The Bitter Tea of General Yen



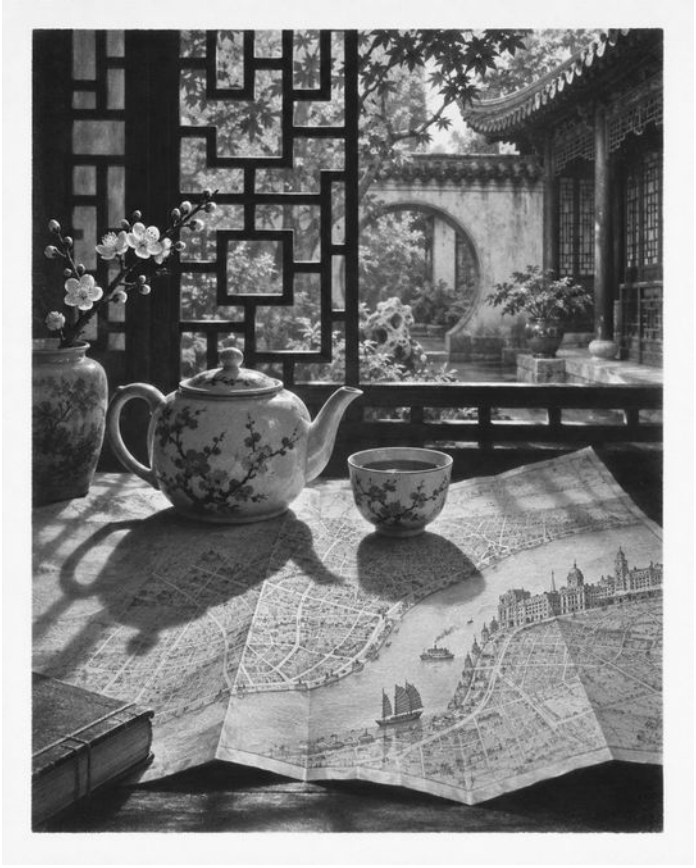
Grace Zaring Stone

PIPCUB EDITIONS

The Bitter Tea of General Yen

Grace Zaring Stone

THE AUTHOR



Grace Zaring Stone

Author vignette inspired by the published work.

Grace Zaring Stone

Grace Zaring Stone was an American novelist whose books reached readers under her own name and, in the case of Escape, under the name Ethel Vance. Travel and life abroad informed her interest in people brought together by political upheaval.

The Bitter Tea of General Yen places a private encounter inside a larger historical conflict. Stone attends to the assumptions her characters carry into that encounter and to the difficulty of recognizing another person across differences of power and experience.

THE BITTER TEA OF GENERAL YEN

by
GRACE ZARING STONE

Author of
The Heaven and Earth of Doña Elena

Illustrated by
Barbara Macfarlane

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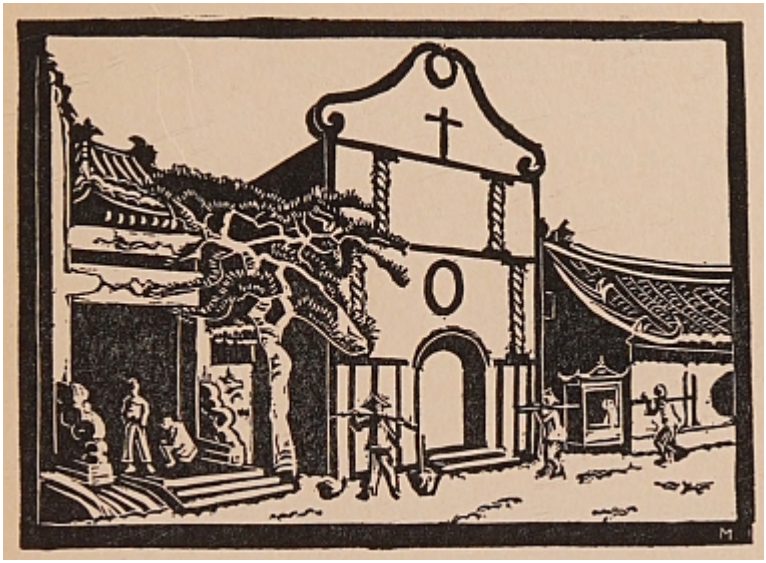
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To
ELEANOR
Who was grown up when necessary



THE BITTER TEA OF GENERAL YEN

CHAPTER I

Megan, drawing her chair over to the window, saw that the rain had given an air of transcience to the solid Chinese earth. For the moment it had stopped raining and all the pools reflected cloudy sky, making the roadway an unsubstantial track over emptiness; willow trees hanging over a wall at the far side of the road were silvered and delicate with moisture, and even the brutal fact of barbed-wire entanglements stretching along the foot of the wall was tempered by the fragility of tremulous drops. She had been told that the barbed-wire entanglements bounded the French Concession and that farther to the left the opening in the barricade marked the entrance to the Avenue Joffre, one of the chief thoroughfares of the Concession.

A French non-commissioned officer and several Senegalese soldiers stood at the entrance and examined, bored but relentless, all the traffic going in and out. All afternoon, in spite of bad weather, there had been a straggling passage of motors, rickshaws, wheelbarrows, and Chinese men in long black skirts, holding large umbrellas, fastidiously picking their way among the puddles. Megan since her arrival in the house, while talking to the Jacksons and when they had gone, unpacking, directing the amah's pressing, was always conscious of the windows. In the dimness of the European house those gray windows opened strangely on to the Chinese road. She was more and more conscious of them as she did various small things that had to be done, longing to possess them undisturbed, and when finally she drew up a chair in the little drawing-room and rested her elbows on the sill, she looked out at that moment when China, washed in a luminous impermanency, presented itself to her not with the dull impact of a solid fact but with the peculiar intensity of a vision seen partly from within.

On the road a car came at tremendous speed from Siccawei toward the Avenue Joffre. The fans of muddy water curving back from its wheels looked like the fins of a porpoise, and like a porpoise it lunged over the uneven road. As Megan watched, only dreamily noting, a small Ford released from examination at the entrance to

the Avenue Joffre unexpectedly darted forward, and to avoid it the large car swerved sharply to the left, skidded and crashed into a telephone pole. Megan heard the crash and the tinkle of breaking glass. She jumped up and ran out the front door. Two of the Senegalese were there ahead of her and several passing Chinese had gathered. The hood was smashed in, the engine wrecked, and the chauffeur had been thrown through the wind-shield and flattened against the telephone pole. But Megan, only now conscious of a real intrusion, stood reluctant before the necessity of doing something about it.

The door of the car opened and a Chinese man stepped out. He was muffled in a coat too heavy for the weather, but his hat had fallen off and a thin, dark trickle of blood ran down his smooth temple. He stood for a moment beside the ruined car feeling himself apprehensively about the ribs, shoulders and arms and, satisfied that he was unhurt, feeling more tenderly still each finger of his exceedingly beautiful hands as if he could not too completely reassure himself that their slight bones were intact. He was so absorbed that Megan said to him sharply:

"Your chauffeur is hurt."

He looked at her vaguely and smiled with a curious lift of his eyebrows, then obviously as reluctant as she was, took a few steps toward his chauffeur and glanced down at him. He turned toward her again and clicked his tongue.

"Annoying!" he exclaimed in English.

Another Chinese man stepped from the car and walked around to observe the extent of the disaster with the foolishly hesitant movements of a fowl picking its way about a littered garden. He also was smothered in a heavy coat, but a cap pulled over his eyes hid his face, and as everything he wore was apparently several sizes too large for him, he seemed a boy of sixteen or even younger. He and the Chinese man were about to enter into a consultation when the French sergeant walked up and, brushing curtly between them, began to question the Chinese man. The boy moved away and the man answered the sergeant, smiling as though their meeting furnished an unexpected but agreeable opportunity for conversation. Finally he took a paper from his pocket and showed it

to the sergeant. The sergeant examined it, then looked up at him, looked him over, and with deliberate mockery saluted him. The Chinese man continued to smile, though his smile now was not directed at the sergeant; it became diffused, meditative, touching rather some particularly uncertain aspect of humanity just revealed to him. He turned away. In touching his forehead to return the salute he had discovered his fingers to be smeared with blood and this further reminder of the hazards of life seemed to deepen his meditation into melancholy. His smile vanished.

"Annoying," he murmured once more.

From the Ford which had stopped a few yards up the road jumped a vigorous, black-bearded priest in a black soutane. He ran toward them and, paying no attention to any one else, bent at once over the chauffeur whom he laid out flat on the ground, uttering loud exclamations. Megan knew that the chauffeur was undeniably the real, if the less interesting sufferer, but she felt that the Chinese man had met with an unmerited slight from the French sergeant. And he too had been actually hurt. She exclaimed impulsively:

"Please take my handkerchief," and drew a clean folded one from the pocket of her cardigan. The Chinese man answered, "Thank you, but I have one."

He took a large handkerchief out of his own pocket, unfolding it to its full size and displaying a character embroidered in the corner. Something in his gesture made Megan realize her offer had implied that he could not possess a handkerchief. She was resentful, not only because he had checked her impulse but he had also made it seem a bit absurd. She turned away from him abruptly and joined the priest.

The Senegalese and the French sergeant strolled over but they only stood looking down while the priest felt the chauffeur's body for broken bones. Megan knelt beside him in the attitude of one ready to help and even with some reluctance ran her fingers over the chauffeur's skull through bristling, oily black hair. The priest lifted an eyelid. Then he said to her in French:

"And the skull, is it broken?"

"I don't think so," said Megan; "perhaps you had better examine it."

The chauffeur's face was a mass of cuts, with glass driven into the flesh. She began to feel a little sick.

"It is horrible, isn't it?" she said.

"Yes, they can't stand much," said the priest, "they are desperately undernourished."

"No one seems to concern himself," said Megan, glancing still resentfully at the Chinese man who was cleaning his forehead with little dabs of the handkerchief.

"Oh," said the priest, shrugging his broad shoulders, "what do you want! They are five hundred million souls!"

And Megan saw that it was difficult for him to bear in mind the surpassing value of such a super-abundant commodity.

The sound of another car stopping made her look up. A crowd had gathered by this time and the magnificence of the new arrival diverted most of the attention. Like the first it was a shining and obviously new car but spattered high with the mud of rough and rainy roads. The windows were draped in chenille fringes, and through them Megan saw a woman's head, her black hair melting smoothly into the dusk of the background, her face vivid as a painted egg-shell, supported apparently on a shining collar of lime-green satin. She lowered a window and leaning forward made little chirping ejaculations at the sight of the wreck. The Chinese man walked over and spoke to her. He leaned on the window, and as he talked to her with considerable animation, Megan looked at him more attentively. Nothing about him suggested any particular age; his face was smooth and of a uniform pallor, the nose long and aquiline, the eyes bulging a little, there was a curl of humor at each side of his small, full mouth and a certain vigor to the modeling of his forehead, but the hands with which he gesticulated as he talked betrayed him, not so much by their feminine delicacy and beauty as by a way he had of handling things that was both fastidious and ineffectual.

The priest got up from his knees and went over to speak to the Chinese man. The small Chinese in the great coat and the sergeant joined them. The priest evidently made suggestions in Chinese. They talked a great deal, and the sergeant watched them cynically, to indicate that he had the proper contempt for a conversation of which he could not understand a word. Finally a decision was arrived at. The priest and the chauffeur of the second car picked up the injured chauffeur and put him into the second car. They laid him on the floor at the feet of the lady, bending his legs into an uncomfortable position, and the two Chinese men got in after him. Then they drove off. The priest, having watched them go, took off his hat to Megan and went to his Ford, which awaited him a little farther up the road. The small crowd of coolies and passers-by continued, for want of anything better, to stand listlessly about the damaged car. It began to rain again. As Megan slowly crossed the road to the house the French sergeant, looking at her ankles, hummed a French song called *Valentine*.



CHAPTER II

Inside the house Megan sat down by the fireplace, in which a fire was being built and lighted by the coolie. In leaving the street she had turned her back on China; the house she was in was on the wrong side of the barbed-wire barricade and in Chinese territory, but it might have been a house in Brighton, as English as it was possible to make it. There was a cottage piano in one corner, loaded with photographs in standing frames; a plum-colored carpet covered the floor and on the walls hung pictures, evidently belonging to a series and representing dogs of different breeds sitting on cushions, taking tea, and wearing lace caps and top-hats. The tea table was being set near the fire by the number one boy for the Jacksons, who had said they would be back about five o'clock.

It was the Jacksons who met Megan on her arrival at Shanghai that morning. The ship anchored down the Whangpoo, and before she could step aboard the launch that was to take the passengers up to the jetty she was accosted on deck by a small, shabby man with a soft apologetic voice and a very drooping mustache who told her he was Mr. Jackson, of the China Inland Mission, sent to meet her. Megan turned so pale that the little man caught at her arm to steady her.

"But Bob," she stammered, "has anything happened to him?"

"No, no," cried Mr. Jackson hastily, "he is well, he is quite well." And all the time the launch was chugging up the river he continued to reassure her as to Bob's safety, for he was terribly afraid of emotional women, that is, when they were of European race; the outcries of a recently widowed Chinese he was capable of taking with calm. He explained to her that Bob had been unable to leave Changsha, and that while he was not exactly in actual danger, still there was a great deal of fighting around Changsha and at various points along the river, so that he might even be delayed for weeks.

"But can't I get up to him?" asked Megan. "After all, I've come all this way to marry him."

"Well," said Mr. Jackson soothingly, "well, as a matter of actual fact you cannot. I've tried to get a permit for your passage from the authorities, but they aren't permitting any women and children to travel on the river now. We want you to stay here with us, and when Bob does come we'll have the wedding in Shanghai. Mrs. Jackson and I were forced to leave our station a month ago, and we've taken the house of some friends who are in England on leave. You'll be quite comfortable with us, and it will give you a little time to adjust yourself to the conditions here. I see Mrs. Jackson now, standing on the jetty. See, the one with the green umbrella. She will be mighty glad to have you with us. She has lived for so long where there are very few white ladies."

After all there was nothing to do but go with the Jacksons, but Megan was not so deeply disappointed as her first fright had led Mr. Jackson to suppose. She could not explain to him what she had never fully admitted to herself, that she had come as much for China as for Bob.

Megan had not looked to Mr. Jackson, and she would scarcely have looked to any one, the sort of girl who would become the wife of a medical missionary in China. She had been born and brought up in a small New England college town, but she had had winters in Boston and several trips to Europe, and because her father was for many years the president of the college she was used to a society of comfortable means and a most determined intellectuality. Bob lived in the same town, the son of an Episcopal rector with a large family. They had known each other always, gone to dancing class, picnics together, been completely indifferent companions, until quite suddenly, when she was seventeen, Megan fell in love with Bob, that is to say, she decided to focus on him all the ardors and enthusiasms, all the capacity for dreaming and questioning, of which she was capable. It was a secret passion of course and not a little desperate, because she knew with that part of her which in every sane person, and even in the young, remains the onlooker, that no one would take her seriously, least of all Bob, who was a good-looking young man, an excellent athlete, but full of common sense. And Megan did not really want Bob to be conscious of what she felt for him. She never wanted to realize him in an actual world

in any rôle that he would be likely to play; it was enough for her to dance with him sometimes in a tense and beatific silence and to write a great many poems which she kept locked in a drawer in an envelope marked "in case of my death, please destroy."

Megan had been one of those dazzlingly beautiful children whom people exclaim over as if they were deaf or insensible, so that even very young she had been aware, as children of royal blood or great wealth are aware, that she enjoyed some special privilege. And not alone from the exclamations of the careless but from the attitude of her parents did she divine this privilege. Her father would tear his eyes from the pages of a book to look at her; he treated her with an aloofness that had a touch of awe. Her mother's attempts to be severe, to discipline, broke down always into endearments, so that Megan lived with her in an excited atmosphere of fancied slights, sulks, tears, kisses and passionate admiration. Megan was privately considered by some older persons as a thoroughly detestable child whose parents, and indeed most of the world, spoiled beyond reason, and to these persons her screaming tantrums enjoyed an equal fame with her beauty, but to most people this beauty had its usual happy effect of minimizing her faults and enhancing her virtues. Scarcely any one could fail to be touched when so brightly lovely a child was willing to share her cake with another or tell the truth under stress.

But as Megan grew older she began, by degrees but surely, to be a little less beautiful, until by the time she was well in her teens her beauty had left her entirely. This did not happen suddenly, and she herself was slow to realize it because the attitude of people toward her was so well established that it was slow to change. But it did change. And once she overheard some one say:

"Yes, that is Davis' daughter now; you would never think she was such a ravishing child, would you?"

Megan went home and saw in the glass the thin well-shaped body, the rather hollow-cheeked face of a handsome girl, a girl with some of that haggard Celtic look, together with the long upper lip, the rather blunted Celtic nose, the eyes greenish gray, brilliant and

black-lashed, but she saw that of the intangible and extraordinary Celtic bloom nothing remained. She saw also that she had lost her kingdom.

Of course this loss, as in her love for Bob, would mean practically nothing to any one else, not even to her parents, and the realization only added to her bitterness and resentment. The callousness of the world to the greater part of human suffering struck her for the first time. But there was nothing to be done about that and she herself remained profoundly indifferent to all the hidden sources of grief that people around her concealed daily. She cultivated the belief that the beauty of the world is always in some sense marred, that we must all expect to lose what we most cling to, and therefore that it is our own fault if we let ourselves in for disappointment. For a year or so Megan constrained herself into the pattern of the cynic, astounding when she could by bitter speeches and pleased only when she created a flutter of alarm. Then at the moment when she felt she had established the fact that she had nothing to live for, Bob, who had come back from two years as interne in a Boston hospital, made two astonishing statements: one that he was going out to China as a medical missionary and the other that he loved her and wanted to marry her.

The young cynic vanished as quickly as she had come. The sterility of that attitude had always repelled her, even while she had taken a perverse enjoyment in its repellent effect on others. She now unconditionally renounced it. Bob was in love with her. They would be married as soon as he was settled in China and was able to send for her. Megan underwent one of those irrational and complete changes that happiness will produce in nearly any one. She was herself astonished at the change. She not only loved Bob, but some emotion had been released in her which welled up irresistibly and for which Bob alone was not enough. Up to now she had treated her religious beliefs with some indifference, sometimes with scorn, but Bob's orthodoxy, his desire to serve, seemed to her now to have the only beauty and dignity. She was going to be a part of his life, which was a life for the relief of suffering. Her part would be to bring happiness. All the misery of humanity, by which she had been only vaguely irritated when she felt herself to be a part of it, she now

looked on with the sensations of a man cured of a disease who is impelled to testify to the remedy before others. She knew that no one should be unhappy, that evil, sickness, poverty, injustice, all demanded one treatment. No man would be unhappy if love for his fellow man filled his heart. During the time before Bob left for China Megan lived in a period of exultant joyousness. There were no problems, there was nothing that was not fundamentally right. She even looked at herself in the glass. She was no longer beautiful. Good. She instantly accepted humility, and she discovered that even humility may always be accepted by the proud when it is acknowledged to be a grace and ornament of the spirit.

Bob went to China and was not able to send for her as soon as they had both expected. A long summer dragged past and autumn came. Megan, still happy but a little less exultant, tried to do settlement work in the small city where she lived, a city where the prosperity of the inhabitants made such work among them so difficult, so desultory, that she gave it up. In the early winter she went to a hospital in Boston as a probationer. But she was not a success. The external ugliness of the life depressed her, and her imaginative pity for the worst cases, added to an irresistible physical disgust, was such that she became fumbling and even absent as to detail. The patients themselves did not like to have her about. This discouraged her, and when her mother on a visit found her more than ordinarily hollow-cheeked, with eyes over-brilliant from strain, she promptly took her home. So a gradual depression began to settle over her. Her impulses did not change but there was no outlet for them. She thought a great deal of China. She read Bob's letters over and over and out of their bare words extracted gradually a vision of China's wretchedness and beauty. China and Bob both needed her, but Bob was now an accepted fact, dear, a part almost of herself, while China was unknown; it put no limits on her imagination. And China held the greater magic.

Then in January came a letter saying that conditions in China had grown suddenly worse; Bob gave them details that at this distance lost their significance. The British at Hankow, the Nationalists, Russian influence, all this meant nothing. Still, Megan's parents were worried. It did mean another delay. As they sat about together,

Megan reading parts of the letter aloud, she suddenly felt that another crisis had come to her, like that one when she looked in the mirror and for the first time saw there a long pale face that was her own. If she could not get to China now, and to Bob, it seemed that something terrible and definite would happen to her. She did not define it, but it seemed vaguely to take the character of a loss of faith. It cast her into a panic. Looking up she saw her father and mother watching her with a common expression of anxiety on their faces. She knew by instinct that some peculiar quality of their love for her made them vulnerable, in a way that she was not, and abruptly, without reasoning, she stormed over their weakness. She burst into tears.

"But I've got to go," she cried. "I can't stand these disappointments any longer, I've got to go."

And as she knew at once, even without looking at them, that she had won, a feeling of release streamed over her.



CHAPTER III

When the Jacksons returned for tea she told them all about the wrecked car, which they said they had seen as they came in, and particularly about the extreme callousness of the owner of the car. Mr. Jackson did not seem to think that was anything out of the ordinary.

"It was probably some rich man taking refuge in the Concession," he said. "They tell me the Cantonese are at Sunkiang, only about thirty miles away. Lots of Chinese are making for the Settlement."

Mrs. Jackson held her cup in one hand and the *North China Daily News* in the other. She read:

"'Over a hundred executions of Communist sympathizers took place yesterday and the heads of some of the more prominent agitators were put in cages over the gates of the native city.' That ought to be a lesson to them. Will, why don't you go and take snapshots of them to send home?"

Megan involuntarily raised her eyebrows and Mrs. Jackson saw her.

"But it does them good to see what goes on out here! They ought to see it with their own eyes. Why, I've seen plenty of executions at Shasi, and sometimes they hung them alive in chains on the city wall. And I'll never forget seeing heads there one rainy evening with birds pecking at them. Yes, it would do them good to realize some of this at home. No one knows what we go through out here. It is the fashion nowadays to accept everything, but it is a whole lot easier to accept things at a distance than close by. And the only way to accept calmly what happens in China is to stay at home and believe nothing any one tells you."

"It is the only way, my dear, to maintain any pleasant international relations."

Mr. Jackson smiled under his long mustache at Megan as he spoke. Megan did not have a very keen sense of humor, and unlike most people who lack it she knew that she lacked it. She considered it the refuge of those who dare not look facts in the face, but she saw

that Mr. Jackson possessed a sense of fun arising from fundamental good temper, which he took to be humor, and it was a great comfort to him. As a boy she was sure he had put wet newspapers in the beds of his school fellows, and still remembered it with a wistful smile.

"Besides," he said, "you mustn't try to frighten Miss Davis."

"I'm not being frightened. I want to know what is actually happening. Whatever it is I want to know."

Mrs. Jackson returned to the *North China Daily News*, which she laid on the arm of a chair while she buttered a scone.

"'It is rumored,'" she read, "'that General Yen Tso-Chong is in Shanghai in one of the Chinese hotels of the French Concession. Not long ago the General successfully completed negotiations with the Nationalists which resulted in the turning over of his province with practically no shedding of blood. The General has a well-organized army and maintains an arsenal under the management of a European, which turns out among other things a trench mortar said to be the equal of any. His province is one of the most prosperous in China. He is particularly able and astute, and despite his unfriendliness to the Hankow faction (his own capital has lately been the scene of numerous Communist executions) he is regarded by many as one of the coming leaders of the Nationalists, among whom he represents the more sane and anti-Bolshevist element. The purpose of his alleged presence in Shanghai, at a time when it is held by the troops of the Northern party, is unknown.' Will, isn't that Doctor Strike's General? But of course it is. Yen Tso-Chong, that is the name. He is the one who turned the Doctor out of his college."

"Doctor Strike," explained Mr. Jackson, "is a very good friend of ours. He is a very learned man, belongs to all sorts of scientific societies and is a great Chinese scholar. He has written a textbook on the Chinese language and translated the Odes. Besides that he is a man of amazing power, spiritual and physical as well, though he is not as strong as he used to be. His life of labor is beginning to tell on him."

"Is the Doctor in town?" asked Mrs. Jackson.

"I don't believe he is in town. He was to get in touch with me as soon as he got back. Yes, General Yen must be the Doctor's erstwhile friend. I believe he did use to think very highly of the General, who they say is a well-educated, intelligent man. He didn't seem to change his mind about the General even when he turned him out of his college. But the Doctor isn't one to give up hope of a man easily, not when he has set himself to save him."

"They say the General is very dissolute in his private life," said Mrs. Jackson. "I am surprised the Doctor would overlook that. They say he never travels without special trains for his concubines, and when you read in the French papers (they publish such things) that his concubines are sent away from a city, it means that city is about to fall."

"Is a Chinese dissolute because he has concubines?" asked Megan.

"He isn't considered so by the Chinese. But then that really isn't the point, is it? We have to apply our standard to them, don't we, and make them accept it?"

Megan sipped her tea and considered this last remark, coming so flatly from the apologetic little Mr. Jackson. It is always so easy to mock at intolerance because quite naturally each one of us would prefer to be treated with tolerance. In fact, we much prefer tolerance to mercy. Mercy is forced to recognize that justice exists; tolerance is indifferent to it. As to Mr. Jackson's statement, obviously they were here to enlighten China. To assume the apologetic attitude, the humorous, the tolerant attitude, would in his case be merely a flabby cowardice.

"Of course, that is what we are here for," she repeated staunchly, feeling however that she had not entirely clarified the issue in her mind.

Mrs. Jackson complained of a headache and took the paper over to a sofa, on which she took a slightly reclining attitude.

"Will, do you remember Mrs. Walsh's headaches?" she said. "Well, do you know how she finally cured them? She knew an old country woman back in Wales who kept a special flock of sheep and a special bed of saffron. I can't remember what this old woman did,

but it seems she gathered this saffron, and then sheared the sheep from whatever part of the sheep you had the pain, all at a certain period of the moon. Then she tied this wool around the saffron and sent it to you. Well, Mrs. Walsh got some from the sheep's head and she has never had a headache since. I wanted to send for some myself," she turned to Megan, "but Mr. Jackson wouldn't hear of it. Of course he was right, but I still have headaches."

Mr. Jackson was worried that this story had been told before Megan. He looked at her a little anxiously as he said to his wife:

"It would have been an outrage for a woman of your training to consider such a thing. If I were you I wouldn't think anything more about it."

"I'm not thinking about it, I only said I still have headaches."

"I'd rather you had a headache than indulge in a gross superstition."

"Yes, I'm sure you would," said Mrs. Jackson, "but then of course, it is my headache."

Megan had finished her tea and had just lighted a cigarette. As she blew the first smoke through her lips, she was reminded of the tea hour at home, and the cigarettes she and her father enjoyed together when he came in from his study, tired and sometimes harassed. She was not listening very intently to the rather involved conversation, except to say to herself that Mrs. Jackson was displaying considerable skill in muddling things, when she noticed they had both stopped and were looking at her. They seemed a little embarrassed, as simple people are when what they consider an impropriety has been committed in their presence. In the place where there were so few white ladies it had evidently not been brought to their notice that a lady could smoke a cigarette. Because she was their guest Megan crushed it out on the rim of her cup, but she was annoyed with them nevertheless; it seemed to her they carried intolerance a little too far.

"Did you have a nice afternoon?" she asked.

"Well, we had a rather trying one," said Mr. Jackson. "We were obliged to go way over to Chapei to see about a friend of ours, a Miss Reed, who is in charge of St. Andrews Orphanage. She has a number

of Chinese Christian orphans and some little Russians. There were two ladies helping her, a Miss Minton and Miss Soames. Miss Soames has appendicitis and is in the Shanghai General Hospital (that reminds me, dear, we ought to go there to-morrow). You see, Chapei is Chinese territory and a very rough section; lots of workers in the mills live there, and it has always been very labor-ridden. We tried this afternoon to get Miss Reed to move into the Settlement, but she couldn't be persuaded it was necessary."

"Persuaded!" exclaimed Mrs. Jackson. "You couldn't persuade that woman. It is a pity, I think, to feel you know everything in this world."

"Well, dear, I shouldn't say her disagreeing with me constituted a claim for universal knowledge. Should you, Miss Davis?"

He smiled again under his long mustache, and Megan smiled back at him. She felt sure he had had a hard afternoon with Miss Reed.

"Is the orphanage in any real danger, do you think?" she asked.

"It is hard to say, but it very well may be. There seems to be no doubt that the Chinese will take Shanghai. The Concessions are too well defended to be harmed. That is, they are now. If this were happening two months ago it would be a different story. But I feel sure it will go hard in the Chinese city and the outlying districts. If Miss Reed and her orphanage were in my charge, I'd order her to leave."

"I wonder why she won't come."

"She won't come," said Mrs. Jackson, "because people have told her it is unsafe and she loves to disagree with them. She loves nothing better than being in danger and then saying, 'Oh, it was nothing, it was nothing really.'"

"My dear, you must not be so bitter and critical. Miss Reed is a good woman."

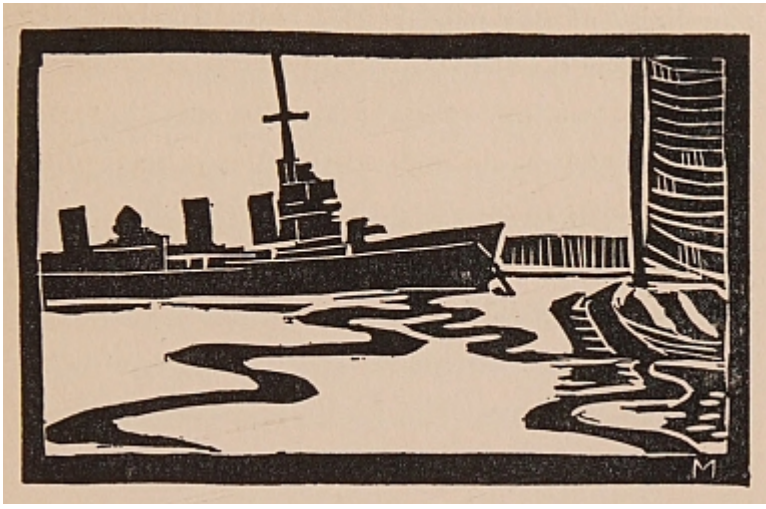
"Well, so am I a good woman," said Mrs. Jackson emphatically, and Mr. Jackson said nothing but sighed and twisted a little sadly the drooping ends of his mustache.

"Besides," said Mrs. Jackson, "I don't see why you insist she is as good as all that. She loves making herself and every one around her miserable. She has put herself and another lady and a lot of children in danger of their lives and she puts you to no end of trouble."

"Oh, come, come," said Mr. Jackson, and he went over to his wife, awkwardly patting her shoulder. "Suppose I get you an aspirin," he said.

The classification of a good woman, surely a classification that was now fairly obsolete anyway, disturbed Megan, but she knew he meant it only as testifying that Miss Reed was unquestionably physically pure. She thought perversely of the concubines of General Yen Tso-Chong and wondered if intolerance sometimes fails because even though honorable and vigorous it can often overlook an essential point. Miss Reed made every one miserable. Perhaps the concubines did not. What was the essential point? Megan gave it up.

After dinner Megan went to her room early, and read in bed for some time. She had a book of Papini, Perugia's *Peintres Chinois*, and an old book on Jesuit missions in China and Japan full of old engravings. But she could not concentrate on any of them. She wrote a long letter to Bob telling him of her arrival, of the Jacksons, of the episode of the wrecked car. Then she turned off her light. Her open window now was only a square in darkness but it brought her the odor of the night. She wondered if there could really be a difference between this smell and that of rainy nights at home; this too was herby and clear, a new smell, but into the room crept a strong under-taint of fertilizer suggesting sickness and age. It came somewhere from the great plain beginning outside her window, a plain that has supported life for such countless ages one wonders it has any power left to force out a single fresh shoot. Megan, already tired, felt the oppression of such a burden; on her relaxing consciousness the sheer immobility of it pressed heavily, pierced through now by the young, quickening jets of rain.



CHAPTER IV

The next morning early Megan went to her window. The rain had momentarily stopped, but the sky was gray and low and it would surely rain again. Along the muddy road passed the Chinese, pushing heavily laden wheelbarrows or sitting in rickshaws holding bundles bigger than themselves on their laps. Even motor-cars were bulging with mattresses, sewing-machines, stoves, all those possessions which are accepted without thought but which when dragged out of the houses where they belong give such a pitiful exposure of the actual simplicity of our needs. Mr. Jackson was right; the rush for the Settlement had begun.

It was Sunday. After breakfast they rode to church in rickshaws, with the hoods up and leather aprons fastened across them by patched-up loops of string. It was raining a little. Megan had never been in a rickshaw before and she did not feel the horror she had anticipated at being pulled along by a human being. The coolie had muscled bare legs and he swayed from side to side with a faint trace of swagger; the odor of garlic he had been eating came cheerily back to her. There was something about the equipage, disreputable as it was, that gave her a feeling of pomp and circumstance not entirely unpleasant.

They passed the entrance to the Avenue Joffre, going along the road edging the Settlement, to the Avenue Haig. On their left heavy coils of barbed wire shut out a few mean Chinese houses, a large Chinese building behind a brick wall, with an institutional look about it, farther on making a barrier to dreamlike vistas of water-soaked fields, canals, and low Chinese farmhouses with roofs horned like the new moon. They turned to the right at the side of a large riding-school with paddocks and an enclosed ring. A huge tow-haired Russian groom was leading a horse from the ring.

The church was bare. Only Europeans were there, and they got up, sat down, made the responses with what seemed a determination wearier but more dogged than it would have been at home.

"'Let me never be confounded," sang the choirboys in their white, reedy voices.

In the afternoon Mr. Jackson went off to try to persuade Miss Reed for the last time to evacuate the orphanage. Mrs. Jackson expressed the belief that he would not succeed.

"I wish Doctor Strike were here," she said to Megan. "He could make her do it. But Will never can; he is afraid of her."

She added that Doctor Strike might be expected at any moment now, and every time the telephone or the door-bell rang she said, "That is probably the Doctor now." But he did not come.

The afternoon passed interminably to Megan. She longed to be out helping Mr. Jackson evacuate the orphanage. She envied Miss Reed, who at least was in the midst of the storm. It was so hard sitting still and watching Mrs. Jackson knit, trying to talk to her. After she had shown Mrs. Jackson her trousseau, which Mrs. Jackson evidently found much too plain, and had answered a few questions of "what they wore" at home, they really had nothing to say to each other. Toward the one subject on which Megan tried to draw her out Mrs. Jackson maintained an evasiveness that had a flavor of positive resistance. In her rambling sentences she would sometimes mention casually and without explanation, as if every one must have heard of them, such persons as Doctor Strike, Mrs. Walsh at the Socony Installation, Miss Reed, her amah who was devoted to her, but she could not be induced to talk about China. She had not a trace of intellectual curiosity. If there were things in the world mysterious and a little terrifying, she would refuse to be either mystified or terrified, she would blank them off. And China she ignored as if it had been an obscene fact of life, like sex. Megan tried to imagine her sitting for the last twenty years in a Chinese house, eating Chinese food, speaking Chinese and ignoring China.

Seeing Megan was restless, Mrs. Jackson asked her if she cared about reading, and when Megan answered that she did, Mrs. Jackson went up-stairs and returned with a book.

"I find this very helpful," she said, handing it to Megan.

It was a small, thin volume printed in 1884 by some mission press in Calcutta and it was called *A Noble Life*. Megan looked through its yellow pages and saw it was an account of the life of Archibald Alexander McPherson, who left the British army to engage in mission work in India. As Megan read here and there to see if she might discover what had been the force that had driven him to do this, she came on sentences like these:

> "He became more and more sensitive to sin. On one occasion he corrected his native boy for some fault with more sharpness than he afterwards deemed necessary and when he became convinced that he had given away, even in a slight degree, to anger, he called his servant and falling on his knees begged his forgiveness with tears of contrition."

Megan looked up at Mrs. Jackson with astonishment. She now pictured her on her knees before the number one boy, begging his forgiveness with tears of contrition. And even Megan smiled. Mrs. Jackson and Archibald Alexander McPherson both had a knowledge, perhaps equally unerring, of their own needs, and Mrs. Jackson was not to be diverted by any pleasing fantasies she might profess; she remained untroubled by such mystic pressures as tormented Archibald Alexander McPherson.

As Megan sat pretending to read, the telephone rang again. It turned out to be a young naval officer she had met on the boat whose name was Bates. He wished to take her to dinner. She had not particularly liked him but after a slight hesitation said yes. She explained him to Mrs. Jackson as a pleasant sort of fellow who had come out to command a gunboat and would leave the next day for up-river. Mrs. Jackson did not understand why an engaged girl wanted to dine with another man, especially on Sunday.

"I'm really not endangering my future happiness. And certainly I ought to begin to know something of China."

"I don't think the wife of a mission worker needs to know the China that a gunboat commander is going to show her."

"Are they so dreadful?" asked Megan, smiling.

"I think they're pretty loose in their morals, though there was a nice one evacuated us out of Shasi."

Lieutenant-Commander Bates took her first to the Palace, where they could sit and watch the lights of the war-ships anchored along the Bund,—English, French, Dutch, Italian, Japanese and American. Megan looked at the American cruiser with pride. More than any of the others, of course, it contained steel, discipline, honor, handsome men and sudden death.

"Have a cocktail," said Bates.

"Thanks, I believe I'll have a glass of sherry."

"Better have a cocktail. I knew by your voice over the telephone that you thought you should not come. I see by your face you wish now you hadn't. Suppose you be as reckless as you can and I'll be as careful as I can and perhaps we'll strike a mean."

Megan was regretting she had come; in saying yes she had been headlong, thinking only of a momentary escape from the dear Jacksons, forgetting that she might find Bates' society infinitely more trying. She was so stiff and formal that Bates himself began to have regrets. He said to himself that she would be completely wet, and to brighten up the prospect a bit he drank three Martinis.

They started for a place some one had assured him was amusing. Megan wanted to ride in a rickshaw so they ambled up Nanking Road in the rain, a European street of European shops, harshly lighted, with glimpses down narrow side-streets of more diffused lights and fluttering banners. Farther along the shops became all Chinese and suddenly the street was a blaze of lighted turrets and towers. On Bubbling Well Road opposite the dark emptiness of the Race Course they found the place they were looking for.

In the cloak-room a flock of Chinese women fluttered about her. They wore evening coats with great ruches about the necks and underneath a hybrid garment, half of Europe, half of Asia, the costume of the treaty port, a long coat dress with a stiff high collar. They were thin, fleshless, with the bones of birds, their lacquered hair cut short like men's, their skins seeming without pores, *mat*, delicately yellow. Some had brought small children, dressed and

painted as miniatures of themselves. In the café they sat about in chattering groups, and when the music began they fox-trotted and Charlestoned with Chinese men in evening clothes or long skirts. There were an equal number of Europeans about and the place was full of smoke and jazz tunes. Down a long stairway at one end some Russian Jewish strong men, coated with liquid powder and draped in leopard skins, postured under a white spot-light. Bates found a table, and Megan resigned herself to enduring Bates and the jazz and the Jewish strong men. It was the things which made it like a dinner at home she found hard to endure. But there was so much noise they did not have to talk much, and a certain amount of time was passed in dancing.

Bates said: "We'll see nothing like this up-river, better enjoy ourselves while we can." For Bates considered them fellow victims. "What do you suppose your missionary crowd would think of this place?"

"I suppose they'd be shocked. They are not out here for this, you know."

"I'm willing to believe that. I'm very broadminded myself, but I don't see where their jobs would be if there weren't things to shock them going on. You really have to look at that side of it, don't you?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"You do now. Then there is this side of it: why don't they turn to on some of the white population, do a bit for the Russkys, say? There are thousands and thousands of them here, all out of work and selling themselves and what-not. Look at that one over there for instance, rather easy to look at and undoubtedly on the road to Gehenna."

There were plenty of Russian faces, but the girl Bates meant sat by herself at a table near them, getting up every now and then to dance with whoever asked her. The men who came over to her from other tables were in general as self-conscious as though they had been asked to go up on the stage and help a conjurer, but the girl was somber and half asleep with exhaustion. She was overly buxom, dressed in a too thin, soiled, flowered chiffon dress. Her hands were dirty, but her eyebrows met in an exquisite scimitar arch over black eyes like those in Persian miniatures. Her head was beautiful in a

way that was almost an affront, cruel and Semitic. Bates did not really admire her, he was accustomed to prettiness groomed and moderated; she was beauty in the raw. Still she disturbed him and he went on looking at her. Megan's mind flashed back momentarily to the Chinese woman she had seen in the car with the chenille fringes, the car that had stopped at the scene of the motor wreck. She remembered against the Russian woman's look of submerged revolt the Chinese woman's air of modesty and complete acceptance of living.

"That girl is too fat but she has got a good nose," Bates continued. "That is what is the matter with these Chinese women. No noses."

"They have rather Egyptian noses, haven't they? And they are rather alike, come to think of it, both agriculturalists for thousands of years and peace-loving. I suppose it is natural for an agriculturalist to be peace-loving. But can there be any connection, do you suppose, between agriculture and noses?"

"Well, I'm not prepared to say. Let's dance. You wouldn't think," he said as they worked through the crush, "that this city is going to be captured in a few days, would you?"

"But is it? And will it make a great difference?"

"Bound to be. And it will make plenty of difference to the Chinks. Don't you worry though. We're looking after the Concessions. You can give us credit for that, noses or no noses."

The evening stretched in front of her like a tunnel. The continuous blare of sound, the smoke, and across from her the fatigue and scorn of the Russian woman, who never ceased to dance with whoever asked her and to say at intervals, "One small bottle wine, please,"—these things became insupportable. Feeling that it must be nearly morning she stole a glance at her wrist-watch and found it was only quarter past twelve.

"I must go now. The Jacksons will worry if I am out late."

"Good girl. Must get good girls home early. Boy, bring chit."

But he had time to consume another whisky soda. He was becoming agreeably boisterous, he laughed at everything she said.

"Perhaps after all I'll have a chance to sack a city. Can you see me doing it? Can you see me tearing jade earrings off the shrieking women? Can you?"

"No, I can only imagine you rescuing them in the orthodox manner." But the truth was she did not want to imagine Bates in China at all, and it was a matter of complete indifference to her what he did or did not do.

In the lobby he tried to persuade her to go on to some other place with him. There was a Russian club just outside the Settlement where they had real vodka and served the meat on a bayonet, and another place where they had a roulette wheel.

He was like a child in his desire for entertainment and in his dependence on some one else for it. He was even dependent on Megan now that they had had dinner and a few drinks together. But she would not stay.

When he deposited her at the house she found Mrs. Jackson sitting up for her.

"Did you have a nice time?" she asked.

Megan admitted that she wished she had not gone.

In her own room she decided to have a bath and turned on the water so that the little bathroom was a cage of steam. She had an idea of washing away the unpleasant impression the evening had left with her, but in the tub she felt more depressed than ever. Clothes are more of a protection to us than we realize until we take them off. When we take off our clothes we take away at the same time all the evidences of the rôle we have chosen; we are very apt to lose our dignity and even our purpose, and for the moment to sink tack into an indistinguishable humanity. Megan lay in the warm water feeling that this poor stripped creature that was herself was not worthy of her vocation.

In her bed she propped up the pillows and picking up the account of the early Jesuit Missions ruffled the pages back and forth, thinking of the view she had just had of the European excrescence on China. It was obvious that white Shanghai must be chiefly composed of homes full of honest citizens like any other city, like Indianapolis, like Dijon, like Brighton, probably as nearly like them

as it could possibly be made. But the dulness of the entertainment she had taken part in was doubly dull, seen as a transplanted thing, just as the stoves and sewing-machines of the refugees had seemed particularly pitiful as things one felt compelled to drag with one from place to place.

Megan lay looking idly at the frontispiece which gradually caught her attention. It was an old steel engraving of a Jesuit church in a Chinese city the name of which was unfamiliar to her. All round the church were curving Chinese roofs, laden with preposterous porcelain figures, over garden walls sprouted fantasies of unknown trees and before it were set small swarming figures of coolies bearing yokes, beggars with their bowls, ladies with parasols, and the sedan-chairs of the rich. In the midst of all this, the Jesuit church lifted its flat façade, broken half-way by two orderly volutes, with half-dimensional, twisted pillars on either side of its doors. The suggestion of the grandiose and the gigantic was discreetly tempered by reflections of logic, of Aristotle and the sciences, and the inappropriateness of the whole to its surroundings lent it a delicious perversity and charm. A Jesuit façade in China. The first small wedge in the breach which was to grow wider and wider till all Europe poured in, no longer, alas, the Europe of amiable sophistries and the art of making clocks, but a vast and terrible lava flow of artillery, transportation, oil, steel-girded buildings, sanitation, jazz, democracy, equality of the sexes, business efficiency and the true word of God.



CHAPTER V

On one of those blue and white days that sometimes come as a voluptuous relief in the midst of rain, and at about noon, the city was taken. Mrs. Jackson and Megan spent the morning in small shops along the Rue du Consulat looking for jade to send to Megan's mother. The small streets running between the Rue du Consulat and the Rue des Deux Republiques, which is Chinese territory, ended in grilles, and they were further guarded by barbed-wire entanglements and chevaux-de-frise. At intervals along the Rue du Consulat were redoubts of sand-bags guarded by French Marines, and as Megan and Mrs. Jackson walked along the sidewalks crowded with Chinese, they passed, every hundred yards or so, groups of Annamites under French officers slowly patrolling. Among the usual flutter of banners, red, white and yellow outside the shops, were a great number of Nationalist flags, red with a white sun on a blue field.

"See," said Mrs. Jackson, pointing to them, "they know the city is going to fall and they have turned already."

But they themselves did not know it had fallen until they reached home about noon to find the telephone ringing. Mr. Jackson was calling.

"The Cantonese have taken over the Native City and the railroad station," he said. "I think you had better stay indoors until we see if anything further is going to happen."

Megan thought there must be some mistake.

"But do cities fall like this?" she asked. "I have not even heard a shot."

Mrs. Jackson said: "Now I guess Miss Reed will be sorry she did not move out of Chapei."

"Maybe she was right after all and there is no danger."

"We'll see," said Mrs. Jackson.

When Mr. Jackson came in a half-hour later he brought Doctor Strike, whom he had met in the city. They all had a late tiffin together. The windows were open and sunlight poured in with a

spring odor of flowering bulbs in the garden. They could hear the rumble of heavy trucks passing and once firing a long way off. Doctor Strike said:

"When I was on the Bund they were firing on the Pootung side, but you couldn't hear it here."

He was a tall gaunt man almost entirely bald, with a salient jaw and fine large mouth; his pale eyes under bushy brows burned with such intensity that he himself seemed to realize their gaze would be difficult to bear and let them only flicker over those he looked at. As soon as he came into the room Megan felt that here was a man of a totally different caliber from the Jacksons. There was something restless, fluid and molten about him, that one felt even under his quiet voice and rather laboring speech. Megan wondered if it was because he was a great Chinese scholar that he spoke English laboriously, used it as if it were a not too familiar vehicle, hesitating over some words and then bringing them out with a sudden impatience.

After they had talked for a while Megan asked him about his work at the Christian College in the capital of the province of which General Yen Tso-Chong was military governor.

"I was president of the college a great many years," he said, "and certainly they were the best years of my life. It is a lovely city, Miss Davis, a capital of old China, classical China. I wish you might see it. But it is impossible now, every one has cleared out; I don't believe there is a white man there. In my time there were a hundred or so, not counting those of us out at the college. Yes, it was a wonderful time. I had fine young men to work with, the best type of Chinese. Among them was General Yen, not a general then of course, but a brilliant youngster, already a Chinese scholar, and coming from one of the old Mandarin families of the province. I was very attached to him. When he left me he went to Europe for a few years and when he came back I still saw him, but of course not so much. He was interested in politics then and very occupied. He went to Wampoa for some military training. We rather drifted apart, but I always admired him and when he made himself tupan of the province I believed it was the best thing that could have happened. I had confidence in him. I knew there would be certain traditional things

he would do that would be wrong, but I hoped for others, for an increasing number of others, that would be right." Doctor Strike flashed his eyes absently over them all for a moment, then looked down at his plate.

"It is hard to tell when things first began to go wrong," he said, "but it came about slowly and surely. All this political unrest to begin with. Then the General, once the power was in his hands, began to abuse it. He took over all the revenues of the province and gave no accounting for them; he began to train large bodies of troops, troops ha conscripted and paid off by loans from the local chambers of commerce. I say 'loans' but of course they were actually levies never meant to be paid. Then he stopped all the exportation of rice (rice, you know, is one of the chief products of the province), and made large sums out of kumshaw from the smugglers. Why, when I left he had actually collected all the taxes of the province up to 1930! Of course he did a few admirable things too. He kept strict order; he made expenditures on public works. Certainly the roads were never in better condition (he was fond of motoring), and unexpectedly he even endowed a few charities here and there. Well, as I said, all this happened gradually and in the meantime the political situation grew more and more acute. The Cantonese, or Nationalists, as they like to call themselves, were practically at his doors. It was about then he told me he was obliged to put in a Chinese as president of the college. He did not say who obliged him, but I got nothing out of argument except that I might remain, because of his friendliness to me, as adviser to the Board. Then he said the whole foreign staff would have to leave to make way for Chinese instructors, the instructors all men we had educated of course. So they left, but I hung on. The man he had selected for president was a fine fellow, I knew him well, I hoped to work through him, or at least to save our property and all our gear for better days. But the General had no intention of my remaining. He had just sold out to the Nationalists, not from conviction but from pure political expediency. He saw they would win anyway. He felt himself particularly strong, particularly successful. He ordered me to leave. There was no getting around him this time; I had to go. An

armed guard escorted me to the train and we parted," the Doctor smiled bitterly, "with all the flowery speeches you could think of. And since then I have been waiting here to see what happens."

"Well, I'm surprised," said Mrs. Jackson. "I thought the General was always a great admirer of yours." It seemed that Mrs. Jackson was gratified by the General's defection, whether because of a natural satisfaction in some one else's disappointment or because it illustrated some conviction of her own that the Chinese could not be depended upon.

"I don't know," replied Strike. "Certainly I was once an admirer of his."

"Well, what do you suppose caused him to turn on you?"

"Oh, I don't know," Doctor Strike spoke in a low voice, and there was something painful to Megan about the puzzled, stilled look on his face. The General's defection from such a man seemed to her horrible. She wished Mrs. Jackson would leave Doctor Strike alone. But suddenly he lifted his head and flashed a look around at all of them. "It doesn't matter what he thinks about me," he said, "it doesn't matter. I shall never give up hope of him. It is hard to make clear to others on just what we rest some of our convictions. They seem to rest on nothing tangible. Perhaps on instinct. Perhaps they are a truth which we remember, though it was spoken to us when we were unaware. I only know this, I shall never give up hope of the General. I know that there is something fine in him, yes, and even something superfine. It is as though under all the load of falseness his spirit continually cried out to me, 'I'm here, I'm here, come and find me.'" The Doctor stopped abruptly and looked down, both hands clenched beside his plate. As Megan watched him he looked up again, not seeing her, and suddenly his face was touched by a fluttering, strange smile, as if before some more vivid memory of the General he found himself once again charmed and dismayed and hopeful.

"Where is General Yen now?" asked Mr. Jackson. "Mrs. Jackson was reading in the paper that he had come to Shanghai."

Doctor Strike spoke with an effort at casualness:

"Has he? I don't know. He is probably with friends in the Chinese city."

Megan was annoyed with the Jacksons for continuing to talk about what was obviously so poignant a thing to Doctor Strike, but Mr. Jackson insisted:

"He wouldn't have been safe in the Chinese city until to-day. If he came while the Northerners had it he must have come incognito and gone into the Settlement, or into the French Concession. You probably know, Miss Davis, that the French have always kept their Concession separate from the International Settlement here in Shanghai. The paper said he had gone to a Chinese hotel in the French Concession. Maybe he came to try to buy them out here."

"Perhaps," said the Doctor shortly.

They left the table and went back to the front room, where they could see the road outside and the refugees who flowed past now as inevitably as water down-hill. Against their steady stream the big armored trucks loaded with Annamites in mushroom hats lunged their way toward Siccawei. Doctor Strike watched them pass, never taking his eyes from them, as he smoked his pipe by the window. And Megan watched him, wondering how old he was, what his life had been, what his thoughts now could be, and filled at the same time by a complete satisfaction as though she had found something which she had felt all along must exist.

"Do you like the Chinese people, Doctor Strike?" she asked.

He turned quickly and leveled his colorless, brilliant eyes on her.

"But I love them!" he exclaimed. "Who would not? They are perhaps the most tragic people that has ever lived. For hundreds of centuries they have enjoyed the highest plane of living and thinking. I doubt if even the Greeks ever perfected a more entirely civilized being than a Chinese gentleman of the Tangs or of the Sungs, and yet they have so far been permitted to be the victims of what seems the most colossal irony. Like the Greeks they have been permitted to miss persistently the one essential truth."

"You mean the existence of God?"

"Not the existence of God," cried the Doctor violently, "of any god, a god of truth, of justice, of power, of wisdom. No, what would all that mean, but the existence of a God of love?"

His words had such a naked ring that Megan was momentarily abashed, even while she more than ever admired him.

Mrs. Jackson got up with some suggestion of hauteur to go upstairs. She was offended by an enthusiasm which she felt obscurely was a reflection on her own value.

"Well, I don't like them," she said coldly, pausing at the door, "and I've lived among them for years too. But I've done what I could for them, and I guess I've given the best of my life. Mr. Jackson and I did a good work in Shasi."

And she went out.

Mr. Jackson spoke hastily and rather at random but with his habitually good-humored intent.

"I wish we had had a strong central authority in Hupeh like your General Yen. Any strong hand is better than none. We were overrun with bandits and deserters from both armies, and the lawlessness has been such for years that there was practically nothing we could accomplish. And I sometimes think," he added sadly, "that God's work is accomplished better by a celibate, like yourself and, well, like that French priest in Shasi, Father Roget, a great friend of ours. He had a very humorous way about him, big and fat he was, with beard and glasses. The Chinese like that. When we left we tried to get him to come too, but he wouldn't. He was killed finally. Some roughnecks tried to break into his church and when he tried to stop them they killed him. But he was beloved for all that. I would have liked to stay too, but of course I had Mrs. Jackson to think of. You know, we thought for a time we weren't going to be able to make it. We missed the gunboat that was to take all refugees away. We were inland when it came, so when we reached Shasi we had to hide forty-eight hours in a sampan in a crowd of other sampans till luckily the gunboat came back for us." And Mr. Jackson looked affectionately at the spot where his wife had vanished, "Brave little woman," he said very low to himself. Then he pulled out his watch.

"Well, about time to go for Miss Reed now," he said briskly. There seemed to be no doubt now Doctor Strike was here that they would get Miss Reed. "We can put them in the two north rooms," he said.

Megan did not listen to their plans for Miss Reed. She was thinking of Mrs. Jackson waiting in the sampan for the gunboat they did not know was coming back. No matter how vividly she could imagine what Mrs. Jackson ought to have been thinking of in the sampan she felt sure that in reality Mrs. Jackson's thoughts would always be to her incalculable, and, it must be admitted, unimportant.



CHAPTER VI

But when Doctor Strike and Mr. Jackson returned about six o'clock they brought the disquieting news that they had been unable to get into Chapei and to do so it would be necessary to get permits from so many authorities, English, French and Chinese, that they would be obliged to wait till the next morning. All evening they talked about it off and on, and Megan saw it was greatly on their minds, though no one seemed to think the orphanage was in any immediate danger.

The next day was a typical one of the lower Yangtze Valley, an enclosed day of gray, low-hung sky, rather warm. Doctor Strike and Mr. Jackson left the house early. As they did not return or even telephone at noon, Megan after tiffin persuaded Mrs. Jackson to go into town with her. They walked down Nanking Road through dense crowds. It was easy to see that something was hanging over the city; the streets were thronged but the shops were empty, even the drums beating and the screech of mechanical pianos in the cheaper shops could not draw any one from the streets. Rickshaws passed, their air of gliding swiftness an illusion created by the angle of the coolies' bodies, and more coolies carried a heavy piano by on bamboo poles. "He, ho, he, ho," they sang as sweat streamed into their eyes. Megan stopped to watch the skirted Chinese dart through the crowds between crossings. She saw that they never looked at what was coming toward them but only at what had already passed. They were saved by auto horns and shouts of coolies. At one crossing came an old man with a venerable thin beard and a big blue smocked apron swinging from his hips. As the Sikh policeman gave the signal for traffic to swoop down once more upon him he stopped, held up one hand admonishingly and looked about with an air of pained surprise. Then he sneezed twice, and having done so, with dignity moved on. It became difficult to move among so many people.

"Let us go to the Astor for a cup of tea," suggested Megan. She was touched to see by Mrs. Jackson's expression that she considered this casual invitation an occasion of social importance and that in

the crowded lobby she lost her air of assurance and became suddenly a timid, badly dressed woman, but one who is nevertheless enjoying herself. They found a table wedged close to others where they could see through a window the Soviet Consulate across the way and a corner of the Garden Bridge.

It was not five o'clock, yet because of the grayness the lights were on. Three men and a woman sat at the table closest to them. They were leaning forward and talking confidentially, but they had to raise their voices. Their words came over the hum of the tea-drinkers and the clink of crockery, and Megan, hearing them, became gradually aware of their stinging, their fantastic incredibility.

"—spent bullet came into her room, right here. The clerk at the desk just told me."

"Who is she, do I know her?"

"—they say the whole of Chapei is on fire now. You know what those Chinese houses are. It is one fiery furnace."

Mrs. Jackson and Megan looked quickly at each other.

"—Yes, a shambles too. Full of cornered Northern troops, fighting from house to house. They are so desperate they'll probably try to break into the Settlement for safety."

"—But the worst is those Russians. You know, White Russians in Northern pay. They are in an armored car on a siding over by the North Station, they are shelling everything around till their ammunition gives out. They're doomed and they know it. What will happen to them?"

"I hate to think."

Megan leaned toward Mrs. Jackson.

"Do you hear what they say?"

Mrs. Jackson nodded absently.

Megan felt her heart beating faster. She could not drink her tea and wondered how Mrs. Jackson could go on eating large cream cakes and toast with jam. But war was a commonplace to Mrs. Jackson, while tea in a hotel lobby was not.

"Can't they do something about it?" Megan asked.

"Oh, no, that is all Chinese territory."

Megan took out her leather cigarette case and put it back again.

"I see," said Mrs. Jackson, "they are wearing lots of red fox. And it used to be so out of date. Isn't it funny how things always come back?"

And she continued to look around her with a politely furtive greediness at this delightful world which she knew only too well she would shortly have to leave.

"Isn't that Mr. Jackson?" asked Megan.

Mrs. Jackson turned. "Why, so it is."

He was talking to a man who, Mrs. Jackson said, was one of the American consuls. Presently he saw them, nodded absently, and in a moment came over and joined them. His face was very flushed, his eyes looked heavy.

"Doctor Strike is still trying to get his pass," he told them. "He has been trying all afternoon to reach General Hsu at the Nantao Yamen. I don't know with what success. I advised him if that failed to try to get hold of General Yen. You know, the paper said he was somewhere in the French Concession. I have just been trying to get the Orphanage by telephone but can't get it. The whole district is a blaze of fire, it seems."

"Well, you've done all you can. Sit down and have some tea."

"Yes, do have some tea," said Megan.

Mr. Jackson sat down heavily with a sigh. Megan poured him a strong cup and he drank it without saying a word. Then he made an effort to recover his cheerfulness.

"Well, I've always been a little afraid of Miss Reed," he said; "maybe the Cantonese will feel the same way."

"It seems to me I smell smoke," said Megan.

"You probably do. Chapei is not far."

Megan looked out of the window. She could see the patrols on the Garden Bridge, Spanish marines from the *Blas de Lezo*. In the ballroom of the hotel the orchestra was tuning up for the tea dance which began at five.

"Do let us go and walk a little," she said. "If you are not too tired, let us walk toward Chapei."

Mr. Jackson thought they would not get very far, but he got up and Mrs. Jackson reluctantly followed.

They walked along North Szechuen Road. There were so many Chinese on the sidewalks, they had to elbow their way through. The Chinese stood about not moving, not even talking much. There was none of the nervous activity of Nanking Road. They stood looking dully at the passing motorcars, wheelbarrows, rickshaws, loaded with the refugees pouring in from Chapei. Several stretchers passed, carried by coolies. On one a Japanese child in a gaudy kimono lay face downward, joggling helplessly.

"Most of the Japanese live this way," Mr. Jackson called over his shoulder. He walked ahead of them, elbowing his way along. "There must be sniping going on."

A Sikh stopped them and told them by signs that they could go no farther. He held out his arms and made a pantomime of shooting. "Click, click," he said, "plenty shoot." His face crinkled into smiles, his eyes nearly shut, his teeth and tongue showed in the midst of his handsome black beard; his smile was so infectious they could not help smiling with him and liking him. They stood for a moment, feeling friendly but not knowing what to do.

Then the Sikh moved off and they turned up Range Road, a street of red brick houses with small garden plots in front behind brick walls, like a street in an English Midland town or in a London suburb. The street was nearly empty and instead of sky a great cloud of smoke rolled up from behind the roofs. There was an all-pervading acrid smell of charred wood and burning paints and varnish. At the far end was some sort of barricade with a few people standing before it. They walked down toward it, wondering why the street was so empty and hearing every now and then a soft spat on the walls of the opposite side.

Suddenly Megan almost tripped over a bundle that looked as if it might have been dropped from a passing truck, and saw other bundles lying about, gray, the color of the road itself. They were Northern soldiers in gray woolen uniforms. One lay with his head hidden on his arm as if asleep; another, his face turned toward the

sky, was as livid as though a green light had been turned on him, and still another had his arms stretched out in an arrested, a histrionic gesture of abandon. Megan noticed his hands, which were very plump and delicate; they reminded her of the hands of the man in the wrecked car.

Mr. Jackson shook his head over them.

"Poor fellows," he said, "they were trying to get in here to save their skins."

At the barricade a few British soldiers, Durhams, stood by a machine-gun, and just outside, about fifty yards farther on, a hundred or more Northern soldiers sat about on the ground, their arms in a pile in front of them. Like school children they were waiting to be told what to do next. But there was no one to tell them. A few civilians, Japanese and European, had gathered around the barricade, and a good-looking young Jew in riding clothes came up to Mr. Jackson and began to tell him what had happened.

"I came along just here like this and I say to myself, these boys are going to make a rush for it. There were some on the roofs firing into the street,—they are still there, better keep close to the wall. They came in a rush, and they scared the daylights out of me, I'll tell the world." But he moved on, leaving unexplained what a young Jew in riding clothes, without a horse, was doing in that galley.

Mr. Jackson spoke to one of the young Durhams. The cornered Northern troops had tried to break into the Settlement for safety, so they had had to kill about sixteen of them. The rest had thrown down their arms. He himself was nineteen years old and had never been under fire before. His eyes were shining, his voice cracked a little, and when a Japanese wishing to hear pushed too near him, he kicked him violently away, not because he was brutal,—his face was that of a good-tempered child,—but because he was excited into a state bordering on exaltation.

A car came along Range Road and with a sharp scream of brakes stopped at the barricade. It carried a Japanese flag and Japanese Marines on the running-board. A British car followed it. Three British officers, among them General Duncan's Chief-of-Staff, got out and walked through to where the Northern prisoners sat about waiting for something to happen. Fifteen or twenty Sikhs on

horseback trotted along the road, at the end a magnificent one who rode thoughtfully, stroking his gray beard, deep in contemplation of some private matter, neither hurried nor indifferent but as obviously made for war as the Chinese are for peace. An ambulance came with great honking, for the road was becoming crowded. An army doctor and several hospital corpsmen got out and bent over the bodies. Over one who was alive they held a consultation. The Chief-of-Staff came back and gave orders for the road to be cleared. The Durhams began to push people along.

As Megan turned, she saw one of the doctors light a cigarette and put it in the mouth of the Chinese soldier. She held back long enough to be sure that a faint breath of smoke drifted between his colorless lips. She walked along content that at least one of these hunted creatures had escaped, that in the midst of all this defeat she might identify herself with one tangible victory.



CHAPTER VII

When they reached the house it was seven o'clock. The house was cold, for the coolies had let the fires die down, and when Mrs. Jackson fussed about, spurring the boys to activity, she saw that dinner had not even been started.

"What is the matter with these boys!" Mrs. Jackson complained, but she knew what was the matter.

There was no word from Doctor Strike.

Megan went to her room and sat down with a book. She was quite aware that she was becoming overcharged; her hands trembled noticeably as she turned the leaves, and with an instinct for preserving her balance she tried to take her mind as far as possible from China by reading a book that had nothing to do with it. But she could not. She remained abnormally alert to all she had just seen. Finally she left the book open on her lap and deliberately abandoned herself to the barbaric images that filled her mind, letting them riot through as they must, hoping when they had had their will for the power to discipline them into some permanent understanding of them. What she most clearly saw were the young Chinese soldiers tossed like discarded bundles on the road, yet lying in dignity for all that. Only man among animals, she thought, even among those most noble, has any dignity in death; the rest become at once carrion. But Megan had never in her hospital, nor again here, looked at a man just dead without feeling that that which had just left him had been in its essence truly august. The young Chinese soldiers were past help from her, but there remained all of China and it could not be possible that having reached China she should find herself thwarted as at home. That almost desperate irritation which she felt before obstacles began to take hold of her. She dropped her book and walked over to her window, open now on darkness and rain and a few casual lights. She thought of Miss Reed at the beleaguered orphanage in the midst of Chapei. Miss Reed's ultimate desire, she was convinced, was for martyrdom, and apparently she was about to attain it. A desire so capable of definite realization was, she felt sure, rare. Miss Reed was fortunate. And it

came to her with a further irritation how much her own desires still floated unharnessed and goalless, waiting amid a confusion as of voices, beating of wings, sharp flashes, for something they could take hold of and make their own.

Mrs. Jackson called her from below and she ran down-stairs in great haste because haste gave an illusion of direction. But she found it difficult to eat, and Mr. Jackson also sat making scraping sounds with his fork, eating nothing. His face was flushed and his eyes were heavy. Mrs. Jackson, after watching him anxiously during the meal, leaned over and felt his forehead.

"Will," she exclaimed, "you have a fever!" She jumped up and ran to the foot of the stairs, calling her amah to bring down the thermometer.

Mr. Jackson looked apologetically at Megan.

"I got soaked to the skin yesterday and to-day, but I don't feel as if I had a cold at all." But sitting foolishly with the thermometer in his mouth, he admitted to pains in his head and back.

"Does your chest hurt you?" demanded Mrs. Jackson.

He said it did not.

"Well, into bed you go. I am going to rub you with Vick's Salve and give you a hot lemonade and some aspirin. And don't you stir till they burn the roof over our heads. Mr. Jackson had pneumonia two years ago at Shasi," she explained, "and it all came from not doing as I said."

"But, dear, I must stay up till Doctor Strike comes, or at any rate till I have some word from him. He may need me."

"When he comes I'll send him right up to you. But there won't be a thing you can do, Will. The Doctor is never going to get a permit from that man."

"No, I'm afraid not," Mr. Jackson admitted sadly, and he suffered himself to be led up to bed.

Megan and Mrs. Jackson sat up a while. Several times the telephone rang and Megan always ran to answer it herself. But it always proved to be a Chinese who had got the wrong number. Even the exchange was worse than usual that night. Doctor Strike did not come. Finally they went to bed.

Megan lay in bed knowing she would never be able to sleep. The rain had stopped but moisture dripped off the eaves of the house and it grew gradually colder so that she pulled a blanket over her. Suddenly she heard what she knew to be firing. It came from somewhere the other side of the International Settlement and it sounded like a stick drawn rapidly along a picket fence. Megan got up and ran to the window, but aside from the red glow in the direction of Chapei there was nothing to be seen. The firing went on but came no nearer. Then it stopped. Megan went back to bed. She began to count sheep as her father had made her do as a child. Sometimes when she had been sick or frightened he would sit by her bed and count them for her. She made herself think of her father. Then of Bob. Bob was as near to China as she would let herself think. It was easier to picture Bob's fulfillment than her own. She saw Bob's life as one long integrity in the midst of grossly multiplied odds. She saw too, with some confusion of feeling, his blue eyes. Dear Bob. And she did not know she had gone to sleep until a bell jangled immoderately somewhere in the midst of her unconsciousness. Before she knew what she was doing she had jumped up and turned on the light. Her traveling clock said three-thirty. The bell rang again and she heard one of the boys scuffling to the door. As she dressed she heard the door open and Doctor Strike's voice in the hall. Then she heard the voices of the Jacksons. But while she listened there were no sounds that might be Miss Reed and her orphans.

When she got down-stairs she found Doctor Strike and the Jacksons in the living-room before the fireplace, where the sleepy coolie was laying a fresh fire. Mrs. Jackson wore one of Mr. Jackson's overcoats, Mr. Jackson was wrapped in a blanket, Doctor Strike was hanging his wet overcoat on a chair. His face was hollower under the eyes and quite white, but he did not suggest fatigue; on the contrary he seemed to restrain, as ever, a restless, burning vitality.

"Good evening, Miss Davis," he said as she came in. "Or probably it is good morning."

"Yes, it is three-thirty. No Miss Reed?"

"Not yet," he answered. He sat down with them and began to rub his strong bony hands together. "Pretty cold," he said briskly. "I wonder if I could have some coffee. I have not eaten anything since noon."

"I'll get you some," said Mrs. Jackson, "and you'd better have some sandwiches too."

She went out and Megan sat waiting for Doctor Strike to tell them what had happened. The room had a strange look, seen in a startled awakening from sleep, as though what was most familiar in it was only a replica in a changed substance. She let her eyes linger on the plush carpet, the pictures of dogs in lace caps and toppers, the flannel collar sticking up from Mr. Jackson's blanket, the coolie making the fire, whose bristling head some disease had turned bald in patches, all of which assured her that she was awake in a world of things that remain permanent.

"It is cold driving," said the Doctor, still rubbing his hands together.

"Have you an open car?" asked Mr. Jackson.

"Yes, all I could get. It was the only kind they would send with a Chinese license, and they were reluctant enough to give me that."

"Then you got your permit, did you?"

"Yes, finally." And though he did not yet say so, Megan felt sure by the sudden flare in his eyes that he had got it from General Yen. "I spent some time at the Consulate, as you know, and a great deal more time trying to get in touch with the Nantao Yamen. I tried through every Chinese of influence I know in Shanghai. Our authorities were trying to arrange an armistice between the Cantonese and the Northern troops cornered in various sections around the North Station, and General Duncan sent one of his officers who went with a Commissioner and some Chinese to the Nantao Yamen to see what could be done about it. I asked them to speak at the same time about the orphanage. But all the negotiations fell through and on their way back from the Yamen they were nearly killed by a mob. They only escaped because General Hsu, questioning the guard he had sent with them, found they had not been escorted all the way to the Settlement. So he sent

after them, and they were barely reached in time to save them from the mob. Not too reassuring, is it? Remember, these were some of our highest officials under a flag of truce. Well, well,—at any rate this got me nowhere and it was already late. Earlier in the day a Chinese I knew had mentioned that General Yen was staying in a house on the Route Ghisi, and I determined as my last resort to try to reach him. After all," he said, "we had been friends."

Mrs. Jackson came back and sat down.

"The sandwiches and coffee are coming," she said. "So you saw General Yen again? What did he do?"

"I went to the house in the Route Ghisi but a very insolent boy coming to the door told me he wasn't in. 'When will he be in?' I asked. He said he didn't know, so I pushed in past him and said I'd wait. I sat in a dark hall. The house seemed truly deserted by its masters; no one came in or out and I could hear behind a heavy door at the end of the hall the muffled voices and laughter of the servants. Every now and then I'd call the number one and question him as to the whereabouts of General Yen, but he would not tell me anything. I waited there from nine to eleven. Finally the number one came and asked me for five dollars. I gave it to him and he said General Yen was attending a banquet being given for him by friends at the Great Eastern Hotel.

"I went there but when I spoke to the clerk he told me the General was not in the hotel. So I went over the hotel myself from floor to floor, till I heard sounds from a room that made me feel a party was going on inside. I pushed open the door in spite of all the room boys on that floor who had gathered to protest against it. Well, he was there. It was already late and the party had been going on a long time. The General was quite drunk, drunker than I have ever seen him. But he knew me at once. He insisted I sit down beside him and join in the festivities, he offered me food and champagne,—yes, he prefers champagne to samshu,—and he presented me to all and sundry as his old and honored friend. Of course I took nothing, and every time I tried to speak to him about the safe-conduct pass I wanted from him he would only answer by offering me champagne, or he would recite amorous verses, some of which he said he had written himself, and his friends would all laugh and the singsong

girls would set up a din. It was very difficult. I began, I am afraid, to get angry. At one moment I had an impulse to pull everything off the table and throw chairs at each member of the party. I sat there sufficiently silent and stiff one would imagine to cast a damper on them. And perhaps I did, for suddenly the General grew silent too. He sat and looked at the ceiling, a way he has when he is thinking, and I began to pray that I might be given the power to touch the good that is in him, that I know is in him. My prayer must have been answered. After a little time he reached over for a sort of menu card that lay by his place and called for some one to bring him a brush and ink. 'What is this you are asking me for?' he said."

Doctor Strike took a soiled piece of stiff paper out of his pocket and handed it around for them to see. He smiled at Megan, the smile she found so charming, for it was always a little tremulous and uncertain in the midst of his firm, lined face. He put the paper back again.

"What time is it now?" he said.

Megan looked at her wrist-watch.

"Quarter to four."

"I don't want to cut too close on time. If I can have that coffee I'll get right along."

"You aren't going there now, are you?" asked Mrs. Jackson, and without waiting to hear his answer she went out to hurry the preparations.

"I must leave as soon as I can," said Doctor Strike. "You see, it is like this. I did not feel myself that a safe-conduct pass alone in times like this would be much of a help. I spoke of this to the General, asking him if he couldn't let me have one or two of his men as a body-guard. He hesitated about this, said he was leaving himself on a special train at six o'clock from the North Station and would have to take all his guard with him. I told him the orphanage was so near the station I could get my friends out and have his guard back by six o'clock. He said his guard were already at the station and unless I could get that far there was no way he knew of to communicate with them. 'Then give me an order to them,' I said, 'I'll pick them up there.' He still hesitated, and then a peculiar thing happened. There

was a young woman with him, one of his concubines, I suppose. While I was talking I saw her looking at me in an interested way, and at last she leaned over and spoke to the General in a low voice. I could not hear what she said but finally she said to me, in excellent English too, 'Doctor Strike, the General will do what you ask.' I believe she had something to do with persuading him. Before I left I managed to have a few words with her. I thanked her. She told me, here is the remarkable part, that she was educated in the Presbyterian Mission School in Soochow. I was in Soochow, you know, for years and she said she knew me as soon as I came into the room."

"Extraordinary. It seems like a real providence working out," exclaimed Mr. Jackson.

"But how does a Mission-reared girl become the concubine of a general?" asked Megan.

"I don't know. It distressed me. I must try to learn more about her."

Mrs. Jackson and the number one boy returned with coffee and sandwiches, and the Doctor began to eat and drink hungrily.

"There is one thing that worries me now," he said, "and that is my driver. He has a Chinese license but I know he will balk at going into Chinese territory. I have a short distance to go between the barricade at Range Road and the North Station, but anything may happen in it. And further, there is the possibility of my not making contact with the guard. He may give me trouble or at the least desert. I think two of us, Jackson, would be better than one."

Mr. Jackson's face showed utter misery and humiliation.

"He cannot possibly go," cried Mrs. Jackson. "He has a temperature of one hundred and two. He oughtn't to be up here now. You know he almost died of pneumonia two years ago."

"Oh, I think I can manage it," said Mr. Jackson.

"No, no," cried the Doctor emphatically, "don't think of it. It is cold outside and raining, it would be suicide."

"Let me come," said Megan, "I can drive a car. I would be able to do that while you do whatever else is necessary."

Every one turned to look at her and Megan felt her face flush. Her words had come without her mind having consciously prompted them or her will consenting, but now that they were spoken they suddenly crystallized into her intention.

"You say you can drive a car," asked the Doctor, "a Ford?"

"Yes."

His eyes turned a current into her so that all her weaknesses seemed to jangle out audibly like electric bells. But she bore his scrutiny as well as she could and after all, she thought, perhaps the keenness of his vision is inward, not for what is about him. Some instinct even told her that he was often blinded by the reflections of his own qualities and that the last thing to surprise him in another would be courage. Of Mrs. Jackson however she was more afraid. But when she glanced at her Mrs. Jackson was not looking at her, and it was Mr. Jackson who uttered a protest.

"But Miss Davis, I don't believe you realize the possibilities. Remember, I feel a great responsibility for you."

"I really insist on going," said Megan, "if Doctor Strike thinks I can be of any help." She spoke so emphatically that her voice sounded disagreeable, and Mr. Jackson sank back in his chair looking quite ill and sadly worrying the end of his mustache.

"Have some sandwiches and coffee then," said Mrs. Jackson; "you ate no dinner, I noticed."

It seemed to be settled, though Doctor Strike, had not yet definitely accepted her. Megan ate some sandwiches and drank heartily a cup of coffee to demonstrate that she was not at all nervous.

"I don't believe we'll have any trouble," said the Doctor. "I have a permit from General Duncan for the Settlement and one from the French Commandant of the Defense for the Concession. We can only of course go through the Concessions. That leaves us a minimum of Chinese territory to cross between Range Road and the North Station, only several hundred yards as I remember it, and from there on we have the guard of General Yen."

He said the last words with a smile; he was happy, Megan saw, actively happy and even a little triumphant.

"What time is it?" he asked again.

"Four o'clock."

"Then if you will get a warm coat, Miss Davis, we had better be starting."

Megan ran up-stairs and returned with a coat.

Outside in the thin rain stood a Ford car, the curtains down and a Chinese driver huddled at the wheel. He did not even look at them and Megan was sure the Doctor was right in believing he could not be depended on; he was sullen or frightened or both. The Doctor got in beside him and Megan got in the back. The driver climbed slowly out and cranked. Mrs. Jackson stood by the car talking to Megan:

"You had better button up your collar," she said, "these nights are raw and you don't look too strong. You'll be in luck if you don't catch your death of cold." And she added with an unexpected satisfaction, "Miss Reed will certainly be surprised when the Doctor turns up with a lady."

The car jerked forward before Megan could answer.



CHAPTER VIII

They entered the Concession at the Avenue Joffre and drove down it at tremendous speed. At this hour it was empty of people, and seen in the half-darkness and misty rain, it looked like any street in an American suburb except that at the corner under the lights stood the motionless Annamites in their peaked hats, as sinisterly irrelevant as if they were part of a bad dream. They turned into the winding Avenue Foch, which marked the boundary between the French Concession and the International Settlement. At the Bund they showed their passes, a green laissez-passer from the French Commandant of the Defense and a slip of typed paper from the Shanghai Defense Force, and entered the International Settlement. They passed along the Bund under the staring eyes of the war-ships and crossed Soochow Creek at the Garden Bridge, where they again showed their passes to Marines from the *Blas de Lezo*. They turned left along the creek, up North Szechuen Road and into Range Road. It became a longer ride than Megan had expected.

Once or twice Doctor Strike leaned back and said a few words, but it was so obviously to give the illusion of a casual ride that she did not bother to play up to it. She was too intensely preoccupied. The sudden opening of a channel for her energy and will made her a little giddy. And this giddiness, this feeling of an uncontrollably quickening rhythm, mounted alarmingly. Megan tried to put a check on it by holding up for examination each fragment of sensation as it passed. But everything remained as blurred as it had been before. She was only sure of that released energy flowing strongly and now so inevitably forward. This release gave an amazing sense of freedom, for a moment too vertiginous a freedom. The exquisite poise of free will in the midst of the ordered progress of the will of God seemed to have been jarred, suddenly to vary wildly. Megan jerked it sharply back.

She sat staring at the back of Doctor Strike's head. He wore no hat and his great bony skull was flanked by two prominent ears. His ears were vaguely and irritatingly amusing. That was because they were so obviously a vulnerable mechanism. What a long way from

the flawless intrepidity of the Doctor's spirit to the imperfection of those ears. It is with instruments such as these that we go armed. Megan was overcome by their inadequacy, she found them lamentable and all at once heroic, as though they stood for all of our weakness, for our glory.

The car reached the Range Road barricade where they had been a few hours before. It stopped and Megan admitted she was now thoroughly afraid. Perhaps she had been so ever since arriving in China. But in naming fear it seemed to lose some of its importance. It took its place among such things as heat, cold, hunger and stomach-ache, one of the lower, more elemental ills. Her teeth chattered and she felt a definite cramp. As she put up her hand to tighten the collar of her coat she was relieved to find her fingers articulating.

Doctor Strike leaned out and presented their passes to the sergeant and she heard him explain what their errand was. The sergeant was sympathetic.

"I'd like to go along, sir," he said wistfully. He put his head inside the car to look at Megan. "Good evening, miss," he said.

"Good evening," said Megan.

They drove slowly on. It was a dark street sewn with barbed wire, and because Megan knew it to be a sort of No Man's Land between both territories its very emptiness was a menace. She smelled smoke again. The roofs of the houses ahead blackened against a dull glow. They made a swing to the right and stopped before another barricade. It was guarded by Chinese soldiers. As the Doctor showed his pass, Megan saw ahead, across an open space, the whitish lights of the North Station, and beyond, a confusion of black lines traced against the heavy smoke of half-quenched fires. She saw directly at her left a yellow wall with a large advertisement, partly in English, partly in Chinese characters, "Ruby Queen Cigarettes," and below, a small white sign "Boundary Road." They passed through and along Boundary Road toward the station. They drove very slowly, and as they crossed the open space between two barbed-wire entanglements the Doctor leaned out, peering ahead for signs of the promised guard. The enclosure of the station, surrounded by a high iron fence, was crowded with troops standing about under the arc

lights. On the ground lay row after row of men in gray uniforms, roughly laid out, filling all the available space. Megan did not know whether they were dead or had dropped there in exhaustion. The car stopped by a gate and she heard the Doctor speaking to a soldier standing there. They appeared to be having an argument and the car, while they talked, punctuated their words with its senseless rattling and chugging. Then the Doctor turned his head a little toward her and said:

"The guard is not here."

She saw his face was rigid but not with fear or even anxiety. It struck her that the General had failed him again.

"Really?" she said.

He would not even look at her; with his eyes on the ground, he said: "Yes, but I think we had better go on anyway. Are you willing?"

"Certainly."

Suddenly the engine stopped. The driver began to shout excitedly at the Doctor, he flung out his hands, addressing every one, especially the soldiers crowded around the station gate, then he jumped out of the car.

"Well, I expected this," said the Doctor. He got out after the driver and Megan closed her eyes, her mind going blank for a moment at the idea that the Doctor would be dragged off and she left alone in the car. Fear is a concentration so intense that of necessity it occasionally snaps into moments of unconsciousness. The Doctor cranked the car and when he climbed in again Megan felt such relief that she broke into a light sweat. They drove on, leaving the driver and the crowd at the gate. They passed on the right the smoldering ruins of godowns and station sheds, then turned abruptly to the left across the car tracks and down a narrow street.

"I think this is the place," said the Doctor.

They were in a close, dark street of shops with overhanging galleries. After the fire-wasted section they had left behind them it was strangely intact. It seemed safe. The shops were shuttered and closed, no light showed in the houses, and it was dark except for a low glow reflected from the fires behind them which occasionally intensified into a momentary brilliance and died again. Farther

along it became quite dark. They went slowly because of the rough, cobbled road. Ahead they saw a light shining from a flat, bland surface set in the midst of the tortuous curves of Chinese buildings. It was an oil lamp burning over a doorway and just beneath it was a slab of white stone with the words "Saint Andrew's Orphanage." There was something very bald and innocent about these words but the brick orphanage was dark and apparently deserted; the windows made a thin glimmer like new ice over dark water, and Megan saw that some of them had been broken and were starred with long cracks like broken ice. Across from the orphanage was some sort of eating-house with one narrow door open. There was a dim light inside and when the car stopped Megan heard Chinese voices and smelled the rancid odor of Chinese cooking oil.

"Here we are," said the Doctor and climbed out.

Megan got out and as her feet touched the ground, as she saw that she was able to respond to the necessity of moving, her fear suddenly, perceptibly lightened. It passed like pain, leaving her weak-kneed but with a calm that can come sometimes from exhaustion. She looked up at the white slab set over the door and the words graven on it. A thin rain began to fall in slanting lines across the light of the oil lamp and but for that light she would have believed the orphanage to have been long abandoned. Not a sound came from it. As they moved toward the steps a soldier suddenly stepped into the radius of light. He wore a dirty gray uniform and had a fat face pitted with smallpox which had blinded one eye. He was followed by several soldiers who came out of the door of the eating-house and two or three other men in nondescript clothes only a little better than a coolie's. The Doctor fumbled in his pockets for his pass and spoke to the first soldier in a voice which because of its totally unexpected hail-fellow joviality struck Megan as a little shocking. He was making, she was sure, some jest about his inability to find anything, and the very falseness of his air of good-fellowship told her their attempt had become desperate. The failure of the guard to be at the station had weighed down the danger side of the scale and what might be behind the walls of the orphanage held the other side in uncertainty. She stood quietly holding her collar across her mouth while the Doctor produced all his passes, Chinese,

French and English. The group pressed closer around them, close enough to brush her shoulder. They seemed profoundly stupid but obstinately insistent on being in on whatever was to happen.

"Why don't they go on?" thought Megan. "Can they possibly care what we do!" And their motives, so impossible to clarify, represented still another element in their present problem. But the most important was the dark and apparently deserted orphanage.

Megan dropped her eyes to the ground; she could not bear to look at the Chinese, nor at the Doctor who was flourishing his passes under the eyes of the sullen soldier, joking and even laughing in his unnaturally cheery voice. She could not bear to take part in his humiliation; she was ashamed at even, feeling it to be humiliating. It was courage of a sort for which she was too petty.

Suddenly Doctor Strike changed his tactics.

"Well, well," he said abruptly but still jovially, "we will just have a knock at the door and see who is in."

He caught Megan's arm and pushed her ahead of him up the five steps to the door. He rapped on it with his fist and called not loudly but with sharp insistence, "Miss Reed! Miss Reed!"

Not a sound came from behind the door. They stood directly under the oil lamp. In its shadow, and from the slight vantage of the five steps, Megan, watching the upturned faces of the group below, saw in them some indefinable change as if the Doctor's movement had stirred in them a necessity for action. She knew she and the Doctor would never be allowed to come down the steps, get into their car and drive off,—not without some other event, perhaps a mere trifle, coming to change the course of the accumulating determination of the group. The Doctor knew this too, but he only stood looking down at them with an expression of intense thoughtfulness.

"I don't think there is any one inside; they must be gone," murmured Megan.

The Doctor did not answer.

"Maybe they are dead," added Megan.

The Doctor shook his head. He rapped on the door once more, and raised his voice to a shout, "Miss Reed! Miss Reed!"

Suddenly the door opened before them. They stepped inside and it was closed behind them with a firm and reassuring bang.

They stood in complete blackness in which Megan heard heavy breathing and felt the nearness of human bodies.

"Just a moment," a whisper sounded close to her ear. There was the scratch of a match and a nimbus of yellow light appeared on the dark in which, as in a fluid, was caught the small, lined face of a woman with large pale eyes. It was the redoubtable Miss Reed, who would not take any advice and whose obstinacy had brought them all to this predicament. She held a candle in her hand. Behind her stood another woman, a sturdy, sandy-haired girl, stout and asthmatic. It was she whose breathing Megan had heard. Miss Reed looked at them a moment and then exclaimed in a singularly sweet, low voice:

"Oh, Doctor Strike, is this really you? How like you to come, how like you!"

The Doctor nodded and said brusquely: "I have Miss Davis with me."

His air of good-fellowship had vanished, he looked sterner than Megan had ever seen him.

Miss Reed smiled gently at Megan and said, turning to her companion:

"This is Miss Minton. I am sorry we have no lights, but we didn't want to provide a target and besides the electricity is cut off. We have been staying in the back of the house. That is why we didn't open the first time you called. We came as soon as we could." She apologized as if she had said, "The butter is not so fresh to-day."

"Are you all here?" asked the Doctor.

"Only Miss Minton and myself and five Russian children. The rest were all taken away by Chinese friends. I couldn't find refuge for the others so I stayed with them, and Miss Minton very generously preferred to stay with me."

The stout girl, breathing heavily, nodded in corroboration of this.

"Won't you come into the parlor? It opens into the court, we'll be more comfortable there."

"No, I think not," said Doctor Strike. "'You had better get the children together and come with me at once. I think any delay at all would be the worst thing possible. I have a car outside."

"I don't believe, Doctor," said Miss Reed hesitatingly, "that we will be allowed out. You'll find there is a guard there, supposedly to protect us but actually to keep us in. I tried several times to-day but wasn't allowed to pass."

"I saw your guard. It came out of an eating-house across the way as we drove up. There are a few others with them. But it is our only chance just the same. I must try to jolly our way through. You know a whole mob of Chinese has been known to turn if you can only give them something to laugh about."

"Yes, but——"

At that moment a noise from the street made them all start, a commonplace noise but nothing could have been more ominous. It was the Ford engine. The doctor swung around and for a moment wrestled with the double latch of the door. Miss Reed blew out the candle. After an infinitesimal delay the Doctor got the door open. It framed a square of dimly lighted street, in which the Ford was just starting amid the group of Chinese who scattered a little to let it pass. When it had gone they all with one accord turned toward the open doorway and Megan saw on every face one sudden grotesque disturbance of line, while a wave of sound broke from them, terrifying in its simplicity, like the laughter of children tormenting a cat. Doctor Strike slammed the door and once more they stood in darkness.

Megan said to herself that at any rate they had given the Chinese something to laugh about.



CHAPTER IX

They stood for a moment without moving and Megan heard the heavy breathing of Miss Minton, punctuated by one long sigh of resignation from Miss Reed. Then a match scratched once more and Miss Reed's candle was relighted.

"Who could have taken it?" she asked.

"My driver," said the Doctor bitterly. "He must have followed us. I should have counted on that possibility. I should never have left the car."

"But what else could you have done?" cried Megan, anxious to reassure him.

"You could have come to the door. I should have stayed in the car."

He dropped his head forward between his shoulders for a moment, like a man overcome by exhaustion.

"Well," said Miss Reed, "we may as well go to the parlor now."

They followed her down the hall and through a door into a room where on a center table burned an oil lamp with a green shade. It was a room bare of rugs, with a few pieces of blackwood furniture made by native carpenters; on the walls were some of Hoffman's religious pictures; a quantity of mats and doilies of cross-stitch and filet hung over tables and chairs, and on the top of an harmonium there were vases of paper flowers, like the needlework probably the work of the orphans. In one corner stood a splendid old Korean chest, looking almost abashed to be keeping such company.

They sat down about the center table in silence. It was cold so Megan kept on her coat. She said nothing, she was absorbed in the wonder of having been so calm, of still feeling calm. Miss Reed picked up a pencil and began to follow with invisible lines the pattern of the cover. Her finger-nails were quite blue with cold. She was watching her pencil, her rather prominent pale eyes cast down; her colorless lashes, unusually long, absurdly suggested under the light the feathery antennae of an insect. Megan began to take an interest in her. She looked at her more closely and at the Doctor.

She guessed that between Miss Reed and the Doctor there was an antagonism of some sort, perhaps of long standing. From the look of his set face it might be even active dislike. He sat with his arms folded across his chest and in the light of the oil lamp his head was reduced to its essential structure, almost skull-like, but it no longer suggested weakness to Megan. It was the same head only now its bareness was formidable.

"What has been happening to you here?" he asked. "And why have you been so unwilling to leave?"

Miss Reed might easily have felt that some reproach was due her but apparently she did not. She answered in her sweet, gentle voice:

"I believe up until yesterday we were quite safe. I have been through a great deal in my time. I was in Senchow in 1903, my first year in China. I was only eighteen then. You couldn't expect me to seek shelter at the first alarm. But yesterday things grew suddenly worse. Shells fell from somewhere very near, my amah said from a car on a siding by the North Station. One of them wrecked the servants' quarters across the court, but no one was hurt, fortunately. I could tell that areas near us were on fire. There has been a tremendous amount of smoke. And there was plenty of street fighting all afternoon. But by that time we had abandoned the front of the house because about noon an unfriendly crowd gathered outside and broke the windows with stones. Once some one set fire to our buildings in the back here, but we managed to put it out, with God's help. To my surprise a guard was appointed by some one to protect the property. I don't know by whom. They spend most of their time in the eating-house across the street and they did not help us a bit when the crowd gathered. But when I try to go out they always stop me. All yesterday afternoon I sent my amah out with the children, one by one, to the houses of various Christian Chinese, who I knew would take care of them. But the little Russians I had no place for, and besides, the amah never came back after the last trip. So there are only the five Russians, Miss Minton and I here. Miss Soames, you know, is in the Shanghai General, she was taken ill over a week ago."

"Why do you suppose a crowd gathered, just general animosity or something special?"

"Rather special, I am afraid. A child was run over by a truck in front of the house about a week ago. We took him in here and gave him first aid but he died shortly after, and the parents came and made a terrible to-do, blaming us for his death. He was an only son and the father is a foreman in one of the Naigai cotton mills, a prominent labor leader, rather important in this district. Of course we've always had a great deal of antagonism from the people here, but I think the incident would account for the crowd. I believe if it had not been for our little guard and the fact that there were so many snipers about in the streets and on the house-tops they might have—well, they might have done nearly anything to us."

She sighed resignedly and dropped her eyes again so that her lashes hung antennæ-like against the light. Miss Minton, whose heavy face and rather congested eyes had been turned toward her while she spoke, now looked anxiously to Doctor Strike to see what the effect was on him. But he made no comment, he was not looking at any of them, and Megan felt that he was trying over in his mind the various possibilities left open to them. She wondered what they would do now. The little back parlor suggested to her vaguely a room where she had gone to Sunday-school as a child, and it seemed, by association of ideas, safe. But she was afraid to dwell on ideas of safety and security lest they should weaken her. She stared at a cross-stitch camel embroidered on the table cover and turned her thoughts to schoolboy stories of journeys across the Gobi and wild Mongol raids.

"How long would it take you to get the children ready?" asked the Doctor.

"They are in the next room," said Miss Reed, "sleeping in their clothes."

"Then you had better wake them up and we will start at once."

Miss Minton looked hastily from the Doctor back to Miss Reed and she began to breathe asthmatically again.

"Why, Doctor," exclaimed Miss Reed softly, "you don't think of our starting out now on foot, do you?"

Miss Minton looked around with an expression almost of triumph, as if Miss Reed's obstinacy were a source of satisfaction and even pride to her.

"I certainly do. I insist on it. We are actually only a short distance from Range Road. The streets are as empty now as they ever will be. In one hour, in half an hour, they will begin to fill again. It is unfortunate that the guard promised me did not come and still more unfortunate I lost the car, but you cannot stay here."

Miss Reed, who had been assiduously making designs on the table cover with her pencil, lifted her eyes to Doctor Strike, and Megan was startled to observe under the long pale lashes the fixed idolatrous gaze of a schoolgirl.

"I don't feel it would be wise to leave," she said gently. "I feel if we stay here with our guard we are comparatively safe, but if we start out, even if we are allowed to leave the house, we will be attacked before we reach the barricade."

Doctor Strike let his quicksilver eyes flicker angrily over her for a moment.

"I don't understand you," he cried. "Do you really suppose Miss Davis and I came here to shut ourselves up in your orphanage, where the best we can hope for is to cower under cover until some one else comes to take us out?"

"I am sorry about Miss Davis. I did not ask any of you to come, though I appreciate your devotion in doing so. But I am responsible to God for the safety of these children and Miss Minton. I don't feel it would be wise to expose them in the streets now."

"You prefer to keep them here and be burned out, hit by a shell, or butchered by the mob?"

"I don't believe we would even be allowed to leave."

"I have a pass from General Yen. I have got by on it so far. If I can get you out, will you come?"

"No," said Miss Reed. "I don't think it would be wise."

The Doctor turned from them and slumped forward in his chair till his long legs stretched straight in front of him. He folded his arms across his chest and stared at the floor. He looked as if he were

going to sleep, worn out by discouragement. Miss Reed added little flourishes to her invisible designs, and Miss Minton breathed out an explosive, "Well!"

Megan said, "I think you ought to reconsider, Miss Reed. The Doctor has been working for days to get you safely out. I think you ought to do as he says."

"You must really let me use my own judgment," replied Miss Reed, but she did not look at Megan, only at the Doctor, and Megan saw she drew a positive intoxication from this opposition of their wills. She felt as if it were a taut cord between them which, as soon as Miss Reed gave in, would snap and leave them separated once more.

"Horrible woman," she said to herself. "If Mrs. Jackson were here she would know what to say to her. One commonplace word from her would shatter the spell." For she knew it was useless to talk to her of sacrifice and death and torture. She had already accepted these possibilities with complacency. Exasperation with Miss Reed began to take possession of her. She looked at her watch and saw it was after five o'clock. In a short time, she was not sure how short, it would be daylight. She looked at the Doctor. His head sunk between his shoulders was the head of a sick old bird of prey.

Perhaps he felt he had undergone enough humiliation even for the sake of saving their lives. As she looked at him, he came to a decision. His head jerked up from his chest; he said shortly:

"You are probably right. I believe after all you are safer here."

"Yes, that is what I think." Miss Reed drew in a deep breath and laid down her pencil. "I feel sure I am right."

The Doctor got up and took out his watch.

"I forgot this doesn't run," he said, "it hasn't for the last week, but I don't seem to remember to have it fixed. What time is it, Miss Davis?"

"Five ten."

"Well, shall we once more brave the dangers of Chapei?" He spoke again with his air of using English laboriously. "Unless, like Miss Reed, you prefer the safety of the orphanage. How about that?

I don't like to ask you to take a chance that she is not willing to take."

"Oh, I'm willing."

"Good," he said cheerfully. "I am proud of you!"

Megan buttoned up her coat. The Doctor had taken his off and it hung over the back of his chair. As he lifted it to put it on, Miss Reed ran around the table and held it for him.

"Thank you, thank you," he said.

There was no trace of irritation in his face. Looking at Miss Reed Megan saw in her eyes an empty look as if one feeling had evaporated too quickly for another immediately to take its place.

They stood about the table for a moment. Then Miss Reed crossed over to one of the windows and opened it. She stood there listening. Megan heard the rain falling more heavily now, spattering off the eaves, on to the sill, on to the tiles of the courtyard, a deliciously relaxing sound, a sound of abandonment, of dissolution. They all listened. Then a sudden crackle of rifle-shots burst through, stamped against the monotones of night, silence, and rain like rockets on a dark sky. Megan was vividly conscious once more of the terrors of the outside, terrors beyond this veil of rain streaming over them like a protective insulation. The thought of safety became suddenly so sweet that her mind clung to it for a moment with a piercing delight. Then she thought of how a few hours before she had lain in her bed and envied the workers at the orphanage, and a forced, heavily articulated courage crept over her. She heard without surprise Miss Reed's voice:

"Perhaps it might be better to make a run for it. If you can wait a moment I'll get the children ready."

Miss Reed hurried into the next room followed by Miss Minton. The Doctor sat down again and closed his eyes. Megan sat down opposite him. He said nothing, and Megan could see in his face no sign of anger or triumph. She wondered if he had ever been aware of the curious adoration, forced into an unwilling antagonism, which Miss Reed so clearly felt for him. Poor Miss Reed! She did not

believe he did. His skull-like face with closed, hollowed eyes was empty now of all feeling, only his lips moved slightly as if he were praying.

Very shortly the two women returned with five small children wrapped in coats and shawls, huddling together and staring at the light like little blinded animals. One little girl was crying, but Miss Minton very expertly wound her woolen scarf across her mouth so that her sobs were muffled and she might use her scarf, if she wished, for a handkerchief. Miss Reed and Miss Minton carried two old suitcases and wore very worn coats of leopard cat and no hats. Miss Reed's small face framed with short hair, in spite of its many lines, looked strangely childish above the frayed fur collar, especially as Megan saw on it the adolescent look of adoration which had become now faintly idiotic. She walked to Doctor Strike and laid her hand on his arm.

"We are in your hands now, Doctor," she said.

But the Doctor made no reply. He took her bag abruptly from her, snatched Miss Minton's and stalked out of the parlor. Miss Minton and Miss Reed gathered a child with each hand and followed. Megan came last with the smallest, she who had been crying.



CHAPTER X

At the street door they stopped for a moment and listened. No sound came from the street, but they heard once more at a little distance the crackle of rifle fire. The Doctor seemed satisfied. He opened the door slowly, then suddenly swung it wide. The street was empty, the eating-house across the way shuttered and closed, the dim light over their own door shone only on rain spattering in puddles on the rough road.

"We are fortunate," said the Doctor. "Now keep close together but don't walk too fast."

They closed the door carefully and noiselessly behind them. They stood still while the Doctor looked cautiously up and down the street, but still they saw nothing and heard only the vast, diffused sound of rain.

"It seems almost too good to be true," he murmured.

They started slowly down and quite suddenly Miss Minton slipped on the wet step and fell thudding her whole length to the sidewalk. She fell without a word, as completely as though she carried out a rehearsed part, and lay there with her head turned from them. They looked at her, unwilling to believe she had actually fallen. Doctor Strike stepped down and picked her up. He held her for a moment, and her eyes were congested, astonished, her mouth half open.

"I've hurt my ankle," she said hoarsely.

The smallest child began to cry once more, and Miss Minton was not able as before to muffle her sobs.

They stood and looked at Miss Minton, even Doctor Strike looked at her for a moment, as though she had deliberately betrayed them and they were aghast at her duplicity. The smallest child went on sobbing.

"Hush, darling, do hush," whispered Megan. She wiped its streaming eyes and nose with her handkerchief.

"Oh, I've hurt my ankle!" Miss Minton's voice had become a groan of anguish.

The Doctor bent and examined it while Miss Reed held her up.

"It isn't broken," he said. "You will just have to walk on it somehow. I'll help you."

They redistributed the children and the baggage, the Doctor put his arm under Miss Minton's arms.

"Try now," he insisted. "You've got to do it." She limped forward, her breath coming in explosive groans at every step. The youngest child began to cry more loudly.

"Hush, darling," said Megan and, when she did not stop, shook her slightly. "You really must hush," she said sharply.

They moved along the street with the slowness of a nightmare. But Megan knew they must reach the barricade, because there were always certain things that God would never permit and the slaughter of these children was one of them. They would certainly reach the barricade. The street was so cold, so dark, touched only by flickerings of distant fires, that it was impossible to imagine it as ever made aware of the infinitely remote warmth and beauty of the sun. Megan felt that she might be crawling over some dead planet, strayed outside the universe, moving blindly and remotely toward no possible end. And yet the barricade was only a few hundred yards away. Doctor Strike had said the Chinese were never able to discover the existence of a God of love. It had not seemed so tragic when he said it as it did now. Now she could not conceive of how they had existed without it. Only to a God of love was everything possible, immortality, redemption, miracle. Miracle. These children were going to be got alive and unharmed to the barricade.

They reached the end of the street, turned to the right and walked slowly, the limping Miss Minton in their midst, past the smoldering, smoking ruins of the godowns to the North Station.

The station enclosure was crowded and steam from an engine gushed up from behind the roof of a platform. They kept on the far side of the street. Miss Minton was groaning and sobbing. She fell against Doctor Strike's shoulder.

"I can't do it," she cried, "I just can't do it."

The Doctor looked over and saw inside the iron fence of the enclosure five or six rickshaws waiting, the coolies squatting between the shafts. There was a crowd around the entrance, which was a side one leading directly to the train platforms. They had not yet come to the main gate. They could see that the crowd was mostly soldiers but there were coolies among them. The Doctor seized Miss Minton more firmly about the waist and half carried her across the street to the side gate. Megan, Miss Reed and the children followed close behind. At the gate the Doctor called stridently:

"*Wambotso!*"

The rickshaws swooped down on them like pigeons to scattered grain. There were six of them jostling and tugging for place. The crowd in their curiosity pressed them against the iron fence. Megan's shoulder was pressed against the iron. She pushed and kept as well as she could a clear space in front of her for the huddling children. A very tall coolie with a bronze aquiline face and a cue wound around his battered felt hat was looking at her across several heads and shoulders. He held a long bamboo carrying-pole. He said something in a loud voice and some of the others laughed. Megan looked away from him. Doctor Strike had reached one of the rickshaws with Miss Minton and lifted her in. The rickshaw started. He put four children into the next and sent it following, Miss Reed he lifted by force into the next. Megan saw her protest, heard her say wildly, "Not till you come, Doctor!", but he set the youngest Russian on her lap and himself shoved the rickshaw forward.

The rickshaws swerved aside to make room for a big closed car which had come up to the side gate. The soldiers began shoving the crowd to make way and Megan was nearly pushed off her feet. She had a momentary glimpse of Doctor Strike's face, rigid and white, and the blaze of his quicksilver eyes, as he turned to put her in the next rickshaw. Then the tall coolie with the carrying-pole struck him over the head. He staggered backward from her, crashing into the rickshaw he had intended for her. Megan caught him under the arms and, with an effort that seemed to tear her strength out by the roots, lifted him into it. The rickshaw lurched forward and she had time to see them all four wabbling drunkenly in their flight away from her down the street. Suddenly frantic, almost beyond

consciousness, she clutched at the remaining one. But she felt herself torn from it, heard shouts, indistinguishable clamor, and through it, like a thin ray of light, like a small sudden pain, one scream that was her own.



CHAPTER XI

The circles that whirled around Megan's head came dangerously close, but there seemed to be no way to stop them because she floated on darkness unsupported. Then something else touched her, harsh and ugly even in darkness, and on consideration she found it was within her and it hurt. But that was exactly it, it was pain. And pain made her aware of a body that seemed to form sluggishly about her once more, out of uncertain elements.

The circles swung past, widening, they slewed off, whirled more remotely. But the pain became something that had to be handled. It was punctuated by a joggling movement, irritating, persistent. It was like tiny jets of flickering light.

The last of the circles throbbed dimly a long way off, vanished, and the joggling went on. Something must be done. An effort of some sort must be made. But where was the spring of action? In the arms, in the legs, in the eyelids? Push somehow. And it was easy after all. It was done.

Megan saw that it was raining again. Another rainy day. She seemed to be caught in one great, gray, endless spider-web of a rainy day.

But the pain was only a pain in the head, over the eyes, making it difficult to keep them open.

The joggling went on, modified now and unimportant.

Directly ahead was a little half-moon shining agreeably in the grayness, a little half-moon of lime-green satin supporting another moon, full, round, traced with benevolent, surprised eyebrows.

"Do you feel better?"

Some one had said that.

"I believe I do," said Megan and saw a train moving, rain streaming down a pane, a Chinese face over a collar of lime-green satin.

"Then I want you to drink some tea."

A hand like a curled shell held a glass over which hung steam in a small fog, with an odor of aromatic flowers.

"I don't think I can drink it."

"Please try."

"I think it will make me sick."

The eyebrows lifted now with such a delicate insistence, not really eyebrows, only painted lines done with one stroke on a powdered forehead.

Some one came up from behind and held a hot, wet towel on her forehead. Surprisingly, it felt well, seemed to dissolve most of the pain and made her conscious of other lesser pains in the back, shoulders and arms. But the head was the real pain in spite of towels.

"You must not be frightened," said the lady, "no one will hurt you."

Suddenly a vista clicked open. She saw the face of the coolie with the cue wound round his hat, four rickshaws fleeing from her down a dark street, and she felt again the last draining of strength as she lifted Doctor Strike into the rickshaw, felt also the humiliation of her terror which had permitted her to shriek for help in the midst of a crowd. This last became physical.

"I'm afraid I'm going to be sick," she said.

"Try to drink some tea."

A cool hand slipped under her head. Megan looked into a glass and saw little tea flowers swimming in it upright like weeds on a river bottom. They moved up to her and a heat that was pungent flowed down her throat direct to some center of weakness which was instantly fortified. She was not sick.

"The General thinks it will do you good."

"The General!"

In the corner of the carriage nearest the window sat a man in a gray uniform. His prominent eyes held the reflection of some incomprehensible amusement. As he saw her looking at him he rose out of his seat and bowed.

"I am so sorry for you," he said. "I am not responsible for what has happened. But I am charging myself to take care of you and you will not be harmed." He made a slight gesture with one hand, expressing an apology more delicate than his words. Megan stared at his hand. The beauty of it was strangely familiar.

The amah put another towel on her head, and the lady in the green satin coat at intervals held the tea to her lips. Megan sipped it slowly. There was a significance to all this which escaped her.

"Haven't I seen you somewhere before, or am I imagining——"

"No," said the General, and he smiled outright, "you do not imagine. You were kind enough to offer me a handkerchief."

"But of course. You were going into the Concession. The wrecked car."

He and the lady nodded.

To decide what she was doing in a train with the man of the wrecked car, with the lady of the green coat, was too much for her. To ask them did not occur to her. But she had seen them before. That made the situation reasonable enough that she was able to accept it for the time being.

"Oh, I guess it is all right," she said vaguely.

They nodded again, both smiling to reassure her. Megan closed her eyes. She heard them murmur to each other in Chinese. When she opened her eyes the lady was sitting across from her, over her knees the amah had spread an embroidered towel and she was feeding herself with chopsticks out of little bowls, held close to her mouth, which the amah handed her in turn. The General was not eating. He smoked a cigarette and, his head leaning back against the cushions, blew smoke rings toward the ceiling. Megan studied the amazing, wasteful beauty of the hand with the cigarette. She remembered its inefficiency when touching a bleeding forehead, when holding open a car door, yet it remained an exquisite instrument.

She turned her head a little. The corridor behind the glass-topped door was crowded with soldiers in gray. One leaned with an air of privilege against the glass. Around his neck he wore a salmon-pink silk cord attached to a Mauser from which hung a salmon-pink silk

tassel. The other soldiers carried small bath towels and tin cups. This grander one no doubt was the General's orderly. Megan turned to the window, trying to raise her head a little, and the amah at once lifted her, supporting her against a cool linen shoulder. The train was cutting across a land spread out in the greenness of young rice and mulberries beginning to leaf, a land webbed with canals bringing water to the endless fields, on whose muddy shallows fringed with water hyacinths the laden, unhurried processions of sampans wove great slow patterns of movement about the arrow-like flight of the train. The train passed relentlessly the small half-naked men carrying loads swung from their shoulders, who stepped with the jogging trot of the heavily burdened along stone trails already pressed deep into the sod by the weight and weariness of endless feet. A hill rose and disappeared, carrying on its crest a pagoda, an unstable shape of inverted bell-flowers stacked one on top of another, surely a deliberate note of the purest frivolity against the fatigue, the solemn fertility of the land.

Megan closed her eyes and the amah gently let her slip back on the seat. She opened her eyes to be sure that nothing had changed, for already the train, the General, the lady, the door against which leaned the orderly with the pink-silk cord, the window opening into China, had become the accepted reality to which she clung. She tried to stay awake.

The General leaned back, blowing smoke rings, looking up meditatively at the ceiling; the lady sat beside him, silent because he did not wish to talk, but with an air of readiness as though her own possible meditations were held only at his pleasure, never quite losing, even when he was not looking at her, the lightly seductive smile with which she turned to him when he spoke or even made a movement.

Megan closed her eyes, opening them suddenly again. The General was handing his cigarette to the lady to extinguish for him. He leaned his head more firmly on the seat-back and closed his eyes. The lady watched him and, seeing he did not appear comfortable, slipped an embroidered satin pillow back of his head. He did not thank her, his eyes remained closed and his head slipped forward slightly. Apparently he was asleep. Megan watched him

without restraint. His hair, growing in a peak from the well-modeled forehead, was smooth and black as a Spaniard's; with his eyes closed, their prominence, the effect of the Mongolian slant, were exaggerated and some of the masculinity of the face was lost, so that he looked like one of those sculptured heads of androgynous Eastern deities. The lady also watched him for a time to be quite sure he slept. Then she put a smaller pillow behind her own head and closed her eyes. Even in her sleep her smile, fragile and seductive, hovered on her lips.

Megan slept and awoke with the certainty that she had slept long.

"Oh, yes, that Chinese train." She was for a moment even frightened. Some quality of the light had changed, it must be afternoon. Very close to the window and throwing its shadow into the compartment passed a great crenelated wall hung with tattered vines. A towered water-gate made a fantastic opening in it. The lady had covered her satin coat with a darker one trimmed with fur. The General with her help was putting on a military overcoat. Then he bent down to look out the window, yawned copiously and smoothed back his hair before putting on his cap. The orderly came in to assemble the luggage. In the corridor the soldiers were standing at attention, flattened against the wall to make a passage. Seeing Megan was awake the lady leaned over her.

"We are here now," she said. "Your tiresome trip is over. Do you feel well?"

"Not too well."

The General spoke to her in Chinese and after a few words she turned again to Megan.

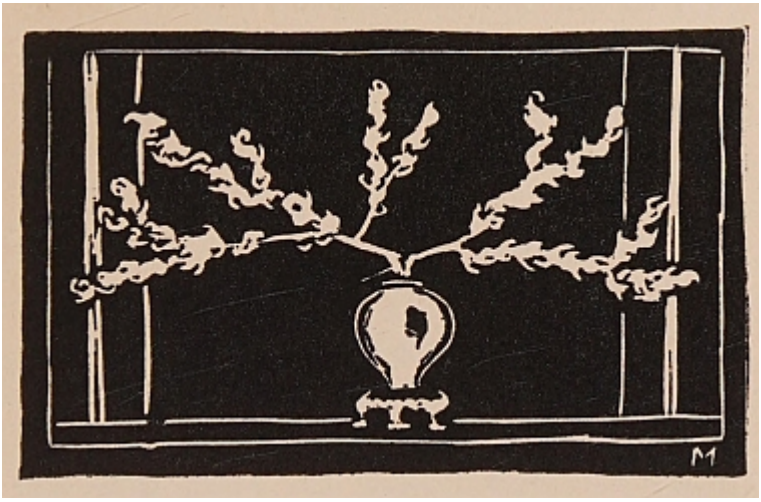
"The General thinks it will be better for you not to walk through the station. He will arrange to have you carried out in a chair. You must be very quiet."

"Where are we going? What general?" Megan was suddenly angry. "Who is this general?"

The lady's reply meant nothing until she had repeated it several times over. Finally she penetrated the unfamiliar pronunciation, "General Yen Tso-Chong."

Doctor Strike's General.

And the concubine.



CHAPTER XII

It was an elaborate, brass bed enclosed on three sides and heaped with bright satin quilts. Megan had been in it all the afternoon of her arrival and all the next day. Now it was morning again. She had wakened to a tumult of birds but they had quieted now and in spite of certain small noises about the house the underlying stillness struck her as remarkable. She moved her arms and legs tentatively and as she held up one arm the white-silk sleeve of a Chinese coat fell back from it, showing an ugly green bruise reaching almost from shoulder to elbow. She examined her hands. They looked veined and tired.

She could not distinctly remember how she had got here. Only a vague impression of a station in which throngs of clamoring Chinese were pushed aside to make way for her chair, a closed car with the curtains down where she leaned her head on the shoulder of the lady with the green coat. And they had driven perhaps half an hour, perhaps less. Then she had stepped out before a gate in a red stucco wall, had insisted she could walk and fainted. Since then she had dozed or slept, waking to sip tea brought her by the amah and sometimes by the lady. Now for the first time her head felt clear and the pain in it was almost gone.

She turned on one side and looked curiously at the room she was in. It was rather bare. There were a few pieces of blackwood furniture, differing at once from the blackwood pieces of the missionaries by an air of unmistakable sophistication. By the octagon-shaped window, in a dark blue bowl, bloomed a twisted miniature tree bearing translucent yellow Chinese plum flowers. On the wall across from her bed was a hanging painting on brownish silk of two dark, furry monkeys eating orange-red persimmons. Megan looked at this a long time. It was impossible not to feel in sympathy with these monkeys; they pecked at the fruit so absently, they were so distrait, unable to concentrate on anything, forever vaguely and obstinately pursued by some great, mysterious sadness in all things, a sadness that not caperings, malice, nor a full stomach could quite take away. It was a true portrait, delicately executed,

precise but summary; it gave character to the whole room, making unimportant the offense of the brass bed, the phonograph and records piled on a table, a gilt clock and candlesticks empty of candles, such as one sees on the mantels of cheaper French hotels. Yes, in spite of these things the room had an appearance of style in the sense that a defective work of art may still have style because whoever created it has been able to set on it the seal of a superior personality.

Megan liked the room, her father she thought would like it. And suddenly she realized that her father at this very moment must be believing her dead. Her parents' grief, Bob's grief, struck her too vividly, with too strong an implication of reproach, to be endured. Her headlong rush into this disaster blazed itself like a trail from the moment when she had sat with Bob's letter on her knee and told her parents that she had to go to China come what might, down to the moment when she had demanded a miracle from God. The miracle had come but already it had lost its sheen, as though it had been tossed to her carelessly by One who knew that miracles are not always of very great account. A depression began to settle over her because she felt that she had been humiliated by something more profound even than fear. Then she thought, "Well, perhaps it is all of no importance, I am not dead. I will let them know it in the quickest way possible. As soon as I can get a paper and pencil, write a note, have a telegram sent. And after all, I am in China, where I felt I had to be, and maybe I was even right."

She thought of the General and his concubine, of all Doctor Strike had told her about the General. Apparently for all the Doctor's ardor, his knowledge, he had never been able really to touch the General. And how much he had wanted to! All the time he had been talking of him Megan felt she must have been half aware that she herself had already touched the General's life by the mere brushing of a wing and that she would inevitably touch it again more deeply. Perhaps this was to be the miracle.

She was too recently humbled to be willing to dwell much on this, but in spite of herself vague and glorious pictures began slowly to flood her mind. A Chinese man. A Chinese woman. Truly that was all of China. Her pictures merged into sleep and she awoke again,

determined at once to get up. She sat on the edge of the bed and waited until the dizziness and slight pain in her head passed. She sat there wondering if the house she was in could possibly be in the midst of a city. It was so quiet. In the early morning there had been so many birds and even now the air coming in the open octagon-shaped window was fresh and there was about it some indefinite coolness, an aroma, as of water near by. Occasionally she heard soft slippered feet cross a tiled or brick pavement outside her window, and there was a telephone somewhere in the house that rang at intervals, answered by a Chinese voice, monotonous and persistent. But the telephone was not ringing just now. From a greater distance she heard on a soft road the march of feet, then a staccato command. The footsteps halted and at another command she heard the muffled clatter of rifles as the company came to rest Bugles sounded and the notes dissolved instantly like bubbles in the tranquillity of the air. And from somewhere a cock crowed. Certainly she was not in a city.

Beside her bed on a small table was a wicker basket. She opened it and found silver tea things kept warm by the wadded lining. She poured herself a cup and drank it. When she put her feet to the floor she had another moment of dizziness, but she was stronger than she expected. She had to wait a moment until her head grew steadier. Then she moved slowly and with shaking knees but she managed to reach the window.

It opened on a courtyard where flower-beds were set in patterns among tiled walks. Willow trees, fragile and green, posed with an air of artifice against the opposite wall, and there were three gray boulders fretted by water into curious hollows and contours that were placed like statues on gray stone pedestals. Over a low wall curving like a dragon's back Megan could see another garden with a pine tree in the center, growing in dark scaly strata, and beyond more tiles and ornamented roofs of buildings. A round moon doorway led from her court into the next and Megan decided it was all one estate, a series of small houses connected by courts and gardens. Over one more distant roof rose the bold, smoky blue

outline of a low mountain, giving a final secretiveness and intricacy to the small hidden gardens. Megan leaned her elbows against the window and looked as far around as she could.

A servant crossing the court looked up and saw her, turned and ran back into the house. In a moment the door behind her opened and the lady who was the concubine of the General came in. She stood on the threshold, holding her hands in a little conventional gesture of surprise at seeing Megan up and about.

"But you feel so well?" she asked.

Megan said that she did.

"Then you must have something to eat. You must be very weak. And please sit down. Don't tire yourself."

Megan sat down by the center table and the lady rang a bell near the door. A servant appeared.

"What would you like to eat?" the lady asked. "We can give you some foreign food. Would you like ham and eggs and some fried potatoes and toast? We can give you coffee too, if you prefer it to tea."

"I'll have it all, please. I do feel rather desperately hungry."

"Perhaps you would like to dress. I can only offer you my clothes. Yours are very nearly ruined, though I have had amah mend them as well as she can."

"I believe I would feel better if I dressed. It is very kind of you to offer me something of yours."

The lady rang again and spoke to her amah. Presently the amah returned with clothes and a toilet box which she and the lady set on the table. They opened it and arranged its folding-mirror. There were foreign brushes inside with silver backs.

"You must use this box," said the lady. "I will leave it here with you. And I will send you some soap. When you feel stronger and want a bath, amah will help you, though we have only a Soochow tub. But the coolie will bring all the hot water you want. You must ask for anything you want."

She stood behind her and watched attentively while Megan brushed her hair into shape till it fitted her head like a thin dark cap. Then she and the amah dressed her in a stiff coat of sulphur-

yellow brocade with a little Chinese collar and loose sleeves, the hybrid dress of the treaty port. The amah put silk stockings on her feet and slippers of satin, very pointed, with soft felt soles, a little too small for comfort. The lady offered her the use of various powders, eye pencils and lipsticks of French make, in all colors—almond, rose, blue lilac and geranium—but Megan refused. When they had finished with her she looked at herself, and the amah and the lady peered over her shoulder into the glass. The long white face and eyes heavily shadowed, the body enclosed in a rigid tube of shining yellow, gave her a hieratic, Byzantine look.

When the food came she ate ravenously, and the lady sat beside her, her shell-like hands crossed neatly in her lap.

"That is very good, that will make you strong again," she said.

"Yes, it is delicious. I feel strong already."

"I am so glad you are well again," and she added, "The General wants to know when you are feeling well enough to receive him. He wants to talk to you."

The faint chill she felt at these words surprised Megan. She looked about her. This room with the old painting, the blossoming plum, the garden outside, herself in a costume for a fantastic portrait, these were all still vaguely dreamlike. The General would instantly introduce the note of reality and of struggle. She felt a reluctance to take up life again. But she forced a little enthusiasm, because the whole significance of things now lay in the General's being, in a sense, delivered into her hands.

"I suppose I feel well enough now, but don't go yet," she added hastily, as the lady made a movement of rising. "Do stay and talk to me. Tell me your name so that I will know what to call you."

The lady sat back again, folding her hands in her lap with the instant acquiescence of one accustomed to obey.

"My name is Mah-li," she said.

"Doctor Strike told me he had known you years ago in Soochow and that you were brought up in a Mission school. Is that so?"

Mah-li's eyes opened a little wider.

"*Aiya!* So you were with Doctor Strike, who wanted the body-guard!" And she looked at Megan with an obvious wonder. Apparently she could not imagine what had made Megan go into Chapei but was too courteous to press the point, and Megan thought that to tell her it was to rescue some women and children from the inhumanity of her countrymen would be rude and slightly ridiculous. She felt already that her relations with Mah-li would have to be conducted with more care than she had so far been accustomed to expend on any one. There was a line stretched between them that it was imperative neither should cross, but whereas Mah-li saw the line clearly, Megan did not.

"Yes, I remembered Doctor Strike," said Mah-li. "He is a very good man. Every one in Soochow said he was a very good man."

"He is a great friend of China," said Megan; "he admires China very much."

"Yes, he is a very good man," Mah-li repeated politely and indifferently, and Megan was annoyed to see that measured on some invisible scale of hers Doctor Strike did not weigh very heavily. She would have liked to force an appreciation of Doctor Strike on Mah-li but instead she said:

"You must have learned your excellent English from the Mission. Did you?"

"Yes, I learned to speak English and to embroider and to cook and to use a typewriter."

"Really? That is splendid. I can't use a typewriter myself. Do you —that is—do you do any typing ever?"

"No. And I don't embroider." After a moment she added, "I don't cook either."

"Well, you speak English anyway!" Megan smiled heartily, a little disconcerted by the apparent uselessness of Mah-li's foreign-learned accomplishments. "It seems to be one of the benefits of education that one learns a great deal for which one has no use. But it is all training. It develops one, makes one more efficient."

"More what?" said Mah-li.

"Well, more able to handle whatever comes up. One doesn't always know what one's needs are going to be. I don't think any training is ever really lost."

"No," said Mah-li and added, from pure politeness apparently, "A Christian education is very nice."

Megan was sure Mah-li was finding this conversation hopelessly dull, her look of pleased curiosity had gone. She looked a little sleepy, like a child.

"Have you ever been to Soochow?" Mah-li asked.

"No, I've just come to China. I've only been here a few days. I came here to be married."

"*Aiya!*" A gleam of interest returned to Mah-li's eyes. Her eyebrows lifted perceptibly. "To Doctor Strike?" she asked.

"No, no," Megan laughed. "Doctor Strike is old enough to be my father!" It was the first reason she had thought of but she realized at once it would be the least effective to Mah-li. And she again felt a necessity for explaining her presence with the Doctor at the North Station. But she gave it up. They would have plenty of other times to talk and she sighed from sudden physical weariness. Mah-li got instantly to her feet. A flicker rather like vexation crossed her face.

"I am afraid I tire you. I had better go." She spoke a little stiffly and Megan had an impression of vanity revealed for a moment, an attribute so unsuspected in Mah-li that she could not take in its quality or extent.

"I wish you wouldn't go," she protested. "You have been so kind to me and I have had no chance to thank you properly."

Mah-li smiled a little constrainedly and stood by; the table, resting her finger-tips on it lightly, poised between going and staying.

"Please do not thank me. I would be lacking in politeness to have done otherwise. Besides," she added, "it was the General's wish. It is he you must thank."

Megan looked at her, surprised at the touch of malice in her voice. It pleased Mah-li for some reason that she should now be dependent on the General, even to a slight and fortuitous extent; not in any sense comparable to Mah-li's dependence, which had the weight of

five thousand years behind it. For five thousand years there had been Mah-lis, with fragile hands, with silks, with eyebrows in an imposed line of fixed decorum. For what a short time indeed had there been Megans, whose independence was so new, so slippery, and perhaps even a little unstable. Megan took one of Mah-li's hands and pressed it warmly.

"I hope you will come and see me again," she said.

Mah-li murmured, "Thank you," and went out.

The servant came in and cleared away the remains of her breakfast. Megan took a chair over by the window and sat where she could look out.

Her interview with Mah-li had not been satisfactory, but it was the first she had ever had with a Chinese and it would have been foolish to expect much from it. Soldiers were drilling on the road somewhere beyond the walls, in the house the telephone rang and the Chinese voice answered it monotonously and persistently. Perhaps an hour passed, but Megan was scarcely conscious of it; the minutes passed over her like soundless waves that never break, flowing from an unimaginably distant source.



CHAPTER XIII

Some one knocked at the door. Megan said, "Come in" several times before it was opened. The young orderly with the salmon-pink silk cord about his neck stood in the doorway. He said something she did not understand, stood aside, and after a perceptible moment the General came into the room. He walked over to her and, clicking his heels together in the proper manner, bowed. He carried his cap under his arm.

"Good morning," he said. "I hope you are better."

"Yes, much better."

He drew up another chair to the window and when he was seated took out a gold cigarette case. He was smiling in a conventional manner with little nods of the head as he offered her a cigarette.

"I have Turkish and Virginia tobacco."

It had occurred to her that this meeting might be to him as startling in its novelty as to her. The assurance gave her more confidence. She took a cigarette from him and the General snapped a gold briquet (he was really most opulently provided), lighting first her cigarette then his.

"Are you quite comfortable here?" he asked. "Do you like this room?"

"Yes, it is very nice. I have been enjoying the view of the garden. And that painting on the wall, I admire that very much."

"Do you? I am glad, because I like it too." The General turned in his chair to look at it. "It is by an artist of the early Ming dynasty. It is not very old as things are old here in China. But I always take it with me. It possesses a great variety and excellence of brush stroke."

They smoked in silence, neither looking directly at the other. A large ash fell on to Megan's lap.

"I will send you ash-trays," said the General. "You must excuse this house. I use it now as my yamen, but it is not my house. It is the pleasure house of a friend of mine."

"Is it in town?"

"No, it is on the lake. You will see by and by, it is a very beautiful location."

There was another silence. The General looked so fixedly at the end of his cigarette that Megan was able to look at him. He was smaller than she realized, his gray uniform fitted dapperly over a shoulder too plump, there was a smoothness about his skin and hair that was unpleasant to her, and even his hands were faintly repellent by their abnormal delicacy.

He said suddenly, as though he had been turning it over and had come to a decision, "I want to assure you again that you are quite safe in my house. I don't want you to feel that you are in an equivocal position."

"Why insist so?" thought Megan. "I would have felt no concern over my safety if he hadn't brought it up." She looked at him more sharply and was disconcerted to realize she could be so affected by a physical repugnance. She was quite unprepared both for the repugnance and its effect.

"I feel," she said, "I am in a position requiring an explanation."

The General raised his eyebrows a little and his eyes appeared absurdly prominent.

"But your position is very mysterious to me! I myself don't know why I should find you in Chinese territory, early in the morning, surrounded by an unfriendly crowd, from whom incidentally I saved you."

"I know you saved me. I am grateful to you for that, but I had a perfect right to be in Chinese territory. I had a safe-conduct pass signed by you."

"By me!" The General's eyes began to show amusement and astonishment. "By me! Then is it possible Doctor Strike was with you?"

"Yes, we were together. He was struck on the head by a coolie with a carrying-pole. I got him in a rickshaw and it went off with him. I was left behind but it was not his fault, he was unconscious. We also had with us five children and two women from St. Andrew's Orphanage in Chapei. But Doctor Strike explained all this to you. We were relying, as I said, on a safe-conduct pass signed by you."

"Ah, these safe-conduct passes!" The General waved them aside with one hand. "You people expect too much of them. Do you suppose the coolie who struck Doctor Strike knew of your pass, or would have respected it if he had?"

Megan waited to see if he would express any concern over Doctor Strike's fate, but that aspect of it did not seem to occur to him. She said rather bitterly:

"I see now your safe-conduct was worthless. But I did not know at the time. You see, I have lived all my life in a country where if a situation comparable to this were possible, such a pass would be effective. The whole training and temper of the people would make it so."

The General looked at her, doubtful how to take this.

"Do you speak seriously?" he asked. "Where is this country you are talking about that has no mob spirit, no race hatred, but only a perfect respect for law and authority? I had supposed you were an American."

Megan realized too late that she had been carried away, and simultaneously that she must not be carried away again. It was she and not he who had given way to a sense of antagonism.

"I am sorry," she said hastily. "I am afraid I was too rhetorical. Yes, I am an American."

He acknowledged her withdrawal with a nod, slight enough not to attach undue importance to it.

"I have never been to America," he said gently, "but I have lived in England for a time and in France and Germany. Are you also, like Doctor Strike, a missionary?"

"No. But I came out to be married to one of the doctors at Changsha, at Yale-in-China."

"Ah, yes. Well, I am glad you are not a missionary, even if you are to become one."

"Why?" said Megan. "Do you dislike them?"

"No," said the General. "Only I have found few agreeable friends among them."

"Doctor Strike however admires you greatly."

"I greatly admire Doctor Strike, though I must say I was rather relieved when he decided to leave my province. He was too much like an atom of radium locked in a desk drawer. Yes, I had been wondering all along if you were not with Doctor Strike or in some way connected with that orphanage. But what did you go with him for? I don't understand it. For the excitement perhaps?"

Megan did not answer and he shook his head, smiling as if he found her an impossible subject for analysis.

"When Doctor Strike asked me for the famous safe-conduct pass," he continued, "I didn't want to give it to him because I felt sure he would put too great a strain upon it. He found me, as perhaps he told you, in a Shanghai hotel dining with some friends, and he urged me at a time when I could not well refuse. You see, I was not supposed to be in the European sections of Shanghai. At the time you saw me I was going in under a false name as a prominent official of the Northern government, a man who, unknown to the authorities, was at that moment actually dead. When Doctor Strike found me I had completed the negotiation I came for, but it would still have been very unpleasant for me to have been obliged to explain my presence to the foreign authorities. Of course as soon as the Doctor began to urge me, I thought of the position I was in. But I am quite sure it never occurred to the Doctor to make use of it to get his pass. No, I am quite sure he never thought of it for a moment." The General stopped to smile at this further aspect of the comedy.

Megan looked at him intently. "Yes," she said, with an insistence on each word, "I am sure he was not only unwilling but even incapable of betraying you."

The General's smile became inquiring; he looked at her a moment, then let his gaze wander toward the ceiling as he did when he wished to withdraw his attention from the more immediate considerations. He grew deeply thoughtful and she had the satisfaction of seeing his urbanity appear to be invaded by a sudden, sharp uncertainty. But he dismissed that.

"When I spoke of the situation in which I could not very well refuse," he went on to explain, "I meant that Doctor Strike was in a fair way to spoil the gaiety of the party my friends were giving me. He is the sort of man who would infallibly respect one's grief but be

incapable of respecting one's gaiety. That would have been regrettable. I wanted very much to get rid of him. I wrote him the pass on the back of a menu card. It was the only paper available except a bill from the hotel and I chose it because it had a design of Kuomintang flags at the top. Yes, my host is very Europeanized. He not only believes that menus are desirable as stimulating the appetite and perhaps falsifying the origins of certain dishes but he believes in the sacredness of a flag. And I too at that moment, perhaps under the influence of a beneficent champagne, believed that if my safe-conduct pass were to have any efficacy, it would be due to those flags!"

Megan did not answer. She could not decide whether he was trying to offend her or if, unable in this novel situation to achieve the proper balance and perhaps a little fearful lest she attempt to bully him, he was only making futile alternate gestures of courtesy and warning.

"My friends," he said, "knew I was leaving the city at a certain hour; so, because of the extreme merriment of the party, they themselves accompanied me to the station. When I got there I found you being handled very roughly by the crowd around the gate. A coolie was hitting you on the head with a carrying-pole. It must have been the coolie you said struck Doctor Strike a moment before. He was probably emboldened by his success in felling the Doctor. I had my guard extricate you. And then I really had no idea what to do with you. I have explained to you that for various reasons I had to leave without involving myself in explanations with the foreign authorities. I was already in Chinese territory, my train was waiting, so I brought you along. As soon as I can make suitable arrangements you shall return. In the meantime you must consider yourself my guest."

Megan thought for a moment before answering him. He had not said a single unreasonable word. Except for the anxiety for her parents, for which he was hardly responsible, she was glad to be here. She had no thought that she was in any personal danger; on the contrary it was she herself who was the disruptive element in the midst of a long-established plan. The prospect of troubling all this false security filled her with excitement and genuine pleasure, yet

she was at the same time on the verge of anger. Surely she was not really disturbed by so trivial a thing as the nearness of a stridently alien flesh; perhaps it was the pressure and the will to dominate of an alien mind.

The General in his turn, she could feel it, was taking advantage of her abstraction to scrutinize her more closely. She threw her cigarette out the window and turned to him.

"I see I owe you a great deal," she said; "please forgive me for not being more gracious about it. The truth is I am still a bit bewildered."

"That is quite natural. It must be bewildering to you to wake up unexpectedly in China."

"By the way, there is something I would like to ask you to do for me that will put my mind very much at rest."

The General nodded.

"It is to send a telegram to Shanghai to my friends there so that they can let my parents and the man I came here to marry know I am safe."

"The parents and the bridegroom! But certainly I will send one at once. In all probability they believe you dead. Now there will be rejoicing, even though they will not be able to think so ill of us as they might have liked."

"I feel sure," said Megan stiffly, "that in this case they will be glad to be mistaken."

"No doubt at all. And I shall see about reassuring them at once." He leaned toward her, his cigarette case held open, but Megan shook her head.

"No more, thanks."

"As it turns out," said the General, tapping a cigarette on his thumb-nail and slowly lighting it, "as it turns out I shall not be able to arrange for your return immediately. An incident occurred at Nanking, at the same time I brought you here, which has aroused so much feeling, both among my people and among yours, that I do not yet know what will come of it."

"What sort of incident?"

"In capturing the city of Nanking the troops of General Chen Chien got a little out of hand. War, you know, does not bring out the best qualities of tolerance and self-control; that is one reason why we Chinese are so unfitted for it."

"But what was the incident?"

"A number of people were shot and some were killed, missionaries largely, Doctor Williams of the Nanking College, some ladies, the British Consul too, I believe."

"Shot by Chinese?"

"By troops, yes."

"But that is an outrage!" cried Megan, overwhelmed with anger. "We are not at war with you!"

"No? Well, at any rate your gunboats, in retaliation, fired on the unarmed, civilian population of Nanking, killing hundreds. But after all, why should you and I talk about it?"

"I don't believe they fired on the civilian population, or if they did, they must have been forced into it."

The General shrugged his shoulders.

"We will get nowhere by discussing this. It would only drag us both into the vulgarity of open anger. I will send you some Shanghai papers which have just come to me. You can read there all your own point of view."

But if the General was not already angry, he was agitated. His hand holding the cigarette shook nervously. This shaking hand made Megan realize how near she herself had come to losing control, perhaps irreparably. What about all the vast misery of China which had in no wit changed? What about the word of God that was to illumine the drowsy twilight of its spirit? Christianity had always spread to an inevitable accompaniment of bloodshed, its own and, it must be admitted, that of others. But the loss of life was not to be considered in the saving of a soul. Life, blood, flesh, were nothing; the spirit everything. Megan sat with clinched hands, and while for several moments neither she nor the General had said a word, she was as exhausted as though they had been engaged in a mortal struggle.

"Yes, you are right," she said. "We won't talk about that. I want as a matter of fact to see your point of view as far as I can. I believe I can do it better when you don't argue with me."

The General smiled suddenly and taking out his handkerchief wiped his forehead.

"Delightful," he murmured. "Do you know," he said, "for a moment you quite terrified me. There is something about the European eye, I can't explain the effect it has on me. It gets so—large." He returned his handkerchief carefully to its pocket. "But I am glad you are trying not to think too ill of us."

Megan's cheeks still burned and her voice was still a little husky.

"Oh, we don't really think ill of you. Certainly not in America. On the contrary we like to sentimentalize over your superiority to ourselves. Haven't you noticed that attitude in England too? Peace-loving exquisites, passionate over tea, philosophy and calligraphy, that is how we like to think of you."

The General seized with relief this diversion into a wider field.

"And aren't we that?"

"I know nothing about your actual tastes. But as to peace, the country never seems to have known it. And any one can see that your philosophy has never brought you good government, justice, or an equal distribution of happiness."

"Our poor philosophy! So you demand it give us good government, justice, and an equal distribution of happiness? But you seem to think it is a safe-conduct pass! Haven't you people rather a mania for drastic remedies? I have observed that you are very prone to attach yourself to one thing like religion, or democracy, or even proper sanitation, and believe that it will cure all. Our philosophy enables us to support life in the only way it can be supported, by an endless series of compromises; successful compromises, perfectly adjusted to our temperament. That is surely a great deal for a philosophy, don't you think so? It is even a great deal for a religion. But," he added, "you are right in supposing we are peace-loving. In the real China we have always been predominantly agriculturists. A farmer's life is bound down to his plot of earth. He doesn't need to fight like the herder for new

pasture grounds, or the trader for new markets. So war is not the result of our deeper necessities and certainly not of our inclinations. We fight because the corruption of our officials forces us to. But even then we run as often as we fight, which proves, as Bertrand Russell says, that we are rational men, because what we fight for is not worth our death."

"It is arguable whether there are not some things worth dying for, even if you have failed to discover them." Megan tried also to speak lightly. "So I am right as to your being peace-loving. And as to tea, is it true you drink only that?"

She remembered then that Doctor Strike had said he had found the General very drunk, even the General had admitted his weakness, and was sorry she had spoken, but the General said pleasantly:

"In our period of greatest civilization we drank wine, and those who could afford it drank it to excess. Only savages and animals practise sobriety, continence and moderation. Yes, our greatest poet was drowned in an attempt to catch the moon in the river. I saw once in a private collection in England—so much of our art has gone abroad—a very charming painting of Yang Kwei Fei, who was a great beauty of the Tang dynasty. She is holding a wine-cup and the legend says, 'Yang Kwei Fei, drunk but still drinking.'"

"I wonder if you can be typical," said Megan. "What you say is very confusing."

"I don't want to tire you with discussions, when you are just up." The General got up and threw his cigarette out of the window. "But I do not see why I should be typical. Fortunately for our entertainment, men of the same race don't resemble each other, as ants resemble ants, or tigers tigers. Though it might prove more convenient in the matter of international relations if we did. Then we could all behave toward each other without compunction, in the simple brutality of the animal world."

He held out his hand to her and Megan shook it carefully as though she were handling porcelain.

"I will send word to Shanghai at once," he said. "And by the way, I don't yet know your name."

"My name is Megan Davis, Miss Davis. If you will send word to Mr. Jackson, of the China Inland Mission, and ask him to notify my family and friends I shall be very grateful."

"Will you please spell all that?" said the General, and he wrote it down in a little note-book he carried in one pocket. When he had closed it again he said very formally, in a high strange voice, as if he were making an official proclamation:

"There is at present only one female in my household. If you have no repugnance for her society she will be glad to visit you from time to time. I myself am very busy with the political situation in my province."

"Of course I have no repugnance," Megan exclaimed. "She has been very kind and I think she is charming."

"Then she will come again whenever you wish. She speaks English well."

He took out his handkerchief, wiped his forehead and smoothed his hair before putting on his cap. His gesture was eloquent of relief from a considerable strain. He gave her a slight salute and walked over to the door.

"Good morning," he said, clicking his heels together.

"Good morning," said Megan.

The orderly with the salmon-pink cord, who had been waiting just outside, opened the door for him and he went out.



CHAPTER XIV

Megan spent the rest of the day on the bed or sitting by the window. She felt no desire to leave her room to see what was beyond the tiled roofs, to meet half-way any new experience. The peace of the General's yamen began to act as a soporific on her nerves. The one sound that persisted, the distant ringing of the telephone and the Chinese voice, became part of the silence. Only once she heard violent noises outside, which proved to be the amah hysterically haranguing one of the servants, but seeing Megan looking at her from the window the amah smiled as if to assure her that it was nothing serious, and the quiet became even deeper than before.

Late in the day they brought her some Chinese food, rice and concoctions of meat and fish, bamboo shoots, cabbage, bean sprouts and soy sauce, served in delicate bowls veined like thin flesh. Megan ate adventurously and found it represented a whole new scale of flavors, as outside her experience as the tones of a Chinese musical scale, so that her hunger remained mysteriously unsatisfied.

She was lying on the bed when a knock at the door made her sit up. The orderly with the Mauser on the salmon-pink cord opened the door but instead of the General a much younger and smaller man in the uniform of an officer came into the room.

As without a word he walked over to the table, Megan looked at him with astonishment. She saw that his body and hands appeared to belong to a very young girl, his face suggested the texture of *pâte tendre* and his black eyes and eyebrows were outlined with exaggerated precision above cheeks that surely had a trace of rouge. If he had been an actor, he would have excelled as an impersonator in female rôles. Evidently he spoke no English for as he put down on the table a roll of papers, a carton of cigarettes, a box of matches and an ash-tray, he said something in Chinese, then bowed and with a smile of thin sweetness turned and went out. If the papers and cigarettes had not been there to prove his reality, Megan would almost have believed him to be an apparition.

They were the Shanghai papers promised by the General. She lay back on the bed to read them. There were pages about the Nanking incident, but for fear she might become angered again, Megan looked only at the head-lines. It was when she saw her name at the head of a column that she felt a sudden sharp excitement.

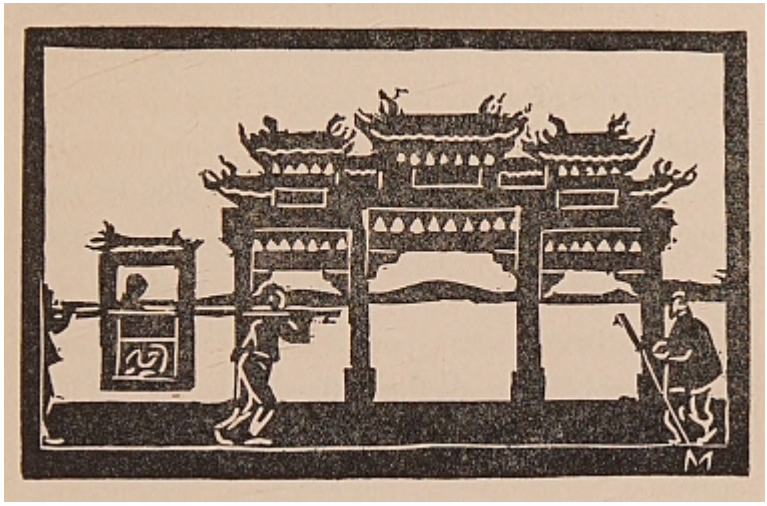
TRAGIC INCIDENT IN RESCUE OF ST. ANDREW'S ORPHANAGE. YOUNG FIANCÉE OF DOCTOR LOSES LIFE NEAR NORTH STATION.

She read an account of what had happened, what had so nearly happened.

"... The last of the four rickshaws contained Doctor Strike, who was unconscious when they reached the Range Road Barricade. He remembers only being hit on the head, as he was about to put Miss Davis into the fourth rickshaw. He is convinced that she sacrificed her life to save his as only she could have got him into the rickshaw. The other members of the party were unaware of what had happened to Miss Davis and they only discovered at the Range Road Barricade that she was not following them. On hearing their story five Durhams, who were among the guard at the barricade, made a hasty impromptu raid into Chinese territory. But when they reached the North Station there was no trace of Miss Davis. They spoke no Chinese and could get no information from the bystanders. They were reluctantly obliged to return. It is almost certain that she was killed and that the crowd, through fear or anger, made some immediate and unthinkable disposition of the body. Every effort is being made to recover it however, through the Nationalist authorities, who disclaim all responsibility and knowledge of what occurred."

Megan put down the paper, feeling that she had perpetrated a fraud on the world. Still, death had come very close to her, and if she were not actually dead and no longer in danger, she was at least alone as she had never been. Unlike the bewildering loneliness one feels in the midst of crowds, or the terrible loneliness one feels at times with those one loves, this loneliness was profoundly exhilarating. It meant that she had been, for the time, stripped of her tradition and her place in the world, cut off from the physical support of her parents' love and of Bob's. It was not the eerie loneliness of the spirit. It was a challenge.

Megan lay back, her hands clasped behind her head, and the Shanghai papers slipped one by one to the floor. Half asleep she dreamed of a golden province, a province of peace, order and universal happiness, ruled over by the heroic image of General Yen Tso-Chong.



CHAPTER XV

The next morning she felt very much better, and after her European breakfast she decided to go out into the garden. No one had told her to keep to her room. As she opened her door she saw Mah-li, in a little furred cape, crossing the outside room. Mah-li stopped.

"Good morning."

"Good morning, Mah-li."

"You are going out?"

"Yes, to the garden," said Megan. "I feel I would like a breath of air."

"Do you want to come with me then? I am going into the city to buy some things."

"I would love to."

Mah-li hesitated.

"Only I am not going to drive in the automobile, I am going in a chair, because the streets where I am going are so narrow. Perhaps you wouldn't like that."

"I would like it all the better."

"Come along then and I will order another chair."

Megan went with Mah-li across the flagged court she had seen from her window and through a room furnished with heavy American metal office furniture, with calendars, Chinese and English, large wall-maps, and on one table a dark blue, glazed bowl with a twisted skein of yellow plum. A few officers sat about, and Megan saw the telephone she had heard ringing all during the day. A soldier sat before it with a pad on the table beside him, and when he was not engaged in telephoning, he drew pictures on the pad. They went on to an open space of bare dirt and a few trees, where platoons of soldiers were being drilled by a smart young gray-clad officer. They were of all ages, some, Megan was sure, no more than twelve or thirteen years old. She recognized the gate in the red stucco wall through which she had come. They passed around the spirit screen, through the gate, and stood in the roadway that

followed the shore of the lake. Mah-li's chair was waiting, and while the coolies in dark blue livery went off to get a second chair Megan looked about her.

The lake was so near that just across the road stone steps led down into it, under a great stone pailou with four columns. The sky was cloudy, the water of the lake milky white, darkened by fleets of little islands connected by shapely half-moons of bridges, or causeways, planted in trees; low mountains hemmed it in with delicate but firm corves of blue and fainter, smokier gray. At its far end Megan could see the town, and all around the shores a succession of gardens and groves from which rose low, tiled roofs of pleasure houses. Before the yamen a backwater formed by a bend of the shore was filled with drifts of lotus plants. She turned to look behind the yamen where the hills were very close. On one of them stood the trunk of a pagoda, shorn of all its roofs and bells, out of the top of which sprouted a ferny growth. Megan was overcome by beauty, for which nothing that Doctor Strike or the General had said had adequately prepared her, but she thought she recognized in it nevertheless a quality similar to that of the landscape seen from the train. The one line that drew the eye upward was that of the pagoda trunk, which even without its upturned eaves struck a note of intended levity amid the great, flowing, earth-bound curves which circled and so completely enclosed the horizon.

When the chair came Megan climbed in and Mah-li recommended that she let down the small blinds before the windows on either side so that her appearance would create no comment in the streets. The coolies picked up the poles and started off with a peculiar jouncing motion that gave Megan a headache. Every now and then at a cry they stopped and shifted the poles to the other shoulder. She drew her blind back a little so as to look at the lake. As they crossed one of the causeways, planted in trees, they passed through more platoons of soldiers marching in goose step, absurdly unmilitary creatures, with ingenuous smiling faces. On the left side of the road were garden walls enclosing summer-houses and gardens, most of them of ox-blood red, with undulating dragon tops and odd-shaped windows elaborately latticed. They came to the outskirts of the town, to narrow lanes between small shops and

whitewashed blank walls, sometimes with great black characters painted on them, lanes so narrow they jostled against the coolies with their carrying-poles. The streets grew more crowded and noisy. Megan held open only a crack of space between the blind and the window so that she saw in too quickly passing glimpses. The sun came out and the chair began to get uncomfortably warm.

In a street in the heart of the town they stopped and got out. Megan followed Mah-li into a shop through a wide portal of profusely carved and gilded wood. In the gloom hundreds of jars on shelves around the wall looked down at them like great glaucous eyes.

"This is a medicine shop," Mah-li told her. "One of the famous medicine shops of China. I take Chinese medicines always. I am afraid of foreign doctors."

"I hope you are not ill."

"I have a pain here that comes and goes, especially after I have eaten a big meal." And Mah-li, opening her cape, laid her hand wistfully over a section of her green satin coat.

"Dear me, I hope it is not serious."

The place was full of a pungent but stale medicinal odor as unfamiliar as the flavor of Chinese dishes; it suggested roots and herbs brewed a long time in ancient pots. In the close air of the place it was overpowering. They crossed an open court where Megan stopped to admire the intricate carving of the woodwork, angles of temples and pavilions, all smothered in dense foliage, from which peered tiny faces of men and animals, smiling from a serene secret world. Inside the next building a clerk brought her a high blackwood stool, where she sat while Mah-li made her purchases. For the pain that came after a large dinner she was apparently buying all the drugs in China. A clerk figured up her account on an abacus.

"Would you like to see more of the shop?" asked Mah-li.

Megan said yes, though she was giddy and tired. She followed Mah-li into more rooms and across more courts, where unexpected sunlight cut through the gloom in blue smoky shafts. At the end of a tunnel-like passage Megan sniffed amid all the dead odors a sudden

drift of musk, savage and alive. In the court beyond were wooden barred cages along the walls, in which large deer stood amid heaps of dirty straw, looking out with beautiful eyes full of fear and a certain disdain.

"Oh, I love them!" She leaned against the bars, but they were quite wild, they would not come to her hand stretched confidingly toward them.

"I hope they are not going to kill them."

But no one answered her and turning she saw Mah-li had left. She looked across the open court where coolies, naked to the waist, pounded something in a mortar, and saw in the dusk behind them the satin gleam of Mah-li's collar. Megan did not know whether to join her or not. She made several further attempts to attract the deer and turning was about to follow Mah-li when she saw that a man was with her. They were so absorbed in what they said to each other that distance condensed heavily between her and them and they seemed to stand unattainably far. She stopped abruptly, and waiting, listened to the low murmur of their unknown words. Presently they separated and their heads, bowed in the repeated noddings of a ceremonious farewell, were caught for a moment and illumined by a common shaft of sunlight. Their delicate faces, their narrow eyes fixed on each other in a locked and grave attention, glowed like those of marionette lovers in a fairy play. Mah-li's companion was the exquisite apparition who had brought Megan the cigarettes and Shanghai papers.

Mah-li returned to her slowly, her eyes fixed on the ground. She lifted her head and her look collided sharply with Megan's curious gaze. "That was Captain Li," she said, "the General's aide."

Her eyes reminded Megan of the deer's eyes, holding a little of fear and a great deal of scorn, the scorn of a simple organism for a more complicated one. Megan felt a slight uneasiness.

"Oh, yes," she replied vaguely. "Tell me, do they kill these deer?"

"No," said Mah-li, after a slight pause in which she turned to look negligently at the deer, "they use the horns only."

They left the medicine shop and once more got into their chairs. Megan wondered if the shopping tour had been entirely for the sake of that meeting. Having seen them together she could not doubt that Mah-li and Captain Li were lovers, and yet she was not entirely shocked. The relation of the General and Mah-li seemed to her quite as irregular. She knew that this relation was only the outgrowth of a patriarchal state of society, but she was inclined to look on the man's side of it as tyrannical and an abuse of privilege. As to its romantic importance she felt that it could not measure up in any way to what she had read in the attentive faces of Mah-li and Captain Li. But she realized her inability to weigh values with any such scales, she knew that from a lack of experience she looked on all such relations in a literary, a decorative, an unbrutal sense.

Mah-li stopped at one other shop where they sold fans. She bought a black one with a multitude of tiny brilliant figures on one side and gold characters on the other. In selecting it she had them bring out quantities of fans while Megan sat beside her looking on. Mah-li did not speak to her, she was very much occupied with the fans. She carried an elaborate French purse, from one of the Russian shops of Shanghai, one of green spangles with a marcasite clasp. She was very proud of this and left it lying under piles of fans, so that she lost sight of it and then had it searched for and finally recovered after some confusion.

When the fan had been wrapped in cottony paper she stood looking at it, then suddenly handed it to Megan. "I would like to give this to you," she said. "Will you please accept it?"

Megan was not expecting this and said rather briefly: "Thank you." When she got into her chair she looked at the fan thoughtfully.

Megan grew tired and very giddy as they made their way along in the enclosed chairs, and an emanation a little sickening began to steam up from the close-packed crowd about her. It struck her immediately and instinctively as a certain cruelty, though she could not place it very definitely unless it was in the overcrowding of any confined city, where the relentless fecundity of the population continues to turn out more human beings than there is need for. She felt it strongly however in the straining back muscles of her bearers, in the heads of the little scrambling children dusted with powder

and plastered with paper seals over deep ulcers, and finally she heard it in the music of a wedding procession, in the midst of which rode the bride in her sealed, red satin chair, music that was acrid, irritating, aphrodisian. It was a great relief when they left the city and came out on the open shore of the lake. The sun was streaming through openings in the clouds and breaking into light and shadow the sustained lines of the mountains and the curving shore. Megan drew up the blind so that the cooler, cleaner air bathed her head.

At the yamen Mah-li took her into one of the gardens a little way up the hillside, where in a stone pavilion were benches and a center table.

"I know you would like tea," she said. "They will bring it here to us."

Megan leaned her head against a pillar and closed her eyes. The air was full of the watery smell of the lake, and fatigue that was almost an appeasement flowed over her. She heard the General's voice and opened her eyes. He stood just outside the pavilion as if he had stopped on his way through the garden.

"Have you been to the city?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You must not tire yourself. Remember, you are very important to me, I cannot return you in anything but good condition."

"I suppose you mean I am now a sort of demonstration of your good behavior."

"Just about that. By the way, you got the Shanghai papers?"

"Yes. Thanks very much."

"I suppose you enjoyed the experience of reading about yourself all those extravagant things that are only said when one is dead?"

"I don't believe I enjoyed it. I kept thinking how dreadful it must be for my family to have to read these things. And then, it wasn't right somehow."

"When I was a child," said Mah-li, "I was very sick once and every one thought I would die. So every one at the Mission was very kind to me, especially people that had never been kind to me before. Even the very cruel embroidery mistress brought me a large peony

and laid it on my pillow. But when I got better they were all just as they had always been and the embroidery mistress made me work harder than ever."

Megan watched Mah-li with a smile, as we watch children whose gestures are so pretty, whose motives are so helplessly transparent, that even their vanity, greed and deceit have the charm of being reduced in scale and harmless. It seemed to her that her smile was shared by the General.



CHAPTER XVI

Megan slept out the rest of the afternoon until well after dark. At about nine o'clock she ate again and while she was eating the General's orderly brought her a note.

> "My dear Miss Davis [she read], will you not join us in a little game of cards, with which we are trying to pass the evening hours?"

She was about to refuse but thought that perhaps over the friendly relaxation of cards she might go far toward winning the confidence of the General and Mah-li.

She followed the orderly into the outer room and across the court into a room where at a table under a light sat the General, Captain Li, Mah-li and a man she had not seen before. He got up as Megan came in and walked around the table to shake hands with her. He was a stout man, with a red face merging into a bald head; his eyes were clear, childlike, blue, and when he smiled at her his teeth were the most dazzling and regular she had ever seen. His smile gave a sudden ingenuousness to a face gross and inexpressive. His clothes of an American business man were light gray, lately pressed and foppish.

"I am very pleased to meet you, Miss Davis. I am the General's financial adviser, Mr. Shultz. I've already heard a lot about you from the General." He looked steadily at her as he spoke and there was a not too faint insolence in his look.

Megan, a little dazed, murmured:

"How do you do."

The General said:

"Good evening, Miss Davis. We are playing poker; as it's an American game I thought you might like to join us."

"No, thank you, I'll look on," said Megan. "I don't play poker. And besides I have no money."

"I'll be glad to carry you," suggested Mr. Shultz. His voice was a fine tenor, marred by the looseness and indecision of his accent.

"It's just a little friendly game," he added, "the kind of friendly game where you gotta lose to the General. Captain Li and I'll be out a few thousand before the evening is over."

"I think I'll watch."

Megan sat down in a vacant chair by Mah-li, who was delicately dealing the cards.

"But do you play?" she asked her.

Mr. Shultz had sat down opposite them.

"Sure she plays," he said. "All these girls play and Mah-li is a terror. She is the only one here dares get money off the General."

Megan watched them. Beside the delicate small-boned Chinese faces, with their shallow shadows, the face of Mr. Shultz was as unformed as a lump of baking-dough. There was a glass of whisky and soda beside him and he handled this and his cards with the clumsiness, the surety of a derrick hoisting a load of gravel. His stubby nails were highly manicured and he wore a large diamond ring. The game progressed, punctuated by a few ejaculations. Every now and then Mr. Shultz looked up at Megan with a cold curiosity, unquickened by any sympathy. It was obvious that he did not approve of her being here, and whatever the circumstances that brought her, she should certainly have managed to avoid them. Megan read this opinion definitely in one of his slow glances and she met his judgment with an equally visible scorn. She did not in her turn approve of his being here. The financial adviser to a Chinese general indeed! Perhaps he was one reason why the finances of the province were shrouded in such disrepute. It seemed to her a bitter irony that the General should have rejected a man like Doctor Strike only to fall into the hands of Mr. Shultz. She saw the General looking from one to the other of them with a faint smile. It had perhaps amused him to bring them together, capable of discerning, as he certainly was, some of the differences that must lie between them, in spite of their common tongue. His amusement became so apparent on his face that Mr. Shultz, looking up, saw it.

His blue eyes hardened and for a moment this lump of flesh, without having made a movement, became formidable. The General's smile grew abstracted.

"Well, Miss Davis," said Mr. Shultz in a more friendly tone, "you're a newcomer here I take it."

"Yes, indeed."

"How long you been in China?"

"Several days only."

"Several days! Well, this is a strange situation, finding yourself in a place like this."

"Is it? Yet I'm sure plenty of missionaries have found themselves from time to time in Chinese families."

"Missionaries! Maybe. But then they do lots of things a lady like you wouldn't think of."

"They are much more courageous than I, if that is what you mean."

"Well, that isn't exactly what I mean. Sweeten up here everybody, sweeten up."

He began to deal the cards out heavily and surely. The General sat back in his chair watching him as if he had been a juggler hired for the evening.

"I used to be in the Customs," said Mr. Shultz, "the outdoor Customs. I was inspecting a ship once sailing for Amoy and way down in the hold, among all the Chinese passengers, was a black-haired girl, lying on a bunk reading a Chinese book. She was the best-looking girl I ever saw anywhere in my life. Her hair was all slicked down and she had on trousers and a little coat. Her feet were large but I didn't notice that then. I leaned against the bulkhead and looked hard at her, but she only went on turning the pages very carefully, till finally I couldn't stand it any longer. I said, 'Honey, who belong your master?' Well, the moment she looked up I saw I was wrong, but before I could get away she said loud and clear, 'Christ is my master,' so I said, 'Then I beg your pardon,' and shoved off. But I certainly couldn't approve of that girl, traveling in Chinese quarters in Chinese clothes and all. Missionary, of course. They always used to dress and live Chinese."

"What an extraordinary anecdote," said the General, and not the hard look which Mr. Shultz gave him could quite banish the delighted smile from his face, "and it proves that in reality you are only capable of being attracted by what is familiar to you."

"Oh, I know what you mean," said Mr. Shultz negligently. "But I am very broad-minded just the same. I know you've got your good points same as we have."

"I also am broad-minded," said the General. "I also am willing to admire. For instance, just at present I am suffering from a toothache, so I admire in you a dazzling monument to the efficacy of your nation. I refer, Shultz, to your teeth."

Mr. Shultz smiled, revealed the teeth and said, "Well, have another whisky soda then. Scotch is the best thing I know for toothache."

"And you, Miss Davis," said the General. "What do American ladies drink ordinarily? What would you like? May I offer you some champagne?"

"Nothing, thank you. Unless perhaps a glass of cold water."

"Better not," said Mr. Shultz. "I can have the boy bring some of my chow water if you like. But you'd better try White Rock or Perrier."

"Cold water! White Rock!" said the General. "Is that the stuff by which great civilizations are nourished!"

But Megan interrupted him. His levity made her uneasy though she could not quite tell why. Perhaps it was because the presence of Mr. Shultz, far from simplifying her situation, seemed to have complicated it. She did not want Mr. Shultz to feel that he had to protect her from anything, because that would cast a cloud over her relations with the General. Mr. Shultz's presence made an even more delicate balance necessary and the General's boisterousness might inadvertently upset it.

"Have you lived here long, Mr. Shultz?" she asked coolly.

"Longer than you've lived anywhere," he replied. Then he gave his attention to his hand for a moment. As the three cards he called for were dealt him he held them tightly against his chest, moving them only enough to see the edge of their marking. "Yes, longer than

you've lived anywhere," he repeated and laying them face down on the table he pushed a stack of chips forward. "I'll raise that fifty," he said, and after having called the General's three queens, he remarked, "Well, sometimes it pays to believe them. Yes, Miss Davis, I know China well. I guess I know all their bad points and their good points too."

"What are some of their good points?"

"We've always known how to build walls," said the General, raking in chips with his delicate fingers.

"Ah, yes, walls. To keep people out, I suppose?"

"A lot of good that did you," said Mr. Shultz. "You never kept 'em out. What you ought to have done was to grow a little hair on your chests."

"Would that have kept them out!" exclaimed the General.

Megan felt an even more complete disgust with Mr. Shultz. It wiped out any repulsion or antagonism she had felt for the General, which after all had been largely physical and as she believed unimportant. Now she felt sorry for him in the hands of this terrible Shultz, convinced that there was nothing in him capable of resistance to such a brutal vulgarity. She felt she ought to make an attempt to defend him herself. Mr. Shultz leaned back in his chair and took from his vest pocket a fat cigar. He held it up to his nose and smelled it meditatively.

"The best point the Chinese've got," he said, "is humor. And there is only one time it fails them. That is on a question of face. They can't stand their dignity trod on. Never. But they can laugh at each other like nothing you ever saw. That so, General? Oh, the General here has got the keenest sense of humor of the lot. By and by I'll tell you a little incident to illustrate just how far he can go in laughing at the other fellow."

"I hope," said the General, "you will confine yourself to anecdotes about yourself. Another episode like that of your inadvertent assault on the honor of your fellow countrywoman."

Megan again interrupted with determination.

"You are the General's financial adviser, aren't you? Just what does that mean, Mr. Shultz?"

"It means I can get more money out of this province than any man alive. Right now I've got nine hundred thousand taels in a box-car on a siding ready to ship anywhere. But it doesn't mean that the General follows my advice on what to do with it. Not so you'd notice it. He keeps me so he can do what I tell him not to."

"What do you spend it on, General? I'm interested to know how a province is run. Nine hundred thousand taels in a box-car seems a huge sum to me!"

"Depends on what you're used to," said Mr. Shultz. "The Missions wouldn't think much of it."

"One thing I spend it on," said the General, "is my arsenal. I am proud of that. It is my pet. You know we invented gunpowder long before it was known in Europe, but only used it for fireworks. I am forced now by circumstances to turn out arms; we produce a trench mortar the equal of any made in Europe, but if peace ever comes to my province long enough I shall spend my time in inventing and producing the most delicious and the strangest varieties of fireworks."

"Hm," said Mr. Shultz, "I doubt it."

"And what else do you do with it?" asked Megan.

"Oh, I don't think it would interest you, Miss Davis. It is all very dull. Upkeep of my troops, of roads and government buildings, propaganda."

"Propaganda?"

"Yes, a great amount of my revenue goes into that. Foreign and local, especially local. I can only govern by force and the good opinion people have of me. I have to buy both of them, and I find that good opinion is much the more expensive."

"I believe in the local propaganda all right," said Mr. Shultz. "A few pamphlets around to the soldiers. They can't read them and they respect any one that can shower them with information that's a mystery to them. But not this foreign propaganda. No one cares in Europe or the States what a bunch of Chinese are doing. 'Don't get us in on it,' that is all they say. No, you overdo it. Enough's enough."

"No," said the General, "you are wrong; enough is seldom enough. A small surplus is generally necessary." He turned to Megan. "You'll admit, Miss Davis, that in a country like yours, where nearly every man can read, it is of the utmost importance that he read the truth?"

"Don't make me laugh," said Mr. Shultz. "There isn't such a thing as truth, the way you mean it."

"You are clever to see the way I mean it," said the General.

"Sure I'm clever," admitted Mr. Shultz. "Say, is this poker we're playing or lotto? How about a few royalties here, ladies and gentlemen, how about a few royalties?"

He bit the end off his cigar, spitting it into the corner of the room. The General offered his briquet. Captain Li, looking politely aloof, sipped hot tea with a sucking noise.

"Yes, I guess I'm clever enough," Mr. Shultz said, "but I'm a child alongside you, General. I'll admit that. I'll tell you that little incident I spoke of, Miss Davis; it'll illustrate what I mean about the General's sense of humor."

He looked around on them with his shining white smile. His teeth, so regular, so efficient, were made to chew things into small bits. He looked greedy. The General gave a slight exclamation, probably of annoyance, and made with his hand holding a cigarette a gesture of sudden surrender. Megan wondered that he allowed this Mr. Shultz to go on as he did. Surely there was something he could do about the insolence of a man who was in his employ. He was himself presumably a despot, yet that momentary gesture of his hand, a gesture of an almost touching beauty, revealed the secret weakness of one who was peculiarly susceptible to disgust and fear.

"Well, it was like this," said Mr. Shultz. "A while back the General decided that the Nationalists were pretty sure to win out here in China and he thought he'd better accept some of their secret offers of negotiation. But at the same time the feeling here was strong against them, especially among the men who were backing him. He was in a delicate situation. Any other man would have sent the best older politician he could lay hands on to negotiate for him. But not the General. If the Nationalists met any serious defeat, if anything went wrong here at home, it was important that he be able to back

out quickly and no older man was going to be his goat for him, see? So he sends a young man, one of those idealistic scholar chaps, fine family, father great friend of his and all. This lad goes off thinking it is all for the good of China. But the trouble with all this was that the negotiations were premature. The Nationalists couldn't back up their promises at the time, and it was no go. But this boy was so full of enthusiasm for the Nationalists' aims that he couldn't bear to have the turn-over fall through. He began to reproach the General, to talk right and left. The General was beginning to be in wrong all around, with his own crowd and with the Nationalists. Every one knew that the boy had got from the Nationalists a proposition to sell out for so much, and then that the General had refused to accept the offer. It wouldn't look to you or I as though there was much could be done about this, because this boy's father was a great supporter of the General and an old personal friend. Captain Li here is a cousin of the boy and they say his intimate friend. They say Li is a scholar too. Well, this is what the General did: he went through all the motions of being shocked beyond words, claimed the boy had been carried away by false doctrines and tried to sell out on his own. And when he heard this the boy lost his nerve and ran. He didn't seem to have confidence in the General like he ought, because the General wasn't intending to harm him at all. He's got too much humor for that."

Megan looked at the General but his face showed only a conventional and rather absent smile of politeness. He was intent on the game which was progressing during Shultz's recital. Shultz paused in fact long enough to call a hand of Mah-li's and having, as usual, lost, remarked:

"Interesting but expensive." Then, looking at Megan, he went on: "Well, of course they caught this young man easily enough. It seems he was passing for a cart coolie and he had got him a brand-new cart. One day he hid in a farm in a little outshed where they store vegetables, but he left this cart outside and the soldiers spotted it right away as being too new-looking. So they went in. He resisted them, but they got him. And Here's where the General's cleverness comes in. Did he execute him? Not a bit of it. If he'd done that every one would have believed he had double-crossed him and was

obliged to get rid of him to keep him from squealing and this boy's family would have got some revenge on him. No, he pardons him after allowing himself to be persuaded a bit by all the relatives and all the prominent men of the province. That way they think he is straight, and besides, he gets a great reputation for being magnanimous. Everything O.K. I call that humor."

Megan looked quickly at the General and at Captain Li. They made no comment.

"Li don't speak English," said Mr. Shultz.

Megan sat in silence. She was not inclined to believe anything Mr. Shultz, an obvious adventurer, an extremely repulsive personality, might say. Nevertheless the story struck a memory of what Doctor Strike had suggested about the General's capacity for treachery. She looked at the General; she remembered the gesture of helplessness he had made a moment before, and she decided they must both be wrong, deceived by what was perhaps an external necessity and had no bearing on any integral part of the General's character.

"What became of the young man?" she asked, saying to herself that it really did not matter what Mr. Shultz told her.

"Oh, him? Well, he got badly mauled when they were taking him out of the farm. Some say they hamstrung him but I'm not sure. Anyway, it don't matter because he shot himself. He had lost face."

This of course was so obviously an attempt to pile on horror that it justified her disbelief of the whole story. The General had leaned back and was looking at the ceiling.

"What do you say about it?" said Megan.

"I? Why, I say he is lying grossly of course. He is trying to entertain you. I thought you would recognize that."

Megan felt relieved.

"Then it is not true?"

"It is not true. It is based on a real incident of course. But there is no single motive in it that is correctly stated."

"Oh, it's the truth, all right," said Mr. Shultz easily. "But what's the use of being upset? I don't want you to think badly of the General. He is a little hard on his enemies, and even on his friends, but he believes we are in this life to get what there is out of it. He

knows we've only got one life to live. Everybody is after the bacon and he might as well be the one to get it. Yes, sir, to bring home the bacon every time, that's the General's philosophy."

"See here," said the General, "I don't mind your lying about my actions, but I will not have you explaining my philosophy."

And the General smiled, but a bit uneasily. Mr. Shultz also smiled, his smile of white teeth and clear eyes, all candor and arrogance.

"Why, don't I know you like I know my own self?" he demanded. "Ain't you and I thick as thieves?"

He leaned over and clapped the General on the shoulder. The General shrank from him and began to deal, but Mr. Shultz held up two fingers close together and waved them before his face, to show how little separated his sympathies from those of the General.

"Don't you tell me everything?" he continued. "And if you don't, don't I know where to find out anyway?"

"I don't know. Do you?"

Mr. Shultz leaned his elbows on the table and, as his cards came, turned the edges up just enough to peep under.

"Sure I do. Like to hear, Miss Davis, how I find out what I want to know about the General, that is, when he hasn't confidence enough to tell me himself? Well, this is how. I give fifty dollars to his body-guard."

Megan looked at the General but he did not seem to be very disconcerted by this news. Perhaps he felt that his body-guard would not be in possession of any very valuable information. And he had also just drawn a pair to three of a kind.

"You give too much," he said.

"Oh, sometimes I give more than that," said Mr. Shultz. And when the hand was finished he repeated, "Yes, it becomes an expensive business. If fifty isn't enough, why, I give two hundred and fifty to Captain Li here. Yes, sir! And if it is something I really have to know, five hundred will do it. Five hundred Mex to Captain Li."

The captain, recognizing his name, looked inquiringly about the table. The General's face seemed to have shrunk under his smile.

"And how does Captain Li know?"

Megan felt at once by the tone of his voice that he was excited, and evidently Mr. Shultz recognized it too. He pushed his chair back and got up.

"You'd better ask him that," he said.

But the General did not ask. He sat counting chips from one hand to the other and back again. He was looking down at them, and over one eye a small nerve pulsed visibly. Mr. Shultz walked around the table and as he passed behind the General he looked at Mah-li and his teeth flashed in a smile.

In the corner of the room was a phonograph. He went over to that, and turned on a record. It was *E lucevan le stelle*, sung by Caruso. The voice poured out so familiar and European that Megan was startled. Mr. Shultz stood listening a moment, then he came back and sat down, resting his elbows on the table. The General appeared also to listen.

"Is that good music?" he asked.

"No," said Megan.

"That's the stuff," said Mr. Shultz, his eyes dreamy with satisfaction. "That's the greatest voice the world has ever known."

"Is it a love-song?" Mah-li asked Megan in a low voice, but Mr. Shultz heard and answered for her.

"That's what it is, Mah-li. Red-hot too. You ought to know."

Megan got up and went over to the phonograph, which was near a window. The window was open and a light rain was falling on the flags of the court outside. The dwarfed yellow plum, which some one about the yamen seemed to have placed in every room, bloomed in its dark glazed bowl, on a table piled high with records. Megan, leaning over to smell it, saw herself in her yellow robe dimly reflected in the glaze. The plum had a powdery pollen smell that made her think of the dust on the wings of moths and butterflies. The perfect voice continued to flood the room with tones that, despite the banality of the air, held nobility and glamour. Megan watched the General as he appeared to listen intently, wondering how it was striking him. Surely this simple insistence on desire and death must be apparent even to him, even in its unfamiliar medium. Was he thinking of Mah-li she wondered? What would a Chinese

love-song be like? The music of the wedding procession she had heard in the afternoon came suddenly back to her, not as remembered sound, but as a depression of spirit.

The General was frowning. "I don't know your good music from your bad," he said. "A music house in Shanghai sends me catalogues and I order every seventh name on the list."

Megan came back slowly and sat down by Mah-li. The game had stopped. Mah-li sat with her hands clasped on the table and Megan saw the jade rings she wore.

"How pretty," she said, touching one lightly with her finger.

Mah-li spread her hands out fanwise, and the General leaned over and looked down also at Mah-li's hands.

"Do you know jade?" he asked, and bent closer to examine the rings.

"I know no more of it than you do of music. It does interest me however. I believe it is a very esoteric taste, isn't it?"

"Do you like it?" He seemed to her unduly persistent. "Look at them closely," he said.

Mah-li stripped off the rings and Megan, a little embarrassed, examined them. The jade was set in diamonds on gold bands. She did not like the settings. The color of the jade was deep and translucent but it aroused no special emotion in her; she was not fond of jewels.

"Valuable as diamonds, gem jade like that," said Mr. Shultz with satisfaction, "and these people would rather have it."

It seemed that he meant even this to be offensive. Megan started to hand back the rings.

"Yes, I can see they are lovely," she said politely.

The General suddenly caught her hand and closed it firmly about the rings.

"I want you to keep them," he said, "they are yours."

Megan shook his hand off and dropped the rings as if they had been hot coals.

"They are yours," the General insisted, "put them on and wear them."

"That is simply preposterous, I wouldn't think of it. I don't want them."

Megan was stammering with indignation, but more from his peremptory touch and command than from what he implied. She had not realized that yet. She turned to look at Mah-li and saw by the fixity of her eyes, looking directly ahead of her, that she was deeply troubled. The young captain took a sip of tea with a sucking sound, set down his cup and politely hiccoughed.

"You must take them," the General repeated. "I assure you they are mine to give. The money which bought them came from me. Or so I am told," he looked around at all of them and added with finality, "so now I give them to you."

"This is too disgusting!" Megan started to get up, but Mah-li suddenly put out her fragile hand and touched her arm. There was the urgency of the suppliant in the pressure of her fingers.

"Please take them," she whispered.

Megan turned and looked at her. Then she gave a final exclamation.

"I'll take them," she said, looking at Mah-li and ignoring the others, "but I'll return them to you in the morning."

She gathered them loosely in one hand and sat staring angrily ahead of her.

Mr. Shultz burst into a roar of melodious laughter, and under cover of it Mah-li said something in Chinese to the General. He nodded indifferently and she slipped from her chair and left the room.

When the door had shut behind her, Megan said:

"I hate you both for humiliating her like that. It was disgusting." But she did not look at the General, she looked straight at Mr. Shultz. She got up. "I'm going now."

The General pushed his chair back abruptly. He said nothing, but he looked at her with an expression of such despair that she did not know whether it was genuine or assumed to play the buffoon and to disarm her. As she stood surprised, he took her gently by the arm and pushed her back into her chair.

"Don't go, please," he said. "Have another cigarette, let me offer you something to drink."

She shook her head. But she decided not to leave as long as she was angry.

Mr. Shultz poured himself another drink and puffed at his cigar. Then holding it between his teeth he began to count up the chips.

"Nice girl, Mah-li," he said, "well-mannered, raised in a Mission school she tells me." He winked at Megan.

"She is altogether charming," said Megan icily; "she is pretty and quiet and modest, and I am quite sure she is good."

"Well, that's an idea!" laughed Mr. Shultz.

"Why shouldn't she be quiet and modest?" said the General. "You must understand that she belongs to a class so accepted that it is not necessary for her to put forth any lures whatsoever. She does not have to exert herself. For five thousand years it has all been done for her. She has only to apply rouge and jewels, to conduct herself in a certain way, and fifty centuries of seduction act for her. You must admit, Miss Davis, we make life easy for women in China."

"Isn't he the ladder?" said Mr. Shultz. "I told you he had humor."

Megan rested her head on her hands, covering her ears to shut out Mr. Shultz's words.

"I really want to go. I can't stand this sort of stuff you both talk, it is so artificial and confusing and it doesn't mean anything. I am tired of it."

"Perhaps I'd better go," said Mr. Shultz, getting slowly to his feet. He looked Megan over as he ground his cigar into the ash-tray. Without another word he finished counting the chips, those of Mah-li, of the Captain and the General, then he took out a paper and pencil, made a note and handed it to the General.

"Settle up to-morrow," he said. "Good night, Miss Davis. Now you and the General can have a little heart-to-heart talk." He strolled with a curious lightness of step over to the door and once more turned to look at her, a ponderous man with a heavy turtle-neck, but his eyes were youthful and insolent. "Don't forget your rings, Miss Davis," he drawled.

When he had gone, Megan said to the General, "How did you ever get hold of him?"

"Oh," said the General with the air of being suddenly confidential, "he came to me with a letter from a good friend of mine. He is a remarkable man. He does everything. He understands thoroughly all Western business methods because he has been connected at one time or another with various firms, and while he is not actually a graduate engineer he has had enough experience (he was with a company making some sort of quartz light and with one making radios) so that now he manages my arsenal and does it extremely well. I should say the prosperity of my province is largely due to his efficiency. I am very attached to him."

"He is ill-bred," said Megan, "and he has no ideals; he is a thoroughly unscrupulous adventurer. If you knew the West better you would recognize that at once. Don't let his efficiency blind you."

"He has two virtues besides his efficiency," said the General, "that are even more indispensable to me. He is courageous and he is loyal."

"Loyal! And yet he talks about you as you heard him talk to-night!"

"You don't understand. He was calling my attention to a betrayal. He was reminding me first how disliked I am in certain quarters, how great a bribe might be given, and to whom. He wanted to focus my distrust on a person whom it would not be possible for him to accuse directly."

"Maybe so. But I still wish you would get rid of him. That he should represent all you want to accept from the West is pitiful. I can't imagine a man like you rejecting Doctor Strike and accepting Mr. Shultz. Doctor Strike also has courage, and he also is loyal——"

"But not to me," the General interrupted. "Doctor Strike's first loyalty would always be elsewhere. He would probably say to his God. And a man who has dedicated himself to the service of any god is unreliable as a friend."

"Mr. Shultz seems to me to be dedicated to himself, first, last and always."

"That is just it. That is why he is loyal to me. He is a thoroughly reasonable man. I am his best chance. My interests are his interests. As long as that remains so I can count on him absolutely."

"But you yourself told me it did not occur to Doctor Strike to betray you to the authorities to get his safe-conduct pass."

"The motive was not strong enough. He would betray me to please his God any time. The difference is I can control the loyalty of Shultz. I can make it always to his advantage to serve me. When I cannot do that any longer I can expect to lose him. But how can I possibly foresee what Doctor Strike will do! On one occasion he actually tried to persuade me to save a young man's life, at the expense of my own. When I would not do so he turned against me. No, no, Shultz has all I want of the West. Doctor Strike has nothing."

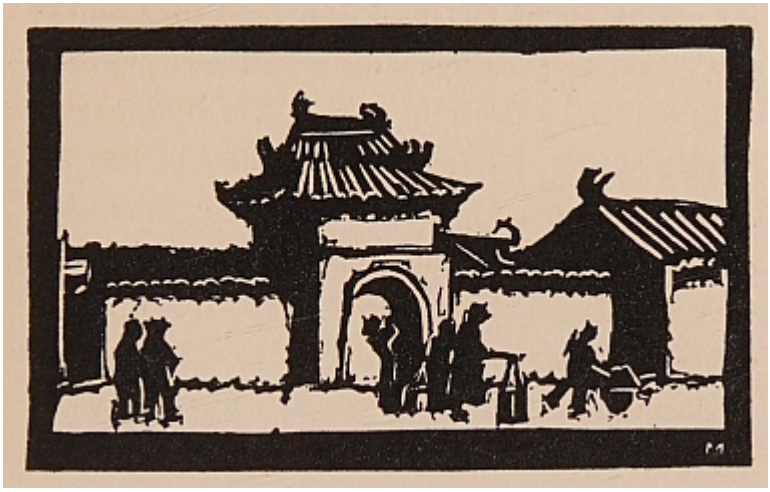
The finality of these words silenced Megan. The General sat looking at her, and Megan, who was never self-conscious, looked back at him, thinking not of him but of the Jesuit church in the Chinese city, of the first attempt, simple, gracious and even courtly, to bring the word of God. Yet after several hundred years during which the attempt had increased in volume and complicated itself immeasurably, China, which had accepted so many other things, still felt no need of the Word. It accepted Mr. Shultz. It rejected Doctor Strike.

Megan sighed as if she herself had partaken in the long struggle. She looked at her watch. It was eleven-thirty.

"I must be going. I want to say just one more thing. You won't be hard on little Mah-li, will you? Whatever Captain Li has done I am sure she is quite innocent. I am going to return these rings to her tomorrow. Unless you would return them yourself?" She held them out tentatively but the General did not answer. "Well, then I will. Good night, General Yen."

The General stood up and bowed as she passed him.

"Good night, Miss Davis."



CHAPTER XVII

Megan slept heavily and as she came slowly out of unconsciousness she checked off one by one the familiar sounds of the yamen, the farmyard crow of the roosters, the soft thud of barefooted soldiers drilling in the outer court, the ringing of the telephone and the voice of the young orderly. Already these sounds meant a routine of life. She lay in bed all morning and toward noon asked her amah for a hot bath. Presently she heard the coolie carrying pails of water and emptying them in a robin's-egg blue Soochow tub that stood in a little bath closet off her room. She listened, thinking how much labor each intervaled splash had cost and wondering at the simplicity of Eastern life.

In this yamen of the General she had seen no sign of luxury or magnificence. It was a house obviously made for a life which began and ended with the rising and the setting of the sun. Early in the evening she had heard a click of tiles from the kitchen court in the rear, where some of the servants played mah jong, but that had soon stopped and by ten o'clock the yamen became a collection of dimly lighted rooms where people slept. Even the group at the poker game had an air of enforced wakefulness, like children kept up at a railroad station.

After her bath Megan sat down before Mah-li's little dressing-case and brushed her hair into lacquered smoothness. Then she examined the case and the lipsticks and eye-pencils it contained. She gave a slow experimental stroke to her lips and, daring further, touched her face with some of the pallid almond powder, put a faint touch of blue on her lids. Her eyes stood out startlingly in a face of luminous skin, of subtle transparent shadow; she saw that whatever the cause she was changed, something had heightened, intensified, she was once more beautiful.

Her eyes caught Mah-li's rings lying where she had left them. She picked them up to examine the jade more closely. For all their high polish they gave back very little light, rather light sank in them and was lost; they retained obstinately their perfection of green. Megan put them on her thin fingers so that when she saw Mah-li she would

have them ready to slip into her hand. While she waited for more food, for something, it did not matter much what, to happen, she stroked her lips fastidiously with the lipstick, looking at herself, gratified by her appearance and by her gesture, which was like a movement in a steady pantomime.

A tiffin came and was eaten, cleared away. She smoked five cigarettes, watching the jade on her fingers as she smoked. Then there was nothing to do. She lay down again, her hands behind her head. How bewilderingly full a Western day is, how many things to do and what little time to do them in! What does a Chinese lady's day consist of? Small duties no doubt, little rituals, talk about sewing, gardens, children, the everlasting preoccupations of women. Mah-li's day,—what did she do, what did she think about? How could she ever understand what Mah-li would think about! Yet it must be simple too, if one only had the key. If there were only some way to grasp what it meant, this life murmuring around her, a monotonous melody, so widely spaced that years grew between the notes.

And there seemed to be three notes dominating: simplicity, sameness, security. How long ago did they irrevocably decide, these people, just what and how much to extract from the world about them, from the jewels of the earth and growing things, from rivers, the seasons, men and women? How long ago did they gather together ceremonials and establish the relations of a man among men into a stylized routine, in which the dignity of each is preserved intact like a fly in amber? How did they unerringly know what fragile crystallizations of verse, what massive undulations of form and color, would satisfy their palates? How did they render their palates once and for all incapable of satiety? Perhaps by turning every effort toward the establishment of peace, peace in the land and in the heart, by refusing action for the sake of decorum, by placing propriety above love, by ignoring equality and freedom that the best may be cultivated, and by refusing to be lured from their submissive contemplation of life to the perils of ecstasy and aspiration.

"I wonder if I am right about them," thought Megan, "and should one consider any group so enormous as a homogeneous unit. There is surely room among them for greater variety than this. And so many of them have already been assailed by contacts from another world, the circle has already been broken in places. The General has spent years in Europe. He speaks English perfectly, and it should be impossible for him to speak a language so different in all its forms from his own without experiencing certain modifications of thought. One would imagine the language, even taken by itself, to be as active as a cake of yeast. And he is troubled. That is just what is the matter with him, he is disturbed as I could never even conceive of being disturbed. No wonder he instinctively resists as best he can, striking blindly, making foolish gestures, taking refuge in any formula that presents itself. Poor General!

"And how very charming he is!"



CHAPTER XVIII

A sharp whistle sounded outside her window, a sound as unmistakably European as Caruso's voice. Megan knew it must be Mr. Shultz. She waited until it came again, with greater urgency, then got up reluctantly. She looked down on Mr. Shultz from the window and saw him standing below in plus fours with pale checked golf hose and elaborate brogues. As he looked up at her the expression of his eyes softened perceptibly, and she realized that she was still decorated with Mah-li's make-up and that Mr. Shultz, unconscious of the cause, found her more attractive than he had the night before, that he was impressed by the change. Although she believed his admiration to be a matter of complete indifference to her, she felt a certain amiability toward him, a tolerance that she could not account for.

"Good morning, Miss Davis."

"Good morning, Mr. Shultz. Where are you off to?"

"I'm going away to attend to some urgent business of the General's, and I don't like to leave you here alone all day. Not that you can't take care of yourself in most circumstances, but things aren't going so well over in town. If Mah-li, for instance, should want to take you on any more shopping tours, like she did yesterday, you'd better not go."

"They aren't fighting in the town, are they?"

"No, not fighting, but maybe getting ready to. It is a funny thing, Miss Davis, but I seem to have a kind of sixth sense where money is concerned. And I can just tell by hundreds of small indications, that no one else might hardly notice, that there has been an awful lot of money let loose in the last day or so in that town. It didn't come from the General, so that means the Communists have got it and if they've got it the probabilities are it is Russian money. No one hands out money just for the improvement of the race, Miss Davis. It is for value received, and that looks bad."

"I suppose you mean the Communists are being paid to throw the General out."

"It looks as if they were going to try."

"Can't you pay them more not to?"

"Good Lord, Miss Davis, you sound Chinese!" Mr. Shultz laughed.

"Oh, I didn't mean it seriously," said Megan, smiling. "It just slipped out. Still it does seem reasonable, doesn't it?"

"Reasonable, except that there is no end to it. No, that is what our army and our arsenal are supposed to be for, so we don't have to spend so much on bribes. We find the army is cheaper in the end. The only trouble is they can bribe the army too, if they want to blow that much."

"But haven't the army any loyalty?"

"Oh, you mustn't think of them like our army, Miss Davis. They haven't any convictions, they are mercenaries. They don't care who has them, so long as they get their rice and a little loot."

"The thing to do then would be to give them the convictions, wouldn't it? Make them feel the General is the man to bring them prosperity and order and justice, and that he can only do that through their loyalty."

"Propaganda? Yes, we do that too. But it is terribly hard, Miss Davis, to fix anything new in the minds of people who haven't had a new idea for five thousand years."

"I suppose it is."

The spring air had an enervating softness. Megan leaned her head against a side of the window and looked up at rifts of blue that opened occasionally in the misty sky. Mr. Shultz leaned against the wall looking up at Megan.

"Isn't Captain Li one of the Communist party?" she asked.

"We think he is. We think he has been betraying the General all along."

"Then why keep him?"

"Sort of hostage, I guess. His family are very powerful, they are supposed to be friends of the General, but you never can tell. And then he can't do much harm here."

Megan was about to say, "And Mah-li?" but she did not. Though she found Mr. Shultz quite bearable when he was not being an obvious and direct influence on the General, she did not wish to discuss Mah-li with him. She felt bound by a mysterious loyalty to Mah-li and the General. Mr. Shultz, the General had said, was bound by reason and interest. It did not seem fitting that she should discuss either of them with him.

"Well, don't worry about me," she said. "I'll take good care to keep out of harm all day!"

"Right-o," said Mr. Shultz, "and don't you worry any. I've got it all fixed to get you back to Shanghai if anything happens suddenly. And if it don't, I've still got it fixed to get you back in a few days. I don't like your being here with these people. The General is a good scout, but after all, he is Chinese, and his reputation with women is none too good. As for Mah-li, she isn't the sort a lady like you should associate with."

Megan laughed. "So you have ideas of decorum too!"

"Sure I have," said Mr. Shultz rather indignantly. He straightened up and put on his cap. "Well, I have to hustle on now," he said, "but I'll be back by dark. So long, Miss Davis."

"So long, Mr. Shultz."



CHAPTER XIX

He had scarcely gone when Megan heard a timid knock on her door. She called but as no one came in she went to open it herself. Mah-li stood outside wearing her little fur-collared coat and carrying a blue embroidered bag in her hands. She stood quite stiffly, holding her bag and looking at Megan with such a strained, empty smile of politeness that Megan put her arm comfortingly about her shoulders and drew her into the room. Mah-li shrank from her a little, and when Megan closed the door behind her and turned to her again she did not renew her gesture but invited Mah-li by a wave of the hand to sit down by the table.

"I am so glad you came," she said. "I have been hoping all morning you would, but I did not know how to get any word to you."

Mah-li sat on the edge of her chair and her eyes fixed themselves on a corner of the room.

"Yes," she said, "I came to say good-by to you. I am leaving in a few moments."

"Leaving! My dear child, it isn't possible, is it?" She did not like to ask if the General was sending her away.

Mah-li nodded.

Megan sat considering her. She felt only indulgence for Mah-li, and her imagination returned to the glimpse of two delicate painted faces seen for a moment in one shaft of sunlight. She could not blame her for a lapse from so problematic a duty. A feeling that this kind of love, anti-social as it is, has in it something too sacred to be bound by law is strong in the West, where the rights of the individual are of such transcendent importance and where society seems to be created for the good of man, rather than man for the good of society. There was nothing in Megan's tradition nor in her experience to make her capable of censoring Mah-li, the rebel, too severely.

"Well," she said, "it may be the best thing in the end. You could not have been happy here. I have wanted to tell you from the first that if I could help you in any way I would. And now I am sure I can.

You must come to me when I get back to Shanghai. We can plan then what is best for you and what will make you happy."

Mah-li looked up and a little puzzled frown gathered between her perfect eyebrows.

"Yes, I told you I would be married in Shanghai and perhaps now I shall have a home there. But wherever I am, it will be the same. I will look out for you. You mustn't worry about that at all. You can stay with me until you choose the sort of life you want to lead. There are so many occupations for women these days, even in China. They don't have to be the slaves of fantastic customs any longer, and you mustn't feel that this one experience has ended things for you. Not at all. You will start out all fresh in a new world and with a real friend to help you. For I want you to consider me your friend, Mah-li. Will you?"

The inadequacy of words became almost terrifying to Megan. With all the affection and help she wished to pour out on Mah-li she could only flounder about in phrases that seemed to bend under her. But she felt Mah-li must be aware of the warmth of her intention.

"You are very kind," said Mah-li.

"I suppose," said Megan, "that you are an expert with your needle and can make all those fascinating embroideries such as I saw in Shanghai. And then you type, you tell me. That might be something you would like to follow up. And speaking English so well, I have an idea we could find you some very interesting secretarial work."

Mah-li looked into the corner again and a smile curled her lips, a timid smile, but one holding the ghost of mockery. Megan stopped, for she could not continue to ignore the fact that Mah-li, as she stood, was a piece of pure decoration, made only to give pleasure. It was with relief that she thought again of Captain Li.

"Is Captain Li a Christian?" she asked, not that it seemed likely but as a means of introducing him into the field.

"Oh, no," said Mah-li, and she added, "He is a scholar."

Megan ignored this jibe, if it really was meant as such, and thought for a moment of just how she had better present Captain Li as a solution of Mah-li's future. She found, as she considered him,

that he was a more delicate problem than she had first believed.

"I suppose you will expect to see Captain Li again," she said hesitatingly. "You will expect to—that is, you will—well, will you see him again?"

Having on Mah-li's behalf abolished the fantastic custom of concubinage with one wave of the hand, she now was not sure where to place her. Marriage with the young captain did not seem to offer the inevitable solution. She found him increasingly difficult to talk about.

"I don't know," said Mah-li.

"But he knows you are being sent away, does he not?"

"He will see that I am not here," said Mah-li sensibly.

"Then surely he will realize that you are in trouble and that his actions have put you in the way of being misunderstood by the General. I believe the General even thinks that you gave information about him to Captain Li. I am sure he believes it. Mr. Shultz practically told him so before us all."

Mah-li's eyebrows contracted sharply.

"But as I said before, don't let that upset you too much," said Megan hastily. "It will all come out all right when we can only think of what is best to do for you. We don't want to act hastily. Captain Li, you say, is a scholar. He comes of a powerful family, and I hope he is a young man of principle and good character. Is he?"

Mah-li did not answer, and Megan realized that in her desire to help and in her confusion she had stepped far over the line that Mah-li appeared to believe should exist between them. She stopped, looking anxiously at Mah-li's face. It was quite blank. She sat with her hands clasped on the little blue embroidered bag which she pressed against her stomach. She leaned against it as if for support. Megan saw that the bag contained a hot-water bottle, the little red rubber collar and nickel stopper of which protruded over the top. She smiled suddenly at the combination. What a child Mah-li was! It seemed once more clear to her that while she must treat her as a child, with patience, with indulgence even, she must also handle her with firmness.

"Mah-li," she said directly, "why is the General sending you away?"

Mah-li looked suddenly sick. She drew her shoulders together, huddling forward over her hot-water bottle. She looked like a small costly bird transported to an unfavorable climate.

"The General is sending me away," she said, "because Mr. Shultz told him I got money from Captain Li for giving him information about the General."

And looking up at Megan she smiled again her constrained formal smile which Megan knew was meant to recall her to reticence. But she disregarded it.

"Why does the General believe Mr. Shultz?"

Mah-li answered in a barely audible voice.

"The General believes him because he himself has not been generous to me. He supposes I want the money. My mother and my grandparents live in Soochow." She added, and Megan could scarcely catch the words, "They are very poor."

For a moment Megan was tempted to transfer some of the responsibility for Mah-li's conduct to filial devotion. It would be more Chinese. But Mah-li's motives were not really important to her now; they seemed only an indistinguishable part of the general romantic error of her life. What was important now was that Mah-li should put herself in her hands, confide herself and all her little complexities to her, so that she might save her.

"Is it true, Mah-li," she demanded, "that you did sell information about the General?"

Mah-li's eyes had such a look of withdrawal that it was as though her face sank down through water, then she bent her head, looking into her lap, but Megan pressed forward relentlessly.

"Tell me. It makes no difference to me what you did. It won't change my feelings toward you if you sold him ten times over. I can understand that you may have been driven to it. I only want to help you. I want to do everything I can for you. I must make the General see as I do, that you have never had a fair chance, and that you are a child and haven't understood right and wrong any more than a child, that he must forgive you and do what he can to help you. He

also has been to blame in his relations to you, so he ought to be all the more willing to forgive. But you see, I can't talk to him, Mah-li, until you tell me the truth. Try to tell me. I've told you it doesn't matter, but just tell me. Why, Mah-li, you don't realize to what extent I want to be your friend."

Mah-li did not raise her head. Megan saw her face foreshortened, and her forehead was a dome of obstinacy. Her eyebrows raised slightly but she made no answer, and Megan was unable to continue with any assurance of being understood. She had no idea what to say now and a definite irritation with Mah-li for not accepting her generosity stole over her. Mah-li's every effort was to maintain, even with desperation, the obscure balance necessary to her self-respect, or perhaps only her vanity.

They sat in silence; Mah-li, reassured, raised her head and looked now with polite inquiry toward Megan, waiting for her to continue. Megan wished that she were actually a child and could be given one efficacious slap. She thought of the rings.

"I have your jade," she said. "I would have sent them to you but I thought it safer to wait until I saw you myself. I put them on so I would be sure to have them ready."

She slipped off the rings and handed them to Mah-li. Mah-li took them without hesitation but she did not put them on. She looked at them lying on her palm and Megan felt she was trying to make up her mind to say something about them.

"You have told me," she said finally, "that you would be glad to do me a favor. Did you really mean that?"

"Why, of course I did. I have just told you I would do anything for you."

"Then I want you please to send these rings to my father and mother for me. They are old people and poor. They live in Soochow. I have written it down for you." She reached inside her coat and drew out a slip of paper with a few Chinese characters on it. "Your friends in Shanghai, who have lived in China for so long, will know how to send a package there. Or that Doctor Strike who came that night to the General. He is a very superior man," she added, obviously anxious to please Megan by praising him. "I knew him

when I was a little girl in Soochow. He would tell you just what to do with them." She handed the rings back and for a moment her fingers rested on Megan's warm palm like cold little shells.

"You have a chill," Megan exclaimed, "you mustn't go out like that. Let me order some hot tea for you."

"No, no, don't order anything. I ought to have gone earlier, and I really am not cold. These spring days are sometimes a little chilly. You see, I brought my hot-water bottle."

She touched the embroidered blue bag, and Megan once more smiled at the combination of ornament and utility. But as she looked up she surprised in Mah-li's eyes a wild uncovered gleam of fright. For a whole moment it fluttered before her uncontrolled and Megan stared back in dismay.

"My dear child," she cried, "you are ill, you mustn't go away at all. Stay here with me. I'll arrange it somehow."

"No, no," said Mah-li, "that is impossible."

She ran one finger across her eyebrows to restore serenity to her face. Megan could scarcely believe she had seen that look.

"I am not ill. I am tired; that is all."

She got up and drew her coat together. Megan got up too and impulsively taking her hands drew her slightly resisting figure to the window.

"Don't forget that I meant what I told you. I am your friend and am here to help you."

Mah-li let her hands lie irresponsively in Megan's, but she turned her face toward her with what seemed for the time a vague expectancy.

"And don't forget either," said Megan, emotion making her voice a little husky, "that you have another Friend who is always with you. Didn't they ever tell you these words of His at the Mission schools? —'Come unto me all ye who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.'"

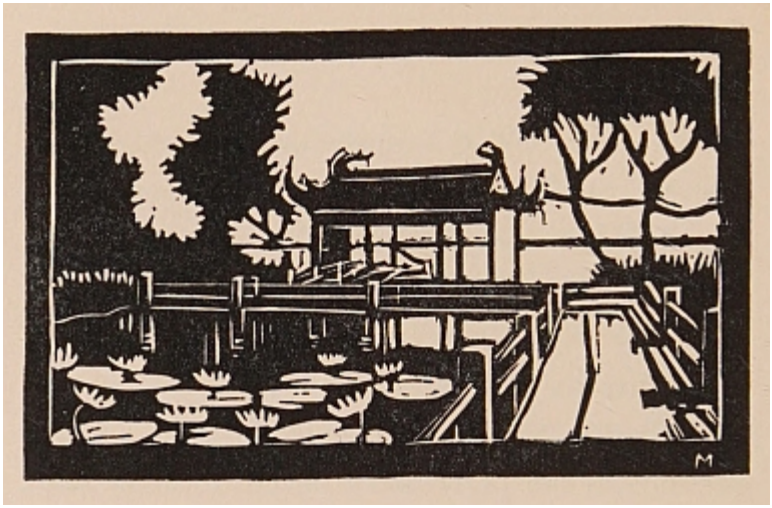
"Yes, I remember that," said Mah-li. "I embroidered it on a scroll once and they framed it and hung it on the wall. But it never seemed to me to be true. It was two thousand years ago He promised that and the happiness and unhappiness of the world have not changed

since. No, the unhappiness is still poverty, sickness, dying and separation, the happiness is still the friends around the rice bowl, the acquiring of riches and honor, the son that is born. These things are the same. He has not really changed the world. I think He only used words of courtesy like any other man."

"But He was not man, Mah-li, He was God. And you are wrong; millions have listened to Him and His love has transfigured the lives of half the human race."

"Has it?" Mah-li turned away. A shadow of disappointment crossed her face. Whatever she expected she had evidently not received. She walked slowly to the door and when she reached it, Megan took her by the shoulders and suddenly kissed her in an awkward school-girl fashion on both cheeks. She felt the blunt little cheek-bones and sniffed the perfume of Mah-li's young skin, that was strangely like the aroma of fine old parchment, but when she looked at her she saw that this intimacy brought them no closer together.

After Mah-li had left she stood wondering what she could have said or done that would have proved more effective. The remembrance of Mah-li's fingers clutched about the neck of the hot-water bottle struck her to the heart. She could not rid herself of the idea that Mah-li had come to her in the hope of something quite definite that she had not received. But what more did Mah-li want? Had she looked for a confirmation, or for a new formula, or only for some comforting observance? Or had she too hoped for the miracle, and this time the miracle had not been forthcoming?



CHAPTER XX

She was still standing in a rather cold and discouraged preoccupation when the orderly came with a note from the General asking her to drive with him. She decided at once that she would go, seize a favorable opening in their conversation and speak to him about Mah-li. That would obviate at least any imminent physical danger. She did not know just how far a Chinese general might be expected to go in punishing an unfaithful concubine but it did not seem unlikely to anticipate even sudden death. However, death for Mah-li did not greatly worry her. Her coldness and her discouragement had vanished at the prospect of an encounter with the General.

She was elated to discover that she had now a definite issue on which to base an attack on him, an issue entirely satisfying in its human implications, the very ache and anguish of mind he would feel over Mah-li's defection making more valuable his forgiveness of her. An issue also on the grand scale, since it demanded of him an unqualified renunciation of his sterile ethic. In a word, if she could force him to accept it she would at the same time force him to accept irrevocably the very essence of the Word of God.

She joined him before the yamen and once more got into the car of which she had a faint remembrance of having driven in from the station. It was very elaborately fitted with green enamel vanity case and smoking set, the windows garlanded with chenille fringes. Two gray-clad soldiers armed with Mausers rode standing on the running-board. They drove in silence and Megan watched the lake with its fleets of islands strung together darkly. There was a light mist, the young leaves of some of the trees had a reddish flush, almost like the first bronzing of autumn, and the low key of all the colors, the milky air, would have given a late autumnal melancholy to the landscape if it had not been for a few fruit trees that bloomed with poignant freshness. They turned into the hills and stopped before a great gate.

"Would you like to get out?" asked the General. "This temple is very interesting. I want to show it to you."

They walked up an avenue of huge camphor trees and turned off at the left before a curious mound of rock, fretted and hollowed out by water. In the depressions were carved half-relief figures of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The General led her into narrow caves and passages in the rock, where water dripped and dim Indian faces sculptured in low relief looked down from the walls.

"But this can't be Chinese!" she exclaimed.

There was a closeness, a secrecy about the place and the faces had a quality of emotional life that did not seem to her Chinese.

"The monk who founded this temple came from India. This hill reminded him of India, so he called it 'the hill that flew over.'"

They walked farther into the grove across little streams of clear water, paved with polished pebbles, over which hung an occasional graceful pavilion. Among the rocks were more sculptured figures. On a ledge across the stream, behind a pattern of branches, was a figure that particularly attracted her. Megan stopped to look at it, and the General suggested they rest for a moment. To have an uninterrupted view of the Buddha Megan sat down on a smooth low boulder and the General sat beside her. He offered her a cigarette and Megan took one, sitting with her elbows on her knees, her chin on her knuckles, entirely at ease now. The General watched her between soft puffs at his cigarette. Megan, smoking, was absorbed in the figure carved in the rock. The sun came out and a few leaf shadows wavered over it, breaking up the lines and surfaces. What was there about it, as in the faces carved in the caves, that had seemed not quite Chinese? It was a face serene and with the lowered eyelids of a man asleep, but one felt that this man dreamed and that in his dream he knew all the lost paradises, where love is the law, the beginning and the end. The Chinese do not dream such dreams. Even during the brief Buddhist domination they remained secretly and profoundly indifferent, insensible, to these intoxications of the spirit, and Buddhism passed, leaving them untroubled as though its shadow only had passed over them.

Megan, raised to a higher point of sensitivity, felt that the General, looking at her, was aware to some extent of what she was thinking and that he was smiling a little ironically, saying to her in his mind, "See what we are capable of living through untouched.

And how can you ever hope to change us?" She heard his inner laughter and with it the laughter of hundreds of small voices, shrill, thin, as notes of cicadas, rising all about her from tree, water, earth, hearth flame, the voices of the small gods, the ancient gods of China never abandoned, forever satisfying a people whose contemplations are all bounded by the earth and the sky, whose kitchens, markets, fields, temples and gardens, they fill with their aroma of homely poetry, their ceremony, their magic. The General laughed with them, and they, a little senile in triumph, laughed with the General.

"You make me think such strange things," said Megan aloud.

"I know," he replied. "You were thinking that you do not represent the first religious invasion we have lived through. And perhaps you are even wondering if you will be able to do more for us than the others did, yes, even with all that you are willing to give away with it in the way of kerosene and munitions and a thousand like commodities, tucked in like a coupon in a package of cigarettes, entitling one after so many to six plated silver spoons."

But Megan did not feel that he spoke bitterly. He looked at her with a smile of pure banter.

"You do like to make fun of us, don't you?" she said. "But after you have made fun of us, admit that what we strive for is worth more than a life of agreeable social relations. For that is your ideal, isn't it?"

"But, Miss Davis, the most important thing in a man's life is his social relations! It is true that in China everything is built on that. We have a sense of harmony and just proportion that you can never understand. In a man's duty to his gods we leave him considerable choice. It concerns him alone. In letters and the arts he is allowed less choice: an error of taste or judgment would have more effect on others. But in his duties to those dependent on him and on whom he is dependent, it was long ago decided what they were to be and since then no choice has ever been allowed. Our fault is that we are what one might call myopic. We cannot see clearly beyond a certain radius. Few of our works of art, for instance, are meant to be seen from a distance. And so the immediate relations are apt to seem

more important to us, the more distant ones less so. It seems to work out with us that a man's relations to his father are very nearly perfect, to his state as good as he can conveniently make them."

The General picked up a few pebbles and threw them one by one into the stream, then he threw them a little farther, until one struck the knee of a seated figure. It was the first gesture Megan had seen him make that did not seem the expression of some secret strain, in spite of the fact that all his gestures were gracious.

"Now I've told you what our goal is, tell me what you understand to be yours. I'll see if I think it is so much finer than a life of agreeable social relations."

"You explain things so much better than I do, I don't know whether I can tell you."

She thought a moment.

"I suppose," she said, "our ideal is all contained in the words of Christ. 'Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with thy whole mind, thy whole soul, and thy whole strength.' And following that, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' He himself says that is all the law."

"To love my neighbor as myself has always seemed to me a very disgusting injunction. I can only say that you don't usually carry it out. You personally perhaps, but then you are strangely sincere. To you the important thing seems to be a certain generosity. You are willing (you must forgive me this, Miss Davis) to be generous at nearly any one's expense. Most people are not. Your tenet, if carried out, would lead to an inconceivable state of disorder. It is possibly the theory most dangerous to humanity at large that has ever come into the world. It is fortunate, perhaps it was inevitable, that it should have been accepted by races gifted with an ability to think one way and live another. The Ideal. Yes. To them that remains sufficient in itself. They hold it up in one hand, as if it were a great crystal ball, and they say to others, 'See, this is what I aspire to. Isn't it beautiful of me!' And with the other hand they quietly pick the purse of an admiring listener."

Megan burst out laughing, partly at the droll twist of his eyebrows as he said this, and the sly gesture of the hand delicately picking an invisible pocket.

"It isn't fair to judge a man by what he succeeds in accomplishing," she said. "Your theory of social relations, you admit, doesn't work out perfectly."

"No, it does not. But taken purely as an ideal of conduct, tell me why I should be expected to love an aged beggar, who sits outside my gate, who is a congenital scoundrel, and who is loathsomely afflicted with elephantiasis?"

Megan, at the risk of being inept, decided to answer him seriously. But it was something of a strain to do so and she spoke with none of the heat that had formed her words to Mah-li.

"Why, to help him, of course. I believe that only through love can people be saved. And your beggar must be saved, must become conscious that he too is a creature of God."

"But he knows already that he is a creature of God. And I cannot save him. Elephantiasis is incurable, so is old age, so, I believe, is even rascality."

"Really!" Megan laughed, abandoning seriousness, "you almost make me despair of you. Do you consider then that between you and that beggar there exists no relationship whatsoever?"

"Certainly. But it is a very simple one. Mine to him is to toss him the coins on which he sustains his life. His to me is a lively gratitude for my bounty. In this way each of us is satisfied. But it would be as horrible for him as for me should I undertake to love him. Indeed, when you insist on that you can really put no limit to what I must love. You will end up by insisting I love things of which I can't even speak."

"You are reducing it to the absurd and that isn't fair. Just tell me one thing. You call yourself a Communist, don't you?"

"No, no," protested the General.

"Well, a Republican then. Does a beggar at your gate fit into that picture?"

"Oh, politics!" The General shrugged and made a little half-turn with his fingers, dismissing politics like so much dust. "Every one must have a label. Almost any label will do."

Megan felt too languid to continue. Beauty rising from the grove and from the figures carved in the rock seemed to coil like delicate smoke through her brain. They sat without speaking for several moments and then by unspoken agreement got up and walked farther along till they came to the temple, containing a vast wooden Buddha whose head touched the ceiling. Priests were chanting in voices pitched on a low note which mounted and descended as in a Catholic vespers. One sounded, at intervals, a little muffled drum. A young acolyte brought them tea, which they drank on a wooden bench against the temple wall. They wandered afterward into a dusty hall full of gilded lohan standing in rows in the gloom. But there was little beauty in the temple, the great Buddha or the lohan, and Megan's eyes returned to the hill outside, feathery with bamboos and mounded with graves. Soft white clouds rested on it. The temple lacked utterly what she had already found in the grove, a sense of mystery.

They walked slowly back to their waiting car, and as they drove along the General pointed to an island in the lake.

"To-morrow if I am free we must visit that island. There are pools and pools of lotus there, crossed by red causeways. I will have them forbid the landing of any visitors for the whole day and we will take tea undisturbed in one of the pavilions. You will imagine that you are in old China, not the China of temples but the China of gardens."

"What a delicious phrase!" and she repeated it in a whisper. "'The China of gardens!' You must not think," she said dreamily, "that I don't realize what charm your life had at its best. The truth is I scarcely dare to think of it. The faintest fragrance of it would seduce any imagination."

Megan looked toward the island the General had indicated and thought of a red pavilion over pools of still lotus, and she suddenly thought of the tea the General would pour for her as having the power to steal away the soul. A slight shock as if something had fallen seemed to vibrate warningly through her nerves. She turned to look curiously at the General. He returned her look blandly, a little absently. Perhaps he also was thinking of the pavilion. Megan's eyebrows gathered in a frown.

"But the trouble with that life was," she said severely, "it was enjoyed by far too few. Such a tiny per cent of your countless millions ever knew it."

"And what difference does that make? Undoubtedly the quality of it was such that only a rare few could appreciate it. Who wants a civilization that would seem satisfying to your beggar with elephantiasis? But how you struggle, Miss Davis, against the idea of your own pleasure! Your plan is to diffuse it over the whole world, share it with the whole race. I am surprised at this in one of your incomparable distinction. Don't you know that the more concentrated pleasure becomes the keener it is? I sometimes feel it is at its best when tasted by oneself alone."

"You are a poor Republican. You don't dare admit your ideas to many people, do you?"

"To practically no one. I know I am a poor Republican. Whenever a good Republican becomes really necessary in China, I will go under."

"You hate all this change then?"

"Not entirely." He smiled at her. "Certain new combinations seem to rise out of it occasionally that make it worth what is lost."

Megan exclaimed, "It is not possible that you are being gallant, is it?"

"Why not? How very unflattering you are! Do you think we have never been gallant to women?"

"Well," Megan laughed with a touch of constraint, "I somehow never pictured a Chinese gentleman as being anything but subdued by his mother and tyrannical to his wife. But I suppose that is an absurd injustice. You must have had generations of women with beauty and wit and of course goodness. And then in modern China, —I should think you would enjoy these astonishing changes that must have come about in educated women."

Megan realized that the comradeship they had managed to arrive at so suddenly and without effort had vanished at the first mention of women. They were once more on their first uneasy footing. Why? Because such a comradeship was fundamentally unnatural to him, or because she was thinking again of Mah-li? With a sudden

compunction she forced Mah-li to the foremost position in her mind. Until his responsibility to Mah-li was settled, she told herself, there could never be real friendliness between them. She said decidedly:

"And even among those not educated in the modern way, one has only to look at their faces to see how many of them have good temper and a keen sense of humor."

He bowed his head toward her.

"I thank you on their behalf."

"For instance, Mah-li," she insisted, "I find her full of all sorts of possibilities."

The General did not answer. He turned halfway toward the window.

"I have grown very fond of her. She struck me as a child who has for the time more or less lost her way. She is only a child, you know."

But the General evidently meant to discourage her. He did not answer, and Megan felt alternately hot and cold with the desire to urge him to some declaration of his intentions and the fear that he would only continue to be baffling. She turned from him and saw on the hill, outlined against a white cloud, the pagoda with tufts of foliage sprouting from its top. It recalled the General's phrase about the China of gardens and she regretted that the illusion of their sympathy had to be lost so soon. In helping people, she thought, one foregoes such a great deal of their charm, one even at times voluntarily destroys it. She permitted herself one final pang that this must be so, and because of this weakness returned with even greater insistance and fervor to her determination that the General should face the issue on Mah-li. But before she could speak again the General said to her:

"Please let us never talk any more of Mah-li. I respect your feeling toward her, but she is worthy of none of it. You do not understand."

He spoke in his rather curious high voice, what she thought of as his official voice, and his rebuke gave the final spur to her ardor. She saw that the car had reached the gate of the yamen and it was slowing down to stop.

"But I do understand," she cried, "I do. Don't stop here, please, drive on a little. I have to talk to you."

The General looked at her blankly; astonishment seemed always momentarily to paralyze his initiative. Then he leaned forward and spoke to the driver. The car moved slowly along the road. For a moment Megan tried to think clearly what to say to him, but could not and decided to trust to an onrush of emotion.

"You and I will never be friends," she said, "till we settle this about Mah-li. It is just like a wall between us. I must make you see it as I do. I must make you feel your responsibility to Mah-li. She is a creature dependent on you, so much less intelligent than you, so simple, so uncomplicated, that she is like a child beside you. You can do anything you want to her, make nearly anything you want of her. Your responsibility is simply limitless. You feel she has deceived you, sold information about you to your enemies, perhaps even been unfaithful to you. All that is dreadful, and if it is true you have a certain justification in crushing her. She is probably helpless to prevent you. I want you to think of all these things and then forgive her. I don't know exactly how you feel about her. I mean whether you love her—as—well, as a lover. But that is of no importance."

Though Megan said this she saw on the contrary that it was of tremendous importance, that perhaps it was the key to everything, and her attack took a slightly different direction. "I want you to see the beauty of giving love where it isn't returned or merited, isn't even understood. Any man can give love where he is sure it is returned. That perhaps isn't love at all. But to give it with no thought of return, of merit, of gratitude even, that is ordinarily the privilege of God. Now it is your privilege."

Megan watched him anxiously for a visible effect of her words, saw none in his profile and lowered eyes and became more warmly personal.

"Oh, General, with all you have, and you have so much—yes, I appreciate your real superiority—it hurts me to see you blind to the possibilities that are in you. You are thinking of yourself always as a man. Think of yourself as a child of God's love. Of Mah-li as a child of the same love. Yes, and of me too, all of us His creatures. Then

there is no barrier between us. Do this thing I ask you. Do it even blindly if you must, and I promise you, I am so sure of it, I promise you you will know for the first time what happiness is. You will know——"

Words failed her suddenly and she turned her head to hide tears starting from her eyes. She wiped them away with her finger-tips and leaned her head against the glass, feeling in waves that exultant happiness she had promised the General.

The General did not speak nor even turn his head, and after a few moments Megan began to sense an awkwardness in his silence. She had been carried so far beyond the prescribed limits that the question of whether she had been splendidly justified or only ridiculous now seemed to hang on the result in him.

"Please go back," she said unsteadily.

The General leaned forward and gave the order. The car stopped, made the turn and went back toward the yamen. They did not speak again. Megan was afraid to add a word. As his silence continued she was further convinced that she had said all there was to say, and moreover that what she said had been justified.

At the gate of the yamen the guards on the running-board jumped off and held open the car door, standing at attention on either side. The General got out and held his hand to help Megan from the car. Still not wishing to look at him she looked only at his hand. She saw it for the first time palm up, the fingers curled slightly toward her in a gesture that seemed like a gracious according of mercy. As she fleetingly touched it, she gave it a sudden involuntary pressure, a pressure that was quickly returned. Then she walked hurriedly past him, so hurriedly that it became almost flight. No one joined her, and she reached her room alone.



CHAPTER XXI

Back in her room, Megan sat by the window and watched the daylight slowly fade into a twilight opalescent with mists from the lake and mountains. The essential lines of the roofs, of the moon door and the rugged stones on their pedestals, stood more firmly revealed in the slightly blurred atmosphere. Against the opposite wall the downward spray of the willow trees had a grace too rarified, too apparitional, for earthly things of sap, leaf and bark. The yamen was more than ordinarily quiet, drilling had stopped, the telephone no longer rang, slippered feet no longer passed in the court. Megan sat quite still, looking out on the ideal province, the province of low blue mountains, of rice and mulberry, glimmering canals, of a lake with islands for pleasure houses, lotus gardens, little pavilions of red lacquer, all bathed in the moist air, the freshness of space and silence. And she saw even more clearly the ideal ruler, a hieratic figure sculptured from the Eastern rock, wise, subtle and patient, from whose hands, stretched toward his people, streamed enlightenment and mercy. Megan knew that such a province, such a ruler, can have no existence in this world, yet the capacity for holding these images in her spirit filled her with a sense of power and of rest. A knock on her door sounded sharply in the stillness.

"Come in!"

It opened and she saw Mr. Shultz standing outside.

"Come in," she repeated and pointed to a chair opposite her by the window.

Mr. Shultz came toward her slowly, but instead of sitting down he leaned over the back of the chair. In the twilight his face had none of its ruddy look and was even more formless, his blue eyes were almost invisible, only his teeth gleamed in a smile. The sound of his heavy hands falling on the back of the chair suggested fatigue and strain.

"Tired?" she asked.

"You bet," he answered wearily.

"Don't you want to sit down?"

"Haven't time. I just wanted to be sure you were all right. Been out to-day?"

"Only with the General."

"The General go out?" he exclaimed. This seemed to surprise him.

"Yes, we drove over to see a temple in the hills."

Mr. Shultz gave a low whistle and after a pause devoted to astonishment said:

"Seen Mah-li to-day?"

"I saw her this morning; she came in here. The General had sent her away evidently, and she was on the point of leaving."

"Did she try to get you to go along?"

"Me! Of course not. Why should she?"

Mr. Shultz made no reply.

Megan said, "I was very worried about her. I am sure the General sent her away because of what you said last night."

"Maybe so," said Mr. Shultz, and a sardonic inflection to his voice stirred her a little.

"You shouldn't have turned him against her, you know. It really wasn't for you to protect his domestic life." But Megan stopped at once; the question of interference was one he might too easily seize and retaliate on, and it had not been only a question of the General's domestic life. "It wasn't very chivalrous of you," she said rather weakly.

Mr. Shultz thought.

"No, it wasn't," he admitted, "but I said a little more than I meant to when I got to talking. It made me so sore to think she would double-cross him like that. She would just as soon see him shot in front of her, so long as no one took her jade rings off her. Yes, it made me sore all right. I think she had it coming to her." And he murmured reflectively, "The damned little tart."

"No, I don't think she did," said Megan. "And I don't believe a Western man like yourself can have any conception of her position or what her chance has been to be anything else."

"Maybe not," said Mr. Shultz. "I suppose it is true the kid never had much chance. Anyway, it does my heart good to hear one woman stand up for another. But I guess," he added, "she don't seem much like a real woman to you, more like a doll."

Mr. Shultz was as ready to sentimentalize over Mah-li as to condemn her. He seemed to think her as delightful as she was dangerous and, except for moments when he was stirred to real anger, would no doubt treat her with a leniency amounting to weakness.

"How are the Communists getting on?" asked Megan lightly. "Will they keep us awake to-night?"

To her surprise, Mr. Shultz answered more gravely. "I'm afraid they will." But he said no more, perhaps not wishing to frighten her.

Megan wondered why she wasn't frightened. Because it seemed unreal, and unlike the capture of Shanghai, it was an affair between Chinese. How strange that even though these people now held all her interest they still lacked some essential reality for her. She puzzled over this but the possible night of alarms remained chimerical and apart from herself.

"Mist's clearing," exclaimed Mr. Shultz.

She looked out the window and saw that in spite of the gathering darkness the garden stood out more distinctly, as though breath had evaporated off the surface of a mirror. Above the black carved ridge-line of a roof she saw in a green sky a sharply burning star.

"Wind from the bay," explained Mr. Shultz, but Megan was not listening. In the same way had the relations of the General and Mah-li been essentially unimportant, the vital point being that the General should show mercy because Megan asked him to. Having acknowledged this she allowed herself to go no further. But she turned to Mr. Shultz with an anxiety in her eyes that made them, for the moment, starry.

"Don't worry!" murmured Mr. Shultz and leaning across the chair back patted her arm. "Don't worry," he repeated as he turned and went out.



CHAPTER XXII

The amah came in, turned on the light, and a moment later her supper arrived. Megan ate it, conscious that she was tired now mentally and physically. The food brought a warmth to her body and a soothing dulness to her mind. It occurred to her that Mr. Shultz in spite of his vulgarity reminded her faintly of Bob. She could not put her finger on the resemblance, unless (she chose the best traits) it might be a certain efficient and unimaginative acceptance of difficult situations. Almost as casually it struck her that she would probably never marry Bob. It seemed that she had just heard those words spoken lightly by some one, not as though she herself had formulated them. A pang so deep that it touched some raw inner root shot through her. Megan dropped her spoon and rested her head in her hands. It was better not to think when thinking produced only unexpected and unhappy thoughts, dangerous thoughts. She resolved to put Bob and the General out of her mind, to let their relations slide past her for the time being, and of course take them up again to-morrow. She managed to keep her mind blank by eating, with great attention to the soothing effects of warm food. She looked at the objects around the room once more, the gaudy quilts on the bed, the painting of the monkeys, the dark blue bowl of plum, a replica of which was in every room in the yamen, like an intimate personal signature. Whose, she wondered, Mah-li's or the General's?

Megan did not wait to smoke a cigarette, she dropped over on the bed and lay inviting fatigue to overcome her. She fell asleep.

She heard a knocking at her door that grew into pounding before she could rouse herself to answer it.

"Come in," she said sleepily.

The General's orderly opened the door and brought her a note. It was from the General and suggested she join the poker game. Megan's watch said ten-forty. Rather late. But in view of what Mr. Shultz had said it might be better to stay awake and spend the

evening in their company. She rather gingerly examined her mental condition, as lately she had been examining her bruised body on awakening. It seemed to be once more sound, empty, untroubled.

Megan got up and brushed her hair carefully before Mah-li's mirror. She powdered her face and added a touch of lipstick because she did not want to look at all afraid or even anxious. Then she followed the orderly across the court.

As they passed the room with the telephone, she saw through the open window that it was brightly lighted and four officers sat there around a table playing mah jong. It was unusual for them to be up so late, or at any rate when she had passed this room the night before it had been darkened. She paused to look at the effect of the bright window square in the darkness of the court: the four Chinese heads seemed to be set in low relief against a shining wall, depth and perspective were wiped out by the too strong contrast of light and dark, the window square was flat like a picture hung on the night. She looked curiously at the Chinese officers. They were playing absently, not with the usual lightning quickness of a mah jong game, and they talked in their low, teasing Chinese voices, their heads close together over the table. The telephone rang, and one of them pushed back his chair and got up. While he answered it the others listened with an intensity that was like a heavy weight. Megan turned and saw the face of the orderly beside her. He also was puckered between the eyes by a childish bewilderment. When he saw Megan looking at him, he turned and rather hurriedly crossed the court to the room where the General held his poker games. She followed him.

As she came in the door she saw the same group about the table, with the exception of Mah-li. Mr. Shultz got up, the General also, and it was he who held out a chair for her, saying:

"Come here, Miss Davis, and sit facing the south. That is the place for the most honored guest."

She sat down beside him in the chair he indicated, Captain Li on her other side and Mr. Shultz across from her. The poker game with its monotonous phrases continued.

"Sweeten up here. How about a few royalties?"

But there was a difference. Mah-li was not here. Although she had scarcely spoken all that other evening, she had been all along the disturbing element, not, Megan felt, through any fault of her own. To her Mah-li was helpless in the midst of circumstance, and no matter what she had actually done, Megan continued to count the final humiliation to her suave and provocative person as a cruelty. But now Mah-li was gone and the disturbing factor to-night was something from without. The pressure of it was felt by all three of them and seemed to push them closer against one another. Megan even felt herself brought closer to them by the common danger, vague as it was.

But she was still sleepy. She yawned once or twice and in spite of polite efforts to swallow it the General noticed.

"You are tired," he exclaimed. "My note must have wakened you. How stupid of me!"

"No, no," said Megan, "I'm entirely rested. Don't pay any attention to me."

The game continued, but like the officers at the mah jong game they were all three preoccupied by something else. When the boy came in with the tray of drinks they deliberately put down their cards to fill their glasses. Mr. Shultz, instead of his whisky and soda, drank in little determined gulps a small glass of brandy. The betting was so listless that Megan, who by now understood a little of the game, was bored by it. She was looking at the General's hand.

"Why did you lay that down?" she asked once.

"Really I don't know," he answered.

He looked at her as though he were listening for something. After his first flurry of welcome he seemed to have forgotten her presence. For the moment, and until whatever threatened them passed, they counted only as a group, they were being bundled roughly together and their importance as individuals was in abeyance. Megan realized this herself, feeling no longer keen interest nor antagonism toward any one of them. This bored her too. She watched them play for half an hour, till the smoke began to give her a headache. Then she wondered if it would not be better to go back to bed. She yawned once or twice again, partly from ennui, partly from nervousness.

"I don't believe anything will happen to-night," she said to herself. "At any rate I can't sit here waiting for it."

She got up, but instead of leaving them she went over to the window opening on the court. It had become chilly and clear. Little sudden gusts of wind blew along the eaves, and the stars trembled as they do on cool windy nights.

As she stood there she heard from the direction of the city a distant but distinct sound like the drawing of a stick along a picket fence. It stopped, broke out again as if coming from several directions at once.

"What's that?" Megan exclaimed.

She turned. Each man held an attitude of suspended action and listened. No one answered her.

"Firing?" she asked.

The General nodded. The noise continued.

"Or is it fireworks?"

"No, not fireworks," said the General.

Megan leaned out and found that she could see the lighted square of window across the court and the officers sitting at the mah jong table. They sat like figures of wood, motionless. Megan looked from them to the group in the room behind her. Their attitudes were almost identical; the same suspense held them.

The firing stopped.

Almost immediately the telephone rang, and Megan saw one of the wooden figures start toward it with the jerk of something inanimate drawn by a string. His replies were so low spoken she could not even hear his voice. Presently he hung up the receiver and turned. Megan saw that he looked at the seated men in silence and they looked back at him. She thought he was smiling. She had the impression, even from those whose faces were turned from her, that they were all smiling. The one who had answered the telephone left the room and came across the court. He knocked on the door. The orderly opened it and he came in. Megan turned from the window to watch him. He stood by the door; if he had been smiling he was stolid enough now. The General spoke and he answered in short

phrases. Mr. Shultz listened intently, his eyes turning from the face of the officer to Captain Li. As he listened he looked down at Captain Li with a smile of contempt, hardy and open.

"Well, that's that," he said crushingly.

Captain Li did not look up.

The General dismissed the officer, and Megan watched for him to cross the court but he did not appear for a moment and when he did the General's orderly followed him. He went back to the lighted room, and at the table where the three others waited for him, he leaned forward to speak to them, resting his hands on the table. They got up and, leaving the tiles in disorder as they lay, one of them suddenly turned off the light.

With the blotting out of the lighted room and its figures of men, with the cessation of small sounds of chairs scraping the floor, of telephone calls, a barrier seemed to have suddenly broken down and night poured unrestrictedly around the yamen, flooding the courtyard with darkness and loosing a wind that rustled along the eaves and brushed the branches of the willow trees restlessly against the wall.

Megan went back to the table and sat down. A change had occurred inside the room. The three men sat back in their chairs. The pressure that had held them for a time against their wills, molding them into a group, had relaxed and each was once more an individual. Each only waited now, in order to prove it to the others, some opportunity strongly to assert himself. As Megan had partaken slightly in their fear she now experienced some of their relief and an acute reviving interest.

"Well," said Mr. Shultz, "so that is over."

The General said, "It seems to be. I have just been thinking how fortunate it is that men are divided so unevenly into the simple and the astute. One astute say to a hundred thousand simple.

"Yes," said Mr. Shultz, "like the Belgian's patty,—one hare, one horse."

"There is no other real division among them," continued the General, "and no other is necessary."

"Don't be too sure of being astute," said Mr. Shultz, and in spite of his evident satisfaction over the turn of affairs in the city, his words were clipped and irritable. He slammed his hand down. "Let's cut this out. Three-handed poker is a waste of time. Yes, I know how smart you feel just now. It is a grand feeling to get in first, but don't forget who it was put you wise."

The General also laid down his cards, and Captain Li, perceiving the game to be over, put his hand down regretfully—it contained a full house—and folding his arms sat gazing at the light. Mr. Shultz turned in his chair and leaned his elbow on the table. He took a cigar from his pocket and examined it, together with his highly manicured nails, smelled it, then twisted it about in his mouth, wetting it with his tongue, and catching it finally with a vicious snap in his fine teeth.

"Yes, don't forget," he continued, "don't forget that you'd have been cold meat by now if it wasn't for me."

The General looked at him with an expression of tolerance.

"What is the matter with you, Shultz? It doesn't annoy me that you helped me out in this matter. Why should it annoy you that you are obliged to consider my safety as your own? To a certain extent we are each dependent on the other." His eyes on Mr. Shultz beamed with benevolence. It was evident that he had leaned heavily on him in the last crisis, perhaps draining confidence and courage out of his mere presence. "I'm surprised at you, Shultz, I really am. You don't seem to love mankind as you should, all of them, the astute and the simple"—he turned to Megan and his eyes were full of released good humor—"as Miss Davis does," he added.

"Hm," Mr. Shultz grunted, "I don't know what you are talking about."

Facing Megan, the General poured himself a whisky soda.

"I am talking about Miss Davis so I don't blame you for not understanding. Miss Davis is much more complicated than you are, Shultz. Although you are compatriots I should not wonder if you found each other quite strangers most of the time. Isn't that so?"

Mr. Shultz did not condescend to answer. He smoked on as though he had not heard.

"Miss Davis!" the General exclaimed, holding up his glass; Megan measured his former disquietude by this too exuberant gesture and excused it on that ground. "Miss Davis, it is a mistake, an esthetic mistake, to try to understand you, because the whole produced is probably better than any of the component parts. To analyze you would be to reduce the ph[oe]nix to mere bones, skin and feathers."

Megan looked at him astonished, and from him to Mr. Shultz, who had turned and whose scrutiny held surprise and faint contempt.

"Of course you are being absurd," said Megan. "There is no reason at all why you and I should not understand each other. You yourself once said men of the same race don't necessarily resemble each other as tigers do tigers. You just wondered if Mr. Shultz and I might not find each other strange. You see, it is up to the individual in each case. All of us, with some effort and sympathy, can be reduced to certain elements and consequently understood."

Mr. Shultz got up and walked over to the phonograph. He began to turn over the records. The General leaned toward Megan, and his voice became less declamatory, more confidential.

"But is it really understanding you want? I have an idea that understanding doesn't enter very largely into your program. I have an idea that what you really want, certainly where I am concerned, is to change me, to make me over into some new image; the image of God, but also, slightly, the image of Miss Davis, His creation and at the same time hers. Isn't that so?"

This statement brought a chill to Megan. It was not his manner of making it, which she had already excused, but that stated from this angle her intention did not appear as crystalline as she felt it to be.

"But of course I want to help you," she said. "The motives of those who try to help are always suspect. But I don't see why you said just that."

And as she thought about it she became even resentful that he had been able so deftly to uncover an aspect of her desire to convert him, which she herself had been dimly aware of for some time, but until now unwilling to admit.

The General, watching her closely, now assumed his buffoon's expression of mock alarm.

"You are angry with me," he exclaimed, "because I have said what is true. And it is you who tempted me to be truthful in the first place by your own directness. But of course I was foolish to suppose you meant me to follow you in that."

Megan glanced at Mr. Shultz, who was turning over records, and at Captain Li, who was apparently about to go to sleep. Captain Li did not count, but she did not want to be spoken to like this before Mr. Shultz. She lowered her voice a little.

"Yes, I have been very frank with you and you have a right to be frank with me in return. That is quite all right, I don't mind that. I don't want you to think however—that is, I don't want you to feel—that I am trying to force you to any change just to gratify myself."

The General was about to answer but changed his mind. He slowly took a cigarette from his gold case and lighted it.

"Miss Davis," he said finally after several puffs, "I want you to believe that I consider it a privilege to be included in your regard, even along with several hundred million other human beings."

Megan did not answer. She looked down at her clasped hands and saw with annoyance that she still wore the jade rings. After Mah-li had left them with her there had seemed no other place to put them. She tried covering one hand carelessly with the other but, ashamed of this, she boldly laid her hand on the table so that the General could see that she still wore them if he liked. He looked at them a moment with a slight smile, then resting an elbow on the table he waved one hand before her like a magician about to begin an incantation. A tiny banner of smoke from his cigarette blinded her for a moment.

"Yes, I find you truly remarkable," he murmured. "Tell me, please, what gives you this confidence with which you go about the world? You pass through dangers that are not dangers to you, through temptations that are not temptations. You feel you are armed with a glorious medicine that is a sure cure for all disorder, and you don't see that your medicine (which so far as I am able to make out consists of an indiscriminating universal love) would, if

taken, produce a ten times greater disorder. And as to this love you talk about, I believe you are even mistaken in its true character. It seems to me only an outlet for your irresistible energy. It is energy. I have not seen in you any real concern over living harmoniously with your fellow men."

Megan twisted one of the jade rings on her finger and did not answer. She looked even sullen.

The General continued: "Truly there have been many moments when I have wanted to laugh at you, and other moments when I have found you admirable." He paused and his voice sank almost to a whisper. "And even other moments—but perhaps you don't want me to speak of them. I might astonish you beyond endurance."

Megan looked quickly and instinctively toward the corner of the room where Mr. Shultz stood turning over the phonograph records and humming softly to himself. For the first time his solidity was comforting to her. She looked down again reassured. The General talked on in a low murmurous voice, like a bee drumming from flower to flower.

"Perhaps you believe us incapable of such moments. I am quite sure you do. You have never seen our young men poring over stories whose sentiments would seem very startling to you. I don't know why I say our young men; our old men also. I could tell you of an officer of mine who spends all his pay buying costly medicines from Szechuen, so that his father, who is a very old man, may enjoy the society of a young wife. Have you read any of our poetry, Miss Davis? Do you understand our music? Have you seen paintings of women walking among fruit trees, in which the fruit trees seem like women and the women like fruit trees? Do you know that there has never existed a people more purely artist and therefore more purely lover than the Chinese? The fact is that it was to protect themselves from the excesses of their own temperaments that our earliest ancestors patiently and laboriously fortified themselves by a submission to ritual and authority. Of course we still retain excesses, being civilized, but our excesses are even now those they long ago decided to allow us. Yes, we are completely enmeshed, Miss Davis, like caterpillars in cocoons. I know that we seem very dull to you, because we no longer depend on a personal inspiration.

But you must remember that the personal inspiration is apt to be dull to every one but to him who feels it. He, of course, is carried away by the intoxication of supposing he has created something. But because we refuse to be carried away by it or to depend on it, you must not imagine that we do not think with any profundity—nor feel with any passion."

"Why do you tell me this? Is it really necessary that you explain everything to me, even your occasional moments?"

Megan spoke sharply and she hoped indifferently, but her face was flushed.

"Simply to show you how unaware you are of so many of the fundamental impulses of people around you. Those," he added gently, "whom you wish to help, to change. But don't be offended with me, Miss Davis. It is true that my admiration for you is enormous, and it is true also that I detest a lapse from suitability, a vulgar action. I would never do anything unworthy of either of us."

"No," said Megan, "I feel sure you wouldn't. Now don't let us talk any more about it."

"Certainly not if you find it so objectionable. But I wish you didn't. It is very trying never to be able to approach you as one human being to another. Because I see clearly I am not really a human being to you, simply a problem, an object of attack, and impersonal attack at that. Perhaps no one about you is entirely real to you yet. You are too young, you have lived too little. And because I am an alien I am even more remote than the others."

"I'm not too young," said Megan indignantly. "I have lived much more than you think, and I have had disillusionments and disappointments."

The General smiled. "Not really? Why even your voice is unbruised."

"And you are wrong too about my not looking on you as a human being. I realize how human you are, and it is because I do that I wanted to save you from what you just called the excesses of your temperament. I was afraid in that instance we spoke of this afternoon (I won't speak of it again because I know you did as I

asked) that you might be carried away by jealousy and revenge. I wanted you to put them out of your heart and do a very beautiful act of mercy instead."

"You accuse me of all excesses, even the grossest," exclaimed the General. "Are all excesses alike to you? Because I drink often until I am overcome, because I admire women easily, because I love painting and fireworks, do you think I am capable of jealousy, of anger, of revenge? Miss Davis, the things you speak of, the excesses which make a man disgusting and ridiculous, were all overcome for me by the patience and wisdom of my remotest ancestors. Those which they have permitted me to keep may seem equally repellent to you, but they do not seem so to me. No," he cried emphatically, "I am incapable of these things you speak of. You will never make me over in that way, Miss Davis. You will never turn me into a creature of emotion and impulse and blind energy. No matter how much you urge me to overcome qualities I don't possess."

Megan hesitated over her answer, she really had not been listening carefully to what he said, because she was more occupied in the change which had come over him. His voice, his expression, had changed. He did not seem as before to be amused, charmed, irritated, as though he played with an unruly child, who in the excitement of the game might even be expected to hurl a brick at his head. He was suddenly neither amused nor charmed, he was not even irritated. She did not know if he was angry but she felt that he must be more deeply disturbed than she had ever seen him. She could not understand why.

"But what is it?" she exclaimed. "If I misjudge you I am sorry."

"Sorry!" exclaimed the General. "What could make you regret anything! Your energy would merely carry you on to something else."

"But what are we talking about? I don't want to hurt you."

"Don't you?" cried the General.

He made a move, as though he would get out of his chair, but suddenly he sat down again and with a gesture swift but light he put his hand over hers. Their eyes meeting were as startled as though they had run into each other in an unexpected place. She could not

doubt, seeing his eyes, that he was as unprepared as she for the impulse that he unthinkingly followed. But he did not move his hand away, and Megan looked down at it. The pressure was so slight she scarcely felt it, but as she looked at it a tingle of repulsion ran from his fingers up her arm, a repulsion definite enough to be an actual shudder of pain. It ebbed gradually, drained off, and a counter-current of magnetism took its place. This flowed more deliberately, expanding into slow heat, setting in motion a vibration of the blood which hummed in her ears like a shell held against them. A delicate, dim anæsthesia settled over her like a cloud, her pupils dilated a little, her muscles relaxed. She felt herself slipping loosely toward something that awaited her. The weakness that drew her toward it made her feel it must be evil, yet it could not be so simple as that. It was at once familiar and strange, compelling and repellent, eternal and yet it passed from her like a breath. Megan jerked her hand away and held it tightly with her other hand as though it had been touched by fire. She breathed in astonished little gasps, startled as much by the rescue as by the danger. Her salvation seemed to have come from without and to be miraculous. She faced the General coldly and said as though some one else had prompted her:

"What did you finally do about Mah-li?"

She caught only a last glow on the General's face before it darkened into obstinacy. He did not answer. He leaned back in his chair and tapped on the table with his fingers.

"What a pity," he said so low she could scarcely catch the words. "For a moment then you were as lovely as you were meant to be."

But Megan insisted. "Where is Mah-li now?"

After a moment's silence, the General looked at her as coldly as she at him.

"She is probably dead," he said in his harsh official voice.

"Probably dead! You don't mean you——?"

"She allied herself with Communists. I allowed her to share their punishment."

"You did that! But you couldn't have done that when you knew how I felt! I can't believe it of you, you couldn't have done that!"

Megan was suddenly thrown again into a state of inner disorder. It was quite true that she could not believe it of him. He had always seemed to her so deeply vulnerable. Even in moments like those just past, when his influence over her had been most powerful, there had always seemed to be in him the germ of defeat. And now he had proved himself impervious, adamant.

"Yes, I did just that," he said.

She could not find words to answer him. She sat looking at him in a silence of anger, consciously giving way to its onrush because it seemed to carry her further from that moment of weakness. Then words broke from her in a hot torrent.

"Then all you said just now was a lie!" she cried. "You are capable of jealousy and of revenge. You were angry because she tried to harm you, so you decided you would harm her more than she could possibly harm you. And you were jealous, because she was young and lovely, and she didn't love you. That was really her unforgivable sin, wasn't it, that she didn't love you, so you revenged yourself for that most of all!"

Even as she spoke it struck Megan that anger was a strange thing for her to be feeling so overwhelmingly at this moment. The pathos of Mah-li's death had not yet touched her, the enigma of that purposeless little life. And more in compunction for her own blind violence she exclaimed:

"Poor little Mah-li! Oh, I should have kept her with me. I shouldn't have trusted her with you at all. But how could I know what you were? A brute, yes, just a bully and a brute!"

The General's voice broke in harshly.

"Not at all." His calm was imposed now only by a mighty effort. The nerve over his eyelid throbbed visibly. "Of course you would want to see Mah-li's punishment in some such light. I knew that by the reasons you advanced against it, by your hysterical manner when you urged them. You were so carried beyond yourself that if it had been of no particular importance I would have been glad to do what you asked. But it was important, and not at all because of my individual feeling. Mah-li behaved in a way which, for reasons I'm not able to understand, you find admirable. Why, one would

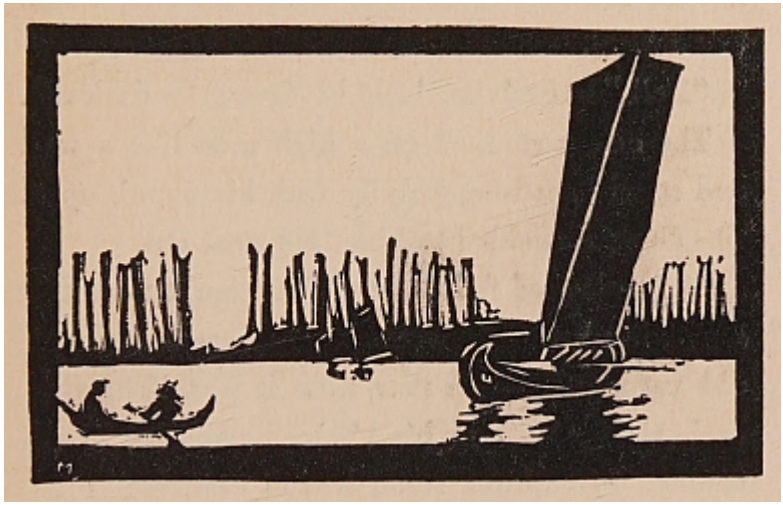
imagine that you found rebellion admirable of itself! Well, fortunately society does not. Mah-li had a definite place in society, just as a bowl is meant to be shapely and to hold wine, tea or water. If the bowl were no longer shapely and wouldn't hold anything I would throw it out. Mah-li had made of herself an ugly, useless, an incongruous object. I threw her out. Not from revenge or jealousy, which are as bad as rebellion. No. But as a man who wants his house and his world full of peace and propriety and harmony."

Megan was silent.

"Am I quite clear?" he insisted.

"Oh, quite clear!" Megan suddenly began to laugh, and her laughter, though low and suppressed, forced tears from her eyes. "But how conventional you are! Yes, you are even willing, as you once said of my generosity, to be conventional at any one's expense." Megan's laughter was ready to burst into tears. "Oh, oh, I am so disappointed in you!" she cried. "If you had done away with her for any other reason. But to have done it through cowardice, yes, cowardice, and such a paltry cowardice at that. Because you weren't even really afraid. You just couldn't stand to see Mah-li forget her place in the world. How horrible! Nothing could be more horrible! I am ashamed for you!"

A sudden knock on the door silenced her.



CHAPTER XXIII

Mr. Shultz called from the window, "What's that?"

The door opened and a gray-clad officer stepped in. He held on to the door-knob and, swaying a little, looked wildly from face to face. Then his eyes fixed themselves on the General. He began to talk in a high-pitched steady stream of Chinese. Mr. Shultz came over to the table and stood behind the General's chair. The General asked a few questions. The officer answered. Mr. Shultz, in an effort to understand, puckered his mouth and knitted his forehead. One statement struck him like a blow.

"Hell," he exclaimed and his face grew dark red.

The officer stopped on a high note like a wail and stood breathing heavily with his mouth open. The General nodded to him. He went out.

Megan looked from one to the other, aware that something had gone wrong, but aware also that it did not matter much now what it was. The General, sitting back in his chair, looked up at the ceiling. Mr. Shultz stood beside him, heavy but alert.

"I had a hunch," he said, "that something like this would happen. That first boy that came to bring us the news was all wrong. I saw it in his eye. I never disregard a hunch but I don't regret it."

"What is wrong?" said Megan. But no one answered her.

"We'll have to do a lot of high-speed thinking now," said Mr. Shultz. "You've got the brains, General, I leave it to you."

Mr. Shultz went over to the window and leaned out into the dark court listening to the stillness of the yamen. He came back.

"The place is deserted," he said. "They're all gone. I can feel it."

"Then it is useless for you to stay," said the General. "The sooner you leave, I should say, the better."

"What is the matter?" Megan repeated more insistently.

Mr. Shultz looked at her as though he had forgotten her, but answered pleasantly.

"The Communists have taken over the city, Miss Davis. That was the firing we heard. The troops went over to them. Even the General's body-guard has deserted. The boys at the telephone got word what had happened, came and gave us a false report and cleared out. This last officer who just came was on guard at the arsenal. They have taken that over. I'll bet," he added, turning to look down at Captain Li, "our little friend here could tell us something about this."

"As you leave," said the General, "you had better take Li with you and shoot him somewhere outside. See if he is armed, will you, Shultz?"

Mr. Shultz leaned over the back of Captain Li's chair, jerked him to his feet and felt his body expertly.

"Nope," he answered, finding nothing.

Captain Li, who had taken his mauling with the absent expression of a child being undressed for bed, on being released as absently sat down again.

The room was extraordinarily still. For a moment they all sat listening to the stillness which pressed in upon them the completeness of their desertion.

Megan thought how absurd this all was. She had expected a night of alarms and bloodshed and yet it had all come about in a way peculiar, apparently, to China. The General had simply been sold out. Nothing more would happen unless he insisted on remembering that Captain Li also had forgotten his place in society.

Mah-li of course was safe. If she was to share the fate of the Communists it was certain that she was now sharing their triumph. The General had failed there at any rate. She repeated this to herself with an exultant satisfaction. He had tried to preserve a decorum that was already a corpse. And perhaps since he had failed, since he had been forced to do as she asked, it might be possible to forgive him. Even now, though she was still ready to heap every reproach on him, she felt an obscure, imperative necessity to reinstate him.

"I think we'd better take Li with us," said Mr. Shultz, breaking the silence. "But I don't like to shoot him unless I have to. Come along, General, let's get going."

The General did not answer, and made no movement of getting up. He stared at Mr. Shultz, and Megan saw on his face the same expression of doubt she had seen before, when he had spoken of Doctor Strike and the safe-conduct pass. It was a doubt that struck at the deepest roots of his beliefs.

"What's the matter?" demanded Mr. Shultz.

"Do you mean," said the General, "you want me to come with you?"

Mr. Shultz looked at him in astonishment, and as the General's meaning dawned on him he was even embarrassed. He said nothing.

The General spoke haltingly and in a low apologetic voice. "But I am the one they are after. If I come with you your chances of getting away are practically nothing."

Mr. Shultz suddenly regained his assurance.

"Oh, go to hell," he said jovially. "What do you think I am!"

The General dropped his eyes and bent his head. Megan saw he was undergoing a deep humiliation; that this generosity, because he had been unable to admit its existence, was cutting him to the quick. She wanted him to be so humiliated and so wounded. She wanted him to be smitten, as by a scorching bolt, with this unlooked-for example of a generosity that not all her words or those of Doctor Strike had been able to convince him of. Not their words, not even the obvious trend of their lives, had touched him. Now, strangely, Mr. Shultz had been made the instrument. Mr. Shultz was not the man she would have chosen. This particular quality was perhaps the only estimable one he possessed, but he had presented it nevertheless, flawless, intact, indisputable as a diamond.

"We'd better make straight for the bay," he said. "The railroad won't be possible. Where's your car, General?"

"About a quarter of a mile up the road. The officer who just came drove from the arsenal in it. He left it there in case the yamen was already in their hands."

"Will he take it away?"

"No, he won't want to be caught in it."

"Then if we get going, it may still be there. It is our only chance I'd say."

"And at the bay, what then?"

"There is my launch. I leave it in a different place every few days. They're not apt to know where and only the sampan will be at the landing, a sampan like any other. To-night it should be at the landing where they load the junks of contraband rice."

"Can the launch get us down the bay?"

"I think so. Anyway, it can get us away from here."

"Well, let us go then."

Mr. Shultz went over to the door of a small closet used as a pantry. He opened it and disclosed the boy who served their drinks, asleep under shelves laden with bottles. Mr. Shultz shook him until he woke, then taking him by the shoulder propelled him across the room to the phonograph. He took the first record he came to and put it on the machine, turned the crank and adjusted the needle. The bright and alien Italian magic vibrated once more through the Chinese room.

"You keep this going. Must wantche walkee, savvy?"

The boy nodded and leaned anxiously over the instrument.

"Another round before we go?" asked Mr. Shultz, coming back to the table. "Have a little Dutch courage, General? Miss Davis?" He looked over the litter of glasses, cards, and trays full of cigarettes and ashes. Then he poured himself a swallow of brandy and gulped it down. His eyes fell on Captain Li again. "Come on, big boy, and just remember, whatever happens to us now happens to you too."

He jerked Captain Li out of his chair. The General said a few words in Chinese to him and Mr. Shultz pushed him forward. The General caught his arm.

"If you'll follow me," he said to Mr. Shultz and Megan, "I think it would be better to go out this way."

They passed into another room, unlighted except for the light coming from the door left open behind them. They crossed two rooms and an empty dark court, turning down a narrow runway between houses from which they came out on an open space. Megan supposed it to be a garden because the gravel of ordered walks

crunched under their feet and in the gusty wind the dark trees about them made sudden abrupt gestures against the pallor of starry sky. After the smoky room they had left the air seemed fresh and even sharp, full of the agitation of hidden rustling leaves and grass. They came to a gate which the General opened himself.

"The road is over there," he said. "The car, if it is still waiting, is along this stretch."

They crossed a field. Ahead of them, sprinkled at an indefinite distance in the dark, were a few trembling lights. The field was full of mounds, some topped with what seemed replicas of houses. Graves. Once a fetid odor drifted across their path like a warm current in the cold air. Then their feet touched the smoother surface of the road, and they almost collided with a car that, without lights, waited there.

"Well, this is luck," exclaimed Mr. Shultz. "Think of the old bus being here!"

The General's driver sat at the wheel. He had been waiting stolidly and he showed no surprise at seeing them. Perhaps he was expecting them. He climbed down without a word and opened the door. The General and Mr. Shultz explained to him the route he was to follow. The General and Megan got in and Mr. Shultz sat between them, Captain Li took one of the folding seats. Against the faintly luminous square of the windows the chenille fringes made fanciful patterns. The car started.

"Looks as though we're going to get a good break all around," said Mr. Shultz with satisfaction.

The sound of the motor was comforting and enveloped them in security. That the car should have been there, that it should function so perfectly, seemed to mean they were intended to get away unharmed. Mr. Shultz's hunch evidently told him so, and Megan was inclined to believe he was right. Mr. Shultz talked in a low, agreeable voice, like a host who feels the responsibility for his guests. He talked to Megan more directly.

"Well, this will make something for you to write home about, Miss Davis; your friends will enjoy all your Chinese adventures."

"Yes," she answered absently.

From time to time he leaned across to peer through the window.

"Nice clear night," he said, "good wind. We'll be down the bay in no time. If my launch isn't where it ought to be, we'll take a junk. There is bound to be at least one there, probably more. How much money have you got with you, General?"

"Oh, five or six hundred dollars."

"Well, I always carry some. I wish, though, I had more on me tonight, though sometimes that's the worst place for your money."

He kept up a continuous comment to divert them, because he was doubtful in some degree of all of them. He himself needed no distraction; he had the peculiar resolution of a man who goes into danger continually in order to make money, the resolution, more dogged than courage, more suave than courtesy, of a good salesman. Every thing of the chancey, the romantic, was so far removed from him, he seemed to operate so definitely by rules that could not go wrong for him, that he gave an illusion of safety. Megan accepted safety and was conscious of the General.

She thought nothing coherent about him. His refusal to accept the conversion she had tried to reveal to him had been followed so rapidly by his own failure and downfall that she was not able to strike a balance of feeling. Bitterness, satisfaction and even pity contended with one another.

The road grew rougher, and they were jolted mercilessly. Megan took advantage of the movement to turn her head so that beyond the bulk of Mr. Shultz she saw the General's profile against the window. Seen only as a dark outline, the humorous lines, the effeminate softness, the occasional arrogance, all she disliked in him, were not visible; only the profile detached itself, holding as in carven rock its look of race, its sureness and purity of line. Listening to Mr. Shultz's voice, Megan stared at the General with a growing sense of dull and helpless regret as though she saw before her the now useless charm of the dead.

The car stopped suddenly. Mr. Shultz let down a window and leaned out.

"Well, here's the bay anyhow."

The General said nothing. Megan saw an embankment sloping away from them and at its foot a small landing stretching into an indeterminate expanse of water. On the shore by the landing a lantern hung on a bamboo pole. Mr. Shultz peered intently into the darkness.

"Do you see your launch?" asked the General.

"Not a sign. But I see a sampan alongside the landing. It may be mine."

"Are you sure this is where you ordered it to be?"

"Sure."

The driver stopped his engine and turned their lights off. Their eyes accustomed themselves to the dark, and they heard the quick, angry lap of water on the shore and the blowing of the wind. The General pointed up the shore.

"I see people there and a junk. Perhaps they are loading."

Megan, following the direction he pointed, made out a dark cluster that might be men and, dimly on the water, the outline of a junk with three masts, the foremost slanting sharply forward and faintly illumined from below by a light in the bow.

"Loading rice," said Mr. Shultz. "Some of your internal revenue, General."

He leaned further out and peered around, then drew his head in again.

"Now let's figure this out," he said. "If the launch is not here, they have either taken it, or some accident or carelessness is responsible. But we can't wait around here and I think the junk is our best chance. The sails are hoisted. In five minutes we can be aboard. What do you say?"

"We must get aboard," said the General, but when Mr. Shultz opened the door none of them moved, as though each was reluctant actually to precipitate any action. Finally Mr. Shultz climbed heavily out, and the rest followed him. They stood outside the car, exposed once more to the vast insecurity of the night. Then they started down wide steps cut in the bank. Megan could see the loom of the

junk below them and a great white eye staring from the bow. It was farther out from shore than she had at first realized. The General's steps lagged. Half-way down he stopped and said:

"They are not loading. No one has moved. There hasn't been a sound. They are soldiers put here to guard the landing. It is no use, Shultz."

Megan tried to see his face; there was not enough light to make out his expression, but his voice had been flat, a little breathless. It showed no excitement, even no fear, because he knew suddenly that there was no hope for him. From the moment when firing broke out in the distant city he had been lost. He knew it now.

Megan stepped close to him and whispered, "Don't give up like this. Don't."

"Oh, it's not so good," said Mr. Shultz. Megan saw him feel his hip pocket. "But we can't turn back now. They are coming to meet us." And he leaned toward Megan. "If they start firing before we get down, you run back and get in the car."

Megan watched the dark group moving along the shore toward the foot of the steps. In a moment, if they went on down, they would be in their midst. If they turned and went back they would, she supposed, be fired on. And where would they go? The group of soldiers stopped and stood apparently looking up at them.

"Oh, come on," said Mr. Shultz. "They are only Chinese soldiers. I can wangle this."

They started down once more. At the base of the steps was a narrow strip of beach. They stood in the light from the lantern, which made a circle around them like the halo around a dim moon. On its edge the fifteen or twenty soldiers hesitated, huddled against one another. One was elbowed by a companion into the circle of light and Megan saw his bare feet and the shine of his cheek-bones, but having been forced forward, he only smiled foolishly and tried to step back. But more were coming, pushing in from the dark and their shifting, uneasy movements were forming a semicircle on the steps, cutting them off from all but the landing. Mr. Shultz looked them over.

"Don't let them hear your voice," he said to the General. "Maybe they won't know you under your cap. Keep an eye on Li."

He took out a cigar and with an ostentatious lack of hurry or concern lighted it in his cupped hands. He threw the match aside with a sweep of his arm. Then he stood quite still, puffing smoke from between his teeth, still holding the cigar. He looked at the soldiers, taking stock of the barrier they made, stupid, even timid, but dismaying by mere numbers.

The wind blowing off the water caught loose hairs and whipped them across Megan's eyes; it made a small but disturbing whistling in her ears, and filled her with a penetrating chill. Her jaw began to tremble with cold. Why didn't Mr. Shultz do something?

Mr. Shultz stepped abruptly out on to the landing and leaning over the side called in a low voice, "Wake up, you louse."

A small boy's head, with startled goggle eyes, rose from the sampan into the light.

"Well, it isn't my sampan after all," said Mr. Shultz casually surprised. "But it will have to do. Come on." He leaned down to cast off the mooring.

The General took Megan's arm and made a step forward, but at the same moment Captain Li caught her other arm and jerked her away. The unexpectedness of his movement gave it strength. She stumbled, and he gave her a push that sent her out on the landing. Then he began to shout, to wave his hands. Unable to move, she stood watching the hideous activity of his puppet-like figure. Suddenly he snatched the General's cap off and his gesture revealed a violence of purpose of which his feeble body was incapable. His falsetto voice, as though aware of its impotence, broke into sobs.

"He has gone mad!" cried Megan. She turned to Mr. Shultz and saw him straighten up, the mooring rope slack in his hand. She was horrified to see that he looked undecided, puzzled. She had been so confident he would be able to do something.

A crashing report made her wheel around. The General's arm was still raised, still holding a revolver, and Captain Li beside him stood swaying on his feet, poised in the attitude of a man about to catch a

ball, his mouth open, but suddenly and astonishingly silent. As she watched he crumpled to the ground.

The General stood alone in the ring of soldiers.

Megan for the last time turned to Mr. Shultz. The indecision in his eyes was terrible. He looked at her almost pleadingly. Then she saw resolution take form in them. He picked her up under the arms and dropped her into the sampan. Megan scrambled to her knees and caught hold of the gunwale, but Mr. Shultz jumped heavily down beside her and shoved clear of the dock. Megan caught his arm, trying to hold him back. She clutched at the dock.

"Don't leave him!" she cried.

"No use," said Mr. Shultz. "I've got to get you out of here."

Megan repeated stupidly, "Don't leave him!"

She saw the General standing on the shore in the midst of the soldiers who had hesitatingly, even apparently good-humoredly, closed around him, leaving only an opening on the side of the water, where he could not now escape. No one had touched him. He stood still, head bent a little forward, searching the darkness for Mr. Shultz, for Megan, who were abandoning him. The light of the solitary lantern shone on his hair ruffled into an unaccustomed disorder. He looked young, fugitive, afraid. She could not see his eyes but she felt sure they were fixed now on her, she felt they were asking her for something, for what she had always promised him, her medicine, her courage, her salvation. Now was her last chance. One word would give it all to him. One word would save him. But what word? Only a low cry escaped from her lips, an inarticulate dim signal of one human creature to another.

But the General must have heard. He lifted his head, suddenly erect, and Megan saw that with one hand he nervously, but with dignity, with a final necessity for decorum, smoothed back his ruffled hair.

The small boy poled, the current caught the sampan and drew it from the shore. There was only a tangle of struggling figures now on the bank. Some one knocked the lantern into the water and night swirled over Megan.

The General was gone.



CHAPTER XXIV

The little coast steamer rolled laboriously up to Shanghai. Mr. Shultz got a deck chair and dragged it forward so that Megan, who was very seasick, could get the breeze. She lay back with her eyes closed, trying by will power to hold off nausea. Mr. Shultz sat beside her. He told her about a scheme he had to get up radio programs in Shanghai, for broadcasting to the Chinese, make the Chinese firms do it as advertising. When it got cold he put his coat over her, and once he gave her a swallow of brandy with disastrous results. Gradually he stopped talking and finally sat looking at her with clouded eyes. He could not entirely forgive her for having been there. It was her presence that had prevented his taking a chance on getting the General off. Of course he had to save a white lady but he had wanted to save the General too. When he thought of how he had been obliged to watch the General's end he was filled with an enormous despondency and helplessness.

"Well, they got him," he would repeat to himself, "they got him, the sons of bitches." Then he would call the Chinese steward again.

"Boy, you catch whisky soda, chop chop."

Megan, turning in her chair, saw his head nodding forward.

There had been little sleep for either of them on the junk. When they climbed aboard the crew had stared at them stupid and insolent, paying no attention to Mr. Shultz's demands to see the laodah. But Mr. Shultz had gone boldly aft, followed by Megan, and for long moments she had listened to his voice, now creamy with persuasion, now breaking into sharp spattering threats. Finally, under pressure of a roll of bills and a Mauser nestling against his ribs, the old Chinaman by the tiller had given in. Three or four of his crew manned the capstan to weigh anchor, singing a strange broken song, others sheeted home the sail that had been idly slatting in the wind. Presently Megan heard the slap of water against the blunt bow. When they were well under way, Mr. Shultz led Megan into the cabin so that she might stretch out on one of the bunks, but she only stood a moment inside the door, looking hopelessly through the

thick air at the hostile eyes of the Chinese women, at the babies on the floor, the ducks and fish hung against the bulkhead, the shrine at one end, smelled the mixed odor of hot rancid grease, opium and incense, and staggered out again. Mr. Shultz rolled his coat up for her, and she lay cold and desperately seasick, flat on the deck near the tiller.

At last day broke underneath the world and light began slowly to flood the sky with ripples of light from below, crossed by flying wedges of birds. The sun came and tormented her all day, its direct fire searching under her eyelids. By mid-afternoon they reached the mouth of the shallow river, too late, Mr. Shultz told her, for the flood tide, so they hung for hours, swaying giddily between the two blazing mirrors of sea and sky. The women did their cooking, smoke curled from the vent hole in the cabin, and the laodah had a game of mah jong with two of the more decorative of them. Fish were caught. A baby wailed. The delay was of no importance. Gradually the two mirrors dimmed and burnished again into crimson. Night came. The world for Megan became the cycle of day and night. Endless.

Then out of emptiness she heard water under the bow again. It was very early in the morning, still dark, when they came to the junk anchorage off the low-built city. Mr. Shultz called a sampan, that like an unsubstantial water insect carried them under the shadowy hulls of the junks to the Bund, where a small coast steamer lay waiting as squat and respectable as a boarding house.

In the basin-stand of the cabin was a cake of fresh pink soap. Megan, holding it to her nose, smelled Europe once more and fell over on the transom for a few hours of troubled sleep.

The jetty at Shanghai was crowded with passengers just off a tender from one of the big liners, such a crowd as Megan herself had landed with so short a time before. Now in her soiled Chinese robe she sat huddled on a bench while Mr. Shultz went to a near-by alley off Nanking Road, across from the Palace Hotel, to get a taxi. Megan could not endure to wait in the Palace while he got one, but here on the jetty no one particularly noticed her.

In the taxi they sat in silence, driven recklessly along the winding Avenue Foch between lines of tangled barbed wire. It seemed strange to see the barricades again, strange to them just risen out of China like drowned men from deep water. As they neared the Jacksons' house, Megan said:

"Forgive my saying this, but I've been so dependent on you, you won't mind. You must promise me that if you need any money now or any help, you'll let me know."

"Well, that is very kind of you, I am sure," said Mr. Shultz. "But I sent some money to Shanghai a few days ago for safe-keeping. I sent it in my name. If it is safe I'm fixed. If it isn't, I've got other lines out. You forget, Miss Davis, I'm a financial adviser!"

When they reached the house she said, "You will come in with me?"

"Not now. I'll be around some time later."

They shook hands lingeringly.

"You've been splendid," said Megan.

"Thanks. You have too."

"No, no, you were the one. You were splendid."

Mr. Shultz repeated, "Well, thanks."

They were friends now, not so much because they had shared danger, as because each had found something in the other to forgive and had forgiven it. He watched her up the steps and saw the door opened before he drove off.

The number one boy stood at the door glassy-eyed with amazement at the sight of Megan in her Chinese dress.

"Missie no have got," he stammered. "Master no have got. Other master have got."

"It must be Bob," thought Megan, and at the door of the little drawing-room she paused, trying to control the sudden pounding of her heart.

But it was not Bob. Doctor Strike, his head wrapped in bandages, sat in a chair by the window. His eyes were closed, his mouth, relaxed from its austere tightness, was slack, a little open. He was asleep, and his sleep exposed him to her; he was sick and old, and

he had, to all appearances, failed. Megan now knew how much. She had herself measured the very depth of his failure. As she looked at him, his eyes opened. Dazed with sleep he looked at her unknowingly, and suddenly they lighted from within.

"Miss Davis!" he cried.

Megan went to him and took both his outstretched hands.

"Don't get up, you are still ill. Were you badly hurt?"

"Yes, hurt," he repeated.

A little red plush stool, with a book on it, stood by his feet. Megan pushed the book off and sat down. He still held her hand, gripping it with nervous bony force, not taking his eyes from hers.

"I've prayed for you, my child," he said, "every hour since. I thank God."

"It's all right," said Megan, "I'm quite safe."

"And you saved me!" he cried. "Yes, I know that. I can't forget it ever. You saved me."

"Don't," said Megan, pained by his intensity, "Don't. What does that kind of saving mean?"

"It means life," said Doctor Strike roughly.

His eyes searched her up and down, seeing her Chinese dress, even the jade rings on her fingers.

"Did you get the General's telegram?" she asked.

"Three days ago."

"He picked me up at the station and took me on a train down to his capital. I was very kindly treated."

"Good, good." The Doctor's eyes softened. "You were well treated. That's good."

"Yes, very. He meant to return me. But trouble broke out there. An uprising. We were trying to get away and just at the last moment he was killed. An American who was with him, a Mr. Shultz, brought me back."

But Megan saw that at the word of General Yen's death Doctor Strike had ceased to listen to her. His eyes looked beyond her to take in a greater perspective. She stopped and waited for him to speak.

"It is hard to believe," he said at last, "hard to believe. I've known him to be in danger so often. But he has always got through. Now he is actually dead. Well, then it is all over. It is finished. That is what your gift of life means, my dear, it means we can still go on, that the final reckoning, when our successes and our failures are summed up, is not yet upon us.

"But he is dead and we can't do anything more for him, we can't help him, we can't save him. It looks as though we had failed." The Doctor stopped and his mouth of an old man trembled. "Perhaps we can't be sure," he said in a lower voice. "Perhaps we can't be sure. He said, 'I am the Way.' The way may stretch farther than we think. It may not end here with the end of life. The General too believed in a Way, another Way. Perhaps they meet." Doctor Strike dropped his head in his hands. He had forgotten Megan. "We must trust to the mercy of God," he said.

They sat in silence, both thinking of the General and of that mercy to which they at last so unwillingly relinquished him, both only fearful that since it must recognize justice, it might be less perfect than their own.

THE END

Colophon

The Bitter Tea of General Yen
Grace Zaring Stone

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