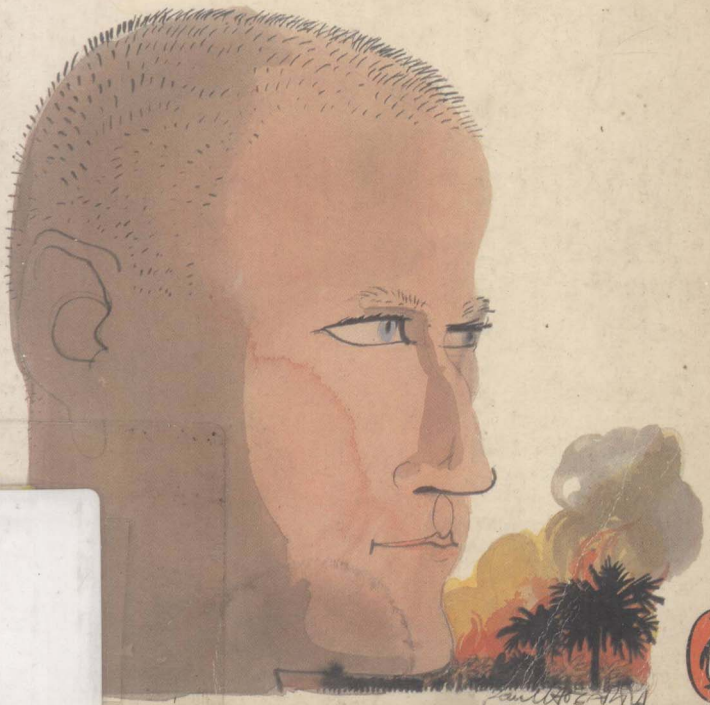
GRAHAM GREENE

THE QUIET AMERICAN



MORE ABOUT PENGUINS AND PELICANS

For further information about books available from Penguins please write to Dept EP, Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, Middlesex UB7 0DA.

In the U.S.A.: For a complete list of books available from Penguins in the United States write to Dept CS, Penguin Books, 625 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10022.

In Canada: For a complete list of books available from Penguins in Canada write to Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 2801 John Street, Markham, Ontario L3R 1B4.

In Australia: For a complete list of books available from Penguins in Australia write to the Marketing Department, Penguin Books Australia Ltd, P.O. Box 257, Ringwood, Victoria 3134.

PENGUIN BOOKS

THE QUIET AMERICAN

Graham Greene was born in 1904 and educated at Berkhamsted School, where his father was headmaster. On coming down from Balliol College, Oxford, where he published a book of verse, he worked for four years as a sub-editor on *The Times*. He established his reputation with his fourth novel, *Stamboul Train*, which he classed as an 'entertainment' in order to distinguish it from more serious work. In 1935 he made a journey across Liberia, described in *Journey Without Maps*, and on his return was appointed film critic of the *Spectator*. In 1926 he had been received into the Roman Catholic Church and was commissioned to visit Mexico in 1938 and report on the religious persecution there. As a result he wrote *The Lawless Roads* and, later, *The Power and the Glory*.

Brighton Rock was published in 1938 and in 1940 he became literary editor of the *Spectator*. The next year he undertook work for the Foreign Office and was sent out to Sierra Leone in 1941–3. One of his major post-war novels, *The Heart of the Matter*, is set in West Africa and is considered by many to be his finest book. This was followed by *The End of the Affair*, *The Quiet American*, a story set in Vietnam, *Our Man in Havana*, and *A Burnt-Out Case*. *The Comedians* and twelve other novels have been filmed, plus two of his short stories, and *The Third Man* was written as a film treatment. In 1967 he published a collection of short stories under the title: *May We Borrow Your Husband?* His most recent publications are *A Sort of Life* (1971), his autobiography, *The Honorary Consul* (1973), *Lord Rochester's Monkey* (1974), a biography, *An Impossible Woman*: *The Memories of Dottoressa Moor of Capri* (1975: edited), *The Human Factor* (1978) and *Doctor Fischer of Geneva or The Bomb Party* (1980).

In all Graham Greene has written some thirty novels, 'entertainments', plays, children's books, travel books, and collections of essays and short stories. He was made a Companion of Honour in 1966.

GRAHAM GREENE

THE QUIET AMERICAN

PENGUIN BOOKS
in association with William Heinemann Ltd

Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England
Penguin Books, 625 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10022, U.S.A.
Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia
Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 2801 John Street, Markham, Ontario, Canada L3R 1B4
Penguin Books (N.Z.) Ltd, 182–190 Wairau Road, Auckland 10, New Zealand

—

First published by William Heinemann Ltd 1955
Published in Penguin Books 1962
Reprinted 1965, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973
Reset and reprinted from the Collected Edition 1974
Reprinted 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979 (twice), 1980

—

—

Made and printed in Great Britain
by C. Nicholls & Company Ltd
Set in Linotype Times

Dear Réné and Phuong,

I have asked permission to dedicate this book to you not only in memory of the happy evenings I have spent with you in Saigon over the last five years, but also because I have quite shamelessly borrowed the location of your flat to house one of my characters, and your name, Phuong, for the convenience of readers because it is simple, beautiful and easy to pronounce, which is not true of all your countrywomen's names. You will both realize I have borrowed little else, certainly not the characters of anyone in Viet Nam. Pyle, Granger, Fowler, Vigot, Joe – these have had no originals in the life of Saigon or Hanoi, and General Thé is dead: shot in the back, so they say. Even the historical events have been in at least one case rearranged. For example, the big bomb near the Continental preceded and did not follow the bicycle bombs. I have no scruples about such small changes. This is a story and not a piece of history, and I hope that as a story about a few imaginary characters it will pass for both of you one hot Saigon evening.

Yours affectionately,

Graham Greene

'I do not like being moved: for the will is excited; and action
Is a most dangerous thing; I tremble for something factitious,
Some malpractice of heart and illegitimate process;
We're so prone to these things, with our terrible notions of duty.'

A. H. CLOUGH

'This is the patent age of new inventions
For killing bodies, and for saving souls,
All propagated with the best intentions.'

BYRON

PART ONE

Chapter 1

AFTER dinner I sat and waited for Pyle in my room over the rue Catinat; he had said, 'I'll be with you at latest by ten,' and when midnight struck I couldn't stay quiet any longer and went down into the street. A lot of old women in black trousers squatted on the landing: it was February and I suppose too hot for them in bed. One trishaw driver pedalled slowly by towards the river-front and I could see lamps burning where they had disembarked the new American planes. There was no sign of Pyle anywhere in the long street.

Of course, I told myself, he might have been detained for some reason at the American Legation, but surely in that case he would have telephoned to the restaurant – he was very meticulous about small courtesies. I turned to go indoors when I saw a girl waiting in the next doorway. I couldn't see her face, only the white silk trousers and the long flowered robe, but I knew her for all that. She had so often waited for me to come home at just this place and hour.

'Phuong,' I said – which means Phoenix, but nothing nowadays is fabulous and nothing rises from its ashes. I knew before she had time to tell me that she was waiting for Pyle too. 'He isn't here.'

'Je sais. Je t'ai vu seul à la fenêtre.'

'You may as well wait upstairs,' I said. 'He will be coming soon.'

'I can wait here.'

'Better not. The police might pick you up.'

She followed me upstairs. I thought of several ironic and unpleasant jests I might make, but neither her English nor her French would have been good enough for her to understand the irony, and, strange to say, I had no desire to hurt her or even to hurt myself. When we reached the landing all the old women turned their heads, and as soon as we had passed their voices rose and fell as though they were singing together.

'What are they talking about?'

'They think I have come home.'

Inside my room the tree I had set up weeks ago for the Chinese New Year had shed most of its yellow blossoms. They had fallen between the keys of my typewriter. I picked them out. '*Tu es troublé,*' Phuong said.

'It's unlike him. He's such a punctual man.'

I took off my tie and my shoes and lay down on the bed. Phuong lit the gas stove and began to boil the water for tea. It might have been six months ago. 'He says you are going away soon now,' she said.

'Perhaps.'

'He is very fond of you.'

'Thank him for nothing,' I said.

I saw that she was doing her hair differently, allowing it to fall black and straight over her shoulders. I remembered that Pyle had once criticized the elaborate hairdressing which she thought became the daughter of a mandarin. I shut my eyes and she was again the same as she used to be: she was the hiss of steam, the clink of a cup, she was a certain hour of the night and the promise of rest.

'He will not be long,' she said as though I needed comfort for his absence.

I wondered what they talked about together. Pyle was very earnest and I had suffered from his lectures on the Far East, which he had known for as many months as I had years. Democracy was another subject of his – he had pronounced and aggravating views on what the United States was doing for the world. Phuong on the other hand was wonderfully ignorant; if Hitler had come into the conversation she would have interrupted to ask who he was. The explanation would be all the more difficult because she had never met a German or a Pole and had only the vaguest knowledge of European geography, though about Princess Margaret of course she knew more than I. I heard her put a tray down on the end of the bed.

'Is he still in love with you, Phuong?'

To take an Annamite to bed with you is like taking a bird: they twitter and sing on your pillow. There had been a time when I thought none of their voices sang like Phuong's. I put

out my hand and touched her arm – their bones too were as fragile as a bird's.

'Is he, Phuong?'

She laughed and I heard her strike a match. 'In love?' – perhaps it was one of the phrases she didn't understand.

'May I make your pipe?' she asked.

When I opened my eyes she had lit the lamp and the tray was already prepared. The lamplight made her skin the colour of dark amber as she bent over the flame with a frown of concentration, heating the small paste of opium, twirling her needle.

'Does Pyle still not smoke?' I asked her.

'No.'

'You ought to make him or he won't come back.' It was a superstition among them that a lover who smoked would always return, even from France. A man's sexual capacity might be injured by smoking, but they would always prefer a faithful to a potent lover. Now she was kneading the little ball of hot paste on the convex margin of the bowl and I could smell the opium. There is no smell like it. Beside the bed my alarm-clock showed twelve-twenty, but already my tension was over. Pyle had diminished. The lamp lit her face as she tended the long pipe, bent over it with the serious attention she might have given to a child. I was fond of my pipe: more than two feet of straight bamboo, ivory at either end. Two-thirds of the way down was the bowl, like a convolvulus reversed, the convex margin polished and darkened by the frequent kneading of the opium. Now with a flick of the wrist she plunged the needle into the tiny cavity, released the opium and reversed the bowl over the flame, holding the pipe steady for me. The bead of opium bubbled gently and smoothly as I inhaled.

The practised inhaler can draw a whole pipe down in one breath, but I always had to take several pulls. Then I lay back, with my neck on the leather pillow, while she prepared the second pipe.

I said, 'You know, really, it's as clear as daylight. Pyle knows I smoke a few pipes before bed, and he doesn't want to disturb me. He'll be round in the morning.'

In went the needle and I took my second pipe. As I laid it down, I said, 'Nothing to worry about. Nothing to worry about at all.' I took a sip of tea and held my hand in the pit of her arm. 'When you left me,' I said, 'it was lucky I had this to fall back on. There's a good house in the rue d'Ormay. What a fuss we Europeans make about nothing. You shouldn't live with a man who doesn't smoke, Phuong.'

'But he's going to marry me,' she said. 'Soon now.'

'Of course, that's another matter.'

'Shall I make your pipe again?'

'Yes.'

I wondered whether she would consent to sleep with me that night if Pyle never came, but I knew that when I had smoked four pipes I would no longer want her. Of course it would be agreeable to feel her thigh beside me in the bed – she always slept on her back, and when I woke in the morning I could start the day with a pipe, instead of with my own company. 'Pyle won't come now,' I said. 'Stay here, Phuong.' She held the pipe out to me and shook her head. By the time I had drawn the opium in, her presence or absence mattered very little.

'Why is Pyle not here?' she asked.

'How do I know?' I said.

'Did he go to see General Thé?'

'I wouldn't know.'

'He told me if he could not have dinner with you, he wouldn't come here.'

'Don't worry. He'll come. Make me another pipe.' When she bent over the flame the poem of Baudelaire's came into my mind: '*Mon enfant, ma soeur . . .*' How did it go on?

Aimer à loisir,
Aimer et mourir
Au pays qui te ressemble.

Out on the waterfront slept the ships, '*dont l'humeur est vagabonde*'. I thought that if I smelt her skin it would have the faintest fragrance of opium, and her colour was that of the small flame. I had seen the flowers on her dress beside the canals in the north, she was indigenous like a herb, and I never wanted to go home.

'I wish I were Pyle,' I said aloud, but the pain was limited and bearable – the opium saw to that. Somebody knocked on the door.

'Pyle,' she said.

'No. It's not his knock.'

Somebody knocked again impatiently. She got quickly up, shaking the yellow tree so that it showered its petals again over my typewriter. The door opened. 'Monsieur Fowlair,' a voice commanded.

'I'm Fowler,' I said. I was not going to get up for a policeman – I could see his khaki shorts without lifting my head.

He explained in almost unintelligible Vietnamese French that I was needed immediately – at once – rapidly – at the Sureté.

'At the French Sureté or the Vietnamese?'

'The French.' In his mouth the word sounded like '*Françung*'.

'What about?'

He didn't know: it was his orders to fetch me.

'*Toi aussi,*' he said to Phuong.

'Say *vous* when you speak to a lady,' I told him. 'How did you know she was here?'

He only repeated that they were his orders.

'I'll come in the morning.'

'*Sur ie chung,*' he said, a little, neat, obstinate figure. There wasn't any point in arguing, so I got up and put on my tie and shoes. Here the police had the last word: they could withdraw my order of circulation: they could have me barred from Press Conferences: they could even, if they chose, refuse me an exit permit. These were the open legal methods, but legality was not essential in a country at war. I knew a man who had suddenly and inexplicably lost his cook – he had traced him to the Vietnamese Sureté, but the officers there assured him that he had been released after questioning. His family never saw him again. Perhaps he had joined the Communists; perhaps he had been enlisted in one of the private armies which flourished round Saigon – the Hoa-Haos or the Caodaists or General Thé. Perhaps he was in a French prison. Perhaps he was happily making money out of girls in Cholon,