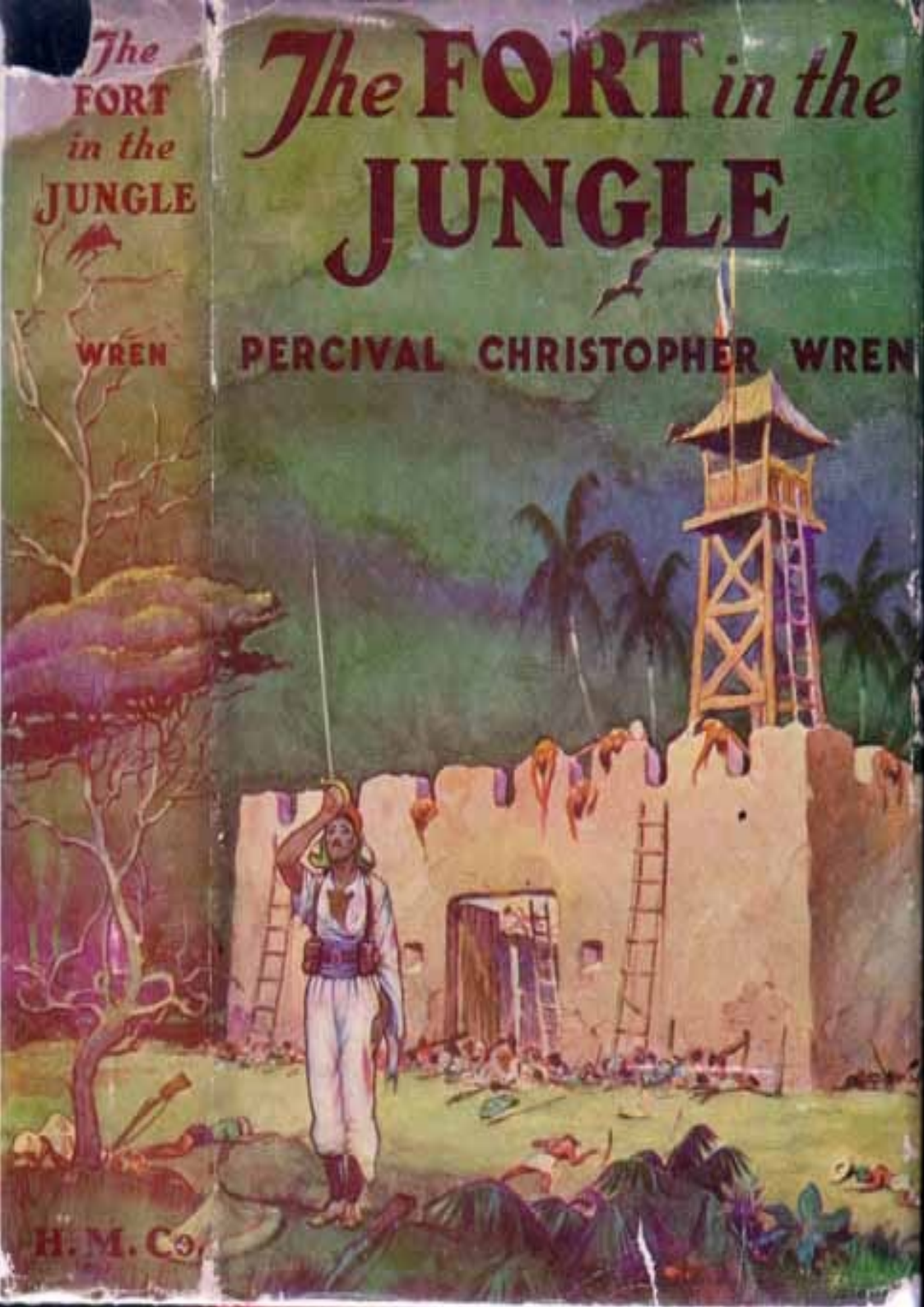
The FORT in the JUNGLE

PERCIVAL CHRISTOPHER WREN



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WREN

H. M. Co

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NOVELS BY P. C. WREN

BEAU GESTE
BEAU SABREUR
BEAU IDEAL
GOOD GESTES
SOLDIERS OF MISFORTUNE
THE WAGES OF VIRTUE
STEPSONS OF FRANCE
THE SNAKE AND THE SWORD
FATHER GREGORY
DEW AND MILDEW
DRIFTWOOD SPARS
THE YOUNG STAGERS
THE MAMMON OF RIGHTEOUSNESS
MYSTERIOUS WAYE
VALIANT DUST
FLAWED BLADES
ACTION AND PASSION
PORT O' MISSING MEN
BEGGARS HORSES
SPANISH MAINE
EXPLOSION
SINBAD THE SOLDIER
BUBBLE REPUTATION

EDITED BY P. C. WREN

SOWING GLORY

FORT
IN THE JUNGLE

BY
PERCIVAL CHRISTOPHER WREN

"I've taken my fun where I've found it,
I've rogued an' I've ranged in my time."
Kipling.

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TO

THE MEMORY OF MY COMRADES

OF

THE FRENCH FOREIGN LEGION

"*Partout où ils ont passé,*
Partout où ils sont tombé,
Ils ont semé de la gloire."
(*Song of the Legion*)

PART I

1

The jungle fort of Houi-Ninh, its back to the swift and mighty river Meh Song, its front and flanks to the illimitable Annamese jungle, stood like a little rock, almost submerged beneath a deep green sea.

Behind it, a theoretically pacified land of peaceful if resentful villages, set in rice-field, forest, plain and swamp; before it, the unconquerable jungle, its dank and gloomy depths the home and defence of fierce swift jungle-men, predatory, savage, and devilishly cruel.

And beyond that vast uncharted sea of densest forest and impenetrable swamp, a further *terra incognita*; and then China, inimical, enigmatic and sinister.

The little jungle fort was strong, the foundations of its walls great boulders of stone, the walls themselves dried mud and great baulks of mahogany, its vast and heavy iron-wood gate secured by huge steel bars which were lengths of railway-line.

Within the square of walls was the low oblong white-washed *caserne* containing the *chambrée* in which the men slept, the store-room, the cook-house, the non-commissioned officers' quarters, and the office-bedroom of the Commandant.

The fort was besieged. Hordes of flat-faced, slant-eyed warriors, half brigand, pirate and dacoit, half mandarin's irregular soldier, swarmed about it in the gloom of the jungle just beyond the tiny clearing that surrounded its walls. From lofty iron-wood trees, a galling and decimating fire had been kept up for days, by the Möi, Tho, Muong and Chinese sharp-shooters armed with Sniders, Chassepot and Gras guns, as well as excellent Spencer carbines and Remington repeating rifles, reducing the garrison to half its original inadequate numbers, and inflicting upon it the loss not only of its Commandant, Lieutenant Jacot, but of its half-dozen non-commissioned officers as well.

It was now commanded by an ordinary *soldat première classe*, the *Légionnaire* Paladino, senior man present, and readily-accepted leader.

The last official communication from the outside world had been a suddenly-ended heliograph message, the concluding sentence of which had been ominous.

"Those about to die, salute . . ."

It had come from another fort set upon a hill some twenty-five *li*[1] distant.

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[1] *Li* = about 600 yards.

§2

A handful of assorted soldiers gathered from the ends of the earth, of very widely varying nationality, creed and breed, of greatly differing education, birth, and social experience, stood in the dark shadow of imminent death; Death ineluctable, inevitable, inexorable; Death now as certain as—death.

These men knew that no power on earth could save them; that no power from Heaven would save them; that this was as certainly the last night of their lives as it would have been had they each been seated alone in the condemned cell, doomed by law to meet, at dawn, the hangman, *Madame la Guillotine*, or the firing-party.

They knew that to-morrow's dawn was the last that they would ever see.

The victorious and triumphant army of the *Pavillons Noirs*, the Black Flags, jungle savages, Möis, river pirates, Tonkinese dacoits and bandits, and Chinese Regulars in disguise, now bearing down upon them to join their besiegers, out-numbered them by a hundred to one. It could, and would, by sheer weight of numbers alone, overwhelm them, obliterate them. Against it, they had precisely as much chance as has a snail against a steam-roller. Should this great force of irregular but magnificent, well-armed fighting men, instead of sweeping over the little jungle fort, trouble to ring it about with fire, the score of defenders' rifles would answer a thousand.

And for how long?

Almost with their guns alone could the Tonkinese and Chinese jungle-warriors blast, into its original dust, the mud wall of the wretched little post, already more than half-submerged by the slowly rising tide of the ever-encroaching jungle.

But this they probably would not do. They were very fierce, impetuous and primitive in their swift savagery. Almost certainly they would rush it, destroy it, stamp it flat, and let the jungle in. In a few weeks there would be no sign of where it had stood. It would be sunk full fathom five beneath an emerald sea of leaf and stalk; strangled, choked, drowned beneath the green ocean of leaves.

These men were doomed, for they were abandoned. Not abandoned callously, carelessly or neglectfully, but by necessity, the harsh cruelty of military fate and the adverse fortune of war. To have saved them would have cost ten times their number. To have saved the fort would have cost ten times what it was worth.

And loss of prestige? That would be regained a hundredfold when the General was ready, and reinforcements for his disease-decimated sun-smitten jungle-worn army should reach his headquarters from France.

The only doubt about their certain death lay in the question of the manner of it.

A furious headlong charge of strong swift swordsmen, brown, black-turbaned, Gurkha-like; rush upon rush, and an overwhelming flood which would surge across the stockade as waves break over a child's castle of sand, and then swift sudden death by bullet and blade?

Or, perchance, a long slow day of torture by thirst and heat and wounds as, beneath a hail of bullets from high surrounding trees, they died slowly, man by man, their fire growing slacker and slower until the last wounded man with his last remaining strength and failing sight, reached the last cartridge and fired the last shot of the defence?

According to their Annamese informants, "friendlies" fleeing before the advancing host—this had been the fate of the first of the two forts that the rebel horde had attacked, the only other outposts on that side of the mighty river, deep and swift. It had been enveloped, surrounded during the night, and at dawn had been subjected to so heavy a fire at so short range that by noon the little post had been silenced, the fortunate among its defenders those who had been killed during the battle. The wounded had been crucified, slowly roasted alive, or indescribably tortured with the knife.

On the other hand, the second outpost had been carried by an overwhelming rush, and its defenders had died on their feet, whirling clubbed rifles, stabbing with fixed bayonets in a wild pandemoniac *mêlée*.

But few of the men of this latter fort had lived to suffer torture—fortunately—for these Black Flag pirates, the jungle dacoits of the Far East, are the most ingenious, the most inhuman, the most devilishly cruel and callous torturers on the face of the earth.

And this was the third outpost.

Their last night. How should it be spent?

Had these men been of a homogeneous regiment, whether English, Scottish, Irish, French, German, Italian, Russian, Dutch, Swiss, Greek or Spanish, their general reaction to such a situation might be to some extent predictable.

Condemned to death without the possibility or faintest hope of reprieve, doomed to die at dawn without the slightest chance of escape, the men of one of these nations would have spent the night in grim uneasy jest; of a second in dour resigned solemnity; of a third in hectic nervous gaiety; of another in futile wrath and bitter recriminations against those by whom they had been "betrayed"; of another in a drunken orgy and a brave effort at the consumption of all stores of food and drink; of another in the singing of hymns and of national sentimental songs; and of yet

another—in carrying on precisely as usual.

But of these particular men, not more than two were of the same nationality, and they represented most of the countries of Europe.

They were, nevertheless, soldiers of the French Foreign Legion, and as General Négrier had once informed the Legion, they were there to die, they were hired to die.

It was simply their business.

That was what they were for.

And so they sat—a wasteful plethora of tins of "monkey meat" and black issue bread, *bidons* of wine and packets of cigarettes beside them, talked and played *mini-dini*—and ate and drank, and were not merry, in spite of this unwonted luxury.

§3

It was their leader, the suave, cynical Paladino, a baffling enigmatical man, who made the suggestion, as they sat in a circle about the glowing embers of the fire, waiting for death, matter-of-fact, business-like and unperturbed, each man *bon camarade* and *bon légionnaire*.

Although literally a case of eat and drink, for to-morrow we die, they maintained, from force of habit, all correct military procedure, and a sentry paced the cat-walk, the long narrow firing-platform that ran round the inside of the fort four feet below the top of the wall.

"Hell!" yawned Paladino lazily, and stretched himself. "Soon be there, too."

"Wonder whether *le bon Dieu* tries us one by one, or in a bunch," he added, as he lay back against a box of ammunition, settled himself comfortably and lit a cigarette.

"What, us? Us old *légionnaires*? Oh, one by one, of course," asserted Lemoine, "and in camera, too."

"In camera, behind closed doors? Oh, too bad," grinned Borodoff. "We would have liked to hear the worst about one another."

"True," agreed Paladino.

"Well, why not have it now?" he added.

"Afraid we haven't—er—quite enough time," smiled old Bethune. "My own sins alone would take . . ."

"Of course they would, *mon vieux*," agreed Paladino. "Take a month at least. I wasn't so optimistic as to imagine that we were going to have time to hear it all. Not even just yours. What I suggested was 'the worst'. Let's each confess our worst, blackest, beastliest deed, fully and faithfully, truly and honestly."

"Yes," agreed Lemoine. "And no boasting. Let's form a Dirty Dogs' Club and see who, on his own confession, is the dirtiest dog. He shall be proclaimed President. First and last President of the most short-lived club on earth."

Paladino rose to his feet.

"*Bon!* I declare the Club to be about to be. We are the original and only candidates for membership. I am the founder. Our friends the Black Flags will be the un-founders. Let none of your confessions be unfounded though. . . . You begin, Nul de Nullepart."

Le Légionnaire Nul de Nullepart began, and others followed his excellent and stimulating lead . . .

Suddenly a Snider boomed, and Schenko, looking out through a *creneau*, staggered back and fell from the cat-walk down into the *enceinte*.

"*Aux armes!*" bawled Paladino, as every man, grabbing his rifle, sprang to meet the rush of savages that surged over all four walls, like a wave.

The struggle that followed was long and desperate, ending in a wild *mêlée* in which single *légionnaires* with whirling rifle-butts or darting bayonets fought desperately, each against a dozen; dying, man by man, until but one of them was left alive. He, clubbed from behind, had been knocked from the cat-walk down into the *enceinte*, and lay partly buried, and almost concealed, beneath the half-naked corpses of fallen dacoits, brown bodies partly clad in bright *panaungs*.

PART II

CHAPTER I

As I have already told,[1] I was bred to the sea, my father being an Admiral, and my forbears having held rank in the British Navy for centuries.

But my mother, abetted, if not instigated, by my step-father, Lord Fordingstane, decided that she could not afford to send me to the *Britannia* and into the Navy; I was apprenticed to the shipping-firm of Messrs. Dobson, Robson, and Wright, of Glasgow, and made my first voyage, as an Apprentice, in one of their ships, the *Valkyrie* of ill omen.

Sickened, for the time being, of the sea—for this voyage was one of the most tragic and disastrous made by any ship that ever came to port—I decided to be a soldier; and, with my fellow-Apprentice, Dacre Blount, enlisted in the Life Guards, a regiment in which my step-father had been a Cornet.

Having served for a couple of years in the Life Guards, Dacre Blount and I accepted a friend's offer of a chance to go to sea once more, this time on a gun-running expedition to Morocco. Here I was captured by nomad Arabs, sold as a slave, and, later, taken by my master to Mecca.[2]

The pilgrim ship in which we were returning from Jiddah was burnt; and I, escaping from it, was picked up by an Arab *dhow* which, proceeding to Djibouti in French Somaliland, was there seized by the French Naval authorities for the slaver, pearl-poacher, gun-runner and *hashish*-smuggler that she was, and handed over to the civil power. My Arab captors, long wanted by the French, were tried for piracy and murder, and were shot; I, proclaiming myself an Englishman, late in the employ of the Sultan of Bab-el-Djebel, was accused of being a Secret Service agent and spy, left for long in doubt as to my fate, and then, having been tried on an espionage charge, was found probably-guilty and given the choice between enlisting in the French Foreign Legion and suffering indefinite detention.

In point of fact, I was just in the humour to join the French Foreign Legion, being at the moment rebellious against Fate, at a loose end, and somewhat desperate.

Moreover, that way of life undoubtedly promised adventure, and of adventure I was avid.

It seemed to me, too, that I was remarkably well equipped for this new rôle, inasmuch as I was a soldier, spoke and understood Arabic perfectly, had a good ground-work of French, knew the desert and the Arab and the Arab's way of fighting, better than any veteran in the Corps; and, thanks to sea-training, Guards' training, and my extremely active life in the desert, was a remarkably tough,

seasoned and active young man.

But Fate will have its little joke; and as I knew Arabic and was an experienced desert fighter, I was sent almost direct to where the only useful language was Annamese; the terrain was swamp and dense jungle; and the mode of fighting was as different as it could possibly be from that of Arab warfare.

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[1] *Action and Passion.*

[2] *Sinbad the Soldier.*

§2

Accounts of the routine of joining the Foreign Legion, proceeding to Sidi-bel-Abbès, and undergoing recruit-training are numerous, and their number need not be increased. Suffice it to say that my training as a Guardsman, my size and strength, and my African experience, stood me in very good stead, and enabled me to endure, if not enjoy, recruit days at the depot at Sidi-bel-Abbès, and to suffer nothing worse than boredom.

It was at just about the time when I was dismissed recruits' drill that a notice appeared in *rapport* that a draft would shortly be going as re-inforcement to the Legion battalion in Tonking on active service against the rebellious or, rather, unsubdued, followers of the Emperor of Annam, who had recently been defeated by the French and exiled from Indo-China.

These mountaineers, Annamese of the Dalat plateau and other highland parts of Tonking, aided by vast hordes of dacoits, brigands, and pirates, known as Black Flags, and secretly subsidized and supported by the Chinese Government, who reinforced them with bodies of irregulars and regiments of Chinese regular troops, were a powerful and dangerous enemy who had inflicted more than one definite defeat upon French Generals.

Promptly I put in my name for the draft and, presumably on the strength of my previous military training and experience, my physique, and the white crime-sheet of a blameless life, I was accepted, our Commanding Officer, *Chef de Bataillon* Wattringue doing me the honour of speaking a few words to me as he inspected the special parade of applicants for foreign service.

"What's your name, *mon enfant*?"

"Dysart, *mon Colonel*."

"Previous service in the British Army, I'm told. Regiment?"

"Life Guards, *mon Colonel*."

"Your father an officer?"

"Admiral, *mon Colonel*."

"Why did you come to the Legion?"

"For adventure; active service, *mon Colonel*," I replied, telling him the truth and nothing but the truth—if not the whole truth.

"Is he a good shot, a good marcher and a good soldier?" he enquired, turning to Captain Dubosque, commanding my Depôt Company.

"Excellent," replied that worthy man.

"And you wish to proceed forthwith to Tonking, eh?" he asked, turning again to me.

I assured him that I did.

"Well, perhaps you will. And equally—perhaps you won't," he replied, and passed on.

A fortnight later my name was published in Orders among those, my seniors and betters, who, having had six months' service and not having suffered imprisonment during that time, were to be formed into a separate section, receive flannel uniforms and a white helmet, and parade with the troops under orders for Tonking.

Of the men who entrained at Sidi-bel-Abbès for Oran to embark in the troopship *Général Boulanger* from Marseilles, already full to capacity with troops of the *Infanterie de la Marine*, few returned, most of them leaving their bones in the swamps, jungles, and military cemeteries of Indo-China.

Not a few died of heat-stroke, disease, and wounds before the troopship reached Pingeh, the port of Saigon in Cambodia.

Of those who died of wounds, two were shot attempting to desert in the Suez Canal where the ship tied up for the night; three at Singapore where we stopped to coal; while one man, who had succeeded in swimming from the ship at that port, was taken by a shark.

These deaths led to others, as, the deserting *légionnaires* having been shot by sentries of the Marine Infantry, there was, for the rest of the voyage, a very strong Legion feeling against the men of that Corps, a reciprocated bitterness of spirit that was expressed in more than one desperate and murderous conflict.

After calling at Saigon in Cochin China, the troopship proceeded to the mouth of the Red River, where the Legion draft was transferred to a couple of river gunboats, the *Lily* and the *Lotus*, and taken some six hours' journey up the river and disembarked at the town of Haiphong.

From the wharf, our draft marched by way of a fine *boulevard*, the *Avenue Paul Bert*, to the Négrier Barracks, whence, a day or two later, we were taken on gun-boats another day's journey up the Red River to the base camp at a place called Hai Duong.

Thence, after rest, re-organization and re-fitting, we marched to a spot we called Seven Pagodas, and thence to the camp of the Second Battalion of the First Regiment at Houi-Bap—the seat of war.

I was on regular active service at last.

CHAPTER II

We soon learned that the Annamese army, known as the Black Flags, and by profession river-pirates and jungle dacoits—together with their allies, a large force of Chinese irregulars, also bandits in time of peace, reinforced, according to our scouts, by regiments of regular soldiers of the Chinese army who were led by white officers—held a strongly fortified position at a place called Quang-Ton. Already one considerable battle had been fought near this place, and, whoever claimed the victory, the enemy undeniably held the ground.

Our camp at Houi-Bap was the nearest French base to this strong enemy position; and with us, besides details, lay a battalion of *Tirailleurs Tonkinois*, native Annamese troops of the Delta, led by French officers and drilled by French non-commissioned officers.

Our battalion of the Legion had been divided into three companies, one of which occupied the base with its stores of food and munitions, while the other two marched out and operated, for several weeks at a stretch, as flying columns in the enemy country.

In my time at Houi-Bap I played many parts, having been, on different occasions and for varying periods, a cook, for the first and last time in my life; an exterior decorator, with whitewash only; a wood-cutter; a water-carrier; a stone-dresser; a carpenter; a road-navvy and a brick-maker.

A kilometre or so from our fortified barracks, within the stockade of which was quite a strong *réduit*, a claypit and brick-yard had been constructed, and here, under the guidance of a Sergeant who knew nothing about it, a dozen of us were employed in modelling bricks in clay, and stacking them in the kilns in which they were to be baked.

Nor did we make bricks without straw. While we worked, a section of native soldiers, *Tirailleurs Tonkinois*, chopped rice-straw for our use, while others carried buckets of water from the brick-yard well, and another section fed the kiln fires with wood.

These Annamese were under the command of a *Doi* or native Sergeant, who struck me as a remarkably intelligent man, very active, forceful and competent, as well as a good disciplinarian.

Later, I encountered *Doi* Linh Nghi in a different capacity, came to know him better, to like him very much, and to rank him among my real friends.

I cannot say that I found this aspect of life in the Foreign Legion thrilling or even attractive, for the work was extremely hard and dirty, the climate exceedingly hot

and humid. So it was without regret that I learned, one day, that, enough bricks having been made, my Section was to join the Company that was going out on patrol, and was to be left by it at a distant outpost beyond the River Meh-Song at a place called Houi-Ninh.

We fell in, that morning, in full marching order, khaki uniform of cotton drill; rifles and bayonets; a hundred and twenty rounds of ammunition; filled water-bottles; ground-sheets rolled up, tied in a loop like a horse-collar, and worn over the left shoulder; laden knapsacks and haversacks; and a very heavy *mâchète* in a wooden sheath. The *mâchète* was both tool and weapon, like a broad thick straight-bladed sword, very sharp, and extremely useful for hacking one's way through the jungle where there was no path, or the track was so overgrown with creepers, bamboo, bushes, high grass and undergrowth that it was invisible. Incidentally, I once saw a powerful Yunnanese take a man's head right off with a *mâchète*, severing the neck as cleanly and neatly as though it had been a cucumber.

On our flank fell in a company of *Tirailleurs Tonkinois*, their uniform, of the same material as ours, consisting of a kind of vest, shorts, and their own native Muong puttees. They were bare-footed, and they wore round flat bamboo hats like plates, held in place by red cotton bonnet-strings.

These men were armed with carbines which took the same cartridges and bayonets as our own rifles, but were lighter and shorter weapons.

Out, through the great gates of the palisade—which ran right round our barracks, fort, store-sheds and various quarters and buildings, quite a village in itself—out, along the river bank between the rice-fields, and away into the jungle, we marched; far away out into the open country.

And through that open country of the Delta we continued to march, generally over a well-cultivated plain, with here and there villages nestling in clumps of fine trees and surrounded by growths of graceful bamboos. Between the villages, the country was covered with thick and luxuriant vegetation of brightest green, with very tall grass, and with patches of dense jungle and forest. Here and there, small hills broke the usual flatness of the terrain.

In this country, within a few days' march of Houi-Bap, the villages that were occupied were also, in theory, pacified, and the headman and elders would usually come out, kow-tow, and produce fruit, betel-nut, sugar-cane, milk or tea as peace-offerings to the soldiery.

Those that failed to come out were promptly brought out. For had they not accepted the protection of *Madame la République*, and had they not now the privilege of paying their taxes into her treasury at Phulang-Thuong?

Occasionally we came upon a village which was merely a charred heap of smoking ruins, this being the work of the exiled Emperor of Annam's Viceroy, the Annamese General De-Nam, and showed that they had refused to pay taxes to him likewise.

As my friend *Doi* Linh Nghi pointed out to me, when we talked in camp at night or on the march, it really was a little hard on the unfortunate villagers of this "pacified" zone, that, if they wished to keep the roof over their heads and the crops on their fields, they had to pay taxes twice, a toll of rice and money to their late Emperor in the person of General De-Nam, and also the taxes levied by the French authorities.

As we got further from our base, the spirit of the villagers changed, either their courage being greater or their wisdom less. The gates of the stockades with which the villages were invariably surrounded, would be barred and the place would show no signs of life. The Commander of the column would order the leading section to pull down the great iron-wood beams which, placed one above the other, their ends resting in slots cut in the huge and heavy door-posts, secured the stout resistant iron-wood doors.

The first of such places that we visited caused us some annoyance, for, having entered with bayonets fixed, rifles at the ready, mouths grim, and eyes glaring watchfully, we found—nothing. The place was absolutely empty. The villagers had all departed through some postern in the stockade at the other side of the village and escaped into the dense jungle beyond, where their cattle and other worldly goods were already hidden.

Day after day, week after week, we marched; and now, when approaching villages, were frequently met with a shower of bullets. In such cases the Commander would practise the column in attack drill, skirmishing up to the place and finally carrying it with the bayonet—quite unopposed. The training was good and the assault bloodless, the villages invariably being found to be empty.

It must have been policy rather than cowardice or doubt of the issue that made the Annamese peasants behave so, for each one of these villages was a strong post in itself, quite a jungle fort, surrounded as it frequently was by a deep moat, an embankment, and either a double or triple stockade of very stout bamboo.

In addition to such obstacles, entry into these jungle villages must be made by way of a passage through the embankment and stockades, only sufficiently wide for the domestic buffalo to make his way when he went forth to graze in the morning and returned at eventide.

It seemed to me that when we did have to attack one of these villages, occupied

by a well-armed and determined garrison, we should only capture it at considerable cost, the narrow entrances being commanded by loop-holes through which a hot fire could be poured at close range upon the attacking force.

And, in due course, and not before we were extremely glad to see it, we reached the distant outpost of Houi-Ninh, beyond the Meh-Song River which we crossed, one at a time, by a swinging "bridge" of rattan and bamboo.

At Houi-Ninh my section, under Lieutenant Jacot, relieved the garrison; was left behind by the departing column; and remained in occupation until those who had not died of fever were ready to die of boredom.

CHAPTER III

While I and my Section were forgotten here in Houi-Ninh, things went rather badly with the French. The enemy, reinforced it was supposed, from China, became extremely active, over-ran great areas of the Pacified Zone, re-conquering and occupying the whole country up to and beyond the River Meh-Song, on the banks of which our little outpost stood.

The three outposts, on the further side of this river, of which ours was one, were attacked. Two of them fell at once, and their garrisons were put to the sword.

Ours was then besieged, was assaulted, and, after a desperate fight, was overwhelmed. I, thanks to a blow on the head from a rifle-butt, was stunned and left for dead.

Coming to my senses, I found myself the sole survivor of the garrison, alone in the silent post, now tenanted but by the dead.

§2

It was a shocking situation, one calculated to unhinge the mind of any person not inured to horrors. Fortunately for me, I was not without experience of such. The fort was a grave, strewn—I had almost said filled—with the hacked and mutilated bodies of my comrades and the corpses of those whom they had slain in the fierce barter of lives.

All that was wrong with me, physically, was an appalling headache, and a wound which, although it had at first seemed to me to be a depressed fracture of the skull, was merely a scalp wound. My thick *képi* had saved me from the worst injury, and doubtless the confined space in which we had been struggling on the cat-walk had prevented my assailant from doing himself justice. . . .

Never shall I forget the first awful minutes of recovering consciousness, when I found myself pinned down, half-crushed, almost smothered, by the bodies of the dead.

At first I thought I was myself dead; and then, when convinced that I was alive, was sure that I was dying, for I was in hideous pain, and could move neither hand nor foot.

When, however, I fully recovered consciousness, I found, after a few mighty heaves and struggles, that I could sit up . . . stand up . . . and walk about.

What amazed me was the fact that the fort should be deserted, almost intact; and I concluded that there must be some more attractive object to which the pirate

and rebel force had passed on, as soon as our post of Houi-Ninh had fallen and its garrison been exterminated.

As I staggered round the *enceinte*, averting my eyes from the bodies of my comrades—some of which had been deliberately mutilated—and entered the barrack-room, store-room and other quarters, I saw that the place had been looted and wantonly damaged; but there had been no attempt to set the buildings on fire. Nor had all the tinned provisions been removed.

I wondered whether policy or haste was the reason for this only partial destruction; whether the *T'uh Muh*, the leader of this horde, had decided that it would be foolish to destroy a captured fort that might later be extremely useful to himself; or whether he had been in too great a hurry to pass on to join General De-Nam and be in at the death.

I decided that haste was the reason; and that it accounted for the fact that only a few of the dead had been mutilated.

Possibly these had fallen, wounded, unable to defend themselves longer, and had been tortured to death. Possibly the mutilation was merely a wanton and savage hacking of the dead by the actual slayers of the fallen *légionnaires* whose desperate resistance had enraged them.

There lay Paladino, his khaki uniform dark-stained with blood from head to foot, his face in death still wearing its cynical expression, still looking as baffling and enigmatic as in life.

Near him, lay his friend Lemoine who evidently, back to back with him, had sold his life as dearly; for about them was a heaped circle of dacoits, shot, bayoneted, clubbed, in the last struggle of two against a score.

Old Schenko, veteran of a hundred fights, lay where he had fallen from the cat-walk, a bullet through his head.

Near him, savagely slashed and hacked, was the man I had known as Nul de Nullepart, a hitherto attractive man.

There they lay—my comrades; Paladino, Nul de Nullepart, Schenko, Pancezys, Gusbert, Richeburg, Van Diemen, the men who so shortly before had been confessing each his worst sin (some of which had been pretty awful); the men with whom I had lived and marched; eaten and drunk; worked and sung and talked—stiff and grim and gory in death.

And I felt that the least I could do was to give them decent burial.

Having stripped, washed, and bathed my head in a bucket of water, I made coffee, had a meal of cold boiled rice, tinned meat and biscuit; and then walked round the cat-walk staring over the wall into the surrounding jungle, thick, dark and

dank, that seemed about to advance across the little clearing, some forty yards in width—studded with thousands of little bamboo stakes, hardened by boiling in castor-oil, and sharpened to a knife-like point—that lay about three walls of the fort.

Not a sign of a human being.

I thought of the heliograph. It was just possible that I could get a reply if I flashed it long enough.

Climbing, by way of the inside staircase, to the heliograph platform on the roof of the high watch-tower, I found that it had been smashed. What surprised me was the fact that the tricolour had been left flying, or rather, drooping, from its mast.

Uncoiling the halyard from the cleat at the mast-foot, I raised and lowered the flag many times. Should any far-distant telescope trained upon it, see this movement of the flag, it would be known that something was wrong at the fort of Houi-Ninh.

I could do nothing more in that way, and I must get to work.

For the next hour or two I laboured like a horse between shafts, seizing the feet of each dead dacoit and dragging him behind me, through the gate, and out across the clearing into the jungle.

This work was not as difficult as it was horrible; and, before long, I had cleared the fort of the bodies of its invaders.

This done, I shut the big iron-wood gates and dropped the steel bar into place. I had had some compunction about opening these, but as the enemy had completely departed, it seemed safe to do so; and, in any case, if there were another attack upon the place, it would be completely impossible for me to hope to defend it alone. In these days of machine-guns, rifle-grenades, and "pineapple" bombs thrown by hand, one *légionnaire* might do a good deal from a fort wall, against such an enemy. But, at that time, it would have been merely a case of a man with a rifle and bayonet against hundreds, perhaps thousands, equally well-armed. So it really mattered little whether the gates were open or shut.

I then, wearing only my boots and a pair of cotton shorts, began to dig. Fortunately the ground inside the fort was soft; and, by swinging mightily with a pick, and then putting my back into it with the long-handled French army shovel, I made good progress.

Had I had unlimited time, I would have dug a grave for each of my comrades. As it was, I should have to be content to dig one big grave six feet wide and long enough to take them all—in three or four tiers.

With intervals for rest and food, I worked all day, in spite of the heat and a splitting headache; for I had a great feeling of urgency, apart from the fact that, in that climate, the sooner burial follows death, the better. Unless I did this I could not

possibly stay in the fort, and I could not drag my comrades out to be devoured by vultures and wild beasts.

I must undoubtedly have had a pretty savage clout on the head, for I distinctly remember that, at one time, when throwing heavy spadefuls of earth up out of the deepening grave, I thought I was on the slag-laden lighter in Valparaiso harbour; that lighter in which I had done the hardest and heaviest labour that I ever did in my life, shovelling the slag, heavy as lead, into great baskets for the ballasting of the ship *Valkyrie*. I also remember thinking that the vultures that settled on the walls of the fort, and eyed me, were the men of my Watch who, instead of helping with the cruel, heavy work, took a spell and loafed—watching.

It was well for me that I was strong beyond the ordinary and inured to the hardest of labour.

That evening I rested for a couple of hours, and then began work again, closing my ears, as I did so, to the sounds that came across the clearing, from where leopards and other wild beasts disputed over the bodies of the slain dacoits.

By moonlight I buried my comrades, carrying each to the edge of the grave, lifting him down into it, and disposing him as well as I could.

It is not a night that I willingly look back upon; but I am glad that I did what I did, my only regret being that I had to place them all in the one grave, row upon row, like sardines in a box.

When I had finished, and filled the grave in, I carried stones and laid them in an oblong upon the tamped earth. In the midst of the stones I planted a rough cross, formed by nailing a length of packing-case to a wooden post; and on the short arm of the cross I printed, as neatly as I could, with indelible pencil, the usual

Morts sur le Champ d'Honneur.

And on the upright of the cross I wrote their names.

Well, I had done my best, and if France cared to do better, she would have the opportunity.

§3

My work finished, I threw myself down on my string-and-frame bed and instantly fell asleep. I had intended to think out the problem of my line of conduct, and decide what should be my next step; but I must have been asleep by the time my head touched the bag of straw that was my pillow.

When I awoke it was evening. I had slept all day. Going out into the court-yard

and walking round the fort, I realized that nothing had happened.

There was the tidy grave as I had left it. There were the little heaps of kerosene-soaked torches lying on the cat-walk beneath each embrasure of the wall, just as they had been left, all ready for use at night. The bamboo ladders were in place, and so far as I could see, neither man, beast nor bird had crossed the wall.

Having climbed the cat-walk and slowly circumambulated the fort, carefully studying the green wall of the jungle as I did so, I returned to the *chambrée* for a meal.

As I boiled the water for my coffee, I realized that I must come to a decision and stick to it.

Once I had made up my mind, there must be no shilly-shallying; and I must make it up soon.

I must decide whether to go or to stay.

My earliest inclination had been towards the former course.

Certainly I must stay, otherwise what should I be doing but deserting my post?

That, at first, seemed obvious. Just as the garrison of yesterday would have remained where they were and defended the fort to the last, so must I. The principle was the same, whether the garrison consisted of a hundred men or of one.

But would Lieutenant Jacot, had he known what was happening, have remained here, in view of the fact that all three outposts on the far side of the Meh-Song River must be cut off, and were of necessity abandoned to their fate, by reason of the fact that big rebel armies were between them and their base?

Since the little outposts must inevitably go, need their tiny garrisons perish with them?

I came to the conclusion that, had it been possible to withdraw and retire, he would have done so.

Once we were surrounded by a hundred times our number, he had no choice but to remain.

My position was different. The siege was raised; the enemy gone; and I, a single individual, might very well be able to make my way back along the route by which the *compagnie de marche* had come from Houi-Bap, should I decide to do so.

And what good could I do by remaining? Obviously I couldn't defend the place. And though fine phrases about Keeping the Flag Flying and Defending the Place to the Last sounded very well, the flag would fly by itself all-right, and I couldn't defend the place for five seconds if the returning hordes attacked it.

Nor would anything be gained by giving the impression that the place was once more fully garrisoned. Even if the ruse were successful, it would not impress the

Black Flags in the least. They knew perfectly well that they could take the place, as they had done before, by sheer weight of numbers; and the question of the strength of the defending force would not interest them in the least.

No; one man could do nothing at all in Fort Houi-Ninh. He would be absolutely useless.

If I stayed, I should be completely idle and worthless if the place were not attacked, and promptly killed if it were.

And there was another consideration. If I stayed there alone in that haunted place, I should go mad.

Summing up the pros and cons, I came to the conclusion that the sensible thing to do was to go where both I and my information would be of some value, and not to remain where both would be perfectly useless.

The decision made, I started to put it into execution.

I would rest until my head felt better, eat and drink plentifully of what provisions the looters had not taken or destroyed, and regain strength for the long march that I was going to undertake to rejoin my Company at Houi-Bap, if I might do so.

I could there give an account of what had happened on the far side of the Meh-Song River, and resume my place in my Company. . . .

Having rested, I would tidy the place thoroughly, leave it all ship-shape, lock up and fasten the gates, let myself down over the wall, and march off.

Unfortunately I could not do so with the honours of war, carrying arms, drums beating, and flags flying. I had no arms to carry, the dacoits having, of course, taken every rifle and bayonet with them. There was no one to beat the drum; the honours were doubtful, as my side had been defeated; and the only comfort was that the flag still flew over the fort.

And, curiously enough, it was a real comfort. It seemed to promise that we should return, and that my comrades, advance-guard in the Army of Civilization, would not have died in vain.

Apart from the fact of being unarmed in enemy country, and passing through a jungle swarming with dangerous beasts and more dangerous savages, it was extraordinary how lost I felt without my rifle. I really think I could have marched better with my right hand occupied and encumbered with its familiar weight.

On the other hand, I was for the first time in my marching experience, glad of heavy extra weight—that of food—as, before lowering myself and dropping from the fort wall, I had thrown over as many tins of meat and sardines, and as much biscuit as I thought I could carry in addition to the mass of cold boiled rice with which I had stuffed a haversack to bursting.

I had also filled a couple of *bidons* with half a gallon of wine. Of water there would be no lack.

It was a nightmare march. Time after time I was terrified almost to death, especially in the hours of darkness when unseen forms moved about me in the jungle; when I heard the sound of following feet; when twigs cracked under the weight of approaching man or animal; when I saw the gleam of twin orbs and momentarily expected to be smashed to the ground by a springing leopard.

By day things were not so bad. Time after time I dived from the track into dense jungle, and lay hidden, as parties of men who might have been villagers, pirates, wayfaring pedlars, dacoits, scouts, brigands or wandering Chinese soldiers, came in sight.

Over the greatest fright of all, I still smile.

One morning I awoke, stiff, aching, foot-sore and miserable, from a short dawn sleep among the roots of a great tree.

Rising to my feet, I was about to force my way through the undergrowth on to the path, when I was alarmed by a most terrific crashing clatter. It was so near, so loud and so intimidating that my heart stood still. It was a strange noise too, for I had heard nothing quite like it, and could assign it to no known and reasonable cause. It was almost as though all the slates were falling off a house on to the stones of a court-yard—which was a quite impossible phenomenon in that uninhabited green hell. It was as though coolies on a ship were slinging stacks of crockery down on to a quay, which was equally absurd. It was as though a thousand small boys were shattering cakes of toffee with hammers, an improbable event in the heart of the Annamese jungle. And the sound seemed to come from all round.

Hastening to escape, I came upon the cause of it. Two gigantic tortoises were fighting on the path.

Really, a dozen men armed with swords and shields could hardly have made more noise. With the anger of fright I cursed the beasts from the bottom of my heart. They were not noticeably affected thereby.

And one day I heard distant rifle-fire. Not only the sustained din, rising and falling, of independent firing, but the regular crashes of the *tir de salve* or volleys; and knew that I was within a short distance of French troops.

Scouting forward with the utmost care, I found, to my unspeakable joy, that a *compagnie de marche* of *Tirailleurs Tonkinois* was skirmishing with a band of Black Flags into whom they had bumped on patrol.

Luckily for me, I was on the flank of the Black Flag force, and could make my

way past them to within shouting-distance of the opposite flank of the French firing line.

Luckily also, I was in full Legion uniform, otherwise I should have run an excellent chance of being shot by my own side.

A French non-commissioned officer of *Tirailleurs Tonkinois* having briefly questioned me, took me to his officer who, having heard my story, offered me his congratulations on my escape, it having been assumed at Houi-Bap that there were no survivors of the three forts on the far side of the Meh-Song River.

To my great pleasure, my friend *Doi* Linh Nghi was on this patrol, his task being the gathering of information from the villagers. These could be divided into two classes, those who feared the French more than they did the Annamese General, De-Nam; and those who feared the Annamese General De-Nam more than they did the French authorities.

Of the former but few were left alive in this area; and of those who were, the majority were homeless fugitives. It was from these that the *Doi* got his information concerning the movements of the rebel parties.

Those whose terror of General De-Nam was greater than their fear of us, had saved their lives and their villages, by giving the rebels every assistance in their power; rightly arguing that, whatever punishment the French might inflict upon them for this, it would not be wholesale slaughter after hideous torture.

Some of the sights I saw in the villages that had not been amenable to the dacoit leader were horrible beyond telling. I did not imagine that human beings could be such bestial brutish devils as those must have been who had so tortured and mutilated the victims they were about to murder.

The principal leader of the band operating in this particular part of the country was a former *ly-truong*, or sub-prefect, named De-Nha of whom much more anon.

With the patrol I returned to Houi-Bap, reported to Captain Bonnier of my Company, and was taken before the Officer Commanding the garrison, now a small Brigade consisting of a battalion of the Legion; a battalion of *Tirailleurs Tonkinois*; a mixed battalion of the Biff, as we called the French regular troops of the line; a company of *Infanterie de Marine*; and a battery of mountain artillery.

Somewhat to my relief, this officer took the view that I had done a sensible thing in endeavouring to rejoin my Company, and that it would have been merely foolish to sit down and do nothing in an empty and abandoned fort until I starved to death, went mad, or died of fever.

In point of fact, he said, orders had been sent to the officers commanding all

three posts, to blow them up and retire, but the orders had never reached them. So swift and sudden had been the incursion of the Chinese bands, the assembling of General De-Nam's pirates and dacoits, and the universal uprising of the "pacified" districts, that all patrols, pickets, and outposts had been cut off and destroyed.

Being an emaciated fever-stricken wreck, a poor pitiable object, looking far worse than I felt, I was sent to hospital and then put on light duty.

CHAPTER IV

It was at about this time that I had the good or bad fortune to come in contact with the famous Captain Deleuze, *doyen* of the Military Intelligence Service in Indo-China. . . .

One day I was talking to my Annamese friend, the *Doi* Linh Nghi, at the door of his hut, in the street of the village of Houi-Bap, that had grown up in the vicinity of the Fort of the same name. The *Doi* was seated cross-legged on the ground.

Suddenly he sprang to his feet and saluted, as a shadow passed across us. Looking round, I saw that an officer, in Legion khaki, somewhat stained, was standing, apparently listening to our conversation.

He was a small, dark, rather sallow-faced man, about whom there was nothing remarkable—with the exception of his eyes. These were extraordinarily bright, clear, and piercing; save when, deliberately, he made them appear dull and lifeless, a thing that, apparently, he could do at will.

What it was about his eyes that gave this impression and expression of alertness, watchfulness and penetration, I do not know; but it was probably partly due to the fact that the iris was curiously pale, varying from a kind of Cambridge blue to an indescribable light hue that was scarcely any colour at all.

When he spoke, one noticed another peculiarity, his voice being extraordinarily soft, low, and quiet, but at the same time perfectly audible. I believe that I never failed to hear what he said to me, and yet it seemed that he always whispered.

Save for these two slight peculiarities, he was in appearance most ordinary and insignificant, a man to whom one would not give a second glance or second thought, unless it were to wonder how so completely commonplace a person, one so lacking in presence, distinction and soldierly appearance and carriage, should have been an officer at all.

But not only was Captain Deleuze an officer, he was a very fine one indeed, one of the best in the French army of his day, and worth almost a Brigade to the General commanding the army of Indo-China.

I sprang to attention and saluted him.

"Ah!" he whispered in French with a quiet smile, "plotting great things with a Sergeant of Annamese *Tirailleurs*, are you? What language were you talking?"

"His, *mon Capitaine*."

"So I thought; and that is as it should be. Why shouldn't every soldier of France, serving in Tonking, learn the language and talk it to *les indigènes* instead of letting them grunt horrible 'pidgin' French at them? I suppose you never allow the Sergeant

to talk French to you, do you?"

"*Oui, mon Capitaine*, I do. It is part of the bargain. He teaches me Annamese, and I'm teaching him French."

"Ah! There's some sense in that. Teaching him proper, grammatical, French, are you? And he is teaching you proper, grammatical, Annamese?"

"*Oui, mon Capitaine*. That is how it goes. He wishes to qualify as an Interpreter."

Captain Deleuze smiled.

"Oh. He does, does he?"

I did not then know that the *Doi* was a very valuable agent, assistant and spy in the service of Captain Deleuze.

"And are you learning to use the honorific as well as the ordinary? Can you handle the *tao* and *toi* properly?" he asked.

"I am learning, *mon Capitaine*, though it's a difficult language, as, apparently, there is no grammar, not to mention an alphabet."

Captain Deleuze smiled again.

"I know," he said.

So did I, for, until recently, I had been very dissatisfied with my progress, finding the Annamese language infinitely more difficult than Arabic. This is not remarkable, inasmuch as it is, like Chinese, made up of an enormous number of small noises, groups of which contain sounds so like each other that it takes not only training, but very careful attention, to distinguish any difference between them.

Time after time, for example, *Doi* Linh Nghi would say to me,

"No, I didn't say *binh*. Listen; I said *binh*," apparently making precisely the same sound. Or,

"No, you are saying *adhow di*, whereas you mean *adhow di*," or,

"If you mean 'peasant', 'countryman', the word is *nhaque* not *nhaque*. Understand?"

No, I didn't understand. I simply could not hear any difference, and at times I despaired of ever speaking Annamese correctly.

This very day, just before Captain Deleuze had spoken to me, *Doi* Linh Nghi had just insisted that if I thought I was using the word 'home,' I had better say *phteah*, and not make the barbarous noise, something like *phteah*, which I had just uttered. . . .

"Tell me. Of what nationality are you?" asked Captain Deleuze, addressing me in Annamese, and properly referring to himself as *tao*, the form appropriate to a superior addressing an inferior.

"Give me some account of your life up to the time you joined the Legion," he continued in Annamese.

I replied to the best of my ability in the same language, and using the *toi* self-reference which is correct when an inferior addresses a superior.

"Why, that's pretty good. That marches," he said, when I had finished. "Positively fluent. Are you a student of languages?"

"No, *mon Capitaine*," I replied. "I can pass for an Arab, and have done so in the sacred city of Mecca; and I can speak French quite fluently. I know no other languages."

"Well, you are on the high road to knowing Annamese, *mon enfant*; and with English, French, Arabic and Annamese to your credit, I think we could do something with you. Yes. Positively I almost think we could nearly do something with you. . . . Meet me here at this time to-morrow evening."

And turning on his heel as I saluted, he passed along on his way to the Fort.

On the following evening, being off duty, I strolled down to *Doi* Linh Nghi's reed-thatched *caigna* for my usual hour's Annamese conversation-lesson, sitting and chatting while an aged hag (who was not his wife), perhaps his girl-friend and perhaps his mother, cooked his rice, which, with dried fish and green local vegetables, she would bring him on a brass platter, with perhaps a handful of fresh-water prawns on a banana leaf.

This *Doi* Linh Nghi would eat while we talked, a thing that at first surprised me, as I was under the impression that no "native", be his religion what it might, cared to sit and eat in the presence of a person of some other race and creed.

Nevertheless, this he would do without the slightest embarrassment, ceasing not to talk as he shovelled the food into his somewhat capacious mouth, a feature whose natural ugliness was not improved by its interior decoration of black-lacquered teeth.

Of all things in the Annamese Heaven above, on the Annamese earth beneath, and in the waters under the earth, we talked, not forgetting local politics, military information and mis-information, and the state of the country.

Fast as we talked, and interested in our subject as we might be, *Doi* Linh Nghi never forgot to pull me up and correct me when I made a mistake in pronunciation.

When he had finished dinner, the flat-faced, slant-eyed, good-hearted and evil-looking little chap would say,

"*Et maintenant nous parlerons Français, Monsieur le Légionnaire Dhysaht*. You belong teach me speakee all the same Frenchman. But what good I suppose you do that, when you belong different *Nais*?"

Thus he would relapse into the horrible broken French which is to that language what the Gold Coast 'pidgin' English of Sidi boys and the traders' house-servants is to the English language.

And his heart was really in his linguistic studies, just in the way that mine was, for he had a great desire to learn the French language thoroughly and to rise in the world. Before long he would, nevertheless, bid his lady-friend, mother or maiden aunt to bring out his *sahat*, his rice-straw mat, and on this he would stretch himself at full length.

An idea would then occur to him—the same idea at the same moment, every night of his life—and he would ask the aged lady if she could see anything of a wooden tray inside there in the *phteah*; a tray on which was a lamp, a bowl, a silver skewer, a little box and, in point of fact, what you might call something like an opium pipe. Yes, and probably she might find his pillow knocking around somewhere near the tray.

And always she would find these things exactly as he described them, the pillow being nothing more nor less than a shaped block of blue china-ware—solid, hard, shiny blue china—ornamented, believe me or believe me not, with a neat linen frill tied about it. Later, I saw many of these amazing china pillows, thus enclosed in a frilled pillow-case, their angularities and asperities proclaiming themselves at the corners.

"I think I'll have a puff or two of the black smoke," observed *Doi* Linh Nghi as usual, this evening.

"I'm sure you will," said I.

And he picked up the opium pipe, a thing some twenty to thirty inches long and a couple of inches thick, one end covered by a silver cap, the other having a jade mouthpiece far too large to go into the mouth, and in the middle of it, a small hole through which the smoke was drawn. A quarter of the way up the stem was the pipe bowl, a large silver receptacle completely covered in, save for a hole, in diameter no bigger than that of a large needle. On top of this hole, the burning pill of opium rested, and through the hole, the smoke was sucked down into the bowl, along the stem, and through the mouth-piece into the mouth and lungs of the consumer.

First, *Doi* Linh Nghi lit the lamp, opened the silver box, and, taking the little silver skewer, collected on the point of it a small lump of the thick heavy opium, semi-liquid in consistency, and dark brown in colour.

This he passed through the little flame of the lamp so that it bubbled and thickened, when he dipped it again into the box and collected more opium upon it.

Having done this, half a dozen times, he had got enough opium for a pipe-

smoke. He then put the pipe into his mouth, warmed the upper surface of the pipe-bowl in the flame, placed the opium over the hole in the bowl-cover and held it above the flame. The opium sizzled and burned, and *Doi* Linh Nghi sucked strongly at the mouthpiece, inhaling the whole of the smoke so that none escaped even from the bowl, into the circumambient air.

When he could inflate his chest no longer, and must cease to draw, he puffed for a brief space as does an ordinary tobacco-smoker, smoking quickly.

The opium being all consumed, he laid the pipe down upon his mat and gently and slowly exhaled the black smoke from his lungs.

Watching it float upwards, dark, heavy and opaque, he heaved a tremendous sigh of utter content and grunted,

"*Biet! Meh! Biet!* . . . Ah, that is good."

And a great peace and silence fell upon him.

The silence was broken by the sound of a foot-step, and looking up, I saw a dirty little Annamese *nhaque* approaching, wearing on his *chignon* a little turban surmounted by a lacquered *sakalo*, a round flat hat made of bamboo, and shaped somewhat like an inverted plate, but coming to a point in the centre. He also wore a dirty cotton vest and short trousers or long knickerbockers, such as are worn by the Muong tribesmen.

This strange little man, shuffling near, stood and stared at the opium-drugged *Doi* Linh Nghi with lacklustre eyes, his half-open mouth exposing teeth apparently carved from polished ebony.

"*Kamm môk phdâl!*" he murmured, and subconsciously I repeated his observation in the common Arabic phrase *Mektoub rebib*—It is written and will come to pass. "He must follow his Fate and act according to his Karma."

"Opium!" he added. "Smoking opium. Now he's happy. But he will die of smoking opium."

"*Sday er chéat mûy*," I observed sapiently. "One can only die once."

"*Kamm môk phdâl*," countered the coolie, who seemed to have no other conversational gambit; and the *Doi* snubbing him and showing off, repeated this in unexpectedly accurate French.

"*Le Karma se réalise.*"

"He's wandering in his mind already," observed the coolie censoriously.

"And who might you be, fellow, that you speak to a white soldier and to a Sergeant of *Tirailleurs Tonkinois*?" I said, speaking *de haut en bas*, further to practise my Annamese.

The *nhaque* grinned foolishly.

“Me?” he said. “Me? I am a plainsman.”

“Well, I can see that, you black-toothed yokel,” I replied politely. “And hear it too, for your voice is as ugly as that of the rain-bird—or of a horn-bill, for that matter. Do you suppose I take you for a *tho*?”

Again the man grinned foolishly.

“I am a plainsman,” said he.

“You don’t say!” said I.

“Oh yes I am, and the Lu Thuong of Phulang-Nguyen sent me here to see if the *linhtap lanxa* had gone away yet.”

“Oh, the Headman of Phulang-Nguyen sent you to see whether the French soldiers had gone away, did he? Why does he want to know?”

“Fruit and vegetables,” was the reply. “He’s not going to send us down here with them if the *Ong-quang-Ba*,[1] the Lord of Three Stripes, has taken the *linhtap lanxa* away.”

“I see. And has he distilled any *choum-choum* to sell to the *linhtap lanxa*?”

“Oh no,” grinned the yokel. “He’d never do that, or the Lord of Three Stripes would give him more than three stripes. He! he!”

And thus we discoursed on high important matters; I discovering that I could understand all the coolie said, and, what was more pleasing, that he obviously understood all I said to him.

By and by, *Doi* Linh Nghi bestirred himself and prepared another pipe.

Watching him with idle stupid eyes, his face vacant, his mouth hanging open, the peasant was deeply interested and apparently envious.

Again we talked.

Again *Doi* Linh Nghi prepared a pipe and smoked it.

And several times again.

Whereafter, remarking in perfect English,

“Well, if that lad has another, I’ll say he’s doing himself too well, in the opium line,” the coolie rose to his feet.

“Not at all bad, Dysart,” he continued. “Not at all bad—for both of us. You didn’t spot me, did you?”

“No, Sir, I certainly didn’t,” I replied, nearly as open-mouthed as the late coolie, now Captain Deleuze, had himself but recently been. It was a wonderful piece of acting and a marvellous make-up, for not only had it deceived me, but had completely taken in the experienced and oft-deceived Sergeant Linh Nghi of the *Tirailleurs Tonkinois*—himself a *tho* mountaineer from the Tam-Dao highlands of Thai-Nguyen in the west.

This was the beginning of my connection with Captain Deleuze, for, from this day, started my long and absorbingly interesting service under this remarkable man.

Among his other great abilities, gifts and accomplishments was a very high degree of skill in the art of military topography, for every form of sketching, surveying and map-making was as easy to him as the writing of a report. And not only had he a wonderful eye and artistic gift, but his draughtsmanship was that of a professional, being as accurate as it was neat.

In this extremely useful art, he later trained me with great care, taking me out on reconnoitring expeditions, and each time showing me how to make a *topo*, both of the journey and of its objective.

But here I am running ahead too fast, as it was some time before I was seconded, nominally as his batman, and lent to him for Intelligence work.

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[1] *Captain.*

§2

I do not know whether it was because I was an Englishman that Captain Deleuze first took to me. Of the British he was a great admirer, and he had a very high opinion of our Secret Service and of the efficiency of our army generally.

Having questioned me and discovered that I had served in the Life Guards, he was interested at once; and more so when he knew that I had not only been a sailor, but had lived as an Arab among Arabs in Morocco and Arabia, and had actually made the Pilgrimage to Mecca. He seemed to think that the fact that I could, in such surroundings and circumstances, pass as an Arab, showed that I had a great natural aptitude for native languages, and for disguising myself as a native, too.

Having got me put on special duty under him for study of Annamese; of military surveying, map-drawing and map-reading, he made something of a friend of me, treated me in private as an equal, and talked very freely of his ambition, both for himself and his country, in Tonking; of the history and geography of Indo-China; of its ethnology; and particularly of the French connection with the country since 1585 when a Jesuit Father, Georges de la Mothe, established missions, churches and schools throughout the Delta of the Mekong River; of the French campaign which began in 1867; and which, flaring up from time to time, had been active again ever since 1886—so active that, as recently as 1892, Hanoi, the capital itself, had been captured, sacked, and partly burned by an army of Annamese aided by Chinese

irregulars.

He also told me a thing which surprised me—and he was in possession of the most accurate information—that in 1883, 1884 and 1885 alone, over fifteen thousand of the best troops of France had died in Tonking.

One evening, when I reported as usual at Captain Deleuze's office room, I found him seated at his desk with an array of saucers of paint, brushes, wigs, crêpe-hair and spirit-gum—in fact a complete actor's make-up outfit. Beside him on the floor lay a small and varied heap of native clothing and weapons, *panaungs*, *pasinns*,[1] *sakalos*, sashes, turbans and such.

"Well, my lad, I'm going to turn you into a damn great ugly Chinese thug. We'll start by painting you yellow. Then touch up your eyebrows with a razor and black paint, doctor your eyelids with gelatine, and fake the corners with some glue. . . . I'll show you. . . . Give you a long straggling moustache, I think . . . and a pig-tailed wig, of course. . . . Or I wonder if you'd look better as a *poogni* in canary-yellow robes, with a begging-bowl. . . . How would you like to have your head shaven? Nice and cool, anyway. . . ."

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[1] *Lengths of coloured cloth draped about the body.*

§3

Both in my study of Annamese, and my practice in disguise and the pursuance of correct behaviour appropriate to that disguise, I contrived to make progress which satisfied Captain Deleuze.

On several occasions he permitted me to accompany him when he made excursions to neighbouring towns and villages or up the Red River, himself disguised as an Annamese lowlander, a pedlar, a priest, a dacoit, a coolie, a camp-follower, a shop-keeper, a railway contractor, a café servant; as a seller of carved wooden models and toys and figures modelled in clay and split bamboo; as whatever was useful in the attainment of his purpose—observation, verification, personal communication with his spies, and the collection of information.

On the occasions when I accompanied him, I myself, owing to my height and bulk, always went in the rôle of a Chinese tough, a truculent ruffian who earned his living as a "strong-arm man", personal body-guard and bully; a rôle for which Captain Deleuze unkindly informed me I was admirably fitted by my appearance, if

not actually so intended by Nature.

Certainly I could use my fists, and, upon more than one occasion, had to do so, to the utter amazement as well as discomfiture of aggressive and truculent persons who were either over-inquisitive or disposed to be arbitrary, high-handed and interfering.

With us went the admirable *Doi* Linh Nghi and the half-dozen members of his Section whom we called his family, they being, in point of fact, brothers or near kinsmen of his, from the same Highland village of the district whence came the admirable *thois* who are to the French what the Gurkhas are to the British.

Our most ambitious effort in the guise of wandering *budmashes*, rag-tag-and-bobtail jungle-ruffians, was a visit to the camp of the famous Luu-Ky himself, a Chinese brigand-leader who was harrying the railway under construction from Phulang-Thuong to Lang-son; swooping down and slaughtering working-parties; actually carrying off French engineers for ransom or torture; ambushing convoys going by road to Lang-son; and generally making himself a thorough nuisance. During the week before our visit to his camp, he had suddenly rushed the escort of an ammunition-column, captured twenty-five cases of Lebel rifles, and ten thousand rounds of ammunition, killed Commandant Bonneau of the *Infanterie de Marine*, and after mutilation, had crucified, upside-down on trees, all who fell into his hands.

He had also captured a prominent railway engineer named Gautrin, and notified General Voyron that, unless a ransom of one hundred thousand silver dollars was paid for him within a week, his ears would be forwarded; within a fortnight, his hands; within three weeks, his feet; and at the end of the month, his head. . . .

Our visit was a great success, for we learned that, in the attack on the convoy, Luu-Ky had been wounded, that the wound was doing very badly, and that he was unlikely to recover. On the strength of Captain Deleuze's report, Luu-Ky's hitherto amazingly mobile force was surrounded, attacked, and handled so severely that it practically ceased to exist.

§4

Captain Deleuze next turned his attention to a dacoit leader who was making himself extremely active in the vicinity of Houi-Bap, collecting revenue for General De-Nam from villages not more than a few days' march from our Brigade Headquarters.

This was that previously-mentioned brute, De-Nha, concerning whom *Doi* Linh Nghi had already gathered information, a former sub-prefect under the Emperor

Ham Nghi, and now an officer in General De-Nam's rebel army.

According to information, he was prominent in, if not at the head of, General De-Nam's intelligence department, and was a man of great ability, considerable activity, and most devilish ingenuity in obtaining both information and subsidies from the wretched villagers in what was officially termed the Pacified Zone.

Concerning this man and his movements, Captain Deleuze gave me all the information he had; and then, himself being unable to leave Headquarters, offered me no less an opportunity and task than the capture of this redoubtable villain.

"Since he has had the courage to venture so near to the jaws of the apparently sleeping tiger, we'll let them take a snap at him, eh, my son? Show him whether the French tiger is alive or dead, asleep or awake. . . . What about it?"

CHAPTER V

"Well, there you are, S.N.B.D., *mon enfant*; Sin-bad, *le grand pêcheur*. Let's see what sort of a mess you can make of it. Don't bungle it wholly, as it's rather important. Your orders are to *get* him. Alive or dead. Preferably very much alive. Far preferably. Use what brains you've got; make your own arrangements; and tell me afterwards exactly what you did and why—and how your plans mis-carried. Take that Annamese, *Doi* Linh Nghi, and let him take whom else he wants. Leave that to him—so long as he understands it is rather a kidnapping than a raid. I should think half a dozen of you would be ample. Any questions?"

"No, Sir. I think not. . . . Alive or dead. Preferably alive. If I am successful, well and good. If I fail . . ."

"If you fail, I know nothing about you. You are absolutely repudiated," smiled Deleuze.

"By the way," he continued, "don't get caught there. And if you do, don't squeal. But you won't do that, I know. Nor would the *Doi* Linh Nghi. There is absolutely no torture on earth that would get anything out of those chaps, once they have decided that they won't utter. . . . And the men he takes with him won't know anything, and wouldn't talk if they did."

That evening I slipped out from Deleuze's quarters, looking, I flattered myself, an extremely convincing brigand. Just the type of burly ruffian that might have been a mandarin's kept bully, or leader of a gang of jungle banditti.

Making my way as unobtrusively as possible to *Doi* Linh Nghi's hut, I found him awaiting me, the only outward and physical signs of his military profession being his rifle, belt and cartridge pouch. At his left side hung a naked *mâchète*. For the rest, he looked the part he was about to play, and a regular jungle dacoit.

With a low laugh and a quiet greeting he led the way to where, in the dark shadows of the trees at the end of the row of thatched *caignas*, lounged a small group of men.

As we approached, these instinctively straightened up; and when we joined them, fell into line, ordered arms, came to attention and stood as rigid as though on parade.

Doi Linh Nghi swore, and I made a mental note to learn the oath, for it sounded good to me.

"Look at them," he said. "Why, the buffaloes, the crocodiles, the coolies, the women! And I chose them for intelligence and because they are relations of mine. Look at the mud-fish. They look more like policemen than dacoits, don't they?

Dragons tear their entrails!"

"Stand at ease, you worms. Stand easy, you maggots. Stand anyhow, you ticks."

And in low but definitely persuasive voice, the *Doi* Linh Nghi bade them forget that they were soldiers—not that they really were what he would call soldiers—and to remember that they were *yak*, pirates, Black Flags, jungle devils—and act accordingly.

Grinning cheerily, the Gurkha-like *tirailleurs* endeavoured to obey as we set off, *Doi* Linh Nghi leading, I behind him, and the rest following, silent as shadows, in single file.

At first, our road lay across miles of narrow ridges, those difficult and heart-breaking paths that run between the endless flooded paddy-fields.

Marching by way of these paddy-bunds is trying enough by daylight, especially if one is not at, or near, the head of the file. For the little low dams are of soft earth, and by the time a few feet have trodden this, it has become softer and softer and quickly turns to mud, and the causeway deteriorates and degenerates into semi-liquid slush. It is almost impossible for a number of men to follow each other quickly along one of these crumbling bunds, as those at the end of the line, endeavouring to keep up, are soon slipping and sliding, when not actually floundering in the water that covers the rice. At night, it is of course ten times as difficult to keep on the narrow ridges serving as paths.

It was both fortunate and unfortunate that the night was pitch dark, for, while it aided concealment, it made progress extremely slow, and increased not only the danger of our losing our way, but of losing each other.

This last danger, however, I obviated by ordering each man to "catch hold of the tail of the monkey in front", a most feeble jest extremely well received.

Thus, groping blindly through the darkness, we must have covered about a couple of miles every hour.

Personally, I was glad when we reached the jungle, because pitch-black as the night was, it was really no darker than it had been out in the paddy-fields; for there had been no sign whatever of moon or stars, our only help being the occasional flash of lightning which showed *Doi* Linh Nghi where we were.

Though in no wise, and in no slightest degree, braver than other average people, I am, nevertheless, not what you would call a nervous person; but I freely confess to detesting the jungle at night, particularly on a pitch-black one. Whenever it has been my misfortune to make a night march alone through the jungle, I have always found my imagination far too active, doing its best to persuade me that I am being followed by a silent-footed savage whose knife or sword, spear or arrow, I may, at any

moment, receive between my shoulder-blades; that at the next step I shall plunge headlong into the hole dug in the jungle path as a trap for big game; that a tiger or a panther is keeping pace with me close by, stopping when I stop, going on when I go on, and awaiting an inviting opportunity to spring. . . . That sort of thing.

So that on this occasion, in spite of the slight extra noise inseparable from the company of seven other people, I was very glad that these born jungle men were with me.

As we made better progress, owing to the improvement in the quality of the path, I wondered whether it could be true that *Doi* Linh Nghi could, as he professed, see in the dark, or, at any rate, see very much better than a European can. It certainly seemed so, for although our pace improved, we never left the path or ran into any obstacle. Before long, the question that had been exercising my mind —as to whether such little noise as we made might be heard by the rebel scouts, pickets or patrols—ceased to trouble me, for the occasional flashes of lightning gave way to a really tremendous thunderstorm.

Suddenly the black veil of night was rent by a most brilliant flash of lightning, which seemed to pass across our immediate front—illuminating the jungle and imprinting upon my mind an unforgettable picture of mighty tree and enormous creeper, lofty palm and graceful bamboo—immediately followed by a crashing earth-shaking peal of thunder that was literally deafening. All to the good, until the torrential rain that followed turned the jungle path to a ditch, and our hot perspiring selves to shivering teeth-chattering miseries.

For at least three hours more we splashed along, our way lit by lightning, our approach unseen, unheard, and unknown.

One thing was certain—no warrior of the rebel army would consider it right or reasonable of his Commanding Officer to expect him to operate on a night like this. It was no part of his military duty to face the fiends and devils, the ghosts and *peis* which, as anybody knows, arise and disport themselves on occasions of nocturnal thunderstorms, roaring up and down the jungle, seeking whom they may devour, and looking particularly for poor harmless banditti, pirates, and dacoits who have a few odd dozen murders, robberies and torturings to their account.

Yes, this terrific storm, unpleasant as it was, and this torrential rain, chill and fever-inducing as it might be, were all to the good. I only hoped it would last until we were into Yen-Trang and out again, our object accomplished.

Suddenly *Doi* Linh Nghi halted so abruptly that I bumped into him. By the light of a flash of lightning he had seen something.

"The village," he whispered, waiting for another lightning flash, and began again

to move forward slowly along the path.

After a while, he halted again, turned aside and forced his way into the undergrowth. In a clearer patch of long grass, brushwood, cactus, saplings, and hibiscus shrubs, he stopped.

"We'll camp here till dawn," he whispered.

'Camping' was a simple process and consisted of squatting, or lying down, in the mud.

With my back against a tree, drenched to the skin, and shivering with cold, I sat; and, in spite of extreme discomfort, in fact, sheer physical misery, I dozed off.

From this doze I suddenly awoke, wondered for a moment where I was, and then realized that I was sitting in the middle of a steaming dripping Annamese jungle, surrounded by half a dozen men as alien to me as human beings could be, about to embark upon a somewhat desperate undertaking, and incidentally serving a foreign power in the Far East; I, who had thought, at one time, to lead a peaceful life as a British sailor; and at another, as an officer in the army of a Moroccan potentate. Seaman, trooper, slave, cavalry instructor, pilgrim to Mecca, French political prisoner. And now a ha'penny-a-day *légionnaire*. *Vogue la galère.* What was I doing in this galley? Nodding, for one thing.

In the jungle something stirred. And the *Doi* Linh Nghi seated himself beside me.

"It's all right," he whispered. "He's there. I've been into the village. Had a talk with a well-beaten *nhaque* whom they've 'taxed' of all he possessed. He doesn't like them much. He won't hinder—if he hasn't the pluck to help. I've left the gate unfastened. No risk. No danger. Not the slightest. All drunk on *choum-choum*, or disgracefully drugged with opium."

"Shameful," I observed, and *Doi* Linh Nghi, opium addict, chuckled.

This was excellent news, and the remarkably fortunate state of affairs would greatly facilitate operations. Not only had Deleuze impressed upon me that this important De-Nha would be much more valuable to him alive than dead, but I had most definite scruples about killing him or encompassing his death. I think I should have felt the same had he been an enemy of England instead of rebel against France, in spite of his horrible record for fiendish cruelty, torture, and murder.

Nor, most definitely, did I want to be killed, much less to fall into the hands of these people.

I shuddered as I thought of some of the revolting soul-shocking sights that I had seen when we had recovered the bodies of our wounded, victims of these fiends.

Doubtless, there again, the tremendous thunderstorm which had lasted with unabated vigour for most of the night, had befriended us, for it was the custom

among the *yak*, Black Flags, river pirates and jungle dacoits, to carouse, drown fear, and give themselves Dutch courage on the occasion of a big storm at night coinciding with some war-like undertaking or predatory excursion.

While probably they would stoutly deny that they were either religious or superstitious, they would be willing to admit that one never knew; that the gods or devils who hurled the thunder-bolts and shook the world with their rumblings and grumblings, their ravings and roarings, might well be inimical, jealous of the prowess of warriors like themselves and of the fame of their leaders.

Anyhow, draughts of potent rice-alcohol and pipes of opium produced not only a joyous and care-free spirit, but a succeeding peace and, eventually, oblivion to din, devildom and danger.

Again I nodded and dozed, and was awakened by *Doi* Linh Nghi shaking me gently.

"Eat and drink, *Nai*," he whispered and, nothing loth, I took my hard-boiled eggs and bread from my haversack, ate them with relish, and took a pull at the cold coffee in my water-bottle. Not a particularly elegant or hearty meal, but how many a time would I not have given all I possessed for such a feast when I was a starving Apprentice in the *Valkyrie*.

By the time I had finished, there was a suggestion of dawn in the sky, and I rose to my feet.

"Hear and heed me," whispered I to my followers. "Load rifles," and each man put a cartridge into the breach of his Gras rifle, carefully licking the bullet with his tongue as he did so—whether for luck or with the idea of facilitating its passage through the barrel and the air, I don't know, though I have frequently seen *légionnaires* do the same thing with each cartridge that they used.

"Rifles in the left hand," I ordered. "Draw *mâchètes*. No man is to fire unless I do. Understand, if any man fires his rifle before I fire mine, I will kill him—and fine him too. We are going into this village and out again, as quickly and quietly as we can; and we are going to bring a man with us. Don't forget. We are dacoits and this is a raid, a *dah*. But without robbery or bloodshed, if we can help it."

I then bade *Doi* Linh Nghi repeat my instructions and give them any further details, orders, and information.

"Listen, Yellow-bellies," he said. "The dogs of brigands are opium-drunk. And if the villagers had the guts of lice they'd cut their throats, for last night the dacoits looted them of everything they couldn't hide. The *lu thuong* doesn't love them any more than he does us. The *nhaques* won't interfere. If anyone tries to do so, flick his nose off with a *mâchète*. No need to be rough, though. But if the people in Yen

Trang all wake up, and do want a fight, they can have it. With *mâchètes*. No shooting, though, until the *linhtap lanxa* here gives the word. Remember and obey, or the bellies of pythons be your graves. Very suitable too. . . . Follow me."

"Yes—and you follow me, *Doi*," I added, damping the spreading fires of his importance; and, taking the lead, I crept in the direction of the village, now dimly visible in the growing light.

Moving slowly and silently, we made our way along the path that we had left during the night, and followed it to where it ended at the gate in the stockade surrounding Yen Trang.

As we approached I saw that this stockade was itself surrounded by a quite considerable moat, covered with lily pads or lotus plants. Across it, the path was carried by a bank of earth. Creeping along this, I found that, as *Doi* Linh Nghi had said, the great ironwood gate was unfastened.

Slowly and gently as I could, I pushed it inward; though, careful as I was, there was a hideous groaning when the clumsily-constructed door moved.

As soon as it was possible, I slipped through the aperture, my heart in my mouth, while I wondered whether I should get a big Snider bullet or a spear in my chest as I did so.

But again the *Doi's* information was accurate. The villagers were not astir, and whatever rebel sentries had been posted had evidently taken refuge from the storm and solace from care.

Save for the yelping of pariah curs and the crowing of a rooster, the place was like a village of the dead.

Before me was an inner wall or barricade of bamboo, thick hedge, and earth-backed wattle. In this, opposite the main gate, was a door of the kind that does not open and shut, but is raised and lowered. It was raised. The knocking-away of a bamboo pole that supported this would cause the heavy door to fall, like a portcullis, and close the second entrance to the village.

Glancing through this, I found I was looking down the main street of Yen Trang, the houses appearing well-built of sun-dried mud, and thatched with reeds, some actually having green chicks or blinds of split bamboo hanging down across their doorways.

"Which *caigna*?" I whispered to the *Doi*, and he answered my question by again taking the lead.

Swiftly, in single file, we went up the street, glancing anxiously from left to right and—speaking for myself, at any rate—with swiftly beating hearts.

Turning a corner, *Doi* Linh Nghi glanced back at me, grinned cheerfully, and

pointed to where, a few metres further on, was a chick-covered doorway in a high wall.

As, unconcernedly, he raised this for me to enter, I wondered precisely how far this expedition would have penetrated into the village of Yen Trang, but for the great thunderstorm and the consequent orgy of its present garrison. It would have been a very different and more gory story—had any of us lived to tell it.

Stepping under the raised chick, I found myself in a tiled *patio* or garden court-yard, in the centre of which was a well, over-hung by a blossoming guava tree.

Round three sides of the courtyard were huts and stables. On the other was a superior house whose neat thatch and split bamboo blinds gave it a curiously smug and urban air. To me it was a most unexpected villa to find inside that savage stockade, planted in the heart of the Cambodian jungle.

Even as I glanced round the court-yard and up at the house, a door opened, and a small fat man came, or rather staggered, forth; a shifty-looking person with a weak chinless face from which depended the longest and thinnest moustache and most stringy straggly beard I have ever beheld.

"*Toi!* Stop!" cried *Doi* Linh Nghi in a harsh stage whisper. "*Adhow di?* Where are you off to?"

The sight of seven desperate-looking ruffians, each with a rifle in one hand and a *mâchète* in the other, appeared to afford this man no surprise whatever.

It was he who afforded the surprise, for, staggering toward me in a drunken fashion, he emitted a piteous groan, collapsed at my feet, grinned amiably, joined his hands, and extended them toward me as though in prayer.

It was not until I observed that one of the extended hands held a cord, which the *Doi* promptly seized and wound about the man's wrists, that I realized that this was the *lu thuong*, the headman, and that the simple villager was acting according to arrangement, playing his artless part in the drama of De-Nha's capture.

With his *mâchète* the *Doi* cut a superfluous end from the cord, and tied together the man's feet. I then witnessed a small example of the curious matter-of-fact cold-bloodedness with which these people are wont to behave, upon occasion; for, pinching up a considerable portion of the *lu thuong's* plump cheek, the *Doi* drew the edge of his *mâchète* across it, making quite a nasty cut, which was promptly followed by the considerable effusion of blood.

Upon this gash the *Doi* pressed his palm and then dabbed it about the man's face until he was a most sanguinary spectacle. Not content with this, he then pulled up the man's cotton sleeve and treated his arm in like manner.

Nor did the *lu thuon*g flinch, much less object, when the sharp *mâchète* was

drawn across the flesh of his biceps.

The whole affair had not occupied more than a minute, but by the time the *Doi* again picked up his rifle, the *lu thuong* was a mess.

Obviously he was a brave man who had put up a strong resistance and suffered severe wounds in the defence, not only of hearth and home but of the rebel officer and spy, De-Nha, for whose safety he was, for the time being, responsible.

With a surprisingly occidental wink, the *lu thuong* groaned as the *Doi*, having admired his handiwork, kicked him in the ribs.

"*De-oh! De-oh!*" moaned the *lu thuong*.

"Is he still in the inner room?" hissed the *Doi*.

"Yes, on the bed, under the mosquito curtain," whispered the *lu thuong* between groans.

"*De-oh! De-oh!*" he wailed. "I am undone."

"Without doubt," replied the *Doi*, adding for his victim's further comfort, "and I'll flick your head off as we come back, if anything goes wrong."

"Hurry up, *Doi*!" I urged nervously. "Come on. . . ."

Leading the way, again, with my heart in my mouth, I raised the bamboo chick, opened the door through which the *lu thuong* had come out, and found myself in a big screened verandah.

Opposite was another door. This proved to open into a passage, on the left side of which was a room.

Glancing in, I saw that this was evidently the inner room to which the *lu thuong* had referred.

Leaving two *tirailleurs* in the court-yard, two in the verandah, and one in the passage, with orders to give warning of danger and to use only their *mâchètes* if attacked, I entered the room, followed by the *Doi* and the other *tirailleurs*.

On the floor lay a brawny and burly Chinese, dressed in felt-soled boots, black trousers and a thin white linen coat. Beside him was a rifle and cartridge pouch, and in his belt a big knife.

Judging from his size and obvious strength, and the fact that he was sleeping across the doorway, I decided that he was De-Nha's personal body-guard, and probably a very useful one, when sober.

On a large wooden couch, under a mosquito curtain, lay the man who must be De-Nha, dressed in a black silk *sarong* and white silk singlet.

His yellow-ivory face was not one that, in any circumstances, would have inspired me with admiration, affection, or confidence.

Beside him lay an opium pipe, and on a little table, close to the bed, the usual

lamp, skewer, and silver box.

"De-Nha, the *ly-truong*," grunted the *Doi* . . . "Shall I cut this fellow's head off?" he added, staring contemptuously at the insensible Chinese.

"What were your orders?" I asked coldly. "Are you sure that the man on the bed is De-Nha?"

"Look at his green silk turban. Look how his hair is rolled. Look at his little finger-nail."

And indeed the nail of the little finger of his left hand was some six inches in length; a revolting sight.

Beside him lay a Winchester repeater and a revolver of the latest American pattern.

"Looks as though we have got to carry him," I said.

The *Doi* snorted.

"Let him carry himself."

"How are you going to wake him?"

"Light a cigarette and stick the red-hot end up his nose. Or I'll shove the point of a knife under his finger-nail."

"Nothing of the sort. Try hauling him off the bed."

And, *con amore*, the *Doi* seized De-Nha by one foot, put his own against the side of the couch and hauled.

A moment later the rebel officer was lying beside his faithless body-guard.

"Up, you dog," growled the *Doi* and planted a most useful kick in the prostrate man's ribs.

On the window-sill stood a porous earthenware water-*chatti* in a state of perspiration.

Seizing this, I inverted it above De-Nha's head, and a stream of cold water splashed down upon him, to the detriment of his white silk vest, as the earth of the floor turned to mud.

With a deep shuddering sigh De-Nha opened his eyes.

"Kill me," he said, and closed them again. Obviously there was no need to fear that this drunk would raise an alarm. He was opium-drugged to the point of insensibility.

And again the *Doi* kicked him heavily in the ribs.

"I wish you wouldn't do that, *Doi* Linh Nghi," said I.

"What did he do to a dozen of our men after the fight at Cao-Lang?" growled the *Doi*. "Fed them—on each other's eyeballs."

"He did, eh? Well, tell him I'll feed you on his, unless he gets up and comes

quietly."

This the *Doi* did. Then, going beyond these instructions, and adding performance to promise, he spat a stream of red betel-nut juice on the man's throat, laid down his rifle, drew a line with his fore-finger across the bare neck and raised his *mâchète*.

"Yes, kill me," smiled De-Nha, and closed his eyes.

This was definitely annoying. The minutes were passing, and I was extremely anxious to go. Also determined to take De-Nha with me, alive.

"We'll drag him," said I.

Promptly the *Doi* seized one of De-Nha's bare feet and signalled to the *tirailleur* to take the other.

"Gag him, tie his hands together behind his back, and then drag him."

The *Doi* snatched the green turban from the man's head, turned him over, wrenched his hands behind him, bound his arms tightly together with the long silk turban, cut off a foot from the end of it, forced the man's mouth open, and stuffed as much of the silk as possible, and apparently more, into his mouth.

A moment later De-Nha was travelling rapidly out of the room, out of the house, and across the court-yard, face downward, and emitting strange muffled sounds.

Across the *patio* we hurried, down the village street, pursued only by yelping dogs, out through the gates, across the bridge and into the jungle.

Here, panting with haste and exertion, the four men in charge of De-Nha, at a signal from the *Doi*, flung him down.

"Going to walk?" asked the *Doi* and was answered by a vigorous nodding of the long-haired head.

"Untie him and take the gag out," I ordered.

"Let two men go in front as point; one man as connecting file; and you and three men will be in charge of the prisoner. I'll march ten metres behind you. Drop a man for rear-guard, a hundred metres behind me. If we are followed, he is to shoot. Tie one end of the turban to the prisoner's right hand and the other end to a *tirailleur's* left hand. If he attempts to escape, knock him out with a rifle-butt. But tell him he'll be cut down with *mâchètes* and that I'll shoot him too. Tell your men I'll shoot them also, if he gets away. Shoot everybody. Shoot you. Shoot myself. Shoot the moon. Come on. We'll hurry along before it gets hot."

Definitely I was elated, joyful; and probably nervous and chatty by reason of a rising temperature.

And on, at a jog-trot, we made our way back through the jungle, to the obvious indignation of flocks of white-breasted jays which followed us along, squawking their protests and ribald comments.

Soon the sun came up, a great ball of fire, and in spite of the dense shadow of huge iron-wood trees, areca and macaw palms, bamboo and wild plantain, it grew quickly hotter, so that our soaking clothing dried, and, sweat as we might, dry it remained.

Hours later, we emerged from the jungle and began our weary crossing of the long paddy-bunds, until at long last we reached the Fort, where, on a chair in the shadow of the gateway, sat Captain Deleuze watching and waiting.

He rose to his feet and came to meet us, as our ruffianly mud-bespattered party approached.

"Got him, eh? Well done, *mon enfant*. Let the *Doi* and his men dismiss, but tell him to parade here at Retreat. I'd like him to be present when I question De-Nha. He's bound to have some bright ideas, especially if De-Nha won't utter. You'll come too, and take down question and answer, *verbatim*, in French. Can do? Good. Dismiss."

CHAPTER VI

That evening I was accordingly present at the extremely interesting interview between Captain Deleuze, wonderful Intelligence Officer, and De-Nha, Black Flag pirate, dacoit, rebel officer and confidant of the great De-Nam who was Chief Mandarin and principal fighting General of the exiled Emperor Ham-Nghi, and himself uncrowned king of all Yen-Thé, and northern Indo-China.

It was a remarkable contest of wills; Deleuze, cold, relentless, determined, and with unlimited power over the fate of his prisoner; De-Nha, diabolically clever, subtle, elusive, supple, but equally determined, and with complete power over Deleuze's power, inasmuch as he valued his life at nothing, and feared pain not at all.

Deleuze sat at his table, note-book and pencil before him. I was at a smaller one, to one side, with paper, pen and ink. *Doi* Linh Nghi, in undress mufti, squatted on the ground at Deleuze's left hand; the prisoner, a cord about his neck held by an Annamese Corporal, stood between two *tirailleurs* with loaded rifles and fixed bayonets, his feet fastened together by a short chain, and a large and heavy log of ironwood attached to his right ankle.

Deleuze was taking no chances with so slippery a customer as De-Nha. The man, while a prisoner, would be well fed and reasonably well housed and treated, receiving no brutality, injury or insult; but he was, from the French point of view, a traitor taken in armed rebellion rather than an ordinary prisoner of war, as well as a man with a shocking record of fiendish barbarity to such wounded and prisoners as came into his hands.

Searching question and evasive answer followed more quickly than I could translate and record; and, from time to time, I had to beg for respite while I caught up.

"All-right. Plenty of time," said Captain Deleuze. "I want you to get everything down. What are you writing there for his last answer?"

"' *I have never seen any European at General De-Nam's headquarters. Nor have I ever heard of any European officer being at General De-Nam's headquarters. Nor have I ever heard of the Chinese Generals Ba-Ky and Luong-Tam-Ky.*'"

"That's right. Quite right. Ready?"

And question and answer proceeded.

"Of what nationality is the European who is well known to be helping General Luu-Ky."

"I have never heard of Luu-Ky."

“When were you last in the Quang-Yen province?”

“I have never been there.”

“When were you last in Lang-Son?”

“I have never been there.”

“In Lam?”

“I have never been there.”

“In Cao-Bang?”

“I have never been there.”

“In Ha-Giang?”

“I have never been there.”

“In fact, you know nothing, and you know that wrong, eh?”

“I know nothing of these matters.”

“And you are going to tell nothing but lies, eh?”

“I cannot tell what I don’t know.”

“And you know nothing and know that wrong, as we have just said? Ah. . . . Exactly. . . . Now my friend. You have given me no information whatever. Suppose I give you no food whatever?”

“Then I shall die of starvation, and you will still know nothing.”

“And suppose I allow you no sleep whatever?”

“Then I shall go mad and die from want of sleep, and you will still know nothing.”

“And suppose I allow you no drink whatever.”

De-Nha gave Captain Deleuze a quick look, and his eyes fell. He licked dry lips.

“I shall tell you nothing,” he said.

“We shall see,” replied Deleuze, eyeing his captive thoughtfully as he tapped his note-book with his pencil.

“Take him outside and wait in the verandah,” he ordered the Corporal of Annamese *Tirailleurs*.

Deleuze sat in silent thought for a minute.

“Well, *Doi* Linh Nghi,” he said. “What steps would you take to get information out of this man?”

“Just what you had better do, *Ong-Quang-Ba*,” grinned the *Doi*. “This jungle dog is fool enough to be an opium addict, and by the look of him has got to the point where he cannot live without it; where he’ll do anything for it. Keep him without any, until he’s going mad, and then allow him one pipe of *sai*. Just one pipe. That will make the craving far worse, and before long he’ll reach the stage at which he’ll do anything, *anything*, for more opium. Do anything on this earth—even tell the truth.

Then save his life with half a dozen pipes of good *chandu* while you find out whether he has told the truth or not. Then cut off his opium again until he's ready to tell you some more."

"Better than torture, eh?" smiled Deleuze.

"Better than torture? It *is* torture. The very worst that could be devised. And the only one that will make him talk. You couldn't get a word out of him with a knife or with fire. No—not if you crucified him upside-down on a sunny wall. I'll say that for the dog. But no man who is as accustomed to opium as he is, could stand its being suddenly cut off. It isn't possible. Even I couldn't do it."

"But you don't use opium, *Doi*, surely?"

"Oh, no, *Ong-Quang-Ba*. Not to say use it. Just occasionally, perhaps I . . ."

"But never more than once a day. And never more than ten pipes, eh?"

Doi Linh Nghi grinned sheepishly.

"Smoking opium is a very bad thing," he said.

"Well, if smoking opium is a bad thing, we'll see how bad not-smoking it is—for our friend De-Nha," decided Deleuze.

§2

It proved an immeasurably bad thing for De-Nha, and broke him completely, mind, body and soul.

Had I not witnessed the results of this sudden deprivation of opium, I should never have believed that they could have been so drastic and comprehensive—in fact, fatal; for had he not received a pipe of opium when he did, undoubtedly he would have died.

That there might be no possibility of bribery and corruption, Captain Deleuze placed De-Nha in my charge, with the *Doi* to assist me, he selecting a couple of other *Tirailleurs Tonkinois*, relatives of his, who, in the first place, could be trusted to obey his orders absolutely, and who, in the second place, would have no opportunity of disobeying them.

Ordinary guards and sentries, about the hut in which he was confined, would prevent De-Nha's escape; my particular business was to prevent his purchasing opium from anybody, a thing he would certainly endeavour to do, and be in a position to do, if not watched and prevented.

Subtle and cunning as he was, the *Doi* was a match for him; and, as De-Nha's condition soon proved, our arrangements were efficacious.

His prison was a room provided with one barred window, some eight feet from

the ground, and a strong door, in which there was a grill, opening into an outer room.

Beneath the window was not only the sentry on duty, but one of the *Doi's* followers; while I myself—or, in my absence, the *Doi*—always occupied the outer room into which De-Nha's cell opened.

In the verandah of this outer room squatted another of the *Doi's* Annamese, and very frequently, at irregular intervals, I would bid him go and change places with the colleague who was on duty with the sentry beneath the window.

My strict instructions to the *Doi* and his men were to the effect that, whenever De-Nha begged for a pipe of opium, the reply should invariably be,

"Certainly. As much as you like of the finest *chandu*—provided you answer the *Ong-Quang-Ba's* questions truthfully."

I doubt whether anybody who has had no experience of the amazingly strong hold that opium-smoking gets upon its addicts, can visualize or imagine the horrible sufferings that deprivation causes these poor wretches.

De-Nha, at certain times in the day, suffered real torture; acute agony so obviously terrible that I would certainly have alleviated it, had it not been my duty to do otherwise. Badly as he suffered throughout the day, the torture reached its climax at the times at which he was wont to indulge in his horrible vice. It was quite clear that midday and sunset were the hours when he "drank the black smoke".

Toward noon he would begin to yawn, the yawning increasing in length and strength until it became prodigious. This phase would be followed by one of a jerking of the limbs, a spasmodic and violent starting and jumping, a sudden rictus of nervous twitching. This would only cease when he burst into the most profuse perspiration that I had ever seen. The man did not sweat. It was as though he were a great sponge suddenly wrung by a giant hand. He spurted water from every pore.

And he wept like a child and,

Albeit unused to the melting mood
Dropped tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their medicinal gum.

And then, even by the second day, he would literally pray to be given a pipe of opium, one tiny pellet; and he would swear by everything he held sacred, and with obvious sincerity, that he would pay for the opium with a diamond bigger than the pellet itself.

I was present, both at noon and evening, on the second day; and found it very painful to witness this man's sufferings, and to hear his desperate prayers. I was glad when the praying gave place to swearing.

There was nothing pathetic, pitiful or pitiable about this phase, this truly amazing stream of violent malediction and filthy invective. It was really remarkable, something new even to me, who had heard the worst efforts of drunken sailors; of stevedores and wharf rats; of blue-nose Captains and bucko Mates who were artists; of angry Life-Guardsmen; of enraged Arabs, who are no mean performers, and—of comrades in the Legion.

Never before, and never since, have I heard anything to equal De-Nha's range, violence and fluency.

The next stage was collapse. Words would fail him, and then, quite literally foaming at the mouth, he would fall back on his frame-and-string couch and into a shuddering rigor distressing to witness, his sunken eyes staring blindly from their darkened sockets, his face a yellow death-mask.

And there he would lie and gasp, fighting for breath and, apparently, for life.

At the end of about an hour from the beginning of the attack, he would be still and, seemingly, dead. From this state of coma, he would, later, emerge, weak, miserable, and ill.

I was surprised that such a seizure, occuring twice a day, did not have fatal consequences; but Captain Deleuze, a man of wide experience in this and all other matters pertaining to Indo-China, concerning which he was even then writing his famous book, *Notes Cambodgiennes*, was quite certain that nothing of the sort would occur.

"He'll suffer all right, poor devil; but he won't die," he said. "What remains to be seen is whether his opium-smoking has left him with enough guts to withstand deprivation for long. Personally I doubt it."

He was right. The attacks grew worse and, after bearing his agony for a week, De-Nha gave in, offered to answer any one question Captain Deleuze liked to ask, in return for one pipe of opium; and to give him all the information that lay in his power, if he would give him the daily allowance to which he was accustomed.

Accordingly, just before noon, the yawning and trembling De-Nha was again brought before the Captain as on the previous occasion.

"I'm going to ask you a question, and you are going to answer it. I shall then give you one pipe of opium," pronounced Captain Deleuze.

His shaking hands clasped, his black eyes almost starting from his head, De-Nha profusely thanked his captor, swore to tell the truth, and begged him to ask quickly and give him the pipe.

"I shall do that at midday and evening, until I find out whether you have told me the truth. If you have, you will get a pipe for each question, until I know all I want to

know; and, thereafter, the daily allowance to which you are accustomed. If I find you have not told me the truth, you will get no more opium from that moment. Also you will be brought to trial for armed rebellion in a pacified zone, making war on the French Republic, and for murder—for the brutal torture and murder of French subjects."

"The question! The question! . . and the pipe," begged De-Nha.

"*Bien!* The question. Now then, speak the truth. What is the name of the European whom the Chinese Government has sent to help General De-Nam's *Pavilions Noirs*?"

"Kar-Ling."

"Say that again," said Captain Deleuze, putting his hand to his ear and listening with the utmost care.

"Kar-Ling," repeated De-Nha.

"Again."

"Kar-Ling."

"Now," said Deleuze, turning to me. "Think of an English name that sounds like Kar-Ling."

"Well, there's Carling. I've never actually met the name, but it sounds English."

"Yes, now shorten the 'a' which they always lengthen."

"Kolling," I said. "That might be English, but I don't know the name. Oh, there's Colin, though; but that's a Christian name in my country."

"Yes, now put on the 's' which these people always drop."

"Oh, Collins! Yes, Collins. That's quite a common English and Irish name. Or, possibly, an Irish name that is quite common in England. I don't know which . . ."

"That's it," said Deleuze, a note of triumph in his voice. "Collins. An English and Irish name. That there *is* such a man, and that his name is Collins, accords with my previous information. . . . De-Nha, I think you are speaking the truth. You shall have one opium-pipe, and I will see you again at sunset."

And at Retreat, De-Nha was again brought before Captain Deleuze and questioned.

"Are the Chinese Generals who are helping General De-Nam and the Black Flags, named Ba-Ky and Luong-Tam-Ky?"

"Yes, they are," was the prompt reply.

And again De-Nha was given a pipe of opium.

Day after day, the broken man was questioned, and on each occasion he gave a piece of information in return for a pipe.

But one pipe, to a man accustomed to a score, was the merest palliative, and only served partially to tide him over the worst of his awful nerve storms.

Before long, he was only too willing to tell everything he knew, in return for five pipes of opium at midday and five at sunset.

It occurred to Captain Deleuze, that, by raising the opium reward from five pipes to seven, De-Nha might be induced not only to tell everything he knew, but to suggest everything helpful to the French that he could; and the *Doi* accordingly received instructions to change his attitude, or, rather, his manner, toward the rebel.

He and his followers were to do their utmost to cultivate his friendship. So far was this to be carried, that the *Doi* was, on his own account, to give De-Nha an extra pipe of opium. This was to be done in pure kindliness and *bonhomie*, though if De-Nha chose to reward the *Doi*, there would be no harm in that.

To me, Deleuze explained that he really saw no reason why De-Nha should not be won over to the French side, especially if he had some experience of the benefits that had undeniably accrued to those leading Annamese who had accepted French protection and friendship, and who had remained loyal to their new allies.

If he contrasted this with the fate of those who proved disloyal, he might draw a moral and learn a lesson, an object lesson sufficiently striking to impress the said moral deeply upon his mind.

And apart from this, there was the question as to whether he might not consider life, in the rôle of a well-rewarded and faithful friend of the French, as being vastly superior to that of a hunted jungle-dacoit, whose ultimate end must, at very best, be exile from Cambodia to China or elsewhere.

"Anyway," decided Deleuze, "it's worth trying."

And there again opium was to play its part.

This does not mean that it was to be suggested to De-Nha that he would get more or better opium by joining the French; but that Deleuze the Psychologist was going to use De-Nha's opium craving, first to introduce to his mind, and then make it something of an *idée fixe* therein, that his welfare and his life depended on fidelity to the French.

"Now then, Sinbad the Bad Sinner," said Deleuze to me, one day, as I reported at his room, which was the Intelligence Bureau of the garrison. "I've got absolutely everything out of De-Nha, both in the way of information and advice. From information to sound advice was a short step under the opium urge. Let's see how long a step it will be from good advice to active assistance; and from that to the turning of the coat.

"Yes, that turning of the coat, which the conqueror calls loyalty—to him," he

added cynically. "Now look. Cut down his pipes by two a day, one in the morning and one in the evening, until he begins to get desperate again. Then let *Doi* Linh Nghi be a friend in need, the true friend in sore need. Let him give him one, unknown to you, and say to him, as he does so, the first time,

"' *Why don't you join us—and have plenty?*' And again in the evening, the second time,

"' *What a fool is the man who lives like a beast in the jungle, when he can live like a mandarin in a town, protected by the French flag.*'

"To-morrow when he has got De-Nha begging on his knees for the extra one, let him say,

"' *Why don't you join us? Look at me—wife, house, rations, pay, pension. Nothing would induce me to go back and be a jungle dog.*'

"Then in the evening,

"' *I wish I were you, De-Nha. The French would make you an officer, a civil official, a judge, a rich man, a mandarin.*' That sort of thing. Understand?"

I assured Captain Deleuze that I quite understood.

"Then, at the end of about a week, take a hand yourself—along the same lines, until you think the time is ripe for making him a fair offer—and we'll see how he reacts to it."

"But could you trust him, Sir?" I asked. "He strikes me as being a most awful scoundrel."

"It is because he's a most awful scoundrel that I trust him," smiled Captain Deleuze.

And, doubtless noting my look of puzzled bewilderment, added,

"It is only because he's a most awful scoundrel that I can get him to betray his side—in return for a handful of opium. It is only because he's a most awful scoundrel that I can appeal to a scoundrel's self-interest—that being his only ideal. . . . When the time comes, I shall promise him that, if he joins us, his past sins will be forgiven him. He shall have rank and pay as an agent—in the Intelligence Service. And, after the war, a civil job proportionate to his ability and usefulness. All this, provided he proves his good faith by undertaking a certain job I have in mind.

"And you'll be in on that, my lad," he added, giving me one of his straight, piercing glances.

"And, meanwhile, I think we'll stage an execution for his benefit; or, at any rate, let him witness one, at a moment when he's not feeling too good—somewhere about midday or sunset, eh?"

That struck me as definitely cruel; but I reflected that inasmuch as De-Nha was a

notorious past-master in the art of cruelty, there would be a certain amount of poetic justice about it.

CHAPTER VII

Definitely it was a cruel business, though I imagine De-Nha would not have suffered nearly as much, had he not been on the edge of one of his terrible nervous break-downs.

At midday on the following Saturday, seven brigands, taken in the act of dacoity and murder in a little village within the pacified zone of French influence, expiated their crimes of robbery, torture, and wanton murder.

De-Nha, almost yawning his head off, jerking and twitching like the victim of an acute attack of St. Vitus's Dance, was led from his cell and, his hands tied behind his back, taken to join them.

These seven dacoits, captured in the administered zone, had been sent for trial before the Annamese mandarins whom the French had appointed as judges—it being part of the excellent French system that, as soon as a province is declared pacified, the administration of justice is handed over to the sort of people who would have been performing the function had the French not come there.

Thus, these pirates had probably been tried by the identical functionaries who would have tried them had they been taken in dacoity in the days of Ham-Nghi, the exiled Emperor of Indo-China.

They had been tried according to Cambodian law, by Cambodian mandarin judges, sentenced, and condemned to death.

By whose direction I don't know, the Judges, as well as the condemned men, were brought from the scene of the trial in Bac-Ninh to the appointed place of execution here at Nha-Nam.

The execution was a most impressive and unpleasant business; and it made at least one of its witnesses very definitely sick.

A square having been formed by the European and Native troops stationed at Nha-Nam, the Bench of Judges—and these mandarins looked truly magnificent in their ceremonial robes of rich embroidered silk of red and gold, with handsome silk turbans of similar colour upon their heads—marched in state, at the head of a retinue of retainers, to the shaded seats provided for them.

Behind their judicial thrones stood the bearers of their huge umbrellas, each mandarin being provided with two of these, so that no ray of sunlight might strike upon his sacred person; their banner-men, bearing aloft the triangular flags appropriate to their rank and station; their sword-bearers; their pipe-bearers; the bearers of the silver boxes in which were their betel-leaf and areca-nut (the *pan-*

supari of India) and a motley horde of retainers, in somewhat dirty red uniforms, a shabby riff-raff crew, of duties unspecified.

I don't know whether their journey from Bac-Ninh and the present pleasant spectacle provided for them a sort of Bank Holiday, but this herd of retainers certainly seemed remarkably happy, behaving like children at a Sunday School treat, laughing, singing, jabbering and pushing each other about, while indulging in futile and infantile horse-play. Anything less like the sober and serious retinue of Judges of a High Court of Justice could scarcely be conceived.

Nor did the mandarin Judges seem in the least surprised or annoyed by the conduct of their henchmen, refraining from rebuke or remonstrance, even when the Officer Commanding the garrison took his place in the seat of honour in front of their grand-stand.

All being ready, and the troops being called to attention, the prisoners were escorted from the *canha-phâ*[1] into the hollow square formed by the ranks of soldiery, French Line and Infanterie de la Marine, Annamese, and Foreign Legion.

The guard surrounding the dacoits were *linh-le*—mandarin body-guard men—in ill-fitting ill-kempt green uniforms, shouldering rusty rifles and wearing side-arms of which the only uniformity was their unpolished dirtiness.

Following the prisoners and guard, marched the executioner, a huge powerful Chinese wearing a red singlet on which was embroidered, in gold, a Court of Justice crest or other device; black silk trousers and felt-soled boots. His bare arms and shoulders were enormous, and in his right hand he carried a great curved sword of which the blade was over a yard long; a sword of unusual shape, in that the great gleaming blade, instead of tapering from hilt to point, grew broader as it grew longer.

I decided that doubtless this curious shape added weight to a blow so struck that only the lower part of the blade came in contact with the object to be cut.

The seven rebel dacoits and the unfortunate De-Nha walked in single file, their hands bound behind them; and I must say that they displayed the utmost courage and *sang-froid*.

It is all very well to say that Chinese, or other people, don't fear death, and do not regard it as we do. But I think that is rather begging the question (of courage) and refusing to give credit where credit is due. For the fact remains that all of them, with the exception of the first man executed, were to witness the infliction of a particularly hideous form of death that was about to be similarly meted out to themselves.

Anyhow, I was impressed by their coolness and courage, and only hoped that if I were in such circumstances, I could bear myself as bravely and stoically as these

robbers did. Certainly nothing in their lives became them like the leaving of it.

When the prisoners and escort were halted in front of the Commanding Officer and the Judges' grand-stand, they talked, laughed, and chatted as though they were about to witness a race-meeting, instead of the slaughter of each other; turned about and took a lively interest in their surroundings; and, from time to time, with great nonchalance, yawned, scratched themselves, and ejected the red betel-nut juice with which their mouths were, as usual, filled.

The executioner, being ready, made them extend to the left at four paces interval, De-Nha being at the end of the line of eight men, and some thirty yards from the first one.

The prisoners being in their appointed places, the executioner's assistant visited each one, unbuttoned and turned down the collar of his cotton coat, and bade him kneel.

It interested me to note that this young gentleman—evidently an executioner's apprentice hoping to rise by industry, zeal, and the closest attention to duty, to the lofty rank of executioner himself—was concerned to see that there were no stones, lumps, or other undesirable irregularities which might cause discomfort to his patients when they knelt. Obviously he bade them take such ease as might be possible to those who kneel with their hands bound behind them, their heads bent and necks offered ready for the edge of the sword.

Of De-Nha I took particular note, and saw that he was as cool, unconcerned and courageous as the other seven. As he looked about him, between his terrific yawns, and glanced at the Commanding Officer, at the Judges, at Captain Deleuze and at me standing behind that officer, there was not the slightest suggestion of appeal in the look he gave us, nor were his tremendous jerks and twitchings in any way to be confused with the ordinary trembling and shivering of a frightened man.

Had he at that moment made any appeal, whether to man or to the gods he worshipped, it would have been for opium, and not for his life. . . .

The eight prisoners being on their knees and, by the standards of the assistant executioner, comfortable, the sentence of the Mandarins' Court was read aloud, that all the Annamese natives assembled might know of the offences of these men, and bear witness to the righteousness of the punishment that they so richly deserved.

This having been done, the executioner looked toward the Commanding Officer, who raised his hand. The executioner then thrust the index finger of his left hand into his mouth, advanced to the first of the condemned men and traced a wet line of red betel-juice, almost like red paint, across the back of his bare neck, just where the spinal column joins the skull.

He then took the long hilt of his great sword in both hands, stepped back a pace, swung it aloft, remained motionless for a second while he took aim, and then brought it down like a thunder-bolt or a flash of lightning upon the outstretched neck of his victim. One heard the *swish* of the sword through the air, and the dull *thud* with which it encountered the neck; and one saw the head straightway fall to the ground and roll.

An absolutely clean cut, removing the head as neatly as a flower is struck from its stalk by a cane.

I noted that the body did not fall immediately. For quite a perceptible time it remained kneeling, while blood spurted to a distance of at least six feet. It moved to and fro once, while yet erect; and then slowly collapsed.

Personally I did not feel at all well. I glanced from the decapitated man to the others. All had their heads turned to the right and were watching with deep interest. On the face of not one of them was there any look of fear, horror or disgust. Definitely they took a sporting interest in the executioner's technique and degree of skill.

The executioner, I noticed, stooped, touched the blood with his finger, and then smeared his own lips; this being, as I learned later, a specific charm against any retaliation, by evil influence, on the part of the spirit of the dead man.

He then approached the second captive, and as he did so the man spoke.

Looking up into the executioner's face, he uttered his last words.

"A damn' good swipe!" said he—that being an exact translation of his remark in Annamese.

The executioner nodded his appreciation of the compliment.

Again he wetted with betel-juice the neck now well outstretched for his convenience.

Personally I had seen enough, and closed my eyes.

I could not close my ears, however; and seven times I heard that dreadful swish and thud, *swish* and *thud*, *swish* and *thud*, at intervals of about two minutes.

And then Captain Deleuze, as doubtless had been arranged between him and the Commanding Officer, walked over to where De-Nha knelt.

Having talked with him for awhile, Captain Deleuze bade him get to his feet and return to his hut, to which place I, *Doi* Linh-Nghi and his corporal's-guard, escorted him.

Captain Deleuze afterwards told me that at the psychological moment when De-Nha had seen the heads of his seven fellow-captives fall, he had offered him his life and all the opium he wanted, if he would forthwith abandon the utterly lost cause of

the exiled Emperor Ham Nghi; leave the service of General De-Nam; and accept the authority of the French Republic that had supplanted the late rulers, and that would, henceforth and for ever more, rule Indo-China.

De-Nha, observing that opium was essential to his happiness, and life essential to the proper enjoyment of his opium, agreed to make his submission to the French, and to take service under them in return for opium, life, freedom—and for reward and promotion in accordance with his deserts.

After having smoked a dozen pipes and slept for a few hours, De-Nha was accordingly allowed to leave his cell, and to walk abroad in the excellent, if not desired, company of myself and the *Doi*.

As we passed the entrance to the Fort, we beheld seven long bamboo poles, on the top of each of which was a head, recently the property of one of the murderers executed at midday.

"They'll never smoke again," grinned the *Doi*, jerking a thumb in the direction of the heads.

"Just what I was thinking," replied De-Nha.

Our instructions, and De-Nha's condition, were now changed. His cell became his bedroom; the outer, or guard-room, his sitting-room; and the verandah, the abiding-place of his servant, the said servant being one of *Doi* Linh-Nghi's *tirailleurs* who had orders to do anything in reason that De-Nha desired, but never to let him out of his sight.

My duty, for the time being, was to cultivate the man; and, if not to grapple him to my soul with hoops of steel, to attach him thus to the French cause, appealing alike to his cupidity and his ambition.

It was a somewhat distasteful, but extremely interesting, task to make a study of this dacoit, ex-officer of Mandarins' Irregulars, whose outlook on life, experiences, philosophy and standards differed so widely from my own. He was, of course, infinitely cleverer than I, as well as being equipped with weapons that were not in my armoury at all—such as a complete lack of scruple and truthfulness, and all that Europeans regard as necessary to common honesty and the preservation of self-respect. In saying this, I do not lose sight of the fact that it was a game of wits, and that it was my duty to pit the man's cupidity and self-interest against any loyalty that he might cherish towards his exiled Emperor and his former employers. What I mean is, that, in small matters and in great, he would lie in the most circumstantial manner, while asseverating the truth of what he said with every binding oath of which he could think; and that therein I was handicapped.

Every day I indulged freely in the pleasures of his society and conversation, and carried out Captain Deleuze's instructions that I should see a great deal of him, endeavour to win his confidence, and form an accurate conclusion as to his real sentiments and intentions, particularly the latter.

Nor did I have to play any Judas part of false friendship, attempting to delude and deceive him. Incidentally, that would have been a rather funny sight and a foolish undertaking; unless, as is indeed possible, my blunt and straightforward simplicity were even more baffling and deceptive to him than were his subtleties, lies, and cunning wiles to me.

Anyhow, we got along together famously, De-Nha's approval of me being enhanced by the fact that Captain Deleuze was allowing him a fair ration of opium, while instructing me to increase this allowance surreptitiously when De-Nha piteously implored and entreated me to do so.

Our *Mèdecin Majeur* Baillot, himself an opium-smoker and student of the pathological effects and values of the drug, had been very interested in De-Nha's violent reaction to deprivation; and, on one occasion of his paying a visit to De-Nha, I asked him whether it would be possible to break the man of his vice by very gradual diminution of the allowance. He was of the opinion that it would not, and that when a man had gone as far along the opium-addict's path as had De-Nha, the best thing for him was—opium.

He further expressed the view that, provided De-Nha did not increase his present allowance, he would live longer with its use than he would if it were curtailed even very gradually, with a view to final elimination.

"Anyway," said *Mèdecin Majeur* Baillot, "the man is incurable, and if you were to put him on a desert island where opium was unprocurable, he would soon die, even if he were 'cured'."

I believe that Captain Deleuze had asked him for a pronouncement on the subject, with the object of keeping De-Nha alive and well—so long as he was ready, willing and able to use his undeniable talents and knowledge in the service of the French Military Intelligence Department.

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[1] *Condemned cell of native prison.*

CHAPTER VIII

And one day, some weeks later, Captain Deleuze took me into his confidence, paid me a great compliment, and proposed to give me the opportunity of showing what I was made of, as he expressed it in his excellent English.

When we were alone, he always talked to me in my own language, partly, doubtless, for practice in idiom, pronunciation and accent, though that was not in the least necessary, and partly for secrecy and safety, as there was not a soul, so far as we knew, European or Annamese, who could speak or understand English.

"Well, now, Sinbad the Sailor and Fishmonger, what do you make of your catch? Can he be trusted?" he asked.

"A difficult question to answer, Sir," I replied. "But I quite believe he can be trusted to be absolutely true and faithful—to his own interests."

"Quite so," smiled Deleuze, who had held long conversations with De-Nha. "Quite so. I think he has seen the light. The light of his own advantage. Seen the light and tasted the flesh-pots. The flesh-pots of French rewards. Yes, I think he has seen the light and tasted the flesh-pots and heard the sweet reasonable sounds of the chink of French gold-pieces—the wages of virtue. And he certainly realizes that the wages of sin is death. Yes, I think it is time he touched some wages, and smelt the incense of praise in high quarters. Then we shall have appealed to all his senses."

Captain Deleuze gnawed the tip of his right forefinger, a trick he had when thinking deeply toward a conclusion, while as yet undecided as to the issue.

"Think the bonds of his senses will hold him?" he asked, shooting one of his penetrating glances into my eyes.

"While he's here, Sir, with sufficient opium on the one hand and sudden death on the other."

"Think he'd run away if he had the chance?"

"Not unless he could run with a stock of opium," I opined.

"And suppose he could?"

"I don't know, Sir. He's so deep, so cunning, and such a liar, that it is very difficult to say whether he firmly intends to stick to the French connection for ever, or whether he means to bolt at the first opportunity, and tell General De-Nam all that he has learned here."

"Well, we'll come back to that in a moment; Sinbad the Fisherman. Listen. Suppose I give you a little longer for the casting of your nets about the soul of your queer fish, and I give him every possible inducement to remain within those nets, will

you stake your life on your skill as a fisher of men?"

"Bet my life on his complete conversion—or perversion?" I asked.

"Wager it. Literally. Look; suppose you feel that you've won his confidence, so far as a creature of that type trusts anybody; and suppose I feel I've made a sufficient appeal to his cupidity and ambition; and supposing he agrees to what I'm going to propose—will you take a risk on his fidelity? His fidelity, partly to you personally, and partly to his own interests? It will be a case of greed and ambition being up against heredity, breed, blood, instincts, old loyalties, and such faith and honour as an Annamese dacoit possesses."

"Take a risk, Sir? I will if you will, of course."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean if you like to entrust me with the job, I'll do my utmost to—er—bring it off."

"I'm sure you will. Take the risk, I mean, and it will be some risk. I'm going to bank on De-Nha seeing his profit in sticking to us. I'm going to send you where only he could take you. To the Annamese Headquarters."

"General De-Nam's headquarters, Sir?" I asked, astounded.

"No. Worse than that. I've got two or three native spies there, pedlars, camp followers and such. . . . No, I'm going to send you to the real Headquarters. To the fountain-head whence flows the stream of subsidy. The place where the sinews of war are strengthened and renewed, exercised and developed. Yes, the Headquarters whence General De-Nam gets his help.

"I am quite certain that regular reinforcements and supplies of arms, ammunition and food, reach De-Nam's headquarters from a superior one, a base that is either somewhere far away on the other side of this Province, or on the actual Chinese border. Or, possibly, in China itself.

"And I want to find out all about it.

"I want to know where the base is. Of what it consists. Who commands it. And, most particularly, whether there are any European military advisers there. And if so, who they are.

"I believe that, under the influence of the opium-deprivation torture, De-Nha spoke the truth in saying that the Emperor of China has got three of his best Generals there, helping De-Nam, the former Viceroy in Yen-Thé of the now exiled Emperor of Indo-China.

"Also that they have a European adviser, the man whom he called Kar-Ling.

"Now, if Kar-Ling is the man I think he is, and of whom I have heard from other sources, he is an English adventurer and swashbuckler and soldier-of-fortune named

Collins.

"And that's where you come in, my son.

"I want you to get to the real base of operations with the help of De-Nha, and there introduce yourself to your compatriot—as a fellow soldier-of-fortune. I want you to find out everything there is to be found out, not only present facts, but future plans—I'll give you details later—and make your way back here again as soon as you can. I must know what the plan of campaign for next season is, and what China is going to do about it. . . . What do you say? Can do?"

"I can try, Sir. But it seems that it will all depend on De-Nha. If he turns traitor to us . . ."

"Exactly. It will all depend on De-Nha—*and* on the courage and ability of Sinbad the Sailor turned Soldier, eh?"

"Now then—Committee of Ways and Means. De-Nha will have to show you the way and I shall have to find the means—of keeping him faithful . . . to us."

§2

Again Captain Deleuze told me all that he knew—and it was a good deal—about the position of affairs on the Chinese border beyond Lao Kai.

He spoke about the political situation as between the Imperial Government of China and the French Republic: about the French suspicions concerning the surreptitious assistance given, in spite of former solemn treaties, to the rebel Annamese by the Chinese, who looked with fear and suspicion upon the foreigner's encroachment not only upon the coastal lands of Eastern Asia to the south of the Flowery Kingdom, but actually in the direction of their South Eastern border (where the longer there was an active enemy of the French between the Yunnan-Kwangsi borders and Annam, the better): about the probable existence of the camp of a large force of Chinese regulars on the border beyond Lao Kai: about the probability of there being a concentration of bands of Chinese irregulars under the leadership of Chinese ex-Generals operating on this side of the border, and, from time to time stiffening the armies of the Viceroy, De-Nam, with invaluable reinforcements of well-armed, well-trained fighting men: about the frequently-confirmed suspicion that there were European adventurers, quite possibly secret and unacknowledged emissaries from European Governments, advising and assisting these forces.

He also advised me as to the dangers and difficulties of the journey right across Tonking from Houi-Bap to the Chinese border, and as to the best means of surmounting them.

Once I had crossed the border near Lao Kai, and located the camp of the Chinese Generals, I must act according to circumstances, fend for myself, gather what information I could, and return with it as quickly as possible.

"I shall send *Doi* Linh Nghi and his gang with you, Sinbad, and on them you can, of course, rely absolutely. They'll do the Faithful Unto Death business all-right.

"De-Nha himself, your guide, will be your great danger; and we'll make it quite clear to him that, whatever happens to you and the rest of the party, one of them will see to it that De-Nha is disembowelled if there is any treachery. It is just possible, in fact I think we may say it is reasonably probable, that, with big rewards on the one part and the likelihood of a dirty death on the other, he may keep his oath of fidelity to us.

"On the other hand, he may not."

"Anyhow, there it is; and you must take it or leave it, on that understanding. I'll fit you out with a good-sized *sampan* and crew; and you'll go up the Red River as far as possible.

"You can start off as a party of pedlars, and turn into pirates as soon as you are well away from Houi-Bap. The boatmen will quite understand that. They've been seeing simple villagers turn into dacoits, and river-pedlars into river-pirates, all their innocent lives.

"You yourself had better be extremely terse and taciturn—if not generally dumb. When anyone seems to think your Annamese is faulty, you are a Chinaman whose appropriate language is the To-jen of Nanningfu Kwangsi, or the Pu Tai of Yunnan; and you are not very much at home with the barbarous Tai Dam of Tonking; and if you run into a gentleman who speaks the purest To-jen of Nanningfu Kwangsi, or the Pu Tai of Yunnan, then your real tongue is the Chin Tai of the Yangtze; or, if you prefer it, Laos Yun; Kun Lu; Shan, or Ngio; Tai Nua of Muang Baw—or any other damn thing you fancy. See?

"Which language *do* you prefer?" he asked, in reply to my sickly smile.

"Deaf and dumb language, I think, Sir," I admitted.

"And a very good one too. . . . When in doubt, pull out a big knife, and stare at your questioner's stomach. . . ."

CHAPTER IX

Among the things that I shall not forget, is that journey up the Red River from a spot near Houi-Bap right across Tonking to Lao-Kai, and beyond into China.

Not that we went the whole way by water, of course; but before I finally escaped from that dreadful river, it seemed to me that I had been born on it, had lived on it, and would certainly die on it, a positive Styx, hundreds of miles in length, with De-Nha my enigmatic Charon.

By the time I had done with it, I also knew something about gorges, rapids and waterfalls; something about rain; and something about the gentle art of crouching.

For we lived in a sailing *sampan*, a craft in which one can neither stand upright nor comfortably lie down; a kind of floating one-roomed house, the room being, as I have indicated, of insufficient length and insufficient height to afford comfortable accommodation for anything bigger than a monkey or a small Chinese.

In the thatched hut of plaited straw, we squatted to cook our miserable stew; we squatted about the pot to eat the mess, our fingers sufficient for our simple needs and simpler manners; in the hut we squatted all day and all night; and shivered, wrapt in melancholy and clothed in misery as in a garment.

For weeks and weeks we poled along through heavy rain, through light rain, and through thick mist, for a change; until I came to think that there was a kind of rain and a kind of fog peculiar to the Red River and peculiarly wet, depressing, and damping, not only to straw huts and cotton clothes, but to the spirits, yea, the very souls of their occupants.

We made our slow laborious way along water, through water, on water, in water and under water, for, at times, and for very long times, the rain was so heavy that the surface of the river was but a plane dividing a mass of water of normal consistency from a mass of water slightly mixed with air.

The sky, invisible, was one vast mass of leaden, grey wool, a cosmic sponge that for days and days on end was in process of steady contraction.

If the river voyage had lasted much longer, I think I should have gone mad, for I found that I had come to endow the Red River with life, with personality; a detestable devilish water-fiend of dark and muddy complexion; swift, silent, hateful, and hating, determined to sweep everything before it, on, down to the sea; everything from ant to tiger; from castor-oil plant to mighty tree.

And when, at night, I was disposed to feel grateful that I could no longer see it, I heard it; for ever sucking at its banks; for ever bringing down small avalanches of earth and clay and mud.

And not only could I hear it as I lay awake shivering in sodden misery, but I could feel it, or rather, feel its damp exhalation penetrating to my mouldy bones and spreading its vile fever throughout my racked and suffering frame.

I would rather do, day after day, the longest of forced desert marches or jungle marches, tortured by thirst, and sore from head to foot with aching pain and unbearable fatigue, than again spend those weeks of crouching in a *sampan* on the Red River of Tonking.

I was always thankful when natural obstacles, the need for provisions, or some imminent danger from nature or from man, drove us ashore and into the jungle.

Here there was hardship enough. Leeches for example—reptiles for which I have an acute natural abhorrence—and the burrowing ticks. After marching through grass, one would emerge with an absolute dado of solid tick all round one's legs, loathsome brutes that fastened on with powerful mandibles and burrowed into one's flesh, swelling as they did so. Each of these foul pests, if not carefully extracted, would leave behind it a sore place, an angry spot, that might develop into a horrible boil. Like the leeches, they were best treated with the glowing end of a cigarette, or with a burning match, when they would fall away without leaving their heads behind them, as they did if pulled out.

I think it amused my companions that I was far more concerned with ticks and leeches than I was with such trifles as tigers, black panthers, mighty pythons or poisonous snakes.

And, now and again, stretches of the jungle near the river would be delightful, especially on sunny days; and, to me, the lofty bamboos, so huge and thick, yet fragile-looking; so straight and aspiring; so pliant and supple, and yet so strong, were a delight to the eye and a constant joy.

In places the bamboos gave way to bananas, the glossy sheen of their great waving leaves of a deep and delightful green, with which the great red flower contrasted so strikingly. Often about this huge deep crimson flower, apparently lavishly cut in velvet, fluttered lovely little birds so small that, at first, I had thought they were big insects. What always surprised me was that a stem so soft as is this of the banana, so spongy that one could thrust one's thumb into it and watch the wound bleed clear crystal blood, colourless as water, should have the strength to uphold such a wealth of heavy foliage.

For miles we would march in silence over the rich black soil, probably pure leaf-mould, judging from the strong odour of decay that arose from it. Frequently we traversed a narrow path on the edge of a ravine, a wooded cliff rising precipitously on one side, the *khud* or *huey* sloping sharply on the other. It was here that I

realized, glancing down into such a canyon, how truly enormous is a big tree. One could see the trunk of some mighty monarch of the forest rising out of the sea of evergreen that formed the bed of the *huey*, a tree whose roots must be many yards down out of sight, among the shrubs and younger trees, and looking upward, one could see its branches spreading aloft incredibly high above one.

Plodding along in a kind of waking dream, I would note new insects, creatures I had never seen before; flowers of which I knew nothing; and mighty trees, the names of which I could not tell. Most things were unfamiliar to me in this wild and beautiful primæval jungle.

And, from time to time, we would emerge from parklike glade, upon open savannah, and thence enter dense dark forest, bamboo thicket, and typical jungle; and so back to the banks of the accursed Red River where it swept fiercely along, wide as the Thames at London, red with the clay it scavenged from its own crumbling banks, and toothed with jagged rock.

In spite of the apparent speed of the river current, great patient Chinese junks, their huge sails of plaited straw, trimmed to the breeze, would progress, inch by inch, under the propulsion of tough tireless men, strong yet agile who, indefatigable, ran to and fro, from stem to stern, poling incessantly, literally pushing the heavy junk along with the great iron-bound bamboo poles. Some time they would reach China; and what was time to them?

And, occasionally, De-Nha saved our lives, as we encountered suspicious hostile villagers, sullen and unsociable; or worse still, wandering bands of dacoits and river pirates, men who, whatever their professions of military attachment to this or that insurgent mandarin, were plain marauding thieves and murderers.

With the river pirate, the Black Flag, the dacoit and the jungle robber, as well as with the surly and unfriendly villager, inimical both to predatory dacoit and to encroaching foreigner, no-one was more competent to deal than De-Nha.

By robber and villager alike he was accepted as the genuine article—because he was the genuine article. Although now—professedly—ally and agent of the French, he had spent much of his life in the jungle; and up to the day whereon I captured him, had been precisely what he was pretending to be now, leader of a gang of dacoits, masquerading as soldiers of General De-Nam. . . .

Thanks to De-Nha, this journey across Tonking was no more dangerous to me than to any other humble traveller exposed to the ordinary risks of drowning in the Red River; of starving in the jungle, through losing the way; of suffering mishap from savage man, beast or reptile; and of death from fever and disease. Without De-Nha's guidance, help and protection, I should probably have had my throat cut, or

met with other fatal mishap, before I had covered a quarter of the journey.

No, the expedition might be arduous, but, thanks to De-Nha, it wasn't dangerous. The real danger would come when I reached my destination. Even if he did not turn traitor, I should probably die a very sticky death; and if he did turn traitor, I should certainly do so.

I looked forward with more interest than enthusiasm to our arrival at the Chinese border and thereafter at the Headquarters of Generals Ba-Ky and Luong-Tam-Ky.

In spite of my anxiety I enjoyed the overland part of the journey, ever avid as I am of new sights, smells, and sounds; ever seeking a new thing; loving new scenes, and contact with strange peoples.

It was on one of the upland paths of the highlands of Tonking that I first saw, or perhaps noticed, the ubiquitous walnut-men, strange people who apparently make a living out of a few walnuts, and travel hundreds and hundreds of miles to do so. From time to time, we encountered tiny caravans of the most minute ponies that I have ever seen, laden with walnuts, travelling from China southward, and visiting the various native markets on the route.

The walnut-merchant will set forth from his village, leading his string of ponies or perhaps mules, on a journey often occupying several months, and taking him through the Shan States, Burma, Northern Siam, or through the Lao country down to Cambodia.

It was always a delight to me to meet one of those little caravans, the foremost ponies jingling with silver bells attached to their brightly-coloured halters, two *hahps* strapped pannier-fashion across their backs, steadily walking, walking, in single file, along the narrow tracks and jungle paths.

Doi Linh Nghi informed me that, on the return journey, they were generally laden with coloured blankets which the merchants buy in the bazaars of the South. These are in great demand in their own country, especially the bright red ones.

Now and again, the larger caravan of a more ambitious merchant would carry betel-nut and potatoes as well; and, occasionally, the ponies and mules would be followed by the cheaper and even more sure-footed coolies, each laden with a precious burden of brick-tea.

One night we made our frugal camp near that of such a merchant—obviously to his great anxiety and discomfort—and I instructed *Doi* Linh Nghi to buy a brick. This I discovered to be a solid block of compressed tea, weighing at least seven pounds. Personally I had never used brick-tea, and did not know how it compared with the more familiar kind, in the matter of strength and quantity per cup; though I

had heard that it was, for some reason, the finest tea procurable.

I asked *Doi* Linh Nghi whether he were familiar with its use; whereunto he replied by enquiring whether I thought he was a savage. What did I take him for? Of course he knew how to make tea from the block.

I bade him go to it, and watched the process.

First he knocked a lump off with his *mâchète* precisely in the manner in which a bricklayer knocks a lump off an ordinary brick which he is trimming to shape. This he put in an iron pot which he set on the camp fire to boil. As the water boiled, the lump disintegrated, and the water turned to stew. After a time, and to me it seemed a terribly long time, the *Doi* produced a very dirty cotton rag and a short length of hollow bamboo, one end of which was closed by the natural joint.

Into this bamboo receptacle he slowly poured the brew through the filthy rag strainer. Into the tea he then dropped a small handful of salt and a lump of butter—cadged, purchased, or stolen from the merchant's cook. That none of the precious butter might be lost through adhering to his fingers, he washed these useful members in the tea. And, even while my soul, not to mention my stomach, was filled with wonder, he produced a third ingredient, held it above the wide mouth of the bamboo vessel—which, incidentally, was about nine inches in diameter and held quite a quart—before dropping it in.

"What's that?" I asked; for obviously it was neither salt nor sugar.

"Washing soda," replied the *Doi*; and let go.

Then placing his hand and the dirty rag over the top of the bamboo, to prevent loss, he agitated the receptacle violently, somewhat in the manner of the modern shaker of cocktails.

This rite performed, he drew his *mâchète* and stirred the brew, even as one's maiden aunt was wont to stir the tea with a silver spoon, in the vicarage drawing-room.

Anon he poured me forth a generous measure of this 'tea' into one of the wooden bowls we now used instead of army *gamelles*.

Dubiously I tasted it, and found it—extremely good.

Nor were the tea-leaves wasted, for under the close superintendence of the *Doi*, his brother, who masqueraded as a cook and was a villainous impostor, made a dough of barley flour, mixed the tea-leaves with it, broke the mass up into lumps, rolled it into dirty balls, baked them by the fire, and invited me to enjoy myself.

Having eaten our evening meal of rice, walnuts, dried fish, and soaked apricots, we paid a ceremonial visit to the unhappy merchant, with the view to learning anything that he might be in a position to tell us.

Doi Linh Nghi of course took the lead, and I attended in the capacity of his faithful but stupid follower, retainer, and body-guard.

By the merchant's, perhaps unwillingly, hospitable fireside we had a sort of second supper of *tsamba*-cakes of barley flour, moistened with excellent *chang*, grain beer, which I thoroughly enjoyed. Thereafter this good man produced a bundle of *biddis* or *birris*, native cigarettes, and, foul as they were, I doubt if I ever enjoyed a smoke more.

Expressing to the *Doi* my surprise at finding tobacco of any kind here, I was told that the man was not only a vendor of walnuts, betel-nut, potatoes, tea, and salt, but was also a tobacco-merchant.

A tobacco-merchant? Had he got any cigarettes or cigars such as the French officers smoked down in Hanoi and Haiphong?

No, grinned the *Doi*. Of course not. He had only got these *biddi* things and water-pipe tobacco.

What was that like?

Not the sort of thing that I should care about, intimated the *Doi*, and bade the merchant show us a sample of his pipe-tobacco.

Whereupon the good man produced a fat bamboo cylinder from a package, pulled a wad from the end of it, and gouged out some of the alleged tobacco.

It bore a faint resemblance to tobacco as I had known it at sea, in one of its less refined manifestations, but only a very faint one. To me, it looked like a compound of dead leaves—some of which might have been tobacco leaves—treacle, water, rum-soaked navy-plug tobacco, mud, rice-husks, and the floor-sweepings of a small tobacconist's shop situated in a busy and dirty thoroughfare; and, so far as it smelt at all, it smelt of opium and stale tobacco-juice.

I forbore to lay in a stock of it.

I suppose the most dangerous part of our overland journey was through the country infested by the Möi, who are real savages, some being mountaineers, others nomadic jungle dwellers, while others again are arboreal, living somewhat after the fashion of the Sakai of the Malay Peninsula.

Being fierce and predatory, they are easily formed into bands of brigands—by such people as De-Nha, who seemed to understand them and to get on with them quite well.

When we approached one of their villages, De-Nha would beat a *réveil* on the village drum which is always hung up outside the village, and upon which every visitor is expected to "knock." To enter the village without banging the village drum is

rather like entering an Englishman's house without knocking or ringing at his front door.

I was always glad when we had got away with whole skins from one of the Möi encampments or villages. With their forbidding, ugly faces, unpleasant manners and truculent bearing, they filled me with alarm.

In one Möi stronghold in which De-Nha advised us to show no undue anxiety to depart, lest it be supposed we were afraid, I was privileged to see a beauty-specialist at work.

Sitting on the chest of a prone candidate for loveliness, he was busy banging his customer's teeth with a hammer and primitive chisel, the idea being to break off every tooth at the level of the gums.

This work being completed, so that there were no signs of teeth in the upper jaw, he would set to work with a file and bring each tooth of the lower jaw to a sharp point.

"Well, well," reflected I. "*Chacun à son goût* and *de gustibus non est disputandum*."

Yes, it was an interesting journey, and village life not the least interesting part of it.

I have seen many devices for the patient irrigation of plots of land, varying from pot-bearing wheels, bullock-dragged bags of water, and tread-mills worked throughout the day by innocent men, to the carrying of water in goat-skins, that it may be sprinkled drop by drop upon the thirsty ground. But it was in this strange country that I first saw water *shovelled*—with long-handled coal-scoops. By the patient shovelling and shooing of water along little runnels it was made, contrary to natural law, to flow upward to a level above its source.

Another difficulty with which the peasants have to contend in the cultivation of their rice, is the choking growth of the Japanese lily, a small mauve flower, clusters of which over-run their rice-fields and obstruct their water-courses. Originally, it was planted here and there by the Annamese in commemoration of a forgotten Khmer Queen. It does indeed keep her memory green (or mauve) and has become a perfect pest to the peasants, who have the utmost difficulty in keeping their rice-fields free of this prolific and quite useless weed.

I have also seen many forms of threshing and husking, but it was on this journey that I first saw the strange pounding system whereby rice is separated from its husk, leaping women being the motivating power.

Into a kind of vast wooden bowl, the heap of rice is shovelled. On the rice rests a great ball of wood, stone or iron; and, attached to the ball, is the end of a see-saw.

On the far end of the see-saw plank leaps a lady. Down goes her end of the plank and up goes the ball attached to the other end. Off steps the lady. Down goes the other end, *bump*, and with it the ball which drops with a heavy thud upon the rice.

She then repeats the process—and continues to repeat it all day long.

Fine exercise, and, in that climate, tiring even to watch. I had heard the curious distinctive thudding noise thus made, many times, and had not accepted the explanation offered me by Doi Linh Nghi—that it was doubtless the sounds made by the *lu thuong* beating his wife.

As we approached one village—Fo-lu, if I remember rightly—on the road to Lao Kai, we met a curious pair who provided the *Doi* with an opportunity to deliver himself of a parable, an exercise to which he was addicted.

An amazing lame man was leading a blind one; and, stopping for a chat, in search of information as usual, we learned that the two men, who were probably Laos, had received their injuries at the same time and place, when pursuing their innocent and peaceful avocation of honey-seekers.

The man who had been blinded, proceeding along a jungle path, found his way barred by the trunk of a great tree that had been felled by teak-cutters. Thinking that there might be a deserted bees' nest among the branches, he went to climb on to the trunk. At the same moment, as he explained, a small, equally innocent and peaceful honey-bear, also thinking that there might be a deserted bees' nest in the branches, reared up from the other side. They met face to face, and it was the face of the Lao that suffered; for, with one blow of his paw the "quite harmless" honey-bear removed it, including the eyes. The man was still an unpleasant sight, and must have been a worse one at that awful moment.

The other honey-gatherer, while looking up into a tree in search of bees' nests, received a tap on the back of the head. Turning about, he too found himself face to face with a denizen of the jungle. This was a python, dangling by its tail from the branch of a tree. Promptly seizing him and enveloping him in a cold embrace, it proceeded to crush him to death.

Most luckily (or not, according to the point of view) his right arm was free from the coils of the great snake, and in his right hand was the *mâchète* without which he never ventured into the jungle. He had time to strike one mighty blow with the razor-edged blade of the heavy *mâchète*, and it almost took the python's head off.

The coils relaxed and the huge serpent fell to the ground, the man collapsing with it, and being found later 'almost unhurt' as he said, there being no other damage done than the fracturing of his thigh bones, the dislocation of his ankles, knees and

hips, the smashing of his left arm and collar-bone, and the breaking of an unspecified number of ribs. And yet, after a time, miraculously he walked again; and here he was, cheerfully leading his cheerful companion in misfortune, over the face of Asia.

'I should grouse and grumble!' thought I, as I saw that pair set off again, each riotously happy with the *biddis* or *birris* (whichever it may be) that I had given him to smoke.

In Fo-lu, if that were the place, I saw a fire; and watched with interest the proceedings of the local Fire Brigade. Amateur, I imagine.

As we turned the corner and came on the scene, a house was burning merrily, its bamboo woodwork and attap-leaf thatch lending themselves to conflagration.

Happily the house was situated within a hundred yards of the river. Less happily, its proprietor and other would-be saviours possessed but one bucket, and that not a large one.

As we approached, a fat and furious man dashed past us with the bucket, panting and wheezing stertorously. A minute or two later—for he did not do the hundred yards in the level ten seconds—he returned, yet more furious, puffing and panting even more stertorously, and spilling water at every step.

Arrived at the burning house, he whirled the bucket about his head, liberally sprinkled the interested bystanders, and sent at least a half-pint of the 'precious fluid' against the cold and solid wall of stone.

Loud cheers rose above the frenzied shrieks of the Fire Brigade.

But a long lean man, thinking he could better this performance, gave the fat runner a cruel push, snatched the bucket from his willing hand, and showed him really how to run. It was good running too, until, tripping, he fell, rolled headlong, and decided not to rise. The whole Fire Brigade rushed for the bucket. Two stalwarts seized it by the handle and, side by side but not in step, ran to the river. Here they fought for its possession, the victor returning at a steady jog trot with the bucket on his head. A coolie who had risen from the ranks, he now reverted to type.

With the bucket of water still balanced upon his head, this intrepid fireman entered the house and was lost to sight.

He emerged some minutes later without the bucket, but carrying a very small and very pink pup which seemed to resent being taken from home so young.

"*Meh! Lombâk!* . . . The *samrap sy nam*, the bucket, where is it? Where's the bucket?" wailed the fat man who, I think, owned it and the house.

With the air of one who soothes and propitiates, the coolie placed the pink dog in its master's arms, and smiled brightly. Though he spoke not with his mouth, his

whole bearing said,

"There, there! Hush now! What of buckets and houses? Here is the pink dog."

The pink dog bit the fat man and the crowd cheered. But not, as I thought at the moment, in approval of the dog's conduct.

It was cheering a peculiar monkey which now appeared on the roof. Aloft he bore the bucket. First he tried the bucket as head-gear. Then finding that it acted rather as an extinguisher than as a hat, he used it otherwise.

It was an amazing monkey, called, I think, a gibbon; tall but not large; and the arms which were attached to its narrow shoulders were of such an incredible length that rather it was a small monkey attached to long arms than a pair of long arms attached to a small monkey.

Be that as it may, it had the bucket, and fire-fighting operations were at a standstill.

The Brigade was nonplussed.

And then the fireman who had been a coolie had a brilliant idea, though I admit that the same idea had also occurred to me.

Dashing off, he later re-appeared carrying a long light bamboo ladder.

Meanwhile the monkey too had an idea. It occurred to him that he personally might help by filling the bucket—and without going to the river. This he proceeded to do forthwith.

"*Wah!*" exclaimed the Fo-lu Fire Brigade.

The coolie, then arriving, placed the ladder against the wall of the house on the side that was not burning, mounted it quickly, and climbed to the roof.

The monkey equally quickly descended on the other side.

"Well, that's done it," the coolie seemed to say as he returned.

And then *Doi* Linh Nghi, standing beside me, in turn had an idea; one which, I admit, had not occurred to me.

"What about getting another bucket? Why not borrow another bucket?" he asked.

He went and offered this idea, for what it was worth, to the fat man.

"Good Joss!" said the fat man, or words to that effect. "That's an idea. Now that *is* a notion."

And rushing up to a tall cadaverous melancholy man whose moustache was not quite as long as his beard, that being at least three feet in length, he shook him violently and begged for the loan of his bucket; for the love of Heaven to lend him a *samrap sy nam*, in short, a bucket.

"Bucket?" quavered the ancient. "Bucket? What do you want my bucket for?"

"To put my fire out."

"Why?" was the reply.

"Why not?" countered the fat man.

"Yes, but *why*? Why should *my* bucket put out *your* fire?"

"Oh, Hell!" or words to that effect, moaned the fat man, "I'll *hire* your bucket."

"Well, that's a funny thing to do! I never heard of hiring buckets before. However, I'll certainly hire you my bucket. Or, rather, I would do so if I had one. I haven't got a bucket. What should I do with a bucket? I'm not a milkmaid, am I?"

"No, you are a . . ."

But I'll not put down at my leisure what the anguished householder said in his haste.

Suddenly a bucket fell, as from Heaven. In point of fact, it fell from a high tree, either of the *neem* or mango variety, whence the monkey had taken it. Having, for the time being, exhausted its possibilities as a plaything, he had dropped it.

At once the Fire Brigade got to work with that promptitude and dispatch, that vigour and indeed abandon, for which Fire Brigades are noted.

As one man they rushed to the river, the empty bucket borne in their midst.

As one man, they rushed back from the river, the bucket borne in their midst, empty. *Trop de zèle*—in their struggles they had lost the lot.

They were not discouraged.

Realizing that it is useless to cry over spilt water, they again dashed back to the river.

What they did not dash, was any water upon the fire; for again none survived that violent passage.

It was my turn to have an idea.

"Why not form a chain?" I mildly suggested to the fat man.

"Chain? Chain? Chain of what?" he enquired testily.

"Chain of men," I replied. "They should stand in a line, and pass the bucket from hand to hand. Thus all would be helping. There would be no confusion. The bucket would arrive and return with speed—and with water."

"Oh, *go* away!" replied the fat man. "Can't you see I'm busy. . . ."

It was at about this time that a small Chinese boy emitted a shrill yell and fled from the scene.

I wondered what had bitten him, and learned later.

A hitherto somewhat lethargic fireman, so broad in the shoulders and bowed in the legs as almost to be deformed, suddenly realized that this method of fire-fighting was all nonsense, and himself started to fight. He fought for an idea and for the

bucket.

He won it.

To the river he fled. With the bucket almost full, he returned; dashed up the ladder that the coolie had left standing against the wall; climbed the roof; walked along it; poured the water down a hole which I presumed was some sort of a chimney aperture; came back with the bucket; and retired from active life as one who has not only set a good example but done his good deed for the day. And sufficient unto the day.

Again the bucket went to the river.

But this time, one who had grasped the idea of the broad squat man, and wished to emulate him, met the returning party half-way; fought desperately for the bucket; won it; did precisely as his exemplar had done; and also retired. Beside the broad man he sat upon the ground and fanned himself.

The breeze fanned the flames.

Merrily they roared; soon they seized the entire house in their embrace, and swiftly devoured it.

As the roof fell in and the walls started to join them, a procession approached, headed by the small Chinese boy who had so suddenly fled from our midst.

Behind him came a vastly quivering huge Chinese; and behind him a string of coolies bearing each upon his head a zinc pail. A dozen coolies, and to every man a pail.

"Saved!" I murmured dramatically.

"At a price," I added, seeing the light of battle and the lust of barter in that shining Chinese eye.

But alas, too late, too late. That bitter cry.

And I bethought me,

> "*The saddest words of tongue or pen*
> *Are those sad words—'It might have be'n.*"

The fat man shook his head.

Even the Chinese merchant realized that he was a day after the fair; or, at least, some hours after the fire had grown beyond reasonable proportions.

Having cuffed the small boy, he led the procession away again.

The fat man kicked the pink dog and walked off the scene—whither I know not.

I never enjoyed a free public entertainment more.

I have said little about the conduct of the man De-Nha on this journey, because there is little to say. Although he was, in a sense, our leader, he was with us but not of us. Brooding, aloof, unfriendly, he walked apart, and held no communication with us beyond what was necessary.

On the other hand he played his part and did what he was there to do, inasmuch as he explained us away when explanation was necessary, and led us away when departure from camp or village was advisable. Without him we could not have got along; but, on the other hand, there were undoubtedly times when he was extremely glad of our company, times when he was recognized, and accused of being precisely who and what he was. It was then that I and the *Doi* and his merry men ceased to be merry, looked extremely truculent, drew ugly weapons and showed our teeth.

Studying the man, I came to the conclusion that it would be foolish to come to any definite conclusion at all, inasmuch as he himself did not know what he was going to do. If ever the silly phrase 'a prey to conflicting emotions' were justifiable, it was here; for, undoubtedly, his emotions preyed upon his mind and undeniably they were conflicting.

He hated us. He hated the French; and I am sure that he would a thousand times rather have been a *ly truong* under the Emperor of Annam than a petty official of the French. What would keep him faithful to us if anything would, was the knowledge that the Emperor's cause was lost; and that if De-Nha rejoined General De-Nam in the jungle, a jungle life would be his to the end of his days. And he was a man who could, and did, hope for better things than a rough and barbarous existence, living from hand to mouth, and certain, sooner or later to be deprived of those luxuries, such as opium, that had become necessities.

What I did feel pretty certain about, was that he would very promptly succumb to any offer that was a real temptation, and take any chance of exchanging the French connection for something that promised at least as well. I was equally sure that he was devoid of what is known as honour, entirely unhampered by any scruples of common honesty, and that if he remained faithful to us it would be because we represented his best material interests.

Looking back on that time, De-Nha is curiously shadowy; as distrustful as he was distrusted; despising *Doi* Linh Nghi and the other *thois* as much as they despised him; a grudging and unpleasant companion who was no companion at all.

And so, at length, we reached Lao Kai, a little town of definitely Chinese appearance, with its tiled roofs, upcurled and dragon-adorned eaves, its superior pagoda-like *wat*, and its long paper-banner bedecked bazaar, shaded by rain-trees.

Led by De-Nha, who had evidently been this way before, we passed through

Lao Kai, and, a few days later either close to, immediately upon, or actually over the Yunnanese border, came upon a vast fortified perimeter camp.

CHAPTER X

This great camp of Phu-Son, each entrenched and stockaded side of which must have been a mile in length, was built about an already fortified village, beside which was a really fine fort of mediæval pattern. It was clear, even to me, when I had time to study the place, that it had been built either by a pupil of Marshal Vauban, the great military engineer of the days of Louis XIV, or at least by a most competent European engineer working to the plans of a Vauban fort.

It was extremely interesting, and in some curious way heartening, to find, in a place like this, a building so obviously European, one that might have come straight from Strasbourg, Landau, or Clermont, or any such French place fortified by Vauban himself.

In point of fact, it was similar to, and nearly as strong as, the citadel at Bac-Ninh, built about 1715 by French military engineers borrowed by the then Emperor of Annam from Louis XIV.

This fort inside the great perimeter camp was octagonal in shape, each side having a frontage of about a furlong's length, and strengthened with regular old-fashioned bastions and demi-lunes.

Inside it, as I came to know later, were the excellent houses of the two Generals commanding the Brigade of troops encamped here; as well as very good officers' quarters; staff-offices; and barracks for a battalion. I imagined that it had originally been built as a Chinese border fortress for the defence of Yunnan against invasion by the Annamese.

Within its precincts was a great old pagoda, now used as a sort of *yamen*, military court-house, and general headquarters, by the two Generals who were in joint command of the garrison, or perhaps respectively in command of the two forces composing it, of which more anon.

Although the perimeter fortifications of the place were modern, and indeed recent, there was an air of strength, solidity and permanence about this camp that surprised me.

§2

I now, for the time being, entirely resigned leadership and initiative to De-Nha and *Doi* Linh Nghi. It was up to them to get our party accepted and enrolled in the heterogeneous dacoit army of which this was the headquarters. This was, in point of fact, a simple matter, as all able-bodied men, accustomed to the use of arms, and willing to accept the discipline and terms of service, were welcome, be they

Yunnanese, Annamese, Black Flags, Laos, Möis, or other.

De-Nha, of course, had no difficulty whatever in presenting himself as an ex-dacoit seeking better service than that of the nomadic jungle bands of General De-Nam. Nor were *Doi* Linh Nghi and his men suspected of being anything but Delta Annamese patriots who preferred exile to servitude—in other words, easy robbery to hard work.

And when the *Doi* and his relatives were accused of being deserters from some regiment of *Tirailleurs Tonkinois*, they grinned coyly and, with bashful mien, forbore to refuse the blushing honours thrust upon them.

And, inasmuch as both De-Nha and *Doi* Linh Nghi vouched for me, I too was accepted as a good fellow likely to succeed by my honesty, industry, and close attention to all branches of dacoit duty.

True, they admitted, I was only a Mongol lout of sorts, and intensely stupid, but see how strong and (as they would observe later) what a marvellous marksman with a rifle; firing it as I did from the shoulder, using the sights as the *Farangs* do, and able to put a bullet not merely within a given area, such as a town, but on a given spot, such as a house, or even a window of a house in that town.

These things were later tested and found to be true. I also, by request, gave an exhibition of strength and skill with a sword. This was so successful that a brilliant career was prophesied for me—as an executioner.

Little did I think when learning sword-drill from my Troop Corporal-Major, and the art of sabre-fighting from the Corporal-Instructor of the Life Guards, that I should ever exhibit my skill to such an audience or earn such encomiums. It never occurred to me that a man who could divide the leaden bar, sever the hanging sheep into two halves, or cut the dangling handkerchief, was qualifying for the post of executioner.

With my companions, I was enrolled with this dacoit army, mainly Chinese, encamped near the Annamese border, and commanded by the Generals Ba-Ky and Luong-Tam-Ky.

As a brigand-recruit I walked warily; taciturn, truculent—and in considerable danger. Without the help of De-Nha and *Doi* Linh Nghi, I should have been in infinitely greater danger, and my career as a dacoit considerably shorter. With them, I occupied a hut in the camp lines outside the fort; was given a crude yellowish uniform, consisting of a long vest buttoned up to the throat and slit up the sides, worn over what were either short trousers or long breeches, a broad conical hat, a fairly good rifle of Russian make, and a belt and cartridge-case containing thirteen rounds

—an unlucky number—of cartridges which, still more unluckily, did not fit the rifle.

Thus accoutred and equipped, I attended drills and parades which would have charmed Mr. Frederick Karno, appealed to his peculiar sense of humour, and enlarged his horizon.

Squad-drill and Company-drill were rendered easier than are these exercises in the West, by reason of the fact that unanimity of movement was not exacted—only a general unanimity of spirit, an acceptance of the fact that something else was to be done now, and by practically everybody. Thus "*Quick march*" meant "Go forward, more or less in a body"; "*Halt*" meant "Now you can stop and either stand up or lie down"; "*About turn*" meant "Shuffle back here again"; and "*Right*" or "*Left Turn*" meant "Go more or less East or West or somewhere". . . .

The rifle-range I did not attend, being excused this particular parade by reason of the admitted fact that my rifle, like those of many of my new comrades, could not be fired. I did, however, attend daily instructional classes in aiming-drill and the use of the rifle. These exercises differed materially from those prevailing in European armies.

At the word of command, we removed our rifles, from all the varying and different positions they might happen to occupy at the moment, and took the butts firmly beneath our right arms. Or the left, if preferred. The Squad was then directed to look more or less in the direction of the object to be aimed at; such an object, say, as the fort itself, the distant village of Pac-ho, or a mountain in China.

The recruit having looked in this direction, could then either close his eyes or keep them open, whichever he liked; or indeed, could do both—in other words, blink them repeatedly should he prefer that method of sighting. But what he must do, without option, was to point the muzzle of the rifle—especially, particularly, and notably the muzzle—in the direction in which he was, or had been, looking. Then, grasping the rifle about the waist, middle, point of balance, or anywhere else, with the right hand, he must bring his left hand smartly or slowly across his chest, insert it beneath the right arm and the rifle, give the trigger a good shove with his thumb, index-finger, coat-sleeve, button, or anything else, until, happily, the thing went off, *bang*.

The rifle having been fired, the recruit must then, without further word of command, re-load the rifle and repeat the process until his ammunition was expended or his *Ong-Tu-phian*[1] clouted him over the head and told him to do something else.

The great thing, it was explained to us, was to make a noise.

That was the real aim and object of rifle-fire.

And the noise, we must note, served a double purpose. It intimidated foes and enheartened friends.

Therefore the good rifleman, the marksman, the sharpshooter, must bang off frequent and free; high, wide, and handsome; and the more often he fired, the better man was he. And there is nothing better than rifles for the purpose of noise, except artillery. That, by reason of its greater noise, was the more important arm.

And therein the *Farangi* were our superiors; but only to the extent that they could make more noise. . . .

One of our Instructors, a superior man, who had undoubtedly held similar rank in the regular Chinese army, pointed out to us that, in point of fact, there was often more to it than that. He told us, what was perfectly true, that if we lined a stockade, looked toward the enemy and kept on firing, they would, as they advanced toward us, sooner or later come literally under our fire. As even such silly buffaloes as we must know, bullets fall, and the enemy approaching must enter the zone in which they are falling. He estimated that, provided we held our rifles reasonably level, there would be in front of them a danger zone of anything from three hundred to six hundred yards wide, a zone beginning about a furlong away from our rifles.

Once the enemy had come within a third part of a li of us, a couple of hundred yards, *rifles were of no further use*, as they would only send bullets over the heads of the approaching foe.

And it was then that the rifles should be discarded—when the foreign devils were a couple of hundred yards distant.

Yes, that was the time to throw them down and take to the sword, *mâchète*, *mīt*, *lâp*, *pīa*; spear, *mai-tau*, *chawk*; halberd, axe, *khwan*, *khio*; and indeed, if anyone cared about such new-fangled foreign things, the bayonet.

Anyway, what was true was that, once the enemy had got to within a furlong of the position, it was no use to try any longer to frighten him with loud bangs. Having got so far, he was evidently coming right on; and that was the time when good drill, good discipline and good soldiering told; the time to take to the sword and be willing to die by the sword.

A good stout lad, that Sergeant-Instructor, who knew his job. . . .

Some of his drill-orders, though not, I believe, to be found, then or now, in any drill-book, remain with me still:—

"*Squad!* Take those rifles off your shoulders, off the ground, off your backs and wherever else they are. Under the arm-pits; place *rifles*.

"Look at the pagoda on the hill.

"No—that squint-eyed fool near the middle of the back row—I'm not a

pagoda. Don't look at me. Oh, you're looking at the pagoda and not at me? Right. Try and look at it with both eyes at once, then.

"Now, fire *rifles*. Go on.

"Good!

"Now go on doing it till I wave my arms about in the air."

I enjoyed my drill-lessons with the Chinese-Annamese Dacoit Pirate Brigand Patriot Army at the Phu-Son Barracks more than I did those I received in the British Army at the Knightsbridge Barracks.

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[1] *Sergeant*.

§3

I soon discovered that these Chinese dacoits were really good material.

Given a year in the hands of British officers and British drill-sergeants they would, in battle, led by these same Britons, have given a good account of themselves against any troops in the world, for they had the root of the matter and all the essential makings of a soldier.

The first military quality they possessed in abundance—courage. Led by men who had at least as much courage as themselves, they would go anywhere, attack anything and stand up to the attack of anybody.

The second qualification was theirs also, for they were physically strong. Mostly Yunnanese, they were definitely sturdy, tough and most enduring.

And thirdly, they were definitely amenable to proper reasonable discipline, understanding the necessity for it, and accepting its restrictions without a murmur; and in point of fact, these troops would have had but little respect for an officer whom they did not regard as somewhat ruthless, even cruel, in his punishments.

They were, moreover, of extremely cheerful spirit, given to easy laughter, appreciative of a joke, and though devilishly grim when about the business of warfare, ordinarily merry and light-hearted.

Moreover, they could travel light, light as any troops in the world, and subsist indefinitely on a handful of rice a day. Their health was good, their needs small, and if properly handled and looked after, their morale always high.

Excellent troops, in fact, and in their native jungle a desperate and dangerous foe, capable of dealing with an equal number of trained European troops on equal

terms. Against white soldiers their crying need was of course officers, men of character and education superior to their own, trained in the science and art of war.

To set against their military virtues, they were severely handicapped by two military vices. They would not fire their rifles from the shoulder and they would not march in step. This was, of course, because they had never been trained to do so; and it was to remedy these two grave faults that I was supposed to set to work.

Had I been going to train these men to fight on my own side, turn them from the dacoits and pirates that they were, into *Tirailleurs Tonkinois*, I should have enjoyed the work, and with such material could have made a good job of it.

I could have made them into far better soldiers than the Chinese regulars whom later I saw.

And even as it was, in spite of their horrible habit of firing the rifle with the butt stuck under the arm-pit or planted against the hip, and in spite of the fact that at drill not two men in a Company were in step, they were formidable fighters.

Had they ever been taught to use the rifle properly and been given sufficient ammunition wherewith to practise shooting and improve their marksmanship, the conquest of Annam would have been an even slower and more costly business than it was.

§4

And here I lived in a strange waking dream, a dacoit among dacoits, as in the Sahara and Arabia, I had lived as an Arab among Arabs.

It was fantastic—and the most fantastic thing about it all was the fact that it did not seem so. Before very long, incredible as it may appear, the weird nightmare life took on the hues of reality, of normality; and I ceased to wonder at it and at myself.

And, meanwhile, I learned a very great deal concerning the local situation, local politics, plans and people.

People! One day it appeared in orders—in other words, it was bawled out by the Chinese Sergeant-Instructor, after one of our drill-*divertissements*, that on the morrow we should be inspected by the Generals and the Colonel Kar-Linh, Commandant of the horde, herd, force, mob or Brigade.

This pleased and interested me greatly, for I was most anxious to see the famous General Ba-Ky, the possibly more famous General Luong-Tam-Ky, and the mysterious Colonel Kar-Linh or Kar-Ling.

"*Attention!*" bawled the Sergeant-Instructor. . . . "Here! Come back, you! I didn't say '*Rice*', I said, '*Attention*' . . . Stand up, those three at the end of the row.

You can't stand at 'attention' if you are sitting down. . . . Put out those *biddis* there. European troops don't smoke at 'attention'. Not openly, like that. . . . Stop that laughing and listen to me, damn you, or I'll come and disembowel a few of you, and you can laugh at that. . . . I'm going to have you as smart as *Farangi* General Gardan's army before I've done with you. You may have broken your mothers' hearts but you won't break mine. . . ."

Sergeant-Instructors are very much alike, all the world over.

"Now then, stop shoving and shuffling, and listen. Parade to-morrow at sunrise. There will be a General Inspection—and I will give any mud-fish a week's *cangue* who parades without his hat, without a coat of some sort, without a belt or a cord or something round his belly, or with his rifle bunged up with mud. . . . No rifles to be loaded before coming on parade. No man to smoke, spit, scratch, talk, laugh or sit down while the Generals are passing along the line. See? . . . Right. Now you can all push off. . . ."

Along the ragged line, next morning, after we had been standing at complete inattention for at least a couple of hours, rode three men on short-necked sturdy Chinese ponies, followed by a miscellaneous crowd of officers, aides-de-camp, banner-men, pipe-bearers, executioners, halberdiers and orderlies.

Two of the mounted three were obviously Chinese. The third was as obviously European; and I think my heart beat a little faster at the sight of him—a fellow-European, very possibly a brother Englishman, here in this amazing assembly of "drilled" and uniformed Chinese and assorted robbers, dacoits, brigands and what-nots.

The Generals rode in front of this man, one of them a huge savage-looking desperado, the sort of creature one might see in a pantomime, or, nowadays in a film, without any amazement. He was so like one's conception of a ferocious Chinese bandit-chief or pirate as to be almost incredible; almost too bad to be true, too realistic to be real.

The other General was of a very different type, half the size of the first one; and, whereas the latter's face expressed cruelty, rapacity, villainy and brutality, this one's face expressed precisely nothing at all.

Beside his horse walked—or rather, stalked—a very dreadful-looking man, who must have been at least seven feet in height, and who, in spite of that fact, looked disproportionately broad to the point of deformity. Such arms have I never seen, in point of length and size; nor more enormous thighs and calf-muscles. This monstrous person—who was clad in nothing but a tightly-folded loin-cloth—bore over his right

shoulder a great and gleaming sword. He had the most sinister face I have ever seen in my life, a curious and freakish malformation of his lips and teeth adding to its bizarre hideousness; for the lower canine teeth were as abnormally long as were the arms and was the creature himself. These fangs protruded and lay flat against the upper lip—and outside it. Thus even in complete repose the expression of the horrible face was a ferocious tooth-baring snarl. . . .

The third man might have been a well-fed weather-beaten, tough British field-officer masquerading in some outlandish Oriental uniform at a Tattoo or Military Tournament spectacle. For he, like the Generals, was dressed in a yellow cotton tunic and trousers; high felt-soled riding-boots; a curious mediæval-looking velvet hat, typically Chinese in style; assorted belts and cross-belts; and odds-and-ends of decorative braiding, aiguillettes and shoulder-straps. He wore a European sword and a revolver which looked to me to be of British Army service-pattern. As he rode slowly past me, I summed him up for a stout soldier of fortune, and learned later that I was not far wrong. . . .

The Inspection followed.

We marched forward in line; the line became two ranks as the taller and more enthusiastic forged ahead; the two ranks became two parties, as the left of the line edged off to its left and the right of the line bore away to its right.

We were ordered to turn about and many of us did so.

We were requested to form line again and open fire upon the Fort.

This we did, most of us looking earnestly toward it while tucking the butt of the rifle under the right arm-pit and fumbling for the trigger either with the left hand or the right. Many of us looked for the trigger instead of the Fort.

One man, a happy warrior who was not quite all the perfect man-at-arms should be, discovered, on jerking the trigger, that there was a cartridge in his rifle after all. It was unfortunate—for him at any rate—that the bullet narrowly missed General Ba-Ky who was, somewhat recklessly, rather to the front than the flank of the firing-line.

Pour encourager les autres not to be wasteful of ammunition, the General ordered the man to be reprimanded by being suspended from the Fort wall (on a piece of telegraph wire bound about his united big toes) until he dropped off or otherwise showed improvement.

I wondered whether he would have been more severely admonished if he had missed General Luong-Tam-Ky in like manner—or Colonel Kar-Linh.

My next pre-occupation was the problem of the best method of establishing contact with the European officer, Colonel Kar-Linh, in such a manner that I should not be immediately arrested as a spy and shot out of hand.

Life was cheap at this interesting place, and the question as to whether a man should die seemed subordinate and indeed subsequent to that as to how he should die.

For the authorities—the Generals Ba-Ky and Luong-Tam-Ky—were specialists, artists and scientists in the art and science of painful slaying, and were ever on the lookout for subjects for experiment. I never heard that the Colonel or any other subordinate presented the Generals with the case of a man worthy to die, without discovering that the Generals fully agreed with the justice of the sentence. Or, at any rate, with the sentence.

If Colonel Kar-Linh took one look at me when I addressed him in French or English, said,

"You are a spy and you'll die to-morrow," I should certainly die to-morrow—or to-day.

I decided to walk warily, bide my time, and exercise the excellent Scottish virtue of caution. Too often in my few short years had I been impulsive and "glaiksome." On this occasion, glaiksome I would not be.

Meanwhile *Doi* Linh Nghi, in conversation with his new comrades, learnt a great deal, and, among other valuable items of information, that the Viceroy De-Nam was constructing a vast and impregnable fortress in the jungle, a place that, when completed, would be citadel, arsenal, treasure-house, base and General Headquarters of the insurgent army of Annam.

From *Doi* Linh Nghi's description of the description given by those who had seen it, the Great Fortress was quite evidently modelled upon the plan of this comparatively small one, itself a copy of the Vauban fort at Bac Ninh.

According to eye-witnesses' accounts, it had three tiers of fire from the great outer stockade; a vast surrounding moat, dry and deep, filled with sharply-pointed poisoned bamboo stakes; two inner stockades both similarly defended; high flanking towers, and a most cunningly devised and constructed fort within.

Entrance to this latter could not be obtained except through passages that turned at right-angles and were so narrow that only in single file could invaders pass through them—and only under a blasting and withering rifle-fire. Evidently this was a place with which nothing but artillery could deal; and, apparently, was so sited that artillery could neither approach nor see it.

What was needed, I decided, was not only an accurate plan of the place and its

surrounding defences, but an even more accurate contour-map of the adjacent country.

I would not leave here until I had made these or had concluded that such a thing was really impossible. . . .

In time, the Company, gang, band, or troupe to which I belonged was moved from the camp lines into the Fort, for guard purposes.

Here we were quartered in a foul and filthy barrack-building that had the loveliest old grey stone-tiled roof with up-curling super-imposed eaves.

We were now taught the whole art and mystery of guard-mounting and the performance of all the duties of a sentry in a smart and soldier-like manner.

Before long, we could do things, if not in the Buckingham Palace sentry style, at least quite as well as these things were done anywhere in Annam, if not in all China.

Guard would be mounted and sentries posted at the great gates; over the arsenal; at the main-guard; over the houses of the high officers; over the arms and ammunition stores, and around the walls.

One, having business or having no business, would approach a sentry, and a listener—or indeed anyone within ear-shot, whether listening or not—would hear,

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Hullo, Ah Fat! What about a flutter at fan-tan. I've got the makings and twenty-five *sabuks*."

"Show us your money. Right. Wait till I get these belts off. . . ."

Or, perchance, visiting-rounds, their approach wholly unchallenged, would halt and patiently await the smart and soldierly voice of the watchful keeper of the midnight vigil. Having waited in vain it would, still patiently, but a shade reproachfully, ask to be challenged, whereupon would follow a prolonged loud yawn, and a sleepy voice from the darkness of a doorway would enquire whether anybody had got a match.

At first *Doi* Linh Nghi was livid with rage at such a slovenly travesty of the military ceremonial and smartness that he loved; soon he became merely contemptuous; and, finally, much amused.

Being a man whose humour was apt to express itself unconventionally, he played a practical joke upon the Sergeant of the Guard, one night, a jest which I could not approve. Standing in the complete darkness of a recessed gateway, he awaited the dawdling slouching approach of the visiting-rounds in motionless silence, allowed the Sergeant to ask three times that he be challenged, and then suddenly fired his rifle.

Visiting-rounds fled; the guard and most of the Company, if not the entire population of the Fort as well as of the camp, turned out; sentries left their posts and

came running, and chaos and darkness reigned. When lights had been procured and an angry officer, followed by a score or two of armed warriors, came to investigate, there was nothing to investigate, *Doi* Linh Nghi having relieved himself of his duties at this post and taken up those of another.

I professed to be very angry with him; and had he been caught he would certainly have been punished in some manner calculated to render him no longer useful to himself or anyone else.

Thereafter a certain liveliness reigned at night, and the business of sentry-visiting was taken quite seriously.

One evening, as I squatted with my back against a wall at a spot I often occupied because, from it, I had a good view of the door of the excellent little house occupied by Colonel Kar-Linh, that officer came to the window.

Behind him I saw the figure of a woman, apparently wearing European dress. She seemed to be looking out, over his shoulder, as might a captive permitted to take a glimpse of the outside world from his prison door.

Softly I began to whistle *Rule Britannia*. Colonel Kar-Linh heard, started and stared.

I changed my tune to *The British Grenadiers*. The Colonel came to the door of the house, and placing his hands upon his hips, his arms akimbo, planted himself four-square in the porch, the expression of his face, of his whole body in fact, one of "What the Devil!"

I next favoured him with a few bars of *Ye Banks and Braes*, and, as I did so, the scene seemed to change and his house in the Fort of Phu-Son to be the house of the Nawab of Aundhara at Mecca in Arabia.

When I had finished, the Colonel whistled the first two bars of *God Save the King* and I obliged with the next two.

For the best part of a minute he then stood perfectly still, staring hard at me.

My heart beat fast, for I had now burnt my boats, and my fate lay in the hands of this soldier of fortune whose reputation, even in this robber stronghold, was not too savoury.

Suddenly he raised his hand and beckoned to me to approach. Rising to my feet, I slouched over to where he stood, and gave the best representation that I could achieve of a stupid and bashful coolie, sullen and uncomfortable in the presence of his superior. With hanging head and dangling arms, I stared foolishly at the dust wherein I scrabbled with the big toe of my left foot. I then rubbed my left calf with my right foot and mechanically scratched my ribs.

"Well?" growled the Colonel in English. "What's the game?"

He was certainly English, I decided.

I grinned sheepishly and grunted the Annamese noise of interrogation.

"Who are you?" he then enquired in French, adding,

"And where did you study—music shall we call it? And why English music?"

I grunted again, and the Colonel tried me in German, whereat I shook my head. He then spoke in Russian and Chinese, and I continued to gape and grunt.

Just as he was about to get angry and do something regrettable (from my point of view) I waxed eloquent and confidential.

"I'm an Englishman, Sir," I said. "British, rather. A Scot. Served in a British Regiment. Gentleman-adventurer, like yourself, and a soldier of fortune."

"You're British all-right," agreed the Colonel, and I think there was a look of satisfaction, if not a smile of pleasure, on his face at hearing his native language. "Don't know about gentleman, though you must be a bit of an adventurer to come here. As for soldier of fortune, you've been a soldier all-right and the fortune may follow—and be damn' bad fortune too."

"I'll risk it, Sir," I grinned.

"You're certainly taking a risk," he replied, and the tone of his voice was not altogether reassuring. "I've had my eye on you, or somebody else's eye, ever since I heard there was a man here who fired from the shoulder and could hit a target every time at five hundred. At first I thought you might be one of Gordon's former men from Kwang-si, but you are too young. Afterwards I guessed you might be a deserter from the French Foreign Legion, and then I guessed you might not—because you'd never have got here through the jungle, even if you'd known where to come. . . . Now I've heard you talk, I'll tell you who you are, if you'd like to know. You're a deserter from the 90th, and you've made your way here from Burma. Isn't that it?"

I looked as sheepish, confused, and guilty as I could, and forebore to contradict my superior.

"And a hell of a long time you must have been wandering," he decided, "judging by the look of you and the way you behave and sling the pidgin. . . . Gone completely native, haven't you?"

I admitted, not entirely without complacency that I had pretty much 'gone native'.

"You didn't take *me* in, you know," said the Colonel.

"No, Sir," I agreed, knowing perfectly well that I had taken him in completely; although, no doubt, he had been puzzled as to how and where I had come to learn

musketry.

For a minute or so he studied me, summing me up, and suddenly seemed to come to a decision.

"I suppose you want a job?" he said. "Promotion and all that. . . . Well, come here just after sunset, and I'll talk to you. If you can keep off drink, opium, or whatever your trouble is, I can use you. You teach these swine a bit of drill and discipline, musketry and fire-control, and turn them into something like soldiers, and you'll be worth your corn to me. Good corn too and plenty of it. . . . What's your name, rank and regiment?"

"Sinclair Noel Brodie Dysart," I replied, "formerly Trooper in the Tins—I mean Her Majesty's Life Guards; and some-time Inspector-General of Cavalry in the army of His Highness the Sultan Mahommed el Kebir of Bab-el-Djebel."

The Colonel smiled wryly.

"I'm sure you were," he said, "and at about the time I was Standard-Bearer to the Devil in the Holy War in Heaven. . . . Well, whether you were that or Sergeant Jock Gordon of the 90th Highlanders, late of Mandalay, doesn't matter, so long as you can do Sergeant-Instructor here, with the rank of—Captain shall we say? I'll give you a trial, anyway.

"And give you Christian burial," he growled with an ugly scowl, "if there's any trouble. See?"

I saw.

That evening I had a long talk with Colonel Collins, Military Adviser and Chief of Staff to the Generals Ba-Ky and Luong-Tam-Ky, joint Commanders-in-Chief of the Independent, and mainly Chinese, army of Phu-Son. Having listened to my account of myself, without comment or evidence of credulity, Colonel Collins offered me the post of Sergeant-Instructor with the rank and pay of Staff Captain and the additional duties of personal aide-de-camp to himself.

He made it clear to me that if I succeeded in satisfying and pleasing him I should never regret having found my way to Phu-Son, and that if I failed to satisfy and please him I should regret it very bitterly for the remainder of my life, which would be brief.

To the Generals Ba-Ky and Luong-Tam-Ky he formally presented me, at a sort of durbar in the *Yamen* building, describing me as a young friend and protégé of his who had, at great risk and with extreme courage, made the difficult journey all the way from Burma to join his famous examplar, Colonel Collins, and to take service with him under the flag of the illustrious Generals Ba-Ky and Luong-Tam-Ky whose

fame had penetrated even to those distant and barbarous parts.

The illustrious Generals grunted with one accord.

General Ba-Ky, huge and forbidding, smiled ogre-like and hoped, for my own sake, that I should give satisfaction.

General Luong-Tam-Ky, small and most enigmatic, smiled not nor spoke any word at all. . . .

By order of Colonel Collins I was given a one-roomed house in the Fort garden, a small building that had been a store of some sort, but which, furnished with a table, chair, and heavy teak-wood bed, made a sufficiently comfortable dwelling.

Doi Linh Nghi I appointed my orderly, and two of his relations my batman and body-servant, while a third was selected by the *Doi* as cook for the five of us. Certainly the worthy *tirailleur* knew enough to boil water in an iron pot and throw rice into it.

An excellent Chinese regimental-tailor devised me a noble uniform of brilliant yellow; and, in this, with a sort of mandarin hat, belt and cross-belts, high felt-soled boots and a big sword, I must have cut an imposing if unconvincing figure.

And so, without great amazement, I found myself a commissioned officer in the highly-irregular forces of the auxiliaries of His Majesty the (exiled) Emperor of Annam and in a position to see and hear most of what was going on, and to learn what I had come to discover.

So far I had succeeded beyond all expectation or hope—thanks to my splendid *Doi* Linh Nghi and the less splendid De-Nha.

CHAPTER XI

The Generals Ba-Ky and Luong-Tam-Ky fascinated me, both independently and in their amazing contrast. No two men in this world were ever more unlike in character and physique, in characteristics and technique.

And yet, in spite of their utter and complete difference one from another, I don't know which of them terrified me the more. One was the prototype of Chu Chin Chow himself, a huge powerful and villainous semi-savage; and the other was a tiny, gentle, and mild little man who might have been Private Secretary to Confucius.

And I don't, I repeat, know which of these twain terrified me the more.

General Ba-Ky (Chu Chin Chow) almost frightened me to death: General Luong-Tam-Ky (the Private Secretary) almost frightened me to death; the one by what he threatened to do, and did do, to many and many a victim of his wrath or suspicion; the other by not threatening to do anything at all, and by what one imagined he had done to the victims of his wrath or suspicion—who disappeared and were seen no more.

General Ba-Ky's slogan and signature-tune might well have been,

"*We are the Robbers of the Woods*", for that is precisely what he was; a powerful robber-chief of the most truculent type; a ruffian who stuck at nothing whatsoever; a swashbuckler whose simple creed was "What a man dares he may do"; a brute devoid of mercy, kindness, magnanimity or compassion.

General Luong-Tam-Ky would have acknowledged nothing so blatant as a slogan nor so individualistic as a signature-tune, if such things had been known in his day. Had he been a Christian, his favourite text would have been,

"*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*," for a more apparently meek person I never encountered—nor one with a firmer intention to inherit all the earth he wanted.

Another text which would have appealed to him, competing for his preference, almost successfully, with the above, would have been,

"*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the Kingdom of Heaven*," inasmuch as he was so apparently poor in spirit and desirous of a Kingdom in Heaven—after he had enjoyed one on earth.

And doubtless, without a smile, he would have murmured quite frequently,

"*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God*," because he loved to make a solitude and call it peace, and to walk before men as a humble child of God. And I am quite certain that before, during, and after, an execution, especially if accompanied with examination by the torturer, he would have

murmured,

"*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*," his own mercy, *bien entendu*, which was like that of the great Amir:

> "*But three days hence, if God be good, and if thy strength remain*
> *Thou shalt demand one boon of me and bless me in thy pain.*
> *For I am merciful to all, and most of all to thee. . . .*"

Nor to this day am I certain as to whether the man was a colossal hypocrite.

Somehow I don't think he was.

I got the impression, rather, that his idea of good form and good style, was meekness, humility and poorness of spirit; and that he considered his colleague, General Ba-Ky as vulgar, blatant, and, on the whole, rather a Bad Man. Certainly not a Good Egg.

Over an execution, General Ba-Ky would smack his lips, laugh hugely, and gloat.

Very bad form indeed.

For General Luong-Tam-Ky, watching the ugly business just as carefully, would, with completely expressionless face, murmur the equivalent of

"Sad! Sad! Sad!"

Very gentlemanly.

When some wretch was to be put to the question with indescribably hideous torture, General Ba-Ky would openly enjoy the show, occasionally suggesting ideas that would win the admiring approval of the executioner himself.

But when General Luong-Tam-Ky questioned a man, albeit his methods were even more excruciatingly agonizing than those of General Ba-Ky, he would permit no sign of approval, much less of pleasure and enjoyment, to appear upon his inscrutable face.

And when he suggested another and improved method of persuasion, it would be regretfully, deprecatingly, and with a remark to the effect that though bitter constraint and sad occasion dear drove him to suggest this now, it must not be regarded as a precedent.

A melancholy duty performed in the very best manner. Most gentleman-like again.

I don't think that General Luong-Tam-Ky could have thought very much of General Ba-Ky's Old School, and I am sure he would have been the first to black-ball him had anyone put him up for the exclusive Service Club to which, in Peking, General Luong-Tam-Ky doubtless belonged.

No, I'm not sure; but on the whole, I think perhaps I would rather have been condemned to death by General Ba-Ky, or even put to the torture by him, than have suffered at the hands of the gentle and pious General Luong-Tam-Ky.

It would perhaps have been a quicker business, but, nevertheless . . .

In person, General Ba-Ky was as tall as I—and I am over six feet—heavily built, and very powerful; a robustious noisy person who ate Gargantuan meals, drank very freely of *chang*, *choum-choum* and what he called indifferently *nam-fai* and *ram-fai* and *lam-fai*, and which appeared to me to be a kind of brandy; shook with Homeric laughter; bawled unseemly jests; roared savagely at trembling servants; was given to the wearing of fierce raiment; and generally behaved as though he knew himself to be the spiritual ancestor of our Chu Chin Chow.

In person, General Luong-Tam-Ky was tiny, smallboned, fragile, frail, and delicate; a dainty cat-like person who went softly, ate sparingly, drank only scented mandarin tea, very very rarely smiled and never never laughed; neither made nor noticed jokes of any kind; spoke gently and kindly to servants and inferiors; never threatened, scolded, nor uttered abuse; never showed anger, annoyance, interest, desire nor any other emotion whatsoever; was of pleasant and learned discourse; and generally behaved as though he knew himself to be the spiritual descendant of the immortal sage, saint, savant and philosopher, K'ung Fu-tze known to the West as Confucius.

One could not say that at feasts and communal meals General Luong-Tam-Ky regarded General Ba-Ky and his manners with disgust or disapproval, for signs neither of those sentiments nor of any other ever showed upon his completely impassive and utterly inscrutable countenance.

No stolid Chinese face carved from a block of ivory ever showed less, told less, or changed less, than did that of General Luong-Tam-Ky; the surface of no lake ever revealed less of what was hidden in the depths beneath it; the face of no statue of Buddha was ever more changeless, more secret, more unreadable.

And as I have said, these two Chinese Generals terrified me, the gentle polite and humble "Private Secretary" as much as the roaring ruffianly Chu Chin Chow. Both were to me so alien, so strange, as to be entirely beyond my comprehension.

CHAPTER XII

And what of the man whom both these mediæval War-Lords, these Robber-Barons, these Chinese *tuchuns*, trusted?

Being a fellow-Englishman, I thought I could understand him in a way in which I could never understand the Chinese.

But what at first I could not understand was how a man of his race and up-bringing, education and training, could possibly behave as he did.

Later I learned the reason.

Had you seen this man, bearing, rightfully or otherwise, the widely-known, highly-respected, and indeed welcome, name of John Collins, you would have said that he was apparently a typical Englishman, or rather representative of a very well-known type of Englishman—somewhat John Bullish; of full and ruddy countenance; four-square, thick-set, bluff and hearty.

Clean-shaven and properly dressed, he would have been well in the picture in the cattle-market of any English country town, as a prosperous farmer about the business of the buying and selling of beasts. He would have walked around, a straw in the corner of his mouth, a considering look in his eye, a bucolic stick in his hand; and, from time to time, he would have prodded specimens of fat stock.

Or again, strange as it may seem, in cassock and surplice, academic hood and stole, he would have been well in the picture in a pulpit, the pulpit of an ancient village church; a sporting parson who rode to hounds (and why not), who liked his glass of port after dinner (and where's the harm), who was hail-fellow-well-met with all men, be they County gentry or humble villagers; be they bluff cheery squires or furtive poachers; a fine crusted Tory who stood for Church and State and the good Old Order of things that had made Merrie England what it was—or used to be.

Not that there was anything whatsoever of the sanctimonious or parsonical about John Collins. I allude merely to his appearance, and say that, according as you dressed him, he would have looked a typical British farmer, squire or fresh-faced parson, open-airy, breezy, jolly and debonair.

And in this he was, in a way, even more deceptive than the two Chinese Generals, his colleagues, or rather his employers and masters; for Chu Chin Chow looked the ruffian he was, and Luong-Tam-Ky, the Private Secretary to Confucius, looked the quiet scholar, the austere ascetic that he was; whereas John Collins looked the open-hearted, open-handed, bluff and honest John Bull that he was not.

Most definitely he was a crook, a rogue and a rascal, a fact that relieved me of any sense of treachery when considering my own conduct toward him. Inasmuch as

the man was utterly dishonest and faithless, I felt no compunction whatsoever in deluding him, in playing my part as spy and secret agent, to the utmost of my power and ability.

Of his history it was extremely difficult to learn anything at all, as he was a congenital liar. When he was pretending to have nothing to conceal, to be quite proud of his past, and to be telling one all about it, his statements were probably then the furthest from the truth. It was only from other sources and by unguarded remarks of his own, that I could get anywhere near the facts of his undeniably remarkable history—until I learned all about him from an accurate biographer.

According to his own account, he had been a British Officer—whether naval or military unspecified—and had been lent by the British Government to China.

His agreement with the Chinese having terminated, he had returned to England, sent in his papers, and thereafter gone back to China and resumed service with the Imperial Government privately. According to his own story, he had been not only an officer of high rank, but had reorganized the Chinese Consular Service; put life, efficiency and honesty into the Chinese Customs Service; and had generally played the sort of part in China that such men as General Gordon and Sir Robert Hart actually did.

At first he took me in, with his plausible story but, although somewhat simple-minded and naturally prone to believe what I am told, I am not really gullible, and am protected by a very valuable gift of character-reading and an intuitiveness concerning people with whom I come in contact—more especially people of my own speech and nationality.

So that, even to me, it was fairly clear that a man who was, as he described himself, a sort of cross between Gordon and Hart, would not now be here as a kind of military dry-nurse and adviser to a pair of Chinese Generals, on a surreptitious and somewhat disreputable bush-whacking expedition into neighbouring territory and against the forces of a nation with whom their government maintained diplomatic relations, and was outwardly at peace. The Chinese Government might order such filibustering and might give every support, in secret, to the enemies of France; but no such man as Collins professed to be, would have lent his countenance, much less his sword and military skill, to its support.

Moreover, the man himself did not fit in with the account that he gave, for although he was very well veneered, the veneer was thin; and it was early quite evident to me that he had never been a British Officer nor moved in the military, naval, diplomatic, or consular circles that he described.

When he drank too much, as frequently he did, quite definitely he went to

pieces, spoke in the manner that was natural to him, and behaved according to his kind. And this was very revealing.

No, I set Colonel John Collins down as a bold, brave and resolute soldier of fortune; a very competent and courageous fighter and leader; and the type of man who, at an earlier date and in the right place—say the India of Clive or Wellington—might have risen with the help of his sword, his ability, his pluck, and his lack of all hampering scruple, to a very high position.

John Collins having told me the wonderful story of his life, or rather a wonderful story about his life, I told him the simple truth concerning mine.

I gathered the impression that he rather 'handed it to me' as possibly the bigger, better, and brighter liar of us twain.

CHAPTER XIII

"Come and pick a bone with us to-night," suggested Colonel John Collins to me, one evening, as he passed the door of my hut on his way from the parade-ground to his own house.

I gathered from this form of words that he was inviting me to dinner.

I accepted with alacrity, as I was definitely interested in his wife, or rather, to discover what manner of woman had the honour and distinction to be Mrs. John Collins.

Was she a Frenchwoman who had drifted out to the East in the wake of an officer—or an Officers' Mess? Was she one of those smart, active, tight-corseted, beady-eyed Frenchwomen of whom there were so many at Saigon, ably officiating in shops and hotels?

Was she an American from one of the wonderful nightclubs or houses of Shanghai?

Was she one of those inevitably golden-haired women who, poor souls, are left stranded by illness in the trail of a travelling theatrical troupe?

Was she one of those European boarding-house keepers to be found in every port from Bombay to Hong-Kong *via* Colombo, Calcutta, Rangoon and Singapore?

I somehow fancied that she would be some sort of European, though I didn't know why I should think so. It was just as likely that she'd be a fascinatingly pretty Chinese girl, a golden-skinned Southern Siamese lass, or a dainty, yet capable, Japanese wench.

John Collins was much more of the type that installs a *congai*—what the *Doi* termed a *teasphiryéa*—than of that which marries a European according to his own law and custom, and remains faithful to her.

Besides, if he had married a European woman, it was hardly likely that she would have accompanied him on such an expedition, and to such a place, as this.

No, it would be a girl of the country, who went well with the wine of the country, of which John Collins was so fond.

Nevertheless I made myself as presentable as possible in the yellow uniform that Colonel Collins's extremely clever Chinese military-tailor had made for me.

As I approached John Collins's house, an hour later, the *conyam* rose to his feet, opened the door, bowed low, and ushered me into the presence of his master, who, in a sort of ante-room, part office, part den, was mixing himself a sun-downer.

"Have a drink, Dysart," said he with a smile which showed all his teeth but did not extend to his eyes, the hard, cold, penetrating eyes that watched so warily.

"May I have a . . ."

"What you are going to have, young feller, is a real whisky and soda, whisky from Scotland and soda from—God knows where. Probably cost more than the whisky by the time it got here."

"Thanks," said I; and, lacking something to say, asked *à propos* of nothing in particular.

"Does Mrs. Collins speak English?"

I don't know what made me ask this foolish question; but possibly I had been wondering subconsciously whether she talked Annamese or French, because if she spoke nothing but Chinese, she and I would not get much forrarder.

Why should we get any forrarder? I didn't know; but again, subconsciously I imagine, I must have been wondering whether I could learn, in conversation with her, anything about Colonel John Collins and his present undertakings.

John Collins swallowed his drink at a draught—more like a thirsty soldier, drinking water to save his life after a desert march, than a man taking an *aperitif*, or what should have been a mere *aperitif*, before dinner.

"Does she speak English?" he said with a laugh, as he looked into his empty glass and promptly replenished it; but made no further reply to my question.

"Have another?"

"No thanks."

"Not much of a performer on the bottle, are you?"

"No; very poor."

"Well, you'll excuse me if I . . ."

And John Collins opened another bottle of soda-water and poured himself a third drink.

The bottles were of the kind closed with a glass marble fitting against a rubber ring, and I noticed that Collins needed no bottle-opener. His right hand must have been pretty strong, for, holding the bottle in it, he pressed the marble down with the fore-finger without apparent effort.

"Come along then," he said, having swallowed the third drink as hastily as the others, and pushed open swing-doors that only partly filled a wide doorway, inasmuch as they began about two feet from the ground and only extended to within three feet of the top—thus admitting air from above and below and giving some privacy, as one could not see over them.

The room into which he ushered me was furnished as a sitting-room, and I could see at a glance that a woman had made pitiful efforts to make it look like a Western drawing-room. There were flowers in what appeared to be vases but were really

silk-swathed or even paper-draped, tins, jars and bottles. Over crude teak and blackwood chairs were thrown lengths of silk; and across what had once been a settee was an undeniably Spanish shawl, a beautifully embroidered thing of heavy silk with long trailing fringe.

As I looked round, the door on the other side of the room opened and a woman entered the room.

"Mr. Dysart, Poppy," said Collins. "My wife."

I stared open-eyed, if not open-mouthed, at a picture by Goya; a typical Spanish woman with black hair, arching black eye-brows, brown eyes, long black lashes, a small red mouth and a lovely complexion, very white save where a healthy and delightful glow coloured the cheeks to rose-pink.

She smiled, and her teeth were small, regular, and perfect.

She was beautiful.

And what surprised me even more than her beauty and the fact that she was European, was the expression of her face. It was essentially kindly, sweet, and gentle. At the same time, it was grave, serious, and had about it an air of, what shall I say? Resignation is perhaps the best word.

This was no French camp-follower from Marseilles; no manageress of shop, stores, or hotel, from Saigon; no flotsam of a travelling theatrical company from Paris; no escapee from a Shanghai brothel.

This was a gentlewoman, and there is little wonder that I stared, glanced from her to Collins, and back again.

What language did she speak?

Not Spanish, I hoped, for I knew not a word of it. It would have surprised me, too, had she done so, as I didn't think that Collins knew that language.

French?

Probably . . . Well, I could get along quite comfortably in that language.

"How do you do, Mr. Dysart," she said, extending a tiny, shapely, and well-kept hand.

She was English!

"How do you do, Mrs. Collins. This is a truly delightful surprise for me."

"And for me too," she smiled. "I'm so glad you are English."

"Well, British," replied I, for the sake of something to say, and to keep the ball of conversation rolling. "I'm a Scot, as a matter of fact."

"Ah, of course. Dysart. But when we English say 'English' we mean 'British', naturally. Just a little boastful pride and self-esteem—our including the Scots," and she smiled again, delightfully.

I liked her voice tremendously, and voices mean a lot to me. I think there is nothing more revealing, both as to social origins, education, and background, on the one hand, and as to character and personality on the other.

It was the voice of an educated person of good-breeding, and it was a gentle, pleasant, and sweet voice that accorded well with the mouth from which it issued. Her voice was like herself; like her face; like, as later I learned, her character and nature.

Is there such a thing as love at first sight?

I don't know.

But I do know that this woman made a deep and indelible impression upon me at first sight.

But, good God! What was she doing here in China, here at this Chinese headquarters; here in the camp of two such men as Chu Chin Chow and the Private Secretary of Confucius?

And for that matter, how came such a woman to be the wife of John Collins, cold-hearted callous crook; rascally swashbuckler, and tough soldier of fortune?

I could have understood it had he been deserving of the honourable title of gentleman-adventurer—for though adventurer surely he was, gentleman definitely he was not. And when in this sense and connection I use the word 'gentleman', I have no thought whatsoever of birth, breeding, and social origin. I have myself been a sailor (on nine pounds a year), a private soldier in two armies, and a bought-and-sold slave standing daily on a sale-block, but I try to keep a decent standard of morals and manners.

And she was this man's wife!

How she was dressed, I do not know; but it was somehow in the European fashion of the day, and it was somehow evening-dress. Probably the regimental tailor had copied some copy of a copy of a *dhirzie's* or rather a *kon-nyip-pah's* copy of an evening dress that she had brought from Home, or that had been sent out from Home.

I suppose that, had she been in that uncharted wilderness before war broke out, it would have been possible for her to get clothes up from Haiphong by way of the Red River, though I doubt it.

Part of my surprise at seeing her looking so *soignée* must have been due to the fact that, according to John Collins, his wife had always accompanied him wherever he went; and that he had not been anywhere near civilization for years, not even to Peking, much less Shanghai, Hong-Kong or any town boasting a European shop. . . .

A Chinese servant, presumably the Number One Boy, announced that dinner was ready, and we went in to dine in the adjoining room.

Here again it struck me as pathetic that this Englishwoman should have attempted to reproduce, in this godforsaken spot on the Tonking-Chinese border, a British dinner-table with white napery, polished silver and cutlery, glass and flowers.

In the centre of the table was a floral ornament, a bouquet of beautiful jungle flowers in what I felt sure was a most unworthy bowl, judging by the fact that it was swathed around with silk.

About the dinner there was no doubt, however. An excellent meal, admirably cooked; and though I doubt not that the *fons et origo boni* was goat and jungle fowl, the meal was worthy of a first-class hotel.

Conversation was difficult.

Collins, as usual, talked shop when not pumping me, as he was wont to do, with questions suddenly shot at me in the midst of his campaigning disquisitions; whereas Mrs. Collins most obviously, and very naturally, wished to talk of Home and to learn the latest news from England.

Unfortunately my own personal knowledge of English affairs was some three or four years old; but we could talk of London which she knew and loved, and of which I had seen a good deal in my Guardsman days.

It gave her pleasure even to hear such names as Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens, Drury Lane and Covent Garden; Bond Street, Regent Street, and Piccadilly; and I made a mental note of the fact that Collins himself seemed to know scarcely anything of the London of my day, and but very little of England. This fact I pondered even as he talked, switching off my conversation with his wife as frequently as he could, and sometimes with gross rudeness, to matters of local and personal interest.

From the first I had not liked Colonel Collins very much, and during this dinner I found myself heartily disliking him, for his manner toward his wife.

This was most boorish and ungentlemanly, and whenever he directed a remark to her, it was either of a sneering or a snubbing nature. I gained the impression that it annoyed him when some witty remark of hers caused me to laugh; that he disliked her to monopolize the conversation even for a minute; that he felt that women, or at any rate this woman, should be seen and not heard, and only seen when he wanted to look at her.

Throughout the dinner, he made me feel uncomfortable, and at times made my blood boil by his insufferable rudeness. Whatever I had thought him before, I now thought him an oaf and a churl; for, undeniably, in relation to the person for whom,

surely, his best manner and manners should have been reserved, he was boorish, churlish, and mannerless in the extreme.

Had he only been mannerless it would have been bad enough; but he was intentionally rude; so rude that, at times, she flushed; and at such times I relapsed to school-boy and half-deck crudity, and frankly admitted to myself that I would have liked to punch him on the jaw—obviously one of those sad examples of evil communications corrupting good manners.

After dinner, Collins proposed taking our drinks into the drawing-room, and to that room we all three went, the Number One Boy appearing and placing the whisky and bottles of soda-water on a low table beside the silk-draped deck-chair in which Collins reclined—evidently a regular part of the evening ritual.

Mrs. Collins having resumed her place on the sofa, motioned to me to sit beside her; and, watched by Collins, who sat and smoked and steadily drank, we talked of Home.

As he drank, Collins grew more silent and morose, eyeing me, I thought, and indeed his wife also, with increasing disfavour, though he interrupted our conversation less and less, and finally ceased to speak at all.

Opposite to us he sat and glared, favouring her with a long, considering, and unfriendly look, as she spoke, and turning the same baleful regard upon me when I replied.

I felt thoroughly uncomfortable; and so, I thought, did Mrs. Collins. I began to understand whence came that look of quiet resignation, that air she had as of a grave wise child, a child that is too thoughtful and not too happy. Not that there was anything in the least degree childish, in the derogatory sense of the word, about her; but there was a simple sweetness, an unaffected naturalness, a kind of fundamental innocence that reminded one of a child; of, as I have said, a grave wise child that loved to smile but had almost forgotten how to laugh. . . .

In a brief silence that fell between us, I heard a sound that made me look up sharply. It was, as I had thought, a snore. The excellent Colonel Collins was sound asleep, his face presenting a much less prepossessing sight than when, full of animation and hearty false good-fellowship, it smiled and smiled and could not possibly belong to a villain.

Mrs. Collins eyed him long and thoughtfully.

"Your husband is asleep," I said fatuously.

"Yes. Pray don't speak loudly enough to wake him," she replied.

For the first time that evening there was a faint edge to her voice; and I gathered —though I did not for one moment think she intended me to do so—that she greatly

preferred the Colonel asleep to the Colonel awake.

Accordingly I lowered my voice to the soft level of hers and, talking almost in whispers, we conversed for the better part of an hour.

Better part, indeed, for I doubt whether I ever more enjoyed an hour, or had ever been happier, in all my life.

I realized this, and it amazed me.

At the time, I put it down to the fact that this delightful person, so friendly, simple, kind and sweet, was the first white woman to whom I had talked for years, the first one with whom I had held real conversation since I left home to join the Life Guards.

For during those days in London, I had scarcely spoken to any of the women of the class with which most of my comrades associated, as they did not interest me in the very slightest degree. I had met none whatsoever in Africa or Arabia, and had never encountered a native girl to whom I could talk at all, or with whom I had any desire to talk.

As I thought the matter over, I realized that Mrs. Collins was the very first woman with whom I had had any real conversation since I had last seen Elizabeth at Wellingbury, and Celia on the *Valkyrie*, just before.

Elizabeth I had loved as a boy loves a very young girl, but she had grown up, grown away from me, and married a young cavalry officer whom she had met out hunting; and Celia I had never greatly liked, much less loved.

I suppose it was because Mrs. Collins was the first woman of my own class and kind whom I had met in all these years—coupled with the fact that I was so emotionally starved, having led not only a completely celibate life but a practically womanless one for several years—that now made her conversation, her presence, her self, so irresistible, delightful, charming, so fascinating alike to my senses and my soul.

Not that she made the faintest attempt to be fascinating or had any intention of charming me. Of that I am as certain as I am of anything in this world. She was just completely natural; just her real self; and that was, as I say, charming, fascinating, and delightful.

What we said I scarcely remember, though it was of Home, of herself, and of myself. Without inquisitiveness or anything in the nature of idle curiosity, she asked me about my past life because I interested her; and, like everybody else, I was only too pleased to talk about myself. And as she interested me, I asked her about herself, while endeavouring to refrain from being indiscreet or seeming to pry.

And the more we talked, the more I marvelled that she was what she was, and

that she looked as she did look; that she showed so little trace, indeed no trace whatever, of what she had been through.

Although there was nothing of complaint in what she told me, it was obvious that her life had been one long frustration, suppression, disappointment; that she had had none of the things that make life endurable, if not happy, for women of her sort.

It was obvious, in short, that her life must have been a most unhappy one, and a very hard one.

And yet she did not look unhappy. There was nothing whatsoever to suggest that she had had such a life, except what I have termed a slight air of mild resignation, the air of one who expects nothing good from life, and gets precisely that.

Nor was her face lined, her eyes anxious or hunted, her mouth bitter, her look disillusioned, her speech cynical or plaintive. . . .

With a sudden loud snort, Colonel John Collins sat upright, opened his eyes, and glared at us.

"About time for another drink, what?" he said, grinning, "and then if you'll forgive me, Dysart . . ."

I took the hint and rose to my feet.

"If you'll excuse me, Mrs. Collins. . . . Thank you so much for a most delightful evening. I can honestly say I have not enjoyed myself so greatly for years, and . . ."

"And all that," jeered Collins, in a harsh, sneering and unpleasant voice, using what I felt was his normal domestic tone.

For the sake of peace I took another unwanted drink, said good-bye at once, and made my way back to my hut, feeling that, somehow, to-night was epochal and marked a turning-point in my life.

CHAPTER XIV

Thereafter I cultivated Colonel Collins assiduously; at first, I believe, with a view to learning more and more about the plans of the two Generals for the coming season's campaign, and, before long, I am certain, in the hope of seeing Mrs. Collins again.

More than anything in the world, I thought, I wanted to find out what the Imperial Chinese Government was doing, and was going to do, to help the cause of the Emperor of Annam.

More than anything in the world, I soon realized, I wanted to see Mrs. Collins again, to hear the sound of her voice, to talk to her about myself and induce her to talk to me about herself.

I was undoubtedly starving for the least crumb of affection, acutely suffering the pangs of hunger for self-expression.

I was yearning to free myself from the iron repressions clamped upon my soul by my mother, who, hating my father and loving another man, had always denied me her affection and prohibited the demonstration on my part of the love that I, as a child, undoubtedly felt for her and yearned to express.

I am not seeking to make an excuse, only an explanation—an explanation of the fact that soon I found myself seeking and seizing every opportunity of going to Collins's house, and looking forward throughout the whole day to the minute when at sunset I could go to his door and ask the *conyam* whether his master were at home and would speak to me for a minute.

I occasionally saw her by this means, and I felt certain that she was always glad when this happened.

Naturally I rightly attributed it to the fact that the sight of a British face and the sound of a British voice would inevitably be most welcome to any woman situated as she was; an oasis in that dreary desert of alien environment and wearisome ennui of exile.

Few people who were not prisoners were ever such a prisoner as she was in that house in a fort in a camp in the occupation of that great horde of semi-savage bandits.

It may have begun in pity but it ended in love—for before long I realized that it was not anticipation of seeing the cunning and cruel face of Colonel Collins, hearing his growling and minatory voice, that made my heart beat painfully fast as I approached his house, made me sing merrily within myself as I did so, and caused me to rise in the morning happy in the thought that at evening I should have excuse to

walk in that direction.

One day the *conyam* informed me that Colonel Kar-Linh had left the camp and would not return until dinner-time. I was just about to turn away from the door when Mrs. Collins appeared at the entrance to the Colonel's room which opened into her drawing-room.

"Good-evening, Mr. Dysart," she said, smiling her adorable slow sweet smile, the expression of the very essence of gentle friendliness and kindness, "you have just missed my husband, I'm afraid. Can I give him a message for you?"

"No, thank you, Mrs. Collins," I stammered in great confusion. "I really came to see . . ."

This was unlike me, for I am not usually quite so gauche, diffident and stupid as all that—and I had actually been about to blurt out "I really came to see you", which was the plain truth.

Perhaps there was something about her that constrained one to tell her the plain truth—her candour, grave simplicity and unaffected naturalness.

Suddenly she smiled and asked me when I had last had an English afternoon tea—with a tablecloth and thin bread-and-butter.

I laughed.

Certainly I had not had an English afternoon tea in Annam, nor on board the transport *Général Boulanger*, nor in Sidi-bel-Abbès, nor in prison in Djibouti, nor on the Mecca pilgrimage, nor in Bab-el-Djebel, nor perhaps precisely a typical English afternoon-tea when I was a trooper in the Life Guards.

No, the last time must have been during my brief visit to my home, on my return from the voyage in the *Valkyrie*.

"Not for years," I replied.

"Then come and have tea with me now," she said, and again my heart beat almost painfully fast as she led the way to the drawing-room.

Here her Number One Boy brought a very dainty tea indeed, and in that room I seemed to have stepped from the sixteenth century into the nineteenth, and from barbarism and brutality into beauty and brightness.

It was really quite wonderful to be sitting in a drawing-room and taking tea with a gentlewoman, and unspeakably wonderful to be sitting thus and talking with Mrs. Collins.

I forget most of what was said.

I was too intent on listening to the sound of her voice, to pay much attention to her words, too occupied in watching her lips, her eyes, her grave sweet face, to

notice what she was saying.

I did however realize that she was asking me all about myself, though never about my business, and it delighted me that she should be interested, and should ask me to tell her more concerning my adventures and experiences.

When I said that I would rather talk about her, she replied that possibly she might tell me about herself some day, but not now.

I think I was on trial, and I think she longed to find me to be the sort of person to whom she could really talk and of whom she could make a friend.

How she must have longed for the society of another woman.

For a while we sat silent, and I stared at her as she poured out tea.

Yes, she was lovely by any standards, and though at least as old as I, had somehow the fresh and innocent face of a child—of a grave wise child, as I have said, one to whom Life has been a very serious business, devoid of laughter.

While there was nothing in the slightest degree miserable, peevish, bitter, or discontented about her expression, there was that elusive look of resignation, of patience, of suffering controlled and indeed denied, that I found pitiful and pathetic. I put it down to the fact that through being what she was, she was where she was, and I was conscious of a surge of futile anger at the selfishness of a man who could condemn an Englishwoman, especially one of obviously educated, refined and cultured (one has to use these words) antecedents, to live in such a way in such a place.

Not the most overwhelming love could excuse such monstrous selfishness, unless it were returned in equal measure—and then, of course, the wilderness were paradise enow. But, somehow, I could not imagine Colonel Collins inspiring such a love and devotion. Rather he struck me as the sort of hoggish man in whose society any delicately nurtured woman would find Paradise itself to be wilderness enow.

As I sat and looked at Mary Collins and listened to her voice, I fell deeper and deeper in love with her, headlong, desperately in love, and life became a joyous thing because she was in the same world with me.

I loved everybody and everything because I loved her.

I loved the moon that looked down upon us both and beautified the house in which she dwelt.

I loved the stars because that night she came to the door with me, and looking up, remarked upon their apparent extra brilliance. Never again would I look up at the stars without thinking of her and of the night when I dared to wonder, in my folly and presumption, whether they appeared the brighter to her, as they did to me, because her heart was singing too—as the stars of the evening sang.

I loved Life and Man and God and . . . In short—I was in love: and madly in love with lovely Love, as well as with lovely Mary Collins.

§2

And so my sufficiently amazing life in the robber-stronghold of Phu-Son became yet more amazing, for that grim and blood-stained place, scene of torture, savage punishments and sudden death, was made my brief Paradise on earth, because in it dwelt the woman who turned existence to a thing of beauty, joy, ecstasy and gratitude.

I was never so happy in all my life as I was there; never so miserable; never so filled with delight, hope, misery, fear, doubt and anxiety.

For soon I must go, and the sooner the better for the success of my mission. I must go—probably never to see her again; go, leaving her not only in the place most unfit of all places in the world to be the habitation of such a woman, but leaving her in the gravest and greatest danger.

For what was to become of her if anything happened to Colonel Collins—and undoubtedly anything might happen to him at any time, whether because he gave offence to one or other of the *tuchuns*, the War-Lords, or through any of the other manifold dangers of battle, murder and sudden death to which his life in the fever-stricken jungle and as a fighting soldier in the frequent battles, skirmishes and forays constantly exposed him.

What would be the fate of lovely Mary Collins if the man who had so callously brought her there were killed?

Every possible opportunity of seeing her that occurred, I seized; and, before long, I was making opportunities when none fortuitously befell; planning, plotting, scheming and watching for the least chance of seeing her for however brief a space.

Nor had many days passed, many such occasions been seized or made, before I, however humble and modest Love may have made me, could not fail to be aware that Mary Collins welcomed them, was glad to see me, looked forward to our next meeting, found in me something that so long she had lacked and desperately needed—someone reliable and trustworthy, someone kind and understanding, someone who cared what became of her and would strain every nerve to prevent any evil from befalling her, would protect, cherish and befriend her.

For, as I then guessed, and later I came to know, she suffered that most dreadful of all miseries—loneliness; had that most terrible of all knowledge, that she had not a friend in the world, not a soul to whom she could turn for sympathy and support.

§3

One day when she was again alone, suffering her usual solitary confinement in the house that was her prison, she invited me to tea with her and told me the story of her life.

CHAPTER XV

Mrs. Collins told me her story—which was of course part of that of Colonel John Collins, about which I was more than anxious to hear—very much as follows.

"I was born in Kent. Our house was in the Elham Valley—in the *Ingoldsby* country.

Do you know Canterbury? Oh, good! Don't you love it? I simply adore the place. The Cathedral, the Precincts, St. Augustine's, the Dane John, St. Martin's Church, Harbledown. I love every inch of it. I used to sit for hours in the Precincts, just looking at the Cathedral; and for hours in the Cathedral itself, especially when there was no service in progress.

My father was a Canon. I don't remember my mother. When he died, he left no money, and a maiden aunt of mine adopted me. I believe she was very poor, and even prouder than she was poor.

As a child, I thought of her as old; but, as a matter of fact, when she took me she must have been in her twenties, and a most attractive woman, well-educated and with a great fund of humour and commonsense. And she was so good to me that I really don't know that I lost a great deal in not having a mother. I don't see how any mother could have been more loving, kind and understanding than she was. And, considering how really hard-up she must have been, she was generous beyond praise. She must have worked like a slave too, because the house was quite big, and very frequently she was without any maid at all.

A neighbour of ours was a Sir Stanbury Macke Collins, a retired *taipan*. He had made quite a big fortune in China, lost a good deal of it when he invested it in England, and settled down in Kent to grow fruit. He was one of those apple-growing experts, quite fanatical on the subject.

I liked him very well. So did Aunt Phoebe, and I think Sir Stanbury liked her more than very well.

Unfortunately, as I realized when I was older, poor Aunt Phoebe was hopelessly in love with a doctor in Canterbury, a splendid man, very clever indeed, and yet without sufficient sense to see what he was missing.

Oh, how dull life was in the Elham Valley. Canterbury Cricket Week was the high spot of the year, when we would go over and watch the cricket and see the play given by the famous Canterbury Amateur Theatrical Society, the 'Old Stagers'. One looked forward to it from one

August to the next.

We had practically no social life; and almost our only visitor was Sir Stanbury, who must have been twice as old as Aunt Phoebe.

Then, one day, things looked like brightening up, for Sir Stanbury announced that his son, of whom he was always telling us, was coming home from China for a holiday.

He came; and, the next day, Sir Stanbury brought him over to see us.

I rather liked him at first. He was something entirely new in my experience. And after I had got used to his face, I got used to him, too. I found him amusing and full of most interesting information. He talked extremely well, and he talked the whole time. I say 'when I got used to his face', because, at first, it struck me as the most extraordinary face I had ever seen. It was so curiously round and smooth then; and there was something very strange about the eyes and hair.

One doesn't notice it here in China, but there, in Kent, in the peaceful backwater of the sweet Elham Valley (one can call it that—or a beastly dead-and-alive hole) John Collins was somehow—shall I say—exotic.

I was eighteen then, and a fool, apart from being about as ignorant and innocent as only a girl of that age, brought up in a Canon's house in the Cathedral precincts and then in a maiden aunt's house in a village, could be. Because Sir Stanbury had been so kind to us and such a friend to us, almost our only friend in fact, I was prepared to like his son, anxious to like him, in fact; and when a girl is determined to like a man, she generally succeeds. Nevertheless, there were times when John Collins jarred; times when he puzzled me very much; times when I felt that definitely I did not like him.

I have only myself to blame, of course, for I saw a great deal of him, as both, he and his father used to come over to our house almost daily, besides entertaining us to tennis and tea, and inviting us to dinner.

One day, when Aunt Phoebe and I were sitting under the cedar on our lawn, she suddenly said,

'Well, Mary, how do you like John?'

'John Collins? Oh, I don't know . . .'

'He likes you well enough, my dear. What are you going to say when he asks you to marry him?'

I never pretended with Aunt Phoebe.

'What do you advise?' I asked.

‘Well, I can only tell you what I should do. I should marry him. I should want to get away from here—not just vegetate, grow old, and die, in the Elham Valley. It isn’t as though I could take you about—so that you’d meet . . . people.’

‘Perhaps he won’t ask me.’

‘He will. I’ll tell you something. Don’t tell anybody else. Sir Stanbury asked me yesterday if I would marry him.’

‘Marry John?’

‘No him, himself.’

‘Why he’s old enough to be . . .’

‘Anyway, he asked me to marry him; and when I told him I was awfully sorry but it was impossible, he said he hoped John would have better luck.’

‘Perhaps he meant that John was going to ask you too.’

‘Perhaps. However, the question is what are you going to say when he asks you? Do you like him?’

‘Sometimes I do—very much. Sometimes I don’t?’

‘Well, I imagine there are times when most women like their husbands very much, and times when they don’t . . . . I wish you were in love with him. Still, I think every woman ought to marry, if she can. . . . And eligible men don’t grow on every bush round here, do they?’

Aunt Phoebe sighed.

‘I believe he’s quite well off. And he’s going back to China. You’d like to travel, wouldn’t you?’

‘Love to.’

‘And to see China and probably Japan?’

‘Love to.’

‘Well then . . .’

And the more I thought about it, the more the idea of getting away from the village and the terribly narrow dull life that we led, appealed to me. The more I thought about it, the better I liked the idea of travelling—a sea-voyage; foreign parts; strange peoples. . . . And, of course, the idea of the fuss and importance of being a bride also appealed to me.

And one day something Aunt Phoebe said—though I’m sure she did not mean it to have that effect—brought it home to me that she was really terribly poor, and that I was an expense and a burden to her. I knew perfectly well that she never would have admitted that she felt the burden,

or that she would not have been only too delighted to have shared her last penny with me.

Well then, thought I to myself, didn't that make it all the more up to me to relieve her of the burden; to be an expense to her no longer, since this opportunity offered.

And that is how I came to marry John Collins.

He brought me out to China directly, without other honeymoon; and, after spending a little while at Hong-Kong and Shanghai, we went to Peking.

At Peking he took me to see his mother.

His mother is a Chinese woman who cannot speak a word of English.

When I learned this, and knew that my husband was a half-caste, son of Stanbury Macke Collins and this Chinese woman, I realized what it was about him that had puzzled me, and the reason for the curious shape of his smooth round face, his unusual eyes, and stiff black hair.

Many other things too, mental and moral, as well as physical.

Quite evidently he loved his Chinese mother, and certainly treated her far better than her husband had done.

She had refused to leave China when Sir Stanbury retired and left the country for good; and, apparently, he had not been very particular to see that she was comfortably provided for, and well looked after.

In Peking, my husband 'went native', as they say; became entirely Chinese, and, whereas many English merchants, officials, traders and adventurers had dealings with the Chinese, as foreigners retaining their own traits, manners, customs and nationality, my husband had dealings with Europeans as a Chinese, which I believe a great many of them supposed him to be.

Naturally he speaks the language perfectly; and, in Chinese dress and surroundings, no-one would imagine that he was a half-caste, much less suppose him to be a European.

The Chinese authorities apparently thought a great deal of his father, Stanbury Macke Collins, but less of his son who was so like one of themselves.

What exactly his position was, and what exactly he did, I cannot tell you, but he was *persona grata* with all the important people, from

mandarins of the lowest rank up to the Empress herself.

We used to go away from our Peking house for long periods at a time, and on these occasions visited the Treaty ports, Japan, Russia, and Annam and French Cochin China; always, I believe, on Government business of some kind.

As a young man he was certainly a soldier, but whether he had an officer's training and went to Sandhurst or Woolwich I don't know.

For some reason that I can never understand, he always took me with him wherever he went; and yet contrived to keep me in almost complete ignorance of what his business was, though from time to time I met various Europeans, sometimes French, sometimes German, sometimes Russian, but never English. These foreigners were nearly always soldiers.

Why did he always take me with him—and yet always keep me in complete ignorance of his affairs?

It wasn't as though he was so in love with me that he couldn't bear me out of his sight, or that he was anxious for my safety if he left me behind in Peking. There was nothing of that sort. Why he married me I don't know, for he tired of me very quickly; and, from his manner, one would imagine that, on the whole, he rather disliked me, and at times positively hated me.

There again I don't know why, for, being young and, as I have said, a fool, I took the line of least resistance, did everything I could to keep the peace and to make life bearable. I hate quarrelling, squabbling, bickering. It is so wearing, tiring; so degrading, disgusting. And, to me, there was one thing worse than being weak and meek and submissive—flabby and spineless, if you will—and the one thing worse was a chronic state of quarrelling; constant rows.

I simply couldn't have it.

You see I had married him to get away from home, and to relieve my aunt of a burden; and I felt that I must do my part, that I must pay what I owed.

I paid.

I have paid ever since.

I have paid all the while.

He strikes me—with his fist—quite frequently . . .

And he's strong, forceful, ruthless; a far stronger character than I. I don't suppose I was very remarkable for lack of firmness of character

and strength of will; but he dominated me completely, broke my will and made me what I am—his obedient servant, his slave.

When I realized—and he made it impossible for me to do otherwise—that he had quite ceased to love me, I begged him to let me go back to England. I told him he need not support me. I'd find work of some sort. But no, he wouldn't hear of it. In fact, he flew into a rage, struck me in the face, and told me if I ever talked like that again I'd—regret it.

Why on earth did he marry me? Was it that he wanted an English wife in his business? Wanted to keep up his English? Wanted to be, and to seem, as English as possible, should occasion arise? I have often wondered."

CHAPTER XVI

I didn't wonder. It was clear enough to me. His love had been desire, passion. Not the desire of the moth for the star, but of the half-caste for the Englishwoman to whom he must needs look up. The dislike that followed the attainment of his desire was the expression of his inferiority complex.

He hated her because he had loved her, because he had been unable to help loving her; because she was so infinitely his superior in everything but strength and cunning.

I could see it all, or I thought I could, and probably I was right.

§2

If such a thing were possible I loved Mary even more, after she had told me the pitiable story of her spoilt, wasted and tragic life, than I did before. Certainly thoughts of her filled my mind more constantly and completely than they had done hitherto, and it was with conscious effort that I switched them from love to duty.

I think I rendered this difficult feat more easy and acceptable by vaguely combining the two incompatibles and promising myself that, somehow, I would rescue her from her extremely dangerous situation—one that was a shameful disgrace to her husband—when I left Phu-Son and returned to my headquarters. I told myself that somehow, by discovering all I could about the position, strength and garrison of the great New Fort, the arrival of reinforcements of regular troops from China, and the time, route, and nature of the big convoy of munitions, money, uniforms, and food, I should be helping her by shortening my stay and hastening the date of her departure.

For though I neither would nor could formulate actual plans for taking her away from her husband and from Phu-Son, the feeling was growing, strengthening and hardening in my heart, that it would be quite impossible for me to go without her.

This feeling was almost subconscious, for until the situation changed and events forced my hand, I shied away from the thought of what I felt.

My mind did not frankly admit, so to speak, that any such feeling really existed. I am no psychologist in that sense, but I imagine that it was a case of Reason and Emotion acting independently, Thought and Feeling going about their separate affairs without reference the one to the other.

In fact, at this time I felt that I should most probably interfere and take Mary away from this vile dangerous environment—and I thought that I should do nothing of the sort.

What right had I to endeavour to combine abduction with Secret Service work; and what hope had I of being able to take a European woman through those ghastly jungles? A fine thing if I—falsely pretending that what I desired to do was what I ought to do—took her from the comparative, if temporary, safety of the armed camp and exposed her to infinitely greater hardships and dangers, dangers to which she succumbed.

I had asked myself, times without number, what was to become of her in this den of thieves, if anything happened to her husband.

I now asked myself what was to become of her in the most pestilential and dangerous jungle in the world if anything happened to me.

Suppose I and my tiny band of followers were killed and she fell into the hands of the Black Flags, the river pirates and jungle dacoits, notoriously the cruellest devils in the world.

No; Intelligence and Reason boggled at the idea.

But Feeling and Emotion clung to it, hugged it closely, and refused to let it go.

The horns of a dilemma indeed.

I could not go away, leaving the woman I loved in such a situation.

I could not go away taking her with me into a situation far more hazardous.

And I could not much longer remain where I was.

Meanwhile, De-Nha had most urgent instructions to find out all about the New Fort; and, for a beginning, most important of all, where it was. If I could return to Captain Deleuze with really definite detailed and reliable information on that subject, I should have earned my corn—and his gratitude.

What I could now tell him about the camp and fort of Phu-Son, about the Generals Ba-Ky and Luong-Tam-Ky, about Colonel Collins, about the Chinese bandit army, and about the help in money, materials, and regular troops from China, would be interesting and valuable; but the real facts about General De-Nam's great citadel, arsenal, and treasury, the New Fort, would be priceless.

That I must learn and then I must go.

And Mary Collins must go with me.

Of course Mary Collins must not, could not possibly, go with me.

§3

One day it dawned upon my somewhat dull mind that General Luong-Tam-Ky was interested in me.

In other words, I consciously realized a fact of which I had been subconsciously,

if increasingly, aware, that General Luong-Tam-Ky came and watched me at work rather more often than he did the native officers of the force of which he was joint Commander-in-Chief, sent for me and questioned me on points of European drill, musketry, commissariat and tactics, and generally took notice of me.

Frankly I found this disturbing, and, as his questioning proceeded from general military and European matters to private and personal ones, I found it rather more than merely disturbing.

The man was so wily, so enigmatic, so inscrutable and unfathomable, that I grew increasingly uncomfortable.

Time after time, he tried to trap me into betrayal of the fact that I understood French; and repeatedly he endeavoured to prove that I knew the Annamese Delta country and places like Hanoi, Haiphong, Bac-Ninh, Phulang Thuong and other towns in the occupation of the French.

Either he was suspicious that I was a French spy, or else, thanks to the treachery or carelessness of De-Nha, he knew that I was.

Probably the fact that I loved Mary so utterly and desperately saved me from worrying unduly over what was undeniably a dangerous situation.

Nevertheless, there were times when I could not refrain from speculating on what would be my fate if this cold, infinitely cruel and relentless man decided that I was a spy, and that he would deal with me accordingly.

I should be as helpless as a kitten in the hands of a brutal lout, or as a very small fly in the web of a very large spider; and not only would General Luong-Tam-Ky be on his mettle to learn me to be a spy, but to do something calculated to discourage others from visiting him in that capacity, when the news of my fate was bruited abroad. For doubtless he would forward some portion of my anatomy to French headquarters with a detailed description of what had happened to the rest of me.

I tried, at first, to persuade myself that I was fanciful, that the situation was getting on my nerves; that his interest in me was only the natural interest of a keen General in the valuable work of a foreign expert; and, at times, in my higher flights of optimism, that he liked me personally, and took an interest in me for my own sake. "For my *beaux yeux* in fact," thought I, and laughed aloud at my own foolishness.

When the matter became obvious beyond all doubt, and beyond the possibility of ignoring it as a fear-bred fancy, I consulted Colonel Collins on the subject.

His re-action was peculiar, interesting, and again, in its way, disturbing. For he too, both by reason of his Chinese blood and his long residence in China, could be extremely Oriental himself, as incomprehensible and devious, as inscrutable and enigmatic, as any of them.

At first, he pursed his lips, frowned, and eyed me searchingly. Having questioned me as to what made me think General Luong-Tam-Ky was specially interested in me and becoming increasingly so, he smiled slyly and nodded his head several times.

As I gave him instance after instance of the General's exhibition of attention to my humble self, my past life and present activities, Colonel Collins appeared to grow impatient, to be annoyed, and to exhibit feelings of anger. Studying him carefully and then thinking the matter over very carefully at my leisure, I came to the conclusion that, at first, he was afraid that the General was growing suspicious, and that he, Colonel Collins, was about to lose the services of a valued, if not esteemed, colleague; that, secondly, he began to wonder whether, perhaps, that was not the real situation, but that I was "making up" to the General and pretending that it was the General who was cultivating me; and that, thirdly, and finally, he decided that both these theories were wrong, and that the General was about to remove him and put me in his place.

I decided, in fact, that Colonel Collins was jealous and angry, and that the savage stare with which he favoured me indicated a suddenly aroused suspicion that I was playing the part of the cuckoo in the nest. And as there was a distinct and definite sneer in his words, tone, and manner, at the end of this interview, I felt quite sure that, should the fledgling prove to be a bird of the cuckoo variety, his place in the nest would soon be vacant.

Deeply I regretted taking my troubles to this man, a self-centred schemer, an ego-centric and unscrupulous careerist, devoid of kindliness, friendliness, or the faintest desire or intention of doing anything for anybody except himself, and imbued with both the desire and intention of removing from his path anybody who in any way obstructed it.

Life thereafter became more of a strain than ever, as I made my anxious way between pit-falls and death-traps, fearing the brutal General Ba-Ky; very greatly fearing the more dangerous and more watchful Luong-Tam-Ky; and now fearing, almost as much, the suspicious and treacherous Colonel Collins.

And there was another man whom I think I feared, in a way, more than any of them, because I hated and despised him; regarded him as a loathsome worm; and yet knew that at any moment the grovelling and humble worm could turn into a serpent of the deadliest kind. This was the traitor De-Nha, who had sold his cause for a handful of opium.

I could not rid myself of the suspicion that he would prove a double traitor, would find familiar lures stronger than foreign temptations, decide to bargain with the Generals and throw in his lot with theirs, if it seemed likely that they would make it

worth his while to do so.

It seemed to me that he could make a fine story of how he, having been captured by the French, had tricked and fooled them, and succeeded in bringing the star-turn of their Military Intelligence Secret Service straight to the feet—or rather the hands—of the ever-victorious Generals.

And when I tried to persuade myself that he had left it too long and too late, and that the Generals would say, "Why didn't you denounce him at once?" my better judgment replied that doubtless he had done so at once, had betrayed me as soon as we arrived.

It would be just like these marvellous Chinese to fool me to the top of my bent; to indulge themselves to the top of their own; to employ me in their service, make the utmost use of me, let me teach their troops everything I could—and then torture me to death.

Yes, life was something of a strain.

Possibly the strain would have been too great, and I should have broken down through anxiety, fear, and insomnia but for my great and glorious love.

Perfect love casteth out fear—to some extent. Mine was very perfect, and it must have cast out much of my fear.

And yet there remained, ever present and chief of my problems, unanswerable and insoluble, the question,

"How can I remain much longer—and live? How can I go—and leave Mary here?"

§4

And, as a cat watches a mouse, *Doi* Linh Nghi watched De-Nha. By night and by day that evil and cruel Annamese was under the incessant and unwavering observation of the *Doi* or one of his men. Never was he permitted to walk alone, to sleep alone and to be alone, for, in his comings-in and his goings-out, his risings-up and his lyings-down, one of them accompanied him as did his shadow—as did indeed The Shadow watch and accompany his admired master the General Luong-Tam-Ky.

CHAPTER XVII

My next social function was a dinner party, or rather a *dîner tête-à-tête* with General Luong-Tam-Ky; an extremely interesting, indeed, painfully interesting, function; for I felt as though I were an insect pinned firmly down beneath the microscope, although the lenses of that extremely powerful microscope were but the aged-looking and myopic-seeming eyes of the man to whom I mentally referred as the Private Secretary to Confucius.

Never before in my life had I been treated with such extremely contemptuous courtesy, or should I say with such extremely courteous contempt.

I was made to feel that, in the presence of the meek, the humble, the pure-hearted, the poor-spirited, the peace-making General Luong-Tam-Ky, I was a low and vulgar savage, an ignorant thing that had crawled in from the outer darkness of foreign parts, and up from the primæval slime of Western barbarism.

I was also made to feel slightly uncomfortable. For behind the General stood this man whom I had seen at the General's inspection and who was known throughout the camp as The Shadow. Something of a misnomer, for The Shadow was one of the most substantial people I have ever seen. I personally am tall, broad and thick beyond the ordinary, but beside—or rather in front of—The Shadow I felt, and doubtless looked, small.

He was, as I have said, a truly enormous Chinese or other Mongol, with colossal muscles and one of the most sub-humanly savage faces I have ever seen.

What made me uncomfortable was the fact that never once during that long meal did he take his eyes off me.

I should greatly have enjoyed telling him that it was rude to stare, but doubtless that was what he was there for. And undoubtedly I made no motion, particularly with my hands, that he did not follow with the utmost attentiveness. I felt that The Shadow was the last man whom many a poor wretch had seen on this earth. In another sense, he was the last man whom I wanted to see—again. . . .

My first shock was suddenly to discover that General Luong-Tam-Ky was an English scholar; and when I say scholar I don't mean merely that he could make himself understood in English.

Not only did he speak the language perfectly—and, apart from his thin piping voice, almost without accent, save an occasional weak 'r' that tended to turn into a liquid consonant—but the English that he spoke was admirable in matter as well as manner.

He must, of course, have lived for years in England; and he had studied English

literature to some purpose. Had I closed my eyes, I could have imagined that I was in the study of some aged don or vicar, listening to high discourse uttered in the thin piping voice of age. Not that he was by any means old.

Incidentally General Luong-Tam-Ky did not talk as so many English-speaking Chinese do, as though he had a plum in his mouth.

But unfortunately Shakespeare, and the greatest of all the European poets, playwrights, authors, philosophers, scientists and divines were as nothing in his sight, which could see but a little way beyond the great Confucius.

I, of course, was ignorant on the subject that most interested and informed the acute, highly-developed, and well-stocked mind of my host.

And though, at this dinner we were not amused, I was almost amused at the thought that I should have dubbed him the Private Secretary of Confucius, when I discovered him to be not so much a student, a follower, a disciple, as a fanatical worshipper of the god-like sage.

To my shame I did not even know the Saint's date; and, like most Englishmen, knew practically nothing at all about him, save that he was the Wise Man of China, and that Confucianism was a philosophy that was practically a religion.

I was surprised and interested to learn that Confucianism was much older than Christianity, the Sage having been born some half a century before Christ.

As, between courses—of shredded pork with chilli sauce, stewed shoots of young bamboo, rotten eggs with mercifully strong onions, chicken curry, pickled turnips, fishes' eyes and other such dainties—we drank our ceremonial mandarin tea from saucerless and handleless cups, General Luong-Tam-Ky would quote the Master, and I imagine his translation was admirable.

"But, ah," observed he, "Greatness. Strength. Wisdom . . . What says he of these things?

> "' *The greatest hills themselves must crumble,*
> *The strongest beams must break,*
> *And the wisest of men must wither and die like a flower.*'

As he himself did," he commented with a sigh.

And suddenly from the midst of his abstraction, he shot at me quick look and sudden question,

"*Quelle heure est-il, Monsieur?*" . . . and he very nearly had me. Almost my hand moved instinctively toward my pocket, as though I were about to consult a watch.

"I beg your pardon, General?" I said; and no flicker of smile or look of interest disturbed the calm serenity of his face.

"I merely asked, in Chinese, whether you would take more tea," he said.

And after we had, in silence, consumed the anonymous contents of the next bowls that were placed before us—something that tasted as one's hands smell after taking a fish off the hook—he asked,

"And have you, from your studies of the Christian religion, educed a Golden Rule?"

"Yes, General, I have. But I don't profess to follow it—always."

"And what is it, may I ask?"

"To prefer the Good; and to treat my neighbour as I would myself."

"Ah, yes, yes. I must teach you the Golden Rule of Confucius. It is more comprehensive than that. In fact, it is a Golden Fasces of Golden Rods or Rules, the least of which is like your only one concerning your neighbour. On this subject Confucius says,

"'*What you don't like to be done to yourself, don't do to others.*'"

"The same precept," I murmured.

"And again," continued the General,

"'*What the superior man is seeking is always within himself, but what the small man seeks is always in others.*'"

And, with supreme insolence, he added,

"Is there anything *I* can do for *you*, young man?"

I smiled wryly.

"At the moment, General, I seek nothing in you," I replied; and again received the quick look from the expressionless eyes which were the only things alive in the inscrutable face.

"Ah, '*The supreme man is dignified and does not argue*'," he quoted.

This I received in silence.

"'*He is social but is not a partisan.*'

"It is my pleasure at the moment to be . . . social," commented the General on this Confucianism, and promptly shot a question at me.

"Are you a partisan, young man?"

"At the moment, a partisan of yours—and your cause, General," I bowed.

The General vouchsafed no comment upon this, but daintily drank a cup of tea, savouring it as does a port-drinker his wine, and admiring the delicate egg-shell china which I thought an incongruous item of Military Headquarter furniture.

"And what says Confucius with regard to Man and his Words?

“‘ *He promotes not a man because of his words, but neither puts he good words aside because of the man.*’

“*Qu’est-ce que c’est que vous tenez dans la main?*”

In point of fact I had my chop-sticks in my right hand and nothing whatsoever in the other, and I don’t think that I glanced at the empty hand, or that it moved at all. If the old devil were bent on making me confess to a knowledge of French, I thought I could defeat him.

“I beg your pardon, General?” I said again.

“I merely said in Chinese, ‘Don’t you agree that the superior person would not favour a man on account of what he said; but, on the other hand, would take note of anything, worth hearing, that was said by the most despicable of men?”

“Have *you* anything of interest to tell *me*?” he added with the suavest insolence.

“Nothing whatever, General, despicable though I am,” I replied coldly.

In point of fact I could have told him something of the greatest interest, and I could have done something that would have interested him still more, but this was neither the time nor the place to betray the fact.

“‘ *The cautious rarely err*,’ saith Confucius,” observed the General sententiously, but whether in praise of my own caution I did not know.

“Propriety is a virtue,” he further observed, *à propos* of nothing, unless it were of the propriety of my present conduct.

“‘ *A poor man who never flatters, and a rich man who is not proud, are good characters; but they are not equal to the poor who are cheerful and the rich who love the rules of propriety! . . .*’ How wonderful, how beautiful, how truly exquisite and exquisitely true are the words of The Sage,” he said, and metaphorically smacked his lips over the flavour of these words of wisdom.

“And, like that of Confucius, has your Christian ethic, your Excellent Way—borrowed from the East, of course—anything on the subject of . . . insubordination?” he asked, as with parallel chop-sticks he delicately pursued fragments of meat floating in a thin clear soup.

And while hastily I reviewed my somewhat scanty array of remembered texts, he continued,

“Insubordination, disobedience . . . Terrible sins, especially in the soldier. What saith Confucius?

“‘ *Extravagance leads to insubordination, and parsimony leads to meanness; but far better it is to be mean than to be insubordinate.*’

“How do you punish the insubordinate soldier in your army? It is with *crapaudine*, is it not?”

For a moment he almost had me there, for I was on the point of saying,

"No, not in the English army," but, remembering in time that the word *crapaudine* should convey nothing to the simple English soldier and adventurer that I professed to be, I replied,

"*Crapaudine?* What is that, General?"

"Ah," he lied, "in Chinese, we call it the Death of a Thousand Cuts. Have you ever seen that punishment?"

"No, General."

"You shall. I mean, you must. It is interesting. We bind and compress the culprit, naked, in a net of thin wire. So tight is the wire-netting that his vulgar flesh, bulging, protrudes slightly through every mesh. The executioner, with a knife of razor edge, removes every bulge."

"Ingenious," I said.

The cold eyes held mine with a long look.

"' *All that is required for true style in conversation is that it conveys the meaning*', saith Confucius," he observed, and again looked me in the eyes.

It was a meaning look, and I grasped the meaning; and, immediately, as though reading my thought—and it would not in the least have surprised me to learn that this Intelligence Incarnate, calling itself General Luong-Tam-Ky, read every thought of mine as it entered my mind—he again quoted his confounded Confucius.

"*Speech must reveal, and not conceal, thought*."

This seemed to me an unexceptionable, if platitudinous, statement; and, further to point his moral and adorn the tale of Confucius, he added,

"Yes. The Death of a Thousand Cuts . . . Life and Death . . . On this subject what saith Confucius?"

And I forbore to remark, "Oh damn Confucius," as, looking at me and through me, he favoured me with the Confucian *obiter dicta* on the subject.

"' *While we know so little of life what can we know of death?*' saith the Sage."

"Still, to a man of principle," he went on, "what are Life and Death but interchangeable terms? Life is the gateway inevitable to death; death the gateway inevitable to Life. Yes; what are Life and Death to a man of principle? And on the subject of principles, what do we find in the Golden Rule?"

I didn't know. I hadn't looked. But I promptly learned.

"' *A man can command his principles; but principles do not always command the man. . . .*' Do your principles command you, young man?" he asked.

"I hope so, General," I replied; not a little bored, and more than a little

uncomfortable.

"Then I hope they are high principles," countered General Luong-Tam-Ky, and made me a neat little harangue in French, wherein he pointed out to me that by the sacrifice of my principles and my wise refusal to allow them to command me, I might do for myself a very neat stroke of business indeed! There and then!

With blank uncomprehending stare, I listened to his excellent French and when he had finished, murmured,

"I don't understand Chinese."

"No, but you understood every word of what I have just said," replied General Luong-Tam-Ky.

Whereat I could but smile and shake my head.

"Pardon me for contradicting," I said.

"Oh, I'll pardon you for contradicting," replied General Luong-Tam-Ky, "but I shan't pardon you for any—er—indiscretion; and I would recommend strict caution. Yes, '*The cautious rarely err*' saith Confucius—and they never have to die the Death of a Thousand Cuts."

CHAPTER XVIII

That same evening, as though sufficient unto the day had not been the evils thereof, *Doi* Linh Nghi came to my hut, bringing with him not only the impedimenta of his vice, but two opium pipes where one had come before.

"What's this?" I asked him. "Do you think you are going to pervert and demoralize me?"

The *Doi* grinned somewhat uneasily, displaying his ebony teeth.

"No," he whispered in Annamese, "but we are going to pretend that I've done so. We are going to spread our mats side by side, lie face to face, and look as though we are drinking the black smoke together. Then if any yellow-bellied devil spies through the key-hole or the torn paper of the window, he can but report that we indulge together, as good opium-smokers should. And if any burst in, let them find us senseless, drugged. I've something to tell you. Try a pipe, *Nai*."

"No thank you," I replied, "especially if you've got something important to say, and I need my wits about me."

"Oh, it's important enough."

And the *Doi* spread our mats, and then set about the cooking of the first opium pill.

Having inhaled, held on, puffed repeatedly, and finished the first pipe, he laid it down, and, with his face a foot from mine, began to whisper—in Annamese, of course.

"It's De-Nha," he began. "I am quite certain that he's going to cook his rice in a Chinese pot."

Ah! Feathering his own nest, was he? Exactly what I had subconsciously been expecting to hear, though I had really had nothing to go upon; nothing palpable. But I had had an instinctive feeling that such a man as he must be weighing profits, must be at any rate endeavouring to find out whether he could find a better market here than at French Headquarters.

And, in addition to an intuitive feeling that this was the obvious course for him to take, there was also the rational conclusion that, granted he'd do much better for himself on the winning French side than on the losing one of General De-Nam and his exiled Emperor, he might decide that he could do better still with the Chinese than with either of them.

Trying to put myself in De-Nha's place, I imagined his preference for a Chinese *milieu* rather than a French one; and the probability that he would see not only his immediate profit, but his future gain, in selling his secret concerning me to Collins and

the Chinese Generals. Added to this was the certainty that the man was an utter rascal to whom the crooked path would inevitably be more attractive than the straight one, for its sweet crooked sake alone.

"What do you actually know, *Doi*?" I asked.

"That he visited General Ba-Ky late, the night before last, and stayed with him while a man could march four miles. Late last night he visited General Luong-Tam-Ky, and with him also he stayed for long. And now, at this present moment, he's in the house of the foreign devil, the Colonel Car-Ling."

"And you had no possible chance of hearing what he said to the Generals, and couldn't have got into Colonel Collins's house to-night?"

"Ask yourself," replied the *Doi* in his somewhat independent and off-hand manner, as he prepared another pipe. "Is it likely that General Luong-Tam-Ky or General Ba-Ky would talk with De-Nha where they could be overheard?"

"No, it isn't likely at all," I agreed, "but what about the house of Colonel Car-Ling? People come and go there in a way that is not possible at the house of either of the Generals."

"I know they do," grinned the *Doi*. "I come and go, quite a lot, myself."

"Oh? On what business?"

"The business of giving my good opium to his chief slave."

So the *Doi* was in touch with Collins's Number One Boy, was he? This was interesting.

"Good. Well done. Any results?"

"No. There has been little reason for any until to-night."

"Would money help?"

"No. The best *chandu* is far above money, here."

"You can give me money to buy some more, though, if you wish to," added the *Doi*, with his ingratiating grin.

"Right . . . Have you learned anything at all?" I asked.

"Nothing of any interest or importance. The *tuchun* drinks the black smoke and the fire-water of the *Farangs*."

So Colonel John Collins was an opium-addict, was he?

No. I doubted it. Hadn't I heard somewhere that the opium-addict is never a dipsomaniac, the drunkard never an opium-addict? On the other hand, perhaps a man could use both alcohol and opium to excess, without being either an actual drunkard or an advanced opium-addict. This would account for Collins's "nerves", his uncertain temper, surliness, and general sullen and smouldering liverishness.

"He is an angry man of uncontrolled wrath, who beats his servants. He also

beats his *batham-phiryéa*."

"*What?*"

"He beats his wife, which I believe is not the custom of the French, is it?"

I felt sick; literally and physically sick. That even the servants should know this awful and incredible thing. . . . And then I found myself seeing red, flying into such a passion of rage that I clenched my fists and dug my nails into my palms. Had my hands been about John Collins's neck at that moment . . .

"He takes bribes," continued the *Doi*, "and, as he has the commissariat contract for one of the Chinese regiments, he makes a lot of *ngurn*. If he only got ten *sabuks* a week for each soldier, he'd make a lot, wouldn't he? A very good squeeze indeed."

"Oh, this gossip is of no value," said I, when I could control my rage sufficiently to be able to speak calmly.

"It shows the character of the man, doesn't it?" objected the *Doi*. "He's a man of bad character, and therefore not to be trusted. On the other hand, he is a man of bad character and therefore to be trusted to be not honest. Therefore it is probable that the Chinese do not trust him much, and would readily believe evil of him. He is a taker of bribes, and is avaricious. Therefore he might take bribes—from the French."

"Yes, he might do all sorts of things. Let's get down to bamboo pegs. Is it likely that his Number One Boy, I mean his chief slave, as you call him, will over-hear anything of what De-Nha says to him to-night?"

"It won't be his fault if he doesn't."

"You've told him to try, eh?"

"Yes. With enough *chandu* for ten pipes, as a reward."

"How did you know De-Nha was going to Colonel Car-Ling's house?"

"I didn't know. I followed him there."

"And then?"

"Went round to the back, to the servants' quarters, and asked the chief servant if he wanted some opium," grinned the *Doi*.

"And he did, eh? And you showed him how to earn it? How do you know he'll tell you the truth?"

"I don't. But why should he tell me lies?"

"He'll make up something or other, to get his opium."

"Well, that's where you come in. You can decide whether it sounds like the truth."

"Yes, there's something in that. It isn't likely that Colonel Collins's servant could

make up a story, about what De-Nha said to his master, and deceive us with it. If he heard nothing, he wouldn't have the least idea as to what De-Nha and his master were likely to talk about, and couldn't make up a tale that would lead us astray."

"That's just what I thought," said the *Doi*. "If he made up a lot of lies, it wouldn't take us in. There'd be no harm done."

"Except a waste of good opium," he added.

"By the way," said I, "in what language would De-Nha talk to Colonel Collins?"

"Chinese," replied the *Doi*. "The Tai Yoi of Kwangnan Yun-nan, or perhaps the Kon Yai of Kwangnan Yun-nan, or again, it might be the Pu Tai of Yun-nan."

"Oh, De-Nha speaks that Chinese, does he?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well then, in what language does the Number One Boy talk to you?"

"The Tai Dam of Tonking," was the reply. "He has been a servant in Saigon, Haiphong and Hanöi."

"A travelled gentleman," I mused. "Does he speak French?"

"Sure to, a little. He was in French service down there."

"And he is not faithful to his present master."

"Yes, he is," contradicted the *Doi*, cynically. "Opium is his present master."

"I wonder whether Colonel Collins knows that his Number One Boy understands French, Annamese and Yunnanese."

Personally I thought this over-hearing eavesdropping scheme a pretty forlorn hope. In the first place, it would surprise me a great deal to learn that a servant had been allowed to overhear so important a conversation as that which De-Nha was likely to hold with Colonel Collins, late at night; and, in the second place, it seemed to me that there was far too great a babel of tongues for any accurate information to emerge, even if all that was said was clearly overheard.

I was also aware of the fact that two pure-bred educated Chinese, each talking Chinese, could be utterly incomprehensible to each other; that a Chinese from one part of China was as foreign in language and everything else, to a Chinese from another part of China, as a Turk to a Laplander or a Spaniard to a Pole.

This being so, I didn't think there was much chance of the production of an accurate French version of the gist of an Annamese conversation with a Peking half-caste Chinese overheard by a Yunnanese, and reported by him to a Tonkinese highlander whose account of it was again to be translated by a Scot into French!

And I was right. Once again the *Doi's* optimism had not been justified. But far better an unjustified optimism than a fully justified pessimism.

Nevertheless, something quite useful did materialize, and the idea originated in

my own un-subtle blundering Western mind.

§2

For when, on the following night, the *Doi* again came to drink the black smoke with me, and we lay down side by side upon our mats, and he unfolded for my consideration his tale of the Number One Boy's tale of De-Nha's tale to John Collins, I rejected it utterly.

And then a small brain-wave further agitated the disturbed surface of my troubled mind.

"*M-e-h-h! Ma-chai!*" I jeered in Annamese. "Rubbish! Bosh! I hope you didn't give the rascal opium for that pack of lies."

"Not I," declared the *Doi*. "Only just enough to make him want some more."

"Well now. Here's an idea," said I. "It can't do any harm, and might do a lot of good. Get hold of the Number One Boy again, and promise him a whole *bât* of opium, a regular *khong-hõ* of it, if he does what you tell him to do."

"And what shall I tell him, *Nai*?"

"To come and have a talk with us here."

"Yes, and then?"

"Bribe him to go to De-Nha with a false message from Colonel Collins, and then to come and tell us what De-Nha said."

"What sort of message?"

"That if De-Nha would meet Colonel Collins at a certain place and time, he'd pay him what he asked for the information he had got—about me."

The *Doi* considered the matter with pursed lips.

"Might lead to something," he said at length.

"Yes, we might get at him, and bribe him to tackle De-Nha himself," I said, for I hadn't really much hope of his overhearing anything.

"Look, *Nai*; suppose De-Nha has already given us away, and we are as birds with strings tied about their legs, but don't know it until they go to fly?" asked the *Doi*.

"Well?"

"Then what about telling the servant the truth, and promising him not only a lot of opium but a lot of money, if he can discover that from De-Nha?"

"How?"

"Why, we'd tell the servant the truth, and then send him to De-Nha to sell him the *truth*. Then he comes back and tells us what De-Nha said—whether De-Nha

just laughed at him for his pains and said he knew all about it. . . . And then see whether De-Nha comes to us and warns us that John Collins's Number One Boy has discovered us to be spies!"

"Yes," I replied, "that improves on my idea of trying to get the Number One Boy to make De-Nha give him money in return for not spoiling De-Nha's market by exposing the same goods for sale. See what I mean?"

"Surely, *Nai*."

"Yes. It would have annoyed De-Nha very much to have found that the Number One Boy had as good a secret as he had," I continued, musing aloud, "but what you suggest is better. If the servant tells De-Nha that he knows we are French spies, and De-Nha doesn't warn us, that's clear proof of his treachery. If he is being quite straight, being quite honest, he will come to us immediately, in a great fright, tell us all about it, and warn us that our secret is discovered and that we had better vanish."

"True," replied the *Doi*, "but look, *Nai*. Suppose De-Nha hasn't said a word about us, and we go and tell this servant who we are! What then?"

"Very awkward indeed . . . But you feel pretty certain yourself, don't you, that De-Nha has betrayed us, or is going to?"

"Yes, undoubtedly. Why else should he visit both the Generals and Colonel Collins, separately, late at night . . . Who's De-Nha? What is De-Nha to them that they should give him interviews, in secrecy, like that? He must have gone behind our backs and told them something. He must have convinced them that he has got something to say, and something to sell. Otherwise, for all they know, he's just an ordinary jungle dacoit who follows me as I follow you."

"Quite so. I think it's perfectly safe, or as safe as anything could be, in this place."

"Yes, he has either told them or he's going to tell them—or going to tell it to that one of them who offers most and promises best. . . . We couldn't be much more unsafe than we are, whatever we tell Colonel Car-Ling's servant. Besides—he's an ignorant fool and opium-addict who couldn't make good use of valuable information if he had it."

"We needn't tell him much, either."

"No. You leave it to me, *Nai*. I'll tell him a tale that won't do any harm if he takes it straight to his master, but that will serve our purpose if he takes it to De-Nha—as I think he will. . . . Anyhow, I'll go on getting more and more friendly with him. Perhaps it might be a good thing, after all, to mix a little money with the opium. Those Chinese are avaricious rascals."

"Yes, so different from the Annamese," I agreed gravely.

“Have you any French gold pieces, *Nai*? Any twenty-franc pieces?”

“Yes, I have some of the small and some of the big, in the belt next my skin.”

“Well, I’ll give him one of the small ones and promise—what? Two of the big? If he finds out all we want to know. You leave it to me.”

I felt quite certain I could leave it to the *Doi*, so far as honesty went, and fairly sure, as far as intelligence and diplomacy were concerned.

I accordingly gave him a gold ten-franc piece and authorized the promise of a twenty-franc piece if the man succeeded in proving to our satisfaction that De-Nha was behaving treacherously.

“Ten thousand fire-breathing dragons!” exclaimed the *Doi*. “I’d like to roll De-Nha down the side of a mountain bristling with knives. I’d like to sit him beside a pond and feed his entrails, foot by foot, to mud-fish.”

“Quite so; but that wouldn’t help us, would it, *Doi*?”

“No. We shall have to help ourselves.”

“It’s about time we went back to Houi-Bap,” he added, looking up from his pellet-cooking.

“Yes, we’d have gone long ago if I could have found out where the Big Fort is, and when the money, ammunition and reinforcements are coming from China, and by which route.”

CHAPTER XIX

The next day was an important one for me—in some ways one of the most important of my life; for I learned two pieces of invaluable information, the first concerning my official business, and the other my most intimate personal affairs.

A spy who was in the private pay and very private service of Colonel John Collins had come, post haste, with most important news, bringing with him an Annamese dacoit to bear witness of the truth of his story, and to provide further evidence.

In my capacity as adjutant and aide-de-camp to Colonel Collins, I was present in the old pagoda orderly-room of the *Yamen* at the examination of the spy and his witness, who were questioned—though not in the locally sinister use of that word—in the presence of Generals Luong-Tam-Ky and Ba-Ky.

The great news—and it was of the utmost importance to the French—was that General De-Nam, the great leader of the Annamese revolt, and formerly Viceroy of the vast province of Yen Thé, was dead.

"Dead? Dead? Killed in battle?" asked General Ba-Ky. "One of the French ninety-millimetre shells, or what? We ought to have got him some of those mountain-artillery guns. He could have beaten the French then—or kept them busy for years longer."

The spy smiled and shook his head slowly.

"No; oh, Lord," he said, "the great Viceroy of the Emperor did not fall in battle. Nor was he assassinated by enemies. He was merely poisoned by friends."

"And who were these kind friends?" silkily enquired General Luong-Tam-Ky.

"Chinese, oh Lord," replied the spy.

"*What?* . . . . Do you want to ornament a tree-trunk, upside down, with nails through your feet?" whispered Luong-Tam-Ky.

The spy spread deprecating hands.

"I do but speak the truth. The truth gushes from my mouth as water from a hole in a rock. Is the rock to blame?"

"Speak on," commanded General Ba-Ky, sitting with his sword across his lap, and looking more like Chu Chin Chow than ever.

"Gun-runners," replied the spy, "vendors of rifles, arms and ammunition."

"And why should they kill the Lord General De-Nam?" enquired General Ba-Ky with ominous calm.

"Wouldn't he pay them for the arms and ammunition?" enquired General Luong-Tam-Ky.

"Yes, Lord, he paid in full," was the reply.

"Well?" asked Colonel John Collins.

"He won back every *sabuk* of the money at *bacquang*.[1] Not only that, but every *piastre* they brought with them."

General Ba-Ky roared with laughter.

"Cleaned them out, did he?" he chuckled.

"And then bade them go," smiled the spy. "But ere they went, they poisoned the rice cooked for his morning meal. And so he died. He died in great pain. But as he was about to die, he smiled and said,

"' *The Chinese win. As usual.*'

"Then suddenly he sat upright, looked around him and, in a great voice, cried aloud,

"' *Srok Khmer mün dèl sun*'—'the Khmer Country shall never die' and straightway fell back—and died."

Whereupon General Ba-Ky shook with great guffaws of hearty laughter.

"And who rules in his stead?" asked General Luong-Tam-Ky.

"Lieutenant-General De-Tam," replied the spy.

"Yes, that's probable," agreed General Luong-Tam-Ky. "He was his Second in Command, and completely in his confidence. So General De-Tam now commands the armies of the Emperor of Annam? We must send him a military mission."

"Recognizing him at once?" enquired General Ba-Ky.

"We will ponder a while; talk of it; sleep on it," replied General Luong-Tam-Ky. "To-morrow morning, having decided, we will act."

"Is it known throughout the Annamese forces that General Lord De-Nam, is dead?" he asked the spy.

"Yes, Lord, they made no secret of it," was the answer. "They made him a grand funeral, a mighty *tamboun*. It was a big *tamasha*, with much grief and feasting."

"And where is he buried?" asked General Luong-Tam-Ky.

"Inside the great New Fort at . . ."

The man glanced at me.

"At you-know-where," he concluded.

I would have liked to present him with half a dozen of the best on his own you-know-where.

"Oh, buried him inside the Fort, have they?" said Luong-Tam-Ky. "They'll defend that to the last. . . . Yes, that'll be the main Headquarters and the Citadel too. And they'll fight for that so long as there is a loyal Annamese on his feet."

"H'm. So much for the good De-Nam," he added, nodding his head.

"And what of his son?" he asked the spy.

"He had no son," growled General Ba-Ky.

"And what of his son?" repeated General Luong-Tam-Ky, who was evidently better informed than General Ba-Ky, and had refrained from sharing the information with him.

"What of the son of De-Nam? Is he born yet?"

The spy shrugged desponding shoulders and again spread deprecating hands.

"Born; lived; and dead; oh, Lord," he replied.

"H'm. How do you come to know so much?" enquired General Ba-Ky.

"The time being so near, I waited that my information might be complete; and General De-Tam had given orders that the woman's bodyguard should retreat northward, which was the direction in which I must come."

"Why did General De-Tam give such orders?" asked General Luong-Tam-Ky.

"Because the French were advancing and firing with guns at the stockade line held by General De-Tam."

"Well?"

"I followed the body-guard of the chief wife of the late General Lord De-Nam as they retreated in advance of General De-Tam and his two Lieutenant-Generals, De-Truat and De-Hué; and we came into the mighty forest of Quinh-low where the trees are bigger than any in the world, and where there are the ancient iron-mines worked by the Khmer people a thousand years ago. Here they had to halt for a night, that the son of De-Nam might be born. And on the second day of the fifth month of the year, his first son was at last born to our late Lord the Viceroy De-Nam."

And here the man broke into a sort of threnody,

"*Alas, that he lived not to see that day!*
Alas that his child should be born fatherless!
Alas that the great Lord De-Nam should die childless!"

"I'll give you an 'alas' on your own account in half a second," promised General Ba-Ky. "Who asked you to sing a funeral song?"

The spy, who seemed to be genuinely moved, glared for a moment at General Ba-Ky and then, somewhat sulkily, indicated the dacoit whom he had brought with him.

"This man knows the facts. Saw everything himself. Let him speak."

And, as a matter of practice and accurate recording, and to take back a document that would surely interest Captain Deleuze, I wrote down in a field

pocket-book that I had obtained from Colonel Collins, exactly what he said. It was as follows.

"The beloved favourite wife of our great and honoured chief the Lord De-Nam was approaching her time, when, suddenly, great fire burst forth from the big guns of the *Farangs* and the scouts came in with the news that great numbers of infantry soldiers were advancing into the jungle, not only Annamese in *sakalos* but *Farangs* in white helmets.

"Then, in spite of the fact that her hour was very near, the Lord De-Tam bade her arise and journey far into the Quinh-Low jungle; and he bade the Commanders De-Truat and De-Hué to follow with their bands, while he himself with his main army fought a rearguard action.

"And as we journeyed into the jungle of Quinh-Low, we heard the sound of the battle far behind us.

"And after marching for a day and a night, the lady, the wife of our great Lord De-Nam said,

"'I can go no further'. And straightway her child was born, the son of our Lord De-Nam.

"And the leader of the bodyguard sent word quickly back by me, to the Lord De-Tam, saying,

"' *A son is born unto our late Lord and Viceroy De-Nam. Come then and protect him, lest harm come to him. For the Generals De-Truat and De-Hué have marched on.*'

"And when I, the messenger, reached De-Tam and gave him the message, De-Tam said,

"' *This news comes at an ill moment, for behold I have bidden my troops to disperse, and now they are scattered like rice-husks before the wind, and they cover the face of the country, hiding in their villages until the French retire. And when the French have retired, my troops will assemble again in the great Fort where De-Nam is buried and which the French will never find.*'

"And even while I, the messenger, spoke with the Lord De-Tam, scouts arrived saying,

"' *Fly, oh Lord, for the foreign soldiers are here, led by a traitor.*'

"And De-Tam said to me, the messenger,

"' *I will join the bodyguard with the fifty men who are with me.*'

"And it was so: I, the messenger, leading General De-Tam and his fifty

men back to where the bodyguard waited, protecting the woman and the new-born babe.

"So now the Lord De-Nam's son was guarded by General De-Tam and seventy-five men.

"And in a day or two, when the woman could again march, General De-Tam and the men advanced further into the jungle of Quinh-Low, taking the woman and the child with them.

"And they marched from one secret food-store to the next, there being rice in plenty in these hiding-places, where the great Lord and Viceroy De-Nam had, in his wisdom, concealed it, that his troops might not starve when retreating.

"But the traitor who was leading the *linh-lanxa* followed, and day by day, the white soldiers fired upon General De-Tam's force, and the retreat became a rearguard action, with night attacks and dawn attacks, daily.

"And so hard did the white soldiers press upon General De-Tam, that of rest there was but little, of sleep there was none, and scarce was there time to cook our rice.

"And one day a man of the bodyguard said that near-by there was a hiding-place beneath the earth, for he knew of the entrance to a cave from which was a passage leading underground.

"And we found the entrance to the cave behind rocks and bushes, but the passage leading from it into the bowels of the earth had fallen in, for it was an ancient place of iron-workings long abandoned to the jungle. And there, in the cave, De-Tam and all his party abode, protecting the woman and the young child, until our food was almost gone, and there was but little water.

"And one day, I, the man whom De-Tam sent out to bring water, was seen and followed by an Annamese soldier of the French. But discovering this in time, I led the soldier astray and came secretly to the entrance, after darkness had fallen, and told General De-Tam of this thing.

"Nevertheless, in spite of my cunning, the *tirailleur* who had seen me brought other soldiers to the spot where he had last beheld me, and there they made constant search throughout a morning; and at midday they sat down to rest and eat food, and they were close to the entrance to our cave.

"And suddenly the child began to cry and to scream.

"The mother lay sick and ill and scarcely conscious.

"The child, whom she could not feed, ceased not to cry and to scream, doubtless because it was hungry and in pain. Bananas it would not eat.

"And De-Tam, fearing lest its cries and screams be heard by the searching soldiers, ordered me to dig a little hole quietly in the soft earth.

"This I did. And in the hole, De-Tam laid General De-Nam's son, and covered it carefully with a piece of silk, as was fitting, the child being a young prince.

"He then bade me fill the hole up, tread the earth flat, and place stones upon it. This I did.

"So, without dying or being slain, the child went to join its ancestors.

"And presently after, the mother's soul came up from the depths, her mind came back from its wandering, and she asked for the child.

"And when De-Tam told her that it had gone to join its father in the way that was fitting, she was so stricken with grief that she became as one who is mad.

"'Where is it? Where is it?' she cried.

"'Out in the jungle,' replied De-Tam, wishing to be rid of her.

"And out into the forest she fled.

"Next day, De-Tam sent me out to scout, and I found that the soldiers had gone. So we left the cave and continued on our way.

"And in the path we found the body of the woman, with a knife driven to the handle in her body, the blade being through her heart and protruding behind her. This she had done herself, for her right hand still held the handle of the knife, showing that she had died fittingly, as became the daughter of a great man who was the wife of a great man and the mother of his son."

"And I have come here with this man," added the dacoit, "on promise of great reward."

"And what of De-Tam?" asked General Ba-Ky of Colonel Collins's spy.

"He, making a wide circle, returned to the great New Fort at—you-know-where. It is his intention there to reassemble his troops and hide until a big French army, passing on far into the jungle, in ignorance, leaves the great Fort behind them. Then when the French go to attack the strong stockaded place of which they shall receive full information, General De-Tam, having cut their lines of communication,

will take them in the rear, leaving a strong force to prevent reinforcements from reaching them."

Invaluable information indeed, and the sooner I could get it back to Captain Deleuze, the better.

But first I must know where the Fort of "You-know-where" was situated. On the strength of this information the French General would doubtless be able to ambush the ambushers; and I imagined him playing De-Tam's game as far as it suited himself—sending a force to attack the "strong stockaded place" that was to be betrayed to him; another one to deal with De-Tam's main army that issued forth from the Fort of "You-know-where"; while yet a third French force entered and occupied that great New Fort, sacred burying place, treasure house, arsenal, and last citadel of the rebels of Annam.

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[1] *Fan-tan.*

CHAPTER XX

And so the great General De-Nam was dead. . . . What would be the effect upon the situation here?

§2

Late that evening, after I had eaten my frugal dinner of rice, *tsamba*-cake and dried pears, and was drinking cup after cup of brick-tea sweetened with *mauri*, I received the other information that so concerned me privately.

As I sat in my hut, after a hot and hard three hours on the parade-ground and a route-march, one of our *tirailleurs* brought the *Doi* a note for me.

It was from Mrs. Collins.

With my heart beating faster than usual, I read as follows:

> "*My dear*,
>
> *J. went off at sunset with a party on some expedition or other, and will not be returning in less than a week at earliest. I must speak to you. Will you come over in about an hour's time, when the servants, except my amah, will have gone to their quarters? I believe she is trustworthy, though of course I don't know. I don't really trust anybody but you.*
>
> *M. C.*"

I knew that something serious must have occurred, or she would not have written to me like this, would not have taken the risk of writing a letter at all—still less of asking me to go to her house late at night.

I thought it better to tell the *Doi* where I was going; and I bade him remain in my hut till I returned.

Keeping to what shadow I could find, I made my way to Collins's house. As I approached the door, it was opened by a Chinese woman in a black silk coat and trousers, her hair like a black lacquer casque, her yellow face expressionless.

Fastening the door behind me, she led the way to the drawing-room where Mrs. Collins was sitting on the blackwood couch. The room was dimly lit by one lamp, turned low.

As soon as we were alone, I took Mary's hands in mine and kissed them, and she drew me down beside her on the sofa.

"Oh, my dear," she said. "I'm so glad you've come. What a day! I don't know

where to begin. Forgive me if I am a little incoherent. You will agree there is some reason. My husband went at sunset, and said he would only be gone for a couple of days or so; but I gather from General Luong-Tam-Ky that he won't be back for ten days at least, as he has gone to the great Fort at Thay-Taong. . . ."

I instantly noted the name. *Thay-Taong*. So that was where the great rebel Citadel was! She had given me a piece of information indeed; though, I was perfectly certain, unintentionally and quite unconsciously.

"General Luong-Tam-Ky told you?" I said.

For this also was an interesting and, indeed, amazing piece of news, although valueless. How and why should General Luong-Tam-Ky be in communication with the wife of Colonel John Collins?

"Yes, General Luong-Tam-Ky," she repeated. "He honoured me with a state visit this evening."

I repeated the name *Thay-Taong* to myself that, in my surprise at this information, I should not forget it.

"Paid you a visit here!"

"Yes, and as I say, in state. Carried in his chair. With a bodyguard. Flags and all complete. I wonder he didn't have a band."

"What did he want?" I asked.

"Me."

"Wanted to see you? What about?"

"He wanted *me*. He came to inform me that it was entirely unnecessary that my husband should ever return from the journey on which he had been sent by General Ba-Ky and himself."

"Not return?"

"No. Do you remember the little story of Uriah the Hittite?" she asked.

And then I saw a great light. Saw in a flash. And 'flash' is appropriate, for I felt as though a thunder-bolt had fallen at my feet; and almost as though I had been struck by lightning.

She had been speaking so calmly, so quietly—as was her wont—that I had not suspected how great her fear and trouble were; how terrible her danger.

"He told you that your husband . . . ?"

I stared incredulous.

"He did me the honour formally to propose that I should become his . . . his *pu-ying*, his *kon-ying* . . . presumably his *prapon thom*."

"But, God bless my soul! You already have one husband, and he . . ."

"And he 'need not return from his journey' according to General Luong-Tam-Ky

—as I have just said," replied Mary.

"You mean that General Luong-Tam-Ky would simply have him murdered?"

"It wasn't put as bluntly and coarsely as that. Nothing more was actually said than that there 'was no reason why he should ever return'. But the meaning was perfectly clear."

"Yes, I have had some experience of Luong-Tam-Ky's ability to make himself perfectly clear."

And I thought of the great patriot and warrior De-Nam, poisoned by a gang of filthy gun-runners because they wanted their money back after he had won it at *fan-tan*. And this man, John Collins, was also to be poisoned, or shot or stabbed in the back, because Luong-Tam-Ky wanted his wife.

"Has he ever shown any signs of this sort of—madness—before?"

"No. It came as an utter surprise to me. Had it been the other one, Ba-Ky, it would not have been such a shock. Ba-Ky leers at me horribly every time I see him."

I could imagine Chu Chin Chow's leer at a woman. But, so far, it had been another case of the dog whose bark was worse than his bite, or of the Chinese proverb that the barking dog does not bite.

"What did you say?" I asked.

"Used the very word you did just now.

"Madness.

"Without stopping to think, I asked him if he had gone mad.

"He said Yes, he had. He had been driven mad by Beautiful Quiet Fairy . . . I gathered that I am the 'Beautiful Quiet Fairy' in question. . . .

"Then I talked to gain time, wondering which would be safest for my husband; whether I should put him in more danger by telling Luong-Tam-Ky that Colonel John Collins would thrash him within an inch of his life and then hang him to a tree; or whether it would be even more dangerous to pretend to appear to be somewhat pleased and honoured and friendly, and that I would—consider the matter."

"And what did you say?"

"I hardly know what I did say. I tried not to make the beast savage, and I tried to show him that it was absurd, impossible . . . lunacy. It was simply terrible. Heaven knows I have little reason to wish John well, seeing how he has treated me all these years; but he is my husband, and I have got to save him. . . . And myself too. Just think what a position I should be in if . . . if . . . Alone here among these Chinese—and with that man Luong-Tam-Ky . . ."

"You aren't alone, Mary," I said, "and you are not going to be."

"Oh, my dear. . . . Thank you . . . It was to you I turned . . ."

"Of course. How did you get rid of him?"

"It is like remembering a dream. A nightmare, rather. I said,

"' *You don't mean to say you'd commit a murder? Murder my husband?*'

"And he smiled and repeated that same phrase. '*There's really no reason why he should come back. Accidents happen in the best regulated little expeditions, you know.*'

"So, for want of something more effective to say, I told him that I should certainly die if my husband did. That seemed to amuse him, and he observed that 'Beautiful Quiet Fairy' was much too lovely to die.

"I told him that was where he was wrong; as in point of fact, I shouldn't have the slightest objection to dying."

She stared before her with tragic eyes.

"At first my mind seemed numb, and I couldn't think. Then I had an idea. I made a shot in the dark. But whether what I said also amused him, or whether it gave him something to think about too, I don't know. I said,

"' *You ought to know my husband pretty well by now, General Luong-Tam-Ky. He's a very clever man, or he wouldn't be what he is, an officer of high rank under the Chinese Government. He's not a fool, you know, and he knows how to take care of himself.*'

"' *Oh no, he's not a fool,*' Luong-Tam-Ky agreed, '*and I am quite sure he knows how to take care of himself.*'

"' *Well, then, do you think that if you had him murdered, you'd survive him long?*'

"' *What do you mean?*' he asked.

"' *What I say. Colonel John Collins isn't a very trusting person, you know. He wouldn't be alive to-day if he were. Don't you think that he has arranged that if anything happens to him, something will happen to you too? . . . And that he counts on your having enough common sense to realize it.*'

"' *Why should anything happen to me?*'

"' *Because he knows perfectly well that if anything happened to him, it would be through you.*'

"And I tried to read his face, his eyes, to see how he took it. I might as well have tried to read a closed book. Better. There would be something on the cover of a closed book. . . . But I think he turned the idea over in his mind, for he was silent for a minute or two."

"Yes, Mary. He'd certainly think it over," I observed. "Sort of idea that would

appeal to him. Just about what he'd do himself. What did he say next?"

"That my husband wasn't the only man who could take care of himself. . . . By then I had decided what would be my best line," continued Mary Collins.

"' *Suppose anything happened to my husband and he didn't return here, I should certainly die. Whether you would or not, I don't know; but I do know that I should.*'

"' *Because you love him so much?*' sneered Luong-Tam-Ky.

"' *No, because I love life so little,*' I replied.

"He thought this over for a while, his face absolutely inscrutable.

"' *And suppose your husband unfortunately did not return from this expedition, you really think that something would happen to me, do you?*'

"' *I know it would.*'

"' *My food would disagree with me; or I should meet with an accident?*'

"' *I don't know in the least what would happen to you, except that you wouldn't survive him long.*'

"' *Ah! And who is there in this camp so faithful to Colonel John Collins that he would carry out his instructions—after he was dead?*'

"' *I don't know*,' I replied.

"' *You think there is such a person?*'

"' *I am certain there is.*'

"And then I thought I could see that he was reflecting, turning over in his mind the names of the people who might be as obedient and faithful as that. For he shifted his eyes and stared at the floor.

"Suddenly he looked into my eyes again and said,

"' *How long has your Number One Boy been with you?*'

"Well, I thought I'd follow that up.

"' *Oh, ever so long*,' I lied. '*I couldn't tell you. He has been with my husband longer than I have been married to him.*'

"Then the thought crossed my mind that he might think of you, Sinbad, and that this might be dangerous for you."

"Well, he knows that I am not an old friend or faithful servant of Colonel Collins, Mary," I said.

"Yes, but he also knows that you are a compatriot," replied Mary, "and might very well think that my husband had left me in your charge, and that you had promised to look after me if anything happened to him—and to see to it that something also happened to General Luong-Tam-Ky. . . . How can one tell what such Chinese as Luong-Tam-Ky think? We can't enter into their minds at all."

"No," I agreed. "I think about the safest guide is to consider what we would do in any given circumstances, and then decide that they would do just the opposite. . . . What was the end of it?"

"Well, he went away, with my firm assurance that if my husband died I should die."

"Do you think he believed you?"

"My dear, who's to say? I certainly did my utmost to make him believe me. And if you weren't here, that is of course what would happen. I have no intention of becoming the property of a Chinese—after having been that of a Chinese half-caste, all these years."

"I'll send word to your husband," I said. "I'll send a messenger, or go myself—to Thay-Taong."

"No, you mustn't go. Please. Please don't leave me here alone."

"All-right. I'll send a couple of my *tirailleurs*."

"You trust them?"

"Absolutely. I think there's no-one I trust more, except yourself. I'll send them off at once."

"Look here, Mary," I added, not stopping to wonder what she would reply to such a proposal. "Would you like me to stay here to-night? I could sleep on this couch or on a mat in the verandah."

She met my gaze for a moment.

"I'm not frightened," she said. "Nothing will happen to me—yet awhile. Good-night, and thank you, oh so much. Take care of yourself, Sinbad."

I put my arms about her, and she clung to me while our lips met in a long kiss of love.

And then I hurried away, my mind in turmoil and in torment.

CHAPTER XXI

Next day *Doi* Linh Nghi hung about the compound of Colonel Collins's bungalow until the Number One Boy left the house and retired to his own quarters at the bottom of the garden, for his afternoon opium-smoke and *siesta*.

To him the *Doi* made overtures, opening up bright vistas adown which the servant might glimpse a gleam of gold and eddying volumes of the ineffably desirable 'black smoke.'

If he desired the gold piece which the *Doi* showed him, and a couple more of twice that size, with enough opium to give him a score of pipes a day, he was to hold converse with my other follower, De-Nha. He was to tell De-Nha that he had learned something about me, the *Farang* who was now a *Nai-tha'han*, a Lieutenant, and had joined Colonel Car-Ling. Did he understand?

Oh yes; he understood.

Well, that *Farang* was not a white officer from *Muang Angrit*[1] at all, he was really a *linh lanxa* of the French army. He was a French spy. Did the Number One Boy understand?

Yes; he understood all-right. He was to go to De-Nha and say that he knew that this European was not an English officer but a French soldier and a spy.

Right. He was to say that to De-Nha.

Well, what then?

Then he was to say to De-Nha,

"I am going to sell this information to General Ba-Ky or to General Luong-Tam-Ky or to Colonel Coffins himself, whichever seems likely to pay most."

Right. He was to say that to De-Nha.

Well, what then?

Then the Number One Boy was to note very carefully what De-Nha said to that. And if De-Nha told him he mustn't do such a thing, he was to ask De-Nha how much he would give him to keep the secret.

Did he understand?

Yes, he understood quite clearly.

Then—and this was very important—he was to tell *Doi* Linh Nghi exactly what De-Nha said. Exactly. And if he was very clever, and did all this very nicely, and reported accurately, he was to get the two big gold pieces as well as the small one which he would have in advance. And opium.

Now he must repeat what he had to say to De-Nha, to make sure he had got it all right.

Yes. . . . He, the Number One Boy, was to go to De-Nha; tell him that the new white man was a French spy; and see how De-Nha took the information. He was then to say that he was going to sell this secret to the highest bidder; and then note carefully how De-Nha took that piece of information.

Good. Quite right, agreed the *Doi*; and particularly he was to report whether De-Nha seemed surprised and horrified; seemed strongly to object to his selling the secret to the Chinese; and report whether De-Nha tried to bribe the Number One Boy to do nothing in the matter at all.

In fact, the *Doi* clearly explained to the Number One Boy that what he really wanted to know was whether De-Nha had already learned the interesting secret, and was in the market for its sale before ever the Number One Boy knew there was any secret to sell.

And indeed, by the time the *Doi* left the Number One Boy, the mind of that admirable servant must have been most abundantly clear on the subject of finding out whether De-Nha was behaving, or about to behave, treacherously toward those whom he professed to follow and to serve.

It seemed all-right; but the same question gave me pause again, for a moment. When I had heard all that the *Doi* had to tell me about his interview with the Number One Boy, I asked once more,

"And what about the Number One Boy himself? Did he seem at all interested in the question of whether we are what we pretend to be; or really are, French spies?"

"No," replied the *Doi*. "Why should he be? As we said before—he's only a servant and not particularly interested in anything beyond opium—and money."

"He didn't even ask whether it is true that we are French spies?"

"Well, he did say, when I was leaving the compound,

"'*And is the white Nai-tha'han really a linh lanxa, a French soldier and spy?*'"

"Oh, he did, did he?" I mused. "What did you say?"

"Oh, I just said,

"'*No, of course he isn't! But I believe that dirty dog De-Nha is going to tell the Chinese that he is. Going to get an innocent man tortured and put to death, just for the sake of what he himself may get out of it. That's what we want to find out about him.*'"

"And what did the Number One Boy say to that?"

"Just grinned like the vacant-minded *khon khi ya*, the silly opium-addict, that he is, and said,

"'*Oh, what a dirty dog. What a yellow-belly*,'" replied the *Doi*.

And it seemed to me that if the *Doi* were entirely satisfied, there should be no reason why I should worry as to the cogitations of the Number One Boy.

If De-Nha were a traitor we were for it.

If he were not, the Number One Boy really did not matter.

Suppose he did go with a cock-and-bull story to his master or to the General, who'd believe him?

Who was he, and how should he know, any more than they did, who I was or where I came from?

No, the vapourings of Colonel Collins's opium-sodden servant would interest nobody; and might be a considerable danger to himself, if they came to my ears—or so he would argue.

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[1] *England.*

CHAPTER XXII

And the next night I received another piece of information; another shock, one which made that of the previous night seem comparatively gentle.

Again Colonel Collins's *conyam* gave one of my *tirailleurs* a note for me, from Mary. It ran,

> "*My dear*,
>
> *More trouble—and worse in some ways! Thank God you are here—and are what you are. Will you come over again to-night, fairly late?*
>
> *M.*"

In a state of fuming impatience and great anxiety, I waited until I thought that the servants would have left the bungalow and gone to their houses at the bottom of the compound, and she would be alone save for the trusted *amah*.

Again this woman, with her boot-button eyes, lacquer-like hair, and expressionless face of old ivory, admitted me, fastened the door behind me, and showed me into the drawing-room.

As soon as we were alone, Mary came to me, and as we kissed, my arms about her, I felt she was trembling.

"What is it, Mary?"

"Sinbad, what isn't it?"

"The General again?"

"No, not yet. . . . Another—admirer!"

I had those sensations known as 'blood running cold' and goose-flesh.

Not General Ba-Ky? Good Heaven, where were we, if these two all-powerful Chinese, here in the world's wildest back-of-beyond, were going to fight—for the woman whom I loved far better than I loved my life?

"Ba-Ky?" I asked.

"No," replied Mary. "Not Ba-Ky, thank God. And you'd never guess from whom my second proposal of—protection—has come. Two in two days. Who am I? What am I?"

I took her hands and tried to soothe her.

"Tell me, Mary."

And to my utter astonishment, amazement so great that I did not really understand, the first time she said it,

"The Number One Boy," she replied.

This was beyond common comprehension.

The Number One Boy?

What was this? What did she mean? The head servant; the butler; the Number One Boy as Europeans call them, in the Far East? That he had attacked her? That he . . .?

"The Number One Boy," she said again.

I sprang to my feet, and if ever a man had murder in his heart, or rather righteous homicidal rage . . .

"Where is he?"

I had certainly never in my life wanted a servant as badly as I wanted the Number One Boy at that moment.

Mary caught at my hand.

"Sit down, my dear, and listen. He's not a servant at all."

"Your head servant, your Number One Boy—is not a servant? What do you mean?"

"He's not a servant at all. He's an officer of the regular Chinese army—rank of Major—and prominent Secret Service Agent."

And once again, what on earth was this?

What were we talking about? Colonel Collins's head servant, butler, Number One Boy—a Chinese officer, a Secret Service agent? . . .

Well, why not? Anything was possible to these people. Nothing more possible than that such a man as Colonel John Collins should be watched, spied upon, reported about; particularly on such a mission as his present one, when it would be a simple enough matter for him to set up as a *tuchun*, a War Lord, on his own account if he thought he would.

Yes, it was quite possible.

And suddenly, to Mary's very great surprise, I laughed aloud.

"It's not really very amusing," she said.

"No, it isn't," I said, shocked and ashamed of myself. "Do forgive me, Mary! But I've just remembered something. I've been using your Number One Boy—your Chinese Major and Secret Service Agent—to find out whether my guide and spy De-Nha is betraying me—denouncing me for a French spy! We have just told the man that we *are* French spies!"

"My dear! What will happen?"

"God knows."

"It's no laughing matter, surely."

"No. And I'm not laughing. I'm making funny noises with my mouth, Mary. I

could kick myself from here back to Houi-Bap."

And indeed I felt that I could go and tell Captain Deleuze that I had declared myself as a French spy—to a Chinese Secret Service officer . . . and that I could then go and blow out my brains. . . . *Brains!*

I felt that I must laugh; and I never felt less like laughter in my life. I could have hanged myself.

And then I realized my colossal selfishness. Here was I, thinking of myself and my own affairs when Mary was not only in terrible trouble but in the greatest danger.

"I'm so sorry," I said. "I beg your pardon, Mary. It took me rather aback—to hear that the servant was an officer—and to realize that I have been giving him money and opium and telling him all there is to know about myself and my mission. . . . I'm so sorry. Tell me what happened."

"When he had cleared away dinner and finished his work, he came into the room and stood in front of me, bowed, and said in excellent English,

"' *Will the Nai Mem please excuse me? Yesterday Luong-Tam-Ky said that the Nai Colonel need not return from his expedition to the new Fort.*'

"' *Well?*' I said.

"' *He will not return*,' was the reply.

"And I got that horrible pain deep down inside, again; and I seemed to be growing very cold, almost as if my heart were turning over and going to stop. It's a horrible feeling."

I took her hand in mine, and she continued.

"' *What do you mean?*' I asked. '*That something will happen to the Colonel?*'

"' *No, I mean that he will not return. He doesn't intend to return. He has gone.*'

"I stared at him absolutely incredulous, and he said it again.

"' *Colonel Collins has left the Nai Mem for ever. He will never come back. He has left her alone in this camp of soldiers. He has abandoned her.*'

"And again I could only think as I had done about Luong-Tam-Ky, that the man had taken leave of his senses.

"' *Are you mad?*' I asked. '*How dare you come and say such things to me?*'

"' *Because it is true*,' he said. '*I have been watching him for a long time. Ever since he came here. It was to watch him that I entered his service. I am on special duty, seconded by the head of the Military Intelligence Branch of the Chinese Secret Service. . . . I have read everything that he has written, and*

everything that has been written to him. There is nothing about him that I don't know, and that I have not reported to my superiors. And he is now carrying out a scheme that he has contemplated for some time. . . .'

"He talked just like that, Sinbad, and I knew that the man was speaking the truth —about himself, I mean. His English was practically perfect. There was nothing of the servant about him. When I said,

"' *Who are you?*' he replied,

"' *Your very humble servant, Major Li Hsian Chang of the Imperial Army and Chinese Secret Service—at your orders, Madam.*'

"I had to believe him. As regards what he said about himself, at any rate. He was so convincing; and though he was, of course, dressed as a servant, it was plain enough then that he was not one. He held himself differently, spoke differently, was different.

"A different man altogether.

"It was extraordinary how he turned from a menial into a masterful and cultured person of consequence, a person of quality. He's what he says he is, Sinbad. Whether he's speaking the truth about my husband is another matter."

"And what did he propose?"

"To take me away."

"What, to . . ."

"To take me away—to a place of safety. To get me out of this camp. 'Rescue' me, in fact. Then it appeared that he had heard everything that General Luong-Tam-Ky said yesterday. He showed him in here, you know, just as though it was the visit of an ordinary afternoon caller. And then he listened, and heard every word that was said. He made no secret of that. Part of his job, I suppose."

"What, just listened at the key-hole?"

"I don't know. Probably he has a proper 'listening-place' as they call it. It is likely that there is nothing but a sheet of wall-paper between this room and the next, in some spot. One's heard of that sort of thing in China. Anyhow, the fact remains that he knows exactly what was said. And he asked me what I supposed was going to happen to me when Luong-Tam-Ky realized that there was no need to prevent my husband from returning from Thay-Taong—as my husband had no intention of going there. In fact, he had simply run away and abandoned me here. He then hinted that I should be lucky if Luong-Tam-Ky did get hold of me and not Ba-Ky—or something worse happen to me."

"What did you say, Mary?" I asked.

"I said,

“‘ *If you are what you tell me you are; and if there’s a word of truth in what you have told me about my husband; I can look after myself.*’”

“And then?”

“Well, he practically told me not to talk nonsense; asked me how on earth I could look after myself, here in a camp with a couple of thousand soldiers—and Luong-Tam-Ky, not to mention Ba-Ky.

“I told him what I told Luong-Tam-Ky—that I had no wish to live.

“But, I must say, he frightened me. I don’t know whether I am at all lacking in imagination; but by the time he had finished, I was far more frightened than ever I have been when I have tried to visualize exactly what I should do here, if anything happened to my husband.

“And having succeeded in completely terrifying me, he begged me to escape while there was time, and before anyone knew—what at present only he knew—that my husband had left the Chinese camp and the local Chinese service for good, and had abandoned me here in the middle of it.

“Then I asked him why, supposing for one moment all he had said was true, he was so interested in my fate. I said I should have thought he’d have been more concerned to send the information about my husband as quickly as possible to his superiors at Peking.

“He replied that it was what he was going to do; that he was going to leave the camp at once, and hurry to the nearest point whence he could send the message, and that he wanted to take me with him.

“I asked him why, once more, and remarked that surely he’d travel faster alone . . . Then he told me why . . .”

“Yes?”

“Luong-Tam-Ky’s story over again. . . . He said that he was in love with me, had been in love with me since the first time he saw me, and had been longing for a chance to save me from a life in which I was unhappy and from a position in which I was not appreciated . . . He made love to me . . .”

Again I sprang to my feet, uncontrollably enraged.

“The impudent hound! The damned insolent Chinese dog. I . . .”

“That’s how I felt, my dear, but I must say he was very careful not to be offensive.”

“So will I, when I get hold of him,” I swore.

“Don’t imagine there was anything in the nature of—an attack . . . or a threat . . . or anything of that sort. In point of fact he merely begged me to escape while I could. Implored me to let him save me. And it was only when I asked him why he

should wish to help me, that he told me the reason—because he loved me."

"And what was to happen when he had saved you?" I asked.

"He didn't go into that. He was going to get me safely to Peking."

"Yes. Perhaps!" said I. "Is he in the house now?"

"No. There's only the *amah*, and the doors at the back and front are bolted inside, as well as locked."

"Was he in the house when you told me about Luong-Tam-Ky?"

"No. No, he couldn't have been."

"And what was the end of it?"

"Well, I pretended that I didn't believe a word he said, and that I was not in the least frightened—only angry beyond words, and that he himself had better escape from the camp, before my husband came back.

"Then he repeated that my husband never would come back, and begged me to believe it. I said I didn't believe it, didn't believe a word he had said, and that even if it were all true, I should not attempt to escape—with him, at any rate. . . . That I should, of course, wait for my husband. . . . And that, supposing he did not return here, Peking was the last place I should go to. Then he asked me where on earth I supposed I could go, and who on earth would take me there.

"I had half a mind to reply that, if I had to leave here, you would take me. But I thought I had better not say that, especially as you are supposed to have come from China yourself."

I pondered this for a moment.

"Just as well, perhaps," I agreed. "Though I really do not think it would have made any difference. He knows who I am and where I came from, thanks to my own idiotic folly. But who on this earth would ever have dreamed that that dull plate-licking servant was a Chinese officer and agent?"

"Well, I didn't mention you. What I thought at the moment," continued Mary, "was that it might make him jealous of you and bring you into still greater danger."

"Yes," I agreed, "if what he says is true, and he were really jealous of me, it would probably complicate things. What line he might take with regard to me as a French spy I don't know; but one can imagine what it would be if he thought that I was your . . . your . . ."

"Lover," said Mary.

"Yes; and if he thought I were going to help you to get away, and try to get you safely down to Hanoi."

"I wonder if he's speaking the truth," I added.

"About himself or about my husband?"

"Either. Both."

"Well, I believe he's speaking the truth about himself, for as I said before, he's certainly no servant. I have met Chinese 'officers and gentlemen' in Peking, and he's of that class."

"And about your husband?"

"That I don't know. It would be quite like him to abandon me here, if it were to his interest to do so. If there were the slightest reason to do so. He doesn't love me in the very least; and he has shown me nothing but unkindness, unfriendliness, neglect, rudeness, and at times, actual cruelty. Blows. And it has been like that for years. Time and again I have wondered why on earth he didn't get rid of me. And it is quite likely that he has done so now."

"Suppose he has gone off for good. Gone right away. How would this fellow, this Number One Boy know?"

"Well, as he said, he has read everything that my husband has written, and every letter that he has received. Then, of course, he did his packing. He may know that my husband took everything of value that he had; and may have seen him destroy papers and that sort of thing, as though he were never coming back. He may have overheard him in conversation with some messenger or spy. That man who brought him the news about De-Nam's death has been coming here every day. I've no doubt the Number One Boy . . . or 'Major Li Hsian Chang' . . . has heard every word of their conversation—exactly as he heard my conversation with Luong-Tam-Ky."

"Yes, he overheard, no doubt, and he probably knows all about Colonel Collins—as servants do in the East. . . . I say, do you think that perhaps Luong-Tam-Ky knows too, and that is why he came to you with his . . . foulness . . . the moment your husband had gone?"

"I wonder," replied Mary. "The Number One Boy declared that he himself was the only person who knew."

"Well, clever as he may be, he can't really say what Luong-Tam-Ky knows and doesn't know. No-one can. It's entirely possible that, whatever your husband has done, he has done with the complete knowledge of Luong-Tam-Ky; possibly not only with his knowledge, but with his approval and assistance."

"Yes, it is possible. Particularly in the light of what the Number One Boy told me about these two Generals."

"What was that?" I asked.

"According to him, Luong-Tam-Ky and Ba-Ky are not Annamese by birth and nationality, and not regular Chinese Generals either," replied Mary. "They are Chinese, and they are Generals here, all-right; but they are not on the Chinese Army

List, and they take no orders whatsoever from the Chinese War Office or Imperial Court."

This was intriguing and would interest Major Deleuze if ever I got the news to him.

"What are they, then, according to the Number One Boy, *alias* Major Li Hsian Chang?"

"Chinese masquerading as Annamese. He called them Powerful Barons; the commanders and leaders of the independent Chinese forces in North and West Tonking. He said that these Chinese bands are trained, disciplined armies of brigands; and Luong-Tam-Ky and Ba-Ky are really Robber Chiefs, Brigand Chiefs, each one king of an enormous province north of the Yen Thé. According to him, both these great Chinese brigand chieftains had established their kingdoms, south of the Chinese border, long before the present French armies ever came to Tonking."

"And the Chinese Government supports them?"

"Yes; and this man, Major Li Hsian Chang, is liaison officer between the Chinese Government and these two *tuchuns*, War Lords, Generals of armies of—banditti."

"And part of his job was to watch Colonel Collins?"

"Yes; so he says. It seems that my husband really left the regular Chinese Army and took service in the joint army of these two Robber Chiefs."

"Let's suppose he told you the truth. Did he say what his excuse or reason would be for leaving his job here and going to Peking?"

"Yes, he did—to make a personal report on the general situation; on my husband's activities; on the results in Tonking of the death of General De-Nam; on the strength of the French forces; and to bring back powerful Chinese reinforcements."

"That seems likely enough. Plausible, anyhow . . ."

What a mess! What a sudden development of affairs. And where did I stand now?

Either this Chinese was, or was not, Major Li Hsian Chang of the regular Chinese army, accredited liaison officer and secretly a spy of the Chinese Military Intelligence Service.

And he was now in possession of the fact that I also was a spy.

Luong-Tam-Ky and Ba-Ky either were, or were not, Chinese Generals; and were probably merely powerful Robber Barons subsidized and helped by the Chinese Government, and—of the uttermost importance if what he had told Mary was true—Chinese regular forces, secretly sent to aid the late De-Nam against the French, were likely soon to arrive at this camp. Not only reinforcements, but most

probably the great convoy of provisions, munitions, and bullion for the payment of troops.

If I could only discover the truth—and relevant details—what a piece of work I should have done for my chief. . . .

"Sinbad, my dear, what are we to do?"

And again I realized my selfishness.

Duty was one thing—and I would do my duty to the utmost—but self-centred egoism, a desire to distinguish Sinclair Noel Brodie Dysart, was a different matter.

And surely I had a duty to my own countrywoman as well as to the foreign country that I served.

And, provided I did not attempt to escape from this place before I had learned all there was to know, it was, for once, a case of love and duty marching hand-in-hand. Herein I was more fortunate than the hero of fiction who inevitably, in such circumstances, stands between love and duty.

As soon as I knew a little more, as soon as I could confirm the truth of what this alleged Chinese officer and spy had told Mary, I could escape. Go while the going was good, and take her with me.

But take her with me through the jungle? Down the Red River?

Practically impossible.

And wholly impossible to leave her here if, indeed, Colonel John Collins had deserted her.

"What am I to do, Sinbad? You tell me, and I'll do it."

"Wait," I replied. "Wait a little while. My messenger will return from Thay-Taong where your husband is supposed to have gone. . . . And we'll see whether your husband returns. If he does, it's a pack of lies; and he'll know what to do with Mr. Number One Boy and with Luong-Tam-Ky, too, I should think. If he doesn't return, it will look as though the Number One Boy is Major Li Hsian Chang, and has told you the truth."

"And suppose General Luong-Tam-Ky or, for that matter, Major Li Hsian Chang, if that is his name, becomes . . . dangerous? Suppose one of them or Ba-Ky threatens me . . .?"

"Then we shall have to escape. Leave it to me. I'll keep the closest possible watch on the alleged Major Li Hsian Chang, as well as on Luong-Tam-Ky and Ba-Ky; and I'll have one of my men always near this house, by night now, as well as

day, so that you could send me a message at any moment. Your *amah* could give it to him, or come to me herself if necessary. I wonder if she is really faithful?"

"God knows. I believe she is. I think she is truly attached to me. I've always treated her most kindly and have never had any fault to find with her. As a race, the Chinese are honest; and these *amahs* have a very good name for trustworthiness and faithfulness."

"You keep her in the house with you?"

"Oh, yes. She sleeps outside my room, and only goes down to her hut for meals."

"Shall I come here myself to-morrow night, in any case whether you send for me or not?"

"Oh, Sinbad, I should so like to see you. You are like a rock . . . and I am so lonely . . . have been for years. Yes. Come and talk to me. After the servants have gone for the night."

"Including the Number One Boy," I said. "I suppose he will . . . go for the night?"

"I'll send for you if he shows any signs of doing otherwise."

"Well, then, unless I hear from you before, I will come over at this time to-morrow night."

But I did not do so.

CHAPTER XXIII

As I returned to my hut that night, keeping as far as possible in the shadows of the trees, bushes, and bamboo clumps, I was suddenly aware that I had company—quite a number of companions—who, ghost-like and silent, surrounded me; a most eerie and unpleasant sensation.

As I passed from black shadow into patches of lesser darkness, I saw vague outlines of two or three men in front of me, two or three to left and right, and, glancing behind, saw that I was followed.

What was this? Luong-Tam-Ky's bodyguard, his—assassins?

What had I better do?

I was unarmed and, so far as I could make out, the odds were at least ten to one; the men big and brawny. Suppose I made a dash for it, whither should I run, supposing I escaped?

The moon came out from behind a cloud as suddenly something was pressed hard into the small of my back and a quiet but compelling voice said,

"*Halte-là! Levez les mains! Vite!*"

And I partly saw, partly heard, and partly felt, that the circle of men closed round me. Discretion seemed the better part of valour.

I put up my hands.

"*Bien! Vous êtes discret. Avez-vous un pistolet? Tenez-vous tranquille. Je vais vous fouiller. Et écoutez, Monsieur l'Anglais—tenez les mains au-dessus la tête. Eh bien! Vous comprenez la langue Française!*"

The speaker then gave orders for me to be seized and bound, and on the spur of the moment, I decided that again discretion would be the better part of valour, there being a good dozen of them. In any case they had got me, and I should be of more use to myself, and to Mary, whole than damaged; more likely to escape whatever threatened if I were uninjured, than if my skull were split or I was stabbed, shot, or otherwise wounded.

My hands being firmly secured behind my back, and my arms bound to my sides, a halter was put somewhat tightly about my neck, the end of it held by the leader of my captors, and I was bidden to march.

"*À votre maison, s'il vous plaît*," indicated the man in command.

And to my hut I was taken, and the end of the halter was tied to my frame bedstead of heavy teak-wood. The leader then bade me sit on the ground, and gave orders for my feet to be tied together. This having been done to his satisfaction, he peremptorily motioned to his followers to go outside.

This they did, closing the door behind them and leaving me alone with their commander.

This individual proceeded to light the hurricane lamp that dangled from the roof; and, by its light I saw—what did not surprise me—that he was Mary's Number One Boy, *alias* Major Li Hsian Chang.

He had changed his house clothes for a yellow tunic and trousers of somewhat military cut, and this change of dress seemed to alter his whole appearance, manner, and bearing.

He now looked taller, more slender and wiry. His complexion was fair for a Chinese, more like that of a sallow European than of a Mongol; his cheek-bones were prominent and high, and he had the forceful jutting chin associated rather with the West than with the East. His eyes were curious too, being much larger and handsomer than is usual with Chinese, and were now, at any rate, very bright, keen and intelligent.

His look had completely changed, and was of a commanding and compelling quality, in marked contrast to his former humility and apparent respect, if not servility. There was nothing whatsoever of the usual Chinese blank non-committal evasive quality about it. When he looked me in the eyes, I realized that I was up against a man of character; not only of character and of brains, but of action.

"Shall we talk French or English?" he asked, seating himself in my chair and eyeing me coldly.

"All one to me," I replied in Annamese. "I am an Englishman; but, like yourself, I know a few words of French."

The Chinese smiled.

"I know in what language Colonel Collins will talk to you when he returns," I added. "A language you'll understand—and probably the last you'll ever hear."

"Colonel Collins will not return," he replied. "And if he did, he would not find me here. Nor you."

"No?"

"No. Now, as Mrs. Collins has already told you, I am a Chinese officer. And as your *Tirailleur Tonkinois* has already told me, you are a French spy. It wasn't, perhaps, very clever of you to send him to tell me all about yourself so that I could help you to trap your faithless follower De-Nha. But we will take it that it is perhaps a greater tribute to my own cleverness than to your stupidity. You can hardly be blamed for not realizing that I was anything but what I appeared, a domestic servant addicted to opium."

"I don't give a damn whether you are a domestic servant addicted to opium or a

Chinese spy," I replied. "But whatever you are, you don't surely suppose that you were told the truth, do you—when you were told I was a French spy? Ask yourself, man! Is it likely that if I were a French spy—I should tell anybody?"

"I shouldn't have thought it likely," the Chinese replied.

And I writhed internally with shame and self-reproach.

"But the worthy De-Nha was able to confirm your story concerning yourself," he added.

I laughed.

"De-Nha! Good man. He seems to have carried out my instructions well."

Again the Chinese smiled.

I grew to dislike that smile.

"So my renegade Annamese Linh Nghi, who was once a *Doi* of *Tirailleurs Tonkinois*, and my renegade Annamese dacoit, De-Nha, who was once in the service of De-Nam, have succeeded in persuading you that I am a French spy, as I bade them, have they?"

"They have," replied the Chinese. "Completely. And you are a French spy. When you so clumsily sent the *Doi* Linh Nghi with your ten-franc piece and instructions for me to sound your suspected follower De-Nha, I followed those instructions promptly. Most willingly. Eagerly, in fact. I didn't quite see what the game was, and didn't suspect that it was as simple as it turned out to be. . . .

"My good fool, your De-Nha is an invaluable person—to me. About as clever as ten of you. Nearly as clever as I am, in fact. It didn't take me long to turn him inside out, and to get his whole story, from the time you captured him at Yen Trang to the time your Captain Deleuze (of whom I begin to think less than I did) sent him up here with you. . . .

"Oh yes, the whole story in detail, and the details checked. I know all about the opium torture and the witnessing of the executions ordered by the mandarins of Bac-Linh. I have personal knowledge of the truth of that part of the story, as I was there myself—in the crowd. . . .

"Oh, that interests you, does it? That makes you look up sharply! . . . No, of course I wasn't there, in the crowd or anywhere else. But a spy of mine was. Oh yes, De-Nha 'came across' all-right, as they say in America. 'Came clean.' And I'd have cleaned him inside and out—if he hadn't done so. He knew that—and preferred opium to my—cleansing process."

"What a long story, Mr. Servant," I yawned. "For a Number One Boy in good service, you . . ."

"Don't be silly. And don't let's waste any more time. Now look here. I have a

proposal to make. You are a soldier of the French Foreign Legion, attached to the mis-named 'Intelligence' Bureau, run by Captain Deleuze. You are a French spy, and came up the Red River and through the jungle, guided by the dacoit De-Nha and followed by a *Doi* and half a dozen *tirailleurs* of the French so-called 'Secret' Service, and Military 'Intelligence' Branch.

"What you wanted to find out, was whether there were any regular Chinese forces here; and, if so, whether they had any European advisers and instructors—any French Foreign Legion deserters, or other renegade Europeans, helping them. Well—you have discovered that there are. And that more are coming. But you are most certainly not going back with that information."

"No, Mr. Servant?"

"No, Mr. Englishman-in-French-pay."

"What am I going to do then?"

"One of two things. You are either going to die—slowly and in some discomfort—or else you are going to . . . join me."

"Join you? As a fellow house-servant in good service, and . . ."

"Yes. The Imperial Chinese Service."

"That would be nice. But suppose I prefer my present service with Colonel John Collins and the Generals Luong-Tam-Ky and Ba-Ky?"

"In that case you can chose between Heaven and serving—the Son of Heaven, my Imperial master."

"But surely anybody who is in the service of the Generals Luong-Tam-Ky and Ba-Ky is in the service of the Son of Heaven, your Imperial master?" said I, partly to gain time, partly to gain information, and partly—for the sake of something to say.

"By no means. The thread that joins these two 'Generals' to Peking is extremely tenuous. They are nothing more nor less than brigands. They have their uses politically, and maintain a buffer State between China and the French invaders of Annam. But they are no more subjects, servants, or agents, of the Son of Heaven than is the Ruler of Afghanistan the servant or agent either of Britain or of Russia . . .

"Regular Chinese Generals! Why, they are little better than the 'ear-men' who live by kidnapping and ransom, and send to recalcitrant slow-paying relatives an ear of their captive as a hint and a warning.

"Luong-Tam-Ky and Ba-Ky and their three thousand soldiers live entirely on the country and the wretched peasants, by levying toll on all trade-routes, markets and roads; and on the river traffic too; by raiding; by robbing towns; and by what they call taxation; and by loot of every description.

"We merely permit them to exist as long as they operate on the other side of our

border, and as long as they are useful to us in keeping the French occupied. Your 'Colonel' Collins merely plays the honourable rôle of Third Robber. And if you were what you pretend to be, you'd merely be the Third Robbers' parasite, a glorified drill-sergeant, making robber-bands more efficient, and turning Chinese dacoits into hireling soldiers."

A loquacious gentleman, this Chinese; and telling me quite a lot. But the reason and excuse for his communicativeness was not far to seek. He was talking with what he regarded as either a dead man or a recruit to his following.

"Yes, that's the situation, Mr. English-Frenchman, but you are not going back to French headquarters to describe it."

"Why should I? Who wants to go to French headquarters—to describe the uninteresting situation here or anywhere else?"

Again the Chinese smiled.

"Why waste time?" he asked persuasively. "You haven't very much, you know. Unless you join me, that is . . . Now, if you like to give me your word, your solemn promise—to join me and be loyal to me, I'll accept your promise and I will trust you absolutely."

"Why should you accept my bare word and trust me?"

"Because I have lived in England, and know your type. Also I am a physiognomist and can read faces. What are they but indexes? Indexes to the book within. The book of character. Yes, I can read such indexes. If you give me your word, I will accept it."

This was interesting.

"The Chinese should always trust the English, and the English trust the Chinese—instead of the Japanese. That's where they make a mistake, and what you call back the wrong horse. Will you join me?"

"In what?"

"In my work. Will you, an Englishman, drop the French connection altogether, and take service with the Chinese? There can never be a real Anglo-French alliance, you know. Whereas a firm Anglo-Chinese alliance would be a very great thing indeed, both for England and China; both for Europe and Asia. Think how a man like you could rise in the Chinese service, and what you could do for your great country. Look at Sir Robert Hart, who rose from student-interpreter to British Minister Plenipotentiary at Peking. Look at Charles George Gordon and his influence with Li Hung Chang and the Emperor. Why, the Emperor gave him the rank of *Titu* and the Order of the Yellow Jacket, the highest rank and the highest decoration in China, when he was no older than you. You too could go very far."

"You seem to know a lot about me. What makes you think I should be useful?" I enquired.

"Because Captain Deleuze thinks you are useful; and, in spite of what I said just now, I know him to be a very clever man. Very clever indeed. Besides, the sort of man who can make his way here from French Headquarters and deceive Colonel Collins and the Chinese *tuchuns*, is a man not only of ability but of—guts. . . . That's a vulgar word, isn't it? . . . Will you join me and work with me?"

"What would the work be?" I temporized.

"First of all, to get Mrs. Collins safely away from here and into China. I am short-handed for a job like that. Secondly, to tell me absolutely everything you know about the French plans. Thirdly, to take service permanently, honourably, and loyally, in the Imperial Chinese army; and teach and train certain units, in European warfare.

"Efficient discipline and modernity are what we lack. The Chinese army isn't up to date, either in equipment or methods. What we want is a nucleus of troops trained on the European model, and made equal in every way to a corresponding unit of the best European troops. Mind you, the material is good. None better. What we want is officers and training. Once we had the nucleus, properly trained and properly officered, it would become a New Model for the Chinese armies. We could have such a New Model in every State, like Li Hung Chang had, thanks to General Gordon, when he was Governor in Kiang-Su. You've heard of his Ever-Victorious Army, of course, in Sungkiang, and how it captured Chansu, Suchow, Chanchufu and every other place it attacked?"

"Well, I'm an obscure and humble soldier of fortune. I'm afraid I am not a Sir Robert Hart, and I'm not a General Gordon," I replied.

"No, but the one was a clerk and the other a subaltern of Royal Engineers—before they entered Chinese service and had their chance of greatness. Will you join me?"

"No. And since you are so sure my man De-Nha told you the truth, what's the good of asking me? If you know I am a French soldier, a French Military Intelligence spy, what's the good of asking me to join you? If I'd betray my service, I'd betray yours."

The Chinese smiled again.

"Life is dear, especially to Europeans—for some reason," he said.

"Well, supposing I were in French service and would leave it to save my life, and join you, would you expect me to be very trustworthy?"

"I am willing to risk it. If you give me your word, and promise that, if I spare your life, you will join the Chinese Imperial Service and be loyal and faithful, I will

take your word and keep mine."

"I believe you would," I said.

"And I am quite sure that you would. I know the type."

Subtle flattery.

What would be the best thing to do? If I flatly refused his offer, I should most probably never see Mary again; never see the base at Houi-Bap again; never take back to Captain Deleuze such information as I had gleaned. If I cheated this man and he found me out, as he would do, I should get even more short and painful shrift than if I flatly and finally refused his offer now.

Should I save my life, and do what seemed the best thing for Mary, by leaving the French service and joining the Chinese?

Undoubtedly there was far more scope and opportunity in such service than there was in the French.

The utmost I could hope for in the way of promotion in the French Foreign Legion was to rise to the rank of sergeant-major, and possibly *adjudant*, the highest rank of non-commissioned officer. There was practically no chance at all of a Commission; and, if there were, and I got one, I should probably end my days as a grey-haired lieutenant, or possibly captain, in the French service; and retire, if lucky, on a pound a week or so. Much more probably I should leave my bones in some nameless hole-and-corner place in a Tonkinese, Madagascan, or West African swamp, if not in the sands of the Sahara.

No, there were certainly no prospects in the French service; and I had no intention of sticking to it beyond the five years for which I had contracted to serve.

On the other hand, in the Chinese service there was unlimited scope; and a man of ability and integrity—and I could provide the latter requisite—could rise to almost any height. Certainly to rank, fame, honour, and wealth.

And there was the little matter of one's life; and what, honestly, was far more important to me then, the matter of Mary's safety.

A career, life, Mary . . .

The alternative, death by torture.

It seemed foolish to hesitate.

And yet—those curious inhibitions.

Somehow I felt I could not do it, much as I might want to.

True, I was in an alien service, and had been more or less pitch-forked into it as a way of escape from a Djibouti gaol; and yet I *was* in that service; I had joined it by my own choice; I had signed a contract, however one-sided; and I had taken service under a flag which bore in letters of gold, the motto '*Honneur et Fidélité*'.

I was a soldier of fortune, a mercenary. I had joined a mercenary army, and the foundation of such a force is the fidelity and loyalty of the men who join it.

And in a way, in my immeasurably humble capacity, I represented England in that polyglot heterogeneous army.

And Colonel Wattringue, Captain Dubosque, Lieutenant Jacot, had all noticed me, referred to me as "the Englishman".

And Captain Deleuze. . . . Yes, that was the chief part of the trouble. Somehow, I could not let him down. Captain Deleuze had trusted me; chosen me for this job; believed not only in my ability, but, of course, in my faithfulness and loyalty.

On the other hand, he would probably never know what had become of me.

No—but I should.

All my life I should know that I had ratted under pressure; under threats—and promises.

Life would not be worth living if one had that constant regret; that constant shame at the back of one's mind, the knowledge that one had betrayed the flag under which one had taken service, gone over to another one, an Oriental one, an enemy's flag, really.

No, I felt I couldn't do it. And I honestly felt, in my bones, that Mary wouldn't wish me to do it.

But hadn't I a debt to her, quite as real and strong as my duty to Captain Deleuze and to my present employer *Madame la République*. Since I loved Mary and she loved me, hadn't she the first claim on me? It seemed like it. I wanted it to seem like it. The wish was father to the thought.

But no, it wouldn't do. I knew that all argument was specious. I was a soldier of France; and in furthering the interests of France my duty lay. The first claim on me was that of my military superiors. . . .

All very portentous.

But I was still fairly young, and, though rapidly growing older and lapsing from grace, I still took myself seriously.

"Well?" asked Major Li Hsian Chang.

"The answer is in the negative," I said. "And final."

"Which, of course, goes to prove, though further proof is entirely superfluous, that you are a French spy."

"Well, whatever I am, I remain."

"Then I'm afraid you will have to die."

"Well, look here, Major Li Hsian Chang, or whatever you are—can't we be a little more comfortable about it? We have had a very pleasant and friendly

conversation, and you have tried to improve my mind and prospects. What about cutting this cord and letting me have a stretch? I've got cramp most damnably."

"Cramp! My dear Mr. French-Englishman. . . . Cramp, did you say. . . . You'll be tied in knots of utmost agony shortly, raving mad with unbearable pain. Have you ever seen any Chinese torture? I don't mean jungle stuff, I mean really artistic performance by a master?"

"But look here, Major, I thought you were civilized, and all that."

"Yes, we were civilized beyond the rest of humanity when you were naked savages daubed with woad."

"Well, why talk about torture? Civilized people don't go in for that."

"You mean Western people don't. We do. Custom of the country. I'll show you."

"But with what object?"

"Oh, primarily to make you change your mind."

"Well, I shouldn't be much good to you after being tortured, should I?"

"Oh, there are some tortures that make the strongest men shriek and scream like young girls, without doing them the least harm. Permanent bodily harm, I mean. It cows them mentally and spiritually, though, for quite a while."

"And suppose I didn't change my mind, in spite of having to shriek and scream like—a Chinese, did you say?"

"Well, since you insist on being so French, it will teach you not to be a Frenchman, won't it? You'll wish you had stuck to your own country."

"Hardly be worth all that trouble for so small a result, would it?"

"Oh, no trouble, I assure you. Besides, there's the deterrent aspect of it. When news gets back to your Headquarters of how you died, there won't be any more volunteers for this sort of job, will there?"

"Any number," I replied. "Captain Deleuze will probably come himself."

"And, finally, you know too much. You are not going back to French Headquarters with the information you've gathered here about the *tuchuns* and Chinese assistance. Why, it might precipitate a Franco-Chinese war—the last thing we want."

"Well, there's no need for torture to prevent my going back, is there?"

"No actual need; but you are going to die—and that's the way you'll die. Custom of the country. *Autre pays, autre mœurs*, as you say in your present service, Mr. Renegade."

"Well, I admit that you surprise me, after your talk about civilization. Why the most filthy degraded savages in the Cannibal Islands don't . . ."

"No hope along those lines, Mr. Renegade. You don't suppose you could

‘shame’ me into adopting your Western standards, do you? Do you know what Confucius says on the subject of the Problem of Pain?”

What, another of them? Damn Confucius!

“But of course you don’t. The Problem of Human Pain is one of the most interesting and intriguing conundrums propounded for the consideration of the philosopher. Pain. That strange two-edged gift of the gods. Some there are who think that the whole solution of the right treading of the Excellent Way lies in the understanding of the infliction and bearing of pain.”

“Couldn’t we study it, the other way round?” I asked. “I’ll take the infliction side, and you study bearing it.”

Again the Chinese smiled, this time quite pleasantly.

“By inflicting pain on you, I shall suffer it,” he said, with apparent sincerity, “for I like you. Among the barbarians of England, of America and of France, in all of which countries I have studied engineering and the other military arts and sciences, I have occasionally encountered such as you, men whom I have liked. It will give me great pain . . .”

“Well, why not spare yourself?”

“Duty,” sighed Li Hsian Chang, and the smile that followed the sigh did not strike me as at all sincere.

He rose to his feet.

“Think it over. I’ll ask you once again, and then put you to the question, the torture. If you withstand that, I’ll have you shot or, perhaps, since you are doubtless a good Christian, crucified.”

He turned to go.

“Look here, Major Li Hsian Chang,” I said. “Don’t behave like a Möi dacoit—since you are so highly civilized. At least undo my hands and feet. You’ve got your gang of ruffians round the house. Aren’t a dozen of them enough to keep me here?”

“I am awfully sorry,” was the reply. “I’m afraid I must leave you tied up. The worse the cramp gets, the more clearly you will think, or perhaps, the more wisely.”

“Can’t you take my word for it that the answer is *No*. And if you feel you’ve got to shoot me as a captured spy if I don’t change my mind, shoot me and have done with it—as an officer of any decent army would do to a prisoner, even if he were a spy. If you’ve been a military *attaché*, and mixed with the officers of the British, American, and French armies, surely you’ve learned . . .”

“My good Mr. Renegade, when I was attached to units of the armies you mention, I made no effort to change their military customs. I didn’t urge upon them my views on capital or other punishment. Since you’ve been good enough to come

to the East and to meddle in Oriental matters, suppose you accept the customs of the East as I did of the West.

"You find them 'barbarous'. So did I yours. Horribly barbarous. Here we torture spies, to make them talk; to make them change their minds, or their side; and if they don't do it, we shoot them. I'm awfully sorry, as I say, for I like you very much. Nevertheless, I don't propose to modify our excellent national customs on that account, and if I decide that you are not amenable to the torture that doesn't permanently damage, we'll use the other, and you will be most incurably damaged, maimed, deformed, deprived, for the rest of your life, which will be about one hour. Depilation and total flaying for a beginning of this second process; and going on to the bow-string; a red-hot iron nut or bolt under the arm-pit, or inside the bound-up hand; the foot in a pot of boiling oil; the hand-crusher.

"Do you know the Beauty's Bar and The Parrot's Beak? It was one of our Judges who invented The Beauty's Bar for the benefit of his wife—a naughty woman. A very ingenious man.

"I expect you know the burning splinter one. We fill you with inch-long splinters until you bristle like a porcupine. Then we set light to them, and they burn and fizzle right down to the buried point, half an inch deep in the flesh. But I may not be able to get the proper wood for that. . . . Still, we'll do our best.

"And I have a few that I am sure you've never heard of. Nobody has, for I invented them myself, and have found them most efficacious for the extraction of information.

"One of them I have never known to fail. It will be interesting to see how you stand up to it, or rather lie down to it. It is done in the horizontal position. As I say, it will spoil you for good . . . how do you put it—ah, yes . . . for keeps. But we needn't regret that unduly, as you won't outlive to-morrow in any case, unless you join me."

I tried another line.

"Look here, Major What's-your-name. Give me time to think it over. Cut this damned cord and set me free for twenty-four hours. I undertake not to leave the camp and . . ."

"Not to shoot me in the back or take any other steps against me, eh? I believe you'd do it too. Keep your word, I mean. But I don't think I'll risk it, much as I'd like to try the experiment, and see whether you kept faith. But business first and pleasure afterwards, as you say in the West. Yes, duty first."

"But if I give you my promise . . ."

"Now look here, if you say another word, I'll have you gagged very painfully—

and put a *cangue* round your neck too. And unless you are looking for really solid trouble, don't shout and call for help. If you do, my man will come in and knock you on the head. Not fatally, of course, but sufficient to soothe you for a few hours. Then you will have a headache as well as cramp."

"*You*'ll have something, when my turn comes," I replied, eyeing this solemn slight man, whom I could have broken across my knee, and yet from whom power, resolution and forcefulness seemed to emanate.

"Well now, think it over. I'll come back later when I have made my arrangements. Make no mistake. You are either going to die very painfully, or join me."

And opening the door, he spoke to a big Chinese who, having glanced at me, nodded his head with an expression of willing and cheerful obedience.

I cannot say that he actually licked his chops.

CHAPTER XXIV

I suppose the hours that followed were among the worst of my life, although, thanks to the fact that I have adventured in many places and sought sorrow far and wide, I have had some unpleasant ones.

"I have taken my fun where I've found it", and it has been very varied, and some of it not so very funny.

I felt utterly dejected, miserable, frightened, and most thoroughly wretched.

When I thought of Mary, I felt sick and faint with horror, fear and anxiety.

Had I not also been face to face with death and the probabilities of horrible torture, I should still have had sufficient to account for that frame of mind, inasmuch as I was weak with hunger, suffering the pangs of thirst, horribly cramped and in great distress of mind.

What had this accursed Chinese meant by 'other arrangements'? The kidnapping of Mary? For that was what it amounted to, whether he called it rescue or not.

The one faint gleam of light in that particular darkness was the thought that she would probably be better off in his hands than in those of Luong-Tam-Ky, and but little worse off than she had been in those of her husband, the surly and ruffianly Chinese half-caste, calling himself Colonel John Collins, whom I now knew to be but a swashbuckling free-booter in the pay of the two Robber Barons and Bandit Chiefs, Luong-Tam-Ky and Ba-Ky.

I hope and I believe that my anxiety for the woman I loved was greater than that for my own miserable fate of being tortured to death or, at best, killed in a hut in a robber camp.

And how I regretted having sent my faithful follower and friend *Doi* Linh Nghi and his remaining *tirailleurs* scouting and spying to Men-tsz, Fo-lu and Thay Taong respectively, for news of Collins, that very day. It had occurred to me that he might not have gone to the New Fort at Thay Taong at all.

Had the *Doi* been here, either this would never have happened or he would now be doing something to rescue me. I could imagine him and his men dealing most faithfully with the Chinese who were guarding the hut. The Annamese would move as softly and silently as cats in the darkness, and would account for them one by one. The Chinese would never know what killed them.

As it was, the *Doi* probably would not return to this place for several days.

What a miserable fool I had been to land myself in such a position as this!

Thinking back, where had I been a fool, apart from attempting to undertake so

difficult and hazardous a task as spying on this camp of the brigand allies of the Annamese rebels?

I could hardly blame myself for not discovering that Collins's Number One Boy was a Chinese officer.

I could hardly blame myself for obeying Mary's request to go to her house that night.

I could hardly blame myself for coming back in the darkness unarmed. Had I shown fight I should probably have been killed, then and there, when the Chinese surrounded me, and Major Li Hsian Chang put his pistol against my spine.

Could I blame myself for having fallen in love with Mary? Was that where I had gone off the rails, and was it the cause of my present plight?

Anyway, I couldn't help it. Collins had invited me to the house. I had seen her and I had fallen in love with her as unconsciously and inevitably as I fell asleep at night. To me it seemed as natural and inevitable a phenomenon as the rising and setting of the sun.

No, I could not blame myself for having fallen in love with her.

Could I blame myself for having admitted the fact and acted upon it?

No. It would have been an act of prudence and virtue bordering on the mean and the cowardly.

In spite of the fact that I am a Highland Scot, member of a race supposed to be noted for caution, I am not cautious. I have little respect for excessive prudence, and I am afraid that the contemplation of virtue, as virtue in the abstract, does not attract me. Certain virtues I do admire and love, such as courage, loyalty, honesty and kindliness, but I cannot remember ever yearning to be The Virtuous Man.

No, I had fallen in love with Mary; desperately in love; and I had had the honesty to admit it and accept its implications and *sequelæ* without conscious casuistry or self-deception.

I felt that I should have been something of a coward and a cad to deny it, and to refuse her, in the circumstances in which she was placed, such comfort and help as that admission gave her. In spite of my Scottish conscience, I could not blame myself for loving Mary; for being Mary's lover.

In point of fact, I gloried in it. And, little as I like the type of person who makes bad luck the excuse for every failure, disaster, fault and sin, it seemed to me that I had been unlucky in the fact that this damnably clever Secret Service agent should have been at his headquarters when I arrived, and particularly that he should have been a member of John Collins's household.

What an exceedingly clever man he must be, to have played such a rôle as that

of a servant in that *ménage*, so successfully. I recognized fully and freely that it could only be through amazing cleverness, astuteness, resolution, and ability, that he had done what he had.

And I touched the depths that night, possibly the lowest depths, as I half-crouched, half-lay, there in an agony of cramp, unable to rise to my feet, unable to do anything but roll from side to side, tethered by my slip-knot halter to the heavy native bed.

In the story-books, I should doubtless have burst my bonds—a thing that, had I been the strongest man alive, I could not have done, as I had no purchase or lever for my strength. Or I should have been able to slide my hands out from the cord which I should have loosened.

In point of fact, the more I struggled, the tighter they became, and the more I twisted them, the more my hands swelled.

It was an extremely efficient piece of work, and the idea of tethering me by the noose about my neck, an admirable one, for the least attempt to increase the distance between myself and the short thick bed-post, immediately suggested strangulation. One effort was quite sufficient, for the halter, already uncomfortably close-fitting, was yet further tightened, a condition of affairs that I had no means of improving.

No, in the absence of the *Doi* there was no hope of rescue from without, and none of self-help within. I could do nothing but wait. Await my fate like a sacrificial ox—or ass.

I toyed with the thought of calling to the Chinese sentry at the door, and endeavouring to bribe him, but remembered Major Li Hsian Chang's parting remark, and the face of the said sentry. He'd probably come straight in and crack my skull with a rifle-butt if I made a sound, without waiting to hear what I had got to say.

Nor was it likely that he'd be open to bribery and corruption. Obviously he and the rest of the squad, band, or gang, that had captured me, must be Major Li Hsian Chang's men, and devoted either to his person or his interests, or both. Doubtless they were picked soldiers of the Chinese Imperial army, or more probably, Chinese Imperial Secret Service spies and agents.

No, I should get nothing but a frightful welt on the head if I attempted to call the sentry.

Oh, for my faithful *Doi*! Oh, for one of those sharp projections against which I could patiently rub my bound wrists, as the hero, thus unfortunately situated, invariably does in the story-books.

When was it that I had previously been in just such another fix, my hands bound behind me, tied up like a chained dog? It must have been the time the nomad Arabs captured me on the Moroccan coast when my shipmate, Halling, and I had rowed ashore from the gun-running ship for a stroll on the beach.

Yes, in a way, I had been worse off then than I was now, for I was pretty badly knocked about, and in the hands of ruffianly savages, one of whom was more than anxious to hack my head off, and with difficulty restrained by others whose cupidity exceeded their brutality.

On the other hand, those people, murderous as they were, had not resorted to actual torture, other than that of blows and kicks, and dragging me along behind a horse. Anyway, I had been in a most parlous condition and position—and the point was that I had come through all-right.

Never say die. While there's life there's hope.

And what about Mary and her life and her hope?

How long I lay brooding, shivering with fear and fever, at times almost in a state of torpor in spite of the agonizing cramp, the pain of which was driving me mad, I don't know.

Suddenly I raised my head and glanced toward the door. I had heard a sound from that direction, a sound of movement and of voices.

The door was flung open. Now for it.

Give way? . . . Give in? . . . For Mary's sake and to save my life? Or stick it out like the British Soldier of whom Lord Elgin wrote, who died under devilish torture rather than give information, or kow-tow to his Chinese enemies.

I would try not to give way; try to stick it out. . . .

But, oh, for an intimate minute with Major Li Hsian Chang, my hands unbound, and he and I unarmed.

I stared in amazement as someone entered.

It was not Major Li Hsian Chang.

CHAPTER XXV

It was that amazing disciple and student of Confucius, the Robber-Baron, the *soi-disant* 'General' Luong-Tam-Ky.

What now? Had he come to see the fun? And while deprecating the shocking cruelty of his Chinese friend and colleague, to suggest other and greater refinement of fiendish cruelty?

Were General Luong-Tam-Ky and Major Li Hsian Chang about to give a competitive exhibition of their skill in the arts of torture, myself providing the *vile corpus* of experiment and demonstration; literally butchered to make a Chinese holiday?

But no, he was alone.

And when I came to think of it, so far as I could think at all, how did Major Li Hsian Chang, *alias* Number One Boy of the Collins's *ménage*, stand in relation to Luong-Tam-Ky?

Or didn't he stand at all?

Had Luong-Tam-Ky any idea whatsoever as to who Colins's Number One Boy really was?

That I should soon discover, and if Luong-Tam-Ky did not know, I would promptly enlighten him. Quite conceivably he might object to Collins's Number One Boy proving to be a Chinese officer, Military Intelligence agent, and spy—upon the comings and goings, the doings and undoings of the Robber Chiefs, Luong-Tam-Ky and Ba-Ky.

As this thought flashed through my mind, Luong-Tam-Ky stood and stared at me, the surprise he certainly felt in no way reflected on the unchanging mask that was his face.

I thought it politic to wait for him to begin, and to see what line he was going to take, for from it I might learn something.

"Well, well," he said, and continued to stare at me.

Evidently it had also occurred to the excellent Luong-Tam-Ky that it might be politic for him to wait for me to begin, and to see what line I was going to take.

"Good evening, your Excellency," I observed, non-committally.

"Or morning," he corrected, contributing but little to my own conversational offering.

"And not very good either, is it?" he added.

"Not very."

"What has been happening?"

"Violence," replied I.

"' *And how deplorable is violence*', as Confucius says."

I agreed.

"And who has been acting thus violently?"

"Not Colonel Collins," he suddenly added, shooting a probing look deep into my eyes.

"No, he has gone away."

And for some reason or for no reason, perhaps because I was a little depolarized, if not demented, by fright, fever, anxiety about Mary, and the untoward happenings of the night, I added,

"Gone to the New Fort at Thay-Taong."

Once again Luong-Tam-Ky did not look surprised, but he looked at me with obviously increased interest.

"Ah, the New Fort at Thay-Taong. Yes, that rather bears out what I thought."

"What did Your Excellency think?"

"Oh, a lot of things. In point of fact, I came to have quite a little talk with you about them. But I find . . . somebody else has been before me—also to have a little talk. Who was it?"

"I wonder if you'd know him under his right name?" I replied.

"I wonder," observed His Excellency.

"It is someone whom you know, but don't know that you know. And don't know, although you think that . . . I am getting muddled . . ."

Definitely my temperature was rising high and fast.

"Parables, parables," murmured Luong-Tam-Ky. "Meanwhile, wouldn't you be more comfortable . . . if I were to have that cord cut?"

I stared in amazement. Somehow, I hadn't looked upon this cold cruel villain as a possible friend in need. Surely he could have come for no other purpose than to add to my trouble, and to make my plight possibly worse.

And doubtless he was only playing with me as a cat with a mouse. He must have found out how things were between me and Mary, and come to eliminate a miserable rival, to take a jealous revenge on . . .

Luong-Tam-Ky went to the door and spoke to someone without.

To my further bewilderment, the moon-faced sentry whom Major Li Hsian Chang had left on guard, entered, and at Luong-Tam-Ky's bidding, drew his bayonet. It was dull and it was dirty, but quite obviously it had been very recently and very thoroughly sharpened.

So this was the end?

I closed my eyes—and the man cut the thong close beside the knot, cut the thong that bound my ankles together, unwound about a *wah* of cord, and then cut the cord about my wrists.

Luong-Tam-Ky then, with kindly and gentle solicitude, loosed the tight halter from about my neck, and helped me to rise to my feet.

Thankfully I sat down upon the pallet of my bed.

With his own hands he poured out water from an earthenware *chattie* into a tin mug, and gave me one of the best drinks I have ever had.

As the soldier went to leave the hut, Luong-Tam-Ky, with a sharp word, bade him mount guard inside.

I wondered whether this were for his own personal safety or to keep the man in sight, and handy for further questioning.

Apparently the fellow realized that, whatever orders Major Li Hsian Chang had given him, those of 'General' Luong-Tam-Ky had to be obeyed—and promptly. Whatever he might be in the sight of God and Peking, Luong-Tam-Ky was a General here, all-right.

"Now then, tell me what happened," said Luong-Tam-Ky in English. "It was not done by a dacoit, a common robber, because such things don't happen inside a camp that I command; and moreover, I found that Chinese on guard outside your door, mounted as a sentry. It appears that he has forgotten who stationed him there. We'll stimulate his memory later! . . . Now, my young friend, tell me all about it."

So kindly and sympathetic was his voice, that I almost wondered that he did not say 'Tell Papa all about it'.

What should I tell him—the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; or the truth with reservations?

How much did he already know; and for what reason had he come; and exactly what would happen if Major Li Hsian Chang came back and found him here?

And where were the rest of the gang who had captured me? And if they had faded away into the darkness, at the approach of General Luong-Tam-Ky, would they not go straight off and warn Major Li Hsian Chang of what had happened?

"Might I first ask what auspicious event has brought your Excellency so opportunely to my help?" I temporized.

Luong-Tam-Ky's thin lips parted in what was perhaps intended for a smile.

"The desire to enjoy your delightful company," he said.

"How honoured is this miserable and unworthy one," I bowed. "I can scarcely believe it."

"I'm sure you can," replied Luong-Tam-Ky dryly.

"Listen," he added in quiet tones. "I came to make you a proposal. Or rather, to discuss with you a most important matter out of which might arise a proposal—one that I am sure will be most welcome to you. Also to make you an offer of the most advantageous kind."

I murmured my chastened delight.

"Yes," he added, leaning back in my chair, folding his arms beneath his sleeves and eyeing the lamp pensively, reflectively.

"Yes, I have been having a little conversation, indeed a long conversation, with a friend and follower of yours—*one De-Nha, late a subordinate leader in the service of the lamented General De-Nam*."

Oh, so De-Nha was a traitor, as I had supposed, and *Doi* Linh Nghi had known.

And he had been to Luong-Tam-Ky and betrayed me.

And Luong-Tam-Ky had come straight to me.

Yes, the cat playing with the mouse, as I had supposed, or rather the fierce fanged tiger with the bleating foolish calf.

And yet, granted that the kindliness, sympathy and friendliness were savage mockery, why the cutting of my bonds? Why had he set me free and given me water? For the pleasure of having me trussed up again twice as painfully as before?

I had heard that one of the cruellest Spanish tortures of mediæval times was to allow the prisoner to escape from his cell, to escape from the prison building, to escape from the court-yard and precincts, to get out through the last great gates, clear of the gaol—and then to gather him in again. . . .

Should I spring on this devil as soon as the cramp had completely left my limbs, and circulation had returned to normal; spring on him and break his neck across my knee—and take my chance with the sentry there by the door?

And then what? Doubtless Major Li Hsian Chang's men were still about the hut, and if by chance I evaded them, where could I go? Certainly not to Mary's house.

"Yes," continued the soft and silky voice. "I have been having a most interesting conversation with De-Nha, an unreliable person, but doubtless, in this instance, a speaker of the truth. It was, as I said, for the pleasure of paying you a social visit and enjoying the charm of your conversation that I came, but I thought one subject of conversation might be—the interesting information that he gave me.

"And now"—the voice altered completely, and its silky quality changed to one of steel—"what happened here to-night?"

Well, he had given me something to think about, and now I'd give him something to think about—and something perhaps equally important and unpleasant.

“Has your Excellency ever visited the house of Colonel Collins?”

It cannot be said that Luong-Tam-Ky frowned or that the probing concentration of his stare increased, but it seemed to do so. The expression of his face did not change, but behind his eyes it was as though something crouched, ready to spring.

“The house of Colonel Collins,” he murmured. “Let me see. Yes, yes. I distinctly remember returning his formal visit of honour. We drank tea together with due ceremony.”

“Did your Excellency happen to notice Colonel Collins’s butler, major-domo, chief servant—what Europeans in China call ‘Number One Boy’, I believe?”

“No,” replied his Excellency. “I cannot honestly say that I did. I don’t notice servants much. One ant is very like another.”

“Well, this ant isn’t,” said I.

“No? . . . He is more . . . ant-like?”

“Much. Colonel Collins’s Number One Boy is Major Li Hsian Chang of the Imperial Chinese Army, Military Intelligence branch. He’s a Secret Service agent, here to spy on you and General Ba-Ky, and to report on everything that happens.”

I think Luong-Tam-Ky’s expression did, for once, change. Certainly he rose to his feet.

“If you are speaking the truth—just repeat it, will you?” he said quietly. “If not, don’t—for your own sake. I hate violence, but if you are telling me a pack of lies . . .”

I don’t think I ever heard anything more sinister than Luong-Tam-Ky’s quiet voice.

“I am telling you the absolute truth,” I replied.

Yes, I had given the Brigand Chief something to think about—and he was thinking hard.

“Tell me again,” he whispered and wiped his lips.

“Colonel Collins’s Number One Boy is Major Li Hsian Chang of the Imperial Chinese Army, and an agent of the Secret Service Military Intelligence Department. He’s a spy—and reports to Peking everything that happens here, everything that you and General Ba-Ky say, and do, and propose to do.”

“How do you know?” whispered Luong-Tam-Ky; and had I been lying, the black eyes would have been difficult to meet.

“He has told me so himself.”

“Why?”

“He had me seized . . .”

“Where?”

“Just outside my house.”

“When?”

“About midnight.”

“Where were you going?”

“I wasn’t going. I was coming. Coming back from visiting the sentries.”

“Yes?”

“And he had me bound—as you found me.”

“How many men?”

“About a dozen.”

“And he told you this tale. . . . Why?”

“Because our little friend De-Nha had been talking to him also.”

Slowly Luong-Tam-Ky nodded his head, reminding me of a china mandarin, in my mother’s drawing-room at home, which interminably nodded its head in just that fashion when set in motion.

“And De-Nha told him—what he told me, eh?”

“I don’t know what he told your Excellency.”

“I think you do. *He told me that you are a French spy* sent by the Intelligence Bureau at Houi-Bap, to spy on this camp, to find out whether we were Chinese regulars, whether we had any European advisers and instructors, whether we were receiving regular assistance from the Imperial Chinese Government, where the late General De-Nam’s new head-quarters and citadel are, and anything else you could discover.”

“Yes, that appears to be the tale he told Major Li Hsian Chang,” I agreed. “Major Li Hsian Chang believed it and had me seized, as you see—which seems to prove that the Number One Boy of Collins’s domestic staff is—what he says he is. He proposes to torture me to death unless I confess everything and also join him.”

“Join him? In what?”

“In his Intelligence work.”

“Leave your service, or rather the French service,” murmured Luong-Tam-Ky pleasantly . . .

“. . . and enter the Imperial Chinese service. In other words, enter his own employment; spy for him instead of . . . Serve him instead of you,” I corrected.

“And tell him everything you can about the present French dispositions and future plans, eh,” whispered Luong-Tam-Ky.

I stared blankly, open-mouthed, and trying to look more foolish than usual.

“Do you still deny that you are a French spy and came here direct from French Head-quarters?”

"But of course."

"Then most certainly you die. This 'Number One Boy', or spy, or whatever you call him, can get on with the good work. He can deal with you as he likes—and *I* will deal with *him* afterwards."

And he turned to the slant-eyed slab-faced lout guarding the door.

No, I didn't want that thong back again cutting into my lacerated wrists and swollen hands, and I certainly didn't want to encounter further trouble from Major Li Hsian Chang, in whom definitely I recognized the man of action, the man of his promise—who performs even more than he promises.

Compared with Ba-Ky and, perhaps, even with this Luong-Tam-Ky, Major Li Hsian Chang was the biting dog that did not bark much. In his hands I had no hope but through treachery to my employers, falsity to my adopted flag.

Obviously in Luong-Tam-Ky there was hope, otherwise why was he here in the small hours of the morning?

"Die if I am *not* a spy?" I said.

Luong-Tam-Ky turned to me, hopefully I thought.

"Yes, die—if you are *not* a French spy."

"Why?"

"Because if you are a French spy, I can make use of you."

"How?"

"You shall see. If you are a French spy I can help you, serve you, save you, in fact. For you can help me; serve me."

"And save you?" I asked, wondering what on earth the man was talking about.

Luong-Tam-Ky smiled unpleasantly, or rather, showed yellow teeth through thin lips.

"A humorist," he murmured. "Well, are you French?"

Was it a trap?

"No, I am English," I replied, playing for time.

"I know you are," replied Luong-Tam-Ky patiently. "According to De-Nha, an English member of the French Foreign Legion; and I may add that De-Nha has quite convinced me of the truth of his story.

"As, obviously," he added, "he convinced this spy of yours, this Major Perhaps, possibly of the Imperial Chinese Army . . . Yes, De-Nha convinced him all-right; and he convinced me also."

"He almost convinces me!" I admitted, with what I intended to be a quizzical smile.

"Yes, I'm sure he does; let us decide that he is right, shall we?"

"And if so, your Excellency?"

"And if so—you are a free man. You return to your headquarters at Houi-Bap . . . and to your—Captain Deleuze, isn't it?—full of information and advice; and you receive reward, promotion and decoration."

"All that, your Excellency?"

"Yes. I will stipulate that you do. You will . . ."

Suddenly a great light dawned upon my somewhat slow mind, and my heart beat faster.

I was conscious for the moment of a feeling of overwhelming relief, thankfulness, joy almost.

His excellent Excellency, the self-styled General Luong-Tam-Ky of the small, compact and independent army of Chinese brigands, was going to—do a deal.

Unless this were an improbable refinement of cruelty, he was going to save, rescue, befriend, me and set me on my way back to Houi-Bap.

And not only should I be the bearer thither of the information for which I had been sent by Deleuze, but the wearer of a very fine feather in my cap.

I should bring back proposals that would be most warmly welcomed by the French authorities—nothing less than a treaty with one of the most valuable of the enemy's allies.

Too good to be true? A trick? A trap? A grim jest?

No, he hadn't come to me at three o'clock in the morning to crack a joke. He meant it.

The death of General De-Nam had decided the rascally schemer that it was time for the rats to leave the sinking ship, and he was going to be the first rat.

Luong-Tam-Ky, Robber Baron and Bandit Chief, had decided to go while the going was good. To go over to the French.

He would turn his coat while it had some value.

He would join the French while there were rewards for doing so; become their friend and ally instead of remaining their enemy and becoming their captive.

That was it.

General De-Nam was dead, leaving no heir, and his mantle had fallen upon De-Tam, who was not of a stature to wear it.

I had guessed rightly and I must think quickly.

Doubtless the news that I had given him concerning Major Li Hsian Chang would strengthen him in his decision to open negotiations with the French.

Why with the French, and not with the Chinese?

Because the Imperial Chinese Government would never permit him to operate

on their side of the border; whereas doubtless the French would be entirely willing for him to do precisely as he pleased in the wild jungles and mountain fastnesses of the border country along the frontiers of Yunnan, Kwangsi, and Kwangtung, throughout the then unadministered and probably unadministrable districts of Ha-Giang and Cao-Bang, and throughout the upper reaches of the Red River.

Yes, I could quite imagine the French, without a smile upon their faces, without a tongue in an official cheek, declaring the excellent General Luong-Tam-Ky to be the new Governor, Mandarin Judge, and tributary ruler of undefined Northern Tonking —until such time as they were ready to make other arrangements.

Yes, that would suit the French; and most admirably it would suit Luong-Tam-Ky in the new circumstances; and doubtless he would get in on the ground floor and get in first—the rest, nowhere.

Luong-Tam-Ky the winner; General Ba-Ky and Colonel Collins literally nowhere—on this earth.

Luong-Tam-Ky first, the rest also-ran, though I didn't somehow think that General Ba-Ky and Colonel Collins would run far.

And as for a moment I sat silent, and stared, deep in thought, at Luong-Tam-Ky, so did that astute man sit in silence and stare, deep in thought, at me.

How had Major Li Hsiang Chang's intervention affected the matter? Speeded things up, probably.

I didn't know, though probably Luong-Tam-Ky knew, how near the promised Chinese reinforcements were.

Regiments of regular soldiers from the Imperial Army were to be placed at the disposal of the Robber Chiefs, to be used against the advancing French; used, but not acknowledged, turning, as they shed their uniforms, from drilled and disciplined troops, into border dacoits indistinguishable from the General's own followers.

If those troops—and doubtless they would be specially selected units—were not only on their way, but near at hand, the matter was urgent for Luong-Tam-Ky.

If the disguised and secret liaison officer, or rather, agent, Major Li Hsian Chang of the Imperial Chinese Army, knew, should come to know, or should even suspect, Luong-Tam-Ky's intentions, the situation would become difficult, dangerous and critical, for the latter gentleman.

Doubtless Major Li Hsian Chang's influence with the General Commanding these reinforcements would be paramount; for almost certainly he would be, though not the ranking officer, at least in a position to give definite instructions and orders to the Commandant of the Chinese reinforcements.

As the man on the spot, Major Li Hsian Chang would have instructions to use

his own discretion and initiative, according to the demands of the local situation. So that anything that had to be done about Major Li Hsiang Chang had better be done soon and quickly.

Yes, the effect of Major Li Hsian Chang's intervention would be to speed things up.

What was Luong-Tam-Ky saying?

"I will stipulate that you receive reward, promotion, and decoration. You will return to your Head-quarters the bearer of proposals for an alliance, offensive and defensive, between General Luong-Tam-Ky and General Voyron commanding the French forces in Tonking."

Here was a turn of Fortune's wheel; a *volte-face* on the part of an apparently unkindly Fate. One minute, a helpless prisoner with a choice between horrible death and treachery; the next minute a free man, successful beyond his wildest dreams.

It was all too good to be true, and I must walk warily, for there must be a snag somewhere.

Why? If Luong-Tam-Ky were going to make me his messenger, he'd see to it that I had every chance to arrive safely at my journey's end.

Was it possible that such good fortune could be mine? I knew this man to be not only fiendishly cruel, but cruel with a clever refinement far beyond that of Ba-Ky, himself no mean practitioner of the art of torture.

Was he paying me the compliment of inflicting mental torture before proceeding to physical, his opportunities for the use of the higher form being somewhat restricted in such a place as Phu-Son? But Ba-Ky . . .

An idea . . .

"And what of General Ba-Ky, your Excellency?" I asked, still unbelieving, hanging in doubt, and wondering whether this and other questions might lead to elucidation; perhaps to the confirmation of my hopes.

"Ah! . . . And suppose I could lead General Ba-Ky along the same Excellent Way in the direction of a French alliance, how great would be the gratitude of those noble people."

"And suppose he declined to be led?"

"Then how equally great, no doubt, would be the gratitude of my noble new friends if General Ba-Ky—met with an accident."

"And General Ba-Ky's troops?"

"Would find me an even kinder and better leader than General Ba-Ky was."

"And the Chinese reinforcements?"

"Well now; if the leader of the Chinese reinforcements, and this excellent young

man who has hitherto been Colonel Collins's servant—what did you say his name was? . . ."

"Major Li Hsian Chang . . ."

"If they both knew nothing of the change of circumstances here, of the new political and military situation, why—the Chinese troops might go astray, mightn't they?"

It looked to me as though they certainly might.

"Yes, they might be led into quite a strange situation, might they not? A situation in which they would have a choice of laying down their arms and being captured to a man, or being massacred to a man."

"By the French forces, do you mean?"

"Well, well, why trouble the French forces?"

And I saw the point, quite clearly. Why trouble the French forces when, no doubt, the admirable troops of General Luong-Tam-Ky could quite easily, in the rôle of allies, lead the Chinese regulars into some hopeless *impasse*, disarm them, and give them a probably not unwelcome opportunity of changing their status; changing from service as regular soldiers to that of highly irregular dacoits. The Chinese regular, ill-paid, ill-treated and badly-led would have little compunction about joining a force that was really a huge dacoit band wherein discipline would be easier, conditions far pleasanter, and loot plentiful.

Here again their change of flag, from that of Imperial China to the Black Flag of Piracy, would now bring a considerable force to the assistance of the French cause, doubly valuable in view of the fact that not only was it added to their own side, but taken from that of their opponents.

Once again I was hoping even more than I was doubting.

And then, suddenly, what had loomed at the back of my mind, casting a dark shadow upon nascent hope, advanced and became clear.

Once again I was amazed at my selfishness and ego-centric pre-occupation with my own affairs.

Mary . . . What would become of her if I, with Luong-Tam-Ky's assistance and protection, set forth on my return journey, leaving her in this robber camp.

And what was the truth about Colonel John Collins? Had he abandoned her to her fate, or had this man decided to put him out of the way?

And Major Li Hsian Chang? Would he have acted as he had, if the Chinese reinforcements were not close at hand, giving him adequate power to implement all threats?

How much of what he had told me had been the truth?

Somehow I felt that he was an infinitely more forthright, direct, and truthful person than Luong-Tam-Ky; though at the same time, I realized that a Secret Service agent rarely benefits his country, or attains his object, by simple ingenuousness.

"And Colonel Collins?" I asked suddenly. "How will he be affected by your change of—er—attitude?"

"There soon will be no Colonel Collins," was the quiet reply; and the boot-button eyes staring at mine looked, I thought, defiant, or were they completely without expression?

They reminded me of those of a crab. Or a snake.

"How is that?"

"He will not return from—the place to which he has gone."

"The New Fort at Thay-Taong?" I said.

Luong-Tam-Ky showed no surprise.

"Yes, you know where the New Fort is, don't you?" he smiled. "Clever. You shall take an excellent map and a plan of it, back with you. . . . No, Colonel Collins will not return from Thay Taong."

"Major Li Hsian Chang says he has no intention of returning."

"No intention of returning?"

"No. He says he has gone. Run away. Left your service altogether."

"*What?*"

And then I thought I would play what might prove a trump card.

"Yes, he says he has gone for ever—and deserted his wife."

Luong-Tam-Ky inhaled deeply and slowly, making a hissing noise between his teeth. A curious sound and unpleasant.

"This house-servant, calling himself a Major and a Secret Service Agent, told you that Colonel Collins has fled from this camp, leaving his wife and everything else, and is not going to return?"

"Yes."

"Where has he gone? To China?"

"He didn't tell me."

"Why did he tell you at all?"

"Because when I asked him what he wanted me to do, since he gave me the choice of joining him and working with him or being tortured to death, he replied that the first part of the work was to help him to get Mrs. Collins safely away from here and into China."

And again Luong-Tam-Ky drew a long whistling breath.

Gently, softly, he rubbed his hands together, one over the other, as though washing them.

"We will talk with him," he whispered. "We will talk with him. We will ask him questions."

"Are you sure he hasn't run away too?" I asked.

"Why should he? Wasn't he coming back here to talk with you, to ask *you*—questions?"

"Yes. But won't his men have warned him that you've come here?"

"Of what should they warn him? Do I not command here? Being challenged by the Chinese sentry at your door, I praised him for his watchfulness, and brought him inside here with me, as you saw."

"But the others? There must have been a dozen of them."

"Well, if still on duty, they saw me brought in here by the sentry, didn't they? And if one of them mentions that to Li Hsian Chang, he'll promptly come in to see what's happening, won't he?"

"I suppose he will."

"And what about this sentry?" I asked.

"And what about The Shadow?" smiled Luong-Tam-Ky.

And I remembered the great grim silent man whose presence at my dinner-party with Luong-Tam-Ky had made me a little uncomfortable.

"Oh, he's handy, is he?"

"As always," was the reply. "With his men. Why do you suppose he's called 'The Shadow'?"

"Your Excellency has a shadow, even at night?"

"Especially at night," smiled Luong-Tam-Ky.

"Now listen. Let us know how we stand before this—servant—comes. You admit that you are a French spy. I admit that I wish to enter into negotiations with the French. I will send you back with a letter to the French General proposing a meeting between myself and an officer of suitable rank, who will be empowered to make terms with me. Meanwhile, I take no steps against the French. And I keep them informed as to any steps about to be taken by De-Tam and his Chinese allies—regular Imperial troops, I mean. I will send a personal letter by you, and you will bring back an answer. Yes, you will return with it yourself."

I thought not.

No, I somehow felt I had had enough of this camp and of the neighbourhood of Luong-Tam-Ky. Once I had got safely away and back to my base, someone else could bring the answer.

And I would not go alone. By some means or other I would take Mary with me.

The door opened and Major Li Hsian Chang stepped into the hut.
Behind him loomed the gigantic figure of The Shadow.
I had never expected to be really pleased to see this individual.

CHAPTER XXVI

As the door opened and Major Li Hsian Chang stepped into the room, so close behind him was The Shadow that I gathered the impression that The Shadow was shepherding and impelling, not to say hustling him, through the doorway.

Things happened very rapidly. There was a swift brief exchange of Chinese words, somewhat like the hissing and spitting of angry cats; the moon-faced sentry grunted or hiccupped and sank to his knees, and one great hand of The Shadow seized Major Li Hsian Chang by the neck, while the other closed upon the revolver that he attempted to draw from its holster.

Definitely the clever Secret Service officer had been surprised, caught napping, and was trapped.

General Luong-Tam-Ky did not rise from his chair, moved not a limb, remained entirely passive of countenance, and only issued his orders in a sibilant whisper.

Like a small boy handled by a big man, Major Li Hsian Chang was thrown to the floor by The Shadow, turned upon his face, and bound hand and foot. At first he struggled violently and fiercely, but a short-arm punch below the ribs so winded and distressed him that he could only lie gasping like a fish.

With celerity and dispatch The Shadow fastened his wrists together behind him, united his ankles, his knees, and his elbows, in bonds and thongs of leather, and then placed about his neck the halter that had so recently adorned my own, and tied the end of the cord to the bed-frame.

In fact, and in the space of about five minutes, Major Li Hsiang Chang was occupying the position and situation that had so recently been mine.

Time's whirligig and the turn of the wheel of Fate, indeed.

He took it well, and I felt that I was about to see how a Chinese of birth and breeding, of honour and tradition, could die.

General Luong-Tam-Ky almost smiled as he turned to me. At any rate, his teeth showed between his lips as he spoke, which was unusual.

"Would you like to kick him in the face?" he asked.

"No thank you," I replied.

"Why not? You can kick him as much as you like and anywhere you like. There are places where it is even more painful to be kicked than in the face. Or will you beat him with a bamboo?"

"I don't wish to kick him or beat him," I said. "When I was his prisoner he showed me how Chinese treat captives, and explained why. I should like to show him how the British treat prisoners."

"What would you like to do?"

"Untie him and let him get up. Take his parole and treat him decently. He'll keep his word if he gives it."

"Childish," whispered General Luong-Tam-Ky. "You Western barbarians are illogical silly children. What would this dog do to me or to you if the positions were reversed? What *did* he do to you?"

"Well, I'd like to show him the better way, the way of civilized people."

General Luong-Tam-Ky spat and turned to serious matters.

"So you are a spy, are you?" he said in English, and I wondered whether he spoke in this language for my benefit or because he and Major Luong-Tam-Ky came from different parts of China, spoke a different dialect, and might not completely understand each other.

Major Li Hsian Chang made no reply, but watched Luong-Tam-Ky warily with his hard bright eyes, so deep and so shallow, expressionless and unreadable. If he were frightened, as surely he must have been, he gave no slightest sign of it.

"Will you talk—and save yourself?" asked Luong-Tam-Ky.

Major Li Hsian Chang answered nothing; merely sat and stared unflinching at the face of his questioner and judge.

"Will you join me, tell me everything, give me all documents you may have in your possession, and save your . . . reason?" Luong-Tam-Ky slowly enquired.

Major Li Hsian Chang made no reply, and the expression of his face remained blank.

"No? Well, I think I can promise you one thing, and honourably keep my word. No dying man ever took so long to die as you will."

For all notice that Major Li Hsian Chang took of this sinister promise, he might have been stone deaf.

"As your information might be of some use to me—and to the French," continued Luong-Tam-Ky, "I will give you one more chance to save yourself from a really memorable death. Listen.

"I am going to join the French. General De-Nam is dead, and De-Tam neither wields the same influence and power nor has the same ability. The cause of Ham-Nghi the Emperor of Annam is lost, and only fools will continue to support it. I am going to negotiate with General Voyron for the hire of my army and, satisfactory terms having been arranged, I shall transfer my services from the Emperor of Annam to the President of the French Republic.

"Incidentally I shall be appointed Governor of Yen Thé with a great salary, great subsidiary emoluments and no—interference.

"Yes—taxation will be heavy in Yen Thé. Incidentally, General Ba-Ky will meet with an accident, and the joint command of the Army of Phu-Son will be unified. There are objections to dual control, really. And decidedly there are objections to General Ba-Ky."

Major Li Hsian Chang yawned.

"Well, I was about to observe," continued Luong-Tam-Ky in his silky whisper, "that if you chose to join me *and* bring with you the reinforcement of Chinese regulars now on their way here, we could make an arrangement mutually and entirely agreeable.

"The soldiers would sooner fight the Black Flags and dacoits of the Annamese army than fight the French—with their loud artillery and their superior discipline, weapons and tactics; there would be far more loot for them; they would have an easier and better time altogether—and no one in China need know.

"You and I could come to an arrangement—also mutually and entirely agreeable—about the consignments of money, and so forth, for their support, and we could use the troops as we saw fit. Should their Commanding Officer prove—difficult—which is improbable, he too could meet with an accident.

"Should some garbled tale reach Peking concerning the situation here and the employment of the Chinese regulars, we could temporize as long as possible, and then when Peking got obnoxious and the situation became acute, we could sever the connection altogether. The Imperial authorities couldn't do much, as we should then have the French behind us; and if they sent a force against us, it couldn't cross the border for fear of provoking war with France. . . ."

There was a minute's silence in the hut while Luong-Tam-Ky and I watched Major Li Hsian Chang's face.

"Well?" continued Luong-Tam-Ky, "will you join me and bring over the Chinese regulars—or shall The Shadow and I devise something new and really great in tortures, something to which we will give your name—and make it famous for all time?"

Again Major Li Hsian Chang yawned, and did it extremely well.

"Ah," whispered Luong-Tam-Ky and turned to The Shadow.

"Collect his ears and his eyes," he said, "and put them in a bottle. I'll send them to his family. Stab his ear-drums. Cut off his nose and cut out his tongue—and put them in the bottle too."

What orders he had given The Shadow I did not know as he spoke to him in a dialect of Chinese.

I glanced at the moon-faced sentry who had never moved since he had

hiccupped and collapsed. I saw that he was lying face downward in a pool of blood that had oozed from beneath him. Presumably there had been something in The Shadow's hand when he struck the man. As the giant, grinning amiably, now advanced upon Major Li Hsian Chang, his razor-edged knife drawn, I asked Luong-Tam-Ky what he was going to do. His reply told me what the order had been.

This was too much for me. Major Li Hsian Chang had undoubtedly intended to kill me, and probably to torture me too, but I couldn't stand by and see a fellow-creature's eyes gouged out and his ears sliced off, however good cause I had to dislike him.

"No, your Excellency," I objected, "don't do that. What does Confucius say?"

I hadn't the vaguest idea as to 'What Confucius said in 'eighty-four,' or whenever it was, but I felt certain that he must have said something apposite.

"And what does he say?" enquired Luong-Tam-Ky blandly.

"' *Ne'er let your angry passions rise*' and also '*To err is human, to forgive divine*', and '*A merciful man is merciful to a beast*'—which this fellow certainly is. And besides, think of what Confucius says about the Problem of Pain."

"True," replied Luong-Tam-Ky. "He says, '*Pain is the strangest and the most valuable of all the Gifts of Heaven*.' We will give this spy the most valuable of gifts in full measure—and the strangest too."

"If you blind and deafen him now, he won't be able to see and hear," I pointed out somewhat unnecessarily, "and you may want him to see—to sign something; and to hear what else you may have to say to him. Besides, if you make him dumb, he obviously won't be able to answer any questions, if he changes his mind about it."

"He won't answer any questions," replied Luong-Tam-Ky. "He's not a European," and the robber-chief sat considering me for a while, in silence.

Obviously he was wondering what axe I had to grind that I should thus intercede to save the life of the man who had himself been about to kill me. That it should be mere humanitarianism was beyond his comprehension and did not enter into his calculations in the least. No, I must obviously have some excellent ulterior reason for this peculiar line of conduct, and Luong-Tam-Ky was trying to fathom it and the depths of my cunning.

I think he came to the conclusion that I wished to keep Major Li Hsiang Chang as a kind of second string to my bow, with a view to having a friend in him should the Chinese reinforcements arrive suddenly, unexpectedly, and in great strength.

Whatever his conclusion may have been, I think that my well-meant intervention sealed the Secret Service agent's fate—or rather expedited it.

Turning to The Shadow, Luong-Tam-Ky hissed an order, and the giant strode forward again, his gleaming sword raised above his head. I sprang to my feet, and received a blow from The Shadow's left hand that dashed me against the wall, knocking the breath out of my body and stunning me almost. It was as though I had been kicked by a horse or struck down by an elephant.

I don't wish to set down gory details and blood-curdling descriptions of horrors, so I will merely state that when I pulled myself together and rose to my feet, Luong-Tam-Ky had, as he said, 'taken precautions to prevent the spy from escaping'.

I had heard, as I lay partially stunned, four sounds—such as I had often heard when passing a butcher's shop—and when I looked, I saw that the unfortunate man had neither hands nor feet.

No, he would not run away.

Nor would he die of loss of blood, for The Shadow was binding the cords about his wrists and ankles as string is bound about the handle of a cricket-bat.

Having finished his task, he went to the door, looked out, and then, turning, picked his victim up and flung him across his shoulder.

(I afterwards learned that, before returning, he carried the poor fellow to the prison beneath the *Yamen* building, where, later, under the direction and supervision of Luong-Tam-Ky, he tortured him to death.)

My anger boiled over as I glanced from the mess of blood, and the horrible débris, to the calm face of Luong-Tam-Ky, and I foolishly endeavoured to scald him with the vituperation that flowed forth from the seething cauldron that was my mind.

The torrent of my words might have been a gentle zephyr wafted across sweet flowers for all the effect it had. He merely murmured, when I had finished, that the sight of a Western barbarian blundering blindly in the Red Mist of Wrath was an interesting and amusing one. And now to business once again, after the annoying hindrance caused by the unseemly irruption of the fool who called himself Colonel Collins's Number One Boy and Major Li Hsiang Chang of the Imperial Chinese Secret Service, and perhaps was neither.

"Look here, General Luong-Tam-Ky," objected I, "if you want to talk, we must go somewhere else. I feel sick. I can't sit here and listen to you . . . with a dead body in the room, and that poor devil's hands and feet lying about, and this filthy mess of blood all over the place. I am not a—Chinese."

General Luong-Tam-Ky almost smiled.

"What are hands and feet but things?" he jeered. "And what is blood but a fluid? What is a dead soldier, but a man asleep? . . . I do not want it to be known, yet, to Ba-Ky, that I have been in conference with you. We will talk here, and if you *must*

notice trifles of débris, be thankful that you have not—yet—contributed to them. Now then, is there any reason why you should not start at once for your headquarters, taking my letter and my verbal message?"

"Yes. Several. For one thing, I am not going back to Houi-Bap until I have seen De-Nam's great New Fort at Thay-Taong, been all over it, sketched it, and mapped the country round it."

"No necessity," replied Luong-Tam-Ky, "I have a most admirable scale plan and elevation, an excellent sketch and an accurate map of the country."

"I should want to compare them with the original," I replied.

"Well, you can visit Thay-Taong on your way back without making any very great detour."

"Is it true," I asked, "that De-Nam's treasury is there?"

"It is," replied Luong-Tam-Ky, "but it won't be there much longer. As soon as I hear from General Voyron that my proposals—and terms—are accepted, I shall seize the New Fort. That will be simple enough, as I shall offer to strengthen the garrison, and march a battalion of my troops into it—as allies of De-Tam."

"And you will hold it for the French?" I observed, rather as an obvious statement than as a question.

"I shall hold it for myself. I, the new ally of the French, will occupy the New Fort of Thay-Taong as my permanent headquarters, my base, and the impregnable outpost which will render the invasion of Annam by Chinese troops quite impossible. I shall in fact, be the local French representative, Commander-in-Chief, and Governor of the border province."

This seemed good enough, seemed to be, in fact, precisely what the French military authorities would desire and warmly welcome. If anyone could keep the wild northern marches of Annam quiet and peaceful, it would be this powerful robber-chief. If there were any trouble from the local Annamese insurgents, he would promptly 'make a solitude and call it peace,' and peace was the one thing desired by the harassed French Government against whom murmurs concerning the cost and futility of the Indo-China campaign were turning to shouts—a growing tumult that in Paris was causing the insecure foundations of its popularity to tremble.

Yes, this little arrangement would be an admirable one; a powerful enemy turned into a friend; a source of weakness and danger turned into a means of strength and safety; and the cost—ever the first and last word in Cochin China—defrayed entirely by others, those other people without a voice or a vote, the hapless Annamese villagers, the amount of whose taxes Luong-Tam-Ky would fix, and which he would himself collect.

Little or nothing as I personally had had to do with bringing about this incalculably valuable detachment of Luong-Tam-Ky from the Annamese and Chinese connections, I had made the journey and the highly dangerous contact successfully, and it would be a splendid thing for me to be able to return with the wonderful news; with Luong-Tam-Ky's own letter and message to General Voyron; with the ability to give an absolutely accurate estimate, and indeed description, of the position of affairs at Phu-Son; and with the plans, sketches, and maps of the New Fort and the Thay-Taong country. . . .

I had indeed been lucky, fortunate beyond all hope, expectation and desert. And if I had done nothing more, I had deserved well of my officer and justified his belief and trust in me.

And then I remembered Mary Collins.

How could I possibly go and leave her here?

I could not. Certainly not until I knew the truth concerning the fate, movements and whereabouts of her husband. If he had been murdered by order of Luong-Tam-Ky, or had departed finally from Phu-Son, I must rescue her from the hideous danger in which she was.

If the statements of Luong-Tam-Ky and Major Li Hsian Chang were both false, as was quite probable, and Colonel Collins might return at any moment, presumably I must leave her here, though it seemed a terrible thing to do, and I should be leaving my heart and my happiness behind.

But what could I do, if Collins came back here? After all, he was her husband, and while he was alive she was as safe as ever she had been in the wilder parts of China. And what could I, a private soldier on a half-penny a day, do to support her, even if I got her safely down to Hanoi?

That, however, would be a secondary consideration if Collins were dead or had deserted her. First things first, and the very first thing would be to get her away before Luong-Tam-Ky seized her and she disappeared, probably for ever, into his house and the guardianship of The Shadow and his squad of other shadows.

"Yes," mused Luong-Tam-Ky aloud, "I shall be French *préfet* of the Province, and General in the French Colonial Army . . ."

"What about Colonel Collins?" I suddenly interrupted.

"He has outlived his usefulness here, I think," replied Luong-Tam-Ky silkily. "And in point of fact, he seems to have realized it. . . . Though I realized it first, I believe."

"It would be as well if your Excellency told me everything," I said. "I shall be very fully and carefully questioned when I return to Houi-Bap; and the Intelligence

Department won't make recommendations to the General until they know all the facts. . . . Suppose Colonel Collins also thought that the death of General De-Nam had so changed the situation that . . ."

"I have supposed it," was the quiet reply. "And I took steps. Colonel Collins was to have gone to the New Fort, to decide whether the field of fire from the outer walls really needed widening; and I made arrangements that he should not return. He was to have met with an accident. But—you know how it is—people are so suspicious. And some are so untrustworthy. Really there's quite a lot of deception and unreliability here. Flagrant dishonesty . . ."

"*No?*" said I.

"Yes," re-affirmed the good General. "You'd hardly credit it. . . . And either Colonel Collins decided for himself that the wind had changed a little, and that he'd better be going, or else the scoundrel whom I entrusted with the business went to Collins and sold him the story and his life. Positively that amounts to fraud-when-in-a-position-of-trust. Flagrant fraud. And the man must be punished. Of course he'll say that Colonel Collins never went to the New Fort at all, and that he waited there for the Colonel in vain. . . . Anyway, Colonel Collins has left us. He has got away all-right, safe and sound, and just in time. A very clever man, our Colonel Collins."

"Yes," observed I, "Major Li Hsian Chang told me that he had gone—for good."

"*What?* . . . How did he know?" asked Luong-Tam-Ky quickly.

"Why, he was his Number One Boy. He packed his kit and noted that he spent some time in destroying papers and documents. And he took away with him things that he had never taken on expeditions before, when going from Phu-Son out into the jungle—things he would not have taken had he been intending to return."

"Yes, of course," whispered Luong-Tam-Ky, "the spy was his house-servant. . . . Well, the spy shall talk, if human ingenuity can make him talk. Though I doubt it."

So did I. I very much doubted whether the will-power of Luong-Tam-Ky, backed with the power to inflict incredible agony, would defeat the will-power of Major Li Hsian Chang, backed by nothing but his cold courage.

"He also said that he had read every word of every letter received or written by Colonel Collins," I added, "and I have reason to believe that he was speaking the truth when he said that the Colonel had gone, and gone for good. I believe, too, that he knows where he has gone—and why he has gone there."

Luong-Tam-Ky shot me a suspicious glance.

"He did not tell you that?" he asked.

"No," I replied, and forbore to admit that he had told me nothing, and I only knew these things because he had told Mrs. Collins—and had told them to her for his own private and personal reasons, because he wished to persuade her to let him rescue her from Luong-Tam-Ky and the perils of Phu-Son.

"Yes, a very wily man, Colonel Collins," mused Luong-Tam-Ky aloud. "He has always gone while the going is good, as he puts it, and known enough to stand from under, and come in out of the rain. But not really straightforward. Not ingenuous . . ."

He murmured on, soliloquizing apparently, and then suddenly shot a question at me.

"*Where has he gone?* Peking? Yes?" he hissed, and the look that accompanied the words was sufficiently daunting.

"I don't know," I replied. "How should I? I am not in his confidence."

"If I thought you knew—I'd have it out of you," he whispered, and at his tone The Shadow handled his sword and seemed to calculate the thickness of my neck.

"Well, don't think it, General," I replied, "if you want me to negotiate for you at Houi-Bap. I'm the only person who can give them a verbal message from you and assure them that it is genuine, and that the situation is as you describe it."

"I was only joking," the General assured me, and I felt that if that were so, I should prefer him to remain serious.

"Well, we will see what the spy thinks when I hang him up for a day or two on a meat-hook—to think . . . Anyhow—I'll soon get news of the good Colonel Collins—and if he is on his way back to Peking—he won't get there. And if he has gone to meet General Wun Kai Shek and the Chinese reinforcements, he'll meet his death too. . . . He can't escape me. . . . There isn't a village in a circle of a hundred miles where they'd dare to tell me a lie. I'll soon find out where our Colonel Collins has gone. . . . Yes, that'll be it—he has gone to meet General Wun Kai Shek to tell him to hurry up. No doubt, that'll be it. He couldn't actually know, I think; but he made a pretty good guess. Thought he'd go where it would be healthier for him—and where he could curry favour with Peking. Foresaw the end of his job here."

"I wonder he didn't take his wife," I drew a bow at a venture, thinking that the remark could do no harm, and might produce an enlightening reply.

"Do you?" replied Luong-Tam-Ky drily. "And advertise the fact that he was—escaping?"

"I hadn't thought of that," I said.

"No?" sneered Luong-Tam-Ky. "He was only supposed to be going to the New Fort at Thay-Taong, and to be returning in a few days."

"Then he has deserted her?" I said.

"Absolutely. He knows he can never return here, having disobeyed my instructions to go to Thay-Taong, and gone to meet the Chinese army instead—if he hasn't actually gone to Peking."

"That's very terrible for Mrs. Collins, my compatriot," I remarked.

"Oh, she'll be cared for; she'll be cared for," replied Luong-Tam-Ky airily. "Don't worry on her account . . ."

"A hostage," he added, eyeing me inscrutably, and almost smiling.

"To ensure the eventual return of Colonel Collins?" I asked feigning stupidity.

"Nothing could ensure the return of Colonel Collins," was the reply. "We shall never see him here again—unless it is with his hands tied behind him, and a rope round his neck. He may perhaps come in that style, of course. I think he will, if he has gone to meet General Wun Kai Shek with a tale about me, and proposals that Wun Kai Shek takes my place—and my army. . . . Yes, I think I have made General Wun Kai Shek a rather better offer than Colonel Collins can. . . . It will be amusing if Wun Kai Shek does bring him here."

And I think it is no exaggeration to say that General Luong-Tam-Ky smiled.

"What will happen if he does?" I asked.

"I shall hang them both, after giving them a little salutary pain," was the prompt reply.

"Hang the Chinese General?" I exclaimed.

"Yes. He's not trustworthy. He's the sort of man who'd march in here, in pretended innocence and ignorance, and who'd agree to join me and go over to the French, and then double-cross me. Curry favour with the Imperial authorities by betraying me. . . And then blackening my memory," sighed General Luong-Tam-Ky.

"But it's more likely that General Wun Kai Shek will hear all that Colonel Collins has to say, and then strangle him—so as to keep for himself the credit of having found me out. Then he'll arrive pretending to know nothing, and intending to assassinate me, take over command, and march the whole army to the New Fort and General De-Tam. . . . A cunning and deceitful fellow, this General Wun Kai Shek."

"Quite a dirty dog," I opined.

"A dirty dog," agreed General Luong-Tam-Ky.

§2

And by the time he had finished talking to me, I felt that I had a pretty clear

understanding and good grasp of the actual situation—and knew that I was utterly undecided as to what I was going to do.

I accepted, as definite facts, that General Luong-Tam-Ky really wished to desert the Annamese cause, dispose of General Ba-Ky, and join the French with his bandit army; that he intended to deal, as circumstances indicated, with the Chinese General, Wun Kai Shek, and his force of Imperial regular troops; that Colonel Collins had deserted his post and his wife, fled finally from Phu-Son, and either gone to meet General Wun Kai Shek or returned to Peking; that, in either case, he would be seen no more, as, on the one hand, General Wun Kai Shek would seize him, on Luong-Tam-Ky's information that he was a traitor; or, on the other, the military authorities at Peking would do so on General Wun Kai Shek's accusation.

That, I was sure, was an accurate estimate of the position of affairs; and I could not deny that it was now my business to go as soon as I possibly could; to return with all dispatch to Houi Bap and Captain Deleuze with the information I had gathered; and, infinitely more important, with the letter and verbal proposals of General Luong-Tam-Ky.

I could not deny it, but I tried to do so.

I argued that it would be a much better plan to wait and see what happened to the Chinese reinforcements, and find out whether General Luong-Tam-Ky succeeded in incorporating that force with his own.

If he did, with or without the co-operation of their General Officer Commanding, General Wun Kai Shek, he would be a much more valuable ally to the French, as the regular Chinese troops, though neither trained nor disciplined to the European standard, were good material, stout fighters, and quite able to meet De-Tam's dacoit army on equal terms and their own ground, be it swamp, jungle or hill.

Yes, I really ought to postpone departure until I could tell Captain Deleuze exactly what happened to the reinforcements from China, and the big convoy of provisions, munitions and money that it was escorting.

And, in any case, I could not go until *Doi* Linh Nghi returned from his spying expedition to the New Fort at Thay-Taong.

I must see the place for myself, of course, as well; but I couldn't go without the *Doi* who, other considerations apart, would be absolutely necessary to the success of my return journey.

And when I had thought of every specious argument for delay, I produced the real one.

I could not go and leave Mary here, now that I felt certain that her husband had deserted her.

That he had done so was incredible.

And that he had done so was certain—in the light of what Major Li Hsian Chang had said about the preparations he had made for departure, and what General Luong-Tam-Ky had said about the excellent reasons there were for that departure.

He had gone; and he had failed to take his wife with him, as that would have betrayed the fact that he was going for good, and probably because she would have been a hindrance to his movements. Also, doubtless, he thought that the fact of his leaving her and his household there in Phu-Son would for some time postpone any suspicion that he had deserted, thrown up his job and fled; thought that it would delay pursuit, and give him time to get sufficiently far away from General Luong-Tam-Ky's sphere of influence to be safe.

How could I emulate the scoundrelly hound—desert her, too, because she would be a hindrance to my movements; because by taking her with me, I should bring down upon me the wrath and vengeance of General Luong-Tam-Ky?

But of course, reason as I might, I knew that the whole argument was specious.

It was my duty to go, and to go without her; because, by taking her, I might jeopardize the whole situation, now so favourable to France. For that might well be a result of Luong-Tam-Ky's anger if he discovered what I had done. It might be a result of my delay if he did not; for, naturally, I should not be able to travel as fast with her as I should with only my hardy *tirailleurs*, born jungle-men.

And indeed it was a hideous position in which I found myself, and the horns of the dilemma cruelly sharp.

How could I possibly leave the woman I loved, the woman whose image was never out of my thoughts, in such terrible danger? It would have been heart-rendingly painful to leave her at all, a sickening agony of spirit, but to leave her to the unthinkable fate that was inevitable, to leave her to what amounted to torture—how could I do it?

And how could I possibly fail in my duty, ruin the whole undertaking, spoil the, hitherto, incredible success of the expedition and throw away the chance of greatly shortening, if not actually ending, the whole war—for my own private reasons, in consideration of my own inclinations . . . because, in short, I had fallen in love! It will be believed that I did not sleep very well that night.

CHAPTER XXVII

Next day *Doi* Linh Nghi returned.

I have seen few uglier faces than his, and fewer still of which the sight has given me more pleasure than it did on this occasion. And, judging by the grin that raised his ears and exposed thirty-two teeth lacquered like black china, *Doi* Linh Nghi was glad to see me.

His news was interesting.

"It's a wonderful Fort they've built there, *Nai*," he said. "A regular castle. You might call it three forts really, the second inside the first, far stronger; and the third inside the second, strongest of all. And a town inside the third. All General De-Nam's treasure is there too, buried with his body, right in the centre. They'll never surrender, if it comes to a siege. Never. You must come and make a picture of it, and of the country round. It's wonderfully sited—a deep river round two sides, a deeper swamp round the third; and the fourth, the only one that can be approached on dry land, is nearly as bad with moats and deep staked pits, each big enough to catch a herd of wild elephants. It's wonderfully hidden in the jungle too, but the jungle has been felled and cleared for a thousand metres from this only dry-land side. . . . And now about Colonel Collins. He never went there at all . . ."

"No, I didn't think he went there. I have been hearing things," said I. "Have you any idea where he did go?"

The *Doi* grinned. Evidently he had a tale to tell, and was going to tell it in his own way.

"He never went there at all," he repeated. "But somebody else did. Went there to meet him. And who do you think that was?"

"How should I know? Out with it, you chattering old woman."

"De-Nha! . . . Went to Thay-Taong New Fort to meet Colonel Collins."

Here was news indeed.

"What—by arrangement with him? To talk quietly about—something?"

"No. By arrangement with General Luong-Tam-Ky. . . . . To kill him quietly about—something."

"Did he do it?" I gasped.

"No. I've just told you Colonel Collins never went to Thay-Taong at all."

"No, of course not. . . . Well, now tell me all about it."

And over the preparation of a pipe of the 'black smoke', *Doi* Linh Nghi did so.

He and his brothers made their way to Thay Taong and, in the rôle of good dacoits anxious to join De-Tam's army, hung about the Fort, saw everything, heard

all the news, and suddenly ran into De-Nha.

The embarrassment was mutual, for if De-Nha was in a position to denounce them as French *tirailleurs*, they were in a position to make things equally uncomfortable for him, the renegade who had led them to the Phu-Son camp and vouched for them as good honest bandits. Nevertheless, they took care that he should never be out of sight of at least one of them; they talked unkindly at him; sharpened knives in his presence, and considered his throat and his paunch.

Also they made him drunk with rice-spirit, and induced him to talk.

Yes, he assured them, he was, of course, a staunch stout friend of the French, and entirely loyal to me. What he was really doing at Thay-Taong Fort was spying out the land in the interests of his dear French allies, and to assist me. . . . Also to catch Colonel Collins off his guard, either approaching the Fort or leaving it! Somewhere in the jungle where he camped for the night.

"To *catch* him?" asked *Doi* Linh Nghi. "But why?"

"To slash him across the back of the neck with a *mâchète*," was the reply.

"But why, once again?"

"Oh, because he is a very bad man, and to oblige General Luong-Tam-Ky"—who was going to advance De-Nha to very high preferment if he contrived the neat and quiet assassination of Colonel Collins.

And why did General Luong-Tam-Ky particularly desire the assassination of Colonel Collins.

Because he was intriguing against General Luong-Tam-Ky and had something up his sleeve.

"Yes," thought I to myself, as *Doi* Linh Nghi paused to inhale a deep draught of the black smoke, "and because he has a beautiful wife upon whom General Luong-Tam-Ky has cast a covetous eye."

"And why did General Luong-Tam-Ky choose you for the job?" enquired *Doi* Linh Nghi of De-Nha.

"Choose me?" replied De-Nha, grinning drunkenly. "Well, you see, he has rather got me by the tail, since I gave myself away to him, trying to drive a bargain; and now he knows who I am. If I didn't do what he asked, he'd have me tortured. He'd tell General Ba-Ky all about me, and have a torturing match with him. See which of them could do the funniest things to me. Also I was a good man for this job because no-one would suppose that General Luong-Tam-Ky was behind it. If he had had it done by The Shadow at Phu-Son, people would have suspected him, and General Ba-Ky might have got nasty, and the Chinese General who is coming with the reinforcements would certainly have got nasty. . . . Yes, I'm going to slash him as he

sleeps, one night—or more likely, put some of this arsenic in his cooking-pot when he camps."

And then, without deep and lasting regret, I learned of the end of the matter—and of De-Nha.

Having too little opium, thanks to the machinations of *Doi* Linh Nghi, and too much rice-spirit, De-Nha went to pieces and, in a state of combined nervous break-down and drunkenness—what must in point of fact have been a condition bordering on *delirium tremens*—said too much, told his deeply interested hearers all that was in his very evil mind.

Also he told them of a torture of his very own, his private patented invention, a lovely inspiration that had come to him one night when he was tax-collecting in the "pacified zone", for General De-Nam; and which he had practised on innumerable villagers, particularly women.

And in their little jungle-camp, on the track between Phu-Son and the New Fort, the *Doi* and his brothers pirated the patent, plagiarized the brilliant idea, and tried it on De-Nha, its author.

As he himself had said, it was wonderful—and death, though certain, was very slow. . . .

And Colonel Collins had, as General Luong-Tam-Ky said, fled, without going near Thay-Taong, and the only question was whether he had gone to meet General Wun Kai Shek and the convoy, or gone to Peking to tell the military authorities what was happening at Phu-Son, and how De-Nam's death had affected the position of affairs in Annam. Anyhow, the sooner General Luong-Tam-Ky made his little arrangement, the better; the sooner he was an accepted and officially recognized ally of the French, the sooner could he deal effectively with whatever local situation might follow upon Colonel Collins's action or the attitude of General Ba-Ky.

Having thanked and praised the *Doi* for his good work at the New Fort, I bade him see that his men continued to keep a close watch on Colonel Collins's house, and inform me instantly if anything happened there.

Sending for me to his house, that night, Luong-Tam-Ky told me that I must be prepared to depart at short notice; that his letter to General Voyron would be ready in a day or two; that he would provide me with a guide whom I could trust; and that he would do everything to facilitate my overland journey to the Red River and my passage down it to Houi-Bap.

I gave General Luong-Tam-Ky my solemn promise to do all that he desired (but

forbore to add that I should do more than he desired) and to make my way when he gave the word, straight to Houi-Bap and give a full and true account of the situation at Phu-Son.

But I must, I stipulated, go by way of Thay-Taong so that I myself could sketch the New Fort and map the country; and must take back with me the men who had accompanied me on my journey to Phu-Son.

"Especially De-Nha," said I maliciously, and carefully watched for any change of expression on the inscrutable face before me. "He is a man who can be particularly useful to the French, knowing the southern country so well, and so much about the methods and affairs of the late General De-Nam."

"Of course," agreed General Luong-Tam-Ky, "take him back with you. An excellent honest fellow. I'll tell him he must be your guide again. You won't need mine. I was talking to De-Nha about you, only this morning. . . ."

Which was curious in view of the fact that *Doi* Linh Nghi and his brothers had killed him in the jungle a week ago.

§2

So I was to be prepared to depart at short notice, was I?

Thank God for that.

The one thing I wanted was to be gone from this fantastically treacherous atmosphere, this haunt and home of lies and cruelty and violence. For I had made up my mind that I would do both the things that I so desired to do.

I would keep faith with Captain Deleuze who trusted me; and I would keep faith with the woman who trusted me.

I would take Mary Collins with me.

Obviously her husband had gone. Obviously he would not, and could not, return —for if he did so, he would be murdered by General Luong-Tam-Ky.

So to leave her here would be to act almost as villainously as her husband had done.

CHAPTER XXVIII

But it was one thing to make the decision, and quite another thing to carry it out.

The first obstacle was Mary herself.

On leaving Luong-Tam-Ky's house, I went to hers, learning from my watchful *tirailleurs*, as I approached, that no-one had visited the place since yesterday, when I myself had been there.

She looked ill, haggard, and unhappy, as, in the circumstances, was very natural; but her face brightened, her eyes lit up, and she looked a different woman as I came into her drawing-room, and told her that she must come with me, must make what preparations were possible, and be ready to leave at any moment.

"Darling," she said, "I shall not do it. I won't come with you."

"Why not? You don't think he'll ever return here? You don't think he deserves to find you here, if he did return? . . . He simply can't come back. He'd be coming to his death, and he knows it, after disobeying Luong-Tam-Ky, who has made one attempt to kill him already. . . . I think Luong-Tam-Ky knows something about him and . . ."

"It's not that," replied Mary. "I'll never speak to him nor see him again, if I can possibly help it. I'd sooner die than go back to him as his wife. I'd almost sooner that Luong-Tam-Ky. . . . No, I am not coming with you; because I should be a drag and a hindrance and a danger. You'd travel twice as fast without me and . . ."

"Nonsense, Mary," I interrupted. "Your being in the sampan won't make it go down the Red River more slowly, will it?"

She smiled sadly, and kissed me.

"No, dear—but what about the jungle-marches from here to the river? Can you pretend I shan't be a burden and an anxiety? And there's another thing. Luong-Tam-Ky would guess that you had taken me with you, directly he found that I had gone. He'd send his soldiers after us. And instead of just marching, which would be wearisome enough, you'd have to fight as well."

"Then we'd fight."

"My dear, he'd send a hundred, two hundred, five hundred men, rather than let you escape him . . . *And they'd have orders to take you alive*. . . . No—I'm not coming with you—but oh, how I wish I had words to thank you for . . ."

"Mary," I said solemnly, "do you trust my word—believe me when I assure you that I am speaking the truth?"

"Yes, absolutely," she smiled, her sweet face glowing with the sort of look that, as a child, I would have given anything to see on my mother's.

"You are truth and reliability and honesty itself," she added. "I did not know there were men like you, dear. . . . Of course I believe you."

"Very well, then. Listen. I give you my word that I will not leave Phu-Son without you. . . . I mean it. . . . If you will not come willingly, I will carry you off."

"Darling, I cannot let you run the risk of . . ."

"Well," I interrupted again, "I have given you my word. Directly I get permission from Luong-Tam-Ky to go, I shall do so—and I shall not go without you. Nothing on earth will induce me to do so."

"And it will be a thousand times more difficult if you resist abduction," I smiled.

Mary broke down, sobbed quietly, and gave in.

"Suppose I cause your death," she wept.

"Suppose you don't talk nonsense," I replied.

"Well, I could die too," she said, "and how willingly, if you were dead."

"But I shan't be," I assured her. "I am going to get you safely down to Hanoi, and you'll never in all your life set eyes on John Collins again."

"Oh, if I could only think so!" she whispered, and I seemed to get a glimpse of what the horror of life with that Chinese half-caste had been.

And then we tried to make our plans; and she agreed with me that it would be best for her to disguise herself either as a Chinese woman of the coolie class, or as a young dacoit. That, it seemed best to leave to her. She could try both disguises, and see whether, in the tunic and trousers of a Chinese woman, or in the cotton coat and *panaung* of an Annamese, she made the more convincing figure.

It would not matter greatly. We should be a well-armed and truculent party; we should avoid villages as far as possible; our guide, provided by Luong-Tam-Ky, would be only too anxious to deliver us safely, and would easily and convincingly explain us; and he would be able to use the dread name of Luong-Tam-Ky, should that be necessary, between Phu-Son and the Red River.

No, what I feared was not the dangers of the journey, great as those undoubtedly were, but those of pursuit and capture by Luong-Tam-Ky.

What would happen in that case, was a nightmare thought, something from which the mind shied away like a terrified horse.

For, after all, apt and useful tool to his hand though Fate had made me, I was not indispensable.

There were others whom he could send to General Voyron with his letter proposing an alliance. Naturally I was by far the best messenger in the circumstances, but I was not essential. He could send a regular diplomatic mission under a flag of truce.

And, if I had read the man rightly, vengeance on anyone who thwarted, deceived, defied or robbed him, would be very sweet, very dear. Probably even sweeter and dearer than gratified ambition.

And, as I have said, I realized that I was not absolutely necessary to the gratification of his ambition.

If I read him rightly, my capture and punishment would be the prime and primary desire and consideration of his cruel soul. . . . Punishment! He would surpass himself.

And what of Mary, if pursuit and capture were successful. Her punishment would be different from mine, and it would be lifelong—mine a matter of days, perhaps hours; hers a matter of years, perhaps decades.

And yet I could not leave her.

No, of course I could not; for if I went off in peace with honour and his blessing, abandoning her there, her fate would be almost as bad as if I took her and she were recaptured.

If I seem to labour the point of my terrible anxiety and indecision, my arguing back and forth, I may be conveying some faint impression of the labour of my soul, the fear, the agony of mind, that I endured while awaiting Luong-Tam-Ky's orders, and making preparations for the journey.

And if that journey had seemed a pretty hopeless undertaking when I was contemplating getting into Phu-Son as a spy, what did it seem now, when I was proposing to make it accompanied by the woman I loved more than anything in the world, and pursued by the man I feared more than anything in the world.

Three days later, Luong-Tam-Ky sent for me, said that he had learnt that Colonel Collins had joined General Wun Kai Shek, that Luong-Tam-Ky's own emissaries had reached General Wun Kai Shek first, and that he himself had come to a most satisfactory understanding with the Chinese General. They understood each other perfectly—both on the subject of the unpleasant fate of Colonel Collins and of the future employment of General Wun Kai Shek's troops and General Wun Kai Shek himself.

"But was Colonel Collins proposing to return here with General Wun Kai Shek?" I asked.

"He was not," replied Luong-Tam-Ky. "He was on his way to Peking with a tale about myself. And now he is on his way to Heaven, with a tale about himself; doubtless plausible—but unconvincing, I fear."

"Start to-night," he concluded, "and make all dispatch by the shortest route.

There is no point whatever in your visiting the New Fort at Thay-Taong for, as I have informed General Voyron in this letter, I march in a few days to take it over, garrison it with my men, and hold it henceforth as my own Head-quarters—the seat of government of the Northern Province of Yen Thé of which I shall be *Préfet* and Commander-in-Chief."

And, the wish being father to the thought, I endeavoured to persuade myself that, since the French would jump at the chance of this alliance, the New Fort would never be besieged by them, would indeed become their own fort, as its Commandant would be their ally, tenant and nominee.

This would shorten my journey greatly, and lessen the number of days to be spent in the jungle, on the way to the Red River.

But it would not do, argue with myself as I might.

It was entirely possible that Luong-Tam-Ky's scheme might go wrong; that the Chinese General Wun Kai Shek might remain loyal to his Emperor, bluff Luong-Tam-Ky, double-cross him, and put a spoke in his wheel—or remove the wheel altogether; that, having disposed of Luong-Tam-Ky, he might seize the New Fort himself, or, at least, strengthen its garrison (of De-Tam's men) and defend it stoutly against the French.

No, I must explore the place, learn all about it, make a plan of its fortifications and defences, and map the surrounding country.

Of course I must. How could I possibly go back to Deleuze, having achieved what I had, and confess that I had left undone the most important thing of all, failed to seize one of the most golden opportunities ever vouchsafed to a spy?

The immediate question was as to whether I should tell Luong-Tam-Ky that I must see the New Fort before I returned to my Head-quarters; make it a stipulation that he should allow me to do this if he wanted me to be his ambassador to the French, or at least his completely informed messenger and plenipotentiary.

And, even while Luong-Tam-Ky stared at me, his hard bright boot-button eyes expressionless, I decided that I would say nothing. He was giving me the chance to leave Phu-Son, and I would take it without suggestion, argument, or cavil. If I said I must go to the New Fort and he said I must not, he would probably see that I didn't.

If I said nothing at all, he would assume that I acquiesced in what he said about there now being no need for me to go there.

No, I would say nothing. Let me get away from this place, taking Mary with me, before the situation changed and something worse befell.

Upon this I decided.

Would the whole of my life thenceforward have been different if I had decided

otherwise?

"Very well, your Excellency," I replied. "I will start to-night."

"Come here toward midnight, and you shall repeat to me exactly what you are going to say to your Intelligence people. I will hand over this letter to you, and give you your orders. You may go."

§2

Thankfully I went from the *Yamen*.

As I passed Colonel Collins's house I hastily glanced round.

No-one in sight.

Unceremoniously opening the door, I slipped inside. Mary, her heart in her mouth, had been watching from behind the partly-closed shutters.

She came to me, and I threw my arms about her. Taking my face between her hands she drew it down to hers; and among the things that I shall not forget is that kiss. Not only our lips but our hearts, our very souls, met and mingled and became one.

"To-night, Mary," I whispered as soon as I could speak. "Have you decided on the disguise?"

"Yes, I'm going to be a hill-man. I can make myself look just like a villager from the Northern Shan States or a Karen or a Kamu jungle man. They are about my build and the dress lends itself splendidly. Dirty baggy trousers and loose coat and my hair scraped up on top and tied up in a *muäk* or *kän*, a sort of little turban. I could look the part to perfection, and nobody would dream that I was a woman."

"And you really dare make the venture, Mary?" I asked.

"My darling, nothing on earth would induce me to remain here—alive—after you had gone. Would you have me do so?"

"No . . . Luong-Tam-Ky says that your husband is dead. Wun Kai Shek killed him—at Luong-Tam-Ky's request—as a traitor. I should think it's true. He *must* speak the truth sometimes."

And of course I would not leave her, in any case. It was unthinkable. Collins having left her to her fate (and whether he were still alive or not), there was nothing else for it but to take this desperate chance of saving her from it.

And there, in the very shadow of Death, we had our hour of love.

And when I rose to go,

"My darling," she whispered, "whatever happens, we have had this."

CHAPTER XXIX

That night there assembled at my hut, a band of cut-throat ruffians; the biggest ruffian, in every sense, of them all, myself; my faithful *Doi* and his brethren as choice a gang of jungle dacoits as ever terrorized a peaceful village or raided and robbed the caravan of a harmless trader.

Armed to the teeth, we were arrayed in motley garments, partly correct jungle wear of *panaung* and short cotton coat, partly a travesty of Chinese military uniform. But there was nothing burlesque about our Lebel rifles and ammunition, our razor-edged *mâchètes*, and the heavy revolver that dangled from my belt.

To the *Doi* I explained the situation as it concerned the wife of Colonel Collins—that she was a compatriot of mine whom I was going to rescue from the robber camp because her husband had deserted her there; and made it abundantly clear to him that, whoever did or did not arrive safe and sound at Houi-Bap, the *Nai-Mem* Collins must do so. And that, like myself, he and his brothers must be prepared to lay down their lives in her defence.

Then and there I bade him harangue the other *tirailleurs* to that effect, and to make it clear to them that the present sole reason for their existence was to get the white *Nai-Mem* in safety down the Red River.

This he did with most obvious earnestness and sincerity, and I could see that the others received and accepted his instructions as a sacred charge.

I was cheered and enheartened by their patent willingness, loyalty, and fidelity, and promised myself that, if all went well, when we reached our destination, they should not find me lacking in gratitude and the expression thereof.

I was touched and grateful, and was, somewhat dumbly, moved to give expression to my feelings. To their amazement, I solemnly shook hands with each one of them, a gesture which gave me pleasure and some relief for pent-up emotion, and gave them a sense of the importance and solemnity of the occasion.

The *Doi* was delighted, and explained to his brethren that this was not only a signal mark of honour, but an expression of my utmost confidence, and an unbreakable seal upon our verbal compact to carry the matter through and to be faithful unto death.

I then bade the *Doi* go to Colonel Collins's house, give three double knocks and three single knocks upon the shutters nearest to the door, and wait till someone dressed as a Shan, a Karen or a Kamu man came out. That would be a smallish person, in very baggy trousers, a very loose baggy coat, and hair scraped up under a small turban-like head-binding.

This small hill-man was to be taken to the gate where the party would await me. None of them would speak to, or know anything about, this individual except that "he" was my personal servant or boy. If anyone at the camp gates was in any way inquisitive on any subject whatsoever, they were to be extremely truculent, pull out their *mâchètes* and ask whether the inquisitor hadn't got an ear too many.

In point of fact, it was extremely improbable that any notice would be taken of them. General Luong-Tam-Ky would have seen to that.

I felt quite sure that, unless he were playing some incredibly devious cat-and-mouse game, our departure would be facilitated in every way. Nor was it likely that one so immersed in affairs of state and matters of high policy, including his own immediate future, would be likely to interest himself in the slightest degree concerning my domestic arrangements, and whether I did or did not travel with a personal servant.

No, in point of fact, I had little or no anxiety in the matter of getting Mary safely away from Phu-Son.

It was the dangers of the journey that appalled me, and, greatest of all, the danger of pursuit and capture by Luong-Tam-Ky as soon as he discovered that she had vanished, and guessed, as immediately he would do, that she had escaped with me.

"Carry on, *Doi*," said I, saw my faithful band creep away into the darkness, took a last look round the hut in which I seemed to have lived for years, and made my way to Luong-Tam-Ky's house in the *Yamen*.

With a grim smile, The Shadow met me at the door and conducted me to the well-furnished silk-hung room where Luong-Tam-Ky spent his leisure hours in the study and contemplation of the teachings of Confucius.

From beneath a cushion of the wide low dais-like bed on which he sat, the General produced a sort of small scroll which was, in point of fact, a letter written on a long narrow strip of paper, rolled about a small cylinder of wood and tied round with thin silk cord, and sealed with wax.

"Here is my message to your General," he said. "See that he gets it safely," and proceeded to wrap it in a piece of oiled silk. "Should you lose it—and I recommend that you do not lose it—give General Voyron my verbal message.

"Tell him that by the time you reach him, I shall be sole and supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Chinese irregular army hitherto commanded by myself and General Ba-Ky, and of a strong force of Chinese regulars (at present) commanded by General Wun Kai Shek; that my headquarters will be the Citadel of the New Fort of Thay-Taong; and that, in return for my assistance in suppressing the

Annamese rebellion and guarding the Yunnan frontier against invasion from China, I shall expect to be appointed *Préfet* of the Northern Province of Tonking; receive a subsidy to be mutually agreed upon hereafter, and such munitions of war as I may consider necessary for the proper pacification of Northern Tonking and the protection of the Yunnan-Kwangsi Marches.

"In point of fact, the sooner your General agrees to my terms and comes to a satisfactory arrangement with me, the better it will be for the French, inasmuch as this long and wearisome war will be the sooner ended."

And much more to the same effect—all very interesting, and not the least interesting feature of it being the fact that this devious-minded villain in whose hands Machiavelli himself would have been but a babe, obviously trusted me completely. I suppose that was one of the secrets of his power and success—knowing that there were people whom he could trust, and trusting them. A lesser man than he, Ba-Ky for example, would have trusted nobody, and been the loser thereby.

And, having received his last instructions, I took my leave of General Luong-Tam-Ky, and never in my life did I with greater pleasure bid anyone farewell.

Escorted by The Shadow, who, I felt, regretted our parting inasmuch as I was still whole and hale, and sound in wind and limb, I made my way to the southern gate of the camp, and found my little company awaiting me.

At The Shadow's bidding, the gates were opened, and we filed out on to the track that led to the jungle, our numbers the same as on our arrival, but how incredible a change—Mary Collins in the place of the detestable De-Nha.

And in my heart I prayed that the same number might in safety reach Houi-Bap.

CHAPTER XXX

I will not set forth wearisome details of our jungle march, one day of which was so like another; nor of my visit to General De-Tam's wonderful Citadel, called by the Annamese the New Fort, at Thay-Taong.

Suffice it to say that, even to me, no expert, it was obviously a marvel of military engineering skill, a place of such strength that no force unequipped with artillery could hope to take it by assault. Quite evidently it was a stronghold that would yield only to long and patient siege, or to intensive pounding with shrapnel and high-explosive shells, and it seemed to me a most particularly fortunate thing, from the French point of view, that Luong-Tam-Ky was proposing to hold it as an ally and confederate of the French.

It solved an almost insoluble problem, for how a brigade, with artillery, was ever to reach and invest this distant jungle place, I could not see.

And while I spied, measured, and mapped, Mary remained hidden in our little secret jungle camp, a kilometre or so from the Fort, in the care and guardianship of the *Doi*. Always he or I was with her, and I felt that with him she was as safe as with me, probably safer, for he had a trained jungle sense that I lacked.

In the course of a long and somewhat varied life, I have met few men whom I trusted as I did this semi-civilized Annamese ex-dacoit. He was a man, and in the essentials he was a gentleman, for all his yellow hide, blackened teeth, and deplorable attitude to the acquisition of loot, the smoking of opium, the slitting of throats, and the torture of deserving enemies.

And to my overwhelming love for the woman who had put her life in my hands were added respect immeasurable and the highest admiration for her courage.

Battle bravery is cheap enough; the expression of physical courage, in hot blood, easy; but how many men possess the dogged and enduring cold courage of women in the matter of bearing pain, hardship, and suffering, and that acute and cruel discomfort which combines mental misery and physical wretchedness.

It made my heart ache to see her suffering, to see her reduced to living like a savage; marching mile after mile, hour after hour, until she was ready to drop with fatigue; to see her sleeping on the ground like an animal, with no covering or protection above or beneath her; to see her eating the horrible, ill-cooked food on which we had to subsist, mainly dirty rice, stinking dried fish, garlic, unripe unpalatable jungle fruit and berries.

Occasionally, when camping, or rather halting, for the night near a village, the

Doi would be able to scrounge a pot of stew, the chief ingredient of which might or might not have been dog, sometimes was undoubtedly snake—for eels are not found in the heart of the jungle—or a curry of bamboo-shoots, sweet-potatoes, brinjals and other strange vegetables.

One memorable feast remains in my mind, provided by a headman who gathered from the *Doi* that we were the advance-guard of a large Black Flag force, a feast of which the *pièce de résistance* was stewed iguana, and which Mary, in the firm belief that it was veal, thoroughly enjoyed.

But when night found us on our jungle track, far from any village, rice and tightened belts comprised the dinner menu, though breakfast was sometimes better than dinner by reason of our companions' cleverness in setting snares for "small deer" on the jungle run-ways. Skinned, cleaned, dissected and cooked, these forest fauna could, and did, pass as rabbits, hares, jungle fowl, and similar acceptable articles of diet. In point of fact, they were nothing more than rats and other little beasts of that kind. I am no naturalist, but fancy that some of them may have been creatures of the *genus* ichneumon and civet-cat.

The method of cooking these was simple. The meat was cut into small pieces. Each morsel was then impaled on a small wooden skewer and held over the camp fire, being constantly turned about until cooked on all sides. It was then eaten off the skewer, and another piece took its place to be cooked in turn.

One disappointment Mary suffered owing to the *Doi's* unfounded enthusiasm as to the acceptability of a novel item for the bill of fare. For, one day, we entered a tract of jungle which was suddenly alive with the sound of a loud and incessant whirring and hissing and a curious chirping noise.

"Good!" grinned the *Doi*, "we shall feast to-night!"

Abruptly halting and grounding their rifles, he and his brethren promptly started the hunt. And, unlike men who hunt by sight, and dogs who hunt by scent, they hunted by ear, each man selecting a noise and pursuing it to its source. The source might be half-way up a tree, in the heart of a bush, under a pile of boulders, or a foot deep in the ground, but with dogged and untiring zeal they tracked it down and secured it.

"It" proved to be a large insect of the beetle or grasshopper variety, presumably some local brand of cicada. These roasted, the *Doi* informed me, would provide a noble feast that night.

They did, a feast in which Mary and I did not join. To the wonderment of our Annamese friends, we ate a handful of rice, while they, with smacking of lips, grunts of joy, and rubbings of happy stomachs, fed fatly on their roasted beetles.

I think, on the whole, they decided that our religion forbade the eating of insects, and they respected us for our self-denial and strict observance of our law.

And so we fared along, over the hills and through the jungle, our return journey being very similar to the upward one, in its daily experiences and adventures. . . . But oh, how different for me!

On the outward journey I had been full of doubt, anxiety and fear. Now I was happy. In spite of my anxiety for Mary, I was filled with joy. My heart sang with happiness, and daily, hourly, my love for Mary seemed to do that which was surely impossible—to increase. Undoubtedly my admiration did, as I marvelled at the cheerful courage with which she faced the hardships of this forced march that was no mean feat of endurance for a man as strong as I, no light undertaking for those born jungle men, my *tirailleurs*. Foot-sore, half-starved, weary to death, she never uttered one word of complaint, one syllable of self-pity. On the contrary, her sole concern was lest she should be a drag, a hindrance, a brake upon the wheel of our progress. Never would she allow us to show consideration for her in the matter of wayside halts, earlier camp-making at evening, or later camp-breaking in the morning.

I use such expressions from military habit, as though we pitched *tents d'abri* and formed a real camp, whereas in point of fact, our sole bivouac gesture was the lighting of a fire when this was possible. Where we halted we sat and ate, and where we ate we lay down and slept, save whomsoever of our party was on sentry duty.

And actually Mary proposed that she should take her turn at this, alleging that we were just as tired and as much in need of sleep as she was.

Here, however, I drew the line, of course.

But in this one particular alone did her daily routine on this journey differ from ours. As we rough and hardy men lived and ate and marched, so did this delicately-nurtured woman, and when I endeavoured to commiserate and offer the comfort of hope, she assured me that she was happier than ever she had been in all her life.

"Dear," she said, "what is a little physical weariness, a little hunger? Don't you realize that I am marching out of a prison in which I have lived in misery of mind body and soul; in which I have suffered for years that have seemed like centuries? . . . Sinbad, I am with you. What more do I want? I would sooner live like this, in this jungle, for the rest of my life than be separated from you. . . ."

One night, at a spot where the *Doi* calculated that we were some three marches from the river, he woke me up. I was sleeping beside Mary, beneath a great thick spreading tree. On the other side of it, three *tirailleurs* slept with their feet toward the ashes of the camp fire, over which they had cooked joints of rat on little skewers. Each man was swathed from head to foot in a dirty cotton sheet which, by day, must have functioned as a turban, a loin-cloth, a sash or a shawl. There, beside the jungle path, the *Doi* had stretched himself, while, in a circle about us, patrolled the sentry with shouldered rifle. This man, the *Doi's* brother, had wakened him because, as he expressed it, he felt unhappy, uneasy in his mind.

This, to me, sounded a somewhat inadequate reason for disturbing the camp, but obviously not so to the *Doi*. He could quite understand a sixth sense telling a man that something was wrong and that some danger threatened, something unspecified and unknown, but nevertheless both real and imminent.

"Has Ai Pow seen or heard anything?" I asked.

"Nothing, *Nai*, but he feels, smells, and tastes something."

"What in the name of the Great Grandfather of all Devils and Dragons do you mean?"

"What I say, *Nai*. He feels that we are surrounded. He smells something in the breeze. And he has a taste in his mouth, a sort of Chinese flavour."

I knew enough to realize that it was quite pointless to argue about the matter, or to ridicule the *Doi's* statement.

"Tell him to wake the others and stand-to," I ordered. "What do you think we had better do, *Doi*? Break camp and move on?"

I had sufficient sense, sufficient faith, wisdom and understanding, to put myself in the *Doi's* hands when in the jungle and in the presence of some jungle danger.

"No, *Nai*," he replied. "If we are surrounded as Ai Pow thinks, and as I believe we are, it would be far better to wait for dawn, so that we can see where we are going and what we are doing. If we go blundering along in the dark, we may get shot or slashed by friends."

"Have we any friends?" I asked.

"Who knows? If it is some dacoit *tha'han*, we can soon persuade them we are friends."

I spent the rest of that night in the greatest mental discomfort and anxiety, for the *tirailleur's* suspicions and apprehension had infected me with the fatal microbes of doubt and fear.

Truly he who loves gives a hostage to fortune. Had this happened on the way up, I should have been merely excited. Now I was frightened.

Slowly the night wore away, and it seemed many long hours ere "morning in the bowl of night had flung the stone that put the stars to flight."

As soon as it was light enough to see the tree-trunks and make out the track, I gave orders for departure. No fire was to be lighted, and we must move off unenheartened by food or so much as a drink of hot tea.

Poor Mary. Her preparations for leaving her resting-place and starting on a day's march consisted merely in rising from the rough ground on which she had lain in uneasy slumber.

Ai Pow and another *tirailleur* I ordered to march a hundred paces ahead; then *Doi* Linh Nghi; Mary just behind him; I just behind Mary; and the other two *tirailleurs* a hundred paces in the rear, so that we had our point and rear-guard and our main body of three.

And just as I gave the order to march, a Snider banged.

"That wasn't half a kilometre away," whispered the *Doi*, and I myself had estimated the distance at about three or four hundred yards.

"It wasn't fired toward us," he added.

And, scarcely had he spoken, when heavy firing broke out, increased in volume and spread in extent, until we seemed to be almost ringed by skirmishing troops.

What on earth could this mean?

Was it possible that a French force had made its way as far north as this, and been attacked at dawn by a force of Black Flags?

No. That was absurd. Quite impossible. And if there had been a small French *groupe mobile* or a big patrol, in this part of the world, which of course there was not, it would not be distributed in a wide circle—as evidently these opposing forces were.

"What's happening, *Doi*?" I asked.

"*Mai rü!*" ejaculated the *Doi*, and spat. "The gods alone know. There are no French or auxiliaries for hundreds of miles, and the Black Flags don't fight among themselves."

"Could the Chinese regulars be fighting the Phu-Son force?" I asked, realizing, as I did so, that the question was a foolish one.

"Not down here," shrugged the *Doi*. "If they fought at all—and why should they?—it would be north of Phu-Son, away up on the border. But the Emperor of China sent them to help De-Tam, not to fight him."

"What had we better do?" I asked.

"Hide. Get off the track, and hide," was the reply which accorded entirely with my own views.

It seemed to me that the best thing to do, indeed the only thing to do, was to lie down and see what happened. Whoever the opposing forces were, both could not be our friends, and probably neither was. It was the most puzzling affair I had ever encountered, and the only conclusion at which I could arrive was entirely unsatisfactory—that a large force of Black Flags was practising military manœuvres, staging a sham fight, in short—which was absurd.

Gathering my little force together again, I got them off the jungle path; and, in a tiny grassy basin in the heart of a bamboo thicket, itself completely surrounded by saplings, shrubs, undergrowth and thick scrub, we settled down to wait.

"Quite a *ka'n rop phung*—a regular battle," observed the *Doi*, as the volume of musketry increased.

Evidently Ai Pow had been right, amazingly right. We had been surrounded during the night; and, at dawn, the force that, intentionally or unintentionally, surrounded us, had been attacked.

"The attackers are the stronger," observed the *Doi* later.

"How do you know?"

"There are far more rifles being fired toward us than are being fired away from us," he said; and, as usual, he was right.

The sound of a rifle fired toward the listener is quite different from the sound of one fired in the opposite direction; and I noticed, the *Doi* having mentioned it, that the whip-like cracks of the attacking rifles were much more numerous and frequent than the duller reports of the defending rifles.

"Hark!" said Mary suddenly, a somewhat curious-sounding remark to make in the circumstances, until she added,

"I can hear voices," and, a moment later, shouts were distinctly audible and sounds of battle other than those of rifle-fire.

"Chinese," observed the *Doi*, as a loud screaming, yelling and shrieking—the noise that in the case of European troops would have been the cheering and hurrahs heralding and following a successful charge—suddenly broke out.

The distant hubbub subsided, a few shrieks and screams, horrible and suggestive, rent the air, and then silence fell.

"That's over," observed the *Doi*. "Nothing to do now but kill the wounded," he added.

"But who on earth are they?" I asked again. "What's happening?"

"We shall know before long," replied the *Doi* grimly. "We are in the middle of the ring."

At the moment I rather wished that I knew the Annamese for 'Job's comforter',

for undoubtedly the *Doi* was a good specimen of the breed.

All very well for him to be enjoying life; but although he would undoubtedly die in Mary's defence, he wasn't dying a dozen deaths hourly, as I was, listening to these sounds of savage battle and realizing the terrible danger in which she was, a new danger somewhat unnecessarily added to the thousand which I had realized, allowed for, and expected.

"What about trying to creep away now?" I suggested to the *Doi*, all sounds of conflict having died away.

"What about staying where we are?" he replied, in his usual blunt but not disrespectful manner. "We don't want to run into them, do we?"

"No, my good fool," I replied irritably. "We want to make our way through them and do a forced march to the river."

"You stay where you are, *Nai*," he replied. "Half of them will be hunting the fugitives down every jungle track there is; and the other half will keep a complete circle to catch those who are still inside it. While we are hidden here, we are safe. . . ."

But we were not.

Even as he spoke, there came crashing through the bushes a large party of dacoits.

Seizing our rifles, we sprang to our feet and faced them—and with as much hope and chance as a litter of blind puppies would have against a mob of hobnail-booted cudgel-wielding louts.

The *Doi* stared, swore and laughed.

"Luong-Tam-Ky's men!" he said. "What a fuss about nothing. . . ."

And as he spoke, I recognized the Sergeant who, in my first days at Phu-Son, had instructed me in the use of the rifle and the mysteries of military evolution.

How had they found us? Evidently they had seen signs of our having left the track and made our way to the bamboo thicket. Good jungle tracking. What did it mean? Whom could General Luong-Tam-Ky have been fighting?

Before I could ask the question, another band bore down the jungle path, turned aside in the direction of the Sergeant's mob and joined them.

Friends or enemies? Were we captured only to be dragged back whence we had come? Or would these people speed us on our way to the river?

And again, before I could ask a question, there was another irruption of men clad in the yellow cotton cloth uniform of the Phu-Son army; and, for some reason—instinct, intuition or sub-conscious horror of these men, my heart sank as I realized that their leader was The Shadow himself, and his followers Luong-Tam-Ky's own

bodyguard.

As one having authority, The Shadow thrust his way through the mob that clustered clamouring around us, clapped his huge hand heavily down upon my shoulder and smiled in a manner that even at that moment reminded me of the smile on the face of the tiger who carried the young lady of Riga.

"Good," he grunted. "Come along. The General wants you.

"He's been looking for you," he grinned, as I hung back. "Come along."

And there was nothing for it but to 'come along', though my knees were ready to knock together with terror as I realized that this pursuit and capture of my party by General Luong-Tam-Ky was the pursuit and capture of Mary. He had discovered her flight, immediately guessed that I had taken her, and had set out in pursuit. And the fact that he himself had led the hunt in person, showed the importance that he attached to her capture.

I felt physically sick with fear and horror.

What would he do to her? At best, force her to be his *congai* or *téasphiréa* or whatever they called it. At worst, punish her for daring to insult him by escaping.

And I had some idea of what Luong-Tam-Ky's punishments were apt to be.

And what would he do to my faithful *Doi* and his brethren, for helping her to escape?

The glimmerings of a faint hope dawned on the blackness of my despair as it occurred to me that, possibly, I might be able to use the political situation to help her. Conceivably it might be possible for me to persuade him that my assistance was so important as to be almost essential to the success of his plan for entering into alliance with the French.

But then again, what reason had I to suppose that I was the only messenger whom he could use?

On the other hand, I was undoubtedly the best and most appropriate envoy, ambassador plenipotentiary, for his purpose, inasmuch as I was not only in the confidence of the Military Intelligence authorities, but their own agent. There was a hope, a chance, it seemed to me as I stumbled along, humiliated to the uttermost depths, impotent and ashamed, and feeling more like a whipped cur than ever I had felt in my life.

I, the clever fellow, the big brave strong man—who had been going to save Mary and take her to a place of safety—outwitted and captured by the Chinese bandit, seized and brought back when he wanted me, like a broken-winged crow on the end of a string.

I glanced back at Mary following close behind me, the *Doi* and his *tirailleurs* in

single file behind her. Not by word or movement had she betrayed the fact that she was anything but what she purported to be, my Kamu jungle-servant. She was still brave, stout-hearted and enduring. She returned my look, and forebore even to whisper a word in English; and her courage gave me strength, for I realized—or did I?—what it must mean to her to be going back into the power of Luong-Tam-Ky; and moreover, to be going back into the power of that sub-human fiend straight from the arms of the man whom she loved.

And I think I put it coldly when I merely say 'whom she loved', for she had made it clear to me that she worshipped and adored me with the pent-up thwarted passion of a lifetime of repression.

And suddenly I realized that there still swung at my right hip the heavy revolver loaded in six chambers with big soft leaden bullets.

Had I the strength and courage, the unselfishness and nerve to shoot her dead; to shoot Luong-Tam-Ky; to use three other cartridges in ridding the world of The Shadow and a couple of his assistant torturers, and then to shoot myself?

And if I had, was it likely that Luong-Tam-Ky would give me the opportunity? . . . But what an amazing thing that I had not been disarmed!

And glancing around me, I realized that the *Doi* and his men still carried their rifles and wore their *mâchètes*. Was this an oversight for which someone would pay dearly when it was noticed, or was it sheer contempt of our paltry half-dozen surrounded by hundreds of equally well-armed dacoits?

And suddenly the jungle path debouched into a savannah-like glade in which was a considerable camp. In its centre was a big tent, its front rolled up.

Inside the tent, surrounded by his officers, scribes and attendants, sat Luong-Tam-Ky, sipping tea.

As we approached the marquee, the dacoit mob dispersed about the camp; the body-guard, headed by The Shadow, closing in about us.

Entering the tent, The Shadow kow-towed, spoke in some swift hissing dialect of China, and drawing his great sword, took his stand in his accustomed place, behind his master.

A hundred curious eyes gazed at us from faces expressionless.

In desperate anxiety I stared at the inscrutable visage of Luong-Tam-Ky, foolishly and vainly hoping to gather something from its expression, whether of anger, triumph, hate, or contempt.

Again it was as though I tried to read the contents of a closed book.

I did my best to maintain an unrevealing poker-face; and, anyhow, I could match his silence and let him speak first.

He did.

"Good morning, my young friend," quoth General Luong-Tam-ky. "I am very thankful to find you are safe. I was quite anxious about you."

Now, what was this?

Some hideous mockery, no doubt.

Thankful to find I was safe, was he!

Safe and sound and hale and whole—for torture? He had been anxious, had he!

Anxious lest I should get to the river and escape before he overtook me?

I made no reply.

"Yes, I was very much afraid that that evil man Ba-Ky had caught you."

Ba-Ky? What was he talking about?

"It was what you call a near thing—isn't that the expression?—touch and go. He'd have got you at dawn to-day, if I hadn't got him first. My one regret is that the rascal escaped. But we shall catch him, we shall catch him. And meanwhile I must see you safe to the river. Yes, I shall not enjoy that tranquillity, which is the wise man's *summum bonum* in life, until I have seen you safely embarked in a good sampan on the Red River.

"Yes, and with two or three escorting sampans, I think, with some of my best troops in them. Not that that really would be necessary, for I will take good care that Ba-Ky never interferes with you—or with me and my plans—again."

"Ba-Ky?" I stammered. "You were fighting General Ba-Ky this morning?"

So that was it, was it?

"Yes. A treacherous fellow. Disingenuous. Distinctly dishonest, in fact, and a fool. He actually thought that he could make overtures to the Chinese General Wun Kai Shek, join forces with him and eliminate me! . . . Yes, 'eliminate' is the *mot juste*. . . . And then, no doubt, he'd have turned upon General Wun Kai Shek and made himself Commander-in-Chief of the Phu-Son army and the Chinese reinforcements too. . . . Why, I shouldn't be surprised to learn that he actually contemplated going over to the French, entering into an alliance with them in return for being made *Préfet* of Northern Tonking with headquarters at the New Fort of Thay-Taong! That's the sort of man General Ba-Ky is."

And all this Luong-Tam-Ky said without a smile, without the flicker of an eyelid.

And without a smile or the flicker of an eyelid, I agreed with him that that was indeed the sort of man that General Ba-Ky was.

But what had this to do with me and my capture?

Luong-Tam-Ky enlightened me.

"And, of course," he continued, "his one idea was to catch you and prevent your

reaching French Headquarters with my message. And now you are wondering how he knew about that."

And here I fancied, doubtless wrongly, that the unsmiling Luong-Tam-Ky smiled reminiscently.

"Yes, that was Major Li Hsian Chang's last effort; his attempt at revenge," he explained.

For a few moments Luong-Tam-Ky fell silent, evidently in contemplation of a pleasant memory.

"Yes, he died well, that one. Suffered pain like a true Confucian. And I assure you, my young friend, it really was pain. For I gave him of my best. But not a word did I get out of him. Not a syllable. Not a sound. It was an almost perfect performance on his part. Practically perfect, for it was marred only by one faint sound of an indrawn breath. So, on the whole, I think I may say that I won, for I did wring just that expression of suffering from him. Faint and slight, I admit, but undeniable.

"Yes, he drew in his breath when I . . ."

But I cannot set down here in cold print what Luong-Tam-Ky then said.

"On the other hand, perhaps he died thinking that he won, for he admitted nothing, confessed nothing," he continued. "And he did have just that small satisfaction—that when Ba-Ky went to have a look at him, in my absence, to see how he was getting on, to see how certain little ideas of mine had worked, and to try a few of his own—the good Major Li Hsiang Chang did have the slight satisfaction of telling General Ba-Ky what I was going to do.

"How did he know? Why, since he was *in articulo mortis*, on the very point of death, I had amused myself by showing him how far his own plans had gone astray, and how nicely mine were prospering. I had told him how I was going to delude and eliminate General Wun Kai Shek, take over his troops, eliminate Ba-Ky, seize the New Fort at Thay-Taong, and then, really powerful, with my large new army and fine Citadel, propose myself as ally to the French and enemy of the Chinese.

"And I told him how I had sent off you, his late captive, as my ambassador.

"Well, there he scored a point, for as I say, when I went away to dine, Ba-Ky came into the torture chamber to enjoy an hour's sport with the Major, and, in a nasty vindictive spirit of vengefulness, he told Ba-Ky everything. . . . And promptly the beastly Ba-Ky, impetuous as a bull and clumsy as a crocodile, himself started off in pursuit of you with a company of his best Chinese!

"Luckily for you, your visit to the New Fort put him off the scent, and he actually got ahead of you, reached the Red River and turned back.

"On the return journey he got news of you at Phu-lu, turned back once more, made an encircling drive and had got you in the middle of it, when I fell upon him this morning, just in the nick of time. . . . I, of course, was far better informed as to your movements than Ba-Ky was, and knew that you must be pretty close to the point at which he was making his drive."

I was beginning to breathe more freely. Not a word had he said about Mary. Could it be that in the sudden upheaval, the *coup d'état* at Phu-Son, he had been too occupied to think of her; too busy plotting and planning and taking steps for his own advance and his rival's downfall, even to realize that she had disappeared?

And, as though by telepathy, by an act of thought-reading, he straightway spoke of what was in my mind.

"Yes, I could calculate your progress pretty accurately—apart from reports that my spies brought back from time to time—as your speed must be that of the slowest member of your party. Though I must say that Beautiful Quiet Fairy has kept up wonderfully. Yes, a remarkably fine performance. And I must compliment her on the disguise. . . ."

And here he bowed gracefully to the dirty, sullen-looking, loutish coolie—who was Mary Collins.

Instinctively she shrank against me as that dreadful, though expressionless, mask of a face was turned toward herself, those cruel eyes probing her own.

"Yes, Beautiful Quiet Fairy has been wonderful," he whispered.

Luong-Tam-Ky turned the stare of his cold eyes from Mary's face to mine.

"I am very glad you took her away from Phu-Son," he said. "Very glad. Good! . . . See that you get her safely to Houi-Bap. It gives me great pleasure to know of your forest idyll, of how happily she went away with you, of your joyous honeymoon in these sylvan glades."

And, once again, what was this? Could I believe my ears? Was this devil mocking me, dispelling my fears and raising my hopes, the better to torture me thereafter?

"But I thought . . ." I blurted out.

"Yes, I know you did," soothed Luong-Tam-Ky. "No doubt Beautiful Quiet Fairy has told you of the talk I had with her when I visited her at her house. Only a little subterfuge, a trick. Hardly that; more of a jest, really. What I really wanted to discover was the exact relationship—mental and spiritual relationship, I mean—between Beautiful Quiet Fairy and the man Collins. To find out how far she was in his confidence, and what she really knew of his movements and actual intentions. I very quickly came to the conclusion that she knew nothing at all; that she was not in

his confidence in the slightest degree; and that she was of no use to me whatsoever."

"But you . . ." I blunderingly began in my bewilderment.

"Made love to her? Proposed to take her into my household? . . . Do you really suppose that I, I of all people, could love a European woman; could really interest myself in, could actually desire, anything so—undesirable? A person so ugly, unattractive, unpleasant? I suppose you Europeans will never realize that, to Chinese of culture and refinement, you are most repulsive, with your horrible pointed noses, your ghastly red or pink-and-white colouring, your hideous hair, your dreadful eyes, set at such an unnatural angle. And I suppose, too, you will never realize how extremely objectionable you smell.

"Make love to a woman—and to a *European* woman? *Pah!* The thought makes me feel sick."

As this sub-human or super-human devil talked, my feelings were a curious mixture of rage and relief; of anger that the impudent little yellow beast should speak thus of Mary; relief that he was not in love with her (to call it love); relief that he did not desire her, had no interest in her whatever. A tremendous load was being lifted from my mind as, slowly, I realized that we had not been pursued and captured that Luong-Tam-Ky might seize Mary, but that, on the contrary, we might be saved from Ba-Ky.

Then the thought crossed my mind—why should Ba-Ky be so anxious to prevent my reaching French headquarters?

And I decided that what he really wanted, of course, was documentary evidence of Luong-Tam-Ky's treachery to the Emperors of Annam and China.

He would conclude that I must be the bearer of a letter to the French General, and would be prepared to make any effort to obtain this letter for the undoing of his rival; or if he were able to kill him, to use it as evidence, reason, and excuse for the murder of his colleague.

And yet an insoluble sediment of doubt still lay at the bottom of my cup of happiness, beneath the joy and relief that was so quickly taking the place of the terror, horror, and despair with which our capture had filled my mind.

Did this man ever speak the truth?

Were things in this horrible *milieu* ever what they seemed?

Could it really be possible that he was entirely indifferent to Mary and her fate, and that he in no way resented my rescuing her from Phu-Son?

Well, that I should soon know, and could put it to the test at once.

"Then if your ever-victorious troops have defeated those of General Ba-Ky and driven them off, we can continue our march to the river?" I asked.

"But certainly. Immediately. The sooner the better. As I have said, I shall not feel easy in my mind until I have seen your sampan on its way. If you and Beautiful Quiet Fairy will honour my poor table with your presence at what I fear will be but a rough camp meal, I shall be charmed—and then you can resume your march at once. And since General Ba-Ky is still alive and presumably dangerous, you shall be preceded by a strong advance-guard, followed by an even stronger rear-guard, and accompanied by an escort. I myself will, meantime, take the field in search of the treacherous and detestable Ba-Ky himself."

And that excellent breakfast to which we—in the shadow of The Shadow—sat down in General Luong-Tam-Ky's luxurious tent, was, I suppose, the very strangest social function in which I have ever taken part.

I have no doubt that the General enjoyed himself.

Mary and I did not.

Luong-Tam-Ky took a malicious pleasure in making Mary uncomfortable, in addressing her ironically as Beautiful Quiet Fairy as he glanced at her torn, soiled and ragged clothing, her dirty hands, her stained disfigured face and tousled head.

Had the scoundrel had a trace of the hospitable intention that he repeatedly professed, he would have given her an opportunity to take a bath, and would, at any rate, have provided her with a change of clothing.

From time to time he professed to wonder how she would enjoy life at Houi-Bap as a camp-follower, a temporary *protégée* of a private soldier living in barracks when not on active service. . . .

Following my lead, Mary wisely and patiently refused to be angered; pretended not to understand the point of many of his observations, to be oblivious to the venom of his shafts of malicious wit, and impervious to the wounding stabs of his malignant tongue.

Inwardly I seethed and boiled. Outwardly I remained cool, telling myself how utterly harmless was this annoyance in comparison with what I had feared when first we were brought into his presence.

Still, we got a thoroughly good meal of well-cooked food, however little we enjoyed it; and, unpleasant as the present might be, the future was roseate.

Nevertheless, I was thankful that I carried his letter and message; thankful that he had a use for me, or I should have eaten that excellent curry, stew, shredded pork with chilli sauce, pickled turnips and fishes' eyes with unpleasant thoughts of poison.

For I felt intuitively—and, as I have said before, I am extremely intuitive, with a perception at times amounting almost to second sight—that, for some reason, this

man hated me, hated Mary, hated us both so bitterly that nothing would have given him greater pleasure than to wreak some horrible vengeance upon us, though vengeance for what, I knew not.

Toward the conclusion of this fantastic nightmare meal, Luong-Tam-Ky bade The Shadow call an officer whom he named.

To this man, the General gave instructions to send off a *Nai Roi Tri* at once, with twenty-five men, along the track to the nearest landing-place on the river; to order another *Nai Roi Tri* with twenty-five men, to parade at once and accompany me on my march; and to instruct a *Nai Roi Ek* to be ready to march, with fifty men, half an hour after I had started.

Evidently the worthy General most certainly intended that we should reach the Red River and our sampan in safety, if an escort of a Captain, two Lieutenants and a hundred men could ensure it, while he and his army not only covered our retreat, but scoured the countryside for the remaining forces of our would-be captor, Ba-Ky.

An hour later we resumed our march and, in spite of our advance-guard, rear-guard and escort, I maintained our former order; a couple of *tirailleurs*, then *Doi* Linh Nghi, Mary just behind him, I just behind Mary, and a couple of *tirailleurs* behind me.

The Chinese soldiers of our immediate escort under their *Nai Roi Tri* straggled along the path, some preceding us and some following.

In point of fact, I should have been much happier without their company, and should have felt safer lacking their protection.

On asking him, I found that the *Doi*, like myself, was unable to make up his mind as to whether we ran more danger from our escort, from parties of Ba-Ky's searching forces, or from wandering bands of dacoits, whether nominally in De-Tam's service or not. . . .

That night, we camped in greater luxury, the *Nai Roi Tri* producing two tiny tents, *sahats* for ground-sheets, and clean *thi's* or *nons* (a kind of thin mattress or *resai*); as well as hot cooked food—stew, curry and rice. Undoubtedly the officer had received instructions to care for our comfort as well as our safety.

But even then, so suspicious had I become, that to myself I murmured,

"*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*", as I eyed our plentiful and appetizing supper and the two tents complete with bedding. Positive luxury.

Feelings almost approximating to gratitude filled my mind as I realized that Mary would not be sleeping on the hard damp ground, exposed to dew or rain, to irritating or poisonous insects, or whatever might befall.

I woke in the morning almost happy. Sumptuously we breakfasted, and soon after sunrise, broke camp and resumed our march.

The second day of this phase of our journey was a repetition of the first, and at nightfall on the third we reached the Red River at the tiny three-hovel village of Bahn Cao, and made camp for the night, between the bivouac of the advance guard who had arrived some hours previously and that of our escort.

An hour later, the rear-guard under the *Nai Roi Ek* arrived and camped between us and the river.

Again we had an excellent supper and comfortable beds in our respective tents.

After supper, the three officers joined us for the ceremonial drinking of tea, and although it was mandarin tea of admirable flavour, it undoubtedly contained some narcotic.

For in the morning I did not wake as usual, before dawn, but was awakened later by the *Doi*. . . .

Slowly I came to full consciousness to find him shaking me violently. This fact alone warned me that something was wrong, for only the utmost urgency could excuse so gross a breach of Annamese manners as this laying-on of hands by a social inferior.

"Wake up, *Nai*, wake up!" he shouted, as with both hands he shook my shoulders. "Pull yourself together, quickly. *Wake up!* They have gone. *Pai lao! Pai lao!* They've all gone. . . . Listen. . . . *They've gone, and taken the Nai Mem with them*."

They had gone—and taken Mary with them.

CHAPTER XXXI

It is curious how little we remember of the details of the happenings before and after the greatest crises of our lives, even though the facts of the crisis itself may be indelibly seared upon the consciousness, deeply branded upon the memory.

I suppose I cannot have run the whole way from Bahn Cao to the spot at which Luong-Tam-Ky had been encamped. And yet it seems to me that I did—that I ran night and day without stopping. But that is absurd, for no man, no European at any rate, can run for two days and two nights—even with the incentives which were mine—without rest, food or sleep.

One reason, of course, why that return journey seems a featureless nightmare, an unbroken period of super-human attempt continuously to run and to walk and to stagger on, is because I was still under the influence of the narcotic drug which had been administered to us.

Whatever the drug was, its action was peculiar, for when the *Doi* shook me into wakefulness, I am quite sure that I grasped what he was shouting with the utmost urgency, in his frenzy of anger, of apprehension.

They had gone and taken Mary with them.

I grasped it.

I went to spring to my feet and was immediately crushed and buried beneath a land-slide of cool yet molten lead. I could not lift a finger, move an eyelid or utter a sound. I was conscious of this—and then lost consciousness completely.

Again I recovered sufficient consciousness to be aware that I was enclosed in a tightly-fitting coat of lead, a leaden shell moulded exactly to my body and placed in a coffin. . . . And then, that the *Doi* was tearing this thick leaden wrapping from about me; tearing it with his voice, a sharp-edged weapon that pierced and penetrated my brain, a white-hot instrument of agony that, torturing me, burned its way into my consciousness, my soul, my inmost being.

They had gone and taken Mary with them.

I knew it was he. I knew his voice. I grasped what he was saying. With horror I understood it, and again went to leap to my feet—and was again overwhelmed, embedded, as a toad enclosed in a pocket of limestone a hundred feet beneath the surface of the earth; in Stygian darkness; in a silence that could be felt; in an immobility terrifying, annihilating.

And again I would recover consciousness of the fact that I was alive; that I had an identity; that someone was shaking me violently and shouting in my ear; that it was

the *Doi*, and that they had all gone and taken Mary with them.

They had gone and taken Mary with them.

And at last the phenomenon had changed.

Instead of being overwhelmed in the black annihilating sea of molten lead, I managed to struggle free of it—to reach, as it were, dry land; to sit up; to look around; and then, with swimming senses, with a feeling of deadly nausea, a sensation that I was about to faint, and that if my head did not cease to spin round I should die, to seize the *Doi* with feeble hands for my support, and to understand what he had so long been trying to tell me—that we had all been drugged.

We had all been drugged.

Either I had been drugged more heavily than the others, or, being a European, had suffered more severely, had been less able to tolerate the drug.

According to the villagers—when the *Doi*, returning to consciousness, pulling himself together and shaking off the effects of the narcotic, had questioned them as to what had happened—the Chinese force had departed twenty-four hours before, the three officers taking my "servant" with them.

They had noticed this because the servant had struggled, fought and screamed.

Some of them, hanging about the camp on business of supplies and futile endeavour to get payment for them, had noticed the little scene, mainly because it struck them as curious that leaders of a dacoit band should take the trouble to drag away a servant thus, particularly an unwilling one; and curious that a flick with a *mâchète* had not ended the noisy and obstreperous coolie's protests.

And then—what helped to bring me to my senses even more than the cold water that was being dashed upon my head—was the *Doi* telling me that I had been unconscious for a day longer than he had.

With a supreme effort I got to my feet.

"They've been gone for two days?" I cried. "The *Nai Mem* was taken away two days ago?"

"Yes," replied the *Doi*. "The *lu thuong* here said I had been '*dead for a day*,' and I have been working for a day trying to get you back to life."

"You fool," I shouted. "Why didn't you start off after her at once? You cowardly, brainless . . ."

Reaching up, the *Doi* patted my shoulder soothingly.

"I sent the others, *Nai*," he said kindly, as a father to a distraught child. "As soon as they could crawl, I sent them. I thought I had better stay by you, and get you back to life."

"And they are a day behind them?" I said.

"Yes, *Nai*. The dacoits had twenty-four hours' start, and my men were very sick. But they'll hang on."

And it was then that I, reeling, staggering, and falling to the ground; rising and lurching on, scarcely stopping to be sick, began my two days' forced march back over the jungle track along which I had come so happily but two days ago.

As I have said, I remember no details of that journey, nor of my setting out. But the *Doi* must have flung haversack and water-bottle over my shoulders, and seen that I belted on *mâchète* and revolver ere I started. Also, either he or I had put my boots upon my feet and my turban on my head.

What I do know is that I out-distanced the *Doi* himself, that stout enduring hillman, half of whose life had been spent on jungle tracks.

Heaven alone knows how far and fast I ran before I fell and rested, but I left *Doi* Linh Nghi behind, and reeled into the camp of Luong-Tam-Ky alone.

§2

I was expected.

Quite evidently, Luong-Tam-Ky had counted on my doing precisely what I had done.

As I burst forth from the jungle track into the wide savannah in which Luong-Tam-Ky's camp was pitched, an officer in charge of a picket, the *Nai Roi Tri* who had been with my escort, sent a man running in the direction of Luong-Tam-Ky's head-quarter tent.

As I reached this, Luong-Tam-Ky himself, The Shadow as usual at his elbow, appeared in the opening.

"You've come back?" he said, his voice, though not his face, expressing surprise.

"Where is she?" I gasped, as soon as I could speak. "If you have harmed her, I . . ."

"But I thought you were four days' journey down the Red River by now!" expostulated Luong-Tam-Ky. "I thought you were the bearer of dispatches—of the utmost importance to your General and to me! I thought you were on special duty! And I thought I had entrusted you with . . ."

"Where is she, you dog?" I growled, and my flexed clutching hands must have risen toward his throat, for The Shadow raised the great naked sword that rested on his right shoulder.

"What turmoil of mind! What lack of self-control! What perturbation. . . ! You Europeans who think so highly of yourselves. . . ! Will you tell me why you have turned aside from your duty; oh, man of the nation that prates so much of *Duty*?"

I took a grip upon myself. Useless to have my skull split by The Shadow while I strangled his master. Useless to shoot them both, if I hoped to rescue Mary from this . . . this . . .

"You know why I have turned aside," I answered. "You know why I have turned back. What have you done with her? Where is she?"

"Of whom are you talking? Of Beautiful Quiet Fairy?"

"I am talking of Mrs. Collins."

"But what is she to you?"

"You know what she is to me. My compatriot. An Englishwoman, abandoned by her husband in a camp of Chinese . . ."

"Soldiers," supplied Luong-Tam-Ky. "Well? Did I send you from Phu-Son to take your . . . your—compatriot—to Houi-Bap, or to take my letter and message to your General? What are you, a Secret Service Agent or a woman's 'bearer', a male nurse, a 'Boy'? Or are you, perchance, a pimp or *procureur*?"

I think I must have raised my clenched fist. Certainly The Shadow raised his sword again.

"Or just a lover . . . of one who is another man's wife? And if I offered no objection to your taking a woman with you for your delight, is that any reason why you should lose a week on the journey? And then you have the insolence . . ."

"Listen," I interrupted. "I was taking Mrs. Collins down to Houi-Bap. You raised no objection. On the contrary, you went out of your way to be insulting about her appearance and person. You said you had no interest in her, whatsoever. . . . Why have you drugged me and my men, and kidnapped her? Did you think I'd go on, leaving her here in your hands? Where is she? Do you think I will go without her? If you want your message and letter taken to the French General and . . ."

"You said 'listen'," interrupted Luong-Tam-Ky, his voice still as silky, soft, and low as ever. "Suppose you listen while you have ears with which to hear. Are you, or are you not, a Secret Service Agent on a mission from your General? Have you, or have you not, a message of the utmost importance for him? Is there, or is there not, the greatest need for haste, the greatest urgency? Do you suppose I can stave off Ba-Ky and General Wun Kai Shek and De-Tam indefinitely? Not only must I know where I stand with the French, but they must know too. And here you waste days and days chasing a woman, while . . ."

"Waste days?" I shouted, almost foaming at the mouth with impotent rage, as this

smooth liar tortured me. "Waste days? Waste time? By whose orders was I drugged so that I was forty-eight hours unconscious?"

"I was not aware that you had been drugged," was the soft quiet reply. "If you mean you were intoxicated, blind and senseless, on *choum-choum*, could you not have been carried down the Red River in a sampan, drunk as a hog? Couldn't your men have taken their sottish leader on to the boat and let him sleep off the effects of his swinish debauch?"

"My men were drugged too, by your orders."

"Indeed? This is interesting news. Pray whence did you gather it? And, since you insist on wasting my time—suppose that, for some incredible reason unspecified, I had had you and your men drugged. Just supposing such rubbish, what was to prevent your getting on board your boat instead of coming rushing back here? Is that your European idea of trustworthiness, fidelity, duty?"

"Europeans do not abandon their friends," I replied. "My duty was to find out what had happened to Mrs. Collins. . . . Now then, I've had enough. Tell me where she is. I am going to see her; and, what is more, I'm not going on without her. If you want me to take your message and letter to Houi Bap, you can see me safe on board a sampan at Bahn Cao with Mrs. Collins—for I will not go without her."

"So! . . . You will not go on without her, eh? . . . Now why? . . . Sense of duty? I love and admire this wonderful 'sense of duty'—of which Europeans have the monopoly, of course. Your 'sense of duty'—to this woman—brought you back. . . . But, do you know, I should have thought your sense of duty to your military superiors, your sense of duty to your bond and promise to me, would have carried you on. I should have thought you would have said to yourself,

'*I have General Luong-Tam-Ky's message to repeat; I have his letter to deliver. The whole issue of this long and terrible war depends upon it. The fate of nations. My duty is to go on, even if I leave a thousand weeping, wailing women behind me.*' . . . A curious thing, this European sense of duty."

Will it be believed that such was the power of this man's personality, the hypnotic stare of his compelling eyes—or else the absolute truth of what he said, that I was confounded, convicted, ashamed?

He was right, of course. I had no duty but to Captain Deleuze and my military superiors. I had done absolutely wrong in turning back.

And then I remembered this devil's treachery, his poisoning of myself and my followers, with some foul drug. How could he prate of urgency when he had delayed me thus?

But did two wrongs make a right? Did his villainy provide any excuse for me? If he could afford to cause a couple of days' delay, that didn't prove that Captain Deleuze and the French authorities could. And if Luong-Tam-Ky, for his own ends, and to the danger of his own plans, had delayed me for two days, had I any right to add five or six more days' delay—to the danger of the French General's plans? Of course I had done wrong in turning back.

And as these thoughts flashed through my mind, my blood boiled again.

Let it *be* wrong! To Hell with their plans. What were they beside Mary's happiness, safety and life?

"Well?" continued the voice that was rapidly driving me mad. "What of this devotion to duty? Or was it devotion to the woman? . . . Now, tell me the truth—and you shall see her. Was it devotion to the woman?"

"What is that to you?" I growled as I fought to restrain myself from springing on him.

"Nothing. But it may be something to you—if you wish to see her again. . . . Do you love this woman? Was it because you loved this woman that you have failed in your duty to your superiors, broken your oath to me?"

"What is that to you?" I growled again. "Mind your own business. Why should I answer your question?"

"Because unless you do, you will never see her again. If you don't love her, presumably you don't want to see her. If you do love her, you shall not see her—unless you admit it."

"And if I do admit it, shall I see her?"

"Immediately."

"And shall I be free to take her away with me?"

"Absolutely. Perfectly free to do anything you like with her."

"Very well then, I do admit it. I do love her."

"*Ah-h-h-h-h!*" breathed Luong-Tam-Ky.

My confession seemed to give him the utmost satisfaction; for though his face showed nothing of his feelings, the sound that he uttered was definitely an expression of the greatest gratification.

"Come," he said. "She is in here."

And rising, he led the way to where a heavy curtain, consisting of a ceremonial *panaung* of thickest silk, richly worked in gold thread, hung over a doorway in the side of the tent.

Pulling this to one side, Luong-Tam-Ky passed through into another smaller tent forming a kind of annexe to the main marquee.

Impatient, excited, my heart beating fast, I followed close behind him, The Shadow treading on my heels.

He had spoken the truth.

Mary was there.

On a kind of bed or couch, and covered, all but her head, with a purple silken sheet, she lay.

Her eyes were closed, her face waxen white.

She was dead.

Even as I threw myself down beside the camp bed, now her bier, I knew that she was dead. Even before my lips found that hers were as cold and unresponsive as marble, I knew that she was dead.

Mary was dead.

So, for the time, were my heart, my brain, my mind.

My heart indeed was broken.

My spirit was broken.

And I was numbed, mind, body and soul.

So numb, so cold, that there was not even any warmth of anger in me, not a glow or spark of rage and wrath, as I turned to Luong-Tam-Ky and asked stupidly, as might a stricken child of a cruel elder.

"*Why did you do it?*"

I think nothing can so convey the utterly crushing weight of this blow, as the fact that I, Sinclair Noel Brodie Dysart, huge and powerful, should turn, still kneeling, and piteously ask of the slight small General Luong-Tam-Ky, who had murdered Mary, murdered my love, my life, my soul, my hope,

"*Why did you do it?*"

And as, dazed, numb, half-comprehending, and but semi-conscious, I knelt and seemed to feel my heart dying within me, Luong-Tam-Ky answered me.

"Why did I kill Beautiful Quiet Fairy?" he whispered. "Because she slighted and insulted me. Because she replied with harsh and evil words when I came to her house and told her that I loved her. Because she fled from Phu-Son and from me. . . . And incidentally, this is your punishment for helping her to do so. . . . Yes, Beautiful Quiet Fairy was foolish, and had she done nothing worse than I have said, I

might have spared her life—that, for the rest of her days, she might make atonement. But, alas, she herself made it impossible for me to show forth my clemency, my forbearance, my great and earnest desire to be merciful.

"Do you know what she did—only last night?

"She struck me in the face.

"To you dogs of Western barbarians that is but as—a kick to a dog. To me it was a matter for life-long remembrance. Not a cause for fierce red anger and deep black shame. I do not permit such intrusions upon the calm of my spirit. No—merely a matter of life-long remembrance for me, and punishment and death for her.

"I wonder if you've ever heard of the great Judge whose wife misconducted herself and then struck him in the face, and for whose sake he invented the marvellous torture thenceforth famous under the name of The Beauty's Bar . . . ? Beautiful Quiet Fairy misconducted herself with you and struck me in the face, and she too suffered the wonderful punishment of The Beauty's Bar.

"And thereafter she died."

His words beat upon my brain, penetrated to my understanding.

He had tortured, as well as killed, Mary.

This brought me trembling to my feet, but still so crushed and so broken with grief that I was not a man.

"And you," continued Luong-Tam-Ky, "are suitably punished too, I think, by your own act and deed. You loved this woman. You dared to love her, knowing that I proposed to raise her up and take her into my own house. Treacherously you used the privilege and position to which I had appointed you as my ambassador, to take her from me . . .

"Fool! Did you think you could escape from my country, having thwarted, insulted and injured me?

"And when I had re-captured you and her, I did you the unmerited honour of devoting a whole hour to thought of you and your fate; and I decided that though I punished you, yet you should serve me. But though you should serve me to the full, yet would I punish you with a torture that should tear and rend and burn your mind and soul—instead of your worthless body. And I fooled you and re-assured you and soothed your trembling doubts; told you I had no use for her, and sent you on your way to where I wanted you, on the banks of the Red River, to the spot where your sampan awaited you; your sampan, on board which your followers would carry you when they recovered from the smaller dose of my drug.

"And there was your punishment—had you been faithful to the trust I reposed in you. You would have lost your woman, knowing only that I had re-captured her.

But, were you faithless, as you were, and did you return in the hope of recovering her, as you did, then was your punishment to be two-fold, as was your offence. For, to your crime of taking the woman from me, you added the crime of neglecting the duty with which I had entrusted you.

"You committed the second crime—and you have your punishment. You have lost your woman and you have gained some knowledge that will remain with you for the rest of your life, the knowledge that she was tortured to death through fault of yours. . . ."

So it was my fault, was it, that Mary lay there dead, that Mary had suffered the incredible agonies of the most devilish torture that this . . .

And the realization—that there, actually before me, prating and babbling and accusing her and me, was the man who had done this unspeakable, unbelievable thing—brought me to life.

At the same moment, I was sub-consciously aware of a din without, and of wondering that Luong-Tam-Ky seemed unaware of it.

"Yes," he said, "Beautiful Quiet Fairy offended me, and now she is dead."

"*And so are you*, you mad dog," cried I, and pulled my heavy revolver from its holster.

As I did so, I felt a sudden sharp pain in my back . . . The Shadow! . . . Behind me . . . The point of his sword was between my shoulder-blades.

"I?" smiled Luong-Tam-Ky. "Dead? Far from it. And far from it are you."

And, without moving a muscle of his face, without the flicker of an eyelid, he stood and calmly gazed at me as I raised my revolver.

"Of course you cannot kill me," he said. "That high sense of duty—of which Westerners have the complete monopoly—forbids . . . What a blow to the French if their new ally were killed! What a sad thing for the French if this deplorable war began again, and dragged on interminably, because the only man who could stop it had been killed. Killed by their own agent, too! And all over a woman—and a dead woman at that.

"Yes, Captain Deleuze's chosen spy, envoy and agent, while about the business of the French Republic, runs off with a woman and, on her account, prevents a Treaty of Peace, prevents the stopping of the war, prevents the quiet and peaceful annexation of Indo-China."

For a second his fate hung in doubt . . . His fate and mine . . . The fate of thousands of men; tens of thousands, perhaps; the fate of villagers, men, women and children; the fate of Annamese and Chinese soldiers; of dacoits and French troops,

hung in the balance.

For a second that seemed interminable, the madness of righteous rage, burning boiling indignation, love, pity and despair, fought with—conscience, sense of duty, realization of right and wrong.

I had but to pull the trigger and he was dead.

And I should die on the sword of The Shadow.

And I should be at peace.

And I should find Mary.

And I should have failed utterly, sinned most grievously, and, in my selfish vengeance, prolonged a war.

Like an arrow striking through my brain went the question,

"What was this devil saying?" And the answer,

"*The truth.*"

And to the shame of my manhood or the credit of my conscience, I momentarily lowered the revolver.

And, mandarin-like, Luong-Tam-Ky nodded his head.

"And that is the other portion of your punishment," he said. "That you cannot kill me. *That you can do nothing but further my interests.* . . . You may go now. Proceed with all dispatch to Houi-Bap and—further my interests. You can help me. You can show your gratitude, and reward my merciful forbearance. . . . You can *assist* me, my young friend, but—you cannot kill me."

Bang! . . .

For once in his life, the face of Luong-Tam-Ky showed what he felt, shock, surprise, agony, as his knees gave way beneath him, he swayed, collapsed, and fell to the ground.

Had I killed him?

Had I, unconsciously, beside myself with rage, knowing not what I did, raised the revolver and shot him dead?

Stupidly I gazed at the weapon in my hand. No.

And, as I glanced from it to the quivering body of Luong-Tam-Ky, I was aware of a horrible face that glowered grinning between the curtain and the tent wall, and of a great figure that, thrusting the curtain aside, strode into the tent with a roar of Homeric laughter.

Ba-Ky!

With the snarl of a tiger, The Shadow sprang at him.

And Ba-Ky fired a second time. And again.

And The Shadow, reeling back, fell across the body of his master.

With another roar of triumphant mirth, Ba-Ky strode forward, seized a wrist of each of his victims and dragged them thence into the pavilion, to show them to the swarming soldiery.

And I was left alone with Mary.

THE END

EPILOGUE

For the benefit of those who may be interested in this phase of my Odyssey:—

General Ba-Ky assumed precisely the political attitude taken up by the late General Luong-Tam-Ky, and sent me on my way with the same message and a letter identical save for the change of name!

Perhaps because I did not in the slightest degree care what happened to me, I reached Houi-Bap safely and was there commended, rewarded, decorated and promoted to the rank of Sergeant.

It would have been all the same to me if they had shot me.

My heart, my happiness, and for the time being, my only interest in life, were buried with Mary in the heart of the Annamese jungle, a hundred miles away.

And when the time came for me to leave Indo-China and return to Sidi-bel-Abbès to take my discharge at the end of my service, my sole regret was parting with my dear and faithful friend *Doi* Linh Nghi.

May we meet again—in this life or the next—for he was that rare phenomenon, a true, loyal, and faithful friend.

NOTE

The story of Sinclair Noel Brodie Dysart's sea adventure is told in the book ACTION AND PASSION; his desert adventure in SINBAD THE SOLDIER. (John Murray.)

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *Fort in the Jungle* by Percival Christopher Wren]