

# **The Tears of Autumn Study Guide**

## **The Tears of Autumn by Charles McCarry**

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## Plot Summary

The Tears of Autumn circles the globe following Agent Paul Christopher's quest for proof that the South Vietnamese are behind the assassination of President John F. Kennedy as revenge for Kennedy backing the 1963 coup d'etat.

Agent Paul Christopher learns from an informant, Luong, about a meeting between a North Vietnamese official and an unidentified woman. Paul is in Paris with his case worker, Tom Webster, White House aide Dennis Foley, and Peggy McKinney when word comes of a coup d'etat in Saigon. Paul flies to Rome to visit his girlfriend Molly, and then to Washington, DC, to meet old friend and Agency high-up, David Patchen. Paul has met in the Congo with Alphonse Nsango when word comes of John F. Kennedy's assassination. Back in Rome, Paul learns of Soviet paranoia because assassin Lee Harvey Oswald had once defected to the USSR and hears from Saigon acquaintance Nguyễn Kim of the Ngos' determination to "spit out of their graves." Within ten days, Paul forms a hypothesis.

When Foley orders Paul's investigation ended, Paul resigns. In Geneva he withdraws a large amount of money deposited in his name, drives to Paris, where Kim tells him about Vietnamese family ties, sells him names of contacts, and promises that "Lê Thu" will "open doors." In Saigon, Paul visits the Truong toc, learns from Wolkowicz's associate about Oswald's trip to Mexico City, meets an enigmatic Ngo relative, Fr. Jean-Baptiste Ho, hears how heroin will ensnare young U.S. troops arriving in-country, and returns to Saigon to find Luong murdered. After another interview with the Truong toc, Paul is shot at and nearly car bombed, arrested, and told to leave the country. After attending Luong's wake, arranging horoscopes from Yu Lung, and inadvertently killing Luong's killers, Paul catches his plane.

Back in Rome, Paul learns from Soviet defector Gherman Klimenko about Frankie Pigeon, arranges use of an Agency villa, sends Molly with Websters to Switzerland, obtains translations of the Chinese horoscopes, runs into Kim, who renews Truong toc' death threat against Molly, obtains evidence in Zürich confirming Klimenko's story, hires Stavros Glavanis and Jan Eycken to kidnap Pigeon, and personally extracts Pigeon's confession, all of which he mails to himself in Washington. Back in the Congo, Paul learning about the hiring of Lee Harvey Oswald from a Cuban, Manuel Ruiz, prepares a final report, and offers it to the government. Foley's new White House superior, J.D. Turnbull, believes it, but burns it as a political expediency. Paul is reunited with Molly in Zermatt for New Year's Eve and accepts that she will not leave him, even at the risk of her life.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

Paul Christopher boards a plane in Bangkok, Thailand, thinking about how his ex-wife Cathy and girlfriend Molly obsess about poetry he can no longer write, and how his South Vietnamese agent, Luong, faces death. Paul has just paid off Luong as ordered by section chief Wolkowicz for photographs of North Vietnamese intelligence chief Do Minh Kha and a mystery woman. The powerful Ngo family wants Luong dead.

In Paris, a city Paul has long known but no longer loves, he types a report to his case officer, Tom Webster, and then sleeps for 12 hours with it under his pillow. Tom reads the "hot" report before dinner guests arrive. Dennis Foley, the President's right-hand man, takes a dislike to Paul's political neutrality and insists that JFK will live up to his commitments. Brains and style are back in government. Foley's dinner date, Peggy McKinney, the ambassador's wife, agrees: the right people are in power and will stay there. A courier delivers news of a coup d'etat in Saigon, followed by a phone call confirming the Ngos' deaths. Peggy declares that 1 November 1963, will show the world that the U.S. is taking the initiative again.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

The novel opens rather confusingly, with Paul Christopher flying out of Bangkok, Thailand, musing about the two women in his life who have been obsessed with his poetry, a talent that vanishes when he becomes a spy. He also thinks about the Vietnamese agent he has long used and knows will be killed by the South Vietnamese regime. A flashback to Paul being ordered to pay off Luong and not coddle him as a child is not easily caught on first reading. The scene introduces Wolkowicz, but dwells distractingly on his being tortured in World War II. That he prizes getting along with the Saigon authorities over actually learning what goes on in the country comes out later, when Paul talks about his formal report with Tom Webster, his case officer. The scenes set in Asia establish that Paul has an ear for language and speaks impeccable French.

The story then shifts to Paris. Another confusing passage has Webster musing on the nature of the agent's life in the midst of a description of Webster's difficulty interpreting phone codes. Much is made of French technical ineptitude in tapping phones, vulgarity, and anti-Americanism. Dinner at the Websters paints a vivid picture of the Kennedys' "New Frontier." Elegance, directness, and decisiveness are back in style, even if French President Charles de Gaulle snubs JFK's envoy, Dennis Foley. The alleged dirty tricks by which JFK is elected over Nixon in 1960, are mentioned but play no further role. More to the point of the story is the devotion with which Foley declares that JFK will stick by the South Vietnamese regime, no matter how unpopular or non-democratic. He and the apolitical Paul form an instant enmity that remains to the end of the novel.



Just before learning the Ngo brothers who rule the South have been assassinated, they are declared "horrid" and the Ambassador's wife tries to lead a college cheer over their deaths. No one will join in, and Sybille Webster weeps over all of the corpses that politics creates. Undeterred, Peggy McKinney insists on a difference between petty Asiatic dictators and presidents of the greatest nation on earth. Peggy prophesies that the date 1 November 1963, will go down in history showing the U.S. once again in charge. It proves a pivotal factor in the rest of the novel.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

Paul tries to dodge both Molly's question about his poetry and her attempts to get him to talk about his real life. He tells how his ex-wife kills off their marriage. During dinner, the communist journalist Piero Cremona comes over to talk about what everyone had known was coming, given a man of action in the White House. The generals will fail and the U.S. Marines will have to come to the rescue. Molly is Australian, wants to be a real writer but produces "tripe" about Italian fashions. They have been together since first making love, and Webster has her investigated in Canberra.

At the safe house on Q Street in Washington, DC, David Patchen says Foley wants Paul fired. David and Paul have been friends since recuperating from wounds together in World War II. David's facial paralysis and limp disqualify him for field work, but he is a natural administrator. Both see intellect as a force to be used in secret to find truth. Both can both predict and use others' mistakes. David swears that "the outfit" has nothing to do with the Ngo murders and fears Paul is losing his sense of humor. Paul admits he is tired of travel and lying, but plans trips to Léopoldville and Saigon.

In Léopoldville, Paul meets the Sorbonne-educated revolutionary Nsango, who may yet become Prime Minister, but is now living in the forest, hunting and being hunted. Nsango shares photographs and names of Cuban revolutionaries who operated locally for a month. The old friends arrange to use postcards to request future meetings. Paul passes his report to Trevor Hitchcock, son of missionaries, and has dinner with him and his nervous wife Theresa before his 10 PM flight. Trevor tells about a German little person who he recruits and trains in Berlin in 1946. Should Dieter Dimpel's services be needed, Hitchcock sets up a sign/countersign. At the airport, Paul learns that JFK has been killed and is numb. Landing at dawn in Rome, Paul checks in with Tom, should he be needed.

## Chapter 2 Analysis

As Molly tries to penetrate Paul's walls of silence, he tells about his self-absorbed ex-wife, Cathy, including a long and detailed account of her affair with a director that ends up with her being brutally beaten. She calls Paul to take her to the hospital, and he is sexually aroused by her. The scene connects with nothing later in the novel and the caesura to the next scene, which is germane, is sharp. A communist journalist, Piero Cremona, comes over to talk about how everyone had known a coup was coming, given a man of action in the White House. The generals will fail and the U.S. Marines will have to come to the rescue. Cremona soon provides vital information on how the Soviets view the assassination of John F. Kennedy, and put Paul onto a vital Soviet asset, ostensibly a newspaperman for TASS, the Soviet news agency.



After two detailed asides, one establishing Molly's identity and another both establishing David Patchen's identity and the fact that Patchen and Paul both view the intellect as a force to be used in secret and that they are both able to predict others' mistakes and profit from this—Paul flies to the war-torn Congo to meet the complex revolutionary leader, Nsango.

Paul has great faith in the man and hopes he will one day lead his nation but at present worries about the risks Nsango takes fighting in the forests. Chinese revolutionaries have come and gone and the Cubans are now establishing themselves. Neither has been willing to arm the Congolese rebels fighting the Belgians. Nsango provides the Cuban's names and photographs, which Paul passes to a fellow agent, who regales him with the story of an ex-Nazi midget spy for the Americans, who now lives as a watchmaker in Switzerland. He establishes a sign/co-sign for Paul to use, should he ever need his expert services. Paul will, of course, hire Dieter Dimpel later in the story.

News of John F. Kennedy's assassination reaches Paul in the Léopoldville airport and leaves him speechless. A Belgian priest provides the foil for him to admit his love of America and of JFK are the same.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Paul suddenly understands why JFK is assassinated. He has always seen mental images that he pieces together, as when writing a poem. He realizes that political murders are usually about vengeance and, without anger, sets about discovering the details needed to tell the truth. He knows who to contact and realizes he may die trying—although three days in Siena with Molly have convinced him that he loves her and wants to live. Earlier, Tom had spoken about Soviet paranoia about Lee Harvey Oswald's past and their desire to distance themselves from him. On Tom's orders, Paul contacts Cremona, who mentions the Tass agent, Klimenko.

Oswald is dead when Paul runs into Nguyễn Kim in Rome and introduces him to Molly at lunch. Drinking heavily, Kim talks about his family's royal history, his present poverty, his service to the exiled Mme. Nhu, and his certainty that the Ngos were killed by the Americans, who forbid the press to reveal it. A third brother, Ngo Dinh Can, has been betrayed and imprisoned. Kim talks of the JFK tragedy, of Russian fears, and of the Ngos' determination to "spit out of their graves." Before leaving, Kim asks to take their picture as a souvenir. Paul and Molly enjoy a week together before he understands something Kim says and rushes to the U.S.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

Chapter 3, set in Italy, finds Paul realizing that he loves Molly but also intuits why JFK is murdered. Paul has always had the gift of picturing events in his head and afterwards piecing together the facts that support the vision. His superstitious ex-wife considers it mind-reading, but Paul believes it is more akin to the creation of poetry. Washington is so obsessed with the assassination that Webster speaks to Paul over open phone lines about the need for information. The Soviets worry that President Johnson will launch a nuclear attack on Moscow because of Lee Harvey Oswald's connection with Russia. The TASS agent in Rome is concerned.

Oswald is already dead when Paul runs into Nguyễn Kim in Rome. They have worked together in Saigon as American reporter and South Vietnamese press agent. Kim is assisting the infamous former "First Lady," Mme. Nhu, as she rebuilds her life in the West. As will be seen later in the novel, a complicating factor for Paul is that Kim meets Molly over lunch and before he leaves, takes the couple's picture as a souvenir. Molly's presence allows Kim to talk candidly about the familial political structure in Vietnam and the certainty that the Ngo family will rise again to power. Kim explicitly blames the Americans for Diem and Nhu's deaths and berates the press for covering up the story. Heavy drinking perhaps makes Kim more talkative than normal or prudent. Molly is offended at the two assassinations and resulting grief are compared. Only after a few days and nights of making love and enjoying normal life together with Molly does Paul



understand something that Kim says, "Ils cracheront de leurs tombes" — "They would spit out of their graves." Paul rushes this insight immediately to Washington.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

Fearing eavesdropping, Paul and David Patchen meet at the Statler Hotel to talk about the Ngos needing an American gunman to obtain "blood for blood," assessing Oswald useful because he is unstable. The Ngos are probably amazed that the Americans have not yet linked them to Oswald. Paul needs White House approval to investigate, and Foley remains the liaison. Foley is listless when they first meet in David's house but grows fiery labeling the hypothesis as insane, illogical, and grotesque, and demands to talk with David alone. Foley believes Paul is obsessed and questions David's objectivity. David defends Paul's rare qualities and maintains that the Ngos have the motive and the skill to pull off the crime. When Foley orders the matter dropped and refuses to talk to LBJ, David warns that Paul will pursue it on his own.

When Foley departs, David and Paul listen to the tape recording and head to a bar for privacy. Foley believes Paul but will not allow JFK's memory to be blackened or U.S. foreign policy set on its head. Paul's flaw is believing that others think the truth will make men free. It only makes them angry, because humans are imperfect. Paul can continue his quest only by leaving the Agency. Word will spread slowly, leaving him unofficial resources. Since he is friends with Foley, Wolkowicz should not be trusted. Soon afterwards, Peggy McKinney's brother, a Green Beret captain en route to Vietnam, contacts Foley, who prepares a letter to Wolkowicz. The captain memorizes Paul's photograph. Foley will not forget him.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

Chapter 4 marks a turning point in the novel. Paul convinces Patchen that the Ngos are behind JFK's murder, needing "blood for blood." He accepts the psychology of hiring Oswald and the implications if this is proved and published. Patchen cannot authorize an investigation without White House approval, and Foley remains the liaison. Patchen doubts if things would be different with a Texan in that job. Note that Paul and Patchen meet in a hotel rather than an Agency safe house to avoid electronic eavesdropping. They switch to Patchen's living room to talk with Foley precisely because tape recordings are automatically voice-activated there. Patchen's situation as a divorcee is rather pathetically painted in passing.

Foley is clearly sunk in the mourning process and is as wildly defensive of the dead JFK as he had been of the living, vibrant one he continues to imitate (he still wears the PT-109 tie clasp). He and the captain who meet at the end of the chapter epitomize the sentimentality that swept the U.S. after Kennedy's assassination. Foley, who is clearly an obsessive/compulsive personality, goes on the offensive, accusing Paul of O/C and Patchen of lack of objectivity in assessing his old friend. He wants Paul sent for rest and recuperation. Patchen calmly catalogs the traits that have won Paul praise and respect



in the Agency and then warns that Paul is capable of independent action. Paul has a good track record as a "singleton" and can not be controlled. He feels as strongly about JFK and the U.S. as Foley—while not necessarily assessing the potential "harm" in the same way. Patchen concludes that Foley is crude, emotional, and ridiculous, and advises him to go through proper channels to deal with Paul (as earlier Foley had recommended Paul go through the Warren Commission with information about the assassination). Patchen knows the outcome: any official investigation will be quashed.

The old friends listen to the tape and then go outside where it is safe to talk. Having defended Paul to Foley, Patchen lights into him about all the trouble he causes through self-righteousness. Patchen will fire him in the morning and slow the spread of the news to keep unofficial options open to Paul. He has already told Foley that as a journalist Paul has innumerable contacts. If Paul gets into a jam, Patchen will rescue him and justify it later, and, if Paul wants to return, Patchen will re-hire him after the case is solved. Foley will not survive long under LBJ, Patchen is sure.

Particularly interesting in this chapter are the psychological profiles of Lee Harvey Oswald that the agents develop. They note that the Mafia would not agree to assassinate a President out of patriotism, that someone with an inferiority complex could be convinced he would be changing history, and that Oswald's use of a rifle sets him aside from other Presidential assassins and would-be assassins, who use hand guns so they can "smell their victims." Oswald's rating as a sharpshooter in the U.S. Marines is, oddly, omitted. The psychological theme is further developed when Foley orders Patchen to fetch him a glass of water and fails to drink it. Patchen knows it is done to establish hierarchy, but would have timed bringing the water for right before the departure to make the point more forcefully. Foley is clearly outmatched.

The plot thickens when Peggy McKinney's "fine-strung" Green Beret brother visits Foley. There is no indication that Foley initiates the contact and no one else is suggested. Foley seizes the opportunity, pulling strings to get the captain in place as his man in Saigon and in contact with his old friend, Wolkowicz, who is revealed to have been in on the planning for the ill-fated Bay of Pigs operation, the undisputed low-point in the Kennedy Administration. Wolkowicz dramatically favors killing Fidel Castro. Two Kennedy lovers blind to the truth are thus aligned to frustrate Paul's efforts in Vietnam and probably endanger his life.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

When they return to Rome, Molly moves in with Paul and drives out Cathy's ghost. He loves her because she has not been part of his past. A letter arrives from David, quoting two lines of one of Paul's poems and code directing him to a specific box in the Union de Banques Suisses in Geneva under the name P. S. Runner. Paul draws \$25,000 in \$100 bills and CHF 25,000 in CHF 100 notes, rents a Peugeot with French tags, and drives all night to Paris. It takes half a day to find Nguyễn Kim. Paul slips a tail before stopping for dinner, during which Kim explains the Vietnamese terms "toc," "chi," and "phai," and applies them to the Ngo family. Kim warns him off writing about the anti-American Ngos and sees that Paul is up to something.

Tom Webster darts over when Kim is in the bathroom to suggest that Paul drop by the apartment. When Kim returns, Paul offers him \$200 per name for ten good contacts, including the Truong toc. Kim jots down names and addresses, warning that these are dangerous men. The name "Lê Thu," he says, will "open doors." When Kim departs with his \$2,000, Paul goes to the Websters, who are upset over his resignation. Tom produces a sealed envelop containing an unsigned note with details of Oswald's movements before Dallas, offers to augment the Geneva money, warns against visiting the U.S. while his "friend" is in "power," and says that Tom knows only that he has quit. Paul memorizes the data and burns the pages.

Paul insists that resigning is no sudden decision. He is tired and he has held agents' hands long enough. Tom insists that dinner with Kim looks suspicious, Kim has been running money through Beirut and wants to buy a Marseilles heroin factory to improve profit margins. Tom proudly admits to planting a tracking bug on the Peugeot and offers to search the computers for the name Lê Thu. As a private civilian, Paul declines. He sneaks out before dawn, moves the bug to a truck, and drives to Brussels. By afternoon, Molly is wearing a new ring—and hears that Paul is heading to Asia.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

Chapter 5 is loaded with technical material. First, Paul is told about a Swiss numbered bank account and withdraws a considerable amount of money. How these accounts work is described. Only at the end of the chapter is it clarified that the money represents Paul's salary as a writer, gotten to him discretely. The next bank reference in the novel is less benign.

Next, Paul hunts an elusive Kim in Paris, avoids tails, and gets him to explain the Vietnamese terms "toc," "chi," and "phai," and apply them to the Ngo family. This section is dense reading, but the bottom line is that they remain meaningful cultural links in the 20th century, particularly because the Truong toc as a living link to the ancestors,

mediates family problems. Kim clears up Western misunderstandings of "ancestor worship," particularly how it is practiced by Catholic Vietnamese. When Paul pretends to be interested in writing a magazine article about this, Kim says he will never get it straight, the readers will not care or understand, and no Vietnamese will talk to him about it. He claims to know what Paul is up to. For \$2,000, Kim gives him a list of prominent but dangerous names and suggests that "Lê Thu" will "open doors" in Vietnam. This proves an understatement later in the novel. At the end of the chapter, Kim is revealed to be involved in the opium and heroin trade. More comes out on this late in the novel.

Finally, at Websters', Paul receives a detail accounting of Oswald's activities in the months leading up to the Kennedy assassination: 24 Apr.-25 Sep. New Orleans, passing out leaflets for the "Fair Play for Cuba Committee;" 25-27 Sep., bus ride to Mexico City; Sep. 27, unsuccessful visits to the Cuban and Soviet embassies; 27 Sep.-1 Oct., stays in Mexico City, movements unknown; 3 Oct. arrives Dallas; 16 Oct. begins work at the Texas Book Depository. The rifle is mail-ordered under the name A. Hidell on 13 Mar. On 1 Nov., Oswald rents POB 6225, Terminal Annex, Dallas. Note that Paul is able to memorize such detail after two quick readings and burn the hard copy. This will allow him to fit all of the pieces of the puzzle together going forward.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Honey leads Paul home from a bar on Tu Do Street, takes his money, and tries to flirt, but Paul wants just a sister for a few days in a safe house. Before dawn, Paul walks to find Luong's house, identifies himself as a friend, Crawford, and when the family is gone, hands Luong his lost pay. Luong explains that the Lê rule before the Nguyêns, so it is a common surname. Because the Ngos are in mourning, learning a connection to Lê Thu, particularly if opium is involved, will be hard and expensive. Paul and Luong discuss lucky numbers, which are less a force than an "elegance."

Paul is up at dawn next day to bring vital information to the Truong toc's. He knocks long on a garden door before getting the attention of a young woman, who is rude until he hands her a sheet of paper with a message. When the Truong toc eventually seems him, Paul tells about cousin Ngo Tan Khoi's murder and burial in 1958 and how to contact the surviving killer, Gaboni. Paul assures the Truong toc that he wants only to express sympathies for the loss of Diem, whom he knows slightly. The old man says that few understand Diem because he lacks the gift of popular gesture. Paul quotes Lao-tzu about rulers loving the world as their body, surprising the Truong toc. The Ngo family is divided politically but works together as much as possible. When Paul mentions that the two presidents die within 21 days of one another, the Truong toc doubts the sorrows are similar. Americans live in another world. As Paul leaves, Paul suggests the young woman who he first met at the garden door hide her contempt if she wants to be worthy of the Truong toc.

Paul next visits Wolkowicz in his world of paranoia and high security. They watch his pet python kill and devour a drugged newborn pig before Paul claims to be just a reporter earning a living, doing a piece on the Ngos, and asks to see Don Wolfe. Wolfe recalls leaving Mexico City on 2 Dec. 1963. The Russians had been "scared shitless" and the Americans a bit hysterical about the Russians trying to look respectable. Ruby killing Oswald was a gift to the Soviets. The Agency lacks the manpower to watch Oswald in Mexico City 27-30 September. There are no Vietnamese in Mexico City at that time, but a Cuban in transit from or to Vietnam, Manuel Ruiz.

Leaving the foreigners' compound, Paul is surprised not to be tailed. In the Pussycat Night Club, where Honey is entertaining an American sergeant, Paul finds Luong's message: "1230 Airborne." Luong is uncomfortable meeting at home. His asking about Lê Thu has startled people, who advise him to forget the name. Luong wants still to talk to an ex-priest in a village on the Bien Hoa road, who is related to the Ngos. He has grown rich storing opium from Cambodia and Laos and might talk with Paul for money or out of curiosity. Luong provides a map and the name of a garage where Paul can get a car without papers. Paul and Luong will meet again at Honey's at 5 AM.



The Citroën is comfortable and quiet. Paul knocks on the church door until the priest appears. A woman backs away. Fr. Jean-Baptiste Ho has a facial tic, odd in an Asian. Paul identifies himself as an American outcast/pariah needing help and suggests that the new regime is less tolerant of Ho's activities than the Ngos. A sniff of heroin stings Ho's cheek. Paul advises Ho to Kim in Paris—to change banks—and observing that Ngo Dinh Can is being held in Chi Hoa Prison, where the French earlier tortured Ho, Paul asks about Lê Thu. When Ho claims ignorance, Paul suggests that Ho plans to hook the stupid, young GIs on heroin as vengeance. America foolishly underestimates Vietnam's power.

Paul wants 1) confirmation that Lê Thu is the code name for JFK's murder; 2) specifics on how the message is transmitted from Saigon to the North; and 3) the name of the North Vietnamese recruiter or whoever activates Oswald. Paul wants the information to meet an intellectual challenge. He will be in plain view all day in Saigon, should anyone wish to provide answers. Before getting into the Citroën, Paul checks carefully for booby traps. Halfway to Saigon, Paul sees movement in the darkness and is fired upon from the rear.

Paul reaches Saigon late, parks five blocks away, and walks, passing two men he recognizes, in an alley. He finds Luong recently dead of a gunshot and flees, phoning Wolkowicz to claim the body, and takes a room at the Continental Palace where he prepares a coded message for David Patchen to mail from the American embassy. When the hotel terrace empties, the Truong toc's girl approaches Paul's table and sits stiffly. He is surprised that a male relative has not been sent. Nicole's uncle wants to see Paul again. Over dinner, Nicole talks about France and the logic of its language. Paul sees the Vietnamese priding themselves in murder. Paul believes in consequences.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

Chapter 6 finds Paul back in Vietnam, working out of the Pussycat Night Club to arrange safe lodging and to contact Luong. Luong is nervous having Paul in his house. He accepts the late payment without question and talks about the difficulties of researching Paul's supposed article about the Ngos. The information Kim has provided serves Paul well. Everyone in Vietnam, including some foreigners, believe that personal luck keeps one alive. When Luong quotes Lao-tzu's Tao Te Ching, the basic text of Taoism and revered throughout Asia by members of other religions, Paul recognizes it and this leads to a discussion of lucky numbers. Luong notes that Diem and Nhu die on 11/1 — Luong's lucky number both directions — which certainly spares Luong's life. Diem's lucky number is well-known, and any multiple of seven is considered auspicious, especially 21. Paul insists he is not toying with superstitions but wants to learn.

Paul next visits the Truong toc at 5:30 AM, and encounters a rude young woman who obviously dislikes the color of his skin. She is lighting incense before the family shrine and both she and the Truong toc wear white, the color of mourning in Vietnam. Paul offers the old man information on when, where, and how a relative died in France, solving an uncomfortable mystery for the family. Recognition of Lao tzu's words again



helps Paul establish rapport. The Truong toc's assertion that there can be no comparison between the deaths of the two presidents is too facile. Paul's rebuking the young woman's rudeness leads to her correction by her uncle and her becoming a major character in the ongoing story — Nicole. Paul next visits Wolkowicz, who is shown to be obsessed with his personal safety and takes pleasure in watching his pet python feed. In a novel where people are tortured and killed, it is this pathetic scene where the violence seems gratuitous. Paul confirms Oswald's visit to Mexico City and meeting with a Cuban revolutionary who later visits Hanoi.

This confirmation allows Paul to formulate the hypothesis that he places before the heroin-addicted, ex-priest, Jean-Baptiste Ho. Paul's visit to Ho's remote village shows the struggle for the hinterlands between the Saigon government and Viet Cong. Ho earlier suffered at the hands of the colonial French and under the Ngos, to whom he is remotely related, is able to build an economic empire in illicit drugs. The generals may crack down, Paul warns, and shows he has put Ho and Kim together in the plot. Paul has specific facts about JFK's assassination that he wants confirmed. Having several times in the novel scoffed at popular ideas about spies gotten from books and movies, Paul uses the stereotype to suggest that if he is killed, others will use the information he has already gathered against Ho.

Returning to Saigon, Paul finds Luong shot dead and recognizes the killers whom he earlier passed. Wolkowicz observes that had Luong been killed by the Ngos, his widow would collect a pension, but this death is not in the line of duty. Recall the discussion of luck at the beginning of Chapter 6. Another bit of classical spy craft is described when Paul gets to his hotel room, using a dictionary lookup of words to create a code for reporting to Dennis Patchen. It is a pocket dictionary, however, so many words are lacking. That evening, Paul has a philosophical discussion with Nicole in a restaurant that ends with him declaring he believes in consequences. All humans seek to murder without feeling guilt, from simple tribesmen, to revolutionaries, to the Americans vaporizing Hiroshima — a second mention in the novel of that horrific event.





# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

Cholon is so crowded that Paul and Nicole abandon the Citroën and walk. After a series of alleys, they enter a rat-infested building and go upstairs. The Truong toc is intrigued about Paul's earlier questions to Ho, who is present, but claims to have no answers. It is stupid to talk so openly and risk one's life. Ho scoffs at the idea they will admit to killing an American president and destroying the American army with heroin. When the Truong toc stops the bickering, Paul asks why commit such a colossal act as killing JFK and then keeping it secret. Letting it appear like the act of a random lunatic strips the act of elegance and allows JFK's policies to continue. Diem and Nhu's efforts to end American influence will not fail if America learns that JFK is killed in revenge. They will be so disgusted that they will demand a complete and permanent retreat from Vietnam.

Ho recommends killing Paul, but the Truong toc declares him harmless and learns that Kim gave Paul the words Lê Thu to introduce himself. As a code name, it is poetic but insecure. Truong toc laughs and denies a plot. They accept the Ngos' deaths and their own weakness. The Kennedys live in "another dimension of power." When Paul declares he will resume his work, Ho mocks his bravado, but the Truong toc shows Paul Molly's picture, taken in Rome. The old man watches panic cross Paul's face and bows. No one interferes as Paul leaves by the front door, but in the street Luong's killer fires a pistol at Paul, who dodges and leads a chase that ends on the street where Paul has parked the locked Citroën. Seeing it open, Paul falls to the pavement just ahead of a deafening blast.

In the police station, Wolkowicz offers to keep Paul out of Vietnamese jails in exchange for the full story. A Major orders Paul out of the country by midnight. Wolkowicz takes Paul to Wolkowicz's villa and hears about the visit to Ho's church and meeting with the Truong toc. Paul is only surprised that the attack on him is so public. The Ngos are preparing to turn the Yanks into addicts when they arrive in force as retribution for Diem and Nhu. Wolkowicz informs Paul that someone in the White House is out to cause problems and has dispatched an amateur, gung-ho Green Beret captain. The shooting attack on Paul is amateur, like the killing of Diem and Nhu, but the car bombing is not. Picturing Molly, Paul agrees to leave the country on schedule.

Renamed Tho in death, Luong lies in his coffin, watched over by the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Buddha. When Paul pays respects, Tho's brother, Phuoc talks of Tho's admiration. Paul says that he would recognize the killers and recommends searching in Cholon. Phuoc recommends that Paul seek the noted Chinese astrologer and geomancer named Yu Lung. Wolkowicz assigns Paul a car and driver. Paul sends Pong in with six dates and times and sends them and five half-\$500 bills to secure an appointment for a "friend of Lê Thu." Nicole is waiting at the Majestic. She talks about the Truong toc not knowing how to deal with Paul and about Vietnamese culture as thought it were a secret code. Paul sends thanks to the Truong toc for Molly's



photograph and says he has pictures of his own. Nicole does not understand, but Paul is sure the Truong toc will because he too believes in consequences.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

A second meeting with the Truong toc led to a clandestine location in the Chinese quarter of Saigon to discuss Paul's meeting with Jean-Baptiste Ho. Paul charges explicitly that the Ngo family killed JFK and plans to hook the anticipated American military forces on heroin. To keep the truth of the assassination secret destroys its political power, for by knowing the truth, America will turn its back on Vietnam, as the Ngos had hoped. Whether communist-controlled or not, the country will rule itself. The Truong toc refuses to believe the hypothesis and produces a photograph of Molly to imply how they will keep Paul in line.

On the street, Paul narrowly escapes death from two directions. First, two men, firing pistols in the style taught by the U.S. military, miss him and chase him to his parked car, which he sees must have been booby-trapped and falls to the pavement to avoid being blown up. Wolkowicz negotiates his departure from Vietnam rather than the prospects of rotting in jail and being tortured. Thoughts of defenseless Molly again help him make his decision to leave.

Paul goes to Luong's wake, where Roman Catholic and Buddhist practices are intertwined. Recall earlier the discussion of how the cloud of ancestors that a Vietnamese feels with them throughout their life does not imply a conflict with Christian dogma. Paul is most struck by the fact that bananas are piled on Luong's chest and rice overflows his mouth. Both are intended to confuse the "Celestial Dog" who would otherwise devour his entrails. Vietnamese are renamed in death. Luong becomes Tho, which signifies "longevity" or a coffin bought in advance of the need. Tho's brother remarks that Tho will be dead a very long time and that Tho, knowing his line of work does not make for a long life, prepared amply for his family's future. His widow, it is revealed, may not leave the house for two years. Mourning customs are described at some length. Brother Phuoc returns later in the novel, where his status as a semi-monk is better described.

To make sure Paul gets to the airport on time, Wolkowicz assigns him a car and driver. They are apparently feared by the Vietnamese. Wolkowicz's paranoia is seen in the Chevrolet's armaments. Note that a Chevy is not easily camouflaged in traffic like the European cars. Phuoc has suggested that Paul visit a renowned Chinese astrologer and geomancer, Yu Lung. Paul intriguingly sends in five dates-and-times — horoscopes require such precise detail — and half of five \$500 bills, the implication being that he will restore their value as currency once he has spoken with Yu Lung. Again Paul drops the provocative word "Lê Thu."

The final scene, in which Nicole meets Paul for lunch, reveals more aspects of the mysterious Vietnamese culture. It also reinforces the fearful notion that innocent Molly will be drawn into the deadly situation after Paul has worked so hard to screen her from

his second life. What the pictures of his own might be is left mysterious, but he earlier mentions he believes he has seen a picture of the Cuban revolutionary Manuel Ruiz. He is sure that the Truong toc will understand because he understands consequences. The Ngo brothers had also understood consequences. The astrologer is about to help crack the mystery.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Yu Lung is a prosperous gentleman of 40, in a Western-style office inside a very Chinese house. Paul produces his half of the bills and Yu spreads out six sheets of rice paper covered with circles and Chinese writing. They show a remarkable conjunction of forces. Three of the four men are dead or soon to be and the fourth is active in their fates but in no danger himself. Yu explains that horoscopy predisposes rather than predestines. There are also "geomantic" factors involving the five natural elements; none of the doomed men is in harmony with the world but under the influence of Ma Tham Vong, a malevolent ghost that makes violent death inevitable. Yu assumes one of the three is a powerful foreigner, who had been predisposed to Ma A Phien, the "opium ghost." Without particulars on other individuals involved, Yu cannot produce a complete chart. That is the man in whom Paul is interested.

Claiming that horoscopy is a "settled science" and all horoscopes unique, Yu observes that "chance" in Asia is feng shui: being in the right place at the right time. Lê Thu is an inauspicious name for children. Yu seems to lie about Luong not dying because of the name. Although consultations are secret, Yu keeps records to be able to consult prior readings. He explains the structure of his reports, puts the reports in a file drawer and leaves the room to fetch scotch. Paul uses the opportunity to cut off the summaries from seven more reports and pockets them. Over scotch, Yu explains how he is a "sojourning Chinese," who has been in Vietnam all his life. Yu does not touch the envelop holding \$5,000 in Paul's presence.

Pong has been followed, so they drive out into the paddies with lights off. On a curve, they block the road and set up an ambush to either side. The Simca screeches off into the water, flips, and sinks. Pong pulls out the bodies and photographs them. At the Xa Loi Pagoda, Paul shows Phuoc his brother's killers whom Phuoc recalls drinking outside Yu's. Yu had demanded \$5,000 to talk about Lê Thu, which Luong had gone to ask from Paul. Lê Thu is also Nicole's mother's death. Near the airport, Wolkowicz agrees to mail an envelop to the Truong toc in the morning. Paul shows the the dead killers to Peggy's brother and declares he has lost amateur status.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Yu Lung is introduced as a modern-looking businessman, a "sojourning Chinese," who never considers where he is but always looks some day to being home in China. Based on birth dates and times, Yu has prepared charts for Diem, Nhu, JFK, and the Ngo Truong toc. The first three are dead, he sees, and the fourth is behind those deaths. He explains to Paul much about horoscopy and geomancy, which must work together and laments that other key figures in this drama have not been charted. The discussion of Ma Tham Vong and Ma A Phien is confused but provocative; its very technicality adding



to the mystique and suggesting that the Ngos and Kennedy are truly fated to die as they have. There is the slightest hint of JFK's playboy nature, which is scrupulously kept out of the press until some time after his death. This trip to Vietnam comes so soon after the assassination and Paul's resignation that he probably would not have had time to pull Oswald's Marine Corps records to determine his date and time of birth.

Receiving a supplemental payment, but politely not verifying it, Yu provides means and opportunity for Paul to steal additional horoscope summaries, having explained to him what the various unintelligible character clusters designate. Clearly, Paul will need to get these to a Chinese language specialist. The amount that Paul hands over—\$5,000—just happens to be what Yu demands on the night of Luong's death. Paul supposedly learns about it only when he takes to Luong's brother Phuoc photographs of his brother's killers. Phuoc is conveniently along on that visit and describes a far less serene Yu than Paul has experienced. Luong's killers die accidentally while chasing Paul and his skillful driver, Pong. Paul had intended to capture and question them, but they drive off the road into the flooded rice paddy. The passage is almost poetic as the rice stalks settle after the waves of impact and escaping air. The accident will look like a Viet Cong ambush.

Paul's time in Vietnam ends enigmatically, with him giving Wolkowicz a sealed envelop to mail to the Truong toc and telling Peggy's brother that he has lost amateur status, which had been an inside joke between Wolkowicz and Paul.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Paul doubts if a photograph of Nicole will upset the Truong toc, but hopes that it will slow Truong toc's pursuit of Molly. Christmas decorations are out in Rome as Paul enters their apartment and panics when Molly is in neither the bedroom nor bath. She enters nonchalantly, carrying wine glasses to surprise Paul, who she hears drive up. As he opens the bottle, it slips from his hands, and when they make love, he cries out as if in pain.

Later, Molly finds Paul examining strips of calligraphy, complains how he keeps secrets from her and demands to know why he is frightened. Paul explains that the Vietnamese want to kill her to punish him for learning their secrets. Reluctantly, he says that he is on the way to proving that they are behind JFK's murder and admits to having sometimes been unable to prevent deaths, which is akin to murder. Molly tells him about a phone call from someone with an accent insisting on meeting at St. Peter's. Molly worries about a trap and reminds Paul that JFK is killed in public. He replies that they want not just to kill them, but to remove all trace of their existence.

Paul enters the basilica, pauses at the original of Luong's Sacred Heart and approaches Gherman Klimenko at the Pietà. On the rooftop gallery, the nervous Russian announces that he wants to defect and, when Paul insists that he is a journalist, rattles off operations in which Paul has been involved and names Tom Webster and David Patchen as his bosses. To get Paul to listen, Klimenko mentions Cambodia, Cuban intelligence, and certain bank accounts. As a guard insists that it is closing time, Paul and Klimenko set up a meeting at Shelley's grave at 5 AM, for Klimenko to provide details on Operation Weedkiller.

Paul mails a postcard of Pope John XXIII to Nsango, leaves a coded phone message to bring Tom to Rome, and buys Molly a ring. She is squeamish about accepting an opal, which leads to serious talk about the danger they face. Rome is empty when Paul meets Klimenko, who produces pictures of couriers Anthony Rugged and Ronald Prince (i.e., Ruggieri and Principi) picking up the \$1 million that Klimenko earlier deposited in the small Dolder und Co. bank in Zürich. No receipts are involved and the money is released on the Italian codeword "tortora" (dove). Klimenko draws a map to Director Wegel's office. Paul objects that this is speculation, not evidence.

Klimenko tells about recruiting a Mafia boss, Franco Piccioni, a.k.a. Frankie Pigeon, in 1956, delivering a \$100,000 retainer and promising a large fee should his services ever be needed. Pigeon is given the address of a safe house in Chicago to visit at 10:18 PM upon receiving an Italian telegram saying his uncle Giuseppe has died. Klimenko can only guess what the costly mission is in November 1963, but says that Pigeon spends the 12 days of Christmas every year in Calabria. He walks twice a day with two guards and is a hypochondriac. Paul asks Klimenko not to mention Pigeon for 14 days.



Paul and Tom discuss Klimenko's defection and keeping Molly off the streets until New Year's Eve. The Websters will include Molly on their Zermatt vacation. Paul asks for weapons and anonymous use of the Rome section's villa on the Via Flaminia along with codes for deactivating the bugging system. Before leaving, Tom produces a newspaper clipping about the murder of Jean-Claude Gaboni in Paris—six days after Paul tells the Truong toc about him. Paul asks to see any mention of himself or Molly in the wiretaps on Kim's place. He tells her that sending her with the Websters is "routine precaution," and promises to be with her on New Year's Eve.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

The action returns to Rome, with Paul extremely security-sensitive and Molly unable to comprehend what goes on in his mysterious life. He is so frightened by not finding her in bed that he cannot regain control, even while making love. Molly says that she used to think it is Cathy who is crazy and caused the marriage to break up, but now believes it is Paul. He summarizes the situation: the Vietnamese want to kill them because he has learned their secrets and want all trace of them to vanish. Molly forces Paul to interpret lines of one of his poems that she has read, about a father, a cave, and a rose. She does not see his father refusing to talk after age 50 as somehow beautiful or mystical. This seems to be another idle aside.

Most of the chapter deals with the Russian spy, Gherman Klimenko, and the American Mafia boss who apparently hired Jack Ruby to kill Oswald. Klimenko is understandably nervous as he meets Paul on the dome of St. Peter's Basilica. The KGB knows that he has lost his nerve and wants out. He has been phoning Paul for days while Paul is still in Vietnam. He wants to retain the respect of his colleagues by not selling out for money. Klimenko also points out that the KGB has long known about Paul's real life, so helping Klimenko will not blow his cover. He lists details from Paul's storied past. Amused that Paul does not recognize his reference to No. 2 Ulitza Dzerzhinkogo - KGB headquarters in Moscow — Klimenko gives the barest outlines of an "Operation Weedkiller," whose high price and coincidence with the timing of Oswald's death, which earlier had been called a real boon for the nervous Soviets, do not leave a lot of room for alternative explanation.

Klimenko tells about his mask within a mask in approaching Frankie Pigeon in 1956, delivering him a hefty retainer and promising a large fee should his services ever be needed. The cryptic details for meeting at a Chicago safe house at precisely 10:18 PM brings about an aside on Russian timekeeping. The intricacy of the message activating Pigeon is delicious. So, too, are the details of how Klimenko puts the money in the Swiss account and how it is withdrawn the next day. It is at that point that Klimenko decides to defect. He draws two maps for Paul from memory and relates a good deal of trivia and useful fact about Pigeon. Paul sets up the defection with Tom Webster.

The British poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, who drowned off the Italian coast and is buried in Rome, gives a literary twist to the mission. His friend, the writer Edward John Trelwany, who snatches Shelley's heart from the funeral pyre, is buried near Shelley and provides



the cover name for the agent who will pick up Klimenko. He is to ask if he still has Shelley's heart; the answer should be "no," since Trewlany gives the heart to Shelly's wife, Mary.

Uncharacteristically, Paul asks for weapons and the exclusive use of a villa. What he has in mind is developed in the next chapter. The key information that Klimenko has given him are that Pigeon walks twice a day in public and is a hypochondriac. That Paul is wise to have the Websters guard Molly is shown in the swift justice meted out on Gaboni, the killer of Ngo Tan Khoi. All Kim's recorded conversations are in Vietnamese, which the Agency is not able to translate rapidly, but Tom promises to keep a watch for references to Paul or Molly. Paul uses a neat analogy to the "ordinary precautions" doctors use when working around infectious diseases to explain to Molly how undercover agents minimize their own risk. This fits in with what he has in mind for the phobic Pigeon.





# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

Paul feels less vulnerable being alone. The Ngos will have to catch him in the open to kill him, which he does not think will happen. He parks his car to get it towed safely into police custody and catches the train to Milan, amused at how closely his methods match Klimenko's. From Milan he backtracks to Rome for a meeting with Alvaro Urpi, a 40-year veteran of the Vatican Library and an expert in all dialects of Chinese. Paul hands Urpi Yu's strips, which Urpi proclaims fine and poetic, in a rare idiom. He will do his best to render them into Latin within three days.

Paul returns to Milan, buys climbing and photographic equipment, rents a car, and heads to Zurich. He fixes the Dolder und Co. architecture in his mind before visiting Dieter Dimpel. Paul lays out his proposal as a simple test of skill, sketches the bank and surrounding buildings and the director's office interior. Paul is in an adjacent hotel with access to the roof. Paul fears that he has failed to convince Dimpel when Dimpel excuses himself to collect a rucksack of climbing gear. It takes 31 minutes for Dimpel to rappel down the hotel wall, climb the steep, snowy roof of the bank, slip down the chimney, and return. Dimpel takes four shots of five documents. In payment he demands any artifact of Adolf Hitler upon which he can wipe his behind and frame. Paul is back in Rome by evening, but passes his building, seeing three Vietnamese watching it.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

Short Chapter 10 sees Paul deliver Yu Lung's horoscope strips to a friend in the Vatican Library for translation and his successful mission to convince Dimpel to make copies of the Operation Weedkiller documentation. Two key pieces of evidence are on their way to being his. In both cases, the reader sees unusual places and meets colorful characters.

Alvaro Urpi's has forgotten his native Portuguese (Maca, off the coastline of China, is still a Portuguese colony in 1963) but is fluent in "all dialects" of Chinese, Latin, and either French or English, which he speaks with Paul. He has relatives on Macao with whom he has difficulty communicating. He has not taken holy orders but lives like a monk in the church for 40 years. He fears that relatives the age he is when Dominicans rescue him are living a tough, immoral street life.

In Zurich, Paul seems delighted to meet the small-statured Dieter Dimpel, who views himself as a field marshal. Dimpel is entertaining a lady when Paul arrives. His hallway is filled with artistic nude photographs and his rooms with clocks that chime simultaneously. At 50, Dimpel is proud of recently climbing the Matterhorn. He takes Paul's bank job as a challenge. Only after delivering the punchline does he laugh, telling

Paul what he wants as payment. He wants to wipe his rear end on an item of Hitler memorabilia and then frame it. Amusingly, U.S. officials later in the novel still believe that Dimpel is a Nazi.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

To break Frankie Pigeon without putting a mark on him, Paul selects Stavros Glavanis and Jan Eycken. Paul met Glavanis in Indochina and has used him several times, but never for interrogation. Paul drives them to a Roman villa once used by a Mussolini mistress and the SS. To inspire Glavanis, Paul says that the subject works for communists. They must drive to Calabria, take him from a guarded house, drive him back, and break him within three days. Paul has Eycken drop through a man cover in the garden and closes it. Within five minutes, Eycken is huddling against the wall. The chamber is ten feet in diameter, 15 feet high; the sloping walls are white, reflecting high-intensity lights. The subject is used to being protected, thinks he is dangerous, has never felt vulnerable, and is a hypochondriac. They may use water torture, must not show their faces, and may immobilize but not kill the bodyguards.

It is dark the next day when Glavanis and Eycken return. Paul hears the trapdoor open and shut, feeds the men, and hears about the easy abduction: chatting, shooting the bodyguards in the face and Pigeon in the leg, giving him pills, and hustling him away. He is handcuffed but not blindfolded. They will give him 12 hours alone to worry, naked, hyperventilating, and bombarded by a tape of dissonant noise. Over lunch, Paul tells Glavanis and Eycken to keep whatever money the bodyguards carry. They are to ask Pigeon repeatedly about the \$1 million to build psychological pressure for Paul's final question. They work for three hours, before Glavanis reports that the water has worked well. They let Pigeon rest while Paul dresses like a gray-haired Italian carrying a doctor's hypodermic case and dressing gown.

Pigeon is naked, befouled, and panicky but defiant when Paul enters. After making him more comfortable, Paul explains what an injection with leprosy germs holds, reviews what he knows from 1956 to the present, and records and transcribes Pigeon's rapid, full confession. Pigeon is to be left unconscious 300 km. from Rome, but not killed for an "operational reason."

## Chapter 11 Analysis

Chapter 11 sees Paul confirm his hypothesis that Frankie Pigeon, the Chicago Mafia boss, hired Jack Ruby to kill Lee Harvey Oswald. Two new characters are introduced, Stavros Glavanis and Jan Eycken, trained and experienced terrorists and interrogators. Their varied background, unified by service in the French Foreign Legion around the world, is explored, bringing in details of the tragic history of the Balkans during and after World War II, and in less detail, France's doomed efforts to maintain its empire in North Africa and Indochina. Diembienphu, the great turning point in the Vietnamese struggle for independence, is mentioned several times. The two terrorists do not approve of Paul's humane treatment of suspects and suggest he may some day regret it.



Paul does not seem in the least humane in his treatment of Pigeon. He locks him in a structure previously used by the SS to sweat information out of important prisoners. No one but the Agency is willing to rent the property thereafter. Paul locks Pigeon up for hours to let his fear grow. Note that Eycken, holding gun and flashlight, is shaken in just five minutes as a demonstration. After waiting, naked in pitch darkness, Pigeon is put upon by two masked thugs in blinding light. Eycken forces water down his throat, although Paul had doubted it would be necessary; it seems to be Eycken's favorite trick and he does not deny himself the pleasure. Paul then enters, looking like an Italian doctor, comforts the prisoner a bit, and then threatens to infect him with leprosy, having in graphic detail described the sufferings it will cause. The hypochondriac in Pigeon wins out over his tough-guy bravado, and he tells everything he knows, in a soprano voice, like a castrated choir boy. After getting a signed and authenticated confession and nude photographs to keep him quiet, Paul orders Pigeon released far from Rome. He claims he has an "operational reason" for keeping him alive, much to Eycken's dismay. Paul thinks about Ruby being overjoyed and expecting the Congressional Medal of Honor.



# Chapters 12-13

## Chapters 12-13 Summary

Urpi describes Yu's analysis as obscure and metaphorical, too beautiful to deal with murder. In addition to two brothers and a foreigner, all marked for death, there is a virginal woman involved. With his apartment still being watched, Paul drives to Milan, whose airport is less likely to be watched than Rome's. In Orvieto, he mails the accumulated documentation to himself in Washington, DC. Nguyễn Kim is waiting for him, carrying a warning from the Truong toc that Paul will never find traces of Truong toc in this mystery and will have to hide Molly for the rest of her life. She is the target because Paul is not vulnerable to fear but is to guilt. Paul flies to the outskirts of Elisabethville via Khartoum, Nairobi, Salisbury, and Lusaka.

Armed with a .22, Paul meets Nsango after dark in the quarter of the city where refugees from the bush war have settled. Paul relates the fantastic story that he plans to tell Manuel Ruiz, who Nsango warns could be dangerous. Two Cubans have died, leaving five. All have dysentery and are jumpy, but may be glad to see a fellow white man. Putting Molly at risk is in Paul's mind as he is taken to Nsango's camp in an abandoned village. Nsango tells Paul about finding a pile of severed right hands here as someone's warning. No one knows if it is mercenaries or the Chinese. Paul awakens to the sound of reveille. Tribesmen assemble with an armed Cuban watching. Nsango goes to explain Paul's presence to Ruiz.

Ruiz is breakfasting on yam and beer at 3 PM when Paul (calling himself Charron) arrives. Ruiz is under 30, with long, curly hair, steady eyes, and the pallor and shakes of a dysentery sufferer. Arms, ammunition, and Cuban propaganda fill the room. Paul watches Ruiz's reaction as he brings greetings from Do Minh Kha through a friend in Saigon, Lê Thu. Ruiz is disturbed that Paul found him and knows his name, but Paul remarks that white men dressed in fatigues stand out in Africa. Still, he guesses, "success is more important than security." Paul hands over CHF 20,000 from Do as a sign of solidarity. In return, Do, who cannot move freely around the world, wants Lê Thu. Ruiz returns to his paperwork but invites Paul to dinner.

In Nsango's hut, Paul pulls out a small wire recorder and reports that Ruiz will surely talk tonight. Nsango arranges for Ruiz's radio to be sabotaged to keep him from reporting anything. The Cubans have given only Nsango and other senior Africans weapons, and the rest are impatient to get theirs. Nsango wants to catch the Cubans in a firefight, but they rarely go anywhere together. Paul asks that Ruiz be spared for a month or two.

Ruiz is drunk by dinnertime and needs to talk about his ideals. Between bouts of diarrhea, he tests Paul's knowledge of people and places, and praises the practical Vietnamese revolution. Eventually, Ruiz mentions a pompous KGB agent in Hanoi, Benshikov, who first suggested using a professional rifleman in Dallas. Paul plays



along, saying that Oswald seems too unstable. Ruiz had doubted Oswald would succeed, which is why he let his people make contact—as a harmless favor to the Vietnamese and to stock up future credit. Ruiz tells Castro nothing, has little contact with Oswald, and sees a propaganda benefit in revealing JFK's vulnerability even if he survives. While in Hanoi, Ruiz shows Do Oswald's dossier.

The Cubans pretend to be interested in having Oswald train freedom fighters and suggest they will help him defect. Ruiz watches Oswald for three days in Mexico City before meeting in the park, where he bluntly proposes the job and Oswald accepts, believing he will change history and imagining himself respected and trusted in a Socialist country. Ruiz had expected Oswald to be killed and had not worried that the Americans might get him to confess, since unlike the Cubans and Soviets, the FBI does not torture. They would view Oswald as crazy. A typical amateur, Oswald specifies meeting after the assassination at the Texas Theater and the kind of car and amount of money he wants to escape to Mexico. Ruiz treats him as a genius. Do had insisted on 22 November and had the shooting charted down to the specific minute and intersection of streets. Oswald knows from the papers that JFK will be in Dallas that day but not that he is working for the Vietnamese.

When Ruiz's bowels send him to the latrine again, Paul fires two rounds of birdshot into his neck. Four bursts from a Kalashnikov dispatch the other Cubans. Nsango asks for a postcard when Paul no longer needs Ruiz.

## Chapters 12-13 Analysis

Brief Chapter 12 is somewhat of a geography lesson as Paul works to avoid detection as he returns to Africa for another meeting with Nsango. After picking up Urpi's translation, which the pious man says is strikingly lyrical considering it deals with murder, Paul drives from Rome to Milan, and then flies circuitously to the outskirts of Elisabethville, the bush pilot being too afraid to land in the city. Note that Salisbury is the name of Rhodesia's capital in 1963; on modern maps it is Harare, Zimbabwe. Politics dictates the various routes.

At the Vatican, Urpi's religious life is further examined and the stark church of St. Sabina founded by St. Dominic is depicted. Orange trees are mentioned for the third time in the novel, with no more indication of their significance suggested. In Milan, Paul is surprised to meet Kim, who brings from the Truong toc admiration but also the threat to hunt Molly to the death. Paul does not fear death personally but would feel guilt over Molly's death. This menace hangs over the rest of the novel.

Chapter 13 takes up the action shifts in the Congo, where Paul confronts the Cuban revolutionary Manuel Ruiz, about whose links to Mexico City and Hanoi he knows. As background material, the brutality of the Congolese war is symbolized by piles of severed right hands and the destitute civilian populations by ghetto buildings that look like toothless skulls. Nsango's followers are champing to get their hands on automatic

weapons. Note that Kalashnikov is the manufacturer of assault rifles; in 1963 the AK-47 is popular in liberation armies around the world.

Like the Chinese before them, the Cubans are reluctant to hand these weapons out, and the reason is clearly racial. Ruiz looks down on Africans as just another form of fauna and longs to return to Cuba to claim credit for Nsango's revolution. Nsango mock-taunts Paul for being his publicist, making him world famous through stories and graffiti. White men stick out, particularly when dressed in fatigues. Paul and Ruiz agree that Asians cannot travel around the world without being suspected. The Africans want to kill the Cubans but cannot get them together in one open place.

During their first meeting, Paul sizes Ruiz up as an isolated idealist who needs to talk about his achievements. He lacks an intelligence officer's training, which would keep his mouth shut. Their second meeting begins with Ruiz as wary as a drunken man can be, testing the waters to see if Paul is, in fact a friend of Do Minh Kha, the North Vietnamese intelligence chief who Luong photographs with a mystery woman in Laos in the beginning of the novel. Needing the psychological release of talking about his unexpected triumph in killing JFK, Ruiz tells the full story of Oswald's recruitment. Everyone involved with Oswald goes out of his way to degrade the man. Paul tapes the conversation and again uses birdshot to immobilize an enemy. The other Cubans are murdered, Nsango happily keeping track of the bursts of gunfire on his fingers, but Ruiz is spared in case he is needed to testify further.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

Paul joins Dennis Foley and a Texan who Paul has not yet met, J.D. Turnbull, to whom Foley now defers, at David Patchen's Washington house. Turnbull presumes to thank Paul in LBJ's name for his recent work, although he understands Paul no longer works for the government. David specifies that Paul alone owns the information he has collected before laying out typed sheets and photographs. There are no copies, so the men take turns reading. The Director has refused to read it. Joviality leaves Turnbull's face as he reads and Foley's shows tension. When David tells of Paul's decorations, skill, and accuracy, Foley points out their friendship. Turnbull pushes to get the "flavor" of the report, but Paul will not talk until the U.S. role in overthrowing Diem is admitted. Foley stiffens, but David, on Turnbull's orders, says that the White House countenanced, advised, supported, and encouraged the plot and welcomed the results. Diem and Nhu's deaths have not been part of it. Turnbull recalls Harry S. Truman's caring more about deaths at Pearl Harbor than at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and as "an old country lawyer," asks to hear what goes on behind the written report.

Paul's report focuses on the who and why of JFK's assassination. Secondary are the who and why of Oswald's execution and the possibility of heroin being used as a weapon against U.S. troops in Vietnam. "The outfit" can investigate the drugs angle. The two killings are solved without a doubt. This draws from Trumbull, "You fellows are a cold bunch." Paul continues: the Ngos know the Administration wants to replace them with someone more "pliant." Doubting they will survive, Diem and Nhu prepare to "spit out of their graves" to avenge their family and their nation, not themselves. Horoscopes are important in Asia and to scoff at them is dangerous.

Yu Lung prepares horoscopes on 8 Sep 1963, predicting Diem and Nhu's murders at the instigation of a powerful foreigner, and again on 12 Sep (JFK's anniversary), adding Do Minh Kha and Dao/Nicole. The Truong toc takes over planning. Yu uses feng shui to plot the most propitious place to kill JFK and determines the periods in the lunar calendar when he is most vulnerable to violent death. Because of Diem's personal lucky number and Vietnamese funeral customs, 22 Nov is deemed best. It forms "an elegance."

Do is a cousin of Diem and Nhu, and blood is thicker than ideology. Yu's horoscopes indicate that Do should be brought into the plot in Vientiane in early September and Dao/Nichole is the best messenger. Do will owe the Ngos for raising his long-lost daughter. U.S. asset Luong is sent to Vientiane to see what so high-ranking a communist is doing there and observes him in the company of an unidentifiable Vietnamese woman. They subsequently learn that Dao/Nichole tells her father about the plot codenamed Lê Thu. The family cannot let the assassin suspect that Vietnamese are doing the hit; it needs a white "cutout" to arrange it. Back in Hanoi, Do tells Ruiz about the plot and Ruiz suggest Oswald, who has been claiming to be a guerrilla fighter,





but is considered too crazy for Cuba to recruit. Ruiz doubts the plot can succeed, but Do is positive it will. Ruiz agrees to approach Oswald. To this day, Ruiz believes the North Vietnamese hunted JFK, not the Truong toc. Ruiz meets Oswald in Mexico City the day after the Russians and Cubans both refuse to talk to him, and Oswald swallows the bait. Ruiz goes to the Congo and Oswald returns to Dallas.

Foley is annoyed that the meeting is running so long and stares at Paul as Paul continues. Oswald's killing does not involve the Vietnamese. Feeling pressure to distance themselves from Oswald, the KGB activates Frankie Pigeon to arrange a hit for \$1 million. Long anxious to get into the syndicate, Ruby accepts the job. If the mob learns that Pigeon breaks discipline and takes a paying job independently, it will kill him. Pigeon is scared. Pigeon and Ruby both see it as a patriotic act. Within 24 hours of Oswald's death, things settle down for the Soviets.

Trumbull expresses amazement at this confused mess, but David assures him it is standard procedure and can show a dozen similar cases. David questions only the counterfeit money. Paul confirms that Klimenko carries 50 bills forged by the SS during World War II. The bank catches it, but Pigeon does not. The KGB probably scraped the cash together too fast to check serial numbers.

Red-faced with liquor and anger, Foley demands an explanation of Paul's methods in collecting the data and catalogs the deaths, injuries, and felonies committed along the way. David forbids Paul to respond and vehemently points out the weakness of Foley's case. Had Paul fewer scruples, more people would be dead. Paul's results justify his methods, which is always the rule. Not having lived this life, Foley cannot imagine or understand it. The conversation with Ruiz is on tape and both Ruiz and Pigeon are alive and could be questioned. Paul's evidence is incontrovertible. He has no motive to darken JFK's memory. Foley will never learn.

Trumbull admits that Paul has made a good case for the people he has fingered. David believes him; Foley disbelieves him, and Trumbull worries about LBJ having to tell the American people the truth. They have had too many shocks already, and their support is needed to carry out the mission in Vietnam. Americans would want to nuke Vietnam, and Congress would never give another dime to the South. Although he believes Paul's story, Trumbull burns the evidence. Left alone, after dinner, Paul and David discuss the likelihood that the Ngos will continue hunting Paul.

## Chapter 14 Analysis

Long, detailed Chapter 14 concisely and succinctly summarizes all that Paul has discovered. The new President's aide, a fellow Texas lawyer, wants to hear how agents operate. Foley, who has lost his PT-109 tie clasp and is described as a man between personalities, trying to turn Texan, remains antagonistic and brooding. David Patchen, Paul's ex-boss, reminds them that Paul is a private citizen, filing a report as a courtesy to the U.S. government. Paul first demands an admission of guilt for the overthrow of



Diem. David puts it squarely on the White House's shoulders but says the leaders were not to be killed.

Paul's summary is as useful for the reader as for J.D. Turnbull. Many loose threads are woven together into an integral tapestry. Foley's attempts to blacken Paul for the deaths, injuries, and illegalities committed are rejected and Foley is not only reminded that Paul's record for obtaining superior results despite generally humane methods is unmatched, but is told that he cannot understand or judge because he has never lived this life. Some of the deaths and injuries represent collateral damage in attacks mounted against Paul by enemies. They are reminded that both Ruiz and Pigeon remain alive and could be brought in to testify.

In the end, Turnbull unilaterally decides that the American people cannot afford another shock to their system. If he shows Paul's report to the President, LBJ will be obliged to make the findings public. Turnbull is less concerned with preserving JFK's memory—he is an LBJ man and the enmity between the two executives had been ill-disguised even while both were alive—than with making sure the U.S. military buildup in South Vietnam can be maintained. Early on, the men agree that the question of purposefully addicting young GIs to drugs can be explored by the Agency. If Americans hear the Vietnamese are behind the assassination, they will demand a nuclear attack (hardly far-fetched in 1963/64), and Congress will end all funding for the South. *The Tears of Autumn* is published in 1975. By then it is clear that getting entangled in Vietnam destroys Johnson's presidency and slows the realization of his Great Society. By burning Paul's report, Turnbull is consigning LBJ and the United States to that fate. Turnbull has the luxury of not seeing that coming.

The chapter ends with Paul saying enigmatically, "Only one Kennedy has been short." There is no indication one way or the other whether this points to the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy five years later.



# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

Molly has been skiing all day when Paul arrives. She wears all the rings he has given her but does not kiss him hello. It has been a wonderful week, despite "a certain lack." Molly has learned to love Sybille, dancing and flirting with everyone and everything except Tom. Tom has gone down to watch every train unload and returned to tell Molly that she is not about to be liquidated. Molly has not told Tom anything about what Paul has been doing. Paul tells her that he has learned everything possible and he is out of it. They decide to stay on at Zermatt.

Tom looks like he is costumed for the 1932 Olympics as they meet in the bar for mandatory hot buttered rum. Tom has seen no trace of Kim's people in Zermatt or references to Paul in the wiretap logs. Kim had thought Paul ready to kill him in the Milan terminal and raves about stopping him. If he uses a European operator it will be harder to spot. As Paul tells Tom all he has learned, Tom's face stiffens. Tom worries about Molly bringing Paul down and advises him to run. He cannot blame Paul for wanting to be with her but says it is a mistake. When Paul asserts that Molly does not want to hear about their life, Tom replies that everyone does. They go off to enjoy New Year's Eve.

Sybille and Molly dress for the elaborate holiday dinner (*réveillon*), but Tom has to rent the headwaiter's tailcoat. Tom kisses Molly at midnight and dances with her while Paul and Sybille talk at the table. Paul doubts if they will marry and hears Sybille's opinion that he will never be able to make Molly go away. Sybille is angry that Paul has thrown his life away for nothing. When they leave the dining room, they admire the Matterhorn. Seeing Molly wearing five rings, Paul recalls Cathy saying on Majorca that people do not make such offerings to the Virgin to obtain forgiveness of sins, but only to live a little longer.

Paul and Molly stay on after the Websters leave. Molly is a marvelous skier and full of laughter at dinner. At bedtime she knows what is on Paul's mind and refuses to leave him. Molly owns her own body just as Cathy had. Cathy abuses her body and breaks her own heart, but Molly chooses to give up her body and die before she will leave Paul. He sees that her determination is ruthless. She has taught him to feel again. Paul thinks of what he should say or do to outwit her simple passion but gives up. Experience has taught him that treachery cannot teach or save. Paul feels Molly's pulse as she sleeps with her arm across his chest.

## Chapter 15 Analysis

The final brief chapter seems scattered. Its message is that Paul Christopher and Tom and Sybille Webster all believe Molly is better off if Paul runs away. They are together at



the foot of the Matterhorn on New Year's Eve. The danger appears to have slackened, but Tom is sure Kim will not give up pursuing Paul. Already bitter at her husband's honor of country and outfit attitude, Sybille resents Paul's throwing his life away. To make her point, she throws away the champagne that Tom's salary has purchased.

The five rings that Paul bought for Molly around the world make him recall the cathedral on Majorca, where pilgrims leave jeweled rings on the fingers of the statue of the Virgin Mary. Ex-wife Cathy had remarked that people offer such riches not to get their sins forgiven but to live a little longer. It is a sign that Majorcans are afraid to die. Not strictly logical, the remark adds nothing to the story and seems simply thrown in.

Molly is reluctant to go up to bed, knowing what Paul has to say. She chooses to die rather than leave him, and couches this in terms of Cathy's promiscuity. At this point it seems particularly odd that she consistently defines herself by and against her predecessor. Paul's profession supposedly has taught him to be ruthless, but he cannot apply it to Molly. He has seen that betrayal has never saved anyone he has known. He accepts that Molly has taught him to feel again.



# Characters

## Paul Christopher

The principal character in the novel *The Tears of Autumn*, Paul is a veteran intelligence officer whose cover is a globe-trotting journalist. Before he becomes a spy, 15 years earlier, Paul is a poet, but spy craft kills his gift. Paul is an idealist, refusing to carry a gun and avoiding whenever possible killing people. Fellow agents make fun of this, but admire his talents and intuitions. Many say he is more trouble than he is worth, but he is much decorated and trusted by his old friend, David Pratchen, who is highly placed in the Agency, and his case officer, Tom Webster, in Rome.

Paul is divorced from Cathy and has a lover, Molly, in Rome, Italy. As the novel opens, Paul has been in nine countries in 20 days, changing languages and names constantly. After meeting with a Vietnamese contact in Laos, who he knows is about to be killed in Saigon, Paul flies to Paris to report to Tom Webster. Paul learns fluent French in Paris, and lives there with Cathy during their marriage. He no longer loves the city. During a dinner party, they learn of the coup d'etat in Saigon. Twenty-one days after the Ngos are killed, Paul is preparing to fly to Rome to a reunion with Molly when he hears about John F. Kennedy's assassination.

Within ten days, Paul pieces together a hypothesis that JFK's killing is retribution for the Ngo's deaths. When the White House liaison orders him to desist, Paul quits the Agency, and begins as a private citizen collecting all the pieces. He flies and drives around Europe, photographing evidence locked in a bank and torturing an American Mafia man. He visits Saigon—where he is shot at and nearly car-bombed, wrongly arrested for the murder of his friend Luong, and ordered out of the country. He finally visits the Congo, before getting everything in place. He presents his evidence to the United States government as a courtesy, since the data belong to him, and watches when a White House aide decides it would be politically dangerous even to show it to President Johnson. Paul's work of months is burned. Paul gets to Zermatt in time for New Year's Eve with Molly and the Webster, and accepts that Molly will not leave him, even if it costs her life

## Molly

Paul Christopher's current lover, Molly is a russet-hair, tall, lithe beautiful Australian journalist living in Rome and frequenting the museums. She writes "tripe" about fashion, but wants to be like Paul, traveling around the world and writing important things. Molly speaks well but writes badly, never having had a tough editor to teach her discipline. She suspects Paul has a deeper, darker side, but Paul carefully shields her from his work for the "Agency" (probably the CIA). Molly learns that Paul once wrote poetry and is frustrated that he will not tell her about it or in any way open up. She knows that Paul's marriage to Cathy ended because of his reserve, and she is beginning to think



Cathy is not at fault for taking lovers. Molly is not solemn in bed as Paul had imagined, but playful, enjoying making love in a circle of candles.

Before they become lovers, Molly minds Paul's office while he is traveling. Paul realizes he wants to be with her permanently the first time they make love. On a lunch date with Molly, Paul runs into Nguyễn Kim, an acquaintance from Saigon, and invites him to join them. As they talk about the assassinations of the Ngo brothers and John F. Kennedy, Molly is offended at the two events and their resulting grief being compared. Paul and Molly sit for a souvenir photograph before Kim leaves. It comes back to haunt them, as the head of the Ngo family in Saigon decides that Paul's inquiries into Vietnamese involvement in JFK's death has gone too far. Knowing that Paul does not fear death, they target Molly, knowing he will feel guilty. Knowing that Molly has no survival training, Paul does not alert her until he gets back to Rome. He then teaches her secret knock codes and other basic skills. He tells her that agents take precautions just like doctors treating

infectious patients.

As he prepares to obtain the last pieces in the puzzle, Paul entrusts Molly to his case worker, Tom, and his wife, Sybille. The Websters take her skiing in Switzerland, and Molly is soon masterful and elegant on the slopes. When Paul returns for New Year's Day, the Webster both try to talk him into running away, but Molly insists she would rather be killed than give up Paul. He sees that Molly has taught him to live again and does not argue.

## **Thomas R. and Sybille Webster**

Tom Webster is Paul Christopher's Paris-based case officer in the Agency (probably the CIA). Quick-witted, phlegmatic, neither fluent in French nor good at using phone codes, and slightly deaf, Tom is good at forming and using friends. He learned Arabic in his youth and in his twenties saves a Middle Eastern monarch's throne. Nothing surprises Tom or touches his emotions. Short and muscular, a former shot putter at Yale, Tom wears outdated clothes, is homely, and has no luck with women .

Tom lives with his wife Sybille in an apartment in the avenue Hoche and makes fun of the Bonapartean decor but secretly enjoys it. Tom claims that Sybille has nailed his scrotum to every wall. Photographs of her as a young ballet dancer are everywhere. Tom begs Sybille not to act like a "Southern belle" in front of visiting White House aide Dennis Foley during a dinner party. The dinner is interrupted by news of a coup in Saigon and the death of the Ngo brothers. Twenty-one days later, President Kennedy is killed, and after a little digging, Paul decides that Kennedy is killed as retribution for the Ngos. Paul officially leaves the agency, which angers the Websters. When Paul's girlfriend Molly is threatened by the Vietnamese, the Websters take her skiing in Switzerland over Christmas. When Paul survives and joins them for New Year's Eve, the Websters try to talk him into leaving Molly, lest she slow him down and get him killed.



## Cathy Christopher

Paul Christopher's gloomy ex-wife, Cathy is constantly referred to either by Paul or his new girlfriend Molly. Cathy grows hysterical trying to get Paul to write a poem about their lovemaking and punishes him for his inability by taking lovers. Cathy has a perfect face and body. They meet in Europe where she is sent to study languages and art. She is superstitious but void of ideas and wants only to be beautiful. She is sexually insatiable and rapturous but void of skills as a lover and unable to learn. When Paul cannot tell her details of his work as a spy or write her a sonnet, Cathy is upset. When Paul is away, she begins having affairs, first with an Italian actor, who Paul knows and who beats her up when she breaks up with him. When Molly moves in with Paul in Rome, she exorcises Cathy's spirit from the bed.

## Piero Cremona

A columnist for the Italian communist newspaper L'Unità, Cremona approaches Paul Christopher and Molly in a restaurant after the Ngos' assassination and observes that "the imperialist eagle" has again devoured its young. Everyone had known the coup was coming because there is a man of action in the White House. The joke of a South Vietnamese army will fail, and the U.S. Marines will come to the rescue.

## Dieter Dimpel

A Munich-born little person (apparently suffering dwarfism, but sometimes called a "midget" without intent as a pejorative) Dimpel struts around like the Nazi Field Marshal Hermann Göring. Dimpel had been excluded from the Nazi Party as a freak, but falsified papers, inadvertently giving himself the same party number as Adolf Hitler (555). Dimpel is caught and sent to the Dachau concentration camp for two years, after which he spends two more years in a Soviet camp. Escaping, he is recruited and trained by Trevor Hitchcock to spy for the Americans in Berlin. For three years he comes down fireplaces, cracks safes, photographs the contents, and escapes without a trace. Surprised by a Russian officer one night, Dimpel escapes, but his cover is blown and Hitchcock sets him up as a watchmaker in Zürich.

Needing to confirm information provided by defecting KGB agent Gherman Klimenko, Paul hires the dapper, debonair man who collects fine art, enjoys fine liquors, entertains ladies, takes artistic nude photographs, and at 50 climbs the Matterhorn, to go down the chimney of Dolder und Co. Bank and photograph documentation of the \$1 million deal. He does so and asks as payment some artifact used by Hitler in order to wipe his rear end on it and frame it for his wall.





## Do Minh Kha

A section chief in the North Vietnamese intelligence service, Do is a cousin of the Ngo brothers who are running South Vietnam and more loyal to blood relations than to politics. While visiting Laos in September 1963, Do is observed by a U.S. paid spy spending three days with a young woman, later identified as his long-lost daughter, Dao/Nicole. She tells her father about the family's plan to kill John F. Kennedy, code named Lê Thu — "Tears of Autumn" — which is also the "death name" of Do's late wife. After leaving Laos, Do returns to Hanoi, where he meets a Cuban revolutionary, Manuel Ruiz, who presents Lee Harvey Oswald's dossier. The final logistics are then put in place.

## Dennis Foley

The novel's villain, Foley is a member of the Kennedy Administration and is a cold, bony man with the air of a former athlete—self-aware and contemptuous—who stares out of pale blue eyes and changes facial colors rather than expressions when pleased or annoyed. He always wears a black tie with a PT-109 tie clasp, and affects JFK's mannerisms. JFK sends Foley to Paris to inform French President Charles de Gaulle as to who is running the world, but de Gaulle refuses to see Foley.

Foley violently opposes Paul Christopher's theory that the South Vietnamese are behind JFK's murder, retaliating for the assassination of the Ngo brothers, almost certainly at Kennedy's behest. Foley is also upset that Paul reports on Rep. Wendell's theories about Nixon's victory in 1960. Foley remains hostile to Paul at the end of the novel, but is in the final confrontation deflated, finding himself obliged to assimilate to Texas mannerisms. He has removed his PT-109 ornament but is "between personalities."

## Stavros Glavanis and Jan Eyken

A Macedonian-Greek terrorist with credentials dating back to resistance against the Nazis and Greek communists, Glavanis honed his skills in the French Foreign Legion in Algeria and Asia. Paul Christopher hires him and French Foreign Legion comrade, the Flemish Jan Eyken, to kidnap and terrorize the U.S. Mafia boss Frankie Pigeon, in order to confirm Pigeon's involvement in the execution of accused Kennedy assassin Lee Harvey Oswald. Paul worries about Eycken being identifiable, because he lost both thumbs to Algerian terrorists years before, but Eycken wears rubber gloves. He resorts to water torture because it is his favorite technique. Both men are disappointed that Paul leaves Pigeon alive and tell him one day his humanity will cost him dearly.

## Trevor and Theresa Hitchcock

The son of a successful Presbyterian missionary in the Kasai region of the Congo, Trevor frees himself of God and Africa at 18, studying German and Russian in the U.S.





during World War II, and intending to work in a cold climate. Instead, he is sent back as an agent to the Congo, where wife Theresa cannot adjust to the climate and constantly fears rape. Trevor tells Paul that if he is ever in Zürich, he must look up Dieter Dimpel, a midget, a watchmaker, and a retired spy.

## John F. Kennedy

A historical figure, JFK is the 35th President of the United States, revered for the new sense of style and vigor he imparts to government. He is assassinated on 22 Nov 1963, in Dallas, TX, by Lee Harvey Oswald. Paul Christopher follows hunches that result in a report that JFK authorized and encouraged the assassination 21 days earlier of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem, and JFK's death is retaliation for that act, planned by horoscopy and feng shui. The Washington crowd, including diplomats abroad, are shown early in the novel picking up the President's mannerisms and interests (including touch football), which grudgingly give way to Texas ways by the end of the novel. After reading Paul's report, Lyndon Johnson's right hand man, J.D. Trumbull burns it, deciding Americans cannot stand another shock regarding their beloved fallen leader.

## Gherman Klimenko

A KGB agent whose cover since 1955 has been correspondent for the Soviet news agency TASS, Klimenko urgently contacts Paul Christopher in Rome to meet at St. Peter's, where he announces he is tired and wants to defect. Klimenko is short, bald, perpetually cold, and pathologically nervous. In return for Paul's help in reaching safety in the U.S.—insisting that Paul's cover as a writer has also long been blown—Klimenko identifies Frankie Pigeon as a sleeper KGB agent in the U.S. awaiting assignment since 1956. Klimenko has no direct proof, but everything points to Pigeon hiring Jack Ruby to kill Presidential assassin Lee Harvey Oswald. In 1956, posing as a Belgian businessman, Blanchard, had recruited Pigeon and arranged contact in a safe house should his services be needed, which occurs in November, 1963. Moscow sends the \$1 million fee to Klimenko in Stockholm, and he hurriedly hand-carries and deposits it in Zürich, then goes to Rome, determined to defect.

## Vuong Van Luong

A South Vietnamese intelligence agent working for Paul Christopher (whose surname, he thinks, is Crawford), Luong has made enemies with Ngo Dinh Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu and is facing sure execution when he returns to Saigon. Luong is first seen in Vientiane, Laos, where he has observed and photographed a meeting between his boyhood chum, Do Minh Kha, now a high North Vietnamese official, and a mystery young woman. The South Vietnamese secret police are watching to see if Paul will tip Luong.



The five-foot six-inch, married, 29-year-old university graduate is spared when the Ngo brothers die in a military coup. Looking for clues to support his theory that the Ngo family is behind President John F. Kennedy's assassination, Paul asks Luong to chase down leads. Paul finds Luong dead of a single bullet wound to the forehead on the threshold of Paul's rented room. Paul attends the wake, praises the dead man, in death renamed Tho (meaning "longevity" or coffin bought in advance), and donates \$5,000 toward the widow's expenses. Paul learns from Tho's elder brother Phuoc that he had not expected to live long in this profession and had put up over \$1 million to provide for his family. Phuoc recommends that Paul seek out the Chinese astrologer and geomancer Yu Lung. Phuoc lives at the Xa Loi Pagoda, a center of the political opposition to the Ngos.

## **Peggy McKinney**

The wife of the U.S. Ambassador to France, Peggy has always had a high opinion of herself and acts as though she is in charge of the embassy. She and Sybille Webster are alumnae of Sweet Briar. Influenced by the JFK White House, she reads Proust in French, is learning about Africa, and plays left end in touch football every Sunday. She is invited to the Websters for dinner to balance Dennis Foley, on the night of Paul Christopher's return to Paris. With the face of an ingénue, standing like a model, dressing like Jackie Kennedy, she still makes a fool of herself, leading a cheer when word comes of the coup in Saigon and the Ngo brothers' deaths.

Later in the novel, Peggy sends greetings to Foley through her brother, a Green Beret captain en route to Vietnam, and Foley pulls strings to make the brother his man on the streets of Saigon, getting in the way of Paul's investigation of JFK's murder.

## **Ngo Dinh Diem, Ngo Dinh Nhu, and Ngo Dinh Can**

Historical figures, Diem is the autocratic President of South Vietnam overthrown by generals on 2 Nov 1963, and Nhu is his younger brother and principal advisor. Both are shot in the head sitting in an army vehicle, ostensibly by a Vietnamese officer. A third brother, Ngo Dinh Can, seeks asylum from the Americans but is turned over to South Vietnam, imprisoned, and expected to be executed. The brothers have their horoscopes prepared and, seeing clearly that their days are numbered, begin making arrangements to "spit out of their graves" at the Americans. This is Operation "Lê Thu." Diem's lucky number is seven, and John F. Kennedy's assassination is arranged 21 days (three times seven) after Diem's death. Twenty-one is also an important day in Vietnamese funereal rites.

## **Mme. Nhu / Lê Xuan**

The widow of Ngo Dinh Nhu, known as the "Dragon Lady," Mme. Nhu flees Vietnam with her children, first to Rome and then to Paris. Press secretary Nguyễn Kim, an old acquaintance of Paul Christopher's, tells about this remarkable, determined woman over



lunch in Rome, recalling her reaction to Ho Chi Minh's apology for murdering another Ngo brother and offering Diem half his power. Born a Buddhist, she converts to Roman Catholicism when she marries and becomes a zealot. She is more devoted to restoring the Ngo family's power and fortunes than the blood members.

## Nicole / Dao

A young Vietnamese woman living with the Truon toc of the Ngo family in Saigon, Nicole (her French name) is initially hostile towards the American Paul Christopher, who discovers that in September 1963, she is the mystery woman seen in Bangkok with a North Vietnamese official, Do Minh Kha. She is sent to tell her long estranged biological father of the family's plan to assassinate John F. Kennedy in retribution for killing Ngo Dinh Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu. Do goes on to talk with a Cuban agent, Manuel Ruiz, who handles connections with Lee Harvey Oswald.

Nicole's prominent uncle sends her to fetch Paul for a second meeting in Cholon, the Chinese quarter of Saigon. Her face and gestures have softened, and she admits the long, monotonous mourning for the Ngo brothers is making her tense. She speaks French like a Parisian, differentiating her inflections between business and charm. Late in the novel, Paul learns about Nicole's mother's death at the hands of the French or Viet Minh in 1954, and her adoption by the Truong toc, who had loved her mother but lost her to Do Minh Kha, the communist leader. After the Battle of Dienbienphu, the Catholic Ngos head south. Dao means "peach blossom."

## Alphonse Nsango

A revolutionary leader in the Congo, Nsango (code name: "Spendthrift") has a degree from the Sorbonne and one of the finest political minds in Africa. He is also superstitious, fears foreigners, and speaks rapid French tinged with his own language. Before the novel opens, Paul Christopher pays a juju man to cast the spirit that Nsango believes is consuming his liver into an enemy's body. Hopes that Nsango will become Prime Minister vanish in 1961, and Nsango fades into the forest, where he is stealing weapons. At their first meeting in the novel, in Léopoldville, Paul fears that Nsango is taking too many risks and discounts the Cubans who have arrived, replacing the Chinese as political advisors and recruiters. Paul has put a ticket to Algiers and Cameroonian documents in an Elisabethville bank deposit box in case Nsango must flee the Congo. Nsango mocks the idea. Paul pays a second visit months later to Nsango's remote camp outside Elisabethville, where he meets the Cuban leader, Manuel Ruiz. Nsango jokes that Ruiz wants to claim responsibility for Nsango's worldwide fame, when Paul is the actual agent, talking up his name and painting graffiti everywhere. At Paul's request, Nsango temporarily spares Ruiz's life when his men kill the other Cubans.



## Nguyễn Kim

A UCLA graduate and unofficial press agent to the Ngo family in Saigon, Kim, runs into Paul Christopher in Rome, while handling the press for the exiled Mme. Nhu. Kim joins Paul and Paul's girlfriend Molly for lunch and, drinking hard, talks about his family's royal past and the tough determination of the Ngo family to rise from the ashes of Diem and Nhu's murder. When Paul declares that that event has been eclipsed by John F. Kennedy's assassination, Kim remarks that death comes to the high and low alike. He asserts that the Americans are responsible for Diem and Nhu but prevent the press from publishing it. Reporters are "intellectual sluts" and "clowns, whores, sycophants." Kim insists that the Ngos will rise again and "spit out of their graves." This phrase, which Paul remembers later, helps Paul fit together the missing pieces in the plot to kill JFK.

Paul looks up Kim in Paris shortly after resigning from the Agency and pays him \$2,000 for ten good contacts in Saigon. Paul later learns that the destitute Kim suddenly runs over \$2 million through Banque Sadak in Beirut, and this gets linked to efforts to Kim's efforts to buy a heroin factory in Marseilles. Kim provides Paul the phrase "Lê Thu" to use as a door opener in Vietnam. Kim's photograph of Molly shows up in Saigon as a threat, and when Paul returns to Paris, Vietnamese men are watching his apartment. Paul flies out of Italy from Milan, hoping the airport there will not be watched, but Kim is there to deliver the Truong toc's continuing threat: they will kill Molly because Paul does not fear death but does fear guilt.

## Lee Harvey Oswald

A historical character, Oswald is an ex-U.S. Marine who defects to the USSR, later returns to the U.S., and wants to help foment revolution in Latin America. Oswald is eventually approached by Manuel Ruiz about changing history by killing President John F. Kennedy. Seizing the bait, Oswald assumes he will be whisked to safety, does his duty, and is arrested without knowing that the vengeful South Vietnamese are behind his deed. He is gunned down by Jack Ruby on orders from the KGB. Everyone who talks about Oswald put him down as an outsider, clown, idiot, and even "faggot."

## David Patchen

Paul Christopher's oldest and best friend in the Agency, David is the fourth highest administrator. He and Paul meet as patients in a naval hospital at the end of World War II. They are roommates at Harvard and are recruited together. Because of his wounds, which make him easily identifiable, David goes into administration, at which his photographic memory makes him brilliant, while Paul goes into the field. When they first meet in the novel, in a safe house on Q Street, Washington, DC, David fears Paul wants to quit the Agency and that his girlfriend Molly will not be enough for him. David observes that the Kennedy Administration is filled with innocents who have never smelled a corpse and do not understand consequences.



Paul and David meet again when Paul conceives the idea that the Ngo family of South Vietnam is behind JFK's murder. David defends Paul to White House Aide Dennis Foley but then tells Paul that his self-righteousness is not worth the trouble. He fires Paul to give him freedom to explore on his own, having promised to rescue him if he gets in trouble. In the final meeting, David admits to Paul that the Kennedy White House knows beforehand about the plot against Ngo Dinh Diem and encourages it. He denies that the Agency is involved. David again defends Paul against Foley. He is not sure whether the Ngos will continue to hunt Paul and Molly or not once it is clear Paul's story will cause no repercussions.

## **Franco Piccioni / Frankie Pigeon**

A member of the Chicago Mafia, Pigeon hires Jack Ruby to execute accused Presidential assassin Lee Harvey Oswald in November 1963 as an act of patriotism. Gherman Klimentov, in the U.S. as a TASS correspondent assigned to the U.N. in 1956 approached Pigeon, claiming to be a Belgian businessman. He gives him a \$100,000 retainer and sets up a safe meeting house, should the Belgians ever need his service. Klimentov, of course, works for the KGB. In November 1963, Klimentov deposits \$1 million in a numbered Swiss bank account after Ruby completes his mission.

Paul Christopher has Pigeon kidnapped from the Calabrian village of his birth, where he always spends Christmas and uses Pigeon's morbid fear of disease to make him divulge his secret. Pigeon's will power breaks down when Paul threatens to inject him with the bacteria causing leprosy. Two former French Foreign Legion comrades, Stavros Glavanis and Jan Eycken, soften Pigeon up for several days with cold, water, and obnoxious noise. Paul retains a written, fingerprinted statement and nude photographs of Pigeon with his legs soiled from fright. If the mob learns of Pigeon's activities, they will kill him.

## **Jack Ruby**

A historical figure, Ruby is on the fringe of the Chicago Mafia, "more a hustler than a hoodlum" according to his handler, Frankie Pigeon, who without the syndicate's knowledge hires Ruby to kill Presidential assassin Lee Harvey Oswald within 24 hours of being contacted by the KGB. Pigeon considers Ruby a romantic. Ruby expects to get the Congressional Medal of Honor for doing his patriotic duty.

## **Manuel Ruiz**

A Cuban Marxist, protégé of Ché Guevara, Ruiz uses a variety of surnames including Rogales and Linares, but always with Manuel as the given name. He is a great jungle fighter, surveying revolutionary prospects for Guevara in Bolivia, Columbia, and Panama. He disappears in August-October 1963 in North Vietnam during the planning of John F. Kennedy's assassination. Ruiz recruits Lee Harvey Oswald in Mexico City



after New Orleans Cubans vet Oswald and reject him. Ruiz doubts that Oswald will succeed, despite Do Minh Kha's absolute confidence in the horoscopes.

All these details come out when Paul Christopher visits Ruiz in the Congo. Ruiz is suffering dysentery, drinking heavily, but needs to brag about his exploits to another white man. After taping all the particulars, Paul disables Ruiz but spares his life, feeling he may need to talk with him again. While a Marxist, Ruiz is portrayed as a quintessential racist, paying no attention to any Africans except Nsango, and wanting to return to Cuba to take credit as the white man behind the successful revolution in the Congo.

## **J. D. Trumbull**

An official in the Johnson Administration, Trumbull appears at the end of the novel, sporting a Texas drawl and an unpressed suit. He decides Paul Christopher's report is too inflammatory to show to the President. After reading it carefully and pressing some questions on the author, Trumbull burns it in the fireplace and departs.

## **The Truon toc**

The eldest male in the main line of eldest sons in a Vietnamese family, the Truon toc is the family's spokesman. Nguyễn Kim refuses to name the holder of the office in the Ngo family when he explains the relationships between "toc," "chi," and "phai" to Paul Christopher, who returns to Saigon and has several meetings with the Truon Toc, who finds Paul interesting but dangerous and orders Kim to kill him and his girlfriend, Molly. Paul says he includes the Truon toc's name in his report, which, unfortunately is burned.

## **Alvaro Urpi**

An expert in all dialects of Chinese, Urpi resembles a monk but has never taken orders. The son of a Portuguese soldier and a Cantonese woman, Urpi is rescued from corruption in Macao at age 12 by Dominicans, who recognize his talent for scholarship. Paul Christopher brings Urpi the strips of ideographs taken from Saigon astrologist Yu Lung and within three days has translations of their dangerous message.

## **Don Wolfe**

A British-speaking agent who Paul Christopher finds working next door to Barney Wolkowicz in Saigon, Wolfe recalls events in Mexico City when Lee Harvey Oswald visits in September 1963. There are no Vietnamese in Mexico City at that time, but a Cuban who is in transit from or to Vietnam, Manuel Ruiz.



## Barney Wolkowicz

The Agency Station Chief in Saigon, Wolkowicz is a friend of JFK's "right-hand man" Dennis Foley. Tortured by the Japanese during World War II, part of the planning for the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion and an advocate of killing Fidel Castro, Wolkowicz fits the classic role of an agent in a pulp novel. Deathly afraid of suffering violence, Wolkowicz arms and armors his villa, office, and cars. He is upset that Paul Christopher's agent, Vuong Van Luong, fails to learn the identity of the mystery woman visiting Do Minh Kha in Vientiane, Laos, in September of 1963. When Paul leaves the Agency to pursue his theory about John F. Kennedy's assassination, Wolkowicz receives from Foley instructions to get in Paul's way, but Wolkowicz feels obliged to bail Paul out, warn him, and see him on his way out of the country.

## Yu Lung

A respected Chinese astrologer and geomancer who has spent his entire life in Vietnam, Yu Lung lives in Cholon, the Chinese quarter of Saigon, near the Tat Canal by the racetrack. His house is poor on the outside and rich inside. Yu Lung prepares horoscopes on 8 Sep 1963 showing that Ngo Dinh Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu will soon be killed at the instigation of a powerful foreigner. Deducing that man is John F. Kennedy, Yu Lung on 12 Sep (JFK's anniversary) draws up a second set and uses feng shui to determine that Kennedy can most propitiously be assassinated in Dallas, TX, on 22 Nov. 1963.





# Objects/Places

## Bangkok

A city smelling of waste, whose people sleep in the streets, Bangkok, Thailand, marks the end of Paul Christopher's three weeks of work on the coast of Asia trying to destabilize the Ngo regime in South Vietnam, and what lamentably appears to be his final parting with spy/friend Vuong Van Luong. Luong has been watching an important North Vietnamese visitor, Do Minh Kha and a beautiful young woman. Only late in the novel is it learned that Nicole/Dao is telling her biological father about the Ngo family's plans to assassinate President John F. Kennedy and seeking his help in hiring an assassin.

## Dallas, TX

The site of President John F. Kennedy' assassination on 22 Nov 1963, Dallas is carefully selected through feng shui, the ancient Asian practice of "geomancy," which determines how good and evil forces act on human beings. It is vital that the fatal shots not be fired in a northerly or northeasterly direction, which are considered unlucky. Lee Harvey Oswald fires almost directly due west. The optimal date for JFK to die violently is selected by horoscopy. He happens to be visiting Dallas on the propitious 21st day after the death of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem.

## Geneva

The cathedral-like Union de Banques Suisses in Geneva is used to funnel money to Paul Christopher he needs to independently investigate the assassination of John F. Kennedy. The money is in Box 22XI63 under the name P. S. Runner, requiring no signature, just the second line of specified verse, which David Patchen has provided to Paul. The balance is \$100,000 or CHF 432,512.65. Leaving Geneva with a portion of the money, Paul drives to Paris.

## KGB

The Soviet intelligence and internal security agency in 1963, the Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopastnosti is thrown into a panic when it hears that the assassin of U.S. President John F. Kennedy is a former defector to the USSR, who has recently visited the Soviet and Cuban embassies in Mexico City trying to get readmitted. The KGB quickly activates a "sleeper" agent in the U.S., Frankie Pigeon, to arrange for Lee Harvey Oswald's swift murder. The KGB swiftly gathers all the \$100 bills it can find that it includes a number of counterfeit bills produced during World War II by the SS. Fed up with the spy's life, KGB Agent Gherman Klimenko defects in Rome, Italy. He is amused





when the American agent Paul Christopher does not recognize that No. 2 Ulitza Dzerzhinkogo designates the feared KGB headquarters in Moscow.

## Lê Thu

Lê Thu in Vietnamese means "Tears of Autumn." Its use in the novel is suitably complex. Most simply, Lê Thu is the codename whereby the Ngo family expresses its hatred for the United States and JFK. It is a non-secure codename because meaning(s) can be attributed to it. Nguyễn Kim suggests that when he returns to Saigon, Paul Christopher use Lê Thu to "open doors." More to the point, the phrase raises alarm and suspicion.

To an American, it readily suggests the atmosphere surrounding the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. In the Southern hemisphere, however, that act and the murder 21 days earlier of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother and advisor, Ngo Dinh Nhu occurs in the spring. Several times Lê Thu is contrasted with Lê Xuan, the given name of the Mme. Nhu, the infamous "Dragon Lady." Lê Thu is also the death name of Do Minh Kha's late wife, mother of Dao/Nicole, who the Truong toc of the Ngo family raises in Saigon after 1954.

## Léopoldville

The capital and biggest city of what in 1963 is known as the Congo, Léopoldville sits on the Congo River. After the novel's time frame, Léopoldville receives the name by which it is found on modern maps: Kinshasa. It is a humid place, with geometric European-style buildings that look out of place. The population suffers from skin diseases and leprosy. Three years before this novel, the country revolted against its Belgian colonial masters and achieved independents. Paul Christopher meets the revolutionary leader Alphonse Nsango in the capital.

## Mexico City

The crossroads for airline flights among Moscow, Beijing, and Havana, Mexico City is where Lee Harvey Oswald is recruited to kill John F. Kennedy. American agent Don Wolfe is in the Mexican capital when Cuban terrorist Manuel Ruiz meets Oswald at the Alameda Park. Both the Soviet and Cuban embassies refuse visas to the former defector to the USSR. Ruiz travels on to Hanoi, after being photographed by Mexican airport security.

## Paris

On the last day of October 1963, Paul Christopher lands in Paris after visiting nine countries in 15 days, most recently Thailand. Paul once lived in Paris with his ex-wife Cathy, and knows the city better than any place in America. In Paris he learns to speak



perfect French, write poems, and make love, but he no longer in 1963 loves Paris. As an American spy, Paul finds himself doubly hated there and knows he is under surveillance, as is his case officer, Tom Webster, who lives in an apartment in the avenue Hoche. Paul stays in a safe house on the sixth floor of a building behind the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Paul and Molly have dinner with Nguyễn Kim at La Couple, and after Paul fetches money in Geneva he drives all night to Paris, finds Kim, and learns about the Vietnamese terms "toc," "chi," and "phai." Paul later learns about the murder of Jean-Claude Gaboni in Paris—six days after Paul tells the Truong toc about him.

## Rome

Paul Christopher's girlfriend Molly lives permanently in Rome, working as a fashion reporter. Many scenes in the novel take place in the Eternal City. Early on, Paul and Molly have lunch with exiled, penniless, alcoholic Nguyễn Kim, who rants about the murdered Ngo brothers "spitting from their grave" at their enemies. The couple unfortunately allows Kim to take their picture as a souvenir, which turns into blackmail. Paul and Molly also run into Piero Cremona, columnist for L'Unità, who talks of the Russian connection with Lee Harvey Oswald. Paul and Molly are shown as visitors to the Galleria Borghese and the zoo.

Molly eventually moves into Paul's apartment on Lungotevere Street, a curving street Paul has chosen because it offers no hiding for covert surveillance. It is across the Ponte Sant'Angelo from St. Peter's Square, where Paul meets the Russian would-be defector, Gherman Klimenko, and arranges a second meeting on Percy Bysshe Shelley's grave in the Protestant Cemetery.

Paul meets Stavros Glavanis and Jan Eycken on Capitoline Hill, whose columns make the Greek homesick for Athens, and takes them to an Agency villa on the Via Flaminia, where the three force Frankie Pigeon to explain how he hired Jack Ruby to kill Lee Harvey Oswald. The Roman villa once belonged to one of Mussolini's mistresses, but after the SS used it to torture prisoners—the facility Paul and his assistants use—no one will rent it. The Agency uses it for novice and elderly agents. Paul avoids flying out of Italy from the Rome airport, wrongly believing that Milan will be less closely watched.

## Saigon

The capital and chief city of South Vietnam in 1963, when *The Tears of Autumn* is set. Saigon (on modern maps it is "Ho Chi Minh City"), provides numerous venues for the novel. The Agency section chief is Barney Wolkowicz, whose concerns about security lead him to live and travel surrounded by armor and weapons. The Pussycat Night Club on Tu Do Street serves as the natural place for Vietnamese prostitutes to pick up American soldiers beginning to arrive in Vietnam, while its bathroom is where spies leave cryptic messages for one another.

Several scenes are set in Cholon, the Chinese quarter of Saigon. Paul visits the Truong toc's elegant home and first meets Truong toc's niece Nicole, who he later meets again



on the terrace of the Continental Palace Hotel. Paul is led through dingy warehouses to an ominous meeting. Paul visits his late agent's brother, Phuoc, at the famous Xa Loi Pagoda, which the Ngos invaded months before, cracking down on political enemies.

Saigon comes most alive when Paul returns from the hinterland to find his contact Luong dead at the threshold to Paul's rented room, is nearly gunned down by two military-trained assassins, assaults a young Chinese who thinks Paul is a thief and tries to keep Paul from fleeing, and stops just short of being blown to bits when an angry mob attacks his already booby-trapped car. Brief scenes in the police station filled with foreign-made communication equipment and a brief farewell at the airport wrap up Saigon's part in the novel.

## Vientiane

The capital of Laos, Vientiane is the meeting spot for Do Minh Kha and his long-estranged daughter, Nicole/Dao in September of 1963, where she tells her North Vietnamese father about their South Vietnamese relatives' decision to avenge the deaths of Ngo Dinh Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu by killing U.S. President John F. Kennedy. An astrologer has determined that this is the most auspicious time and place for the plot to be advanced.

## Washington, DC

Washington, DC, houses the headquarters of the unnamed "Agency" (almost certainly the Central Intelligence Agency or CIA). Headquarters is never seen, but the Agency maintains a safe house on Q Street, where Paul Christopher stays during a visit in October 1963. To avoid Agency eavesdropping, Paul meets with friend and boss David Patchen in Patchen's home on M Street to outline his theory about John F. Kennedy's murder; they meet at Patchen's house once again in the novel's finale. During the October meeting, Patchen catches White House aide Dennis Foley's angry denunciation of Paul's theory on tape and shares it with Paul before suggesting they go to a late-night bar to talk privately about Paul leaving the Agency to develop leads unhindered on his own.

## Zermatt

An Alpine resort in the shadow of the Matterhorn, Zermatt is the refuge to which Tom and Sybille Webster spirit Paul Christopher's girlfriend Molly upon learning of South Vietnamese death threats against her. While Molly is enjoying a Christmas vacation under protection, Paul in Zürich and in Italy obtains the final pieces in the puzzle of John F. Kennedy's assassination. Paul reaches Zermatt in time for the gala New Year's celebration, and he and Molly spend a few more days skiing and making love.

## Zürich

The Swiss city to which Paul Christopher traces \$1 million paid by the KGB to couriers representing Frankie Pigeon. Paul goes there, hires Dieter Dimpel to enter the old-fashioned Dolder und Co. Bank through a chimney and photograph documentation on the \$1 million deal. It is circumstantial evidence to confirm that Pigeon hired Jack Ruby to kill presidential assassin Lee Harvey Oswald. The bank discovers that some of the \$100 bills that the KGB scrapes together are SS counterfeits left over from World War II.



# Themes

## Truth

The Tears of Autumn juxtaposes the practical view about truth held and practiced by field agent Paul Christopher and his long-time friend, David Patchen, who is high up in the Agency's hierarchy, with the view of members of the White House staff. Paul and David see human intellect as a force to be used, usually in secret, to arrive at objective truth. This allows them to predict others' mistakes and benefit from them. When Paul perceives a link between the assassinations of South Vietnamese leaders Ngo Dinh Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu and, 21 days later of U.S. President John F. Kennedy, he demands first of all to know that "the outfit" has nothing to do with the Ngo murders. David swears that the Kennedy White House knew ahead of time about the coup d'etat in Vietnam, assisted in its planning, and approved of the outcome. The Agency had not heard beforehand that the deposed leaders would be killed.

When White House aid Dennis Foley, seeking to keep the romantic memory of Camelot from being besmirched, demands that Paul drop his investigation, Paul resigns from the Agency in order to continue unhindered in his pursuit of the truth. He knows his quest could put him in physical danger, but he perseveres. He assembles evidence, following up on leads to document his hypotheses, and only when the last piece falls into place, does he report it to the government—strictly as a favor, since the data belong to him.

Foley again resists, claiming that David cannot be objective about his old friend, Paul, and that Paul could not possibly have talked with a Cuban revolutionary in the Congo. David cites a sound recording of the conversation and notes that Paul has kept two key witnesses alive. They could be independently interviewed and the few loose ends tied down. Foley refuses to back down. His new boss, J.D. Trumbull, believes Paul's fabulous story and his findings, but cynically and unilaterally rules that it is too dangerous for the new President or the American people to hear and summarily burns it. Why Paul does not object is left unclear.

## Vengeance

Vengeance runs through Charles McCarry's novel The Tears of Autumn. The basic premise is that the Kennedy Administration decides the unpopular South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother and advisor Ngo Dinh Nhu must be replaced with politicians more amenable to the U.S. point of view. Seeing the writing on the wall, the Ngos commission a horoscope, which shows them inevitably doomed. Before their death, they and their relatives begin planning to extract "blood for blood" from the Americans. The Ngos are killed, supposedly by a South Vietnamese officer, after the coup, and Washington rejoices. Twenty-one days later, JFK is gunned down in Dallas, TX. Protagonist Paul Christopher hears about "spitting from the grave" and puts two and two together and begins looking for evidence of a link between the two murders.



He finds that members of the Ngo family reside both north and south of the political border, overlooking ideology. He also learns through a Cuban revolutionary visiting Hanoi, that Lee Harvey Oswald, an American rifleman and avowed Marxist, was hired to carry out the Kennedy assassination. A second act of vengeance is stepping up the importation of raw opium and developing facilities to convert it to heroin. When thousands of U.S. soldiers and Marines are committed to the war in Vietnam, they will be sent home addicted, to wreak havoc on supposedly untouchable U.S. soil.

Vengeance also figures in the Soviets' paranoia when it comes out that Oswald had once defected to the USSR. The Kremlin is certain U.S. bombers will destroy Moscow. At the end of the novel, proof of the plot is destroyed lest Americans be so incensed at a supposed ally killing their beloved president that they will demand South Vietnam be "nuked." Oswald kills JFK to avenge the masses oppressed by capitalism; Jack Ruby executes Oswald on behalf of all patriotic Americans and expects the Medal of Honor; Pigeon, the Mafioso who hires Ruby, quakes in fear at having his independent action uncovered by the Mob, which will certainly want revenge.

## Fate

Charles McCarry's novel *The Tears of Autumn* delves into Asian views of fate. Protagonist Paul Christopher learns that fate, revealed through horoscopy and geomancy predisposes an individual but does not predestine him or her. Assuming one knows one's auspicious or dangerous days and places, one can do something to avoid or embrace that fate.

Oddly, when South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother and advisor Ngo Dinh Nhu realize that the Kennedy Administration is determined to replace them with politicians more amenable to its viewpoint, they take no action. Instead, they accept their fate and rally the Ngo family to help them "spit from the grave" on the Americans. JFK's horoscope is prepared most meticulously to determine when in the lunar months he is most susceptible to the violent death that is foreseen.

The Ngos perish on 1 Nov. 1963 (2 Nov. by U.S. time). Because seven is Diem's lucky number and seven times three, twenty-one, is particularly auspicious—and twenty-one marks a special place in Vietnamese mourning rituals—the Ngos resolve to attack on 21 Nov. 1963. The feng shui of the killing is also carefully determined. Dallas, TX, is auspicious, and the assassin is to fire at JFK directly from the east. This is, of course, precisely what happens in Dealey Plaza. Having no foreknowledge of these plans, JFK is doomed. Given the reaction to the evidence among Americans who see it, it is unlikely that anyone would have given any belief to what they consider superstition.



# Style

## Point of View

Tears of Autumn by Charles McCarry is narrated anonymously in the third person, past tense omniscient. Dialog is used extensively, switching naturally between past, present, and future. The narrator is positively inclined towards the protagonist, Paul Christopher, but allows his ex-wife Cathy and girlfriend Molly to chip away at his smooth veneer, trying to find a person under the agent's armor and journalist's disguise.

A White House aide, painted entirely as unsavory, at first meeting finds Paul obsessive/compulsive, and rejects his theories out of hand because they might tarnish the memory of John F. Kennedy, who is portrayed almost as a demigod. Paul has allies in the Agency who believe him, but Dennis Foley has the clout to shut down any official investigation. This only make Paul resign and continue on his own. As he reaches this decision, his old friend in the Agency, having defended him to Foley, tells him how exasperating he can be.

As Paul gets caught up in horoscopy and feng shui, lucky numbers, Buddhist funereal beliefs and practices, the narrator skillfully makes sense of it all for Western readers. S/he does not abandon Paul when he is less humane than usual in getting information out of a Mafioso, but shows him shaken by what he has had to do. Above all, the narrator commiserates with Paul over the Vietnamese targeting Molly rather than himself.

## Setting

Tears of Autumn by Charles McCarry is a mystery/adventure story that truly roams the world. Paris, Washington, DC, and Saigon (nowadays Ho Chi Minh City) host the action more than other places, but hardly dominate the story.

The action begins in September of 1963, when the Ngo brothers ruling South Vietnam realize that the U.S. will soon back a coup d'etat and alert North Vietnamese relatives to the coming need for "blood for blood." That first clandestine meeting, watched by a U.S. agent, but not immediately understood, takes place in Bangkok, Thailand. Later, as a civilian, protagonist Paul Christopher spends an extended period in various places in Saigon and risks driving at night to an unnamed village on the Viet Cong-menaced Bien Hoa road. He is nearly killed in Saigon, finds the body of a friend and attends his wake, visits a famous Buddhist temple and the home of a "sojourning Chinese." Western hotels and restaurants and the secure villa housing the U.S. Agency chief are shown. Paul's days in Asia end when he is expelled rather than arrested. Paul twice visits the Congo, once in Léopoldville, the colonial capital (today Kinshasa), and once in an unnamed village that is only beginning to recover from the civil war. Africa is depicted as a brutal, hopeless place.





In Europe, Paul visits Paris twice, which is described in some detail. French manners and spy technology receive some scoffing, but U.S. hubris in the era of the New Frontier is nicely put down by the French. Rome, Italy hosts the action four times, in multiple locations, and St. Peter's Basilica and the Vatican Museum within Vatican City are seen several times. Paul chooses to live on a curving street with nowhere for spies to watch his door. When spies show up, he sees them easily. Museums and restaurants are described. The villa where the SS once torture prisoners is used to force an American Mafioso to tell how Jack Ruby is brought into the story. Elsewhere on the Continent, Paul visits Geneva, Switzerland, to withdraw money legally, Zürich to photograph evidence in a bank illegally, and at the end of the novel reunites with girlfriend Molly in Zermatt on New Year's Eve. He also passes briefly through Brussels and Milan.

Paul visits Washington, DC, three times for four meetings, one in a safe house, another in a public hotel to avoid bugs, and twice in his high-placed Agency friend's house. They go outside to talk in private or turn up televisions and music equipment. Paul's final report on JFK's assassination goes up in smoke in a Washington fireplace. Other story items are told second-hand, involving action in Chicago, New Orleans, Mexico City, Hanoi, Vientiane, Munich, Berlin, and the Dachau concentration camp.

## Language and Meaning

According to publisher information on the book jacket, author Charles McCarry worked as a deep-cover CIA operations officer in Europe, Africa, and Asia during the 1950s and 1960s. Thus, he writes what he knows about personally. He resists any temptation to bury the reader in jargon and even scoffs at how movies and books stereotype spies. The closest he comes is saying that "Lê Thu" (Tears of Autumn) as a code name is poetic but insecure. He explains that it has real-world connotations, which allow it to be broken.

Much of the novel deals with the Vietnamese culture and mentality, with citations from Lao-tzu's Tao Te Ching, the basic text of Taoism, revered throughout Asia by members of various philosophies and religions, lucky numbers, feng shui (long before it becomes popular in the West for deciding home decoration), and horoscopy. Paul is first taught the proper respect for things not easily understood but proven over time and then warns American skeptics not to scoff. McCarry does a fine job of clarifying why from a Buddhist point of view, JFK had to die on 22 Nov. 1963 while being driven westward through Dallas, TX.

More broadly, the novel, written a dozen years after the events it portrays, preserves the atmosphere of Camelot and the collective depression that follows the young "prince's" (JFK) demise. It also captures the revolutionary fervor that encircles the globe as colonies break loose from mother countries, often with terrible bloodshed. When Oswald turns out to be a former deserter to the USSR, the Kremlin fears U.S. bombers will appear overhead to destroy them. That paranoia, common to both sides in the Cold War, is captured nicely. The era is convincingly depicted.





## Structure

Tears of Autumn by Charles McCarry consists of fifteen numbered but untitled chapters, whose length varies considerably. Each chapter consists of multiple numbered but untitled sections. The novel generally follows a chronological order, but a few unannounced flashbacks occur that become clear only later in the story. There are numerous asides that serve little purpose and several occasions when something is built up that the reader expects to recur, only to be disappointed.

The first three chapters establish the major characters and conflicts over the meaning of the assassinations in Saigon and Dallas, TX. Protagonist Paul Christopher learns that the Ngo family, two of whose members die in the 2 November 1963 coup d'etat, need "blood for blood" from the man of action in Washington who in the very least encouraged the rebellious generals. When a White House aide of peculiarly intense loyalty to the dead President orders Paul's investigation ended, Paul resigns from the Agency to work as a private citizen, knowing his old comrades will cooperate when they can.

Paul follows a series of leads, which paint a comprehensive and compelling picture. The revelations come slowly through Chapter 13, with Paul working on some conclusions before getting full confirmation. In the background, his research convinces the Ngo family's powerful and bemused spokesman, the Truong toc, that Paul must be eliminated. The same thing occurs to certain U.S.-trained Vietnamese gunmen. Paul learns about horoscopy and geomancy and how they determine that JFK should be shot from the Texas Book Depository while being driven westward on 22 Nov. 1963. Politics means less than blood as Ngos in the communist North and in the South work together on Operation "Lê Thu," with a Cuban bound for Africa from Hanoi making contact with Oswald in Mexico City. Paul hires an ex-Nazi little person to photograph evidence to support a Russian agent's claim that he personally carried \$1 million to a Swiss bank to pay off the American Mafioso who hired Jack Ruby to execute Oswald. The KGB agent defects. Paul hires professional interrogators to break the Mafioso, and the last pieces fall into place.

Chapter 14 provides a handy recap of all the evidence, but ends with Paul's evidence being burned for political reasons. The final chapter rather disappointingly shows Paul's friends trying to talk him out of staying with his girlfriend Molly but his deciding to live happily—if warily—ever after.



## Quotes

"Tom Webster had said nothing during dinner. The evening had been spoiled for him by outsiders. Paul operated all the time on hostile ground; in every country but his own he was a criminal. Outsiders, who did not know how fast betrayal traveled, could do him harm, perhaps even kill him, by knowing his name and speaking it at a cocktail party. Tonight Webster had entrusted Paul's identity to two people who had no right to know it. He put his hand on Paul's shoulder and began to speak.

He never got the words out. The doorbell rang and Webster went to answer it, closing the door behind him so that no other stranger could catch a glimpse of Paul. The others went on talking; Paul heard Webster speaking English in the hall.

When he came back, he held a perforated embassy envelope in his hand. He opened it and read the cable it contained.

'Wonderful,' Webster said in a flat tone. 'There's been a coup d'etat in Saigon. Some generals have seized power. The Saigon station says the coup has succeeded.'"

Chapter 1, pg. 22.

"'You're crying. Would you like to pray with me?'

'No, Father. I don't believe.'

'It's a frightful thing.'

Paul thought the priest was talking about his rejection of faith. 'For some,' he said.

'For all. President Kennedy was a great man. That death should come like that to him—he was like a young prince.'

'Yes, it's a great shock.'

'You must have loved your President.'

'I love my country,' Paul said.

'It's the same thing, perhaps.'

'Ten minutes ago I wouldn't have said so, Father. Now I think you're right.'" Chapter 2, pg. 50.

"'Oh, the Ngos have power,' Kim said. 'They're a force of nature. You can't understand it, Molly, but they're a great family. They forget nothing, they forgive nothing. Do you understand French? Ils cracheront de leur tombes.'

Kim's speech had begun to blur. He shook his head violently, his small face was deeply flushed. Paul knew the signs; Kim's capacity for alcohol was small, and he would soon need to go to sleep.

'Your Kennedys are not powerful in themselves,' Kim said. 'They live in a powerful country, that's all. They were working with their hands, unable to read, when the Nguyêns were kings of the land, and the Ngos were already wise men.'" Chapter 3, pg. 62.

"'I'd say that's pretty melodramatic,' Paul said. 'We were told from the beginning that our job is to keep the water clean. We feed the politicians information, they do what they



want with it. But we don't doctor the information to suit political purposes, much less the emotional purposes of a short-timer like Dennis Foley. What Foley wants from us is a kind of treason—his illusions are more important than the truth.'

'That's what I just got through telling you.'

'We don't seem to be understanding each other very well, David. Would it help, do you think if we spoke German?'

'Paul, you really are an arrogant bastard,' Patchen said. 'Your whole career has been a series of moral lessons for the rest of us. You won't use a gun. You won't betray an agent. You won't give support to a regime that tortures political prisoners. You won't countenance a coup against the Ngos, even though you've done more than anyone else to create a political opposition to them. Only your means justify the end. People have been telling me for years that you're more trouble than you're worth, and I'm beginning to see the point.'" Chapter 4, pg. 74.

"Christopher climbed the stairs. The air smelled fresh, as if there had been rain in the night, and the sunrise washed across the roofs of the quarter. The boy was asleep again on the landing outside Honey's room, sprawled on his back with one trouser leg pulled upward on his hairless calf.

Stepping over the sleeping figure, Christopher looked down. It was Luong, his eyes staring, his black hair blown forward as if by the wind. Christopher knelt and touched his skin. It was still warm; there was a black stain on his trousers where his bladder had emptied.

Christopher pushed back Luong's hair and saw the small blue hole on his smooth forehead. 'He's not your child,' he heard Wolkowicz say. Christopher laid his palm on Luong's cheek and closed the eyes and the slack lips with his thumb and forefinger." Chapter 6, pg. 120.

"Luang lay in his coffin with a bunch of bananas on his chest to confuse the appetite of the Celestial Dog, devourer of the entrails of the dead. A ring of candles burned around the edge of the coffin, and an oil lamp smoked beneath it. A child of ten, Luong's eldest son, stood at his father's feet, welcoming mourners. He wore a straw headpiece and a robe of white gauze, covered with patches to show his wretchedness. Christopher bowed to the corpse and gave the child an envelope filled with piasters, two bottles of Veuve Cliquot, and a satin banderole on which was written a compliment to the dead man.

'I was your father's friend,' Christopher said.

'Tho spoke about you,' the boy said. 'I remember your visit.'" Chapter 7, pg. 144.

"Yu Lung, when he returned with the whiskey, did not glance at the file cabinet. He handed Christopher this glass before he poured whiskey into it, and smiled when Christopher held the empty tumbler up to the light.

'Will you spoil it with ice?' he asked.

Christopher shook his head. They touched glasses.

'You've spent a good deal of time in the East,' Yu Lung said. 'You've learned our



manners—you don't make sudden noises or laugh in that peculiar way Europeans have. They guffaw and stare at one, expecting that one will put on an expression that exactly matches their own. One is not, after all, a mirror.'

'Living in Saigon has made you into a Vietnamese, Yu Lung.'

'No,' Yu Lung said, 'though I was born here, like my father. We Chinese who live abroad call ourselves hua-chiao. The words mean "sojourning Chinese." A sojourn is by definition temporary. One of our poets said we are like migrating birds with our souls flying ahead of us to China; we take no interest in our landing places or even in our journey—we beat our wings violently, in pursuit of our souls. Vietnam is where I live, my dear fellow—but it is not my world.'" Chapter 8, pg. 160.

"The money went into the bank in Zurich on November 25. it was taken out the next day, just before the bank closed.'

'By whom?'

Klimenko looked aside. 'I don't tell you that now. When we meet again, when I have assurances—but not on this roof, in the rain.'

'You'll have assurances when I have this information,' Christopher said.

'Weedkiller?'

'Yes. All of it.'

'Tomorrow,' Klimenko said. 'I can't wait longer than that.'

Christopher nodded and smiled at the guard, who had come onto the gallery and was walking toward them with his arms thrown out and his shoulders shrugged to show that he was at the end of his patience.

'All right,' Christopher said. 'Five o'clock in the morning, in the Protestant cemetery behind the Porta San Paolo. I'll need you on Shelley's grave.'

'Romantic,' Klimenko said.

He walked away, leaving Christopher to talk to the remonstrating guard, who might remember him.'" Chapter 9, pg. 179.

"Dimpel pursed his lips, sipped his cognac, made the glass ring again. 'What made you think that?' he asked.

'Johnson's description of the way you worked in Berlin. He thinks you were a genius at what you did.'

'What I did was certainly good for Major Johnson. I was much younger in Berlin. Besides, that sort of thing seems stupid once you've stopped doing it. Men like yourself, who go on with it all their lives, find that hard to understand.'

'I'll describe the job,' Christopher said. 'It involves entering a room through a fireplace, opening a file with a simple tumbler lock, photographing documents.'

'What building?'

'A bank in Zurich.'

Dimpel burst into laughter. He had a deep voice. 'A bank? In Switzerland?' he cried. 'It would be safer to commit sodomy at high noon in the middle of the Bahnhofstrasse.'" Chapter 10, pgs. 203-204.



"'You know so much, tell me what the job was,' Pigeon said.

Christopher picked up the hypodermic and depressed the plunger, so that a thin stream of the yellow serum squirted out of the needle and through the light. 'That's what you're going to tell me,' he said.

'You can kill me!'

'No. I give you my word I won't do that. Not with a gun or a knife, or anything quick'

The trembling of Pigeon's body intensified. He stared into the light, then turned his whole body away from its glare. He swallowed noisily. When at last he was able to speak, he did so in a rapid soprano voice, like a castrato.

Christopher had to ask him only two or three questions. When Pigeon was done, Christopher left the room, taking the hypodermic with him, and the spool of tape on which he had recorded Pigeon's hysterical spillage of what he had done to earn Klimenko's money." Chapter 11, pg. 225.

"Ruiz had told his story with nonchalance. Now his face collapsed into an expression of comical urgency. He slammed the beer bottle on the tabletop and rushed out of the hut. Christopher followed and saw Ruiz, tearing at his belt, running toward the bamboo screen that hid the latrine. He heard the Cuban's bowels open in a loud burst of gas and liquid. Ruiz groaned and retched, squatting astride the ditch with his arms wrapped around his own body.

Christopher, a pace behind the crouching man, drew the .22 pistol from his belt and fired two rounds of birdshot into the base of Ruiz's neck; the pistol's weak report could barely be heard above the drums. Ruiz emitted a groan, full of breath as if he had been kicked in the stomach, and fell forward into the ditch." Chapter 13, pg. 251.

"'I'll tell you a plain fact,' Trumbull said. 'If the American people believed that a bunch of Vietnamese got together and killed John F. Kennedy, they'd want to go over there and nuke that country—nuke it. You'd never get another dime out of Congress for South Vietnam. You'd never get an ounce of support from the press—those fellows love Kennedy's memory almost as much as Dennis does.'

Trumbull riffled the pages of Christopher's report. 'You've got to be careful who you let change history,' he said. 'You're sure that this is the only copy of this thing?'

'There's a photograph in Christopher's head,' Foley said.

Trumbull gave Christopher a smile of great sweetness. It was the last time he looked at him.

'I've grown a lot of gray hair, son,' he said, 'but I've never seen anyone do the things you say you've done. I want you to know I believe you did it all. And I wish you luck—I mean that, Paul.'

Trumbull stood up and went to the fireplace. He picked up the poker and stirred the logs. Kneeling with an apologetic, arthritic groan, he fed Christopher's report into the flames, sheet by sheet. Bits of charred paper, lifted by the draught, flew up the chimney." Chapter 14, pg. 268

## Topics for Discussion

What function does the French girl in the white bikini in Saigon's Cercle Sportif play in the novel?

What does the meeting with Trevor Hitchcock in Léopoldville reveal about Africa's role in world politics?

Paul Christopher and Dennis Foley each regards the other as obsessive. How do their obsessions and patriotism compare and contrast?

How does Yu Lung view non-Chinese—Vietnamese and Europeans in particular? How does this fit the racial tension in the novel at large?

How would you justify or condemn Trumbull's unilateral decision about Paul Christopher's report?

What do you think drives Gherman Klimenko to defect? Could his part in the Kennedy assassination upset him sufficiently, given all that professional spies appear routinely to do?

How is Paul Christopher's ex-wife used in the novel? Is it a fair portrayal?