

The moths swarmed round the kerosene pressure lamp that was burning bright and slung from a hook outside the entrance to the timber bungalow. The entrance was some six feet above the grassed compound and was reached by a flight of wooden steps with a handrail to one side. All the bungalows on the compound were built like this, off the ground on stilts so that you could walk underneath them, albeit crouched if you so wanted.

The seventeen-year-old girl climbed the steps behind her parents as they joined the private evening cocktail party arranged by some of the Sarawak administration expats living in the district. She was a shy girl somewhat secluded having spent most of her life in a girl's boarding school only travelling to be with her parents once a year for the summer holidays.

For lesser holidays she usually stayed with one or other of her friends' parents in Surrey or Kent. One of these friends was June, a few months younger than her, who had a ten-year-old brother who enjoyed annoying Joan whenever she stayed with June. Then there was Sally an only child like herself: she got on well with Sally at school but found holidays with her a bit dull. They mostly read books and dreamed of adventures or speculated deliciously about the private lives of the various village trades people. But since she turned seventeen, Joan began to feel an emptiness, an inner ache for deeper relationship - something beyond herself.

That summer for the first time she began to feel grown-up as she boarded the BOAC flight to Singapore. As was normal for international airlines in the 1960's, minors were individually taken care of by one of the air hostesses. This year her allocated air-hostess had asked her to help with three younger children travelling on their own and she had willingly done her best and had felt invited to be part of the airline team.

She looked round the large spacious lounge of the ex-pat bungalow and it soon dawned on her that they were all married couples and she was the only single girl present. But now she felt like only a half-adult as she stood there sipping her glass of Perry while her parents joked and laughed with their friends. Most were probably in their forties, one or two in their fifties maybe. But there was one man who looked about twenty-two. He had spotted her and walked over and introduced himself.

He had a beautifully handsome face and walked with a strong relaxed gait. He smiled and spoke kindly to her. He had a young wife apparently who was talking with a group of the ladies. Was this the first time she had come here for her holidays?

'No,' she managed ... she been here last year but in a different house then. She self-consciously sipped some of her drink eyeing him over the rim. She was transfixed: he was wonderful.

She felt tongue tied ... but he continued to introduce himself. He was a geologist helping the local survey work - he was from Canada. ... No - she had never been to Canada?... He came from Alberta to be precise. ... Yes, it was a beautiful place. ... No, he'd never been to Surrey in England but he had an aunt in Edinburgh whom he had stayed with on a couple of occasions. The last time was to watch the Military Tattoo in the castle grounds. It was just amazing. Had she been?

She managed to open her mouth and whisper ... 'yes,' she had been with her parents when she was ten. It was very exciting then to be out at night watching the famous performances to such heart stirring bands.

Her face was flushed and he gently offered to re-fill her glass. She felt she was tingling all over. When he returned, he suggested she might like to meet his wife and the other ladies. She meekly complied. He then moved on to chat with some of the men. The girl listened to the ladies' chatter but she took little in ... her thoughts were elsewhere ...

As the evening passed, she found herself gravitating uncontrollably towards wherever the geologist was in company. Her brain now drawn as a moth to the lamp. The geologist was aware of her adoration and he smiled inquisitively to her on occasions. She didn't respond but felt his caress inside her.

The time came her parents were saying goodnight as they prepared to take her home. She came to and meekly smiled at people murmuring goodnight to them as she followed her mother round. But when it came to him - the only him in the room for her - she melted her heart crying but her face motionless. She just looked longingly into his eyes as her mother gave her a prod. 'Come on dear, it's time to go.'

They walked back to their bungalow a short throw away by torch light. The girl wondered if she would ever see him again. Her parents had arranged several trips for her and as it happened, she didn't see her geologist again that summer. Gradually the ache in her heart wore off, but in its place a new determination grew. Somehow one day she would go Alberta in Canada. She felt she was sure to find him there. At nights when she was lonely, she dreamt about it and the great adventure she would then be a part of.

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