CHAPTER 10

Killer men come

Shortly after this the rains came and forced us to shelter for days on end inside the cave house. The tracks became torrents, the forest became a swamp. I longed for the howl of the gibbons instead of the roar of the rain on the trees outside. It did not rain in fits and starts as it did at home, but constantly, incessantly. I worried over our beacon, that was becoming more saturated now with every passing day. Would it ever dry out? Would this rain ever stop? But Kensuke was stoical about it all. 'It stop when it stop, Micasan,' he told me. 'You cannot make rain stop by wanting it to stop. Besides, rain very good thing. Keep fruit growing. Keep stream flowing. Keep monkeys alive, you also, me also.'

I did make a dash up to the hilltop each morning with the binoculars, but I don't know why I bothered. Sometimes it was raining so hard I could hardly see the sea at all.

Occasionally we sallied out into the forest to gather enough fruit to keep us going. There were berries growing in abundance now, which Kensuke insisted on gathering – he didn't seem to mind getting soaked to the skin as much as I did. We ate some, but most he turned into vinegar. The rest he bottled in honey and water. 'For rainy day, yes?' he laughed. (He loved experimenting with the new expressions he had picked up.) We ate a lot of smoked fish – he always seemed to have enough in reserve. It made me very thirsty, but I never tired of it.

I remember the rainy season more for the painting we did than for anything else. We painted together for hours on end – until the octopus ink ran out. These days Kensuke was painting more from his memory – his house in Nagasaki, and several portraits of Kimi and Michiya standing together, always under the cherry tree. The faces, I noticed, he always left very indistinct. He

once explained this to me. (He was more and more fluent now in his English.)

'I remember who they are,' he said. 'I remember where they are. I can hear them in my head, but I cannot see them.'

I spent days perfecting my first attempt at an orang-utan. It was of Tomodachi. She would often crouch soulful and dripping at the cave mouth, almost as if she was posing for me. So I took full advantage.

Kensuke was ecstatic in his delight at my painting, and lavish in his praise. 'One day, Micasan, you will be fine painter, like Hokusai, maybe.' That was the first shell painting of mine he kept and stored away in his chest. I felt so proud. After that he insisted on keeping many of my shell paintings. He would often take them out of the chest and study them carefully, showing me where I might improve, but always generously. Under his watchful eye, in the glow of his encouragement, every picture I painted seemed more accomplished, more how I wanted it to be.

Then one morning the gibbons were howling again and the rains had stopped. We went fishing in the shallows, out at sea too, and had very soon replenished our stores of smoked fish and octopus ink. We played football again. And all the while the beacon on the hilltop was drying out.

Wherever we went now we took the binoculars with us, just in case. We very nearly lost them once when Kikanbo, Tomodachi's errant son – always the cheekiest, most playful of all the young orang-utans stole them and ran off into the forest. When we caught up with him he didn't want to surrender them at all. In the end Kensuke had to bribe him – a red banana for a pair of binoculars.

But as time passed we were beginning to live as if we were going to be staying on the island for ever, and that began to trouble me deeply. Kensuke made repairs to his outrigger. He made more vinegar. He collected herbs and dried them in the sun. And he seemed less and less interested in looking for a ship. He seemed to have forgotten all about it.

He sensed my restlessness. He was working on the boat one day and, ever hopeful, I was scanning the sea through the binoculars. 'It is easier when you are old like me, Micason,' he said.

'What is?' I asked.

'Waiting,' he said. 'One day a ship will come, Micasan. Maybe soon, maybe not so soon. But it will come. Life must not be spent always hoping, always waiting. Life is for living.' I knew he was right, of course, but only when I was lost and absorbed in my painting was I truly able to obliterate all thoughts of rescue, all thoughts of my mother and father.

I woke one morning and Stella was barking outside the cave house. I got up and went out after her. At first she was nowhere to be seen. When I did find her, she was high up on the hill, half growling, half barking, and her hackles were up. I soon saw why. A junk! A small junk far out to sea. I scrambled down the hill and met Kensuke coming out of the cave house buckling his belt. 'There's a boat!' I cried. 'The fire! Let's light the fire!'

'First I look,' said Kensuke. And, despite all my protestations, he went back

into the cave house for his binoculars. I raced up the hill again. The junk was close enough to shore. They would be bound to see the smoke. I was sure of it. Kensuke was making his way up towards me infuriatingly slowly. He seemed to be in no hurry at all. He studied the boat carefully now through his binoculars, taking his time about it.

'We've got to light the fire,' I said. 'We've got to.'

Kensuke caught me suddenly by the arm. 'It is the same boat, Micasan. Killer men come. They kill the gibbons and steal away the babies. They come back again. I am very sure. I do not forget the boat. I never forget. They very wicked people. We must go quick. We must find all orang-utans. We must bring them into the cave. They be safe there.'

It did not take him long to gather them in. As we walked into the forest Kensuke simply began to sing.

They materialised out of nowhere, in twos, in threes, until we had fifteen of them. Four were still missing. We went deeper and deeper into the forest to find them, Kensuke singing all the while. Then three more came crashing through the trees, Tomodachi amongst them. Only one was still missing, Kikanbo.

Standing there in a clearing in the forest, surrounded by the orang-utans, Kensuke sang for Kikanbo again and again, but he did not come. Then we heard a motor start up, somewhere out at sea, an outboard motor. Kensuke sang out again louder now, more urgently. We listened for Kikanbo. We looked for him. We called for him.

'We cannot wait any longer,' said Kensuke at last. 'I go in front, Micason, you behind. Bring last ones with you. Quick now.' And off he went, up the track, leading one of the orang-utans by the hand, and still singing. As we followed, I remember thinking that this was just like the Pied Piper leading the children away into a cave in the mountain side.

I had my work cut out at the back. Some of younger orang-utans were far more interested in playing hide-and-seek than following. In the end I had to scoop up two of them and carry them, one in the crook of each arm. They were a great deal heavier than they looked. I kept glancing back over my shoulder for Kikanbo, and calling for him, but he still did not come.

The outboard motor died. I heard voices, loud voices, men's voices, laughter. I was running now, the orang-utans clinging round my neck. The forest hooted and howled in alarm all around me.

As I reached the cave I heard the first shots ring out. Every bird, every bat in the forest lifted off so that the screeching sky was black with them. We gathered the orang-utans together at the back of the cave and huddled there in the darkness with them, as the shooting went on and on.

Of all of them, Tomodachi was the most agitated. But they all needed constant comfort and reassurance from Kensuke. All through this dreadful nightmare Kensuke sang to them softly.

The hunters were nearer, ever nearer, shooting and shouting. I closed my eyes. I prayed. The orangutans whimpered aloud as if they were singing along

with Kensuke. All this while Stella lay at my feet, a permanent growl in her throat. I held on to the ruff of her neck, just in case. The young orang-utans burrowed their heads into me wherever they could, under my arms, under my knees, and clung on.

The shots cracked so close now, splitting the air and echoing round the cave. There were distant yells of triumph. I knew only too well what this must mean.

After that the hunt moved away. We could hear no more voices, just the occasional shot. And then nothing. The forest had fallen silent. We stayed where we were for hours. I wanted to venture out to see if they had gone, but Kensuke would not let me. He sang all the time, and the orang-utans stayed huddled around us, until we heard the sound of the outboard motor starting up. Even then Kensuke still made me wait a while longer. When at last we did emerge, the junk was already well out to sea.

We searched the island for Kikanbo, sang for him, called for him, but there was no sign of him. Kensuke was in deep despair. He was inconsolable. He went off on his own and I let him go. I came across him shortly after, kneeling over the bodies of two dead gibbons, both mothers. He was not crying, but he had been. His eyes were filled with hurt and bewilderment. We dug away a hole in the soft earth on the edge of the forest and buried them. There were no words in me left to speak, and Kensuke had no songs left to sing.

We were making out sorrowful way back home along the beach when it happened. Kikanbo ambushed us. He came charging out of the trees, scattering sand at us and then climbed up Kensuke's leg and wrapped himself round his neck. It was such a good moment, a great moment.

That night Kensuke and I sang 'Ten Green Bottles' over and over again, very loudly, over our fish soup. It was, I suppose, a sort of wake for the two dead gibbons, as well as an ode to joy for Kikanbo. The forest outside seemed to echo our singing.

But in the weeks that followed I could see that Kensuke was brooding on the terrible events of that day. He set about making a cage of stout bamboo at the back of the cave to house the orang-utans more securely in case the killer men ever returned. He kept going over and over it, how he should have done this before, how he would never have forgiven himself if Kikanbo had been taken, how he wished the gibbons would come when he sang, so he could save them too. We cut down branches and brush from the forest and stacked them outside the cave mouth so that they could be pulled across to disguise the entrance to the cave house.

He became very nervous, very anxious, sending me often to the hilltop with the binoculars to see if the junk had returned. But as time went by, as the immediate threat receded, he became more his own self again. Even so, I felt he was always wary, always slightly on edge.

Because he was keeping so many of my paintings now, we found we were running out of good painting shells. So early one morning we set off on an expedition to find some more. We scoured the beach, heads down, side by side,

just a few feet apart. There was always an element of competition with our shell collecting – who would find the first, the biggest, the most perfect. We had not been at it long and neither of us had yet found a single shell, when I became aware that he had stopped walking.

'Micasan,' he breathed, and he was pointing out to sea with his stick. There was something out there, something white, but too defined, too shaped, to be a cloud.

We had left the binoculars behind. With Stella yapping at me all the way, I raced back along the beach and up the track to the cave house, grabbed the binoculars and made for the top of the hill. A sail! Two sails. Two white sails. I bounded down the hillside, back into the cave and pulled out a lighted stick from the fire. By the time I reached the beacon Kensuke was already there. He took the binoculars from me and looked for himself.

'Can I light it?' I asked. 'Can I?'

'All right, Micasan,' he said. 'All right.'

I thrust the lighted stick deep into the beacon, in amongst the dry leaves and twigs at its core. It lit almost instantly and very soon flames were roaring up into the wood, licking out at us as the wind took them. We backed away at the sudden heat of it. I was disappointed there were so many flames. I wanted smoke, not flames. I wanted towering clouds of smoke.

'Do not worry, Micasan,' Kensuke said. 'They see this for sure. You see.'

We took turns with the binoculars. Still the yacht had not turned. They had not seen it. The smoke was beginning to billow up into the sky. Desperately I threw more and more wood onto the fire, until it was a roaring inferno of flame and dense smoke.

I had thrown on almost the very last of the wood we had collected, when Kensuke said suddenly, 'Micasan, it is coming. I think the boat is coming.'

He handed me the binoculars. The yacht was turning. It was very definitely turning, but I couldn't make out whether it was towards us or away from us. 'I don't know,' I said. 'I'm not sure.'

He took the binoculars off me. 'I tell you, Micasan, it come this way. They see us. I am very sure. It come to our island.'

Moments later, as the wind filled the sails, I knew he was right. We hugged each other there on the hilltop beside the blazing beacon. I leaped up and down like a wild thing, and Stella went mad with me. Every time I looked through the binoculars now, the yacht was coming in closer.

'She's a big yacht,' I said. 'I can't see her flag. Dark blue hull, like the *Peggy Sue*.' Only then, as I said it out loud, did I begin to hope that it could possibly be her. Gradually hope turned to belief, and belief to certainty. I saw a blue cap, my mother's cap. It was them! It was them! 'Kensuke,' I cried, still looking through the binoculars, 'Kensuke, it's the *Peggy Sue*. It is. They've come back for me. They've come back.' But Kensuke did not reply. When I looked round, I discovered he was not there.

I found him sitting at the mouth of the cave house, with my football in his

lap. He looked up at me, and I knew already from the look in his eyes what he was going to tell me.

He stood up, put his hands on my shoulders, and looked me deep in the eyes. 'You listen to me very good now, Micasan,'he said. 'I am too old for that new world you tell me about. It is very exciting world, but it is not my world. My world was Japan, long time ago. And now my world is here. I think about it for long time. If Kimi is alive, if Michiya is alive, then they think I am dead long time ago. I would be like ghost coming home. I am not same person. They not same either. And, besides, I have family here, orangutan family. Maybe killer men come again. Who look after them then? No, I stay on my island. This is my place. This Kensuke's Kingdom. Emperor must stay in his Kingdom, look after his people. Emperor does not run away. Not honourable thing to do.'

I could see there was no point in pleading or arguing or protesting. He put his forehead against mine and let me cry. 'You go now,' he went on, 'but before you go, you promise three things. First, you paint every day of your life, so one day you be great artist like Hokusai. Second, you think of me sometime, often maybe, when you are home in England. When you look up at full moon, you think of me, and I do same for you. That way we never forget each other. Last thing you promise and very important for me. Very important you say nothing of this, nothing of me. You come here alone. You alone here in this place, you understand? I not here. After ten years, you say what you like. All that left of me then is bones. It not matter any more then. I want no one come looking for me. I stay here. I live life in peace. No people. People come, no peace. You understand? You keep secret for me, Mica? You promise?'

'I promise,' I said.

He smiled and gave me my football. 'You take football. You very good at football, but you very much better painter. You go now.' And with his arm round my shoulder he took me outside. 'You go,' he said. I walked away only a little way and turned round. He was still standing at the mouth of the cave. 'You go now please.' And he bowed to me. I bowed back. '*Sayonara*, Micasan', he said. 'It has been honour to know you, great honour of my life.' I hadn't the voice to reply.

Blinded with tears I ran off down the track. Stella didn't come at once, but by the time I reached the edge of the forest she had caught up with me. She raced out on to the beach barking at the *Peggy Sue*, but I stayed where I was hidden in the shadow of the trees and cried out all my tears. I watched the *Peggy Sue* come sailing in. It was indeed my mother and my father on-board. They had seen Stella by now and were calling to her. She was barking her silly head off. I saw the anchor go down.

'Goodbye, Kensuke,' I whispered. I took a deep breath and ran out on to the sand waving and yelling.

I splashed out into the shallows to meet them. My mother just cried and hugged me till I thought I'd break. She kept saying over and over again, 'Didn't I tell you we'd find him? Didn't I tell you?'

The first words my father said were, ‘Hello, monkey face.’

For almost a year my mother and father had searched for me. No one would help them, for no one would believe I could still be alive – not a chance in a million, they said. My father too – he later admitted – had given me up for dead. But never my mother. So far as she was concerned I was alive, I had to be alive. She simply knew it in her heart. So they had sailed from island to island, searching on until they had found me. Not a miracle, just faith.

Postscript

Four years after this book was first published, I received this letter.

Dear Michael,

I write to tell you, in my bad English, that my name is Michiya Ogawa. I am the son of Dr Kensuke Ogawa. Until I read your book I thought my father had died in the war. My mother died only three years ago still believing this. As you say in your book, we lived in Nagasaki, but we were very lucky. Before the bomb fell we went into the countryside to see my grandmother for a few days. So we lived.

I have no memories of my father, only some photographs and your book. It would be a pleasure to talk to someone who knew my father as you did. Maybe one day we could meet. I hope so.

With my best wishes,

Michiya Ogawa.

A month after receiving this letter I went to Japan, and I met Michiya. He laughs just like his father did.

ジ・エンド

あぶない	*Abunai*	Danger!
アメリカ人	*Amerikajin*	An American
だめだ	*Dameda*	Forbidden
英国人	*Eikokujin*	An Englishman
ごめんなさい	*Gomenasai*	Sorry
ジャパン	.....	Japan
きかんぼう	*Kikanbo*	
きみ	*Kimi*	
道哉（みちや）	*Michiya*	
長崎	.....	Nagasaki
おやすみなさい	*Oyasumi nasai*	Goodnight
さよなら	*Sayonara*	Goodbye
ともだち	*Tomodachi*	
ジ・エンド	.....	The End
やめろ	*Yamero*	Stop!