

*Excerpt:*

A couple of boats had been dragged up on the flat of the riverbank. Nobody around. Ian sat in the shade of the largest boat and pretended to be watching the barges and tugboats going past him.

He stole a glance at the house, hoping to spot Finch. Nothing there, but something rising out of the water maybe thirty feet from him caught his attention.

At first, he thought it might be a caiman—South America's version of an alligator. Caimans were native to the area, although, he had no idea if they lived in this part of this particular river.

But instead, out of the river, rose a young woman.

She seemed to be struggling with...an anaconda?

When the shiny black, long body wrapped around hers, Ian moved, ready to dive into the water to help her, but she had the upper hand and dragged the wriggling beast toward shore with a triumphant smile, and he could see that she had a giant eel.

He couldn't take his eyes off the thing. The eel stretched as long as the woman was tall, over five feet. They wrestled in the shallow water, the scene stunningly primal and elemental.

She had a piece of rag tied around her small breasts, and another around her slim waist, covering only the private parts of her body. She was the most stunning sight he'd ever seen, long dark hair streaming down in wet rivulets. A goddess risen.

A goddess in mortal struggle.

His western sensibilities pushed him to run and help, but the woman and the eel and their battle seemed somehow the spirit of the Amazon itself, and he felt like an interloper. He felt that he couldn't take the woman's triumph away from her.

And she did win, dragging the eel to shore, grabbing a rock the next second and smashing the eel's head. The eel was still squirming when, with the same, sharp-edged rock, she gutted the thing, dumping the insides back into the river. She was not a peaceful goddess.

She washed the eel efficiently, then picked up the carcass and carried it, staggering under the weight, up the tall, steep bank, and in through the back door of the house Ian had been watching.

Ian's chin might have dropped a little. Or a lot. In fact, he felt as if his chin just hit his lap.

Who on earth was she?