



The Scorpion-Fish

Nicolas Bouvier

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On an unnamed Island that can only be Ceylon, the traveller checks into his 117th rented room, abandoned by his lover, poor and feverish. A book on Indian insects deepens his morbid fascination with the crawling inhabitants of the room-'a pretty world of killers'- barely distinguishable from the insect like habitues of the local cafe, the charlatans and fake exorcists, the indolent landowners, merchants and priests. In this exhausted state, he grows antennae that are 'tensed between the real and the occult'. The distinction between fact and fiction is blurred, but in this world of the imagination truths are sometimes crystal clear. A long-dead, levitating priest and the beautiful but deadly scorpion-fish, symbol of Bouvier's ambivalent relationship with the Island, are but two of the specters which eventually lose their hold on the author, releasing him back to life. It is a classic tale of the mental breakdown of a western traveller in the feverish heat of the tropical East - but which yet offers precious insights into the world and the self.

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