

GRAHAM GREENE

The Quiet American

*Introduction by*

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PENGUIN BOOKS

## I

After dinner I sat and waited for Pyle in my room over the rue Catinat; he had said, 'I'll be with you at latest by ten,' and when midnight struck I couldn't stay quiet any longer and went down into the street. A lot of old women in black trousers squatted on the landing: it was February and I suppose too hot for them in bed. One trishaw driver pedalled slowly by towards the river-front and I could see lamps burning where they had disembarked the new American planes. There was no sign of Pyle anywhere in the long street.

Of course, I told myself, he might have been detained for some reason at the American Legation, but surely in that case he would have telephoned to the restaurant—he was very meticulous about small courtesies. I turned to go indoors when I saw a girl waiting in the next doorway. I couldn't see her face, only the white silk trousers and the long flowered robe, but I knew her for all that. She had so often waited for me to come home at just this place and hour.

'Phuong,' I said—which means Phoenix, but nothing nowadays is fabulous and nothing rises from its ashes. I knew before she had time to tell me that she was waiting for Pyle too. 'He isn't here.'

*'Je sais. Je t'ai vu seul à la fenêtre.'*

'You may as well wait upstairs,' I said. 'He will be coming soon.'

'I can wait here.'

'Better not. The police might pick you up.'

She followed me upstairs. I thought of several ironic and unpleasant jests I might make, but neither her English nor her French would have been good enough for her to understand the

irony, and, strange to say, I had no desire to hurt her or even to hurt myself. When we reached the landing all the old women turned their heads, and as soon as we had passed their voices rose and fell as though they were singing together.

'What are they talking about?'

'They think I have come home.'

Inside my room the tree I had set up weeks ago for the Chinese New Year had shed most of its yellow blossoms. They had fallen between the keys of my typewriter. I picked them out. '*Tu es trouble,*' *Phuong* said.

'It's unlike him. He's such a punctual man.'

I took off my tie and my shoes and lay down on the bed. *Phuong* lit the gas stove and began to boil the water for tea. It might have been six months ago. 'He says you are going away soon now,' she said.

'Perhaps.'

'He is very fond of you.'

'Thank him for nothing,' I said.

I saw that she was doing her hair differently, allowing it to fall black and straight over her shoulders. I remembered that *Pyle* had once criticized the elaborate hairdressing which she thought became the daughter of a mandarin. I shut my eyes and she was again the same as she used to be: she was the hiss of steam, the clink of a cup, she was a certain hour of the night and the promise of rest.

'He will not be long,' she said as though I needed comfort for his absence.

I wondered what they talked about together. *Pyle* was very earnest and I had suffered from his lectures on the Far East, which he had known for as many months as I had years. Democracy was another subject of his—he had pronounced and aggravating views on what the United States was doing for the world. *Phuong* on the other hand was wonderfully ignorant; if *Hitler* had come into the conversation she would have interrupted to ask who he was. The explanation would be all the more difficult because she had never met a German or a Pole and had only the vaguest knowledge of European geography, though about *Princess Margaret* of course she knew more than I. I heard her put a tray down on the end of the bed.

'Is he still in love with you, *Phuong*?'

To take an Annamite to bed with you is like taking a bird: they twitter and sing on your pillow. There had been a time when I thought none of their voices sang like *Phuong*'s. I put out my hand and touched her arm—their bones too were as fragile as a bird's.

'Is he, *Phuong*?'

She laughed and I heard her strike a match. 'In love?'—perhaps it was one of the phrases she didn't understand.

'May I make your pipe?' she asked.

When I opened my eyes she had lit the lamp and the tray was already prepared. The lamplight made her skin the colour of dark amber as she bent over the flame with a frown of concentration, heating the small paste of opium, twirling her needle.

'Does *Pyle* still not smoke?' I asked her.

'No.'

'You ought to make him or he won't come back.' It was a superstition among them that a lover who smoked would always return, even from France. A man's sexual capacity might be injured by smoking, but they would always prefer a faithful to a potent lover. Now she was kneading the little ball of hot paste on the convex margin of the bowl and I could smell the opium. There is no smell like it. Beside the bed my alarm-clock showed twelve-twenty, but already my tension was over. *Pyle* had diminished. The lamp lit her face as she tended the long pipe, bent over it with the serious attention she might have given to a child. I was fond of my pipe: more than two feet of straight bamboo, ivory at either end. Two-thirds of the way down was the bowl, like a convolvulus reversed, the convex margin polished and darkened by the frequent kneading of the opium. Now with a flick of the wrist she plunged the needle into the tiny cavity, released the opium and reversed the bowl over the flame, holding the pipe steady for me. The bead of opium bubbled gently and smoothly as I inhaled.

The practised inhaler can draw a whole pipe down in one breath, but I always had to take several pulls. Then I lay back, with my neck on the leather pillow, while she prepared the second pipe.

I said, 'You know, really, it's as clear as daylight. *Pyle* knows I smoke a few pipes before bed, and he doesn't want to disturb me. He'll be round in the morning.'

In went the needle and I took my second pipe. As I laid it down, I said, 'Nothing to worry about. Nothing to worry about at all.' I took a sip of tea and held my hand in the pit of her arm. 'When you left me,' I said, 'it was lucky I had this to fall back on. There's a good house in the rue d'Ormay. What a fuss we Europeans make about nothing. You shouldn't live with a man who doesn't smoke, Phuong.'

'But he's going to marry me,' she said. 'Soon now.'

'Of course, that's another matter.'

'Shall I make your pipe again?'

'Yes.'

I wondered whether she would consent to sleep with me that night if Pyle never came, but I knew that when I had smoked four pipes I would no longer want her. Of course it would be agreeable to feel her thigh beside me in the bed—she always slept on her back, and when I woke in the morning I could start the day with a pipe, instead of with my own company. 'Pyle won't come now,' I said. 'Stay here, Phuong.' She held the pipe out to me and shook her head. By the time I had drawn the opium in, her presence or absence mattered very little.

'Why is Pyle not here?' she asked.

'How do I know?' I said.

'Did he go to see General Thé?'

'I wouldn't know.'

'He told me if he could not have dinner with you, he wouldn't come here.'

'Don't worry. He'll come. Make me another pipe.' When she bent over the flame the poem of Baudelaire's came into my mind: '*Mon enfant, ma soeur . . .*' How did it go on?

Aimer à loisir,  
Aimer et mourir  
Au pays qui te ressemble.

Out on the waterfront slept the ships, '*dont l'humeur est vagabonde.*' I thought that if I smelt her skin it would have the faintest fragrance of opium, and her colour was that of the small flame. I

had seen the flowers on her dress beside the canals in the north, she was indigenous like a herb, and I never wanted to go home.

'I wish I were Pyle,' I said aloud, but the pain was limited and bearable—the opium saw to that. Somebody knocked on the door.

'Pyle,' she said.

'No. It's not his knock.'

Somebody knocked again impatiently. She got quickly up, shaking the yellow tree so that it showered its petals again over my typewriter. The door opened. 'Monsieur Fowlair,' a voice commanded.

'I'm Fowler,' I said. I was not going to get up for a policeman—I could see his khaki shorts without lifting my head.

He explained in almost unintelligible Vietnamese French that I was needed immediately—at once—rapidly—at the Sureté.

'At the French Sureté or the Vietnamese?'

'The French.' In his mouth the word sounded like '*Françung.*'

'What about?'

He didn't know: it was his orders to fetch me.

'*Toi aussi,*' he said to Phuong.

'Say *vous* when you speak to a lady,' I told him. 'How did you know she was here?'

He only repeated that they were his orders.

'I'll come in the morning.'

'*Sur le chung,*' he said, a little, neat, obstinate figure. There wasn't any point in arguing, so I got up and put on my tie and shoes. Here the police had the last word: they could withdraw my order of circulation: they could have me barred from Press Conferences: they could even, if they chose, refuse me an exit permit. These were the open legal methods, but legality was not essential in a country at war. I knew a man who had suddenly and inexplicably lost his cook—he had traced him to the Vietnamese Sureté, but the officers there assured him that he had been released after questioning. His family never saw him again. Perhaps he had joined the Communists; perhaps he had been enlisted in one of the private armies which flourished round Saigon—the Hoa-Haos or the Caodaists or General Thé. Perhaps he was in a French prison.

Perhaps he was happily making money out of girls in Cholon, the Chinese suburb. Perhaps his heart had given way when they questioned him. I said, 'I'm not going to walk. You'll have to pay for a trishaw.' One had to keep one's dignity.

That was why I refused a cigarette from the French officer at the Sureté. After three pipes I felt my mind clear and alert: it could take such decisions easily without losing sight of the main question—what do they want from me? I had met Vigot before several times at parties—I had noticed him because he appeared incongruously in love with his wife, who ignored him, a flashy and false blonde. Now it was two in the morning and he sat tired and depressed in the cigarette smoke and the heavy heat, wearing a green eyeshade, and he had a volume of Pascal open on his desk to while away the time. When I refused to allow him to question Phuong without me he gave way at once, with a single sigh that might have represented his weariness with Saigon, with the heat, or with the whole human condition.

He said in English, 'I'm so sorry I had to ask you to come.'

'I wasn't asked. I was ordered.'

'Oh, these native police—they don't understand.' His eyes were on a page of *Les Pensées* as though he were still absorbed in those sad arguments. 'I wanted to ask you a few questions—about Pyle.'

'You had better ask him the questions.'

He turned to Phuong and interrogated her sharply in French. 'How long have you lived with Monsieur Pyle?'

'A month—I don't know,' she said.

'How much has he paid you?'

'You've no right to ask her that,' I said. 'She's not for sale.'

'She used to live with you, didn't she?' he asked abruptly. 'For two years.'

'I'm a correspondent who's supposed to report your war—when you let him. Don't ask me to contribute to your scandal sheet as well.'

'What do you know about Pyle? Please answer my questions, Monsieur Fowler. I don't want to ask them. But this is serious. Please believe me it is very serious.'

'I'm not an informer. You know all I can tell you about Pyle.'

Age thirty-two, employed in the Economic Aid Mission, nationality American.'

'You sound like a friend of his,' Vigot said, looking past me at Phuong. A native policeman came in with three cups of black coffee.

'Or would you rather have tea?' Vigot asked.

'I am a friend,' I said. 'Why not? I shall be going home one day, won't I? I can't take her with me. She'll be all right with him. It's a reasonable arrangement. And he's going to marry her, he says. He might, you know. He's a good chap in his way. Serious. Not one of those noisy bastards at the Continental. A quiet American,' I summed him precisely up as I might have said, 'a blue lizard,' 'a white elephant.'

Vigot said, 'Yes.' He seemed to be looking for words on his desk with which to convey his meaning as precisely as I had done. 'A very quiet American.' He sat there in the little hot office waiting for one of us to speak. A mosquito droned to the attack and I watched Phuong. Opium makes you quick-witted—perhaps only because it calms the nerves and stills the emotions. Nothing, not even death, seems so important. Phuong, I thought, had not caught his tone, melancholy and final, and her English was very bad. While she sat there on the hard office-chair, she was still waiting patiently for Pyle. I had at that moment given up waiting, and I could see Vigot taking those two facts in.

'How did you meet him first?' Vigot asked me.

Why should I explain to him that it was Pyle who had met me? I had seen him last September coming across the square towards the bar of the Continental: an unmistakably young and unused face flung at us like a dart. With his gangly legs and his crew-cut and his wide campus gaze he seemed incapable of harm. The tables on the street were most of them full. 'Do you mind?' he had asked with serious courtesy. 'My name's Pyle. I'm new here,' and he had folded himself around a chair and ordered a beer. Then he looked quickly up into the hard noon glare.

'Was that a grenade?' he asked with excitement and hope.

'Most likely the exhaust of a car,' I said, and was suddenly sorry for his disappointment. One forgets so quickly one's own youth: once I was interested myself in what for want of a better term they

call news. But grenades had staled on me; they were something listed on the back page of the local paper—so many last night in Saigon, so many in Cholon: they never made the European press. Up the street came the lovely flat figures—the white silk trousers, the long tight jackets in pink and mauve patterns slit up the thigh. I watched them with the nostalgia I knew I would feel when I had left these regions for ever. ‘They are lovely, aren’t they?’ I said over my beer, and Pyle cast them a cursory glance as they went up the rue Catinat.

‘Oh, sure,’ he said indifferently: he was a serious type. ‘The Minister’s very concerned about these grenades. It would be very awkward, he says, if there was an incident—with one of us, I mean.’

‘With one of you? Yes, I suppose that would be serious. Congress wouldn’t like it.’ Why does one want to tease the innocent? Perhaps only ten days ago he had been walking back across the Common in Boston, his arms full of the books he had been reading in advance on the Far East and the problems of China. He didn’t even hear what I said; he was absorbed already in the dilemmas of Democracy and the responsibilities of the West; he was determined—I learnt that very soon—to do good, not to any individual person but to a country, a continent, a world. Well, he was in his element now with the whole universe to improve.

‘Is he in the mortuary?’ I asked Vigot.

‘How did you know he was dead?’ It was a foolish policeman’s question, unworthy of the man who read Pascal, unworthy also of the man who so strangely loved his wife. You cannot love without intuition.

‘Not guilty,’ I said. I told myself that it was true. Didn’t Pyle always go his own way? I looked for any feeling in myself, even resentment at a policeman’s suspicion, but I could find none. No one but Pyle was responsible. Aren’t we all better dead? the opium reasoned within me. But I looked cautiously at Phuong, for it was hard on her. She must have loved him in her way: hadn’t she been fond of me and hadn’t she left me for Pyle? She had attached herself to youth and hope and seriousness and now they had failed her more than age and despair. She sat there looking at the two of us and I thought she had not yet understood. Perhaps it would be a good thing if I could get her away before the fact got home. I

was ready to answer any questions if I could bring the interview quickly and ambiguously to an end, so that I might tell her later, in private, away from a policeman’s eye and the hard office chairs and the bare globe where the moths circled.

I said to Vigot, ‘What hours are you interested in?’

‘Between six and ten.’

‘I had a drink at the Continental at six. The waiters will remember. At six forty-five I walked down to the quay to watch the American planes unloaded. I saw Wilkins of the Associated News by the door of the Majestic. Then I went into the cinema next door. They’ll probably remember—they had to get me change. From there I took a trishaw to the Vieux Moulin—I suppose I arrived about eight thirty—and had dinner by myself. Granger was there—you can ask him. Then I took a trishaw back about a quarter to ten. You could probably find the driver. I was expecting Pyle at ten, but he didn’t turn up.’

‘Why were you expecting him?’

‘He telephoned me. He said he had to see me about something important.’

‘Have you any idea what?’

‘No. Everything was important to Pyle.’

‘And this girl of his?—do you know where she was?’

‘She was waiting for him outside at midnight. She was anxious. She knows nothing. Why, can’t you see she’s waiting for him still?’

‘Yes,’ he said.

‘And you can’t really believe I killed him for jealousy—or she for what? He was going to marry her.’

‘Yes.’

‘Where did you find him?’

‘He was in the water under the bridge to Dakow.’

The Vieux Moulin stood beside the bridge. There were armed police on the bridge and the restaurant had an iron grille to keep out grenades. It wasn’t safe to cross the bridge at night, for all the far side of the river was in the hands of the Vietminh after dark. I must have dined within fifty yards of his body.

‘The trouble was,’ I said, ‘he got mixed up.’

‘To speak plainly,’ Vigot said, ‘I am not altogether sorry. He was doing a lot of harm.’

'God save us always,' I said, 'from the innocent and the good.'  
'The good?'

'Yes, good. In his way. You're a Roman Catholic. You wouldn't recognize his way. And anyway, he was a damned Yankee.'

'Would you mind identifying him? I'm sorry. It's a routine, not a very nice routine.'

I didn't bother to ask him why he didn't wait for someone from the American Legation, for I knew the reason. French methods are a little old-fashioned by our cold standards: they believe in the conscience, the sense of guilt, a criminal should be confronted with his crime, for he may break down and betray himself. I told myself again I was innocent, while he went down the stone stairs to where the refrigerating plant hummed in the basement.

They pulled him out like a tray of ice-cubes, and I looked at him. The wounds were frozen into placidity. I said, 'You see, they don't re-open in my presence.'

'Comment?'

'Isn't that one of the objects? Ordeal by something or other? But you've frozen him stiff. They didn't have deep freezes in the Middle Ages.'

'You recognize him?'

'Oh yes.'

He looked more than ever out of place: he should have stayed at home. I saw him in a family snapshot album, riding on a dude ranch, bathing on Long Island, photographed with his colleagues in some apartment on the twenty-third floor. He belonged to the skyscraper and the express elevator, the ice-cream and the dry Martinis, milk at lunch, and chicken sandwiches on the Merchant Limited.

'He wasn't dead from this,' Vigot said, pointing at a wound in the chest. 'He was drowned in the mud. We found the mud in his lungs.'

'You work quickly.'

'One has to in this climate.'

They pushed the tray back and closed the door. The rubber padded.

'You can't help us at all?' Vigot asked.

'Not at all.'

I walked back with Phuong towards my flat. I was no longer on my dignity. Death takes away vanity—even the vanity of the cuckold who mustn't show his pain. She was still unaware of what it was about, and I had no technique for telling her slowly and gently. I was a correspondent: I thought in headlines. 'American official murdered in Saigon.' Working on a newspaper one does not learn the way to break bad news, and even now I had to think of my paper and to ask her, 'Do you mind stopping at the cable office?' I left her in the street and sent my wire and came back to her. It was only a gesture: I knew too well that the French correspondents would already be informed, or if Vigot had played fair (which was possible), then the censors would hold my telegram till the French had filed theirs. My paper would get the news first under a Paris date-line. Not that Pyle was very important. It wouldn't have done to cable the details of his true career, that before he died he had been responsible for at least fifty deaths, for it would have damaged Anglo-American relations, the Minister would have been upset. The Minister had a great respect for Pyle—Pyle had taken a good degree in—well, one of those subjects Americans can take degrees in: perhaps public relations or theatrecraft, perhaps even Far Eastern studies (he had read a lot of books).

'Where is Pyle?' Phuong asked. 'What did they want?'

'Come home,' I said.

'Will Pyle come?'

'He's as likely to come there as anywhere else.'

The old women were still gossiping on the landing, in the relative cool. When I opened my door I could tell my room had been searched: everything was tidier than I ever left it.

'Another pipe?' Phuong asked.

'Yes.'

I took off my tie and my shoes; the interlude was over; the night was nearly the same as it had been. Phuong crouched at the end of the bed and lit the lamp. *Mon enfant, ma soeur*—skin the colour of amber. *Sa douce langue natale*.

'Phuong,' I said. She was kneading the opium on the bowl. '*Il est mort*, Phuong.' She held the needle in her hand and looked up at me like a child trying to concentrate, frowning. '*Tu dis?*'

'*Pyle est mort. Assassiné.*'

She put the needle down and sat back on her heels, looking at me. There was no scene, no tears, just thought—the long private thought of somebody who has to alter a whole course of life.

‘You had better stay here tonight,’ I said.

She nodded and taking up the needle again began to heat the opium. That night I woke from one of those short deep opium sleeps, ten minutes long, that seem a whole night’s rest, and found my hand where it had always lain at night, between her legs. She was asleep and I could hardly hear her breathing. Once again after so many months I was not alone, and yet I thought suddenly with anger, remembering Vigot and his eye-shade in the police station and the quiet corridors of the Legation with no one about and the soft hairless skin under my hand, ‘Am I the only one who really cared for Pyle?’

2

I

It was strange, this first return to Saigon with nobody to welcome me. At the airport I wished there were somewhere else to which I could direct my taxi than the rue Catinat. I thought to myself: 'Is the pain a little less than when I went away?' and tried to persuade myself that it was so. When I reached the landing I saw that the door was open, and I became breathless with an unreasonable hope. I walked very slowly towards the door. Until I reached the door hope would remain alive. I heard a chair creak, and when I came to the door I could see a pair of shoes, but they were not a woman's shoes. I went quickly in, and it was Pyle who lifted his awkward weight from the chair Phuong used to use.

He said, 'Hullo, Thomas.'

'Hullo, Pyle. How did you get in?'

'I met Dominguez. He was bringing your mail. I asked him to let me stay.'

'Has Phuong forgotten something?'

'Oh no, but Joe told me you'd been to the Legation. I thought it would be easier to talk here.'

'What about?'

He gave a lost gesture, like a boy put up to speak at some school function who cannot find the grown-up words. 'You've been away?'

'Yes. And you?'

'Oh, I've been travelling around.'

'Still playing with plastics?'

He grinned unhappily. He said, 'Your letters are over there.'

I could see at a glance there was nothing which could interest

me now: there was one from my office in London and several that looked like bills, and one from my bank. I said, 'How's Phuong?'

His face lit up automatically like one of those electric toys which respond to a particular sound. 'Oh, she's fine,' he said, and then clamped his lips together as though he'd gone too far.

'Sit down, Pyle,' I said. 'Excuse me while I look at this. It's from my office.'

I opened it. How inopportunistically the unexpected can occur. The editor wrote that he had considered my last letter and that in view of the confused situation in Indo-China, following the death of General de Lattre and the retreat from Hoa Binh, he was in agreement with my suggestion. He had appointed a temporary foreign editor and would like me to stay on in Indo-China for at least another year. 'We shall keep the chair warm for you,' he reassured me with complete incomprehension. He believed I cared about the job, and the paper.

I sat down opposite Pyle and re-read the letter which had come too late. For a moment I had felt elation as on the instant of waking before one remembers.

'Bad news?' Pyle asked.

'No.' I told myself that it wouldn't have made any difference anyway: a reprieve for one year couldn't stand up against a marriage settlement.

'Are you married yet?' I asked.

'No.' He blushed—he had a great facility in blushing. 'As a matter of fact I'm hoping to get special leave. Then we could get married at home—properly.'

'Is it more proper when it happens at home?'

'Well, I thought—it's difficult to say these things to you, you are so darned cynical, Thomas, but it's a mark of respect. My father and mother would be there—she'd kind of enter the family. It's important in view of the past.'

'The past?'

'You know what I mean. I wouldn't want to leave her behind there with any stigma . . .'

'Would you leave her behind?'

'I guess so. My mother's a wonderful woman—she'd take her

around, introduce her, you know, kind of fit her in. She'd help her to get a home ready for me.'

I didn't know whether to feel sorry for Phuong or not—she had looked forward so to the skyscrapers and the Statue of Liberty, but she had so little idea of all they would involve, Professor and Mrs Pyle, the women's lunch clubs; would they teach her Canasta? I thought of her that first night in the Grand Monde, in her white dress, moving so exquisitely on her eighteen-year-old feet, and I thought of her a month ago, bargaining over meat at the butchers' stores in the Boulevard de la Somme. Would she like those bright clean little New England grocery stores where even the celery was wrapped in cellophane? Perhaps she would. I couldn't tell. Strangely I found myself saying as Pyle might have done a month ago, 'Go easy with her, Pyle. Don't force things. She can be hurt like you or me.'

'Of course, of course, Thomas.'

'She looks so small and breakable and unlike our women, but don't think of her as—as an ornament.'

'It's funny, Thomas, how differently things work out. I'd been dreading this talk. I thought you'd be tough.'

'I've had time to think, up in the north. There was a woman there . . . Perhaps I saw what you saw at that whorehouse. It's a good thing she went away with you. I might one day have left her behind with someone like Granger. A piece of tail.'

'And we can remain friends, Thomas?'

'Yes, of course. Only I'd rather not see Phuong. There's quite enough of her around here as it is. I must find another flat—when I've got time.'

He unwound his legs and stood up. 'I'm so glad, Thomas. I can't tell you how glad I am. I've said it before, I know, but I do really wish it hadn't been you.'

'I'm glad it's you, Pyle.' The interview had not been the way I had foreseen: under the superficial angry schemes, at some deeper level, the genuine plan of action must have been formed. All the time that his innocence had angered me, some judge within myself had summed up in his favour, had compared his idealism, his half-baked ideas founded on the works of York Harding, with my cynicism. Oh, I was right about the facts, but wasn't he right too to

be young and mistaken, and wasn't he perhaps a better man for a girl to spend her life with?

We shook hands perfunctorily, but some half-formulated fear made me follow him out to the head of the stairs and call after him. Perhaps there is a prophet as well as a judge in those interior courts where our true decisions are made. 'Pyle, don't trust too much in York Harding.'

'York!' He stared up at me from the first landing.

'We are the old colonial peoples, Pyle, but we've learnt a bit of reality, we've learned not to play with matches. This Third Force—it comes out of a book, that's all. General Thé's only a bandit with a few thousand men: he's not a national democracy.'

It was as if he had been staring at me through a letter-box to see who was there and now, letting the flap fall, had shut out the unwelcome intruder. His eyes were out of sight. 'I don't know what you mean, Thomas.'

'Those bicycle bombs. They were a good joke, even though one man did lose a foot. But, Pyle, you can't trust men like Thé. They aren't going to save the East from Communism. We know their kind.'

'We?'

'The old colonialists.'

'I thought you took no sides.'

'I don't, Pyle, but if someone has got to make a mess of things in your outfit, leave it to Joe. Go home with Phuong. Forget the Third Force.'

'Of course I always value your advice, Thomas,' he said formally. 'Well, I'll be seeing you.'

'I suppose so.'

## II

The weeks moved on, but somehow I hadn't yet found myself a new flat. It wasn't that I hadn't time. The annual crisis of the war had passed again: the hot wet *crachin* had settled on the north: the French were out of Hoa Binh, the rice-campaign was over in Tonkin and the opium-campaign in Laos. Dominguez could cover

panion. 'We'd better be off.' I watched them idly as they went out side by side into the sun-splintered street. It was impossible to conceive either of them a prey to untidy passion: they did not belong to rumpled sheets and the sweat of sex. Did they take deodorants to bed with them? I found myself for a moment envying them their sterilized world, so different from this world that I inhabited—which suddenly inexplicably broke in pieces. Two of the mirrors on the wall flew at me and collapsed half-way. The dowdy Frenchwoman was on her knees in a wreckage of chairs and tables. Her compact lay open and unhurt in my lap and oddly enough I sat exactly where I had sat before, although my table had joined the wreckage around the Frenchwoman. A curious garden-sound filled the café: the regular drip of a fountain, and looking at the bar I saw rows of smashed bottles which let out their contents in a multi-coloured stream—the red of porto, the orange of cointreau, the green of chartreuse, the cloudy yellow of pastis, across the floor of the café. The Frenchwoman sat up and calmly looked around for her compact. I gave it her and she thanked me formally, sitting on the floor. I realized that I didn't hear her very well. The explosion had been so close that my ear-drums had still to recover from the pressure.

I thought rather petulantly, 'Another joke with plastics: what does Mr Heng expect me to write now?' but when I got into the Place Garnier, I realized by the heavy clouds of smoke that this was no joke. The smoke came from the cars burning in the car-park in front of the national theatre, bits of cars were scattered over the square, and a man without his legs lay twitching at the edge of the ornamental gardens. People were crowding in from the rue Catinat, from the Boulevard Bonnard. The sirens of police-cars, the bells of the ambulances and fire-engines came at one remove to my shocked ear-drums. For one moment I had forgotten that Phuong must have been in the milk-bar on the other side of the square. The smoke lay between. I couldn't see through.

I stepped out into the square and a policeman stopped me. They had formed a cordon round the edge to prevent the crowd increasing, and already the stretchers were beginning to emerge. I implored the policeman in front of me, 'Let me across. I have a friend . . .'

'Stand back,' he said. 'Everybody here has friends.'

He stood on one side to let a priest through, and I tried to follow the priest, but he pulled me back. I said, 'I am the Press,' and searched in vain for the wallet in which I had my card, but I couldn't find it: had I come out that day without it? I said, 'At least tell me what happened to the milk-bar': the smoke was clearing and I tried to see, but the crowd between was too great. He said something I didn't catch.

'What did you say?'

He repeated, 'I don't know. Stand back. You are blocking the stretchers.'

Could I have dropped my wallet in the Pavillon? I turned to go back and there was Pyle. He exclaimed, 'Thomas.'

'Pyle,' I said, 'for Christ's sake, where's your Legation pass? We've got to get across. Phuong's in the milk-bar.'

'No, no,' he said.

'Pyle, she is. She always goes there. At eleven thirty. We've got to find her.'

'She isn't there, Thomas.'

'How do you know? Where's your card?'

'I warned her not to go.'

I turned back to the policeman, meaning to throw him to one side and make a run for it across the square: he might shoot: I didn't care—and then the word 'warn' reached my consciousness. I took Pyle by the arm. 'Warn?' I said. 'What do you mean "warn"?''

'I told her to keep away this morning.'

The pieces fell together in my mind. 'And Warren?' I said. 'Who's Warren? He warned those girls too.'

'I don't understand.'

'There mustn't be any American casualties, must there?' An ambulance forced its way up the rue Catinat into the square and the policeman who had stopped me moved to one side to let it through. The policeman beside him was engaged in an argument. I pushed Pyle forward and ahead of me into the square before we could be stopped.

We were among a congregation of mourners. The police could prevent others entering the square; they were powerless to clear the square of the survivors and the first-comers. The doctors were

too busy to attend to the dead, and so the dead were left to their owners, for one can own the dead as one owns a chair. A woman sat on the ground with what was left of her baby in her lap; with a kind of modesty she had covered it with her straw peasant hat. She was still and silent, and what struck me most in the square was the silence. It was like a church I had once visited during Mass—the only sounds came from those who served, except where here and there the Europeans wept and implored and fell silent again as though shamed by the modesty, patience and propriety of the East. The legless torso at the edge of the garden still twitched, like a chicken which has lost its head. From the man's shirt, he had probably been a trishaw driver.

Pyle said, 'It's awful.' He looked at the wet on his shoes and said in a sick voice, 'What's that?'

'Blood,' I said. 'Haven't you ever seen it before?'

He said, 'I must get them cleaned before I see the Minister.' I don't think he knew what he was saying. He was seeing a real war for the first time: he had punted down into Phat Diem in a kind of schoolboy dream, and anyway in his eyes soldiers didn't count.

I forced him, with my hand on his shoulder, to look around. I said, 'This is the hour when the place is always full of women and children—it's the shopping hour. Why choose that of all hours?'

He said weakly, 'There was to have been a parade.'

'And you hoped to catch a few colonels. But the parade was cancelled yesterday, Pyle.'

'I didn't know.'

'Didn't know!' I pushed him into a patch of blood where a stretcher had lain. 'You ought to be better informed.'

'I was out of town,' he said, looking down at his shoes. 'They should have called it off.'

'And missed the fun?' I asked him. 'Do you expect General Thé to lose his demonstration? This is better than a parade. Women and children are news, and soldiers aren't, in a war. This will hit the world's Press. You've put General Thé on the map all right, Pyle. You've got the Third Force and National Democracy all over your right shoe. Go home to Phuong and tell her about your heroic dead—there are a few dozen less of her people to worry about.'

A small fat priest scampered by, carrying something on a dish under a napkin. Pyle had been silent a long while, and I had nothing more to say. Indeed I had said too much already. He looked white and beaten and ready to faint, and I thought, 'What's the good? he'll always be innocent, you can't blame the innocent, they are always guiltless. All you can do is control them or eliminate them. Innocence is a kind of insanity.'

He said, 'Thé wouldn't have done this. I'm sure he wouldn't. Somebody deceived him. The Communists . . .'

He was impregnably armoured by his good intentions and his ignorance. I left him standing in the square and went on up the rue Catinat to where the hideous pink Cathedral blocked the way. Already people were flocking in; it must have been a comfort to them to be able to pray for the dead to the dead.

Unlike them, I had reason for thankfulness, for wasn't Phuong alive? Hadn't Phuong been 'warned'? But what I remembered was the torso in the square, the baby on its mother's lap. They had not been warned: they had not been sufficiently important. And if the parade had taken place would they not have been there just the same, out of curiosity, to see the soldiers, and hear the speakers, and throw the flowers? A two-hundred-pound bomb does not discriminate. How many dead colonels justify a child's or a trishaw driver's death when you are building a national democratic front? I stopped a motor-trishaw and told the driver to take me to the Quai Mytho.

## II

I left a note at the Legation asking Pyle to come and then I went up the street to the Continental for a drink. The wreckage was all cleared away; the fire-brigade had hosed the square. I had no idea then how the time and the place would become important. I even thought of sitting there throughout the evening and breaking my appointment. Then I thought that perhaps I could frighten Pyle into inactivity by warning him of his danger—whatever his danger was, and so I finished my beer and went home, and when I reached home I began to hope that Pyle would not come. I tried to read, but there was nothing on my shelves to hold the attention. Perhaps I should have smoked, but there was no one to prepare my pipe. I listened unwillingly for footsteps and at last they came. Somebody knocked. I opened the door, but it was only Dominguez.

I said, 'What do you want, Dominguez?'

He looked at me with an air of surprise. 'Want?' He looked at his watch. 'This is the time I always come. Have you any cables?'

'I'm sorry—I'd forgotten. No.'

'But a follow-up on the bomb? Don't you want something filed?'

'Oh, work one out for me, Dominguez. I don't know how it is—being there on the spot, perhaps I got a bit shocked. I can't think of the thing in terms of a cable.' I hit out at a mosquito which came droning at my ear and saw Dominguez wince instinctively at my blow. 'It's all right, Dominguez, I missed it.' He grinned miserably. He could not justify this reluctance to take life: after all he was a Christian—one of those who had learnt from Nero how to make human bodies into candles.

'Is there anything I can do for you?' he asked. He didn't drink, he didn't eat meat, he didn't kill—I envied him the gentleness of his mind.

'No, Dominguez. Just leave me alone tonight.' I watched him from the window, going away across the rue Catinat. A trishaw driver had parked beside the pavement opposite my window; Dominguez tried to engage him, but the man shook his head. Presumably he was waiting for a client in one of the shops, for this

was not a parking place for trishaws. When I looked at my watch it was strange to see that I had been waiting for little more than ten minutes, and, when Pyle knocked, I hadn't even heard his step.

'Come in.' But as usual it was the dog that came in first.

'I was glad to get your note, Thomas. This morning I thought you were mad at me.'

'Perhaps I was. It wasn't a pretty sight.'

'You know so much now, it won't hurt to tell you a bit more. I saw Thé this afternoon.'

'Saw him? Is he in Saigon? I suppose he came to see how his bomb worked.'

'That's in confidence, Thomas. I dealt with him very severely.' He spoke like the captain of a school-team who has found one of his boys breaking his training. All the same I asked him with a certain hope, 'Have you thrown him over?'

'I told him that if he made another uncontrolled demonstration we would have no more to do with him.'

'But haven't you finished with him already, Pyle?' I pushed impatiently at his dog which was nosing around my ankles.

'I can't. (Sit down, Duke.) In the long run he's the only hope we have. If he came to power with our help, we could rely on him . . .'

'How many people have to die before you realize . . .?' But I could tell that it was a hopeless argument.

'Realize what, Thomas?'

'That there's no such thing as gratitude in politics.'

'At least they won't hate us like they hate the French.'

'Are you sure? Sometimes we have a kind of love for our enemies and sometimes we feel hate for our friends.'

'You talk like a European, Thomas. These people aren't complicated.'

'Is that what you've learned in a few months? You'll be calling them childlike next.'

'Well—in a way.'

'Find me an uncomplicated child, Pyle. When we are young we are a jungle of complications. We simplify as we get older.' But what good was it to talk to him? There was an unreality in both

our arguments. I was becoming a leader-writer before my time. I got up and went to the bookshelf.

'What are you looking for, Thomas?'

'Oh, just a passage I used to be fond of. Can you have dinner with me, Pyle?'

'I'd love to, Thomas. I'm so glad you aren't mad any longer. I know you disagree with me, but we can disagree, can't we, and be friends?'

'I don't know. I don't think so.'

'After all, Phuong was much more important than this.'

'Do you really believe that, Pyle?'

'Why, she's the most important thing there is. To me. And to you, Thomas.'

'Not to me any longer.'

'It was a terrible shock today, Thomas, but in a week, you'll see, we'll have forgotten it. We are looking after the relatives too.'

'We?'

'We've wired to Washington. We'll get permission to use some of our funds.'

I interrupted him. 'The Vieux Moulin? Between nine and nine thirty?'

'Where you like, Thomas.' I went to the window. The sun had sunk below the roofs. The trishaw driver still waited for his fare. I looked down at him and he raised his face to me.

'Are you waiting for someone, Thomas?'

'No. There was just a piece I was looking for.' To cover my action I read, holding the book up to the last light:

I drive through the streets and I care not a damn,  
The people they stare, and they ask who I am;  
And if I should chance to run over a cad,  
I can pay for the damage if ever so bad.  
So pleasant it is to have money, heigh ho!  
So pleasant it is to have money.'

'That's a funny kind of poem,' Pyle said with a note of disapproval.

'He was an adult poet in the nineteenth century. There weren't so many of them.' I looked down into the street again. The trishaw driver had moved away.

'Have you run out of drink?' Pyle asked.

'No, but I thought you didn't . . .'

'Perhaps I'm beginning to loosen up,' Pyle said. 'Your influence. I guess you're good for me, Thomas.'

I got the bottle and glasses—I forgot one of them the first journey and then I had to go back for water. Everything that I did that evening took a long time. He said, 'You know, I've got a wonderful family, but maybe they were a little on the strict side. We have one of those old houses in Chestnut Street, as you go up the hill on the right-hand side. My mother collects glass, and my father—when he's not eroding his old cliffs—picks up all the Darwin manuscripts and association-copies he can. You see, they live in the past. Maybe that's why York made such an impression on me. He seemed kind of open to modern conditions. My father's an isolationist.'

'Perhaps I would like your father,' I said. 'I'm an isolationist too.'

For a quiet man Pyle that night was in a talking mood. I didn't hear all that he said, for my mind was elsewhere. I tried to persuade myself that Mr Heng had other means at his disposal but the crude and obvious one. But in a war like this, I knew, there is no time to hesitate: one uses the weapon to hand—the French the napalm bomb, Mr Heng the bullet or the knife. I told myself too late that I wasn't made to be a judge—I would let Pyle talk awhile and then I would warn him. He could spend the night at my house. They would hardly break in there. I think he was speaking of the old nurse he had had—'She really meant more to me than my mother, and the blueberry pies she used to make!' when I interrupted him. 'Do you carry a gun now—since that night?'

'No. We have orders in the Legation . . .'

'But you're on special duties?'

'It wouldn't do any good—if they wanted to get me, they always could. Anyway I'm as blind as a coot. At college they called me Bat—because I could see in the dark as well as they could.

Once when we were fooling around . . .' He was off again. I returned to the window.

A trishaw driver waited opposite. I wasn't sure—they looked so much alike, but I thought he was a different one. Perhaps he really had a client. It occurred to me that Pyle would be safest at the Legation. They must have laid their plans, since my signal, for later in the evening: something that involved the Dakow bridge. I couldn't understand why or how: surely he would not be so foolish as to drive through Dakow after sunset and our side of the bridge was always guarded by armed police.

'I'm doing all the talking,' Pyle said. 'I don't know how it is, but somehow this evening . . .'

'Go on,' I said, 'I'm in a quiet mood, that's all. Perhaps we'd better cancel that dinner.'

'No, don't do that. I've felt cut off from you, since . . . well . . .'

'Since you saved my life,' I said and couldn't disguise the bitterness of my self-inflicted wound.

'No, I didn't mean that. All the same how we talked, didn't we, that night? As if it was going to be our last. I learned a lot about you, Thomas. I don't agree with you, mind, but for you maybe it's right—not being involved. You kept it up all right, even after your leg was smashed you stayed neutral.'

'There's always a point of change,' I said. 'Some moment of emotion . . .'

'You haven't reached it yet. I doubt if you ever will. And I'm not likely to change either—except with death,' he added merrily.

'Not even with this morning? Mightn't that change a man's views?'

'They were only war casualties,' he said. 'It was a pity, but you can't always hit your target. Anyway they died in the right cause.'

'Would you have said the same if it had been your old nurse with her blueberry pie?'

He ignored my facile point. 'In a way you could say they died for democracy,' he said.

'I wouldn't know how to translate that into Vietnamese.' I was suddenly very tired. I wanted him to go away quickly and die. Then I could start life again—at the point before he came in.

'You'll never take me seriously, will you, Thomas?' he complained, with that schoolboy gaiety which he seemed to have kept up his sleeve for this night of all nights. 'I tell you what—Phuong's at the cinema—what about you and me spending the whole evening together? I've nothing to do now.' It was as though someone from outside were directing him how to choose his words in order to rob me of any possible excuse. He went on. 'Why don't we go to the Chalet? I haven't been there since that night. The food is just as good as the Vieux Moulin, and there's music.'

I said, 'I'd rather not remember that night.'

'I'm sorry. I'm a dumb fool sometimes, Thomas. What about a Chinese dinner in Cholon?'

'To get a good one you have to order in advance. Are you scared of the Vieux Moulin, Pyle? It's well wired and there are always police on the bridge. And you wouldn't be such a fool, would you, as to drive through Dakow?'

'It wasn't that. I just thought it would be fun tonight to make a long evening of it.'

He made a movement and upset his glass, which smashed upon the floor. 'Good luck,' he said mechanically. 'I'm sorry, Thomas.' I began to pick up the pieces and pack them into the ash-tray. 'What about it, Thomas?' The smashed glass reminded me of the bottles in the Pavillion bar dripping their contents. 'I warned Phuong I might be out with you.' How badly chosen was the word 'warn'. I picked up the last piece of glass. 'I have got an engagement at the Majestic,' I said, 'and I can't manage before nine.'

'Well, I guess I'll have to go back to the office. Only I'm always afraid of getting caught.'

There was no harm in giving him that one chance. 'Don't mind being late,' I said. 'If you do get caught, look in here later. I'll come back at ten, if you can't make dinner, and wait for you.'

'I'll let you know . . .'

'Don't bother. Just come to the Vieux Moulin—or meet me here.' I handed back the decision to that Somebody in whom I didn't believe: You can intervene if You want to: a telegram on his desk: a message from the Minister. You cannot exist unless you have the power to alter the future. 'Go away now, Pyle. There are

things I have to do.' I felt a strange exhaustion, hearing him go away and the pad of his dog's paws.

## III

There were no trishaw drivers nearer than the rue d'Ormay when I went out. I walked down to the Majestic and stood awhile watching the unloading of the American bombers. The sun had gone and they worked by the light of arc-lamps. I had no idea of creating an alibi, but I told Pyle I was going to the Majestic and I felt an unreasoning dislike of telling more lies than were needed.

'Evening, Fowler.' It was Wilkins.

'Evening.'

'How's the leg?'

'No trouble now.'

'Got a good story filed?'

'I left it to Dominguez.'

'Oh, they told me you were there.'

'Yes, I was. But space is tight these days. They won't want much.'

'The spice has gone out of the dish, hasn't it?' Wilkins said. 'We ought to have lived in the days of Russell and the old *Times*. Dispatches by balloon. One had time to do some fancy writing then. Why, he'd even have made a column out of *this*. The luxury hotel, the bombers, night falling. Night never falls nowadays, does it, at so many piastres a word.' From far up in the sky you could faintly hear the noise of laughter: somebody broke a glass as Pyle had done. The sound fell on us like icicles. "'The lamps shone o'er fair women and brave men,'" Wilkins malevolently quoted. 'Doing anything tonight, Fowler? Care for a spot of dinner?'

'I'm dining as it is. At the Vieux Moulin.'

'I wish you joy. Granger will be there. They ought to advertise special Granger nights. For those who like background noise.'

I said good night to him and went into the cinema next door—Errol Flynn, or it may have been Tyrone Power (I don't know how to distinguish them in tights), swung on ropes and leapt from bal-