DAUGHTERS OF SHANGHAI

A THESIS IN
Creative Writing and Media Arts

Presented to the Faculty of the University
of Missouri-Kansas City in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

by
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Kansas City, Missouri
2022

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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2022

ABSTRACT

Daughters of Shanghai is an historical fiction novel set in China between 1937 and 2014. It is centered around resilient Lucy Lau who struggles to survive war, natural disaster, betrayal, and grief while raising four generations of daughters. She believes that honor comes before duty, and family before all. She waits for the day that one daughter will understand an inheritance she's kept secret for seventy-five years, a Ming tea set that's worth more than money. It's a family heirloom that for three hundred years has been passed down from mother to daughter. After the communists won the civil war, it became a bourgeois relic and a crime to own. Its motif depicts a snowy scene, the Tao plum tree, Confucian bamboo, and Buddhist evergreen—the three friends of winter, China's three religions. All of her history painted on porcelain whose strength and beauty has never been surpassed. Lucy keeps the tea set safe as a symbol that her family and their nation will endure even the harshest conditions. From the Japanese invasion, World War II, the Chinese Civil War, the rise of Mao, the

Cultural Revolution, the revival of capitalism, and new communism under Xi Jinping, Lucy Lau's story is the story of modern China through the eyes of an ordinary citizen.

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

Daughters of Shanghai explores the reality of living through chaotic events that changed not only China but the course of human history. I began writing the story while I was a UMKC-MFA student in June of 2021. I was strongly influenced by the content of novels assigned in classes; *Dispatches*, Michael Herr, 1978, *Mason & Dixon*, Thomas Pynchon, 1997, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Novel*, Jane Smiley, 2005, and separately, *The Things They Carried*, Tim O'Brien, 1990. The violence of war has been portrayed in different ways. From Pynchon's postmodern creative fiction to Herr's hard-hitting creative-non-fiction, reality can be traumatic to readers. I chose a classical novel form and was inspired by *China's War Reporters*, M. Coble Parks, 2015, to make Lucy Lau a war photojournalist. She was placed naturally at major events in the story and at the forefront of the women's equality movement in China. Like Michael Herr's character, her occupation was inherently dramatic, she was at odds with the Japanese enemy and with her own government who tried to censor news stories. The first chapter opens in 2014, Lucy's granddaughter is unaware they are related. Chapter 2 begins the story of Lucy's life in 1937 and moves forward in time. Lucy gives the reader a unique perspective about the deep divide that began with the Chinese civil war and persists among the people along political, cultural, and social lines. It's a rift that the communist party goes to great lengths to hide from the west. Like Tim O'Brien, I fictionalized dialogue and personal interactions, but the events are true.

Research and information from eyewitnesses have been my biggest issue. In the first section of the novel, 1937-1949, I relied extensively on *ProQuest Historic Chinese*

Newspapers, 1832-1953. I was interested in narratives of average people and how they coped with the devastation of Japan's air campaign against civilians. The summer of 1937 was a turning point in world history in the way war was conducted. The Nazis' decimated Guernica to aid Franco in the Spanish Civil. Japan used incendiary carpet bombing over Shanghai, Beijing, and Tientsin. There had never been more inhumane war crimes committed by government actors in violation of accepted standards of behavior. In China, 98 million people, twenty-five percent of the population, became refugees in less than a year. The scale of human displacement was unimaginable, accompanied by the worst ecological destruction man has ever perpetrated. It happened quickly, the nation was in chaos, and then half of it was under Japanese occupation. International war reporting was big business; between 1937 and 1945 there was almost too much information available. I have struggled with portraying the horror without desensitizing readers. From *Dispatches*, I learned that it was better to leave out events that readers are most familiar with from books and movies and find in my research something new the reader doesn't know. One example, in *China's War Reporter's*, Parks writes extensively about the enormous pressure on Chiang Kai-shek to defy Japan and trigger war. May Fourth leftist writers popular with university students had been urging war for years. New modern magazines led by intelligentsia screamed that it was the only smart path. The Soviets kidnapped Chiang Kai-shek's son and held him in Russia to add pressure for war. Horrible floods along the Yangtze in 1937 crashed the China economy, adding to the pressure to free China from Japanese control over its finances. To top it off, in December of 1936, two of Chiang's generals kidnapped him and held him for eleven days with a plan to force him to declare war. When the Battle of Shanghai finally came in late August 1937, 500,000 Chinese soldiers, 200,000 Japanese soldiers, an estimated 1,000,000 civilians were

killed. At least a million people fled Shanghai to nearby Nanjing for safety. The nation was elated. The journal, Nahan (War Cry), printed on the front page, "Look to the front! There is artillery fire; there is blood, there is suffering, there is the tragedy of mankind destroying mankind. But amidst this blood, this suffering, this tragedy; glory and happiness have been produced. The Chinese people's freedom and liberation." Three months later, the Rape of Nanjing occurred; another 600,000 civilians were killed. Chinese soldiers had left the city. The problem for me is that after writing the scenes, I don't want to use them. They would put the novel into a category of fiction I don't want to be in. What is interesting but hard to put in-scene is the lust for war among students, intellectuals, and literati. Once the war started, it was catastrophic, yet the reckless talk continued as enormous numbers of innocent civilians were killed. I am working on how to dramatize the shock of those early defeats and how it changed the nature of the war. I have similar issues with the rise of the communist peasant army. It was far more violent and mob oriented than I imagined. One of the clever devices used in *The Great Believers*, Rebecca Makkai, 2018, to show the significance of losing a generation of gay men during the AIDS crisis was to draw a parallel story with a lost generation of art and artists living in Paris who died from the Influenza epidemic during World War I. She simultaneously reinforced her story about loss and grief and overcame reader bias around homosexuality and religion. I want to be sensitive to political and ideological bias as I continue writing the story; readers may not be prepared for some of the surprises I found in my research.

My issue with information swung in the opposite direction in the period after the war. After 1950, information was tightly controlled by the communist party. Mao believed that journalism, literature, and art should serve the communist party and its goals. Nearly all

newspapers, magazines, and journals were closed between 1950 and 1952 for review. The ones that reopened in 1953 were published by the Chinese Communist Party which believed strongly in propaganda. Remaining writers and artists stopped producing material or were imprisoned where they committed suicide or vanished. Archival newspaper information was suppressed, especially about the nationalist army fighting the Japanese war. Starting around 1966, historical material was systematically destroyed.

The story is a novel in progress, and I have a long way to go before it's finished. I view my thesis as the skeleton of the story awaiting more musculature and final skin. I already know that some scenes will have to be changed because the plot is evolving, the chain of events has to be adjusted. For example, in Chapter 1, Aiwei's mother has been taken to reeducation by the Security Police because of a play she's written. I already know that her disappearance is more complicated and connected to *her* mother's role in the party. I would not have been able to map out the main storyline without methodical use of a scene structure around historical events. Both Professor Pritchett and Professor Higgins in Playwriting were invaluable in teaching the construction of dramatic scenes, dialogue, and story arc. I am in the process of layering in different aspects of society, culture, and fleshing out my characters; the atmosphere of the story. I'm adding what was happening in the world at that time, events that strongly affected people in Shanghai, Wuhan, and Chongqing. For example, there was a crash in commodity and silver prices, and foreign aid dried up. There were major floods in Shanghai in late-July and August that interrupted intense fighting and disabled Japanese tanks. There was an international war on drugs, undercover-FBI-style, with fire fights and arrests on the docks in Shanghai. Famous writers, actors, and journalists were constantly on the front pages of newspapers flying in and out of China as if the war didn't exist. Critical to

me is adding the characters' inner thoughts, feelings, and beliefs around Confucius, Tao, and Buddhism. Eastern culture strongly affected their behaviors, reactions, and decision making. To portray an authentic Chinese mind is a difficult task for a western white woman with a Catholic upbringing. The issue is bigger than authenticity; one of my challenges has been developing characters with a rich inner landscape who evoke empathy in the reader and balancing their thinking with action for story pace and drama.

There is a large gap in time between the first and second sections of the book. It is four chapters of material that are pivotal to the story; two of them are set in Wuhan, 1938. It was a time when the nationalists and communists set aside their differences. Chiang and Mao let generals in the field run the war, and student organizations run propaganda and refugee programs in Wuhan—censorship receded in that time. That year restored world confidence in China's government and military. There was more social, political, and cultural change than ever was or will be again in China's history. Unfortunately, the Japanese demolished Wuhan, the capital moved to Chongqing. Chiang and Mao reverted to their paranoid micro-managing ways.

I had stopped writing section one of the novel to focus on section two that begins as the communists are taking control of China. As I neared my thesis completion date, I thought it was a mistake. Conventional wisdom is to start at the beginning of a story and work through to the end. I learned an important lesson. I came to the MFA program to learn how to write, and my goal was to leave with a story of which I am proud. The chapters in this thesis represent significant mile-markers in Daughters of Shanghai. They are my roadmap. I know exactly where my story is going. If I didn't have them as a boundary, Daughters could meander and take years to complete. I have made more progress in a year and a half than I

ever imagined possible. And thanks to Professor Terrell, I will be launching a podcast about the China when I am done to promote the novel. Every class that I have taken in the MFA program has been incredibly instructive. The quality of the assigned readings has been key. In addition to the ones I have mentioned, I recommend to everyone *Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Novel* by Jane Smiley, which is worth a second plug. *NW: A Novel*, Zadie Smith, and *Out Stealing Horses: A Novel*, Per Petterson, because of their quiet and beautiful writing. *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, Arthur Conan Doyle, a master of description who reveals character not through point of view, but through the eyes of another character. *Old Mortality*, Katherine Anne Porter; I love that story because I saw the structure of scene at work. *Ulysses*, James Joyce, whose use of voice and psychic distance is a master class in itself. In my time at UMKC, I have learned that every piece of fiction has something to teach me and offers a tool I can use.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences have examined a thesis entitled, "Daughters of Shanghai," presented by Giana Miniace, candidate for the Master of Fine Arts Creative Writing degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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Shanghai - July 2014

Pan Anzhen hated Shanghai, there was too much of everything, skyscrapers, office buildings, condos, mud in the river. All of it steeped in humidity. She couldn't wait to leave. Fuxing Park outside her hotel was a throwback to the past, colonial but beautiful with manicured flower beds, winding paths, old Sycamores. It was ninety-nine degrees, she stewed in juices she didn't know her body could make and coughed on oily exhaust that hurt worse than the sandstorms in Beijing that blew in off the Gobi. She'd been walking in circles, looking for Shenyu Street with a 1937 map, it was faded, and useless. There were no wide avenues, no "Rue la" or "Route de" anymore, no mansions or promenades.

She felt clammy, then dizzy. Tiny spots floated out of nowhere; a thunderclap went off inside her skull. A stabbing pain followed; one of her migraines. She held on to a Sycamore, everything went black for a moment. The pain spread out in waves across her forehead. No one passing noticed; too busy moving like robots before they rusted. The headache was a bad omen; she shouldn't have come looking for what didn't exist. She wasn't a noble outlaw from a novel, there were no magic stones to find old ladies. Her mother's disappearance had made her reckless. She had listened to and old man who said she him met once when she was little—he had kind eyes and he said to find Lucy Lau because she had guanxi, connections. The next thing she knew, she was on a train to this hot, smelly place. The old man was probably senile; people from the Red Guard-era were like that. They told stories they thought you wanted to hear, it was survival for them. He gave her the map, *French Park* was circled on it, and a star on Shenyu nearby. She was a good journalist who

followed evidence, not fantasies.

And yet, she was in Shanghai because she could find nothing about her mother's disappearance; the Security Police were bastards. Her phone went off. Three texts from her boss; she'd missed a deadline. In trouble again. On the sidewalk, huge tree limbs swayed over the avenue like arches and shaded the street. For all the good it did, it was like a sauna. Her mother said their family had been from Shanghai before the war with Japanese. They must have walked the same streets, been as miserably wet with sweat as she. Her head pounded; it was time to go back to Beijing, back to work.

She shoved the map in her purse. The Sycamore had a paper notice stapled to its peeling bark. A nearby street would be demolished, part of the local committee's renewal plan. Modernizing. It could be a good story—if the buildings were early communist factories or republican era apartments. Maybe even old French mansions. Her boss might not be so fen dang, a bastard, if she came back with photos. The street was one block up and two over.

And then she was standing at the entrance to an original Li-long neighborhood like she'd seen in history books. There had been hundreds like them before the wars. Four blocks long and closed off by a raised tramway at the far end. High brick walls ran down both sides of the lane, stone Shikumen gates around heavy wood doors every 20 feet. Behind the walls, homes with pitched rooves like the pointed hats of Ming scholars. They were set back which meant front gardens, very rare for the city. There were huge potted plants on either side of each gate like sentries. It was a wealthy street and well-maintained. She used her phone to take photos.

On the curbstone, Shenyu was stenciled in white. It couldn't be. She didn't believe in the red thread of fate; that Heaven tied together people who were destined to meet. Yet here

she was.

Two security guards stepped out from a hut hidden behind a giant red Maple and demanded her identification and the name of whom she was visiting. She said Lucy Lau, handed over her wallet, and let them riffle through while she took more pictures. The stone gates had characters carved into them, maybe literati who lived in the houses during the Q'ing Dynasty, or bamboo-twig poems from wealthy men to honor their favorite courtesan houses, or Republican politicians, possibly early communist leaders.

The guards were uninterested in the Lau woman, and completely unimpressed that she was a journalist from Beijing. They handed back her wallet and returned to their air-conditioned hut. She wandered down the lane and found number 230. She rang the bell and waited a long time before a young man heaved open the door.

"Is this Lucy Lau's home?"

"Miss Lau isn't expecting anyone." He frowned at her and started to close the door.

She felt bad about her poor manners, but her mother had been missing for over a week. Finding Shenyu Street was destiny. "Please tell her that Pan Anzhen would like to speak to her."

He hesitated, asked her to wait, and went inside. The garden was large with three fruit trees planted along the brick wall full of fragrant pink flowers preparing to fruit. Peach. Her mother tried to grow them, but failed year after year. It didn't matter, she still dug, fertilized, and pampered her trees all season ignoring the barren branches.

"You may come," the young man said and held open the front door.

She entered. "Hello? Miss Lau?"

Inside the home, like the lane and the garden, was like being in another place and

time. The furniture was old, made of hardwood, a hand-knotted carpet in the main room was woven in gold, deep reds, and royal blues in a medallion pattern with a path worn into it from the front door to the kitchen in the back. A long side table was crowded with framed photos and grainy images of vanished people in clothes that were once fashionable, their faces serious. Except one woman in a 1920's photo looking directly at the camera and smiling.

"I see you've met the family," a woman said.

Anzhen startled; the photos fell over. A small, elderly woman with white hair knotted on her head stared at her.

"Nín hǎo," Anzhen said and stood up the frames; they fell again. "Pardon me."

The old woman watched, said nothing. Anzhen gave up, Miss Lau took the gilt frame she was holding.

"My mother. I believe they were called flappers."

"She looks rebellious."

Miss Lau touched the smiling face in the golden frame. "Far from it. She was the first woman in over nine hundred years of her family without bound feet. The practice was outlawed."

"No wonder she looks happy."

Miss Lau sighed. "On the contrary. She thought her marriage match would suffer. Because she was uncivilized."

"But it's such a brutal thing to inflict on women," Anzhen said. In the older photos, the women had the tiniest feet inside silk embroidered shoes; none were smiling.

"Oh, it wasn't inflicted on the women, Anzhen. It was practiced by them." Miss Lau laid the frame on top of the others. "It's complicated, and a story for another day." She

clasped her hands in front of her. "I'm told you'd like to speak with me. I so rarely have visitors. Would you like tea?"

Anzhen followed her to a traditional square table. The young man served them. Her cup was chipped, and the teapot was missing its lid, but the porcelain was beautiful. Classic blue and white underglaze with color enamel. Above a frieze of stylized lotus flowers was a nature scene, the three friends of winter motif—the pine, the bamboo, and the plum tree. She'd studied ceramics at college; it was one of the oldest Ming patterns. The evergreen was a Buddhist symbol for longevity. The bamboo, Confucian for eternal friendship. The plum tree, Taoist purity. All three religions of China in one pretty landscape, and three birds in friendship for their history. The inside of the cups was the palest yellow with a delicate peony at the bottom.

"That's a lovely tea set."

"It belonged to my mother. And her mother before her. And many mothers before that." Miss Lau turned the cup in her hand. "I've been waiting to pass the set on to my daughter."

She was clearly in her nineties—such an odd thing to say. "Miss Lau, I've come to you because I've been told that you might be able to help me with something."

"Oh?" Miss Lau set down her cup and leaned forward. She smelled of the most interesting combination; mandarin orange and something earthy, woodsy.

"Yes. My mother is a playwright in Beijing. She's quite famous, you may have heard of her, Pan Zaiwei." Miss Lau stared at her, her hands shaking with age, no sign the name meant anything. She probably never left her house, and was far too old to offer help. Anzhen set down her cup. "My mother is missing."

“Oh, child.” Miss Lau reached across and patted her hand, her antique chair creaked. “I’m sorry. Missing or taken? In re-education?”

A woman who had been alive as long as Miss Lau knew better than anyone how the party operated. “I’m not sure, and I don’t care. I want her back. Someone sent an email from her account saying that she’s gone to a government seminar.”

“You don’t think it was her?”

“No. She’d never leave without seeing me first. Māma didn’t send that email.”

“Women are unpredictable, as you know.” Miss Lau freshened their tea, sat back.

Red thread of fate or not, Anzhen had no patience for a lonely old lady who never saw guests and liked to talk. “Māma writes plays that challenge corruption. A friend in the news bureau told me she’s been accused of promoting dangerous western values.”

“What do you mean?”

Anzhen looked down into her cup. The lovely little peony inside was painted to trick the eye into thinking the petals were moving—an old Chinese technique that pre-dated the Ming period. Deception was woven into Chinese DNA; nothing was ever as it seemed. “Party censors warned her about her plays in the past. But she didn’t listen. Recently she became angry about the great uprooting and wrote a new play about it.” The little peony looked drowned, helpless. “I’m to blame.”

“That’s nonsense, the urbanization of the countryside is an economic miracle,” Miss Lau said and sipped her tea. “Everyone says so.”

“That’s what state media wants them to believe. That a few disgruntled peasants have complained. But it’s not true. I travelled across the country for months to report on it. Everywhere I went, I found the same thing; it’s like warfare. Residents violently evicted like

it's still the Cultural Revolution. My editor refused to publish the story; I showed it to māma."

"What did you show her?"

"Interviews and photos of local committees kidnapping their own residents, keeping them out while they bulldoze homes. Villagers have no choice but to accept apartment houses built alongside ridiculous businesses like snail farms or shoddy high-tech firms. Most of them have never had customers. You have to understand, the villages are in the middle of nowhere, the people are uneducated, unskilled, they have no income to pay rent. Before all this happened, they grew their own food in their gardens. Everything's been taken from them and replaced with a mirage. They're literally starving, and no one cares."

"That is not how it's portrayed."

"My mother's play was about a village that starts a new revolution. Mao-style. It was going to open simultaneously in sixteen cities across the country. The date she chose was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Tiananmen democracy protests."

Miss Lau's eyes, which had been lively, hardened with focus. "And you think the party is afraid audiences will be sympathetic."

That switch in interest sent a danger signal; māma taught her to never trust strangers. The party paid handsomely for security tips or gave spiritual rewards that could be more valuable than money. But she was desperate. "Mama met with the theater directors to finalize opening details. The next day, all of them were arrested—except one. They were charged with conspiracy to disturb public order." Anzhen expected Miss Lau to throw her out of the house. Nobody wanted to be involved with the security police.

Miss Lau sat back, steepled her fingertips. "What do you want to do, Anzhen? What

would you like me to do?"

"A man came to see me at my office. I don't know how he knew māma was gone, but he said he knew her. That he'd met me once. He told me that you could help me find her. He said you and he were friends. His name is Meishi." Miss Lau's eyes filled with tears, she covered her face with her hands. "Miss Lau, are you all right?" Anzhen waited until Miss Lau recovered, sipped her tea. "Was he telling the truth?" she said. "Who is he? How did he know she was missing? Miss Lau, please—"

Miss Lau wiped her eyes, reached for Anzhen's hand. Her touch was nearly weightless. "You're a journalist, you know that to help the accused is to be treated worse than the criminal."

An old panic gripped her—she'd been held for two weeks by the People's Armed Police for reporting on corruption within the army; a story about the so-called princelings, children of party leaders and their role in an environmental disaster at a factory in Guangdong. She was released, and her report was published as a series after it was heavily edited. Two attorneys, one who represented the whistle-blower at the factory, and one who represented the whistle-blower inside the People's Liberation Army, were both convicted of crimes in closed court and received life in prison. That was before the new security law—her story would never be published now.

"That's true," Anzhen said. "But only if māma confesses to a crime. "She won't. Miss Lau, I need to know if you can help me or if I'm wasting my time here."

"I want to show you something."

Miss Lau crossed the room to a large painted cabinet on the far wall and opened doors to reveal stacks of yellowed documents and albums, thousands of papers that appeared to be

as old as Miss Lau. She searched until she found a folder of newspaper articles with a particular date on its tab.

"That's a lot of old papers, I thought those things were destroyed in the purges," Anzhen said.

"Yes," Miss Lau said thumbing through the folder. "Documents and photos were the first thing the party used against people to prove counter-revolutionary thinking. If you had them, there was no escaping the charges."

Māma told Anzhen that when she was a teenager, she built a fire in the bathtub and burned all the pictures she had of family and friends. She tried to memorize their faces as she fed them to the flames, but they faded over the years. It was as if her past was erased, made irrelevant.

"How have those never been discovered?"

Miss Lau looked back, with a defeated sigh, said, "I've been diligent. I'm saving them for someone."

"What if I reported you? You don't know me, yet you opened this cabinet."

"Trust is the heart of any relationship," Miss Lau said.

"The security police don't care if you're and old lady, they'd take everything you own."

Miss Lau closed the cabinet. "No one can take what's in my memory." She returned to the table with a newspaper article which she spread on the table.

It was from 1976, Anzhen couldn't read all of the classic Chinese characters. A picture in the center of two women flanked by men on either side was at a theater in Shanghai, the opening of a play. She looked closer; one woman looked familiar. Everything

was old-fashioned, the clothes, hairstyles, their expressions—

"That's māma!" It was her, but it wasn't. She was different, another life, another time. Miss Lau was staring at her; she could feel it. Old ladies seemed harmless, wanting help made Anzhen dismiss warnings māma taught her to never ignore. She pushed the article away, sat back. "Māma's plays are taught in theater school, everyone knows who she is. But this old newspaper? She was barely sixteen, she wasn't famous yet."

"This one," Miss Lau pointed to the second woman in the photo, late thirties. "Is my daughter."

Anzhen almost laughed with relief. The connection was that māma knew Miss Lau's daughter. "What was the play? In the article?"

"It was a reimagining of *The Dismissal of Hai Rui*, the honest bureaucrat."

"The Wu Han play?"

"Yes. The one that started the Cultural Revolution."

Anzhen studied the photos more closely; Miss Lau's daughter looked unhappy, she wore severe, boxy clothes and was plain compared to māma, who was smiling and electric. "What did your daughter do in the play?"

Miss Lau traced the photo with a crooked finger. "Your mother's play was very good." She pointed to the date of the newspaper. "Premier Zhou Enlai died that year. In January. The party refused to acknowledge him or pay respect to his memory."

Anzhen nodded politely. Old people cared too much about such things, past events that didn't matter. They didn't teach anything about it in normal school or in her college history classes.

"When the day of mourning came in April, thousands upon thousands of wreaths

appeared all over Tiananmen Square. They were for Premier Zhou. You don't know this, but people loved him, they wrote poems on cards and brought huge flowers arrangements. It was like his funeral."

Miss Lau was drifting in time. *Get to the point!* Anzhen toyed with the cup in her hand, tried not to shout that māma was alive and needed help.

A soft hand lifted her chin. Miss Lau's small penetrating eyes stared at her with resolve, the kind that hid banned documents for decades.

Anzhen she set down the tea. "I'm sorry, I'm listening."

Miss Lau sat upright. "Zhou tried to make reforms after the long dark years. They were more terrible than you can imagine. Over two million people came to Tiananmen for him that day. But all of the commemorations were cleared away by the morning."

"Why?"

"Mao feared that respect for Zhou was criticism of his past mistakes. Oh, people became furious and returned to Tiananmen the next day to protest. The army and the police were mobilized; there were huge riots, terrible violence. It was the second Tiananmen tragedy with a passion to equal the May Fourth protests of 1919."

Māma talked about the Zhou protests many times, but Anzhen didn't pay attention, she thought it was something in a play. "Didn't Mao die that year?"

"Yes, Anzhen, in September. And Mao's wife was the first of the Gang of Four to be arrested. A new optimism swept across the country; anything was possible again. That was when your mother wrote this play." Miss Lau gazed at the newspaper photo. "It was very popular. But it was too soon for criticism of the state."

"And your daughter?"

"Ah," Miss Lau shook her head solemnly. "My daughter was a Maoist through and through. It was a strange time; mothers of underage playwrights always accompanied them. When this play opened, and the mother realized that it was a political criticism, she reported her daughter to the authorities, then disowned her."

"Wait, my grandmother disowned māma? Because of this play?"

"Yes. For her safety, your mother was forced to move away to Beijing and start a new life on her own."

Anzhen stared at the woman and at her mother—there was so little resemblance. "That's *your* daughter," she repeated but couldn't look up. "*My* mother is your granddaughter?"

"Yes."

"No. Māma told me we don't have any family. It's just the two of us."

"She told you what was best for you to know. Your grandmother would have endangered you."

"Endangered me?"

"What happened at Tiananmen changed her life. Your mother is an artist, she's driven by her heart to speak; to create."

"You're wrong. Maybe you're confused. Or mixed up." Anzhen got up from the table. The over-furnished house was too much, claustrophobic. She had to leave. "Māma wouldn't lie about family."

"Your mother protected you from a complicated past."

It couldn't be, but she knew it was. Memories came to her like a parade of snapshots; māma's smiling face, handing her the special birthday package that came every year from

Shanghai. Māma got one on her birthday, too. And one at New Year's. Tears blurred her sight.

Miss Lau said softly, "I've waited a long time to tell you about your family. To tell you who you really are."

She abruptly wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. "I know who I am. I'm Pan Anzhen, daughter of Pan Zaiwei, from Beijing. We have no one else."

"Child, you're a daughter of Shanghai. Just like your mother and her mother before you," Miss Lau said. "Whether you know it or not, you've a part of our family story." Her wrinkled hand felt warm over Anzhen's. "You will write your own future. Wouldn't you like to know the secrets of your past?"

2

Shanghai, Connaught Road - June 1937

Lucy crept down the curved staircase into the entryway. The wall clock ticked, 8 am; floorboards creaked. At the front door, she turned the brass knob slowly—freedom for the day.

"Zǎo ān," Good Morning, Māma said from the dining room.

Mā de! Shit! She could pretend she didn't hear, keep going, just don't hesitate. She turned around, māma was sitting at the eight immortals table with an open parasol looking out the window. "You're up early," Lucy said.

"And you're dressed nicely," Māma said, tipping back the parasol.

Lucy kissed her powdered cheek. "Zǎo ān. You look like Madame White Snake with that silly thing."

"A snake spirit? Lovely."

"It's the dining room," Lucy said. "You have a parasol."

Māma sighed as if surrounded by difficulties. "The sun is ruinous, pumpkin. You know that." Weak light filtered through peach trees in the garden.

"Of course," Lucy said and rolled her eyes. Māma was obsessed with whitening her skin. She approached it with the discipline of Confucius; the *Analects* she followed was a daily regimen of rice water washes, crushed pearls ingested in tablets she had specially made at the chemist, and astringents distilled from pine tree kernels that grew in the north. All recipes found in *Formulas of a Thousand Gold Worth:* a 1,300-year-old book.

"I'm glad I caught you before you got away." Māma poured tea from the prized Ming

set. The table was set for family breakfast, an hour-long affair. Lucy should have run when she had the chance. “I arranged a fitting for you this afternoon. The dressmaker on Yates Road. You know the one.”

“I can’t,” Lucy said, inching toward the door. “I have plans today.”

Māma looked at her over the rim of her teacup. “You can’t go to the Cultural Association dinner next week wearing rags. Mr. Wang squeezed you in today.”

“Rags?” Lucy said. “I have a closet full of dresses.”

Māma’s brows knit up with doubt. “Don’t be silly. Last year’s.”

There’d be no quick exit, she surrendered, slumped in a chair. “I liked it better when you and father ignored me. It’s like you’re on some kind of rescue mission. You won’t stop until you remake me into one of those fake western women.”

“You’re perfect. Sit up straight, pumpkin. A lovely, smart, modern young woman. You should dress like one.”

“Sure. Like a picture in a magazine.”

“Are you being clever?”

“No, māma. Smart means fashionable, doesn’t it? I prefer to be intelligent.”

“You can be both.” Māma refilled the teapot with hot water, swirled gently, gracefully poured a second cup. Lucy had watched her a thousand times, never tired it. “Father is the honoree. I want you to look your best for *Shanghai Life* and the *China Daily*. Photos are forever. That’s all.” She held out a pale-yellow Ming teacup.

Across the room, the front door waited to be opened. Lucy could jump up and be out of the house before māma could stop her. No one ever missed her when she was gone.

“Lucy? Are you listening? Honestly, reform you!”

"I said remake." She took the cup in both hands; māma cooed, she loved good manners. "You dress me, put makeup on me like a doll." The cup was brutally hot. At the bottom was a little peony painted in pinks and reds. The petals almost moved. She knew how the drowned flower felt. "Māma, I have my own life—"

"Freshly picked oolong," Māma said and waved steam toward her face. "Very floral. You're favorite."

"I'm serious. I hate going to dinners, ballroom dances."

"It's social, pumpkin. You're seventeen now, time to make connections. When you're older, you'll be glad you know people."

"Everyone I meet is pretentious. They talk for hours about nothing. Clothes, movies, tea parties. I have more important things to do."

"Don't be silly. You haven't given boys a chance," Māma said.

"Boys talk about clothes more than girls."

"Pumpkin." Māma put her hand on top of Lucy's with finality. "You really need to make more of an effort."

"To be like you?"

Māma drank deeply, closed her eyes, savored. It was no use; they were too different. Māma looked modern, but underneath she was etched in traditions. She'd graduated from an American college, drove her own car, yet agreed to an arranged marriage. She read three newspapers a day, was on the board of the Shanghai Women's Bank, and had saved the Lau family business from an embezzler, yet spent most of her time going to parties and fundraisers. She believed in modern science, but was superstitious. No one could use the door on the north side of the house because evil came on winds from the north. At New Year,

they had to eat fish, it sounded like surplus, brought luck in the following months. When she and Henry needed shoes, even before they could walk, they handed the money to the salesclerk, shoes sounded like evil. They were a gift and evil spirits could attach to them. It was all so ridiculous.

“I don’t have time to argue, māma. I’m on my way to a May Fourth march.”

Māma sat upright, let the parasol drop to the side. “It’s not a good idea, Lucy. Your father and I agree on this, you don’t understand about these protests. Whom you’re dealing with. The Shanghai Municipal Police are arresting people for the smallest infractions. It’s in the legal roundup in the *Gazette* every day. And those nasty neighborhood societies are patrolling—”

“Now who’s being silly? I’m going to the university—”

“*You’re* going to the university?” Her brother, Henry, said from the doorway, a hand shielding his eyes. “It’s so bright.”

“Henry, really. You look awful,” Māma sighed.

Henry made his way to the table. “Do they allow children at university events?”

“I’m not a child!” Lucy said.

“I meant secondary students.”

“Henry,” Māma pushed dishes and her newspapers aside. “Stop annoying your sister and sit here.”

Henry kissed her cheek, sat smugly. “Well, it’s true. She hasn’t graduated normal school yet. Besides, aren’t you and your friends a little late for a May Fourth?”

“Are you still tipsy?” Lucy said pouring more tea. “Marching against imperialists isn’t limited to one day, Henry. Besides, the coronation parades delayed permits for

everything else. We had to wait."

"Of course the British revolving monarchy has priority over Chinese national holidays," Henry said and tried to look his most pitiful with māma. "Do we have any Lisperin, māma? My head is pounding."

"Yan Yan will get you some." Māma rang the table bell for their number one boy.

"Another late night?" Lucy said sweetly. She already knew; at 4 am he stumbled around in and knocked over something heavy in his bedroom, woke her up. "I'd put yuan on Del Monte's."

"You're too young to wager," Māma said.

Henry laid his head down, he looked miserable.

"It's the only place open past 3 am." Lucy rummaged in her bag, found a wax envelope of headache plasters, peeled off two. "Here." She came around, pressed one on each of Henry's temples. "That will cure you better than pills. Nothing will cure your avarice, I'm afraid."

"You deserve that, Henry," Māma said. She tucked her parasol underneath the table, fixed Henry's tea, patted his hand. The sun slanted through the window, cast shadows over the table.

Henry scratched at the patches, pulled them off. "I'd rather have pills. Modern medicine. Where's Yan Yan?"

"You should put them back on," Lucy said. "It's polishing day. He's somewhere up to his elbows in silver and brass." She took up the *Gazette*, māma had been reading the "Russian Colony" column, her favorite. The abdication of Edward VIII and crowning of George VI. "They're fawning. You'd think Russians would find it embarrassing for a king to

give up his throne for an American woman."

"Russians love the English, they're wài," māma said. Related by maternal kinship. "George and Edward's grandmother, and Alexander III's wife were sisters."

Lucy didn't have patience to hear the nine grades of relations between two old royal families. "Look, the Germans sent more troops into the Spanish war; I thought they had to abide by the non-participation agreement," she said.

Henry pulled the paper away from her. "Let me see. The fascist louts aren't happy with destroying Guernica for Franco? Oh, well, look at that—the League of Nations issued another resolution. That will scare the einheitliche off the Nazis." Uniforms.

"It isn't funny," Lucy said. "The League did nothing when Japan took Manchuria. And Mussolini took Ethiopia—"

"Alright, alright," Henry pushed the newspaper back. "You're making my head worse. Did they find the missing pilot? The American woman?"

Lucy turned to the front-page, checked for news of Amelia Earhart. "No. Maybe she landed on an uninhabited island. There are dozens of them."

"Or maybe she decided to go to Manila, a lovely city," Māma said. "Women are unpredictable."

Lucy folded the paper, took a last sip of tea. "I'm off." She headed toward the door. Father appeared in the entryway dressed in a suit and tie. "Zăo, father." She bowed quickly and sidestepped him.

He took her by the elbow. "You're leaving early. Where to?"

"The university."

"Later. Come sit." Father kissed māma on the cheek.

Lucy would never escape; the door looked impossibly far away.

"Henry, I see you were out making the most of your summer break. And Lucy, you're off to protest something." Father frowned at māma. "I can't abide this, Zhen-yi. What will become of our jìsì?" Our prosperity, our heirs. "We've raised a college playboy who drinks too much and a leftist with an arrest record, both wasting their time with troublemakers."

"That's not fair!" Lucy said.

"Didn't father pay your bail at municipal jail?" Henry said.

"We had permits for our rally."

"You were arrested."

"SMP arrested everyone. Father, you're the one who always said when the winds of change blow, don't build walls, build windmills."

Henry leaned over his tea and pressed his knuckles into his temples. "Do you ever stop talking? Don't you have some dead bodies to pick up off the streets like garbage?"

"That's a heartless, horrible thing to say, Henry," Lucy snapped.

"Their families left them out like garbage, not me."

"You know there's still a drought in Szechuan. Those people are poor, they can't afford burials."

"That's enough," Māma said.

She glared at Henry across the table. "What happened to you at Amherst?" she muttered. "All parties and fashionable clothes. Don't people matter to you anymore?"

"You're always fighting someone or something. It's boring," Henry said but he'd put too much effort into it and pressed his forehead.

"Your mother said, enough!" Father shouted.

Lucy sipped tea. “Henry,” she said after a long pause. “Remember when you thought vagrant ghosts were haunting you?” She set down her cup. “Imagine all those unburied children and the nasty things you said about them. What if they find you?”

Henry’s mouth pursed into a thin angry line; his eyes were murderous. “It was embarrassing enough to see you and that giant Cossack in the *Herald* holding a corpse. But it’s better than our family name on the *Municipal Reports* page because the Kempei Tai or the Japanese Consul had you arrested and flogged.”

“Lucy doesn’t hold corpses, Henry,” Māma said. “They have laborers for that.”

“My friends saw her!” Henry cried. “All of Shanghai saw her.”

“How many times did the vagrant ghosts make you wet the bed?”

“Lucy!” Father pounded the table. “Apologize this minute.”

Henry’s face was inflamed.

“Henry, I’m sorry you wet the bed,” she said.

Father stood. “Lucy, I’ve had it with you—”

“I’m sorry, Henry,” she said quickly. “I didn’t mean to make you so mad. Only a little.”

“Lucy,” Father sighed loudly, threw his napkin on the table. “Your passions, your activities are admirable, but you’ve ignored school, your friends, this family.” Māma poured tea for him, which he took with a grateful bow.

“You think my friends are leftists, that they just want to cause trouble. But it’s not true. Everything is changing around you, but you don’t see. The entire nation is demanding that Chiang stop appeasing the Japanese. We can’t be ignored.”

“Let others make demands, Lucy,” Māma said. “People who’ve already graduated

from school. Who are married. You have things to accomplish." She uncovered the tureen and began ladling soup; steam rose over the bowls like storm clouds. "Not everyone agrees with you and your friends. Most people just want to feed their families. A fight with Japan would make life impossible."

"Your mother is right," Father said. "Sometimes inaction is better than unwise action."

The Bird's Nest soup was gelatinous, two wrinkled jujubes stared up at her like eyeballs. She pushed it away. "Father, our nation proclaimed independence on May 4th, 1919 like every nation who fought the Great War. That was almost twenty years ago, but we're not equal to other peoples. We don't have freedom. Japan refuses to allow it. The world has watched fascist military expansion while the League of Nations does nothing."

"My head is going to explode," Henry groaned.

"No one likes what's happening," Father said.

"The Seven Gentlemen wrote that it's time to fight for ourselves. Generalissimo Chiang arrested them for violating censorship. He can't bully everyone into silence."

"That's rich!" Henry nearly gagged on a mouthful of soup. "Chiang was kidnapped not even six months ago. Two of his own generals tried to bully him into war with Japan. He has a right to stop extremists, and to stop leftist writers who want to incite the people."

"Henry, Japan now has 50,000 soldiers in China. Chapei, not even a mile from this house, was destroyed 5 years ago. It's still ashes. You, father, and Chiang don't see that war is already here, but the rest of us do."

"It's a war we can't win, Lucy," Father said firmly. "The Seven Gentlemen want blood and battle so badly; do you think they will fight? No. They're literati, lawyers,

magazine publishers, actors. They peasants, students, and factory workers to die for their cause."

"We can't allow Japan to get rich by colonizing us."

"Sending men to die with no hope of winning is an empty sacrifice. It's irresponsible," Father said.

He was earnest and believed, father and the older generations had lived with so many insults and injuries from imperialists, had been forced to accept their own helplessness that they didn't know it was time to rebel. She read from the front page of the *Herald*. "The Nippon Association issued new demands yesterday; they have petitioned the Settlement Council to abolish public schools." She laid the paper in front of father; her heart was pounding. "A cost saving measure, to reduce taxes on businesses. They mean Japanese businesses." Father's eyes dropped to the story. "It's their right, they now have the largest population in the International Settlement. Based on all the Imperial soldiers they've imported, not families or school children." Father didn't react, was uninterested in reading the story. The gulf between them had grown impossibly wide. "They say the British will likely comply; they always follow their rules and regulations no matter how ridiculous they are."

"The Council is full of corruption," Henry said between spoonsful of soup.

"We can't let them," Lucy said.

"Ānjìng!" Silence! Father pounded the table. "You've been allowed every freedom, Lucy. Every opportunity, the chance to choose a path but you've rejected guidance. A jade stone is useless until it's polished. Young people are good for nothing until properly educated." He placed both hands on the table; he'd come to a decision. "Do you believe that

your mother and I want the Kwantung Army, or Imperial Command in Tokyo, to control our nation? Do you think we want to trade western imperialists for Japanese? There are larger issues that you refuse to see. One of them is the safety of our family and our business." He steepled his fingers, calmed himself. "Your mother has always wanted you to attend Wellesley College as she did. Madame Chiang has written on your behalf, and you've been accepted for attendance in the fall." Lucy nearly choked; she hadn't yet graduated secondary school. "You'll return to America with Henry at the end of the summer."

She wasn't happy. She'd once dreamed of going, had listened to her mother and Madame Chiang tell stories of Wellesley for years. They were Yi Wen and May-ling Soong who roomed together in an ivy-covered building, who read Arthurian romances and played basketball in sateen bloomers. She imagined herself in a diner booth with American boys after a dance, sharing a milkshake and apple pie. She had always wanted to look like the picture on her mother's dressing table, her hair cut short and curled at the ear, in a sequined dress, head thrown back smiling with dark lipstick, lined eyes.

"Well?" Father said.

Māma and Henry were staring at her.

"I want to stay in Shanghai, go to college here."

"Lucy," Father said. "It's been arranged. You've always wanted to go."

"My future is here." Her parents exchanged looks while Henry continued to eat. "You want to send me away because I'm an embarrassment. Because I don't like your dinner parties and your friends. They see me in the newspaper like Henry said, and you can't explain why. That's it, isn't it?"

Father reached for her hand, she pulled away. "The Nippon Association is agitated—

the situation is fragile," he said. "More boycotts will mean more Japanese militants. More of imperial soldiers."

Māma remained calm, but her eyes looked worried. She read newspaper stories every day, told her about businesses that were ransacked and burned by thugs to silence owners suspected of anti-Japanese activities. "You can live in the same dormitory that Aunt Olive and I shared."

She had the rest of the summer to change their minds. "Thank Aunt Olive for me, māma. I won't do anything dangerous; I promise. But I don't know how you expect people to be quiet when our nation is being strangled."

Māma sighed and looked away.

Henry had a second bowl of soup, was spooning out jujubes. "She's impossible," he said.

Father looked tired, rubbed his eyes. "We can talk more later."

It was no use; they'd force her to go no matter what she wanted. She left; at the front door she turned around. The three of them were talking about the Hell Drivers performing at the exhibition racecourse, they rolled their cars, Henry was going with a friend.

"Last year, the Benevolent Association collected 40,000 children," she said. Henry, māma, and father looked at her like she was a stranger. "Left like garbage because Chapei is a wasteland. No homes, no jobs, no schools. Only Japanese soldiers are allowed to patrol." Māma and Henry ate pancakes.

Father's face softened, she thought he might hug her, and they could start over. His mouth pursed; he and Henry looked alike when he did it. He seemed confounded, maybe wondering where he'd gone wrong with her. He picked up the newspaper turned to the

financial section.

“I don’t understand any of you,” she said and stomped to the door. She slammed it behind her.

“This has to stop,” Father yelled. “You *will* stop.”

She had forged a path the way father taught her, the way māma once did. She was just like them in her differences. Now, they expected her to yield. Never. She ran down the porch steps out onto Connaught Road.

3

Shanghai, Fudan University - June 1937

A cold damp draft crawled along the sidewalk, pulled up from Soochow Creek at the north end of the street. The chill was unseasonable; Lucy shivered, she'd left the house without a sweater and walked quickly rubbing her arms for warmth. June was the party month; gardens up and down Connaught were festooned with the union jack for summer-long coronation tiffins, or set with tables for wedding tea parties. Huge magnolia, goldenrain, and camphor trees were hung with red ribbon and double-happy banners for graduates and new babies. Guests would gather and tremble in an inauspicious, foul wind.

A private rickshaw waited at the end of the block on Hardon Road. The puller was short, wearing a padded vest over his pants and a cap like a taxi driver; he saw her coming. "Smoothest wheels in Shanghai. Look, lady, fresh paint. Two dollars Mexican. Anywhere you want to go."

She had no patience for the bargaining dance, and prayed he had a warm blanket for his riders. "Yes," she said and climbed in. "Fudan University."

Henry jogged up the street behind her. "Did you say Fudan? In Woosung? Did you not hear a word Father said?"

"How could I not? You sound just like him."

"I thought Fudan was burned down in the siege."

"It was rebuilt a few years ago. What are you doing here, Henry?" Lucy said, slumping back on the rickshaw seat.

"I brought your sweater." He handed her the angora, her favorite. "I wanted to make

sure you're alright. Father was stern."

She pulled it on; it was heaven. "Māma sent you, go home!"

"No one sent me," he said, brows knit together. "Now that I know you're going to Woosung, I'm coming with you."

"Don't be dramatic, there'll be thousands of students."

"It's surrounded by the Japanese district! You know māma sends me the *China Post* every week, don't you?"

"Yes, so your brain doesn't forget Mandarin."

"Funny. I read about policemen being stabbed around Fudan campus. Undergraduates being searched and shot by Imperial soldiers." He looked genuinely concerned.

"It sounds worse than it is, Henry. The plan is to march through the Settlement."

Henry muttered something about *her* brain, stepped inside the rickshaw. "Wonderful. I haven't been to a student march in years. I love them."

"I'm not a child." She blocked the seat with her bag. "On one condition—promise you won't run home and tell māma everything."

"May my teeth fall out if I do," Henry said, pushed her bag away, climbed in.

The puller adjusted his wheels, glanced back at Lucy. He was wasting time, he wanted a higher fare but wouldn't ask. "Blanket for you," he said, handed them a red plaid Subei blanket. Henry spread it across their laps and tucked it tightly around her knees which dissolved the leftover annoyance she had with him.

The puller took up the shafts, looked over his shoulder again and waited.

"It's alright, I'll pay three," she said.

"Robbery!" Henry said.

“Hush!” Lucy squeezed his hand. “You waste that much on a single taxi dance.”

“Yes. But it’s dancing.” Henry noticed her canvas bag. “Is that the camera I gave you?” She nodded; he sighed smugly. “The police will find your photos helpful,” he said. “To identify the leftist criminals who get away.”

“Very funny. No one’s getting arrested today.”

“Well, don’t lose it, I had to pay thirty dollars duty.” Henry held her hand in his lap. “I knew you’d love it,” he said. “You’re a voyeur at heart.”

She leaned against his shoulder; wondered if he knew she’d forgive him anything as long as they could sit together, hold hands. “It’s the best gift you ever gave me.”

Hundred-year-old trees passed overhead with woody, overgrown limbs swaying in the wind. Chinese gardeners wouldn’t trim them, it offended Pi-Feng, the tree god. Some of them had gaping holes cut in their canopies; limb thieves crept through at night and used bamboo poles to steal firewood.

At the corner, they turned onto Peking Road toward the Bund. The puller loped along between cars, pedestrians, and foot peddlers and screamed obscenities at them to get out of his way. The markets had already hung out their smoked ducks and chickens. Sellers had dragged boxes of books and magazines onto the sidewalks. Pharmacists had put out their signs; tea traders had opened their store fronts. The rickshaw swerved hard; a peddler jumped back, he was carrying a bamboo pole hung with dozens of pots and pans that clanged like monk’s bells. He cursed them to the realms of hell; their puller kept jogging. By the time they made it through downtown traffic and crossed Fenglin Bridge, Lucy was nauseated from exhaust, diesel, and rotten vapors off the Huangpu River. Fudan University’s main entrance was clogged with cars and buses; the new medical school had recently opened, and students

waited to turn in. Their puller dodged rickshaws careening out of nowhere, then looked back over his shoulder, "Where?"

"The gymnasium," Lucy said, gripping the seat.

The puller cut across heavy traffic on Szechuan Avenue; an electric streetcar barely missed them, he jumped the sidewalk and came to a stop at the entrance to the brand-new gym built in the modern deco-style.

"We're alive," Henry muttered as he climbed out.

Lucy dug in her bag, paid the Mexican-dollar coins, and got out unsteadily. The puller pocketed the money, yelled, "Make way," and darted off.

The campus was newly landscaped with freshly paved streets surrounding it. A streetcar stopped and a dozen students jumped off. Busses pulled in and still more students poured out. Other students wandered up Tien Dong, Szechuan, Soochow, and Cha Poo roads, all of them seemed headed toward the gymnasium.

"The campus is nice," Henry said. "Modern."

The buildings were architecturally similar, metal, steel, and glass. The male students were dressed in summer wool or linen suits, some with vests, and ties, leather shoes. The females, like Lucy, were wearing skirts and sweaters, or day jackets, with white blouses.

"It's all Chinese," Lucy said. "The first one in the city. And they have quotas, as many females as male students. Do they do that Amherst?"

"I'm not sure." He paused for a moment. "I don't think so."

"Fudan's private now," Lucy said. "But the government gave them money from the Opium Fund. They spared no expense. Come on."

Inside the gym was chaotic; cheerful noise at a deafening level echoed off the rafters

and wood floors.

"It's so exciting!" Lucy said.

A roar of shouting and clapping came from the crowded bleachers; one group cheered against another back and forth to see which was loudest. Ten groups of about twenty students each were directed by student-leaders shouting instructions for the march with more students lined up waiting to take their place in the next round of groups. The basketball courts had been set with long tables where students painted big-character posters and affixed them to sticks.

"Lucy, everyone here is a lot older than you," Henry said. "No one asked if you're a university student?"

"There's Yu Lichen," Lucy said and waved. "She didn't see me. Come on, I'll introduce you."

"Lichen is older than *me*. Is she a professor?" Henry said.

"She's one of the student-leaders. She's 23, for your information. But she's already a reporter for *Ta Kung Pao*."

"Aren't they in Tianjin?"

"She's assigned to Shanghai. Last week, I heard her say the paper sent her to Tokyo to study. She just came back. I haven't talked to her about it yet, but she must know everything about the Imperial Army, the fascist movement, the Japanese economy. Do you think Tokyo is like Madrid? I mean with intrigue and spies, it must be horribly fascinating."

"Horribly?" Henry made a face. "Who says horribly?"

She made her way down the aisle through stacks of boxes filled with pamphlets, poster paper, and paints. Students waiting for instructions, talking, and laughing stopped to

look at her curiously when she and Henry pushed past. On the court, ten feet of paper from a huge roll had been unfurled in the middle of the floor, students were on all fours gluing on pictures and painting big-character slogans.

Henry pulled her arm. “Lucy, that’s a call to boycott Japanese companies and products.”

Glossy pictures cut from magazines showed Japanese brands of groceries, clothing, publications, and alcohol interspersed with enlarged photographs of their factories in Shanghai, with the addresses. She hadn’t believed her father when he accused her of being unpolished, naïve, yet there was the banner, proof he was right.

Lichen was at a long table nearest her painting a May Fourth poster. “Look at that, Henry. *Mr. Democracy: Mr. Science*. Modern China. It’s for the march. I don’t know why that banner is here.”

“Lucy, you know why.”

“And look at that one, *My Hand Writes: My Mouth Speaks*; New Literature,” she said. It was one of the oldest May Fourth slogans. She wouldn’t admit it to Henry, but they both knew. The students had been warned in the strongest terms, but they were planning a call for boycotts along with democracy and modernization.

Another shout thundered up from the bleachers. A student leader climbed on a chair and with raised arms screamed, “Japan took Manchuria without firing a shot!” Hundreds of students were roused with discontent, rattled the wood and metal benches. A second student leader yelled, “Them limited war got them the rest of our northern provinces!”

A chant started and grew “Resistance, resistance.” Students raised their fists, stomped their feet. “We want war!”

“Lucy, we have to go,” Henry said and pulled her arm. “Radicals have taken over the march. You can’t be arrested again; you’ll go to prison this time.”

Lichen pushed past Lucy and dug in an open box near the bleachers for a bottle of paint. She paused to watch the chant, then overlooked Lucy to smile at Henry on her return to the court and her posters.

Henry smoothed his hair. “That’s the one you know?” he said.

“I met her. How long have I wanted to study journalism and photography? You might be right about the boycott banner. But I want to talk to Lichen before I go.”

“Lucy, the Municipal Police watch everything in Woosung. If we don’t go, you’re going to get us both in trouble.”

“A few minutes, I promise.” Before Henry could talk her out of it, she left him in the aisle and nervously approached Lichen. “Hi,” she said. “Is it alright if I take photos while you make posters? For my school paper?” She held up her camera, adjusted the lens, she was ready to take pictures, then checked the distance setting.

Lichen spilled her bottle of paint which leeched into photos she had pasted to poster and ruined everything. She traded looks with another girl at the table. “I’ll have to start over!” The poster had quotes from a new genre of short stories written in vernacular hand printed on it; people could understand the quotes for a change, they weren’t in classical Chinese characters.

Lichen blotted the paint with a rag, yanked the poster off the table.

Henry gave her impatient looks; she didn’t have much time. She reset the distance dial for a close-up, focused the lens. “I want to be a journalist like you. It’ll only take a moment. I have a new camera my brother gave me…” Lichen gave her a scornful look. Lucy

froze; she was babbling. Lichen walked away.

"Let's see that," said an American man she hadn't noticed. He took her camera. He was mid-twenties, unshaven, his shirtsleeves rolled up and his tie loosened. "Nice. German, latest model. A lot of reporters I know don't have one half as nice. Do you know how to use it?"

"I don't have time," Lucy said. Westerners were so rude; she pulled her camera out of his hands and followed Lichen to the next table. "I don't need an interview; I can take pictures of you three working." She sounded pāi mǎ pì, like she was patting the horse's ass.

Lichen ignored her, whispered to a girl next to her who stood up and said to Lucy, "I've seen you here before, what's your name?"

"Lucy. Lucy Lau. I met Lichen last week at the organizing meeting—"

"I remember. I'm Liqun, her sister. Lichen is busy. *And* she has no manners. Look, won't the students working over here make a great photo?" She led Lucy to a table by the auditorium doors where three boys and two girls had painted dozens of large character posters with multi-color slogans. They were affixing them to wood paddles. "I'm sorry, my sister's not herself today."

"Last week, she talked about working for *Ta Kung Pao*. How they sent her to study in Tokyo," Lucy said and focused her camera on the students, they smiled and froze for her.

"Yes, three years," Liqun said.

"It's my dream to do what she does, be a photo-journalist traveling the world."

"That's not the way to do it," the American said from behind her. "I can show you how to frame like a pro."

"That's the second time," Lucy spun around with her camera gripped tight, ready to

curse him if he touched it again. If she were older, he wouldn’t try. “If you’re such a pro—"

“This is Joe, he works for *China Daily*,” Liqun said, unbothered that he had followed them. “He’s always hanging around keeping track of us.”

“May Fourth protests are big news,” Joe said. “Especially since the trial of the Seven Gentlemen is next week.”

“They spoke out because of what we started on university campuses,” Liqun said.

“So you keep telling me,” Joe said. “The Japanese are jumpy about students inciting people. They listen to you.”

“We’re the future,” Liqun said.

“Mottos are great, but I need something fresh,” Joe said.

“May 4, 1919, was the day China woke up,” Lucy said. “We won’t stop until the rest of the world pays attention.”

Liqun smiled in surprise. “From the mouths of students.”

“I like that,” Joe said, noting it on a pad he pulled from his shirt pocket. “But I don’t think that’s why you have such a big turnout today. I hear a famous person will be marching with you. Is it true?” Joe said.

Liqun shrugged. Lucy hadn’t heard that. She was lying about writing a story for her school paper. But she wanted a photo of somebody famous.

“This is Lucy,” Liqun said.

“Nice to meet ya, Lucy,” Joe said leaning one way then the other, sizing up the table of students. “If you stand over here, the light’s behind you. Gets rid of the shadows.” He moved her by the shoulders. “See the stage in the background? Readers’ll recognize where it is.”

Liqun nodded, agreed. “His photos in the *Daily* are pretty good.”

Lucy focused, noticed the light in the frame, not just shadows, how it reflected in the students’ eyes, off their foreheads. What Joe said made her see differently. She got the poster slogans in the shot when he suggested it, which made Liqun happy.

The gymnasium doors opened, and a distinguished man entered with an entourage of graduate students who were a little older; their clothes were richer, their slacks draped better, their ties were silk, they wore stylish hats.

“Literati,” Joe whispered to her. “Get your distance set, that’s Guo Moruo the poet. Wrote *The Goddess*. Makes women go weak in the knees.”

“I know him!” Lucy quickly adjusted her range and got full-face shots of him smiling warmly and waving at someone behind her. She had read *The Goddess* three or four times, it changed everything. With his, “I am I,” he defied old-style, powerless poetry. “Doesn’t he live in Japan?” she said.

“Now you’re catching on,” Joe said. “The better question is, why is he here?”

Lucy turned around; Guo had been waving at Lichen who was watching him and waiting, but students surged forward from the bleachers and tables, encircled him, jockeyed for his attention.

Liqun hooked her arm in Lucy’s. “Do you want to meet him? For your school article?”

“What? Yes, of course.”

“I’m first,” Joe said. “You promised.”

“Alright,” Liqun said. “We’ll wait until his fans have fed like glass noodles.”

“I have to tell my brother,” Lucy said. “He’s waiting for me.” Henry had been caught

up in a wave from the bleachers and pushed onto the court. He freed himself and she introduced him.

He was polite but nervous and said, “Lucy, we should go.”

“Your sister is about to meet the famous Guo Moruo, Henry. Can’t she stay?” Liqun said.

As vain and sarcastic as Henry could be at home with her, he was shēnshì wèi, a true gentleman in public. He bowed, “Of course.”

Joe retrieved a bag from under the table, took out his camera, showed Lucy. “Rolleiflex Automat, latest model.” He handed it to her.

“It’s beautiful,” she said. “Looks expensive.”

“Very. Two lenses, fastest shutter speed ever made, double exposure prevention. You have no idea what I’m saying, do you?” Joe said. She stared at him. “Can you hold the light meter?”

He asked her to read the numbers on the meter, explained what they meant, and how to change aperture and shutter speed settings accordingly. He took close-ups of Guo, then widened out; Guo amid the crowd with dozens of May Fourth posters behind him. He took several shots of Lichen, background smudged. She was tall, willowy, and looked like a magazine model; her skin was perfect. Joe was sure of every shot; he focused and took them quickly. He whispered to her what he saw; lines, angles, composition, focusing tricks. At the end of the roll, he asked her to get more film from his bag.

“Why are you teaching me all this?” she said when she handed him the roll.

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you,” Joe said, loading new film.

“Try me.”

"You adjusted your camera twice before you took Lichen's picture."

"So," Lucy said, confused. "I wanted a good shot."

"Yes, but it made her nervous. She spilled the paint and walked away. You spooked her because you didn't know what you were doing."

She wanted to like him, he had a generous nature, but he couldn't help being offensive. "I know that!" she said. "It's a new camera."

Joe laughed. "No. See, I could tell you're serious about your photos." He closed his camera. "I don't waste my time with people who don't do their work well."

"He's ready," Liqun said and introduced them.

Guo was sitting alone in a corner of the gymnasium. Joe had his notepad out and his questions ready when someone from his entourage pulled a chair up for him. He interviewed while Lucy took photos.

Guo had been a Lt. General in the Northern Expedition fighting communists and bandit warlords with Chiang Kai-shek. "I left for Japan in 1929. The moment trade unions and workers rebelled in Wuhan, Nanjing, Shanghai, Canton, and Fuzhou, Chiang took revenge on them. He blamed communists for provoking unrest and purged them from the military."

"Chiang's reign of white terror," Joe said, scribbling. "Factories, government buildings, and universities were occupied, destroyed. Foreigners were killed."

"Yes, and Great Britain gave up their Hankou concession in Wuhan. A victory."

"Foreign investment dried up," Joe said, poised to write.

Guo sighed. "The split between republicans and communists must be resolved before our nation can have unity. Can China rely on foreign investment *and* protect worker rights?

The Soviets avoided the issue, suppressed the international worker movement. Eventually, the problem must be faced." He removed his glasses, rubbed his eyes wearily.

Lucy felt Guo's fatigue. He must have answered the same questions posed by dozens of journalists yet he was patient and fair-minded—very much like father.

Guo looked up, smiled at Lucy. "I believe Miss Lau has questions?" He rose and motioned for Lucy to take Joe's seat. Before Joe closed his notebook, Guo said, "Without foreign investment, China is poor. Without worker rights, China is a failure."

"I'm grateful for your time," Joe said and bowed.

Lucy sat, she had no pad of paper, no prepared questions. But she never understood her father's insistence that Japan and China were more alike than different. "I'm curious," she said. "What do people in Japan think? Young women like me, or Lichen and Liqun. Do they feel Chinese in Chapei or Manchuria deserve to die so they can expand and live better?"

Guo stared at her with his mouth slightly open and blinked quickly. He laughed out loud. His entourage who had spread throughout the gymnasium to talk with Fudan students, turned in surprise, looked at her as if she'd made a blunder. Lichen looked at Guo with concern, but Liqun put a hand on her arm, and they returned to painting.

"I'm not laughing at you, Miss Lau. I thought you would ask about poetry or my plays. Perhaps the comparison to Goethe that seems to haunt me year after year." He waved at students around them working hard on preparations. "So dedicated, yet everyone in the press, in magazines, calls them the irresponsible generation. Decadent, spoiled. Look at them, they'd work all day and night. They come to colleges that promise them the world, then extort high fees, excessive charges. They're diploma-mills. There are no jobs for these students when they graduate. More than thirty percent of them will beg for work. I'll tell you

something, the same thing has been happening in Japan for a long time. A poor economy will make people do things they never imagined. Turn to fascism, militarism, expansion." He pulled off his glasses, leaned closer with his elbows on his knees and spoke softly, intimately. "I have a dear friend, another poet. Maybe you've heard of her, Yosano Akiko."

"Everyone knows her!" Lucy said. She was legendary—a freethinker. She wrote wildly erotic poems, not just what a woman's heart wants, but what her body desires.

"Just five years ago she struck a knife in those who thought it was noble to send young men to Manchuria to die for the emperor. She was always against imperialism, against wasting youth on war. She risked arrest to condemn militarists. And now?" Guo shook his head, gazed sadly at Lichen and Liqun. "She's just written the most beautiful love letter to wakamono," Young men. "Urging them to dance through barbed wire, carry with them a canister of destruction. Scatter their pure bodies, explode like a blooming rose bud, give life to a samurai's honor." Guo looked as if he might cry, he sighed with slumped shoulders. Liqun had told Lucy that he had six sons in Japan: six soldiers in waiting. "It hurts me here," he said and pressed Lucy's hand over his beating heart.

Over his shoulder, Lichen stared at Lucy. She grew angry and dropped her paintbrush, rushed toward them. Before Lucy could pull her hand away, Lichen shoved her off the chair. She fell, the chair tipped over. Guo jumped up, his eyes and mouth wide with embarrassment. He stared at the fallen chair and spoke to Lichen in low, blistering Japanese.

Lucy understood so little Japanese, and she couldn't move from the floor. This middle-aged man who had shared his pain of what might become of his sons and the loss of his friend, had showed no compassion for Lichen's wild, tender heart and shamed her while she cried.

One of the students picked up Guo's glasses, folded them, handed them back. They ignored Lichen while Guo inspected them carefully and his entourage reassembled around him. They left the gymnasium walking quickly with Lichen following behind.

Liqun helped Lucy up, pushed her hair back out of her face. "It's Lichen's revolutionary fire," she tried to laugh. "Guo is a hero to students everywhere. They want his approval. Lichen is jealous for his attention."

Lucy's bottom hurt where she fell; her neck ached. "Jealous? But he's so much older."

"Poets listen to their hearts, no matter what it wants."

The gymnasium slowly returned to the high noise level. Joe had been in the bleachers taking notes, reappeared with his notepad. "Is your sister alright?"

"She will be," Liqun said. "She's Guo's tall white orchid tree. Isn't that too much?"

"Poets," Joe said.

"Why does she let him treat her so badly?" Lucy said, straightening her dress.

Liqun watched student leaders begin handing out posters to students who filed out of the gym. "She loves him. It's time. Guo will be leading the march. Lucy, do you want to walk with us? Joe is coming."

"I'm going for a couple of blocks," Joe said. "Then I have to get back to the office."

"Why are you being so nice to me?" Lucy said to Liqun.

"Most people are afraid of our family. Nobody ever spoke to Lichen the way you did," Liqun laughed. "She was so embarrassed when she spilled the paint."

Lucy had no idea who their family was.

"Their grandfather was governor of Guangdong," Joe said to her.

“I didn’t mean to be rude.”

“I know. My sister has been coddled. It’s good for her to be treated like a normal person.”

Henry didn’t like the idea of Lucy joining the march and tried to talk her out of it. Liqun asked him to be their escort. He agreed if Lucy would leave when Joe returned to the newspaper. They took May Fourth posters and joined the crowd outside. The sky had cleared, and it was warmer. Lichen walked on Guo’s right, Liqun the left, with Lucy between Joe and Henry. Over a thousand students made their way from Fudan University down North Szechuan like bees around a hive, disorganized, noisy, and excitable. When they crossed Soochow Road onto Fenglin Bridge, they arranged themselves into columns, became orderly, pumped posters up and down, and chanted “May Fourth!” Students holding the ten-foot Japanese-boycott banner followed at the end. Traffic and pedestrians stopped to let them pass. Drivers shouted Guo’s name from cars and buses, they honked and waved as he passed. He was elated and raised his fist intertwined with Lichen’s.

Two blocks into the Settlement, sirens wailed, and a truckload of helmeted Municipal Police poured from a side street. They were young Russians in blue uniform with their truncheons out, the riot squad who were on-call for use against mobs. Lucy felt panic spread—they were marching peacefully yet the truncheons began to strike. Students were blocked from side-streets, the crowd split and half ran east toward the Bund the other half held each other’s hands and ran back toward Fudan University. But it was a trap; they were met by men wearing red arm bands, Nippon Association thugs. Guo’s entourage surrounded him, Lichen, and Liqun and pulled them away. They were swallowed by crowds running in different directions. Lucy was pushed to the ground and Henry was pulled from her by

people trying to flee. She got to her feet; a cloud of smoke spewed from a police canister they'd thrown out of their truck and choked her. Everyone was coughing, crying. There were screams and bloodied faces rushing past, angry Japanese men shouted obscenities and pursued them with leather saps in their hands. Someone grabbed her arm and nearly pulled her off her feet.

"Come on," Joe said. "I know where to go." They ducked inside a small tailor shop. The owner was sewing on a stool. Over his shoulder, Joe said, "I know him." They went through and out the back door. Municipal Police had students rounded up and tied together, but no one stopped the two of them.

At the end of the block, Lucy couldn't see. Her eyes watered painfully, her throat was raw. She pulled her hand away. "Wait!" she croaked. "I have to find Henry." She rubbed her eyes. "It burns."

"Lucy, there's nothing you can do." Joe held her face, searched her eyes. "You're okay, the chemical smoke they use is an irritant. Listen. Your brother looks athletic. He can outrun those bozos, believe me. Pheasants can outrun 'em." Street prostitutes. "Even when they're caught with their dresses up." Joe pulled her into a quickstep.

But she couldn't stop crying because of the bodies; for weeks, there had been photos of them floating down the Yangtze—hundreds of them. They were day laborers, nobody cared about them because they were from the countryside and had no family. Government censors told newspapers not to print the pictures even though everyone saw them, everyone knew what happened. Upriver, there was only one construction project—the Imperial Japanese Army was fortifying their barracks with concrete and steel. She should have listened to Henry about the march, the banner, about Fudan. If something happened to him,

she’d never forgive herself. And neither would her parents.

“No, Joe! I have to find my brother.”

4

Shanghai - June 1937

Lucy and Joe waited inside the glass doors of the Capitol Movie Theater with the ushers staring at the mob scene until smoke cleared from the street and police sirens receded. Students held by SMP were made to kneel together in groups where they held hands and cried from the gas. A Riot Squad truck screeched to a halt in front of the theater. A dozen Russians still in their helmets pulled back from positions along the street, climbed in, and sped away. When the smoke cleared, there was no sign that the Nippon Association had been there except blood smeared on the sidewalks. Only bewildered Chinese shopkeepers and westerner businessmen ventured out of buildings. British SMP officers banded around the kneeling students, apparently saw no sense in arresting them, and walked away. The students ran away and traffic quickly resumed on Szechuan Road.

"I'm pretty sure I know where Henry is," Joe said and took Lucy to the Central Police station on Fuzhou where he asked the desk officer for "Tiny." The officer made a call, told them to wait in the lobby and brought tea. "Thanks Paddy," Joe said.

"You look like shite," Paddy said went back to the front desk.

The tea was tepid, but strong and calmed Lucy's shaking hands.

"Tiny's a friend of mine, Detective. I met him on that severed-heads case."

"That was *your* story?" Lucy said.

"Yes, I had a good run with that one. It took a month before they stopped the killings."

"I saw the first photos. I couldn't look after that." She had nightmares about the wide-

open eyes, terrified faces. “Did they ever find the bodies?”

“Nope, never did.”

“It was so… bloody. I could never take pictures like that,” she said.

“Important story like that, sure you could,” Joe said. “The whole city was scared stiff. At the newspaper, messengers and copy boys wouldn’t take a taxi. Drivers quit taking fares in Hongkew.”

The story had horrified Henry. “One thing that scares any Chinese is a dismembered body,” Lucy said. “It means the ghost is crippled.”

Joe looked perplexed but didn’t ask further. “Tiny solved the case with my photos.”

He seemed overly proud of himself. “SMP take their own photos,” she said.

“I was looking into the motive behind the murders. Did my own investigative reporting on one taxi company terrorizing a rival,” Joe said. “It was a theory, but it was right. Turned out a new company in Hongkew was behind it. Owned by Japanese.”

A tall Chinese man appeared wearing a suit. He gave Lucy a wary once over, spoke to Joe privately. They shook hands and he left.

“Henry’s here,” Joe said. “Tiny’s going to get rid of the paperwork and he’ll be released. No one will ever know he was arrested.”

“Joe, thank you!” Lucy hugged him, then felt awkward. “I’m sorry, this whole day has me overly emotional. Thank Tiny for my family.”

A uniformed SMP officer escorted Henry out of an elevator an hour later and waited for them to leave the station.

“I don’t want to talk,” Henry said when they got outside. “I just want to go home.”

“How about some tea first?” Joe said. “And some food. Pull yourself together before

you see your parents. I know just the place."

The short walk to the Great World Entertainment Center nearby felt good. The temperature had warmed up; the sky had cleared. Inside the enormous building, they could get lost in crowds, then sit in the tea garden on the 3rd floor. Lucy held Henry's hand when they entered the first-floor arcade. It was busy and loud, there were gaming tables, singsong girls offering their cards, magicians doing tricks as they walked, an entire row of slot machines, dozens of birdcages, and out in the courtyard, acrobats walking a tightrope between buildings. Even with so much to see, passersby stopped to stare at Henry's black eye and scraped cheek. He nervously squeezed Lucy's hand, and she said a silent prayer they wouldn't run into anyone they knew—if he thought there'd be gossip, he'd worry himself to pieces. One flight up, actors sold tickets in front of the opera theater, cricket sellers had stands, there was an herb medicine section, and a section of earwax extraction. They took an escalator to the third floor, pushed through a crowd watching jugglers, around long lines in front of ice cream stands, and past the stuffed whale exhibit. At the far end, was a replica of the Ihoan tea hut in Kyoto with potted plants and lattice work in front. The hostess led the three of them to a table in the back.

A young woman with short hair and razor thin eyebrows saw them and waved, then came toward Henry smiling. She feigned a moment of alarm. "Henry Lau home from school. Don't you look a mess. Are you alright?" Then she smiled brightly at Joe.

Henry blushed. "Lucy, you remember Daisy Li. Daisy, this is Joe."

Joe stood. "Joe Walker," he said and offered his hand.

Daisy shook daintily. "Henry, I hope you're not too busy carousing that you miss the Cultural Association dinner for your father." She didn't take her eyes off Joe, no doubt

wondering if he was Henry's friend or Lucy's.

Henry smiled weakly; it looked like it hurt. "Lucy and I are both going. We wouldn't miss it."

Daisy slyly appraised Joe's clothes, shoes, his hair, fingernails. She was thorough, but she didn't notice that Henry was flagging. She turned to Lucy. "I have the most delicious navy chiffon. It's *the* color in America this year. So flattering, for a change. Do you remember last year? That horrid lilac. Nobody looks good in lilac, don't you agree, Joe?"

A waiter arrived with the tea service and cakes just as Henry listed in his chair.

Lucy took his arm before he keeled over. "Henry isn't feeling well, Daisy. You know boys and their late nights. We should get some tea in him."

Before she left their table, Daisy extracted promises: Lucy had to show her dress at the dinner, Henry had to go to bed at a decent hour, and Joe had to stay exactly the same. She ta-ta'd and left the teahouse with her mother who had been watching them from her table.

Henry sat up. "Is she gone?"

"You were pretending?" Joe said.

"He's a good actor," Lucy said. "When he wants to be."

"I'm sure her mother is already calling Māma," Henry said. "To make up some story that I was in a fist fight."

"Don't be silly. She'll want to know everything about Joe," Lucy laughed. "It'll drive Māma mad."

"Daisy seems… nice," Joe said.

Lucy didn't know why batting eyes and giggles made men blind. She arranged the teacups and began steeping the tea.

“We make tea at tiffin, in the office,” Joe said. “They just throw teabags in the water.”

Henry groaned, turned his chair toward the arcade and watched through the open lattice as people passed with food from stands and ice cream, laughing and chattering.

“How awful. I’ll show you the right way. The water temperature is very important. It should be just boiled, to refine the energy of the tea. We let it cool a little, not too much.” She felt the water pot, it was perfect. “The first pot of tea isn’t for drinking.”

“It isn’t?” Joe rested his chin on his hand.

She liked the way he watched her hands. “No. It’s to purify. You pour the hot water over the tea leaves, then pour it out.” She poured the water in the teapot slowly, tilted it for Joe. “And see? If the tea leaves are good quality, they’ll sink to the bottom. You know the energy is gone if they float.”

“If they float,” Joe said.

“Yes,” she said. Joe had deep blue eyes, she could fall into them. “The essential energy in tea is descending.” She strained the water out into an empty pot on the tray. “And now, the second pot of water brings out flavor.” She poured more water, swirled, then poured tea in three cups. “We add more water to the pot and let it steep; the third time is the best. But no more than three times.”

“Three pots,” Joe said staring at her.

“You sound like a recording,” Henry said and took a teacup.

Joe seemed unbothered. “Repeating helps me remember,” he said.

“Never mind him,” Lucy said. “He gets cranky when he’s hungry.” She pushed the plate of pumpkin cakes toward Henry; he took one and ate it in a single bite. “Now, the most

important thing—never use teabags no matter what anybody tells you. Even if they bring it at tiffin."

"Really?"

"Really. Tea bags are inferior quality. It's better to pay a little more for loose, higher grade."

"Māma always buys the second best," Henry said.

"Unless you're a connoisseur, you can't tell," Lucy said.

"He probably prefers coffee," Henry said and drained his teacup.

Joe sipped his tea. "It's very good."

"See? I taught you something."

"You look better, Henry." Joe ate a cake. "Alright, we need to talk about what Tiny told me. The march turned into a riot. The Nippon Association and the consul lodged all kinds of complaints with the Settlement Council."

"Was anybody hurt?" Lucy said, fearing for Liqun and Lichen.

"Two students were killed." Joe put his hand on hers. "I didn't recognize the names. But SMP arrested over a hundred students."

Chaos, students running from angry men, screaming, eyes bulging from the gas, blood streaming from head wounds—it was worse than she imagined it could be. "Why are students arrested and punished while the thugs go free?"

"Are you serious?" Henry said.

"I didn't really think the Japanese would be so brazen," she said.

"Father told you," Henry said and ate another cake. "I told you."

"They hate boycotters," Joe said quietly. "Because it cuts into their trade money."

"You said they killed two people, and still no arrests?" Henry said.

Joe shook his head. "It's a headache for the Council. The Japanese army attaché buries them in paperwork and threats." He drank his tea, pushed it forward for more. "I'm a pool reporter, been writing stories about their tactics for a year now. No one's stopped them yet." Joe leaned on the table, became serious. "Your parents will read about it when the *Evening Mercury* comes out," he looked at his watch. "In about an hour. They'll be worried. Lucy, it's best that you don't go to anymore marches or protests. Not until things settle down, anyway."

Lucy and Henry took a rickshaw home. Māma went into near hysterics when she saw Henry's face and called Yan Yan to make an herb paste for the bruising. She took him to the kitchen. Their father said nothing until they were gone.

Lucy prepared for whatever punishment would come; she deserved it.

"I hope you learned something today," he said.

"We need heroes now more than ever, not appeasement. Just like the outlaws who weren't afraid to stand up to oppressors."

Her father nearly yelled, "*Outlaws of the Marsh* is a tale we tell children. You and Henry could have been killed today!"

He stomped into his office where he kept his crickets in antique cages and boxes on the bookshelf. He dusted and shined each one when he was angry; their singing calmed him. "Going away to college is for your safety, Lucy. I don't think our family will survive if you don't." He held a small black cricket in his hand; it began to chirp. "It's your duty to do as I ask."

She couldn't hide her astonishment. "What will be left when I come back?"

Her father placed the cricket inside its silver inlay hibernation box and looked up wearily. “Honor before duty, family before all. I’m hosting a banquet tomorrow night. Henry would have gone, but with his face… It’s impossible. I want you to attend.” He opened the big ledger on his desk. “Lucy, remember: a host never embarrasses or compromises a guest. Especially guanxi.” He ran a finger down a column of numbers; he was finished speaking with her.

She left quietly and was about to close the door. “Why haven’t you invited me before?”

“You’re naïve, Lucy. I hope college abroad teaches you that life isn’t a choice between what you want and don’t want. It’s between what you can’t and won’t accept.”

She told Henry about the talk and that she never wanted to work at Lau Cloth. “You’re the one who loves spinning, dyeing, and manufacturing. Everyone says you’re a born accountant.”

Henry nodded. “You used to like going to the Lau offices,” he said. “Remember when father took us to Wuhan?”

“That was a long time ago,” Lucy said. “The banquets sound boring. Old businessmen drinking too much, courting each other.”

“It’s not like that with guanxi.” Professional contacts. “It’s tradition but talking with them is interesting. And they expect it.”

“I don’t know what to say, how to behave,” Lucy said. “What if I look brainless?”

“Don’t worry, no one cares what you think.” She must have looked crushed because Henry put a hand on her shoulder. “No one ever cared what I thought, either. Try to enjoy it.” He gave her a few simple things to say if anyone mentioned the lingering effects of world

depression, commodity prices, or the state of trade. It was the best he could offer.

The next evening, Yan-Yan brought to her room a new dress and jewelry from her mother's lockbox. He had the latest *Linglong* magazine and applied her makeup like the girls in the pictures, then curled her hair. In the tall mirror, she looked like the modern women her mother hoped she'd be. The cocktail dress was emerald-green, corseted, and sleeveless. Her waist looked tiny and she had a curve at her bosom. The color was striking against the velvet skin of her décolletage and long arms.

"You look like your mother," Yan Yan clapped his hands. "Only young!" And he called Māma to come look.

She brought her special perfume—agarwood, sandalwood, and mandarin. Very expensive, Yan Yan mouthed. Her mother skimmed Lucy's wrists and the hollow between her breasts with the wand. "Body heat releases the aroma all night long," she said.

Father drove to a mansion in the French Concession, a zhujia, courtesan house. It was bigger and more impressive than their home with manicured flower beds and a statue fountain in front. Inside, the furniture was English, the carpets Persian, with walls hung in scrolls and old tapestries, and stone carvings on the tables. In the entryway, a butler met them and took her wrap, led them into the reception lounge where father left her alone and greeted guests who had arrived.

An attractive middle-aged woman in a painted silk dress approached her and said, "I'm Madame Bái láng." Lucy bowed. "Welcome to my house." She offered her hand like a westerner.

Lucy took it, felt she'd stepped wrong because Henry had told her to use western manners. "I'm pleased to meet you, Madame. This is a lovely home."

“We have your father to thank for that. He’s been our benefactor for several years.” Madame Bái láng turned over Lucy’s hand to inspect the heavy gold bracelet she was wearing. “Lovely bauble. It’s time for the show.” She excused herself.

Three young women slowly descended a wide staircase in brightly colored Cantonese opera costumes. Everyone turned to watch. They were courtesan entertainment with white-painted faces, heavily shadowed eyes, and impossibly sculpted hair. They arrived at the bottom landing like fairies on a scent of chrysanthemums and sweet Osmanthus blossoms. Father smiled foolishly and took one girl’s hand. He escorted her through the room for guests to admire. The other two followed while servants in long padded robes passed silver trays of food. In one corner, three sing-song girls played instruments and sang softly.

Father presented the young lady and said, “Lucy, this is Li Shishi.”

Shishi bowed deeply. “My pleasure.”

Lucy bowed in return. Shishi had a perfect melon-seed shaped face, and large shy eyes; she and Lucy were about the same age, seventeen.

The other two courtesans stepped forward. “This is Li Meishi and Li Weishi,” Father said.

“Oh, you’re three sisters!” Lucy exclaimed. “Like the famous Leijing twins from the cabaret.”

The three of them laughed behind their raised fans.

“Not quite,” Father said. “Weishi is dan. He’s well known in the opera house. You and Henry have seen him perform several times.” One of father’s associates whispered in his ear and he excused himself.

“Your talent is inspiring,” Lucy said to be courteous—Weishi dropped his eyes

demurely. He was as beautiful as his sisters. She wouldn't have known he was male. Dan lived as a woman all the time. The three siblings stared at her, expecting her to say something.

Weishi took her hand. "Henry, your brother, is a treasured friend. He's told me so much about you."

"Really?"

"Yes. For instance, I know you're impetuous and curious, born in the cycle of metal monkey."

"I'm afraid that's true. Have you known each other long?"

Out on the terrace, father looked serious, one of the businessmen raised his voice.

"Yes," Weishi said. "A year now. We correspond when he's away in school."

There was tenderness in Weishi's voice; they'd shared confidences. Yet she knew nothing of him.

"Will you excuse us?" Father said and took Lucy's arm. "I want you to meet some important associates. Remember—"

"I know; don't embarrass the guests," Lucy said.

Father introduced her to one client after another as they made their way toward the terrace. Most of them were polite and charming. One had brought his son who stared stupidly at her and refused to speak. Another introduced his son, Ji, who was handsome but overpraised father—patting the horse's ass.

A waiter offered a tray of seafood. "From Dalian today, fresh from the boat. Giant crab from Vladivostok, fresh squid from Japan, Ningbo clams, and Yantai prawns." The shellfish had been shucked, cooked, and returned to its shell—artfully arranged like a

painting. Lucy tried not to appear gluttonous but couldn't stop herself. They rarely ate it at home, it was too expensive.

Father smiled as if she were a child playing in the mud, enjoying her pleasure. "Lucy, Ji attends school in America. New York, I believe."

"Yes," Ji said. "Are you considering going abroad?" He offered her a glass of wine and whispered, "So you don't choke on the crab."

Father nodded—he drank only tea but approved of her taking a glass. She sipped; it was surprisingly mild like sherry. "Xiè xiè," she said.

"Do you like it?"

"Yes. Very much."

"It's from Chilin. My family has been growing grapes there for over a hundred years," Ji said and didn't stop. He droned on and on, something about his family's illustrious past, a long line of favored sons. Father was next to her, a waiter refilled his teacup but he was listening intently to a pair of Japanese associates about a new spinning factory they'd acquired. Father said there'd be no Chinese owners left; she wanted to listen, but Ji wouldn't stop talking. His voice made her ears want to close up.

One of the associates rescued her. "Many pardons, Ji. May I have a word with Miss Lau?" Ji wandered away.

The Japanese associate bowed ojigi, the politest way, which she returned. "I see you're wearing the dress our company sent. It looks lovely on you," he said.

Lucy was caught off guard; she thought māma bought it for her.

Father looked momentarily embarrassed. "My apologies. Mr. Ito, Mr. Tanaka, you haven't formally met my daughter, Lucy. Yes, she wears the dress beautifully. Lucy, I'm

afraid I didn't have a chance to explain that your dress was a gift from the Matsui Shipping Company."

Her throat went dry. After the attack on students the previous day, she was speechless. Matsui was the largest shipping company in Shanghai, many of their employees belonged to the Nippon Association. She sipped her wine stalling to think of something to say. "It was very thoughtful, you shouldn't have."

"A lovely young woman deserves lovely things," Mr. Ito said and raised his glass.

A waiter presented a tray of perfectly fanned out fruit. "Hangzhou peaches. Yantai pears. Qingdao grapes."

The expensive fruit, the seafood she had gorged on—most people in Shanghai couldn't afford any of it. Her stomach soured; she shook her head.

Mr. Tanaka waved it away. "Your father mentioned you're going abroad for school in the fall, like your brother. I'm sure you'll have great success."

The singsong girls weaved their way through the room and serenaded guests with their stringed huqin and tihu. They trilled softly like birds.

"It's a pity that Shanghai universities are so inadequate," Mr. Ito said. "The Education Ministry should do something about the curricula. It's positively primitive."

"Quite right," Mr. Tanaka said. "The entire system needs to be modernized. I don't blame you a bit for your choice, Lucy." He and Mr. Ito laughed cheerfully. "Funding is the problem, of course. So much money has been spent on the military instead of schools. Shameful, really."

Lucy held in her fury, the hypocrisy, audacity. She had promised Father she wouldn't offer her opinions. "Yes, shameful," she muttered. Father gave her a warning look over the

rim of his teacup.

"All of the economic problems can easily be avoided," Mr. Ito said. "With the turmoil around Beijing, the new demands made by my country are reasonable. Don't you agree, Mr. Lau?"

Father sipped more tea and nodded, avoided a reply.

"Generalissimo Chiang has been unfairly pressured," Mr. Tanaka said. "It was prudent to bring his kidnappers to justice so quickly. As a lesson to others."

Mr. Ito nodded vigorously. "I'm sure they'll learn; these tactics lead nowhere.

"Pity. In the past, our nations were always able to negotiate problems amicably," Mr. Tanaka said.

Lucy wanted to scream; *Negotiate at the end of a gun?*

"Yes, the statesmen of the past understood compromise," Mr. Ito said. "These younger ones are hotheaded."

"It's unfortunate," Mr. Tanaka said.

"Yes, unfortunate." Mr. Ito regarded Lucy, seemed to be thinking, *here's a student, the very generation grown so stubborn*. He smiled. "We love the Chinese. Even after the boycotts, worker unrest, skirmishes between soldiers. We feel no bitterness toward the people," he said.

"Why should you?" Lucy said. "You have Manchuria, the mines, the world pays you for our ore in silver. Japanese towns haven't been bombed, occupied—"

"Lucy!" Father nearly choked on tea.

Mr. Ito blinked rapidly as if he'd misheard. "Well. That's an interesting point of view."

“Very,” Mr. Tanaka shook his head sadly. “We’re merely protecting our business investments in Manchukuo, Miss Lau.” He took another glass of champagne. “Disruptions only cause misunderstanding, add to the hostility between our peoples.”

“You said you love the—” Lucy began.

Father tensed; she stopped talking. Mr. Ito changed the subject, asked Father when he could open the newly acquired cotton spinning mill. Across the room, Shishi, Weishi, and Meishi were laughing with a group of guests. She and Weishi locked eyes—he raised his glass to her. He must have sensed something was wrong, his smile fading.

Father said, “Lucy, perhaps you’d like to excuse yourself, mingle.”

“Yes,” she said and lifted her chin, determined to say something polite. Something sparkling like the wine glass in her hand. “Mr. Tanaka and Mr. Ito, I’d like you to know—"

Sing-song girls surrounded them twittering and strumming their instruments. Mr. Tanaka’s eyes bulged when one of them leaned against him and sang. Meishi took Mr. Ito’s arm and said, “It would be my honor to sing a request.”

Father pulled her toward the front door where Weishi was waiting. “Take her home,” he said and returned to the reception room.

5

Shanghai – Chapei Neighborhood north of Soochow Creek

Lucy looked down into a six-foot-deep ditch where discharge drained from cotton spinning factories all the way to Soochow Creek. Rising sulfur and chlorine fumes burned her eyes. At the bottom lodged in mud and foul water was the corpse of a child.

Two laborers, barely out of their teens, kicked off their slippers and slid down the embankment. They pulled up their collars over their noses. One lifted the child by the pants waist, the other wedged a sling underneath then scaled the dirt wall again. They hauled the body out and laid it on a sheet at her feet where she could inspect and categorize the death.

She checked boxes on the Benevolent Association clipboard, looked for identifying marks; Female, six years old. She was terribly thin, no checkbox for that, or short hair and eye-sockets clotted with contaminated mud. She couldn't slip her fingers between the girl's lips; they were hardened shut. Georgii, the Russian driver, pried them apart. Inside, her gums had the tell-tale blue line that darkened to black. Lead poisoning.

"Look," Georgii said pulling up her sleeve. On her arms and legs, sores had developed and not healed, chromium holes.

"Dear heaven," Lucy said. Down in the ditch, pretty yellow rings rippled across the water—deadly chemicals.

Not far away, the original factory had been recently modernized; *Toyada* was painted in bright red Kanji characters on the smokestack. The Japanese had taken over most of the mills in Shanghai and filled them with children bought from families who couldn't feed them, or they bought them from brokers who stole them off the streets. It was the drought

and famine in Sichuan, two years of no rain. The four-rivers basin was dry. The great plain had turned into hard, grassless clay. Peasants fleeing starvation came east for factory work but found a nightmare. The saying was that Shanghai was a city of forty-eight story buildings built on twenty-eight layers of hell.

The little girl's clothes were tattered, not only was she underfed and poisoned, but her ribs were bruised. Lucy was going to be sick and turned away. The child's body had to be buried for her soul to go to heaven. Without it, she'd be miserable in the afterlife as she'd been in this one—always hungry and in pain.

Georgii said something to the workers. They wrapped up the sheet, took the child to the back of the truck with the other bodies. "Finish counting and we'll go."

Under Benevolent Association Record of Collection, she wrote, *Found off Whashung Road, near Soochow Creek. Toyada Mill.*

Georgii stared up at the factory like he could take it apart with his hands. "Did you see her elbows?" he said angrily.

They had been scalded, pushed into boiling dye vats as punishment for being slow. Georgii's face showed what he was thinking; there were more children inside. They got in the truck. The next stop would be worse, a Chapei hutment. Georgii hummed *Kalinka* to calm himself and kept an eye on the street; crime gangs and Japanese soldiers might try to steal their truck. She felt safe with him. He knew what to do; he was big, strong, and had been a soldier in Russia. He told her once that he had been a boxer.

"I have to tell you something, Georgii. I'm going to college at the end of the summer. In America. You'll have to train someone new to ride with you."

"Or, I could learn Chinese," Georgii said. "Don't worry. I can fill in the sheets. It's

not good for someone young to see so much death."

"It's important," she said. "I know it's ridiculous, but I feel like they know."

"When we take them to the cemetery?" Georgii said turning onto Jukong Street.

"Yes. Their spirits know."

"What does it matter? Life is to be lived now."

"Then nothing would be worth dying for," she said.

They pulled into Chapei at the cross street with Chungshing Street. Only a few thousand out of half a million people remained after the Japanese destroyed it. Those who stayed were too poor to leave and lived in makeshift straw huts with no running water or electricity. They survived by scavenging. Their view across the Soochow was glass and steel skyscrapers sprouting like flowers while for them, time had stopped. The municipality laid no new water pipes, no electrical wires, paved no new roads; nothing was rebuilt.

Georgii cut the engine. Lucy pressed her temples. Her eyes ached from an oncoming headache, atmospheric pressure. A storm was moving in. A wall of dark clouds sat over the treetops and the temperature was dropping. The workers in back would be freezing in their wet robes with only the truck's canvas covering to protect them.

"It's odd," Georgii stared through the windshield. "Too quiet."

There were normally a hundred or more children running through the hutment shouting and crying. There were always people around.

"Look." He pointed to a crowd behind a row of huts.

Their dirty patched tunics were huddled together, they parted as Japanese soldiers burst through and were stiff-armed out of the way, were sent sprawling. The soldiers looked different, they were well-nourished, tall, and muscular in shiny blue helmets and pressed

uniforms. Their bayonets were already fixed, they barked orders, and waved their arms. People ran and pulled belongings from their huts.

Lucy had never seen anything like it. “Georgii! What’s happening?”

“I’m not sure. The North Rail Station is running. And the cotton spinning factories are running. What are the soldiers doing?”

Lucy checked the rearview mirror for more soldiers. Her temples were pounding. “We should go.”

“Yes. Give me a moment,” Georgii said. He knew how soldiers behaved. The Japanese caused panic on purpose to move people out of the hutment. “They control everything in Chapei, why do this?”

Outside the truck, a panicked mob was moving toward them, would overrun them. “Georgii, I’m scared,” Lucy said. “Japanese soldiers don’t answer to anybody.”

He wasn’t listening. “They don’t see this as a neighborhood. Land is territory to defend.”

“Georgii!”

Four Buddhist monks appeared in the crowd wearing bright saffron robes and red arm bands, Nichiren sect, weaving in and around the huts. Nichiren were popular with Japanese merchants abroad because they were militaristic and enforcers. They had put down boycotts and labor protests in China.

Lucy pulled out her camera, which she always carried, and snapped photos. The flowing robes were beautiful in a sea of dirty brown and gray. One monk shouted to the others and pointed. Lucy followed his finger, a hundred feet away, an Imperial Japanese officer paused in the chaos to light a cigarette. He looked at Lucy. She slid down, but it was

too late. He marched toward the truck with two soldiers in tow.

"Stay calm," Georgii said. "They won't shoot."

"What if they do?"

When the three soldiers were twenty feet away, Georgii turned to her with his huge sad eyes, "I should have taken you away from here, I'm so sorry." Georgii was stateless, a refugee from the Bolshevik Revolution with no passport, no papers of any kind, and no money or status. No one would defend him.

Lucy jumped out of the truck and walked quickly toward the soldiers. Only when she stood in front of them did she know she'd made a mistake. She said the only thing she could. "Where are you sending these people?"

The officer dropped his cigarette and circled her while speaking Japanese. She understood little but it didn't matter, he wasn't talking to her. He lit another cigarette with his hands cupped around the flame; a cloud of smoke obscured his face. When it cleared, he stared at her and waited for her to disrespect him, the excuse they used to beat or shoot Chinese.

She couldn't breathe. This nameless man and all the foreigners like him for generations past could do what they wanted to her, her nation, her people. And there was nothing and no one to stop them. She lifted her chin and silently counted; it kept her from screaming. Before she reached four, the officer blew smoke at her.

"They're being relocated," he said, looking at her clothes and her shoes, then grimaced while dragging on his cigarette.

"I. I asked where they're going."

Another soldier said, "To Jessfield Park refugee camp."

“Jessfield—”

From behind, she was grabbed around the waist and lifted off her feet. Georgii swung her around, she dangled in his arms.

“Arigatō,” he said, towering over them. He bowed quickly and marched back toward the truck.

“Halt!” the soldier shouted. The orange tip of his cigarette slashed back and forth as he issued commands she couldn’t hear.

Georgii stopped beside the truck with his hand on the door. He was shaking. “Are they aiming at us?”

“Yes.”

They had dropped to a knee ready to fire, then turned to look over their shoulders. A crowd streamed out of the hutment. Georgii opened the truck, shoved her in, slammed the door. She grabbed her camera and through the window glass started taking photos of the soldiers with trembling hands. They ran away before being overrun. The truck was in the path of the crowd. Lucy braced for impact, Georgii gripped the steering wheel. Like a large stone in a river, people surged around them rocking and buffeting them.

She smelled smoke. There was a rumble that quickly grew and drowned out the sound of running feet. Everyone turned, their faces darkened as black smoke rose over the hutment. Long fluttering tongues of fire jumped over thatch roofs, split like serpents, then consumed shacks one by one. Heat spewed out like dragon’s breath. Flames moved forward at frightening speed. The crackle of fire was deafening.

Smoke trapped beneath the approaching thunderclouds churned and billowed, blocking out sunlight broken only by flashing flames below. Higher up, the storm had

gathered strength, blue lightning began to fork down. It was impossible to breathe through the noxious fumes. People dropped to the ground and covered their faces with whatever they could grab in their hands. A hot wind swept up wood, straw, and dirt into a spiraling vortex. Nothing was left unburned. Railroad tracks nearby screeched and bowed upward in the raging heat.

The windows in the truck suddenly shattered, which nearly burst her eardrums—shards flew everywhere. Georgii threw himself on top of her. She struggled and yelled for him to get off, she wanted more photos, but he couldn't hear. She pushed and shoved, and he finally released her. She started taking more photos.

Georgii pulled her arm to go, but she shook her head. The monks and the soldiers had started the fire and she wanted proof. There was gunfire. Screams. Another stampede toward the Settlement. She got out of the truck, blindly taking pictures in every direction. Black haze and burning ash floated down from red-heated clouds stinging her face and arms. In less than twenty minutes, everything was gone.

A child screamed. A woman and little boy were huddled against the truck, ash was heaped around them. The child's clothes were smoldering. Lucy pulled the woman to her feet then to the back of the truck and lifted the canvas. Dozens of women and children were inside staring back with sooty faces. One of the workers reached out to help the woman climb inside.

"No more room," he said after Lucy handed him the child.

The sheet-wrapped bodies they'd collected had been tossed out and were lying under a thick layer of debris. The worker shook his head. *Think of the living.*

"Get off!" Georgii yelled.

Five men had him on the ground beating him, trying to pin his arms. Another stood by with a knife and threw himself over Georgii like he was mounting a wild horse.

Lucy ran forward, “Stop!”

Someone grabbed her. She struggled helplessly while they continued to beat and stab at Georgii until he stopped moving. He held his chest where his shirt was dark with blood. The men were Green Gang—she recognized the character for salt smuggler, Anqing, tattooed on the backs of their hands. They held her and forced everyone out of the truck.

“No! This belongs to the Benevolent Association.”

She was struck across the face and fell back onto Georgii. Men climbed in the truck and drove away. Everyone stared in silence—no one dared resist. One of the men grabbed her by the arm and yanked her up. “I know you.”

They threw her in the back of a sedan, and one man held her down on the floorboards with his knee in her ribs while the other drove. She begged him to go back for Georgii. He pressed harder until she couldn’t breathe or speak. The tops of neon-lit buildings flickered through a small rectangle of window visible from where she lay curled in a ball whimpering. And then the giant, large-leafed Plane trees, the French called them Sycamores, were marching past like sentries one after another. The French Concession. They drove in circles for an hour, it couldn’t have been more because thunderclouds were still sitting over the city. They never lasted more than an hour. They parked behind a building—a large sign said *Mansion Hotel*.

The driver hauled her out by the collar and through a door where deliveries were accepted. She tried to break free, they hoisted her under the arms and dragged her into the service elevator like a bag of laundry.

The elevator car went to the top floor and opened into a large lobby; armchairs, potted palms, and nests of tables. Three suited men were standing in different parts of the room; they glanced at her with no interest. The two gangsters pushed her into the room then left down the elevator.

She began to cry. A carved wooden door opened, the suited men stiffened and, to her amazement, Big-eared Tu, the Green Gang boss, came in. She knew it was him from his photos in *Ling Long* and *T'ien Hsia* magazines. He was taller than she would have guessed, nearly gaunt, wearing old slippers and a long robe with sauce stains down the front. His hair was combed straight back, which made his ears stand out even more. He had pock-scars on both cheeks. He was pale and looked ill as though he never went outdoors. Yan Yan told her he was addicted to opium—only the best from his fields in the Yangtze valley.

Tu said something to the suited men. His mouth was wet with slippery, large lips and yellowed teeth—the signs of addiction. When he extended a huge, skeletal hand, Lucy nearly fainted.

She shook in the western style. Before she could stop herself, she blurted, “Who would want a girl like me? Those men kidnapped me.”

He stared at her; his eyes were dull, slightly feverish, with enlarged pupils. How many times had her father told her a cicada doesn’t sing in winter? To stop talking, don’t make matters worse.

Tu frowned. “Kidnapped? I’m sure you’re mistaken. I was told you were in distress.”

“If you think my father will pay ransom, he won’t.”

He searched her eyes with genuine curiosity. “You think you’re worth a ransom?”

“I just said I’m not.” She bit her cheek and wished she could turn into a puff of smoke

like the lady knights in folk tales.

Tu appeared to lose interest. “Oh? You’ve discussed your worth with your father?”

“No. Well, yes.”

“Chapei has become very dangerous. Does your father encourage you to go there?”

“Of course not.” She couldn’t stop thinking about Georgii, the blood on his chest, barely breathing. “I had a driver with me. I’m very worried about him,” she said carefully. “A compassionate man such as yourself—”

His pursed his lips, annoyed.

“I just need to know if Georgii is all right.”

“I ask questions. You answer.” One of the suited bodyguards handed Tu her canvas bag. Tu pulled out her camera. “You’re a photographer.”

“I take pictures of the dead bodies left on the streets. For the Benevolent Association.”

He removed the lens cap. “A regrettable byproduct of a modernizing city.”

She knew from Yan Yan that Tu grew up very poor in Pudong, on the other side of the Huangpu River from the Bund. His parents both died when he was young. He had to survive in a shanty just like the one she watched burn down.

“They’re mostly children. The tally sheets are in my bag if you want to see.”

He turned the camera over in his hands. “German. Very nice. Is it new?”

“My brother gave it to me when he came home from college last month.”

“Did you photograph anything else?” he said and studied the aperture dial, twisted the distance ring, tested the shutter release with a fingernail that was over an inch long and brown with opium stains.

She shuddered. “It won’t advance until you take a photo.”

He looked at her. “Did you take pictures of the fire?”

“I don’t know. I tried to, but the Japanese soldiers—”

“You don’t know? You don’t strike me as a stupid girl.”

He was scaring her. She tried to think but it happened so fast. “The soldiers were harassing everyone, they had bayonets. The stampede started. We saw the fire. It burned everything.”

“Are you sure you didn’t see the fire before the stampede?”

It made sense; the fire was so fast. Tu tapped his palm with her camera. It would take so little to destroy her pictures. Or make her vanish—no one knew where she was.

“Probably,” she said. “People were running, panicked. From the fire. The pictures will show it.”

“I’d rather you tell me.” He aimed the camera at her, twisted dials back and forth, snapped. He handed the camera to the suited man still holding her bag and smiled at her. His teeth weren’t just yellow stained by opium tar. They were decayed. He was one of the wealthiest men in town but looked like a vagrant.

A girl who was younger than Lucy brought tea and food and set the tray on a low table between two divans. The suited men receded to the corners of the room.

The smell of food made her ravenous. The tea was Yunnan—fermented. Her stomach growled loudly but no one seemed to notice. Tu stood next to the girl and carefully watched her arrange small plates and teacups.

Lucy’s hunger disappeared. She and Georgii had picked up the body of a fourteen-year-old girl the month before in the Blue House District where girls lived in brothels. It was

unusual, they called SMP, but no one came. The girl was a yao'er, a one-two tile, named for dominoes. Georgii didn't want her to see, but she insisted. Her intestines had been cut out and wrapped around her neck while she was still alive. Lucy had nightmares for weeks.

She couldn't look at Tu. The Green Gang ran the Blue House District. He poured tea from a tall silver pot, told her to sit on the divan opposite him, but she couldn't move. Georgii said the girl wasn't valuable in the house anymore. Used-up girls were sent to work in xianrou zhuang, salt pork shops, where laborers paid little. They didn't spend money for entertainment. The girls were "on-demand" and each one had dozens of men forced on them a day. Yet she was fourteen years old.

Tu said it again. "Sit."

She sat on a very expensive silk. Her soot-stained clothes probably ruined it. He served her a cup of tea, then two finger sandwiches on a plate. He didn't pour for himself, but sipped tea from the spout of a small red teapot whose lid was held on tight by a thin golden chain. The spout was narrow and curved. Nothing could be inserted into it. He was afraid of being poisoned.

"Your father provides a lovely home on Connaught. But you spend your time in Chapei. Have you no friends or a lover?"

"I have friends."

"Yes, radicals and refugees. You protest and fill tally sheets with death. Why not write poetry or one of those Mandarin-Ducks-and-Butterfly novels that girls love so much?"

"You don't know me," she said. He was infuriating. "I spend my time doing what's important to me."

"Aren't you repulsed by the dead bodies, the filth? The way people live in hutments?

They raise children like animals. They sell them." Tu tilted back his head and sucked on the little teapot. "You assume they deserve your help."

The elevator dinged; the doors slid open. Two of the largest Russian men she'd ever seen entered. They had meaty faces and stocky bodies. Behind them was Madame Chiang Kai-shek, dressed in a fashionable wide-legged suit with a dozen strands of long pearls around her neck, and pearls embedded in the soles of her platform shoes.

She rushed forward in a cloud of perfume with her arms open, the same perfume her mother wore. "Lucy, you frightened all of us! Thank the Lord you weren't hurt in that terrible fire. Your poor mother is beside herself."

Lucy jumped to her feet and nearly collapsed with dizziness from fire smoke and confusion. "Aunt Olive, what are you doing here?"

"I came to get *you*, of course. I came the minute Yueh called me."

"From Nanjing?"

"I was in town visiting. Yueh said there was an enormous fire. If they hadn't found you… If he hadn't rescued you… I can't imagine! You could have been killed!" She held Lucy's shoulders at arm's length, careful not to stain her suit. "The Benevolent Association is careless. Your mother thought they'd take better care. Sending you to Chapei! You'd be welcome at any of my charities. You'd be safe, for heaven's sake!"

Tu had removed himself and stood at the door to his apartments. "You needn't have worried. I always take care of my guests, as I'm sure you remember, Madame Chiang." He bowed deeply.

One of his suited men opened the door for him. "Miss Lau, don't forget your bag."

On a club chair near the elevator was the canvas bag with her camera sitting on top.

"Thank you, Yueh," Aunt Olive said. "Lucy, let's get you home."

"Yes, thank you for the escort, Tu xiānshēng," Lucy said. Mr. Tu.

Tu left with two suited men—one remained. Lucy inspected her camera; the film appeared to be untouched.

Aunt Olive took her arm and pulled her toward the elevator. "We'll discuss everything later. Right now, you need a bath and a good night's sleep."

She and Aunt Olive didn't speak until they got in the car and headed up Avenue Joffre toward Du Roi Albert. Neon lights strobed across the window glass, reflected her hideous appearance.

"Lucy, Tu is dangerous. Whatever he wanted—"

"He wanted to know about the fire. What I saw. It was Japanese soldiers. Why does it matter?"

"He wants that land, Lucy. He's had trouble dealing with the Japanese military attaché, the Settlement Council, landowners. Nobody is willing to move the survivors. It would look bad," Aunt Olive said.

"Is that why no one helps those poor people? They want them to move?" She hugged her canvas bag more closely.

"It's valuable land; that how these things work, Lucy." Aunt Olive squeezed her knee. "Your mother wanted you to meet other girls your age, maybe a nice boy. Not to get yourself killed." She fingered her pearls and stared out the window. "What would she do if she lost you?"

"She has Henry, her little Buddha."

"Lucy, you know the saying; in our children, we live again. She sees herself in you.

That's what scares her. She tried to stay out of your way, and it's gone horribly wrong."

"The hutment wasn't dangerous. It was the soldiers and the Green Gang."

"Thank goodness you're going to college where you'll be safe."

Rain began to pelt the car. The city was a blur of muted colors. Aunt Olive hugged her and refused to come inside the house. At the front door, her mother wrapped a shawl around her shoulders and hugged her. She told Yan Yan to run a hot bath, then sat next to the bathtub pouring bowls of warm water through her hair until the ash was gone.

Her drenched and singed clothes, and one remaining shoe, were in the trash the next morning. No one objected when Lucy asked to take the car; she didn't offer a reason.

Lucy drove to 17 Bund—the *China Daily News* building between the Bank of Taiwan, owned by the Japanese empire, and the Chartered Bank, English-owned. She asked for Joe at the reception and was shown to the bull pit on the 5th floor. A sign said "Prize Pumpkins" over the doorway, and "Missouri News Colony" under that.

Tiffin lunch had just arrived. Two teenagers in blue restaurant jackets were setting out food from cloth-covered baskets. A dozen reporters and copy boys rolled swivel chairs forward or sat on the edge of desks waiting to eat. Chinese workers wandered in with their shirt sleeves rolled up fastened with arm bands. The smells made Lucy realize she was famished.

Joe called her in, gave her a bowl, and she ate like she'd been starved for days. She told him about the hutment fire and the photos she'd taken while he spooned a second helping of rice and shrimp in her bowl.

They sat at his desk, and she slowed down enough to tell him about the pictures. "I have three rolls of film. I don't know where to take them to be developed." She pulled the

film out of her bag. “You said to tell you if I had anything important.”

Joe yelled, “Su Yi!” A young woman who was eating at a table of Chinese messengers raised her head. She was wearing slacks and a man’s tie. She shoveled a last bite in her mouth and ran to them. “Su Yi, take these down to developing. I need them right away.”

Su Yi held out her hand, but Lucy hesitated to give them up. The film was the only proof of a dozen bodies without masters she and Georgii had collected that day, and of the Japanese soldiers, the Nichiren monks, the fire that destroyed more than 500 huts, and some of the people who were shot as they fled.

Joe had a mouth full of roast pork that he didn’t bother swallowing. “Su Yi is trustworthy. More than me.”

“That’s right,” said a woman in a smart silk blouse. “No one trusts Joe.”

Everyone laughed.

Su Yi blushed and made a quick bow. “Don’t worry,” she said to Lucy in Mandarin. “I’ll take care for you.”

Lucy handed over the film; Su Yi dashed out of the office.

“That girl is made of wind,” said a reporter holding up a shrimp skewer, then driving it into his mouth.

“It’ll take about an hour. Su Yi will wait and bring back the photos. Try some sweet rolls.” Joe placed an almond bun in her bowl.

When Su Yi returned with the photos, she laid them out on a long table in the staff room. Everyone in the bull pit gathered around to see. The first one was Georgii staring at the camera with his sad eyes—she still didn’t know what happened to him. She fought back

tears.

“You can’t publish these,” Silk blouse said, sipping tea and slowly walking around the table.

“You have to,” Shrimp skewer said, following her.

Joe stood back with his hands on his hips looking at all the pictures. “The regulation says don’t mention ‘Japan’.” He smiled. “We strictly follow the rules.”

“Don’t do it, Joe,” Silk blouse said. “You’re already in the doghouse. Morriss thinks you’re a China sympathizer.”

“Of course, I am. These low-grade fascists are warmongers. Everybody knows it.”

“You’re getting nuts again, Joe,” Silk blouse said pointing a long red fingernail at him.

Joe picked up a photo of the Imperial soldier lighting a cigarette, surrounded in exhaled smoke. “Everyone hates Chiang’s Kai-shek’s appeasement policy. The demilitarized zones that Chinese forces can’t enter. Now, seven of the most respected journalists and artists are on trial for saying it in print. John Dewey and Albert Einstein have written in support of the *Save the Nation from Extinction* movement for chrissakes.”

“Kàn!” Look! Su Yi said, bent over a photo with a magnifying glass. “Those are Tu’s men. They’re setting the fires.”

6

Shanghai – July 1937

Lucy was in her father's office when Joe called. "I have a frontpage story breaking tomorrow," he said. "About a criminal partnership between the Green Gang and the Japanese Imperial Army Garrison in Hongkew. Do you have time for me to tell you about it?"

Her parents were gone all afternoon; she and Henry were home alone with Yan Yan. "Frontpage? Congratulations!" Lucy said.

It had taken him a month to pull his investigation together, but he uncovered a series of crooked deals and murder plots around opium trafficking out of North China.

"There was a big raid in Tientsin last month; a ton of opium was seized, headed through Egypt to France and America. Three Japanese consular police were killed, 35 Imperial army officers and soldiers were arrested. The League of Nations isn't happy; Japan signed the drug suppression treaty last year. They issued an official resolution against the Japanese government, not that it means much."

"Another resolution; wonderful. That's a lot of opium," Lucy said. "I didn't see the story."

"Nobody did. The Japanese delegate protested; the military attaché had a fit with the Information Ministry, strong words about unreliable information. It was censored. They don't like aspersions against their army," Joe said. "I uncovered a second stream of money in the opium story. You know the pictures you took of the bodies without masters? The Green Gang is running underground factories for the Imperial army."

"*For* the Japanese?" she said. "I thought secret societies were the most patriotic of

all."

"Times are changing. They took over old, abandoned factories, mills and manufacturing—I don't know how many. The Imperial Navy ships out opium for Tu, and he runs factories for them. Money for everybody; a devil's deal."

"Georgii and I picked up so many bodies in the past six months. There were chromium holes. And there was fungus from silk-winding mills. We couldn't understand it because they were shut down years ago."

"Exactly. Tu's been running illegal factories that make high risk, high value-products," Joe said. "The crowning piece of my story—the commercial land deal in Chapei. The one your Aunt Olive told you about. I was able to prove that settlement council members were involved with Imperial Japanese officers and Big-eared Tu Yueh. I know there were more, but—"

"It's enough," Lucy said. "The children and the residents who couldn't go back will have some justice."

"Answers anyway. Developers couldn't start building until they got rid of the hutment. But those people kept hanging on, they just wouldn't leave."

"That's why the municipal government wouldn't lay new water pipes or electrical lines. They delayed public works to force them to leave?" Lucy said.

"Yes," Joe said. "Tu bribed everybody. Did you know he bought Great World Entertainment Center? He must be making so much money he doesn't care who knows it."

"Why didn't he bribe people to leave the hutment? He can afford it."

"I don't know. Ego? The fire was their undoing, Lucy. Your photos are proof of everything. I wouldn't have a story without them. But I won't use them if you don't want me

to. It’s your decision.”

She remembered the smell that day; straw and dirt burning with what was left of buildings and piles of tires. Running from the heat and fumes. “Five hundred people died. They would have taken a few taels. Less than the cost of a burial.”

“It’s best investigative piece I’ve ever written.”

“What about Georgii?” she said. “Anything?”

There was a pause on the phone. Joe said, “No, nothing. I’m sorry.” Papers rustled; he was stalling. “Lucy, there’s something you should know. Su Yi went over your photos with her eagle eyes, then took them to SMP. They identified at least a dozen Green Gang members. They also ID’d some of the monks and Nippon Association members. We got their names,” he said. “Tiny arrested as many as he could.”

“Really?”

“Yes. I can’t imagine anyone involved is happy about it.”

“I know what you’re saying, Joe. You should print it!”

“In one way, I’m glad to hear you say that. But I don’t think you understand. Tu knows the pictures are yours. It’s dangerous for you. He’s spiteful.”

Lucy closed her eyes. On the car ride home that night, Aunt Olive knew, too. Georgii had saved her from the Japanese soldiers and died because of Tu. “Publish them. All of them.”

She tried to think of what to tell Father and Māma, and avoided them when they came home, took a long walk through the park, came home around back through the moon gate. She sat on a bench in the garden and closed her eyes, listened for insects and other flying things fleeing the heat. They’d gone quiet in their torpor. A heated breeze swept in off

Soochow Creek. It was high tide, and the smell was tolerable. A faint drumbeat accompanied by the muffled slaps of oarsmen in sculls from the Rowing Club came and went. Her mother's peach trees were full of singing cicadas, the leaves fluttered in the wind.

Henry came out and she told him everything, he was furious. "Why did you tell Joe to print them?"

"I had to! All those children… And Georgii. If you had seen what happened, you'd understand." She burst into tears.

"Tu won't care that māma and father don't know anything, Lucy. Or me. The Green Gang is everywhere; we can't hide from them."

"I have to talk to Aunt Olive. Maybe she can do something."

"Good luck," Henry said. Then he had the idea to ask Yan Yan. Houseboys talked to each other at the market, in department stores, at the pharmacists; they knew everything about everyone in town.

He knew that Aunt Olive was in Shanghai that night hosting a dinner for the English Ambassador at the Cathay House. "It's invitation only, you'll never get in," he said.

"I bet she will," Henry said and called Weishi, who entertained diplomats and other typans, business executives.

Weishi drove to their house with an evening gown and jewelry, and he helped her dress. "They're costumes from the opera, but it doesn't matter. Looking gorgeous is the trick," he told her.

Henry dressed in a tuxedo to escort her to the Cathay House. Weishi told them to walk in and not to offer any explanations if they were asked for an invitation. Yan Yan showed her pictures, but they were nothing compared to the most beautiful ballroom she'd

ever seen. She was terrified yet excited, Henry held her hand. The lighting came from everywhere and nowhere; hidden fixtures dimmed or intensified mechanically when the music rhythm changed. All the glass was Lalique crystal, some frosted some sparkling. The stemware, chandeliers, wall sconces, even the lissome statues of *10 Ladies of the Fountain* ringing the dance floor inside Corinthian column niches and the Cathay logo sparrows etched into wall plaques and pendant lights. She felt like she was walking inside a pale rose dream that glowed, the chandeliers sparkled like stars above, and table lights looked like candle fire.

"You're not here to admire the decor, Lucy!" Henry hissed and pulled her toward the gallery.

Everyone in the gallery reception lounge looked important and wore black ties and silk. They were split in two groups. One was Chinese who bowed, exchanged cards, and drank tea with each other; they seemed to move in slow motion compared to the second group. The group of westerners who hand-pumped, laughed too loudly, sipped cocktails, and talked too fast.

"There she is," Henry pointed. "Go save our lives!"

Aunt Olive was the tiny woman in the middle with a perfect round face, impeccable poise, and dressed exquisitely. She looked the same, but her qi was Madame Chiang Kai-shek, the ruthless, gracious wife who spoke for the generalissimo. It was always a shock to see her in public. Important, powerful people vied for her attention and courted her. The same people who'd crush her if she showed any weakness.

"Aunt Olive!" Lucy waved, was recognized and ushered forward, swept up in open arms that smelled like Māma.

"Lucy, what a surprise." Aunt Olive held her at arm's length, appraised her dress, her

jewels, and shoes. “How lovely you are!” she smiled.

“Aunt Olive, may I speak to you? It’s—”

“This is General Hu Zongnan,” Aunt Olive pressed Lucy’s hand into that of a middle-aged man from a northern province.

Lucy smiled politely while Aunt Olive spoke to another guest. The general presented his card. By the time she looked up, Aunt Olive had slipped away toward the edge of the dance floor where Henry intercepted her and whispered in her ear—her smile disappeared, the color drained from her face. She held Lucy’s gaze from across the room, and for a moment, there was compassion before she exited to the terrace with Henry. Lucy followed and found them arguing.

“She didn’t know. Surely Tu will listen.”

“The land deal is all he cares about.”

“Aunt Olive,” Henry said calmly. “What can we offer?”

She looked at Lucy sadly. “Early in my marriage, a driver picked me up from shopping. Just as he always did. He drove around for hours. I thought he was mad.” She took Lucy’s hand. “Later, I found out that it was Tu’s men. He held me until my brother paid a ransom. I was already married to the generalissimo, he didn’t care. No one can control Tu Yueh, least of all my husband.”

“If he can do that to you, what will happen to māma and father? I saw his eyes, Henry. He’s crazy.”

“Get hold of yourself, Lucy,” Henry said. “Tell them everything. Tonight. Before the story comes out. Father will know what to do.”

“Lucy, there’s something else,” Aunt Olive said. “The censors will leave you alone, I

can see to that. But the Nippon Association will be furious. The Lau businesses will be targeted. And I'm not sure what the Japanese consul and the military attaché will do." She returned to the gallery where people were waiting.

"Henry, what have I done? I should have listened!" She couldn't stop from crying.

Henry gave her his handkerchief. "Father will know. You'll like America if we have to move. I like it very much."

"They're going to kill us. Our bodies will never be found. Like Georgii. And that poor yao'er girl. And all those headless taxi drivers."

"Come on, let's go," Henry said and put his arm around her.

"Where?"

"We're going to the *New China*," he said, and led her to the elevator.

"What? How can you think of dancing at a time like this? We have to go home and tell Māma and Father."

"They're out tonight. Do you want to sit home and think about dying? Or show off that dress?"

She dabbed her eyes. Dancing sounded ridiculous. But she'd be tormented at home. "That's where Leijing Rose and Leijing Lily are hostesses," she said.

Henry smiled. "I know. I've danced with both."

"Really?" She blew her nose. "They won the Dance Empress crown."

"That information is only published in bourgeois magazines, Lucy. I'm shocked."

"*Linglong* isn't bourgeois. It's very modern."

"Well," Henry took his handkerchief and wiped mascara from underneath her eyes. "That's enough now. I'm glad you like *Linglong*. Something other than protests and

petitions.”

They drove to the New China on Avenue Edward VII in the French Concession and were ushered through heavy velvet drapes and followed a man in a tuxedo to a cloth covered table near the dancefloor. Their table boy set down a bowl of watermelon seeds. “A gift from the manager.” He was gone before Lucy sat. Dozens of table boys in white jackets and black pants carried trays high over their heads through the jostling crowd. A full Filipino orchestra was on one stage, and an American jazz band was setting up on another—the Harlem Gentlemen.

Dance hostesses glimmered under soft pink lighting on one edge of the floor, each in her own chair with a small table for tea and watermelon seeds, woo niuhs. “Yan Yan said they do more than dance. He said there are rooms upstairs where they make real money.”

“Yan Yan should stick to fashion magazines.” Henry caught her staring at the women. “They’re mostly Russian. Typans,” business executives, “love ng legs, large breasts, and no passports. Typans love them.” Business executives. “They break up many marriages.”

“And the Han women?”

Henry leaned closer. “Yan Yan didn’t tell you?” Lucy shook her head. “Chinese men prefer Chinese women. We like smaller breasts. Hairless skin is silky.”

“All ladies have silky skin.”

“Western women eat beef and butter. It makes them grow coarse hair.”

The woo niuhs were all pretty in their way. Some tall and slender in high-neck qipaos with slits cut to the thigh. Others petite in chiffon, athletic, or statuesque like goddesses.

Henry left her to see a Chinese hostess in red flowing chiffon dress. He tried to give her tickets, but she was out of her chair before he laid them down. A woo niuh in the chair

next to her waited while a man slid one ticket across the table, then two, three, four, five. She finally gave a curt nod and took his hand.

Henry spun the niuh like a professional dancer, the layers of her dress lifting like a red cloud. Other niuhs waved to him from their chairs and sent table boys onto the dancefloor with messages that he tried to ignore. He switched partners every time the song changed. Table boys kept replacing his tea even though it was untouched and brought her fresh cups, too.

At the back of the dance floor where it was shadowy, something yellow and shimmery caught the light. A tall niuh in a satin qipao was gyrating against her partner while they two stepped back and forth. The man stared up at the smoky rafters in a daze. It was odd. Another couple nearby was linked at the pelvis. The niuh leaned back so far, she would have fallen backward if the man hadn't gripped her by her waist. He stared at her swaying breasts and rocked to the music. The orchestra took a break and the women left the dance floor while the men adjusted themselves uncomfortably. Lucy turned away quickly. She didn't like the cabaret and sent the table boy to get Henry from the dance floor; he came right away.

"Are you alright?" he said wiping his sweaty brow the handkerchief she stained with mascara tears.

"I want to go. Māma and father should be home by now."

Henry looked back at the niuhs who waved and smiled. "Are you sure?"

"Henry, I have to tell them—"

"You're right. I'm dreading it. Let's go," he said and led her toward the kitchen. "You didn't think about Tu, did you?"

"I didn't dance either," she said.

Henry asked one of the table boys to take them through the kitchen to the back alley where the valet had their car waiting, and offered him an enormous tip.

"For you, it's free," the table boy said.

"Take it," Henry said and put Lucy in the car.

They drove through back streets lined with Plane trees. She hated them. They were knobby and bald half the year, the bark flaked off in sheets and crawled with pests.

"Henry, on the dancefloor, I saw the niuhs do things… It was crude," Lucy said.

"They're just doing their job, it's not like they're pheasants walking the streets."

"Then men did things in front of everyone."

Henry laughed.

"I'm tired of you laughing at me, Henry."

"Men can be impatient, Lucy. The ladies accommodate them. No one cares."

At home, Lucy and Henry found their parents in their bedroom. Māma was at her dressing table. Father was hanging his tuxedo. Yan Yan had just brought tea and was turning down the bed.

"Māma, father, I have something to tell you," Lucy said.

"If it's about Wellesley, don't bother. I've already paid tuition and board," Father said.

Henry sat on the divan. Yan Yan sat next to him, curious. It'd be pointless to make him leave.

"No, it's not that. There's a newspaper story coming out tomorrow in the *China Daily*. The paper was printed two days ago. I couldn't stop it if I wanted to."

Father and Māma didn't move; their eyes widened as they listened to her story unfold. She told them everything about the fire, Georgii, Big-eared Tu Yueh, what Aunt Olive told her that night, Joe's investigation, and what he read her over the phone. When she was done, it was silent.

Yan Yan said, "I have cousins in Suzhou. There aren't very many Japanese there. They won't find you."

Father tried to smile. "That's kind, Yan Yan, but it won't be necessary. We'll have to face this directly."

"You're right, Jing. We've faced warlords in the city. Communist uprisings, the purge," Māma said, and tried to look brave.

Lucy's choice was a terrible weight, she put strangers over her family. "Even Aunt Olive is afraid."

"We'll hire protection at the factories and the office," Māma said.

"Yes," Father said. "The warehouse is outside the city; it should be safe."

"What about us?" Henry said.

"I don't think Tu would risk harming us. He'll probably want Joe's article to be forgotten, move his land deal forward," Father said.

"I'm so sorry," Lucy said and tried not to cry. "I wish I had listened. I'll go to Wellesley; I'll do what you say—" She burst into tears.

Māma came forward, embraced her in the comforting smell. "Hush, pumpkin. What's done is done. The only path forward is through the fire."

The next day, they were up early at the breakfast table while father read the newspaper waiting to hear what it said. "The story isn't here," he said.

It had been pushed off the front page. A special edition was published because of an incident south of Beijing two days before. Japanese and Chinese forces were engaged in an escalating battle that started on Lugou Bridge, better known as Marco Polo Bridge. Students outraged by Japan's belligerence had gathered at Tiananmen Square. Anti-Japanese protests quickly grew, attracting students from five different universities. It became a riot that spread to Tientsin, and then other cities. The Japanese Kwangtung Army based in Manchuria sent reinforcements by rail to Beijing. A furious backlash from Chinese journalists and magazines prompted Generalissimo Chiang to reject further compromise. He demanded that the Empire of Japan withdraw—which he had never done before.

"Chiang Kai-shek stopped appeasing Japan?" Henry said, incredulous.

"It's wonderful! Keep reading," Lucy said.

The entire nation was filled with hope. It was predicted that war would soon begin, and Japanese forces would be expelled from Tianjin, Beijing, Shanghai, and eventually, Manchuria.

"Along with Emperor Puyi, the little traitor," Lucy said.

"You don't know what you're saying," Father said, near despair. "Puyi is only a figurehead, he doesn't matter."

"A hundred years is enough. We'll finally get our nation back," Lucy said.

"You have eyes but don't see!" Father said. "One doesn't drink poison to quench a thirst."

Māma sat upright in her chair. "Here it is! With a huge headline," she said and held up the newspaper. Joe's story took up the entire back page.

Lucy couldn't bear to look. It was exactly as he had described. That afternoon, there

were anti-Japanese protests down Nanjing Road. Lau spinning factories and offices were burned, the warehouse was cleaned out. That evening, there was a knock at the door. All four of them came to the entryway when father answered, Yan Yan watched from the dining room.

It was a uniformed officer of the Shanghai Municipal Authority. “Mr. Lau Jing? Service to appear in Municipal Court,” he said.

Father looked over them quickly, then read out loud. “Mr. Ito and Mr. Tanaka are suing Lau Jing personally for damages incurred by the loss of their property in a warehouse located on Western Road, and material in process within factories located in Shanghai. Plus, defamation due to a newspaper article that appeared under the byline Joe Walker in *China Daily*.” He rolled up the papers; he looked like a beaten man. “There’s more, but I can’t.”

I’m just a servant of the municipal authority, Big-eared Tu had said to her. “Tu is behind this,” Lucy said.

“It doesn’t matter,” Father said. “They can take everything we own.”

“How can you be responsible for a newspaper article you didn’t write?”

“Because you helped him,” Henry said.

“That’s right. *I* helped. Not father.”

“You’re seventeen, Lucy. A minor. Until you’re 21, father is responsible for you and what you do,” Henry said.

The case was on the docket in the British Supreme Court for China and Japan in record time. Within a week, Lucy, Henry, māma, and father met with the barrister defending the family business on Yuanmingyuan Road. His office was located across the street from the British Consulate compound where the court was housed. It was the same cream-colored

building with cold, Corinthian porticoes, expansive gardens, and shaved lawns.

"He graduated from Oxford, that's the best. He's lived in Shanghai for decades, knows all the judges," Henry whispered to her.

He meant the man was British, an old China hand who came east to make his fortune. His office was filled with Q'ing and Ming vases, and lacquered screens, yet he remained seated at his desk when they were introduced. He was one of those expatriates who didn't mix with foreigners even though he was the immigrant, nor eat the food. The kind who belonged to clubs and racecourses that didn't allow Chinese and pushed little old Han men off the sidewalk because they were in his way. She despised him immediately; father had a grudging admiration for yangguǐzi, westerner devils. They had no manners, were unrefined as a people, but they had built an empire from nothing and modernized the world; he respected their power.

"I'm afraid there isn't much we can do, Mr. Lau," the barrister said, closed the file. Years of experience were etched in his long, droopy face. Many cases fought; opponents vanquished. Yet without entering court, he'd already lost. "Matsui is entitled to recover inventory losses and tort damages for defamation. Lau Manufacturing hasn't sufficient monies to cover the claim. The judge will order an accounting of your personal assets to pay the claim."

"Our home? Our accounts?" Māma said. "How can they take everything? It wasn't our fault." She looked like she was drowning; had slipped underwater quietly without struggling, with surprise in her eyes.

"No," Lucy said, but she was slipping under, too. "Joe's article never mentioned Matsui, how were they defamed?"

The barrister shuffled pages on his desk looking for something. “There are legal guidelines, China and Japan have agreed on a punitive standard… Yes, here it is. Economic losses to be compensated for mentioning the Empire of Japan and inciting negative feelings. The Mukden trouble has made the issue more draconian, but there you are. Negotiated and settled.”

Behind him, legal books lined the shelves. Just decisions, barristers who had battled for the wronged. The Will of Heaven prevailed. Taoist ying and yang restored. That’s what Joe’s article had done, tried to restore justice to the murdered, the invisible.

“You have to fight it!” Lucy said. “Won’t the *China Daily* help? Joe’s editor?”

“They may face their own lawsuit, but I’m not aware that they share any responsibility for inventory losses.”

She explained what led to the article even though he didn’t ask, he listened and tapped his desk impatiently when she got teary. She started with that night in the truck, the poisoned little girl, the Imperial soldiers and Nichiren monks, hutment fire, the Green Gang thugs who beat Georgii, Big-eared Tu. It poured out like she was one of those incorruptible detectives in a gong’an novel that nobody but māma and Yan Yan read anymore. A court-mystery, where the ghosts of the victims haunt Ming officials until they solve the crime. The barrister heard nothing useful, no additional facts or helpful information.

He said to father, “We’ll seek the lowest possible punitive damages. Of course.” She wanted to smash his porcelain collection when he said he’d take up the matter of fees at a later time.

The crossed the street to the court room, the hearing was over quickly. The barrister put up no meaningful challenges, no defense. Matsui won, father was ordered to divest all

their property and accounts, turn over the proceeds immediately. They had no home, no money. Lucy held māma's hand, they followed father and Henry outside. She was in a fog. In the bright heavy sunlight, māma hugged her and whispered she was sorry there'd be no Wellesley for now. She cried when she hugged Henry. They'd find a way to return him to Amhurst, a wasted investment was too much to contemplate. She wouldn't have it.

For now, they'd live in Aunt Olive's home. She had offered her house on Seymour Road while she and the generalissimo were in Nanjing for the remainder of the summer. Father said they'd be fine. Just fine.

7

August 1937

Lucy arranged to meet Joe in the restaurant at Wing On Department store on Nanking Road. She was eager to show him a portfolio of photos and ask for a job, was early and pretended to shop. It was torture to pass the perfume counter where salesmen recognized her and pulled out bottles expecting she'd buy something. Salesgirls walked the floor in blue skirt suits, which was trés moderne, one stopped to show off handsome new American writing pens and held out a silver tray with a test pad. She scribbled a funny idiom, four characters. The salesgirl laughed and showed it to the others. She wandered through imported furniture and jewelry. There was a sale in women's apparel; French ladies bought without trying on, they tailored everything anyway. English and American ladies took armloads off the rack meaning to spend hours in the changing rooms. A salesclerk she knew chose a sporty tennis outfit for her to try on, said it would flatter her figure, and was perfect for the country club.

The white terrazzo was murder; her feet began to swell. She climbed seven flights up the curving staircase to the roof garden where it was achingly hot but shaded underneath an arbor covered in thick vines. The tea garden was quiet, not many customers in the heat of the day. Across midtown, a huge steel crane added a layer to a new skyscraper. A breeze blowing up from the Huangpu River fluttered her photographs, some shook loose. She chased them, but they flapped over the side. Four of her best floated down over rushing traffic, were caught in a wind stream between buildings and swept into the river.

By the time she got to the restaurant on the fifth floor she was late. Liqun and Joe

were already at a table talking about Missouri where he went to college for journalism; the *China Daily* had hired half a dozen reporters from his school.

“Shanghai isn’t much different than St. Louis or New York as far as I can see. Baseball games, football games, I’ve even seen a jai alai match like in Tampa. The cinema has all the latest movies from America, and I eat hamburgers almost every day.”

Liqun made a face. “Shanghai-style; with a fried egg on top, peas and fries on the side. It’s a sin against cuisine,” she said.

Tea and cakes were served. Joe prepared the teapot and emptied the first steep. “Just like Lucy showed me,” he said and poured three cups from the second pot.

“Lucy, you’ve civilized him!” Liqun said, made a toast. “Gānbēi.” Dry your cup. “Before the world ends.” They tapped their cups on the table, drained their tea.

“You look well, Liqun. How’s Lichen?” Lucy said. “I didn’t see what happened to the three of you after the riot squad came.”

“I’m not sure. She’s been incognito, even from me. You see, Guo went back to Tokyo,” Liqun said. “I think the march scared him. If it wasn’t for his fans, the literati who followed him like ducklings, I don’t know what would have happened. They fought off those terrible men, saved Lichen, Guo, and me. Two of them died.”

“I’m so sorry,” Lucy reached for her hand.

“It’s been hard for Lichen. Part of the reason she was sent to Japan was for medical treatment, she has lung disease. She was working and getting well.”

Joe poured more tea for them. “*Ta Kung Pao* had no choice but to bring their correspondents home; all the news services did. There’s no protection now that hostilities with Japan are serious.”

"She looks perfectly healthy to me. Will she be all right?" Lucy said.

"Her heart hurts most," Liqun said. "She misses Guo. She's worried for him. There are rumors." She nervously tore at a paper napkin.

"Rumors?" Joe said. "That Guo is a traitor to his homeland?"

"Yes," Liqun said wadding up the napkin. "She's afraid the Imperial military and police will threaten him. Control him. His words can do damage."

"Would they use his Japanese wife and sons against him?" Lucy said.

"Are you joking?" Joe said. "Have you been in a Japanese school? The teachers are militarists. Children pledge their lives daily to the emperor first. Their families second."

"Kokutai," Lucy said. Everyone heard about it, but it was too extreme to believe. Emperor Showa was descended from Amatarasu, the Sun Goddess. He was sacred, inviolable—it was written into the Japanese constitution.

"Exactly," Joe said. "It's not just national identity. He's the official head of state and he's the head of the military. It's a crime to criticize the emperor or his policies. People are in jail for speaking against the war."

"That's not what my sister is worried about," Liqun said. The wadded paper was twisted into a sword-like spike. "She feels that she needs him."

"She loves him?" Lucy said.

"She's going to have a baby."

Lichen was Lucy's role model, a modern woman living her dream. Until her heart betrayed her.

Joe shook his head sympathetically. "That's why she pushed you. Has she told your family?" Liqun shook her head, no. "Will they be angry?"

"Angry?" Liqun said indignantly. "Do you think my family is like the missionaries who hate people for being human? For living?" She bit her lip and sank back into her chair. "I'm sorry. You don't deserve that. One feels guilty for regretful behavior. Sin and shame debase the person. It's a Christian idea. Lichen committed no crime, there's no punishment. Only a consequence—perhaps a beautiful baby boy with fat cheeks."

"What did Guo say?" Joe said.

"He was unhappy." Liqun stabbed a cake with the napkin sword. "He accused her of being selfish and irresponsible."

He had been embarrassed in the gymnasium and shamed her because *he* felt selfish and irresponsible. Lichen was carrying his child while his wife and six sons waited for him in Kyoto. Lucy put her hand over Liqun's. "And chubby legs in red pants with a little jacket to match. He won't be short like Guo. He'll grow tall like Lichen."

Liqun smiled but her eyes were moist. "I don't know how to help her."

"Maybe work will distract her until she forgets," Joe said.

Lucy had read in Linglong magazine that men thought everything was a game or a puzzle to solve. "Speaking of jobs," she said. "I have some photographs for you to look through." She gave him the folder. He and Liqun leaned in and looked at them together. A Japanese soldier turning at the waist after having forcefully slapped a middle-aged European man, likely a stateless Jew whose face was compressed and contorted by the impact. The refugee camp at Jessfield Park where row after row of drab green tents sat in mud. A group of four Chinese children hiding in a doorway as Japanese tanks rolled unsteadily down a rutted Hongkew street with the International Settlement's skyscrapers in the medium

distance. Meishi in makeup wearing a beaded Schiaparelli gown; he could have been mistaken for a woman in New York or Paris. Hulking gray gunboats displaying flags of Japan, America, Britain, and Italy lined up on the Yangtze River.

"Lucy, these were very dangerous for you to take," Liqun said. "They're good."

"No one even noticed me," she said. "Did you see the one with the rickshaw bandit? He begged me to take his photo, but I had to promise not to give it to the police."

Joe glanced up. "These are wonderful," he said and studied the images. "You've really improved."

She felt a flush of pride. She'd been worried for nothing. "Then, you'll hire me? I can work with you and Su Yi?"

"No."

"Come on, Joe," Liqun said. "Lucy can take pictures at the studio. You've been dying to get a story about the film company. I can get her in to the movie sets, she can talk to actors, writers—"

"You said you couldn't do that," Joe said.

"I said I couldn't do it for *you*," Liqun said. "You don't speak speaks Chinese." She squeezed Lucy's hand. "Oh, don't give me that look. I didn't want to hurt your feelings."

"Pictures help circulation," Lucy said and sat back with her tea. She watched Joe mull over his answer. "I have access to a lot of places you would never see."

The hostess brought a fresh teapot and cake. Joe ate a large piece and looked at her photos again. "Your father really took it on the chin."

"Yes," Lucy said. "Because of me."

"I warned you before I sent the story to press that it was a risk. Not just for you, but

for your family."

"Because of the Green Gang and Big-eared Tu. Not because of the courts," Lucy said. "I had no idea Matsui could take everything my parents own. The inheritance they saved for Henry and me."

"Joe, nobody likes to be reminded of their mistakes," Liqun said.

"It wasn't a mistake," Lucy said. "Father was trapped by Matsui. They were using him. Our business belonged to them, and he was forced to do what they said. They made the decisions and the profit."

"All of the mills in Shanghai belong to them now. That's what I found. It's a monopoly, old-style imperialism. The same with wood products and iron," Joe said.

"I'm not glad we lost everything. But I'm not sorry for what I did either," Lucy said.

"Does your father know how you feel?" Liqun said.

"I'll tell him one day," she said. "Not yet. I need to make money and help my family. Will you hire me?"

"Lucy, you're a kid—"

"What difference does that make?" Lucy said. "*My* photos got your big story. We can do it again."

"Joe, you told me how you got your big break," Liqun said. "You weren't much older than Lucy. I was younger than Lucy when I got my first movie role."

Joe sighed. "I'll give you a try. No promises."

8

Nanjing – August through December 1937

Half of Nanjing was new, modern, and bursting with commerce—brickworks, tileworks, lumber mills, new neighborhoods, new shopping hongs. Refugees with nowhere to go crowded inside new municipal buildings which General Tang made available. His soldiers ushered them in and let them camp in offices and hallways. Lucy, Henry, Weishi, Meishi, and Shishi were assigned to the Presidential Building.

"This is worse than a college dormitory," Henry said. Bedrolls, suitcases, pots and pans, even chickens squawking in crates were stacked up along hallways on all five floors. The constant activity and loud noises gave Lucy a pounding headache.

After a week, she and Henry took Weishi, and Meishi to an appointment Henry managed to secure at the travel office where they could arrange for train tickets to Wuhan. Shishi stayed with their belongings. The line was disorganized, they stood for hours in the heat with no food. Near dusk, they left with a booking. They got a sleeper car, no one knew exactly what day or time of departure, but train service would resume soon. They stood outside, the heat of the day receding. In the eastern sky toward Purple Mountain, a buzzing sound came toward them slowly growing louder. Six airplanes punched through a layer of purple and gold clouds stacked close together in the shape of a pyramid. They were polished steel, modern and sleek. Their wings sagged from the weight of bright blue ellipticals underneath. They descended, broke formation like a blooming flower, and circled around in two parallel lines along a pair of tree-lined boulevards leading toward the new municipal center.

Toward the Presidential Building. An inner wind rose inside Lucy. She felt it before the thought formed. The heaviness of death in her arms and legs. The planes were flying toward all the people who had fled Shanghai. They were heading toward Shishi!

The blue ellipticals detached. Time slowed as they tumbled end over end, closer and closer to the rooftops of the three beautiful new buildings of the capital. The planes never paused, they continued on their path quickly diminishing in size, their engines becoming fainter until they vanished into the clouds.

No, no, no!

The bombs struck. Erupted. Debris and black smoke shot upward like spears. Gray smoke mushroomed out of burst windows all around the building. Only then did the sound of explosions reach the travel office. Everyone gasped at the same time.

Her legs trembled and she sank to the pavement. It wasn't like the hutment fire with deafening noise, the screams and wails of people fleeing. In front of her, three huge stone and brick carcasses smoldered in silence.

Henry didn't move. Weishi knelt beside her whimpering. Lucy wanted to photograph it, memorialize the wicked devastation. But she'd left her camera in her suitcase. Tu had said that she hid behind it and was afraid to live her life. Afraid there wasn't anything beautiful in herself to express, to write, or paint. He said that she photographed ugliness because it was easier to suffer than to create. She believed him, but he was wrong. Pain had to be witnessed because too many injustices remained unseen and were accepted by the world.

The next day, she found Joe who had a hotel room in Old Nanjing with other *Daily News* journalists. He and Henry waited in line to retrieve Shishi's body from the Presidential Building. They allowed a few people in at a time because the structure was feared unsound.

Lucy watched and wrote down descriptions of everything she saw; people were grief-stricken, angry people, defeated, and fearful. They pulled a few survivors from the wreckage and then she saw every emotion that could be expressed. They buried Shishi in a mass grave where prayers were said at the same time in a loud confusion of shouts and cries before the pit was covered over by large tractors. Like everyone else, most of their belongings had been destroyed, but not Weishi's three suitcases full of beautiful costumes, clothes, and jewelry which in her grief over Shishi she would have left next to the grave. Lucy placed one dress she had salvaged inside Weishi's bag, she, Henry, and Meishi carried them for her. They waited for information about train service, but a week went by, then two. Joe learned that the trains were overwhelmed with refugees and wounded soldiers fleeing rapidly advancing imperial troops in the south, the north, and Shanghai. All domestic planes were reassigned to the Chinese army. Desperate to help them, he took them to the docks.

It was pandemonium. Commercial cargo was being loaded and off-loaded. Frightened families were unpacking cars full of what appeared to be their entire households, including bedsteads and cooking ovens. Other families were standing next to a single bag with half a dozen children, their amahs, mothers-in-law, and a house-boy frantically bargaining to board steamships or junks in any space available.

Joe knew the captain of a junk called the Hóng Yú, the Redfish. The captain was small, nervous, and he didn't speak but nodded when Joe offered him wads of American cash. Joe waved Lucy, Meishi, Henry, and Weishi aboard.

A car drove up, the driver opened the backdoor and Tu emerged in his long robe and slippers—he appeared clear-eyed.

He spoke only to Lucy. "I've come to tell you that Madame Chiang, your Aunt Olive

has been in an accident. Her caravan was attacked while she was touring the front on behalf of the generalissimo. She sustained serious injuries, no one is sure if she'll survive." Tu handed her photographs of bombed cars.

"Her car is armored. Her brother had it made in Germany." She handed the photos to Henry who stared at them blankly while Meishi held onto his arm and looked on with shock. "No, it can't be. The generalissimo always sends an escort—"

"I've can offer you and your brother assistance in Chongqing. If you will work for me, agree to my terms, both of you will be safe under my personal protection. Madame Chiang is unfortunately incapacitated for the foreseeable future."

Lucy was stunned. The driver didn't wait for her reply, he moved toward the baggage. Tu's big car was the only vehicle anywhere in sight. His driver had to cross the entire dock where thousands of people were pressed together near hysteria. He didn't care one bit what they'd suffered or if he ran over people or property.

"Did you hurt anyone on the dock?" she demanded of the driver, who refused to look at her. Then to Tu, "How did you know I was here?"

"I know what I want to know."

Joe pulled her arm. "You might not like it, Lucy, but he's right. You'll be safe." He glanced over her shoulder at Tu, then lowered his voice. "Your aunt is going to be flown to America for surgery."

"I'm not going to Chongqing," she said to Tu. "We're going to Wuhan."

"Wuhan will be the next city to fall."

She didn't trust Tu. "I have a little sister to take care of. We're going to family in Wuhan."

Tu looked at Weishi curiously as if he was appraising ceramics or a vase—she was the only woman on the dock wearing a fashionable dress and matching shoes. “She’s a stupid girl. I tried to tell your father but, like you, he wouldn’t listen.”

Weishi’s face collapsed into tears. Lucy was speechless. “You knew father? You’re lying.”

“I keep secrets. I don’t lie.”

“Henry, is this true?”

Henry traded glances with Meishi and Weishi. “It’s complicated, Lucy. Father dealt with a great many sensitive problems,” he said.

She looked to Joe for support, to say they were wrong, but he had the same sympathy in his eyes that he had for Liqun. “Did you find out in your investigation?” Lucy said. Joe wouldn’t answer. It was true.

“Have it your way. You are your father’s daughter.” Tu returned to his car; his driver opened the door. “Saving people is a waste of your time, Lucy. They will drag you down with them. You should know that by now.”

“You can’t scare her,” Henry said.

“The little white face has a voice after all. I wasn’t speaking to you, Henry.”

“Leave him alone,” Lucy shouted.

“With a word from me, the captain will throw you off this junk,” Tu said.

She hated that he could. “You have the power to do whatever you want,” Lucy said.

“Yes.” Tu got in his car, and they drove across the dock honking while people dove madly out of the way.

“Jesus Christ, Lucy,” Joe said. “Your hands are shaking. No one speaks to Tu like

that. Are you okay?"

She wasn't sure, but she tried to smile. Joe took Henry and Meishi below deck to stow their things.

Weishi hugged her. "Thank you for saying you're taking care of your little sister."

Lucy was angry and confused. Weishi had the perfect face, and her growing belly was a constant reminder that father chose her over the family. He had been a pawn of Japanese businessmen, and he did business with Tu who tarnished everyone who associated with him. Henry knew and didn't tell her.

"Weishi, did you work for Tu?"

Weishi was silent for a moment. "Tu is aroused by girls he can't have. Girls whose spirit he must first break."

"That's not an answer."

"I was offered. He declined."

Weishi was beautiful, everything about her was cultivated and refined. It didn't make sense. "Did he trick father?"

"Your things are stowed. You're all set," Joe said.

The junk was prepared to leave port. The captain told Joe to disembark. He took her hands and wanted to say something but couldn't find any words. The sun reflected gold in his brown hair, he was unshaven with his shirtsleeves rolled up like he was in the newsroom. She didn't know how to say she already missed him.

"Oh, I have something for you." He handed her a leather Rolleiflex case. "You can send me pictures of what's happening in Wuhan. And along the way."

She opened it—it was his camera.

"And I got you plenty of film," Joe said.

"The kind real photojournalists use," Lucy said.

"You are the real deal, Lucy."

It was the most beautiful thing she'd ever held. She didn't want to cry and look like a messy woman, but she owed Joe a debt. He taught her how to be a witness to life's events. The invisible thread of fate had tied them together before they ever met. She hugged him around the neck and didn't want to let go. He kissed her mouth and for once, she didn't pull away.

The captain yelled, "Qǐmáo." Raise anchor.

Joe stroked her cheek then quickly left without looking back.

The deck became chaotic. The first mate yelled that from Swallow Rock just east of them, spotters called in two Japanese Navy fleets steaming up the Yangtze, set to converge with four divisions of imperial soldiers marching overland from Shanghai. Three hundred boatmen sat two at an oar and readied the paddles. They pulled anchor and the boatmen began to stamp their feet to the drumbeat, their oars slapped the water. Weishi held her by the hand like a frightened rabbit—her belly had grown in just a few days. Someone shouted, "Weiho!" And then, "Weiha!" They pushed back from the dock with a jolt.

Imperial Japanese naval ships made the bend at Yijiang Gate in the city wall and began firing on the city. Explosions in the river near the junk sent geysers up to drench the deck. Lucy was frightened out of her mind and fell to her knees in sloshing water. She and Weishi crawled from hatch to hatch and frantically tried to pry one open to get below. But they were sealed. They were stranded with the boatmen who shrank back from projectiles whislting through the air and stared straight ahead. They obeyed the captain who shouted

orders she couldn't comprehend. The junk pitched from side to side, she had nowhere to take cover, the camera Joe had given her hammered her chest painfully. She had no choice, she and Weishi tied themselves to the aftmost mast and she began taking photos of mortars flying from advancing naval ships. Her hands were shaking badly, but she concentrated on focusing, distance, framing each shot.

Above her, red lugsails unfurled from three stepped masts. Each one was shaped like the dorsal fin of a sailfish. They caught a strong wind and were propelled; suddenly the junk was heeling at flank speed like explorers on Zheng He's ancient ships. They tilted so close to the water she was lashed with saltwater and could have touched the foamy trails of their wake if she had reached out. The captain threw back his head and laughed like a crazy man. He yelled thanks to Radiant and Bloom, the goddesses of the Yangtze, for sending winds that outpaced the Japanese bombs. By the time their vessels entered Nanjing harbor, the junk was cutting like a weaver's shuttle past dozens of steamships at anchor, tossing about in whitecaps and their own oily bilge. Thousands of people were still on docks all along the waterfront screaming and begging to be saved when the Redfish turned into the wind.

Lucy felt sick at the sight. Sick with disgust for herself for the relief she felt at leaving them and sick knowing what was going to happen. She got an entire roll of film taken of people in Nanjing before their faces faded in the distance. Her last shot was flames over the old city of Nanjing.

Half a day later, the goddesses faltered, the wind died. The river current was against them, and the oars were set to. Boatmen beat against the water with the rhythm of centipede legs. Their thrilling speed had turned into miserable treading. The junk, was made of teak and camphor wood, painted dirty red. It was flatbottomed, without a keel and creaked and

moaned, continually rolling one way then the other like a corkscrew in the current. Like a pig on a spit. Lucy stayed on deck once the hatches were opened. It was cramped and airless below and she couldn't bear the thought of being trapped in the dark like a coffin.

Junks sailed in pairs on the Long River, the Yangtze. Small sampans called three-plankers and wubans that were miniature versions of the Redfish sped by them with gulls and crows circling their masts. They veered off on inland waterways and tributaries like waterfowl and quickly disappeared. No one they encountered seemed to know about the Japanese invasion, nor did they ask about Shanghai and Nanjing when hailed. She and Meishi began to feel safe when no Japanese airplanes or warships had been seen for four days.

They were against the flow of current at a constant incline, and the water became more turbulent as they entered the foothills. Every li west was a battle. There was no rest for the boatmen until the river began to twist and turn between boulders on either riverbank. Giant coils of rope were hoisted from below, they used lines to drag the junk over shallows and rapids, around bends, sometimes inside the steep walls of limestone cliffs where their voices echoed back like the gods were watching over them, warning them to keep a steady pace or the hull would be damaged. Everything they did was by ear, thousand-year-old songs amplified like invisible chords over the rushing river. Watching the boatmen switch between oaring and rope lines, constantly singing and chanting like choir boys kept her fascinated all day. They didn't use modern equipment; it wouldn't have served any purpose.

On deck watching boatmen, Weishi said, "It looks like a sanxian." The stringed instrument she played.

She'd not spoken in days. Not since Nanjing which had worried Lucy. Three long

ropes stretched from the boat across the muddy water to shore, and each tied seventy boatmen to the junk. The men faced upriver with the line over their shoulders and heaved in when the drum was struck. They were shirtless, brown from the sun, and the ridges of their spines looked like strings of beads.

"Oh, like the instrument." Lucy cupped her ear to make out what they were chanting.

"Hai, first!" the leader shouted.

"Go up, go up, niú," the men chanted in reply.

"They're singing that they plow slowly like oxen," Weishi said.

"How do you know the songs?"

"We were raised on the river. It's where Meishi, Shishi and I learned to sing."

"The boat we passed going down river sang about flying like birds. They had their sails up."

"They were sailing with the current," Weishi said. "Their sails are wings. Lucy, your father was a good man. But still a man. What Tu said is true, I'm a stupid girl. Don't judge your father because me."

"Don't defend him. You have no idea what he's done."

9

Chongqing - 1944

"Get off my boat, woman! I've no time for nonsense!" the captain of the *River Maid* said in the local Sichuan accent. His tones were mixed up, she barely understood him. He was tall with unusually long limbs and moved her aside by the shoulders like she was cargo. He shouted orders for his crew to make ready, they were departing immediately.

Boatmen smoking at the railing flicked their cigarettes into the water. More of them spilled out of an open hatch. None wore shoes as was their custom. They swarmed over the deck with hard calloused feet scratching the wood like river rats and threw themselves at stowing, winching, and hoisting while the captain made his way astern pointing at unfastened battens and rigging, crying, "Jiā kuài!" Be quicker!

"No! Wait!" Lucy yelled. She darted after him; the junk pitched and pulled against her mooring lines. She was flung against the mast. Her camera bag struck her chest and knocked the wind out of her; she couldn't breathe. She grabbed the boom, the railing, anything for balance and followed.

Aiwei was on the dock waiting. She wouldn't come aboard, the junk scared her, everything scared her. She had her hands over her ears to muffle the sound of loose planks below that were screeching like owls. She lost sight of Lucy and became frantic then ran along the dock pushing people out of the way crying, "Māma! Māma!"

Lucy wanted to sweep her up in a hug, smother her in kisses and soothing words. Aiwei was only six years old but looked like an anxious old woman, aged from worry. But she couldn't. If the *River Maid* departed it might not return for days, maybe weeks. They

needed the fresh vegetables the captain had promised them. The wharf was clearing, hundreds of people were climbing the stone steps toward the lower level of the city. Most of the sampans and junks had pushed off, dropped their sails in the gathering breeze or had set to oars and were rowing upriver against the current. Japanese planes would arrive soon—no one in their right mind would risk being on the wharf or near the Cháotiān Gate at the top of the stairs when the daily bombings began.

She caught up with the captain at the stern—he was taking a fist full of foreign currency from a westerner who had a handgun strapped to his leg. Two boatmen lowered crates over the side rail. The westerner climbed over, and a motorized sampan sped away from the junk toward the opposite shore cutting across heavy river traffic.

The captain folded the money into his pocket. “There goes your carrots and cabbage. Now will you leave?”

The little sampan was overloaded with a tall stack of vegetable crates held down by the westerner and a second man; it sat low in the water as it lurched toward a shiny black limousine waiting on the other side of the river.

“Mā de!” Shit! “You sold everything to a single customer?” Lucy slammed her fist on the rail.

“He had money.”

“I have money!” She pulled out the few Fabi left over after paying for rent and rice.

The captain laughed. “He had real money, not that worthless paper.”

“It’s official currency, you have to take it.” Lucy crammed the Fabi back in her pocket.

“Not if I have nothing left to sell,” the captain said unhitching a braided dock rope.

She hated that Sichuan men refused to look her in the eyes—they believed downriver women from big cities like Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjin, especially the leftovers without a husband—were rich, immoral, arrogant. The captain worked hard for his money, his hands were coarse, his arms were sun-brown and bony. He looked to be in his mid-thirties yet smelled strongly of daodi medicinal herbs used to treat aches and pains of old age. His junk was shabby, in need of repairs. In his place, she would take foreign currency over Chinese, too.

Henry told her the Finance Ministry was printing new currency like joss paper, which led to hyper-inflation. The Fabi was worth less and less every day. What else could the government do? They'd been at war for 12 years against the most well-trained, well-equipped, well-disciplined, and cruelest army in the Pacific—there had never been a hope of winning. The best their people could do was flee, pray Japan's other enemies would defeat them before all of China was destroyed. Almost a hundred million people lost their homes, moved inland toward the mountains—in Chongqing, the wartime capital, tax receipts were practically nonexistent, international aid was sporadic, foreign diplomats kept their old imperial mindset, they were temperamental. Meanwhile, every port along the coastline, every major industrial city, and half the population were controlled by the Japanese—*they* collected taxes and used the money to destroy the other half.

On the far shore, the two westerners filled the limousine's trunk and back seat with vegetable crates. The men were like river crabs, scavengers who could smell junks coming, crept in unnoticed, took what they wanted, then slipped back to their fancy enclaves across the river—huge newly built villas with glassed-in tennis courts and swimming pools where bombs never fell. The car probably belonged to a wealthy ambassador, maybe a journalist

from Reuters, UPI, or TASS; they bought crates of food to entertain other foreigners who wouldn't eat it. Over gimlets and champagne, they'd talk about the tragic situation in China, pretend they had nothing to do with it while trays of beautiful vegetables sailed in daily still moist with morning dew sat untouched. And tomorrow, all of it would be in the garbage heap wilted and spoiled and Aiwei, like most children in Chongqing, was slowly going blind with chicken-eye—night-blindness from lack of vitamins.

None of them saw themselves the way she saw them, the way all Chinese mothers saw them—the same foreign devils who had robbed their nation through the century of humiliation. They thought of themselves as adventurers, friends, allies. In truth, the war with Japan only added an enemy to the people's fight for liberation from foreigners. She both hated and pitied them.

On the dock, Aiwei had attracted a small group of passersby. They saw her watching the junk, nervously biting her nails, and stopped to see for themselves. She had always worried that Lucy would one day vanish like countless soldiers, refugees, or people who seemed normal but had been broken by years of random death raining down from the sky. Aiwei slapped at people who tapped on her shoulder and pestered her with questions about Lucy, the junk, and the captain.

Lucy pulled the captain's sleeve, forced him to look at her. "Ni ma!" Your mother! "Even here you *could* be a hero," she said to shame him, but he turned away. "What's left for us?"

He coiled and uncoiled his rope, stared at the river.

"Don't ignore me! I'm empty-handed because you cheat me!"

He threw down his rope which caught his boatmen's attention. They left their duties

and came forward—one of them shouldered past her roughly. “Downriver bitch!”

She’d had enough and shoved him back. “Bastard!” she said.

The boatman spun around, bleary-eyed from a drunken night. He dropped his crate and pushed up his sleeves, furious with her, intending to slap her or worse.

“Mama!” Aiwei shrieked from the dock. Around her, the mildly interested crowd became riveted and more people gathered around.

The captain leapt between Lucy and his man. “Get back to work!” he shouted.

The angry boatman kicked his empty crate, stalked back to the others who were growing agitated. The crowd on the dock whispered and nodded among themselves like they were watching a street show.

The captain grabbed Lucy by the arm. “Are you crazy? You make demands in your bi ge silk blouse…” Your shitty high-class clothes. “Any one of my men would slit your throat for it and not think twice.”

“I’d gladly give it to them—it’s not even mine,” she said—but it was a lie, at least partially. She’d fight anyone who tried to take it from her. She wrenched herself from his grip.

“You think that would save your life? Ai-ya, woman!”

Her hand was drawn to the intricately embroidered collar—she knew she shouldn’t have worn the blouse, it belonged to a dead woman—to Weishi, Aiwei’s real mother. She was a secret they’d kept—bad secrets brought bad luck. For 6 years a suitcase full of her things sat in a corner of the apartment. Lucy had recently opened it—everything inside was so beautiful, so expensive. Mulberry silk was her weakness, a caress on her skin. She owned two cotton dresses and a pair of slacks; nothing compared. Before she knew it, she had

slipped it on and now her life, Aiwei's life were in danger because she was vain.

"You don't know me!" she shouted and backed away until she was against the railing with her camera bag held tightly against her bruised chest.

"No one cares, woman! I told you, there's nothing for you. Take that fidgety little girl and leave before it's too late!"

On the dock, Aiwei was reaching out to her with both hands, her clouded eyes pleading for Lucy to save her, to take her away from the bystanders who were pointing at Lucy and the captain, speculating on who'd started what, picking sides, tormenting Aiwei with what might happen next.

The captain's face reddened, he raised himself up to his full height, daring her to say more. She was trapped with nowhere to go, nothing left to do—she had challenged him on his junk in front of his boatmen. And yet his eyes were clear, he was well-nourished—Aiwei could go blind forever. For Lucy, nothing was worse than leaving without the vegetables.

"No, I won't!" she said fighting back tears, her voice cracked. "I'm not leaving here without something for my daughter."

The captain halted, blinked in surprise. Behind him, the boatmen circled closer—they were desperate to leave Chongqing. Two of them darted in, one grabbed her by the arms, the other grabbed her legs.

"Zhàn!" she screamed. Stop! The camera in her bag would be ruined if it got wet—it was her prized possession. She struggled and kicked; the sleeve of her blouse ripped at the shoulder seam. More boatmen crowded around and took hold of her. They lifted her to the railing to throw her overboard into the filthy brown water—it stank from open gutters that ran alongside the stone staircases and gushed with black offal; animal blood, entrails, organs,

and feces from abattoirs, which emptied into the river and rotted along with trash that had been pushed down the cliffsides underneath stilt houses clinging to the cliffsides.

"Wait!" she yelled. "Last Wednesday you said to come back. That you'd save carrots and a cabbage for me. And the Wednesday before that. Remember?" She tried to squirm free, but the boatmen twisted her arms painfully. "Qǐng!" Please! She burst into tears. "My daughter and I walked here all the way from the upper city. It took us an hour and a half!"

The captain lifted his hand to strike her, to make her stop talking, stop crying. She squeezed her eyes shut and sobbed; her camera bag heaved against her chest. She waited for it to be over. There were shouts from the dock.

"Ràng tā zǒu!" Let her go!

"Guài wu!" Monster!

"Tā shì wèi nǚshì!" She's a lady!

"Tāmen méiyǒu liángxīn!" They've no conscience!

"Tāmen lěngkù wúqín" They're cold-hearted.

"Hé chǒulòu de." And ugly.

The slap didn't come, she was suspended half on, half off the junk. She opened her eyes; the captain was staring at the people on the dock, at a hù, ten or more people shaking their heads and fists at the boatmen and at the captain.

"Your customers are angry," she stammered. Below her, unidentifiable debris floated in an oily slick. "They won't forgive you if you throw me over. They won't buy from you anymore."

He lowered his hand, snarled at his boatmen to let her go, then grabbed her by the wrist, pulled her away from the railing. "You're a fool," he said.

The boatmen were near panic watching both the mountain peaks and the horizon downriver. Mist and fog were dissipating for the day, the sky had brightened from dark gray to dusky purple—it was clear enough for Japanese bombers to see their targets, to see everyone on the dock.

"Aiya!" The captain said something she didn't understand to one of his boatmen who scurried away, the rest of them rushed back to their work. "Downriver women aren't usually so stubborn." He picked up his bundled rope. "They don't come down the stairs like you. They don't like to get dirty."

"I had to—rickshaws have been outlawed in the city."

"Health officials—dou bī," he grunted. Funny cunts. "They want Chongqing to look healthy, shiny. Can't hide the real shit." He grimaced up at the stairs, at the gutters swarming with flies and mosquitoes.

"You have no vegetables left?"

"They took it all," he turned on her angry once more. "I had no choice."

And across the river, the limousine sped away. She'd been defeated by foreigners again. "Hun dan!" Bastards!

She picked up a piece of shriveled carrot left on deck and threw it as hard as she could; it fell short and was swallowed by the river without even a splash. The boatman that the captain had spoken to returned from the deck cabin holding something.

"Here, take it," the captain said and pressed a cabbage into her hands.

It was small, its outer leaves limp and brown—fresh tears blurred her sight. "This is your food, isn't it?" Lucy said.

"Don't come back here again," the captain said and pulled her by the arm to the

gangplank, pushed her across, and moments later the *River Maid* shoved off.

She slipped the cabbage in her camera bag. Aiwei hugged her around the waist, they watched the junk drift quickly downriver. The crowd around them moved hastily toward the stairs. They were the last to climb the 300 age-worn steps upward through the diaojiaolou, the bamboo forest of stilt-houses that like scaffolding hugged the limestone cliffs all along the river as far as the eye could see. They were built by squatters and war refugees who used anything they could find, leftover planks, pieces of twine, bamboo poles to make homes. There was no land or affordable housing left in the upper level of Chongqing, nor even the cheapest parts of the lower city. Long rows of stilt-houses were held upright by leaning against one another—they were swept away yearly when heavy rains and monsoons came, but with the steadfastness of ants, peasants and refuges rebuilt them again and again.

The steep stairs curved with the cliff and switched back, they could see hundreds of river junks and sampans streaming away from the wharf, avoiding the strong rapids in the center where hidden boulders could damage their flat hulls and sink them. Ascending was like climbing a ladder; Aiwei pulled herself up each stair and kept stepping on the canvas bookbag that she insisted on carrying everywhere.

There were trails of stains and dark spots that appeared to be old, left from generations of peddlers who used to line the steps and hawk local baijiu wine, Hubei teas, and Sichuan pepper oil while bang bang porters jogged up and down hauling passengers and cargo on pole carriers. A recent health order recently banned them as vagrant elements. But that's not what the stains were—it was blood from an air raid massacre. Limestone was porous, it soaked up the souls of the murdered. The blood remained, yet everything else was washed away—it was powerful, those in the underworld could use it to reach through the

stone into Aiwei’s small hands and steal her qi.

“I’ll carry you, pumpkin,” Lucy said and knelt.

Aiwei stepped onto Lucy’s knee and around pickaback. They took the steps two at a time; Lucy didn’t look down—didn’t want to think about that day when thousands of women and children had crowded onto those stairs to see the Ba character form in the river. Ba, the old name for Chongqing, it was like magic that water flowing over submerged boulders could produce such a thing. It only happened once a year when there was little snow melt from Tanggula Mountain on the Tibetan plateau, the source of the river, and the water level was low. She told Aiwei that the goddess of the river had written the character with her finger just for them.

The Japanese came flying low up the Yangtze. The steep mountains surrounding Chongqing had at first protected them—children were too young to have seen the planes before; they waved at pilots in their cockpits. As they passed overhead, shiny bottles dropped out of their bellies and opened like blooming lotus petals. She knew what they were as soon as she saw them; she’d seen them in Shanghai, and in Nanjing, Changsha, Wuhan. She had always been one step ahead of the enemy with her camera.

On the Cháotiān stairs that day, mothers panicked, snatched up children, screamed for help. Everyone surged upward toward the stone archway. They clambered over each other, stumbled, slipped—trapped themselves. She was at the top near the gate holding baby Aiwei, watching the terrified faces, frozen in shock. A stranger pulled them into a tea shop with dozens of others—it was crowded, dark, heated by frantic whispering. Cries and moaning were drowned out by explosions. Later, when they came out, bodies lay sprawled down the stone steps jumbled together and naked, their clothes disintegrated into ashes by blasts and

chemicals.

Japanese death from the sky had become normal since then—and yet impossible to get used to. There were people who refused to leave their homes, others who dared the bombs to find them. They prepared as best they could; important functions and factories were relocated inside caverns, children trained at school with daily air raid drills and first aid. The worst part was uncertainty and constant worry—no one could predict where the bombs would fall, what would be destroyed, who would be victims. Only two things never failed—the Song Tower's Ting Shih T'ai bell rang at 9 a.m. as it had since 1380. And Japanese war planes followed.

She and Aiwei reached the dusty Cháotiān Gate and entered Chongqing's lower level—an ugly gray layer between the dunes of the riverbank and the pink mists over Eling Hill in the upper city. It was dirty and chaotic, a place where refugees and the poor collected like water flowing downhill.

"I don't like it here," Aiwei whispered and hid her face in Lucy's neck.

Lucy knelt to set her down. "We'll make it to St. Mary's quickly, I promise," she said, and pried Aiwei's arms off her neck.

There was no color, no trees, flowers, or grass; only flinty clouds over narrow cobblestone lanes thick with sand blown up from the riverbank which peasants with bent brooms swept into piles at the curbsides so cars and carts could pass. Fumes from unlicensed "kitchens," small factories, abattoirs, and repair shops smelled offensive yet couldn't hide the open sewers and garbage dumps. Noodle-stands with fire drums spit rancid steam; in front of them customers holding their own bowls waited in long lines while peddlers weaved through them and for few coins, sold pencils, oranges, dented pots, and live river eels writhing in

their hands. Dirty, sickly-looking people pushed and shoved past one another, even the children had strong-smelling cigarettes in their mouths. Nearly everyone wore the same rough gray fabric that was manufactured in huge underground mills, produced by the New Movement Society who handed out clothes to war refugees and peasants when they arrived in the capital—along with food coupons, vaccinations, and mandatory identification cards.

The *River Maid* captain was right—health officials were dou bī. They vowed to fight crime and disease caused by filth, endless over-crowding, and opium. But it only worsened the longer the war lasted because refugees had nowhere left to go except Chongqing. They made their way across the plains on foot, bikes, donkey carts, a few of them with money, by rail. Most of them arrived bàn sǐ bù huó, more dead than alive. Lucy had taken hundreds of photos, mainly of children who arrived not knowing what had happened to them, where their families were, how they'd survived. Her own newspaper wouldn't publish them—it would hurt morale. Aunt Olive went around the world asking for aid, begging for help, but it didn't come. Health officials labeled war orphans and refugees vagrant elements. They harassed them as if they were prostitutes, beggars, and petty criminals; to get them off the streets, to make them invisible. It made her so angry. Foreigners had oppressed China for generations, and then refused to stop the Japanese when their warships sat in port 12 years before. She was angry at the Japanese who were imperialist oppressors just like westerners. And she was angry with her own government who was too weak to protect their own people. She did the only thing she could do—she sent dozens of photos to Joe in Chicago, war refugees, homeless children, civilian bombings. Everything the censors wanted to ignore.

"Mama," Aiwei held back tears. "I'm scared we'll be stuck here when the planes come."

Lucy lifted her chin, gave her an earnest smile. “Don’t worry, we’ll get you to school in no time.”

St. Mary’s was on the outskirts of town, outside the normal bombing radius. Chongqing was a heat island—morning fog and mist burned away quickly allowing Japanese bombers to target them often.

She held Aiwei’s hand, they hurried past dark and empty stilt-houses that had become ghost homes. Health officials had recently chased away the residents; outlawed just like rickshaws, beggars, and prostitutes as unhygienic and unsightly. But in darkened doorways and underneath between the stilts, there was movement. People had returned to live shadow lives—she’d come back and take photos.

They neared the staircase to the upper city where an empty parcel of land that had once been a large building was bombed, then knocked down to prevent squatters. A dump heap quickly accumulated over the debris. At the top of the heap was a 12-year-old boy and young girl about Aiwei’s age, both in faded, patched-over clothing. They were digging through garbage with a pair of dogs sniffing and pawing alongside them. Aiwei stopped and stared.

“Come on, pumpkin,” Lucy said, but Aiwei wouldn’t budge. “No closer,” Lucy said and pulled her backward by the shoulder.

The girl was small like Aiwei, with hair shorn like a spring lamb. She was elbow-deep in the heap tugging on something she was determined to pull out.

“Mama, her eyes…”

The little girl was staring up at the sky, her eyes completely clouded over with chicken-eye. She flinched and yanked back like she’d been cut or bitten, then sucked her

fingertips, but she didn't give up—thrust her hands in the garbage again. Lucy felt sick, once progressed the blindness was irreversible. Yet she was working the dump heap, guarded by dogs, the boy within a few steps. Lucy wrapped her arms around Aiwei—without regular vitamins, she could become that little girl.

"You're squeezing me," Aiwei said and pulled away. She watched the little girl intently—she believed children who misbehaved, who ate too much, were misshapen, ugly, or unlovable were worthless to their families. They were throw-away children—the was proof was the two on the dump heap. Every day on their way to school, they passed orphanages full children who had been left on the side of the street by the hundreds-of-thousands across the nation. It was a terrible thing to do, but Lucy let her believe it, she couldn't bring herself to tell Aiwei the truth—that when the Japanese invaded, so many people had been uprooted and had run for their lives along clogged roads, their mothers had simply given up, left their children, forgot them, lost them. More children had died than orphans were found—they drifted unnoticed into death, and it was probably better, a lesser cruelty. They'd been saved from further suffering. It wasn't only the Japanese who destroyed cities, their own government evacuated then burned villages and fields before they could fall into enemy hands. Aiwei didn't need to know how many mothers had been stolen, forced to work in mines, sex camps, and munition factories run by the enemy; or were killed in bombing raids like Weishi—her real mother.

Lucy rummaged in her bag for her camera, focused on the little girl's determined face, then the pawing dogs. From the right, two men with health badges pinned to their jackets came into the frame—they broke from the crowded street and ran toward the dump heap yelling at the children with spittle flying from of their mouths. Lucy knelt, steadied an

elbow on her knee to take a succession of shots. The men were baojia, neighborhood volunteers who acted on behalf of health officials—they were drunk on power, on themselves.

The two dogs ran down the dump heap snarling, which kept the men at bay. The men yelled threats—they'd beat the children; they'd take them to the health office for vaccinations and food. They choked the air with promises, lies, and bitterness. She capped the lens and tugged Aiwei, she didn't want trouble but there was no moving her, she looked worried—the boy had the little girl's hand and was carefully pulling her down the far side of the heap.

Aiwei pulled Lucy's arm, "Look, mama!"

The boy grinned, like a little villain, pointed with his pinky finger. "Hutu dan!" he screamed. Bastards!

The two men became enraged and lunged toward him; the dogs snapped and barked.

"Èr bǎi wǔ!" the boy yelled. Two hundred fifty—stupid assholes!

Aiwei giggled behind her hand, even she knew why it was funny.

The little girl threw what she'd dug out of the dump heap at the men, it missed but her aim was true. "Cào nǐ mā!" she screamed. Fuck your mother!

Lucy laughed; she couldn't help it—they sounded like boatmen. The boy turned and saw her and Aiwei, seemed surprised that they'd bother to watch what might happen to two street children. The baojia picked up sticks from the heap and swung at the dogs.

"Zhàn!" Lucy screamed. "Why are you harassing children? What have they done? Tell me your names! I want to file a complaint!" And she took off the lens cap from her camera, took several pictures of the men.

The men looked at Lucy and Aiwei, the dogs continued barking. Baojia was compulsory but voluntary and unpaid, a thankless job. The men said something to each other and shrugged.

"Ni mei!" one of them yelled Lucy. Fuck you! They dropped their sticks and walked away, back into the crowded street.

Aiwei ran to the little girl; Lucy couldn't hear what was said. The boy laughed and the three of them spoke together. Lucy took pictures, then knelt and put her camera away.

Aiwei came back, "Mama, I want to give them our cabbage—they need it."

"What?" Lucy said, sure she'd misheard.

"They have nothing."

"But pumpkin, we need—"

"Mama, it's alright. One cabbage won't make a difference for my eyes."

She and Henry had been careful never to mention chicken-eye, they didn't want Aiwei to know because of the way she worried about everything, it would have scared her. "Pumpkin, you don't understand—"

"Mama, I understand. My eyes aren't very bad."

Aiwei knew. Lucy couldn't think—she didn't know what to say. Aiwei's big somber eyes, unfathomably dark, with three white spots at the edges—growing larger by the day… No, they'd been diligent, she'd found vitamins. "It was the last cabbage. It belonged to the captain."

Aiwei touched Lucy's cheek. "Mama, why are you crying?"

She didn't know she was. "What?" She wiped her cheeks and stood up.

"Please, mama," Aiwei said.

She felt dizzy, she'd stood too fast or gone too long without eating. Aiwei reached into the camera bag and held up the cabbage; she was asking permission to give away the one thing Lucy fought for, the battle she'd won. Her temples ached with a vicious headache—she nodded.

Aiwei ran back to the children and offered them the cabbage. The little girl felt it all over and hugged it like a prize. The boy picked her up and carried her off with their dogs trotting behind.

Aiwei skipped back. "I'm ready to go to school now, mama," she said.

10

Chongqing - 1944

Lucy took Aiwei to school late again. They had one final stop to make even if Aiwei was going to have a fit. The grocery hong, the owner kept her order aside.

“Mama, please!” Aiwei wailed. “It’s late!”

“I know, I’ll be quick, I promise.”

She loosened Aiwei’s grip on her hand and went inside. The hong was full of women spitting anger at Mr. Chu who was trapped behind the counter.

“It’s not my fault. The flour mill was bombed again,” he shouted with his hands up.

Noodle and bun prices on his board had been crossed out twice and raised over thirty percent in the hour the store had been open. Rice in the counter bins had also been priced higher.

“No one can afford it,” someone yelled.

“The mill was bombed last night. The buns were made days ago. Why are they more?”

“Chu!” Lucy yelled. “Mr. Chu, can I have my order?”

He pulled out her order. The price was double what she expected. She dug in her pocket; she could only afford a third of it. “I’ll take one sweet potato bun.”

Mr. Chu unwrapped the package and shouted at women cursing him while he removed three buns and two wax packets of noodles. He was rewrapping when someone slapped his hand.

“Aiya! Buy somewhere else!”

“Where? You cheat us!”

She couldn't stop thinking of the blind girl they'd seen in the lower city. Aiwei on top of a trash heap, every day a sightless fight to eat, running from health officials. She wanted to grab the buns on the counter and run away. Instead, she left the hong while women snatched packets of broken noodles and boxes of stale tea from one another.

She handed the sweet potato bun to Aiwei. "Here's breakfast."

"That's a sweet bun!"

"I know, but it has vitamin A. It's good for you."

"You eat it. You're too skinny, mama."

"I'm fine."

Aiwei's mouth puckered, she stared with her dark penetrating eyes. Lucy felt snared.

Lucy hugged her too tightly. "I'll take half if you take half."

Aiwei broke off part and stuffed it in her mouth. They took the route to St. Mary's Middle School for Girls along a patchwork of newly paved roads that intersected with old brick and muddy dirt roads. Aiwei seemed to relax at Boundary Road where they were outpaced by rickshaws, cars, even donkey carts. She swung her canvas bookbag—which was enormous and empty. Publishing houses were destroyed in the Shanghai bombing and there were still no textbooks.

The Ting Shih T'ai bell rang. Above them, the sky was still cloudy, they were far enough from the city center to feel safe. They passed an orphanage where children stared out the windows, traumatized by whatever trek brought them to the city. Aiwei cringed. She had nightmares that Lucy would leave her someplace and abandon her like thousands of children and babies found on roadsides and city streets.

"I'm late."

“Me, too,” Lucy didn’t care if she was late or if she missed the whole day. It seemed like she wrote the same dull news story over and over. More propaganda of battle wins and brilliant war strategy. No one believed it.

A formation of planes appeared flying low and roared overhead. Lucy pushed Aiwei to the ground and covered her. People on the road ran toward a hillside where a flashing red light indicated an air-raid shelter tunneled into the mountain range. She and Aiwei followed into a cavern that had been enlarged to the size of an amphitheater. They were ushered to the back where bare light bulbs were strung along the wall.

They sat on poured concrete flooring with their backs against the excavated rock. Caverns in the Gele Mountain were the safest place of all.

“This is very fortunate,” Lucy said.

“Look,” Aiwei ran her hands over crystals in the rockface. “It’s bái yún shí.” Dolomite, she smiled up at Lucy. “We learned in school.”

“It’s beautiful.” She put her hand over Aiwei’s.

The doors closed like a tomb. Everything darkened, a ring of lights blinked on and glowed gold. Outside, bombs exploded. Aiwei wrapped her arms around Lucy.

“Don’t worry, it won’t be long.” She stroked Aiwei’s hair and hummed the vagrant woman’s aria which had been playing over and over in her mind all morning.

From the beginning, Lucy wanted to tell Aiwei they were half-sisters, that Lucy wasn’t her mother. That Meishi had wanted more than anything to raise a daughter but died protecting her during an air raid. It was a mistake to keep secrets from her. She was a Lau and deserved to know the truth. Henry disagreed, and thought Lucy was being selfish. It was more important to protect their father’s reputation and the Lau name than it was for Lucy to

find a husband. But as time passed it became apparent that Aiwei didn't believe the family stories she was told. And one day she would feel betrayed by them.

They sat near families and clusters of people who seemed to be work groups from a nearby factory village. Next to them, a young woman was playing mahjong with an elderly man who couldn't see well in the dim light. She was hiding tiles. Aiwei elbowed Lucy each time she pulled one from her lap to cheat. There were small children fighting over a toy which distracted the old man further. After an hour, the bombing still hadn't stopped.

Aiwei nuzzled into her. "I'm scared."

Lucy wrapped her up in a hug. The ventilation began to knock, then sputter. The temperature rose steadily. Coughing and wheezing worsened. The elderly man clutched his chest; the woman wailed and jumped up. Tiles fell out of her skirt. His family carried him to the front where health officials formed a circle to whisper about the situation, then did nothing. What they said was quickly relayed back by one group to the next.

A middle-aged couple pushed through the crowd with a large family—the proverbial seven fathers and eight mothers. Elderly grandparents, aunts and uncles, sons with wives and children. Fù qin, the father, argued to be released, his duty was to attend to his larger family, but officials were adamant their duty to shield citizens from incineration and chemical bombs took precedence over his obligation to his family. He became angry, the entire became belligerent and demanded to leave. Officials brandished their weapons. They forced everyone away from the exits. The cavern quieted. Everyone was on edge to see what would happen. Aiwei again bit her fingernails, which were down to the nubs.

A booming crash startled everyone. It was followed by rumbling below ground, a cave in. Black dust shot out of a side tunnel, arched across the cavern dome, and fell like

snow. People choked, wailed, and shouted. A crowd surged past Lucy and Aiwei toward the exits. Guns flashed like firecrackers with a deafening echo. The crowd heaved backward in fear of the weapons. Like a tsunami receding from the shore, people rushed over those who couldn't get out of the way trampling them. More shots were fired, everyone dropped to the ground. The lights went out. The whir of ventilation fans came to an abrupt stop.

People yelled, "Open the doors!"

"Turn on the fans!"

"We're suffocating!"

But the doors remained sealed. It was incomprehensible that health officials were their tormentors. Their neighbors and friends who had been elected to the positions. Red lights above the exit doors cast a rosy glow across hundreds of frightened, confused faces.

"Bāng wǒ!" Help us! someone shouted from far inside the caved-in tunnel.

"Láidé kuài!" Come quick!

At first, the voices were faint but grew louder as more survivors joined in. There were hundreds, if not thousands, trapped under rocks and dirt.

Aiwei clutched her arm and cried. "They're alive."

The trapped people begged for shovels and help digging out, for mercy, for health officials to organize a bucket line. Instead, instructions blared over a megaphone and vibrated against the walls. Everyone was to remain in place rather than risk triggering another cave-in. People listened in anguish and pleaded with officials; please change your mind, the trapped have little time, they're running out of air.

Aiwei heaved with sobs. "We have to help them."

The muffled cries and screams from the tunnel reached a frantic pitch. It was

agonizing to hear. It went on for over half an hour. Lucy could do nothing but hold Aiwei's hand. Sweat ran down her arms and legs. The air didn't move, it was nearly unbreathable and stale, dense with dust particles and spent breath. Aiwei buried her head in Lucy's breast. The voices dwindled, lost conviction, yet went on for another half hour. It felt like forever. The people knew there would be no rescue. Somewhere deep in the mountain, a rockslide induced a collective gasp. Then raw anger ricocheted through the cavern. A man stood up and shook his fist, made accusations. Then another. Mothers joined, couples, then whole families. They shouted that health officials were incompetent, they were murderers. Fury and grief built into a revolt. No one wanted the cavern to become their coffin. Officials became panic-stricken. They were outnumbered.

While attention was focused on the rebellion, people in the rear of the cavern began to peel away toward a side tunnel. The mountain range was a rare karst formation with interconnected caverns and cave systems that extended many li in all directions through the mountain range. It was possible that there were many entrances and exits. She tapped Aiwei's shoulder and motioned for her to quietly follow, then crawled toward the tunnel that others had slipped into. It opened into a small cavern used to store equipment. Beyond that, a passage had already been found by others.

She planted her hands on Aiwei's shoulders. "We're going to follow these people through the mountain."

Aiwei stared at her gravely. "Are you sure?"

"No, but we can't stay here. It's not safe."

They walked long stretches in the dark on uneven ground into a constant, chilly breeze. Then, the wind died down and it became warm and humid. She had to pull Aiwei

along rather than lose sight of the bobbing lamps held by people ahead of them in the distance, even though she was afraid of sinkholes and rockslides that couldn't be seen. Spiders crawled up her legs, she bit her lip not to scream and swiped them away. Twice, giant millipedes dropped from low-ceilinged passages onto Aiwei's neck; she screamed and flailed until Lucy picked them off. Where the passages gave way to dark vaulted caves, bat guano carpeted the ground. She became light-headed from the eye-watering ammonia fumes. Beetles gorging on the droppings clicked and crunched underfoot.

"Look!" Aiwei waved the small flashlight from her school bag back and forth across the cave wall; crystals glittered like gemstones. "The star spirits are protecting us. See?"

High above them the sound of flapping boat flags was carried on a wind, and as it grew stronger, so did cave crickets. A thin stream of anxiety widened inside her. It wasn't boat flags, it was hundreds, maybe thousands of bats fluttering on the ceiling, driven to take flight by Aiwei's flashlight. Bats were Wu Fu, a symbol of the five blessings, but their rodent faces and reptile wings scared Lucy to death. Her ears filled with the beat of their elastic wings. One of their bony wingtips brushed her cheek, and then another. She picked up Aiwei and ran, scraped her arms against the rock wall, and stumbled but kept going. The passage suddenly opened into an enormous cavern with a small opening high above where the bats streamed out.

They had been on a steady decline for 4 li, over a mile, then up again much more steeply at least that same distance. They could have been walking in great loops or a straight line, she had no sense of direction, or any way of knowing how deep below ground or close to the surface they were. At some point, the Song Tower bell rang. By the eighteenth, they emerged on the other side of the mountain range completely off the Chongqing peninsula in

the village of Daping.

It was a strange miracle—the sun was behind the hills. They were in a small park where a dozen old men sat at wooden tables underneath banyan trees playing cards and drinking tea. The men watched her and Aiwei stagger out and said nothing. They simply continued their games as if everything were normal. A radio on one of the tables made no announcement about the locked-down cavern, nor anything about the day's bombing raid on the capital. She and Aiwei wandered through the village in search of food. Lucy had a few coins and bought two carrots and egg drop soup. The cook ladled up a lukewarm bowl, then dropped in a bite-sized piece of red pork for Aiwei, who thought she'd been given a feast. Lucy wanted to kiss him. It had been two weeks since Aiwei had any meat.

They ran into a gang of children, different ages, who were uncared for and in rags, roaming the streets. A dozen or more moved toward them like a bird-tide. Lucy put her arm around Aiwei and tried not to show fear. They swooped in, circled out, swooped in again squawking like a flock.

"Pretty girl."

"What do you have?"

She felt someone nudge her from behind, another from the front—it was a distraction.

"Spare a coin?"

"Oh, watch your step."

Lucy nearly collided with a teenage boy and halted.

"Aiya," a girl behind bumped her.

Dirty hands grabbed at her clothes and hair, snatched away Aiwei's bag. She slapped at them, Aiwei screamed. Nearby, Nationalist soldiers blew a whistle; the child-gang

scattered down the street. Soldiers, themselves emaciated, half-hidden in doorways where they appeared to be lying in wait, ambushed the children. Most of them got away, but those who were seized were manhandled, the soldiers went through their pockets and stole from them, then pushed them away.

Lucy ran across the street; they had the boy who'd taken her jade hairpin. "Wait! My pin!"

The boy ran before she got close. The soldier slipped her hairpin into his pocket. "He got away."

No one cared that she and Aiwei had been attacked. They weren't interested in stopping crime. They wanted zāng, spoils. It crossed her mind to beg for the hairpin, but the soldier stared past her. They barely received rations, food was expensive, especially if they had families.

Aiwei hugged her. "Don't cry, mama. It's alright."

But it wasn't. Her father had given the hairpin to Meishi. It was jadeite, pearl, and coral carved into jasmine flowers. She had worn it out of envy because she and Henry had nothing. The clothes, jewelry, Ming tea set, all of it belonged to Aiwei whom she had to repay. Every time she tried to hate her father and Meishi, she created another debt of guilt.

They started the long walk home. The main road was busy with construction projects; two new schools, a hospital, restaurants, and an enormous government building—most of it for foreigners. The laborers wore clothes and headwear from across the middle kingdom, and they shouted to one another in tones and dialects from every province.

By the time they returned to Chongqing's upper city in a deliveryman's truck, it was well past 5 PM. The Japanese planes were gone, the garden in front of their building was a

mess of fallen masonry and broken brick. Everything was coated in a thick layer of residue from chemical bombs. If it didn't ignite properly, peach-colored clouds floated down from the sky. They called it longevity—it couldn't be washed away no matter how many times it rained or how hard they scrubbed with brushes, it had to be scraped off.

Aiwei got a broom and swept with their neighbors. She wanted to tell everyone about their adventure in the cave. Meishi came home still wearing theater make-up from the club where he entertained foreign dignitaries. Aiwei dropped the broom and ran to the gate. She poured out the story of star spirits on cave walls guiding them home, and the bats who blessed them.

Meishi came into the kitchen to help Lucy, he burst into tears. "Lucy, what would we do if anything happened to the two of you?" He collapsed in her arms.

Lucy held him by the shoulders. "What are you talking about?"

"It was on the afternoon broadcast. 1,200 people died in the cavern today. Something about the Japanese accelerating their bombing raids. A failure of the cave ventilation. And a cave-in. How did you get out?"

Her knees felt weak, she had to sit. "A side tunnel collapsed. People were trapped and no one would help them."

"They're not going to dig out the bodies. People were trampled to death. Others suffocated before the doors were opened."

"I was so scared when they wouldn't let us out. We followed people who thought there was another way through the caverns."

Aiwei brought Meishi's pot of cold cream and a hand towel. "You wouldn't believe it, uncle. We ran into outlaws and soldier-thieves in Daping. We barely escaped." She threw

herself into a chair to watch Meishi clean his face.

Meishi wiped away his tears. “I’m afraid your mama has been careless with you, pumpkin. What should she receive? Twenty lashes?”

Aiwei squealed with delight. She loved it when Meishi sentenced Lucy to jail or to a whipping. Though no one carried out the sentences.

11

Chongqing - August 1945

In the center of Chongqing, the *Daily News* editorial offices were on the second story of a century-old brick tea-trading company. Reporters, copy editors, and city editors were in an open area with scarred wooden desks, ringing telephones, and typewriters on moving stands. Filthy floor-to-ceiling windows were tilted open to vent summer heat. Heavy manufacturing fumes and diesel exhaust were suctioned in from the street along with paper fibers, ink mist, and metal particles from the printing presses below. Yufeng and Yuyan, their bǎoguǎn, custodians, constantly dusted and swept, but faced a losing battle. They were gathered at a long conference table for the weekly editorial meeting. Mr. Wu, the Editor-in-Chief, sat at one end with his notes laid on his large belly and read each assignment aloud. Even with the windows open, the air cigarette-cooked and reporters and city editors stared blank-faced while Lucy pulled threads from her frayed cuff.

“Well?” Mr. Wu said.

Pressure was mounting. She had to say something, anything. “It’s newsworthy," Lucy said.

“That’s your only reason?” Mr. Wu said. His toad-eyes were magnified behind large, smudged spectacles. “Too risky if you’re wrong.” He turned over the page on his belly. “Next.”

Lucy reached out with her arms revealing ink-stained cuffs. “I wasn’t wrong about the American weapons. Was I?”

“What did they call them?”

“Atom bombs,” Lucy said. “Everyone thought I was crazy. You said that two explosions in Japan could never end the war.”

“It’s not exactly over,” Wendell Xu said. He was a reporter who sat at the desk next to hers and was near her age. “How many Imperial soldiers are still here? A million? Two?”

“They gave up the tanks and airplanes. But their swords, pistols, and bayonets. Who’s going to make them?”

All across occupied territory, newspapers made clear to Chinese citizens—Japan had been defeated by western technology, not Chiang Kai-shek’s armies.

“Did you see the story about the Nationalist soldiers sent to Shanghai? The Americans transported them to take over the Japanese Garrison. They refused to get off the ship. The Americans had to throw them overboard,” Wendell said.

“I wouldn’t get off either. Do you know what it’s like to live under Japanese occupation?” Lin said sadly. “To face a thousand slaps day after day? Or the bayonet? Or the Kempei Tai?”

“The Japanese lost the war; you’d think they would be contrite.”

“They won’t lay down their weapons until they get a favorable agreement with Chiang. In the meantime, they’re ransacking Shanghai.”

“The first time anybody ever heard Showa’s voice and it’s to surrender to America and Britain. Their war lasted four years. Ours has been fifteen.”

“Nobody cares about China, Korea, Formosa, Philippines, Burma, India, Malay, Singapore—we’re brown people,” Lin said.

Lucy lost patience and slapped the table to regain attention. “Chiang Kai-shek’s victory announcement was ridiculous. He didn’t explain anything. My story clarified the

nature of the bombs, their power, the German scientists. And *why* the emperor surrendered."

"She's right about that," Wendell said.

"We had the information before the newsreel service. Nobody scoops the newsreels. We had it before anybody in China. But you didn't trust me then either," Lucy said.

Mr. Wu used his shirttails to rub his spectacles, then scraped at one with a thumbnail. His shaved and oiled head reflected green from the shades rolled up over the windows. His silence made her bolder.

"And later, when I wrote about the Japanese Imperial Command leaving soldiers and technical experts behind, ordering them to work with Chiang Kai-shek's generals, you wouldn't run that story."

"What about it, Lucy? You're the only one who squawks when a story is rejected."

"First, my stories get rejected more than anybody's. And second, my stories are always scoops. And third, the Americans approved the deal. Nobody finds that shocking? The Americans agreed to allow *their* enemy to share industrial technology with China?"

Mr. Wu lifted his spectacles up into a shaft of light swirling with cigarette smoke. "The technology will be wasted. Chiang Kai-shek's generals are old; they won't try anything new. All they have is loyalty, not brains," he said and started reading the next feature story in his notes.

"Wait!" Lucy said. "You're right about his generals!" Mr. Wu looked up and blinked at her lazily. "They're set in their ways. They're yes-men and warlords. But that's not the story. My angle is irony. Bitter enemies become partners in the space of a day. A week. Not just China and Japan, but America and Japan."

Wendell stubbed out a cigarette in an overfull ashtray. "Everyone knows the Japanese

ran the occupied areas shùnlì de jinxing." Like clockwork. "They always use the most modern methods and they're disciplined—"

"Yes," said Lin, an older reporter who had escaped from Tianjin during the war. He had suffered terribly and had lost his wife and children under Japanese occupation. "They have killing and oppression down to a science. Like factory work," he said bitterly. "It will be difficult for them to teach Chiang's generals; old dogs don't learn new tricks. They didn't trust each other enough to share power and defeat the enemy."

Lucy had to bite her tongue, or she'd lash out. Their editorial meetings always descended into accusations about Chiang, westerners, the Japanese, their own divided people. They were like children fighting over toys.

"Lǎo Lin," Elder Lin, Lucy said respectfully. "Japan offered us valuable knowledge and expertise that our allies couldn't or wouldn't offer. We can argue all day about Chiang's ability to make use of it. That's beside the point. What's important to me is that you trust my contact and my information. He has always been correct."

"Lucy is right," Wendell said and lit a cigarette with a slim Russian lighter.

Lin snatched the cigarette away from him, sucked on it, then blew the smoke in Wendell's face.

Wendell waved it away, unbothered, and took out another. He tamped it on the table while he reviewed a list of front-page news stories. "Lucy's brought in more features than anybody, yet she hardly ever gets the byline. If her contact says the peasant army is over a million soldiers, I vote for printing it."

The table erupted into shouts and arguments, everyone talking over each other with different opinions until Mr. Wu gaveled the table. "I'll not publish a story that communists

are coming to kill every person in Chongqing! It's madness."

"She said they wanted to kill Japanese collaborators and anti-communists—" Wendell said.

"And anybody who worked for the Nationalist government," Lin said puffing the cigarette.

"And journalists. That's everybody in Chongqing!" Mr. Wu said.

"And they're going to Wuhan first," Lin said, at which the arguing began all over again.

Mr. Wu gaveled the table. "You see? Madness!"

"I know how it sounds," Lucy said. "I showed you the photos. They're rounding up and killing people in cities and villages across the nation. Hundreds of thousands if the reports are to be believed. The accounts are from journalists and war correspondents who witness the events. They're professionals like you and me. Names you recognize, they've reporting in newspapers and magazines in Shanghai, Beijing, Wuhan, Shandong, Tianjin. Some of them are famous."

"It's the Americans, they're behind it," Lin said.

"Why would you say that?" Wendell sighed.

"It's the Russians," an editor said. "They want another Bolshevik Revolution."

"You mean the Soviets."

"Who cares?"

Lucy left the office headed toward the lower city. At the stairs, a woman with rags tied around her feet sat on a three-legged stool singing for coins. It was a beautiful aria in Cantonese. Her voice was a low register, sorrowful, almost bitter.

Overhead the purple layer of clouds was thinning, pulled out by river breezes warmed by the sun. The woman sang in fanxian style. *How I regret now that I was lured by the world and came down the mountain to wander.* It was *Madame White Snake*; the same song Weishi had sung at the first business banquet Lucy attended the night her father brought her into their family business. She hadn't known that shuyu, courtesan entertainers, were still acceptable or that father had hired them for the season. Weishi sang only to father. He watched intently, tenderly, and smiled at her all evening. That was before anyone knew she was his lover or that she was pregnant with Aiwei.

She hadn't thought of father in a long time. It was too painful, they had an argument and she said terrible things to him the night Shanghai was bombed, the night he and her mother were killed.

She fumbled in her pockets for a coin to give the woman though she had none to spare. The woman with the melancholy voice had given back a memory she thought she'd lost; father had been happy before he died. She wanted to show gratitude. She placed a coin in the woman's lap.

Henry came in from the Department of Finance, ashen faced, shoulders slumped like he carried a weight home. He hadn't looked so upset in years.

Meishi went to him with a hug and led him to the table. "Aiwei, get Uncle Henry a cup of tea."

Lucy prepared herself for bad news. "What happened?"

"Negotiations between Chiang and Mao have broken down—neither will ever compromise or live in peace together. The two sides asked for audit reports to prove the nation is solvent."

"Chiang or Mao?"

"Don't be stupid," Henry snapped. "The ones who actually paid for Chiang and Mao to fight the Japanese—the Americans and the Soviets, of course."

Lucy winced. "What's this about?"

"All this time, they were supposed to be united against the Japanese. The war has been a miserable failure because they hate each other. Now, the countries who financed it want to know if enormous amounts of their money were syphoned off—it's perfectly obvious to everyone that it was." He dropped his face in his hands. "Damn our father, Lucy. Damn him, and damn Amherst."

Weishi rubbed Henry's shoulders tenderly and kissed the crown of his head. "Calm down. It won't help to fall apart. Tell us exactly what happened and then we can decide what to do."

Henry pounded the table. "T.V. Soong is what happened. And the Russian one, Petrov."

"Aunt Olive's brother? Mother said many times that he's very smart, Henry."

"The economy is in shambles, or haven't you noticed? They're printing money like New Year's joss paper—prices are rising by the hour. And I've got a team of people fabricating a set of books to show that everything is peachy."

"What?"

"Yes, years' worth. Chiang's accounts. Mao's accounts. A complete lie."

"Alright, that's not so bad."

"Experts are looking at them, Lucy. Entire armies have been financed and equipped for Chiang and Mao—half of them are fictitious. The payroll, supplies, the weapons—all of

it went on the black market. The Americans know it, the Soviets know it, but the accountants don't. The official audit has my signature on it."

Lucy closed her eyes and rubbed her forehead, if only the nightmare would end. Over a decade of war with Japan, not a day without the stench of burning bodies and gnawing hunger in her belly. "What about the real records?"

Aiwei slid tea in front of Henry—almond-scented steam curled up from the cup then melted into this air like a ghost. He bowed to her. "Thank you, apricot eyes."

Meishi finished wiping off makeup and took Aiwei by the hand. "I think we'll go visit Miss Cai upstairs and see if we can listen to the mid-autumn festival on her radio."

After they left, Henry looked more miserable than ever. "Zenwei ordered me to burn the original books and sign the forgeries. I laughed at him. I thought he was joking. We've been friends for six years. Then he pulled his gun and said I could die right there, or I could risk jail if anyone ever discovered the fraud. It was my choice."

"Henry, I'm so sorry."

"I told him he'd never get away with it; Aunt Olive would be furious. He said it was her idea. That father had bragged how well I did in accounting at Amherst. She ordered him to have me produce the books."

Lucy covered her ears. She wanted to scream, to pull out Aunt Olive's hair. They were family and had known each other all their lives. They didn't know her at all. She distanced herself after the war started and said it was because of father's business ties to the Japanese. That she loved them. But everyone had business with Japan. Then, Lucy wrote a story about refugees that angered her. The final break was Aiwei. Aunt Olive was a Methodist and thought raising a child of sin dishonored their mother.

“Your eye is twitching again, Henry.”

“It’s my nerves. My blood pressure is high again. I don’t know if I can go on like this.”

He was already gray at the temples; his face was drawn. He was only 27 years-old but looked as old as father.

“You did what was necessary. Meditation will calm you.”

Henry finished his tea and sat in a lotus pose by the window overlooking a giant elm clothed in autumn-gold. The incendiary chemical longevity had covered the leaves and the setting sun made them glow pink, the color of love. It was an illusion, the elm was poisoned and unable to drop its leaves. It was smothering and would soon die. Already, flowers in window boxes all along the street had withered to brown.

Henry looked serene sitting by the window. He could forgive easily, and release hurt and grudges. Confucius said some crimes carry punishment and others carry guilt. If one prayed, Heaven granted divine mercy. Aunt Olive sacrificed him to cover up her husband and her brother’s wrongdoing. It was really to protect herself which was an offense against Heaven. She had no one to pray to, nowhere to turn for forgiveness.

12

Chongqing - 1945

"Ban lǎoshī," my teacher, Miss Ban, "Said that if I'm late again, I have to stay after school and write a whole page of characters," Aiwei said.

They were on the way to St. Mary's walking in the dusty trail next to Boundary Road. It was newly paved, four-lanes where traffic, pedestrians, and bicycles converged from a patchwork of old brick streets and dirt roads on their way to jobs and schools in the city. Aiwei swung her new bookbag, which Henry brought her from the Finance Ministry.

The Ting Shih T'ai bell rang; late as usual.

"She'd punish you when she knows we walk so far?" Lucy said.

"Uh huh."

Next to them, German-made and American-made delivery trucks rumbled along the road already rutted from overuse, their huge tires kicking up dust and mud. Lucy pulled Aiwei further into the grass. It didn't matter how many bars of laundry soap she used, her school uniform was stained from a daily shower of red soil. She hated construction traffic which had been ongoing for years. As the Japanese took more land, more government work, universities, businesses, embassies, and hospitals relocated to Chongqing. People needed apartments, hongs, groceries—they sprouted like weeds. Truck drivers were paid only if they met their delivery schedules, they slowed for no one.

An obstinate donkey swayed into the road. An old Minsheng truck veered sharply, the driver laid on the horn and hurled curses out his window. Nationalist soldiers who'd hitched a ride were bounced back and forth on top of sacks. A pallet shook loose and fell out with a

pair of soldiers still clinging to it. The driver braked hard, and a truck behind swerved to avoid a collision. A chain reaction of near crashes ensued. The Minsheng driver jumped out screaming that his materials were irreplaceable. The cost had already gone up. He ran around back screaming that he couldn't afford it, and begged the soldiers to help him heave the pallet back in.

Aiwei laughed and laughed—it was like music. The man in the donkey cart kept moving, laughing until he was out of sight. Old ladies walking in front of them stopped and watched, cackling at the poor driver. Lucy pictured the man's children and wife, an elderly mother, all going without because the driver wasn't going to get paid. Since the war, humor had gotten dark. People thought the defeat of others was hilarious—sàng humor. She didn't like it.

All the soldiers climbed out and took turns scolding the driver for not fastening the pallet better. They made sure he'd miss the delivery time, but they helped him reload. Aiwei saw Lucy smiling at her and hugged her around the waist. In that moment Lucy didn't care about the driver or the soldiers. All the trucks on the road could overturn if it would make her pumpkin happy.

At the schoolhouse, Aiwei ran inside without looking back, then turned at the door and yelled that she wanted to stay late, she'd walk home with a girl who lived on their street, probably after dinnertime. Lucy hurried back to the city; she was late for work again. By the time she got to the *Chongqing Daily Newspaper*, the office was already in chaos. It was like a factory floor when all twelve reporters were in. Four type setters were at their linotypes setting up pages, and the printing press in the basement was burning ink and oil, heated paper thwacking around huge rollers. Yet it wasn't near the deadline time. She made her way

through messy desks pushed together in disorganized ways. Everyone quieted when she walked through and looked away when she said, "Zǎoshang hǎo." Good morning.

Something important had happened, and she was sure it involved her. No one would look her in the face. Mr. Wu had never liked her but didn't dare fire her because Madame Chiang Kai-shek was her Aunt Olive. But it didn't stop him from calling her into his office almost daily when she was late and berating her in the huge window into the newsroom where everyone could see.

She made her way to her desk. Next to her, Wendell said quietly, "Today wasn't the day to be late, Lucy! Here, look at this." He slid a magazine across from his desk to hers.

Time Magazine dated a month prior. The cover was one of the photos she'd sent Joe; a Cantonese woman carrying a child along a bomb-pocked road, a naked child running behind. In the background, a burning train.

"That's my photograph!"

"Hush! There's a problem. The man with Wu is from Military Affairs. He's here about the article," Wendell said.

Through the window into Mr. Wu's office, it appeared the man in uniform was angry with Mr. Wu. Lucy flipped through the magazine. It was full of her photos, all in color. Page after page of children, women, terrorized faces, bombs caught as they were falling on roads clogged with refugees. There was a clear sense of what she intended, the war was worse for women and children than anyone. On their faces was starvation, desperation, despair. Joe had given her sole byline credit. It was titled, "The Suffering of a Nation." He'd published all her photos like he promised. *Time*, with the largest circulation in America! She was going to cry. She bit the inside of her cheek to stop it. Not here, no weakness in front of people she worked

with. They were watching, looking for a reaction. Everyone tried so hard to ignore civilian deaths, and yet it was all around them. Newspapers and magazines in Great Britain, Europe, Northern Africa showed the reality of war, but not in China. Now they saw.

Wendell yanked back the magazine.

"Wait!" she said.

He slipped it underneath a pile of papers and pretended to edit a story. "Here he comes," he whispered.

Mr. Wu shuffled toward her with the uniformed official behind. She felt an urge to run but she couldn't, her legs were shaking.

"Lucy Lau, please stand," Mr. Wu said.

She stood. Mr. Wu was Sichuanese, tall and rotund. He looked down at her through thick-lens glasses, he had fisheyes. He laid a copy of the magazine on her desk. "Have you seen this?"

Wendell wouldn't look up. "No. I mean, yes. I glanced—" Lucy said.

"You've brought shame to our nation and to the newspaper—"

"What? It's a feature spread! Showing the truth of war will raise foreign aid—"

"Dī néng!" Incompetent! "All you've done is make China look backward and inept compared to Japan, a modernized, disciplined nation. Why do you think we run stories of victory and achievement? Shèng zhě wáng hóu bài zhě kòu, Lucy." The winner becomes king, the loser is vilified.

"The stories you make us write aren't true, everybody knows it," she said.

"Do you know what you've done to Madame Chiang's efforts with foreign governments? Tirelessly she flies around the globe to raise money. She speaks on behalf of

our nation to end disease, to help our children, our soldiers. And you sabotaged her!"

"No!" Lucy's said, confused about what was happening. The magazine was a month old, if it was so damaging why didn't she know before now? Joe would have told her. "Aunt Olive supports my photography."

"Not anymore!" Mr. Wu nearly exploded; pulled at his own hair. "Mùtourén!" Idiot! "She's the face of the New Life Movement. Making cities clean, vaccinations, feeding refugees and children, bringing doctors to Chongqing. You're her nominal niece and you criticized everything she's done. In the foreign press, no less. *Time Magazine* of all places."

"There's so much suffering, so much need. I wanted to help." Lucy said, but it sounded as hollow as a cracked bowl.

The official with Mr. Wu stepped forward, threw a newspaper on her desk, the *Shanghai Evening Post and Mercury*. He was small and thin with tones from Northern China. He must have been trained with KMT secret police in Manchukuo. "The Kempei Tai," Japanese Intelligence. "Reprinted all of this. They used it as propaganda and ran extra-editions in Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjin. What started out as an embarrassment for Generalissimo Chiang and Madame Chiang has been made into a political humiliation. And your hand is on the knife in their back."

The entire newsroom was silent. Everyone stared at her. She was numb, she had no words, no explanation. It didn't seem possible that what happened to her in the hutment fire twelve years before was unfolding in nearly the exact same way. Despite her good intentions, fate had led her to another disgrace. She pictured the tormented faces of father and māma, they'd been forced to turn her over to municipal authorities in Shanghai and watch as police led her away for publishing photos that violated censorship laws. The court found them liable

for her crime because she was their responsibility.

Lucy bowed to Mr. Wu with her hands extended. “Duìbuqǐ, wǒ cuòle,” she said. The deepest, most sincere apology one could offer.

Mr. Wu’s face softened toward her for a moment. “It’s too late for apologies,” he said.

The official sighed with disgust and snatched up his newspaper. “Madame Chiang wishes me to tell you that there will be no further contact between you.” He left the office.

Mr. Wu’s mouth tightened, he mumbled obscenities, and worked himself up again. Whatever he would say next left no room for kindness. “I can’t fire you, Madame Chiang forbids it out of filial duty to your deceased mother.”

Lucy knew better, Aunt Olive didn’t care one wit about filial duty. But she cared about her public image. And for that, Lucy was eternally grateful. Dismissing her niece, even a nominal niece, would appear petty and vengeful, an acknowledgement that there was more truth in photos than in the government’s propaganda. Her role as a great humanitarian would be tarnished, the money she secured from governments and charities would dry up.

Mr. Wu narrowed his fisheyes. He was ready to deliver the final blow. “I’ve been instructed to cut your salary,” he said. “And you’re banished from the newsroom. You won’t be causing further damage. Take your things and get out!”

Lucy leaned against her desk to steady herself. Wendell looked up from his story with concern. “What?” she stammered. “We barely live on what I earn! Mr. Wu, please don’t!”

“You should be grateful you haven’t been arrested!” Mr. Wu snapped. “Can you imagine how awkward that would be for the paper? For me as Editor-in-Chief?”

Whispers spread through the newsroom. General Dai Li and his secret police made

people like her, people who criticized Madame Chiang or the Generalissimo, disappear never to be seen again. Mr. Wu was right; it could have been much worse. She had no choice but to accept her fate, to fade into the background.

"Mr. Wu, what about story assignments? How will I get my photos developed?" she said.

Mr. Wu flinched when she said photos. "I've left assignments for you in the mailroom. That's where you'll find them from now on. Chieh-lu will get what you need from the supplies closet." He made sure everyone in the newsroom heard him say, "In the future, when Miss Lau comes to get assignments, no one will speak to her unless necessary. And you, Miss Lau, are under strict instructions not to stay longer than fifteen minutes." He returned to his office and slammed the door hard enough to rattle the window.

The staff began to openly criticize her. They wanted her to hear. Wendell sat on the edge of her desk and dared anyone to tell Wu. "Don't worry, this will be forgotten soon. Nobody gets *Time* except diplomats and rich merchants. And those newspapers the Japanese reprinted it in? Only collaborators read them." He leaned in and tried to smile. "Nobody cares about the New Life Movement anymore."

Old Ling, their cartoonist, who hated Mr. Wu and insulted him constantly because she'd been famous longer than Lucy had been alive, appeared with a fresh drawing. It was Mr. Wu with a fishtail and exaggerated fisheyes holding *Time Magazine.* His hair and fishtail were on fire. "I'm going to miss you, child," she said and hugged Lucy. "Don't give up the good fight."

Lucy returned home with a sack of supplies and two story-assignments. Mr. Wu wrote a single instruction across the top, write what you're told. She threw the papers in the

bedroom she shared with Aiwei and rearranged the furniture in the front room to clear a space near the window. In the afternoon, sun filtered through the branches of a dead elm in the courtyard. It was perfect for taking photographs, she didn't have to use reflectors or extra lamps. She put water on the stove, set out the Ming teacups, and dragged her dressing mirror and changing screen in. She set her portfolio on a low table by the chuang, couch, just in time. There was a knock at the door. Her clients were early.

"Lucy Lau? I'm Jiesha and this is Letian," said a tall, refined-looking man in a Beijing accent. He wore a nicely tailored western suit and next to him was a young man carrying a garment bag.

She bowed and showed them to the chuang, offered her portfolio to look through while she prepared tea in the kitchen. Meishi had pestered her to take photographs for his clients at the club where he performed. Everybody had a fùyè, side occupation, to make extra money, and he believed it was time she had one, too. She had booked a few clients. Now she'd have to grow her business in earnest. She could do it. Photography was her passion, especially portraits in the manner of old paintings. Everyone wanted a photo taken for entertainment, fantasy projection, artistic amusement. They were image doubles, Aiwei called them paper mirrors.

She waited for the water to boil and began to feel dejected again. She had felt the same way about the photos before the war, defying censorship laws. Her parents lost everything. Afterward, it didn't matter that the photographs had predicted the Japanese invasion. She wasn't vindicated, the government never admitted their disastrous policies led to war, never apologized for destroying her family. It was happening again, she'd ruined everything because she wanted to show the truth of the war. She couldn't stand that Mr. Wu

stopped her and censored her stories. She complained to Henry and reasoned that people should know. He told her to quit talking and do something.

"You're wallowing in self-pity!" he had shouted at her. "If father were alive, he'd be ashamed of you! When will you learn?" And he stalked off with Meishi.

She learned. She wasn't a victim of circumstances, she created them. And she didn't care what anyone thought of her. She cared about the photos, the people in them. She sent the photos to Joe hoping they'd be published. And just like before, the people around her would suffer for it.

She poured water into the Ming teapot, replaced the lid. Steam curled out the spout toward the ceiling. It was a secret weapon of sorts. Everyone knew the three friends of winter motif painted on the outside in classic blue and white, the branches of plum, pine, and bamboo conveyed steadfastness, perseverance, and resilience. She wanted potential clients to identify her with those qualities. The teapot was a subtle reminder that she was a trusted business associate.

"Miss Lau? Miss Lau, do you need any help?" Jiesha called.

"I'll be right there," Lucy said and carried the tray into the front room where they were staring at one of the pages in her portfolio.

Jiesha wore a sad smile. "So many of your photos are heartbreaking. The trains are so crowded and overloaded. And the boats—"

"At the beginning of the war, I was a reporter documenting the Japanese invasion," Lucy said.

Letian flipped the page. "This is Yuan Shikai," he said incredulously.

It was a man sitting in a small boat on a placid mountain lake dressed as a humble

fisherman. He wore a straw cape and hat and held a pole pretending to fish.

"Yes." Lucy set down the tray.

"You didn't take this picture!"

"I did," Lucy said. "I haven't been able to afford a studio stamp for the back. Yet."

"I've seen this photo everywhere. It's practically famous," Letian said.

"Really?" Lucy sat in a chair opposite them. Letian was excited, but Jiesha showed little emotion.

"He's going to be elected Provincial Superintendent of Sichuan," Letian said.

"I'm afraid I don't know much about local politics. I'm from Shanghai and—"

"He's a warlord. He fooled everyone into thinking he's some simple, honest man from the countryside. Your photo is a trick."

"Yes, it's a trick. He wasn't on the lake. The photo was taken right here in the apartment. The lake was a second photo that I double exposed—"

"This poem on the bottom, 'The fisherman looks down on aristocrats.' Did you add that?" Jiesha said.

Lucy leaned back in her chair; an awful feeling crept up from her stomach, a sour feeling. "No, he had chosen it before he the photo was taken," she said. "Why?"

"He's not humble or poor. He's militant and ambitious. Your photo reformed his reputation, tricked people," Jiesha said. "He made everyone think he wasn't interested in politics."

"The rest of the poem says, 'The heart of this old peasant carries weapons and arrow.' He didn't hide his intentions," Lucy said.

"The photo gained him huge popularity," Jiesha said.

“Photos project an aspect of oneself,” Lucy said. “You know that. It multiplies the self. There is an aspect—"

“It’s not her fault, Jiesha,” Letian said leafing through the portfolio. “If not Miss Lau, someone else would have taken it.” To her, he said, “Jiesha takes politics personally.” He stopped at a photo of a woman in traditional robes holding a basket of chrysanthemums. “The goddess scattering flowers is interesting,” he said.

“The grieving goddess of the Luo River,” Lucy said. Letian nodded. “But she’s not dressed as the traditional character. She’s dressed as beautiful Luofu a more modern character. Do you see, a little eroticism has been introduced? With a tone of emptiness. I’ve used the old literary form and contrasted it with a newer poem. It was an effort to evoke Vimalakīrti—”

“Yes!” Letian clapped. “It’s very funny! And smart. I love it! Look Jiesha, Miss Lau has mixed myth and literature to make something new. Do you have more costumes? Other settings?” Letian said.

“I don’t have use settings. I use a double exposure technique. I can use any background. Like the mountain lake in Yuan’s photo,” Lucy said. Jiesha and Letian looked around the bare apartment judging its spareness which made her nervous. “I have costumes, let me show you.” She retrieved the suitcase of Weishi’s clothes. They rightfully belonged to Aiwei, she was plundering the child’s inheritance again. She hesitated. Letian and Jiesha were pointing at photographs, examining them carefully. She opened the suitcase; everything was neatly folded with tissue paper.

“Oh, my!” Letian said. “These are beautiful.” He began pulling out items one by one. Head pieces and dresses with beading, sequins, pin pleats. “Oh, Jiesha, look at this!

Gorgeous. Much nicer than what I brought…”

“You brought your own?” Lucy said.

“Yes, but these…”

Lucy said, “I have to charge extra—”

“I don’t care,” Letian said.

“Your photos are beautifully done,” Jiesha said with his hand on a glossy photo of the goddess. “No shadows or blurs. The angles are ideal.” He smiled at her. His eyes were intelligent and patient. He had the demeanor of literati. His hands were soft and uncalloused, white face washed in rice-water, kept from the sun. He was unused to hard work.

“I agree,” Letian said. “Whatever you charge. I agree.” He returned to the tray to pour tea for the three of them.

Jiesha took a cup, waited for her to take one before sipping. He was well mannered. She liked him very much. The tea filled her with a harmonious sense of ming, fate. Everything would be alright. Weishi’s clothes, the photos, her banishment from the newsroom, her reduced pay.

“Do you know what kind of photo you’d like, Letian?” she said.

“My cousin knew what he wanted when he got here,” Jiesha said.

“I see,” Lucy said. “An entreating-self photo?”

They were the most popular. Two images of the same person: one standing, one kneeling. Or one inside a window, one outside. The person in masculine clothes, and feminine, pretending to be a couple. The imagery showed self-empowerment, the rejection of foreign authority. New China was looking for help from within rather than from outside. She could do a more contemporary interpretation. An imitation of Ming era pleasure paintingsHe

could dress to play meiren, an idealized young woman yearning for love in her boudoir. It was trendy to be a fashionable Western woman; exotic, desired by all. To feel coveted, powerful, with admirers, wearing a different cultural mask.

Letian said, “I’d like something with five or six exposures.”

Lucy smiled inwardly, a challenge. “I see,” she said and sipped her tea slowly. “I don’t yet have a price for that.” She wasn’t sure it was possible. Four exposures were the most she’d attempted. “Did you see the four-exposure photo in the portfolio? The client is a novelist.” She didn’t know why she felt the need to explain. Changqing was her name, nineteen years old, she wanted something playful. “I posed her at a table in four different costumes.”

“Here it is,” Letian said. “She has four different expressions, too.”

Changqing was very intelligent and while she changed dresses, Lucy quite enjoyed their conversation.

Jiesha looked at the photo closely. “I wonder what it would be like to have four different bodies. Four different faces for the world to see,” he said.

“It’s strange you should say that,” Lucy said. “She and I talked about the same thing.” When the final photograph revealed itself, she titled it, “The Transformation of a Lady,” which deeply moved Changqing. “I think the photo shows the different paths her life could have taken.”

“Hmm,” Letian said and turned the page.

Jiesha smiled at her for a long time, seemingly intrigued by the thought. Most people regarded photos as shadows on paper; it was reflection, something artificial that was made real. Other people believed the camera captured part of a person’s physical image. As I was,

not as I am, or will be. They were mirrors with memory. But the four images of Changqing had captured something more true. What was, is, and could be. Her paper mirrors reflected the reality of many selves. It was like the Buddhist concept of emanation bodies. The camera's magic was that it had the 'marks of reality.' Her photos *created* many selves.

Lucy looked over the rim of her cup, she wanted to be honest. "Letian, I haven't taken a six-exposure photo before. But there's no reason I can't do it."

Letian stood. "I'm willing to try," he said. "Price isn't a concern. I think this one." He pulled an emerald-green gown from the suitcase along with his garment bag.

She resisted the urge to pull Weishi's dress out of his hands. She told herself Letian was a gift, they needed the money. There was another issue, she had vowed that she would never make the same mistake she made on the *River Maid*. "There's one more thing."

"Yes, what is it?" Letian said.

She set down her cup and stood. "I'd like to be paid in foreign currency."

Jiesha frowned, leaned forward. "That's a problem," he said.

Her heart sank. She should have been happy with Fabi. Just because they wore good clothes, had impeccable manners, and had an aura of wealth didn't mean they had foreign currency. She must have misjudged.

"Yes," Letian said. "Anything other than dollars or rubles would be difficult."

She wanted to cry with relief. She helped Letian with the changing screen. "Either would be fine," she said.

While mounting her camera on a tripod, she pictured herself buying all of the vegetables the *River Maid* carried and tipping a porter to carry the crates to the upper city. Watching Aiwei gorge on cabbage rolls and pickled cucumbers for days, her eyes clearing

with every bite.

Letian rattled on and on while he changed. “I want you to print dozens of copies along with a poem I’ve written. Then, I’m going to send them to all my friends so they can respond in verse. It’ll be so much fun!”

Yule type photos were entertainment for a group of friends, and most fun if they sent back poems and comments, or their own photos.

Jiesha rolled his eyes and whispered to her, “Oh, to be young again!”

He was her age, maybe a year or two older, possibly twenty-eight. Yet he seemed more mature, and serious. Letian emerged in the haute couture gown. Father had it flown in from Berlin for Weishi when he discovered she was going to have his child. Lucy had no idea until after Aiwei was born and Weishi told her the story. The dress was exquisite, five layers of gossamer fabric with filaments of gold thread running through it and a skin-colored silk underlayer. Letian brought padded breasts, he looked almost naked beneath the layers. He was like a huli jing fox spirit who appeared to humans as beautiful temptresses. He handed her his poem neatly printed on a card.

“You could get into *Meiyu* looking like that,” Jeisha said motioning for Letian to twirl for them, which he did. *Eyebrow Talk* was a racy women’s magazine with extravagant fashion.

“You’re beautiful,” Lucy said. “Come, stand by the window. Now, look right at me.”

“That’s rather brazen,” Jeisha said.

“I know,” Lucy smiled.

Jiesha got him laughing, carelessly tilting back his head as though he were an ingénue. “I sense a new obsession for Letian!”

Time flew. She felt like she had known Jiesha and Letian for years, they had much in common. There was a knock at the door which Jiesha answered for her. It was Wendell who came in with a box full of documents and photos.

He was beside himself and pulled her into the kitchen. "Lucy, something terrible has happened. You said it would. All the information you need is in this box. It proves everything your contact told you. Get it to your friend in Chicago." He turned to go, grabbed her in a hug. "Please, Lucy, leave Chongqing now. While you can."

13

Chongqing - October 10, 1949

“Slow down, Wendell! I can’t go so fast on this old linotype. It hurts my fingers!” Lucy was getting a breaking story exactly as Wendel was spitting it out. He was agitated, barely taking a breath, two strings of xiao mian noodles swinging from his mouth. He’d left negotiations between Chiang Kai-shek and Chou Enlai that afternoon.

“You should have seen Chou Enlai. He kept saying no. You know how he is; so polite. Petrov screamed, Nǐ gěi wǒ tīng hǎo!” You better listen!

“And then?” The wall clock ticked closer to the deadline, she had to get Wendell to go faster. If anyone found her in the newsroom, they’d both be in trouble.

“General Wedemeyer lost his mind. I thought he was going to pick up Chiang like a rock and throw him in the river.” Wendell used his chopsticks to dredge noodles into his mouth, red pepper oil dripped down his shirt.

“Keep going,” Lucy said.

“He said that Chiang had been warned about the opium, there’s no more money from America. He tried to say it in Mandarin like Petrov, but it came out nonsensical.”

She knew it! Big-eared Tu and the Green Gang, the drug trafficking was always going to be Chiang’s downfall. U.S. and Soviet diplomats knew about his brotherhood ties with Tu, and his past with warlords. They spent four years overlooking it because Chiang opium raised money for the army. They needed Chiang to lead China after the civil war; Mao wasn’t a real option. But the generalissimo was temperamental, vain, childish. And he neglected his troops. By the time America sent Wedemeyer to finish a peace deal work out

political concessions, it was apparent that Mao had been busy secretly stirring up a peasant rebellion in the countryside. He never intended to compromise with the Nationalists.

“Chou left for the Winter Airfield, flew back to Yan‘an. Mao is poised to take over every major city in the north.”

“What do you mean?”

“The communist army is huge. Your contact was right. Mao conscripted recruits all across the central plains. He gave peasants land if their sons joined the CCP.”

“He can’t do that. He signed the constitution.”

“Well, he did. Killed the landowners and handed it over. Oh, and Madame Chiang and the Generalissimo had a huge fight in front of everybody. You should have seen her, Lucy. She was furious. Chiang was hosting a meeting. She came down the stairs waving around black stockings and a silky, lacey thing. His eyes got so big I thought they were going to pop out. Then, she threw his false teeth at him. Started screaming that he never put them in for her anymore. She didn’t care, she wasn’t going to look at his ugly face anymore.”

Lucy leaned back in her chair. “Really?”

“That’s not all. She said he better be happy with his xiǎo sān,” little three, mistress, “Because she’d make sure no woman ever said yes again. He’s a chī dòu fu.” A pervert who forces himself on women.

“Oh, my.”

“I know. She doesn’t know there are dozens of girlfriends. I don’t know why, but they always say yes.”

Aunt Olive had been in America for over a year, avoiding Chiang as the war worsened and Japan destroyed everything from Shanghai to Wuhan to Chongqing. It went on

and on and then, without warning the Americans ended the war. Suddenly, the carnage and destruction abruptly ended. Millions of Japanese soldiers stopped fighting, but they still controlled every city and ran all the factories.

"She never cared before. Why now?" Lucy said.

"All the news services were there. Everyone got photos."

Aunt Olive was a strategist, she never did anything without a reason. "What about the battle for Shanghai?"

"Word is, Chou Enlai has agreed to let Chiang retreat to Taiwan." Wendell opened another noodle bowl. "Most of the Nationalists already moved their money out of local banks through Hong Kong to Taipei. The fighting in Shanghai will end as soon as Chiang leaves the mainland."

"Seems fair." Lucy began typing again. "Chiang let Chou escape in 1927. What about the rest of the nationalist army?"

Wendell wiped his mouth, set down the bowl, and pulled a stack of pictures from his bag. "These weren't in the box I gave you. They're from Changchun, Manchuria. I just got them from a low-level Soviet diplomat. The communists blockaded the city from May to October."

The top photo was CCP General Lin Biao with a group of his soldiers; as she flipped through the photos, they progressed from spring to winter, green landscape turned gray, trees became barren, soldiers grew thinner, their faces more hostile.

"I haven't heard about a siege."

"No one has. But 160,000 civilians starved before the nationalists surrendered."

"What? Why did they wait so long?"

"Keep looking." Thousands of KMT-uniformed bodies were piled in the snow, their faces and hands blackened from exposure. In later photos, spring grass was sprouting around the clothed skeletons. "Across the north, nationalist soldiers and anyone they even suspect is a collaborator has been rounded up and executed. The number is in the tens of thousands. That's on top of all the Japanese collaborators they've rounded up and killed." Wendell picked up his noodle bowl, set it down again. "Think about it. Manchuria was invaded by Japan in 1932. They were involved in all business; everyone is considered a collaborator. Best guess? 200,000 or more have been executed this year."

There were dozens of photos. Open pits piled with bodies, shrunken, faceless, nameless. It was worse than photos taken during the war, except the soldiers standing beside mass graves were Chinese, not Japanese.

Wendell watched over her shoulder; the smell of Sichuan pepper berries was sickening. He pointed to a young man with a newspaper in his hands, The Chongqing Daily.

"That's us!"

She couldn't bear it and turned the photos face-down. "Are you sure this is accurate?"

"I'm sure. Right now, Mao's army is rounding up anybody they think is anti-communist." He gulped his tea which had grown cold on the desk. "To answer your question, that's why the ntionalist soldiers didn't surrender."

"Tiān a!" By Heaven!

"The peace negotiators on both sides want to keep all this quiet. Except a friend of mine thinks people should know."

"A friend? The one who took you to Pianyan for the weekend?" Lucy envied Wendell's freedom to take a lover whenever he wanted. His friends were usually men in the

diplomatic corps of foreign countries who gave him breaking stories and decadent weekend trips in the mountains.

“Yes, but no one can know.”

She turned the photos face-up again, spread them out. The end of the war was supposed to be an end of violence. China had suffered enough. Yet here was a new wave of death rushing toward the capital. Chongqing was the prize in the civil war, Mao’s symbol of total victory over Chiang Kai-shek. That’s why Aunt Olive left, a survivor to the end.

“Chiang saw these photos, didn’t he?” Lucy said.

“Yes. He’s so stubborn, no one can reason with him.”

“And Mao can’t be pressured.”

“Exactly. They’d both let the nation burn.”

“They knew Chiang was losing the civil war for a long time.”

“They didn’t want to help him because he made deals with the warlords in Canton. He bought their loyalty just like in old dynasty days.”

Lucy rubbed her temples. Chiang couldn’t stop the warlords who threatened to rob and pillage the same way they had before the war. His army was busy fighting the Japanese. Instead, he bribed them. He sacrificed the people, the law, and the constitution.

“Oh, Wendell.”

“The diplomats suppressed these photos because they couldn’t risk public outrage against Mao, too.”

“He’s targeting people to kill. We have to print the photos.” She had to get Henry, Meishi, and Aiwei out of Chongqing immediately. Not only did she and Henry work for the nationalist regime, but everyone knew they were related to Aunt Olive.

"Are you joking?"

"People we know will be murdered."

"Do you smell that?"

Loud juddering and clanking followed by a rumble through the floor startled them. Smoke crept up the stairs. Lucy ran down to the printing room with Wendell behind her. All the pressmen were gone. Their brand-new printing press with elephant-size spools of paper that should have been unfurling at an incredible rate of speed, slipping through rollers and around cylinders of cast-linotype plates before being the cut, folded, and bundled—was jammed and furiously burning through lubricant and ink, producing streams of smoke.

"It's going to blow!" Lucy yelled.

"Turn it off!"

"How?"

The power control was near the paper rolls where gears strained and growled to be released. She was afraid to get any closer. The rollers jolted; she jumped back. The machine groaned. Less smoke spiraled out of the grinding cogs. Liquid must have run dry. The press shook violently, there was a loud bang. It fell silent.

Lucy stared at it. "This was done on purpose. Who would do such a thing?"

Wendell pushed a type-plate to the floor; it cracked in half. "Fuck Wu."

"Wu? He would never destroy the press."

"It's his fault. He kept the payroll money for himself. The rest of us are going hungry."

"Everyone in the city is owed back wages, even him."

"Wu is the enemy, Lucy, just like Chiang. Cào nǐ zǔ zōng shí bā dài." Fuck their

ancestors to the eighteenth generation.

There was a piece of metal type wedged inside the press, Lucy worked it until it came out. “This is what jammed it. This was stupid. Without papers to sell, nobody has money to leave the city.”

The press smelled like a bombed field. Every person in Chongqing in one way or another could be considered enemies of the CCP.

Wendell scrutinized the metal character in her hand. It was the character for change. “Whoever put that in the press didn’t expect to get back wages. Or to return to work.”

Lucy went home along empty streets. There were CCP check points being erected at the ancient city gates. At home, Aiwei, had set out the Ming tea set and was arranging and rearranging the cups. Lucy put a pot on the stove and poured boiling water into the teapot. She was determined to appear calm while planning to leave the city as soon as possible.

“Who are the soldiers on the street?” Aiwei said looking out the window.

“It’s the new army uniforms. Come look, see how I swirl the water like this?” Lucy held the teapot with both hands and rotated it slowly.

Aiwei peered inside. “It smells like dirt.”

“Because it’s Oolong. Uncle likes green tea, which is flowery. Some rare tea smells like pickles.”

“The pictures are pretty.” Aiwei touched the bird painted on the teapot. “Ow!”

“Careful. When you’re old like me, it won’t hurt very much. Do you remember what the trees mean?”

“The three friends of winter; Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism.”

“And the bird?”

“The magpie is for happiness.”

“Clever girl.”

“And we pass the tea set to our daughters, right mama?”

She nearly dropped the pot. She would never pass the Ming set to a daughter. “Yes, pumpkin. And we teach our daughters that family is important. We live by principles.”

Aiwei was much smarter and more responsible than Lucy had been at her age. She everything her father wanted in a daughter, everything Lucy wasn’t.

Henry returned home with bags full of papers from his office. He was unusually happy. “Come here, apricot eyes.” He showed Aiwei how to help him pile reports and documents in the fireplace in such a way that air flow would burn them quickly and completely. He held her hand and let her light matches for the flames to consume it all to ashes.

They had started on a second batch of papers when Meishi came home carrying a large sack. “I have a surprise!” He unpacked a feast of seafood like they hadn’t seen since before the war, shrimp, fish, and crab. “I entertained the last of the American diplomats, they departed today. What a gift they left me.”

Lucy set out plates. Henry lifted Aiwei into a chair and pushed her up to the table.

“Everyone’s leaving the city, it’s a mass exodus,” Meishi laid out the seafood like a buffet down the middle of the table. “Trains are overcrowded, roads are clogged.”

“They’re returning to homes that don’t exist. It’s only natural after war,” Henry cracked open a crab leg for Aiwei that was bigger than her fist and gave it to her; inside was soft and white.

“Trees move to die; people move to survive.” Lucy said. “Even without newspaper

photos, everyone knows what's coming."

"What's coming?" Aiwei stuffed the crab in her mouth and nearly choked.

Lucy didn't answer. She filled a plate with shrimp, but the tender pink flesh looked like a wound and she couldn't eat it. "We can leave tomorrow. Aiwei and I are packed and ready."

"Where are we going?" Aiwei said.

"There are hundreds of small villages we can root ourselves in. A few years from now, we can return to Shanghai." Lucy pushed her shrimp on Aiwei's plate.

"We have to travel as cheaply and lightly as possible." Henry eyed the suitcases Lucy had lined up by the door. "As far as I'm concerned, the only necessary items are Aiwei." He kissed her crabmeat covered hand. "And the Ming tea set. We can sell everything else."

Lucy had packed Weishi's clothes and jewelry because one day Aiwei would want them. And her newspaper photographs, which was her life's work. It took 3 large suitcases.

"If we buy train tickets, we can take all the baggage," Meishi said lifting a small piece of fish delicately between chopsticks with impeccable table manners.

"No!" Lucy snapped. "Bandits and warlords are hijacking trains just to survive this madness." Henry frowned at her; Meishi did too. Neither liked her discussing such things in front of Aiwei. But young as she was, she knew. People in the building talked discussed their plans; she understood what was happening. "Henry, she's old enough."

Henry and Meishi traded glances. "It's true about the trains," he said. "Just like old days, there's no one to stop robbers and thieves."

"We can't stand out in any way. We must be a few pebbles among many. That's how we protect ourselves. And you," Lucy said to Aiwei. "No one can even suspect that we have

a valuable heirloom."

"If people are willing to kill us for the tea set, why not sell it?" Meishi said. "Be done with it once and for all."

"We have a duty to protect it," Lucy said.

Henry asked Lucy to stop, and he took Meishi's hand. "It would be easier to do what you say, but we promised our father. And we promised your sister. That isn't something to ignore easily."

It was the first time Henry had mentioned Weishi. Later that night, Lucy put Aiwei in bed, tucked a thin blanket all around her, and read from *Outlaws of the Marsh.* The fugitives weren't always right, but they did right because they were star spirits. Aiwei loved them.

When it was time to turn off the light, Aiwei seemed troubled and twisted her blanket in her hands. "Where are the star spirits, māma?"

"Not everybody meets them."

"Mrs. Cai upstairs lost everyone she loves. She cries a lot."

She kissed Aiwei's forehead. "It's time for hope, pumpkin." But it sounded weak.

Early the next morning, they abandoned nearly everything they owned in the apartment and left for the lower level of the city. Before descending the three-hundred steps to the docks, Henry dropped two heavy suitcases filled with Lucy's photographs. "I'm not carrying them one step further! It's absurd to haul paper when we're running for our lives."

"Have you any idea what those photos mean?"

"War, war, war! Open your eyes, Lucy, we're living in the aftermath."

"They show what really happened!"

"We all want to forget."

“You don’t know what you’re saying!” She threw open one of the bags, pulled out a photo of a young nationalist soldier sitting in the snow. He had no shoes, and he was so thin it hurt to look at him. “That American fool tried to blame these boys for *his* failures! What was his name?”

“General Stillwell.”

“Yes! He watched them die day-after-day yet refused to open warehouses full of bullets and gasoline. Chiang was never going to bow to *him,* an imperialist yángguǐzi!” Foreign devil. “But Mao did! He whispered sweet lies to Stillwell. Like a fēng líu yùn shì!” A torrid love affair!

“Gè huā rù gè yǎn.” Different flowers appeal to different eyes.

“That’s not funny, Henry. Our nation was divided. Stillwell put his thumb on the scales and tipped them. He helped the communists and not the government. Mao got weapons, food, supplies for *his* army.”

“Chiang got what he deserved.”

“Did *he* deserve what he got?” She held up the photo.

Henry looked past the photo—his way of avoiding a fight. As a child, he would have walked away from her and run to māma. As a man, he faced her, but with a mask of indifference. “Chiang got money from American taxpayers.”

“Money.”

The soldier looked exhausted, bent forward, bony elbows on his knees, a flinty hope in his eyes. Again, and again westerns had made pulpit promises to the Chinese people; we’re sending help. She believed them. Each time the Flying Tigers shot down a Japanese plane, the entire nation cheered. But no American troops ever set foot in China. Losses

mounted; cities fell. And then, one day it was over. A new war started between nationalists and communists.

"None of that matters now," Henry sighed.

"It matters. Aunt Olive, the generalissimo, their guanxi, got rich on money meant for our soldiers. They used you to move money from account to account, then stole it. We're criminals in the eyes of the nationalists *and* the communists."

Meishi put his arm around Henry's shoulder. "It wasn't your fault."

"These photos are proof of what happened."

"Lucy, there was never enough to save China. Not enough money, supplies, or weapons. No one was ever going to save us."

"No, Henry! You don't know what you're asking. They made me write lies every day. Chiang's false victories. Staged photos with his happy troops." She pushed the photo at Henry, he wouldn't take it. "Mao got revolutionaries because peasants hate Chiang and his generals."

"They hate Mao just as much, he reigns in terror, too. And uses the same secret police tactics."

"At least he pays his soldiers. Pays their families."

"Are you listening to yourself? Mao pays the families by taking other people's land. Killing the rightful owners."

"We're saying the same thing. It's just smarter to kill landowners. There are far more peasants," Lucy said.

"Killing anyone is absurd, Lucy! Peasants know what's right and what's wrong."

"Aren't you the optimist. Did anyone in Chongqing do the right thing?" She held up

the photo again.

Henry snatched away the photo, ripped it in half. “Photos don’t matter. Nobody wants to see what they tried so hard to ignore in the past.”

She knew but couldn’t admit that everyone understood the suffering but did nothing.

Henry’s mouth pursed. “You told me not to blame myself for Aunt Olive. Don’t blame yourself for what you wrote.”

“I have proof. These photos are evidence of the lies.”

“We can’t carry extra weight!”

They continued to argue. Just when she thought Henry was wavering, he’d purse his lips, repeat his objection. Aiwei quietly rummaged through the open suitcase. She pulled out a large manila envelope and with great effort, pushed the heavy bag down the cliffside.

Lucy thought she was imagining it, she nearly choked mid-sentence. The bag cut a path through garbage, discarded clothes, and refuse. Photos fluttered out all the way to the river. “What have you done?” she said.

Meishi knelt next to Aiwei. “What’s in there?”

She handed him the envelope. “The negatives,” she said.

He opened the flap and looked, then smiled. “Go ahead, now the other one.”

Aiwei dug inside the second suitcase, found another envelope, and did the same. Lucy held in tears as the bags filled with dirty river water. It felt as though the people in the photos were drowning. But nothing was lost.

Henry kissed Aiwei’s forehead. “Thank you, pumpkin.”

They descended the age-worn stone steps toward the docks. Black and white photos were plastered further and further along the riverbank. By the time they reached the wharf,

the images had been washed white. The captain of the *River Maid* recognized Lucy and Aiwei, threw up his hands and told them to go away, he wanted nothing to do with them or their money. Meishi saw a customer from the private club where he worked, who remembered him. He was the captain of a larger junk sailing to Yichang, which was half the distance to Wuhan. He and Meishi spoke a short time and reached an agreement for the passage.

On board, boatmen prepared and served the four of them the same lunch as the captain and his officer. It was a feast; fresh-made wheat noodles in sesamum sauce and sliced cucumbers sprinkled with salt and vinegar. They ate while an elderly man sat next to the rudder and told them folktales as he beat time with bamboo clackers. Aiwei laughed. Henry sulked and eyed the captain throughout the voyage.

They ploughed toward Yichang slowly—red cliffs and rocky shore gave way to fishing villages and steep hills that had been terraced, cultivated for generations with rice—green cascaded down all the way to the river.

"Look!" Aiwei ran to the railing.

Women and children stood ankle deep in water, planting, washing and called out to the boatmen, who shouted back—the young girls shrieked with delight. Aiwei jumped and waved at them for attention.

They arrived late in the afternoon at the wharf in Yichang, a busy port with empty junks pulling in and departing heavy with agricultural cargo. Meishi excused himself and disappeared into the captain's deck cabin; Lucy and Aiwei watched boatmen unload cargo onto three-wheeled dock carts while Henry fretted and stood outside the cabin door. Half an hour later, Meishi emerged dressed in a beautiful red opera costume wearing full theater

makeup.

“I agreed to entertain the captain and his friends tonight in exchange for our fare. How do I look?” Meishi twirled; yards and yards of shimmering silk lifted around him like he was the Flower Princess. Rough, sweaty boatmen stared. Henry grew visibly upset and pretended to be concerned with some dangerous unloading operation.

Aiwei adjusted Meishi’s waist piece. “You’re beautiful!”

“The captain arranged a place for us to sleep tonight. I’ll return as soon as I can,” he said to Lucy and kissed Aiwei’s forehead.

The captain appeared from below deck washed and wearing traditional robes. He called Meishi and held out his arm; they disembarked together without speaking. The quartermaster showed them to a rice storehouse a short distance from the wharf where they waited another hour for crates to be stacked and workers to be dismissed. He unlocked a small room in the rear behind a row of rice bins and gestured to cots, clean blankets, and a washstand.

“The captain told me to offer this. Just for the night,” he said, and left.

She and Aiwei were exhausted and fell asleep in each other’s arms to the faint tread of leather on floorboards, Henry pacing back and forth. When she woke, it was morning. Meishi and Henry were arguing.

“I’ve always been an entertainer, you know that.”

“I don’t like it. What you did isn’t entertaining.”

“When did you become so jealous?”

Henry threw down the expensive leather grooming kit Meishi had given him years before—bottles inside shattered releasing spice and amber aromas. “We’re not children

anymore."

At the front of the storehouse, enormous metal doors clanged open; the morning sun flooded up into the beams and rafters. A commotion of shouting, screeching, and banging against wooden crates proceeded through the storehouse toward them. Lucy pulled Aiwei off the cot and shielded her.

"Is it bandits?" Aiwei hugged Lucy's waist tightly and wouldn't let go.

Five angry women appeared and blocked the doorway. They carried oars, yulohs, sampan steering poles, and demanded Meishi be handed over to them.

One of the women sneered at the jewel-embellished dress, which had been wrinkled during the night, and the lady's headpiece Meishi was still wearing. "Duànxiù!" Cut off sleeve!

The captain's wife must have known he preferred men; duànxiù was a male lover for whom a man would gladly cut off his shirt sleeve when he awoke rather than disturb his sleep.

Henry gallantly stepped between Meishi and the women. "Your argument is with your husband, not here."

"He's a fox spirit—a deceiver! He seduced my husband!" The wife raised her oar.

"Stop!" Henry said forcefully. "It was a mistake; he didn't know."

The women urged the wife to go further to protect her family.

Lucy's heart pounded painfully, she couldn't breathe with the women pressing in on them, their hot breaths hissing foulness, the wooden oars threatening. Aiwei wasn't born to die in a moldy storehouse, she'd barely begun to live.

"We'll leave," Lucy shouted and pulled Aiwei off the cot.

She handed a suitcase to Meishi, one to Henry, tucked a third under her arm—the one that held the Ming tea set. She marched toward the doorway with Aiwei's hand in hers; the women parted. Henry and Meishi's footsteps were close behind, but Meishi's platform shoes slowed him down. The loud clacking provoked furious insults and battering of crates from the women. Meishi squealed, he'd been prodded with their oars, his headpiece fell off. The captain's wife held it up like a trophy. The women were becoming angrier and angrier.

At the end of the aisle, the quartermaster stood at the huge brass-hinged doors.

"Help us!" Lucy cried and broke into a run, practically dragging Aiwei off her feet.

The quartermaster watched, indifferent to the four of them fleeing the vicious women. He was equally unmoved by the captain's wife demanding he shut the doors before they escaped. Red silk billowed over her shoulder, Meishi had been shoved from behind and had collapsed in a heap. The women surrounded him and were beating him with their oars. Henry threw down his suitcase and tried to help him up but was struck in the neck and shoulders. Lucy didn't know what to do. She couldn't see a way to go back and help either of them. If she did, Aiwei and the Ming tea set would be left unprotected.

Henry endured the blows, yanked Meishi to his feet, and hauled him out of the storehouse like a bag of rice. The quartermaster frowned at the women's undignified display and swung the doors closed before they could get through.

The four of them ran until they reached the main road out of Yichang, which was a wide lane rutted by years of bombing and truck traffic. It was dusty and busy with cars spewing noxious fumes, carts pulled by bad-tempered donkeys, and a large number of people walking in the middle of the road, all of their belongings strapped to their backs, oblivious to the gridlock they caused.

“Stop!” Meishi bent over, his hands on his knees. “I need to catch my breath.” He sat on the curbstone and hiked up his skirts. His makeup had smeared down his face, his hair was matted to his head, the expensive costume was torn.

Lucy gave him the handkerchief her mother taught her to always keep in her sleeve. A bruise was forming over one eye, and he was bleeding from his nose and mouth. Most passersby didn’t give them a second glance, others slowed to stare curiously. Drivers in old cars became annoyed at the congestion and honked for everyone to get out of the way.

Aiwei sat down next to Meishi on a stone. “I’m sorry you lost your suitcase and all your costumes, uncle.”

“It’s alright, they were old and worn out anyway.”

Henry pretended to watch the road but kept glancing down at Meishi. His mouth was swollen and he, too, had a black eye. “Perhaps it’s time to give up entertaining,” he said casually.

“Perhaps not. Look…” Meishi showed them a fistful of money the captain had given him. “We won’t have to worry about food or a place to sleep for at least a week.”

“You put us in a dangerous situation,” Henry snapped.

“We have to be more careful,” Lucy said dabbing at Meishi’s mouth. “Blaming each other is useless.”

But inside, she felt qīshàngbāxià, seven ups, eight downs—horribly anxious. They could have died for nothing. She was ashamed to admit it, but she had been as worried about losing the Ming tea set as losing Aiwei. She had held onto the suitcase like it was a treasure that mattered as much as her own life.

They began walking again, she and Meishi took turns telling Aiwei stories of outlaws

on the run. Henry sulked; he was a wall of silence. They ate along with everyone else when villagers brought clay bowls of day-old noodles and refried rice to sell with home brewed beer and cold tea. Traveling with masses of people who'd been far from home for too long felt safe. Everyone was looking for their families. Henry finally came out of his mood and laughed when Meishi and Aiwei sang a song for a couple who had just married. The song was about the time to love and make children. They would grow to hate each other soon enough. The couple was heading to the groom's village of Dangyang.

"That's where we're going!" Henry said.

Lucy pinched him, but he pulled away.

"We have family there that we haven't seen since before the war," Henry said. And that was his rebellion, how he revealed his irritation with her and with Meishi. "Don't we sister?" And he slipped his arm in Lucy's daring her to contradict him.

If she could kick him, she would. Henry had learned from father how to change his personality to suit strangers. He put on a mask as easily as Meishi put on theater makeup. It was a show of independence, an irony that they had no family and no home.

There was only one thing to do. Lucy squeezed Henry's hand in solidarity. To the bride and groom from Dangyang she said, "Yes. We may resettle there."

Meishi, never one to be left out of a performance, sighed heavily. "It's been so long. We hope they're still living."

"What's your family name?" the groom said.

"Hu!" Lucy said. One of the photographers she worked with in Chongqing had been from Dangyang. "Our mother was a Hu."

It was risky to give a family name, they could be discovered as liars the minute they

arrived in the village if the groom was the gossipy kind.

“Your mother’s line. Well, there are a few large Hu families. I know most of them,” the groom offered.

Lucy groaned inside. “Wonderful.”

14

Dangyang – 1949

"You don't belong here!" A teenage communist soldier grabbed Lucy's arm and yanked her up off the suitcase where she sat. He kicked the bag aside.

Aiwei, astride a suitcase next to her, was tipped over shrieking, and struggled to get up. She reached for Lucy but was held back by a second soldier. There were four of them. They'd been badgering travelers funneling into the Dangyang village square barking commands and intrusive questions, weeding out liúlàng, the wandering population. anyone who didn't have kinship in the province through their father's lineage. The soldiers were new recruits in the People's Liberation Army. Fresh-faced, unrestrained, they were irritated by large families who ignored them and pushed them aside while they reunited after years apart.

The soldier squeezed Lucy's arm. "What's your name? Where are you from? What's in here?" He kicked the suitcase with the Ming tea set inside.

Lucy's mind went blank. All she could think of was shattered pieces of ancient porcelain. The ridiculous soldier hadn't yet seen his second cheng shou birthday, He wasn't twenty years old. He had no weapon, only his arrogance. The ones with him looked even younger.

The groom they'd walked with from Yichang pushed between Lucy and the soldier, which broke his grip on her arm. "Nice uniform, Wei. Did your mother iron it for you?"

Wei was forced to step back. "Well, look who finally returned. This isn't your concern."

"Have you met my new wife?" The bride along with the groom's large family, mostly

women, surrounded the soldiers and began asking about their mothers, aunts, and sisters.

Wei's attention shifted to an elderly man with a strong resemblance to the groom, the grandfather, to whom he bowed quickly. The show of respect produced a complicated series of emotions across Wei's face. He was conflicted, embarrassed, revived, annoyed. He yanked down his day jacket and straightened with authority. Lucy wasn't sure if it was to impress the grandfather or the younger soldiers.

"I watched you here today," the grandfather said calmly. "You mistreated people who have known you since your tying ceremony as a baby. What would your grandmother say, Wei?"

Wei's brow pleated and he dropped his head, hair fell across his face shielding his thoughts.

The grandfather spoke barely above a whisper, no one heard him except Lucy when he said, "Your grandmother taught you filial piety and social harmony. Why would you now disrespect yourself and her? Have you forgotten Confucius—"

Wei looked up with a cold stare. "Confucius? Tying ceremonies? Old thoughts! Old ways are backward! They led to China's ruin." He pushed the grandfather to the ground.

The bride gasped; the women in the family were shocked speechless. The soldiers with Wei looked at one another and grinned foolishly. The groom rushed forward to help his grandfather. Remorse flashed across Wei's face, then vanished. He walked away quickly with the soldiers following.

"My family has a celebration waiting for us," the groom said to Lucy. "We have to go."

He took his bride's hand and tried to radiate joy. The grandfather couldn't walk. The

groom's brother carried him on his back and led them in a quiet procession out of the square.

Lucy lined up their suitcases and lifted Aiwei onto the largest bag. "Are you alright, pumpkin?" Aiwei nodded, her eyes were teary. "We're fine. Really," Lucy said. "Uncles will be back soon." She wanted desperately to check the Ming tea set but didn't dare open the bag. Instead, she shook the leather case gently. No sound of loose or broken porcelain. The crumpled feeling in her chest loosened.

Two men deep in conversation walked briskly from an ornate building nearby where people had been coming and going all afternoon. It was surrounded by a beautiful garden, the kind of place where rich people held weddings, funerals, and festivals. The men stopped in front of Lucy and Aiwei, so caught up in their conversation they didn't notice they'd almost tripped over their suitcases.

"Everyone in town saw what he did to Lu's ancestor temple! It's terrible. He broke the statues of his ancestors. Can you imagine?" one of the men said.

The second man said, "The ancestor tablets, too. With generations going back to the Yuan Dynasty."

"Lu is the village leader. How can they defile his sacred family temple?" the first one shook his head.

The other nodded solemnly. "Lu's not the village leader anymore. I was at his house at a dinner party when that… that tailor confiscated his property. For the people, he said." The man lowered his voice. "They kicked in the door, scared all of us to death. The tailor said *he'd* been made the zuzhang." The local party leader. "And he was taking Lu's house for himself. He invited *his* friends over, made us watch while they ate the dinner Lu made for us. They drank his best wine. They broke the porcelain. He tossed old Lu and his wife out on the

streets that night."

"I haven't seen Lu since…"

"I didn't criticize how your family made money!" Meishi shouted.

"You were happy to take father's money!" Henry screamed back.

"That's not fair!"

The two men turned and stared at Meishi and Henry, grumbled something about the rudeness of strangers, then hurried away.

"Is that how you go unnoticed?" Lucy pinched Henry's arm. She had wanted to hear the rest of the Lu story.

"It's his fault!" Meishi threw himself on a suitcase. "He doesn't want to spend any of my tainted money. He'd rather we sleep in a rat-infested storehouse again. I said absolutely not! You agree, don't you, Lucy?"

"I found one," Henry said. "It's nearly empty. And it's on the edge of town. No one will ever know we were there. Besides, I like Dangyang. The people are nice."

"No, they're not, uncle!" Aiwei jumped in his arms.

"We met some CCP soldiers," Lucy said. "They're very aggressive, Henry."

Henry stroked Aiwei's cheek and pinched her chin. "We need a good night's sleep and a hot meal, pumpkin. Everything will be better in the morning,"

She climbed into his arms. Aiwei was small and fragile looking but always relaxed with Henry. They had been able to find enough vegetables to stem the progression of her chicken-eye, but it hadn't gone away completely. She needed a stable home, fresh food, and a school with friends.

The storehouse Henry and Meishi found was larger than the one in Yichang. “This is much nicer,” Aiwei said and screamed her name to hear it echo between the soaring beams and the wooden floorboards.

“Oh, my head,” Meishi squeezed his temples. “Shall we sleep on the floor? In the rice bins?”

“Don’t worry. I’ll lay out my clothes to make a bed for you,” Henry said.

Lucy envied them. Even when they were angry, they made kind gestures to one another.

“Some of these are empty,” Aiwei said from inside a bin that was open on top.

Tin lids on others were tied shut with twine. Lucy tapped on the side of one. “Half full.”

“Maybe the season is over,” Aiwei said.

“Such a brilliant child,” Henry scooped her up. “Let’s see if there’s a room in back.”

They found what had once been an office and spread out their clothes to make beds. The storehouse was quiet except for rats scratching at the corners of empty rice bins and the distant howl of wind sweeping up the gulley along the Yangtze.

“It’s so dark,” Aiwei said. “It’s scary.”

“The fields around the village were ripe. They’ll bring produce here to store soon. We need a plan,” Meishi said.

“We saw so many farms and rice fields. I’m surprised there isn’t more stored here,” Lucy said.

Henry laid down and slipped his arm around Meishi’s waist. “We’ll decide what to do tomorrow.”

They fell asleep underneath vented windows in the roof where the moon drifted slowly through a river of stars against the clear dark sky. Their room was lit as if by candlelight.

Before dawn, someone shook Lucy awake. “Hey, get up.” She was startled and sat up quickly.

Someone else prodded Henry with a foot. “What are you doing here?”

“You! Hey, you! Wake up.” Meishi was shaken by the shoulder.

Lucy could make out Henry rousing. He pushed himself up on his elbows. Meishi mumbled and turned over.

There were six shadows looming over them; the moon had set, no light filtered through the windows above. The strangers drew back as a single silhouette when Henry and Meishi began to stretch and yawn.

Lucy’s eyes adjusted, red armbands on their sleeves meant local militia. Their faces emerged; none of them were over 15 years old. They didn’t appear to be carrying weapons—which didn’t mean anything, militia were dangerous. Aiwei rubbed her eyes, yawned. The teens stared at her curiously and glanced at one another—they didn’t know what to do.

“What’s your name?” Lucy asked a tall thin girl who looked to be the eldest.

The girl crossed her arms and leaned with her hip canted, feigning confidence. “Yuan.”

“Like the money. That’s clever,” Lucy smiled. “We were tired and stopped to rest. I hope that’s alright.”

Aiwei threw off layers of clothes blanketing her and struggled to her feet then approached a girl two or three years older than her. “I’m Aiwei.”

"Ni hao." The girl asked Aiwei about her hair and her shoes. It was as if they already knew each other. They held hands and walked into the storehouse whispering and giggling. A boy their age followed them.

Lucy wanted to jump up and stop them but remained still even after they disappeared around a row of rice bins.

Henry was speaking to one of the boys who said, "We're guarding against anti-communists."

"Are there many around here?" Henry said and picked through the pile of clothes scattered around him.

"Not anymore."

"Then you have an easy job." Henry took his time pulling on a shirt made of expensive cloth with a button-down collar.

The boy watched as if he'd never seen western-style clothes before. "Farmers are mad. The zuzhang confiscated the whole harvest," he said.

Lucy stopped craning for sight of Aiwei, Henry quit buttoning; they both stared at the boy waiting for more.

Yuan and the teens traded nervous looks again. She said, "They store rice and grain here, then truck it out fast before there's trouble."

Henry resumed dressing. "That's why the bins are empty?"

The boy nodded. "We check the place at night."

Henry stood. He was much taller than the teens. "I see—to prevent raids. Well, no one came in here last night, and we're neither anti-communists nor angry farmers."

Aiwei returned with the girl and boy, she was near tears. "Māma, they've been

telling me about their homes."

Lucy reached up to her. "Come here, pumpkin, tell me." She pulled her close where she was safe.

"They'll tell you," Aiwei said and held out her hand for the girl to sit on the clothes-bed. The little boy crawled next to them, and they sat cross-legged with their knees touching. "You can tell my māma."

They told how the entire province was turned upside down. "My family home was taken," the girl said.

"Mine, too," the boy said.

"We had a farm," the girl said. "They took our land, the animals, everything. Now, my mom and I live with my grandmother."

"They?"

"A huǒ," A gang of men, "Kept coming to our farm. They argued with my father and my uncle," the girl said and twisted handfuls of clothes in her hands.

"Did they want to help tenants working on your land?" Lucy said.

"No. After they killed my father and my uncle, they gave all of our property to a family we didn't know. All of the tenants left."

"They were thrown out?"

The little girl nodded. "My brothers had to show the new people what to do. They never farmed before."

The older boy who was talking with Henry started shouting. "He's a huge shǎ bī!" The teens blushed, even boatmen didn't use that language. "You know it's true! He's lucky nobody burned down his tailor shop."

"Wait a minute," Henry said. "You're saying *nobody* respects the zuzhang?"

"He's a zhuan jia!" the boy sneered. A brick specialist.

Yuan smiled behind her hand—it was a homophone for someone who pretends to be highly skilled, but says and does ridiculous things which keeps revealing their incompetence.

"During the war with Japan, he was always trying to start some kind of uprising or another. Collective struggle he called it. All it ever did was make people mad."

"The communist cadres must have liked his determination," Lucy said.

Yuan shrugged. "It made the district party look like diao sī."

"Yuan!" the boy snapped.

"You cursed. I can too, if I want." She crossed her arms, turned to Lucy. "He tried twelve, maybe fifteen times. He never got it right."

"Yet they made *him* the zuzhang!" The boy's hands were fisted at his sides.

"What does that term mean?" Henry said.

"Permanent chief," the boy said. "It used to be customary for a hundred families to run each village, each family takes a turn being chief. Now there's only *him*."

"No one has a say anymore," Yuan said. "All the villages and hamlets in this area are what they call an administrative unit. That's thousands of families. It's too big."

"A tailor?" Henry said in the business tone he learned from father, the one he used to stall for time when he was trying to understand a tricky problem. He stared at dust particles floating through a shaft of light cast through the ceiling vents. "Who failed at fifteen insurgency attempts, was made the permanent leader of a huge farming population, after killing landowners?"

"He doesn't even know what it takes to grow rice or grain," the boy said. "He has no

education, no experience."

Yuan frowned and nodded at the boy. "He replaced Lu Jing's father."

"He was your father?" Lucy said to the boy. "We heard about a Lu family yesterday."

Tension filled the little room. None of the teens would look at Lu Jing who dropped his eyes.

Henry tapped his chin, watched dust swirl and eddy upward with the sun's heat. "Why did the uprisings fail?" he said.

Yuan twisted a strand of hair. "Because they were stupid. Nobody wanted to join his army. What for? To live in dirt camps? Eat insects and tree bark like him?"

The journalist from Dangyang who Lucy knew wrote about tenants and peasants defending some of the landowners and protecting their tenured plots. The south wasn't drought-prone and harsh like farms in the north. "Is it because farmers do well here and have no reason to leave for a soldiering job? They'd give up too much," Lucy said.

Lu Jing nodded. "The tailor kept telling tenant farmers they should withhold part of their rent. Give it to him instead of to landowners. He thought paying taxes to the government and paying taxes to the communists were the same. But he didn't know what he was talking about or who he was speaking to."

"Why is that?" Lucy said.

Lu Jing leaned against the wall. "Tenant farmers don't pay taxes. Neither do peasants," he said. "They don't pay the grain tribute to the army either. That's how the baojia system works going back to the Song Dynasty."

"It's the landowners obligation?" Lucy said.

"Yes. The tailor was asking tenants and peasants pay something they don't owe. To

become tax collectors for the communists. And to feed the New Fourth Army. But the Nationalist Army were fighting the Japanese, not them. You see?"

Henry nodded. "The peasants got nothing in return."

"It would have broken the three principles of the people," Lucy said.

Father constantly harped on the three principles, the victory of the republican constitution. He said Sun Yat-sen wrote one that was superior to America's constitution, stronger than any European nation's, and more humane than Confucius.

"Exactly," Lu Jing said. "We fought many generations for those principles."

"Your father taught you well, Lu Jing," Henry said.

Yuan sighed, shook her head. "No one could explain it to the tailor. He wouldn't listen."

Lu Jing squatted on the dusty floorboards. He found a piece of broken pottery and turned it over in his hands. "I don't remember his first rebellion; I was too young. The second time, my father took me to the square. Angry people laughed at the tailor and the cousins who were with him. They were mocked. A year later, he agitated people again. He had help from a dozen or more bi lian." Green Lotus, a homophone for vagina-faced. People who were shameless and despicable. "They were all thrown in the river. The tailor almost drowned and people felt sorry for him. After that, each time he was caught, he was run out of town until people calmed down."

"Persistent," Lucy said.

"They tried to tell him he was wasting his time. Here, money grows in the soil."

"It's not their soil," Lucy said.

"This area is very fertile. Tenant farmers keep half of what they grow. Landowners

get the other half in rent," Lu Jing said not looking up. "Even when the nationalists levied much higher taxes for the war, farmers made money."

"They got more than that," Yuan said.

"What do you mean?" Lucy said.

"Many landowners lived in cities. They were stuck there under Japanese occupation," Yuan said. "Rent payments to occupied areas was forbidden. The money would have ended up in the hands of the enemy."

Lu Jing scraped his palm with the broken pottery and drew a thin line of blood. "Chiang Kai-shek allowed tenant farmers to keep all their profits," he said. "Under baojia, it's not proper to ask tenured tenants to pay taxes, so that wasn't collected either."

Henry began to laugh. "Chiang understands financial strategy after all." He kept laughing until tears welled in his eyes. "Mao couldn't make tenants pay taxes to him if they weren't paying them to the government. The tailor must have gone crazy trying to organize uprisings. He couldn't finance them!"

Lu Jing grimaced and wiped his hand on his trousers. "The tailor hates all of us. He thinks he was abused. He's getting revenge."

"Wait a minute. What about landowners paying bribes, hiding rice crops. The government couldn't honor all the food certificates they issued for soldiers' families. There were other problems, too. Peasants had disputes," Lucy said. "Didn't they want to join the rebellion?"

"Not really, a few dan teng." Egg-aches, pains in the balls. "With the landowners gone, most issues were settled quickly," Lu Jing said. "Even the areas under control of the New Fourth Army," the communist military, "They kept baojia and followed the law."

"They had to, didn't they?" Henry said. "Or people would have thrown them out."

"To us, the communists were just like the nationalists," Yuan said.

"I guess either side was a lot better than the Japanese and their puppet regimes," Lucy said.

"Or so we thought. We didn't know what was happening far away from the village." Yuan became sad. "Communists were stealing farms in the countryside. They told peasants they could have the land for free if they promised to pay taxes to the CCP and grain tribute to the New Fourth Army. If they resisted, they were killed."

"They couldn't refuse, could they?" Lucy said.

Lu Jing became red-faced. "It wasn't a secret for long. When my father and others found out, they were furious. A big huǒ of communist cadres came. They were from Yan'an. At a public meeting, they said it wasn't stealing, it was land redistribution. It was fair because tenant farmers and peasants had nothing, that everyone should be grateful change had arrived." He hammered the wall with a fist. "It was a trick. They were extorting families, taking boys to be soldiers."

The torment would never end. She'd seen the Green Gang do the same thing in Shanghai a hundred times. They made promises to families who couldn't afford to feed their children. In return for a daughter, they'd receive money for a better home, full bellies, medicine. Once the agreement was made, the parents were paid a few coins, the girls were taken and resold by the thousands to factories and brothels where they were locked up. Troublesome ones were drugged with opium. Fragile ones either died or were ruined, and easily replaced.

"Suddenly, Mao had a big army and a successful revolution," Lucy said.

Lu Jing was half hidden in shadow; his voice was tormented. “They took my cousins.”

Lucy couldn’t look at Henry who had forced her to abandon her photos, the thirteen- and fourteen-year-olds with faces as hard and withered as cordwood, in ill-fitting communist uniforms, next to bodies piled in the snow, or rotting in the sun. They were farm boys who never wanted to pick up a gun.

Yuan squatted next to Lu Jing and waited for him to acknowledge her; she hugged him. “When the civil war ended, landowners came back to find they owned nothing,” she said. “Either someone else owned it, or their animals were gone, their equipment was in a dozen other barns, the soil was unusable. Production in the province is half what it used to be. Taxes are higher than during the war. Small farms can’t afford to grow anything.”

“When the communists started demanding entire crops in grain tribute, farmers came to my father for relief. They were going hungry, forced to leave their property,” Lu Jing said. “He did what he’s always done, he appealed to the baojia to stop it. That’s when the communist authorities disbanded the baojia system and replaced it with the zuzhang.” Lu Jing punched the wall so hard it cracked the lathe and plaster.

“It isn’t fair, the end of the war was supposed to mean the end of suffering,” Yuan said.

“We have to go,” Lu Jing said. “They expect us at the public meeting soon.”

“What about them?” Yuan said. “Should we leave them here?”

Lu Jing looked from Henry to Lucy, down at Aiwei, then Meishi. “We have to take them with us.”

“Why?” Yuan said. “You know what will happen.”

The girl sitting on the clothes bed hugged Aiwei. “No, Jing! Don’t!”

“Bie fan!” That’s enough! He waved at all the clothes scattered on the floor. “Gather your things, we’re leaving.”

Between Henry, Meishi, and Lucy, they could have overpowered the teens and run away. Lucy and Henry silently piled their belongings in suitcases while Meishi held Aiwei. They didn’t speak of it, but each knew the other agreed they should attend the public meeting—their father had taught them how to negotiate, and Aunt Olive had taught them how to deceive.

They returned to the village square crowded and a long line in front of the ornate building. A sign with handwritten characters said *Public Hall*. Lu Jing had agreed to let the young girl and boy take Aiwei to a nearby hong, a store; to eat and wait. They were beside themselves when Meishi gave them enough money to buy a meal’s worth of sweet buns and candy, which they hadn’t had in over a year. Lu Jing escorted them up to the hall. People stepped aside, nodded, and bowed to him with respect. The Lu family name was carved into scroll work atop the que towers at the hall entrance—it was an ancestor temple, built sometime in the 1300s. Lu Jing nudged her to keep moving forward when she stopped to stare at the artistry.

Two well-dressed men stomped out of the hall engrossed in some indignation—no one in the village seemed happy.

“He’s no leader! He wasn’t even good at his job!” one of the men said.

“He couldn’t read simple characters!” the other grunted.

“But he’ll sniff out anyone who’s hiding money, and he’ll take it!” the first man said.

“As if he can,” the second one sniffed.

"He will! He's like one of those Kansu hunting dogs."

"Lu had favorites, to be sure. At least he pretended to be fair!"

"Watch what you say, or you'll disappear like him."

The men saw Lu Jing and hurried away. Inside the building, a room was full of people sat so closely together that they couldn't move.

"We wait here," Lu Jing leaned against the wall while people pushed past him. He stared at empty apses around the temple but remained silent.

Lucy tried to imagine what it felt like to spend every special day of your life in storied hall, to know it yī wǔ yī shí, one five one ten—down to the smallest detail. And then, to see it stripped bare, plundered as if none of your history mattered.

"What are you going to say?" Henry said to Lu Jing.

"I don't know. You weren't stealing."

Meishi pressed his head against the wall and looked up with a sigh. The ceiling was painted like the heavens. "Oh, that's very pretty."

"Look," Lucy tugged Henry's arm. "The statues were ripped out." No one bothered to sweep away plaster dust piled on the floor or fill in holes where brass ancestor placards were once embedded. The base of marble columns remained, and short stretches of ceiling molding. "It was priceless. They could have sold all of it."

Someone wanted to erase images of the past and ways of honoring it as well. They despised the practice of venerating ancestors—and they wanted everyone to know it.

Lu Jing was watching Lucy. "Philosophy is the enemy of communism. The zuzhang says there is only Mao thought. To follow Confucius, to respect your elders, is to resist."

"You can't erase the past," Lucy said.

“Mao says the past is a trap,” the Lu boy said.

Henry became impatient; for him, the past was painful. He didn’t want to remember. He painted on a smile and introduced himself to a couple sitting nearby fanning themselves in the airless room. He said they looked vaguely familiar and asked if they’d met before in years past. Lu Jing was silent.

“Our home in Zhenzhou was destroyed. The Yellow River flood, you know,” Henry said sadly. It was fascinating to watch; people called their friends to come closer. “We fled to Wuhan, like everyone else. What a human disaster!” Just like their father, Henry sighed at all the right moments. “Now we’re looking for our mother’s family. We haven’t seen them in years.”

Henry invented marvelous details of a completely fabricated story—they hadn’t been near Wuhan at the time of the failed plot to blow up the river dam and stop Japanese invaders. Of course, he chose a disaster everyone knew about. The plan went wrong, a million peasants drowned, the countryside was devastated. And the nation mourned. Anyone else would have been caught in their lies, but not him. Hearts opened; mothers went teary, fathers shook their heads. Several young men touched Henry’s arm with desire. Lucy held Meishi’s hand tightly. It was his turn to be jealous.

The meeting was called to order with wooden clackers, a relic of Qing dynasty days which was strange considering the old ways were now backward. The zuzhang sat at a rough table in front of a hundred or more villagers. It was true what they said, he wasn’t a good tailor—his seams were puckered, his hems were uneven. The four young soldiers Lucy dealt with in the square the day before sat next to him.

“Does anyone have any bitterness to speak?” the zuzhang said.

“Yes!” An older man stood up, there were two men with him. “We supported you and the new communist system. But you chose uneducated people to replace experienced heads of our village. Now we have problems. We worry. We can’t tolerate it.”

The zuzhang slammed his fist on the table. “Sit down!” The four soldiers in their stiff new uniforms nodded. “Sacrifice is necessary.” He stood, stared down at the crowd. “For the good of all, we must demand loyalty. The greatest Buddhist principal is that attachment to worldly possessions is a sin. Don’t forget that craving and desire lead to corruption.”

The soldier Wei, who was baby-faced like the god Nezha, stood up. The room quieted. “The real evil of our past is feudalism,” he said. “The long history of repressing the people, keeping them in poverty generation after generation. We can’t sweep that away without unity. Our nation has a new reality—you are either Maoists or you are enemies.”

Some people cheered. Others whispered and complained, some shouted.

“You’re asking too much!”

“No! You have too much!”

“You’ve taken my entire crop, that’s more than the Nationalists took!”

“Who are you to complain? We can’t feed ourselves!”

“It’s our turn to get fat!”

“There’s no war anymore! Why is the army so large?”

“Lies! You’re hoarding rice. Greedy landowners!”

“The bureaucracy is too large!”

“Enough!” the zuzhang banged the table again. “We will proceed to the trial!”

A trial was a surprise to everyone. Murmurs and whispers spread through the hall. No one knew there was an accused, let alone that a crime worthy of a public proceeding had

been committed. It was customary to allow for a period of public comments before such a serious undertaking.

Old Lu was forcibly pulled from the back room by two of his own neighbors. He stumbled and fell, begged the men to stop forcing him. The Lu boy gasped; a groan spread through the crowd. Lucy had never seen him before, but she pitied him.

Lu was the richest man in town, yet here was, a thin, frail old man in filthy clothes. He looked haggard from lack of sleep, he acted as if he didn't know where he was or why the crowd was staring at him. Then, he stared at the empty apses along the walls, the missing statues, and went berserk.

"It's Lu! It's Lu!" echoed through the temple and outside into the garden. More people shoved their way into the hall.

The Lu boy suddenly launched himself into the crowd and struggled to get through the wall of people and chairs. He made his way to the front and began to cry when he stood in front of his father. Whispers finally reached Lucy—he wasn't just Lu's son, he was his eldest son.

"Lu Wengchang has been charged by the communist administrative unit with crimes against the public," the zuzhang held a handwritten piece of paper, but it was upside down—that was also true, he couldn't read. "You broke into the premises occupied by the party zuzhang where you attempted to steal items belonging to the people."

"You're the thief! Those things have been in my family for generations!" Lu shouted; his voice was shrill and small.

His son took his hand—he tried not cry but even from a distance anyone could see that his cheeks were moist. No one said anything. Not a soul challenged the zuzhang's

charges or spoke out about a rushed trial. The cruelty of throwing an old man like Lu out of his home. Lucy fought to understand why his family and friends had failed to defend a good leader or at least ask for compassion. His son was the only one to stand next to him.

The zuzhang didn't bother to follow trial procedure. When silence lingered for over a minute, he read Lu's verdict aloud; guilty. His sentence; execution.

His son began sobbing. Lucy moved toward him; Henry gripped her hand and pulled her back. She was enraged and wanted to scream. Everyone must know what the tailor was doing.

She knew. He was like Aunt Olive, and she hated them both.

"Let me go!" she yanked herself free and ran out of the hall through the beautifully carved doors.

Henry was sprinting when he caught up to her. "Slow down! There was nothing you could do!"

"I want to leave this town!" she slowed to a fast walk.

"Do you think any other village is different? The Nationalists lost the war, Lucy!"

"I want to see Aiwei!"

"She's fine. She made a friend. We have to stay for the assessment this afternoon," he said, panting.

"What?"

"Did you think only farmlands would be redistributed?"

Lucy stopped to stare at Henry. "What are you talking about?"

Meishi finally appeared. "No one tried to stop me. Our militia guards vanished after Lu was sentenced."

"There's a property assessment. They're taking stock of everything. I think it's to give it to whomever they want."

"Stop it!"

"It's true. I overheard it, too," Meishi said.

"You're a journalist, don't you want to find out?" Henry said. "We're going to find out sooner or later."

"You should stay out it. These people scare me," Lucy said. She began walking toward the hong, toward Aiwei. Yet, even as she said it, she knew Henry was right. She'd dig out her camera and her two remaining rolls of film.

They took Aiwei and Meishi back to the storehouse. The militia teens were there, they had returned to commiserate about their friend and his father, who was to be executed the next day. Then she and Henry returned to the village square where teams of people had begun marching in and out of homes, hongs, and around small farms nearby that had not yet been redistributed to peasants.

Lucy introduced herself to the zuzhang and explained that she and Henry had returned to Dangyang in search of family.

"I worked for a newspaper in Changsha. I'd like to write about how you're unifying the province." She took his photograph—he was deeply flattered and agreed to let her follow him during the assessment.

Teams of eight measured how many mu were in each plot of land; about six per acre. It felt just like a big property sale; like the entire village was being appraised the way Lucy's father used to evaluate warehouses and commercial land in Shanghai. On each of the zuzhang's team, one person measured, one calculated figures, one wrote down notes about

everything. Lucy took photos and made her own notes while Henry chatted with the zuzhang and made him laugh.

That night, the villagers returned to the public hall; a formal speak bitterness meeting where anyone could have a say about any issue they wanted. The zuzhang had promised all the villagers that unlike the past, his people's committee would hear and settle all people's problems justly.

First, the zuzhang spoke about how the administrative unit was reorganized by the local party organization. The community was divided into classes. Labels were assigned to each class, and every person who registered at the public hall was designated a class category by the zuzhang.

"We made the assessment earlier; each family has been categorized into a class that reflects their assessed category. From rich, to middle rich, to middle poor, and low poor, each person will be issued official papers as proof of identity and class. Your papers are an important part of accountability to your community."

"What are you saying?" someone shouted.

"Your papers tie you to your community. They ensure you are held responsible to the party organization for the health, the wealth, and the happiness of all people."

The hall was silent—either no one believed what they were hearing, or they weren't paying attention. Lucy furiously made notes in shorthand rather than miss a single word the zuzhang said.

"Planning is critical in an optimal society. Therefore, you are required to seek permission from the local party to leave the village, to move residence, to engage in commercial and public activities such as earning a wage, selling your labor, buying and

selling products, seeking marriage, planning for children, and attending school."

He coughed, gave the audience a moment to digest what he'd said. "Landlords are those who own more than 50 mu." That was eight acres; they hired labor to work their land, or they rented out land.

"Rich peasants own 30 mu of land." Five acres; that was usually a family with sons who were capable farm hands, they didn't need hired labor, and they could sell excess produce.

"Middle peasants own 15 mu of land." That was as little as two and a half acres. You could be self-sufficient and feed your family on that, but you'd use everything you produced.

Poor peasants had too little land to feed the mouths in their household, they worked rented land or hired themselves out as labor. Hired labor were people who had no land, they worked yearlong as hired hands, or lived in the village, they made a wage selling their labor.

Lucy, Henry, and Meishi were sitting at the front where villagers paid no attention to the zuzhang. They were eager to speak bitterness, slyly shoved each other, and mumbled insults under their breath.

Earlier in the day, the zuzhang and his assessors were masterful at unearthing pent up resentments in the village. At first, Lucy thought it was natural anxiety over the civil war, radical change, and upheaval. But the zuzhang knew damning gossip about everyone in the village. It was as if he had collected the information. He leveraged what he knew, used it to stoke past disputes and old wounds between neighbors, then his assessors pressed deeper. Soon, small issues that had festered became problems that could no longer be lived with. The zuzhang fueled an illusion of injustice. By the time everyone gathered at the hall that evening, people glared at one another, they were primed to blame, accuse, air any grievance

they had ever had.

“Everybody looks angry,” Meishi said and sank back into his seat. “Didn’t they hear what he said?”

The four soldiers reappeared; they were armed with weapons and sat at the pine table on either side of the zuzhang. He used the clackers and called the meeting to order. A dull rumble of disquiet and complaints continued, the clackers failed to silence the hostile crowd.

“Everyone who wants to speak bitterness will be heard.” The zuzhang called the first person in line. “We are the people’s committee. Our investigations and our decisions are final.” He gestured to the four soldiers with him. “Any person who commits a serious violation of the people’s rights, especially any charge of cruelty, will earn a term in tyrant-landlord jail.” He described the hard-labor camp outside the village.

There were no objections. A series of villagers were heard—mostly ordinary disputes over land boundaries, payments, unsettled debts. They were mainly differences of opinion between the parties; some imaginary, very few real crimes.

After an hour, Lucy’s notes revealed a pattern in the verdicts and sentences; anyone in the class of landlord, rich peasant, or middle peasant was treated as a class enemy. The farce of an investigation by the zuzhang and the soldiers—which lasted a few minutes and was nothing more than whispered words between them, always found the class-enemy guilty. The acceptable-class accusers went away ecstatic having won homes, property, or money damages.

When everyone in line had spoken, the zuzhang showed renewed energy. He announced that his assessment calculations were complete; the total amount of land, buildings, the number of homes in the administrative unit had been tallied. He had even listed

the number of rooms in each home along with every single piece of furniture in those rooms—everything anybody owned was accounted for.

"We have decided how to redistribute according to our plan for justice," he said, and seemed to stand taller, he was wearing a stiff new military uniform. "We followed one simple rule; houses and furniture are made by exploiting the labor of others. Those items are, therefore, the highest priority for redistribution."

The hall erupted in shouts, people jumped to their feet and shook their fists.

"You have no right!"

"We inherited our possessions, it wasn't exploitation!"

"My grandfather built our home!"

"My ancestors were artisans; they made our furniture decades ago!"

Dozens of soldiers suddenly burst through the doors and swarmed into the hall where they took positions against the walls—everyone was taken aback and fell silent.

The zuzhang acknowledged the senior officer and was saluted in return. There was no doubt who was in charge. The man who had been a tailor with no education appeared transformed. He was made confident by his control over the military reinforcements, by his dominance over the villagers.

Henry fidgeted in his chair; he was agitated. Meishi placed a hand on his thigh to calm him.

People stood to be heard. "I have bitterness to speak."

The zuzhang refused to listen to any objections and gestured to Wei who began reading the redistribution plan. "The Hu Mingwei family retain two-thirds of the family house. The other one-third goes to his brother, Hu Qingwei's family."

“What?” Hu Mingwei flew out of his seat, but a soldier grabbed him by the neck. Mingwei struggled for a moment, realized it was useless and gained control of himself. “Wait. I want to speak. Respectfully.” The soldier released him but stood next to him. “My brother and I got the same inheritance. I managed mine well while my brother squandered his share. Why should I now give away to a fool what I worked hard to keep and build-up?”

The zuzhang nodded to the soldier next to Mingwei, who was dragged out of the hall flailing and shouting.

Wei continued reading the list. “Hu Mingwei’s family will keep one-third of their furniture, the rest will be redistributed to the families Zou, Ma…”

“I object!” a woman shouted. “I married into the Hu Mingwei family three months ago. I brought furniture as my dowry. It’s all I have! You’re taking everything!” She began to cry uncontrollably.

The zuzhang was unmoved and waved her away. The next family on Wei’s list had their barn taken away but were able to keep their home.

“How will I keep my animals?” the father wailed.

Wei read the next family’s fate. Lucy was confused—the party seemed to think the administrative unit was like a giant puzzle, resources were nothing but pieces to be scrambled up. The zuzhang could take pieces of land, homes, rooms inside of homes, furniture, and even people—he could reshape them, reassemble them into a new landscape, a new city, in whatever way he wanted. And he expected that what emerged would function perfectly despite the way he and the Land Reform Team went about it. Perhaps he thought the unavoidable deaths, hurt feelings, broken attachments, loss of treasures, and severed family ties would be forgotten through thought reform. Resistance or counterrevolutionary

protest was forbidden and met with severe punishment or death.

How the zuzhang thought his new reality could work without anger and resentment was a mystery. There had already been so much trauma and violence in the nation.

As the meeting wore on, some families were even broken apart. “The whole is greater than the one—stop complaining!” the zuzhang shouted impatiently.

There were people who had offended the zuzhang in the past and found themselves relocated to tiny homes or apartments, or among ten in a one-room home far from the village center, or two families in a two-room hovel. The goal of the plan was to take from those who had more or settle old scores.

Finally, Henry could take no more and stood up. He was in the middle of a crowded row and soldiers couldn’t reach him to stop him from speaking. “Everyone here knows the teachings of Confucius and Mencius. We believe in justice and restraint.” People around the hall leaned forward with interest. “For many years, Chiang Kai-shek confiscated the property of anyone who collaborated with the Japanese. We saw the unfairness in that half the nation lived under occupation; our enemy forced people to cooperate—dockworkers, grain suppliers, textile workers, newspapermen, theater actors, even the salt merchants’ guild. Yes, they got rich under Japanese control, or they would have been killed—and for that, they were considered traitors. After the war, they bought their way out of trouble by paying Chiang’s government.” Everyone nodded silently. Soldiers moved into the aisle, stepped over people to get to Henry, but he wouldn’t stop. “You’re doing the same thing! The communists promised us fairness, not policies that repeat the same mistakes of the past. Why condemn people who committed no crime except to live, to survive? You’re acting with no heart.”

Claqueurs could be heard throughout the hall—strong approval for what Henry was

saying. The zuzhang searched faces to identify who, but hands were hidden underneath padded robes and he couldn't tell who was clicking. His wild eyes made Henry bolder.

"You hold petty grievances against people who are as fallible as you."

Lucy could feel the restless tension mounting in the hall—something was going to erupt. Over a decade of war, nearly half the population had become refugees—they'd lost their families, their land, their homes, entire cities and villages had simply disappeared. And now what was left was being taken, for what?

The zuzhang pounded the pine table, and he looked like Yan Wang, red-faced King of Hell, in story books she showed Aiwei. Henry represented all the old ways, everything entrenched and oppressive that should be swept away—he looked and spoke of having attended a foreign university, was a city-dweller, was of high birth. Lucy feared he'd be arrested and killed like Old Lu.

Instead, the zuzhang leaned back in his chair and forced a smile. "Tell me again, who in Dangyang are you related to? And what is your business here?"

Lucy jumped up quickly and repeated the story exactly as she'd told him before. Then looked for support in friendly faces among the crowd. "We're disappointed that our family no longer lives where we remembered. We've all lost so much in the war."

The zuzhang was shrewd. "It occurs to me that you might be mistaken. Are you sure your family is from Dangyang? Perhaps you should try the province west of here."

Lucy didn't need further urging; it was a threat. They would never fit in to a village with a zuzhang like the tailor. If they had any chance at all of evading communist committees, of hiding their past, it would be in a larger town where they could disappear into crowds. Where they could appear harmless, manufacture unassuming identities, go

unnoticed.

Lucy wanted to be invisible.

"Perhaps so," she said.

She left the meeting and found Aiwei with her friend's family. Henry and Meishi followed, and they departed the village that evening across an open field eastward toward Wuhan. They didn't rest until they'd walked for 3 hours and gone over 30 li, almost 12 miles.

15

Hubei Province - 1949

Don't stop, keep going.

Lucy walked in a daze. She was inside herself, a small place where nothing touched her, and everything seemed far away. The hum of insects was blunted; the sun's glare didn't sting her burned face and arms. She didn't think about the suitcase on her back; so heavy, straps cutting into her shoulders. It didn't matter, she would have dragged it all the way to Wuhan no matter how far it was or what Henry said. She ignored the brown blur of fields around her and looked forward, only forward. She couldn't bear to see what had been left in them. She set her sights on the horizon even though it wavered like a mirage and made her doubt they could get there.

Aiwei stumbled next to her, barely able to keep her eyes open. The pull of a smaller hand in hers was the tether she desperately needed. Without it, the fog of hunger and thirst might lift her into the sky, and she'd never come down.

"Don't stop, pumpkin," Lucy mumbled.

They hadn't eaten a meal since Dangyang, since the zuzhang quietly told her they could end up like Old Lu—shot in the head. They left town right away. He was a vengeful man, to be safe they followed backroads, country lanes, even avoided small hamlets. Kept just near enough to the Yangtze to hear the river rushing toward Wuhan and get lost on the 270-mile walk. But there was no food to buy or to beg, only discarded vegetables rotted by heat, covered in flies. Aiwei couldn't eat it and had quickly become weak, Henry and Meishi staggered like drunkards, and she couldn't think straight.

One foot in front of the other.

The first day out of Dangyang, pastureland around them was green and gold; well-tended land for many li, many miles—she and Henry had a terrible argument about the meetings the zuzhang forced villagers to attend, the same meetings that were happening all across the countryside.

"If you had kept your mouth shut, we'd be living in Dangyang—invisible and happy," Henry said.

"Happy?! You're the one who said everything they were doing was unfair. Remember Confucius and Mencius, you said," Lucy snapped.

"You challenged him in front of everyone," Henry said. "When will you learn?"

"We all saw what he was doing," Meishi said gently. "He used his power to get even with people, called it part of land reform. He's a petty fool."

"In the bigger scheme of things, landless peasants and lease-farmers deserve the fruit of their labor," Henry said. "They've been poor and illiterate for generations."

"That's the point—if he, the cadres, Maoism, any of them had tried to end oppression or injustice, or even pretended to—I would understand. Did anyone give the landless the fruits of their labor?" Lucy said. "No! They killed anyone who owned land or had homes and gave it to other people. Or they took from people who worked hard and gave to people who didn't work at all."

Meishi hooked arms with Henry and made himself a barrier between them. He was born a triplet, raised with two sisters—he understood better than most the push and pull between brother and sister. He and Henry had been so hopeful for a change in the nation, an end to corruption, a rebirth that would lead to prosperity for everyone. "Aiwei, are those

berry bushes up there?” Meishi said.

Aiwei squinted and skipped ahead happily, rummaged through a bramble.

“I’m so tired of war and killing,” Meishi sighed. “Haven’t we suffered enough?”

“They manipulated peasants and villagers to kill one another,” Lucy said. “The communists didn’t do anything except put the idea in their minds—those people have more than you, go ahead, take it. Why should you work for it?”

“I don’t want to think about it anymore,” Henry said. “You’re always thinking about things you can’t change!”

“It’s happening everywhere! They made people hate each other, then kill one anothe. We watched them do it.”

“I said I don’t want to talk about it anymore,” Henry pushed Meishi away and walked ahead, stooped next to Aiwei and helped her look for berries.

“Lucy, please be gentle with Henry,” Meishi said. “It’s his duty to look after you and Aiwei. He blames himself that we almost died.”

“But we didn’t,” Lucy said. At the bramble, Aiwei was complaining the berries were picked over and her arms were scratched for nothing. Henry reached deep in the bush and came up with a single plump blackberry for her. “Meishi, I don’t think Henry sees what’s coming. You heard what the zuzhang said; the villagers have blood on their hands now. He told them that they were all in it together now. He was scaring them, telling them that landowners and their families would come back with nationalists for revenge. That only communists will protect them from what they did to their neighbors. And he’s the one who got them to kill in the first place. Who does he sound like?”

Meishi sighed deeply. “Big-eared Tu and the Green Gang.”

“Exactly. Scaring prostitutes into staying at the *House of Pearls*—telling them the police would arrest them for their crimes.”

“Yes,” Meishi said. “Crimes *he* made them commit, then convinced them he was their only protection.”

“Half of Dangyang joined the Communists after the zuzhang said those things,” Lucy said.

Henry carried Aiwei pickaback and joined them.

“That word, jieji—I’ve never heard of a landlord class or peasant class,” Meishi said. “Whoever heard of a tyrant class?”

“Or rich peasant and middle peasant?” Henry said.

The work team cadres taught everyone jieji, class divisions, which didn’t exist before the Maoist system came to the countryside. It was a Japanese word, it meant rank like the military. It was the first time anyone had ever used labels to divide the people or attempted to turn one group of Chinese people against another. Enemies of the people had always been foreign imperialists.

“And using objects to make people emotional is a theater technique,” Meishi said. “That’s what those things laid out on tables did.”

“The landlord property?” Henry said.

After goods and property were seized from landlord homes, the cadres pushed tables against the walls of the public hall and displayed everything like plunder. Dangyang wasn’t a wealthy village, but there were generations worth of family treasures—porcelain sets that had been passed down, a valuable tobacco press someone with meticulous hands had made over a hundred years before, dozens of bedlinen sets hand-stitched with good luck characters for a

happy marriage, silver pins, jade figurines, silk hangings, many sets of wood chairs and tables hand carved with family names.

"It was laid out like zhanlan guoshi," Henry said distastefully, extravagant fruit displays.

"On stage, objects are powerful," Meishi said.

No one wanted to touch belongings of the dead for fear of angry ghosts, but people were curious to know items' cost, age, who had owned what. The cadres pressed things into villagers' hands. Lucy kept shuffling through the crowd with her suitcase in front of her, both hands on the handle protecting the tea set and her camera inside.

"Here, look at this. It's very old and expensive," said one of the cadres, a young woman from the south. She offered Lucy a crackled-glazed celadon bowl with one hand and reached for the suitcase with the other. "I'll hold your bag for you."

Lucy's heart raced—the Ming tea set had been in her family for 600 years, it was worth more than a celadon bowl, more than everything in the public hall combined. Maybe more than everything in Dangyang. If the Land Reform Team found it, they'd lead her like a dog to the village gate where the zuzhang would force her to kneel, he'd shoot her the same way he shot Old Lu. She couldn't speak, she backed away and tried to think, nothing came to her.

Henry appeared with a snuff bottle and asked the young woman what it was, how it was used. Of course, he knew, but he smiled charmingly, and the young woman forgot Lucy. She found a chair and sat, slid her suitcase underneath, and tried to breathe. The work team cadres asked everyone to point at something and speak bitterness—compare the difficulty of their harsh lives with the ease of the landlord class, to share their most miserable memories,

and to rethink the past carefully. The next day, those vague recollections were recast; moments that had been pulled from many lifetimes of rural hardship had been transformed into detailed accounts of exploitation and cruelty and used to accuse even more class enemies.

"They're not going to stop, Henry," Lucy said. "Jieji is arbitrary. If they don't have enough enemies to struggle against, they classify more. They want revolution, to mobilize the masses. It doesn't matter how much destruction or violence it causes."

Henry was quiet for a long time. "Lucy, you're wrong. Communists care about the people. You know more than most about suffering, destitute, illiterate people—you drove that charity truck through every pitiful hutment in Shanghai."

She and Henry had never agreed on the communist cause. "People are suffering—there's terrible unfairness. But it can't be overcome with more unfairness and oppression."

"Our own government was oppressive and unfair. Generalissimo Chiang and Aunt Olive had a chance. They failed," Henry said.

She couldn't argue—he was right. They didn't speak for the rest of the day. By the next, she'd forgotten about the zuzhang. Her neck and back ached painfully; she was so hunger she ate the elm bark Henry offered and she convinced Aiwei to eat it, too. It was a terrible mistake; they were thirsty and drank muddy water, they vomited and became dehydrated.

And while she was finding sweet herbs to calm Aiwei's stomach, she saw something happening in the fields, valuable grain was left un-gathered. Land was overgrown or untilled. Hubei was the nation's most fertile land; it didn't make sense for the harvest to waste away.

They were miserable but didn't stop and pressed on through what became rolling hills

of fields. They plodded along a rough wooden boundary fence, and through the railing was a pair of tall grain reapers sitting idle with two figures draped over the wheels. Soldiers in People's Liberation Army uniforms were walking away from the reapers along with a group of peasants—they were headed up the hill and didn't see Lucy, Henry, Meishi, and Aiwei approaching. The figures on the reapers were dead bodies. One of the peasants turned and saw Lucy staring at the bodies. He was unbothered and went on with the others. The Land Reform Campaign was a priority for Chinese Communist Party, and nearly every soldier and cadre were involved in re-education. It wasn't a crime for people to kill landowners, or the enemy classes, they were to be struggled for their property and eliminated if they resisted. Everyone knew not to interfere, passersby could easily be confused with counterrevolutionaries and shot on-sight if they in any way prevented Land Reform from proceeding.

Lucy hurried past the dead and pulled Aiwei by the hand. It was the worst kind of bad luck. Unburied bodies gave rise to vagrant ghosts who wandered the earth, they had no place to rest, no place for their families to visit on grave-sweeping day when everyone paid homage with food and money to ancestors in the spirit world.

She slept fitfully that night, and the next day, late in the afternoon, a Land Reform work team, two men and a woman each wearing identical drab-green jackets with short collars, were standing in a wheat field beside four kneeling men. Lucy and one of the men locked eyes. He was young and soft-looking with unruly hair, a new cadre from a large college, she imagined. He had a pistol in his hand, and he casually pressed it to a man's temple as though it were the most natural thing for him to do.

Lucy's mind buzzed with fear that Aiwei would see, and she yanked her down into

the wheat grass before she knew what was happening. Henry and Meishi squatted next to them. They were surrounded by blue sky and pale green stalks. Shots were fired. Nesting birds hidden in the field flapped, squawked, and flew overhead. She knew the faint, bitter smell of cordite wafting over the wheat, American pistols. The only sound was their quick, shallow breathing. She told herself to be brave, they couldn't stay thsere forever. There was nothing to fear from work team cadres. But everyone knew that many of them were fanatics, they'd grown up during the war and had known only violence, death, and suffering. They had a taste for killing. It was silly superstition, but she silently said a prayer for meng yen sha, for blindfolding ghosts to make her, Henry, Meishi, and Aiwei invisible. To veil them from the work team cadres. Vagrant ghosts could do such things.

They came out of the field. The bodies had been left where they died. Neither she, Henry, nor Meishi spoke of what happened. She wasn't sure that Aiwei could see the bodies, which was a blessing, but she'd heard the shots and knew the smell, too. They were silent as they walked away. Lucy's grandmother taught them to be solemn around the dead, voices could attract ghosts, they were restless and were drawn to children. They could smell the weak, sick ones like Aiwei whose chicken-eye had worsened, and they would try to steal her soul, or worse, use her to reenter the world. Lucy held onto her hand and wouldn't let go, but the longer they went without food, the harder it was to be watchful of bad omens.

Keep going.

At night, they stopped. In the morning, they walked again. Had it been four days, five? They walked until the dew rolled in, then piled clothes on the wet ground, collapsed in the chill night air. She closed her eyes and hoped for sleep, but it didn't come, only dread. A fear that she'd made a mistake, that she'd end up unloved with no one to love. If she lost

Aiwei and Henry, who would she be? They were the only two people in the world who mattered to her. And they were withering away. Aiwei because she had no proper food. Henry because he had given up. She had the urge to walk again, instead lay there and distracted herself by listening to the Yangtze. It was rushing on without them, flowing chaotically, freely, echoing up the gorge. The sound mocked her; *Don't stop, you shouldn't stop*.

Everyone slept peacefully under purpled skies, she was anxious and alone. When the sun came up, they repacked and walked again.

One foot in front of the other.

In a daze, unthinking, unfeeling. Her thoughts wandering until Aiwei yanked away her hand and pointed into a half-reaped field where dozens of death-crows flocked around six bodies in padded robes. Wild animals hadn't yet found them.

The field wasn't large, the equipment wasn't new; the farmers were rich only in comparison to their neighbors. Aiwei wasn't looking at the corpses, but at the black birds, she stared with a strange curiosity. They'd lived with Japanese bombings in Chongqing; eight years of daily death and violence from the sky, and yet the lifeless bodies of farmers in an open field seemed more sinister. She didn't know what to say to Aiwei.

The smell of sun-cooked flesh reached them, Aiwei gagged with revulsion. "Bodies without masters," she cried.

"Yes," Lucy said. And she knew why it was different.

They weren't soldiers, they weren't fighting for a cause. Their lives weren't taken because of anything they did or who they were. They died because of jieji; a class definition. They were enemies because of what they had, what they owned. And their bodies, contrary to

the most sacred traditions of Confucius, Mencius, and Laozi, were left to rot as if their existence had meant nothing. Human nature was supposed to be elevated through mastery of desire, yet Maoism was unleashing the worst of it. People wanted and took. There was more violence, death, and suffering.

The crows began to caw, they used scalpel-like beaks to peck at the men's eyes and pierce their distended bellies which erupted and triggered a feeding frenzy.

Meishi screamed, Henry spun him around and held him.

Aiwei burst into tears. Lucy shielded her. "Don't look, Aiwei. Don't think about it." She pulled her away by the hand. "I won't let go; I promise."

They're just bodies, they don't feel it. But in her mind, she heard ghosts screaming.

Aiwei kept her eyes squeezed shut. "Are there more of them underneath the ground?"

Lucy wrapped her in a hug and walked faster. She whispered, "You're walking on a cloud. Your feet aren't touching the ground at all."

Lucy led Aiwei away as she heaved with sobs, and she vowed right then not to make the same mistake the landowners made. She had seen through the zuzhang the same way she saw through Aunt Olive and Big-eared Tu—they were jealous and greedy.

She couldn't stop to comfort Aiwei or to explain what had happened to the men, not until they got to their uncle in Wuhan. The dead landowners didn't realize that there was another way. Her father taught her that one could oppose like iron or like silk—iron resists by standing firm, silk allows force to flow through. No fabric was stronger than silk, no metal more brittle than iron.

"Henry!" Lucy yelled. He hadn't moved and was mesmerized by the birds' grim battle over carcasses; Meishi whimpered into his chest. "We have to keep going."

They trudged on but slowly, they were lethargic as if the earth itself was pulling at their feet. By late afternoon, they came across a cherry orchard with trees so full of fruit their limbs were bent. It was dangerous to steal food; no one had sympathy for thieves, even for those who were starving. Communist soldiers and CCP work teams guarded the farms and they killed bandits on sight. It took only a glance between she and Henry for both to know they'd risk it; they had to eat.

"I'm small," Lucy said. "No one will see me."

But Henry was the one who crawled on his belly through the fence and into the trees to gather fallen fruit off the ground. He came out with stained shirttails filled with some bruised, many green, squirrel-bitten, and some fungus-covered cherries. They divided it in four piles; Lucy picked through and bit off inedible parts, spit out the pits for herself and Aiwei. Velvety juice filled her mouth, but there was no flavor. She'd lost her sense of taste. Her stomach growled loudly, but she didn't feel hunger pangs when she placed all the good cherry bits into Aiwei's palm.

"Eat it slowly, pumpkin," she told Aiwei.

Aiwei looked at each piece vacantly and pushed it between her lips slowly. Lucy felt the same, removed from her body, from feeling. There were burst blisters on her feet, now open sores which she didn't know until she took off her shoes the night before. She also didn't realize that the strap burns from the suitcase on her shoulders had been bleeding. She should be worried, but she didn't care anymore.

They finished the cherries and walked through a valley of tall wildflowers. Weed grass with bristle-tips cut her ankles. When the seed pods burst, it was hard for her to breathe. She grew dizzy and thought she might faint, but it took too much effort to complain about it.

"Lucy," Henry said, his voice seemed to float to her from a great distance.

She turned to look at him—the sky tilted. He stepped closer, slowly rotated sideways. Then she was laying on the ground looking at a wildflower and Henry's dusty shoe.

Everything was quiet, bright, and still. She didn't want to get up. She was tired and closed her eyes. She'd fought so hard for so long to live. She had been running away from the god of death. And yet it didn't make sense. The two of them had been walking hand in hand. They were old friends.

Something touched her cheek gently—a purple flower with translucent petals. It was moist with water and shimmered in the sun. She licked her cracked lips, reached out to touch it. Its thorny leaf pricked her—a thistle. The pain was an electrical current that instantly vaporized the fog in her brain. It was such a delicate flower, but excruciating.

She sat up. Aiwei was standing with her face tilted up at the sun staring with milky eyes. Henry and Meishi had left Lucy where she'd fallen; they were in a stupor wandering away hand-in-hand. The four of them were near their breaking point, they couldn't go on this way and had to get to Wuhan more quickly.

It was near sundown; Lucy led them to the river's edge where sampans in a small fishing village were tied up for the night. She asked Meishi for money; he didn't reply or resist when she took it from his pocket. She asked an old man who was alone in his boat to ferry them to Wuhan; he stared at her warily as if he didn't understand her dialect. When she showed him the money, he understood perfectly and snatched it out of her hand. She regretted not bargaining—he seemed aggravated during the trip and without warning jerked the sampan through gorge rapids and around boulders. They pitched and rolled. Aiwei, who weighed too little to stay seated on the bench, was bounced around like a cuju ball and

scraped by rough planks until Lucy and Henry held her down.

The trip was shorter than any of them expected. The Yangtze was calm at the conjunction with the Han River where Wuhan was made up of the tri-cities—Hankow and Hanyang on the eastern shore of the Yangtze with the Han River between them, and Wuchang on the western shore of the Yangtze. She was shocked by what she saw from the sampan—the entire metropolis appeared to be suspended in time, at a terrible point in the past. The Japanese had been entrenched for years when millions of imperial soldiers were based in Wuhan. It took the Americans to finally dislodge them with massive bombing in late 1944. Now, five years later while other parts of the nation were recovering—little had been rebuilt; debris was yet to be cleared away, the rivers were foul with oil and chemical runoff.

The commercial buildings and factory smokestacks of Hankow were cold and dark. For generations it was a sprawling industrial powerhouse, iron and steel factories, silk and cotton mills, tea packing and food canning. It was now a soot stained, debris-lined shadow of itself. She and Henry looked at one another, neither of them expected this. They'd both hated Chongqing; a vipers' nest of corrupt officials, ambitious foreigners, and communist double agents. At least she'd been proud to watch a modern city grow out of nothing with western buildings clinging to steep cliffsides; huge new hospitals looking out on river junks. Government authorities—Chinese and foreign, spoke in looping circles and were fatuous, but they spent money on public health, education, and food. Merchants thrived; Chinese doctors were called in from all over the nation. Japanese bombing didn't stop the people from thriving.

Wuhan should have been the same; it was the heart of the nation, their Paris, Munich, New York. Lucy wanted to cry for what she saw, a lost city.

The sampan glided with the current past Wuchang on the east bank. The huge railway interchange with the only direct line to Beijing was in still ruins. A row of railway cars had been melted together. Part of the track-iron had been twisted like ribbons and wooden ties were tossed into mounds like matchsticks. The enormous stone station was scorched and missing part of its roof.

"Mama, look!" Aiwei cried. In the distance was the curved xie shan rooves of Wuhan University on Luojia Hill, which had survived. The old campus was still intact.

"You can see that?" Lucy held Aiwei by the shoulders and looked into her eyes. She was elated that her sight had not been further diminished.

"That's where I'm going to go," Aiwei said and slipped her arm around Lucy's waist. "Right, mama?"

"Yes," Lucy said, but she doubted she could keep the promise.

Henry, who knew every nuance of Lucy's tones, said, "Who knows, pumpkin, maybe you'll change your mind. There are better colleges in Beijing and Shanghai."

"Not for me!"

Lucy hugged Aiwei, they watched Wuchang's waterfront pass by. Aiwei had been near collapse an hour before and now she was excited to see the carved gables and tiered tiles that were her dream of the future. She didn't notice the railway station or wrecked districts between the river and the gates of the university.

It had been the same when Lucy and Henry were growing up; the 1920s were terribly chaotic in China. The two of them cared only that the clay figures they made by the dozens didn't crack in half before drying, and that they could play in the park. At 5 years-old, she had no idea why her mother cried watching Sun Yat-sen's funeral procession crawl through

the French Concession. Or at 11 years-old why everyone was upset about train wreck in a place called Mukden.

The old man guided them into the mouth of the murky Han River. On the southern shore, Hanyang looked like a bleak forest, branchless smokestacks growing out of rubble. They angled toward the Hankow Bund on the northern shore. It had been a fairy-nightscape lit by thousands of streetlights; everyone owned a picture postcard. The tallest landmark remaining was the hexagon-shaped Medieval water tower. Under pale-yellow moonlight, the gloomy redbrick looked like a brutal robotic sentry. Gone were the flowering Plane trees that from the river had softened the stone faces of revival buildings along the Bund. The sand on the river beach was blackened with oil and littered with discarded ship parts.

The old man used his yuloh, steering oar, to steady the sampan against a military-grade pontoon dock which was meant to be temporary, but piers had yet to be rebuilt. Henry climbed out and helped Meishi, Lucy, and Aiwei over the side. They were weak and clumsy, and when they were out, the old man poled the sampan backward.

“Our bags!” Meishi called out.

“Mā de!” Shit! Henry stomped into the river and latched onto the hull.

“Nǐ tā mā de qù sǐ ba!” Fucking go to hell! The old man yelled and beat Henry off with his yuloh.

Henry fell backward into the muddy river. Meishi plunged in after him, and they both staggered out coughing foul water. Lucy could do nothing but watch the sampan disappear in the current. The old man had stolen the two suitcases Henry and Meishi were carrying. Her bag was still strapped to her back. Everything was safe, the tea set, her camera, her negatives…

She gasped. "Weishi's clothes! You put them in your case last night." She dropped the bag on the dirty beach and threw it open. "Fen dan! Diao si!" Bastard! Asshole!

"Yes, he is," Meishi said and pulled out clothes for himself and Henry.

They changed on the beach. There were streetlights several blocks away, activity and people, but the beach was deserted. Aiwei watched without interest, she had returned to her detached demeanor. Lucy couldn't stop searching for the old man's sampan upriver.

"They were just clothes," Henry said.

But they weren't just clothes—they were the only connection that Aiwei would ever have to her real mother. Five zhàng away, 40 feet, a fishwife was tending cooking baskets stacked atop a large pot made to boil over charcoal bricks set into the sand. When she shook her baskets, the smell of bream fish escaped on curls of steam. She had seen the entire episode and when she looked at Aiwei, her face softened. She called them closer.

"Do you have any money?" she said doubtfully.

Lucy nodded and pressed into her hand the remaining money she'd taken from Meishi. It wasn't much, not enough to feed them all. The fishwife didn't count the money but pocketed it and began filling bowls with rice, a small piece of fish, broth with mushrooms. Lucy asked Henry and Meishi to take their bowls with Aiwei and sit on pallets by the water wall while she waited for the last bowl. The simple soup warmed her hands and spread up her arms into her cheeks. She was overcome with gratitude and impulsively hugged the fishwife. "A candle lights others," she whispered. "Xiè xiè." Thank you.

"Á? Á?" the fishwife stiffened and pulled away, embarrassed, but she smiled a little. "Don't spill!" she said and busied herself with her baskets.

Lucy sat next to Aiwei and scooped half the rice into her mouth, made herself spit it

back into the bowl, and then ate more slowly. Aiwei was staring at her food as if she didn't believe it was real. "Is something wrong, pumpkin?"

"Should I save some of it? In case—"

"It's alright. Eat all of it, in small bites," Lucy said.

Aiwei ate the rice first. She tried to slip the fish into her pocket, but Lucy pulled her hand back—she ate it reluctantly.

"Good," Lucy said. "Now the broth." They emptied their bowls and watched boats swaying in the current for a long time. They were drunk on food.

Aiwei took the bowls to the fishwife. "Hǎochī," Delicious, she said and handed them back with both hands.

The fishwife seemed touched with her courtesy and bowed deeply to her. "You look much better." She patted Aiwei's shoulder tenderly.

Aiwei came back smiling and they watched the fishwife cook more fish and vegetables to sell the following day.

"Uncle will demand the tea set," Henry finally said.

"We'll tell him we don't have it," Lucy said.

"He won't believe you," Henry yawned. "We need him."

"Just give it to him. Or sell it to him," Meishi said.

"Meishi, please," Lucy said. Her head began to pound with the anticipation of an argument, one they'd had many times. "It's not for me to decide. Nor you. When she's old enough—"

"When who's old enough?" Aiwei asked.

Lucy stroked Aiwei's cheek thinking of another lie to tell her; the soup had restored a

blush of color to her face. “I was talking about dì xí,” my father’s younger brother's wife. “She and our uncle are the head of the Lau family now.”

“Isn’t she old enough for that?”

“She’s old but doesn’t know very much.”

Aiwei smiled but wasn’t satisfied, Lucy could see it in her eyes, but she didn’t ask anything more. Henry began describing dì di and dì xí so that she would recognize them when they met. In Dangyang, he had concocted a story to explain how Lucy had a child; uncle knew the truth, but for Aiwei’s sake they needed him to lie as well. Henry believed in simple fabrications; Lucy married in Chongqing and lost her husband early in the war; marriage and birth records were lost when the administrative building was bombed sometime in 1944.

“You need a bath, uncle,” Aiwei said.

“So do you.”

They began walking toward their uncle’s home. The nighttime chill and dampness were chased away as the sun came up. Meishi held Aiwei’s hand and quietly recounted some of the Monkey King’s adventures. Lucy couldn’t remember the last time he felt like telling stories. There were people huddled in every doorway they passed. Women with small children and men with soldiers’ blank stares, tattered blankets wrapped tightly around them. They leaned out to hear Meishi’s tale. She’d never seen so many refugees, even after the disaster of 1938 when everyone was fleeing the Japanese invasion. In a strange way, they were lucky—it was safe to be like four grains of sand lost in an ocean of nameless faces.

They found their uncle’s street; Hanzheng, where tea merchants and cotton mills had traded and exported to Europe for generations. Their uncle owned a compound with an

apartment above their hong and a large home and extra building for storage behind. Along the brick-lined lane, two and three-story commercial buildings were jammed up next to each other and each one was hung with dozens of slogans, idiom woodcarvings, and sales-pitch banners. But they'd been stripped, vacated, and uncared for as if no one had used them for years.

A group of drunken CCP soldiers stumbled around the corner laughing and puffing on the fat cigarettes they made in a factory in Yan'an to raise money for the communist revolution—the rough paper they used produced copious clouds of bluish smoke. The soldiers saw Henry first.

Henry raised his hand and shouted, "Tongzhimen hao!" Greetings, comrades!

The soldiers look at one another through a haze that smelled of sticks and dirt. One of them spit out his cigarette—on his collar was a small metal pin of Mao Tse-tung. "Give me your dēngjì biǎo." Registration papers.

"Tongzhimen xinkule!" Comrades, you work so hard, Henry said and slapped him on the back. "Relax. We just arrived; we're looking for our uncle. Maybe you know him, the Lau family. He lives on this street."

Henry went through the nine grades of kinship, named all their paternal family in Wuhan.

But the pin-wearing soldier was unmoved. "Where are your registration papers? Where were you before Hankow?" he demanded.

"We wanted to be registered with our family. Surely you can understand?"

The soldiers grabbed Henry and Meishi by the arms.

"Wait," Henry said. "The village we came from was very small. We worked for our

mother's kin—a rice merchant who was well-regarded. When the work teams came, they decided he wasn't an enemy. He wasn't struggled. He made amends for his status by giving ownership deeds to his storehouse and other properties to his workers."

The soldiers stepped aside and whispered for a long time. They kept looking back at Henry, then Meishi, occasionally Lucy and Aiwei. It went on and on. They seemed willing to let the whole matter drop, except the pin-wearing soldier who was in a foul mood. He lit another cigarette and looked over their clothes and Lucy's suitcase.

She panicked. "We want to be part of the real revolution here in Wuhan. It's where the labor movement started, yes? We refused our share of the rice business to work with real reform in the factories."

The pin-wearing soldier balked. They were arrested for a crime the soldiers couldn't or wouldn't name and taken to an overcrowded jailhouse. They were told they'd be released if and when their uncle was found and verified their story. The guards were uninterested in giving them food or water. There was no toilet, not even a pot to relieve themselves. Henry sulked and Meishi fell into a deep sleep with Aiwei next to him on a lice-infested cot which he negotiated away from another prisoner for the socks he was wearing.

"A rice merchant who wasn't struggled? What a ridiculous story, Henry," Lucy muttered angrily trying not to wake Meishi and Aiwei.

"The factories are real reform?" Henry sneered.

"He was looking at my suitcase."

"Leave the talking to me. You aren't good at it."

He was right; anxiety always made her say the wrong thing. "When uncle comes, he'll go through it and find the tea set."

"If he comes."

"He'll come. He wants the tea set more than he hates me."

Refugees whispered stories of people who had been forgotten in the jailhouse for weeks with little food. They ate scraps—melon rinds, days old rice, anything left over from the soldiers' lunch boxes, and often got diarrhea which was smeared and dried across the floor. Some of the prisoners had nearly died from it. She and Henry were told that if their uncle wasn't found or if he refused to pay the fine, like everyone who was unregistered, they'd be sent to farms in the countryside where workers were desperately needed.

Lucy's anxiety spiked to an all-time high—she couldn't stop biting her nails even though they were bleeding. The last time they saw their uncle, he had been so angry with her that he had screamed and yelled obscenities while Aunt Cixi, his wife, stood next to him shēngqì, generating qì like a volcano. If Henry and Meishi hadn't been with her, Cixi would have held her while uncle beat her, maybe to death.

It was her photographs of Imperial soldiers killing civilians in Shanghai that Joe published in an International Concession magazine that upset him. She couldn't get an article in Chinese print because any mention of the Japanese Army was censored in China. Once the story and photos came out, there were protests and a boycott of Japanese businesses in Shanghai. Her father's Japanese partners sued him for their losses; the courts gave them the Lau family business in Shanghai—which was the profitable arm of Lau Enterprise, plus their father's bank accounts, their home—everything. Except the Ming tea set, which her father gave to Weishi, his lover, to care for the daughter that was soon to be born—Aiwei. There was nothing the international courts could do; Chinese law placed compensation to courtesans above commercial claims.

And then the Japanese invaded. Lucy thought she'd been vindicated; she was right to warn people about the Imperial Army. But her uncle didn't care. He hated their father for cheating him, leaving him with the Lau Cloth Company, and wanted the Ming tea set as restitution.

She paced back and forth in the tiny cell.

"Please stop doing that," Henry said. "You're making everyone uneasy."

Women and men had herded together in the cell and backed away from her. Their weary, pinched faces made her feel ashamed. They'd said nothing even though they wanted to, and it was because they were used to suffering in silence, they expected intimidation—no one dared speak out.

She sat on the edge of the cot next to Aiwei who was in a deep sleep. "What will you say, Henry?"

"First pray that he comes."

Late the next day, their uncle appeared at the cell bars. "I should leave you here to rot. Your father betrayed us all, and it was your fault!"

"I warned father what was happening," Lucy said. "He didn't listen. Neither did you because you were making profit from the business."

He looked away; he couldn't deny the truth of what she said.

"I've taken the tea set. I'll pay your fine if you agree not to dispute my right to it."

Meishi and Aiwei were awake watching her. More prisoners were brought to the cell, the door was unlocked with a loud thud. Some people inside became jíyú, impatient, and surged forward. The guards screamed insults and curses, used the new prisoners as shields to push back anyone near the bars, then slammed the doors shut. When they were gone, uncle

came back.

“Give me your answer. I can’t abide this place,” he said.

“Henry…” she pleaded.

“Lucy, father wouldn’t want us to suffer for pride.”

“You think I’ve done this for pride?” she said angrily.

She felt Aiwei watching her, her dark eyes didn’t miss anything, she listened to every tone. Lucy had become her nominal mother the day Weishi with Aiwei in her arms, died in the first bombing of Chongqing—16,000 people died that day, half the city burned in fires that raged for weeks. Lucy thought they would all perish. But they didn’t, and she had loved Aiwei like a true daughter ever since. But there was a qīng yà inside her, a conflict she had to hide—even Henry didn’t see. When she looked at Aiwei, she had to wonder if her father had changed fate. If Aiwei wasn’t really his offspring, but a little doll from the Goddess Guanyin, a borrowed baby who would run away back to Heaven or be taken back. Not a day went by that Lucy didn’t fear she’d changed her own destiny. That Aiwei had replaced the child who was meant for her—that she would never have her own. And to make up for the loss, she tried to bind Aiwei to her with family stories, filial duty, love, and care—all the things her parents gave her. She hadn’t really been protecting Aiwei’s inheritance, she’d been protecting her own future.

Lucy grabbed the cell bars. “Uncle, come back. I agree.”

16

Wuhan - 1949

Lucy pulled Aiwei backward into a corner of the jail cell careful not to lean against the moist stone walls slick with some green mold that could cause sickness. At the iron bars, five or six pedicab drivers were banging and swearing, grabbing the jailors as if they were protesting on the street. They were wet from the Han River, black from diesel oil, and smelled of dead fish. It was impossible to breathe near them.

"Bái chī!" Morons! A jailor struck at them with a baton and hit their wiry arms. The men screamed and pulled back.

Lucy hugged Aiwei and slid down the wall into a crouch. The pedicab drivers were far more injured by the jailors lack of solidarity than their brutality.

"Guài wu!" Monster!

"Méi liáng xīn!" No conscience!

"Lěng xuèdòng wù." He's cold-hearted.

"Chǒu bā guài." And so ugly.

The guard struck the bars, snarled, "Yě bù zhào zhào jìng zi!" Take a look in the mirror—and laughed when the drivers shrank back.

"Èr bǎi wǔ." They're stupid, another guard said.

The drivers had been thrown off the pier by their labor union boss for causing a naoshi, an unauthorized protest disturbance, over unpaid wages.

A stout guard appeared; he was annoyed. "Chǎo sǐ rén le!" This racket is killing me! He demanded to know what the problem was, told the guards to shut up when they blamed

the pedicab drivers, unlocked the cell, and pointed at Henry, Meishi, and Lucy, then noticed Aiwei and scowled. “Get out!” He rattled his big ring of keys warning the pedicab drivers to move aside. They were pushed down the dim hallway roughly, out of the jailhouse, and onto Hankow Street where bright sunlight and honking trucks and cars assaulted them like New Year’s fireworks.

“Wait! My suitcase,” Lucy leapt at the big jailhouse door, but it was slammed shut.

“Your bag is safe,” their uncle said, leaning against the building and fanning himself with a shan shan. “I sent it home. Follow me.”

Uncle was tall like Henry, with an athletic Shanghai gait. Lucy pulled Aiwei into a quick step and followed but could think of nothing except Aunt Cixi going through her suitcase in search of the Ming tea set. She’d find it, and the camera—the camera that had caused so much misfortune and grief in their family. Cixi was spiteful, she’d drop it or smash it, and say that it was her duty to rid Lucy of her obsession. It had ruined the Lau family, killed Lucy’s father and mother. For years, aunt had blamed Joe for giving her the cursed thing, for teaching her war photography—as if her passion was a magic spell he had cast over her. It never occurred to aunt or uncle that her articles and photo essays that revealed the suffering of a nation was a worthy pursuit. They both believed the Japanese invasion was fated, a punishment from Heaven for the misdeeds of the people and their leaders. When Lucy objected, defied the logic of blaming victims for their plight rather than the oppressors, aunt told her it was vulgar work for a woman, then remarked coyly that Joe didn’t see her as a woman when he took her to dangerous places where she first photographed Japanese soldiers committing their crimes in Shanghai.

“Ow, you’re squeezing me,” Aiwei pulled her hand out of hers.

"I'm sorry, pumpkin," Lucy said.

Uncle crisscrossed the street rather than fight the crowded sidewalk, in and out of stopped trucks and cars whose drivers shouted at each other. Idling engines, hot and revving without reason, produced a dirty layer of exhaust that hung over the street. Drivers cursed at them as they weaved through, threatening to run them over while people watched from the sidewalk.

Her head throbbed from the fumes, intensified to pounding, dark spots appeared in her periphery, she couldn't hear herself think from the honking. Her mind began to retreat. *Keep going. Don't stop.*

"It's a boiling cauldron this time of day," uncle said over his shoulder. And his voice floated to her the way Henry's had just before she fainted in the meadow. "All these hongs close at lunch time." He looked back, saw that she and Aiwei had drawn closer to him. He was surprised and sped up until he'd put a few paces distance between them again. And even dazed as she was, she realized that uncle wanted to make sure he couldn't smell their dirty clothes and their oily hair, which offended his senses more than the traffic congestion. She slowed and kept his gray, bobbing head in her sight.

Shoppers on the sidewalks streamed in and out of hongs laughing and chatting in a hum that made her unaccountably happy. The night before, after losing all of Weishi's clothes to the thieving old man in the sampan, they had walked on cratered cobblestone next to sooty brick buildings that tilted against one another their facades crumbling. Hankow had seemed like a hopeless, defeated city. But nothing was as it seemed; everything was different in sunlight. Doors and windows had been thrown open, merchants laid out their bright displays, and like day-blooming flowers, attracted customers by the hundreds.

“Don’t get lost,” uncle waved them to move more quickly.

But she was weak from hunger and dizzy. She stopped and held her head. The sky over buildings wobbled. Henry grabbed her arm before she fell. Meishi swept Aiwei up in a hug.

“Uncle,” Henry called. “We have to eat something.”

They stopped at the corner, an old-style teahouse, and uncle asked for a table open to the street. Henry helped her to a chair and sat beside her. Uncle furiously tried to fan away their unpleasant body smells, and finally pinched his nose. The teahouse was ornate with thin carved panels that had been painted red and bright yellow, now peeling, and dozens of faded paper lanterns hanging from the ceilings. A waiter brought them hot tea in an iron pot and large ceramic cups. Lucy poured for everyone, as was customary, and no one mentioned her shaking hand or that she spilled tea on the table. And after a few sips, the warm tea invigorated her.

“This isn’t the way home I remember, uncle,” Lucy said after an uncomfortable silence.

“You need to go to the bathhouse first. Cixi won’t let you in like this.” And he released his nose to drink tea.

“Thank you for thinking of us,” Henry said drily. “You know we barely escaped from Chongqing?”

“That’s very unfortunate.” Uncle said and glanced down at their shoes, all of them had holes in their soles. Lucy’s were worn through, stained, and had been cut on river rocks. “Cixi and I have had our own misfortune. We moved to Jianghan Lu Street.”

The Japanese Concession. Since the war ended, the terrible losses they endured at the

hands of the Japanese, the senseless massacres and violence, no one wanted anything to do with their legacy.

Uncle saw Lucy and Henry look at one another—he toyed with his teacup. "We moved to an apartment," he said. "It's quite nice."

"An apartment?" Lucy said, trying very hard to conceal her shock. Uncle, Aunt Cixi and their two sons had lived in a luxurious compound that had belonged to Lucy's grandparents. The term misfortune was an understatement. "And our cousins? Do they live with you as well?"

"They both live in the same apartment house as Cixi and me. It's the old Mitsui Bussan Kaisha building. I believe you know it."

Only outcasts or collaborators would be exiled to the Japanese Concession. Who else would want to live there with the memories of the past?

"Yes, I know the building. Henry, didn't we go there a lot?"

Henry nodded. "We loved visiting Wuhan with father," he said to Meishi. "He took us to see his largest client, Mitsui Shipping. Their offices were in that building."

"They each have their own apartments—with their wives," uncle said.

"Blessings on the marriages," Lucy said. "Have you grandchildren yet?" And in her mind, she could hear Henry asking what kind of women would marry their cousins, they were petty and spoiled, neither of them believed in hard work. Just like uncle.

"No, not yet. After the compound was taken—"

Henry nearly choked on his tea but recovered quickly. Lucy couldn't blame him; the compound didn't belong to uncle, it belonged to the Lau family which included her and Henry. "Taken?" Henry said. "You didn't sell it? And the Lau Cloth and Supply Company?"

"I didn't sell anything. And I don't own anything anymore. Not the compound, supply company, cloth spinning or the cloth mill. Which means you and Lucy have no family interests in Wuhan anymore, if that's what you want to know."

Henry looked at him defiantly. "What I'd like to know is—what happened?"

Lucy kicked Henry under the table. "What Henry means is, in Chongqing the news was heavily censored. We knew only what Chiang Kai-shek wanted us to know. Then, we traveled the countryside, there was no news from the cities. Whatever political changes, especially here in Wuhan, must have been very difficult for you, uncle," she said.

"You have no idea," uncle said and poured himself more tea.

Henry tensed; his cheeks reddened—he was boiling inside. Uncle had no idea what the four of them had been through, and he didn't care. He was well nourished, lived in an apartment, his sons were married. He sipped his tea and contemplated his difficulties as though no one had suffered as he had suffered. And at the same table, their filthiness, thin faces, lice infested hair, threadbare clothes, Aiwei's chicken-eye due to malnutrition was plain to see.

Uncle sighed. "And now my problems are made worse because the party is creating impossible friction between workers and labor unions. It makes my job impossible."

Henry lost patience. "Your job? You have job?" he said.

Lucy glared at Henry to stop talking. "Uncle, what are you talking about?" she said. "The party has no reason to create friction. Labor unions represent the workers."

"Is that what you think? In the countryside, did the Land Redistribution Teams represent the tenant farmers? Did they represent peasants?"

Henry couldn't contain himself. Between clenched teeth, he said, "Tenant farmers

and peasants have been unable to own land for generations, uncle. Land redistribution was the only way."

"Did it work? Do they own land now? Does anyone?" uncle said.

"No." Henry leaned back in his chair. "It's being put into collectives," he said. And his demeanor changed from agitated to calm. He was thinking over something uncle said, putting pieces together with something else that might have been bothering him.

"Exactly. Why say the revolution is meant to share with peasants what landowners had if it isn't?" Uncle leaned on the table and rubbed his eyes; he looked much older than his years. "It's happening in factories and manufacturing, too. Why say the revolution is meant to help workers if the labor unions and the state take everything away? They call it 18 chops of the knife."

"You said workers are organized. They protest. They strike. The make demands," Henry said.

"Yes. The party tells workers they deserve money for their labor. The problem is labor unions also do what the party tells them. It's… problematic."

"Wait, they're telling both sides opposite things?"

"It seems so," uncle said.

"Maybe there's nothing for us here," Lucy said.

"And people are looking for you, Henry," uncle said. "Asking about your job at the Finance Ministry under Chiang Kai-shek."

Lucy nearly spit out tea on the table. "When was that?" She dabbed her mouth with her napkin and saw Meishi sitting very still staring at uncle like a tiger—it sent a chill through her. Everyone thought Henry was the tall, athletic, jealous protector of diminutive,

artistic Meishi. But the opposite was true. Meishi was an actor, often unnoticed, but he was like Yan-luo, king of the underworld. If it even crossed his mind that someone might hurt Henry, he became hellish wrath personified. He didn't like uncle one bit.

Uncle set down his cup. "A few weeks ago, officials from Shanghai came to interrogate me about the matter. They said they were from CCP Central."

"What did they ask?" Lucy said, but she already knew the answer.

"Why you'd embezzle money from the Nationalist Government War Fund, Henry. And where you'd hide it."

"They said *I* took the money?" Henry stammered and his eyes became moist.

Lucy saw in his wet, darkened eyes that he finally accepted what he didn't want to believe; what she'd known all along. They were fugitives because Chiang and Pock-marked Tu were blood brothers, and after the communists won the civil war, they wanted as much as they could take away when they retreated to Taiwan. Aunt Olive wen, too. She was rich beyond belief in her own right, she had Soong family money in banks all over the globe. But she took more from her husband and from Tu and in exchange she had betrayed Lucy and Henry, her best friend's children who she had sworn to protect.

Aiwei silently took Henry's hand and held it across the table.

"It wasn't the first time," uncle said. "Before the civil war resumed, Chiang sent investigators here to find you. I don't know why he thought you'd come to Wuhan. I didn't tell them anything. I didn't know anything."

"Didn't tell them anything," Lucy repeated. She wished she could believe him—he loved gossip, hated their father, hated her. "You could have told them that Henry didn't embezzle anything," she said. "Chiang's the thief. And Tu."

“Why would I accuse Tu, of all people? Or Chiang?” uncle snapped. “I’m not bùjìng. And why would he send investigators if *they* embezzled the money? Of course, I can’t ask him or Madame Chiang. Neither one is here to defend themselves.”

Uncle had told her many times she was bùjìng, disrespectful to him. She couldn’t help it; he had no loyalty to father, his own brother. “Henry wasn’t here to defend himself when they made accusations either,” Lucy said.

“Hmph,” uncle said, unmoved.

Henry took a long, deep breath. “Maybe Chiang and Aunt Olive sent investigators to mislead people. To give them time while they fled to Taiwan.

“Where they’re richer than anyone,” Lucy said. “And we’re here in Wuhan, so poor that we have to beg you for food and a place to sleep. You’ve known Henry all his life, is he a criminal?”

Uncle calmly sipped his tea, made a face because it had gone cold, and set down the cupn. “I’m sorry, Henry. Your sister’s right. She’s the rogue of the family, not you.” He watched people pass along the street, nearly colliding. Traffic had begun to move forward, there was more honking. “They asked about your father and mother. About Tu and how you know him, Lucy. They had photos of you with him. They were very thorough.”

Henry smiled at her, but it looked like surrender. The photo of Lucy with Tu could have come from only one person, Aunt Olive. How many more betrayals had she planned for them? “Maybe Wuhan isn’t the best place for us, Lucy,” he said.

“You didn’t steal anything, don’t behave like a thief,” uncle pounded the table with a bony fist—the teacups clattered. Aiwei jumped. He sounded like a Lau rather than the dan teng, pain in the balls, father said he was. “Besides, Henry, I need your help with the

business."

"My help? You said you don't have Lau Cloth and Supply anymore."

"It's complicated. I still have responsibilities. If I can arrange registration papers, will you come to the mill?"

"Lucy," Henry said. "What do you think? Do you want to stay?"

Uncle looked surprised that Henry asked for her opinion but said nothing. "What kind of responsibilities, uncle?" Lucy said.

"When the state took over, they confiscated my deeds, my ownership certificates, inventory, supplies, equipment… Everything except the debts. There are outstanding bank loans with my signature on them."

Henry began to laugh. And because she had been so worried for him, Aiwei laughed and clapped her hands.

Uncle became indignant. "I don't think you understand, it isn't funny."

"I understand. They took your life, left you with obligations that will send you to jail. I was made to falsify accounts at the point of a gun. Investigators have come after me. They want to put me in jail."

"It seems neither of us had a choice," uncle said. He swirled what was left of his cold tea, looked at the leaves in the bottom of his cup.

Lucy wondered what fortune he saw in the cup, if he knew what disasters were coming, would he change course? Henry poured his tea out on the street. Uncle watched like Henry was a different man now, worthy because they shared the same dilemma. A conciliation she hadn't believed was in uncle's nature.

"Uncle, I'm sorry you lost everything," she said.

He waved her off.

“If you have nothing, they can take nothing,” Henry said and poured hot tea.

“The party consolidated all of the cloth spinning, milling, and dying companies in Wuhan.”

“You mean collectivized?” Henry said.

“Yes. I manage the Milling Storage and Supplies Department. Can you imagine? With my experience? It didn’t take long for the new directors to run the business into the ground. Morale is very poor, we’ve had strike after strike, there’s no profit. Not enough income has been generated to pay employees, especially the new ones they hired. They can’t possibly repay loans.”

“Uncle, you and father started the company. Surely you can make them see reason.”

“No one listens to me. I’m a symbol of the old ways. I’m ridiculed. A collective makes their decisions by putting out fires, not planning wisely.”

The waiter brought a huge bowl of duck soup and hot/dry noodles that he placed in the center of the table. Uncle looked at Lucy, it was her duty to serve everyone. While Aiwei ate her noodles, which she eagerly heaped into her mouth, uncle watched and grimaced. Lucy wanted to slap him. It was wonderful that Aiwei’s hunger had returned, and he had no right to judge her manners.

“Uncle,” Lucy said to draw his attention away from her. “What can Henry do?”

“I have a dozen bosses who constantly pour different instructions into my ears.” Uncle said and looked at Henry for a reaction.

“Bosses have to be cautioned to remain practical,” Henry said.

“Yes, but how can it be said without seeming to criticize—"

"This is the best bowl of soup I've ever eaten!" Aiwei said.

All of the serving bowls on the table were nearly empty. "It's the most expensive, to be sure," uncle said.

"The prices are higher than when the war ended," Meishi smiled. "What happened?"

Uncle looked at him as though he'd just noticed Meishi. "The labor strikes. Protests. Production everywhere has slowed, especially food. There've been fifty strikes in Hankow this month alone."

"Fifty strikes! Why?" Lucy said. "Look at all the people in the hongs."

"You remember how your father insisted on giving employees the cotton waste at the mill?" uncle said.

"Yes, don't all mills do that?" Lucy said.

"It became common practice. And for years employees made their own cloth from waste, always after hours. They relied on the extra money."

"Father said it built good guanxi," Henry said. Good employee-employer relations.

"It didn't cost us much to give it, and employees loved it. Well, the state ended the practice. They didn't tell anyone or bother to find out who depended on the money. They just stopped it one day."

"But why?"

"I don't know. They did the same thing with the food subsidy at festival time," uncle said.

"That's been tradition for a hundred years. Wages are only part of what employees expect," Henry said.

"The directors don't care. The party doesn't care."

"That's very stingy," Lucy said.

"Do you remember Wang?" uncle said.

Lucy remembered a tall, well-educated man with a Beijing dialect who visited father in Shanghai every month. He had eight or nine children that he constantly talked about. She loved hearing funny stories of their misadventures.

"He calls them master monks because they enforce austerity. They cut out bonuses for good attendance, too."

"The bonuses are just smart business," Henry said, and shook his head while he drank soup broth.

"Let me tell you something," uncle said and leaned on the table. "Here in Wuhan, we had a headache of regulations during the Japanese War. Everybody had their own rules, different forms to fill out. Japanese forms, communist forms, republican form. In occupied areas you couldn't sell to this one. Communist areas, you couldn't buy from that one. Republican areas you could buy or sell to the other one. And then there was the graft, the bribes to keep track of. Three sets of books you had to keep: warlords, nationalist army, communists. We kept it straight with two administrative staff. These new directors don't have all that paperwork, but they hired forty-eight more managers!"

Meishi laughed behind long, delicate fingers. "You're joking."

"I'm not. They had to cut workers' pay so we can afford the managerial salaries." He sighed heavily. "They tell me the party cadres need jobs. It's giving me an ulcer." The bill came and uncle looked sick but paid it without comment. "Come, we'll go to the fragrant water house. All of you need washing."

On the next street corner was a bathhouse in a plain building with no markings on the

outside. Inside, everyone knew uncle. It was open in the center around a large hot water pool. Two women with their hair in kerchiefs greeted she and Aiwei, then pulled them into the female locker room, and told them to disrobe. They stood still while the scrub masters used a cuōzǎojīn, small nubby cloths, to viciously rub them head to foot with some mixture of salt and herbs. She carefully avoided Lucy's shoulder wounds and the blister sores on her feet but made the rest of her raw and bright red. Next to her, Aiwei made chirping noises Lucy had never heard before. They were then doused from a bucket of rice vinegar and given white cotton shifts before being led to the pool to join uncle who was soaking with Henry and Meishi, thin curls of steam were rising around them.

"You look much better," uncle said. "And you smell delicious."

"I thought it would be painful," Aiwei said. Everyone turned to stare at her; she'd said nothing all day. "But I feel wonderful." And she swam in circles around them like a river dolphin.

By the time they rinsed, dressed, and walked to the apartment, Aunt Cixi, her sons, and their wives were waiting with a fruit plate, cookies, and fresh tea. Lucy had never been more grateful to uncle, having them washed and fed first was a blessing. The apartment was small and dimly lit, but neatly kept and clean, with one bathroom down the hall that was shared by all the apartments on the floor. Cixi greeted them with her head high and her hands tightly laced—she tensed when Lucy kissed her cheek as if it were painful.

VITA

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