

He opened the paper and gasped with horror - Marianne

22nd July 1876: Joseph

I opened the newspaper and went directly to the crossword. I like the routine. I always sit in the conservatory surrounded by my tropical plants and birds. The *Times* crossword is never easy but once I've cracked a clue I know I will eventually finish the rest.

I studied the clues for a while but my mind wandered to the day ahead. I wasn't looking forward to the finance sub-committee but all the figures were in order and for once there were no major problems. After that it would be the scientific programme committee and a meeting to evaluate new proposals: the question of evolution was sure to crop up. It would be unwise to make my position public but I am with Charles on this.

I was about to set the crossword aside when something else caught my eye. I gasped with horror. It was about Marianne, *my* Marianne, and it was a report of her death in Borneo.

No! My mind raced. No, surely not. She was so talented, doing such great work, such a service to the country and to the Gardens. Her work was invaluable. She was a fine botanist and a brilliant illustrator. Her pictures brought the wonders of the natural world to life for scientists and for the general public alike. We were kindred spirits.

Marianne was on yet another tour of the world and it was true there had been no news of her for quite some weeks. The report mentioned Borneo. Yes, she had said she was on her way to Borneo in a note attached to the last package of drawings. But why? how? Marianne always travelled alone or with a local guide. I knew it would be months before any details emerged.

22nd April 1876: Marianne

What a day! Nijat and I were travelling up river in a dugout canoe. His name means success and although I am not superstitious I took that as a good omen. The rain was torrential and the roots and banks were covered in slithery mud. It didn't bother me. I am used to tropical climates and in any case, I knew my drawing materials were safe and dry. It would be another four days before we got to Bau, and then on to Nijat's village and the limestone cliffs where we hoped to find the pitcher plants.

That was my goal: the giant pitcher plant - *Nepenthes* - in full flower. Nijat had said the Djuttas knew where they grew, and that's where we were going. On a hunch, as always.

29th April 1876: Marianne

We arrived in Tasek Kuyit and were welcomed by Nijat's extended family. They were delighted to see him after so long and I have to say I've never felt so at home, or made so welcome. I couldn't understand a word of the dialect but that didn't seem to matter. I slept in a wooden house, some might say a shack, on stilts. I could see the banana trees in the yard and the cliffs in the distance.

The next day, Najiit took me deep into the forest, cutting a route through the undergrowth. We found what we were looking for just after mid-day. The pitcher plant was the largest I've ever seen. I set up my easel. At first, I couldn't get the composition right but after several attempts I managed to capture the

shape. The colour was harder. It was a delicate shade of I don't know somewhere between beige and red. I had to mix green to tone it down. I only take a few colours on my travels so I have to adapt. I am a scientist but out in the jungle there is scope for some artistic license.

31 April 1876: Marianne

By rights I should have been on my way – to Java and then Ceylon. But why not take a break, no one will miss me and no one will know. Why not stay on in Tasek with Nijat and the Djuttas for a couple of weeks, why press on with the punishing schedule of my botanical adventure?

It was quite out of character, but that's what I did. Nothing. I swung about in the hammock strung up under the house. I played with the mangy dogs and children and thought little of it.

Well, all good things come to an end and after a few weeks Nijat and I packed up the canoe and set off back to Bau and from there down to Sarawak. There were more delays on route and the weather forced us to stop for another couple of weeks. I am so used to adversity that I take it in my stride. I just do more sketching – privately. I have my own book – not of plants, but of imaginary scenes that I just make up.

Once we arrived back in town I checked in to my hotel. The clerk looked up, surprised. 'We thought you had disappeared' he said. 'Oh no' I replied, 'Just a few delays, I had a delightful time in Tasek'.

1st August 1876: Joseph

I can't sleep, I'm off my food. I can't get any news. The Times reporter was useless. Catherine, Marianne's sister, had a letter from an hotel in Sarawak saying Marianne was dead, and what should they do with her luggage? She'd gone on a trip upriver and never returned. The canoe and her things had not been found. It was dangerous country, and that was that.

28th October 1876: Joseph

It was raining hard and the blustery autumn storm had not yet blown out. I was just settling down to my morning crossword when Martha, my housekeeper, tapped on the glass. 'Joseph, someone at the door'. I got up, grumpily. This was my time, and I was not to be disturbed.

I went into the hallway. There was a dark figure in what looked like a Macintosh and some kind of hood. Puddles of water were already forming across the tiles. 'I'm sorry' I said 'you must have the wrong address, I am not expecting anyone. Martha will see you out'. As I turned the figure spoke. 'Joseph, don't go. It's me, I'm back and I've got something to show you'.

I spun around –the hood was thrown back and yes, it was Marianne!

I was stunned. 'Marianne' I gasped. 'But it stated in the paper that you were.. dead. Dead and gone in Borneo.'

Marianne took no notice: 'What, me, dead, no certainly not. Look, here I am, fit as a fiddle. I want to show you ...'

But I was not paying attention.

I was looking for the announcement I had cut out of the paper. I found it and showed it to Marianne. She checked the date. 'Oh, oh that, yes, well I had a difficult journey back, it took a while, someone must have

made a mistake. You know you really shouldn't believe everything you read in the paper, not even in the Times.'

'Now look at what I've bought for you. Marianne removed the oilskin wrappings and brought out a package of perfectly dry paper. 'Look, what I found! This must be the largest *Nepenthes* you've ever seen. I think it might be a new species. We must show Charles.'

