The Quiet American

By Graham Greene
Phuong.
Do you know where he is?
He told me to wait here.
He would meet me
after he had dinner with you.
Yes, he was supposed to, but he didn't.
Perhaps he's still at the American legation.
I have been to the legation. No one is there.
Well, so many last minute things to do.
I understand you're both
leaving for America very soon.
Well, he can't be much longer.
Come upstairs and wait.
I can wait here.
There's nothing improper about it.
I'm sure he would approve.
I will wait here.
Of course, there's always the chance
that he might be at the river front
watching the American supplies unload.
Perhaps.
Well, some of them might be his.
Now he's going home,
he'll want to make sure
that they fall into the right hands.
- What did you tell them?
- Where I shall be.
If he should return while I'm gone.
What's all the chatter and giggling about?
They think I have come back to you.
- Mr. Fowler?
- I'm Fowler.
My eyes are no longer young.
Can you identify her for me?
Mine are no younger than yours.
You know who it is.
They wouldn't let her come in with me.
There are those who complain
about being kept in,
and those who protest at being kept out.
In the search for justice,
one becomes depressed
at the unpopularity of the pursuant.
You can't have brought me here at 1:00
in the morning to ease your depression.
How long have you been with her tonight?
I found her outside my flat a short time ago.
- She was waiting for someone.
- Who?
Why don't you ask her?
Where had she been before that?
I'm prepared to answer questions
only about myself.
I'm not an informant.
Uh, (CLEARS THROAT) at 6:00,
you had a drink at the Continental.
The waiters remember.

At 7:
The correspondent of The New York Times,
obviously a man of high character, 
to the Majestic Hotel. He remembers.
Then you hired a cyclo-pousse.
The driver remembers.
And arrived at the Vieux Moulin
restaurant about 8:20.
You had dinner by yourself,
you left about a quarter to 10:00.
Several old ladies remember
that you arrived at your home about 10:00.
And that you did not come out
until after a short time ago.
Vigot, it's far too late
and I'm much too weary to play at charades.
What do you want?
-- Entrez.
Merci.
Sugar?
No.
At the restaurant,
you were impatient about the, uh,
waiter's slowness in bringing the bill.
- Yes, I had a 10:00 appointment at my flat.
- With whom?
That should be none of your business.
Sanctity of the press.
Well, of course.
You could withdraw my card of identity
and bar me from news conferences.
The country at war,
it is not easy to maintain legality, you know.
I do my best.

Well, at 10:
a young American at my flat.
He'd sent a message late in the afternoon.
He wants to see me
about something important.
Have you any idea what?
Everything is important
to this young American
but he didn't show up.
Hmm.
And, uh, when you found her
outside your flat,
she was waiting for the...
The same young American?
She's worried about him.
Is it true what one hears that they were,
how do you say,
sweethearts,
and they were going to be married?
They are going to be married
as far as I know.
Yes.
Yet, up to no more than a month ago,
forgive the indelicacy of a policeman,
the same young lady
was equally devoted to you.
That, I must insist, is none of your business.
For more than two years,
up to a month ago,
the deep mutual devotion of this
young lady and you was very well known.
Mr. Fowler, what do you know
about the young American?
Now please answer my questions.
Believe me, it is serious.
You know as much as I do. Probably more.
Nationality, American. Age, young.
Very young.
Occupation,
I've never clearly understood what it is.
One of those American groups,
there seem to be hundreds of them,
that stretch helping hands
around the world,
holding out packages of hope.
The name of his escapes me.
Friends for Free Asia.
Oh, very likely.
And he believed it literally.
He'd work at the profession of friendship
as if it were law or medicine.
He was a friendly young man, then?
Not one of those noisy, bellowing lads
at the Continental bar.
A quiet American.
Very quiet.
Un Américan bien tranquille.
How did he die?
What makes you think he's dead?
A foolish policeman's question, Vigot.
For one thing,
you just spoke of him in the past tense.
He was found in the water.
Under the bridge to Dakow.
Did he die what's called a natural death?
Highly unnatural.
The Vieux Moulin restaurant
is right beside the bridge.
Are you sure I didn't slip out long enough
to have killed him?
I'm sure of that.
She didn't do it.
Come and see. She's waiting for him still.
Now one of my reasons to...
For asking you to come was to suggest that
the shock would be more gentle
if you were to tell her in private.
Away from the eye of a policeman.
That's human of you.
One has one's moments.
Mr. Fowler,
would you mind identifying him?
Uh, it's not very pleasant,
but it's a necessary function.
I would think you'd ask some
medical official to identify him properly.
Perhaps you're not as sure
as you say of my innocence.
Your methods are dramatic, Vigot,
but a little old-fashioned.
The medieval concept of the criminal
confronted by his crime will betray himself.
The stairs are badly lighted.
Be careful you do not slip.
You see, they don't reopen in my presence.
The wounds.
They're supposed to bleed again
before the eyes of the guilty.
But then, they're frozen.
They didn't have refrigeration
in the Middle Ages.
He did not die from his wounds.
He was drowned.
We found the mud of the river in his lungs.
They should have let it happen quickly.
They?
Whoever.
You cannot help us at all?
Is it all right to smoke in here?
Who's there to object?
You recognize him?
Excuse me.
He was so determined to do good.
To people, to countries, to continents.
To the world.
Well, he was in his element now.
With the whole universe to improve.
When was it? Only a few months ago.
A lifetime ago, one might say.
It was at the Continental, I remember.
In the momentary cool
which comes to Saigon
when the working day is done.
Phuong was prolonging
her usual pre-dinner milkshake.
I was comparing the Indochinese war
being won in the newspapers at home
with the one being lost
by the French in the north.
We sat in silence.
Content to be together.
- Mr. Fowler?
- Oh, hello.
Joe Morton and I are having a drink
up on the terrace.
Would you and young lady care to join us?
Of course.
Oh, this is Ms. Hei. Ms. Phuong Hei.
- Enchante.
- How do you do?
Her unfinished milkshake
seems to be the problem.
May I?
Have you tried the milk bar
across the street?
The milkshakes are much better than here.
Uh, each morning at 11 hours,
I go there to have milkshake.
Each night at six hours, we go here.
I like there, the milkshake more better.
Bravo!
To date, her longest consecutive passage
in almost English.
It's certainly better than my French.
Of course,
the subject may have inspired her.
Milkshakes.
It's nice that the two of you
find something in common so quickly.
Well, step right up, folks,
glad to have you aboard.
Just sit anywhere.
So, what's your pleasure?
Vermouth cassis.
And Miss Phuong?
Oh, you brought your own, eh?
Well, basket parties welcome, I always say.
Uh, just the one drink, son.
Well, what do you always say?
Say?
Oh, I was thinking.
Phuong's a lovely name.
How do you spell it?
P-H-U-O-N-G.
It's the Vietnamese word for "phoenix."
Phoenix.
Fabulous bird.
Rises from its own ashes
and lives on even more beautiful.
Except that nothing nowadays is fabulous
and nothing rises from its ashes.
Not even a milkshake.
It sounds pretty hopeless.
Is that an opinion, Mr. Fowler?
- How was it?
- Routine.
You've been up north to the war,
Domínguez?
Well, where's Bill Granger?
He said he'd meet us here.
I had my car at the airport.
He took a pousse-pousse.
He should not be long.
Oh. How about that milkshake now,
Miss Phuong?
- Encore?
- Oui, merci.
If you don't mind my asking, Fowler,
how come you didn't go up to Hanoi
with the rest of the correspondents?
Well, I mean,
sending your assistant up instead,
I should think you'd wanna get
the smell of battle
the way the other boys do.
Oh, thank you,
but I'm not longer one of the boys.
I haven't been since my school days.
I don't think the battle smells, really.
It stinks. I don't like it.
You haven't answered my question yet.
Which, I'm afraid I've forgotten.
You were saying
that nothing rises from its ashes nowadays,
whether that was opinion or fact.
I suggest that you ask the dead.
French or communist, it doesn't matter.
Their ashes can't be told apart.
What about the living?
They want not to be dead.
Does it matter how they live?
If you mean does it matter
whether they stay alive
under French colonialism
or Chinese communism,
the answer is, no, it does not.
I was asking about a way of life,
not staying alive.
I don't think that Phuong, for example,
could tell you the difference.
Oh, she can tell the French
from the communists, of course.
The communists look like her own people,
but don't ask her to separate the concepts.
Don't expect her to understand ideas.
She's far too busy fighting for existence
in a world too full of people.
Isn't that a frightening assumption?
That 22 million people
are content only to stay alive?
That whether they stay alive
under one force or another
shouldn't matter to them in the least?
They've never known anything else
and what they don't know won't hurt them?
Isn't it just possible
that there's a third choice?
A third force?
Third force?
Twenty-two million Vietnamese
deciding for themselves
how they wanna live.
You must remember that for Americans,
figures have magical meanings.
A third force. Five freedoms.
Um, lucky seven, and
two for the price of one.
Well, time for just one more round
before supper.
Fowler?
I'm afraid we must be
seeing to our own dinner.
- Will you have it with me?
- Well...
I've never been, but I hear
the food's good at the Rendezvous.
Le Rendezvous!
It seems that we will be happy
to dine with you.
Joe?
Oh, I wish I could, son,
but Mrs. Morton won't eat anything
that isn't shipped from the States,
frozen or canned.
- Dominguez?
- Forgive me, my diet.
One evening, soon, we must all
dine together in a wheat field.
Encore a fresh scotch and soda.
You sure you won't break down
just this once, Dominguez?
Orange juice.
Good evening, sir. Are you alone?
No. That is, I'm with these people here.
I see you have no lady.
May I introduce Miss Yvette, Miss Isabel?
Very good dancers.
They speak French and a little English.
Uh, thank you very much,
but I've come in to have dinner
with my friends...
You will require partner.
It is embarrassing to dance
when there are three at a table.
One is always neglected.
I don't mind, really.
Actually, we've got a lot to talk about.
And two gentlemen
can speak much more freely
when the lady has another lady to talk to.
I'd rather not, if you don't mind.
Well, obviously, she does mind.
What's she saying?
I haven't a clue. Probably the same subject.
- Phuong.
- No, no. Just keep her out of this.
Phuong, get him out of this.
No, no, she mustn't get involved.
How did I get into this?
Why don't we leave? I don't want
Miss Phuong mixed up in a thing like this.
Phuong, can't you stop
the Chinese delegate?
I'm sure she's repeating herself.
I don't know what she's saying.
I speak Mandarin, she speak Canto.
It is most serious, sir.
There's a war, you know.
Business has not been very good.
The soldiers will not come
to a place like this.
These ladies are not for soldiers.
Here, please.
What was the magic formula?
We buy one extra dinner,
one extra bottle of wine.
They, how you say,
throw the dice who has the credit.
- Okay?
-(CHUCKLES) Okay.
Miss Phuong, I want to apologize.
Apologize?
We had no right to involve you
with girls like that.
They are my good friends.
I have go to school with many.
I think you should know,
when I first met Phuong two years ago,
she worked here.
As one of those?
Why do you keep saying "one of those"?
They're perfectly respectable
dining and dancing partners.
Not, in the words of the hostess,
not for soldiers.
But that's no way to...
I mean, what's their future?
In time, some of them
form a more permanent association
of one kind or the other.
And the rest?
Well, when they're no longer wanted here,
the age of retirement is rather young,
I suppose a military career is indicated.
It is a matter, after all,
of somehow to continue to exist.
Would you like to ask her now the difference
between a way of life and staying alive?
Will you dance with me?
Shall I order now for the three,
that is, four of us?
Perhaps it was because
they were gone so quickly
and I was so quickly alone,
but suddenly I saw myself
as perhaps they saw me.
A man of middle-age,
understandably concerned
more with the menu than the music.
And he held her properly, not too close.
The way you're supposed to hold
another man's girl,
according to the rules.
Mr. Fowler.
Please, don't get up. May I sit down?
It seems you already have.
I didn't know you were here.
I am dining with friends.
Who is the man dancing with my sister?
An American.
Is he wealthy?
That you'll have to ask him.
He looks quiet and reliable.
Is he married?
That, too, you will have to ask him.
I would think not.
When an American is married,
he looks married.
This is Phuong's sister, Miss Hei.
How do you do, Miss Hei?
Do you come from New York?
No, uh, Texas.
Why not New York?
No particular reason.
I just happen to come from Texas.
I have a picture book of New York.
The bridge of George Washington live there.
Is your father
a successful businessman?
I'm afraid not. He... He's a professor.
A teacher. But a man of importance?
To the few
who consider teaching important.
Is he coming here?
I would like to make his acquaintance.
Do you have another sister?
You know I have not. Why?
Because you're cross-examining this
young man like a hungry marriage broker.
Do you have any particular bride in mind?
I have only one sister.
Exactly.
She needs to be secure.
She deserves to be secure.
She is good and very, very loyal.
Well, I must be going back to my friends.
I would like to meet you again.
Well, maybe we could all
have dinner together,
when Mr. Fowler gets back from the north.
When are you going to the north?
Very soon. Dominguez thinks
I ought to take a look at the war.
Then you must have dinner
with me and my sister
when Mr. Fowler is away. Good night.
She certainly speaks English well.
She makes herself understood.
We could finish to dance now, if you like.
If I like?
Well, uh,
dinner will be served at any instant.
It should be here by now.
When it will arrive, we will finish.
I might very well
have been there as a chaperone.
It was a role I didn't want to play.
To wear a smile and a look that said,
"Enjoy yourselves.
I like to watch you dance."
Suddenly, I felt an uneasiness.
I wished I'd never heard the rumor
about the battle in the north.
I wished for Dominguez to tell me
it was only a rumor after all
and I didn't have to go.
But there I was,
about a week after our dinner
at the Rendezvous.
I wondered how long Phuong's sister
had waited before she called.
Oh, I'm sorry.
The noise of the mortar fire
has made you awake.
I wasn't sleeping.
They will not attack tonight in any case.
It is too close to daylight.
But we continue to break up
their concentrations.
Concentrations, my eye.
Your eye, Monsieur Granger?
Commies are concentrated
exactly one to a tree,
knocking off your mortar teams
like sitting ducks.
Let them run their own war, Granger,
it's the French who are dying.
Too many French are dying
that don't have to die.
They're my friends. I can't be unconcerned
about friends who die unnecessary deaths.
Unnecessary?
What do you mean?
I mean the defense of this country
that was conceived in the 19th century
and being fought in the 20th,
from Beau Geste forts that were built
a generation before the trenches of Verdun.
I had no idea you were, um,
a military analyst.  
I am sure our battle command will want  
to consult you before making further plans.  
Your command here  
has no authority to make plans.  
They're made in Paris,  
just as they were in the 19th century  
and transmitted to you, isn't that so?  
Shortly after dawn,  
there will be a low altitude inspection flight  
for the journalists.  
You will require some sleep.  
In other words, dismissed.  
That's what I get  
for not drinking on the job.  
In case you haven't noticed, I'm sober.  
One would never know.  
You carry sobriety well.  
Where's your faithful English nanny?  
I may have to get a new one.  
This nanny drinks too much.  
Hey!  
Wake up, cousin. It's time to go beddy-bye.  
Yankee swine.  
That's my boy. Up you go.  
By the way,  
what is that book you were reading?  
I was wondering.  
The poetry of Lamartine.  
It is a comfort to me.  
An escape, like whiskey, or...  
It is of the 19th century.  
What do you suppose they're up to?  
And why would they send an American  
of all people?  
Hello, there.  
- Do you know this man, Monsieur Fowler?  
- I think I do.  
I'm sure glad you're not asleep.  
It took me longer than I figured.  
I've got to get that jeep  
back to Hanoi by morning.  
What were you doing in Hanoi?  
I was a stowaway, to tell the truth,
of one of our medical aid teams.
Remember I told you I wanted to come up
and get a look at it for myself firsthand.
I regret that I cannot supply a guide.
And, um, why did you come here
from Hanoi?
I just thought I'd drive down.
See Mr. Fowler.
You just thought...
You drove past I do not know how many
communist patrols.
Through our own bombardment of roads.
Is this to be believed?
It is to be believed.
Was that the French bombardment?
Well, it sure is accurate.
Some places the whole road was gone.
I had to guess where it picked up again.
Thank you for the compliment.
And, uh, someday,
when there is peace and time for it,
perhaps you will take my hand
and walk with me across the water
to America.
Well, the communists control
the roads at night.
What if they'd caught you
and cut your throat?
That's why I borrowed a jeep
with a big red cross painted on it.
They'd be sure to know
I was a non-combatant.
Of course.
Well, when you go on that walk
with the Colonel,
let me take your other hand.
- Well, anyway, I'm here.
- Yes, to see me. What about?
What does that mean?
It'll be dawn pretty soon.
The communist troops
vanish in the daytime.
They hide their uniforms and become
peace-loving, neutral third force peasants.
I didn't come to talk politics.
Good.
It's so quiet suddenly.
I... I think I'm in love with Phuong.
Is that what you came here to tell me?
I had to.
Couldn't it have waited
till I got back to Saigon?
I couldn't have stayed away
from her for that long.
You mean you have stayed away?
I wanted to tell you about it first.
Wouldn't be fair otherwise.
And all's fair in love and war.
Communists don't fire
at the red cross on jeeps, and...
When did you think you fell in love?
That night at the Rendezvous,
dancing with her.
I guess it really started earlier when
she got mixed up with the girls at the bar.
I felt sick thinking about her
winding up like that.
Her sister invited you out, didn't she,
after I left?
Yes, but I kept away. It wasn't easy.
But it was only fair.
Naturally, if you were married to Phuong,
it would be different.
I wouldn't come
between a man and his wife.
You seem pretty certain
that you can come between.
That's for her to decide.
You got a cigarette?
Keep the pack, I've got some more.
I asked for one cigarette, not economic aid.
I don't want to be impressed
by how many packs you've got.
It's just that I still have half a carton
back in Hanoi and you've run out.
I can't marry her. I have a wife at home.
She would never divorce me.
She's high church, if you know what I mean.
Episcopalian. I am too.
We've got that in common.
Not with me, you haven't.
You and my wife.
I have no church.
Would you marry Phuong?
Of course.
A woman's entitled
to the security of marriage.
Her sister's words.
Everything her sister says is not
automatically wrong.
Because she thinks you're rich
and I'm poor.
She's wrong there, all right.
Haven't got a nickel.
Oh, but you have the infinite riches
of respectability and youth.
I envy you that.
But I intend to keep Phuong.
I intend to keep her.
Well, however it works out.
We both have her interests at heart.
I'm fed to the teeth with your
brothers-under-the-skin dribble about
cellophane-wrapped security
for the atomic future.
I don't care that about Phuong's interest,
you can have her interest.
I want her. I want her with me.
I'd rather ruin her and be with her
than worry about her interest.
Dawn any minute. I better be starting back.
- Let me buy you a drink before you go.
- Well, I could use one.
-- Two whiskeys.
German.
Foreign legion.
This detachment has quite a lot of them.
By the way, I've got a cable for ya.
Came just after you left Saigon.
Dominguez asked me to bring it along.
Has it occurred to you that Phuong might
just possibly choose to remain with me?
You know it's a strange thing that neither one of us can say "good luck."
Put some mud on that red cross.
Even in daytime, it's a tempting target.
Thanks for the drink. See you in Saigon.
He didn't know it,
but he'd brought his victory with him.
That cable from my home office in London.
The congratulatory cable of promotion.
The end of Phuong and me.
I was to come back to be the new foreign editor, to live in London.
What passed for life in Bloomsbury Square and the 73 bus and The Press Club.
They could keep it.
No more whiskey?
Almost two weeks passed before I could return from the north to Saigon.
Seemed hopeless.
Even if Phuong was still waiting for me.
It seemed hopeless.
The cable I sent up, was it important?
How did you know it was delivered?
From the young American the day he returned.
He was kind enough to invite me to tea at the Majestic, with Ms. Phuong and her sister.
Milkshakes are very poor at the Majestic.
I think I should tell you, I've begun to pick up,
how shall I put it, rumors about rumors.
That was to be expected.
It seems that apart from his organization, he imports personal supplies, books and documents for his studies, it was assumed.
I imagine that he and Phuong have been inseparable.
Recently a box of his supplies was opened by mistake.
What was in it?
American plastic.
What would he want with plastics?
I was afraid that you'd greet me, if you were here to greet me at all, with "Hi". It's an American word for those who don't have enough time to say "Hello". Your English should be more fluent than it is. It must be a handicap. How do you communicate? Do you show each other your picture books? - Communicate? - Hmm, with the American. How do you talk? My sister and he, they talk most. He's very serious. Very quiet. Well, his feelings are loud enough. You must hear them when you're alone together. We are never alone together. - Never. - Never? Only when we dance. But sitting at the table is always my sister. Where we go, sometimes my sister and other people, but always my sister. My sister says he loves me. What do you say? Who can be loved, who wants always so many people. He has a fine dog. - Standard equipment. - The dog loves me. I think I love the dog too, maybe. I shall have to watch that dog. He may be the third force. Fair play, man's best friend, mom's apple pie. Make some tea. -- Come in. I hope I am not interrupting. Not at all. Sit down, won't you? You are just in time for tea. -- Thank you.
I wonder, could you ask your dog
to take his paws off me?
I thought the British were great dog lovers.
No, we think the Americans love dollars,
but there must be exceptions.
You are an exceptional Englishman,
I'll grant that.
I thought you were gonna call him off.
He has a name, hasn't he?
Come on, Duke.
I guess she told you,
we've been seeing a lot of each other.
Seeing was precisely the way she put it.
Across crowded rooms.
Isn't there a song about it?
I gather however that
the evenings were not enchanted.
You're not making this any easier for me.
A, why should I make anything easier
for you, and B, what?
I came over as soon as
I heard you were back.
Well, you have something to discuss?
You know I have.
Oh, let me guess, plastics?
What are you going to do? Make a plastic
model of a perfect national democracy?
How did you hear about the plastics?
Or are you planning to get married
and go into the toy business?
You almost hit it.
Local toy industry has started
its output for Chinese new year.
It's only a couple of months off.
I got the idea that if we help them
get started on use of plastics
for masks, horns, things like that,
they'd cost less to make
and more people could afford to buy them.
And I do plan on getting married,
that's what I came here to talk about.
As I recall it,
Phuong is to choose between us.
Oh, no, not yet.
I wouldn't stand a chance right now.
I just want her to know how I feel.
Well, how do we go about it?
After all, you're the visiting team.
It's only cricket
that you should have first whack.
Gonna be one terrific handicap for me.
My French is just awful.
I'm taking lessons,
but that's no good to me here today.
Yes, you are at a disadvantage there.
Phuong's English is not good.
Still better than my French.
Actually, she's probably understood
very little of what we were saying.
We've been talking much too quickly, but
if you speak slowly enough,
she will understand. Most of it.
And if she speaks slowly enough, I can
manage to understand most of her French.
And if there is any confusion,
I'll be happy to act as interpreter.
It's a ridiculous situation, but thanks.
Yes, it is, but not at all.
I've told her that you had
some important things to say to her,
that you'll talk very slowly,
and that she must listen well.
Phuong, I am in love with you.
I understand.
It has not been easy to keep
from telling you while he was away.
I did not want you to think that
I would make love to you behind his back.
And I did not want anyone to say that you
were behaving dishonorably toward him.
Dishonorably?
I understand.
There's a little confusion here
about the word "dishonorably,"
she thought it meant honor.
I straightened it out.
So you know very little about me.
There's not been much time and even
less opportunity, do you understand that?
I want you to love me too.
Because I want to marry you.
Make marriage with me?
To make you happy,
and secure for the future.
I'm afraid we've run into a real block here.
Future means nothing to her,
not even in French.
I doubt whether she would understand it
in Vietnamese.
Future is a...
Foreign tense. People who exist
from day to day have little use for it.
But I can make you understand it, Phuong.
I can make you see
that the future will be happy for you.
That's why now that he's back,
so he can hear me,
I'm asking you to see me, to be with me,
alone and as often as possible.
I understand, I think.
- Have you got any whiskey?
- Help yourself.
I assume that it's my turn to bat.
Since we are being fair about it,
I won't take advantage of you
by talking French.
Go right ahead.
Oh, no, it's so long since I've played cricket.
I want to see what I can do.
Phuong, are you going to leave me for him?
He might marry you. I can't. You know why.
Are you going to leave me?
- No.
- Never?
Seems to me she understands
about the future very well.
Nobody can promise that, Phuong.
Even he can't. Marriages break.
Often they break easier
than relationships like ours.
- I do not want to leave.
- But?
Shouldn't you whip out
your bank balance at this point?
I haven't got one.
It's you she's waiting to be reassured by.
Go ahead, make her feel wanted and secure.
She's had that from me for two years.
It's made her happy.
How would she get it married to you?
From your chauffeur
when your away at the office?
Tell Phuong. When you decide to move on,
what will you leave her with?
Or does she get passed on
with the furniture?
Actually, the furniture isn't mine.
Actually, neither is she.
Will you marry me?
Say it in French and say it for yourself.
-- Will you marry me, Phuong?
- Tell your dog to stop barking.
- Come with me now.
No.
Now, all at once,
I do not understand.
She faces situations in her own way.
She's getting the supper.
Would you like to stay?
No, thanks.
You know, I wish you could marry her.
Do you really?
Those girls at the Rendezvous,
don't be too sure it wouldn't matter to her.
Goodbye, Phuong.
"Dear Helen, " I wrote.
"I'm coming back to England soon
to take the job of foreign editor.
"You can imagine
I'm not really happy about it.
"England is to me the scene of my failure.
"I had intended our marriage
to last quite as much as
"if I had shared your Christian beliefs. "
You write about the fight in the north?
No.
This is about an old war. "Before we were married you warned me that "there can never be a divorce. "I accepted the risk. I have nothing to complain of "At the same time, I'm asking for one now. "For more than two years, "someone has been very loyal to me. "It's stupid of me to tell you this. "I'm putting a reply into your mouth. "But please believe me, to lose her will be for me "the beginning of death. " - Finish? - Finished.

I just asked my wife to divorce me. Never asked before. There's a chance?
A small one.
- He's young.
- Who?
The American. It is not important.
I lied to you, Phuong. My paper is sending me home soon. I could come with you. I would like to see London. It would be very uncomfortable for you if we were not married. I could come with you anyway. Are skyscrapers in London?
No, America. And the Statue of Liberty?
That's America, too. The Cao Dai religion was invented in 1926 by a Vietnamese civil servant. It's a combination of Buddhism, Christianity and Confucianism. There is a pope. There are both male and female cardinals. By 1951, there were more than two million faithful in its congregation.
At least once a year, the Cao Dai hold a festival at their holy see in Tay Ninh, which lies 80 kilometers to the northwest of Saigon. The attendance at these celebrations was good. The chief attraction being, not so much the vigorous young religion, as the vigorous young Caodist army of 25,000 men. They were neutral at the moment. But one could always hope.

Most important of all was the urgency of getting back to Saigon before sunset. The lonely road through the rice fields was protected during the day. At night, together with all other roads, it belonged to the communists. The shadows had already reached the holy mountain, where General The held out, up to recently the Cao Dai Chief of Staff. He was no longer neutral. But no one spoke of him much that day. By now, everyone had seen the show and wanted to leave as quickly as possible. The stampede back to Saigon had begun.

While the eye of God looked down upon a few of us who were trying to get a last-minute story out of the Pope's deputy.

Your Eminence, is it true that General The is getting your men to join him in the hills to fight both the French and the communists? They will return. We are neutral. We are a religious faith. We do not recognize war. With an army of 25,000 men?

Is it true that General The has asked for your support of a national democratic government that is neither pro-French nor pro-communist?
Um, a third force government.
Love is the one true force,
which in time, will unite the world.
Let me know how it all turns out.
Your Eminence,
we know how you feel about love.
How do you feel about General The?
We are neutral,
we do not recognize war.
I recognized
the Caodist commandant.
He'd been one of General The's
closest assistants,
before The took to the hills.
They stopped talking as I came over.
It seemed to me that I'd interrupted
a very private conversation.
Hello, Commandant, how is the General?
Which general?
Oh, surely in the Caodist faith
all generals are united,
even General The.
Something has gone wrong with my car.
Can't get it to start.
I have sent to the barracks for a mechanic.
He will come soon.
Oh, I hope so.
It's time to be starting back to Saigon.
Well, I'll go and cool off
in the cathedral for a bit.
I'll see you before I go.
The entire concept of the cathedral,
so the story went,
had come to its founder in a dream.
A Walt Disney Fantasia of the east.
Dragons and snakes,
no glass in the windows.
And everywhere, the eye of God upon you.
Oh, petrol.
The Cao Dais must have siphoned it out
while the eye of God watched over me.
I wonder why just your car
when there were dozens of others
with larger tanks easier to get to.
What do you suspect?
An international spy ring.
Too much coincidence, that's all.
First, my car conks out for no good reason.
You came up alone. You'd be the logical one
to give me a lift back.
And your car has just enough gas left
to run out here.
Well, in that case, Ava Gardner should be
waiting for us in the watch tower.
If not, the guards may have
a little petrol to spare.
Well, at least we reached the territory
of the Vietnamese army.
It'll be getting dark pretty soon.
Then it won't matter which flag covers us.
- Anybody look out?
- No.
I'll call out if it's all right to come up.
Not a bloody word.
Not a drop of petrol.
Now put those guns away. Sit down.
They'd be sure to spot your car.
I managed to get it off the road anyway.
You nearly managed to get
my head blown off. Come up.
Meet a couple of fellow warriors
for democracy.
They are just kids.
Now what could they be expected
to do if the communists attack?
Fire one shot possibly, and then try
and disappear into the rice paddies.
Very sensible.
Well, it's going to be a long night, I'm afraid.
Still, there are 40 of these towers
between us and Saigon.
Better odds than roulette.
If we had some cards,
we could teach them to play bridge.
Why not give them a lecture
on national democracy?
They are the perfect audience. Trapped.
You just don't believe in it at all, do you?
I believe that this wall is behind my back.
I believe that those guns are loaded.
Two beliefs.
Both confined to this hut at this minute.
Both frightening.
Cigarette, or am I being ostentatious?
Well, I'd...
I'd give that couple to the guards.
We'd better stay friends with them.
Wouldn't have thought you would suggest
using economic aid to buy friends.
They are scared.
I wouldn't blame them if they
handed us over to the communists.
They don't believe in anything either.
They just want enough rice.
They want one day to be
much the same as another.
They don't want our white skins around
telling them what they want.
You're telling them what they don't want,
which is the same thing.
The skins in Russia are still white too.
- All of Indochina goes.
- I know that record.
Burma goes, Malaya goes, Indonesia goes.
But what does go mean?
Well, I don't know what I'm talking
politics for. They don't interest me.
I'm a reporter, I'm not involved.
My friend, you are a mass of involvement.
I don't take sides.
I'd be still reporting whoever wins.
If they win, you won't even be able to
pretend you believe what you report.
This sudden importance of the individual
and his freedom.
Why have we only just discovered it?
50 years ago, no one ever spoke of it.
It wasn't threatened then.
Ours wasn't threatened then, no,
but who cared then about theirs?
Oh, don't come to the east
with that cry about
the threat about the individual soul,  
not unless you are prepared  
to do something about it.  
At this moment to these people,  
it's the others who stand for the individual.  
To us, they are just  
so many units in  somebody's concept of global strategy.  
Some of that is very unhappily true.  
And what are you prepared to do about it?  
Me?  
I'm from a country that's been  
in existence for less than 200 years  
in a very old world.  
That same 50 years ago,  
we were barely taken seriously as a nation,  
much less a great force for wisdom  
and decision.  
But suddenly now,  
a watch-tick of history later,  
the world waits angrily for us  
to provide the answers  
it hasn't been able to find in 50 centuries.  
French patrol tank.  
It wasn't as smart as I thought  
getting your car off the road.  
Maybe we can signal them  
on their way back.  
If they come back.  
Well, in the meantime, there is nothing  
better we can do than try and sleep.  
Aren't you sleepy?  
Just thinking.  
What do you suppose Phuong  
is doing right now?  
Now? Probably, sprawled on the bed,  
a joss stick burning  
to keep away the mosquitoes,  
memorizing her collection of picture books.  
She knows more about the royal family  
than I do.  
She can take you on a tour  
of the Grand Canyon.  
I wish she would.
Sounded like a mine.
I guess that tank won't be coming back.
No.
We're in for it, I'm afraid.
What's he saying, can you guess?
Probably an ultimatum to these chaps
to surrender.
Sounds like a gramophone record.
How close are they?
Can't see them.
About 200 yards, I should say.
We're no help to these two.
Let's get out of here.
Make straight for the field. Aim for the rice.
I don't know how deep the water is.
We'll find out when we get there.
My foot! Something broken when I jumped.
- Come on.
- Don't be a bloody hero.
Head for the tall grass,
as they say in Texas.
I don't want to be helped by you.
Write a letter about it to The Times.
You know what's the funny thing
about those kids,
they didn't run.
I wanted to stay. I prefer to die on dry land.
Save your breath.
Who the hell asked you to save my life?
We are not a couple of movie marines.
You're not even gonna get the girl
in the end.
It's a shame about the car.
I hope it was insured.
Thoughtful of you.
Characteristic.
Hate to see anything happen
to an automobile
without an insurance company
getting stuck for it.
If you don't mind, I think
I'd like to go back to the ditch.
Lie flat. This is quite painful.
This is the fireman's lift.
I learned it in the Boy Scouts.
They taught you the wrong things.
You should have left me lying where I was.
My good deed for today.
Phuong might miss your kindness
and occasional gifts.
So, you did it for Phuong? (PANTING)
Also, characteristic.
The American belief
that women love heroes.
Not always.
You could have had her if I were dead.
- Try not to move that leg too much.
- If it'd been you, I'd have left you.
No, you wouldn't.
I'll be back in a little while.
Where do you think you're going?
Down the road to look for a French patrol.
Don't be a fool. They'll shoot you
before they know who you are.
- If the others don't get you first.
- I'll see ya.
He moved like a hero
in a boy's adventure story,
wearing his heroism like a Scout's badge
and quite unaware of the absurdity
and improbability of his adventure.
But the absurd and the improbable,
like the Boy Scouts and Marines win in the
end more often than we like to think.
And a few weeks later,
it was my day for going home
from the hospital in Saigon.
"Dear Thomas,
I was not surprised to get your letter.
"You're not a man, are you,
to remain alone for very long.
"You seem to pick up women
like your coat picks up dust."
- Does she permit that you marry me?
- She doesn't say yet.
"Would you actually marry her?
"Perhaps, you would.
"I suppose, like the rest of us,
you're getting on and don't like living alone.
"I feel very lonely myself, at times.
"Even a woman, if she's left
early enough, can find another companion.
"But you didn't leave me in time."

What was that?
It is fini, the cognac.
"And marriage doesn't prevent
you from leaving a woman, does it?
"It only delays the process.
"You say it will be the end of life
to lose this girl.
"Once you used exactly that phrase to me.
"I don't suppose I was the first
to hear it nor will she be the last.
"You've always attached so much
importance to the truth, Thomas,
"but your truth is always so temporary.
"And I've never been able to argue
with you or to convince you.
"So, it's easier to act
as my faith tells me to act
"and simply to write,
I don't believe in divorce.
"My religion forbids it.
"The answer is no."

The letter's bad?
She says no?
Nothing of the kind.
It's very helpful.
She's consulting a lawyer.
Then it is the most happiest letter.
And you read it with such a long face.
May take some time.
The arrangements are complicated.
You could make a settlement.
I have no money.
My sister says you could take out...
Assurance of your life.
Your sister is a poet at heart.
May I buy two new scarves of silk?
For my trousseau?
Three, if you like.
It's a modest enough endowment
of worldly goods.
Come in.
- Hello.
- How are you feeling?
Oh, coming along.
Actually, I was in process of going home.
I know. That's why I'm here.
Oh, I forget to tell you.
Because he have big open American auto,
I ask my sister to ask him,
would he come here to fetch you?
In a little auto, your leg would not fit.
She shouldn't have done that.
Very thoughtful of her. No trouble for me.
- Is this your bag?
- Oh, don't bother about that.
You have all you can handle
with those crutches.
I've been meaning to write to you
while I was here to say thank you.
You certainly saved me
from an uncomfortable end.
Ready to go?
By the way, I have news for you
that I know you'll be glad to hear.
You've always said that Phuong's
interests are what we both had at heart.
I just received a letter from my wife.
She's more or less agreed to divorce me.
I wish you both every happiness.
That's very fair of you.
I had lied cruelly to them both.
But I thought,
at least, she won't leave me now,
before I have to go.
Aren't you setting up the tree
a little early for the Chinese new year?
It's weeks off.
If one waits, the best blossom are gone.
Which scarf did you decide to keep?
The yellow.
Why didn't you show it to me?
It is put away with the others.
I want to see it.
— Come in.
— Good morning. Do I disturb?
— Not at all.
As you see, we're getting a six weeks' 
running start on the Chinese new year. 
You are very kind. 
How is your leg? 
Oh, coming along. 
I shan't require even this stick much longer. 
Oh, sit down, won't you? Some coffee? 
Perhaps soda, if it is no trouble. 
Phuong... 
Uh, what's the story? 
How quickly you always come to my point. 
If it a story, it is one only for you. 
In the wrong hands, 
someone less objective, 
it could be distorted into an ugly slander. 
— Oh, it sounds important. 
— It might be. 
Thank you most kindly. 
I would like to take you to meet 
a Chinese friend of mine. Mr. Heng. 
You must forget his name, of course, 
and that you have ever seen him. 
What's it about? 
I would rather you heard from him. 
Have you seen much lately 
of the young American? 
Well, not since the morning 
he drove me home from the hospital. 
How long ago is that? Two weeks? Three? 
I do not remember. 
Seems to me you should. 
You gave every indication 
that it was quite a happy day. 
But you had come to know him well? 
— In some ways. Why? 
— His activities. 
Apart from his charitable organization 
and his studies. 
Only what I heard from you. 
This nonsense about plastics. 
The third force.
Everybody's heard him sounding off about that.
One hears it has now become an obsession with him.
Yes, well, he was preaching that when he got here.
It just shows that he hasn't learned anything.
And that a leader must be found for this third force.
He may have found his leader.
Does it matter?
I don't know.
May I take you now to my friend?
Well, if you think, it's worth following up.
- I'll be back for lunch.
- It will be prepared.
Au revoir.
- Your friend doesn't seem to be here.
- He said for you to enter.
And that he would meet you.
- Oh, well, how shall I know him?
- He will know you.
- Mr. Fowler?
- I've come with the Dominguez.
He said you had something to tell me.
I do not know any Dominguez.
Of course.
Oh, will you come with me, please?
- Do you see this?
- What about it?
Diolacton.
Afraid that doesn't mean anything to me.
I had two of these drums here.
They were picked up accidentally with other junk
at a garage of Mr. Fangran Moi.
Do you know him?
Moi? No, I don't think so.
His wife is a relation of General The.
Well, I still don't quite see...
Would you know what this is?
Might be a bathroom fixture.
It is a mold.
This mold was made in the USA.
Diolacton is an American trade name.
Do you begin to understand?
Frankly, no.
There was a flaw in the mold.
That was why it was thrown away, but it should not have been thrown away.
Now, the two empty Diolacton drums, that was a mistake.
Mr. Moi came here personally.
Naturally, I could not find the mold and only one of the two drums.
From here, Mr. Moi went directly to the flat of a young American.
Well, perhaps, he was repairing the American's car in his garage.
He was not and he never has.
Mr. Moi's visit was a private one.
You seem to have established some sort of connection between the American and General The.
A very slender one.
Certainly not a news story.
Not yet, perhaps.
And yet the Americans consider opium habit-forming. (LAUGHS)
Uh, Mr. Fowler, your neutrality is well known, that is why you're here.
You can sympathize if some of us feel strongly on whatever side.
If you're hinting that you're a communist, don't worry, I have no politics.
It's important to my committee that someone will take a fair view.
That is why I've shown you this and this. Just what is Diolacton.
It sounds like condensed milk.
It has nothing to do with milk.
Do you see the fine white dust on the bottom?
It's one of the American plastics.
Yes, he told me he was importing plastics for making toys.
Not for toys.
We only want you to remember
what you have seen.
Perhaps, one day you'll have a reason
for writing about it.
But you must never say
that you saw the drum here.
Nor the mold.
Particularly not the mold.
That path will lead you
directly to where your friend is waiting.
Thank you.
Mr. Fowler.
Perhaps you will be near the flower stalls
on Boulevard Charner
at precisely half past 1:00 this afternoon.

Half past 1:
Your friend, does he live here in Saigon?
He comes and goes, I believe.
The communist have
a couple of committees
who specialize in assassination.
His wouldn't be one of them, would it?
Forgive my ignorance.

Half past 1:
Almost the hottest time of the day.
I hope it's worth it.
- Oh, hello.
- How do you do?
Won't you sit down
and have a drink before lunch?
Or don't you?
Sometimes. I don't make a ritual of it.
Either way, I don't wanna sit down.
- Forgive me, if I remain seated...
- Fowler, why don't you belong to a church?
I thought we'd exhausted that subject.
I'm afraid I have no faith in your gods.
You have no faith in anything.
That shouldn't keep you
from belonging to a church.
Because of the social advantages,
I believe, that in America,
to belong to the proper Protestant...
You must need some repository for the guilt
and self-loathing you feel about yourself
as a human being.
I don't know that I do.
Your greatest talent lies
in diverting your own attention from it.
I assume that you're getting at something.
When you do pick a church,
choose one that'll hear your sins,
at least, your version of them,
and give you absolution.
- Get out of here.
- When I have finished.
You could lie to a church, you know.
And cheat it. Just as you do
to human beings who trust you.
You, for instance?
For one.
You should never trust anyone
when there's a woman in the case.
Were you afraid you couldn't win
without lying to Phuong?
European duplicity.
We have to make up for our lack of supplies.
- How did you find out?
- Her sister.
She knows you've been called home
by your paper.
Oh, that. (CHUCKLES)
Yes, I told Phuong about that.
She must have told her sister.
And the letter from your wife?
The lie about the divorce?
It is almost time for lunch.
Have yourself a rare steak for once.
A dreary lie, Fowler.
If you'll pardon the Americanism, corny.
A favorite lie of a desperate,
middle-aged, middle-class husband
trying to hang on to an extracurricular fling.
How did Phuong's sister
get hold of the letter?
Phuong had it somehow.
She brought it with pride and happiness
to have it translated.
I might have guessed that she knew.
Well, the reason for the lie
should be obvious enough.
I wanted to keep her.
Just as a comfort. One of the old-fashioned
comforts until you're ready to leave her.
With what?
Certainly not with a deep freeze
and a television set.
Your anti-Americanisms
are pretty worn out, too.
Some of them have become
anti-British by now.
Have you thought she might want a home,
a place to belong, children?
Bright, young American citizens,
ready to testify. Is that more up-to-date?
Not much, but the distortion is greater.
Well, then be grateful to me.
You can drop your scruples now too,
and go ahead without them.
Not that I am too sure
how scrupulous you are,
away from the wide-screen world
of romance.
- With plastics, for instance?
- Plastics?

It's almost 1 :
What are you talking about?
I hope you know what you're doing there.
I assume that your motives are good.
Well, they always are.
I sometimes wish you had
a few bad motives.
Might help you to understand
a little more about human beings.
You know, for people as expert
with them as you are,
the use of certain words
should be licensed, like guns.
Words such as human beings and understanding. In your hands, they are a menace to society. Operation Bicyclette. What's happening? It looks like a policemen's ballet. It is not yet half past 1:00. My watch must be four minutes slow. What happens next? For the time being, that is all. What's it all about? Let me show you something. Look carefully. Look at the pump. Does it remind you of anything? Yes, the mold for the plastic. That was shaped like the half-section of a bicycle pump. I thought you would be interested. Come and have a drink with me, Heng. I'd like to know more about it. Oh, I'm sorry, I might give you a prejudiced opinion. The garage of Mr. Moi is right there. But Mr. Moi is elsewhere at the moment. In the days that followed, I caught occasional glimpses of them together. At the cinema. Strolling with his dog, of course, in the botanical gardens. Driving past the Continental in his car, laughing at being young together. I was not yet ready to risk the chance of running into them. So, I found myself from time to time in places like Le Pavilion. Le Pavilion was a coffee and gossip center for non-Asiatic wives, one flight above the street, considered cheap and sanitary. There was little likelihood that either Phuong or the American would come there. Besides, it was 11:00 in the morning.
And I knew precisely where Phuong would be. Having her milkshake at the milk bar, across from the Continental.
- What is it?
- A bomb, monsieur. A great disaster.
- Close to the Continental.
- Continental? Vigot! Vigot!
I've gotta get across to the milk bar. I've got a friend there. Everybody here has friends. Milk bar. Phuong is at the milk bar.
- We must get across to it.
- She's not there.
- She must be. She always goes at 11:00.
- Not this morning.
- Why not? How'd you know?
- I warned her not to. You warned...
- What do you mean you warned her?
- Told her to stay away.
There was supposed to be a French military parade. It was canceled at the last minute. I heard rumors there might be a demonstration sometime, like those bicycle bombs.
- Not "those" bicycle bombs. Yours!
- Mine?
Take a look. Take a good look around. And see what full drum of Diolacton can do.
- Diolacton?
- No, I want you to look! Why this of all hours, the shopping hour, when the place is filled with women and children? What are you talking about? Do you think that General The would call off the bombing because the parade was canceled? No, no, this is much better than a parade. This is front page news. The blood of women and children.
That's real news.
You must be out of your mind.
Look, you put your General The
on the map, all right.
Look, that red color on the street.
There's your third force.
And those things being carried by on
stretchers, there's your national democracy.
Why don't you shut up?
For once in your life, why don't you
just shut up and help somebody?
Go home to Phuong,
and tell her about the heroic dead.
Mr. Fowler.
A few dozen less
of her country people to worry about.
Mr. Fowler.
Someone wants to see you.
Someone? Who, your friend?
If you want, I can bring you to him.
I was there in the middle of it.
- Blood...
- I know.
Forgive my bringing you here.
It was thought best that we meet
where they would be
least likely to search for me
or my associates.
This place of strange worship.
No stranger than
Saint Paul's or Saint Peter's.
The police will be very active today.
You had nothing to do with it.
It was the American again.
His General The's
not a very controlled character.
- And plastics are not for boys from Texas...
Look, how can I help, Heng?
He's gotta be stopped.
You must try to be calm, Mr. Fowler.
How many bombs and dead children
can you get out of a drum of Diolacton?
If you feel so strongly
that he must be stopped,
would you be prepared to help us?
He comes blundering in here and other
people have to die because of his mistakes.
It's a pity you didn't know
he was in the watch tower that night.
You could have made sure
that your people would get him.
It would've made a lot of difference
to a lot of lives.
We have been standing in one place
too long.
We agree with you
that he has to be restrained.
If you would invite him to dinner tonight
at the Vieux Moulin restaurant.

- Between 8:
We would talk to him on the way.
Well, he may not want to.
He may not be able to.
Then ask him to call at your flat
sometime before 6:00.
He will certainly come.
If he accepts your invitation to dinner,
take a book to your window
as though to catch the light.
Why the Vieux Moulin restaurant?
It is by the bridge to Dakow.
We shall be able to talk undisturbed.
What will you do?
I promise you, we will act as gently
as the situation allows.
Will you help us, Mr. Fowler?
I don't know.
I don't know.
Sooner or later, one has to take sides.
Is that not so?
Take a book to the window
as though you want to catch the light.
Mr. Heng's instructions
smacked suddenly of cheap melodrama.
Surely there must a proper book,
a pertinent passage.
Come in.
I found your note
under my door.
It is forgiving of you to come.
- I thought so.
- Will you have a drink?
I can only stay a minute.
Well, you must be having a very busy day.
The note said you wanted to see me.
What about?
I thought, if you weren't engaged,
we might have dinner together.
Why?
Perhaps to talk.
All right, I think we should.
The Vieux Moulin restaurant

**between 9:**
Wherever you like. I think we should
try once more to understand each other.
We'll try at dinner.
What do you hear from General The?
- I haven't seen him lately.
- No?
I should have thought he'd have come
to Saigon to see how his bomb worked.
What makes you so sure it was his bomb?
Wasn't it?
He's an unpredictable man. I don't know.
I don't think so.
I shouldn't trust him too much.
Believe me, international democracy
is something that comes out of a book.
That one?
No, I was trying
to recall a favorite passage.
General The is nothing but a bandit
with a few thousand men.
He's not the leader for your third force.
It's not my third force.
And whoever said he was the leader?
Your country mustn't trust men like The.
Promise me, you won't help him anymore.
Help him? My country? Promise you?
You're talking cloak-and-dagger nonsense.
Oh, I had forgotten, you're a student.
A private citizen
saving the east with powdered milk,
DDT and the fireman's lift.
Does General The conduct a seminar
in self-administration or...
Or does he specialize in plastics?
Plastics again?
This is gonna be a long dinner.
We've got a lot to straighten out.
No. I'd better cancel dinner tonight.
Perhaps another time.
- Another time might be the wrong time.
- Well, stay here and talk now.
Afterward...
Later we can go out to dinner, anywhere.
I'll grab a cyclo-pousse
and meet you at the restaurant.
Come on, Duke.
My car went on the blink
again this afternoon.
Couldn't get it to start.
Do you carry a gun now, after that night
on the road from Tay Ninh?
That's an odd question.
Why should I?
You know, I was gonna keep it all for dinner,
but you've really got a weird picture of me.
To begin with, it's quite true that I have
been in touch with General The.
- A cigarette?
- No.
But for once our concept
of the truth coincides.
After I was graduated from college, I took
some post-graduate work up at Princeton.
One of your universities that give degrees
in public relations and theater craft?
Einstein thought more of it.
While I was there,
I met a very prominent Vietnamese
living in exile in New Jersey.
Who was he?
You know or should know as well as I.
Because if all goes well, if Vietnam becomes an independent republic, this man will be its leader. And this future leader sent you to General The? What makes you believe any sane government or sane man would send me on a mission like that? Then who did send you to General The?
- I did.
- What was your business with him?
I happen to believe very deeply in that third force. So I wanted to find out where the General's loyalties would lie, if and when this man returned home to Vietnam. And did you? Too bad you won't be here. It'll be quite a show. You seriously expect me to believe that? No.
I think you believe whatever you need to believe emotionally. What right has your government to send you on an idiotic mission like this? To meddle with the lives of other people. I have told you and told you, my government has nothing to do with it. Idiotic or not it was my own idea.
- Well, why haven't they stopped you?
- They have. They weren't very pleasant about it. That's why I've got to finish up in a hurry. I'm being sent home next week. Phuong's going with me. We're going to be married at home. Then, for the first time, he spoke of Phuong. Of taking Phuong away with him. And leaving me behind alone. Now, it looks as though we'll be able to bring her sister over for the wedding.
The house will be packed.
I can see my mother now, stewing about
where she's going to put everybody.
You still looking for that favorite passage?
I just remembered...
"Though I perchance,
am vicious in my guess,
"as, I confess, it is my nature's plague."
Othello, isn't it? Don't stop.
"To spy into abuses,
"and oft my jealousy.
"Shapes faults that are not..."
There will never be another
like him, will there?
Think thoughts about human beings
that have never been thought before.
He went on remembering
his classroom notes
from An Introduction to Elizabethan Drama.
Suddenly, I was very tired.
I wanted him to go away quickly and die.
So that Phuong and I,
and the world, would be as we were.
Before he came in.
And I imagine that the ability
to express the unique thought
or the unique word is what's called genius.
I imagine so.
- You've got a great talent for words.
- Thank you.
You depend on them.
As if saying a thing in an effective way
made it true.
Shall we save the truth for dinner?
Come on, Duke.
What are you afraid of anyway?
Like an adolescent boy
who keeps on using dirty words
all the time because
he doesn't want anyone to think,
he doesn't know what it's all about.
You're going to hate this.
But I think you're one of the most
truly innocent men I'll ever know.
See you at dinner.
We can make it another time.
What's that?
If your work takes you
longer than you think.
Don't bother about meeting me for dinner.
- I can make it.
- But if you can't comfortably,
look in here later.
I'll come back at 10:00,
if you don't meet me, and wait for you.
There was no harm in giving him
that one chance.
But what was I hoping for?
Did I, of all people, hope for some
kind of miracle?
A method of discussion
arranged by Mr. Heng
which would not be...
Simply death.
It was no longer my decision.
I had handed it over to that somebody
in whom I didn't believe.
You can intervene if you want to.
In so many ways,
a telegram on his desk,
his dog can become ill.
The minister can want to see him.
His work, whatever it is,
can take up the time.
You cannot exist unless you have
the power to alter the future.
It was exactly 5:47 this afternoon.

At 6:
at the Continental.
The waiters would remember.
Open the door. Open this door! (BANGING)
Inexcusable negligence.
I had no idea you were still there.
You must be chilled to the bone, Mr. Fowler.
Would you have a cognac?
I'll go home now, if you're finished with me.
Well, of course. I have a driver standing by.
Cannot have been pleasant to see a friend for the last time in such a condition.
No.
Oh, this is perhaps not entirely legal, but you might want to have this as a keepsake. A more agreeable memory of him.
It was found near his empty wallet in the mud of the river bank. An indication that the motive of the murder was robbery.
Well, that's kind of you, but I have other memories.
By the way what happened to the dog, you looking for it?
No.
Well, it will probably... Thank you. Turn up in the American's flat when it's hungry.
If it hasn't been eaten by now. If it does, you might analyze the earth in its paws. Perhaps, you will immortalize me in a...
In a detective romance, Mr. Fowler. Inspector Lecoq. Inspector McRae. Inspector Vigot. (CHUCKLES)
Was the dog with him when you last saw the American?
No.
When was that?
Well, I told you. No, you told me only that you expected him to come to your flat at 10:00.
When did you see him last?
Well, this morning...
Well, yesterday morning now. Just after the explosion at the Continental. Just after that senseless, heartless murder of dozens of innocent...
Yesterday morning. And you didn't see him again? No. Alors... You must be extremely weary. The driver waits for you.
- Good night, Mr. Fowler.
- Good night.
Where have you been?
To where he lives.
His automobile is there, but he's not.
What did they want, la S?ret?
What did they say? Where is he?
He's dead, Phuong.
He's dead.
How was he made dead?
Somebody killed him.
Who?
They don't know.
Why?
They don't know.
Where are you going?
You can't just walk the streets.
Police will pick you up.
Then they will have him and me.
-- Phuong, don't leave me alone.
You don't seem to be uncovering
much damaging evidence.
There is nothing more damaging
than the American soft drink.
Would you care for one?
His taste in music on the other hand
was excellent.
Debussy, of course.
Strange country, America,
what one thinks of it depends always upon
which American one has in mind
at the moment.
Have found the rest of her belongings?
Of the young lady? They are not here.
Oh, she must've picked them up already.
And left behind a valuable collection
of picture books?
No, the more logical assumption is that
the rest of her belongings
were not here to begin with.
Of course.
The wedding had to be suitable
for the family trade.
Passed by the censor boards.
Separate residence to the end.  
Marriage being the end.  
Would you mind if I took  
these picture books with me?  
I'm afraid I would.  
They weren't his.  
And they are not yours.  
All right.  
--- Once more now.  
--- One more?  
--- Why though?  
--- This is an English lesson.  
No, no, no.  
--- You have your turn next.  
--- Oh, no.  
--- No, no.  
--- All right wait a minute.  
--- Come a little, come over here.  
--- Okay.  
Now one word.  
--- Say prune.  
--- Prune.  
Very good,  
little closer, now once more.  
Prune.  
Very good, now once more.  
Prune.  
I like this word.  
What word?  
Pru...  
Baby,  
nobody in Texas says prune  
the way you say prune.  
Now, we can understand why  
he did not use his car last night.  
It had been drained of gasoline.  
You may call it petrol with me.  
Forgive me, I was thinking American.  
But, obviously it was considered  
necessary for him  
either to walk or to use a cyclo-pousse.  
So that he could be more quietly killed.  
It's an old device, but they seem  
to be unusually devoted to it, eh?
Whoever.
I am reminded of another time when
the car of the American
suddenly would not function.
Less than two months ago,
don't you remember?
Do you have a... Oh, no, never mind.
I remember also that you...
You were good enough
to offer the American a ride
in a car that was rented for you
by your assistant.
Perez?
- Dominguez.
- Ah, Dominguez, yeah.
And curiously enough,
that car too ran out of petrol, huh,
which forced you to spend the night
under a communist attack.
That was when the American
saved your life, was it not?
I didn't ask him to.
I told him he was being a fool.
Ah, it's depressing how much
the human being does
instinctively what is foolish.
And whereas...
Mr. Fowler,
knowing how deeply you must regret
the murder of a friend, who saved your life.
Even over your objection.
And having thought about it
through the night,
can you be now of any help to me?
Sorry, I didn't think about it
through the night, I was extremely tired.
I slept deeply.
Then as a man of untroubled sleep,
as a reporter,
do you have any views?
Perhaps he was killed by the communists.
They've murdered
plenty of people in Saigon.
Distinct possibility, but why?
Perhaps they didn't like his friendship for General The.
The French may have murdered him for the same reason.
Remote possibility.
After all, The has been fighting both the French and the communists.
Well, perhaps the Cao Dai's killed him to punish General The for leaving their army.
Perhaps General The killed him because he knew the Cao Dais.
Perhaps he was murdered because someone wanted his money.
But, at any rate, we have ruled out suicide.
You're not thinking up some new electronic third degree?
No, by what chain of thought I cannot say, but I've been thinking suddenly about the American's dog.
Oh, did you find it?
It was never lost.
- Well, you told me that it was...
- I told you that we were not looking for it.
When did you find it?
Last night in the mud not far from the American.
I suppose it refused to leave the body.
They killed it too.
I'm truly sorry to hear that.
Mr. Fowler,
I would like to know why you lied to me.
The American visited you yesterday.
Not long before he was killed.
What gives you that idea?
Where you live at the foot of the stairs the floor is being repaired, the workmen finished laying the cement

at half past 4:
Then they went on to another job.
There must be many floors in Saigon being repaired with cement.
With the footprints of a dog that match exactly the ones of the poor dead beast?
I have nothing to tell you.
Nothing at all.
Perhaps later then.
After you have become more uninvolved.
You do think I killed him.
No.
Then why is so important whether I saw
the American again yesterday before I...
Before he died.
Mr. Joe Morton's office.
Hello, Miss Hei, don't hang up.
Listen. I have been ringing
your flat for 20 minutes.
Have you told Phuong
not to answer the phone?
Well, you stop lying to me,
I know she must be there.
Where is she then? Tell...
Yes, yes, I know you have a job to do.
I intend to go on bothering you
as much as I want.
Until I find Phuong.
Oh. Won't you have a drink?
Oh, perhaps a little English whiskey-soda,
thank you.
I understand you are not going home,
that your newspaper permits you to stay.
I only received that letter this afternoon.
When did you read it?
This morning.
Well, it is fortunate it arrived
after the killing rather than before.
Yes, you...
You would've had quite a case against me.
Is that why you think
I was concerned in his death?
That my motive was wanting Phuong back?
-- Now that the American is dead...
Could I have a little more soda?
Has she come back to you?
Or that my motive was revenge
for losing Phuong.
You did not kill him, Mr. Fowler.
But you and I know who did.
Actually, you'll never find the man.
Or men who killed him, Vigot.
He was killed at long distance.
As much by an idea as anything else.
An idea?
All his life,
they saturated him with this idea,
from books and slogans, church pulpits,
lecture platforms.
An idea so repugnant
that he was killed for it?
You would've made a good priest, Vigot.
What is it about you
that would make it so easy to confess?
If there were anything to confess.
You've mixed for yourself a drink,
but you are not drinking it, huh?
It might be unwise.
There are no secrets of the confessional
in your profession.
Secrecy is seldom important to a man
who confesses, he has other motives.
To cleanse himself.
Not always.
Sometimes he wants only to see himself
clearly as he is.
Sometime he's just
weary of deception.
If I agreed I was weary of deception,
would it necessarily mean my deception?
That depends. For instance?
Well, let's begin with plastic bicycle bombs.
The young American imported
some plastics.
- Did you know that?
- That was the first deception I had in mind.
Aesthetically, I must agree with you.
It makes as much noise. It is less expensive.
But unfortunately it will not break.
They are pretty effective
at blowing off men's legs.
Plastic noise makers?
Vigot, just for once, even unofficially,
face the truth.
Yesterday morning,
at least 50 innocent people
were blown apart by a 200-pound bomb
of Diolacton
supplied by the American to General The.
Well, if it is true, it is quite a truth.

Diolacton?
Mr. Fowler, what is Diolacton?
Well, it's an American trade name
for plastics.
It's a fictitious name.
There is no product, plastics or otherwise,
American or otherwise,
that is called Diolacton.
What difference does it make?
If this were a work of fiction
and entertainment, there would be none.
But you've applied it
to a very real, historic disaster.

Where did you hear the name?
I have seen it painted on an iron drum
discovered this afternoon,
in the junkyard of a Mr. Heng.

- Do you know him?
- No.

Oh.
He is a chief of one of the communist
assassination committees here.
He's under arrest.
What does it matter
what the plastics were called?
By any other name. The dead are dead.
All of them.

You described the bomb as being
200 pounds of,
let's call it American plastics,
somehow used as an explosive.

How?
I'm not an expert in such things.
It's a pity your French is no better
than it is, Mr. Fowler.
What's my French got to do with it?
Do you know the meaning of
the French word "plastic?"
Plastics, of course.
There's a more deadly meaning.
Plastic is a very well-known explosive.
Discovered, I believe, by the British.
It's like putty and can be shaped
into many forms.
There have been great quantities of it,
here in Indochina
since 1945, at least.
It has nothing to do with American plastic.
But I saw the press in Mr. Moi's garage.
You were sent to see the press.
It was made childishly easy for you.
Did you know that Mrs. Moi
is a relative of General The?
Did you know what Mr. Moi is?
Also under arrest.
But the guilt, Vigot.
The guilt for yesterday's mass murder.
Do you ask now about guilt?
Do you ask now about a guilt you decided
upon before the crime was committed?
And for which the sentence
has already been carried out
upon a very young man,
with, as you put it, an idea.
To whom could
the presence here of this idea
be so terrifying that it was considered
worthwhile to kill the young man
who carried it?
Because it was the idea
that had to be murdered, Mr. Fowler.
The young American merely had it
in his possession, so to say.
Haven't you gone on long enough, Vigot?
Why don't you just go away
and file it all under cases uncompleted?
My file is complete.
It is yours which is not.
- Just go away.
You know, it is a mistake to say that
communism is appealing
to the mentally advanced.
I think this is only true when the mentally advanced are also emotionally retarded. Don't you agree? So often one finds brilliant, sensitive minds inwardly tortured by unexplained fears and hatreds, who find temporary peace of mind in devoted lip service. I'm not a communist, Vigot. If you were, it would be less sad. If they thought it so necessary to assassinate him, they... They could have done it anytime. But someone was required to help assassinate the idea. Someone gifted in the use of words to, to plead the righteousness... I don't plead causes. But yet someone so emotionally involved that he would not permit even his training as a professional reporter to, to reject an obviously idiotic story. Someone so emotionally involved... Oh, you stand there repeating yourself endlessly. Even under the Inquisition, confessions came to an end. All right, mea culpa, what do you want of me? To see yourself plainly for once. Stripped of intellectual pretense. Tell me, would you have believed what you heard without question, without hesitation, if you were not terrified of losing your girl to a younger man? Could you conceivably have passed the judgment of death upon him if he had not already taken your girl? I salute your loyalty to your traditions. Vive la France. Cherchez la femme. Do not underestimate either of them.
You have been looking for the girl.
She can be found starting tonight
at Le Rendezvous,
where she will dine or dance
with you or both.
If you are willing to pay.
And this is a telegram for you.
It was in the possession of Dominguez.
Was?
Oh, set Dominguez free, Vigot. He wouldn't
hurt a fly. He's innocent and gentle...
And saintly.
Wasn't it he who rented the particular car
for you when you went to Tay Ninh?
Oh, it was Mr. Heng, by the way
who disabled the American's car
and drained your tank.
They tried to kill him then.
They were quite prepared to kill you too.
Yes, but not Dominguez
just because he hired a car.
His associates tell me it was Dominguez
who first recognized
your obsessive fear of losing the girl.
It was Dominguez who first lied to you
about plastics.
It was Dominguez who first sent you
to Mr. Heng.
Dominguez followed you
the day of the explosion.
You are right, Mr. Fowler,
I do go on endlessly.
Read your cable-gram.
I have read it.
It's a strange finish for such a story.
It may appeal to you, but for my part,
I dislike happy endings of the type one finds
in the older American films,
or the newer European ones.
More crushing to you than anything else
must be the realization
that you have simply been used.
That you could be so childishly manipulated.
Now, if you will pardon my attempt
at colloquial English, Mr. Fowler.
They have made a bloody fool of you.
Have thought over your letter
and acting irrationally as you hoped,
I've told my lawyers
start divorce proceedings.
Grounds, desertion.
Helen.
Vigot, Vigot, wait for me.
Give me lift, Vigot.
Will you take me to the Rendezvous?
Even that.
Phuong, I have something for you.
Happy New Year to us both.
I am sorry, I do not yet read English.
But, well, let me read it to you then.
It's from my wife. It came today.
It's about the divorce.
She's giving me one.
You see, I wasn't lying after all.
This came from the office.
This letter came this morning.
They say I'm to stay here.
Do you understand?
We could be married and stay here.
Excusez-moi, monsieur.
Phuong, everything we've ever wanted
is right here in my hands.
Oh, perhaps some of these people
speak English.
They'll tell you. Where's Vigot?
He'll tell you. You'll take the word
of an inspector perhaps...
What we have always wanted
is in your hands? What is that?
To be together again as we were,
to have again what we had.
What were we and what did we have?
We can't talk about such things here.
You don't know these people...
They are my friends.
Things could be different now.
It has already been different.
There was a man who
gave to me something.
- What? Canasta lessons, frozen food...
- Of himself.
I've known a man who loved me. He's dead.
Look, you can't just dismiss me like this.
Have you ever loved me?
Have you ever even lied to me
that you loved me?
Just asking you for a dance.
I have had someone want
to marry me because he loved me.
I have just told you...
That's because you are forcibly
deprived of the competition.
What are the present prices? A meal,
a bottle of flat champagne under flat fee.
Keep out of this.
What will become of you here
in a place like this,
with people like these?
Since when does the future concern you?
It was always no further away
than your next pipe.
Now, it concerns me now.
Now is too late for you.
Fowler, it's none of my business, of course.
- Quite right.
- And I don't hold with guilt by association.
You too are innocent, Wilkins.
I absolve you too.
Not from the human race you can't.
Oh, let me put it to you
as a professional item.
"The celebration of Chinese new year
was briefly interrupted last night
"in a Shaolin restaurant, by a shabbily
dressed, middle-aged, Caucasian
"who appeared suddenly on the dance floor,
unshaved, unwashed and unwanted
"and made a public nuisance of himself
by haranguing a young Vietnamese girl."
I wish someone existed
to whom I could say I was sorry.
I drive past the cathedral.