

Extract 2

Chapter 7

In the evening, when Miss Minton came to ‘hear her read’, Maia said, ‘I’m not staying here without you. I shall write to Mr Murray.’

‘I think you will find that at the salary the Carters are paying me, it might take a little while to find someone else,’ said Miss Minton dryly. She picked up Maia’s hairbrush. ‘Don’t tell me you’re doing a hundred strokes a night because I don’t believe it. I’ve told you again and again that you must look after your hair.’ She picked up the brush and brushed fiercely for a while. And then: ‘Do you want to go back, Maia? Back to England?’

‘I did,’ she said, thinking about it. ‘The twins are so awful and there seemed no point in being here, shut up in this house. But not now. I don’t want to go now because I’ve seen that it is there. What I thought was there.’

Miss Minton waited.

‘I mean ... the forest ... the river ... the Amazon ... everything I thought of before I came. And the people who live in it and know about it.’

Then she told Miss Minton about the boy who had taken her into Manaus.

‘He didn’t speak English, but he had such a listening face; I couldn’t believe he didn’t understand everything I said. Oh, Minty, it was such a wonderful journey, like floating through a drowned forest. You can’t believe it’s the same world as the Carters live in.’

‘It isn’t,’ said Miss Minton. ‘People make their own worlds.’

