

XI - 79 - 3. A Play About China

D. Prologue before Act I 4 pages

## Prologue

(Peiping, middle July, 1937)

(Stage totally black save for a white spot in which stands a hospital bed with a small table and chair near the head. On the table a water-bottle, glass with thermometer, ~~and~~ a glass, a small ~~table~~ shaded table light. On the foot of the bed hangs a wooden board with hospital charts.)

Col. Wu: (entering noiselessly, going to be) Old Wang! General Wang!  
General Wang: (Rolling out of bed in pajamas) Did anyone see you come in?

Wu: Who knows; The Japs have spies everywhere. Like bedbugs, they come out at night. Here are the clothes--and here's the chauffeur's license and badge. The car will be here in half an hour.

Wang: What news from Chou?

Wu: The same as yesterday; his troops are scattered but fighting as they fall back. They're trying to assemble in Paoting. The Japs know it --because they bombed Paoting yesterday. If you can escape through the lines, you can catch up with Chou somewhere near Paoting.

Wang: If I get through? And what about you?

Wu: I'll try to catch up with you at the Buddhist temple. If I'm not there within two hours after you get there, don't wait. Take the bicycle which the monk will give you. He has money for you. Then get out.

Wang; You must reach there. Leave ~~here~~ this place within an hour. The Japs have started calling at all hours of the night. One came last night to tell me they've made me the head of the puppet government. ~~But I lost~~

Wu: Yes, I know. The whole country knows. <sup>Yesterday</sup> The Japs ~~have~~ broadcast your name as the new head of the puppet government. There are <sup>secret</sup> already leaflets in the streets ~~against you~~ branding you as a

traitor, to be shot on sight. Yesterday one of your batallions surrendered to the Japs, thinking you had surrendered. Major Liang surrendered with them. Ever one expects this whole thing will end in just another compromise with the Japs. The secret leaflets accuse you of giving orders to your troops to surrender. . .

Wang: (pulling on coolie clothing from the bundle given him by Wu)

I gave no orders!. The Government sent me none to give. I surrendered the city to save it from destruction. And the Government may still settle this as just another local incident.

Wu: No! The country is in arms. . . demanding war.to the finish.

Wang: Better I had blown out my own brains rather than surrender the city.

Wu: Save your bullets for the enemy.

Wang: (Shaking his head violently) I still can't think--my brain's half dead from sleeplessness. I hear Chou's voice--and yours; that last night we were together. . .

Wu: All that's past.

Wang: Nothing is every/ past. I keep hearing Chou's accusation: "first appeasement; then treason." Then he said: "You lick the feet of the Japs, but we'll fight with sticks and stones. . . you'll live in slavish luxury under the Japs, but we'll die. Yesterday Manchuria. . today all China. . . tomorrow the world.

Wu: Forget it! Chou is hot-headed. Tonight you bury the past. When you reach your troops, you can prove to the country that you're no traitor. You can fight.

Wang: You and Chou are young. . . you belong to the new world. My head will soon be gray. . . Each night I lie with my regrets, listening to voices. If I only had time to go from house to house, explaining ~~my~~ the reason I'm called a traitor to the nation! Telling them that I will retrieve my honor. . . Dreams. . . fantasies. . .

You and Chou must now become my teachers--at my age! (He stands up fully dressed in the clothing of a workman. Wu goes to him, pulls the clothing about critically.)

Wu: Don't stand so straight. . . slouch a little so you won't look like a General in coolie clothing! That's better. (Glancing at his watch) The car ought to be here.

Wang: Do you trust that foreign doctor? Remember--this is not his country

Wu: He's risking nothing by taking you out of the city. His car flies the American flag--and the Japs don't search American ~~flag~~ cars. Now remember what you're to do: When the car comes, wait until the chauffeur comes inside. He is your height and he'll pass on through to the back. Then you walk out and get into the driver's seat and drive off. The American will be in the back seat. If Jap sentries stop you, look dumb and let the American talk.

(The purr of a motor car is heard. Both men listen.) Wu

Wu: He's come. . . . (car stops) All right. . . now go. . . calmly.

(General Wang goes swiftly into darkness. Wu listens until the motor engine accelerates and slowly dies away in the distance. He glances at his watch, then starts and listens; goes swiftly to bed and climbs in fully dressed, pulling the sheet up over his head just as a white-clad foreign nurse enters quietly and looks curiously about. She tiptoes to bed and stares at it, then about.)

*Frances Stone:*

~~Nurse:~~ I was certain I heard voices. (Glances curiously about, then goes out).

(Blackout for a few seconds. Lights come on again showing the same scene. Covered figure in bed. Same white-clad nurse, followed by a foreign doctor in white. Dr. has a stethoscope about his neck. Distant roar of artillery comes from distance.)

*Frances:*

~~Nurse:~~ I didn't wake the General this morning, Doctor. . . . He sleeps so badly. . . talks in his sleep, walks around.

Doctor: If I were in his shoes I'd do more than walk around and talk in my sleep. . . he's the new head of the Jap puppet government now. He's sold his country inch by inch up to this time. . . now he goes the whole hog.

*Francis:*

~~Nurse:~~ Surely not!

Doctor: They're all alike, these old Generals. I doubt if the younger generation is any different. . . merely more impotent.

Nurse: I'll lay a bet with you. . . that the Japs will occupy the whole country within six months--and use no more than five divisions--just as they say.

*Francis:*

~~Nurse:~~ I'll take that bet! The ~~XXXXXX~~ youth is different.

Doctor: You're new to China, young lady! I'll collect the twenty  
--let's say, on New Years Day, 1938! ss.

dollars ~~six months from this morning~~ The Japs mean busine/

*Francis:*

~~Nurse:~~ So do the Chinese! They're fighting all around the city.

Doctor: A useless waste of blood. You're wasting your money by betting

*Francis:*

~~Nurse:~~ I'll bet on common human decency.

Doctor: (laughing) It's your funeral! Now wake the new ruler of our great city up! I've work to do. . .

*Francis:*

~~Nurse:~~ (Going to bed and shaking the figure) General Wang! General

Wang! The doctor's here! (She pulls sheet back)

(Col. Wu rolls out of bed fully dressed and, without a word, walks past the doctor and nurse ~~inx~~ and off stage back. Doctor and nurse stare in stupefaction).

*Francis:*

~~Nurse:~~ Now, who's that!

Doctor: Well, I'll be everlastingly damned!