



DOCTOR RETURNS FROM WAR

*An extract from the book
Faith And The Crossword*

In 1945, a bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Another on Nagasaki. So terrible the destruction, so unbearable the shock that proud Japan sued for peace. The whole world longed for peace. And weary India began her civil war. Families that had lived side-by-side for generations drew apart, became frightened, panicked, and the slaughter began. Hindus blamed Muslims, Muslims blamed Hindus, and both cursed the British. And the cry was heard: "Quit India!"

In 1947, I was acting commander of the British Military Hospital, Lucknow, in the rank of Lt. Colonel. Inside my hospital, I was surrounded by English majors, captains, nurses and patients. It could have been any place in England. Outside it was different. The natives were sullen, rude. They attacked single white soldiers. They raped one of my nurses. And

everyday, the walls were covered with messages: Quit India. Get out. You so-and-so bastards. Quit now.

On 8th August 1947, while my car was held up by the sentry at the gate, I saw the writing on the wall—Quit India. At that point in time, utter confusion. Chaos overcame me. My world collapsed. My mind went out of control. It cried out for peace. For an answer. And the only answer—Quit England!

I talked to Evelyn. We talked the whole night, and in the morning, Evelyn said: “Wherever you go, I go.” On that day, I was a British colonel, commanding a hospital famous in British and Indian history. My orders were to wind it up, hand it over to the Indian Army, and march off to Deolali, where I would be demobilized or sent off to the British Army of occupation on the Rhine. I had to act immediately. I decided to resign. As a wartime soldier, I knew something of warfare, but little of regulations. I urgently needed help. I thought of my General. At all times, generals do not talk to colonels, they barely notice them. But I knew that the general had a certain regard for me. He was frantic about punctuality and efficiency. Besides, I had been his personal doctor for two years. I had treated him and his lady in some delicate situations. I knew them intimately. So at 8 pm, 9th August 1947, I rang up the general’s residence.

ADC: “What do you want?”

Teddy: “I must talk to the general.”

ADC: “Like hell! Office 11 a.m. tomorrow!”

Teddy: "John, something very serious, please."

ADC: "Get here at once! Don't stay more than five minutes."

John met me at the steps, took me along the verandah, around the house to the back. The door of the room was wide open. It was a huge Indian bathroom. And in a huge tub lay the general, completely relaxed in soap and hot water, a whiskey in his hand. By the tub, was a low table, and on it a few glasses and a bottle of VAT 69.

General: "Help yourself. What the hell is it?"

Teddy: "Sir, it is terribly serious. I want help."

The general climbed out of his tub, dried himself, wrapped a towel around his middle and we moved into the drawing room. Our conversation:

Teddy: "I have to. I must resign,"

General: "You are out of your bloody mind. No resignations in wartime. And why?"

Teddy: "Sir, there is violence in the city. Today, it was very bad in Hazratganj. Tomorrow, there will be shooting."

General: "If there is shooting, we shoot"

Teddy: "General, that is my trouble sir. I have no wish to shoot. I have no wish to be shot."

General: "I reason?"

Teddy: "Sir, I am an Indian." I placed my brown hand beside his red one.

General: "Fernandes, we have never made any distinction. You are English, your wife is English, and your children are English. You have everything to lose."

Teddy: "Sir, I have burned my boats."

The general looked at me without expression, got up, and walked away. He was shocked. I was shaking. At the door, he said, "John, fix the damn thing."

The next day, General Cariappa inspected the troops in Lucknow. When he came to my detachment, he said "All well, Colonel?"

Teddy: "Fine, sir!"

After the parade, I went home, took off my uniform, and became an Indian.