

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

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Under the Bed in Tokyo

Yokohama had been destroyed, and part of Tokyo. Many people had died and many were homeless. News of the great earthquake of September 1, 1923 had flashed around the world but cold print conveyed no more than that. Japan was far away across the Pacific, a country of kimonos and rickshaws and cherry blossoms. Now the ugly reality lay exposed, the stark scene illuminated by an October afternoon sun as passengers lined the rail while the Dollar Line's "President Harrison" was tying up to a half-ruined pier. Here and there a roofless fire-blackened concrete skeleton with gaping windows was still standing, as was the squat tower of the deserted railway station where clock stopped at just -past noon recorded the moment when disaster struck. Otherwise a busy port and teeming city had been wiped out of existence, every brick building reduced to rubble, every wooden structure and flimsy house consumed by fire. The earthquake had shuddered many of those houses down when people were preparing their noon meal over hibachis glowing with charcoal and fires had sprung up everywhere, fanned by a stiff breeze which soon became the roaring fury of a firestorm, Thousands of men, women, and children had been pinned under falling masonry and collapsing tile roofs or trapped by flames as they fled, to make of the city a vast crematorium. The fires had long since burned out but a spiral of smoke still rose from a mound of smoldering cotton bales heaped to the roof of a vanished warehouse.

The city had been reduced to ashes but its life was beginning to stir again. A small crowd waited on the pier for the ship's gangway to be lowered. Distant ant-like figures were moving through the desolation. Tin-roofed shacks had been erected along roadways cleared for a modest bustle of foot traffic and horse-drawn vehicles, an occasional automobile. The aptly named Tent Hotel, pitched on the rubble and ashes of the Grand Hotel, displayed a streak of white canvas on the Bund. On the semi-circle of bluffs above the city a fringe of buildings spared by the fire still stood on the skyline, some intact, sore in disarray and an American flag floated over the field hospital rushed up from Manila by the U.S. Army as part of its response to disaster.

A few passengers debarked with their baggage to spend the night in the Tent Hotel, and a few came aboard, including, a young man who was looking for me. "I'm Vice Consul Martin," he said, "with a message for -you. Your orders have been changed and you're

assigned to Tokyo instead of Kobe. You'll have to get off the ship here before it sails at midnight." This was splendid news – I would be at the center of things rather than far away to the south, and, attached to the Embassy rather than a satellite Consulate. There was plenty of time to check out with the purser, to have the wardrobe trunk brought up from the hold and put out on the pier, to pack the bags in the stateroom. Young Martin was happy to have dinner on board and answer a flood of questions.

The Consulate had been obliterated and its site occupied by an Army detachment brought in from Manila. Joe Ballantine had arrived from Shanghai to take charge; two Vice Consuls and several Japanese staffers rounded out the complement. They were all camping out in Army tents, eating Army chow, and not too unhappy, although water was a problem and there was no electricity. The rail line had not been restored and I would have to go up to Tokyo in an Army truck. The Embassy had been installed in the Imperial Hotel and Jefferson Caffery was Chargé. Beyond that Martin didn't know much about what went on in 'Tokyo.

As we climbed down with the hand luggage the pier was completely deserted except for the wardrobe trunk standing there on the rough planking in the glare of the ship's lights. In Washington they had told me to provision myself as though headed for a desert in which none of the amenities of civilized life could be found. Consequently the trunk was stuffed with soap, toiletries, and a year's supply of clothing, along with all the formal attire prescribed for a budding diplomat. To move that trunk was obviously beyond our powers, there wasn't a soul in sight to help with it, and we would have to come back in the morning.

Away from the ship all was black except for a few specks of light and a brighter glow from the Tent Hotel. On the sagging pier we stumbled toward a lantern hanging on a pole to mark an improvised pontoon bridge that crossed a short stretch of water and brought us finally to land. Martin led the way into the customs shed where a dozing figure in rumpled uniform topped by a red face under a bristle of black hair sat at a desk lit by a kerosene lamp and adorned with a bottle and an empty glass. Our loads spread on the counter, Martin addressed authority: "We're going ashore now; would you like to see the baggage?" The figure stirred, coughed up phlegm, spat copiously on the floor. "God damn," it said, and relapsed into immobility. "Please clear this baggage, we want to go ashore." The figure spat again. Another "God damn." "Thank you very much," Martin said, as we picked up the luggage and departed by the farther door. I was in Japan.

A sentry shone a flashlight at us and opened a gate in the chain fence. The American Consulate was a cluster of tents dimly illuminated by kerosene lanterns. Martin led the way and lit his own lantern to reveal an Army cot on either side of a wall tent floored with packed rubble. We were soon between Army blankets, the lantern had been doused, but I continued to babble into the darkness, wildly excited as I was by what was for me a great adventure. Martin's replies got shorter and. I thought he was dropping off to sleep when he suddenly slipped across the tent and tried to get into bed with me! Outraged, I gave him a knee in the belly and he retreated to his own cot, mumbling, "But you

shouldn't talk that way.' To this day I don't know what I said or had done to make him expect a welcome on my side of the tent.

It was some time before I fell asleep. What an introduction to my first post abroad! The first Japanese I had encountered was a horrible drunken brute; the first Foreign Service Officer I met was a revealed homosexual. What further disillusionments lay in store for an innocent abroad? In the morning I found out.

At breakfast in the mess tent Joe Ballantine welcomed me to a Japan he loved and turned me over to a sulky young Vice Consul with instructions to retrieve my trunk. One of the Japanese staff quickly recruited a couple of baggage coolies equipped with rope and carrying pole and we trooped out on the pier to where the trunk still stood, but no longer in solitary state. A gang of stevedores lay in wait for us, four or five of them in the dingy rough cotton tights and short jackets of Japanese laborers, sweat-rags on their heads. As our men approached to pick up the trunk a great jabber of expostulation arose and the Japanese clerk stepped forward to interpret. More talk, floods of talk, with sweeping gestures, while the two Americans stood mumchance. At last it was explained. The stevedores had spent the whole night guarding the trunk, they said, even circling the area in a small boat to protect it from a raid by water. They had been faithful to their trust, they pointed out, anyone could see that the trunk was untouched, and now they wanted their pay.

"That's ridiculous," I exploded, "we didn't hire them, we've never seen them before, we don't owe them anything. Tell our men to pick up the trunk and let's go." Another flood of talk, and the baggage coolies still hung back. "Can't we find somebody who is in charge of this dock, or maybe a policeman?" I asked Martin desperately, but he only looked helpless. I felt helpless myself, remembering last night's customs officer. The stevedores were not impressed by either of us and were determined to hold their hostage until they collected tribute from the foreigner. The baggage coolies clearly had no intention of doing battle for us, there was no authority in sight to be invoked, and we ourselves carried none. The impasse was complete and I had to surrender. What did they want? Twenty yen? Impossible ridiculous, but I would give them, ten even if they didn't deserve it. Now it was just a matter of haggling and the tension of confrontation eased. We settled for fifteen and while the racketeers were gloating over their money the trunk was picked up and borne away. Ballantine was more amused than indignant over the incident, but he cast an appraising eye toward his Vice Consul; that young man wouldn't get very far in the Service.

There was an hour or two to wait, and Johnny Tynan drifted in from the Tent Hotel, knapsack over his arm. He had graduated from Georgetown University, he told us, and set out on a freighter to go around the world. At an early stage the crew tried to rough him up, but Johnny had been an inter-collegiate boxer and after a bout or two on the afterdeck he had no more trouble. In Kobe he heard about the earthquake and decided to draw his pay and come up for a look-see. Now he was sitting beside me on my cot while we pored over a Japanese phrase-book; after my recent experiences I was determined to learn something of the language as soon as possible. So I was going up to Tokyo with my

baggage? Could he hook a ride? There was no objection, and in due course we set out in a light Army truck, Johnny sitting behind on the trunk.

The dusty road more or less paralleled the deserted rail line through a countryside of rice paddies and market gardens and a series of small towns. There was some earthquake damage to larger buildings but most of the shops and houses were still standing, untouched by fire. After the ashes and rubble of Yokohama this was the real Japan at last, not the Japan of picture postcards but a land where every sight and sound and smell was strange and exciting. Particularly exotic were the smells: the mingled odors of musty rice straw, pungent soy sauce and sour sake, the scents of cedar and pine, incense from a Buddhists shrine, the reek of open drains in the towns, the whiff of night-soil from lush market gardens. The narrow streets of the villages were crowded and our driver roared through them, klaxon blaring, scattering animals and people and leaving behind a trail of outrage against the heedless foreigner. And so to Tokyo and another scene of devastation.

Between the high stone gateposts of the Embassy a curving driveway led to a heap of rubble over which the American flag flew from the stump of a flagpole, its upper half burned away. On the extensive grounds within a surrounding wall an encampment housed a detachment of Marines and some junior Embassy personnel, with space available for stray Americans. I had a wall tent for myself, floored with the grass of a lawn and equipped with Spartan military simplicity except for the wardrobe trunk. For ablutions a soldier left a pail of cold water outside the tent flap every morning.

Major Latham presided over the mess tent in which the Marine officers and Embassy folk breakfasted, dined off Army rations, and spent their evenings gossiping until bed-time, all for a modest mess bill. During one such session Lee Murray, code clerk in the Embassy, lamented his inability to get home leave after surviving the earthquake – Washington was dilatory about producing, a replacement – and Johnny Tynan spoke up. He had taken Foreign Service courses at Georgetown and thought he could qualify. Consequently Lee was on his way before long and Johnny was sworn in as code clerk. This was possible because most Government cable traffic in those unsophisticated days utilized the simple “Gray code” of five-letter groups listed in a book, no more elaborate and not much more secure than the similar commercial codes of Western Union and private companies.

So much for living. Getting to work was a walk of twenty minutes or so through a burned-out area to the Imperial Hotel, that earthquake-proof monstrosity designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in an attempt to create something vaguely Oriental out of an exotic confusion of jagged forms and elaborate angels, with walls the color of his Arizona sands into which shells, has been ground to take e the skin off an unwary knuckle. The Embassy had taken over a wing of the hotel for its Chancery, most of the furnishing replaced by office equipment except for the carpeting, an occasional couch or armchair, and light standards of elaborate metal lattice-work. Yes, we had electricity, and bathrooms with hot water, plenty of them and much superior, I thought, to the cold shower rigged up by the Marines.

Most of the Embassy officers roomed in the hotel and they had complained so bitterly to Washington about the high cost of their way of life that all salaries, including mine, were doubled by “hardship” allowances. Consequently I was quite well off and could afford to lunch in the hotel and foregather in the bar on equal terms with colleagues and others in the foreign community, although in the Embassy hierarchy I was the lowest form of animal life. For some weeks, therefore, life moved in a narrow orbit between tent home and hotel office, with on occasional foray into Tokyo’s main business district. Some multi-story office buildings had collapsed, but most had survived; the vast Marunouchi Building had shed its skin of yellow brick but was being repaired; the Bank of Japan and other buildings with excessively heavy steel frames were intact; the big department stores had been damaged but were back in business; the Ginza was coming to life as a shopping street. The charming little cottages of the prostitutes immured in the Yoshiwara, completely wiped out by fire in a scene of unspeakable horror, had been among the first to be rebuilt as good as new.

The bar of the Imperial Hotel was naturally the main gathering-place for the foreign community, particularly the Americans, a place where news was exchanged and “earthquake stories” circulated. Here we learned of the reluctance of the Japanese, wary of foreign intrusion, to accept help from abroad. A U.S. Navy vessel loaded with relief supplies was permitted to discharge its cargo (provided it departed immediately), but Philippine rice was below Japanese standards and most American foods were alien to the Japanese diet; the winter-weight union suits were mostly too big and many of them, buttoned-up flaps and all, appeared as the outer garments of rickshaw coolies; no Japanese body ever occupied a single bed in the field hospital on the bluff in Yokohama. Those were some of the things we were told as we sat in the bar after work.

Men who had survived the earthquake, tongues loosened by alcohol, also had to relate their experiences, to unburden themselves to anyone who would listen. Some of the tales were tragic and some comic, there had been miraculous escapes, cases of blind panic and arrant cowardice, instances of magnificent heroism and self-sacrifice.

One man whose wife was pinned unconscious under fallen roof beams was driven back from frantic efforts to release her, and he would never forget how her hair puffed into flame as her face was blotted out in a gush of fire and smoke. Poor old Babbitt went once a week to Yokohama to search the ashes of the Grand Hotel for some trace of his wife, last seen struggling to get out of a window. All he ever found was his coin collection melted into a solid mass of metal.

Then there was the tale of two Army language officers collecting shells and romping naked on an empty beach, their clothing and picnic basket stowed among the rocks. When the earthquake struck the sea retreated, leaving a vast expanse of shining sand over which they raced to escape the tumbling cliff, only to sense a huge tidal wave roaring toward them and then scramble up the rocks to avoid being swept away. Another shock, and again they fled out on the sand, again climbed the shattered cliff. With all of their possessions buried under tons of rock, they made their painful way inland to a farmhouse

where charity fitted them out with kimonos and sandals. It took them five footsore, exhausting, half-starved days to get back to Tokyo.

Most dramatic of all was the story of Tommy Ryan, repeated endlessly by one Bridges, an American salesman who had been in Tokyo on that Saturday afternoon while his wife was staying in the Grand Hotel in Yokohama. It was a hot, muggy day, and she, like several other women, was taking a bath before lunch. When the hotel collapsed a chimney fell across the tub, fracturing her legs and pinning her down, completely helpless. Tommy Ryan, a young Assistant Naval Attaché, had been sitting on the hotel verandah and at the first shock he vaulted the railing into the street, escaping death by two feet, as he put it. After milling about in the panic-stricken crowd he heard a woman screaming and soon located Mrs. Bridges high above the street on the mountain of splintered wood that had been the hotel. He climbed up to her but found the bricks of the chimney more than he could move alone. Back in the street, he seized upon a fellow American to help him, but was brushed aside – fire wars now blazing up and smoke billowing over then. (Tommy would never say his name, but some people thought they knew.) So Tommy clambered up again, and alone he tore at the bricks with bleeding hands in a frantic race with the fire and got the woman out just as the flames were reaching them. Down in the street he snatched a kimono from the nearest Japanese and carried the helpless woman to the shore where small boats from the “President Wilson” standing off in the harbor were doing valiant rescue work. Now she was convalescing in a Kobe hospital while Bridges sat in the bar proclaiming his conviction that Tommy Ryan was a hero, a saint, the salt of the earth, but he was not satisfied until he had written in the same sense to his Senators and Congressmen, the Secretary of the Navy, the Secretary of State, the Chief Justice, even President Coolidge himself, in fact to everyone in Washington he had ever he had ever heard of. As a result of this one-man campaign Ensign Ryan was recalled to Washington, promoted a grade, and assigned to a soft berth on the President’s yacht “Mayflower.”

The country was in official mourning for the: seventy-five thousand Japanese subjects consumed in the holocaust. Theaters and cinemas were therefore closed, no public entertainments were permitted, and when the Imperial Hotel arranged dances for its foreign guests they were hastily abandoned after the hall was invaded by members of the super-patriotic Black Dragon Society in samurai gear, waving swords and denouncing, sacrilegious foreigners. In these circumstances the diplomatic corps withdrew within itself to form a tightly knit community cut off from all but official contacts with the host country; it was a group of foreigners beleaguered in a sea of unfriendly Japanese. The British were somewhat aloof and the Americans were mere hotel-dwellers, but there were pretty daughters in the Belgian, French, and Siamese Embassies, dinner parties were exchanged and dances organized, even a fancy-dress party; for such festivities protocol was relaxed and all presentable young people were welcome. That was all very well and sometimes fun, but some of us found the Japanese countryside more interesting and far more beautiful than anything in the capital, while the country folk were more hospitable, more attractive and more friendly than city people, as is often the case in rural areas around the world.

Only a few weeks after my arrival in Japan, therefore, three restless young men decided rather brashly to get out of Tokyo for a weekend in Nikko, site of the fabulous ancestral shrines of the Tokugawa shoguns. Armed with a phrase-book and equipped with overnight gear in knapsacks, we set out on a northbound train for a railway junction with the mellifluous name of Utsonomiya whence, we were told, we could get to Nikko on a branch line. The train was a revelation, gliding over a smooth roadbed through an open green countryside of fields and clumps of pine or bamboo among which thatched farmhouses crouched like plump mushrooms. The railway car, of European corridor compartment design, was gleaming spotless, and at a station along the way we could chaffer through the windows with peddlers offering Kirin beer and *bentos* – flat lunch-boxes of rice topped by strips of eel cooked in soy sauce. Delicious they were, although we were clumsy with the wooden chopsticks in their paper sheaths.

At Utsonomiya the train glided on its way leaving us on an empty platform at the edge of town, the station deserted except for the baggage porter, a gnome in a red cap. The gnome had little more English than we had Japanese, but the phrase-book and sign language made it clear that there would be no train to Nikko. Could we get a motorcar to take us there? He was a blank. Could he find a taxi? That seemed to ring a bell, and he darted away up the street, leaving us to wait while a small crowd of schoolboys gathered to stare and giggle. A few travelers arrived at the station in the dark grey kimonos of middle-class Japanese, but one and all turned away when we approached them, phrase-book at the ready. From among the schoolboys a voice called out, “You speak English?” and we turned eagerly, but they only laughed at the joke.

After half an hour of this we decided to strike out for ourselves, splitting up to quarter the town, the station to be our rendezvous. Some distance along the street I followed there was a bicycle shop and in a lean-to alongside stood a Ford sedan. Eureka! In the shop an old woman motioned me to wait, soon returning with a bright-eyed youngster about ten years old in the short kimono and visored cap of a schoolboy. “Yes,” he said, in carefully enunciated English, “can I help you?” He listened to my tale of frustration and seemed to understand perfectly. “You wish to go to Nikko,” he said. “You wish to go in a motorcar. Please wait here.” He turned to go and I stopped him. “What is that,” pointing to the Ford, “what is the word for it?” “*Jidisha*,” he said, and grinned broadly. “That is a Japanese word I shall never forget,” I told him, and I haven’t. (It means “fire-wagon and it wasn’t in the phrase-book). “Can we take that one?” “No,” he said, “I will bring. Please wait.” The old woman sat me on a stool with a cup of tea and a biscuit, and before long the little boy was back in a touring car driven by a nondescript character, his assistant beside him on the front seat. (In those days a driver in the Orient always had to have an assistant, presumably to the dirty work, if any.)

Back at the station we picked up the other two travelers, empty-handed and desperate, and soon struck a bargain for the trip. The little boy was pleased and proud, and just then we loved him, that precocious infant with the spirit of a Samaritan; he was not one to pass by on the other side like the travelers in the station. So we made much of him and offered him money, but he wouldn’t accept it. He even refused a Hershey bar. “I am pleased to help you,” he said, and would hear no more.

It was only two hours to Nikko, along a gravel road climbing past fields and forests to the Miyako Hotel. The affable black-coated proprietor that old-fashioned little hostelry was only too glad to see tourists on his doorstep again and there was nothing he wouldn't do for us, his only guests that weekend and perhaps the first in months. The next day was one of pure delight as we explored the sacred precincts and stood in wonder before buildings of lacquer and gold adorned with carvings painted in bright colors, gleaming like jewels against the dark green of the giant cedars, nor did we overlook the famous three monkeys under the eaves of a shed. With the hotel's facilities to speed us on the way our return to Tokyo was a breeze.

Another memorable expedition took us southward to a railway station from which we climbed a gravel road slanting up the side of a deep valley to Hakone. Half way up a landslide had carried a quarter mile of road into the depths below and a gang of laborers was gouging out the steep hillside with handcarts and mattocks and shovels of unfamiliar design. We edged gingerly across the gap and reached the Fujiya Hotel at dusk. Again we were the only guests, this time in an ornate tourist facility resembling the lavishly decorated ground floor of a pagoda. There was electric light, but no hear, it was colder indoors than out, and we shivered mightily in our tweeds as we sat around a table in the vast empty drawing-room. Two sharp hand-claps, a voice instantly answered "Hai!" and a servant came running. Brandy might warm us up, we thought. We ordered a bottle and surprised ourselves by drinking the whole of it, but the alcohol went more into producing heat than inspiring conviviality, and we were still stone cold sober, accent on the cold. In despair we retired to our rooms and our sunken baths – long and deep and copiously fed by pipes leading into the hotel from a nearby hot spring. The body heat engendered by that steam-wreathed session was enough to carry us comfortably through our pre-prandial cocktail and a formidable dinner before we retreated to the shelter of soft beds and mountainous quilts. In the morning we climbed the rounded shoulder of the mountain for the traditional view of Fujiyama mirrored in the waters of Lake Hakone.

In later months, as we gained in sophistication, many more expeditions were organized by different groups in the American community. Some followed the tourist trail to the resorts and beauty spots touted by the guidebooks, to Kamakura, Miyanoshita, Atami, Kyoto and Nara, even to an assault on Fujiyama. Others were off the beaten track, to a fascinating Japanese hotel unknown to foreigners at Chuzenji on the Izu Peninsula, or to a climb of Mount Nantai, looming five thousand feet over Lake Chuzenji on the highlands above Nikko. Since all Japanese mountains are sacred, when we climbed Nantai the women had to hang back out of sight and rejoin us above, while the men followed the prescribed path through a gate guarded by a Shinto shrine where the white-robed priest collected an admission fee and intoned a prayer for our safe journey up the mountain. At the top a large bell was mounted on a stand and we rang it vigorously to announce our safe arrival to the priest below.

In the meantime my way of life was drastically altered when the mess tent was addressed by Major Latham one evening. "I'm sick and tired of all these damned civilians," he said, glaring at us. "I'll give you a week to find other quarters. This is a military operation, not

a damned hotel. I don't care where you go, but you can't stay here." The Imperial was out of the question despite my temporary affluence, but there was no conceivable alternative until someone in the bar suggested Coty's house. Before the earthquake Coty had been the manager in Japan for National Cash Register, living with his family in a Japanese house, and the company still had it on a long lease, although at the moment it was full of refugees. When they cleared out I might be able to live there.

That was the answer, and within a week Titus and I moved in to take over the one room already vacated, and soon the whole house. To share expenses we recruited two young married couples from among our colleagues. They were only too glad to get out of the hotel and they settled in happily, one couple in the wing, the other in the larger front room upstairs, while Titus and I remained in the smaller bedroom. We all had to memorize the address: Aoyama Sanhome Minamicho rokuji-ichi banchi Coty San no uchi. Quite a mouthful. In translation, working backwards, it came out as "Mr. Coty's house, 61 South Street, Third Avenue, Greenhill." The street number, incidentally, was no help; numbers were assigned in chronological order as houses were built. The policemen in their box at the corner would know.

To get to it from midtown there was a street-car line along Sanhome to Aoyama, but it was not in operation. Sanhome was paralleled by Minamicho, one block away to the south, a tree-shaded dirt road lined on one side by middle-class Japanese houses screened from the street by high bamboo fences; on the other side it bordered the great Aoyama cemetery. Located on solid high ground, this purely residential area had survived the earthquake with no visible damage, its electric power and water supply intact.

Coty's house was unusual in that district for its second story with glassed-in facade from which one could overlook the vast expanse of the cemetery – acres and acres crowded, almost paved, with gravestones, shrines and monuments, all of rough grey stone with an occasional shrub or tree to break the sad monotony. A one-story wing dripping wisteria extended from the house to the street, and in the angle, inside our bamboo fence, a modest little garden displayed a plum tree in one corner, a clump of bamboo in another, some azaleas and ferns, but no grass on the hard-packed earth. Outside in the street, looking to the right on a clear day, one could see the tiny cone of Fujiyama pricking the sky under arching trees, as it does in so many Japanese prints. A hundred yards away to the left a two-man police box stood at the corner of a dirt road bisecting the cemetery. 'That road was lined with cherry trees, and in the spring thousands of families would be coming from all over the city for a ritual stroll under the blossoms whenever the newspapers announced that the cherries were blooming in Aoyama.

Some adjustments had been made to adapt a Japanese house for the use of an American family, but they were minimal. Coty had put down a few rugs so that we could wear shoes indoors and not be walking on the *tatami*, those springy slabs of straw matting, six feet by three and several inches thick, which floor all Japanese houses. He was not going to live on the floor as the Japanese do and had introduced iron beds and wicker furniture, but to protect the precious *tatami* every leg of chair, table or bed had to be planted on a flat glass saucer. He could, and did heat the house in winter with good old American oil

stoves in every room, but he could not introduce plumbing nor could he alter the structure of the house and the scantlings that supported the second floor behind plaster walls seemed flimsy.

There were no windows except the untypical glass facade of the second story, and no doors other than one at the side entrance giving on a tiny porch. Instead there were *shoji*, decorated paper screens in light frames of natural wood fitted into grooves top and bottom; they served as partitions and as sliding doors between rooms and they opened the living-dining room wide to the open air of the garden. (The Japanese, it is thought, came originally from a warmer climate far to the south and were clinging to their ancient ways.) The second story and its two bedrooms separated by *shoji* were reached by a narrow staircase of unpainted polished wood.

There was no plumbing either, except for a tap somewhere in the back premises. The communal bath was a tall oval wooden tub, full to the brim with water heated by a charcoal fire underneath. Ritual called for scrubbing with soap and water and thorough rinsing (tin dipper provided) before climbing into the tub and sitting on a wooden bench, soaking in hot water up to the neck. One emerged lobster red, warm through and through, and pleasingly relaxed.

In the absence of plumbing there was no water-closet, only a cubicle housing a seat with a tight lid, above a receptacle to catch and store the night-soil. Once, a week this was emptied, when what we called a “honey-wagon” arrived to take away this vital contribution to agriculture, and for the next half-hour we longed for those pads the Japanese wore over their noses in winter to guard against catching cold. The “honey-wagon” was a narrow vehicle carrying tall wooden drums all in a row, their lids less than air-tight, and it came in various sizes ranging from the two-cylinder miniwagon pushed by a couple of coolies to the eight-cylinder horse-drawn monster often encountered on streets leading to the waterfront, there to be emptied into barges for transport farther afield.

We had no servant problem in Coty’s house; along with it came the Japanese family he had employed for years and to which he turned over stewardship when he left Japan. The reigning queen of the establishment, as far as we were concerned, was Hiday San (Miss Chrysanthemum), a comely young woman who had been more or less brought up with Coty’s daughter and spoke fluent English. She was our linguistic link with the neighborhood, the policemen on the corner, and the rest of the staff, which meant with her family. Chief among these was “Cooky” San, her father, a talented cook who was a friend of the chef at the Imperial -Hotel. From a kitchen we never saw he produced amazing and delectable things, ranging from a delicious concoction of baby eels and rice to the roast turkey and baked Alaska of a formal dinner. Our encounters with him were brief, however, and we practically never saw his wife and ten-year old son; they all lived together in back premises which we would not penetrate, but among them they kept the house spotless, did the laundry, pressed the suits, mended the socks, polished the shoes. What more could anybody want?

Some means of transportation other than shank's mare would have been welcome, but there wasn't any. Street-cars were not running, no taxicabs were to be found in Aoyama, and it was too far to expect a rickshaw puller to take one to the Imperial Hotel three miles away, and anyway that would have been expensive. So we walked, back and forth, three miles each way, rain or shine, through the cemetery under the cherry trees, and then along a street of small neighborhood shops, finally through Hibiya Park to the hotel. The street of shops was fascinating and one stopped often to study the things offered for sale: clothing, housewares, foodstuffs, medicines, toilet articles, every single item different from anything one had ever seen before, most of them handcrafted and often beautifully decorated. And then there was the archery range and the booth where young men practiced *judo* under an instructor, the art store lined with fascinating picture scrolls, the curio shop with its ivories, jades and lacquers. To walk that street twice a day for months on end was to acquire a sense of intimacy with Japanese life that no tourist could derive from the department stores or the blaring commercialism of the Ginza.

If the Japanese Government had political problems we juniors paid little heed, but we were quite aware of the shock to national pride delivered by the Asian Exclusion Act of 1924. An Imperial rescript admonished the people not to revenge themselves on Americans living in Japan – they could not be held responsible for what had been done in Washington – and none of us were ever abused or even reproached. Nevertheless a corpse eviscerated in traditional *hara-kiri* fashion was found in a corner of the American Embassy compound along with a suicide note of eloquent patriotic protest. The police told us privately that it was probably only a cover-up for murder, since no man could commit *hara-kiri* and also cut his own throat, but this was never made public. The body was therefore buried in Aoyama at a ceremony attended by thousands of people amid inflammatory speeches and scenes of great emotion. The police at the corner were worried lest our house in Minamicho attract demonstrators, but nothing happened and we rejoiced in our obscurity.

One political fact of life no one could escape was the reverence paid to the Emperor, direct descendant of the Sun Goddess who gave birth in a cave to the first of a line unbroken even through the era dominated by the Tokugawa shoguns. No Japanese could look down on the Emperor from above and every eye was cast to earth in his presence. Just then the Emperor was dying in the Imperial Palace and all of his attributes, including the idolatry, had been assumed by Hirohito, the Prince Regent. It was therefore unprecedented in Japanese history, more desecration than political act, when an unhappy student fired a shot at Hirohito's passing limousine from a gun concealed in a cane. The police saved the would-be assassin from being torn to pieces by the crowd and he stood trial hopelessly behind a conical straw dunce-cap reaching to the shoulders and concealing his features completely. There was talk of an Imperial pardon, since he had missed his target and only broken a window, but that was just talk.

Perhaps 'because of that incident roadways were cleared half an hour before the Prince Regent was scheduled to pass, no one was permitted even to cross the street beforehand, and all windows overlooking his route were sealed blind. The police hauled an indignant Australian diplomat down from the lamp standard he had climbed, camera at the ready

for a candid shot. I was caught myself one day at a street crossing and required by a vigilant policeman to wait, along with a steadily growing crowd of Japanese men and women in like case. When the red Daimler touring car with its gold chrysanthemum insignia at last come down the street, Hirohito sitting alone on the back seat, the crowd sank to earth as one man, leaving me standing, the only upright figure in a sea of – prostrate kimonos. The Prince caught this phenomenon out of the corner of his eye, gave me a knowing grin, almost a laugh at the absurdity of it all, and waved a half salute. Smiling back, I returned the salute and had to restrain an impulse to cheer, it gave me such a warm feeling for Hirohito. God he might be to the Japanese, but for me that day he was a fellow human being, a man with a sense of humor.

An earthquake is not a one-time thing, I soon learned. After a major slippage along the fault it is a matter of months before the stresses deep underground are locked into immobility and pressure builds up for the next shudder of release, perhaps in twenty-five years. In the meantime we were constantly experiencing minor quakes as the earth settled down, most of them known only to the seismographs although every once in a while there would be a perceptible tremor. This would reach the surface as a distinct shock, a bump from below, followed by some seconds of intense vibration and finally by earth waves rippling over the surface. On the cot in my tent I could watch with equanimity when I was jolted awake and the tent pole waved to and fro. Sitting at the dinner-table in someone's house was something else again: with the shock from below forks stopped halfway, cups paused in midair, and talk broke off abruptly while everyone held his breath; there was an audible sigh of relief when the vibration did no more than rattle the dishes and only a picture fell down when the house began to sway. One day a fairly stiff one tipped over the lamp standards in the office and through the windows we could see the telephone poles and light standards along the street waving back and forth like coconut palms in a hurricane, the earth rippling toward us in clearly visible waves. In the Imperial Hotel this was in no way alarming since we that the hotel was earthquake-proof, built as it was on a single great slab of reinforced concrete that rode the waves like a giant raft.

The house in Minamicho was not earthquake-proof, we well knew. When the big one hit at dawn of a winter morning and a tremendous shock jolted me out on the floor I therefore rolled promptly under the iron bed. It would some protection, one hoped, if the roof were to collapse and heavy tiles crunch down. The night light in the hall dimmed and went out as current was shut off at the power station and the first sharp jolt was followed by a protracted rasping shudder as rock ground against rock, far below. The noise was deafening; every pane of glass and everything movable in the house was rattling violently, house beams were strumming like banjo strings, and the excruciating din extended to everything in the neighborhood. Nell Calder was screaming in the next room and I never heard her. Titus scrambled around on the floor in the space between our beds and I yelled at him: "Get under the bed, you damned fool." "I can't find my glasses," he gasped, and finally obeyed. By then the waves were hitting the house and it tossed and pitched like a small boat in a choppy sea, every joint creaking and groaning. At one point it pitched so steeply that I felt myself sliding on the *tatami* and dug my nails into the straw matting to keep from going overboard. The whole framework of the house

was twisted and wrenched back and forth so far that the *shoji* came out of their grooves and fell in all directions.

Altogether it lasted more than two minutes, the longest two minutes in any man's life, until that dreadful swaying finally died away and I climbed into bed; it was over, and I was cold. Calder busied himself putting the *shoji* back in their grooved between our upstairs rooms, like the solicitous bridegroom he was. Titus was still scrambling around. "I've got to get out, I've got to get out," he said, put his foot through a *shoji* and stumbled out into the hall and down the stairs. The policemen from the corner called to know if we needed help and Hiday San replied that all was well.

When Titus came back to bed in the grey light of morning he explained: "I just had to go outside to see if the earth was still underfoot and the sky overhead. Everything was in place, the trees still standing, and now I feel better." Eventually the sun rose, he had some breakfast and he felt better yet. But none of us can ever forget that two minutes of blind terror, of utter helplessness as we lay trapped in a storm-tossed house from which there was no time to escape and in which the only possible refuge seemed to be under a bed.

On the Richter scale it was a major earthquake, not one of the greatest. Six months before it would have been catastrophic, but everything not earthquake-proof had already collapsed in September and there was not much additional damage. There were a few fires, quickly extinguished, but the fear of them was so great that a number of guests in the Imperial Hotel, we were told, had rushed outdoors and plunged into the lily pond at the front entrance. Could they have been refugees from Yokohama?

Bachelors in Bombay

When you arrived at a new post fifty years ago, this time in January of 1925, this time in Bombay, you took a room in the best hotel, this time in the Taj Mahal, and then asked everyone you met how and where to settle in for the duration. The hotel wasn't bad if you liked Victorian mahogany, chintz and rattan, pink gins and chota pegs, Mulligatawny soup and lamb curry, but it was rather expensive for a junior officer and I kept on asking.

In due course I put the question to a couple of young Americans who shared a flat on the Cooperage, only ten minutes on foot from the hotel, twenty or so from the office, and very soon they invited me to dinner. It was a matter of mutual inspection as we sat on the verandah in the cool of the evening, and next day John took the plunge. Would I like to join them in a three-man bachelor mess, share and share alike? I would indeed, and promptly checked out of the Taj.

My two mess-mates, I soon learned, were juniors in the Bombay office of American Express, that combination of travel agent and banker which was busily seducing American and other tourists away from Thos. Cook. John was of Irish extraction, quiet-spoken for one of his race but far from humorless. He was not a big man physically but our senior by some years and consequently our leader in most things. (He ended up a

Vice President of the company.) His mess-mate was a tall, sallow, rather colorless Virginian christened F. Glasgow Clark. He was so proud of his middle name and his relationship to novelist Ellen Glasgow that we perversely called his “Oscar” for no other reason than that. Oscar kept the books and managed the household, his only weakness being a passion for banana ice-cream produced in the kitchen. Almost every night, it seemed, we had banana ice-cream for dessert, but when John or I protested, suggesting mango ice-cream for a change, Oscar would instantly put us out of countenance. If anyone didn’t like banana ice-cream he could manage the house himself; Oscar would be happy to turn over his stewardship.

In those days every household maintained in India by the master race was awash with servants. Each of us had a “bearer” to tidy his room, shine his shoes, keep his clothes in order, draw his bath, hold his shirt for him, help him into his pants and shoes, accompany him on his travels. My bearer was a sturdy dark-skinned man from Goa, recruited by asking the others to find one for me and hired because his chits (references) were good. He had been trained by British officers who found him invaluable at home and on hunting trips. His name was George, he said.

At least one of the three bearers was always available to wait at table, bring drinks, dump ashtrays, run errands, or do anything else required of him at any time of day or night. They slept somewhere, perhaps on the kitchen floor like the servants who guarded master or mistress in the hotel by sleeping across the door-still on a mat in the corridor. The cook did the marketing in the bazaar, returning home in a loaded rickshaw, a cake of ice slung from the axle. He furnished Oscar with a weirdly spelled account of his expenditures, by immemorial custom withholding is traditional commission of one anna in the rupee. (There are 16 annas in the rupee.) He was assisted by an apprentice who paid him for the privilege and would be a cook himself one day. A sweeper and a *mali* (gardener) were also on the roster, although only Oscar ever saw them. The sweeper scrubbed, swept and polished during the day and the *mali* kept us supplied with fresh flowers, never mind where he got them. Finally the *dhobi* came to take away a mountain of soiled white drill suits, personal linen and household linen, all returned in a day or two clean, bleached in the sun, and carefully ironed.

It was a simply but adequately furnished two-bedroom flat, the dining-room converted into a third bedroom for me, and we ate in the drawing-room. Double doors opened on a deep verandah and that was where we spent most of our time at home. The place was quite airy with fresh breezes off the sea and we didn’t suffer too much from the heat. We slept under mosquito-nets, of course, and in the evening a spiral of green Japanese punk burning under one’s chair also discouraged mosquitos, but not completely. In the end we all got malaria, mosquito-born from the street. We never got dysentery, however; Oscar insisted that all ray fruits and vegetables be soaked for fifteen minutes in the “red water” of mercurochrome tablet. If any of us got dysentery the cook would be fired.

Our verandah faced the west, overlooking the dusty park known as the Cooperage. Dotted with coconut palms and clumps of shrubbery, the park boasted a bandstand where crowds of natives gathered for weekly concerts provided by the Municipality, and beyond a line

of palms Malabar Hill rose above the waters of the Back Bay. From a distance Malabar was a mass of foliage through which peeped the white facades and red tile roofs of Lord Brabourne's Government House and the spacious villas of native potentates and wealthy merchants. Just perceptible were the Towers of Silence where the Parsees, unwilling to defile earth or water or fire, exposed their dead to the vultures perched on the encircling wall, waiting for the next litter-borne corpse followed to the door by silent white-clad mourners. Inside, priests split skulls and broke arm and leg bones to facilitate the cleansing process; any bits of bone the vultures left were cast down a deep well.

Malabar Hill was also the scene of a crime which caused a great scandal and provided the Times of India with material for many a column as the story unfolded. To begin with, a Bombay businessman had been waylaid and murdered as he drove along the broad highway slanting up the hill. The attackers sought to escape in a motorcar but were soon apprehended by the police; there were eye-witnesses and the fate of the criminals was sealed. There was more to it than that, however. The murderers were identified as retainers of the Maharajah of Indore and it soon became clear that their lord and master had sent them to mete out princely justice on a man who had abducted a girl from the royal harem and was living with her in Bombay City. Under British law the Maharajah was just as guilty of murder as his henchmen, but the police couldn't touch him, the hereditary ruler of a princely state, completely independent of the British Raj and even entitled to a 19-gun salute from the armed forces. In Indore his power was absolute; he was above any law but his own whim. A crime committed on territory subject to British law and British notions of justice was, however, something else again. Punishment was clearly due, but how to enforce it was the problem, and controversy raged for weeks. The issue was finally resolved when Indore was summoned, before the Council of Princes, tried and found guilty by his peers and required by them to abdicate.

It was unthinkable that a young man living in Bombay didn't belong to at least one club. The stuffy old Bombay Club was out of the question but an American junior officer could belong to the Gymkhana; it welcomed all young white males except "counter-jumpers" employed in retail establishments. The Gymkhana occupied an open space of green turf in the heart of the European section; one leg of the all-India cricket tournament was staged there, as well as an annual "gymkhana" of tent-pegging, jousting at the ring and other equestrian sporting events. Its shady verandah was a good place to meet for *tiffin* (lunch or light meal) or to congregate with friends in the evening before going on to dinner.

The Bombay Yacht Club was more select, a haven for sailors and oarsmen, and its terrace looking out over the waters of the harbor was a delightful place on which to linger with a gimlet, that pleasing concoction of gin and Rose's lime juice. Once upon a time, according to well-established legend, the Viceroy of India, down from New Delhi, repaired to the Yacht Club with a local maharajah to sit on that terrace and was promptly accosted by the club secretary. It was a strict rule, the secretary said, that no person of color could enter the club's premises except in the capacity of servant. As a result Lord Willingdon recruited a group of wealthy Parsees, Hindus and Moslems to organize the Willingdon Club, a dream of a country club on the edge of town, complete with golf

course, tennis courts, swimming pool., and what have you, centered on a marble pavilion where the best food and drink in all India were to be had. Completely free of racial prejudice, the Club even admitted white members who could afford it. For us it was a treat to be invited to the Willingdon Club for a dinner-dance.

We were by no means wholly dependent on clubs for our social life, however. As is often the case with foreigners in a large community we tended to clot into a social group, ours being mostly but not exclusively American, and the Cooperage mess was part of it. Twenty-five or thirty of us were constantly in each other's company in a shifting pattern of dinners for eight and two tables of bridge, picnics at Juhu Beach, tea-dances at the Taj Mahal, Saturday afternoons at the magnificent Bombay race course. We were all in our twenties, bachelors and young married couples, not a single girl in the lot.

Most of the men in our self-centered little social group were the Bombay representatives of American companies, responsible for developing business in western India, and they were often away on trips of some duration. This left footloose young wives, several of them at any given time, ready and willing to be amused. In the course of human events each such abandoned wife was often seen with a particular bachelor at dances or dinner parties and this kind of pairing-off was an understood thing. The husbands seemed reconciled, perhaps out of necessity, and for the most part there was no great harm in it; when her man returned the wife would usually be telling him all.

But not necessarily. There was a story around that young Terry dropped in for a drink with Doris and in the drawing-room was surprised to find her husband unexpectedly back in town; on the table beside him lay the automatic he usually carried with him on his trips upcountry. Terry turned and fled incontinent. Guilty conscience, the tongue-waggers concluded. And there was the time when John and his boss's wife strolled into the dark from a dance at the Willingdon Club. The lady did not return and when John came into the light it was seen that the knees of his white trousers bore fresh green grass stains. This phenomenon was studiously ignored by all, including John, but he sat down rather quickly and soon went home. Nothing was ever said about this, in the mess or anywhere else.

Soon thereafter, perhaps because of this, the Cooperage mess joined the sartorial revolution which was developing. We in Bombay had scorned for some time the long-established Calcutta fashion in evening dress, slavishly copied in other cities, which combined white drill trousers with a black alpaca jacket. We thought it unattractive and impractical, especially because white drill trousers are instantly wrinkled and soon soiled, while alpaca jackets seemed more appropriate for office than evening wear. We therefore reversed the order, topping our black tropical-weight trousers with white sharkskin jackets. This was such an improvement that the new fashion caught on quickly and soon spread even to Calcutta.

The Cooperage cavaliers also developed for themselves what we called the "chit system" to mitigate the shortage of feminine society. We were particularly well equipped for this, I with colleagues at posts along the China Coast and in the Indies, the American Express

boys with a far-flung network for trapping tourists. When an attractive young lady entered the system anywhere she would be picked up by one of the lads, suitably entertained, and assured that she would be well looked after at her next port of call. Thus a chit would arrive in Bombay giving the necessary particulars and we would reciprocate with similar chits covering eastbound travelers. It worked like a charm and helped to keep everyone happy.

Then came a bonanza to put all this in the shade. The Denishawn dance company arrived from California for an engagement in Bombay; they ended by touring India for three months. Until then we hadn't realized how starved for theater we were. An Italian opera company toured India annually, a magician in Chinese dress came to put on a one-man show, the Amateur Dramatic Society struggled through an occasional polite comedy, and that was literally all the theater we had, other than the aptly named "flicks" peddled by Hollywood. Now there was something we Americans could be proud of, and we were all stage-struck in varying degrees.

Ruth St. Denis, we came to understand, was an Irish girl from Hoboken who had become one of the pioneers of modern dance, breaking new ground as dancer and choreographer. Some years before she had teamed up with Ted Shawn – they were now married – to organize a dance group in California. Martha Graham had joined them after her early experience as a Spanish dancer in the "Follies" but soon left to embark on her own dazzling career. There was no lack of talent still in the company, however; Charles Weidman and Doris Humphrey were there and would later become stars in their own right, while Ted would end up with his young men at Jacob's Pillow after path retired. For us just then the important thing was the arrival in our midst of a dozen lovely, talented, well-mannered young things. One and all they adored "Miss Ruth," they were dedicated to their art, and they worked very, very hard. Not too much time for play, therefore, and anyway June Rhodes, the little blonde dynamo who functioned as general manager, kept a careful eye on the girls. She fended off prowlers, but for some reason had a soft spot for By Wrigley and me; we were privileged to go backstage at will and we watched many a performance from the wings. It was also acceptable to take a girl to a tea-dance if there were no rehearsals, organize a swim and picnic at Juhu Beach, see her to the hotel after the show without too much loitering on the way. We were assiduous with flowers and even more practical help, as on the occasion in New Delhi when the company arrived late from Madras after a hot and dusty train journey. Only an hour to curtain-time and the show must go on. So By and I dashed to the Cecil Hotel to commandeer two waiters with cold drinks and enormous trays of sandwiches; the girls were near to tears with gratitude.

The Denishawn repertoire was eclectic, including such contrasting numbers as a lively country dance in which the youngsters pranced joyously, or Ruth alone on the stage floating to the melody of the Liebestraum waltz, or Ted displaying his muscles as a living statue or creating the illusion of a gold-crowned, many-armed Siva. For this tour Ruth had devised a number of Indian dances and a knowledgeable Indian woman told us that every movement, every pose, every gesture was an accurate rendition of a fragment borrowed from the sacred dances presented in South Indian temples. The most famous of

these for us was the “Dance of the Black and Gold Sari” in which Ruth came on the stage to a tinkling little tune, bearing on her arms a rolled-up black and gold sari; kneeling front center she bowed to the audience in a deep salaam, then rose and with graceful little dance steps unrolled the sari, twisting it around her hips and tucking in the folds with clever fingers, exactly as an Indian woman does when dressing. When she reached the climax and brought the end of the sari over her head the Indian audience burst into spontaneous applause and the galleries shrieked and whistled, demanding an encore. She never did that little dance without being compelled to repeat it three times.

When the company came back to Bombay for its last repeat engagement we gave them all a party, presenting parodies of their program to the extent feasible. Wrigley, in black-face and union suit dyed black, posed on a box as a living statue while Peggy Wills played soulful music on the piano. But when she broke into an Irish jig he hopped down and did a creditable soft-shoe dance as the youngsters giggled and Ted applauded with a strained smile. It was John who brought the house down with the “Dance of the Red and White Sari.” Dressed in his underwear he came on our improvised stage clasping a roll of cheap bazaar cottons stitched end to end and made a spectacular entrance when, being a little drunk, he tripped and fell flat on his face. He picked himself up, and with Peggy vamping the little tune John proceeded with his dance, winding yards and yards of cloth around himself, getting thoroughly entangled, and finally collapsing in a heap amid shrieks of laughter from the whole company, not least from Ruth herself.

Life for bachelors in Bombay was not all fun and games, of course. Most of our days we labored in offices to earn our modest salaries in a manner no better and no worse than anywhere else. For many of us, however, this was not all and from time to time we had to go on the road to the cities of western India regarded as Bombay territory, to great cities like Cawnpore, Lucknow, Lahore, Delhi and Agra, or to smaller centers in between. For a young man this was often exciting; after his business was done he could visit all the wonderful places described in tourist guides. There was a price to pay, however. Distances were vast, travel was necessarily by rail, and that meant acute discomfort.

The British were justifiably proud of the extensive railway network they had constructed in the nineteenth century, and indeed it had contributed greatly to the economic development of India, but in 1925 its rolling-stock, apparently designed in the days of a young Queen Victoria, was not only obsolescent, it was worn out. Locomotives belched soft-coal smoke and cinders, the third-class carriages jam-packed with natives were still much as described by Kipling, while the sleeping-cars for the elite were divided into compartments accessible only from a station platform. To get a meal passengers had to climb out during a stop at a way-station, push through the milling crowd on the platform, and climb aboard the dining-car, returning at the next stop by the same route in reverse. Fortunately the stops were long, twenty minutes or so, and there was no need to hurry.

Arrayed for travel in khaki shirt and shorts topped by the khaki pith helmet characteristic of Bombay (in Calcutta they were white) I would arrive at Central Station with George shepherding the baggage coolies to a four-berth compartment. The baggage included a bedding-roll hired from American Express containing a thin mattress, a blanket, dingy

sheets and a limp pillow, a cotton towel or two. George would make up my bed on one of the berths and then withdraw with his own little bundle to a cramped cubicle for servants at one end of the car, whence he would emerge whenever the train stopped, to loiter within call on the station platform. He was there to fetch from the dining-car cold drinks or hot water for my ablutions, to pack and unpack the bedding-roll, to guard my possessions when I was away in the dining-car. No one travelled without a bearer.

The so-called berths were really hard benches upholstered in a kind of black imitation leather, one above another on each side of the compartment, and the uppers could be hauled up out of the way. A small tap yielded tepid drinking water next to a door leading to a minuscule wash-room and toilet. Open windows were screened, shades could be pulled down on the sunny side, and electric fans in the corners of the ceiling could be turned on to stir the air. They also stirred the dust and cinders that leaked through rattling doors and windows and swirled across the linoleum floor. In hot weather, it was said, one could close the windows, place a cake of ice in a tin tub on the floor and direct the fans on it. That was the theory anyway; something to think about.

If a man had a compartment to himself he was lucky, or perhaps he had bribed, the guard to ticket it as full. Otherwise the discomfort increased in geometric ratio as additional passengers intruded with their baggage and sleep might be disturbed in the middle of the night when a passenger sought to board the train at an upcountry station and the guard and he raced along the cars, banging on doors and demanding entrance. A generous man would open up; a selfish one would keep quiet behind his locked door and wait for them to go away.

With all this in mind I was not looking forward to my next trip to Delhi when an exciting alternative presented itself. Sitting at table in the Gymkhana we were listening to Larry Kent's exuberant account of his plans for a publicity stunt to put his Graham-Paige automobiles on the map in India. He was going to stage a non-stop run from Bombay to Delhi, a thousand miles away, something no one had ever done before. The roads would be primitive, of course, but passable in dry weather and the rains were months away; most of the rivers to be crossed were unbridged but there were ferries; he knew where he could get petrol and oil; he had mapped the most practicable route. To make the trip non-stop, he said, would require three drivers to take it in turns, say in two-hour shifts, since the going might be rough, and two men would be functioning while the third could sleep. How about it? Would any of us like to make the trip with him? The big redhead's enthusiasm was contagious and two of us volunteered forthwith. Pres Wills was manager of Dupont's office in Bombay and could do as he liked. As an American official I was in a more vulnerable position. What would Washington say? What would the local firms representing Ford or General Motors have to say about any activity on my part for the benefit of a competitor? It was agreed, therefore, that my participation would be strictly anonymous and above all that my name would not be used in any publicity.

The sun was setting in a cloudless sky beyond Malabar Hill as we assembled on the Cooperage for this venture into the unknown. We were all in khaki traveling kit and everything else was in the baggage sent ahead by rail with George and the other bearers

to wait for us in the Cecil Hotel. We had grease to protect our faces from windburn and goggles to protect our eyes from the glare of the sun. There was food and drink, for we would not be stopping for meals; if the car came to a standstill for any reason the motor would still be ticking over and we could claim that this run was non-stop. Larry was at the wheel for take-off, with Pres beside him to operate the spotlight. He noted the time, raced the engine, and we were off!

Memories of the next day and a half are blurred. Pres and I never knew where we were, since Larry did the navigating, and for us, whether driving or operating the spotlight or trying to sleep in the back seat, our every faculty was concentrated on the road, and only the road, as we hurtled through a pitch-black night or under a blazing sun. We swept through towns and were scarcely aware of them; although we were in open country most of the time we have recollection of the fields, the trees, the hills that must have been there. What we do remember is the road, narrow, twisting, pot-holed, sometimes rocky, surfaced only by a layer of fine white dust. Glancing back we could mark our trail by the continuous band of white thrown up by flying wheels, a cloud of dust so fine that it hung in the air for minutes before drifting away. Fortunately there was almost no motor traffic – it would have been impossible to overtake another vehicle and tunnel past in an atmosphere more impenetrable than the densest fog. Twice we met motorcars coming the other way; then it was necessary to slow down, guess at the way ahead, and plunge blindly into a blank whiteness.

There were breaks when the road ended abruptly on the bank of a river and we had to stop while the motor idled. A steep earthen ramp would lead down to the water's edge and to the ferry, hastily assembled for this exceptional burden by laying planks across two boats. With the Graham-Paige precariously aboard, this contraption would be poled and paddled to the farther bank and another earthen ramp. Here we also could refuel and roar away with a loss of no more than half an hour in running time.

Concentration on the road of course encompassed everything on it. During the first night there was little traffic other than an occasional bullock-cart plodding through the darkness, its driver asleep on a pile of grain sacks or bales of cotton. The spotlight picked it up in good season and then it was up to the driver to slip by as quickly as possible before a panic-stricken bullock could veer across the road. Come dawn the traffic between villages came to life and the driver had to be constantly alert to avoid disaster as the car wove its way in a plume of dust between bullock-carts, handcarts, loose cattle and groups of pedestrians, or waded through an occasional flock of sheep. Special care was needed when passing a string of camels because camels can kick sideways. And so all day under the blazing sun we followed the relentless road.

During our second night we were traversing wild country through one or another of the native states in the Central Provinces. The way was particularly rough and tortuous and the spotlight was picking up the glowing eyes of wild animals on or beside the road. Most of them – jackals, antelopes, rabbits, civet cats – skipped nimbly out of the way, but at one moment I was confronted by the bulk of an enormous boar planted in the road, his white tusks gleaming, his little red eyes glaring. To hit him would have been catastrophe

for us, even if he paid with his life; fortunately he lumbered just enough to one side as the car swerved past and we all gasped in relief.

Well into the small hours of that second night my eyes suddenly gave out. At one moment I was peering ahead along a beam of light, at the next there was complete blackness. Blindly I stopped the car in the middle of the road. "Sorry," I said, "I can't see. Somebody else will have to drive for a while." Larry took me by the arm. "Into the back with you," he ordered, "and stay quiet until you have had a rest." He took the wheel and we started off again while I lay there in a semi-stupor. (The trouble was that I had been unable to accommodate the glasses I normally wore behind the goggles that were so essential during the day and the result was severe eye-strain.) When I came to I could see again and the morning light revealed the trees and fields of the tidy countryside surrounding Delhi. Larry was driving; he insisted on being the man at the wheel for the triumphant climax to our adventure.

As we climbed wearily up the steps into the Cecil Hotel our servants were there to greet us, all broad grins, but the Anglo-Indian clerk at the desk was not impressed. "Sorry, sir," he said to Larry while Pres and I drooped against the wall, "all space in the hotel has been booked and we can't give you rooms. We have pitched some tents on the grounds, however, and we can take care of you there." Larry expostulated; we had made reservations from Bombay, we had motored all the way and just arrived, we desperately needed food and baths and sleep. The clerk was adamant; tents or nothing.

Then my old friend Miss Anna arrived on the scene like an angel from Heaven. She was manager of the family-owned Cecil Hotel, that comfortable old-fashioned hostelry which had ministered to travelers since the turn of the century. She was also a warm-hearted and perceptive woman; she took one look at me leaning against the wall, did a double-take, and issued brisk orders. We were to have rooms immediately, no matter who had to be bumped into a tent; this was an emergency and it had to be dealt with.

George promptly disappeared with the baggage and I was led upstairs to a comfortable room. In a mirror I caught sight of my face and realized what had prompted Miss Anna's reaction. Layers of dust and grease formed a mask pierced by two bright scarlet holes, a truly horrendous sight. Now George arrived through the back door, herding a gaggle of hotel servants with a tin tub and pails of hot water, and I was in his hands again. Bathed and fed, I was dropping off to sleep almost before I could reach the bed. George woke me at noon and I went down for lunch, only to fall into bed again and sleep until dinner-time.

Drinking their pink gins in the bar the three adventurers glowed with self-satisfaction. Larry was ebullient; he had been busy with reporters and photographers and was getting all the publicity he could want. The Graham-Paige, according to the press, had travelled non-stop from Bombay, its engine ticking over as sweetly in Delhi as when it had started; the air in its tires was sea-air; that marvelous American vehicle had covered a thousand miles cross-country in a day and a half! In all India there had never been anything like it. (Not for long, of course; records are made to be broken.)

Back home the Cooperage mess was soon in trouble as one after another we came down with malaria. In retrospect we know that it came from the massed listeners around the bandstand, a short hop away for a mosquito when the wind was in the west. In such a crowd there was bound to be a sizeable number of natives carrying the malaria parasite in their blood; they had no protection at all from insect bites and even our defenses were sketchy at best. We had given no thought to this and boasted that we could ward off malaria with the help of enough Scotch and soda when we sat on the verandah before and after dinner.

As it happened I was the first victim. Every Thursday at exactly four o'clock in the afternoon I would suffer a violent chill, shivering uncontrollably and obviously through with the office for the rest of the day. By the time I got home to a quinine tablet the fever was running high and when it broke I was pouring sweat, my bed so soaked that the sheets had to be changed. In the morning I was back to normal but drained of energy and barely able to stagger back to work.

This went on for some weeks until Kitty Bossi heard about it and insisted that I see a doctor, an Italian specialist on malaria. Doctor Vicente came, listened to my story, and fingered my belly. Sure enough my spleen was enlarged and I had malaria, he said, but I wasn't really coping with it. When an attack was checked by quinine, he explained, the organisms feeding on the blood simply turned into spores which lodged in the spleen. Hence the enlargement of that organ, a sure sign of malaria. (And that was why British soldiers and policemen were warned not to hit natives in the belly, since the result was often a fatally ruptured spleen.) In due course the spores would erupt into another generation of parasites in an endless cycle. To get rid of my malaria, he insisted, I would have to eliminate every last spore, including those that remained in hiding, and that meant fifteen grains of quinine every day for sixty days. For the next two months, therefore, I went about with ringing ears, partly deaf and a bit fuzzy in the head, but it worked. In the end I was grateful to the good doctor, who later died of malaria himself.

Oscar was next, but he couldn't face the music and fled the country. Then John began to complain of stubborn constipation and turned to me for help. In view of my experience with malaria I was now regarded in the mess as a medical authority and for some time I had been dispensing home remedies with some success and only one near-catastrophe. That was the time Harry Russell said he couldn't sleep and I got some veronal tablets from the chemist. Uninformed as to veronal's potency I was nevertheless cautious enough to give him only half a tablet; when he fell sound asleep in the middle of dinner and had to be carried to bed. I was really scared and flushed the rest of those tablets down the drain. In John's case he responded to none of our treatments, not even to a glycerin enema, and he finally went to the company doctor, who thought to take a blood test. And there it was! Malaria. There are several types of malaria, we were told, including my weekly bouts, the "quartan agues" of medieval Europe (an attack every four days), and John's mysterious paralysis. So American Express transferred him to Ceylon and a convalescence at Nuwara Eliya, where he enjoyed cool mountain air and boasted of fresh strawberries for breakfast.

The departure of our leader was the end of the line for the Cooperage mess, and as we went our several ways I moved in with a young American couple as star boarder, complete with the wardrobe trunk and George. At the same time my way of life changed completely; reversing biological processes the butterfly became a grub immured in its cocoon. Instead of flitting about town I spent my evenings and my weekends hard at work on a project which absorbed my energies and commanded all my attention seven days a week for months on end.

It all started over lunch with George Shantz, who had been trading in gold and silver on the Bombay bullion market on behalf of Irvine Trust. The bank had finally tired of this, George said, and he was going home, but he thought I might be interested in one of his activities. For some time he had been inconspicuously helping one of the leading firms in the market to prepare its weekly published reports and by doing so he had gained invaluable insights into the operations of the native traders whose activities created an important, complex and highly speculative market. He knew that one of my duties was to prepare reports for Washington on financial activities in Bombay (he was one of my sources) and he felt that if I took on this job it would day off handsomely for me.

In due course, therefore, George took me to meet Maneklal Premchand, senior partner in Premchand, Roychand & Sons, in his solidly paneled office in Apollo Street, not far from the new building of the Bombay Bullion Exchange. From the beginning Maneklal impressed me favorably. Medium in height and weight he had no outstanding physical characteristics, but his Indian dress or London suitings were equally impeccable, his eyes intelligently alert under a brush of graying hair, his facial expression assured but calm and amiable, his speech educated, direct and always to the point. We became friends on the spot and eventually he would even eat his lunch in my presence, although as a Jain, the strictest of Hindu sects, he should have turned his back lest my shadow pollute his food. That food, incidentally, consisted of a saucer of parched grain.

After not too much palaver we came to a clear understanding. What Maneklal wanted was someone to prepare every week the text of the printed market reports he distributed, the statistical work to be done by his clerks, the text to be written in lucid English by someone with a background in economics. He soon recognized that this new young man would do just as well as Shantz had done. He also recognized that such an arrangement presented problems for me as an American official and that the Washington bureaucracy might take a dim view of it, whether or not it became public knowledge.

My collaboration would therefore have to remain a dead secret. The question of compensation was not even mentioned, it being understood that the advantage for me, as it had been for George, would be the information I acquired about what went on behind the scenes in the financial markets in Bombay: the bullion market, the stock exchange, the money market, banking operations, and anything else relevant for my purposes. Every Friday just before noon I would therefore repair to Maneklal's office and for an hour or so we would discuss the happenings of the past week, deciding what should go into the published market report, the text of which was delivered on Monday morning in shape for the printer. (Some developments would be discreetly ignored, as when His Exalted

Highness the Nizam of Hyderabad dipped into his fabulous treasure and broke an imminent corner on the silver market by sending a freight car floored with silver bars over his Guaranteed State Railway for spot deliveries in Bombay.)

The financial reporting from Bombay soon displayed an unprecedented sophistication which readers in Washington, unaware of what lay behind it, either took for granted or, if they happened to notice it, doubtless attributed to the competence of the reporting officer. As for him, he soon became fascinated with the lore of the bullion market and went on to undertake extensive research into the whole subject, poring over official publications and bombarding Maneklal with questions. Bombay was then the center of Indian trade in precious metals and one of the great bullion markets of the world, a highly developed complex involving banks, brokers, importers, wholesalers and retailers, organized around the Bombay Bullion Exchange, an association of the principal native dealers.

India, this research soon revealed, was a country which traditionally enjoyed a favorable balance of merchandise trade as a heavy exporter of cotton, jute, rice, wheat, oilseeds, shellac, mica and other natural products, while it was unique among nations in settling that balance mostly by imports of silver ingots, gold ingots, sovereigns or eagles, as it had done for generations. In the immediate post-war years after 1918 India was absorbing annually some 6,000,000 ounces of gold and 90,000,000 ounces of silver, 40 percent of the world's gold production and 30 percent of its silver. Unhappily for India, however, wealth in this form produced little of real value. The whole history and tradition of the people, the economic and social organization of the country and its primitive financial system induced a pervasive habit of hoarding gold and silver, whether as bullion stored unproductively in the strong rooms of princes or wealthy merchants or as ornaments adorning the wives and daughters of farmers after crops had been harvested, later to be sold at a loss when it came time to buy seed for the next crop.

All of this had many ramifications, and it took six months of hard labor to sort it all out and complete a massive report on "The Bombay Bullion Market" which was eventually published in Washington, but that is another story and here we are dealing only with matters which never reached the files.

Such a one is the story of Premchand Roychand's annual report for 1925. Maneklal and I wanted it to be more than the usual routine summary and he agreed enthusiastically to include a discussion of what we called "the fundamental problem of India's wasted resources." That problem we identified as being "in spite of the fact that the wealth of the world for many decades has been poured into India's lap in the form of gold and silver, the standard of living of the great mass of the population is distressingly low, the industrial development of the country is obviously backward, and a large proportion of its vast natural resources is as yet practically untouched. The root cause of these conditions," we argued, "lies in the rudimentary character of the country's credit system. The life-blood of Western civilization is credit and its genesis is the accumulation of capital. Without these India can never develop to the extent of which she is capable. With a pitifully inadequate banking system, with savings jealously hoarded in the form of unproductive metals, with no funds available for the development of industrial enterprise,

India will always be a backward nation unless her people can be educated to see the folly of their present practices.” For obvious reasons the twin evils of cow worship and over-population were not mentioned in the report, which went on to say: “If India’s gold and silver holdings were invested we would be receiving from the rest of the world, not gold and silver, which experience has proved provide little in the way of comfort or improved standard of living to the Indian people, but rather the manufactured goods, the foodstuffs, the services of the other nations – in other words, real wealth.”

This line of thought provoked admiring editorials from Bombay’s Times of India and Calcutta’s financial journal Capital. It also attracted attention in the Bombay financial community and British bankers, convinced that a “native” could never produce anything like that, besieged Maneklal with queries as to the authorship of the report. He could not honestly maintain that it was all his own work, but he kept faith with me and gave inquirers no satisfaction. One of the local bankers finally pronounced judgment: “Only an Englishman could have written such an economically sound résumé.

Crime and Punishment in Singapore

Crime in the Street

Tommy had just emerged from the guest room to join me on the balcony when Superintendent Lang of the Detective Branch dropped in, as he sometimes did when in the neighborhood at drink-time. He seemed to like Americans, perhaps because in our home he was treated as a human being and social equal, which was more than could be said for a class-conscious colonial society in which a policeman was respected as one of the lower orders. For me the big Yorkshireman was a valued friend and a mine of information about the seamy side of life in Singapore. He had even taken me with him more than once on his tours of inspection through the crowded lofts which housed in tiny cubicles the faceless multitudes of coolies, rickshaw-pullers, stevedores, food-hawkers and peddlers, complete with their wives and children – part of my education, he said. Tonight he had brought along Bobbie Fraser in his full uniform as Probationary Inspector of Police. Bobbie explained importantly that he was on duty, tomorrow being May Day when the Hylams were expected to put on a Communist demonstration. “Nothing serious, but they mustn’t be allowed to get out of hand, you know.” As for Lang, in wrinkled whites after a long day, he didn’t need to say that he was always on duty and that even then the Detective Branch knew exactly where he was.

It was pleasantly cool on the top floor of Eu Court, a new four-story apartment house – three stories of flats above ground-floor shops – built on Orchard Road by a Chinese merchant out of his profits from the rubber boom of a few years back. We were well above the clouds of mosquitos that emerged at nightfall from the shrubbery around the villas in which most Europeans lived, and we were high enough to catch all the fresh breeze off the sea. Singapore is practically on the Equator, the sun sets all year round at exactly six o’clock, and night falls swiftly. In half an hour the heat of the day is forgotten and the mercury drops twenty degrees. That is the time, doctors say, for a spot of whisky to tide a man over the change in temperature.

Ah Soong stood waiting for orders. Highball for Tommy. Pink gin for Bobbie. What would the Super like? Whisky? Beer? “The way I feel tonight I’d like a nice pint of bitter out of the keg. Have you got anything like that?”

“Of course not,” I answered, “and even if there were any I couldn’t abide it. Last time I was through London I tried your famous bitter in a pub and barely got it down, out of politeness. For money you can put it back in the horse.”

Lang reared up indignantly. “You Americans,” he sputtered, drinking that poison you call Bourbon, and ginger ale on top of it, and full of ice! A highball, is it? You can have it. Give me a half peg of Scotch and a squirt or two of soda. No ice.”

The rattan armchair creaked under the big man’s weight as he leaned back, long drink in hand. “We’ve had a spot of luck this month,” he remarked. “Only one homicide so far, a Chinese floating in the harbor and we don’t know yet who he was or where he came from.

Tommy pricked up his ears. Fresh from the States and pigging it with me while my wife was away, he was insatiably curious about the many strange sights and sounds and smells of this polyglot Oriental city, trade center for the tin and rubber and copra and spices of Malaya and the islands of Indonesia. A Crown Colony garrisoned by British troops, it was also a port through which twenty-five or more ships a day passed on their journeys between the Indian Ocean and the China Sea. The policemen were something new and exciting for him, and he was eager with questions. Lang was in a kindly mood, rather flattered by the attention, and happy to give us a notion of what it was like to keep the peace in a city of half a million people, mostly Chinese, with fringes of Malays from upcountry and Tamils from South India and a smattering of strays from every country in the world, all governed under the benign jurisdiction of the Colonial Office in the name of His Britannic Majesty.

“Actually,” Lang continued, “we have to deal with about five homicides month, on the average. The records show exactly sixty cases in 1929 and sixty in 1930; if we keep the figure under that we’ll be doing well in 1931. We don’t solve all of them by a long shot, the way they do in detective stories. Who can identify a low-class Chinese coolie, beaten up and clubbed to death, much less point a finger at who did it or why? Maybe his friends can tell us something about a Malay taxi-driver found stabbed on a back road, but not much about the man who knifed him and dropped out of sight upcountry. One way we hold down the violence is by keeping guns out of the hands of all natives; they can’t buy one anywhere in the Straits Settlements and anyone caught with a gun on him gets an automatic jail sentence. Any weapon like that has necessarily been smuggled in from outside.”

The second round of drinks was now in hand and Ah Soong had been told that dinner would be late. Tommy wanted to know why he couldn’t find a single night-club in

Singapore, by which he meant a place where he could dance into the small hours and maybe pick up a girl.

“There aren’t any, of course. Curfew at midnight, you know. This isn’t Shanghai. Some of the young people like you always want to go on after the dancing packs up at the Raffles, but you’d have to go to somebody’s house for a nightcap or else take a rickshaw to the Egg Club for fried eggs and a cup of coffee. The Egg Club is what they call it, but it’s nothing more than a collection of trestle tables and benches, charcoal stoves and Coleman lamps, set up in the open air in the middle of a back street. Illegal, of course, and we don’t let them stay in the same street more than one night, but the rickshaw coolies always know where it is when you go looking for it. We turn a blind eye; the neighborhood doesn’t often complain about the nuisance and the youngsters could get into a lot more trouble than that.

“Opium dens? You must be thinking of tales about Chinatown in San Francisco. Here, the opium business is controlled by the Straits Government, in Penang and Malacca as well as Singapore, and all addicts are registered. They have to smoke their pipes on Government premises and they get a daily quota that’s supposed to be within their means but enough to keep them happy, and they go on with it for years. Prices are fixed to give the government a nice bit of revenue out of it.

The Super continued on a graver note. The biggest problem for the Detective Branch is the gambling, and we go all out on that. We’re convinced that it’s the root cause of a great deal of thieving as well as most of the armed robbery and the like. Cut down the gambling and you automatically cut down on crimes against property. It’s the Chinese who are the inveterate gamblers, every last one of them, from the coolie betting a few coppers to the rich merchant putting down hundreds of dollars on a roll of the dice. In the racing season everybody bets, on the ponies, of course, but all year round the Chinese crowd into games organized by professionals. They work several kinds of dice games played with three dice or six, but biggest of all is Fan Tan, and that’s all over the place. There was even a set going on the roof of this apartment house. Bobbie here raided it last month when you were out of town, and got a good haul. The house servants who live up there didn’t know anything about it, of course, although the beans were rattling under their noses, but half a dozen characters who couldn’t explain why they were there drew jail sentences.

“Another headache for us is the so-called secret society imported from China. There may be as many as a hundred of them in Singapore right now and they give us no end of trouble. These secret societies are not really societies, more like what you Americans call mobs, but they certainly are secret and we don’t often get inside one. They may organize robberies or act as fences but they live mainly on extortion. Practically every Chinese shopkeeper in Singapore has to pay squeeze to one of those societies, and a failure to come across means that a gang will wreck the shop or eating place one night, or beat up the proprietor or even murder him. He usually contributes meekly after the society has exhibited one of its gunmen and he has been given a glimpse of a weapon. It’s worse

trouble for us when societies get into disputes over territory. That can mean bloodshed, and maybe a corpse or two, but there's usually damned little we can take into court."

The telephone rang. "Is superintendent Lang there?" A few monosyllables and he hung up, turning to Bobbie. "Man shot in Victoria Street. Let's get to it." Bobbie started up and Lang glanced appraisingly at us. "Would you like to come along?"

Would we? There was a stampede for the door and we dashed down the stairs Bobbie in front yelling for the driver of the police car parked in the courtyard. As we piled out of the entrance the car drew up and we were off down Victoria Street. Four blocks away a rapidly growing crowd signaled the scene of action and we pulled up just across the street.

Victoria Street is a main thoroughfare, wide, paved, lighted by gas lamps, in the evening thronged with pedestrians, handcarts, rickshaws, motorcars, buses. It is lined with the usual unbroken row of Chinese shophouses, all two-storied, with shops below and a crowded warren of small rooms above. The upper story overhangs, roofing the five-foot sidewalk, and is supported by square brick pillars. Between sidewalk and street is an open drain, deep, about two feet across.

Most of the shops were closed and shuttered at this hour, and we headed for the lights of the lone coffee stand that was still open where the crowd was thickest. Lang shouldered his way to where a motionless figure lay face up on the sidewalk. There was no sign of violence – just a low-class Chinese lying there in his white cotton undershirt and black trousers, bare feet asprawl. A group of Malay constables kept the curious well away, and four or five Chinese detectives flitted back and forth, nosing through the crowd like hounds casting for a scent. A big shirt-sleeved Englishman was bending over the body – Williams of the Police, expert in matters Chinese. The coffee stand was deserted save for a single scullion squatting motionless on a stool; the proprietor was outside on the sidewalk explaining volubly to a detective. At one side a Chinese woman lay in a dead faint, her head supported on the shoulder of another.

Lang bent over beside Williams, lightly touched the silent form. "Very dead," he said, and turned the face to the light. "Ah, we've got him printed. He was up only a month ago." He pulled up the undershirt and exposed a small crescent-shaped wound, exactly like the little cut a penknife would make, just over the solar plexus. Lang felt under the back. "Still inside. That's a bit of luck. Small bullet. Must be a .32."

"Nice clean Murder," said Bobbie, looking at the body critically.

"He was hit twice," said Williams, and he felt under the man's hips, only to pull his hand away with a sharp exclamation. It was covered with blood, invisible on the black cotton trousers. He went into a shop, still deserted except for the rigid figure on the stool, and washed his hands at a tap.

Lang went swiftly through the clothing and garnered several bits of paper covered with Chinese characters. Williams looked them over under the gaslight. "Secret society pidgin," he said. "He's been collecting. Better have a look at his digs. He lives just up here beyond Rochor Road."

A choked, bubbling wail rose above the buzz of the crowd. The woman had come to. "It's his wife," Williams said. "She won't leave his body. They ought to get her out of here."

Lang talked in an undertone with Williams as detective after detective slid up, saluted, and reported briefly before merging into the crowd again. The woman broke into a crazy singsong, shrieked hysterically, and threw herself violently to the ground as a couple of policemen and her woman friend tried to get her away. Finally a stalwart Malay constable picked her up bodily and put her into a rickshaw, the other woman climbed in beside her, and they, started off up the street, the half-crazed woman shrieking and moaning and struggling to get down.

Bobbie had been racing up and down the drain with a flashlight and dashed up to report that he hadn't been able to find the gun. "There usually isn't one," he explained to us. "For a job like this they'll rent a gun from someone who makes a living by hiring it out at five or ten dollars a time. The gun is hidden in a package and handed to the gunman usually by a woman, just before he goes into action, and he passes it back to her later."

The conference broke up and we all climbed into the police cars, zigzagged a few blocks, and pulled up in front of another darkened row of shophouses. Lang jumped out and pushed through a little crowd of food-hawkers and idling rickshaw coolies to seize a Chinese by a shoulder – the only man in sight who looked like a local resident. Protesting volubly, the man led us through a shop piled high with gunny sacks, up a crazy flight of stairs, and along a narrow corridor lighted by a dim kerosene lamp. Lang pulled aside a flimsy curtain and the flashlights revealed the home of the deceased – a room about eight feet square, palatial for a low-class Chinese, furnished with a double bed, a wash-stand, a decrepit cabinet, cane chairs, a round table, two big spittoons.

Williams went straight to the stand and picked up the tin washbowl. "Always the first place to look," he said. In the little space below he found a sheaf of thin papers covered with Chinese characters and he glanced quickly through them while Bobbie held a flashlight. "Well, well, a list of the shops he's been squeezing. Good enough." He sorted through a heap of oddments in the cabinet and pulled out a bunch of slips. "Pawn tickets. Probably for stuff the gang has stolen."

The bed was turned back, the mattress poked. Nothing. The flashlights swung around the room and centered on a picture – a Chinese man and woman, dressed in their finest, sitting primly on either side of a round table. As we stared curiously that awful wailing broke out in the street below. The wife had come home.

Down the stairs and outside, where the street was now blocked by a crowd of curious Chinese attracted by the cars, the lights, the constables, the thrilling news that had spread like wildfire through the Rochor District. The distracted wife sat on a chair just outside the door while her woman friend dabbed her face with water and crooned to her in a soothing monotone.

Off again in the cars, this time to the police station, where a British sergeant of police sat at a desk and native policemen and detectives sat or stood about in a large room on the ground floor. One wall consisted of highly polished steel bars, floor to ceiling and six or eight inches apart, arranged to form three cells. In one of them, seated on stool under bright ceiling lights, was a young Chinese, perhaps in his early twenties, with unusually clean-cut features and alert eyes. Two Malay constables opened the door of the cell and led him out to stand before the desk. We could see that his cotton undershirt was torn half off his shoulders and there was a smear of dried blood on his chin.

A Chinese interpreter stepped forward and question and answer alternated rapidly, Williams putting in a word occasionally on his own account. A linen coat was produced and held up before the prisoner. He touched it and his fingers ran rapidly over the pockets. His face seemed to sag and Williams pulled out a clip of cartridges.

More questions and answers, all very quietly. It might have been any idle conversation in an unfamiliar language except for the alert constables standing by their prisoner, the bars on the cells, the knowledge that less than an hour ago this personable young man had fired a bullet into another man's body, and in due course would be hanged by the neck till dead.

"He's confessed," said Lang, and the tension eased. Handcuffs were produced, the prisoner manacled, and a police car drove away with Williams beside the driver, the prisoner in the back with a constable and a detective on either side. "They've gone to take his confession before a magistrate," Lang explained. "It's no good having a confession to the police – not admissible in evidence. They'll rout out some magistrate who'll probably curse us for disturbing his evening. Then he's promised to show us where he threw away the gun, but it'll be a miracle if we find it."

Soon the four of us were back home, having a refresher after all that activity, and before going on to dinner Lang filled in the story for us. The corpse belonged to a bad hat, known to the police as head of a minor Hokkien secret society, and he was murdered because he had been poaching on the territory of another gang. That lot had a gunman on the payroll – the young man we saw at the police station – and they supported him upcountry when he wasn't in town. He got a hundred and fifty Straits dollars for every job like this. (At 77 U.S. cents per dollar that would be \$85.00 to us.) It used to cost only fifty dollars to have a man killed in Singapore but the price has gone up and the police take sore credit for that.

It was quite clear how it all went. When it was decided to murder the man he was followed for several days to establish that he often spent an evening in that little coffee-

shop in Victoria Street. Probably used it as a kind of office. The gunman came down from Johore in the afternoon, the place was pointed out to him, and he was shown the target. As his victim sat there quietly sipping coffee he was just across the sidewalk, the gun under his coat, lurking behind a pillar and waiting for the next move. Completely unaware of all this, the man paid for his coffee, elbowed past a rickshaw-puller who was perched on a stool tucking into a bowl of bahmi, and strolled out the door only to be confronted by the gunman, who stepped out from behind the pillar and fired pointblank at him. The shot missed, hitting the coolie in the leg, and he turned to run. A second shot caught his hip, knocking him down, and he rolled over on his back. The third shot was perfectly placed and he never moved again.

The gunman ran down the street, trying to lose himself in the crowd, throwing away the gun and later his coat, since he still had those damning cartridges in the pocket. But the hue and cry was on, a police constable was on point duty at the next corner, two Chinese detectives were just up the street, and he was caught between them. He surrendered after a brief struggle and was led back to the coffee-shop shop while a phone call was being put through to the Detective Branch and Williams was speeding to Victoria Street in a car full of detectives and constables. The detectives immediately pounced on everyone who might have been on the scene, and by good luck got two right away, a Chinese and a Malay who were eye-witnesses and could positively identify the murderer. Before we got there he had been rushed off to the lock-up, the wounded rickshaw-puller landed in General Hospital, and the witnesses were conducted to the Detective Branch to have their statements taken. The case was complete except for the weapon, but if it were found it would only be the cherry on top.

“Let me see,” mused Lang. “We can get him ready for the Assizes on the 12th, sentence will be passed on the 14th, and he’ll be for it on the 28th. Less than a month. We’ve had a bit of luck.”

“Nice clean murder case,” said Bobbie.

In a shooting outrage which occurred in the Rochor District last night one Chinese was instantly killed while another is in a very serious condition. The shooting is understood to have been in connection with a premature “celebration” of Labour Day. No arrests were made.
Singapore Free Press, May 1, 1931

Blackmail and Other Misdemeanors

It was tea-time on the terrace of the Europe Hotel as its shadow inched across smooth green turf toward the Cricket Club gleaming white against a background of palm trees and the bright blue of the sunlit harbor. The hum of voices nearly drowned the clatter of tea cups as turbaned servants in knee-length white coats girded by red sashes circulated among the tables distributing plates of Carr’s biscuits and cucumber sandwiches. This was a bit of England transported to colonial Singapore, the ritual of tea on a summer afternoon, complete with muslin frocks and flowered hats, although the gentlemen in attendance were clad perforce in the white drill of tropical civvies.

Only a few tables on the shaded terrace were unoccupied; the clientele of the Europe was notably faithful and could be counted on to be there every afternoon. In the social hierarchy of the Crown Colony they were in a class by themselves, those good people. None of the men were members of the Singapore Club, where tycoons met at noon for three pink gins and a curry before returning to the office to sign letters and doze away the afternoon. The ladies gossiped about the doings in the Tanglin Club but had never sunbathed by the pool or sat out a dance with an aide from Government House. The Raffles Hotel was world famous, of course, and one went there from time to time, but it was full of American tourists and a lot of foreigners from everywhere. One was much more comfortable here, among one's own kind. Anyway the Europe was a cut above the Adelphi, stuck in the middle of town and no view, even though George could produce the hottest curries this side of his native Colombo. As for the Van Wijk, it was low, no two words about it, that Dutch hotel under the trees where sailors off the ships and all sorts of mixed breeds came looking for tarts. Non-existent for them, in a part of the city they never visited and of which they knew nothing, the several floors of the Southern Hotel blazed with light every night, its public and private dining-rooms crowded with Chinese bankers, merchants and landlords who might be ordering a banquet, complete with singsong girls, equal to anything in Hong Kong or San Francisco, though maybe not Shanghai.

It was in this atmosphere that the wives and daughters of the British subjects who staff the Empire with their menfolk in the Europe Hotel. The men were employees of banks and trading companies, working-level civil servants and administrators, serving out their time before going back home with their pensions. In England they would regard themselves as respectable middle-class citizens, loyal, dutiful, knowing their place. Here they were all that and more. Here they, and above all their women, were also guardians of the race, intolerant of miscegenation in any form and regarding "natives" as children to be disciplined for their own good, to be guided in useful directions, to be recruited as raw manpower, all with the best intentions in the world under the protection of His Majesty's armed forces and British law. So they drank their tea and munched their biscuits, chattered and gossiped, secure and self-satisfied.

Into this sedate picture two alien figures came up the steps from the street. One was a white man (an Englishman?), a small erect figure neatly dressed in khaki shirt and shorts, khaki-colored stockings, well polished brown shoes. Not alarming, the man, not too much out of place. But his companion! A black woman, a very black woman, scrawny but full-breasted in a dress of shocking pink satin, her face heavily powdered under a drooping white hat, her cheeks rouged, her lips a slash of red. Not a Negress, no not that, perhaps an Indian, a Tamil? Tamils are very dark. Conversations broke off abruptly and the questions raced unspoken from table to table as every head turned to stare at this odd couple sitting down near the entrance.

"Boy," the man called to a passing waiter, "bring one tea one lemon squash." His voice rang out clearly in the stunned silence and the servant fled. An assistant manager hurried forward. "I'm sorry sir, we can't serve you. You'll have to leave."

“What do you mean you can’t serve us? And why should we leave? We’re British subjects, my wife and I, and we have as much right here as anyone else. This is a public place, isn’t it? Bring us tea immediately.”

Still dead silence, and the company craned to watch. The assistant manager was firm. “No, you can’t have tea here. And you will have to leave. If you don’t go immediately I shall have you put out. And if you create a disturbance I’ll call the police. Now go.” A towering Sikh watchman, summoned from the interior of the hotel, loomed over the woman.

“Come, dear,” the man said. “We’re not wanted here, it seems, and I don’t think much of the place anyway, and even less of the people.” He took the woman’s arm and led her down the steps. The Sikh followed closely and pulled shut the iron grille that guarded the entrance at night. Barred from the hotel and standing on the sidewalk next to the rickshaw stand, the man faced the assistant manager and the phalanx of fascinated spectators, his eyes coldly contemptuous, his lip curling. “This is an outrage,” he said, “an insult to the British flag, a violation of the law.” His voice rang out more clearly than ever. “You haven’t heard the last of this by any means. I’ll be seeing you in magistrate’s court.” With that he climbed into a rickshaw beside the woman and they disappeared up the street.

On the terrace the excited babble rose to a crescendo. That was Begg. I’ve heard about him. And that was his wife. She’s a Tamil. What a horror! What will he do next? They ought to be in jail.

The hotel management went into a huddle. Would he really file suit? He’s a smart lawyer, they say. Did anyone touch him or the woman? Good, he can’t claim assault. And he was careful not to do anything we could charge him with. He’s a clever bastard. But we can’t have him and that woman barging in whenever they like. We’ll have to buy him off, I suppose, and the Raffles will chip in if they know what’s good for them.

And that’s the way it was. The Singapore Free Press had nothing to say about the affair, although the European community was buzzing with the story. No charges were filed by anyone and there was no court case. Nor was the incident repeated. When Begg made a deal he kept his word, provided he were paid enough, that is, and often enough.

If a Chinese secret society could collect squeeze from a shop there was no reason why Begg couldn’t collect from a hotel, less crudely, perhaps, but just as effectively and no doubt just as profitably.

We Americans viewed all this with detachment as we listened to the gossip and various ladies voiced their sense of outrage. We certainly didn’t think to criticize; in 1930 there were plenty of Jim Crow laws on the books at home and in those days we took white discrimination against uppity blacks as a matter of course. Begg was something else again, and we wanted to know more about him and his wife.

He was a remittance man, everyone agreed, but he never received any remittances. Instead he had been fixed up with a job on a British rubber estate upcountry, after which his people washed their hands of him. How or when or why he married a Tamil girl was not clear. There were certainly plenty of Tamils on the rubber estates; they were recruited in South India and shipped in by the trainload to work as rubber tappers or common laborers. And it was not difficult to understand how a man living alone on a rubber estate might get a Tamil girl pregnant. But why on earth did he marry her? One story was that a Scotch Presbyterian estate manager insisted that he marry the girl and when the news reached London he and Begg were both out of work. Most people thought that this tale was clotted nonsense, but they had no other explanation to offer. The indisputable fact was that Begg and the Tamil girl were legally married and had come to Singapore to set themselves up in business.

That business was prostitution, no less, and they lived on Mrs. Begg's earnings, with trimmings of blackmail. The prostitution bit was straightforward enough. Every evening Mrs. Begg in her pink satin dress installed herself at a table at the Van Wijk Hotel, her paler sisters under the skin set at other tables, alone or in small groups, and men on the prowl sat at still others. The Van Wijk wasn't much of a hotel but waiters brought drinks from the bar to the lighted area of trampled turf arranged as an open-air cafe under the trees, the whole complex surrounded by a low wall and served by a rickshaw stand in the street near the gate. There was no movement between tables; a municipal ordinance forbade soliciting in a public place and the ban was enforced, but there was nothing to stop a man from giving a girl the eye, or vice versa. The woman would then get into a rickshaw and go around the block, the man would get in another rickshaw and go around the other way, and thus the twain would meet in a back street and go on from there. Some men like dark meat and Mrs. Begg didn't often have to sit all evening alone with her lemon squash.

My friend the policeman denied that this was just another example of British hypocrisy. "What do you want us to do?" he expostulated. "Here we have a dozen or more tourists and men coming off the merchant ships every night looking for you know what. We don't allow street-walkers – there just aren't any in the European parts of town, as you well know – and those people have to have some place to go. I'd rather see them at the Van Wijk, where we know everybody, than trusting themselves to the next taxi-driver or rickshaw-puller. The Chinese can look after themselves but a newly arrived American jolly well couldn't. It's a kind of prevention and much better than a tragedy that's beyond cure."

"Maybe you're right at that," I admitted, "but what about the Beggs? They seem to have invented a new wrinkle. One of my lads saw the whole thing one night. He was having coffee on his balcony when along came Mrs. Begg in a rickshaw to meet a man in the street just below. They seemed to be arguing, presumably about monetary matters, when suddenly she let out a string of curses and started beating the man with a stick, all the time screaming bloody murder. The man tried to defend himself but then Begg came racing up, yelling for the police, and that was too much for the victim, who forked over some money and fled. How about that? It's blackmail, pure blackmail, and people say

Mrs., Begg's stick is set about with gramophone needles. Dangerous weapon if a man caught one in the eye. Tommy says that if he ever met Mrs., Begg on the street at night he'd run like hell the other way."

"Yes, I've heard tell of things like that," Lang said, "but what can the police do? I'd dearly love to catch them out but they're pretty cute about picking time and place and we've had no luck. And then the victim is maybe a sailor shipping out next morning or a planter in town for a night out and well aware of what the London directors would think. So nobody comes to us with the tale and without a sworn complaint we can't pull them in."

The case of Abdul was something else again. Abdul was our office boy-cum-messenger, what they call a tambie, and he was a favorite with all of us, American officers and Chinese clerks alike. Always clean and neat, he was proud of his smart uniform and wore his pill-box hat with an air, happy to be working for the Americans who treated him so well.

One afternoon Abdul returned to the office with a troubled face. He had run into Mrs. Begg on the street, he explained to Chang, and he was worried about what she might do. He was just walking around showing a friend the sights, he said, when Mrs. Begg came down the street in a rickshaw. She was a sight herself, in her pink satin dress, and his friend asked who that could be. Abdul was a bit vague about what he said in reply, but whatever it was she heard it and scrambled out of the rickshaw, screaming obscenities and lashing at him with her famous stick. He and his friend between them wrestled the stick away from her, and Abdul broke it over his knee. That brought even louder shrieks and a demand that two British soldiers passing by come to her rescue, but they only laughed at her. She finally rolled away, screaming more obscenities and threatening Abdul with dire penalties when her husband learned about this. The soldiers told him not to worry; he had only been defending himself and there was nothing the bitch could do about it.

They were wrong. When Abdul came to work next day he was arrested by a constable and led away to appear in magistrate's court and face a charge of assault and battery sworn to by Mrs. Begg. We held a council of war and Tommy was dispatched to call on the magistrate before court convened and try to fix the case. After all, it was Abdul who had been assaulted and the charge was ridiculous on the face of it.

Tommy was glum when he reported back. Even if Abdul were an employee of the United States Government, the magistrate had said, he was a British subject under local jurisdiction and he would have to answer to a duly sworn complaint. The reputation of Mrs. Begg was not germane to the case and even to speak of it invited an action for slander. In his court all British subjects stood equal under the law and every case was judged on its merits, regardless of either party's social standing. He wouldn't dream of dismissing a case before he heard the evidence. Abdul would have to stand trial.

In the event the trial was a farce. Begg led on behalf of his wife and had recruited three witnesses to support the charge. One and all they swore that little Abdul had attacked Mrs. Begg without provocation, dragging her from her rickshaw and inflicting severe injuries on her person. The victim of this brutal assault offered to display her bruises. The stick was not mentioned; that was a delicate subject.

Abdul had no witnesses to support his denials. His friend had left town and he didn't even try to locate two soldiers in the ranks of the Welch Regiment. He was alone and defenseless, overwhelmed by the weight of evidence.

The magistrate found him guilty perforce but forbore imposing a fine on a first offender, although Abdul was admonished not to repeat the offense and he had to pay court costs. These were assessed at four Straits dollars, a sum that didn't put much of a dent in the petty cash account.

The more we thought about it the more we seethed with indignation. Was this the vaunted British justice? Perhaps something of the sort was only to be expected in a Malayan sultanate like Perak or Kelantan, we told ourselves, but not in a court presided over by a British magistrate who spouted legal platitudes about impartial justice and equal rights under the law. More British hypocrisy?

But Begg wasn't through with Abdul. A few days later Chang came to my door in mid-morning. "Mr. Begg is outside in the corridor," he reported. "He says he wants Abdul to come out so he can serve a summons on him."

"A summons? A summons for what? Bring him in and I'll talk to him."

It was my first and only confrontation with Begg in the flesh. I didn't shake hands or ask him to sit down, and he stood there by the door in his neat khaki shirt and shorts, pith helmet in one hand, a paper in the other. His rather sallow face was a mask under close-clipped brown hair, his gray eyes level, his demeanor quietly assured. "I'm here to serve a summons on your man Abdul in a civil action," he said. "He has been found guilty of an atrocious assault on my wife and under the law she is entitled to damages. I'm suing him on her behalf and he will have to pay for his crime. I know that he's here and I'm asking you to produce him."

That was the gist of what he had to say and he said it several times, always in that flat, unemotional voice. I was far from unemotional, but we were alone behind the closed door and the things I said to him are fortunately not a matter of record. It was impossible to insult him, I soon discovered. He took it all with no change of expression, brushed it aside as "neither here nor there," and returned to his litany: Abdul had been convicted of a crime; he must pay a penalty; Mrs. Begg was entitled to compensation; that was the law. If Abdul wasn't produced he would wait; in the corridor until he came out, however long that might take. This last was what gained the day for him. I wasn't going to let him display himself by our office door for the whole world to see. While he couldn't barge

into the office, and didn't try, there was no way to force him to leave the public corridor. So Abdul was served with the summons and would have to go to court again.

The Chinese staff coached Abdul elaborately and rehearsed him for his appearance before the magistrate. Barefoot and dressed in his shabbiest shirt and shorts, he put on a magnificent act, Tommy reported. He pleaded for mercy, he wept, he moaned that the Americans paid him only a pittance, he was in debt, his parents were dead, he was the sole support of an aged grandmother and six brothers and sisters. The magistrate listened without comment to this tale of woe, nor did he seem at all impressed by the importunate demands of Begg for compensation to salve his wife's distressing wounds. Without hesitation he announced the verdict.

It was unreasonable, His Worship declared, to expect a lowly office tambie to produce a large sum of money and his American employers could not be required to pay on his behalf. The amount of damages the plaintiff could collect, he ruled, was twenty-five dollars. That sum, he stipulated would be payable at the rate of one dollar per month and the plaintiff would have to appear in court to claim it. Begg's dismay at this dictum was a sight to see. Tommy chortled, while the magistrate ignored all protests and called the next case. Begg stormed out in a rage, declaring that it was an insult to require him to appear once a month for two years to collect his award, and he wouldn't do it. Our victory was complete.

As we congratulated each other in the office we decided that after all there was something to be said for British justice if it functioned in practice, even if somewhat deviously, to protect one of His Majesty's lowliest subjects.

Smarting under this set-back, Begg made a mistake. For a long time had operated successfully in lower echelons of the colonial society, seemingly invulnerable to retribution, but now he reached upward in the social scale with a foray into the area where the levers of autocratic power are manipulated. There was no conceivable financial advantage to be gained from what he did, and no apparent reason for it unless it was simply an act of defiance. What did he do? He and his wife attended an auction, that's what.

In those days turmoil in China produced a constant flow of loot to the treaty ports and down the coast to Singapore and beyond. Priceless treasures came on the market at figures that bore no relation to their value: blackwood furniture inlaid with mother-of-pearl, elaborately adorned lacquer cabinets, ancient screens and wall hangings, rare porcelains, intricate carvings of jade and ivory, fabulous silk embroideries. Many went to stock curio shops but the finest pieces were offered privately to wealthy collectors. Sir William had been one of the most assiduous and knowledgeable of such collectors as he climbed the ladder of promotion in the giant banking, shipping and trading company that he finally headed, but now he had come to the end of the line. The London directors as a matter of policy limited the Managing Director to five years in office, after which he was required to give way to another while he himself would retire with a comfortable fortune. Sir William was therefore leaving Singapore, but he had acquired many more things than

he would have room for in a country house in the Home Counties. What was left behind would therefore be sold to the highest bidder and Sir William advertised a public auction to be held in his sprawling mansion in the Tanglin district.

The European community was agog. It would be a great opportunity to pick up treasures not normally available in the curio shops. It would also be social occasion; everyone would be there, possibly even the Governor and Lady Clementi with a party from Government House. All went well as the motorcars drew up and a growing throng circulated through the ground floor rooms, noting; and comparing and choosing the items that appealed to them. Then, horror heaped on horror? Begg and his Tamil wife debouched from a rickshaw, strolled through the entrance, and seated themselves on a sofa in the main drawing-room. No one thought to stop them and no one quite dared to eject them; after all it was a public auction, advertised as such. They seemed to be having the time of their lives, Tommy reported, Begg in his neat khaki, his wife reeking with patchouli in her pink satin dress. They giggled and nudged each other as they spotted one after another of their victims; they grinned broadly as newcomers did a double take and moved hastily into other rooms, the main drawing-room itself quickly emptied, and some people even fled the place altogether. Tommy didn't stay to see the end of it all. The auction was actually held, he understood, but judging by the situation when he left it was not the social success that Sir William had hoped it would be and it probably cost him money.

Not long after this an Inspector of Police came down to Singapore from Malacca, dressed himself in mufti, and sat at a table in the Van Wijk compound. In due course Mrs. Begg departed in a rickshaw, the stranger in another, and they met under a street-lamp for the well-worn routine, but this time the scenario had a different ending. When Mrs. Begg let out her shrieks and started beating the man with her stick he seized her and held her firmly. "I'm a police officer," he said, "and you're under arrest." Struggling violently, she scarcely heard him, nor did Begg as he charged out of the shrubbery across the street to attack his wife's assailant from the rear. A whistle blew, constables came running, and the two were at last in the clutches of the police.

That night Begg received a visitor in his cell. All charges against him would be dropped, he was told, and he would be provided with a passage to England if he would undertake never to show his face again in the Straits Settlements. His wife? No, she would have to remain in custody. Proudly, defiantly, Begg refused. Unless his wife went with him he would not leave Singapore.

The sentence was a stiff one – three years hard. Just for assaulting a policeman and resisting arrest? We wondered. Was it aggravated assault? Did Mrs. Begg's stick draw blood? Perhaps. Or was there more to it than that? Authority was inscrutable.

Calcutta to London

The BBC and the Calcutta Gazette had told us of the fall of France, the Battle of Britain, the fire-bombing of London, the desert fighting in Cyrenaica, all geographically pictured in the London Illustrated News, but war had no immediacy for us in that April of 1941 as we sweltered through another “hot weather.” No U-boat ever appeared in the Bay of Bengal, no hostile aircraft triggered an alarm. The teeming white-clad Indian population crowded the streets and festered in the slums. The upper crust of officials, bankers and businessmen struggled to preserve an alien way of life, sheltering from the blazing sun under the overhead fans that stirred the air in offices or clubs, sleeping; uneasily under mosquito nets in the spacious apartments and mansions of Ballygunge or Alipore. -In New York, they say, it isn't the heat, it's the humidity. In Calcutta it was the heat and the humidity, and in the “hot weather” it was lethal.

Calcutta was not completely untouched by war, however. :An occasional train from the north discharged files of chanting, skylarking young men on their way to training camp and eventually the Western Desert. An anti-aircraft battery appeared on the race course, where earnest ladies dispensed tea and snacks to bored soldiery. On the broad expanse of the Maidan slit trenches were dug and hastily filled in again they were promptly flooded with sub-soil water in which several goats and one Bengali were found drowned. A trickle of Blenheim bombers on their way to Singapore paused briefly to fly over the city and provide semblance of reality to the “practice” air raid alerts announced. from time to time in the Gazette. The population was instructed to black out all homes when the sirens wailed and the street lights went out, but in steaming Calcutta any thought of stifling behind drawn curtains was inconceivable. The Saturday Club therefore draped itself in black, installed more electric fans, and staged dances for members who would otherwise be sitting in the dark until the all clear. The native population regarded the alerts as a joke, to be sabotaged by flashlights aimed at the sky.

The cable from the State Department was a bombshell: I was transferred forthwith from the Consulate General in Calcutta to the Embassy in London! It was a call to action, it was freedom from prison, it was a breath of fresh air. It was also an earthquake. No man in his right mind would move anything he valued to London when bombs were falling; no man of conscience would take up cargo space to ship personal possessions when the U-boats were strangling England. Everything had to be dumped – automobile, books, furniture, everything. I would arrive in London with hand luggage, but even so it would be a problem to get- there. Fighting by land, sea and air was surging across the Mediterranean and North Africa; the way was blocked.

The Department instructed me to proceed “immediately” by ship to Capetown, by ship to Boston, by ship to Lisbon, by air to England. Months and months on the way, I reckoned, while I wanted to get to London before the Germans. Couldn't I go by air? Qantas Airways, I learned, was sending flying boats under Air Ministry auspices in a great “horseshoe” from Australia to Durban, stopping at Calcutta on the way. Another route share d by BOAC and SABENA flew overland far south from Cairo, across Africa to Lagos, and then 3,000 miles over the sea to England. The two arcs touched at Cairo, where I could slip across from the one to the other. That was how I would get from Calcutta to London.

The odds were against the grant of permission for an undistinguished American official, and a civilian at that, to fly on air lines under military control, where he would be vulnerable to offloading by any pipsqueak in uniform. What swung it was doubtless the destination – London and the Embassy – and the strong backing of Consul General Tom Wilson, bless his memory!

It took a fortnight or more to settle personal affairs and make farewell rounds while the cable files overflowed. But even when all permissions had been granted and passage booked there was a last-minute flap; the passenger list of six for the scheduled flight out of Calcutta was already taken up by high priorities. Authority finally relented, however, and at six o'clock one steaming morning in mid-May I boarded the four-engine Sunderland Cooee floating on the Hooghly. There were rows of empty seats in its spacious cabins and a pile of mail bags, but I was the only passenger. Those six priorities were phantoms. In the event I learned that the plane was loaded to capacity with mail for Australian troops in the Middle East and carried no more passengers than it had to.

From the air at that time of year, just before the southwest monsoon, the great plain of India looked almost as much a desert as the real deserts that came later – parched and brown as far as the eye could reach. There were three descents for refueling – this was a flying boat, remember – at Allahabad on the Ganges, at Gwalior on a reservoir, at Jaipur on another reservoir, before we landed on the sea at Karachi and sidled alongside a pier. Consul Macy bore me off to spend the night at his home.

There -was time to kill on the dock in the morning and we chatted with the local Brigadier, who introduced us to “Mr. Smith, Mr. Jones and Mr. Brown.” Macy raised an eyebrow and whispered that the Brigadier would not be up so early for ordinary folk. They were in fact to be my fellow passengers to Basra: General Auchinleck, Commander in Chief of British and Indian forces in India, remote and stern-faced in shapeless khaki with no insignia, an attendant Colonel, and a natty aide. This explained the attempt to off-load me in Calcutta before I ever started, and not for any pipsqueak either. I shall never know how security officers were persuaded that I was harmless and would be discreet. The military trio spent most of the time during the trip poring over maps and documents in whatever compartment of the aircraft I was not in.

We flew for a while along the arid shore of Pakistan, coming down briefly for fuel and bottled lemonade at the lonely sandspit of Jiwani – our last sight of India. A considerable flight over sea and rocky desert brought us to Dubai on the Trucial Coast, where a tiny stone structure built out over the water represented Qantas Airways. Three ferocious-looking Arabs carrying muskets and girded with knives in silver scabbards were explained as the guards employed from one nearby village to protect the station from the attentions of another nearby village. Apparently the respective sheiks were deadly enemies, being cousins, and were at times dissuaded with difficulty from continuing hostilities when planes were refueling. The Airways man had been there four months and was anxiously awaiting his relief.

Again over the sea, past miles of desolate land seamed by hills and ravines, and we came down on the water at Bahrain in mid-afternoon. It was announced that we would spend the night there, and a station wagon took us through a wattle-built village and a mud-built town to a sunbaked little hotel. The Greek proprietor wrung his hands over the problem of housing us along with passengers on a plane due in from Basra, but ended by bunking me in with the Colonel in a reasonably comfortable room. The local Airways fellow came with a long face to tell me that it would be out of the question to take me beyond Basra the next day. He had an involved story about loads, extra fuel tanks, and the need to route the flying boat straight across the desert from Basra to Tiberias instead of along the normal route up the Euphrates to Baghdad and then across. No arguments would shake him. It was final.

A ray of light came when I spied the name of John Brancker on a list in the hotel manager's hand. John was head of BOAC operations in India and was coming in from Basra on his way back to Karachi and Calcutta. I felt that I should be able to cash in on many nights at the 300 Club with John and his wife, and as soon as possible poured two whiskies into him before unfolding my tale of woe. John rose to the occasion, scoffed at any idea of taking me back with him or leaving me stranded in Basra, and issued appropriate instructions while I was ordering another peg for him.

Not much sleep that night as we were routed out for a take-off in the dark and a flight up the Persian Gulf. Basra in early morning was a city of white cubes among date palms and at this season it was seamed with waterways (it was flood time). We came down on the Shatt al Arab, confluence of the Tigris and the Euphrates, amid a cluster of substantial buildings – oil tanks, hangars, godowns and the airport Hotel.

The Auk, as he was called by the troops, was met on the dock with stiff salutes and hustled off in a staff car, reputedly to meet General Wavell and others come to beef up the lagging Mesopotamian campaign against rebellious Iraqis. I trailed into the hotel with the crew and we idled over buns and tea at the bar. The bare lobby, more barn than airport lounge, was littered with military equipment and the verandah was stacked waist-high with beer bottles. A sign informed us that the air raid shelter was unsafe, being in a direct line with the oil storage, the hangars, the docks, and practically every military target in the vicinity. In the dusty little garden an Indian cook, surrounded by a clutch of Gurkha riflemen, squatted over a bubbling pot.

David Graham wandered in. He had been called up from his job at Jardine Matheson's office in Calcutta and was now a staff officer, complete with red tabs. We chatted for a time between his sallies outside to ship more generals off to the meeting and he told me that a little battle was being put on for my benefit. This explained the frequent outbursts of nearby artillery fire, close enough to rattle the hotel fittings, and the booming of naval guns up the river. A company of Gurkhas was guarding the airdrome, someone said, and they had been attacked the night before, but come dawn the Iraqis discovered that they were up against Gurkhas and departed forthwith. Someone else said that all the rest of the show had left for the north, toward Baghdad and beyond.

We took off on another Sunderland, the Canopus, still with the same crew. The man in Bahrain had not exaggerated the problem I presented; some of the mail was left behind on the dock, along with all but one of the chairs, the one on which I sat in lonely state. Rising heavily from the river, we flew over the “battle” just far enough to see the smoke of exploding shells and long lines of mechanical transport heading out into the yellow distance. The war in Mesopotamia was hotting up.

For the next six hours we lumbered westward over the undulating surface of the desert, its monotony interrupted only by an occasional huddle of black Bedouin tents or the long shadows of camels grazing on nothing. The pilot come back to reminisce over the days of his youth, when the RAF (Royal Air Force) was flying its mail from Cairo to Baghdad at a study 70 miles an hour – a three-day journey broken at night by landing on any convenient level spot, building a fire, and sleeping on the sand.

Eventually a range of hills rose ahead, we circled over a desert fort to announce our arrival, and crosses; a bit of Syria or perhaps Jordan into Palestine, the border marked by a broad strip of ploughed land, clearly visible from the air. Cultivation checkered the smooth hills as the Canopus dropped into the valley of the Jordan where the Sea of Galilee stretched from the Golan Heights past Tiberias, site of the vanished Roman city built by the Emperor. The sea – call it a lake – was a clear blue, sparkling in the sun, its eastern shore (where the Gadarene swine rushed over the cliff) steep and barren, its western bank green with cultivation. The plane ploughed to a stop near a little café half buried in flowers, where huge glasses of orange juice were to be had, and a shaded “lido” accommodated a score of bathers, Jewish boys and girls in a scene straight out of Coney Island.

At take-off the plane roared over the single tower remaining from the Emperor’s building; activities and climbed high enough for a glimpse of Nazareth on its hillside and a widespread view of the Plain of Armageddon. Good country for tank operations, one of the crewmen said. All the way to Cairo transport planes were required to fly at no more than 1,000 feet, for identification purposes, and the thermals were rough as we soared over fields, olive groves and orange orchards, over Tel Aviv with its neatly laid-out real estate developments, and so to the edge of the Mediterranean where a couple of hulks on the beach bore witness to the tales of frantic refugees wrecking ships in order to get ashore in the Promised Land. After an exceptionally rough stretch over the northern desert of Sinai we cut the Canal about midway and I was on familiar territory, craning for a sight of the Nile and Cairo. It was just as I had left it except for miles and miles of tents lined up across the desert where the troops of the Middle East Command were housed.

Down on the river and my first passport inspection so far, although I had traveled over half a dozen countries. The Egyptian officer wanted to hold my passport until I returned to the flying boat in the morning, but finally let me keep it. That was a piece of luck, because I didn’t leave in the morning, nor by flying boat. After checking in at Shephard’s Hotel as a guest of the airline I got to the Legation, now established in a large villa in the residential area, and found myself at home with old friends and

colleagues. Telegram to Lisbon about my still missing Portuguese visa. Telephone to Newport, the Air Ministry's dispenser of priorities. Telephone to BOAC – the Legation would pay for my passage beyond Cairo. By 8:30 I was in the clear and back to the hotel for dinner and early to bed, dead tired. Last of all came a message to say that I was off-loaded by a Marine officer and could not go on the plane next day. I would sleep late for a change.

The idea of a day off was not unwelcome, but Shepherd's Hotel was no place in which to spend it. Shabby and bare, its past glories tarnished, it was noisy with the clatter of military boots and the palms on the verandah seemed dusty and faded. Better the Legation and old friends to gossip with, most of the staff being on duty Sunday as on any other working day. I learned that Jim Scott, who had taken over from me in Cairo, was missing; sent to Istanbul on a courier trip he was now stuck in Beirut on his way back. Jimmy Roosevelt and a couple of Marine officers, like me en route to London, were there to call on the Minister, and we discussed travel plans to little purpose. When I talked with Kirk he tried to recruit me in place of the missing Scott, but my heart was set on London and he did not argue. Lunch at the Gezira Club, familiar territory to me. The golf course was still in use, although part of it was given over to an anti-aircraft battery; the tennis courts and swimming pool were still busy. The only important difference from what I remembered was the military influx which jammed the bar and the dining room with uniforms in place of the civilian white drill of yesterday. An afternoon of milling about in the Legation was followed by cocktails at Ray Hare's house and dinner with Bob Carr at Maadi, a suburb reached by electric train from the city.

Cairo was of course on the fringe of the fighting and was blacked out at night, or rather blued out. For some reason lights were dimmed by using blue bulbs or painting headlights over with blue paint; this produced an eerie effect but I could not learn just how effective it was from the air. The streets were crammed with soldiers – British, Australians, New Zealanders, Maoris, Indians. British disciplined and respectful to officers, Australians swaggering and blandly refusing to salute, Maoris often drunk. The New Zealanders were a fine lot, farmers, lawyers and businessmen, all volunteers, and I chatted with a group of them on the blued-out train to Maadi. They had just come out of Greece and still believed that they could have held off the Jerries if there hadn't been so many of them that they were forever outflanking every British position. They were scornful of dive-bombing after a day of it during which they didn't lose a gun or suffer a casualty. The safest place was among the guns, they maintained. They were also convinced that they could clean up the Western desert whenever they got around to it.

At Cairo I was leaving the "horseshoe" and the comfortable flying boats which hummed along over India and Iraq and Palestine. Instead I was picked up early at the hotel, along with a group of airmen in uniform, all of us completely ignorant as to how and where we were going to travel. Three different Airways people had told me three different stories, and Jimmy Roosevelt had told me another. There was nothing to do but trust in God and the Air Ministry.

A bus took us to an airfield where we learned that we were being taken over by SABENA, the Belgian airline that operated across Africa in collaboration with BOAC under Air Ministry control. The plane was an ancient tri-motor Junkers with one of its engines in the nose, its metal wings fluttering in the wind and rattling alarmingly as compared with the stolidity of the Sunderlands. Every seat was taken and I squeezed into the radio compartment with one of the flying officers and the little Belgian radio engineer – a piece of luck, as it turned out, because this was also the smoking compartment and it boasted the only window from which anything outside could be seen. My fellow-passengers included Brigadier General French, responsible for all military censorship in Africa and consequently a great traveler; the others were all pilots engaged in ferrying American-made planes across Africa from Takoradi on the coast of Ghana, where they were assembled, by way of Lagos and Khartoum to Cairo, where they went into active service. It was a mixed bag – some combat pilots (officers and sergeants) fresh from the Western Desert with tales of the fighting around Tobruk and Derna, some BOAC pilots borrowed for this job, and one Polish sergeant pilot with very little English. He was the man who trudged into Kano out of the desert to say: “Me good, plane no good.”

For the next two days we followed the Nile due south, but the river makes such tremendous bends that we saw little of even the strip of green winding across dun-colored desert that marked its course. For most of the passengers there was nothing to do but swap yarns or doze off, while I could watch the rugged surface of the desert sliding back underneath, the occasional small sandstorm presenting a wall of brown dust, the distant mountain ranges off to the west. The plane flew high to keep the engines cool, and it was comfortable enough for the passengers, but when we came down at Wadi Halfa the doors opened to a blaze of heat unrelieved by a burning wind. The airfield, barely distinguishable from the flat plain of sand and gravel, was the first stop in the Sudan, complete with passport inspection in a little shack, the only building on the airfield or in sight anywhere. Clearances were routine, but a new demand arose for a “yellow fever certificate,” and I had to confess my lack of one. In the end I was given a paper certifying that I had not been exposed to yellow fever in Wadi Halfa.

The end of the afternoon brought us to Khartoum, where the air-drome seemed more active at first glance, but it was soon apparent that most of the planes standing about were machines cracked up by ferry pilots. A new Lockheed was lined up, and the Airways man said that he had telegraphic instructions from Cairo to shift me to BOAC, which went straight over the desert from Khartoum to Lagos, stopping at such places as El Fasher and Kano, more or less along the route followed by the ferry pilots coming the other way. The Lockheed was out of sorts, however, and I had better stay with SABENA. Somebody said that it was a more interesting trip anyway, although somewhat longer.

They looked at passports and took another whack at my yellow fever certificate, but didn't bother about baggage, and finally pushed us off in some rattletrap taxicabs to the Grand Hotel. This tourist caravanserai on the bank of the Nile was jammed with military and other air passengers, and we had to line up to register, after which we were ignored for an hour. Persistent questioning at the desk revealed that no rooms were to be had; we would have to bunk in a sleeping car on a siding about half a mile away. But could we

bathe and eat here? Certainly. We had to lug in our own baggage and find the bathrooms, but the servants refused to give us towels on the ground that we were not staying in the hotel and had no room numbers! At that point I blew up, and after storming around a bit I had the hotel manager in person showing me to a bath and rounding up soap and towels. After dinner some of us went to an open-air cinema where most of the audience were soldiers and we watched Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers "Follow the Fleet." The bunks in the sleeping car were just as hard as those I once tossed upon on the night train from Cairo to Luxor, and toilet facilities were just as scanty, but we slept for a few hours until routed out at dawn for an early departure.

From Khartoum we followed the White Nile, ever southward, but still mostly over desert. At Malakal on the river the passengers sweltered in the plane during refueling and only I in my privileged position could see the file of tall, stork-like naked blacks (Shilluks?) toting gasoline tins on their heads against a background of the round grass huts characteristic of the Central African landscape. After Malakal we left the desert behind and the plane soared over the type of country associated with African big game – grassy plains dotted with trees and clumps of shrubbery. We saw no game, however, until a herd of antelope bounded away as we swung into Juba, marked by a single rocky hill, and bounced to a stop on the unshorn turf. Here there were three shiny new Martin bombers (called "Maryland" by the RAF), more or less damaged, and one Curtiss fighter ("Tomahawk") that had wiped out its landing gear. No one would say why they were here so far from the ferry route. Juba was the last stop in the Sudan, only three hundred miles from the source of the Nile and close to the border of the Belgian Congo stretching south and west to the Atlantic. A passport officer came by while the Junkers refueled and we sheltered from the sun under the wing of a Maryland. He dithered a bit over my passport and my heart sank at the thought of being stranded in Juba, but in the end there was only another entry on the yellow fever chart.

Now we turned westward for a hop of 450 miles into the heart of the Congo. At first the country was open and lightly wooded but the forests thickened and in about half an hour there was nothing but that green carpet underneath, unbroken as far as eye could reach, with no sign of life except for a single distant smoke. At one point a brown river snaked its way across the endless forest, slicing the greenery cleanly on either bank where a straight wall of vegetation rose two hundred feet above the water. Otherwise it was a sea that would be even more lethal for a downed airplane plunging to earth through the treetops than for one ditched in the open Atlantic.

Evening brought us to Stanleyville on the banks of the Congo, to a neat little airport and a drive through tropical scenery to the modest white-painted "Hotel des Chutes." Here only French was spoken and I had to interpret for everybody, including the flyer who asked about a dance or a cinema or some place to go or do or see. All answers were in the negative. There was nothing to do but eat and sleep and nowhere to go, not even, in the absence of transport, for a sightseeing trip to Stanley Pool and the famous falls of the Congo. It was no hardship, as a matter of fact, to sit there on the terrace for drinks before dinner, the lights shining bravely into the dark night. The little bar in the main room, where Madame sat behind the cash-register and Monsieur served as barman, boasted

luxuries unknown by then in more civilized communities – American cigarettes, Bass ale, Pernod, and many more. The bedrooms were simply furnished but the food was good and there was even a glass of wine at dinner. Fortunately hotel bills were no problem on this route through Africa, passengers being housed and fed at Airways expense all the way to Lagos.

Our plane, now a Lockheed, was away by eight o'clock, but we flew for only three hours or so over the forest to Libenge, another riverside town on a northern tributary of the Congo. We never saw the town but landed on an airfield carved out of the forest where corn and millet sprouted at the end of the runway among the charred stumps of giant trees. Here an amazingly attractive little restaurant run by a French woman provided excellent food served by smartly costumed waiters. The roast lamb and Brussels sprouts were well prepared, pineapples and papayas came fresh from the garden, and there was plenty of table wine if no spirits. Just outside groups of blacks, some in bright cottons, some nearly naked, followed a beaten path toward the town, their burdens balanced on their heads.

After lunch a station wagon took us a mile or so along a forest road to a park-like little settlement of tin-roofed cottages built on a grassy slope above the chocolate river in the shade of a grove of tropical fruit and flowering trees. A servant appeared, but he soon left after serving out cotton sheets and towels, and we distributed ourselves among the "chalets" to make out as best we could with bare floors, iron beds, primitive toilet facilities and kerosene lamps. The afternoon was idled away under the trees as we watched the river for sight of a crocodile until a vicious little thunderstorm drove us indoors. After another ride along the forest road to the restaurant for dinner we were brought back and left to our own devices for the night. One of the airmen and I, equipped with a flashlight, discovered a lonely little cafe where we stopped in for a beer, a game of Russian billiards, and the nine o'clock news. We were the only customers and soon turned back to our quarters, where we found that the management had thoughtfully set up flimsy barriers of old corrugated roofing on the steps leading to the river in order to discourage crocodiles from exploring inside during the hours of darkness.

After a good breakfast at what was now our favorite restaurant we flew only twenty minutes or so to a military airfield at Bangui in French Equatorial Africa. The RAF boys poked around the hangers, sneering at the decrepit old French aircraft standing about, and after a time we were motored to the officers' mess on a little hill overlooking a pastoral countryside with cattle grazing in distant fields. Here we had another breakfast (eggs and bacon), a glass of port, and friendly conversation through the official interpreter, as I had now become. The talk was carefully non-political and the word "Vichy" was never uttered. After all, these charming young men might one day be dropping bombs on us. We actually stayed in Bangui for three hours, nobody knew why, and decided that it was a nice place to visit.

About noon we headed westward again, this time for Douala in the French part of the Cameroons, over forest now interrupted by an occasional clearing, by signs of cultivation, here and there by a sandy road leading to a cluster of grass huts. The plane

dodged bush-pilot fashion between rainstorm and steeply rising hills to brim us down in mid-afternoon for a first sight of the Atlantic Ocean. At the airport we were split up and three of us were taken to a nameless little hotel near the docks, the shabbiest and barest yet encountered, while the others were billeted in the Grand Hotel. General French viewed the arrangements with a jaundiced eye until one of the lads dropped in to see how we were doing and assured us that we were in clover – the Grand Hotel was worse – after which the General cheered up and we went for a walk. This brought us to Douala's only bright spot, the Lido, where a murky swimming pool under a tin roof offered a swim and the dance hall ("Le dancing" on Saturday) boasted a bar, a gramophone, and the radio news. Also small luxuries smuggled ashore from the "sea stores" of a freighter, and we managed a few drinks and some cigarettes before returning to our hotel for an indescribably bad meal and an uncomfortable bed.

It was only a few hours along the coast to Lagos, to British territory again, to the end of the SABENA line, and to the point for a take-off to England. On Apapa Airfield more American and British airplanes had cracked up, indicating that we were again on the ferry route. Our party now broke up – I never saw any of them again – and I was shipped off in a station wagon to check in at the Airways office, to stop by the Consulate and find it closed for Decoration Day, and finally to debouch at the Old Ikoyi Club, a country club now converted into the BOAC Senior Mess. Here the Air Ministry temporarily abandoned responsibility for my support and it was made clear that I could stay at the Club only because there were no decent accommodations in the city; also that it would cost me a pound sterling a day, which was fair enough.

Lagos turned out to be a pleasant interlude in the journey to London, although a rather extended one – two days short of three weeks – and a period much longer than I had bargained for. The weather was delightful, mostly sunny with an occasional shower to keep the landscape green, while the air was cooled by a steady fresh breeze off the ocean which rattled the palm fronds and kept the temperature in the low 80's. After Calcutta's steaming "hot weather" it was heavenly. Of Lagos itself I gained only fleeting impressions: of a terrain flat and low-lying, interrupted by lagoons and watercourses, dotted with coconut palms, flowering trees and tropical vegetation; of a European residential district where British colonial officials, bankers and businessmen were housed in villas; of a business district dominated by the shabby fronts of shops, offices and godowns belonging to trading companies and banks; of native quarters and miserable slums teeming with the Yoruba population. Lagos is on the "Slave Coast" of West Africa, as distinguished from the "Ivory Coast" (French) and "Gold Coast" (British), strung along the Bight of Benin in an arc known as the "Guinea Coast." It was from the Slave Coast that the bulk of American negroes originated and the intonations of Yoruba voices in the distance took me back to Mississippi, as did their ready laughter, their high-pitched giggles, their rhythmic music dominated by incessant drums.

The Ikoyi Club was a pleasant place indeed. A large comfortably furnished lounge and bar led to a dining room which provided excellent cooking and delicious tropical fruits under the supervision of an English steward. Sleeping quarters were again "chalets" but this time they were well equipped little frame houses scattered under the trees. Mine was

presided over by an attentive houseboy named Peter who kept the place immaculate and woke me every morning with a heaping plate of pineapple and a full glass of orange juice. For the first time in my experience in Asia or Africa I found the windows carefully screened and the doors additionally guarded by a sort of air-lock devised to prevent the accidental intrusion of mosquitos. No mosquito net over the bed and I didn't get a single bite all the time I was there. Nevertheless it was the custom in Lagos, I soon learned, to take five grains of quinine at least once a day to ward off the Blackwater Fever for which the area was once notorious. The bottle was often presented by one's hostess on the cocktail tray and some people had taken ten grains a day for twenty years. The Club provided a swimming pool in the garden, tennis and squash courts, and a golf course a hundred yards away, but more useful for me was the good fellowship, among the pilots, office staff and passengers drifting in and out. There was plenty of company to do anything or nothing with, therefore, and the evening session at the bar before dinner to listen to the radio news and gossip about the day's happenings enabled me to keep abreast of current activities in the small world of the airline.

I had the added good fortune to land a job. When Perry Jester showed up at the Consulate after the weekend holiday I found him snowed under at his office on the second floor of a small office building. His Vice Consul had just departed, while the relief man was stuck in Leopoldville hoping to work his way by river steamer to Matadi at the mouth of the Congo and then catch an American freighter to Lagos. So I volunteered to help out and Perry chuckled over having on his staff an officer senior to himself. There was plenty of work, especially in coding and decoding cables, many of which dealt with numerous submarine attacks on merchant shipping off the coast. The Jervis Bay, a Castle Line passenger ship operating as an armed merchantman, was sunk at sea after a heroic battle with a U-boat, and one day a torpedo snaked into Lagos harbor itself, sinking: the harbor dredge. All this caused great turmoil as vessels fled to port, shipping was paralyzed, and Lagos was even blacked out for fear of an air attack launched from Dakar where the Vichy French were reportedly seething over the British invasion of Syria.

None of this seemed to inhibit the social life characteristic of a British colony, to which I was admitted as an officer attached to the American Consulate. I was often at the Jester home, an attractive villa in the European residential district, and, there I met some of local officialdom, getting several dinner invitations as a result. Edith Jester herself organized a luncheon for Lord Mountbatten, who was on his way to London to take command of a British aircraft carrier. Mountbatten, tall, handsome and smoothly articulate, was most affable. Over lunch he had a lively discussion with a couple of Marine Colonels about American carriers and their launching techniques; he marveled that they could get planes into the air so quickly. The Advocate General of the Colony, a saturnine Scot of the old colonial school, gave a black-tie dinner where I was seated next to Lady Bourdillon, the Governor's wife, who would talk of nothing but London. After dinner we all went to a pageant given by the Girl Guides, where Lady Bourdillon was doing her duty as patroness. The less said of the pageant the better. Another dinner party took us afterward to the open-air Rex Cinema, a special occasion because the Governor was there with young King Peter of Yugoslavia and a party from Government House. A bachelor dinner with a young Standard Oil man, one of the few Americans in Lagos,

resulted in a visit to the Royal, the only night club in town, where the concrete roof of a dingy three-story hotel was organized for open-air dancing. Music was provided by a hand-cranked gramophone, the place was mercifully ill-lighted because of the black-out, and the “hostesses” were Yoruba girls apparently recruited mainly because they knew a few words of English, possessed cotton dresses, and could wear shoes without obvious agony.

During my stay in Lagos several planes loaded with AAA priorities left for England without me, notably one which departed the second day after my arrival. During my first evening in the Club lounge the gossip before dinner was all about the disruption caused by the submarine attacks, said to be particularly serious at Freetown in Sierra Leone, the next stop on the route north. The port was jammed with shipping, it was said, and the town terribly overcrowded, not a bed to be had for love or money. The airline would never pick up a passenger there, and as for getting away by sea the journey to England would take seven weeks; in any case no ships at all were moving while submarines were cruising offshore. Don't get stuck in Freetown, I was advised. So when I was awakened by a couple of airline staffers in the middle of the night with news that a seat to Freetown was available for me within the hour I turned my back and huddled under the blanket. I was going to London, not Freetown, I insisted, and nothing would move me despite frantic pleas. It would be a crime, they argued, to let a plane leave Lagos with an empty seat.

This flat refusal of mine got me in the bad graces of the authorities, and the next week the Claire flying boat was sent off with Jimmy Roosevelt, three U.S. Marine officers, Lord Mountbatten and an Australian financial mission. I was disappointed not to be included, but got no sympathy from the staff; I had refused a passage to Freetown. It turned out that I was lucky after all, for the Claire broke down at Bathurst in Gambia and its passengers were stranded for eight days in a spot much worse than Lagos. The next week the Guba (the long-range plane that explored New Guinea) came in from the north with Averell Harriman, recently named head of the Lend Lease Mission in London, and a staff reputedly on a tour to inspect the aircraft assembly facilities at Takoradi. He appeared only once in the Club, a remote and preoccupied figure, gone before I could summon courage to approach him. The Guba turned back to London, having picked up Prime Minister Fraser of New Zealand and some of his people. No room for me, especially on that aircraft – not exactly a passenger liner. Next was a Boeing on a survey flight, one of several just acquired by BOAC, and I shot off a wire to Cairo asking Newport to book me on it, but he came back relentlessly with “refused passage to Freetown.” Just as well, because the Boeing also broke down at Bathurst with engine trouble and was still there when I left.

Now I was getting impatient and radioed London Embassy to say that if they wanted me on board something would have to be done at that end. Although I didn't know it, my old friend Grant Isaacs was dealing with the Air Ministry on priorities and action was immediate. The next afternoon I was told, in great secrecy and without a hint as to what was in the wind, to weigh in, settle my affairs, and get a health certificate. For that I called on the Public Health Officer, a red-faced Englishman in wrinkled white drill,

ensconced in a tiny office. He instantly reached for a form and filled it in, certifying that I was free of yellow fever. “How can you do that without even taking my temperature?” I asked, to which he replied “You’ve been here for three weeks, haven’t you? There’s no yellow fever in Lagos, and if you haven’t got it yet you never will.” So that was that.

After a few hasty farewells I paid my mess bill and packed, my fingers crossed until I was actually on board the Cathay. This was one of the Sunderland flying boats with which I was familiar, but stripped of its inner skin and all gadgets. That saved about a thousand pounds of weight but made it noisy and, I later discovered, cold.

This trip, it turned out, was arranged primarily to airlift young King Peter safely to England, along with General Simovic, his Prime Minister, and two other officials with names ending in ich. They all kept to themselves in the rear compartment most of the time, but the young King emerged occasionally to chat pleasantly in fluent English; the others spoke only their own language and French. My only clear impression of the King was that he was very young, younger than his 17 years, and that he needed a haircut. Simovic was by far the strongest personality in the lot, as evidenced by the fact that one cold night he heaped four blankets over himself while the rest of us, including the King, had to do with one each. Among the other passengers there was a British Military Intelligence Colonel from Greece, a Naval Intelligence courier in immaculate London suitings, an Australian left over from the financial mission, and a mysterious Rumanian who took off without paying his mess bill and was met in England by a man from the Foreign Office,

Most of the first day took us over an empty sea to Freetown and a landing in the crowded harbor. As predicted there was no accommodation to be had ashore (except for royalty at Government House) and we were motorboated to the Esperance Bay, sister ship of the ill-fated Jervis Bay and also a Castle Line vessel converted into an armed merchantman. The wardroom made us cordially welcome and we were parceled out to double up with the ship’s officers. Who wants to go ashore in an overcrowded, blacked-out town when he has a comfortable berth, a good hot shower, good food, pink gins at 3d. each and a cheery bunch of naval officers with whom to pass the evening? I blessed the bar-room gossip in Lagos who advised me not to get stuck in Freetown.

A short hop of a few hours took us next morning to Bathurst, a lonely settlement posing as capital of tiny Gambia, smallest of the British colonies on the Guinea Coast or anywhere else and, like Lagos, scene of the slaving activities of Anthony Adverse. Royalty went off to Government House and the rest of us to an indifferent lunch in a rather shabby BOAC Mess. No beer in town, we were told, and no whisky after Jimmy Roosevelt and the Marines had been there a week. There was nothing to do all afternoon, for the Colonel and the Australian and me, but to wander the dusty roads of the settlement, admire the brilliant cottons in which the native women were clad, and gape at their intricately sculptured coiffures. We stopped in a little shop for a gunny sack in which the Colonel later stored his uniform, replacing it with disreputable mufti he had forehandedly purchased in a Cairo slop shop. In preparation for our landing in Lisbon, he explained.

In order to avoid possible interception by German or Vichy French fighters from Dakar we flew that night from before sundown until well after sunrise, far out to sea and very high. It was cold, and we huddled in our chairs with a blanket for partial warmth, sleeping more or less. The coast as we approached it didn't look- like anything Lisbon should be, and King Peter finally admitted that we were going to land at Gibraltar instead. This was doubtless because the British were reluctant to risk stray royalties in spy-infested Lisbon, where security was poor, and it explained the secrecy at Lagos, so deep that even the MI Colonel was fooled.

The Yugoslav contingent was whisked away to Government House and the rest of us, stood around on the dock while our skipper worried about what to do with us. No alien civilians were allowed to set foot in Gibraltar and we were all civilians, outwardly at least. It was finally arranged that we could stay in the Bristol Hotel, a run-down place used as the RAF Mess, provided we would promise not to set foot outdoors all day – we would be arrested if we did. We were completely ignored by the boys in blue and everyone else, and I swept out of their “smoking room” (bar) when my hopeful inquiry as to whether or not I could get some matches was met by a cool “I doubt it.” For lack of anything better to do I climbed to the roof for a breath of air, a nap in the sun, and a view of the Rock towering over the town and the harbor – much less impressive at close hand than from a distance. We were given breakfast and lunch and tea, but when we left for the Cathay nothing was provided to take with us for dinner. The prospect was gloomy when we settled into our seats until royalty showed up with an enormous hamper from Government House. King Peter shared out sandwiches, fruit and red wine, thereby improving the general atmosphere remarkably. The heavily-loaded take-off required three attempts, after which the pilot took us clear around the Rock, giving us a splendid view of it at close hand.

The all night flight was a repeat of the previous one – far out to sea, high and cold – and in the morning there was the English coast. Opaque screens were placed over the windows but we found that they were readily removable. We flew for some time over the checkerboard of the countryside, with a fighter patrol circling about, and eventually landed on the estuary at Poole. Royalty (Kent) was there to meet royalty, we cleared customs, immigration and censors, all very easily for me, and I was in England!

The motor trip to Bournemouth was a delight, over smooth highways between green hedges and gardens brilliant with rhododendron and lupine, and there wasn't a sign of bomb damage. At the railway station I ran into two of the Marine officers who had left Lagos ten days before me, much to my disgust at the time, but they had arrived from Lisbon only the previous night due to their enforced stopover at Bathurst.

The train up to London passed through Southampton, and there was plenty of bomb damage along the line, but an unbroken row of enormous cranes still stood on the docks and the port was far from being out of action. Plenty of bomb damage coming into Waterloo, also, but the gigantic power station at Battersea hadn't a visible scar. There was bomb damage along the Strand, and some on the Savoy Hotel itself, where I got a

comfortable room and had a real bath again in a real bathroom. Hot water flowed from the taps and valet, maid or waiter could be summoned by a touch of the bell. Civilization.

The hotel in Curzon Street where I settled in was not quite that civilized but it had the advantage of being within walking distance of the Embassy, which I found established on the first three floors of an apartment house at No. 1 Grosvenor Square. The Germans had been bombing Mayfair, I was told, in order to teach upper crust Londoners the lessons previously delivered to the inhabitants of modest row-houses in the East End, and there was ample evidence of it. The rubble had been cleared away, but the facade of my hotel was pockmarked and there was no glass in the boarded-up window of my plain little single room. Between Curzon Street and No. 1, as we always called it, a number of buildings were missing on Chesterfield Hill and in Farm Street, while in Grosvenor Square itself there were gaps in the skyline. In the middle of the Square a barrage balloon operated by a detachment of WAC's floated over the tangle of trees and untended shrubbery that had once been a garden enclosed by iron railings long since fed to the blast furnaces. No. 1 had escaped damage so far, but the back of the deserted Italian Embassy two doors away was gone, and with it a crowded Royal Artillery Mess.

The Embassy staff had suffered no casualties, I was told, although my old friend and colleague Henry Stebbins had missed becoming one only by a miracle. Henry had rented quarters in a mansion diagonally across the Square from No. 1, and one night he was groping his way home after working late when the alert sounded, but not much was happening in the vicinity as he climbed the stairs to his room and closed the black-out curtains. Dinner was long gone, and he stepped across the passage to his pantry for a snack before going to bed. Meanwhile a lone bomber strayed overhead, and Henry was just reaching for the peanut butter when a stunning crash knocked him flat, deafened, blinded and nearly suffocated by plaster dust. After a bit he pulled himself together, climbed to his feet and fumbled his way in the dark to the bedroom door. He was about to step through when fresh night air struck his face and he drew back just in time. The bedroom wasn't there! Henry turned up later at No. 1 with all of his possessions in a paper bag. Saved by a peanut butter sandwich, he said.

I quickly learned for myself that in London a black-out was really black, not blue, that an air raid alert was not for practice, that bombers overhead were not for show. For my first raid it was almost bed-time when the sirens wailed and a distant drumfire of anti-aircraft guns announced enemy bombers following the Thames estuary to their target. Nearer and nearer, louder and louder, it came, with the inevitability of an approaching thunderstorm, until all hell broke loose with a deafening crash as the big guns opened up in Green Park, only a few hundred yards away, followed instantly by more heavies and the rows of rocket-launchers in Hyde Park, the mobile Bofors batteries set up in West End parks and open Squares. Together they created one continuous earsplitting pandemonium of gunfire interspersed with the occasional hollower boom of an exploding bomb or landmine in the distance and the patter of shrapnel raining down. Outside the night was illuminated by the muzzle flashes of guns, the brilliant flares dropped by the raiders, the pyrotechnics of shells and rockets bursting overhead the glare of searchlight beams fixing on the tiny silver shapes of bombers high above the city.

But I saw none of this brilliant display from my darkened room and could only crouch in a corner to protect myself according to the conventional wisdom from flying glass that actually wasn't there. There was nothing else to do, nowhere to go, no safety to be found in a world erupting in a cacophony of crashes. After only a few days in London I knew little about the defenses, had never heard a gun fired, was unable to interpret what I was hearing. Imagination created a vision of shattered buildings out of every salvo, widespread devastation out of every explosion, leaping flames out of the glare seeping through the boarded-up window. I could not appreciate that most of the din was created by the defenses and I could see nothing at all of sights that later became thrilling and even beautiful.

How long it lasted I cannot say, but it went on and on, interminably, until blind fear of the unknown merged into impatience and impatience into resentment. In that hour no epithets applied to the Germans were too harsh. By the time it all died away, perhaps half or three quarters of an hour later, I was an initiate, a Londoner for the duration.

When I climbed Chesterfield Hill in the morning Mayfair stood just as it was the evening before. No buildings were down, no new gaps appeared in the skyline around the Square, and the barrage balloon still nestled among the trees, ready to rise again when called upon to keep bombers from coming in low. The morning bulletin described the raid as "short and sharp" and the damage as "light." I might claim that I had reached London before the Germans; but not before they had also arrived by air and were making their presence felt.

End of interview