

SO MUCH  
LIFE LEFT  
OVER

Louis de Bernières



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*Chacun de nous a sa blessure  
Son coin de paradis perdu  
Son petit jardin défendu*

Georges Moustaki, 'Alexandrie'

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## I

### Gun Snap

The crackle of gunshots bounced between the mountainsides, the percussion fading with each return of echo. Daniel Pitt and Hugh Bassett sat side by side on a small level patch, playing gun snap. They had on the table before them two decks of cards, a box of ammunition and two Mark VI service revolvers. Fifteen yards away was a gibbet with two rows of six tin cans suspended from it on pieces of string.

The idea was to be the first person to put a bullet through every can. Sometimes, for a change, they went down to the valley, threw bottles out into a lake, and sank them with rifles. These were fine ways for two old fighter pilots to pass the last hour of the day as the mist rose up and supper was cooked in the bungalows.

Daniel Pitt and Hugh Bassett suffered from the accidie of not being at war. Even in a land as beautiful and surprising as Ceylon, they missed the extremes of experience that had made them feel intensely alive during the Great War, in spite of its penumbra of death. Neither of them missed the killing, and if they went out after duck or small game, they never returned with more than their families could eat. They had both, many times, seen the way in which the light suddenly goes out of a man's eyes as he passes out of the world, and it was just the same with an animal. There was no longer any triumph in the kill, the guilt was as intense as it had ever been, but still they yearned for the passionate oblivion of the hunt.

There is a kind of man who, having been at war, finds peacetime intolerable, because he cannot develop the civilian's talent for becoming obsessed with irrelevant details and procedures. He hates the delays and haverings, the tedious diplomacy, the terrible lack of energy and discipline, and, above all, he hates the feeling that what he is doing is not important.

If you have struggled for the freedom of France, or have fought to keep Zeppelins out of the skies over London, what else can seem important thereafter?

Daniel and Hugh were fortunate to be involved in the manufacture of tea, because everything in that industry depends upon good timing and good teamwork, and strictly understood hierarchies of responsibility. Daniel loved the huge and beautiful machinery in the factory, and could not resist rolling up his sleeves and helping the Singhalese engineers when it broke down. Machinery was so much easier to deal with than people. There was always a precise set of reasons why a machine may not be working, and there were always completely logical solutions. People were slippery and elusive, changeable and moody. You thought you understood them and then found out that you did not. You thought they loved you, and then they suddenly turned spiteful or indifferent.

Daniel enjoyed the sheer reasonableness of the machinery, but he also enjoyed the brotherhood of mechanics, and he reflected quite often that he had more in common, and more enjoyment, with the engineers than he did with those British people who congregated at the club. He had picked up some Singhalese, in addition to the Tamil of the tea workers, and was finding that the more languages you know, the better you understand your own. He realised that languages divide the world up differently from each other. He was half French, and had often wondered why it was that his French personality was different from his British one. In French he was more emphatic and rhetorical. Somebody had told him once that in Russian there was no word for blue. There was bound to be a word for pushrod, or tappet, though.

It was very fortunate for him that he had the company of Hugh Bassett, who had spent his war flying Sopwith triplanes and Camels over France, in the Royal Naval Air Service. The RNAS had been operating out of airfields alongside the Royal Flying Corps, and they had an inexhaustible amount to talk about, to mull over, to repeat. Both had binged beyond the borders of sanity, knew the same jokes and ribald songs, had overflowed the same strip of desolation month after month; fought the same

battle to keep flying sickness disorder at bay, to remain optimistic, to perform over and over again the impossible trick of trampling their own fear underfoot every time they sprinted to the cockpit. Daniel wondered if he had ever been truly courageous at all, but had rather been seduced by the wondrous beauty and excitement of flying, consoled by the airman's simple fatalism. If today's the day, then today's the day. Goodbye, world, it was good to know you. All I ask is to die a clean death, one that's not by burning.

But now he and Hugh, and the rest of those who had survived, had so much life left over that it was sometimes hard to cope with. Some became drunks; others fell quiet and imprisoned themselves inside themselves; some foresaw a brave new world and strode out towards it; others returned to what they had been before, and turned the war into the memory of an outrageous dream from which they had at last awoken. Most were as proud of what they had done as they were amazed to be yet alive.



## Archie and Esther

In late May of 1925, Archie was delivered to Taprobane in the early evening, with the intention of spending the first two weeks of his annual three-month leave with his brother, and then going snipe shooting in the wetlands west of Trincomalee.

He had havered over the invitation for some time. The fact was that his long unrequited passion for Daniel's wife made it painful for him to be with them. He felt cut off and safe in Peshawar or Simla, or in the Hindu Kush. In those places Rosie was a remote and beautiful dream, and that she existed at all was a kind of joy to him, and a pleasure. He could bivouac in a nullah, with his sepoy's slumbering about him, and gaze up at the stars, remembering Rosie sipping tea, Rosie as a little girl, Rosie playing tennis, Rosie at prayer in church or talking earnestly about poetry in the conservatory at Eltham. Archie cared not a whit for poetry, beyond 'How Horatius Kept the Bridge', but Rosie's bright-eyed passion for it almost made him believe in its importance. The way she talked about it, you'd think that it was as vital as bread. He loved her blue eyes, her chestnut hair, her freckles, her bohemian armbands, and the way that her hips moved when she walked. He loved her soft voice, and the shadows of sorrow in her eyes that had never quite gone away, even after marrying his brother.

That wedding day had provided the most painful hours of his life. It had been completely unbearable to think of her in Daniel's arms, night after night, for all the years to come, raising the children that he would never have, and would so much have wanted. On the boat back to India he had written a long confessional letter to Daniel: '... One has dreams. It is very hard to endure the sight of them fluttering away like a flock of sparrows. It leaves a taste in the mouth like licking an old penny.' He had concluded the letter by asking to be buried in Peshawar.

Archie thought a great deal about death. One saw a great deal of it on the North-West Frontier, and the tribesmen seemed to find a value in it much higher than any they attached to life. To them, the latter was just an irksome anteroom to paradise. Archie thought they yearned for death because their religious fanaticism made any enjoyment of this life completely *haram*. Life was not to be enjoyed until you were dead, and in paradise.

The fun in Archie's life was of the unenduring, self-destructive kind. He drank too much, and too much enjoyed the danger of being up in the mountains, always in imminent jeopardy of avalanche, ambush, capture and torture. But the most destructive pleasure of his life was thinking of Rosie, becoming paralysed by dreams.

It was therefore with great misgivings that he had agreed to come to Ceylon instead of taking ship straight back to Southampton, and now that he was out on the terrace with Rosie and Daniel, sipping tea as they watched the mist rise up in the valley below, those misgivings became even greater. This was too much like paradise, and something was bound to go wrong.

Rosie was talking animatedly about her work in the clinic: '... and the natives don't trust our medicine at all, because they've got their own, and so they only come to us when they're desperate, and obviously by then it's too late, and they die anyway, and of course that means they trust our medicine even less.'

'Damned awkward,' said Archie, puffing on his cigarette. He smoked Abdullas when he could get them, and was enjoying the first of a pack he had bought in Colombo before setting off.

'Worse than awkward,' said Daniel. 'You build a lovely expensive clinic for your workers, and then it's only a few Europeans who use it.'

'It's so frustrating!' said Rosie.

'There must be something you can do,' said Archie.

'What do you do in India these days? It seems like a lifetime since I was there. Has anything changed?' asked Daniel.

'No, it's just the same. On the North-West Frontier, the only medicine they believe in is the bullet, if you don't count things like swallowing a verse of the Koran. It's completely different in Calcutta or Delhi, obviously. The more sophisticated Indians use

both systems at once, as far as I can see, depending on the expense. Rosie, my dear, will you be using the clinic ... on the day?

‘What day?’

‘Well, I see that ... forgive me ... I know one is not supposed to draw attention to such things, but ... Well, it is quite evident, if you don’t mind me saying.’

Rosie patted her stomach happily. ‘Oh, you mean this!’

‘Yes. And congratulations. I imagine it’s due quite soon?’

‘Six weeks,’ said Rosie. ‘We’re so happy about it, aren’t we?’ she said, turning to Daniel.

‘We are indeed. Poor little Esther isn’t, though. She doesn’t want the competition. She’s very grumpy, and says, “Daddy, make it go away.” She says she’s going to give it to someone else.’

‘So will you be having the baby at your clinic?’

‘One normally gives birth at home,’ said Rosie. ‘I expect we’ll get the midwife in, and hope that she’s here on time.’

‘I can’t imagine what it’s like, giving birth,’ said Archie. ‘Must be hell. Strange how easy it is for cats and dogs, eh? And such damned hard work for you. The curse of Eve, eh?’

‘I’d rather not think about it,’ said Rosie.

‘Sorry. I’m just glad it’s not something I’ll ever be called upon to do.’

‘Well, I’m glad I don’t have to creep about being ambushed by Pathans,’ said Rosie.

‘We have a lot of fun too,’ said Archie. ‘We put on a new Gilbert and Sullivan every six months, and once we did a mock *Romeo and Juliet* with our largest officer as Juliet. You should have seen him mince. The sepoy think we’re mad, of course. And then there’s the Peshawar Vale Hunt.’

At that moment Esther came out in her nightdress, with her thumb in her mouth. ‘I can’t sleep,’ she announced. ‘You’re too noisy, and I’m not tired, and it’s not even dark.’

‘I think the plan failed,’ said Daniel to Rosie. ‘I did say there wasn’t any point in sending her to bed early.’

‘Well, I thought that Archie might want us to himself on his first night here. Children can be such a distraction, and then they take all the attention, and you can’t talk about anything else.’

‘Oh, you shouldn’t have done that for me,’ exclaimed Archie. ‘My niece is adorable, and I see her so little.’ He beckoned to her, saying, ‘*Viens, chérie*, come and sit on my smelly old knee.’

Esther settled herself onto his knee with much aplomb, her thumb never leaving her mouth, and he put his hand to the side of her head, pushing it against his shoulder.

‘Suffer the little children,’ he said happily.

‘You do smell cigaretty,’ said Esther.

‘Nothing like a child for honesty,’ said Archie. ‘Is “cigaretty” nice or nasty?’

‘A bit of both. Daddy doesn’t smoke.’

‘Everyone thinks I’m very strange,’ said Daniel. ‘I don’t smoke, and to make matters worse, I’m half French, though it doesn’t much show. I prefer coffee to tea, and I’d rather be at home than at the club.’

‘You are strange, little brother,’ said Archie. ‘I always did say so.’

‘Uncle Archie?’

‘Yes, *chérie*?’

‘Why’s your moustache orange in the middle?’

‘Cigarettes. There’s something orangey in the smoke.’

‘If I go to bed, will you tell me an *histoire*?’

‘As long as you promise to get so bored that you go to sleep.’

‘I will when it’s dark.’

‘Dark soon,’ replied Archie. ‘Look at that sun, sinking like a ship.’

‘It’s on fire,’ said Esther. ‘It’s a wheel on fire.’

‘Come on, my darling,’ said Archie. ‘I’ll carry you in. Why don’t you pretend to be a wounded soldier, and I’m carrying you to safety?’

He stood up, and Esther flopped in his embrace. ‘Oh, I am *blessée*,’ she cried, ‘and I think I might die. Kiss me hardly.’

‘Say goodnight to Mummy and Daddy,’ said Archie, presenting her in turn to Rosie and Daniel for a kiss on the forehead. ‘I hope you’re cured by the morning,’ said Daniel.

‘It’s prob’ly fatal,’ said Esther.

Archie carried her indoors and laid her in her small bed. ‘There,’ he said, pulling the covers over her.

‘Now you’ve got to tell me a story.’

'I'll tell you one about Ali Anei, the elephant. I was told it by someone called "The Mad Major".'

'Why's he called Ali?'

'Because he is a Mohammedan elephant.'

'And why is he called Annie?'

'Because Anei means elephant.'

'But Annie's a girl's name.'

'Not Annie. Anei.'

'Uncle Archie?'

'Yes?'

'What's a Mohammeding?'

'A follower of the prophet Mohammed. Look, it would take hours to explain. Do you want a story or an explanation of an entire religion?'

'Story, please. Uncle Archie, does Mohammed like elephants?'

'I've no idea, *chérie*. He was very fond of his camel, and it's said that he liked cats, and he had one disciple who loved cats so much that his nickname was "Father of Kittens", and I believe that in his will he left only one white mule. Can I tell you the story now?'

She nodded her head solemnly.

'Once upon a time there was a big bull elephant called Ali Anei, and this elephant was the biggest and strongest in all Ceylon, and he lived with his wives and friends and relatives by a huge lake that was full of crocodiles, at the very edge of the jungle.'

'Now, one day in the dry season, he went down to the water to drink, and it so happened that there was a crocodile just under the surface, and when Ali put his trunk into the water, the crocodile said to itself, "Oh goody goody, a big grey wiggly sausage!" And he grabbed hold of it with his dreadful sharp teeth.'

'Uncle Archie?'

'Yes?'

'What was it called?'

'The crocodile? It was called Lord Palmerston.'

'No it wasn't!'

'Was!'

'Wasn't wasn't wasn't!'

'Was was was!'

‘Not!’

‘All right, it was really called Lieutenant Colonel Aloysius Reginald Arthur Quibbling Crockersnapper. Don’t you want to know what happened? Well, Aloysius the crocodile pulled hard on the trunk, and Ali Anei pulled back. Ali was much bigger, so he began to drag the crocodile out of the water.

‘Now, Lieutenant Colonel Crockersnapper’s best friend happened to be passing by, so he thought he’d lend a mouth, and he grabbed Crockersnapper’s tail in his jaws, and heaved backwards, but Ali was still too strong, and then Crockersnapper’s second-best friend came along and grabbed hold of the crocodile’s tail, but Ali was still too strong, and before you knew it there were ten crocodiles trying to pull him into the water so they could gobble him up.

‘Now, you might be wondering why Ali’s friends didn’t come to help, even though he was bellowing with pain and indignation. Were you wondering that?’

Esther shook her head.

‘Oh, never mind then. So, when there were ten crocodiles pulling, Ali felt himself beginning to be overpowered, and just then he noticed that he was next to a rubber tree, and he wrapped his tail around it.’

‘Trees aren’t rubber,’ said Esther. ‘They’re made of wood.’

Archie sighed resignedly, and said, ‘Very well, there was a wooden tree, and Ali wrapped his tail around it to anchor himself, and they all stayed like that for five hours because it was a complete stalemate.

‘Ali racked his brains for a solution to his predicament, and then he had a very good idea. He breathed in and breathed in and breathed in until he could inhale no more, and then, with all his might, he blew through his trunk, which by now was right down the crocodile’s throat. He blew so hard that the crocodile swelled up as round as a football, and he blew so hard that the crocodile expanded so much that quite suddenly it exploded – bang! – and all his friends fell back into the water with a big splash.

‘So that’s how Ali Anei defeated the crocodile, and he went back to his wives and friends and relatives, and showed them his wounded trunk, and he said, “You wouldn’t believe what just

happened to me,” and he told them the story I have just told you, and they said, “Stop making things up,” because they really didn’t believe a word of it. But we know it’s true, don’t we?’

Esther looked at him sceptically in the gathering darkness and said, ‘Will you stay with me ’til I fall asleep?’

‘Of course I will.’

‘Uncle Archie?’

‘Yes?’

‘Where’s my birthday?’

‘Where? Don’t you mean “when”?’

‘No. Where is it?’

‘Um, well, I suppose it’s waiting for you just round the corner, and when it comes it’ll be here. Here in Ceylon. At Taprobane.’

‘Which corner?’

‘At Daddy’s tea factory, I expect. But don’t go looking for it, because it’ll see you coming, and just nip round the next corner.’

‘Why don’t balls have edges?’

‘Gracious me . . . I suppose that a ball is a solid body with only one edge if you think about it. Or perhaps it’s the only geometrical solid with no edges at all . . . I’m afraid you’ve got me there.’

‘Uncle Archie, how big is air?’

‘How big is air? Good Lord . . . well . . . um . . . it’s a big blanket a few thousand feet deep, and it wraps the earth up completely. I expect your father would know how big it is. He used to be a flyer. Ask him in the morning.’

‘Uncle Archie, why is “brought” not “bought”?’

‘Well, “brought” means “did bring”, and “bought” means “did buy”. Does that make sense? Do you think you’ll remember that?’

Esther nodded, and said, ‘I’m going to sleep now.’

She turned on her side and closed her eyes. Archie sat on his chair, leaning forward with his arms on his knees and his hands clasped together. He watched the child fading away into her dreams and thought he had never seen anything so beautiful in his life. He put out a hand to stroke the side of her head, but then withdrew it.

He would have loved to have had a child like this, and he wondered again why it was that he had quite deliberately cut himself off from any chance of living from a full heart. ‘Had it

beaten out of me at Westminster,' he said to himself. At prep school and then at public school he had learned to close himself off so completely during his ten years of thrashings, spartan training on the sports fields, and the Hobbesian war of all against all, that he knew he had become like the prisoner whose cell door has fallen open, but cannot go out into the light. 'Why didn't this happen to Daniel?' he asked himself. Daniel had been thrashed and bullied and half starved as well, but he had emerged with a heart open to the world. His own was in the darkness out of choice, it seemed. At home in England there was Rosie's sister Otilie, a good woman who loved him, with whom he could have enjoyed domesticity and children, but at the back of his mind was the knowledge that anyone who adored him as sincerely as she did must have something wrong with them, and should therefore be avoided. It was easier to love Rosie because she would never love him in return.

Archie observed the sweet little girl breathing softly and peacefully in the half-light, and felt tears well up. He closed his eyes and muttered, 'Dear Lord, let this child live a long life full of happiness, and may she never suffer harm, and defend her from wars and disasters, and watch over her and protect her.' He paused, then added, 'And as far as I'm concerned, I don't mind if you take me as soon as you like. Amen.'

After an hour had passed, Rosie came in to look for him, fearing that something was amiss. She put her head round the door, and saw Archie in the darkness, stock-still in his chair with his hands clasped together and his head bowed. 'Is everything all right?' she whispered. 'Is she asleep? Supper's ready.'

Archie looked up at her with sorrowful eyes, and said, 'Tickety-boo. Perfectly splendid. Along in a minute.'



### 3

## Archie and Rosie

As usual, Daniel left for the tea factory just after dawn, and when Rosie came out onto the terrace an hour later, she found Archie at the table with a pot of tea and half a dozen weapons laid out in front of him. One of them was dismantled, and he was pointing it at the sky in order to peer down the barrel.

‘Gracious me, what an arsenal,’ she said. ‘Is there a war on?’

Archie said, ‘Good morning, my dear, and what a lovely morning it is too. It’s splendid to see the mist burn off in the valley. It’s all so marvellously green, and the air is so breathable that I don’t even want to spoil it by smoking.’

‘Oh well, Ceylon is the second Garden of Eden, don’t you know,’ said Rosie. ‘According to the natives, Adam was sent here after the expulsion from Paradise. His footprint is on Adam’s Peak, but I haven’t seen it yet.’

‘The natives? I thought they were Hindus and Buddhists. What’s Adam to them?’

‘We’ve got plenty of Roman Catholics and Mohammedans too. It’s obvious from the names. Fernandos and da Silvas and Mohammeds in batches of a dozen. I think the Hindus even have Jesus as one of their gods. That’s what I’ve heard. What’s this very slender gun for?’

‘Snipe. It’s a close-range business, and you don’t want to make them inedible by blasting them to bits with a big dose of shot. It’s wonderful snipe shooting here; you can bag a thousand in a day.’

Rosie was horrified. ‘A thousand in a day? A thousand?’

‘Yes, indeed.’

‘Oh my goodness!’

Insensitive to Rosie’s horror, Archie ploughed on. ‘And this gun is a twelve-bore, but it’s got one smooth barrel and one rifled

barrel, so you can put shot or a ball in one barrel and a bullet in the other. You know, a crocodile with one barrel and a peacock with the other.'

'Crocodiles? Peacocks?'

'Mm. And this one is good for dogs. You can use a dead dog as crocodile bait. There's nothing a crocodile likes more than a dog. I understand that people do eat them in China. Never tried it myself, and never will, no doubt, unless I'm in China and having to be polite.'

'Dogs?'

'Yes, and this is the best of the lot. My pride and joy. It's a Jeffery Nitro Express .600. Look, I even had my name engraved on it. It's got Krupp barrels and a truly wonderful ejector mechanism.'

'It's absolutely huge. It must weigh a ton.'

'It's *magnifique*. The strike poundage is 8,700 pounds, and the velocity is 2,050 feet per second, and the safety isn't automatic, so you don't get caught out when the beast is charging straight at you and you've got no time for messing about. I'll show you a bullet, if you're interested. They're absolute whoppers, packed with cordite, nickel-covered for penetration. Eighty-eight shillings a hundred. You don't waste them.'

Rosie had a horrible suspicion, and asked, 'So, is this an elephant gun then? Is that what you mean by "the beast"?''

'Yes, bang on, my dear. It's an elephant gun. It's surprising what you can do with an elephant. You can make the feet into walking-stick stands, and I know someone who used a section of trunk to sheathe a biscuit tin. One always keeps the tail. If there is one, of course.'

Rosie sat down heavily and trembled. Archie looked at her with concern. 'What's the matter, my dear? Are you quite all right?'

She suddenly lost control of herself. 'Crocodiles? Dogs? Peacocks? A thousand snipe? Elephants? I can't believe my ears. Are you completely mad? What is the matter with you? Walking-stick stands? Trunks for biscuits?'

'My dear —'

'Don't you know that people love dogs? And peacocks are too beautiful ... and ... and ... a thousand snipe in a day?'

‘But, Rosie ... my dear –’

‘I am not your dear! Don’t call me that! You’re despicable! A bloodthirsty maniac! And elephants! Don’t you know that elephants live in families like us? And they’re intelligent and sensitive, and the natives use them for work? And you’re going round making them orphans and widows? Archie, I’m sorry, but you utterly disgust me.’

‘But, Rosie!’

‘I’ve said what I feel. All this slaughter of innocent animals is utterly vile!’

Archie stood up slowly, devastation written all over his face. ‘Rosie, listen,’ he said, with desperation in his voice. ‘Innocent animals? But, my dear –’

‘Don’t call me your dear. I’m not! And I like to be called Rosemary. How many times do I have to remind you?’

Archie went to the table and picked up his precious Jeffery.600. He went to the edge of the terrace, took the gun by the ends of the barrels, and hurled it out over the hillside. It turned lazy circles through the air as it described its arc down into the bushes below.

‘I’ll be off now,’ he said, turning round, and taking out his silver cigarette case. He removed a cigarette and, with shaking hands, put it between his lips. He took his lighter from his pocket, and pressed the lever several times. When it failed to ignite he flung it over the hillside in the wake of his rifle. ‘Please ask Daniel to forward my possessions to the Grand Hotel in Nuwara Eliya.’

Leaving Rosie open-mouthed on the terrace, he went inside and found Esther standing behind the door, where she had been listening to her mother shouting. Archie kissed her on the top of her head and said, ‘Goodbye, little darling. I’ve no idea when I’ll see you again.’

‘Uncle Archie, don’t go,’ she said.

‘Got to,’ he replied. ‘*Pas de choix.*’

‘Uncle Archie, were you alive in the olden days?’

That evening, Daniel came in and gathered Esther into his arms, carrying her out to the terrace.

'Uncle Archie did go,' said Esther.

'Go? Where?'

'Down the hill.'

'Where's Archie?' he said to Rosie, who was sitting somewhat rigidly in her wickerwork chair, hands clasped across her distended stomach.

'I believe he's walking to Nuwara Eliya,' she replied.

'What? Walking? To Nuwara Eliya? It's bloody miles!'

'Yes, he asked me to ask you to forward his things. To the hotel.'

'Why? What's happened?'

'I'm afraid we had a falling-out. I got angry about him killing all the animals, and he threw his elephant gun over the hillside, and he just went.'

'Oh God,' said Daniel, 'you know how he feels about you! And you've been shouting at him, I suppose?'

'Well, I did shout a bit. You know I can get heated. When I feel very strongly.'

'About shooting elephants?'

'And other things. Snipe, crocodiles. He even said he shoots dogs for crocodile bait.'

'You shoot rabid dogs, and you shoot pariah dogs who are taking livestock, at the request of the villagers,' he said stonily.

'No one shoots them for fun.'

'Oh, really? Oh dear. But elephants! They have families, and they're so sweet and intelligent. And such useful workers.'

'Well, the solitaries aren't.'

'The solitaries?'

'The rogues. The periya aliens. The ones who've been expelled from the clan. They've often lost their tail in a fight. They rampage in the villages and trample the huts. They're an absolute menace. In the absence of lunatic asylums for mad elephants, you have to shoot them. Archie shoots rogues, and it's always at the request of the natives or the local authorities. You need a special licence to kill any other kind of elephant. It costs a hundred rupees, and you have to get one for each province. Archie can't afford to go round spending a hundred rupees at a time, can he? He had a request when he was in Colombo. There are two rogues in the

jungle behind Trincomalee. In the Eastern Province. Didn't he tell you?

'Oh gosh,' said Rosie, putting her hand to her mouth.

'You have to shoot from virtually point-blank. The shots have to go straight into the elephant's brain or the beast just keeps on charging. You only have two bullets to fire before you're trampled to death. I wouldn't do it for love or money. Archie's braver than I am, that's for sure. It's heroism of the first water.'

Rosie's eyes began to fill with tears. 'He said ... he said you can take a thousand snipe in a day. A thousand!'

'The bag,' said Daniel coldly, 'is distributed to the villagers. It's their one chance of a good feast, once in a blue moon. And there are literally millions of snipe around every tank. That's why it's so easy to get a thousand of them.'

'And the crocodiles?'

'I think you know the answer already, don't you?'

Rosie nodded, but Daniel continued anyway. 'Some of them get a taste for children and dogs. They can pull a grown man under and drown him before they eat him. And they're eminently edible, especially the tail.'

'Well, it seems a shame to kill peacocks,' she said feebly. 'They're so beautiful.'

'So are pheasants. Peacocks are just the local pheasants. I've seen you eat pheasant. Gaskell used to bring them to The Grampians when she came back from the estate.'

'Oh goodness, I've done a dreadful thing,' said Rosie, beginning to cry, and wiping her face with the back of her sleeve. 'I was so foul and horrible to him. Can't you go after him and ask him to come back, and tell him how sorry I am?'

'How little you know him. I'll go after him and take him to Nuwara Eliya. I know he won't come back. You say he threw his elephant gun over the hillside?'

Rosie nodded. 'And that silver cigarette lighter you gave him.'

'That gun was absolutely his most prized possession. It cost him something like ninety pounds, for God's sake. If we can find it in the morning I'll have to get it repaired myself.'

'It was absolutely massive,' said Rosie. 'I can't believe it would be much damaged.'

'It's very easy to dent a barrel.'

'Oh, Daniel, I'm so very sorry. Do you think he'd be able to walk to Nuwara Eliya?'

'He's a Frontier Scout,' replied Daniel. 'But all the same, I'm going to take the Henley and go after him.'

'But it's getting dark!'

'Well, then. Even so. God knows when I'll be back.'

'I'm going to write him a letter,' said Rosie, hanging her head. 'With any luck I can get it to the hotel before he leaves for Trinco.'

'You do that. But you'd better put Shompi to bed first.'

'Yes, of course.'

Daniel went to the hallway to retrieve his gauntlets and goggles, and returned to the terrace, where Rosie was sitting glumly, watching as the sun went down. 'I used to have three brothers,' he said fiercely, 'and now I only have one. Two brothers lost to the Empire. Both killed in South Africa. My father is dead. Archie is the only brother I have left.'

'What are you saying?'

'You know how Archie adores you. If anything happens to him ... if he's prompted to ... do anything ... You know how little he values his life ... Well ... if anything happens, I'll never forgive you. And neither will my mother.'

'He wouldn't, would he?'

'He lives his whole life in the hope of losing it,' said Daniel. 'He's always been disgusted with himself. I thought you knew that.'

'Oh, darling, please don't be so angry with me.'

'I am damned bloody angry,' he replied, and left.

After the roar of the retreating Henley had faded into the darkness, Rosie knelt in the drawing room and tried to calm herself with prayer, but was immediately interrupted by Esther.

'Uncle Archie did go and now Daddy's gone,' she said, with her thumb in her mouth and her first and second fingers crooked over her nose.

'Yes, but Daddy's coming back.'

'Good,' said Esther. 'Can I *faire dodo* now? Can I have an *histoire*?'

'Mummy's no good at French,' said Rosie. 'In fact I seem to be rotten at lots of things. I'll tell you one in English, if you don't mind.'

'Can I have "Le Petit Chaperon Rouge"?'