

IN THE JUNGLES OF THE AMAZON
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We were on the Negro river ferrying down to the River Amazon. The water of Negro was so black that it seemed there must have been a coalmine somewhere on the riverbank. Was it there? As I asked my uncle, he was visibly annoyed, and said, "Are they teaching like this in India these days?"

Uncle was perhaps vexed at being interrupted in his talks with his Portuguese friend. Ever since we embarked the boat at Manaus, they were incessantly talking. The colour of the river water or the scenes on the bank mattered little to them. I had no idea what they were talking about because they were speaking in Portuguese. Only two days have passed since I came to Brazil and I could pick up only two Portuguese words-- bondia, meaning good day and obrigado meaning thank you.

Uncle had been living in this country for about ten to twelve years. The mountains here are reputed to be abounding with colourful semi-precious stones and I learnt that Uncle had a business in coloured stones.

He stayed in Rio de Janeiro. Near the sea was his big residence. But I could not see Aunt or any children of theirs. I saw Aunt only once, as a new bride with rings on ears and nose and a bridal crest, on the marriage reception day. The marriage ceremony was held at Palasi in Nadia district, where Uncle had some sort of business. I had been there in the ceremony, on the lap of my mother.

When I grew up I read in my history book that the English defeated Bengal's Nawab Siraj-u-ddula in the mango groves of Palasi and eventually became the rulers of this country.

My secondary school examinations were due in two years. I never saw Uncle or Aunt ever since I saw them in Palasi. I came to Brazil because Uncle was there. I had won a round-the-world-visit ticket by participating in a letter-writing competition that was held on an international level. This ticket enabled me to travel over Bangkok, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Los Angeles, New York, Rio de Janeiro, Copenhagen, Delhi and back to Kolkata.

True the plane ticket round the globe cost me nothing but lodge and board in Bangkok, Hong Kong, Tokyo, New York, Los Angeles and sightseeing meant a pretty package. Since Uncle had a house in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, the ticket became handy. Father wrote to Uncle about my winning the prize and Uncle replied that he would receive me at the airport if he was informed of the airline I was traveling. In point of fact, father was a little proud that I won the competition in which school children of one hundred and fifty countries sat. Father bragged a bit to Uncle about my prize.

Whoever would not be delightful to win a prize. And a round-the-world air ticket would make anybody jump in joy. The very phrase, round-the-world, reminded me of the book by Jules Verne, 'Around the World in 80 Days'. If I only could go round the world in 80 days, I could have made so many friends in so many countries!

The subject of the letter-writing competition was this very theme: visiting a new country. You would have to invite an overseas friend to come and visit your country. I won the first prize. Got the round-the-world air ticket. But let alone the world, even one country would have been beyond my reach, if Uncle were not there.

Uncle was busy in his work throughout the day and so the first two days I roamed by the seaside at Rio. Even on the third day, I walked along the seaside. There was lesser chance of getting lost if you walked by the sea. Moreover, I loved seas.

That night Uncle asked me at the dinner table, "Do you want to see the jungles of Amazon? If you do, get ready at seven in the morning for the airport."

The plane took off from Rio and first came to Brazil's capital, Brasilia. After an hour there, the plane flew off non-stop to Manaus, the capital city of the Amazon state. That Portuguese friend of Uncle was waiting here at the airport and his car took us down to the Manaus jetty where we got on to a motorboat.

On the Negro river we could see another river on the left. The water of that river was yellowish. Or perhaps brownish. It was difficult to see the colour from such a distance.

I had a yen to know the name of a river when I saw one. Even though Uncle was immersed in talk with his friend, I could not but ask, "Look, Uncle, look at that river. The colour of the water is altogether different, isn't it? What river is that?"

Uncle was not that annoyed this time. He said, "That is Solimoes– the river of yellow water. Like the Negro, it also flows into the Amazon. There are around a thousand tributaries, all flowing from the left and right sides into the Amazon.

Uncle's friend called him by his name, Barin. Uncle too called his friend by name, Gonzalo.

Why they were going to the jungles of Amazon or why they were taking me along, I had no idea. Perhaps they had some work there and Uncle had no other place to accommodate me and that was why I was being taken.

We reached the Amazon river after about two hours. The odd thing I noticed, the black water of the Negro river and the yellow water of the Solimoes retained their blackness and yellowness even after mingling with the water of the Amazon. This distinctiveness of colours was discernible for quite a stretch.

The Amazon river was so very long, it gave one some fright if one went on looking. It was said that the Amazon was two times or three times longer than our Ganga river that stretched from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal. Uncle said that the mouth of Amazon was 400 kilometers wide. We were just four people in the vast river in that vast jungle– Uncle, Gonzalo, I and the boatman.

The boat steered towards the bank after some time and we were sailing almost along the bank. Vast trees on the bank formed thick jungles, of which there was no end.

The sun was so fierce on the Amazon river that it seemed to scorch the skin. We felt relieved to get the thick shades of the jungles on the bank. I wondered how many thousands of miles I was away from Kolkata, where on earth I was at that time– sleep was overtaking me but I resolved, I did not know why, not to yield to sleep.

2

Some trees here were so very tall that it was a wonder that they stood erect right up to the sky, instead of stumbling over to the ground. Thick roots crept down the trees down to the river water.

Suddenly I saw a monkey clutching at the hanging roots of a tree with its tail and swinging strongly. It was almost swinging over to the boat sometimes and that gave me a creeping feeling. Imagine, if it landed on to the boat!

Watching me, Uncle perhaps felt for me, "No need to get frightened. They are called woolly monkeys– so thick are the hairs of these monkeys– as thick as woolly rugs."

No sooner had Uncle said that, when the monkey got off the tree-roots and jumped upon the boat. Before anybody could realise what was happening, the monkey, at another bound, fell upon Uncle and snatched with both hands the bag that was on the lap of

Uncle. It jumped on to the roof of the boat and at another bound, it got over to the tree and hang by its roots.

Startled at the sound of four or five rifle shots, I saw both Uncle and Gonzalo with rifles in their hands. The shots did not touch the monkey. Both went on shooting. With lightning speed, the monkey sprang from roots to roots and from trees to trees and got lost amidst the jungle.

Gonzalo's eyes were darting fire and Uncle, rifle in hand, thumped his chest and broke into loud cries. For the first time, he screamed in Bengali, "Oh me, I lost my everything."

I did not know how one small bag could contain somebody's everything. That bag would not hold even twenty-five of my dearest storybooks. The bag was made of leather, quite old, although the three or four inches long lock did sparkle. May be, because it contained Uncle's everything, the lock was so big.

Gonzalo spoke to Uncle excitedly in Portuguese and Uncle too jumped up and told me, "We are getting into the jungle. The boat will stay here. We will return as soon as we find the bag."

He told something similar to the boatman. The boat had dropped speed, almost to half, as it was plying along the bank. The boatman slowed down the boat still more and skillfully steered the stem of the boat towards the bank and stopped. He laid out a wooden plank that connected the boat and the bank. Uncle and Gonzalo almost ran down the plank with their rifles. A minute later, I failed to follow them with my eyes in spite of my best efforts.

The wooden plank remained as it was. Only I and the boatman (I did not know his name even now) were there. The endless jungle stretched before me. Once I read in the '*Bhraman*' magazine that this Amazon jungle stretched over six million square kilometres, spanning as many as nine South American countries. Deep inside this jungle were some primitive people whom nobody ever saw and who knew nothing about the world of ours, of the civilised man, outside the pale of these ancient jungles.

A few hours ago the river was glistening in the bright sun. Now the sun was setting, casting wonderful rays on the sky and the water— such a sunset I never witnessed before. But when the heart throbbed in fear, the play of seven hues could not reach the mind beyond the eyes. The sky was darkening, the river water was blackening, the jungles in front seemed to be a frozen darkness— I failed to understand how Uncles would come back to the boat in this enveloping darkness. I did not hear even one rifle shot ever since they got down to the jungle.

Neither did I know the language the boatman spoke. I heard him speaking only once after the departure of Uncles— in Portuguese, I guessed.

Unable to hold myself anymore, I spoke in English, in as simple English as in our English textbook, "Why are Uncles being so late? Can you guess something?"

Did the man fall asleep? He said, haltingly, in a sleep-laden voice, "Repeat, and speak little slowly."

I repeated my words, as haltingly.

What he said in his strange pronunciation meant that anybody could enter the jungles of Amazon but few could return.

But of those two, Gonzalo was a vastly experienced man, and could perhaps trace back the way to the boat. But only *Boto* knew if they would return if they did not recover the bag from the monkey.

"Who is *Boto*?"

"You have come to the Amazons and ask who *Boto* is? Haven't you heard of *Boto Vermelho*?"

The man's voice was tinged with pique and anger. I humbly submitted to him that it was my first day at the Amazons and so I was still ignorant of *Boto_Vermelho*, and if he would please enlighten me.

Why was not the light turned on in the boat? I heard the man speaking in the darkness— *Boto* was the king of the kingdom of Amazon, with his sparkling big city down under the Amazon river, since ancient times. The vast palace was built with many-coloured stones. The brain of *Boto* was larger than the human brain. The people of *Boto's* kingdom were way ahead from human beings in intellect, affection, swimming capability. Only they knew of the mysterious Amazon. The white men these days roamed over the Amazon a couple of days or so and bragged that *Boto* was some sort of a dolphin, that *Boot* was not reddish but rosy. Amazon was a different universe— what did outsiders know about it?

I felt that the man took some pity on me, perhaps because Uncles did not return or perhaps he was talking about *Boto*. He softly said, "You belong to another world. You may not believe but those who live on this river, in the jungles, in the islands, on the riverbanks look at their children and claim that they were the boys or girls of *Boto*. There is no end to the tales of *Boto* in this Amazon region".

Whoever wanted to listen to such cock-and-bull stories? But the mention of the palace with multi-colour stones beneath the river made me wonder if Uncles were up to using of divers to get at those coloured stones or diving themselves. Did they come to the Amazons to collect coloured stones from the riverbed? After all, they did trade in coloured stones. But it seemed improbable, a little later. The educated and intelligent people like Uncles would hardly believe in tales of *Boto's* palace under the river.

3

I did not know when I fell into sleep. As I woke up, the Amazon river was blazing in the morning sunshine. The boatman fellow lay supine and was in deep sleep. An empty pack of sandwich and an open can of coca-cola lay beside him. Uncles had not returned!

Wherever I looked, it was water or jungles, jungles or water and nothing else. It was a different world of water and jungles, as if outside of our world.

I had no idea what to do, where to go, how to search for Uncles. I was angry with myself that I got the round-the-world ticket.

My stomach was churning in hunger. I tried to get biscuits from the food bag of Uncles and the rustling sound disturbed the fellow's slumber. He looked over the boat and muttered something in Portuguese, which I failed to understand.

I said in English, "Uncles must have got into a trouble, they must have lost their way in the jungle. Do you know the tracks of the jungle?"

Instead of answering, the fellow asked me back, "Do you know the way *Boto's* city deep in the belly of the Amazon river? Hah, finding the tracks in Amazon jungles!"

Saying this, he abruptly stood up and started the boat engine.

He steered the stem of the boat and said, "Go inside and sit still, if you want to survive and I will reach you to Manaus. If you want to die, tell me and I will drop you in the jungles. There is no use of waiting here— I'm going back."

Tears swelled into my eyes for the first time as I heard him talk like that. I firmly said, "Let me off at the jungle."

The fellow took me over to the spot where Uncles climbed down and laid up the plank for me to get down as Uncles did. He pulled back the plank, steered the boat round and slowly plied back.

I was blank in mind— what to do, what would happen next, I could decide nothing. I could only see the boat gliding away in the distance.

The boat gradually became small and looked like a toy boat in our childhood days' water-tub. Suddenly it seemed that the boat was coming back.

There was no doubt that the boat was indeed coming back. I was so filled with joy at this that my heart lay prostrate in obeisance to God, whom I never saw, never possibly thought of.

The fellow brought the boat to the riverbank, touched the jungles and again laid down the plank. He took two food bags of Uncles in two hands and told me "You can choose either of the bags. You don't know who *Boto* is, you don't abide by *Boto*, who will protect you in this jungle that has no beginning, no end. Try to survive as many days as you can on this food bag and water. I too will have to go a long way over many rivers, so I have to carry myself one bag. Which one you will like to have— Uncle's or Uncle's friend's?"

Compared with the greater anxiety over where to go in this vast jungle, where to find Uncles, how would I live till I find them, the choice of bags appeared to be trifling.

Even so, I preferred to pick up Uncle's bag, moreover my clothes were in that bag.

The fellow said this time, "Wait, I'll come back" and vanished into the big trees and shrubs of the jungle.

After five-seven minutes the fellow returned, in his hand seven or eight fruits, which looked like myrobalan. There was a cutter in Gonzalo's food bag. He cut one fruit into two halves and scooped out soft pulpy kernel, a bit like that of palmyra fruit. The kernel was in fact a worm. Holding it on his palm, he proffered it to me and said, "Look at it closely. A man, when he loses way in the jungles, has to survive by eating this worm. You will get these fruits in plenty in these jungles. Keep these with you for the time being. Keep *Boto* in mind. Let *Boto* protect you. How will you live and why in this jungle which is like the seamless sky!"

I did not know why words failed me.

The fellow suddenly picked up the smaller bag, which belonged to Gonzalo and stepped on the plank and climbed over to the boat with hurried footsteps. Then he steered the boat and ferried into the distant water.

When his boat became smaller, as small as the pulpy worm, and went beyond sight, I picked up Uncle's bag and walked into the jungle. I had no idea where I was going and where to go. There were no footprints on the wet, rotten, fallen leaves in the jungle.

The bag was heavy, containing I did not know what. There must be something else than dry food and water bottle. The boatman had put Gonzalo's cutter into the bag.

My feet felt heavy as I dragged on and pondered how many days I would have to carry on if I failed to find Uncles. The trees were so very tall with so thick roots hanging out. It was difficult to penetrate the many creepers and shrubs, which were like rolled wires.

Who knew how far Rio de Janeiro was away from this jungle that carried in its midst hundreds of rivers that were thousands of miles long. If I failed to find Uncle, who would

take me to Rio? My plane would take off from that city. With these thoughts overwhelming me, I sat down beneath a very big tree. My eyes were heavy as sleep was overtaking me.

4

Six or seven days I had been roaming into the jungle, with a faint hope to find Uncle. I walked and walked, casting my eyes as far as I could but there were only jungles and jungles. In front and back, left and right lay the forest, thousands of years old.

Days passed somehow and I dropped the myrobalans, given to me by the boatman, one by one. I thought that I would keep count of the days passed this way. All the fruits were dropped— how many I did not know— perhaps six or seven. Or, could be, eight. I was, therefore, into eight days stranded in the jungle.

The body became weak, I did not know how I looked. I was straggling along like a blind man in the midst of tall trees, tree leaves, tree trunks, tree roots, birds, bees, worms, insects, flowers, pungent small, cobwebs of monstrous size. Holding the faintest hope that I would stumble upon Uncles.

Right, left, I trudged on, whichever way I could, howsoever I could manage. When exhausted, I lay down under trees. And fell into sleep too.

One day I woke up and saw a small boy staring at me, squatting right in front of me.

I hurried into a sitting posture. I was more surprised than frightened to see a boy all on a sudden.

The boy wore no shirt or pants, with only a string of small wooden statues round his waist, a cover of fresh leaves tied with a string at the navel. I was surprised more by his oddly tranquil eyes than by his odd garment. He looked quite younger to me, might be eight or ten years old.

I looked on steadily at his eyes, talking to him continuously, silently, of course, because I knew English would be of little use here.

The boy at last slowly swept away dry and rotten leaves that lay heaped over many days and cleansed the spot. I noticed that the boy was picking up small sticks, some thin, some thick, from among the garbage of leaves when he was cleansing the spot. I could see that the boy preferred those small thin twigs, which came off boughs and branches of trees. He took out a few such twigs from the bag, which lay hung at his waist. He spread out the twigs of various sizes, horizontally and vertically, and looked at me, as if asking me a question.

I could not make out anything from the pattern of twigs. I gazed at it, I wondered if it was giving a picture of a sunrise.

I did not know what the boy made of my gaze, he stuck an arm-long stick into the soft damp soil, squeezed a grain, a bit bigger than a *pui* fruit, and with its juice made nine marks on the stick, I felt like charged with electricity. Was the boy saying something like nine sunrises? Why nine? Why sunrise?

It struck me that he was trying to know if I had seen the sun rising nine times in this jungle. I was sure, that was his question. He wanted to know how many days I spent in this jungle. At once I took a firm stick and drew a picture of a sunrise on the soft wet soil and drew seventeen marks beside the sun. I was not sure if I was into seventeen days in the jungle, a couple of days more or less, but that was difficult to convey, so I drew seventeen days.

I always stood first in my school days in drawing, and was awarded first prizes in sit-and-draw competitions many times. Geography teachers, science teachers were also full of praises for my drawings especially. The delight that was expressed by the tranquil eyes of the boy proved that my drawings were not in vain. He saw the drawing in totality, put another stick beside the stick that had nine marks and made eight more marks on the new stick. And then he hopped and jumped like the woolly Amazonian monkey and disappeared.

And came back, jumping as before. He had on his hand three types of tree-leaves. The shape of the deep yellow and violet leaves was odd, rolled like a pipe. They looked like inverted trunks of an elephant. The two leaves were identically shaped, different only in colour. The green leaves were shaped like pea leaves, a bit thicker, and bigger in size.

The boy brought the violet leaves near my nostrils and I smelled a bitterly sweet and sour scent. He mimicked as if he was chewing the leaves and asked me to do the same. I chewed on and the sour sweet scent penetrated my nose and mouth into my body and I felt that I was quickly recovering.

The boy then took the yellow leaves on his palm and went on pressing when juice came out and was pasted over my sore wounds. He signalled me to lie supine and he pasted those green leaves, round and thick, one each on my forehead, chest, elbows, wrists and knees. Surprisingly, not a leaf fell off from my body. I had no doubt whatsoever that this strange unknown boy was indeed my benefactor. In that dire need, my heart was filled with joy to get such a useful friend after so many days. I almost forgot that there was something like joy anywhere in the world.

My suppressed hunger was increased manifold on receiving beneficial services. I made a few sketches on the soil, indicating that I was very hungry.

I could see that the boy could understand everything quite immediately. He looked at the sketches for a moment, and picked up my bag and signalled me to follow him and scrambled through the jungle like a squirrel. I could hardly match his speed and I had to run sometimes through the jungle lest he went out of sight.

How long I walked I had no idea but my body did not feel tired, the pain of those sores and wounds were numbed. I could notice another thing,— those thick green leaves were dropping off one by one from my body.

Half an hour later or probably an hour later, the boy entered a clutch of big trees and signalled me to enter it. It was an open spot even though my sight was thwarted by big trunks of trees. It looked like a cleansed and swept compound of a Bengali household. The only difference was, there would be no such big trees in our village homes,— if there were one or two, they would be at the side or the end of the compound, but here these were standing erect reaching the sky right in the midst of the compound. The compound looked spick and span, unlike the wet and damp soil of the village, free of a single fallen or rotten leaf.

If I could get hold of a box of pastel or a piece of charcoal, I could have filled the compound with sketches. I could have conveyed to my benefactor, this boy with tranquil eyes and odd dress, the danger, my miseries in which I was. I had drawn so many pictures on rough pasteboards with the eyebrow pencil of my mother and this was dry and swept soil.

The very thought of mother produced a pang in my heart. Father too must have been worried, without any news from me for so many days.

My friend was away somewhere behind the big trunks of the trees. He came back with various types of foodstuff on a thick leaf, which looked like an elephant's ear, hollowed in the middle.

The boy had two pots like the nest of *babui* birds, which were hanging from a firm creeper round his neck, just as the revered elders of a village wore a scarf or folded wrappers round their necks. The pots resembled the small vessels to hold *nalén* molasses in our Bengal villages. He untied both the pots from the creeper and placed them on the swept ground before me. He pointed at one pot, which held water. As I took some water and sprinkled over my eyes and mouth, I felt vastly relieved. I then washed my hand with water and gorged on the roots and fruits of various tastes.

He now pointed to the other pot. As I took it, I found milk in it. As I drank it, I found to my consternation that it was no milk but some fruit juice, a bit sour. The boy I found was exhorting me to drink it to the full. We were exchanging our messages through signs and signals, through facial expressions, and we were quite adept in making our signs expressive. I could realise that the boy was signalling that the fruit was very dear and useful to them, as I drank the fruit juice. Perhaps, in that summer climate, very salubrious.

Taking a soft stone or a lump of colour which looked like a piece of sulphur, the boy handed it over to me with his eyes staring at my eyes, and I thought he was asking me clearly, to disclose to him how I came there and why and from where.

I felt very cheerful as he stared at me with those quiet eyes and I broke into a laughter as I also stared at him. This was my first laugh after I came to the Amazons.

I went on making sketches on the ground with that lump of colour and told my friend my story. To denote West Bengal briefly, I made sketches only of plantain trees, jute crops, *sefali* flowers and mango trees. My friend glanced over my sketches and as he looked over the plantain trees and mango trees, he built up a plantain tree and a mango tree with the help of a few sticks, as he did in the morning. I could guess from his expressions that plantains and mangoes were known to them, that this region also produced those two fruit trees. It would have taken a much longer time if I had to write how far off Brazil was from our country, how many rivers and tributaries, hordes of islands in them, and then my Uncle, Gonzalo, the monkey snatching away Uncle's bag, Uncles chasing the monkey into the jungle, the boatman going back, my jungle life, the trials and tribulations I suffered in the jungle. I tried my best to convey all this briefly. And I did not forget to tell him how glad I was to be privileged with his company.

We nearly forgot that we were both ignorant of the languages each of us spoke. We were conveying our thoughts through sketches by lumps of colour or twigs and through our facial expressions. Thus I got rid of a misconception I had earlier formed. I thought my friend was much younger to me but now I understood that he was nearly my age. The shortness in height and his baby facedness had caused the wrong notion. In fact 365 days did not make a year in this land or universe of theirs. By means of coloured stones and by uttering sounds, he made me understand that they called it *Imanu*— the time from one sunrise to another sunrise— and *Idimanu* which we called a year. Nine days made up one *Dimanu*, nine *Dimanus* made one *Bidimanu* and nine *Bidimanus* made one *Idimanu*. $9 \times 9 = 729$ days made their one year. Equals to our two years. My friend said he was seven years old, which meant that he was fourteen years, in our measure; he was of my age. They calculated their *Imanu*, *Dimanu*, *Bidimanu* and *Idimanu* by means of their beautiful

coloured stones. They kept track of *Imanu* by using light violet stones, which looked like water-hyacinth flowers. Nine such stones made one *Dimanu*; *Bidimanu* was calculated with stones with the colour of glows of fireflies. And *Idimanu* was calculated with nine stones, which had the hues of seeds of pomegranates, a little deeper.

5

The boy's name was Uba.

Uba pronounced his name, rather cutely, thinning his lips. He conveyed the meaning of his name by building with chips and sticks a small strip of a boat. Small boats were called here Uba. It was something like canoes of palm, which were seen in Bengal, in the rainy season, when fields were submerged in water, on swamps and canals.

Uba stood up abruptly and ran on, pulling my right hand. I had no choice than chasing him.

Soon we came up to the bank of a tributary. I had no idea that so near the deep jungle, a river could flow with such a force. A small boat was rocking near the bank at the thrust of waves— the boat was tied to a tree on the bank.

Untying the rope, Uba placed it on my hand and climbed down to the water. The rope was so sharp that a little pull might cut my skin.

At the summons of Uba, I took the rope and climbed the boat. Uba too took the rope and climbed it.

As I watched the rope in Uba's hand, he informed me that it was made of fibre of many trees and so very strong. He told me this by means of chips and sticks and facial expressions and he pronounced its name, *Envira*.

As we proceeded, what surprised me was a series of boats, of many sizes and appearances, tied to many trees on the riverbank.

I never dreamt in my life of fourteen years that I would ever sail on an Amazon tributary on a boat called Uba in the company of a boy named Uba. We sailed along smoothly, protecting our head and limbs against the boughs and roots of trees, shrubs and bushes. Strange unknown scents of various creepers, flowers and fruits were wafted by the breeze— some smelt like Vicks and some such medicine. Altogether a clime of joy around me.

Uncle was yet untraced but the company of Uba had dispelled the claustrophobia caused by the jungle. Even the previous night when the nightmarish darkness enveloped me, did I dream that such things would happen to me! Sometimes things happened in a man's life that far surpassed dreams.

Uba tied the canoe to a tree as before and brought me to a courtyard surrounded by tall trees where, to my surprise, some twenty or odd men and women of various ages congregated. They had in their left hands coconut shells and with their right hands drawing blood from the shells to paste their faces. Were they coming back from a hunting spree and that was why they had all of them blood in their shells? Or had they preyed on some stranded people and drew blood from them? The blood on their hands and faces threw a chill down my spine.

Uba could guess at my mental condition. He came down to a boy and took from him a few dry-fruit seeds, which mixed in water, became violently red. He applied the colour on my face with three fingers.

With those chips and sticks as well as verbal sounds he told me that I was frightened for no reason. That was not blood. But red colour. A few drops of water with the grinding of seeds of *urucu* fruits would yield that colour. The word *urucu* means red colour. They applied the colour quite thickly on faces in festival times. This evening they were holding a festival. The whole village consisted of those twenty or odd people. The courtyard surrounded by trees was their festival ground.

A girl came abruptly to me with a coconut shell, dipped her right hand into the colours of the shell and offered her face to me. People could express so many things without uttering a single word!

Uba was still slapping colours on my face, perhaps painting something, when I too began to smack colours on the forehead of the girl, on the cheeks of Uba. I finished up painting *saluk* flowers on the girl's forehead and red flowering trees on Uba's cheeks.

The courtyard had many baskets woven with big leaves, brimming with fruits and roots and plenty of foodstuff. The big earthen vessels had in them three to four kinds of fruit juices or some other drinks. A few stunted drums or some such musical instruments were kept leaning against tree trunks. Quite a big boat was kept hauled up at a raised place, from the beginning.

Information was obtained from Uba that it was their boat festival.

Uba pulled me up near the big boat and said, "Once the boat came floating to a river in our village when there was a fierce flood. There were no men on the boat. The oar was beautifully painted on, nobody else other than some painter from the jungle would have been able to paint thus. Because the boat came on its own, it was the first object that was brought out on a festival day— it did not belong to our village or this side of the Amazons. Great care was taken of the boat throughout the year. On the day of the festival, the boat was kept on the highest platform.

Uba took a great delight in telling me of the boat. He moved round and round the boat and went on saying, "This is known as *Casko*, quite different from our Uba. *Casko* has to be built with the whole trunk of a tree. You have to scrap the inside with an axe and widen it with the heat of fire. Because it is made of a whole trunk, *Casko* is stronger than ordinary canoes. Generally canoes are made of wooden planks stuck together."

Uba told me of many other types of canoes. Who else but people who lived by riversides and nurtured by water and jungles would love to talk about boats. The boat festival was one of their chief festivals. They named their children after boats.

They had hardly coloured and painted their faces when another group of ten or odd people joined them. They too had various patterns on their faces in red colour. Some had only red colours dabbed on their cheeks and foreheads. They too brought food baskets, some carried on their necks and shoulders small drums and other playing instruments of strange looks.

Men or women, young or old, all of them had red colours on faces, some more, some less. The wreaths on women's waists were broader, with wooden statuettes, fruits and roots, leaves and creepers of more variety. They had moreover coloured flowers as earrings, red again, leaves and creepers on their arms. The shapes of those leaves and creepers were so beautiful that I could not stop looking at those and felt joyous. It seemed that skilled goldsmiths of our country had spent days, intent on creating these leaves and creepers.

It was time for the sun to set. Everyone was arranging the baskets of fruits, vessels of fruit juices and pots of beverages on the Casco. Uba let it be known to me at some opportune time that the fruit, which hang in a bead-like bunch on the waists of women, was called *Acai*. There were fifty to sixty *Acais* in each bunch and many such bunches made up a cluster— almost as many *Imanus* or more in one *Idimanu*.

Uba signalled with his hand and emitting sounds made it known to me that one pot of beverage was made of fruits of *tapereba* trees which were tall white trees— the fruits were yellow.

Uba did not desert me, even in that festival crowd. Lest I should feel lonely and sad in the midst of unknown people, unknown languages, he was acquainting me with various objects.

When a group of four was bringing a very big wooden plate, small fried fish on it, to the boat, Uba told me, "This is called *Tambaqui*, with nice smell, living on fruits and seeds. Have a bite, you'll like it." I drew near to it— it looked something like *Khaira* fish in our country, less broad perhaps.

Uba's mother— Uba told me she was his mother— was slicing up with a big knife ripe papayas, which were in a basket, and arranging them on a large tray of wickerwork. From a distance the sliced papayas looked like blooming sunflowers. Quite a few papayas were extremely red inside.

Uba gave me a couple of those slices, which tasted sweet just like mangoes.

Eight people, some children, some aged, Uba being one of them, carried a three-to-four feet long dried fish and put the tray on to the boat. Uba called me there. I drew near and found that the spine of the fish had been shorn of, as a result of which the fish was divided into two, head to its tail. Each slice was turned on to the other slice, so that the fish looked as if uncut. Uba told me the fish was called *Pirarucu*, very tasty.

The sun had set beyond the jungle and the moon had risen on the other side and the place woke up to dances and songs, drinking and eating. The sound of music mingled with the chirpings of birds, cries of animals, noises of insects and sent shivers of joy down my spine. The thrilling sounds had a beautiful beat and rhythm.

Not only Uba but many children and aged men and women pulled me up by hand and drew me into their midst. Singing and dancing, some of them handed me foodstuff, some offered fruit juice in hollowed leaves that looked like an elephant's ear. To speak the truth, I forgot all my worries and problems and I felt like sailing on a canoe on a river of pleasure. I never saw so many people so delirious in joy earlier. This was possible only in a jungle, I thought, with the people of a jungle. I ate to my heart's content scented *Tambaqui*, ripe papayas, unknown but tasteful fruits. I never imagined that eating could be so joyful.

When everybody finished their eating, they sang and danced towards the river, keeping beats with the cries of animals and chirpings of birds. When they reached the riverside they dispersed along the bank and untied the many boats of various sizes and shapes, which were bound to the trees and climbed on them. Uba took me on in their boat. This time he did not take the Uba we had taken in the morning— it was another canoe.

The canoes advanced like swarms of cranes in the sky. There were sounds of music in some canoes. As I chanced upon the moon I was startled— I never saw such a big moon. It seemed that the Amazons were the moon's own country.

6

Such a jungle, such a river, such a moon, such people I would have missed if I were with Uncles. I did not know why I thought of Uncles, even though I had grave misgivings regarding my chance of ever getting back to home.

Tuneful music came afloat from the canoe in front of us. Suddenly the music stopped and Uba stooped low over the water and was looking up the place cautiously.

Within a couple of minutes all the music stopped, in all canoes, near and distant. The great moon hang in the sky, the great river lay beneath and there was strange silence in between.

Uba's whispers broke the silence— *Boto! Boto!*

The manner of his speaking, the expressions on his face, the pointing out by finger at the water seemed to indicate that *Boto* was sighted.

It was always a good omen to sight *Boto*, moreover in the boat festival night.

Uba made me understand that the stoppage of music in the boats meant that everybody was aware of the sighting of *Boto*. When music stopped in one boat, the others would stop it, whoever first realised that music had stopped. Thus the good news that *Boto* was in sight spread from one boat to the others within a couple of minutes. All then stopped music and approached the first boat, encircling it in silence.

Not to talk of others, I myself felt eager to see *Boto*. It was *Boto* who protected people in the Amazons from all dangers. He had his big city beneath the river, his big palace of coloured stones.

Suddenly Uba signalled me to look at the river and I saw a very tall creature slowly moving around under three to four feet of water. Its nose or beak was very thin, an arm's length or so. The head was very big and there should not be any surprise if its brain was bigger than the human brain. The tail was bifurcated at the end of the body and it looked beautiful. Was the colour red? It seemed a bit rosy.

If it was a dolphin, it was a rare good luck to see a dolphin in the Amazon river on a full moon night— how many others were so lucky? And if it was the deity of the Amazons, then my sorrows and prayers must have been known to *Boto*. As I watched *Boto* beneath the water I told myself, "*Boto*, I don't know who you are. If you are really the protector of the Amazons, you please let me find a way to get back to my parents and school friends."

What was surprising was that *Boto* showed no sign of anger, fear or annoyance at so many canoes encircling it so closely, that it was so very slowly moving around below three or four feet of water, engrossed in its own feeling of joy, sometimes surfacing above the water with the same joyousness— it looked as if it was dancing to inner tunes, beats and rhythms of its own mind.

While roaming inside the jungles, Uba sometimes used to kneel and sit on the ground. And signalled me too to sit down. He would see into my eyes for a long time with those deep eyes of his and I did not know what he saw there. It seemed that sometimes he was seeing something or trying to see something far beyond.

It went on like this quite a few days when Uba, one day, was kneeling on the ground, with his eyes on my eyes and began some sketches with chips and sticks. The sketches indicated that Uba was trying to guess through my eyes who I was. He wanted to know from where I came. To which world I belonged and what was that world like.

I did not know how to answer these questions. A thought came to me that I should tell him of Kolkata, the Kolkata I lived in. I thought a great deal and at last I selected a piece of ground, swept it clean and with great attention made sketches and sought to convey to him ideas about myself, about my parents, my friends, my school, of the city of Kolkata, its houses, transport system, shops and bazars, about people. I mentioned the name Kolkata several times.

Uba bent on the big sketch, moved his head this way and that to get at the picture minutely and began to arrange his chips and sticks. He was quite adept in telling a story through his sketches. I could get at what he tried to convey by one glance.

As I heard the word Kolkata from Uba, my delight knew no bounds. He pursed his lips, moved his tongue and uttered the sound strangely, pointed out the picture and said, "There is no jungle, no bird, no butterfly, no big rivers, in Kolkata. How do you live there? That is a land of mere sand."

A land of sand? Did it mean desert? When I lived in Kolkata, I hardly thought of Kolkata as a desert. Now that as I was living in a jungle, Uba's words did make me think, yes, truly, there was no green jungle, no bird, no butterfly in Kolkata.

The van rickshaws, the closed cars looking like big tin boxes, little children huddling inside and going to schools— the picture made Uba look up to me. He failed to understand the import of this picture. Some tender faces peeping through small windows in those tin boxes and trying to look at the outside world— Uba watched those faces intently and wanted to know whatever it could mean.

How would I explain a school, in this jungle in Amazon. I drew a few more sketches and tried to elaborate on the subject. Uba kept on gazing at me for quite some time and went on thinking. Then he made sketches with chips and sticks and asked me how would I know this earth unless I lived in a jungle with trees and flowers and insects, experienced summer, rains, winter and spring, and just by living in Kolkata.

Abruptly Uba grasped one of my hands, cast those deep eyes of his on my own and said without uttering a single sound— don't ever go back to that country.

7

I spent quite a few days in Uba's village. And spent in comfort. It was a delight to learn new aspects of their lives, new phases.

One early morning when I just woke up Uba came with a bag made of firm tendons of big dried leaves and took out nine transparent stones with hues of waterhyacinth flowers and told me, "You've completed three *Dimanus* in our village. I hope you will live here a full *Idimanu*."

One *Idimanu*. I remembered it meant $9 \times 9 \times 9 = 729$ days, or two years according to our calendar. But my secondary examinations were scheduled much earlier. What would happen to my parents if they had no news from me? If only I could despatch some sort of message— in that case I could have stayed back seven or eight more *Dimanus* (62 or 72 days). If I indeed stayed one full *Idimanu* as Uba requested, but how would I go back home? Uba's world was beyond the reach of letters, telegrams, telephone, fax or e-mail.

One day I had asked Uba, "How is it that your nine days made one *Dimanu*?"

I took it for granted, their *Dimanu* resembled our week. But why nine days?

Uba arranged his chips and sticks strangely and sketched a sky full of stars, drew nine zeroes there and put nine stones of light violet colour in their midst and named each of

the nine zeroes. Noting the sketches made by chips and sticks and listening to the sounds he made, I understood that because there were nine planets in the sky, their week was made of nine days. The nine days of the week were named after nine planets. I heard the names of the planets various times and I jotted down their names with the coloured juice of a fruit on the smooth dry leaf of a thick creeper.

The more I saw their world and their lifestyle, the deeper I was being drawn into the mysterious river and jungle.

Morning to evening, I roamed around with Uba in the water and forests and I got acquainted with their insects and animals and birds, with their trees and shrubs. I collected food, fruits and seeds for dressing-up, medicinal roots and barks, petals of flowers, barks of trees, feathers and fins of insects. Here one could spend days observing the trees, flowers, creepers, leaves, insects. There was no end to learning from observation of their living methods. Not only the large animals and birds, even the small worms would throw up surprises, the way these built their hearths and homes, collected food, reared up the small ones, skilfully protected themselves against dangers. And what a variety of their colours and structures, of snouts and fins. Butterflies I counted of twenty-five types. And countless was the number of strange, beautiful flowers.

Uba and his ilk looked like an extension of the insects and shrubs of this jungle. Whatever they needed for sustenance they derived from this jungle, which seemed to be their father and mother. Their biggest festival was the forest festival. Much bigger than the boat festival, the forest festival brought forth a continuous flow of joy from dawn to dusk. Villagers from a distance mixed with one another in this forest festival.

At the end of the day, everybody went back to respective villages, drank sherbat of various fruit juices, danced for a while, took their meals, lay down and exchanged with another their day's happenings and experiences.

I was given a place to lie down, beside Uba. He told me of this habit of theirs, lying down and exchanging notes, that they used to tell one another if they saw anything in the jungle, if something odd occurred somewhere.

One day, as they were lying and telling stories after the night dances, songs and meals when the boy next to Uba told Uba something and both stood up. Others too got up. Everybody got flustered listening to Uba and the boy and were speaking to one another. It seemed that they were in an urgent meeting.

Abruptly they all knelt down, thumped their chests and uttered sounds which were oddly tuneful but seemed to be groans. The tune sounded familiar; I once heard the same whining sound from a large bird here, whose rainbow colours between the neck and breast I could see from below. Uba had informed me that the bird was emitting such sound because a serpent ate its egg. Otherwise the bird had a different chirp, which it would not produce in its time of sorrow.

They were all emitting the same whine now. Had they come across some grave danger?

Meanwhile, the same wailing sound came floating from a distance. Soon the same tuneful groan was heard from various distant corners. Just like the sound of a conchshell in our country in times of earthquake, one conch sound followed by other conch sounds from distant places.

Uba by means of his chips and sticks, movement of hands, raising and lowering his fingers, many facial expressions as well as uttering of sounds, told me something like

this— today five or six birds, of extremely large size and odd appearance, were seen in the sky where three rivers intertwined and fell into the Amazon river. Somebody had seen them.

"Are they who were seen flying in the sky as big as this?" I showed them the room.

The man who had been to the confluence of three rivers at the Amazon river said, "Each one of the flying creatures were certainly as big as the room."

"Did you see anything moving on their back?"

He said that he had seen large cobwebs on the back of the bird.

I was talking to them, making Uba the medium. Hearing all this, I wondered if he had seen a helicopter.

I drew a large sketch of a helicopter on the ground and asked Uba, "Has he seen something like this?"

Before Uba could ask, the man came near me at one bound, almost tumbled upon the picture, watched it moving his head this way and that, and raised his head and nodded to inform that he had indeed seen some such creatures.

Why were those five or six helicopters there so far away at the Amazons?

I could see that everyone was frightened. My heart also sank when I realised that the flying creatures were helicopters. It struck me that missing me Uncles must have gone back to Manaus and Rio and came to the Amazons on helicopters to find me out.

I told Uba, "Take me tomorrow to the place where three rivers have met the Amazon."

8

Neither of the three rivers were that wide, they were more like the narrow mountain rivers of our Sikkim with a strong current.

We started at dawn and when we reached the Amazon river, after seeing all along the criss-crossing three rivers, the sun was right at top of our head.

We did not have to wait long. The sound of a helicopter was familiar to me. Perhaps the river was very wide here, even two helicopters made such a reverberating sound that the sky and the river and the jungle seemed to be in a hustle and bustle.

Two more helicopters were sighted at a distance. ~~and two more higher up on the sky.~~ ← *omit*
All of them were hovering over the jungle at the point of confluence of three rivers, sometimes over the river.

I could clearly see the people inside the two helicopters which had come down low on the water and none of them was Uncle or Gonzalo or resembled policemen. It was obvious that they were photographing the scene around from inside the helicopters, with long lenses fitted in their cameras. One seemed to be handling a video or movie camera. The photographer in one helicopter sometimes took off his eyes from the camera and was looking up at papers or a map or something like that.

In course of time, all the **four** helicopters flew up at the top of the jungles and swooped down very low and photographed at the confluence of three rivers.

There were two more men in our group, apart from Uba, the fellow who came yesterday and I. One of them was the headman of Uba's village and another man had come from a distant village and he was a headman also.

We five stood against four big Brazilnut trees and kept a watch over the helicopters. Those two helicopters, which had come low on water and photographed the jungle,

suddenly came down on the **land** at the riverside. The others too followed suit and landed up on the **hard soil**.

The men now came out of the helicopters and looked on, this way and that way. Two of them went on clicking their cameras and the others spread out a very big piece of paper on the **ground**.

Behind the cover of the shrubs and creepers we crawled towards the raised bank of the river. As I watched closer, it appeared that the piece of paper over which those people were poring and exchanged views must have been a map.

Uba and the rest of them did not know what a helicopter was. They could not fathom out why so many creatures with strange wings had come to their river and jungles. I guessed, they had taken a fright too.

Two or three of them looked like Brazilians and the others seemed European or American. I told Uba, "You stay here. Let me go and talk to them— let us know what they want, why they are here."

Uba was reluctant to let me go alone. Learning from him what I intended to do, the others too made gestures and forbade me to go. Uba reasoned further more, "As it is, these are so many uncouth creatures, and there are so many people from unknown countries. If you go near them, those creatures will certainly grasp you and fly off into the sky."

"No, no, before I go over to them, I will fly a banner of peace. Moreover, they may not be bad people at all."

The two headmen would not listen to me and said, they would bring all from the villages, if I really wanted to go. Everybody in the village was a skilled hunter, the young and aged had all bows and arrows.

I knew that all. But the mystery could be hardly solved with the help of hunters. I tried my best and persuaded them to have faith in me, to believe that I would soon come back and then took a sparkling white leaf after tearing it off from the roots of a very big *Kachu* tree, raised it as high as possible and began to sway the leaf. These *Kachu* leaves were as thin as papers that made kites and when swayed with the roots in hand made a rustling sound in the air.

The white flag attracted their notice after some time. One of them shouted at me, "Hi! What are you doing there, buddy?"

These days even our students in English-medium schools use these expressions, hello and hi. I read the word, buddy, somewhere, could not recollect where and then suddenly remembered that it meant a close friend, a chum.

I raised my voice as loudly as I could and asked in English, "Who are you, please? Where are you coming from? How can we help you?"

"Come down, please come down. How come, you are in this jungle? Where is your home, Pakistan, Mauritius or Sri Lanka?"

Another fellow asked, "Are you from Bangladesh?"

"I'm from India."

Assuring Uba and all once again, I made way through trees and got down to the riverbed.

As I neared the helicopters, those foreign *sahibs* were beside themselves in delight.

One of them put a hand on my shoulder, "You're not a jungle, are you?"

Another man turned towards him and said, "He's a gentleman. Isn't he?"

Yet another man pushed them back and stood in front of me and said, "Heigh! How did you come here? How could you reach here?"

Still another man yelled, "Been here long?"

Another man said, "Where do you live in this jungle?"

The man who called me a gentleman uncorked at one pull a tin of coca cola and put it on my hand, "Feeling thirsty?"

Another man tore off a pack of biscuits and offered it to me, "When have you come here, how and from where? And why, tell us frankly, boy. You can't be staying alone. Whom do you live with?"

I did not know who they were, why they were here, what made them photograph the river and the jungle, what that map was about. Were they hunting for a hidden treasure, teamed together in the river and jungles of Amazon? It might not be safe to disclose everything. I only told them how I came to see the jungle with my Uncle and somehow got separated from him. I had been looking for him but failed to find him. I was roaming alone in the jungle losing my way.

Listening to me, the sahibs exchanged glances among themselves. One said, "What is your Uncle's name? Where does he live?"

Another said, "Give us his complete address."

Lest I lose my way in a foreign land, my mother insisted that I memorised Uncle's address, even when I was in my own country. As I gave them the address, the sahibs again exchanged glances. Then one of them said, "Exactly where did you get separated?"

"Far away from here. In the midst of the jungle and I don't know its name."

"Can you name any locality, within say twenty or fifty miles of the place?"

"Negro with black water and Solimoes with yellow water meet the Amazon river. From say about two hundred miles down that spot Uncle got down and never came back. I too got down there in search of my Uncle, entered the jungle and lost my way. That spot too must be about two or three hundred miles away."

The sahibs were intently listening to me. One blurted out, "How many days are you here after you lost track?"

"I can't say. I don't remember."

"Are you living alone or with somebody?"

I was in two minds, should I tell them about Uba and others? I lied to them, "I live alone."

"Where do you sleep?"

"In my search for Uncle, I roam inside the jungle and wherever dusk falls, I spend the night there."

"What do you eat?"

"I've become used to eating jungle fruits. They are quite good. I quench my thirst by taking fruit juice. And there are some fruits which have nice nuts inside their shells."

It suddenly struck me that I had not yet known their purpose of coming to this place. Uba and others must have been anxiously waiting for me.

I asked the man nearest to me, "Why are you here. What are you doing here?"

"We are measuring the rain forests of the Amazons."

"Of what use will be the photographs of the jungles?"

"If you have to measure the jungle, you'll have to photograph."

"Why do you measure the jungle?"

"Because the jungle will have to be cut down."

"What?" A loud cry came out of my heart, "Such a big jungle and all of it will be cut down?"

"Not all, but some parts. Jungles will be cleared at places which will be a bit bigger than four Portugals put together."

When my visit to Brazil was finalised, my father told me the Bengali words for the rain forests of Brazil– evergreen forests.

Which meant that the clean air of the evergreen rainforests of Brazil serving as the inexhaustible source of oxygen– that would be cut off?

As I pondered, the sahib told me, "Come, we'll reach you to your Uncle's house at Rio. Come on, climb up this helicopter– you'll reach Rio in two days. You are so very long in this jungle. You need a medical check-up as soon as you reach Rio, or perhaps, even before that, at Manaus. "The sahib looked at my shirt and pants.

Another told that sahib, "You'll get a doctor at Ariaui. I hear, you can get a doctor at Ariaui Towers Hotel specialising in diseases caused by insect bites of the Amazon jungles."

"I'll go a few days later. I want to stay here a few more days."

"What? Does anybody other than a jungle want to live here of one's free will?"

Another sahib said, "Are you crazy? You ought to be grateful to us for our help. If you miss this opportunity, you will never be able to get out of this jungle. You don't know how fierce are tribals here. You'll die here, most painfully."

The man who offered me coca-cola grasped my hand suddenly and said, "Don't be silly, let's go."

I unclasped my hand slowly and said, "I'll not go today."

"You must go! And today!" Saying this the sahib who was very tall and strong lifted me in his arms and strode rapidly towards the helicopter.

And at that very moment, a tuneful wail from many birds with rainbow hues came afloat from the riverside jungle and pierced my heart.

As I threw up by my hands and legs to get away from the strong embrace of the fellow, another man came and grasped my legs. Another man came and firmly held my hands. Thus they put me on to the helicopter and the pilot flew it very high up in the sky.

I had drawn a picture of Uba and that was left behind in the bag. In the bag were also those nine waterhyacinth-coloured stones, which Uba gave me to count *Dimanu*. The bird's wail from the riverside jungle rent my heart. Tears welled up in my eyes.

The fellow who almost twisted my hands suddenly stooped down and whispered in English, "Please forgive us. We are sorry that we had to use force. We have only done our duty– the duty every civilised man is bound to render to any other civilised man. Can any civilised man stay in the company of the jungles?"

Reaching Rio de Janeiro, I found Uncle's house under lock and key. The helicopter fellows summoned police when all efforts failed and opened up the house. The house was empty, as empty when we left, exactly in the same order. Which meant that Uncle did not return from the Amazons.

I entered the room where I stayed in, and found my plane ticket tucked up inside the pages of the book, 'Around the World in Eighty Days' that was on the table.

The next day, two of those helicopter fellows took me to the airport.

As I landed up in Kolkata, an acute pain rent my heart. So many people around, so many houses, buses, trams, handcarts and rickshaws but none in the crowd was my friend. Nobody knew me, neither did I know them.

I changed two buses after pushing and jostling with the bus crowds and arrived at my house to find mother waiting right at the door.

I ran up and hugged her. Mother too tightly embraced me and said, "What were you up to? No letters, no news, nobody lifts the phone at your Uncle's house! Did you forget all about us, your mother and father?"

"Where is Father?"

"Oh, don't talk of him. From mornings to nights, he had been running from police stations to police stations, appealing to police chief, police deputy, minister and whoever not."

Mother took a brief pause and said, "Tell me truly what happened? Did you get lost?"

I then talked to her about Uba, Uba's village, the Amazons, the jungles that covered the sky. The thought of the jungles moistened my eyes and with wet eyes I told her, "I'll go to Uba's village, will you go with me, to the Amazon jungles?"

In the evening, when my father returned home and saw me shouted in great joy and excitement, "Returned? You've returned? Oh god!"

As he found me in tears when he came near me, "What's the matter? What's happened to you? Tell me what happened? Did you fall in danger? No news, nothing from you, and your Uncle sent us no news. Alright, it is enough that you've come back in one piece. Now tell us, what exactly happened? Why have you taken so much time to come back?"

As I told them how we lost way in the Amazon jungles, and how at last I came back to Rio de Janeiro, the tears in Mother's eyes never stopped flowing. "Oh, what terrible sufferings! You've gone through so much hardship! Who knows where your Uncle is now and how is he pulling through." She went on wiping her tears and yet tears were welling up again.

Father could take it no more and burst out in sorrow, anger and despair, "He's been always obstinate. And that much greedy. Once he was trapped by police when he was selling spurious drugs in Baharampur. But he could not give up his yen for money. I have no idea at all what grave danger he is in now; he must be suffering a lot. It is not easy to sit back doing nothing. What do you suggest?"

"I think we need to go to the Amazons and somehow find him back. I can do it."

"Are you mad. Will I ever let you go again." Mother said this and Father nodded, "Have you gone really crazy?"

I insisted this time and said, "I can find him alone, with the assistance from Uba. Uba and the rest know everything about Amazon. They belong there."

"Will you stop it?" Mother said and again burst into tears.

Father said, "Don't ever think of it. Not even by mistake. Keep it in mind."

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