



Inheritance

A novel of a different America

GOLFE DU MEXIQUE

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Echelle balnéométrique

INHERITANCE

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**Translated from the original
French (La Concession) by the
author**

**This is a novel of parallel history,
in a universe where America is
French. The style tries to convey
some sense of that world, in
which English is a relatively
secondary language.**

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NOBODY REMEMBERS

Pierre Henri Lemoyne, lieutenant-de-vaisseau commanding the submarine *Restigouche*, searched uncertainly through the dawn filtering without enthusiasm from the shutters. Barely illuminated, the door of the bathroom was nevertheless proudly and joyously decorated by navy blue trousers with the silver stripe of the headquarters staff, by a bra which was certainly not of military origin and by a belt whose severe cut made a startling contrast with the lacy pants perched like a butterfly on the holster. For an instant, lieutenant-de-vaisseau Lemoyne examined ponderously the trousers on the door. "Helm to port," he murmured, "Sailor, you are not in regulation uniform." He stopped, closed his eyes, opened them, and shook his head. Methodically, the lieutenant-de-vaisseau undertook an inventory of the room; was he not supposed to be specialized in intelligence gathering? The expensive carpet of a burnt gold revealed: two masculine dark socks; a champagne glass mourning *La Veuve Clicquot*; a small national flag, blue crossed with white; also, one very feminine stocking languishing on bottle green trousers, striped black; another champagne glass; and another champagne glass; finally, an

opulent couch. On the couch, Lemoyne recognized the very feminine thighs, the curvaceous back, and finally the head of Céline Dandurand, the Chief Stenographer at the Assignment Office, Headquarters, Naval Base of St-Jacques-de-Californie. An other head, belonging to lieutenant Jean-Jacques de Lauzon, rested on the shoulder of Céline Dandurand. The hairy legs on lieutenant de Lauzon provoked an uncertain smile on Lemoyne's face. This small shock awakened Lemoyne for good; he realized that his own head occupied a pleasant pillow, from which he could now see, as more light pressed into the room, the small balcony that hung from their suite in the Breton Inn of Tlanoloc. There floated a submariner's jacket, that of a lieutenant, and certainly serving on the Restigouche. On a sky-blue jacket, Lemoyne also recognized the mirror of Venus on an open red hand, ringed with the letters SAF-MRAS, the feminine auxiliaries of the Navy of the République d'Amérique Septentrionale. Yesterday's croque-miche were agonizing on the table, feeble in chicken, drying in tuna, and absent in ham. Lemoyne liked ham croque-miche, a taste acquired by nibbling those in his father's office. "Eh well, Pierrot," would laugh his father, "this sacré Sandquiche (or was it lliouiche?)! These English! Not much good at building or soldiering, but they invent some of life's small pleasures." Lemoyne's pillow shuddered, whispered and

transformed itself into a young woman. The former pillow whispered: "Do I have a pain in the head!" and then, "What time is it?" This magic formula completed the transformation of the pillow into a long-haired brunette who stretched and jumped for the bathroom, dragging with her the coverlet, which made her look like an escapee from a Louis XV ceiling. The bed emitted a polite squeak. The bedside telephone interjected a discreet melody. Lieutenant-de-vaissseau Pierre Henri Lemoyne recovered his sense of reality. In the telephone, a discreet voice said "Seven o'clock, Sir, good morning, Sir." "Thank you," answered Lemoyne, "do not forget breakfast for four."

"And coffee, lots of coffee," added Céline Dandurand, rising in turn.

"Well, Pierre," said the sleepy voice of lieutenant de Lauzon, "we certainly followed the admiral's orders!"

The rear-admiral had said "We will discuss it after the holiday. Go celebrate appropriately the Centennial of Independence." Lemoyne, de Lauzon, Céline Dandurand and Nicole Thurax had celebrated. Long live the Republic! Long live the Nation! The survivors of the celebration took slowly position around the table as it was progressively covered with sweetbreads, croissants, and various fruits.

"I will sit in front of the balcony," said Nicole, "the air will do me good. Why did we have to drink so

much? You know, at the bottom of all this, August Fourth, one thousand nine hundred seventy six, is beautiful and good, but is it not window-dressing? After all, we have done what we like since Louis XVI."

"How can you say such a thing!" Céline was scandalized. "We earned our independence by our efforts and it is necessary to be proud of our accomplishments."

"Nicole is partly right," intervened de Lauzon. "The Bonapartes liked to mention us in their bulletins, but we were their allies more than their subjects."

Lemoyne sat down heavily facing Nicole. "At any rate, we are right in thinking that the date is rather suspect," he said a little pompously. "Yesterday was also the three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the death of Henri IV."

"I didn't know that!" wondered Céline. "But what importance in the death of an old king?"

"It is probably thanks to him that America is French. Would Richelieu have sent his great fleet if Henri had not insisted on sending to America colonists and soldiers and everything. King Henri is the father of the Republic."

"Curious fate for a king," said Nicole. "Are you named after king Henri?" "Not exactly," said gloomily Lemoyne, "my father was named Raoul Henri, but he held the name from his maternal grandfather."

At this reminder, the four friends stopped speaking

and turned their attention to buttering their croissant or chewing on their hard-boiled egg. Lemoyne drank his coffee. Nicole looked at Céline, then at Pierre. "Your father was Lord Administrator of the Chutes du Saguenay?"

"No," sighed Lemoyne, "of the Entreprises Hydrauliques des Affluents de la Rive Nord."

"Oh," exclaimed Céline, dropping jam on her culotte, "that is even bigger. At least I didn't besmirch my uniform. But then, in the Conseil des Seigneurs, you are his principal heir?"

"The Senate, the Senate," corrected de Lauzon, "since 1956. Pierre would normally receive from the Senate his father's mandate. Is that it?"

"Just about," said Lemoyne. "But this fief has been in my family for thirty years. We produce a quarter of the electricity for the regions of the Capital and of the Gulf. The Senate could entertain a proposition from another family. But if I become Lord Administrator of the EHARN, I will have to say farewell to the submarine Restigouche."

"What will the Navy do if you resign?", asked Céline.

"I would rather know what Pierre will do," said Nicole. "This is because of the Decrets de Marly?"

"Yes," said Lemoyne, "or ultimately the interpretations and judgements since the decrees." He raised his head and turned toward Céline, smiling. "The Restigouche belongs to a class of submarines specially conceived to penetrate into

some difficult places in the search for information. The first was named the Gaspé. The Navy always has in reserve good officers to command them".

"They work in secret," added de Lauzon, winking at Nicole.

"And, we are going to miss the train for Port-des-Anges if we try to explain," concluded Lemoyne, pushing away his half-full cup.

"The Admiral is expecting you," said the aide-de-camp in the anteroom; it was nine hours two, Monday, August Seventh, one thousand nine hundred seventy six.

"So, Lemoyne," said Admiral Jussieu-Desroches showing an armchair to his subordinate, "you enjoyed the Centennial?"

"Yes, Sir," answered Lemoyne, but despite my attempts at loose living, I didn't completely forget my dilemma." "I understand perfectly." The admiral nodded slowly. "In a word, you have to choose between the pursuit of your family interests and that of a career which promises well."

The admiral cut short any beginning of protestation.

"You certainly are one of our best submarine commanders and probably the best intelligence officer in California. Your ship is efficient. The Germanics suspect who is behind the accident that befell their famous false tanker two years ago."

Lemoyne also smiled at this pleasant memory, then

scowled as he recalled that he must likely abandon his adventurous life. The admiral considered the Chinese painting, sole decoration on the wall facing his work-table, as if he had been suddenly seized with doubts as to its authenticity.

"But finally, Lemoyne," he almost exploded, "how could you put yourself in such a bind? Did you not know that your father would someday die? You know, even the Lemoyne are not eternal! You have two sisters. Who was going to succeed your father?"

Lemoyne had a vague gesture, which he did not correct by attempting an even vaguer one. "Perhaps I hoped that one of my cousins would take over, without the Senate causing too much difficulty. Anyway, I might as well do something, rather than just wait."

"For your father to die?" interjected the admiral.

"No, no, The possibility of his death didn't exist for me. Small, I let myself be spoiled and I obeyed. But later, I looked for more independence. I did not want to be my father's shadow. I did not want to spend my life trying on his suits and redecorating his office in my mind. I wanted to be active, as if I depended only on myself, as if I didn't have a fortune, as if I was the first Lemoyne instead of the last. I wanted to see what I could have achieved if I was called Bellefeuille or Dupont."

"So," said the admiral with a slightly sardonic smile, "you became an officer in the Navy, like all

your forebears since d'Iberville. You did a training period on the aircraft carrier Iberville, without tickling your sense of irony."

"But I rose to the challenge I had set myself!"

"Certainly, but that is not the question. In so doing, you demonstrated the typical traits of your family, by activities traditional with them. You cannot so easily escape your roots."

The admiral stayed pensive for a moment. "Do you know the beginning of my career?" he asked.

"Yes, Sir, you were appointed to command the landing forces, during the intervention in China in 1952. You were the youngest officer eligible for such a high command. The partisans of one of the Chinese governments tried to blow you up with a rocket attack."

"Yes, and I confess that I acquired much bitterness from it. But in Port-Aux-Anges, Gouvernement de la Haute-Californie, the proponents of murdering admirals are very rare, except perhaps among the younger officers."

"I know the story, said Lemoyne. "At the time, many asked why we absolutely had to support one clique of generals, with its trollops, its agents, its guerrillas, pretending that they were the legitimate government of China."

"Any of these things served as the basis of their legitimacy", said the admiral, "and three quarters of China is today free of Japanese occupation." "The Japanese support of the government in Nanking

probably also weighed in the balance." "This is an old sterile debate. We speak of me, because it allows us indirectly to speak of you. You know probably also that my father was in the Navy, hero of the Battle of the Sea of Ireland."

"We all learn that at the academy in Rimouski," said Lemoyne.

"Everyone doesn't learn at the Naval School that I did not want to be a Navy officer," retorted admiral Jussieu-Desroches. "I wanted to be a mathematician. My father and I agreed that I would go to Rimouski, but that I would do a speciality in mathematics. After an honourable training period on a cruiser, I would quit the Navy for a university. I learned Chinese, and did a thesis on landings to obtain my degree." The admiral leaned forward. "Lemoyne, do you think that the Minister would have come for me on that cruiser if I had been called Dupont?"

Lemoyne shook his head. "I prefer not trying to answer. The question is too philosophical or too personal."

In a low voice and hardly moving his lips, admiral Jussieu-Desroches outlined his program. "First, you will give me your resignation, which I will put with precaution in a drawer. Second, I will give you, as usual, an undated general mission order. Finally, I am giving you a special six-month leave-of-absence. In six months, you will have time to verify your options and better understand your situation. If

you return to us, you will have been on leave and the letter of resignation will never have existed." The admiral watched briefly the roadstead which lay under his windows. "One thinks better at sea," he added. "Thank you," said simply lieutenant-de-vaisseau Lemoyne. He rose slowly and saluted. The admiral hesitated an instant, then offered him his hand.

Lemoyne returned slowly to his quarters. Among the sleeping vessels of the docks, he saw the basin reserved for submarines. He didn't see the *Restigouche*, but he knew that it was there, right behind the maintenance shops. In a few days, it would be ready to take the sea. Lemoyne sighed. He had not yet finished his last mission report. Among the mail which waited for him on his work-table, there was a heavy grey envelope from the Senate of the Republic and an other, yellow, from Me Jérôme Anctil, notary of the port of Mobile, Gouvernement de la Basse-Louisiane.

OTHERS PLAN

Senator Jean-Denis Dubuc represented the Gouvernement of Texicanie. Previously, when the Senate was called the Conseil des Seigneurs, and each Seigneur was a member by right, such a man as Jean-Denis Dubuc would not have been found there. When later two names were drawn by lot among the seigneurs of a Gouvernement to represent it, the name of Jean-Denis Dubuc would not have been found in the urn. But in 1956 the Radical Republican Taschereau-Duplessis ministry had pushed through a reform, supported by the vast majority of the Assembly of Representatives, turning the Conseil into the Senate, in which every Gouvernement would elect two senators (for a total of a hundred and twelve). Since then Jean-Denis Dubuc, Representative faithfully elected by the city of Corpus Christi, had held the gleaming key to this improved confraternity who managed the social and economic structure of America. He had begun as the humble emissary of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers to the Sieur de Lanaudière, designated by fate, in 1951, to sit in the Conseil. The Sieur de Lanaudière was not an unpleasant man. He was driven by no great ambition, except to do good and

avoid evil. He was the promoter of no great project. Especially, he was the defender of no particular philosophy: seigneurialism (hardly a doctrine) seemed to him normal; he understood the social-feudalism which it had generated; he would have not persecuted the supporters of capitalism (even if they were mostly English or Virginien); he smiled when he read the works of anarchists; he respected the vast erudition shown by some materialist dialecticians. Of course, the anarchists, the materialist dialecticians, the capitalists especially, frequented hardly presentable people: craftsmen, owners of small factories, peasant-proprietors or even chairmen of labour unions. The Sieur de Lanaudière liked his friend Jean-Denis Dubuc, who had excellent manners, but could still speak to those people.

The Sieur De Lanaudière had however one weakness: he liked his seat in the Conseil, even if henceforth he would be Senator! When you thought about it, "Senator" had a classic, Roman, ring to it, and it pleased the former pupil of the Récollets. He didn't always understand the issues debated in the Conseil but, when in doubt, he trusted his conscience and the good advice of the ministers, his friends. Being a senator, under the new dispensation of 1956, meant undergoing the torture of an election and the Sieur de Lanaudière disliked confrontation. No problem, had said Jean-Denis Dubuc, in the luxurious library of Lanaudière manor, near Corpus

Christi, we need two senators; you will be one and I will be the other. Jean-Denis Dubuc had been a Representative since 1942 and knew the delicate art of electioneering. The Sieur de Lanaudière found himself a senator, just like Jean-Denis Dubuc. Henceforth, Senator de Lanaudière confided in his friend and colleague, and recommended him to his cousins and in-laws, and to his friends, the ministers. Jean-Denis Dubuc and his friend were re-elected senators in 1963 and in 1970. In April 1977, they might again be chosen by the citizens of the Gouvernement of Texicanie. But Senator de Lanaudière was getting old and the pleasure of being a senator had lessened. Senator Jean-Denis Dubuc, was willing to continue for a bit, for he was not like the Sieur de Lanaudière, who had no ambition.

Another ambitious one was savouring the buffet prepared in the library. James Philip Wadsterston (Call me Philippe, he said to his workers) was a former citizen of the Dominion of Virginia who had emigrated from his native land, and now made huge profits, from a flourishing enterprise that manufactured motors, both steam and Diesel oil. M. Philippe, either because of his origin as a Virginian, or because of his condition of owner rather than seigneur, didn't hide a certain leaning toward capitalism.

Jean-Denis Dubuc and Mr. Wadsterston were not the only guests in the very comfortable library of

Lanaudière manor. Besides their host, the group included general (retired) Dieudonné de St-Lambert, Richard de St-Lambert, the son of general, and Reynald, the grandson of the Sieur de Lanaudière. General de St-Lambert also knew "M. Philippe". After having commanded with distinction a brigade of automotive artillery in China, he had sat with assiduity and intelligence on the Committee created by the Ministry of War to choose a system of propulsion which would give to automotive vehicles real efficiency in combat. The general had met M. Wadsterton, among the other manufacturers of motors. M. Wadsterton had amiably invited the general to dinner. The general had accepted. M. Wadsterton had offered gallantly a coat of silver fox to Madame de St-Lambert. The general had refused. The general didn't understand M. Wadsterton's clumsy maneuverings; while the steam motors made by M. Wadsterton were mediocre at best, his diesel motors were well conceived. The general saw the possibilities of diesel motors for a combat vehicle, partly because such a vehicle would be easy to camouflage. The general had been astonished to see M. Wadsterton at the Sieur de Lanaudière's home, and by the apparent intimacy between Senator Dubuc, a doubtful politician but presumably patriotic, and the manufacturer of motors. If general de St-Lambert had not left at once, it was because he had come in the hope of dissipating once and for all his biggest concern. His son Richard had not

passed admission to the Military College of Carillon. He had failed miserably at Laval University, in history, in letters, and in administration. Neither commercial studies, nor engineering had been possible for him. He had tried a new, experimental discipline, econometrics, for another disaster. Since he was agreeable and gentle and liked by women, he had at least given the general the joy of being a grandfather. But this joy was tempered by an additional worry: what would happen to his grand-children when he died? The general was close to despair when he received the invitation to this meeting at the de Lanaudière manor.

"Your grandson," said Senator Dubuc, "will not want to abandon the fertile and joyful earth of your plantations, the sweetmeats of your manor and his agreeable way of life."

"This is true," nodded slowly the Sieur de Lanaudière.

"The question, therefore," continued Dubuc, "remains that of the future of your family. Are you satisfied with your concessions of oilfields and refineries? Have you considered giving back to your family its place of a century ago?"

The Sieur de Lanaudière and his grandson tried to speak at the same time. Since they were both well-mannered, it was the eldest who took the floor.

"What matters most would be the certainty that my family could continue to occupy with dignity its

position in society. Our present concessions do give us this guarantee. Would it be wise to risk the future to raise ourselves just a little higher in the esteem of our peers? Who embraces too widely badly holds," he concludes as if he had just invented the saying.

"The deer at rest is devoured," threw out, a little drily, his grandson. "The military importance of petroleum is undeniable, true, but this importance renders difficult an increase of production. The Ministry of War, like the Navy, are already thinking of asking the Senate the control of this resource."

"You make me sad," said slowly the Sieur De Lanaudière to his grandson, "in speaking like one of these vulgar capitalists." At these words, M. Wadsterton intervened, squeaking his chair.

"However, wealth is a tool...." A look from Senator Dubuc made him shut up. He reseated himself with dignity in his chair, like a cat ruffled by a bad dream.

"In a world with so many uncertainties," purred in a soothing voice Dubuc, "it is often necessary for the preservation of what we hold dear to undertake projects which will allow to forestall the tricks of fate." General de St-Lambert looked briefly at M. Wadsterton. "You understand me, general," smiled Dubuc. The general understood very well.

"You intend to take the EHARN from Lemoyne," he stated a little too brutally, as if to relieve himself. M. Wadsterton looked at the general, pretending to yawn. Reynald de Lanaudière crossed his arms and

strenuously nodded yes. Senator Dubuc, looked warily like a hunter who has fired a little too quickly and who wonders if he has made a hit. The Sieur de Lanaudière protested: no one wanted a quarrel with Lemoyne! "Our families were often opposed in the past, since the time when Armand de Lanaudière wanted to attack Vera Cruz from the interior. He died because Admiral Lemoyne believed he could do better with his fleet. The duel resolved that question in 1837. Now, dignity recommends we behave correctly, excluding low tricks."

"So this is why you forbade my cousin from seeing Pierre Henri?" said nonchalantly Reynald.

"I admit," continued the Sieur Of Lanaudière without reacting to the comment from his grandson, "that the law does not grant any advantage to those who hold a concession over a long period, nor does it foresee any hereditary character. But custom, tradition and a certain respect for the old families has always favoured the transmission of a concession to a legal heir. The State reaps an advantage, for normally a family concession is most efficient in managing the national wealth."

"This is just prejudice," cut in less politely than usual his grandson. "An individual learns methods and invents them. With careful study and enough experience, anybody can manage well. Anyway, do we not have helpers, graduates of schools of administration and of commerce, as well as jurists

to look after daily affairs and advise us? If the Lemoyne had succeeded in obtaining the petroleum of the Arthabaska, they would have recruited the managers which they needed."

"But that's it," the Sieur de Lanaudière was somewhat excited. "There are not only daily decisions, like you said. The wisdom of a large concern comes from a long term vision, from a culture which places every technical decision in the context of society and the State. How many certified administrators are only mercenaries, without attachment for a tradition or the nation, interested only by their own advancement or their own fortune? Who but us would keep them from squandering long term resources for short term advantages?"

"The English and the Virginiens," underlined Reynald de Lanaudière as he looked at the others, "let those who dispose of funds regroup and confide the administration of their concerns to a paid manager. For the past fifty years, their businesses prosper, their production increases and their employees have pocket money."

"And ours do not?" almost interrupted his grandfather. "And how do they live? In squalid hutches, with a rotten atmosphere, where their children drink the water infested by the uncontrolled wastage that spits from their factories. The Virginiens earn only a temporary reprieve and their sons look for shelter among us!"

M. Wadsterton coughed as if he had swallowed a puff of the infernal smoke evoked by his host. Senator Dubuc took advantage of the silence which followed the outburst to make gestures of pacification, smiling and shrugging.

"Nobody," he bowed slightly, "proposes we imitate the Virginians, the English, or the Russians. Simply, we think that the son of Raoul Henri Lemoyne will not want the concession of his father. He may not neglect submitting a request to the Senate, but he will not pursue it vigorously. With an energetic presentation, we could obtain the EHARN for Reynald de Lanaudière."

"Without too much opposition from the Lemoyne?" asked quietly the Sieur de Lanaudière. Senator Dubuc contemplated for an instant the splendid panelling of the library. "No. Lemoyne son does not wish to follow his father."

"But then, it will be necessary to give up the concession of the oilfields of Texas and Monterrey? Since the Senate did not want to let Lemoyne keep both the EHARN and the petroleum of the Arthabaska, it will not either accept that we hold two concessions?"

Senator Dubuc rose. "It would be possible to give them to someone who would be very near the de Lanaudière family," he said as if thinking out loud.

"Who? I don't see....," the Sieur De Lanaudière was perplexed.

Dubuc stopped near Richard de St-Lambert and put

his hand on his shoulder. Richard de St-Lambert tried to smile proudly, but strangled by emotion, he gave an excellent imitation of someone who has just swallowed a peach pit. His father let out a long sigh, but said nothing. M. Philippe rubbed his mouth strenuously with the back of his hand; his chair squeaked once again. For the first time, the Sieur de Lanaudière doubted his friend and colleague.

"With all due respect to the general," he pronounced slowly, "I am not sure that Richard is exactly the person indicated to administer the resources that the Republic entrusted to me. I do not doubt his moral and personal qualities, but his training and his experience....." He hesitated, stumbling on the choice of a reasonable expression. "At least," he added for the benefit of Jean-Denis Dubuc, "this young man is not bound to my family, except by an imprecise cousin-ship."

"We would strike a powerful blow," explained Senator Dubuc on a tone of confidence. "The de Lanaudière cannot hold two concessions, but alliances are not forbidden. If someone of an other family holds a concession but seeks to collaborate regularly with yours, there is no problem. Your power to do good – or evil – will be increased. You know than this kind of understanding has been done before. The majority of the aircraft makers are held by three cousins and a brother-in-law. Three of the biggest flour mills are conceded to two brothers and a brother-in-law. Why not do the same for the

EHARN and the oilfields of Texicanie?"

The Sieur de Lanaudière closed his eyes for a moment before reacting. "But... are you suggesting.... my granddaughter.... General?" General de St-Lambert rose and, bowing to the master of the house and to the destiny of his only child and his grand-children, pronounced the ceremonial words. "Sieur de Lanaudière, I have the honour of asking you, in the name of my son Richard, the hand of your granddaughter Diane-Aimée Du Plessis. I give my word that he will love her, protect her and uphold her honour." The general sat down, without laughing. The Sieur de Lanaudière remained speechless.

Happily, Jean-Denis Dubuc never let a situation escape his control. "You see the advantages. You guarantee the future of your descendants, while finding in the person of Reynald a way of upholding your rank. You link your name to that of St-Lambert, to the greater honour of the two families. And also," he finished on a more intimate and prosaic note, "your grand-daughter won't suffer with such a husband." The general repressed with difficulty another sigh.

The Sieur de Lanaudière was not listening to senator Dubuc. He mildly rubbed his left ear with the index of his right hand. "This is a lot for one afternoon," he said finally. "If the parents of Diane-Aimée had not died." Then, straightening slowly, he continued. "But, since we are being frank, let us put

everything clearly. You all need my collaboration for your projects, even that foreign Monsieur over there who has said little. It is certain that the St-Lambert family is worthy of us; at least the children do not question our traditions. I do not doubt that the EHARN would be a beautiful jewel for the family. But also " - he raised his head and looked straight at his grandson - "the prestige of a seat in the Senate has to be preserved for a family who possesses one."

"You want me to seek election to your seat in the Senate!" exclaimed Reynald De Lanaudière. "But I not want a political career! The administration of our concessions will occupy all my time, without even speaking of the EHARN!"

"Our friend Dubuc will see to the politics," answered the Sieur de Lanaudière. "I will wager Tricorne, my grey, on your chances. Being a senator, for a de Lanaudière, is not exactly politics, as you said. Serving the State has always been the natural work of those of our rank. We are the ones who occupied North America, who reduced the English holdings to the sole Virginia, who transformed New Spain, who re-established the balance of power in Europe and who will preserve that of the world. Were you not the one telling me that daily management could be entrusted to specialists?"

"Paid managers," whispered Reynald de Lanaudière, looking desperately at Senator Dubuc. Dubuc was thinking fast. He needed a second

senator, and the young de Lanaudière would reap the prestige of his grandfather. But the position, once taken, could not be offered later to a future collaborator. But then, nothing was guaranteed in politics. Another candidate could not be elected with certainty. Several ambitious "reformers" already waited impatiently for the Sieur de Lanaudière's announcement of his retirement.

Anyway, this was the simplest solution and, the most elegant, to the problem created by the retirement of the Sieur de Lanaudière.

Out loud, Senator Dubuc said deliberately: "There, Sieur De Lanaudière, you show the depth of your wisdom. To the advantage of our project, we must seek the prestige of service to the State. You won't be surprised if I tell you that I intend to seek election again. It would be very pleasant for me to have at my side the grandson of the one who did me the honour of supporting me during so many years." Turning toward Reynald De Lanaudière he added: "Your grandfather sees far and understands that it will be a pleasure for me to offer you my help and my advice."

"But...." interjected Reynald De Lanaudière, paler and paler. Finally, he said "I accept" in a dry voice, trying not too look like someone to whom it has been proposed to eat something disgusting. Dubuc shook his hand.

"Then, I also accept," said mildly the Sieur De Lanaudière. He raised his hand; the time had passed

for politics, for business or for family pride. The general de St-Lambert nodded slightly. "I propose a toast," Senator Dubuc had recovered, "to our triple happiness, a new concession, a new senator and a new couple." The Sieur de Lanaudière slowly raised his glass, looking him in the eye. The general drank gravely, his son politely. Reynald de Lanaudière swallowed a healthy swig. M. Philippe touched lightly his glass to his lips. M. Philippe never drank much.

LEMOYNE SATISFIES HIS CURIOSITY

The train attendant brought Lemoyne another mint-flavoured lemonade. "It gets hot on the shores of the Mississippi," he said, sliding aside the compartment table. Lemoyne put aside the heavy document he was reading for the third time and sighed slightly. "I have been stationed in St Jacques for almost five years, he answered, but I always regret the winters of Sept-Iles." The attendant looked up suddenly. "I spent a winter on the Alaska border during my military service, and I still have nightmares. We bought vodka from the Russian soldiers to help us support the winter."

"On the other hand, winter is something we share with the Russians, our best friends, after the French, of course. We are Northerners and this is why we love liberty."

"I understand, Monsieur. We are the two biggest republics in the world. But, for my part, I asked the National Railroads to not assign me north of Iroquoisie." The attendant accepted his tip – almost a louis.

"How long before Mobile?" asked Lemoyne. "In

three or four hours, Monsieur," answered promptly the attendant before leaving the compartment. Lemoyne took up the Senate document. The Senate of the République d'Amérique Septentrionale, defender of sovereignty and of security, to the citizen Pierre Henri Lemoyne, son of Raoul Henri Lemoyne, former Seigneur-administrateur des Entreprises Hydrauliques des Affluents de la Rive Nord, sends greetings! Given that, by the decision of 14 March 1928, the Entreprises Hydrauliques des Affluents de la Rive Nord were conceded to Joseph-Baptiste-Julien Lemoyne. Given that the said concession was confirmed and enlarged with Blanc-Sablon in the north to Tadoussac in the south by the judgement of 25 May 1937. Given that the enlarged concession was completely remanded to the Sieur Raoul Henri Lemoyne, son of Joseph-Baptiste-Julien Lemoyne, by the judgement of 13 October 1952. Given that the former Raoul Henri Lemoyne died on the fourth of February 1976. Given that the citizen Pierre Henri Lemoyne is the only son and therefore first male heir of former Raoul Henri Lemoyne. The Senate, by the decree CSAP 1267 of 12 April 1976, advises the citizen Pierre Henri Lemoyne that the concession of the Entreprises Hydrauliques des Affluents de la Rive Nord will be granted on the 12 October 1976. The citizen Pierre Henri Lemoyne must be present on the said date, to signify to the Senate his intent to claim the said concession.

According to the law of 23 May 1964, every citizen intending to claim the concession of a seigneurie must, by the date set by the Senate, present his request according to the formula prescribed by article 123, paragraph (h) of the aforesaid law, itemizing the qualities which justify his designation to the title of franchisee. The formula must be accompanied by a letter of irrevocable credit for a sum of ten percent of the evaluation of the seigneurie. The candidate must be present in person at the Senate audience. His absence will be considered by the Senate, according to the decree FL 13567, confirmed by the judgement of 25 March 1923, as a withdrawal. The candidate has the right, according to the decree FL 14688, confirmed by the judgement of 25 January 1934, to be accompanied by a legal counsellor, chosen by himself.

Lemoyne put the letter on the seat and turned the first page of the formula mentioned in the letter. It asked the usual questions: name, given names, Gouvernement of birth, Gouvernement of residence, given name of the father, name of the mother, names and given names of the grand-parents, Gouvernements of birth of the parents and grand-parents, religion – four choices offered, Catholic, Reformed, Jewish and Other – occupation, education – diplomas in chronological order – and military service. Military service took up a lot of space on the formula. Military service was not only the first duty of every citizen and the sign of a

member of American society, but also represented the ultimate test of the qualities of an individual: courage, of course, but also initiative, energy, inventiveness and self-discipline were confirmed and developed. Women had earned the right to vote in 1923, partly because they had shown that they could accomplish several military functions, other than service at the front, during the Three Emperors War. Since New France, women had always worked with the same energy as their men for the construction of a society in America.

Lemoyne was reminded of conversations with his old professor of history in the college of Longueuil. Our society, he would say, hesitates between two poles. Europe, especially France, or the Empire, had provided the major share of our civilization. We have our language, our laws, our dominant religions (Catholic and Reformed) and the essential elements of our world-view. But – the professor would then pull on his pipe – the new continent provided also a strong influence. The climate, or rather the climates, had pushed the first Americans, or Canadiens as they said three hundred years ago, into inventing new forms of society and new cultural forms. The continent also offered a liberty unknown in Europe. This is why the seigneurial tenure had thrived, for it permitted a flexibility of organization and the necessary adaptation to the New World. This form had been swept away by the Revolution in France, in 1776, for the yoke of old

habits could not otherwise have been replaced. In America, the attachment to personal relationships and to the human scale, such as that expressed in the famous letters of Crèvecoeur, had given its value to the seigneurial system. Nobody could escape the determinism of history.

Lemoyne smiled in recalling the solemn airs of the old professor, Lionel Groulx, surrounded by his loud brood and hardly respectful of their father's reputation. The position of women in American society had evolved between these two poles. The mother represented the American pole. These Huronnes, these Micmacs, these Séminoles, these proud Agnières who had borne the children of the soldiers, the hunters, the explorers and the sailors, had bound completely the people of North America to their continent. Despite the courage of American mothers – like Madame de La Peltrie commanding the family fort in the absence of her husband – women represented the indigenous side, the uncontrolled side of the national character. In reducing the political role of the woman, they had limited unknowingly the impact of the unconscious. Lemoyne shook off his daydreaming and returned to the study of the document. The Senate needed to know the details of the candidate's career. It was interested naturally in commercial and financial transactions, but also in voluntary work, in publications and to membership in boards of all kinds. The formula also required the names of

persons ready to stand surety for the candidate. The questions were somewhat different for an heir. They were particularly tough when a concession had been mismanaged. Lemoyne remembered a great-uncle, Gervais Villeneuve, who had been accused of deceiving both his employees and the Ministry of Taxes and Ordinary Revenues. He had had many a painful moment in answering all the questions put to him by the examining magistrate. Annex A represented by itself half the mass of paper. This annex was used to calculate in detail the financial situation of the seigneurie in question. It was necessary to indicate all the expenses and all revenues, to verify with a notary the value of all properties and possessions and to calculate with a complicated formula, the bonds, good, credits and other servitudes on the properties, so as to finally establish a net value. This amount served as the basis for making the official evaluation. Lemoyne knew from his father that these subtle calculations rested on legal traditions several centuries old. Of course, the difference between two calculations depended sometimes on the interpretations that could devise a good notary.

The assistant-conductor pulled Lemoyne from his reading and his dreaming. "Mobile, gentlemen, ladies, Mobile in thirty minutes." Lemoyne noticed that the train was indeed slowing down. He stretched, reordered his clothes and rang for the attendant. While that person gathered the luggage,

Lemoyne reassembled his documents, carefully placing them in his briefcase of supple leather. He consulted his agenda: Me Anctil, August 10, at 16 o'clock, at 12, Bienville Street, Mobile, Basse Louisiane. The train crossed a suburb of Mobile, neat and tidy and vaguely Spanish. Since several generations, some descendants of Spanish colonists, or of hispanicized Indians, had quietly filled the ranks of the specialist tasks in this harbour, both commercial and military. Now, their sons occupied managerial positions or owned their own businesses. That's America, thought Lemoyne proudly, contemplating the pleasant scene. At the train station, he had another vision of America. The harbour resembled the decor of an opera by Vigneault, with derricks raising their plaintive arms to the heavens, and huge piles of packaging like jellyfishes caught in a whirlwind. The outskirts of the harbour with their neighbouring factories were less appetizing than those of Port-des-Anges or even the well-tended districts for workmen of Mobile itself. The buildings seemed covered in verdigris. The streets, badly paved, spat from time to time some formless garbage. The workmen in the streets did not seem unhappy, however. They walked in small groups toward their homes or to a bar, laughing and slapping each other on the back, like the original Americans that they seemed to be. Lemoyne remembered that there was in Basse Louisiane an Autonomous Region of Fox or of

Illinois. Bienville Street was part of the old city. Although it had a tired enough aspect, it seemed clean and well-kept more so than the surrounding streets of the harbour and the old factories. The taxicab let Lemoyne off at an old house, no longer rich looking, but well maintained. Its style recalled the Norman houses that Lemoyne had often seen in his youth, near Boucherville, before his father had installed his family in a new modern manor in Sept-Iles. The door was opened by an old gentleman, whose general appearance recalled that of the house.

"Me Jérôme Anctil?" asked Lemoyne. "I am he," answered the old gentleman with a small bow, "are you captain Lemoyne?"

"Lieutenant-de-vaissseau," corrected Lemoyne.

"Excuse me, I had taken you for the butler."

The old notary smiled. "I have scarcely any visitors," he said. Looking at Lemoyne attentively, he added "You do not look at all like your uncle, my old friend."

"My uncle? my uncle Méridée-Marc?" Lemoyne entered a small salon decorated in a distinctly out-of-date style. The furniture was thirty years old and of a light and square design. After the long Three Emperors war, collapsible and very simple furniture had become the style and sold very well to the officers and administrators enriched by the war. That fashion had spread to the French Empire, to America, to the Russian Republic, everywhere in

fact, except Japan and the regions under Japanese influence. Lemoyne examined it all attentively while his host went looking for mint-flavoured lemonade. The furniture was no vulgar imitation manufactured in the Portuguese colonies, but were quite authentic.

"You are admiring my furniture," said Me Anctil, offering a glass to Lemoyne. This was not a question. "I keep them as a souvenir of my second wife. For comfort, I prefer the Napoléon IV couches. They are heavy and ugly, but you can settle there to read a good novel or listen to a good concert."

"We had similar pieces in Boucherville, but our new manor of Sept-Iles was furnished with Swedish modern. But I am impatient to know the message from my uncle, that you mentioned in your letter."

The notary nodded. He opened the small desk, and took out a large envelope. It was covered with various writings, indicating many border crossings and was heavily embellished by the stamps of several administrations. The notary offered the envelope to Lemoyne, who pulled out two pages of heavy paper, covered with a large and sloppy handwriting. There was also the business card of Me Pierre Paul Nolet, of Bangkok, in Thailand. On this, Me Nolet explained briefly that the handwritten letter had been given to him by Marc-Méridée Lemoyne, with instructions to forward it to

Me Anctil, in the event of his death, which had occurred on the 23rd of December 1975. Lemoyne unfolded the letter and read; it was not dated.

My dear Pierre Henri, you remember me, I hope. We often talked in Boucherville, before your departure for Sept-Iles, and also a little there. You had many questions on the universe for me and on the why of things. My answers provoked other questions. You didn't know it then, but I often spoke to your father, of you and of your questions. He was worried about your future and of the position that you had to take in the family. I believe that you are rather someone who asks questions than someone who deals out answers. It seems that I have at most a year to live. I have many friends here, but I would like someone of the family to come take my place, at least for a time. I know that you will have to inherit someday your father's position, excepting political misfortune, but you could during some years share the work of my collaborators. Your training will permit you to contribute, but especially your curiosity-filled mind will help see the new roads. I don't dare hope that you would let abandon the EHARN for our little adventure. Obviously, if you are reading these words, I am dead. Here therefore is what you must do. Go to Bangkok and see Me Pierre-Paul Nolet, whose address you will have from my friend Anctil. Then, ask to meet Apricot. She will lead you to our small domain. You can trust Me Anctil. He is an old friend.

Embrace him for me. Me Nolet will do what is necessary. I deal only with old friends, it is safer. Farewell. You should of course discuss all this with your father.

The signature said simply "Marc-M." "What do you know of this adventure that my uncle offers?", said Lemoyne.

"He wrote me from time to time, after his resignation from the Institute and his departure for the Orient. He was trying to link two disciplines and talked of new departures. Do you know his rubber vine? It gave him a certain celebrity."

"Yes, certainly, we spoke of it in the manor. But we never spoke of the reason of his departure. He divorced his wife, I believe?"

"The divorce was rather the symptom of a deeper concern, which made Marc – he was Marc to us – unsatisfied with official institutions and sponsored work. He left in search of his fate. What are you going to do now?"

Lemoyne sighed. "I have to make a painful choice. Undertake the succession of my father, or accept the compensation, in the name of my family and pursue my work in the Navy. My uncle would not have made this proposition without knowing that I would be tempted. Anyway, he couldn't foresee that his death would be immediately followed by my father's. Normally, I could have spent at least ten years exploring his world. How to decide? If I accept my uncle's offer, I must also take the

compensation for the concession, without too much haggling. Will it be sufficient for my sisters and for my mother? My mother will have to return to Boucherville and live with the pension. My brothers-in-law will complain of the weakening of their family by alliance."

"A hundred million or so seem a sufficient consolation to me. Who looks after your affairs in Quebec?"

"Me Bégon. He is busy with preparations. I join him in a few days to verify everything and make the official deposit. The proposal must be made by October 12th."

"You have therefore sixty-three days to verify your paperwork, go to Thailand, take your decision and make your case. I presume Me Bégon has spoken to the necessary people?"

"Probably," confirmed Lemoyne, emptying his mint-flavoured lemonade. "Tomorrow, I leave for Quebec. Tonight, I sleep!"

"Then I offer you the hospitality of my house!" Me Anctil took the glass from Lemoyne and made a gesture toward the bar.

"Gladly," said firmly Lemoyne, "and you will tell me about my uncle."

COOKING UP A PLOT

In the smaller salon of the de Lanaudière manor, the guests chatted quietly, a glass of champagne, of St-Raphaël, or of mineral water in their hand. An Indian-looking servant circulated among them, a tray balanced on his left hand. The Sieur de Lanaudière entered discreetly, accompanied by a tall young woman, with a peaches and cream complexion. Rather brusquely shaking her evening dress, she approached general de St-Lambert and offered her hand. The general carried the hand to his lips with a prim but elegant gesture. M.

Wadsterton was suddenly next to her.

"I do not have the honour," he murmured, "of knowing Mademoiselle."

"Then," retorted courteously the general, "I have the pleasure of introducing Diane-Aimée Du Plessis, daughter of Jérôme Du Plessis and of Aimée-Valérie De Lanaudière, and also grand-daughter of our host."

"You must call me M. Philippe," said M. Wadsterton bowing.

"You may know," continued the general in a confidential tone, "that Mlle Du Plessis' parents, as well as those of our future senator, died tragically

during the mysterious torpedoing of the Marguerite Bourgeois."

M. Wadsterton nodded. "I seem to remember, in 1963, no? There would have been a war if we could have identified the submarine. But allow me to introduce my wife." He signalled Madame Wadsterton, who joined him at once.

"This is an honour for me," she said, lightly shaking the hand of Diane-Aimée. "I am here only thanks to my husband. I used to work in one of his factories and I..."

"Elise, I don't believe Mlle Du Plessis wants to know the story of your life," reproved M. Philippe briskly.

"And why not?" intervened a feminine voice. It belonged to a lady who might have been fifty, lovely with a beauty which had been flamboyant and was now luminous. General de St-Lambert smiled and took her gently by the hand. "Here is Madame de St-Lambert. I don't believe, my dear Eliane, that you know Madame Wadsterton."

"Should we not say Madame Philippe?" teased Madame de St-Lambert. M. Wadsterton interrupted her.

"I see Madame Dubuc. Come, Elise, I will introduce you to her. Excuse us, ladies, sir." He almost pushed his wife toward the small group where chatted the Dubucs. The de St-Lambert watched him leave, and Madame de St-Lambert risked a wink.

"And you, Diane-Aimée, how are you? One would suspect you had cried?"

"But no, Madame, not at all!"

At this moment, the butler announced dinner. The Sieur de Lanaudière offered his arm to Madame de St-Lambert who accepted with a smile. From his seat at the head of the long table, the Sieur de Lanaudière placed his guests. He exercised his privilege as host to put Madame de St-Lambert on his right and allowed his senatorial colleague the pleasure of sitting on his left, so that he could speak face to face with the lady. Senator Dubuc was spoiled, it must be said, for Mlle Du Plessis settled on his left. Reynald de Lanaudière, at the foot of the table, guided Madame Wadsterton to his right and put his future brother-in-law on his left. M. Philippe hurried to sit next to Madame de St-Lambert, forcing Madame Dubuc, who did not deserve such a fate, to sit between himself and Richard de St-Lambert. At least she would have that one's father as a companion. For the moment, Madame Dubuc was asking Reynald de Lanaudière if he would himself drive a horse during the races after Christmas Day. He nodded yes, while the soup steamed and Richard de St-Lambert sought to extinguish his cigar. A footman came to his rescue. The general, who didn't smoke, pointed out the turpitude of his son to Madame Wadsterton, who was in complete agreement. Her husband would have smiled if he had heard, for he knew that she

hid sometimes, on the excuse of a migraine, to smoke.

The Volaille Etonnée of the de Lanaudière's chef triumphed, as usual. The Sieur de Lanaudière ate slowly, his eyes half closed, Madame de St-Lambert forgotten and his wine glass rarely used. Richard de St-Lambert choked, then collapsed on the table. The forks went down one by one. A footman hurried to Richard de St-Lambert's place and began to slap his back. Madame de St-Lambert also rose and moved to her son. The butler approached the Sieur de Lanaudière. The footman stopped rubbing Richard de St-Lambert's back and examined his hands. He looked at the butler and said something in Spanish. The butler frowned and examined the stricken guest. Then, he turned toward the Sieur de Lanaudière. "He is dead, Sir, I think" he said in a neutral voice. Madame de St-Lambert let out a small cry and sat down suddenly. M. Wadsterton looked wildly about.

"Is he sick?" said Madame Wadsterton.

"It is necessary to call a doctor, Sir," said the butler. The Sieur de Lanaudière nodded.

"Do it," he said finally. "My friends, my people will call my own doctor. Perhaps, in the meantime, we can go on with the dinner."

Madame de St-Lambert rose quickly. "If you do not mind, she said, I prefer to watch over my son." "I have confidence in your people, of course, but I think it is my place."

"Of course, Madame," said de Lanaudière.

"General, may I count on your presence?" "Yes, yes, replied the general, I will represent my family."

The servants removed Richard de Saint-Lambert, and tidied his place. Madame Wadsterton followed Madame de Saint-Lambert with her eyes. She made as if to rise, but her husband forbade it with a look.

"I feel for you," said Madame Wadsterton to the general. "I lost two children in an accident; perhaps he will recover?"

"It is the fault of all those substances he uses. I thought that on this occasion he would be all right."

"Oh," said Reynald de Lanaudière, "we all have gone overboard at some time."

The guests finished their dinner, but with more dignity than pleasure. Dessert, a superb pumpkin clafoutis, however revived them somewhat. A few smiles appeared. As coffee was being served, the butler approached his master and murmured a few words. Everyone put down his cup: Reynald, as if there was nothing special; Madam Wadsterton, very nervously; Diane-Aimée, very calmly. The Sieur de Lanaudière looked down sadly. "The doctor confirms the death. He suspects a poison, not yet identified." "But, who...?" began Reynald de Lanaudière "The doctor believes a special investigation is necessary, and he has already called the Sûreté." General de Saint-Lambert was now holding his wife tightly; he nodded firmly.

The Sûreté sent two inspectors in plainclothes and a

van full of policemen, driven by a maréchal-des-logis. A suspected murder among some of the most respected families of America, in the presence of two senators, required particular attention. "Chief Inspector Tremblay," said the older one, bowing to the Sieur De Lanaudière, "and here is my associate, Inspector Rivard." Inspector Rivard bowed also. He observed the premises with curiosity and a little envy.

"Sir," said the Chief Inspector, "we would like to interrogate all those who were in the manor at the moment of death. I will entrust to my associate the task of speaking to your domestic staff. Would you allow me to borrow a room where I will talk to your guests one at a time ? I do not wish to bully you, but you will understand that at this time I must not disregard any possibility."

"My butler will put you in my smaller office," answered the Sieur De Lanaudière, " please do what you must, sir."

Chief Inspector Tremblay thanked his host and joined the guests, sitting in the small salon.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I understand than you are a little shaken by this business. However, I must ask you to give me a little time. The observations that you may have made will be forgotten tomorrow." He looked at Madame de St-Lambert, very pale, seated against her husband. "If you can, Madame, I would like to begin with you."

In the small office, Madame de St-Lambert sat very

straight. The Chief Inspector took an armchair by her side. "Madame," he said gently, "you feel a bottomless grief. Tell me, did your son have any enemies ?"

Madame de St-Lambert repressed a sob. "No, he had no quarrel with anybody. Everybody liked him, though he was not much good at anything. He was happy to be marrying Diane-Aimée Du Plessis."

"He had been courting her a long time ?"

"No, he would not have dared. His father made the arrangements. We were celebrating the engagement this evening."

"Therefore, you see no one who might have wanted to kill him ?"

"No, not at all, he was always nice." The tears welled up again in Madame de St-Lambert's eyes. The Chief Inspector took her hand. "That will be all, Madame, thank you." Madame de St-Lambert left.

The butler showed in the general. "Good evening, General. I believe you, certainly, understand the importance of moving quickly. The murderer is perhaps not far away."

"Yes, we do what we must. It is necessary to move faster than the enemy. I do not see who would have wanted to kill my son."

"An unhappy rival ?"

"For the hand of Diane-Aimée Du Plessis ? If you knew the reputation of my son, you would know that charming the ladies was his main talent. But he had

not made any enemies that I know. As for Diane-Aimée, her grandfather has assured me that there was no important suitor. It is difficult to believe that he might have lied."

"Did your son not have gambling debts ?"

"No, gambling didn't interest him. I suspect that he understood nothing of games or cards."

"What about politics ? This wouldn't be the first attempt at solving a political difficulty by eliminating a bothersome individual."

The general growled. "My family always served France, then the Republic. We never were mixed up in politics, and certainly not in plots."

"But, did the wedding of your son not imply an alliance with the de Lanaudière ?"

The general blushed slightly. "Of course, we had foreseen an arrangement, on the matter of a concession, but it was nothing unlawful."

"Can you tell me about that ?"

"I can hardly discuss it without the others' consent." Chief Inspector Tremblay looked attentively at the general. "Thank you," he said finally, "but please do not leave the Gouvernement of Texicanie for a few days."

As the general left, Senator Dubuc entered briskly.

"I told your agent I had to see you."

"Please sit down, Sir," said politely the inspector, "I am listening."

"I do not believe this affair should be entrusted to an ordinary inspector from a Gouvernement. We are

here two senators, two major families, and everything we touch are affairs of State. We need someone here from the Sécurité Publique."

"I am ready to believe you, Senator. In effect, you are telling me that this is not about vice or personal vengeance. Can give me more details ?"

Senator Dubuc was at a loss. "Exactly," he finally said. "This is about complicated affairs concerning the State, maybe even Foreign Affairs."

"Would that explain the presence of your Virginien guest ?"

"He is the guest of the Sieur de Lanaudière, whose home this is. Mr. Wadsterton makes motors and motorized vehicles, and has some dealings with the family."

"He is not the sole maker of motors. I wondered why he was here."

"M. Wadsterton is with us since twenty years. He can deal with who he wants, even if he is not a citizen."

"But he must obey the law, however."

"Inspector, you have no reason to doubt M. Wadsterton or anyone in this house. I tell you than it would be normal and more advantageous for your career to let us leave and to turn the case over to the Sécurité Publique."

"Senator, I have reason to suspect any one who is now in the manor. A man was killed. Do you believe that the Sécurité Publique would like me not to collect the most possible facts ? Tell me, do

you know what arrangement was foreseen between the De Lanaudière and the St-Lambert ?"

"Even if I knew, I would not tell you. I repeat that you are not in your place here."

The Chief Inspector sat behind the desk. "Thank you, Senator, for your cooperation. I will certainly warn the Sécurité Publique, as you advise me. For now, I will ask you to return to the salon."

Senator Dubuc threw a dark look at the policeman and left, grumbling.

Tremblay sat back in the Sieur de Lanaudière's armchair. He started to play with the paper knife shaped like a Japanese sabre, all the while nodding to himself. "Ouch," he said suddenly. The paper knife was a real knife. "Agent Simoneau," he called, "ask the young de Lanaudière to come in. Also, if possible, I would need a bandage." The policeman returned soon with Reynald De Lanaudière and a housemaid who began to make a bandage for the inspector's left forefinger.

Reynald exploded as he came in. "You have no reason to suspect any one of us. My cousin has lost her intended, the de Saint-Lambert their son, our house is upside down and you interrogate us ! Look for the guilty elsewhere !"

The Chief Inspector looked at the progress of his bandaging and waited a moment. "Can you suggest some possible leads ?"

"Obviously ! We are preparing a major change of concession and the present franchisee wants to

block us!"

"Of which concession are we talking?"

"The EHARN, of course ! Don't you read the newspapers ? With the salary you receive, you at least have the time of to read the newspapers !"

"The Lemoyne concession ? What connection between the murder of this evening and that concession ?"

"Think !" Reynald de Lanaudière could not stand still. He leaned toward the inspector. "The father died and the son wants to recover the concession. The Lemoyne have always used violent means. Anyway, Pierre Henri is without morality and thinks only of fun. Nobody can keep track of his bastards !"

"Do you have any facts ?"

"You don't know that family. Not only have we had to fight them since the foundation of Louisiane, but our families were almost neighbours in the Haut Richelieu. We met often during our youth. We had to protect Diane-Aimée from Pierre-Henri's base appetites."

"But why then murder a de St-Lambert, and how ?" Reynald pouted disdainfully. "Nothing is easier. It is sufficient to bribe a servant."

"You give me no obvious motive," underlined Tremblay. He smiled to the housemaid and moved his wounded finger.

Reynald frowned. "We and the St-Lambert intend to make changes."

"Changes ?"

"The EHARN for de Lanaudière and Texicanie for the St-Lambert. A beautiful stroke ! But you must not understand. "

"Did you know Richard de St-Lambert well ?"

"A little. He was not brilliant, but he would have been a good husband for Diane-Aimée."

The inspector looked keenly at Reynald. "You seem to be very attached to your cousin."

"Of course, what could be more normal. We are alone in the world, except for grandfather, and we have neither brother nor sister."

Agent Simoneau entered discreetly. "Excuse me, sir," he said, "but inspector Rivard would like to see you a moment."

"Thank you," said the Chief Inspector. "Please bring him in. M. de Lanaudière, I note what you said. Please do not leave the Gouvernement without informing us."

Reynald De Lanaudière walked noisily out, almost knocking over Inspector Rivard.

"Eh, well, chief, the servants are unanimous. The cook, the butler, and the two footmen called Pedro and Agile Feather were the only ones involved in serving the meal."

"Therefore," said thoughtfully Tremblay, "either one of those four placed a poison in de St-Lambert's plate or a guest slipped something to the deceased."

"Or, this is a poison which acts slowly. The laboratory will need the time to establish that."

"Or else, this is not a murder after all. It will be necessary to know the quantity of alcohol in the victim's blood at the moment of death."

The two police officers looked at each other, and shrugged simultaneously. "What about you, Chief, have you found something?"

"The Saint-Lambert are dazed. I don't believe they have any useful information. Senator Dubuc and the young De Lanaudière are very worried."

"Why would they kill Saint-Lambert?"

"I don't know if they killed him, but his death certainly put a knot in their capstan."

"What?"

"An old Navy expression. They have prepared some major plot against the Lemoyne and seem to fear them. This Wadsterton, by the way, his name rings a bell?"

Inspector Rivard thought a moment "So far as I can remember at two o'clock in the morning, he was once accused of fraud against the Republic."

"It seems me there is something else. Go fetch him for me."

Inspector Rivard returned with a visibly very worried Wadsterton.

"I have done nothing, officer," he said.

"Chief Inspector. Why were you here this evening?"

"You sent for me."

"I mean, why were you invited to this family gathering? I understand that the De Lanaudière

would invite Senator Dubuc, but you ?"

"The family and myself have often done business. We hold some similar ideals."

"Such as ?"

"We believe that automotive vehicles, like those I manufacture, should be put within reach of any family. Millions of ordinary citizens, like you, would travel freely. Why should the automobile be the privilege of taxicab companies, some transport companies and the military ? "

"And police inspectors on duty ? "

M. Wadsterton wiped his face with a polka-dot handkerchief. "I am a citizen respectful of the law."

"Are you in fact a citizen ? of what country ? You were once a client of our services, I believe."

"A simple misunderstanding, you know ? Everything worked out in the end !"

"Do you still have any dealings with the government of Virginia ? Do you still have factories over there, with underpaid workmen ?"

"Yes, I have a few factories, but I am not a spy. Virginia is very small, how would she maintain spies ?"

"Who mentioned spies? M. Wadsterton, you are coming with us. Please wait in the salon."

The two police officers watched a breathless and worried Wadsterton leave. "So, chief, now what ? It is getting late."

"You are right, Rivard. We are going to leave. Has the maréchal-des-logis finished with the body and

the clues ?"

"Yes, chief, for a while now."

"Fine We are going home. You will return tomorrow to interrogate any remaining witnesses. Tell them to go to bed, but to remain where we can get their testimony."

"And Dubuc ?"

"I do not believe Senator Dubuc wants any trouble. The elections are coming. Also, tell the maréchal-des-logis that Wadsterton and the two footmen are coming with us for an identity check."

"The cook and the butler ?"

"Too obvious. Leave them alone. I am going to see M. de Lanaudière and thank him for his hospitality. Then, we will leave."

"Fine, chief."

"I believe that I will indeed call Commissaire Hamel, of the Sécurité Publique. He is an old friend."

DEFENDING ON TWO FRONTS

There was one thing worse than Québec in the month of February: Québec in the month of August. To make matters worse, neither the rank of lieutenant-de-vaissseau, nor the name of Lemoyne had spared Pierre Henri the discomfort of having to share his compartment with an Assistant-Commissioner of railroads. In his train, the administrator could vie with the officer in prestige. The train was idling on a sidetrack since crossing the Saint-Laurent on the Champlain bridge. From his window, Lemoyne saw the derricks of many shapes and ages, and the massive dry docks between the rivers Saint-Charles and Montmorency. Impatiently, Lemoyne looked for revenge on the administrator. "Why are we stopped ? And why are we in the refitting harbor ?" The administrator was not going to be provoked.

"We centralized passenger traffic for Quebec and its suburbs at Sainte-Foy station. It was impossible to displace the factories and the military facilities, so we invented this detour."

"Your Central Station is therefore central only in name !"

"Not true. It is situated in the centre of an urban

agglomeration and lies near numerous administrative offices."

"Why not simply use another bridge ?"

"The industrialists of Cap Rouge already complain that six bridges are insufficient. The construction of an other bridge is difficult to imagine and it would have been unthinkable to shut one during the necessary transformations. You see, we are already moving."

The train was in fact moving forward again. Lemoyne could catch sight of the mixed bag of houses the harbour workmen inhabited and the immense smoking steelworks a little further to the north. Near the station, the factories were smaller and cleaner, for they manufactured consumer products. The number of factories increased year after year. The population followed: metropolitan Québec had now nearly nine millions inhabitants. Chantilly, Pierre-Henri Lemoyne's sister, waited at the exit of the station. She drove herself a cabriolet, a sport model, whose motor used double compression to recycle the steam and give extra power. Lemoyne kissed his sister on both cheeks. "And how is Maman ?" he asked. His sister guided the cabriolet with a steady hand through Boulevard Papineau, the big boulevard which pierced the forest of buildings surrounding the Citadel, with the government buildings within its walls. Chantilly answered without taking her eyes off the road. "She is well, given the circumstances. She is eager to

know your arrangements in view of conserving the concession." She observed her brother a moment. Chantilly was not yet married, although she was already twenty-four. Attached to her family, she did not however feel ready to serve as the tie between the Lemoyne and another family.

"Maître Bégon is busy preparing the brief. Jussieu-Desroches gave me a six-month leave. I have a mysterious offer from uncle Marc."

Pierre-Henri told his sister about his trip to Mobile. Like most major families, the Lemoyne maintained an apartment on the Island of Orléans. When the Assembly and the Senate were in session, there was always a member of the family on watch. Most embassies had moved there. As Québec became more and more industrialized, the families that could had fled toward this restful and verdant island. The ambassadors had moved their residences, then the embassies had followed. The ferries had bloomed. Some families had paid for the flamboyance of maintaining their own galley, decorated with their coat-of-arms. The invention of motors had meant the replacement of the galley by the limousine or the cabriolet and finally the prefecture had gotten around to erecting a bridge between the island and the capital. Since the death of Raoul-Henri Lemoyne, his widow and his youngest daughter occupied the apartment permanently .

Lemoyne went directly to his mother's rooms. Thin

and pale, she kissed him, then examined him attentively. "You look burnt-out, Pierre-Henri. The climate of California does not suit you."

"No, Maman. Over there, a tanned complexion is fashionable."

"Because of the Navy ? You cannot get much wind in your submarine."

"It is the sun. It shines all the time, and people will even lie on the beach for the pleasure of feeling the heat."

Chantilly intervened. "The women also ?"

"Of course ! They have invented a bathing costume which exposes the most skin possible to the sun."

Madame Lemoyne shook her head. "What manners ! They must attract many young men and many problems."

"I would like to go to California," said Chantilly.

"Will you take me, Pierre-Henri ?"

Madame Lemoyne sniffed at that idea. "It seems bizarre, this fashion consisting in burning the complexion. It reminds me of this craze for slipping on the snow on boards. Our forebears strained enough on their snowshoes, let us benefit from our modern advantages. And you, Pierre-Henri, are you decided to leave the Navy to look after you family affairs ?"

Pierre-Henri looked at his mother, embarrassed.

"Honestly, Maman, I do not know what to do. Papa always told me to always try to do more than necessary. In the Navy, I am useful, I am a pioneer."

"You would be ready to let the EHARN go to others ! Think of the work done by your father and by your grandfather. Think of the destitution in which we would plunge !" Madame Lemoyne started to breathe irregularly, while she wiped her eyes with a handkerchief of Irish linen.

"Maman," said mildly Pierre-Henri, "a compensation of a hundred or a hundred and fifty millions louis, is not exactly destitution."

"You do not understand, Pierre-Henri. You are an only son. If you do not keep the concession, it will be lost to the family forever."

"Why ? I have four or five cousins who could succeed, besides their children."

"There's another thing. When do you plan to marry ? Will you let your cousins see to your progeny ?"

Madame Lemoyne turned her back on her son and made a small sigh.

Chantilly went around to her mother. "Do you understand why I become angry when you speak to me of weddings ? Why couldn't a woman obtain a concession ?"

"The problem is not philosophical," said her mother drily, "your brother has to act now to preserve what we have now. If you, Chantilly, could legally be a Seigneur-administrateur, I wouldn't lose my time talking to this one."

Pierre-Henri raised an appeasing hand. "I have a letter from Marc-Méridée. He proposes that I take over his concern."

"In Thailand ? Do you suggest seriously to me that this adventure is a valid alternative to one of the most important seigneuries of America ?" Madame Lemoyne tightened her small fists. "Leave, I need to think."

Pierre-Henri went to kiss his mother, but she turned away.

Chantilly gently took her brother's arm and led him outside. In the summer garden, Pierre-Henri took his sister's hand.

"Maman is very worried. She talks of nothing else since your last visit."

"It was not my fault if I was at sea when Papa died."

"No, but you did not reassure her, and I fear that your behavior has confirmed her opinion."

"Which is ?"

"She is convinced that you do not have the makings of a major Seigneur, and maybe of no Seigneur at all."

Pierre-Henri bowed his head. "I like to play. I also like to look for, find or face the unknown. But I do not want to run away. The family counts also for me. What do our sisters think ?"

"Jasmine and Jean Charles will never speak to you again if you do not defend ferociously the concession. Huguette and Sylvain are less categorical, but they hope that you will take it up."

Pierre-Henri stopped and took his sister's other hand. "And you ?" he asked.

"I have always liked doing things with you, and the offer from uncle Marc intrigues me. If I was a man" - Chantilly raised her chin - "it is to me that he would have made that offer."

"If you were a man," said Pierre Henri, laughing, "there would be two dozen less broken hearts. But there is a possible strategy: after I have verified our file with Me Bégon, I believe than I will have to go to Thailand." His sister smiled and nodded quietly. At breakfast, Madame Lemoyne was absent. "La Lady, she was not to feeling well," said the maid, serving the pain doré. "She is at war with you," said Chantilly.

"Again racial riots in English Somalia," answered Pierre-Henri, swallowing some coffee and turning the pages of the Journal de Québec, whose analyses were read religiously every morning in government antechambers. The butler interrupted the meal.

"Your pardon, Monsieur, but there is a gentleman from the police, who wishes to speak to Monsieur."

"Send him to the small salon, Marcel, I will see him."

"Good morning, officer, to what do we owe the honor ?" said Lemoyne as he entered the green salon. The police officer turned around briskly; nothing marked him as a police officer, for he wore a pale grey suit, made of cotton or linen, similar to the one of any official who had to suffer the heat (and the odours) of Quebec in July and August.

"Are you Capitaine Lemoyne ?" he said in greeting.

"Lieutenant-de-vaisseau, yes, I am he," retorted Lemoyne inviting with a gesture the police officer to sit.

"I am Commissaire Wilfrid Hamel, of the Sécurité Publique," he said, once comfortably installed.

"Your house is well appointed."

"Thank you," said Lemoyne. "And if you told me what I can do for you ? My breakfast will get cold."

"I must first say that I am here unofficially. Some colleagues of the Sécurité asked me to come see you discreetly."

Lemoyne waited for the police officer to pursue.

"Did you know Richard de Saint-Lambert ?" asked the Commissaire, looking Lemoyne in the eye.

"No. Would he be a relative of General Saint-Lambert ?"

"His son. He just died."

Lemoyne raised his eyebrows. "You have no comment?" said finally the commissioner, after a moment's silence.

"It is certainly sad," said prudently Lemoyne, "but I did not know this gentleman. His death does not really concern me."

"However," said Commissaire Hamel, "he seems to have been murdered."

Lemoyne smiled slightly "And am I a suspect ?"

"Maybe," said the police officer, passing a document to Lemoyne. He recognized the official heading of Senate documents: To the citizen Richard de Saint-Lambert.. Further: In the name of Senate of

the République d'Amérique Septentrionale, I confirm reception of your proposal for the seigneurie of the Oilfields of Texas and of Monterrey.

Lemoyne looked at the Commissaire. "But these oilfields are conceded to Israel de Lanaudière?"

"Then you do not know that the son of de Lanaudière has submitted a proposal for your father's seigneurie ?" asked a little drily the police officer.

Lemoyne shook his head. "I have as a matter of fact an appointment with the family notary this afternoon. So, the de Lanaudière take up old feuds. But I won't be surprised if there are several candidacies."

The policeman interrupted "The son of Saint-Lambert was killed with a dose of atropine, during a supper at the de Lanaudière manor, where he was a guest. Did you have any dealings with Senators De Lanaudière or Dubuc ?"

"Almost never. I know that my father hated Dubuc and that he encouraged Antoine de Beauharnois, the senator from Quebec, to fight him."

"Therefore," said Commissaire Hamel taking out his notebook, "we are dealing with two enemies, or at least adversaries, of your family ?"

Lemoyne thought for a moment. "I wonder, however, at the association of two individuals so different. I imagine that Israel de Lanaudière could have worked in the Senate with Dubuc. But I see them

with difficulty at a pleasant evening with their families."

"The supper was at de Lanaudière manor."

"More and more astonishing."

"They were apparently celebrating with dignity the engagement of Diane-Aimée Du Plessis with Richard de Saint-Lambert." Lemoyne gave a short bark, before regaining his self-control. "Your pardon, but that match seems rather unlikely."

"However, this is confirmed by the two families. The contract had not been signed, however."

Commissaire Hamel put his notebook back into his pocket and stretched his shoulders. "M. Lemoyne, we arrested a certain Wadsterton. It seems that the de Lanaudière proposed to construct with him some low-cost automotive vehicles in the factories that Wadsterton owns in Virginia, according to the laws in force down there. It seems that this Monsieur Wadsterton has been involved already in some business of information sold to a foreign power. But we don't see why he would have killed the young Saint-Lambert while preparing a juicy contract with the future father-in-law. Who could benefit from his death?"

"Do you ask me as an intelligence officer?"

"If Richard de Saint-Lambert became seigneur of petroleum in Texas, and then Reynald de Lanaudière became seigneur of the EHARN, the big losers would be the Lemoyne."

"Not only the Lemoyne, all America. This

Wadsterton is a manufacturer of motors and of machinery, born in Virginia. I know him by reputation, for he did business with the Ministry of the Navy, for some airship motors. He is a scoundrel who would not hesitate to steal and to poison with his machines."

"Has he done any business with you, or with your family?"

"No, the EHARN buys in Duquesne or in Rouillé; we bought little from the south, except oranges and bananas. So this Wadsterton was present at the fatal supper."

"You will admit that this is a bizarre situation. A member of an important family seeks to preserve a lucrative seigneurie. This member of the family would be, in addition, a specialist in intelligence and counter-espionage. A person implicated in essential negotiations regarding this seigneurie is killed. To top it off, a doubtful individual, known for his suspected dealings, is present during the fatal supper, as you said. This would not be a simple murder, this would be an affair of state."

"And the Sécurité Publique would investigate, but discreetly, for we are dealing with an influential family." Lemoyne smiled sadly. "Your hypothesis rests however on an improper premise, that is that the member of the influential family is absolutely determined to keep the concession in question. What would he have to do? Use his connections to keep the Sécurité Publique out of the affair? Reject

the concession, proving the vacuity of the whole plot ? No, Monsieur unofficial investigator, I did not kill Richard de Saint-Lambert or have him killed."

Commissaire Hamel observed Lemoyne for a moment. Lemoyne glanced significantly at the wall clock. "If you have no other questions ?" he said.

"Just one more. Where were you in the night from the eighteenth to the nineteenth of August of this year ?"

Lemoyne looked modestly at the policeman. "In the train, between El Paso and Vaudreuil. I have at least twenty witnesses."

The police officer put away his notebook and rose.

"Then, Monsieur, for the moment I leave you.

Where can I reach you ?"

"Call here," said simply Lemoyne, "someone will know where I am. And now, I will say good-bye.

Marcel will show you out". The butler appeared discreetly. Commissaire Hamel threw a final look in the small salon and followed him out.

"And ?" asked anxiously Chantilly. Lemoyne sighed.

"Exactly what I feared: my breakfast is cold."

PLAYING THE GAME NEVERTHELESS

Maître Bégon could easily have claimed, as his due, the luxurious office of the Bégon's hôtel particulier, where five generations of notaries had counselled as many generations of Taschereau, of Ramezay, of Berthelot, of La Chesnaye and of Lemoyne, besides an impressive quantity of less prestigious but sometimes very lucrative cases. His father, Aristide Bégon, had taken his retirement and didn't use his office except for rare meetings with an old client. According to a timeworn convention, he, Gatien Bégon, would have inherited that office. Then, every member of the family would have obtained a promotion toward a more luxurious office, a discreet and talented trainee would have been rewarded with a permanent contract, and the sons and nephews of the Bégon clan would have begun climbing the traditional ladder. But Maître Bégon still occupied the somber office with its dark furniture in which he had undertaken his career twenty three years earlier. He was surrounded by his friends, the volumes of law, aligned in their shelves of oak and of ash. The oldest, treatises on

the Coutûme de Paris, judgements of the Conseil Souverain de la Nouvelle France, decrees of the intendants of Nouvelle France, of Acadie and of Louisiane and other respected forebears rested on the top right, as appropriate to their age and their worn book bindings. The different versions of the Civil and Criminal Codes succeeded, in chronological order, the most recent within the reach of Me Bégon. A compilation of the most recent judgements of the Senate, the Guide du Code Civil, 1973 edition, the Traité complet des lois d'Amérique, by Morin, 1972 edition and the Recueil des principales perplexités légales by Dupuy and Salone, 3rd edition, stood at attention directly behind Me Bégon. At Bégon, Bégon and Bégon, the most precious documents filled the strongrooms especially conceived to guarantee the temperature and humidity favourable to their conservation. Those rooms hid a hundred and fifty years of contracts, of understandings, of testimonies, of correspondence, official and unofficial, which would have made the career of numerous journalists and historians. Had Tremblay-Duranleau really borrowed the money from Junot de St-Vallières during the steelworks scandal in 1897 ? Had De Soulanges obtained special consideration in the grant of the contract for the construction of the battleships Montréal, Tadoussac and Saint-Louis in 1935 ?

But Me Bégon would never open his strongrooms to

historians or to journalists. He was the heir of a fortress of which he would never betray the virtue. The intercom in Me Bégon's office hissed, announcing the arrival of Lemoyne. The notary's eyes followed the movement of the oak door engraved with crowns and lilies. Lemoyne appeared very tall framed in the door. Since the office was longer than wide, the customer seemed to move through a tunnel which made him seem to shrink as he approached the desk. The law is ancient and deep, signalled this architecture. The only window, from an angle, illuminated Me Bégon from behind and from his left, which necessarily made him the centre of vision of any person entering the office. But, on a man used to the restricted space of a submarine, this arrangement did not have the intended effect. "Good-day, lieutenant de vaisseau," said Me Bégon, standing up to greet his client. He made a point of always addressing people by their correct title. He motioned soberly Lemoyne to a seat in the overstuffed green armchair, to his right. The other armchair was of a dark grey. The two armchairs dated from before the war of Three Emperors and had been redone often in those fifty years. Their hues were reproduced always exactly by a specialized house who kept a file on the special needs of their customers. The Persian carpet dated, for its part, at least to the wars of the first Napoléon.

"So, do you still like California ?"

"I like especially the Navy and submarines."

"And what of this new fashion for the girls to expose their skin to the sun ? Maybe I should open a branch office in Port-des-Anges ?"

"You have the same preoccupations as my mother. Did she speak to you of the concession ?"

Me Bégon slipped a thick sheaf of documents toward Lemoyne. "I have here your complete file, that you will verify and sign. I had the accounts reviewed by Gonzalez, my new assistant for financial questions. He had to work especially hard to conciliate the changes since the final presentation of your father with the last yearly report of the Entreprises." Me Bégon never used the acronym.

"You can read it comfortably in the small cabinet near the swimming pool." He stopped an instant to place the copies in the right order, two copies for the Senate, a copy for the official archives, one for the customer and one as a working copy. He examined Lemoyne briefly. "Did you learn that the de Lanaudière have applied for the Entreprises ?" Lemoyne straightened in his armchair and nodded briefly yes. The notary looked at his client with a stern eye. "It is my responsibility to know everything," said the notary. He thumbed slowly a document drawn from the file. "The Senate has received already three proposals, continued Me Bégon. "The de Lanaudière, as you know already, the Lamothe-Cadillac and the Sénécal."

"The Sénécal ?" Lemoyne grimaced.

"This is a family, or rather an entrepreneur, who obtained concessions, twenty years ago, of large plantations in the territory of the Gouvernement of Missouri, after having accumulated a certain fortune in the manufacture of toys, in collaboration with a Neapolitan exporter. He is trying his luck in obtaining a major concession and to erase the memory of his former dealings." The notary was silent for a minute, while he verified an element of the file.

"The Sénécal," he continued, "offer a tempting compensation of two hundred and thirty-five million. Everyone seems to know your situation, and that you would be ready to abandon the Entreprises." He stopped and looked at his client. Lemoyne nodded. "I imagine that my mother has complained lengthily of me to her friends. She finds inadmissible that I do not fight ferociously to keep the EHARN. She is supported by the other branches of the family and by my sisters, except one."

"Chantilly," said the notary.

Lemoyne smiled and continued. "I am not certain that I am interested. The compensation would allow my family to live very comfortably, according to their rank. My sisters would keep their autonomy, which matters to me, even if I know that my brothers-in-law would also benefit. My mother likes her sons-in-law. In addition, the Navy still interests me and I like clandestine operations."

The notary interrupted politely. "Only the Sénécal

put a figure on their offer. The two others leave that question to the Senate."

"It is very coherent," commented Lemoyne, "the Sénécal have everything to gain in attracting my support, while the others trust their allies. But there is more."

He sat up in the armchair and put his left hand on the desk. "Yesterday, I had the visit of a commissaire Hamel, of the Sécurité Publique. An unofficial visit, as they say."

"When they visit a Lemoyne."

"Perhaps. But he clearly showed that he suspected me of having murdered Richard de Saint-Lambert, the son of the hero, in order to damage the de Lanaudière candidature."

"I read the newspapers. I am not perfectly objective, but an individual as suspect as Jean-Denis Dubuc is perfectly capable of sacrificing a supposed friend to harm a possible adversary."

"Dubuc has no particular reason to attack my family."

"The Lemoyne are probably indifferent to him. He pursues another aim. The Sieur de Lanaudière is his colleague in the Senate. It is useful to him to remove your candidature in order to further that of the son of de Lanaudière. Maybe he only wants to frighten you."

Lemoyne raised an eyebrow at this suggestion.

"Either you fear for your life or you get rid quickly of the Entreprises. But, tell me, what will you

decide, in the end ?"

Lemoyne crossed his arms and breathed out slowly. "Do you know Me Jérôme Anctil ?" The notary shook his head. Lemoyne continued. "He gave me a document from my uncle Marc – Marc-Méridée, you remember – which invites me to take over an original experience that he began in Thailand."

It was the notary's turn to raise his eyebrows.

"Of course," went on Lemoyne, "he believed that I would dispose of some years before the death of my father. But curiosity devours me."

"According to me," said Me Bégon, "only two alternatives deserve consideration: negotiation with a family or the struggle to keep the concession."

"That is your recommendation as my legal counsellor," smiled Lemoyne, "but put yourself in my place, and tell me this would not tempt you ?"

Me Bégon tightened his mouth and did not answer.

"Very well," said Lemoyne, "and what is therefore our political position, in the committee for Concessions and Seigneuries ? Senator Dubuc will evidently vote against us."

"Yes, since he has organized a machination with his crony de Lanaudière."

"I never understood the tie between scum like Dubuc and a man of good family like De Lanaudière. Does he so much want to stay Senator ?"

The notary tapped the file with his index. "Motives are always mixed. The committee now has

seventeen members; there are two vacancies.

Assume that Dubuc, Senator of Texicanie, will vote for de Lanaudière proposal." Me Bégon pulled a list to himself. "Viger, of Manitoba, will vote for Sénécal. They are of the same region and have some business in common. Beauharnois, of Québec, is a faithful friend of the Lemoyne. Just like Latour du Tremblay of Haute Louisiane."

"He is a cousin of my mother."

"De La Galissonnière, of Michigan, will vote for Lamothe, on grounds of regional politics. Bélanger-Biencourt, of Maine, is an old ally of de Lanaudière, to whom his vote is guaranteed. Cuvillier."

"Cuvillier, for us, this is certain, as well as Rigaud-Niverville of Saint-Laurent."

"Yes, but those are our sole steadfast friends. We can possibly count on the vote of Beaussac of Deseret. He is young and doesn't like de Lanaudière." The notary put down his list. "May I offer you a good cup of coffee ? Mlle Gervais, bring us if you please coffee for two."

"Continue," he said.

"Rigaud-Samson." Lemoyne interjected "Bas-Ohio, for de Lanaudière."

"Just so, and also D'Auteuil of Lafayette."

"I count four, maybe five votes for us, four for de Lanaudière, one for Lamothe, two for Sénécal. Correct ?"

"Yes, counting Tardivel of Illinois, possibly

Thierry-Callières of Beauce. He often did business with the Sénécal. I have no indications for Forest of Arkansas, Beaulac de Sèvres of Haute-Californie, Letellier of Floride or Gayot of Arizona."

"If I may, I see therefore the situation like this."

Lemoyne took a good swallow of Me Bégon's Cuban coffee. "We can count on four sure votes. For a majority, we must acquire five votes. This means we must convince the four uncertain senators, while keeping the vote of Beaussac, which is very possible. In case of difficulty, it will be necessary for us to convince the senators favourable to Sénécal or to Lamothe to vote for us or in the worse case, to abstain. The position is basically the same for de Lanaudière. Do you agree ?"

"You summarize well the situation, and you see why I told you to negotiate with the great families."

"But negotiation with the de Lanaudière seems to me excluded," said Lemoyne with an irritated air, "they really want the concession. It must be the son who thought of this."

"Probably, for the father seems more interested in retirement. But in my opinion, it is Senator Dubuc who stage-managed the son as much as the father. However, the Sénécal are no innocents. If the de Lanaudière assume the withdrawal of the Lemoyne, the Sénécal become their main rivals. Would they have provoked the candidacy of Lamothe ?"

"We should be asking who would benefit from the death of young Saint-Lambert ? It seems to me much

too twisted a plot to concern only the Lemoyne, especially since I am not a very plausible suspect." Me Bégon nodded. "But, however," he said thoughtfully, "an accusation of murder and a meeting with a magistrate would be a good way to dissipate our efforts during the audiences on the concession. Not to mention the effect on the undecided senators." He reassembled his notes and straightened in his armchair. "The main thing is to stay in touch with the senators. There are fifty two days before the hearing. It would be necessary for you to meet the friends of the family, among whom we will count Beaussac. Would your mother accept to be the hostess of a small supper, in two or three days ?"

"In two or three days, certainly. My sister Chantilly will also accept, even if she is not particularly enthralled by the concession. She is interested rather in the arts, in the cinema in particular."

"The presence of Chantilly would certainly be an asset. Perfect. For my part, I will make an appointment with senator De La Galissonière, the friend of Lamothe. He must well doubt that his proposal is condemned and will look for an understanding. Could you meet Viger or Tardivel ?"

"I know the son of senator Tardivel, he is an intelligence officer in the Troupes de la Marine. Try calling him for an appointment." The notary pressed his buzzer. "Mlle Gervais, please call Senator Tardivel, at home or at his office. Also, please

bring more coffee." He watched Lemoyne attentively. "You did not tell me your preference, only that of your family."

Lemoyne sat back, his hands behind his head. "My preference goes to my fate, but what is it ? I wonder what I will find in Thailand."

"You mean," began Bégon, when the hooting of the telephone interrupted him. "Yes ? Good day, Senator. Me Bégon. You are well ? Yes, arthritis is painful. Madame also ? You do plan to run again in 1977. Yes. Look, Senator, I am calling you on the subject of the Entreprises Hydrauliques des Affluents de la Rive Nord. The Lemoyne, yes. If you agree.... what ? Yes, Pierre-Henri Lemoyne is here. Lieutenant-de-vaisseau. Here, he would like to see you to discuss this business. We believe that we would have some common interests. M. Sénécal ? Not at all, his offer is reasonable. We agree, I believe, that the de Lanaudière proposal is regrettable. Yes, you are right, this is bad for the country. When you wish The day after tomorrow, fourteen hours ?" The notary looked at Lemoyne, who nodded "yes". "Then, perfect, he will go see you. I ? No, I believe he does not need me. Yes, I will. Good-bye."

"I hope you will find an understanding."

"The day after tomorrow, I will see. Then, I leave for Thailand."

"Do you have a booking on a ship ?"

"I have no need of a booking on a ship, Maître !"

DIVING INTO ACTION

The Restigouche slipped its prow between the surface under a menacing sky. Sometimes, through a break in the clouds, the moon half-illuminated the waves who rolled on the submerged deck of the submarine. Leaning on the rail of the conning tower, three sailors kept a halfhearted watch. Their thick binoculars, hanging from their necks, underlined the almost symbolic aspect of their presence at such an hour. "Eh, Second Maître, there are at least two hours before dawn. How about letting luck decide who will finish the watch ? The other two could catch a little nap."

"And who will watch the stern, son of a mermaid ?"

"The Second Maître is right, Drolet. There are small reefs everywhere here."

"You are talking through your hat, Nadeau, the sonar will warn the helm and we are running at reduced speed anyway."

"It's not just the reefs. The Japanese control islands all around here. Do you want to run into a destroyer ?"

"If we couldn't see a destroyer, a destroyer couldn't see us !"

"Nadeau, if you give me a smoke, I won't report

your attempted mutiny."

The sailor gave grudgingly a cigarette to the NCO.

"Well, anyhow, this is a strange voyage."

"And why do you say that ? This is an ordinary patrol."

"Didn't you listen to what they said in the mess ?

The commander is leaving the Marine."

"Why would he leave the Marine ? He is the best."

"His father died and he has to take over the seigneurie."

"Bull..! Anyway, it doesn't interest him. He said so to aspirant Fradet. Proof, he is here!"

"Proof that you will never go beyond the rank of sailor!"

"We like being sailors, on the Restigouche, Second Maître."

"That's not the question. The commander is going to Thailand looking for an inheritance. The secretary of the admiral said so to me".

"How is that, Second Maître ? "

"That is not your affair. In any case, it seems that the admiral gave him a special mission order to allow him to disembark in Thailand."

"What about us, Second Maître ? We have heard that there are women over there who know how to do some extraordinary things."

"With fatheads like you ? Anyway, it will depend on the commander."

"Look, Second Maître, look to port. There, on the three hundred. A bright light."

"Already the dawn ?"

"Imbecile! Too early and to the West !"

The three look-outs screwed their binoculars to their eyes and fixed the horizon. The swash of the waves and the grinding of the motors filled the silence. "It glows and it moves about, Second Maître. It looks like a fire."

"A ship ? I'll advise ensign Chartrand." The NCO. leaned into the hatch. "Officer of the watch! Object on the port bow !"

In an instant, a white-capped silhouette emerged from the tower. "Well, Second Maître ?"

"We see a fire off to port. It was not visible a few minutes ago." The officer observed for a moment the mysterious fire. "This certainly is a ship burning. There are no islands within reach of binoculars here, and the reefs carry no vegetation to burn." He moved to the hatch. "Helm to port, three hundred. Reduce speed to ten knots. Wake up the commander."

Quartier Maître Denoncourt served as helper, secretary and servant to lieutenant-de-vaissseau Lemoyne. He explained the situation as his commander hurried into his uniform. "Denoncourt, are they sure about the fire ?"

"Quite so, commander. It glows and it moves about."

"An hour before dawn ? Can they see anything else ?"

"Nobody mentioned anything, commander."

Lemoyne mounted the ladder to the conning tower. The glow had grown and one distinguished hues of yellow, of orange and of red.

"Do we dive, commander ?"

"Not yet. Tell the sonar to try to identify the object. Tell him also to see if there are others vessels around." Lemoyne slowly checked the horizon with his binoculars. "Mr. Chartrand, find me on the map some reefs near the burning ship. Hurry !"

While the submarine moved toward the fire, the grey beginning of the dawn crawled over the horizon. "The weather will be heavy, commander. Maybe we will have a storm."

"Very possible, Second Maître. We will navigate submerged if necessary."

Ensign Chartrand returned with the map and the information. "Commander, sonar says that there is a second vessel, one or two kilometres from the wreckage. There is a reef about thirty two meters wide to starboard." The mention of a second vessel provoked a renewal of tension on the tower. The sailors and the Second Maître replaced their binoculars to attempt to see the unknown vessel. Nadeau sighted suddenly. "There, a little more to port ! It is stopped not far from the burning wreckage."

"Can you identify it ?"

"No, commander, but it is big enough." Lemoyne left the ship's rail and put his hands behind his back. He thought for a few moments, nodding his head. "Mr.

Chartrand ! We are going to dive to periscope depth. Steer for the reef that you found me."

"Aye, aye Sir !" Ensign Chartrand slipped down the hatch. One could hear his voice giving the orders. The klaxon sounded and the sailors followed Chartrand. While the submarine changed its heading and started to dive, Lemoyne fixed his binoculars on the vessel approaching on the horizon. When the tower was on the point of diving, he leaped to the hatch and dogged it shut.

"Raise periscope !" Lemoyne turned his cap and seized the handles of the periscope. He checked the horizon, then returned to his examination of the ship. Around him, the crew maintained the heading and stayed alert. The Restigouche slipped quietly behind the pink and white reef revealed across the waves by the growing day. Lemoyne ordered the crew to maintain position and raised the periscope a little more. "Mr. Chartrand ! Take the periscope and tell me what you see."

"A cruiser, a Japanese cruiser ! Or, in any case, of Japanese design. And a cargo, burning. I don't believe that this is a Japanese cargo. An Imperial ? Difficult to tell with this fire. In any case, I have the impression that the Japanese, if they are Japanese, are taking prisoners. There are armed men in a launch and another launch is collecting the survivors. Wait, yes, the fore turrets are armed."

"Your hypothesis ?"

"A cruiser, of Japanese origin, attacked a cargo,

probably an Imperial, for an unknown reason. The passengers and the crew are prisoners."

"Not bad, mister Chartrand. But I believe that these are pirates. The cruiser is an old model and I don't believe the Japanese still use them. Would the Japanese attack an Imperial ship ? Besides, notice that the armed sailors don't wear a uniform.

Gentlemen, we are going to attack this corsair and liberate the prisoners. We are also going to learn how pirates acquired an old Japanese cruiser."

Some knowing smiles welcomed this declaration by Lemoyne. Drolet winked to Nadeau.

But Lemoyne prepared for action. "Arm the forward torpedoes ! Ahead, three knots. When you have gotten round the reef, you will veer to port, right on the cruiser. Mr. Chartrand, your ship!"

Before the crew had had the time to obey these orders, a bosun emerged brusquely into the bridge.

"Commander, commander, wait ! We have only torpedoes equipped with probes !"

Lemoyne turned sharply to the NCO. "Yes, commander, this is true. Since this was only an information patrol, we lightened the submarine by taking only torpedoes equipped with probes and submarine cameras." All faces filled with dismay.

No one dared look at his neighbour or the commander. He had a gesture of impatience.

"Cancel the order! Maître Brunel, you are telling me we don't have torpedoes ! How are we supposed to defend ourselves ?"

"But, commander, but you gave orders to lighten the submarine and it seemed a logical choice to us. We always have the cannon if we want to stop and inspect a small vessel for interrogation."

Lemoyne absentmindedly sat on the jump seat fixed near the periscope. In a moment, he started to laugh. The sailors watched him, astonished.

"Well, Maître Brunel, do you have any explosives aboard ?"

"Yes, commander, but.."

"And do we have any inflatable boats ?" The NCO. began to understand. He smiled back.

"Then, here is what we are going to do. But it is necessary to move fast. Maître Brunel, you will cobble together a bomb with a detonator, strong enough to make a big hole in an old cruiser. Second Maître Gagnon, take your crew and inflate two boats. Second Maître Trefflé, you are going to bring one torpedo to the deck, when we surface. M. Chartrand ?"

"Commander ?"

"Bring us to the surface, but without letting the hostile ship see us. Do you understand me ?"

"Of course, commander; anyway, they are to the west and the day is dawning."

In less than a half hour, Lemoyne, ensign Chartrand, Maître Brunel and a team of seven sailors dragged an inflated boat, one torpedo and an unlikely assembly of explosives, a timer, electric wire and insulation. They moved to the reef, which hardly

emerged from the water. "Now, smartly, it is necessary to pass the boat with the torpedo over the reef without damage. This reef is rather rough."

Swearing low and sweating high, the sailors succeeded in placing the boat and its cargo on the other side of the reef. Lemoyne observed the cruiser-corsair who was busy embarking the final prisoners. Ensign Chartrand joined him.

"Commander, if we sink the cruiser, the sailors from the cargo will have seen two wrecks in a day, or almost. Isn't that a lot ?"

"Better than staying at the hands of pirates, don't you think ?"

The Ensign shrugged and bent to his work. Seated in the water which lapped the reef, he calculated the time it would take for the scratch fire ship to reach the target. During this time, the explosives specialist imagined the loads and the delay, while urging on his mates. "Two red wires and a yellow, Simard !" "But, Maître Brunel, the manual says."

"The manual doesn't plan for a kilometre of salty water!"

Second Maître Gagnon tried to seal a breach in a section of the boat. He reported to Lemoyne, discouraged. Commander, this boat is not the safest bet."

" Well, take the other ! We will succeed in returning to the submarine with a weak section. You are the one who must not go weak !" The sailors smiled widely, and hurried to bring the other boat. The

explosives specialist Brunel invoked several Church instruments, trying to solidly wire his detonators and his timer as the sailors moved his material to the new boat. Finally, everything was ready. Lemoyne gave his final briefing. "Maître Brunel, no margin of error in timing. As soon as we start the motor of the torpedo, it is necessary to engage the detonator. Ready there, the mechanic ? Chartrand, aim this thing."

On the third attempt, the motor of the torpedo started. The bizarre skiff started out toward the cruiser, while Lemoyne and Chartrand followed with their binoculars. The path seemed impossible, even with a margin of error. But the Ensign Chartrand was more than competent and the torpedo moved with decision toward the cruiser. Chartrand grumbled and balled a fist. "The boat is leaking ! See, caisson two has collapsed!"

The sailors looked ferociously at Second Maître Gagnon, who munched and grumbled, and tried to follow the boat. Lemoyne observed the boat, then shook the head. "We will lose sight of it in an instant. Have you ever done math with problems of faucets and of tubs ?" The sailors laughed feebly, the eyes turned toward the cruiser.

Chartrand noticed a sudden agitation on the bridge of the cruiser. "Look, Commander, I believe they saw something."

Lemoyne saw indeed some faces on the bridge who seemed to be looking at the team from the

Restigouche crouched down on its reef. "This is to our advantage, if we serve as a distraction. If they see us, they don't see our rickety raft." The sailors watched anxiously. Some started to calculate the time before the impact. Others, especially the rookies, evaluated the distance between them and their submarine. Would they have trouble rejoining it ? But anxiety changed sides in an instant. The cruiser disappeared behind a sheaf of water and the noise of the explosion seemed to blow the water from the reef for a brief moment. When the water was back again, all saw, even without binoculars, than the cruiser corsair was sinking by the stern. A second explosion, then a third shook the vessel. The officers scrutinized attentively the result of their work. "It is sinking fast, Commander. We hit its munitions hold."

"Indeed, which suggests that this cargo was carrying something that could motivate the pirates to attack it."

"Munitions, Commander ?"

"Munitions and explosives. But it is indeed sinking fast. We must move quickly if we want to liberate the crew of the cargo and take some prisoners." The team regained the submarine at the double. Lemoyne signalled to Ensign Bertrand, who was on watch, to steer toward the two wrecks. The sailors hurried to their posts, congratulating themselves for their success. "You see, Nadeau, why it's special to sail on the Restigouche !" Drolet and Nadeau, still on

watch, stood on the prow of the submarine rushing to help any survivors, on the look-out for anything that floated. But neither they nor the others saw anything other than a slick of fuel-oil and some flotsam.

"They sank too fast, Commander."

"I believe you are right, Second Maître. The munitions must have been stacked on the bridge and blew up in a chain-reaction. But there must be some survivors among those who were shuttling between the cargo and the cruiser."

"I don't know, Commander. They had almost regained the cruiser before our torpedo hit. We worried that the cruiser would move before our gizmo got there. We would never have been able to hit a moving ship."

"Probably, Second Maître, probably. It is necessary to seize opportunity and find a solution with the means available."

A shout interrupted the discussion: "Wreckage to starboard !" On an upside-down rowboat lay one human shape blackened by smoke and oil. The Restigouche approached slowly and the sailor on the prow was able to hoist the man aboard.

Lemoyne went down to the infirmary to examine him while the submarine pursued its search.

"He is not a European, Commander. He seems Malayan or Burmese to me. Anyway, he suffered serious internal injuries. I don't give him long to live."

"Burma is a Germanic colony, but I don't believe that the Germanics recruit sailors in their colonies. Can you tell if he had a uniform?"

"His clothes were filthy from the explosion, but I don't believe that he wore a uniform. He is seriously injured to the head and he has several broken ribs."

"Lamontagne, can you save him? It would be interesting to interrogate him."

"I can keep him alive for a while. But without true care he won't be very informative. We must get to a harbour"

"Not before Thailand, in any case."

A sailor came to report. "Commander, the cruiser has disappeared and the cargo has begun to sink. Ensign Bertrand says that there are no other survivors."

"Very well. Then, on to Thailand. And you, Lamontagne, I want the prisoner alive when we get there."

The prisoner survived. He had not entirely regained consciousness, but he no longer lost blood and the injections of the medic prevented infection. The story of the cruiser also took strength. By Bangkok, the cruiser had become a battleship and the crew had rowed to its hull, at the peril of their lives. Lemoyne planned his landing. "Bertrand, you will stay aboard. Keep a watch and give the others forty-eight hours leave. Chartrand, you will bring the prisoner to the hospital of our embassy, pretending

than he is one of our sailors. I want to interrogate him without the Thais getting involved. For my part, I am going to take Denoncourt and do a personal investigation. When the prisoner is delivered, Chartrand, you will change place with Bertrand. I imagine you will want to discover the exotic pleasures of Bangkok ?"

The Restigouche was moored to an embankment reserved for foreign warships. The Thai government, stuck between the Germanic colonies of Burma, Imperial Indochina and British Malaya, was kept busy preventing the discord which would have threatened its autonomy. The formalities done, Ensign Chartrand left with his patient, accompanied by the medic, in a rickshaw propelled by two smiling and sinewy brothers. Lemoyne turned to his aide. "Now, we must find the Place Nouvelle. I must meet a certain Maître Nolet. We had better ask our way." Denoncourt called politely to an NCO from an Imperial cruiser.

The man stared vaguely at him. "Place Nouvelle ? What do you want, my friend? Women, alcohol, or gambling ?"

LEMOYNE LOOKS BUT DOES NOT TOUCH

With an expansive gesture, Maître Nolet pushed the tourniquet for Lemoyne and Denoncourt. The building didn't seem very big seen from the outside. But as he entered, Lemoyne had a sensation of immense emptiness. Denoncourt raised his eyes toward a corrugated roof, painted red. Me Nolet smiled slightly. "This is a removable roof, in canvas. It protects against the monsoon and against the sun when it gets too strong." The notary and his guests were hardly alone in the stadium. Every corner was replete with a teeming humanity, jabbering, and motley-coloured, somehow both colorful and washed-out; a humanity rather masculine than feminine, but not exclusively. The sides of the canvas stadium were covered with murals which seemed to Lemoyne typical enough of popular oriental art. They represented women queerly clothed, or painted, who danced or twisted and turned in poses that Lemoyne didn't understand. Denoncourt marvelled and pointed at the curiosities as he spotted them. "Are we going to see some dancing ?"

Me Nolet pointed to the centre of the stadium. A barrier woven from red string isolated from the audience a surface of about thirty meters by fifteen, covered with a carpet, red also. In the centre of the carpet stood a small tower or table, about eighty centimetres high. The table, or stool, was hollowed out on top, to about five centimetres. Two booths offered at each end of the ring the means to place a bet. Both were busy. "I don't understand," muttered Lemoyne in the notary's ear, "I would have guessed that this is a place for a dance or a spectacle, but its nature is not apparent." "Patience," answered Me Nolet as he greeted some acquaintances. One of these approached. He was colonel of a regiment of foreign infantry, those which the French Empire often used in its overseas territories. He was also a knight of the Empire. Lemoyne knew the insignia and the cut of the uniform, which he had seen on occasion (sometimes on dead bodies, for information is not always easy to obtain) during his missions. The colonel was named De Salinas and had won his rank of knight through an exploit against some rebels further north. He knew Lemoyne by reputation. He had shared more than one jeroboam with Me Nolet of a 15 Août, and had also called for his help in the legal matter of sharing some war booty. "This is your first visit ?" he asked with a wink. "Bet on Septima, she will earn you a month of extra pay, even an American sailor's pay !" He patted the notary's shoulder and left. Before

Lemoyne could ask the notary about the suggestion made by colonel De Salinas, a noise from the crowd diverted his attention. At the same moment, a waiter bowed at their table. The crowd roared, louder and more regularly. Then it stopped abruptly. Masked persons were filing into the red-ribboned ring. "Septima! Septima!", said a voice. Then was heard "Blue! Blue!." Then the sound became a general cheering. "Cascada! Cascada!", "Musca ! Musca !", "Green ! Green !", "Jasmina ! Jasmina !" Finally, Lemoyne heard also "Apricot! Apricot!" "Is this our Apricot ?" he asked.

"But of course," retorted briskly Me Nolet, "wait a moment, I am going to place a small bet."

The notary cut himself a path to the nearest booth. Lemoyne fixed his attention on the parade of masks. Every individual wore a large cape. There were seven blue and eight green; the green seemed woven of a piece and carried a big Chinese character, while the blue gave rather the impression of pieces sewn together, of the same colour but with some visible nuances. Their capes wore no special sign. Me Nolet returned. "I bet Blue Apricot 2; this means that I foresee a Blue victory, and that than our Apricot will sow two times. Do you want to wager something ?"

"I will wait until better understand the principles of the game. And you, Denoncourt ?"

"I will follow your lead, Commander. Are they going to fight ?"

"Not exactly, my friends. This is a game in which every team has to score goals."

Denoncourt watched wide-eyed, looking from one individual to the other. Each wore a mask. Every mask was different in its shape or its design. One represented a cat who mewed. Another seemed to represent the head of a bird, possibly a peacock. However, the colour of the masks agreed with those of the capes. The individuals entered slowly into the red ring. The lights increased slightly above this while decreasing elsewhere in the room. The two groups of masks faced each other, without any noise, but with everyone rolling their hips and shoulders. Then, a small man, of Eurasian appearance, hurried to the centre of the ring.

"Mesdames et messieurs, welcome in the Pavilion of the Moon."

"Did you notice, Denoncourt ? Again a German accent."

"Yes, Commander, the Germanics use many agents or create many refugees."

The small announcer was still speaking. "This evening, we have the pleasure of presenting a game of Li Nu Yin, between the Jade Kittens, to my right, and the Mahareb, in blue, to my left." The announcer paused, so the partisans of each team could applaud and shout encouragement. "The game will be divided in two periods, each of thirty minutes, without pause except in the case of penalty." The crowd demonstrated noisily its

satisfaction. Me Nolet explained. "A game is normally played in two periods of twenty minutes. Often one is satisfied with one period of a half-hour. Such a long game, in addition to prolonging the pleasure, shows a certain rivalry between the two teams. In the present case, the Kittens are very strong and are sponsored by a rich Chinese shopkeeper. There is his seal on their capes. The Mahareb is a team of independent players, owing nothing to anyone; their name means, Wild cherry tree."

"And Li Nu Yin means.. ?" asked Denoncourt. Me Nolet shrugged slightly. "Something like the feminine energy becomes strength thanks to the woman."

The announcer greeted the two teams and left the ring. A woman replaced him; although this individual was also masked, her tight fitting costume left no doubt as to her sex - or then the transvestite would have been a master of his art ! The costume was like that of a Pierrot, alternately white and black. The woman, who was apparently the referee, gestured to the two teams. Two blue individuals and three green withdrew from the ring, leaving five players of each colour. The referee tossed a coin. "Heads !" said the grim green mask. The coin showed heads. The referee gestured again and the players withdrew their capes with an abrupt gesture and threw them to their sisters standing around the ring. Denoncourt made a small admiring

noise. The women were almost entirely naked. Their arms wore gloves without fingers which rose to just above the elbow and their legs wore stockings to just above the knee. Gloves and stockings were of the same colour as their capes. Controlling his emotion better than his aide, Lemoyne appreciated the firm and vigorous beauty of the players, very different from the pale and languishing style, fashionable among the women of his class. The skins seemed smooth and tense, their colours running from pale coffee to a blond almost golden.

Denoncourt turned a questioning look toward Me Nolet. "Who assembled these women from everywhere in the world? Can this be chance?"

"Indochina is a big bazaar, where one can encounter any part of humanity. It is normal than it should attract adventurers – male and female – and some marginals from everywhere. In Bangkok, one finds everything one could want. One also tolerates any sort of dream, like the one which the uncle of your commander could pursue. One also invents new games, as you see."

"So, then," asked Lemoyne, "who is Apricot?"

"The blue player with very dark hair."

"The one whose, ah, chest, is.."

"The second from the left." Me Nolet smiled.

Lemoyne examined attentively the players, who stood in two triangles, facing each other. Each triangle was formed of three players; a fourth stood

in the point, with the fifth behind her. Lemoyne could see now the movement of muscles, and the slow swing of shoulders while they took position in the ring. He noticed also that most bodies showed small scars. With the players in position, the referee took a small ball from a pocket, which one wouldn't have thought possible on a costume so tight-fitting. The ball was half-black and half-white, like the costume of the referee. She let the ball between the legs of the green player at the tip of the triangle. The player had a graceful movement of the hips to seize the ball. Lemoyne held his breath. The referee gave a small blast of her whistle and the game started. Three Mahareb moved quickly to the right of the table, as if to get round the Kittens. The green player, still holding the ball, threw herself back and toward her right, while her sister on the right advanced as if to charge the blue team. The audience made a collective growl. The three green players (a wing, the beak and the tail, specified Me Nolet) of the left, of the centre and of the rear rolled toward the menacing line of the blue players. The two line entered strenuously in contact, with a humph ! from the players and an oh ! from the room. The right wing of the green team had during this time reached the tower and tried to block the access. On the left of the tower, three green players and three blue fought strenuously. On the right, the green carrier of the ball had succeeded in approaching of tower, but two blue players,

outmanoeuvring the right wing of the greens, surrounded her. Lithely, the carrier made a leap forward, over the tower, then by a quick turn of her body, she bestrode the tower. There was a sound of a gong and Lemoyne could see the ball in the cavity of the tower. There was in the crowd a mixture of growls and of shouts of satisfaction: "Septima! Septima! "

"Yes, yes, this is she, "said Me Nolet.

"And yet, you bet on Apricot," noticed Lemoyne.

"This is like a horse race," exclaimed Denoncourt, "but this is much more stimulating !"

"You have not yet seen anything," smiled the notary.

"I like horse-races", added Lemoyne.

The success of the green player did not stop the action. The blue beak succeeded in slipping though the wall of the bodies made by the green players and to somersault toward the player named Septima. She coiled her body around Septima's and pulled her from the tower. Another blue player leapt to help her teammate, but she was blocked by an incredible contortion of an adversary. Me Nolet made a small involuntary sigh. The star player, Septima, slipped like an eel from her adversary's grasp, jumped up and landed with a thump, on her belly, on the tower. She slipped forward after taking the ball. The players separated. They formed two lines, the carrier of the ball keeping to the right extremity of the green line. Suddenly, she rolled toward her left, while her sister jumped over her.

The movement repeated down the line. During this time, the blue players feinted forward. The green movement took the other direction. In a flash, the carrier pushed her body to break off her team, and, using it as a base, somersaulted over the blue line. Two blue players threw themselves, with an abrupt movement of their hips, on her. But the three other blues crawled quickly between the tower and the four other green players. Septima seemed to fly over the two players who tried to counter, as she looked for a way to manoeuvre toward the tower. She could not leap, but succeeded in launching her body on the ring floor, like a soap on a slippery surface. Her body hit heavily the tower with a crack, and the gong sounded again. Before Septima could recover, a blue player, in a sudden movement, stood astride on the tower and knocked the green player aside. The blue player took the ball in a flexible movement. To the shout of "Olga! Olga!", the player - the blue beak - lifted herself by her arms to the tower, raised her legs, then jumped toward the rear to land crookedly on her right knee. Lemoyne imagined the grimace of pain behind the mask, which seemed to represent an ape. Two green players galloped on hands and knees toward the blue player still stunned. Two blue players rolled under them, to hinder their advance. There was a blur of movement outside the ring. Lemoyne saw then Apricot throw off her cape and tumble into the ring, while the stunned blue player slipped out.

Standing on her hands, Apricot levitated her body to seize a green player about the neck with her legs. Then, she raised herself by passing her arms over her head and dived toward Olga. The green player was constrained by the strength of the movement to lower her head, which broke her impetus. Benefiting from her confusion, Apricot raised herself on a knee and withdrew the ball from Olga. The crowd let out an oh ! "Unusual," said Me Nolet, "to take the ball from a player of one's own team." The green players hesitated, some planning again to move forward on Olga, others seeking to block the new carrier of the ball. Apricot threw her body forward, the movement of her legs spread wide behind her on the carpet. She pushed herself to the tower, which she mounted with a kind of overhand crawl. The gong sounded and the crowd clamoured. Me Nolet pushed Lemoyne lightly with his elbow. Denoncourt tightened his fists and shook his arm. Septima, however, had understood what her adversary was about. She sprang right to Apricot, too late to prevent her scoring. But she succeeded in pushing up against the tower and tried to seize the ball. Apricot pushed back and the two players tested their strength, each attempting to repulse the other. The room became silent, the other players in a circle around the tower, and Lemoyne felt his mouth dry up. He slipped his hand toward the Kouai-Lo that he had not seen appear and took a swallow. Finally, Apricot won the test of strength

and repelled her opponent, who did a back-flip. Apricot slipped from the tower and rolled toward her left. She attempted to get round the tower, while two green players, woke up and tried to seize her. But Septima had not given up, and she cartwheeled up to the position occupied by Apricot. She shouldered off a blue player who had wanted to block her with her back and found herself behind Apricot. She passed a leg about Apricot's neck and brought back her head hard into the small of Apricot's back. Apricot grunted and fell on all fours. She brought back a leg and pushed against Septima. Septima refused to let go, but her body slipped slowly toward the ground. In the moment where Septima must finally let go, her head slipped between Apricot's thighs. Here, Apricot gave a suppressed shout and the ball rolled to the floor. The referee blew her strident whistle. The players stood up, the green at one end of the ring and the blue at the other. The referee passed a hand between Apricot's thighs and withdrew it stained by a little blood. "Penalty for biting" announced loudly the referee. Septima had not moved and replaced her mask, which had slipped, revealing during an instant a wide sensual mouth. The crowd showed its agitation. The referee showed her two hands to Septima. She shrugged, left the ring, slipped into her cape and left the arena, her head high. The game went on. The incident had obviously shaken some players. During the

remaining minutes of the first period, the players were satisfied in turning about one another or in manoeuvring by jumps in line. When time ran out, the referee blew the intermission. The players got up and retired to the wings, shouldering into their capes. After their departure, a hubbub filled the room. The audience commented on the game and, naturally, lined up to make or change their bets. The waiters hurried to the tables.

"It is time to make an appointment with Apricot," said Me Nolet, standing up. Lemoyne and Denoncourt followed him as he made a path across the moving mass of the audience.

Me Nolet guided them to a wide door labelled **FORBIDDEN TO THE AUDIENCE**. He looked around quickly and entered. A big scarecrow of a guard challenged him uncertainly. The notary slipped him some bills and whispered a few words. The guard disappeared and Me Nolet entered a short corridor. He knocked at a door and entered, followed by Lemoyne and Denoncourt. They were in the dressing-room of the Mahareb. Their entry unleashed a loud protest. The players were busy changing their stockings and their gloves and wiping their bodies with big white towels. Almost all had withdrawn their masks. At the sight of the three men, they expressed some ugly words and reached for their masks. Some, their mask out of reach, hid their face with their hands. A middle-aged woman approached the three men. "This

dressing-room is forbidden to spectators ! The players need rest between the two periods." Me Nolet made signs of pacification. "We only need to speak to the player named Apricot."

"I am here," said a voice, "it's all right, Marianne, I will speak to these gentlemen outside."

Apricot detached herself from the group, removing her mask. She had wrapped a towel about her waist. She gently brought her visitors back into the corridor. "I bring you a friend of a friend, the nephew of Marc-Méridée, Pierre Henri," said Me Nolet.

Apricot offered a long and fine hand. "Is this inheritance from Marc-Méridée ?" Me Nolet nodded seriously yes.

"Then, we will meet tomorrow. Come see me at home, Place du Tigre Souriant. We will go out to the plantation. Does this suit you ?"

Lemoyne looked at Me Nolet, who shrugged.

"Certainly. I am impressed by your style. I hope than Septima didn't hurt you ?"

Apricot smiled. "It will certainly not keep me from playing. But I believe that Septima will have to take two or three days of rest."

Denoncourt impatiently wanted to speak. "Madame, it would be necessary to play this game in America. I am certain than there would be large audiences."

"Don't listen to him, Madame, I believe that he is very impressed."

"It is nothing. Do you have nothing similar in

America ?"

"Not with humans, in any case. There are races with dogs and horses, but this is not the same thing at all !"

Apricot put a hand on Denoncourt's arm and looked Me Nolet in the eye. "Do you know what Marc-Méridée wanted to entrust to his nephew ?" The notary shook his head. "I met M. Lemoyne yesterday when he gave me the letter of my American colleague. I am only a go-between." He put his index on the shoulder of the athlete. "I bet Blue Apricot 2."

Apricot showed three fingers and winked. A comrade interrupted the conversation.

"We are leaving," said Lemoyne, "goodbye, Madame Apricot, until tomorrow."

Denoncourt tugged the sleeve of his commander.

"We should also bet. Blue Apricot 2, did you say ?"

"Three," interjected the notary, "moreover, I have to modify my own bet." The shouts of the crowd warned them that the players had returned.

Lemoyne noticed that there were new masks in both teams. Apricot was not in the blue starting line.

This time, the referee threw directly the ball to the blue team. But the game moved slowly. The blue carrier precipitated things by slipping behind her line then doing a somersault toward the left. The green wing before her succeeded however in doing a split and tripping her. The ball rolled far from the tower. During several minutes, the players jostled

each other clumsily, without succeeding in taking an advantage. The room began to produce some hisses and some ohs! A tall player of the Kittens of Jade, who had not played until then, sought to upset the balance. In addition to being tall, she had striking shoulders and a large bosom, almost menacing in its firmness. To the shout of Tatiana ! Tatiana ! this player attacked strenuously the players of the Mahareb. The blue beak collapsed from a knee in the back, while a wing was repulsed to the red ropes of the ring. The smallest of the blue players, of Asian appearance, laced her legs, in a faultless movement, about Tatiana and tried to hold her arms with her thighs. But Tatiana succeeded in lifting her with her back, then threw herself to the floor, shattering her courageous opponent under her weight. The victim of this movement stayed stretched out on the floor, breathing with difficulty. Tatiana rolled to one side and, while her sisters blocked the adversaries, slipped on her belly to seize the ball.

Lemoyne said farewell to the money of his bet while Tatiana threw herself toward the tower. But Apricot had intervened. Substituting for the player hit by the big Green player, she cartwheeled to the tower, jumped over it to land on her hands; then, arching her back, she put her feet on Tatiana's shoulders. Tatiana was forced to stop. One of her sisters struck Apricot on the arm with both feet, but Apricot had succeeded in slipping under Tatiana

and butting her solidly in the stomach. The ball fell. A blue player seized it on the fly. Apricot turned from under the green player, not without giving her a hard body blow, and landed behind her on her knees. The carrier of the ball gave a twist of her hips, sending the ball under a green player to Apricot's feet, who did a wide split to recover the ball. She did an impossible back-flip, followed by a second; at the last moment, a green player succeeded in making her fall, painfully, but on the tower. Apricot gave a slight shift of her hips and the gong sounded. Apricot seemed to be resting, balancing on the tip of her feet. Tatiana and the others players slipped toward positions to attack, screaming in short bursts, then jumped to meet each other. Tatiana overturned an opponent, almost pulling off her mask. During several minutes, the bodies collided without any one succeeding in seizing the ball. Finally, a green player reached it, slipped off the tower and rolled toward the rear. She turned around brusquely, then somersaulted forward. Tatiana struck out with her arms, her hips, her legs and even her breasts to open a path to the tower. She succeeded in almost reaching it, but at the last second, a Mahareb player, with a complexion like coffee with milk, passed under her and forced her to fall on the carpet. She pursued her attack, while Tatiana, sweating heavily, took three players under her arms and legs. Again, she succeeded in almost reaching the tower, but this

time a blue player rolled on her, provoking her fall. There was a deadening crunch and the ball rolled to the right line.

Apricot rolled over the inanimate green player and slipped onto the carpet to meet the ball. She did a somersault and the ball disappeared. "Two minutes to play," whispered Me Nolet. Apricot got round two players, slipped between another and the edge of the arena to back flip toward the tower. But Tatiana had got rid of the three blue players that had been holding her and dived behind Apricot. Before she could make her final jump, Tatiana seized her head between her thighs and squeezed. Apricot could neither jump nor liberate her head. The seconds flew on. Tatiana tightened and tightened. Apricot's face blushed deeper and deeper. She sought to stretch her body, as if to slip from Tatiana's embrace. Meanwhile, two blue players had passed their legs about Tatiana's shoulders, forcing her to arch her back more and more. The crowd had stopped any noise, as if to add no weight to either antagonist. The muscles of Apricot's neck seemed to twist, to the rhythm of the crunching of Tatiana's vertebrae. Apricot was stretching. stretching. She pushed her left leg toward the tower, slowly, slowly, until the tip of her foot almost touched it. Then, she put her hands on Tatiana's loins, expired deeply and gave a quick hip thrust. The ball hopped onto her left leg. Apricot stretched her neck a final millimetre and sighted the foot on

the edge of tower. Her leg trembled. The ball rose on her toe, then fell in the cup. The gong sounded. The referee gave the signal of the end of the game. During an instant, the scene did not change, like a snapshot. Then, like a storm on a pond, mobility returned. The two Mahareb players regretfully released Tatiana. The Kittens got up slowly. Apricot rose slowly, shaking her head painfully. Helped by her sisters, she slowly limped from the arena. Noise returned like an explosion. Denoncourt dragged Lemoyne toward the betting kiosk. "We won, commander, we won !"

WHERE LEMOYNE IS LED UP THE GARDEN PATH

The Place du Tigre Souriant (Smiling Tiger Square) had an irregular shape but a pleasant aspect. A small garden showed a surprising variety of flowers, tropical and otherwise. One could sit there in the shade of two spreading firs, still astonished at finding themselves in such a hot country. They had been installed there by some Germanic colonists, whose nostalgia for their native country often provoked similar gestures. Apricot lived in a small pavilion of indeterminate style, identified by a placard showing her name, in French, in Thai and in British, as well as the Chinese character for an apricot. Me Nolet parked his bulky Schneider in the shade of a tall palm that leaned toward the courtyard of Apricot's pavilion. The square obviously received few vehicles. Its peripheral situation was awkward for the uses of vehicles. Besides, the modest appearance of the houses testified to revenue insufficient for the upkeep of an automobile, combustion or steam. Children' heads popped up from the bushes and the passion flowers to marvel at the long and powerful car which sighed

in repose. Following a maid, they crossed a well maintained courtyard, bigger than might suspect a visitor on seeing the house. A walk of white stones spun almost in a straight line between a mass of running vines, crossed sometimes by flowers, both tropical and European, in white boxes. Then the walk wound around the pavilion itself, passed a garden shed, freshly painted, and lost itself in a terrace of white tiles, surrounding a tempting swimming pool of a delicate blue.

"Hello, gentlemen," said Apricot, slipping out of the water. Lemoyne, a little disappointed, noticed that she wore a fashionable bathing suit, crossed back and front. The maid presented to Apricot a big fluffy bathrobe, pink, blue and peach.

"Please sit," she invited, indicating two chairs with one hand and tying the belt of her bathrobe with the other. "Did you find my house without difficulty?" Lemoyne bowed slightly. "Yes! But after last night, I, we, despaired of seeing you again."

Apricot laughed gaily. "Because of the last manoeuvre of the game? This kind of situation sometimes jars the audience, but a true player of Li Nu Yin knows her limits and those of her adversaries. What we do here is nothing. Do you know why Li Nu Yin is officially illegal in Thailand?"

"I had never heard of it," confessed Lemoyne. "It is true that my work carried rather on naval questions."

"Well ! You will therefore be curious to learn that the game is played in some regions of China with a ball of blown glass."

"Such violence is a bit surprising. Is that version legal in China ?"

"Perfectly ! In Indonesia, a variant of the game allows players to carry a metal claw in the heel of their stocking. As you see, here, we are very inoffensive." Apricot smiled a wide smile. Seeing Lemoyne a little crestfallen, she put on a polite face and asked: "At least, the experience was profitable ?"

"11 314 ticals, that is nearly a thousand American louis." Lemoyne pulled a sheaf of notes from his jacket. "Moreover, here is a share for you."

Apricot frowned slightly and glanced at Me Nolet. Then she pursed her lips slightly "A lady prefers a more delicate homage. After our trip, you will invite me to dinner at Essendienst."

"After our trip ?"

"Yes. I invite you to a lazy man's lunch. Then, we will go to the plantation." She raised a hand and her maid emerged carrying a tray loaded with good things. There were small round breads, born of the love of a bagel for a croissant. There were fine meat roulés, an invention of Indochina which had delighted more than one gourmet. Some country patés of a French style lay in harmony with some Germanic wurst, daintily sauteed in fragrant Thai oil. A bowl of cool fruit, cleverly sliced, completed

the presentation.

"Do you then possess a rubber plantation ?" asked Lemoyne, a plate in his right hand.

"You will see. It is near Krunkao. The car will take us quickly."

In the garden, Lemoyne walked slowly, to better observe the face of Apricot. She had fine features, in a face more square than oval. Her mouth was wide, but her lips rather thin. Her nose would have been inappropriate in an exhibition, but her face was graceful. Especially, her green eyes, slightly almond-shaped, gave her a look at the same time ingenuous and mysterious. Surprisingly, her complexion, despite the very dark hair curling over her ears, seemed rather pale through the suspicion of tan that one noticed. Did Apricot surprise the thought ? She examined slowly the face of her guest, turning slightly her head.

"May I ask a question ?" asked Apricot, absentmindedly licking her fingers.

"But of course," reacted briskly Lemoyne, drawn from his sensual daydream. "If you don't know at all what your uncle has prepared for you, why have you made the journey ?"

Lemoyne hesitated a moment. "My family has a long tradition of service to America, since the era of New France. An ancestor commanded the expeditionary force which took Boston, the main English fortress north of the Dutch. Admiral Lemoyne of Tourneville, who destroyed the English

fleet off La Corogne, was a distant cousin. My father, until a few weeks ago, was seigneur of one of the main energy concessions on the continent. I have been charged, since several years, with the surveillance of our interests in Asia. I am perhaps a faithful member of my family. Am I the prisoner of a domestic tradition ? My uncle's inheritance may open a new path for me."

Without waiting for Apricot's reaction, Lemoyne pursued brusquely. "May I also ask you a question ?"

Apricot smiled and nodded. "Well, here, I wonder: your name is Vertefeuille ?"

Apricot laughed. "Anne-Aimée Fleur-d'Apricot Vertefeuille. My father was born in Alsace, of a Jewish family. He worked a long time as an agronomist and botanist in the plantations of Indochina. My mother was the daughter of an officer in a colonial regiment of the Empire. When he retired, my family came here. You know that Thailand serves as a buffer between the Germanic colonies in Birmanie, the British colonies in Malaisie and Imperial Indochina. In the Germanic colony are numerous Jews from Alsace. My father bought the plantation that you will see soon."

Me Nolet interrupted the conversation. "Time to leave, madame Apricot."

"Indeed ! Give me a moment." She disappeared into her house and re-appeared in a few minutes, wearing a one piece costume, of a peach colour.

After a few words to her maid, she motioned to the two men: "Let's go !"

Lemoyne prepared to open the rear door. Apricot gestured that she would sit up front. With a slight shrug of his shoulders, Lemoyne slipped into the back seat. The sedan was equipped with an air conditioner, inestimable luxury for the climate of Southeast Asia. Lemoyne gave a small sigh of satisfaction, but Apricot shivered without pleasure. "You have lived here for more than twenty years and you have not made peace with the climate ?"

The notary raised a corner of his mouth. "I would have wanted to make peace, but the climate doesn't stop attacking me. So, I defend myself. Do I take the road of Krunkao until Mindao ?"

"Yes, until the thirty second kilometre mark. You will then take to the left after the small temple." The car started with a whisper of steam and a screeching of tires.

"Michelin ?" remarked Apricot. Me Nolet smiled smugly. He guided his Schneider across the crowd who strolled in the street of the Roi Revenu, until the Market of Samthiong. In this season, the market was little frequented, which avoided a long detour in the labyrinth of surrounding streets. There were nevertheless some stalls occupied by fishmongers, sellers of vegetables and, especially, those sellers of junk always lying in wait for the naive customer. Driving prudently, Me Nolet reached the boulevard of king Rama V, traced out in 1889 on the pattern of

the great boulevards of Paris.

Lemoyne gestured impatiently at the sight. "They have erected the straight line to a cult. We, in America, believe that the human scale and the balance of elements are the best guides in architecture, as in organization."

"The French Empire and the Germanic look more alike than either would like to admit," suggested Apricot sardonically.

Lemoyne nodded, amused. "I have heard the same words from the mouth of a naval officer of the Russian Republic."

The Schneider sped now on an asphalted road, lined with sycamores. Although the town has been left behind, the planning remained in evidence. Kilometre after kilometre, the plantations were demarcated by tall palisades of bamboo, pierced by fancy entrances, drawn according to the whims of their owners. One saw an imitation of the Arc de Triomphe, amusingly neighbour to a copy of Schoenbrunn. "To be expected, I suppose," said Lemoyne leaning to see, "we are near the Germanic colonies. But are we going to a similar establishment?"

"I told you that my father was Jewish. He put up a menorah."

"But why did my uncle set up there? Was this after meeting you?"

Apricot shook her head. "Not at all. My father had been here for several years, to pursue his

experiments. Your uncle was a sort of chemistry professor, and maybe of physics, at the National University of Thailand. They tolerated his research, without believing in success. One day, my father went to the university with a problem about an alloy for a machine, that he never finished. His friends at the university, between drinks, spoke to him about your uncle. My father knocked at the door of the laboratory where worked your uncle. Their association started thus. I was only nine years old. My father would have liked me to follow in his footsteps, or at least that I should finish my diploma, but he never fought my preferences."

Apricot smiled softly at this memory. "But, tell me, why did your uncle leave America ?"

Lemoyne pursed his lips. "He left when I was eleven or twelve. I remember that they talked about him a little in family reunions, especially as a quitter and a bad study. However, they expressed sometimes a certain pride when reading his rare letters. I don't believe that there ever was a quarrel, but rather an irresistible desire to be elsewhere. My uncle even went to England and to Scotland ! I remember having seen the stamps from his letters." The car rolled in silence during several minutes.

"Careful," said suddenly Apricot to Me Nolet, "you are missing the entrance !"

The Schneider sighed, then entered a narrow road of ground stone. After a few minutes, it stopped before an iron gate, decorated, as Apricot had said,

with a menorah in forged iron. "Honk twice, pause, honk again twice, pause again, then honk three times." After a while, a Thai of possibly fifty came slowly to open the gate. "Hello, Madame, hello, Maître," he said to Apricot and to the notary, but looking at Lemoyne.

"Hello, Ananda, here is lieutenant-de-vaisseau Lemoyne, the nephew of M. Marc-Méridée."

"The nephew of M. Marc-Méridée," repeated Ananda, examining Lemoyne.

"Yes," said Me Nolet, moving forward, "here are the official documents sent to me by my American colleague and the will of Marc-Méridée Lemoyne. They establish that M. Marc-Méridée Lemoyne leaves his possessions to his nephew Pierre Henri Lemoyne, an officer of the American navy, on the condition that he settle here and pursue the work." Ananda had listened in silence. He smiled slightly, then opened the gate wider. "Get in," said Me Nolet, after the car had cleared the gate that the Thai had closed again.

"Ananda was assistant to my father," said Apricot, "he manages the plantation in my name. He also helped with the work of my father and of Marc-Méridée Lemoyne."

"Yes, added Ananda, I was before that his assistant at the University. Do you know what we did here ?" The question was addressed to Lemoyne.

"No," he confessed, with a look at Apricot, "but I am more and more curious."

At first glance, nothing distinguished the plantation Vertefeuille from another. The little road rolled slowly between fields of rubber vines. "Ficus ampelideus," said Ananda waving at the fields.

"In essence," said Lemoyne, examining the fields, "you are growing tires."

"The rubber sap is encouraged to grow in clusters of a certain shape. One can then pick the clusters with a machine and send them directly to the factory. The production is increased and the manpower is reduced."

"The Germanics wanted to produce artificial rubber during the war of the Three Emperors, in a pilot factory in Buchenstadt, near the oilfields of Vallachie, but the cost was exorbitant."

The Schneider stopped on the indications of Apricot, near a long shed. There were three similar sheds, painted white, whence emerged some hoses and some electric cables whose meaning did not appear apparent to Lemoyne. A little further, one saw a corner of the house where Apricot had been raised. All followed Ananda into the third shed. Light entered by the glass roof, but it was cooler inside than out thanks to a clever arrangement of open windows. To the left of the door opened a small office, replete with papers and books which covered the worktable, the shelves, the chairs, a drawing table and even the cover of an aquarium, where lived somehow, to the surprise of Lemoyne, a colony of tropical fish. " This was, as you

suspect, the cabinet of your uncle," said Ananda to Lemoyne. "I still take care of the fish, although I added nothing to the collection since his death." A tall half-wall divided the shed into two parts. The first, in addition to the study, sheltered a laboratory. Its equipment, rather eclectic, included among other thing some miniature greenhouses, some capacitors and a distillery, small format. In a corner, they had liberated enough room for another small worktable, on which Lemoyne recognized a photo of Ananda with two pretty smiling women. Ananda led them through a kind of door installed in the half-wall. In this half of the shed, it was very hot and very humid. The space was almost entirely occupied by some wide tables, as one one would expect in a greenhouse. Indeed, on the tables, one saw massive entanglements of greenery installed on stones. Ananda gestured to Lemoyne to approach. Apricot observed Lemoyne.

"Touch", said Ananda to Lemoyne. Lemoyne bent to the table and saw what seemed to be bolts covered by the leaves of the plant. He lifted one, to confirm that it was indeed a bolt. But it emerged from the stem of the plant, like a grape on a grapevine.

Lemoyne noticed also that the stem of the plant was very rigid, almost metallic. He looked at Ananda, then at Apricot. "A bolt vine ?" he said finally.

"In a word, yes", answered Ananda.

"But, how ?" asked Lemoyne, the plant bolt still in his hand. Ananda took the bolt that held Lemoyne,

pulled it from the stem and returned it to a still astounded Lemoyne.

"Time for refreshment ! " suggested Apricot, reassuming her role as hostess. Seated on a comfortable armchair of the veranda, a glass of iced tea in his hand, Lemoyne contemplated the bolt.

"Fundamentally, this is nothing very complicated," explained Ananda, "once you have succeeded in recoding genetically the plant, it is sufficient to provide the necessary elements and let it grow. The plant obeys its genetic code, draws the iron in the mineral and produces a bolt. Need I specify that this bolt is totally rust-proof."

"But the plant", objected Lemoyne, "surely the plant cannot reproduce ?"

"No, not the one which produced the bolt. But it is very easy to cultivate, like one does a mule."

"I suspect the process is slow enough."

"Any organic process is slow, but this requires no factory, no chemical activity, and does not produce any loss. One could install the plant everywhere, provided that you have light, heat and humidity."

"Did my uncle create all this ?"

"Your uncle and my father," answered Apricot. "My father mastered genetic codes, and your uncle the chemical and energy process."

"But then," asked Lemoyne, turning to Me Nolet, "what does my uncle leave me, exactly ?"

"He leaves you," answered quietly the notary, "his share of the facilities here."

"The rest belongs to me," added Apricot, "less a fraction that now belongs to Ananda. You are our partner, if you wish." She spoke the last words almost in a whisper.

"You must make a decision before twenty-seven days," said Me Nolet, consulting his agenda.

"Barely time to go to Québec and face the Commission on Concessions," Lemoyne said to the ceiling. Apricot moved near him. "We need you. I cannot manage everything alone, and Ananda is a researcher at heart."

"But I know nothing of chemistry or botany !"

"You can invest your time and your money. You could manage the laboratory, give it some depth and some security. Ananda could pursue the work and introduce young researchers into the project. And, such an undertaking also requires imagination and some foolhardiness."

Ananda intervened with an animation who surprised Lemoyne. "For Thailand, and for other small countries, this process would permit inexpensive industrialization. We could better resist the Germanics if we were less dependent. Help us !"

"And you would write a new page in the history of the Lemoyne family !"

"What do you decide ?" asked Me Nolet.

"I decide to invite madame Vertefeuille to dinner." Lemoyne turned questioning towards Apricot.

"Well then, we hardly have time to get back to Bangkok," said Apricot briskly, tapping a nail on

her Rhenish watch.

At Essendienst, the evening was quiet. Several tables were vacant and the servers chatted quietly. Apricot had exchanged her travelling costume for an evening dress which uncovered her shoulders, in the Spanish fashion. "Very elegant," commented Lemoyne, "I am happy that we are near the Philippines."

"You speak as an American intelligence officer ?" teased Apricot, sipping her apéritif.

"The Spaniards do not particularly like the Imperials, but they fear the Japanese appetite for their colonies. As we do not threaten Cuba and can support them in Asia, the Spaniards are not badly disposed towards us."

"Oh, the impressive analysis," approved mischievously Apricot, in ordering a fish steak of salmon with Javanese sauce, "do you know therefore something of Asia ?"

"I have made more than a dozen fact-gathering cruises."

"And this is your first visit to Thailand !"

"We are more interested in what the Japanese are trying to do in the Pacific. We do not want them to enlarge their sphere of influence."

"Do you believe that some conquests are worth the effort ?" asked Apricot, savouring her wine from Alsace.

"Territorial conquests ?" specified Lemoyne. "Louis XIV returned Cuba to his grandson, in exchange for

Florida."

"How long was the time required to decide ?" asked Apricot. "He had all the time necessary, and he was dealing with family, not a foreigner."

"Are you saying that strangers cannot deserve affection ? But to found a family, it is necessary to know intimately a stranger."

"Some strangers deserve attention and fidelity. But those alliances often are temporary."

"Yes, but all parties can obtain a mutual advantage. Could personal feelings not co-exist with great projects ?"

"A delicate question," sighed Lemoyne. "Could one choose between a person and an idea ?"

"The difficulty is greater when some parties have divided loyalties," retorted Apricot, looking Lemoyne in the eye.

"Sometimes, indeed," said Lemoyne, "the parties have difficulty establishing their priorities. I believe that I must return to my submarine."

In his silent cabin, Lemoyne looked in vain for an answer, or for sleep. When Denoncourt entered noisily, speaking of a certain Marjolaine, he was just as uneasy as the moment of leaving Apricot.

"It is time for me to go," he said, the following day, to Me Nolet. "I will send a message in twenty seven days."

"Twenty six," retorted the notary. "Was your evening costly ?"

"Very well, twenty six days," answered Lemoyne.

"This was an evening without price."

A HARD-EYED LOOK AT THE LEMOYNE FAMILY

On this day in September, Jesus Island knew a treacherous heat. Through the window, one could catch sight of a pleasant day, sunny and agreeable. But outdoors, the temperature and the humidity would surround slowly their victim, and wear it down to weariness and pain. The anonymous building near the river seemed inviting and well-lighted. In a small meeting room inside, inspector Rivard felt his courage transformed into a choking concern, all the more unpleasant for being imprecise. "How can you stay seated quietly?" he asked his superior, Chief Inspector Tremblay. Tremblay did not raise his nose from his novel. "We are the police, Rivard. It is the criminals who must be afraid. Some advice: always bring reading material or a pastime when it is necessary to meet someone of importance in the State. These gentlemen never seem to be on time." But, as if to contradict the Chief Inspector, the door opened just as the clock on the wall chimed the half hour. Commissioner Hamel entered, well attended by three men. The first was about sixty, a man of

worn face and white hair, but with dark and tough eyes. The second wore the uniform of a captain of the Foreign Legion. The third displayed an offhand appearance, an impression confirmed by his expensive but loosely worn suit. Rivard recognized this third man: Cyprien Vigneault-Demers, the minister of Public Security. Commissioner Hamel presented the two police officers to the minister. In turn, he presented them, Chairman Beaulieu of the Special Committee of the Ministry and captain Vygotski, the private secretary of Chairman Beaulieu.

"Allow me to congratulate you, Chief Inspector," said the minister, "for your excellent initiative in communicating with our friend Hamel since the beginning of this affair."

"Thank you, Monsieur le ministre," answered Tremblay in a neutral voice. "But it was apparent that this affair, as you said, was beyond the expertise of a simple Chief Inspector. I must add that it was actually my assistant, inspector Rivard, who had the idea."

All eyes turned to Rivard, who blushed and mumbled denials. "Do not be so modest, young man," said the minister, smiling slightly. "We are always looking for serious young people, with initiative. But let us all sit down." Once the six installed about the table, with their files and their documents, the minister continued. "Chairman Beaulieu and myself have studied carefully your

report. We convoked you both for this is a serious matter, regarding the security of the State. You have sworn to defend the Republic and its laws: the time has come for you to participate in a delicate and necessary operation for this defence. Chairman Beaulieu will begin with a few questions concerning your report."

Chairman Beaulieu looked straight at Inspector Rivard. "Your superior," he said, "affirms that the domestics were not involved. None of those working that evening had a criminal record. That seems surprising for people of their background. The report states that you investigated these suspects. Are you that sure the servants are all innocent, or at least not involved?"

Under this direct approach, Rivard straightened up. After a brief look to Chief Inspector Tremblay, he answered slowly. "The origin of these people is not the problem. There are criminals at all levels of our society. I found no official trace of any condemnation, except one or two fines for being drunk in a public place. What is more, the servant who had in actual fact passed some years in jail was on leave."

"Officially on leave," underlined Beaulieu.

Commissioner Hamel interrupted him politely.

"Excuse me, sir, but my own investigation confirms the absence of the individual in question. I attempted to establish a possible tie with the Lemoyne family, not only Pierre Henri, but his

mother, his sisters and his cousins. If there was a tie, it would be very well camouflaged."

"This Lemoyne is a professional," commented in an admiring tone captain Vygotski.

"But not a political agent," added drily Chairman Beaulieu. "Your investigation pursued a precise aim. That of agent Rivard was, shall we say, more innocent, therefore more likely to reveal undesirable facts."

Seeing the bewildered expression of Tremblay and of his assistant, the minister explained. "It is preferable that lieutenant-de-vaissseau Lemoyne should be innocent, do you understand me?"

Commissioner Hamel turned toward the minister.

"Let me explain to my colleagues, as police officers." He smiled candidly to Tremblay and Rivard. "You see, in this story we have several difficulties. It is not necessarily serious that another family take the concession from Lemoyne. But blood that would poison the dealings between the great families would be very inopportune. You know like me that the Republic and its friends have to constantly watch the schemes of doubtful powers."

"Like the Germanics," said hatefully captain Vygotski.

"Yes," continued Hamel, "like the Germanics. It is therefore almost unthinkable to prosecute Pierre Henri Lemoyne. Even if he was cleared, the doubt would rekindle former quarrels."

"But, if he was guilty?" asked inspector Rivard, with renewed agitation.

The minister raised a soothing hand. "You are here to help us establish that he is not. There is also, as the commissioner was about to say, the question of this foreigner, this monsieur Wallerdon."

"Wadsterton," corrected Chairman Beaulieu.

"Yes, that's it. He seems to be an honest sharper, without direct ties with the government of his native Virginia or with other foreigners. But we don't much like his presence in this story."

"We must pay attention, then," said commissioner Hamel. "Since he had just created this association with the De Lanaudière and the de St-Lambert, it seems difficult to see what motive he might have had."

"Indeed," said Chief Inspector Tremblay, "we didn't see any tie between this gentleman and the crime. An assassin leaves some direct indications of his action, such as microscopic traces, for example, or holes in his schedule. If he is skilled, he leaves some indirect indications in attempting to cover his tracks. This Wadsterton left only a mess."

"The mark, possibly, of a very skilled agent," suggested captain Vygotski.

"I don't believe so," said slowly Chairman Beaulieu. "A good agent would be discreet. I see little use for an agent of one power in impersonating the agent of another."

"It is necessary to underestimate neither the

Germanics, nor the Japanese," said the captain.

"Since the Japanese couldn't send one of their own here overtly, for he would be easy to spot, it would be clever to hide their acts under the disguise of a clown."

"This is why you are here," said the minister to the police officers. "Your investigation seems to show that this is not a political crime."

"Or a vendetta," added commissioner Hamel.

"Let us continue," said Chairman Beaulieu. "Chief Inspector, you did a tight analysis of the opportunity presented to the assassin. Please summarize for us, especially for the minister."

"Very well," continued Chief Inspector Tremblay.

"The victim died of a dose of belladonna, a natural poison which kills fast. Someone simply put this product in the victim's soup. If we exclude the domestics, the assassin had to be at the table. We can probably eliminate as suspects the members of the family of the victim."

"Therefore, if we put aside this Wadsterton, we are left with a member of the De Lanaudière family. I understand," said the minister.

"Why not suppose that this is a plain murder," said a little too loudly inspector Rivard. He stopped and blushed a little.

"You are right, Inspector," said Chairman Beaulieu.

"Define for us a plain murder."

"Well, we must not suppose that the members of the great families think of their privileges and their

powers. If one of my friends killed someone, it would be certainly not be for political reasons, or financial ones." He stopped, then added: "I not mean to say that I know any one capable of killing." "Everyone is capable of killing," said seriously Chairman Beaulieu. "I would say even that it is the easiest thing in the world, except for the obstacles that social control raises. Pursue your reasoning." "You have just given the key of the murder. One kills because something seems more desirable, or more intolerable, than our submissiveness to social controls. This rule applies to De Lanaudière as to Rivard."

"Or to Tremblay," put in the Chief Inspector.

"Yes," said Chairman Beaulieu. "Inspector Rivard, your principle is both very simple and very sound."

"But," intervened the minister, "the murder in question upset the relations of St-Lambert and De Lanaudière. The family of St-Lambert has withdrawn from the project of Reynald De Lanaudière, which is seriously weakened without this involvement."

"One can see the skill of those involved," said captain Vygotski. "It seems impossible to demonstrate the guilt of Lemoyne, but they take advantage of the crime."

"Who benefits from the crime.... " said Chief inspector Tremblay.

"Your investigation brings us rather to look for a woman," retorted Chairman Beaulieu. "Your report

doesn't name a guilty party, but a quick analysis of the arrangement of the table, in conjunction with your findings, points to a certain person."

"You mean," began Rivard, but Chairman Beaulieu interrupted him. "No names, for now! If you hope to have a long career, you must first learn prudence in affairs of State. But the guilt of this person would be convenient."

"Convenient for whom?" asked quietly Chief inspector Tremblay.

Chairman Beaulieu fixed him with his dark eyes.

"This condemnation would close the case, already unwieldy given the importance of the persons involved. Then, it would remove everything political, which would eliminate one possible cause of tensions. De Lanaudière, especially the son, might not forgive Lemoyne, but his credibility would be weak. Secondly, it would reduce the manoeuvring room of some political actors."

"Even if the case is not political, it is political," said inspector Rivard, his eyes wide.

"We need," said Chairman Beaulieu, "an indisputable proof of the utilization of the weapon by this person. We also must have a proof, or a confession, of the personal nature of the motive. Could you provide, with the help of Commissaire Hamel, what we need?" He insisted on the word "provide" and turned his hooded eyes on inspector Rivard.

"If such a proof exists, we can find it," answered

Chief Inspector Tremblay.

"You have our confidence," said Chairman Beaulieu. "We prefer to call on your sense of duty, rather than having to guarantee your silence."

"We will do our duty as police officers," said Chief Inspector Tremblay, putting a hand on the shoulder of his colleague.

"Very good," intervened the minister, "but we must have more than that. There must be proof solid enough to allow us to publicize the case, and turn it into a political success."

"Such as, for example, arresting the culprit in a public place," added Chairman Beaulieu. Captain Vygotski leaned over to whisper something in the ear of his superior, who nodded slowly. "Excellent idea, indeed. Minister, my secretary makes a suggestion which it will be necessary to discuss."

"But if such a proof doesn't exist?" asked Rivard, looking at Chairman Beaulieu. "We all hope, as you must, that it does exist," answered slowly the magistrate. "Such situations are not unknown. I saw several in my long career. I began my career, as you must not know, as an inspector of police in Nouvelle Orléans. We succeeded in preventing the introduction of new drugs being shipped through that port."

"We do know that this threat was suppressed."

"I always knew how to provide to my superior the necessary proof, sometimes looking for them in some unlikely places."

"We must always respect the law, of course," intervened quietly Tremblay.

"No doubt. We defend the Republic and its laws. We must make sure that this task is done with the dispatch necessary to guarantee the triumph of the law."

"And the defeat of the enemies of the Republic," added captain Vygotski. "America is a country which has a special mission in the world. Luck gave you the opportunity to participate in this mission."

"I believe my friends will manage," said Commissaire Hamel.

"A final detail," said the minister quickly. "It is very important that Pierre Lemoyne never know of this meeting."

"He is an intelligence officer," commented captain Vygotski. "If he asked a few questions, he might discover something."

"Therefore our young colleagues must be very discreet," said Chairman Beaulieu. "This kind of operation succeeds only if the client never knows it existed."

Minister Vigneault-Demers rose, meaning that the meeting was over. "I wish good luck to you, my friends," he said, shaking hands with the three police officers. "We count on you."

Commissioner Hamel led the two other police officers out of the room. "I think you have deserved a drink," he said as they went out.

The minister watched them leave. "You are still convinced this is the best solution ?" he asked Chairman Beaulieu.

"This is the solution cheapest in lives and the most elegant as for the means used," he answered.

"There is little risk of an unfortunate slip.". "An accident for Lemoyne, you don't believe in it ?"

"Please, minister, some discretion, as you told the young police officer. That option was not satisfactory from the point of view of External Affairs. Our colleagues said so clearly."

"So it seems that our interests and those of the Lemoyne family coincide. Of course, it won't be the first time."

"Like the Special Committee, the great families must serve the Republic."

"Besides," sneered captain Vygotski, "poison is a woman's weapon. The lady very probably is guilty."

TIME TO CHOOSE

The audience chamber was closed by two vast doors, in oak of course. Each door measured almost three meters, although they had been carved before the adoption of decimal measures by the Republic. "We do not want your measures from Europe", had shouted to a marshal of Empire, a little before the independence of the Republic, the Sieur Elzéar Bédard of St-Jérôme, a seigneur particularly opposed to the tutelage of the empire of the Bonapartes. Like many, the Sieur Bédard of St Jérôme considered America to be the true France, betrayed by the one in Europe with its Italian and Dutch Imperial barons, its Catalan cardinals and its Italo-Germano-Polish dynasty. The doors illustrated this fierce pride of race. One panel represented the taking of Port Bourbon, or Boston, as it was called then, and the victory of La Corogne over the Anglo Spanish fleet. The other showed the vote of independence by the seigneurs, on August 4, 1876. These famous doors slowly swung open to admit Pierre Henri Lemoyne, his mother, his sister Chantilly, Me Bégon, his assistant Gonzalez and a barrister named Huygens. The audience chamber was sumptuously decorated. The ceiling spilled

over with the frescoes typical of the art of the end of the previous century, blending a mild eroticism to an excess of colour. The central image represented allegorically the death of Papineau-Joinville, the principal leader of the independence movement. The room itself was divided unequally by a balustrade. At one end, a big table, half moon in shape, waited for the members of the senatorial committee. Senator Dubuc already occupied his seat, where he was talking in a low voice with senator Bélanger-Biencourt, who seemed agreeable to what he was saying. The Chairman of the committee, senator Thierry-Callières, also occupied his chair and was explaining something to an assistant. Some pages were putting documents and pitchers of water at each place. A page put a cushion on the chair reserved for senator Cuvillier, which unleashed polite laughter in the audience. Behind the balustrade sat the laughers, that is the petitioners for the seigneurie of the EHARN, as well as witnesses or spectators interested by these questions.

While the Lemoyne family headed toward the table reserved in its name, Pierre Henri noticed that the De Lanaudière were already busy at theirs. The son, Reynald, discussed vigorously with his notary, a middle-aged man that Lemoyne didn't recognize. The father, visibly annoyed, watched his colleagues take place at their table. The documents no longer interested him. Lemoyne also noticed Diane-Aimée

Du Plessis and bowed. The grand-daughter of Sieur De Lanaudière answered with a brief nod. Lemoyne also watched the Sénécal family grouped around its table. The chief of the family was a man of about sixty, white-haired, and tired-looking. Two younger men, probably his sons, spoke together as they verified some documents. Their legal counsellor had visited the Lemoyne manor, and he greeted briefly Lemoyne. Pierre Henri returned his bow. "Do you know him?" asked his mother in a low voice.

"Of course," said Pierre Henri, "Me Legouanec, who looked after the Miron contract, in 1965." Pierre Henri turned to notice that the Lamothe family had not arrived.

His mother pulled him by the sleeve. "Are you certain you met all the senators? Senator Tardivel seemed optimistic at supper. I spoke again to his wife, and."

"Mother, we spoke to everyone. We must now participate in the session and we will see what will be possible."

"No deals! You have to give up this idea of going to Thailand and keep our concession. What happened to your duty towards the family. I would die of shame." Chantilly furiously signed to her brother to say no more.

The senators were now all present, except for senator La Galissonnière. The Chairman of the committee examined briefly the room, then rang his

bell. Silence slowly prevailed. "We would be ready to begin," he said, "but I do not see the representatives of the Lamothe family." A notary, or an attorney, approached the bar and gave a note to a page, who carried it to the Chairman. He read it quickly, then passed it to his colleagues. He rang his bell again. "Today, the 12th of October 1976, I, Gaspard-Luc Thierry-Callières, senator representative the Gouvernement of Beauce, Chairman of the Committee on Concessions, Seigneuries and State Powers, declare open this session of the committee. Please note that all the members are present, except Senator La Galissonière. No, here he is." The Chairman greeted the late arrival briefly, then continued. "Today, the committee must rule on the assignment of the Seigneurie of the Entreprises Hydrauliques des Affluents de la Rive Nord. We have the submissions of the Lemoyne family, who presently holds this Seigneurerie. The representative of the Lemoyne family is here ?" Pierre Henri rose briefly. "Present, citizen Chairman." Senator Thierry-Callières verified solemnly the presence of all the tenderers, then addressed the committee. "The Lamothe family had also presented a submission, but, for reasons of its own, it has decided to withdraw. I have a message from Me Le Soucy, notary of Michilimackinac, informing officially the committee of this decision." There was a brief murmur in the room, and several faces, including

those of some senators, looked more cheerful. "So far, everything goes well," slipped Me Bégon to Pierre Henri.

"We have to render a decision today," said the Chairman. "All the members of the committee have read attentively all the submissions. Now, before rendering its decision, the committee wishes to put some questions to the candidates. According to custom, the time before lunch will be given over for these questions. The committee will deliberate this afternoon and will render its decision before sixteen hours. Messieurs, if you are ready, we shall begin. The floor goes to Senator Tardivel."

Senator Tardivel adjusted his glasses on his nose and brought his microphone close. "My question is addressed to the representative of the De Lanaudière," he said. "While admitting that petroleum and electricity are two forms of energy, I wonder if the experience of your family, obtained in a climate so different from the one of the EHARN, has prepared you to administer their production. Nothing in your presentation answers this question, however fundamental." The Chairman invited an answer with a look. The De Lanaudière discussed it briefly.

After a moment, Reynald De Lanaudière rose.

"Monsieur le président, senator Tardivel, if you will reread our presentation, you will notice that I have myself spent several training periods in the irrigation systems of the North, from Lake Slave to

the Red River. I believe I am ready to evaluate the impact of climate on work. Anyway, the possibility of living a variety of experiences is the strength of our society, and new challenges are the source of novelty."

"I am happy to hear you say it," commented senator Tardivel. Reynald De Lanaudière remembered that senator Tardivel furthered the candidacy of the Sénécal, which was certainly a novelty. He looked at senator Dubuc, who replied with a brief nod.

"I also have a question for the Lemoyne family," added senator Tardivel. "Is it true that Pierre Henri Lemoyne is to receive in inheritance a Seigneurie in Asia?" Pierre Henri rose, but Me Bégon was faster. "Not exactly, monsieur," he said, "for Thailand recognizes the European system of property. My client has the possibility" - he insisted on the word possibility - "to take over an activity undertaken by his uncle, some years ago." "Allow me to insist," added Pierre Henri when Me Bégon had finished, "on my intention of respecting the laws of our country and the honour of my family." Senator Tardivel growled slightly. He shook his head, when the Chairman verified if he had more questions.

Senator Letellier took up the questioning: "The memoir of the De Lanaudière family argues that it could pay larger royalties to the State than those of the past ten years. I didn't understand how they expect to manage that."

This time, the legal counsellor answered. "In our opinion, the amount spent on research by the present seigneur is too high. The EHARN function with a mature technology, which requires little innovation. The data of Table 9-A indicate clearly that innovations represent only 3% of the expenses of immobilization, while research represents 13% of working expenses. In reducing both figures to the smaller, we would economize several millions, of which a large part would return to the State."

Pleased with himself, he sat down.

Me Bégon rose. "Permit me, citizen senators, to comment the calculations of my scholarly colleague. If one considers the amounts spent on innovation, included under the category immobilizations as a percentage of the costs of research, we obtain the figure of 63 %. These are therefore necessary modifications to the equipment or administrative expenses, rather modest in fact, especially if taking into account the climate."

"If I may continue," said the senator from Florida, "there have already been two references to the climate in less than an hour. We are several in the Senate to argue that the capital should be installed under a more lenient climate. We have more than once proposed transferring the capital to Nouvelle Orleans or Saint-Louis. We see again today some telling testimonies on the terrible situation of Quebec as regards the climate."

Senator Bélanger-Biencourt intervened briskly. "I

remind my colleague that this question was discussed in depth, and that the committee reported, as I had the honour of presiding it, that the capital is ideally situated from a military, political and industrial point-of-view. A capital cannot be just anywhere !" The audience laughed quietly.

"Order, please, gentlemen, order, if you please," said senator Thierry-Callières. "With all respect to my colleagues, I don't believe that the moment is well chosen to discuss the site of the capital."

While the laughter died down, a messenger presented himself to the Chairman; after reading the message, he frowned and consulted one or two colleagues. Finally, he spoke. "I have just received a message of an exceptional gravity, concerning, among other things, the security of the State.

Consequently, I recess the session for an hour." The senators rose to be informed of the situation. The audience started to speculate in a purr of voices. "Another manoeuvre ?" whispered Pierre Henri to Me Bégon.

"If that is the case, someone has managed to surprise me," answered the notary.

"Look !" exclaimed Chantilly, nodding her head towards two men who approached the table of the De Lanaudière at an official pace.

"Police officers !" exclaimed Pierre-Henri's mother.

"Yes, there is the one who questioned me last month. But he doesn't seem interested in me to-day." The two police officers had shown politely their

authority. With a suppressed oh! from the crowd, they arrested Diane-Aimée Du Plessis. The assistant of the De Lanaudière's legal counsellor followed, speaking with animation to one of the police officers. Lemoyne and Diane-Aimée Du Plessis arrived before commissioner Hamel at the same time.

"Good day, monsieur Lemoyne," said the police officer. "As you see, we have our assassin."

"Good day to you, commissaire Hamel," said Lemoyne. "I must tell you that the satisfaction of not being a suspect is darkened by the identity of the accused. Are you sure of your conclusion?"

"Absolutely. Traces of belladonna were found in her room. The analysis of various testimonies indicate clearly that she was the best placed to commit discreetly the crime."

Pierre Henri looked at Diane-Aimée. "I do not believe this," he said finally.

Diane-Aimée smiled palely. "I don't regret my action. They wanted me to marry him, this Richard de St-Lambert, even my grandfather who knew me better. I would have married, I wish to help my family, but I did not want a stooge. I need a man of initiative and courage: his being poor would have mattered little to me. We are already too rich." She fixed Pierre Henri with her mauve eyes. "A man like you, perhaps? Less spoiled by life?"

She showed the police officers that she was ready. She stopped again for an instant and turned her head

to Pierre Henri. "I will think of you when the guillotine falls." Pierre Henri stood astounded in the stream of journalists who followed the police officers and their prisoner.

He returned slowly to the family group. "What did she say ?" asked Me Bégon. Pierre Henri looked at his mother and his sister who, standing, observed the exit of Diane-Aimée Du Plessis through the historic doors. "She repeated what someone else had told me, on the importance of well choosing the person with whom one founds a family."

Pierre's Henri mother looked sternly at her son.

"Some years ago, you could have saved the honor of two families and founded a dynasty."

Chairman Thierry-Callières recalled everyone to order. The buzzing in the room died down. "We are going to renew the session," said the Chairman. But the Sieur De Lanaudière rose, very pale. "Citizen Chairman, following the events that we have just experienced, I believe that it is my duty, to preserve the honour of the family, to withdraw solemnly the submission of my family for the Seigneurie of the Entreprises Hydrauliques des Affluents de la Rive Nord."

A loud hubbub exploded from the crowd. "Silence, please !" cried out the Chairman, "Continue, Monsieur."

Visibly upset, the old man finished his declaration. "I believe that the honor of a family is its most precious possession. But a child's life shouldn't be

squandered without feeling. We retire from this contest, to work on the defence of my granddaughter, unjustly accused."

"Is he sincere ?" asked Chantilly.

"I believe so, yes, he will do everything for her. It is time I did something for myself. Messenger !"

He wrote two notes. "Please take this to senator Rigaud-Niverville and this to senator Tardivel," he said to the messenger.

"What are you doing ?" whispered Me Bégon.

"I am defending my honour and taking in hand my fate." Pierre Henri rose gravely. "Monsieur le président !"

"You wish to make a declaration ?" asked senator Thierry-Callières.

"Yes," said in a firm voice Pierre Lemoyne, watching the arrival of his messages to their recipients. "Monsieur le président, senator Tardivel alluded earlier to the inheritance of my uncle. Although it is not a Seigneurie, that project interests me. I must certainly be faithful to the traditions of my family. But it seems to me that this tradition, far from being a rigid yoke which limits our actions, is rather an incitement to open new paths and to explore new frontiers. Consequently, I withdraw the candidacy of our family for the Seigneurie of the Entreprises Hydrauliques des Affluents de la Rive Nord."

Pierre-Henri's mother hissed: "No !"

"Hush, mother," said Chantilly, squeezing her arm.

Pierre-Henri finished. "I also declare that we are ready to accept the compensation proposed by the S n cal family. This family has demonstrated its talent for administration and we believe that it will know how to give a new beginning to the EHARN. Thank you, monsieur le pr sident." The room had listened in silence to Pierre-Henri's declaration. When he sat down, the crowd exploded again in excited conversations, while senator Dubuc sought to dominate his rage, and while the Chairman sought to bring back order. Once silence returned, he declared: "This is not the first time that the grant of a Seigneurie has followed a retraction, but never this dramatically. Given the lateness of the hour, I suspend the session until fourteen hours." The Chairman rose heavily, followed by his colleagues. The Lemoyne family made it way through the crowd, surrounded by journalists, returned from their pursuit of Diane-Aim e Du Plessis, and overjoyed by their good luck. What a day ! The Lemoyne succeeded in opening a path to the exit. Together, they moved slowly through the unfeeling doors.

A HAPPY END, AFTER ALL

The Lemoyne family often dined at the Gargouf. The little restaurant prepared excellent sea food, especially the fried clams that appealed so much Pierre-Henri. The end of this fateful day found him seated at a table with his mother, Chantilly, and his eldest sister, Jasmine.

Madame Lemoyne was inconsolable. "We will no longer hold our concession. You will be very far. And I won't have any grand-children."

"Don't exaggerate, mother," said Chantilly, "you already have two."

"But they don't bear the name of Lemoyne. I devoted myself to this family and I will leave nothing."

"You can make wise investments and support the arts, like your friends. Think, Mother, Diane-Aimée preferred death to a life with a man she did not want."

"I would say rather," intervened Pierre-Henri, "that she eliminated without hesitation this undesirable man. Husbands and fathers will be henceforth more circumspect."

Chantilly looked her mother in the eye. "You, Mother, did you marry a man or a family? Would you have made the same choice Diane-Aimée Du

Plessis rather than live with a man which you did not want ?"

"I couldn't have done it," said Jasmine. "But my husband is kind, I can't complain."

"Is that sufficient ? I will take only a man who inspires me to do lunacies. But what do the men think ? Pierre-Henri, speak up !"

Pierre-Henri hesitated. His mother used the silence to intervene. "The family, our system of families, is the fundamental element of our society. Without it, everything falls apart. I was not unhappy with your father, know that. But lunacy is bad for oneself, and bad for society. I would add that this truth applies also to men."

"I have heard," slipped in Jasmine, "than some ladies died rather than undergo an unwanted marriage. Like aunt Marianne ?"

Madame Lemoyne lowered her head. Then, raising it suddenly, she said: "But we, the great families, have to give an example."

"Why wouldn't we be the ones to take example on the others ?" retorted Chantilly. "The ordinary people don't make these ridiculous analyses. They choose according to their heart. This is what the knights used to do, once."

"Chantilly is right," said Pierre-Henri. "Diane-Aimée is right, despite the extravagance of her gesture. There were some judicious arguments for retaking the concession. There are also arguments for the pursuit of the enterprise of uncle Marc-

Méridée. But I leave, not for some judicious reason, but because of a lunacy, because of a person."

Madame Lemoyne's eyes glistened. "An unworthy person, who earns her living, if I understood well your description of the other day, in running and jumping before an audience. This is unthinkable, this is un-American !"

"Love can only be a lunacy, but it is also the only possible choice."

"Pierre-Henri makes the right choice," said steadily Chantilly. "I will do the same, someday !"

At this moment, Me Bégon entered the private salon and sat down near Pierre-Henri. He greeted the ladies, then put his hands flat on the table. "Well," he said, "it is done."

"How did they vote ?" asked Chantilly. Me Bégon smiled sardonically. "Senator Dubuc proposed to reopen the period of submissions. His proposition was rejected by twelve votes to two, his and that of Bélanger-Biencourt."

Chantilly appeared surprised. Me Bégon explained. "Letellier favoured the Sénécal family. Bélanger-Biencourt was a partisan of the De Lanaudière. These two have quarrelled on the question of the capital and oppose each other on all questions. This is a fundamental given of the present political scene."

"Yes, but what about the vote on the assignment of the Seigneurie ?" asked Pierre Henri, drinking a bit of wine.

Me Bégon shrugged slightly. "Twelve for the assignment to Sénécal, giving you the compensation suggested, one against. At least Dubuc has respected his word, this time."

"Madame," said the notary turning toward Pierre-Henri's mother, "I hope you will leave me the honor of helping you to invest the compensation?"

"Certainly," said coldly Madame Lemoyne, "since my son is leaving for Asia. What do you think of such behaviour, Maître?"

"Oh, maman!" almost shouted Chantilly with an annoyed air, "Pierre-Henri isn't entering religion, nor becoming a pirate, he is going on a trip, that's all!" Then, smiling, she teased her brother: "You will invite me?"

"Certainly!" said Pierre-Henri. He called the waitress to ask for a telephone.

Me Bégon crossed his hands on the table and raised his eyebrows. "You had only to say nothing and the concession was yours."

"Yes, probably, but I realized that I did not want a continuity, but a beginning." Pierre-Henri glanced at his family, then drew Me Bégon aside. "Did you obtain any information on the case of Diane-Aimée?"

"My usual informants tell me that the Sécurité has irrefutable proof. She seems to have confessed."

"But is the confession of a woman in these circumstances valid?"

"Probably. But why does this affair interest you so

much ? Because of the past ?"

"No. Because of the future. Her gesture helped me to make my own decision. What's more, they may have re-arranged the proof a little."

Me Bégon shrugged again. "Who knows ? Anyway, what can you do ?"

Back at the table, Pierre-Henri took the telephone presented to him, then put it down. He smiled to his mother. "I promise more grand-children." He took the telephone. "I wish," he said to the PTT attendant. "to send two messages. The first is addressed to Me Pierre Paul Nolet, Place Nouvelle, Bangkok, Thailand. Say: "I accept the inheritance of my uncle. Do what is necessary.'" Pierre-Henri Lemoyne looked again at his family. Then he said to the attendant: "The second message is for Anne Aimée Fleur-d'Apricot Vertefeuille, Place du Tigre Souriant, same city. Just say: "I am coming."

To put the story in context

The key element in understanding an alternate history is the defining moment, when history diverged from our own. In this story, the key difference is that king Henri IV, of France, was not assassinated by the monk Ravailiac in 1610. Consequently, he ruled for many more years, consolidating France's government, and her power and Navy. The colonization effort of 1627, which sent ships and men to develop New France, was not crushed by the attack of the Kirke corsairs, working for the king of England. New France prospered, with new specialists and new investors arriving every year.

In our history, the French colony established strong alliances with the Indian nations, and in 1701 created with them a sort of United Nations of North America. This cooperation with the Indians is a key element of the story's universe, including the inter-marriage which was frequent in our history also. To give economic development a legal structure, king Louis XIV created a system of territorial grants, called seigneuries, whose holders were encouraged to increase the population and their holdings productivity. The story supposes that the system has become the basis for the country's economy, at least for natural resources.

With a strong population base, support from a prosperous France, and close alliance with the Indian nations, the New France of this story eventually included most of North America, including large pieces of our history's Mexico, and its New England (Boston is Port-Bourbon). However, Virginia, and the southern colonies, have survived to be sort of warm Canada. The République d'Amérique Septentrionale, which means the Republic of North America, is more or less this universe's USA, proud of its Americanity, open to innovation and social mobility. But, the world is no safer than ours, and international rivalries persist. Perhaps the world is a little safer, since there is no nuclear power, and hence no nuclear terror. There are other major differences, but of course it is to discover these that a reader will look at the story.