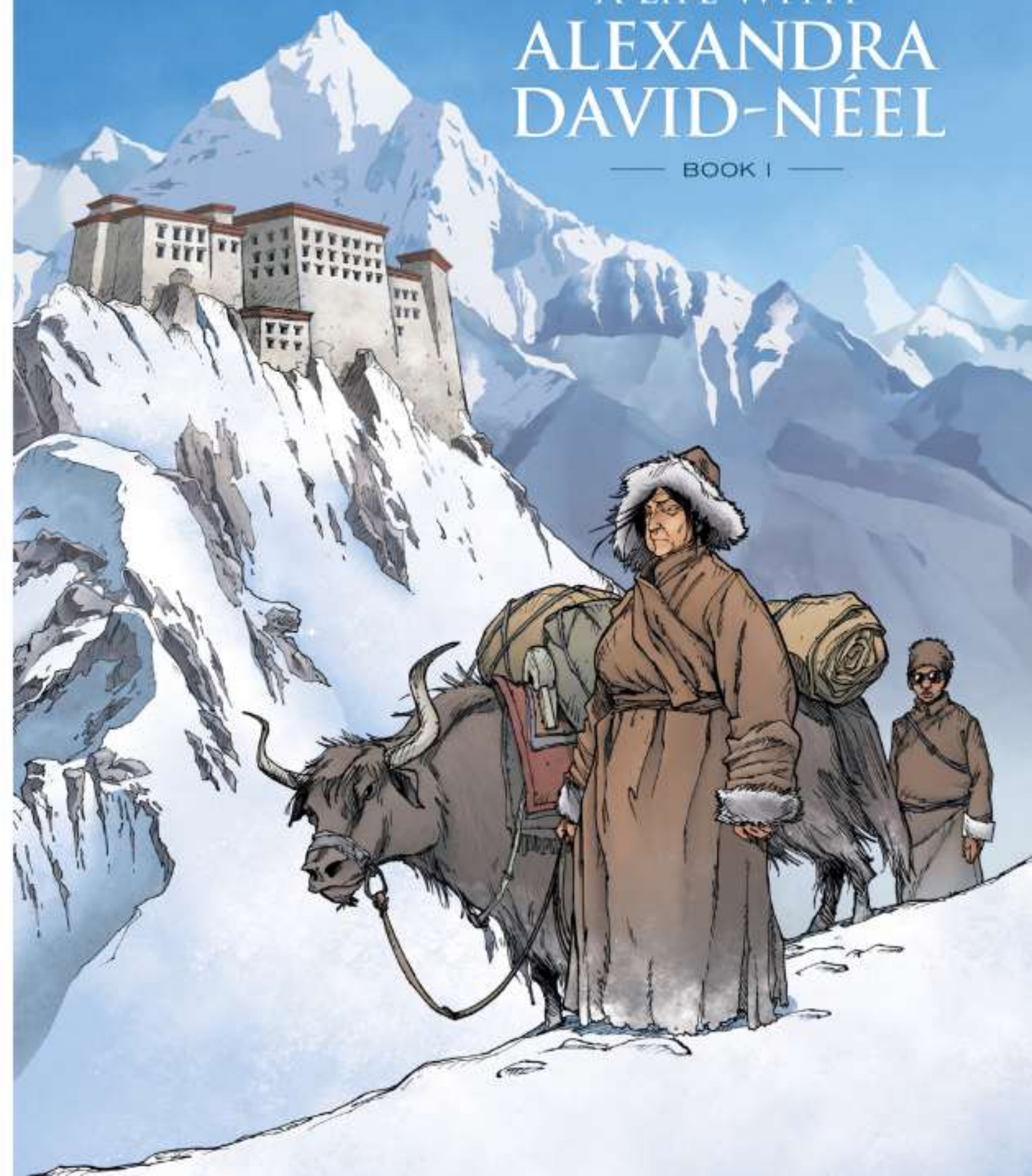


FRED CAMPOY & MATHIEU BLANCHOT

# A LIFE WITH ALEXANDRA DAVID-NÉEL

— BOOK I —



# Discovery Publisher

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# A LIFE WITH ALEXANDRA DAVID-NÉEL

— BOOK I —



*To my mother, who very early on awakened me to spirituality.*

*A warm thanks to Marie-Madeleine Peyronnet for having kindly let us illustrate her magnificent book.*

*A warm thanks to Patricia and Frank from the Alexandra David-Néel House in Digne-les-Bains, France, for their kindness, feedback, precious help, and for keeping encouraging us.*

*A warm thanks to Hervé Richez for his enthusiasm and his technical help.*

*I would like to thank my co-author, Mathieu Blanchot, for his patience, devotion and impressive work.*

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*Lastly, my warm thanks to Joëlle Désiré-Marchand who did us the honor of writing the historical booklet.*

*Fred*



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## THE MEETING











LACHEN  
HERMITAGE  
SİKKİM, 1915







AIX-EN-PROVENCE,  
FRANCE, JUNE 1959







SEXTIUS HOTEL,  
JUNE 1959.

WHAT IS  
YOUR NAME?

MARIE-MADELEINE  
PEYRONNET.

HOW OLD  
ARE YOU?

I AM GOING TO  
BE 29 YEARS OLD,  
ON JUNE 30.

WHAT IS YOUR  
RELIGION?

CATHOLIC.

YOU SHALL CONTINUE  
TO PRACTICE YOUR  
RELIGION!







UNFORTUNATELY,  
I DID NOT GET AN EDUCATION, NEITHER  
DID I LEARN ANY TRADE. I'VE KEPT MYSELF  
BUSY WITH SOME CHARITY WORK IN MY  
VILLAGE. I USED TO BE A COACH IN  
SUMMER CAMP FOR THE RED CROSS...



SO  
YOU LOVE  
CHILDREN?

YES, MADAM,  
CHILDREN AND ALSO...  
TRAVELING!



TRAVELING?!!

YES, AND TO RECONCILE  
THE TWO, I BECAME A NANNY  
AND, WITH THE FAMILIES OF THE BABIES  
I TOOK CARE OF, I HAVE TRAVELED AROUND...



HOW NICE IS THAT,  
MISS! HAVING MYSELF FALLEN  
BACK INTO CHILDHOOD, YOU ARE  
EXACTLY WHO I NEED!

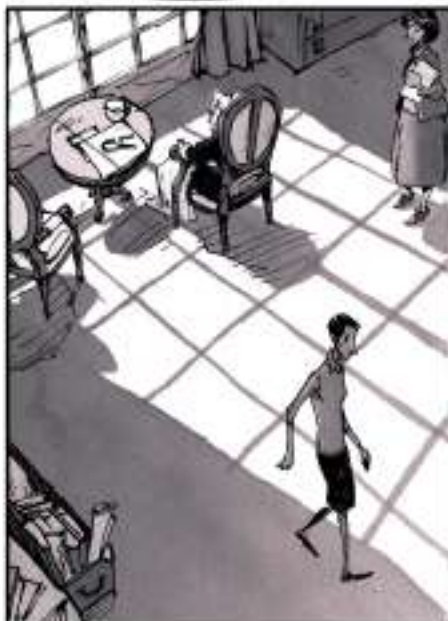


WELL...  
I WILL THINK ABOUT IT...  
I WILL CALL YOU IN A  
COUPLE OF DAYS.

GOODBYE!



GOODBYE,  
MADAM...



HOW DID  
IT GO?



I HAVE A FEELING I  
AM GOING TO GET ALONG  
JUST FINE WITH THIS  
YOUNG LADY!

I THINK  
SO TOO,  
MADAM...



AND NOW...



I FIND MYSELF ALONE IN THE LOBBY OF THIS GRAND HOTEL, STILL NOT REALIZING THAT AT THIS VERY MOMENT, I HAVE JUST TAKEN WHAT IS MOST PROBABLY THE BIGGEST TURNING POINT IN MY LIFE!

INDEED, I'VE JUST MET THIS AMAZING WOMAN, PHILOSOPHER, ORIENTALIST, EXPLORER...



... THIS AUTHENTIC PARISIAN, FIRST WHITE WOMAN WHO, IN 1924, WAS ABLE TO ENTER LHASA, THE CAPITAL OF TIBET, FORBIDDEN TO ALL FOREIGNERS AT THE TIME.



HAVEN'T I BEEN ENTRANCED? NOT BY THIS TIBET I NEVER HEARD OF, BUT BY THIS LIVING LEGEND WOMAN I VIRTUALLY KNOW NOTHING ABOUT?...

ALL BUT HER NAME...



ALEXANDRA DAVID-NÉEL !

MARIE-MADELEINE !



THE SEXTIUS HOTEL JUST CALLED! COME, QUICKLY!









HOW COULD I, HAVING NO OTHER AIM IN LIFE THAN TO PROVIDE MY HELP TO THOSE AROUND ME, ABANDON A WOMAN WHO IS OVER 90 YEARS OLD AND WHO, MOREOVER, IS GOING TO DIE IN THE COMING HOURS?



YOU CAN COUNT ON ME, MADAM, I WILL SPEND THE NIGHT WITH YOU!

PLEASE ALLOW ME TO GO TO MY SISTER'S TO PICK UP SOME THINGS. I'LL BE BACK IN TEN MINUTES!



YES, MADAM!

BE QUICK...



YOU WILL SEE, I AM NOT AN UNGRATEFUL PERSON...



AND NOW, WITHOUT SAYING GOODBYE OR WHERE I'M GOING, I'M LEAVING MY FAMILY...



IT IS STILL JUNE 17, 1959. IT IS SIX O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING AND I AM MAKING A "SOLEMN" ENTRANCE INTO ALEXANDRA DAVID-NÉEL'S LIFE!



I AM STAYING AT THE HOTEL SEXTIUS, JUST FOR THE NIGHT...

WELL, THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT...



7 P.M.: ALEXANDRA DAVID-NÉEL ISN'T DEAD...



8 P.M.: SHE IS STILL ALIVE...



9 P.M.: SHE HAS A GREAT APPETITE AND, CLEARLY, DIGESTS VERY EASILY...



10 P.M.: SHE LOOKS YOUNGER AND DEFINITELY NOT DYING!



1030 P.M.: FIRST CHALLENGE: MAKING HER BED...



HER "BED" IS AN ARMCHAIR COVERED WITH A SHEET. ITS FOLDS MUST BE LIKE THIS AND NOT LIKE THAT...



HERE, A SMALL CUSHION FOR HER LOWER BACK...



THERE, ANOTHER SMALL CUSHION MADE OF VARIOUS RAGGED PIECES OF CLOTH, STUFFED IN A SMALL COVER OF CHINESE EMBROIDERY, TO LAY HER HEAD...

ON THE FLOOR, A STRAW MAT ON WHICH A CUSHION IS PLACED, COVERED WITH THE CANVAS OF HER CAMP TENTS, TO LAY HER FEET...







DEFINITELY NOT! I AM NOT USED TO IT! FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE HAVE I BEEN "TASKED" TO MAKE A BED IN THIS MANNER...



FOR IT IS INDEED ABOUT OBEYING ALEXANDRA'S COMMANDS WHO, LIKE A CONDUCTOR DIRECTS HER MUSICIANS, COMMANDS MY EVERY MOVEMENT!



BESIDE, THE CUP...



A LITTLE FURTHER, A SMALL DIARY ON WHICH SHE WRITES HER PENDING MAILS, THE ONES COMPLETED, AND ALSO...



BESIDE THE BEDSIDE TABLE, A CHAIR WITH BOOKS ON IT, AS WELL AS THE LAST PAGES WRITTEN DURING THE DAY AND ALSO BLANK SHEETS, IN CASE INSPIRATION STRIKES HER DURING THE NIGHT.



“DAY? NIGHT? WHAT DOES IT MEAN? THOSE ARE JUST WORDS,” SHE SAID...



JUNE 20, ALEXANDRA DAVID-NÉEL IS IN GREAT SHAPE AND, FOR THREE DAYS, I HAVE BEEN SUBJECTED TO THE MOST INTENSE EXAMINATION, A REAL DELUGE OF QUESTIONS WHICH I CAN'T AVOID ANSWERING!

ALEXANDRA WANTS TO KNOW AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE ABOUT ME, MY FAMILY, MY FATHER AND MY MOTHER, MY MOST DISTANT ORIGINS, MY CONNECTIONS, IN SHORT... ABSOLUTELY EVERYTHING!

EVEN IF I THINK THAT I HAVE FOUND SOME HINT OF AN ANSWER, I AM STILL WONDERING: WHY ME?



DURING ALL THIS TIME, I KEPT ASKING MYSELF: WHY ALL THESE QUESTIONS? WHAT IS SHE LOOKING FOR? AND ABOVE ALL, WHY HAS ALEXANDRA DAVID-NÉEL SET HER SIGHT ON ME?



WELL!

WE ARE LEAVING FOR DIGNE IN TWO DAYS. MY VILLA IS SPLENDID, YOU WILL LOVE IT THERE! BUT WE HAVE TO PACK MY BAGS AND, BELIEVE ME, IT IS NO EASY TASK!



AND, INDEED, I REMEMBER THOSE TWO LONG DAYS OF PILING UP TIBETAN FUR-LINED DRESSES, CHINESE SILK DRESSES, MANUSCRIPTS, AND NEWSPAPERS. A TRUE NIGHTMARE!

AS I WAS LOADING THE TAXI WITH THESE UNUSUAL "PIECES OF LUGGAGE," I SWORE THAT I WILL NEVER BE CAUGHT DOING THAT AGAIN! WHATEVER HAPPENS, NEVER AGAIN WILL I MOVE WITH ALEXANDRA DAVID-NÉEL!



OW!

MY LEG!

FOOLISH GIRL! WILL YOU BE CAREFUL!

WITH THE UTMOST RESPECT AND AFFECTION I HAVE FOR THE WOMAN WHO WILL BE MORE THAN A MOTHER AND A GURU TO ME, MAY I ADD THAT SHE IS CERTAINLY THE MOST DIFFICULT "PIECE OF LUGGAGE" TO FIT IN!



EVERYTHING IS NOW GOING WONDERFULLY WELL: THIS IS A SPLENDID DAY AND THERE I AM ON MY WAY TO DIGNE, WHERE MADAM'S SUMPTUOUS VILLA AWAITS ME, WITH ITS ROSE GARDEN AND ITS THREE PATIOS FROM WHERE I WILL CONTEMPLATE THE BEAUTIFUL SUNSETS...

... YOU WILL NEVER HAVE OUR HEART...

I AM DRIVING NOT FAR FROM MR. BELLON'S TAXI AND I AM TAKING MYSELF FOR FANGIO AT THE WHEEL OF ALEXANDRA'S RENAULT 4CV!

AND ALL ALONG THE WAY, I AM SINGING!

I AM SINGING THE REPERTOIRE THAT WE USED TO SING AT SUMMER CAMP. I AM CROSSING THE MIRABEAU BRIDGE TO THE TUNE OF AFRICAN SONGS.

... BEAT THE DRUMS, TO OUR LOVED ONES, TO THE COUNTRY, TO THE HOMETLAND, DYING FAR AWAY, IT IS FOR THE AFRICANS!

I AM DRIVING THROUGH MANOSQUE SINGING ALOUD THE MARCH OF THE FOREIGN LEGION.

TIENS, VOILÀ DU BOUDIN, VOILÀ DU BOUDIN...

... AND I AM REACHING DIGNE, ALMOST VOICELESS, GLORIFYING LA MARSEILLAISE!

IS MY SUBCONSCIOUS AWARE THAT THIS IS THE LAST DAY I AM SINGING?

AS THE DAY OF GLORY, FOR ME, IS FAR FROM HAVING ARRIVED!

...OF THE MOTHERLAAAAND, THE DAY OF GLORY HAAAAAS ARRIVED!



AND HERE WE ARE AT THE FERRÉOLS DISTRICT.  
BUT... NOT A SINGLE SOUL AROUND AND ALL THE  
SHUTTERS ARE CLOSED... A REAL WASTELAND!



SUDDENLY, I AM BESET BY FEAR: HAVING HEARD  
OF ALEXANDRA DAVID-NEEL'S RETURN, HAVE  
ALL RESIDENTS RUN AWAY?

WELL, WHAT  
IS GOING ON,  
FERNANDE?

TODAY IS THE DAY JO MAGAUD MARRIES  
ADDY, MADAM! THEY ARE ALL IN SAINT-  
JULIEN FOR THE WEDDING!

WELL, LET'S  
GO HOME!

I'M FEELING  
BETTER NOW!



WHILE THE TAXI IS  
MAKING ITS WAY  
THROUGH THE TALL  
GRASS...



...I AM RUSHING THROUGH A  
THICK JUNGLE...



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## SAMTEN DZONG





Thank you for reading this book preview. We sincerely hope you have enjoyed it. More at:

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Publisher

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## “The first woman to enter Lhasa, the heart of **Forbidden Tibet**.”

**I**n 1959, the young Marie-Madeleine entered the service of a peculiar old woman whose strong character has overwhelmed her most dedicated previous employees. This uncharacteristic woman is none other than Alexandra David-Néel, an explorer, philosopher, writer, who was, in 1924, the first Western woman to enter Lhasa, the heart of Forbidden Tibet. In a seemingly frightful scrapyard where the memories of fourteen years spent in Asia are piled up, Marie-Madeleine finds herself plunged in the exceptional life of the famous adventurer, going from her conversion to Buddhism to her meeting with the Dalai Lama. Although the old woman is as unbearable as fascinating, a strong bond with the young employee will gradually develop...

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GRAND ANGLE

