The assault party between Camps II and III
CHO OYU
By Favour of the Gods
by
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with a Foreword by
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METHUEN & CO LTD
36 ESSEX STREET LONDON W.C.2
First published as Cho Oyu:

Gnade der Götter by Ullstein Verlag,
Vienna, in 1955

This translation first published 1957
Foreword

There is magic even in a figure. For many people who climb mountains, summits have a certain fascination on account of their height, as well as, or even apart from, the difficulties they offer. Both aspects present a challenge. Thus, the "Three-thousanders" of our own islands command respect, even though we are thinking only in terms of feet above sea-level; in the minds of some they are in a "class" of their own and worthy to be climbed on this very account. In Scotland they are known as "Munro's", and a man may be known by the number of these he has climbed in a lifetime, or a day.

So it is in the European Alps, with the summits of 4,000 metres and above; in the Himalayas this peculiar distinction attaches to those twice that figure. It is but natural that these giants should be surrounded in our minds by an aura of romance, for there are only fourteen 8,000-metre peaks in the world. Hence the fascination, for Tichy and his friends, of Cho Oyu.

Now the romance, whether of the Ben Nevis, the Mont Blanc, or the Everest "class" of mountain, may be deemed illusory and misleading. There is just as much fun and often a far greater technical challenge on lower peaks in many ranges. Yet the magic of these figures derives from something fundamental in man's make-up—the urge to spend himself, to reach towards the limits of human endurance for the simple purpose of discovering where that limit lies. This I have long believed, and this story of six men, three from the West and three from the East, striving together against natural forces and human frailty to pass beyond 8,000 metres and reach a mountain top, may help others to understand it, too.

The story is remarkable in many ways. First, because they achieved their goal with so few resources, human and material. Even those of us who not only prefer but believe in the greater efficacy of "small" expeditions rather than "large" ones to tackle the biggest peaks of all would hardly have accepted a figure of only three European climbers as sufficient for this task.
Secondly, because it is the first expedition in which the whole enterprise was so fully shared by Sherpas and Sahibs together; this, perhaps, partly explains the first point I have mentioned. Thirdly, it was a remarkable exploit because, for the first time in this new era of Himalayan climbing, there was simultaneous competition to climb a high peak by two expeditions from different nations. Before they made the second, successful bid for the top the Austrians were surprised by the arrival of a Swiss-French party bent on the same goal; great credit is due to both that the outcome was both fair and friendly. This is a pointer to the future, for, as in the Alps within the last hundred years, there is bound to be rivalry over first ascents of the remaining untrodden summits.

The story is remarkable, too, for its author, modest, quiet and gentle Herbert Tichy, who, rendered helpless and in great pain with frost-bitten fingers, himself endured to the top—a feat of outstanding moral and physical courage. In telling his tale, he will awake, through his own love for that enchanting land and its friendly people, the memories of many other Himalayan travellers and the sympathies of many more still.

And what am I to say of Pasang Dawa Lama, their Sirdar and my old friend of three small expeditions between the wars? With him I first saw the traces of the Yeti: he was with me on Nepal Peak and with my wife and myself on two reconnaissances of Pandim. Now, at the summit of his powers, he has set a new standard for human performance, for what the body can achieve when driven by a ruthless will. To him mainly is due the climbing of the world’s seventh highest mountain. This performance, by which Pasang travelled from Namche Bazar to the top of Cho Oyu in three days, walking many miles across rugged mountain country and climbing some fourteen thousand feet, is also a pointer to the future; to the day when men will reach the top of Everest without oxygen.

The climbing of Cho Oyu by the Austrians and the Sherpas will, I trust, provide a pattern for the method and the spirit in which future Himalayan mountains will be climbed.

JOHN HUNT

Aston, Henley-on-Thames
27th July, 1956
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CHAPTER ONE

Turquoise Goddess

I shall never forget a single detail of the evening when I first seriously thought of attempting a 26,000-foot peak. Other evenings may have been more memorable, other landscapes even more beautiful; yet I can always recall that particular evening minute by minute, mood by mood.

We had been following a narrow gorge for many hours along a path which crossed and re-crossed a small but turbulent stream. We could sometimes cross by a fallen tree or use rocks as stepping-stones, but as a rule it meant taking off our boots and stockings and wading.

After covering over 600 miles of west Nepal, and crossing rivers more dangerous than the highest peaks, this little torrent was no challenge and lacked even the spice of danger. It was merely an obstacle to grumble over.

I was therefore in a bad temper, and sometimes so lost to shame that I let Adjiba or Gyalsen carry me across. I was sick of taking off my boots and pulling them on again; and I had been on the tramp for four months almost without a pause. The thrill of unexplored valleys and hitherto virgin 20,000-foot peaks had given way to the daily routine of travel, and even this was made rather unpleasant by wet feet at the bottom of a gloomy gorge.

But soon the path climbed round the shoulder of a mountain into the evening sunshine up to a small farm, where we were to halt for the night. Only two or three more nights in Nepal; then our long trip would be over and we should be in India again.

There were terraced fields below the farmstead, and as harvest was long since over—it was the end of December—we could pitch our tents there. The sun was warm and mellow.
The Sherpas had broken off a few sugar canes as we came through the fields, and we cut them into handy pieces and chewed them. I forgot the tiresome stream and felt happy again. Pasang came up to me with a look of embarrassment, which, as I knew from experience, meant that he was going to ask for something.

"End of journey, ha," he said, to break the ice.

"Yes," I said. "Only a day or two more."

That concluded the conversational gambit.

"Sherpas very tired and hungry," he went on. "Goats cheap here. A goat make Sherpas very happy."

The farmer, who was sitting among his five children one terrace above us, lord of all he surveyed, had already consented to sell us a goat; and as I was as hungry as my Sherpas it was only a matter of cheapening it by a rupee or two before the goat was ours. This was enough to turn the night into a feast.

I sat on a clean bamboo mat lent us by the farmer, and while I took my ease, the happiness of the past months came over me.

Pasang sat down beside me and without further ado asked:

"Another high peak, eh?"

"High peaks" had often occupied us. There were only the five of us—four Sherpas and myself—but we had climbed several virgin summits of over 20,000 feet and were confident that we could climb still higher ones.

"Yes," I said. "Gladly. It is only a question of the money and the Nepalese permit."

Neither of these conditions impressed Pasang. Every expedition, whether from Europe or America, was fabulously rich in the eyes of the Sherpas. This, oddly enough, was usually true, but not in my case.

The government in Kathmandu would certainly keep a 26,000-footer for me, Pasang assured me.

"There's Cho Oyu," he said. "It is a very high mountain, but we could do it."

The decision to attempt Cho Oyu was made.

I did not know then how difficult the climb would be, but when I recall this talk, I see myself sitting in the evening.
sunshine of Nepal just as if I had been at home and I feel how much I owe to the friendship of the Sherpas, without which the dream of climbing a high peak could never have been realized.

Much has happened since the half hour the three of us spent on the summit of Cho Oyu. The President of the Republic of Austria has placed the medal for services to my country in my frost-bitten hands, and the Mayor of Vienna presented me with the Carl Renner prize. These honours and the unforgettable days on Cho Oyu fill me with gratitude. But the supreme moment of the whole adventure was the hours we spent that sunny evening below the lonely farm amidst unnamed mountains. Their friendly warmth inspired our light-hearted, but not I felt unjustifiable, resolve to attempt a 26,000-footer and was the prelude to our success. It gave me courage to make the preparations, which had to fall far short of what such an enterprise required. I used to look back to that evening for encouragement when doubts assailed me. If the summit had not seemed unattainable then, beneath the very frown of the Himalaya, we must surely have a chance. When I recalled that evening all doubts vanished and every difficulty seemed small.

We never made use of tents at that time. The nights were dry and not too cold. Pemba and Gyalsen prepared the goat, and Adjiba lit a fire on the terrace below us. Its smoke rose up between us and the valley and gave to the distant solitudes a suggestion of human habitation.

Pasang and I sat on the bamboo mat. The sadness of parting afflicted me no longer. This was not, after all, to be the last of such evenings. On many another I should await the fall of night, tired out after a long day’s climbing.

The shadows filled the valleys with dark-blue lakes. Innumerable green ridges still stood out against the rising tide of darkness, but were soon overpowered by the sun’s eternal rhythm. Then only a lofty glacier here and there caught the light, keeping up a brief rivalry with our camp-fire. And when night fell, no walls parted me from it; its stars, brighter than ours at home, were not just pricked out upon the darkness; they were the night itself, and what would the darkness be if it did not open the windows of eternity?
This may seem a strange and unprofessional way of beginning the story of the ascent of a 26,000-foot mountain, but it was not just the wish to conquer a high peak that turned our thoughts to Cho Oyu; it was the longing for the boundless peace of evenings such as these.

"Next year, Cho Oyu?" Pasang asked.
"Cho Oyu," I agreed.
Adjiba brought the fried liver of the goat.
"We go for Cho Oyu," Pasang told him.
"Aha," Adjiba said, cutting a cucumber into thin slices.
That’s how we decided to attack the seventh highest mountain in the world.

Cho Oyu is situated about twenty miles north-west of Everest in the main ridge of the Himalaya on the borders of Nepal and Tibet. Its official height is 8,153 metres or 26,750 feet, which would make it the seventh highest mountain in the world. The great Himalayan authority, Professor G. D. Dyhrenfurth, estimated it at 8,200, and Shipton’s latest recording, 8,189 metres, is in close agreement. If that is correct, Cho Oyu goes up one place and takes precedence of Dhaulagiri. But that is a detail which may be left to geographers and geodesists. For us and our readers too all that matters is that it is one of the very highest mountains.

The name Cho Oyu has not so far been given a final interpretation. Professor Dyhrenfurth explains it as Goddess of the Turquoise. The Tibetan compound name Chomo Yu abbreviated in the vernacular to Cho Oyu means Chomo, goddess, Yu, Turquoise. This interpretation may be right; the turquoise is the favourite stone of the Tibetans and in the evening light Cho Oyu takes on its blue-green tint.

We asked a priest at Namche Bazar what the name meant. He said, "Great head" or "Mighty head", which too is enlightening. Heinrich Harrer, who spent "Seven Years in Tibet", gave me another meaning: Cho-i-u means head of the god or god head. Cho, God, U, Head, I standing for the genitive. Quickly spoken, these three syllables give very much the same sound as the mountain’s usual name.

The name is certainly Tibetan; from the north this mountain
is visible for a great distance, whereas on the side of Nepal it is concealed by foothills. This makes it probable that the Tibetans gave it its name.

Cho Oyu has been known in Europe since 1921, but attracted little attention until our ascent. Other peaks of over 26,000 feet like Everest, Kangchenjunga, Nanga Parbat and K2 won a quick celebrity from the attempts made on them and the sacrifices they exacted. Cho Oyu escaped notice.

The first British Mount Everest Expedition of 1921 provided a clear photograph of the mountain taken from the Nangpa La, showing the ascent route which we too chose in our turn. But its mission was restricted to finding the route up Everest and it could not waste time on anything less. However, the photograph showed that Cho Oyu was a "possible" 26,000-footer.

Thirty years passed before a British Expedition was in its neighbourhood again. This was the reconnaissance of Everest led by Eric Shipton, the aim of which was to find out what possible routes to the summit of the world led from Nepal;
for meanwhile the political whirligig had brought about an important change. Tibet, through which so far all routes had led, was now closed to foreigners, and Nepal, hitherto barred, had suddenly been thrown open. Once more a small party, in spite of being restricted to a definite objective, made the ascent of Nangpa La and saw Cho Oyu from the north-west. Murray, the experienced Himalayan climber, wrote on that occasion: "The north-west face of Cho Oyu is the most promising I have seen in any of the great Himalaya peaks."

Finally, Cho Oyu was the goal of a British Expedition led by Eric Shipton in 1952. Outstanding climbers took part in it. There were Hillary, who a year later stood on the summit of Everest, and Lowe from New Zealand, and Riddiford, Evans, Gregory, Bourdillon, names known to all who know anything of Himalayan climbing.

This expedition came to an ice-fall at about 22,000 feet and reckoned it would take two weeks before they could make it passable for the Sherpas. They abandoned the climb. We negotiated this ice-fall in one afternoon.

I do not mean to make any comparisons between the capabilities of the two expeditions. No doubt the British climbers could have reached the summit of Cho Oyu if it had been their real objective. They had been counting on making an attempt on Everest that season, but the Swiss got in before them. So they went after other game with the object principally of testing the team and its equipment, hoping that if the Swiss failed they would be able to attempt Everest the following year. But what deterred Shipton above all was that the route up Cho Oyu would take them a few hundred yards over the Tibetan border and he wished at all costs to avoid political complications.

Immediately after my return from Nepal in January, 1954, I had asked permission from Kathmandu to make the ascent of Cho Oyu in the autumn. The government of Nepal is extremely cordial and sympathetic in its attitude to foreign expeditions, but all the same a considerable delay must be reckoned with, since there are not many peaks of 26,000 feet and over, and a great many climbers who wish to be the first to scale them.

Nevertheless, one day in April I had an official letter from
Kathmandu. Knowing it brought the decision, I dared not open it. Instead I opened my last bottle of champagne and drank it before reading that fateful letter.

If it brought a refusal, I thought, then I could rest content and be thankful. I had had a glorious time in Nepal already and perhaps my idea of climbing had little in common with first ascents of 26,000-foot peaks.

If it gave permission I should have a tremendous labour to face; I should have to get together a great deal more money than I had ever possessed in my life; I should have to procure the necessary equipment from tents to down jackets within a few weeks; I should have to enlist two or three European climbers, including scientists.

The bottle was finished and the decisive moment had to be faced. I opened the letter.

Yes, it said, the Government of Nepal would be glad to welcome me again in Nepal. Cho Oyu was reserved for me in the autumn of 1954.

So it was settled. That peaceful evening among nameless mountains was not to be the last. I should enjoy many more. But this time the responsibility was far greater. I had not just myself and my Sherpas to answer for; I was responsible for the success of an expedition.

It would have to be as small a one as possible for financial reasons alone, and there were other reasons arising out of the expedition itself.

Gigantic expeditions with tons of baggage and hundreds of porters, issuing reports like war communiqués and bound by solemn oath like soldiers to do or die, seemed to me to violate the sanctity of the Himalaya. I was convinced that the ascent of one of the highest peaks could be achieved with more modest equipment and at smaller expense. This of course was my own personal opinion and I was careful not to say much about it. In mountaineering circles I was advised not to say much either about my intention of scaling the peak, and that was my own wish. So we were able to set off without the usual propaganda and publicity, although it could not be kept a secret once we had our official permission.
Also, we had to have a name in order to raise the necessary funds, and "The Austrian Cho Oyu Expedition, 1954" was the obvious choice. It did not necessarily imply an ascent; it might mean merely a reconnaissance.

Next I had to get down to the real crux of the matter—finance. And there I came up against difficulties which at times seemed insuperable. It was bad enough to be attempting one of the half dozen highest peaks in the world with only three Europeans; it would never do if inadequate funds increased the mistrust we already aroused.

I am still astonished that the money we needed was collected within the short period of two months. My gratitude to the official bodies of Austria, to representatives of finance and industry, to many friends, can never be expressed. They gave me their confidence, and confidence is beyond thanks. To justify such confidence was the least I could do; I shall always be in their debt.

How, for example, am I to thank the Honorary Consul from South America?

A friend rang me up at a moment when I was completely stumped.

"There is an Austrian from abroad at the XY Hotel. I was telling him of your plans. He was interested. Go and see him."

I drove to the hotel and met an elderly man. We made polite conversation until I began to feel embarrassed and wondered whether my friend might have been mistaken.

Then he remarked,

"You’re off to the Himalaya."

"Yes."

"You need money."

"Yes."

"Would a thousand dollars be of service?"

"Yes," I said for the third time.

He took out his cheque book and wrote out ten cheques for a hundred dollars each and gave me them.

"There is one condition—don’t mention my name. I should not like it. I wish you success. Goodbye."

I said, "Thank you. Goodbye."
Of course money was not always forthcoming with such miraculous ease.

In my opinion three Austrians and seven Sherpas formed a strong enough contingent, and the same equipment was provided for all ten of us. The Sherpas had the same down jackets, sleeping-bags, and windproof smocks as the rest of us; they were to take part in the assault and had to have the same advantages. It occurred to me that three good rope teams could be made up with an Austrian and a Sherpa to each; the four remaining Sherpas would surely be enough to deal with transport to the high camps. Needless to say, it did not work out like this; we had eleven Sherpas and we were never divided up into particular rope teams.

Sepp Jöchler of Landeck was the climber of our expedition. He had climbed the north face of the Eiger with Hermann Buhl in the most difficult conditions, and the north face of the Matterhorn with Ernst Senn. He is one of the greatest Alpine climbers of our time, yet I think I may say that for the success of our expedition his qualities as a man counted for more than his proficiency as a climber. He was and is a magnificent friend.

Dr. Helmut Heuberger, geographer at the University of Innsbruck, was our scientist. Sepp and I were quite happy to say, "It's a bit cold today," but Helmut would hold up a complicated thermometer, which registered sun-ray, moisture and many other facts, and was able after a minute or two to announce, "Minus 8 degrees Celsius."

Which was reassuring.

We greatly prized Helmut's scientific instruments, particularly his cloud reflector, by means of which he ascertained the direction and speed of the passing clouds. Not that we should ever have used it for shaving—we didn't shave; but together with his thermometer it aroused such astonishment and excited such curiosity among the villagers that the moment Helmut got to work on his calculations, we were entirely overlooked.

Which was very welcome.

I was supposed to be the expedition's leader, but we were not disciplined on military lines, and when a decision had to
be made we sat down and discussed the matter. Usually Pasang’s greater experience turned the scale. None of us, I hope, had the feeling that I was “Leader of the Expedition”.

I need not introduce the Sherpas individually; they will do that for themselves as the story unfolds. We knew that we had no hope of success unless the Sherpas gave their best. They were each in his way fine comrades, and we never doubted that we could rely on each one absolutely.

Pasang had got them together, and as we later discovered, they were nearly all members of his far-flung family and included two of his sons. This was no disadvantage; they all obeyed his lightest word and his authority was absolute. He was perhaps even too self-confident and thrusting since the tour we had made together.

Adjiba was as fond of a drink as ever.

Gyalsen was still so small and youthful that it was difficult to give him credit for his wide experience.

Pasang’s brother, Ang Nyima, one of the Sherpas I had not known before, was a particularly likeable fellow. He was our cook, neither a very good nor a very bad one, but he took his duties very seriously and fixed anxious and enquiring eyes on us while we ate. If our faces clouded over, his eyes at once filled with tears. We were anxious not to hurt his feelings, but it was hardly possible during all those months always to smile at every meal. His name, Ang, child, Nyima, Sunday—Sunday’s child, suited him perfectly.

Pasang’s sons were called Kami Lama and Purbu Gyalsen. Both had the sophisticated air of being easily bored; they were often lost in their own thoughts, but never failed to do a full day’s work.

Pemba Bhutar, Gyalsen’s brother, was the merriest of them all. He always kept his broadest grin for the worst moments.

These seven were to take part in the assault and wore clothing provided by us. Pasang’s team were all first class and not one of them ever failed us. Here once more are the names which are inseparable from the first ascent of Cho Oyu: Pasang Dawa Lama, Adjiba, Ang Nyima, Gyalsen, Kami Lama, Purbu Gyalsen, Pemba Bhutar.
A few more Sherpas besides these came with us as porters not only to the high camps but right up the mountain. It is not necessary to name them all, but I want to mention a few.

There was Da Gyalsen—the shrimp of the expedition. His activity was unceasing and he took on the wearisome task of massaging my frost-bitten hands.

Karma, whose life had once been despairs of, sported a very stylish moustache and always looked the gentleman.

Lhapka was deaf and always ready to play the clown for our benefit. We held him in particularly fond memory because it was he who always carried our midday meal on the return journey. As we did not cook by day, but only ate a light meal cooked at the previous camp, Lhapka was the most important person on the retreat. He summoned us back punctually at midday if we had gone on ahead and divided up the ration in exactly equal portions.

They were all delightful and I can only hope their memories of us match ours of them.

And now a few more words about our equipment.

The usual thing is for an expedition to provide the Sherpas with the clothes needed for the expedition and to make them a present of them at the end. This causes difficulties with the Indian Customs officers, who insist that the same number of socks shall be taken out of the country as were brought in. It is not at all pleasant to take socks back to Europe after they have been worn by Sherpas for months on end. Anyone, even Customs officers, can see that.

Experienced Sherpas take part in two expeditions a year and consequently collect a vast assortment of special clothing, which they sometimes keep as precious possessions but usually sell. In Darjeeling, where most Sherpa climbers live, there is a regular black market in ultra-modern Alpine equipment, and the most elaborate boots with felt interlining and cork cold-excluders made in New Zealand, Germany or France are obtainable there for about £2. In their countries of origin they cost quite six times as much.

Sherpas are all connoisseurs of the latest climbing equipment
and know very well whether a down jacket from the Argentine is to be preferred to one from France. In remote and primitive villages such as Thami and Thyangboche you find the most up-to-date legacies from Himalayan expeditions side by side with hand-carved wooden pitchers and, in Tibet, beaten iron work. Aluminium ski sticks are common. Sectional ladders of light metal used by the British Everest Expedition for crossing crevasses serve now for reaching the first floor of a Sherpa’s house, and Adjiba’s mother keeps her grain in the oval canister of the Swiss Expedition. A young Sherpa we met was wearing a light kind of shoe, which, like a mitten, separated two toes from the rest. I had seen shoes like this in Japan. He had, in fact, got them from the Japanese Expedition to Manaslu.

It is surprising and also symbolic to find in the high villages of Nepal the most modern utensils and materials, such as we seldom see, side by side with the most ancient articles of daily use and wear.

We distributed our Alpine equipment among our Sherpas in Namche Bazar, and they looked it over with a critical eye. We felt very proud when Pasang, apparently out of sincere conviction and not politeness, said, “Very good equipment, better than other expeditions.” We were, I think, really well fitted out, although we only took a fraction of the stuff other expeditions provide themselves with.

The total weight of our equipment, packed in wooden cases, was 926 kilograms, and subtracting the weight of the cases, 800, or 1,800 lbs. It included the entire clothing for ten men, as well as Alpine equipment such as tents, sleeping-bags, air mattresses, pickaxes, ropes, climbing irons, boots and hundreds of other articles.

Judging by our experience, often in very severe conditions—October is a very cold season in the Himalaya—we were fitted out perfectly well. We had all that was necessary, nothing superfluous.

With the single exception of a cooking stove from Germany (we had two other Austrian ones), everything was manufactured in Austria. I do not mention this for patriotic motives, but to show that a Himalayan expedition can be equipped from the ordinary resources of its own country.
We had nothing out of the common and no new inventions; only the usual equipment, adapted to Himalayan conditions.

We did not originally mean to take any oxygen with us as we considered that our peak was not beyond the limit of unaided human endurance. But events in the Himalaya—Hilary's mischance and the death of a member of the Austrian expedition to Saipal—warned us meanwhile of the serious danger of pneumonia at great heights, so we took two steel cylinders each containing 150 litres of oxygen. They would have enabled a man to breathe oxygen for several minutes, and doctors assured us that a shock of this kind might have a decisive influence on the course of the disease. We never, thank God, had need of our stock and brought the cylinders back unopened.

In my view, and in that of my Tyrolese companions, no ultra-modern and sensational equipment is required in the Himalaya as long as one is ready to adapt oneself as closely as possible to the actual conditions. What is required is that the material and usefulness of each article shall be given careful thought.

The great drawback of our expedition was its lack of a doctor. Helmut and I are doctors only of geography and geology. Sepp is an engineer. None of us knew what to do in the case of serious illness. But Austrian hospitals gave us more medicines than we needed and instructed us in the use of them. Although it was no solution of the problem, it served our purpose. Helmut soon showed a decided inclination for the medical profession and every evening his tent was besieged by the local inhabitants in quest of pills and ointments or, what they loved best, injections. His treatment was adequate even for the severe, third-degree frost-bite of my hands. The medical profession in Vienna was astonished to see how few of my fingers had suffered irreparable damage.

No doubt it was irresponsible behaviour to go without a doctor and we were lucky to get away with it. We had a surgical knife for amputation and I can still hear the surgeon who gave it me saying: "Press hard and then as clean a cut as possible." Thank God we did not need it.

One more detail of our preparation:
Well-meaning friends advised us to be insured. In spite of the risk, we found a Society in Vienna willing to insure us for the normal premium. Sepp, who is married, insured his life as well; Helmut and I, being bachelors, were content to be insured against accidents. The Society was taken aback when they learned, after we had discussed the policy and arranged for medical inspection, that Sepp suffered severely from sciatica and that Helmut had been shot through the lung in Russia as well as grazed by a bullet which just missed his spine. I was the only one who had a clean sheet, and yet in the end it was my fingers for which the Society had to make very generous payment.

We were, all told, a poor lot, as in spite of my generally sound health I smoke a lot and drink without reluctance.

People will tell you that for the high Himalaya it is safest to be within the twenties. Pasang—to go by his variable reckonings on his fingers—was forty-three. I was forty-two. Ang Nyima and Adjiba were close on our heels. Helmut and Sepp were a mere thirty-one, and most of the Sherpas about twenty. We were on the whole an over-age team to suffer so little loss at such heights; on the contrary, we found what we went for.

So much for preliminaries.

Now we’re off.
CHAPTER TWO

Waiting for Dagot

It was the end of August. We were waiting in Birganj.

"She'll come tomorrow for sure," Narain Lal said.

"Perhaps," Malhotra said.

"There was much rain," Lal replied.

"She won't come if it rains tonight," Helmut said.

"She is certain to come," said Pasang.

"So we must wait," Mendies said.

"Yes, wait," Sepp put in.

"But she may come after all," I said.

We were talking about a Dakota which might be flying to Kathmandu. Without it, floods and rain made it impossible even to reach Kathmandu, the starting-point of our expedition.

Birganj, the first Nepalese town on the main road into the interior of the country, looks very inviting on the map. It is both farewell to India and welcome to Nepal. You can't help feeling happy there, particularly if you have a glorious autumn in the Himalaya to look forward to.

Nevertheless we were feeling downright miserable. Nepal and Northern India were in the throes of the worst and most disastrous floods in human memory, and Birganj had been turned into a wretched and muddy imitation of Venice. The roads to Kathmandu were blocked by landslides and might be for months. But we had hopes of a plane that would land us in a trice in the Valley of Nepal. We had not expected our troubles to start until we reached Kathmandu, and now they had come upon us on the border of India and Nepal. We were stuck fast in the mud and it did not look as if we should get out very soon.

We were living in Birganj's "best" hotel—it only had one. The way to the bathroom led through thigh-deep mud, and in the road there was water to the knee. We had little hope of
reaching Kathmandu in a trice. Consequently our talk was always of the Dakota which would come as soon as the aerodromes in Kathmandu and Simra were serviceable.

"Dagot"—that was our only hope. This was the pronunciation favoured by Narain Lal, the representative of the Jam Air Line. The representative of Air India certainly said "Dakota", but even that did not bring the machine. Like the two heroes in the play Waiting for Godot, unable to find any way out of the hopelessness of our existence, we clung to the belief: "Tomorrow Dagot will come." And still it was hidden behind the rain-clouds.

Actually our hopes were fully justified. There is an aerodrome called Simra fifteen miles north of Birganj, from which two planes a day leave for Kathmandu. But as there is no wireless communication between Birganj, Simra and Kathmandu, and as only one tiny train goes once a day from Birganj to Simra, and as you cannot sleep there because it is nothing but a landing-strip, waiting entails an unpleasant degree of suspense. It almost looked as though our high-flying plans would come to grief in the mud of Simra.

The beginning of our journey to Nepal had gone much better. Two days spent negotiating the Customs in Bombay had scarcely diminished the optimism we brought with us from Europe. On the contrary, our success filled us with pride. We had beaten a Swiss expedition to Gaurisankar and a French one to Makalu. Not by much perhaps, but anyone who knows the Customs in Bombay in August knows that every hour gives cause for rejoicing.

Anyway, we were full of pride and hope. We climbers had occupied some columns in one issue of the Bombay newspapers: s.s. Asia of the Lloyd Triestino had brought many tons of mountaineering equipment to India and many climbers of repute. We took a modest place among them, and that was why our baggage attracted the attention of the Customs officers. They had never seen such a wretched expedition setting off to climb so high a mountain. Only 926 kilos in all. I knew the figure well because I paid for its freight from Vienna to Kathmandu. Compared with the three tons and six tons of other expeditions it did not err on the side of luxury.
WAITING FOR DAGOT

Our optimism, as yet unaffected by even a hint of Birganj's tenacious mud, had reached its height in Delhi, and it was raised to this pitch by the sight of two brown bandy legs coming towards me at dusk in the garden of the Hotel Cecil. I could not make out the man they belonged to and by their shape they might just as well have bestridden horses by the hundred as scaled Himalayan peaks by the dozen, yet I had seen these same legs plodding on before me for so many hours in the previous autumn that I could not doubt they belonged to Pasang.

After the end of the Argentine expedition to Dhaulagiri he had spent two weeks leave with his family at Darjeeleng, and now he met us in Delhi.

He told us he had enlisted a first-class team, who would be awaiting us in a few days in Raxaul. Adjiba, the bibulous companion of my last year's trip; Gyalsen, too, zealous and responsible Benjamin of the party. Only Pemba was missing—off with an Italian team. So at least Pasang said, but perhaps it was only that he did not want to join us. I was sorry at first, but then I recalled the endless and monotonous whistling with which he accompanied our long treks: it had sometimes got on my nerves. Perhaps we could do without Pemba, after all, and no doubt his weakness for music would not grate on the noise-accustomed ears of Italians.

Our satisfaction over Pasang's news was increased by the thoroughly mountaineering atmosphere of the Hotel Cecil. Major Hotz, the manager, himself an old climber and Himalaya enthusiast, can sympathise with desires seldom confessed to by travellers in Asia. We asked, for instance, to have three beds in one small room at a price to correspond. At the moment, since the monsoon was just ending, the hotel was the Indian base of a number of expeditions. A lone American climber had just set off to climb Nanda Devi, and a French party, including two of the Annapurna expedition, were on their way to Makalu. The Swiss excited particular interest. Their leader was Raymond Lambert, who with Tenzing had got to within a thousand feet of the top of Everest. You could see in the swimming bath that he had sacrificed not only a few fingers but most of his toes. The great joy of the journalists was Madame Claude
Kogan, fashion designer of Nice, who the year before had climbed Nun Kun in Kashmir. Her feminine charm had no rival among her fellow-climbers and we had her to thank for so monopolising the attention of the Press that we could proceed with our preparations almost unnoticed.

All we had brought from Europe was a few pounds of powdered soup, some sweets, some grape-juice, a few tins of milk and powdered coffee. We were buying all the rest in Delhi to save freightage. Our plan was to live off the land in Nepal as far as we could, and to take to our tinned and concentrated foods only during the actual climb. After making calculations we spent—I have the bill before me—892 rupees on food. It bought us all we needed; we could have got through on less.

Pasang would have to re-adapt himself. It is true that compared with our last year’s travels in west Nepal, for which we had had only 330 pounds of baggage and equipment all told this was a mammoth expedition. But Pasang came straight from the Argentine expedition to Dhaulagiri and related with pride that the South Americans had had eight aeroplanes to take their stuff from India to southern Nepal. Four hundred mules and 250 porters transported it from there to their base-camp. It was a concentration of material power against an unconquered giant; and it cost a tragic death, alleviated by a last great consolation.

The leader of this expedition, young Lieutenant Ibanez, suffered so severely from frost-bite complicated by pneumonia that he arrived at Kathmandu in a dying condition. He was only conscious at intervals and was then too weak to speak, but in one of these intervals he was told that his wife in the Argentine had given birth to a child. He smiled and raised two fingers. No, only one, he was told. Again he raised two fingers. Then his friend understood: yes, the baby was two months too early, but it was strong and healthy.

If Nature had followed its normal course, Lieutenant Ibanez would not have been granted his last smile.

But we were not yet in Kathmandu, where we were told the tragic and yet merciful story. We were in Delhi, where the
Austrian ambassador, Dr. Albin Lennkh, was so kind as to give a grand and as yet quite unmerited party for us. Pasang, in corded silk trousers of a striking brown-red colour, with the bronze "Tiger" medal, conferred only on the very best Sherpas, pinned on the breast of his blue shirt, talked to ambassadors and excellencies, was photographed and interviewed, just as if it was all in the day's work. From the way he flourished his glass it might have been whisky he was drinking; but it was only lemonade.

Pasang is—or, rather, was—a convinced abstainer. Many an evening during our trip in west Nepal was warmed and brightened by a bottle and the sentimental memories it invoked. It was usually Adjiba who got the drink from a farmer and often insisted on playing host. They were delightful, friendly evenings and the relaxation helped us to face the exertions to come. Pasang smiled indulgently but would not be persuaded to let a drop pass his lips. And even when Adjiba drank too much, as he sometimes did, and was reduced to a maudlin state, Pasang was not roused to indignation. He was not going to quarrel with a friend over a natural weakness, even though he was above it himself.

So I was not at all surprised when he stuck to lemonade at the party. He had told me that he had only once, eighteen or twenty years ago, had one sip of alcohol. How then could the hospitality of the Embassy make him waver?

But we had a surprise three weeks later when we were only two days from Namche Bazar. Our Sherpas from Darjeeling were in great spirits because they would soon be seeing friends and relations, whom in many cases they had not seen for years. Some of our Sherpas came from that neighbourhood, but finding it easier to make a livelihood in Darjeeling had ended by settling there and starting a second family. It was quite natural that they should be overjoyed to pay a visit to the first.

Pasang lacked this joy of reunion; he had only his Darjeeling family. Nevertheless, his face wore a look of unusual and surprising jollity. I remember that day very clearly.

We had just accomplished the hardest stage of our march to base-camp, over a pass of about 14,000 feet, which owing
to the sudden change of temperature might have been dangerous for men unused to cold, like our porters from Kathmandu. We got down without any casualties into the steaming sultry jungle where the rain fell in great drops from the leaves, then clambered down a steep descent and over an even steeper ridge. Leeches, unused to so many bare legs, made the most of the opportunity. It was a wretched day.

The column, as often happens on the march, had strung out, and when I got out of the jungle and stopped in front of some poverty-stricken houses, I was not sure whether we had reached the end of our journey or not.

Then I saw one of our ruck-sacks on the ground under the eaves of a house and from within I heard Sepp’s voice raised in bewildered protest. Next Pasang appeared in the doorway and invited me in with sweeping gestures. “Sherpa house,” he said. Sepp was seated on a low bench, and looking at me reproachfully. There was a shallow cup of milky fluid at his elbow and a Sherpa girl by his side, who at brief intervals raised the cup to his lips and gave it a tilt. Sepp protested and gulped. Before he could draw breath the cup was replenished from a large wooden pitcher. My entry released Sepp from the attentions of the young lady, but she turned them on me with unabated eagerness. I just had time to tell Sepp, “It’s chang,” before gulping too.

There was nothing wonderful in all that. The Sherpas love their home-brewed beer and their hospitality rises to Homeric heights. The wonderful part of it was Pasang; without waiting for the girl to fill his cup he was filling it for himself again and again and emptying it with a will. His eyes swam with happiness; he had obviously acquired the taste. When he encountered my astonished gaze, he did not even affect embarrassment at being caught out. “I know what the chang here is made of,” he chuckled to himself. What need to say more?

Pasang has been faithful, sometimes too faithful, to chang since his successful ascent of Cho Oyu; his long abstinence made him an easy victim. By the time Adjiba started, Pasang was well away, kissing us and calling us his father and his mother. Sometimes we were not sure whether our son did us credit.
WAITING FOR DAGOT

His weakness may be forgiven, and it ought not to find a place in the account of an expedition. But his behaviour at the ambassador's party was beyond reproach, and that really was our send-off.

Soon Delhi was only a memory. A forty-eight hour railway journey took us to Raxaul on the Nepalese border, a journey which was lengthened by several hours and a few detours owing to floods, and enlivened by our seventeen cases in the van, which, owing to the apathy of the railway porters and the limited time for changing trains, caused continual anxiety. As some of the cases had the customs-seal attached to them with very thin wire, which it was extremely desirable to have undamaged at the frontier to avoid paying a high duty; as syrupy grape-juice was dripping from a package similarly sealed in spite of our intention of using it as a source of nourishment; and as the railway porters had no feeling at all for our troubles, we really suffered from no lack of distraction.

At last our rather forlorn situation, with only Pasang to share it, came to an end. We arrived on a rainy evening in the cheerless station of Raxaul, where a troop of wild and weird-looking fellows were waiting to give us a tumultuous welcome. They did not exactly inspire confidence, but they were our Sherpas. Adjiba grasped my hand and his face was one broad grin; there was Gyalsen, even younger and tubbier than I remembered; and then a face I did not know, but which beamed as though we were the oldest of friends: it was Pasang's brother, Ang Nyima. There was no time to take a look at the rest; with the typical energy of their race they flung themselves on our cases. We no longer relied on the leisurely assistance of the railway porters, for the cases were hoisted up in triumph and dumped in the waiting-room without ceremony. We might rest assured now that the last seal was broken and not a bottle left intact, but all those laughing faces and the longing they expressed to be up and doing left no doubt that we had our troop about us and that the expedition was afoot.

The Indian Customs officer was a little surprised by the varnish of syrup on the waiting-room floor, but next morning the Cho Oyu Expedition was under way. Some of us preceded
and some followed the swaying buffalo carts loaded with our baggage. Compared with the importance of our mission it all looked rather unconvincing. But we were on the move and we were in Nepal.

The road was under water in places. I recalled the same time the year before, when there had been terrible floods, deaths by the hundred and thousands of acres lost. And now there was the same scene of destruction and the same tales of disaster. It seemed as if Nature wished to match the highest mountains with disasters on the same scale.

And then we reached Birganj and were waiting for Dagot.

As long as the rain poured down all and every night, making the road in front of the hotel a river by morning, we had no excuse for thinking of a lift to Simra; the aerodrome was a lake.

But at last there was a rainless night and we could hope.

Simra aerodrome is a flat expanse of grass which soon dries in the tropical sun. Two air lines, Jam Air and Air India, serve Kathmandu. Owing to the lack of wireless communication they never know when their machines may arrive or how full they may be, but they were eager to help and as optimistic as we had been a few days earlier. Yes, they would gladly fly the Sahibs and the Sherpas to Kathmandu; five in the Jam Air plane and five in the Air India one. And they would easily share our cases between them; Air India would take eight and Jam Air nine, or the other way about. Longing to be off, we sat and perspired in the motionless clammy atmosphere.

The representatives of the two lines were perseveringly amiable even when the comments of the would-be passengers became less and less friendly. Soon, they smiled engagingly, soon.

And after an hour or two a machine could really be seen in the cloudless sky. Was it Air India or Jam Air? Which had won the toss? Neither; it was a vulture; its motionless wings had deceived us. Several other vultures practised the same deception, but soon the throb of the engines was unmistakable, and a few minutes later the machine landed. The sun had got so hot meanwhile that it raised a little dust. It was a Jam Air plane and so full that it could only take one or two more
Approaching Cho Oyu. The monsoon was over and the numerous rivers and streams we had to cross were not so swollen.
Mending bridges was Sepp Jochler’s particular joy. In the process he performed feats a gymnast would be proud of.

The bridges in this region were usually much stronger than those in west Nepal, where they were mostly made of bamboo ropes.
passengers. None of us was included. The representative just
managed a look of pained consternation on our behalf before
the plane took off, and then met our protests with promises for
tomorrow.

We waited with fading hopes for Air India, and the same
thing happened; only this time the pilot was one who had a soft
spot for Himalayan climbers, whom he had chiefly encountered
on aerodromes as nervous wrecks. He went so far as to reckon
up the load, to take in a minimum of petrol, and next the
Sherpas were stowing our cases away in the tiny machine.
We could hardly believe our eyes. Then half an hour of blissful
suspense—first ten, then only five, no, seven of us could be
taken on board. The Sherpas’ difficult names had to be written
and crossed out and written again on the tickets. Adjiba was to
be left behind—no, Ang Nyima. But suddenly all eight of us
were aboard, crouching happily on the cases. The rest of the
Sherpas would join us in two days. The Air India man solemnly
promised it and we positively believed him.

We bumped over the ground, gained speed and were air-
borne. At first we saw below us the flooded rice-fields of the
Terai, the plain of southern Nepal, then the first low hills,
getting steeper and steeper by degrees. Rivers had torn deep
brown gashes in the valleys. The tide of mud had left its high-
water mark in fields and villages. We tried in vain to distin-
guish the track taken by the road which would within fore-
seeable time connect India with Kathmandu, but the monsoon
had abolished the results of a year’s labour, and still the cars
needed in Kathmandu got there not on their wheels but on the
shoulders of hundreds of coolies.

We flew through beautiful clouds; mountains of unforget-
table loveliness which yet hid the view of the real mountains
to the north. The emerald-green of the rice fields gleamed at
the bottom of deep cloud gorges. Then the clouds thinned out;
we were over the Valley of Nepal.

I remember with almost painful distinctness the moment a
year before when for the first time I saw the temple roofs of
Kathmandu flashing in the sun. I had had the same foreboding
then: “What would be the end of such a glorious beginning?”
The roofs might flash, but I felt sad.
But it was no time for sadness. We were buoyed up by the bracing air of Nepal and its still more bracing welcome. Customs and passports only detained us as the excuse for friendly greetings. We felt at home, which was just as well, because Nepal was to be our home for some months to come.
CHAPTER THREE

We Sleep with Gods

The actual start of an expedition is both a relief and a disillusionment for its organisers. Relief, because the equipment collected with such meticulous care (the lack of one stone may bring down the whole pyramid) and the exactly calculated supplies of food are now at last in operation. Disillusionment, because what have been the preoccupations of so many months (how many sleeping-bags, what sort of down for the windproof smocks, ten- or twelve-spiked climbing irons and a hundred other such decisions) are now no more than loads of 50 pounds each carried by fifty sweating coolies.

Coolie is a hateful word and I use it with repugnance, but a distinction has been established in English parlance between different kinds of porters. There are the Sherpas, who, on the flat, carry little but their equipment—those at least who are intended for the assault on the summit. There are the porters—who carry loads like the coolies but owing to their special characteristics as mountaineers rank above them. Lastly, there are the coolies, called in Nepalese “Baria”, who form a trade union or caste of porters for commercial or mountaineering purposes at a daily wage fixed as a rule by the government (half pay for the unloaded return journey). They are unemployable beyond certain degrees of hardship, or in climatic extremes.

This division into what amounts almost to castes is no fault of mine. I learnt it in the Himalaya and chiefly from Pasang. It has its justification. I have come across coolies who from fear of fatigue forsook their duty and their loads, but I have never come across a Sherpa who was deterred by any danger not wilfully or wantonly incurred, and I have seen many with frost-bitten hands and feet, and heard of some who died rather than
fail in their duty. So it may be pardonable if there are both coolies and Sherpas on the paths of the Himalaya. Coolies as a rule live longer, Sherpas more proudly. Probably neither can change.

Porters occupy a position between the two. In our particular case they were Sherpa-coolies, Sherpas who had come from Darjeeling with Pasang. Many had been on the Dhaulagiri Expedition and they all now wanted to get home to Sola Khumbu, which would have meant a long and expensive journey on foot, whereas now they were paid, and well paid. Pasang, no doubt, gained face by being able to offer so many men such a profitable return home.

Some of these Sherpa-coolies took part in our ordeals on Cho Oyu and behaved magnificently; others, according to agreement, stayed behind in their villages. All were good fellows whom we shall never forget.

We set off from Kathmandu on the 2nd of September, 1954, a year and a day after I had left it on my tour of unknown west Nepal. On that occasion we faced a long and difficult trek; this time our road was the well-trodden one followed by Everest expeditions. With luck we might achieve our aim before the onset of winter storms.

We spent the evening before our departure with the Swiss party, and wished each other success.

“We'll look out for you on Gaurisankar,” I said, “and as soon as we see you on the summit, we'll drink a bottle to your health.” It was a generous promise, as we had only three.

Lambert, too, said he hoped we should reach our objective. We spoke of our mountains as if we had known them intimately for years, whereas in reality we knew them only in the light of our hopes and ambitions, aided by a few photographs and descriptions, and the nearer we got to them the more remote they seemed. In Kathmandu we could still talk of them with some confidence because they lay somewhere to the north. Our confidence ebbed in Namche Bazar, where we met many who had actually seen our mountain and could speak of it with greater authority than we could. When at last we were on Nangpa La, the pass that leads into Tibet, and knew that half an hour's march over the ice-field would reveal Cho Oyu
in all its greatness and glory, I felt as one might feel on being introduced to a poet whose works one has long admired. How would the reality compare with the imaginary picture I had formed?

But in Kathmandu these mountains, Gaurisankar for the Swiss, Cho Oyu for us, were still distant yet intimate friends, and we wished each other success without compunction: “Good luck and we’ll drink to your health.”

Two lorries conveyed our baggage to Bhatgaon, nine miles distant; the coolies awaited us there and we had saved ourselves almost a day’s march. It was a sunny morning, and the air was fresh and not too hot. There were many women on the roads, nearly all with flowers gleaming in their black hair, a charming sight. Perhaps it was the day of a festival. It was for us anyway.

The days now slipped past like the beads of a rosary. We camped at dusk so as to make use of the early mornings and also to avoid the rain, which usually came down after midday. The loads were collected every night to protect them from thieves and damp and shared out again among the coolies in the morning with laughter and occasional bickering; and then the long troop strung out in search of a distant and to most of them incomprehensible goal. The Sherpas set the pace; or at least they behaved as if they did, but actually they had little influence on the rate of march. The stages for each day were ruled by tradition and have been observed by the Nepalese for hundreds of years. No Sherpa, no Sahib, and no bribe either, can alter what reason and experience have laid down. But it did us and the Sherpas good to urge the porters on now and then, although it made no difference.

But I don’t believe it did us any good to keep thinking of Cho Oyu. It was behind the foot-hills and the high clouds, a distant goal, a phantom almost. It would take us three weeks to get to the foot of it; and perhaps the severe monsoon would have swept the paths away or carried away the bridges, or perhaps the coolies would fall sick or pack up—

It was tempting to pore over photographs of Cho Oyu every night and to ponder Eric Shipton’s descriptions, which I knew almost by heart, and to plan our final assault.
"Over this shoulder—it can’t be difficult."
"We must have a camp here."
"That’ll be No. III."
"That’s where the English turned back."
"Keep to the right here."
"Here to the left."

We could talk like that all day, but it was silly and only wore down our nerves. We had only Shipton’s few words to go on and a photograph where an ice-fall which had defeated him occupied precisely one-sixteenth of an inch. We could only detect two or three possible routes. But we were not mathematicians to make exact calculations. We wanted to come to grips with the mountain and to find out which ridges and shoulders would put us in touch with it.

That expressed our whole endeavour; and what a lot it stood for!

Suppose you are to meet an important man from whom you await some critical decision—you can’t lay down beforehand each question and each reply. You must wait for the vibrations which may bring you together and the barriers which may keep you apart. You must not, for the sake of a preconceived plan, overlook the one or fail to break down the other.

These considerations are not, of course, an accepted principle for the ascent of a 26,000-footer. Nevertheless, I said, "Sepp, don’t let’s talk about the mountain any more, eh?"

So we forgot our objective and enjoyed each day as it came.

It would be tedious to narrate every detail of our march to Namche Bazar. We followed in the tracks of other expeditions—notably Everest expeditions. They had rubbed off the bloom which I was still able to enjoy in west Nepal the year before; they had also spoilt the market (four eggs for a rupee instead of ten) and the villagers treated us with that mixture of interest and condescension people bestow on a travelling circus.

The unforgettable temples of the capital with their lovely sculptures in wood and their gilded roofs gave way to the more modest buildings of the countryside. And in the mornings the lofty clouds and the glimpses—often only a minute long—of distant snow-speaks made us forget works of art. Soon the
clouds came lower, mist enveloped us and we lived in a world of daily doings, not in a vision of distant dreams.

There was an old bearded man among our porters, who had been with me for two weeks a year before on the way to Manangbhot. A flicker of recognition flitted across his wrinkled face, but he looked aside at once to weigh up the loads the Sherpas had just set out. I was about to go up to him and remind him of the time we had spent together, but his look deterred me and I too glanced down at the loads. It was like meeting someone with whom one has shared a brief but intensely personal experience which one hesitates to recall before strangers. Perhaps that was a far-fetched notion; perhaps the memory of our time together meant less to him than the danger of being allotted a heavy or angular load.

Our plan was to keep our costly, and heavy, tinned foods until we were above the snow-line and to live meanwhile off the land, but this rule was not strictly followed. We had taken a dozen loaves with us from the Snow View Hotel and as they first went hard and then mouldy they considerably eased the change-over to the native chupattis. In the morning we usually drank Nescafé and also opened a tin of butter and a tin of marmalade. We cannot claim that we were strict ascetics, but all the same we got our tins almost intact on to the mountain. We lived well. There were chickens, eggs, rice, potatoes and onions. Ang Nyima proved to be a competent cook. Pasang, who had not yet succumbed to his love of chang, was great at organising supplies of milk, in which we cooked rice and oatmeal. He also got hold of a sheep which was to accompany us as far as Namche Bazar, where, he said, sheep were few and dear.

It was very sad and disconcerting to find how much Sola Khumbu—the ancient home of the Sherpas, which we were to reach in two weeks—differed from the Sola Khumbu Pasang had extolled so highly the year before. Sheep, by his account, were so plentiful there that the Sherpas were glad to part with them for a few shillings. Milk and butter were there for the taking in all the houses. There was a permanent glut of potatoes, and the people were thankful to anyone who would help to get rid of them.
Pasang’s tales of plenty had often been a severe aggravation of our lot in west Nepal, where the country was so poverty-stricken that we had to haggle obstinately for a sheep, and milk and eggs were so scarce that we often nearly starved. I sometimes inveighed against the injustice of having to traverse this niggardly land when only a hundred miles or so away to the east there was a land of plenty.

The sheep we had bought—it was the dearest sheep I ever bought in the Himalaya—made Pasang’s tales all the more annoying. It was thin, and a year ago we should have eaten it up in two evenings; now we had to take it with us for a fortnight on our way to Sola Khumbu. I had reason to be suspicious. Pasang was not only a great climber but a great patriot. But patriots have done worse before now than arouse unfounded culinary hopes.

And after all, the sheep never reached its destination, though it fulfilled its destiny. For a few days it engrossed all our attention. We stroked it and pulled it the most succulent grasses, the Sherpas fought for the privilege of holding its rope, and when we had to cross perilous bridges, it did so on the back of one of them like a tired and jittery grandmother. We often envied it.

Once it caused Helmut embarrassment. We had camped on a roomy site and each of us had a tent to himself. Helmut’s tent was pitched purposely off to one side because of his habit of talking loudly in his sleep, and we were looking forward to an undisturbed night. The sheep was tethered to a stake.

In the middle of the night there was a sudden alarm: the Sherpas, sound sleepers as a rule, were all shouting at once. I crept out of my tent and found Sepp already stirring and the whole camp in an uproar. The sheep had vanished—perhaps it had been stolen, perhaps it had escaped—and every one except Helmut joined in the search.

While the Sherpas scattered over the country and along the road to find it—in case it was not already unlawfully penned up somewhere—I happened to pass Helmut’s tent. His embarrassment and air of guilt were unmistakable, but when he heard of the lost sheep his face cleared. He had been convinced that his nightly clamour was the cause of the excitement.
The sheep was soon found; it had only gone for a walk. Nevertheless, it never reached Namche Bazar. Having less resistance than we foreigners, it fell sick of a diarrhoea, and had to be slaughtered, and one wet day when the porters refused to go any further it crowded the customary fowls off the menu.

Our track led in an easterly direction up hill and down. The moisture in the air approached saturation point, and the ascents were usually so steep that we dripped with sweat from head to foot as if we were in a Sauna. After crossing many southward-rushing streams, we at last turned north towards the Himalaya up the Valley of the Dudh Kosi, or river of milk. We never slept in our tents if we could help it; after a night's rain they were wet and heavy and we preferred houses or temples. If it was a house, we took things as they came and slept in one corner of the room with the Sherpas next us, laid out in rows like sardines, and after them came the householder and his family. The nights were loud with talk, prayers and snores.

I preferred sleeping in a temple or at least in front of a house-altar. Most of the better Sherpa houses have a separate room where gods of clay or bronze gaze down from the walls in earnest contemplation. Sometimes joss-sticks were alight there, or prayers said, but as a rule the gods were left to their meditations; they were not disturbed if barrels of chang or sacks of rice or corn were stored at their feet. The needs of the soul and the belly kept company without disturbing the peace.

The gods were never pushed aside to make room for our sleeping-bags, but the sacks and barrels were. We did not need to feel we were intruding; the gods could gaze quietly down on us. Their eyes disturbed me sometimes; they put questions I could not answer. But they would not tolerate evasion. I had to avoid their eyes and was conscious of my failings. Was my object a trivial one? I had no answer, only an excuse: it gave me pleasure. And if I did not strive after this fleeting reward, another would. Would he be less of an intruder than I?

The eyes gazed down and pondered. There was no understanding or forgiveness in them, only the eternal, age-old question.
It would, as I have said, be tedious to describe the journey in detail. When I consult my diary I am ashamed to see how brief the entries are, and they would be even scantier if I had not had Helmut’s example always before my eyes; he pulled out his notebook at the briefest rest and started writing. I watched him dubiously. He had no need to pause for reflection: his days were so full that he could have gone on writing half the night. I almost believe he wrote while walking during the easier stages of the day’s march—but I can’t prove it. Anyway, he spurred me on to write more than I otherwise might. I find many entries of a trivial kind, such as, “We live dangerously.” That had nothing to do with heroic deeds; it was in allusion to the way we ate and the warnings of the Swiss doctor.

Helmut, who had a great liking for scientific knowledge, one day produced from among his papers the medical report of the doctor who had accompanied the Swiss Everest Expedition. It dealt with the hygienic principles to be observed on a Himalayan climb.

I learned with dismay that we were doing the very opposite to what he said we ought to do.

We had often drunk unboiled water.

We had, if not always with enjoyment, eaten chupattis, the flat bread of the country, and also a fruit resembling a gherkin.

If anyone offered us dirty rice-spirit or—as happened later—beer, we never disappointed our host by prudently declining. On the contrary!

When it was wet or when there was no suitable site for our tents, we spent the night on the floor of an almost windowless house in company with the Sherpas and the usually numerous family of the householder.

And although we had plenty of Paludrin we forgot to guard against malaria by taking it.

I was not surprised that this way of life did me no harm, but was relieved to find how well Sepp and Helmut put up with oriental foods they had never met before. Their occasional glances at the sacks which contained our tinned food were not so much an aspersion on our daily menu as the expression of sheer hunger. Our health certainly did not suffer; not one of us was seriously ill; and our humanity gained enormously.
As a small party we were much more dependent on the goodwill and friendliness of the inhabitants than large expeditions are. If you drink with a man out of his dirty earthenware jar or accept peeled potatoes from his unwashed hands, he has a better feeling for you than if you were a Sahib in front of a tent to be admired from afar. In my belief friendly feeling is worth more than circumspection about bacteria and stomach upsets.

Helmut made a big contribution to good feeling by sleeping off his greatest—according to him, his only—debauch under dirty blankets on the long bench of a Sherpa house rather than in the sanitary seclusion of his tent, or in the open and ozone-laden air. His state was perfectly understandable. We had Cho Oyu and many festivities behind us and it was the day before Pasang's wedding. It surprised nobody that Helmut arrived unsteadily at Lukla where the wedding was to take place, and it gave the Sherpas unbounded delight when he lay down on the bench instead of in his tent and fell asleep amidst all the noisy preparations for the dance that night. After that it seemed perfectly natural when he took part in the dance as soon as he woke and showed his appreciation of its not very simple rhythms, astonishing though this feat was. We were fine fellows; we sometimes climbed, as we ought, a peak of 26,000 feet or more, and sometimes drank our share and recovered in time for the wild dances at night. We were conscious of being important emissaries of Western culture, long to be remembered in Lukla, and so we did our best not to upset the dancers with our clumsy steps.
CHAPTER FOUR

Shooting Stars and Mortal Longings

We were surprised in Those by an evening's rain and looked for shelter without even thinking of pitching our tents. After one of Pasang's voluble negotiations we were directed to the first floor of one of the houses. As usual, too, we first deposited our loads and put our money in a safe place and then swept the floor, enveloping our rucksacks and ourselves in clouds of dust. Our hostess, a taciturn old woman, stood on no ceremony. She had two charming daughters, who kept on giggling and combing their hair, no doubt because of the presence of so many fine upstanding Sherpas.

Those was the last large market-town on our route, where for the last time we could buy such luxuries as matches, cigarettes, sugar or electric torches. For the present we were well supplied and did not need to make many purchases, but we knew that in a few weeks Those would seem to us a centre of civilisation. We should then thread the bazaar as men unused to being among their fellow-men; we should buy sugar and cigarettes, perhaps even onions and garlic. We should have the feeling of having come to the end of a great adventure, its blissful solitude over for ever. Provided, of course, that all went well.

Those is a village of smiths. The coal and iron ore found in the neighbourhood have given rise to the smelting and working of iron, an industry still in its primitive and picturesque stage, but not innocent of slag-heaps and the clang of hammers. But perhaps that is not how it appears to the dwellers in the high valleys. To them it stands for human progress. It manufactures the sickles for reaping the harvest, and the sword-like knives for splitting the tough Himalayan wood.
Our quarters in Those had one great disadvantage in spite of the taciturn lady and her giggling daughters; Ang Nyima had set up his kitchen on the ground floor, and the still, rainy air let the smoke grow up through the house like a mushroom. We alternately choked and went for walks in the rain. Then it was time for our evening meal and we put up with it.

I looked forward to a peaceful evening after the Sherpas had had their meal too and the fire had been put out, all the more because I was suffering severely from a middle-ear inflammation. But I was disappointed.

We had been priding ourselves on living in Those’s market square, in the middle of which there was a small shrine with a beast resembling a pig on top, perhaps representing the elephant-god, Ganesha. The sight of this shrine had inspired in me no evil presentiments, but now the whole square began to fill with people, mostly children, who all started singing a religious chant in an ever-repeated and never-changing rhythm. It sounded to me like “lia, lia”. After I had listened to it for some time I began to find it upsetting; it was impossible either to talk or to think, and to sleep was out of the question.

We asked Pasang whether a special celebration was in progress. To have been the witnesses of a rare event would have been some consolation.

“No,” Pasang replied, after making enquiries. “It is not that. But the people of Those are very pious. They pray every evening.”

This deprived the chant of its one possible charm and we lay in our sleeping-bags and suffered, trying in vain to make up for it by pretending that the old lady had sent her two daughters out to friends at dusk in prudent fear of our dangerously romantic air. They had been spending their time adorning their hair with cheap jewellery.

In spite of ear-ache and sleeplessness, this notion did something to restore our morale, but the gaiety of some of the younger Sherpas suggested that they had a rendezvous with the young ladies and this tore the last shred of comfort from me. I stared miserably into the darkness, punctuated by the torches of the chanting children. You could buy long tapers in the bazaar which gave a bright light, and the children waved
them in time to their singing. At first it was a pretty sight, but you grew accustomed to it, and the drums and cymbals were too loud to permit any long-continued enjoyment.

Then suddenly this noisy and distressing night was transformed into a vision of symbolic beauty. The children stopped singing, and for a few moments the shrine was forsaken. Then the women of Those came bringing their nightly offerings.

They were in festal robes and we now saw that the complicated dressing of their hair which had occupied our two girls was for the gods, not us.

The square was in darkness. The women brought their offerings, luminous flowers of the tropical valley, in baskets of woven bamboo, and a butter-lamp gleamed through the coloured leaves and petals, giving the flowers a life of their own. They were the only source of light and had neither the impersonal warmth of the sun nor the drab utility of neon lighting. It was a light of sheer beauty. I had often seen flowers shining, but it was in the light and warmth of the sun. Here flowers had usurped the role of the sun, or rather, they were stars, softly shedding rays of every colour and expressing all the beauty of the world and the whole reach of human desires, and it looked as if the baskets were not being carried by the women, who in spite of their bright dress were merely black silhouettes, but as if the flowers themselves had become undulating chains of shooting stars, taking our desires with them in their long journey through space. And the shooting stars, carried by the women to the shrine, became a milky way which slowly faded and died out.

After this I settled down to sleep, but then the old lady began to pray in a loud, insistent voice. She had not attended the ceremony, perhaps because of our presence in the house, and now she set to work on repairing the omission. Or perhaps she always spent her nights in this way; old people do not always sleep much. Her raucous voice filled the now silent night with its assertive and insistent tones until at last I fell asleep.

In the morning my ear-ache had gone. So I always feel doubly grateful to that night in Those.

The porters were in good form after the first ears had been boxed on the fourth day's march. One of the younger fellows
had earned this attention from Pasang for slackening his pace and throwing the whole caravan into confusion; he had also diverted some of our pots and pans to his own kit. And now a difficult and even dangerous stretch had been tackled without complaint; the path, hitherto well-marked, had abruptly ended, washed away by the night-rains, and we had to traverse a cliff-face which descended steeply to the river. The water was a reddish brown torrent, and anything but inviting.

There was no real danger, but it was not pleasant, and if the porters had been faint-hearted we might have lost several hours there, and several loads too. Their nerve did not fail them until we reached Junbesi a few days later.

I remember one evening because it gave me fresh cause to admire the independent spirit of the Nepalese countrymen. For centuries they had lived under a harsh dictatorship—in theory at least; in practice, the remote valleys were little affected by the rule of the Ranas. It might have been expected, then, that the people would be cowed and submissive.

There was little of that to be seen in the occupants of the few lonely huts we came on, or in their wives, rather. The precipice along which the path led was steep and there were no level places for our tents, with the exception of a few maize fields from which the crop had been gathered. They were near the cottages and not very inviting, but they would do, and our use of them could do no possible damage, yet the women warned us off fiercely, and if it had not been so late, and raining, and if there had been any other level spot, we should have fled. As it was, in spite of superior numbers, we felt extremely uncomfortable.

The first and only day-off we enjoyed during our whole approach march was in Bandar monastery and in honour of the sheep. It was raining hard, and the porters were uneasy at the prospect of having to cross several dangerous rivers next day. So it fell out right that the coolies and the sheep had both reached the end on the same day; the coolies rested and the sheep were slaughtered.

The thought of such a day of rest is very tempting while
you are on the march. You won't have to creep out of your sleeping-bag into the moist air of dawn, and instead of two cups of tea for breakfast you will drink as many as you please. You can incite Ang Nyima to culinary heights, such as baking a cake; and you can take out the handy pocket editions of the Bible, Faust, or Rousseau presented by thoughtful friends and settle down to steady reading. Much can be done which hitherto has had to be foregone.

In fact, none of these omissions is made good. You're simply restless; even the first cup of tea seems an unnecessary weakness; you only want to get on, and the idea of passing a happy day with Ang Nyima's cake and the reading of Faust is unthinkable. At the last moment you try to go back on your promise and to get the porters on the road. But besides being less wayward, they are still sleeping off the effects of the night's festivities. So you have to put up with the day of rest.

I wondered whether to stay in the temple, which was full of smoke because Ang Nyima was baking his promised cake in the dry forecourt, or whether to go for a walk in the rain. Sepp was trying his skill as a climber on the vertical temple walls and receiving the plaudits of the Sherpas. Helmut, in spite of the rain, went off in search of an ice-age moraine, from which he might draw conclusions about the climate of this part of the earth in earlier times. I arranged a contest at putting the weight with a stone, a sport which the Sherpas took very seriously, and I was not among the first three.

Then suddenly the day was over; and as it had never stopped raining the porters were triumphantly vindicated. If we had not accepted their wise advice we should all have been drowned for certain.

By morning the rain was less heavy and the first dreaded river was merely a swollen stream; but it was spanned only by two slender tree stems. They gave me the sinking feeling I had with most bridges in Nepal, but I was ashamed to straddle across, though I should have liked to. Sepp stepped lightly over as if he preferred such a bridge to any other.

The second bridge, over the Likhu Kola, was a pleasant surprise. We had been warned of it by Lambert, who had crossed it two years before, but perhaps it had then lacked a hand-rail,
We had taken on some women porters for the approach march; they were paid the same as the men and were usually the speedier.

Helmut and Sepp giving first aid to the boy from Jurebesi who collapsed with cramp during the crossing of the pass.
SHOOTING STARS AND MORTAL LONGINGS

or perhaps the Swiss had found the planks in a particularly wet and slippery condition.

Neither bridge was any excuse for our rest-day. If we had known how good they were we should probably have held out against the sheep and the coolies. But it mattered little whether we reached our base-camp a day earlier or a day later.

In general, I dislike having my route described for me beforehand. I prefer to travel as we did a year before in west Nepal, relying solely on the directions of the inhabitants. They are in such surprising contradiction that a responsible person cannot possibly rely on them.

“How many days to Talkot?” I once asked.

After reckoning on his fingers and muttering to himself, the man finally replied, “Seventeen days.”

“To Talkot, how many days?” I then asked another. He too took to his fingers and even had recourse to some of his toes. “Ten days,” he said, having apparently subtracted the toes.

The astonishing thing about these answers was that both men had come from Talkot. They looked at each other in beaming satisfaction at the unanimity shown by their answers. It was a good thing they were so widely travelled. How otherwise would strangers in the land ever find their way about?

The information supplied by Europeans is far more dangerous. They do not make use either of their fingers or their toes; their memories suffice them, and as they have themselves travelled the very road or travelled in the very country inquired about, they can say without hesitation that we shall need the intrepidity of real men to follow their example.

I still remember the Afghan traveller who, when I planned a trip to Afghanistan in my early days, warned my father that it would be simpler and less trouble for all concerned if I committed suicide in Austria. I spent the happiest time of my life in Afghanistan and the magnificent hospitality I met with there is one of the reasons why I have never been able to get over my love of Asia.

I mentioned above that the courage of our porters ebbed as we got nearer Junbesi. We had to decide at that point whether we should trust to crossing the Dhud Kosi by a bridge which at

The ice-peaks of the main range of the Himalaya rose above the clouds with a dream-like remoteness.
this season had as often as not been swept away, or whether we should go further north and over an unpleasant pass about 14,000 feet high. Neither alternative seemed to attract our porters.

Their headman had undertaken in their name and in writing before leaving Kathmandu to transport our baggage to Namche Bazar within eighteen days, and of course they must have known the difficulties to be expected. But it was warm and pleasant in Kathmandu and the contract was financially attractive. So why worry over distant passes? And off we went.

On the climb up to Seta monastery (we were to be in Junbesi next day) the porters, hitherto in the best of health, began to show signs of suffering from various ailments. Not that they would leave us in the lurch; it was very clear that they were draining their strength to the dregs rather than disappoint us. This abrupt change in their bill of health made us fear the worst.

Seta is in a remote situation with an extensive view, of which we saw little owing to the dense mist. We could scarcely see the man ahead. There were only a woman and some children there; the former occupants, who worked the land belonging to the monastery, had been murdered some years before. Pasang told us this with the pride felt by the inhabitants of a street which has been the scene of a crime. "Very dangerous people here," he assured us.

Next morning we had a long and very lovely climb up a gentle ascending ridge, and at midday found our first gentians and short, sweet Alpine grass on the top of the pass.

Herds of yaks were being driven over the pass. They wanted to enjoy the fresh grass, and the herdsmen, who had a job to keep them moving, uttered desperate cries which sounded like "Yeah, yeah". Some of the animals had muzzles of woven bamboo and much against their will had to leave the choicest herbage untouched.

The porters, now that we were so near Junbesi, the place of decision, tried their very best to look ailing, and their pace was so slow that Sepp and I arrived far in advance.

It is a lovely place, and on our return it seemed to me delightful, but now it was unfriendly and not inviting.
We always relied on the greater experience of the Sherpas when it came to bivouacking; and so now we waited to know whether we should spend the night in the temple or in our tents. We waited in the forecourt of the temple which, pleasingly empty on our arrival, was soon crowded by inquisitive onlookers. They stared closely in our faces and if we wrote anything down laughed loudly and made mocking comments. I did not take to them.

At last some of the porters arrived, but not, of course, the ones who had our sleeping bags and tents. The loads were deposited in the temple forecourt, and nobody knew what to do next. Pasang, I considered, ought to have been on the spot, or anyway to have sent Adjiba ahead; he was remiss, I considered.

His party was the very last to arrive. Helmut and six Sherpa coolies carrying our money completed it.

I went up to him. “That is not right, all Sherpas together and no-one to look after the baggage. It is not good.”

I got the worst of it, as I always did when I took Pasang to task.


On the return journey Sepp and I walked by ourselves all through the valley which Pasang had described as a haunt of murderers. We came on an old woman washing potatoes in a stream, who was not at all pleased at being photographed. Two young, hefty-looking fellows came up; they revealed no murderous intentions and only helped the old lady to wash the potatoes. We must have missed the murderers.

However, Pasang withdrew in dudgeon at my criticism of his arrangements. Meanwhile there was an increase of sickness among the porters as soon as we heard that the bridge over the Dhud Kosi at Jubing had been carried away. We had the dreaded pass to face.

At first it was only the headman and three of his favourites who reported sick and asked to be released. This loss we hoped to make good with porters from Junbesi. Pasang, still a little
injured, started negotiations with the inhabitants. Some women and children agreed to accompany us as porters.

Meanwhile, we three Sahibs had to face writing our first letters since the true start of the Expedition for the returning coolies to take back to Kathmandu. I was never so convinced that I was not born to be a writer. I simply did not know what to say. "So far all well. We are in good health. There is a lot of rain and ticks. Love . . ." I felt I was writing the stupidest letters I ever wrote in my life. But what was there to say?

The critical moments were still to come and I have an almost superstitious dread of optimistic forecasts; anyway, writing letters would do nothing to put the coolies in better heart.

The sick list had lengthened by morning. There were eight lead-swingers, including, happily, the young man who had tried to make off with our cooking utensils. It would have been useless to try and talk them out of their ailments. They would have gone in any case. They squatted in the forecourt of the temple wearing the drawn look of their pretended ailments, but when they learned that they were being paid in full they jumped to their feet and set off home in high spirits.

Pasang had to look for substitutes, and in order to avoid too long a delay we sent some of the loyal coolies ahead in charge of Sherpas. Thus our caravan was strung out.

The wife, or mother, of the mayor requested our medical assistance. The old lady suffered from some illness which kept her in bed, or at least indoors. She had been given "Pedroxin" by the Swiss Expedition two years before. We were shown the cellophane packing, but the patient had found no relief, and now wanted an injection. Helmut, who had taken on the duties of doctor, gave her penicillin and we were able to go on our way with great increase of face.

The substitute porters were mostly young women, and they did much to raise the Sherpas' spirits. There was laughter and song, and we lost little by the exchange.

The rain began again. After climbing up a long hill we had to descend steep muddy slopes on which it was all we could do to keep our feet. We were thankful for any tuft of grass to give us a foothold. I never knew before that clay could be so slippery. Unnumbered generations of coolies have passed this way with
their loads, coughing and spitting as they went. This does not affect the state of the ground in the long dry season, but in the rains it adds to its natural slipperiness. That at least was how I explained it.

Ringmo is a beautiful monastery surrounded by prosperous farms. It rained without a pause, and yet the valley had a friendly and inviting air. Once we had a glimpse of not too distant glaciers through a gap in the clouds. "We'll stop here for a few days later on," we said. "Later on"—that meant on our return, after Cho Oyu. When we did return the valley was in all its autumn glory, but we had lived so long among the peaks that we did not think of carrying out our plan.

After Ringmo we had the long and dreaded ascent of the pass to face, provided at least the rain had stopped. Rain might be fatal to our porters. It would mean snow on the summit of the pass and they were not properly clothed for such temperatures. Also, the night would have to be spent in the open without any shelter; we should not be within reach of any village. So I awaited the morning with apprehension.

The porters quickly scattered among the cottages. The start was to be by moonlight at four. The Sherpas, cheered by the girls from Junbesi, laughed and chattered as though they had a picnic in front of them in the morning.

Adjiba told stories of a Swiss expedition he had been with, which had lost two coolies on this stage. "Two hundred and fifty coolies, five headmen, too many and too much haste—snow, bitter cold, two coolies fall down and die." He looked at us and laughed happily.

We set off punctually in the morning by the light of the moon. In contrast to their customary behaviour, the porters jumped to their loads and were eager to be off. It was a good start.

At first the track led beneath trees whose thick foliage obstructed the light of the moon. I could not make out the men in front of me, and could only refresh earlier memories by means of their smell or those natural noises they gave out with the unconcern of horses who have stood long in the stable. Then I tired of these guessings and went on ahead. It was a lonely
solitary walk. Only Sepp was ahead of me. We climbed a long ridge, and as we met the full warmth of the sun, we felt for the first time that we were really in the mountains.

We had a rest among dwarf pines, gentians and edelweiss. Clouds were piling up again to the south. The coolies soon caught up with us and carried on along the path, which climbed on and on; they did not want to lose a moment of the fine weather. They gave us pitying glances for taking the first chance of a rest in the sun after so many wet days; when it was a matter of haste the Sahibs after all were a poor lot.

We did not need to worry about these thrusters, who would reach the caves in good time; it was the laggards bringing up the rear we had to think of. Pasang and Adjiba passed us in good form: "Fine today, we have good luck."

Sepp, Helmut and I formed the rear-guard and urged on the loiterers. We were surprised to find no Kathmandu coolies among them; they were all women and young people from Junbesi. Perhaps they were less afraid of the road, or perhaps they had not got into their stride. More likely they were simply slower than the Kathmandu fellows, whom the Sherpas had looked down on up to now.

There were two children among the Junbesi lot. Their age was not easy to guess, but they were certainly little more than children—sixteen or seventeen, Pasang said when I asked him; and as fourteen year olds carried their younger brothers and sisters on their backs we saw no reason to refuse their services. They would have taken deep offence at any scruples of that kind. These were of the same age and equally dirty and good tempered; one had a dagger in his belt. You couldn't tell either from his face or his clothes whether he was a girl or a boy.

At the end of the climb both fell further and further behind; their loads were heavy, their legs short. Suddenly the one whose sex was in doubt fell on the ground and wept bitterly. We tried to get him, if it was a him, on to his feet, but he fell down again. He had cramp in his legs. His friend paid no attention to repeated shouts of "Urdshe" or "Dordshe", which were apparently meant to attract his attention, and merely enjoyed his well-earned rest without showing the slightest signs of concern.
We were now just below the top of the pass, and in a few minutes cold and misty snow-clouds would envelop us. What could we do for the boy? (The massaging had put it beyond a doubt that he was one.) Should he return to Ringmo or go on to the top? Most of the Sherpas were far ahead. We despatched Pemba Bhutar after them to say that Pasang must come at once, bringing with him one of the other Junbesi coolies, who would have to take the boy back there.

Meanwhile we took turns in massaging him, but his cries only became louder. Pasang did not come. There was a chill mist and it was getting late. At last the cramp relaxed and the boy was able to walk on. We gave him and his friend, who looked more unconcerned than ever, their wages up to date and conveyed to them by signs that they were to go back to Junbesi.

They said yes and set off, leaving us convinced that we had averted a catastrophe; and then Pasang arrived, quite out of breath. We told him with pride what we had done. We had shown that we were capable of taking an important decision without his help.

“He was nearly dead,” I said reproachfully, as if it were Pasang’s fault, “but now they will soon be in the shelter of the forest.”

Pasang and the other Sherpas who had come with him said nothing.

Suddenly our patient appeared among the scattered rocks which littered our path. He still limped a little and put on a woebegone air, but he came up to us with surprising alacrity. The Sherpas had a word with the two of them and then said, “They want to come on with us.” There was no further allusion to our having saved a life. The loads the two had been carrying were shared out, and they led the way at a smart pace. I tried in vain to come up with them. It dawned on me that a box on the ear would have done more good than massage.

They both accompanied us without difficulty as far as Namche Bazar, and on our return journey we encountered them again, on the road and carrying heavy loads. They gave us a “Salaam, Sahib” with the cheerful familiarity of persons whom we had not impressed as being particularly bright, making it clear
CHO OYU

enough that they would be ready to take on for us again, but it was a case of "Thank you all the same".

With these two to set the pace we soon reached the top of the pass, some 14,000 feet high, and if the weather had not turned cold and misty should have had a glorious view. As it was, we hurried on to the wooded saddle where we hoped to find the caves. Next, rain set in and I was thankful we had the worst behind us.

We found several caves in the overhanging cliffs which gave us some shelter. The porters had put mats on the ground and were crowding round fires which gave out more smoke than heat. They had done a fine job that day. We pitched our tents in the rain and felt quite happy.

But we were not so for long, for Pasang came to tell us that Karma was missing. Karma was one of the Sherpa-coolies who were coming on to Namche Bazar with us, a likeable fellow with an aristocratic air and a little dark Menjou moustache. He had been with Pasang on Dhaulagiri and was now on his way home.

Later we learned to value his strength and fine qualities, but so far he had been more of an anxiety than anything. He had reported to our evening surgery with severe pains all over his body at the end of the very first day's march and after questioning him we decided that he must—like the rest of us—have severe cramp. Rather than destroy the credit of our medical service we administered a few aspirin tablets. A little later he was feverish, probably it was malaria. Again we administered the appropriate remedy. Then, after he had surprised us by being the winner at putting the weight, we hoped we should see no more of him at our surgery hour.

And now he was missing. No-one could say just when and where he had last been seen. One of the coolies said he had seen him on the pass, where he had been reeling like a drunken man and shivering, but he could not say why he had not told anyone about it, and we suspected that he only wanted to draw attention to himself. The fact remained that it was already getting dark and cold, and Karma was only wearing shorts and a shirt and was not to be found.

Pasang and some of the Sherpas set off with electric torches in
search of him, shouting as they went. Meanwhile we crouched sadly under the cliff near the kitchen, feeling ashamed of enjoying Ang Nyima’s hot soup in spite of our anxiety.

Then Pasang and the other Sherpas returned, wet through and shivering. Karma had not been found.

“He’s dead, I know,” Pasang said.

We went sadly to sleep; there would be no sense carrying on with the search in the rain and darkness. He had probably felt dizzy and fallen over a precipice, and would be lying among the rocks with all his bones broken; or possibly he had got tired and lagged behind until he died of cold and exhaustion.

Soon after sunrise the Sherpas went back in small groups along the track. We had a view of it right up to the top of the pass, and we saw the party as small dots moving slowly on and imagined their repeated cries—“Heh! Karma, Karma—heh!” We three joined in the search, too, with medicines and bandages in a rucksack, but we were afraid we should not need them. Suddenly we heard a shout from above us and saw that the Sherpas had turned round and were coming back in a bunch. No doubt they were carrying Karma’s body, but there might still be hope. We held ourselves in readiness.

The first man to appear was Karma—with an embarrassed smile. He showed no signs of injury or fatigue, but looked as if he had slept better than we had. No doubt he had, in spite of his shorts.

Feeling tired and feverish, he had rested too long on the way up and then lost sight of us. When he set off to overtake us he had followed the wrong path, but came at last on a little stone hut used as a shelter in summer by herdsmen, where he had spent a comfortable night without bothering his head over our feelings when we missed him. And now, here he was. I was greatly relieved and would have liked too to pull his hair for him, but that of course was impossible.

The Sherpas, inspired by the same feelings as I, gave Karma a cool welcome with his breakfast. There was nothing more to keep us. The porters, eager to be down in the valley, quickly took up their loads and followed a well marked path through the undergrowth. Then we too got off. The dreaded pass was behind us.

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Soon after, we had our first view of Everest from a wooded hill. It was a wonderful and unforgettable experience for any climber to see before his eyes the king of mountains, the highest spot on earth! It took a little time before we realized it. We suddenly saw a group of ice-clad peaks when we reached the crest of the hill. A moment before we had been in jungle which entirely obstructed our view, then the foliage thinned and sank away like those curtains in a modern theatre which are withdrawn beneath the stage.

They were magnificent, awe-inspiring peaks, and we took out maps and compasses to identify each by name. There's Kangtega; no, it's the next one to the north; and that one is an unnamed but wonderfully beautiful peak. From the map we knew that Everest could not be far away. Then we recognised it, a flat unimpressive mass, outdone by the more striking 20,000-foot peaks all round it. It would have been a complete disappointment but for the long streamer of snow that rose straight up from its summit. We pointed it out to the Sherpas, who glanced politely in the required direction and in deference to our apparent agitation murmured a polite, “Aha,” and then looking down the valley said: “Lukla's down there,” the native place of Pasang and Gyalsen. It was our turn to murmur a polite “Aha!” and after this exchange of sentiments they set off downhill at top speed to reach a warmer stopping-place as soon as possible. We were glad we had spared ourselves the trouble of trying to impress the coolies with this unique sight. As we went on down, clouds veiled the modest summit of the world.

I was always surprised at the indifference of the Sherpas to the distant view of the mountains which dominate their lives and are the object of their fanatical ambition.

I heard Europeans and Americans in Kathmandu disputing excitedly and at length about the names of the various peaks seen glimmering on the horizon on fine days, although there was not a climber among them. Some of them were positively in love with the wild beauty of a mountain which they could only see at all with field-glasses.

It was another matter with the Sherpas. They just said, “Aha,” and then: “There's Lukla.”
I remembered Pasang's behaviour when he had his first clear
view of Saipal (over 23,000 feet) a year before. This peak was
equitely unknown then and our first sight of it was from a
distance of several hundred miles. It was to be our final moun-
taineering objective. We knew that it would take us weeks to
reach it. Perhaps the ascent of it might be difficult; perhaps we
might never even arrive at its foot; but we all, particularly
Pasang, were eager to climb one more high mountain. Saipal
became our one topic every night.

"Winter now, but if little snow can do," Pasang said.
"Best by a warm south ridge," I replied.

We knew that the fulfilment of our wish depended on the
as yet unknown character of the mountain.

At last, after many hard weeks and many detours, we saw
Saipal from close at hand. I was the first on the summit of the
pass which brought it into view and waited there with com-
placency; I was proud of having found the way there through
such a stretch of country. There was our goal before us, and
now at last we could plan our route to the summit.

Pasang joined me. "There's Saipal," I said.

"Aha," Pasang said, and, pulling some dried goat's flesh
from his rucksack, began to shave slices off it. It was the only
way of eating it without danger to the teeth, and yet, reason-
able as his procedure was, Pasang was a disappointment to me
at that moment.

I know Sherpas better now, and don't expect them at the
first sight of a mountain which may bring them fame or death
to do anything but slice shavings of goat's meat, or else say,
"Lukla's down there."

Perhaps it is not out of animal indifference; perhaps it is
unconscious shyness; they may not like to see things or events
which may touch their own lives so nearly in a cool and distant
light. Perhaps it was a sort of embarrassment that made Pasang
shave his goat's flesh. It is one thing to come to grips with
a mountain, to clap your climbing irons in its flank and defy
its fierce storms and its avalanches; and another thing to tackle
it as a mathematical problem from far away.

Perhaps again these are the thoughts of a European, and
what moved the Sherpas was simply hunger and home-sickness.
Anyway, we followed them down into the valley. The clouds got thicker and we still had a steep pass to surmount; and it began to rain. At last we reached Thate, where Pasang found himself as a drinker and celebrated his home-coming with many bowls of chang.
CHAPTER FIVE

The Home of the Sherpas

Thate fulfilled the promise of our moist arrival: it rained, and we drank, afternoon, evening and night. All we knew of it at night was the patter of drops on our tents and the loud stamp of the Sherpas' dancing feet on the wooden floors.

In spite of the difficulties which were likely to arise from these festive celebrations, I was delighted to be in the country where the Sherpas were at home and greeted at every door as long-lost sons. What could go wrong for us as long as we stood well with these people?

We had only a short stage before us and so could have a long lie. Awakened in the morning by an old man emptying a bowl of chang into our mouths, we nearly got indignant, but realised just in time that he was the owner of the fields in which we had put up our tents. Also, his broad smile left no doubt of his good intentions. We gulped and shook ourselves.

There were none of the expected lamentations while we had our proper breakfast from our stores, seated in the open and surrounded by the whole population of Thate; on the contrary, spirits were high. A Sherpa girl of Junbesi, who so far had drawn our attention only by the charm of her youth and her continuous giggle, was playing the mouth organ; Pasang had girded on two wrist watches and was handing round newspaper clippings and photographs which showed how important he was. We behaved as though nights of dancing, chang at waking and maidens making music at breakfast were only what we were accustomed to.

We started on our next stage to a rousing tune and with many protestations of friendship. This stage was only one of two hours and brought us to Ghat.
Pasang's face grew anxious. We should be in Namche Bazar, the last place of any size on our way to Cho Oyu, in a couple of days. He had told me for hours on end what a paradise it was for butter, milk, corn and tsampa and yet now—as I mentioned before—it was a miserable place, where we should be lucky to come on a potato. Consequently, Pasang explained, it was his duty to cross the Dhud Kosi to Lukla, his native village, and procure from there the provisions required for our further journey. It might be an exaggeration to say that his face wore the air of martyrdom; he mentioned the facts, as it was his duty to do, but he did not make much of the burden they imposed. Ang Nyima, Gyalsen and a few other Sherpas had meanwhile vanished; they too came from Lukla. Pasang put away his photographs and newspaper clippings with care and took off his wrist watches; in a few hours Lukla would know what a famous son it had. We felt rather lonely and forsaken, but finding some watercress in a backwater we decided to make a vitamin salad; there were lemons too to be had.

An elderly European couple came along to our tents while we were dawdling the afternoon away; they were the first white people we had seen since Kathmandu and we should have been less surprised if they had been climbers. They were missionaries from Darjeeling. The object of their twenty-six-day journey was partly to see the country but chiefly to visit a crippled child who had been one of their charges in Darjeeling.

"We promised him," the missionary's wife explained.

They had kept their promise, and were now on their way to Kathmandu by the route we had come by, a six weeks journey in all. They had only two porters and the paths they had travelled day after day had been turned into rivers by the monsoon. The bridges had often terrified the missionary's wife, as I could well believe. "I had to sit down and pull myself across inch by inch," she said.

I was proud to come from the same continent as these two, although their virtues were so far removed from anything I could lay claim to. I offered them cigarettes and chang; it was all I could think of and quite inappropriate. They declined with a smile and went on their way. Their porters were drunk, and a friendly village elder who tried to escort them as far as the
bridge lay down half way there to sleep off his potations. I envied these two their dignity; they had the wise resignation which became their age and which often distinguishes people who have lived long in Asia.

We said goodbye. Their two porters lurched after them, but they walked upright and a little wearily to face day after day those utterly alien and overpowering landscapes, not for the sake of the mountains but simply for the sake of love. I admired them very deeply.

I was recalled to mundane affairs by my watercress salad. It was tasteless and tough; the thought of its vitamins was its only charm. Besides, we had no oil; which saved my face as a cook.

We were due next day at Namche Bazar and then the rigours of our approach march, which had nothing to do with mountaineering but were due only to the tropical features of the country, were over. We should then get out our warm pull-overs, our Anoraks, ropes and crampons. I was glad. However enjoyable the time we had already spent, I could never, in spite of good resolutions, get our mountain out of my head.

Again we made a late start. Adjiba woke with a thick head and the usual excuse: "Meet old friend, drink too much." The Lukla party, who had promised to be back by dawn, were still absent. I should have been considerably more surprised if they had been present.

Adjiba took charge and his ready flow of words got our caravan on its feet, in spite of affecting delays at every house and village. The Sherpas were hailed again and again by their compatriots; Adjiba was always encountering old friends, and we too got involved in friendly greetings and the accompanying cup of chang. Helmut dispensed, and I played the part of a Bara Sahib whose heart warmed to meetings of old friends. It was a nice day, full of feeling and above all devoid of haste.

The finishing touch was when Ang Nyima caught up with us, expressing as great a joy as if he had been parted from us for weeks, and bringing a present of eggs and tiny peaches from his family which he divided among us. The eggs, which were
scarcely larger than the peaches, were presumably of a special kind, because Ang Nyima insisted on our breaking them at once and tossing them off. This was a pleasant change, as his arrival conjured up many more old friends with the concomitant chang, and we could now take alternate gulps of chang and eggs. Helmut burrowed in his medical bag for the right medicines. Sepp became anxious and was eager to get on, and I—well, it came over me that a less strictly organised expedition could never have approached a 26,000-foot mountain before.

Naturally, we did not reach Namche Bazar that day, but stopped at a small village with the melodious name of Sorsola. It was only a little way short and next morning we descended to the river, crossed it by a very narrow bridge—a tree trunk sawn in half lengthways—and reached Namche after a very rewarding climb.

The bridges of the Himalaya frighten me a great deal more than its mountains. I had experienced the year before some extremely unpleasant ones in the Marsyandi Valley, and when I showed photographs of them to well-meaning friends in Vienna, they exacted our promise to be very careful never to cross any bridge before we had tested it, or when necessary repaired it. It was a rash promise which brought many troubles on us and some dangers we might have been spared.

We had experienced this when crossing the Likhu Kola. The Swiss had warned us about the bridge. It was in fact in good order, but we remembered our promise, and Sepp, who has a macabre love of the bridges of Nepal, which he crosses as a rule with folded arms, set about repairing it. One of the planks, he saw, might be pushed home in its iron clamp, and this would make it safer for the porters. To do this he had to let himself down from the side of the bridge. He was in his element, of course, but nevertheless in danger of slipping and disappearing in the torrent.

The sliced tree-trunk which parted us from Namche presented the same dilemma between practical safety and the promises of ideal safety we had given. In the Himalaya a tree-trunk means a safe and commodious bridge; we had nothing to worry about. Yet looked at through the eyes of our anxious friends at home it was certainly a very narrow one.
Final preparations at Namche Bazar. Sepp fixing crampons to the Sherpas' boots and testing cookers, ropes and ice-axes.
At first the Sherpa children regarded us with the utmost suspicion and astonishment, but we soon made friends with them.
THE HOME OF THE SHERPAS

We crossed it, Sepp with folded arms and I in mortal terror, and then exchanged an embarrassed look. What about those friends of ours? The Sherpas had said yesterday that it was a very dangerous bridge and so we had to give our friends a show. We got a rope out of a rucksack, and Sepp, eager to enjoy another transit, made it fast from one end of the bridge to the other. Ang Nyima and another Sherpa, still a little affected by all the meetings and greetings, braced it round their shoulders and so when the porters came along they had a hand-line running at about waist level to help them over.

It was a great success. No coolie fell into the river. They and the Sherpas, knowing nothing of our promise, were touched by our care for them. They said we were a good expedition and they had never had such careful Sahibs before.

But our consciences were troubled all the same. If a coolie had slipped, which the delusive security of the rope made all the more likely, he must inevitably have dragged the two Sherpas with him in his fall. We decided never to make any rash promises again, but were greatly cheered by the general good humour, which was just what was needed for our arrival in Namche.

There is often a moment before the attainment of a supreme aim which anticipates the rapture of success and is even part of it. A man who is off to sea may be stirred by the sight of the first seagull, and yet be unmoved when he sees the harbour-bar. A man who is looking for a wife may never know happiness to equal that of the first smile and the first hint of sympathy.

It was the same with Namche Bazar. As I climbed the steep ascent from the river with Sepp, I was filled with complacency over our success at the bridge. We zig-zagged up bend after bend, and then Namche was before our eyes.

It would be an exaggeration to say that the sight was overwhelming, or even impressive. A few stone buildings tumbled down a hill of a withered, autumnal colour. The mountains behind were brown; not a glacier or lofty peak was in sight.

Nevertheless, I was filled with happiness. The trivial difficulties were all behind us: whipping up funds, equipping the expedition, the journey, the monsoon, paths washed away, gnawing doubts. Three or four days now and we should be at the foot of our mountain.
So we walked on in high spirits. The Sherpas had overtaken us meanwhile and they had a particular house in view, where they said we should be well off; but before we got there we were hailed from another house and invited to come in. There was a tall wireless mast in the yard—it was Namche Bazar's wireless station. Soldiers and police inspire me as a rule with a certain distrust and aversion, not so much because of a bad conscience as because I do not see why they should have the rules of human conduct under their eyes in black and white, and judge and punish accordingly. But these feelings left me in my previous tour in Nepal when I ran into some military posts. An officer named Malik embraced me, presented me with a fat shoulder of mutton, and actually shed tears at parting.

So, followed by Sepp, I went in without the least reluctance. Our papers were in order; we had nothing to fear. Every man had his passport and visa and I also had a letter of recommendation from the government.

We climbed a ladder to the first floor and were given a friendly greeting by the officers, who said it was their duty to look at our passports. It was only what we expected and we produced them at once, but they waved them aside in consternation: there was plenty of time for that; we must be tired and thirsty; we needed to recuperate a bit. They produced tumblers and filled them up with rum. The hospitality of the Sherpas we had found so overwhelming was only a tentative effort compared with this commanding, military style. We drank first to Cho Oyu, then to the soldiers stationed at Namche Bazar, then to Austria, then to Nepal.

We tried to show our passports from time to time, but the commandant, whose name was Mishra, was shocked at such a tactless and hasty mention of official business. Besides, Helmut was not present, and it would be simpler to look at all three at the same time.

The drink did us good after the long, hot march. We forgot our respective titles and called one another brothers. I find in my diary the entry, "Brothers of the four seas." I don't know now quite what I meant by it, but we must have been philosophising about universal love and have decided that the peoples of all four continents were brothers. The Chinese, who have
never had any love of geographical facts, seeing that they occupy the middle point of the earth, say, "Brothers of the Four Seas."

When Helmut turned up, his face at first showed unbrotherly surprise, but he was soon overpowered by our martial hosts. We had arrived in the morning and it was afternoon before our passports were given a friendly inspection, leaving us at liberty to reel to the nearby house which our Sherpas had made our headquarters. By that time we were convinced that Namche Bazar, thanks to its fraternal soldiery, was a very friendly place.

We put up our tents among the houses. Slender white prayer-flags streamed from the roofs. It was a long time since I had slept among them. They waved gently in the air, soaring up to heaven like the pillars of a cathedral, and resembling the latest buildings of glass and steel without walls or roof, which, though erected for practical purposes, might just as well serve the purposes of devotion if people had a few minutes to spare for contemplating the bewildering vastness of the universe.

They recalled thoughts and feelings I had had on many other nights I had passed among them. There were the nights I had been privileged to spend with the monks, Yang Samuda and Jen Sang, in monasteries in Mongolia, where temples rose in lonely magnificence from the steppe-like ships from the sea. Yet they dominated the earth only; the distant sky overwhelmed them. Even the pride of their great walls could take nothing from its majesty.

But then there were the prayer-flags ranging above walls and roofs; they lacked the imposing assurance of stone and mortar; they felt their way and obeyed every impulse of the wind. These monastery flags were far more than a pious caprice. As sails catch the winds of heaven for the use of men, so these flags took mortal wishes up to bridge two worlds, which without their fluttering would jar on one another—two worlds which are far asunder and yet not to be separated.

I remembered prayer-flags in the dense, rain-soaked jungle of Sikkim, where they seemed to be a human emanation of the forest and yet gave out a sound like leaves and reflected the light of the moon. They afforded a two-fold pleasure: they belonged to nature besides owing their existence to human desires.
I had seen prayer-flags too in the valleys of northern Nepal, and I must try to describe these valleys to make the significance of the flags comprehensible. They are not valleys in our sense of the word but deep, brutal gashes that gape unhealed. In the narrow space between the rivers which ripped them open and the vertical lips of the wound there is just room for a field or two where potatoes, maize and corn can be grown. The village nearby must not dare to occupy a foot of cultivable ground. There are always flags flying over these villages, not single as in the jungle, but forming a wall, visible before you see the village itself and giving the impression that they were not flown as an afterthought to protect the village but that the village would not be there if they had not been there first.

Architecturally speaking, this is nonsense, since the flags are mostly attached to the roofs and roofs could not be there without houses. And yet I believe it to be the other way round; the flags were there first, at least in the thoughts and wishes of men. Only beneath these visionary flags could the houses be built which were to carry them. Now houses and flags are inseparable.

They have a special look too—threatening, as though they were up in arms against an imminent injustice. They do not pray, but fight. When the steep gorge submerges the houses at dusk in hostile darkness and the men retreat to the warm fireside, the flags still keep up their head-strong battle against the coming night.

It was these very flags I loved the most, as one laments the passing of thoughts and wishes which have ceased to be part of daily life and appear only in the misty no-man’s-land of dreams. You try to fix them and they dissolve; you look away and at once they are there before your eyes. It is an endless game you can play until you fall asleep; then you wake to see everything plainly in the morning light.

The flags of Namche Bazar, however, were not threatening; their movements were as soft as the sound they made.

I sit thinking and writing of them in a town flat; out of the window I can see other windows and the roofs of other buildings; and there is a pool of water on the balcony after last night’s
rain. The ripples on its surface could only be caused by a strong wind, but the wind’s uproar is drowned by the noise of the city; the houses present an immovable barrier and there is not a plume of smoke to be seen. I should know nothing of the tearing wind but for this little pool.

Perhaps it is the same with prayer-flags. I love them not because they take arms against heaven and assail it with their hopes and fears but because they give a form to its least breath and turn it into sound and movement. The invisible, inaudible storm outside my window is ghostly and oppressive. Yes, I love prayer-flags because they give a second life to storm or stillness.

Although our reception in Namche Bazar gave such promise of brotherly love, we were disappointed to find on the evening of the third day of our stay that the promise was unfounded. It was a cold, wet evening, which, as things turned out, we were not likely to forget.

So far all had gone perfectly. Our tents were pitched on flat stubble, our baggage was safe against rain in the neighbouring farmhouse, the officers had paid us a return visit and we had re-paid the compliment. Our mutual feelings had been unruffled for the whole two days. Pasang and the missing Sherpas had returned from Lukla with the necessary supplies. Sepp had inspected all our climbing equipment and we had distributed socks, stockings, crampons and sun-glasses among the Sherpas. We felt we had done good work, and were thoroughly pleased with ourselves.

There was only one small matter to arrange before setting off: we had to find a Dak-Walla, a runner, who would at intervals carry our despatches to Kathmandu and bring back our post. Mishra had promised to get hold of the very man, a most reliable Sherpa who had performed the same office for the British Everest Expedition to its complete satisfaction. But meanwhile Pasang had got busy too. He told me that our man could not go all the way to Kathmandu by himself; he must have another man with him who would have to have the same pay. It was clear that Pasang thought more of getting a friend of his a good job than of sparing our purse.
That evening when Mishra came along and told us that the man he had mentioned was ready to be our mail-runner on the terms offered, Pasang joined in. It was impossible, he said, for one man to go alone; all expeditions had two.

“One,” Mishra said.

As I mentioned before, it was a cold, unpleasant evening and most of Namche Bazar’s inhabitants had drunk a good deal of chang to warm themselves up. Pasang, who was not yet used to being buoyed up in this way, forgot the deference he owed Mishra as representative of the government of Nepal. He felt that his honour and authority as Sirdar were being impinged on and feared losing face in the eyes of his compatriots; so he stuck his hands in his pockets and made some remarks which Mishra found offensive. Mishra thereupon raised his voice and Pasang did the same. It might have remained a private altercation had not Mishra’s fellow-officers, who were also taking a walk through the village, heard the noise and come up. The Sherpas heard it too and emerged from their cook-house and sleeping-quarters. They were all more or less drunk.

Pasang had not had time to mend his manners; he was talking and gesticulating wildly and suddenly blows were exchanged.

The spectators closed round with every intention of joining in, while Helmut, Sepp and I tried in vain to stop the fight. Mishra, with full justification, demanded a public apology, which Pasang flatly refused. Soldiers armed with rifles came from the barracks and they and the Sherpas faced one another. Suddenly fighting broke out.

We three Europeans ran helplessly to and fro trying to pacify each side in turn. Both, I must say, treated us very politely as encumbrances to be gently shaken off, obviously convinced that it was none of our business and that we should be better out of the way.

I was in mortal terror. The Sherpas, usually so good-natured, were transformed. They looked like wild beasts, blood-lust blazing from their eyes, and they were armed with heavy sticks, and stones as well. Even the gentle Ang Nyima was unrecognisable.

The soldiers were no better, and were only waiting for an excuse to open fire. Stones hurtled through the air, thwacks resounded on hard skulls, and we three—pushed aside as mere
nuisances—were afraid the situation was out of hand. It may have been no more than a common scrap in a Himalayan setting, but to me it seemed appalling. Suppose our whole expedition ended in a bloody fray!

Then suddenly there was peace. Stones were dropped, sticks and fire-arms lowered. To judge from the casualties, honours were even. Adjiba was groaning and bleeding from a blow on the head and one of the older soldiers was in the same state. That was all.

Mishra insisted on a public apology being made to the old soldier, and I was naturally ready, but I had only been a spectator and so was not capable of making the amends honour required. Finally some of the Sherpas bowed down before him and touched his feet, and with this moving ceremony a reconciliation, which satisfied all except Adjiba, was effected. I embraced the old warrior and pressed my cheek to his bearded face, giving him at the same time a packet of cigarettes. We were not far off tears.

He had shown great generosity; for him it was not just a headache and an open wound as it was for Adjiba, but a severe aggravation of his religious duties. In two days he had to celebrate the first anniversary of his mother’s death, and to do so properly he had to shave his head, an operation which his wound would make extremely painful. It was lucky for him, however, that the scuffle did not happen two days later when his skull would have been even more vulnerable.

Next morning, when the bellicose influence of the chang he had drunk had worn off, Pasang went very soberly to the station to express his regrets; but Adjiba, now in the fond care of a friend from his native Thami, was groaning piteously. Mishra and his fellow-officers paid us a visit. We all shook hands over and over again, and all were eager to take the full blame for the unfortunate occurrence. Pasang and Mishra embraced and called each other brothers. We took on the one runner Mishra had got for us.

It was peace after storm, and a few weeks later on our return journey the mutual good feeling rose to even greater heights. Not one of us will ever forget the kindness shown us by the soldiers of Namche Bazar.
CHAPTER SIX

Over the Nangpa La

We left Namche Bazar and resumed our journey on the 23rd of September. Pasang found it very difficult to recruit the porters needed, in spite of his excellent connections among the inhabitants. Not a single coolie from Kathmandu accompanied us any further. We had not expected this either, as their thin clothing was unsuited to the climate, and they were not in any case acclimatised to the cold.

The lack of local porters was all the more surprising because Eric Shipton in his account of his Cho Oyu Expedition of 1952 said that so many Sherpas volunteered that they were almost fighting to get hold of the loads. It was quite the opposite with us.

The reason was not that we inspired less confidence than the English, but that the Sherpas are to a great extent nomads. They live where their crops are raised or where there is pasture for their yaks. Some of their villages are deserted when their inhabitants move up to the higher pastures. Many of the Bhutias in the central Himalaya have summer villages and winter villages.

Our arrival in Namche Bazar coincided with one of these migrations. Pasang had to take what he could get, old women and young were all fish to his net, and still we were short of porters for our twenty-six loads. However, our house was on the road from Namche Bazar to the north, where our goal lay, and now and then small parties of Sherpas passed by heavily laden with merchandise from Tibet. Often a few words were enough; they would leave their loads in one of the houses, drink a cup or two of butter-tea and join us.

By midday we were on the road without having had to abandon one of our loads. Our greatest difficulty was the women from Namche Bazar engaged as porters the day before. They
had done full justice to the parting from their friends and their families and when we overtook our proud array we saw that some of our Sherpanis were so drunk that their male companions had to carry them and their loads as well. This predicament was taken as a great joke; we were the only ones who showed signs of annoyance, but what did that matter? We were only foreigners. And as it was a short stage to Thami the Sherpas' hilarious mood did not make much difference. We should all no doubt reach Thami by nightfall. After that the severer trials of high camps would begin.

The way to Thami was a dream of beauty. It led along the edge of a steep descent, past scattered fields and small-holdings. The Bhote Kosi, which we intended to follow as far as Nangpa La, the pass dividing Nepal from Tibet, foamed below. This river has a steep fall, and as we were going upstream we were able to cross it without great loss of height; the bridge was a good one. Soon after we were in Thami.

It lies in a lateral valley a little west of the road to Nangpa La and is surrounded by wild, snow-covered peaks dominating the path to Rolwaling Himalaya. We saw little of these mountains as they were obscured by the mists which follow the monsoon. But what we were able to see made us wish to brave that path one day.

The houses of Thami, unlike those of Namche Bazar, are scattered about among the fields, and this, although the fields were now reaped and under the plough, gave a look of peace and prosperity. They were bordered by fragrant meadowland threaded by a stream divided into several channels, and it was not, as is usually the case in the Himalaya, edged with gravel and debris; the turf went right down to the water's edge. It was the most beautiful village we had yet seen.

This was Adjiba's native place. He had almost recovered from his blow on the head and went on in advance to prepare a simple welcome for us. His house, kept by his mother, was poor enough, like the rest in Thami, but owing to my old friendship with Adjiba we could settle down and feel we were at home.

His mother, a wonderfully energetic old lady, greeted us with a reserved cordiality, both friendly and dignified. While
our tents were being put up in the field we sat round the fire on which the inevitable potatoes were being cooked and these, with salt and stuffed chillis, made the festive meal. My observations were probably not exhaustive, but I had the impression that Sherpas in the higher villages, at this time of year at least, lived exclusively on potatoes and chang. I have scarcely ever seen them consume anything else.

When you are being spoilt as a guest, there is no need to peel your own hot potatoes; your hosts fight for the honour of doing it for you. If you watch them for a short time as they dig in their nails and strip the potatoes of their jackets you will soon see that their fingers, at first black from the day’s work, acquire a spotless flesh-tint, while the potatoes they hand you are not white but grey.

One might, of course, on trivial pretexts insist on peeling one’s own potatoes, but only at the cost of giving offence and without ceasing to be responsible in other ways for the occasional cleanliness of Sherpas’ hands.

Tsampa, the mixture of roasted meal and tea, is also prepared in the fingers, and as the right consistency is not easy to hit it is simpler, after vain attempts to avoid the too wet or the too dry, to leave it to one’s hosts to manipulate. And the manipulation of tsampa is a far more radical method of cleaning the fingers than peeling potatoes.

Or again, if you have ever watched the brewing of their beloved chang you would need to have implicit faith in the germicidal properties of alcohol to drink it with equanimity. An unappetising-looking mass of cooked and fermenting grain is kneaded over and over again and finally pressed through a bamboo sieve. As a rule the whole family unites to make a jolly occasion of it; and constant movement in a moist substance acts as a more thorough detergent than hours of potato-peeling.

It is just as well, then, unless you do not mind affronting your hosts, to take your potatoes as you find them. That is what we did, and we were rewarded by seeing the stern features of Adjiba’s mother relax: perhaps these men her son went about with were not barbarians of whom the worst was to be expected. We devoured the grey potatoes and she smiled on us benignly.
One more word on potatoes may be forgiven, since they formed the staple of our diet for several weeks.

Sometimes we roasted them in the hot ash and what I enjoyed most was the burnt and ashy skin. The Sherpas could not understand this; to eat the skin was in their eyes the worst possible manners. They rubbed or knocked them clean on stones or, if they were indoors, on some piece of furniture, but they were too polite to express their horror of my habit openly. The children, however, remarked on it aloud and Pasang sometimes could not hide his embarrassment at having to own up to me as a friend.

This shows that it is not easy to win the confidence and sympathy of a foreign race, even in such a small matter as a potato.

Thami was shut in by two high moraines and we climbed the northern one early in the day, hoping to get a glimpse of Nangpa La and our objective, Cho Oyu, before the clouds took charge. We had a clear view, but our maps were inaccurate. There was a sharp dip in the much-indented horizon which might well be the pass, and if this supposition was correct we could see Cho Oyu too. We inspected it narrowly with field-glasses; it looked extremely forbidding from this point of view and we could only hope that we could go for it by other ridges and shoulders or, better, that our long-range conclusions were incorrect.

Meanwhile the porters had sorted out their loads; it took them some time owing to the drink consumed the day before. Our way led through a very beautiful valley where there were small hamlets here and there. The fields were enclosed by high walls, which gave them the look of empty swimming-baths; at this height the scanty harvest could never ripen unless the force of the cold winds was broken and the sun's sparse rays concentrated as though by a burning-glass. They looked very odd and if you did not know the real reason you might think it was miserliness and suspicion.

We spent the night at Marlung. We were now following the course of the Bhote Kosi, and Helmut, as geologist, explained that the long ridges running down into the valley were originally moraine walls which, after the melting of the ice,
had formed the dams of scattered lakes. We tried to imagine the valley as a series of lakes; it must have looked incredibly beautiful. The dammed-up water had then broken through the walls of debris, and left empty basins with shallow alluvial deposit. Unfortunately, we were some thousands of years too late to enjoy a view of lakes stepped up one above the other against a background of mountains 22,000 feet high.

Marlung was the last inhabited place we should see on our march to Cho Oyu. There was still Chule in front, but it was very small, the Sherpas said, and also on the other side of the river, which we might not be able to cross. So Marlung offered us our last chance of completing our preparations. We were well off for provisions and equipment, but we were now beyond the tree-line and as we wished to save our petrol for the high camps it was important to take firewood on with us. Pasang, after prolonged bargaining, which, as usual, became heated, reached an agreement for ten yak-loads of wood to be carried up to our base camp.

We were not quite sure yet where our base camp would be, as we had first to reach the top of Nangpa La and then look about for a suitable site. That would not be easy if we arrived at the same time as the whole cumbersome caravan; it would be better if an advance party went ahead to choose the site and then guided the main body for the last part of the march.

Sepp, who liked to travel by himself, volunteered to act as the advance-party with one of the Sherpas; and as he was the climber of the party he would be the best judge of where to establish our camp. Helmut was glad to follow on slowly, because he would have time for his scientific observations as he went along.

I volunteered to go ahead with Sepp to decide on the approach-route to Cho Oyu, leaving Pasang to organize transport and Helmut to act as leader. I looked forward to accompanying Sepp, who was sparing of words and liked to have a hundred yards between himself and the next man. I sympathised with him and looked back with longing to the lonely treks of the previous year, when I had none of the worries of organisation and man-power entailed by even so small an expedition as ours.
The night at Marlung was a case in point and explains why it was I hankered after my last year's tour. Our tents were on rising ground, one to each of the three of us, which was what we liked best if it was possible. The Sherpas and coolies were crowded together round one of the houses and as it was raining they had put up two or three tents in front of it. The solitude of my tent delighted me. I could dream or write in peace, undisturbed by the Sherpas and all the trivialities and real difficulties of our enterprise. After a little time I should go down to the Sherpas as the Sahib and Pasang would say: "There are only four yaks in Marlung. How shall we get the firewood up?" Then I should say, to reassure him, either, "You'll do it all right," or else, "Tell them we won't have their four yaks unless they find us all ten." It would all be arranged, but not as a matter of common concern; there would be a gap.

A year ago there had been no gap. We were a little party, all dependent on one another. I relied on the Sherpas' practical experience and they without me would never have been exploring those unknown regions. We were close friends and the comfort of the night ahead of us depended on the way we complemented one another. But we were not friends for the sake of our comforts; we were friends first and our success followed from it. Now we formed an expedition, a great undertaking: there were the Sahibs, the Sirdar, the Sherpas and the porters. The hateful and perhaps inevitable distinctions that life imposes had got hold of us. I was often sad: I find many entries like this in my diary: "It is not as it used to be. Has Pasang become the Manager of an Expedition? Have I changed?" Probably it was only the numbers that made the difference. There was nothing to be done about it. We were bound for a lofty aim and perhaps lofty aims demand the sacrifice of personal principles.

It was quite different on our return journey. All barriers were levelled; the villages we passed through gave us an enthusiastic reception after our hard-won success, which we owed as much to the Sherpas' splendid support as to our own perseverance. We had no difficulties ahead of us; nothing but a happy home-coming which made no special demand on discipline or speed. While we still had our goal in front of us, it was necessary perhaps to be organized as an expedition.
Nevertheless, I was glad to go ahead with Sepp and to have a day on my own. We took Gyalsen with us and a local porter who knew the district and had already crossed the Nangpa La.

The valley at this point was grassy and the ground rose in rounded hills. We saw Chule on the other bank—a few houses of grey stone crowded together among walled fields.

According to Shipton’s map and notes we should still come upon four stone buildings, called Lunak. They were not inhabited but used occasionally for shelter.

When we passed a ruinous cottage I asked our porter whether it was Lunak. He nodded. We were surprised and pleased to have got on so fast; we should soon be at Nangpa La at that rate. But the path took a turn to the left, not marked on the map, and our line of march was now parallel with the mountains which form the highest part of the Himalaya. We had to cross a few moraines, as unearthly and awe-inspiring as a lunar landscape. We could never have found our way without our guide. The path could only be guessed from occasional yak-droppings and a slightly more even surface discernible here and there among the wilderness of stones.

Suddenly after walking on for several more hours we saw four stone buildings ahead of us. “Lunak?” we asked rather dubiously. Again our porter nodded and said, “Lunak.” This no doubt was the place, and we had not come as fast as we thought. Shipton’s description was “four stone huts, two without roofs”. The two in better repair had no roofs either, only the ruinous remains of a roof. They made little impression on us, yet they were the last human habitations we were to see for a month, and I did not guess then what a feeling of comfort and security they would give me on the homeward march.

This time we made no halt there, and soon the track turned north again into the Nangpa La valley. We followed the crest of a low ridge of moraine, running as straight as if it had been following an architect’s drawing. We saw some curious tracks on a glacier opposite and examined them for a long time with the field-glasses. They looked like deeply embedded human footprints, but at that distance it was impossible to estimate their size, particularly as there was nothing to compare them with. It was not very likely that they were impressions left
by bits of snow or ice rolling down the slope, because they began on a very flat stretch of the glacier and there was nothing to account for little avalanches at that spot. Naturally I thought at once of the “Yeti”, the snow-men of the Himalaya.

I had once seen spoor in the central Himalaya which might reasonably be ascribed to them. From what other Himalayan climbers and particularly Sherpas had told me I imagined these strange creatures belonged to a hitherto unknown species, possibly of ape, or bear.

There are parts of the Himalaya where the Yeti are never heard of and others where they are heard of frequently. The parts near Nangpa La seemed to be a favourite resort of theirs. The splendidly equipped Daily Mail expedition of the year before, whose sole object was to solve the riddle of the Yeti, had only found tracks in this region, never a specimen to photograph.

The aim of our expedition was two-fold. In the first place it was, of course, to climb Cho Oyu, and the next three or four weeks would decide whether we should succeed. Whether we did or not, I wanted to devote the following few weeks, accompanied only by one or two Sherpas, to geological studies such as I had carried out on my tour of the year before; but above all I wanted to catch sight of the elusive Yeti. Meanwhile Helmut would pursue his scientific investigations, to which the climb itself would not be able to add much, and Sepp was eager to bag other peaks with Pasang’s assistance. I hoped that this arrangement would give us each some degree of independence and enlarge the scope of the expedition as a whole.

Unfortunately, my frost-bitten hands upset the plan. I was unable to take any photographs on the return journey and found the cold of the higher valleys intolerable. This made it foolish to attempt the search of the Yeti when I could not have taken a photograph even if I had found him. I needed warmth and medical attention.

I tried to persuade Helmut and Sepp to carry out their own plans while I went on in advance to Kathmandu, but they generously refused to part from me and break up our common enterprise, and so we learned nothing of the “abominable snowman”.

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While Cho Oyu still lay before us any detours were ruled out, and on our return we were too happy and tired and disabled to investigate the marks we had seen a month before and which were still there, only larger. We could not explain them, but clearly they were not made by any living being; they were some phenomenon caused by the midday sun and the icy night-air, which produce effects unknown in temperate climates.

Without losing time even on discussing the matter, we had to push on in order to prepare the way for the main body.

Progress became more and more difficult. We came on a stretch strewn with the detritus of glaciers and fragments of rock, and were quite unable to see any trace of the path. Wearily we staggered over one obstacle after another. We were tired out, and it would have suited us better to halt for the night, but we had to improve on our short lead and get beyond the moraines to where the glaciers began in good time to reconnoitre the terrain known as Sasamba for our base-camp. It got dark, and although there were only four of us, there was some risk of losing one another, which would have meant a night in the open for Sepp and me, as Gyalsen and the porter were carrying the tents. I had had a taste of this the year before and had no desire to repeat the cold, damp and, worst of all, unnecessary experience. So I forgot my manners and yelled out in not very polite terms to the man before and behind me to keep in touch. At last we joined up in the beam of a torch and stumbled on to the Sasamba camping place. So at least our guide said, but it was only a very moderately level bit of ground and as liberally strewn with sharp fragments of rock as the ground we had staggered over for the last hour.

Nevertheless, we were thankful to put up our tent at last and to have a night’s sleep to look forward to. But for a moment it looked as if we might attack Cho Oyu one tent short, because in attempting to heat up some bean and sausage soup the petrol was spilt and set alight. Luckily there was a pool of half-frozen water just outside and I was able to put the fire out in time to save the tent. But we spent a damp and uncomfortable night. Our performance that day did not, all told, fill us with pride.

The morning sun was late in reaching our camping place and getting up was cold and unpleasant. We left our porter in charge
Adjiba (left) was next to Pasang the most experienced of our Sherpas, and Gyalsen (below) the most competent of the younger generation. Both had crossed west Nepal with me in 1953 and their behaviour on this second occasion was equally admirable.
of the tents, while Sepp, Gyalsen and I set off over the glacier to the head of the pass in order to reconnoitre the approach to Cho Oyu. We had not yet set eyes on our goal and were now convinced that the mountain we had seen from Thami and taken to be Cho Oyu was some other peak.

The glacier was almost without fissures and the snow so hard that we could make rapid progress. We knew that Cho Oyu must come into sight at any moment, but we only once had a brief view of its south-west face in the fold of two nearer mountains. It was not very inviting, but we were not alarmed because our plan was to attempt the mountain from the north-west. The more difficult the side we saw now, the greater the probability that the route we planned would turn out to be easier; or so at least was my illogical conclusion.

The pass was a very wide saddle, not a narrow gorge but a smooth snow-covered depression. A branch was planted in the snow at its highest point, with innumerable prayer-flags attached to it as thank-offerings from the pilgrims and merchants who had crossed safely. They did not wave in the wind as they did in the valleys. They were coated in a thick layer of hoar frost and could not entrust their prayers to the breeze.

They also served to mark the boundary between Nepal and Tibet, since, though not very accurately mapped in these regions, it generally follows the Himalayan watershed. We had to cross the Tibetan frontier for a few hundred yards, but the risk was small and so too was the outrage done to Tibetan sovereignty. Nevertheless, I did not feel quite happy as we approached the lateral valley on the east which we firmly believed would offer us the approach route to Cho Oyu.

Eric Shipton in his reconnaissance had felt the same compunction at leading a large expedition across glaciers which were probably in Tibetan territory.

But as soon as we set foot on the west face of the mountain we were once again right on the imaginary boundary and had only to take one pace to the south to pacify our consciences and be actually in Nepal—though still, of course, in dangerous proximity to the menacing frontier-guards.

We descended very gently into this lateral valley; the mountains in the foreground retreated and suddenly, after we had
advanced a few more steps, gave us a clear view of Cho Oyu, looking just as we knew it from the photographs of the Eric Shipton Expedition.

It was wonderful to see our goal in front of us at last after all those months of planning and the weeks of journeying. We were not sure whether to be cheered or alarmed by the sight. As a climb it did not appear to be impossible, but neither was it inviting.

We knew too that the abrupt view we had of it made the slopes seem less steep than they really were. The height of Nangpa La was given officially as 19,035 feet (according to our altimeters it was only 18,051 feet). We had now lost about two hundred feet; so the summit of Cho Oyu was about 8,860 feet above us.

But there was no point in speculating at first sight of the mountain about the number of feet to be scaled. We came on a broad moraine which was the ideal place for our base-camp; and so had accomplished the task set for the day.

After a short rest, Sepp and Gyalsen went back to Sasamba, where the main body was due to arrive that evening. I told them to go on ahead on some excuse I have now forgotten; perhaps I said I was tired or wanted to take a longer look at the mountain, or perhaps that I just wanted to be alone. We were such good friends that we did not need to go into long explanations. They left me without so much as a glance.

I crouched down in the snow; but it was not Cho Oyu I looked at, it was the view to the north. There the glacier fell away and the grey-brown vales of Tibet closed in, wave after wave. Beyond, there were more hills, faint outlines of snow-peaks, and again hills upon hills. The best of the view was the peaceful harmony between earth and sky, whereas looking south what one saw was the wild commotion between the two. Superficially, the great plains of Hungary or the level forests of Finland may make a similar impression, but there it is the earth that supremely matters and the sky is merely its tremendous frame. Here the sky was the dominant feature, with the earth there only as its limit. Even if you did not know that this grey expanse of land was fifteen or sixteen thousand feet high, you would feel its isolation from all other parts of the earth.
and its surrender to the embrace of the sky. Cloud-banks sailed singly above it; probably they were higher than the clouds above our heads and yet they seemed to be part of the heaved-up earth. They and their dark shadows which lay on the landscape like sombre lakes formed a unity; they did not, as with us, belong to two separate worlds; they were both a part of the earth and above them the sky began its illimitable reign.

I had stayed behind to enjoy this scene without interruption. I felt once more the joy beyond desiring which the sight of it always inspired. I did not even want to explain it. I wished for nothing whatever. I was so utterly contented that I even forgot our mountain and everything connected with it.

Then suddenly a fresh impulse overwhelmed me: I wanted to stand on the summit of Cho Oyu. This may seem a belated impulse since our whole enterprise had only that aim. Yet so far I had not felt it like that.

I am no mountaineer in the strict sense. Mountains, strongly as they have always attracted me, are not for me aims in themselves, tests of technical accomplishment and physical strength; they are only part of that great world in which I feel so much at home. I love mountain-peaks as I love people, because they are equivalent parts of a greater whole.

My Cho Oyu enterprise did not arise from the unconditional desire to climb a 26,000-foot peak. I never imagined during the long and tedious preparations that the ascent once achieved would make me any happier. It was not an ambition; it was merely the result of thinking things over.

I had passed many solitary months in the Himalaya and scaled a few high peaks with the least possible resources; I had also read the accounts of the great ascents of peaks of 26,000 feet and over and I considered that these too might be climbed without organizing the matter on a scale which seemed to me to disturb the harmony of creation. And then I felt repentant. How dared I, even to myself, criticise these enterprises without being familiar with their peculiar difficulties? How could I express opinions without having tried them out in practice?

It was not therefore from a fanatical love of climbing, nor from ambition, that we had made Cho Oyu our goal. It was merely the wish to prove certain conclusions I had drawn by
putting them into practice, and as I am neither a practical nor a logical person, I was often oppressed by this cool and rational motive.

But now that I gazed into the vastness of the sky above Tibet, I suddenly felt different. I wished to press forward into that sky recklessly and even though it would suffer us only on its circumference. It had drawn me on for so many years and never once proved a disillusionment and I wanted now to get as close to it as my limited human powers allowed. There before my eyes was Cho Oyu, and its ridges were ladders into that longed-for sky. Suddenly I had become a fanatic in my desire to climb them.

I know that such feelings contain many contradictions. Experiences and episodes in those very mountains had taught me that the sky and all it stands for can be approached most closely when you shut your eyes and forget all about ascents that seem to lead to it, when you keep to your own self and cherish that little bit of the sky which is within each one of us.

I walked back to the branch and the frozen prayer-flags, and, taking one last look at Tibet, turned again to follow our downward tracks. The smooth fall of the glacier, like a drawn curtain, opened up the distant scene. I was back in a world of measurable distances.

Meanwhile the heat of the sun had melted the surface of the snow and the hour given up to day-dreams cost me severe physical exertion. In the early morning we had scarcely left visible marks on the hard crust, and even Sepp and Gyalsen, as I observed enviously, had, on their return journey, scarcely dented it at all. But now I sank up to the knee in slush. It was a slow and exhausting struggle. As I could see that Sepp and Gyalsen had had the same fate lower down, I decided to avoid the glacier altogether during the middle hours of the day.

I ended the journey on wind-swept ice and hard stone, and when I reached the camp we all agreed that it was a well-spent day. We had found the approach to our base-camp and it was not difficult.

The weather deteriorated as usual towards evening. Snow
and hail fell from a grey sky. But we sat in our tent drinking hot tea.

We kept a look-out with the field-glasses for the main party, but the two Sherpas saw it first with the naked eye as tiny dots winding slowly over the moraine far below us. We could well understand, after our own experience the day before, how weary the men and the beasts must be, and crept back into the tent, feeling thankful that we had this trying stage behind us.

At last the Sherpas reached us, leaving the rest of the caravan three or four hundred feet below. Pasang was obviously proud and relieved to have got provisions and equipment thus far without either loss or delay. We could say in reply that we had found a good site for the next day's camp.

"But you are in a dangerous place here," he said, pointing to our tents.

It had not seemed dangerous to us. A steep ice-fall from the mountains enclosing us was too distant, we thought, to threaten us with avalanches. But Pasang stuck to his opinion and told us that a few years earlier avalanches of ice had come down at this very spot and killed several men.

No doubt he was right. I knew from earlier experiences that Himalayan avalanches do not obey the same laws as our Alpine ones and that it was risky to follow our home-made precedents. Many disasters in the Himalaya have been due to the obstinacy of the Sahibs in trusting to their expert knowledge of snow and ice in the Alps and rejecting their Sherpas' warnings.

It was very understandable that the main body should bivouac in the lower and safer site, and though it cost Sepp and me a considerable wrench to move our camp again and join them, it would have been a wilful provocation of providence if we had disregarded the warning. On the other hand, we were often to camp on sites where the margin of safety was not wide enough to notice.

So we descended to the others, who we found had built themselves circular walls of stones as a protection against the cold wind. We had not enough tents to accommodate all the porters.

Morale was not very good. They were exhausted by the hard going and not eager for the next day's climb up the glacier.
Some were for turning back, but Pasang succeeded in talking them out of it.

I was glad it was the last night we should be at the mercy of the porters, whose moods could never be counted on. Tomorrow we should be alone with the Sherpas, and their stalwartness never failed. In that respect the unpleasant part of our journey was over; now the real encounter with the great forces of nature began. The petty disputes with indispensable helpers were done with, and tomorrow we should have only tried friends about us. During the weeks we were on the mountain not one of them ever disappointed us. For that reason alone it was a wonderful and unforgettable time.

The morning was cloudless. The yaks began the day’s march very early, as they had to reach their destination in time to return again to the Sasamba moraine before the surface of the snow was softened by the sun, otherwise their weight would sink them to the flanks and they would be unable to move. Their drivers were well aware of the danger and were eager to get off.

The rest of us followed in a lengthy train. The day was one in a thousand, the sky deep blue, the mountains lavishly giving off their white splendour. There were some women among the porters and their brightly coloured clothes were like early flowers in a snowy meadow. I took many colour-photographs of them against this splendid background but discovered later that the film had got stuck—I had put it in badly—so these shots were an over-exposed chaos of colour. I consoled myself with the thought that I should have another opportunity on the way down, little knowing that my hands would be crippled and unable for pain to hold the camera.

In fact, it was an equally lovely and cloudless day when we made the descent. Our success and the joy of renewing our links with life gave me a glow of satisfaction. Sepp had stayed behind to take the last photographs of Cho Oyu; we had lived so long on its ridges and shoulders that we wanted to have an over-all view. Helmut was occupied with his scientific observations. One or two of the Sherpas were ahead of me but I did not try to catch up with them. It was my greatest wish to walk alone over the Nangpa La snowfield. Pasang and Adjiba were behind
me, Pasang in a bright-red windproof suit, Adjiba in one of bright blue. (We had been thinking of colour photography when we bought our equipment.) They were walking together and talking like old friends who were out on a spree and exchanging confidences. I was quite overcome with the beauty of the whole scene—the gleaming white of the glacier with the aching blue of the sky above it, and then the two men strolling along unconcernedly as though the throne of the gods was their ancestral home. They looked so proud and splendid, walking down from the roof of the world. Pasang made some joke or other and Adjiba’s white teeth flashed in his almost black face.

I tried to photograph them but my hands shook and smarted in the cold air, and I put the camera away again. The sight of the two at that moment is none the less unforgettable. Almost like gods, I thought, or at least men who live familiarly with the gods. Of how few of us can that be said!

And so Nangpa La in all the beauty of its colour and its nearness to the sky, with the two Sherpas walking together, remains unrecorded for me except in memory. I can see it all when I close my eyes. I am almost glad I failed to photograph it. No record could be better.

We reached the lateral valley where our base-camp was to be situated before the snow got soft, and the yaks were driven back at once. Most of the porters also started down immediately, but some stayed overnight before setting off home.

We discovered a level site, safe from avalanches, and set up the tents at convenient distances from one another. The Sherpas built themselves a roomy kitchen of stones and stretched plastic material over it as a roof. Snow which fell in the afternoon brought it down once or twice and poured down the men’s necks and into Ang Nyima’s saucepans, causing great merriment.

As we lay in our tents we knew that we had only one task in front of us—the ascent of Cho Oyu.
CHAPTER SEVEN

The First Attempt

I find the following entry in my base-camp diary: "Possibilities of Cho Oyu not yet at all clear. In any case it is far steeper than the photos show, certainly no very easy twenty-six-thousand-footer."

That was our first impression. But there was no point in bothering yet about the accessibility of its highest slopes. We had first to reach them.

For a start, while the Sherpas brought in the rest of the baggage, which the porters in their haste to be gone had dumped a few hundred yards lower down, we made a brief reconnaissance. After discovering a small valley running south which would bring us straight to the lowest point of the west face, we returned in triumph. Next day we should reach the foot of the mountain.

Helmut, who was a little feverish, was to remain behind in base-camp for the time and organise the build-up of supplies, while Sepp and I and all available Sherpas were to establish Camp I with all the baggage we could carry. From there we should see how to proceed.

The events of the next few days were unexpected and astonishing. I had thought that we should study the mountain like a difficult arithmetical problem, test its shoulders and ridges and perhaps only after a week or two find what seemed a practicable route to the summit. I had often, of course, indulged the secret hope that we might be able to take it unawares—catch it napping.

But it was Cho Oyu who took us unawares. For a start, we discovered the approach to its glacier-covered west face; next, it laid itself open from one camp to the next; the problems set by each day had such obvious solutions, which in turn
THE FIRST ATTEMPT

opened up the way for the following day, that we simply had no choice but to go on. Then storm and cold drove us grimly back and the easy successes of the previous days were brought to a standstill.

In order to reach Camp I, we had to cross the narrow glacier which girdles Cho Oyu on the west. At first we followed the moraine because the ice would be narrower higher up, but finally we had to cross it. Sepp was guide.

It was an unusual sort of glacier and very fatiguing. It was not really dangerous and had no deep fissures and no threatening icefalls, but in revenge it was frozen in waves, forming a labyrinth through which we had to find the best way we could.
It was like an obstacle-race beset with unexpected hurdles. Sometimes we went side by side instead of one after the other. The man who had been the leader might be stopped, held up by a steep wall of ice, and for some time we all followed the one who was farthest in advance and had therefore found the best way on. There was no real danger; at worst there was only the risk of slipping and landing perhaps in a pool of icy water. It was the ideal terrain for learning to move over ice, but we did not want to learn; we wanted to get across.

Finally the last fold of ice was behind us. These waves or folds of ice were higher than ever where the glacier met the moraine, and we were glad to have firm ground under our feet again. We were all exhausted, and soon established Camp I at a suitable spot on the moraine. Someone found a rusty jam tin among the stones, so Shipton must have halted here and we were on his tracks.

There was a violent thunderstorm that night. The blinding flashes and the thunder rebounding from the mountains seemed to me a bad omen, a growl from the gods to warn us not to intrude. But then I remembered that in Asia a thunderstorm is usually regarded as a good omen and I went peacefully to sleep.

Next morning there was a hand’s-breath of fresh snow which quickly melted in the warmth of the sun. The mountain gave us no excuse for a discussion on the route to take, so without any talk we picked up our baggage and climbed a cruelly steep scree, on which in our heavy boots we slipped back at every step. We had no sooner started than I stepped on thin ice over a pool and filled my boot with water. Higher up, where the sun was less powerful and the wind stronger, my boot and sock froze. I was glad our boots were not lined with felt, as they would have taken a horrible time to dry.

Camp II was set up at a height of 20,300 feet. Here we left the exhausting scree behind us and the ridge rose in its white and icy beauty right up to the west shoulder, which was marked by a craggy band of rock.

We were glad to have got beyond the loose stones, and hoped to find quicker going on the bare and windswept ridge. A few days later I was even more glad to be back among the
stones, for they were no longer an exhausting, shifting obstacle, but a release from the clinging obstructions of deep snow, and, above all, they were warmth and life after the deadly storm that swept the flank and ridge.

But we knew nothing of all that as yet. We were thankful for an almost windless evening, and enjoyed the lovely view as well as Ang Nyima’s cooking—tea, cheese and tinned fish. By five o’clock or so we were all in our tents and the peace of the night, broken only by snores, groans, or heavy breathing, descended upon us.

As we had only two tents and not enough provisions and equipment for establishing Camp III without risking loss of contact with the camp below, we explored the ridge above us with the intention of retreating again on Camp II.

It was tempting, our strength and the weather permitting, to try for the summit without pausing for unnecessary days of rest. But we could not expect our small team to build up supplies quickly enough, and unless they could do so the assault-party would not have a manned and provisioned camp to fall back on if they tired or got into bad weather, still less any hope of help in case of accident. The rear party would be too done in by the exacting labour of bringing up supplies to be able to make contact with the assault party as well.

Tempting as it was to carry the summit by storm, the risk was too great to be run. Pasang and I had made such ascents in west Nepal, but for one thing they were lower, and also these unprofessional methods were permissible for a party so small and ill-equipped that a well-organised attack was out of the question. The responsibility was limited to two persons, Pasang and myself, both ready to risk their lives. The ascent of Cho Oyu was not a personal matter. We were responsible for the smooth working of an enterprise which was part of the common human striving towards the loftiest aims. The material and spiritual cost of such aspirations is so great that there is no justification for adding to it by imprudence.

For this reason I made a sortie up the ridge with Sepp and Pasang. It was not blown so clear, nor was it as hard-frozen as I had hoped. In places we sank to the knee in powdery snow, and the effects of altitude were already noticeable. Nevertheless,
we reached a spot where at a height of about 21,600 feet we meant later to establish Camp III. The ice-fall which had turned back the British expedition was above us. We had neither the strength nor the time to attempt it, but it did not look impossible. The first thing was to establish a camp below it and await supplies, then we could negotiate the obstacle at our leisure. We turned back feeling very pleased with what we had seen.

Sepp, who had not, like Pasang and me, spent part of the previous year in the Himalaya, suffered from the height and was in a bad way. We decided that he should go down next day to Camp I and join Helmut, while I would stay up there and establish Camp III. Then we would consider what to do next: Sepp had difficulty in breathing during the night.

Next morning we could not leave the tent until midday owing to a storm which made it impossible for me to go on or for Sepp to go back. When it died down, one or two Sherpas came up with another tent and provisions, and Sepp set off. It was a sad sight to watch him descending to the screes and supporting himself on two ski-sticks, but I had no time to waste on sentimental reflections. The cold drove me back into the tent, where a feast was waiting in preparation for the great effort demanded of us next day—onion soup, corned beef and potatoes, tinned fruit. It was warm and dry in the tent and with hunger appeased I felt happy and contented. I ventured out once more in the evening; the Sherpas were asleep in the other two tents; mist was drifting up the ridge, leaving the view into Tibet and over the still glimmering mountains clear now and then. I might have been the only human being in the world. I crept back without waking the Sherpas and closed the opening tight in case of a snow-storm.

The next day was not very fine. The sky was cloudless but a bitterly cold and penetrating wind swept the ridge. Tempting as it was to stay inside, I could not answer for such softness. Helmut must undoubtedly have got his carrying party off and it was time we had Camp III ready. I had sent down a very optimistic letter by a Sherpa three days before, on the 30th September, asking Helmut to vacate the base-camp and to take all we should need up to Camp I.
DEAR HELMUT,

I hope you are all right again. It looks as if we might be able to find a speedy way up. For this we need:

1. All tents to be collected at Camp I. All food left in the base-camp to be hidden under stones.
2. First priority for Camp I: one tin petrol, plenty of tinned food, tea, cocoa, tsampa (no flour, potatoes, or paraffin) and grape-juice.

As soon as you are at Camp I we shall be in easy communication because the descent is so quick. We will have as many Sherpas as possible available for the Transport Base Camp, i.e. Camp I.

This all sounds a bit sudden, but perhaps there's a chance. Hope to see you soon. Writing from Camp II, circ. 20,300 feet. Hoping to have Camp III tomorrow at 22,000.

All the best and see you soon,

HERBERT.

P.S. added to yesterday's.

Sepp is a bit groggy and is going down to Camp I in the morning. Please join him there—with the best food, also tents. Thanks for all.

Petrol urgently needed.

No doubt Helmut had meanwhile carried out most of this, and it was high time we too got going again.

Leaving camp is always accompanied for me by a medley of feelings and sensations, which there is plenty of time to disentangle during the long day's march.

It makes a great difference whether tents are taken down or left standing. If they are left standing they give the feeling of a refuge to which retreat is possible. The thin canvas is a symbol of security; you can look down on the dark rectangles from high above and know that you are not alone.

In this case we had to pack up our tents and carry them with us. That in itself is unpleasant because it means spending the last few minutes before the start without any protection. You stand in a tearing wind and what a moment ago was home is now a patch of dirty trodden snow with a few empty tins lying about on it. The sadness of a final departure is in the air.
And not only that; there is also the finality of a new day, and you are now thrown on your own resources and on your friends. The tents are no longer a fixed point in the vast desolation of the snow, but part of the load you carry with you.

The tracks already made by Sepp, Pasang and me were a great help; we did not have to find our way. All we had to do was to follow them blindly until they came to an end. It reduced life to its primitive simplicity, but after all, we were at an altitude of about 20,000 feet.

We were not roped, and sometimes long gaps parted us, but every moment's rest brought us together again. None of us had the strength or energy to go on ahead when he came up with the others. He was only too glad of the excuse to sit down in the snow and get back his breath.

We got to the end of our own tracks early in the afternoon. It seemed advisable to carry on for a few hundred yards and put up our tents immediately below the crevasse. We should be nearer our next task.

We knew from Eric Shipton's account even before we left Europe that we should find the crux of Cho Oyu at this point. Shipton wrote:

"But at an altitude of 22,500 feet they [Hillary, Lowe, Evans, Bourdillon, Gregory and Secord] encountered a formidable barrier of ice cliffs which ran right across the face. . . . It was obvious that it would take at least a fortnight to overcome this obstacle and establish a route over it, and this would necessitate the build-up of supplies on a scale which had already been decided against. So we reluctantly abandoned the attempt to climb Cho Oyu."

These observations were far from encouraging. However, the British Expedition was undoubtedly deterred from bringing up its whole equipment because of its fear of encroaching on Tibetan territory. But for this it would certainly have persisted in the attempt. All the same, it could not be easy: such experienced Himalayan climbers as Hillary, Lowe, Evans and Gregory would never regard an obstacle as unsurmountable if there were any way over it.
THE FIRST ATTEMPT

So we had to be ready to face a severe and long tussle with the ice.

Our behaviour was hardly adapted to the emergency. We had no sooner reached Camp III, or rather the site for it, and thrown down our loads, and ourselves panting beside them on the snow, than Pasang proceeded to get out ice-pitons and snap-hooks. It was two or three o'clock in the afternoon, just the right time for putting up our tent, making tea and getting ready for an evening's rest. But Pasang wouldn't hear of it. Again and again he fixed his eyes on the ice-fall as though it had personally insulted him. Adjiba did not seem to take the insult so much to heart; probably, like mine, his heart was set on a cup of hot tea. But I did not dare to encourage such feeble cravings and so leave Pasang's ferocity in the lurch. When Adjiba gave me a questioning and reproachful look, I let my eyes fall in embarrassment and strapped my crampons tighter. There was to be no resting, or eating, or drinking. This was not to be an expedition of months; the attempt on the ice-fall had to be made at once as though we had only days to reckon on. We filled our rucksacks with ice- and rock-pitons, took some ropes and started on the climb. Meanwhile the other Sherpas erected the tents, and Ang Nyima dug out a hole in the snow for his kitchen.

After the long and exhausting march up to get there, I would gladly have left the two of them to go on alone. It was Pasang's own affair if he had not the sense to alternate rest and exertion. There was no need for me to go any further. I went all the same. It was not from any wish to climb the next few hundred feet, but because I did not like to decline the challenge of a perhaps decisive ordeal. It was more a question of being shamed into it than convinced.

The first steps were the worst. For that distance we were continuing the ascent of the ridge; the challenge of the ice-fall was still ahead. We sank in snow to the thighs, and every yard was a separate exertion. But then the ice-fall rose steeply above us, the snow got harder, and we were at the end of the ridge.

Now Pasang produced his rope and we roped up; I felt nothing but sheer exhilaration.

It was glorious to be on a rope again with Adjiba and Pasang,
those tried and trusty friends. We did not interrupt the vast silence or the beating of our hearts by a single word. It was not the first time we had faced such ice-falls together with the peak we were after above us, beneath us the great desolation parting us from all mankind, and within us that tried friendship which alone makes the invasion of such altitudes possible.

I felt then that we had never been untied from that rope and that all I had been through and the people I had seen since our last climb were forgotten. It was not that those things and those people were in any way diminished, but now the rope, on which our lives and our comradeship depended, was all in all.

About a hundred and ninety feet of nearly vertical ice faced us. Even if we could get up it, what should we find at the top? Pasang took the lead and every movement he made showed sound judgment and experience. The rope ran slowly through my fingers. Adjiba stood below me. Not a word was spoken. Pasang first tried a deep chimney in hopes of finding his way on. He vanished in the darkness of the recess and scarcely any rope was paid out now. The tents of Camp III were already there below, ready to receive us. Our tracks over the virgin snow of the ridge led from them to us. Would they end here? Should we ever reach the summit?

My thoughts were interrupted by a shout from Pasang. "No way on."

He traversed the ice-fall to the left and then struggled upwards again.

"Like in Jagdula," he panted out. A year before we had encountered similar ice-falls in the gorge of the Jagdula river. The memory gave me renewed hope.

"Jagdula good; here good," I said.

"Will see," Pasang replied.

Slowly and cautiously he made his way up. I had sunk my ice-axe deeply and securely in the snow; Pasang would not fall far even if the worst came to the worst. Adjiba stood looking up as if he had no faith in our proceedings and was sure he would have to hold us when we fell.

Pasang vanished over the cornice. Then he called out. "Follow on!"
The porters we had taken on at Namche Bazar carried the firewood so indispensable for our base-camp over the Nangpa La (right). Prayer-flags were put on the summit by pilgrims and traders. Sepp and Gyalsen resting on the first reconnaissance of Cho Oyu (below).
The step levelled out; we were standing on a ledge. Adjiba had joined us. The ice-fall did not look unscalable here, but we could not be sure yet. Perhaps we could get round the next steps and fissures by going to the right. Ten minutes—or was it half an hour?—of concentrated effort and then we knew that the way on lay open before us.

We were so tired out that we fell down and lay in the snow, incapable of speech. It was only by degrees that joy got the better of exhaustion.

I could hardly grasp it; in an hour we had overcome the great obstacle. Perhaps we had had the supreme luck to tackle it at the one possible spot. Perhaps the ice-fall had altered since Shipton attempted it.

We had never dared to hope we should negotiate it so rapidly and with so little difficulty.

We had our first view of Cho Oyu in all its massive grandeur from our Base Camp (18,000 feet).
CHAPTER EIGHT

Disaster

We slowly returned to the top of the ice-fall, very tired but very happy. We wanted now to make the climb practicable for the next day.

Adjiba took out of his ruck-sack two hundred-feet lengths of rope which we had brought with us for this very purpose. We then drove two long wooden pegs into the snow to fix the ropes to, but although the surface was as hard as ice, underneath it was too soft to give the pegs a firm hold. So we started to clear the snow from the ice with our ice axes. This was too much for us after the exertion of the day, and for a moment we were dead-beat. But progress next day would be greatly hindered if we could not fix a rope, and Pasang found the answer.

We drove the pegs cautiously through the hard crust of the snow and then turned it into slush with our own water, which quickly froze. It was not a very pretty sight, but after a minute or two we found that the pegs held. The end justifies the means.

Somehow these repugnant traces of the presence of human beings on an ice-fall where no human being had ever stood before gave me a feeling of confidence and security. The two lengths of rope knotted together were of great service to us later on, for they gave us the first assurance that we might regain our hold on life after the disastrous storm at Camp IV.

At the moment, however, I did not suspect what the rope would mean to us before many days were over. I descended to Camp III, leaving Pasang and Adjiba to make some improvements in the route. At first the ice-fall was steep and difficult and my whole attention was concentrated on my crampons and the snow. As long as I was careful to keep the two in conjunction I should reach the camp in a few minutes. I daren’t give rein
to my joy over our success yet; all my attention was claimed by the sharp spikes and the snow.

At last the slope got less steep and then the track took me safely to the camp. The Sherpas, who had watched our difficult climb up the first step, but did not know what we had found over the top, came out to meet me in great excitement, shouting "Is there a way on?" They knew as well as we did that this was the crux of Cho Oyu, and that if we could overcome it the summit was within our grasp.

"Rasta hei—Is there a way on?"

How often I had heard a Sherpa ask that question, to have it answered sometimes with a yes, oftener with a no.

This time I could answer, "Yes, there is."

Ang Nyima gave me a bowl of hot tea, and Gyalsen helped me off with my crampons while I drank it. The tents were up, and now it would have been sensible to creep into my warm sleeping-bag and rest. But I was intoxicated by the rush of happiness when I realised that tomorrow we should reach 23,000 feet and that on the day after Pasang and I might stand on the summit! I did not dare yet to put it into words, but I could read on the Sherpas' beaming faces that they had the same thought too.

The storm had died down and I could now enjoy the wonderful view over Tibet. I did not retreat into my tent but sat in the snow among the Sherpas and warmed my hands on the hot bowl of tea; the feeling of loneliness which occasionally came over me was lost in their joy over our success. Ang Nyima gazed at me with tears in his eyes. It was not from any anxiety over the merits of the tea he had made, but just that he was moved.

Adjiba and Pasang were soon on their way down, carefully cutting out each step. The Sherpas rushed out again to meet them, relieve them of ropes and crampons and give them hot tea. They were tired out but proud and perhaps a little too self-confident. I recalled that long afternoon's wait in Jagdula gorge. We had had two possible peaks in mind and were too short of supplies to achieve both, so we separated to reconnoitre the routes and save time. I tested the approach-route to the "Mountain between two lakes", while they went north. I was the
earlier back, and while awaiting their return could see that the steep ice-fall down which they would come was exposed to avalanches.

As they stood there tired out and proud, like two gladiators in the arena, I felt the same anxiety and love and solidarity I had felt on that occasion, and I almost regretted that we had such an important mission. Success now would not as then be a personal matter; it would mean public recognition and acclaim.

That might be why they had been so venturesome. Perhaps they wished for the fame it would bring more than for the experience itself. I felt confused and sad.

But no. In Adjiba’s case there could be no doubt. He would attack any mountain, the more difficult the better. It was in his blood. Fame was a matter of indifference to him; he was satisfied if he got a good “chit”.

But what about Pasang?

And me?

The Sherpas’ happy talk broke through these thoughts. The route was there, tomorrow we should reach Camp IV, the day after—— Once more we were a brotherhood, and there was no need to brood.

We had three tents and I could have one to myself, a great luxury. It was a fine night and I was filled with happy anticipation.

It’s odd—I’m a practical man on the whole who doesn’t usually get so wrought up that an experience drops right out of his memory, and yet the next day—it was the 4th of October—is almost a blank.

Probably the shock of coming within an inch of death two days later put my memory out of gear. This would be comprehensible, because the way death came on us at Camp IV was not the way we, as daring climbers, might have expected; it was long drawn-out and agonising and quite enough to derange the mind.

It was not actually death, of course, or I should not be writing these words. Yet it was; I only needed one degree more weariness and self-surrender to make me give up. But there was the reaction against increasing weariness, there was the
question, why? there was the burden of responsibility and the bitterness of renunciation.

This may give the impression of gloating on the memory of our disaster. I am not gloating; I am only trying to explain how a whole day could fall out of my memory.

Yet I may treasure the memory of that storm in Camp IV. Not from boastfulness—it was not a situation to boast of; and not for feeling’s sake either, although I shall never forget the Sherpas’ ashen faces; but simply because those moments passed in the shadow of eternity have absolutely nothing in common with everyday life.

In any case, I can form only a very vague idea of the 4th of October. My diary, which I had on me, has the following entry:

"4.10. Enjoying tent to myself. Final preparations were planned for early morning. At dawn all three tents flattened by terrific storm. Never known anything like it. Lie like fish in a net, or a corpse under a shroud. Cloudless sky and tearing wind all day. Two Sherpas from Camp II. When it strikes the canvas it is like a punch of almost human, brutal strength. Have never encountered such violence in such contrast with the beauty of the landscape."

These entries are very clearly written and are given here as they stand. And yet I know almost nothing of that day.

Perhaps the exhausting climb up to Camp III had been too much for me. Sepp, who has far greater physical strength than I, had had to turn back and Helmut had remained below. Perhaps I had over-estimated my own resources. But I can honestly say that I was unaware of it and was not guilty of thrusting deliberately. I just went the pace that came naturally to me.

On that same lost day I wrote a letter to Sepp and Helmut, who were organizing the build-up somewhere lower down, where exactly I could not be sure.

Camp III. 4.10.
My Dears,

Established Camp III here yesterday at 21,300. Have found way up ice-fall. Hoped to be at Camp IV 23,600 today.
But violent storm, all tents wrecked, cannot move.

Urgent need of tins, petrol, remaining tents. Three or four days must decide whether we make it. Please come as soon as fit.

All the best,
Yours, H.

P.S. Just had your (Helmut’s) news of the 3rd. Transport up to here very difficult owing to appalling wind.

Some Sherpa porters who got up here suffering severely from the cold. Please supply them with socks and stockings from reserve.

Love to both, H.

The account of Sepp’s and Helmut’s achievements in preparing to back up the assault on the summit will follow. Meanwhile, I will give the story of the assault.

The weather was good on the 5th. It was cloudless as usual, but the cold wind of storm-velocity had died down. We set off to reach Camp IV at 22,900 feet. Besides my old friends of last year, Pasang, Adjiba and Gyalsen, there were also Ang Nyima and Pemba Bhutar.

The fixed rope we had made fast the last day but one was a great help in scaling the first steep step. We went unroped after negotiating the ice-fall. It was chiefly a struggle with the effects of altitude, a lassitude that suffused the whole body like a hot bath, but we knew that the prospect of attacking the summit with any hope of success the day after depended on the progress we made now. So we kept going.

I have a very clear memory of that day’s march and can still distinctly see each resting-place where we flung ourselves down without a word, after accomplishing another seventy or another hundred feet at that torturing height. Not a word was said. We were not just tired, we were utterly exhausted; the speed and the possibility that success might be within our grasp seemed to empty us right out. Pasang and I, whose task it would be to try for the summit next day, carried light ruck-sacks, while the other Sherpas had the heavy loads required for the assault on a mountain of this height. But there was no distinction between us as we lay panting side by side in the snow. The responsibility
for tomorrow's attempt weighed as heavily on Pasang and me as their loads did on the shoulders of the other Sherpas.

I look back to that day with thankfulness, to the joy of weariness and the feeling of having given one's best; to the glorious solitude, never before disturbed by a human being; to the friendship with the Sherpas, who climbed up towards the cloudless, cruelly cold sky as though it were their longed-for home.

We established Camp IV, two tents, at four o'clock, just short of 23,000 feet. Gyalsen and Pemba Bhutar helped. It was not easy, as the storm had got up, and afterwards they went down again to Camp III. These two young Sherpas did a grand job that day, and I watched them set off with admiration. They seemed almost to take it flying. And why not? There were our tracks to follow, and they had the fixed rope down the ice-fall. Yes, but thirteen hundred feet, at that altitude, separated them from Camp III, and the sun was low. I never doubted they would get there all right. I knew what Gyalsen was good for.

Now there were the four of us, at 23,000 feet, Pasang and I in one tent, Adjiba and Ang Nyima, who were to cover our return, in the other. I can't imagine a better team, its only weak point myself perhaps.

I was almost sure Pasang and I would reach the summit next day; it would be the third highest to be trodden by man. Adjiba was getting our meal ready while the valleys below vanished in the haze of evening.

"An easy mountain. Peak tomorrow."

"Yes," I said. "Peak tomorrow."

"What shall we do next? We have so much time left."

"We'll try another high one. Lhotse, perhaps," I suggested.

Idle, boastful talk, but we felt justified. If the weather had not changed that night, we might well have got to the summit next day. Nearly two weeks later when we started from that same spot, we were already tired out; yet we succeeded.

Nevertheless, a modest waiting on events would have been more fitting than presumptuous words, even though we had reached that point as easily as if we had been in the Alps on a mountain of 13,000 feet. The weather had never yet threatened disaster. Why shouldn't we have hoped to reach the summit next day?
It was not a comfortable evening. Our tents were on the exposed side of the shoulder, which was swept by an icy tempest. Snow and fragments of ice were hurled against them and they stood broadside to the wind. I had thought of putting them the other way, but it would have required a tedious terracing of the steep mountainside. The snow here was not soft underneath, as it was further down; it would have needed chipping out like stone to the bottom.

It was not a comfortable evening, but you could not expect better at that altitude. No cause for worry. Once I was inside the tent I could not bring myself to creep out again and photograph Camp IV. Tomorrow, I decided, on our return from the summit. Then the two tents would be seen from above standing out like dark pearls against the white snow; the Nangpa La glacier, the grey mountain-ranges of Tibet and the evening sky would form the background.

Sleeplessness, the great problem at these heights, is a cause of bodily and nervous fatigue. If you take sleeping-pills there is the danger of falling asleep in the early morning just when you need all your energy. Lowe, the New Zealander, had that experience on Everest.

I was lucky. As I lay in my sleeping bag side by side with Pasang I felt the fatigue of the day overcoming me and had scarcely time to notice how at this altitude breathing is not automatic but a conscious effort. On many a night much lower down I had got up with a feeling of suffocation and fought for breath because I had forgotten in my sleep to breathe consciously as one does for a medical examination. I heard Pasang breathing regularly; probably he was already asleep.

I felt protected and safe in spite of the utter solitude of our bivouac and although I was perhaps sleeping at a point higher and more remote from the world than any other man alive. I had Pasang with me, and Adjiba, and Ang Nyima. I tried to explain to myself the intimacy and warmth of my feeling for them, but weariness carried my thoughts away as the current of a river floats the drift-wood away from its banks. The day was over; I fell asleep.

I did not dream that night, but waking was a nightmare, and I clung to the hope that it was actually a bad dream. The
Our route from Base Camp to the Cho Oyu massif led across a moraine where the going was difficult.

Camp II (20,300 feet) on the snow-ridge leading to the ice-fall and the west face.
View from Camp III (21,600 feet) north-west to the peaks of Tibet. Left to right: Pasang, Adjiba, Pemba Bhutar, Gyalsen and Da Nurbu
The ascent was not the achievement of any one man; it was the work of the whole team. Pasang
and Adjiba being cared for by the other Sherpas after we had found the route over the ice-fall
sound of Pasang groaning convinced me that it was real. The side of the tent was being pressed down on my face by some invisible force, preventing me from breathing, and an uproar of rattling, whistling and screaming filled the air. It took me half a minute to realise what had occurred.

The wind had become a hurricane and had torn our tents from their moorings; the tent pegs had snapped. I put out my hand and felt for Pasang, who was groaning, in his sleep perhaps, or perhaps from a presentiment of disaster to come. Stare as I might, no chink of light was to be seen. It was still night.

There was no actual cause for anxiety. We two and our rucksacks were heavy enough to hold the tent down. We should not be blown away. I edged over to the outer side to deprive the wind of purchase, and after making a free space for my mouth fell into a doze. No, there was no cause for anxiety. Often a storm at night was followed by a clear, still day.

By the time daylight glimmered through the canvas, the wind had increased in violence. I can't say whether I had slept in the interval or lain awake, but it was now day and I had to come to some decision. I couldn't lie on in a twilight state between sleeping and waking, between life and death; that would be too easy.

The sun penetrated the yellow fabric. It seemed to promise life and warmth, in strange contrast to the icy hurricane which threatened to hurl us down the mountainside.

I nudged Pasang again.

"Wait? Go down?" he asked.

I didn't know which. I didn't even know whether it was morning or evening, whether we had passed a long day in our wretched tents, or whether the sun had just risen and we still had the day to endure.

"We'll see," I added.

We crept out from under the tent. It was not easy, for the wind kept the canvas tight down on us like a fisherman's net and hugged us. As soon as I was out I was surprised to see the sun in the east, and about two hours up. So the day was not behind us and we could not indulge in any illusion that the time for decision had passed by. If we had had the night in front of us we could have settled down to wait in resignation.
There was not a cloud in the sky. But we could not always see the sky; it was hidden by thick flurries of snow. A hurricane of a force I had never experienced scourged the snow-covered mountainside, and Helmut, who took observations from lower down with his instruments, estimated its speed at about eighty miles an hour. The temperature was thirty to thirty-five degrees below zero. The most horrible part of it was the cloudless blue sky.

I crouched down beside Pasang in the snow. We could not stand up. The wind would have thrown us down or lifted us from the ground.

The other tent was also wrecked. The huddled bodies of Ang Nyima and Adjiba were moulded by the flattened canvas. We gave them a prod. They were still alive and crept out to join us.

The four of us cowered together beside the flattened tents and stared into the vortex. We could only speak in shouts. "Never known a storm like this," Pasang shouted. "All die."

He repeated it again and again.

I agreed with him. We should all die.

Adjiba and Ang Nyima said nothing. They sat huddled and dumb, their faces a bluish grey, marked by death—no, dead already. Their dark eyes were fixed on mine, asking no questions, hinting no reproach. They were gates to another world, at whose frontier we had now arrived.

I experienced a strange split in my ego.

Like Pasang and Adjiba and Ang Nyima, I was a poor wretch, tortured by cold and the fear of death, whose only comfort in face of the final and utter solitude was derived from the presence of my three companions. And at the same time the other part of me looked down without the least emotion, almost with irony, on the four of us. My fate was not at all terrible to this second me. "You've always played fast and loose a bit with this possibility; you can't complain if it has come true. But how can you answer to yourself for the death-stricken faces of these three Sherpas?"

This split personality persisted throughout the events that followed; one part acted instinctively and suffered in the flesh, and the other followed events without feeling or pity, merely
as a critical observer, coldly making his own comments upon them.

We were still huddling together, overwhelmed by the violence of nature and incapable of coming to any decision, when suddenly the wind lifted the other tent and threatened to blow it right away. I threw myself on it without thinking and held it down, my body on the tent, my hands in the snow. I had had my mittens stripped off in creeping out of our own tent, but that did not matter very much as I had put my hands in my warm trouser pockets inside an outer windproof smock. While we sat cowering together, I never thought of my hands; they were well off compared with the rest of my shuddering body.

Now they were in contact with the snow, and in the next two or three minutes this is what happened:

The tent was rescued. The Sherpas salvaged it. But I felt a burning sensation in my hands. The pain got worse and throbbed through my whole body.

Probably their warmth melted the snow when they first touched it. The icy hurricane seized on and sucked at the moisture, a hurricane of eighty miles an hour at a temperature of thirty-five degrees below zero, and the circulation of the blood at that altitude is sluggish.

The pain got worse and worse. I chafed my hands, and beat them against my sides; it did not stop the pain. I thought of creeping into my tent, but it lay like a sail, flat on the snow. I got into a panic, as if I had been on fire—and actually the injuries caused by frost and fire are similar—and started shouting.

The Sherpas, who had been busy so far salvaging the tent, rushed up, and as soon as they realised my disaster, Pasang and Ang Nyima undid their trousers and my hands felt a little warmth between their thighs. It was the only place in our half-frozen bodies where any warmth lingered. Pasang knew that. Meanwhile, Adjiba was hunting under my tent for my mittens.

My watching, critical self showed up again. I saw it all before my eyes as a picture, Pasang and Ang Nyima with their backs pressed against the wind, and myself kneeling crucified between them, my hands outstretched and hidden within the remnants of warmth which might still be my salvation. My animal self
relished these few seconds of warmth and shelter, but that other self thought: "What a subject for Kubin to paint! 'The Crucifixion' or 'Journey's End'."

I tried to think of a good title for this macabre scene, then went on inconsequently to wonder where Kubin lived now. Was he still at Linz, among those misty, sombre Danube landscapes which inspired his paintings?

Then my animal, life-loving self returned. Adjiba brought my mittens; I seized them. My hands were white and swollen. I felt they were done for, but we were not done for yet.

Panic returned.

"If we mean to live," I yelled, "we must go down, not sit here."

The Sherpas' grey death-masks did not come alive, but the three men acted promptly.

Values had altered. A wrap was worth more than a Rolleiflex. We snatched up any aid to warmth among the equipment and left everything else behind. The tents stayed where they were. The storm might destroy them completely or perhaps we might be able to recover them later, but now our lives were all we thought of.

I don't mean to suggest that it was my panic-stricken initiative that got us down. Our retreat was not the reward of my efforts or my fright, but the work of the three Sherpas. All the same, I feel that my will played the decisive part.

The Sherpas, owing perhaps to their religious faith or to their almost animal links with the earth, do not, as we do, regard death as the dark gateway to unknown dread. They die more simply and more harmoniously, and if I had said to Pasang, "There's no way down. We must die where we are," we should have stayed in Camp IV—for ever.

Yet it was nothing I did; it was just that un-asiatic tincture in my blood which made me shout: "We must get down unless we mean to die here."

The Sherpas took the brunt of the journey down. Their resource and energy returned as soon as the decision was made. We anchored the tents and left them where they were. It was not a retreat, but a rout.
My hands were useless. Pasang had to strap on my crampons for me, then we roped up and began the descent. I recall very little of the strenuous hours which ended in Camp III. I can only remember the violence of the storm, which drove us on over the snow, and the sight of the Sherpas throwing themselves down and creeping like cats when a sudden gust caught us. I could feel the throbbing agony in my hands and the wind cutting my face like a knife. I could see the clouds of driven snow, which showed us how vain our hopes and efforts were. It was hard going.

But I also remember the feeling of security and friendship. We were four on a rope, and I felt sure that all or none would get down. It was not conceivable that the strongest of us would unrope and leave the rest to their fate; it was equally inconceivable that we should abandon the weakest because he hindered the rest. Anything of the sort would have made nonsense of the life we led.

Perhaps memory idealises, but I doubt it. The rope was not just a rope to be tied and untied as desired. It was too strong a bond to be severed lightly.

As we got down the storm abated, but by now the Sherpas too had their finger-tips frost-bitten. When we reached the perpendicular step in the ice-fall we let each other down on the rope to Camp III, where we found Sepp.

He had got back his form and climbed up to Camp III, from where he had tried for several hours to come to our rescue, but he was blown again and again off the steps of the ice-fall. Once the wind carried him a hundred and seventy feet through the air and he landed in soft snow not far from a sheer drop.

He looked ghastly. His face was aged and furrowed, and ice and snow clung to his beard.

Later I asked him, when we were looking over our photographs, why he had not taken some shots of us then. He could have got some striking pictures.

"I didn’t like to," he said. "You looked so frightful. Pasang was crying and talking about dying all the time."

I remember nothing of all that. I only remember how glad
I was to see Sepp, and how it dawned on me for the first time that we had failed.

I showed him my hands. They were like tuberous growths by now.

"They're finished and the summit's finished."

The flight was resumed, Camp III vacated. The rope was no longer needed, we were at home on the ridge now, and at this height the storm was endurable. We had given death the slip. But the pain in my hands pulsated through my whole body. I knew my life was saved; I was sure my hands were done for.

Down to Camp II. I tottered down the ridge which we had ascended a few days before feeling so confident of success. Glorious, no doubt, to have been on such terms with death. But sad to be a cripple, I thought, as I tottered on.

Camp II. Late afternoon by now. Helmut was there. Although not yet well and although it was his job to organise the "lift", he had come up through the storm with the presentiment that we might need his help. He was not a doctor of medicine, but he was able to give me the first injection to stimulate my circulation.

Tents were not yet put up. I sat among the rocks in the wind and bared my arm. Pasang held me in his arms with motherly solicitude while Helmut gave the injection.

Flight was still our one thought. We wanted to get away from the mountain which had handled us so cruelly, down to Camp I, where we should be less exposed to the storm, but I was too weak and could go no farther. I was afraid of the long screes. I was tired and only wanted to forget.

Two tents were set up and four of us stayed there for the night, Sepp and I in one, Gyalsen and Da Nurbu in the other. All the rest went on down.

I was lying down when Pasang came to say goodbye. He was going to take my hand when he saw my hands, so he bent over me instead and kissed my cheek. I felt like a corpse to whom he was bidding farewell.

Never could I have dared to believe that we should kiss each other again two weeks later, again with tears in our eyes,
tears not of pain this time but of happiness because we stood together on the summit.

But that night at Camp II I had no hope whatever. All I had was the ever-recurrent certainty that my hands were done for and the peak lost.

I was as helpless as a babe and Sepp looked after me with tender care. The same thoughts went round and round in my head like a never-resting wheel; again I asked the question mankind has always asked: Why had it to be? Why could the weather not have held up one day longer? Why had the wind to blow with that destructive fury? Where and when had I committed the crowning mistake? But no, the assault had been properly organised and there had not been any mistake. Where then was the hidden blight? Was it that arrogant self-confidence of the evening before? Or could we be so cruelly punished for no reason?

There may be no answer to these senseless questions. They whirled round in my head, but they did not diminish my sufferings or shorten the seemingly endless night.

Sepp told me later that I talked to myself as if I had been delirious and continually asked for tea. Gyalsen and Da Nurbu were kept busy all night, melting snow and boiling water. According to Sepp again, I took eighty pills to help my circulation, though the maximum daily ration was sixteen. Apparently it did no harm; indeed, my hands got far better than I had dared to hope.

By noon next day we were all assembled in Camp I for a council of war. We felt dispirited and beaten. My hands needed medical attention and the nearest doctor was in Katmandu, three weeks march away. Probably the moist and tropical climate of the valleys would do my injuries more damage than the cold, bacteria-free air of the high regions. I remembered Maurice Herzog’s account of how the expedition doctor had to keep amputating fresh pieces of his finger during the return journey from Annapurna. We decided it was better for me to stay where I was.

My hands meanwhile had swollen to twice their size and were covered with huge blisters. We had all the latest cures for frostbite and knew also how they should be administered,
but we did not know whether these blisters, which looked as if they had been caused by burns, should be left to dry up or be lanced. At the medical consultation we held, Sepp very sensibly said he was no doctor and refused to cast his vote, Helmut was for leaving them to dry up, but Pasang said with utter conviction: "All cut, all cut." As Pasang had certainly seen and dealt with more cases of frostbite than any of the rest of us, we followed his advice.

The doctors in Vienna told me that it was the very last thing we should have done. But after all, Pasang is a priest and a climber, not a doctor.

Camp I was ideally sited on a moraine, composed of rock fragments overlying the glacier, and during the cold nights we could hear the ice beneath cracking. Cho Oyu was there in front of our eyes, its peak looking strangely foreshortened and flat. We could stay there in comfort and recuperate.

We soon recovered our spirits after a few hours of rest. The mountain had given us a check, but Sepp, Helmut and Pasang were undamaged. They could make a second attempt as soon as we had got back our strength.

Pasang was the first to get over the effects of the storm and we decided that he should return to Namche Bazar to fetch our reserves of petrol, flour, tsampa and meat. We knew now that we could not take the mountain by storm. It was going to mean patient and careful preparation.

It was not from negligence that we had left some of our stores at Namche Bazar, but to avoid unnecessary expense. We worked it out like this:

We might reach the summit quite quickly, in which case it would be a waste to have all our stores carried on from Namche Bazar and back again. On the other hand, we might find almost at once that the mountain was unassailable and then we should probably seek some other goal in the Everest region. For this too it would suit better to have our depot at Namche Bazar.

We had not, of course, overlooked a third possibility: the bid for the summit might occupy a considerable time, in which case we should obviously require the whole of our supplies. But the time would also allow, or so we thought, for sending a few men back for them.
Our worst enemy was the wind. Beneath a cloudless sky it swept the bare slopes at speeds up to 80 miles an hour.
And now we wanted them all. We did not know yet how urgent the need would be or with what anxiety and apprehension we should count the days.

So Pasang and a few of the Sherpas would return to Namche Bazar, and we could expect them back in about ten days. Our supplies would last us till then. Also, there were a few tins buried in the snow at the high camps, and we could go after these if we ran short.

We little thought then that these tins of fish, beans and sausage, abandoned in our flight, would be in the nick of time for a fresh assault ten days later. No longer something good to fall back on, they would constitute the bare build-up for our second attempt on the summit.

Pasang was all eagerness to be off to Namche. Before Helmut had done digging about in my fingers, before the horror of the storm had ceased to echo in my ears, he was asking how many pounds of tsampa and how much petrol he was to bring back. And should it be half a yak or a whole one? A whole one would have the advantage that it would come on its own feet.

I was annoyed at the time by his haste to be off, for the state of my hands appalled me, and, like all sick people, I was egocentric. When I look back, I see how right his instinct was. If he had delayed one day, who can say whether we might not have missed the weather, and the peak?

Helmut attending to my frost-bitten hands after the catastrophic hurricane at Camp IV, while Ang Nyima looks on intently.
CHAPTER NINE

The Snow-Cave

For the time being, the peak did not bother us. On the contrary, we were thankful to forget it.

When wind and sunshine permitted, I lay in the open in my sleeping-bag and enjoyed the glorious view. The six Sherpas who had stayed behind spent the time mending our tents and cooking. One day when the weather was favourable, they climbed to Camp IV and brought down the two tents we had left there.

Our two Tyrolese, now fully recovered, found camp-life irksome and set off, carrying only light baggage, to reconnoitre the west face of Cho Oyu. We were all in good spirits again. My injuries did not make a return to lower regions necessary and the Tyrolese were in great form. We could expect Pasang back in ten days with fresh supplies; and then we would try our luck again. Meanwhile we would wait and recuperate.

So we thought. But on the third day Adjiba suddenly announced that he could see some people low down on the moraine, and with our field-glasses we made out two figures apparently heading for our camp. It was impossible at that distance to make out any details, but they seemed to have a military look and we even imagined we caught an occasional glint of metal. They might be Tibetan or Chinese soldiers. Our high camps and we ourselves must have been visible from far within Tibet, and probably they were coming to have a look at the intruders. Although we were confident of being in Nepalese territory in Camp I, we did not look forward to the encounter with any pleasure. We had our passports and could only hope that the frontier guards, if such they were, would recognise that our aims were innocent.
When they came nearer, we saw that they were dressed as climbers. The glint had come from their ice-axes.

"A mem-sahib," Adjiba said, and we were inclined to agree, although naturally both wore trousers and windproof smocks; Himalayan wind-proofs, unlike the fashionable garments for winter-sports, do not do justice to the female form.

We went to meet these new arrivals.

It is always a strange experience to encounter Europeans after being for some time in a country where you don't expect them. There is a pleasure in being with people again who speak the same language and probably have similar interests; the longing for Europe, which you cannot always forget, is unexpectedly, and to a slight degree, appeased. You are no longer by yourself, and with equal suddenness your links with your native-born companions are weakened the moment you start up in an unknown tongue, or in English at a speed they cannot keep up with.

I remember once when I left Tibet disguised as an Indian pilgrim with Kitar and Kapur and met a young Englishman in the Himalaya who was hoping to shoot a snow-leopard. It was fine to talk to him about common interests; but far finer to be rid of him and to enjoy alone the last weeks of our primitive and taciturn life!

Then again, that first meeting with a white man after my four months of solitude in west Nepal. It was an Englishman again, who lived with an Indian wife at Pithoragahr, the terminus of our travels. I had no idea that any European lived there and when I saw him passing the Dak bungalow where we were putting up, I ran after him and we shook hands as if we had been old friends. He at once invited me to stop with him in his house, which was on the top of a hill and unlike any house I had ever seen. He had once been an architect, apparently an eccentric one, and had had the finest site in the world at his disposal—the crest of a hill, with a view of the Himalaya for a stretch of five hundred miles. The north wall of his house was entirely of glass. To the west you saw the sacred mountain of Badrinath, to the east Annapurna. I spent a delightful evening with him and woke to an unforgettable morning when every peak was lit by the rising sun. We talked of many intimate
and personal concerns, just as we might have done in Europe; and yet as the morning wore away I wanted to be back with the Sherpas again; I was ready to exchange the incomparable view and the stimulating talk for the common life of the Dak bungalow and the few words which were all my understanding with the Sherpas needed. The next night was spent, not among books, but among slightly tipsy Sherpas (except for Pasang, who never drank at that time) and I was perfectly happy. The return to one's own life is usually far harder than parting from it.

Consequently, we may be forgiven if we went to meet the newcomers with mixed feelings.

They were indeed climbers and they negotiated the unpleasant moraine with a speed that aroused our admiration. We now recognised them as Madame Claude Kogan and Bertholet of the Swiss Gaurisankar Expedition.

We had met the Swiss in Delhi and Kathmandu, and wished each other success in our several enterprises and drunk to "our" peaks.

The Sherpas brought our visitors tea in our tents, and Bertholet told us that they had found Gaurisankar too hard a nut to crack. He suggested we might tackle Cho Oyu together.

We showed no enthusiasm for this proposal and said we preferred to carry on with our plans on our own. There were so many "undisposed of" peaks round about, of 23,000 feet or so, which would be well worth while, or if they wanted one of the giants, there was Lhotse waiting.

Madame Kogan replied that it was too late now to alter their plans; the whole Swiss Expedition, coolies, yaks and all equipment, were arriving next day. The suggestion that they might select some other goal in the neighbourhood was repeated and we then separated on very uncomfortable terms. The Sherpas stood round, eager to hear what was being said, for they understood enough to be alarmed. We did not know how to answer their questions but could only say that we should have to wait in the hope of the Swiss turning their attentions elsewhere.

As Sepp and Helmut did not want to waste the next day, they decided to climb a very beautiful and very steep mountain
of 20,600 feet which stood out against the sky on the far side of the glacier where we had our camp. It was a fine day and I could lie in the open and watch them.

It was not very pleasant. At first they had screes to cross and were not easy to pick out, but as soon as they got on to the glacier, which extended to the summit, their bright-coloured wind-proofs showed up against the white. It was a difficult ice-face and their progress was slow. I could see them with the field-glasses laboriously cutting steps and securing each other; and sometimes one or other would be motionless for minutes on end on that ice-face, which in places was in shadow. I could imagine how cold and uncomfortable it must be.

We had not been too lucky of late, and it was not hard to think of even worse blows. First there was the catastrophe at Camp IV, now the arrival of the Swiss, and how appropriate it would be if those two up there had an accident.

The pleasure I took in their fine performance was marred by anxiety, until late in the afternoon they reached the 20,600-foot peak, which they christened Mount Tyrol.

We below did not lack for diversion. We could watch the ascent of Mount Tyrol above, or follow, below on the moraine, the passage of the long Swiss train across the glacier.

Sepp and Helmut got back late in the evening by the light of their torches, full of the glorious day they had spent, and also of confidence in themselves after achieving such a feat in the most difficult circumstances. They too had seen the arrival of the Swiss and reported that they had put up their tents about an hour away below us.

We expected them to come next day to pursue our discussion, but when they still did not appear in the early afternoon we went to their camp. I had not walked a step since my return from Camp IV and was unsteady on my feet in the loose stones of the moraine; I had also lost my voice, owing no doubt to gasping in so much ice-cold air, and could barely croak; and then there were my swollen and useless hands. It was unlikely therefore that I would impress the Swiss as leader of an expedition, but perhaps they might have seen Sepp and Helmut on the ice-wall the day before and their performance might make up for my poor showing.
We were given a very friendly and hospitable welcome. We sat down in a large tent on metal chairs at a proper table, a luxury we were unused to, and ate biscuits and jam and freshly make yak wurst. After days of nothing but Ang Nyima's pea soup, I'm afraid we ate more than was consistent with good manners, but these luxuries could not stave off the real object of our visit for long. We took our stand on our special permission from the Nepalese government to attempt Cho Oyu this autumn. Permission for any of the higher peaks in Nepal had to be applied for in good time, and in many cases there was a waiting-list: "Spring 1953, the English. Autumn 1953, the Germans. The Japanese have applied for Spring 1954—yes, you may have Autumn 1954." Cho Oyu, we asserted, had been reserved for us exclusively.

The Swiss replied that they had a travel permit for the whole district and that they were entitled therefore to climb any mountain.

We countered by saying that they had never either in Kathmandu or elsewhere mentioned any thought of climbing Cho Oyu, although they well knew it was our goal. If they had, the government would certainly have told them that Cho Oyu was reserved for us.

To this they answered that we had never stressed our intention of reaching the summit, and that they had had the impression that we meant no more than a reconnaissance. We replied that there had never been any mention of a reconnaissance in any of the accounts of the expedition in the press; it was described simply as an expedition to Cho Oyu. Naturally, we had not said much about reaching the summit because our small numbers might have aroused comment.

They made it clear they would never agree to our claim. Helmut, who was the only one of the three of us who spoke French, conducted our case; I put in a croak here and there and Sepp stared into vacancy with a sombre look. In spite of this we all three ate heartily.

The Swiss repeated their offer of collaboration. They would let us be the first on the summit. But it was collaboration we desired above all things to avoid. The modest outlay was the great distinction of our expedition. We believed, and wished
THE SNOW-CAVE

to prove, that a peak of 26,000 feet could be scaled by a three-
man team, although nothing of the sort had been attempted
before; and we refused to sacrifice this distinction at the last
moment. We told them we had established our assault camp
after cutting out our route through the worst difficulties
of the ice-fall, and asked them to wait until we had made
our final attempt, which should be at the first favourable
moment.

Raymond Lambert, warned by his experiences on Everest
two years earlier, objected that the storms would increase in
violence every day and that to agree to our proposal would
cost them too much time. A few angry words followed, but
in spite of this an agreement was finally made. The Swiss might
start at once to establish their Camps I to III, that is, up to
about 23,000 feet, and then wait until our attempt had been
made.

This was a strange arrangement to come to for a mountain
of that height, up to then almost unknown, on which we had
expected to have a clear field and unlimited time. We were not
sure it was the right conclusion. It might have been better,
considering our small and weakened team, to accept the Swiss
offer of collaboration with their well-equipped five-man ex-
pedition. It was Sepp chiefly who stood out against making
any compromise. “Rather let the peak go than that,” he
said.

We swallowed our last biscuits spread with jam and re-
luctantly declined the invitation to stay on to supper. It would
be dark and we did not want to keep our Sherpas waiting, or
they would be out with torches looking for us. Dr. Lochmatter,
the Swiss doctor, examined my hands and consoled me. I should
only lose one and a half fingers probably, and there was no
need for an immediate operation. Only I must avoid cold.
Lambert rapped his stumps on the frozen snow. “Long
fingers nix good,” he said to comfort me. “Short fingers nix
cold.”

Once more we exchanged good wishes and then tramped
slowly and not too happily back to our camp. The Sherpas met
us with torches and wanted to know what was to happen now.
We calmed them down by saying, “All right,” but we were
not too sure about it. Ang Nyima produced his best bean soup and we tried not to think of the yak *wurst*.

We had to make a decision. The most reasonable thing would be to await Pasang’s return with fresh supplies, for we were scarcely able to feed ourselves even on the most meagre scale. That would be all right if we could remain in base-camp and take it easy, but it would be another matter if we had to provide for the exertions and possible delays of a new bid for the summit.

When Adjiba went up to Camp IV to fetch down the tents left there he made an inventory of the supplies left buried at each camp. He did this in Tibetan characters and in red chalk on a felt boot, which he also brought down with him. I have kept this very original form of inventory as a memento, but although the felt boot is impressive, the list was not.

| Camp I.   | 6 Nescafé          |
|          | 3 Ovaltine         |
|          | 1 Cocoa            |
|          | 3 Porridge         |
|          | 1 Cheese           |
|          | 2 Jam              |

| Camp II.  | 2 Cocoa            |
|          | 1 Cheese           |
|          | 1 Milk             |
|          | 1 Primus           |

| Camp III. | 2 Cocoa            |
|           | 1 Coffee           |
|           | 1 Cheese           |
|           | 3 Jam              |
|           | 10 lbs. Tsampa     |
|           | 1 Phoebus cooker   |
|           | 1½ pts. Petrol     |

| Camp IV.  | 4 Fish             |
|           | 2 Meat             |
|           | 2 Milk             |
|           | 6 Porridge         |
|           | 1 Primus           |
|           | 1 Phoebus cooker   |

At 25,600 feet the surrounding peaks look noticeably lower.
Six Sherpas besides we three would have to live on these items, and it looked as if nourishment would be chiefly hot drinks, as long as the petrol lasted.

We stayed all next day in Camp I, unable to come to a final decision. Were we to wait or start on the climb? Then one of our Sherpas, who felt our helpless situation as keenly as we did ourselves and had been snooping round the Swiss camp for news of their intentions, reported that the Swiss had started on the ascent.

Unless we meant to let the peak go we could not wait any longer. Next day must see us at Camp III.

The Sherpas knew, better perhaps than we did, how ill-prepared we were, but did not utter a word of protest or warning. They were splendid. Although they were deprived of the authority and experience of Pasang, their leader, they did not hesitate; they were ready to repeat the ascent into the region of killing storms from which they had only just escaped with their lives. We owed our final success not only to Pasang's unique achievements and our own tenacity, but even more to the loyalty and self-sacrifice of the other Sherpas. The hard work and dangers ahead did not promise fame, as they did for Pasang; they meant nothing but hard work and danger and the feeling of having been in the show.

Ang Nyima and Da Gyalsen stayed behind in Camp I. The other four Sherpas, including the most experienced of all, Adjiba and Gyalsen, climbed with us.

We were not such a hopeful and dare-devil team as on the first occasion. We had been through too much. We had learnt the deadly fury of a storm at 23,000 feet up and knew that we could never reach the summit unless conditions were favourable.

It is just this helplessness and utter submission to chance that seems to me the best of the high Himalaya. In our own mountains technical ability, careful planning and physical strength can carry it off in the teeth of the worst weather—man can be master of his fate there even in the most adverse conditions. On the high peaks of the Himalaya technical ability, the best equipment and correct planning only enable one to accept the verdict of a higher court. And even if all conditions
are met and a storm strikes the intruders, there is no going on or getting down. The dependence on a higher power—call it luck, chance, fate or God—gives such enterprises an eerie suspense, a feeling of expectancy and humility. You do all that lies in your power, but the verdict lies elsewhere.

My plan was to go as far as Camp III, where, in spite of my hands, I might be able to help in organising the "lift". The route was familiar now, for we had trodden a regular path up the screes, and it gave us a sense of security and proprietorship.

We passed Camp II without stopping and without putting up tents. We wanted to get to the foot of the ice-fall. Our tracks were visible even on the ice; apparently the Swiss had passed by in the meantime. We did not rope up: each man went as fast as he could. Often we were widely separated, but not one of us ever dreamt of falling out. We knew each other and our own powers so well by now that we formed a unit even when we were apparently far apart.

We were afraid of the violent wind and did not want to expose our tents to it if we could help it, so at Camp III we dug out a cave in the snow. Sepp, being an engineer, undertook the planning of it and most of the labour too. Through snow which was powdery and not too hard-frozen, a sloping shaft led into a vaulted chamber, in which we could sit without bumping our heads too badly. The shaft had to be negotiated on all fours, or if you did not want snow down your neck, you could wriggle your way along. The entrance was barricaded against the uncomfortable draught with a ruck-sack and some lumps of snow. I, as the invalid, was given the best place, between Sepp and Helmut and so protected from the cold on both sides. Helmut lay on the outside wall and maintained, after a short time for reflection, that the draught blowing through the powdery snow was distinctly perceptible at every gust of the wind. We who were on the inner side found it easy to administer consolation by pointing out that when our dug-out had had time to freeze our breath, there would be nothing more to worry about, as the whole interior would then be cement-faced. Helmut muttered something, but did not seem convinced. Adjiba and Gyalsen cooked, and every time
they made tea or cocoa our cave was enlarged because they obtained the water from the ceiling.

It became quite pleasantly warm. Perhaps that is an exaggeration, but it will pass if taken as a comparison with the flapping tents. The accounts of the arctic igloos in which Eskimos sit and sweat, bare to the waist, never convinced me, and now I believed them even less. I pulled a second wrap over my woollen cap and settled down to sleep.

Next day was not very fine, but it was not hopeless. The plan was for Sepp, Adjiba and Gyalsen to attempt Camp IV. If they succeeded and the weather held, Sepp and Adjiba would try for the summit on the day after, and Gyalsen would stay at Camp IV. Helmut and the other Sherpas would follow up and cover the return of the leading two. It was a lot to ask of them, but we dared not let a single favourable day go by.

The three crept out of the dug-out. The wind had increased. They headed for the ice-fall and were lost to sight; we crawled back into our shelter.

It now seemed very empty, and we had a long day before us. Perhaps another and another after that would elapse before I, who had to stay behind alone, would know what luck they had had.

There is nothing I dread more than having to wait and do nothing. It gives time to think. On this occasion I weighed victory against the sacrifices it might entail and saw it not as a participant but as I might in after-years, with a cold and ageing eye. I was oppressed by the weight of a life-long responsibility.

After a few hours we heard sounds in the snow outside. The three had returned, looking done-in and very cold. Sepp told the news. The wind and the cold had become very severe. They had got up the ice-fall, but on the level ice behind it the wind was so violent that it seemed hopeless to attempt to reach Camp IV. They had buried the tent and a few other articles intended for the assault in the snow and turned back.

I did not know whether to feel disappointed or relieved. I was glad to see them back, but every day’s delay reduced our rations and made the peak more remote—unless Pasang arrived in the nick of time.
And now that we heard how the storm hurtled the snow across our roof we felt very thankful to be together and alive. It was a night of relaxed tension.

Next day was so bad we were scarcely able to emerge. It took all our courage when the necessity arose, and we returned half frozen. Our dug-out, when we had wriggled in head-first, seemed the only safe refuge beneath the cruel, cloudless sky, stretching on far below us over the mountains of Tibet. In this pitiless world the snowfields seemed to be gliding along because the storm continually drove the crystals of snow before it. Wind was the only element, and it was no longer the movement of air but a fearsome and menacing power with a demon at its back.

Helmut was giving me daily injections to stimulate my circulation. I knew that it depended on this whether I kept my fingers or not and yet I often found it difficult to submit. I could not get my pullover and windproof smock over my swollen hands in order to bare my forearm, so the injections were given in the thigh. But even pulling my trousers down was troublesome and, above all, cold. Helmut had to warm the frozen ampoules before he could fill the syringe, and I had to be ready the moment he was, or else the liquid would freeze again in the syringe. I would often gladly have dispensed with the injection, and my fingers too, but Helmut was standing no nonsense. His self-forgetful insistence was worthy of a better patient, and I can never be grateful enough for the way he undertook the wearisome business over and over again.

We were both fortunate in one respect: cold and wind were bearable down there. I was a patient in a white-tiled hospital and Helmut the house-surgeon. He had good reason to be called so; I have his scientific precision to thank for it that I got off with very slight permanent damage. He refused to let me off a single injection, curse them as I might.

Another long day in the shelter followed. Like all vacant days, it seemed both a brief moment and an eternity. There was nothing to do but wait. A useless attempt would be a waste of calories and energy, and we had to save both.

Sometimes we heard the squeak of frozen snow under the tread of human feet. Sepp told us that the Swiss had fixed a
second rope up the step in the ice-fall next to the one Pasang, Adjiba and I had fixed. This made it easier to negotiate.

So they were here. And the snow squeaked when they passed our dug-out.

We knew an assault-team would have to try for the summit at the first possible moment, and that was what we had promised the Swiss. It might be tomorrow. We no longer dared to hope that Pasang could return in time.

In the morning the wind had gone down after a calmer night. We could not let this chance go by: we had to act. Up to Camp IV was the order of the day. As we were making the necessary preparations inside our shelter, Adjiba reported that three persons could be seen on the ridge below. It was almost certain that it could only be some of the Swiss or their Sherpas, yet, hoping against hope it might be Pasang with the life-giving supplies, we waited in acute suspense.

Yes. It was Pasang.

He crept in, his face grey and lined with the strain he had been through.

"Have the Swiss reached the summit?" he asked.

"No," we replied.

"Thank God for that," he panted. "I would have cut my throat."

It was no mere phrase. He had not the air of a man who was giving way to exaggeration. He had made a unique contribution already to the history of climbing, and had a second instalment still to make.

He had heard at Marlung, 13,000 feet, on his way back that the Swiss Expedition was heading for Cho Oyu. In the Himalaya as in all sparsely inhabited countries news spreads with incredible speed and accuracy.

So, after quickly packing up the supplies, he had covered the distance to our Base Camp over the arduous Nangpa La in one day, accompanied by two Sherpas. Now he was with us at Camp III on the morning of the second day, bringing with him, moreover, the provisions we needed. Early in the afternoon of the next day he was to stand on the summit of Cho Oyu. In barely three days he would have surmounted nearly 14,000 feet as well as travelling many miles over moraines.
and glaciers of unusual difficulty. This exploit is, I believe, unique.

For the moment we naturally could not know what the next day would bring, we could only rejoice that Pasang had come in time. He had brought some eggs for us, and when Adjiba cooked them we found them delicious and invigorating. We now had enough food to attempt the peak with a clear conscience. Also, the lift from the camps below was beginning to function smoothly again. The peak was no longer an irresponsible gamble but a justifiable attempt.
CHAPTER TEN

In Tune with the Infinite

The start from the dug-out reminded me of the flight from Camp IV when the storm had wrecked our tents. But this time we were not fleeing from death, we were driven by a wild desire to exploit life to the utmost.

It was my original plan to stay behind in Camp III to avoid hindering the assault-team. But I shared the optimism which Pasang's arrival and the supplementary food inspired, unfounded though it might have been, and while the assault was on, Camp III would be nothing more than an unimportant supply depot, too far down to get immediate news of how things were going and to take appropriate measures. To sit and wait in that hole in the snow seemed to me too horrible a prospect.

So I too got ready for the start while we devoured what was left of the eggs. It meant being a burden on the others as I had to ask them to lace up my boots and strap on my crampons, but they found time to take charge of me in spite of the need for haste.

I felt my helplessness on the steep ascent compared with the energy and go of the rest. One of my crampons came loose on the ice-fall and when I tried to put it right my hands began to throb with pain until I could have cried, not only for the pain but at being a drag instead of a help on this critical day. Gyalsen came and tightened the strap for me, and I was able to go on again after having halted our progress for a few precious minutes.

We unrope above the ice-fall. The equipment buried by Sepp on his last sortie was shared out, then we followed the tracks we had made in the snow scarcely two weeks earlier. They marked the route but were little help otherwise. Apparently
the Swiss had not got up so far, as our tracks were the only ones the storm and sun had weathered. But whereas at our first attempt we sank in to the knee and every step was an effort, today we could walk on hard, wind-packed snow.

It seemed we might actually have struck that brief and favourable spell when the autumn storms had swept away the summer snow and not yet assumed their absolute and deadly dominion. I had hoped for this interval long ago when making my plans. I had experienced it in west Nepal, where we met with favourable weather for the highest ascents even at the beginning of December, but as I had no comparable data I was not sure whether that had been due only to an exceptionally fine autumn or whether the same might be looked for in east Nepal. In theory one might hope that between the summer monsoon, which brings snow-storms from about June to September, and the winter storms, during which any attempt is useless owing not only to the cold but also to the short days, there might be a brief truce combining the advantages and disadvantages of both seasons, when storms were endurable, cold endurable, and when the wind had swept the mountain clear of deep snow.

In spite of the efforts demanded of us and a shortness of breath which made it difficult to speak, we felt hopeful. I was an outsider in this final struggle, but I felt thankful and elated. When I climbed these steep slopes on the first occasion I was accompanied only by Sherpas, but, magnificent and responsible though they are, the weight of the final decision rests on the European. It has often surprised me. There were Pasang and the rest of them, all physically superior to me and, in the case of Pasang and Adjiba at least, with a far greater experience of the Himalaya than I; and yet when it came to a vital decision, a matter of life and death, they waited for me to say.

At the same time, I have often heard Pasang criticising various expeditions. The Sahibs, he would say, had made a great mistake, or they had neglected the most obvious precautions. He did not seem to look up to the Sahibs exactly. He had too often known them helpless and confused.

Once or twice I brought the talk round to the possibility of an all-Sherpa ascent of a 26,000-foot peak. "You are technically
Adjiba emerging from the dug-out which was Camp III of our second attempt
and physically better climbers than we Sahibs," I told him. "You could easily collect enough money in Nepal and India to finance an expedition. Imagine what a success it would be to scale the Kangch with a Sherpa team!"

Pasang was ambitious, too ambitious perhaps, yet he obviously thought little of the chances his compatriots would have. The Sahibs might be too susceptible to frost-bite and make mistakes in their judgment of ice-conditions, but without them it was apparently not possible to scale a throne of the gods.

When my hands were frost-bitten at Camp IV and it depended on the self-sacrifice of the Sherpas whether they would let me be a drag on them or not in their descent, when I was only an aggravation of the disaster which the storm had brought on us, they looked to me to decide whether to venture on the descent or die where we were.

I could not understand the contradiction at the time and do not fully understand it now. Perhaps it is our longer and wider experience of mountains which entitles us to play this part. I do not like to bring in racial distinctions, but perhaps our climate and our past make it more natural for us to take responsibility.

In any case, I was glad to have Helmut and Sepp with me, or, more correctly, to be with them. It was their part now to plan and act; I was only the front-line headquarters which might perhaps be able to give support.

The storm resumed its merciless onslaught, and the sky was without a cloud. We reached the site of Camp IV and dug out the dumped tins. I saw the depressions in which our tents had stood and felt the desolateness of those hours.

Instead of stopping there we went on in hopes of finding a less-exposed site. We were all exhausted by the ascent and unable to climb much higher. The Sherpas, too, who were not stopping for the night, had to have enough time to reach Camp III by daylight.

We stopped on a level saddle of snow about a hundred and sixty feet above our old camp at four o'clock. We should have liked to dig out a cave, but it would have taken hours, as the snow was frozen so hard that the Sherpas could scarcely level the small patches needed for our tents. Again we had to

Ascent to Camp IV. The greyish-brown uplands of Tibet can be seen above the ridges of snow.
set them broad-side to the wind, as any other position would have cost too much labour in the hard snow. The tents were lashed together and anchored with special care to withstand the force of the gale.

Six of us spent the night there; Sepp, Pasang and Adjiba in one tent, Helmut, Gyalsen and I in the other. The rest of the Sherpas hurried back to the dug-out; it was high time.

My hands had begun to hurt me while waiting for the tents to be put up and I was the first to creep inside. I had no energy left for photographing Camp IV and I did not venture to ask Helmut or Sepp. We thought of nothing but getting the thin canvas between us and the gale.

The noise of it was all we could hear as we lay in our tents, with a few hours to spend before we could go to sleep, or try to. At those altitudes it is not a matter of course, but the boon of chance or of drugs.

Next day’s programme had been carefully planned. At the first hint of dawn Sepp and Pasang were to set off, climb the peak and return, while we were to go to meet them with a tent and sleeping-bags in case they might be needed. The choice of the assault-team was obvious; Pasang had never been in better form in his life and he if anyone deserved to scale the peak. We gave him the flags of Nepal, Austria and India to plant on the top when he got there, as he was firmly resolved to do. Sepp too was in first-class condition and an expert climber with long experience of ice. His determination alone would have entitled him to make the attempt; and the two of them formed a team which could be relied on to succeed if success was possible. To add any more would only be a drag on them. A second Sherpa would be superfluous; he could only duplicate Pasang without being his equal. Helmut was a little too slow-moving for such an ordeal, and I was a cripple and out of it.

We did not know exactly how high we were. According to the English photographs and altitudes we were now at least 22,900 feet up, but our altimeters only showed 22,500 or 22,900. Sepp and Pasang had therefore to climb quite 4,260 feet and descend again within the day, a tremendous, almost superhuman feat at this height.
They had to do it without oxygen. We had only two bottles for medical purposes and they were not adapted for using while in movement.

We had sometimes thought of establishing a Camp V at about 25,000 feet, but that idea was now unanimously rejected. We were within striking distance of our peak and we knew the deadly peril of bad weather. If it was favourable in the morning we were not going to play for safety but stake all.

For the present, we could only lie in our sleeping-bags and wait for the night. Time hung heavy, but I was not tired or somnolent. I was excited and my mind was lively. I thought of that talk in west Nepal nearly a year ago when Pasang first mentioned Cho Oyu; the intervening time had ripened the plan and now it had borne fruit. We lay there parted only by a few hours possibly from success; and I should have to wait and do nothing while the other two tried their luck.

I shouldn’t care to assert unequivocally that in my further reflections ambition and vanity played no part whatever, but I hope I may truthfully say so.

I imagined the following day: at dawn Sepp and Pasang would disappear up the snow-covered ridges, and I should be left to wait. The hours would be unbearably long. At midday we should say: “They must be on the summit by now,” but we should not know for certain. Then we should carry the tent and the sleeping-bags up the mountain in case they needed shelter in their descent. But we should still be waiting and gazing up at the steep and desolate stretches of ice and snow.

I should never be able to endure such a day as that. I had staked all on Cho Oyu since that talk a year ago, and now at the last moment my stake was disallowed. I had to sit and do nothing, to leave the crucial moment to others and stay safely in the tent. The prospect filled me with a gloom such as I had never experienced. It was so painful that I forgot the pain in my hands.

We were three in a tent only large enough for two. Helmut and I lay with our feet one way and Gyalsen with his the other. This saved space.

I said to Helmut across Gyalsen’s feet, “I’ve changed my mind. I’ll go and tell them in the other tent.”
Helmut merely gave a nod of resignation; he had had more than enough of me as a patient.

I crept into the other tent, where I was far from welcome. Adjiba was busy with our evening meal and was short of room in any case.

"I'm going with you tomorrow," I told Sepp and Pasang.


Pasang nodded and said, "Adsha—good." Probably he had never really believed we should not make the attempt together.

My gratitude to both was unbounded. They had not uttered a word of warning or dissent or even hinted that my change of plan might lessen their chances.

I did not in fact believe I should be a hindrance. I had gone as well as any of them on the climb up to Camp IV. My hands, of course, were useless, but if I protected them with cotton-wool and mittens I should be in no greater danger than the others. They would be just as likely to get frost-bitten. Though I have no love of high resolves, I felt on this occasion justified in my resolution to go for Cho Oyu. I had got as far as this once before and been cruelly chastised. I would try it again tomorrow.

I went back to my tent feeling very happy, and leaving Adjiba even happier at being allowed to get on with his cooking. The meal he was preparing was the indispensable prelude to success next day.

It was a sleepless night. Three are too many for one tent. Gyalsen spread himself more and more and his snores were maddening. His feet, although they were enclosed in his sleeping-bag, tickled my nose and I tried to push them across into Helmut's face—which was probably what he had just done to me. Gyalsen slept on as soundly as a child, undisturbed even by our four feet, which ought to have been a greater disturbance to him than his two were to us.

Much is often said after the end of an expedition about tent psychosis. Its members get on each other's nerves owing to the congestion and physical proximity of life in tents, and I have often had attacks of it on my travels. Little peculiarities which would not ordinarily be noticed cause disproportionate annoyance.
Kitar, who went with me to Tibet in 1936, used to chuckle to himself every now and then. He may have had happy memories or it may have been a trick of breathing, but it made me avoid sharing a tent with him.

Pasang cleared his throat so violently that you instinctively made room for the expected discharge. But he never spat. It took me a long time to get used to this habit of his.

Helmut made noises in the night which seemed to be the after-thoughts of an ample meal, and as we were usually hungry these noises were decidedly provoking.

These little annoyances are not really hard to bear. It is far worse to spend long nights side by side with a good sleeper. This sign of good health is taken as a personal insult which the sleeper has been keeping in reserve all day.

Gyalsen might be a fine specimen of a Sherpa in other ways, but nothing would wake him once he was asleep. We banged his feet in vain.

It was still dark when I heard sounds in the other tent, where Adjiba was getting breakfast ready. It is a long business to heat up anything at this height, but it was only three o’clock. Much too early, I thought.

At last I heard him say, “Breakfast,” as he handed in a bowl of cocoa and then one of porridge. I enjoyed the warmth and consumed both devoutly. Gyalsen was snoring on; Helmut had pulled his sleeping-bag up over his face. He wouldn’t have breakfast till later when we had got off.

It was slowly growing lighter outside. I could hear Sepp and Pasang getting ready. The wind was not too bad and the sky cloudless. A good day for the peak.

Time I was up, but I lay on as if assailed by doubts. Then I waked Gyalsen. He pulled on my frozen boots for me with great difficulty.

Boots are a real problem in a tent at great altitudes. You have to take them off, or your feet would freeze, and except for them you get into your sleeping-bag fully clothed. We did at least. You know that your boots will be frozen stiff by morning, and there is not a warm spot to put them in. It would be ideal if you could take them with you into your sleeping-bag and
keep them soft with the warmth of your body, but with all the clothes you are wearing you are swollen up like a balloon and it is hard enough to get into your sleeping-bag at all. A larger sleeping-bag which would give room for your boots as well would weigh more, so of two evils you choose the less, which presumably is frozen boots. You put them under your head as a bolster in the hope of keeping them warm. It is a vain hope.

Gyalsen panted and grunted and nearly broke my ankles before he succeeded at last. I put a protective covering made of sail-cloth over my boots to keep out the cold. It was not very strong, but it would last the day with crampons over it.

I emerged just as the sun was rising blood-red over the mountains of Tibet. It was icy-cold. Sepp and Pasang took up their ruck-sacks without a word. None of us spoke. We did not venture on any allusion to the favourable omens.

Pasang strapped my crampons on for me, an act of true friendship which meant baring his hands for several seconds in the freezing air. Sepp looked grave and resolute. We endeavoured to exchange smiles.

My hands were still supple from the warmth of my sleeping-bag and I could take hold of my ice-axe, which was soon clamped in an iron grip when they stiffened. Two ski-sticks dangling from my ruck-sack were no use at present as the ascent was too steep and the snow too hard, but higher up we might come on soft snow and then they might be a welcome help.

We said goodbye, laconically, to the others. We were eager to be off and also to end the standing about on that cold and shadowed mountainside.

The ascent was first up steep snow. I tried hard to set myself a steady pace and to breathe with deliberation. Slowly does it, I warned myself, we have many thousand steps to take. We mustn’t be in a hurry.

We were not roped. Pasang was in front of me, Sepp behind. Sometimes we were close together, at others almost out of sight of one another. We gained height pretty fast. The condition of the snow was ideal—a compact surface which our crampon-spikes just gripped enough to give support without fatigue. In deep snow these steep slopes would have been terribly exhausting; we could not have hoped to reach the summit.
And with any risk of avalanches the ascent would have been foolhardy. We seemed to have struck one of the few days when snow and storm conspired to create the best conditions.

Even so they were arduous enough. It was bitterly cold and the wind was getting stronger. Sepp's feet were without sensation. He had once had them frozen on the north face of the Eiger and they had been susceptible ever since. He hit them with his axe to make the blood circulate.

I felt my responsibility. Once more a decision had to be faced.

I might have said: "It won't do. Turn back." It would have been good advice. Yet I should never have got rid of the suspicion that besides the solicitude for Sepp there might have been a lurking ambition to be the only European to reach the top.

I might have said: "Pull yourself together, Sepp. You'll make it." But how could I take the responsibility for his losing a foot?

It was a case when each man must decide for himself. Pasang knew his own resources; I should know if I had to turn back; Sepp too must know best what to ask of himself. What I said to him was, "In your place I should turn back, but do as you think right."

There was no time to lose. It did not matter who reached the summit, as long as one of us did. Sepp took a few circulation pills, loosened the straps of his crampons, and carried on.

It was an act of courage and self-sacrifice. He knew well after his experience on the Eiger what frostbite meant; and it was not only ambition that spurred him on, but his loyalty to us, whom he would not leave in the lurch. We might all need each other's help before the day was over. I shall always be deeply grateful to him.

We were still in shadow. Sometimes the sun shone parallel with the ascent, but it gave no warmth. Pasang was in front, treading out our route as though possessed. So far I was going well; my breath and my feet were in good form and as long as I placed my crampons with care I had little need of my axe or my hands.
We had to take several breaths for every step. I had time to think, or to listen-in to my thoughts, between my gasps. A first hand-shake (so they ran) was just like each of my steps. I thought of the first meeting with someone who seemed to be likeable. As the fingers closed, their pressure gave a tentative promise of sympathy, yet you didn’t like to grasp too firmly in case you missed what was being offered. Nor did you like to give a limp hand, because you had your own feelings to express. It was the same with each step I took. I and this mountain wanted to make friends, otherwise I should not survive the day. I had to feel its surface with my crampons; not hurt it unnecessarily and yet impress it with my will.

These thoughts ran their own course in my head and eased the labour of breathing.

In time we reached the wide girdle of granite and ice which is the distinctive feature of this mountain; it is a steep climb of only a few minutes, but I tried in vain to get a hold with my hands or to pull myself up by my ice-axe. My hands were useless lumps and every time they touched the rock they hurt intolerably.

I was making these useless efforts when I heard Pasang’s voice above me.

"Rope, Sahib."

Sepp, who was just behind me, knotted the rope round me, and in a few seconds I was up. Pasang stowed the rope away in his ruck-sack without a word.

Up and up we went, and still there were steep and apparently never-ending slopes of snow above us.

I had a camera with black-and-white film in my ruck-sack, but I hadn’t the energy to get it out. Besides, I couldn’t have operated it with all those mittens on and I didn’t dare expose my fingers even for a couple of seconds.

Sepp, who had colour-film in his camera, took a snap of me at about 25,500 feet. It shows that we had got well up. The surrounding mountains, many of 23,000 feet and over, had sunk considerably by that time. When we made an enlargement there was a white projection from my lips, like a cigarette or a fault in the film.
About 330 feet below the summit. We were exhausted, and each step cost several breaths.

At the same time we felt an indescribable happiness
Above us was the vast expanse of the sky, edged by the world's highest mountains.

View from the summit of Cho Oyu
Pasang and I on the summit. On the left, Everest and Lhotse
“What can it have been?” I asked Sepp.
“You had an icicle on your face,” he said.
I hadn’t noticed it. The breath from my nostrils must have formed an icicle which broke off from time to time. My nose had been frozen without my knowing, and for the first day of the descent my nostrils were closed.

We had our one short rest on the shoulder where we had once thought of establishing a Camp V. Pasang produced a Thermos of hot coffee which tasted delicious and put new heart into us. We also ate some chaura, or roasted rice, a common food in the Himalaya.

There were no great difficulties now to be expected. We left Pasang’s rope and the ice pitons behind here. We should not come on deep snow now; the strong wind had done good work and swept the whole peak bare and exposed the ice in many places. So I left the two ski-sticks too. They were an unnecessary burden and knocked against my legs annoyingly.

Higher and higher. We moved like robots which could only go on and on. It was our wills, though, which strove on and made machines of our bodies.

The other peaks sank lower as we climbed and the blue sky of Tibet stretched ever farther. It was the old friend of many an adventure, the companion of many unforgettable hours.

The dreaded storm had died down. It was no more than a wind at our backs, helping us along.

We were now in what is called the “death zone”, the region of over 26,000 feet. The life-giving atmosphere of earth seemed to verge here on the cold of outer space, where men are intruders in a landscape of absolute and abstract beauty, never intended for their eyes.

The notion is of medical not journalistic origin. Medical science has discovered that without artificial oxygen the body can stave off degeneration, that is to say, death, for some time at these heights, but cannot renew itself.

Though each step was an effort and each breath a gasp, it was here we enjoyed the great experience of the whole day. It may have been due to the proximity of the sky, the consciousness of having reached the limit of our world, or to the
deficiency of oxygen, which made the brain-cells react differently. In any case we entered on a state where things lost their superficial outlines and revealed their true being, where the individual and his surroundings melted into a harmonious whole and even the nearness of death took on a benevolent instead of a menacing character.

I know from the accounts of others who have gone to these altitudes without oxygen that they have seen beneficent visions and heard friendly voices.

Frank Smythe tells how once on Everest he failed to distinguish between facts and visions. He knew that his companion, Eric Shipton, had turned back and that he was alone. But he could not rid himself of the feeling that Shipton was just behind him, and his nearness gave him strength and confidence although he knew that in fact Shipton was not there. Fact and feeling, space and time, ran into one another.

He also saw dragon-like creatures hovering in the sky. He knew that there were no such beasts. They were only optical illusions caused by eye strain. But when he shut his eyes and opened them again the dragons were still there.

Hermann Buhl tells how during his fine, solitary ascent of Nanga Parbat he heard a voice warning him that he had lost one of his mittens. It may have been a sixth sense, his subconscious, his guardian angel, or the help of dead friends.

I expected, as I fought my way on into the vast desolation, to hear my dead father's voice. I felt sure he would have a word of encouragement for me. I was so sure of it that I sometimes stood still to listen.

I heard nothing but the wind and behind it the utter stillness. Nevertheless, I was not disillusioned. The world seemed to me to be instinct with a hitherto unknown benevolence and goodness. The barrier between me and the rest of creation was broken down. The few phenomena, sky, ice, rock, wind and I, which now constituted life, were an inseparable and divine whole. I felt myself—the contradiction is only apparent—as glorious as God and at the same time no more than an insignificant grain of sand.

I lack words to describe the experience of these hours. Perhaps they are lacking in human speech, just as there are no
words for the smell of a flower or the emotion aroused by a sunset. It can only be conveyed by allusion and in the hope that one’s own fumbling may arouse in others the vibration of the same emotion.

Mystics of all ages have tried in vain to express their experiences, and have had to take refuge in similes.

I believe I went through something of the same sort. I had broken through a metaphysical barrier and entered a world where other laws were in force. I recalled Blake’s words. “If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to men as it is, infinite.”

Here the doors were all thrown wide open and an indescribable, impersonal bliss filled me. It did not prevent my believing that we should all die that very day. My waking mind was convinced of this. We should reach the summit very late and never get back either to Camp IV, or to the tent with which Helmut and Adjiba would come to meet us. We should have to bivouac in the open and we should be frozen. This belief was also part of the enfolding bliss; it had nothing heroic in it, or menacing, and it did not make me hurry.

As nearly all religions strive to take away the fear of death and to make it seem acceptable, I may claim to have had a genuinely religious experience.

Joy at our imminent success, of which I no longer had any doubt, played scarcely any part in it. The peak we strove for was no more important or unimportant than the world around me and myself; it was just a part of the whole.

I do not know how long this state of bliss lasted, two hours perhaps or three. The mountain still rose in front of us however high we went, offering little difficulty except what was due to our fatigue. We had now been on the move for eight hours almost without a pause, and we were getting slower and slower. At last the ascent slackened and the view widened.

Suddenly there was no further ascent. The view was unobstructed. We were on the peak.

Pasang was coming towards us. His ice-axe was in the snow with the flags of Nepal, Austria and India waving from it. I am no great lover of flags but at the sight of these three, my own country’s and Nepal’s and India’s, the two countries I
love so much and have to thank for so much, tears came into my eyes. It was three o’clock on the 19th of October, 1954.

Pasang embraced me. The tears that ran down his cheeks were blown away into eternity as crystals of ice. The peak meant more to him than it could to us. He had been Sirdar for twenty years and intent on a “very high” mountain. He nearly had his wish on K2 and on Dhaulagiri, but it just eluded him. Today the great ambition of his life was fulfilled. He was too happy to speak; he could only sob out over and over again: “The peak, Sahib, the peak.”

Sepp and I had tears in our eyes too, and felt no shame. We hugged and kissed each other. How glad I was all three of us were there. All three walked arm in arm to the highest point. The endless blue sky fell steeply all round us like a bell. To have reached the peak was glorious, but the nearness of the sky was overwhelming. Only a few men have been nearer to it than we were that day. It was the sky that dominated our half-hour on the summit.

Of course it had its bounds, and what bounds could be more august—Everest, Lhotse, Nuptse, Makalu, and there perhaps was the Kangch, and there the wild group of Kangtega. We might have gazed and gazed, but we were tired and could not delay.

Sepp had a small wooden crucifix which his mother had asked him to take and he now placed it in the eternal snow. Pasang and I buried sweets and chocolate in the ice as a thank-offering to the gods. This is customary in the Himalaya, even after surmounting a difficult pass. I have often thrown tsampa, rice and sugar to the winds, joining my thank-offering to those of my native-born companions. I naturally observed the ancient rite on this occasion too.

I tried to excavate a little hole in the hard snow with my ice-axe, but my hands were so clumsy that I had to kneel down to it. I remained in this position for a few seconds, the only right one, as it dawned on me, and I knew that we had all thanked the one God in our different ways.

We took the usual summit photographs, rather reluctantly though we knew they would be the only proof of how we had spent the day. It was difficult to pin the mind to correct
exposures. Besides, it was so cold that even Sepp could only take his mittens off for a second or two. I tried in spite of my clumsy fingers to take a panoramic view and then handed my camera over to Sepp. I made one attempt to wave the flag-bedecked ice-axe triumphantly, but either my arm was too weak or the wind too strong. Anyway, we were spared that picture. Pasang took a shot of Sepp and me, but he only got in our heads and unlimited sky. He is not very gifted in that direction.

Our shadows were lengthening; the half-hour had gone by. We had to start on the descent unless we meant to tempt providence.
CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Descent

After taking a last look we set off to follow our tracks down, going separately, as before, and faster than we had dared to hope. The difference between the ascent and the descent is many times greater at these heights than in our own mountains. We soon reached the shoulder and recovered the things we had left there. We knew now that my foreboding would not be realised; we should after all, barring accident, reach Camp IV that night. It was hard to believe that that little dot in the white and icy monotony far below meant life and safety. In a few hours we should be in our sleeping-bags and saying, “Do you remember——?” That breath-taking feeling of the peak would be a memory.

I tried to keep it as long as possible. I did not know whether I should ever again experience time and space as a unity that drew no distinction between memory and wish, and melted them into one experience.

As I staggered on through the glorious solitudes of the Himalaya I had known now for twenty years, the past was suddenly cut loose and swam into the present. The peak of Cho Oyu meant no more to me than my earliest feeling for that whole range of mountains. The one was unthinkable without the other.

Deliberately, step by step, as in the morning, I planted each crampon in the snow. It was not now to husband my strength but to enjoy this day for as long as I could.

I recalled my first sight of the Himalaya. A friend and I had gone to India on motor-bicycles and been put up by a German forester near Patiala. He took us with him to a shooting-lodge of the Maharajah’s, high up in the mountains, and far away in the north we saw a thin white streak—the ice-clad Himalayan peaks. The sight was a great joy to me. I did not know then that the love of those mountains would never leave me.
Back at Vienna University, as a geological student, when Professor Eduard Suess allowed me to suggest a topic for my Doctor's thesis I said as a matter of course, "The Himalaya".

He looked at me with a kindly and meditative eye. "I have never had a pupil who took the Himalaya for his thesis. It would give me great pleasure," adding after a pause, "only the Himalaya are very far away and the journey expensive. How will you manage it?"

"Easily," I said. "I am a journalist."

The professor nodded.

"Then it is settled. You will bring me your thesis back with you from the Himalaya."

I nodded too, but I did not smile.

It was true that I had had one or two articles on motor-bicycling trips published, but I was scarcely entitled to describe myself as a journalist. An experience I had had in Berlin not long before ought to have warned me against such an exaggeration.

German illustrated papers at that time had run into circulations of millions and paid highly for good pictures. I had brought back eight hundred excellent photographs taken with a Leica on a motor-bicycle tour in foreign parts and was confident they would serve to finance further travels. Thanks to an introduction from a friend of mine, I was able to show these pictures to the High Priest of illustrated periodicals. The interview is still fresh in my memory.

"An hour of my time is worth twenty marks," the great man told me. "However, you're young. I'll make you a present of the time needed for inspecting your photographs."

I had pasted them carefully into an album for this very purpose and was very proud of them. I fully expected to be greeted as a discovery. Press photographers might be sent anywhere in the world and had a thoroughly enjoyable time of it.

My book was examined with a professional eye, page by page. Each picture was considered with care, sometimes with a magnifying glass in order to appreciate the detail better. He did not utter a word as he turned the pages. After three hours of it my painful suspense was ended.
He shut the book and said, "No. 637 is middling, all the rest are worse than bad. They're very bad. If you take my advice you'll stick to geology."

In spite of this, I have financed my travels chiefly by means of my camera, and anyway No. 637 did not strike me as being particularly good.

Luckily, I did not have to disappoint Professor Suess. I persuaded a newspaper to give me an advance which paid for my journey to the Himalaya. When I reached Tibet, I spent a month of solitude among the highest mountains in the world, where I got to know their unforgettable beauty, and also Kitar.

He was the first Sherpa I ever travelled with, and a distant relation of Adjiba's, who was at that moment waiting for us a few hundred feet below. Twenty years ago the Sherpas were only at the beginning of their renown. They had had little experience of expeditions from the west and had not yet acquired their proficiency as climbers, but they were splendid fellows, less civilised than they are today, when they know the difference between nylon, perlon and grillon, and perhaps even more likeable. Many still wore pig-tails. Kitar wore his hair short; otherwise he was a native product of the country. It was impossible not to like him. I have told elsewhere of the joy and tragedy of his life, and also of his death on Nanda Devi. Kitar, as I have said, was the first Sherpa with whom I shared a tent, and I shall never forget him.

While I slowly continued the descent and the valleys were invaded by the shadows of night, Sven Hedin took Kitar's place in my memory. His books had inspired in me the wish to see the countries they described. After my return from Tibet he kindly wrote a preface to my book, but it was only just before his death that I made his acquaintance in Stockholm.

I spent several hours with him; his memories of the Himalaya, the holy mountain of Kailas, and the lake of the gods, Manasarowar, which he had seen over fifty years before, brought them more vividly before my eyes than even my own recent sight of them was able to do. I knew when we parted that I should not see him again. Vigorous and alert as he was, he had reached
the limit of human life. I found it impossible to thank him adequately for his share in introducing me to the Himalaya.

The wind had fallen and the sun was low. The uplands of Tibet, which a moment ago had glowed with soft colours, were now veiled in the purple dusk. Camp IV was clearly visible and there was no doubt of our reaching it without difficulty. Pasang was a long way in front of me; he must, I knew, be longing for a rest in his tent after the tremendous efforts of the last few days. Sepp was behind. He, like me, must have found that today's experiences brought earlier ones to mind.

They reminded me too that, besides these friends, there were many others who had shown me the way or made it smooth.

I saw Sven Hedin talking with such energy that his pince-nez always seemed about to fall off his nose.

I saw kindly Professor Suess, who, knowing that it was only a spirit of adventure and not intellectual ambition that impelled me to the Himalaya, nevertheless gave me my head and was a life-long friend.

I saw my father, who let me go my own way, although I'm sure it cost him many a prayer and many sleepless nights.

I saw Kitar's cheerful face and felt his nearness, as I had on many a stormy night in a tent high up on the Gurla Mandata when the wind threatened to hurl us over a precipice.

None of them was alive now. Yet as I went down the steep descent to Camp IV they seemed to be alive and beside me. Neither that day nor the peak would have been possible without them. It was all the gift of their great qualities, their friendship and their selflessness. It was their peak and their success, superficial, perhaps trivial in their eyes and not worth being awakened for out of their long sleep. Yet to them I owed an insight into a state of being where the laws of our everyday life were no longer valid and where man himself is small and his surroundings vast. We were suddenly together again, friends and companions as we had once been, and parted no longer by that delusive barrier called death. They were with me or I with them and they would understand and forgive my wish to have them with me on my hard and lonely path.
I had now reached the girdle of rock which had almost held me up a few hours before. Those hours seemed an eternity during which I had experienced much that life hitherto had denied me, but the descent was easier and I got down without any trouble. I found Helmut at the bottom. He and Adjiba had come as far as this in case we might need help or the shelter of a tent. He had heard from Pasang that we had reached the summit, and he was beaming. We scarcely spoke; I was still in a state of elation and it seemed only natural to kiss each other.

Then I went on, leaving Helmut to wait for Sepp. I was full of admiration for Helmut. He had taken on the thankless task of coming up in support, and he carried it out to the letter.

I could feel sure now that the day would end well and without accident. I scarcely felt fatigued, though I must have been because I often stumbled in places of no particular difficulty and had to save myself with my ice-axe from falling headlong.

The landscape was in the same key as at dawn when we set out—a red glow over Tibet. The shadows climbed higher. It was time to escape their icy embrace and the exposure of the mountain-side, yet I would not hurry. Sepp and Helmut were behind me and I felt how rare it was to feel the friends of the present and the past about one.

Camp IV was close. The wind had fallen. There was a bright light outside the tent where Adjiba was making us a hot drink, and in an hour or an hour and a half I should be there with him. He was not a man of many words. Probably he might say nothing at all, for he was a more silent man than Pasang, and even Pasang could only get out, "The peak, the peak." But I looked forward to the tight clasp of his arms.

Adjiba meant a great deal to me at that moment; he stood for all those wonderful Sherpas without whose aid I should never have enjoyed the Himalaya as I had. He was an old hand, five times on Everest, who had carried Maurice Herzog down from Annapurna when otherwise he might have lost his life from severe frostbite. He had been very near the peak of the earth's highest mountain; yet personal ambition never touched him. He had seen Sahibs die far above the snow-line and Sherpas too, but had never wavered in his faith that he had to live his life out in the Himalaya.
I have passed many weeks with him there. Twice I have seen death turn his ashen face into a mask of resignation, and shall never forget the bluish grey tint of his skin, the sign that death had already taken possession within.

Once it was in west Nepal, when he nearly bled to death from dysentery. My drugs were useless. Nothing checked the ebbing of his life. His eyes looked thoughtfully at me from his sallow face.

The same eyes looked into mine when the storm burst on us at Camp IV. They did not accuse me. He might have reproached me, since it was at my wish he was there, yet I saw nothing in his eyes but the memory of our happy hours together.

Now I went to meet this man who had twice been ready to die with me and for me, this time after the greatest of all our achievements and adventures.

How little really I knew of the thoughts and wishes which influenced Adjiba and the other Sherpas. I had been about with them for months on end, but I did not know the tenor of their thoughts and the things in life they wished for. I was ashamed to know so little of these friends of mine. It was comforting to remember how my own thoughts and wishes came unexpectedly like birds out of another sky. I had no command over them. Their wings suddenly darkened the sky, clear a moment before of a single wish, and drove me off on fresh travels. How could I expect to know more of my friends than of myself?

During my long talks with priests and hermits of the Himalaya I have often had an inkling of the great joy of being devoid of wishes, that utter calm which lies at the heart of all music and all earthly beauty. But then the birds have darkened the sky with their wings, and I am not sure I do not love them for bringing such restlessness with them.

I was glad on the whole that on our return journey through the Himalaya to Kathmandu we should not pass any of the temples or any of the caves where in earlier days I had been given the blessing of the priests and the counsel of the hermits. I should have found it hard to justify myself. A 26,000-foot peak! They would have shaken their grey heads in kindly concern.
My last thoughts of the day which had gone so well were sad because of their wise and disappointed eyes. Yet I hit on my excuse:

"I have had the same experience as you, only in another way. There are many paths to the final realization."

I fancied I saw a little sympathy in their eyes, though not full agreement.

There were still two hundred yards to go before reaching the camp, which was now in deep shadow—two hundred yards and then the ascent would be a memory. But I might still enjoy the last minutes of this day of this day—the illimitable view into Tibet where the dusk had laid its purple carpet; the gleam of the high peaks soaring up to catch the sun; the motionless air, unvexed by the hurricane which had harassed us for days; the complete weariness of my body, hurrying me to the camp as though it were not a part of me; my state of mind, oblivious of the laws of space and time. All this opened up a vast realm I had only dreamed of up to now.

I knew it was a final parting even though I might return to the Himalaya. I could not enjoy this view a second time, never descend again from the roof of the world. It would remain for ever a far-off dream.

Adjiba put an end to my reflections. Leaving his cooking, he ran the last steps to meet me, took me in his arms and said nothing but, "Sahib", again and again. It was so dark by now that I could not tell whether he had tears in his eyes.

He took the pot from the spirit-stove and held it out to me. We had only had a few gulps of coffee all day and I was so parched by the dry air that I could hardly speak. The liquid warmth was bliss: I drank it all at one draught.

Adjiba watched me with triumph, as though he had performed a great feat. It was hot rice-wine and it loosened the bands of cold and weariness and brought me back to the warmth of life from the vast and splendid spaces of the day. I got into the tent. Pasang was asleep. Sepp and Helmut now arrived. We had another sleepless night, but this time on account of happiness.

We kept asking each other—"Do you remember—?"

The day of the ascent was over.
THE DESCENT

It had made great physical and spiritual demands on us, and feeling that I could only give a personal account of it I asked Sepp and Helmut to complete the story with their own description of their experiences. I wish I could have given Pasang's too, but he was on another expedition, this time to Dhaulagiri, when I was writing this book.

This is Sepp's account:

"I had got my form back at last. The three days and nights in the snow dug-out, which we could not leave because of the violent hurricane, and the vain attempt in spite of it to reach Camp IV, had left me feeling rather mouldy. It was nothing new. A 26,000-foot mountain cannot be taken by force. The gods who sit enthroned on the highest peaks must first be favourably disposed before men may venture to approach them. And today I had the clear feeling that their mood had altered. The storm might still howl in undiminished vehemence and make the firmly anchored tents flap violently, but I lay quietly beside Pasang and Adjiba and without closing my eyes, preparing myself for the hours ahead. It was not unlike looking forward to a hard climb in the Swiss Alps: at first cold feet, then guts again—and neither would let me sleep. We had to climb four thousand three hundred feet in order to reach the top. I thought of Hermann Buhl’s great performance and doubted whether we should ever get down alive. But Pasang, the indestructible, was sure of it. He was in such tremendous form that I could imagine the effort it would cost me to keep pace with him. Then there was Herbert. He was coming with us in spite of his frost-bitten hands. All through our long approach-marches I used to dream of us two and Pasang together on the peak. Now it might come true.

Herbert, Helmut and Gyalsen were in the other tent. Coughs and grunts came from all sides. Nobody slept properly.

At three there were signs of life in our crowded tent. Adjiba, trusty soul, was getting the spirit-stove going; Pasang groaned as he tried to pull on his frozen boots. I was still condemned to immobility, because, as can well be imagined, a two-man tent holding three clothed and quilted men, three ruck-sacks and two porters' loads did not allow all of us to be on our feet at
once. I watched Adjiba cooking porridge with stoic and imper-
turbable calm. All these Sherpas are fine fellows, who are
equal to any situation and do their duty gladly and as a matter
of course.

We left our tent at six. It was still twilight and bitterly
cold. I said goodbye to Helmut, who wished us the best of luck.
Needless to say, I went back once more to my dear friend
Adjiba. He grasped my hand and said very quietly, 'Good luck,
Sahib.' And then he pulled some Dextro-Energens out of his
windproof and put them in my pocket. I could read in his face
that his good wishes came from his heart and I was so touched
that I lent him my twelve-spike crampons—he had forgotten
to bring his from Camp III, and put on ones with spikes only
round the edges.

We were carrying two ropes, pitons and snap-hooks, an emer-
geney sleeping-bag for shelter, some food and two Thermos
flasks of coffee. Our route ascended the steep windswept slope of
perpetual snow immediately behind the tents and a fissure choked
with drifted snow. We noticed the rarefied air and breathed
with difficulty. Our cumbrous clothing too helped to slow us
down. The peaks around us were already bathed in sunshine
and gradually the vast and secret uplands of Tibet were flooded
with light. I never saw them without feeling a longing to visit
them in spite of their sombre and unvarying colour. Soon I
had to stop looking at the glorious view and give all my atten-
tion to my feet. The hard, wind-packed snow did not make
easy going. We were high up now on the shadowed ice-clad slope
and could not hope to be in the sun on this north-west face
until many hours had passed. The cold seeped in through our
clothing; my toes had been lifeless for some time and now I
could not feel my feet at all.

Herbert advised me to turn back. But how could I give it
all up on the last day of our three weeks battle for the peak?
I was torn two ways. I did not want to lose my feet for the
sake of climbing a 26,000-foot peak. Yet once on the Eiger
bad luck had turned to good. Herbert and Pasang had gone on.
First I loosened the straps of my crampons at the risk of getting
my hands frozen, then I took a handful of circulation pills and
followed them. I could not forgo the peak.
THE DESCENT

Pasang, who was leading, struck out a well-judged route to a vulnerable place in the girdle of rock—it was a rock-climb of average difficulty. Herbert had to be given a rope, as his hands were useless.

On top we were in the sun; it only just caught us and gave no warmth, but it was cheering. I kept looking at the ridge on our left. I realised with dismay how terribly slow the ascent was at these extreme heights. I asked Pasang whether we could ever reach the top that day. He said, ‘Yes, sir,’ as if it was a matter of course.

He now traversed to the right over bad ice with a gradient of forty-five degrees. This stretch of under twelve hundred yards took us nearly three hours and by the end we were just about through. My crampons were uncomfortable and exhausting, as the risk of slipping was considerably greater than with twelve-spiked ones. At 25,000 agility decreases remarkably. Herbert too was in trouble on this lap and we were both pretty well knocked out by the time we reached the long-desired shoulder where we had once thought of placing our Camp V. Helmut and Adjiba had undertaken to follow on with a tent, so that we should not need to camp in the open supposing we failed to get back in time. I wondered whether they could ever get as far as this.

We paused for a drink of coffee and a mouthful of chocolate and then the climb was resumed. This next stage was wonderful because we had lowered all the surrounding peaks and there was a splendid view at our feet. I had no regrets and no misgivings. I was suddenly overwhelmed with happiness at being in the midst of these mountains. Mountains mean so much to me. And there was such a feeling of solemnity and sanctity up there.

I wondered whether other people would be affected in the same way. I thought of my people at home. My father would say, ‘That’s quite high enough. Now come down.’ And my mother, ‘Pray God nothing happens to you.’ And my wife: ‘Keep your heart up and don’t give in. I’ll help you.’

Yes, the peak was not far off now. Unless the gods turned nasty at the last moment we should soon scale their exalted throne.
CHI OYU

It was not so easy though. As soon as one ascent was slowly surmounted another rose beyond.

We were now in the so-called 'death-zone'. There was little oxygen in the atmosphere and air-pressure fell to 270 m.m. We walked slowly and uncertainly. Our rate of breathing rose to ten breaths to a step. Our minds began to wander and strange fancies came into our heads. I was suddenly seized with a frightful cramp in the belly and could hardly go on. Then I felt my feet were winged; someone seemed to lead me by my left hand while another unknown good fairy gently propelled me from behind. Pain and well-being alternated. I suffered and dreamed by turns.

Then suddenly the peak of Everest came into view. We had done it. Pasang, who had already hoisted his flags, came back and we all three walked arm in arm to the summit of Cho Oyu. We embraced and kissed each other and tried in vain to find words for our happiness. Herbert, radiant, tears in his eyes, could only say, 'Sepperl, I'm glad—'

And what about me! Tears ran down Pasang’s cheeks too. We sat in this state of bliss in an indescribable arena of tremendous and overpowering mountains whose splendour was overwhelming. I thanked God and the mountains for such joy.

It was three o’clock. A biting wind swept the smooth bare top, where the flags of Nepal, Austria and India flew on the highest spot. My axe nearby flew the Tyrol and Karwendler pennant. We took some photographs, but it was too cold to make a good job of it. We started on the descent at half past, after Pasang and Herbert had offered up some food to the gods and buried it in the snow, and I had set up the crucifix my mother had given me for the purpose.

We had to hurry. We wanted to get as far down as we could before darkness fell. Camp IV was the merest speck far below and the sight of it was enough to sap one’s courage. The danger of our present situation drove us on. I was full of admiration for Herbert, who had dared to make the ascent with frostbitten hands. He always said he was no climber; but he loved the mountains and could move on them better than most.

The sun shone full on the flank we again had to traverse. It was a much more difficult operation this time because we were

Three o’clock in the afternoon of 19 October, 1964. The flags of Nepal, Austria and India flying from Pasang’s ice-axe.
tired out. The other two at least were sure of their footing, but I began to feel uncertain of mine although I have nothing to say against the form of crampon I was using. The reason was chiefly the numbness of my feet. I dared not risk the slightest stumble and each step cost me all my strength and concentration. As I had been used to the severest tests, climbing in the Alps, I was able to hold out until I got to the bottom of the rock-face, where Helmut was waiting with the tent. I let myself fall into the hollow he had scooped out for me and told him how tired I felt. He fed me with delicacies he had brought, and the tears in his eyes expressed his delight at our success.

There was still far to go. The sun had vanished behind jagged peaks and darkness was climbing up to us. A lonely tent was hidden in the black gulf. We struggled on, all well satisfied, and repaid a thousand-fold for our exertions."

And this is Helmut’s account of the day: "18 October.

Camp IV—two yellow tents on the perpetual snow above the ice-fall. Was the hurricane going to spare them this time?

The slopes above us did not look very difficult, but the peak alone was an imposing mountain, and Sepp and Pasang proposed to make the ascent next day—four thousand feet at a go! It might, according to our altimeters, be six hundred and fifty feet more. And they meant to be back by night. It didn’t seem possible. We ought even now to establish a Camp V up there on the level ground at the top of the rock-face.

But Pasang had his plan and wouldn’t be talked out of it. We were all now in pretty good shape, and Pasang was positively bursting with strength, energy and impatience.

We lay in our tents, waiting for the night. Herbert and I were side by side with little Gyalsen lying the other way with his feet between us. All three of us were voluminously clothed, which did not leave much room for comfort in a two-man tent.

Herbert seemed lost in thought. There was nothing unusual in that. Yet I felt sure he had something particular in his head.
I spoke to him at last, and he began, more to himself than to me, 'I don't see why I shouldn't go. What can I do here all day?'

His resolve strengthened as he went on talking. He was determined to go to the top with Sepp and Pasang. The goal gleamed before his eyes. He had almost got there before, and now in spite of his frost-bitten hands, he had reached the same point again. There would be little actual climbing; it was just the steep ascent. And he had gone faster today than Sepp.

I said nothing; my first thought, 'With those hands—utter madness!' gave way as I understood better how he felt. He was his old self, with whom to think was to act. He knew what he was doing, and the risk. In spite of my anxiety I knew he had to go.

He went over to the other tent to discuss it with the others. He was away a long time. When he returned, the plan was made. My task was to move up in support.

19 October.

The yellow tents flapped, and a flurry of hail whipped against the canvas. I withdrew my head into my sleeping-bag again. I wondered how many hours the other three had been under way but could not persuade myself to look at the time. When I did, it was half-past nine. At this altitude it would be easy to hibernate. Half-past nine? Good Lord——!

'Adjiba!'

'Sahib?'

I nerved myself to creep out of the warm coverings and whisked across to the other tent. Adjiba and Gyalsen were sitting there with that impassive look on their faces. Our indomitable spirit-stove was murmuring beneath a saucepan of snow.

'Gyalsen, you're going down to Camp III to fetch another tent.'

'Yes, Sahib.'

'And you and I, Adjiba, will pull up this tent and carry it up to Camp V.'

'Yes, Sahib,' and after a pause, 'and what do we take as well?'

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I thought quickly. ‘Two air-mattresses, so that we can all five sit cosily; a sleeping-bag for whoever is worst off; a spirit-stove, a saucepan, some Ovomaltine and these tins here; also torches, candles, matches——’ Finally I added a few medicaments from our medicine chest, thinking particularly of frost-bite and exhaustion.

At intervals we scanned the mountain. The hard-frozen perpetual snow showed no signs of a track and the steep rock-face offered a liberal choice of black dots——

But there—there was something in motion up there! We could only make out one person; he was approaching the platform of rock on which we intended setting up Camp V, in case the three of them were unable to get back that night or failed to reach the summit. Five hours since they started and high time we got moving. But by the time we had had something to eat and stowed away the tent, which was frozen stiff, in my ruck-sack, it was half-past eleven.

The granite girdle crossed the entire mountain a few hundred feet above us: a low rock-face. Above it the slope of perpetual snow. Very nice to be up there on skis, with enough wind in your lungs!

Adjiba and I followed the tracks, nothing of which was visible now but the holes made by crampon-spikes. Every step cost many breaths and we seemed hardly to move. My ruck-sack almost suffocated me. I stood gasping after every few steps. And what about all the stuff Adjiba had on his back? Yet he made nothing of it. He was panting too, but only out of politeness. At last he went ahead in hopes of spurring me on a bit. ‘Sahib, how late is it?’ I needed no telling. At this pace we should never reach Camp V.

I was driven to a last expedient: twenty steps and a short pause; a hundred steps, and a short rest. That was better and soon I felt I was past the worst. Gradually we gained height. There were only a few peaks now we could not see beyond. To the north the basin of Tingri Dong sank in haze between brown mountains. But I went on counting desperately—17, 18, 19, 20, stop!

We were now on the ridge of perpetual snow which parted the slope we were on from the broad trough of the glacier.
below Cho Oyu's north shoulder on our left. We traversed to the glacier-trough and approached the rock-face at the point where it was most easily scaled. Adjiba was for roping up all the same. The altitude was now visibly affecting him too.

Suddenly we heard a shout. Someone in red waved to us from the top of the rock-face. It was Pasang!

He lost no time in climbing down and rushing up to us. 'Very lucky day, very lucky day——'

All three had reached the summit!

Pasang, the stern, impenetrable oriental, threw his arms round my neck. His face was quivering; words bubbled out of him.

So now we knew that the assault-team had got back safely and Adjiba hurried down to get hot drinks ready.

Next a tall figure in blue came in sight. It was Herbert, moving cautiously and holding his frost-bitten hands out in front of him as if they were glass. Pasang got out a rope, but Herbert was climbing down by then, skilfully using the palms of his hands to ease himself down, and then he came walking up to me step by step as though out of another world. Little was said, but neither of us will ever forget our meeting that day.

Finally Sepp climbed down, looking grave and absorbed. He sank down in the snow two paces from me, overcome by a sudden attack of weakness. I still had a piece of chocolate. We scarcely mentioned the peak, though we thought of little else.

It was dark when we reached Camp IV. I sprained my right ankle, going down, luckily.

Herbert, Sepp and I lay awake for a long time, giving way to fatigue, happiness and exhilaration.'
CHAPTER TWELVE

"As Conquerors, Homeward Go!"

In the morning the wind was whipping the tent and I thanked the gods with all my heart for their graciousness in having given us a fine day and called a halt to the storm, which, under them, was sole lord of the high peaks.

We lay on in our warm sleeping-bags, our thoughts no longer bent on the magnificent open spaces above us. We said goodbye to them and turned back to the valleys where life could be lived.

The storm took leave of us; it was no storm we should ever encounter again once we had turned our backs; it was not to be compared with the storms of lower-lying country; it was an element in itself, as powerful and destructive as fire. We had only to hold out against it for a few more hours before reaching the shelter of the valley.

Pasang had got up early and started down. We waited, hoping the weather might improve and allow us to make the descent at leisure, enjoying our reflections instead of wrestling with the wind. We might stop for rests in the sunshine and take a last look at the flanks and ridges we knew so well, and when we went on again our memories would go with us, weaving the present and the past in one web as they had the day before. But the storm did not die down.

Adjiba got a good breakfast ready, and Ang Nyima and Gyalsen came up to help with the transport of the tents. By midday we felt we could not wait any longer with a good conscience. It would be foolish to spend another night there and run the risk of an even worse day for the descent. We were still 23,000 feet up and we had not forgotten that night of disaster.
Sepp was in no great trouble with his feet, I was glad to find; and my hands had not suffered; nor was my frozen nose very bad. It was only swollen at the tip enough to close my nostrils, but I could breathe through my mouth.

It was not pleasant to leave the shelter of the tent. Dull sky, drifts of mist whirling past, bitter cold, a strong wind. The Sherpas were waiting to pack up our tent. Cold and fatigue showed in their faces, which all the same beamed with delight whenever their eyes rested on us with the pride of parents in children who have passed with distinction.

I felt during the descent how weak I was. No doubt the previous day had used up all my reserves though I was scarcely aware of it at the time. I had been borne on by a power outside me without the need of any spur; and when I stopped to get my breath in a succession of gasps, it did not feel as if I was pumping the necessary oxygen into my body; it was rather my spiritual self threatening to come to a standstill if I did not take care to breathe deeply.

Now that delightful separation between the body and the spirit was over for good, I felt I was a heavy weight I had to drag along. My vision was poor; the storm drove mist and snow into my eyes; my spectacles got iced over and I could not wipe them clear. We were not roped; I was just behind Sepp, who was in much better form than I. I stuck particularly close to him while we traversed a steep flank where there was new snow lying, placing my feet exactly in his footmarks, which barely showed up against the milky grey of which our world was composed.

I could scarcely keep going on the level stretch above the step in the ice-fall, but felt dizzy and reeled as if I was drunk. I had to stop every now and then. Sepp and Ang Nyima got to the ice-fall far in front of me and waited for me there. Helmut, who had sprained his ankle on the descent from the rock-face the day before, was coming along slowly and just traversing the steep snow above me.

Gyalsen was a pace behind me. No one had told him to keep an eye on me, but he clung to me like my shadow. It could not have been pleasant for him to go my snail's pace so dutifully with his heavy ruck-sack to carry. The going was so good
here that I could well get along alone even in the state I was in. I wanted to say, "Go ahead and wait at the ice-fall", but I could not. If I stumbled he was there to hold me up; yet if I looked round while I was going well he did not appear to know I was there but looked straight past me, making a face which was intended to represent complete exhaustion. He might have been thankful to have me in front to tread out a track for him in the snow and act as a shield against the wind. He was so deeply ashamed of his weakness that he didn't dare to look me in the eye.

Gyalsen was not a good actor. He found it very difficult to combine the weariness and languor of his face with the strong and vigorous grip which saved me from slipping. But his efforts to do so were very touching.

Sepp and Ang Nyima were waiting at the upper edge of the step in the ice-fall. Gyalsen tried hard to make it plain that he had been the cause of our slowness. He staggered along behind me to show that I had had the utmost difficulty in getting him along at all in his feeble state.

The mountains swam before my eyes, and I did not dare descend the step without being roped. The rope Pasang, Adjiba and I had fixed two weeks earlier was still there, but although it had played its part in our success, it was useless to me now, for I could not close my fingers on it. I did not feel I could make the descent unaided and when I saw the anxious and attentive looks of the other three I knew I could own up without shame. I was all in, the landscape was blurred and spinning round and I could not distinguish the foot-holds in the ice.

Possibly the repeated injections and pills had been too much for me; or perhaps it was the stabs of pain that burned along my nerves; or perhaps I had simply done too much. In any case, I could do no more and my three companions took charge of me. I could give way and know that I was safe in their care.

Ang Nyima and Gyalsen knotted a rope round my chest, and Sepp went ahead unroped to help me, pointing out the places where I was to put my crampons. The rope which secured me from above was paid out as I moved; it was tight enough to prevent me falling off the ice-face, loose enough not to hinder my descent.
Two of the Swiss, who had dug out a shelter in the snow near ours at Camp III, were standing below and looking up at us.

For a time all went well; and then the two Sherpas ceased paying out rope. Perhaps it had stuck. I could not see them now; the rope came out of the dim sky. It gave confidence and a sense of security, only now it wasn’t moving any longer. I called as loud as I could for “more rope”; but the rope did not move an inch. I tried to bring it to life with the weight of my body, but it only constricted my chest and pulled up my wind-proof blouse to let the cold wind in. The situation was more absurd than dangerous.

Sepp, who might well have remembered the ghastly hours he had spent at this spot in the attempt to support our first assault, stood below and cheered me up. Meanwhile, Ang Nyima and Gyalsen took the weight of my body and were no doubt convinced they had saved me from falling to my death. I was the middle point in the efforts of all three, who were probably as tired as I was.

That blissful feeling of a dual personality which I had had on the summit returned, and once more I was a spectator of the plight I was in. I heard Julius Patzak singing, “As conquerors, homeward go! As conquerors, homeward go!” This passage from the oratorio, The Book with the Seven Seals, had not been in my head for weeks, and now that I was dangling like a puppet from the ice-face that song of victory rang in my ears.

The contrast between my actual situation and the promise of “As conquerors, homeward go” made me laugh. Sepp looked up rather dubiously. Perhaps my mind had given way.

“It’s so funny—that’s all,” I said to reassure him.

Then the rope started moving again. The descent became less steep and I could do without it. A few minutes more and we were at our snow-cave. Two Sherpas, as round as balloons in their warm down clothes, came running up the track to meet us. They already knew from Pasang that we had scaled the peak. First they welcomed Sepp, who was in front, and then bombarded me like cannon balls and nearly threw me off my balance. They were tiny fellows and as they were on lower ground their faces just reached my chest. They pressed against me with the physical warmth of good-tempered animals,
Herbert Tichy: were the gods merciful or cruel?
Return through Sherpa country. A Sherpani giving Pasang an enthusiastic ovation, oblivious of her household duties.
"AS CONQUERORS, HOMEWARD GO!"

repeating, "Sahib, Cho Oyu", again and again, their faces beaming all over and their eyes brimming with tears of joy. They took my ruck-sack, light though it was, off my back and supported me for the last few hundred yards to our shelter.

Some of the Swiss had been watching our troublesome descent and when we came to their camp Dr. Lochmatter and Bertholet shook hands with us. They rejoiced with us in our success, and Lochmatter said he would come along and examine my hands. It was consoling to have a doctor to attend on me.

Back in the familiar snow-cave, where we had spent such painful hours of suspense waiting for the verdict. Now it was a safe and warm retreat.

Helmut was the last to arrive. The Sherpas hurried out to meet him and helped him down the ice-step. Even without Pasang, their leader, who was probably at Camp I by now, they knew what to do and needed no telling. No expedition could ever have had such selfless and eager support from its Sherpas.

At first we all meant to continue the descent to Camp I, but I felt that I, for one, was not equal to the long ridge and the painful screes. The rest might go, leaving me there with a Sherpa.

Then all of them, Sepp, Helmut and the Sherpas, decided to spend the night in the cave. I don't know whether it was because they were tired or because of a sentimental reluctance to abandon the regions of ice and snow or because they would not leave me behind; anyway, I was glad that we were all to spend another night there together.

Dr. Lochmatter came along our narrow shaft, bringing the medicaments required. After taking a look at my hands he said that there would be no need to operate as long as sepsis did not intervene, and that was not likely in this bacteria-free air.

Later when we met the Swiss again at Namche Bazar on their return home he reassured me once more. Although he neither operated nor gave me any treatment, his advice to wait and not worry was a great help to me, and I should not have enjoyed the return journey half so much if I had not had his professional reassurance. Lochmatter was a good friend, whom I take this opportunity to thank again.
And now he sat with us in our snow-cavern. Adjiba had conjured up some of his much-loved rice-wine. Ice clinked in the bowl, and we passed it round, with apologies to Lochmatter for our primitive manners. But after all, the simplest cocktail was an achievement.

Lochmatter, not quite as sober, we hoped, as when he arrived, retreated after a time to his own hole, leaving us to spend the night within the same snow walls as had sheltered us during very anxious hours.

And now our joy was unconfined.

Sepp had got back the feeling in his legs again, and they had not suffered permanent frost-injury. We had reason to be thankful we had got off so lightly, and celebrated accordingly. Adjiba’s rice-wine went the round. It was so cold that we could only take little sips.

We had a wonderful surprise that night: our mail-runner had brought our first European mail to Base Camp. I distributed our letters. Helmut, a great writer and receiver of letters before the Lord, had twice as big a bunch as either of us. Like regular prodigals we lit our last candles and our cave shone like a fairy grotto while we pored over the hopes and fears of distant friends. We knew well that our good fortune was partly owing to their good wishes, their thoughts and prayers; they were a part of our success, and again I was filled with that sense of the whole cosmos which made the ascent of our peak so unforgettable.

At last weariness overcame us, Sepp and me at least. We had read our little lot. Helmut, who had scarcely mastered half his pile, was wide-awake, and every now and again burst into a laugh. What delightfully amusing correspondents he must have!

We two, jealous of his unfair share, insisted at last on blowing out the candles.

“Just two or three more,” Helmut pleaded.

“Quite time you packed up,” Sepp said. And I said, “Oh, go to sleep.”

The snores of the Sherpas, Helmut’s chuckles and the glistening of our icy walls were my last impression of the day.

We felt almost sad to say goodbye to our snow-cave next morning, for we had grown really fond of it. Although the
sun was out again, a bitter wind swept the ridge. I could not take any photographs, but Sepp and Helmut made use of the last chance at this height, and as I should be the slowest I set off first. I did not need my ice-axe now; two ski-sticks, looped on my wrists, were of more use.

It was the familiar ridge I had now travelled four times. The tracks we had been the first to tread out in the deep virgin snow were a well-worn road, which the wind had packed tight. It did not follow our first foot-marks; many short-cuts and variations had been introduced. At one point we had kept close to the rock, fearing an avalanche; now the track followed the fall of the ground down the snow-field. The cautiousness of pioneers had been forgotten.

I was glad to be alone, as I wanted to take leave of the mountain by myself. Yet I could not lose myself in thoughts and day-dreams; there were many difficult places which needed care. I was still tired, too, and made full use of my two ski-sticks.

I caught sight of someone coming to meet me. It might have been one of our Sherpas sent to relieve me of my baggage, or perhaps one of the Swiss.

Then I recognised him: it was Lambert.

He is one of the greatest mountaineers of all time, an almost mythical character throughout the Himalaya, and a tragic one. He had twice got nearer to the top of Everest than any man had done before him, but storm-conditions, such as we had at that moment, had driven him back.

We stood together, two mere men in the face of eternity, both impelled by the same ambitions and on this occasion competitors for one and the same mountain.

"The peak?" he asked in broken English.

"Yes," I said, "the peak."

Lambert put his arms round me.

"Congratulations, congratulations," he said.

It was not from politeness only. I felt he was really glad. The storm tore at us. For me it was a last farewell message from the peak, for Lambert a grim warning not to persevere.

"Bon voyage," I said as we parted.
I often stopped and turned round. A long banner of blown snow was flying from the peak; far below it I saw Lambert, now diminished to a dot. I admired him for the pleasure he took in our success and for his courage in planning to appeal once more against the verdict of the gods.

When I came to the site of Camp II, I found ice- and rock-pitons, a few crampons, and a short rope lying about. The Sherpas who were following me down would collect them and carry them on to Base. They are as tidy in this matter as good housewives, and I shared their good housekeeperly feeling. After great things come the little.

I felt my attachment to these material objects as I collected them in a heap. They were made of steel, of alloys, of wood or nylon, apparently dead objects which you can make use of wherever they can play their part. I remembered the enthusiasm of the man who made our crampons for me. He was a great climber who had many difficult ascents to his credit and I felt he wished me well. As I was rather short of money at the time he kept giving me one more bunch of spare-parts, and then another ice-hammer. His goodwill seemed to give life to those inanimate objects.

The sight of them reminded me of my ice-axe. There was nothing new-fangled about it, but it had gone with me across west Nepal a year ago. It was often rather superfluous when we were charging along steep mountain-paths or climbing the endless screes, but at other times it was the only guarantee of a long stride or leap across the ice which helped us to scale a peak and which, without this implement of wood and steel, would have been too foolhardy.

It was an old rusty axe—the thong had seen such long service that it was hardly to be trusted—but it was an old companion which had been to and fro between Europe and the Himalaya with me, and now had been with me on the peak. I had left it behind in the snow-cave and a Sherpa would bring it down. It was rather sad, I felt, to end the descent from my highest mountain without this old friend.

I huddled in the cold sunshine and strong wind, lost in my memories. The track, which had so far led over perpetual ice and snow, now took to screes and loose stones. I tried again
and again to get my crampons off, but I could not undo the ice-coated buckles with my numb fingers, and the pain was so severe that I had to wait for help.

A solitary figure appeared on the ridge above, perhaps one of the Swiss, or Sepp or Helmut. If it was a Swiss he would turn off over the northern flank before getting as far as my resting-place, but I hoped it was one of us and then I would be able to end my meditations. Lovely as it was there, I was longing for the warmth of the valley. I wanted to be back at Camp I. But without help I could not get my crampons off.

The man had not yet reached the spot where the Swiss track and ours parted company. Even if he was a Swiss, he might come on, considering that the weather was hardly of the sort to suggest a voluntary rest in the snow. I made a last attempt to undo the buckles; I did not want to ask for help. But it was no use. I felt ashamed of my clumsy efforts and also of my stupid pride.

It was Sepp. He sat down beside me. We said little. There was so little to say. And what there was—about the parting from the mountain and the happy prospect of the valleys—would only have lost by being put into words.

It was lovely sitting there in silence. Our sufferings and despair, and the joy of being on the summit, were memories now; but all the more part of us just because they no longer had the force of actual experience.

Sepp took off my crampons for me and then we made tidy heaps of the pieces of equipment left behind there. The Sherpas would not be able to overlook them now even if our triumph made them oblivious of their housekeeperly duties.

We then began to descend the steep screes down to Camp I. How wearisome they had been when we started the ascent, and they were only the first rung in that great ladder to the sky. The loose stones had slid from under our feet, subtracting a little at each step from the height we gained. By this time a path had been trodden by the unremitting toil of the Sherpas who carried up our supplies, and this hint of a road showed what Cho Oyu meant for them. We had had the best of it, we were in the van and assailed the peak; but our assault was only possible because Adjiba, Gyalsen, Ang Nyima, Kami, Da Nurbu and
the rest of the Sherpas trod that thankless path over and over again. It was a monument to their friendship and the hardships they had endured.

We descended very slowly. I was taking great care not to fall and had my hands through the thongs of the ski-sticks, which I made use of as a second pair of not very nimble legs. Sepp was able to go much faster. Presently he left the path and I followed without thinking, feeling sure he must know what he was doing. He stopped for a rest and I sat down beside him. Below we could see Camp I, where there was much coming and going between the tents. No doubt a feast was being got ready for us.

I wondered greedily whether it would be yak meat or yak wurst, and then almost unconsciously felt that I was no longer touching a frozen crust of snow but an almost forgotten softness and warmth on which I could rest my hands without fear. The ground was covered with cushions of yellow moss. I pulled off my mittens and even the bandage from one hand and cautiously stroked one. Sepp had taken his mittens off too and was doing the same. Now I knew why he had diverged from the straight path.

"The first moss," he said.
"Yes," I said, and that was all.
He must have been ashamed of his weakness, because we went on immediately to discuss the chances of there really being yak meat at Camp I.

For the last few minutes we walked over flat moraine, which was churned up in tiny but savage mountains of small stones. I felt weak and dizzy again and every yard uphill was an effort I had to take my time about. I suffered from the hot sun in all the clothing I had worn for the assault.

When only one more stony ridge parted us from the camp, I found I could go no farther. I should never have believed that one step could cost such an effort. I had to sit down and rest.

"You go on," I told Sepp.
He stood where he was.
"Do go," I said impatiently. I was not ashamed of my feebleness, but I was annoyed that it held up others.
"AS CONQUERORS, HOMeward GO!"

Sepp vanished over the next little range. After a time I was able to go on again, and then I saw him waiting for me.

"You go on ahead," I said.

But he let me pass him and kept behind.

The Sherpas caught sight of us now; we were on the last ridge. They rushed up and embraced us, clapping us on the shoulder, clasping our hands. Suddenly I understood why Sepp had made me lead the way: he wanted me to be the first to receive the Sherpas' welcome. I should have liked to thank him, but not even since our return home have I ever mentioned that moment. When he reads this, he will know it was because I could find no words.

Our tents were ready for us, and hot tea too. A feast of yak meat and tinned delicacies was to come. Pasang had got the better of his elation over his and our success.

"Lucky days," he said, "ha, lucky days. A very high peak."

I thought of those evenings the year before when we first dreamed of this peak. Now the dream was fulfilled and done with; new ones billowed out like clouds on life's horizon.

"Perhaps another high peak," I said to him. "We'll come back and all go for another together."

I forgot that it depended on the verdict the doctors gave on my hands. I was only thinking that our happiness would justify a fresh exploit.

"Fine," Pasang said, as though our return for another of the high peaks was all in the day's work, "but first I get married."
CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Pasang’s Wedding

I had always thought of Pasang as a pattern father of a family, and so I asked in some astonishment, “Get married?” I had first known him as a Lama and then for the last twenty years as a married man, which was no contradiction of the admirable rule of his order. He often spoke with pride and affection of his wife and seven children, two of whom, Kami Lama and Purbu Gyalsen, both good Sherpas, were with us.

Pasang was surprised at such utter misunderstanding of his private life, and patiently explained that the customs of his religion permitted him to marry more than one wife if he could afford it. He had fallen in love with a girl in Lukla, his native village, on our journey out. Her name was Yang Tshin.

He went on to explain that according to Sherpa custom the bridegroom paid his future parents-in-law an indemnity for the loss of their daughter or else worked for them for an agreed time. Pasang had not wished to do either; so he had made the following proposal: “If I get to the top of Cho Oyu, you shall give me Yang Tshin for nothing. If I don’t, you can keep her, and I will pay you a thousand rupees damages.”

A thousand rupees was a large sum even for such a celebrated Sirdar as Pasang, and now we could see his magnificent performance, up to the top from 13,000 feet in three days, in a more human light. Also his dramatic, “If the Swiss have got there first, I’ll cut my throat”, lost a little of its fine frenzy.

This wager of his made him a popular character. Later on the press gave him headlines such as, “Scaling Cho Oyu for love”, and comic drawings appeared with the caption “If it became the fashion”, showing the hair-raising climbs demanded of prospective sons-in-law.
However, I am certain that Pasang would have scaled the mountain with as fanatical a vigour even if there had been no threat of losing Yang Tshin and a thousand rupees. And judging by the inseparability of the married couple during the few weeks we could witness it, the marriage would undoubtedly have taken place even if the bet had been lost.

Pasang, anyway, was in a great hurry to set out for Lukla without the loss of a day. But we were tired and had no such inducement. We preferred to travel at leisure, and so told Pasang that slow and sure won the race, with other proverbs to the same effect. But our clinching argument was that Yang Tshin would regard him with greater awe and veneration if he arrived at the head of an expedition instead of rushing off to her helter-skelter.

He took this point in a flash, and we had our day's rest in calm.

Our great headache was how to announce the news of our success. I had undertaken to send the Vienna Presse a cable giving the first news of the result. We had a friend in Kathmandu, the proprietor of the Snow View Hotel, who despatched our letters and cables as soon as he received them from our mail-runner.

Earlier, in Delhi, I had discussed the possibility of the exclusive transmission of the news. They all said it was quite impossible for the news of a fresh ascent to reach Vienna in advance of other capitals. Correspondents would learn of it in the cable office and, thanks to better news-services, would get it through to their news agencies far quicker.

Consequently I had arranged with the Presse that I would send a code-message; it was one which would be unlikely to attract attention. Camp X was to stand for the peak. We knew that we should never establish a Camp X on Cho Oyu. Therefore “Camp X reached by Jöchler and Pasang” would mean that success had been achieved. I prided myself on my cunning.

But there was a snag. Our mail-runner would take nearly two weeks to reach Kathmandu. Until he did, the cable could not be handed in. In the meanwhile the news would spread, and all the more because the marriage of Pasang and Yang
Tshin depended on the result. The wireless post at Namche Bazar would hear of it and transmit it by wireless to Kathmandu as it would be their duty to do. By that time our mail-runner would only be half-way there.

There was no possible way of ensuring priority for the Presse, which had given us very generous support.

I regretted this very much, but there was a bright side. It might seem to be a slight on the government in Kathmandu, which had given its blessing to our expedition, if it heard from Paris, London or Vienna that one of their country’s highest peaks had been conquered.

So we despatched a Sherpa to the wireless station at Namche Bazar with a brief report of the ascent and the request that it might be forwarded to Kathmandu. We thanked the government for having given us the opportunity of planting their country’s flag as well as Austria’s and India’s on one of the highest peaks in the world.

After that we took our ease in the sun, opened our last tins without a care and recalled the wretched days we had spent when we were last at Camp I.

Next morning we continued our descent to Base Camp and with this the final departure from Cho Oyu began. Base Camp was not, properly speaking, a camp at all; it was only an imaginary point. We only possessed eight tents and had had to take them all on with us, so we could not leave any at our base. But as the Sherpas went on ahead we could count on finding tents erected for us.

We had never been a very strictly disciplined expedition. Now we resembled a troop of refugees. The Sherpas took up their loads and went down in parties of their own, Helmut stayed behind to enjoy a little leisure for his scientific observations, and Sepp, Pasang and I went along together, enjoying our newly won celebrity and carrying shamefully light rucksacks.

Avoiding the glacier which, when we began the ascent, had obstructed our progress so annoyingly though without imperilling our lives, we followed the moraine down to the Swiss Base Camp, but found it deserted. The whole party with the exception of one old Sherpa were on Cho Oyu. We did not
envy them. We knew how far we had gone and what difficulties we had faced, and what a task it had been to get the loads carried up to the point from which the summit could be attempted without further support of any kind.

This old Sherpa was a friend of Pasang’s and he invited us to have a cup of coffee with him. He was apparently the expedition’s cook; anyway, the coffee was both hot and strong. We sat in the shelter of sun-warmed rocks; the two Sherpas talked to each other in their own language, so we could not follow what was said.

I wondered on which side the old Sherpa’s loyalty lay. Was he glad that Pasang had conquered the peak, a feat he himself was past thinking of, or had he hoped that his Swiss Sahibs would win the prize?

They talked with great seriousness and as old hands. It might have been about the price of salt in Darjeeling or the relative merits of Swiss and Austrian tents. Their philosophy, derived from the ancient wisdom of Asia and the religion or superstition of the Himalaya, had been widened by their contact with expeditions and the various mentalities and equipment met with among them. They must have been convinced that the men from beyond the great sea were all fanatical lovers of mountains. There were the English: practical, reserved, bagging the highest peaks; the French and the South Americans: quick and voluble, “first-class mountain-men”, in the judgment of the Sherpas. The whole world was divided into countries whose tents were good and tinned food appetizing and those whose tents were not able to stand up to storm-conditions and whose tinned food was not as good as tsampa. Sometimes I’d have liked to hear from Pasang or Adjiba which countries in their opinion were great and powerful and which had a good name. But they would not be drawn; they didn’t know from which countries next year’s expeditions might come and they didn’t want to fall out with any of them.

Our road from the Swiss Base Camp to our own was again over moraines and glaciers and, easy though it was, we had to be on our guard against being forced into considerable detours by broken ice. I soon lost touch with Sepp and Pasang. The last two exhausting years, devoted to travels and
preparations for travels, had to be paid for; and now I could relax. Besides, we had done what we set out to do and the time to be tired had come.

So I crept slowly along, supported only by my two ski-sticks, and if Sepp had not waited to show me the way to our new Base Camp established by the Sherpas farther down the valley, I might very likely have lost my way. Helmut devoted the last day on Cho Oyu to his special studies and did not arrive till late, guided by the Sherpas’ shouts and the light of their torches.

From here we saw Cho Oyu in all its splendour for the last time. Streamers of snow blown from its slopes showed up against the blue sky. Its peak looked very far off and forbidding. It was scarcely credible that we had stood on the summit a few days before.

We did not waste much thought on that; Ang Nyima was cooking the leg of a yak for us. We were hungry and the frozen meat looked very inviting, so we took it from his hands before he could put it in the stew-pan. It tasted excellent and crackled between our teeth. I believe Sepp and Pasang and I could have eaten the whole leg, and we forgave the yak for its stubborn and self-willed nature; undoubtedly the beast had its points. Ang Nyima did not know whether to rejoice at our good appetites or to weep because we had forestalled him in his cooking. Finally we let him cook a few yak steaks and the evening ended happily once he had decided that they were the real triumph of the feast.

Our last good look at Cho Oyu! Tomorrow the mountains surrounding Nangpa La would come between and hide it for good. A tiny black dot was visible at the altitude of our Camp IV, that is, at about 23,000 feet. One of the Swiss, Lambert probably. He appeared to be stationary, and we could well imagine how he must have fought for every step in the teeth of the storm. He seemed to be an intruder in a realm where men have nothing to seek. We almost forgot that we had been just as presumptuous only a short time ago.

Pemba Bhutar had been sent on ahead to the wireless station with our news and told to recruit enough porters in Marlung or Thami to undertake the transport of our gear. Ang Nyima
stayed behind with it and we carried only what we should need for the next two days.

We took our time crossing the Nangpa La. It was a lovely cloudless day; the mountains shone and glistened and we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. The baggage-train of the Swiss, transported chiefly by yaks, had left deep tracks in the snow, with their dark droppings showing up here and there.

The going was unpleasant on the lower part of the glacier; the sun of the last months had melted the snow and laid the ice bare. Most of us had not put on crampons and had to go very carefully over the ribbed ice.

The porters Pemba Bhutar had collected met us on the moraine which had so fatigued us with its continual ups and downs on our outward journey. They were a very mixed lot, more women than men, and we sat down and joined them in a very jolly picnic, for they were well supplied with food from their villages and made us welcome to it with the hospitality that comes naturally to Sherpas. There were cooked, ice-cold potatoes, tsampa, raw yak meat. They had jars of chang and rice-wine also and had no wish to be burdened with them any longer. They kept on filling our cups and their own. The women's brightly coloured jackets and skirts shone in the sun and their faces, tanned almost black, beamed with good nature and happiness.

We had to separate at last because the porters were due that evening at our Base Camp and we at Lunak. So the women pressed their last potatoes on us and we took a last drink for the road.

The ruinous huts of Lunak seemed to us the height of civilisation. The Sherpas had hidden a bundle of firewood there on the approach-march, and once more we enjoyed the comfort of drinking our tea in a room full of smoke.

Our tents were on grass instead of on snow or stones, and the night was so warm that we undressed for the first time for four weeks. My hands were much less swollen and painful now and it was not too difficult.

The next day was one of unforgettable beauty and contentment. After continuing for some time over bare and stony moraines we came to alpine pastures which on our way up had
Cho Oyu

seemed to us poor and barren after the luxuriant valleys we had left. Now their tiny flowers, occasional birds and humming insects seemed the picture of abounding life.

Sepp was full of energy and climbed a shoulder to take a photograph of Cho Oyu from the south. His familiar red pull-over showed up on the bare mountainside.

We meant to stop at Marlung for our midday break and the Sherpas had made the necessary preparations. They had been rather mysterious about it, as people are before children’s birthdays. According to Pemba Bhutar, who had made the arrangements himself, a hot meal would be ready for us in one of the cottages, perhaps to include eggs even. But for some reason the cottage in question was bolted and barred and nobody was to be seen looking out from any of the others either. Our Sherpas called out to our prospective host and as there was no reply gave it up and we went on our way to Thami.

There Adjiba’s mother welcomed her son back with as much composure as if he had just been off for the day. Nevertheless, we had a foretaste of what the following weeks were to bring. Adjiba’s house filled up with guests, and chang flowed in rivers. Adjiba was a fine fellow, his mother “a grand old lady”, we were fine Sahibs and Pasang was feted as a little god.

We sat round the fire, where the old lady held court like a queen. Mountains of potatoes were cooked and eaten. Helmut and Sepp retreated to their tents, but I was afraid of the effects of cold and damp on my painful hands and bent over the fire like a rheumatic old man. Then Adjiba made up a magnificent bed for me on the wooden floor, the acme of luxury, and I went peacefully to sleep while more potatoes were cooked and more chang consumed. The fire flickered in light and shadow across the room, every vacant spot on the floor had its sleeper and Adjiba’s mother made herself comfortable near the embers and began to pray. Probably she suffered from the sleeplessness of old age. When I awoke later on, the old lady’s prayers were still competing with the Sherpas’ snores.

We meant to spend several days at Thami; its alpine pastures seemed more delightful to us than Namche Bazar. But we changed our minds after one day’s rest there and decided to go on.
Beautiful as it was, it was too cold for us to spend much time outside our tents or the cottage, and as warmth was what we longed for we felt we should be better off at Namche Bazar. We hoped for a more exciting bill of fare than potatoes and even dreamt of a roast fowl. Pasang had gone on ahead to make the preparations for his wedding.

We were just getting into our sleeping-bags on our second and last night at Thami, feeling tired out and full-fed, when something, which apparently had to do with us, seemed to be upsetting Adjiba's other guests. There was a whispered consultation and then we were told that a party was being given in a neighbouring cottage, and that our presence there would be esteemed a great honour. As we had had enough chang and potatoes in the course of the day I should have liked to be spared this social occasion, and Sepp and Helmut felt the same. But for once I was the implacable leader of an expedition. It was, I said, an obvious duty of politeness to accept the invitation, and we did so.

One or two young fellows thereupon went out, presumably to give warning of our arrival. With heavy hearts we pulled on our boots again and got ready to go.

The night was pitch-dark. A Sherpa lighted our way across stone-walled fields with flaming splinters of wood, which did not save us from frequent stumbles; and then the torches burnt out. We stood in the darkness. No light was to be seen in any of the houses and the whole of Thami seemed to be asleep. Our guide called out some name which we did not catch and then he too vanished with a few reassuring words.

We waited for some time without being able to detect any signs of the promised party. Apparently enthusiasm had over-reached itself, as it often does, particularly in the Himalaya. So we felt our way back to Adjiba's house and went to sleep.

The next day we proceeded at a leisurely pace to Namche Bazar along an almost level path crossing the mountainside. The four officers posted at the wireless station came to meet us before we had descended on the village and as soon as they saw us they ran up to embrace us. Captain Mishra handed us a telegram of greeting from the Nepalese government.
CHO OYU

"Thanks for the message of success, which has been transmitted to international press. Please accept hearty congratulations and convey the same to members of your successful expedition but we shall not be happy until your frost-bitten hands and legs are all right. Bravo, heroes."¹

Tears filled our eyes as we read it.

"Now we're heroes," I said to Sepp and Helmut, and we looked down on the ground in embarrassment.

But that was not all; the officers had composed a greeting of their own and inscribed it in block letters on a large sheet of paper. Mishra pressed it into our hands:

Check-Post, Namche Bazar.
26.10.1954

Austrian Cho Oyu Expedition 1954
Dear Brothers,

Our hearts knew no bounds when I read of your remarkable success on Cho Oyu, the seventh highest peak of the world. Please accept our hearty felicitations at this weighty occasion and convey the same to your colleagues. Enclosed is a message of congratulation from the Government of Nepal.

Yours brotherly,
H. P. Mishra,
Check-Post Officer.¹

Words failed us. We could only say, "We thank you", over and over again.

We went the last few yards down to Namche Bazar with arms linked. Anyone who remembered the scuffle of our previous visit would have concluded that we were under arrest.

Pasang reeled up to us; he had been celebrating all day; he too embraced us and assured us that we were "his father and his mother". Mishra and, of course, the other officers were in the same relationship. The whole world, or Namche Bazar at least, was one large family of loving parents and children.

An enormous barrel of chang was awaiting us—we paid for

¹ In English in the original.
it later. A feast was prepared, and not one only. The officers insisted on entertaining us and we insisted on entertaining the officers, and nearly every household insisted on entertaining us all. As the evening was long, a sequence of hospitality was agreed upon and, lest we might be anxious, we were told that this was not the only evening; there were many more to follow. We began to feel alarmed: Cho Oyu was a trifle compared with the consequences.

The days at Namche Bazar were all so alike that it is hard to distinguish them in my memory. I woke every morning with the firm intention of writing the long-overdue account of our expedition. Sepp and Helmut slept in their tents in a stubble-field. My nights were spent in the shrine of the farmer’s house nearby, where our headquarters were situated. It was warmer there.

Nevertheless, my hands were painful and I had to get up earlier than the others and sit by the fire. Even so the pain persisted, however much I toasted them. At last the farmer appeared. He looked at my doleful countenance with sympathy and gave me a bowl of chang. Tea was not ready yet. I drank the chang on an empty stomach and felt a little better. My landlord was pleased with the success his prescription had had, so he left the jug at my elbow. By degrees the pain became bearable.

Punctually at seven the sun reached the field on which the tents stood. I sat down on the spot on which its rays first alighted and spread out my hands. The rays of the sun worked wonders, and by now I felt much better. I was determined to start on my report. Meanwhile Sepp and Helmut had got up and we laid our air mattresses side by side in the sun and waited for breakfast, a very luxurious occasion because we still had some tins of coffee and jam. After breakfast, Helmut, whose hands are very soft, massaged my fingers. He felt they were in his charge and lavished every care on them. It was warm and pleasant by now and the agony of the early morning hours was forgotten.

I had not actually any excuse for putting off my report any longer, but I should have had to retire into the shade of the house or a tent; there was too much wind and dust in the open.
So I told myself that my health mattered more than the *Presse* and called to Da Gyalsen.

Da Gyalsen was, as I have mentioned, one of our Sherpa coolies. Originally he had only been coming as far as Namche Bazar with us, but as he carried heavy loads and had, as the youngest, to do all the unpleasant jobs which the other Sherpas were glad to shirk, he had stayed with us for the whole of the time.

Finally I got this “maid of all work” to massage my hands for hours on end. I had no scruples over making use of him, because if he had not been manipulating my hands he would only have been scouring Ang Nyima’s pots and pans.

He carried out his task with great skill and sensitivity, reminding me often of Gyalsen, who had supported me on the descent from Camp IV and looked past me in embarrassment all the time. My fingers were still swollen and the slightest touch in some places caused me acute pain. Da Gyalsen used to come within a fraction of an inch of these places and yet never touch them. And the astonishing part of it was that he never looked down but gazed into the distance, lost in a dream.

This enabled me to study his face at leisure. It resembled the face of a young elephant. He had the habit of sniffing at very short intervals. I never saw him blow his nose either with a handkerchief, or in the manner of skiers, with a finger. Sniffing, with him, took the place of breathing. It became one of the characteristic notes of our expedition and even on the darkest night we always knew when Da Gyalsen was in the neighbourhood.

His monotonous occupation was not without diversions out here in the sun. There was another field below, separated by a terrace; and there the Sherpas cooked, fought and played football. Da Gyalsen was all ears and eyes and he was particularly engrossed by the fights and scuffles. “Bravo, Da Nurbu”, he yelled, or “Rotten shot, Pemba Bhutar”. No football fan could have followed a match with greater enthusiasm, and all the time he was applauding, criticising or loudly deriding, his fingers were assiduously at work. Not a single drop ever fell from his nose; at the last moment he sniffed it back without once releasing his pressure on my hands.
It was midday by then. Da Gyalsen went off to the cookhouse to help. He liked that. He was a small, thin, poorly nourished boy at the outset of our march; by the end he was thriving and as round as a ball.

There was no question now of the report before lunch. "Lunch time," I told Helmut, who had meanwhile covered many pages.

The sun set early; it was the beginning of November and quite chilly. I was soon dreading my painful night and did not want to miss the last minutes of sunshine. And after that we had our social duties to perform. Either we gave a chang party or else we had one to attend. Usually both.

It was a week before my report was written.

Pasang had meanwhile despatched one or two Sherpas to Lukla to buy provisions and, above all, to tell Yang Tshin of his success and her good fortune. The Sherpas were a long time gone. Probably they were enjoying Lukla's flowing bowls. Pasang grew more apprehensive as each day passed. Sherpa girls know their own minds and no doubt he was afraid that Yang Tshin might have changed hers in spite of his having won his bet.

At last his emissaries returned with good news, and the new-laid eggs we had been longing for. Pasang's face cleared and Ang Nyima tried his hand at an omelette. Cheerfulness was restored.

Pasang now made plans for the coming festivities and assured us that it was to be such a wedding as had never before been known in the Himalaya. We were to be the guests of honour. We found later that we were also financing it.

We never quite understood the exact course of the rites and ceremonies. It may be that Pasang improvised a bit. Apparently there was a "little" and a "great" wedding and it may, again, be that Pasang had celebrated the little one in advance. The "great", which was to take place in Lukla, was to be the star-turn we were invited to attend.

In any case, Pasang went off to Lukla to escort Yang Tshin to Namche Bazar, where we were to be introduced to her. We decided to fit in a brief excursion to the monastery of
Thyangboche and then return to Lukla to witness the clinching and final ceremony.

The return of Pasang with his bride, or was she already his wife? was a great event for Namche Bazar. Pasang in his turquoise pullover and those reddish-brown corded silk trousers was such a blaze of colour that Yang Tshin could scarcely match him. He went first, bandy-legged, and she, taking tiny steps, followed after like his shadow. They were inseparable; for the weeks we were able to observe them the distance between them was never greater than a yard or two. And yet the energetic and purposeful way in which Yang Tshin stuck to his heels left little doubt that he would soon match his pace to hers. These distant perspectives of marriage lay in the far future when the two made their entry into Namche Bazar.

Old women, a few men and numerous children, full of admiration and curiosity, lined the road; fragrant boughs and shrubs were burned in honour of the bridal pair, and an aged priest enticed plaintive notes from his conch. It was a great day for Namche Bazar; there was a crowd in front of our house, where we and the officers hastened to receive them. Pasang pressed his bride into our arms with a large and brotherly gesture, and as we were "his father and his mother", we were really justified in a parental tenderness. The officers too were granted the same privilege.

Yang Tshin had brought her younger sister, Tsam Tshi, with her. She was pretty, amiable and embarrassed. Probably she was not accustomed yet to being the sister-in-law of so important a person. We suspected she had come as chaperone to preserve the proprieties during the interval between the little marriage and the great. She was in the forefront of events to begin with, but the further the festivities proceeded the more she seemed to be pushed into the background. I do not know whether she was able to fulfil her duty. We celebrated day and night; there was dancing, singing, drinking and eating. I can say without serious exaggeration that we were more or less drunk for two weeks.

Pasang was much esteemed as a dancer, perhaps on account of his bandy legs, and was not sorry to be admired at all hours. We ourselves preferred to take the floor by night and indoors.
Pasang’s wedding at Lukla was an unforgettable occasion. He rode proudly to the bride’s house, with an umbrella as a sign of honour (right) and had to drain innumerable bowls of chang (below), an ordeal almost as formidable as the ascent of Cho Oyu.
Dancing began there at dusk as a rule and continued without a pause, literally, until dawn.

Men and women danced in a long row without caring particularly who was next them. They hung on to one another any way they could and did not mind clasping both neighbours by the bottom in order to give the row a firmer cohesion.

This was indeed very necessary. The dance, accompanied by voices only in a melodious chant, began with slow rhythmic steps backwards and forwards. Then the song suddenly ended and was succeeded by a succession of wild staccato shouts. The wooden floor groaned under the stamping of the Sherpas' heavy climbing boots, which outdid the percussion instruments of a jazz orchestra.

This too ended abruptly and a new song began. Occasionally a dancer fell out for a drink of chang, but the row itself was never broken and danced without a pause. We often took part in these dances, encouraged by the lighting; at best it was by candles and concealed our performance from close observation. Helmut developed a real mastery and it is principally owing to him that the Sherpas paid us the compliment of saying that no expedition they had ever known had so excelled in the dance. We were exceedingly proud of this tribute.

Of course, the festivities in which we took part were not always given up to revelry; they were sometimes solemn ceremonies.

An old Lama of Namche Bazar said a long prayer in honour of Cho Oyu and us, and gave us his blessing. He dipped an ear of corn in a jug of chang and sprinkled us with it. It was a beautiful and dignified ceremony, and in conclusion we were presented with kattas, silk scarves of honour, which we wore round our necks.

Kami, too, Pasang's versatile son, who was employed as a rule as a chauffeur in Darjeeling, composed a poem in many verses and recited it in a high treble. He described our heroic conquest of Cho Oyu in metaphorical language: the Swiss were as strong as buffaloes, the Austrians as swift as ibex, and Pasang, the victorious eagle, had decided the contest.

We could not follow it word for word, but it was impossible not to gather that Pasang Lama played the chief role. There

As guests of honour we could not decline a single toast and it was not easy to deal with our cameras as well as the bowls we were offered at every step.
was not a verse in which his name did not crop up once or twice. Even he felt at last that this was embarrassing and he gave the bard the tip; promptly in the very next verse there was mention of the "Bara Sahib" (that was me), of Sepp Sahib, and Helmut Sahib. And so, thanks to Pasang's sense of fair play, we could rest content with the part we played in the epic.

One afternoon the Swiss expedition passed through Namche Bazar in a lull between two festive occasions and camped above the village. The last trace we had seen of them had been Lambert's solitary figure at 23,000 feet. We had not seen or heard anything of them since, even by rumour. We did not know whether they had scaled the summit or not, although we had often discussed the possibility among ourselves. We three were convinced they would succeed. Pasang to our surprise would not hear of it. "No can do," he said again and again with emphasis.

Naturally we were curious.

The Swiss passed our house at a distance of about a hundred yards and we tried in vain to guess from their demeanour whether they were elated by victory or dejected by defeat. There was nothing to suggest either the one or the other. Even Pasang was at a loss.

He despatched Gyalsen to their camp to find out from the Sherpas. The road went straight uphill, but Gyalsen, propelled by curiosity, was nothing loth.

We were not kept waiting for the answer. He returned with the speed of a young antelope and was not far off turning a somersault.

"I always say, No can do," Pasang said with pride.

We paid the Swiss a visit in the evening and they told us that Lambert and Madame Kogan had spent a week of hurricane in a snow-cave at about 9,000 feet, but the icy wind had ruled out all hope of assailing the peak. Nevertheless, Madame Kogan had established the altitude record for women. We congratulated her on the feat; they opened a bottle of whisky and we drank to Cho Oyu.

The Sherpas' songs are very expressive. I remember one touching scene.
It was on our homeward march. The Sherpas decided to camp for the night in a village we did not think attractive. We wanted to go on farther, but there were all sorts of reasons against it—no site for tents within miles, no cheap poultry to be bought, the path farther on would be dangerous. We began to think we ought to be grateful to them for the prudent foresight they showed.

Naturally, not one of the reasons they gave was valid. The true reason was simply that Yang Tshin had an aunt and uncle living in the place and they wanted to have their niece with them for an evening before she was lost to sight in the great world of Darjeeling.

Not one of the Sherpas, from a strange shyness verging on shame, would mention the real reason, although it was one that we Europeans could appreciate equally well. Any subterfuge was good enough if it avoided the mention of family feeling; and when Pasang invited us into the house next morning to be presented with kattas and treated to chang we were reluctant to spend a fine day in a dark and smoky interior. We only mended our manners when the relationship was casually alluded to.

We sat on the bench next the hearth as is the custom in all Sherpa houses, and drank the three glasses of chang which custom also prescribed. Pasang and Yang Tshin sat next us in the place of honour.

Our hosts were an aged couple, and very poor; their clothing was torn and the man had a pair of old climbing boots, probably relics of an expedition, on his bare feet.

It was obvious that the parting from their niece was a great sorrow. They stood in front of us with tears in their eyes, pressing us again and again to another drink.

Then the wife began to sing in a cracked voice, and the man, standing a pace behind her, joined in softly. The light from the window fell on their faces and showed them up against the darkness. There was nothing but their wrinkled faces, trying bravely to smile while tears streamed down their cheeks, and their plaintive voices. Then the woman broke off and wept on her niece's neck. The man was left standing by himself, uncertain whether to give way to his grief too. Instead, he
sang on for a word or two. Then there was silence but for the old lady's sobs and caressing words, and of course for the noise of Pasang clearing his throat, as he always did with particular vehemence in moments of feeling. As soon as the old woman had recovered she stood proudly erect and sang on. Her husband seemed thankful to be rescued from his embarrassing isolation and joined in as before.

Lukla, where the wedding was to take place, gave us a disappointing reception. All through the hungry weeks on Cho Oyu we had beguiled ourselves with anticipations of the feasts we should enjoy on our homeward way. Roast fowl formed the staple of these visions, and they made us thoroughly greedy.

There were no fowls in Namche Bazar; at least, we were not sold any. The officers once, and only once, treated us to one, but it was carved into so many portions that it only put a sharper edge on our greed.

Our Sherpas consoled us by saying that at Lukla we could have all the fowls we wanted; so we sent Ang Nyima on ahead to select the plumpest and youngest and cook it. The country we travelled through that day was delightful; so was the weather, and we were in good spirits. We were invited to rest in every little place we passed through and offered drinks of chang. We might have been strolling along at a vintage feast.

But very soon Sepp and I took the lead and set a brisk pace. We had no need to confess why; we knew very well why we were in such a hurry. We might have the luck to fall upon the evening fowl at midday.

Ang Nyima's seven-year-old son, Purba Tsendu, kept pace with us. He had come to meet us at Namche Bazar so as to spend a few days with his father. They saw each other very seldom because Purba stayed behind at Lukla and Ang Nyima lived in Darjeeling.

Purba was a delightful child, well brought up and eager to be serviceable. His father had impressed upon him that he must at all times and whenever possible do all he could for the Sahibs and he took this duty very seriously. He never left us and as soon as he saw us lift a hand he ran up to give his zealous but awkward help. The lacing up of boots was his speciality; and
if we took out a handkerchief he tore it from us and pressed it to our noses. It is not so easy to blow one's nose with the help of a foreign and childish hand. We loved Purba, but we feared him too.

On the journey to Lukla we gave him a camera to take charge of. Satisfied with this responsibility, he left our noses in peace.

Thus we all three approached Lukla. Some children posted as look-outs on the top of a small ridge gave news of our arrival and before we had reached the outskirts an old man came to meet us with a flask and forced us to take a drink of very evil-tasting rakshi. We would gladly have done without it, but we were anxious to commit no social howlers in Lukla of all places. Nearly all our Sherpas had relations there and it would have been unforgivable if we had offended Ang Nyima's uncle, say, or Gyalsen's father.

So we accepted a luke-warm sip and were escorted to the house where Ang Nyima was squatting over his kitchen fire. He beamed up at us so joyfully that we did not even think of asking about the fowl. We just lifted the lid and saw something simmering in a red-brown liquor. Aha, chicken with paprika, we thought with satisfaction, and then sat leaning against the sun-warmed wall of the house, and waited. We were very hungry.

After a short time potatoes were brought out. In the ordinary way, we should have fallen on them ravenously; on this occasion we were fastidious and scarcely touched them. We knew what we were waiting for.

At last Ang Nyima called out: "Khana ready!"

It was dark indoors, but we could make out mountains of rice and chicken on our plates. We set to and then looked at each other, speechless with disappointment: the chicken was the toughest yak our teeth had ever closed with.

Ang Nyima, in the joy of reunions with his kinsfolk, could not have gone all out in the pursuit of a fowl, and now stood there conscience-stricken, his eyes full of tears. We chewed joylessly at our yak and felt disappointed with Lukla.

Helmut escaped the disappointment. He too had dreamed of the fowl, but he had been the victim of unremitting hospitality all the way to Lukla. He arrived very late and we heard him yodelling from afar.
The two Tyrolese were past masters at yodelling. The language difficulty restricted our conversation, but as singing was an important part of the entertainment every evening, the Tyrolese and the Sherpas were able to display their art alternately.

The yodellers were a great success and drew loud and enthusiastic applause from the Sherpas, who even tried to imitate them, with little success, naturally. Nevertheless, I must warn students that if they come upon sudden bursts of extraneous melody in the songs of Sherpaland they will not be on the heels of an important cultural discovery; it will be no more than an echo of Helmut and Sepp.

Magnificent as these two were as yodellers, the piercing and exultant whoop with which Helmut closed his performance was always the star turn. It threw his audience into transports of joy. They ended by waiting for this climax in such a rapture of anticipation that they scarcely attended to the many verses of “My little home in Zillertal”. It was the whoop that made the house rock with applause.

Helmut’s home-coming yodel on this occasion sounded very half-hearted and quite lacked its accustomed vigour.

“He’s drunk,” Sepp quite rightly concluded.

Pasang, who arrived with him, confided to us: “Plenty much trouble with Helmut Sahib."

Pasang had precisely as “plenty much trouble” with his own balance. They had met the social duties of the homeward march fair and square, whereas Sepp and I had shirked them. I have already described how Helmut lay down on a bench to sleep it off and only awoke to join in the dance later on in the night. He never missed the fowl at all.

Next day preparations for the wedding began in earnest. As with all weddings which aspire to any social distinction, there were many questions of precedence and ceremony to settle. We were not sufficiently familiar with the customs of the Sherpas to give even the most well-meant advice, but on one point we were as convinced as we were united: the wedding-breakfast ought to consist of chicken. Knowing by now that we were not only the guests of honour but the financial backers of the wedding, we felt entitled to make this suggestion. Pasang
and Ang Nyima promised to do their best. Here too poultry was scarce.

We spent the day of the preparations, in which we had no part to play, lazing in the sun. Pasang was a little wrought up, and no wonder. It was not a wedding to be easily forgotten.

Lukla was in a state of excitement on the day. A few old women were still hurrying to a neighbour’s to put the last touches. Aromatic leaves were burnt as a smoke-offering in a little stone hearth which was used for such occasions. Helmut had slept off his debauch. Lukla’s two dozen houses were in a state of feverish excitement.

The cloudless sky of the Himalaya and its blazing sun shone down on us. We had brought out the flags which Pasang had taken up to the top of Cho Oyu; other flags of India and Nepal were to be seen, waving in the wind and giving a festive air.

For the actual ceremony of the “great marriage” Pasang and a bridegroom-leader, or best man, had to ride from the house in which we had established our headquarters to Yang Tshin’s house. We and the Sherpas either preceded or followed as an admiring cortège. The distance between the two houses was only eight hundred yards, but it was a long way.

The path was lined by the inhabitants of Lukla holding out cups and bowls of chang or rakshi. To decline was out of the question on such a day. We advanced a yard at a time. I was full of admiration for Pasang, who in spite of the promising formation of his legs was no horseman, and yet did honour to all these toasts on horse-back.

His mounted escort was one of the finest men I have ever seen. He looked as proud as an ancient Roman and his expression, self-confident and slightly amused, had the timeless and cosmopolitan air of a superior person.

Pasang’s brother, Dorje, who officiated in the village as Lama, blessed the bridegroom and sprinkled us too with an ear of corn.

We guests of honour, although we had to go on foot, were included in the toasts and it still amazes me that we were able to take so many clear shots of the wedding train.

Even if the wedding was not in itself such a splendid affair as Pasang had led us to expect, we shall always remember it for the Sherpas’ exuberant joy, the villagers’ hospitality, for
Yang Tshin’s face, positively sullen with dignity, for Pasang’s heroic efforts to cut a figure on horse-back, and of course for our own eager desire to deal simultaneously with cameras and cups of chang.

The procession stopped in front of the bride’s home, where Yang Tshin stood supported by three elderly ladies and holding, as everyone else did that day, a cup of chang in her hand. Pasang had to have one more before he was allowed to drop wearily from his horse and enter the house, where drums were throbbing and prayers being intoned. I did not witness much of the religious part of the wedding; instead I lay down outside in the warm sunshine and went to sleep. When Sepp woke me up, there was a Mrs. Pasang No. 2 and the conquest of Cho Oyu had started on its long chain of consequences. It was a wonderful day.

Then the homeward march to Kathmandu was resumed. Yang Tshin accompanied us, or Pasang rather, at an interval of two paces. He was taking her back with him to Darjeeling.

Mrs. Pasang No. 1 could not have known anything of these events and might, we feared, be surprised at this enlargement of the domestic circle. We asked Pasang, as tactfully as we could, if he did not expect complications when he introduced Yang Tshin to his home.

He looked at us in astonishment. “No. It is a very large house. There is plenty room.”

That is what men who climb high peaks are made of.

There is little more to say of our journey home; it was a happy and harmonious finale. We followed the usual Everest Expedition route, which has often been described and is well used to foreign travellers. We renewed our acquaintance with villages and villagers we had got to know a few weeks earlier and felt quite at home.

I can call up a few pictures, such as a farmhouse smothered in bright-red flowers; the outlines of high peaks to the north, now seen in clear perspective; the late rice-harvest in the level fields; the peaceful and contented inhabitants of the hamlets; the cordial welcome we were given everywhere.
The Sherpa children had their hair elaborately combed in honour of the bride and bridegroom (above) and Ang Nyima dressed his son in white (right).
I made the most of the warm sunshine during our return through the sheltered valleys to soothe the pain in my hands
Pasang, a lama as well as a mountaineer, giving Helmut his blessing on a festive occasion
And then one day we were in Banepa, one stage only from Kathmandu, the end of our journey. We even had hopes of a lorry; in the dry season the roads of Kathmandu are passable as far out as this.

It was a sorrowful evening; the sadness of parting was in the air. Tents were erected for the last time. Tomorrow we should be sleeping at the Snow View Hotel.

"Buy a few gallons of liquor. This evening we have big farewell party," I told Pasang.

We sat down for our evening meal served on cases and the Sherpas and porters collected round, squatting silently in the darkness with their eyes fixed on us. They had already eaten, and waited patiently for Gyalsen to pour out the drink.

One more of these last evenings. I was moved and slightly drunk.

"We will come back next year. We’ll try the Kangch."

Adjiba had been on the recent reconnaissance of the mountain by a British expedition. He described it as a "mountain can do", one that could be climbed.

I did not, of course, know that the British had announced their return to it\(^1\) or that my hands would rule out any plans of the sort for a year to come.

It seemed at the time only natural to select a new goal for our Sherpas and ourselves. We could scarcely imagine a life in which we were not mountaineering together.

"Kangchenjunga," the Sherpas told each other, and the porters repeated "Kangchenjunga". We were all fine fellows and the high peaks of the world were at our feet. It is very pleasant to be drunk in Banepa.

Then the Sherpas, still a dark and motionless mass, started singing. The Tyrolese supplemented them, and the drink was plentiful. Each of us three called up a Sherpa or porter from time to time and drank with him. We filled his cup, as he stood embarrassed at being singled out for the honour, and then drank with him and embraced him. It was like shaking hands for the last time and saying, "You did a fine job and we liked you very much." Blushing and happy, he withdrew into the darkness.

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\(^{1}\) Kangchenjunga was climbed by a British expedition led by Charles Evans on 25 May 1955.
Then they formed up in a long row for the Sherpa dances, and we heard the familiar tunes again and took our places. Perhaps we might never dance that dance again. The inhabitants of Banepa were astonished at such revelry by night. The Sherpas were almost as much foreigners to them as we were—creatures of another world who chased after mad exploits.

A lorry actually turned up next morning and we had not to tramp the last miles to Kathmandu. It was an invigorating morning; hang-overs and headaches were blown away by the cool wind we met.

We sat on our baggage, not very comfortably, but enjoying a fine view. "Jai Hind!" and "Jai Nepal!" our companions shouted to wake up the sleepy villages we passed through. Sometimes they added, "Jai Austria!" and we felt greatly honoured. The flags that had been flown on the peak were brought out again and Gyalsen raised the victorious ice-axe aloft.

By midday we were sitting in the Snow View Hotel with a pile of telegrams in front of us. We were astonished to see how big it was.

I had been convinced even before we set out that the day of the 26,000-foot peak was over. Annapurna, the first of them, had been won, Everest itself conquered; Nanga Parbat, that fateful mountain for the Germans, had yielded. What was the point of another ascent? It could only be done to please ourselves.

After we had climbed the peak we often discussed the repercussions we might expect in Austria.

"Zita, my wife, will be glad," Sepp said.
"My friends will be pleased too," I agreed.

We didn't dare go beyond our nearest and dearest. Occasionally I might see our success as front-page news. But I never counted on it.

Sepp and I had a few bets.
"The government won't have cabled," I said.
"It will," Sepp replied.
"Bet on it? A fiver?"
"Right."
"The Alpine Club has cabled. Bet on it?"

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“No, not on that.”
I lost fifteen pounds all told.
There were cables of congratulation from the Austrian Government, the city of Vienna, the Alpine Club and many friends in Europe, Asia, America and Australia.
We were surprised, touched and grateful. Fifteen pounds seemed to be a small price to pay. And besides, I haven’t paid Sepp yet.

We were fallen upon in Kathmandu by the correspondents of the Indian and Nepalese press, and I’m afraid were an unfailing source of disappointment.
“Did you employ any new climbing gadgets?”
“No.”
“Any clothing not hitherto tried out?”
“No.”
“Oxygen, of course.”
We did not need to give a blank negative that time.
“We had two bottles of 150 litres each. But only for medical purposes. If any of us had contracted pneumonia at a high altitude we should have given him neat oxygen to breathe for a few minutes. Doctors say even this can bring about a turn for the better.”
“Three hundred kilos of oxygen then,” and they began noting it down.
“No. Only two bottles, weighing five kilos the two perhaps. It was compressed oxygen, weighing almost nothing. If not under pressure it would have taken up the same space as three hundred litres of water.”
“Aha,” they said listlessly and let their pens fall.
“You didn’t have to make use of the oxygen?” one countered obstinately.
We replied that as none of us had been ill, the bottles had been brought back unopened.
Despondence descended on us all. A last hope flickered in the face of the obstinate one.
“How many tons of baggage had you?”
“Nine hundred kilos.”
The figure was not worth noting. After a pause, during
which we guiltily looked down on the floor, a final question was fired off.

"Any new foods?"

"Grape syrup, bean sausage and Nescafé."

They made bored notes and hurried off to cable our "story", as they kindly called it.

We were a severe disappointment. They were eager to communicate our triumph in full detail to the world—so many tons of equipment; plastic tents warmed by atomic waste; crampons which melted their way into the ice by means of self-generated heat; vitamin-pills as large as beans which supported life unaided for several weeks . . .

We could not supply them with any sensations of the kind, not even the now familiar oxygen apparatus; nothing except the peak itself and good team-work. Nevertheless, they did their best not to let out what a poor lot we were.

In Europe the meagreness of our outfit was put to our credit. And I believe I see now why the journalists of Kathmandu were so set on attributing our success to the latest technical inventions. It was not their fault but ours.

Why should Asia expect anything of us except technical achievements? We began the conquest of Asia five hundred years ago because our ships were more seaworthy and our weapons more deadly than theirs, and because we needed their merchandise. We did not rule these countries because we were wiser, but because we had discovered the uses of steam. They have seen for centuries that technical mastery means power. Can we laugh at them for asking about vitamin-pills and the latest inventions? It is too late now to tell them that we are not exclusively rationalised machines and have another side. We have so seldom revealed it.

Apart from missionaries, on whose heels the trader follows, our exports have been clocks, cloth, radio, films, cars, aeroplanes and all the other products of industry—very rarely a faith or a philosophy. This is regrettable. We need not feel ashamed of our faith and our philosophy, even when confronted by the ancient civilisations of Asia.

The result is that the impression we make on Asia is much the same as that made by America on ourselves. America has
the tallest buildings, the fastest aeroplanes, the best drugs. We admire and envy, but we would not change places with them because the age of our society is glorious as well as burdensome.

It would have been foolish to try to impress on these journalists that our object had been to achieve our purpose with the fewest possible technical aids. We were from the west and the mark of the west is the machine.

As we wished to board s.s. Victoria in Bombay at the beginning of December, we could not make a long stay in Kathmandu. We were treated by the Europeans and Americans living there with a kindness we shall never forget. The British Ambassador, Christopher Summerhayes, and his wife invited us over and over again to their beautiful house, and made us feel at home in the British way.

We had not much time to enjoy all these kindnesses or the beauty of the town. We had to proceed to India. The trip was at an end.

We left by air, and all the Sherpas and porters who had come on with us from Lukla escorted us to the aerodrome.

And there something very remarkable and very touching occurred: just before the machine revved up, an elderly Sherpani from Lukla suddenly burst out sobbing. She had been one of our porters, a reliable one who was scarcely ever the worse for drink, and we had not treated her particularly well or particularly badly. She had been with us for exactly two weeks. Now she was crying as if her heart would break. Even the rest of the Sherpas, men whose lives are lived in the presence of death, were crying too. The Indian pilots looked on in astonishment. They had seen many expeditions come and go, but they had never known anything like this.

When I look back to Cho Oyu today, to the mountain which engrossed so many weeks of our lives and will be an inseparable part of all our days to come; which we sometimes loved and sometimes hated; which we feared and yet made our own, I always see its peak through this veil of tears. They seem to me to be the real success of our expedition, worth more than the peak itself.
APPENDIX

Diary of the Expedition

SEPTEMBER TO NOVEMBER 1954

2 September  Start from Kathmandu.
19 September Arrival at Namche Bazar.
23 September Departure from Namche Bazar with 27 porters.
27 September Reach Base Camp (18,000 feet).
28 September Reconnaissance of route to Cho Oyu.
29 September Camp I (19,000 feet) reached.
30 September Ascent to Camp II (20,300 feet). Tichy, Jochler, Pasang, Adjiba and Ang Nyima spend the night there.

1 October Reconnaissance of route to Camp III by Tichy, Jochler and Pasang; return to Camp II.

2 October Bad weather. Jochler descends to Camp I, the rest remain at Camp II. Heuberger comes up to Camp I from Base.

3 October Camp III established (21,600 feet) by Tichy, Pasang, Adjiba, Ang Nyima, Gyalsen, Pemba Bhutar and Da Nurbu.

4 October Assault team stays at Camp III because of bad weather. Heuberger attempts to reach Camp II with some Sherpas. Impossible owing to weather. Jochler remains at Camp I.

5 October Camp IV established (22,900 feet) by Tichy, Pasang, Adjiba, Ang Nyima, Gyalsen and Pemba Bhutar. Gyalsen and Pemba Bhutar return in the evening to Camp III. Jochler reaches Camp III in stormy weather. Spends night there with the two Sherpas.
6 October *Disaster of the storm at Camp IV.* Tichy's hands frost-bitten. Descent of assault team. Jöchler attempts in vain to reach Camp IV. Heuberger and some of the Sherpas ascend to Camp II. Camp III vacated. At Camp II first injection for Tichy's frost-bite. Tichy, Jöchler, Gyalsen and Pemba Bhutar spend night at Camp II. The others descend to Camp I.

7 October Whole team assembled at Camp I.

8 October Pasang goes to Lukla with some of the Sherpas to fetch supplies.

9 October Rest.

10 October Reconnaissance of west face of Cho Oyu by Jöchler and Heuberger.

11 October Encounter with Madame Kogan and Bertholet of the Swiss Expedition.

12 October Ascent of Mount Tyrol (ca. 20,600 feet) by Jöchler and Heuberger.

13 October Discussion at camp of the Swiss Expedition.

14 October Proposal for fresh attempt on Cho Oyu.

15 October *Ascent to Camp III*, for which snow-cave is dug out.

16 October Jöchler, Adjiba and Gyalsen attempt to reach Camp IV. Impossible because of storm.

17 October Storm. Assault team remains all day in snow-cave at Camp III.

18 October Arrival of Pasang. *The whole team ascend to Camp IV.* (Tichy, Jöchler, Heuberger, Pasang, Adjiba and Gyalsen.)

19 October 6 o'clock. Start for the peak. (Tichy, Jöchler, Pasang.)

15 o'clock. *The peak of Cho Oyu (26,750 feet) reached.*

15.30 o'clock. Start of descent. Heuberger and Adjiba come as far as rock-face to meet assault team. Gyalsen descends to Camp III.

19 o'clock. Arrival at Camp IV.
20 October  Storm. Pasang descends in morning to Camp III. Ang Nyima and Gyalsen ascend from Camp III to Camp IV. At midday all descend to Camp III and spend night there.

21 October  Descent to Camp I.

22 October  Rest.

23 October  Departure for Base.

24 October  March from Base to Lunak.

25 October  March from Lunak to Thami.

26 October  Rest.

27 October  March from Thami to Namche Bazar. Several days' rest and excursion to Thyangboche.

5 November  Departure from Namche Bazar.

8 November  Pasang's wedding at Lukla.

22 November  Return to Kathmandu.