

BORN TO TROUBLE

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city. Any danger I got into in the jungle was of my own seeking, or my own fault for being a damned fool.

On one occasion, within an hour of leaving Bagan Limau on a trip to Ayer Manis, the kampong of my old friend Awang, son of Idris, my party and I struck and followed for several miles the tracks of an elephant herd, and when we camped that night they walked completely around us at a distance of perhaps twenty yards. I hung onto my bull terrier Mike's mouth, for fear he would bark and stampede them over us. Just before we made that camp I had been surprised to find, over fifteen miles from a village, and in an acre or so of clearing, a hut occupied by a Chinese squatter and trader; for he had several kinds of the smelly delicacies which appeal to the Chinese, and several cases of pop which the Malays love and call "Ayer Blandah." The squatter offered us tea and talked rapidly. We all shook our heads, and he pointed into the jungle and then to his nose, and again with his hands, made the sign of a fisherman describing the size of a trout he had hooked and lost. We still shook our heads, and the Chinaman cried "obat" (medicine), which left us as bewildered as before. Then on the dirt floor of the hut he began to draw, and Mahat exclaimed "Badah!" (rhinoceros) I was very much excited, for I had never seen one outside of captivity; so we hurried on to where there was a good camp site and spring, at the foot of Mount Pantai, intending to go back and have the Chinaman show us where to find the rhino. Samat was all for having me shoot the beast, for he said the Chinaman was describing its horn, for which he would pay perhaps a hundred dollars. I expressed my doubt that the squatter had ever seen such a sum, for the yield from his kebun couldn't exceed about thirty dollars a year, and I asked what he would do with the beast's horn. Samat pityingly explained that the horn of a badah is much prized in Chinese circles for its aphrodisiac properties, and sells for fabulous sums. However, I still firmly declined to shoot the beast and was busy explaining to Samat and Mahat that by not shooting I was doing China a favor—instigating birth control. My remarks were ribald, and the two Malays laughed loudly until a windy snort brought us to a sudden halt, and thirty feet away from us by the spring where we intended to camp, was the rhinoceros. He seemed to be smaller than those I had seen in captivity, but his single horn was huge, and I had to

fight back an impulse to shoot for a trophy. His head swung from side to side as he searched for us and Samat whispered that he was preparing to charge. Whether he was, I do not know, for Mike, who had gazed in amazement at the weird creature before him, attacked it. I had no fear for Mike's safety, but did expect to see the rhino try to attack him. Instead of which the brute ran a short distance, to stop and snort, and as Mike rushed him, to cock his tail and crash off into the jungle—to be seen no more. That was the only single-horned rhinoceros I ever saw, for they are rare in Malaya, as is the two-horned Sumatran species, although altogether I saw about a dozen of the latter. One I saw on the narrow Segamat road at night, when he showed every desire to charge my little sports car; but luckily for the car and me, changed his mind and galloped ahead of us for some fifty yards like an amorous cow, before disappearing into the roadside swamp.

It took a considerable time to reach Ayer Manis, for I was just wandering and learning many things, one or two of which may be of interest. At one spot in the more open jungle, we came upon a large grove of cottonwood trees, with bursting pods, and I explained to my companions that the kapok was in growing demand for use in life preservers. Both Samat and Mahat thought it was a good idea, for it would preserve and lead to the cultivation of the trees which were sacred, for did not their pods shelter the souls of virgin girls who had died in infancy? On that trip, Samat taught me how to make snares for deer from the long strands of rattan which often grow to a length of over four hundred feet. The method is simple for the *jerat* is set in a deer run on the edge of the jungle at a height to catch the animal's head. Mahat did his share by teaching me to drug fish with the sap of the tuba root, something which is contrary to law and therefore delighted my poaching blood. Incidentally, I have seen catfish caught in Malay rivers so heavy that they must have weighed over two hundred pounds, for it was an effort for two men to lift them.

But it was in Kelantan that I took part in a fishing expedition which interested me above all others, for it was a drive. The kampong of Ayer Terjun-Waterfall is a beautiful place above a falls which shoot over the rocks like silver horse tails, and the brown-thatched huts with golden bamboo walls stand on silver sands and