

AN EXCERPT FROM
THE GIRL
BY MEGAN ABBOTT

Through the half-open doors, June could see women with severe hair and pendulous earrings, their arms laced high with Mexican bracelets. Men with pencil moustaches and the slick look of morphine and Chinatown yenshee, their cuff links dropping to the floor, their heads loose on their necks. Some were dancing, hips pressed close, and others were doing other things, straps slipping from shoulders, bracelets clacking to the tiled floor.

Under a darkening banana tree in the center court, two women, ruby-haired both, their bodies lit, swarming each other, their silver-toned faces notched against each other. They were famous, both of them, famous like no one ever would be again, June thought, and to see their bodies swirling into each other, their mouths slipping open, wetly, was unbearably exciting, even to June.

“Let’s see the sights,” the seersucker man said, gesturing inside one of the rooms.

But suddenly the coral-mouthed girl didn’t want to and June’s agent had a darting look, and said he’d spotted George Tusk and had a sweet deal he wanted to seal over a pretty girl’s bare back.

The seersucker man drifted away and it was only June and the girl.

A dark-haired man in glasses came up to them. He had in his hand a tall green bottle and a pair of balloon goblets crooked in his finger.

“Please?” he said, lifting the bottle.

“Are you the owner?” June asked.

The man grinned wetly, his face a white streak under a torch flame.

Slowly, he set the glasses on a rosewood table and poured the green liquid from the bottle.

“Are you him?” June asked again, the alcohol—whatever it was—hitting her the second it hit her tongue, tingling through her mouth like cocaine.

“Oh,” the girl said, touching her greening lips. “It’s very fine.”

The man starting talking to them about the Mayans.

“They’d fasten a long cord around the body of each victim. After the smoke stopped rising from the altar, that meant it was time.”

June was not listening because he did not look important. He had rolled up his shirtsleeves and she saw a tattoo of a woman with a long webbed tail on his forearm.

“They’d throw them into the pit,” he was saying. “The tribe would watch from the brink and then pray without stopping for hours. After, they’d bring up the bodies and bury them in a grove.”

June couldn’t really hear, her head starting to feel echoy and strange.

The man was suddenly gone and June couldn’t remember him leaving.

What had they drunk? She felt her dress slipping from her shoulders, her own mouth seeming to go wider, spreading across her face.

She felt the girl’s hands on her, and they were walking on the faintest of feet, their tiny shoes tapping on the courtyard.

They stood under an arching tree hung thickly with long soft blooms like red bells. The bells tickled June’s hair and made her skin rise up.

“I’ve been here before,” the girl said, eyes saucering. “I know where that hallway goes. I was brought here. I had something done to me here.”