous land itself, which could be the world's timber reserve, apothecary, spicery, and perhaps, who knows, the last great gold mine, has never yet been developed. I'm not sure I'm such a great supporter of this civilisation, but along the Amazon at least, it has failed up till now. Just one state, Amazonas, as big as the German Empire and some of its neighbours put together, has a population today of four hundred thousand, of whom eighty thousand are in Manaus. This state has a grand total of eight kilometres of railway line, and outside the few towns has no roads suitable for vehicles. Somewhere in the forests there must be petroleum, coal too perhaps; there are vague rumours. Meanwhile river steamers burn the most precious woods known to world trade. Amazonia produces three maize harvests a year, and half the world goes hungry. To Manaus and Pará naked Indians appear sometimes out of the bush, to get drunk and buy iron tools. Now and then they pay with a lump of gold ore, or a precious stone. This golden Paititi might well lie even now in the unexplored region between the Rio Branco and the Rio Negro; ever since Francisco de Orellana was there, or imagined he was there, it has never been rediscovered ...

"And with that, my dear Doctor Schwarz," said the Globetrotter, "you have the actual end of the tale I have told. Neither Orellana nor his race have robbed the Amazon of its treasures. The Amazonian Indians, some of them at least, are still headhunters, and a few are cannibals, but they have learned something new from the whites: civil war and *pronunziamento*. The history of European civilisation on the Amazon River began with the rejection by Orellana and his companions of the legal authority of Governor Gonzalo Pizarro, and continues in that vein with the rejection by First Lieutenant Ribiero and his companions of the legal authority of

Governor Dr Turiano Meira. That is all. There you have the end of my tale about the discovery of the Amazon by white men. The tale has no end."

The Globetrotter fell silent, with a glance at Dr Carson. Bernhard Schwarz said, with a calm smile: "Yes, but Francisco de Orellana! You can't get out of it, Herr Hilary! You must tell the whole story of this man, to the end! You stopped at the point where he still seemed to have an opportunity to travel back to the land of his yearning, and maybe this time with more sensible preparations. You must not, Herr Hilary, break off your tale at this point. It won't do. There are still too many illusions ..."

"Shouldn't we leave just a few as they are?" asked Hilary, looking down at his white shoes.

"No, better not," said Schwarz, still with a smile as if from a sunny distance. "Please do me a personal favour, and tell the tale to its end. I – I'm superstitious, I fear unfinished things." He stared at Lord Athill and then spoke again, slowly, his voice soft: "When one is nearing the end, one has to put things in order, and leave behind nothing begun but not finished. One would have to hover as a ghost to await the ending."

Lord Athill gave a formal nod of his aged narrow head. He knew this.

Dr Carson made a dour dismissive gesture of a professional kind, the gesture of a doctor to whom come patients sensing that their end is near. Athill and Schwarz exchanged smiles.

Hilary's gaze was thoughtful. Then: "You're right," he said in a decisive tone. "Let's not leave an unfinished tale fluttering about in the cosmos like a ghost. You're right, a clear clean ending would be best!"

The doctor almost imperceptibly shook his head. Lord Athill placed a hand firmly on his shoulder. "Let it go, doctor," he said, and in his quiet voice was a touch of a great lord's peremptoriness; "let it go. The ending of such a long story always has something consoling in it. If one –" Suddenly he broke off, and they understood what he was thinking. Dr Carson darted a quick glance, with more tender kindness than any would have suspected of the medical man.

Meanwhile, Doctor Bernhard Schwarz from Leitmeritz lay limp in his deck chair, his stubbled chin lifted to the hot scented breeze. His eyes were closed, not looking at the last little bit of the great river and the forested horizon and the sultry land for which he had yearned so long. You might think he was asleep. Suddenly, without moving or opening his eyes, he said quite cheerfully from the depths of his chair: "I know that Don Francesco de Orellana died when he came away from Paititi, even though he imagined he would return one day. One comes to Paititi at most once in a lifetime, and even then one is not really there!"

A disturbance erupted on deck, everyone running. Passengers jumped up from their chairs, the deck-golf party in progress towards the bow was abandoned, long golf clubs clattered to the deck, everyone thronged at the rail from where they were supposed to see something: a giant turtle, swimming through the golden yellow water to one of the small dark forested islands, mysterious and impenetrable, where hot blue air shimmered over the treetops. The turtle swam slowly, and where it disturbed the pale gold water it cast reflections of the improbable sapphire blue of the Amazonian sky.

As the Cruisers crowded laughing at the rail and stared at the swimming turtle through big binoculars, on the deserted stern deck the Globetrotter Hilary began to narrate the end of his long story. Bernhard Schwarz listened, very pale, very calm, with a quiet smile in which he was already at peace.

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I shall tell quite briefly, said the Globetrotter, how Orellana returned from the island of Cubagua home to Spain, how he had to come ashore in Portugal, and how the Portuguese king tried in vain to tempt the discover of the Amazon lands to his service. Now begins the brief but intensive war of intrigue between Spain and Portugal for this new region, which in the end became Portuguese; but that's another story. Francisco de Orellana hastened from Portugal to Valladolid, where the Spanish monarchy currently held court, this being May of the year 1543.

It is possible that on the voyage Orellana sometimes thinks of the Pizarros, and how he needs to justify his desertion of Gonzalo. Unnecessary worry: on his arrival he finds he has nothing to fear from his erstwhile friends. He had heard already in Cubagua of Marquis Francisco Pizarro's murder; in Spain he learns that he wasn't succeeded by Gonzalo Pizarro, who was languishing in semi-disfavour; while the third brother, Hernando, lay in the dungeon at Medina del Campo on account of his deeds in the civil war against Almagro. It seemed now meritorious to have opposed the House of Pizarro. When Orellana, arrived at the court in Valladolid, wrote a lengthy memorandum for his king detailing his voyage of discovery, it was merely for form's sake that he mentioned being unable to take his ship back upstream because of the rapids. He had all the more space to detail his services, the honours he had received, and how fitting out the expedition to the Land of Cinnamon had cost him more than forty thousand pesos ...

Orellana's report to Charles V is a stilted overblown piece of writing such as could be produced only in the Spanish Renaissance. But it contains mysterious sentences about particular indications of the riches "of these great Provinces that I have discovered, in order the better to serve God and Your Majesty and to bring to knowledge of our holy Catholic Faith to the peoples of these Provinces and set them beneath the Dominion of Your Majesty and the royal Crown of Castile; to which purpose, ignoring the risks to myself and with no Advantage to myself of any kind, I boldly ventured to know what there might be in aforesaid Provinces."

He entangles himself for a considerable time in liana-like vine-sentences and then comes to a conclusion: "For inasmuch as the Natives of aforesaid Provinces could be brought to Knowledge of our holy Catholic doctrine, they for the most part being gifted with reason, I implore Your Majesty that you may find it of good service to make me Governor of aforesaid Provinces in order that I may discover and settle them for Your Majesty, I offer myself to do this in order to serve God and Your Majesty."

This supplication from Francisco de Orellana is a matter of record, as is the minute from the Council for the Indies recommending that the King Emperor grant the request and permit Don Francisco to colonise the newly discovered lands, under particular conditions. The Council for the Indies knows that the Portuguese are planning an expedition to this coast that neighbours their Brazil, and that great haste is required. This document too is still in existence today, with all its seals, signatures and curlicues. But what was said in secret audience, when the Infante Don Felipe met Don Francisco de Orellana, nobody knows.

The conversation took place at a time when Charles V was absent from Valladolid, conducting a war in Germany against the Duke of Cleves. The sixteen year old Don Felipe, a pallid youth, is Regent for the first time in his life, or is so named; at his side is the huge figure of the Duke of Alba. Was Philipp II ever young? If he was, how could he have closed his mind to the golden dream-images that Francisco de Orellana must have revealed to him? There is no evidence that after his return to Spain Orellana ever spoke to anyone of certain matters that surely motivated his actions; his report to the king contains at best only vague hints that he has private intelligence of the riches of the great river lands. What did he whisper into the ear of the young Infante? We know that the courtiers in the antechamber at the palace of

Valladolid remarked on two curious pieces of jewellery that Don Francisco wore on the day of the audience: a gold ornament at his belt, in the shape of an ear of that strange new Indian corn, and on a slender chain a little snake of emerald, contemporary chronicles report.

As for this golden ear of maize, it may well be the same one on display even today at the Museo Arqueologico Nacional in Madrid, in Hall 4 of the upper floor; the skilfully fashioned piece is said to be Peruvian, but shows certain dissimilarities from the other examples of plastic art from Inca times that are displayed alongside. It seems that Francisco de Orellana placed the precious little piece in the hand of the Infante as he knelt before him at the audience. If that is the case, we may perhaps surmise that Don Francisco also showed, or maybe even gave, to the heir apparent the little snake of Amazonian stone. But it has not come down to us today, and is not to be found in the museum at Madrid or in the Imperial Cabinet at Leningrad, where from the time of Catherine the Great the world's greatest collection of objects made of this mysterious South American mineral are to be found; the great northern Amazon woman had an obscure predilection for the green Amazonian stone.

Following the audience Don Felipe is said to have referred to the great dangers, physical and spiritual, encountered by Don Francisco on his intrepid voyage. Was this comment connected in some way to the heathen amulet? We do not know; but if the princely bigot had harboured lurking suspicions of Orellana's Catholic purity of faith, he would surely have handed him over to the Inquisition, rather than a few days later causing that formal "Capitulation" of 13th February 1544 to be issued, in which he was named Vice-regent of the land of New Andalusia recently discovered by him, with the titles Governor, Captain-general, Adelantado and Alguacil Mayor, not limited to his own person, but should he have a son, bestowed also on him. The income of three hundred thousand maravedis the Governor was expected to derive from the new lands would also pass down to the as yet unconceived son ...

All this was prescribed in the Patent of the Infante acting as Regent, with many precisely worded conditions: how Francisco de Orellana was to recruit an army for the conquest of these lands, comprising two hundred Spanish infantry and a hundred cavalymen; and that he should take on board his big ship materials for constructing small river brigantines; and then he was enjoined to bring at least eight clerics at once to New Andalusia so they can begin to instruct the Indians without delay. It reflects well on the young Infante, who later became the bloody King Philipp II, that this early document from his first regency is filled with loving concern for the Indians of that distant land, with strong prohibitions against maltreatment, plunder, and kidnapping.

But Francisco de Orellana, Governor of his dreams, Captain-general of his desires, has now to find the son who is to inherit Paititi. The fierce tempest of his fate drives his ship on at breakneck speed. He finds again his youthful love Doña Ana de Ayala, woos her, and wins her hand. The son who is to rule in the Amazonian lands will be born to this cold, blonde, haughty woman, and not to Coniapuyara, heathen guardian of the hidden city. Can it be that Francisco de Orellana did not place that green talisman, the stone snake, into the cold damp hand of the sickly youth, the Infante Don Felipe, but rather into the hand of his lovely young bride Doña Ana? Having entered into union with her, he certainly cast aside forever all devilry of forests and waters; but did he perhaps hand over that symbol of the great Mother of Waters, the tutelary amulet?

We do not know; but it is certain that after his marriage to Ana, many things begin to go wrong for the future Governor of New Andalusia. The story of his preparations for the second expedition to the Amazonian lands is a sad litany of setbacks; no, of obscure semi-successes that are more aggravating than a conclusive defeat, because they signify not an ending but a

tenuous continuation in which unhappy causes persist and dangerous consequences draw near. Firstly, Orellana cannot raise the necessary funds, for Ana de Ayala brought not a single ducat into the marriage. Then his godfather Cosmo de Chaves in his home town of Trujillo lends him thirty thousand maravedis, which is not enough by far, but can be used to begin construction of a ship. Orellana is on fire with an impatience that helps him overcome various obstacles, but how many tribulations assail him! The Castilian Crown has contributed nothing to his great enterprise other than a parchment Letter of Patent and some resounding titles; the ship's cannon requested by Orellana are refused by the Admiralty; the experienced pilots he wants to take with him are not made available.

All around him is a watchful mistrust. Wherever he looks for help, he finds nothing but surveillance. A Dominican monk, Friar Pablo de Torres, appointed as Veedor-general to the expedition – meaning a privileged general spy for the Crown, with secret mandates – sits with Orellana in Seville and sends report after report to the Council for the Indies: how slowly the fitting-out proceeds; how the date set for departure has long since slipped by; how there is no money for provisioning the ship because of Orellana's unwise marriage, which the Dominican deprecates in his secret reports; and how he plans to lease ships rather than buy them.

The Court in Valladolid grows uneasy; there is already a willingness to lend credence to whispered voices, and in place of Orellana entrust the expedition to another captain, or even postpone it. Then it is learned that the King of Portugal is equipping a big armada which is to explore Orellana's river. Shilly-shallying and doubt are succeeded by haste and precipitous activity. Four vessels are loaded up in great haste, for good or ill. Before it departs, the Council for the Indies instructs the Veedor-general to check over once more the inventory of weapons, equipment and food supplies, and the crew's muster roll. The Dominican arrives at the harbour of San Lucar to find the ships gone.

Orellana has fled one grey dawn with his fleet, leaving his spy back on dry land, either because he can't stand the man or because he dare not undergo the ordered inspection: the ships are badly built and poorly provisioned, food is insufficient, and instead of hiring Spanish sailors, as strictly enjoined by the Court, he has on board Portuguese and Frenchmen, and even English adventurers suspected to be heretics. Of his four vessels, only the Galician *San Pablo* carries the necessary artillery; the *Breton* has only two genuine Spaniards in its crew of eighteen; the caravel *Guadalupe* is very small, with only ten crew in addition to the Portuguese pilot Gil Gomez. The flagship is again named *Victoria*, like that other one lying rotting in the harbour of Nueva Cadiz on the island of Cubagua: the true Jungle Ship that would never have lost its way in the forested lands.

The new *Victoria* has a sumptuously decorated cabin for the Governor's lady Doña Ana, who accompanies her husband, but there is no winged heathen goddess pointing ahead at the prow, for Doña Ana would tolerate no such thing. And while the ship was being so hastily put together there was no sign of the artisan Diego Meria; he had silently shaken his head when Orellana tried to enlist him for this new voyage, he'd rather head for Rome, where the Pope needs artistic talent. Few of his earlier companions join with Orellana, for those who have travelled once down the great jungle stream knew only too well what hazards would await them there. Hazards; but also treasures of gold? Orellana has never mentioned treasures to his companions; black Pedro, the slave with the pierced tongue, is no more obstinate in his silence. He's now again at Orellana's side, gazing at him and trying in vain to speak, to cry out, to implore with his round negro eyes.

To cut a long story short, the Globetrotter continued, Orellana dashed headlong into this new enterprise like a madman, or rather like a malaria sufferer who is responsible for his

actions only in the intervals between fevers. We know little about this voyage, we have no good Father Carvajal, who is now fulfilling his office of Vicar-general at Lima. No chronicle informs us of the progress of the four vessels to the Canary Islands. All we hear is that a full three months later they are lying at Tenerife, either because the commander is sick, or perhaps he hopes to augment his provisions. Then on they go, only to Cape Verde, and spend a further two months at the islands, in pestilential winter rains. Why do they wait? What does Francisco de Orellana hope for? What makes him delay so long? Most of the crew fall sick on these African islands, and ninety die. The vessels, poorly maintained, are in bad shape; in order to make at least three of them seaworthy, it proves necessary to break up the fourth for its rigging and anchors and nails. When at last Orellana gives the order to ship out, fifty men refuse, claiming they are too ill. Among them are four of the military commanders who are supposed to conquer those enormous lands by force of arms.

So on they sail, defeated at the first battle. We know nothing of the voyage, or of Francisco's mindset. He has with him the wife for whom he wants to conquer a kingdom; she has never yet conceived the son who is supposed to inherit it. What is she to him, this blonde hidalga Doña Ana, during these days of ultimate despair? We do not know; but no man would so defiantly expose to such danger a wife he truly loves. When Orellana continues on, in the teeth of every wind, on vessels that lack food and water, has he not already thrown away his hopes, his life? Is it not a hopeless yearning that drives him on into the impossible? Perhaps it's a yearning for the other, for Coniapuyara. *She* would have borne him a son, heir of Paititi!

And now the calamity intensifies. First a storm, then thirst on the empty ocean. Rain saves their wretched lives, but in the fogs of contrary weather a ship is lost, the biggest and best, with sixteen soldiers on board, eleven irreplaceable horses, and all the iron and tackle that they need. The ship disappears, perhaps not without assistance from the crew; but it never arrives at any Christian harbour. At last the other two ships are driven by a good north wind towards land: one hot December day Orellana sees the blue sea turn a golden brown, and he recognises the potable waves of the big freshwater sea, he is near to his goal and is able to drop anchor off a forested island. Anchor? The ships have long since had no anchor, so they drop cannon into the shallow water, cannon meant for the defence of the capital of New Andalusia.

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The rest, the Globetrotter said, as a glance from Dr Carson urged him to speed up, is told in my historical sources only in obscure and cursory passages. The now tiny army is known to have sojourned for months on the outermost islands of the delta, subject to hunger, fevers, and fights with Indians. The ships are unable to locate the main stream, and as they strive to penetrate the jumble of overgrown side creeks they continually come up against sandbanks and shallows. They still have parts of the river brigantine they brought from Spain; Orellana has them piece it together with immense effort, but in order to replace the missing parts they have to break up one of the big ships to scavenge planks, nails and clamps. The crew grumble at having to destroy the last ship but one. What's the point of the brigantine, when the military expedition has failed and retreat is our only salvation? The last horse has already been devoured, and the last dog. They'll never conquer this diabolical land, never find the main river, it's bewitched. Around the campfire the Spanish warriors speak in hushed tones of the dreadful laugh that came from the forest last night, and the blows of the ghostly invisible axe that kept sounding louder than the axes of the toiling crew; and strange tracks have been spotted in the undergrowth, of a being that places one human foot alongside another that seems to be the claw of a giant jungle cat. They whisper to one another: the forest demons

hate the Adelantado, he forfeited their favour by throwing away a heathen amulet, driven by repentance and admonished to do so by his confessor ...

Francisco de Orellana, haggard from fever, afire with a desperate yearning, urges on the construction of the brigantine that will carry him upstream even if it means leaving just him and the negro Pedro alone. Of these critical days on islands in the lower river only one person would have been able to provide a report: the Adelantado's wife. But she never spoke of it. Why not? One can hazard a guess, through the heavy veil of centuries that conceal this fate. For when months later the brigantine is finally ready, Orellana leaves his wife behind on the bigger vessel; he himself takes command of the smaller as it proceeds ahead to find at last the opening to the route into the Promised Land.

By evening the little brigantine is ready to hoist sail, just as the sun begins to sink and all the unearthly glory of dream-colours floods across the river and the endless forest. Orellana orders immediate departure, and sails off into the fading daylight. He hoists the golden flag of Castile and the standard of a Viceroy and Adelantado. With salvos and blaring bugles the bigger ship salutes the brigantine as it sails slowly past to the west, into the golden purple glow that plays about the jungle trees, and in its fiery brilliance you already seem to see darkness and the approach of night.

For a moment both vessels are side by side in a narrow lagoon, and Doña Ana, pale and blonde and upright on deck sees her husband leaning against the mast in his armour all of gold. He is supported by his black slave Pedro, or else he would fall down. There he is, drenched in light, stiff and immobile; his face does not turn towards his wife or his crew, who are once again cheering him. He stares only westward, westwards into the golden glimmer behind which, invisible still but sensed by all of them, the dark of night is concealed. They see him shift slightly. He lifts a shaking hand to his brow to shade his dazzled eyes: what does he think he's seeing? What shapes in the glare of the sinking sun, what city of gold? Or does he see *him* as he looms out of the first black shadows behind the huge jagged palms, him, the one with the single gloomy brow in the middle of the low forehead, whose blue teeth give a menacing smile, him, the one who confuses paths and tempts mortals astray: Curupira?

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The Globetrotter Hilary slowly rose from his deck chair. "The end," he said. He looked at Dr Schwarz lying there, his eyes closed as if not listening.

"The end!" Lord Athill insisted, somewhat brusquely.

Hardly anything, murmured the Globetrotter quickly, is known of the end. We know that the larger vessel, with Orellana's wife and a crew almost dead from starvation on board, eventually reached the Isla Margarita, a Spanish island off the coast of Venezuela. We know a little of Doña Ana's later fate: Juan de Peñalosa, who was with her on the ship, became the proud lady's life partner, and they lived on a great while in Panama. Of what the other survivors related on their arrival, only faint and fragmented echoes have reached us: how the bigger vessel was unable to follow the brigantine into shallow and completely overgrown creeks, and so waited off the island where the brigantine was cobbled together.

The brigantine never returned, and no one knows by what means the bigger ship came to know how, after a dreadful odyssey along narrow waterways, after bloody encounters in the forest, Orellana succumbed to misery and fever and was buried in a grave beneath a big tree with golden leaves. Besides this well-known version there is another: those on the big ship never heard anything more of the brigantine; like the memories of the living, on that golden evening, it was forever lost to them, on into the setting sun, into the radiant dream.

“That is the end,” said the Globetrotter softly. “Francisco de Orellana sailed on into golden dreams. Are they death? No matter. Navigare necesse.”

“And it is not necessary to live,” Lord Athill quoted slowly.

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On the eve of the *Hildebrand's* final departure, it lay quite close to the forested island. The vessel's position had shifted a little with the onset of the flood tide.

That night, which was infinitely hot and filled with starlight and moonshine, a young couple, a gentleman and a pretty miss from the cruise passengers, sat a long, long while on the upper boat deck; they were so young and so much in love on this tropical moonlit night, and no one needed to give credence to the dreamily spooky things of which they told much later in whispers, faces flushed – she to her mother, he to an older friend: of frightful voices in the forest close by, thuds of a giant axe, a shrieking laugh and a human cry ...

Documented is only that the passenger in Cabin 3 on B Deck, Mister Bernhard Schwarz from Leitmeritz in Czechoslovakia, was observed by the steward, who had come by to collect shoes for polishing, through the door, which was open because of the heat, not lying in his bunk, but changing into the khaki linen suit familiar to the whole ship, along with his jungle boots, spats and pith helmet. To the steward's surprised question, Mister Schwarz, who seemed cheerful enough though quite red in the face, responded only with a quiet smile; the steward was very sleepy, and what's more not at all inclined to puzzle over any of the passengers' lunacies; so he didn't repeat his question, just picked up the canvas shoes that No. 3 had set out for chalking, and went off to his own cabin.

It has also been ascertained that, on the part of C Deck closest to the beach of the forested island, there was found the curious bivouac-sheet cloak of the missing passenger and, hanging from the rail, his grotesquely big and clumsy binoculars. The hunt for the man lasted all next day, to no avail, before with great regret the assumption had to be made that he had fallen overboard during a sudden attack of fever, and drowned. The fellow passengers who had spoken to him last attested that he had felt a little unwell for days; these included his gracious lordship Lord Athill, former Britannic Government Minister.

The river was searched in vain for the body, and in vain did they tramp over the little jungle island that lay so close to where Schwarz must have entered the water. Nothing was found, not the least little object belonging to the unfortunate man, nor even a trace of his big clumsy boots, which would have been impossible to mistake in the muddy ground.

Quite nonsensical, of course, is the statement of one of the policemen who searched the island, a native Caboclo, that fresh prints were indeed discovered on the little island, but not of European boots, rather the tracks of a bare human foot and a huge jaguar claw, impressed side by side as if they belonged together and were the two feet of a *single* being. Of course there are no jaguars so close to the town of Pará; and nothing is more likely than that this Caboclo, heading off into the brush to search for the corpse, had fortified himself with too much Aguardente de cano; for Indians, whether civilised or not, are full of superstitious fears, and whenever they are excited see everywhere ghostly forest spirits whose greatest delight lies in enticing human beings away from the correct path and into terror and danger, ever deeper into the great secret of the Amazonian forest world; everywhere they see him, sense him, Strangefoot with the turtleshell axe: Curupira.

THE END