



PENGUIN  CLASSICS

**GRAHAM GREENE**

*The Power and the Glory*

With an Introduction by JOHN UPDIKE

## GRAHAM GREENE

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Born in England in 1904, Graham Greene was educated at Oxford. His first published work was a volume of verse in 1925 and his first novel was *The Man Within*. Since then he has published more than a dozen novels from *The Quiet American*, *The End of the Affair* and *The Heart of the Matter* to *The Comedians*. In addition, he has written a number of books which he refers to as entertainments, such as *The Third Man*, *Brighton Rock* and *Our Man in Havana*.

Several of Greene's novels and short stories have been made into successful motion pictures and two of his plays were produced on Broadway. His novels have won him an international reputation for subtle characterizations and accomplished craftsmanship. In 1952, Graham Greene was given the Catholic Literary Award for *The End of the Affair*.

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ORIENT EXPRESS

THE POWER AND THE GLORY

THE QUIET AMERICAN

TRAVELS WITH MY AUNT

TWENTY-ONE STORIES

TO VIVIEN

WITH DEAREST LOVE



# PART I

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# Chapter One

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MR. TENCH went out to look for his ether cylinder: out into the blazing Mexican sun and the bleaching dust. A few buzzards looked down from the roof with shabby indifference: he wasn't carried yet. A faint feeling of rebellion stirred in Mr. Tench's heart, and he wrenched up a piece of the road with splintering finger-nails and tossed it feebly up at them. One of them rose and flapped across the town: over the tiny plaza, over the bust of an ex-president, ex-general, ex-human being, over the two stalls which sold mineral water, towards the river and the sea. It wouldn't find anything there: the sharks looked after the carrion on that side. Mr. Tench went on across the plaza.

He said *Buenos días* to a man with a gun who sat in a small patch of shade against a wall. But it wasn't like England: the man said nothing at all, just stared malevolently up at Mr. Tench, as if he had never had any dealings with the foreigner, as if Mr. Tench were not responsible for his two gold bicuspid teeth. Mr. Tench went sweating by, past the Treasury which had once been a church, towards the quay. Half-way across he suddenly forgot what he had come out for—a glass of mineral water? That was all there was to drink in this prohibition state—except beer, but that was a government monopoly and too expensive except on special occasions. An awful feeling of nausea gripped Mr. Tench in the stomach: it couldn't have been mineral water he wanted. Of course, his ether cylinder ... the boat was in. He had heard its exultant piping when he lay on his bed after lunch. He passed the barbers' and two dentists' and came out between a warehouse and the customs onto the river bank.

The river went heavily by towards the sea between the banana plantations: the *General Obregon* was tied up to the bank, and beer was being unloaded—a hundred cases were already stacked upon the quay. Mr. Tench stood in the shade of [4] the customs house and thought: What am I here for? Memory drained out of him in the heat. He gathered his bile together and spat forlornly into the sun. Then he sat down on a case and waited. Nothing to do. Nobody would come to see him before five.

The *General Obregon* was about thirty yards long. A few feet of damaged rail, one lifeboat, a bell hanging on a rotten cord, an oil-lamp in the bow, she looked as if she might weather two or three more Atlantic years—if she didn't strike a norther in the gulf. That, of course, would be the end of her. It didn't really matter: everybody was insured when he bought a ticket automatically. Half a dozen passengers leant on the rail, among the hobbled turkeys, and stared at the port: the warehouse, the empty baked street with the dentists' and the barbers'.

Mr. Tench heard a revolver-holster creak just behind him and turned his head. A customs officer was watching him angrily. He said something which Mr. Tench could not catch. Pardon me, Mr. Tench said.

My teeth, the customs man said indistinctly.

Oh, Mr. Tench said, yes, your teeth. The man had none: that was why he couldn't talk clearly: Mr. Tench had removed them all. He was shaken with nausea—something was wrong—worms, dysentery ... He said: The set is nearly finished. Tonight, he promised wildly. It was, of course, quite impossible; but that was how one lived, putting off everything. The man was satisfied: he might forget, and in any case what could he do? He had paid in advance. That was the whole world to Mr. Tench: the heat and the forgetting, the putting off till tomorrow, if possible cash down—for what? He stared out over the

slow river: the fin of a shark moved like a periscope at the mouth. In the course of years several ships had stranded and they now helped to prop up the riverside, the smoke-stacks leaning over like guns pointing at some distant objective across the banana-trees and the swamps.

Mr. Tench thought: Ether cylinder: I nearly forgot. His mouth fell open and he began moodily to count the bottles of Cerveza Moctezuma. A hundred and forty cases. Twelve times a hundred and forty: the heavy phlegm gathered in his mouth: twelve fours are forty-eight. He said aloud in English: My [5] God, a pretty one : twelve hundred, sixteen hundred and eighty: he spat, staring with vague interest at a girl in the bows of the *General Obregon*-a fine thin figure, they were generally so thick, brown eyes of course, and the inevitable gleam of the gold tooth, but something fresh and young ... Sixteen hundred and eighty bottles at a peso a bottle.

Somebody asked in English: What did you say?

Mr. Tench swivelled round. You English? he said in astonishment, but at the sight of the round and hollow face charred with a three days' beard, he altered his question: You speak English?

Yes, the man said, he spoke English. He stood stiffly in the shade, a small man dressed in a shabby dark city suit, carrying a small attaché case. He had a novel under his arm: bits of an amorous scene stuck out, crudely coloured. He said: Excuse me. I thought just now you were talking to me. He had protuberant eyes: he gave an impression of unstable hilarity, as if perhaps he had been celebrating a birthday ... alone.

Mr. Tench cleared his mouth of phlegm. What did I say? He couldn't remember a thing.

You said: 'My God, a pretty one.'

Now what could I have meant by that? He stared up at the merciless sky. A buzzard stood there like an observer. What? Oh, just the girl, I suppose. You don't often see a pretty piece round here. Just one or two a year worth looking at.

She is very young.

Oh, I don't have intentions, Mr. Tench said wearily. A man may look. I've lived alone for fifteen years

Here?

Hereabouts.

They fell silent and time passed, the shadow of the customs house shifted a few inches farther toward the river: the buzzard moved a little, like the black hand of a dock.

You came in *her*? Mr. Tench said.

No.

Going in *her*?

The little man seemed to evade the question, but then as if some explanation were required, I was just

looking, he said. I suppose she'll be sailing quite soon?

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To Vera Cruz, Mr. Tench said. In a few hours.

[6] Without calling anywhere?

Where could she call? He asked: How did you get here?

The stranger said vaguely: A canoe.

Got a plantation, eh?

No.

It's good hearing English spoken, Mr. Tench said. Now you learnt yours in the States?

The man agreed. He wasn't very garrulous.

Ah, what wouldn't I give, Mr. Tench said, to be there now. He said in a low anxious voice: You don't happen, do you, to have a drink in that case of yours? Some of you people back there-I've known one or two-a little for medical purposes.

Only medicine, the man said.

You a doctor?

The bloodshot eyes looked slyly out of their corners at Mr. Tench. You would call me perhaps a-quack?

Patent medicines? Live and let live, Mr. Tench said.

Are *you* sailing?

No, I came down here for-for ... oh, well, it doesn't matter anyway. He put his hand on his stomach and said: You haven't got any medicine, have you, for-oh, hell. I don't know what. It's just this bloody land. You can't cure me of that. No one can.

You want to go home?

Home, Mr. Tench said; my home's here. Did you see what the peso stands at in Mexico City? Four to the dollar. Four. Oh, God. *Ora pro nobis*.

Are you a Catholic?

No, no. Just an expression. I don't believe in anything like that. He said irrelevantly: It's too hot anyway.

I think I must find somewhere to sit.

Come up to my place, Mr. Tench said. I've got a spare hammock. The boat won't leave for hours-if you

want to watch it go.

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The stranger said: I was expecting to see someone. The name was Lopez.

Oh, they shot him weeks ago, Mr. Tench said.

Dead?

[7] You know how it is round here. Friend of yours?

No, no, the man protested hurriedly. Just a friend of a friend.

Well, that's how it is, Mr. Tench said. He brought up his bile again and shot it out into the hard sunlight. They say he used to help ... oh, undesirables ... well, to get out. His girl's living with the Chief of Police now.

His girl? Do you mean his daughter?

He wasn't married. I mean the girl he lived with. Mr. Tench was momentarily surprised by an expression on the stranger's face. He said again: You know how it is. He looked across at the *General Obregon*. She's a pretty bit. Of course, in two years she'll be like all the rest. Fat and stupid. Oh, God I'd like a drink. *Ora pro nobis*.

I have a little brandy, the stranger said. Mr. Tench regarded him sharply. Where?

The hollow man put his hand to his hip—he might have been indicating the source of his odd nervous hilarity. Mr. Tench seized his wrist. Careful, he said. Not here. He looked down the carpet of shadow a sentry sat on an empty crate asleep beside his rifle. Come to my place, Mr. Tench said.

I meant, the little man said reluctantly, just to see her go.

Oh, it will be hours yet, Mr. Tench assured him again.

Hours? Are you certain? It's very hot in the sun.

You'd better come home.

Home: it was a phrase one used to mean four walls behind which one slept. There had never been a home. They moved across the little burnt plaza where the dead general grew green in the damp and the gaseous stalls stood under the palms. It lay like a picture postcard on a pile of other postcards: shuffle the pack and you had Nottingham, a Metroland birthplace, an interlude in Southend. Mr. Tench's father had been a dentist too—his first memory was finding a discarded cast in a waste-paper basket—the rough toothless gaping mouth of clay, like something dug up in Dorset-Neanderthal or Pithecanthropus. It had been his favourite toy: they tried to tempt him with Meccano: but fate had struck. There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in. The hot wet [8] riverport and the vultures lay in the waste-paper basket, and he picked them out. We should be thankful we cannot see the horrors and degradations lying around our childhood, in cupboards and bookshelves, everywhere.



There was no paving: during the rains the village (it was really no more) slipped into the mud. Now the ground was hard under the feet like stone. The two men walked in silence past barbers' shops and dentists': the buzzards on the roofs looked contented, like domestic fowls: they searched under wide crude dusty wings for parasites. Mr. Tench said: Excuse me, stopping at a little wooden hut, one story high, with a veranda where a hammock swung. The hut was a little larger than the others in the narrow street, which petered out two hundred yards away in swamp. He said, nervously: Would you like to take a look around? I don't want to boast, but I'm the best dentist here. It's not a bad place. As places go. Pride wavered in his voice like a plant with shallow roots.

He led the way inside, locking the door behind him, through a dining-room where two rocking-chairs stood on either side of a bare table: an oil-lamp, some copies of old American papers, a cupboard. He said: I'll get the glasses out, but first I'd like to show you-you're an educated man ... The dentist's operating-room looked out on a yard where a few turkeys moved with shabby nervous pomp: a drill which worked with a pedal, a dentist's chair gaudy in bright red plush, a glass cupboard in which instruments were dustily jumbled. A forceps stood in a cup, a broken spirit-lamp was pushed into a corner, and gags of cotton-wool lay on all the shelves.

Very fine, the stranger said.

It's not so bad, is it, Mr. Tench said, for this town? You can't imagine the difficulties. That drill, he said bitterly, is made in Japan. I've only had it a month and it's wearing out already. But I can't afford American drills.

The window, the stranger said, is very beautiful.

One pane of stained glass had been let in: a Madonna gazed out through the mosquito wire at the turkeys in the yard. I got it, Mr. Tench said, when they sacked the church. It didn't feel right-a dentist's room without some stained glass. Not civilized. At home-I mean in England-it was [9] generally the laughing Cavalier-I don't know why-or else a Tudor rose. But one can't pick and choose.

He opened another door and said: My workroom. The first thing you saw was a bed under a mosquito tent. Mr. Tench said: You understand-I'm pressed for room. A ewer and basin stood at one end of a carpenter's bench, and a soap-dish: at the other a blow-pipe, a tray of sand, pliers, a little furnace. I cast in sand, Mr. Tench said. What else can I do in this place? He picked up the cast of a lower jaw. You can't always get them accurate, he said. Of course, they complain. He laid it down again, and nodded at another object on the bench-something stringy and intestinal in appearance, with two little bladders of rubber. Congenital fissure, he said. It's the first time I've tried. The Kingsley case. I doubt if I can do it. But a man must try to keep abreast of things. His mouth fell open: the look of vacancy returned: the heat in the small room was overpowering. He stood there like a man lost in a cavern among the fossils and instruments of an age of which he knows very little. The stranger said: If we could sit down ...

Mr. Tench stared at him-blankly. We could open the brandy.

Oh, yes, the brandy.

Mr. Tench got two glasses out of a cupboard under the bench, and wiped off traces of sand. Then they went and sat in rocking-chairs in the front room. Mr. Tench poured out.

Water? the stranger said.

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You can't trust the water, Mr. Tench said. It's got me here. He put his hand on his stomach and took a long draught. You don't look too well yourself, he said. He took a longer look. Your teeth. One canine had gone, and the front teeth were yellow with tartar and carious. He said: You want to pay attention to them.

What is the good? the stranger said. He held a small spot of brandy in his glass warily-as if it were an animal to which he gave shelter, but not trust. He had the air in his hollowness and neglect of somebody of no account who had been beaten up incidentally, by ill-health or restlessness. He sat on the very edge of the rocking-chair, with his small attaché [10] case balanced on his knee and the brandy staved off with guilty affection.

Drink up, Mr. Tench encouraged him (it wasn't his brandy) ; it will do you good. The man's dark suit and sloping shoulders reminded him uncomfortably of a coffin: and death was in his carious mouth already. Mr. Tench poured himself out another glass. He said: It gets lonely here. It's good to talk English, even to a foreigner. I wonder if you'd like to see a picture of my kids. He drew a yellow snapshot out of his notecase and handed it over. Two small children struggled over the handle of a watering-can in a back garden. Of course, he said, that was sixteen years ago.

They are young men now.

One died.

Oh, well, the other said gently, in a Christian country. He took a gulp of his brandy and smiled at Mr. Tench rather foolishly.

Yes, I suppose so, Mr. Tench said with surprise. He got rid of his phlegm and said: It doesn't seem to me, of course, to matter much. He fell silent, his thoughts ambling away; his mouth fell open, he looked grey and vacant, until he was recalled by a pain in the stomach and helped himself to some more brandy. Let me see. What was it we were talking about? The kids ... oh, yes, the kids. It's funny what a man remembers. You know, I can remember that watering-can better than I can remember the kids. It cost three and elevenpence three farthings, green; I could lead you to the shop where I bought it. But as for the kids -he brooded over his glass into the past-I can't remember much else but them crying.

Do you get news?

Oh, I gave up writing before I came here. What was the use? I couldn't send any money. It wouldn't surprise me if the wife had married again. Her mother would like it-the old sour bitch: she never cared for me.

The stranger said in a low voice: It is awful.

Mr. Tench examined his companion again with surprise. He sat there like a black question mark, ready to go, ready to stay, poised on his chair. He looked disreputable in his grey three days' beard, and weak: somebody you could command to do anything. He said: I mean the world. The way things happen.

[11] You drink up your brandy.

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He sipped at it. It was like an indulgence. He said: You remember this place before-before the Red Shirts came?

I suppose I do.

How happy it was then.

Was it? I didn't notice.

They had at any rate-God.

There's no difference in the teeth, Mr. Tench said. He gave himself some more of the stranger's brandy. It was always an awful place. Lonely. My God. People at home would have said romance. I thought: five years here, and then I'll go. There was plenty of work. Gold teeth. But then the peso dropped. And now I can't get out. One day I will. He said: I'll retire. Go home. Live as a gentleman ought to live. This he gestured at the bare base room- I'll forget all this. Oh, it won't be long now. I'm an optimist, Mr. Tench said.

The stranger said suddenly: How long will she take to Vera Cruz?

Who?

The boat.

Mr. Tench said gloomily: Forty hours from now and we'd be there. The Diligencia. A good hotel. Dance places too. A gay town.

It makes it seem close, the stranger said. And a ticket, how much would that be?

You'd have to ask Lopez, Mr. Tench said. He's the agent.

But Lopez ...

Oh, yes, I forgot. They shot him.

Somebody knocked on the door. The stranger slipped the attaché case under his chair, and Mr. Tench went cautiously up towards the window. Can't be too careful, he said. Any dentist who's worth the name has enemies.

A faint voice implored them: A friend, and Mr. Tench opened up. Immediately the sun came in like a white-hot bar.

A child stood in the doorway asking for a doctor. He wore a big hat and had stupid brown eyes. Beyond him two mules stamped and whistled on the hot beaten road. Mr. Tench said he was not a doctor: he was a dentist. Looking round he saw the stranger crouched in the rocking-chair, gazing with an effect of prayer, entreaty. ... The child said there was a new doctor [12] in town: the old one had fever and wouldn't stir. It was his mother who was sick.

A vague memory stirred in Mr. Tench's brain. He said with an air of discovery: Why, you're a doctor, aren't you?

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No, no. I've got to catch that boat.

I thought you said ...

I've changed my mind.

Oh, well, it won't leave for hours yet, Mr. Tench said. They're never on time. He asked the child how far. The child said it was six leagues away.

Too far, Mr. Tench said. Go away. Find someone else. He said to the stranger: How things get around. Everyone must know you are in town.

I could do no good, the stranger said anxiously: he seemed to be asking Mr. Tench's opinion, humbly.

Go away, Mr. Tench said. The child did not stir. He stood in the hard sunlight looking in with infinite patience. He said his mother was dying. The brown eyes expressed no emotion: it was a fact. You were born, your parents died, you grew old, you died yourself.

If she's dying, Mr. Tench said, there's no point in a doctor seeing her.

But the stranger had got up: unwillingly he had been summoned to an occasion he couldn't pass by. He said sadly: It always seems to happen. Like this.

You'll have a job not to miss the boat.

I shall miss it, he said. I am meant to miss it. He was shaken by a tiny rage. Give me my brandy. He took a long pull at it, with his eyes on the impassive child, the baked street, the buzzards moving in the sky like indigestion spots.

But if she's dying ... Mr. Tench said.

I know these people. She will be no more dying than I am.

You can do no good.

The child watched them as if he didn't care. The argument in a foreign language going on in there was something abstract: he wasn't concerned. He would just wait here till the doctor came.

You know nothing, the stranger said fiercely. That is what everyone all the time says-you do no good. The brandy [13] had affected him. He said with monstrous bitterness: I can hear them saying it all over the world.

Anyway, Mr. Tench said, there'll be another boat. In a fortnight. Or three weeks. You are lucky. You can get out. You haven't got your capital here. He thought of his capital: the Japanese drill, the dentist's chair, the spirit-lamp and the pliers and the little oven for the gold fillings: a stake in the country.

*Vamos*, the man said to the child. He turned back to Mr. Tench and told him that he was grateful for the rest out of the sun. He had the kind of dwarfed dignity Mr. Tench was accustomed to—the dignity of people afraid of a little pain and yet sitting down with some firmness in his chair. Perhaps he didn't care for mule travel. He said with an effect of old-fashioned ways: I will pray for you.

You were welcome, Mr. Tench said. The man got up onto the mule, and the child led the way, very slowly under the bright glare, towards the swamp, the interior. It was from there the man had emerged this morning to take a look at the *General Obregon*: now he was going back. He swayed very slightly in his saddle from the effect of the brandy. He became a minute disappointed figure at the end of the street.

It had been good to talk to a stranger, Mr. Tench thought, going back into his room, locking the door behind him (one never knew). Loneliness faced him there, vacancy. But he was as accustomed to both as to his own face in the glass. He sat down in the rocking-chair and moved up and down, creating a faint breeze in the heavy air. A narrow column of ants moved across the room to the little patch on the floor where the stranger had spilt some brandy: they milled in it, then moved on in an orderly line to the opposite wall and disappeared. Down in the river the *General Obregon* whistled twice, he didn't know why.

The stranger had left his book behind. It lay under his rocking-chair: a woman in Edwardian dress crouched sobbing upon a rug embracing a man's brown polished pointed shoes. He stood above her disdainfully with a little waxed moustache. The book was called *La Eterna Martyr*. After a time Mr. Tench picked it up. When he opened it he was taken aback—what was printed inside didn't seem to belong; it was Latin. Mr. [14] Tench grew thoughtful: he picked the book up and carried it into his workroom. You couldn't burn a book, but it might be as well to hide it if you were not sure—sure, that is, of what it was all about. He put it inside the little oven for gold alloy. Then he stood by the carpenter's bench, his mouth hanging open: he had remembered what had taken him to the quay—the ether cylinder which should have come down-river in the *General Obregon*. Again the whistle blew from the river, and Mr. Tench ran without his hat into the sun. He had said the boat would not go before morning, but you could never trust those people not to keep to time-table, and sure enough, when he came out onto the bank between the customs and the warehouse, the *General Obregon* was already ten feet off in the sluggish river, making for the sea. He bellowed after it, but it wasn't any good: there was no sign of a cylinder anywhere on the quay. He shouted once again, and then didn't trouble any more. It didn't matter so much after all: a little additional pain was hardly noticeable in the huge abandonment.

On the *General Obregon* a faint breeze began to blow: banana plantations on either side, a few wireless aerials on a point, the port slipped behind. When you looked back you could not have told that it had ever existed at all. The wide Atlantic opened up: the great grey cylindrical waves lifted the bows, and the hobbled turkeys shifted on the deck. The captain stood in the tiny deck-house with a toothpick in his hair. The land went backward at a slow even roll, and the dark came quite suddenly, with a sky of low and brilliant stars. One oil-lamp was lit in the bows, and the girl whom Mr. Tench had spotted from the bank began to sing gently—a melancholy, sentimental, and contented song about rose which had been stained with true love's blood. There was an enormous sense of freedom and air upon the gulf, with the low tropical shore-line buried in darkness as deeply as any mummy in a tomb. I am happy, the young girl said to herself without considering why, I am happy.

Far back inside the darkness the mules plodded on. The effect of the brandy had long ago worn off, and the man bore in his brain along the marshy tract-which, when the rains came, would be quite impassable-the sound of the *General Obregon's* siren. He knew what it meant: the ship had kept [15] to time-table: he was abandoned. He felt an unwilling hatred of the child ahead of him and the sick woman-he was unworthy of what he carried. A smell of damp came up all round him; it was as if this part of the world had never been dried in the flame when the world was sent spinning off into space: had absorbed only the mist and cloud of those awful spaces. He began to pray, bouncing up and down to the lurching, slithering mules stride, with his brandied tongue: Let me be caught soon ... Let me be caught. He had tried to escape, but he was like the King of a West African tribe, the slave of his people, who may not even lie down in case the winds should fail.

## Chapter Two

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THE SQUAD of police made their way back to the station: they walked raggedly with rifles slung anyhow: ends of cotton where buttons should have been: a puttee slipping down over the ankle: small men with black secret Indian eyes. The small plaza on the hill-top was lighted with globes strung together in threes and joined by trailing overhead wires. The Treasury, the Presidencia, a dentist's, the prison—a low white colonnaded building which dated back three hundred years, and then the steep street down—the back wall of a ruined church: whichever way you went you came ultimately to water and to river. Pink classical façades peeled off and showed the mud beneath, and the mud slowly reverted to mud. Round the plaza the evening parade went on: women in one direction, men in the other: young men in red shirts milled boisterously round the gaseosa stalls.

The lieutenant walked in front of his men with an air of bitter distaste. He might have been chained to them unwillingly: perhaps the scar on his jaw was the relic of an escape. His gaiters were polished, and his pistol-holster: his buttons were all sewn on. He had a sharp crooked nose jutting out of a lean dancer's face: his neatness gave an effect of inordinate ambition in the shabby city. A sour smell came up to the plaza from the [16] river and the vultures were bedded on the roofs, under the tent of their rough black wings. Sometimes a little moron head peered out and down and a claw shifted. At nine-thirty exactly, all the lights in the plaza went out.

A policeman clumsily presented arms and the squad marched into barracks; they waited for no order, hanging up their rifles by the officers' room, lurching on into the courtyard, to their hammocks, or the excusado. Some of them kicked off their boots and lay down. Plaster was peeling off the mud walls: a generation of policemen had scrawled messages on the whitewash. A few peasants waited on a bench with hands between their knees. Nobody paid them any attention. Two men were fighting in the lavatory.

Where is the jefe? the lieutenant asked. No one knew: they thought he was playing billiards somewhere in the town. The lieutenant sat down with dapper irritation at the chief's table: behind his head two hearts were entwined in pencil on the whitewash. All right, he said, what are you waiting for? Bring me the prisoners. They came in bowing, hat in hand, one behind the other. So-and-so. Drunk and disorderly. Fined five pesos. But I can't pay, your Excellency. Let him clean out the lavatory and the cells then. So-and-so. Defaced an election poster. Fined five pesos. So-and-so. Found wearing a holy medal under his shirt. Fined five pesos. The duty drew to a close: there was nothing of importance. Through the open door the mosquitoes came whirring in.

Outside, the sentry could be heard presenting arms: it was the Chief of Police. He came breezily in, a stout man with a pink fat face, dressed in white flannels with a wide-awake hat and a cartridge-belt and a big pistol dapping his thigh. He held a handkerchief to his mouth: he was in distress. Toothache again, he said, toothache.

Nothing to report, the lieutenant said with contempt.

The Governor was at me again today, the chief complained.

Liquor?

No, a priest.

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The last was shot weeks ago.

He doesn't think so.

The devil of it is, the lieutenant said, we haven't [17] photographs. He glanced along the wall to the picture of James Calver, wanted in the United States for bank robbery and homicide: a tough uneven face taken at two angles: description circulated to every station in Central America: the low forehead and the fanatic bent-on-one-thing eyes. He looked at it with regret: there was so little chance that he would ever get south: he would be picked up in some dive at the border-in Juarez or Piedras Negras or Nogales.

He says we have, the chief complained. My tooth, oh, my tooth! He tried to find something in his hip pocket, but the holster got in the way. The lieutenant tapped his polished boot impatiently. There, the chief said. A large number of people sat round a table: young girls in white muslin: older women with untidy hair and harassed expressions: a few men peered shyly and solicitously out of the background. All the faces were made up of small dots: it was a newspaper photograph of a first communion party taken years ago: a youngish man in a Roman collar sat among the women. You could imagine him petted with small delicacies, preserved for their use in the stifling atmosphere of intimacy and respect. He sat there, plump, with protuberant eyes, bubbling with harmless feminine jokes. It was taken years ago.

He looks like all the rest, the lieutenant said. It was obscure, but you could read into the smudgy photograph a well-shaved, well-powdered jowl much too developed for his age. The good things of life had come to him too early-the respect of his contemporaries, a safe livelihood. The trite religious word upon the tongue, the joke to ease the way, the ready acceptance of other peoples homage ... a happy man. A natural hatred as between dog and dog stirred in the lieutenant's bowels. We've shot him half a dozen times, he said.

The Governor has had a report ... he tried to get away last week to Vera Cruz.

What are the Red Shirts doing that he comes to *us*?

Oh, they missed him, of course. It was just luck that he didn't catch the boat.

What happened to him?

They found his mule. The Governor says he must have him this month. Before the rains come.

[18] Where was his parish?

Concepcion and the villages round. But he left there years ago.

Is anything known?

He can pass as a gringo. He spent six years at some American seminary. I don't know what else. He was born in Carmen-the son of a storekeeper. Not that that helps.



They all look alike to me, the lieutenant said. Something you could almost have called horror moved him when he looked at the white muslin dresses—he remembered the smell of incense in the churches of his boyhood, the candles and the laciness and the self-esteem, the immense demands made from the altar steps by men who didn't know the meaning of sacrifice. The old peasants knelt there before the holy images with their arms held out in the attitude of the cross: tired by the long day's labour in the plantations, they squeezed out a further mortification. And the priest came round with the collecting-bag taking their centavos, abusing them for their small comforting sins, and sacrificing nothing at all in return—except a little sexual indulgence. And that was easy, the lieutenant thought. He himself felt no need of women. He said: We will catch him. It is only a question of time.

My tooth, the chief wailed again. He said: It poisons the whole of life. Today my biggest break was twenty-five.

You will have to change your dentist.

They are all the same.

The lieutenant took the photograph and pinned it on the wall. James Calver, bank robber and homicide, stared in harsh profile towards the first communion party. He is a man at any rate, the lieutenant said, with approval.

Who?

The gringo.

The chief said: You heard what he did in Houston. Got away with ten thousand dollars. Two C-men were shot.

G-men.

It's an honour—in a way—to deal with such people. He slapped furiously out at a mosquito.

A man like that, the lieutenant said, does no real harm. A few men dead. We all have to die. The money—somebody has to spend it. We do more good when we catch one of [19] these. He had the dignity of an idea, standing in the little whitewashed room in his polished boots and his venom. There was something disinterested in his ambition: a kind of virtue in his desire to catch the sleek respected guest of the first communion party.

The chief said mournfully: He must be devilishly cunning if he's been going on for years.

Anybody could do it, the lieutenant said. We haven't really troubled about them—unless they put themselves in our hands. Why, I could guarantee to fetch this man in, inside a month if ...

If what?

If I had the power.

It's easy to talk, the chief said. What would you do?

This is a small state. Mountains on the north, the sea on the south. I'd beat it as you beat a street, house by house.

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Oh, it sounds easy, the chief wailed indistinctly with his handkerchief against his mouth.

The lieutenant said suddenly: I will tell you what I'd do. I would take a man from every village in the state as a hostage. If the villagers didn't report the man when he came, the hostages would be shot-and then we'd take more.

A lot of them would die, of course.

Wouldn't it be worth it? the lieutenant said with a kind of exultation. To be rid of those people for ever.

You know, the chief said, you've got something there.

The lieutenant walked home through the shuttered town. All his life had lain here: the Syndicate of Workers and Peasants had once been a school. He had helped to wipe out that unhappy memory. The whole town was changed: the cement playground up the hill near the cemetery where iron swings stood like gallows in the moony darkness was the site of the cathedral. The new children would have new memories: nothing would ever be as it was. There was something of a priest in his intent observant walk- a theologian going back over the errors of the past to destroy them again.

He reached his own lodging. The houses were all one-storied, whitewashed, built round small patios, with a well and a few flowers. The windows on the street were barred. Inside [20] the lieutenant's room there was a bed made of old packing-cases with a straw mat laid on top, a cushion and a sheet. There was a picture of the President on the wall, a calendar, and on the tiled floor a table and a rocking-chair. In the light of a candle it looked as comfortless as a prison or a monastic cell.

The lieutenant sat down upon his bed and began to take off his boots. It was the hour of prayer. Black beetles exploded against the walls like crackers. More than a dozen crawled over the tiles with injured wings. It infuriated him to think that there were still people in the state who believed in a loving and merciful God. There are mystics who are said to have experienced God directly. He was a mystic, too, and what he had experienced was vacancy-a complete certainty in the existence of a dying, cooling world, of human beings who had evolved from animals for no purpose at all. He knew.

He lay down in his shirt and breeches on the bed and blew out the candle. Heat stood in the room like an enemy. But he believed against the evidence of his senses in the cold empty ether spaces. A radio was playing somewhere: music from Mexico City, or perhaps even from London or New York, filtered into this obscure neglected state. It seemed to him like a weakness: this was his own land, and he would have walled it in with steel if he could, until he had eradicated from it everything which reminded him of how it had once appeared to a miserable child. He wanted to destroy everything: to be alone without any memories at all. Life began five years ago.

The lieutenant lay on his back with his eyes open while the beetles detonated on the ceiling. He remembered the priest the Red Shirts had shot against the wall of the cemetery up the hill, another little fat man with popping eyes. He was a monsignor, and he thought that would protect him: he had sort of contempt for the lower clergy, and right up to the last he was explaining his rank. Only at the

very end had he remembered his prayers. He knelt down and they had given him time for a short act of contrition. The lieutenant had watched: he wasn't directly concerned. Altogether they had shot about five priests -two or three had escaped, the bishop was safely in Mexico City, and one man had conformed to the Governor's law that all priests must marry. He lived now near the river with his house-keeper. That, of course, was the best solution of all, to [21] leave the living witness to the weakness of their faith. It showed the deception they had practised all these years. For if they really believed in heaven or hell, they wouldn't mind a little pain now, in return for what immensities. ... The lieutenant, lying on his hard bed, in the damp hot dark, felt no sympathy at all with the weakness of the flesh.

In the back room of the Academia Comercial a woman was reading to her family. Two small girls of six and ten sat on the edge of their bed, and a boy of fourteen leant against the wall with an expression of intense weariness.

'Young Juan,' the mother read, 'from his earliest years was noted for his humility and piety. Other boys might be rough and revengeful; young Juan followed the precept of Our Lord and turned the other cheek. One day his father thought that he had told a lie and beat him: later he learnt that his son had told the truth, and he apologized to Juan. But Juan said to him: Dear father, just as Our Father in heaven has the right to chastise when he pleases ... '

The boy rubbed his face impatiently against the whitewash and the mild voice droned on. The two little girls sat with beady intense eyes, drinking in the sweet piety.

'We must not think that young Juan did not laugh and play like other children, though there were times when he would creep away with a holy picture-book to his father's cow-house from the circle of his merry play-mates.'

The boy squashed a beetle with his bare foot and thought gloomily that after all everything had an end-some day they would reach the last chapter and young Juan would die against a wall, shouting: *Viva el Cristo Rey*. But then, he supposed, there would be another book: they were smuggled in every month from Mexico City: if only the customs men had known where to look.

'No, young Juan was a true young Mexican boy, and if he was more thoughtful than his fellows, he was also always the first when any play-acting was afoot. One year his class acted a little play before the bishop, based on the persecution of the Early Christians, and no one was more amused than Juan when he was chosen to play the part of Nero. And what comic spirit he put into his acting-this child, whose young manhood was [22] to be cut short by a ruler far worse than Nero. His class-mate, who later became Father Miguel Cerra, S.J., writes: None of us who were there will ever forget that day ... '

One of the little girls licked her lips secretively. This was life.

'The curtain rose on Juan wearing his mother's best bathrobe, a charcoal moustache, and a crown made from a tin biscuit-box. Even the good old bishop smiled when Juan strode to the front of the little home-made stage and began to declaim ...'

The boy strangled a yawn against the whitewashed wall. He said wearily: Is he really a saint?

He will be one day soon, when the Holy Father pleases.

And are they all like that?

---

Who?

The martyrs.

Yes. All.

Even Padre José?

Don't mention him, the mother said. How dare you? That despicable man. A traitor to God.

He told me he was more of a martyr than the rest.

I've told you many times not to speak to him. My dear child, oh, my dear child ...

And the other one-the one who came to see us?

No, he is not-exactly-like Juan.

Is he despicable?

No, no. Not despicable.

The smallest girl said suddenly: He smelt funny.

The mother went on reading: 'Did any premonition touch young Juan that night that he, too, in a few short years, would be numbered among the martyrs? We cannot say, but Father Miguel Cerra tells how that evening Juan spent longer than usual upon his knees, and when his class-mates teased him a little as boys will ...

The voice went on and on, mild and deliberate, inflexibly gentle: the small girls listened intently, framing in their minds little pious sentences with which to surprise their parents, and the boy yawned against the whitewash. Everything has an end.

Presently the mother went in to her husband. She said: I am so worried about the boy.

Why not about the girls? There is worry everywhere.

[23] They are two little saints already. But the boy-he asks such questions-about that whisky priest. I wish we had never had him in the house.

They would have caught him if we hadn't, and then he would have been one of your martyrs. They would write a book about him and you would read it to the children.

That man-never.

Well, after all, her husband said, he carries on. I don't believe all that they write in these books. We are all human. You know what I heard today? About a poor woman who took him her son to be

baptized. She wanted him called Pedro-but he was so drunk that he took no notice at all and baptized the boy Carlota. Carlota.

---

Well, it's a good saint's name.

There are times, the mother said, when I lose all patience with you. And now the boy has been talking to Padre José.

This is a small town, her husband said. And there is no use pretending. We have been abandoned here. We must get along as best we can. As for the Church-the Church is Padre José and the whisky priest- don't know of any other. If we don't like the Church, well, we must leave it.

He watched her with patience. He had more education than his wife: he could use a typewriter and knew the elements of book-keeping: once he had been to Mexico City: he could read a map. He knew the extent of their abandonment--the ten hours down-river to the port, the forty-two hours in the Gulf of Vera Cruz-that was one way out. To the north the swamps and rivers petering out against the mountains which divided them from the next state. And on the other side no roads-only mule-tracks and an occasional unreliable plane: Indian villages and the huts of herds: two hundred miles away the Pacific.

She said: I would rather die.

Oh, he said, of course. That goes without saying. But we have to go on living.

The old man sat on a packing-case in the little dry patio. He was very fat and short of breath: he panted a little as if after great exertion in the heat. Once he had been something of an astronomer and now he tried to pick out the [24] constellations, staring up into the night sky. He wore only a shirt and trousers: his feet were bare, but there remained something unmistakably clerical in his manner. Forty years of the priesthood had branded him. There was complete silence over the town: everybody was asleep.

The glittering worlds lay there in space like a promise-the world was not the universe. Somewhere Christ might not have died. He could not believe that to a watcher there *this* world could shine with such brilliance: it would roll heavily in space under its fog like a burning and abandoned ship. The whole globe was blanketed with his own sin.

A woman called from the only room he possessed: José, José. He crouched like a galley-slave at the sound: his eyes left the sky, and the constellations fled upwards: the beetles crawled over the patio. José, José. He thought with envy of the men who had died: it was over so soon. They were taken up there to the cemetery and shot against the wall: in two minutes life was extinct. And they called that martyrdom. Here life went on and on: he was only sixty-two. He might live to ninety. Twenty-eight years-that immeasurable period between his birth and his first parish: all childhood and youth and the seminary lay there.

José. Come to bed. He shivered: he knew that he was a buffoon. An old man who married was grotesque enough, but an old priest ... He stood outside himself and wondered whether he was even fit for hell. He was just a fat old impotent man mocked and taunted between the sheets. But then he remembered the gift he had been given which nobody could take away. That was what made him

worthy of damnation-the power he still had of turning the wafer into the flesh and blood of God. He was a sacrilege. ~~Wherever he went, whatever he did, he defiled God.~~ Some mad renegade Catholic, puffed up with the Governors politics, had once broken into a church (in the days when there were still churches) and seized the Host. He had spat on it, trampled it, and then the people had got him and hanged him as they did the stuffed Judas on Holy Thursday from the belfry. He wasn't so bad a man, Padre José thought-he would be forgiven, he was just a politician, but he himself, he was worse than that-he was [25] like an obscene picture hung here every day to corrupt children with.

He belched on his packing-case shaken by wind. José, what are you doing? You come to bed. There was never anything to do at all-no daily Office, no Masses, no confessions, and it was no good praying any longer at all: a prayer demanded an act and he had no intention of acting. He had lived for two years now in a continuous state of mortal sin with no one to hear his confession: nothing to do at all but sit and eat-eat far too much: she fed him and fattened him and preserved him like a prize boar. José. He began to hiccup with nerves at the thought of facing for the seven hundred and thirty-eighth time his harsh house-keeper-his wife. There she would be, lying in the big shameless bed that filled up half the room, a bony shadow within the mosquito tent, a lanky jaw and a short grey pigtail and an absurd bonnet. She thought she had a position to keep up: a government pensioner: the wife of the only married priest. She was proud of it. José. I'm-hic-coming, my love, he said, and lifted himself from the crate. Somebody somewhere laughed.

He lifted little pink eyes like those of a pig conscious of the slaughter-room. A high child's voice said José. He stared in a bewildered way around the patio. At a barred window opposite, three children watched him with deep gravity. He turned his back and took a step or two towards his door, moving very slowly because of his bulk. José, somebody squeaked again, José. He looked back over his shoulder and caught the faces out in expressions of wild glee: his little pink eyes showed no anger-he had no right to be angry: he moved his mouth into a ragged and baffled, disintegrated smile, and as if that sign of weakness gave them all the license they needed, they squealed back at him without disguise: José, José. Come to bed, José. Their little shameless voices filled the patio, and he smiled humbly and sketched small gestures for silence, and there was no respect anywhere left for him in his home, in the town, in the whole abandoned star.

## Chapter Three

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CAPTAIN FELLOWS sang loudly to himself, while the little motor chugged in the bows of the canoe. His big sunburned face was like the map of a mountain region-patches of varying brown with two small lakes that were his eyes. He composed his songs as he went, and his voice was quite tuneless. Going home, going home, the food will be good for m-e-e. I don't like the food in the bloody citee. He turned out of the main stream into a tributary: a few alligators lay on the sandy margin. I don't like your snouts, O trouts. I don't like your snouts, O trouts. He was a happy man.

The banana plantations came down on either bank: his voice boomed under the hard sun: that and the churr of the motor were the only sounds anywhere-he was completely alone. He was borne up on a big tide of boyish joy-doing a mans job, the heart of the wild: he felt no responsibility for anyone. In only one other country had he felt more happy, and that was in war-time France, in the ravaged landscape of trenches. The tributary corkscrewed farther into the marshy overgrown state, and a buzzard lay spread out in the sky. Captain Fellows opened a tin box and ate a sandwich-food never tasted so good as out of doors. A monkey made a sudden chatter at him as he went by, and Captain Fellows felt happily at one with nature-a wide shallow kinship with all the world moved with the bloodstream through the veins: he was at home anywhere. The artful little devil, he thought, the artful little devil. He began to sing again-somebody else's words a little jumbled in his friendly unretentive memory. Give to me the life I love, bread I dip in the river, under the wide and starry sky, the hunter's home from the sea. The plantations petered out, and far behind the mountains came into view, heavy black lines drawn low-down across the sky. A few bungalows rose out of the mud. He was home. A very slight cloud marred his happiness.

He thought: After all, a man likes to be welcomed.

He walked up to his bungalow: it was distinguished from [27] the others which lay along the bank by its tiled roof, a flagpost without a flag, a plate on the door with the title, Central American Banana Company. Two hammocks were strung up on the veranda, but there was nobody about. Captain Fellows knew where to find his wife-it was not she he had expected. He burst boisterously through a door and shouted: 'Daddy's home. A scared thin face peeked at him through a mosquito net; his boots ground peace into the floor; Mrs. Fellows flinched away into the white muslin tent. He said: Pleased to see me, Trix? and she drew rapidly on her face the outline of her frightened welcome. It was like a trick you do with a blackboard. Draw a dog in one line without lifting the chalk-and the answer, of course, is a sausage.

I'm glad to be home, Captain Fellows said, and he believed it. It was his one firm conviction-that he really felt the correct emotions of love and joy and grief and hate. He had always been a good man at zero hour.

All well at the office?

Fine, Fellows said, fine.

I had a bit of fever yesterday.

Ah, you need looking after. You'll be all right now, he said vaguely, that I'm home. He shied merrily away from the subject of fever-clapping his hands, a big laugh, while she trembled in her tent. Where Coral?

She's with the policeman, Mrs. Fellows said.

I hoped she'd meet me, he said, roaming aimlessly about the little, inferior room, full of boot-trees, while his brain caught up with her. Policeman? What policeman?

He came last night and Coral let him sleep on the veranda. He's looking for somebody, she says.

What an extraordinary thing! *Here?*

He's not an ordinary policeman. He's an officer. He left his men in the village-Coral says.

I do think you ought to be up, he said. I mean-these fellows, you can't trust them. He felt no conviction when he added: She's just a kid.

I tell you I had fever, Mrs. Fellows wailed. I felt so terribly ill.

You'll be all right. just a touch of the sun. You'll see-now *I'm* home.

[28] I had such a headache. I couldn't read or sew. And then this man ...

Terror was always just behind her shoulder: she was wasted by the effort of not turning round. She dressed up her fear, so that she could look at it-in the form of fever, rats, unemployment. The real thing was taboo-death coming nearer every year in the strange place: everybody packing up and leaving, while she stayed in a cemetery no one visited, in a big aboveground tomb.

He said: I suppose I ought to go and see the man.

He sat down on the bed and put his hand upon her arm. They had something in common-a kind of diffidence. He said absent-mindedly: That dago secretary of the boss has gone.

Where?

West. He could feel her arm go stiff: she strained away from him towards the wall. He had touched the taboo-he shared it, the bond was broken, he couldn't tell why. Headache, darling?

Hadn't you better see the man?

Oh, yes, yes. I'll be off. But he didn't stir: it was the child who came to him

She stood in the doorway watching them with a look of immense responsibility. Before her serious gaze they became a boy you couldn't trust and a ghost you could almost puff away: a piece of frightened air. She was very young-about thirteen-and at that age you are not afraid of many things, age and death, all the things which may turn up, snake-bite and fever and rats and a bad smell. Life hadn't got at her yet: she had a false air of impregnability. But she had been reduced already, as it were, to the smallest terms-everything was there but on the thinnest lines. That was what the sun did



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