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BROWN WOMEN AND WHITE



*BROWN
WOMEN
AND
WHITE*

BY

ANDREW A. FREEMAN

WITH DECORATIONS BY

F. L. AMBERGER

NEW YORK

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TO

M. A.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANDREW A. FREEMAN was born in Baltimore, Md., and studied at Johns Hopkins and Columbia Universities. He began his newspaper career on the *Baltimore Sun*, and has worked on the *New York Evening Mail*, *New York Herald*, *Chicago Journal*, *New York Daily Mirror*, *Japan Advertiser* and the *Bangkok Daily Mail*. He has contributed articles to various magazines, among them *Asia*, *Current History*, *McCall's*, *The New Yorker* and *The Outlook*.

He has traveled and lived in Asia, Europe, Africa and South America, and since his return from Bangkok, where he was editor of King Prajadhipok's newspaper, he has devoted himself to writing.

Brown Women and White is Mr. Freeman's first book.

CHAPTER 1





HE East never hurries. What can time mean when ceaseless existence is man's fate? He waits and things happen. That is why he believes in genie and magic carpets.

But to me, as I took refuge in the shade of the deck of the *President Van Buren*, while she inched her way into the harbor of Betel Nut Island, which is Penang, there were no genie or magic carpets. I was not of the

East. Nothing could happen to me here but death by roasting.

The town simmered in the tropic sun like a pot of stew prepared for a Gargantuan with an appetite for corrugated iron roofs, trolley cars, rickshas, docks, jungle vegetation and men. The milky smell of hot latex from near-by rubber factories clung to the place like the stench of frying fat in an all-night restaurant. The stretch of water separating the ship from the island was like a blue River Styx and I was being delivered to Pluto's steward to be tossed into his infernal pot.

God! And to think I've got to stay here twenty-four hours.

I was on my way from Singapore to Colombo. Why Colombo? I did not know. I was traveling, hoping for something to happen. Ceylon seemed a likely place so I was going there.

Closer and closer to the cauldron crept the steamer, backing and going ahead, as if to postpone contact with those seething shores. A gang of Tamil coolies dressed in dirty "G strings" gave little heed to her arrival. Huddled in the meager shade of the wharf shed, they were scooping handfuls of rice from banana-leaf plates. Ingots of tin fiercely glistened in the sun. A miniature locomotive panted along the quay.

Once the ship was moored the apathy on the dock changed to action. A fat, brown ogre swathed in white, appeared from the recesses of the godown. He shouted

and clapped his hands. Reluctantly the Tamils rose. They dropped their banana-leaf plates into the lagoon churned to a mustard hue. The hissing water, sadly scalding the ship's propellers, subsided. The brown men began to sing a mournful chant as slowly they moved the raised platform for the gangway into position.

“Ai ah! Ai, ah! Ai ah!”

White men dressed in glaring white clothes and cork helmets came aboard. What were they here? Why did they leave behind the urbane comforts, the kindly sun of the British Isles? Were they, too, like the Tamils, slaves in this satanic kitchen?

“Christ, it's hot!” said Bill Rhodes, a fellow traveler, staring mournfully at the activities on the dock. He was disembarking at Penang for three years on an American rubber plantation in Malaya.

“Now I know why they call America God's country.” By way of an afterthought he removed his sweat-soaked collar.

God's country. This trite remark had no meaning for me until I heard it in Penang. Heat and a benevolent Supreme Being are not compatible thoughts. God made the temperate zone. The devil must have made the tropics.

Suddenly above the cries of fruit and jewel vendors,

the labor song of the Tamils and the panting locomotive, I heard my name called.

“Did you hear what I heard?” I said to my collarless companion. “Or am I just crazy with the heat?”

It seemed absurd that any one should know of my existence in this port of Pluto’s stew. An envelope was thrust into my hand, bearing the legend:

ON HIS MAJESTY’S SERVICE
STRAITS SETTLEMENTS GOVERNMENT TELEGRAPH
TELEGRAM IMMEDIATE

On His Majesty’s Service? Could it be His Satanic Majesty? But I tried to shake off that thought. I wanted to believe that I held in my hands news that some one had died and left me a lot of money. I thought of buying a nice cool island with running hot and cold water, with frigidaire and all clinking glasses, with lagoons and coral strands and crescent moons, with sanitary wash-tubs and hula girls. “But there is no relative or even a friend who has money,” some diabolic imp kept saying. That was true. It couldn’t be that. It must be bad news. Good news could never come out of Pluto’s port. My apartment had been robbed. Some one was sick. I’d have to go home.

“Well, aren’t you going to open it?” Rhodes asked.

“Here,” I said, “you open it. I’m afraid to.”

“Well, can you beat that?” he said handing the message to me.

The envelope was an Aladdin's lamp and "Bangkok" and "editor" and "the King's newspaper" were the words of a spell. The genie was already taking form. A wish I had wished back in Singapore was about to come true.

I had heard about the paper in Manila. I dreamed about the job in the South China Sea and inquired about it by cable from Singapore. It would mean a prolonged stay in Siam. Siam! The very word spelled glamour, romance, and adventure. But in Singapore—well, there are even matter-of-fact Singaporeans and they had done their best to dissuade me.

"For goodness sake, don't go to Bangkok," they said. "Bangkok is the hell-hole of the East. It is full of cholera, leprosy and other plagues. White men's burial services are more common than heathen festivals. You'll never come out of Siam alive."

"NEED EDITOR REORGANIZE KING'S NEWSPAPER STOP COME TO BANGKOK IMMEDIATELY STOP WILL PAY ALL EXPENSES."

Penang seemed different. The sun was friendly. I thought I detected syncopated rhythm in the Tamils' song. The locomotive chugged in a spirited fashion. It looked like Siam and the plagues for me after all.

And why shouldn't I go? Had I listened to kind-hearted advisers I would never have come this far. I should still be home digging myself deeper and deeper

into the rut of safety there to dream of fantastic places, to hear the boom of temple gongs and the thrum of tom-toms in the security of a New York flat. Why, then, listen to twaddle about Bangkok? Nevertheless, now that the Siamese adventure was actually beckoning, I felt something of the fascination of fear that one experiences when alone at night with a mystery novel.

The Tamils had swarmed over the ship. They were removing the hatches and were making the winches rattle like riveters working on a skyscraper. For a moment I stood there looking at Bill.

"I'm going," I said.

"What about cholera, typhus and leprosy?" asked Bill.

"Damn the diseases," I said. "I may never get an opportunity to work for a king again as long as I live."

"Yes, but can this king cure leprosy?"

"Why not? After all, anything's possible in Siam."

Bill shrugged his shoulders and walked off.

Better not take any chances on changing my mind.

I dashed down the gangplank in quest of a travel bureau. A ricksha man ran me through the little town which was to be my last direct contact with America and Europe. The great ships do not come to Bangkok. Passengers and cargo are reshipped from Singapore up the Gulf of Siam, or travel one thousand miles by railway from Penang, through the Malay Peninsula.

The train, I found, was the best way to go to the Sia-

mese capital. It had left already and the next one would not depart for two days.

The next day I went down to the dock to say good-by to the ship. The winches were banging away hoisting the last of the tin ingots aboard. All night long the Tamils had loaded tin, enough for millions of cans which would come back on the next trip of the vessel filled with milk, tomatoes, peas, soups, fish and beef, to sustain the white man in exile. A bearded Indian fakir sat cross-legged in the middle of the dock and played eerie minor notes on a little flute. Occasionally he would hopefully raise his head to the passengers at the rail who tossed him coins. He would pick them up, examine them carefully, pocket them with a shrug and continue to play his mournful tune.

The clatter of the winches stopped. There was a lull on the dock. Deep booming noises came from the ship as the hatches were closed. The Indian's pipe grew louder. The Tamils began to swarm over the side like rats. The brown ogre appeared again. His white robe brushed my arm as he strode out from the godown yelling in a high-pitched voice to the sleepy coolies. They hauled away the gangplank. The ship's jazz orchestra struck up "Yes, Sir, That's My Baby." The fakir was undeterred and rocked back and forth to his own music. The deep-throated siren spoke. Lines were cast off. Propellers churned.

“Yes, sir, that’s my baby,
“Yes, sir, I don’t mean maybe.”

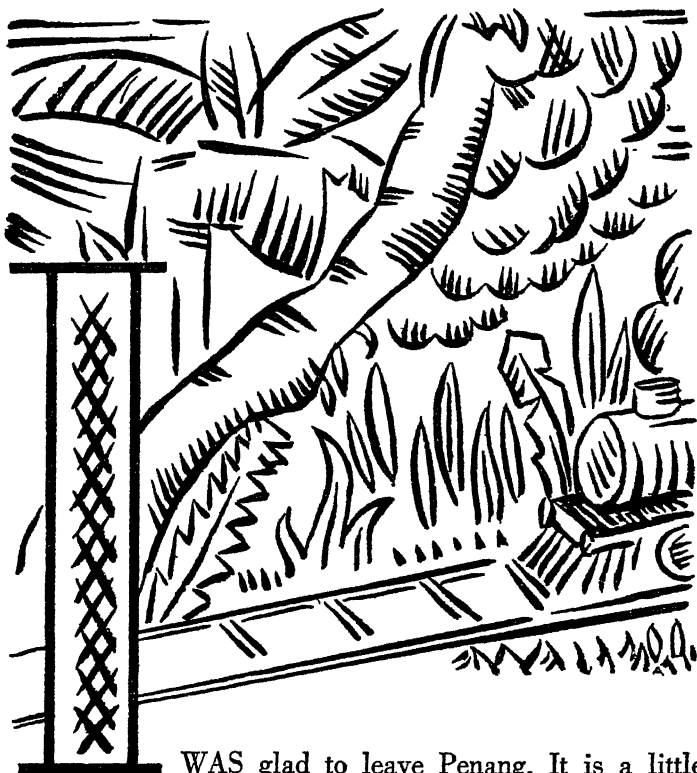
A melancholy solemnity pervaded the departure. The coolies stood and watched the vessel. The little group of white men in the shade watched the vessel. The passengers watched the dock.

“Yes, sir, that’s my baby,
“Yes, sir, I don’t mean maybe.”

It grew fainter and died as the liner turned her stern to the dock. The groups broke up and slowly disappeared. The Indian played his melancholy air over and over again. The *President Van Buren* passed out of sight behind an island to start the long journey across the Indian Ocean to Colombo, without me. I hailed a ricksha, waved him to go north, north toward the mysterious Land of the White Elephant.

CHAPTER 2





I WAS glad to leave Penang. It is a little town teeming with Chinese, Malays and Indians but orderly and British to the core. The Church of England towers above the Mohammedan mosques. The asphalt streets are spotlessly clean. Except for an occasional opium den, it is as respectable and smug a town as one could find anywhere in middle western United States. Its clubs still exclude enemy aliens, meaning Germans,

and the law requires all newcomers to register with the police. Had I not complied with that statute after landing I might have learned something of British jails in Malaya. But my passport showed that the police knew I was in town and I was permitted to take the ferry to Prai on the mainland where the train was waiting.

Except for several palm trees, a Standard Oil tank and a few sidings, Prai is a station without shelter. There was none of the bustle and excitement incident to departure. There was not even any one to shout "All aboard!"; no raising of steps or banging of doors. As if it were accustomed to take such matters into its own hands, the train lurched forward without warning and lumbered slowly into a tunnel of green slashed out of the jungle, dark and foreboding. Gingerly, as if afraid of what lay ahead, the little procession of cars gathered speed and headed for Pedang Besar on the border where I would change for the Siamese Royal State Railways. It would take a thirty-six-hour journey to span the Malay Peninsula.

The train chugged through mile after mile of jungle rubber plantations, stopping at tiny stations along the way. All this land, which produces the finest rubber and most of the world's tin, once was Siamese, but British imperialism had forced the Siamese to give it up.

Occasionally a white planter immaculately dressed in khaki shorts and white coat, would take his place in the first class coach. He would open a newspaper or book and read as if he were a Long Island commuter. His

studied nonchalance, his aloofness to all things about him, irritated me. He, with his superior knowledge of this sea of green through which the train was struggling, should have smiled, should have said a word of encouragement, should have told me that it would not be long before I should arrive at some friendly port.

Outside the window brown jungle folk looked curiously at the train and its occupants, holding their hands to their ears when the siren screeched. Every blast was a scream of contempt, the battle cry of the white man. Only the jungle itself seemed to defy this strident, puffing worm, for all along the line I saw gangs of coolies hacking away with long knives and axes at brush and trees intent upon engulfing the tracks.

It was late afternoon when we arrived at Pedang Besar. In appearance it was no different than the many stations at which we had stopped. Siamese railway officials in neat, khaki uniforms moved about with papers and paraphernalia incident to the dispatch of trains. Coolies, naked except for the ubiquitous "G string," moved trunks and freight from one train to the other. A money changer licensed by the government, changed my Straits dollars for *ticals* and *satangs*. (The *tical* is worth approximately 44½ cents in American currency and there are 100 *satangs* to the *tical*.) The bills were plainly marked in Roman numerals and in the left-to-right script of the Siamese which has its roots in Pali and Sanskrit.

After a brief and courteous passport examination, a porter bowed and took me to my car. I entered a neat corridor into which various compartments opened. My brown guide stopped at one of the doors on which my name was typewritten. He showed me the bell and said in English: "If master wants anything please ring." With a sharp bow he left.

The compartment was clean and roomy and contained a wash basin, chair and the usual pullman lower and upper berths over which mosquito bars were suspended. A few minutes after the train got under way I pressed the button for the attendant. A smiling face showed itself. I ordered a *stengah* (Malay for large whisky and soda) and settled down for the long run to Bangkok. It was hot. I looked out of the window at a harsh landscape with a scrub growth terminating in sharp rocky hills.

My fellow travelers were Europeans; a salesman for an Italian artificial silk firm; another for automobile tires, toothpaste and shaving cream; another selling farm machinery; two young Dutchmen going to join a Dutch firm in Bangkok; an American missionary and his wife; and a tall, young Englishman, dressed in shorts, who was returning from home leave to the teak forests of northern Siam. I saw them only at meal time when all of us would emerge from our compartments like so many sacred cattle being taken to pasture. The tall Englishman sat at my table.

“Beastly train, isn’t it?” he said putting down his whisky and soda.

“Not so bad,” I said.

“How long will you be in Bangkok?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” I said. “Probably as long as I hold the magic envelope.”

“I beg your pardon?” he said, looking at me quizzically.

“You see,” I said, “a genie is taking me there.”

He laughed.

“Have you ever been to Bangkok?” I asked.

“Yes, many times. It’s a beastly place.”

There was a pause. I waited for minutes hoping that he would talk and finally, to make conversation, I asked,

“Where are all the elephants?”

“One of them may come along any time,” he replied.

“When this road was first built the trains didn’t run at night because of collisions with elephants.”

“You’re kidding me,” I said.

The Englishman poured another drink.

“No, really,” he said. “There ought to be a law requiring all stray elephants to have head and tail lights. By jove, if we controlled Siam we’d put the country on an efficient basis. These people are not fit to govern themselves.”

“Why not?” I asked.

“Well, look around you. Look how they do things. The Oriental will never appreciate what the white man

has done for him, that's why. If we handled our own affairs like the Siamese do, where would we be? Swamped by slant-eyed heathens."

The train was one of the best I had ever been on and from the little I had seen of these "slant-eyed heathens" it would not be so dire a calamity to be swamped by them.

Towns at which the train stopped appeared to be two or three thatched-roof huts on the edge of the jungle. Sometimes a high-wheeled bullock cart or a Ford was to be seen. Instead of the Malay *sarong*, the *panung* began to be in evidence. The *panung*, worn by both men and women, is a bright-colored cloth draped around the legs from the waist to the knees and looks like bloomers.

Some of the women wore nothing above the waist while others covered their brown breasts with a strip of white cloth which left their stomachs naked. Their bodies were small with pleasing compactness. Their hair was cropped. Their almond-shaped eyes were brown, sparkling with childlike wonder. Yet when these delightful creatures smiled from a never-ending source of mirth, they were repulsive. Their teeth, varnished black from the juice of the betel nut, gave their mouths the appearance of a cavern on the side of a hill.

The men were sturdy, varying from short to middle height. Their features were Mongoloid, their eyes brown, and their hair smooth and black. To the despair of man-

ufacturers of shaving equipment, the Siamese have little or no facial or body hair.

In the Siamese flows the blood of China, of India, of Malaya and of the mysterious Mon and Khmer.

At one of the stops several passengers alighted and were soon surrounded by a group of naked peasant children. They cried "*farang*" (foreigner) and touched the missionary lady's dress with shouts of pleasure. They stroked her arms and exclaimed about their whiteness. Several women, attracted by the shouting children, came up and they, too, chatted with gleeful excitement at this strange being. Their frank, carefree happiness was contagious and soon several of the passengers and the Siamese began talking, the one in English and the other in Siamese, just as if they understood each other perfectly. There was none of the cringing fear of the whites which I had noted in other Oriental countries.

To the Siamese the foreigner is not a devil as he is in China. He is merely a *farang*, a word taken from the French *forain* to designate any white man. Watching the little group that surrounded us, I recalled a walk I once took through Shanghai's native quarter with a journalist who had spent many years in China. A woman, half blind with trachoma, thrust a dirty, wooden begging bowl at us.

"*Yang kwei tsz,*" she cried, "*yang kwei tsz,*" which means foreign devil.

"I shall give you nothing if you call me that," said my friend in Chinese, moving on.

"*Yang kwei tsz hsien seng*," she whimpered, meaning Mr. Foreign Devil.

Again my friend told her that he would give her nothing if she persisted in using that designation. But she continued to follow us and tried again.

"*Hao yang kwei tsz seng*," she whined. "Mr. Good Foreign Devil."

We quickened our pace and she started to trot at our heels.

"*Lao yeh hsien seng yang kwei tsz*," she cried thrusting the bowl again. "Lord Foreign Devil give me a copper."

Obviously she knew no better so we put coppers and a 20-cent piece in her bowl as she called blessings on the heads of the *yang kwei tsz*, foreign devils.

When night came the train, which had been doing its utmost to attain a speed of thirty miles an hour, had made its way from the Bay of Bengal side of the Malay Peninsula to the shores of the Gulf of Siam. Stops now became particularly trying. Instead of being welcomed by happy Siamese, hordes of mosquitoes and other insects swarmed out of sleeping trees and bushes into the cars. They hummed, buzzed and battered themselves against the electric light. I was at dinner while the train was at a station and I had to stop eating and defend my-

self against their attack. Mosquitoes stung my ankles and face and flying ants bumped into my ears. There was no use leaving the table, for these nocturnal pests had completely engulfed the train. I sat and watched them drown in the soup, the beer and the coffee.

Once under way this Egyptian plague vanished and I rejoiced in the tropic night into which the locomotive poured a golden rain of sparks from its wood-burning engine. At times the brush was so close to the track that I could hear its leafy fingers scratching at my window as if some one were seeking entrance into my little compartment to warn me of the power of the jungle. I began to admire the fortitude of the Siamese in their struggle against the mute force of vegetation that forever pressed itself against their lives, even against the most powerful machines of the West, as insidiously relentless as the waves of the sea.

I slept fitfully. I would sit up in my berth and look at the blackness. Still the jungle. For nearly twenty-four hours now it had been staring in at my window and in the darkness it took on terrifying shapes. I turned my back to it. A mosquito sang in my ears. I switched on the light and fruitlessly searched every square inch of the netting. Finally I traced the noise to the electric fan. There was a friendliness to the little machine that comforted me as it faithfully yet futilely whirled its blades against the heat.

I was tired when I awoke in the morning but it was

good to see the sun. From the dining car ahead came the fragrance of bacon and freshly made coffee. From the breakfast table I caught my first glimpse of the Gulf of Siam, a sapphire sea gleaming in the brilliant sun.

The little locomotive puffed along and finally pulled into Hua Hin, Siam's Newport, about six hours from Bangkok. Here a number of Siamese carrying tennis rackets and golf clubs came aboard. They had none of that serious attitude of the American golfer returning from his club. They really seemed to know one another and talked spiritedly in English and in their pleasant-sounding native tongue. It has a singing intonation, a flowing liquid inflection with none of the harsh staccato of the Chinese. They wore fedora hats, white military coats buttoned up to the chin and gay-colored *panungs*. White stockings and European oxfords completed their costumes. I felt I was going to like these men.

With the arrival of the Siamese, the dining car took on the aspect of a café. The funereal formality, the hushed tones inspired either by the lack of proper introductions or by the fear of the jungle, were gone. We found ourselves laughing aloud and calling to each other with lively voices. Some of the Siamese took off their coats and sat about in neat, white cotton or silk, athletic shirts. They ordered curries and coffee and drinks.

Even the missionary and his wife smiled and my English table mate lost his restraint and said:

“It won’t be long now before we’ll all be in Bangkok. It’s like going home for me. I’ve had a lot of good times there.”

I looked out of the window. We were slowly moving out of the station of a rather large town. At the end of one of the streets rose a great conical pagoda. The rays of the late afternoon sun diffused its tiled surface with gold and lifted it from its earthly base so that it hung from the heavens like a talisman and transformed the drab, dusty shacks around it into fairyland.

The Englishman touched my arm.

“Some one is calling you,” he said.

And behold the genie had slipped out of the envelope and had taken the shape of a dark-skinned young man. He was dressed in Western whites. As he approached he was warmly greeted by several Siamese.

The words “Know, O thou Ifrit, that I am he whom thou seekest,” came to my tongue, but before I could utter a word the genie spoke.

“I am Michael Duffy,” he said as he seated himself at my table. “I hope you have had a pleasant journey. This is nothing like the Twentieth Century Limited but I’ll tell the world that this is not a bad little rattler. I’ve been sent down here by His Royal Highness Prince Svasti and Louis Girivat, who run the paper for the King, to greet you and to make you comfortable. I am the only reporter on the *Bangkok Daily Wail*—pardon me—I mean *Daily Mail*.”

Michael Duffy . . . a Siamese with a name like that . . . the Twentieth Century Limited . . . I'll tell the world . . . His Royal Highness . . . The *Daily Mail*.

I mumbled something about appreciation and the length of the journey.

"Yes, it's a pretty long jump," he said. "So you're from the States? You're going to have a lot of fun on the *Daily Mail* or I miss my guess. Our competitors—they're Englishmen, you know—have already figured out how long you will last."

"How long will that be?" I asked.

"They give you two months," he laughed.

"What does that mean? That I'll die of disease or that they'll run me out of town?"

"Oh, don't let that worry you," Duffy replied somewhat cryptically.

I wondered what he meant. What lay ahead? Had I enemies even before I arrived?

CHAPTER 3





MICHAEL DUFFY

had been to America as manager of a troupe of Siamese *takraw* players imported from Bangkok for the delight of the patrons of American vaudeville. There were twelve athletes who performed marvelous tricks with a reed puck, and an orchestra consisting of four men. Every one of them hated to go; had to be threatened with punishment; had to be pushed on the boat; all but

Duffy. He was happy. To his Eurasian mind any white man's country was better than Siam.

The blood of his father, an Irishman who had come to Siam to practice medicine, was calling. The elder Duffy married a Siamese, stayed five years, went off on a holiday to Ireland and never returned.

Michael was brought up a Catholic and was educated at Assumption College in Bangkok by French Brothers who not only schooled him in religion but taught him bookkeeping, typewriting and the simple laws of business. Instead of taking dictation, he wrote poetry in his mother's attap-roofed hut stuck up on stilts in a grove of areca nut trees. Like many youths who write poetry, he became a newspaper reporter. Occasionally one of his verses would appear on the editorial page of the paper and he was happy.

And then Levine, the Keith agent, arrived in Bangkok. He saw a good box office attraction in the dexterity of the native jugglers and the mysterious monotony of music from bamboo xylophones, oboes, tomtoms and sweetly-toned gongs. A *kongsi*, company of merchants, was organized to finance the trip to America and to partake of the profits. Duffy was sent as manager. He was the only one of the group who could speak English.

They played the Palace Theater in New York and made a tour of the United States, booked as the Royal *Takraw* Players of Siam. The press agent gave Duffy the title of Prince but it was only during the last week

of their tour that he got a chance to play the conventional rôle of royalty.

Stella Joy was a tap dancer with Moore and Finch Extravaganza. They were booked on the same route with the Royal Siamese *Takraw* Players. Duffy had seen her several times back stage and it seemed to him that some strange force was bringing her into his ken. He found himself seeking vantage points in dark places behind sets from which to drink in the loveliness of her little body, the soft whiteness of her skin and the luster of her blond hair. She expressed all the feminine graces which exist only in dreams of brown men cursed with white blood. For weeks she remained an untouchable, one with whom he could associate only when he scribbled verses to her in hall bedrooms of theatrical rooming houses.

On their matinee opening in Philadelphia, Duffy's long vigils of silent worship were rewarded. As Stella came off the stage from her solo number, she tripped on a piece of canvas and fell. She lay still. For a moment he was petrified by the thought that he could not help her. She was still an untouchable. But at last he found her in his arms. The warmth of her body stabbed him with exquisite pain. When he put her in a chair in her dressing room he saw his hand move down her arm. He held it there for a moment and recoiled as if he were burned. Never before did he know that his skin was so brown. His mere touch had contaminated that lovely body. He was backing toward the door when she opened her eyes.

“Oh, it’s you, Prince! Gawd, what happened to me?” she said.

Her voice was a raucous contralto, the jazz tone so popular with devotees of vaudeville. But to Duffy it was the sweetest music, like gongs of the temple that called saffron-robed Buddhist monks to prayer at sunrise.

When they arrived in Baltimore, Duffy saw Stella again. It was a hot July night when he climbed the stairs of his Centre Street boarding house to his room on the third floor. The door opposite his was open and there, inside, was Stella. He was so surprised at her sudden proximity that he stood transfixed.

“Snap out of it, Prince,” said Stella. “What are you scared of? Come on in.”

As he walked across the threshold to a chair opposite the cot on which she sat, he was conscious of a bare foot stuck in a ragged mule. Stella laid aside the brown silk stocking she was mending, tucked her feet under a faded, blue silk kimono and leaned back against the wall.

“You know, Prince, I never thanked you for rescuing me up in Philadelphia.”

He turned his head away from her direct gaze with the shyness of a school boy.

She giggled.

“Rescued by a prince. Can you beat that? Why, I’m a Cinderella and you’re my prince. Ye Gods, if I don’t look out I’ll be believing in fairies.”

She got him to talk of Siam. That subject put him on

safe ground and he forgot his timidity. He even told her how much more beautiful she was than Siamese girls and that he had composed poems about her. At her suggestion he raced across to his room to get the verses he had written.

Somehow the childlike simplicity of this Oriental got under that tough skin of Stella's, skin that to Duffy was finer than the richest silks and velvets of the East. The reading of the poems completely broke down his reserve and all the desire which distance had given this gorgeous creature gushed from his lips in words of adoration.

She asked if he had a palace in Siam and he described a great estate on the river enclosed in walls of marble where musicians played sweet music on silver and gold gongs; he told her of his garden where white lotus flowers floated on ponds of moonlight and stars; of the river that lapped the walls and of the sumptuous barge on which he floated when the moon was full, while servants fanned him with great punkahs of peacock feathers.

As she listened she was carried away by the enthusiasm of the brown man sitting next to her. There on the bed in her threadbare, silk kimono, her blue eyes bluer with the wonder of what she had heard, she looked like a child listening to a bedtime story.

"How thrilling, Prince! How simply wunnerful," she said.

He leaned close to her and took her hand.

“You are like the lotus in my garden in Bangkok,” he said.

She tolerated him for a moment and then:

“Listen, big boy, it’s time you went to bed.”

She got up. She suffered him to kiss her hand and gently but firmly pushed him out of the door. The sharp click of the lock was like the ringing of an alarm clock interrupting a dream. He closed his door taking care not to lock it for fear that the lock would be too great a separation from his treasure across the hall.

For the rest of the week he showered her with gifts—jewelry, flowers, taxi rides, clothes and furs. He was every inch a Prince. He asked her to marry him and she was to give her word in the room Saturday night when the show closed.

He waited. She was to be there at 11:30. At two o’clock he closed his door, flung himself on the bed and sobbed himself to sleep. He was awakened by voices outside and rushed to the door.

“Hey, Joe, don’t make so much noise! You’ll wake up the Prince and there’ll be hell to pay.”

“Listen, kid, I told you he’s only a nigger. What do you care. Come here and give us a kish.”

There was a silence as the two staggered into each other’s arms. Finally Stella said:

“Lishen, big boy; I’ve got to get out of this.”

“All right. Come on. Get your things together and

come on over to my room. We'll get a train out of here in the morning."

In the eternity it took for them to pack their bags, Duffy stood with his back to the door, his limbs rigid. His eyes were fixed on the leaves of the trees shivering in the light of the street lamp outside the window.

"O.K., kid, we're all set. Let's go," said the man who was Joe.

"Jesus, but this is a dirty trick to play on the Prince."

"But, listen, sugar, he's only a nigger, I told you. If I'd catch him laying hands on you I'd kill him."

Stella laughed hysterically, but Joe must have put his hand over her face. The cry was stifled.

"Listen, baby; do you want to wake up the house? Come on. Let's get going."

Duffy heard him start down the steps. His heart sank only to leap back to his throat. Stella had tiptoed to his door.

"Prince," she whispered, "this is a hell of a trick, but I'm white, Prince, honest I am. I'm a sap and you're a nigger."

She walked away a few steps and burst out laughing.

"I'm a sap and he's a nigger. I'm a sap and he's a nigger:"

"Shut up Stella and get the hell out of here."

The suitcase bumped against the stairs. The front door banged. A taxi motor shattered the silence of the street.

Duffy and the troupe sailed for Siam the following week.

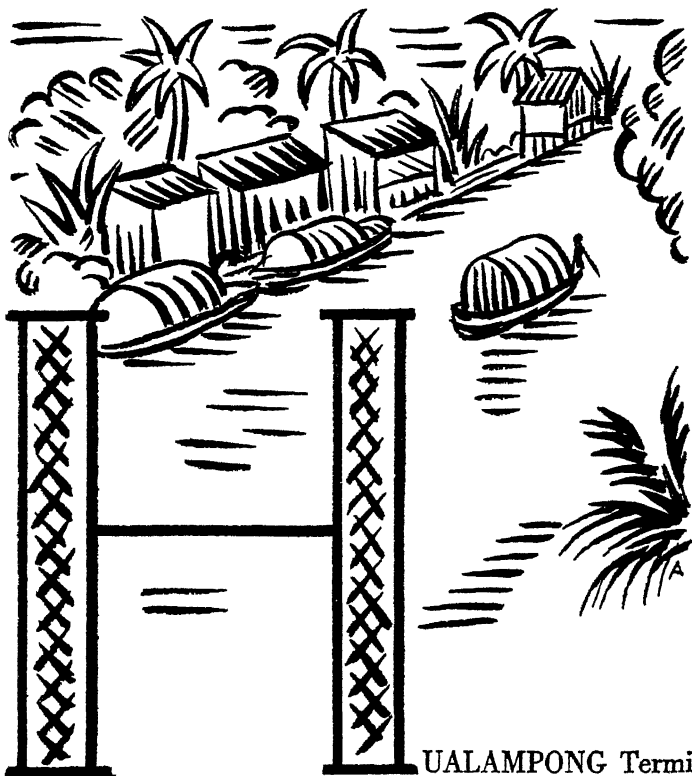
When the time came for settling accounts the *kongsi* said that too much money had been spent for expenses. Duffy had been meticulous in his bookkeeping and had made every effort to keep expenses at a minimum. His explanation that the cost of living in America was ten to twenty times that of Bangkok made no impression. The *kongsi* insisted that he owed them fifteen hundred *ticals*. Although every cent he spent on Stella was out of his savings, he was afraid the knowledge of that affair would be used to prove he misappropriated money. And so he agreed to make good that sum.

For two and one-half years he forfeited to the *kongsi* half the salary he received as a reporter. His Siamese wife, whom he had married a month after he returned from America, and their baby managed to live along in a thatched roof hut on the outskirts of the city while he paid for the week he spent adoring Stella.

This was the story told me a long time after our first meeting.

CHAPTER 4





UALAMPONG Terminus appeared to be a gigantic pipe cut horizontally in half and set down over the trains. There was a festive mood in the great shed. Crowds of Siamese, Chinese, Indians and Europeans, many carrying garlands of flowers, lined the platform eagerly peering into car windows for friends or relatives. There was no kissing or hugging or handshaking. The Siamese bowed to each

other, placing their hands together in the attitude of prayer.

Having assured customs officials that I carried no fire arms, my baggage was passed and Duffy took me to the Royal Hotel. He introduced me to the Italian manager, who sent us with a Chinese boy to my room.

"I've got to go now," Duffy said. "Sorry I can't spend the evening with you. Kosol, Louis Girivat's secretary, will call for you in the morning. So long."

Dinner was served in a pavilion in the garden. As I entered I was struck by the silence. In a room that probably could have accommodated two hundred guests, fifteen persons, all Europeans, sat in scattered groups lost in a sea of tables. The silence seemed to portend that this was their last supper.

Outside was the jungle. Once in a while one of the diners would stop eating and stare into the darkness of trees and shrubbery whence came a symphony of whistling snakes, drumming crickets, trumpeting frogs, the reedy notes of the gecko and the pizzicato of the lizards. When this ensemble stopped mosquitoes played a droning cadenza.

The smell of food was lost to the senses drugged with the perfume of flowers. Chinese boys shuffled in and out with the courses. Once a woman laughed. The sound of her voice seemed to rip the silence. All heads turned in her direction. I noted that the lower part of her even-

ing gown was swathed in a bright Burmese *sarong* to keep the mosquitoes from her legs.

The spell was broken while I sat on the veranda drinking liqueurs. A gecko, about a foot long, darted down the post in front of me after an insect whose aimless flight ended with the flicker of a tongue and the crunch of the animal's jaws.

"Tookay, tookay, tookay," cried the gecko.

"Why, he seems to be talking," I exclaimed.

A man who sat next to me reading *Punch* looked up from the periodical and raised his hand for silence.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven," he counted as the gecko called. The ugly beast duplicated the winding-up sound of a cuckoo clock before striking the hour. It started with a staccato crescendo and ended with a weak diminuendo as if exhausted by the effort.

"When he calls seven times it is lucky," the man explained. "I take it that this is the first time you've heard a gecko call. You will be particularly lucky."

"Well, it looks like I'm going to need all the luck I can lay my hands on," I said, and went to bed.

I was pitched into consciousness as if a bucket of ice water had been flung at my perspiring body. Through glassless windows came ear-splitting shrieks tapering off into the heat with a sadness, a hopelessness that stiffened my spine.

It was my first morning in Bangkok. The night seemed

to have had no effect upon the temperature and now the sun was up again to add more heat to a world already close to the boiling point.

I got out of bed and stood with sagging knees. The pajamas clung to my body. It was as if I had been asleep in the rain. I stepped out on a parapet that jutted from my room and looked around. There was a drooping listlessness to all living things as the sun grimly climbed over a patch of areca nut trees in a field across the road. Through the mahogany trees and the feathery spines of the casuarinas in the hotel compound came the shrieks again as if carried by waves of heat. Only one in dire agony could bring forth the energy to scream at that hour. It was six o'clock and the sun seemed to have its noon intensity.

Again shrieks penetrated the heat. They seemed closer than when I first heard them. I looked in the direction from which they came. In the second it took to turn my head, I pictured a woman inflicted with all the diabolical tortures of Oriental villainy. On the road a ricksha man idled with the shafts of his vehicle pointed upwards. He seemed undisturbed by the cry. In a canal a woman breast deep in the muddy water, calmly pushed a net supported by slight bamboo poles. She was fishing for breakfast.

On the thatched roof of the hut across the road were two large apes. They walked upright like men and were without tails. They tugged at their long leashes, wres-

tled with one another, leaped at branches and then sat down and shrieked. No one was torturing them. They screamed in that heart-rending manner for the pure joy of screaming. They were welcoming the dawn.

“Whew, what a relief,” I sighed as I returned to the room. The boy who brought early morning tea said that the animals were gibbons and that they were pets of a Siamese. I had been similarly startled on first hearing the wavering scream of a loon and the ghostly screech of a great horned owl while camping in Canada, but the cry of the gibbon, as I heard it that morning, was far more terrifying.

Tea consisted of cold, dry toast, a pot of steaming tea, dwarf bananas that were sweeter than the large variety, and pomelo, about the size and color of grapefruit but without the latter's pungency. I needed something to relieve the situation and fell to with a will. The effects of the screams were completely washed away in the bathroom, a cubicle in a corner of which stood a portly earthenware jar larger than a hogshead. It was full of cool water. This must be the tub, I thought. Do I go in feet first or head first? A trial revealed that both methods were wrong. Finally I discovered a dipper and that it had a definite place in the process of bathing. With it I dashed the water on my perspiring body.

The spirit of the guests at breakfast contrasted with that of the dinner before. There was a briskness in their step as they came to the tables. They smiled. They

chatted. It was as if they were cheered by the fact that darkness was gone and that light, despite the heat it brought, had come again to renew hope. It made me eager for the arrival of Kosol who was to take me to the *Daily Mail* office.

Kosol was about thirty-five years old and wore the conventional *panung* and military coat. There was a wide-awake twinkle in his eye that warmed me to him. He walked with a slight limp. Kosol had had a colorful career. He started out as a *dek-wat* (temple boy) and got a haphazard education from the priests. At the age of thirteen he joined a circus and was adopted by a team of acrobats who taught him trapeze work. After traveling all over the world for ten years he fell while playing in London and broke his leg. The bone did not knit properly and he was forced to give up acrobatics. When he had paid doctors and a hospital bill he was penniless and to get home he stowed away on a P & O boat for Singapore. He finally reached Bangkok and became a typesetter on the *Daily Mail*. When Louis Girivat discovered that this typesetter could read and write English, he made Kosol his secretary.

"I've got bad news for you," said Kosol with a smile as we set out in the car. "Your job begins in two days."

"That's impossible," I said. "I don't know a thing about your city, your country or your people. Why, I didn't even know where Bangkok was until I reached Penang."

“That’s fine,” said Kosol. “That’s just the spirit Louis wants. We’ll supply the information and you the fresh point of view. Louis is a great boy. You’re lucky to fall into his hands. I’ve known him for ten years and he’s the squarest chap I’ve ever met. Don’t worry. I’ll start your education right now. I’ll show you the town.”

Bangkok, or Krungdeb, as the Siamese call their capital, is a city in the midst of the jungle. The luxuriant growth surrounding it seems like an ever-menacing octopus stretching its tentacles toward the houses. In the darkness it creeps closer to the city, constricting it with leafy coils. Cynics say that the jungle will win back what it has lost and that it already has had some measure of success.

Snakes come right down to the business section showing little fear of motor cars and trams. A thirteen-foot python was killed on the veranda of one of the hotels and a cobra was beaten to death by clerks on the second floor of a department store two days before I arrived, Kosol said.

“Are many people bitten by cobras?” I asked.

“Very few,” he replied. “The cobra won’t attack unless you madden him in some way. And if you are bitten we have a fine Pasteur Institute always supplied with anti-venom serum.”

“How about tigers? The Institute has nothing for their bites, has it?”

“No,” he said, “but you don’t have to worry about tigers. They don’t hunt around Bangkok. At least they don’t come into the city. On my last trip up-country, not far from Bangkok, I happened to stop at a spring to drink and there I found the braceleted arm of a girl who had been eaten by a tiger.”

Bangkok is a floating city held fast in one of the coils of the Chao Phya River. Nearly one half of its 800,000 people live on the river and *klongs*. To them earth is not the parent of nature. Mother Water is the great provider. On her turbid bosom they are born, they attend school, shop, go to the movies, are married and are cremated. Rice, the staff of life, is harvested from lacustrine plants. Fish takes the place of beef. Milk is not a part of the diet of these riparian dwellers. The human breast supplies all that children need and it is a common sight to see a two-year-old stand by the side of his squatting mother and suckle. Foundations of houses, be they stilts of wood or concrete, rest in mud. The few buildings over three stories actually float on pontoons. The lowliest hut-dweller may have his private swimming bath if he has energy to dig a hole three feet deep or less.

The *klongs*, fed by the river, are utilized as a medium of transportation, as bath tubs and as sewers. Before the installation of the modern waterworks, the water of the

canals was drunk, resulting in cholera and typhoid epidemics.

Except for a few roads through the congested sections of the city, the canals are crowded with more traffic than are the streets. The internal combustion engine has not as yet found a place in the hull of the sampan—clumsy-looking vessels propelled by coolies who jam poles into the mud and push from bow to stern. Many of the boats have come a hundred miles, their boatmen poling at high tide and resting at low water. Peddlers display their wares in boats; and cooks, in the most unstable canoes, tie up at other boats and dispense steaming rice, fried fish and meat.

The Chao Phya divides Bangkok into two districts, Bangkok and Dhonburi, the Manhattan and Brooklyn of greater Bangkok. Government buildings, royal palaces, banks, business houses and homes of the élite are in Bangkok. Dhonburi, with its 300,000 inhabitants, is a medieval labyrinth in the jungle. The main *klongs* are electrically lighted at night and policed by gendarmes in sampans.

The principal thoroughfares in Bangkok teem with life and motion. Motor cars with sirens constantly screeching, dash past rickshas, hand-drawn carts, gharries, bicycles and other vehicles. The drivers of automobiles give little heed to the life and limb of Siamese, Chinese, Burmese, Indians, Malays, Cambodians and Annamites as they overflow the narrow sidewalks. Ped-

dlers mince along under the heavy weight of carryalls, singing a song of their wares. Coolies squat on their haunches and placidly partake of bowls of rice.

Except for the many temples, the city is architecturally as unattractive as a sprawling mining camp. Frame shacks of one and two stories, with occasional three-and-four-story wooden buildings housing a Chinese restaurant or shop, meet the eye on every street. The Siamese seem to have forgotten the noble art of building which was theirs for many hundreds of years. They inherited from the Khmers all the secrets of Angkor but have discarded them for the poorest structures of the West. Native architecture has sunk so low that it is said that only three architects remain who can design the temples which are structural gems. When they die, it is likely that Siamese architecture will pass into the limbo of other Eastern arts banished by Occidental utilitarianism.

Everywhere there are Chinese. They pull richshas, ride in Fords and Buicks with Siamese chauffeurs, run hotels, garages, machine shops, drug stores, grocery stores, restaurants and ice plants.

"Where are all the Siamese?" I asked Kosol.

"Probably asleep," he laughed.

"Not a bad idea letting the Chinese do all the work."

"I wonder."

We walked through Sampeng, the Chinese section, a miniature of Shanghai's native quarter. We were in another world. The pace was faster. There was an air of

intense industry such as one finds in Occidental bazaars at Christmas. The dreamy look of the Siamese was not in the faces of these yellow automatons.

"Some day," said Kosol, "we shall wake up and find ourselves Chinese."

"You mean a revolution?" I asked.

"No, it will be just as I said. We'll be absorbed by the people from whom we fled a thousand years ago."

"Aren't the Siamese doing anything to stop it?"

"It's easier to act tomorrow than today."

"What are the Chinese doing?"

"They're not plotting. They're just coming in greater numbers all the time. About half the population of Bangkok is Chinese already. They control the country's business while our people sit in government offices and sip tea."

We stop at Wat Poh, the most picturesque of all the temples. A fair is in progress. It seems that all the Siamese of the city are there. Every one is smiling. Native musicians tap silver-toned gongs; barefoot girls sewed into gleaming garments, posture. Hawkers at side-show tents where freaks are displayed, among them a Siamese girl who does the Charleston, shout jokingly at merry-makers. Naked children dash about with bamboo pipes, blowing tiny pebbles at passersby. Saffron-robed monks sit in their bare shacks and meditate while novices sol-

emly mingle with the crowds, wandering from booth to booth, staring at luxuries they have foresworn. They tolerate this earthly intrusion of their hermitage because the rentals paid by merchants keep the temples in repair.

Groups of beggars, some displaying grisly members of their bodies rotting with leprosy, sit at the entrances of the temples with vendors of gold leaf, candles and incense. Inside the darkened halls are groups of natives wearing hats, smoking and spitting betel juice. The temple is not sacred. It is a town hall.

We pass through gold-lacquered doors into the largest building. As my eyes become accustomed to the gloom, a massive figure takes shape. It is the Great Reclining Buddha whose length stretches some two hundred feet and whose head rises about thirty feet from the floor. His bed is incrustated with lotus petal designs. His eyes are closed and his monumental head rests on one hand. His lips curve slightly upward with that elusive smile that only Gautama Buddha knows.

“Thus did our Lord compose himself for his eternal rest from the never-ending cycle of reincarnation,” said Kosol.

Merit-makers are pasting gold leaf on the gigantic image. For a few *satangs*, half-naked boys scale the body and place the leaf in parts inaccessible to less spry worshippers. There is no regularity to the regilding. There is a blotch on the nose, several on the hand and a few are scattered about on the torso and legs, as if the

Perfect One were suffering from measles. The fair lasts for two days and at its conclusion every square inch of the image will be covered with gleaming gold. And thus it will lie, smiling its great smile while its body tarnishes in the gloom until the next year's affair.

Beggars shake their bowls at us as we go out. The thousands of beggars in Bangkok are no indication of economic distress. They are merely emulating the Buddha.

One of them is fondling a fat puppy. Fat dogs are as rare in Bangkok as fur coats. We stop to speak to him. He tells us his name is *Nai* (Mr.) Kam and that he makes a *tical* a day, more than enough for himself and his dog. The most liberal givers are the Siamese and the most stony-hearted are the Europeans.

"The profession of begging," he says, "is an exalted one. Once you are accepted in the circle, you are a free soul surrounded by brothers who are more than willing to help you."

He tells us that he had been a laborer in the railroad shops at Makasan where he received 64 *satangs* (27 cents) a day. He couldn't bear the slavery any longer and tried his hand at begging. He was unsuccessful in collecting a *satang* until he met a beggar who told him the secrets of the beggars' union.

The watchword of the profession is share and share alike. When the day begins, older beggars who act as walking delegates, tell the others what places will net

the best returns. They report on the festivals, cremations and other big social events scheduled for the day. The beggar who fails to tell others of a place where folks forget the sacredness of their pocketbooks is forced by the brotherhood to work alone. Such a verdict amounts to ostracism and it is best for the unfortunate one to go back to toil if he desires to eat. No penance is rigorous enough to wipe out the treachery. It is the unwritten law of the beggars.

“Are you married?” I asked *Nai Kam*.

“No,” he replies, “my dog is my companion. A wife disturbs a man’s moods while a dog respects them.”

As we moved from street to street, my nose was assailed by every odor in the scale of smells; jasmine, spices, gasoline fumes, garbage and sewage floating in the *klongs*. From side streets came the syncopated rhythm of shuttles where feet and hands were weaving silken cloth. More often artificial silk is used, for even the Siamese have learned that man’s silk is better than that of the worms which toil in the northern part of the kingdom. Lengths of all colors recently dyed, lay drying on the grass, lending a carnival note to a dung-heap. Naked children played about. Little girls modestly wore a cord around the waist from which was suspended a square of woven silver strands. The boys wore nothing.

I caught glimpses of paddy fields, crazy quilts of

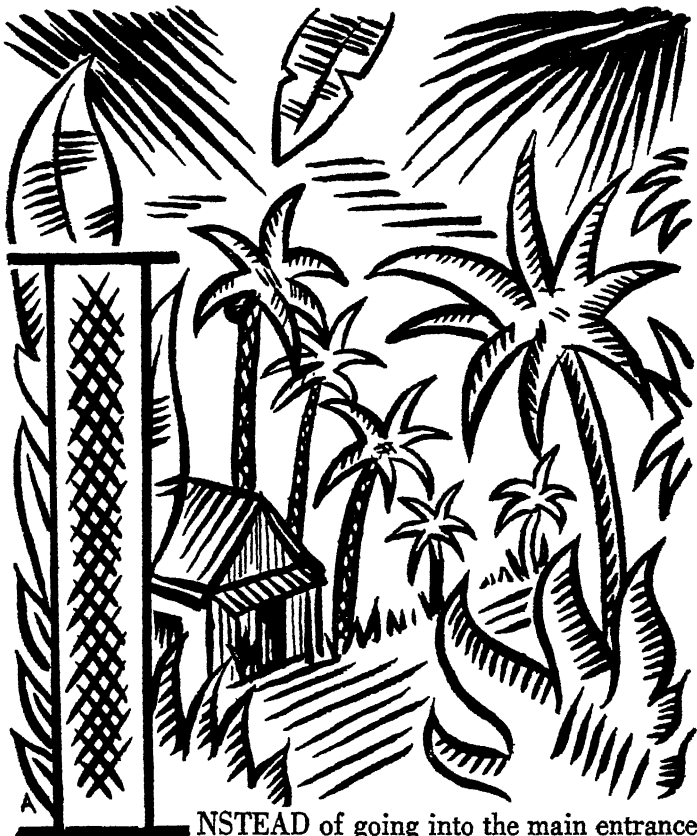
fresh green plants growing in squares of muddy water, nurturing the staff of life. Rice is Siam's greatest commodity and the foundation of its economic structure. A hulking water buffalo dragged a wooden plow while birds walked on its back, pecking at lice.

The car finally skidded to a stop in front of the newspaper office in Si Phya Road. It was a rambling, wooden, two-story building badly in need of several coats of paint. A crude sign reading "*Bangkok Daily Mail*" in Siamese and in English jutted from the wall. Embracing the signboard were branches of the flame-of-the-forest ablaze with great clusters of blood-red flowers.

This was the theater where the drama of the city in the jungle would be enacted for me.

CHAPTER 5





INSTEAD of going into the main entrance, Kosol entered a gate which led into a rear compound.

“I’m sorry to have to do this,” he said. “Woods, the editor who has been filling in for the last two months, will not permit you in the office until his contract expires Thursday night.”

“Why, has he got anything against me?” I asked.

“No,” said Kosol. “It’s because Louis and he have had a quarrel. He’s a bit temperamental but not a bad chap. Louis has fixed up a temporary office for you in that house over there. Williams, who was editor before Woods, used to live in it with his Siamese wife and children.”

We entered a two-story frame building with verandas on both floors. It was separated from the newspaper plant by a small plot of weeds. Seated at a desk in a white-washed room on the ground floor was a short, rather stout man of forty years. The roundness of his light brown face was accentuated by a slight baldness. He wore Western clothes and looked more like an Occidental than an Oriental.

This was Louis Girivat, general manager of the *Daily Mail*, and editor-in-chief of its Siamese edition. He had worked his way up from office boy in the approved manner in which success is achieved in the Occident. Probably it was because of his French father. Unlike most Eurasians, as I learned later, he did not live in a world of his own. He was held in high esteem by both Occidentals and Orientals. There was no bitterness in him because of his mixed blood. He was content to live as a Siamese and was more intelligently interested in the country of his mother than most full-blooded inhabitants of Siam.

Although he had never been outside the borders of

Siam, he had the air of a man of the world. He spoke English, French and Siamese fluently and some Chinese.

"It's a shame to introduce you to the paper in this fashion," said Louis, "but Woods wants it that way. Since it's only two days before he quits, I thought I'd install you here for the time being. I don't like arguments."

Although he didn't like arguments, he made a good fighting partner as later events proved. Even when I was wrong he stood stanchly at my side and pulled me through many a tight place.

"You're to work with Mr. Stillwell," said Louis. "He's an American we brought out from the States to take charge of the paper. He's over at the Oriental Hotel now, sick. You'll probably have to do all of the work. I don't know when he will get well."

"What's the matter with him?" I asked.

"He's been drinking but don't let that worry you."

I laughed.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Louis.

"On the train Duffy told me that the English editors said I would last two months," I said. "Then Kosol came along with the fact that I have to go to work in two days. When I come here I find I am not permitted in the office and then you tell me not to worry about Stillwell."

"Well, it's going to be hard but we'll stand by you," said Louis. "Meanwhile, what can I do for you?"

“I want to get out of the hotel. How about getting a house to live in?”

“You can have this one if you want it.”

Had a similar house been offered me in the States, I would have turned it down. It looked like a large shack in an alley on the wrong side of the railroad tracks. Its companions were corrugated iron godowns for the storage of paper, thatched-roof coolie huts and a house of similar design about fifty feet away in which Louis and his family lived.

The room that had been converted into an office was the dining room. Across the hall was the living room. Upstairs were two huge bedrooms and a shower bath rigged up in a cubicle lined with tin. The débris of the last occupants was strewn about.

Yet I accepted Louis' offer. No doubt there were other houses far more charming and homelike, but they required time to find. Anything would be better than the dismal atmosphere of the hotel.

Louis and Kosol left me in the “office” with a dozen copies of the *Bangkok Daily Mail*. They were staid British sheets with advertisements on the first page. Except for one column of cables, each paper contained a monotonous array of clipped items from six weeks to three months old. They were set up under lifeless headlines like black clay pigeons waiting to be shot.

When I had gone through three of them, I realized that my stay in the Land of the White Elephant was not going to be a holiday. The only thing to do was to throw the old paper into the waste basket and begin again. From across the weed patch came the thumping clangor of flat bed presses. Two half-naked, grimy Chinese squatted on their haunches outside the pressroom smoking cigarettes. A tall Indian watchman with fierce black mustaches sat on a gasoline can and drowsed.

If the job was going to be hard, at least it was going to be colorful.

Instead of thinking of policies, make-up, and other editorial matters, I walked upstairs again for another glance at my future home. Perhaps the knowledge that a former editor had lived there with his Siamese wife drew me to the rooms they had occupied. Did he lose his job because he missed too many boats? Was living in these white-washed walls a polite form of being on the beach? Outside one of the windows were the branches of the sacred Bodhi tree under which the Buddha received the heavenly light. It is said to bring luck to those who live near it.

As I was going back to my desk, a crumpled piece of white paper in a corner caught my eye. The slanting, thin stroke of the pen of a feminine hand caused me to pick it up. Before I could read it, Kosol called me, and with a feeling of guilt I thrust it into my pocket.

“Have you had a look at the *Daily Mails*?” he asked.

“Yes. They’re terrible,” I said. “They remind me of tombstone epitaphs. There’s something sad about them, something that reflects the state of mind of the editor. I notice that most of them were gotten out by Williams. What happened to him?”

“He was fired because he was bound for the beach,” Kosol replied. “He went to pieces and couldn’t pull himself together. I did everything I could to help him out of it but he went right on drinking himself into a stupor and neglecting his work. He was a corking good journalist, too.”

“What happened to him?” I asked.

“A woman,” laughed Kosol.

“I thought he was married to a Siamese and had a family,” I said.

“Well, white men here don’t exactly call that marriage. It’s a convenience to tide over a certain period. In Williams’ case I think it was an obstacle. I got an inkling of his trouble about six months ago when I found him alone late one night at the office. He was slouched in a chair before a typewriter. It contained a blank piece of paper. A half-filled bottle of scotch was next to the machine. He was drunk.

“‘Hello, Kosol,’ he said. ‘Sit down and have a drink.’

“I asked him what he was doing so late.

“‘Writing a letter to the most beautiful girl in the world,’ he said, ‘to tell her that I don’t love her. Did you ever write a letter like that, Kosol?’

“‘Go on, you’re drunk,’ ” I said. “‘You don’t know what you’re talking about.’

“‘Don’t know what I’m talking about?’ he laughed. ‘That’s funny. It happens that *you* don’t know what I’m talking about. What do Orientals know about love? To you a woman is like a coat, to be worn until it is shabby and to be tossed aside for another garment.’

“‘Come on, let’s go home. You’ll never write that letter the way you are,’ ” I said.

“‘Gotta write it, Kosol,’ he said. ‘Gotta tell her. It would break her heart if she heard of Chaloy and the children. I want her more than any other person in the world, but I’m afraid she’ll never forgive me. We’re both licked.’

“I called two pressmen who were working late. We carried Williams home and put him to bed.”

Gordon Williams’ engagement to Adelaide Norwood did not come as a surprise to their friends in Manchester. The two had known each other from childhood and it was taken for granted that they would marry. On his graduation from Magdalen, Williams went to work on the *Guardian* and within a year journalist circles were predicting a great future for him. Because of his success and the fact that he was going to marry Adelaide, his friends called him “lucky.”

“Williams gets everything,” they said.

A month after their engagement, Williams was sent by his paper to India to study the movement for independence. His dispatches were brilliant. Several of them were read in Parliament. On his return after four months, the *Guardian* offered him the position of permanent correspondent in India with a substantial increase in salary. He realized that it was his great opportunity and when he saw Adelaide he pleaded with her to marry him immediately. She was cold to his proposal. She said she hated India and could never be happy in places like Bombay or Calcutta.

He pleaded with her, telling her how much it meant to him. She accused him of selfishness. She said he made her feel that she was his property. She hated him for it and ended by breaking their engagement.

When he left her that evening he was obsessed by one thought—to get away as far as he could go—from her, from his friends and from his paper. He did not hate her for what she had done. He hated himself. He did not wish to embarrass her by his presence. The next day he took a ship for Singapore.

Unlike many men who go to the East to escape similar situations, Williams did not go on the beach. He lived quietly at the Adelphi Hotel from which he made tours into various sections of the Straits Settlements. On a trip to Bangkok he found a vacancy as assistant editor on the *Daily Mail* and took the job. While clipping the

Manchester Guardian, which came as an exchange newspaper, he ran across an item telling of Adelaide's marriage to Sir John Hunt-Robinson, a wealthy ship broker.

Until then he had cherished the hope that Adelaide would send for him, that his stay in Bangkok was a temporary thing. Now, however, he realized that it was all over and he sent her a note wishing her all the happiness he had lost. When the manager of the *Daily Mail* offered him the editorship and a three-year contract, he accepted.

About a month after his installation as editor he had occasion to go to Chiangmai and when he returned he had Chaloy with him. He had bought her from her father for two hundred *ticals*. They came down together in a first class coach and he put her up at his hotel until the house in back of the office was completely furnished. The white colony was horrified, not necessarily because he had taken a Siamese wife, but because of the way he had brought her into Bangkok. Such things were not flaunted in the faces of people. They were done clandestinely.

Chaloy was a beautiful, shy little creature. He gave her servants and even bought her a car. The arrangement seemed to be a truly happy one. Williams taught Chaloy English and she taught him Siamese. A year later Chaloy gave birth to a boy and Williams was supremely happy.

“Naturally,” continued Kosol, “you can well imagine how pleased we were with the whole arrangement.

“Then the thing happened and he snapped. What it was I don’t know. He would go off to Chinese cafés and drink. He would be sick for days and Chaloy would nurse him back. Once on his feet again he would go back to drinking. His work became slovenly. He didn’t seem to care what happened.

“I suggested that he go to Hua Hin for a while. He wouldn’t hear of it. I told café owners not to sell him drinks but that did no good.

“Night after night I saw a light burning in the office and I knew that he was sitting before the typewriter trying to tell some girl that he didn’t love her. I still don’t know if the girl actually existed or whether it was some one who came to him when he was drinking.

“When we had exhausted every means to help him, there was nothing to do but to get some one else to run the paper. That’s why you’re here.”

That evening while changing my clothes for dinner I reached into my pocket and pulled out the crumpled paper I had found on the floor. It appeared to be one of several pages of a letter and read:

“ . . . beg you again for forgiveness. Your silence is driving me to distraction. How many more times must I write you that I made a terrible mistake when I mar-

ried John. I was a fool. I divorced him because I realized that it was only you that I loved. This is the last time I shall ask you to come to me. If you do not reply I shall take the first boat . . .”

CHAPTER 6





WITHIN two days the ghosts of my predecessor's mutilated romance were driven from the house and in their place were furniture, lamps, rugs, a few books, a kitchen stove, a cook and a housegirl. All I did to put my house in order was to spend an afternoon with Louis at an auction where the household effects of a *farang* leaving for England were put on sale. He had been Number Two in the branch of

one of the big English banks and was quitting after six years. His wife and two children, both born in Bangkok, were going with him. The auctions of these departing guests are monuments to the ephemeral existence of the white man. He comes, buys furniture, auctions it off to others who have recently arrived, and they in turn eventually do likewise.

The sale was held in the garden of the *farang's* home. A dapper Eurasian in a red tie and a bowler hat banged his gavel on the veranda rail. Those waiting to snap up the bargains included venerable Indians with white beards, and young Indians with blue-black beards, Siamese in varicolored *panungs*, Chinese in black trousers and coats, Malays in bright-colored *sarongs* and Europeans in spotless whites. The sun, the jungle, the East, had taken its toll of another white man and we were a pack of good-natured wolves haggling over the kill.

"*Chet bhat, chet bhat, pet bhat, pet bhat, seven ticals, seven ticals, eight ticals, eight ticals,*" rattled on the auctioneer in Siamese and in English with the fervor of a radio announcer, and a perambulator was sold to a Chinese who wheeled off his purchase with a great show of pride. Since Oriental babies do not know the luxury of perambulators, I remarked to Louis that the buyer must be a modern father.

"Not so modern," said Louis. "His baby will never ride in that carriage. He'll turn it into a pushcart for iced cocoanuts or bananas or make a lunch wagon out of it."

The baby carriage was about the only object put up for sale on which I did not bid. Here I accumulated chairs, beds, chests of drawers and other necessary pieces of furniture. They were carted off to my house and when I saw them again they were all installed in their proper places. Linens were on the beds and table. Towels, dishes and all the paraphernalia for keeping house were also there. Louis' wife, Charoon, had arranged them all and had hired servants while I was at work getting out the paper.

Why she hired female servants I do not know. *Meh* (mother) Pin, the cook, was an emaciated creature of forty years. She looked sixty. She wore a black *panung* and a shabby garment like an old style corset cover. Chun, the house girl, was younger, about twenty-five. She seemed to have but one *panung*, a purple cloth, which, at least, always looked freshly pressed. The teeth of both women were black; their lips were starched with red lime, an essential ingredient when chewing betel nut, and hung open as if they were too stiff to close. When they spoke, the sounds they made were like those of a deaf mute. These two were on my monthly payroll at the rate of twenty *ticals* for the cook and fifteen for the girl.

I saw Chun only at meal times when she would shuffle in and out of the kitchen with the dishes prepared by *Meh* Pin. She seemed afraid of me. She would hurry out of my sight as soon as she had served a course and

I would catch her peeping at me from behind the door leading to the kitchen. Often *Meh* Pin would join her and they would whisper about me as if I were a demon for whom they had to care.

My first meal was a complete disappointment. *Meh* Pin, I had been informed, could cook foreign food, but from the dishes which Chun placed before me it was impossible to tell just what school of cookery she attended. Everything she served, including vegetables, came out of the frying pan and appeared before me floating in fat.

With the aid of Charoon I showed her some of my own culinary tricks. She tried very hard to learn but never got very far. I suffered eating her food for two months because I was too busy organizing a staff of reporters and editorial assistants to find time to employ a new set of servants. Chun, too, had her faults. I soon discovered that she had a weakness for rice wine, a government monopoly, bootlegged around Bangkok. Fortunately she did not fancy whisky, for I always found my bottle just as I left it. She had a way of disappearing at times when she was wanted and her absences were always coincident with the appearance of Gloria Swanson or Norma Talmadge at one of the many movie houses.

Had it not been for Louis and his family, I would probably have given up the house and gone back to the hotel. Nowhere in the world have I encountered more

sincere and lavish hospitality and more honest evidence of friendship than I received from this Siamese family.

Charoon was one of the most charming Siamese women I met during my stay in the Land of the White Elephant. She was about twenty-two years of age and combined with youth the soft maturity of womanhood. She was less than five feet and was always dressed in stiffly starched *panungs* and blouses of the finest silks. She wore her soft, jet-black hair long. When in my presence she was shy, not with the awkwardness of Chun, but with a natural modesty of sheltered breeding. It was a month before I discovered that she could speak English and French. Charoon was Louis' second wife, the first, a Sino-Siamese, having died at the birth of Praphai.

Praphai was sixteen, an age when a girl in the tropics is most alluring, an age when most girls are married and already have two children. She was not pretty, according to our standards of esthetics, because her nose was flat. Her eyes, however, were lambent pools of brown set in almond shores. Her mouth was a mobile line of red embodying all the lure of sex in the blood of brown, yellow and white men. Despite the fact that her father was half French, she showed no characteristic physical traits of her white blood. She combined the mystery of the Oriental with the glowing warmth of the jungles. She wore a *passin*, a *sarong*-like skirt, and a sleeveless blouse beneath which were repeated the curves of her golden brown cheeks. She was stockingless and

her small feet, tucked into heeless, patent leather slippers, made a slapping sound as she walked, giving an earthly reality to the ethereal fluidity of her movements.

At first she was as shy as her stepmother. She would say "How do you do?" with formal emphasis on each word and then as if she could think of nothing else to say to hide the blush that came to her cheek, she would run off. I caught her on several occasions watching me from behind a shutter in her home as I went about the compound. I was the first white man she had met, her father told me.

Despite the fact that Praphai was a girl, she was the apple of his eye. She was his constant companion. He gave her rubies, sapphires, diamonds, and when she wore them all, no woman in the diamond circle of the Metropolitan could outshine her.

The months preceding her birth were lucky ones for Louis. He spent much of the time gambling and always won. Every cent he made he put aside for her. On the day she was born there were thousands of *ticals* in the bank in her name. As a child he taught her English and French and when she was old enough he sent her to St. Joseph's Convent. Unlike many of her classmates she was not Catholic. She clung tightly to Buddhism, the faith of her father.

"I want her to be a modern girl," Louis told me. "I want her to have her freedom. I want to send her to a

school in the States. The only thing I'll positively not let her do is dance with a man."

"You want her to be a modern girl and yet you disapprove of dancing!" I laughed.

"I can't help it," replied Louis. "I can't bear to think of the girl with her body next to a man's, jumping about to those damn, barbaric jazz tunes."

"And how will you stop her when she goes to America?"

"I don't think she will disobey me."

"You're wrong, Louis. She won't want to disobey you, but she will. She'll have to adapt herself to Western ways."

"She'll go to the States only for study, not to learn to dance or have affairs with men."

"Better not send her, Louis. It would be a great mistake. Keep her here. Let her do what she likes until she finds a man she wants to marry."

"That's a funny way for an American to talk."

"It may sound funny to you now. It may be tragedy in the end if she goes."

She would go to America. She would enter Smith or Wellesley. She would spend months of misery adjusting herself to her new environment. Orchids that thrive in the jungle grow only in hothouses in the Occident. After four or six years she would no longer be a Siamese girl. She would be an American. She would dance, she would drink, she would go unchaperoned. Men would pay her

compliments. Men would kiss her. And when she had attained her freedom she would come back to polygamous Siam where girls are chattels, where girls never are permitted the company of men, where girls do not think. The chance that she could readapt herself to the environment of her girlhood would be slight.

“No, Louis, let her stay here. She’ll never know what she has missed.”

As time went on Praphai forgot her shyness and during her summer vacation we became fast friends. She would bring to the office candies made of palm sugar and Chiangmai walnuts, bananas steamed in sugar cane leaf, jellies in banana leaves, and mango a la mode with rice cooked in cocoanut milk.

She would come to my house in the evening with her friend Napah and ask me questions about America. Napah was a vivacious girl of fifteen, the only child of her father’s Number One wife, who like Praphai’s mother, died when Napah was born. She was very unhappy at home with her six stepmothers, all of whom cared only for their own children. Napah confided in me once that the happiest moments of her life were those visiting Praphai and when her father took her to India.

“Tell us about America,” they would say, and they would sit entranced while I told them of buildings that raised their roofs above the clouds; of trains that dashed

underground; of people who had never seen a tree; how girls worked in offices, stores and factories earning their own living.

The madness of America was like a fairy world to these children of the torrid Land of the White Elephant. Their greatest ambition was to go there. They could not understand why I had left to come to their "dreary" country.

"Do all men put their arms around girls in the offices?" asked Praphai. "Do they really kiss each other as much as they do in the cinema?"

"No, but they would all like to," I said.

"That's what I can't understand about American men," said Praphai. "They're always hugging a girl. Siamese men don't do that."

"How do you know?" I laughed.

"Because I never saw them do it," she replied.

"Wouldn't you like some one to put his arm around you?" I asked.

"Well, I don't know. Maybe if I like the man very much."

She looked at me for a second and dropped her eyes.

"Do women in America choose their own husbands?" asked Napah.

"Yes, my dear, they do, and the man, poor fellow, often has little to say about it."

"How funny," she exclaimed. "Here a girl has noth-

ing to say about her husband. Her parents give her one and she must be satisfied."

"That's why I would like to live in America," said Praphai.

"And you wouldn't mind men putting their arms around you?"

"No, I wouldn't if I could have something to say about choosing my husband. At least I would then be the only wife."

"Do men have more than one wife in America?" asked Napah.

"Many of them would like to. Some who have a lot of money and are unhappy have concubines."

"What does the wife say?" asked Praphai.

"The husband keeps it a secret."

"Suppose the wife finds out?" asked Napah.

"She'd probably find another husband," I said.

"And does she find another husband?" asked Praphai.

"She generally does," I answered.

"That's what I like about America," said Praphai. "If only Siamese women could have that freedom! I'll never marry unless my husband agrees that I shall be his only wife. I'm not going to be a man's slave."

Here was the eternal feminine in rebellion against the customs and traditions of her ancient people—a feminist in a polygamous land. Could this be her white blood speaking? Napah had the same idea and so had

many of the girls in their school. They had all taken a secret vow that their husbands must be monogamous.

Once, while Louis, Charoon, Praphai and Napah were at my house for dinner, I put "Valencia" on the portable phonograph and held out my arms to Praphai to dance. She looked at her father and he looked at me.

"So you're trying to corrupt my daughter?" he laughed. "Well, I guess you won't hurt her."

Neither Praphai nor Napah could move about the floor easily in their heelless slippers. Louis and Charoon laughed merrily at the clumsy efforts of the girls to mince along to the music as I did. Finally both of them ran across the compound and in a few minutes were back in high-heeled pumps.

In half an hour they had learned the steps. I put on "Looking at the World Through Rose Colored Glasses," "Hallelujah," and "Tea for Two"—my dance repertoire. I coaxed Charoon to dance and Praphai got her father on the floor. We danced until midnight and then Louis suggested that we go for a ride.

We drove on avenues of dirt, lined with mahogany and acacia trees whose upper branches intertwined to form a leafy canopy. Above was a full moon which bathed the flat landscape in brilliant silver. Its radiance filtered through the plashed foliage overhead dappling the road with leaves and branches in chiaroscuro. The

air was burdened with the perfume of jasmine and frangipani. Pink and white lotus flowers lay in the still waters of the *klongs* like beautiful ghosts of the plant world. From across the paddy fields came the sound of a native orchestra, the soft boom, boom of gongs and the fainter sound of liquid notes from an instrument like a zylophone. The music came from a temple where a cremation was being held.

The storied roof of the temple, studded with myriad pieces of broken porcelain, gleamed in the moonlight like an iridescent jewel amid palms and areca nut trees. In the compound illuminated by numerous flares, were perhaps a hundred persons eating and drinking. All were paying their respects to a friend and relative whose mortal remains were doubled up and sealed in an urn about four feet high. The urn stood on a raised platform from which it would be removed later in the night and placed on the top of a huge bonfire. Buddhist priests in saffron robes, their heads and eyebrows shaved, squatted before the platform and chanted prayers. It was the only funeral note in the scene. To Buddhists, death is a step closer to Nirvana, the goal of all existence, or in the words of Edwin Arnold:

“Unto Nirvana, He is one with life
yet lives not. He is blest, ceasing to be
Om, mani padme hum. The dewdrop slips
into the shining sea.”

To these people there is no hell. They have no fear that the friend to whom they were saying a last good-by would smoulder in fire and brimstone. Why, then, should they weep and mourn?

We drove on for two or three miles and then turned around. The road had ended. The only road leading out of Bangkok is the railroad. Automobilists must be content to move in a trap bounded by the limits of the city. When communication cannot be made by train it is accomplished by boat, or by elephant through jungle trails.

We passed imposing homes of nobles and temples great and small meditating in the moonlight like the founder of the religion they represent. Fortune tellers and Chinese vendors filled the night with their sing-song cries. We swung into Rajadamnern Avenue, a broad thoroughfare with a park in the center and roads on each side. We passed the King's palaces, masterpieces of ancient architecture; the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, the cathedral of Siamese Buddhism, and the Throne Hall, an Italian renaissance structure where the King holds important audiences. It was as incongruous as a palm tree in Greenland—the Government's genuflection to the ways of the West.

We soon found ourselves in Yawarad Road, the Broadway of the Chinese quarter. Even at that late hour

lights glared. Blaring orchestras from restaurant balconies dinned an invitation to dine into the ears of the milling crowd which overflowed the sidewalk and mingled with rickshas and automobiles. Those who laughed were Siamese. There was a sober intensity about the Chinese that made one wonder why they came to this street of pleasure.

“Let’s have an ice cream soda,” said Louis.

Ice cream soda! There was something depressing about it; something one hundred per cent American. It was an intrusion; the wrong piece in a jig-saw puzzle.

We turned into Ice Cream Soda Street, a block with half a dozen shabby-looking stores before which a score or more of cars were parked. Chinese boys with trays were carrying chocolate, vanilla, strawberry and raspberry drinks to the occupants who blithely sipped the beverages through straws. This American institution was introduced into Bangkok by a Chinese who had been a soda fountain clerk in a San Francisco drug store.

CHAPTER 7





ALL OF US
were on edge. Royalty was coming. Coolies swept the floors and dusted. Reporters, assistants, clerks, and office boys put on their coats and brushed their hair with sweet-smelling oil.

“Prince Svasti will be here at four o’clock,” Louis told me with a trace of nervousness in his voice. “He wants to see how you are getting on. For goodness sake

button up your collar and put on a tie before he comes in. I'll have tea served in my office."

He looked around the city room.

"Where's Stillwell?" he asked.

"He hasn't been in today," I said. "I haven't seen him for two days. I suppose he's on another bat."

"A fine way for an editor to act. He's already disgraced himself in the foreign colony with his drinking and has made us a laughing stock. The Prince has heard about it, too, and has threatened to fire him if he doesn't quit."

"Don't be too hard on him, Louis. Dick will straighten out soon."

"Soon? He hasn't drawn a sober breath since he's been in Bangkok. I hope he has sense enough to stay away while the Prince is here."

The Prince, attended by his secretary, came in his American motor car. The men in the office stiffly sat at their desks and applied themselves to their tasks like schoolboys with the principal in the room. Louis, who always worked in his undershirt, had on a white coat. I promptly put on my tie.

Prince Svasti was dressed in a pongee military coat unbuttoned at the throat, blue *panung*, white stockings and white shoes. He was about sixty years old and stout. His flashing eyes, set under a broad forehead, indicated an unusually keen mentality. He had an air of suppressed energy, a quality more Occidental than Oriental, inher-

ited from that strain in the royal family which produced the country's greatest leaders. He was a brother of King Chulalongkorn and by reason of his daughter's marriage to King Prajadhipok, he was the sovereign's father-in-law and uncle. Prince Svasti had had a brilliant career in the service of his country and as Minister of Justice had brought about many important legal reforms. He was now retired from public life and was devoting himself to the administration of the *Daily Mail* and its Siamese edition for the King.

The Prince rose as I entered Louis' office and extended a warm, firm hand. He spoke English perfectly with a well-modulated, deep voice. As we talked he puffed on an old briar pipe.

"I congratulate you on the spirit of the newspaper," he said. "I never realized that there was so much news in Bangkok until I read your American headlines. That's what we need here—enterprise and energy. I see you are not going to be a 'yes-man.' That's the expression, isn't it? We've got too many people here who don't know how to say 'no.'"

The Prince, too, was not a "yes-man," as I later discovered, and because of his frankness he was not as popular as other members of the royal family. He never gave orders about editorial policy and never interfered. So far as I was concerned he and the King were ideal bosses.

We talked of typesetting machines, a high-speed press

and an engraving plant of our own; the need for a more extensive cable service, the need for a low press rate, the lack of trained newspapermen, and of Stillwell.

“Stillwell has not been playing fair,” said the Prince. “I give him another week to sober up and go to work. If he doesn’t he’s through. His conduct and neglect of the office has been shocking. I can’t understand what’s the matter with the man. He came here with the highest recommendations.”

Richard Stillwell was fifty-six years old. He should have had scores of short stories and a dozen novels to his credit. He should have served time in Hollywood at \$1,000 per week or had a penthouse atop some river apartment house in New York. Instead, he was tottering on the edge of that limbo of alcohol-soaked souls which, East of Suez, is called the beach.

When Williams began to devote himself to the composition of a letter to Adelaide Norwood instead of getting out the paper, Prince Svasti decided that the *Daily Mail* needed new blood, and he set out to get an American to take charge. He cabled the Siamese Legation in Washington and two months later Stillwell arrived in Hualampong Station—drunk.

Newspapermen being the most sentimental of all craftsmen, Stillwell and I became bosom friends from the moment we bought drinks for each other at the bar

of the Oriental Hotel. In fact we decided we must live together and he forthwith moved his trunk into my house in the newspaper compound.

Stillwell was one of that group of brilliant writers who made the old *New York Sun*. As the years passed he got the reputation of being a great rewrite man when sober, a good fellow and a good drinking companion. City editors clamored for his services. Cub reporters regarded him with awe. If he came into a city room drunk, some one would be delegated to take him home in a taxi, and when he turned up the next day or even the next week, all would be forgiven. As time went on he thought he had the game licked but time and drink were pipers with which he had not reckoned. The fingers that punched out the best news stories of the day became less facile and the forgiveness of city editors changed to disgust. They were willing to lend him money or buy him a drink but none would hire him.

When the representative of the Siamese Legation asked them to recommend a good man, the choice eventually fell to Stillwell. A job so far from Park Row might change him; might be his making. So they threw a great party for him and sent him half way round the world to make him see the error of his ways.

It was pleasant to share the house with Stillwell, particularly because we had two things in common: we liked the Siamese and disliked the patronizing attitude

of the whites. We went places together and even got an invitation to the Royal Bangkok Sports Club. The visit to the latter, I think, was the beginning of Dick's collapse.

The Sports Club was the be-all and the end-all in the social life of the white colony. It was on the outskirts of the city, a long ramshackle structure with a huge bar. The land for the golf course, race track and building was given by King Chulalongkorn as a place for Siamese and foreigners to meet, but one rarely saw a Siamese there. Somehow white members contrived to let brown men know they were not wanted.

There Stillwell and I met or saw the local Occidental celebrities. The Smith-Joneses gave us a clammy hand. Their name was mentioned with awe because Mr. Smith-Jones was the Number One man of the Borneo-Burmah Company which sold more insurance, roofing materials, condensed milk, whisky, fire apparatus, automobiles and phonographs than any other house. The Black-Whites gave us a cold nod. Mr. Black-White controlled all the teak shipped out of the country because his relative, a nurse to one of Chulalongkorn's many children, persuaded the King to give her miles of teak forests. Mrs. Black-White was the president of the Ladies' Musical Society.

Not far from our table sat the pastor of St. Paul's drinking whisky and soda. He was not an American. Horrors, no! British, of course, which explained the

whisky and soda. The American Charge d'Affaires was drinking the health of a washed-out widow, the only unattached white woman in the colony. A few tables further away sat a number of French men and women and next to them a group of Italians. The Danes sat by themselves as did the remaining nationals. Each table seemed to be invested with extra-territorial rights. In fact the occupants appeared to be so exclusive that it was not difficult to imagine that those who moved about held passports visaed by Mr. Smith-Jones and his wife.

Several Englishmen, holding positions not under Number Two in their firms, a standing which gave them more social freedom than men in lesser positions, left their tables to join us. They talked of golf and tennis and the trouble they continually had trying to force some sense into the heads of their native servants and employees. They discussed the coming club dance and the prospects of the club's rugby team in the game against Penang.

After several drinks the case of Mrs. Wright, the principal figure in the current scandal, came up for gossip. It seemed that her husband found her and the dashing new clerk, recently arrived from the main office of Mr. Wright's firm in London, alone in her house together. The youngster had tired of parties with brown girls in the company mess. He was homesick and sought the companionship of Mrs. Wright because she was white. Whether Mrs. Wright was bored with the round

of bridge, gossip and the Ladies' Musical Society and found the company of the young man a source of relief, or whether she merely took a motherly interest in him, was not considered. The consensus of opinion was that the young man should be sent home immediately. It was such goings on, once they became known to the natives, that lowered the prestige of the white man.

The white man, one of them said, after upbraiding a Chinese waiter who had spilled a few drops of the drink he was serving, must maintain his prestige if he is to get along in the East. The native must be kept in his own place at all costs. The white man's burden, don't you know.

"Wow, what a bunch of stiff-necked bimbos they are," said Dick when we got home. He poured himself a half tumbler of whisky and downed it with a shudder. "Jesus, every one of them was scared to smile. I'd sock them all for the sake of a glass of synthetic gin and the conviviality of a Park Row speakeasy."

The waning moon was going down behind the umbrella-like tops of the areca-nut palms. From somewhere among those trees a native orchestra was playing while girls sang in a minor falsetto.

He poured himself another drink.

"Say, tell me, why did you hire such awful looking servants?" he said. "Don't you know that a female

servant is in a way a concubine? Ye gods, no one would want Pin or Chun as concubines. What about a harem? Say the word and I'll fire these hags you have at the end of the month and get a few smart babies in here."

"Anything you say, Dick," I said. "But remember a concubine is also a wife."

"What do you mean, a concubine is also a wife?" he asked.

"Well, for the sake of your education, if you live with a woman and appear in public with her, she is your wife and although there is no marriage law, she can claim you as her husband if she wishes."

"Well, who in hell wants to appear in public with her?"

I shrugged my shoulders. I looked into the bedroom and thought I saw Chaloy and Williams in bed.

"Brown," said Dick. "Don't you like brown? Brown arms must be warmer than white. Funny, isn't it, how we don't even turn to look at an octoroon at home but somehow brown skin here is different. There is something cold about white skin, something like the spirit of the Sports Club—afraid to be itself. Have you noticed what little things the girls are? Have you noticed how easily they smile? Girls that we look upon as children are women here—women with child faces."

"Do you know what the penalty is?" I asked.

"Penalty for what?"

"Living with a brown woman."

“Who cares. Well, what is it?”

“Ostracism from the white colony,” I laughed.

“To hell with the white colony!” he said. “A bunch of snobs who have nothing to be snobbish about. A lot of goddam clerks and cheap business men who rob the natives. They think they’re dukes and lords because servants call them ‘master.’ I’ll bet none of them could hold down a job at home. The less I see of them the better.”

“White women, too?” I asked.

“White women, too. I’ve seen enough of them. No, I take that back. There is one I have not seen enough of and some day I intend to, if ever I can face her.”

“Who’s that, Dick?”

“Ellen, my daughter. She’s going on twenty-one now and I haven’t seen her since she was two. She’s still in Durban where I left her living with my people after her mother ran away with another man. She’s a wonder. I’ve written to her every week since I left South Africa. I’d give a lot to see her again, but I guess that’ll never be.”

“Why, Dick?”

“It’s a funny thing. I guess I got started on it when she was a child. I would write her fanciful stories about myself. I would tell her that her father was a great writer; that he was the greatest newspaperman in New York; that he owned the newspaper on which he worked. As she grew up I continued to write in the same vein

never telling her the truth about myself but always stories about the greatness of her father. She always addressed me as 'Dear Great Man' and showed my letters to all her friends.

"She knows nothing about my drinking or the fact that I really have been a failure. But I suppose she's none the worse for it. I want to see her, yet I can't bring myself to the point of telling her the truth. I told her when I came here that the King himself had brought me out; that he gave me a castle to live in; that I had ten servants, and that the King consulted me about matters of state. I suppose if I stay here long enough I may be able to make what I said come true and then I can send for her or go to her."

I left Dick on the veranda with a bottle of whisky and got inside the mosquito bars, thinking how tragic it would be for him to have to tell his daughter the truth. When I called him the next morning, he did not answer. His bed had been untouched.

I did not see him until late that night. He woke me up when he came in and insisted that I get up and have a drink with him.

"Boy," he said, "I've found two of the prettiest brown janes you ever saw. They'll make the swellest concubines. I've got it all fixed with them to move in at the end of the month. One of 'em is sixteen and the other is seventeen. I'm going native. You won't blame me when you see these babies. Cutest brown bodies you

ever saw and shy as can be. I guess it was because I was white. You've got a thrill coming to you, kid. I'm going to tell the whole white colony to go to hell."

The next morning he refused to eat but drank three bottles of beer. He laughed at my warning about mixing sun and alcohol.

I did not see Dick again for three days. He had a habit of coming in when I was asleep and slipping out before I was up. During that time he was thrown out bodily from every hotel and club. On the morning of the third day of Dick's absence, I got a note from Prince Svasti telling me he had written to Dick that he was fired and that I was to take charge from then on.

Late in the afternoon Dick walked in and slumped into a chair across the desk from me. His arms lay inert against him. His open, spatulate palms were like dead flesh against his soiled white trousers—eloquent of his helplessness. His eyes were half-closed and his disheveled, gray head nodded with a slightly perceptible motion.

"Kid," he said, "I've been fired."

"I'm sorry, Dick," I answered. "I've done everything I could to hold your job for you but you insisted on playing the fool. You can't blame the Prince when you've been in the office only twice in the two weeks since we started work."

He raised his hands a bit and they flopped against his legs as if they were too heavy to do his bidding.

“What am I going to do?” he asked. “The Prince refuses to pay my way home because I broke my contract. I can’t get work here.”

I finally arranged with Prince Svasti to give him two weeks’ salary and money to buy a ticket to New York. When I told Dick of the arrangement he grasped my hand.

“Kid,” he said, “you’re a real friend, but I’m not going to New York.”

“Not going to New York?” I asked in surprise.

“It’s no use going there. I can’t get a job. I’m going to Durban.”

“Don’t be foolish, Dick. Think what it will mean to your daughter to discover the truth about you. Go any place but there. She’d be happier if you would. Let her continue to think of you as a great man.”

“Great man?” he laughed. “No, I’m finished with all that. I’ll never be able to make the story I told her end the way it should. I’m going back to her. I’ll tell her everything. She’s the only one I’ve got. She’s old enough to understand. Maybe she’ll take care of me.”

Dick was drunk on the day he was to sail. Louis and I found him in a Chinese gin-mill. We put him in a car, led him to a sampan and took him out to the ship as it lay in mid-stream. Two sailors carried him to his stateroom and put him in his bunk. I took off his shoes and unbuttoned his collar. He was asleep when I said good-by.

CHAPTER 8





IT'S two o'clock in the afternoon, two hours before press time. The thermometer on the wall hovers around 100. Through slits in the shutters the heat waves float dizzily up from the street. In the cookshop across the way sleeping coolies are sprawled on rope cots. A high-wheeled bullock cart covered with thatch drifts by. In the shade of an acacia tree, a coolie woman nurses a child from naked breasts as she puffs on a black cheroot.

A barefoot Buddhist monk, carrying a great umbrella under which he will sleep at night, treads the burning cement. He is followed by a small boy, his attendant and novice, who trots to mitigate contact with the hot sidewalk. The one telephone in the office jangles a summons from a far distant world of machines, of action, of madness.

The bell stops ringing. Thern comes in.

"That was Chuang at headquarters," he says. "He's got a story about a murder up at Wat Saket."

"My God," I say, "who'd have the energy to commit murder in this heat? Wat Saket? A temple, isn't it? Let Nakorn take the story and tell Pleng to hurry up there and get some pictures. Has Siri cleaned up that embezzling story?" (A government official had been stealing 30,000 *ticals* from the government for the past eight years.)

"It'll be finished in a few minutes," says Thern.

A messenger boy brings a telegram from the post office. It's a flash from Reuter's.

London, May 20—A message from New York states that Captain Charles Lindbergh unaccompanied in a Ryan monoplane, the Spirit of St. Louis, started on a trans-Atlantic flight to Paris at 7:52 this morning.

"Watkins," I call.

A dapper young Englishman who had punched the

nose of the editor of one of our English rivals and got a job on the *Daily Mail*, walks in.

"Here's an American who is flying across the Atlantic alone," I say. "Get out the clips and make a column shirt-tail out of it. Explain the story to Lert so that he can make a map diagram for tomorrow."

Udom comes in. Through the influence of his father, a wealthy nobleman, the government had sent Udom to America to study civil engineering. He had spent four years, ostensibly at Columbia University, but came back to Bangkok with a postgraduate degree from Broadway. His father got him several jobs in government service from which he drifted to the *Daily Mail*.

"Hello, boss," Udom says. "I've got a little piece for the paper but I don't think you'll use it."

"Why do you think I won't use it?" I ask.

"Because the foreign colony won't like to see it in print," says Udom with a smile. "The government railway commissioners' survey shows that the Meklong Railway is unsafe. The road, you know, is owned for the most part by Englishmen."

"What's wrong with it?"

"Boiler pressure on locomotives is too high for safety. Those engines have been used for twenty years or more."

"Is that all?"

"Hell, no. Switches won't lock. Telegraph poles are

about to fall on the tracks. Bridge heads are weak. Curves need alignment and a few other things like that.”

“Why, it’s a peach of a story. What kind of a road is it?”

“It’s in Dhonburi, on the other side of the river. Very few foreigners ever use it but lots of Siamese and Chinese farmers do. It’s paid big dividends for the past twenty-five years.”

“Why bother to fix up a road and buy safety devices for a bunch of coolies? Is that how they make it pay?”

“I guess so.”

“Take a ricksha over to the Meklong office and see what the president has to say about it.”

“You’d better go easy. English papers don’t print things that make the foreign colony mad.”

“Why should they get mad?”

“A story like that hurts their prestige.”

“You mean they think they’re tin gods and that it will show them up for what they really are.”

“Yes.”

“Would you print the story if you were in my shoes?”

“I’d think about it a long time before I would.”

“That’s the trouble with the Siamese. They think too long about everything, especially about the delicate feelings of the white man. Go on over and see the president.”

The telephone rings again—no longer inharmonious.

There's a promise of a fight in this tranquil, torpid world in the jungle.

"Prasut is on the wire with a whale of a story," says Thern. "A Siamese girl is going to be queen of Cambodia."

"Hello, Prasut," I say. "Who is she?"

"A dancer. King Manivongse fell in love with her while she was dancing in Pnom-Penh."

"How do you know it?"

"How do I know it? You don't think I'm kidding you, do you? I got the whole story from the girl's mother who just got off the train from the border."

"Where are you?"

"Hualampong Station."

"Where's the girl's mother?"

"I've got her right here."

"Get a picture of the girl from her and come on in."

Udom comes back.

"What did he say?" I ask.

"He was mad as hell," Udom replies.

"You didn't expect him to kiss you, did you?"

"He said the railroad was in first class condition and that our story was a bunch of lies and that I should tell you that if you printed the story he'd sue for libel."

"You're sure of the facts aren't you?"

"Certainly. It's a matter of government record."

"The hell with him. Sit down and write a bang-up story. Write exactly what he said and be sure to say that

he threatened to sue for libel. Forget what the foreign colony will think.”

I rub my hands in glee. I'm proud of my staff. If the Siamese are timid about printing facts at least they've got a great nose for news.

I look into the city room. It is a large room flanked by a porch into which a guava tree pushes its branches. There are two tables. At one are the reporters of the Siamese edition of the *Daily Mail*, a morning paper. Sitting on her haunches on a chair is a wizened little woman chewing betel nut. She spits into a yawning, giant cuspidor as she translates a Chinese fairy story into Siamese for the next morning's installment. At the other table is the staff of the English edition banging away on typewriters.

The telephone booth, on the door of which is a sign: "Abandon hope all ye who enter here," separates the two staffs. Soh is in the booth yelling in Siamese to the district man that he's a "lousy reporter." The office boy dozes at the copy shoot, a tin can on a rope which runs through a hole in the floor to the composing room below.

I go downstairs to make up. Sixteen semi-naked Siamese, Chinese and Indians are setting type by hand. They are illiterate and recognize the letters of the alpha-

bet only as physical objects. The copy they send upstairs must be proofread several times before it is clean.

Columns of type are expertly placed in forms and locked up. The big flat-bed press starts to moan and bang. Page proofs are pulled for dropped type. I glance over the saucy little sheet with its pictures and piquant headlines:

SIAMESE DANCER MAY BE CAMBODIA'S QUEEN
MEKLONG RAILWAY UNSAFE DECLARES GOVERNMENT
LONE AMERICAN FLIER SPEEDING ACROSS ATLANTIC
ACCOUNTANT CONFESSES EMBEZZLING 30,000 TICALS

“Okay, let 'er go!”

The motor groans. Two wooden arms come down and pick up the printed sheets at the rate of eight hundred an hour. A relay of brown boys takes them out to the circulation department in the compound where they are cut and folded by hand. Motorcycles sputter. Bicycle bells ring. A tabloid newspaper is flung into the faces of a brown race that has forgotten the word for hurry.

Does it mean anything to them? Does this alien mirror that is held up to their lives stir them from their lethargy?

I thought the Meklong Railway story would. But it had no more effect than revelations of Tammany graft have on Tammany votes. The people of Bangkok worried as little about being exploited as the people of Chicago or New York.

As it would happen in either of these two American cities, the story of the dancing girl and the King of Cambodia amused and aroused them. It was another Cinderella story with magic wands and genie that made wishes come true. It did not, however, have the conventional fairy-story ending because certain ogres got the upper hand and nearly brought a diplomatic break between France and Siam, threatening to end my career in the Land of the White Elephant.

If it were not for the weakness of all mankind to get up on the roof top and shout his good fortune to the world; if it were not that the *Daily Mail* placed a megaphone to the mouth of the shouter, Nangsao Baen and King Manivongse might have lived happily ever after. What is sweeter than adulation and the envy of one's fellow man, even though these breeders of evil depart from the Eightfold Path of the Blessed One? What was more natural for the parents of Nangsao Baen, wandering minstrels who had nothing in their lives to hope for than that their next performance would enable them to buy rice and maybe a bit of fish? They had to talk. They had to shout.

Nangsao Baen's mother began as soon as she took leave of her daughter in the women's quarters of King Manivongse's palace in Pnom-Penh. His Majesty's gold, suspended from a silver chain around her neck, lay in

her bosom. The feel of the coins in the silken handkerchief made it seem that it was she, and not her daughter, who was being fondled by a king. It gave her a sense of importance which she communicated to the few women who were traveling in the third class coach from the Cambodian border to Bangkok.

These ladies in turn talked and what they had to say reached the ears of Prasut who happened to be at the station when the train arrived.

“Where is this lady who says she will be the mother of the Queen of Cambodia?” asked Prasut.

They pointed to a woman who looked more like a peasant than an actress. She wore a green cotton *panung* and a soiled white blouse. She was arguing with a custom guard over the contents of a basket.

“Will Your Royal Highness be good enough to accept the good wishes of an unworthy servant of the people?” said Prasut ironically in his best court manner.

“You honor me, sir, more than I deserve. I am not yet Her Royal Highness.”

“But your daughter and King Manivongse?”

“She is his wife but is not as yet queen.”

“What makes you think, then, that she will be queen?”

“His Majesty has honored her with the royal name of Srivasti Amphaibongse and has ordered the royal scribes to write into the royal records her title of Chao Chom.”

“Your daughter has been signally honored. No common wife is worthy of the royal title of Chao Chom. Tell me how this romance began.”

“My daughter and I were playing in Battambang. Business was very bad. It was hard for our company to make people part with their *satangs* even to see my beautiful Baen dance. We were even thinking of closing up and coming to Bangkok when one evening the manager whispered to us that King Manivongse was in the audience.

“I said nothing to Baen for fear that she would become stage struck, and she danced divinely. She really is a marvel, you know, despite the fact that she was never chosen as a member of the royal dancing troupe.

“Well, we played two nights in Battambang because of the King’s visit and he was there the second night, too. I noticed that he sat on the edge of the seat and applauded loudly when Baen went off. That night we had some beef curry to celebrate and moved the next day to Pnom-Penh.

“On our arrival in the Cambodian capital, the King commanded that we give a performance at his palace. King Manivongse, in the uniform of a field marshal, was surrounded by court attendants in bright military uniforms. I noticed that he did not take his eyes off Baen whenever she appeared on the stage.

“When she came out for her solo number, King Manivongse leaned over and whispered to one of his lieutenants who got up and ordered the performance stopped. A courier was sent to the stage. Who was this beautiful Siamese dancer? What was her name? Who accompanied her? Was she married? When the desired information was transmitted to His Majesty, he commanded that I come to see him privately at his palace the next day.

“The least I expected was that His Majesty would command Baen to dance before him. When I entered his private audience room he greeted me in a very friendly manner and complimented me on the beauty of my daughter. Imagine my surprise when he asked me for Baen’s hand! To this I readily consented. He then asked if the girl’s father would do likewise. I told him he would, but rather than take my word he told me to wire my husband to come to Pnom-Penh. He was doing a clowning act in Bangkok and took the first train to the capital. In return for his consent to the hand of Baen, King Manivongse gave him the title of *Luang* [Count].

“When I told the good news to Baen she did not seem to appreciate that a miracle had happened.

“‘Do you realize,’ I told her, ‘that this is a chance in a million, a chance in one hundred million? How many kings are there who go around proposing to dancing girls? Darling, you are foolish. Put on your best *passin* and blouse and come with me to the palace.’

“When we got Baen’s clothes freshly washed and pressed she looked charming and to say that King Manivongse was happy was putting it mildly.

“Baen had been in the palace for three days when His Majesty announced to the court that his Siamese wife had pleased him so much that he had decided to make her his Number One wife to outrank the five others who shared his bed. It was then that he conferred upon her the title of *Chao Chom* and a royal name and made arrangements to have her crowned queen after the cremation of his illustrious father who died two months ago.

“When the news reached the women’s quarters there was no end of catty remarks. Fortunately for Baen, His Majesty established her in another part of the palace, a place of her own, and sided with her in all arguments.

“Their first argument was funny. It gave me a new insight into my daughter. Baen wears her hair in shingle fashion, a style most becoming to her. Now His Majesty very diplomatically suggested that he did not like the shingle bob and wanted his newest wife to do her coiffure in *pom tat* fashion, or cut short like a man’s. Baen would not hear of it. She said the Cambodian fashion was ugly and would ruin her looks.

“His Majesty, she told me, pleaded with her saying that it was only a matter of cutting off a few hairs to make him happy. But still she held out. Finally the King compromised. He agreed that she should wear the

shingle bob until the cremation of his father, when, as a mark of respect and mourning for his parent's memory, she, with all the faithful, would shave her head entirely and allow her hair to grow in the Cambodian fashion.

"After two weeks, His Majesty was so pleased with Baen that he gave her the keys to his personal safe and turned over to her the domestic affairs of the palace. She supervised her august husband's meals and took care of his clothes. When I left Pnom-Penh, the two were extremely happy. Baen proved that she was as good a wife as she was a dancer and King Manivongse was proud of her."

And so ended the first installment of the story of the Siamese Cinderella and her prince. Nangsao Baen and King Manivongse were on the tongues of everyone in Bangkok. The hut of Nangsao Baen's mother and father became a shrine for all believers in miracles. They were photographed, they were interviewed and theatrical managers offered them fabulous sums to appear in their theaters.

The scene shifts. It is the office of the French Resident Superieur in Pnom-Penh. Enter the ogre. Copies of the Bangkok newspapers detailing the meteoric rise of Nangsao Baen are on his desk. He frowns. To him it is not a fairy story. He calls on His Majesty King Mani-

vongse. They are closeted together for a long time. He goes back to his office and sends a long telegram to Monsieur Réau, Minister of France to the Court of Siam.

It's a dull day in the *Daily Mail* office. I wish that there was more news to print about the dancing girl and the King. The telephone rings.

"It's Monsieur Chalant, the French Consul," says Thern.

Probably, thought I, an invitation to another one of those charming parties for which the Legation was noted.

"Your story about King Manivongse is all wrong," says Chalant. "I am sending you a statement which we have prepared and Monsieur Réau wants you to print it just as it is written. After that we must ask you to print no more about His Cambodian Majesty and this girl."

"May I ask, Monsieur, why you ask us to print no more about this story?"

"Because the whole thing is ridiculous."

"You mean that the marriage of Nangsao Baen and the King is ridiculous?"

"Yes, and we insist that nothing more appear about it."

"I am sorry, Monsieur, but the French Legation is not running this newspaper."

In due time the statement came to the office.

According to the news received by the French Legation from the highest authority in Pnom-Penh, it appears that the rumors of a would-be marriage between the King of Cambodia and a Siamese dancer are quite unfounded. This dancer has been really engaged by the royal entertainment department at Pnom-Penh under the same conditions as other Cambodian dancers.

We [the *Daily Mail*] regret having misled the public in this connection.

It had a cold dictatorial ring. I showed the statement to Prince Svasti, who said that according to Siamese and Cambodian customs, Nangsao Baen was the wife of King Manivongse and that he could make her queen if he so desired. When I asked several Siamese noblemen why the French wanted the story hushed up they laughed.

"Just a little French imperialism," they said.

We printed the Legation's statement leaving out our regrets about having misled the public, and sent a reporter around to see Nangsao Baen's father.

"If the French object to our daughter," he said, "we will bring her back to Siam. We do not wish to be the cause of any trouble."

A week passed without any news of the royal romance. Just as Bangkok was about to forget the story of the little dancer, the French Legation issued another communique.

H.M.King Srivasti Manivongse of Cambodia, being displeased with the inaccurate and ridiculous assertions of the father of Nangsao Baen, has ordered the dismissal of the latter and her immediate return to Bangkok.

Nangsao Baen arrived in Bangkok the next day and denied that King Manivongse had sent her home. She came, she said, to see her younger brother who was ill.

“His Majesty did not want me to go and it was only after I promised to return to him in a few days that he gave his consent. I am still his wife.”

Evidently the Resident Superieur thought that by sending her home the prestige of France, so disastrously threatened by the remarks of a clown, would be saved and nothing more would be said. But that able diplomat did not know news. Once more the *Daily Mail* fared forth with this banner line:

“I AM THE CAMBODIAN KING’S WIFE,”

SAYS NANGSAO BAEN

States She Is Going

Back to Pnom-Penh

Poor Nangsao Baen. She knew nothing of the devious workings of international affairs. She knew nothing of the harm she had done to the good name of France. She was the king’s wife and like all good Siamese wives, she knew her place was at her husband’s side.

"It's a damn shame to sacrifice this girl for official pride," said Kosol. "Why, it's not unusual for King Manivongse to marry a dancing girl. His father had several Siamese dancing girl wives and our own kings have taken actresses for wives."

"And what about the kings of France?" I asked.

"It's a throwback to the days when the French could do anything they wanted with Siam," he said. "I still remember when their warships bombarded Bangkok on a trumped-up charge that we had insulted a French citizen."

But the slate was not yet clean. French officialdom called for a pound of flesh.

Two days after Nangsao Baen had arrived in Bangkok, I was summoned to the office of Raymond B. Stevens, American Adviser to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mr. Stevens, who hailed from the granite state of New Hampshire where he had been representative of his district in the state legislature and member of Congress, had succeeded Dr. Francis B. Sayre. Since Dr. Sayre had aided in abolishing extra-territorial rights of Occidental nations in Siam and had brought about equitable treaties for the Siamese, there was little left for Mr. Stevens to do. But he had about him a mysterious Coolidge-esque quality that gave an impression of tremendous importance. As a result he became popular with the Siamese.

"I am rather surprised at you," began this New Hampshire Yankee in King Prajadhipok's court.

"What have I done?" I asked.

"Well, I don't understand why you have given so much space to that silly story about the dancing girl and the King of Cambodia."

"Don't you think it's a good story?"

"No, I don't. It's ridiculous and you've got to stop printing anything more about it."

"Why?"

"Because I agree with the French."

"They've asked you to have us stop?"

"Yes."

"Are you speaking for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs?"

"Yes, I am. But of course we are only asking you to do this. We are not ordering it done."

"Have we violated the laws of libel or interfered with diplomatic negotiations between France and Siam?"

"No. But the French don't like the story. They claim it hurts their prestige and therefore I must ask you to put an end to the whole business. I don't see the sense of printing it anyhow."

"But have we said anything derogatory about France? We are only printing the news."

"Well, they don't like it and that's all there is to it."

To a Siamese official I would have been more sympathetic. I would have attributed his attitude to fear of

the power of France and would have gladly forgotten the whole affair.

Finally I promised that the English edition of our paper would print no more about Manivongse if Stevens would get a similar promise for the Siamese papers and the other two English language dailies.

When I returned to my office I found that the *Siam Observer* and the *Bangkok Times* had a statement from the French Legation which had not been sent to us. It bore the French title of *A Dementi* and read:

We are informed by the French Legation that Nangsao Baen has really been expelled from Cambodia as undesirable and that she will not be allowed to return to Pnom-Penh.

"Well, I'll be damned," I said to Kosol, who had taken a deep interest in the story. "They exact a promise from me to quit publishing the story and right on top of it send out another statement."

"It looks like they want to muzzle the *Daily Mail*," said Kosol, "so that they can print what they want without fear of comment from us."

"Why, they're insulting a Siamese subject. What crime did Nangsao Baen commit to be classed as an undesirable? They've certainly made a mountain out of a molehill."

I immediately telephoned Mr. Stevens and told him that in view of the Legation's latest communique, I did

not intend to live up to my agreement. I said that the time had come for the Foreign Office to talk to the French Minister rather than to us.

“Do you think that Stevens knew that the French Minister had branded Nangsao Baen a menace to Cambodia when he spoke to you?” asked Kosol.

“No, I don’t. I think he was tricked into it.”

At last the Siamese shook off the torpor of the jungle. Scores of indignant letters poured into our office urging us to demand an apology from the French for their insult to Nangsao Baen. Foreign Office officials, however, remained discreetly quiet. All but Stevens. He wrote a letter to the Foreign Minister demanding that the *Daily Mail* be closed as a menace to the Siamese people. But I never received formal notice to that effect.

Meanwhile, Nangsao Baen hid herself in the hut of her father. Theater owners pursued her with large offers holding out contracts for three hundred *ticals* nightly, a salary which she could not earn in a year. Even a vaudeville circuit agent, reading the story in Manila, made her an offer to come to America. She refused them all.

“I am no longer a dancer,” she said. “I am the wife of the King of Cambodia.”

I instructed Prasut to urge her to accept one of the contracts, but his arguments were futile. She could not

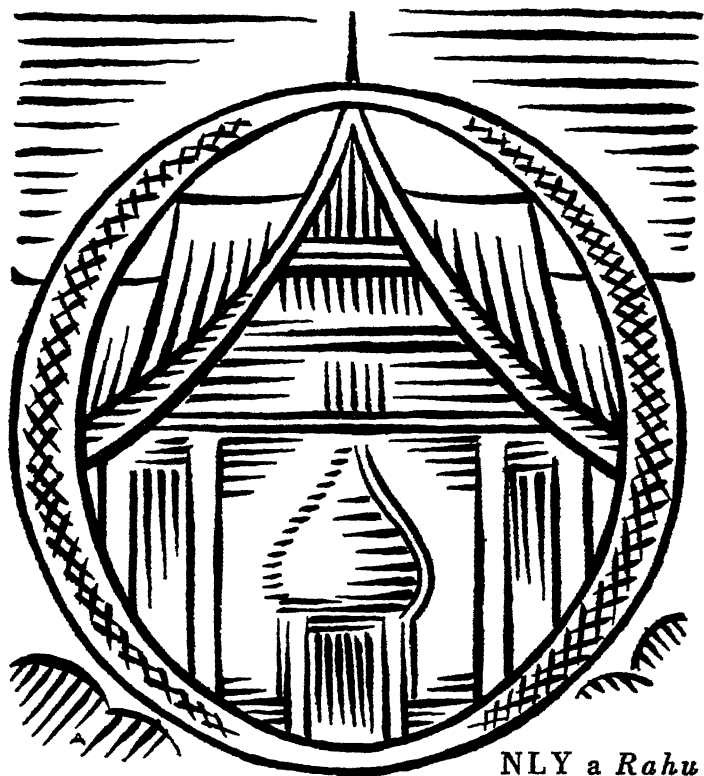
understand that it was the Resident Superieur who was the power in Cambodia, not the King.

King Manivongse looked around for another queen more acceptable to the French. French newspapers in Indo-China called the action of the Resident "a sword thrust in the water." Monsieur Réau fell sick shortly after the Manivongse case faded from the papers, and died after an operation. Lower class Siamese said that his death was punishment for his part in the banishment of Nangsao Baen.

Nangsao Baen slid back into obscurity. Her mother and father continued their clowning and their daughter finally went back to dancing, a bit more conscious of the song of her hips and the lilt of her posturing figure.

CHAPTER 9





NLY a *Rahu* could have inspired the *Daily Mail's* defiance of the French Legation and there's going to be a big noise until he's driven out," laughed Kosol. "Somebody's going to be punished."

It was far past midnight and too hot to sleep under a roof. Our car was parked in a paddy field outside the city. We sat in the back seat clad in voluminous

Chinese silk trousers and smoked cigars wrapped in lotus petals. The top was down and the syce was curled up in the front seat, asleep. On one side of the field hung the Southern Cross and on the other the Great Dipper turned completely around pointing to a North Star too far from this equatorial land to be visible.

It was quiet now, except for the sharp whistle of a snake or the cow-like moo of a frog. Desultory explosions of firecrackers came from the direction of the city, the last of a colossal clamor created by hundreds of thousands of natives beating on dish pans, washboilers and other noise-making devices to frighten *Rahu*, demon of the heavens, from swallowing *Phra Chandr*, the moon.

We were two miles removed from the clangor, but it beat upon our ears to the point of pain. Not only were Siamese throughout the land intent upon scaring this evil creature away from his celestial meal, but the entire Hindu world was united in a hymn of din—one-half the earth was trying to pierce eternity by banging on a washboiler. But *Rahu* was unmoved by this monstrous cacophony. If he heard it at all, it was no louder than a whispered "Boo!"

As the moon slowly disappeared into his mouth, the din increased to a desperate intensity of pleading. Yet *Rahu* was inexorable. Darkness descended upon the earth. A chill breeze blew across the fields. There were goose pimples on our scantily clad legs. The stars, but a few minutes before eclipsed by the brighter satellite,

dropped closer to the earth to engulf it in their infinite profusion. For a minute fraction of time this was the end of the world.

Nevertheless hope was not gone. The din continued. The shadow of a whirling world passed from the face of the moon. Light was reborn. The clangor subsided like a long, drawn-out sigh of relief. Cosmic confidence reigned once more.

"What do you mean by a *Rahu* in the *Daily Mail* office?" I asked Kosol.

"Government officials believe that only demons speak out as directly as you did with the French Legation," he replied.

"I thought they liked the way we handled the story."

"Most of them did, but there's a class of ruling princes here who feel that the paper violated their prerogative."

"What is their prerogative?"

"To make decisions when they get around to it."

"But something had to be done right away."

"You must remember that there is no hurry here. Inertia takes the place of initiative and initiative is punished whenever it appears."

"But what are they afraid of?"

"The man with any enterprise upsets the ways of paternalism. He gets power too quickly. He goes over the heads of those in his way. Heads, you know, are sacred here."

“So they’re afraid the *Daily Mail* will get too much power?”

“Right. If you had been a government official and had acted as you did in the Nangsao Baen case, you would have been banished to a lifetime job in some jungle village.”

“Is that why you think somebody is going to be punished?”

“Certainly. If some one’s head doesn’t fall, the ruling princes will lose face and faces are the most important part of sacred heads.”

“Who will it be?”

“I don’t know.”

“Me, I suppose.”

“No, you’re a foreigner. They won’t touch you.”

“Who, then?”

Kosol shrugged his shoulders.

One evening, a month after the eclipse of the moon, Prasut Vicharn, who handled the Nangsao Baen story from its inception and had written an unsigned editorial in defence of the dancing girl, came to my house. He looked haggard and worn. He had been away from the office for a few days due to his wife’s illness. He threw himself into a chair on the veranda.

“I’m through,” he said.

“Through?” I asked in surprise. “What do you mean?”

“I’ve got to quit my job at the office.”

“Do you want to go?”

“Hell, no.”

“What’s the matter? Is it your wife?”

“No, not her, poor kid. She’s expecting a baby.”

“You’re expecting a baby and you want to quit your job?”

“I don’t want to quit. There’s nothing I want more than to stay on the paper. It’s the work I’ve always wanted to do.”

“And I can’t let you go, Prasut. Men of your ability are altogether too scarce in this funny little country of yours.”

“It isn’t funny. It’s pathetic. I thought through my work with you I could change some of the narrow-minded, selfish, and vindictive ideas a certain class of people have here. But I guess I haven’t a chance. They’re trying to break me.”

“What do you mean?”

“They’re trying to break me as they do every one they send to Europe and America for study. Progress, action and paternalism don’t mix. I’m about to be hazed. I’m about to be taught to be docile.”

“You’ve got me. I don’t understand what you’re driving at.”

“I’ve been called to report for conscription. I’m not in the government service so I’m eligible for the army.”

“They want you with your education and training to spend two years carrying a musket? That’s ridiculous!”

“If there were a good reason for the army, I’d be glad to go. But what does it accomplish? Who are our enemies? Would our little barefoot soldiers from sleepy jungle hamlets stand a chance against a European power? The army only bolsters up the prestige and vanity of the ruling princes. I hate them. They kill initiative and independent thinking. They’re making us a country of polite boy scouts who learn to bow and smirk for titles of nobility.”

“Do you have to join the army?”

“No. If I take a job in the government, I won’t have to serve. But either way will be the same. They’re out to haze me. My father has already showered an official of the health department with gifts to arrange a job for me.”

“Ye gods, what’ll you do there?”

“I don’t know and I don’t care. They’ve got me and I’m through.”

So Prasut, young, enthusiastic Prasut, was chosen as the sacrifice to paternalism. It was wrong and cruel. If anyone had to be spanked for speaking out in the Nangsao Baen case, it should have been I. But I was not in the family.

“I’m sorry, Prasut,” I said. “It’s a tough break.”

“Well, it all comes of going to America to study,” he said. “Had I remained here I might have been a contented boy scout. Do you mind if I tell you about myself? I don’t want to bore you but I feel like talking. It’s the night before my execution and I’d like to get it all said before I go.”

“Go ahead, Prasut, get it off your chest.”

He lit his pipe and began.

“My father is the rare Siamese whom Occidentals call a self-made man. His business is milling and shipping rice and he supports a large family in comfort and gives his sons expensive educations. My early childhood was like thousands of other boys—a carefree, naked existence steeped in fairy lore and superstition.

“When I was six years old I was clothed for the first time and sent to public school. I remember little of the period between that time and my eleventh birthday when the tonsure rite was performed. It was an elaborate Brahminic ceremony during which the tuft of hair on the top of my head, which had not been cut since birth, was shaved off as a formal notice of adolescence. The house was decorated and there was feasting and merry-making. A Siamese orchestra played and friends and relatives brought me gifts.

“‘You’re a man now, my boy,’ said my father after the guests had departed.

“I felt the top of my head and wondered what the loss of my hair had to do with manhood.

“‘I’m going to send you to a missionary school,’ continued my father. ‘I want you to go there because you will get better instruction than in your present school and you will learn about Occidentals, which is more important. I am paying your tuition and therefore you do not have to become a Christian but if you wish to try Christianity, go ahead. Remember that the Buddha taught that all *darma* (religious doctrine) may be tested and tried. Yet whatever you do, you will always be a Buddhist.’

“After three years among the missionaries, I was packed off alone to an expensive preparatory school in the suburbs of Boston, ten thousand miles away from home. When I arrived in San Francisco the buildings, the rush, the traffic, the many tall, white people, frightened me. But the most vivid picture I have of my first day in America is the evening I spent with an American my father knew. He lived in Alameda with his wife and two children, a boy of ten and a girl of fourteen.

“After dinner the girl put a dance record on the phonograph and she and her brother danced. We had a fine time until the girl held out her hands to me to dance with her. I had never danced in my life. I refused but she came over and took me in her arms while her mother and father laughed. I thought and hoped I would faint from embarrassment. I had never been near

a girl before. She told me to follow her. I took a few steps and fell. She tried to pick me up and fell on top of me. I was so ashamed I wanted to run away, but her mother took me in her arms. I remember how hard I tried not to cry but finally the tears came.

“I wanted to cry many times after that. Everything was so strange, so unreal. The first six months of my life at school seemed to tear the very soul out of me, although every one I met did everything they could to make me comfortable. I once thought that if I could have some Siamese curry I might stand the agony I was going through. I sent a wire to my mother and asked her to cable the recipe. It arrived the next day, but when I made it, it tasted flat, worse than pork and beans.

“But somehow time passed and I found myself no longer homesick or craving my native dishes. I was graduated from prep school and entered Harvard. By that time I was a real American. Home seemed far away where people did things in a strange and ridiculous way. I found no difficulty with my class work and went in for sport. I played tennis and basketball, but got along best in soccer. I even worked on the university paper. I had plenty of money and many good friends.

“It was not until the late Prince Mahaidol of Songkla came to study medicine at Harvard that I found I was a Siamese. His Royal Highness was a most unusual man. He loved his country better than most of his royal relatives. They called him a renegade when he married a

commoner and an eccentric when he gave up his post as director of public health because the men under him were physicians who knew more than he did.

“Very few persons around Boston knew he was heir apparent to the throne of Siam and that he was a man whose fortune ranked with America’s richest. He was plain Mr. Songkla to his classmates. During his last year at medical school he worked among the poor of Boston, often spending an entire night at the bedside of a mother waiting for her child to be born. Once, while speeding home from a case at three o’clock in the morning, he was stopped by a policeman.

“‘Huh, only a chink,’ said the officer in disgust, and waved him to go on.

“That’s all he wanted to be—‘only a chink.’ It expressed his modesty.

“Prince Mahaidol used to tell the little group of Siamese who came to his home to take only that which was best from Western civilization but to keep in mind at all times that the East was not dead; that it was very much alive and that it had as much to teach the West as the West the East.

“I shall always cherish the memory of His Royal Highness’ little home because it was there that I met my wife. Valai was then a student at Wellesley. She was the first Siamese girl I had ever met. Although I had been out to parties with American girls and felt at my ease in their presence, I did not know what to say to

Valai when the Princess introduced us. It was not Valai's beauty, or that she looked so charming in her Western clothes, or the fact that she had the poise of a Wellesley college girl, but it was because she was Siamese. I guess I reverted to type. I was stiffly polite and formal and all I could offer to the conversation the rest of the evening were silly monosyllables.

"When she left for home, I did not offer to accompany her. Siamese men never do that. I suppose you know it isn't necessary because the man generally meets a girl once in the home of her parents before he marries her.

"My Siamese formality vanished after the first meeting. Both of us were in our senior year. We went out together, did the things that American couples did even to the point of spending weekends at Cape Cod. I proposed to her in the conventional American manner and we decided to be married when we got home. I knew my father would have no objection and Phya Indurat, her father, who had traveled and lived abroad extensively during his life, gave his consent by letter.

"We used to sit on the beach at the Cape during the spring and plan what we would do when we got home. Valai was going to organize a women's club which she hoped would be the nucleus of a feminist movement to raise the standards of women. I, on the other hand, was to start a weekly magazine of opinion similar to the *Nation* or *New Republic*.

“We were going to do all that we could to bring the East and the West together. We were going to interpret the Occident to the East and the East to the Occident.

“It was a big order, wasn't it? Valai was particularly anxious to do what she could to eliminate the practice of secluding girls before marriage. Although, as you know, we do not have *purdah*, the separation of the sexes is responsible for many of our social evils. Young men denied the society of girls are forced to seek the company of the worst type of women. That's why we have so many prostitutes in Bangkok. It's curious, isn't it, that a young man may not have the company of even one girl before he is married, but may have as many as he can afford to keep afterwards.

“Valai wanted to encourage girls to share men's ideas, thoughts and aspirations. She wanted to break down their inferiority complex which is the foundation of our harem and our licensed disloyalty. She wanted to teach them to be interesting personalities instead of coy little slaves. She wanted to teach respect for Western medicine, especially at childbirth during which so many of our women die because of the ignorance and superstitious rites of native midwives.

“For myself I set the task of trying to break down some of the evils of paternalism. The trouble with the Siamese is that they are unable to do anything for themselves. Everything is done for them including their thinking. Did you ever see a Siamese fix a flat tire? How

many would be caught washing dishes? How many can put a patch on a *panung*? How many can boil an egg? Our society teaches that those things are humiliating.

“All our people are consumed with one idea—that if they get into government service they have nothing more to worry them so long as they are obedient and do not show too much enterprise. We lay too much stress on the value of titles of nobility which come only to those who hold government jobs. No one else, no matter how worthy, can hope for such honors. That is the quintessence of Siamese paternalism. He who violates its taboos is lost. It is a sword of Damocles which hangs over the heads of all connected with government work. It prevents those in executive positions from making decisions and creates among the best blood of Siam a body of responsibility-dodgers or buck-passers. The court of last resort is the Supreme Council whose royal members decide everything.

“Is it any wonder that the Chinese have control of all the business, of all the money in the Kingdom? The country cannot go on taking Siamese school graduates into the government. Our people must learn how to stand on their own feet in competition with the Chinese. Our very existence is already threatened by our paternalism. The Chinese are slowly absorbing us.

“Government workers may be compared with what is known in the United States as the white collar class. They have developed a smug exclusiveness through con-

tact with their royal bosses and through the knowledge that the paternalistic system always looks after its own. To enter the manual trades, business, engineering or agriculture, would be degrading.

“So you see we had a big job cut out for us. I believed, however, that I could see my part through because the government had no hold on me. The fact that my father paid for my education did not make me liable to seven years’ service with the government which every government student is required to give in return for his education.

“That seven years is really a period of mental and spiritual barrenness. The young man fresh from the West protests against the sleeping and tea drinking which goes on in nearly every government office. His energy antagonizes his elderly bosses who fear that the youngster will set a pace which will jeopardize their jobs. To put him in his proper place, the older men and those who were not fortunate enough to receive a foreign education, do everything in their power to break the spirit of the newcomer. No hazing in an American college is as thorough as that given to the young man entering government service with a degree from a foreign school. He must go through this mill until his superiors feel that all the good effects of his foreign experience have been driven out of him. Then he is promoted and given a title of nobility.

“Valai and I returned by way of Europe. We were

married a few weeks after our arrival. We took a beautiful little home in the Phya Thai district and while Valai fixed up the house I started to work on my paper. I called it *Thai*, "The Free." It lasted for three months. I had to suspend publication because the government refused to allow it to go through the mails. They said I was a Bolshevik. Then you came along with the *Daily Mail*. Need I tell you what this freshman has in store for him at the hands of the upper classmen?"

Prasut did not join the army. He became a clerk in the office of the physician in charge of hookworm prevention. For several weeks he would drop into the newspaper office after work to chat or to write a special article under a pseudonym. His identity was soon discovered and he was forbidden to write again. Government employees are not permitted to express their ideas in any published form.

"God, how I despise them!" he told me after he had received warning that if he continued to write he would be banished to some jungle job where he would spend the rest of his life. "If it were not for Valai and the fact that she is expecting a baby I would shoot myself. I don't know how I shall go on. I sometimes feel that I'll lose my mind."

The baby was born but Valai died ten days later of puerperal fever from an infection which she contracted

due to carelessness and neglect of midwives. Prasut's pleas for a Western physician went for naught with his parents and those of Valai. He had to stand by and listen to incantations of soothsayers and watch his wife take the heat cure. When she knew she was going to die she took her husband's hand.

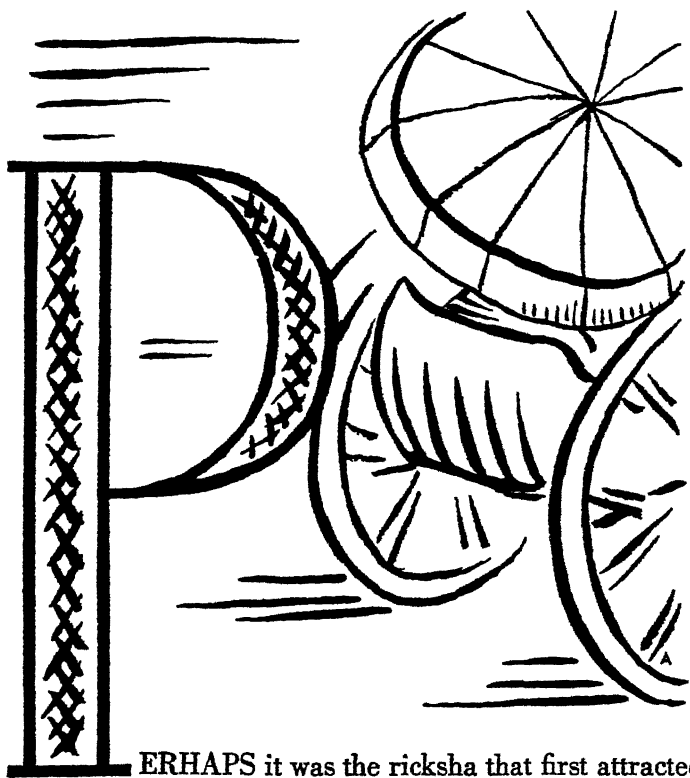
"Prasut," she said, "we were going to teach our women how to have babies safely. We were going to show them so many things. Now all the ignorance that I wanted to break down is taking me off. It is going to be hard for you. I'm not going to ask you to carry on. It is too much. At least do what you can for the baby. Give him what we were going to give our people."

"What good would it do him?" he told me bitterly. "Would it be fair to have him suffer as we suffered? Let him go on like all the others. Some day he will be a *Chao Phya*. It's better to have a title of nobility than be an eternal freshman."

Prasut never entered the *Daily Mail* office again. He followed the line of least resistance. He traveled with a set of rich, young princes, got the reputation of being a good fellow and a good drinker and gave the best parties in Bangkok. When the title list was published at the end of the year, he found himself a *Luang, Luang* Prasut, the first step in the nobility ladder to the highest title awarded by paternalism to sons who are meek—that of *Chao Phya*.

CHAPTER 10





PERHAPS it was the ricksha that first attracted my attention. White women do not ride in rickshas. Or maybe it was the blue Japanese parasol with a ring of burnt orange which she carried. It lay against a bare, white arm like a sentinel challenging the sun—an impotent sentinel challenging an enemy that had dropped into the horizon leaving behind a last breath of tepid air. Perhaps it was the silk-clad leg that swayed gently from

the knee as the ricksha crunched and bounced over the unpaved road.

Despite the slight touch of red in the lips and the darkened eyebrows against a hair of corn-tassel brown, her face gave the lie to whatever might appear brazen about her. Sometimes, as she glided under my window, it was as placid as that of a nun. Sometimes it was the face of a woman in the body of a girl, a woman who had been a mother many times.

Her passing was a daily event, a momentary recess from headlines, rewrites, editorials and the mad scramble for copy. Who was she? Where was she going? Here in this brown land where white women never emerge without some stark sign advertising their respectability—dowdiness, a white male companion, a handkerchief held to the nose, a spine of steel—a beautiful woman was pulled by a sweating, half-naked coolie. Why were white men not trotting behind her ricksha, by the side of her ricksha, trying to make her smile, trying to wrest the shafts from the Chinese?

One day, instead of jogging by, the ricksha man without stopping to break into a walk, so light was his fare, put the shafts down on the dirt sidewalk below my window. To my astonishment she alighted and entered the door below. Some telepathic impulse told me that it was I she was coming to see. I rushed from the window, frantically searched the desk for a pencil and began writing. There was a knock on the rattan swinging door

beneath which I saw her white pumps and the bottom of her pink dress.

“Are you the editor?” she asked.

There was something timid in her voice, something of fear, something of defeat. She was far better to look upon here than from the window. The room seemed brighter, as if some one had placed a vase of flowers on the desk. There was a slight scent of jasmine in the drab office.

“I am June Carey,” she said. “I live up on Si Phya Road, not far from here. I came in to ask if you could give me a job.”

A job in this office! Would it be safe to have this beautiful creature around all day long? Who would get the paper out? At this very minute she was already disrupting affairs. The room seemed to swim with her presence; seemed to shout with her sex.

I wanted to say something smart but I said:

“What do you do?”

“That’s the trouble,” she replied. “I don’t do anything. I was once a stenographer.”

“How long ago was that?” I asked, allowing myself to think that we needed a stenographer.

“It was a long time—too long,” she said. There was something tragic in her voice.

“Can you still operate a typewriter?” I stupidly asked.

"It would come back to me with some practice," she said eagerly.

There was something hypnotic about her. I wanted to tell her to come to work immediately and type tomorrow's editorial for me. I didn't care how long it took her to find the keys.

"I'd like very much to have you," I said, "but I don't see how I can make room for you. The staff is filled and about the only vacancy I might find would be as a reporter. Do you think you could do reporting?"

She shook her head. Once more there came across her face that nun-like smile. It was a perplexing, pathetic smile. A woman probably would have said something catty about it: that she realized this affectation melted the hearts of men. But it wasn't that. Hers was the smile of one convalescing from an operation for cancer, knowing that the scalpel was only a palliative.

"I couldn't do that," she said. "No one would speak to me. I don't know whether I'm afraid of them or they're afraid of me. I'd be a miserable failure as a reporter."

"You mean the white colony?" I asked.

"I mean both," she snapped. Her eyes were half closed. She bristled like a cat at bay. "I hate them."

She stood up and smiled again.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"Why don't you try the commercial houses?" I asked.

"They can use people in their offices."

"I've tried them all," she replied. "They don't want me."

"No prospects at all?" I asked.

"Yes, there's one prospect," she said.

She walked to the window where I had watched her pass. She moved across the floor with regal ease. She seemed smaller than she did in the ricksha, about the size of a Siamese but more petite and frail. I found it difficult to restrain an impulse to put my arm around her and tell her that everything was going to be all right.

"It's not going to be an easy job," she continued, looking out of the window. "I've tried hard not to take it but somehow I seem to be made for it. I've run away from it all my life, but I guess I'll have to take it here."

She spoke as if she were thinking aloud about something too intimate for explanation.

"I wish I could do something for you," I said. "Why don't you drop around in a couple of days. I might find a place in the business department."

"That's awfully sweet of you," she said, starting to go. "I may come back and take you up."

I followed her. As I held the door she looked up at me and said:

"You're not going to ask me to dinner, are you? That's what all the others did, goddam them."

As she ran down the steps I thought I heard her sob.

I watched for her ricksha the next day but it did not appear. I never saw her pass the office again.

Three days later I was having dinner with Frank Thompson at the Phya Thai Palace. Thompson was a Rockefeller instructor at Chulalongkorn University.

"I hear that June Carey called on you," he said.

"My God, how did you know it?" I asked in surprise.

She and I had been alone in the office and I had said nothing about her to any one.

"It's all over the colony," he laughed. "Did you give her a job?"

"How did you know she wanted a job?"

"Florence Allerton told me she went to you as a last resort because you were an American."

"Poor kid. I've a good mind to give her one, even if I have to make a place for her."

"You don't have to worry about that," he laughed. "She's already got a job."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"You don't have to look so disappointed," he said. "She's entered the house of Moscovitz."

"Do you mean Moscovitz, that Russian whorehouse on Yawarad Road?" I asked.

"There is no other Moscovitz."

From the time that June Carey left the illegitimate bed and board of Bill Hanson, men pursued her with offers of their apartments. They dangled marriage before her eyes like a Christmas bonus, a prize to be won

by hard work, application to duty, strict attendance, etc. A concentrated aura of sex emanated from her beautiful body and attracted to her mismated men and erotic youths. Even when she left Greenwich Village and moved to Brooklyn the proposals continued.

Bill was the first to whom she yielded. He was a most attractive Rabelaisian. June had just come from Camden, after graduating from high school with honors in English. She thought she wanted to write and persuaded her father to advance her money to come to New York. Greenwich Village, she had heard, was a haven for writers and she took a one-room apartment on Bedford Street above the one occupied by Bill.

At first Bill looked at her as he would all other girls. Does she or doesn't she, was his watchword with women. Unlike most men, he did not pursue his quarry. He was content to play the rôle of spider making his web too attractive for the fly to pass by. June had heard he was a writer and showed him some of her stories. It was mush—an emotional outlet similar to an ephemeral desire to go on the stage or into the movies. But Bill encouraged her. The girl was too enticing to tell her what he really thought. Instead of showing her how to develop love interest on paper, he gave her practical demonstrations and eventually persuaded her that the two could write better if she would live with him. It would be only a matter of six months or a year before

both could make enough money through writing to marry.

It didn't take her long to discover that she never would learn to write. Hers was a practical bourgeois mind that was quick to eliminate waste. She studied shorthand and typing and took a job as stenographer with a shipping firm in Brooklyn. She thought that by earning her own money she could help Bill. Bill had ability. Sometimes when she read his stories in the pulp magazines, she thought he had genius. She made up her mind that if she couldn't write she would be at least the wife of an important writer. She decided that Bill must get away from the crowd which came to his house nightly to guzzle his gin.

These parties just grew. People would drop in and by midnight the two rooms she and Bill occupied reeked with gin-soaked men and women. Most of the men were writers and artists who were still embryonic because they did not have the energy to be born. They were as afraid of the reality of work as the modern girl is afraid of having a child. The women were either wives, stenographers, advertising copy writers or dress models who seemed to get a thrill through intimate association with the near-great; who succeeded in paying for village apartments through the aid of bachelors who hated to dine alone. The only requirement for entrance to these parties was a reputation of being a good fellow. It applied to women as well as men. There was a

camaraderie, induced by alcohol, of soldiers going into battle, a battle to forget mediocrity, and they entered the fray with a desperate determination. One by one they would pass out and the remaining combatants would stumble over the casualties, carrying on.

June hated these parties. They served no purpose. They were wasting Bill's time and sapping his energy. When she complained about them to him, he told her that she was "silly," that she was a "joy killer," and that she was becoming a shrew. Bill knew that she spoke the truth. He hated to hear the truth especially from June. He was tired of her practical ways. Every time she suggested that they move, he told himself he must find a way to get rid of her.

But Bill was saved that embarrassment. He and Kitty Lowe, who Bill always said was the best sport he ever knew, were lying on the bed while the rest of the party sang, screamed and talked at the top of its lungs. June found them there as she entered the bedroom by way of the bathroom. She stopped before they saw her.

"Bill, darling, why don't you shake June," Kitty said. "I don't understand what a man of your intelligence sees in her. She's just a dumb-bell housekeeper with a pretty face. Say the word and I'll move in with you."

"Do you mean that, Kitty?" Bill asked. "June disgusts me. I can't bear her nagging any longer. She drives

me mad. I can't work when she's around. But if you keep your word, I'll get rid of her."

The story of how June walked out on Bill and how he threw a party the next night to celebrate his freedom, was the topic of village gossip for two or three days. June took a room over in Greenwich Avenue and when several of Bill's drinking cronies came to commiserate with her and offer her the use of their various domiciles, she moved to Brooklyn Heights. And when Phil Meeker, her boss, offered her a place out in Long Island, she no longer tried to run away. She took it all for granted and said "no" as gracefully as she could.

A new ship must be floated in alcohol before it starts on its maiden voyage.

The three hundred or more guests who had assembled aboard the *Columbia*, the latest addition to the fleet of June's firm, had partaken of scores of gallons of cocktails and case after case of wines and highballs. Those who could still stand were dancing to the ship's orchestra while the others retired to convenient staterooms. June escaped from Meeker, who wanted to show her the royal suite, and went to the boat deck. She gazed at the Statue of Liberty, whose brobdingnagian proportions, bathed in a million candle power, stood stark against the Jersey flats. Only the muffled hooting of tugs broke the quiet. June breathed deeply of the harbor and felt cleansed.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" came a voice from the dark. A man stood next to her.

"It makes me want to go home," he said.

There was something about his voice that was reassuring, unobtrusive; and, as if the two had been there all the time, June said:

"I was thinking of the same thing."

"There is something about a ship and the water that does that," he said. "But I mean it literally. Your home must be here or at least within subway reach."

"Not that home," she said. "The one I had in mind is out of reach of subways and ships." She quickly changed the subject. "It's a grand party, isn't it?"

They walked toward the stern to get a better view. As they passed under the dim, deck lights she was surprised to see he was an Oriental, a Chinese, she thought. As a rule she didn't care for Orientals, but this one seemed different. He appeared to be a thoroughgoing American. His clothes fitted well. He smiled frankly, without the unctious politeness which, in other Orientals, gave her the creeps. He spoke English fluently with a slight trace of an exotic accent.

When they had pointed out familiar sights, they went below and danced. His dancing was not perfect. His movements were mechanical as if straining to make his body respond to an alien time. But it was better than June expected. She told him to bend his knees more and they laughed.

The long ride in his car through the ominous streets of the Red Hook Section slipped by in animated talk, and before she realized it she was at her door. He told her that he was Navah Aksorn and that he was attached to the Siamese Legation in Washington. His name and his nationality meant no more to June than if he had said, "I am John Jones, American." She had had a wonderful evening. It seemed cleaner than any she had had since her arrival in New York.

When Navah called her the following week she told him she had another engagement. She must not encourage him too much, something told her. It was all right to see him once in a while but she must remember that he was an Oriental and that she was not. It was playing with fire. But finally she yielded and for two months they saw each other every weekend. He would drive up from Washington on Saturday mornings and they would go to theaters, concerts or take long rides on Long Island or in Connecticut.

Once, when he spent two weeks in Chicago on legation business, she found she missed him. The void his absence created grew greater and greater and the more she realized the reality of it all the more she became frightened. Had not this affair gone far enough? Was she becoming too fond of him? If she married him what would become of her? What about her friends? What about her children? They would be half-breeds. Would she be able to fondle a brown baby? Could she bear to

live in his strange country? But all these fears vanished when he was near.

When spring came he proposed that they drive up to a little inn he knew near Great Barrington in the Berkshires. It meant spending the night with him. Her first impulse was to say "no." Not that this new intimacy was distasteful to her. She wanted it very much. Navah meant more to her now than merely spending the night with him. She was afraid that that night would change all things. She was afraid that Navah would change, just as Bill did after the first few nights. She couldn't afford that now. Navah must not be lost. She looked at him and was reassured. She did not see that dog-like appeal in his eyes, that beseeching, lipsmacking look she had noted in others who had made similar proposals.

The inn was a prim little structure set back from the road in a clump of hemlocks. June and Navah were received by an elderly woman who looked shocked when the Oriental and the fashionably-dressed girl asked for adjoining rooms. After registering at an improvised desk, they were taken upstairs.

June was entranced with her room. The walls were panelled in knotted pine. In the center was a four-poster maple bedstead covered with a blue hand-woven spread. Two windows, draped with white tie-back curtains, looked out at the hills blue against the red afterglow of the sunset. At the other end was a fireplace in front

of which was a braided rug, a Boston rocker and a Windsor chair.

Navah came in with a bottle of cocktails.

"Isn't this the cutest room you ever saw?" asked June, patting powder on her face before a mirror over the highboy. "My grandmother's bedroom must have been like this."

Navah laughed and poured the cocktail.

"It's puritanically cute," he said. "But I like you in it. How about a drink? It's from the Legation cellar."

"Swell," said June, propping herself up on the bed. "Let's drink to our very proper hostess. Did you see the look she gave us when we came in?"

"Brrr, not to her. Here's to the most beautiful girl I've met in America," said Navah standing up and clicking his heels. "To your eyes, your lovely mouth, to everything about you that has opened my eyes to the beauty and charm of women."

"You speak as if I were the first woman you ever knew," said June smiling, secretly pleased at his compliment and formality.

"It may sound trite but it's true."

"Now Navah, you don't expect me to believe that. You're kidding me."

"No, I'm not. I mean it. When I came to America five years ago white women were absolutely unattractive to me."

"Why, Navah, how silly!"

"It does sound silly, doesn't it? I found white skin repulsive. I thought the so-called freedom and emancipation of American girls coarse and crude. You see they are so different from Siamese women who never thrust themselves into the foreground, who practice shyness and modesty rather than brazenness."

"Navah, I think you need another drink."

"No, I'm just trying to make you understand how I felt. I was lonesome and miserable. I put it down to the fact that there were biological differences. I saw beauty only in terms of brown. But you've changed me. I admit now that white women fascinate me and that you have been the greatest fascinator of them all. Or shall I call you my emancipator?"

"Emancipator of what?" asked June, sipping her cocktail and smiling at him.

"You've released me from the shackles of brown blood. You've made me see the beauty that also lies in white arms, white fingers and red lips."

"You talk beautifully, Navah. Your romantic ways go so well in this room."

He stared at her for a moment, got up from the foot of the bed and walked over to the window.

After dinner June changed to a pink negligee trimmed in maribou. When Navah came in he found her sitting in the high-backed rocker, smoking a cigarette. A fire danced in the fireplace.

"Well, aren't you the picture of New England com-

fort!" he said, pulling up a four-legged stool covered with needle point. He sat at her feet.

"Are you happy?"

"Gorgeously," she said.

"It's perfect here with you, the fire, the quiet, the moon looking into the windows. There's something so pleasantly domestic about it. You see, you are making me a real American."

"Aren't Siamese men domestic?"

"Not in the sense that Americans are. You'd never catch a Siamese sitting at the feet of a woman and worshipping her as I am. It would be the other way around."

"Oh, is that it?" she laughed. "So you want women at your feet?"

She was entranced by his talk. She forgot she was one hundred miles from New York, alone in the mountains with a man, an Oriental.

"No," he said. "I want you to stay right where you are."

He moved closer to her.

"You know," she said, "I don't think I'd like Siam."

"Why not, dear?"

"I don't think I'd like the men."

"You like me, don't you?"

"You're not so bad," she said, patting him playfully on the head.

"Siamese men are not so bad, either. It's because they are accustomed to having many women."

"Oh, so they're polygamous?"

"Of course. Didn't you know that?"

"No, but I'm not surprised. Siam is not the only place where polygamy is practiced. Americans are just as polygamous."

"It's true. Polygamy exists everywhere. You find less of it where women know how to interest men."

"I wonder whether you're right," she said seriously. "I have put it down to the brute in man."

"Now don't be too hard on us. You, of all people, should be the last to say that. You, with all the charms and fascinations and mysteries of your sex put together in one little, delightful person I know as June."

"Navah, are you trying to make love to me?"

Her hand trembled slightly as she reached for another cigarette.

"Yes, trying. That's a good word for it. I don't know how to do it. Siamese never make love. It's either a lost art or one that never existed."

"Why, that's ridiculous. Don't the men take girls out? Don't they pet? Don't they kiss, just as we do?"

"They really don't," he laughed, taking her hand. "If a girl is seen in the company of a man before she is married she is called a prostitute. A Siamese girl would be insulted if I complimented her as I have you tonight. Kissing is considered vulgar."

He put her hand to his lips and kissed it gently.

"It sounds awful," said June, "but you don't seem to find kissing vulgar."

"Kissing you, June, is heavenly. I'm glad I'm here and not in Siam."

"So am I," she laughed, rumpling his hair.

"Don't judge us too harshly by what I said. The Siamese have just removed the trimmings, that's all."

"But the trimmings are the very spice of the relations between a man and a woman."

"Yes, darling. So you've taught me. I shall miss them when I go back to Siam, unless. . . ."

June withdrew her hand.

"I didn't know that you were going back."

"Yes, early next month. I'm going to work in the Foreign Office for about two months and then I shall go to the Legation in Rome."

Her heart sank. This was then, to be one of the last evenings they would spend together. She felt cold.

"It's getting chilly," she said. "Get my coat, will you, dear?"

She stood up and waited for him to slip it on. He held it for a moment, tossed it over to the bed and took her in his arms.

She turned around and buried her head on his shoulder. He mumbled unintelligible words of love. He kissed her neck, her lips, her eyes.

“Sweetheart, beloved, you’re crying. Aren’t you happy?”

“I love you, Navah, and you’re going away.”

“Going away?”

“Didn’t you say you were going away?”

“Not from you, dear.”

“Then you’re staying here after all?”

“No, you’re going with me.”

“To Siam?”

“Of course.”

They sat on the bed and embraced again.

“Can you be serious for a moment?”

“No, I’m too happy.”

“Darling, if I don’t tell you this it will be on my conscience all my life.”

“Oh! Another woman?”

“No, no! It’s about you.”

“That’s better. What is it, dear?”

“Do you realize what you are doing by becoming my wife?”

“I certainly do. I will be married to a man who means everything in the world to me.”

“No, forget for a moment that we love each other.”

“Impossible.”

“Do you realize that I’m an Oriental?”

“A wonderful one.”

“Do you know that you are defying custom? That

you will probably cut yourself off in many ways from your own people by marrying me?"

"I know what you're driving at. I know what people will say. I know that our children will be Eurasians. That frightens me somewhat."

"But you are not the only one who will bear a stigma. I will, too. You must remember that my people are just as opposed to such a marriage as your own. I want you to see that, and I want you also to know that I will always love you."

"Will they hate me?"

"That remains to be seen."

He told her he did not intend spending the rest of his life in Siam; that his work would take them all over the world and for that reason there was no need to worry about what his parents would do.

The fire had gone out. The room was dark. The bed was tessellated with squares of moonlight.

"Darling," whispered June, "promise me that you will never leave me."

"Never," said Navah.

Two white arms gently drew the brown man close to her—white, moonlit arms. Corn-tassel hair was beneath his brown cheek. Soft, tender lips sought his own and clung there.

They were married at Borough Hall in Brooklyn and at the end of the month sailed from Vancouver on the

Empress of Russia for Bangkok. It was the honeymoon of June's dreams—the great ship, the luxurious suite, bizarre lands ahead, a husband whose diplomatic position called for deference and respect from the ship's officers and passengers. It was all as she had visualized it—all except the man. He was brown, but she was not yet conscious of that.

On the first day out, Navah introduced her to Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Allerton. Florence Allerton was a semi-invalid in her early thirties. Her husband was a tall, broad-shouldered Englishman who radiated vigor. He was manager of the Bangkok branch of East India, Ltd., and he and his wife were returning after spending several months in England and Canada.

It was reassuring to June to hear Mrs. Allerton refer to Bangkok as home. It gave a more tangible composition to the diffuse picture she had in her mind of her husband's country. Mrs. Allerton was certain June was going to adore Siam and that she was going to be very happy there. But when the Siamese and his wife left, she shook her head:

“Navah never should have done it,” she said.

“She's really a beauty, too,” said her husband. “I never saw a prettier girl. It's really a shame that she threw herself away like that. Of course, Navah is all right, but I doubt very much if he is going to be happy. Their only hope is to stay out of Bangkok.”

“My only hope is that Navah understands what they

both face and that he does not go native like the others who return from the West," said his wife.

After three weeks of glorious leisure at sea, in Yokohama, Kobe, Nagasaki and Shanghai, June, Navah and the Allertons disembarked at Hong Kong to await a ship for Bangkok. They had reserved rooms at the Prince Edward Hotel and there Navah found letters and newspapers from home. June scanned the papers and laughed at the unpronounceable names of the Siamese in the stories. One was an interview with a Siamese woman who petitioned the Queen for a law abolishing polygamy. The article set forth the trials and tribulations of minor wifehood and closed with the following paragraph:

"And what about the chief wife? She was the sole possessor of her husband's heart when they knelt to receive the blessings from older persons at their wedding. Often when his sympathy and attention are needed most he leaves her to seek another young woman to take her place. Her pride is injured. She cannot hold up her head. She cannot be independent. Insult is added to injury, for it is common practice for husbands to bring their newest 'finds' to live in the same house."

The story had a familiar ring. Life in Bangkok was no different than what she had found it in Greenwich Village and Brooklyn. In America men kept their women in separate establishments but in Siam they brought them into their own homes.

She shuddered at the thought and showed the article to Navah, who laughed and said it was grossly exaggerated.

It was not until she boarded the *Kweiyang* that June realized how far away, how far off the beaten track, was the home of her husband. There was no other way to get to Bangkok than by freighter. The *Kweiyang*, a small British vessel, her name painted in bold, Chinese characters on her side, had accommodations for four passengers, and June, her husband and the Allertons had the ship to themselves. They slept in bunks instead of beds and had their meals in the officers' mess.

June was disappointed by the crudeness of it all. She missed the social life of the big liner in which she played an active part. But as slowly and steadily the ship made its way down the South China Sea and into the Gulf of Siam, the beauty of tropic waters, the witchery of the foremast describing an arc just under the low-hanging stars, the quiet, indolent régime of the little world she was living in, enchanted her. Yet as the thought came into her mind that each day brought her closer to her destination, her heart would stop beating. Fear would grip her and she would rise from the deck chair and peer ahead. When her straining eyes perceived only the ever-present horizon of water, she relaxed again and breathed easier. When at dinner several days later the captain said they would reach Bangkok the following night, the food that a moment before tasted

pleasant, turned flat and every bite she swallowed seemed to lodge in her throat.

She tried to analyze her fears. Why should she become panicky at the thought of leaving the vessel? What was the matter? Mrs. Allerton had reassured her many times that life in Bangkok was no different than what she had known at home. People ate, worked, slept, danced and lived in houses with kitchens, dining rooms, bedrooms and tiled baths. Wasn't Navah Americanized?

"You're silly," she would say, but somehow she couldn't convince herself.

That evening she stood in the bow with Allerton and watched the vessel cleave the sea into phosphorescent gems. As a gesture to monotony she had put on her most attractive evening gown, a black feather of a dress which appeared to be more a foil for her white arms and throat than a garment. When she became tired, Allerton spread his handkerchief for her on the sooty hatch. She hummed a jazz tune for a moment and tapped the scaly, steel deck with silver-slipped feet.

"I suppose you think I was foolish to dress tonight," she said.

"Not at all," said Allerton. "The old tub seems to be more livable because of it."

"I feel as if I had put on my best clothes to have dinner alone on a desert island."

"Really, I feel hurt. Aren't we all here to admire you? I think you're positively fascinating."

"I didn't put them on for that reason. I did it to bolster my morale. I feel as if the ship were going to sink."

"Why, what's the matter? Aren't you well?"

"I don't know what it is except that I sometimes think that I am walking on the brink of a high precipice and that with the next step I shall fall."

"Come, come, that's a terrible way to feel, especially while you look so beautiful."

He took her hand. She left it there for several moments oblivious of his presence. He moved his arm slowly toward her waist but before he could touch her she withdrew her hand.

"You and Florence have been lovely to me," she said. "I shall be happier knowing that you are my friends. But nice as you are, you have not succeeded in hiding your pity for me."

"Pity? I don't understand."

"I mean no offense, but you've been treating me as if I were a person about to be executed."

"My dear, you are entirely wrong," said Allerton. "We know, of course, that marriages between East and West are at best uncertain as to their outcome. But Navah is not the ordinary Oriental. He is a man of the world. He understands you. He knows what both of you face. I am certain that everything will be all right."

"I hope so," said June.

When they came to the mouth of the Chao Phya, the slight breeze which had fanned the heat died. The *Kweiyang* came to a complete stop and her rusty, muddy anchor groaned and then splashed into the russet sea. The water over the bar was too low and she had to wait for the shift of the tide.

Navah was as excited as a schoolboy starting on vacation. He held tightly to June's arm as they stood on the second bridge and scanned the horizon. The land was so low that June could not see where the water left off and the land began.

"That's home," said Navah. "In a few more hours we'll be there."

"How long must we wait here?" asked June.

"An hour or so," he said. "I suppose you wonder why they don't dredge that bar so that we could go right up to the city."

June was about to say that she hoped the bar would never be removed; that she preferred to remain right here; that she hoped the ship would turn back. Instead she said:

"No, why?"

"It's a foolish idea, but the Siamese believe that the bar is a natural protection from enemies. They think it prevents gunboats from coming up the river."

June found nothing friendly in the scene that unfolded itself as the *Kweiyang* lumbered through the muddy waters of the river. The stream had no banks.

Palms, tamarinds, areca nut trees and banana bushes came right down to the water. Back of them the alluvial plain stretched for miles—green jungle, muddy and oozy, of a thicker consistency than the Chao Phya.

“Over there is Paknam, a little fishing village I used to go to when I was a child,” said Navah, pointing to a clump of rickety wharfs and attap-roofed huts on stilts. They reminded June of a crowd of stumpy Japanese on high-cleated *geta* standing in the mud watching the ship go by.

“We’ll have to take a little trip down there and get some rice and cocoanut cakes baked in palm leaves. The town is famous for them.”

“I don’t think I’d like that,” said June.

“Why, my dear, they’re delicious,” said Navah. “Wait till you taste them.”

June shuddered.

Navah pointed out the river temple built by King Mongkut, the Wise, with its storied roofs and *chedi* lifting a spire-like finger to the sky. It occupied an entire island brooding on the muddy waters, a Buddhist sentinel.

Om mane padmi hum,—the dewdrop slips
Into the shining sea.

Occasionally there would be an opening on either side of the river where narrow streams flowed into the jungle. They were canals leading back into the sea of

ooze and vegetation to a village where brown folk dwell, brooding like the Perfect One, careless of time.

Directly ahead was a green island as wide as the *Kweiyang*. The ship did not veer from its course and June grasped the rail to await the shock as the blunt nose of the vessel struck it. The island parted and the ship passed through it. It was a floating mass of water hyacinths torn from the banks by the current.

The ship passed sampans with round thatch covers over cargoes of brown paddy. A boatman dressed in a skirt stood in the stern with a sweeping oar, surrounded by his naked children. His wife was bent over a flower-pot brazier cooking dinner.

Logs of teak, lashed together into a huge raft, floated by, guided by men in "G strings." Five years ago or more these steel-like timbers, against which the white ant is powerless, started on their way from the forests of the north to the mills of Bangkok.

The stream narrowed and became more crowded as bend after bend was turned. Sampans, canoes, sailing ships, junks, tramp steamers indicated the approach to the sleepy capital of the Land of the White Elephant. Trees were pushed back a few feet from the shores to make room for dirty frame buildings out of which black smoke flowed in leisurely clouds, a slow-motion symbol of industry in the tropical East.

The *Kweiyang* turned toward the shore where stood a tottering, open dock. Vari-colored *panungs*, *passins*

and *sarongs* made it look like a flower garden. A crowd was watching the ship come to its moorings.

Navah could not contain himself.

"Isn't it wonderful?" he said. "Look, dear, see how beautiful the city is, how quiet, how peaceful. I'm sure that's my family down there on the dock."

"Are all those people your family?" she asked.

"Some are friends but nearly all of them are relatives," he replied.

"Navah, I'm frightened," she said, clinging to his arm. "Let's not get off the ship right away. Let's wait awhile. Maybe some of them will go away."

Navah laughed and went below to see that their luggage was ready for landing.

Florence Allerton came up. She looked better than she had throughout the entire voyage.

"I'm so glad to be home again," she said. "I just can't wait until I get ashore."

"Florence, I'm afraid," said June. "Let me go with you. Navah says that all those people down there are his relatives and I'll have to meet them."

"Don't worry, my dear," laughed Mrs. Allerton. "They'll only bow as you go ashore. They didn't come down here especially to see you. It's just that they're hospitable."

"I guess I'm just a fool. They look so brown, so mysterious. I don't see how I'll go through with it."

"My heart goes out to you, dear," said Florence. "I

know how you feel. But they're not so mysterious as they appear. They are kindly, gentle and human. They won't hurt you. Everything is going to be all right. I shall run over to see you tomorrow and we'll go out together. Cheerio, sweetheart."

Navah was surrounded by a score of Siamese when he set foot on the dock and June was left alone. No one paid any attention to her. Not even one of the Siamese women. She saw several men shake Navah's hand while others raised their hands in prayer and bowed slightly from the waist. She saw him in animated conversation with an elderly man and woman. They talked for a minute and pointed in her direction. Then she saw them go off. Others surrounded Navah and it seemed hours before he came rushing back to her.

"Darling," he cried, "they've left you here all alone. I'm so sorry, but you see how it is. Come, let's go home."

"Home?" she said.

She walked across the dock in a daze. It seemed that the boards were a treadmill rolling under her and toward the water and when she set foot on the road, the road rolled back to the water. Brown faces looked at her, grinned at her, stared at her. Voices making unintelligible sounds dinned her ears. Out of the gibberish, some one kept saying:

"You fool! You fool! Why did you do it? Why didn't

you at least stay at home until he came back? It's too late now. It's too late now."

Her husband was speaking to some one in the front seat of the car. She had never heard him speak Siamese. She looked at his face. It was like the faces that mocked her. Was this Navah, the man she loved, back, so far back, on Brooklyn Heights?

The car turned from the dirt highway into a walled compound and wound its way through royal palms under which children in outlandish clothes played. She wondered whose children they were, there were so many of them.

They stopped under the carriage porch of a large, two-story, modern house of brick and stucco. Two men servants ran down the steps and opened the door. As June and Navah walked through the rooms of the lower floor, she was impressed with the luxury of the furnishings, the tapestries, the rugs, the Louis XV furniture, the profusion of the images of the Buddha, the richness of the silks.

They went upstairs past life-size photographs of venerable Siamese and wrinkled, hunched women, to a large bedroom. It was completely furnished with all the accoutrements of the Western sleeping room except for the bed. It lay in state, a massive four-poster, completely enclosed in metal screening.

"This is not so bad, is it, June?" asked Navah after the servants had brought up their bags and trunks.

"No, dear, it really is lovely," said June.

The familiar domestic objects had reassured her somewhat and she was more at ease.

"You have the honor of occupying the guest room," said Navah with a proud smile. "European princes and noblemen as well as several American millionaires have slept in this room. You see my father is very social-minded."

"It's too bad that I can't add some honor to its roster of occupants," said June.

"Now, sweetheart, don't be that way," said Navah. "You're tired. It's been a pretty trying day for you. Rest up, and tomorrow everything will be all right."

"I hope so, but I'm afraid not."

"Why?" asked Navah, provoked.

"Why haven't I met your father and mother?"

"June, dear, things are different here. You'll meet them tomorrow."

"Who were those elderly people you were speaking to on the dock?"

"Oh, just friends."

"They seemed rather put out about something."

"No, not exactly. Just relatives who had to hurry off to another appointment."

"Weren't they your father and mother?"

"Well, all right, if you must know—they were."

"Why did they act that way?"

“Now, June dear, you’re making it hard for me.
I . . .”

“They disapproved of me.”

“I warned you some time ago that that might happen.”

“Then why did you bring me here?”

“Where else could we have gone?”

“To a hotel.”

“But I couldn’t do that. Why the shame of it would break their hearts. Don’t you see that?”

“Yes, I see that.”

So this was the end of her honeymoon, the end of her dream of supreme happiness. She felt herself growing weaker and fainter. Any moment now and she would fall over the edge of the precipice that haunted her. She wanted to cry. She wanted Navah to take her in his arms and pet her.

“Come now, June, brace up,” said Navah. “I’ll ring for the boy to bring a cocktail.”

“Don’t get one for me,” she said. “I’m going to bed. Perhaps, as you say, I’ll feel better in the morning.”

She awoke with a start. It was daybreak. Navah was sleeping peacefully at her side under a purple silk throw. From the open windows came the soft boom of temple gongs in echoless tones, increasing in tempo until they reached trip-hammer speed. They were calling the monks to meditation and to fare forth from the

temple precincts with their begging bowls to seek a morning meal from good Buddhist housewives.

She got up and looked out of the window. A well-cropped lawn with frangipani trees, acacias, palms, mangoes and beds of bright-hued flowers extended from the house to the river bank. At the end of a dock where there was a pagoda-like shelter, a large cabin-cruiser was moored. The river was crowded with small sampans, propelled by one oar from a high poop. On the other bank was Wat Arun, Temple of the Rising Sun. Its great *chedi*, inlaid with bits of porcelain, atop a storied pyramid, glistened in the early morning sun, aloof from the drab shacks and godowns near its base.

As June gazed at this scene of tropical beauty and luxury she wondered what the day would bring, what other days would bring. Navah would be working. In fact he had to begin this morning. What would she do? His mother and father would obviously be unfriendly. Could she remain in this room for two months until Navah would be ready to leave for Rome?

“At least,” she thought, “it’s a beautiful prison.”

When Navah awoke he was surprised to see her up.

“You must get used to sleeping late,” he said.

“There’s nothing to do until late afternoon. You’re no longer in the land of hurry and rush.”

Instead of putting on his Western clothes he took from a chest of drawers a blue silk cloth about three yards long and a yard wide.

"It's been a long time since I've put a *panung* on," he laughed. "I don't know whether I'll be able to manage it."

He put the full length of it around his waist and brought the ends together in front of him.

"The ends," he said, "are to be put together and folded down diagonally."

He tried to make the fold and each time the silk slipped from his waist to his knees.

"Here, June," he laughed, "give me a hand."

When the fold was completed he pulled the end of it under his legs and pinned it back at the waist. When he had put on stockings that reached just below the knees, white oxfords and a military coat of white pongee, he looked at himself in the mirror and turned to June.

"Don't you think it's cute?" he laughed.

"You look foolish," she said. "Are you going to wear it all the time?"

"Why, certainly."

"Can't you wear Western clothes?"

"Not while I'm here. This is the national costume."

"You certainly don't look like an American any more."

"I'm not an American. I'm a Siamese."

"I don't see how I'll be able to go out with you in that outfit."

"Oh, you'll get used to it."

A servant brought in a large tray of steaming food and placed it on a table. There was a huge silver bowl of rice, fried fish with cocoanut milk and a stew of meat with vegetables.

“At last some real food,” said Navah, as he helped himself to a large portion of rice and fish.

June sat and watched him.

“What’s the matter, June? Aren’t you hungry?”

“Ye gods, how can you eat that stuff for breakfast?”

“Why, this is what we have every morning.”

“Is there any chance of getting some fruit, toast and coffee?”

He called the boy, who dropped to his knees as he entered. Navah spoke to him a moment.

“Sorry, dear, but there is no bread and coffee,” Navah said. “He’s going to bring you some mangoes, mangosteens and tea.”

She nibbled the fruit and sipped the unsweetened tea while Navah smacked his lips over the food that revolted her.

“I’ll probably get used to you in that funny costume and may learn to eat your food once in a while, but it’s going to be hard turning native,” she said when they had finished.

“June, you’re making it so difficult. Remember, it’s only for two months. On November first we’ll be off to Europe.”

A month passed and June became reconciled to her

prison-like existence. In the mornings she would remain in her room and talk to Chalerm, a servant Navah had hired for her because she spoke English. On the few occasions she went downstairs she sent Chalerm ahead to make certain that Navah's parents were not around. She had said nothing to Navah about them since the night of their arrival. She was resigned to the fact that they did not wish to meet her.

"Why do they hate me?" she once asked Chalerm.

"They don't hate you, *mem*," she said. "They are afraid of your blood."

"My blood, Chalerm?"

"Yes, your blood. They want brown children. They will not accept yours. You and *Khun* Navah better go away soon or they will make you very unhappy."

As the middle of October drew near she noticed that Navah looked worried. He was irritable and often left her alone in the evening.

"Navah," she said, "you're troubled about something. What's the matter?"

"Nothing," he said gruffly.

"You're not worried about me, are you? I'm all right now. It's just two more weeks and we'll be off."

"We won't be off," he blurted.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"We're not going to Rome, that's all."

"Not going? You're joking."

"No, damn it, I'm not joking. I wish you wouldn't

look at me that way. The Minister has decided that I stay here indefinitely. He is sending some one else to Rome.”

“Navah!” she cried. In the blackness that overcame her she saw the hope on which she had been living, vanish.

“June, I’m sorry. I’m sorry only for your sake. I couldn’t help it. I think my father was instrumental in bringing it about.”

June was touched by his sincerity. She realized that he was hurt because the change in plans would make her miserable.

“Your father?” she asked.

“Yes. He’s a power in the government.”

“Then he has done us a good turn.”

“I don’t understand, June.”

“I mean we can now go back to the States.”

He laughed hysterically.

“June, you’re a child. How are we to get back?”

“Why, just go back, that’s all.”

“My dear, it’s impossible. I can’t go unless I have a job.”

“But, Navah, you’ll get a job when you go back.”

“Darling, you don’t seem to realize that I can’t leave this country for America unless I go on government business. I’ll never get a passport otherwise. If I could, I’d go with you tomorrow. I’d go tonight if there were a way.”

He went to her and took her in his arms.

“June, dear, I still love you as much as I did when I asked you to marry me. I know that you’ve been through hell these past few weeks. I have, too. But all the ways are closed. We could go to Europe on our own, but that would take money. Do you think that father would give me any for that purpose? Never. His mind is made up that I stay here.”

“Well, I guess I must make up my mind to be a native.”

“No, June, you don’t have to do that. I want you to be yourself. That’s why I love you. Now will you do something for me?”

She looked at him and smiled.

“Florence Allerton is going to Hua Hin for two weeks,” he said. “I saw her yesterday and she said she was coming over to ask you to go with her. Why not go? You’ll like it there by the sea. The hotel is first class. You’ll have a good time.”

“All right, I’ll go providing you look around for a place of our own to live in. Just for the two of us.”

“June, June!” he cried. “If that could only be! It would have to be a miracle. Nothing else but a miracle.”

June left for the seashore with Florence the next afternoon and Navah began to search for his miracle. It was not forthcoming. His father was adamant. Either Navah must marry Phya Banja’s daughter and make her

his Number One wife, or have his income cut off. The marriage must be performed at once.

Navah could have defied him. He could have lived on the small salary he received from the Foreign Office, but it meant that June would be deprived of the luxuries of the white colony. She would have to live according to Siamese standards. Could she do it? He decided that for her. She could not. Neither of them could get along without the money supplied him by his father.

If he refused to accept his father's terms both he and his parents would lose caste. He couldn't inflict that curse upon his father. He would explain it all to June and she would understand. She would be his Number Two wife but she would know that she was first in his heart.

And so the marriage was quietly arranged. The ceremony was held a week later in Phya Banja's home in the presence of relatives and friends. Navah had been given an opportunity to meet Arun, his future wife, but had refused. He saw her for the first time at the wedding. She was a beautiful girl but she stirred no response in Navah. He was thinking of June and telling himself over and over again as if to make himself believe what he said—that she would understand.

The *Thun*, or housekeeping capital, was counted. A huge silver betel-nut bowl was presented to Navah, who took from it a nut and placed it in his mouth. It was then presented to the bride, who did likewise. They

stood hand in hand glumly chewing bitter betel while the guests bound them together with a sacred cord and anointed them with holy water.

Navah and his Number One bride drove to his home followed by guests who had one more function to perform before the ceremony was complete. After assembling in the drawing room, they led the bride and bridegroom upstairs to the room which June and Navah occupied. He and the girl were pushed in amid much laughter. The door was closed and they were left alone in the bridal chamber.

Two weeks after Navah's second wedding he came to the Allertons' house where June was living and begged her to return. His father had bought him a house. June and he could live there. He would never touch his Number One wife. She would be a servant. June would always be first in his heart. Would June only see things that way?

June was bitter. She had been tricked and deceived. She should not enter into any polygamous arrangement with Navah even if it were perfectly proper and legal. She was through being a man's second fiddle. Navah better forget her and think of his Siamese wife, his father and his prestige.

When he left her she went to Florence.

"Wasn't I right?" she asked. "Or am I so upset by what has happened to allow myself to think that I could go back to him?"

“Certainly, June,” she said. “I understand how you feel. I would have done the same thing.”

“It’s an awful mess, Florence. Navah means more to me than any man I’ve known. Had he defied his father I would have been glad to live with him in a coolie hut. But not with another woman.”

She shuddered at the thought. Florence put her arms around her.

“All my life,” said June, “men have wanted me to be their Number Two wife and now that I’m married to the man I love, I’m still just a concubine.”

“Don’t be too hard on Navah,” said Florence. “If he had refused his father’s wishes, your life would be as hellish as it would be if you went back to him now. His father might have had him discharged from his job. Here the father is the law and the son does not disobey as easily as he would if he were American or British. Navah knew that either way would be terrible and he chose what he thought was the easiest.”

Florence did everything she could to make June forget. She took her to bridge games, to the Ladies’ Musical Society and the monthly dances of the Sports Club. The men looked at her with longing glances. They didn’t dare seek her company openly as they would other women because she was no longer respectable—a cast-off wife of a brown man. She received several offers of a house of her own but elected to remain with the Allertons. The women, on the other hand, treated June with

icy formality. They referred to her as "that person" and wondered "why Florence Allerton took her in."

"You're playing with fire," they would say to Florence. "She'll get your husband if you don't look out."

But Florence only laughed at their warnings and begged them to be decent to June.

One night, while Hugh was upcountry, she left June alone to go to a bridge dinner. The houseboy brought June her meal and when it was finished she got into her negligee, rubbed mosquito lotion on her ankles, legs and arms, and sat down to read.

She had been reading for about two hours when she heard a car stop in the compound. Thinking it was Florence she went downstairs just as Hugh walked in.

"Hello, Juney," he said. "Where's Florence?"

"She's at the Franklin's bridge. She didn't expect you."

"She didn't, eh? Well, that's too bad. Why didn't you go with her?"

"Thought I'd stay home for a change, Hugh."

"I don't blame you. I get sick of this running around, too. Let's have a drink."

"Fine," said June.

He clapped his hands and the boy brought whisky and soda.

"Here's to you, June," he said. "You seem to become more beautiful every day."

"It's a curse, Hugh."

"No, it's a blessing."

They talked for half an hour and June went to bed.

She was awakened by some one standing next to her bed. Hugh caught her hand before she could turn on the light.

"June, don't do that," he said thickly. "June, I've come here because I love you. I tried to stay away and couldn't."

He drew her to him.

"Don't, Hugh," she cried. "You've been damned decent to me. Please don't spoil it all in this way. I can't do it. You and Florence mean too much to me. Try to be yourself."

"Come on, now, June. Just one kiss. Surely you can give me that in return for what we've done."

He forced his lips to hers. His hand clutched her bosom. Suddenly he stopped. Florence's car came into the compound. Hugh slipped out of the room.

Several days later June told Florence that she thought she had lived with them long enough. She would get a room somewhere and look for work.

"Why that's impossible, my dear," said Florence. "Aren't you happy here?"

"You've been lovely to me," June replied.

"Only the other day Hugh said how pleased he was that we could do something for you."

"That's the trouble," June laughed. "You've done too much. I've got to do something for myself."

“If you do, the foreign colony will put you in the class with common prostitutes.”

“The hell with them,” said June. “Let them think I’m a prostitute. I’d be truer to myself if I were.”

She took a room with a Eurasian family on Si Phya Road and when she had exhausted every prospect of a job, Mme. Moscovitz, who was stranded in Bangkok two years before with a Russian theatrical troupe, called on her. She offered the best place she had in the house and promised that only the best men in town would see her.

Thompson brought his chair down with a bang from where it was tilted against the veranda wall.

“Boy!” he called to a waiter. “Two whisky sodas.”

Thompson turned to me.

“Well, there you are,” he said with a sigh. “There’s the story of how June Carey entered the house of Moscovitz.”

White women in stylish evening gowns and their husbands in white mess jackets were arriving for the hotel’s weekly dance. The jazz orchestra of Siamese musicians was tuning up in the pavilion across the lawn.

“My God, Frank,” I said. “And to think I could have helped her by giving her a job.”

The boy brought the drinks and we drank in silence.

“Tell me this, Frank,” I said. “Where did you get her story?”

"From June and from Florence Allerton. I see a lot of the Allertons."

"When did June move into Moscowitz's?"

"Yesterday."

"Is there anything we can do for her?"

"You might pay her to write the story of her life now that you know it."

"I'm not kidding. I mean it."

We were joined by Jack Dietrich, private secretary of the American Minister; George Hunt, who operated the Hudson and Essex agency, and Lawton Willis of the Fairbanks Company.

"What do you think of this Carey girl?" asked Hunt as they pulled up chairs.

"What's there to think about?" said Willis. "She seems to know what she is doing. She wouldn't be there if she didn't."

"Do you think it was of her own choosing?" asked Thompson.

"Sure," said Willis. "If she didn't want to go there she wouldn't be there, would she?"

"It's not her fault, Willis," said Thompson. "She's been the victim of circumstances—lousy circumstances."

"What would it cost to send her home?" asked Hunt.

"That's funny," said Willis. "He asks how much it would cost to send her home when he knows that he'll never have enough to buy himself a ticket."

"I figure about eight hundred dollars," said Dietrich.

"That's around eighteen hundred *ticals*," said Willis. "Who in hell has that much money? You fellows are acting like a lot of damn missionaries."

"Suppose we get together the money, how would we give it to her?" asked Thompson. "Do you think she'll accept charity from strange men?"

"Of course she would," laughed Willis. "Isn't she a prostitute?"

"Shut up, will you," said Dietrich. "Who would give it to her?"

"Florence Allerton," said Hunt. "We can give it to her and tell her to tell June it's a loan."

"You talk as if you already had the money," said Willis.

"We'll get it," said Dietrich.

By the next day we had nineteen hundred *ticals* and I was delegated to see Mrs. Allerton.

"She'll never take it," said Mrs. Allerton, "not even from me."

"Try it," I said. "Maybe she will."

"She's a pretty headstrong girl," Mrs. Allerton said. "The last time I saw her she told me that she never wanted to go home because she felt certain that she would either be a first class concubine or prostitute soon after she arrived."

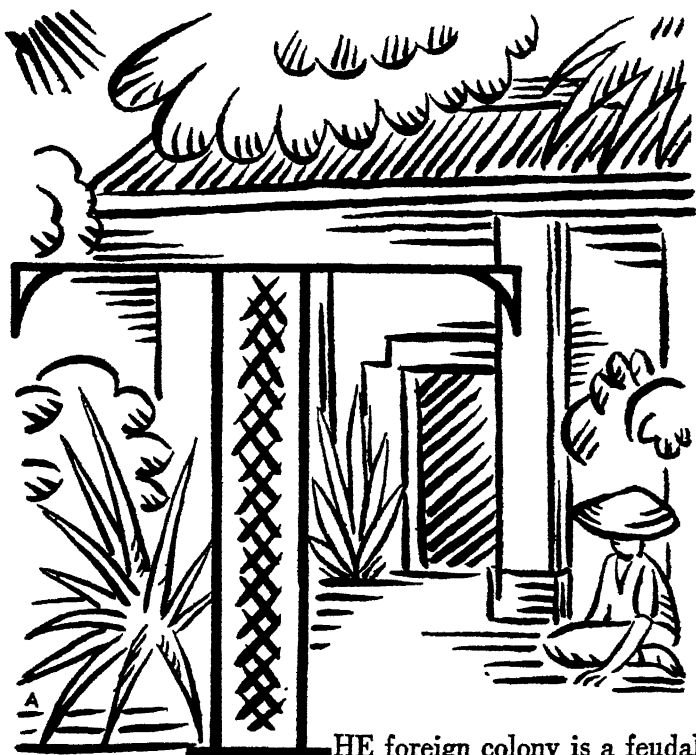
"If she really saw the money she might change her mind," I urged.

“No, I have a better scheme,” said Mrs. Allerton. “I bought her a ticket on last week’s Sports Club sweepstakes. She knows about it. I’ll tell her that she won the money. She won’t think of looking at the papers.”

June took the money, gave the girls of the house a champagne party, and sailed the next week for the States.

CHAPTER 11





THE foreign colony is a feudal municipality, most of whose members regard themselves as martyrs elected by those at home to be standard bearers of white civilization. Fate has appointed them to suffer the trials and hardships of an alien existence while they attempt to knock some sense into the heads of slant-eyed heathens. They believe that they are the prototypes of Captain Cook and Raffles, but before they

make a move they give deep consideration to what their neighbor will say and how it will affect their social standing. The complacency and smugness on Main Streets of American small towns become insignificant when compared to similar qualities existing in Oriental white communities.

Who are these couriers of Western culture? For the most part they are merchants exploiting a naïve people. About ninety per cent of their number are recruited from Europe's middle class. The majority are clerks and business workers whose limited abilities made competition too one-sided for them at home. They were forced by economic necessity—not by the lure of the East—to make a living elsewhere and readily signed a three-year-contract with passage paid guaranteeing them a larger salary than they could earn at home.

On arrival at his post, the latest employe, if he is unmarried, is generally put up at a company mess, similar to a college fraternity house. There the freshman is initiated into the secrets of the society in which he is to dwell. He soon learns what is and what is not done. He learns that the man in the retail business is on a lower social scale than the man who sells his goods at wholesale prices and that the Number One man in the biggest commercial house is the colony's social mentor. As at home, the man with money is to be looked up to, but here he is regarded with greater reverential awe. If the neophyte is not already a snob he is soon taught to be

one. He discovers new powers in himself when his servant addresses him as master.

If the newcomer brings a wife and takes a house, the first purchase she will make will be a small wooden box on which her name will be printed above the legend "Not At Home." This she will place on the gate post at the entrance to their compound.

When the box is up it is a signal to all, who are so inclined, to pay a call. They will send their *syces* with their cards and the *syces* will drop them into the box. That constitutes a formal visit. If cards are found with a corner turned down it is an indication that some one has paid a personal call but was careful to come around when the "Not At Home" box was on the gate. All these calls must be returned and the new arrival will have to send her cards to be dropped into the boxes of her proxy visitors. Neglect in this connection may place her outside the pale.

I did not install a "Not At Home" box when I moved into my house and I recall only one occasion when a member of the foreign colony came to pay a formal visit. I was entertaining our advertising manager, a Scotchman, and one of our photographers, with whisky sodas. We had had two or three drinks when a shiny, new sedan was driven into the compound. From the auto there emerged a well-dressed, rather portly lady whom I did not recognize. Unaware that she came only to leave her card, I asked her in and called to the servant to bring a

drink. She declined and even refused to let me order a lime squash.

I noticed that the advertising man and the photographer were uneasy and stiffly turned down another drink. In the spirit of banter I ventured a polite remark that it was a good thing that there was no prohibition law in Siam. At that the lady arose, smiled very icily and took her departure. Puzzled, I saw her to the car and when I returned I found my guests convulsed with laughter.

“Didn’t you know that Mrs. Black is the wife of the richest missionary in town and that she and her husband are the founders of the prohibition movement for Siamese and Chinese converts?” the advertising manager blurted out.

The resident of the foreign colony becomes a slave to good form and must do everything *comme il faut*. His mottoes are “is it done?,” “go slowly,” “what will the firm say?” And he acts as if he were under the lorgnettes of a thousand Mrs. Grundys. And what are the consequences should he do otherwise? If he displays originality, he is eccentric; if he is sure enough of himself to follow his own inclinations and shows initiative, he is dubbed “common,” or “selfish,” or, if the critics are feminine, his wife is “ambitious.” If he succeeds and wins by his own efforts a niche in a higher social stratum, instead of recognizing his achievement, his friends gain a morbid satisfaction by reminding one an-

other that he was "nothing" when he first came out and they attribute his rise to impudence or good luck.

The life of the man in a business office is about as ideal as any of us would want it to be. He arrives there between 8 and 8:30 A. M.; takes two hours for tiffin (lunch) and a nap; quits work at four o'clock and has tea. Then off he hurries to his club for golf, tennis, badminton, squash rackets, rugby or cricket, dressed in shorts and a dazzling, blue blazer with a monogram of gold gleaming from the upper pocket.

When darkness comes, he sits down with his friends at tables on the club veranda or lawn, and drinks whisky sodas or gin and bitters. He drives home at about 7:30, dresses for dinner, drinks a cocktail or two and then dines, getting up from the table between ten and eleven o'clock.

At tea, over whisky sodas or cocktails, or at dinner, the favorite subject for discussion is their fellow white man and his wife. If they can implicate him and some other man's wife or find that his servants are all attractive Siamese girls, why, then there is real zest and vigor in life. If the victims of their gossip are a married woman and an unmarried man, so much the better. The whispering campaign in an American political battle is mere sign language in comparison.

Fortunately there is always some scandal to enliven their existence. The men heavily outnumber the women, who with few exceptions, are married. The attraction

of the native girl holds the unmarried man for a short time, but after all, he is white and soon longs for the companionship of his own kind of women. That there are affairs with other men's wives which often end disastrously is not surprising. Whatever turn these scandals take, every one does his best to keep any knowledge of them from the native. It is part of the white man's burden.

Despite this responsibility and other social problems which weigh so heavily upon them, I rarely met a white man who wanted to go home permanently. They may say they hate the country, the smells, the heathen, the food, but they stay on. Perhaps they are the modern lotus eaters. Perhaps it's the tropics, where roots quickly take hold in the lush earth. Perhaps something of Asia's calm seeps into fretting Western minds, revealing the wisdom of *prungnee*—tomorrow is another day.

But Arthur Cotton was an exception. He cared nothing for the delightful oblivion of lotus eating. He wanted to go home. He was obsessed with the idea. He would come to the *Daily Mail* office late nearly every afternoon, get hold of the cable spike where the day's wires from Reuter's and the United Press were filed, and pore over them for half an hour. The news seemed more personal when read from the skeletonized cablegrams than when

it was in print. It gave him an intimate contact with home.

He would also go over the prints sent us by photographic syndicates from which he chose pictures of movie actresses, skyscrapers and street scenes of New York.

"You don't want this trash, do you?" he would ask and carry them off to his room where already the walls were covered with scores of photographs, his own collection of Americana.

I liked Cotton and pitied him. He had been in Siam nine years and he spent each one of them planning to go home the next.

"Nine years, eight months and nineteen days," he told me a few months after I met him.

He carried with him a pocket diary in which he entered at the end of each day, the years, months and days of his stay in Siam.

November 20—9 years, 8 months, 19 days.

November 21—9 years, 8 months, 20 days.

November 22—9 years, 8 months, 21 days.

November in Bangkok was no time to think of home. The hot, rainy season had passed and winter had come to the jungle. It was cool at last. While nature remained resplendently green and dusty, there was a suggestion in the air of autumnal briskness such as white *émigrés* yearn for in the tropics. It is strange how a few degrees

drop in temperature will affect the lives of people accustomed to sweltering. Eighty degrees late at night will start hundreds of Occidental tongues wagging about the cold. People will talk about sleeping under sheets and some will claim the distinction of having to protect themselves with a blanket. I shall never forget how I shivered in my bath with the thermometer at 79 degrees.

With the advent of winter, Bangkok's foreign colony emerges from the shade and the punkahs and goes at life a bit more strenuously. Winter is the period of social, cultural and athletic activities which ends in March when the *Lom Wow*, or kite flying breeze, blows in from the Indian Ocean and the mercury climbs back to its accustomed place of 100 degrees in the shade.

"Why talk of going home on a day like this?" I asked Cotton. "Let's do something. Let's go somewhere."

"Where are you going to go in this dump?" he asked. "To the club or to the hotel? What are you going to do when you get there? Drink?"

"You damn kill-joy. What are you going to do when you get home?"

"There's nothing I'd like better right now than to take a ride up Fifth Avenue on a bus and then go to a speakeasy in Greenwich Village for dinner."

"Would you go alone?"

"Hell, no. I've plenty of friends who'd be glad to take me."

"How do you know?"

“Why, what are you getting at?”

“Let’s see. You left Brooklyn when you were twenty-four. You spent a year in London and nine years, how many months and how many days. . . ?”

“Please don’t kid me.”

“I’m sorry, Art.”

“Well, what were you going to say?”

“Do you still think that your friends will interest you or that you will interest your friends after all these years?”

“Why, certainly.”

“I hope you’re right, Art. Stop moping and worrying about home. Come on, let’s go over to the Silom Club. I bet I can beat you in a set of tennis.”

I knew I couldn’t. Cotton was a born athlete. He played tennis, soccer, rugby, and cricket on the club teams and had it not been for these activities, his nostalgia might have driven him to the beach. Not only was he a good athlete, but he was good-looking. His brown hair and brown eyes had won favor with all the colony’s women. But I had never heard a word about an affair.

“No I’m not playing this season” he said.

“You don’t mean it do you?” I was wondering what he would do with his spare time if he gave up his athletics.

“I hate the spirit of their games. I hate the smug way they teach sportsmanship to the natives.”

“You’re not going to allow your little argument over

the game with Chulalongkorn stop you from playing, are you?"

"Would you stand for it?"

The argument to which I referred arose during a rugby game between the Sports Club team composed of thirteen Occidentals and two Siamese against the team from Chulalongkorn University. In the midst of the game the referee, one of the pillars of the foreign colony, was called upon to make a ruling and gave the decision to the Sports Club. The university player involved in the mix-up smiled as the ruling was made and hurried back to his position for the resumption of play. At that the referee called him back and ordered him from the field. When the game was over the Siamese player asked for an explanation.

"No matter what your intention was when you smiled," said the referee, "your action was a contemptuous one and appeared to be interpreted as insubordination against the referee by the spectators."

Ninety per cent of the spectators were Siamese.

The player said that he had had no intention of ridiculing the referee. He explained that he smiled because the incident appealed to his sense of humor.

The attitude of the referee angered Cotton and when he asked that official whether he would have sent an Occidental player from the field under similar circumstances, he merely smiled. However just or unjust the

decision was the procedure was dignified and the white man's prestige was again saved.

"But, Art, if you're going to quit athletics, what are you going to do?" I asked.

"Collect pictures of New York, I guess," he replied.

I finally persuaded him to have dinner with me at the Phya Thai Palace. The cocktails, the food, the wines and the Napoleon Brandy did not take his mind off his homesickness. I made several efforts to stop him from talking but he persisted.

"For God's sake cut out your bellyaching about home and be patient until you've saved up enough money to buy your passage," I said in disgust.

He looked hurt.

"That's the trouble with me," he said. "That's all I've done since I arrived here—save money to go home. Every time I get enough something happens and I'm stuck again."

When Cotton left New York University as a civil engineer he was consumed by the desire to travel. He got himself a job in London and after five months found himself hating the city. He was miserable but he would not go home because he told his friends that he was going to make his way around the world. After a year in London he met Dewitt Dorsey, chief engineer of Machines and Metals, Limited. Dorsey took a liking to the

young American and offered him a job as his assistant in constructing a power plant in Bangkok.

Cotton and Dorsey had been in Bangkok for a year when Machines and Metals went into bankruptcy. Both men were without jobs. The firm, according to their contract, owed them salaries for two more years and passage home but the only way it could be collected was through suit in London courts.

“When the news came that the firm had failed,” Cotton told me, “Dorsey got the idea of taking over the contract to finish the job on which we were working. I had a little over six hundred dollars saved up, just a couple of hundred short of the cost of a ticket to New York. He had about one thousand dollars. He suggested that we pool our resources. He was to go to London to arrange to get the contract and to try to collect the money due us. I was to stay on the job. He proposed to organize a corporation in which I would get twenty-five per cent of the stock and he the rest. At first I did not want to go into it, but Dorsey convinced me that we could make a lot of money and that I would not only be able to go home but that I could go back with money in the bank. I gave him three hundred dollars and kept the balance for expenses while he was away.

“He returned in three months with his wife and the contract. In financing the project he told me that he was forced to give a greater percentage of the stock to his

backers so that my share dwindled to fifteen per cent and his to thirty-five per cent.”

Louise Dorsey, whom I had met on several occasions, was a beautiful brunette but emaciated physically and emotionally. She was Latin in temperament. Her black eyes burning in her thin, white face, bespoke a caged creature. I found her interesting and attractive only when her husband was absent. When the two were together they always found something wrong with each other and to listen to them was like waiting for a sparking fuse to reach dynamite. Dorsey was a cold, undemonstrative individual who, although he constantly quarreled with his wife, seemed to have some deep-rooted affection for her. For it was he who always patched up their quarrels by admitting that he was wrong.

Bangkok was the last place on earth to bring a woman of Louise's high-strung disposition and energy. She was not content to be a sacred cow, as she put it. Even her fondness for athletics did not fully absorb her. She was the best woman golfer and tennis player in the city. I had seen her and Cotton together on many occasions on the links or on the courts but I did not know, until Arthur told me on the evening we dined together, that they were in love with each other. How they managed to keep

the affair from the greedy eyes and ears of the foreign colony will always be a puzzle to me.

“When I first met Louise,” Cotton continued, “I sensed the contempt with which she held Dewitt. She would turn to me for advice and sympathy in her arguments with her husband. It was a difficult situation and I made up my mind that I would stay as far away from her as I could to avoid trouble.

“But it was impossible. Louise sought me out and accused me of running away. It soon became obvious that the more I avoided her the more attractive I became. I felt deeply sorry for her and wondered how so beautiful a woman could have made such a mess of her life. Although I tried everything I knew to prevent complications, I found myself growing more and more fond of her. Both of us were in the same trap and there was no way out. Dewitt was not interested in sports, dancing or other social activities. He spent his spare time reading detective stories. So I became Louise’s companion.

“Both of us were happy when we were together. I entirely forgot my dislike for Bangkok and my desire to go home. I was deeply in love with Louise. Dewitt seemed to have no objections to my going out with his wife. He told me he thought I was a peach to make it possible for Louise to dance, play tennis, and golf. She seemed so much happier he said and added that it made

him feel at ease because he could do what he wanted without irking her.

“But as time went on, Louise grew impatient. The need to surround our love with the utmost secrecy began to tell on her nerves. When Dewitt would go up-country I would see her in the evenings. We would sit and tell each other how much we wanted each other. She would not let me touch her. She was afraid the servants would talk and that what they said would reach white ears.

“‘Much as I hate Dewitt,’ she once told me, ‘I can’t bear a scandal. I would die if our relations were talked about in the foreign colony.’

“As a result we confined our love-making to passionate kissing while driving home at night. In the presence of other people she treated me as she did every one else. She even forced me to accept invitations of other women in order to avoid arousing suspicion. It was all as pleasant as making love in a subway train.

“Our power contract was completed and the profits were not as huge as Dewitt had pictured them. In fact my own share was but a few hundred dollars. As the work drew to an end Dewitt gradually got other work to do. I had no intention of leaving Bangkok now. Louise meant too much to me and so I put all but one thousand dollars back into the company. We had taken over several agencies for machines but the business of selling

them and installing them did not go well. We managed to get only a bare living.

“At last, Louise, unable to bear the strain under which we were living, broke down. She went to the nursing home and remained there for a month. At first I thought she was going to die. She said she wanted to die and gave the doctors and nurses little help in bringing about her recovery. How I concealed my anxiety and fears I don’t know, but she took a turn for the better and slowly recuperated.

“Several days before she left the hospital she told me she wanted to go back to London. She was convinced, she said, that if she remained here she would break down again and die. I was in a quandary. I did not want her to go. She had asked Dewitt to send her home but he refused. He didn’t have the money. She said she would get Dewitt to ask me for a loan. She would go home, return the money to me and I would join her in London.

“I begged her to wait until the firm’s business picked up so that we could both leave and have something to settle down with. She wouldn’t hear of it. She said that would never happen; I must give Dewitt my savings. She had friends from whom she could borrow once she got to London. She would send me a draft immediately. She would start suit for divorce and then I could join her.

“I gave Dewitt the money. You remember when Louise sailed. It was early in June, just about five

months ago. In the week that intervened before her departure I didn't get a moment alone with her and I had to be content to shake her hand on the deck of the steamer and watch Dewitt kiss her good-by.

"I received long letters from her mailed at ports on the route of her ship. She told me she never suffered so much in all her life as she did when she had to be so formal and cold on the day we parted. In all her notes she expressed undying gratitude and love for me and said that we would soon be together.

"I got one letter from her after she arrived in London in which she said that she was arranging to send me a draft and that she would mail it the following week. I waited and waited, not for the check but for a letter from her. I couldn't keep my mind on my work at the office. Much to my surprise I noticed that Dewitt was drinking. I had never seen him touch a drop before. Finally, after two months, I sent Louise a cable. When I received no answer I asked Dewitt if he had heard from her. He told me that she had written him from Colombo saying that she was leaving him and that she would never return. Since then he has heard nothing.

"Well, it was pretty tough while it lasted. I guess there is nothing to say but that I've been a soft-hearted fool. I suppose when Louise got back to her own world she realized that her interest in me was merely a way out of her boredom and an escape from her husband. Do you blame me for wanting to get out of this hole?

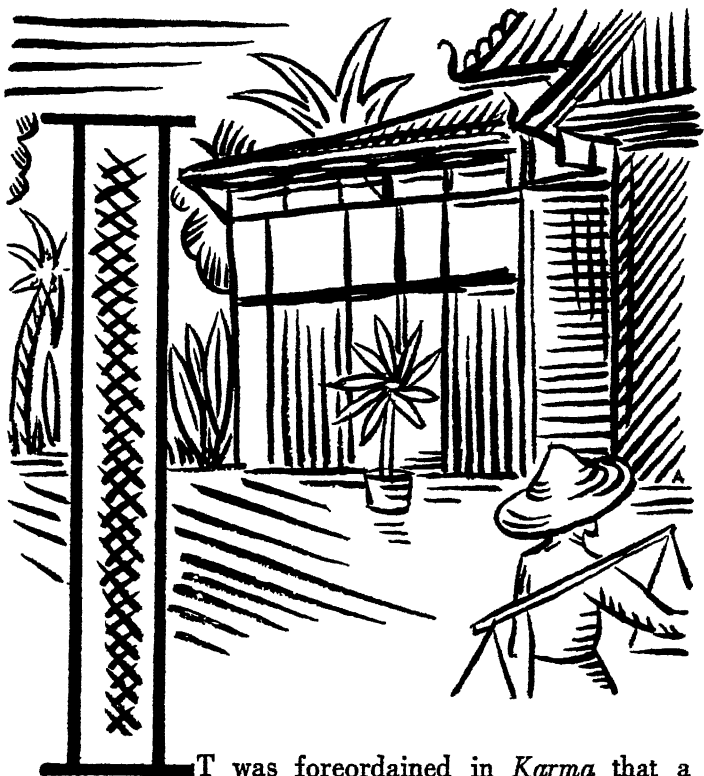
Do you blame me for wanting to ride on a Fifth Avenue bus?"

I still get an occasional letter from Arthur Cotton. Dorsey is going from bad to worse. Cotton is living in Dorsey's house where every curtain, chair and knick-knack speaks of Louise. Dorsey's drinking has brought a bad name to their little engineering company and they are in debt.

I write long letters to Cotton telling him how fed up I am with New York and how I long to go back to the East. He tells me that the man who succeeded me at the *Daily Mail* allows him to read the cable spike and gives him all the pictures the paper cannot use.

CHAPTER 12





It was foreordained in *Karma* that a pretty Chinese peasant girl should leave Canton on the wrong ship; that her body should be found in a brothel in Bangkok and that her spirit should plague the houses of a Siamese prince and a nobleman.

It is told that a woman who operated a chain of houses of prostitution for many years repented, became a nun and gave all her money for the construction of one of

the city's most beautiful temples. At its dedication an old Buddhist abbot got up and said:

“It is not through worship that one attains Nirvana. It is only by following the example of the Buddha in His practice of self-denial and self-sacrifice that one may acquire direct merit and thus redeem oneself from the wheel of the law of countless existences. And in the case of the one who gave this temple, what is the value of the merit she gained thereby? Less than one half *satang*.”

And so similarly were evaluated all the great gifts to the temples, the honor, the power and the riches of Prince X and Phya Z when Kohksi refused to enter the slave trade and took her life instead.

I had just returned from the Kathin ceremony which celebrates the end of *Varsa* or Lent, when Louis told me the bad news.

“I'm being sued for libel and that means jail,” he said.

Libel? Jail? It was difficult to assimilate these sordid facts after what I had seen but a few minutes before. The picture of the solemn majesty of Buddhistic pageantry still lay in my mind's eye. The King was bringing gifts to the monks of the river temples. From around a bend of the Chao Phya there emerged the head and the neck of a great swan. As it made the turn it became

the prow of a giant canoe propelled by a score or more of men dipping long-handled paddles in unison. Behind it came another and still others followed, a single file of crescent-shaped vessels gliding majestically toward Wat Arun, the Temple of the Rising Sun.

Strange notes from a horn acted as a metronome for the paddlers. On the finish of the stroke they turned their paddles upward in a circular motion. Drops of water thrown by this rhythmic movement caught the sunlight, and hundreds of little rainbows flickered momentarily over each craft. The galley men chanted a river song.

And then came the King's barge. Twenty men on each side, dressed in ancient battle garb, propelled the craft. The royal pavilion partly hid His Majesty from the view of thousands of his subjects on both shores. A large fan was swung back and forth keeping time with the chant of the galley men and the upward and downward dip of their paddles.

Libel? Jail? At last my mind oriented itself.

"Who's suing you?" I asked.

"The police department," said Louis.

"The police department? You mean the police commissioner."

"No, the department itself."

"What for?"

"For that exposé that we're running on the slave traffic."

“What? My pet story? Why in hell didn’t they sue me?”

“Maybe you’re next.”

“I should have been first. The English *Daily Mail* has been more outspoken than your Siamese edition.”

“Oh no, it hasn’t. You’ve taught me a thing or two. I can say more in Siamese than you can in English.”

“But there’s nothing to worry about. We’ve got the goods on ’em, haven’t we? Our information and facts are absolutely true, aren’t they?”

“There’s a lot to worry about. We’re beginning to step on the toes of the higher-ups. The brains of the traffic will stop at nothing to shut us up.”

“Is that why you’re talking of jail?”

“Certainly. They can put me there if they want to.”

“Do they think that will stop the fight? What about me? Do you think I’d drop the story?”

“They’d go for you, too.”

“Don’t you see that the suit is a smoke screen to get the mind of the public off our charges that certain detectives have been shanghaiing girls for prostitutes? Why, if they put us in jail it would ruin them. Editorials written from a cell have the power of explosives.”

“But you don’t understand. Siamese don’t write editorials in jail. The threat of libel alone is enough to shut their mouths.”

The editor of a Siamese newspaper, as a general rule, is merely a figure-head to pay the penalty in the event

of a libel suit. He may be a coolie working around the office. His employers never defend him. They find it cheaper and less troublesome to admit the libel, allow the editor to go to jail and hire another.

"Louis, they've played right into our hands," I said. "Don't back down. Let 'em sue."

Louis hesitated.

"Well, it's a go if you'll stand by me."

"Stand by you?" I said. "Why you big stiff, I'll go to jail with you if you want."

And so a Siamese and an American who craved excitement shook hands. It was a declaration of war against a crooked police force and several government officials who, if we made a false step, could ruin us.

I didn't fully realize how powerful our foes were until I was making up the paper a few days later. Chui, the chief compositor, was putting a banner line on our police story.

"Master in very much trouble," he said in a low voice as he lifted the type from the galleys to the form.

"What kind of trouble, *Nai Chui*?" I asked.

"Master watch for *angyee*," he said, going on with his work.

"What's the *angyee* want with a *farang*?" I asked.

"Police pay many *ticals*. *Angyee* say yes. You look out."

"Thanks, *Nai Chui*," I said.

When I climbed the steps to my office my knees were weak. Chui's warning meant that somewhere in the city was a member of a secret society paid to kill me. I got hold of Louis and told him what I had heard.

"There's been some talk about that among the Chinese," he said, "but I don't think it's true. Any attack on you would mean that it was inspired by the police to shut you up. I don't think they'd go that far. Anyhow, be careful. Don't go out alone at night. I've given orders to the watchman and servants to keep strangers out of the office and the compound."

The police were desperate. Their libel suit had not changed our plans. Every day the English and Siamese editions published new evidence, evidence that we had been collecting secretly for months. It showed that certain members of the detective division had been acting for a slave syndicate run by influential Siamese for the past ten years; that they had agents in China who kidnapped girls; that they sent many of the girls overland to houses of prostitution in Malaya because the British forbade their entrance through the ports; that they placed others in syndicate houses in Bangkok and that hundreds of girls were sold every year through a clearing house, or resthouse as it was called.

It was in that resthouse that Kohksi died. The circumstances surrounding her death led us to investigate the slave trade.

Kohksi was the daughter of a farmer in a village outside Canton. From childhood she had been betrothed to Pad Lin who left the village to seek his fortune in Saigon. After he had established himself as a rice merchant he sent for his wife.

When she reached the docks in Canton she was bewildered. Never before had she seen so many people or so many buildings. While searching for a ship which would sell her space on its deck for the passage through the South China Sea, Kohksi met three women who volunteered to help her. They, too, they said, were going to Saigon.

When the steamship, the *Knut Hamsen*, was two days out, Kohksi discovered that the vessel was not bound for Saigon but for Bangkok. Her friends, however, assured her that they would get a ship at Bangkok and sail immediately for Saigon.

But Kohksi never got to Saigon. When the vessel was a day's journey from Bangkok, her friends warned her that if she did not tell Siamese officials she was coming to sell tea, she would go to jail. That was the password to detectives who supervised the landing of all slave girls.

Her protests that she had boarded the wrong ship were ignored by the police. She wasn't the first girl who had changed her mind on arriving in Bangkok, and she and nineteen others were taken to the resthouse of the prostitute syndicate.

Two days later Kohksi hanged herself. Among her effects was a letter to her parents describing her treatment at the hands of the police. The following is a literal translation:

“Venerable Father and Mother:

“After having said good-by to both of you, I came to stay at a lodging house while waiting for a steamer. On my journey I met three women who inquired whither I was going. I said that I was going to join my husband in Saigon and they said they were going to the same place, too. These women talked about Saigon freely. I felt that I was going to have some company on the voyage. I did not know that these three women were really coming to Siam to bring me with them. After a day on the sea, I overheard some men on board talking of *Muang Thai* (Siam). I asked them and they said that the steamer was going to Bangkok and not to Saigon.

“I was ever so afraid and cried my eyes out. Afterwards I said to my friends that we came on the wrong boat and they said, ‘So did we, but never mind, when we get to *Muang Thai* we will get another boat for Saigon.’ Then one of them drew me aside and said that I must not speak to any of the men on board because they were all women procurers and that if I talked to them I would be abducted. I did not know whether to believe the women or not so I did not talk to the men.

“As we came in sight of Bangkok, the three women

told me that when the inspectors came I must tell them I came to sell tea and that if I did not say so I would not be allowed to land for they did not allow women immigrants here. On hearing this I knew instantly that the women were dishonest. I meant to die rather than follow them.

“When the little boat came alongside ours, an official came to ask me whether I came to sell tea. I said to him that really and truly I was deceived by three women and that my real destination was Saigon. Whereupon one of the women led the officer away and another came along. In a commanding voice he asked me whether I was going to leave the ship. I said I preferred to stay where I was and go back to China with the boat. I told him the whole story but he would not listen to me. He kicked me and slapped me and dragged me out of the boat.

“Just now I am staying at the To Sung Chan resthouse and they are persuading me to become—mother, I am ashamed to say it—they are persuading me to become a prostitute. But I am not going to yield. They used terrible language to me and will not let me go anywhere.

“Yesterday a number of men and women came to see me but I did not really know what they wanted. O father and mother, I cannot hold my tears. The thought of my husband and family! We have always been virtuous. I will die rather than take up a shameful life, as they want me to.

“I have already written to Saigon. Staying here is horrible. One day is as lengthy as one whole year. I cannot endure it much longer. When you receive this letter please find a way to help me. If you want money for traveling go to Piew Chia who owes me fourteen *taels* and sixty *cents* and to Tia Ku who owes me eight *taels*.

“Your daughter,

“Kohksi.”

News of the death of Kohksi became known to every Chinese in the city as if it were announced in letters of smoke in the sky. The Chinese are most phlegmatic in their reactions to events concerning them as a group but this bit of news electrified all of them. The fate of that obscure girl and her hopeless struggle for her honor, penetrated their fatalistic armor and moved them all in one direction—to obtain redress for Kohksi.

They gave the girl a fine funeral, notified Pad Lin, her husband, and raised funds with which to see that justice was done. When committees gathered to discuss details of the campaign they were arrested and charged with having met illegally. Owners of theaters and halls who permitted the meetings had their licenses revoked.

When Pad Lin came to Bangkok, the Chinese committee retained Phya Vinaya Sundara, Siam's Clarence Darrow. He prevailed upon the Minister of Interior, executive head of the police, to order the Crown Prosecu-

tor to make an investigation. In his report the prosecutor said:

“The officials of the Special Branch (detective division) and those who were connected with the resthouse persuaded her (Kohksi) and tried to force her to become a prostitute. The Special Branch policemen were Wongkit and Chia Khun. They used the place as an office for selling Chinese girls into prostitution. Kohksi received vile treatment and hanged herself in her misery.”

The inquiry ended there. It remained for Pad Lin to prosecute the two detectives for violating the prostitution law.

Meanwhile a Chinese named Tongwah, who had appeared as a witness for Pad Lin and had given damaging evidence against Wongkit and the police, was murdered. Witnesses voluntarily went to the police and swore that they saw Wongkit, immediately before the crime, point out Tongwah's house to the man who stabbed him.

Tongwah's assailant, a coolie, was charged with murder, found guilty and sentenced to have his head chopped off. But no charges were brought against Wongkit. Phya Adhikarana, the police commissioner, said that he had made a secret investigation and had found Wongkit innocent.

Finally Tongwah's widow, with the help of the Chinese interested in the Kohksi case, charged Wongkit

with instigating the murder of her husband. He was admitted to ten thousand *ticals* bail which high police officials supplied. The police commissioner personally retained a high-priced lawyer to defend the detective. Although now specifically charged with a crime, Wongkit continued to remain on the police force.

When it became obvious that the police were doing everything in their power to smash the case against Wongkit, Louis and I decided to begin our campaign. If a series such as ours had been published in the United States, the police department either through its own officers, the mayor, or a citizens' committee would have been forced to submit to an investigation.

But the Bangkok police were not responsible to the people. In reality they were responsible to the King but they did not fear him. Powerful interests, opposed to many of the King's policies, were on their side. They sent petitions to the sovereign demanding that he stop the *Daily Mail* from making further attacks on the police. It was an outrage, they said, for a government newspaper to assail a government department. They argued that Siam's standing in other countries was being injured by republication of our articles in foreign newspapers. They favored muzzling the *Daily Mail* to save their faces rather than clean up the police department.

The King, however, gave no heed to their requests. Prince Svasti called Louis and me to his palace and said:

“His Majesty says that you should keep up the fight. You are saving him a dirty job.”

When we left the Prince's palace I was jubilant. On my way to the car I grabbed Louis and danced around with him while servants and children smiled.

“Louis, you big bum, that's the best news I've had for a long time. The big boss likes our work. Say, that gives me another idea.”

“What are you going to do now?”

“Clean up the whole police department.”

The Bangkok police, as well as the provincial constabulary, is composed of conscripted men. They are drilled with rifles, taught to march and salute, are given brief instructions as to their duty and assigned to station houses at a salary of four *ticals* a month for two years. After they have served their time they may remain on the force as detectives or commissioned officers.

The police are unarmed except for a small nightstick. Authorities fear that armed guardians of the law may become a menace to the community. Rifles, not pistols, are kept securely locked in station houses for use only in extreme cases. When a policeman faces an armed outlaw he is forced to run back to his commander and ask for a rifle. Criminals are acquainted with this practice and keep themselves well-equipped with pistols and knives despite a stringent law against their possession.

Although the odds are against the conscripted policeman, he often displays unusual bravery in coping with armed men. If he overlooks the capture of a criminal, however, he is not blamed for inefficiency or called a coward. If he is wounded or killed he is more often than not called a fool to risk his life for four *ticals* a month.

As a result, Siam has its full share of gangsters and bandits. These outlaws are as unusual as the Siamese method of dealing with them. For example, there was *Ai* (meaning criminal) Suer Thai. According to the story current in the kingdom, he began his career of crime on the day he ran off with his first wife. When her parents tried to stop the elopement, Criminal Suer Thai shot them and escaped with his wife.

After several years of intense activity as a jungle outlaw, his name disappeared from the newspapers. When the police failed to capture a robber gang in Samud Prakar, they reported that the bandits were led by *Ai* Suer Thai. The famous criminal took offense at this accusation and sent a letter to the police of which the following is a translation:

“The activities of *Ai* Suer Thai have ceased for some time and have been almost forgotten. Then why the sudden excitement in the papers again? *Ai* Suer Thai had nothing to do with the robbery and shooting at Samud Prakar.

“It is true that I have been a bad man but I have not committed all the crimes the police talk about. I have been a killer, a heartless fiend and an outlaw. But these deeds I now repent. I have made up my mind to commit no more crimes. I am tired of hiding in every nook and corner expecting a police bullet if I show myself. I have no wish as yet to go to the ghost country.

“If I am left alone I give my word that I will not disturb the peace of any one again. For a long time I have not committed a single crime. I live alone. *Ai Suer Thai* only asks to be allowed to remain on earth until his day is over.

“Do not believe that the criminal actions of others are those of *Ai Suer Thai*. I have nothing to do with any one now. When *Ai Suer Thai* gives his word not to create any disturbance again, forget any stories about him in the future. They will be false.

“From

“*Ai Suer Thai*.”

Although the police commissioner did not write a letter to the outlaw telling him all was forgiven, at least such was his attitude, for nothing was heard of *Ai Suer Thai* again.

Phya Adhikarana, the commissioner, had risen from the ranks through the patronage of Prince X and by virtue of his position was probably the most powerful nobleman in the city. It was generally rumored that his

wife was the power behind the police throne and that those who wished favors from the commissioner would shower the lady with gifts.

His authority extended into every phase of life. The only persons he could not touch were members of the royal family. Their derelictions were in the hands of the Minister of the Royal Household.

When he wanted evidence he did not have to use a search warrant. Despite the law which grants the subject the right to be arraigned within twenty-four hours after arrest, the commissioner would keep prisoners as long as he pleased. He could set bail or deny it according to his whim.

He hated publicity and looked upon newspapers as his enemies. *Daily Mail* photographers were his particular aversion and when he came to the hearing of the libel suit against Louis, he marched from the car to the Borispah Court flanked by ten officers to protect him from the camera.

The Borispah Court is similar to a magistrate's court. In appearance it is as gloomy and dirty as most police courts in the United States. There are four court divisions: Borispah, Criminal, Appeal and Dika, the last being the highest tribunal in the land. There is no jury. Justice is in the hands of two judges. There is no court stenographer. One of the judges makes notes in longhand

as testimony is introduced. Although there is some degree of blundering and tampering in the lower courts, the judicial system as a whole is free from corruption and learned in its decisions. It is based upon British practice.

On the opening day of the trial, additional police were called out to handle the crowds. Never before had a newspaperman openly defied the all-powerful chief of police, and hundreds turned out to see the show. Millionaire Chinese merchants, coolies, prostitutes, princes and nobles were there, many nervously chewing betel nut and spitting into small cuspidors which they carried with them.

According to custom, the Crown Prosecutor should have represented the police, but the commissioner had no faith in that individual because of his findings against Wongkit. A private lawyer, paid by the commissioner, appeared in his place. Phya Vinaya, attorney for Pad Lin and for Tongwah's widow, represented Louis.

Opposing counsel presented a striking picture. Both were dressed in the customary bright blue *panung* and white duck coat. The lawyer for the police was a tall, near-sighted man who relied on his serious demeanor to impress the judges. Phya Vinaya, on the other hand, was small in stature, gray and debonair. He smiled and joked whenever the occasion permitted. He was a vet-

eran of many legal battles and a profound student of the law of the courts and the law of Buddhism.

The first clash occurred when the police attorney called Louis an enemy of law and order and condemned him for daring to insinuate that the police department's hands were unclean. Phya Vinaya declared that the police were not the angels they wanted the people of Bangkok to believe they were and that his client would prove that every statement contained in the so-called libel was true. To my surprise and delight this statement was greeted by an outburst of applause and cheers which left the judge and court attendants gaping.

The police, strange as it may seem, called witnesses to prove that a libel had been published and the first of these was none other than Wongkit. He was followed by the police commissioner who said that even though the articles in the paper were true they were libelous.

At the conclusion of the hearing the judges held Louis in one thousand *ticals* bail for the Criminal Court.

When Commissioner Adhikarana left the courtroom, the first person he saw was Chuang, our photographer. As if he faced a gun instead of a camera, the police chief threw up his arms and ran through the crowd to his car. As Chuang turned to snap the fleeing dignitary, the latter's bodyguards grabbed the camera and began punching and beating him. The crowd hissed and several yelled to the photographer to throw his camera at his assailants. Then, who was covering the trial, rushed into

the melee and began punching police faces. When he reached Chuang, he seized the camera and made pictures of the officers who surrounded him.

We published their pictures and a letter to Prince Kamrob, Director of Local and Provincial Gendarmerie, demanding that he arrest the offending officers for assault. There was a long delay but eventually I received a note from the Prince's secretary saying that there was nothing unusual in what the police had done.

The police made one more stand to draw the attention of the public from the unsavory details of our slave revelations and the libel suit. The newspapers were featuring strikes in all parts of the world protesting against the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti. Taking their cue from those far distant disturbances, the police let it be known that they were making preparations to combat a general strike of Chinese workers. Orders were given to police captains to cancel all leaves of absence. Reserves were held in readiness. Patrols in the Chinese sections were increased and aid was asked from the Ministry of War to help maintain order. What part of the Chinese community was to go on strike, and why, was kept a secret.

A general strike in Bangkok was as inconceivable as the Daughters of the American Revolution indorsing the Communist Party. Labor was unorganized. No one had ever heard of the existence of a trade union in the kingdom or an expression of the need for one. There were

workers aplenty in the rice and teak mills but no one had ever attempted to unite them. About the only group which showed any solidarity was the beggars' society.

When the day scheduled for the imaginary strike arrived, policemen were to be seen everywhere. Detachments of cavalry were held in readiness on the outskirts of the city. Not one worker quit the mills. Those who were not working enjoyed the show and finally saw the police retire in a most dignified manner to their station houses. The commissioner made it known, however, that it was his great show that discouraged the strikers from putting in an appearance.

But the effect of the show was spoiled by Chuay. It might have been plain stupidity or a knowledge that they could do no wrong that prompted some one in the police department to talk about her. Anyhow, the story reached Kosol's ears at a club in the Chinese quarter and he raced to the office with the news.

"I've got another Kohksi case," he said, "that's going to knock the town dead."

"You mean the cops have kidnapped another girl?" I asked.

"Right. She was brought from Swatow with twelve other girls last week and is being held in the To Sung Chan resthouse against her will."

"Boy, that's a wow. That's where Kohksi died. Have you got all the facts?"

"No. I need help. She has a brother in Bangkok

named Lurng who's been trying to get her released. I want to find him."

"We'll turn the whole staff loose on his trail."

In two hours Lurng was in our office.

"I saw her yesterday," he told us. "She was lured to the ship just before it sailed. She did not want to come. She is married, has two children in Swatow and is expecting a third. When I complained to the police they forced me to put up a bond of one thousand *ticals* for her release pending her deportation to China."

"How did they treat your sister?" I asked.

"They would not listen to her when she arrived," he told me. "They rushed her off to the To Sung Chan. She begged them to notify me but they refused. I heard about her through friends and finally saw her. She's now at my house."

"What are you going to do?"

"Keep her there until the next ship sails for China."

"Aren't you going to take any action against the police?"

"I'm afraid to. If I do they will ruin my business. They've already warned me to keep quiet about Chuay."

The day after we published the story of Chuay's kidnapping, Lurng came to the office and announced that his sister had disappeared. Several men called at his house while he was away and took her off in a car.

"When I reported the case to the police," he said, "they merely shrugged their shoulders and said that

they couldn't do anything about it unless Chuay made a complaint."

"How in hell can she make a complaint when she is probably being held somewhere by police agents who want to get rid of her?" I asked.

"They're afraid of us," said Kosol. "They don't want to find her for fear that she will testify against them."

"The dirty dogs," I said. "You can't beat them."

No one has ever found out what happened to Chuay. The police finally told her brother that they put her on a boat for China but they did not know the name of the boat. Lurng never heard from her again and he believes that she was murdered.

Immediately after the publication of the story about Chuay we won our libel suit. The Criminal Court ruled that the police could not sue because they were not a juristic person.

While counsel for the police was filing an appeal, which was eventually denied by the highest courts, the case charging Wongkit with instigation of murder moved toward a climax. When the police commissioner was asked by the court to produce facts which would sustain his stand that Wongkit was innocent, he refused on the ground that it was a "police department secret." Other high officials when called to the stand also hid behind that secret.

Nevertheless, the Criminal Court acquitted Wongkit, but in passing judgment left an opening for an appeal. They declared that although insufficient evidence was introduced to convict, they believed that the detective was on the scene of the crime when the coolie stabbed Tongwah. Testimony was lacking because police threatened witnesses who volunteered to appear against Wongkit.

When the case reached the Appeal Court, the decision was reversed and Wongkit was condemned to death by decapitation. The detective, still a member in good standing in the police department, entered the courtroom with two of his wives and several police officers. When he heard his sentence he fainted and had to be carried to a cell. For days he refused to eat, asking only for opium. He was isolated after several prisoners attempted to take his life.

Having obtained justice for Kohksi and Tongwah, I started an editorial barrage for an impartial inquiry into police conditions and for a reorganization of the entire department. But our entreaties were ignored. As the fight went on, further pressure was brought to bear upon the King to silence the *Daily Mail*. Rather than muzzle the paper, His Majesty then sold the English and Siamese editions to a group of men headed by Prince Svasti and Louis. In this way he freed himself of the demands of influential protectors of the police and permitted us to continue our campaign.

But our crusade ended in failure. When Prince Kamrob resigned as Director General of Local and Provincial Gendarmerie, the Minister of Interior promoted the police commissioner to that position. Whether it was a slap at us by the higher-ups, or evidence of the inscrutability of the Oriental mind, I don't know. But there it was and we had to make the best of it.

There still remained one person who threatened the good name of the police. He was Pad Lin, husband of Kohksi, who had been clamoring for justice for his wife for nearly a year. Phya Adhikarana found some excuse to go to Saigon and when he came back, Pad Lin was arrested. The police announced that when Pad Lin left Saigon he was wanted for spreading Bolshevik propaganda. He was put in a cell next to Wongkit, the man responsible for Kohksi's suicide. It was grim warning to the little Chinese. He was eventually deported to China where, because he was branded a communist, he was probably executed a few days after he arrived.

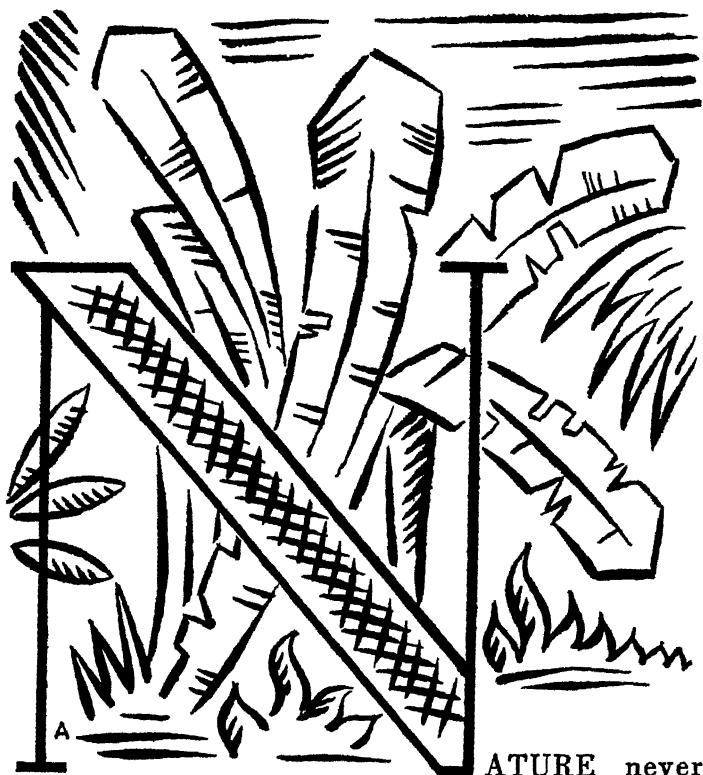
Despite his power, Phya Adhikarana could not save Wongkit. A year after he was convicted, the detective was taken to the execution field down the river where a dancing swordsman cut off his head.

To lose face, or caste, is the greatest punishment that can befall an Oriental and the surest way to this downfall is through gossip. For several weeks after our po-

lice revelations, Bangkok whispered the names of two of the most respected men in the kingdom, Prince X and Phya Z, as directors of the slave syndicate. Both were wealthy and were known as patrons of temples. And when one died of a dread disease and the other went to India for a prolonged stay, the talk stopped and Kohksi's spirit was at peace.

CHAPTER 13





ATURE never sleeps in the jungle. She operates on a twenty-four-hour-day, seven-day-week, three hundred-sixty-five-day-year. Hers is not a five-year plan but a mass production schedule which goes on monotonously for eternity. Aside from the two months of so-called winter, there are no seasonal changes. Spring is merely a calendar event. When March comes, one says it is spring because a sere

world far away is turning green. Instead of a young man's fancy turning to thoughts of love, he is inclined to woo the tepid breath of electric fans, to seek the shade and to sip from tall glasses tinkling with ice cubes.

My own fancies turned to thoughts of moving. Living in my house was like living in the office. The presses banged into my ears not only while I worked, but also while I slept. When the rainy season came, my little patch of jungle reverberated with the raucous chorus of a small breed of frogs. When the males sang to the females and the females sang to the males, it was like an antiphonal choir of mooing cows. Their mating songs drowned out the presses and I would have to shout to make myself heard. I listened to these little creatures for three months and when the doctor told me he was alarmed at my loss of weight, I decided I needed a change.

I found a little house in the paddy fields of the Phya Thai section that seemed to have been built especially for my needs. Its owner was a Siamese lawyer who lived in it with his wife, five children and several relatives. He was willing to move into smaller quarters in the rear and let me have the house completely furnished for one hundred and fifty *ticals* a month.

A real estate man would have called it a bungalow but to me it was an Asian idyll. Only the red-tiled gables could be seen over the hibiscus hedge which walled the compound. When you crossed the bridge over the

klong you saw a one-story house of stucco and teak nestling in a garden of orchids, gardenias, jasmine, mango and frangipani trees and giant bushes of bananas. Bougainvillea crept up the walls. A slightly draped Grecian lady, her rich curves imprisoned in plaster of Paris, presided over a fountain in which fighting fish played.

Inside were four large rooms furnished in Occidental fashion. The living room walls were lined with sectional bookcases containing Siamese volumes and standard English sets: Dickens, Thackeray, Jack London, an encyclopedia, books on home building, interior decoration, gardening and other subjects. One case contained priceless Siamese pottery from the provinces of Sukhodaya and Svargakoloke. In a corner was a rosewood desk alongside which stood a bronze cuspidor three feet high. There were also a rug, divan and several easy chairs.

The dining room was screened and in addition to a large table at which eight could sit, there was a sideboard with a complete set of china, glassware, silver and napery. In the bedroom were two beds with canopies of mosquito netting, a wardrobe and a dressing table. The bathroom, equipped with a modern tub, shower, basin and sanitary toilet, was tiled in the best American style.

A rear porch with teak furniture looked out upon a pond in the center of which was a Chinese tea house with tables and stools of rosewood inlaid with mother of

pearl. Lotus flowers and lilies floated on the surface and occasionally a small fish would ripple the water. Across the pond, hidden by tall bushes, were the kitchen and quarters for servants.

It would be easy to become a lotus eater here.

I went back to the office and told Ah Kin, my Chinese houseboy, the cook and the coolie, who had succeeded *Meh* Pin and Chun, that he would move the next day. I had breakfast in the old house and when I arrived at the bungalow in the evening my bath was drawn, a cocktail was ready and so was dinner.

For two weeks my hours at home approached the idyllic. It was cooler in the paddy fields than in the office compound. I slept peacefully and would be awakened by my Siamese farmer neighbor grunting at his water buffalo as he slushed behind the plough. No banging of presses, no screeching of automobile sirens, no mooing of frogs.

But the pastoral calm I was enjoying was not to last. Late one afternoon on my return from the office, Ah Kin greeted me with a doleful face.

"Cook very much sick," he said.

I went with him to the servants' quarters where I found Kwong groaning on his mat. He was an emaciated man about forty-five years old whom I seldom saw. He would rise at 4:30 A. M. and go off to market to buy provisions for the day's meals, returning in time to prepare breakfast. The coolie, the cook's daughter, Song,

who was six years old, and a Chinese I had not seen before, stood at the door with worried looks on their faces.

"What's the matter with him?" I asked Ah Kin.

"Very much sick," he said.

"How long has he been sick?"

"Three days."

"Who's been cooking?"

"Lim," said Ah Kin, pointing to the stranger. "He cook's brother."

"Why didn't you tell me before that he was sick?"

"No want trouble master," said Ah Kin.

I had a feeling as I watched Kwong writhe that there was no time to lose and I drove at terrific speed to the home of a German doctor two miles away. He got into my car and we raced back to the house. We were too late. Kwong died of tuberculosis two minutes before our arrival.

What was I to do next? The cook had no home except the one where he died. Was I to bury him? As soon as the doctor left, I drove to Louis' house for advice.

"You can't do anything tonight," said Louis. "You'll have to wait until morning."

"I want him out of there tonight," I said.

I had heard that a body decomposes rapidly in tropic heat and I could not bear the thought of being in the house with it overnight.

"All right, Mr. Hurry-up. Did you register with the *Nai Amphur* when you moved?"

The *Nai Amphur* is a justice of peace in charge of a city district.

"I didn't know I had to."

"Well, the *Nai Amphur* is not in his office now. You won't be able to have the body moved until you get his permission. You'll probably have a lot of trouble because you and your servants are not registered."

"Can't you do anything? Haven't you any political pull?"

"All right," he said, "we'll see what we can do."

With the help of the foreman of the Siamese composing room who was a member of the secret service squad, all the red tape was cut. That night the body was removed to a nearby temple where monks prepared it for burial.

Kwong's death caused no interruption in the smooth running of my household. With the fatalism of the Oriental, his brother prepared breakfast the next morning and remained with me until I left Bangkok.

But death struck at my house again. This time its victim was Bozo, my two-months-old puppy. While at lunch one Sunday I heard Bozo barking hysterically under the porch. I gave no heed to the dog until he started to squeal for help. Ah Kin and the coolie leaped over the railing and leaped right back again.

"Big snake catch Bozo," said Ah Kin.

I told the boys to get some sticks and armed with them we climbed over the porch. Lying in the shade was

an eight-foot python and next to him was the crushed body of Bozo. As soon as the snake saw us, it glided under the house beyond reach.

After that I gave thanks that there was a pair of mongooses in the gable. Instead of complaining of their squeaks and jumping over my head, I felt assured that no snake would enter the house although, of course, I doubted whether one of the little animals would attack a python. I saw a cobra late one evening while I was driving out of the compound but he seemed so anxious to get out of sight that I didn't worry about his presence. I was careful, however, when I walked in the garden at night, for these reptiles have a habit of falling asleep in the high grasses. If you disturb the nap by stepping on one, his hypodermic fangs sink into your leg and his poison starts working its way to the nerve centers and that means death.

Aside from my mongoose boarders, the house had its complement of lizards and geckos which crawled around the walls in search of insects. There were always plenty of mosquitoes but I successfully discouraged them from biting me by judicious use of a preparation invented by a local British apothecary.

When the rainy season set in, other insects came into the house, but as long as they had wings I could always take refuge in the screened dining room or in bed. Of all of them, however, the most astounding and the most alarming were black and red ants.

One evening while preparing for dinner guests, I slipped on the living room floor and the next instant felt a score of stings on my ankle. I turned on the lights. My foot was covered with ants and nearly half the floor, the rug and one of the walls were black with the insects. Each of them had a white egg in its mouth. They had come through the front door seeking dry ground. I yelled for Ah Kin who sprayed my leg with kerosene and he, the coolie and I attacked the little creatures. It took us half an hour to spray the swarm and when the boys swept up the dead ants there was a pile over a foot high, literally millions of them.

It made my flesh creep to think of the damage they could do. They could cover a sleeping man's body if he happened to be in their track and his slightest move would be a signal for hundreds of thousands to bite. That night I insulated my bed against ants by putting the posts in pans of kerosene.

Several nights later, I was awakened by the terrified squeals of the two dogs that had succeeded Bozo. They were leaping about as if they were obsessed. When I coaxed one of them to me, I found he was covered with red ants. After Ah Kin and I had bathed the dogs in the bathtub, I went back to see the cause of the trouble. A column of ants about two inches wide was marching across the porch into the house. Evidently the dogs had stepped on this army. As in the case of the black ants, each insect had an egg in its mouth. It was astonishing

how continuous the line was. It seemed unending. Once more we attacked with the spray gun and it was an hour before we had stopped the migration.

I suppose I was something of a missionary when I turned my house in the newspaper compound over to Ashley. It was not any interest in his soul which impelled me, rather it was his ability to turn out good newspaper copy. He was an English journalist who came up from the beach to a job on the paper. Since he did not have a home, I thought my gift would settle him and divert some of his attention from the brandy bottle. But Ashley was a lone drinker and I guess only a woman could reform him, providing she insisted on drinking with him. Ashley, however, would never have stood for that. He was too much of a gentleman, drunk or sober.

It was fitting that I should meet Ashley for the first time at three o'clock in the morning. I was awakened by a scuffle and loud voices below my porch. Some one was shouting:

“Boy! Boy! Let me in! I'm not a thief! You fool, keep your hands off me or I'll throttle you.”

I looked down and saw the Indian watchman pushing a tall, white man from my door.

“Louis lives over there,” the watchman kept saying. “Not here.”

“Let him alone, *Yam*,” I called to the watchman. “I’ll come right down.”

When I turned on the light and opened the door I saw the man was drunk. He was about fifty years old. His clothes were dirty and from the gray bristles on his face it appeared he hadn’t shaved for two weeks.

“I’m terribly sorry for this intrusion,” he said bowing. “I was looking for *Nai* Louis and I thought he lived here. My name’s Ashley. I’m a friend of Louis’.”

“What do you want?” I asked.

“I’ll not trouble you about it. I hope you’ll forgive me.”

“That’s perfectly all right. Where are you going?”

“Home.”

He started to shamle away.

“Are you sure you’ve got a place to sleep?”

He turned around and straightened up as if I had offended him.

“Why, certainly, sir. I won’t trouble you any longer.”

“I don’t believe you. Come on in. Let’s have a drink.”

I was certain that he did not have a cent in his pocket and that he had come to borrow a few *ticals* from Louis for a bed.

When I mentioned a drink his haughtiness melted.

“I’ll keep you up for one drink.”

“Fine.”

Even after three drinks I still was unable to persuade

him to spend the rest of the night in my spare room. Finally I gave him five *ticals* and he left.

Louis learned of Ashley's visit from the watchman and later in the morning he came to me and asked:

"Did he borrow any money from you?"

"No, I gave him five ticks."

"Here," he said, giving me the money. "Let him owe it to me."

"Why?"

"Prince Svasti and I are supporting him."

"Why Prince Svasti?"

"The Prince and Ashley were at Oxford."

"Ashley an Oxford man?"

"Yes and an all-English rugby player."

"Well, I'll be damned. How did he get to Bangkok and how did the Prince meet him?"

"Well, I'll tell you what I know about him.

"When Walter Ashley left England to take over the rubber plantation in Perak left him by a relative, his friends called him a fool. They felt he was too brilliant and popular a person to bury himself in the wilds of the Malay Peninsula. His wife, the beautiful actress, Lucilla Watson, also objected but was finally won over by her husband. He left behind a successful law practice, an enviable reputation as a great rugby football player, and an excellent chance to become a member of Parliament.

"Ashley became a successful planter. For the sake of

his wife who missed the social life of London, he built one of the most luxurious homes in the Federated Malay States where sultans, governors and other dignitaries were entertained. He also leased a home in Singapore where Lucilla spent several months of the year. He was on the upward swing of the rubber market and was ranked as one of the wealthiest operators.

“For ten years he rode the crest of the wave until one of the first great slumps wiped him out with hundreds of others. Within a few months everything slipped through his fingers, the estate, his home, his horses, his golf links. During this trying period, Lucilla and her daughter were in Singapore and refused to return to the plantation while Ashley was trying to save the pieces. Just as he had wound up his affairs and was preparing to join her, he received a telegram telling him that she had gone to London with Alec Harvey, one of his best friends.

“The British colony completely lost track of Ashley after that. Drink was his only solace. Under an assumed name he wandered from one Malay village to another, sinking deeper and deeper into the morass of his troubles. His wanderings took him through Borneo, Java, Indo-China, Tibet, Mongolia and back to Malaya, traveling all the time as a coolie would, managing by means he never revealed to have money enough to buy brandy.

“He turned up at the *Daily Mail* office about five years ago and I hired him as proofreader. Later he be-

came a general handy man around the paper and wrote editorials and news stories.

“Ashley’s story of the annual rugby game between Bangkok and Singapore attracted attention in the foreign colony and was quoted in the *Straits Times*. It was then that I learned something of his background and told Prince Svasti. His Royal Highness ordered that he be paid a good salary. But try as he would, Ashley could not shake off the fascination of the brandy bottle.

“He would disappear from the office for a week or two and would turn up again horribly bitten by mosquitoes because he didn’t have the money to get a bed with a mosquito net at a Chinese flop house. Hoping that he would eventually reform, Prince Svasti kept him on the payroll. A few months before you arrived he was stricken with delirium tremens and we paid for all of his medical expenses. When he went back to work again he continued to drink and I discharged him.”

A month passed. Late one night, while I was writing the obituary of Queen Sukhamal Marasi, an aunt of the King and fifty-second daughter of the late King Mongkut, there was a timid rap at the door and Ashley entered. He was a pitiful sight as he stood with his battered topee next to his chest. His suit was dirty and his tie was in tatters. He looked at me over a pair of bent, silver spectacles.

“May I venture to intrude upon your time?” he said in a timorous, baritone voice.

He appeared to be sober.

“You remember me, don’t you?” he asked. “I am in desperate need of a job.”

“Ashley,” I said, “I’d like nothing better than to take you on but I’ve made up my mind not to hire another man who drinks during office hours.”

“I don’t blame you. If I give my word that I won’t touch a drop while I’m on the job will you trust me?”

“Reforming isn’t easy.”

“I know it, but I’ve got to start some time. Will you do this? Start me at one hundred *ticals* a month and increase it so long as I stay sober.”

“All right. It’s going to be hard to live on one hundred *ticals*. I’ve just moved out of my house. It’s completely furnished. You can have it rent free. But remember, if you drink while you’re working, you’re fired. If you don’t you’ll get a twenty-five-tick raise every month until you get the salary you deserve.”

His gratitude touched me. During our talk he made no excuse for his clothes. He spoke with pride of his newspaper experience. He seemed oblivious of the fact that he was a failure, a beachcomber in the eyes of his respectable fellow countrymen in the foreign colony. He was still a man and I made up my mind to give him more than an even chance to come back.

When he reported for work the next morning his

clothes were clean and neatly pressed. Knowing his drinking habits, I did not expect him to stick to his word. There was always a noticeable aroma of brandy about him but he was not intoxicated. As time wore on he drank less and less.

Whenever Mrs. White, who wrote the social and general items of the foreign colony, would rise from her chair, Ashley would rise and remain standing until she took her seat again. This took place many times during the afternoon and finally, to spare Ashley, the good lady reporter had to suppress her habit of doing things for herself.

Three months after our agreement, he came to the office dead drunk. When I saw him my heart stopped. I felt as if my best friend had betrayed me. I had become deeply attached to the man. Not having the courage to fire him, I took him home and put him to bed where he cried like a baby and begged me to forgive him.

He straightened out for a week and then started drinking heavily again. I warned him on several occasions about our agreement but the beaten look that came into his eyes always softened my heart and I gave him another chance.

Since he knew more about Siam than I, he handled stories which dealt with historical facts. Once when we needed a quick review of the life of the King to be used in connection with His Majesty's birthday, I gave the

job to Ashley. Although he had been drinking heavily, I could not send him out of the office because I was short of men.

His story seemed satisfactory to me, but in my ignorance of Siam one of the worst mistakes that a newspaperman can make got into the paper—Ashley had made the boss appear ridiculous. Prince Svasti was then sixty-one years old and the King was thirty-five. According to Ashley's story the Prince and His Majesty were classmates at Oxford.

The Prince was indignant and all I could do was to hide behind the excuse that the mistake slipped by due to haste in getting out the paper. After that I did not dare trust Ashley. I kept him on the payroll but did not permit him to come to the office. I suggested that he write to an editor I knew in the Straits Settlements and within a week he received an offer of a job providing he would not drink during office hours. Ashley once more promised to reform and was accepted for the position.

The day before he left he asked me for a loan of two-hundred *ticals* to pay his debts and buy the necessary articles for his trip. With tears of gratitude in his eyes he took the money and promised to spend it judiciously. Later that evening I was attracted by a commotion on the street. I looked down and saw Ashley sitting in a ricksha with a Siamese policeman. He was stupidly drunk.

The policeman told me that he found him in the morn-

ing outside a bar flashing his roll of bills at ricksha men who were about to fleece him. The officer stood by Ashley all day and finally persuaded him to come home. I went through his pockets and found he had spent only twenty *ticals*.

We finally got him on the train and when he arrived at his destination he was drunk again.

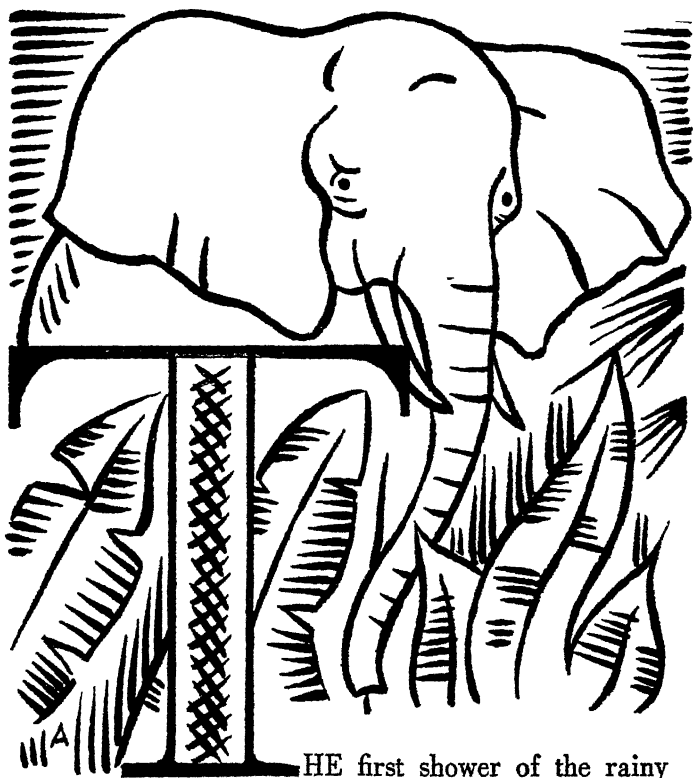
I never realized when I suggested that he write to the editor of the Straits paper, that I would be the medium of a dramatic reunion. As I heard the story some months later, Ashley sobered up and went to work. While reading proof on a social item announcing the engagement of his editor to a Miss Lucilla —, he fainted. When he was revived he told the editor that the girl was his daughter. Thinking that the newest member of his staff had not sufficiently recovered from his drinking bout, the editor refused to believe him. Ashley, of course, was hired under his assumed name.

When he met his daughter he learned that after her mother's death she had come out to the East as a stenographer. She told her father that she had written to police chiefs all over the world in an effort to find him and had given him up for dead.

Two months later Ashley proudly gave away his daughter in marriage. He now lives with her and his son-in-law and takes only three brandies a day.

CHAPTER 14





HE first shower of the rainy season drummed on the iron roof. The air was as viscid as the pitchiness of the night and the electric punkah labored and squeaked against it. Only the neighborhood soothsayer was abroad cheerily advertising his knowledge of the future with a long drawn-out:

"Dee, mahk, mahk, mahk, mahk!" "Very, very, very, very good!"

Perspiration dropped from my forehead and threatened to ruin the yellow flimsy I was editing and pasting for the next day's edition. Saturday's paper was always eight to ten pages larger than that of other days and on Friday nights it was my duty to see that the composing room was plentifully supplied with copy.

I finished the task about midnight and was in the midst of putting my desk in order when a tall, stoop-shouldered man of about forty entered. His clothes were neatly pressed, having by some sartorial magic escaped the wilting humidity.

"I saw a light burning in your office and I thought I'd drop in and introduce myself," he began. "My name's Schaeffer, Harry Schaeffer."

I shook hands with him, at a loss to know why he chose such an hour to call. He was not unknown to me, although I had never seen him before. He had a reputation in the foreign colony as an eccentric. They called him an incompetent loafer because he was always bound for the beach but never seemed to get there. He had been in Bangkok for six years and although he never worked he always had enough money to live on.

He seemed embarrassed. He had a way of staring beyond you when he spoke which gave you a feeling of wanting to turn and see what he was looking at.

"I'm keeping you," he said, dropping his gaze and looking at his hands. "I'd better be going."

“Not exactly,” I said, still puzzled. “What can I do for you?”

“I suppose you think it’s odd but I came in to see if you were interested in poetry.”

“I am, but we haven’t published any since I’ve been here.”

“Well, then,” he said, still looking at his hands, “I guess I’d better go.”

“Wait a minute,” I said. “Is it your poetry?”

“Yes. I was hoping that you might read some of it and publish what you like.”

“All right,” I said. “Leave the manuscript here.”

He drew from his pocket a folded, manila envelope and gave it to me.

“I’d better be going now,” he said awkwardly, and walked out of the door.

It was too hot to sleep. I mixed a whisky soda and reached for Schaeffer’s poems. They were neatly typed and under the title of each was the by-line “Mai Pen Arai,” evidently his Siamese pseudonym. After reading three I was convinced that he had something vital and forceful to say. I got from them a picture of a man brooding over the spectacle of life and yearning to free himself of the madness of the modern world. I forgot about the rain, the heat and the whisky soda and rejoiced at having found an artist in a jungle of club-joining plumbers, clerks and salesmen.

About a week later I was surprised to see Schaeffer burst into the office.

“Wonderful! Magnificent!” he exclaimed over and over again between breaths. “You should see them. They’re simply wonderful!”

I thought he was out of his mind.

“I ran all the way to tell you,” he said, daubing the perspiration from his face with a silk handkerchief. “Two elephants have escaped and are wandering about the city. One of them is about ten blocks from here. You’d better get out on it. It’s a wonderful story. Man, it’s great—the giant creature towering over the houses and trumpeting his freedom. Part of his shackles are still on his foot. It’s a marvelous sight to see him defying the crowds who kept him imprisoned. I envy the beast. I always wanted to go through the streets shouting at people.”

I was dumbfounded at this sudden outburst of what I thought was drivel and he seemed to read my thoughts. He slumped into a chair and started to examine his hands.

“You don’t believe me,” he said quietly.

The telephone rang in the city room.

“Wait a minute,” I said.

Thern came in. He, too, was excited.

“Two of the ceremonial elephants have gone mad and broken loose,” he said. “They’re on a rampage in the city.”

That was enough. I left Thern in charge of the paper, and with Schaeffer and a photographer, I raced downtown in my car.

Everyone was hurrying in the same direction. They were shouting "*Chang!*" (elephant). The thought crossed my mind that they, like Schaeffer, were envying the animals. They, too, were trapped and wanted to break their shackles—shackles far stronger than elephant chains. Perhaps they got a vicarious thrill watching the beasts revel in their freedom.

The culprits were Sirinag and Dongkam, each twenty-five years old. They were kept in a dirty barn behind the Ministry of Justice, down near the river. For months they would sway back and forth, breaking the rhythm only to beg a visitor for cakes or sugar cane, which were on sale at a booth. The two stood side by side, held by huge chains. Their keepers discovered too late that their charges were in must and before the shackles could be strengthened the elephants charged each other, broke the chains and barged out of the enclosure. Sirinag made his way downtown while Dongkam contented himself with tearing down the house of his keeper in the elephant compound.

We found Sirinag in the heart of the congested district with hundreds of persons running after him at a respectful distance. It was a weird procession. The elephant led the way past deserted street cars and automobiles followed by shouting, screaming crowds. As

the thought seeped through his thick skull that his followers were not friendly, Sirinag turned on them, raised his trunk and bellowed defiance. At that the mob would retreat and then return to nag the beast again.

The animal was finally driven toward the river and out upon a small, wooden wharf. It collapsed and pitched him head foremost into about six feet of water. He struggled mightily for several minutes with his head under the surface and his hind quarters impaled on the wreckage. When he failed to free himself ropes were brought and hundreds of persons tried to pull him out. He finally drowned.

Meanwhile Dongkam, eluding all attempts at capture, still remained in the corral which had been strengthened with ropes, posts and barbed wire. At midnight he tired of his cramped quarters, put his head to the reinforced wall and pushed over trees and stones with the ponderous nonchalance of a war tank. Shaking himself like a dog whose coat had been ruffled, Dongkam started on his own excursion, followed by keepers and hundreds of persons.

As soon as he got away, the Minister of the Royal Household, who led the expedition to capture the beast, ordered that a hole be dug large enough for the front feet of Dongkam so that he would fall head first, wedging his tusks into the earth. In this position he would be powerless to struggle and a keeper would be able to mount and control him even in his rage.

When a motor truck containing picks and shovels drove into the square where Dongkam was capering, the elephant charged it. The panic-stricken chauffeur stalled the motor and leaped for his life. Dongkam turned the machine over and crushed it to a twisted mass of steel and splinters.

This bit of sport seemed to enrage him and he charged the crowd. Hundreds of persons in his path rushed for safety leaving behind a man who had been injured in the panic. I saw him try to rise but before he could get to his feet, Dongkam seized him with his powerful trunk. My knees grew weak. I felt I was going to faint. A groan such as that heard in a football stadium after a misplay, yet more horrifying now because of its inspiration, came from the throats of the onlookers.

With the downward thrust of a pile driver, Dongkam dashed his victim to the ground. The mob shouted and threw stones at the beast to divert his attention. But stones had no more effect upon his thick hide than raindrops, and he proceeded to stamp on the man. Picking up the body, he ran in triumph at the crowd, which was now too sickened to shout any more. He dropped his victim near the palace grounds and made for the entrance. He would have entered had not the guards slammed the iron gates.

After ambling about for several hours, Dongkam went to the elephant compound. Waiting for him there was a squad of sharpshooters armed with high-powered

rifles. Soldiers and keepers maneuvered the beast to a spot where he was to be shot, but the crowd interfered with the plan. The order to shoot was not given for fear that a bullet would strike a bystander.

As a last resort, it was decided to try poison. Enough strychnine to kill four hundred persons was put into bananas and sugar cane. These the headkeeper took to the second floor window of a nearby house, from which he enticed the elephant to partake of the dainties. Docilely the beast consumed all the fruit while the keeper wept. He had looked after Dongkam for many years and he said he felt as though he were killing his best friend.

Having eaten the poisoned meal, the elephant looked about for more excitement. Finding a pile of telegraph poles left by a construction gang, he hurled them about as if they were match sticks. He played at this game for half an hour, when his movements became slower. He died at five o'clock in the morning, three hours after he had taken the poison.

The sun leaped out of the East while Schaeffer and I drove back to the office. Shutters were being taken down from shops; women with baskets and cloth bags were going in rickshas to market. From various parts of the city temple gongs were being beaten and here and there we passed monks who hugged begging bowls to their chests.

Both of us had been up all night. I was dead tired

and hoped to get a few hours' sleep after writing my story. Schaeffer, however, showed no effects of the night's vigil. He seemed to be stimulated by the spectacle we had watched.

"How glorious were those few hours before they died," he remarked. "They said the beasts were mad. I don't believe it, unless they were mad with joy."

When we arrived at the office he sat down across from me as I began to write.

"What kind of a story are you going to do?" he asked.

"That's a funny question," I said. "I'm going to write what actually happened."

"But what actually happened is only incidental," he said, gazing intently beyond me. "The story as I see it is that those who break the shackles must die. Those beasts were not mad. They were sane. They rebelled against being imprisoned. All of us are in prison but few of us know it. If we break out we are killed by those who still are in chains. They kill because they cannot bear to see a free creature."

"That's not a story for a newspaper," I said.

"I guess you're right," he said, looking down at his hands. "I'd better be going."

Schaeffer was as happy as a schoolboy with his first piece in the high school magazine when I printed one

of his poems. On the evening it appeared he came to my house.

"I had to come over to tell you how much I appreciate what you've done," he said, his face alight with smiles. "It's the first thing I've ever had published. In fact, you're the first person I ever showed my stuff to. Did you like the others?"

"Schaeffer, you're there," I said. "The *Daily Mail* is not worthy of your piece. It should have appeared in a high class magazine at home rather than in my little sheet."

"Do you really mean it?" he asked eagerly.

"I certainly do. You should submit them to an editor in the States. In fact, you shouldn't be here, but in New York."

"You're wrong," he said. "I couldn't write in New York. I never want to go to the States. I was never happy there. Here, surrounded by all the rampant glory of Nature, I feel I am at last finding true happiness. What I write is merely evidence of my happiness.

"If I go home, I die. America is mad. The entire Occidental world is mad. They live to destroy themselves. Only the Oriental knows how to live. His is not the philosophy of destruction but living for the sake of living. His calmness and his meekness is his strength. No, it is here I remain.

"I know that other life. I have lived it and have been successful as the Occidental man terms it. I have had

money and the power that goes with money. I've given all that up to live here the rest of my days. That's why the foreign colony calls me crazy. They laugh at me and make fun of me because I'm free and they're slaves."

"How are you going to support yourself?" I asked.

"I don't have to," he laughed. "I've fifty thousand dollars in a bank in New York. The interest on that will keep me here like a lord for the rest of my life. Behold, my friend, you're looking on a really free man. I've all I want to care for my needs and I'm doing work that makes me happy. Poetry is only my avocation. I get more out of painting. You must come to my studio some time."

"I envy you, Harry," I said. "You're a lucky dog."

"Maybe I am, but I've been through hell finding myself. I've wasted twenty years of my life to do what I always wanted to do."

"What do you mean by wasting your life?" I asked.

"Ever since I got out of high school in Cincinnati, I wanted to paint. In fact, long before that. I recall that as a child I already had a facility with pencil and water color. The only instruction I had was a drawing course at high school. Before the year was out, the instructor went to my father and urged him to send me to art school—that I had a great gift for art. My father laughed at the suggestion. He wouldn't make his son an artist. It was a waste of time, a loafer's existence. Business, that was the place for me.

“When I had graduated I had to help my parents earn a living. My father fell sick and was not able to make ends meet. And so, with the abandon of a youngster, I gave up thoughts of studying art and became an office boy with an insurance firm. Two years later I became one of its salesmen. I guess I was also gifted with the power of making customers see how criminal it was to leave their wives and children uncared for when they passed into the great beyond. I developed a dramatic appeal in my selling which left the policy buyer feeling that I wasn’t a nuisance but a friend.

“When I was eighteen, I was earning one hundred dollars a week, a tremendous salary in those days. And when I was twenty-four, I was made manager in charge of sales with a salary of twenty thousand dollars a year. I spent my time traveling around the country meeting salesmen and organizing branch offices. When I would go home my father would always remind me that had I not listened to him, I would be a starving artist.

“I was too busy in those days to think of art. I was intoxicated by a sense of power, the worthlessness of which I didn’t realize until many years later. Although I came from lowly parents who emigrated from Germany before I was born, all social doors were open to me, even those of the most exclusive families of Cincinnati. It was flattering to be invited to the best teas, dances and dinners.

“It was at one of those affairs that I met Eve Metzger,

whose father, Colonel Metzger, was the town's business and social mentor and a director in our company. He took a liking to me. I remember once he put his arm around me after I had put over a particularly profitable deal and said, 'Young man, if you stick to what you're doing and do not allow success to go to your head, you'll be the youngest president this company has ever had.'

"Eve, I should say, was the prettiest girl in Cincinnati. Her debut was one of the town's most brilliant affairs. It got on the first pages of the newspapers and the list of the elite who attended filled a column. Yes, I was among them. The Colonel saw to that. I wasn't a bad chap to look at in those days—always well-groomed, well-fed and with all the self-assurance which material success brings.

"I was twenty-six when our engagement was announced, and the week before we were married I was made vice-president of my company with a salary of forty thousand dollars. The Colonel saw to that, too. Our marriage outshone Eve's coming-out party in social brilliance. I still remember the headlines: 'Eve Metzger Weds Youngest Executive.' We went to Europe on our honeymoon and when we returned the Colonel presented us with a beautiful home in Walnut Hills.

"Eve fitted in perfectly with the life we were leading. Very few days passed during the first year of our marriage that we did not go out or entertain on a grand

scale. But I found it hard to enjoy. I began to wonder what it was all about, what that mad social round was leading to. It's dangerous for a society man to question the value of his existence. I spoke to Eve about it once and she asked what else there was to do. It was true, there was nothing else for her to do. That was the life she was brought up to live.

“As a release I had the attic of our house fixed as a studio and den. I bought paints and an easel. Sunday mornings I would get up long before Eve or the rest of the household and go up there and dabble. I even secretly took lessons from a young Russian whom I had befriended by getting him an exhibition and several portrait commissions. As time went on, that attic became a meeting place for impoverished artists, poets and musicians, and in their company I was supremely happy.

“But their coming brought the first quarrel I had with Eve, the one that planted the germ of distrust which as time went on drew me further and further from her world. She disapproved of my weekend companions. She called them loafers who were making a fool of me. They only came for a meal, or a loan, or to use my influence in the town to help them, she said. I suppose she feared that their presence in the house did not enhance our social prestige. Finally, when the subject became a complex with her, I gave up my attempts to paint and my artistic acquaintances. Had it not been for

the fact that she was expecting a baby, I probably would have left her and my business and given myself entirely to art.

“I found myself hating her for having the baby. I felt that the coming of the child was part of her plot to keep me from the thing that gave me the most pleasure. The months that passed until the baby was born were bitter and dark. I began to hate my job and the people of my set. Evidently I didn’t show my feelings. Friends began to talk of sending me to the legislature. But the Colonel advised me to wait a few years when I could get a better appointment.

“The coming of my son, John, brought me the first real happiness since I gave up painting. I forgot about all the pleasures that I had denied myself and felt that he, at least, was something worth while that I created—as though only the elect can have a child! I made up my mind to see that life would not step in and prevent him from doing the things that he wished to do most. It was a curious turn of affairs, wasn’t it? I was embittered when June told me he was coming and hated him and her and the entire world. But when he was born, I felt I had been released from a long imprisonment.

“When John was six years old, my company sent me to Shanghai to organize a subsidiary corporation to do business in the Far East. I was overjoyed with the opportunity to get away from Cincinnati, but Eve wasn’t. At first she wouldn’t hear of it. What? Bury her-

self among a lot of Chinese? It was out of the question. She would get her father to use his influence to have somebody else sent. But her father convinced her she should go and so, grudgingly, she closed the house and said good-by to scores of her friends.

“We took a house in Bubbling Well Road and hired a corps of servants—an English governess, an amah, a first and second boy, a cook, two chauffeurs, a gardener and two coolies. We just couldn’t get along without them.

“During the first six months of my stay in Shanghai, I was absorbed by my job. Yet I was conscious of some overpowering force always about me; something I did not understand at first. It expressed itself in the never-ending labor song of coolies pulling great loads through the streets, working on buildings, unloading and loading ships—slaving for white masters and being paid a pittance. I heard it in my luxurious office on the Bund. It came in through the windows of drawing rooms where I took tea with consuls and foreign generals.

“The labor song of the coolies haunted me. It reminded me of Poe’s ‘Masque of the Red Death’—a grim, slant-eyed ghost chanting in the background of the white man’s life. I began to see that white men were parasites on the back of a sleeping, Oriental giant. Instead of regarding the Chinese as draft animals, I began to admire them, to see in their long-suffering natures a spark of greatness. I learned the lesson that in meekness

there is strength, strength that could withstand all onslaughts of the so-called dominant and superior race.

"I began to cultivate Chinese acquaintances and became particularly friendly with Ah Wong, my compradore. Wong was an elderly man and a noble Chinese. You can imagine my admiration for him when I read in the *North China Daily News* how he changed places with his private ricksha puller and carried him to a hospital. The coolie had collapsed while he was pulling Wong on Szechuan Road. Wong alighted, picked up the coolie, put him in the ricksha, got between the shafts and ran through the streets to a hospital.

"I began to wonder why white men regard the Oriental as inferior; why I could not take a man like Wong into my club, into hotel dining rooms or the park. Either we were insane or the Chinese were insane, I thought. When I talked with Wong there always came over me a sense of shame, shame that in me flowed the blood of the people who were despoiling China, the blood of complacency, smugness and arrogance.

"I began to see that we, the white race, were too conceited to understand that the so-called mystery of the East lies in the fact that names of people and places are unpronounceable and that their way of doing things reverses our own. What is supernatural about the Oriental if he eats rice and fish instead of bread and meat, or if his women wear trousers instead of skirts? While we make a conceit of ethics, Orientals practice it. While

we rush, they walk slowly to the same goal. Why, they are grandparents and we are only children!

“Where is the mystery? Why does the obvious become intangible and occult? The fault lies with the white man, particularly he who finds that where the yellow and brown men dwell his mediocrity is not a handicap. He allows himself to believe that a man who speaks a jargon and whose ways of doing are the reverse of those in the West, is inferior. Rather than try to see that there is reason in Eastern methods, he shuts his eyes and never opens them again for the remainder of his life in Asia. *That* is the white man’s burden.

“But to go on with my story. Eve had transplanted herself without any difficulty and was the colony’s leading social light. She brought Cincinnati to Shanghai. To her, the Oriental was a dirty, smelly, objectionable creature unfit for her society. While my horizon broadened, hers became more and more circumscribed by the feeling of her own superiority. My respect for her was fast dwindling. The only thing that drew me home was John, now a fine lad who spoke Chinese as well as English, much to his mother’s disgust.

“Within three years my business was well organized. We had opened branches in Peking, Tokyo, Hong Kong and Singapore. Only one more remained to be opened and that was in Bangkok. Since our plans were to go home when the Bangkok job was done, I decided to do

the work myself and then go back by way of Europe and put John in school.

“I was entranced by what I found in Siam. There was no labor song. The people smiled and seemed happy. The easy-going pace of life fascinated me. Even the jungle was friendly and I was glad I came.

“Six months after we arrived, little John died of dysentery. It was a terrible tragedy to face out here. I went off and brooded and cried about it. The East had given me a new lease on life but it had taken from me my finest possession, the son whom I had dreamed of bringing up free of the complications which had enslaved me. Instead of being bitter, I saw in this terrible visitation a sign. His death released the last tie that held me to my world.

“I wanted him buried in Bangkok, but Eve would not hear of it. She must take the child with her to Cincinnati. She sailed and left me to look after business, but business was farthest from my mind. I wanted to think. The way to freedom was at last open to me. What should I do? I no longer made Eve happy. Why go back to her now that John was dead? She was still a beautiful, well-preserved woman. She would survive without me. I resigned from the firm and turned over everything I owned, except fifty thousand dollars, to Eve.

“And so here I am, to all intents and purposes just a retired business man, but a very active artist, and shall I say poet? My domestic life is perfect. I have a beau-

tiful little model who insists on living with me and looking after my simple household. She never intrudes herself upon my moods and has no social aspirations, even though she has white blood in her. I am supremely happy. When I feel like painting, I paint. When I feel like writing, I write; and when I want to loaf, I loaf. I have a boat tied up to my shack on the river and when I feel like traveling, I go off and live in the interior."

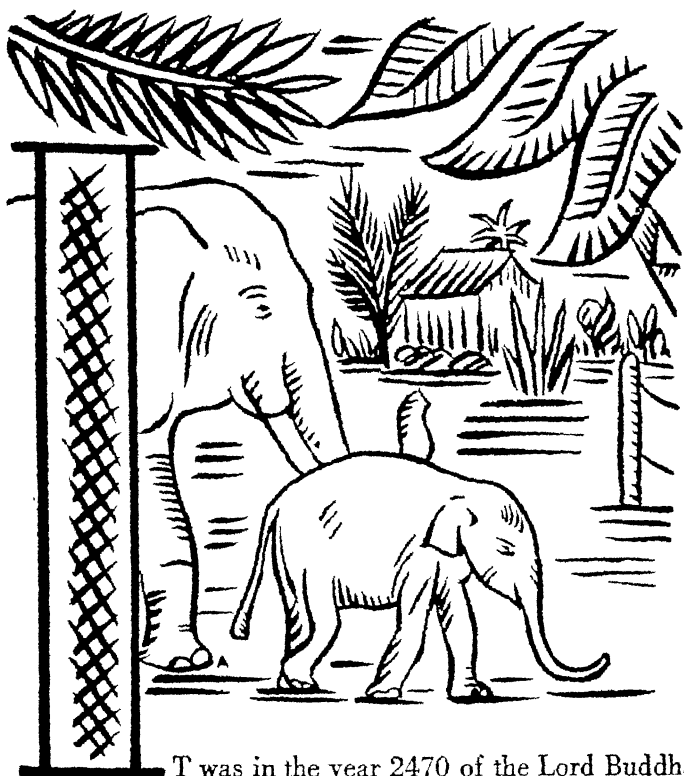
Just before I sailed for home, Harry showed me a letter sent by an art dealer who had passed through Bangkok several months before. He wrote a glowing account of Harry's first exhibit in New York and the newspaper clippings he enclosed proclaimed Schaeffer as one of America's great artists. Many of the twenty canvases exhibited were sold at high prices and the dealer urged Harry to come to New York to execute numerous commissions.

"Well, are you going?" I asked.

"No, old dear, I'm not interested in hearing applause. It turned my head once before. I won't let it happen again. I'm staying right here in the jungle, where I'm just a retired business man."

CHAPTER 15





T was in the year 2470 of the Lord Buddha, which, translated into the Christian era, is 1927, that the Supreme Council of State, in solemn assembly in Bangkok, advised King Prajadhipok to be rid of the white elephant. Many weeks of deliberation had passed before this decision was reached, there being a handful of councillors who defended the animal on the ground that it was being sacrificed on the altar of poor art.

The beast under discussion had been ensconced in a bright, red background on the flag for many years. Wherever the domain of Siam extended, there the white elephant floated in the breeze. But every time a Siamese caught sight of the flag either at home or abroad, the thrill of pride was always tempered with the feeling that something was wrong with the elephant. Many times his tail was too long or his body too broad or his trunk hung crooked. Somehow the elephant was not an elephant.

It appears that Siam's flags were manufactured in Japan. The Japanese, knowing nothing of the artistic tastes of the Siamese, turned out an elephant much in the manner of their own great artist, Hiroshige. To the Siamese, the Japanese elephant looked more like a pig with a caudal appendage at each end. Whether it was impressionism or modernism, or based on the artistic standards of Japanese prints, meant nothing to the Siamese. The result was plainly not an elephant.

The decision of the Supreme Council, which was eventually upheld by the King, does not mean that the white elephant has been discarded. The white elephant, of course, is not really white, but is an albino with pink eyes whose skin is the same dirty gray of less distinguished behemoths. It still plays a vital part in the life of the people.

The intelligent class deny most strenuously that there is anything sacred in connection with the elephant. They

object to the religious connotation and argue at great length that the animal is merely a symbol, a charm similar in every respect to the rabbit's foot, the horse-shoe, the four-leaf clover, the elk's tooth and other talismans. All elephants, regardless of their color, are considered lucky. The white one, however, is the very embodiment of good fortune to the possessor.

The discovery of a white elephant, especially if it be a baby, early in a new king's reign, is considered by the Siamese the soundest insurance of good fortune and a guaranty of an era of plenty. The good luck which follows as a result of its presentation to the ruler, embraces all people of the land.

Such an elephant was born in 1926, during the first few months of the reign of King Prajadhipok, in the elephant compound of a British teak company in Chiangmai, about thirty hours' train ride from Bangkok.

Its birth was hailed with joy and thanksgiving throughout the nation, for the reign had not begun auspiciously.

The new king was looked upon with distrust and his first official acts, especially the dismissal of hundreds of unnecessary government employees, did not meet with the hearty approval of his subjects.

On his first official visit to the northern provinces, the King inspected the elephant, then six months old, and accepted it as his country's mascot. An impressive parade was held and many prayers were said for the

health of the animal. When His Majesty returned to Bangkok, plans were made for a great reception in the capital. A railway car was built and equipped with electric lights and shower baths to house the baby and its mother. Special corrals were constructed at stations on the line to Bangkok.

On the day of departure from Chiangmai, the baby and its mother were given a great send-off. Elephants in rich trappings escorted them to their private coach while priests chanted and maidens danced. All went well until the time came for them to enter the car. Then they balked. Every elephant delicacy was offered to induce them to walk into their rolling home, but it was of no avail. The beasts were in no mood to travel. Finally three elephants were commandeered to push the timid, departing guests into their coach. This operation consumed three hours and officials heaved a great sigh of relief when the train finally started on its run to the capital.

The arrival of the "white elephant special" will go down in my memory as the most impressive scene I have ever witnessed. It will go down in Siamese history as marking the greatest spontaneous outpouring of people the country has ever seen. The train's terminus was not a freight yard with facilities for unloading cattle, but the marble halls of the Royal Station on the outskirts of the city where His Majesty and the princes and peers were gathered.

Nine coaches occupied by dignitaries preceded the elephant car. The coach next to that of the animals was like a temple. Candles glowed and as the cars slowed down the chanting of the priests inside could be heard above the rumble of the wheels. Novices waved heavily-decorated fans with a slow, studied rhythm.

At a signal from one of the princes, a hush fell upon the thousands of spectators. The bolts were withdrawn and as the elephants trudged down the incline a blast from a conch shell pierced the silence as with a sword. Thrice the sound rose and fell, losing itself in the flatness of the paddy fields, sending back no echo. My ears rang with that weird fanfare. The elephants gave no heed to the impressive welcome and plodded down to a marquee where they were dressed for the procession to the palace.

A few minutes elapsed and the curtains of the tent were pulled apart. The animals were swathed in royal robes. Their head coverings were of a red, silken fabric minutely interwoven with gold threads. From their ears hung tufts of colored ribbons. On their backs, immediately behind the mahouts, heavy silks, also embroidered in gold, were fastened. Craftsmen had worked for weeks preparing these costly garments.

Virtually the entire city packed itself along the three-mile-route from the station to the palace grounds. Except for slinking pariah dogs, the business and residential quarters were deserted. It was as if some Pied Piper

had passed through the town luring away all the inhabitants. Even the Chinese, who never stop work except for their New Year's Day, were gone from their shops.

Two policemen on spirited Siamese ponies led the parade. They were followed by a Boy Scout band and scout troops bearing white elephant standards. Then came the two Lao trainers of the white elephant and one hundred men dressed in the *devada*, or attire of the "Heavenly Followers," consisting of a white cloak, red *panung* and tapering head gear in white and gold.

Following them was a band of fifty men each with a small, oblong drum which they beat at long intervals with the palms of their hands, accompanied by the continuous blowing of a conch shell. Twelve seven-tiered royal umbrellas, carried by court attendants, formed the succeeding section, after which came a squad of fighting men in ancient Siamese outfits.

Preceding the white elephant and its mother was Phra Svekvejera, a white elephant presented to the late King. Behind him came the baby and its mother hitched together by a thick white rope. Following the elephants marched an attendant bearing a golden tray on which were the many decorations conferred upon the latest national mascot.

A white monkey, also a symbol of good luck, came next. He was seated on a red chair in a cage mounted on a gold and red palanquin borne by four attendants. The rear guard of the procession consisted of another

regiment of one hundred men in the garb of the "Heavenly Followers."

The lawns and gardens of the palace were turned into a fairy ground. Pavilions were everywhere to shield from the sun, princes, generals, admirals, wives of the late King Chulalongkorn and his unmarried daughters, foreign ministers and their wives and other dignitaries in full dress uniform. Into this colorful setting ambled the procession, its pace being set by the clumsy gait of the elephants.

The elephants were brought to a halt before the royal marquee. There a chapter of Brahmin priests intoned prayers for the baby after which the little animal and its mother were escorted to a newly constructed, luxurious stable equipped with electric lights, electric fans and shower baths.

As the elephants entered their home, a troupe of Lao dancing girls began to perform in the elephant compound. The grace, beauty and syncopation of their movements were delights rarely experienced in Bangkok, for the so-called Siamese dancing, as it is seen in the capital, is of an entirely different variety.

During the night, multitudes poured into the gates of the Royal Palace grounds giving the Napoleon-hatted little guards a real job for the first time in their humdrum life of carrying big muskets. While the elephants munched on the choicest elephant food, acrobats, clowns and tight-rope walkers performed. Groups of *takraw*

players butted and kicked a reed-woven puck with the dexterity of professional jugglers. Use of the hands and arms is not permitted in this game.

The main attraction of the evening was the lantern dance. Gigantic, undulating, papier mache dragons painted in green and yellow and operated by dozens of men, moved about the lawn. The eyes of these beasts were electrically illuminated, as were other portions of the body. Strings of red electric bulbs darted in and out of the mouths in a most menacing manner. Accompanying these weird creatures as a bodyguard were dozens of paper lions, cleverly manipulated by men inside the framework. Groups of Siamese and Lao dancers rhythmically swayed far into the night to the throb of drums and deep-toned gongs.

The next morning, before members of the diplomatic corps, princes and other dignitaries, all in grand full-dress uniforms, His Majesty christened the baby white elephant, Phra Savek Gojadej Dilok.

Ladies of the Court presented food to the Prince Patriarch who offered prayers and led the *Veandean* ceremony. Solemn priests in saffron robes arranged themselves in a circle around the elephant enclosure. A set of candles was lighted. Slowly and silently, with funereal impressiveness, the priests passed the candles from hand to hand. As the first round was completed the conch shell was sounded. At the end of its wailing note the candles were passed around again and finally

for a third time. The service concluded with a recitation by Brahmin priests to the white elephant.

The white elephant ceremonies were enjoyed by all but a few who thought that too much money had been spent to stage the show. They said that something like eighty thousand *ticals* had been thrown away on a superstition.

When the question of expenses for the white elephant pageant came up before His Majesty, several cabinet ministers expressed the opinion that since the animal was presented to the King as a personal gift, the money should come from his own Privy Purse. The King, however, pointed out that thus far he had had very little personal pleasure from the elephant. If the animal were a horse it would be a different matter, for then he could ride it. The people, he said, have taken charge of the elephant and he would not stand in their way by claiming the beast as his own. Since they liked the mascot so much it was theirs and the money for its reception would have to come out of the government's coffers.

In making this decision he drew attention to the fact that thousands of people, living in isolated sections of the Kingdom, were brought into closer touch with the government through the ceremony. No occasion, he said, could have made a better appeal to their unlettered minds than the royal reception to an elephant which symbolized the luck of the nation.

When I was told about the argument concerning expenses, I wondered what Republican or Democratic leaders in America would be willing to pay for a ballyhoo as effective as the white elephant pageant.

While the Siamese were stirred up about their mascot, the foreign colony found themselves with another kind of white elephant on their hands, namely the little sheet of which I was the editor. My practice had been to play no favorites, and as a result, news crept into the paper which the emigrés declared was undermining their prestige. I had heard from time to time that the foreigners did not like my policy but I received no formal complaint until our columnist, in his sketches of Bangkok, referred to "a white prostitute in a ricksha sitting demurely beneath a parasol."

One of our largest English advertisers sent for our advertising manager and plainly told him that we had gone far enough. English newspapers, he said, should not mention the subject of white prostitutes. He did not deny that the city had its full share of young ladies who found it profitable to ply their trade in the foreign community, but to mention them in the public prints did grave harm to Western prestige. This country, he said, must be kept safe for white men, and he as a respectable white man was going to see that it was done. He made it very clear that if we were guilty again of

injuring the sensibilities of white residents, he would withdraw his advertising.

His remonstrance was mild compared with the outcries that followed the publication of a story sent us by a United Press correspondent in Tokyo concerning a Japanese dramatic version of the life of Christ. The play was written, acted and produced by Japanese. In it Mary Magdalene was pictured as a not-too-religious worldling, who worships her Master as a great teacher and at the same time longs for a more fleshly love in return. In one scene, Mary, who has become a member of the Master's household, rebukes the Saviour for refusing to fall in love with her.

"My child," the Master answers, "you do not even understand what love is."

"Oh, yes I do," Mary Magdalene replies. "Rather it is you who do not understand. If you did you would take me in your arms now and kiss me."

The Master then gives up the argument and retreats. Judas Iscariot enters to find Mary weeping in rage.

"What is the matter, Mary?" he asks.

"That damned old fool," she sobs, "has been trying to tell *me* about love."

I felt that the story was an interesting sidelight on Japanese interpretation of the founder of Christianity. Although the treatment was unorthodox, the incident made Christ's renunciation of temptation a poignant fact.

The next day, the editor of the *Siam Observer* printed a leader in which he said that never in his long experience in journalism, had he seen anything so blasphemous as the news story we printed. We were the criminals. Not a word was said against the Japanese authors. I was relieved when I found that he did not conclude his editorial with a demand that I be tarred and feathered and escorted out of town on a rail.

A few days later one of our reporters, en route to Hua Hin, happened to be seated near the advertiser who had objected to our mention of the white prostitute. The gentleman turned to the newspaperman and in a voice that every one in the train could hear said:

“So you’re on that vile sheet which prints articles about prostitutes and has the nerve to call Christ a damned fool. Well, you won’t do it much longer. When my contract for the year expires you can tell your damned editor that it won’t be renewed.”

The gentleman kept his word. The advertising contract was not renewed.

With feeling in the foreign community growing stronger against us, I knew that the withdrawal of one advertisement meant that others would also go. British merchants, who felt offended by our news policy, controlled nearly ninety per cent of the local advertising and a boycott by them would play havoc in our business office. I pointed out the danger to Prince Svasti

and Louis and they urged me not to deviate from the policy on which I had embarked.

“So long as you are fair to every one irrespective of color, there’s nothing to be afraid of,” said the Prince.

The next incident that aroused the wrath of the bearers of the white man’s burden was an editorial in which I criticized the method of raising money for Earl Haig’s fund for wounded British war veterans. On Armistice Day groups of Englishwomen were to sell poppies of three different kinds: one for three *ticals*, one for two *ticals* and one for one *tical*. Such sales methods, I pointed out, were ideal in a community where a premium is placed on prestige since a man would have to buy an expensive poppy or lose caste in the eyes of his neighbors. It would have been better, I said, for people to give as much as they could afford and wear a poppy to show that they had contributed rather than to advertise the amount.

I thought it was fair comment but it seemed that what I wrote merely heaped more coals on the fires of hate that burned against the paper in the white colony. The curses that were hurled at my head at the Sports Club bar were by no means friendly or charitable.

Notwithstanding the animosity of the foreigners, the paper continued to gain circulation. For every cancellation of a white man’s subscription, we received ten new native subscribers. At the end of the first year, our

circulation exceeded the combined figures of the other two English language dailies.

But the event that was to bring out the full force of the colony's wrath occurred when a ten-year-old Siamese boy was caught trying to cash a forged totalizator ticket at one of the horse race meetings of the Sports Club. The youngster said that a man promised to give him fifty *satangs* if he brought back the face value of the ticket. He was taken before the English secretary of the club, a paid employee, who ordered two Indian watchmen to beat the boy with their bamboo sticks. They started in with a will and when they let down a bit, the secretary urged them on by crying: "Beat him harder! Beat him harder!"

Several prominent Siamese complained of the treatment the boy received and when the secretary made no effort to stop the watchmen, the onlookers called the police. The Indians and the boy were arrested and the next day a warrant was issued for the Englishman, who was admitted to bail pending trial.

The Bangkok *Times* ignored the story. A foreigner was involved in what might prove to be a scandal and that was enough to kill the news. The *Observer* printed the incident in its humorous column and said:

"Then the row started. A crowd gathered and loudly asked why an Indian was beating a future hope of the Thai [Siamese] race."

When I showed the *Observer's* comment to Kosol,

who was present at the beating, he said with the customary Oriental fatalism:

“We’re used to insults from foreigners. If the same treatment were given to a dog or a horse as was given to that little boy, I’m sure there would have been a great outcry from the *Observer* and from the white colony’s Society for the Promotion of Animal Welfare. I hate to think what that paper would say if two Siamese beat a white boy.”

True to the traditions of the foreign community, the Sports Club secretary held his head high when he appeared in court. He testified that he yelled to the watchmen to “beat him harder” because the Indians could not hit the boy on account of the child’s twisting to avoid the sticks. He further added that when he ordered the Indians to continue, they had not sufficiently punished the youngster. His attorney declared that the beating was not brutal because the doctor found “only two small, red marks on the boy’s thighs, each about an inch long which would disappear in five days.” The secretary was fined twenty *ticals* and the Indians fifteen *ticals* each.

The only witness who gave evidence against them was a reporter from the *Bangkok Times*, but once more that newspaper remained discreetly silent. It adhered to the policy: “We must keep this country safe for the white man.”

A week after the publication of the conviction of the

club secretary, a rumor came to me that the Sports Club directors, consisting of eight Englishmen and two Siamese, had met secretly and had decided to cancel all future advertisements and printing orders in connection with racing business, which our office had had for nine years. Seeking confirmation or denial of this report, I went to see the club president, who was the Number One man of the largest English firm in Bangkok.

"Is it true," I said, "that the Sports Club will not renew the printing order with the *Daily Mail*?"

"I don't know how you found it out, but it's true," he replied.

"Was anything wrong with the work or was the price too high?" I asked.

"I really do not care to answer that," he said, growing embarrassed.

"If the *Daily Mail* had purchased its paper stock from your firm for the past nine years and suddenly cancelled its order, wouldn't you want to know why?"

"I really do not feel that I should answer," he replied.

"Why?"

He remained silent. Much as I disliked all that this man stood for and what he was trying to hide, I felt sorry for him. Here was the pillar of the foreign colony forced to lower his prestige in the presence of a despised newspaperman. Finally, he said:

“I can say nothing. You will have to take up the matter with the club committee.”

To make what took place in the Number One man’s office a matter of record, I wrote a letter to the committee reporting what had transpired and published it under a headline which read: “Sports Club Retaliates for Story on Boy Beating.” I made it clear that the letter was printed to reveal an attempt to muzzle the *Daily Mail*.

I thought the incident would end there, but a week later a messenger delivered to me the following communication from the Royal Bangkok Sports Club:

“Dear Sir:

“I am instructed to inform you that you have lost the Club’s printing orders because you appear to find the Club of greater value to you as a source of sensational ‘copy’ than as a business client.

“My committee is unable to agree with your idea of what constitutes fair comment on current events.

“Yours faithfully,

“(Signed) C. E. W. HOGGE, Secretary.”

I was astounded at the arrogant conceit of this note which absolved the secretary for beating the boy and at the same time admitted it was punishing us for printing the facts in the case.

I shall always remember the joy of preparing the

decision of the Sports Club for publication. There was a banner line across the front page announcing that the Club admitted punishing us, as well as a photograph of the letter and a cartoon. The latter pictured the Sports Club president shooting a popgun with a cork bullet labelled "printing order" at an elephant representing the *Daily Mail*, while behind him stood the club secretary, over whose head were two angels holding halos. They were labelled "Bangkok Times" and "Siam Observer."

I also reprinted a story from the *Pinang Gazette*, an English-owned newspaper in Penang, which praised the *Daily Mail* for the stand it had taken against the club. On the editorial page was a twelve-hundred-word leader which attacked the club and those in the foreign colony who condoned the action of the secretary. It was the most acrimonious editorial against the white man's arrogance that had appeared in that paper.

As a result of this diatribe we lost a number of valuable advertisements, but the Prince and Louis were undaunted. They said that they would personally make good any money lost in order to maintain a newspaper that was not afraid to print the news. The advertisements eventually returned to the paper when the cause of their removal was explained to home offices of local firms.

A number of Siamese members resigned from the Sports Club. The two Siamese on the club committee, one a prince and the other a titled commoner, did not

resign. Their meekness was the subject of much comment among the natives. Foreigners had flattered them too much. To side with their own people in this case would have ruined their standing with the whites.

CHAPTER 16





I WAS now a renegade. All doors in the white colony except those of a few "eccentric" residents were closed to me. When foreigners, who once were cordial, drove past me in their cars, they ostentatiously turned their heads in the other direction. At the hotels white men lowered their voices and their glances penetrated my back like icy draughts.

For a time there was a rumor that I was going to be

deported. Several influential foreigners, backed by a few Siamese bureaucrats who didn't like the things the *Daily Mail* said about their wasteful and inefficient administration, tried to influence the police commissioner to have me declared an undesirable alien. Fortunately that official took no action although, as far as he himself was concerned, he had just cause for wanting to be rid of me.

I was called a "bounder" and an "upstart," a "crazy American" and a "damned fool," but it was not until the paper opposed the Reverend Masters' attempt to keep the Christian sabbath unsullied that I achieved the blackest stigma of them all. I became a Bolshevik and an enemy of society—white society of course. This brand was placed upon me not because the white colony agreed with the motives of the clergyman, but because the latter was an American. I had already been guilty of editorial attacks upon Europeans, but to cause one's own countryman to lose prestige in the eyes of the Siamese was the greatest breach of the white colonist's code. It happened in this way.

His Majesty the King in a royal decree made known to his people that he had set aside a Sunday for his annual review of the boy scout troops of the entire kingdom. It is the biggest day in the calendar for the youth of the nation, when they goose-step past their sovereign with military precision, clutching wooden staves. Instead of being attached to churches as they are

in the United States, scout troops in Siam are connected with public, private and mission schools supervised by the Ministry of Public Instruction.

The school of the Reverend Masters, which is maintained by the American Presbyterian Mission, had a crack troop of scouts, most of whom were sons of devout and influential Buddhists. The boys were sent to the school, not for conversion to Christianity, but because the missionaries provided better instruction than was given in government schools. A few days after the King's decree was published, the Reverend Masters told his boys that he could not permit them to participate in the review because his mission regarded Sunday as a day set aside for devotion and rest.

When his decision was made known through the columns of the *Daily Mail* exclusively, there was a great outcry from the Siamese. What right had a missionary to oppose an order of the King? The boys were Buddhists and Buddhists have no sabbath. I was surprised at the number of letters we received condemning Mr. Masters.

"Sunday or Monday," one of the correspondents wrote, "they [the missionaries] require the protection of their country's guns just the same."

Perhaps what the foreign colony most disapproved of in connection with this incident was the mild editorial I wrote chaffing Mr. Masters for trying to inflict blue laws upon Buddhist Bangkok. The situation was complicated

by the fact that the headmaster of the Chiengmai school, also operated by the Presbyterian Mission, readily gave his boys permission to take part in the parade. The Chiengmai missionary said that he could not do otherwise because much of the success of missionary work was due to the kindness and aid of the King.

Docile boy scouts, trained to obey and respect their elders and superiors, were in a dilemma. They wanted to march in the parade but to do so meant mutiny. They held a secret meeting and petitioned the Ministry of Public Instruction to permit them to enter the review. An officer was assigned to them as leader and Siamese business men provided buses to carry the boys to the parade ground.

The Reverend Masters was not in the city on the morning of the review. Before they left the school, the boys asked the teacher in charge for permission and when it was denied they walked out in a body screaming "*chaiyo*" (hurrah) for the King. There was a note of hysteria in their voices for it is very rare that a Siamese allows himself the exquisite pleasure of being a rebel. When the troop marched past the King it was received by onlookers with wild cheers. The scouts of the mission school were the heroes of the day.

As a result of this incident, missionary work in Siam received a temporary setback. A number of boys were withdrawn from the school. The Reverend Masters and his wife sailed from Bangkok for a prolonged leave in

the States and several Siamese newspapers reported that he would never return. Believing that the time was fitting to teach the Siamese the advantage of Saturday over Sunday as a sabbath, the Seventh Day Adventist Mission put on a monster drive for the sale of tracts. "Pep letters" were broadcast to salesmen in the field urging them to point out to prospective buyers of propaganda that since the Adventists celebrate their sabbath on Saturday, they were not involved in the scout affair.

The Adventist secretary and treasurer told me with a long face several weeks later that he expected tract sales to be lower that year than ever before. The Siamese, he said, refused to believe that Christians observed any other day but Sunday for their sabbath and therefore declined to buy.

Siam continues to be both a paradise and a paradox for the missionary. The Siamese say to him:

"Glad to have you here. You may really have something to give us. We're not perfect, you know."

Encouraged by this hospitable reception, the wandering religion peddler hopefully opens his sample case and the Siamese chooses a course in business for his son or a primary school education for his daughter.

But notwithstanding the most eloquent salesmanship, he refuses to buy salvation. For the past two hundred years the refusal of the Siamese to purchase a ticket to a Christian heaven has been a thorn in the side of Western religionists. Even the convert-catching device of

offering free education to those who will profess Christianity has had no material effect.

The greatest obstacle missionaries face is the broad tolerance of Buddhism, Siam's State religion. The Buddha taught that all *dharma* (religious doctrine) which is good, no matter where it originates, can be acknowledged or tested by all Buddhists.

Thus when a Siamese boy or girl consents to become a Christian to obtain a free education, he takes the new faith on trial, just as one accepts goods on trial. The prospective convert reserves the right to return to the Buddhist status whenever he feels justified. Notwithstanding this religious flexibility, comparatively few Siamese consent to become Christians for the sake of an education. The larger number of pupils in mission schools prefer to retain their religious beliefs and pay their way.

Out of Siam's eleven million people, the Catholics, after two hundred years, claim to have converted fifty thousand, and the Protestants, after one hundred years, twenty thousand. Modest as these figures are, there is little doubt in the minds of the Siamese that they are exaggerated. If the actual number of converts were recorded in annual missionary reports to home organizations, funds for baptizing all the nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost would no longer be forthcoming. In that respect the

missionary is like a policeman whose promotion depends on the number of arrests he has to his credit.

“All the converts eventually go back to Buddhism,” said John Sylvester, as we discussed the wisdom of the Reverend Masters’ act, “and the insignificant few who remain Christians are better Christians than their teachers because they were once Buddhists.”

And John Sylvester, or perhaps I should still call him the Reverend John Sylvester, Ph.D., ought to know. He was one of those who remained friendly to me. The foreign colony called him a “nut,” the missionaries called him “damned” and the Siamese called him *Kroo* (teacher). These sharp differences of opinion existed because Sylvester, who came to Bangkok as a missionary, had given up Christianity for Buddhism.

He was one of the latest members of the Outcast Club which met every afternoon in a room on the second floor of Lim Kim’s restaurant. The membership of this exclusive little drinking and talking circle was composed of Cotton, Schaeffer, Sylvester and myself. Sylvester, now a teacher in the English department of Chulalongkorn University, was the latest member. Ostracism from the foreign colony was the qualification for entrance.

I still wish for the urbane fellowship of that little group; to hear the machine-gun clatter of mah jong

tiles coming through the partitions of other rooms; to taste again one of the thousands of sun flower seeds we consumed; to see the lovely moon face of San Thoi, our own Sing Song girl who with her companions made the time slip by all too soon. I should like to partake again of the kindly, thoughtful hospitality of Lim Kim, who late one night took us to an opium emporium where we became deathly ill from our first pipe. How I envied the slumbrous peace that descended upon the habitués after a few puffs of the vile tasting smoke, while I drank Enos Salts to stop the retching of my stomach. Opium in Bangkok costs relatively as much as whisky in the United States, since both commodities are in the hands of bootleggers. Siam banned the sale of the drug when she joined the League of Nations and thereby gave up her biggest source of revenue.

Oriental, I noticed, are not as susceptible to the influence of drugs as are Westerners. Either they have a stronger control over their habits or a greater immunity. Opium, some physicians in the East say, has done no more to undermine the health of the people of the Orient than whisky in the Occident. There are just as many octogenarians boasting of having used a temperate amount of opium during their lives as there are those who drink whisky and smoke tobacco. Most Orientals regard an occasional pipe of opium as a tonic. Lim Kim told us that when he is perplexed by some problem,

opium "lifts the clouds from my eyes and lets the true light flow in."

"Kroo Sylvester wise like Confucius," observed San Thoi when our renegade doctor of philosophy had said that no convert to Christianity remains in the fold.

"What do you know of Confucius, little sun flower?" asked Schaeffer, pulling her into his lap.

"San Thoi once Christian," said the pretty little Chinese pleasure girl. She wore a blue gown of embroidered silk with a stiff collar that clung tightly to a neck of pale amber and to a girlish bosom, accenting the contour of her breasts. The dress, flaring slightly at the ankles, set the rest of her beautiful body free. Her oval face, touched with lipstick and rouge, gave her the appearance of a manikin in wax.

"So you were once one of us," said Sylvester. "That makes me very happy, San Thoi."

"I still belong you, you very nice gentleman," she giggled.

"How did you become a Christian, Sun Flower?" asked Schaeffer.

"I come from Canton side," she said, pouring herself a cup of tea. We could never entice her to drink Occidental liquors. "My father keep tailor shop. Ten years old missionary come tell my father I go school. My father say girl no need learn. Read, write make much trouble. Missionary say he take me school, my father he pay nothing.

"I learn Jesus Christ great god, my saviour. Missionary put water on my head, say I am Christian. I sing hymns. When I fight girls, teacher tell me I must love my neighbor. Say bad girl no go heaven. Teacher say Jesus love everybody, Chinese, foreigner. Nice white teacher like me, put arm around San Thoi and kiss her. He say I must be good girl and Jesus love me. He kiss me many time. He say I must listen him or no go heaven. I listen him many times. He make San Thoi feel nice.

"One day principal find me and man. Tell me I very bad girl. He send me home. My father beat me and sell me Sing Song girl in restaurant Hong Kong. White man come by and by. He buy me from master. He very nice. Soon he go to white woman, leave me money. I go find sister Bangkok. She dead. I come here. That's why Christian no good. He talk nice thing, do bad thing."

"Why, you poor little girl," said Schaeffer. "So it was a Christian who brought your downfall. What are you going to do now?"

"Stay with nice gentlemen," said the little incorrigible, coyly.

"All right, little moon face, stay right here," he said, putting his arm around her.

"There you are, my friends," said Sylvester. "In San Thoi you have an object lesson of the evils that Christianity can teach to these simple-minded Orientals. I don't mean that all missionaries tempt girls. No doubt

San Thoi was the temptress. What I mean is that they teach the Bible literally, straight from the gospels without any of the modern interpretations we accept. How can the Siamese, for instance, accept the tenet of 'love thy neighbor' when but a few years ago white men robbed them under the guise of extra-territoriality. How can the Oriental believe in the equality of all peoples when the white man treats him as inferior? That was one of the principal faults I found with missionary work when I came out here twenty years ago and which eventually led me to Buddhism."

"*Kroo* Sylvester very good Buddhist, very good man," laughed San Thoi.

"Why, you don't know what I'm talking about, San Thoi," laughed Sylvester.

"San Thoi know *Kroo* Sylvester very good man," she said.

"Not so good as I might be," he said. "I'm afraid I like you and life too much."

"A little while ago, Sylvester," I said, "you made the remark that Buddhist converts don't stick to Christianity. How about converts to Buddhism?"

"Buddhism is the only all-embracing religion I know of," he replied. "It has no forms, no services, no baptism so far as the lay person is concerned. It says all people are Buddhists. All you have to do is live right and unselfishly and you are a Buddhist. You boys may call yourself atheists or agnostics but in reality you are

Buddhists. Every intelligent man lives a liberal interpretation of Buddhism.”

“How did you learn all these things, John?” asked Cotton.

“How did you, John?” said Schaeffer. “San Thoi has told us about how she became a Christian. Suppose you tell us how you became a Buddhist.”

Sylvester tipped his head back and drank the remains of his brandy, showing beneath his black and gray beard a powerful neck. He got up from the table, clasped his hands behind his head and began slowly to pace the floor. He was of medium height with the build of a wrestler. San Thoi did not take her eyes off him. I didn't blame her. He was a fine figure of a man. Finally he went over to her and said:

“San Thoi, it's a long story. Do you think you could sit through it?”

“San Thoi like anything *Kroo* Sylvester say,” she said, looking up at him roguishly.

He was born in Brooklyn where his father and his father's father had been Presbyterian ministers, and John, as the only son, was brought up for the pulpit. The elder Sylvester was a learned man and although he called himself a liberal, was shocked by the preaching of Henry Ward Beecher. He called him a spell-binder and a showman and concealed from John news-

papers detailing Beecher's activities and speeches. But John managed to learn something about this new voice in the church and was greatly impressed.

John was somewhat of a prodigy and was graduated from Amherst when he was eighteen. Encouraged by his father he continued his studies at Harvard, where he received a degree of doctor of philosophy at twenty-one. He prepared for the ministry at Union in New York and obtained a post as an assistant rector at a fashionable church in Manhattan.

The century had just turned. Robert Ingersoll and Henry George were dead but a few years, yet their principles were still alive and well-known to Sylvester. He was fired with the idea of preaching the simple precepts of Christ.

"Eliminate the dogma and the hocus pocus of the church and you will find religion," he said. "The machine has conquered man and his only salvation is in simplifying his life to obtain a true perspective on its value. This is the function of the church."

The hypocrisy of his rich parishioners galled him. Their unctious piety on Sunday inspired him to preach caustic sermons, until his elder colleague, who had been well cared for by his parishioners for nearly twenty years, called him aside and gave him some sound advice.

"Get over your fine ideals and face the facts," he told Sylvester. "You've got an excellent opportunity

here but you'll never get along by making your congregation writhe in their seats. You're a smart man. There's a place for you in the church but you'll never hold it by clinging so tightly to your ideals. Don't shock these people with radical ideas. They won't get you anywhere. Take your Christianity with common sense."

This little lecture did not stabilize Sylvester. Rather it tended to unbalance him all the more. He had no desire to flatter wealthy men and women who cheated, lied and trod upon their fellow men ruthlessly six days in the week and spent an hour in the church on Sunday. He made up his mind to seek another field for his talents.

He did not get an opportunity until Sarah Sawyer came to the church to tell about the missionary work carried on by her and her father in Siam.

There was something forbidding in the character of Sarah Sawyer as she stood in the pulpit. Probably it was because of her fanatical desire to convert the heathen. Yet her struggles with the devil did not extinguish the lure of her sex. Somewhere behind her cold blue eyes, her tight little mouth, there still lurked the eternal feminine. One could see it despite her utter disregard for the appearance of her clothes. She was like a clock that was never permitted to run down, a form of perpetual tension that would eventually wear itself out from getting nowhere. She would be haggard at forty.

John was impressed with her zeal for the heathen. He thought he saw in her fanaticism a natural enthusiasm and he liked her for it. Enthusiasm, he thought, was entirely too rare in this blasé world. As he listened to her story of hardships while carrying the Word to the benighted Oriental, he, too, became enthused, and when he realized that behind the mask was a pretty girl, his own enthusiasm turned to fanaticism too.

No two people differed more in their ideas than did Sarah and John. John was a handsome male, a black-haired, sincere radical. Unlike Sarah he instinctively understood the logic of other men's wants and struggles. He was tolerant with the weak and liked the underdog. Sarah, on the other hand, was a domineering creature, bound by a limited intellectual and spiritual background. Those who did not see the light as she saw it, were damned.

But she gave herself willingly to this charming clergyman and for the first few months of her life with him found an intense happiness.

Sylvester and his wife reached Bangkok in the latter part of 1901. Siam at that time was in the grip of European imperialism. Its empire, which had once extended far into Indo-China and well down the Malay Peninsula, even close to Singapore, was fast being absorbed by France and England.

Only a few years before, French gunboats had blockaded the mouth of the Chao Phya River on a trumped-up

charge of an atrocity committed by Siamese against a French subject. Thinking that the foreign warships were coming on a peaceful visit, the ancient forts fired a salute, which was interpreted as an attack by the invading French, who started shelling. As a result Siam had to pay an indemnity of three million francs and evacuate the province of Luang Prabang on the Mekong River.

Although they got what they wanted, the French still reached out for more until at length England intervened in order to protect the approaches to the eastern frontier of her Indian empire. A treaty was entered into in 1896 by which the independence of what was left of Siam was guaranteed by both nations.

While Siam modernized her governmental machinery to demonstrate that she could manage her own affairs, her permanent guest, the foreigner and his extra-territorial rights granted in 1855, continued to throttle the country. The enemy was not only at the ever-diminishing borders but within the very boundaries of the country. Since the Siamese knew they could not get justice from the foreigner they refrained from doing business with him and a mild form of anarchy prevailed.

Sylvester was not long in seeing the injustice that was being inflicted upon a mild, happy, simple-minded people. He was inflamed by the atrocities thrust upon the Siamese in the name of civilization. How could he teach the principles of Christ to this meek, brown race

when his own people were doing everything that Jesus condemned? If religion was to be brought to Siam those who needed it most were the white despoilers of the country.

Sarah and her father were shocked by John's observations but agreed that he would forget his prejudice when he understood the dire needs of the heathen. The Reverend Sawyer was a preacher of the old school, a great antagonist of sin, who talked to the Siamese of hell fire. His daughter, too, was a firm believer in damnation and told Sylvester that he was entirely too gentle and considerate with the natives. How could he be tolerant with a people who believed in polygamy and who lived like animals, with never a thought for their souls?

He told her as gently as he could that her attitude was wrong. The Siamese must not be told about hell and sin. It was the duty of the missionary to show by his own life that all white men are not robbers and exploiters. To do this he set out to learn the Siamese language, and much to the surprise of his wife and father-in-law, he selected as his teacher an elderly Buddhist monk who spoke English. From him he not only learned the complicated sounds of the language but also the tolerance of Buddhism. From him he learned that all good Buddhists forgave the atrocities of the white men, for "man cannot achieve serenity of soul until he has completely put aside all thought of self." He learned of the law

of ceaseless existence and redemption therefrom. He would go back to Sarah and tell her with all the enthusiasm at his command of the virtues he was discovering in Buddhism.

She was horrified and insisted that he was becoming a heathen. She fell on her knees and prayed to the Almighty for his salvation. When he told her that Christ must have gotten many of his ideas from Buddha, she said he was a blasphemer. But he took Sarah's objections lightly. He now understood her. He treated her as he would a child who had as yet not learned to understand. He flattered her and told her she was just a pretty girl and he was proud she was his wife because no other woman in the colony was as beautiful as she. But as Sarah grew older flattery no longer appeased her. Her work with the heathen and her despair over the ways of her husband erased all feminine charms.

After John learned to read Siamese, he began to study Pali, the language of Buddhist scriptures, and he made great strides along this new line of endeavor because of his knowledge of Sanskrit. He was fascinated by his researches and spent most of his time at the temple with the monks. Instead of condemning him for his evil ways, Sarah began to appeal to him to give up his heathenism for the sake of their two children, a boy and a girl, one seven and the other ten. He no longer could calm her with a kiss. Quarrel after quarrel ensued. It took all the tact at his command to

induce her to treat him civilly in the presence of the children.

“You are not fit to associate with them,” she would cry out. “You are accursed.”

He no longer argued, but went serenely on his way. The end, he felt, was near. He and Sarah were as far removed from each other as hell from heaven. He knew she was desperate but did not discover what she intended to do until he preached at the cremation ceremonies of a Siamese prince.

In Siam when death occurs the body is seldom cremated at once. It may be kept in a coffin or doubled up in an urn for several months before the remains are destroyed. On the day after death the bathing ceremony is held. This consists of the preparation of the body by relatives and friends for its last journey. Rites are held on the seventh, the fiftieth and hundredth day after death. Before the ceremonial fire is ignited, representatives of all religions are invited to hold services for the dead. Not until Sylvester took his place before the urn in the compound of the temple had any Christian blessed the soul of an unbaptized Siamese. There was no place in heaven for a heathen.

Sylvester's act became the talk of the town and it was then that the white colony began calling him “that balmy missionary.” The Siamese were delighted with his liberalism and wherever he went they saluted him

with bowed heads and hands held in the posture of prayer.

Sarah, of course, was scandalized again, and when she railed at him he said:

“My dear, are they not all His children?”

“His children!” she cried. “Heathens, unbelievers, unworthy of the ministrations of a Christian.”

“That is the attitude of most missionaries here,” he said. “This country does not need such people.”

“Oh, it doesn’t? I’m not so sure about that, but at least it will not see me living with you much longer. I can’t put up with it any more.”

“I had no intention of hurting you. When I spoke of missionaries I was not making a personal reference. I meant the whole class. If any one needs to be taught Christian principles, it is the white colonist and the missionary himself. I can’t bear their hypocrisy.

“Look at Jones. Instead of applying himself to carrying the Word, he is selling pickles and ketchup and canned goods. Why, he has the exclusive agency here for all the manufacturers’ products. I suppose what he is doing is a kind of missionary work, but it has no place in religious endeavor. He should get out and devote himself to business. Look at Jordan and Rogers. They’re doing the same thing. I know there’s money to be made here. It’s easy selling to a people who are afraid of hurting the feelings of the white man, particularly white missionaries. Most of our people seem more

interested in Mammon and their own bigoted ideas than in Christ.”

For a long time he had been thinking that since his own principles departed so radically from that of his mission, it was time for him to get out. At last he made up his mind to take the step but postponed telling Sarah for fear of its effect upon her. When he felt that continued delay was deceitful he told her that he was convinced that Buddhism expressed his own spiritual life better than what the church had made of Christianity. It was closer to what Christ had preached, he said. He begged her to see the light as he saw it. But she told him that his very presence defiled her. She would leave him. She would take the children with her to the States where her father was retiring on a pension.

He had not expected the break to be so clean. He felt there would be a terrific scene but that she would calm down. That she would leave him, although he no longer cared for her, did not cross his mind. He dearly loved his two children and his parting with them nearly broke his heart. He told them that they were going to the States to go to school and that he would see them again in a very short time. But he knew he was lying; that if he went back to his own country he would be not a prophet but an infidel.

A short time after Sarah and the children left, he was given a position as teacher of English in Chulalongkorn

University. The salary was excellent and enabled him to indulge his hobby of collecting Buddhist objects of art.

For a while he gave serious thought to the idea of becoming a Buddhist monk. The vows of the brotherhood are not binding for life and it is the custom for every young man to spend some time in the temple. The *Buat Nak*, or admission to the priesthood, may take place at any time of the year except in *Varsa*, the equivalent of Lent. On the day appointed for the neophyte's entrance, a procession consisting of family and friends is formed, at the head of which marches a band playing lively airs. Behind the band comes a group of grotesquely masked dancers representing demons, ogres and wild animals. The candidate follows. He may be mounted on a pony or may ride a cart. His costume consists of a spiked crown, a white *panung* and a coat over which he wears a mantle of gauze adorned with gold and silver spangles.

The procession symbolizes the life of the Buddha. The masked dancers are tempters. The dress worn by the candidate is the royal robe of Buddha before he became a monk.

At the temple the neophyte humbly presents himself to the abbot and a chapter of monks. There follows an oral examination which seeks to ascertain whether the candidate is a man and whether he is conscious of the step he is taking. His head and eyebrows are shaved and

when he dons the yellow robe, he is officially admitted into the *Sangka*, or holy brotherhood.

When Sylvester told Phra Anubat, his teacher, of his desires, the old monk wisely suggested that because John was an Occidental, he would find life in the temple particularly rigorous and that he felt he would get no more out of it than what he was able to procure under his present status.

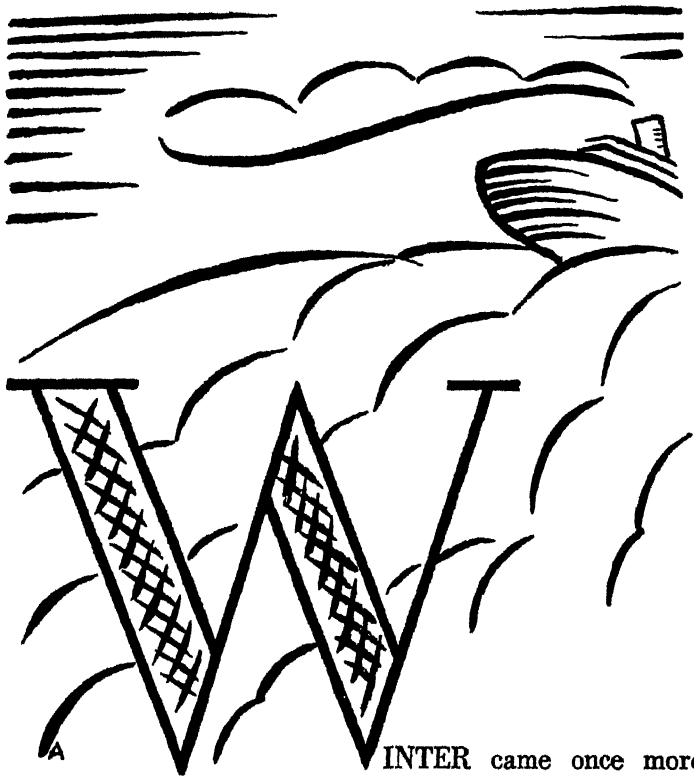
“Live your own normal life,” he advised. “Take a woman. If I know you at all, you need one.”

And so Sylvester learned to take his Buddhism with common sense.

He took a beautiful, young brown girl, the daughter of a prince's Number Ten concubine. He married her according to Siamese form and never appeared in society without her. She died two years later of tuberculosis. Now Sylvester lives alone with his great collection of Buddhist relics. Occasionally he goes out and from what I have seen of him, he still retains the capacity to enjoy life to the full. Sometimes he talks of his children and longs to see them. But he cannot bring himself to visit the United States because he is afraid his son and daughter will not know him.

CHAPTER 17





WINTER came once more and with it all the charm of our springtime. Brown, white and yellow folk again stepped out of their hibernating shade and walked boldly in the sunlight. Although the jungle showed no visible change, its trees and creepers and undergrowth seemed fresher and newer and less menacing than when its green was steeped in the steam of the rainy season.

Praphai had persuaded her father to allow her to assist him in the office and her presence on those exhilarating December days made work for me a trial. As she walked from room to room the slapping of her heelless soles against her bare feet was like the drums of the "Heavenly Followers." It had a narcotic effect upon me and I sat back in my chair and day-dreamed while John Ali, the composing room foreman, yelled up through the hole in the floor for "Kahpee!"

When this brown nymph would come into my room and say, "How do you do, Mr. Editor," and glide out again, she would completely demoralize me. I wanted to rush out into the streets and sing at the top of my lungs. This was not a winter feeling. It must be spring.

Often I saw her in the editorial room talking to Thorn and when I walked past them, a blush would come to her brown cheeks. Once I surprised them in her father's office. Praphai suddenly became engrossed in a book which lay upside down on the desk and Thorn hurriedly left the room. Praphai, the feminist, was having her way. She, not her father, was choosing her man. Yes, it was spring.

There came restless days. If spring brings thoughts of love it also brings the wanderlust. The desire to be off had gripped me again; to feel the soothing motion of the rise and fall of a deck; to know that something new lay ahead. My work was done. It was no longer an

adventure. It was a job. The paper could carry on without me.

I thought of New York, from which I had sailed on a spring day. There would be slush on the streets. Men would be shoveling snow for sixty cents an hour. The newspapers would be saying "Six Die As Storm Sweeps Seaboard," "Fair and Colder Tomorrow," "Lowest Temperature Expected Tonight, 21."

Why leave this land of the lotus eaters?

But there are wanderers o'er Eternity

Whose bark drives on and on, and anchored ne'er
shall be.

I told Louis that I was going to leave.

"You're a crazy fool," he said.

"I can't help it," I said.

The first concert of the Royal Symphony Orchestra opens the winter season and when tickets came into the office, Praphai, Louis and I went. The performance was given in the Theatre Royal, a small auditorium in an enchanting private park not far from the King's palace and the Throne Hall. Here the late sovereign produced and played principal rôles of Shakespearean dramas which he himself had translated into the Siamese.

We were early and Praphai and I left Louis in the lobby talking to friends. We walked through the gardens where gay lanterns revealed sleeping, exotic flowers. The air was charged with their perfume.

“Why must you go away?” asked Praphai, staring into the darkness beyond. The nymph had become a woman, a beautiful brown woman in high-heeled slippers, silk stockings, silk *passin* and sleeveless blouse. A string of diamonds was on her neck.

“I don’t know,” I said. “I guess it’s because there is nothing more for me to do here. I’ve helped your father put the paper on its feet and now something tells me that I must go.”

“Don’t you like it here?”

“I love it. I shall hate to leave, especially, you, your father and Charoon.”

The military band, in a brightly illuminated pavilion outside the theater, struck up a stirring march. I squeezed Praphai’s hand and we walked back.

In the theater fifty Siamese musicians were in a ferment of tuning. About us sat foreign men in white mess jackets and their women in décolleté, Siamese military and naval officers resplendent in white uniforms and medals, young Chinese in Occidental evening clothes and turbaned Indians in long coats and tight-fitting trousers, awaiting the King and Queen.

Their arrival outside was heralded by the bugle call for attention. The military band played the exciting notes of the national anthem. The audience rose and turned about to face the royal box in the balcony. His Majesty, in the uniform of a general, entered followed by the Queen who wore a chic foreign gown. Praphai

whispered to me that Her Majesty was a pretty girl and that she looked like her father, Prince Svasti. When the last note of the anthem sounded, Their Majesties bowed to the audience and took their seats.

The orchestra played Mozart, Beethoven, Haydn, Bach and Wagner. The rendition was perfect but the players lacked the feeling that white men put into the music. Praphai told me that she liked Siamese music better and I agreed with her.

Since I was going away there must be many feasts, and on the morning of the King's birthday, Praphai, Charoon, Louis, Thern and I go by motorboat for an all-day picnic down the river. Here and there we are able to avoid rounding the bends of the Chao Phya by taking shortcuts through jungle canals barely wide enough for the boat. Trees lean over the narrow stream and embrace each other to form a giant thatch. We float through semi-darkness. The boatman turns off the motor to remove weeds from the propeller and the silence is like that of a vacant cathedral. Birds with dazzling plumage rest for a moment on branches and take flight when they see us. I marvel how they find their way through that labyrinth.

We stop at Paknam, redolent of fish, and walk to the market place where Louis buys mangoes, mangosteens, pomelos, papaias, custard apples and a durian. With these products of the jungle stowed aboard, we start for

the deserted island temple about half a mile away where we are to take lunch.

A few minutes after we are under way, I begin to detect a disagreeable odor. When it persists I ask Louis if there is a cheese factory near-by and the remark brings gales of laughter from my friends. Louis calls to the boy who brings up a green, spine-covered object about the size of a watermelon. It is the durian.

"Here is your cheese factory," says Louis as the boy chops it open.

Inside are sections of golden brown fruit nestling in greenish-white cavities. It now smells like decaying eggs.

"Taste it," Louis says.

After much laughter and urging I manage to put some into my mouth. It tastes like sweet, whipped cream with sulphur and a dash of limburger. I eat one section and feel the sickly satisfaction that comes to one who consumes a box of chocolates at one sitting.

While the cook prepares lunch, Louis and I go ashore.

"Look out for crocodiles," he laughs as I step on the bank. "They're supposed to guard the temple."

Although in disuse for only twenty-five years, the temple is already engulfed by vegetation. There are three buildings: the *sala*, or resting place, the *prachedi* and the *wat*, or temple. It is dead silent. We push open the door with difficulty and enter.

The building suddenly reverberates with a beating

sound. Large, hairy creatures flay the air in the gloom. They are bats, the only worshippers at this shrine, disturbed by the streak of light we let in. When our eyes become accustomed to the dimness, we see one standing and two sitting Buddhas smiling serenely. There is an unearthly atmosphere here and we are brought back to reality by Praphai's cheery cry that lunch is ready.

After lunch we smoke and talk and eventually Louis repeats the question that Praphai had asked in the gardens of the Theatre Royal.

"Why must you go away?"

"Don't bring up that subject now, Louis. I'm too happy and I'm afraid I'll change my mind."

"If you do you can write your own contract. I'll build a fine home for you with every comfort including a swimming pool of town water."

A swimming pool of town water! That is the zenith of luxury. While there is water everywhere in Bangkok, one cannot swim without swallowing a million germs of cholera, typhoid and other diseases.

I shake my head.

"I mean it," says Louis.

"I know you do, but I can't accept."

"Now I know you're crazy."

When we start back the full moon has transformed the river and its banks into a silver paradise. The most dilapidated fisherman's hut looks like a miniature palace. The roofs of the temple shimmer in a background

of ghostly palms. Here and there a tree glows with a golden light. It is one of Nature's electric signs operated by thousands of fireflies lighting in unison.

We stop at the house of a friend on the river where a birthday party is in progress. A Siamese orchestra plays and dancers posture. On their heads are crowns which taper to points like the spires of temples. Their faces are whitened with powder. On their shoulders are small pinions set with bright-colored stones. The legs of some are covered with *panungs* while others wear a long, heavy skirt-like garment. Their fingers flash with jewels. There is little or no change of place to the dance. The Siamese are not interested in movement but in rhythms expressed by intricate contortion for which the dancers have been trained since childhood.

The host and hostess greet us by placing their hands in the attitude of prayer and bowing their heads. They are delighted to have us and soon servants drop to their knees and offer us lotus petal cigars, cigarettes, betel nut, fruits and sweetmeats.

The music never ceases. Our host, himself a musician, tells me that the gongs in their circular stands give out the melody while the drums mark the highly complicated rhythm. The larger drum, struck with a stick, produces the strong accents and the smaller, played with the fingers of the flattened hand, taps out the unaccented beats. The wood winds supply a kind of counterpoint which blends with the theme carried by the gongs.

We take our leave after many protests voiced by our hosts, and start for Bangkok. From a distance the city is ablaze with lights in honor of His Majesty's birthday. Thousands of buildings are illuminated with electric signs wishing the King health, long life and happiness.

As we draw closer we find ourselves in the midst of a river mardi gras. On board yachts and sampans festooned with lanterns, are gay men and women singing. The King's yacht, "Maha Chakri," her spars and hull outlined in electric bulbs, slips by bearing Their Majesties. From ashore and from larger vessels come the crystalline notes of native orchestras and the high-pitched voices of maidens singing.

After many days of feasting as the guest of prince, nobleman and commoner, the day arrived, all too soon, for my departure. I started with taking leave of Inky and Spotty, my dogs, who looked sadder than any of my friends as I drove out of the compound for the last time.

My parting with Louis was a silent affair.

"Don't expect me at the ship," he said. "I don't want people to see me crying."

Tears came to my eyes as I left him in the deserted shop. Reporters, compositors, delivery boys and helpers were all at the boat.

The *Kistna*, a funnelless freighter on which I was the only passenger, lay in midstream. Around her compan-

ionway were a score of sampans and motor boats. A crowd was waiting for me on the deck. There were Prince and Princess Svasti, Praphai, Charoon, Napah, Thern and Kosol and Cotton, Schaeffer and Sylvester and all the boys from the office. A large number of Siamese, Chinese and Indians, whom I did not remember meeting, were also there. I shook hands with every one of them and left Praphai, Charoon and Thern for the last. We went into my cabin. The warning signal sounded. Praphai sprang up.

“You will come back?” she said.

I nodded.

She kissed me. It was the awkward kiss of a child. I looked at Charoon fearing that she would be shocked.

“You’ve made foreigners of us,” she smiled as she placed her lips on my cheeks. “Siamese do not kiss.”

I shook hands with Thern and told him to take good care of Praphai. He smiled proudly.

I was deafened by three long, impatient blasts of the siren. I tried to say good-by but the word would not come to my lips. When the sound died out I was alone. I ran to the stern. The sampans were gone. The sun was dropping below the palms and tamarinds. A Siamese orchestra on one of the shores was playing mournfully.

“The wood winds supply a kind of counterpoint which blends with the theme carried by the gongs. . . .”

The lascars knelt on threadbare rugs and made obeisance to the East. As I gazed in the direction of their

bowed heads, the capital of the Land of the White Elephant vanished and in its place was the jungle brooding in the momentary twilight.

“You will come back,” Praphai had said. And then I remembered that there is no word in Siamese for “good-by.”

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