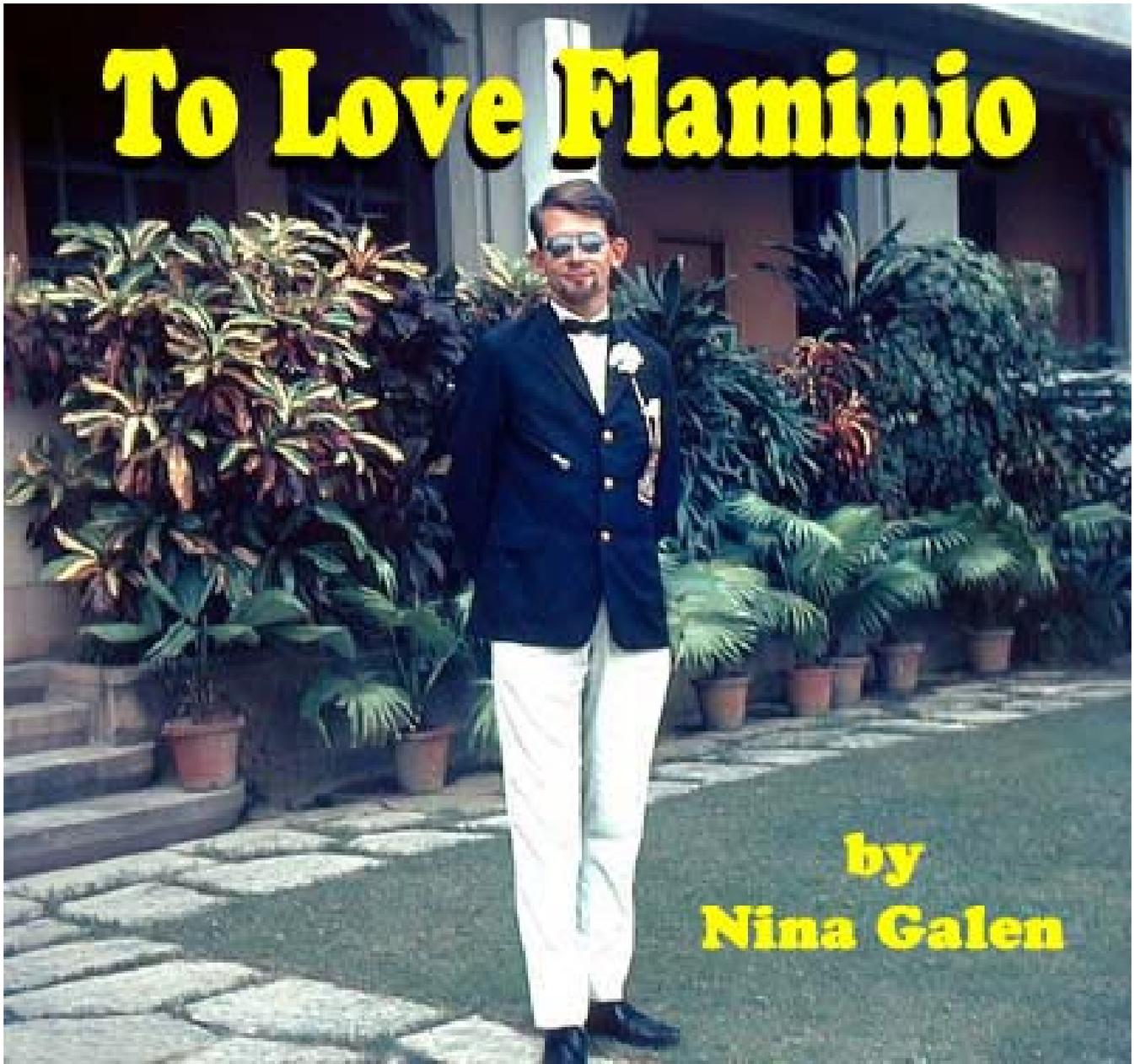


To Love Flaminio



by
Nina Galen

*To Flemming,
with love,
wherever you are*

PREFACE

The memoirs on which this story is based were discovered in a cardboard suitcase left unclaimed in a train station in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Using red and blue ink, the color sometimes alternating within a sentence or paragraph to provide emphasis, their author wrote painstakingly in small, Gothic script, often minutely covering both sides of airmail paper, in an apparent effort to conserve space.

The editor's task was to form a continuous narrative based on these lengthy fragments, straighten out spelling and syntactical errors without losing the flavor of the original, and, where appropriate, render conversations into colloquial English.

Besides these papers, the suitcase contained three butterfly ties, four pairs of white gloves, a white, badly torn man's shirt, and a pair of men's black shoes, the heels of which were completely worn down on the outside edges. Also found were several volumes in French, German, Danish and English of works of history, philosophy, and poetry. Pressed between the pages of one volume was a miniature Indian painting of no worth to collectors.

Efforts to discover the author of these memoirs have been unsuccessful. He apparently is, or was, a Dane, but the various foreign embassies contacted in an effort to trace him, or anyone resembling him, disclaimed knowledge of such a person.

While the unknown author has apparently changed some place names, there is little doubt that the setting of the first part of the story is the Sri Aurobindo Ashram complex in Pondicherry, India, and that the events described took place in the late 1960's.

PART ONE

Chapter 1

India.

The golden sun was setting on the idyllic former French enclave of Villefranche-sur-Mère. Conningsfield (me) sat on the sea wall. Below, on the narrow beach, some Hindus praying. Others relieving themselves. Not so idyllic you say? Perhaps. But just then Her Ladyship rides past on a rented ashram bicycle. So Conningsfield's heart was beating faster, though he did not often watch her (too polite. Also he had to direct the battle on the other side.)

Using all energy, like a soldier, Her Ladyship pedaled upwind to the end of the promenade. There is at that spot, out of sight of the sea, a strange "no man's land." Empty streets. Low buildings with doors and shutters always closed. Here the ashram houses, the native quarter, and the French colonial Governor's mansion almost touch. (A most desolate spot, always some pigs eating hors d'oeuvre in the gutter, do not ask what.) Having some fright she turned, without pedaling came whizzing back, the wind pushing her like a sail. Then a terrible squeak and she stopped.

"You should rent one," she told me. "They're only a rupee a day."

Of course it was not a question of money, though I am not a rich man, rather of dignity. For how can one ride a bicycle and carry an umbrella under the armpit without appearing ridiculous? The monsoon officially over, rain is seldom my worry. But one must always be well armed in this part of the world.

Then she must absolutely tell me all she has seen today.

"The weather vane on the lighthouse is pointing north-northeast. That's south." She pointed a little out to sea. "North." Thumb back over the shoulder. "East." The horizon.

West lies with the shabby waterfront buildings and, so far away, Denmark, my home.

We started walking back together. I asked her what else she had seen.

"The sidewalk outside the police station is covered with khaki shorts."

An incredible land for the American tourist. Washday. I must laugh. Then she

would know what I had seen.

I blushed, caught unawares. What had I seen while gazing out to the flat sea? Not a sail. Hundreds. Sixty ships of the line. The *Redoubtable*, the *Santissima Trinidad* (four decker and largest — in 1805 — afloat), the *Victory*, the *Dreadnaught*, the *Intrepide*, the *Royal Sovereign*, and the *Formidable*, etc. (Also five *Ruderboote* and three dinghies!) Over there, the coast by Cadiz. A light wind, full sail, some confusion. “Run up the signal to open fire!” “Fire broadside!” Then a shot is heard, then the hoisting of colours and the battle begins.

What had I seen? I saw Conningsfield struck down on the deck of the *Victory*, carried below with a ball in the spine. “Gentlemen, we have won a great victory, but we have lost Lord Conningsfield.”

“The battle of Trafalgar,” I replied.

She looked at this confessed military megalomaniac a little odd. “Who won?”

I blushed again, for answer looked modestly to my feet.

“Who lost?”

“It is always Villeneuve who loses,” said Conningsfield with satisfaction. He had never thought highly of that French admiral (1763-1806), valuing his own life more.

We walked slowly farther. She told me that early in the morning she had seen “this figure wrapped in a shroud looking through a wall at the sunrise.” There was no hole or window in the wall. She thought it might be a very poor person afraid to burn his eyes.

This is a danger when looking at the sun. India is full of such blind beggars.

She looked rather sadder. “I saw this little dog. It was....” But she could not tell me.

I felt like hugging her. How civilized she was. Almost in tears for a so small and worthless animal. To be with her made me feel lonely and apprehensive about my own future.

“That wall is going to collapse,” she announced then, like an expert engineer. “Look at those cracks.”

As the sea wall fell into the waves, Conningsfield caught Her Ladyship to safety in his arms. They walked on.

“Tomorrow I see the Mother,”

“Already?”

“This girl I met here, Thérèse, arranged it. I’m not expecting anything.”

“You won’t be disappointed.”

“You felt nothing at all?” She turned and nearly ran over my foot with the bicycle wheel.

“A very nice old lady, but *keine Hexerei*.” In spite of her great age, and that she gives these days only silent audiences, the old Mother of the ashram, protégée of the Founder himself, spoke at some length with Prof. Dr. Conningsfield who holds so many

titles and degrees as listed on the visiting card he had sent to her.

“When you say *keine Hexerei* you mean no witchcraft. No magic.”

“That is correct.” Her knowledge of German is excellent for an American, owing to a year spent traveling in that country.

“I don’t expect witchcraft.”

“You will not be disappointed.”

She looked then at the darkening sea. “I mean ... it’s not witchcraft that I don’t expect.”

“I would say that she is a very nice old lady. Certainly an intelligent and kindly old soul.”

“But *keine Hexerei*.” My words had somehow disappointed and puzzled her.

“That is my opinion, but I could be absolutely wrong.”

“My appointment’s for three o’clock. I have to organize some flowers. What did you take her?”

“I don’t recall. Some red ones and some blue ones that I found in the jungle.”

“What jungle?” she laughed.

I laughed too. Could she not see the jungle surrounding us?

I shall now in “our hero” form give my real ideas and impressions upon first seeing Her Ladyship:

One day our hero went out on official inspection tour of the ashram with his usual Prussian *masque*. He was that day wearing full parade dress (white gloves, umbrella, gold watch chain, gold tie needle, etc.). He remarked a girl aged approximately twenty-five to thirty years old. He remembered his time in Greece. She looked like “the military girl,” as he had called a poor German girl at Rhodes beach. He therefore considered her to be German. She had straight, clipped hair, very big sun spectacles, and her skin was a rather odd colour, somewhat rosy. He had seen this before, but where? He could not remember. In the car (she had been invited to go with the same tour) they talked German and English; her English was not so horribly American, fortunately.

When they took leave, she said, “I am Deborah.” So natural, so modest, not like those snobs who propose to condescend by not mentioning their titles. Of course the very name “Deborah” deeply moved him, so full of Biblical memories, reminding him of home and childhood, and he was so sad the rest of the day.

In the days that followed he saw her sometimes, discovered she was accustomed to follow her own head, but not in an “American” way. He found that she was sometimes shy, had a very good brain, and, that they both held many opinions in common and also different (the last could be interesting and funny).

On the first of their little walks together (all short ones, she was rather lazy until the bicycle) she had said, “Please take me home.” So natural, so feminine. She was then

dressed in blouse and trousers, but with satisfaction he saw that it was not provoking or indecent. Her slacks were not tight to her posterior. She did not strive to look sexy, no makeup. Shy and correct as he was, he did not so often look at her, walked at a good distance. Once he was in a restaurant with her and sat down rather far, one chair away from her, he was so polite. And she said, “But please take the other chair.”

And then one morning, walking by the sea, she asked: “Who are you really?”

Our hero was too stunned by the question to reply at once. Should he have become furious, waved his umbrella and shouted at her: “What do you mean, my young woman? Would you like a good thrashing on your bottom?” No. That was not his way with such beautiful and intelligent girls. Instead, his admiration for her grew. Now that he knew her to be undeceived, he could relax and be himself — Frederick *le Grand (!) le Roi Soleil (!)* etc.

But how had she known? Had he lowered the *masque*?

“I could see your eyes from the side,” she told him.

Then he knew that she really had seen the truth. Our hero’s eyes are mild, honest and youthful, not the stern military gaze he would prefer. For this reason he wears sun spectacles with one-way mirror lenses. A reasonable disguise in a hot land, but if you are in northern Europe and use sun spectacles, esp. mine, apart from summertime, you will reveal your inferiority complexes. Their one weakness: they are vulnerable from broadside. Perhaps their most special and useful effect is that these pieces of mirror reflect back to the interlocutor the exact degree of honesty in his own expression. An honest man will see an honest man; a rascal will see a rascal and be warned.

Then Fate showed its next kindness. Her Ladyship, who came to Villefranche with no previous room reservation, was obliged two days ago to give up her room and change to one in the guesthouse where I am staying. (Only later it was not an unmixed blessing, for, as you will see, complications arose.)

Arriving at the guesthouse, I helped Deborah lift her bicycle off the street through the small gate in the wall. At the other end of the garden, already two of the guests had finished tea. They called to us to sit down with them (at the empty pot and the crumbs — most kind!). These were two American “girls,” only sixty, seventy years apiece. Somehow they have found their ways to Villefranche. Juney stood by Deborah’s chair (she had been leaving to go to her room, where she is completing an enormous photograph montage depicting her life and which she plans to give as Christmas present to the Mother). Now she cleared her throat. A typical American voice, high in the nose.

“Well, before I go, I just thought I ought to explain you last night’s pie.”

Yes, the pie had seemed peculiar, but better forgotten for all time. Juney is young for her old age, has been improved by surgeons who have grasped the facial skin in front of both ears, pulled up the loose, cut it off and stitched together the wounds. Deborah says it is the first circumcised face she has ever seen. Very comical. Now, as Juney was standing over us, I was looking up at her chin from underneath. The same operation has

been performed there. I watched with fascination as she talked, like a ventriloquist puppet with a powdery, sewn-together face.

“Well, you see,” she began, “it had started out to be a lemon pie. Lots of corn starch for a base. Then *just at the crucial moment,*” she looked about wildly and held her head, “no eggs! So I had them send for eggs and they brought two of the *teeniest* you ever saw. Well, plop, in they go and I beat and beat. But still the color isn’t right, so I tell the girl and she comes back with this yellow stuff which *I suppose* I should have tasted first — it was that stuff they use on rice, saffron. So in it goes, just a teeny weeny pinch. But omygosh, when *I tasted* it. So then I had to find something to hide the taste, so I had her get me a bottle of that fizzy orange drink they have here. Fanta. Glug, glug, glug, in that goes. Then I boil and boil. Nothing. I put in some cream of tartar that Mary loaned me and beat and beat, but it still won’t thicken. Boil some more. No good. Beat it. No good. And then,” she screamed, “I put it in the refrigerator and — you won’t believe this — *it sets!*”

Deborah and Juney collapse giggling in each other’s arms.

I tell you, it is amazing that we are all alive and well. I notice that dead rats are lying around the drains each morning. Poison?

“*I hope* it’s only poison,” remarks Tom dryly, then laughs. Deborah laughs too and they exchange a long look.

Who is this Tom? Why has he not been mentioned before?

Chapter 2

In which Conningsfield discovers that “Honorable Exile” can be a reality.

On the 11th of April, 196-, at about eleven o’clock of a dark, clouded evening, Conningsfield left the capital of the little Kingdom of G— (a small country in northern Europe), the scene of so many of his adventures, of so many heroic deeds, so much happiness and so much disaster. Never did he imagine it would take so long a time to see it again.

With him he had two big suitcases filled with clothes, official dress, plastic flowers (white), also more sporty clothes (which in his case was not so sporty), ten butterfly ties, several white gloves which proved to have the intended effect on the natives in the poor, underdeveloped countries he was going to visit (and plunder, though he called it “contribution to the benefit of the country”). Besides this he had only 85 dollars and 62 pounds with him, and a ticket to Ankara. Not much, but he had also some contraband: three cameras and coloured films bought on installment basis (he had paid only the first installment so was sure to get profit), also a tape recorder. A bag and the inevitable umbrella, later to be supplemented. by a field-marshal’s baton, completed the expedition-

ary equipment. Added to this was a good amount of courage and optimism.

“*Ca ira,*” he said to himself. “Nothing to lose, everything to gain.” Fate pointed onwards. Unfortunately our hero, our Phineas Fogg, could not have his usual travel library of 250 books with him. He had only thirty. And not to forget in his jacket pocket his gold pocket watch with the long gold chain which always had a magical effect on naive peoples, they being quite hypnotized by following its movements swinging in the wind.

A brief description (physical) of our hero. He is thirty-three years old, of medium height and less than medium weight, wears a small, carefully-trimmed chin beard (very few hairs on the cheeks, but he is quite normal and not lacking in hormones). His head hair is often rather long, for it grows quickly in hot climates, yet is always within the allowable limit for someone who must have to do with official functions, particularly funerals, and, *parfois*, illegal activities of a relatively (as yet) inconsequential nature. There is nothing, aside from his correct and rather military bearing, to distinguish him from any other man (except that his legs are slightly bowed, only this cannot be seen when he is dressed). He can rather be said to have an appearance of his own than a handsome one, though he is not ugly.

“Dr. Conningsfield,” said the other American lady (very squint-eyed), crossing her heavy legs and taking her filthy bare foot in her hands, “I’ve been meaning to ask you something.” She grinned at my face.

“Yes?”

“I’ve forgotten what it was. Huh, huh.” She laughed slowly, scratching the bloody mosquito bites on her leg.

I ask myself: *What is Flaminio de Conningsfield doing in this place?*

The reason of course is necessity. Only persons of great wealth and no responsibilities can live anywhere. Conningsfield, who possesses exactly 386 rupees, “owes” nearly half of that for the ten days he has lived in the guesthouse. For these ten days he will give them a postdated cheque which proves at least his desire to pay, and who can tell, perhaps when the cheque comes due there will actually be funds in the bank. All this taken into consideration, he might as well stay on a little longer.

This guesthouse is one of several formerly private homes which the ashram has bought for its visitors. In winter come many. Aside from Deborah, Tom, myself and the two American ladies (each of us occupying double rooms), an Indian couple is staying for one month. They are serious people, saying little and eating rice and curry at the far end of the dining table. A Swiss couple arrived yesterday to sit at the table with us like two stones. I am not at all believing in makeup, but I think the wife’s very tan-brown and disapproving face would be brightened by some red on her lips.

But she is disapproving of what? To know this you must watch Deborah and Tom.

Word came just before supper that the Mother is ill and has cancelled all visits indefinitely. Deborah has been waiting already one week to see her, now does not know

whether she ought to stay longer or go. Also complicating her decision is the arrival tomorrow of other guests. She will once again have to give up her room.

“You can have mine,” said Tom. “I’ll sleep on the roof. You’ve got to stay and meet Mother.”

“You can’t sleep up there. The mosquitoes will eat you alive.”

“Let me worry about that.”

“What if it rains?”

“I’ll borrow Flaminio’s umbrella. Besides, Christmas is coming. You can’t spend Christmas all by yourself.”

But Deborah had only planned on staying in Villefranche for five days, now already has been here a week.

“Nothing happens by chance, Chickie,” Tom tells her. “Mother’s power works in strange ways.”

Then Deborah, looking very disappointed not to see the Mother, told us she had already organized some flowers.

We went to his room. Tom’s is the only room with windows, the others having only Texas saloon swinging doors to let in light and oxygen. His room is a separate house in the back garden, formerly used for keeping boxes. Two months ago, coming to the guesthouse, Tom saw the room and at his own expense had it restored to living purposes.

“Don’t look at the cigarette ashes. I’ll have the place swept out tomorrow morning.”

Deborah made a wicked face. “You know what will happen if I move in here.”

“I know what’s not going to happen,” said Tom very sternly. “Look, Chickie, the *I Ching* warned me about you. It told me someone was coming who would try and blow my yoga.”

“You’d rather be eaten alive by mosquitoes?”

“If I must make a choice. Remember, this is an ashram guesthouse personally blessed by Mother.”

“If she’s as enlightened as you say, she’d bless us too.”

“She probably would,” agreed Tom. “Only my yoga comes first. Ask me again in twenty years.”

I myself could offer her little or no relief. Only twice in my life have I had what could be called “complete sexual fulfillment,” and that was with Erde. Erde has since married some ignorant bank clerk and ruined her chances of ever becoming the wife of a Soldier of the Fortune, more is the pity for her.

There is no liquor prohibition in Villefranche and so Tom gave us some Indian whisky. He lit a cigarette and dropped the match on the floor. “I’ll have it swept up tomorrow before you move in. And I move out.”

“I think I’ll leave Villefranche tomorrow,” said Deborah. She was drinking her

whisky and looking at him with desire. “After all, I’m not worse for your yoga than smoking and drinking.”

Tom brought a small photograph of the Mother in a silver frame from his bedside and put it in the window, facing Deborah. “This’ll exorcise you, witch.”

This sort of conversation has been going on for days already, often in the presence of the ubiquitous Conningsfield. Thus far a complete stalemate between them. The Mother has much power over Tom, but he is very lonely for the company of an American girl.

Then Deborah must absolutely know if she is repulsive to him.

“Christ no!”

“Then what the heck’s the matter?”

“What the heck’s the *matter?*” He jumped down on his knees. “What the heck’s the *matter?*” He seized her head in both hands and was kissing her face all over.

“*Nothing’s* the matter, except you’re barking up the wrong tree.”

In fact he was rather tall, gaunt and pale like a tree, so his words were quite comical. Then she would know what was her detractor, the I *Ching*.

“I’ll show you after supper.”

Chapter 3

“Evil-eye” is the name Deborah gives to the American lady whose fat, purple legs are covered with a shiny yellow film of dried blood which oozes from many black, ulcerous insect bites. She scratches constantly with filthy nails. Her natural posture is almost bent in two. She has only one working eye and a broad nose to rest it upon. Her “thing” (Tom’s word) is black witchcraft and she believes it is her occult mission to organize the youth of the world for Christ. Her days she spends in the patio typing with two fingers and five carbon papers on a tiny traveling typewriter belonging to Juney.

“But what can I do?” whispers Juney to Tom. “If I didn’t give her that, she’d ask for my tape recorder, and I absolutely *won’t* give that to *anyone*, not even to Sweet William for his dance recital. Please tell him that, by the way.”

Evil-eye sat down for supper at the little table reserved for her and Juney, while the rest of us sat around the large dining table. Then Tom was up again to help the servants serve, which is part of his yoga. He wears a clean white towel over his arm. Very correct and professional. The Swiss believe he is a genuine servant, are then distressed to see him eating at the same table. (And these are supposed to be persons interested first and last in the *Soul*, not in the social position of human beings! So funny-ironic it is too, because Tom is an extremely rich American, having more money and connections than anyone at the table.)

Thanks to the influence of the former French invaders, European food of the high-

est quality is served in Villefranche. There is no British cooking with its porridge and mutton. At the ashram guesthouse, salads and vegetables can be safely eaten without fear of cholera. Everything is arranged on the serving dish to be pretty for the eye. It is clear that the Indian man who runs the guesthouse (he has long been with the ashram as a disciple and this work is his yoga) is a serious student of metaphysics. I will see how deeply he believes when I ask him to accept my postdated check. From talking to him I do not think he argues with the official ashram policy: *No Charity*.

After supper, coffee was served in the patio, never a successful undertaking since the Americans must have theirs with milk, hence confusion. Evil-eye, barefoot, sat at our table reading *Time* magazine, nose rubbing the page. Her Ladyship was suddenly very upset remembering the little dog she had seen, must absolutely tell someone about this rather typical case. A young dog, hairless on most of its body (I do not know why so many dogs in this country lack hair), had also deep holes behind its “armpits” where it constantly licked and bit. Then it would roll, rubbing its hairless back on the hot pavement, then run several steps howling woo-woo-woo, then biting again, then rolling, etc.

She must know, Deborah said, how life can go on in a universe so filled with pain and suffering. She looked at us, but our eyes were downcast. What could we say? Then Evil-eye raised her head, eyes as usual very angry, almost she would speak, then suddenly looking back into the magazine.

“I mean,” said Deborah in a pleading voice “that little dog belongs to no one. He can’t get any help or relief. His whole life will be one constant misery. And multiply him by millions. The universe is filled with such *pain*.” (She had also once, in Lebanon, seen a boy carrying a chicken upside down by the feet while trying to sell it. The chicken tried to keep its head upward, but was very tired. The boy was always stopping to talk to his friends and perhaps the chicken was in this position many hours. Her Ladyship was, for two days after, in psychological trauma.)

Then Tom told of a white cow he had seen on the “street of lepers” in Benares. A very large, wellfed cow, only with no lower legs. It was standing on soft, bloody stumps which could never heal, very much like leper fingers. Now Tom would know whether we thought a cow could have that disease, but none of us could tell him.

“I sometimes feel,” said Deborah, “that I’d like to go around India with lumps of poisoned meat and feed them to stray dogs to end their misery.”

At this, Evil-eye became very angry, putting down the magazine and looking at us with her squinting eye. “I suppose you people never heard of Jesus Christ.”

There was a very long silence. Then Deborah replied, “I’ve heard of Him.”

“I’ve heard of Him,” said Tom.

Evil-eye looked at Conningsfield. He had to smile, trying of course to hide it out of politeness. He said that he, too, had heard of This Man. Then Tom and Deborah were hiding smiles.

“I suppose you think that’s very funny,” said Evil-eye, “that Someone went and

died in pain and misery on the Cross to save people like you. Very amusing, is that it?"

"It's not amusing," said Deborah kindly (for she does not, I know, even believe in the New Testament story), "but what has Christ got to do with it? He didn't die to save dogs and cows."

It is incredible that all "theological" discussions I have heard in this place are on this level.

"Or chickens," added Her Ladyship.

"Jesus Christ died to save you and me," snapped the witch. "And don't you forget it." Then her nose was back in the pages.

Now we three were nearly speechless, but feeling all the same less sad on the animal question. Tom told us that he had been talking on this very subject with a communist government minister. They were sitting one day by the swimming pool in the tennis club in New Delhi. The minister had said that it was the responsibility of all animals to look after themselves.

"That sounds rather strange for a communist to say," observed Deborah, but could recall reading nothing to the contrary. "In a way, it's even rather reassuring to think of animals having a sense of responsibility. I'd like to believe it."

Evil-eye was again glaring at us. "Go ahead. Go ahead. You'll *love* living in Godless Russia, I can tell you."

Most comical, this "political discussion." Very typical for here. Then I began thinking of my last visit to New Delhi, where I saw something which was most funny but which also saddened me and gave me a sorrowful mood like Her Ladyship after seeing the little dog. As I have a very good humouristic sense, I decided to visit (you will laugh) a prison! The Central Jail. Since it is not always happening in this world as it should, I, giant criminal, was received with all honours and was taken around by the Superintendent and his staff, all prisoners and guards saluting. I took the salute with my field-marshal baton, so I had a feeling like Himmler visiting a concentration camp.

After having seen this I also saw — and then my mood changed from fun to sadness — *the gallows and the scaffold with its fall-litter*, what a harsh reality. I was now alone with the Deputy Commissioner, a very kind and well-educated man, not a bureaucrat, not a blunt man, but one with heart. He invited me to attend an execution. I refused that kind of hospitality quite ashen-faced, He told me they had the executions early in the morning. I asked if they had problems, if it was not a hard psychological pressure on them also. No. in the ten years he had attended thirty executions, there had never been problems. "Well, you see, boy, first we will give you a bath...." Then they put him on the fall-litter, rope on his neck. A nice, comfortable, jovial atmosphere, no noise or irritating disturbances(!) But a man, though he has taken other lives, loses his own either by breaking his neck or by suffocating to death, which takes up to *twenty minutes* if the machinery is not perfect.

(O Justice, quelles crimes on commet en ton nom!)

The odd thing was that the man who told me this was a humanhearted man. Well, in India they have quite another concept of life and death, therefore his and the convicts' attitude. I saw the condemned men. They looked quite peaceful except one, a young boy of about twenty. He looked in despair. The cells were like cages in a zoo. How little to have seen of life, twenty years old, and then a cruel death.

I remembered a motion picture telling of the life of Barbara Graham, the California mother of two who in 1955, in beautiful California, was gassed to death in that so nice gas chamber. I saw the movie in 1959, just one year before Chessman was executed in the same chamber. What a bloody irony of fate! If I attended this in India I would do as in America, try to stop the execution and in anger shout if they realized what they were doing. Therefore I would never attend an execution, though I have a secret interest to see one (nothing perverse).

When Evil-eye left the table both Tom and Deborah jumped upon the *Time* magazine, looking for news of home. Together they found an article concerning a father (very fat, nearly 300 pounds) who killed his daughter and her "hippy" friends. It was a terrible story, read aloud in turns, first Tom, then Deborah. But rather than causing tears, the style of the writing ("soap opera") provoked much silliness in the readers. Soon the three of us were laughing helplessly at this grotesque journalism in which a so sad human tragedy was buried.

Evil-eye, bent, unkind, passed through the room with a roll of toilet paper in her mouth. "How can you people laugh? That's the saddest story I ever read. That poor man."

"Terrible," agreed Deborah, getting her breath. "But the poor *daughter*, " she called after the bent back. "*She's* the victim."

"She got what she deserved," shouted Evil-eye and disappeared into her bathroom.

Then Tom and Deborah returned to Tom's room, promising not to throw the *I Ching* that evening or unless I was there. I did not accompany them. As an Honorable Professor I cannot afford further loss of face among the ashram guests as when seen laughing uncontrollably over murders. I had earlier imagined that my so often being with them might account for Tom's reluctance in fulfilling his male role. But no.

"That's yoga, Chickie," he shrugs.

I am sure that Her Ladyship is feeling very sad internally.

Also Conningsfield is not feeling at the height of joy tonight. Soon he must to Ceylon, that country of rascals and criminals, where he knows the revengeful are waiting to do him harm. It will be one of his more dangerous military adventures, but he must sell there the 51 sarees bought on credit in Benares from merchants *who would absolutely not take no for answer*; so anxious were they to be cheated. Fortunately they have sold them to an honest man who intends to pay them the rest and has given them letters to this effect, including his real identification and embassy address (unavoidable).

So it is obvious that I must not in the meantime throw away the few remaining

rupees, thus placing in jeopardy the adventure to come. By not paying my bill, I am forcing the ashram into a charitable act. It is for their own good (as well as mine) and will help them balance their spiritual books and pave their way to heaven.

One thing must of course be said: the Mother is not false. She is no rascal, only a very good old lady. Why then has her goodness not influenced those around her? They are, it must be said, black as tar in their souls, using the ashram funds for their personal achievement, glory and ambition. Tom says that around the light source there is always a circle of darkness, that this is a well-known fact. But I think there is some exaggeration here.

I tell you, if you wish to be taken seriously in this ashram, do not give them all your money at once. If you do so and are naked they do not praise you (penury is a *Christian* virtue), nor give you a five rupee *dhoti* to wrap around your bones. Unless you can get the Mother's ear you will find yourself living in a rathole in the Tamil quarter.

Nor do the poor Tamils of Villefranche take pity on their ashram neighbors, be they white or black. Although the Mother is of European origin, and many of the ashramites too, there are mostly Indians in the ashram. One sees them riding on their bicycles, their noses twisted upwards so as not to breathe their stinking brothers squatting and defecating in the gutters like well trained dogs. The ashram girls are very serious-looking, wear very short pants, and practice many sports. Adult females wear white sarees. They pretend to see nothing around them, but I think they seldom put their feet accidentally into the gutter piles.

The ashram has its own busy life going on inside many walls. As the ashram expands, it buys more of the yellow buildings of the old French quarter, streaked with black monsoon fungus, and paints them pearly grey. Behind these walls, over which bougainvillaea and palm fronds look, the life of the ashram goes on.

Once a year there is "Olympic Games" and marchby with goose-stepping and arms raised stiffly in salute. The Mother takes the salute from her reviewing platform. Some say there seems to be an unhealthy echo here; it causes puzzlement and consternation in many hearts. I personally think games and marching is not a bad thing, for on the other side are the Indian masses looking like Dachau skeletons. There is little guessing which Conningsfield would choose if he had been born black and with the same prospects.

Her Ladyship, who is of Jewish (!) descent (I learned it only after a terrible *gaffe*), says this choice is not there because the ashramites are the children of the rich, not of the gutters. She says that in fact they are giving up much luxury at home to pursue their karmas in a place where the food is so foul tasting. Tom says the ashram food is very balanced and healthy if one can only force it down the throat (most comical), but I know that even some of the most devout cannot. They are forced by weak stomachs to revert to the rice and curry of their childhood. I myself have eaten once in the ashram diningroom, first standing in line to have such sour yellow slop put into my cup like a

prisoner in jail, then sitting on the floor among the rest to eat in silence and meditation.

I ask you: Is such poor food necessary for the evolution of the soul? Or are some sadists and misers working here? It must be a surprise to the young ladies who come here and give all their worldly possessions to the Mother, then find they will spend the rest of their days eating no better than the pigs.

Thus I feel no interior agonies over my plans to give the guesthouse a cheque with no funds in the bank. I told my plan to Her Ladyship who looked doubtful but promised not to give me away. I assured her that a large sum is awaiting me in Ceylon. With this I will pay my debts. She still looked troubled, which shows that her heart is pure and honest.

So, my reason for being here is financial. And Deborah? She says she has come to Villefranche to write an article for a journal and earn some money. Americans, who are all rich, are always looking to increase their wealth. Juney is living on alimony cheques but giving Art and Civilization lectures (!) to women's clubs when she returns. Evil-eye is a retired school teacher, but not, I think, from the public school system in America. She has been married (!) and has grandchildren. Evil-eye has come swimming and crawling across the world to this place. Even on third-class Arab and Asian trains, she has traveled in safety and comfort. Of her and dirt it can be said as of the pyramids and Time: Evil-eye is not afraid of dirt; dirt is terrified of her.

Her Ladyship is absolutely otherwise, bathing every day, but quickly, because of the cold water and mosquitoes. I have fantasies (nothing perverse) of Deborah in her bath, dipping the cupfuls of cold water over her shoulders and thighs. But then the mosquitoes are fast going around to bite her buttocks. Often she scratches this lower part of her anatomy.

I wonder if Tom has seen her posterior. Tom is twenty-eight, Deborah is twenty-nine, Conningsfield is thirty-three, with eight of these spent giving psychotherapy on a professional level (lacking only "accredited" diplomas, but having studied three times as much as the ordinary "head shrinker"). Tom has done nothing in his life. Only two years was he employed by the army, stationed on Hawaii. Still, he is able to impress Deborah, not by his accomplishments, but by talking of the famous people he has known, such as the former President Kennedy. Therefore I decided to do the same and tell her about my meeting with the Prime Minister of India, Madame Gandhi. This short lecture came two days ago as we and Tom were waiting for tea to be served in the patio.

"My talk with Indira Gandhi was very interesting. She received me kindly. Madame Gandhi is of middle size, pale, a person who has temperament, can be wounded, be stubborn, has brown eyes which are sympathetic when she is answering questions — and mine interested her, they were not the usual ones. Otherwise her eyes are cold, so cold. Two things I shall never forget: Indira Gandhi's cold, brown eyes and her last words to me: 'I am very, very optimistic concerning the future of India. ' "

"That's very interesting," said Deborah, scratching her thigh. She turned to Tom.

“You know, they must sell stuff you can rub in to stop the itching.”

I told her that for this *non sequitur* she deserved more than mosquitoes at her buttocks.

“What?” she said dimly, pretending not to understand.

“A good spanking,” I cried. (Only of course without lowering the underpants or hurting. I am no perverse sadist.)

The next day Deborah moved into Tom’s room. Into her former room, which is next to mine, came an American Christ figure with beard and wide, unblinking eyes. He wears only grey cotton pajamas with rope belt for walking in the street. Though he and his French wife look very poor and have traveled by bus from Madras (the bus fell over so it took them two days to go 100 miles), they have managed to bring with them from the United States a stereophonic tape recorder with two 12-inch speakers and a library of tapes.

At night, putting my ear against the wall, I can hear the music turned very low. But I hear absolutely no other sound. Now I ask you, what are these two zoo specimens (I am being clinical, not derogatory) doing in there all evening? In the ashram circle sexual intercourse is like seasickness in a boat. It is upon everybody’s mind, torturing everyone’s body, but no one will mention it for fear of upsetting the others.

In 1952 I had by chance discovered masturbation, an ugly and quite wrong word. It should be called self satisfaction. My viewpoint on this: If it leads to perverse fantasies, to shyness, loneliness, and feelings of guilt, then it is a very bad thing. But taken as a normal way of getting satisfaction when you are not engaged or married, it can be a practical and good thing, provided you know the dangers as above. I have never used bathrooms, never used my hand or had stinking clothes. (Forgive me, I do not feel satisfaction by describing this — rather I am objective, as a psychologist describing a case.)

But there is one here who will speak of sexual intercourse, though indirectly. Tom had passed his first night on the roof, had seen the sunrise, had come to the kitchen to make tea at six in the morning. The experience of passing the night under stars had unbalanced something inside him, and now he invited us for drinks before lunch in the bar of a hotel on the sea promenade. He ordered double gin and Fanta for himself.

“How come your yoga includes double gins and Fantas and not the other?”

Deborah wished to know.

“I’m not supposed to drink or smoke, either.”

“So I’m easier to resist than alcohol and cigarettes?”

“Chickie,” cried Tom, “it’s taking all my guts to draw the line *somewhere*.”

“If it’s just a line I may creep across it one day.”

“Please, please don’t,” begged Tom. “You’ll blow my mind.”

“Nonsense. Do you good.”

“Chickie, I respect you greatly and I have very little confidence in my own will-power and chances of survival, but I promise to go down fighting. *Please* don’t blow it

for me here. Villefranche is all I have left.”

“I wonder why.”

He looked in desperation to me. “Tell her, Flaminio.”

So it is an interesting situation for a psychologist to observe. I myself have known women to be sexually overt in that way — Erde for one. The story of Erde is the most wicked of my life. So much of woe, of pain, cruelty, depression, tragedy, etc.

Chapter 4

Who was Erde?

On the 24th of November, 196-, there walked into my consultation room a young married lady, Frau X. She was twenty-two, had dark brown hair and wore dark spectacles. Her problem was that she dared not be together with other people; she could not go to a party, not lift a glass. In some way she was irritating, aggressive and narrowminded. I usually never did this, but two times I postponed a consultation with her. She saw me at the top of my might and influence in my elegant office; what if she could see me today, a poor refugee in poverty and exile? If only I myself could then have foreseen. I tried to save her marriage, but impossible. Her husband was rather unintelligent, had been selling cars the last two years. Before that he had been a truckdriver.

It began to go better. I discovered when she took off her spectacles that she was very beautiful. A Bali face. She liked to read and was then studying to be a nurse in hospital. I got very attracted to her but felt I could never, as her confessor, take the first step.

Then came the fatal day, third of February in the following year. (May I now interject that her mother had committed suicide, put herself on fire, and her grandma and great grandma were suffering also from depressions, a massive inherited disposition for generations.) Suddenly she burst into weeping without any warning. I was so touched by this “child’s” helpless crying, and take into consideration my deep sympathy for her, so I caressed her hair on top of her head. Usually with patients I would only offer my handkerchief, but this was too much for me. Then she had her head fall against me and bit me very mild (!) on my hand, smiling and asking if I always did so with patients. This seemed to prove that she did it more consciously than I had thought.

She has never been able to tell why she started weeping. I was sitting in a chair, but then went beside her on the sofa. And there we were for eleven hours, without drinking, eating, going to the toilet, only she and I. She repeated again and again, “Take me, take me.” But I would not. This was a poor creature in distress, a situation which must not be exploited. She said it was so hot (that it was) and took off her blouse, was in brassiere. She begged me to take it off, and reluctantly I bared her bosom. I did not feel

much sexual desire with this, more a feeling, indescribable, of tenderness, protection. For how defenseless she was in that position.

I gave her hugs and, partly as a kind of modesty, covered her bosom with my jacket. I have never been wild for bosoms and never liked to kiss or suck the nipples. I am not a baby and not a voluptuous pig. When I am looking at a girl I am first looking after: (1) her face (2) face again (3) her posterior (4) her legs, etc., etc. But as with everything else, her bosom was perfect as few are. To be quite naked is usually not a good thing. She was one of the very few apart from in the Far East who looked beautiful like that. Had not her mind, *hélas*, been so devilish, how cruel of fate, I would at least have had sexual intercourse with her two to three times daily, so attractive she was.

Of course I caressed her bosom, but with deep respect and tenderness. At three in the night I sent her home. She said that it was odd she did not really feel anything and mentioned how she had once been fascinated by a young man and when she saw him next day wondered what she had seen in him.

Next two days we could not meet, but long telephone talks. Her odd, somewhat hoarse and hard voice. Saturday we were in cinema and saw *Gone With the Wind*. When I saw it in 1958 it had been a bad omen; it should prove to be an even worse this time. But who thought so then?

Afterward, at home in my flat, she put her beautiful little head on my shoulder. She was there all the night. I undressed her. She was lying on her belly. What a magnificent posterior she had! Again there was the usual problem, that my sex organ became atonic for ununderstandable reasons after being led up to her. It did not pain me after some time, and the foreskin went, in contrast to ever before, easily back even very soon. After some time my sex organ, if not introduced into her, became really stiff and hard as a sword (forgive this description, but it has importance to my story). In fact, more than three months would go by before it was in order, but it had convinced me that, as I had always thought, it was *total* lack of training, different practices (self-satisfaction two to three times in twenty-four hours, so it is astonishing that I so soon got it up again at all). But she took it rather patiently, it did not mean so much to her then.

Ten days later came the first of many crises. She had told her husband's aunt about her intention to separate from him. The aunt had much influence on her, but in spite of this I managed to convince her to do as she wanted. Her father, whom I met for the first time, agreed with me. She left her husband and stayed at her father's flat until we left for Greece.

My birthday was on the second of April, a seldom happy day. She was extremely nervous at the thought of seeing all those people, but I promised to support her in every way. We met at the cinema and I had to nearly carry her home. But once there all went well and she was a perfect hostess. We were very much in love.

As birthday presents she gave me (now I think that we are all smiling) a *pair of Bermuda shorts and T-shirt!* It was, to be just, very expensive, eighteen dollars or so.

But as most men I prefer something personal, in my case, books. Whether the gift is expensive or not does not matter, as long as it is a little original or interesting. I do not remember how I succeeded in hiding my disappointment, but I did, and also to hide before the others what I, the lover of books, beautiful things of art, etc. etc., had got. Tasteless, *American*, Bermuda shorts, striped. I must laugh. Extremely funny. By the way, I had much use of them, especially the shirt.

After the guests had gone it seemed to have been the most beautiful day of my life. So much contact and understanding. For love we rolled embracing down from the sofa and around on the carpet.

The next days we could not meet and, against all normal expectation, after such a happy evening where she had forgotten her nervousness, she was rather cold and strange. That same week her husband called me, asking for *Doctor* Conningsfield, not knowing my treacherous role in regard to him, wanting advice about his wife. I talked to him forty minutes and how glad I was afterwards. He was kind but naive, with nothing in his head but cars. Obviously he didn't understand Erde at all. He had been so unhappy. Later I learned he was already having sexual intercourse with another lady and later, when we went off to Greece, began living with her.

Now it happened that in the middle of April she was to take an examination over which she had been nervous for half a year. I did everything I could to help her. It was Easter, she was quite mad with nervousness. The subject was extremely boring. Late in the evenings she could not sit, she could not stay. How often I went home with her at three or four in the morning. She was never grateful, but often rather wicked. She said she could not understand it; she had never been so wicked to anyone before. *Hélas*.

At that time we went with friends on one of the historical trips I liked so much. Erde was extremely unkind to all of us. I felt so ashamed, even though the others said it did not matter. That something was really wrong with her was obvious. During the trip she suddenly wept, no motivation, and later told me that in contrast to before she did not feel anything religious in the cathedral we visited. I read to her about the symptoms of the periodic depression; she agreed that hers were exactly the same. She decided we would leave our country and she would not go to that examination. She decided also that everything about me was wrong and became much more occupied by my "unnatural" behavior than anything else.

Never in my life have I been treated so wickedly. Never before had I tolerated it. Her future was looking very bad. We could no more doubt that she had inherited her mother's mental disease. She would not go to a doctor, we could not go out or do anything, and if we visited museums, etc., she was only occupied with my "behavior." Apart from the fact that — forgive me — I am not a common man, there was of course nothing very special with my behavior.

All this then was only in her mind. Because of her treatment of me I really got clumsy as I never am, so I could not take her to many of the things, art museums, etc.,

she had never seen. Of course, I protested against many of her silly ideas, but as she forgot herself and her own problems and concentrated on me, it was temporarily not the worst.

Since she would not go to a doctor, I pretended that I had a periodic depression and went to a very old one who I knew was a kind fool. I did not use my real name. But he gave me the tablets. We tried first with some green ones (Chlorpromazyl). She fell asleep fully dressed on my sofa, awakened at three in the night, looked with horror and fright on me, and disgust, and jumped out of our flat and down to the nearby lake. So I realized it was not the green ones she needed!

Two days later and she would still drown herself or go back to her husband. This was the day before we should leave for Greece, so everything was in confusion. But after all that, the next day, in a first class compartment, I left with her for München. Such a beautiful morning and night. I was awakened by hearing her groaning. I consoled her. In this way we became closer to each other.

In München we visited Dachau, horrible. One night we stayed together in a very expensive hotel. Sexual intercourse, both satisfied though not the real way, rather by petting, etc. Afterward, quite unmotivated (she has never been able to say why she did it), she said again and again: "How ugly you are!" Very encouraging.

From München to Belgrade. A night there, again deep happiness, darling, dear, etc. Then off for Athens where she was rather unkind again. For the next three weeks it was so.

I had discovered in München that she kept a diary to "confess" to, not a good sign. I read it in the night when she was asleep. Normally such behavior is, of course, not correct, but here it was necessary and gave me much important information. She wrote, for instance, in Athens, that something like a dark cloud would come over her spirits, that she could not resist it, it was like a wet cloth, and trying to resist she got angry. This was a very good description of a periodic depression. She took her Tofranil tablets every day (the strongest anti-depressant means which exist), but they had really no effect up to one month from the start.

We went to Crete. For understandable reasons my secretary had not sent money; we had to cable to Erde's father. In that way she had paid toward the trip 140 dollars more than I, of which she constantly reminded me. It was horrible on Crete until the money came in a cable. She wrote in her diary about "this little, common, unimportant man" (me). This hit. We went out in the evening. I could not of course tell her I had read this (though I have reason to believe she knew I had looked into her diary at least once, in Athens), but from then on when she criticized me, in spite of my patience, I refuted her arguments point after point. She laughed wickedly and said she would not accompany me and left. I let her go. After one half hour I got nervous and went to our hotel and found her there. Very calmly and strongly I scolded her and asked if she realized what a task this was. She burst into tears. After scolding her some more I put her to

bed, consoling and forgiving her. She had a good sleep and wrote in her diary, “Then Flaminio came home and how angry he was and how he scolded and how much I deserved it and I respect him much more.”

Like a mother with a child, I, who normally sleep such a good sleep, now was always awakening. When she had one of her horrible nightmares I would awaken automatically, like a chronometer. Thus one morning, without reasons, she awakened and was weeping for *one hour* constantly. It was such a pity for her father and sisters, that they could not make it through life without her help, etc. Of course nonsense. I had her in my arms the whole time and kissed her tears away. She wrote that I had been most consoling and patient.

Then we went to Rhodes. The first day in Rhodes City was very bad; for no reason she suddenly tore me in my left arm. I have never seen anything so ugly. It became quite black, a spot on my left upper arm in size like a Penguin Pocketbook. It pained of course. I got extremely angry and in spite of her fierce resistance I pulled her down on her belly, in a hurry took up her nightgown and gave her one (1) blow with my hand on her bare buttocks. Extremely seldom and only after much provocation have I ever beaten her and I have always regretted it except this once. Later she showed me her posterior where one could see my hand and fingers and said I had enjoyed it. I swore I had not, and this was true. She never more reproached me for it.

The next night was quite the opposite. She was very kind and we both had satisfaction. I had, what also is correct, told her that statistically most sexual intercourse is not done in the so-called “normal” way but by kinds of petting. She had, though not a pig, a rather indelicate inclination. So much I loved her that I did it, you know, the mouth, you know where. Fortunately she only seldom wished this.

We had now rented a house in Lindos, some distance from Rhodes City. On the 5th we moved in and the next weeks were the happiest in our life together. On the 8th she stopped the diary. Neither of us was interested in mixing with the local hippies. I had 230 books with me and we both read much. The day started at six thirty in the morning: I down to make breakfast, then bath, then she was sewing, etc., while I read languages. At approximately ten thirty I went for water, we went to the grocer, then dinner, then rest, then down again to the beach, then supper at five thirty. At approximately seven thirty we read aloud to each other. She had not much education. I taught her much, reading philosophy, psychology, history and French together with her. About eight thirty to bed.

And so we were not always unhappy. In fact, there were so many days of beautiful peace, no worries, studies from morning to evening, my life’s dearest occupation, beautiful landscape, etc. And we had, apart from when she was ill, never the quarrelling which most people have — who should do this and who that. No nightmares more, no diary.

On the 20th of June, a very warm day, we were at noon going to rest. I went over

to her bed — and suddenly both of us wanted to have sexual intercourse. For the first time in my life that part of me did what it is supposed to do. “*Es gelang, es gelang, so war es doch richtig was ich gesagt hatte,*” I mumbled. I, who was usually so eloquent, was extremely quiet, the whole day looked so tenderly at her, found that it was something so private that we had together, so intimate, that she had something of me in her. A week later we did not succeed, but in the middle of July it was even better. (On account of the risk of pregnancy there was this interval of a fortnight or so.)

But we were not eternally in Paradise. First she got a little kitten. I could see that she should have had instead a child, but since for the time being I could not give her one, she took this substitute. I was at first not so glad, but then one night it was miaowing outside our door. I felt pity for it. But soon it was sleeping in our bed (imagine, in a very private situation) and *then a cat on my bare back!*

Then we met a typical American couple, Sue and Jim Winters. She was thirty-three, he twenty-five, but rather mature. She had been married twice before, now married eight months, he living in America, she in Madrid. Now for the first time they were together. It lasted one month. She was as people imagine an American woman. They were quarrelling from morning to night. After one month he, according to her, tried to murder her, police scandal in the village, etc. Then one month thinking how to dissolve the marriage, and then he disappeared. To Jim our marriage was ideal (he thought we were married, typical American prejudice); here was order, harmony, etc.

But all this brought turbulence in our life and it became obvious that the tablets had had a good but not total effect. Never quarrelling, however. Only she had no interest, she could not understand why, in sexual intercourse, so this stopped in August. I took it with philosophical stoicism. This must not be the crucial point, I said. Then Jim and I once talked about taking cats in their tails and from that time Erde had the lunatic idea that I was a “Himmler” to cats.

So out of defiance and bitterness one could get cruel (no, not anything bad). September was with many clouds over us. October was horrible. Then Jim disappeared. We had often seen a young man at the beach of the type you can find many of in Greece, Italy, Turkey, India, etc. Adonises with very little education. Basilleus was his name (he should have been called Bacillus!). So many young western women are attracted by them because their hair is black. Well, modern Greeks have nothing to do with Ancient Greece. It is an Oriental mixture with all the Muslim vices. He began coming in our house. One morning she told me she had kissed him. He offered not to come more. I realized it was not his fault. So, using psychology, I let him still come, but told him her history. In that way I got him neutralized.

The beginning of November I had to leave for home to arrange our crumbled finances. The week started very badly when Erde threatened to let everything finish in anarchy. Two evenings before I left she burst into tears. It was sad that she should be glad that I was to leave, she told me. I then also burst into tears, and so that day and the

next and the morning I left everything was in order. She took leave of me at the bus. I have never seen somebody wave with the hand such a long time.

The six weeks I was away I was deeply in love with her. I went to France and England, losing one hundred and fifty dollars in vain speculation there. Her first two letters were rather cold, but the last one, before I left for Greece, was one of the most beautiful I have ever received. Why was I so naive? Basilleus had given his word of honour, she had been so tender, and I consider jealousy a low human disposition.

Well, taking six suitcases filled with books, many other things, gifts, etc., I arrived in Athens. I called her on the telephone; she was astonishingly cold, but I thought it might be due to the distance. She told me not to come before everything was in order. I cabled I would come at once and left by steamer, arriving in Lindos the day before Christmas. Basilleus was at the bus stop. He was so odd, as if he had something to hide. As I, mad with love, was going to embrace her, Erde received me with eyes shining with hate. "Now better let the curtain go up!" she said.

Then she told me that she hated me because I had told her she was ill and there had never been anything wrong. Nightmares, to be awakened in the middle of the night with her asking me to remove an imagined thing, were caused only by her "nervousness." The same with the depressions, the weeping without reasons. And I owed her money, should pay her back for her stay, pay for her brother to visit, pay for her return, etc., in total, 900 dollars! I myself had lost on transport, etc., 500 dollars. Otherwise she would go to the police.

She had had sexual intercourse with Basilleus, who quite unashamed came into the house — we even went to that rascal's birthday party pretending everything was in order. Her brother came, behaving worse than a Texan. Again and again I telephoned my mother to send money (my own this time), so I could come home. This lunatic girl could any moment go to the police and say we had had cameras with us that we sold.

But at last I escaped — without paying her the unreasonable amount. She came home in March and had me sign a bill of exchange which I was clever enough to sign wrong, and told her this from India. The last time I wrote to her was shortly before coming to Villefranche.

Now, then, what was the truth behind this story? Was I a cruel rascal, a doctor who cynically exploited his patient because she was a young girl? Did I try to dominate her by saying she was ill? Did there not come anything positive of it? Did I cheat her out of much money? Most likely the truth is that she had unfortunately inherited this illness from her mother. She did not really love me, but instinctively used and abused me to get out of her marriage. Of course I did not exploit her. I gave her all my sympathy. The positive: I learned that I am rather easy to cope with "at close quarters." As for the money, no, I did not cheat her, but I would not pay her as if she had been a prostitute! As for her illness, she was really ill, but it is typical for the lunatic to pretend that he or she is normal.

Erde was FATE.

Chapter 5

Christmas is coming and Tom is buying gifts for the guesthouse. Before he arrived here, the walls were already covered with pictures of the Founder and the Mother in various stages of life and death. Tom has bought even bigger frames, to put in them even larger photographs. Soon, eating or sleeping, these enormous faces will be smiling or frowning at him. He speaks often to Deborah and me of the power of the Mother, which Her Ladyship has named “Mother-power.”

“Nothing is stronger than Mother power,” Tom tells us. His favourite tale concerns the settlers at Ice Cream, the ashram utopia city. One day, attacked by murderous Tamils, one of them called upon the Mother for help and all the Tamils suddenly fell down.

“The story you are about to hear is very, very difficult to believe,” Deborah, who is ashamed, warns. “In fact, it’s impossible to believe.”

Then turning to Tom: “Go ahead.”

“The story you are about to hear,” Tom says, “is impossible to believe, but it is *true*.” Then he tells the story. But his own faith in it is weakening. Now he says he supposes the Ice Cream settler started shouting the Mother’s name and the superstitious Tamils dropped in fright.

“Do you believe that all the Tamils actually *fell down*?” asks Deborah.

“Yes, as a matter of fact I do. Now look, Chickie, don’t blow this for me. *All the Tamils fell down*.”

Then, today, Deborah herself had her “first and hopefully last mystical experience.” She had been reading alone in the patio. Evil-eye, typing until then in a far corner, came over and sat down in the next chair. Then, without a word, the witch started making rapid notes in her copy-book.

“She would whip her head around and squint hard at me out of her good eye,” Deborah told us afterward, clutching her throat, “and then scribble madly on the pad. I guessed immediately that she was describing my physical appearance. She never said a word, just kept writing. I got up, went to my room, and lay down on the bed. It was absolutely clear that Evil-eye was going to send this description to doll-makers in Germany who would make a doll just like me and send it back. Then one day I would start feeling terrible pains — no doctor would be able to diagnose them — because it was Evil-eye sticking pins in the doll. Awful pains.” She pressed her heart dramatically. “But the worst part was: *There was absolutely nothing I could do to prevent this happening*. By the simple accident of being in Villefranche at the same moment with Evil-eye, and maybe having laughed at that article about the murder, I’d doomed myself.”

She continued: “I lay there in real panic, realizing that in just five minutes I’d

become as superstitious as an ignorant Tamil. What to do? Then, as I was glancing about in wild desperation, my eyes fell on a photo of the Mother smiling down at me from the wall. I recalled what Tom had said about the Mother's power being so strong..."

"Right on," said Tom.

"...and I was sure it was stronger than Evil-eye's. The Mother would protect me. I was overjoyed with relief. I figured if I were to wear a talisman of the Mother around my neck, then Evil-eye could never hurt me."

"You betchum," Tom nodded. "And by coincidence I just had made these two talismen. " He pulled from his pocket two chains with pendants fashioned in the ashram insignia. "Mother will bless them. You can take your pick or even have both."

Deborah looked, but wouldn't touch them. "I couldn't possibly wear a talisman," she told Tom. "I couldn't give in to superstition like that. Could you?"

"No."

"Then why did you have these made?"

"I thought for you."

"Not for me, thanks."

"As you wish." Tom put them back into his pocket.

"You just like to spend money."

"That's right."

"Thank you anyway."

"*Pas de quoi.*"

Tom is from Massachusetts, Deborah from the diagonal opposite, Los Angeles. His mother is a Catholic, descended from an aristocratic English-Italian family; her mother was a New York Jewess. Tom's mother is alive; Deborah lost hers some years ago. Their fathers are retired. Deborah's father was earlier in business; Tom's, a Catholic convert, was a famous Air Force general, then later in government service in Washington, D.C.

"My mother believes in Original Sin," Tom told us one evening, "and she's *very* strong on the Immaculate Conception."

"I've recently learned, from sundry relatives, that *my* mother was a nymphomaniac," (!) said Deborah. "Until then I used to think she and my father only did it twice, for me and my sister."

"*My* mother only *did* do it twice," Tom said. "For me and *my* sister."

"Nonsense. All children of our generation think that about their parents."

"I happen to know."

"Mothers always talk virtuous, but they play around just like we do."

"Like *you* do, Chickie."

"I'm not playing," said Deborah, looking at him grimly. "I mean business."

"She means *business*," cried Tom, kicking his long legs into the air. "I'm getting

out of here.”

They both laughed heartily, neither making a move to leave his chair.

“Are you thinking soon to leave Villefranche?” I asked Deborah.

“I haven’t decided yet.” She looked around. “The days are going by and I’m still here. I can’t seem to make decisions.”

“Why don’t you ask the *I Ching*?” said Tom.

“That’s right. We were going to throw some dice or something.”

“Coins.” He got to his feet. “Let’s go to the room. You can ask it your question.”

Going into the back garden we saw Evil-eye coming out of Tom and Deborah’s bathroom with a roll of toilet paper. “My dear,” cried Deborah, “haven’t those monsters given you your daily roll? Take ours, take ours.”

“They don’t give me *any* anymore,” growled Evil-eye, disappearing into her bathroom.

“She eats it faster than they can buy it,” sighed Tom.

“Doesn’t matter, doesn’t matter,” said Deborah quickly. “She can have all of ours.”

“What’s this sudden love?”

“No love, but I’ve found a way to avoid becoming superstitious and wearing a talisman.”

“How’s that?”

“I’m sucking up like mad to Evil-eye.”

I do not know if often ashram houses hear so much laughter, so no wonder the other guests looked at us with suspicious faces. “Chickie,” Tom cried, “I had so much *credit* before you came. Juney and Evil-eye *loved* me. *Now* look at them. Everything’s *blown*.”

“That’s nothing,” Deborah assured him. “Wait until Evil-eye starts measuring you for a doll.”

“Mother!” screamed Tom, clutching his throat.

Tom has occupied his room already two months, paying, to be fair, the double rate. Though Deborah has moved in and he out, many of his possessions remain. Against the wall behind the bed leans the huge teak frame which he had made for a photograph of the Mother, but such a large photograph has not yet been found. On each side of the door are the ram-shaped brass handles he had made because the door was sticking.

“How come you had two made?” asked Deborah as we went inside. “It just occurred to me you don’t need a handle to *push*.”

“Shut up.”

“You could just have had them *plane* the door a little if it was sticking.”

“It didn’t occur to me, so shut up.”

“Why goats?”

“That’s Aries the Ram. If you weren’t such an *ignorant* fucking bitch, you might

know.”

Deborah laughed, not taking his words at all to heart.

In one corner of Tom’s room is an altar with a photograph of the Founder in the center. On each side of this are exotic French brass candlesticks looking like leaves and flowers and polished “by fifty little Tamil hands” (Tom’s words). In front, many stainless-steel sambar bowls filled with tiny chrysanthemums, brought each morning by Tom from the ashram nursery and arranged in circles according to their colour.

“Are you ready to be a bit serious?” Tom asked Deborah.

“I is.”

Then from a box he took a small, thick carpet, the same as I had seen for sale in the ashram handweaving shop. It was yellow with a white design.

“This design is a *yantra*,” he explained to Deborah, “like those drawings you see on the street in front of the Tamil people’s doorways. *Yantras* symbolize the Goddess Sakti, the life force, the divine power, which *some* of us prefer to imagine in Mother form rather than like young, nubile chicks. Actually, this is a fairly poor example,” he frowned, pressing aside the thick wool with his fingers as if thinking some of the design had fallen down inside. “They’re supposed to be drawn with one continuous line. Now, do you know what a *mantra* is?”

“A *mantra*? Of course.”

“And the *Tantra*?”

“Yes.”

“What’s a *mantra*?”

Deborah frowned a moment. Then her face straightened. “I haven’t the foggiest.”

Tom threw down the carpet. “What the fuck is a stupid broad like you *doing* in India?”

“I’m beginning to wonder.” Deborah looked as if she was ready right then to go pack her bags.

Tom picked up the carpet, which had fallen *yantra* down on cigarette ashes. He brushed it off. “Look, we have to go about this thing seriously if we want to consult the *I Ching*. Have you phrased your question?”

“What question?”

“The one you wanted it to answer.”

“Which one was that?”

I volunteered: “I believe you wanted to ask it whether or not to leave Villefranche before seeing the Mother.”

Deborah nodded thoughtfully. “Hold on.” She thought another minute. “All right. I’ve phrased my question.”

“What is it?” asked Tom.

“That’s my business.”

“You’ve got to say the question out loud. That’s part of it. Or at least write it

down.”

“I’ll write it down. In my notebook.”

While Deborah was doing this, Tom arranged the little carpet on the floor. He lighted a piece of incense looking like a blue finger, then set it into a silver cup. He lighted the red and green Christmas candles in the altar candle holders, turning out then all the electric lights except one small one by the bed, which shone on the photograph of the Mother in its silver frame. The room was suddenly mystical and smelling very holy.

From the top of a wardrobe he then took down a golden cloth, from this a book. “This isn’t my copy,” he told us. “I got this one from Mary who wanted to borrow mine which has a different translation. But this one is just as good. The *I Ching* book,” he went on to explain, “is supposed to be kept more than shoulder height above the floor when not being used.” He motioned for Deborah to go down on the yellow rug. She did so. Her knees sank into the soft wool near the smoking incense.

“Now the real *I Ching* thing is to use fifty yarrow stalks which...” he glanced behind him “...we don’t happen to have. So instead we use three coins. I use these *ten-paise* coins.” Opening his hand he showed us the familiar tenths of rupees that we in India use daily. “Real *I Ching* coins are round, have square holes in the centers, and are inscribed on only one side. Now...” He stopped speaking. Out of the pages of the borrowed book had fallen a tiny envelope of exotic handmade paper on which was written in a graceful script: I CHING COINS.

We stared at the little envelope. Everything now seemed very spooky. The candlelight threw weird shadows about the room. It lighted our faces. We looked at each other, very apprehensive.

“I didn’t know Mary had *I Ching* coins,” said Tom softly. He opened the envelope and emptied the contents into his hand. We all leaned closer to see.

“*Five-paise* coins!” said Deborah. We were so surprised it was several seconds before we began to laugh. “What’s with this Mary?”

“What’s with *Mary*?” shouted Tom, rocking backward with laughter. “*Five-paise* coins!”

In a few minutes we had gathered our wits together once more. “What’s your question, Chickie?” asked Tom, snapping his fingers as if impatient.

“Just tell me what to do,” she replied evasively.

I was sure the question concerned her going or staying, and am still hoping she will leave Villefranche before becoming too involved with Tom. Such charming dilettantes have always attracted girls, but this is not what Deborah needs, rather a man of more education and experience in life. She is a much more intelligent girl than Erde — what one could teach her! — things she would never hear about in her southern California university with its swimming pools and bowling alleys and ping-pong rooms. I feel that if she will leave the ashram now I could convince her to come with me to Ceylon, not at first perhaps as man and wife, as with Erde, but as two intelligent beings searching

the joys of study. (Little did I then imagine how in a so short time my dreams would be fulfilled.)

“Is your question properly phrased?” asked Tom.

“Yeah, man.” They looked at each other a long moment. Tom made pretense of wiping perspiration from his front with his sleeve. (I later learned he thought her question concerned her chances of seducing him, so he was very worried.) He handed Deborah the coins.

“Think hard on your question and throw.”

Kneeling on the rug she clutched the coins, closing her eyes tight. Suddenly she opened them. “Should I shake the coins before throwing them?”

“If you wish.”

“I feel I should make an incantation or something at the same time.”

“Great. Anything you want. Give it everything you feel.”

Holding the coins between her hands, she shook them together and let them fly. “Seven come eleven!”

“Baby needs a new pair of shoes,” shouted Tom excitedly.

Shaking with laughter at this unexpected nonsense, we peered down at the coins. Upward on all three were the sides with the three-headed lion figure. “A moving Yin line,” Tom said and wrote down the base lines of two hexagrams, one broken, representing the Yin principle, the other unbroken, or the Yang or male principle.

“The Yang and Yin principles,” he explained to Deborah before going on, “are two parts of the Universal Principle, and it is by their interaction that Change occurs. The *I Ching*, which means Book of Changes, visualizes this. Now, the Yang principle represents heaven, male, active, strong, firm...” Deborah was looking at him with very loving eyes. He cleared his throat. “And Yin, the female principle, represents earth, yielding, dark, soft ... warm ... wet...” He went quite red in the face. “Throw the coins, Chickie,” he said, turning away.

With less silliness Deborah threw five times more, and Tom wrote down the lines. Because of the moving line where Yin turned into its opposite, Hexagram 48 changed into Hexagram 5. With some apprehension, we turned to the explanations given in the book, finding that number 48 was CHING, A Well.

Tom read, “*A well. A city can be moved, but a well cannot. Its water does not rise or become depleted through use. When the people come to take water, the rope may be too short to reach the water, or the pitcher may break. Misfortune!*”

At first reading, this seemed to tell us nothing at all. Deborah as a well? Perhaps. But what had this to do with her question? We read the comments on the text, which added nothing to our comprehension.

“You get a line,” said Tom, and read: “*The water at the bottom is muddy and undrinkable. An old well does not attract animals.*”

Deborah was unenchanted. “So now I’m an old well with muddy water. “

“Here’s what it means, said Tom. “ *The image suggests that a bad situation exists, that it may be time to give up.* ”

Deborah took the book in her hands and began studying the page. She grew thoughtful. Was she going to give up waiting to see the Mother? I hoped so.

Tom, thinking instead that she must give up the seduction attempt, was looking rather gay. “My rope is too short, Chickie. I’d break my pitcher. Disaster!” He took back the book. “But hold on. You get another hexagram.” He flipped the pages.

“Hexagram 5. HSU. Contemplation. Contemplation and meditation bring certainty and success. It would be advantageous to cross the Great Sea.”

The comments suggested that a journey at this time would be rewarding. I called Her Ladyship’s attention to this. “You have never seen Ceylon,” I added. “Miles of beautiful beaches and many historical sites.” I did not mention, of course, the dangerous rascals and criminals who inhabit this paradise.

“The superior man will find contentment in feasting and enjoying himself. Christmas is coming, Chickie. Stay here.”

Deborah looked displeased. “The only part that answers my question is that part about crossing the Great Sea.”

Not knowing then what she meant, Flaminio foolishly pointed out that there was water between the mainland and the island of Ceylon.

She turned to Tom. “Is this supposed to direct your life in general or answer a specific question?”

“Answer a specific question.”

“Well, which am I supposed to do? Be inactive and meditate, or cross the Great Sea?”

“Any way it grabs you. Do both. Bide your time here, *then* cross the sea.”

She nodded thoughtfully and sat back in her chair, staring at the ceiling. Then she got up. “Is that it?”

“That’s it if you think it is.”

She excused herself and went out into the garden. Our two heads turned to look at the notebook lying on the desk. She had written her question in there. We looked at each other and shrugged. Tom opened the book. At the top of one page, scribbled in her awful American handwriting, was the question. *Shld I c.s. ?* I didn’t know what to think. The “c” was surely representing a verb, the “s” a noun. Cross ... sea? But she had written it before consulting the book. “What do you suppose she is asking?” I asked Tom.

He dropped the notebook, rather pale. “Chickie wants to kill herself,” he said. Then he jumped across to the door, pulled hard on the brass handle, and stuck his head like a turtle into the dark. Drawing a deep breath he shouted at the top of his voice:

“Mo-ther.”

Chapter 6

The ashram has begun construction of a utopia city for 50,000 souls. Those chosen few will here study, practice and live the yogic philosophy of the Founder. The architect's plan gives the impression of a galactic whirling dervish. Very impressive. One must congratulate them. The problem: Can mystic philosophers succeed in such a huge practical enterprise?

To begin, as Her Ladyship has already discovered from her ashram acquaintance, they announced their project before purchasing all the needed land. Only here and there is a field with the stone ashram marker. Now the price of the land surrounding these has risen far beyond the reach of the ashram purse.

Then another says that this unbought land is not and never was for sale; it belongs to the Tamil peasants.

Three courses of action are thus open to the ashram. (1) Wait and pray that an American millionaire will die and leave them his millions (their best hope). (2) Pray for the governments of the world to contribute generously and prestigiously to this ashram scheme (in my opinion not very likely, but they think it imminent). (3) Ask the Indian government to confiscate the Tamil peasants' land and give it free to the ashram. Tired of waiting and praying, they attempted this third plan of action. Hence the very bad feelings of the Tamils toward the ashram, even though the plan failed.

The city of Ice Cream (I use for a name the diabolical opposite) is located in the hottest, driest place imaginable. Even the few palms give no shade, the leaves having all been taken for making roofs. The land is clay fields, sand and erosion. In monsoon season it is mud — impossible to ride bicycles. In summer it is so hot the mind grows gaudy flowers. Crazed in this way some settlers tried to dam one of the erosion gullies for a lake. During months they carried clay on their heads with the Tamil labourers. A strong dam was built (*hélas*, over a spring). The first rain of June carried it away.

I am rather impressed by this enormous undertaking. A city with no government, where human beings can live according to their philosophy, is *phantastisch*. Her Ladyship hates the whole idea. How to have such a city for some “snobs” when the Tamil people live in such squalor and filth? I think this is beside the point. Then she says it will never work, that already there are hatreds and jealousies among the settlers, even different settlements forming, the Americans here, the French over there, etc. It is becoming rather a holiday camp for foreign whites, etc. She does not think the city can ever be built, should never be built. Governing, she points out, has been reduced to nasty messages tacked by members upon a bulletin board.

This I call a significant lack of insight. Tom is also 100% in favour of Ice Cream. “Mother wills it, Chickie. *Ergo*, it will be.”

Since throwing the *I Ching* coins two days ago, Her Ladyship has made no move to leave Villefranche. Tom has caught cold sleeping on the roof so she is thinking of moving into the hotel next door. The guesthouse is rather full, and soon I too will have to move out. The reason for these crowds is an International Youth Conference to be held here between Christmas and the New Year.

“Screw my cold. Stay in my room,” Tom tells Deborah.

If she would leave Villefranche now, I would leave with her. Would she accompany me? What are her feelings toward me? I only know that sometimes Her Ladyship will look at me as if I have just floated to the surface of a green temple pond and have not yet been identified. Very unencouraging! When I recite to her my favorite passages from Himmler speeches (most comical), learned from the record player by my bed at night far away in G—, she says, “Flaminio, Himmler was a very bad man. How come you recite him?”

How come? How come, Your Ladyship, you ask me this? How come you don’t try to guess, grey eyes? How come you are you and I am I? How come we are both in this strange country as exiles?

And now, forgive me, a sudden digression. Today was perhaps the most terrible and moving of my life. In only some hours I have looked into the bottom of Hell, then out again. Here is the story.

At perhaps eleven o’clock this morning, our hero was walking along the sea promenade in full parade uniform (he had been on official tour through the ashram library — third time). As he strolled he noticed child beggars waiting outside the window of the Continental Hotel Bar. They were looking very discouraged until seeing this fine gentleman. Usually he would try to avoid these fellows, but today decided to wave his baton and have them disappear, a not so easy task. By chance he looked inside and saw Tom and Deborah drinking gin and Fantas. They did not see him. Their backs were turned toward the windows so as absolutely not to see the beggar children. Conningsfield entered the bar and sat down very near them, on the other side of a potted palm. Here he could hear them without being seen.

At first, disappointment — only a literary discussion. But soon our hero realized this was not an ordinary discourse, rather a most intimate personal revelation by a young woman via a poem by Coleridge (1772-1834), *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

“You know how it goes,” Deborah was saying. “The Mariner shoots the albatross, thus bringing bad luck to the ship. The wind and mist disappear and the ship stops under a broiling sun. They hang the dead albatross around the Mariner’s neck as punishment. Finally everyone aboard is dead except him.

*The many men, so beautiful!
And they all dead did lie:*

*And a thousand thousand slimy things
Lived on; and so did I.*

“He looks down over the side of the ship at the horrible worms and crawly snakes. He feels so low he can’t even pray. Then he notices that even these slimy sea snakes have a beauty, and suddenly he loves and blesses them. At which the albatross falls from his neck, the ship starts to move, and the dead sailors arise to steer it. He’s saved through utter humility, through being able to love even these most lowly sea snakes.”

As Her Ladyship spoke, our hero’s heart was filled with emotion. How urgent she sounded, rather as if this poem contained all the wisdom of life. But what, he wondered, could this American girl know of such deep matters? Was he then right about her, that she had a soul, could be saved, was seeking salvation? Was it too much to hope that he, Flaminio de Conningsfield, might find a way to help her?

“That’s where it’s at,” said Tom agreeably. “That’s what we’re all here for, trying to be saved through love. The Mother saves. She loves us and we love her.”

“But it doesn’t work that way,” objected Deborah. “*She’s* saved because she’s able to love miserable us. But you and I aren’t saved if we love *her*. It’s easy to love someone strong and loveable. But to be really saved, like the Ancient Mariner, we have to be able to love the slimiest creatures of the earth. I mean, what if one could really love and bless someone like, oh, say, Flaminio?”

Conningsfield’s brain was now in absolute maelstrom conditions. He had not yet paid for his glass of Fanta, so how could he run from the place without causing uproar? Also he must listen, hoping to hear it was all a joke.

“But Chickie, that’s what Mother is all about. We give ourselves unto her and she sees to it that we get saved. Thus we don’t have to go around shooting albatrosses, which are *anyway* probably under environmental protection. We work it out through the yoga.”

“I don’t think I’d be able to give myself to her,” said Deborah, “even if I wanted to.”

“You haven’t met her yet. You can’t know. Do you really think you could learn to love someone like Flaminio without Mother’s help? I mean, how humble can you *get*?”

She laughed, a sound like my breathing valve shutting off. “Actually I think he’s a complete psychopath. He thinks he’s Napoleon Bonaparte. If one could love *him*, one could love *anyone*.”

Conningsfield, half in tears, could hear no more. Putting any amount of rupees on the table, he rose from his chair and rushed out into the street. It was less merciless there. Only the noonday sun and the beggars.

How down is the bottom? How low does the Almighty throw us so to test us and finally save us? Compared to Conningsfield a sea snake was tall as a horse today. Never

had he felt such despair and shame.

Returning to my room like a madman I threw myself on my knees and tried to pray, but the words would not come. It was like suffocating in wet sand. Lowly, slimy, miserable Flaminio. Flaminio sea snake. Flaminio psychopath. How could I ever forgive her? Impossible. I thought that I would be ill on the floor and could imagine the Tamil servant on hands and knees cleaning up the vomit. Yet how could one so low as I thus debase another human creature? Nor would I stoop to clean it up myself (too messy). Therefore better some control regarding the dumping of the stomach.

Flaminio Bonaparte. Slowly I got to my feet. Fortunately I am not an ordinary man. No, I am not Napoleon, but neither a commoner. No matter how great my personal grief, I am still able to see beyond it to the sorrows of others. Sometimes it is an easy matter, but another time will take all my mind and spiritual force. Today, for reassurance, I thought on my dear home and parents. No comfort there! So next I thought of the poetry and philosophy so dear to my heart. Could such a lover of poetry be betrayed by a poem? Never. She had misread the meaning, surely that was all. I vowed to go the library, find the poem and one day explain it to her. A human man cannot be a serpent. Only a black devil from Hell can so transform himself.

And so at last I, by way of such thoughts, was able to once again love and bless Deborah, this poor girl wanderer. But how strange that the one person in the world upon whom she sets her hopes for salvation is a Soldier of the Fortune, a self-exile who goes his own way with time for so few. Yet she said she must love Flaminio or she will not be saved upon this earth. His duty then is clear. Flaminio de Conningsfield must put aside his personal *chagrin* and find a way to save this damsel in distress.

(Only I hear some saying: “Ha, this madman Conningsfield has once again deceived himself. At any cost he will escape the insult.” To these I reply: “Although he is up again, the soul cannot descend so low as his this day without some scorching.”)

Last evening, while Tom went to Samadhi where he kneels by the Founder’s tomb (these Catholics are knee-trained from childhood), I spoke to Her Ladyship for nearly two hours. She showed no signs of absolute revulsion, so I began to take less seriously her words of yesterday morning. But as usual she could not look me in the eye. I think that this is in part my fault (1) because of the mirror eye spectacles I often wear (2) because my naked eyes are very timid, which accounts for the spectacles. Therefore it is not a case of inferiority complexes, etc., with the mirrors.

I absolutely must leave here with this lady. Since yesterday, the idea of her salvation has been growing in my mind. Left alone to travel blindly onwards, she will eventually kill herself in a moment of desperation. When I learned of her desire to commit suicide my nose twitched like a lion’s. A weak one straggling behind the herd? Catchable. So does the brave lion select his supper. No loss of prestige or self-esteem.

Perhaps you are now wondering if I intend to save her or eat her! I must laugh. Although a soldier, destruction is never my way unless I am faced with rogues. Regarding Her Ladyship, I only wonder how I can make myself indispensable. Wait on her hand and foot, My Lady this, My Lady that? Spoil her with sweets and expensive gifts? No. It is not for philosophers to stoop to flattery and bribe (also very difficult when the pockets are empty. I wear my exile trousers, so no wonder).

It is clear that if I can be near her at the right moment, when her desperation is absolute, my chance will come.

Chapter 7

The ashram guesthouse is on a street out of sight of the sea. In winter the garden patio is a comfortable, breezy place. Then there is the garden wall, then the public sidewalk with very high curbs, then the street. The street is blinding hot from the sun on the yellow walls opposite. Cycle rickshaw people sleep in their carts or sit watching the guesthouse gate like a bunch of crows.

“Tom’s got the rickshaw *wallahs* organized,” Deborah told me one day. A ferocious-looking driver wearing a green turban (it is too short and always coming undone) saluted her with a wide grin. “That’s the leader.” She returned the salute with a slight nod. “He took us personally for a ride the other day, but usually he just lets the others work. He likes Tom.”

“That rascal took me also the first week until he realized that I would not overpay him,” I told her.

“Of course, Tom’s bought him. Anyone can be bought.”

Only these young Americans and certain middle-aged Frenchmen, thought Conningsfield, can take for granted the death of civilized values which is coming as a direct result of American pragmatism and French existentialism, two sides of the same coin. I knew that Tom had given her gifts. “Has he also bought you?”

But she didn’t reply, preferring to change the subject, too tired, she said, to talk semantics. Then she admitted friendship “isn’t always negotiable.” I felt however that I had seen rather deep into her despair.

I was sitting this morning in the back garden when Tom came out of his room, crossed the path, and tried the handle of his bathroom door. It was locked from inside; Her Ladyship was bathing. Perplexity. Then he glanced around, shrugged, and entered Evil-eye’s bathroom through the next door.

Now the garbage cans were smelling quite strong of fish, but I could not leave that spot. What if Evil-eye should this minute arrive to use her bathroom? And then sud-

denly there she came, La Dame Terrible. Opening the bathroom door (Tom had not locked it!), she went inside. I watched the doorway, faint with apprehension. A moment later she backed out, muttering to herself. Closing the door she pushed wildly at the outside bolt with the back of her wrist until it locked. Then holding her hands in front of her face as in thick fog, she stumbled back into the house.

A minute later Tom's head and shoulders appeared through the transom. He spread wide his long arms. "Help, *help!*" He saw me as I was jumping to go to his aid. "*Help*. Some evil witch has locked me *in* here." Deborah came out of the other door. "Rapunzel Chickie. Save me!"

Together we released him and he fell out the door into our arms. "A living nightmare," he told us when he had regained his breath. "Locked in Evil-eye's voodoo shithouse."

In Tom's room Deborah poured tea through a stainless steel strainer. "The tea is full of flies," she explained. She poured the milk through the strainer. "It's full of skin."

"You could use some exorcising yourself," said Tom. Then we saw her face was pale. We looked outside, but saw nothing. "What's the matter? "

"Evil-eye just went into our bathroom."

We watched the door, our hearts almost stopped. "Why on earth you ever went into hers in the first place..."

"I *had* to."

"And why you didn't lock the door..."

"Don't nag, Chickie. I just thought the odds were against anyone arriving at that precise moment."

Now we saw the hag, bent and old, come out. She pushed the bolt and disappeared toward her room, carrying something that we could not identify.

"Go see," said Deborah.

Tom went and came back a moment later clutching his throat. He collapsed into his chair. "That fucking bitch."

"What did she do?" Deborah was squeaking from nervousness.

"She ... she..." He hid his face in his hands.

"What?"

"...washed out her chamber pot all over the floor."

We both cried out in horror.

"What ... a ... foul ... smell."

Deborah was laughing and moaning. "Poor sweetie has to clean it up," she said, meaning Tom. (But later, when Deborah and I looked into the bathroom, there was no sign of disorder, no odour. Deborah accused Tom of exaggeration and Tom claimed it was a miracle.)

We finished the tea and I was saying goodbye when suddenly we stopped, again staring through the door into the garden. A young man was standing in the sunshine. He

had just come out of Evil-eye's bathroom. This we had all clearly seen. We regarded the stranger curiously. He was a bland-faced young western man, with his shirt-sleeves rolled up on his arms.

"He looks too normal to be a guest here," said Deborah.

"Maybe he's an international youth," suggested Tom.

"Then what was he doing in her bathroom?"

"He might have lost his way. That can happen around here."

The young man looked over, squinting, but he couldn't see into the doorway where we were standing. "Shall I ask him if he needs help?" asked Deborah.

"He's doing all right," said Tom. "You keep your claws off him."

At lunch that fellow Peter (family names are never used at the ashram, so much the better) was at the table. Also there was an autostop couple from Germany, very well dressed for desert campaign. The husband wore a sun helmet on his lion head. The wife, who was American-born and in her late thirties or early forties, wore a turban with veil. When not talking or eating she kept it in place across her face by holding a corner of it in the side of her mouth, then moving her mouth toward the far ear. Very well done. She had bought the turban some years before on a trek to Masada (in Israel). Though she limped slightly from a ski accident, she was always jumping lightly on her feet, thus remaining very girlish in spite of her old face.

Having heard of the Mother of Villefranche, they had made a detour to this place with the idea of visiting her. They were then very disappointed to find this was impossible.

"My own mother died years ago," the wife told us softly, "and my husband's mother was killed in a hunting accident last year."

The poor woman, while on a cross-country trek, had been mistaken by hunters for some animal or bird and shot between the eyes.

Peter, also an American, stocky and with a flat, uninteresting face, has come, he tells us, to observe the youth conference. All of us began now to observe him. An unusual silence came over the table. Her Ladyship asked him what part of the United States he came from.

"Washington." He smiled and looked around at us all. "You can call me Pete."

"D.C.?" One could tell that all the ears in the room, even those belonging to Evil-eye and Juney, were listening carefully.

"State of."

From all sides a sigh of relief. Smiling, Pete looked from one of us to another, finally at Deborah, who wiggled. This sort of fellow is able to attract women by a helpless expression and wavy hair. She asked him why he had come to observe the youth conference. He told her that he had been sent by a publishing company and mentioned a

name that the Americans present said sounded “vaguely familiar.”

Then Pete turned suddenly to Conningsfield. “What brings *you* here?” he asked pleasantly.

After the *crudites* an enormous pearl-coloured fish came from the kitchen. Very reluctant to leave Deborah, but determined for the sake of his yoga, Tom would serve. The fish’s top side was strewn and garlanded with pink onions, tomato slices (very small, Indian tomatoes) and carrot bits. Colourful. It reminded one of Samadhi, the Founder’s marble tomb.

Conningsfield had begun to reply to Pete’s question and was still talking in a rather loud voice. Saying little. Everyone had grown bored and restless, so the fish was welcomed with exclamations of delight. What an old bore, this fellow Conningsfield, they were thinking as they carved the fish hungrily with spoons, these mystical ascetics. Oh, creature of the deep, I said silently to the fish, what would they say to learn this not-so-old bore has 10,000 rupees of sarees in his suitcase, bought on credit in Benares and ready for sale as contraband in Ceylon?

The pearl flesh was soft as soup by the time the platter came to Conningsfield. This Soldier of the Fortune knew that the carving of fish should not be left to ashramites and *Wandervögel*n.

The German’s wife was sitting next to Deborah, and they began to talk. They took an instant liking to one another, along with a certain distrust. (It seems they are *both Jewesses!*) So intimate they became, so quickly, knowing they would never see one another again.

This couple had not the money to sleep in the guesthouse (and did not do as I with postdated cheques), so were planning to move on after lunch and be in Madras that night. As the two women were sitting on my left, I could hear parts of their conversation.

“...and she told my husband that the reason for her headaches was that her twin was in her head.”

“Her *what* was in her *what*?” squeaked Her Ladyship.

“Her twin was in her head. That’s right. The undeveloped embryo of her twin was discovered as the cause of her headaches.”

Keeping their voices low, they were both shaking with giggles. “What did your husband *say*?”

“Baldur just nodded and said, ‘I see.’ ”

“Then he’d heard of such things before? It wasn’t the first time in the history of mankind?”

“Not at all. It seems it’s very common. People can have their twin buried in some part of their body and never even know it until it starts to grow.”

“Grow!” shrieked Her Ladyship, and the two fell into paroxysms of mirth. Tears appeared in their eyes. Tom was frowning. “Dear Lord,” moaned Deborah, “the things

that happen to people. It grew inside her *head*, like an *idea*?"

"It had been there from birth."

"Did they take it out? Don't tell me." She hid her face in her hands.

"I suppose so."

"And was it alive? Did it have the form of a baby? Or of a," she could hardly say it, "yolk?"

"I couldn't ask."

"I don't know which would be worse. It might have been rotten after all those years. A rotten egg in the brain. I never heard of anything so awful in my life."

(Strange, for a moment I thought she would weep.) Then she shuddered. "Let's talk about something else."

After lunch the autostoppers left the guesthouse with their packs on their backs. We three "*mousquetaires*" invited Pete to sip coffee with us in the patio. He asked many questions about Ice Cream, about the American hippy "element" he had heard was living there, whether they took drugs. He asked several questions about cannabis, hashish and LSD, on which Tom happened to be an expert. Had he asked something about philosophy or history, I would have been able to participate, but like this I was forced to silence.

Tom spoke of drugs for nearly twenty minutes without once mentioning hippies or Ice Cream. As far as we all knew when he was done, "strong Nepalese hash" had never moved south of Katmandu.

Pete asked Deborah what her father did.

"He's retired."

"What did he do?" His eyes were looking very sharp now. He examined her face and breasts.

"Who?" She had turned rather red in the face.

"Your father."

"He doesn't do anything. He's retired."

Later, in Tom's room, Deborah was furious. "Why did he want to know about my *father*?" she cried. "He *has* to be from Washington, D.C., from the C.I.A."

"Of course," agreed Tom. "Ninety-eight percent of us in India *are*."

Deborah told us she had guessed the truth when she saw him coming out of Evil-eye's bathroom, had said to herself: "That man is from Central Intelligence." The question then was, what should we do about him?

"Everyone should be warned."

Deborah laughed, saying that Villefranche was not exactly a "hotbed" of drugs and communism. Rather, we should "put him onto Evil-eye," tell him she has a transmitter in her room. "We'll tell him to sniff around in there."

This image made us all cry out in pain.

"We'll tell him Juney's on Nepalese hash and if he's nice to her she'll let him have a little."

“We’ll tell him Flam...” Deborah broke off, recalling perhaps that I had some reason to wish not to be under suspicion by the authorities. “We’ll tell him Flaminio’s from Central Intelligence and we’re all scared to death of him.”

“Perfect,” I cried.

It is flattering to be included in their play, though I never before imagined Conningsfield in the role of a C.I.A. agent, I who have played Socrates and Bonaparte, speaking real lines, thinking real thoughts.

“Actually,” said Her Ladyship then, “for a C.I.A. *wallah*, Pete has divine eyes.”

“Chickie...”

“I think the best way to find out why he’s here is to do a little ... uh ... counterespionage.” She moved her body as a snake.

“*Bull shit!*” cried Tom. “Chickie, if you ...”

Deborah was offended. Did Tom really think she would have something to do with that lout? “With those divine eyes?”

“Chickie!”

She told him that he could watch to make sure things didn’t go too far. She would just get the necessary information out of Pete, then fade away. She winked at me.

“I’ll kill him before he puts one hand on you.”

For a long moment they looked at each other eye to eye. I realized she was still trying very hard to seduce Tom and had found this menace.

“I refuse to be threatened,” said Tom at last.

“Then you’ll come across?”

“Come across! You know I can’t.”

“Then you’ll watch?”

“You know, Chickie, you bitch, this is doing fuck-all for my yoga.”

“Nonsense. It’s just what your yoga needs. Something to get its teeth into.”

“What teeth?” asked Tom, looking very sad. “It’s just a baby yoga, soon to become a statistic. ‘Baby yoga, died in infancy while watching Chickie seduce intelligence agent.’ But not in *my* bed.”

“Next door at Hotel de France.”

“Hotel de *France*? What will the rickshaw *wallahs* think?”

She laughed, so wicked. “That baby needed a new pair of shoes.”

Chapter 8

This morning Her Ladyship moved into Hotel de France, which stands next door to the guesthouse. The head rickshaw driver, whom she and Tom have named “Green Beret,” was allowed into the patio to take her baggage. His brief, dark presence. On this side of the wall one could see he was only a cringing servant, not a “boss.” Deborah and

Tom followed him into the hot street as into a kind of hell. I also must move out. My room is reserved from today onwards by two international youths who will arrive this evening.

Her Ladyship's suitcase was heavier going than when she arrived, also there were many extras on her arm. Tom has given her gifts: shawl, tablecloth, books, etc. He is always buying things and then giving them away, keeping nothing for himself. He says the money goes to good causes: the ashram businesses, the Indian economy. Possibly. But I think it would more profit his host country if he changed his dollars at the State Bank instead of on the black market.

Tom returned alone to find me sitting in the back garden. He was upset at losing Deborah, talkative and social, ordering tea in the kitchen and then making it himself. In the next hour he told much of his personal history to me. He is fascinated, it is clear, of having English and Italian nobility in his family, of being raised in the Catholic Church. He has rejected this religion, but gives the impression that a Catholic upbringing is necessary to become an honest and sensitive man. The only kind of mother to have, he also seems to say, is a virgin. The only valid father, a saint. People's mothers should be of delicate but fading beauty and dipsomaniacal. Fathers should be V.I.P.s.

It is not difficult for an experienced psychologist to draw conclusions about this young man. He would be a saint, would that all women (including Deborah) be pure like his mother. He feels himself inadequate, abandoned, worthless. His grades in university were "B's" (only English literature, and in that only "B's!"). His father and sister had received all "A's." He is his mother's child. I am surprised he does not drink more than he does (like her) or take drugs. Instead he seeks to find himself (or lose himself) in mystical studies. He plans to begin seriously practicing yoga after the hectic holiday season.

Before coming here he spent a year in Scientology. To these sailors he contributed ten thousand dollars, then found certain "inconsistencies" in their philosophy. They told him he was free to go. Next he was "turned on" to Eastern thought while reading Thoreau. But the American Transcendentalists, he felt, were not adequately mystical. (It is typical of Catholics to seek until they find utter obscurity, then pray for light.)

Twice in his life, he told me after learning I had been a practicing psychologist, he had suffered profound nervous depression, each time after a love affair.

"Then this is why you will not accept Deborah?"

"Accept Chickie? Good grief! That would be the end of Tommy, were he to accept. It'd blow my mind. Permanently."

"Does Deborah know this?"

"I've told her a dozen times."

"Yet she insists?"

"*Insists?* She *plots*. Look, Chickie has her own problems. She has to blow a mind a month just to keep happy and fulfilled. Right now she's working on a double

feature: Pete and me. She plans to blow our minds both at once.”

“She’s purposely trying to destroy you?” This seemed difficult to believe but I was willing to try.

“She thinks it’ll be beneficial. But she just never saw anyone sitting for months and years in front of a television set on Cape Cod, his mind blown for good.”

To me what appalls is that Tom’s life is one with all the advantages mine has lacked. Family with nobility and connections near the seat of power. Wealth. Birth in a country with such far borders and influence. Opportunity to study anything anywhere, with no thought to profession and “gainful employment.” And yet none of this can he use. He has become, in spite of all, a refugee. So odd. A weak boy. Deborah would use him like an object to satisfy her sexual appetite. (One morning her eyes and mine happened to fall at the same instant upon one of Tom’s candlesticks, which had somehow crossed the room and dropped to the floor from her bed. She hurried to replace it on the altar, looking very embarrassed.)

Another day we three were together and Tom was talking in endless flow about his family. I had already become bored, was thinking of other things. Then I listened. More family. To me, this is one of the most important subjects, but for Tom it was only compulsion.

“For God’s sake,” said Deborah, “will you please stop talking about your family? You’re driving me up the wall.”

“But Chickie, I’m doing it so you’ll be terribly impressed and have greater respect for me.”

“Fine. But that’s not what’s happening.”

“That’s not what’s *happening!*” He jumped down beside her. He gripped her arms between his long, bony hands. “Chickie,” he begged, shaking her gently back and forth, “can’t you just once be soft and feminine?”

Indignation. “Me? Feminine? Can’t *you* just once be,” she tried to break his grasp with a wild pull, “be a nice chap and get your meathooks out of my flesh?”

He let her go and drew back, his face twisted. “I know why I don’t sleep with you. I’m scared to death of you, witch.”

She smoothed her hair, smiling with chin high. She closed her cat eyes. “I’ll accept that reason.”

Tom laughed. “Did-I-ever-tell-you-about-my-cousin-who-lives-in-Sussex-and-is-an-earl-and-is-married-to-an-Italian-baroness-and-has-taken-up-growing-roses-professionally?”

“I think you just did.”

“And I must say, I feel a lot better for it.”

His problem, I believe, is having no motive for his life. He feels he must succeed very high, like his father, but is afraid of failure. I would say that this is a realistic fear for Tom.

And my own motives? There are three main ones in my life: thirst for wisdom and knowledge, thirst for might and power, thirst for giving and receiving love. Yes, I am a very ambitious man, more than normally ambitious, not satisfied before I can put a *Fürst oder Reichsgraf von* before my name. As a result of my mad and megalomaniac ambitions, I am for the time being living in exile.

Today, knowing that I must move again, even if it is only next door, I have felt a little sad and depressed. The truth is, Flaminio de Conningsfield, Soldier of the Fortune, like anyone else has lonely moments. Exile *ist einsam*. He has tried correspondence, but the lazy people reply once, twice, never more. So he writes sometimes, in these notes, to an older, wiser Flaminio, sometimes to a dumb, old Flaminio, sometimes to his imaginary son or daughter, or his imaginary wife, formerly La Duchessa di Villabella.

After our conversation, so intimate on his side, I showed my sarees to Tom. He has bought (cash from the pocket) two for an even higher price than I dared hope — half again the original retail price (and I had bought them “on credit” paying only a small deposit, therefore much profit). One he will send to his mother, the other give to Deborah for Christmas or send to an aunt. Also for Christmas he has bought from the ashram handmade paper factory sheets of paper with coloured water design, enough to wrap a hundred gifts. In one drawer are rolls of ribbons and rosettes. As Christmas is coming so soon, I wondered whether he could use it all.

“I’m not going anywhere,” he told me. “Christmas comes every year.”

Whistling in the dark? Does he think he will remain here safe and sound year after year?

We looked at each other one moment, each perhaps wondering whether the other would be giving him a Christmas present. In my heart I do not expect one from Tom, or only a small gift, nothing valuable. My own financial position makes it extremely unlikely I will give any gifts at all. Exception: Under the sarees I have one miniature painting, two hundred years old, for which I paid very dear — 140 rupees. I will give this to Her Ladyship if she will come away with me. It depicts Rajput warriors on horseback making battle. One man has lost his head, which is flying out of the picture to the left. I have pricked my finger and touched a little of my own blood on the places of disconnection, but have only succeeded in making an ugly smear in the shape of a cravat. Fortunately, the poor fellow is dead with his eyes closed.

Her Ladyship returned to the guesthouse before lunch to take away the last of her possessions.

“The guy that runs Hotel de France is around the twist,” she told Tom and me. “I asked him the price of the room, and he asked me whether I wanted to pay thirty rupees or forty-five.”

“So naturally you told him you were a rich American and preferred to pay forty-five.”

“But he hadn’t even said yet what the prices *included*. It took me twenty minutes

to get it straight and I'm still confused. For thirty you get the same room and bath and full pension. So why pay forty-five?"

"It's a matter of principle," Tom explained. "Some people prefer to pay more."

"You're as crazy as he is," she laughed. "And hey, you know that Christmas tree they have over there? I told you there was something wrong with it. Well, it finally hit me what it was."

"There's absolutely nothing wrong with that tree.

"But it's upside down." She began to giggle.

"Christmas tree branches go downward. Those go downward. It's perfectly correct."

"But the *tip*, the *point* of the tree, is supposed to be up, not down. The tip of this tree points downward. The wide part is on top."

"It's perfectly correct. The branches go downward, heavy with snow."

"Sweetie," laughed Deborah, "the tree is upside down. That's Christmas in Hindusville for you."

"As a matter of fact," Tom said stiffly, "they had it the other way around and I told them to put it like that."

"You?" She stared at him, bewildered. "You're actually quite weird," she told him, her face now full of interest. "And you'd really rather pay forty-five?"

"Every time."

"Well, lots of luck." She put on her shoulder bag and stood up.

"Where are you going?"

"Home to eat."

"Home! You can call Hotel de France *home*?"

"Bye-bye."

Suddenly it was like she was going away to prison, far from us. Tom cried *damn* the pension system, he would eat next door with her. It would only mean seven rupees extra, not even a dollar. Deborah was unenthusiastic. Lunch, she pointed out, had to be ordered in advance.

"Bull shit. After all the bread I've laid on around that place they'll come up with something for me to eat."

She was silent a moment. "Maybe I'd just like to eat alone. And think."

"About C.I.A.?"

"No, no. That was only joking. He's no agent."

"How do you know? Did you do some counterintelligence?" But Deborah was walking across the patio toward the gate and didn't reply. "Hey, Chickie," Tom called. She stopped and turned. "Don't order any afternoon tea in that place."

"Why not?"

"It costs fifteen rupees,"

Laughing, Deborah disappeared out the gate into the street.

Then our lunch was served at the large table in the diningroom. Then Pete wasn't at lunch and we learned he was not eating there. Tom left the table and went into the street to question the rickshaw drivers. He didn't return.

After lunch the guesthouse manager accepted my postdated cheque rather coldly. I handed it to him wearing full embassy dress, white gloves, plastic chrysanthemum in buttonhole, gold watch and chain, etc. Still, there was a certain stiffness, showing that these ashram people are quite coldhearted at the moment when compassion is needed. "Aspire to the Mother," "Open your being to the Mother," "Call the Mother's power into your heart," etc. Words of the Founder. I make no comment. On one wall I have seen a sign: *Money is Power; Give your Money to the Mother*. Some too-enthusiastic disciple? Perhaps.

The Hotel de France is, like the rest of non-ashram, non-Tamil Villefranche-sur-Mère, a French place run by aborigines. There are no pictures of the Mother on the walls. None of the Founder. No ashram symbols. There are no dancing Sivas, temple carvings or batiks either. In one corner of the dining verandah some very old French journals containing nothing of interest. One Christmas tree. The hotel owner-manager, a black "Frenchman" (who I think has never seen Europe except in travel posters), was standing with his hands on his hips regarding it. His head lay on one shoulder. He wore Bermuda shorts and white knee socks out of tennis shoes. His hair is long, black and fluffy at the ends. Sitting behind him around a table were Deborah, Pete and Tom. They were silent, not sitting straight up in their chairs, also looking at the tree. Tom was smoking two cigarettes, so a very bad ambience prevailed.

"You do not mind," the owner said in French when he saw Conningsfield arriving in such beautiful dress, "living in a hotel where the Christmas tree is under suspicion?"

For once I was speechless, could only laugh. I signaled to the bearers to set down my bags, then removed my gloves and wiped my front with a handkerchief.

"There is one room free until December 26," he told me. "You will pay either thirty or forty-five rupees, just as you wish."

Deborah was hiding her face in her napkin, having another case of hysterical giggles. "Thirty rupees will be fine," I told him gravely. He looked rather disappointed.

"Thirty rupees is next year's special rate, normally beginning on January first. But because you are a friend of *Monsieur* ... uh ...," he indicated Tom, whose name he had forgotten, "I will allow you that price from today."

"*Merci.*"

"Before I show you to your room, may I have your opinion on the tree?"

I looked around. Everyone was hanging on my face. I looked at the wretched pine which resembled a dirty green cube. Grey cotton wadding on the branches. Un-speakable. Tiny coloured lights went on and off. "The lights are not steady," I told him perversely.

"They are not supposed to be. Is there anything else? About the position of the

tree?”

“Too far to the left?”

“Ha,” said Tom. “You see? Turn it the other way and the branches go up.”

“The *star* wouldn’t go on,” cried Deborah, indignant. “The trunk is too thick on top. They had to glue it on.”

“Non-Christians know nothing about it.”

“Nonsense,” said Her Ladyship as I was starting up the stairs. “We had Christmas trees all my childhood.”

“Imported ones.”

“Right from the north of California, my very state.”

“Those were surf boards,” said Tom. I heard Deborah’s laugh.

The bearers following, we were soon at the top of the stairs, standing on the broad terrace while the manager unlocked the padlock on the door of my room. Suddenly Tom bounded up. He took me aside. “I’ll pay your bill,” he told me to my astonishment.

The offer was very interesting. I blushed in confusion. “What is the meaning of this?”

“Your room is right next door to Chickie’s. I’d like to keep an eye on her now and then.”

“An eye on her?”

“Her *now* — I-wonder-who’s-kissing-her-*now* — and her *then*. For her own good.”

“You’re worried about Pete?”

“Aren’t you?”

Have we the right to be jealous, either of us? Are either of us prepared to give her the happiness she is seeking to find with Pete? The answer to both these questions is, yes, I am. Had it been a matter of espionage, I would have preferred to listen at the wall myself. But Americans are better when it is instead this sort of detective work. I was always therefore to leave the key at the desk before going out, taking only the normal precaution to lock my suitcase containing the sarees, watches and tape recorder, which are to be sold later in Ceylon.

Suddenly an idea occurred to me. “Would you care to buy a tape recorder?” He could give me dollars, I was thinking, much better than rupees. Then I only had to bring it out of the suitcase before he was racing down the stairs to fetch his traveler cheques.

This evening I walked alone on the sea wall. The sun had set, the water looked cold and restless. Oceans after sunset will make me nervous and apprehensive. I feel they may jump up suddenly and smother me.

Approximately 100 meters away Deborah and Tom were arguing. It was clear from her movements that she wanted to be left alone. For nearly twenty-four hours Tom

has not let her out of sight, except after ten o'clock at night. He has decorated her room with flowers and Christmas streamers and has hidden the microphone of the tape recorder in some coloured ribbons near the top of the bed. After ten o'clock the gates of both hotel and guesthouse are locked until dawn. Therefore no danger. Tom has anyway given the gatekeepers their orders. Also the rickshaw drivers, who sleep in their vehicles or on the sidewalks, are all paid informers.

The only problem is that Romeo and Juliet seem to show no interest whatever in one another.

"They're cooling it until the right moment comes," explained Tom.

"I sometimes think — forgive me — that you are almost *wishing* they will compromise themselves. I wonder why."

"It's a shame to waste this set-up. The tape recorder was a beautiful idea. I've never gone so deeply into anything before."

"Then you must leave her alone. Give them a chance."

"Never."

"Then when can they get together?"

"Nap time," he replied grimly.

Deborah drove him away and walked down the promenade in my direction, then turned without seeing me and sat down on the edge of the wall. I hesitated to approach her and in that moment was beset by child beggars led by the most obnoxious of the lot who this evening appeared with a shaved head. Bald as a krone. I had to laugh. Whether some religious rite or stinking lice, I didn't know. The shape of his head resembled the carved top of a walking stick I had once owned.

This evening I did not have to threaten them with my umbrella — my ridicule drove them off. The child tried to hide his head under his arms, then led his friends away. I straightened my shoulders. Beggars always unsettle me internally. Coming up behind Her Ladyship I cleared my throat softly.

She turned. "Hi." She smiled, her face looking all the same very sad. I told her this. She turned her eyes back toward the sea. "This place is like an island. I hate islands," she said.

"Then sail away."

"I will. I'm just waiting to see the Mother so I can finish this article I'm writing. If I can't see her soon I'll go anyway.

"Where will you go?"

She sighed. "I don't know. I'll think of something. I've been traveling about three years (!) now, and I still haven't run out of places."

"I'm going to Ceylon the day after Christmas."

"That's nice."

"I have found some people traveling to Madurai who will take me as far as Tiruchirapalli in their car. From there I will take the plane."

“That sounds lovely.” She kept her face toward the sea.

“I think there is room in their car for you.”

She chuckled, said something; her voice had an emptiness in it such as I have never heard. A thousand questions came into my mind. How can such emptiness exist in a so intelligent, healthy young woman? Emptiness is perhaps a wrong and too easy word. Rather her problem is a sort of untouchable despair.

Had she again consulted the *I Ching*? No, she had no more questions. “Anyway, it tells you what you want it to tell you.”

Perhaps she had approached it in the wrong spirit.

Laughing, she agreed, then let her lovely head drop back, was looking up at the colourless sky.

I asked her what she was thinking. She replied that she had been earlier walking along reciting poems of John Donne, that she often had poetry in her head when she was walking or sitting in beautiful places. Would she recite one poem for me? Of course. So, nodding, she began with no hesitation:

*“Go and catch a falling star,
Get with child a mandrake root,
Tell me where all past years are,
Or who cleft the Devil’s foot;
Teach me to hear mermaids singing,
Or to keep off envy’s stinging,
And find
What wind
Serves to advance an honest mind.”*

She asked me then if I wanted her to continue and I begged her to do so. How seldom lately have I heard a poem recited for me. My brain was swimming in sheer pleasure. She recited the next stanza and the last. Then we were both chuckling at this very cynical poem which concerns the infidelity of beautiful women.

I asked her if she had recited it for Tom, that it would only give him more worries. She said she had, in an attempt to make him feel better — that a personal problem seems less important when it is universalized. The inconstancy of beautiful women, she pointed out, is eternal, the same as that of men. (I personally do not share this view.) Then she would know if I had ever heard about someone having a twin in his or her head. She looked at me very oblique.

“The other day at lunch,” I replied.

“Never otherwise?”

“I have read of someone having their twin in the hip.”

“No kidding.” She looked interested. “And anyone might have one and never even know until it started to ... grow?”

“I think it occurs very seldom,” I told her. “Otherwise you would hear of such

things every day.”

Then she rose to her feet and we walked along the sea wall. After a minute we came upon Tom, tall, stiff, staring at the sea with wide, unblinking eyes like a dead man.

Deborah was suddenly very angry, her eyes evil. “Why do you stand like that?” she must at once know.

Tom released his breath and collapsed at the stomach. “To discourage beggars, Chickie. If they think you’re practicing yoga they won’t bother you, unlike certain dumb broads.”

“*Were* you practicing yoga?”

“Ask them, baby. Ask the fucking beggars.”

She turned toward Flaminio, indicating Tom with her pointing finger. “And this I wanted to sleep with.” Her eyes were making lightning.

“This *stiff*.”

Then she saw the effect of her so cruel words. Tom had turned pale. Taking his hand she tried to pull it up to her lips, but he snapped it away. Then he was walking away, very long steps, only not too fast. She was running at his side like a beggar.

“It wasn’t me talking, it was my twin. My *twin*. Sweetie, listen.” She was pulling at his shirtsleeve. “Wait for Chickie. *Please*.”

Tom stopped walking and put his arm around her shoulder. He was looking very sad. They waited for me and we walked home together, nobody talking.

Chapter 9

A man we call “Fatty” and his wife have moved into my former guesthouse room. A typical American Jew, vulgar, fat like a circle around the middle, thin legs, wearing shorts (naturally he would), smoking mustard-gas cigars. He is the father of one of the settlers at Ice Cream. The poor daughter has been drugged already one week awaiting the arrival of her parents, has greeted them smiling vacantly. He, the father, has selected the smallest, thinnest, rickshaw driver to pull his huge bulk around Villefranche for a weekly rate. His wife must ride in a second rickshaw. No room with Fatty aboard. As he rides he looks around as if seeking applause. Anyone will tremble when Fatty removes the cigar, fixes him with a squint, and starts to talk. He talks quietly, only shouting when one attempts to reply.

With Fatty at the guesthouse I am happy to be at the hotel, especially as the bill will be settled honestly (by Tom). (I am not *fond* of deceit but in my life it is often unavoidable for survival reasons.) Tom has carried to my room his sitar, but never stays or practices it. The rickshaw drivers applauded when he appeared with it on the street this morning, as though expecting a concert. To me he looked more like a thief caught by searchlight, desperate, stolen instrument in hand. But the Hindus will applaud nearly

anything (only not poor Fatty). I have seen one small boy in Bombay, seated an evening with his father on Marina Drive, applaud the disappearance of the sun over the horizon.

Tomorrow is Christmas Day, tonight a special supper in the guesthouse. Her Ladyship and I are both invited. We are the only outsiders allowed; not even Fatty's daughter can attend. Tom has arranged it. All morning he has been riding around the town buying gifts, taking Deborah with him in the rickshaw. For her kindness in staying with him she has been given many gifts: a handwoven tablecloth set, more hand-made paper, etc. She has had to buy a second traveling bag for all her booty.

At lunch Deborah and Pete sat very far apart, never looking at each other. Tom was nervous, speaking more than anyone. No after-lunch siestas allowed, he said. Deborah must wrap gifts in his room. Pete must help Juney make Father Christmases with apples, carrots, cotton wadding and toothpicks; yes, they may discuss yoga at the same time. The weather, which had gotten quite hot and humid, suddenly made a tropical downpour. Nearly ten days since the official end of the monsoon season. I left the wet patio and went to help Deborah wrap the gifts. She had been making a very slapdash job of it; I added confusion. Tom ran in and out. As the afternoon passed, the breeze was cooled by the dampness.

The afternoon ended. Our work done, Deborah and I returned to the hotel to wash and dress for supper. Tom stopped me. He was already beginning to take apart our packages and do them over again. "You'll keep an eye on things for me?"

How could I pretend not to know what he meant? I nodded. He was paying my rent. Now I knew why. I, Flaminio de Conningsfield, am a paid informer!

Heavy hearted, I walked about my room, took a cold shower. Hot water, brought in a bucket for bathing, is part of the forty-five-rupee rate along with bed tea and afternoon tea. Assuming that my employer has settled on the thirty-rupee rate for me, I order no hot water, no tea.

But now what? Voices in the next room. Someone is inside with Deborah!

I left my room and passed hers, turning my head to look casually over the half-curtain into the lighted chamber. Framed against the mosquito net they were embracing, Peter and she. Almost the same height, he heavier. So passionate, with eyes closed, so they didn't see me. I wondered if it was their first kiss together. Then, pretending I had seen nothing, I knocked loudly at their door like a stormtrooper.

There was a pause, then another, then the door opened. The two were very confused, covered with blushes. Deborah had picked up her camera. "Hi," she said with a funny voice. "Come in."

I told her I had no time. I was looking for Tom.

"He isn't here." She motioned for me to look around. All honesty and innocence. "I was showing Pete my camera."

I happen to know Her Ladyship's camera. It is remarkable for nothing except its cheapness. I asked them if they knew where Tom might be found. Then I told them

about my last Christmas, spent in Hong Kong, then the one before that which took place in Bahrein. Peter felt it was time for him to leave. "I'll see you at supper," he told her, his voice thick. "Bye-bye." He looked at me very strangely, eye to eye. How, I asked myself, can she go to this one who is so gross and uncultured? Only for his penis? And how can she know anything about his penis until she has seen it? Or reject mine?

Oh, Your Ladyship, how I would love to punish you (so softly, you would never even feel a hurt) for your behavior in this matter. No one can offend a *Schutzstaffeloffizier* without suffering consequences.

But again in my room, alone, I feel a humiliated wreck. Is this what I have sunk to, I ask myself? I think of what I have formerly been, a teacher, a professor, so many adults taking from me an inspiring example, if I may boast. And now this — a paid informer!

Dear Deborah, if I still have the right to pronounce your name (are you weeping now? I hear you in the toilet and have turned on the tape recorder, hoping to record whatever comes to pass), what I have done is for your own good. This American with his dull and uniform face is not worthy of your favours. I know that you are suffering very deep inside from some past hurts, which is why you have come here, seeking love and salvation.

Yet you cannot look into my so timid eyes. O, how to convince you that though I am a soldier I am not cold and cruel? How to convince you that my tenderness for you is real, and not because your father is rich? (For all I know he might be poor, but then how do you travel so far — do silly articles pay so much? I doubt it. And you cannot, certainly, pay your way, moment by moment, like I, a cat with two lives who lives constantly in danger.)

We met later on the terrace, waiting for Tom to come and take us to the gala supper next door. The air was sultry. I have never seen Her Ladyship looking so beautiful. She had put on a silk saree that was as if made out of liquid gold. When she moved, gold ran up and down her body. When she was still, her hands in her lap, fires burned on her shoulders, breasts and knees.

The very feminine and dignified dress had transformed her. How calm and gentle she seemed. Her face was tranquil, holding no reproach for me, no reprisals, in spite of my vile action. I knew that I could never tell Tom what I had seen. I thought: this is a woman whom I could marry. No American woman has ever interested me so deeply — luckily her voice was not so hard as most. Only I would need to educate her a little in history and philosophy.

We talked. She told me she had always lived and traveled alone, had never lived with anyone for any length of time. I told her she was too solitary, that it was normal for women to want a husband and children, a home. "You are seeking something but you do not know where to look."

"What about you?" she smiled, touching the leaf of a plant with her finger.

What about...? *Now* who was the analyst and who the patient? Her question brought a lump to my throat. The dear, dear girl. Can you picture it? There was Conningsfield, sitting in full parade dress (he had no evening dress), only having left the baton in his room since it was unlikely there would be troops for him to review. Anyone else would have been fooled by the disguise, thinking: "That fellow has never passed a solitary moment in his life, always in the midst of his army." Certainly all those 500 million groveling souls down there in the street would have believed this. And *she questioned his way of life.*

This beautiful young woman. How could I burden her with my own story, my sad tale of exile? No, this was too unusual a moment to waste. Our hero felt that this was a woman one could really live and die for. But it was not his job to die. Now that he had restored his self-respect, he could not again suffer such humiliation.

I was about to reply something diversionary when she looked at her watch. "Eight thirty. Maybe he's waiting for us to come over there."

It seemed reasonable. We started down the stairs. On the landing one of the bearers, carrying a bucket of steaming water, stopped to let us pass. "Hot water, Sahib?" he asked me as I was going by.

First, irritation at his tardiness, for I had bathed an hour ago in cold water. Second, the sudden realization that Tom was paying forty-five rupees for my room. "No, my good man," I told the bearer. I was touched.

The street was full of rickshaw drivers. Seeing us, Green Beret ran up to Deborah. "Sahib no inside." Waving his hands, he indicated that we should return to the hotel. "You wait. Sahib coming."

Rather confused, we returned to the terrace. I felt the drivers had gone too far. Deborah felt they had orders from Tom. Perhaps he had planned a surprise.

A few minutes later Tom came bounding up the stairs. "Sorry to be late. C'mon. We have to hurry."

His long, thin body was dressed in a starched white *khurta* and white "ducks" of the United States Navy, flaring at the feet. We hastened after him into the street. Then came many rickshaw drivers running to stop us. My heart jumped into my knees. Then we saw Green Beret untying two garlands of yellow flowers. His black hands snapped the strings. Opening the first he held it high toward Tom's head. His hands, I could see, were shaking. Tom put his head through. I could tell he was taken by surprise and very moved. Then Green Beret handed him the second garland and motioned that Tom should put it around Deborah's neck. He did. Then the rickshaw people, grinning broadly, very proud, all stepped back and gently applauded.

With her gold-brown saree now enlivened by the thick wreath of yellow flowers, Her Ladyship was more beautiful than I had ever seen her. Her face was radiant, as if it was the most perfect moment of her life to become thus like a queen bride.

"Thank you," Tom said, very moved. Deborah could almost not speak. They

shook Green Beret's hand, for once Tom not giving a tip. "And a very merry Christmas to you all."

Then, having no more time, we fled next door into the guesthouse patio, Tom and Deborah looking at each other with speechless joy like escaped prisoners.

When we entered the dining room, I could not believe my eyes. Almost the entire table was occupied. All the guests were there. More than twenty souls. Candles burned down the long center. The walls were festooned with paper hangings. At every place an apple Father Christmas and a crepe paper popper. The Founder and the Mother looked down from the walls. The sideboard altar was arranged with Tom's whole set of candelabra.

Two places at the head of the table were still unoccupied, then filled by Tom and Deborah like a king and queen. Deborah I knew had thought earlier of wearing nothing special for the supper, now was certainly glad to be wearing the saree. She sat on Tom's right. Flaminio sat on her right, just around the corner of the table. I could not envy Tom because of what I had seen so few hours ago. Peter was at the far end of the table, Evil-eye on his right hand like a penalty. Opposite me, on Tom's left, sat Juney. Next to her Fatty, then Mrs. Fatty. On my right was the Swiss couple looking festive as two mossy stones. Fatty's bead eyes were quite steady on Her Ladyship. Everyone was looking at her, so suddenly changed. She looked at everyone indirectly, as though surrounded by suns.

All present were impressed by the action of the rickshaw drivers which had transformed the two former confused Americans at the head of the table into a sort of royalty. As in a fairy tale, so they found themselves redeemed by sudden beauty and the respectful efforts of hirelings.

"I just *know*," said Juney, "that my lei's out there in the street waitin' for me. I shoulda gone out, but I was just too darn busy gettin' things ready around here for you others." She looked very downhearted. "Did you happen to see *my* lei while they were givin' you yours?"

Tom shook his head. "I didn't happen to notice."

"That's just what this dress of mine needs," she sighed. "A touch o' yellah. Now, if I was in Honolulu..."

"You look lovely just as you are," smiled Deborah. "I never saw you looking so pretty."

Juney was wearing a long white dress embroidered with coloured flowers. "I'm sure all those drivers are waitin' for me to come outside. What do you think, Tom? Think I should go out there and let 'em give me my lei?"

"Why don't you take mine," said Tom gently, but I could see it hurt him to give up the rickshaw drivers' gift. Deborah looked pained, too, but nothing to be done. He took his garland off and hung it around Juney's neck.

"Thanks, Tom. I think I *deserve* this for all the work I've done for this party."

“I think you do too,” he said kindly.

Spots of water, bits of petal and pollen dust had stained Tom’s immaculate shirt front. This was seen when the flowers were removed. Now, of course, it was quite clear who should have been placed at the head of the table next to Her Ladyship. Who was he, that well-dressed and unsoiled stranger on the queen’s right hand? A gentleman in waiting? Her secret *amant*? The First Minister of the realm? Perhaps the king’s brother. But only look more closely. Is that not the Pretender, Conningsfield, in disguise? And look even more closely. Is the king not really assassinated with a dagger in his back, ready to topple head first into his supper dish?

The turkey course was named “Juney’s Triumph.” I believe I knew the bird, a small, vicious creature living in the street near the ashram. He would spread his tail feathers and run at me whenever I passed by. But my umbrella could open larger than his tail, he soon learned. Now he or one of his friends was cut in pieces on a dish of rice.

Juney related her struggle. “First I scorched him. Then I boiled him. Boiled him *again*. Then I baked him, then I set him into the rice and baked the heck out of him some more. How does he taste?”

“Delicious,” we murmured.

“A little dry, maybe? A little tough? Be honest. I can take it.”

“Not at all.” Just barely edible if you took a lot of the rice onto the fork at the same time.

“Well, I wish you could have seen that turkey alive. Then you’d understand what I was up against. But it was worth it. What’s Christmas without turkey, I always say.”

Now I saw that Peter was gazing the length of the table at Deborah, who was returning his gaze. Tom, who had a more jealous nature than myself, noticed this too and began to get rather excited. He took Her Ladyship’s lower jaw in his fingers and twisted her face around. Only her eyes looked still toward Peter. Then she jerked loose, biting Tom’s hand. “Stop!”

“What brings you to Villefranche, Deborah?” asked Fatty who had been watching this.

She rubbed her face where the red marks from Tom’s fingers still showed. “Huh?” It took her a moment to gather her wits. Also she probably found it difficult to answer Fatty, whom she disliked. The day before she had seen him forcing his skinny driver to pedal against a strong wind along the sea wall. Fatty, meanwhile, sat in the rickshaw smoking his cigar and looking around proudly. Now she looked at him rather cold. “I was brought here by plane,” she told him. “And car.”

It was like sticking a bull, only he held his violent nature under control. “Have you seen the Mother?” he asked.

“Not yet.”

“I did. Last year. You should too, Deborah. It would do you a lotta good. A real lady, the Mother. You could use some of that yourself.”

“I’m sure. And by the way, in case you don’t happen to know because you yourself don’t ride a bike, it’s very hard pedaling upwind along the sea wall. Usually one lets the rickshaw drivers take the back streets going toward town.”

“You mean yesterday?” He laughed. “Oh, I *know* it’s hard. But I was *punishin’* him. Found the fellow dead drunk the night before. Wanted to teach him a lesson before firing him.”

“You fired him?”

“Course I did. Teach him a lesson. Won’t get drunk next time. Anyway, there won’t be any next time, not with him. He’s out for good.”

I think no one at the table was listening to this conversation but myself. Tom tried to listen, but must talk instead with Juney. Very enlightening, I thought, to hear two Jews with hostile natures turned against each other. Deborah was shaking, pale, to see how gross her Jewish compatriots can be. She looked around, as if for help, but there were no other Jews present except Fatty’s wife (no improvement).

Then Deborah turned to me and said very quietly, “He reminds me of that father we were reading about who killed his daughter.”

“I heard what you just said,” roared Fatty, who must have monster ears for I could hardly hear her myself and was sitting next to her.

Deborah turned absolutely white. The table had suddenly become silent. She took a sip of water.

“I heard what you said,” he shouted again. “That fellah in the magazine who shot his kid. I read that too. I suppose you take the side of the kid. I hear you was laughin’ while you were readin’.”

Deborah was perhaps afraid Fatty would come around the table and beat her with his fists. “Look,” she said, “let’s not spoil...”

“Yeah. It’s Christmas. You shoulda thoughta that before startin’ somethin’. Okay, Deborah, we’ll leave it for now. Only remember, next time don’t be so high and mighty tellin’ other people how to run their lives.”

The whole table was silent, eating. Tom reached over, hooked Deborah’s neck with his fingers, pulled her head close and kissed her cheek. “Cheer up,” he told her. “Christmas comes but once a year.”

At which she couldn’t help laughing, but she was still trembling and her eyes were wet.

Through the rest of the supper Her Ladyship was pale and could hardly wait to get away from the table. Nervously she picked at what appeared to be one string on the flowers overlooked by Green Beret. But when she had finally unwrapped it, against my warning, the bottom fell out of the lei. Now she looked around the room, now at her watch, so human and helpless. My heart went out to her.

After, Tom walked with us back to our hotel, only ten steps, no time to exchange views. Deborah wanted to tell us something. “He’s so *gross*,” she said as we looked

through the locked iron bars. Tom shouted and a dark figure arose from somewhere and shuffled toward us with his blankets on his shoulders. “How *dare* he call me by my first name and look at me like that, like I was a traitor or something. I feel absolutely *violated*.”

Tom bent and kissed her forehead. “Tomorrow we’ll go to the Christmas party and get Mother’s blessings.”

“Will she be there?”

“Unlikely, but she’ll send them.

“Fatty says she’s a real lady.”

“She is.”

“He says I could use some of that.”

“You could. But I love you anyway.”

She sniffed, tossing her head as she stepped through the gate. The gateman saluted. Suddenly she turned and ran back to whisper in Tom’s ear.

Going up the stairs a moment later she told me we were to hand out the Christmas tips tomorrow. In the dim light she looked at her watch. It was ten thirty. “Goodnight, Flaminio,” she said. “Merry Christmas.” I felt her face brush first my left cheek, then the right. Then she was looking for her keys, struggling with the padlock, and a moment later had disappeared into her room.

Late into the night I have read and thought. So soon to leave here — what have I accomplished? More weeks of cost-free existence. That is anyway something. Ahead, in Ceylon, risks, dangers. I have enemies there. The way is hard, my battlefield goals still elusive. I imagine life on that southern isle with Deborah as it was in its better moments in Greece with Erde. How much I could offer her.

The immediate problem is to get her to leave with me. In any case she must move out of this hotel the day after Christmas, as I also, and unless she wishes to move back with Tom she will not have a room in all of Villefranche. Peter has four beds in his room, but they are all reserved for the international youths. Tom has spent some minutes talking with Peter so to learn more about him (then defuse him), has found him knowledgeable in spiritual studies and has given him free one large book printed by the ashram and therefore not rare.

Peter is writing a thesis for a doctoral degree. He will teach. His research concerns American literature of the last century, primarily the Transcendentalist, R.W. Emerson. He has loaned me a small booklet of “The Master’s” essays and I have been quite touched by the sincerity of ideas that the volume contains.

Trust thyself; every heart vibrates to that iron string.

This is true. My heart also vibrates.

Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist.

Yes, I could have written that myself, but what can such a sentence mean to this American with his empty face? Yet he has underlined it! It only shows that everyone here is seeking. Tom? Hoping still to seek himself in what Emerson would condemn as “mechanical isolation.” He promises to shut himself away in some room in the Tamil quarter, and begin his yoga as soon as Christmas is over. Or as soon as, I say, it snows in Villefranche.

Deborah? She seeks her salvation through safe experiences.

Peter? Through plowing pedantry and chance.

Flaminio? I must sigh. So low feeling tonight. So far from Emerson’s advice: *Let us not rove; let us sit at home with the cause.*

Yes, but that he’ll do when the war is over and the conquering hero returns rich and powerful to his native homeland, Europe. His own country is so small, he will have to become a citizen of all Western Europe. In his garden would be France. A so beautiful country, especially the southern part. There, in a quiet valley it was, that Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca 1304-74), the greatest poet of modern literature, wrote his “Sonnets to Laura,” Laura, whom he loved unrequited. It is supposed that she was a married woman with *eleven* children! He dreamed and wrote of her in the valley of the Vaucluse, not far from Avignon. *Blessed be the day, the hour, the minute, the second when I by your two brown eyes was enchanted.* He was perhaps the first modern man. Seldom has a man gotten so much honour and wealth. And seldom did a man feel so miserable as Franzesco Petrarca. He has meant very much to me, both in a good way, but also in a bad. He inspired, made it beautiful, but also exalted and exaggerated my unhappy love for Hilda (the First), the little bronze-brown gypsy-girl (Danish) who preferred (how comical) to marry a shop-assistant and still is living in the neighborhood of the historical castle of Fredericksbourg, Hillerod, North Zealand. The castle on the lake, so idyllic, so breathing with history, so often I have visited. Who would imagine that the last time I saw it was with that Erde who at times, in my body, is still torturing me?

France has many beauties, all agricultural or ancient. The language is easy on the tongue, the country so expensive. One really cannot live there. Germany? Much to admire, but everyone today so fatheaded and *bürgerlich*. Although I speak fluent German (among the ten languages that I have good knowledge of), I have spent only eight days in that country in my life.

Yes, wealth is the key to the garden of joy. When I, alone, one dark April evening left my country (what a contrast to the magnificent receptions during the height of my power), I swore to return wealthy and also to solve my life’s second problem, to find a girl-wife. Later I realized that this was to fight on too large a front. In Rishikesh last year I saw a girl, seventeen years old, niece of a professor friend. She was pretty, perhaps a little too dark in the skin (it is nice if a girl can blush), and was most fascinated by me as I by her. Of course I put it aside as nonsense, although after I had left, her uncle wrote to me and told me that she was much impressed by my personality and had a high

opinion concerning my social dealings!!! (Most funny.)

Well, then, where is the truth? What is the interior background for many of my “tricks?” Although often they can be humourous, there is within me a deep-hidden bitterness (I am a realistic idealist) that you are not accepted for what you are, for your naked humanness, but for what you appear to be in your outer appearance. But I am not a pessimist. I have said to myself, “The world not only wants to be betrayed, it demands it, so let us have the best out of it.”

For heaven’s sake, the important thing is not where you have your knowledge from (i.e. an accredited university) but *if* you have it. There then is the explanation for my weakness for swindlers and betrayers — perhaps they are more honest than the other ones. Furthermore, I am not a general professor (this one must admit, *nicht wahr?*). All the same, here in India I am living as a grandseigneur. “The quiet, learned man, the influential professor.” It is exciting to be a double player. The day I met the Prime Minister was perhaps the top of my power and “career” in India. All the same, I have a tendency to make a fool of myself, for the same reasons as above. Baton under the right armpit — funny, is it not? Was it not funny that the young, beautiful and married girl in the consulate in Kuwait the first time she saw me with my stick rushed several steps backward as if she thought I would cane her a little? Yes, I have nine sticks. “*Der Soldatenkönig*” had twelve.

Well, *die Fahne hoch, die Reihen fest geschlossen, wir marchieren mit festem, ruhigem Schritt!* How much one could learn from Israel: attack, attack, and again attack!

When I came here in March I talked against the death penalty with the Governor of West Bengal. I think I succeeded in convincing. Let us hope I have saved some lives. The main problem is that most Indians think I am twenty-eight to twenty-nine, and not going to be thirty-four (oh, horror). Since I was thirty I have, in sharp contrast to before, done everything to look young and still do have a young face. On my cheeks I have still not very much beard, so I shave them very seldom though I am quite normal and not lacking in hormones.

There is little in these Emerson essays for me. He is aiming buckshot at a flock of birds, hoping that some will hit. Conningsfield has evaded the ambush and flies on, only a feather or two dropping out. Trust thyself. I have always done this, with no one telling me, but it is often difficult.

Chapter 10

Christmas day. Awakening, I heard a bolt pushed shut, a padlock snap. It was six fifteen. Then through my window I could see Deborah going down the stairs. Too early for breakfast, though it was getting light. My first thought was like a spy’s: Was she going to meet her lover?

In one minute I had dressed. No time to clean my shoes. I hurried downstairs,, surprised to see the gateman, normally so lazy, jump up to salute me. “*Bonjour; Sahib.*”

Clearly Deborah had already given her Christmas tip, but I had no intention of spoiling the rascal further.

The sun had arisen before I arrived on the sea promenade. Off in the distance I saw Deborah pedaling her bicycle very fast. Then she turned and was coming back. She did not look like a woman who would get fat and therefore needed exercise. So her motive was perhaps sexual sublimation. (Poets and lovers do not make so much speed at sunrise.)

Rather disappointed in Her Ladyship, I returned to my room. There I saw that the six pairs of white gloves I had washed before retiring, because of the humidity in the air, had not completely dried. I turned them over. In all pairs the whiteness was relinquishing with time. Each pair had its slightly different colour, going toward grey or yellow. Sixty fingers, like sixty Flaminios. Criminal’s gloves. Most comical.

At seven thirty Deborah and I were both served breakfast at the same table. She was looking very healthy from her exercise and excited too. While cycling she had met Thérèse, her ashram acquaintance, and there was a possibility that the Mother would be seeing one or two disciples that day in her private room, although she would not be giving public *darshan*.

“She promised that if she goes to see the Mother she’ll ask to take me along. Only she won’t know for sure until late this afternoon.”

I told her I wished her luck. She said she was only interested for her article, that she wasn’t expecting anything, that since coming to Villefranche she had come to dislike most things about the ashram and had very negative ideas too about the Mother.

We were still at the table when Tom appeared with Deborah’s gift and one for me (*hélas*), beautifully wrapped. He sat down and signaled to the bearer for coffee. The hotel serves strong *café au lait*, but not quite hot enough for my pleasure, nor enough milk for the two cups.

Only then we hesitated to take the gifts; we had bought nothing for Tom. He looked rather disappointed. Then how could we accept? “I didn’t give presents to *anyone*,” Deborah told him.

“Nor did I,” said our hero, taking this opportunity to make Tom the odd one.

Still, he insisted; we were polite. I unwrapped my gift. An ashram trinket. Conningsfield was overcome with gratitude. Deborah unwrapped hers. It was the saree I had sold to him, an expensive one covered with silver embroidery, although he had paid the price as for a gold one. Much screaming of delight, although I was thinking it was not the sort of thing she could ever use. Too elaborate, made for a wedding. It would be put away in a drawer forever when she returned home.

After breakfast we went to Tom’s room. All the gifts that Deborah and I had wrapped the day before had been unwrapped. The presents and piles of paper and rib-

bons were everywhere in the room.

“You unwrapped them all?” asked Deborah in horror.

“I can’t resist opening presents,” said Tom. “Show me a present and I’ll open it.”

“You mean to say, all our work and you just ... ?”

Tom brushed some paper scraps off two chairs and offered us to sit down. “I’d planned to rewrap them *carefully*, but I haven’t had time.”

“I don’t understand,” said Deborah, shaking her head. “All that *work*.”

“You’re a lousy wrapper. Flaminio, too. Now do you understand?”

“You could have said that in the beginning,”

“I thought you knew. Anyway, then you’d have gone away and left me.”

“Jesus. So now you have to redo them all?”

“It’s too late for that. I may just not give them. Nobody gave me any.”

“They’re probably waiting for yours.”

“Then they can wait.”

Then Peter appeared in the doorway. “Anyone home?” He smiled in at Deborah. Tom stepped forward. “Hi, Tom. I came to wish you Merry Christmas and give you back your book.”

“I gave it to you for keeps,” said Tom. “Merry Christmas.”

“Well, thanks. Can I come in?”

Tom stood back slightly. Peter came in and looked around. “Well, Tom, you certainly did get a lot of gifts.”

Deborah laughed. “What are you doing today?” she asked Peter.

“I dunno. I was going to see what you folks were up to. Did any of you get to mass last night?”

We looked at Tom. Tom was the only *mousquetaire* who had definitely planned to attend midnight mass. He had spent fifteen minutes the day before trying in vain to convince Deborah to accompany him. Now he hung his head. “No.”

“Then no wonder I didn’t see you there. A shame you didn’t go. Really pretty.” He looked at Deborah. “I told you you should have come.”

“I couldn’t get away.”

“Anyway,” interrupted Tom, “going to mass isn’t Chickie’s thing.”

“What’s your thing?” Peter asked her. They looked at each other’s faces, half smiling.

“Synagogue,” said Tom. “Come on, you guys. Break it up.”

Then a bearer came to say that the car had arrived. It was Tom’s big surprise for us. He had hired a car to drive us to Ice Cream. “Let’s go.” He piled our arms with gifts to take along. As we walked through the diningroom we saw suitcases and rucksacks. Farther on, strange faces. Some of the international youths had arrived and were sitting all over the patio. Already what seemed our little world was being invaded by robots, a season coming suddenly to a close. As we passed Evil-eye’s door her face peered out at

us through a crack. When she saw the gifts she opened the door and waved Merry Christmas.

Tom dropped a gift off his pile into her hands. Her ugly old face was smiling in a dozen places. Then Juney appeared, having heard the noise, took her gift and kissed Tom on both cheeks. Out of the corner of her eye she was looking at the newcomers seated in the patio chairs. “The new year’s beginning before the old one’s ended,” she observed.

On the street the rickshaw drivers crowded around. They took the gifts from our hands and placed them very carefully in the rear of the car. “Can Pete come with us?” Deborah asked Tom.

“No,” he replied, only half teasing, I think.

“Then I’m staying.”

“Of course he can come.”

Deborah’s face brightened.

“I’ll get in front with the driver,” said Pete.

Tom tipped a grinning, saluting Green Beret, then gave him more rupees to divide among the other drivers. One empty taxi had now driven up behind ours. Fatty and his wife appeared in the guesthouse doorway and the rickshaw drivers all rushed over to them. Fatty stood head and shoulders above the mob, his cigar in his teeth, looking them over. I noticed some resemblance in his face to Mussolini.

“Okay, I want *you* and *you* to get lost. I don’t want to look at you. Go on. Get lost.” He waved two drivers away like cringing jackals. “Okay now, I want *you* and ... *you* to take these parcels very carefully ... *very carefully*” (bellowing) “and put them exactly where I tell you.”

Our taxi left the curb. “Jesus,” said Tom, “and I thought I had the bastards organized. Did you see that?”

“That’s father-power,” nodded Deborah.

“*Father* power! Man. I can’t wait to grow *up*.”

“And have children.”

“And have *children*.”

“Don’t hold your breath,” said Deborah. Very comical. We all had to laugh.

We arrived at Ice Cream after a medium-long ride, during which Conningsfield’s views on “Utopias, Real or Dreaming” were examined (in a brilliant monologue by the Great Man himself). Our hero’s personal belief is that utopias will work only if a new species of man can be evolved to inhabit them. Everyone in the car agreed with this, offering no argument. Conningsfield said further that the leaders of utopias must be sages and philosophers. Although this idea can admittedly be attacked on grounds of a basic naivité, no one present did so. He therefore felt happy at last to find himself

among persons having a similar grasp of things as himself, though he knew that they may only have been humouring the Learned Fellow.

Half of Ice Cream, we discovered upon our arrival, was climbing into taxis to come spend the holy day in Villefranche. All these young Americans were dressed in beautiful colours, the boys more bright even than the girls. Many of the clothes seemed handmade. Tom gave out the gifts which he said were from all the ashramite guests to all the Ice Creamites. Though we had tried to buy some along the way, no ice cream (real) had been brought by us due to the unavailability of surplus milk to the ice cream manufacturers that morning. A poor land. So often, as if by accident, one sees the skeleton through the flesh.

Then Fatty's car arrived. He had three quarts of ice cream, much to our amazement.

"Naw, you don't have to order it in advance if you know how to talk to those fellas. I didn't order it in advance."

Miss Fatty arrived from her hut. Her face wore a genuine and kindly smile. Only her eyes were not clearly focused.

"What are you stoned on today, baby?" asked her father, kissing her front.

"Harry, don't talk like that in front of everybody." (His missus.)

"Hell, *they* know it." He looked around and laughed and coughed. He brought up phlegm and spat it onto the dusty red earth. I looked away and up. The sky was very blue, very wide. "They think I'm like that fella in the article. I'm showin' 'em they're wrong. My daughter can smoke, shoot, eat, or stick up anything she wants to, sleep with any guy she takes a fancy to, so long as she *doesn't lie about it to her old man*. Right, baby?"

The girl smiled at him. "Huh?" She hadn't listened.

I went to find Deborah. She had hidden herself behind one of the huts. "I can't *stand* him," she told me, making two fists. "I've never loathed anyone so much."

I reminded her what Spinoza had written, Spinoza, the Portuguese-Dutch philosopher (1632-1677), so young, such a brilliant scholar, only twenty-four years old when he was excommunicated from his Jewish faith by the Ecclesiastical Council in the synagogue in Amsterdam. *With the judgement of the angels and the sentence of the saints, we anathematize, execrate, curse and cast out Baruch de Espinoza, the whole of the sacred community assenting.... Let him be accursed by day, and accursed by night; let him be accursed in his lying down and accursed in his rising up; accursed in going out and accursed in coming in ... etc.* "He wrote," I told her, "*A man does not hate an enemy he knows he can vanquish.*" (Whom, what, had he in mind? His persecutors? Something within himself?)

Deborah was angry. "But *nobody* could stand that fat monster. Could you?"

"He is no worse than many. I do not find him more disagreeable than some others in the guesthouse."

She was silent. Instantly I was sorry to see her so helpless, wanting so to help her. How many volumes I have in my suitcases. History, philosophy, poetry. Any language. If only I could have her someplace alone, to share with her these treasures!

“What I hate about him, Spinoza or not, is his grossness, his vulgarity, his boorishness. And his meanness.” She was trembling.

Tom came around the side of the hut. “Come on, gang. Back we go, Santa and all his helpers.”

“Is it still Christmas?” asked Deborah.

“Just getting started.”

“Tell me,” she said, putting her hand on his arm. “Am I vulgar and boorish and mean?”

“Has someone been telling you that?” He looked at me.

“I just want to know.”

He looked at her from her face to her feet and back. “Not always. Now come. The cab’s waiting.”

Chapter 11

Christmas afternoon was warm. I was having siesta in my room after lunch, then suddenly awoke. Someone was tapping on my door. Tom’s face looked over the half curtain of the window. He motioned for silence. Stealthily I let him in. He was carrying a book and looked very nervous. He pressed the button, switching on the tape recorder.

“He’s in there with Chickie. They’re just sitting and talking. They didn’t see me look in so they don’t know I’m around.”

The book, I saw, was the *I Ching*. Tom sat down at the writing table, opened the book and pulled out a paper with some lines drawn on it. “I just went back and threw and got these hexagrams,” he told me. “I’m going to look them up now.”

“What was your question?” He hesitated to answer. “You said telling was part of it,” I reminded him.

“Should-I-go-in-there-and-break-it-up-and-make-Chickie-mine?”

I offered him a pencil, for he seemed to be searching in his pockets for one. He waved it away. Bringing out a package of cigarettes, rather flat, and some matches, he lighted one.

It was Hexagram 44, KOU, Contact (Sexual and other). Very appropriate. With three moving lines, this hexagram changed into number 58. Tom read, “*Contact. The woman is very strong. Do not marry her. I don’t want to marry Chickie,*” Tom said. He read on, but what followed did not seem to tell him anything especially enlightening. “The lines are important,” he assured me. “*6 at the bottom. He is held back as if with a metal brake. Persistence in the righteous path is auspicious. Advancing is dangerous.*”

However ... however!” he cried, clearing his throat for the revelation to come, “*even a small, angry pig will waggle its trotters.*”

He lowered the book and looked at me in horror. “*Waggle its trotters? A small, angry pig? My God! What kind of translation is this?*”

Most comical. I had to laugh.

“Okay,” he continued, “*9 in the third place. The skin having been flayed from his haunches ... Lord! ... he can't walk without staggering. No great danger if he proceeds with caution. Being able to stagger suggests he can still manage to walk without being dragged. Dragged! Jesus. 9 in the sixth place. Contact with horns lowered.... Tom shook his head, sighed, and read on. "Regret but no error. Despised, we must recoup our powers."*”

He looked up and stared at me dully.

“I would imagine your question has been answered negatively,” I said.

“I have to look up Hexagram 58 to know for sure.” He flipped the pages of the book. Hexagram 58 was TUI, Joyousness.

He read: “*Joyousness. Success! Keeping to the right course will be favorable. Great! This hexagram suggests happiness can be attained by keeping on the righteous path. When led in happiness we forget our troubles; we even forget that we must die.*” He lowered the book and sighed. “Very happy. I'd forgotten I have to die, until it just reminded me.”

“So now what are you going to do?”

“Go-in-there-and-break-it-up-and-make-Chickie-mine.”

“But I think the answer to your question is definitely negative. The righteous path would be to abstain from action.”

“This morning I threw it and it came out very positive regarding Chickie. I think this time it's just trying to confuse me. You're not supposed to keep asking it almost the same question. I've got to persist in the righteous path, which is to do what it told me to do this morning.”

He stood up, then switched off the tape recorder. As soon as he had left the room (by the back door) I switched it on again. The back doors lead from the bathrooms to the narrow corridor used by the servants and are often left unlocked to permit them to enter and clean. The door to Deborah's bathroom must have been thus unlocked, for he was able to enter there. From wariness (soon learned by travelers in Asia where servants and thieves enter at any moment) Deborah had bolted the door between her bed chamber and the bathroom. Tom knocked at this barrier. “Hot water, Memsahib?”

There was a silence. Finally: “Go away.” Then shouting started. Tom beat upon the door with his fists. Deborah shouted back. Such exasperation in her voice. Such despair in his.

“Chickie, open this door before I break it down.”

“Leave me *alone*,” she shrieked. “Go do your yoga. You have no right!”

“I saw you first.” He pounded harder with his fist.

“You’ll break the lock. Go *away*.”

Then I heard open the front door to Deborah’s room, leading onto the terrace. She and Peter came out. They did not hurry, only I think they had dressed rather fast. She tucked in the back of his shirt. He kissed her on the cheek and she leaned over the railing to watch him go down the stairs. Then she returned to her room.

Tom was running back into my room through the back door, then out the front. Pale he was, without a word to me. Then around and into Deborah’s room, slamming the door behind him.

Terrible recriminations started. Several times the word “yoga,” very derisive-sounding. There was some struggling, furniture being knocked about. It was rather terrifying. I watched the spools of tape turning very silently, winding up the sound. Most efficient, these machines. One day I must own one for my own use. Then the sounds next door were fainter. Were they resolving their differences? Had he agreed to leave?

I went onto the terrace, was looking out over the rooftops, when a small sound came to my ears. Deborah’s door had been bolted from the inside! Back in my room I pressed my ear to the wall joining our rooms. They were laughing together, very low. I pressed my hand against my other ear. Bedframe squeaks — so clear the sound, as if something was bumping up and down inside my head.

How strange. In spite of my many travels, many times living in hotels, I have never heard my neighbors making love. Of course I do not spend my time with my ear against the wall. I am not interested in spying on the lives of others and ask only the same forbearance on their part. But here it was most interesting, actually knowing the two zoo specimens involved and rather much about the situation.

Was he whipping her lightly on her bare posterior? Just this idea made my sexual organ begin to straighten itself out in my pants. (This is a perfectly normal phenomenon which could happen to any man under the same circumstance.) I made a slight adjustment to give it room, opened the buttons and let it stick out into the air.

Soon came the cry, so much like Erde’s voice, from the throat, like an animal’s. At almost the same moment, another cry. I clapped my hand over my mouth.

Later thinking: three persons could thus be satisfied. I must laugh.

Now the tape was to an end. I took it off the machine. I did not know how to make it replay its tune, so hid it in the false bottom of my suitcase with the watches.

They must have slept. For a long time, no sound. Leaving my room I walked an hour among many strangers on the sea wall. The wind, I noticed on my body, had changed direction, was blowing from the sea. I looked to the weather arrow on the lighthouse. Yes, an east wind. Closing my eyes, I thought of home. If only, I was thinking, I could become a very small, light thing, a feather, and be borne by this wind across lands and seas to my own home country. Christmas day at that hour, my family would

still be at the table. Would they remember Flaminio, their exile son? Would they ask each other what has become of him? Where is he passing now his fourth (!) Christmas away from home?

Well, what would they say to know that he is alone and rather sad today. His military tactics have led him only onward, deeper, with no sign of victory on the horizon. Tomorrow he must leave hotel and friends (luckily he has managed to sell some contraband and thus has money in his pocket) and journey alone southward to that dangerous country inhabited by thieves and criminals. His life will be in danger from the moment he sets foot there. One cannot get the better of so many scoundrels, as he has done, without causing jealous rivalries.

So many persons were walking along the promenade. Certainly some were going to the Christmas party given by the ashram, to receive there the Mother's gifts. I recognized the group of Americans from Ice Cream, still very gay and colourful, only a little wrinkled now in their hand-woven clothes.

I followed them at a short distance and soon found myself at the party. I was glad I had dressed in my "uniform" for I had no identification proving I was a guest of the ashram. In fact, I no longer was. But because of my important appearance, they let me in right away. Each ashramite and each guesthouse resident was entitled to receive a gift blessed by the Mother. Naturally the crowd was large.

Under a hangar that was open all down one side stood an enormous Christmas tree. Decorations, coloured lights, the usual. But something was there as I have never seen it before. The whole arena glowed and throbbed with light and colour and a joyful spirit. Thousands waited in a thick queue for many hours to pass into that heart of brightness and receive their gift.

I could have pretended, rapped my way into the queue like an important person in a hurry (as I do when buying train tickets, etc., in underdeveloped countries), but I went first into the hangar to see the gifts. A balloon for each. And then a transparent bag of cheap plastic baby toys! For each person, all adults, the same. And their faces as if the bounteous Mother had given each a diamond.

No, thank you. I could not abuse my authority to receive such a gift. Such items in the suitcase will only inflame customs inspectors. Such provocation I dare not make.

And then I saw, standing in a corner by the tree, a tall, slim figure dressed in white. Tom. He was staring into the soft lights, his eyes wide and unblinking. Walking up to him I put one hand on his shoulder. He turned to look at me, smiling his extraordinary ashram smile, so slow and intense, so false-seeming, but did not speak.

I asked him if Deborah was about. He shook his head, closing his eyes. "No," he breathed.

"Where is she then?"

"Went to see Mother."

"Ah."

I thanked him. Seldom have I seen a person looking so deeply aware of his blessings. Withdrawn and silent, like Flaminio after those two times with Erde, even in the midst of this throng.

Someone from the guesthouse, seeing me empty-handed, gave me the red balloon he had received, a kind gesture, so rare in this place. Passing out through the gates into the street, pressed by filthy begging children, I handed one the gas-filled balloon. His face radiant, he took it in both hands. The rest of the children forgot me and my pockets and crowded around him overcome with awe and envy. Did they think it was a leg of mutton?

Juney and Evil-eye were just arriving. Juney kissed me on both cheeks. A strange sensation. Her cheeks are so powdered, at the same time covered with bristles like a boar. Evil-eye, blushing, laughing and frowning, turned away. Bent as she was she could not reach so high, and who would stoop? The two women then disappeared among the crowd going through the gate. I will probably never see either of them again.

Walking back along the sea wall I thought again of Tom and Deborah. He has won her, and thus has sealed her fate. Tomorrow morning Conningsfield will leave alone, helpless now to help her find salvation.

Tom's personal fears have not come to pass. His union with Deborah has not resulted in the severe withdrawal from life or the nervous depression that he had feared. He has been deeply affected by the experience, but no more than I or any other sensitive soul.

And Deborah has finally gone to see the Mother. She said that this is all she has been waiting for to leave this place. But now that she has found happiness with Tom, she will not leave so soon.

Footsteps on the terrace. Deborah is back from her visit. She has gone into her room. I hear the toilet flush. Then silence. She is alone with her thoughts about Tom and the Mother. O, for an infinitely sensitive tape-recording machine that could record what is going on in her mind!

Later. At seven Tom arrived but she did not come out, nor did he go into her room. They spoke briefly through the door. At seven thirty I knocked on her door to tell her supper was served downstairs. I had to wait almost a minute before she replied. Finally, "Flaminio?"

How sweet my name on her lips, even though her voice was sounding very strange. Perhaps she was crying. But why? "Yes," I replied. Again a very long pause. "I'm not eating supper, thanks anyway."

I told her I was leaving for the south early in the morning. She said she would see me before I left and wished me a good night. I went down to the table. It was perhaps, as usual, an excellent *repas*, but I did not taste any of it. My thoughts were elsewhere.

Dear Deborah,

If I do not see you, just a few lines.

I shall always be grateful that I met you. Though I absolutely had it more in my mouth, I think I have been cured of talking about — forgive me — American women and Jews. I can only feel so ashamed. This is after all one of the encouraging things with us human beings, that talking together can change so many things. I know from when I was very young that you in that way can feel a deep sympathy even for people you before disagreed with. I excuse that I talked rather much concerning myself, though in that way I learned much about you.

You understand, I am in a rather bad situation, knowing very little what the future will bring (I have rather few rupees), fearing to go over to Ceylon, longing after home and knowing, that had it not been such a little country with a narrow horizon, my possibilities had been quite otherwise.

And to live as a poor refugee in an ashram, I would not. Or to return home without money, where it is difficult — in spite of my knowledge — to get employment, that would be horrible.

So forgive that I have felt a little depressed and afraid. Usually I am not so. I also thank you for your sympathy in listening to me and giving me a little opportunity of learning somewhat concerning you. I only hope that your ideals of being independent will harmonize with being really happy. I really wish you and Tom all the absolute best.

Flaminio

P.S. And please understand that though I like to look at life as a play, I am not in my interior one day Frederick the Great, another day Napoleon, etc.

I am not ashamed to admit that I before going to Ceylon knelt down in prayer and asked the Almighty to help me, not for myself but for the sake of my poor family, and to have compassion for my poor family, with tears in my eyes.

PART TWO

Chapter 12

Finally, Colombo.

A tiring two days. First an early awakening followed by a swift breakfast. Only ten minutes after my eyes opened did I learn that Deborah would leave Villefranche with me if there was room in the car. I prayed for some. While she was paying her bill I found a way to rescue for Tom the microphone from behind the crepe-paper hangings in her room. Then, hesitation. I had tipped no one, would not. Then why leave behind such a valuable machine? When Tom came to take it they would pretend to know nothing of it. Then better carry the machine away myself and not make liars of them. The sitar would remain, however.

Deborah was very strange, puffy around the eyes, though she told me she had slept. With our bags around our feet, we waited in the patio for the car. I asked her whether she had seen the Mother. She nodded, then turned away and walked off a little distance. A minute later she returned, now wearing dark spectacles, though there was no bright sunshine.

“What was your impression?” I asked, very curious.

Deborah shrugged, then sighed. I waited. “*Keine...*,” she began, then again a deep breath. “*Keine Hexerei.*”

“You were not disappointed?”

She shook her head, then turned away again, tears streaming down her cheeks. “Let’s not....” She waved her hand, unable to speak.

How overcome I was in front of this awful emotion. Stepping forward I would clasp her to my breast, only thinking one second how her tears would look on my shirt collar. But she was not wearing eye makeup, and the shirt was not perfectly clean, chosen for traveling the dusty roads.

As I tried to embrace her gently, as a brother, she pulled back. “Look out for your shirt!” (as if there was danger of car accident). But in fact, how good of her to think first of another. Extremely touching. I assured her that when I was a practicing psychologist

many tears had stained my clothes, but they always washed away in the tub. (Not often was this so, the tears on the shirt, only with Erde.)

At this moment the car arrived, a rather disappointing sight, not really a car but a little truck or *fourgonnette* with windows only for the front seat, grey and quite rusted. Behind, a sort of workman's bench was arranged for sitting, but there was no back and it was not attached to the floor.

"Jesus," said Deborah when she saw all of this, but there was room for her, only a little crowded inside with our luggage and their household furniture.

Smiling bravely, she shook hands with the owners of the vehicle. These were a rather peculiar French Canadian couple whom I had met for the first time some days ago in front of the ashram library. Not the most successful human specimens. Their tiny eyes seemed rather far apart, the fronts much too broad and high, the chins too long and the noses too short. But I think there are very few absolutely "normal" people traveling these days through India. Deborah was sure that they, if not brother and sister, were close cousins. Quite possibly she was correct, for the baby in the mother's lap had many recessive qualities, looking rather like a dog than a human child.

The husband, we learned after starting out, for all his experience driving from Montreal, was not a good driver. Either too fast or too slow. With his wife he spoke a guttural French, difficult to understand from the rear. Often they pointed to sights that we, with no windows, could not see.

As it was difficult sitting on the bench — so many bicycles, animals, holes, etc., on the road making our way erratic — we soon pushed it aside and sat on the floor. This being rather hard, we pulled bits of pillows and blanket under us. It seemed we were sitting on their bedding and perhaps making it dustier than otherwise. But we shrugged like evil conspirators and did so anyway. I must say that, despite the discomforts (and I have survived worse, particularly in Afghanistan, Iran, etc.) the ride was one of the most enjoyable of my life, owing to the circumstances.

It is perhaps wrong to take as serious words spoken during great emotional upheaval. Deborah told me shortly after starting out, after wiping away some of the tears, that I was "a very good person." So flattering. I blushed. Fantastic dreams filled my mind. Flaminio and Deborah together, alone on a beach, sitting under a tree. I was reading to her out of some volume of history, she listening, occasionally asking a question on the text, I explaining, then reading on. Such a *normal*, beautiful existence, perhaps at last to come true (if at the Colombo airport I was not immediately arrested by the authorities!).

The windows on the sides and back of the *fourgonnette* had been painted over with grey paint for privacy during sleep. We each scratched a tiny hole, now at last could look out. A beautiful and typical but mostly uninteresting landscape. Fields of paddy, palms, villages. It had rained heavily that night. Much of the land was under water. There were temporary lakes with islands, but the road was high and dry.

“What will you do in Ceylon?” I asked Deborah.

She leaned back, thoughtful. She would find a beach somewhere, think, write. She told me that some very strange things had happened to her recently, and she would like to think about them.

“Tom?”

Only it was not Tom of whom she was thinking. Now she frowned. She was, she was positive, the worst person in the world. Tom had warned her that she would blow his mind and she had gone right ahead and done so. Had she told him of her plan to leave Villefranche this morning? No. She hadn't known herself until an hour ago. Suddenly she put her face on her knees. “Flaminio,” she said, “did you ever feel that anyone ever really looked at you?”

I didn't understand her question, only answering that I did not think she ever looked at me unless I was looking off somewhere else. I said this as if joking, but she nodded. Then after a moment she said, “But I mean, did anyone ever...” But again tears were running from her eyes and she had to find a tissue to blow her nose.

Needless to say, after my horrible experience with Erde, this unmotivated weeping was deeply upsetting to me. Only Deborah, more intelligent, seemed really trying to be kind toward me, unlike that evil one who almost destroyed my joy in life. To comfort her I reassured her that she need fear nothing. Tom would not be able to find her — she need not fear his angry, accusing eyes.

“I'm not talking about Tom.”

“Peter?”

“Just in general. Did anyone ever look deep into you, right into your very soul?” Then she would absolutely know if such was possible. “Like looking into a deep, dark well, right to the muddy water at the bottom.”

Her words recalled the *I Ching*. A city can be moved, but not a well. The city must be built around the well. But I knew little about wells and was alarmed at the metaphor she would absolutely make. Did wells as a rule have mud below?

She was certain of it; pollution was everywhere. Then she would know how to clean the well without making dirty the rest of the water.

So I must absolutely follow her metaphor, or she would not be happy. “One way to clean the polluted soul at its very bottom is by psychotherapy and by following the examples of great men,” I told her. But she seemed to lose interest suddenly in our conversation (a typical nervous reaction), took out one of the bananas we had brought along, peeled and ate it.

The journey south was long for the bones but short for the interior man. Most of the way Deborah was very quiet, lost inside herself. I had never known her so kind to me, as if I were a puppy, but often I was thinking of how she could be with Tom and

Peter. Then a suitcase threatened to topple onto me from behind. She threw herself to stop it and a breast was suddenly against my ear. By accident a hand was against her posterior, then disappeared. She sat back with a strange expression. Puzzlement? Had she finally noticed that I am, after all, a man?

Seats on the plane from Tiruchirapalli to Colombo were not available until the next day owing to a pilots' strike. We bid farewell to the French Canadians (who had been wise to bring their own food in the car — we two were by now dying of starvation), and put our suitcases at the Government Bungalow where we each took a room for the night, an unnecessary extravagance since one room was enough. Deborah changed from trousers to a dress, then we went like starving souls to find lunch. After walking about the town with a crowd of curious Tamils behind us, we were able to eat a very good meal of idlis, doshas and sambar at an Indian restaurant (vegetarian, no meat or forks). Naturally Her Ladyship was the only woman in the entire place. This in a country where the Prime Minister wears a saree!

I paid for our lunches — three rupees only for the two meals, coffee making it a little more — and we went “on the town” like tourists. The Rock Fort, dominating the whole city, was 300 feet to the top. By the time we reached the temple we were quite damp with perspiration and happy to sit in the breeze looking down on the city, river and countryside below.

Deborah was very impressed to find where her feet had brought her, but still unhappy and distant. We watched a large bird, a sort of hawk, riding the upwind around the mountain top, just by our feet. He turned and twisted in the wind and came higher. He looked at us, perhaps was puzzled, for he brought one foot out of his tail, stretched it forward carefully against the wind, and scratched his head. Very dusty. We both had to laugh at this so amusing and unexpected sight. Now that Deborah was looking gayer, I asked her why before she had been so sad.

Standing up, she would now move to a place where the view was different. I followed her. She sat on a low wall. I put my hand near, ready to catch her if she fell.

She told me that the day before she had had a very “strong experience” when seeing the Mother and asked if she could tell me about it. I tried to keep my face normal as I said yes.

She told me then that she had been expecting nothing when she went there. First she had met her friend Thérèse, and for a while they waited together in a room somewhere in the ashram. The furniture and most of the floor were covered with piles of books. (Yes, it had been the same when I was there. I had to crouch almost on the floor, so many were waiting that day.) Thérèse, she told me, had worn a far-away, happy expression on her face, but Deborah did not know what to expect. She had been given some garlands to give to the Mother and now watched ants crawling over the blue flowers.

Then they were called and followed a woman to a stairway in a narrow hall with

windows. (I too had been there.) At the top was a door. They were told again to wait and sat down on the stairs. (I, in contrast, had been ushered in immediately.) Here Thérèse's eyes were closed and she wore a rapturous smile. Deborah still felt nothing internally, only in her fingers the sticky flowers. She did not even feel curious. (This is not surprising if one considers what she had been doing when the call came!)

Finally the door opened and a woman bade them enter. They were now standing in the large, spacious apartment filled with sunlight, books and personal objects where the Mother lives. Across the room a woman, her back to them, was sitting at a desk. She was in a wheelchair. Deborah could tell she was very old. Her hair was short and thin. She did not sit up very straight. The woman who had let them in took the flowers from their hands.

“Then Thérèse and I walked across the room and came up in front of the desk. I watched the old woman greet Thérèse warmly, but so quietly. She didn't even look at me. They exchanged a few words and Thérèse, speaking French, told the Mother who I was. And then the Mother ... smiled. And with this smile ... turned completely toward me, and ... and....”

I have never before seen tears burst like that from a person's eyes. Deborah was weeping, nearly lying on the wall, shaking with sobs. I put my hand on her head and she raised herself slightly and tried to speak, only her mouth would not come together around the words.

“And what?” I asked, trying to help.

“She ... she...,” her face was distorted with the effort, “*looked* at me.” Then Deborah hid her face in her hands and wept.

They say there are some persons having much power over others, and this we know is true from studying the lives of certain kings, generals and saints. In some cases the power is political, in others simple hypnotism, with others a true spiritual superiority. I would say that the Mother is no hypnotist, but rather a very spiritually advanced person possessing a great deal of spiritual power. Of course, as with a radio, not everyone is tuned to that power source. I, personally, am not, although I have had deep spiritual experiences from other sources.

I told this to my friend. She shook her head very forcefully, saying that she did not believe in spiritualism. Then how, I would know, did she account for what had happened? She shook her head again, but slower. No rational explanation did she have. A few minutes later, feeling better, she promised one day to tell me more about her meeting with the Mother. When she had recovered herself, we climbed down to the city and returned to the bungalow to wash and rest before supper.

Chapter 13

The island of Ceylon, lying off the southern tip of India, over centuries has been strategic for sea traffic around Cape Comorin. For centuries invaders have come and gone or stayed — Tamils from India, Portuguese, Dutch and British, etc. Unification of the country under the British and a better system of communications brought into conflict all the different social, regional, racial, linguistic and religious populations in this small land. Today, politicians exploit. Newspapers shout a dreary socialism; nevermore the mystery of the East. Crime is rife and rascals thrive. Such a beautiful island, such a gracious and beautiful people. I only wished my umbrella to conceal a sword for safety's sake.

As the plane landed at Colombo my heart was beating, only not from joy as a regular tourist. Fortunately, the police were with backs turned as I went by. In customs my bags were not opened. It is, I think, the official policy of the country to encourage contraband and corruption of every sort. Most obliging. I had all the sarees, the watches, Indian currency and dollars undeclared and undiscovered. Because of overweight on the plane and to save money, I had carried books and many heavy things in my hands and in plastic bags. It is discussible if ever a passenger has had so much “cabin luggage.”

Inside the airport bus we had to speak of temporarily parting. Deborah would to an expensive hotel, at least for one night, until she had seen the way the land lies. Americans cannot live for many days without hot water baths, even when humidity from the air rolls down the legs. She had changed a twenty-dollar traveler cheque in the airport into Ceylonese rupees. The rest she will change on the black market. I warned her against dealing with those rascals, but she will not listen. Always when traveling she has changed her money at illegal rates when possible.

This evening she preferred to spend alone, going early to bed. (It was not yet lunch time, yet she knew how she would feel several hours later!) She however let me accompany her to her hotel, as doing me a favour, which really it was. How well she knows me, even without ever asking questions. The hotel is horribly expensive (she must pay for a room for two persons) and is undergoing massive facelift, so that the gardens are like junkyards. Her room is old-fashioned, not at all luxurious, but I think it is better now than when they shall have finished “modernizing” it. No food is included in the astronomical price of the room, but the bathtub is one of the largest either of us has ever seen, only old and discoloured by time.

Nevertheless, she insisted that the hotel is all right for one night. She was wearing a nylon dress that closed down the front with buttons, on her feet rubber sandals. Her hair had become very limp in the damp air. It was now raining and as she looked out the

window her face was tired and rather old.

After seeing the room she walked with me down the wooden staircase which goes around and around the lift to the bottom. The lobby was crowded with tourists speaking many tongues, but all of a uniform face. Typical package tours. Rows of suitcases with identical labels. Her Ladyship looked lost and sad in her house-dress among these very fat tourists.

“What am I doing here?” she asked me just before my taxi took me away.

I was not sure where I myself would spend the night. My last address is known to my “accomplices” and it was necessary to find another, for they consider themselves betrayed, not knowing the whole circumstances of what actually occurred. For an even less serious “betrayal” I have seen these criminals remove the nose of their victim with a sharp knife, no more bother than cutting off the end of a prawn. So no wonder I was nervous.

But how strange. As we entered the city of Colombo, my embassy dress, umbrella, carnation, etc. seemed to beckon to all the evil elements of the city. People seemed to stop as I passed, heads turned, eyes looked at me suspiciously. My imagination? I do not know. Almost without exchanging words my taxi driver took me to the sort of hotel I had in mind, cheap and disreputable, in keeping not with my elegant clothes but with my purse and intentions. How did he know? Then a few minutes later I was in my room, a grey cellar with lightbulb overhead. At least it was cooler here than on the street, but quite damp.

The best thing to do, I had already decided, was to act as quickly as possible to get many things accomplished in case I must suddenly leave. Locking the watches into my attaché case, I went into the street where I was immediately set upon by street urchins whispering of money exchange. They were offering fourteen, fifteen rupees to the cash dollar. The official rate: five. And the *government itself* offers the *unofficial* rate of nine to try to undercut the other scoundrels. A very comical land.

Then I saw a familiar face looking at me from a dingy doorway. Then I was following him up one street and down another. So humiliating, like an American tourist following the money urchins. Never did he look backwards, so sure of himself. Then through a shabby door and up some stairs. A small room. He walked behind a table and I laid sixty-six Swiss watches out for him to see, all wound and running to the correct time.

These watches I had bartered for in Singapore and had planned to sell in New Delhi. India is the best place for this. You absolutely cannot prevent mad Indians who want to wear Swiss watches from wearing them. So after all, why not take the profit? No harm is done anyone. But for these watches I was only offered 290 dollars, a large shipment having arrived the day before. So I had brought them to Colombo.

The man held a few of the watches to his ear, opened one and looked into its back. Then he offered me 500 rupees! I explained briefly to him the State of Military Emer-

gency in which I found myself. He had no sympathy, only put the money on the table. I took it up. Very depressing.

So, the campaign is on. Only with not many soldiers (i.e. dollars) between me and victory or defeat. My army is not at full battle strength, but is growing. I must be careful to have a good price for the sarees, not become desperate like this afternoon. There is only one successful tactic, and that is boldness and energy. "*He who remains behind his entrenchments is beaten.*" "*One must always be the first to attack.*"

Thinking in this way I visited the Embassy of M— and sent my card in to His Excellency, a short, greasy and dishonourable individual whom I had met during an official Buddhist funeral on my last visit. He had then been interested in contraband Indian sarees and was very impressed with the calling card I put into his hand that day. It bore my coat-of-arms (three crowns, two lions, an elephant, etc., *Mon Dieu et Mon Honneur, Audacter Pugnat*, etc.) and listed all my professional titles and university degrees. I sent him now another, an even better production than the earlier printing, this one done in Teheran in blue ink.

He was not in to receive these "credentials," most likely out on some nefarious errand of his own, armed with credentials given him by his government quite as dishonest as mine. The secretary assured me that His Excellency would contact me by phone as soon as he came in. I left the number of my miserable pension. What would they in that comfortable official residence think to see the telephone which bears that number? On a stinking wall in the stairway of the pension where resides Prof. Dr. Flaminio de Conningsfield, BS, PhD, Councillor of State, S.M., Commercial Advisor, President and Director General of Blah-Blah Institute, etc. I tell you, they *demand* to be robbed.

Supper I ate in my room. My landlady, used to rogues, is very solicitous of the fine gentleman who has sought temporary shelter beneath her roof (me). Such a good supper of local food. How hungry I was.

Afterwards, I telephoned Her Ladyship, so far away from me just now, high up in her room above the sea while I stand underground. But her spirits are no higher than mine. She is writing letters, will early to bed.

"Tomorrow we can meet?" I asked.

She has some errands to do in the morning and will find a less expensive hotel somewhere on a bathing beach far from the city and its pollution. We will meet at lunch-time at Thos. Cook & Sons, Ltd. She admits that she is rather depressed, but says that this will change as soon as she settles down somewhere to live in the sun and write. She has heard of a beach down the coast where there are coral reefs and tropical fishes to look at through snorkel masks. A hotel is already there but it is very expensive and booked up by package tours. Tomorrow she will ask the Tourist Bureau for the name of a less expensive place catering for individuals not traveling on tours.

How easily the possessors of money hammer out their plans.

Chapter 14

The next day at noon I was waiting in the street in front of Thomas Cook & Sons when a taxi drove up and Deborah stepped out. “Hi,” she greeted me, then looked in amazement at the doorway. “Cooks is closed!” Her face was as if seeing the end of the world. “How come? It’s Monday,”

I explained to her that the moon was at the half. She had not yet heard of Poya days which fall when the moon is at the quarter, half and full, couldn’t then believe that a developing country would make things so difficult for itself by choosing a calendar different from the rest of the civilized world.

“So it’s Poya day and everything’s closed. Great. Now what?”

Walking down the street we were approached again and again by urchins offering money exchange. Deborah asked how much she could have for traveler cheques. Only eleven rupees to the dollar. One boy promised eleven and a quarter, but they were more interested in undeclared dollar notes, especially those of large denominations which are more easily smuggled out of the country.

Coming into Ceylon, Deborah had declared only a small part of her money — some French francs, some dollar traveler cheques. The undeclared rest is in traveler cheques. This undeclared part she will sell as necessary for her needs on the black market. I pleaded with her not to deal with these rascals, but she will thus have almost 20% more for her money, and this she would not deny herself. The hotels, she explained, are greatly overpriced. One is forced to do so.

I did not so much like to walk openly on the street in this part of the city, offered to take her by taxi to a restaurant where I knew I would meet none of my underworld acquaintances. After this, her plan was to visit a hotel six miles down the coast. A newspaper article that morning had told of purselifting by gangs on the public transport, so she was determined to go there only by taxi. We found a very small one and arranged the smallest possible fare in advance for the trip.

It was raining when we arrived at the hotel and all the guests, dressed in their beach clothes, were inside. A noise like chicken yards. Again packaged tourists, again everything expensive and no rooms available for solitary travelers. For a while we sat in a bright, modern lounge, drinking coffee, both very depressed by the ambience. Because of the closed doors, the smell of cooked fish floated everywhere — at three o’clock in the afternoon! Hotel de France in Villefranche, so quiet, so dignified, seemed very far away.

After seeing this hotel Deborah would leave Colombo as soon as possible. Only lacking was a place to go, a firm reservation. The reception clerk, very kind, telephoned the hotel near the coral reefs which announced one room available for four nights start-

ing the day after next. The astronomical price included beds and meals for two. A few rupees reduction would be allowed for single persons. Deborah looked distressed. What to do? A long pause while the clerk waited with the phone in his hand. “Okay,” she said at last.

And so the deal was concluded. Such rascals. Compared to these, Flaminio de Conningsfield is a most upstanding citizen!

We returned to Colombo and walked along the sea promenade by her hotel. The rain had stopped but the air was very wet. Deborah wore a raincoat over her cotton dress, still on her feet the rubber sandals which the rain could not hurt. There was a little mud on her toes. She felt very damp and uncomfortable and said she could not wait to get away and live in her bathing suit and look at fish.

I offered to lend her books. She seemed interested, would know what my suitcase library contained. History, poetry, philosophy, I told her. Anything a heart could desire. I waited breathlessly to hear which she would choose — how much that would tell me about her. But she said nothing, only turned her steps back toward the hotel. She did not look at the flat, grey sea on our right. Suddenly she admitted that she had not been very “nice” to me.

My heart dropped. No? Had she not? While I had thought all along that she had been extraordinarily kind. Now was she going to tell me some horrible new thing? I tried to stop her, but in vain.

She told me that in fact she was awful to everyone, but never really wanting to be — it was never her intention to hurt. So now the hurting would stop, from now on everything would be different. Something had changed inside her. She had learned that it was possible to communicate and now she would start with me. If only I would remove the mirror sunglasses, we could begin at least to look at each other’s eyes while talking. This we had never really done.

Quickly I removed them, squinting blindly in a ray of sunlight shooting from behind a cloud. Our eyes now went seeking each other’s eyes, suddenly so timid, shy, as if both had forgotten that eyes are to be found in the face and not in the arm or foot, ready to look off to the distance at any excuse.

No real success to report. We walked on. A breeze had come up and a few paper kites were in the air, strange kites, one ugly black like a crow wing. I turned and saw a fellow squatting on the grass a great distance away. It was the kite merchant, black, hunched, tattered like a crow. When I looked at him, he hopped a short distance toward us, shaking his feathers, holding out his kites. How strange, I thought, he could look so easily into my eyes from so far away.

At five thirty I returned alone to my hotel. The landlady was looking a little peculiar. Some visitors had come and were waiting in my room.

I could feel my head grow dizzy. “English chaps?”

“Yes.”

Pale and shaken, I forgave her for letting them into my private room, for I knew they were nearly unstoppable. My first instinct was to turn, rush out, and get onto the first plane. But how could I leave all my possessions, the sarees, etc., in the hands of these scoundrels? Besides, all my money I had hidden in my room.

Who were these people? Why were they here?

Of course, money was behind the whole thing. They believe I owe them one thousand dollars. This is true only in a very technical sense, only they would not agree. Now there was nothing to do but take a tight grip of my umbrella and walk bravely through the door (behind the landlady).

I have never seen a room so in confusion, even in the worst days with Erde. They had opened my suitcases and thrown the contents everywhere. Books were everywhere; I never hide money in books, but this they could not know. Sarees were opened, all colours; the room was looking like a harem. In the middle sat the English, eyeing me rather cold. I held tighter to my umbrella, told them they could rise to their feet for the lady present.

No one of course moved. Almost unable to bend, so stiff with fright, I sat down myself. The landlady disappeared quite fast, closing the door behind her. I was wondering if they had found the secret place where I hide my money, but there was no way to look without giving them the secret.

All three were the same I had had “dealings” with earlier, only now had grown very long hair, big moustaches, and were wearing coloured shirts with flower print, bright-coloured trousers with wide bottoms, one pair in red velvet. All had necklaces, like women, and many large finger rings. Another carried a gold-tipped cane. Very enviable. Their young faces were pinched and grey, their eyes pale and dangerous.

I offered them to drink. They refused, therefore never learning it was only water I could give them.

Their accents are cockney, the lowest class of English. One told me that I had left town rather fast the previous time. I explained that business interests had called me away. This was not quite true. In fact it was their fault, only they will not see it this way. The following is the absolute truth in this unfortunate affair:

The last time I was in Colombo, after five weeks, being very nervous, my money decreasing, I went to my “criminal friend.” He paid one third of my hotel bill and said that the next day we would start. And, quite astonishingly, we did. I went to the bank and bought \$1050 of traveler cheques. The idea was that they should, unsigned, be sold (to gold smugglers) and then declared lost. Then new cheques would be given by the bank. In that way there is a “profit” of about 800 dollars.

It was like a holiday. The whole gang (these three cockney English, plus some others) gathered — to my horror — in my room. Their faces did not attract me (also I knew of what violence they were capable), though they behaved kind. Then we all had dinner together. As I was sitting there at the table I was thinking: this scheme won't

work. Then, to my horror and stupefaction, I was asked to sign the cheques again (countersign them) and then go out and sell them. All this was quite against our original agreement by which neither should I countersign them nor myself go out in the street to sell them. Too risky. But in that way I could get eleven thousand rupees, then go together with the English to Bombay to buy another one thousand dollars of cheques.

Of course, this I would never do. Had I done so I would not be worthy to hold my head high. Flaminio de Conningsfield the member of a criminal gang? No, I am not a common thief. So I did not sign, stalled them the whole next day with empty promises, and prepared my departure. The day after, early in the morning, I left the hotel (they had, by the way, become suspicious), went on board the plane to Singapore, and thus evaded them.

Before leaving Colombo, on that last day, I purchased with part of the money some star sapphires which, in Singapore, I bartered for fifteen of the Swiss watches, not a good speculation. The rest of the money I declared lost, receiving in that way seven hundred dollars. Then the cheques which I had declared lost I mailed back to my criminal friends, one with a signature. These cheques they would be able to sell and regain their original investment. I could, of course, easily have escaped with all the cheques, for these rascals had not kept their promises to me. Only I am not so low. In the whole affair I acted with my usual boldness — fast, hard and lucky. My only mistake perhaps was to have returned so soon to Colombo.

But how could I have known that some miserable scoundrel thief in the post office would open the envelope and steal the cheques? For now they told me that the cheques had never arrived!

“But I sent them all back to you,” I cried indignantly (with only a slight exaggeration, i.e. 350 dollars).

The decision: They would have all the sarees, tape recorder, etc., plus 500 dollars. I pleaded with them to have patience. The sarees would in three days (a small lie to give me more time) be sold for a good price, out of which I would pay what I “owed” them, though in reality I owed them nothing. Still, to settle matters in an amicable way (and to keep my nose!), I would do so. Finally they agreed, only warning me not to leave Colombo by train, plane or bus. I gave them my word as a man of honour, we shook hands and they went away.

So for an hour I have been arranging books and folding six-meter-long sarees. They have damaged nothing — thieves respect objects — except my sensibilities. How horrible to know someone has been rifling your possessions. Some of the books were uncut when I bought them and have never been touched by another, now have been searched for money. Luckily my money, hidden in a secret place known only to arch-criminals and myself, was not found.

Though they have discovered my presence in Ceylon, I still possess hope. They are dangerous, but I am clever. Still, I wish this all were over. The day after tomorrow,

Deborah will be living at the end of the island in a beautiful beach hotel — I have seen photographs in the tourist brochures. A desert island would be preferable, but what would I not give to share even that packaged life with her, even for a so short time? In a few days the old year ends — a “propitious” moment would say the Indian astrologers. How I long to be with Deborah to greet the new one.

Well, they have given me seventy-two hours respite. All the same, tonight I will sleep with a chair against the door handle and my umbrella at the ready by my bed. The traveling baton will be placed near the door.

One can never be too careful. And so to bed with a good book.

The next morning the telephone rang. Would the Professor please come now to the Embassy of M— to see the Ambassador? The Professor would. So, dressed in full embassy dress, umbrella (it was looking like rain, therefore would be handy as well), white gloves, gold watch chain, etc., with my suitcase of sarees, I took a taxi (to discourage criminals wanting to follow me) to the embassy where I was politely received by the secretary.

Result: The forty-nine sarees had a value of 7500 rupees (which I had not paid), and I got for them 11,000 rupees! Without doubt one of the greatest “coups” ever made by a foreigner, by which I got my revenge to a high degree over this country of rascals and criminals.

Now, having all these rupees, I got the idea to purchase from Deborah some dollars at a rate of exchange favorable to us both. I telephoned her hotel, but she had gone out. So, with my cash well hidden in a secret place upon my person, not to be victimized by the pickpockets and thieves, I turned my steps toward the bazaar.

I do not like the bazaar. It is a dangerous place. No matter what is being advertised on the outside of the shops, it is not really that which is for sale. Behind every shop front is a smuggling gang selling contraband hair spray or electric goods. Now, wanting to purchase a special brand of shaving cream that my skin requires, impossible to find in open commerce east of Vienna, I entered the crowded, noisy streets. I had not gone far when, to my amazement, I saw someone I knew standing in one of the shops on the other side of the dirty window. Deborah. She seemed almost to have been watching for me, now motioned frantically for me to enter. I did so.

“Flaminio,” she said, her face absolutely white. “I’m lost.”

At first I didn’t understand. “What is the matter?” I cried. I glanced about wildly for attackers, saw only very dreary displays of plastic and tin kitchen gadgets.

She could hardly speak. “They’ve taken all my money.”

“What did you say?” My brain would not accept so quickly such news.

“He told me to wait here, that he’d be back in five minutes.” She stared at her watch in despair and shook her wrist. “What does it say?” she wailed.

She was in such a state of shock and horror that she could not read the hands of the watch. I told her it was eleven thirty. “But why did you give him all your money?”

She gripped my arm. “How can I get it back? There must be some way to find him. He’s about eighteen, shortish, wearing a blue shirt. He came up to me in front of the Ceylonese Airlines office. Come on. We’ll get a taxi and go back there.”

Of course it was hopeless, but I went with her in the taxi. No boy with a blue shirt was waiting outside for the return of his frantic victim. Deborah looked absolutely ill, could hardly seem to breathe correctly. Hiding her face in her hands, she told me the story.

Throughout a morning of looking for a quarter of a rupee more per dollar among the various black marketeers of his acquaintance, the boy had slowly gained her confidence. He took some of her francs, he gave them back. He took once some other monies to show to the smugglers, then gave them back, finally wanted to show the sort of traveler cheques she had. She had wanted to tear out a small one as sample, but impatiently he took the entire book of cheques from her hand and told her he would return in five minutes. Then he had disappeared.

“Were the cheques declared entering the country?”

“Some were.”

“Then those you can report lost. Have you the numbers?”

She began frantically searching through her handbag, then her billfold. All sorts of small papers were there — registered letter receipts, a punched ticket for the Paris Metro, but no list of cheque numbers. Perhaps she had thrown it away. By now we were driving back into the grounds of her hotel. She was trembling so that she could not arrange her papers, finally pushing everything back into her bag and snapping it shut.

I paid the driver and we walked up the stairs to her room. There she threw herself face down on one bed. I, so used to this sort of financial ups and downs, attempted to comfort her, but she would have none of it, preferring despair.

“The worst thing about it,” she would repeat and repeat, “is what an idiot I was. What an idiot. What a stupid idiot.”

I assured her she was not. No one can resist such rascals. Her only fault was to be too trusting and perhaps a little greedy. This sort of young rogue with whom she had dealings is typical of the rest of his “profession.” No conscience, no remorse.

“Even if I find the numbers of the cheques and declare them lost, they’ll know something is funny.”

“It is possible,” I told her suddenly and for no reason, “that I can help you get back the money without going to the police or bank.”

“How?” she cried, sitting up and grasping my two arms.

Now that this rash proposal had left my mouth, what was there to tell her? Only to hint at connections, underworld contacts. I told her that it would take some time.

“How long?” She must know immediately.

“A week?”

“Fine,” she exclaimed.

“Possibly two.”

This pleased her less. She looked seriously worried.

I told her then of the sarees I had brought to Colombo, that they had brought a good price and I was quite willing to help her with expenses until the money should be recovered. The only problem was the very dear hotel she was going to where she must pay for a double room.

“But then you can stay there also. It won’t cost but a few rupees more.”

Do you see that even dishonesty has its rewards? My lie, that I could in the seething criminal life of this city find her poor book of cheques without numbers, had already resulted in success beyond my dreams.

“Do you really think you can get them back?” Already she was getting doubts.

“Absolutely.”

“Then you think I shouldn’t report them lost?”

“First let me make certain inquiries.”

She agreed it was best to try first my way, get involved with banks and false statements only as a last resort. How hard it was to keep my face serious when I wanted to embrace her out of happiness and joy. I wanted so to console her, soothe her, make her forget the cheques. “You can be sure,” I told her, “that the banks will make a very thorough investigation. If they learn you had undeclared cheques they will make it difficult for you ever to return to Ceylon.” (Very comical.)

In this way I tried to raise her spirits, but they kept sinking lower. She could not quite believe me (with good reason), and felt one minute she should to the bank, another minute, no, too many risks. She was pale and could not eat lunch, although we ordered sandwiches, felt she had some fever. She said that if she could shut her eyes and sleep forever, it would make her happy. She said she would rather die than ask her father, who wished for her return, to send money.

When her face was hidden I removed from their cache two hundred rupees and put them into her hand. Then I bowed and took my leave, saying that I would telephone to say at what time to meet at the train station, would she only settle her bill. I added that I hoped to have preliminary news of her traveler cheques by the next morning. She thanked me profusely, promising to repay me as soon as possible.

Returning to my hotel, I planned my departure, deciding not to leave my room until it was forever. I instructed the landlady to admit no visitors and to tell everyone that I am ill, covered with red spots of unknown origin. I must laugh, for it is true. There exists in Colombo a certain insect which I have never seen which hops into the clothes at any moment and runs like fire around, covering the flesh with stinging welts. One such had attacked me in the taxi going to Deborah’s hotel, which resulted in much secret scratching while I consoled her. (Fortunately her face was so often hidden in her hands.) Now in my room before the mirror I examined the burning circle of red spots around the lower portion of my anatomy. The unknown culprit had already disappeared.

Then to the telephone. The train will leave very early in the morning; there will be no first class wagon. Both of these are unfortunate for Her Ladyship, but lucky for me (less expensive, also the criminals will not see me leave at that hour). The landlady's son went to purchase the tickets. I spent the rest of the afternoon and evening under the fan, which helped against the mosquitoes.

Bad as my situation is, biting insects, threatening criminals, for the New Year affairs must take a better turn. The army is at full battle strength. Drums and fife playing we shall march southward with chins high. But the enemy is waiting in the north? Ah, but are you sure we are wanting to meet him?

Chapter 15

The next morning it did not rain, though dark clouds covered the sky. Her Ladyship arrived on time, looking very tired, as if she had not slept the night. As soon as she saw me, she would know if I had any news concerning her stolen cheques. I admitted I had not yet. She became greyer, ready to go right then to the bank to report the loss. I swore to her this would be futile. So then she would at nine o'clock go to the American Embassy. I told her that without money she would be deported home on the first plane; the socialist government might be hoping to make a poor example of an American capitalist trading on the black market. Better to take more time, I told her, not rush anything. I should have more news in a few days. And now a train was arriving, so we took up our bags, ready to run for seats, only it was not the correct one.

Our train was twenty minutes late. Deborah, though used to traveling in India, had seldom ridden trains, then always airconditioned compartments. I had often done so, even third class as necessary. Now she was disheartened to see a child urinating on the platform, the mother not even moving her feet as the filthy water ran under her shoes.

More and more people filled the platform, all seeming to Deborah very experienced at taking trains. They would have all the window seats, she was sure. Perhaps we should instead have gone by bus. I assured her that the bus was even worse, but this she could not believe. Four hours on this train would be her death.

And then, to my utter horror, I saw arriving three Englishmen dressed in colourful clothes and jewelry, each with a traveling bag. They saw us. One pointed. Then Deborah saw them and for the first time that morning laughed. She could not know what a threat they were to our plans, did not notice how pale her friend Conningsfield had suddenly become.

Finally the train arrived. Our porters reappeared and jumped aboard one coach with our bags. We followed. They hammered the bags onto a rack with their fists and took their tip.

Our compartment had already most places occupied, only two remaining, far from

the steamy window. We sat down, thigh to thigh with the white-clothed Sinhalese men seated on the wooden benches. Already we were eight or ten, quite enough in a train compartment. Only now more arrived and found room. Then some more. So many narrow-hipped, skinny men, so foul-smelling. More came in; now perhaps fifteen or eighteen sat where in Europe only eight could have fit. A row of skinny legs pushed against Deborah,, making room for more.

She jumped to her feet. "Let's take the bus."

A half minute later we were again on the platform with our bags. The train was leaving. Through one window I saw a flash of red and gold, a moustache, an amazed expression. Then it was gone. I had to laugh. So ironic. Our porters reappeared and with no word, only grieved faces, rushed our bags back across the walkover and to the taxis.

The taxi driver did not speak English, could not understand where we wanted to go. He stopped some people crossing the street and they were able to translate. You understand, the citizens of this country are not themselves villains, but polite and friendly persons, victims of the bad ones, even as Deborah and I.

Now the driver would not take us to the bus station, wanting instead to take us south in his taxi. Sixty rupees only. Deborah looked at me pleadingly. "On buses there might be thieves."

I was feeling rich and the fare was not so high. The hotel taxi, Deborah told me, had proposed 120 rupees for the same ride. Now that we were inside with all our bags, and knowing Her Ladyship would not endure three to four hours on a public transport bus, I agreed. Thus a few hours later we drove up to the Coral Reef Hotel. A light rain was falling. The room would not be ready until four o'clock.

"Let's have breakfast," said Deborah.

Let's. The first breakfast of our new life together. Conningsfield was wishing only that he and Her Ladyship, like the other tourists, had already left their bags inside their room, had been able to dress in beach clothes after passing an agreeable soiree and night. Compared to our hero and his American friend, the others sitting before the glass windows overlooking that idyllic seashore appeared so *intime*, so *en famille*, not just casual acquaintances. But then they were looking a little dull also, so Conningsfield was not moved to envy.

We were served then the worst breakfast of our lives. The eggs had been designed after a junkyard, grey, irregular, smelling of brass. The toast was no better and the coffee unspeakable, so we ordered tea. The view across the lawn toward the sea was spoiled by rain. Americans at the next table were keeping back their children, who begged to go swimming, but later allowed it.

Deborah now seemed almost at the bottom of her morale, wanting to know why she had ever come to Ceylon at all, why to India, why had she ever left home, etc.

"Perhaps you should have remained in Villefranche."

She looked out the window rather long, then sighed. She told me that she still didn't understand why the Mother had so affected her, so that she was often remembering and weeping. She refused absolutely to admit the old woman has any spiritual or super-human powers. Not since that day in Trichy had we discussed what happened between Deborah and the Mother of Villefranche. I felt that, to help her understand, I would have to know more. I asked her if she thought the Mother might have hypnotized her.

"The thought crossed my mind at the time, only I'm sure it wasn't that." Instead, she told me, she had felt a struggle between the Mother and herself, as if the woman had tried to get some sort of power over her, but not a mechanical, hypnotic power.

"Did you resist?"

"Yes, but...." She paused to watch the American children go clattering out into the rain. Then she told me that although she had resisted, she had not wanted to resist, that this was the strangest part. She had wanted the Mother to win, to dominate her. All this had happened in the very few seconds that the Mother looked at her. Now she spoke of the woman's long, very clear, grey eyes.

"Like yours," I said, for Deborah too has grey eyes, and very beautiful ones.

She told me then that she has eyes like her own mother, that the one thing her mother had ever given her graciously was her eye genes. Then again she was remembering her visit with the Mother of the Ashram. "She kept looking into my eyes. I didn't know what to do. Then I asked myself what did I *want* to do?"

She stopped speaking. I could see she was very moved, very close again to tears. "And what was that?" I asked softly.

"I wanted to hold her hands."

Quickly Deborah reached into her bag for her dark spectacles, but the tears were already falling onto her cheeks. I was afraid that once again she would stop talking, but she seemed determined to continue. She told me she had reached out and taken the old, smooth, but surprisingly strong hands of the Mother, who grasped hers, still looking deep into her eyes. And then finally the Mother gave a little chuckle, closed her eyes briefly as if in signal, and their hands gently released.

"And then she turned like a searchlight away from my face and shone full on Thérèse, who fell to her knees weeping."

Deborah wiped under her spectacles with a piece of tissue. I have never felt so tender toward a human creature before, except possibly toward Erde when she would come for her weekly consultations to tell of her unhappy marriage to the car salesman, then take off blouse and brassiere. Now I reminded Deborah that I have had some years of psychological experience and that perhaps if she would tell me something of her past I would be able to help her understand the Mother's influence upon her.

Her Ladyship agreed that this was an excellent idea, only not with our bags sitting out in the lobby (as if our bags had something to do with the condition of her soul!).

Why, she must absolutely know, would the room not be ready before four o'clock? This was very unusual. Now she saw that the rain had stopped. It would be possible to walk along the beach and look for another hotel that would be less expensive and less crowded. Then she jumped up from the table and announced that that was what we were going to do, if I cared to accompany her.

This beach is truly idyllic. Few coastlines have ever so impressed me; the coconut orchards come almost to the water's edge. Off the shore lies the famous coral reef with its tropical fishes. Bending to remove my shoes and socks, for the sand was wet with rain, I could wish my ankles and feet were less white, not sticking out of the rolled up trousers like two skeleton bones. Deborah was wearing her rubber sandals and now walked cautiously on the sharp, underwater rocks, slippery with seaweed.

Almost immediately we attracted one of the local beach boys, the sort that in Greece had caused such disaster between myself and Erde. Naturally I was quite cold to him and tried to drive him off, but Deborah scolded me; she would learn a few things from him. Did he know of a second hotel on the beach?

"Yes, farther down." He is a handsome boy, strong, but has lost most of his front teeth against the rocks. He told us that many times he has broken his bones in the sea.

We three proceeded slowly, he on the sharp rocks with his bare feet, which were black and hard as leather. Now and then Deborah would lose a sandal, would hold onto his wrist while she fished for it in the water. How strange that women know instinctively how to take for granted the full possibilities of the male.

So another came to walk near her, a very small fellow. I imagined him fourteen years old, but he is eighteen and very smart, speaking German as well as some English. His elder brother has gone to Germany to work as gem cutter. A year from now this boy will also go.

Deborah advised him to stay in Ceylon. She was thinking of the cold German winters (and summers) and the dark colour of his skin, so un-Teutonic. But he was eager to be there. He would marry a German girl; he would live where there were actions. Thus he reminded me of a certain Conningsfield; he too would not spend his whole life on a beach.

The hotel to which they brought us was a very simple place with a straw roof, bare rooms filled with beds, all with lumpy mattresses, no sheets or bedcovers, no bathrooms. Each room had so many beds there was no room to walk between them. The rates were rather high.

"Food here very good," the smaller boy told us. "Coral Reef Hotel food *sehr schlecht*."

But Deborah looked doubtful. She did not like the number of beds, also not the expensive rates. And why were no guests staying there? Then they unlocked another door and let us see inside. Only five beds, traveling bags in a corner. Hanging from the hooks on one wall were many bright-coloured shirts, beads, straw hats. In one corner a

gold-tipped cane.

“Not woman clothes,” laughed the proprietor. “Men.”

“Englishmen,” I nodded.

“You know these people?”

“Very bad men,” I told him. “Dirty criminals.”

He shook his head sadly, locking the door with a sigh.

Since seeing that room, there was no possibility in my mind that we would stay at this hotel. Out of the question. Then Deborah noticed on the ground under the outside water tap six pairs of bright yellow chicken feet.

“Well,” she said, “we’ll let you know.”

As we walked back along the beach the sun came out and shone very hot.

Deborah would go immediately into the water with her black friend as guide. Her clothes she would change in the public dressing room under the hotel. Then she would rent a snorkel and rubber fins.

The smaller of our escorts now bid us farewell. His pale-skinned lady was waiting impatiently on the lawn. “My fiancée,” he said with a grimace, nodding toward a fat lady with so ugly red goose-flesh on her arms and thighs. I think he was being sarcastic. He was only interested in a big tip. Then he went to her and began ordering her about, she hastening to please this rascal.

Deborah appeared in her bathing costume, a bikini that she had brought from France. Everyone turned to look. The packaged tourists all had large bathing costumes covering belly and breasts. Deborah was nearly naked, but fortunately her figure was perfect as few are.

She told me she would return in an hour or so. I watched as she walked a little shyly with everyone turning to stare, keeping her towel modestly around her shoulders as she jumped into a native boat and started out toward the reef.

I went to take a chaise longue, found there were only six available and they were already rented. That is the problem with these underdeveloped socialist lands. Everything is planned for the lowest possible need. When the demand is approaching even normal, then nothing is to be had.

Taking off my tie I opened the collar of my shirt and sat down under a kind of giant Pilz (mushroom? fungus? I must ask Deborah) used here for shade on the lawn. Soon came other pairs of feet outside my circle of shade, the toes pointing toward me. I began to reach for my umbrella, then remembered I had left it in the lobby with the luggage, a most dangerous error.

I looked up. Instead of three there were now four, one a pretty, stupid-looking English girl with very long hair and almost no dress, so small it was. When she turned I could see the two round knobs of her posterior. How could such a young, innocent girl go together with these criminals? Had my umbrella been to hand I would have given her a good thrashing on her bottom until she begged for mercy.

Now they accused me angrily of breaking my promise not to leave Colombo without paying them the money. I replied indignantly that I had promised not to leave by train, plane or boat, had said nothing about taxis. And anyway, they had given me seventy-two hours to find the money. I still had until the evening.

So they would return that evening. I told them it was no use doing so, as I could not give them money. The sarees, I told them, had been stolen in Colombo, I had them no longer, and if I was able to come to this hotel it was only because my American companion was paying my room. (How easily I was able to lie, but it is the only way to deal with such riff-raff .)

They left and sat down in the sun a short distance away to discuss what to do, ten minutes later returning with a plan. I was to steal the money from my American friend and give it to them. If I did not do this she was going to suffer an accident while swimming. She would lose her teeth or nose upon the reef, or perhaps even drown. They would give me forty-eight hours to get the money, and there was no way for us to flee.

Afterwards, Deborah returned greatly thrilled and excited from her swim, not noticing how pale in the face her friend Flaminio had become. They had seen many fish and corals, had brought back from the deep a baby tortoise which the tourists on the beach had all photographed. Deborah herself had put the animal back into the water. She had felt it break free from her hands and had watched it through her mask disappear rapidly off into the sea.

She showed me her knee which had scraped against the coral and bled. Her black friend had rubbed a dangerous, slimy coral substance off of the wound, but still one could see ugly red welts arising on the flesh. Would she be scarred for life, she wondered? How strange, she mused, to bring back such a souvenir from the other world under the water.

She laid her hand carelessly on my arm. "You must come tomorrow and see for yourself. It's so easy. You just float on the surface and look through the mask."

"I think it can be very dangerous near those rocks," I told her sternly. "You could be badly hurt." Of course I was thinking more of my English "colleagues" than of the dangers of the sport.

"Nonsense."

Now, as a surprise, our room was suddenly announced ready. Our luggage was carried after us down a long, exterior corridor which opened on a courtyard of tropical plants. The room surpassed expectations — a wall of glass (not too clean, but this partly because of the salt air) opening onto a large private terrace only a few feet from the water. Air circulated by means of perpetually open windows high up on the walls. A good idea in such a hot climate, but an invitation to thieves. The bedroom furniture was attractive; two rather simple beds, the cotton bedspreads gay but badly stained. I did not mind. It was already a miracle that in a moment or two we would be alone together for the first time in *our room*. But Deborah ordered the spreads changed immediately, then

went to the bathroom to shower for lunch.

Only then, *hélas*, there was no hot water. This was no accident; there were only cold-water taps. Such a thing I have seen only in the poorest hotels. Outside rain again had started to fall and the sky was black. There was a cry from the bathroom. Taking off her bathing costume, Deborah discovered that she had been badly burned in the sun. She stuck her head out of the bathroom. Would I ask the room servant for some warm bath water? She would take the teeth washing glass and dip it out of the bucket with that.

After half an hour a tiny kettle of boiling water arrived, as if for tea! Deborah, who had dressed in a robe to wait for her bath, was furious at the error, berating the servant. When he was gone she was very sorry, didn't know what was wrong with herself, had never before spoken to a servant in that manner.

I told her it was the only way to talk to these stupid people, but she had succeeded once again in depressing her spirits, now saying she was no better than Fatty. I do not know how she managed to bathe from that tiny vessel of boiling water, for she closed the bathroom door. I then went downstairs to give her more privacy.

We ate lunch together, watching the storm cross the sky toward the horizon. Deborah tasted the soup and said that thereafter she would touch no soup in that place, that it had been prepared with bad water. I looked around. Others were tasting the soup and adding much salt and pepper.

"Salt and pepper aren't what's wrong with it," she said.

The rest of the lunch was no better. In fact it was inedible unless one was fainting for nourishment. Then she would order an omelette, not the fixed menu. That could not be so bad. The waiter told her there was an hour wait for *à la carte* dishes, even omelettes, so she did not make a special order.

After eating we had no reason to return outside. Feeling sleepy, I decided to take a siesta in our room. I remembered the after-lunch siestas with Erde in Greece. How beautiful they were. But now Her Ladyship's burnt skin, was beginning to pain her, so she covered herself with oil until she was shiny as well as red. Not so appetizing, it must be admitted. I decided instead to read.

So now Deborah would sit on our private terrace and write her article on the Mother of Villefranche. Flaminio, meanwhile, could read anywhere but on the terrace. Or he could read on the terrace and she would work in the room. And so a silent hour passed, I reading, sometimes lifting my head to look out through the glass wall. Deborah, after ten minutes, had abandoned her notebook and was sitting on the terrace wall, thoughtfully watching the rain.

Finally she came in and sat on her bed, saying nothing. I asked her whether she had finished her article and she admitted that she did not yet understand what had happened between herself and the Mother and until she did could not continue writing it. I told her she was perhaps seeking her own dead and departed mother, but at this she shook her head.

“How did your mother die?” I asked.

“Cancer.”

She would not talk about it, was more worried about the lost cheques, wondering if she should immediately return to Colombo and see the American Embassy or wire to her father to cable some money. She looked very doubtful when I told her of my thousands of rupees, but I could not take them out of their secret hiding place to show her. She told me the first thing she wanted to do was repay me.

I told her she did not ever have to repay me, that it was an honour for me just to be with her like this. Would she care to have me read to her? She agreed and lay back carefully (because of the sunburn) on the bed. Would she prefer something from history, philosophy, the languages? She didn't care; I could choose, and she would tell me if she liked it. (This procedural simplicity is the American genius!)

I had bought in New Delhi a book on Napoleon written by a British historian, but had not yet read it and was distrustful — one should perhaps not take too seriously Anglo-Saxon versions of that French emperor. The chapter titles I now saw, while glancing through, indicated that much had been made of the defeats in battle, with little mention of the positive good. I asked Deborah what she already knew of Napoleon from her school studies. She replied that she had never studied French history!

“You know nothing of Napoleon?”

“Only that every psychopath thinks he's him.” She was gazing at the ceiling, then slipped her hand into her shirt in the familiar pose. “Three cornered hat, and all that.”

I had to laugh, hiding my smile behind the book. “Would you like me to read to you of Napoleon?”

“I'd consider it a very unusual experience.” She glanced at me ironically. I wanted to rush over and embrace her. How good we could joke about things so close to the soul.

I put down the Napoleon book, feeling so warm inside. Could I possibly be in love with this young woman?. Concerning my “anti-Semitism,” I wonder if it had really been so deep after all, it seems to me now so distant and remote. Deborah, who has seen past my opaque spectacles, knows that behind my stern, military appearance there is a soul and a man perhaps too soft and mild with a rather large desire for giving tenderness (and also receiving it), a man too easily feeling compassion.

So the military madness is perhaps keeping this in a wonderful balance. “Believe me,” I told her, “I am very far from being a schizophrenic, but am many persons. In contrast to the schizophrenic, in which they have melted together, I am a rather congruent whole.”

Then Deborah would know about my childhood. Beyond the glass wall the rain was falling gently, the dark clouds covering the sky off to the western horizon, the colours of the day muted. I would have liked the servant to bring tea, but the telephone in the room did not work and I did not like now to leave and go down the hall to find him and thus break the mood fallen so suddenly upon us.

Chapter 16

“I was born April 2, 19—. My father was and is a government official; he had a higher education. My mother had somewhat less education, corresponding to a little more than your U.S. highschools. I have only one sister, younger and rather different from me, conventional and neurotic. But starting from my birth, my childhood was rather happy. I was what my mother calls ‘such a mild child.’ What influenced me most? All the classical children’s books, books on animals, Charles Dickens (in *David Copperfield* you will find some of me), historical novels, Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tales, traveler books, books for adults — never many of the so-called ‘books for boys.’ Biographies of the great persons in history and literature soon fascinated me, such books as ‘When the Great Ones Were Little Ones.’ History became my main interest, but from twelve to sixteen it was especially also chemistry, physics, astronomy, biology, zoology, geography, and languages which interested me. Botany, arithmetic and mathematics have never fascinated me, though it seems I have an ability for mathematics.

“From seventeen to twenty it was especially history and languages — Latin, French, then German and ancient Greek which occupied me. From then onwards, history (especially the Middle Ages), and Indian philosophy and art, literature and poetry. (I have a more or less knowledge of fourteen languages, can talk three and a half fluently, read ten.) The great philosophers who influenced me are: Spinoza (the Jewish-Dutch philosopher), Kant, Socrates, Plato, Eckhart, Ruysbroech, Suso, Bruno, Descartes, Schopenhauer, Schelling, Nietzsche, Høffding, Kierkegaard, Shankara, Ramanuja, Lao-tse, Chuang-tse. In literature: Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarca, Goethe, Shelley, Casanova, Voltaire, Rousseau. In history: Louis Quatorze, Napoleon, Frederick *le Grand*, Frederick William 1, Hitler, Alexander, Caesar, Augustus, Claudius, Hadrian, Charlemagne, etc., etc.”

Her Ladyship was frowning, “Your only influences came from books?”

Then I must absolutely tell her (so comical) about a film — *The Great Dictator* (Chaplin) — that had very much importance in my life and also in the lives of several of my school-comrades via me and explains the “military” side of my character. I have seen the film approximately ten times and — how funny — Chaplin should know it! — the effect on us became quite the opposite of the intended one.

Deborah had seen the film, only years before, and remembered very little. “It is a parody,” I reminded her, “of Hitler and Mussolini. So funny. *After all*, we thought, *dictatorship is not so bad!* The film begins: Spring 1918. Tomania (Deutschland-Germania) is in a serious state after four years of war. But the army still fights — a last effort, and then *Sieg!* (victory). Among the weapons which should bring ‘*Der Endsieg*’ was the enormous, long-reaching cannon, *Dicke Bertha* (Bertha *Krupp* von Bohlen und

Halbach) which is bombarding Paris. The target is the Cathedral of Notre Dame, seventy-five kilometers away.

“Seventyfivethousandninehundredandninetyeight, ninetyseven — FIRE!!! With an enormous whistle the shell is rushing through the air towards the honourable target. The explosion, an enormous crash — and an old-fashioned wood-toilet is no more! Chaplin as a little Jewish private is also there. Later he is flying with Commander Schultze in an aeroplane which has turned over. Chaplin cannot understand that levitation is abolished and it is very difficult to drink a glass of water! Well, they crash in a mud-hole, the little Jew loses his memory and spends years in a hospital. In the meantime Aderhonoid (!) Hynkel (Hitler) has taken over power in Tomania, supported by his friends Field Marshal Herring (Goering), and Minister of Propaganda Garbitch (Goebbels). The dictator is seen driving up Siegesallee. Even the statues such as Rodin’s *Der Denker* and *Kampf der Liebe* are doing Hynkel-salute. Field Marshal Herring shows some miraculous new weapons: a shot-proof waist-coat. Hynkel, the genius, has very little time, looks at his wristwatch, takes the revolver and shoots. The man is killed instantaneously. ‘Not perfect,’ says Hynkel, irritated over the waste of his time. Then there is a parachutist. ‘Heil, Hynkel,’ he says, jumps out of the window, and kills himself. They are following him with their eyes. ‘Why are you wasting my time in that way?’ Hynkel says reproachfully to Field Marshal Herring.

“Then the dictator of the neighboring country, Bacteria (Italia) Benzino Napolini (Mussolini) arrives. The train stops, then it starts again. All are falling, then are running up and down with the red carpet. ‘Heil, Hynkie, my dictator-brother.’ Everything is done to let Napolini feel he is number two, and everything fails. Hynkel sits at an enormous table. Benzino gets a fantastic low chair, but then he jumps up and sits on the table! The Ghetto, the Jews, the Stormtroopers, *Sturmabteilungen* (S.A.), Hynkel’s double, the little Jew, etc., etc.

“You wouldn’t believe it,” I told Deborah, “the first schoolday after Christmas holidays (1947-48), after several of us had seen the picture, you could not recognize the school playground. There arose at once three rival empires with three emperors plus one democratic republic! There was I, making an incendiary speech, there the *Sturmabteilungen* had exercises (*Kaisermanöver*), there some rascals were tortured, there the democrats, about 50% of us, had parliament, and there the neutrals tried to keep peace. Also, two to three communists tried to make their cake.

“Then we tested *grosser, dicker Otzenwaldus*, our far-reaching cannon. Four ran in cortege as shells and threw themselves at full speed into the parliament meeting. Horror and trembling and then the battle started!”

I could see that Deborah’s formerly unhappy face was full of amusement as she listened. I was about to continue when there came the sound of a key trying to open our door. A terrific nervousness gripped me. Were those thieves already beginning their little game? Immediately I jumped up and demanded who was there. A mumbling, some

words of apology. A German guest had mistaken the room for his.

“It must be those queers next door,” said Deborah, getting off the bed. “I met them out on the reef. They invited us to share a taxi to Galle with them tomorrow evening. Do you want to? I’ll tell them.”

This sounded better than spending New Year’s Eve with these dull hotel tourists. Deborah went out to tell them we would accept the invitation. I personally abhor the homosexual method of sexual satisfaction, and have never made use of it since 194- when I fell very much in love with a school comrade. But even so, have I really been homosexual? I can without lying say, knowing myself, never really. Our school was the old type, with boys and no girls. The story finished a year later. We were both too young to realize what it was. Later I read about it and was intelligent enough to realize that this was quite wrong and could only lead to misery. So I forced myself to think on girls, and by such a conscious act (it is really true, believe me) left it. Now the only thing remaining is that I like and have sympathy also with nice little boys. But for homosexual experiences of sexual intercourse, I now feel disgust with such things, though pity for the victims.

Deborah returned a moment later to tell me we would tomorrow after supper go to Galle. Then she returned to the terrace, taking up her writing pad and gazing out to sea. I realized with a feeling of overwhelming tenderness that I from now on would have to look very carefully after my American friend so that no harm would come to her at the hands of the British criminals. But I had no plan in mind about how to deal with them. Perhaps with one thousand rupees I could pay their hotel cook to put a little arsenic into their chicken-feet broth. A few drops every day over a certain period of time, or inhaled with the odours of a curry, and the results would be most interesting, though not for anyone’s eyes.

Had I only known, when thinking the above, what horrors did so soon await us, would I have been so light-hearted? Never. But I shall take first things first, relate one at a time.

Chapter 17

Starting at the beginning: *Our first night together*. At supper the food was again terrible. Our hero had ordered special dishes in advance, but though costing extra they tasted no better. Afterwards, we had a glass of cognac in the hotel bar (no other guests present except one dark one, drinking and looking always straight ahead as though alone in the world. Most unsociable).

On the wall, a little framed notice caught our eyes. Together we read it.

*On nee et cri et c'est la vie;
On rit et dort et c'est la mort.*

Although the first line had raised our spirits, the second crushed them completely.

“That’s the most depressing thing I ever read,” said Deborah, and wondered why they had put it up in a public place. “Perhaps to make people drink more.”

We went then to our room to read. First we must change about some of the lightbulbs so that the ones operating would find themselves in the reading lamps and not illuminating the clothes cupboard. The bulbs gave a very weak light. With all our mental resources put to the question, only one pool of light adequate for easy, comfortable reading could be arranged.

The honour fell to me. This was only just, since the books are all mine, but what a challenge. With Erde I had had 250 books, not just thirty. Nearly half of these are in the German language which Deborah has difficulty understanding except conversationally. What could I read to her?

The first book into my hand was poems by Goethe (1749-1832). I would have loved to read her some. Here was one very little one that made me laugh, then I must translate for her, this Goethe-advertisement. “Seeking to buy a little dog that doesn’t growl, doesn’t bite, eats broken glass *und Diamanten scheisst.*” (And s—ts diamonds — very comical.)

At first she could not believe the great Goethe would write so vulgar (in early 19th century, not a very young Goethe!), but then could read the poem for herself. After this she seemed to feel a little happier. “Read some more,” she told me. “Some history.”

My emotion, of course, was great. At last the desired opportunity had arrived to lead again the ideal life, studying, writing, reading aloud with a charming and beautiful female companion. My hands went over the books. Suddenly all seemed written in German, French or other languages even more impenetrable for Her Ladyship. At first only the highly suspect biography of Napoleon was in English. Then I found a history of famous military battles and tactics which was classed among my favorites for reference, also in English.

Was there any famous battle she would like to hear about? Yes, she would like to hear *about Waterloo*, admitting that she didn’t know in which country that place existed, imagining it as a kind of watery swamp in which became bogged down the French army and its three-cornered-hat general. (And this a highly intelligent young woman graduated from an accredited, state-operated American university with a Bachelor of Arts degree!)

But to make her understand Waterloo it would be necessary to explain first the previous battles and the history of France starting at least with the French Revolution, of all of which she was also ignorant. Then, to understand who was Wellington and whom did he represent as military leader, it would be necessary to go somewhat into the history of the British Empire (not to mention Prussia), eventually to touch upon even Clive who opened up the riches of India — the diamonds, gold and rubies of the East — so to fi-

nance England in its rising industrialism and enormous warfare industry, particularly maritime.

She told me she had studied English history in university, remembered nothing, had never felt a need to know it beyond the day of the examination. She had been more interested in other subjects which were optional, such as astronomy and bacteriology. But she remembered little of these aside from a few Newton laws and the names of some highly deadly bacteria which she would probably never meet. Her mind she looks upon as a machine not for memory work but for solving day-to-day problems. I said she was not doing so well in this, and she laughed and admitted I was right.

Now, suddenly, she was burning with a desire to learn everything about military tactics. (Would she lead an army? No, she had only never read anything on this subject and would therefore inform herself without delay.) I read to her several pages — very badly written, a dull introduction — and soon her eyes were closing. She would to bed, would use the bathroom first, very briefly, only teeth washing, then “leave the world to darkness and to you.”

As I was getting into my bed some hours later, having read to myself, for a moment I thought: How pleasant 'twould be to bend over her and kiss her lightly on the lips. She was lying so still under the sheet, only sometimes twitching, with arms and one foot outside. Her hair lay any way about her face and she slept with her cheek against the side of the pillow. But no. I would not take advantage. So rare, I was thinking, to find a single girl twenty-two to thirty years old who is neither a divorcee with several children nor rather ugly and not normal.

The next morning the other bed was empty when I opened my eyes. I found Deborah in temper on the beach. She was paining from sunburn but the sky was overcast and she would anyway go snorkeling in a long-sleeve nylon shirt over her bikini. They had told her, however, that equipment would not be available to rent until nine or ten o'clock when the man would come with the key.

“But that's *terrible*. Early morning is the time to snorkel,” she exclaimed.

Nothing to be done. Also the hotel's glass bottom boat would not be used that day. With cloudy skies there would be no demand. Such lazy scoundrels. Then she must again rent a native boat costing fifteen rupees the half hour instead of the hotel boat for two and a half rupees. So beautiful she was in her anger. She turned to me. “Do you realize we are paying 140 rupees a day for a lousy room with cold water and miserable food and no way to get to the coral reef?”

Her black friend then gave her his mask and said he would go without. Flippers were not necessary if she would wear some rubber shoes to protect her feet from the coral. But how to get to the reef? They would swim slowly, taking their time. Most of the way the water was not deep. He would show her the way.

I had seen no sign of the English and was breathing for the moment easy. I watched Deborah stick into her lovely mouth the large plastic mouthpiece of the snorkel

tube (only first dipping it into the sea) that until that moment had been between the thick black lips of the beachboy. Fortunately I do not have a jealous or perverse nature. Then they sank their faces in and began paddling on their bellies toward the reef, his hand touching her arm for steering.

Then suddenly a hand was on my arm. The English. O horror. The girl and one male would go with me to our room, the other males would rent a boat and follow after Deborah. If nothing was found in the room, the signal would be sent across the water to the assassins by the reef.

Quite trembling with nervousness and thinking fast, I led the way back to the room. To turn and fight or call for help would bring eventually many painful questions from the authorities. These scoundrels were expecting my cooperation for this reason. Also they had half concealed a very dangerous-appearing knife. I would have to think of another way.

A search of the room turned up no money. I told them she must have put her money into the hotel safe. I promised to try and get her to take it out, using some pretext, and would give it to them the following day.

Then I begged them to signal to their friends to return from the reef. This, to my relief, they did. Then, for “downpayment,” they took Deborah’s saree given to her by Tom and the tape recorder. I could not be sorry to see go that evil recording instrument, even less since I had already once sold it, had not declared it entering the country, and would not therefore have to pay for its disappearance. (Also the love-making tape was still in my possession and might eventually be worth much more.)

When they had left I straightened the room, then went outside. It seemed that it might rain again. Sitting under a giant mushroom, I watched the packaged tourists at play. All today were red as tinned beef. The German pederasts with whom we were to go to Galle that evening (O as yet unknown horror!) came down from their *grace matinée*. Together they went backwards into the water, then began swimming backwards, side by side, then turned and swam out to sea doing breast paddle. There was another young pederast with long hair to his shoulders who spent the days sitting surrounded by beach boys or riding bicycles with them, enjoying himself like a girl. Nowhere did I see a man or woman with whom I could have discussed any matter deeper than the weather.

Then the English returned and would again try to interest me in some vile scheme involving drug traffic. I have never in my life involved myself in what is called “international crime,” never touched anything so murderous and ugly as drugs. They had noticed that my bags have false bottoms (only arch-criminals such as these would be concerned to look for such things) and would that I take drugs with me to England for them. My percentage? Very small. The risk all mine except for the buying of the drugs for which they would be responsible. It was only I who would spend ten years in prison if caught.

We were sitting now, to avoid the rain, in one of the gem stores which line all streets in Ceylon, drinking Coca Colas. In these stores much of the smuggled money is first purchased. Trays of rings lay on the table before me for my "choice" in case a policeman or legitimate customer should happen to walk inside. Everyone was very polite, even while proposing this black business. English influence has made polite criminals in all nations where the Empire has reached. So all the more they are rascals.

Of course I spurned their offer with disgust, crying "What kind of dirty scoundrel do you take me for? Once in my life I was in difficulties and was forced to deal with traveler cheques, but I do not do this sort of thing every day."

My words impressed them and they spoke no more of illicit drugs. Now the brother of the jewelry-store owner came in, would talk to me privately. We went into another room. Here he told me that for 100 rupees he would arrange a rendezvous between myself and any virgin girl of the village that I would choose (!!!)

Could I believe my ears? Had he proposed that Flaminio de Conningsfield, Knight of Honour and the Fortune, should *buy* a so young and innocent child? I regretted suddenly that I was not wearing gloves, for I would have struck this criminal across the face.

"Any girl," he told me. "You can walk through the village and when you see one you fancy, tell me and I will arrange it with the parents."

Arrange with the parents the sale of their virgin daughter? "What parents," I demanded indignantly, "would sell their child's virginity for so small a sum? And I am sure you will keep at least half as panderer's fee."

He told me times were hard, hymens were anyway doomed in one way or another to go, it was best that they went at a good price.

If this is true, it is beyond imagining. I, Flaminio de Conningsfield, pay to ruin a young girl child? Impossible. For what is the good of paying for something that is only worthwhile if given freely and tenderly to an adoring husband or fiancé?

He pointed then to a bed in the corner. "If you will come here after lunchtime," he told me, "there will be a girl waiting for you there. If you do not wish to pay the money to me, you may give it to her."

What absolute lack of respect I would have had for myself had I even for a moment considered his wicked scheme. Yet he proposed it so casually, in such a friendly way, as if doing everyone concerned a great service! As I returned to the hotel I was thinking of the ruined girl; on her wedding night what would she tell her husband? That he had been cheated of his marriage right by some nameless white lord owning one hundred rupees?

Deborah had returned from bathing, had had her wash, noticing nothing amiss in the room. We ate lunch together; so hungry we were, the food was almost good. The dessert was very good. English puddings are always rather successful in former British colonies, just as the rest of the meal is usually poor. Her Ladyship was rather more red

now, complaining of burning skin like needles in her back. After lunch she would go to the room and have a siesta. No, no reading together. Perhaps later. However, might she look at a few of my books which were on the table?

Of course she might. It would please me if any of them interested her. I told her not to worry about me, that I would go for a walk. Only where to go without being accosted by rascals? The beach? But there the pederasts had their eyes game. The road? But then the criminals were all standing before the shops, waiting for their prey.

I was a little wondering whether that rascal had really done what he had said — bring a virgin girl to the bed behind his brother's shop. The thought was beginning to torture me (I am a normal male, after all, and no pederast). How terrified she must be, I thought, waiting there to perhaps earn with her little body one hundred rupees — the food and clothing for her family for months.

Her predicament began more and more to obsess me. If I didn't go there, perhaps the man would not want to waste his time and would invite some horrible fat German or some English gangster to have the "honour." Being a sensitive person I became very upset at this thought. Knowing I would not otherwise be at peace, I crossed the road, intending to see for myself what were his evil intentions.

Of course as soon as I appeared on the road outside the hotel some reaction could be seen on every side. Instantly there were the usual young men trailing at right and left, offering good value in gems, tortoise shell, and so forth. Excitement was everywhere, seeing this rich white man walking by. But ignoring everyone and without a word I returned to the shop of that morning. So many useless, unemployed persons sitting around in the shop. They all jumped to their feet when I appeared in the doorway. No, the owner was not yet back from lunch. They would immediately send a boy to fetch him.

I said I would rather see the owner's brother about a certain matter. Although he had seven brothers, the one I wished to see was immediately brought, still almost with his table napkin in his hand, sucking his teeth. When alone with him I demanded angrily if he had done what he had promised regarding the girl. Just as I had expected, he had not. When I pushed open the door to the back room with the handle of my umbrella and looked inside, there were only some young men sitting and smoking smuggled American cigarettes.

The brother snapped his fingers and gave a command. Immediately one of the boys jumped up and ran off. The others, looking curiously at this white gentleman with the angry face, withdrew outside.

"I did not think you would be so low as to procure for me a young girl," I told the man. "I must say this makes me feel better about this island and its morals."

He told me to sit down for a few minutes. He would return shortly. I sat on the bed. On this very bed might have been, had I been otherwise, a young, naked, virgin girl. What a crime I had averted by following my inner conscience.

The minutes passed. It was quite hot and very humid in the dim, windowless room. The beginning, perhaps, of another storm. Why had he asked me to wait here, I wondered? Then he wouldn't mind if I lay back on the bed and shut my eyes for a few minutes. This I did. Perhaps I even slept for a few moments.

Suddenly a sound startled me. I opened my eyes to find I was not alone in the room. Standing against the door, with large, dark eyes fixed on me, was a young girl. What was my reaction to this unexpected apparition? Did I leap to my feet and rush angrily from the room to seek the scoundrel who had sent her and give him a good thrashing? No. Shameful as it is to admit, my reaction was that of any normal, red-blooded man. Instant desire.

I sat up and smiled to reassure her that no harm would come to her, for I had no intention — that is the absolute truth — of forcing her to anything repugnant. Such a monster I hope I am not. “Do you speak English?” I asked.

Her round eyes did not move from my face. After several moments, she nodded. “How old are you?”

She didn't answer. I judged her age by her face to be between twelve to fourteen years, though the Sinhalese mature late and she might even have been eighteen.

“What is your name, my pretty?”

Again, silence. Then I repeated my question, a bit louder. Her lips moved and I thought I heard her say the name Tamila, but I was not sure. I decided, however, to call her Tamila since it was rather pretty and better than no name at all.

Now I held out my hand like a friendly doctor. Very slowly, her eyes on my face, she came across the small distance separating us until she was standing next to me. Then, with a sudden movement, she pulled her dress off over her head and stood before me holding it in her hand, dressed only in a pair of cotton panties.

“Yes,” I told her, “it is very hot in here. I will do the same.”

I removed then my shirt. She seemed fascinated gazing at my skin which is very white except for the arms and face which are rather tan. I, too, looked carefully at her. Such a young body, a brown, so soft skin — no marks or freckles like European girls, although moderate freckles can also be pretty at times. Her breasts were already like two perfect circles with soft brown nipples. I turned her around to see her buttocks which were partly hidden inside her panties. I could not resist (forgive me) slipping my hand under and stroking that so firm little posterior which was soft and warm as two kittens. Also I stroked her head with its long black hair falling almost to the waist.

“I would not dream of hurting you,” I told her honestly, though in my mind my hot, bold penis was already working inside her. Then I very gently pulled down the front part of her panties to reveal the Mound of Venus covered by a very few hairs.

Instantly, to my amazement, her hand came up in the typical *baksheesh* gesture! I have never been so shocked and horrified, made her turn away while I took out the money hidden in a garter on my upper leg, then put a hundred-rupee note into her hand.

So in an instant her dress was back over her head and she was going fast as lightning toward the door. Only another was faster. Then to keep her inside it was necessary to move a table in front of the exit. She did not make any screaming because she knew she would gain no sympathy from the others once I had told them my story.

I brought her back to the bed, undressed her and had her lie down on the mattress while I stroked her back which was covered with a soft fur. I explained to her that I would never oblige her to do anything she did not want to do. She listened without saying a word. Then I explained to her something about what a man is like, asked her if she had ever seen the sex of an adult man (so many young girls are absolutely ignorant of sexual matters, a serious problem and the fault of the parents). She was lying with her cheek against the mattress — it is impossible to faint in that posture — looking at nothing in particular. Then suddenly she was looking at my penis, which I had taken out of my pants.

She then burst out laughing (!!!).

I joined in the laughing, only blushing a little. Yes, it must have been strange to see this part of the human anatomy in a reverse colour to the ordinary one.

Undressing myself completely I lay down on the bed beside her, stroking her shoulders, back and rump. How good it was for her, I was thinking, that the first time in her life it should be done with an educated, sensitive adult man and not one of those black animals which is what she would otherwise have experienced.

So then I came on top and began to introduce my penis (forgive this medical description, but it is necessary to use words of some sort) into her vagina. Only the moment that the head of the penis touched her in that place, something happened. I do not know why it is, but except for twice with Erde this has always been the rule. My organ of sex once again went completely soft as if made of pudding.

I think the reason this time was that I so feared to hurt this girl. I have never, to my knowledge, “deflowered” a virgin. Such a cruel, painful business. Of course, in some cases the hymen is already broken during childhood games *und kommt sowieso nicht in Frage*. With Tamila I decided this was the case, for I found no resistance when I did my work with the fingers. Was she disappointed? When I asked her she made no sign, not even a movement of the head. She put back on her dress and began to talk in a very poor, whining English about her eight brothers and sisters and the rest of her family who had had nothing to eat for five days.

I did not of course believe this one minute, for nowhere in Ceylon, unlike India, do you see human skeletons walking around. However big are the rascals in the government, they will see to giving a daily rice ration to every man, woman and child citizen, even if this costs the economy dear in other ways. But still I have a heart and was moved by this child and so gave her another thirty rupees out of my wallet, then moved aside the table and let her leave.

In a second, like a bird from a cage, she had disappeared into the air. I was

straightening my clothes when the panderer appeared, all smiles. Had I been satisfied by his choice?

I assured him that nothing at all had happened to the girl and that she had not been ruined for her wedding night, that I hoped he would now let her alone in peace and not sell her as undamaged goods to the next white gentleman who put his foot into the shop.

But he was at heart an honest scoundrel and was then very worried that the girl had cheated me, had not done what she had been paid to do. I told him that on the contrary it was I who was unable to do such a wicked deed against innocence and had let the girl go back to her games and childish pastimes. (Later I was told by the beach boys that she is twenty-four years old, married, and the mother of two children (!) though how can one believe such rascals?) Having thus reassured him, I walked back across the road to the hotel.

In our room I found Deborah looking very upset. She had thought of wearing her new saree for the New Year celebration that evening, but had found it missing. Though she did not say, I could see that she had it more in her mouth to suspect of theft the absolutely innocent Conningsfield.

“Is anything of yours missing?”

I looked through my bags and “discovered” the disappearance of the tape recorder.

“We should report this to the manager,” said Deborah, but made no move toward the door, instead sitting on the bed and hiding her face. “Only I hate this reporting and not reporting. I should have reported losing my money. I don’t know why I didn’t.” She looked at me. “Why didn’t I?”

“Like my tape recorder,” I reminded her. “What is not declared entering the country cannot be reported lost.”

“You know,” she said, lying down on her side on the bed, “I think it’s time for me to settle down somewhere. I can’t stand traveling any more. I’ve been away for years.” Where, she wanted then to know, should she settle?

“In your original home, Los Angeles?”

But that place she looked upon as a “nightmare.” Stinking atmosphere, millions of persons on the beaches, cement covering the earth, rude women driving Cadillacs. The school she had attended as a child, all trees and brick paths and butterflies, had become a parking lot. The dry river bed she had played in had become a cement canal.

“Villefranche-sur-Mère?”

“No.”

“Then here on this beach with Flaminio, reading and studying?” (I had to laugh.)

She only smiled rather kindly for reply.

I then inquired whether she did not have to work for a living, whether she could pay her way by writing articles. She told me absolutely frankly that she had *never sold any article*, and was living off a small yearly allowance from the estate left by her mother. The money stolen from her in Colombo was to have lasted until April.

I reminded her that she had implied at different times that her mother had not loved her. One does not leave money to someone unloved. Then she told me it had been a question of income taxes and inheritance taxes. “The accountants figured it out. Ma signed before her operation.”

“What kind of operation?”

“For a brain tumour.”

I was afraid that once again she would refuse to discuss the illness and death of her parent, but I think she had need to talk of it now with someone. She told me that in spite of that she had never “gotten along” with her mother, she had been very affected when death was coming near. First there had been the preliminary diagnosis, then the exploratory operation, the finding of the malignancy. After that her mother had survived another year, becoming completely senile, very small and old, finally lapsing into a prolonged stupor. The last few months she was put into a nursing home and finally Deborah was notified of her death by telephone.

“We don’t believe in funerals,” she told me, “so there wasn’t one. I don’t know what was done with her body. I never even asked.”

How shocking this seemed. Why had she not?

“What was the point?”

What was the point? These words saddened me, so full they were of wisdom and error. For what really she was asking was: To what purpose are the mortal remains when the soul has departed? This question, differently phrased, has occupied philosophers and theologians for millennia. For one raised in Los Angeles it is so apt; there must be many graveyards covered by auto routes and concrete all over the city. If not, some day the children will be playing among gravestones in the parks.

And yet, there is something hard and cruel in such ideas. Not that Her Ladyship is hard and cruel, but she has come from a very recent society where the values are new and untested. Perhaps, I suggested, something is in error. But she did not agree. “Why honour a dead corpse? What is more barbaric and vulgar,” she would know, “than huge funerals with speeches and flowers and tombstones and things like that?”

Very good points. How to argue them? “It is a tie with the past,” I pointed out.

“Exactly.” She shrugged, as if I had just defeated my own argument.

As we talked it was becoming clear that it is *my* role to change *my* ideas if anything is ever to come of my efforts to achieve greatness and power. I, rejecting my European background and sensibilities, will have to stand ready to sacrifice sentiment, to eat from plastic dishes, to turn cities into carbon monoxide gas chambers for birds, in order to live with her in the future.

I noticed that she had been reading a book about Socrates. I asked her which part she had read.

“*Phaedo*.”

This part is a report upon the death of Socrates who drank of the hemlock poison

by order of the court of “justice.” Now I remembered that Deborah herself had thoughts of dying by her own hand. I asked her what she had thought of the *Phaedo*, written twenty-four centuries earlier.

“It made me cry,” she laughed. “Everything seems to make me cry since Villefranche.” She told me it was Socrates’ last words that had this time brought the tears. Now she sat up and opened the book to the correct place. Such famous last words of this great philosopher. In my mind I could recite them in the original Greek. *Crito, we owe a cock to Aesculapius; pay it, therefore, and do not neglect it.*

Immediately tears were coming from her eyes. “He had the right attitude about death,” she whispered.

“But he believed in the gods,” I cried, “and in a life after death. He would bathe himself before taking the poison to save the others this bother, for he knew that his body would be treated after death according to ancient custom. Can man accept death otherwise?”

“It’s too late to ask that,” said Deborah, drying her tears. “The question has become academic.”

Chapter 18

Now coming on was the last night in the year of the Gregorian calendar (Pope Gregory XIII, from 1572-85). Here, only six degrees from the equator, warm weather with rain. Farther north, full winter’s cold. Below the equator to the south, summer going at full blast.

“I couldn’t stand a change in the weather just now,” Deborah said. “I’d like everything to stand still until I can get hold of myself.”

This shows that there were strong forces acting in her subconscious, though her exterior was rather calm. The tears of course were symptomatic, like boiling lava from the depths of the so calm earth. But strange nevertheless. Why Deborah? Why Erde? Why Etna?

I did not much like the elder of the two German pederasts. He was perhaps nearly sixty-five, tall and thin, walking fast with his head forward and always wearing very narrow sun spectacles like slits. His shoulders moved very much when he walked, and even when he was sitting on the beach. Each day he wore, on top of each other, five or six different tiny bathing costumes, removing one with much wriggling after every swim. His *petit ami* was a boy many years younger who was acting as his servant, always fetching cigarettes, towels, etc. Some more p.d.’s had arrived that afternoon, one a handsome blond boy. Also much with the group was an American girl of perhaps thirty-five years with an intelligent face and good taste in clothes. After introductions, Deborah whispered to me that the girl was from a very rich and well-known American family.

Deborah had chosen not to wear the Christmas Eve saree (suddenly too shy), and had nothing else to wear but the drip-dry dress with buttons down the front. The other girl was in pants, looking very chic, but Her Ladyship did not seem to mind. "They are only queers after all," she said.

The men wore very casual shirts with trousers laced up very tight on the thighs, wide at the bottom cuffs, the shirts open to the belt. I wore my uniform *sans* waistcoat, gloves, watch, etc., being rather nervous for the safety of my so few clothes because of spilled drinks and the wear and tear of celebrations in a hot climate. Here anyway were no persons of importance.

On our way to the diningroom I was surprised when Deborah asked suddenly at the desk for mail.

"Cooks is forwarding my mail," she told me.

I thought this strange. Who knew she had come to Ceylon? It had been such a sudden decision.

"Tom. I left him a note that morning."

At this I could not help looking around, expecting to see Tom, tall, gaunt, standing in some corner licking his wounds. "Do you think he will write to you?"

"Unless his mind's blown. In which case I'll have him on my conscience the rest of my life."

The evening began. First we all had supper at our hotel at a large table. The food was very good so it is clear that the cook knows his job, only is too lazy to bother except one time a year. Permission was asked to drink at the table the wine belonging to the Germans, who pretended they were too impoverished to buy the wine on the carte. I myself had planned to drink water, but now felt no compunction about drinking their beverage, which was quite good.

The conversation was very amusing, consisting mostly of a story told by the elder p.d. of a time in his youth when he was still liking girls (!) and wanting to visit one he loved but who lived very far, in Austria. It was then wartime, and also the Gestapo was looking for him as he would not into the army. He had only a bicycle for going on very difficult roads. Very many escapes and adventures, only he could never get to his destination. Later he didn't see the girl again because he had become "queeah." Very comical, but less so when considering that if reaching the girl with his bicycle he might now be leading a "happy married life" on one side and a *sub rosa* existence as pederast on the other.

During supper I noticed Deborah trying to begin a conversation with the other American girl. But Judy appeared disinclined to talk at all, wanting rather to observe from a very lofty height all that was happening around her. Her Ladyship looked angry to be snubbed by this rich American a few years older than herself. But I was thinking that perhaps the young woman was using some drug which put her onto a different level of experience from the rest of us. They said she had been ill and only could decide to

come that afternoon.

The Germans were soon quite high on their alcohol (they began drinking whisky after supper). I myself was feeling a rather pleasant sensation in head and body. Only Deborah had not touched any drink during supper. Now, urged by the Germans, she sipped unenthusiastically on a whisky before getting into the car. There were three cars. Ours was a private taxi arranged by the little lad who would to Germany in gem-cutting business. He was in the front seat next to the driver and would see to getting his commission and some tips, but not, I was thinking, from Conningsfield.

With much gay tooting of horns the cars started toward Galle. There were not yet many firecrackers to be heard. Possibly, I was thinking, this poor folk must save them all to make some important noise at midnight. Also, most used a different calendar. I regretted it was night because Deborah would not see the beautiful and famous Dutch fortress which dominates the port town. It is one of the special places on this island and has a genuine aura of history. The old Dutch fortress, over the coast, such high walls "which not even an elephant can break," as our young Sinhalese guide informed us proudly. And inside the fort the green grass like a sea between the grey stone walls; there too the little Dutch village, so quaint looking, within the fortress itself.

We arrived in Galle, our car following the others to stop at a hotel. We were within the grounds of the nearly invisible fort. There was no moon and we could hardly see the flat front of the hotel which was painted a dark rose colour. When we arrived, it was raining. How eagerly we all rushed up the front steps onto the verandah and then into the huge lobby with many straight-backed chairs. Seasonal decorations were draped from ceiling and walls. But even then I had a feeling of foreboding.

Not many had come here to celebrate. Besides our group there were only some Greek sailors who had been already waiting some weeks for their ship to be loaded. They were not drinking alcohol, something I was glad to see, thinking it would not be an amusing evening if these tough, stupid looking fellows became drunk and uproarious. When Her Ladyship saw the sailors she came very close to me out of nervousness. I assured her that I would not leave her side for a minute.

Now the Germans began ordering drinks, though they had much more in bottles hidden in some bags. The sailors, who spoke almost no English, stayed in the next room playing billiards or throwing darts at a target on the wall. They did not seem very pleased at the arrival of all these queer fellows. They watched mostly Deborah and Judy who are pretty girls. Quite natural.

The Germans were rather gay and pleased with the evening. After a while they told the hotel owner, a fat woman looking in one light as a Sinhalese, in another as a Dutch, to serve drinks for all the sailors too.

Now Deborah would absolutely be leaving. She was very nervous. I told her one drink would not make these fellows drunk. Also, I had seen on the verandah outside the English cockneys who, unseen, had followed us to Galle. I felt it would not be very safe

for us to go outside unless, in a group with others, we could make our escape. Of course, I didn't tell her this.

Then a most unusual sight caught our attention. Judy was sitting in the lap of the handsome, blond pederast and the two were kissing passionately. Neither Deborah nor I could understand this, for the fellow was obviously "queeah." What pleasure could either of them find in these embraces? And soon, much to our astonishment, he had opened the girl's blouse and had out in his hands her two breasts which he proceeded to caress and kiss.

Deborah was sure we were under some visual delusion, like a trick with mirrors, but even so, I could feel my sex rising at the sight. Now Judy was sitting on a table and he was kneeling at her feet, his face in her lap, a most intimate posture. I could see her breasts were of the very large type, with dark brown nipples, not the kind of which I am fond, as when the nipples are soft and pink. Also, the girl was a little bony between the breasts, like a chicken. So I was not tempted, thinking to myself I would like more to unbutton Judy's pants and turn her around and see something about her posterior.

"I think we'd better get out of here right now," said Deborah. But then the older German filled her glass and sat down beside her. She told him she would at once leave. He became furious. I have never seen anyone so angry over such a small thing. He blamed her for wanting to break up the party, for caring only for herself, for drinking their whisky and then wanting to disappear and spoil everyone's fun.

"You are a dirty spoil sport," he told her and took her wrist very tightly in his hand so that she could not get away.

She turned toward me. "Save me," she said, though with no energy in her voice. She knew, I think, that there was absolutely nothing I could do. She bent and tried to bite the German's hand, but he beat her face back, then held her tight to his chest so that she could only struggle uselessly.

Now I noticed that the Greek sailors were no longer playing billiards. They were standing in the doorways and along the walls with very uneasy and excited faces. Suddenly one stepped forward, pushed the blond pederast aside with his knee, and crushed Judy's breasts against his face.

Then all terror and panic broke loose. Already three sailors were dragging Deborah screaming up a flight of stairs. Sailors were everywhere. Now they had off the pants of the men, now they were jumping onto their behinds. The old German was giggling and screaming with his face in the air like a dog. The English, who stepped inside to see about the noise, also were grabbed. First I hid behind the bar, then ran up the stairs hoping to hide in one of the rooms but finding them all locked.

Running along the hall, I could see through one door a great struggling. I could not believe it was Deborah being assaulted by these rascals, but I ran inside as if wanting to join them (better, I was thinking, to be considered one of the rapers than one of the raped). Then an open bathroom door was on the right and a second later I was inside

with the bolt locked.

Cowardly? But what could I have done against those crazy sailors? It was not pleasant sitting in that private place, listening to the screams and sobs in the next room. Through the keyhole I could see them at their game, though I could not count how many pairs of buttocks came between my American friend's knees as she lay back across the table's edge, her poor feet not even touching the floor.

After a time a certain regularity seemed to prevail; a queue had probably formed. Much later the light was turned off and the door to the hall shut. Silence. Cautiously I left my hiding place. Deborah, naked, covered with filth and only half alive, was lying on the floor.

Tears of pity streaming from my eyes, I helped her into the bathroom, ran the tub with hot water (a better hotel than ours, all the same) and lifted her over the edge. Had I not been there to support her head above the water, she would have drowned. Already her eyes were, like those of Eliot's drowned sailor, as pearls, though I am not a keen admirer of that poet.

Tenderly I washed her with the tiny hotel soap, for she made no move to clean herself. When done, I rinsed her with fresh water. It was necessary to dry her while she still sat in the empty tub; wet, she was too slippery to pull out.

I do not know what was going through her mind. The gift of thought is not always a blessing. Her body now looked clean and normal, though I am sure she was hurting everywhere. As I helped her into her dress she sat dully, staring ahead of her. The buttons had all flown off the front of her dress and her underclothes were lost forever. I then dressed her in my own shirt which reached down to her thighs like a very short dress. Fortunately, I was wearing an undershirt or would have had to make my exit as a half-naked Conningsfield (very undignified).

Then Deborah refused to leave the room, pulling back at the doorway like a frightened horse, trembling horribly. She was afraid of meeting more sailors in the hallway or downstairs. I told her I knew of a secret way out and actually managed to find some stairs leading down the back of the building. Through a doorway while passing by I looked back into the lobby and saw several sailors still sitting in one corner. The pederasts were holding discussion around the old German who appeared unconscious and was lying on the floor, badly bruised. Behind the bar the fat woman was wiping glasses. When we went around the hotel to find our taxi, I saw Judy sitting on the verandah with a glass in one hand and a cigarette in the other, taking the night air.

Then suddenly much loud banging. I looked at my watch. Midnight. The start of the New Year. Rockets burst in the air, all making only one spark. Such a poor land. Covering her ears and head, Deborah climbed into the car and we rode back to our hotel, my arm around her, her face in her hands.

No one spoke throughout the journey. At the hotel I paid the prearranged fare. The Sinhalese boy, taking the money, mentioned that after all it was an important

Feiertag, would I give only the double (!) But because of Deborah, he did not insist much and helped me take her up the stairs to our room. We put her on the bed and I thought to give him an extra rupee, only then seeing that the room had been nearly destroyed during our absence. My money, which for fear of losing I had ingeniously hidden in a special place, was gone!

“As you can see,” I told the boy, pointing to the upside down room, “thieves have been here. They have taken all my money.”

He could see I was pale as a ghost, then gave me back the taxi fare, keeping only the driver’s fee. He looked very distressed, probably thinking his people had done this crime, not knowing it was the English. Also he did not know I would be unable to report to the police the loss of this undeclared money.

When he was gone I searched the room from end to end, hoping I had been mistaken about the money, or that the thieves had overlooked some. But I found not one rupee. Then I covered Deborah with both the sheet and bedspread, for she was looking cold in spite of the warm air. Her eyes were closed but she was not asleep. I felt she should be given a pill for sleeping, but had nothing of this sort in my bag, only some imitation pills made of sugar to be used in cases of unextreme emergencies. I gave her one of these with a little water.

“This will help you sleep,” I told her, for there is no good in giving a placebo without indicating what job it is to perform.

So for a long time I lay in the dark, unable myself to sleep, and finally also taking one of the sugar pills. Outside there was still some noise, people hurrying on the beach. (The next day I learned giant turtles had come to lay eggs in the sand, very interesting for the tourists.)

The next morning, awakening, I was thinking unimportant thoughts in my head a long time before remembering where I was and what had happened. My eyes then burst open. Heart pounding, I turned toward the other bed, expecting to see Deborah vanished. But she was still there; only turned on her side. I went around to see if she was asleep. Her eyes were closed. I did not know what to do, but thought it best to leave her until she made some movement.

Then I saw something that made my heart jump. The bottle of sugar pills was on the floor. I picked it up. Empty. My eyes flew to Deborah. Was she dead? Could she have killed herself just by belief in the pills? Or had I made a stupid mistake and given her real ones?

To awaken her was to risk giving her and myself a too great fright. But perhaps she was lying there waiting to die and then I would be saving her much interior suffering. What to do? Then as I watched her, she breathed very deep and turned over on her back. I went to open the cupboard and make a little unspectacular noise. When I looked back, her eyes were open.

“What’s the matter?” she murmured.

I did not know what to reply, so happy I was to hear her voice.

She raised her head and looked around in fright. "Am I dead?"

I could not help laughing, even though so moved. "No, very alive."

Her head fell back on the pillow. "Then I'm dying." Her voice sounded satisfied. She shut her eyes again.

"You ate the sleeping pills," I said. She did not reply, perhaps afraid I would call a doctor to pump out her stomach. "They were only made of sugar!" I shouted joyfully.

Then a long silence. Then she sighed deeply. "Well, shit. No wonder I couldn't sleep." Tears slid out of her eyes to the pillow.

I had breakfast brought to the room, but she would not eat, was not at all hungry. All morning she lay in bed. Then lunch in our room, only again she would not eat. It was not all bad food, so I ate twice the good things and left the rest. I did not want to tell her of the stolen money. How could we ever pay for this room and all this food? She would have to quickly send a cable to her father.

Afternoon, still in bed, supper she would not eat, not even tea or fresh pineapple slices. I was meantime looking for the English, but the rascals were gone. I never saw the Germans again.

That night she slept. For two hours I sat near her, watching her. So many emotions filled me. She has been brought as low in spirit and self-esteem as the old Mariner in the poem. But he, the Mariner, from this low place could see beauties that before had appeared hideous, and bless them. Only with Deborah this has not happened. *Hélas*, the poor girl has not even glanced at this miserable "psychopath." Instead of turning toward love and its salvation, she prefers to take her life. It is even possible that she associates me with her misfortune and blames me for it. Yet perhaps her spiritual awakening will yet come.

This morning she took tea with some sugar in it. I knew then she would begin to recover. At least I can be assured she will not try to fast herself to death. In the afternoon she accepted tea with biscuits. She is regaining her strength in spite of her death wish. The human body is a terrible force, once it selects to live. I think that in two days she will surpass me in strength. Already her eyes at times look quite hard. She is putting up another wall around her despair.

The desk clerk gave me a letter which has come for her. The postmark is Villefranche, forwarded from Colombo. It is surely from Tom. Should I give it to her? In my entire life I have never interfered with government postal services, not abused them in any way by mailing contraband goods, but now I think it better for the doctor to think of the illness of his patient. What if the letter has been written in anger? It might drive Deborah to despair. What if it announces the arrival in Ceylon of Tom? It would drive Conningsfield to despair! So I have put the letter in a special place while I decide.

Chapter 19

This evening Deborah is feeling better, though very low in spirit. Tomorrow we will have to leave the hotel. She does not know where she can go. Then she asked if there has been a letter for her. I said I would ask and pretended to go to the desk, but only went to the garden and waited a few minutes. I went back and told her no, but perhaps tomorrow morning. She asked me whether she can stay with me a few days longer. Tomorrow, she says, we can return to Colombo, and she will cable to her father for money. As soon as the money arrives, she will repay me. Also in Colombo she will see a doctor.

All this is very good, but how will we leave the hotel with no money to pay the bill? Throughout the night, unable to sleep, I asked myself what to do. Finally I decided our only quick solution will be Tom coming to pay the bill. Then in the morning I pretended that the letter had just arrived and gave it to Deborah. Now she too was afraid of what might be written, and told me to go outside while she opened and read it.

Fifteen minutes later I returned — to find her in tears. In her hand was a postcard which had been inside the envelope. So much could not have been written in such a small space, but she was still reading it. So many emotions passed through me. First, happiness that he had said evil things, did not love her any more, must make her cry. Second, anger that he would hurt a so good person as Her Ladyship, even in his anger and despair. Third, fear that if he didn't come at once, it would be very bad at noontime when we must pay the hotel bill and leave.

“What does he say?” I asked Deborah.

“It's from John Hoskins.” She handed me the card. Indeed, the signature at the bottom was in the name of that poet (only three centuries dead), and the message was in the form of a poem. “Read it aloud.”

I sat down on the bed. Her face, still wet with tears, looked eager to hear the words. I read:

*“That time and absence proves
Rather helps than hurts true loves....*

Then she took back the card and read the next lines.

*“Absence, hear thou my protestation
Against thy strength,
Distance and length:
Do what thou canst for alteration,
For hearts of truest mettle
Absence doth join, and time doth settle.”*

Only so moved was she by the next words that she almost could not read, finally

handing me the card, then taking it back again.

*“By absence this good means I gain,
That I can catch her,
Where none can watch her,
In some close corner of my brain....”*

(Now the tears were streaming again from her eyes.)

*“There I embrace and kiss her,
And so enjoy her, and none miss her.”*

Now the sheet was up over her head and she was a little white hill shaking in sobs. Then from under the sheet again the last lines of the poem, read with many halts:

*“Where none can watch her,
In some close corner of my brain....”*

“Do you think Tom will come here?” I asked her.

“Yes.”

I had the same spooky feeling. An hour later, indeed, a telegram arrived from Colombo. Tom was at a hotel, would come if she would allow him to. There was no working phone in the room, so I went to the desk and telephoned him to come that morning before noon. I told him Deborah had been ill, but was recovering. He said he would leave immediately by taxi.

“I’ll tell him I had ‘female troubles,’ ” Deborah said. “Then he won’t ask questions.”

Also then he would not need to sleep with her, a good idea for both.

Two hours to wait. Flaminio was very sad; his dream was already ending and his alternatives not clear. He could not ask Tom for money like any beggar, for he still had his pride and self-respect. He did not have money even for leaving this island, but he would not ask.

Then I for the tenth time again looked through my bags to see if the English had left me anything that I could sell in Colombo, but there was nothing except clothes and books. I was most relieved that my uniform was intact, the gold watch and chain had not been discovered. Also they had left the tape recording. I thought how much this tape was worth to Tom, how much he might pay the destitute Conningsfield to have it.

Now Deborah was wanting to get up and dress herself and pack her bags. While doing this, she found that her camera and other small things were missing. I told her about the robbery, that all my money had been lost. She was at first horrified, then said everything would be all right because Tom was coming. He would have money and she would repay him later. Would Flaminio please go out a few minutes while she dressed?

I went downstairs to the lobby and was sitting there reading a newspaper when Tom arrived. He would now know everything. What was Chickie’s illness? Were we *actually sharing a room*? I explained quickly about the money stolen from Deborah in Colombo and why we had come here together like brother and sister, she being in such

despair. Had we checked out? No.

Then he went to the desk — I had not even suggested that he pay — and took from his wallet several hundred rupee notes. Receiving the stamped receipt, he put it into his back pocket. “Okay. Where’s Chickie?”

I told him how to find the room, then waited until he and Deborah appeared before going to fetch my own bags. She was looking still very pale, but happy to be leaving. We three would go back to Colombo in Tom’s taxi. And then? I did not yet want to think.

But before leaving, Deborah would eat something. She was very hungry. I was feeling too low in spirits to join them at the table, and went instead walking on the beach. Some boys were throwing stones into the water, making them first bounce several times on the surface. I tried it with one stone, but no success.

“Take a flat one,” Deborah’s black friend told me.

So I went looking for a flat stone, thinking that on an island there must be many such. And thinking of the island, I thought again of my exile. How endless it seemed. Had N bounced stones on the water by Elba? Had he ever felt so alone and without prospects as Conningsfield on Ceylon?

Through the windows I could see Deborah and Tom sitting at a table, not even looking outside, their backs toward the beach. Bitterly I thought: Americans always have enough money to go away. Then I remembered the tape, small and flat, such a fine shape. I took it from my bag in the lobby and spun it out over the water. It never bounced, only against all expectation tripped and disappeared into the sea. Most comical.

In the taxi Deborah told me that in view of the robbery, not wanting me to be penniless, she and Tom would give me an extra 100 rupees above the sum she already owed me, to “tide me over.” One hundred rupees. Ten dollars. I thanked them for their generosity, telling myself that in fact they were not obliged to give me even one rupee, so this was indeed *unwarranted generosity*.

They were now busy making plans, were off to London on the first plane. Deborah could not stand being one minute longer in Asia.

Would they afterwards return to the United States?

Two wry faces, like monkeys. They looked at each other. No. Deborah never again. Tom perhaps would go later in the year, just to visit his family.

Then why London?

They felt like being a while in a place like London, especially as Tom knew no European languages. Then they would hear my plans, but I did not know them myself. (Can the lowest and slimiest creature on earth make plans?) Deborah advised me to write the story of my life and adventures, that it would give me something to do and would be interesting to read. “You might even make some money that way,” she told me.

I was glad to be in the front seat, not facing them. There were no clouds at all in

the sky, though that afternoon it would rain. We entered Colombo, not a pretty city in many parts. In a few minutes we would separate, perhaps forever. So fast the car was going, the minutes too were going fast. No way to speak privately to Her Ladyship, to tell her what was in my soul. Such pain. I think I have never known such pain. But nothing to be done. Would she give me her address? She said she had no “permanent address,” only that of her father. I could write to her in care of him.

Then she gave me an address with many numbers, like the address of a soldier or prisoner in jail. “You write there and I’ll eventually get it,” she promised me. She did not ask me what was my address at home, only saying that, when I wrote, to tell her where to reply.

“Where do you want to get off?” asked Tom.

I did not want to get off, but I told him the next corner would be convenient. It was not, however, a part of the city that I recognized.

The car stopped and I got out, taking my bags from the back. Then we were all on the sidewalk shaking hands. Under his calm and correct exterior Conningsfield was very sad, like a little child. He watched the car begin to go away down the street. Then it stopped. Almighty God! Then Deborah was walking back toward me. A dizziness like a great light filled me as she came nearer. I felt her against my chest, against my cheek, so I removed my dark spectacles.

“Flaminio,” she was saying, “I want to thank you so much for...” She stood back to look at me, into my eyes. “You know, I never...” Her grey eyes so clear, in spite of the tears, her tears, mine. I felt such profound emotion, you understand, I think never before in my life had someone looked so at me. Would she therefore stay, forget Tom and stay with me?

“Goodbye, Flaminio.”

Then she was running to the taxi, waved once with the hand and disappeared inside. A moment later the car was gone.

Epilogue

Since that day so much has happened in the life of Conningsfield, Soldier of the Fortune. I cannot count the battles, the campaigns, the retreats and victories.

That same day, as I stood watching the taxi disappear, and with little more than four hundred rupees in my pocket, I remembered a letter of introduction I possessed from a swami at the Ramakrishna Mission in Calcutta to their mission in Ceylon. So there I went to spend two of the most comfortable months of my life, free of charge, peaceful, undisturbed, and who would think I was there?

At this restful place I slowly recovered my peace of mind. I tell you, the Indian philosophies have many good things to offer to the Western countries (materialist, but also good) on a spiritual level. The high concept of Man as an indivisible unity of body, mind and spirit. The concept of Man as a divine creature, as part of the Deity, that we are not a little mortal being that shall perish and disappear as if we had never lived, but that the real thing in us, on which all depends, our consciousness, our Soul, always has been and always will be. That the single consciousness is the same as the world consciousness, that the single Soul is the world Soul. What a sublime, noble philosophy.

On the first of March, so generous was the mission, I left for Madras with the same amount of money with which I had arrived there. Fifteen hours after my arrival in India I was, to my complete surprise, arrested by the Crime Investigation Department. The whole story concerned the sarees which I had bought in Benares on a kind of credit. I had never hidden or refused to pay, there was a haystack of letters to each of the four merchants which proved my will to pay, and a small amount had been paid at the time of purchase. In spite of this I was accused of cheating (!) Also there was something from Interpol concerning cheques to an amount, rumours were saying, of 25,000 rupees. So my situation was very serious.

The detention prison was worse than a zoo. Dachau or Auschwitz were paradise compared with this. After three days I got ill, luckily, and was taken to hospital, under guard, was in a good hospital for fifteen days, and then, only thanks to a pitying doctor, I succeeded in going to a hospital for the poor and not in that horrible fortress prison.

During this time I was thirty days in two hospitals, fifteen days in detention in police stations and the fortress prison — against any law, without any sentence. *It never even came to a trial*, very much against my will, because we would have won. Finally a compromise was made and I was honourably acquitted.

Only now I was totally bankrupt, so it was necessary once again to withdraw to the philosophical life for a short while until I could reorganize my scattered and demoralized forces.

It was in the Hindu ashram at Tiruvanmalai (so much warmer hearts there than in

Villefranche) that I read for the first time the many notes I had made when I knew Deborah. Already how far away that seemed, like a different world. And how many things I saw as I read that I had never seen at the time. Then I had thought her a beautiful and very intelligent and kind-hearted, but rather silly young woman who did not know where she was going, untrained in any discipline, perhaps her greatest advantage in life that she, unlike myself, came from such a great country with unlimited opportunities.

But reading the notes I, like the trained psychologist that I am, saw so much more. I saw a definite behavior pattern. Suddenly I knew what it really was she had so long been seeking, and with this the answer to the riddle of the Mother of Villefranche.

Then I would tell her, but to do so must write her a letter and send it to this highly numerical address, the street having, including her father's, at least 19856 houses on it (!), then five figures also following the name of the state.

Dear Deborah,

How long ago seem those days of monsoon when we were together on that so idyllic yet criminal island in the south. I shall never forget on that last day your eyes which nearly destroyed for me my exile. *Le souvenir que je garde de votre personne ne s'effacera jamais*. I think it is best that fate has arranged our parting. My exile road is hard and full of stones. The enemy is everywhere at hand (you yourself have seen him), the fighting is sometimes fierce (you know this, too), the goals often dismal or obscured. I benefit from moments of repose, withdrawing occasionally into an ashram, there to reconstruct my battered forces with the help of the Almighty and His swamis.

So much I have seen and experienced since our last day in Ceylon, yet am no closer to the final solution. You know something of my life, so I can speak to you frankly of my prospects. A few weeks ago while reading a newspaper (quite by chance some finger of Fate left this particular newspaper where I found it — a sign?), God sent me an interesting discovery. I enclose the article. The key phrase: *Thanks to the complicated administrative procedures ... old coins worth lakhs of dollars are reduced to metal because of lack of appreciation of their real worth. Numismatists all over the world are prepared to pay fancy prices for ancient coins from India.* (!)

So much governmental red tape to send these ancient coins out of the country. I think that the world-famous numismatist, Prof. Dr. Flaminio de Conningsfield, could find a way to help bring them out with no paper-work at all.

But now you are probably saying to yourself: That scoundrel Flaminio is up to his illegal tricks again. Perhaps it is illegal, but I think —

as did your American poet-philosopher H. D. Thoreau (1817-62) — that, when the laws are wrong, it is the *duty* of the people to disobey. Is it right that these precious old coins be melted and lost to the world, sacrificed for the worth of the basic metal they contain? I am sure not.

And now more recently I have heard that I, at the excavations at Taxila, near Rawalpindi, Pakistan, can get ancient Greek gold and silver coins for very little. With all carefulness it seems that if I can get 700 pounds sterling at least, then I will pass Scylla and Charybdis. I have written to my mother, begging her to send me this sum. Otherwise I may have to spend the rest of my days doing meditations and *pujas* in this ashram. (It is a good place, with genuine kindly souls, but not much actions.)

So you see, Conningsfield, Soldier of the Fortune, also has some prospects.

And now I turn to you, dear Deborah, to tell you of a so interesting and important thing that I have discovered concerning you. Please forgive me in advance for talking on a very personal level with you, but we have passed some moments together which I think permit me to speak frankly on certain matters. Particularly since I am, as you know, a trained psychologist, even if my study was not done in what is called a “state-recognized university.” (You understand, it is only in my most backward and stuffy country that such distinctions have any importance.)

You did not know, I think, that during the time I knew you I kept a sort of diary, which was an experiment for me in ways to avoid what could be called loneliness or nervous depression. I sometimes begin such diaries, but they never last more than a week or two (too lazy). Then the other day I was reading and found it was all written about you. Nothing nosy, only a so partially developed picture of you like a map with many important things missing but some large roads and mountains marked.

Then I saw so clearly what you were seeking, as if I had the map and you had none, you going here and there rather blind. You will forgive me, I hope, if I tell you what I saw.

In the center was the Mother. (Do not throw down this letter now, but be patient and read on.) Dear Deborah, I know that in your very American and most modern and pragmatic soul you will find the courage to admit that we are born out of mothers, so these are very important things in our lives. Without our mothers, who are we? Where do we come from? You (American pragmatist) would say (forgive me) that where we come from is not important, it only matters what we will achieve. But this is only the half of life.

I have had long talks here with a swami. He is the personal guru of a

wealthy American woman (rather ugly, I have seen her photograph), who goes about to the different ashrams taking him along. Now she is home for one month to New York for business affairs, so he is resting. He is very modern in his outlook, reads *Time* and *Life* magazines so is not without good knowledge of relativity theory (!) thermodynamics (!) etc.

So many interesting things he has talked of: that the Soul is part of the infinite cosmic energy. The energy of the Soul is what gets things done. "If you really want a thing, you will get it," he told me (good news for Flaminio!). The Soul, if it is energy, can be conserved (Conservation of Energy theory). And matter is energy too ($E = mc^2$). Then matter also can be conserved. Thus the amount of energy in the universe is constant, and what is matter one day can perhaps be Soul the next? I wonder. Then the electric energy in a wooden tree can, in another time, come back as a Soul, the tree of course being burned to release the energy. Could then the tree not come back even as a poem? The poem as a tree?

I think, then, that we can be haunted by matter. I think, my dear Deborah, that you (forgive me) are haunted by matter. By your disappeared mother's body for which you are obliged to endlessly, endlessly seek, just as Hamlet's father's ghost was seeking his revenge in a reverse situation. But you cannot find your mother because she is dead and her material body is lost. So you look here and there. You come to Villefranche. You look at the old lady. No, it is not your mother, but almost. A so old and sick lady with grey eyes. She looks into your eyes and says: No. (Only the fools think that she is saying Yes. The fools remain.)

But then why does the learned Prof. Dr. come to these conclusions? So strange, in the diary one thing so often recurred: the *twin in the head*; "Where none can watch her, *in some close corner of my brain.*"

Q. What is this hidden thing in the head?

A. The deadly tumour in a mother's brain.

This, dear Deborah, is what you have been seeking so long in ever-widening circles. You have been seeking your mother on the other side of her death. Once you have even tried to join her there. DO NOT TRY THIS AGAIN OR YOU MAY SUCCEED! Now tell me that matter is unimportant, that a dead body is without cosmic significance. Would it not be better to have a pretty grave to visit, there to bring flowers, perhaps cry some sentimental tears, then go away renewed to your daily labours?

It is important to be able to reach out and touch the past. I swear it. A so old tree gives renewal when walking under it. Even old beams to hold up a roof give inspiration to persons living beneath. Any country graveyard, or the tombs of emperors, do so a thousandfold.

Now you will laugh and say: Flaminio is from an old country and a bit queer in the head and old-fashioned in his ideas. Perhaps it is true. (It is clear at least he is a military megalomaniac.) Perhaps my love of history, philosophy, and literature will forever prohibit me from gaining the wealth, power and fame that I seek. Or the need I have (even stronger) for love and tenderness will bring me finally to compromise on the rest. (Perhaps you will learn, as I have, that the sea snake may be ourself.)

Your Ladyship (I call you this with deep respect and affection), I will finish now. Evening comes and it is still very hot. If I keep the light on for writing, the mosquitoes will fly in.

I hope this letter finds you in good health and happy. Perhaps you will forgive me for talking of such private (to you) matters. Or you may perhaps learn something you had not known. If you have the time, I hope you will write an even so short reply, if only saying you are not angry at my presumptions.

I sincerely wish you all the absolute best.

Flaminio

Three weeks after sending this letter I received from my mother some money in the form of an airlines ticket home. This I was able to change into its cash value in Madras. It was not enough money to make a "big splash" in the rare coin market, but enough to take me to New Delhi and have cleaned my "uniform" so as to present myself in full battle dress for a meeting with the leading numismatist (mentioned in the newspaper article) Mr. Benegal. This gentleman was kind enough to give me a letter of introduction (being highly impressed with my calling card) to some of the maharajas in Rajasthan in whose palaces lie heaps of precious old coins waiting to be melted down. Mr. Benegal, hoping eventually to be able to save many of these coins and thus gain valuable foreign exchange for his country through legal export means, had of course no idea of the much quicker and more direct intentions of Prof. Dr. Conningsfield.

Then again a day of fun and triumph. I visited the National Museum and the Archaeological Survey of India. Though I only thought to see a little inspector for the coin-collection, both the Director (N.M.) and the Director (ASofI) insisted on having long talks with me, and in the National Museum they were quite mad eager on an exchange basis to sell the whole museum for things for their Western collection. On leaving, I was followed and escorted to the doors by the directors!! My taxi arriving, I waved with my white gloved hands and my baton, fighting against a roar of laughter in my interior. For here I am, a would-be semi-smuggler, and they are extremely eager after pleasing me! Ah, India! What a country for every psychopath of the self-assertive, baton-swinging type!

Several days later I was in Rajasthan living rather well in the palaces of these maharajas who are often very simple, good men, fearing mainly to lose their privy purses because of socialist policies of the Prime Minister. (What a stain on the name of Indian justice to take away these government-promised rights.) Yes, the coins are definitely there, but I will need more money to bring off the coup.

So I have returned to New Delhi where I hope to find a “gang” which is willing to finance a traveler check “loss,” but on better conditions for me than I was given by those rascals in Colombo. All this takes much time, and I have already spent five weeks in a good but bomb-shelter-like room, always in electric light, uncertain economy, and the feeling of being entangled in crime.

And of course there is still one question remaining. That day on the street in Ceylon when for the first time Deborah looked into my eyes and thanked me. Was this *the look*? Was this *the blessing*? Perhaps. Only then, when she said goodbye, did I realize that the Mariner in the poem, though loving the sea snakes (how comical!), did not decide to stay with them, but sailed away. So now I am most anxious to receive the reply to the letter I have written to Deborah. It is not important where she is or with whom she sleeps. The important thing is that she does not become an exile, forever lost upon the planet.

This morning at the Royal Embassy of G— I found my letter to Deborah has been returned. ADDRESSEE UNKNOWN. How ill and dizzy I felt, looking at that envelope addressed in my own particular handwriting (red ink), so covered now with marks and stempels. I put it into my pocket, trembling.

Evening. Perhaps because of the presence in my room of this unopened letter, I am thinking all the time of Deborah. I ask myself: Was knowing her a plus or a minus experience? I think in most ways a plus. It is not every day in the life of a Soldier of the Fortune that a beautiful woman looks with tears into his eyes. Alone, that is worth something. She has taught me that to love Flaminio is to be saved. And were Flaminio to love Flaminio? The same? I wonder.

Well, I will now finish this diary. It has served its purpose. Was it Deborah who not long ago suggested that I write for profit something concerning myself? A book of exemplary manners for young boys? Perhaps something more human, to make even its reader love Flaminio, and thus be saved. (Though I in this diary, as a thorough scientist, noted many things down and made many observations in spite of my mood, I know that I could write at least one novel about that wild and exotic adventure that is my life.)

Concerning Conningsfield: the Memoirs of a Knight of the Fortune. Some excerpts:

The fighting was fierce, the losses enormous. But step after step the Emperor Flaminio (de Conningsfield) at the rear of his troops (rather safe) together with "Slaughter" Schultze, the brave and heroic Grand Marshal, and "Fat" Larzen, the well-nourished Reichsmarshal and Grand Admiral of the Fleet (which had nine admirals and no ships at all), advanced, yelling: "Cut down indiscriminately," "No mercy," "Let them die as cattle," "Break them on the wheel," "Ready for torture," "Forward soldiers, I am with you at the rear guard!" The enemy was seized by despair. Suddenly a bell sounded. "Damned," said the Emperor. They had to stop the battle. It was time for the German lesson.

Conningsfield looked glad-surprised at the letter. So they already now offered him the archbishopric of G—, without his even being a priest, twenty-seven years old. What a career! Half a year ago he had only been a student, and now he would have four bishops under him and perhaps even six followers of the faith!

Conningsfield was standing in the spruce-forest, so filled with pain and despair, so he tore up the grass. He thought on Anne, her little body, her beautiful exotic face and her eyes which he never should kiss.

It is difficult, Conningsfield thought, to leave an Indian temple on socks ceremoniously, when you are flower-garlanded and have a comical red spot on your front. All the monks bowed politely for the Great Man.

And where is Conningsfield now? In prison? Of course not. Attempting a coup d'état? Not yet. Living on a lonely island with a beautiful girl? No, he needs more actions. But where is he then? Perhaps he is sitting opposite you just now, if you want to visit the beautiful little Kingdom of G—, and are therefore in the passport section of the Royal Embassy of G—. You perhaps won't recognize him in the little pedantic bureaucrat sitting there with all his stempels. But is he not a real embassy man? No, but are you sure the embassy should be open today? Better assure yourself.
THE END.