

XI - 79 - 3. A Play About China

E. Another version of Prologue before Act I. 5 pages

PROLOGUE

(Stage is totally black save for a white hospital bed, with a small table and chair near the head. On the table a ~~water-bottle~~ water-bottle, glass with thermometer, and a glass with toothbrush. Also a small table light, shaded. On the foot of the bed hangs a wooden board with temperature chart.)

Wu Yeh-tze (enters noiselessly, goes to bed) 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--as thick as bed-bugs. The car will be here in half an hour. Here are the clothes--and here's the chauffeur's license and badge.

Wang: Any more news from General Fang--or Colonel Chou?

WU: The same as yesterday: their troops are scattered but still fighting. . . . terrible losses! Hundreds of students and the political prisoners who broke out--lying like bloody leaves over the wheat fields. . . . The troops are trying to assemble in Paoting--the Japs know it--they bombed Paoting three times yesterday. If you can get through the lines, you'll find them in that neighborhood.

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

Wu: I'll try to catch up with you at the Buddhist Temple at the end of the road in the southern hills. If I'm not there two hours after you get there, don't wait. Take the bicycle from the monk--he'll give you some money too--and get out.

Wang: I need only one hour's start. You must leave this place within an hour. The Japs have taken to calling at all hours--one came last night at nine. . . . To tell me that they've appointed me head of the puppet government! Turtles!

Wu: I know--the whole country knows it by now. The Japs broadcast the news. . . . now they think you'll never dare take one step without

their protection. . . we'll soon fix spike that! Students have already got out a handbill listing the traitors to be killed--your name heads the list. . . .Hurry up--get dressed!The handbill accused you of surrendering Peiping while your Army fights and dies. It charged that Major Liang's batallion surrendered because you did--at your orders.

Wang: (pulling on clothing) I gave no orders! The Government sent me none! I surrendered the city to save it from destruction--and because I thought--and still think--that the Government will reach some agreement with the Japs. Whatever it does, it would have been better if I'd blown out my brains.

Wu: (pacing back and forth, sometimes stopping in shadows to listen) If you want your brains blown out, let the Japs do it in battle.

Wang: (shaking his head impatiently) My brain's still ~~xxxxxx~~ half-dead! Haven't slept for nights. . . I keep hearing Chou's voice--and Fang's --and sometimes yours. That last night we were together--you remember?

Wu: That's all past. From tonight. . .

Wang: Chou's voice kept saying: "first appeasement--then treason." Then it said; "While you lick the boots of the Japs, we'll fight with sticks and stones." Fang's voice kept saying: "First Manchuria.. then Jehol. . . then Chahar. . . then East Hopei. . . now all north China. Tomorrow, all China--and the next day the world."

Wu: From tonight you bury all that! You'll soon be in command of your troops and prove to the country that you're no traitor.

Wang: You, Fang, Chou--you're all young. But my head will soon be gray. . . each night I lie with my regrets. . . Now you must become my teachers--that's why you must not fail me tonight. Leave here within an hour. (standing up, fully dressed in ~~xxxx~~ the clothing of a poor civilian) Look--do I look like a chauffeur?

Wu: No--you look like a military man in civilian clothes! Slouch a little! (General Wang tries to look like a civilian. Wu looks at his wrist-watch) The car ought to be here!

Wang: Do you trust that foreign doctor? He may not come--this is not his country.

Wu: I'm risking nothing by taking you out of the city. The Japs don't search foreign cars yet, and his car flies the American flag. His chauffeur's just your size--and dressed like you. When the car comes, wait until the chauffeur has come inside--he will pass right on through the kitchen in the back. Then you walk out calmly, take the driver's seat, and drive off. If Jap sentries stop you, look dumb and let the American do the talking.

(The purr of a motor car is heard. Both men listen. Wu goes into shadows and looks below.)

Wu: They've come! The chauffeur's coming in. . . . all right--go now!

(General Wang goes swiftly into darkness back. Wu stands in shadows, watching below until the motor engine starts and slowly dies away. He glances at his watch, then starts and listens as if hearing something. Goes swiftly to bed and climbs in, shoes and all, and pulls the sheet up over his head just as a white-clad foreign nurse enters quietly and looks curiously about. She goes up to bed and stares at the covered figure. Tucks in covers. Tries to pull sheet back from the face, but fails and leaves it. Looks about again and turns.)

Nurse: I was certain I heard voices! (She goes out noiselessly.)

(BLACK OUT for a few seconds, then lights come on again, slowly, more clearly than before. Same scene. Covered figure in bed. The same white-clad nurse, with a foreign doctor in white, enter from back. Doctor has a stethoscope about his neck.)

Nurse: I didn't wake General Wang up this morning, Dr. Anderson. He sleeps so badly--and was talking in his sleep again last night.

Doctor: I'd do more than that if I were in his shoes! There's not a thing wrong with him that I can see--though I don't tell the Japs that. Anyway, shake him up--the city's filled with wounded and I've no time to waste on him. Say, have you heard the latest. . .

Nurse (shaking the figure on bed) General Wang! The doctor's
come! Wake up! (turning to doctor) No--what's the news?

(Nurse pulls the sheet back from covered head).

Doctor:(looking at nurse) A new puppet government's been formed and. . .

(Wu Yeh-tze rolls out of bed fully dressed and walks past the
doctor and nurse without a word. The nurse utters a little
cry. Both stare in amazement).

Doctor: Well, I'll be everlastingly damned!

DARKNESS

There is nothing "heroic" about the Chinese front. The atmosphere is gray and depressed, the people very poorly dressed. The houses look poor and hungry but, like the people and soldiers, they keep going as best they can. There are no Chinese airplanes, trucks, or other mechanized equipment at the Chinese front. No motor roads save a few which the Chinese try to keep destroyed. People and soldiers walk on their own legs and only a few officers have horses. Everything, even shells for the few field guns (small ones) are carried on the backs of men or pack horses.

The ~~xxxxxxx~~ young officers in particular are unusually alert and intelligent, excellently informed about the world, with modern, aware minds. Kuo-hwa and the guards around headquarters carry pocket manuals and study them. Officers (except for General Li) generally have at least one paper-bound book in their pockets.