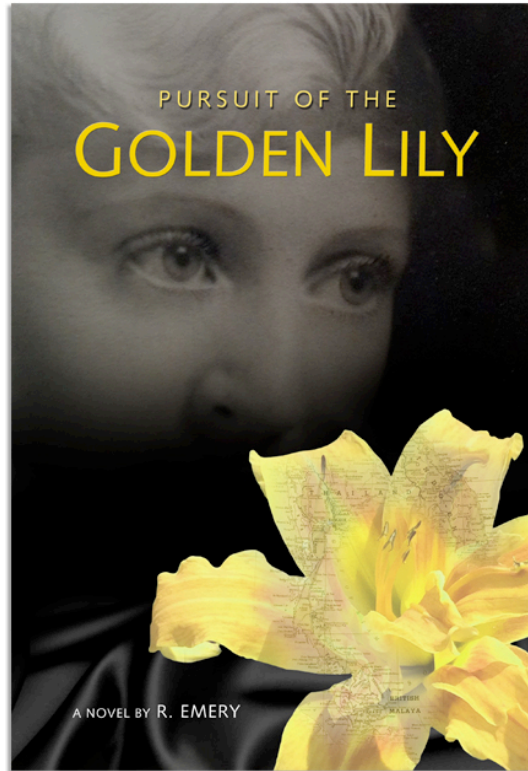


PURSUIT OF THE GOLDEN LILY

A Novel

By R. Emery



“This is a work of fiction, inspired by actual events. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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This book is dedicated to the courageous men and women who work tirelessly, often at their own personal risk, to expose the lies and deceit perpetrated by governments and corporations.

~ For Eddie and June ~



Diary Entry – Saturday March 4th 1944

“The coarse rasp and grind of the ‘death rattle’ heralded closure for the man in my care... his lungs gasped their final breath as the uninvited guest waited patiently to escort him to an unknown destination. I watched his eyes twitch; a dribble of drool drizzled lazily towards the pale, scrawny neck before dropping onto the dull bed-sheet to pool with red and brown splotches... impartial records of earlier suffering.

I held his hand then wiped his brow; he was clammy and cold despite the heavy, humid heat tempered only by the approaching dawn. Strange irony that I, a ‘gaiji’, would offer comfort to one whose creed was to destroy all I loved. The Hippocratic oath did not pick sides. As a physician, I must always treat the patient before me. Here, in this god-forsaken place, I knew well the atrocities that someone like him could inflict on my family, my friends, my fellow POWs... to anyone on the wrong side of his flag.

Why had he chosen me? What wind carried him to my hospital ward, into my presence, at this time, on this day? There was no way of knowing such things... my captors will surely never disclose the reason, for surely, he must be of high rank.

Mine was the only ear that listened to his words... his supplications for relief, his cries of pain... perhaps even his confessions... and finally, towards the end, this strange riddle, uttered in the psychosis of delirium, over and over again. I had no idea what it meant... “Peace, not white, but gold, holds the pearl within one that breathes fire.”

Did he believe in peace? The Imperial Emperor he served certainly did not. Were there dragons in his land of the rising sun? Pearls of wisdom, perhaps? Or, was this simply a favorite phrase, taught him as a boy by some intrepid English teacher? One thing was certain: he repeated the mysterious riddle until his last breath.

*Who was this man? There was urgency to his last words, as if he needed to convey something important. Perhaps he was a reluctant officer, conscripted by birth rather than choice... an unwilling participant in this war. No matter, the great equalizer had come for him, it was over... war makes people do terrible things. “ **EJ – Tha Sao***

(Diary of Capt. E. J. Jamieson, RAMC (225144)

Page 1/2 - Translated from the original Scottish Gaelic by:

Iain Forsythe, Accredited Translator and Interpreter

Glasgow University, Linguistics Dept., Glasgow, UK – May 24th, 1998)

Chapter One

“So many days have passed since I have had the opportunity to write anything here. Dressed in shorts and rubber shoes I am sitting writing this in the shade of a clump of bamboo somewhere in Thailand!”

- Eddie Jamieson, *Diary - Friday May 8th 1942*

Tuesday, November 9th 1998

~ I ~

There are some people that live their lives on this earth like ghosts. They leave no trace, vanishing wraithlike into the quicksand of history. Not so my father. He wasn't famous or anything. No, he was quite ordinary. He loved his family, his work as a doctor, classical music and jazz. He enjoyed playing the piano, bird watching and walking. Endowed with an inquiring mind, he was pragmatic and methodical, not given to triviality or fanciful musings. I never thought of him as mysterious.

When his WWII diary appeared in my mailbox a few months after his death, I was both surprised and intrigued. Enclosed in a plain brown envelope, accompanied by a polite note from the family solicitors, Messrs. Findlay & Dunn, it lay on my dresser for days. Embroiled in a work crisis at the time, I postponed reading it. Then, one of my brothers suggested I travel to Thailand and donate the historical memoir to a small war museum there.

It seemed like a good idea – especially given that Dad wrote it while he was a POW of the Japanese, in the jungles of Burma and Thailand. Since I'd always dreamed of visiting Kuala Lumpur (my birthplace), then tracking the wartime journeys of my parents – from Singapore to Thailand, Australia to the UK – I took this as an auspicious sign. Time to make my dream come true.

Work crisis over, I threw myself into travel preparations and decided to transcribe the diary before departing. That's when I found the mysterious entries.

Two pages of the manuscript were written in another language. No warning, no explanation... just no English. My father, born and raised in Scotland, spoke Gaelic with his mother, so it wasn't a stretch of the imagination to deduce the passages might be Scottish Gaelic. I lost no time in contacting a translator. The translation described a strange incident that occurred when my father was the doctor on duty at Tha Sao POW hospital, near Kanchanaburi, Thailand.

Parts of the text intimated that something important was afoot. Something secret. Something the Japanese did not want spoken of beyond the walls of the emergency room. But what had compelled my father to record this? Writing was forbidden in the camps; it was punishable by torture. Writing in another language would have incurred a death sentence.

I will never know what drove him to risk his life by recording the peculiar proceedings that unfolded on the night of March 4th 1944, nor will I ever know what inspired him to pass the diary on to me, his only daughter. I like to think he admired my curiosity. He knew I'd find an anomaly irresistible, that my dogged determination would prevail. He was right. But what had he wanted me to find?

There were few clues to go on in the translation... except for one sentence. *Peace, not white, but gold, holds the pearl within one that breathes fire.* A riddle. While this phrase made little sense to me, my father implied that it held great significance for the dying man who uttered it. Who was the man? His identity held the key to solving the puzzle, but my father never discovered it...at least not to my knowledge. As I prepared to set off on my epic adventure, it felt as if events from the past were reaching across time, pulling me deeper into a mystery... a perfect quest.

Now, six months on, I was seated across from Mr. Jack MacLean, curator of the Thailand-Burma Railway Museum, in Kanchanaburi, Thailand, who was delicately turning the frail pages of my father's diary. Pausing, he looked up. Brilliant blue eyes held mine for a beat, then his head bowed and he continued perusing the small brown exercise book before him.

I felt my face flush. Was it the heat? The time change perhaps? I'd arrived in Bangkok yesterday. Miami to Moscow – Moscow to Bangkok – a grueling twenty-one

hour flight followed by a hot, sticky night in the heart of one of Asia's most notorious cities. No surprise – the journey had wreaked havoc on my system. I'd hopped the early train this morning, from Thonburi station to Kanchanaburi. Three hours and a short *tuk-tuk* ride later, here I sat, in an air-conditioned office with this rather handsome, and extremely charming, Scottish man. The journey was off to a good start.

“We're very excited that you've chosen to lend your father's diary to us. It's astonishing that he was able to write it.” Jack MacLean glanced at me, his face thoughtful, head nodding slightly. “Aye, and to think he managed to keep it hidden from the Japs all that time.”

I could feel the beads of sweat pooling on my upper lip. Humidity is not a girl's best friend.

“Yes, he was an extraordinary man – I was told he rolled it up, concealed it inside a bamboo pole.” My father's face hovered before me. I missed him.

“His writing is difficult to read, isn't it?” The blue eyes peered over black-framed glasses at me. “Did you make any attempt to transcribe it?”

My heart began to pound. Steady on, I thought, he's asking a simple question, not demanding an exposé. *Peace, not white, but gold, holds the pearl within one that breathes fire* – the curious riddle ticker-taped across my mind like a nursery rhyme loop. No one knew about the phrase – except for myself, and the translator. Absurd to think Jack MacLean knew anything about it – how could he?

I laughed. “Yes, it took me ages to transcribe. There's a reason doctors have a reputation for illegible writing. They do!” Glancing away for a moment, I recalled the hours spent pouring over the manuscript.

“It gave me some profound insights into his daily life, both in Changi, and later in the jungles of Thailand,” I concluded.

“Oh, I didn't realize he was also in Changi.” He looked surprised.

Changi was one of the more infamous Japanese prisoner of war camps used to imprison Malayan civilians as well as Allied soldiers. After the surrender of Singapore in February 1942, all British civilians, including my father, were remanded there.

“He was. Actually, he wrote that life in Changi wasn't that bad.” As the words left my lips I felt the paradox of the statement. It *was* what he wrote. “He mentioned a

vegetable garden, said he'd acted in a couple of skits, even played some music. Hard to imagine everyday activities in the face of such abnormal conditions, and yet it's probably what kept them all sane."

"Aye, I heard things got worse after a prisoner attempted to escape. The Nips tried to force them all to sign some declaration. Of course no one would, so a bunch of men were shot." He shook his head, the attractive face tinged with anger.

"On his journey north to Thanbaya, my father stopped over at a POW hospital called Tha Sao. I was told it's not far from here?"

"That's right," the curator confirmed. He looked out the window then continued speaking. "The hospital was a large compound the Japs built close to the River Khwae Noi; it's on the way up to Hellfire Pass. Hundreds of POWs working on the 'Death' railway would have been treated there."

I followed his gaze. A line of puffy cumulus clouds floated above the Thanon Thongchai mountain range – the lofty slopes that form a natural border between Thailand and Myanmar. Daddy probably gazed at those mountains as he was writing. His heartache had bled from the pages. Would he ever see his wife again? Meet his son? Would he survive? I turned my attention to Jack MacLean.

"Dad liked to write about medical prognoses, treatments, that sort of thing."

"It must have been frustrating for him, not having access to proper medicines and equipment to treat his patients."

"No kidding. The hospitals had little to no antiseptics. Doctors were frequently wading through mud and water to reach patients. It was beyond awful." Thinking of it made me shudder.

"I can imagine." He smiled sympathetically. "We have quite a few photographs along with detailed accounts displayed in our exhibition rooms. I hope you will take some time to look around?"

"Of course," I responded. Was this my cue to up and leave? Maybe not – he continued slowly turning the pages.

Truth be told, transcribing the diary had been distressing. My father spoke little of his ordeal, and the Pacific War barely received mention in school history lessons. His accounts depicted the POW's arduous journey from Singapore up into Thailand; that was

just the beginning of their nightmare. Five days and five nights packed into steel railway cars. Scorching heat. Thirst. Starvation. Filthy, unhygienic conditions causing rampant sickness. Dysentery. Diarrhea. Abdominal colic. You get the picture. But the worst was yet to come.

“Did he describe anything in the diary that seemed out of the ordinary?” The Scottish voice cut into my thoughts. I met the gaze peering at me intently.

My heart pounded in my ears. This was silly. I needed to get a grip. Sometimes my fertile imagination ran amok. (“*Relax, he’s asking perfectly normal questions,*” said Sage Self, my omnipresent inner voice.)

“Well, I guess it depends on what you’d call ‘out of the ordinary’?” I attempted to keep my tone measured, but despite best intentions sarcasm snuck in. “Would watching healthy young men drop dead from beriberi, cholera and the occasional torture session qualify?” Mr. MacLean appeared contrite.

“Of course. I didn’t mean to belittle his experiences one iota, I just wondered if there was something in particular that stood out for you?” Looking momentarily disconcerted, he shifted in his seat before continuing. “Well, as I said before, we’re delighted to be able to display this important record of events here at the Railway Museum.”

The man was all smiles again. He glanced at his watch. Here we go, I thought, time’s up.

“I have a meeting at eleven, but would you care to join me for dinner this evening so we could continue our discussion?”

Dinner! I wasn’t expecting that.

“That’s very kind of you, Mr. MacLean,” I said, a trifle formally.

“Please, call me Jack.” He grinned, then gently slipped the diary into the brown envelope I had delivered it in. “Good, well that’s settled, I’ll pick you up at eight. Where are you staying?”

“I have a reservation at Sam’s House – I think it’s close by.”

“I know it well. Sam, the original owner, is a friend of mine – he used to manage the WWII cemetery here. It’s a nice enough spot, perfect for a short visit to Kanchanaburi.”

“I haven’t checked in yet – I came here straight from the station.” I gestured towards my small suitcase parked by the door.

“Well, if you’d like to take a look around the Center, I’ll have my assistant, Sasi get you started,” he offered, standing.

Rising to leave, I took one more peek at the envelope in Jack’s hand. I might never see the diary again. In the last couple of months I’d shared an intense intimacy with the fading memoir; it had brought me close to my father... more than anything else really. Always a gentleman and definitely a loving parent, he had, nevertheless, not been one to divulge much emotion nor share insights into his personal thoughts. But his writing had revealed to me a man I’d never known. A man I had come to admire greatly.

“I think you’ll find the displays very moving.” Jack was waiting for me in the doorway.

“I’m sure I will.” I stepped into the hallway then followed him to the front desk, where a pretty young Thai woman leapt to her feet.

“Sasi, could you please give Miss Jamieson an audio player and exhibition guide?”

The girl gave him a coquettish smile before opening a nearby cupboard. Jack watched her for a moment then turned back to me.

“Sasi will take care of you, and I will see you later. I look forward to it.” Flashing a smile, he turned and left.

Kitted out, I entered the museum, walking under a mockup of a wooden bridge simulating the techniques used to build the structures on the Burma-Thailand “Death” railway. Hundreds of photographs depicting the Japanese Imperial Army’s invasion and occupation of Southeast Asia unfolded before me. Voilà! Narrated in celluloid, a slice of my father’s story; the world and experiences that had, so long ago, shaped all of our destinies and brought me to this place, to this moment.

Faces gazed out at me, in some ways not so different from other 20th century war images. The recent Bosnian war came to mind. Emaciated bodies. Ragged clothes. Haunting stares. Witness to the unspeakable malevolence of war. As my father would often say... “War *does* make people do terrible things, Rose.”

It's easy to be sanctimonious from the comfort of one's living room, far away from the grist and grime of battle, drinking our lattes and wine, philosophizing about peace and love. From that lofty place war is always elsewhere, somebody else's problem... an inconvenience that does not disturb our nice über urban worlds.

As I walked through the quiet rooms, thoughts swirled through my mind. Emotions ebbed and flowed like the tug of the moon on my soul. My recent, forty-eighth birthday was a milestone that had propelled me to reflect on my life – it's probably what gave me the hutzpah to make this journey. I'd spent years pursuing my career as a television writer and producer – enjoying a 'measure' of success, as one friend liked to put it. Sure, I'd taken some risks, but for the most part they were cushioned by the relative security of an excellent resume.

I was restless... questioning... seeking answers. What was my purpose for being here? Where was I going? What did I really want to do? Who am I? Who were my parents? Do soul mates really exist? Is reincarnation real? Ya-de-ya-da-ya-da. Reading my father's diary had awakened something in me. Suddenly I was a daring, adventurous woman, ready to take on the unknown. It felt as if unseen forces were guiding me, urging me to solve the riddle... and I wasn't sure why.

"Is everything alright Miss Jamieson?" Sasi had materialized at my side and was looking at me head tilted, soft, smiling eyes. She really was quite beautiful.

"Yes, thank you, I'm fine," I assured her. For a moment, time had stood still. I'd been standing motionless in front of the same section of photos.

"Please, let me know if you need further information." She bowed her head as her hands formed the Thai welcome greeting referred to as the *Wai*, which has its origins in the Indian *Namaste* – in Hinduism *Namaste* means "I bow to the divine in you." Her acknowledgement immediately warmed my heart; it resonated with my own path of yoga and spirituality. My stomach gurgled. A clock above the doorway confirmed it was lunchtime. I hadn't had much of a breakfast... the sustenance from a sweet Khanom Pang (the Thai version of a waffle), washed down with my obligatory coffee, was long gone.

“Actually, I’ve seen enough for now,” I said, removing my headphones and returning them to her. “I think I’ll go grab a bite to eat.” She nodded politely. Tucking the brochures into my bag, I headed for the exit. Time to explore.

~ II ~

The warm air and a welcome breeze greeted me as I walked out from the cool foyer of the Railway Center onto the street. I hailed a tuk-tuk.

“Downtown - *Ra kha tao rai Ka?*” I asked the driver, trying out my elementary Thai for ‘how much’.

“*See sib baht Krap,*” said the cheerful driver gesturing forty with his fingers.

“How about twenty,” I countered proffering a 20 baht bill. He smiled.

“It’s good you speak some Thai,” he said in perfect English. “Where do you want to go?”

“Sam’s House first – I’ll just drop my suitcase there. Then somewhere with a few shops, some street food... maybe a café?” I chuckled to myself - so much for trying out my well-rehearsed Thai phrases.

“Let’s go!” Grinning, he tucked the money into his shirt pocket then put my bag next to the driver’s seat. I jumped in behind.

Off we went, buzzing along the road, weaving through traffic and dodging pedestrians and dogs, crossing willy-nilly in front of us. Arriving a few minutes later at Sam’s House, I ducked inside and arranged with the receptionist to leave my bag there for an hour or so. I returned to the tuk tuk and we headed off downtown.

Now, I was meandering through the crowds on a bustling street filled with shops, vendors, restaurants, and cafés... did I mention food stalls? No visit to Thailand is complete without sampling street food. I took my time, delighting in tasting and testing from the profusion of choices. Fragrant scents swept over me; curries, green, red and yellow, stir fried onions sizzling in garlic, basil and lemon grass, sprinkled with cashews and poured over rice noodles. Decisions, decisions! Eventually, I settled on a glorious feast of noodles piled high with spicy, steaming vegetables.

Sitting at a picnic table munching away, I thought about Jack MacLean. What was I going to wear for our dinner date this evening? I hadn’t exactly planned my wardrobe to impress handsome suitors. Rolled up t-shirts and loose pants along with hiking boots and

flip-flops was pretty much all I'd packed. Maybe a spin through some of the local boutiques would turn up a charming little number.

There was every kind of shop and stand imaginable crammed into just a few blocks. Colorful scarves and dresses billowed in the breeze, electronics blinked from windows, sexy lingerie invited libido and name brand handbags flaunted chic.

And then, all the people... Buddhist monks jostled with trendy young Thais, their simple orange robes glowing in the afternoon sun... girls and guys stopped to chat to friends or talk into newly purchased cell phones... Hill Tribe women with their vibrant headdresses and babies glued at the hips... families towing tired, screaming kids past endless booths of toys and gadgets and tourists looking slightly stoned by the sensory onslaught.

I absorbed everything as I walked along, dodging scooters and maneuvering broken sidewalks; peeking at this and that, delighting in the sounds and smells, the hustle and bustle, the exoticness of it all.

A small sign, tucked in the corner of a window displaying stylish mannequins, caught my attention. "Following the Pathless Path?" it queried. I wondered if it was a *haiku*, an ancient form of Japanese poetry. No, haikus traditionally consist of three lines, I thought. This was more Allan Watts, an existential Buddhist favorite of mine.

My mystical curiosity ignited, I pushed open the door. A bell jangled as I ascended the steps into a warmly lit, incense-laden interior, leaving the flurry and hum of the street behind me. As my eyes accustomed to the light, I saw there were racks of tie-dyed dresses and T-shirts crammed together amidst statues of Buddha, Hindu gods and goddesses, dragons, angels, and vibrant posters depicting Tibetan mandalas.

"Namaste," said a male voice. I jumped. The man was slightly taller than myself, dressed in some kind of Eastern garb, a colorful *kufi* hat set atop salt and pepper hair. Greenish hazel eyes sparkled with just a hint of mischief.

"Oh, hello," I replied. "You've got quite the collection of cool clothes." I continued scanning through a rack of clothes. "Lots of good stuff crammed in here."

"Thanks. Enjoy... look around. There's nothing to hurry for." He arched his eyebrows and smiled. Did his peaceful demeanor come from following the pathless path, I wondered?

“Do I detect a New York accent?” I inquired.

“Brooklyn, actually.” He flicked a feather duster over an assortment of statues gathered on a shelf, agitating a flurry of dust, which he quickly attempted to divert away from me.

“I was curious about the sign in your window. What exactly does following the Pathless Path mean?”

“Who’s asking the question?” He turned towards me with a quizzical look. Then, his face relaxed. “Got time for a cup of tea?” he inquired, holding out his hand. “Zen Kaminsky.”

“Rose Jamieson, nice to meet you,” I said, shaking his hand. “Could I take a rain check on the tea? I really am interested in the phrase but I’m a bit pushed for time – I’ve got a dinner date.” I gestured down at my simple but plain togs, with a grimace.

“Wanted to see if I could find something a little more glam than what I’m wearing.”

“Ah, hot date is it?” He grinned impishly.

I liked him. There was a comfortable strength and warm humor about him, definitely attractive. Jeez, this journey was serving up some scintillating men... something that had been lacking in my life of late.

“I wouldn’t call it a “hot date” but certainly one worth dressing a little better than this for,” I murmured, diving into a rack of colorful dresses.

At the best of times I’m not the most inspired nor efficient shopper and when rushed am known to get flustered and frustrated, inevitably picking out little numbers that end up on the shelf of ‘*what was I thinking*’. Picking up on my anxiety, Zen gave me some space, disappearing down an aisle. Just as I was about to give up and leave, he rematerialized.

“What about this?” He held out a two-piece garment made of an ethereal, amethyst, silky material. Delicate pink flowers with soft green stems and leaves crisscrossed the blouse while the pants were a slightly darker shade of violet.

“That’s beautiful. Can I try it on, to see how it looks?”

“I think it will look superb.” He indicated a curtained cubicle; I took the outfit and headed inside.

“How long have you been in Kanchanaburi?” Zen was clearly the chatty type.

“I arrived yesterday,” I mumbled, pulling off my t-shirt and jeans.

“Are you staying long?”

“Not sure yet.” My immediate plans were still flexible – searching for clues connected to the riddle was my top priority. The fabric settled over me with a luscious softness and I turned to peer into the mirror. The color set off my blue eyes and tousled blond hair. Mr. Zen had good taste!

“How does it look?” he queried.

“I think it’s perfect. Thanks so much.”

“You’re welcome, I figured the color would look good on you.”

I emerged from the changing room wearing the outfit so he could take a look.

Zen whistled. “Bea-u-ti-ful!”

I blushed. “Thank you.” I wasn’t particularly comfortable with compliments.

Ducking back into the cubicle, I changed, then gathered my new outfit and headed to the cash register.

“How much do I owe you?” I asked.

“That’ll be all of 700 Baht please.” His eyes held mine. Drawn in, I hesitated for a moment before it dawned on me how little money that was for such a beautiful garment.

“Unbelievable!” 700 Baht was about twenty US dollars.

“Welcome to Thailand,” he chuckled. “Do you like music?”

“I do... actually, I’m a musician. I play guitar and write songs.”

“Nice one. In that case you might enjoy a concert that’s happening at the Sivananda Yoga Center tomorrow evening. It’s actually a fundraiser for a local women’s shelter. Care to join me?”

“I’d love that,” I liked this guy, he was cool. “What time does it start?”

“Seven. Why don’t you meet me here, the center’s just around the corner?”

“Brilliant.” Two invites in one day, life was good.

“My pleasure.” His eyes twinkled. “I’ll see you then... Shalom. Have a fun date.”

“Thanks.” I turned and walked out of Shangri-La into the frenzy of the street. Zen Kaminsky, who knew? A BuJew in Thailand!

I caught a tuk tuk back to Sam's House, retrieved my suitcase and formally checked in. Time for a quick nap before meeting Jack, whom I predicted was a punctual-kind-of-a-guy. My small chalet-style cottage was nestled in peaceful, sub-tropical gardens that stretched down to where the two tributaries of the Khwae Noi and the Khwae Yai rivers meet to form the Mae Klong River.

The Khwae Noi was made famous in Pierre Boulle's novel and film of the same name: "The Bridge on the River Kwai". The river rises west of Kanchanburi near the Three Pagodas Pass, high in the Tenasserim Hills. Down through history armies had thundered and plundered across the hills and vales of the Khwae valley. But the rugged, inhospitable terrain had proved too much for most, until the Japanese arrived with their obsessive determination to build the 'Death Railway'.

Ruthlessly working POWs to the bone, the Japanese Imperial Army eventually completed the task. But from Bangkok to Mawlamyine, each wooden sleeper on that four hundred and fifty kilometer line claimed a human life. One hundred and eighty thousand men died in that godforsaken place. In addition to the twelve thousand Allied POWs who perished, there were over a hundred thousand men from Java, Burma and Malaya.

I was beginning to have a visceral sense of what those prisoners must have experienced. The heat, for starters... it was November, but the humidity had not subsided much. My body was sheathed in a perpetual sheen of sweat, and I wasn't doing any physical labor! The diary, coupled with today's visit to the museum had expanded my grasp of the appalling conditions the POWs had toiled under. The crimes against humanity that had occurred here during World War II were atrocious.

I gazed out of the windows, the garden unfolding before me. The quiet *kooel-kooel* of a dove soothed and colorful butterflies flitted in and out of flowering shrubs and ferns. In a small pond, pale lilac water lilies reached up for the sky and the gentle tinkle of a waterfall joined with the omnipresent humming of crickets to orchestrate a lazy afternoon symphony. Hard to imagine cruelty and evil in the face of such beauty and grace, and yet therein it lies, woven into the fabric of things.

~ III ~

I was right; Jack MacLean was waiting in the foyer of the hotel at eight on the dot. He did not disappoint, looking every bit the man of the tropics dressed in tan slacks

and an elegant, soft cream shirt. Folded into a lounge chair, he was flicking through a magazine when I walked in.

“Hello Rose,” he said, rising. His appreciation of my newly purchased attire showed. “You look bonnie.” The Scottish burr was sexy.

“Thank you. I clean up pretty nicely when I try.” Taking my arm, he steered me towards the door.

“Ready for some good Thai food?”

“Absolutely! I imagine you’ve got some favorite haunts?”

“I do. There’s a fine wee place on the river. It’s not far – we could walk, if that’s alright with you?”

“Sounds wonderful. Lead the way.”

Nestled atop a river raft, with cheerfully set tables, hanging lanterns and colorful flower baskets, the River Kwai Floating Restaurant offered a bird’s eye view of the bridge, sometimes mistakenly referred to as the “Bridge Over The River Kwai”.

The truth is there never really was a bridge over the River Khwae Noi, as depicted in the film. That bridge, which was wooden, was built further up river, and destroyed after the war. The bridge now before me, was built during the war, when steel became available. The Allies bombed this one too, but the center span was reconstructed post war. The river flowing past us was the Mae Klong River.

I ordered a vegetable massaman curry and Jack opted for some of the local yeesok fish with a side of Pad Thai. A pretty waitress brought us a couple of Singha beers and we drank to my Dad’s diary, travel adventures and good health. I began to relax; the cool beer and warm evening air coupled with the gentle rippling of the river worked their magic on me. As the sky deepened from maroon to black, the bridge blended into jungle and mountains and the cacophony of night sounds mingled with the chorus of restaurant noises. Glasses clinked and chimed, knives and forks tapped; chatter and laughter rang out.

“*Baht* for your thoughts.” Jack’s face was softened in the lantern light.

“I was thinking about what it must have been like... living out there.” I paused, observing the darkness across the river. “For my dad, for all of them, bound together in the muck and mire.”

“My father was there too, you know,” he said quietly, staring into the night.

“I did not know that. Did he survive?” As he turned back to me, I noticed sadness tiptoeing across his face.

“He survived the camp, but never fully recovered from beriberi and the harshness of what he witnessed. He spent most of his post war life, a weakened, bitter man and died when I was in my early teens.”

“I’m so sorry.” My father’s fixation with sprinkling wheat germ on his cereal was born from those days. “My dad used to say that if only the officers had requisitioned brown rice for the men, so many cases of beriberi would have been prevented thanks to the Vitamin B in the husks.”

“Aye, my father told me how proud the Japs were about serving up nice, polished white rice.” He paused, looking down at his hands for a moment. “It was a cruel episode in history, with dreadful consequences.” His eyes wandered back across the river.

“Working at the Railway Center sometimes makes it hard to escape the past, it’s rather like living in a time warp.” He laughed, ruefully.

“I can imagine.” I commiserated. Our shared history was cozying up between us. My earlier jitters about the riddle seemed completely unfounded. I smiled. “Being here has definitely brought my father’s writing to life.”

“Your father’s diary intrigues me,” he said, his demeanor shifting slightly. “I would be very interested to read the transcript, if you have it with you.” His eyes locked with mine.

“Of course.” I fished for an excuse, glancing around the restaurant as if one might magically materialize. Since the truth is often the best defense I drew on that.

“I’m actually thinking of writing a book inspired by my father’s diary, so I’d prefer to keep the transcript to myself for a while.” He raised his eyebrows, then his face relaxed into a disarming smile. Jack MacLean knew how to put on the charm.

“Of course, I totally understand. Anyway, enough talk of the past. Tell me your plans... how long are you staying in Kanchanaburi? Where are you heading from here?”

The evening was fun. Jack was an easy listener and a good storyteller. His tales of residing in and exploring Thailand captured my travelling soul, while his natural charisma ignited a delightful kaleidoscope of romantic daydreams. Strangely, though, I

wasn't snared. He was almost too good to be true – the kind of a guy no one really believes exists. But hey, this was my adventure and Jack MacLean made for a delectable entrée.

He walked me back to Sam's House. Arriving at the entrance, Jack held out his hand, and with impeccable Scottish manners, thanked me for a lovely evening. There was no awkward pause, no space for conjecture, just a simple polite, "cheerio" and "perhaps we could go sightseeing one day?"

As I wound through the gardens to my little cottage, I reviewed the evening, wondered if I should tell him about the riddle... enlist his help. However, the minute my head hit the pillows, my eyes closed and all of Hades could not stop me from falling asleep.

~ IV ~

Jack MacLean enjoyed his dinner with Rose. She was attractive, fun to be with, had had an interesting life. Her playfulness and strong sense of purpose coupled with an inner wisdom left him wanting more. But Jack's heart was a caged bird, and even when the door cracked a little his soul faltered, perched in the liminal space between fear and courage, freedom and captivity.

The impediment to the sovereignty of Jack's heart was his lover, Mayuree Konishi, upon whom he called after leaving Rose that evening.

Few men could remain indifferent in Mayuree's presence. The daughter of a Thai mother and Japanese father, her exquisite good looks and charm were both a blessing and a curse. Her father, Akio Konishi, was head of the Japanese Yakuza Mafia during WWII, when he'd skillfully used his connections and power to his advantage. Her mother, Ratana, met Akio when he visited Thailand on a business trip in the early 1960's. Already married, with two children and a bevy of mistresses, Akio enjoyed the freedom Ratana afforded him. Women. Booze. Drugs. Gambling.

Tragically, Mayuree was the unwitting witness to years of debauchery, underworld dealings and violence. Trailing the perimeters of lust and greed the young girl might have escaped unscathed had her mother not died when she was eight. Akio then delivered his daughter, already a delicate beauty, into the guardianship of his apprentice, Léi Fēng, a rising star in the Chao Pho Mafia, who lived with his family in Kanchanaburi.

Orphaned a few years later, the sexual abuse at the hands of her stepfather began. Mayuree quickly learned that silent compliance was key to her survival. However, acknowledging the effect she had on men, she honed her skills to her advantage. She became an instrument of desire.

Mayuree opened the door. Jack pulled her to him hungrily, opening her silk kimono, feeling her full breasts. As she kissed him passionately his fingers slid down the sleek landscape of her body, searching, delving into soft wetness as she ripped open his shirt, pressing in, skin to skin. Bodies entwined, they backed into the apartment, the door closed behind them. Jack steered her into the bedroom then pushed her on the bed. He knelt between her legs pulling her down to him, lifting her buttocks, closing in until he was feasting on her. She moaned, eyes closed, body arching into him, his pleasuring skyrocketing her to ecstasy.

Resting for a moment, Jack gently caressed the softness of her inner thighs; then, Mayuree reached down and pulled him on top of her. Flipping him over, she mounted his body, licking, kissing, biting her way down, down, down until her fingers tugged open the button of his slacks, hands releasing his manhood from confines of cloth to surrender into blood red lips. Mayuree skillfully brought him to bliss; she guided him along the path of pleasure, suspended him in the *zone* till he could linger no more... he exploded.

“Where have you been all night?” Mayuree asked Jack as she walked back into the room carrying two glasses of wine. She sat on the edge of the bed, handed a glass to Jack, put hers on the bedside table and picked up a gold box. Taking out a cigarette, she lit it, inhaled deeply then slowly exhaled the blue grey vapor from her slightly parted lips.

“I wish you wouldn’t,” said Jack, watching her while he took a sip of wine, hand reaching out to fondle her breast.

“I like one every now and then, just like you enjoy your whiskey,” she scowled, pulling away. “Anyway, you know I don’t like to be told what I can or cannot do.”

She left him, walked to the open window, casually flicking back strands of her long, straight black hair. The open kimono caressed the shapely contours of her body. Jack watched, intoxicated by her glorious perfection.

“A British woman came to donate her father’s wartime diary to the Railway Center today. I took her to dinner as a gesture of gratitude.”

“Was she sexy?” Mayuree was sitting on the window ledge, blowing smoke rings into the sky. She looked at him seductively, one leg falling to the floor, the other pulled up on the sill flirtatiously revealing herself to him. Jack provided a fantasy niche for Mayuree, one in which she could escape the debauchery long engraved on her soul. With him, she could dare to imagine a different life. But it was in her nature to toy with all men. Jack was no exception.

“She was attractive, but not my type.” Jack didn’t elaborate. He knew Mayuree’s jealous wrath intimately and didn’t seek to ignite it. Mayuree crushed her cigarette into an ashtray; came back to the bed. Straddling Jack, she leaned in, kissed him deeply. She squeezed her thighs against him then sat up; his cock rose between her legs; she caressed it lazily, her fingers circling the tip.

“Was her father a prisoner of war?” she asked, releasing him.

Reaching over, she pulled open a drawer in the bedside table. Her breasts brushed across his chest. He groaned. She drew out two lengths of rope then sat back, constricting them between her hands, taunting him. Jack grabbed one of the cords then slowly began to wind it around her wrists. She squirmed, giggling softly. Leaning forward she plucked the second piece of rope with her teeth. Jack began tying an intricate knot, his eyes fixed on her mouth, rope between pearly whites. Then, he stopped. “Later,” he murmured, dropping the cord. It had been a long day.

Mayuree pouted, spat the rope from her mouth then threw both pieces on the floor. Rising, she drew the kimono around her and stormed off to the window. Jack watched her go. She could be so impetuous. But she drove him insane; her sexual appetites knew no bounds. When she had taught him the Japanese art of *Kinbaku* - the eroticism of the rope - he was hooked; her devoted slave for life. However, right now, he wasn’t in the mood.

“Her father was stationed near Kanchanaburi for a while,” he offered, responding to her earlier question. “He was a doctor at Tha Sao hospital, next to the camp my father was in.”

Jack thought about his father, Duncan MacLean. Theirs had not been the closest of relationships; his father’s constant health issues created pain and suffering that lingered long after the bullets and bombs had stopped. But it was at his father’s urging

that he'd come to Thailand in the first place. Duncan had told Jack a farfetched tale about a British doctor, called Jamieson, and a dying Japanese officer; he'd heard rumors of a covert operations... hidden treasure. Jack had deemed most of it fantasy... until Rose Jamieson called. The minute he'd heard her name, his curiosity was aroused.

"Is she the one?" Mayuree's voice reached into his thoughts. He took a sip of wine as he watched her. She was smoking another cigarette.

"She may be," he replied. "I don't know for sure, but I'm going to keep an eye on her, see if she gets up to anything suspicious."

He had shared his father's stories with Mayuree, never thinking much of it. But unbeknownst to Jack, Mayuree too was privy to such yarns. Growing up, she'd listened to her stepfather Léi Fēng babbling incoherently, during his opium binges, about a Japanese covert operation called the Golden Lily. He'd ranted of caves filled with gold bullion; treasure maps, even corrupt CIA operatives. Subsequently anything remotely connected to the Golden Lily, aroused Mayuree's attention.

Jack rose from the bed, reached for his clothes and began to dress.

"This could be our chance Jack-*jai*," said Mayuree, sauntering towards him. Her kimono fell open; she pressed against him. He moaned, lifted his arms up in mock protest. Virtually the same height as Jack, Mayuree's eyes locked with his. She slowly looped the belt from her robe around his neck, drew the ends tight with both hands as she pulled his face gradually toward her until his mouth hovered centimeters from hers.

"You won't fail me will you?" she hissed; the soft kitten replaced by a sly, more feral feline. *This* Mayuree drove Jack wild. Morality vanished. He capitulated to desire.

"I want to go with you to Scotland Jack-*jai*, but... I must have life I'm used to. For that we need money, right? You need many dollars to keep your sweet Mayuree like she likes?" Her tongue slowly trailed the perimeter of his mouth. He exhaled, loosened the belt that had tightened around his neck. Pushing her towards the bed, he threw her down, mounted her and plunged deep inside.

"You'll have everything you need, I promise," he murmured in her ear.

Message from the author below...

Pursuit of the Golden Lily will be published early March 2016. If you have enjoyed reading Chapter One, and would like to purchase the novel when it is available, please email me at:

rosieemery@hotmail.com

Thank you for taking the time to read Chapter One.

Rosie Emery