



HENRI



"Dedicated to my great-grandfather, Henri"



HENRI

Tome I: The Ones We Leave Behind

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First edition — 2026
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This story takes place in Vietnam in 1945. At that time, Vietnam was part of a large area called French Indochina, which had been ruled by France for almost a hundred years. During the Second World War, many things changed very quickly. Japanese soldiers arrived. Then they left. A movement of Vietnamese people called the Viet Minh began to ask for their country back, and soon Vietnam became independent.

Many French families who had lived in Vietnam for years had to leave quickly on ships heading home to France. Many Vietnamese children — especially those whose fathers had been French soldiers — left too. Henry is one of those children.

This is a made-up story. But the world around Henry and Cà Phê was very, very real.



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Cà Phê



Henry



Anh



Ying



Yang



Chou



Bruce

HENRI

TOME I
"The Ones
We Leave
Behind"

Animā - TV





CHAPTER I

"The Ride"



The morning sun breaks over the mountains like a secret being told. Below, the flooded rice terraces turn the whole valley into a staircase of gold and glass. Moving slowly through the water is Năm, a water buffalo so enormous he makes the earth tremble. On his broad back sits ten-year-old Henry, barefoot, grinning, perfectly at home between those great sweeping horns. Behind him sits Cà Phê, a tabby and white cat with very strong opinions about mud. "Faster, Năm!" Henry calls. Năm does not go faster. Năm goes exactly the speed Năm wants.



Năm suddenly decides that now, right now, is the time to run. His hooves hammer the flooded earth like thunder and a massive spray of muddy water erupts around them, catching the sun like liquid gold. Henry throws his head back and laughs so hard the sound bounces off the mountains. Cà Phê flattens himself low and grips with everything he has. His whiskers press back flat against his face. "I am in complete control of this situation," he tells himself. He is not. He is absolutely, spectacularly not.



The mist burns away and the valley shines impossibly green. Henry lies back against Nãm's warm neck, watching clouds drift past the karst peaks.

Cà Phê, however, cannot rest. A glowing golden dragonfly hovers just inches from his nose. He tracks it with enormous, unblinking green eyes. His tail tip twitches. The dragonfly drifts left his head drifts left. It drifts right his head drifts right. The entire vast and ancient valley ceases to exist. There is only the dragonfly. He swats. He misses. "I was not trying," he announces to no one.



The late afternoon heat settles over the village like a warm hand. The smell of wet earth changes to the sharp, clean scent of split bamboo and drying rice. Henry leaps off Nắm, his bare feet slapping the wooden steps of the stilt house.

Dust motes float around him, glowing like embers in the amber light. Cà Phê follows, flowing up the stairs like a silent shadow. On the veranda, village women weave bright fabrics in the quiet air. "Race you inside!" Henry shouts over his shoulder. Everything here smells of home.



A splash of muddy water lands exactly where Cà Phê was standing. He lets out a sharp little sound and steps forward with great dignity, pressing his warm flank firmly against Henry's side. The boy reaches behind himself without looking.

His muddy fingers find the exact spot where the cat's jaw meets his neck and scratch gently. Cà Phê's eyes slide shut. A deep, vibrating purr begins in his chest, harmonising with the slow rustling of the bamboo. "You're my best friend," Henry murmurs. Cà Phê purrs louder. That means yes.



Inside, the house is cool and dimly lit. Shafts of sunlight pierce the bamboo blinds. The air smells wonderfully of hot espresso and whipped egg yolk. Grandmother Anh stands by the stone hearth, her weathered hands whisking golden coffee foam in a ceramic bowl with practised, uncompromising efficiency. Henry leans quietly against her side. She does not stop whisking. But her stern expression softens, just a fraction, and she rests one hand briefly on his hair. "Wash your hands before you touch anything," she says. That is enough.

For Anh, that is everything.



The amber lantern light paints gentle shadows across Anh's weathered face. She kneels on the soft grass. Cà Phê sits before her, very still, the lacquered coffee bean pendant resting against his white chest. The stern grandmother reaches out and gently brushes the top of the cat's head. They share a quiet understanding about the boy they both love and the heartbreak that is coming tonight. "Keep him safe," Anh murmurs, sternly but not unkindly. "Remember exactly where home is." Cà Phê blinks once, slowly. In cat, that is a solemn promise.



Dusk arrives, bringing a deep stillness. The paper lanterns in the garden bloom with warm orange light. Fireflies drift through the heavy jasmine-scented air. Henry sits completely exhausted on the wooden swing hanging from the thickest branch of the ancient mango tree. Cà Phê lies stretched entirely across the boy's lap, front paws dangling over Henry's knees, eyes closed, breathing slow. "Do you think tomorrow will be like today?" Henry asks softly. The world is filled only with the rustle of leaves and the distant chirping of cicadas. Neither of them wants this moment to end.



Night wraps around the stilt house like a heavy velvet blanket. Cà Phê hops onto the smooth wooden windowsill, sitting tall as he looks out over the dark and quiet valley. The air is entirely peaceful. Below, the flooded terraces have turned to black mirrors, reflecting a sky full of cold, indifferent stars. Somewhere in the distance, a night bird calls once and falls silent. Cà Phê listens. Something is different tonight. He cannot name it. But his ears will not settle.



Cà Phê steps silently toward the bedroom. His whiskers twitch. He peers through the open door. A harsh shaft of moonlight illuminates an object that does not belong. It is a heavy leather suitcase, completely packed, its brass clasps snapped shut. It sits cold and final in the centre of the room. Cà Phê stares at it. His tail begins a slow, deliberate thrash. He has seen this before the geometry of a life about to be folded up and carried away. "No," he thinks. But the suitcase does not care what a cat thinks.



From somewhere outside comes a sound that does not belong to the night. The low, mechanical growl of a truck engine, moving through the dark toward the village. It grows louder. Cà Phê flattens his ears completely against his skull. His green eyes widen, catching a sliver of cold moonlight. He shrinks back from the door. He understands what the sleeping child does not yet know. The golden paradise of the morning, the race across the terraces, the dragonfly, the muddy hand, the swing, all of it is over. "Not him," Cà Phê whispers. "Not my boy."



Outside, the valley sits absolutely silent under a cold white moon. The flooded terraces no longer reflect the joyful sun. They are mirrors of dark, endless indigo. The stilt house stands alone against the jagged shadow of the mountains. In the garden, a single orange paper lantern flickers softly in the night breeze. Then it goes dark. Inside, a small cat sits very still in the shadows, watching a door, waiting for a morning that will never look the same again. Home is not a place. It is the people you love. And someone is about to take his away.



CHAPTER II

"Farewell"



The first light has not yet reached the valley, but Cà Phê is already awake. He moves along the narrow ridge between the flooded terraces, each paw placed with the precision of a surgeon. The water on either side is still and silver. A moth lands on his nose. He shakes it off with tremendous dignity. The air smells of wet earth and endings. Behind him, the stilt house is quiet. Too quiet. The suitcase is still there. He checked. "Today is the day," he thinks. He keeps walking anyway.



Inside the house, Grandmother Anh holds out a small leather-bound book. Her hands are steady. Her voice is not. "This was your mother's," she says. Henry takes it with both hands, as if it might break. Cà Phê watches from the doorway, his green eyes unblinking. The book is old, its cover soft and cracked. Henry opens his mouth to ask a question, but Anh shakes her head once. "Not now. When you are ready." Some gifts are too heavy to unwrap in the morning.



Henry sits on the top step of the veranda, his knees pulled to his chest. The lantern beside him flickers. Below, the terraces catch the last amber light like sheets of hammered copper. Cà Phê presses himself against the boy's side, warm and solid. "I don't want to go," Henry says quietly. He does not say where. He does not need to. The whole village knows. The women have stopped weaving. The buffalo stands still at the bottom of the hill. Even the wind holds its breath.



Henry walks through the village one last time. The pig roots happily in the mud beside the path. Chickens scatter and regroup. Everything is ordinary. Everything is unbearable. A woman hanging laundry raises one hand. A man mending a fishing net nods once without looking up. "You'll come back, little brother," says an old neighbour, though they both know the world does not work that way. Henry smiles because it is polite. His shoes are too clean. Village boys do not wear clean shoes unless something terrible is happening.



Henry sits cross-legged on the wooden floor, the leather book open on his knees. Cà Phê settles beside him, watching with professional curiosity. Henry turns the first page carefully. There are photographs, small, faded, beautiful. A young woman laughing in a garden. The same woman holding a baby. "That's Mẹ," Henry says quietly, tracing the edge of a picture with one finger. He does not linger. He is not ready yet. He closes the book gently and holds it against his chest. "I'll look properly later," he tells Cà Phê. "When there is more time."



The thought arrives without warning, the way the worst thoughts always do. He is leaving. And Cà Phê is not coming. Henry pulls the cat into his arms so tightly that Cà Phê lets out a small, undignified squeak. Then the cat does something he has never done before he wraps both front paws around Henry's neck and holds on. The boy buries his face in the warm fur. It smells of dust and sunlight and every good thing about this place. "I won't let them separate us," Henry whispers.

His voice cracks. Cà Phê presses his nose against the boy's ear. He does not let go first.



The tears come fast and quiet. Henry sits on the wooden floor, his face level with Cà Phê's. The cat has walked right up to him and stopped, close enough that their noses almost touch. Henry's chin trembles. Cà Phê does not look away. He stares straight into the boy's wet eyes with a stillness that says everything words cannot. "They're taking me away from you," Henry whispers. A tear rolls off his jaw and lands on Cà Phê's paw. The cat does not flinch. He steps closer. He presses his forehead gently against Henry's.



But Henry is not a boy who stays broken. He wipes his face with the back of his hand, and when he looks down at Cà Phê, something new is in his eyes. Not sadness. A plan. "Listen," he whispers, pulling the cat closer, tears still wet on his cheeks but a grin starting at the corners of his mouth. "Once Grandma falls asleep tonight, I am going to show you the map. The whole route, every road, every river, every town between here and Hanoi." He scratches under Cà Phê's chin. "You're smart. You'll remember." Cà Phê blinks slowly. He is listening.



Henry lifts Cà Phê high above his head, the way he has done since the cat was a kitten. Cà Phê's legs dangle uselessly. His tail swishes. Anh turns from the kitchen and almost smiles. Almost. "You are getting too big for that," she says. She means the boy. She means everything. "He's coming to find me," Henry says, grinning through the last of his tears. "He promised." Anh looks at the cat. The cat looks at Anh. The lacquered coffee bean pendant catches the lamplight against his white chest. "Eat your soup," Anh says. She does not argue with the boy's hope. She cannot afford to.



Late that night, when the house is quiet and Anh's breathing has gone slow, Henry kneels on the floor with a stick and scratches shapes into the dust. The mountains. The terraces. The river. The road south. Cà Phê crouches beside him, watching the stick with absolute focus.

"This is our village," Henry whispers, tapping a mark. "And this is Hanoi. It's far, but you just follow the road and keep the river on your left." He draws a small house at the end of the line. "I'll be there." Cà Phê places one white paw on the road. "I knew you'd understand," Henry says.



The truck idles in the darkness. Its headlights cut two pale tunnels through the night air. Henry stands on the porch with his suitcase in one hand and a cloth bag in the other. Anh is beside him, one hand on his shoulder. She squeezes once, hard, and then lets go. "Straight back. Chin up," she says. Henry nods.

He walks down the steps without looking back because he knows that if he looks back he will never leave. From somewhere in the shadows, two green eyes watch him go. A promise made with your whole heart cannot be broken. Not even by distance.



CHAPTER III

"Welcome to the
Jungle"



Cà Phê stands at the top of the veranda steps, perfectly still. Down the dark road, the truck's red tail lights glow like the eyes of something that has stolen what matters most.

The engine fades. The lights shrink. The sound disappears into the valley and takes Henry with it. Cà Phê does not move. His ears track the last vibration of the engine long after a human would hear nothing. "Come back," he thinks. The road offers no answer. The night insects resume their song, indifferent. The world has not noticed that everything has changed.



Inside the truck, Henry waves his hand. The stilt house grows smaller behind him, the lanterns, the mango tree, the porch where he ate soup an hour ago. And there, at the top of the steps, a tiny shape. A small cat, sitting perfectly upright, watching him leave. Henry's breath fogs the window. He draws a heart in the mist with one finger. "I'll come back," he whispers. The truck turns a corner. The house disappears. Henry keeps his hand on the glass long after there is nothing left to see.



The house is unbearable now. Cà Phê sits in the middle of the room, alone. Moonlight falls through the bamboo blinds in sharp white stripes across the floor. The hearth is cold. The soup bowl is washed. Anh's chair is empty, she has gone to her room and closed the door, which is what Anh does when she cannot be seen crying. Everything smells like Henry and nothing sounds like him. Cà Phê stares at the door. He stares at the chair. He stares at the floor where the boy drew a map in the dust. The map is still there.



He looks up. The dark rafters of the ceiling creak in the wind like an old ship at sea. A single firefly has found its way inside and drifts slowly through the air, pulsing its tiny gold light against the wooden beams. Cà Phê watches it. It floats without purpose, without direction, without anyone waiting for it anywhere. "That is not me," Cà Phê decides. He is not a firefly. He is not lost. He knows exactly where he needs to go. The firefly blinks once and disappears into the dark. Cà Phê drops his gaze back to the dust map on the floor.



He goes to the swing. Not because he wants to sit on it, but because it still smells of the boy. Cà Phê hops onto the wooden seat and sits upright in the exact centre, the way Henry used to hold him. The paper lanterns glow around him like small patient moons. The garden is impossibly quiet. The jasmine still blooms. The mango tree still stands. Everything is exactly the same and nothing is right. "I made a promise," Cà Phê tells the empty garden. His voice is very small. The garden does not answer. He does not need it to.



He stands at the edge of the known world. Behind him, the terraces, the village, the warm house, the life he understands. Ahead, the jungle rises like a dark wall against the stars. A lone firefly drifts past his whiskers, heading into the blackness. Cà Phê is a house cat. He has opinions about cushions. He has strong feelings about the temperature of milk. He has never spent a night outside in his life. The jungle does not care about any of this.

"One step," he tells himself. "Just take one step." He takes it.



The terraces at night are nothing like the terraces in the morning. The water is black and silent. The moon turns everything to silver and shadow. Cà Phê picks his way along the narrow ridges between the flooded fields, each paw placed with surgical precision. There is no boy on a buffalo to make this beautiful. There is no laughter bouncing off the mountains. There is only a small cat, walking south, following a road drawn in dust by a child's hand. The world is enormous and indifferent. Cà Phê cares enough for both of them.



Dawn comes slowly, turning the sky from black to grey to pale gold. The terraces begin to shimmer. Farmers appear in the distance, bent over the water, their conical hats bobbing like boats. Cà Phê walks along the top of a ridge, his pendant swinging gently. No one looks at him. A cat on a rice terrace is not unusual. A cat on a mission is invisible. "Excuse me," Cà Phê thinks as he passes a woman planting seedlings. "I am on very important business." She does not notice him. He did not expect her to.



The terraces give way to open country, tall golden grass that reaches above his ears, rustling in the warm wind. A wild orchid blooms beside the path, pink and impossible. Cà Phê pauses to sniff it, because he is still a cat and some things cannot be ignored. High above, a hawk circles in the empty blue sky, riding the thermals. Cà Phê watches it for exactly two seconds, decides it is too far away to be a problem, and continues walking. The road to Hanoi is long. He does not know how long. He only knows it is forward.



The sound hits him before he sees them. A loud, obnoxious, theatrical shriek from the branches above, followed by a second, quieter voice saying, "You are embarrassing us." Cà Phê looks up. Two black crested myna birds sit on a low branch, their yellow beaks gleaming, their mohawk crests ridiculous. The loud one puffs out his chest. "A cat! In the jungle! Alone! This is the greatest thing I have ever seen!" The quiet one sighs. "Forgive my brother. He has no manners." "I have **MAGNIFICENT** manners!" says Ying. "I am simply choosing not to use them."



The jungle swallows him. The trees are so vast and ancient that their roots rise from the earth like the walls of a cathedral. The canopy closes overhead, turning daylight into a dim green glow. Cà Phê walks between roots taller than himself, his pendant catching the last scraps of light. Everything drips. Everything hums. The air is thick with smells he does not recognise, moss, decay, flowers that bloom only in darkness. He is very small in a very large world. "This is fine," he announces to no one. His tail is puffed to twice its normal size. This is not fine.



A pig. A large, muddy, spectacularly unbothered pig, standing directly in the middle of the path. Cà Phê freezes. His ears prick forward. He knows this pig. The same round belly, the same spotted hide, the same blank expression. "Hạnh?" he says, stepping closer. His heart lifts for one stupid, wonderful second, if the village pig is here, then maybe home is not so far after all. The pig turns its head. Its eyes are wrong. Its smell is wrong. It is not Hạnh. It is just a pig. Cà Phê sits down heavily. The jungle is full of things that look like home but are not.



CHAPTER IV

"Dangerously
Curious"



The jungle path opens into a clearing where the light falls in warm gold columns through the canopy. Cà Phê stops. Something is moving in the undergrowth, something covered in overlapping brown scales that click softly as it walks. A pangolin, the size of a small dog, waddles into the clearing with a tiny baby curled on her back. Cà Phê has never seen anything like it. "What are you?" he whispers. The mother pangolin glances at him with calm, ancient eyes and keeps walking.

She is not afraid of a house cat. She has bigger problems than cats.



The baby pangolin uncurls from its mother's back and toddles toward Cà Phê with the unsteady confidence of someone who has not yet learned that the world is dangerous. It stops inches from Cà Phê's nose. Two small black eyes stare into two large green ones. Cà Phê holds perfectly still. The baby sniffs his pendant. Then it sneezes, a tiny, ridiculous, perfect sneeze, and tumbles backward onto its bottom. "You are absurd," Cà Phê says. But his whiskers twitch forward, which is cat for smiling. Some creatures are too small to be afraid of.



The jungle falls away without warning. One moment there are trees, and the next there is nothing just air and stone and a drop so deep that the river below looks like a silver thread. Cà Phê stands at the very edge of the cliff, his paws planted on warm rock, the wind pressing flat against his fur. Above him, Ying and Yang circle in the open sky, their black wings catching the light. "MAGNIFICENT!" Ying screams from above. "THE WHOLE WORLD IS DOWN THERE!" Yang glides past quietly. "Do not look down," she advises. Cà Phê looks down. He immediately regrets this.



They find a way down a narrow ledge that zigzags along the cliff face to the river. Cà Phê goes first because he has dignity and also because Ying will not stop pushing. At the bottom, the river is wide, brown, and slow. On the far bank, half-submerged in the mud, lies something that looks like a log. It is not a log. "Is that what I think it is?" Cà Phê asks. Ying lands on a rock and squints. "A log! A very handsome log!" Yang settles beside him. "That is a crocodile." Ying nods enthusiastically. "A very handsome crocodile!" Cà Phê's tail begins to puff.



He needs to cross the river. The river has a crocodile in it. These two facts sit in Cà Phê's mind like stones. He creeps to the water's edge, placing each paw with the silence of a prayer. The crocodile has not moved. Perhaps it is sleeping. Perhaps it is dead. Perhaps it is waiting. "What are you doing?" Yang hisses from above. "Investigating," Cà Phê whispers. "Curiosity is braver than fear." He heard Henry say that once. It sounded better when Henry said it. It sounded better when there was no crocodile.



He is close now. Too close. So close that he can see every ridge and crack in the crocodile's ancient armoured skin. So close that he can see the mud drying in the creases around its closed eye. So close that the lacquered pendant on his chest nearly touches the beast's enormous snout. The crocodile smells of river mud and patience. One yellow eye opens. It is the coldest, most disinterested eye Cà Phê has ever seen. It looks at him the way a mountain looks at a raindrop. "Hello," Cà Phê says, very quietly. The eye does not blink.



The crocodile moves faster than anything that large has a right to move. Its jaws open like a trapdoor and Cà Phê is already airborne, not because he decided to jump, but because every ancestor he has ever had screamed at once inside his legs. Muddy water explodes around him. Teeth snap shut on empty air. He lands on the far bank, slides sideways, scrambles, and runs. Behind him, the jaws crash shut a second time. "RUN! RUN! RUN!" Ying screams helpfully from thirty feet above. Cà Phê does not need to be told.

He is already running faster than he has ever run in his life.



He does not stop until he cannot hear the river anymore. Then he sits down hard in the wet undergrowth and breathes. His fur is soaked. His heart is hammering. His pendant hangs crooked against his heaving chest. Water drips from his whiskers. A leaf is stuck to his ear. He looks absolutely, completely, spectacularly undignified. "I am fine," he announces to the jungle. His voice shakes only a little. A raindrop lands on his nose. Then another.

Then the sky opens. Of course it does. The jungle has a sense of humour and it is not kind.



The rain comes down in sheets. Cà Phê hunches miserably under a giant leaf that does absolutely nothing to keep him dry. Then a sound above, a rush of wings, and Ying and Yang drop through the canopy like two small black missiles. "WE FOUND YOU!" Ying announces, landing on a vine. "We never lost him," Yang corrects, landing beside Cà Phê and shaking the rain from her feathers. "You were very brave back there," she adds quietly. "BRAVE!" Ying agrees. "STUPID! BUT BRAVE!"

Cà Phê shivers. He says nothing. But he is glad they came.



Night falls and the rain softens to a drizzle. They find a thick branch halfway up an old banyan tree and settle in for the night. Cà Phê curls into a tight ball, his tail wrapped around his nose. Within minutes, Ying has landed directly on his head and fallen asleep with one foot in the cat's ear. Yang perches on the branch beside them, one eye open, keeping watch. Cà Phê should be annoyed. He is too tired to be annoyed. The branch smells of moss and bark and is nothing like Henry's bed. But it is warm enough. And he is not alone.



A sound wakes him. Not a dangerous sound, a curious one. A soft rustling in the leaves directly above. Cà Phê opens his eyes. Two enormous golden eyes stare back at him from the darkness. They are perfectly round, impossibly large, and they belong to a face so small it fits in the palm of a hand. A slow loris. It clings to a branch with tiny fingers, its round face tilted sideways, studying Cà Phê with the quiet intensity of a creature who has all the time in the world. "What are you?" Cà Phê whispers for the second time today.



The slow loris leans closer. Cà Phê leans closer. Their noses nearly touch. The loris smells of leaves and night air and something sweet that Cà Phê cannot name. Its enormous eyes reflect the moonlight like two golden lanterns. Neither of them moves. Neither of them is afraid. This is the gift the jungle gives you when you stop running, the chance to meet something you have never imagined, to hold still, and to discover that the strangest face in the darkest forest might just be the most beautiful thing you have ever seen. Curiosity is braver than fear. Henry was right.



CHAPTER V

"Watch you Back"



Kim sees the cat long before the cat sees Kim. She is coiled on a high branch, her emerald scales perfectly still against the moss-covered bark, her head resting in the centre of her own body like a jewel in a setting. Below, a small tabby and white cat walks along the jungle path, a little pendant swinging on his chest, catching the light. Kim's tongue flickers. She tastes the air. There it is, the faintest flash, a glint of something warm and bright against the cat's white fur. Her yellow eyes narrow. She is in no hurry. Kim is never in a hurry.



Cà Phê feels it before he understands it. The hair along his spine rises. His belly drops low to the ground. Every muscle tightens. Something is watching him. He scans the undergrowth left, right, ahead. Nothing moves. Nothing makes a sound. The jungle has gone completely silent, the way it does when a predator is near. "I do not like this," Cà Phê whispers to himself, pressing deeper into the ferns. His ears rotate like small satellite dishes. He cannot see the danger, but his body knows it is there. A house cat's instincts are ancient. They rarely lie.



What steps out of the shadows is not a snake. It is worse. It is bigger. It is a sun bear, black as coal, with a golden crescent blazing on its chest like a second sunrise. It stands on its hind legs and it is enormous. Cà Phê freezes. The bear stares down at him. Its eyes are small and dark and unreadable. Its claws are the length of Cà Phê's entire paw. "Oh," Cà Phê says. It is not a brave thing to say. It is the only thing his brain can produce. The bear drops to all fours with a thud that shakes the ground. Cà Phê does not wait for introductions.



He runs. He runs faster than the crocodile. Faster than the truck. Faster than he has ever moved in his life, his legs a blur of tabby and white, his pendant bouncing wildly, mud spraying behind him. The bear crashes through the undergrowth after him, snapping branches like matchsticks. "LEFT! GO LEFT!" Ying screams from somewhere above. "RIGHT!" Yang corrects. Cà Phê goes straight because he cannot hear anything over the hammering of his own heart. A house cat should not be here. A house cat should be on a cushion. He is going to have very strong words with this jungle when he survives.



The tree. It is the only option. Cà Phê launches himself at the trunk and climbs with the desperate, claw-ripping scramble of a cat who has remembered that cats can climb and bears probably cannot. He goes up ten feet, fifteen, twenty, and stops, clinging to the bark with every claw he owns, breathing in short, ragged gasps. Below, Gấu sits down at the base of the tree. He does not look angry. He looks confused. He tilts his massive head to one side and makes a sound, a low, rumbling huff, almost gentle. "Come down," the huff seems to say. Cà Phê does not come down.



An hour passes. Maybe two. Gấu has not left. He sits patiently at the base of the tree, pulling apart a honeycomb with his enormous paws. Golden honey drips down his chin. He looks up at Cà Phê and holds out a piece, the way a child offers a sweet to a frightened animal.

The gesture is so unexpected, so impossibly tender from something so large, that Cà Phê does not know what to do with it. "Is this a trick?" he asks. Gấu pushes the honeycomb closer with one careful claw. It is not a trick. The most dangerous things in life can surprise you.



Night falls and Cà Phê sleeps against something warm for the first time since he left home. Gấu lies curled on his side in a nest of ferns, his massive body rising and falling with each slow breath. Cà Phê is tucked into the curve of the bear's belly, small and safe and dreamless. Ying sleeps on top of Gấu's head, one wing draped over his own face.

Yang perches nearby, one eye open, standing guard. The jungle hums. The stars blink through the canopy. Four strangers who met through panic and honey have become something else entirely.



Morning light filters through the leaves. Cà Phê opens his eyes and discovers two things. First, he is cradled in Gấu's enormous paws like a kitten. Second, there is a frog sitting on his head. A small, bright green, extremely confident frog that shows no intention of leaving. Cà Phê rolls his eyes upward, trying to see it. The frog blinks at him. "Get off," Cà Phê says with all the authority he can manage from inside a bear's arms with an amphibian on his skull. The frog does not get off. This is his life now.



The frog hops off Cà Phê's head and bounces into the undergrowth. Cà Phê is after it before his brain catches up with his legs, low, fast, threading through the ferns, eyes locked on the tiny green shape. He is a house cat. He cannot help it. "Get back here," he hisses, pouncing. The frog springs sideways. He pounces again. It springs again. Gấu watches from behind, his head tilted, deeply confused by the priorities of cats. Yang sighs from his shoulder. "We are never going to reach Hanoi." From above, Ying cheers. "GET HIM! GET THE FROG!"



The frog leaps one more time and freezes. Not the way frogs freeze when they are resting. The way frogs freeze when they see death. Cà Phê looks up. The canopy above him splits open and Kim drops like a green blade, fangs first, jaws wide, falling fast and silent toward the pendant on his chest.

The flash of light she has been following for days is right beneath her. The frog was not running from Cà Phê. It was running from her. "MOVE!" screams every ancestor Cà Phê has ever had.



But Cà Phê does not run. Something in him, something older than fear, something that remembers the promise, the pendant, the boy refuses to give ground. He throws himself onto his back and swings hard with both front paws. Claws meet scales. The slap connects with the side of Kim's head and sends her jaw snapping sideways, an inch from his throat. It is not a killing blow. It is not even a winning blow. But it is the blow of a cat who has decided that he is done running from things. "NOT TODAY," Cà Phê spits. His pendant flashes between them like a tiny sun.



Kim recoils and rises. She coils into a high striking pose, tongue flickering, eyes locked on the pendant. But she is no longer looking at one cat. Gấu steps forward, his golden crescent blazing, a growl building in his chest that turns the air to thunder. Ying and Yang drop from the canopy, wings spread, screaming. Cà Phê stands between them, soaked and shaking, claws out. Four animals who met by accident, held together by nothing but stubbornness and something that looks a lot like love. Kim holds her gaze for a long, cold moment. Then she slides backward into the green darkness. She will return. But today, the most dangerous things in life have become Cà Phê's greatest allies.



CHAPTER VI

"New Life"



The rain falls sideways in Hanoi. Henry steps down from the truck into a world made entirely of grey, grey sky, grey stone, grey puddles reflecting a city he does not recognise. His suitcase hits the wet cobblestones. His mother's book is pressed against his chest under his shirt. Across the narrow street, two figures stand in the doorway of a tall colonial house with green shutters. A woman with red hair.

A man with glasses. They are smiling. They are trying so hard to smile. Above them, on the wrought-iron balcony, a black and white cat watches the boy arrive. It is not his cat.



Inside, the house smells of old wood and coffee and books — so many books that they cover the walls like wallpaper. The woman kneels down so her face is level with Henry's. "I'm Fanou," she says softly, in careful Vietnamese. The man with glasses stands behind her, holding a cup, smiling gently. "And I'm Dadou." Henry nods. He does not speak. Something warm pushes against his hand. He looks down. A black Shiba Inu with dark, steady eyes is pressing his nose into Henry's palm. "That is Chou," Fanou says. "He has been waiting for you." Chou's tail wags once. Just once.



The bedroom is clean and quiet and belongs to no one. White walls. A soft bed. A window that looks out over rooftops and rain. Henry sets his suitcase down and opens it. His things look strange here the worn clothes, the wooden spinning top, his mother's book. They belong to a different boy in a different house. Chou sits in the doorway, watching. He does not come in. He waits to be invited. Henry looks at the dog for a long time. Then he pats the bed. "You can come in," he says. Chou crosses the threshold carefully, lies down at Henry's feet, and sighs.



Far away, at the edge of the jungle, goodbyes are happening. Gấu stands tall among the trees, his golden crescent glowing in the morning light. Kim watches from a low branch still, unreadable, dangerous, but not today. Ying and Yang circle above. Cà Phê looks back at the bear who tried to eat him and then saved his life. "Thank you," he says. It is not a word that comes naturally to cats. Gấu huffs softly and presses his enormous nose against the top of Cà Phê's head. The cat closes his eyes. Then he turns and walks toward the open road. He does not look back twice.



The jungle thins. The air changes. The enormous trees give way to scrubland, then to dry grass, then to a long dirt road that stretches toward the horizon like a sentence that never ends. Cà Phê walks. Above him, Ying circles lazily against the pale sky. The pendant swings with every step. "How far is Hanoi?" Cà Phê asks. "FAR!" Ying calls down cheerfully. "VERY VERY FAR!" Cà Phê sighs. He keeps walking. The road is long and the cat is small. But small things that do not stop are the most dangerous things in the world.



A man appears on the path ahead like something the jungle decided to grow. He is lean and wiry, with a white beard, a conical hat, and a machete at his belt. A woven basket full of plants and bamboo sits on his back. He stops when he sees Cà Phê. He does not speak. He kneels. He looks at the pendant. He looks at the road behind the cat. He looks at the road ahead. Ying and Yang settle on a branch above his hat. The man nods once, slowly, as if something has been confirmed. "You are going somewhere," Think says. It is not a question.



They sit by a stream in the dappled shade. Thinh unwraps a banana leaf and lays out a small piece of grilled fish and a mound of sticky rice. He places the fish in front of Cà Phê with the quiet precision of a man who understands that a hungry traveller does not need conversation. He needs food. Cà Phê eats without dignity. He eats the way a cat eats when he has not had a proper meal in days — fast, serious, eyes half closed with relief. Ying perches on Thinh's hat. Yang sits beside the old man's knee.

"More?" Thinh asks. Cà Phê looks up. His whiskers are covered in fish. Yes. More.



Thinh stands and points his machete down a path that leads out of the trees and toward the lowlands. "Hanoi is that way," he says. "Follow the river. Stay off the main roads. Trucks do not see small things." He looks down at Cà Phê. The cat looks up at the man. They share a silence that does not need filling. Ying and Yang hop onto a low branch, ready to fly. "You will make it," Thinh says. He does not say how he knows. He is the kind of man who reads the world the way other people read books. Kindness from a stranger can change the direction of everything.



The sun sets over the flatlands, turning the river to liquid amber and the sky to deep rose. Cà Phê walks alone along the dirt road, his shadow stretching long behind him. The rice paddies spread out on either side, vast and still. In the distance, palm trees line the horizon like a row of dark brushstrokes. He is very small on a very long road. But he is moving. Every step is one step closer. Henry drew this road in the dust on a wooden floor. Cà Phê remembers every mark. "I'm coming," he thinks. The river hears him.

The road does not answer. It does not need to.



The river widens. The current slows. Cà Phê stands at the muddy bank, staring at the brown water with the expression of a cat who has very strong opinions about getting wet. Ying and Yang land on a branch above. Below, a small gecko sits on a floating wooden plank, drifting gently in the current, looking extremely relaxed about life. "No," says Cà Phê. "Absolutely not." Yang tilts her head. "It is the only way across." "I would rather walk around." "The river is sixty kilometres long."

Cà Phê stares at the plank. The gecko stares at Cà Phê. The gecko does not seem concerned.



He steps onto the plank. It wobbles. He freezes. It steadies. He takes another step. It wobbles again. His claws dig into the wet wood. His pendant hangs straight down, almost touching the water. The gecko shifts politely to one side, as if making room on a bus. "This is the worst thing that has ever happened to me," Cà Phê announces. It is not. The crocodile was worse. Kim was worse. But cats have short memories for perspective and long memories for discomfort. The current catches the plank and begins to pull. Cà Phê sits down very carefully. He is floating. He hates it.



The river carries them through a floating village — wooden houses on stilts rising from the brown water, fishing nets strung between poles, the smell of cook smoke and jasmine drifting across the surface. Ying and Yang fly above, their black wings cutting the golden evening sky. The gecko rides at the front of the plank like a tiny figurehead. And Cà Phê sits in the middle, soaking wet, deeply offended, carried by a current he cannot control toward a city he has never seen, to find a boy who is waiting without knowing it. He is terrified.

He is ridiculous. He is the bravest cat in the world.



CHAPTER VII

"Leave to Surf"



The river widens like a ribbon unrolling, and the world changes. Gone are the quiet green terraces. Rising from the water is a city — butter-yellow buildings crowding the banks, red flags whipping from balconies, domed rooftops catching the afternoon sun like five bronze bowls turned upside down. "I believe," Ying announces, wheeling overhead, "that this is what the humans call Hanoi." Cà Phê crouches lower on his driftwood. "I believe," he mutters, "that I was not consulted about this."

The gecko says nothing. The gecko never says anything. Cà Phê admires this about him.



The wood bumps gently against a wooden pier. An old Vietnamese man with a conical hat stops mid-oar to stare. Cà Phê gathers himself and leaps, all four white paws stretched wide, and lands cleanly on the dock. The gecko slips between the planks and vanishes forever, a true friend of silence. "Thank you," Cà Phê says to the empty pier. The old man blinks. The cat blinks back. Yang lands politely beside him and neither bird nor boy speak for a moment. Then Cà Phê shakes the river water from his white paws with tremendous dignity, and the city begins.



The streets are narrow
canyons of peeling yellow.
Laundry hangs like prayer
flags between balconies.
Everything smells of spices
Cà Phê has no name for.

Ying is delighted.

Ying is always delighted.
"Look at ALL of it," he
sings. "Look at THAT.
Look at THAT one. Look
at" "Yes, Ying." "THAT
one!" "Yes." Yang flies beside
Cà Phê in companionable
silence, which is the very
best kind of company.



They climb a drainpipe to the tiled rooftops, where the city spreads out like a painting. The five domes of the great market rise in the distance, impossibly large. Cà Phê sits very still. The wind ruffles the fur on his chest where the lacquered coffee bean pendant, placed there by a grandmother in a valley far away rests warm against his skin. Keep him safe, she had said. Remember exactly where home is. "Henry is down there somewhere," he says quietly.

Yang nods once. Ying, for once, stays silent.



On a cobblestone street below, a man pulls a wooden cart holding a French lady with parasol, a pousse-pousse, though Cà Phê does not know the word.

He flattens against a warm wall as it rattles past.

"That," Ying declares, landing on the back of the vehicle uninvited, "is the finest mode of transport I have ever seen." "Get off," Yang says. "I've always wanted a chauffeur."

"GET OFF." Ying gets off.



They reach a great stone plaza. A pale yellow palace looms above all columns and curved balconies and across the square, young Vietnamese people march with red flags. "Something big is happening here," Yang murmurs. Cà Phê watches a French family load trunks into a black car.

A child his size sits in the backseat, holding a photo book exactly like Henry's. His heart makes a sound he did not know hearts could make. It is not Henry. But the whole city feels full of departures.



An old grandmother sits on a low stool outside a tube house, shelling peas into a bowl. She looks up, and her weathered face softens exactly the way another face, many roads ago, once did. She holds out a piece of dried fish between her fingers. "Đến đây, con mèo nhỏ," she whispers. Come, little cat. Cà Phê does not understand the words. He understands the voice. He takes the fish very gently, the way a cat accepts kindness from someone who has clearly known cats before.



From a rooftop ledge they look down at the great market, an ocean of people, baskets, bamboo cages, steam, color.

Every sound you have ever heard, multiplied, and then multiplied again. "Tomorrow we search it," Cà Phê says. Ying looks at Yang. Yang looks at Ying. "We're going to die," Ying whispers cheerfully. "Maybe don't say it like that," Yang replies.



Down in the market alleys, smoke curls from dozens of tiny stoves. Cooks ladle steaming bowls of broth. A butcher swings a cleaver. Children chase each other between fish stalls. Cà Phê walks carefully, one polite paw at a time, feeling very small and very brave and very much in need of a snack he cannot identify. "Stay close," he tells the birds.

"That's usually my line," Yang says.



And then, in the middle of everything, on a wooden crate beneath a red lantern, sits a rat. Not just any rat. A rat with an eyepatch, a small sailor's cap tilted rakishly, and a red bandana knotted at his throat. He is chewing a piece of fried fish. He looks up at Cà Phê without the slightest surprise. "Evenin', cat." "...Evening." "Bruce," says the rat, by way of introduction. "Captain Bruce. Harbor rat. Sea dog. Traveler of the seven seas and, on Tuesdays, the eighth." Yang mutters something that sounds suspiciously like oh no.



Somewhere between the market and the rooftops, Cà Phê passes a shopfront with a tall mirror leaning out toward the street. He stops dead. The cat in the mirror stops too. He tilts his head. The mirror cat tilts its head. "Ying," he says slowly, without looking away. "Is that me?" "Sadly, yes," Ying calls down from the top of the mirror. Cà Phê lifts a paw. The reflection lifts a paw.

After a long moment he decides, with enormous dignity, to pretend this never happened.



Night falls on the rooftops. A crescent moon rises above the yellow city. Cà Phê curls into a tight ball, warmed by a lantern someone has forgotten to put out. Ying tucks his head under his wing. Yang keeps one eye open. "Good night, cat," she whispers.

"Good night, bird." Somewhere in this enormous glowing city, a boy in a green t-shirt is falling asleep too. Cà Phê does not know which window. But he is closer than he has ever been.



CHAPTER VIII

"Almost"



Cà Phê climbs down a wooden ladder into the waking market. Baskets are being unloaded. Charcoal fires are being lit.

The whole alley smells of fish and smoke and the specific kind of hope that belongs only to mornings. "Today," he tells himself, "I find him." "Today," Ying agrees, "we all find him." "Today," Yang says, "we try not to die in the process." "You're very negative for a bird." "I'm very alive for a bird."



On the other side of the market, Henry walks beside Fanou. She carries a woven basket. Her red hair catches the light. She chatters gently about mangoes. Henry holds her hand and does not hear a single word. His eyes drift across the stalls. His photo book is tucked under his arm. Somewhere deep inside him, something tugs, a feeling he has no name for, a pull he cannot explain. He looks up. He frowns. Fanou gently squeezes his hand and steers him on.



Cà Phê turns a corner, and freezes. A man stands in front of him. A large greasy apron. A cleaver at his belt. Small dark eyes narrowing, and then widening, and then narrowing again with a very particular kind of calculation. "Well, well," the butcher murmurs, in Vietnamese Cà Phê cannot understand but whose meaning is absolutely clear. "Aren't you a rare one." Cà Phê's fur begins the slow, ancient business of standing entirely on end.



The chase is fast and loud and extremely undignified.

Cà Phê tears through the market, chickens explode from stalls, a basket of mangoes bursts like a small orange fireworks display, a fishmonger shouts something rude about someone's mother. Behind him, the butcher thunders, apron flapping, cleaver raised. "LEFT!" Ying screams from above. Cà Phê veers left. "Your other left!" Cà Phê veers right. "Close enough!"



He dives through a doorway into a wide wooden workshop, rickshaw wheels stacked against walls, skeletal frames waiting for paint, shafts of dusty light falling from above. He presses himself flat behind a stack of wheels. His heart hammers. His whiskers twitch. Yang lands silently beside him.

"He's gone past." Cà Phê breathes out a breath he has been holding since approximately the creation of the world. His lacquered coffee bean pendant rests against his white chest, rising and falling with each gasp. "That," he whispers, "is not a man I would like to meet socially."



In the very same market aisle, at the very same moment, Dadou walks past with Chou on a short leather leash. He carries a small parcel under his arm. The butcher passes by them, still scanning, still searching. Chou goes rigid. His ears snap forward. His dark eyes lock on the man. Every fiber of the little Shiba Inu screams wrong, wrong, wrong. Dadou tugs gently. "Allez, Chou. Come." Chou turns his head as they walk, one last look at the alley where, in the shadows behind a stack of baskets, the tiniest shape of a tabby cat crouches absolutely still. Three destinies. One meter apart. None of them meet.



He runs again. He nearly makes it. He is four paws from a gap in the wall when the rough twine of a bamboo cage snaps shut above him. The butcher's grin fills the world. "Mèo đẹp quá." Such a pretty cat. Cà Phê presses his paws against the bars. His green eyes are wide and furious. His pendant rests hard against his white chest. Above him, two black specks in the sky do not move. They do not abandon him. They are thinking.



The cage is set down among other cages. Cà Phê turns his head and his heart stops. In the cage beside him sits a monkey with a face the color of sunshine, fur the color of storm clouds, and legs the color of dried blood. The monkey looks at him with enormous calm eyes. "Xin chào," the monkey says softly. Hello. In the next cage, curled into armored balls, are a pangolin mother and her baby. The mother's eyes go wide with recognition. "You," she whispers, in the language of silent animals everywhere. "The one who saw us on the jungle path." Cà Phê swallows hard. "I am sorry I did not help you then." The mother blinks slowly. "You will help us now."



Above, a shriek like a broken accordion splits the air. Ying has landed directly on the butcher's head, all feathers and fury and the exact sound of a military whistle being stepped on by a duck. The butcher swats wildly. The cleaver spins away.

At the same moment, Yang lands silently on Cà Phê's cage. Her yellow beak hooks beneath the sliding bamboo latch. One push. Two. Click. The monkey Đổ, reaches one long delicate arm through his own bars and gently nudges Cà Phê's door open. "Go," Đổ whispers.



They burst into the market like a spilled paint pot. Cà Phê leaping, Đỏ swinging from a red lantern rope, the pangolin mother scurrying with her baby clinging to her tail. Ying spiraling overhead in a victory roll. Yang cutting the air ahead. No one is chasing them anymore. The butcher is on the ground, flapping like a wounded fish. Vendors stop mid-sale to stare. A child points and laughs. And through the chaos, Cà Phê's pendant catches the morning sun and flashes once amber and gold, the brightest flash of the day.



In a quiet alley far from the market, they stop to breathe. Đò the douc langur reaches out one gentle hand and rests it softly on top of Cà Phê's head. He does not speak. He does not need to. Thank you. The pangolin mother bows her armored head, her baby blinking sleepily on her tail. "Where will you go?"

Cà Phê asks. "South," the mother says. "Where there are no markets." Đò's yellow face creases into something like a smile. "And you, small one?" "North," Cà Phê says. "Wherever the ships go."



Across the city, in a quiet apartment stripped nearly bare, Henry stands in the middle of the packing chaos. Suitcases are lined up by the door. The walls are empty. The room echoes. He holds his photo book against his chest. Chou presses warm and steady against his leg. Somewhere far away, Henry feels, a thread is pulling tight. "I felt him today," he says quietly, to no one in particular. "I don't know how." Chou leans harder against him. The dog does not know what the boy means. But the dog understood something today, too.



CHAPTER IX

"At Sea"



Cà Phê sits on a quiet step at the edge of the market, catching his breath. Ying sits on one side. Yang on the other. The world slows. And suddenly he remembers. A wooden floor in a stilt house far away. A boy in a green t-shirt. A stick drawing a map on sackcloth. A line going south. A word at the end of the line. Paris. Henry's voice, bright and determined: I'll find a way across the sea. Cà Phê's green eyes snap open. "The ships," he breathes. "He's leaving by ship." Ying straightens. Yang is already airborne.



In the dim apartment,
Henry stands alone in the
doorway of his bedroom.
His small bag is packed.
His photo book is
clutched to his chest.

The room is empty. The
bed is bare.

Fanou's voice from the
hallway: "Allez mon
grand, il est temps."
Come my big boy, it's
time.

Henry closes his eyes for
one long breath. Then he
turns and follows her out.



Cà Phê runs. He runs through alleys and across boulevards and under rickshaw wheels. He runs past Chinese soldiers and flag-bearers and women with baskets of rice. He runs faster than a cat has any business running. "The harbor!" Yang cries overhead. "Left at the flag!" "I know what a flag is!" Cà Phê gasps. "I never said you didn't!" "You implied it." Even now, even here, he has the energy to be offended.



On another street not far away, Henry walks between Fanou and Dadou, Chou trotting loyally at his heel. Suitcases bump against legs. The street is crowded with other families heading the same direction. Henry says nothing.

His dark eyes stay ahead. Chou glances up at him every few steps, checking. Still here, the dog's eyes say. Still with you.



And there she is. LE MARSEILLAIS. She towers above the wooden pier, a great ocean liner with two white funnels trailing gentle smoke, her hull gleaming in the late sun. A long line of families stretches up her gangway. Porters push trunks. Officers blow whistles. Children wave small flags.

The ship that will take Henry away from everything he has ever known.



Henry walks up the wooden gangway between Fanou and Dadou, Chou tight against his leg. Halfway up he stops. He turns. He looks back at the dock, at the harbor, at the skyline of Hanoi painted orange with sunset. He does not cry. He memorizes.

The salt air lifts his dark hair. Fanou waits. She does not hurry him. Then he nods once to the city a private goodbye and walks on.



Cà Phê bursts out from between two buildings onto the open waterfront and stops dead.

The ship is there. The ship is leaving.

Ropes splash into the water. Dockworkers wave. Smoke thickens from her funnels. The gangway is already pulled up.

Cà Phê's heart does something very close to breaking. "Run," Ying says. For once, he does not shout.



He runs the pier like it is the last thing he will ever do. His white paws barely touch the planks. His pendant the lacquered coffee bean Anh placed on him so long ago, the pendant that has been his whole journey swings wildly from his white chest. The ship is pulling away. The gap of dark water is growing. He does not stop at the end of the pier. He skids. He nearly falls. He throws himself forward until his front paws are over the edge. And he cries out. Loud enough to cross water. Loud enough to reach a boy on a deck. "HENRY!"



On the ship, Henry's head snaps up. His hands tighten on the railing. His dark eyes go wide. There, far below, shrinking already, a tiny tabby and white shape at the very end of the pier, mouth open, calling, calling, calling. A tiny flash of amber catches the sun. His pendant. His cat. "CÀ PHÊ!" Chou throws his front paws on the railing and howls a long, desperate, heartbroken howl that shakes the whole ship. Fanou arrives behind Henry, sees his face, sees the pier, understands nothing and everything at once. The ship does not stop. The ship cannot stop.



The pier is empty except for three small figures. Cà Phê sits at the very edge, his tail wrapped neatly around his white boots. Ying on one side. Yang on the other. All three face the harbor. The ship is a silhouette on the horizon now. Smaller. Smaller. Cà Phê does not cry. Cats do not cry. But a tear works in him the way water works inside stone, slowly, invisibly, and forever. "He saw me," he says quietly. "He saw you," Yang agrees. "Then this is not over." "No, cat," Ying says, with a rare and gentle seriousness.

"This is only the middle."



The harbor stretches around them, darkening to deep blue. The first stars appear. Warm lights flicker on along the waterfront of Hanoi behind them. Three small silhouettes on a long wooden pier.

One tabby cat. Two black birds. And a horizon swallowing a ship. Somewhere on that ship, a boy is still gripping a railing. Somewhere, a dog is still howling. Somewhere, a promise is still alive. Cà Phê rises to his feet. He turns his back on the open sea. He is tired. But he is not finished.



From the shadows of the wooden dock, a shape moves. A rat. A sailor's cap.

An eyepatch. A red bandana.

He laps once, politely, from a puddle, and the reflection shows a small, shrewd, clever face.

Captain Bruce lifts his head.

He has been watching. He has seen what happened. And Captain Bruce, as all good captains do, has an idea.



Somewhere ahead, far beyond
the horizon, is a city called
Istanbul. And far beyond
Istanbul, is a city called Paris.
And in Paris, is a boy.

Volume I
"The end"

TUYÊN QUANG

A JOURNEY THROUGH SOUTHEAST ASIA

(Volume I)

HANOI

HAIPHONG

JUNGLE SECTION

To be continued
in Volume II

SOUTH CHINA SEA
(Biển Đông)



WILDLIFE OF THE ORIENTAL REGION

ENCYCLOPEDIA PAGE

①



ASIAN WATER BUFFALO
(*Năm*)

For thousands of years, water buffalo have worked the rice fields of Vietnam. They are gentle, strong, and very patient.

②



SUN BEAR
(*Gấu*)

The smallest bear in the world, with a golden crescent on his chest. Sun bears live in the forests of Southeast Asia. They are endangered.

③ **CHINESE PANGOLIN**

The only mammal covered in scales. When scared, pangolins roll into perfect balls. They are one of the most trafficked animals on Earth — please help protect them.



④ **RED-SHANKED DOUC LANGUR**
(*Đô*)

One of the most beautiful primates in the world, with bright red legs and a golden face. Found only in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Critically endangered.



⑤ **BLACK CRESTED MYNA**
(*Ying & Yang*)

Smart, loud, and excellent mimics. Mynas can imitate almost any sound — including your voice. They form lifelong pair bonds.

⑥ **GREEN TREE PYTHON**
(*Kim*)



A patient ambush hunter who lives high in jungle trees. Though he is the villain of our story, he is only doing what snakes do.



Vietnamese

Cà phê — coffee

Mèo con — little cat

Nhà sàn — traditional stilt house

Đàn bầu — a one-stringed Vietnamese instrument

Phở — traditional Vietnamese noodle soup

Áo dài — traditional Vietnamese long dress

Viet Minh — the independence movement

French

Bonjour — hello

Mon cœur — my heart (a term of affection)

Mon grand — my big one (a term of affection)

D'accord — okay / agreed

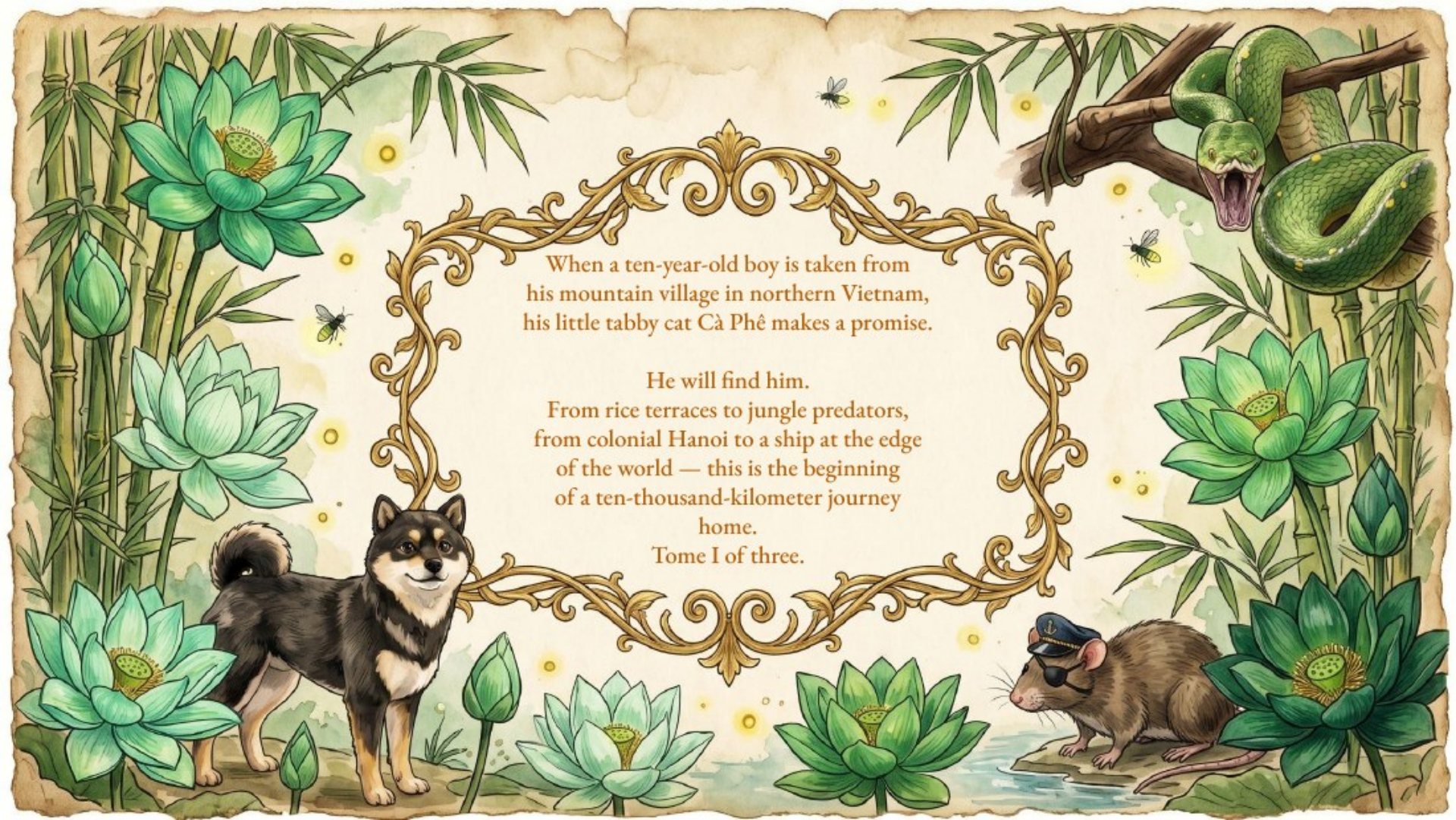
Pousse-pousse — rickshaw

Allez — go / come on

Espoir — hope



To be continued in Volume II — *The Width of the World.*

The background of the page is a detailed illustration of a jungle environment. On the left, several tall bamboo stalks stand next to large, vibrant green lotus flowers. A small black and tan dog stands on the ground in the lower-left corner. In the upper-right corner, a green snake with yellow markings is coiled around a branch, its mouth wide open in a hiss. In the lower-right corner, a brown mouse wearing a blue sailor's cap and sunglasses stands on a rock near a small pool of water. The central text is enclosed in a decorative, golden-brown vine-like frame. Small yellow dots and a few small flies are scattered throughout the scene.

When a ten-year-old boy is taken from
his mountain village in northern Vietnam,
his little tabby cat Cà Phê makes a promise.

He will find him.
From rice terraces to jungle predators,
from colonial Hanoi to a ship at the edge
of the world — this is the beginning
of a ten-thousand-kilometer journey
home.
Tome I of three.