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THE TRUE AMAZON ADVENTURES OF ROGER CASEMENT

by Andrew Shaw

EXTRACT

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THOMSON, 35, *a civil servant in the British Foreign Office.*

SMITH, *a senior civil servant in the Foreign Office.*

DELANEY, *a senior civil servant in the Foreign Office.*

TEA BOY, 17, *employee of the Foreign Office.*

CASEMENT, *British consul general to Brazil.*

POTTER, *director of the Amazon Rubber Company.*

MRS POTTER, *Potter's wife.*

CARVER, *Potter's manager.*

PEPE, *Potter's overseer.*

GABRIEL, 24, *Casement's companion.*

AGOSTINHO, 17, *Casement's companion.*

a BOY, *worker in the plantation.*

RALPH, *a flower shop assistant.*

SCENE 1.

A meeting room in the British Foreign Office, April 1916. There is a worn look to the book cabinet in the corner, the deadish exotic plant on its stand, the government issue chairs. It is a room seldom used.

THOMSON, a low-ranking civil servant, plays with a small British flag on the conference table at which he sits.

SMITH and DELANEY enter. Senior civil servants, they are important members of His Majesty's Government.

DELANEY: Good morning, Thomson.

THOMSON: Good morning, Mr Delaney. Mr Smith.

SMITH: Thomson.

SMITH and DELANEY sit opposite Thomson and place a number of folders on the table along with a white ledger.

DELANEY: Sit down, Thomson.

THOMSON: Thank you, sir. Lovely weather we're having, sir.

DELANEY: Yes. We've been fortunate up to now. How are things in your department, Thomson?

THOMSON: Going very well. Mr Wells has been excellent to work under. I can't think of anywhere I would rather be in the civil service other than the Foreign Office.

DELANEY: Despite these being trying times for us here in Britain.

THOMSON: Sir?

SMITH: The Irish, man. I trust you are aware there are insurrections and acts of terror carried out indiscriminately against His Majesty's Government in the name of Irish Home Rule over the last week?

THOMSON: Yes, of course, sir. Ireland. A terrible situation. Terrible.

DELANEY: There's general unrest abroad, it seems. What do you know of our problems in the colonies, Thomson?

THOMSON: There have been reports of unrest amongst the native population. Local workers who have been causing concern to the Government because of their disloyal attitude towards the Empire.

DELANEY: Come, now, Thomson, you're not talking to a pair of clean skins. You must know that we have sent an official delegation to inquire into certain abuses in the Congo plantations.

THOMSON: I believe there was some unrest in some rubber plantations on the part of certain local workers.

SMITH: Damn it all, Thomson. Stop being so mealy-mouthed. Speak frankly, man.

THOMSON: Yes, sir.

DELANEY: The problem in the Congo and, it seems, the Amazon, is that other nations, and some members of our Parliament, have been taking note of the abuses done by the Belgians and certain British companies to the native population, not the reverse.

SMITH: Sticking their noses into other people's businesses.

DELANEY: Developments in society demand that certain social niceties now be observed. We ourselves commissioned an investigation into the Amazon rubber operations a few years ago.

THOMSON: Yes, sir, I remember.

DELANEY: What do you remember?

THOMSON: It was Mr Casement—I suppose I should call him Sir Roger Casement now—he went down there in his capacity as Consul General and found there were problems in the plantations. A little boy had been murdered. Sir Roger did a good job, sir, according to the papers. I admire the man. He's what you call a humanitarian these days, isn't he, sir? A man with a sense of justice for all people, including natives.

SMITH: Are you saying we treat our overseas possessions poorly?

THOMSON: No, sir. We need the colonies, we need their resources. But people like Sir Roger present a human face to the public. He's a good Christian—Irish, but one can overlook that because he's protestant. It's not right that children die, is it, sir, just so we can put rubber tyres on our motors?

SMITH: Do you own a motor, Thomson?

THOMSON: Of course not, sir.

SMITH: Then don't talk nonsense.

DELANEY: I'm afraid your appraisal of Casement's character aligns with popular opinion, Thomson. He is known at home and overseas as a kind, just, humanitarian man who has done nothing but good for the colonies by his Christian approach to the plantations. It's a pity we've lost a man like that.

THOMSON: Lost him?

SMITH: Casement has been arrested for treason. He was caught landing with a shipment of German guns on the Irish coast five days ago to support the Easter uprising.

THOMSON: I can't believe it.

SMITH: It seems being protestant wasn't enough. The animal Irish in him overcame his better nature and he's thrown his lot in with their bloody nationalist cause.

DELANEY: He's in Pentonville Prison, awaiting trial in three months. We've kept it out of the papers so far, but the story will break soon.

THOMSON: This is terrible news. Terrible for Britain, for the Empire. A good man like Casement.

DELANEY: Yes, like everyone, I too had thought him a good and honourable man.

A knock at the door.

DELANEY: Enter.

The TEA BOY steps into the room. He is young and beautiful.

TEA BOY: Tea, Sirs?

DELANEY: Yes, please. Sandwiches, no cake.

TEA BOY: Very good, sir.

TEA BOY exits.

DELANEY: Speaking of tea, we read your report on the safeguarding of our Indian passage during war time. Neatly done.

THOMSON: Thank you, sir.

SMITH: Fastidious in its detail, one might say. Precise.

THOMSON: Thank you, sir.

SMITH: Prim. Florid.

THOMSON: Thank you. I take pride in my work.

SMITH: Fussy, one might say. Am I not right, Mr Delaney? Feminine.

THOMSON: Has there been a complaint?

SMITH: Why do you say that?

THOMSON: I just thought—

DELANEY: How is your personal life, Thomson? All going well at home, I trust?

THOMSON: Yes, thank you.

DELANEY: You do live at home—I mean, with your parents, don't you?

THOMSON: Yes, sir. In Bishop's Gate.

DELANEY: Charming area.

THOMSON: Thank you, sir.

SMITH: And are you thinking of moving out anytime soon?

THOMSON: Moving out, sir?

SMITH: Leaving home. Launching yourself from the nest. Getting married and living in a house. With a wife. And children. Little Thomsons.

THOMSON: I haven't given it any thought, sir.

SMITH: What a ridiculous statement. How old are you?

THOMSON: Thirty-five, sir.

SMITH: Thirty-five, Mr Delaney. Do you not find that a curious age for a young apparently healthy, apparently virile man to be still living at home?

DELANEY: It is not ordinary, no.

SMITH: (*to Thomson*) How do you explain it?

THOMSON: I have been looking, sir. Not all men are as fortunate as yourself in their choice of wife.

DELANEY: That's not the way to go, Thomson. Mr Smith is recently divorced.

THOMSON: (*a little too ingenuously*) Oh? I did not know.

DELANEY: Really? I had thought it common knowledge in the department.

THOMSON: I'm busy with my work, sir. I don't have time to listen to petty gossip about infidelities and such.

SMITH: I beg your pardon?

THOMSON: I'm terribly sorry, I didn't mean to imply—

SMITH: You pompous little bastard.

DELANEY: Steady on, Mr Smith.

SMITH: You think to pass judgement on me?

THOMSON: I wouldn't presume—

SMITH: "I wouldn't presume". You fawning sodomite.

THOMSON stands.

THOMSON: I strongly object to being termed—

SMITH: Sit down, you effeminate turd.

THOMSON: I will not allow myself to be insulted in this manner.

SMITH: Sit down! And let's see if your arsehole swallows up the chair.

THOMSON is close to tears.

DELANEY: Really, Mr Smith, is this necessary? Do as he says, Thomson.

THOMSON sits.

A knock at the door. The TEA BOY enters with a trolley and places tea things on the table.

DELANEY: Thank you.

TEA BOY: Will you be needing extra sandwiches, sir?

DELANEY: I don't think so. Mr Smith?

SMITH: As long as there's devilled egg, I'm happy.

TEA BOY: There is, sir.

DELANEY: Thomson?

THOMSON shakes his head.

DELANEY: That's all.

The TEA BOY exits. SMITH picks up a document from the table.