



Silk Roads

*The Asian Adventures of
Clara and André Malraux*

Axel Madsen

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To Arnold Orgolini, a friend who continued to believe.

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Foreword

In the years just after the Great War, adventure in faraway places was *the* thing for smart young people. André Malraux had been spared, not because of luck in the trenches but because the slaughter had stopped at his toes. By 1918 boys a year older were being called up, and when it was all over France had suffered nearly a million and a half killed in action, a third of them young men between eighteen and twenty-eight. Having been born in November 1901 instead of November 1900 made him and many of his contemporaries want to prove themselves by seeking perilous action and bracing ventures. Nor was Clara Goldschmidt much different. When the two of them got married (on a date and to scandalize their elders) she, too, wanted to show her mettle. To go on a treasure hunt in the jungles of Southeast Asia was a sporting way of showing one belonged to the new Reckless Twenties.

This uncommon couple found more than they bargained for in colonial French Indochina, and the story is a tale of romance, crime, and political awakening. Clara's nonchalant Jewishness and upbringing that embraced antagonistic nationalities made her sympathetic to the grievances of the Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians. Because André was all French and because he modishly dismissed all political action, his reaction to the clammy paternalism of Indochina's French rulers was one of principle. Clara found racial injustice immoral; he scorned a society based on conformity, exclusion, and the surrender of principles.

Together and separately, Clara and André lived to see the yearnings, aspirations and defiance they encountered in Cambodia and Vietnam defeat the will of Western powers. They lived to see the follies of French colonialism, of one people ruling another, inflame American passions and pain. A year after President Lyndon Johnson threw America's might into the rice paddies of Vietnam, André's visit to the forbidden China in the throes of its cultural revolution was also a covert mission to sound out Mao Zedong on the possibility of rapprochement with the Americans. In 1972, on the eve of President Richard Nixon's historic trip to China, André was flown to Washington to brief the President.

In Paris three years later, the author speculated with André on the grand and collective *Whither humanity?* Helicopters were plucking Americans from the roof of the Saigon embassy while, at the end of his long and tumultuous life, André Malraux told his visitor that the major facts of our time are not events, not even such admittedly shattering occurrences as the advent of the nuclear age, but the shifts in the way we think, in the relentless way we question who we are.

We are, André Malraux believed, at the end of the empires because the sense of manifest destiny is disappearing everywhere, even in communism. "It has never happened before that the world's most powerful nation has no sense of what it wants. Yet the United States no longer has any manifest destiny, nor does Russia. The Chinese don't have it either. Domestically, yes; the national will power is very real. But when they say they want to change Tanzania, they're talking propaganda." What will happen after the empires fall is hard to foretell, because profound change is, by definition, subterranean and because we have a tendency to take our problems for examples. "The question is not one of morality but of destiny; we're not looking for a new Moses to give us new laws, we're trying to find out what we can be." He found it stupefying that the era that discovered nuclear physics and unlocked the genetic code is satisfied with conceiving man somewhere between Marx and Freud.

A few years later, an octogenarian Clara thought back to the time André and she were together when she hated her own semifailures and resented the way André began to write her out of the novel that detailed their Asian adventures. In the name of their total commitment she had cut herself off

from her family and accepted misery. He had felt no need to excuse himself. He not only insisted he had every right to transpose personal experiences into fiction but also believed that, rearranged in the fashion, events appeared more plausible. "I was the repudiated wife of the great man and after that through the peculiar independence that World War II gave me, I recovered my contours and stopped being someone you could see through." Vietnam, she would say, "both wrecked and enriched us. With the weapons that were only his, André would try to dominate the world that, until then, had resisted him. Through his writing he would impose his vision. Our Indochina escapade, exploits, and enterprises would result in books that gave the adventures meaning." She too became a writer, first of fiction inspired by the Indochina ventures and, late in life, of a multivolume autobiography that earned her wide recognition.

If there is a challenge to writing about famous people it is to sketch the portraits while faces and traits are still fleeting and motives still tentative, to catch them *before* they know who they are, before their features are chiseled in accomplishments, fame, and guile. It is before we are somebody that we are interesting.

Here is André Malraux before he could talk about what Mao Zedong told him and what he thought of Trotsky and Kennedy; before the musings about history's finer ironies; before evocative memories of camels coming down the Pamirs, bellowing through the clouds; before his intuition that what makes humanity awesome and culture a great epic is not our own saying so but our questioning everything. Here is Clara before her difficult journey through life, a young woman of privilege and shining intelligence who would come to believe that her true drama—and that of many women—was that to be fulfilled she needed the contact, stimulation, and embrace of a masculine mind stronger than hers.

This book is one of those looking-glass stories that both recreate an exotic world and illuminate the way we change. It is not American flaws and failure that are exposed here, but another people's mistakes and failure to capture hearts and minds. Yet, unlike the missed opportunities of the British in India, the French failures in Indochina would come to haunt the American conscience. This book is both a prophetic journey and a backward glance, an evocation of a vanished world and a reflection on its consequences. It is a story of love, of emotional liabilities, and of commitments to a cause. Above all, it is the story of youth, a time before fame, when all was possible.

PART ONE

Chapter 1

Lorelei

They stood leaning on the port-side railing, a smart young couple in wispy summer clothes. She told him they'd hear the legendary echo when they got right under the cliff. He wondered whether the people living along the banks were as much influenced by the river as they were separated by it.

To fellow passengers they were a somewhat incongruous pair: he a lanky, nervously elegant youth, she a vivacious brunette barely tall enough to reach his shoulder. He was a pale and intense twenty-two-year-old with a flair for mocking gestures and a surly hauteur people found attractive because he looked even younger than he was. She was a diminutive woman of twenty-five whose plainness was forgotten in her elan, her sea-green eyes, her resonant laughter, and the movements of her butterfly hands.

"The rhetorical question is whether there is such a thing as a Rhenish culture," he said.

"Lorelei hurled herself into the river in despair over a faithless lover."

"Do you think we'll see her?" he asked, looking down. The waters were deep and the current formed small whitecaps.

She held on to her velvet-trimmed taffeta hat. "She's not down there. She's supposed to sit on top of the cliff and lure ships to their destruction."

"Excursion boats, too?"

"Heine said nothing about tourists."

He shielded his face with his coat to light a cigarette. "The ballad of the Lorelei made Heine famous before he was thirty."

"Which means you can still beat him." She remembered their honeymoon visit to family in Magdeburg, her grandfather after dinner asking her to take down the works of Heine so he could read a few poems to this new French grandson-in-law.

"You were moved to tears when Grandpa Goldschmidt read to you," she smiled.

"It was the Gothic lettering that made me all emotional."

"How about my lyrical translation?"

He straightened up and watched the riverbank. A railway line ran parallel to the river.

She continued. "When Grandpa saw how touched you were, he told me, 'You see, you shouldn't worry. Your husband and I understand each other perfectly, even though he speaks no German and I no French.'"

The headwind was stronger as the little steamer entered the gorge. The mountains on the left bank were the Hunsrucks, she explained; the Taunus Mountains with the Lorelei cliff were on the right. Anyone who had grown up with a German nanny knew that. Sightseers with Kodaks took up positions along the railing.

It was a beautiful afternoon, the second Saturday in June 1923. The steep hills were terraced and heavy with wine grapes. During prehistoric times the same culture groups existed on both banks, he said. The Romans were the first both to build bridges and to make the river a state boundary. The Rhine was a classic example of rivers alternately unifying the regions through which they flow and making political barriers. Behind them a French voice in a deck chair said this was the most beautiful stretch of the river. She thought of her late father, who had first showed her the Rhine, upstream where the river formed the border between German and Switzerland. The bell clanged on the bridge

Black smoke belched from the funnel as the engine went into reverse, making the ship float motionless below the Lorelei. The cliff towering above the starboard jutted into the river. One hundred thirty-two meters of sheer cliff, someone quoted from Baedeker. The sun slanted, picture-postcard perfect, through the gorge.

German voices shouted from the stern, echoing back to the ship.

“Hello!”

“Peter!”

“*Ich liebe dich!*”

The shouts bounced back from the vertical rock with exemplary fidelity. At the railing, a couple in lederhosen and dirndl were the first to have themselves photographed against the romantic backdrop. A war veteran limped onto the deck on crutches.

Clara recited an approximate translation of Heine’s famous poem about the scorned Lorelei maiden. André said it was obvious that the Lorelei had always been a danger to navigation.

The ship’s whistle blew and children on deck squealed in delight at the piercing reverberation. The bell clanged again, and the ship resumed its downstream cruise.

“What I’d like,” he said, “is a newspaper.”

She knew he wanted to check their investment in the stock market listings and suggested that the newsstand at Cologne’s central station would have French papers.

They took a walk along the deck.

Since their marriage ten months earlier they had lived a nonchalant Bohemian existence. Clara’s dowry was substantial. In Paris, they occupied the top floor of her widowed mother’s townhouse. Between feverish literary activities—to write, André had discovered, was a way of “making it”—they visited their stockbroker and went to all the museums, movie houses, and nightclubs that everybody talked about.

In tune with a time that was passionately in love with the outrageous, André wanted to be different and loved to provoke. Clara saw herself as a young woman sometimes comically bold, with a taste for the quaint, the striking, and for what surprised her. Traveling was their favorite activity.

Sailing down the Rhine was their latest cultural pilgrimage. Their honeymoon had taken them on their first airplane ride to Prague. In the clouds above the Black Forest they told each other they’d one day fly over sunnier vistas. The women of Prague had red headscarves, and the confectioners exhibited their whipped cream marvels in their shopwindows. They walked among the graves at the old Jewish cemetery where the Golem once defended the dead. André was moved by the orthodox Jews with their mossy beards. Clara said she, too, was discovering them. Which wasn’t quite true. She had seen them in Karlsbad before the war and had been embarrassed by their long robes, their curls, skullcaps, and the way they talked with their hands. From Prague they had traveled to Berlin and to Magdeburg to meet the Goldschmidt patriarch with a taste for Heine. The Versailles Treaty that had made Alsace part of France again had divided the Goldschmidt assets and made Maurice, Clara’s elder brother, the head of considerable family interests in the biggest Alsatian tannery. Clara’s younger brother, Paul, was still a moody teenager.

“You’ve married your younger brother,” one of her two uncles said in German when they met André and her at the Magdeburg station.

“A blond goy,” said the other.

Since then, Clara and André had been to Dunkirk to meet members of the Malraux clan, to Athens to climb the Acropolis and to Tunis to retrace the steps of Gustave Flaubert’s *Salammbô*.

The trip down the Rhine agreeably fused their passion for travel and art. Today they were watching the vine-covered hills glide by and speculating about a culture stretching the length of the river.

Tomorrow they would be in Cologne for a second meeting with a man whose ideas set André afire.

Three months ago, after attending a guest performance at the Paris Opera of the Pnompenh Royal Ballet—a company whose spare grace of gestures, tone, and costumes enchanted them—André had met Alfred Salmony in an art gallery in the Rue d’Astorg. Salmony was a heavily built German only a few years older than Clara and André who lost all ponderousness in the presence of art, especially Asian art from the dawn of time. A director of the Cologne museum, Salmony was preparing a comparative art show that wouldn’t be limited to classical masterpieces but fearlessly included the art forms of all kinds of people.

André had invited Salmony for dinner. He arrived with an enormous briefcase and, after dessert, spread hundreds of art photos on the floor. Without talking, he juggled stills around, bringing certain photos together with others—a Thai torso with a classical Greek head, a Han-dynasty head with a Romanesque bas-relief.

Primitive art raised stupendous questions. Juxtaposing photographs or parts of photographs made it seem as if artists of all ages and all cultures worked in diverse ways toward the same ends. Why did a Wei-dynasty bodhisattva chiseled in northern China in the early sixth century resemble a Romanesque statue carved six centuries later in medieval Europe? Maybe art was a bond, a kind of shared nervous system that linked all people across the chasms of culture and time. After Salmony finally said good night, leaving behind a few of his photographs, Clara and André talked all night, feeling there might be a new way of grasping culture.

And of understanding themselves.

They always talked about who they were. Theirs was a union of carnal intelligence and give-and-take; of mutual discovery, aspirations, and shared complicity. To him, she was the necessary partner, his sounding board and ideal woman. To her, he was manifest destiny, playmate, and dazzling example. There were moments, Clara would later write, when their discussions of the sexes escalated to questions of what each expected of the other, moments when “we climbed together I don’t know what abstract mountain, not always with him playing the leader but mostly with both of us egging each other on and developing such a taste for intellectual jousting that the playfulness of the body asserted itself and physical pleasure seemed the natural result of the pleasures of the mind.”

Their families had not approved. After the civil marriage—she in a black Poiret squirrel dress, he in a tuxedo he couldn’t quite fill out—they had laughingly told the families not to take them too seriously: within six months they’d divorce.

When the six months were up, Clara brought up the question, to test him. “Shouldn’t we divorce, at least legally?”

“How about using the money we’ll spend on divorce lawyers in a more constructive fashion?”

“What do you have in mind?”

“A trip to Tunisia, for example.”

They had returned via Italy, and in Naples wanted to see the famous *Sicilian Vespers* puppet show. “*No e descente,*” said the hotel concierge.

“Decent or not, I want to go,” said Clara.

They were taken to a tiny theater full of street urchins who were everywhere, in all the seats, even hanging under the balconies like bats. At the climactic moment when the Sicilian populace murdered the French, the beggar children jumped in their seats and shouted bloodthirsty epithets at the stage. Clara and André never found out whether it was the anti-French spectacle or the sight of street kids that was supposed to be indecent.

Their backgrounds were different, but they knew how to interpret their pasts for each other. From the beginning, he felt she was a kindred soul, someone he could *talk* to—about Nietzsche, the meaning

life, the inanity of conventional ideas. From their first date, phrases and subjects caught fire between them. They divided everybody they knew into “fun” and “no fun” people and agreed the surrealists were beginning to take themselves too seriously. “I wasn’t even sixteen when I first decided I wanted to be a great writer,” he told her on their second date. “Except of course that a great writer, like a great painter, is supposed to suffer a lot.” She introduced him to his first horse race at Longchamp; he showed her African art and, for the thrill of it, took her dancing in one of the lowest dives in the tenderloin district of Paris.

Lately she had discovered that although he had been brought up by a single mother, a grandmother and a spinster aunt, he knew little about women. Challenged, he said a man wanted the woman he loved to live up to the image he had of her.

“A woman,” she replied, “wants the man of her dreams to live up to the image he has of himself.”

One day he thought that, since the values of society were masculine, it would be fun to imagine those of a feminine civilization. They spent hours compiling various hypotheses, sparring and testing each other’s territory.

“I was brought up to believe that women aren’t necessarily inferior,” she told him. “The men in my family took care of business, and their sons divided their time between business and sports. Matters of the heart and consciousness were certainly respected but belonged to the women.”

The division was still true. Maurice might have become the head of the Goldschmidt family French interests, but he was still less gifted than his sister. It had always been like that in the family. Each generation of Goldschmidts and Heynemanns had spawned one daughter surrounded by several sons—Margrete Heynemann, Clara’s mother, had four brothers. So much love was lavished on each generation’s unique feminine specimen that the boys concluded females were ungrateful and the girls thought of themselves as precious things. Maurice had grown up unpredictable, brilliant in school and in college in England but full of repressed hostility. In 1914, he went off to war to prove himself. His sister admired the gesture because the family was not yet French enough for the supreme sacrifice and so many others of their milieu and fortune found ways to shelter their sons from the horrors of the front. Maurice came back a flier with fifteen sorties over enemy lines and was now a crafty and touchy war veteran. Clara’s younger brother Paul was an impulsive nineteen-year-old with gorgeous blue eyes who had been left largely in his sister’s emotional care during their father’s long terminal illness and Maurice’s wartime absence. Their compatibility made him believe that life’s more difficult moments could be resolved with words, a smile, or a studied pout.

Investing a hefty sum of Clara’s inheritance in a Mexican mining company was André’s idea. Stock market speculation was something he had learned from his father.

Clara felt investing resembled betting on horses. Once she had overcome her distaste for an activity where, as she would say, “the sweat of one’s brow didn’t intervene sufficiently to satisfy my ethics as a child of diverse Bibles,” she admitted that for women speculation had one advantage over the Longchamp race track—it didn’t require a particularly smart wardrobe. Members of the Pedrazzi family who ran the mining company had come to Paris and André had been invited to attend the stockholders’ meeting. The Mexicans, he reported back to Clara, were magnificently tanned and sported handlebar mustaches that made them *muy simpático*.

The stock exchange confirmed André’s judgment. Clara and André saw their stock climb to feverish heights that, in inflationary francs, made them halfway millionaires. Their first extravagance for the supermodern apartment they had in mind made them the proud owners of a Picasso.

The mountains forced the Rhine into a sharp right turn. The boat trip would end in Koblenz, the ancient royal seat of the Franks, where the Moselle flowed into the Rhine. Clara and André strolled the

deck again and stood by the railing.

The way the late afternoon sun hit the pine stands on the summit peaks reminded her of Baden Baden and the sanatorium where her father had spent his last months. She remembered the woman doctor who took her into her father's room and told her to be very quiet. Dr. Fraenkel was Russian. She hated the czar and was the first to tell Clara about Russian sufferings, Jewish sufferings. Clara imagined that her father loved Dostoevsky because of Dr. Fraenkel. Five weeks before he passed away Clara understood that he might die, although she couldn't imagine that her mother's lungs would continue to breathe while Otto Goldschmidt's lungs had turned into sponges. He looked so handsome when he was dead. She had been thirteen.

For André the river evoked memories of Allied victory, Armistice Day, and the rightful return of Alsace. His father had returned from the war as a tank commander, physically unscathed but with deep psychic scars. Like so many veterans, he didn't like or understand the postwar era and was turning into a fiercely nationalistic and vaguely anti-Semitic Frenchman. Patriotism had never attracted André. Even as an adolescent there had been something derisive and reckless about him.

Until he met Clara he had never been out of France. If anything had impressed him besides her ability to talk freely about her most intimate feelings it was her command of languages and her upbringing in the grander liberal tradition of settled German-Jewish wealth, spending a coddled childhood between the big house in the Avenue des Chalets with a German nanny and, until the war, summers in Magdeburg and trips to Italy. As a child, André couldn't grow up fast enough. He still believed that to be young was to be held back.

Koblenz and the confluence of the Moselle River were up ahead. For a glimpse of the Ehrenbreitstein fortress, a tour guide drew a group of sightseers to the starboard next to Clara and André. As the medieval castle came into view high up on the precipitous rock, Clara translated the statistics and the story of how German ingenuity had rebuilt the fortress after the French had blown it up in 1801.

They were rounding the stern and heading toward the prow on the starboard side when André's eyes fell on a French newspaper abandoned in a deck chair.

"What do you know?" he grinned, picking it up.

After a perfunctory glimpse of the headlines, he flipped to the financial pages. As they had done many times before, they followed his finger running down the stock listings.

The tiny figure after the Pedrazzini entry informed them that they were ruined.

Chapter 2

At The Guimet

Decisions had to be made. Rushing back to Paris after their meeting with Alfred Salmony, she learned not only that their stock was worthless but also that the members of the tawny and engaging Pedrazzini clan had disappeared. Clara's confrontation with her family had been pained. Maurice said there were terms to describe her husband: rake, arriviste, parvenu, fortune-hunter. Her kid brother Paul was all snickers and spiteful glee when she tried to stand up to Maurice's wounding accusations. She knew nothing about the real world, he sneered, and she and her husband lived in a fantasy land. Margrete Goldschmidt reminded her daughter of the family's misgivings about André, his testy air, his evasive attitude, his time frittered away in galleries and museums.

The plight was classic and usually ended with the family forgiving and discreetly subsidizing the humbled progress toward responsibility of the prodigal son or son-in-law. In André's case, however, failure made him more audacious. Clara and André were rambling through the Guimet Museum of Oriental Art the next day discussing the predicament when he suddenly asked, "You don't expect me to work, do you?"

His words rang strangely in the museum stillness. Yet they made her realize she couldn't imagine him selling cars or stock certificates. "No, but then?"

He pointed to the Buddha head behind the glass partition and asked if she knew anything about the pilgrims' road from Flanders to Santiago de Compostela.

"We have to be serious," insisted Clara.

He said nothing, staring intently at the Buddha face with its closed eyes and puzzling smile.

"The film import didn't work."

He kept his eyes on the Buddha. "The road through France," he said finally, "was staked out with cathedrals, sanctuaries, and small chapels, just like centuries later the Spaniards in California set out the route along the Pacific Coast by missions, one day's ride from each other. Similarly ..."

"We ended up projecting the picture for our friends in a private screening room."

The museum was eerily quiet.

"Similarly," he said in a lowered voice, "temples marked out the Royal Way from Siam to Cambodia. From Dangrek to Angkor Wat, there are shrines that have been reclaimed from the jungle and inventoried. But there must be others, smaller way stations, not yet discovered, swallowed up by the jungle."

Clara knew how he loved the museum's fascinating but confusing heaps of Asian art and artifacts—carved Buddhas, stuffed paradise birds, rickshaws—that Emile Guimet had brought back from the Orient half a century before. But she couldn't see how her husband imagined he could redress the finances by becoming a curator.

In Berlin they had discovered the German avant-garde cinema. Robert Wiene's *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari*, with its startling expressionist decor, stylized acting, and story of a sinister scientist, gave André the idea that—in addition to their stock market speculation—they could become film distributors of pioneering movies. Since the French rights to *Caligari* were already being negotiated, André sank a hefty sum into the rights to its new rival, *Das Haus zum Mond*, a "phantasmal drama" by expressionist stage director Karl Heinz Martin, which André retitled simply *La Maison Lunaire*.

André didn't take into account bureaucratic *visas de censure*, however, they had discovered one back in Paris that insidious nationalism halted the import of the German avant-garde movies. Like Germany, France both maintained and inflated the myth of war sacrifice and the eternal enemy. The commercial exploitation of *La Maison Lunaire* remained unauthorized.

She watched their mirrored selves in the pane of the display case. André's eyes were riveted on the stone features that so perfectly radiated the bliss the soul could achieve through Buddha. On her own face she saw the pain of last night's scene, Maurice's outrage, Paul's glee, and her mother's tears. Firmly she had defended André while inwardly conceding that their epithets described her husband and her too well.

"We will go to little Cambodian temples," he said. "I mean to some little-known, overlooked or forgotten shrine in the jungle."

Her eyes met his in the glassy reflection. His voice was just a whisper, "And we will remove a few Buddhas and Shivas and sell them to museums in America."

She felt a shiver run down her spine.

Before she could say anything he grabbed her hand and dragged her to the opposite wall and to a glassed-in stone relief of apsaras from Angkor Wat. Known either as the king's heavenly concubines or as girls in heaven who offer sexual delights to the pious or heroic dead, the apsaras were carved with sinuous sensuality. The deep, languid lines of their closed eyes, voluptuous thick lips, and bare breasts were continued in their elaborate hair styles, jewelry, and skirts. One of the standing females had her arm under her companion's. A towering jeweled crown on her head rivaled the locks spread out in a halo of points and loops on the other.

"That," he said, pointing, "will allow us to live comfortably for a couple of years."

What had captivated her when they first met was his restless intellect, his passing for beauty, the ardor of his repartee. Now he had surprised her again.

She followed him to the next room, but when he stopped in front of a sandstone lintel she could not quite focus on the carved divas or dancing goddesses.

"What do we know about Cambodia?" she asked.

As a guard walked slowly by them, hands clasped behind his back in civil-service rectitude, André ignored her question. Instead he said that the dancing symbolized divine activity as a source of movement in the universe, particularly as a cosmic function of creation—conservation, destruction, incarnation, liberation. "The object of the divine dance is also to rid humans of illusions."

André kept talking as they walked out of the Guimet and down the Avenue d'Iena. They knew a little about Southeast Asia. They had read Pierre Loti's sensual, impressionistic novels, with the agonizingly beautiful commentaries. They knew Cambodia was part of French Indochina, that it was a tropical country full of alien diseases. They had enjoyed the splendor of the dancing, costumes, and music of the Pnompenh Royal Ballet. Clara realized that her husband's belief in adventure—adventure as an attitude of life, and as a slap in the face of existing values, and as vindication of personal freedoms—plus his love of art and travel, combined with art dealers' gossip, had made him come up with this crazy yet terribly clever solution.

"We need some sort of official backing," he said.

The way he explained it, they should get some sort of official credentials that established them, not as heads of a mission, at least as researchers.

"The more official the character of our travels the better. Nobody will find it unusual if a scholar and his wife rent oxcarts to go and explore an archeological site".

"A scholar and his wife?"

He grinned. “We’ll have to get permission to study not only the huge Angkor Wat ruins, but to explore smaller unknown relics. The interest in Oriental curios is booming, and apparently there have been no new finds. Carvings of devatas, or guardian goddesses, are considered extremely rare.”

He met with Joseph Hackin, the Alsatian-born director of the Guimet Museum, and talked to him about all kinds of ideas. André thought he might interview several cultural types and, on their return, give a lecture at the School of Oriental Languages.

Summer, they discovered, was the wrong time of year for jungle expeditions in Southeast Asia; they would have to wait for the dry season in October.

The Goldschmidts did not take kindly to Clara’s ruin. André’s lack of remorse, his peremptory eagerness to plunge forward didn’t make it any easier on Margrete Goldschmidt, a petite raven-haired widow in her fifties, and her two bachelor sons.

In the next months, however, thanks to André’s help in unearthing the bureaucratic figleaf that allowed the family to turn certain German securities into French assets, they managed to suffer his presence in the big house at 10 Avenue des Châtelets. Better at ferreting out obscure texts than either of his brothers-in-law, André had found a subparagraph in the decree that allowed turning Grandfather Goldschmidt’s prewar holdings in the Muelhaesener Bank into equity in the renamed Banque of Mulhouse.

Between visits to the School of Oriental Languages and to the Guimet André discovered an article in the 1919 issue of the *Revue archéologique* that described how the Fogg Museum of Harvard University had come into possession of an admirable Buddhist head, and how at least eight other Khmer masterpieces somehow had found their way to the United States. “Given the number of Khmer sculptures and the difficult access to the ruins in Angkor,” the author wrote, “one can perhaps accept the ‘emigration’ of a few specimens. Such leaks must not become numerous, however. Let the lawmakers beware.”

It was enough to spark André’s imagination: a temple containing great treasures stood abandoned in the jungle. Officials were apparently ready to tolerate a few more leaks in the direction of American museums. There was no time to lose, however. An August 21, 1923, mandate by the governor-general of Indochina had set up a commission to study and recommend ways to protect Khmer relics. Legislators might soon pass laws mandating that all abandoned sites be classified historic monuments.

Until their departure in early October, when they were not busy preparing for the expedition, they picked up the literary activities that had occupied them between trips abroad when they were wealthy. For Florent Fels, the publisher of limited editions and of *L’Action*, a dynamic little magazine, Clara started translating a Sigmund Freud text she had discovered in Germany, *A Young Girl’s Analytical Journal*, while André wrote the foreword to a political book.

Clara had wanted to be part of the postwar effervescence, her generation’s excitement and discoveries. An avid reader of the new authors and poets, she was too timid to think she could write herself. She reasoned, however, that her ability to translate was one way of getting close to those who did have literary talent. A family friend had introduced her to a friend who had led her to Fels.

L’Action was a passably “anarchic” magazine—against the established order, patriotism, religion, and traditional attitudes. Among its contributors were Max Jacob, Jean Cocteau, the globetrotting poet Blaise Cendrars, the composer Erik Satie, and the Romanian-born father of Dada, Tristan Tzara. The magazine honored the most modern art, discussed new esthetics in every issue, and reproduced works by Pablo Picasso, Raoul Dufy, Juan Gris, and Suzanne Valadon’s alcoholic son Maurice Utrillo. It ran

translations of Maxim Gorki, Alexander Blok, and Victor Serge, the Belgian-born anarchist not actively supporting Lenin's new and still-shaky Soviet regime. Even more daring, *L'Action* published the new German expressionists Franz Werfel, Johannes Becher, and Clara's friends Claire and Iva Goll.

The Golls were a high-voltage couple who loved each other furiously, separated, tried to commit suicide, reconciled, separated again—all accompanied by the fracas of public quarrels. The open house Sundays of these Jewish-gentile Alsatians were cosmopolitan gatherings where the newest ideas from Berlin and Vienna, from expressionist cinema to Sigmund Freud, were discussed and where Marc and Bella Chagall and Alexander Archipenko told about the ferment of the new experimental Soviet art.

The Chagalls had just returned from Moscow where, at Lenin's suggestion, the painter had decorated the Jewish Art Theater—mischievously painting his own likeness in the arms of the dramatic director. Chagall would remember André of the Goll Sundays as a youth with circles under his feverish green eyes.

Claire was very much the blonde Berlin poetess, who at their gatherings preferred to stretch out on a couch. She and Clara were intimate friends. When they were together they said playful things and frisky, affected phrases.

André had written a piece on André Gide in *L'Action*. In the early 1920s Gide was, with Paul Claudel, the great literary figure. Then in his early fifties, the novelist, critic, diarist, playwright, and traveler was a bisexual with a strong tendency toward homosexuality who, since the turn of the century, had pursued his pleasure and striven to make it as public as possible; he upbraided Marcel Proust for turning the men he had loved into women in his novels. The drama of his life was his marriage to his cousin whose strict Calvinism could not accept his paganism and homosexuality but who was nevertheless the person he loved most.

When André met the author of *Les Nourritures Terrestres* on the Boulevard St. Germain for an interview on his views on art, Gide showed up munching a croissant. The resulting piece called Gide “the greatest living French author.”¹ André's gift for taking quick and forceful possession of ideas and for speaking without redundancy or hesitation impressed the interviewee as well. When conversing with Malraux, Gide would say late in life, “one doesn't feel very clever.”

The Cambodian treasure hunt promised to be a bracing mix of risk on the fuzzy edge of law governing historical sites and cultural sleuthing that might lead to important discoveries: Was it possible that the art of the Khmer civilization, which began to decline in the thirteenth century, was a hybrid between Indian and Chinese influences, the kind of cultural overlap that Salmony's juggling photographs suggested?

The couple read everything they could. Clara read foreign books. A British encyclopedia said the Angkor Wat complex was nearly ten times the size of Canterbury Cathedral. German periodicals mentioned Lecoq's recent finds in central Asia, excavations that might support André's theory that a as-yet undiscovered link between European and Asian art might exist. André believed he would find the key in the Cambodian jungle.

André had no difficulty locating a Lieutenant Marek's 1914 account of a visit to a small Buddhist temple at Banteai Srey. While Lunet de la Jonquière's three-volume *Inventaire Descriptif des Monuments du Cambodge* of 1911 had excellent detailed descriptions and maps of sites along the Royal Way from Dangrek to Angkor, Lieutenant Marek reported that the Banteai Srey temple was standing abandoned in the jungle.

André also came upon an article by Henri Parmentier, chief of archeology at L'École Française d'Extrême-Orient in Hanoi, who wrote of the remarkable beauty of the Banteai Srey ruins during

visit in 1916. The Far-Eastern French School was the highest institute of learning in Indochina and André realized, also the Paris government's appointed custodian of Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian archeology. No doubt Parmentier was someone to see once they got there.

Banteai Srey was twelve miles north of Angkor. Everything about it was distinctive. It was the greatest work of Khmer architecture and sculpture in the tenth century. It was founded by Yajnavaraha, a Brahmin of royal descent, and consisted of three tower-shrines in line inside concentric enclosures. The more André delved into the subject the more he realized these could not be the ruins Parmentier had visited seven years earlier. There had to be two sites of the same name. Yajnavaraha's remarkable three-tower shrine near Angkor Wat and the Banteai Srey ruins Parmentier had visited northeast of Angkor Thom on the right bank of the Siem Reap River.

"I don't quite know how, but I bet the confusion can serve our purpose," he told Clara.

While he scanned archeologists' field reports at the School of Oriental Languages library to try to pinpoint where exactly on the right bank of the Siem Reap River they should concentrate their efforts, Clara bought quinine tablets to guard against malaria, snakebite serum, and a dozen hacksaws. The ancient Khmers ignored the use of cement, she had read. It shouldn't be too difficult to dislodge the statuary. With her mother's seamstress she concocted tropical suits of her own design for both of them.

Friends looked upon their upcoming adventure with a mixture of admiration and envy. André knew how to give the story a spin, and Clara had a clever little phrase that always had its effect: they were going to put back into circulation artworks threatened by vegetation and neglect.

But there were moments when they dimly realized their planned adventure was amateurish and improvised. They had always read too much. Their knowledge was all from books, while in reality they would be a couple wandering the jungle with little money and less experience. They ignored such basics as the local language and customs, the hothouse climate, fauna, and the tigers, snake, and mosquitos whose names they could barely pronounce. At night when they were alone in their spare top-floor living room with their lacquered black furniture and lone Picasso on the wall, they talked for hours.

Clara remembered childhood adventure stories full of cruelty. They, too, would be sailing up a river in an exotic land. They, too, could meet people laying claim to supernatural powers, spear-wielding savages, ritual slaughter, slavery, torture. André thought of reenacting Alex-André Dumas novels in the forest surrounding suburban Bondy with his school chum Louis Chevasson. There was one Dumas novel he had never forgotten—*Georges*, the first book he had ever read. It was the story of a foundling brought up on Mauritius Island in the Indian Ocean by a Taiwanese nurse who taught him Chinese and swordsmanship. Georges Munier spent his brief, tumultuous life searching for his father, traveling through exotic lands, fighting and ensnaring ladies and perfidious villains.

"Ensnaring ladies?"

André ignored her sarcasm. "In the end, Georges returned to his island to lead liberated slaves in an assault on plantation owners who from their hilltop barricades set fire to kegs of rum and sent the flaming barrels down on their assailants."

André decided the way to double their chances of success was to find buyers of Khmer art to advance. He explained to Daniel Kahnweiler, the art dealer, that Clara and he might shortly come into possession of a shipment of Khmer art. The gallery owner promised to write a fellow dealer in New York.

Kahnweiler was a German Jew who had opened his first gallery in Paris in 1907 and in five years had become the merchant for Derain, Vlaminck, Picasso, Braque, and Gris. He had been in Italy in August 1914 when the war broke out. To avoid both incarceration in France as an enemy alien and service in the Kaiser's army, he had sat out the conflict in Switzerland. He had been permitted

return to France in 1920 only to discover his property confiscated. Eight hundred paintings belonging to this “impresario of cubism,” as he was affectionately called, were sold at public auction. With his new gallery in the Rue d’Astorg and a French citizen as his associate to protect him from further “enemy alien” prosecution, he was starting over again.

Kahnweiler’s New York correspondent was more than hopeful when it came to selling choice Khmer pieces to American institutions. Kahnweiler suggested André write to his correspondent himself. How much money were we talking about, André wanted to know. Again Kahnweiler obliged and managed to obtain trade figures for Khmer statuary from Paul Cassirer, the famous Berlin art dealer who had first sold impressionists in Germany and had organized the first exhibition of Vincent van Gogh.

In 1930 when André wrote *The Royal Way*, a heroic retelling of their Indochina venture, he would have his two heroes discuss their planned treasure hunt.

Claude Vannec, a trained archeologist who can only think of making a fortune, tells Perken, an older European adventurer in Asia, that if they decided to team up there will be obstacles. French authorities certainly represent hurdles, but there is worse than that. There is the danger of dying:

“The Mois, you mean?” Perken asks.

“The Mois, the jungle, the malaria.”

“I’d have guessed as much. Let’s talk money.”

“A small bas-relief, almost any statue, will fetch thirty thousand francs or so.”*

“Gold francs?”

“That’s asking too much.”

“A pity. Then I’ll want ten at least, and ten more for you; twenty, all told.”

“Twenty sculptures.”

“Feasible, I think.”

“Don’t forget that a single bas-relief, if it’s first-class, a dancing girl for instance, sells for at least 200,000 francs.”†

“How many stones would it take?”

“Three or four.”²

Somewhat against Clara’s will, it was decided that André’s childhood friend Louis Chevasson would join them on the Asian trip. Clara didn’t like the short and good-looking bachelor with whom André had gone to school for six years and acted out Dumas novels in the Bondy forest. She thought Chevasson too impractical and frivolous for a jungle expedition and called him “the colorless one” because he never seemed to have any opinion. She had to admit, however, that once in the bush with the hacksaws, a third pair of hands might be more than useful.

André asked Joseph Hackin and the Guimet Museum board members for a meeting. When the administrators and curators heard him outline his desire to study Khmer art in Indochina, entirely at his own cost, they were amazed by his knowledge. This young man—who lived in a townhouse in Passy and was the author of a number of articles and a whimsical little *édition de luxe* novel in the cubist vein—wanted to undertake an expedition that wouldn’t cost the government anything, yet might eventually add to the prestige of French scholarship.

“Why should we turn up our noses?” Hackin asked when the time came for the board to consider the request.

A *charge de mission* dated October 1, 1923, was duly signed by the new minister of colonies and complemented with letters of recommendation to the Far-Eastern School in Hanoi and to Henri Parmentier, still its head of archeology. The ministerial order authorized André to study Khmer

temples and to recruit farmers and carts to transport his baggage. It specified that “Monsieur Malraux must bear all costs and his expedition can have no commercial aim.” His sole obligation was to give an account of his travels on his return.

Clara and André’s friends were impressed when they told them they were now in possession of ministerial authorization. In a letter to Kahnweiler, Max Jacob made fun of the Malraux mission, saying André would end up professor of Asian studies.

It was decided that Chevasson would follow Clara and André to Saigon three weeks later. When the moment came to say goodbye, Clara saw only apprehension on her mother’s face. Clara felt a shiver of premonition. She was sure a part of her life was over.

In the taxi taking them through the Paris evening traffic to the Gare de Lyon and the overnight boat train to Marseille, she curled up in a corner and sobbed.

“Why are you crying?” André asked.

“Because nothing will be the same again.”

She felt the bitterness of parting; he talked about a future that would be more beautiful yet still look like the past.

Their ship would make a stop in Siam. Maybe they should get off there, she suggested. Siam was an independent country; maybe things would be easier there. Thai art was beautiful too, less perfect than Khmer art in architectural lines perhaps, less solemn but more beguiling.

“There must be antique dealers in Bangkok; maybe we can manage to buy art pieces,” she said on the train.

André assured her that their New York art dealer would advance money once they were in possession of the statuette.

They saw the ship. On the dockside in the gray October morning light the *SS Angkor*, they agreed, bore a name that was foreordained.

They sailed Friday the thirteenth, in first class and without return tickets. Their plan was to travel east around the world. Once in possession of their treasures, they would proceed to Hong Kong and Yokohama. From the Japanese port they would cross the Pacific and see America “backwards,” from San Francisco to New York, where they would deliver their cargo before sailing home across the Atlantic.

¹ In *L’Action* No. 12, March-April 1922.

* After the French financial crisis of 1924–1926, when the franc plunged to 50 francs to the dollar, the dollar stood at 26 francs to \$1. In 1923 30,000 francs therefore equaled some \$1,200 in period dollars or, in 1989 currency, approximately \$9,000.

† About \$46,000 in 1989 currency.

² *La Voie Royale* (Paris: Grasset, 1930); *The Royal Way*, translated by Stuart Gilbert (New York: Smith and Haas, 1935).

Chapter 3

Seafarers

The first time Clara had seen the sea was one summer when Maurice was at camp and Paul stayed behind in the nursery, and her father took his wife and daughter to the Riviera.

Clara was nine years old and thought the ocean was tiny, limited by the coastline and the horizon which she had imagined bigger and much farther away. A flying machine drifting over Nice and the glittering bay was more surprising. Her mother and she wore dresses, hats, and gloves on the Promenade des Anglais; her father was in striped cotton suits and sported straw hat and cane. On the pier he lifted Clara up to show her the water below.

André was the grandson, great-grandson, and great-great-grandson of seafarers. The Malrauxs were a Flemish clan that had lived between Calais and Dunkirk for centuries. The etymology of the family name perhaps derived via Mallaert from Indo-European *mal-ruk* and made it mean “ill-turned plow.” If André’s father was something of an eccentric, his grandfather Alphonse was a character. The son of Louis Malraux, a commander of fishing fleets who died at sea, Alphonse was a master cooper, outfitter, and ship’s chandler, proud of his master title and of his fleet bringing cod from the Grand Banks off Newfoundland. He had married Mathilde Antoine late in life and had three sons and two daughters, with André’s father Fernand in the middle.

Like his father, Alphonse apparently never learned French but spoke the Flemish dialect of the Belgian border dunes. He was a querulous and forgetful man. He forgot to insure his boats (some accounts have it that he found insurance somehow immoral) and one night lost several of his ships including *La Zaca*, his best vessel, in a storm. This brought him close to ruin as he doled out most of his remaining wealth to the widows of his drowned men. He never completely recovered, became secretive, and almost shut himself off from his children. He cursed his fate and, because he was in revolt against his parish priest over some canon-law trespass, could be seen on Sundays kneeling outside the church, railing against God for having brought him to despair but determined to remain within earshot of the house of God.

André was eight years old when, one winter day, grandfather Alphonse (who was in his sixty-seventh year) got so frustrated watching a ship boy’s clumsy attempt at splitting wood that he took the axe from the lad to show him. Forgetting it was double-headed, he swung the axe above his head and mightily he split his own skull. He died a few hours later in a hospital.

André would forget the facts but never the legends about the old man. And he would remember the big stone house in Dunkirk with its tiled walls. The house went to Alphonse’s eldest son Maurice and stood there above the harbor and the gray Channel until it collapsed in a hail of bombs in 1940, when German air power and armor drove defeated British and French forces into the sea.

André’s uncle became deputy mayor of Dunkirk, and his wife recalled André’s childhood visit. “Very early, he had a marked personality, but we were never able to get him to talk about his future. ‘You will see’ was all he’d answer. When he was ten he surprised us one day. He had hurt one knee very badly and for a while we were afraid the leg might have to be amputated. Doctors and surgeons surrounded by the family, held a hushed consultation. When the physicians were ready to leave André, from his bed, said, ‘I won’t see you to the door, gentlemen.’”

Despite his disclaimer that he hated his childhood and couldn’t grow up fast enough, Malraux’s early years were to ring through his fiction. Like his own father, Grabot’s father in *The Royal W*

dabbled in household inventions, and André's grandfather was to be evoked in three of his books. The *Anti-Memoirs*¹ contained savant mixes of transposed memory and acknowledged recollection. Ostensible portraits of the Alsatian Berger family included such paragraphs as the description of the grandfather's funeral:

As the *foie gras* succeeded the crayfish and trout and raspberry brandy followed the Traminer wine at the funeral dinner, the reunion showed signs of developing into a festivity. Thousands of years have not sufficed to teach people how to observe death. The smell of pine and resin drifting through the open windows, and the innumerable objects of polished wood, united them all in the memories and secrets of a common past, of childhoods spent in the shared surroundings of the family forest business; and as they recalled my grandfather, they vied with one another in the affectionate deference which death permitted them to show unreservedly toward the rebellious old burgher whose inexplicable suicide seemed to crown his life with a secret.

A page later, the grandfather's falling out with the Church and his stubborn attendance of mass outside the parish church is remembered:

Thereafter, cut off from the Church but not from Christ, he attended mass every Sunday outside the building, standing in the nettles in an angle made by the nave and the transept, following the service from memory and straining to hear through the stained-glass to catch the frail sound of the handbell announcing the Elevation. Gradually he grew deaf and, afraid of missing the bell, ended up spending twenty minutes on his knees in the summer nettles or the winter mud. His enemies said he was no longer in his right mind, but such unyielding perseverance is not readily dismissed, and for most people this figure with the short white beard and frock coat, kneeling in the mud beneath his umbrella, in the same place, at the same time and for the same purpose for so many years, seemed not so much a crackpot as a just man.

Fernand Malraux was a ruggedly handsome inventor of better mousetraps, a director of ephemeral companies, a believer in dizzy financial schemes, a stock market habitué and a ladies' man with few principles but a big heart. Fernand had not wanted to earn his living on the sea. He was going into business for himself, and as a strapping youngster with a flattering mustache and a sonorous laugh he went to Paris. He had visited Spain once, hated it so much he swore never to leave France again—and never did. Something of a dreamer, with a gift for caricature, he knew his way with gourmet foods and the new century's new ideas. His favorite aphorism was "You must always mistrust yourself."

When Fernand was twenty-five, he fell in love with Berthe Lamy, a tall pretty girl who was eighteen but looked younger. Berthe was the daughter of a farmer and came from the Alps. Her widowed mother, who bore the stately name of Adriana Romania, was of Italian descent and lived with an unmarried daughter in Bondy, still a semi-rural working-class suburb, and managed a modest grocery. Berthe was two months pregnant when Fernand and she got married. They moved into a big apartment at 73 Rue Damremont, a long, prosaic street running down the less-than-picturesque northern slope of Montmartre. Georges André Malraux was born there November 3, 1901.

Little André—the Georges was dropped while he was still an infant—was a serious only child. He spent his first years quietly in the big apartment with his mother when his father didn't sweep him off his feet during irregular if boisterous eruptions into his and his mother's life. Fernand was always elsewhere, it seemed, busy making money. Losing it, too, and recouping. The excitements of André's preschool years were playing in the Parc Monceau and visiting his grandmother and aunt in Bondy, a trip that took two hours via Metro and trolley car. The big events were taking the train all the way to

to Dunkirk to visit his father's family.

By the time Alphonse felled himself with the twin-blade axe Berthe and Fernand were separated and André and his mother living with his maternal grandmother and aunt in Bondy. If business hadn't lured Fernand from home and hearth, women had. He lived in an apartment in town and, in the absence of parental candor, it took André several adolescent years to realize his parents were divorced and that his father was living with a Mademoiselle named Godard.

Fernand's inventions, which included a necktie hanger and an antisplash faucet, had naturally led him to the most amazing of new creations, the automobile. He had come up with various electric starters and a fuel-injection shield that he had managed to market, but his crowning feat was a skidproof tire, exhibited at the Concours Lepine, the new annual competition organized by Paris police chief Louis Lepine and endowed with numerous prizes and medals to encourage small manufacturers' ingenuity.

Fernand's heroes were men who quickened the pulse of the century with astounding creations—Edison's incandescent bulb, Roentgen's X-ray tube—but his heart was especially with France's men of progress: Fernand de Lesseps for building the Suez Canal, Gustave Eiffel for his tower, André Citroën (another Lepine exhibitor) for his automobile gear train, and Louis Blériot for being the first man to cross the Channel in a flying machine. The handmaiden of progress was commerce, and even before the war Fernand invested aggressively in the stock market. At one point he seems to have been the Paris agent for an American bank, although the name of the financial institution he represented was never revealed.

It was a heady and flamboyant era, and Paris was its epicurean center, a most fabulous city with its noble architecture, its boulevards, smart shops, adventurous artists, celebrated fashions, elegant women, and racy nightlife. Governments might succeed each other at a dizzy pace, but France was nevertheless politically stable and economically sound. It was optimistic and expansionist—at home democratic reforms, freedom of the press, secularized free education, and abroad new colonies. Everybody sang the ditty about Le Père Bugeau losing his hat conquering Algeria.

Colonial expansion never excited the minds of the French as it did the British, but most of north and central Africa was nevertheless French. Indochina had been French since the 1860s, conquered by a handful of soldiers, Madagascar since 1897. In all, France now counted some three million square miles of overseas territory and a colonial population twice the size of that of France itself—over a hundred million people.

Colonialism, for Clara and André, began with the cabin assignments. The rigid class system aboard the SS *Angkor* was both metaphor and premonition of the world beyond the prow, of a society Clara and André had never known. The month-long voyage made a profound impression on them.

With them in first class traveled the top administrators and their wives, beginning or returning to a tour of duty. On the deck below were the middle-rung civil servants and the *colons* or settlers, the French merchants and craftsmen determined to carve their stake out of the colonies. In steerage were the Chinese tradespeople, Vietnamese students, and other polyglot colonials. "Given his habit of speaking his mind," Walter Langlois was to write in a book on Malraux's Asian experiences, "young, brilliant, liberal and haughty André must have made quite a few enemies and very few friends during the long voyage across the Indian Ocean."²

Clara and André saw the outline of Sicily as the *Angkor* crossed the Mediterranean to Port Said in four days. The passage through the Suez Canal made Clara look east toward Mount Sinai and wonder whether it would have been any easier to distinguish the tribe of her Hebrew ancestors against the yellow, sienna, and saffron vastness of the desert than to spot a boat on the ocean horizon.

"Between Europe and Asia were a protracted span of days filled with reverie, yearnings, hope

boredom, weariness and heat that ventilation holes in the sleeves were supposed to alleviate,” Clara would write in *Nos Vingt Ans*, the second volume of her memoirs.³ “There were games on the deck where quoit replaced *boules*. There were ping-pong matches, festivities, sometimes costume parties and deck chairs set out next to each other. There were strolls around the deck that you meticulously counted, amusing promenades where you discovered that new twosomes had been formed and the other pairings had been dissolved. And there were boring trots that were good for the health. Bets were laid on how fast we were sailing. On foggy nights there was the melancholy fog horn. There was the news posted at noon, with the attendant surprise that a world existed beyond this ship cruising toward goals that were different for each of its passengers.”

And there were the ports of call. In Port Said, little boys offered dirty postcards and their sisters waited at the quayside. In Djibouti in French Somaliland at the other end of the Red Sea, they plunged into the nameless streets deserted in the noonday heat and saw famished goats which, to prevent them from suckling each other to death, had their teats encased in small sacks. The evening cool brought out a polyglot population: Somalis, Isas, Afars, Yemenites, Greeks, Armenians, Italians, and Indians.

An excursion took Clara and André to cliff dwellings that looked like so many human honeycombs. At nightfall, beautiful girls danced naked for them. At first only the girls who had been paid danced, but the rhythms of the drums captivated the gowned female spectators. Carried away, they slipped out of their djellabas and joined. The pungent heat, Clara would remember, felt no longer oppressive but electrifying.

They had always been tourists with a taste for the spicier folklore. On their honeymoon they had toured the sights of vice in Vienna and Berlin, cities haunted by defeat, depravity, war cripples, hyperinflation, and artists with an acrid, edgy vision. Before they were married, André had dabbled in erotica, an activity that Clara, when they met, had found deliciously naughty.

As a teenager, bookbuying and bookselling had financed André’s increasing independence from his grandmother, mother, and aunt. At eighteen he bullied permission from his mother to look for a studio apartment in Paris while, to his astonishment, his newly demobilized father not only did not object but agreed to add to grandmother Adriana’s monthly support.

Like the eighteenth-century poet Gérard de Nerval he admired, André had browsed through occult books since his early teens. In his wanderings through Paris, he noticed a new bibliophilic emporium near the Madeleine, an elegant rare-book shop called La Connaissance. He ventured in and on a second visit offered his services to the owners, Marcelle and René-Louis Doyon. Doyon was a litterateur of the first order and was soon impressed enough by the young man’s expertise to offer him the position of *chineur*—in Parisian argot, a practice somewhere between ragpicking and secondhand dealing. The job consisted of combing secondhand bookstores in obscure sidestreets for volumes that would interest the select booklovers who browsed at La Connaissance. The postwar slide of the franc was beginning and many affluent Parisians found more security in a first-edition Mallarmé than in stocks and municipal bonds. Since he would be strictly on commission with no strings attached, André agreed.

He worked only in the morning and stayed home when it rained. He showed up at La Connaissance at 11:00 A.M. sharp with the previous day’s catch—now an original edition of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, now an eighteenth-century bawdy text, fifteenth-century German mystics or poetry collections with signed woodcuts. Once money matters had been disposed of, André melted enough to talk. “He had very definite literary opinions and he wasn’t short of sarcasm,” Doyon would remember.⁴ Doyon believed Malraux would be an artist of some sort, though the young man also seemed to show a developed taste for good printing and an all-round talent for publishing.

André was no ladies’ man at eighteen. He was nervously elegant but timid, and his first mistress

were not literary lionesses but easy pickups and little demimondaines. His writer friend Georges Gabor, whose audacious defense of the notorious woman-murderer Landru brought Florent Fels's *L'Action* magazine into trouble with police, was to remember him bragging poetically about one girl who, he said, "possessed the trifling grace of a young monkey."⁵

Evenings were spent on Montmartre. With Gabor and several other young men, André dropped in on a painter or a poet, sometimes Max Jacob in his Rue Gabrielle studio.

André, who earned more than the others and often showed up in a dashing Baudelairean cape, high collar, and moleskin gloves, preferred to dine at flashier tables—Larue's or Noel Peters—but if Jacob was along dinner was at La Mère Anceau, a bistro where Max loved the mutton stew. It was there that André first met the painter Maurice Utrillo. "With his heavy eyelashes rising on the forsaken void of his eyes he asked me, 'Painter or poet?,' sat down and fell asleep," André remembered fifty years later.

Over dessert, Max began to draw—on paper when paper was available, or on napkins or the tablecloth—dozens of sketches of friends and fellow diners in an evening. His sketches of André would all disappear—"transformed," as one of Malraux's French biographers would ask, "into french fry wrappers or burned when the Gestapo sent Jacob to his death in the Drancy concentration camp in 1944?"⁶

Sometimes they finished the night on the seamier side, at a *bal musette* behind the Bastille; at the noisy Tabarin, where one of them might pick up a girl; at one of the new jazz clubs; or the raunchier of gay bars on the Place de Ravignan, where Paris' most notorious "tantes" gathered. "We were young Malraux and I, and easily impressed by the display of real or put-on depravity," Georges Gabor recalled.

When Doyon decided to expand his literary activities and publish a monthly magazine, he naturally asked his young *chineur* to collaborate. When the first issue appeared in January 1920, *Le Connaissance* included an article signed André Malraux, a rather taxing piece of writing on the rage of the day—cubist poetry.⁷

André was also interested in editing, and persuaded the Doyons to let him edit two obscure nineteenth-century texts. André's taste for *le fantastique*—that untranslatable Gallic term meaning much the surreal and the otherworldly as spine-chilling science fiction and demonology—made him choose a stigmatized Bavarian nun's hallucinatory retracing of the Passion and a supposedly edifying treatise full of divination, black magic, devil worship, and witchcraft.

André didn't feel he owed Doyon any allegiance and he soon met two other marginal publishers. One was Lucien Kra, a former circus hand who dreamed of matching a competitor's success in erotica. André soon found two little-known texts by the Marquis de Sade for him. Published with dadaist drawings, the little volume became a kind of under-the-counter best-seller.⁸ Florent Fels, who with his demobilization bonus had founded *L'Action*, brought André under a healthier and more dynamic sway than the semi-clandestine publishers of erotica. It was at a luncheon given by Fels for thirty intimates and not-so-close collaborators that Clara and André met.

The *Angkor* crossed the Indian Ocean along the 5-degree-north latitude line. Although Clara and André told themselves it was bourgeois and silly, they were nevertheless pleased when one night they were invited to the captain's table.

The first Asian landfall of the voyage was in Colombo, Ceylon, the next in honey-scented Penang on the Malaysian peninsula, where the rains never stopped. Clara and André went ashore in Penang with a newlywed couple, the husband a civil servant, the wife with few illusions about the life awaiting her. On high heels after a Chinese puppet show, Clara walked a little behind the others, her

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