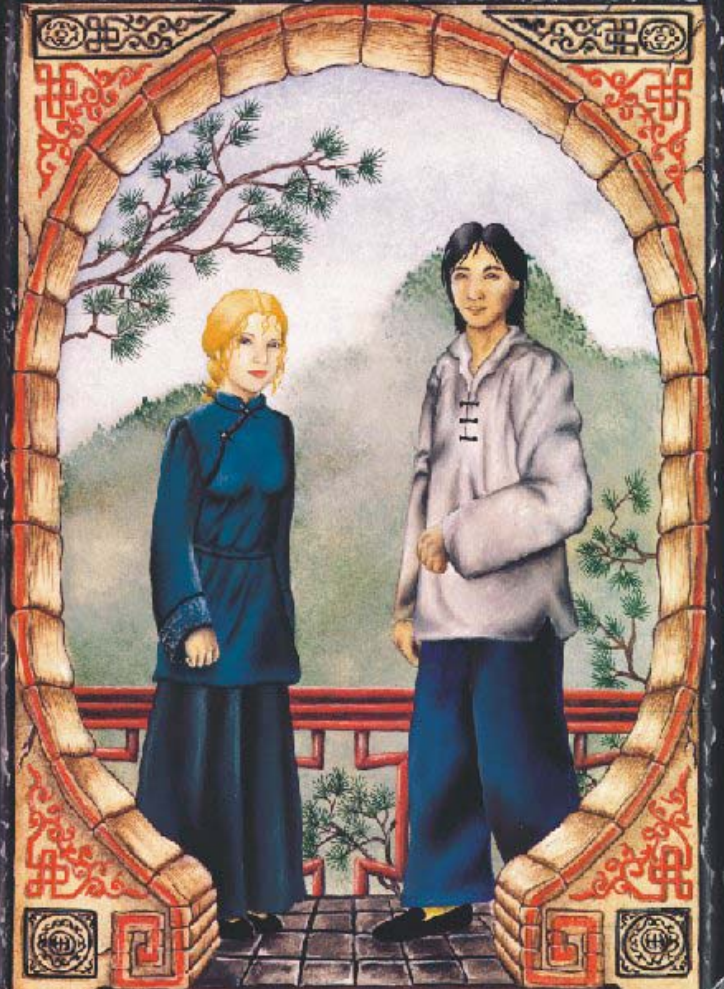
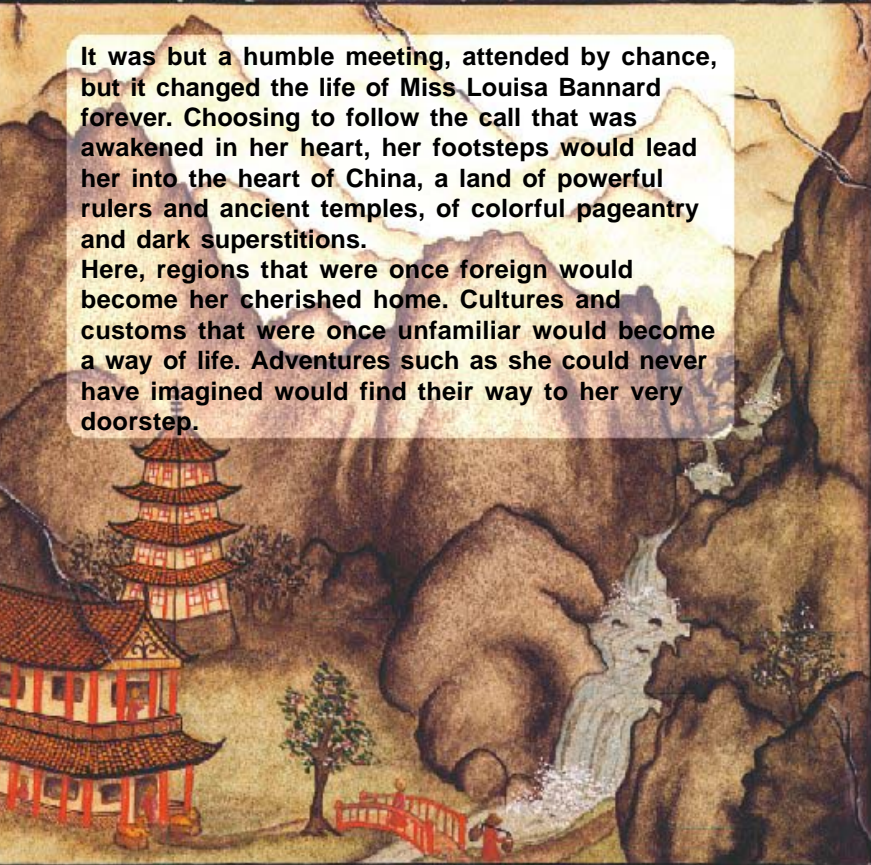


The Mountain Calls

It was but a humble meeting, attended by chance, but it changed the life of Miss Louisa Bannard forever. Choosing to follow the call that was awakened in her heart, her footsteps would lead her into the heart of China, a land of powerful rulers and ancient temples, of colorful pageantry and dark superstitions. Here, regions that were once foreign would become her cherished home. Cultures and customs that were once unfamiliar would become a way of life. Adventures such as she could never have imagined would find their way to her very doorstep.



The Mountain Calls

The Louisa Bannard Story

BY ROBIN MATTHESON

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PART 1
WHEN HE CALLED ME

“The Great Commission is not an option to be considered, but a command to be obeyed.” — J. Hudson Taylor



THE CALL

It wasn't so much what he said that caught my interest, but rather the manner in which he said it.—The slender figure with the intense expression and earnest manner who spoke so imploringly of that land beyond the sea—China!—A land where millions of souls marched the dusty roads not knowing of the Savior's love; a land where so many have died without ever hearing the dear Lord's Name; a land that called out for missionaries to come, to live and die upon her soil in order to give her the truth.

But do let me arrange my thoughts more clearly. I first decided to come to the meeting to listen to James Hudson Taylor¹ speak about his mission in China, for the simple reason that I had little better to do. I was happy to fill an evening listening to this renowned lecturer, rather than sit at home. I had come to know Jesus in a personal way several years earlier, and dearly loved to spend time in fellowship with others who also knew His love, but I did little in actual service for Christ. Other than occasional visits to the neighboring sick or distributing baskets of food to the poor, "active service" was not common, or even accepted, among women of my social standing.

¹see endnote i – James Hudson Taylor

After having found my Savior and resting in His joy and peace, I discovered much of the previous discontentment and anxiety that so vexed me had vanished. Instead, my days were filled with peace, and I looked forward to the prospect of a happy, quiet and harmonious life, basking in my many blessings. I had a wonderful family who loved me dearly, encouraged my interests and provided well for me. We resided at our family estate, and my father, who had passed away, had left ample provision for us all in his will. I was active socially, and was soon to announce my engagement to a kind and goodly gentleman. Yet somehow beneath this ordered existence, and while attempting to rest content, a gnawing question would often pervade my thoughts: Is there something more the Lord would have me do to serve Him?

Charles Endfield, my suitor*, was a most dear man and, moreover, a close family friend who from childhood had cared deeply for me. As children we were always together; we shared all our secrets. As we grew, everyone commented on what a handsome pair we made, assuming we would one day be married. I felt I knew Charles perfectly—as well as he knew me. Though we were not yet formally engaged, we had discussed announcing an engagement some time in the coming year.

Charles encouraged my interests in religious matters, feeling that a good wife must first be a good person, and religion was a suitable way to become just that person. We both attended church regularly, hoping that some of the goodness to be found there would rub off on us, and consequently on the family we assumed we would start soon after marriage.

Unfortunately, good people are at times the most complacent people. With a comfortable life ahead of us and little in sight that could disturb the course

we had determined for our lives, I was in fact a most dull soul. Like an unsharpened sword lying in a sheath, waiting to be brandished by the Master, I needed the rubbing and grinding of the polishing stone to make me the instrument He intended for me, His servant, to become.

As I said, perhaps it wasn't so much what dear Mr. Taylor said that caught my interest, but the manner in which he spoke, as if inspired from Heaven itself. He spoke with a reasoned simplicity, and such a frank and open manner, yet with a determined assurance of God's care and provision. He seemed to me a very joyous man, yet, at the same time, one who carried an enormous weight: the weight of the souls for whom he felt responsible—the souls of a nation. It seemed he cradled that nation to his bosom and loved the dear Chinese people as one would love a child, or even a bride. This was not religious duty; this was the compelling force of God, as he spoke of the needs of China.

He explained the difficult conditions of the field. He spoke of the persecution that both native believers and missionaries faced. He recalled times of great difficulty and despair, and also times of utter joy and fulfillment as he preached the Word of God in the unreached inner regions of the country. Missionaries had long established their work in the coastal areas, but the dangerous and untried inland provinces were untouched, simply for the lack of laborers willing to go. Conditions called for foreign missionaries to identify with their Chinese neighbors to such a degree that they were required to eat, dress, and live entirely in Chinese fashion. In times past such a thing had been virtually unheard of, and even regarded as scandalous in some circles. But as Mr. Taylor's successful mission work became better known, his ideas became more accepted and were later emulated by other missions.

Something compelled me to move down the aisle after the lecture ended. I was more than halfway to my destination before I perceived fully in my mind what I was doing, and the decision I was reaching. Some would say that a decision so quickly reached showed a lack of prudence. But as I walked forward, I knew that this was what I had been seeking for these many years, although I had hitherto been unable to express my longing in words. It was not so much that I made a decision quickly, but rather that I quickly recognized the answer I had sought for so long. This was God's call! A force other than my own will propelled me as I walked across that wide auditorium.

Mr. Taylor stood with his back to me, speaking to a group of men. Though I am not a particularly bold person, I felt I had to speak to him, so I stationed myself behind them and waited. After some time he turned to me, and I noticed the graying hair above his deeply lined eyes that met mine with an expectant look.

"Yes, my dear?"

Suddenly I felt shy. What was I to say?

"Umm ... Mr. Taylor, please let me introduce myself. I ... I am Miss Louisa Bannard of Chelsea. I found your lecture most interesting!"

I paused and Mr. Taylor also waited, eyeing me curiously. Gathering my courage, I took the plunge.

"If I may be frank, sir, I came to your lecture wanting merely to pass an interesting evening. After the first quarter of an hour, I thought surely God must be calling me to offer some sort of assistance to your missionaries in China, and that I could perhaps make a financial contribution. But something did not feel quite right in my heart. I listened for half an hour, and I thought I should do more: I thought perhaps, besides making a monetary donation, I could give of my time to

promote your cause to other individuals. I also thought I could sew for the mission, or perchance collect items which could be of use to missionaries. Yet still I felt uneasy. After listening to your entire lecture, I now feel compelled to say that although God could use my money and my influence, or even my stitching, I believe that what He wants to use ... is *me*. Mr. Taylor, could China use a young girl such as myself?"

Hudson Taylor smiled and paused before he answered. He looked at me as if he wondered the same thing. I will never forget his reply. "My dear young lady," he said kindly, "that depends entirely on whether you are truly willing to be used."

A MAN'S FOES

I opened my eyes and needed a few moments to remember where I was. The early morning sun beamed a few delicate rays through the uneven roof tiles, flooding the rafters of my small room with a rosy light that revealed much dust and a number of resident spiders. The large, unpainted shutters on the windows that led to the balcony overlooking the inner courtyard were still tightly closed. The thin straw mat which covered the wooden summer bed, upon which I slept, was soaked with perspiration in even the coolest morning hours. "China," I whispered to myself, and smiled. "I am home in China."

What prayers had been answered to accomplish this journey! What intercession had been offered and what miracles God had done to open the door for me to be able to give my life in service to Him in this great land. Musing on this always brought certain scenes back to my mind, scenes of more than two years earlier, when it looked as if China would remain a faraway dream.



“Good Lord, Louisa! Have you lost your mind?”

The faces of my younger sister, my mother, and the most pained expression of Charles loomed before me.

I bit my lip, realizing that my timing had been truly awful. A gathering on my sister’s birthday was no time or place to announce my decision to become a missionary, knowing what a shock it would be for my family. I had much to learn, and God was attempting to teach me to conduct myself more wisely.

I had spoken with Charles earlier, and with hindsight I could see the naiveté in which I expected him to be as enthusiastic about my plans as I was myself. Was he not a Christian? Would he not also embrace this call if only he knew of China’s need? So I thought at the time, or rather so I wished. Perhaps my attitude can most aptly be described as wanting to have one’s cake while eating it too. I wanted the Lord, I wanted China, and I felt I should certainly be entitled to have Charles as a companion in my venture, as well as my family’s approval. Surrendering all on the altar of sacrifice, and giving up something good in order to gain God’s best, was a new concept to me.

When I first broached the subject of my fervent desire to be a missionary in China to Charles, he was silent. We were in the garden, and in the excitement of trying to convey all that the Lord had revealed to me, I did not notice the tremendous inner upheaval my animated speech was causing within him. I so wished for him to see the need of China. Oh, if he had only been there to hear Mr. Taylor speak! I thought if I could explain it more clearly he would surely be convinced, as I was, that this was God’s call for us.

“Louisa,” he stopped me after I had spoken excitedly for a full twenty minutes without pause,

“do let me say that all this has been most surprising!”

“Yes, Charles, I know it sounds sudden, but don’t you see ... ”

“Please wait, and let me finish. I had no idea that such thoughts would ever occur to you. You know I believe in God, and we have discussed the importance of our beliefs together many times, but a *missionary*?—To *China*? I ... I don’t quite know what to say,” he stammered. “And that you feel *called*? Why, you act as if God could still speak today! I’ve never known you to speak of such fanaticism. It seems ... absurd!”

“Oh no, Charles! It’s not absurd, it’s a wonderful thing, it’s ... ”

“Please, Louisa, hush now! Let me think on this matter.”

“But Charles!” I called, as he walked away, unwilling to talk more.

That evening I sat at my sister’s birthday dinner celebration and faced a stunned trio. I assumed Charles only needed time to comply with the Lord’s commission, and forged ahead. As soon as I announced my plans to my mother and sister, however, I could see from the hurt expression on Charles’ face that he felt I had betrayed a trust. While I had not said in words that I would wait to speak of these things to others, because the matter was not settled between us as a couple, to make it public as I did was premature and inconsiderate. Yet perhaps it was the Lord Who blinded me to common courtesy, for the words and events that unfolded in the next few days were to change the course of my life.

I was completely unprepared for the reception my news received, simply because my family had always been uncommonly supportive of me. We were a close-knit family, so I had blindly expected enthusiasm rather than reproach.

My mother could not stop sobbing when she realized I was in earnest. I spent most of the evening listening to ghastly tales of unspeakable pagan rites in faraway lands. It was clear just what they felt the fate of foolish young women who ventured to such strange places would be. In between sobs, my mother continuously uttered, "No ... never!" Never had I seen her so distressed.

My sister was equally angry. "Louisa, how could you? Whatever would Father have said if he were still alive? Your behavior is utterly, utterly unfair—to yourself, to your family, and most of all to Charles!"

Charles sat grimly, watching my mother and sister try their utmost to convince me. I searched his eyes, looking for a glimmer of understanding, but found only despair. Never before had we been at such an impasse*.

I could understand their fear and anger. The life expectancy of a missionary in China in those years of the late 19th century was short. Disease took its toll, and many felt the political situation was a powder keg* waiting to ignite. Their arguments were sound: The life I was desiring bore absolutely no resemblance to the life I was presently living. I was proposing a difficult journey of several months to the other side of the world. I would live amongst a strange people whose ways I did not understand and whose language I did not speak. It would mean years of separation, hardship, and most likely an early death. I had responsibilities at home, and obligations to Charles.

But I had received a call from God. Of that I was certain, there was no doubt. I had seen no vision; I had heard no voice, no trumpet call or rolling thunder. Yet I knew that God had spoken most clearly to my heart—and my call was to go to China. What could I say to convince them?

The next morning I fared no better. The servants whispered that my mother was nearly beside herself with anguish.

After numerous attempts to convince her that my wishes were reasonable, she silenced me with her hand. I had rarely seen her act in such a manner. Mother's lips were taut* as she attempted to control her anger. She spoke with a tone of utter finality.

"I am a Christian woman. I fear God and have always attended church regularly. Charities and the poor are known to me, and no one can say I do not give to God from such as we have.

"But Louisa, what you propose is too much! Such sacrifice is unthinkable. I will never, ever concede to this! You have your obligations to Charles as long as he is living. Your word is your honor and the honor of our family. You must not break that trust and dishonor him or us in this way. I will hear no more of this!"

She swept from the room and I thought my heart would break. Her words kept ringing in my head. I loved Charles; I owed him my hand. But God had called me. I felt so confused!

Three days passed—days which I spent praying, reading my Bible and desperately seeking God's will. I blamed myself for the hasty way in which I had presented my plans. I questioned the Lord about why my way would be blocked so steadfastly by my mother if this indeed was the path He had designed for me. I had been raised from a child to do the bidding of my dear parents, and I knew they wished only the best for me. Yet here I was, called to obey God rather than man, as my reading of the Scriptures so clearly directed.

At last I made my decision, and having done so, found instant relief. There is certainly no rest for the double-minded and half-hearted, and though the

decision was difficult, the relief which flooded my being once it had been made felt like sunlight bursting through the clouds and warming my face. Having opened my Bible that third day to the book of Psalms, chapter four, verse three, I read, “But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for Himself. The Lord will hear when I call unto Him.”

Yes, that is me! I thought. The Lord has set me apart for Himself, to use.

I again opened my Bible and it seemed as if the Scriptures jumped from the page. In Matthew 10:36-38, I read, “And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me ... and he that taketh not his cross and followeth after Me is not worthy of Me.”

Yes, I would take up my cross. I was willing to be disowned, to be made of no reputation in the eyes of my family, my fiancé and others; to be regarded as rash and unheeding if need be. I knew that regardless of their approval—or lack of it—I would have to follow God’s call. But before announcing my resolute decision, I prayed a final prayer.

“Dear Lord, You know that I have determined in my heart to follow You. Thank You for the grace and strength You have given me during this time of trial and testing. Thank You for keeping me and guiding my heart to follow You to China. Renew me now! Give me the strength to do this thing—to cast my all with You. Nothing in my hand I bring, for even my dearest ones are forsaking me. I give them to You.

“Thank You for this test. But Lord, if there is any way to make them understand the course which You have set before me, I pray that You will work this miracle in their hearts. If not, I will trust You all the same, but if You would, then please do this thing. Amen.”

I sank back in my chair and felt utter peace, as if my prayer had already been answered. Little did I know that it was being answered even as I prayed, but in ways I would never have expected.

CHARLES

I had not yet spoken, for I had just entered the reading room where my mother sat, purposely ignoring me, pretending to be engrossed in her novel, when the servants rushed in.

“It’s Master Charles!” they shouted. “Send for the doctor immediately!”

Mother and I rushed to the entrance foyer in time to see them carry a limp form inside. The sight of blood caused my heart to quicken and I suddenly felt faint. “Lord help us!” I prayed. My pale-faced mother gripped the banister and shouted for the servants to bring Charles into the main parlor immediately.

As the men attended to him and the maids fetched water and bandages, the gardener hastened to explain the dreadful accident that had occurred. Charles was riding to see us when his horse lost its footing on the side path leading up behind the stables. He was thrown, but suffered little injury other than a sprained foot. But when attempts to remount proved futile, he limped to the retaining wall to rest in the shade of the large stone edifice*. Suddenly the ancient wall collapsed, burying Charles under the rocks. Now, as the servants carried him into the parlor, he was barely conscious.

While waiting for the doctor, tears streamed down my face. Was this the result of my wish to be free to serve the Lord? Was this some sort of dreadful curse visited on my loved one because of my determination to go to the mission field at all costs? Why? I never wished Charles to die, only for them

to understand! I gazed fearfully at Charles' white face and choked back feelings of guilt and condemnation. Suddenly I heard a most distinct voice in my heart, speaking calmly and clearly.

"Wait, and fear not! I am working in the hearts of those you love, because you have trusted in Me."

I sat bolt upright. The Lord had spoken to me! Though I didn't fully understand all that was happening, I felt a flutter of hope and strength knowing God had His hand upon us even in this terrible hour. Still I wondered why...

It took the doctor nearly an hour to reach our estate. During the examination, I paced the hallway with a heavy heart. Mother sat in a chair and wrung her hands. I could see by her dark glances that she blamed me for having put us all through such agony. I knew my mother had suffered deeply after my father's death. She had loved him tremendously, and they had had a fond and enduring marriage. I often thought there was nothing he would not do for her while he lived. But my thoughts were interrupted as the door opened and the doctor emerged.

One look at his face told me everything. Charles was dying. He had suffered extensive internal injuries, the doctor explained, and though he had done all that he possibly could, there was little hope. Charles' family was summoned immediately, and both his mother and father stayed with us. It was far too dangerous to move Charles again, even to their home, which was but a mile from our own. We stayed with him constantly, valuing what few earthly moments we had left with our dear one. Together we all were to witness the wonderful miracle that took place, as we listened to Charles' dying words; words that were to change things for us all in so many, many ways.

THE SECOND CHANCE

The ringing of the bell drew my wandering thoughts back to the present—breakfast would be ready soon! My bare feet touched the tiles, the only cool place in the room, and I quickly washed myself in the clay basin beside my bed. With a sigh, I drew my long, hot Chinese robe over my head. "Well," I comforted myself, "English fashion would be no less confining." But I did wish I could eliminate the leg wrappings, which were particularly uncomfortable in this humid climate.

I knew, however, how very important it was for us, as foreign missionaries, to dress, act and live as much as possible like the Chinese people we were trying to reach. Suspicion of foreign ways ran rampant. Hideous rumors flew in the markets, as old women described the atrocities that "foreign devils" would commit. "No one is safe," old grandmothers warned darkly. "Foreigners steal children, murder them, and use their body parts in strange rituals!"

Thankfully, when we took steps to make ourselves as much like the Chinese as possible, fear often gave way to curiosity, and in time, curiosity to spiritual hunger. Often as I walked the narrow streets surrounding our home, one of the bolder neighbor women would approach me, and perhaps hold up her long sleeve, which more than covered her hand, next to mine. She would smile and comment, "Look, we are dressed the same!"

So I was now used to Chinese fashion, and I could see the wisdom in endeavoring to become someone the people of this country could understand. If I was not so strange, perhaps my God would not be so strange. If they could see that my dress and actions were similar to theirs, then was not my heart also similar? Did not I, who slept on the same type of bed and ate the same type of food, experience the

same type of sorrows and joys? And if my God could help me, could He not help them too?

As I brushed my hair into the tightly bound bun so popular among the women in this particular city, I watched the cook bring more wood for the fire. I knew steaming bowls of rice porridge would soon be waiting for all of us, so I would have to hurry.

Not too fast though, Louisa—or Lu Yisi, as I was now known. If I was in too much of a hurry, I would forget to walk in an appropriately humble posture, shoulders sloped. After spending so many years of my childhood being drilled in the importance of standing erect, that was a hard custom to get used to.

I opened the shutters and the full heat of the day greeted me. It reminded me of that day in England, which was now a world away...



“Open the door, open the door! They must come in! You mustn’t stop them!”

The pale, sweat-soaked figure lay thrashing upon the bed, calling out disjointedly. We opened the shuttered windows to give him more air. But which door was he referring to? The door to the parlor was already ajar*.

Charles had lain unconscious for two days, then on the third he seemed to rally. He spoke to us and took a little nourishment. Our hopes were dashed, however, when high fever set in on the fifth day, and with it a great restlessness and agitation. By the end of the week we all knew there was little time left, and those of us closest to him were at his side constantly.

I had prayed and prayed, asking God to do some miracle to spare his life. I knew the Lord had promised that He was working in the hearts of those I loved, and I clung to that promise as a man overboard would cling to a rope in a raging, stormy

sea. The time Charles lay injured had indeed worked in our hearts, causing us all to pray like never before, and to set aside our divisions as a family—at least for the time being.

“Eliza! Eliza, listen to me!” Charles called my mother. How odd that he would call her by her Christian name, for he never referred to her as anything other than Mrs. Bannard. My mother drew near and held his hand, trying to calm him.

Again Charles called out, “No, no, Eliza! You mustn’t shut the door again! Don’t you remember? You did that so long ago. Don’t shut it for our Louisa, dearest, as you did for me!”

“Charles, whatever are you saying?” my mother questioned, looking very haggard and worn. She mopped Charles’ brow with a cool cloth.

Suddenly Charles ceased tossing on the bed. We all leaned closer. Was this the end? His eyes opened and he gazed upwards past us all. A wonderful calm filled his face, and he smiled.

“Eliza, don’t you see? Louisa’s going is the second chance. Don’t you remember that day so long ago on the bridge, when you told me to choose between you and the call I felt for God’s service?”

My mother stiffened, gave a little cry, and turned as white as the sheet upon the bed. What was happening? Whatever was Charles talking about? The rest of us stood silent in awe.

“Eliza, I’ve come with a message for you. Charles will be with me soon. Don’t fear for him; he shall be very happy in this wonderful place. It is his time and the Lord’s plan is being fulfilled. Heaven is such a wonderful place! And, dearest, I love you. We shall all be together in God’s time in this wonderful Heavenly Kingdom. You know it is I, don’t you, dearest?”

“Richard?” my mother whispered my father’s name, her eyes wide. “How can this be?”

“Dearest Eliza, God’s ways are merciful, and He sends comfort to the comfortless and a sign to them that seek, through the sure word of prophecy. Don’t you remember that I cried, Eliza? You never saw me cry again, did you? But that day on the bridge, I cried. So many tears flowed from my broken heart, because I was choosing you over the call I received to serve God. But you, my dearest one, would not marry a poor pastor.”

Overcome with emotion, my mother buried her face in her hands and sobbed loudly. We watched in wonder. Was this actually my father speaking?

“You knew, darling, that my family would not approve of my desire to join the clergy. Knowing this, you begged me not to tell them, not to upset you and my parents. You did not see that in serving God, I would bring a blessing to you all—the blessing of giving a loved one to God.

“But the Lord sees your heart, dearest one. He understands that you were afraid. Your heart was full of fear—fear of the future, fear to trust God with your reputation and family. Much was the same for dear Charles. He did not understand and attempted to dissuade our Louisa from her call.

“But that day on the bridge, weak as I was, in my love for you, I compromised. Instead of serving God, I followed my father’s wishes and entered into my family’s business.”

With great effort Charles turned his head to my mother and pulled the hands from her face to look fully into her eyes. His dark eyes glowed with a warm understanding love. For a moment, it seemed as if she was again meeting the gaze of my dear father who had left us seven years before.

“Eliza, don’t you see?” Charles’ voice was growing faint, but he spoke emphatically. “This is our second chance. Jesus, in His love for us, has called our daughter Louisa to be His ambassador. Charles

understands now, and he wants you to understand also. He says he is so sorry. Open the door, Eliza, to all those dear souls who will come in through the Heavenly gates. Please open the door, Eliza!”

Charles took one last breath, and a calm and restful smile came over his face. Perhaps he knew that bearing this message from my father had been the most important thing he had accomplished in his life. As we gazed in wonder, my darling Charles slipped away into Jesus’ arms.

It was a long time before any of us could speak. An air of wonderful peace filled the room, as we knew something strange and miraculous had happened. Yet we were full of questions; there was so much I didn’t understand. I was barely conscious of the others who talked in hushed tones as they filed out of the room. I knelt by my mother’s chair and looked up into her solemn face.

“Mother,” I stammered, “what does this mean?”

She looked down at me as she stroked my hair. “Louisa, how I wish I could say it were not true. But things that were spoken in the dark have come to light. This is indeed a sign to me, and I know now that your dear father, who cared for us so deeply, still watches over us from his new home in Heaven.”

She wept softly as she continued.

“That day he referred to on the bridge ... I remember it well. On that day, before we were married, I made your father choose. He loved me dearly and trusted me with his deepest thoughts and fondest dreams. He told me he had experienced a marvelous call in his life, and had felt God speak to his heart. God had called him to become a minister!

“Oh, Louisa, how frightened I was! With that type of future, I knew our parents would never agree to our marriage! We were from families of influence—such a thing couldn’t be! I begged him, pleaded with

him, and finally I threatened him. I made him choose—which no wife has the right to do—between God and me.

“Your father chose me that day, Louisa. But it was a bitter victory for me as I watched him stand on that bridge and sob. They were the last tears he ever shed, for no more tears could be cried after such a torrent.

“Besides me, no one knew of that conversation, or even of your father’s wishes to become a minister. When Richard chose me, he shut the door of his heart to God’s ministry. We never spoke of these things again, and I doubt if he would have spoken of them to another, for it was such a wound to his soul.”

She took my shoulders in her hands, looked me straight in the eyes, and spoke with such earnest intent, “Dear daughter, your father has said that your call to the mission field is our second chance to do the right thing. Though I am still frightened and don’t understand everything, I know God wants me to give you to Him. I dare not refuse a second time. Now I do this freely, and with my blessing. I thank God for sending me that message from Heaven, from your dear father, to help me choose rightly!”

Clasping me to her bosom, we both shed tears of thankfulness, wonder and love for our Savior Who could perform such a marvelous miracle.



I stood on the open door of the balcony, my face lifted to the warm morning sun that flooded the courtyard of my simple home in China. The memory of my father’s final message to us to “open the door to the souls of China” was in my heart and on my lips. Below, the sound of hurried footsteps in the direction of our common dining hall reminded me that the hour grew late.

“Dear Jesus,” I prayed, “though I only have a moment, I want to thank You for the wonderful privilege of being here. Thank You for calling me to be Your servant. Please help me in my tasks today. You called me and brought me here in such a miraculous way. Now lead me each step. Help me to love these dear people with Your love. Help me to give myself to China as You gave Your life for us. Help me to understand and know them, and to do what I can to help open the doors of this land to You, I pray.”

I turned and hurried down the stone steps to my bowl of rice porridge—and the waiting souls of China.

PART 2
THE MOUNTAIN CALLS

*“If the Spirit of Good works mightily,
we may be sure that the spirit of evil will
also be active.” — J. Hudson Taylor.*



IN TIME OF TROUBLE

I hung back in the shadows of the room, and listened as the footsteps approached our doorway. The large wooden door, bolted securely from within, provided a formidable barrier, yet still I fidgeted nervously. I was learning so much these days about hanging on to God closely, and trusting Him with my very life! I closed my eyes.

“The Lord is my shepherd,” I quietly recited. “I shall not want. He maketh me to ... ”

Tap tap! Tap tap tap! Then a pause and another double rapping on the door, followed by three more knocks. I breathed a sigh of relief and quickly unbolted the entrance, letting in the cloaked figure.

La Ong pulled back the gray woolen blanket that was draped over her head. It was still odd for me to see her dressed this way, in the costume of the hill people here. After nearly four years together in China’s coastal cities I had become accustomed to seeing her in the loose trousers and long tunics that were so favored by the women in our former shore district. Since moving inland to this mountain mission station, we both now wore the hill costume, with its wide skirt and long rough apron.

Yet I will always remember La Ong in my mind as when I first saw her, flowers entwined in the bun in her hair, her simple but graceful tunic

flowing as she walked. Her smile was so angelic as she encouraged me over and over in those early years when I was trying ever so hard to understand the fine points of Chinese culture.

“No, Lu Yisi, you mustn’t walk so fast. A lady will take her time and will show respect to those around her by her measured pace.”

Teaching me to walk slowly and gracefully in the manner of a refined Chinese woman was, I sometimes felt, a near hopeless task. Luckily, a local woman of respected social station was expected to have an attendant accompany her at all times. No respectable and decent woman would ever walk the streets alone, even accompanied by her husband, without an attendant. So in like fashion, La Ong was always there to help me when I fumbled, and would whisper in my ear what to do or say. Her constant presence not only helped me, but also helped the local Chinese on the coast to understand and respect us, as we tried to follow their customs in all ways possible.

La Ong was always there. She was my friend—yet more than a friend. She was my teacher, my sister, and one whose faith I grew to love and respect. In the early years at the mission she became my second shadow. As I slowly and haltingly learned to express myself in Chinese, she became one of my closest confidantes. At first I tended to talk more to the mission’s foreign sisters when I was troubled or homesick or having difficult times. But slowly I began to see that I must truly become one in not only my costume and language, but in my thoughts as well. So I began to try to become closer to the Chinese sisters, to learn more about them personally, in order to better understand them and their people.

The true “giving of self” started, however, when I learned to share my heart with them. I learned to

ask the native sisters for prayer, and to ask them to uphold me when I was discouraged. This helped me to forge a bond with them that truly wiped away nationalities and made us one. It was friendship in its truest and purest form, and I am ever so thankful that God privileged me to know these dear ones in that way.

But now my dear La Ong stood there, shivering from the cold outside air. I quickly rebolted the door and brought her over to the warm *kang*, the heated platform where we all slept during the frosty winter months. As she wrapped a thick quilt about herself and busily arranged her cover, I could tell the news she brought back was not good—otherwise she would have told me quickly. Her hesitation spoke more than words in itself. I took her hands.

“Dear La Ong, do not worry if your words will bring me sadness. Please tell me what you have found out.”

Her eyes looked sadly into mine. She spoke slowly. “I have heard much ... too much.” She cleared her throat before she continued.

“Lu Yisi ... they are killing the foreigners.”

It’s a strange thing how time can slow to a near crawl at certain points. Perhaps it is God’s merciful way of letting us fully comprehend events and circumstances during difficult times. But those few minutes on the *kang* together will always remain with me as one of my most precious times with La Ong.

We bowed our heads together and prayed. Oh, how we poured out our souls in prayer to Jesus to please intercede—for the safety of our loved ones, for ourselves, our work and for the sake of the souls that had not yet been reached! There was so much to do here. God had called us to this place! Surely it was not all to be thrown away now when things were only beginning.

Our mission outpost had only been in this mountain crossroads for five short months. Everything had started so very well ...

Our mission was dedicated to spreading God's Word to the inland provinces of China. Missionaries had been operating for many years in the coastal regions under the protection of the British military. Unfortunately, most Chinese associated the heartbreaking practice of opium selling with any and all foreigners, merchants and missionaries alike. The bloodshed that resulted when Britain fought several wars with China to preserve and expand that lucrative trade caused anti-foreign sentiment to run rampant. The effect of the "foreign mud," as opium was called, was devastating and caused no end of social turmoil.

Our mission had from its start adopted the policy of distancing ourselves from the foreign powers and endeavoring to "become one" with the Chinese people in every possible way, in order to make Jesus and His message more understandable to the common people.

The efforts of Christians who sought to bring an "oriental Jesus" to the Chinese people met with resounding success. Each mission outpost looked for the best way to reach those in their area. We gained friends, taught classes to individuals and gave lectures to large groups of those interested in hearing about this new religion. Many people began to believe after reading the scripture portions that had been translated into Chinese, or after hearing the Gospel preached to them in their native tongue.

Missionaries who possessed skill and professional training endeavored to help the local population in some manner—occasionally assisting as doctors, as teachers, or even as skilled tradesmen. Yet our primary goal remained to give Christ's message to those who had never had the opportunity to hear. We

enjoyed much freedom under treaties made with the imperial government, allowing British nationals the right to travel and propagate the Christian faith throughout the whole of China. British nationals were legally guaranteed the protection of the mandarins* in each of China's provinces.

We were not ignorant, however, of where the dangers lay. It was not usually with those who heard our message openly in the streets and houses, who attended our meetings and listened to our teachings. Many of the common people heard us gladly and bought our pamphlets and books of scripture portions which we sold in the markets. As long as we endeavored to show great respect towards local customs and dressed in the native manner, we found the majority of the people most tolerant.

The tide of trouble rose with those who would usurp control from the mandarins, particularly in several of the western provinces. Local politics involved much intrigue, deception and secret alliances between powerful parties who vied for the imperial court's favor.

Few Chinese liked the idea of foreign influence spreading in the region, though our mission work was tolerated due to God's protection and the distinctly local flavor in which we presented ourselves and the Gospel. Unscrupulous men knew, however, that if the mandarins proved unable to provide stability, they could be removed from power. British forces threatened retaliation if assaults were initiated against their subjects. To fight the British would surely ensure the favor of certain power hungry individuals. It was in the best interest of the mandarins' enemies to create massive instability—in short, rioting, carnage and every manner of violence—thus hoping to seize power. The easiest scapegoats, against which the people would ignorantly rally, were people of white skin and fair eyes.

THE MISSION OF LONG DRAGON GORGE

After we finished praying desperately together, La Ong and I sat and waited. There was much to say and many weighty decisions to be made, which forced our words to be measured, as we did not want to do or say the wrong thing. We both knew we had to leave. The question was, how?

I greatly respected my friend's counsel. I knew she had sacrificed much to become a Christian, though she would laugh and make light of the slightest mention of her sacrifice. Her father had a business making temple incense and fake money to be burned in sacrifice to idols. Her entire family had utterly disowned her when she declared her belief in the Christian God.

Not wanting to impose on the hospitality of her newfound Christian brothers and sisters, this gentle woman had slept in the outside markets for nearly a week, not telling the foreign Christians of her desperate situation. After attending a worship meeting at the mission house, she nearly fainted from hunger one night. Then the truth was finally discovered and she was brought into the mission house to live. She became the faithful cook, teacher, nurse, seamstress and backbone of our mission home-life after that. When I arrived in China she had been living with the mission for nearly five years.

In the early years when I was first learning basic Chinese, it was frustrating for me to have to express myself like a baby, or at best as a small child. My education had been such that I valued expressing my thoughts in flowery language. But I soon found that even this forced simplicity proved a valuable spiritual exercise. I had no choice but to boil down my thoughts to their very essence, which forced me to think more clearly. I could not be vague. I learned that much can be expressed with a look, a touch or a smile, if a large vocabulary is lacking.

There were seven of us at our mission house—La Ong and myself; Kai Sun, a sturdy man, and dedicated native evangelist from a neighboring mountain region; Tet Lo, a Christian brother from the Burmese hill tribes bordering our area, who helped us manage the cooking and physical work load at our mission house; along with a dear British couple, Everett and Florence Richardson, and their little daughter Sarah. Though this mountain town had been visited by mission teams many times over the years, it had never, until now, had a permanent mission house of its own.

La Ong and I were bursting with happiness when we had finally been approved to join this mission outpost. It was an experiment to have women and children in such a remote area, and we were thrilled to be part of it. It was a joyful day when we loaded the houseboat with our supplies and began the long journey. I had never before taken such a long trip inside China—over three weeks' length! With every mile I grew to love this country more.

Rivers are the essence of life in China—the hub of all activity. They are used for transportation, communication, drinking water, crop irrigation and nearly everything necessary to life. I learned so much about China as I watched the activity on the shores during that marvelous boat journey.

Then began the trip up the mountain by mule train, climbing higher and higher! The sure-footed animals plodded their way up the muddy paths, winding through lush vegetation, passing villages and towns on the trail to the upper regions. The hills rose from rolling emerald carpets to sheer granite giants, towering above us on the skyline. I felt so small, yet so close to God. He had called me to this place—I knew it! I felt it! Every step in my life had led up to this point, to bring Jesus to the people of the hills in my soon-to-be home.

Long Dragon Gorge! That was the name of the town where our mission was established. Things were going splendidly as far as any of us could see at first. The township was remote in the sense of being far from the coastal cities, yet it was a most vital hub for trade throughout the entire surrounding region. Its radiating trails formed major crossroads to all the mountain tribal areas, since Long Dragon Gorge was the last stop before the river towns—towns which the mountain people generally avoided, detesting the strict control of the cities.

By reaching the various hillsmen that passed through this township on merchant trips and other provincial business, we could accomplish as much, if not more, than by sending out dozens of teams to the bigger towns in the valley below, where travelers were fewer. We hoped that those we reached would become Christians and eventually carry the Gospel back to their unreached tribes which dwelt in the surrounding mountains.

The seven of us at the Long Dragon Gorge mission house lived and worked together as a close family over the next five months. In the evenings, around the fire, we talked for hours together and heard much about one another's personal history. Though my closest friend, La Ong, was Chinese, this was the first opportunity I had had to closely know and understand any Chinese Christians from the tribal minorities, such as Kai Sun and Tet Lo. Their lives were fascinating and I often marveled at their pure faith. They were very determined to bring the Gospel to their people in whatever way they could.

The first time I observed Kai Sun preaching was in a market place. This was a common place for the exchange of ideas to occur, as markets acted as local entertainment centers, taverns, restaurants, minor courts of law, as well as dentist and doctor's offices,

all rolled into one. Kai Sun was being trained by Everett Richardson, our mission elder. Our other mission stations had had great success in sending out native Christians in teams to other areas. We knew that if the work in inland China was to grow, it had to be pioneered by an indigenous native church. People like Kai Sun were the hope of the church's future in China.

There was something very intense about this young man's features, though his serious countenance made his smiles all the warmer, like sunshine breaking through the clouds. He was tall for a Chinese, which was uncommon among the local hillsmen who tended to be sturdy, yet of shorter stature.

I stood among the baskets of vegetables, as La Ong paid for the items we needed for the evening meal. Kai Sun was raising his voice with enthusiasm as he related the story of Jesus' death on the cross to a group of men who had come to the town to trade salt. The crowd was listening intently, asking many questions and responding enthusiastically when, from out of the sidelines, a whizzing projectile flew straight at the earnest evangelist.

Splat! Slimy rotten cabbage ran down Kai Sun's cheek and hair. The crowd burst into uproarious laughter! Then some of the salt traders silenced them. All were quiet as they waited to see what the young man would say or do.

How he managed I wasn't quite sure, but even with cabbage oozing down his face, Kai Sun retained an air of quiet dignity. Wiping the remnants of the rotten produce with his sleeve, he continued calmly on with his story. Though the language differed from the coastal dialect I had learned, I still understood much of his message.

"I was telling you that the Lord Jesus came down from His home in Heaven to Earth to bring wonderful

news to all men,” Kai Sun continued. “Yes, all men! Jesus brings His gift of life to me, Jesus brings His gift to you, and Jesus even brings this precious gift to you, my friend,” he peered through the crowd, “to the young man in the brown vest who wanted so badly to get my attention. Jesus loves you and did you an enormous kindness. He gave His own life so that you could live forever!”

I watched as the young ruffian in the crowd who had hurled the rotten cabbage turned scarlet with embarrassment as all eyes turned upon him. He had expected an angry confrontation with Kai Sun, but the soft answer and offer of salvation was unexpected and overwhelming. His wrath totally diffused, the youth quickly fled the scene. La Ong later told me that Kai Sun sought the boy out and personally talked with him, giving him a copy of a portion of the scriptures in Chinese.

Soon after we set up our mission house, large numbers of people began visiting. Many came out of curiosity, to see how foreigners lived. We would take large groups of them on tours throughout our residence and they would examine each and every room, every stick of furniture and every household item with great interest. This served as a source of amusement for the local people, but it also served as a source of protection for ourselves. Our openness showed we had nothing to hide, no sinister dark secrets for which we could later be accused. Many Chinese feared things foreign, so it was an immense relief to all to see that we lived, ate and dressed as they did.

With every tour of our premises however, we never missed the opportunity to give a little talk about Jesus, a little introduction of who He was and what wonderful news He had sent us to bring. This was surprising news to many of the local population, whose only concept of any “god” was a fearsome deity

whose wrath must be appeased through rituals and offerings. We usually tried to end our little tours with a hymn, sung in Chinese as we gathered around the pipe organ. I would pump vigorously while Florence, Everett’s wife, played. She had a lovely touch and it always moved people immensely to hear that beautiful music and her sweet voice. Baby Sarah was also a sensation with all the people, who were fascinated by her blonde curls and her first words—which she uttered, of course, in Chinese, as it was the language most spoken around the mission in which she lived.

At the time we opened the mission house there were already several Chinese Christian families living in Long Dragon Gorge, who had been converted by some of the evangelistic teams that had visited the area before. It was at the urging of these local believers that it had finally been decided to attempt opening a permanent mission house and, we hoped, eventually a school also. It was likewise hoped that Florence, La Ong and myself could help to reach the women in this place, who we found to be very receptive and open to our visits to their homes. Women in this area were much bolder than the coastal ladies, and the local culture seemed to us less restrictive.

Visits to neighboring towns were also part of the mission’s activities. Everett Richardson had been thrilled recently with the Twin Rivers township mandarin’s reaction to the story of salvation, which he had presented during his last audience with the official. Twin Rivers was the local government seat, about a day’s journey down the mountain. Though the local government operated from Twin Rivers, still the town could not match the influx of merchant traffic from surrounding hills that made Long Dragon a more ideal place for us to operate. However, we were greatly encouraged by the mandarin’s interest in our

activities, as we knew that it was only with this powerful man's agreement that we could continue our work openly and that, furthermore, his actual friendship and patronage could greatly facilitate the spreading of the Gospel.



Everett and his wife, Florence, had left us three days earlier with their small baby, on a missionary journey down the mountain, and back to Twin Rivers. Everett had gone many times before, but now it seemed wise to present a wife and child to those who had befriended him. The mandarin, a scholarly man, looked favorably upon the missionary and had invited him to return to hear more of the Christian teachings. Florence, who had an easygoing and friendly manner, was always a success with the Chinese ladies. Fluent in the language—a daughter of missionaries herself—she moved with ease among them. Everett had hoped that by presenting his wife and the young child, a door could possibly be opened to minister to the mandarin's wives, who also carried considerable influence in the prefecture.

Now we all trembled for their safety.

THE HEATHEN RAGE

All these thoughts tumbled about me as La Ong and I sat upon the *kang*. The necessity of fleeing loomed before us. But what of the others? I reviewed in my mind the events which had led up to our present dangerous situation.

The plan had been for Kai Sun to accompany the Richardsons as far as the river. Tet Lo, our faithful cook, was to meet with Kai Sun at the first mountain town enroute and they were to return together with supplies of millet and other grains. Meanwhile La Ong and myself stayed at home, busying ourselves with much needed house cleaning, as well as the drying of a large amount of

vegetables that we had purchased now during the autumn harvest time, to see us through the coming winter.

We had expected Kai Sun and Tet Lo to return home two nights before, but uncharacteristically, they had not. After the second day, as there had been no word from either of them, La Ong decided to go and make inquiries in the market. We had not set foot outside of our mission since their departure as we had been so busy with our household chores.

Just before La Ong left we were shocked to hear a loud pummeling* on our front door. We both rushed to the entrance and peered outside. A large pile of stones lay heaped at our doorstep, along with clods of dirt and other debris, obviously thrown at the front of our house.

"Who could have done this?" La Ong exclaimed.

"Possibly some children trying to annoy us?" I suggested.

It was odd, though, as we had had no trouble from the town's children before this, and had been treated most hospitably.

La Ong walked into our courtyard and peered out the front gate. She shook her head slowly. "This is not the work of children," she muttered.

I stared at the gate. The heap was a gruesome sight, smeared with animal blood and the Chinese characters for "devil."

"Do you think he signed his name?" I joked nervously, trying to make light of the situation.

"We may be heading for trouble." La Ong eyed me seriously. "I think you should stay here while I go to the market to see if I can find out any word regarding Mr. and Mrs. Richardson, or Kai Sun and Tet Lo. Don't open the door for anyone unless they knock the way we have discussed we would during times of emergency." Over the past years at our mission

homes we had often made emergency preparations and contingency plans. My arms erupted in goose-bumps as I realized she was serious.

I bolted the door after La Ong and tried to busy myself with the unfinished housework. Not more than fifteen minutes later I heard a banging at the front door. "She must have forgotten something!" I reasoned. Forgetting La Ong's caution, I rushed to open the door.

The moment I did so I was sorry. There on my doorstep was a very tall, very muscular and very drunken man. He carried a large club and looked at me menacingly.

"We have no need of foreign devils here!" he slurred through his drunken haze. "The mandarin has enough dogs!"

He spit on the ground, and glared at me. I waited tensely wondering what more he would do. I didn't think I could close the door, which was a rather heavy and unwieldy one, quickly enough to block him from forcing himself inside. No one was around and I knew I was at his mercy.

"Jesus help me," I breathed silently, as the grim man and I faced each other eye to eye. The moments seemed like hours. Then suddenly, he turned on his heels and left, just like that! Heart pounding, I swiftly closed and bolted the heavy door.

"Lord forgive me for answering that without waiting for the proper knock! I simply wasn't thinking. Help me to follow You in each thing I do. Thank You for delivering me, Lord," I prayed. "Please protect La Ong and all the others. Deliver us from evil, in Jesus' name I pray!"

Meanwhile, as La Ong walked through the streets, she was surprised at the quiet atmosphere in the usually bustling market area. Where was everyone? Only a few vendors lingered over their stalls, but most shops were boarded up, closed for

the day. Something surely was wrong! She went to several of the remaining local traders who were always the first to hear all the news, and was puzzled by the surly reception she was given when she mentioned her fellow mission workers. Some stared at her coldly. Others hissed and drew themselves away. What could possibly have brought such a reception?

Finally an old woman drew her aside into the semi-privacy of a wooden market stall. "You shouldn't talk so loudly of those foreigners," she whispered, her voice low. The woman obviously didn't recognize La Ong as part of the mission. "Even mentioning them will bring a curse! We were wrong in ever letting them move here. We've just heard news from the traders coming from Twin Rivers ... " She narrowed her eyes as she spoke. "The white foreign devils are stealing children and murdering them! They use them to make their medicine. The foreign doctor who goes to Twin Rivers twice a year sells this medicine to people, so he is looking for many Chinese children. Those people are evil!" she hissed.

The woman seemed to delight in seeing La Ong's eyes widen, obviously finding someone who knew nothing of the latest gossip. La Ong knew the market woman was referring to the mission doctor and his team who, every six months, traveled to the western provinces from the cities on the plains, healing the sick and preaching the Gospel.

"Don't worry though. They will pay for their deeds," the old woman continued, clutching La Ong's hand. "Already the good people of Twin Rivers have driven out the officials who tolerated such evil works. Already they have succeeded in killing several of the foreign devils before they could cause any more harm!"

La Ong raised her hand to her mouth. That was the town where the Richardsons had gone!

"No, no! It's not true what you say!" La Ong tore herself away from the woman's dirty hand. She knew she had to get home as quickly as possible.

"Don't have anything to do with them!" the wrinkled old seller called after her, as La Ong fled down the deserted market road.

Out of breath, she stumbled into a courtyard. She knew the place well. Here, small groups of menfolk usually gathered to sit and idle away the time, discussing every matter under the sun, while drinking the fermented millet brew so popular in the hill regions. But what she saw now made her stop short, gasping in fear. In place of the normally passive gathering, there was a large and angry mob. Red banners hung from the street proclaiming "Foreign dogs bring opium!"

Why, it looked like half the people of the town were collected here! They all stood, listening intently to a man perched on a barrel who vigorously addressed the crowd. From his dress, La Ong guessed he was not from Long Dragon Gorge, and likely not even from Twin Rivers, but he seemed an outside troublemaker, brought in to sow fear and panic amongst the townspeople. Beside him, large paper banners were pasted to the stall walls showing ugly westerners with grotesque features, driving stakes through the hearts of the Chinese.

"And I tell you," the man shouted as he squinted at his audience through rat-like eyes, "we should not tolerate such evil deeds in any town! The very lives of our women and children are at stake!"

La Ong could see the confused and worried expressions on the faces of people in the crowd beside her. Obviously many were believing the lies.

Suddenly an accomplice of the ruffian who spoke swept to the front of the crowd carrying a lighted torch. La Ong watched in horror as the stuffed effigy* of a foreigner, hanging from a rope swung over some

nearby scaffolding, was lit and soon engulfed in flames. She shrank from the crowd as a cheer erupted from the angry mob. They seemed to be whipping themselves into a frenzy of fear.

"Curse that lying devil, Lord!" she prayed. Fear was contagious, like any other disease, and she knew these evil men would be able to steer this gullible crowd easily with their twisted words.

As dusk rapidly approached she hurried home to me, her heart sinking with the sun. "Jesus lead and guide us through these dark times!" she now prayed. "Help me to protect Lu Yisi from these troublemakers, in Jesus' name, I pray!"

SURROUNDED

Tap tap! Tap tap tap! As La Ong and I sat in silence, holding hands and praying about what to do next, our thoughts were interrupted again by the sound of quick footsteps on the courtyard's flagstones, then the signal knock.

We rushed to the entrance together and heaved open the heavy beam that bolted the door. Looking out into the dim doorway we gasped at the sight we beheld.

Kai Sun stood leaning against the doorway with blood dried upon his dark angular face, a makeshift bandage pressed to his forehead. Normally meticulous in his personal appearance, he looked strange with his black hair matted with dirt and his clothes showing signs of an obvious physical struggle.

"Quickly," he muttered, as we stood gaping at him. Recovering from the shock we bundled Kai Sun inside, who was followed by Tet Lo. Though Tet Lo had obviously fared better than Kai Sun in their encounter, it was apparent that both had recently met with danger.

We quickly led the men to the *kang* and brought water and fresh bandages. Closer inspection revealed

Kai Sun's wound was not as bad as it had first appeared—head wounds always bleed copiously*.

As I held his head in my hands and inspected his cuts, tears welled up in my eyes. "Whatever happened, my brothers?" I implored them to tell me.

"There isn't much time," Tet Lo cautioned. "Brother, please tell them quickly while I pack some supplies for our journey, for we must go now!" Tet Lo rushed off to the storage rooms in the back of the house.

"He is right," Kai Sun replied, looking sadly at us. "The danger is very great. The enemies of the mandarin have spread evil lies. There is an epidemic of typhoid fever in the river towns. They blame it on the presence of foreigners, saying that they have brought an evil curse. Some say it is a result of the medicine the mission doctor distributed on his last round. And now, with him coming around again next month, the talk in the markets is all about the foreigners stealing children to give to the doctor when he comes."

"But surely they can't believe that!" I cried. "They know us! We walk among them! Our doors have been open to all since we arrived."

"Lu Yisi, they are a frightened people, driven mad with fear." Kai Sun placed his hand upon my trembling shoulder. "If they kill, they will think they are doing it to protect themselves and their families against a great evil. Unfortunately, they now think you—and those of us with you—are that evil. Of course not everyone believes this. But it only takes a few to stir up a great pot of trouble. We are in God's hands, but as our Lord advised us, 'If they persecute you in one city, flee to the next.'"

Our attention was diverted by the sound of glass breaking—it was a lamp being thrown over the wall into our courtyard, where fresh hay for the animals' was still drying. Tet Lo came rushing back in.

"Do not fear! God is with us," our faithful cook declared. Racing up the ladder to the loft where a small window looked out into the courtyard, he could see the flames beginning to ignite below. Fortunately the hay was far enough from the house that the building was not in immediate danger. But we could hear a mob gathering outside the main gate and the house wall. "We don't have long!" he called down.

Just then La Ong came in from the kitchen with a sooty lamp and knelt beside me.

"Lu Yisi," she spoke softly, "the time has come for me to make you even more Chinese. Now the outside of you will look like your heart—one of us."

She quickly took the lamp soot and mixed it with oil and some other powder in a small clay bowl. "All women know this trick to hide the gray hairs. But with you, we shall hide everything."

Before I could protest, she had slathered my hair with the black paste until every strand and root was deep ebony. Then she took the oily mass, which was far curlier than the average Chinese woman's hair, and bound it tightly into a braid, entwining bright red string throughout it in a decorative way. I knew this style—it was the way of dress of the people from the highlands, who speak and act differently than the hillsmen where we lived. I had seen them come in from the frosty snowlines to barter animal skins and mountain herbs. Most of the local people looked down on them as being ignorant, backwards and somewhat less than clean.

"But La Ong, why do you dress me like the high mountain people? Isn't it better that I look more like the people in this town, so they won't think me so strange and different?"

"Lu Yisi, now is the time to hide. Anyone who loves you knows you are like us in your heart. But those who hate you will look at the outward

appearance. Even with black hair they will know you are not one of the people from Long Dragon Gorge, or even the people from the plains. They will discern, in little things you do, that you are not from this area. So I have made you as a foreigner, but not a westerner, so that little movements or words or insignificant motions will not betray you. People will assume it is simply the way of the high mountain people, whom they do not know well.”

With that, La Ong smeared a generous helping of dirt from the floor onto my face. “Rub it around, that’s right. No more of that white skin for you. Now you’ll need to change your clothes.”

From a pile of baskets she pulled a black dress with a striped apron that had certainly seen much wear and better days. “I got this from a market girl today, after I heard of all this trouble. She was eager to trade my new shawl for it and thought she had quite a bargain. But if it saves your life, the bargain is mine many times over.”

As the final touch she added some rough painted clay beads around my neck and an ornament that hung over my forehead to help distract attention from the light gray color of my eyes. La Ong then spent some precious moments instructing me in how to properly squat, spit and rest with my head on my arms, looking every bit the country girl, while yet nonchalantly concealing my face completely. She also instructed me how to carry a basket on my back with a band slung around my forehead as the far mountain people do, rather than the way our town’s people walked with a pole slung across their shoulders. In a daze I tried to grasp as much as I could. It was all happening so quickly.

“Lord help me to remember this!” I prayed. Still, I didn’t see how we could escape, with angry crowds just outside our door, even if I was dressed in this disguise.

Crash! We turned in horror, realizing the garden wall gate that Kai Sun and Tet Lo had locked a few moments before had given way. We could now hear the pounding of fists upon our very door. Tet Lo and Kai Sun rushed to join La Ong and myself.

Suddenly an anointing fell upon Tet Lo, our dear and ever faithful fellow-worker. Though normally a meek man, now he spoke with such directive authority none of us thought to question him. “Kai Sun!” he instructed. “You take Lu Yisi into the hay in the loft and make no noise. Stay with her and protect her! Do not come down, no matter what happens! Do you understand me?” he asked as he shoved a wrapped bundle into Kai Sun’s hands.

“Yes, my brother,” Kai Sun nodded while looking painfully into Tet Lo’s eyes, as he pulled me towards the ladder.

“La Ong!” I cried, holding out my hand to my friend. “Come!”

She stood calmly at the foot of the ladder. “No, dear one. My job is down here. I will help Tet Lo.”

“Yes, Lu Yisi,” Tet Lo chimed in. “Go quickly before you endanger Kai Sun.” That quieted me and I let him lead me to the loft, where we bundled down behind the grain stored near another stash of hay, piled deep in a corner.

What I heard downstairs, over the tumult outside, I will always remember. I heard the voice of peace in the midst of a raging storm. I heard the voices of heroes, and the words of martyrs. I heard the prayer of faith as my beloved brother and sister, Tet Lo and La Ong, commended themselves into the hands of their beloved Savior while kneeling in prayer.

“Lord Jesus, You have called us to be Your servants. You have called us to take up our cross and follow You. Thank You, Jesus, for that privilege! We put ourselves into Your hands. You

have led us to this time and this place and we have done Your will. Be with us now, Lord! You promised You would be with us even as we walked through the valley of the shadow of death. Thy will be done, Lord. Amen!"

And with that, they quietly began to sing a hymn as the door burst open.

DELIVERANCE

"Just a little farther, just a little more," Kai Sun urged me. "We just have to make it to that ridge, then we can rest."

My feet felt like lead as we plodded up the steep hillside, breathing heavily. We had been traveling most of the night, making slow progress, but Kai Sun had not wanted to stop and rest so close to Long Dragon Gorge. Thankfully a full moon shone brightly and we could make out much of the surrounding landscape. We did not dare walk on the trails, so we were inching our way up through the thick, rugged hillside brush which tore at our clothes and scratched our faces. Gratefully I looked ahead and saw that the foliage on the top of the ridge was less dense.

I was thankful for the hard climb. It kept me from thinking. The events of the past few hours were still painfully vivid and I didn't want to talk, or even think of it, lest my sadness overwhelm me. I needed time to pray and understand all that had happened, so we walked on in silence. Kai Sun seemed to sense this need, and only spoke every now and then to encourage me onward.

We reached the top of the ridge just as the sun was cresting the far hills. The dawn was glorious, with rosy colors swirling in the low clouds. I felt vaguely surprised that the sun could rise and the morning dawn so radiant, so blissfully unaware of the chaos that had engulfed my world.

At the top we sank down behind a large outcropping of rock behind which was formed a small cave, which shielded us from the elements. Here we lay, exhausted. My lips were dry and chapped from the lack of water on our climb. We had had no time to take water with us, but Kai Sun had managed to keep with him the sack which dear Tet Lo had thrown together. Some roasted barley meal, a small pot, a cup, a sheath knife, a rough blanket, a Bible and a small packet of money were all our worldly goods. As we lay down, the sheer physical and mental strain overcame us and we slept immediately. But after a few hours the exhaustion wore off and I was awakened by my aching body and my wrestling thoughts, struggling to comprehend all that had happened.

I mentally reviewed the scene we had just been part of, though it still seemed dream-like, or part of a play rather than real:

As the crowd rushed into the house Tet Lo had stepped forward. I could hear him speaking calmly, imploring them to be reasonable. He asked where the evidence was of the crimes of which the western missionaries were accused. But the mob was beside themselves with fear and rage. "Where are the foreign devils? Hand them over to us or you will die!" they screamed.

I heard La Ong speaking softly to the crowd. Her voice rang soft and clear like a bell, though I could not make out her words. Then I heard her being struck. Yet my dear friend never cried out, steadfast and brave to the very end.

How I battled laying in the loft beneath the hay, listening as my dear La Ong was seized by the enraged crowd. Tears welled in my eyes, and I could take it no longer. I tried to leap up and rush to her rescue, but Kai Sun pushed me down and held me with all his weight, his hand pressed tightly over my mouth as I struggled.

“Pray, Lu Yisi!” he whispered desperately in my ear.

“Dear Lord, help them! Please help them! Jesus, please protect them!” I sobbed silently. Then, somehow a calm came over me, as I felt the Lord’s voice speak clearly to my heart.

“Kai Sun is right. You should not go with La Ong. Stay where you are. I am with her!”

I immediately stopped struggling, realizing the futility of attempting to rush to La Ong’s aid. There was nothing I could do. Besides, the Lord had said He was with her. With a sudden realization I understood that He was calling her home to be with Him.

Suddenly, an intense rush of peace came over me, and I could see La Ong in my mind’s eye. Her crumpled body lay at the feet of the madmen who were attacking her. As they continued their wild kicking and beating, suddenly the most magnificent scene unfolded before me. I saw a slim, silvery form emerge from the pitiful ruins of her earthly body. It was La Ong! Her face was beaming with smiles as her spirit left her body. She was radiant! As she stood upright, her long hair swung free, waving as though in a gentle wind. Her clothes were transformed from the rough homespun cloth to dazzling white raiment, shimmering as the stars! I saw her reach for Tet Lo’s hand, and as he also left his battered body, a look of joy spread over his face as well. Then both of them floated Heavenward, arms outstretched, not even once looking back.

I had never before seen them so happy, so free! They had escaped in the most beautiful way possible, straight from the clutches of our enemies into the arms of our Savior! I felt such overwhelming happiness for both of them. Death indeed was swallowed up in victory! Still, at the same time I was torn by the sad realization that I would never see my dearest friend again on this Earth. My heart ached with the pain.

My grief was temporarily brushed aside, however, as the realization dawned that our own lives were now in greater danger than ever. Black smoke suddenly billowed up into our haven from the floor below—our home was on fire!

Apparently the mob outside, thoroughly disorganized, had set the outer building ablaze during their companions’ attack. This ultimately worked to our advantage, as the ruffians would have otherwise most certainly searched the loft and found us there. Now, thick dark fumes filled the downstairs of the house and the rioters fled from the house into the yard. We had not a moment to lose.

“Guard the doors and windows! If there’s anyone else in there, don’t let them get away!” an authoritative voice shouted.

Where could we go? My mind raced, trying to think of what to do. “Jesus, please help us find a way out!” I prayed out loud.

“The roof!” Kai Sun gestured to me, as he stood on a storage barrel and reached towards some ceiling beams. Springing from the barrel he grabbed the beams with his muscular arms, as though chinning* on the beams. Then he hooked his legs around the beams and lay on his side, working feverishly at the tiles in the roof on the opposite side of the house from where the crowd gathered. Finally, after several minutes of desperate work, a number of loose tiles clattered to the floor.

“Throw me the bag, Lu Yisi!” he called. I tried with all my might to throw it, but it took several tries. At last he reached down and caught it, pulling it up through the hole.

“Now Lu Yisi, stand on that barrel and grab my hand,” he instructed. I gingerly balanced myself on the rim, and reached up to his outstretched hand, but I was still a couple of feet too short.

“I can’t do it!” I called.

“You must!” Kai Sun urged. Choking black smoke billowed up into our attic loft. There was nothing to boost myself with, no way I could reach him. I knew I could never pull myself onto the beam as he had.

“Jump up as far as you can and I’ll catch you!” he shouted, but I knew my weight would only pull us both back through the hole as he perched precariously on the edge, reaching down to catch me.

“Jesus,” I prayed, “we must escape! You’ve kept us this far. Please show us what to do now!”

Suddenly a vision formed in my mind of the bag I had just thrown up to Kai Sun.

“Quickly!” I shouted. “Is there anything in that bag that could help us?”

Desperately Kai Sun tore open the sack. “The blanket!” he exclaimed, his eyes widening. He tied the end of the rough blanket firmly around his arm and extended the other end to me.

Holding with both hands, I tightly clutched the blanket as Kai Sun braced his legs against the tiles and hoisted me up into the fresh night air.

Panting from the exertion, we flattened ourselves against the roof tiles. What to do now? We could feel the rising heat of the fire below us, and the hay on which we had lain was beginning to catch as well. The roof tiles beneath us were heating rapidly.

“Over there!” Kai Sun gestured to the portion of the roof that covered the storeroom. “That area can’t be seen easily from the front or back grounds. The side yard is filled with thorns, so hopefully no one will be there. We’ll have to pray no one sees us jump or we’ve had it!”

“J-jump?” I questioned fearfully. The roof stood two stories high!

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me,” Kai Sun replied, as he led me by the hand.

“Oh Jesus, please help me. I don’t think I can possibly do this. ... Wait, look!” I pointed at the most unbelievable sight that lay before my eyes. There on the roof before us lay a long bamboo ladder!

“Thank You Jesus! Praise You Jesus!” Kai Sun breathed over and over, as he pulled the ladder towards the edge. Cautiously peering over the side, we saw that Kai Sun’s guess had been right. None of the town’s people had ventured into the thorn-filled side yard, but had stayed in the front and back of the house, and seemed to be occupied watching the mounting fire consume the rest of the building. We quickly lowered the ladder over the side and scrambled down the rungs—so quickly that we surely had supernatural help doing so. Then, like rabbits chased by a hound, we dove into the bushes and raced off into the darkness.

MY GOD SHALL SUPPLY

The morning sun had risen well over the horizon when I woke with a start. I couldn’t remember falling asleep again, after lying awake so long, fitfully reviewing our ordeal. I quickly looked around and relaxed, realizing we were safe. But where was Kai Sun? I stood up, stretching my still-aching limbs, and slowly walked to the edge of the overhanging rocks. He was nowhere to be seen.

“Where could he be? Surely he wouldn’t leave me!” I whispered to myself.

Just then my heart leapt as I saw Kai Sun climbing up the rock ledge towards our shelter. How glad I was to see his face! And he cradled in one arm the most wonderful sight—a pot of fresh, clear spring water!

I was so grateful at that moment that God had brought him back to me, and that we were safe, and that we had water to drink. I felt much, much better than I had the night before. My heart rose in

praise to Jesus for all the miracles He had done to help and deliver us. And yes, though my heart still ached to lose my dear friends, I even thanked the Lord for His deliverance of La Ong and Tet Lo, who I knew were now at our dear Savior's side.

I was so happy to see Kai Sun that I spontaneously wrapped my arms around him when he was back at my side. He looked shocked at my sudden display of affection, then smiled shyly and handed me the precious water. I drank deeply and felt refreshed. Then it occurred to me how hungry I was.

"Look what we have for breakfast!" Kai Sun eagerly informed me, reaching into our sack. "Roasted barley flour! This is what we always ate in my village when I was a boy. It's delicious!"

I had never tried this delicacy so I watched curiously as he measured an amount of the flour into our only cup, mixing it with water into a thick paste. "Now try some!" he beckoned me enthusiastically as he shoved the cup in my direction.

I took a small portion with my grimy fingers—water was too precious a commodity at this point to use to wash—and put it to my lips. As hungry as I was, it tasted—in a word—awful.

I smiled. "It's very ... interesting!" I politely answered.

"I knew you would like it!" Kai Sun beamed. After thanking the Lord for the food, he ate heartily. I picked at the raw, gritty porridge. I knew I needed it for strength for what lay ahead, so I forced myself to eat as much as I could.

I watched Kai Sun from the corner of my eye, glad that I had not been left to face this ordeal alone. Grateful tears welled up in my eyes. I quickly brushed them away and turned my head, but not before Kai Sun had noticed.

"Why, Lu Yisi! What is wrong? Oh, this has been so very, very hard for you!" he reached for my arm

sympathetically.

"No, no, Kai Sun. I am crying tears of thankfulness. Thank you that you risked your life to save mine, my dear, dear friend. I have only tears of thankfulness. I am so grateful to La Ong and Tet Lo who laid down their lives for us both."

"Greater love has no man than this," Kai Sun answered, "than a man lay down his life for his friends."

Then I began to tell Kai Sun of the vision I had seen in the loft, of La Ong and Tet Lo, rising like the shining sun, upwards into Heaven. Kai Sun's mouth fell open.

"But Lu Yisi!" he smiled. "I saw the same thing!" and he finished describing the scene to me, exactly as I had seen it.

"Thank You, Jesus!" we both cried, tears streaming down our faces. We then fell to our knees and poured out our hearts to Jesus, thanking Him for delivering us and for leading us to this place of refuge.

Oh, there is such a release and a relief in prayer! How little we avail ourselves of that mighty balm of healing that gives rest and peace of mind during dark despair! It felt so good to join our hearts together before Jesus.

After praising Him for all He had done to miraculously preserve us, we then asked the Lord for His guidance, as we had to decide what to do next.

When we had finished praying, Kai Sun looked at me. "Lu Yisi, while praying I had the impression that we should stay here today. But I also had the strongest feeling that I should make my way to the main trail to see if there are any signs of the other Chinese Christians from Long Dragon Gorge. We don't know if they attacked anyone else, or only our mission house. The others may need help, or they

may have more word of where else there is trouble. That may help us know where to head next, or where not to."

"I think that is wise," I agreed, though I dreaded the thought of being alone in the mountains. We prayed fervently for God's protection over both of us. Before turning to go, Kai Sun looked back at me.

"You are an extraordinarily brave woman, Lu Yisi," he remarked, fixing his eyes on me.

I could not help but blush, which in turn caused Kai Sun to become flustered, and suddenly he looked more like an awkward youth than the grown man that he was. I could not help but smile in spite of my embarrassment.

"Thank you, my friend," I answered, as graciously as I could muster. "But any bravery I show could only come from God, for my own heart trembles as a leaf!"

"Courage is not the absence of fear, but when one overcomes that fear with God's help," Kai Sun replied soberly. Then turning, he quickly made his way down the rocky cliffside, as agile in this harsh terrain as a mountain goat.

He must have grown up on a mountain such as this to move so swiftly, I mused, watching him depart.



The day dragged on, slow and ever so lonely. When I discovered the Bible in the bundle we had brought with us, I picked it up and read eagerly. Though I still had difficulty with many of the more complicated Chinese characters, I knew the text well enough in English that I could understand easily all I read.

What strength I drew from that spiritual food! I took care lest my hands, which, though I had wiped them, remained somewhat grimy, would soil its precious pages.

The sun had sunk low in the sky before Kai Sun returned, carrying with him another bundle and a

basket as well.

"Wherever did you get these?" I exclaimed, unwrapping the contents. My eyes gazed on what we called "mountain bread," a type of steamed millet loaf, as well as baked yams, roasted dry beans and a hard, strong-smelling substance. "What is that?" I questioned.

"Yak cheese!" he answered, and from his eager expression I could tell he valued it as much as he had the roasted barley flour porridge.

"But where ...?" I asked, shaking my head in amazement.

"Lu Yisi, it was a miracle!" he replied enthusiastically. "Thank the Lord we heard from Him this morning and He directed me to wait by the trail. Just as He showed, I met most of the Christian families of Long Dragon Gorge leaving the town!"

While he talked, the baked yams and millet bread beckoned me invitingly. My mouth watered and Kai Sun noticed.

"Oh, Lu Yisi, you haven't eaten since I left! Please do so now!" He picked out the choicest portions, offering them to me.

I ate hungrily while he continued telling me his story.

"Thank God no one else has been harmed! They heard what happened to us all, and other Christian families who came to our meetings have likewise been threatened, yet the Lord preserved each one of them! They all vowed they would stay true to their faith despite these attacks of the Devil. Every one of them has decided to leave the town, rather than stay and compromise their "foreign" beliefs, which had now made them every bit as hated as if they had been foreigners themselves. They all packed up their belongings and were heading down to Twin Rivers when I saw them.

"I waited by the trailside in the bushes, and when I recognized them, I left my hiding spot and we talked together. They were so happy to see me! But we decided together they should not head to Twin Rivers because ... "

With that, Kai Sun seemed to let his thoughts trail off and suddenly became distracted, busying himself with the parcel he had brought.

"Please have some more food," he offered, changing the subject.

"What is wrong, Kai Sun?" I asked, noticing his vagueness.

"Do forgive me. I am just tired. It has been a long day." He answered apologetically, and the subject seemed to be closed. I knew it was a futile venture to press Kai Sun to continue if he didn't want to.

I ignored his sudden turn of melancholy and remarked, "At any rate, God is so good to us! It is a miracle they are unharmed! Will the families go to the surrounding villages?—Perhaps the violence has not spread there."

"It was outside dirty work, as we suspected; troublemakers brought in from the plains to cause rioting in the townships. Each of the Christians has relatives in the far hills who they can stay with for the time being. Perhaps it is God's way of causing the Gospel to be carried in directions we had not even attempted," he answered.

"God is caring for us and them, Kai Sun," I answered.

"Yes, and look!" he responded, cheering up. "All these things were given to us by our Christian brothers and sisters. See? We're rich!" he jested, holding up our "valuables."

It was true; our meager goods had certainly increased. It touched my heart so to see how sacrificially our brethren had given of what little

they had. We now had two sheepskin coats which I was very thankful for, as this night was certainly turning frostier than the last and we could not yet afford the luxury of a fire due to the danger of being seen. He also displayed another blanket, a sheepskin bag for water, a small cruse of oil, some flints to start a fire, some tea leaves wrapped in paper, and a basket in which to carry it all. Besides all this, our dear friends had given us some more money to help us on our journey. God bless them!

"So, what will we do now?" I asked.

"Rest the night," Kai Sun replied. "Then tomorrow morning we must be up very early. As far as I can see, the only way I can get you safely back to the nearest mission in the plains is by making a major detour across the higher mountains. The lower direct route is too risky, as all that area is under the mandarin's rule. Those who try to wrestle power from him will surely be causing the same trouble in all the lower towns as well. It is simply too risky. Are you willing to come with me to the high mountains, Lu Yisi?"

I looked at him and felt a strange prickling sensation, which I can only say now must have been a premonition or witness of the Lord's spirit.

"Yes!" I replied earnestly. And with that settled, we spread our blankets on our cliff-top refuge's rocky floor and quickly drifted into a deep and restful slumber.

KAI SUN

Though I hated to admit it, I was exhausted. Kai Sun, though ever considerate in many small matters, drove me onwards in our trek, incessantly. For safety, we had been keeping off the main trail, and forging our own way through the rugged landscape. I assumed Kai Sun had my best interests at heart, and worried about my safety, wanting me

as far from Long Dragon Gorge as it was quickly possible. But I was not used to the vigorous climbing, and soon discovered aching muscles in my calves and thighs that I had not previously known even existed. Although on our first day of hiking I had managed to keep up with Kai Sun pretty well, now I huffed and puffed along, trailing far behind him. We talked little as I needed all my breath just to keep up.

To make matters worse, in keeping with my costume I was expected to carry the load of the basket. No self-respecting hill woman would ever let her man carry a load—that was woman’s work! So we tried to make things look as genuine as possible for any who might happen to see us, and arranged my pack to look full, fluffing up the light blankets as much as possible. I certainly looked the part of the mountain wife, loaded down with my basket on my back, the strap slung about my forehead, while Kai Sun surreptitiously* carried the bulk of our supplies on a pole slung over his shoulders.

We stopped occasionally for water and food. I was trying my best to keep a praiseful attitude and remain cheerful, but the pace was draining every ounce of my stamina.

By the afternoon Kai Sun became concerned when he saw me limping. My local shoes were not made for this type of intense hiking through such rugged terrain, and the bark soles had nearly disintegrated. Looking gravely at my blistered and swollen feet, Kai Sun shook his head and then started to undress.

“Wh-what are you doing!” I exclaimed, blushing with modesty as he took off his coat and then his thick shirt to expose his manly chest. Before I could say anything more, he began shredding his shirt into long strips, then deftly wrapped the bandage-like shards around my shoes and feet, creating a pair of makeshift mummy-like boots.

“Kai Sun! You’ll freeze!” I exclaimed. He laughed and put his coat back on. “I’m fine. This coat is thick. Try walking now!” The difference the padding made was enormous, and I was able to continue walking for the rest of the day with much relief.

The next day however, after a restless night’s sleep due to my aching limbs and again, the lack of the warmth of a fire, I felt it hard to go on. Yet Kai Sun urged me to hurry, as we quickly ate and prayed for our protection, then continued climbing steadily upward. My body ached, and the change of altitude began to affect me, making my breathing more laborious.

Though I was trying to understand and be grateful for Kai Sun’s concern for my safety, I began to inwardly wonder if he comprehended that I was much weaker than he was. When I protested that I could not keep up, after only a minute or two of rest he would press me on further. He seemed relentless! I began to wonder if he were a secret ogre, enjoying my suffering.

Jesus! I pleaded. Please help me and strengthen me. Help me to climb this mountain. And Lord, I added, most of all help me to understand Kai Sun!

Seeing my obvious struggle, he finally relented and agreed to risk venturing back onto the main trail, as it would allow us to make much better time. Stumbling onto the smooth road I breathed a sigh of relief. Walking along this well-traveled pathway was so much easier.

We had walked for some time before we glimpsed other people approaching in the distance. Kai Sun informed me that meant we were coming close to Pine Ridges, a major town on the trail north where he hoped we could find supplies and lodging.

We weren’t sure exactly what to do. There was no way of knowing how far the violence had spread. If the insurrection was area-wide, then a town like

Pine Ridges would have been a likely target for visits from the troublemakers.

There was little foliage in which to hide on the high trails, though boulders abounded. After thinking hard and fast, Kai Sun finally motioned for me to hide behind the nearby rocks and wait while he pretended to be eating and resting by the trailside.

To our delight, the travelers hardly acknowledged Kai Sun with more than a nod, obviously intent on reaching the next village before sundown.

We continued on the trail together, and after some time saw another traveler approaching with a mule. This time Kai Sun instructed me to remain on the trail, but not to talk and to keep my head low. I was surprised at how well my disguise worked—the man didn't pay me the slightest attention though he did talk to Kai Sun about the condition of the trail ahead. We knew the local people didn't regard the high mountain tribes highly, so just as we'd hoped, I was looked down on as a relatively insignificant roadside pilgrim.

Walking on the trail was so much easier than picking our way across the steep hillside. I began to believe that I would truly be able to make it after all. My hopes rising, we continued on for several more hours. I eagerly looked forward to our arrival in Pine Ridge and, hopefully, some shelter for the night, and our first hot meal in days!

At last we came to a bend in the trail on a high rocky bluff, not far from the edge of the town. As we rounded the turn, suddenly, without warning, we found ourselves face to face with a group of a half a dozen men, sauntering along the narrow trail, engrossed in a boisterous conversation.

Spying us, they abruptly halted their lively chatter and stood in the midst of the path, staring at us intently. Kai Sun, who was ahead of me, took the situation in at a glance.

Then I witnessed the strangest thing I had ever seen. Sober, stoic Kai Sun suddenly began, of all things, to sing! Not only did he sing, but he did so loudly and very much off key. I stared at him with my mouth agape.

"The merry maidens laugh and sing, the time for love is in the spring-g-g-g!" he crooned, inviting the men to join in on the chorus. They grunted and continued to observe this mad traveler warily, not sure exactly what to make of him.

Then Kai Sun addressed the group of men, with exaggerated motions and bows of greeting. Laughing and slurring his words, he made quite a spectacle of himself. He stumbled, then picked himself up, attempting to stagger past the men. They stopped him, and addressed him sharply.

"What is your business in Pine Ridge?" they demanded suspiciously.

Kai Sun talked animatedly, gesturing at the trail and then at me. As they all turned their heads to look in my direction I kept my eyes cast downward, fixed on the ground, examining my feet and every blade of sparse trailside grass.

The situation seemed tense. Suddenly one of the men strode up to my side and spoke directly to me in a strange dialect I didn't recognize.

I gulped and didn't answer, not daring to look up. What should I do? *Jesus help me!* I prayed silently. He spoke again, this time more forcefully, but I kept my gaze locked on my toes.

It was then that I felt it! The blow knocked the wind out of me, and I fell to the ground, seeing stars dance around my head. I then dared to raise my eyes upwards to see which of the villains it was who had struck me. I gasped as I beheld the one who stood before me menacingly—it was Kai Sun!

He planted himself between the men and me, blocking the way and ranting as a drunkard.

“That will teach you to answer when a man speaks to you, wench!” he slurred, staggering before me. “This stupid mountain woman will learn manners and I’m the man to teach her!”

The group of men were obviously amused by the spectacle of Kai Sun teaching his ignorant mountain wife proper etiquette the hard way, and cheered him on. He continued to verbally berate me as I lay sprawled on the ground before him. Laughing, the men slapped Kai Sun on the back and then picked their way past me, continuing their journey down the trail.

Kai Sun continued to shout at me until the men were long down the trail. As soon as they rounded a far bend, he grabbed me by the hand and pulled me off the trail down past the rocky boulders, hustling me along the nearly vertical slope until we were safely on a rough ledge out of sight, well below the traveled road.

I stood before him, speechless. I felt exhausted, aching and scared, and now I felt utterly humiliated as well. I stood glaring at Kai Sun and anger welled up inside me.

But then my anger melted as I watched Kai Sun slowly sink to his knees before me. He touched his head to my feet in the traditional Chinese gesture, and I realized that this strong man was weeping.

I knelt down and touched his shoulder.

“Forgive me!” he sobbed, over and over. “Forgive me! I would never ever hurt you, for anything!” he cried.

It took some time for him to calm himself. I realized then the incredible pressure Kai Sun must have been under having to look out for my welfare single-handedly, as he had been doing since our escape.

“Kai Sun, I am sure you did what you did for good reason.” I told him. “I trust you.” I could tell the assurance meant a lot to him.

“Most likely you could see from the clothes the men wore that they were residents of the Pine Ridge township, which is the direction where we are heading. The men there wear long woven coats such as they had,” Kai Sun continued.

It was true they wore long coats, however I hadn’t noticed a thing. I was not yet very familiar with the dress of the hill tribes, but the local people could tell everything about a newcomer at a glance.

“When they approached us I overheard them talking about the mandarin’s trouble spreading to their town. They were laughing and saying that his supporters had gotten what they deserved. I could tell they were afraid I had understood them, so I can safely assume they were up to no good.

“Lu Yisi, I had no time to warn you. When I realized they were troublemakers I could only pretend to be drunk so they wouldn’t think I had heard what they were saying.”

I understood then the sudden charade which had transformed my usually stoic escort into a drunken lunatic.

“You are a very clever man,” I said, smiling at him gently.

“Lu Yisi,” Kai Sun said, taking my hand, “you have to believe me, I would never, ever strike you for any reason. But when that man spoke to you, did you understand his speech?”

“No.”

“Of all things that could have befallen us, we met a man who knew a few words of the high mountain tribal tongue. That’s the way you are dressed, like one of the high mountain people. He recognized your dress, so he attempted to speak a few words to you. If things were as they appeared, you would have reacted somehow if he spoke to you in your own language. So you see,” he continued, “I had no choice. I struck you because I had to. I called you a

rebellious wife, who stubbornly refused to answer. I said I had just traded you for two good mules, yet you were already making life miserable for me. I told them you had already tried to run away, and that I was going to teach you a thing or two if you gave me any more trouble. They believed it and left us alone.”

Again he knelt before me. “Please accept my deepest apologies!” Kai Sun looked up at me so imploringly that any anger I might have still felt was instantly quenched. In fact, I could not help but tease him a bit.

“Yes, I’ll forgive you. Still, there is one thing that bothers me about the whole incident.”

“Yes? What is it?” Kai Sun asked earnestly.

“I just don’t understand how you could have the gall to say I am worth only two mules!” I exclaimed in mock seriousness.

Kai Sun blinked at my comment, and I could tell he was trying very hard to comprehend the ways of women.

Much good came from our encounter with the men on the trail. For one, it helped me understand the pressure Kai Sun was facing as he tried to protect me and lead me to safety. For Kai Sun, it helped him to realize that it had to be the Lord that protected me and not his own efforts. Though his quick thinking had saved us on the trail, this trip was obviously not going to be smooth by any means, and if we were to make it, it would only be by the power of God to deliver and protect His children in time of need. God had kept us so far, and it was up to Him to continue to do so. Realizing this relieved Kai Sun of the burden he felt to drive me unmercifully to safety—which was of course, also an immense relief to me.

This change of heart in both of us caused us to join together in greater unity than ever before. Through this we learned our most valuable lesson—

to seek the Lord in everything we did and trust Him for our care. Until that point we had just assumed that proceeding with all possible speed was the best plan. We had not stopped to confirm in prayer if that was what the Lord wanted us to do.

Lastly, and of vital importance, we discerned that we were headed in the wrong direction! Apparently the Pine Ridge township wasn’t any safer than the one we had just left. But which way was safe? We agreed together to pray and ask God to direct us somehow.

A WAY OF ESCAPE

The day was damp and chilly, but still my face was hot and flushed. As we walked I often stumbled and had to rest. A deep cough had settled in my chest and I was certain I was running a fever. Kai Sun glanced at me often with a worried expression on his face.

The nights of sleeping outdoors in the frosty weather, combined with the stress and unaccustomed exertion of steep climbing had taken its toll on my health. We both knew we needed to find shelter quickly.

After our encounter with the men outside Pine Ridge township, we were desperate to know where the Lord wanted us to go. Praying together we were surprised when we both received the strongest impression to head back in the direction of the river townships beyond Long Dragon Gorge. This seemed against all natural reasoning. The river towns were certain to be extremely dangerous places for us, due to the riots and the anti-foreigner campaign in those regions. Also, it contradicted what the Lord had earlier shown us about traveling through the mountains. However, we both were desperate to do His will and felt strongly that this was it for the moment, however little we understood His leading.

Now after walking for a number of days I felt the strength draining from me as my fever continued to rise. I could only pray for the Lord to have His way as we continued following His guidance.

That night, when we stopped to rest, Kai Sun built a makeshift shelter as best he could. He started a blazing fire and drew me close to the warmth of the flames. Then he placed a number of stones in the fire, which soon became quite hot. Wrapping them in cloth, he put one against my back, and others against my feet to add to my warmth. He tried to prepare some broth for me and nearly forced me to drink it, but all I could manage was to take a few sips.

The last thing I remember clearly was lying down upon the blankets near the warmth of the fire as Kai Sun sat upright next to me, checking on me often. The rest of the tale, I only know as I later heard him relate it, when telling me of our ordeal in the mountains.



Kai Sun bit his lip and frowned. He was certainly no doctor, and as he himself was rarely ill, he had little idea of how to tend to someone in serious sickness, other than to pray desperately and follow whatever ideas the Lord might give. He did not believe that Jesus would have brought us through our difficulties so miraculously only to have me perish of pneumonia in the mountains, but that was beginning to look like an ominous possibility.

The morning dawned and Kai Sun checked on me only to have his heart sink as he could not rouse me, other than to a semi-conscious delirium. He attempted to bathe my forehead and hands, and knelt by my side in fervent prayer.

After several more anxious hours, my fever only burned stronger. Feeling helpless, desperate and broken, Kai Sun knelt by my side and poured out his heart to the Lord.

“Jesus, we are Your children and You promised to protect us! Please do not forsake us now! Lord, I have no way to help Lu Yisi. Please heal her! Please do a miracle and help us! Show me what to do. In Jesus name I pray!”

As Kai Sun knelt beside me, desperately imploring the Lord, suddenly the strangest picture began to form in his mind. A vision of a Chinese temple came up before him, with a shining golden roof and fierce bronze lions guarding the stone entrance. Then he saw a high rock which overlooked the temple grounds, and a man sitting on the rock as if in meditation.

“Lord, what is this?” Kai Sun questioned. “Is this of You? Whatever does it mean?”

Somewhat bewildered to be seeing a vision of a temple that obviously was not Christian, he prayed that if this was not of the Lord that Jesus would take it away. Kai Sun claimed the verse, “If he ask for bread, will He give him a stone?”

Again, the picture appeared clearly in his mind, and the feeling accompanying it was that this was the place he should go.

Then clearly and strongly, Kai Sun heard the Lord’s voice.

“Rimpa Sae. He is looking for Me. Tell him I have sent you. He will help you.”



One quality I have always admired about Kai Sun is his obedience. When the Lord tells him to do something, however strange, he does everything in his power to follow where the Master leads. Still not being able to rouse me, Kai Sun carefully hid our few belongings beside the trail underbrush. As there were only two directions to follow on the trail—up, the desolate way we had come, or down, towards the river town—he decided on the latter direction. Tucking our precious Bible and the money we had

with us into his coat, Kai Sun picked me up, lay me across his shoulders and started down the trail.

Soon he was sweating with exertion and stumbling along the rocks strewn in the narrow path. After several hours on the trail with only a few short rests between, his legs were trembling under the weight.

“Lord, I believe what You have said, and I am following You. But please, if it’s possible, do something soon! I don’t know how much longer I can keep this up,” Kai Sun prayed, panting under my weight. It seemed such an absurd situation, heading back into the lap of our enemies with me unconscious across his back. Still, the Lord had told him to go, and he went by faith, trusting that God would do the miracle and send the help he needed.

It was then that Kai Sun noticed the side trail that led up a hill overlooking the trail he was following. As clearly as he had ever heard the voice of the Lord, he heard Him now. *“Turn here!”*

Without a second thought he veered from the path and began the uphill climb, holding me tightly on his back. For a quarter of an hour he labored up the hill, sensing that the answer was very close. As he reached the rocky summit, suddenly his eyes fell on a quiet alcove which overlooked the valley on the other side. There, sitting upon the rocks, was a man dressed in a wine red robe, eyes closed, looking lost in his thoughts and reflections. It was the man in Kai Sun’s vision!

Kai Sun stood transfixed. Seeing a miracle fulfilled before one’s eyes is always awe-inspiring. Then he shook himself back to his pragmatic* frame of mind—what, he wondered, should he do next? How should he explain to this man that he had seen him in a vision, and that though they were fugitives, God had said this unknown stranger would help them?

As Kai Sun pondered all this, the man happened to open his eyes and glance in his direction.

The robed gentleman gaped at us, and he blinked as if trying to ascertain whether the figure standing before him was the remnant of an odd dream or a yet stranger reality. He slowly got to his feet. He appeared to be an older man and was obviously not as nimble as he used to be. Trying to recover himself, he gathered his robe about him and asked, “What ... what do you want?”

Kai Sun looked him in the eye.

“Rimpa Sae,” he began directly. “Jesus has sent me to you.”

With that, the gentle priest broke into the most beautiful smile, as if we had been expected.

RIMPA SAE

I tossed and turned upon the covers. Someone was washing my face. I tried to push the hand away but could not. My tongue felt swollen and I longed for water. I would open my eyes, but could not make sense of where I was and what I was seeing.

Burning hot, then cold and shivering, I felt as though the covers themselves were made of lead and weighed heavily upon my legs. I struggled to kick them off, but gentle hands replaced them.

“Mother!” I called out. I saw her standing above me, her cool hand upon my burning brow, and felt so relieved! She smiled down into my face.

“Darling, I have come to help you,” she whispered low and soothingly. “I’ve brought others too, to help you. Look!”

I glanced past her shoulder and saw Everett Richardson, our mission director, standing behind her, smiling his ever-encouraging smile. Oh! I was so happy to see him. I attempted to tell him of all that had happened to Kai Sun and I, but he held his hand to his lips.

"Just rest, dear. I know all you've been through. God bless you, you did very well. I am proud of you!"

"Louisa," my mother continued. "Mr. Richardson has some very interesting news for you." She smiled knowingly and looked at Everett as he knelt beside me.

"Yes, Louisa. I do have something to tell you. This may seem unusual to you, but I think it is something that you want, and that will make you very happy...."



The ringing of the temple bells finally roused me. Lying on the raised bed, I opened my eyes and beheld the ceiling adorned with intricately painted frescoes of dragons and other surreal images. The scent of incense, which burned in small bronze pots, wafted through the curtains that were draped about my bed. Where was I?

Kai Sun noticed me stirring and pulled back the curtain. Just then a woman with a shaved head entered the room carrying a steaming bowl in her hands. The scent of the herbs in the water filled the air in the small apartment. She dipped a cloth into the water and applied it to my head. The aroma of eucalyptus and other unidentifiable fragrances made my eyes water, though it felt good and made breathing easier.

"Thank you," I answered weakly. The young woman, hardly more than a girl, smiled, but said nothing.

"Her name is Eh Mei," Kai Sun told me. "She cannot speak, for she is a mute. Eh Mei is a novice here. She has been caring for you night and day. Her father was a doctor, and she used to assist him with his patients before she came here. You were very ill, but thanks be to God, I can see the color coming back into your face. It looks like you will be well again!"

I tried to speak, but a deep cough racked me and Eh Mei helped me to sit up. She rhythmically drummed upon my back, which helped greatly to loosen the phlegm lodged in my chest. Exhausted by the coughing spell, I sank back upon the bed. Eh Mei then spooned a delicious broth into my mouth. I felt like an infant, having to be fed and cared for, yet I was thankful and happy to be indoors, warm and safe.

After I had eaten half a cup I felt stronger. "Kai Sun, where are we?"

"At the Zhen Wei Monastery, several miles outside of the edge of the river township."

"A monastery?" I questioned, my eyes widening.

Just then, the thick curtain to my room opened, revealing a red-robed figure. Eh Mei bowed low and a man's voice asked meekly, "May I come in?"

"Most certainly!" Kai Sun jumped up and bowed also. The robed man returned a low bow to Kai Sun as well, in a most respectful manner.

"Lu Yisi, may I introduce you to the honorable Rimpa Sae, the master of the monastery. It is by his kindness that we are here, and by his orders that you have been nursed through your sickness."

"I am deeply in your debt, sir," I answered.

"Not at all, not at all," the priest shook his head. "It is I that am in your debt. For your coming has solved a great mystery for me, one that had given me much anguish of soul. Does not your Holy Book say, 'all things work together for good to them that love the Lord and are called according to His purpose?'"

"Why Rimpa Sae, you quote the Holy Scripture!" I answered, surprised that an obviously heathen priest should know the Bible.

"He is an avid scholar, Lu Yisi," Kai Sun smiled.

"I am only a humble seeker, but I have a learned teacher," Rimpa Sae answered, nodding in Kai Sun's direction. "And I am grateful for your Holy

Scripture. The monks have been busily copying the texts. I have had them working on this since your arrival here.”

Rimpa Sae then displayed a page of the copied New Testament, the characters artistically drawn by hand, the edges richly decorated with designs similar to those on the ceiling. “I have had several of the monks residing here working on this project night and day since your arrival.”

“Yes, Lu Yisi,” Kai Sun now joined in. “Rimpa Sae has been studying the Scripture together with me while you have been recovering. God has done a great miracle in bringing us here.”

“Yes,” Rimpa Sae continued. “Perhaps I should tell you, Lu Yisi, of how I came to be interested in these wonderful things, and of the most unusual way I came to meet you.”

The elderly priest settled in a cross legged position on the raised pallet in the corner. Eh Mei brought in small clay pots filled with burning coals, which Kai Sun and Rimpa Sae held on their laps for added warmth. I continued to lie on my back, too weak to sit. As I took in the scene at times, I wondered if I could still possibly be dreaming.

Rimpa Sae cleared his throat, and began telling his story with the air of one relating a most auspicious* event.

“My home was far from here, in the distant mountain regions bordering Tibet. It was there that I first embraced the monastic life. I was the child of our family to be sent to the monks to study and work—nearly every family sent at least one son—and I excelled in the study and memorization of the sacred texts. Though the system of worship there is much different than here, this was my first step onto the path of spiritual enlightenment.

“When each examination came, I was always the first to present myself. Study was a joy to me,

especially to learn our sacred texts. I was sent to continue my learning in the largest temple of our region. It was there that I was introduced to new schools of thought, and I began to comprehend the enormous task before me, to reach the enlightenment I was searching for. Again I did well and excelled in all manner of classes, driven by my search for the truth.

“It was there that I was taught the crafts.” Rimpa Sae now gestured to the works of art adorning the walls and ceiling. “I learned to paint intricate scenes from the texts, a very fine art, done in gold and rich dyes. I learned to grind the paints from the stones and plants we would gather. I found much fulfillment in expressing my longing for eternity in art. I made the frescoes that still can be seen in the Grand Temple today. Again I excelled and went on to study under many learned teachers.”

Though Rimpa Sae talked of his accomplishments, I noticed that he did not do so in a manner denoting pride or arrogance, but simply as relating a set of facts. He was obviously an artistic master, as well as a religious leader, yet it seemed to mean little to him.

“I was brought to this temple over twenty years ago, a traveling scholar and artisan, and worked to make it the masterpiece of beauty that it is today. Now it is a training ground for those who wish to become skilled in the arts, as well as seek enlightenment through their renouncement of the world. But all the while, a question haunted me. Like a persistent mouse, it gnawed on my conscience.

“I wondered, why do I paint these things which I cannot say I truly understand? What is the meaning of it all? I painted scenes of the unseen world, the spiritual world. I painted gods and demons, the forces of heaven and the forces of hell. But questions would linger in my mind. I wondered, how can man know

the very essence of truth? Can you understand such questioning?"

I nodded. "Yes, Rimpa Sae. Many of us have asked the same question in our lives, wondering what truth is."

The old man sighed. "Temple life today is wrought with much petty politics." He shook his head. "I became disillusioned. I had started out eager to learn, to be a man who understood the mysteries of the spiritual world. But after awhile, I began to think of my work as nothing more than passing a traditional craft on to the younger artisans. The reciting of the sacred texts, the burning of incense, the prayers—I thought of them as part of the beauty of our lifestyle, like a living art and a tradition.

"Yet deep inside of me, I longed for the innocence I had felt when I first entered the monastery as a young novice. Then the prayers and meditations and chants all seemed so mysterious and sublime! I ranked first among the scholars, because I most deeply longed to learn how to make contact with eternity!"

Again he shook his head. "I was growing older, and wondered what would happen after my death, when my spirit left my body. I was so tired—but it was more than just physical tiredness. I had grown weary of life!

"I questioned our existence.—Why would life be such a meaningless repetition of birth and rebirth—a cycle which man seemed doomed to repeat? I could not detach myself from these strange longings, to know with certainty what awaits beyond.

"It was then ..." he paused. "It was then that the dreams started." He looked at me intensely. "They were always the same. I saw a Man who had the kindest eyes! He looked at me with the deepest understanding, and I felt such warmth emanating from Him."

Rimpa Sae smiled as he stirred his memory. "His look was so full of compassion and love that it made me cry. I could see that He was not from here. He wore a long white robe that shone like the sun!

"He held out His hands to me, and I could see that He had been wounded! There were marks on His hands, but He paid no attention to them. He reached out as if to take me in His arms.

"I wanted to know who He was, what was His name! And as I looked at Him, this remarkable stranger smiled and said the word, 'Jesus!'"

By then, tears were pouring down my face, as I listened to the story of the heartfelt search of this dear man.

"Oh, how I wanted to meet that Man!" Rimpa Sae continued. "I wondered if such a Man could be real. I had no idea how I could find Him. I dreamed this dream not once, but many times. Each time I awoke after He told me His name. I wondered if this Jesus was some celestial messenger, sent to guide me into the afterlife.

"So I spent much time in meditation, trying to prepare myself to leave this world. It was just one such day, while sitting in a favorite spot of mine above this valley, that I first laid eyes on this young gentleman," he gestured towards Kai Sun, "and yourself."

Kai Sun then told me of his own miraculous leading to the spot where Rimpa Sae sat that day.

"Rimpa Sae has very kindly taken care of us since our arrival here. In return I have taught him daily from the scriptures. The wonderful news is that Rimpa Sae has opened his heart to Jesus and received Him as his Savior."

Grateful tears welled in my eyes.

"Yes," the man nodded. "I do embrace the Lord Jesus with all my heart. And the knowledge of His Holy Scriptures is finally leading me into all truth.

Did He not say, 'And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free?'"

Kai Sun and I laughed. "You are indeed an excellent learner, sir, as you have just shown us!" I said.

"I am only a humble seeker," Rimpa repeated. "And you are welcome to stay with me as long as you wish. Your safety is my personal guarantee, and my prayer is that you will grow strong and well, and that your stay with us can be comfortable."

REVELATIONS

It took me some time to be nursed back to health, but Eh Mei and Kai Sun gave me more than enough time and attention between them to have nursed an entire hospital ward to full recovery.

Eh Mei was a sweet and gentle girl. I often thought how pretty she would be with a head of hair, but the temple novices, as the nuns and monks, were required to shave their heads. While the monks were being trained in the crafts, the nuns, who lived in separate quarters, were brought in daily to care for the temple, as well as to cook and clean.

After I was well enough, I would often sit and read the Bible to Eh Mei, which she seemed to enjoy. Though she could not speak, she was not deaf, and she was an extremely clever girl. She could easily make herself understood despite being mute.

For our safety's sake, very few in the monastery knew of our presence, apart from Eh Mei and some of the most trusted of Rimpa Sae's coterie*. Our rooms, which looked out upon an isolated courtyard, were part of the priest's private quarters. A private entrance also led to the hillside, but we did not think it safe enough to leave the monastery for the moment. Our meals—all vegetarian fare, but still thoroughly delicious—were brought to us by Eh Mei.

As we had little to do other than teach Rimpa Sae and Eh Mei the Bible, Kai Sun and I had much time to talk. I found myself looking forward to and enjoying our times together immensely. We spent much time praying and discussing the many events that had taken place. I heard much of Kai Sun's plans to reach his people in the mountains, and how God had put the desire in his heart to bring His Word to them. I began to feel that every day I knew this man I learned something more fascinating about him.

I also had much time for reflection, especially of a certain dream that I had while still delirious with fever—a dream of my mother, and of Everett Richardson. I thought of it much and what it could mean, for it was a strange dream indeed.

My mother, from the last I heard through her correspondence, which took many months for me to receive, was very ill. Her expressed wish, in the letters she wrote me, was that I not "leave my plow" by returning to her, but remain faithful to my mission field. This she implored me to do, hoping that in some small way it could make provision for her former misguided attitudes concerning my father's earliest desires to serve God.

I was glad she understood now. Though I missed her, I knew without a doubt she was in the hands of the Lord. I had forsaken all hopes of seeing her again in this life, but I rejoiced in the thought that we would be together forever in Heaven.

Now, from my dream, I had reason to believe that she likely had already passed on to her reward. I wondered, though, about Everett, as he had also been in my dream.

"Kai Sun ..." I began, not knowing quite how to say it. "Kai Sun, I believe Everett Richardson has gone to be with the Lord during the recent riots."

He looked up at me in amazement. "Why, how did you find out? I was afraid to tell you myself."

Now it was my turn to be surprised. "You mean ... you know? And it's true?"

"Lu Yisi, I first heard the news when the Christians left Long Dragon Gorge and I met them by the trail side. Florence and the baby are safe, thank God. Richard died defending them, pulled from his sedan chair* at the mandarin's yamen*. By a miracle the mob ignored the chair carrying Florence and the baby, and the mandarin's men were able to escort them to safety."

"Everett was always a good and noble man," I said. "But why didn't you tell me of this before?"

"You were in such danger, I thought the news could only discourage you. I thought of the scripture, 'I have much to tell you, but ye are not yet able to bear it,' and could not bring myself, under the circumstances, to tell you about it. I thought it best to see you to safety first."

I smiled thankfully. "I think that was wise, my friend. But I feel sad that you had to bear your grief alone."

Kai Sun looked at me. "I think Everett would have wanted me to do all I could to see you to safety."

This stoic man had indeed been used of the Lord to save my life. And now that I had confirmation of Everett's passing, I thought more deeply on the remarkable news that Everett had related to me in my dream.

"But how did you know about Everett," Kai Sun questioned, "if you didn't hear it from me?"

"I had a dream, and in it Everett gave me some guidance. I felt that it was the Lord sending him to me. From that, I reasoned that he had most likely passed on to the other side."

"What guidance did he give you?" Kai Sun asked eagerly.

"Well ..." I looked up at his face and felt my face redden though my fever was long past. "It's a long

story." I wondered how in the world I would ever explain it and not have it sound utterly bizarre.

"Kai Sun, I think I should tell you some other time. Perhaps it is something that, as you have said, you are not yet able to bear. But I do want to thank you again for all you did to help me. I owe my life to you."

He looked embarrassed, though visibly touched. "All the glory is God's!" he replied. "And I know He will continue to preserve us. I intend to see you safely to our final destination," Kai Sun continued soberly, "and bring you back to the nearest mission station."

We both then fell into silence and I pondered that prospect silently.

MIRACLE IN THE MONASTERY

I made up my mind that I would tell Kai Sun. I practiced again and again. I rehearsed the words in my mind until they sounded perfect. Yet as soon as he entered the room the next morning, I lost all confidence and tossed the idea to the wind.

Instead, we drank tea and made small talk. "You look distracted, Lu Yisi. Are you feeling well?" he finally asked.

"Oh yes," I answered, smiling nervously. I knew I had to begin. It was now or never, I thought.

"Kai Sun, what future do you see for yourself?"

He looked up at me and cocked an eyebrow, perplexed at the rather ambiguous* question.

"Why, a future serving the Lord, of course," he answered definitely.

"Yes, I know that," I continued, "But where, how ... I mean ... with whom?"

"I don't understand." Kai Sun looked over at me awkwardly.

"What I mean to say is ... is ... will you always be alone?"

“Why, of course not!” he replied confidently. “I would expect to go out ‘two by two’ when I return to my mountain region. It’s a much more practical way for a team to operate.”

“No, that’s not what I mean. I mean, you personally. Have you thought of your future?”

Kai Sun laughed and looked puzzled. “Lu Yisi, you’re talking in circles.”

I felt myself getting annoyed. “You mean you don’t understand at all what I mean?” I asked, incredulous.

Kai Sun looked more confused than ever. “No,” he answered blankly.

Feeling flustered, I stammered, “What I mean is ... I mean that ... that I think it’s time I bathe now, so you’ll probably have to leave the room!”

I hustled about readying my belongings for a bath, feeling foolish and undoubtedly sounding it too, trying very hard to look absorbed in what I was doing.

Kai Sun quickly hustled himself out the door, wondering how and when he had given cause for offense. Looking and feeling every bit as bewildered as he was, he again tried very hard to understand the ways of women.

I sighed after he was gone. I had utterly botched my attempt. The feelings that had been welling up inside my heart longed to break free, yet I feared what reaction they might receive. The words that I longed to speak were difficult to utter. And Kai Sun certainly wasn’t helping the matter any! I wondered if he shared any of the same emotions that had awakened in my heart.

“My pride!” I chastened myself. I knew that was what had stopped me from speaking plainly. After my porcelain basin was filled with steaming water, I took refuge in the thought of a good wash and diverted myself that way. I reveled in the luxury of

the hot water and scrubbed thoroughly. Washing had become a happy duty since the many days on the trail making do without soap or water.

There were no mirrors in the monastery, but after I had recovered sufficiently from my illness to wash completely for the first time, I was aghast at my reflection in the water. An utterly filthy peasant hill woman gazed back at me from the wash bowl, with matted hair and grimy limbs. It took much cleansing and hours of combing to make myself even remotely presentable. Rimpa Sae obligingly provided a carved ivory comb for my hair, though where he got it I was not certain, as not a soul in the monastery had a single hair upon their heads.

My locks had returned to their auburn state, now that several washings had removed the accumulation of trailside dirt, as well as the remnants of La Ong’s oil lamp dye. Dear La Ong—I wished I had her now to confide in and ask her counsel. How I missed my dear friend!

As I sat drying myself by the stove, I suddenly felt convicted that I had not taken time to ask my dearest and closest friend, Jesus, for His advice and direction. Though I felt sure of the Lord’s leading, yet I had not taken the time to let Him speak to me definitely as to how I should proceed. Little wonder that I felt so confused and nervous!

“Lord, forgive me! “I prayed. “Such an important decision as this needs Your guidance and direction. Please speak to me now and show me what to do! What would You have me say? Please show me what and how to tell him!”

As soon as I had uttered my prayer I felt the Lord’s still small voice whisper in my heart.

Fear not! For I wish to bring all good things to you and fulfil your heart’s desires. I wish for you to bear much fruit, and for you two to be joined as one.

Yet do not I give choices to My children? So must you give this one his choice. For if he chooses to follow Me in this thing, he will endure much scorn and abuse, yet I will bless him and use these things for good. Fear not what you will say, for when the time comes to speak, I will guide you and give you My words. For it is not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord!

I felt such a peace sweep over me. I no longer worried how to choose my words. I knew the Lord would do it. Then I began to receive something more.

Look up, for My little one cometh, ready to know me. And by her shall many turn to righteousness!

I puzzled over the next part of the message, until I heard a gentle rapping at the door. Looking up, I saw Eh Mei enter, carrying a tray of food. I smiled and knew exactly what I should do.

“Eh Mei, thank you so much. But I’m not so hungry now. Why don’t you put the tray down and come sit with me for awhile.”

The girl quietly put the tray on the low table and came to my side. As I took out the small Bible, Eh Mei’s eyes shone eagerly. We had already had a number of special times reading together as I taught her about the Lord and His mission on earth. It was time, I knew, to lead this little one to receive Jesus.

I gently explained that now that she knew of Jesus’ life and the wonderful things He could do, that she could know Him personally and have Him dwell inside her. She nodded her head enthusiastically, and I easily led her in a short prayer to accept the Lord. Though she could not speak, when asking the Lord to come into her life, she gestured with her hand inviting Him in to reign in her heart. When I finished the prayer, her eyes were filled with tears and a huge smile beamed upon her face.

Then she looked at me expectantly. When I didn’t make a move to do anything more, she raised her eyebrows and then pointed towards her mouth, nodding hopefully. At first I didn’t understand. Seeing this, she pointed toward the Bible now open on my lap. Seeing again that I didn’t register any understanding, she folded her hands in prayer and closed her eyes as if doing a pantomime of the prayers she must have observed me praying at times.

Suddenly it struck me! At the last reading of the Bible with Eh Mei, I had read to her of the miracles of Jesus. I opened my Bible again to the book of Mark, chapter eight, and read verse 37 aloud.

“He hath done all things well; He maketh both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak.”

Eh Mei nodded vigorously and emphatically. She obviously wished me to pray for her healing and for her ability to speak!

A wave of doubt washed over me. Oh, what if I prayed for this dear trusting little one and nothing happened—would it destroy her newborn faith?

“Eh Mei,” I gently broached the subject. “It is true that God always answered prayer, but often in ways we don’t understand. Sometimes He answers immediately; sometimes His answers take time. We must trust Him for the result, whether we see the answer immediately or not.”

Eh Mei nodded understandingly, but at the same time her enthusiasm was not the least bit dampened. Again she clasped her hands, urging me to pray.

I shot up a silent prayer to the Lord asking for His guidance, and immediately received two portions of scripture. “Thy faith has made thee whole,” and “Neither has this one sinned, nor his parents, but that the glory of God might be made manifest.”

Lord, help Thou mine unbelief! I prayed silently within myself, and then laid my hands upon Eh Mei's upturned head.

"Dear Jesus, thank You so much for saving dear Eh Mei's soul, for giving her eternal life in Your Heavenly Kingdom. She never has to worry or fear death again, for You have promised to care for her forever. We thank You for that marvelous gift!

"Now Eh Mei comes to You with a petition. She asks for You to heal her, and restore her voice! We know from Your Word that You 'do all things well.' If You see fit to do this thing now, Jesus, we will give You all the glory and all the praise. We ask You to touch her, in Jesus' name!"

I knew the matter was in the Lord's hands, yet I opened my eyes almost gingerly. I knew it would not be my little faith, but this dear one's unwavering belief, and the Lord's own power that could bring this miracle to pass.

As Eh Mei opened her eyes, I saw a sparkling radiance in them. It was a look of utter faith and trust. Then she put her hand to her throat and opened her mouth. A low rasping sound came out. Startled at her own sound, she smiled, and made the sound again and again, as a baby experiments with speech.

Then her vocal chords seemed to loosen and the sounds became distinguishable. I felt the hairs raise on my arms as I watched and listened to that glorious voice.

"Y ... Y ... Ye ... Ye ... Yesu!" she cried, laughing and crying at the same time. Her first word was the Chinese name for Jesus!

I jumped up and hugged her tightly. "It's a miracle!" I cried. "Oh, thank You, Jesus, thank You, Lord!"

Eh Mei tried many words after that, parroting me. "Eh Mei ... Lu Yisi ... talk ... Lord ... miracle."

She seemed eager to try to say everything. Within a short time she was speaking in short phrases.

We both were absorbed in the wonderful miracle that had taken place, when suddenly we heard a loud and urgent knocking at our door. I ran to open it and saw Kai Sun standing there with Rimpa Sae.

"Oh come in quickly, you must see this!" I excitedly urged them.

They stepped into the room and, as I closed the door, Kai Sun gently took my arm. His face was obviously worried. "Lu Yisi," he began. "I'm afraid there's trouble."

"Trouble?" I questioned, searching their faces.

"I'm afraid so," Rimpa Sae joined in. "You see, I find it prudent to know of the affairs of the town, so I have placed ears in necessary places. Those loyal to me bring word that rumors are circulating. It seems that your presence here has been detected, and people are speaking of the foreign woman in the monastery."

"But how did they find out?" I asked. "I've hidden myself in these quarters since our arrival here!"

"As I have told you, temple life is fraught with petty politics. There are many I cannot trust. Perhaps it was one who saw you coming into the temple with me on the first day. Perhaps it was one who questioned my reading and copying of the Christian texts. I cannot know, but one thing is certain—the monastery itself will be searched this very day! It is unprecedented!" The priest shook his head in dismay. "I could refuse them entry, but in these perilous times that may be a most unwise move."

"Then we must escape immediately!" Kai Sun urged.

"I also doubt the wisdom of that, my friend," the gentle priest responded with regret. "For not only is Lu Yisi not yet fit for a fugitive's life in the wilderness,

but most certainly our monastery is being watched. I fear you would be caught immediately.”

During our discussion I had all but forgotten about Eh Mei, but now she stepped forward out of the shadows. She bowed low before Rimpa Sae and then looked up imploringly into his face.

“We ... must ... help ... them!” she urged.

Rimpa Sae, though not one to lose his composure easily, let his jaw gape and then sank into a chair.

Again, Eh Mei repeated. “Please sir ... I ask ... help them!”

“The child speaks! By God in Heaven, is this true?” Rimpa Sae uttered in astonishment.

“Yes!” I responded smiling. “Eh Mei received the Lord and has also prayed for her healing. It happened just before you came. Jesus has healed her!”

“Why, the child has been mute from birth!” Rimpa Sae marveled. “This is a miracle! It is a sign!” A light dawned on his face and his features slowly registered the dawning of an idea. “Why, do you realize this may be just what we need to help us? I believe our Lord has given me a plan!”

Jumping up from his chair, the priest urged Eh Mei to come with him. “This is the sign I have been hoping for to convince those of the elders who yet hang in the balances. Many are fearful of the things I have told them of the Christian God. They need an omen to show them His power. I will need their cooperation for this plan to be carried out. Come! We have no time to lose!”

Moving with a speed that was not commonly seen in the elderly priest, he hustled out the door, followed closely by Eh Mei. “Please stay here until I send for you! And I urge you, when the time comes, please do whatever I ask. I might not have much time to explain!” he called back to us.

As they rounded the corner Kai Sun closed and locked the door behind them. “We had best pray,”

he said quietly. “But I fear we have no choice but to place our lives in the hands of the priest, and hope for another miracle.”

THE FIRE AND THE WATER

The crowd of men approached the monastery late in the day, along the trail from town, just before the lighting of the evening lanterns. The group, whipped to a frenzy of hatred by the accusations heard in town, hesitated at the gates as they weighed their options. The leader of the mob was Pan Lin, a man very impressed with his own authority, who savored his role as leader among these vigilantes. He spoke arrogantly to the crowd and had stirred them all to action, yet it could not be said that intelligence was one of the stronger points of his character.

Just how far the mob could push their demands and accusations with the priests, neither Pan Lin nor his men were sure. If the master of the temple refused them entrance and they persisted, the priests could easily pronounce a fearsome curse on them all, for it was a weighty thing to demand entrance to a holy site. However, as Pan Lin reasoned, harboring a foreigner would have already defiled sacred ground. Expelling them could only bring the blessing of the gods, not to mention bringing him personally the favor of the townspeople, and most certainly an established position as a city elder.

Ultimately the zealous indignation fueling the group far outweighed any superstitious fear of angering the high priest. Pan Lin calculated that any sign of weakness on his part now would undermine his much-coveted authority over his fellow citizens. Therefore, with a show of contempt, he sent a gruff message to be delivered to the master: “Open the gates immediately and allow the grounds to be searched for foreigners!”

No one could have been more surprised than Pan Lin or his gang when they received the following reply. A messenger of the high priest was dispatched—in fact, none less than one of his closest elders, who hurried to the gate and opened it wide.

“Come in, honored sirs, do come in! Rimpa Sae welcomes your visit and your vigilant watchfulness of our town.”

The crowd blinked at each other in astonishment. They were expecting an angry rebuff and didn't quite know how to respond to the courtesy being extended them. Trying to recover his gruff facade, Pan Lin asserted importantly, “We have had reports of foreign devils hiding on the monastery grounds! We demand they be delivered to us immediately!”

“Foreign devils!” clucked the elder. “I urge you then to bring this report to Rimpa Sae himself. He will be most interested.” And with that, the man led the group into the monastery. Passing through the courtyard and into the winding corridors they marched directly to the large hall of audience where the master of the temple, Rimpa Sae, was seated.

Entering the large room, the crowd of troublemakers were more surprised than ever. As soon as they stepped inside, drums began to pound and cymbals to clang. From the corner of the room, six masked performers emerged, wearing the elaborate costume of the dragon dance. The fierce masks and the dramatic movements of the dancers left the crowd in awe. They knew this dance was normally performed only at festivals, or as a special sign of honor and respect for distinguished guests, which left them speechless.

After some moments the priest raised his hand and the music was silenced, as the dancers retreated again to the shadows.

“Welcome, most noble sirs!” Rimpa Sae greeted the bewildered crowd of men. “My aide tells me that you have come with the honorable purpose of searching for foreign troublemakers. I assure you gentlemen that you shall find none here.”

On the defensive, Pan Lin spoke. “We thank you for your welcome, but nevertheless, we are compelled to search the monastery and grounds. You had best cooperate!”

“Yes, of course, most certainly!” Rimpa Sae agreed compliantly. “It would never do to have people talk of foreign spies amongst us. Your course of action is most wise—silence the rumors at once! Search everywhere, high and low. Your search will greatly help to establish the falsehood of such ugly rumors. For how could the gods be pleased with such accusations?”

The men fidgeted restlessly, for they had not anticipated such a reception and it obviously unnerved them. Pan Lin sensed the sudden lack of support from his followers, and tried to save face by speaking in more conciliatory tones with the priest.

Rimpa Sae, however, happily interjected. “No, no! There is no need for regrets or apologies. In fact, I insist that you search the premises! You are after all only doing your duty and protecting us from the malicious lies of those who would seek to discredit us.”

Pan Lin felt some resentful stares at his back from his own men at those words.

“In fact, I am so eager to have your assistance in vindicating us that I will gather a number of my priests together. We will burn incense and say prayers for your search, and perform the dragon dance to chase away any evil spirits that would hinder your mission!”

With a wave of his hand the priest dispatched a messenger calling his elders to assemble them-

selves for prayer. The men quickly returned, with prayer wheels, beads and incense in hand. Rimpa Sae urged the crowd of townsmen to divide in groups and search the premises thoroughly, including the temple itself. Accompanied by an elder, they were urged not to forget any room, including the master's own personal quarters.

The men searched room by room, thoroughly at first, and then less than wholeheartedly as the hunt continued. The elders opened every cupboard and storeroom in the monastery for the group, and even suggested they check the nuns' quarters, after they respectfully allowed the nuns to file into the courtyard under the group's scrutiny. Ladders were brought to search the roof, and the bushes in the compound were beaten and prodded. In short, there was no sign of anyone found hiding on the monastery or temple grounds.

Rather sheepishly, the men filed back into the hall where Rimpa Sae sat waiting for them. The group of elders meanwhile chanted prayers and burned incense, which filled the room with a shadowy cloud. The dragon dancers ceased their wild spinning and whirling as Rimpa Sae raised his hand.

"And what verdict have you brought to me?" Rimpa Sae inquired. "Are we guilty of this crime or innocent as we claim?"

"We have found no one, sir," Pan Lin muttered, bowing low and not raising his eyes to meet the priest's.

"Wonderful!" Rimpa Sae exclaimed. "You have done a most excellent job and assisted us greatly. Now in order to repay your favor, I will offer to read your fortune!"

All the group took a step backwards at that ominous proposal.

One of the elders brought forth a jar and handed it to Rimpa Sae. He held it upwards and closed his

eyes, intoning a low chant. An elder waved incense and another hit a small brass gong. Rimpa Sae then emptied the contents of the jar, mainly small bones and various herbs, onto an embroidered mat laid before him. The men peered anxiously at the arrangements of the articles as they fell upon the mat. The priest peered at them intently, then groaned. The men gasped.

"What an odd thing for me to see!" Rimpa Sae asserted. "Fire and water have mixed today. The fire of lies has been extinguished by the purity of the water. The fire has come to nought and the water reigns supreme. In what year were you born?" the priest asked Pan Lin.

"The year of the rat!" the nervous man answered.

"Oh, that's very good!" Rimpa Sae continued. "A rat will be burned by fire, but he can swim in water! I suggest you stay inside your house—don't go out at all for three days! And don't allow a fire to be lit during that time, not even to cook, for it is a bad omen! For three days you should cleanse yourself repeatedly with water from head to toe, at least twice or thrice a day. Then you should have nothing to fear!"

"Thank you! Thank you, noble sir!" Pan Lin profusely thanked him while prostrating himself, relieved to have escaped so lightly the wrath of the priest. As no harsh words were exchanged, he also was able to save face somewhat with the crowd.

"It is nothing!" Rimpa Sae waved away any thanks. "Now forgive me for I am tired. The dragon dance will continue as you depart." With that the master of the temple clapped his hands and the dancers reemerged, as the drums and cymbals began their rhythmic throbbing.

As the group of townsmen hurriedly backed out of the room, bowing low as they went, the dragon dancers wove in and out of the crowd, the foreboding stares of the masks making the men more than a

little nervous. When the humbled mob exited the large hall, the elders shut and bolted the large carved red and gold doors behind them securely.

"I think it's safe for you to come out now," Rimpa Sae called.

With that, the hot and weary dragon dancers stripped off their masks and costume, revealing amongst the other experienced dancers, a very sweaty duo.

"My, that was warm!" I exclaimed.

"And very exhausting! I never imagined dancing was such hard work!" Kai Sun added.

"Fortunately our friends have not observed the dragon dance closely before, for I cannot say either of you did it justice. But considering how quickly you learned, I would say you can be made honorable members of our temple dance troupe!"

"What a miracle that they never thought to check who was behind the masks!" I added.

"God's blessing and protection is upon us!" the priest declared. "Hopefully those hoodlums will be out of our way for the next three days, locked securely inside their houses taking cold baths and eating cold food while we consider what to do next. I have in mind that you should both be taking a little trip with some of my elders. They should be able to accompany you for some way to ensure your safety."

"Thank you so very much, sir!" Kai Sun bowed gratefully to the priest.

"However, I have one request. I would have to ask that you disguise yourselves as members of the monastery, for the protection of the elders themselves. That would mean," he glanced towards me, "shaving your head, of course."

"Shaving my head?" I asked with raised eyebrows.

"It grows back quickly, Lu Yisi," Kai Sun interjected, trying to be helpful and persuasive.

I gulped, but realized that of course I should comply as it was for the protection of the elders, who were risking their very lives for us. I turned to face the group of gentlemen and bowed low.

"I am very thankful and honored that you have done so much for us. We have no way to repay your immense kindness and bravery. A few locks of hair is a small thing," I told them.

One of the elders looked to Rimpa Sae, requesting permission to speak, which was granted, and he addressed Kai Sun and I. "We marvel at the great power of your God, who can do such miracles as to make the young novice speak. We can only offer our assistance to those who have come here as enlightened teachers. Our master has shared with us many of the teachings of your scriptures. For this we offer any help we can possibly give."

Kai Sun and I gave the crowd of elders, who had co-operated with Rimpa Sae's daring plan to protect us, our deepest bow.

"Very well!" Rimpa Sae continued. "Then tonight we shall lay out your clothing and shave your heads, so that you can have an early start tomorrow morning. I shall bid you goodnight, for all of this has been a great deal of activity for a man of my age."

"Dear sir, how can we ever thank you for all you have done for us?" I asked him.

"Child, you have brought us the light of the knowledge of Heaven. It is we who are in your debt. Eh Mei will accompany you part of the way on your journey, for I am sure she is also much indebted to you," he said.

"All the glory is God's for any good that has come of our stay here. Thank you for how He has used you to aid us!" Kai Sun earnestly told them all. And with those parting words we set out for our rooms.

THOUGHTS AND INTENTS

I ran my hand over the stubble on my head, which felt odd beneath my fingertips. Eh Mei had completed the job quickly and showed me how to wear the costume of a novice. After changing I prayed, and the Lord showed me that now was the time to talk to Kai Sun, as we would have to make some major decisions as to exactly which direction we would head. Much would depend on Kai Sun's reaction to my proposal. I had peace in my heart, which I had lacked formerly. I felt that now was definitely God's time and I had His Words to guide me.

I rapped on Kai Sun's door and it was opened by a young monk who had Kai Sun's intense eyes and expression. I laughed at the sight of him, as he then did at me.

"Kai Sun, I know the hour is late, but I believe that the Lord wants me to have a word with you," I informed him.

"Certainly," he said, opening the door to let me in, while eyeing me curiously.

I settled myself on a chair and began. I could feel the Lord washing me with His grace to broach this potentially embarrassing subject without tenseness.

"Kai Sun, I realize this might seem sudden to you, but I have been praying and I feel I have received direction from the Lord as to what I should do. Of course I understand this depends on your feelings regarding this matter and it is no decision to be taken lightly. But I feel the Lord is giving us a choice. Kai Sun, if you will have me, I want to marry you ... and go with you to the mountains, so you can start a school."

His mouth dropped open and he stared at me with utter astonishment. If it were not for the Lord's grace, my pride would have gotten the better of me, but now I could look upon the scene with almost an air of amusement.

"I see I've caught you by surprise!" I smiled. "Is my proposal all that terrifying?"

His calm was utterly shattered. "Why ... yes ... no! But it ... how? ... Lu Yisi, do you realize what you are saying?"

"Yes, I do," I answered gently. "I have given this much thought and prayer, and I believe the Lord has led me in this decision."

"Lu Yisi, I am most flattered, but you have no idea of the hardships you would have to endure—the sacrifice that a decision such as this would entail! Life in the mountains, married to a Chinese evangelist! How could it possibly work?" He shook his head.

"Kai Sun, I love you! Have you no feelings for me?"

He looked at me with a longing that I had not seen in his eyes before, as if his very heart was welling up within him. It seemed as if only his iron will, which was sorely tempted, could prevent his unspoken emotions from bursting forth through his very gaze. Then he tore his gaze away from mine.

"Lu Yisi, there is so much more to this than emotion!" he argued, attempting to convince himself as much as me. "We must be practical about this!"

I tried to suppress a smile that curled around the corners of my mouth. My ever levelheaded, practical, dear Kai Sun! He went on to list, in a most serious manner, all the reasons why such an arrangement would be totally out of the question.

"I will be living in one of the most remote areas of the country. It is not an area for a woman such as you. I would be facing danger and hostility."

"Danger and hostility," I mused. "That would be interesting for a change, as things have been getting a bit monotonous around here lately!"

“Lu Yisi, please be serious. I have little or no monetary support. How could I care for a wife? I would not be financed by the mission, for that was the arrangement I made with Everett, that I would be trained by the mission, but that any undertaking of opening a work in such a remote area would have to be supported indigenously. Otherwise, I would only be seen as an employee of foreigners, and they would think my conversion was only for money. So I am penniless; I could not possibly support you as a husband should!” he asserted.

A scripture popped into my mind. “But my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory through Christ Jesus,” I replied.

Kai Sun eyed me steadfastly. “You would have no contact with other westerners. You would be leaving behind every vestige of your past!” he reasoned.

Another scripture came to mind immediately. “Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest I would go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.”

Kai Sun opened his mouth, then shut it again. Then looking down he sadly said, “Lu Yisi, I could not possibly ask this of you.”

“Kai Sun, you are not asking this of me. I am asking this of you! However, if you do not love me, or you feel that this is not God’s will, or that it would hurt your future work, then I understand and will not force myself upon you.”

He looked up into my face, and down again, an expression of complete confusion on his features. I could tell where his heart lay, but he felt he must protect me from all possible danger and harm. I understood his reluctance, for he was not one to put his own desires above the welfare of others. Then his expression changed as a thought struck him.

“But Lu Yisi, tell me. How did you know of my desire to start a school? I told you of my plan to reach my people, but I told no one other than Everett of my wish to establish a school there, for I could not see how I could possibly afford to do such a thing. It seemed only a dream!”

“That’s just it—Everett told me in my dream! Do you remember I said he came to me offering guidance?”

Kai Sun nodded.

“Well, the guidance he gave was that the Lord had a plan for us together. I was to accompany you and assist you in your work of opening a school in the mountains. Later, God will use that same school to train local evangelists to further spread the Gospel to all the people in the region!”

“Oh, my dear Lord!” the color drained from Kai Sun’s face. “What does this mean? That is exactly the plan I told Everett!” he exclaimed. “But how will we get the money to make such a thing come to pass?”

“Well, if I knew the answer to that question my dear, I would most likely be God,” I laughed. “But since I am not, we will simply have to trust Him to work it out for us.”

Again, Kai Sun hesitated and looked down. “Lu Yisi, I do hope you understand and are not hurt by my inability to answer you immediately. The last thing I ever wish on this earth is to hurt you ... for you are so precious to me!” He dared to look up before he continued. “But you do understand that I must think on this matter and pray to find God’s will, don’t you?”

“I would expect nothing less of you, and I do understand completely,” I answered as I reached out to stroke his cheek.

With that, I bade him good night, shutting the door behind me. Surprisingly, I slept well that night.

Perhaps it was the peace of surrender as I put my will in God's hands. Somehow I knew I would learn to be content with whatever decision that Kai Sun would make. It was most certainly the grace of God that helped me not to fret.

Kai Sun, on the other hand, slept not a wink. The plan seemed to him utterly unreasonable, impractical and preposterous. Yet his heart told him differently. Did not God often do that which was unexpected and seemingly lacking in common sense? Try as he might to divorce his own personal feelings from his decision-making process, his heart longed to bask in the thought that it could all possibly come to be. A wife whom he loved and who loved him! So what if she was English? God looked at the heart, and others would learn to look past the differences also. Yet could it be? Was it God's will?

Dropping to his knees, Kai Sun prayed as he never had before. It was not before the morning birds began to call, and before first light, that he had peace and an assurance of what to do.

I heard the knocking at my door and knew it was him. I jumped from my bed and ran quickly to open it. One look at the smile that beamed from his face told me of his decision. I threw myself into his arms and he kissed me with a mixed tenderness and passion that brought tears to my eyes. Then he looked at me with his earnest gaze.

"Lu Yisi, I ask you to be my wife and share my life with me."

"What a charming idea!" I laughed. "Why did I not think of it myself?"

Even Kai Sun couldn't resist a smile, though he continued on in his serious manner. "But I wish to inform you of one thing. If you ever, for any reason, should change your mind about the life you have chosen with me in the mountains, I will ask no questions. I solemnly promise that I will be with

you as long as I live. But I also promise I will free you from your vow to me at any time you ask, and seek to re-unite you with your fellow Englishmen at any time you choose. I will not hold this against you, but I will understand."

Try as I might to object to such an arrangement, I could not convince him to reconsider his vow. Ultimately however, I was to find this precondition to our marriage useful. For as I knew the high price of voicing complaint or discontentment with my lot as Kai Sun's wife, I never allowed myself to speak of such things in the dark discouraging moments that every marriage faces. Knowing how easy it would be to throw it all away in one thoughtless statement, I stayed far from the edge of such a dangerous cliff, to allow no room to slip. This strengthened us both.

So I finally ceased arguing with such a wonderful, stubborn man, and gave him a warm, lingering kiss. I chuckled to myself that this was certainly a test of true love, as with my head shaved and wearing the shapeless nun's robes, Kai Sun could not possibly be attracted to me for my looks alone.

At that moment however, we heard someone clearing their throat in the hall. Looking up, we saw an embarrassed Rimpa Sae behind us. Certainly a novice and monk locked in ardent embrace was not a common sight along the monastery halls and he was not quite sure how to react.

Kai Sun, though flustered, recovered himself quickly and announced, "Dear Sir, we would like you to be the first to know of our decision. Lu Yisi and I are now betrothed and plan to be married!"

The priest looked greatly relieved. "My sincerest congratulations to you both! Though for a moment I wondered if there were not some tantric elements¹ to your beliefs, of which I was not yet aware. We have not practiced that form of worship here!"

¹see endnote ii – tantric Buddhism

Kai Sun blushed and said nothing.

The priest suddenly lit up with an idea. "But this is the perfect moment then to present you both with what I have brought! This is for you, with our humblest wishes for your happiness." Rimpa Sae bowed before us both as he handed us an object wrapped in yellow cloth. Kai Sun accepted the rather weighty gift with a bow.

"Please open it now," the priest requested, "so that you will know how important it is to carry this gift safely."

Kai Sun carefully unwrapped the satin cloth covering the object inside and stared for a moment, uncomprehending—it was a solid gold bar! Looking at the priest he said, "Dear gracious sir, your kindness is unlimited, but I cannot possibly accept such a valuable gift! We are most unworthy!"

The priest raised his hand to silence him. "Please do not deny an old man the pleasure of giving," he smiled. "I realize your manners do not permit you to accept this without objection, however I believe that you would be denying me a great blessing if you do not humbly receive my small offering. For does not your scripture teach, 'it is more blessed to give than to receive'? Besides, it is now to be my marriage gift to you both!"

We both looked at the priest and then at the gold bar, speechless. Then suddenly I grabbed Kai Sun's arm. "The school!" I exclaimed. "Kai Sun, God has supplied!"

He looked at me with wide eyes. I think it was all a bit too much for him. After all, within the previous 24 hours he'd seen a mute girl healed miraculously by the Lord, had escaped from an angry mob, shaved his head and changed into a monk's garb, accepted a proposal of marriage from a foreign woman who had revealed a dream of his heart's secret desire, and was now being presented

with a large sum of gold with which to fulfill his dreams. It was many days before Kai Sun could stop shaking his head and uttering, "How great and mysterious is the Lord!"

UNTO THE UTTERMOST PARTS OF THE EARTH

Just as the sun was dawning on the horizon, a procession of monks left the monastery, followed at a respectful distance by two young female novices. Wrapped warmly against the cold morning air, little was visible of their faces under their hats and wraps, for the moment, at least. When they would have to do without their head-coverings, their shaved heads would prove an integral part of the rest of their convincing disguise. After hiking into the town, the group carefully avoided physical contact with any early rising residents, as touching a member of the opposite sex was considered a pollution. The novices kept their eyes humbly downcast, in order to ensure their chastity and piety. Fortunately, there were few citizens in the streets at that early hour in such cold weather.

The group, apparently on a pilgrimage, hired a boat to carry them many days down the river, to a spot where the trails to the east met the river. Beginning first in gentle hills, then rising to high summits, it would take many days to walk this circuitous route if one wished to travel to mountainous tribal lands.

Then one of the monks did an odd thing—he purchased secular clothing and gave it to two of his fellow travelers. After a prolonged and fond farewell, the other monks hired a new boatman and headed back in the direction of the monastery. The returning monks first, however, stopped to send some precious communications by letter-boat to a distant mission station, reporting the developments of a certain new missionary venture; also, hopefully, another letter to

be forwarded by the mission to England, informing a certain young lady's family about her decision to become "Madame Kai."

Kai Sun and I climbed to a high hill overlooking the river valley. We estimated we had ahead of us about a half-day's walk to a nearby minority village¹. We were now far enough away from the center of the fighting that we could rest safely. Hopefully we could spend the remainder of the winter in this village, until the trails opened which would allow us to reach Kai Sun's homelands. We prayed for guidance and decided to tell all we encountered that I was from a distant western province, thus accounting for my light-colored eyes.

Hopefully we could stay at an inn until the snows passed, reaching the people of the town with the Gospel. The area was apparently much less restrictive than most of the country, and with wisdom and careful personal evangelism, we hoped to have a fruitful stay there while waiting for the trails to clear.

Fortunately, in this area a shaved head was a sign of mourning. As it was bad luck to speak of the dead, we hoped we would be asked few questions as to why we were both nearly bald.

As we reached the peak that was dusted with freshly fallen snow, we gazed upon the scene below us.

"Did you ever see anything more beautiful?" I asked Kai Sun.

"Lu Yisi," he answered, looking into my eyes. His train of thought was obviously heading elsewhere. "Do you realize that we have no pastor to officiate at our wedding?"

"Well, then perhaps we shall have to marry ourselves," I suggested matter-of-factly, not one to quibble at formalities.

Kai Sun smiled, and without a moment's hesitation took both my glove-covered hands in his. "Do you, Lu Yisi, take me, Kai Sun, as your husband? Will you dwell with me and serve the Lord with me?"

"I will, my love!" I answered. "And will you, Kai Sun, dwell with me and be my husband and follow the Lord with me all the days your life?"

"Yes, I will, my dearest heart!" he answered.

"Then you may kiss the bride!" I told him, and Kai Sun followed the instructions perfectly. After the most tender and loving embrace I had ever known, we turned to walk hand in hand up the trail.

I could not turn my thoughts from all the miracles that God had done to protect us and to bring us together, now as a couple, to serve Him. I could not possibly thank the Lord enough for all the wonderful ways He had revealed himself to us. And though the future was anything but certain, I had never felt happier. Nearly bursting with emotion, I shouted, "Thank You, Jesus!" at the top of my voice to the barren countryside, and listened as my voice echoed off the surrounding hills.

"Do you hear that?" I asked Kai Sun, smiling. "It's calling us! It's the call of the mountains!"

¹see endnote iii – minority groups in China

PART 3
TO EVERY CREATURE

*“God’s work done in God’s way will
never lack God’s supplies!”* —J. Hudson
Taylor



WHERE SIN DOTH AROUND

In some ways I find it odd that much mention is made of certain events in my life that were, shall we say, somewhat more dramatic than others. To read through these chapters of my life, one might think that the majority of my years were spent in a great non-stop adventure, witnessing such outstanding miracles on a daily basis. I find that amusing, for the truth is that my life, for the most part, was rather routine, and often even humdrum.

My days were mostly centered around the commonplace and monotonous tasks that were a necessary part of the daily life of serving the Lord: nursing a sick child to health, cooking a meal, listening to a friend's troubles, washing the laundry, slowly and laboriously teaching the Word of God to a people who often took a very long time to comprehend even the simplest spiritual truths—all these were the real essence of my life. The other events were, like the icing on a large and multi-layered cake, served to add flavor and interest.

Yet in looking back upon our lives, I see that it was often the little seemingly insignificant things that brought us the greatest satisfaction and sense of accomplishment. Little insignificant bricks, stacked one upon another, build a mighty wall. An exhilarating adventure certainly makes an

interesting story, which should be told to testify of all God did for me. But what brings me the greatest pleasure is looking back on a lifetime filled with expressions of love that were usually manifested in ordinary little ways.

So leaving you with these words I will continue to tell the story of how God brought me to my home in the mountains of present-day Yunnan. My years there were filled with happiness, and also tinged by sadness. It was a great learning time for me, a time to forsake what I thought I knew, and to learn to hear from God step by step. It was a time to learn to be a wife, to learn to love a strange people as my own, to learn not to turn my back on what God had called me to do, and to persevere. Any good that was done is all to the glory of God and only because of Jesus' continual care and direction for us, which never failed.



After having fled the monastery, Kai Sun and I wintered in the lower villages of the hill regions until the winter snow no longer blocked the mountain passes. In early spring, we climbed the high mountains to Kai Sun's homeland—and our new home-to-be.

I remember the incredible blueness of the sky—it seemed to stretch on forever, almost to Heaven itself. Gazing at it, I thought the distant white peaks looked like high mounds of whipping cream against the azure backdrop. I wondered if any place on Earth could be more beautiful. I often wandered to the outskirts of the village to be alone and breathe in the fresh air to get my mind off my troubles.

Those first few years were difficult ones for Kai Sun and I, yet they were tremendously rewarding. We faced many obstacles, but knowing how miraculously we had been brought together kept us from turning on our heels and running when it looked like the rough circumstances would overwhelm us. I was

thankful for this, as had our marriage and mission not been so clearly directed by God, I might not have had the faith at times to stay.

I remember clearly a time in England when I was preparing to come to China as a missionary. A visitor to our family home, a most educated gentleman, expressed his disapproval of my chosen vocation, on the grounds that I had “no right” to journey to a foreign land and “force” my religious beliefs on a group of people who already had their own religion.

“They are happy in their ignorance,” he had protested, somewhat amused by my zeal. “They have no need of your Savior!” Through the years I often thought of this gentleman, and more than once imagined inviting him to spend some time with us in our mountain home.

Village life, though a life I would not have traded for anything, is not always a charming rustic picture. True, I did fall in love with the place and people, but it was not without a difficult courtship. I had to learn to cope with dirt and disease, ignorance and superstition, as well as fear, gossip and a high level of intolerance of foreign ways. “Foreign ways” mind you, might be the way things are done in a village ten miles down the trail.

Clannishness also played a predominant social role, and it took many years to replace it with a sense of a “brotherhood in Christ,” for those who became believers. Virtual wars between rival clans brought senseless bloodshed and bitter strife to many homes. Often families did not even know why they were at odds with other clans, as the bitterness had been passed down from generation to generation, the original offense being long forgotten, but not yet forgiven.

Yes, though the scenery is majestic, and the mountain people very special, rural life has its pressures just as city life. Disappointments come,

crops fail, loved ones die, animals get sick or lost. People must find ways to deal with stress and grief, loneliness and fear. During the coldest winter months when little outdoor work can be done, boredom and the potent home-brewed liquor so popular in the hills can potentially turn a docile husband into a drunken wife-beater, or an irresponsible gambler.

Gambling was common in the hills. Festival times were the worst, especially after the harvests had been gathered, when both men and women would drink for days. A drunken man could gamble away in one night all the hard work the entire family had labored to accomplish throughout the back-breaking planting season. If the crops were gambled away, the animals might also be wagered. In desperate attempts to recoup losses, even family members would be placed as bets. More than once a terrified and wailing teenaged girl had been carried off as payment for a drunken father's gambling debt. In other cases, men had been known to gamble away their own wives. No one liked it, and the villagers would cluck their tongues and wag their heads in shame. But it was simply the way things were.

And then there was the matter of the village shamans*. Feared by all, these men wielded much power due to their ability to contact evil spirits. Demons, people believed, needed to be placated*. An offended and angry spirit had the power to place a curse, bringing disaster to a person's home, or village. Life could be hard enough without arousing the wrath of evil spirits, so the shamans were regularly consulted.

The priest, after much chanting and drinking, would allow a demon to possess his body. The thrashing and convulsing man would then begin to speak whatever words the demon would put in his mouth. Often powerful demons would speak and

threaten to wreak havoc in a village. Huge recompenses might be demanded, and liquor, money, animals, or crops would be offered to appease the demon. Older people could remember a time years ago, when a famine had settled upon all the villages in the region, and a human sacrifice had been demanded. Yes, both demons and shamans were greatly feared in this region. Heads would wag and all would sigh. Nobody liked it, but again, it was simply the way things were.

However, the most pathetic and heart-wrenching cry I ever heard was probably the time a young mother I knew brought twins into the world in her house on the knoll just above our home. We knew the family well, as they helped to tend our animals. The young mother, just 16 years old, had looked forward eagerly to bearing a child.

By that time Kai Sun and I had been married two years and for some reason I had still not yet conceived. I longed for a baby to hold in my arms. Though often it was difficult for me to understand, I was learning the ways of the people and we were encouraged that we were making an impact on the lives of the villagers. Many had turned to Jesus by that time. Yet old ways die hard. The sun had already gone down and we were just sitting down to dinner when we heard the mother's anguished wailing from up the hill, and the horrified cry of the birth attendants: "Two of them! There are two of them!"

Kai Sun dropped his bowl and started to run, with me immediately behind him. He was shouting, "I will take them! In the name of God, stop! I will take them!" But it was too late—by the time we got there the newly-born infants had already been buried. Ignorance, fear and the evil prophecies of demons caused the villagers to fear that the birth of twins brought a curse. The demons demanded that all such helpless infants be immediately buried alive.

Some pregnant women who suspected a multiple birth risked going off on their own for the delivery, preferring the danger of bearing a child alone to having to bury both children. At least one infant could be brought home if no one had proof that two were born. Childbirth was often a feared and secretive event. Women would shed tears and shake their heads. Nobody liked the situation. But things could be slow to change in the hills.

Sometimes, in moments of weakness, when I would carry the weight of trying to enlighten these people on my own shoulders, I felt anger, bitterness, and even hatred. But when I would fall to my knees, seek a heart like Jesus had, and beg Him to give me His own love for these people, my heart would break for them.

People—whether in villages or cities, whether in England or in China, or anywhere for that matter—are all in need of the Savior. Evil, wherever it is to be found, can only be resisted by God’s own power, as He alone is greater and more powerful than any demon. What we cannot do in our own strength, Jesus can do by His power.

Forgive me if I have dwelt on the negative aspects of life as I found it at that time in our mountain home. While there was certainly much beauty and happiness to be found amongst the people of our village and the surrounding countryside, still, that darker side of the story must be told to fully understand the true light that Jesus brought to that place. And though it was difficult, and though often I cried because I did not understand why the people would act as they did, in time I came to love them. I watched as Jesus changed their lives and erased the darkness, pain, superstition and fear. He healed and saved lives and bodies and brought order and peace to a people held in bondage by the enemy of their souls.

Yes, I would have loved for that certain English gentleman to have spent some time with us in our village in the early days, observing the life of the people. Perhaps even he would have then found the need for a Savior.

PUTTING OUR HAND TO THE PLOW

Leaping Tiger Village was where we chose to make our home. We had prayed and asked the Lord to direct us. All the villages in the region, more than a hundred in total, could be reached from trails that honeycombed through the steep mountains and gorges above the river that wound through the hills. Leaping Tiger was one of these, a prosperous place, and the market festivals often drew people from the surrounding areas.

This was not Kai Sun’s childhood home, as it would have caused too great a loss of face for Kai Sun’s family to have their son arrive in their village with not only a new religion, but a foreign wife in tow as well. It seemed safer to wait some time before attempting to re-establish ties with his kin. But the people of this village were of the same tribe, speaking the same language and following the same customs. Kai Sun understood them and patiently tried to teach me to understand them as well.

Initial reactions to our presence went better than I had expected. I was considered quite an amusing novelty, due to the innate curiosity of the local populace. Surprisingly, they warmed to the idea of a local having a foreign wife much more quickly than the Han Chinese would have ever done. Kai Sun drilled me in the tribal customs and oversaw my dress so that I looked as “normal” as possible on our first appearances.

I found it to my benefit to take the lower seat, and to be Kai Sun’s assistant as much as possible. I tried to become as they were in all ways except

those that would have compromised matters of faith or conscience. But in speech, dress and food, I was a proper mountain wife. Because of this, those few things I did not adapt myself to, such as their religious beliefs or low standards of hygiene, became less of a perceived threat. In time they came to shrug off those strange ways of doing certain things as my harmless idiosyncrasies and quirks.

I had to learn again from the beginning the very basics of the language, as it bore little or no resemblance to the dialects I had previously learned. I was a novice, thrust into a school where the final examinations came first and the lessons were learned afterwards. I had no dictionary or phrase book, but learned much as a baby learns, by listening and repeating. After some time I could understand what people were saying. There always seemed to be someone who wanted to help me try to understand, and during our first year Kai Sun was also doing nearly non-stop running translations for me.

When we first arrived, we prayed, and the Lord showed us to use some of the gold we had to buy land in Leaping Tiger Village. It seemed the perfect place for a combination school/church that could reach people in all the villages throughout the area.

The village headman, eager to acquire gold rather than cattle or crops, was very obliging when it came to helping us acquire the proper site. We decided on a place that overlooked the valley, yet was directly next to the trail running through the “center of town,” for the building site. A small stone house stood on the property, but there would be plenty of room for the large school building we planned to construct.

Contrary to the way things were usually done in Leaping Tiger, we bought terraced fields for our crops some distance from our home, rather than adjacent to it. This we did as we hoped in time many people

would be coming to our school and church and we didn't want planting to get in the way of the property's use as a community center of sorts. We were able to hire a few reliable village people to help us with the building and planting, and we lived in the small stone house, while work on the school began.

I knew that it was Kai Sun's dream that we could eventually use the school to train local evangelists to help us reach the area too. However, to fulfill that dream we would first have to put ourselves to the task of winning souls, as there was not a single person in the area who had ever heard of Jesus.

Kai Sun had come to know the Lord when his father, a prosperous farmer, had sent him, the youngest son, to the distant river township to study. It was a sign of prestige to have a son travel so far away to a school to learn to read and write.—Few could afford it and fewer still thought it even necessary. However, prosperity had come to the family of N'gai (for that was Kai Sun's local name). Having acquired several large tracts* of land as payments for debts owed him, and having benefited substantially from unusually sizable harvests, in a very progressive move Kai Sun's father opted to educate his boy.

This had caused no small stir in the area for the mountain people, who in general disliked the Han and had little to do with them, though administration and trade forced them to maintain minimal contact. Many people advised the family against sending their son away, afraid that contact with the “leeches,” the derogatory hill term for the Han people, would contaminate him.

Kai Sun was a bright student and had quickly learned the language, as well as reading and writing skills. After several years of tutelage, Kai Sun, who was then in his late teens, became weary in his studies. He missed the mountains, it was true, but

something more than homesickness troubled him. He was plagued by a certain restlessness of spirit that he could not resolve. He longed for more than to just return to the life he had left behind in the hills, yet he did not even know exactly what it was that he was wishing for. This yearning, though intangible, was as real to him as hunger or thirst, yet he could not say for what it was he hungered. Struggling to put his feelings into words, he realized what he felt was a thirst of the heart, a thirst for truth.

The more he read, the more questions he found were raised in his mind. He resolved to study the ancient Chinese classics, only to find that the more he learned the less he knew or understood. The ageless question formed in his mind, the question seekers have asked since the beginning of time: what is the meaning of life?

His search, however, only started in earnest when he received a precious portion of the scriptures translated into Chinese. A local scholar, while journeying to a neighboring province, had bought it from a traveling evangelistic team.

“Read it,” the scholar had advised him. “It contains a peculiar, but interesting philosophy.”

After studying it thoroughly, Kai Sun had more questions than before, but they were questions of a different type. Instead of inquiring as to the meaning of life, what he now earnestly wanted to know was how he could become a Christian—for he determined that it was a Christian he wanted to be. This eventually led to his own travel, without his family’s approval, to the next province in hopes of establishing contact with Christians. This he did, and he eventually stayed on at the mission, working there, and growing in faith.

Over the years, however, Kai Sun could not forget his own people, who did not know anything of the peace and joy that he had found since his conversion. No

one had ever attempted to reach the tribal people; the mission had enough of a job reaching the whole of the interior of China. The call to return to his homeland would simply not go away. His desire and persistence to reach his people with God’s message were what led to his eventually being accepted for evangelistic training by Everett at the newly-established mission in Long Dragon Gorge.

Now was the time for all that Kai Sun had learned to be put to the test, and I determined to try my best to help him.

“Go ye into all the world,” the Master had proclaimed, and we had obeyed this commandment. “And ye shall be witnesses unto Me ... unto the uttermost parts of the Earth.”

At times in my isolated and unfamiliar life amongst the people of Leaping Tiger Village, I thought no other description could have more aptly fit.

SCHOOL DAYS

Local reaction to the idea of starting a school in Leaping Tiger Village must have been similar in some respects to the reaction Noah might have received upon announcing his intentions to build an ark. The overwhelming majority of people would simply ask, in all sincerity, “Why bother?” Others would laugh and advise us not to waste our time on such foolishness. According to the local mindset, building a school was about as useful and practical as building a dam in the desert. Few, if any, could comprehend why it was necessary.

Ignoring this, we forged ahead. While the work was in progress, however, besides overseeing the construction, Kai Sun’s main project was to convince people that educating their children was actually beneficial. This was no small task.

The village people, while perhaps uneducated as far as reading and writing were concerned, were

far from ignorant. They knew the countryside and its native flora and fauna like the back of their hand. They understood the intricacies of farming in any weather imaginable and were experts in animal husbandry. During the winter months the women concentrated on spinning and weaving home-dyed cloth and embroidering elaborate colorful costumes that were the pride of every housewife. Men cured meat, tanned leather and hewed delicate wood carvings that decorated windows and eaves. Folk medicine was passed down from generation to generation.

The hill people were certainly rich in cultural heritage, yet none of this knowledge was preserved in written form, simply for the lack of someone to write it down. Besides that, without the ability to read, evangelization of the local people would only remain possible through word of mouth. We knew that teaching the younger generation to read was the key to the future of truly reaching these people.

Though little value was placed on book-learning, story-telling was a fine art amongst the hill tribes. As Kai Sun knew everyone loved a story, he made a big show of regularly reading aloud, to his captivated audience, some of the more spectacular Bible stories. Though he used much animation and virtually acted out the stories single-handedly, he made quite a show of always holding the Bible in his hand, and emphasized that he was reading directly from the book. The people were enthralled with the stories and Kai Sun made it clear that there were plenty more where those came from—that is, for those who could read them.

This method, however, contained a slight bit of chicanery*; the truth was, the local dialect was a spoken, but not written language. Kai Sun was actually translating the Bible in his mind as he

looked at the book, rather than reading it directly, as no one would have understood the Mandarin dialect spoken by the majority of the Han Chinese. No one realized this, however, and Kai Sun figured that he would cross that bridge when they came to it. Later, this method proved to be an answer to his dilemma of just how to go about teaching the children.

To teach these remote mountain-village dwellers to speak or write Han Chinese would have been about as useful as teaching them Latin. Instead, he figured he could simply teach the locals the Chinese characters and match them with the local language words rather than the Han. This way they did not have to first learn to speak the Han dialect in order to read, but with some coaching on the changes in grammar and sentence construction—which were admittedly quite different—they could easily understand the basics of written Chinese. This way they could always communicate with outsiders through written characters, if not orally. (Though later we taught the advanced students the spoken Mandarin dialect as well.)

Kai Sun never let an opportunity pass without failing to mention some of the many advantages of book-learning. He would drop hints in passing conversation of the usefulness of being able to understand government rulings and notices, as without a knowledge of them the majority of the local people were at a disadvantage when dealing with officials. He also thought it expedient to casually explain basic mathematics, which could help prevent dishonest tax collectors from overcharging the village when taxes were due. Taxation, which everyone hated, was unfortunately impossible to avoid, and was basically the only reason the government had even intermittent contact with the hill people. The idea that some money could be saved greatly impressed

the headman, and from then on he seemed to offer at least tacit support of the project, which in the end swayed the rest of the populace to not interfere.

The main hurdle, though, was getting the villagers to be willing to part with their children, who they considered a valuable workforce, during school hours. The winter season, when there was considerably less work to be done, was our prime time for teaching. However, two months of heavy snows and bitter cold made it impossible for the children living on the distant outskirts of the settlement to risk the daily round trip from their homes over icy and treacherous trails. It became clear that for at least two months of the year, our school—if it was to happen—would have to be partly a boarding school. Besides the need for an additional building to house students, we also had to convince the parents to let the children reside with us full-time for several months, which meant sacrificing the extra help at home.

Finally, we came up with the idea that at least part of the children's time could be spent spinning and weaving cloth and carving wood. These products could be given to their parents at the end of the term. This pleased the parents, as they felt the time at school then would not be "wholly unprofitable," and they finally agreed to letting them come.

While we started up our actual school classes in late autumn, from the beginning of our arrival in Leaping Tiger in early spring, besides regularly visiting the villagers in their homes, we would hold meetings where all were invited to sing and listen to Bible stories and testimonies. While many initially came out of mere curiosity to see a foreign woman, Kai Sun's stories were a big attraction, and the "church services" on our property by the construction site began to draw regular crowds. Singing was also something the

villagers threw their whole hearts into. Almost every villager could sing beautifully, and Kai Sun was no exception; he had a rich, full voice. He translated many of our favorite Christian songs and taught them to the people who picked them up almost instantaneously. As they clapped, swayed and danced along, we could hear the enthusiastic chorus echo down the mountain: "Jesus, You are the song of my heart!"

While initially no one understood much of what we were preaching, many were attracted to the happiness and joy of the Lord they saw in us. One woman remarked that she "liked Christianity as it reminded her so much of market festivals." While we knew they had to learn that there was more to being a Christian than singing and enjoying a holiday atmosphere, we knew those tests would come of their own. For now, we would let these people absorb as much as they could of the Lord's joyful Spirit.

We began to translate pertinent portions of scripture and sing them to popular local folk tunes. We realized we had to get as much knowledge of the Word into the people as possible, and songs seemed the easiest way to do it. People took to this readily, as they already were familiar with the tunes. Singing along, they would pick up the words quickly and thus we started our "scripture memorization program," without anyone really realizing it. Forming a large circle, the villagers would clap and dance the familiar folk dances to our scripture songs.

This gave us other ideas. Singing festivals and contests were an anticipated local event, a type of singing duel where one team would sing part of a song and the other team would reply. Kai Sun taught them many a Psalm this way, which they would sing back and forth in spirited competition.

We felt, though, that for these people the backbone of our message would have to be God's power over all unclean spirits, and His desire for us all to become His children, saved by grace. While people enjoyed the stories and songs immensely, we could see it would take some time for them to fully trust that Jesus was more powerful than the demons they had feared and worshipped for so long.

We were surprised at first how little interference we had from the shamans. We initially suspected this was because of the headman's approval of our presence, but in looking back now we see that it was mainly the Lord's staying hand upon the demons, who were not allowed to manifest themselves against us until the people had been given a fair chance to hear enough of God's message to be able to themselves knowledgeably choose between good and evil. Later, we were to experience our full share of trouble from the shamans, but in our early beginnings our message was quite popular.

IF I BE LIFTED UP

Despite our popularity, we still had much to learn about how to reach the people, and most of all how to rely on Jesus, Who had to be the source of our strength. I will never forget the first day our combination school and church was completed and Kai Sun invited the whole of Leaping Tiger to attend our first services.

"Have the benches been brought in?" Kai Sun asked me as he proceeded to put on his best outfit, which while immaculately clean, I noted had been repaired more than once.

"Yes, Lei Nor swept out the whole building and had everything brought in."

The benches had only been finished the day before. The stone floor would be covered with dry pine needles in the cold winter, but for now Lei Nor (our general

all-around hired hand, and for his small stature an incredibly industrious man), had swept the smooth stones spotlessly clean. Kai Sun had designed the building so that the entire length of the front walls could be swung open, looking a bit like English barn doors. This way, if in the future larger numbers of people would come to meetings, our building could become an open air auditorium. Today we swung them open wide, as we expected the whole village to turn out for our inauguration.

I noticed how weary Kai Sun looked. "Darling," I asked him with my hand on his shoulder. "Are you feeling all right?"

"Yes, of course. I'm just tired. There has been so much to do." Kai Sun's eyes showed dark circles beneath. He had been working non-stop overseeing the workers in both the building and the fields, as he needed the school finished before the snows came, and also the crops harvested to last us through the winter. "But now it's finished!" Kai Sun added with a note of satisfaction. "Lu Yisi, I have waited for this moment a long time."

I wrapped my headdress properly in place—all married hill women wore them—and adjusted my embroidered apron and vest. Though I doubted I would ever be as skillful at needlework as these village women, I was enjoying learning the local crafts.

Then we heard the singing. We looked at each other questioningly. "They must have arrived and begun without us ..." Kai Sun had a perplexed look on his face.

We opened the door of our little stone house and stepped out into the sunlight. The sight that met our eyes caused us to stare, disbelieving, at the spectacle before us.

The entire property was filled to overflowing with laughing, bouncing, giddy men, women and children, the vast majority of whom were most

decidedly drunk—some to the point of having difficulty standing. Apparently our inaugural celebration was being conducted mountain style—no important festival in the hills was to be attended sober; it would have been bad manners to do so.

A ring of men near the door of the church building held out the corners of a large stretched skin which they used as a makeshift trampoline. Giggling women were being tossed one at a time onto it and hurled high in the air, amidst raucous laughter. As the village women wore no under garments, the game drew lots of attention from everyone, and a bawdy* ballad was being sung by those tossing the ladies.

Others had begun circle dances, clapping and singing. Old men had brought instruments and we could see the celebration had started in earnest. A fight had already started in the corner of the property, and the drunken men, each with a club in hand, parried with their weapons, while bets were placed as to who would be the first to draw blood. Joyful cries of “Fight! Fight!” sent people scrambling to see the action.

A group of small boys took swigs from dry gourds filled with the fiery home-brew liquor, while their mothers were preoccupied with dancing and games. Others were busy trying to tie a dry branch to a terrified dog’s tail, while other boys stood by with a lit stick, waiting to send the branch up in flames once it was tied to the animal. Meanwhile we could see some merchants unfolding blankets getting ready to display their wares on the ground, as was always done on festival occasions. Medicinal herbs and talismans to ward off demons and evil spirits were being bartered.

One particularly drunken villager staggered past us and fell, vomited on the ground directly in front of us, and then passed out in the wretched pool.

I looked at Kai Sun and saw a dark cloud of anger pass over his face. I suddenly became afraid of what he might do—he was tired and his strength was worn down. I took him by the arms and urged, “Kai Sun, please! Please come with me back into the house, now!” Too discouraged to protest, he let me guide him back into our cottage.

Once inside, I closed and bolted the door behind us. Kai Sun sat down at our rough table, staring at the floor. I pulled up a chair beside him and neither of us said anything for some time, though I sat with my arms wrapped around his shoulders, holding him silently.

Finally, with difficulty he spoke. “It is like Sodom and Gomorrah!” he said with disgust. “I feel as if all I have been telling them for months and months is as nothing!”

I knew what a difficult moment this was for him. All he had dreamed of was to bring Jesus to the people here, and now it seemed like a drunken melee was taking place instead of a church service. It was a very rare thing for my steadfast Kai Sun to show discouragement, let alone voice doubt. I knew this was serious. I desperately prayed for him in my mind. Then a verse came to me strongly and clearly which seemed to illumine the dark situation.

“And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me!” I quoted excitedly.

“Excuse me?” Kai Sun questioned, looking up from the floor.

“Darling, don’t worry! That’s the answer—it’s what the Lord wants us to do! Jesus said, ‘And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.’ John, chapter 12, verse 32. We can’t fight against this in our own spirits, but the Lord is more powerful than any evil spirits, or even any local traditions. That is what we have been preaching since we came here—that Jesus is more

powerful than anything. We don't have to fight this, Kai Sun. We just have to lift up Jesus, and He will draw these people to Himself!"

Kai Sun was silent for a moment, then tightened his arm around me. He sighed and said, "You're right. God forgive me. I'm just so tired." Then he looked at me and moved the hair that had escaped my head-wrapping from my eyes. "You are the sunshine of my heart ..." he said, and I wiped the tears from my eyes.

We prayed together and asked the Lord what to do, and he indicated that Kai Sun should simply ignore the goings on and proceed as normal with the message he planned to deliver. It was as simple as that.

With a new strength, we made our way through the crowd. Enroute we managed to pull Lei Nor, who had not yet had enough time to become completely inebriated, to the front with us to join in the singing and to play the drum. He started the rhythmic beat and we began clapping and singing "God is our refuge and strength" at the top of our voices. Soon, people began to gather round and sing with us. Though the alcohol consumption slurred our "choir's" words, they sang with gusto.

When the first song had ended, Kai Sun began to speak with an anointed authority, sharing how we must put all our troubles and cares into God's powerful hands, and He would then care for us. Throughout his speech, Kai Sun would stop and lead them in singing different verses we had taught them, explaining each of the promises from God's word.

Things were going well, and the Lord's Spirit was getting the crowd under control. Kai Sun's voice was ringing across the property and a hush fell on everyone. He shared that he had a dream of a new start for the people of Leaping Tiger, a life where all could be free from fear. He told of how the Spirit

of the Lord was more powerful than any demon, and how Jesus' followers were sent out to bring His message of hope throughout the world and to "cast out demons and to heal the sick."

Then, while he was yet speaking, with a timing that could only have been orchestrated by the Lord Himself, a member of the crowd suddenly fell down writhing to the floor, in the midst of some sort of convulsive seizure.

With frightened cries the crowd scattered; this type of fit looked exactly like what happened when a shaman allowed an evil spirit to take possession. However, this man was no shaman, but apparently a helpless sheep being ravaged by a demonic spiritual wolf! Kai Sun made his way through the throng of people and laid his hands on the contorting figure.

"In the name of Jesus Christ, I command this demon to depart and be bound in the heart of the earth!" he shouted. With that, the battered man's convulsions stopped as suddenly as they had started, and he lay still, as if in a faint.

The people gasped, "Is he dead?" but Kai Sun continued praying.

"Lord, You have all power in Your hands. Please, make this man whole right now! Raise him up so he can make a decision!—He must choose whether to follow You, the God of love, or to follow the demons of Hell. Bring him to his right mind so he can choose whether to enter into the straight gate that leads to life, or the broad path which leads unto destruction! Help him to see that Your arms are held out to him, and that You love him and want to help him, in the name of Jesus I pray!"

A sudden flicker of the eyelids came, and then the man stirred. Opening his eyes, he stood up and faced Kai Sun, looking whole in mind and body. The crowd cheered!

Kai Sun quietly spoke to him. “Jesus Christ has delivered you from the jaws of the Devil. Would you like to believe in Jesus?”

“Yes, I want this Jesus! I ... I believe,” the man eagerly replied.

“Then will you come with me and let me pray for you to receive Jesus into your heart, and receive His gift of salvation?” Kai Sun asked him.

“Yes, I will!” the man replied resoundingly.

Taking him by the hand, Kai Sun led him to the front of the building and onto the little raised platform we had built.

“Today,” Kai Sun called on the crowd, “salvation has come to this man! He has made the decision to put his faith in Jesus, Who is stronger than any demon! He will pray with me so that Jesus can dwell in him forever. Will anyone else pray with us now to receive the Lord Jesus?”

From out of the crowd, five others pushed their way to the front, one of whom was Lei Nor. And so as Kai Sun laid hands on each of them and prayed, the Leaping Tiger Christian church was born.

A GIFT FROM HEAVEN

Kai Sun paced nervously outside the door. Inside he could hear sounds that were strange and somewhat frightening to him, yet he tried his best to retain his composure in front of Lei Nor. The latter, already a father of five, sat nonchalantly in a corner, intent on whittling a new wooden cooking ladle. Every now and then Lei Nor would glance up at Kai Sun and chuckle softly to himself.

The inner room was considered a woman’s domain and Kai Sun had been hustled outside as soon as the appointed time drew near. It seemed to him that he had been out there an eternity! While trying futilely to busy himself with whatever he could, he wondered what could possibly be taking

so long. He prayed repeatedly for the Lord to bring everything to pass quickly and safely and ...

Then he heard it!—The distinctive sweet, though angry, wail of a newborn child!

“Lei Nor! Lei Nor! Listen!” Kai Sun jumped up and grabbed Lei Nor’s hand.

“Be careful of my carving knife, Pastor N’gai!” Lei Nor laughed as he put down his blade to fully enjoy Kai Sun’s euphoria. Looking fully like the cat who swallowed the proverbial canary, Kai Sun grinned with satisfaction. Then, no longer able to contain it, he broke out into a string of praise, thanking the Lord for bringing a ...

“...Oh my! I still don’t know!” he interrupted himself. “Is it a son or a daughter? Why don’t they come out and tell us!”

As if on cue, Tse Ling, Lei Nor’s wife, opened the door of the bedroom and beckoned Kai Sun to enter. There on the bed he saw us, as I lay holding our little newborn baby in my arms.

“It’s a boy!” I told him.

Carefully and delicately, Kai Sun pulled back the blanket from over our little one’s tiny wet and wrinkled forehead, and beamed a smile.

“He is wonderful! He is perfect! What fat, strong arms he has! And his hair—so much of it!” he marveled.

Then looking at me, his eyes became misty. “You, my beloved, have made me a father.”

Tse Ling, however, lovably gruff as usual, was all business. “Then, Father, please take your son and go outside while we finish up in here.”

I could not help but laugh, as she deftly scooped the child from my arms and handed him to a wide-eyed Kai Sun, who held the now squalling little bundle as if he was afraid it would break.

“Wh-what do I do with him?” Kai Sun stammered, as Tse Ling gently steered him out the door.

“Keep him warm! We’ll be done soon. Can’t have any men-folk getting in the way in here, we’re busy!” And with that she shut them both outside.

Kai Sun headed to a chair and made sure the babe was wrapped securely in the blanket, then covered him with his own coat as well, just to be safe. After a few minutes the infant stopped his frantic screaming and opened his tiny eyes, taking in his surroundings and the face that now intently observed him.

“You are my son!” Kai Sun told him. “And I love you very much. You are God’s gift to me, just like your mother is.”

And I could not hear the rest of what they talked about together that day. Yet somehow hearing that little snatch of conversation filled my heart with so much joy that perhaps it would have burst had I heard more.



With so much to do in our mountain home, the days and months passed swiftly. Little Richard Everett N’gai learned to walk and talk. A healthy and precocious youngster, he would play happily on the floor of the Leaping Tiger Church while his father conducted fellowships and Bible studies, or while I taught classes in the children’s school or led the women’s meetings.

Raising him in the hills taught me many things. I never realized, for instance, just how much dirt existed in the world until I had an infant whom I had to keep out of it—invariably young Richard would find something utterly filthy that he wanted to handle or eat. Dear Tse Ling initially helped me, though I had to drill her thoroughly in many matters concerning hygiene. She thought my ideas very odd, as she had five children of her own and, as far as she was concerned, a little dirt never seemed to hurt them.

“Lichay,” as he was dubbed—for no one in the village could pronounce “Richard,” let alone “Everett”—was in every sense a child of the mountains. Apart from his English name (given after my father Richard and Everett our friend), our young son bore few other concessions to “foreignness,” as he spoke no English until much older, and was as swarthy and dark-haired as Kai Sun. When he was a toddler, however, I was nearly beside myself trying to run herd on him, as well as keep up with my other duties.

Tse Ling, having had no other frame of reference than life in Leaping Tiger Village, was hard to convince regarding many of my policies. As Richard grew I observed that, as gruff as she was with others, she would spoil “her Lichay” with a blind, grandmotherly type of affection. Smart as he was, he duly learned to wind her about his little finger and I became concerned for his training, as well as his spiritual development.

It also became apparent that I had to invest more of my time in helping Kai Sun with evangelization, as well as the school. I was torn between my obligations to my child and the job that the Lord had given us, and I prayed desperately for a solution. Then one fine spring day, the answer showed up at my door.

“Madame N’gai, a stranger is coming!” Tse Ling pointed down the hill leading to our home. I peered off the balcony at the figure coming up the slope, but could not yet make out who it was. We had completed the stone and wooden structure of our home the year before Richard was born. I had had my heart set on having a balcony—as a child I had loved to sit and watch the trees wave in the wind from the broad veranda that surrounded our house.

Kai Sun had pointed out that no other structure in the village had such a thing, and we had

endeavored in all ways to make ourselves adapt to local custom. I reluctantly agreed with him, but perhaps seeing the disappointment in my eyes made Kai Sun reconsider. He came to me afterwards, saying he had prayed about it.

"It is such a small thing, what should it matter?" he told me, and the workers had begun to construct the addition the next day.

I think that his "compromise" on our home's design was his way of trying to understand all the adjustments I was having to make in our new life, and he was learning to bend and ask the Lord which issues were important and which weren't. It was often difficult for Kai Sun to express his innermost feelings, which I had to find out in ways other than simply having him tell me. In this, though, prayer helped resolve so many of our conflicts, as if I did not understand his motives I could always pray and ask the Lord why he would do the things he did. I later learned he often used this same tactic on me. This helped us bridge many of our cultural differences, as well as the misunderstandings bound to arise in any marriage, regardless of race or nationality.

Now from my balcony perch I watched as the figure, apparently a woman, came closer into view.

"Kai Sun! Come look!" I shrieked with delight as I stretched my hand towards the now-waving girl approaching us. "It ... it is Eh Mei!"

IN TIME OF NEED

Eh Mei stood before us, smiling broadly and looking as sweet and bright-eyed as ever, only now her lovely face was framed by a full head of thick, shiny black hair.

"Come in, come in! Please do come in!" I welcomed her and embraced her fondly while Tse Ling looked on, half-mystified and half-suspicious

of this newcomer to our village. After observing Eh Mei cautiously and seeing that the situation was under control, Tse Ling finally hustled off to brew some tea for our guest.

As for myself, I could not help but bombard the dear girl with questions, while poor Kai Sun could hardly get a word in edge-wise.

"Eh Mei, it is so wonderful to see you! Do tell me all the news! What has become of Rimpa Sae? How are the others at the monastery? But ... whatever brings you to Leaping Tiger Village!"

She laughed and held up her hand. "I will be most happy to answer all of your questions, however I must do so one at a time. It is certainly a pleasure for me to be here and feel your warm welcome. And of course, the reason I have come to Leaping Tiger Village is to see you."

I marveled as I listened to her. This girl who once could not speak at all was now most articulate. As the days passed and we became reacquainted, I found she seemed to regard conversation and speech with a particular delight, to be savored as one does a good meal. It was the unparalleled enjoyment that could only be fully experienced by someone who had been afflicted and then made whole, comparable to the joy of a once-blind man now able to gaze appreciatively at a sunset.

"After you both left us to come here," she told us, "I returned to the monastery for a short time. But the more I read those coveted scriptures that had been copied from you, the more I saw that, try as I might to adjust again to the monastic life, I was not in the place that I should be. Somehow, along with my voice, something had awakened in my heart that I could not ignore. I could see in you and Kai Sun a light that I had never known in anyone before, and I understood it was the light of Jesus."

I could not help but hug her as I heard of the wonderful change that had come about in her life. I listened fascinated, as her story continued.

"I apologize that this story is rather long, but I would like you to know of the events that took place since our last meeting. Will you bear with me a bit more?"

"Eh Mei, we are delighted to hear all the Lord did for you. Please do tell us!" I entreated.

"I sought an audience with Rimpa Sae," Eh Mei went on, "and discussed these things with him. He was most understanding and agreed that I should seek to follow God outside of the monastery. He himself, by the way, retired from the monastery not long after I left. I think he felt the same as I in many ways, and could not continue on as before. His public explanation however, was that he was leaving on an extended pilgrimage, which he felt would be his last, because of his failing health. I understand he returned to his former home where he hoped to spend his last days."

"He was a good man. Without his help—and yours, Eh Mei—my life may have been lost, and our work here might have never begun," I observed.

Eh Mei smiled bashfully. "I thank God if He used me to help you in anyway. After I left the monastery, I did not know where to go. I first visited with my family. Rimpa Sae had given me letters stating his blessing and consent to my departure from the monastery, that I might avoid trouble with my family, as having a daughter return was considered a disgrace. So what could they say, seeing that I was healed and had the letters of the priest? They were shocked that I was able to speak. Yet somehow, I think it was all a bit too much for them to comprehend. And then, when I told them of my faith in Jesus, they hardly knew what to make of such a thing.

"The neighbors were talking and gossiping. I felt the need to go and find some fellow Christians with whom I could further study the scriptures, but I did not know how to present this to my family. As you know, in this country a daughter may not simply leave her home and do as she wishes—at least not without much trouble. I prayed for a way to present this to them, but before I could, God intervened! They themselves, being very superstitious and not knowing what to make of my being healed by a foreign God, and being unwilling to bear the brunt of neighborhood gossip, felt I should leave. Yet they could not deny the miracle that had taken place in that I could now speak. They feared that my presence might bring upon them the curse of some jealous temple spirit, and suggested I find a Christian monastery, preferably as far away as possible from my home, and become a nun there, since it was the Christian God I now worshipped.

"I was overjoyed! To be honest, neither I, nor they, at that point, understood much of just how Christian worship was conducted, so we assumed that to serve God I must find a monastery. Though I knew that you were not exactly a nun, as you and Kai Sun were to be married, I cannot say I fully understood just what a missionary was at that time. However, we heard there was a large mission station in Wuzhou, so I was sent there, with money for the trip and enough to stay for awhile until I found a 'Christian temple' that would take me as a novice.

"I located the mission and introduced myself—the workers at the mission house were most kind. I began to attend the fellowships and Bible classes regularly and learned so much. I was most surprised when I found out how different the Christian way of life truly is from the monastery. But I loved it! It was a wonderful thing to meet so many believers. I

found work for myself and rented a small room where I lived alone and cooked, and I would help at the mission whenever I could. I was there over two years, learning and growing in the faith.

“At the end of that time however, I could feel a distinctive call in my heart. As odd as it sounded, I felt Jesus instructing me to find you and assist you in your work. When you both left us, you told me you wished to build a school here in the mountains. I prayed many times, asking the Lord if this was what He would have me do, and He answered clearly that this was His will for me. So, to make a very long story short, I have been searching for you since these last few months.”

“Why, that is incredible, Eh Mei! You don’t know how very desperately we need you! But however did you find us?”

“I made inquiries, and was informed of your general whereabouts,” she responded politely.

Sensing she was not telling me all, I asked, “And who did you make inquiries with?”

She hesitated a moment before she replied. “With the mission ...” letting her voice trail off. That alone told me much.

I sighed as I thought of our attempts, nearly a year before, to contact the plains’ mission by way of letter. Posting a letter meant journeying to a distant river township. Kai Sun had had to make that journey, for our school was fully underway and we desperately needed supplies. We actually managed to teach for the first year-and-a-half using only homemade brushes and ink, as well as slates and chalk and a homemade abacus for each student. As no other books were available, our one worn Bible was our sole textbook in those early days. However, once the students were beyond the very basics we needed textbooks and other material urgently.

We also knew we could desperately use help in our job of reaching the entire hill area with the Gospel. We had begun our mission as a self-supporting venture and were meeting with great success. Many locals had received the Lord by that time and we had taught the children of Leaping Tiger the Bible, as well as their scholastics, for several years. These children, being raised as Christians, were the seeds of the future church in the region. Now we had families from surrounding villages, not wanting to be considered backwards in comparison to the more “cosmopolitan” Leaping Tiger villagers who boasted of a foreign school, bringing their children to us. We saw the need to branch out our work, however the surge in our boarding population meant more work than ever on the home front.

If we had fellow mission workers helping us, we could continue to reach out evangelizing the surrounding village areas as well. In addition, Kai Sun hoped we could establish Leaping Tiger as an outpost on the mission doctor’s circuit. And of course he had not forgotten his most cherished dream, to one day train native evangelists to reach every person in the mountains with the Word of God.

Kai Sun had labored over our letter to the mission, offering our home as a base for fellow missionaries who would like to join us. With high hopes he had journeyed to the distant town. Paying a hefty advance deposit at the municipality, he arranged for any letter of reply from the mission to be delivered to us by pony courier. Then, after purchasing supplies for our school, he returned to Leaping Tiger and waited. And waited.

The day we received a reply, I saw him coming home slowly from the fields. While he was still down the hill I could tell something was wrong. He walked

with a slow and weary gait, as a man who is grieving.

“Lu Yisi, the mission has answered us,” he told me solemnly, as he handed over the sheaves of paper.

I could not believe what I read. It was a reply from the district supervisor, whom I did not personally know. Many administrative changes had taken place since our last contact with the plains’ mission, when we first arrived in our previous mission station in Long Dragon Gorge. His reply, to phrase it charitably, was terse. The letter acknowledged that we had once been connected to the mission but had, in his words, “deserted our posts.”

“But doesn’t he understand that we were running for our lives?” I looked up at Kai Sun. “They surely must not understand the circumstances! There was a wholesale slaughter being conducted!”

“Read on,” was all he said.

The communication stated that now, after abandoning our plows, we were asking assistance from the mission, which they felt they could not morally give. In particular they took exception to our “questionable interracial romantic alliance, which was also wholly without the benefit of formal Christian matrimony.” Our relationship was, in their eyes, a scandal.

“They are speaking of our marriage!” I gasped.

In closing, the supervisor suggested that we examine our consciences, abandon our futile work, and that I return at once to England.

It was some time before we could reconcile in our minds what had happened with the mission. Facing danger and persecution had been, in some ways, easier than dealing with such division from our own brothers and sisters. When facing an outside enemy, one finds strength and an ability to fight for that which is right. But internal division

within the circle of the Christian brotherhood robs one of all spiritual strength.

For many nights we tossed upon our beds and spent our days debating what we should do, and also what we could have done to have prevented this rift in the first place. I experienced a full range of emotions from guilt, to self-pity, to righteous indignation.

We recognized our naiveté in not anticipating any negative reaction to our relationship, let alone our unannounced departure together to begin our school. Interracial marriage was not an accepted thing at that time. And while it was understood that Kai Sun was at liberty to begin this project, I, as a single female, was considered the ward of the mission, and under their direct protection and authority. In this we had to admit we could understand why, regardless of the tumultuous circumstances of the times, they were distressed that we had ventured out on our own as we did.

But what could we do now? I knew without a doubt that it was God’s will that I was together with Kai Sun. He was my husband and the father of my child. I saw that perhaps, had God not blinded us to what would be reactions of our mission organization, we might never have had the courage to obey this unusual call. Yet I felt indignant that our relationship received such criticism.

Now we had suddenly found ourselves on the fringes of the entire Christian missionary movement of China, as outcasts. We were in disrepute and we wrestled inwardly that we must somehow vindicate ourselves and our work. Perhaps we should appeal to a higher mission authority? We both felt intermittent anger with the treatment we had received after years of faithful work with the mission, and despair that we now faced the enormous task of reaching this mountain region entirely alone.

It did not take us long to discover, however, that bitterness is a cruel master. Its heavy mantle can smother the flame of Christian joy and happiness, and defeat God's intended purpose for our lives. As the days passed, we recognized that our anger and frustration was simply that, a root of bitterness that we were allowing to fester in our hearts. It finally drove us to our knees, in desperation to rid ourselves of its permeation* into our lives. The conclusion we reached was that, no matter what we or others had done, and no matter how misunderstood we felt our motives to be, we could not let ourselves be defiled by holding on to bitterness against our brothers. Jesus admonished us to forgive and to turn the other cheek. We had to acknowledge our own mistakes and then forgive the mistakes of others.

We also had to fully recognize that it was God who had started this work, not Kai Sun or myself. What God had begun, He could complete, and it was His work, not our reputations, that ultimately mattered. No matter what the mission thought of us, God had asked us to come here and it was God that would have to see us through. In conclusion we felt that, for our own spiritual sanity's sake, we must put it all behind us and simply get on with the work that was set before us.

But now my dear Eh Mei had arrived, and with her a new feeling of hope sprung up in my heart.

"So you understand the mission's feelings about us here, Eh Mei?" I asked her. I wanted to make sure she knew just what it was she was getting into should she choose to stay.

"I have heard of some, shall we say, rather strong differences of opinion in reference to your presence in Leaping Tiger Village. But this I know, 'whereas once I was blind, now I see.' You said just now, if it had not been for my help you would not be here

today. My sister, I say to you the same, if it had not been for you, I would also not be standing before you now. So as you see, I have come to work with you.—That is, if you will have me."



Eh Mei set about making herself as useful as possible in our household. By nature she was a helpful person who instinctively sensed the needs of those around her. An outstanding cook, she was able to add some welcome variety to our meals. Mountain cuisine can tend to be a bit monotonous at times, as there are only limited types of food available, but Eh Mei had brought a variety of vegetable and herbal seeds with her which she planted behind our house, cultivating a delicious garden. She also was an excellent musician, playing the two stringed *erhu*, a type of Chinese fiddle, and singing beautifully. She was a welcome addition to our singing and worship.

My main concern at first, though, was what Tse Ling was going to think of the new addition to our household. Tse Ling, despite her crusty exterior and strong opinions, had a warm heart. She had done all she could to make life as comfortable for us as possible, helping with our cooking, farming, housekeeping and whatever needed to be done. I did not want to unduly offend her, or make her feel unneeded. I did not need to worry long, however.

Though I'm not quite sure how she did it, Eh Mei, with her winsome ways, humbly acknowledged Tse Ling's seniority while at the same time taking over many of her tasks. As Tse Ling sensed her position in our household was in no way endangered, she took quite a liking to Eh Mei, and took it upon herself to instruct her in all ways how to become a proper Leaping Tiger villager. Little Richard also took to Eh Mei instantly. Her unique form of gentle firmness was just what my young colt needed, and

she spent much time helping me in his care, for which I was very thankful.

Eh Mei's arrival at that particular time in our lives was truly a Godsend for us all. I for one, found myself to be starved for female companionship. True, there were many women in Leaping Tiger Village that I had grown close to during our early time there. But few could understand or relate to much besides life within our isolated village, so I often felt lonely. While Kai Sun and I were very close, I still found I missed having a close woman friend and confidante, someone who also knew the Lord and with whom I could talk, such as I had been able to do with La Ong.

Even though Eh Mei's background and mine were not even remotely similar, she having been a Buddhist nun raised in China's interior and myself a foreign missionary raised in England, our lives still overlapped and entwined in Jesus. We shared many things in common; we each had heard the Lord's call in our hearts and had defied conventionality to follow it. We each endured the censure of family and friends, and had come to regard the riches of Christ far greater than the reproach of those we loved. We had also both burnt our bridges, so to speak, in that neither of us could ever, even if we wanted to, return to our former lives. These similarities far outweighed our outer differences, and a strong bond of friendship was born that was to last us the rest of our lives.

HE CARES FOR HIS OWN

It was many months after Eh Mei arrived and the frost had first settled on the ground, when Kai Sun came racing into the house early one morning, with something bundled under his coat. He had gone out for his early morning walk, as was his habit before breakfast. He would often go out alone to pray

and would afterward wander through the village to see how our neighbors and friends were getting along. This morning, however, instead of his usual cheerful greeting as he returned, he rushed to the warmth of the fire.

"Lu Yisi! Please come quickly! Look what I have!" he called urgently, carefully unwrapping his jacket. Peering into his coat, I put my hand to my mouth.

"Oh, my goodness!" I exclaimed. There in the folds of his jacket lay two tiny, helpless and naked newborn baby girls!

Tse Ling, normally quick to react helpfully, instead froze in her tracks. She nervously fidgeted with her apron. "They could bring bad luck ..." was all she could say.

"Damn it! Bring me some warm blankets now before they freeze to death!" Kai Sun barked. "These are God's children! No harm will come to those who care for His lambs, but cursed be the ones who turn their heads to the cry of the innocent!"

We jolted ourselves from our momentary stunned shock and sprang into action. Eh Mei and I each grabbed some clothing and gathered a baby to our shoulders. They seemed too weak to even cry. My motherly instincts took over and I found myself praying desperately that these fragile lives would be preserved.

Breathing a sign of relief that Eh Mei and I now held the little ones, Kai Sun turned to Tse Ling. "I am sorry, my friend. Please forgive me. I had no cause to speak so harshly to you. But my heart is broken for these little ones, who almost suffered a most terrible fate."

Tse Ling nodded. All that we had taught her of the Bible was now being put to the test, as she knew the shamans had declared all twin newborns cursed, and no one had yet openly stood against these wicked false prophets. Our presence here had been

popularly accepted by most of the local people, however our practices had not clashed with the shamans head-on until now. So far, they had left us alone and we had simply gone about our business of lifting up Jesus.

Kai Sun had never hesitated to condemn this evil practice of infanticide, and fortunately we had not heard of the birth of many twins. But to now intervene and actually rescue these children, we all knew was surely bound to arouse trouble. Uneasily riding the fence of indecision, Tse Ling finally shuffled from the room and busied herself in the kitchen. I prayed for her, that she would resist the lies of the Devil and stand strong now.

After wrapping the little ones snugly, I turned to Kai Sun. "Darling, wherever did you find them?"

"They are from Lakpa's household. I was on my walk through the village when I heard the crying and shouting. There was a major row going on in the house where the babies were born. The mother wanted to bury them, fearful that her other children would die if she didn't, but the father didn't want to do it. By a miracle I passed by then.—Just think! I hadn't even planned to go that way!

"You know," he looked into my face, "I believe that because of all we have taught these people, their consciences are being pricked worse than ever before. I know they are frightened almost witless by the shamans, but God is putting a greater fear in their hearts, to fear Him above the demons. We must make them see the horror of it! And somehow," he looked down at the tiny figures Eh Mei and I held in our arms, "I believe He will use these children to do that."

"But however did you get the babies?" I asked him.

"I just showed up in the middle of the argument. I walked in and told them I would take them. The

parents both immediately agreed, so I grabbed the babies and left before they could change their minds."

"You did the right thing, Darling. I am so proud of you!"

"Just think, Lu Yisi, had I not known the Lord I could have been in exactly the same situation. These little girls could have been mine and I also could have ..." he shook his head. "It is too horrible to imagine! But now they are the blessing of God to us. What do you think of that for a name? 'Blessing' ..."

"How beautiful and so appropriate!" I answered, stroking the little one's cheek. "And for the other sweet thing, what about 'Precious'?"

"It's done! Blessing and Precious they are! Oh Jesus, help us to care for them!" he prayed.

"Kai Sun, they are asleep now, but they won't be for long. We will need milk for them. Someone will need to nurse them," I told him, cuddling the babe I held in my arms.

"Let me go and see if I can find someone who will be a wet nurse," he responded, reaching for his coat. Meanwhile Eh Mei and I tried to find more cloth we could use to swaddle the little ones, as well as baskets in which they could sleep. When Richard came in and saw the tiny babes in their baskets by the fire, he squealed with wonder and delight like a small boy finding a hearthful of presents wrapped and waiting on Christmas day! He talked to us non-stop as we fussed over the two darlings, and would hold their tiny fingers in his hand, or stroke their dark black hair gently. When Lei Nor entered the house, Richard rushed up to him and announced with excitement, "Last night Mama had two babies!"

It was some hours before Kai Sun was to return looking worried and angry. "I cannot understand them!" he fumed. "Not a single one will take the chance to nurse these helpless children. Everyone

refused! They made the most pathetic excuses—but not a single one would help! But don't worry—look outside."

I peered into the yard and saw a large nanny goat standing by our doorway, busily chewing on the bushes in my flowerbed.

"Shoo!" I shrieked and the goat ran the length of its rope from me. "I take it you wish for me to feed our babies with goat's milk?" I asked.

"Well, it's the only thing I can think of that we can try," he answered ruefully.

Eh Mei and I set about to boil the milk and dilute it to make some type of nourishment for the twins. We had to use a spoon to get it into their mouths, which they often gagged on, but we had nothing else. We could do little other than experiment with attempts to make a suitable mixture of goat's milk, wild honey, and water, and we prayed continually that it would set well with them. We kept close watch on our babies, but we knew it would be a miracle if they survived. The goat's milk was obviously difficult for the poor little things to digest.

Finally, I put them to my own breasts in an attempt to comfort them, and we hit upon the idea of letting the milk trickle into the side of their mouths. When Blessing and Precious caught on to this, they sucked ravenously and much preferred this method to the spoon alone. Though enormously time-consuming, we thought it was doing them good and helped them to feel loved and secure. We were very concerned, though, as the babies, already small at birth, had hardly gained weight, and in fact, seemed as if they were losing what little they had.

For the next week, Eh Mei and I did little else other than attempt to feed the babies. When one slept, the other wanted to eat, or else had cramps and indigestion from the mixture. We were boiling milk and water, or walking howling infants non-

stop night and day. I felt as if I was on the verge of collapse when I again heard little Precious howling for a feeding.

"Oh Jesus, please help me! Give me the strength!" I prayed, when suddenly I felt the sensation of my own breast milk flowing freely! I looked down at the strange sight.—Richard was now well over two years old and I had stopped nursing him nearly a year before!

I quickly grabbed Precious and held her to my breast. She started to suck and then opened her eyes wide with surprise as she gulped at the steady stream. The milk flowed so quickly she sputtered and coughed, then after recovering, greedily attacked the breast again until she had drunk her fill. Blessing fed with the same results, and from then on we were able to reduce their goat's milk rations gradually as my milk increased. Eventually between the breast-feeding and a porridge mixture we started them on soon afterwards, we were well able to feed them without the help of the nanny goat, who continued her ardent passion for devouring my garden shrubs. We kept her, though, as Richard grew quite fond of goat's milk, so eventually I gave up my attempts at cultivating anything within the goat's vicinity.

How we grew to love those dear precious babies, who were like brands snatched from the burning. Such pure and delicate little things!—We knew their very lives were a miracle. They became my children as much as any flesh and blood child could ever be. Kai Sun helped watch over them with a very special tenderness and vowed that he would protect them with his life should anyone try to harm them.

As we attempted to guard the flame of the little lives the Lord had placed in our hands, meanwhile trouble was brewing within the village. The shamans, who practiced their weird combination

of animism* mixed with odd snatches of Buddhist theology, were growing in anger and jealousy. It seemed the Lord loosed His staying hand, and the flood of the enemy's lies poured forth. The people of Leaping Tiger Village, as well as the surrounding villages (for word of mouth spreads quickly in the mountains), were forced to choose. Now that they had heard the truth, they were faced with believing the truth of the living God or the lies of the demons from hell.

Kai Sun was uncompromising in his messages to the people at the church. "If Baal be God, then follow him! But if God be God, then follow Him! As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!" he rang out. Never had there been such a commotion in the church—the lines were drawn. Some members, the half-hearted who attended only out of curiosity, left and never came back. Other lukewarm followers hoped to hang in the balances and not commit themselves fully to either side until they saw who was more powerful, the demons of the shamans or the God of the Christians. Though initially everyone was afraid to help us in feeding the babies, this time of decision in the end brought those who had truly placed their faith in Jesus closer than ever before.

"We stand beside you, Pastor N'gai," the elders of the church told Kai Sun. "This evil cannot continue. We will fight with you against these evil threatenings and lies!" We were happy to see that Lei Nor stood among them. Despite his wife Tse Ling's weakness, he was standing strong.

It was three weeks after we took the two little girls into our home that the trouble truly erupted. The most important shaman in the area, a beefy and pockmarked man by the name of Dorjay, was renowned for his ability to act as a medium for the demons. Many of his predictions of crops failing and

other disasters had come to pass, and he had also had much success in healing those who worshipped the demons. A "circuit preacher" of sorts for the Devil, Dorjay made his rounds between our village and four others.

After we moved to Leaping Tiger, and the Christian community began to grow, he began spending more time in the other settlements in an attempt to avoid trouble. He maintained his property on the edge of Leaping Tiger, not failing to put in an appearance at the main festivals in order to collect alms. Through narrowed eyes he bided his time, wondering how he could rid the area of the scourge of the Christians that had disrupted his profitable control of the village.

When he perceived his spiritual authority in the region was directly threatened by our adopting the twins, Dorjay moved back to our village in force, bringing with him other men from the surrounding area as well. Talk was rife of the "foreign evil" and the "religion of the leeches" that had infested the countryside. Whole clans began taking sides and things were quickly taking a dangerous turn. The threat of famine or sickness being brought upon the entire village by evil spirits was a frightening possibility, the shaman had warned, and people were nervously waiting to see what would happen next.

Like tinder waiting to be lit, it took little to ignite the fears of such a populace into an angry raging flame. Word came that a family who lived in the ravine outside of Leaping Tiger had suddenly and mysteriously been taken ill. Upon investigation, it was found they suffered from the dreaded typhoid fever! Surely it was a sign of a plague sent upon the entire village in revenge for sparing the cursed twins. No one was safe from such a demonic curse, the shaman told them. Many of the panic-stricken villagers demanded efforts be made to appease the

spirits in order to spare the “innocent” from the menacing ravages of the disease.

The line was clearly drawn. The shaman and his cohorts announced to the village that they would gather to invoke the demons against us. They called all who would listen to come hear what the spirits would have to say. The sinister ceremony was to be conducted on Dorjay’s property at the edge of Leaping Tiger Village, where the trail runs perilously close to the edge of the mountain. That was the part of the forest where it was said special herbs grew that were used in rites to conjure forth the powers of darkness. Most people with any sense avoided that haunted place. However, now all of the village was urged to attend the invocation, to hear what the demons would say!



When word of the shaman’s challenge spread throughout Leaping Tiger, there was a division amongst the people. Those that stood by the Lord refused to attend the shaman’s rite, gathering instead at the church to pray together with Kai Sun and myself. Together we held vigil against the demonic forces that we knew would try to attack.

As the people clustered around us in the building, one of our dear Christian brothers turned to us. “Pastor N’gai, Madame N’gai, you know we will stand by you in this. These twins, and any others born after them, must be spared. We have given our hearts to Jesus and we can no longer tolerate this evil. But we also ask you to consider—for your own sakes—whether you should attempt to escape before trouble breaks out. We fear for your lives! Should you possibly hide in the villages further along the trails?”

Kai Sun and I had spent the previous night seeking the Lord for guidance about that very thing.—What would He have us do? Was this a time to flee, or a time to take a stand? We had the children

to consider and we were desperate to know God’s leading. After much time together on our knees, Kai Sun had turned to me. “Lu Yisi, you know that this school and mission are dear to my heart. But I hope you also realize that I would leave it in a moment if the Lord wished me to do so. I count you and Richard and now the twins—our daughters—my greatest riches. I would never sacrifice your safety to attempt to preserve a building. But I have the impression that the Lord would have us stay during this time. However, I would not do this unless you were in total agreement.”

“Kai Sun,” I had answered him, “I also feel that way! It is not because of our home or the school that I am saying this—God knows this world is not our home and we are but pilgrims and strangers here. But I feel that the Lord is driving a wedge between the evil and the good, and that we have been called here for a time such as this. The verse I received was ‘Stand back and see Me fight, saith the Lord.’ I believe He will fight for us now.”

“My brothers and sisters,” Kai Sun now told the group that had gathered around us. “The Lord has told us that we should take a stand this day. I have preached openly to all that my house will serve the Lord. God will fight for us in this. Please pray with us that the Lord will turn any evil they intend back upon their own heads. We will stay!”



While the Leaping Tiger Christians gathered together in prayer, another sort of meeting was taking place as well. All those who had rejected Jesus and despised the mission and all it stood for, now turned to the powers of hell the shaman was calling upon. Piercing himself with ceremonial flint*, the blood poured from the wounds on Dorjay’s chest and arms. Raising the dried gourd to his lips, he drank deeply of the herbs and liquor.

Chanting and swaying along with the shaman, the entire crowd was being swept up into the fitful pounding of the drums. Faster and faster they beat, and those in the crowd began whirling and calling upon the demons to enter. Suddenly the crowd gasped in anticipation, as they saw the shaman fall backwards and the demon took possession of his priest.

Dropping to the floor, Dorjay lay silent for a moment, then sat up with stiff jerking motions, as his eyes rolled back. With strange contortions he rolled on the floor foaming at the mouth, as the evil force entered his body. Suddenly the thrashing ceased, the evil presence took over, and the spirit began to speak through the shaman's mouth. The voice was deep and raspy and did not sound at all like the shaman's. It clearly rang out through the crowd.

"Bury the Christians, and you shall all be spared!"

Those who had been hanging in the balances, unsure of which way to turn, were undecided no longer. Instead, all those who had gathered on that eerie hillside, fully a quarter of the population of Leaping Tiger Village, cheered and proceeded to whip themselves into a bloodthirsty frenzy. The time of decision had come, and they had cast in their lot with the shaman and his demons, revealing the stubborn darkness of their own heart. There was no more cloak for their sin.



We had finished praying and one of our Christian sisters raised her voice in a hymn. We all joined in, but to our surprise our voices were drowned out by another sound. We looked up towards the ceiling. Rain! But this was not just rain; it could only be described as a virtual torrent of water being poured down upon us by some mighty hand. No one in the

area could ever recall such a rain as the one that cascaded down from heaven that day, in such force that we feared for the roof of the church.

One of the brothers remarked, "This is like in the days of Noah!" The strangest thing of all was that this was the dry season.—The rains had long passed. And no one could recall there being a cloud in the sky earlier on, when the believers had arrived and gathered outside our humble chapel.

Hopes of anyone leaving were out of the question for the moment, so we settled in and continued to sing with all our hearts. Between the songs and the strange but comforting rain, we felt our tenseness washing away. After half an hour's time we were all feeling such joy, bursting forth with God's Spirit, that it looked more like a celebration was taking place than a desperate prayer meeting. Then as suddenly as the rains had come, they stopped.

Kai Sun felt that we had done what we could and asked God for His help. Now that the rains had ceased, it seemed best that people just go home and trust the Lord. As we walked together to the door we heard shouts coming from down the hill. Opening the door we saw a mud-covered figure waving and running up the hill towards us.

"Pastor N'gai! Pastor N'gai! Come quickly!" the desperate neighbor called. "The mountain has given way!"



Upon rushing to the scene, we could hardly comprehend what had occurred. The trail that led to the village, and the whole surrounding mountain, simply was no longer there. Instead, a gaping raw slice of earth, mud and boulders greeted our eyes. Where once homes on the outskirts of Leaping Tiger had stood, there was now nothing but destruction. We shuddered as we realized that the home of

Dorjay, and all who had gathered here with him that day, had been simply swept away by one thunderous brush of God's hand.

The devastation was unprecedented. Every family in the surrounding hills was affected in one way or another, for nearly every family had relations or friends who were killed in the disaster. A deep fear of the Lord fell upon all who heard of the fate of the shaman and his followers.

The brothers and sisters of Leaping Tiger Church banded together to help those who were most heavily affected by the landslide. There were widows and orphans to tend to, as well as some who had escaped death, but whose homes and lives had been buried under the torrent of mud and rock. Church attendance skyrocketed and many who had been half-hearted called out to the Lord. An unprecedented revival hit the Leaping Tiger area and spread to the surrounding villages with a force and swiftness that could only have been engineered by God. The Lord had raised His mighty hand to rescue His little ones. Never again did a mother in Leaping Tiger Village have to fear for the lives of her babies, when she bore more than one. Now, instead of innocent babies, the lies of the Devil lay forever buried beneath a mountain of mud and rock.

PART 4 UNTO THE END

“Had I a thousand lives, China would claim every one.” — J. Hudson Taylor



THE STRANGER

This mortal life on Earth is but our testing ground. Our earthly experiences can break our hearts in ways over which the angels can only ponder in abstract musings. Yet those breakings and moldings of our lives, which we often kick and struggle against, are the raw materials which God must use to make us more useful vessels for all eternity.

Yet how little thought we give these things while still on Earth, busy as we are with all that occupies our days—and busy I was in our village! I loved Kai Sun, and I loved my children, and I loved the challenge the Lord had set before us. We made many trips to the surrounding communities, bringing the news of Jesus to large numbers who had never heard of Christianity before. In time, fledgling groups of believers were scattered throughout the radius of villages surrounding Leaping Tiger.

Our school was also in progress, and what a handful those young rascals were at times! I was often glad for the chance to escape the bedlam of the classroom as we made our evangelistic trips to the surrounding area, though I was always equally happy to return after the break. Our first young students later became some of the strongest believers, as they had been raised from their earliest years on the principles of the Bible.

They, in turn, would often travel with Kai Sun or myself on our trips. There, working beside us, they learned to teach and preach to others, as we had to them. Still, we knew the need for trained evangelistic teams was great, and longed for the day we might properly prepare others to themselves carry God's Word to the mountains and beyond.

Young Richard grew swiftly and Eh Mei was my ever-present help and friend, who mothered the children as equally as I. Four years after Precious and Blessing were added to our family, another dear daughter arrived, Bright Hope. But I am getting ahead of myself in telling this story, for it was the year before Bright Hope arrived that the foreigners came.

They were Englishmen, but they were as foreign to me as they were to any of the Chinese villagers. The first to arrive was a seedy, unkempt trader, whose name was never mentioned. His character, if it were possible, was as besmirched as his once white shirt, which now hung in greasy wrinkles about his sweaty, rotund body. As he descended from his mule that hot summer morning, I instinctively disliked him.

Looking me up and down, he let out a low sound that was half snort and half whistle. "Holy tooth!" he irreverently interjected. "So the talk is true after all, that a white woman be livin' up here all native-like!"

I had not spoken English in quite some time, but managed to answer, "Good morning, sir. I am Madame N'gai, the pastor's wife."

He chuckled in an odd and annoying sort of way. "Oh, I see, I see. Then I don't imagine it's you I'd be comin' to see. Just where might the headman be found in this fine and grand city?" he asked sarcastically, as he rubbed his stubbled chin with his beefy hand.

I arranged for one of the boys to show the stranger, who had never bothered to properly introduce himself, to the home of the village headman. I then went in to where Kai Sun sat, busily preparing for the evening's Bible study. After informing him of the man's presence I told him, "I hope I'm wrong, but I sense the fellow is nothing but trouble!"

It didn't take us long to find out that I was right.— Within an hour the headman had summoned me to his home. Kai Sun was not about to let me go alone, so we walked together down the trail. As we approached his abode, we saw the foreign trader sitting in the front compound in the seat of honor, with the headman and several of his elders gathered about him. At that moment one of the elders arose and greeted Kai Sun most courteously, but drew him aside to "discuss an urgent matter." I, however, was ushered quickly into the group. When the stranger saw me, his eyes widened for a moment before he quickly turned away.

A young girl was serving tea while the corpulent Englishman eyed her with an open and disgusting regard, which tended to make all present somewhat nervous. I bowed to the headman and knelt down as tea was poured for us, a ceremonial ritual that is considered a vital element of good manners in the hills. While I greeted the headman with the customary courtesies, the stranger took a swig of his tea and spat out an errant tealeaf on the ground. Turning towards me, he muttered in English—which none of the elders there could understand, "Bloody devil's brew it is! You'd think a single bloomin' Chink* could learn to make a decent cup of tea, but I ain't found it yet in all o' Chiner!"

His conduct was so despicable that even those simple mountain folk were apparently dumbfounded. Obviously things were not going well between the

headman and the foreigner. The newcomer then leaned over my way, snickered, and stole a sideways glance at the teenaged girl who attended us. "The mountain air makes these lasses hot and ready.— Good bed-warmers they make, I wot!"

Shocked, I stammered, "I ... I beg your pardon!"

The stranger ignored my embarrassment and turned to the headman to continue the conversation my entrance had interrupted. I was most surprised, however, to hear this coarse intruder converse in near fluent—however crude—plain's dialect.

"So now what's your answer? I'm offering this village the opportunity to make good business—good money, and lots of it! Lots of trade!" The stranger looked about him at the purposefully blank faces of the elders, who busied themselves with their teacups. "It seems to me these people here don't fully understand my generous offer to make a bit of money for themselves. Or so I assume, or they wouldn't have called for you," he gestured in my direction, "to interpret for them!"

An uncomfortable silence settled on the group and I perceived I was expected to say something.

"Sir," I addressed the headman in the local dialect which the Englishman apparently did not understand. "I am not quite sure what business brings this stranger to Leaping Tiger Village. But I do know," I nodded respectfully at the headman, "that you are able to speak and understand the dialect of the plains as well, or perhaps even better, than I myself can. May I ask why it is that you are in need of my assistance to translate?"

"It is difficult ..." the headman explained as vaguely as he could muster. "There are many considerations. The foreigner wishes us to trade in opium. Or rather he promises to supply us with opium if we supply him with women. The sailors and soldiers always want many women, and he says

the mountain women give them the least trouble. He offers a lucrative trade if we will supply him with enough women for the parlors in the big cities."

I was well aware of the type of life the girls in the "parlors," or opium dens, in the cities lived. Most places were grimy hovels where young girls were kept as virtual sex slaves for the abusing pleasure of foreign sailors and wealthy Chinese alike.

"You see, since we here are Christians, we have no wish to engage in such business." The headman looked at me for my reaction, hoping that I would like that reply. Knowing the headman as I did, I did not suspect his devotion to God was what stopped him from doing business with this vermin. Our village leader, though a shrewd politician, had wavering loyalties in all matters except those concerned directly with the making of money. To that quest he remained true, and spent most of his time pursuing profits to his utmost. He seemed to like us, though, and looked favorably on what we had done for his village. For that reason we retained amiable ties with him, but as far as his religious sincerity was concerned, I did not deceive myself.

No, there was something more than moral issues at stake here, though I wasn't quite sure what. I nodded approval at the headman's words, but sensed uneasily that I was about to be called upon to do an unpleasant task.

"It would seem best that you tell the Englishman of your feelings at once," I replied warily. "Foreigners handle their affairs that way. They speak quite directly."

"Yes, I can see that such is the case from the words this man speaks! It is most odd, most ..." he searched for a word, "... most uncivilized! It is difficult ..." The headman shook his head. Then his face brightened, as if he appeared to suddenly have hit upon the most brilliant solution to the dilemma.

“Why, of course, you Madame N’gai! You are also a foreigner! No offense intended, of course,” he gestured toward me, “but you see, you can most easily explain our predicament in a way that will arouse no ill feelings with these people. They are after all, somewhat powerful.”

“He hardly looks powerful,” I observed, glancing at his greasy ensemble.

The man eyed us curiously, as we continued what to him was our unintelligible conversation.

“Not necessarily him,” the headman continued, “but the people he represents. For his ties are with men who we dare not trifle with. To refuse them is to invite trouble. Do you see the braided rope bracelet he wears on his arm?”

I glanced at the dirty ornament the stranger wore. It looked like nothing of consequence. “What of it?” I asked.

“Have you ever heard of ‘The Brotherhood of the Dragon?’” the headman questioned in a low tone. I shook my head. “They are a very powerful and secret society of the leeches,” he explained using the contemptuous hill term for the plains’ folk. “They control many of the parlors. If crime is to be found, they are no doubt at the bottom of it. Even the warlords fear them! Many owe them money. Only a man in league with them would be allowed to wear such a thing as the bracelet this one wears! If we refuse him, he is liable to bring trouble on us all! Oh, it is difficult!” he moaned. The headman grew agitated, envisioning the calamities such disreputable fellows could bring upon the profitable and peaceful life he led as the head of Leaping Tiger Village.

“So,” I wryly summed up the situation, “you would prefer that he simply brings trouble upon me, rather than on all of you, is that it?”

“Precisely!” the elder smiled, quite pleased that I had gotten the point so quickly. “After all, it would

not be good to put the entire village in danger, would it? And as a foreigner you will be able to convince him much more easily than any of us. It really is the only solution, isn’t it?” he nodded, convincing himself ever more certainly as he talked.

I said nothing for a moment and then told him, “I will have to have a word with my husband first.”

“Most certainly, Madame N’gai, by all means!” They ushered me out to where Kai Sun stood impatiently waiting, and I then explained the situation to him briefly.

“The headman is terrified of the hoodlum and thinks the fellow’s connections with this so called ‘Brotherhood of the Dragon’ are dangerous. It might all be the headman’s imagination, because he certainly doesn’t *look* all that imposing. But still, I feel we have to do something, or these people might just be intimidated into doing business with him after all!”

Kai Sun looked at me. “So as I understand it, they want you to act as the intermediary, or rather scapegoat, to assure any blame can rest on your shoulders rather than upon the village counsel. Such politics!” Kai Sun shook his head. “You know, I have heard of the Brotherhood of the Dragon ... this may not be a light matter. Let’s pray!”

We lifted up our hearts to the Lord on the spot and desperately asked him for help.

“Jesus, we need to know immediately what to do. Is this our fight? It seems these people don’t have the courage to stand up against this man. Please show us what to do and speak to us now!”

No sooner had we stopped praying than the soft reassuring words of our Lord filtered through our thoughts, and out of Kai Sun’s mouth:

“Fear not, My children, for though the time cometh when the good shepherd must lay down his life for the sheep, your hour is not yet come. This

is but a test. Stand strong and speak My words, for this evil one will not be allowed to triumph over you, try as he may. For no weapon that is formed against you will prosper.”



Armed with these reassuring words from our Lord and Master, we entered the headman's quarters where the Englishman fidgeted restlessly as the elders led him in circles yet again, stalling, and making it appear as if they did not understand all the man was saying to them.

“Takin' yer bloomin' time, ye all are! I need you to talk some sense into this bunch 'ere!” he called out to me as I walked back in.

“You can be assured that we won't be taking any more of your time than is necessary,” I stated firmly, looking the man squarely in the eye. “I am afraid there has been a misunderstanding. The people of Leaping Tiger Village have no desire to do business with you.—This is simply not that type of community. I am sorry that you have troubled yourself in journeying here. If you leave now, which I suggest you do, you can reach shelter by nightfall.”

He narrowed his eyes and glared at me. “So the high and mighty church hen wants to tell me what to do!” he snorted.

Though Kai Sun didn't understand the English we spoke, he saw clearly the tension in the air and took a step closer to me. I returned the glare of the man's snake-like eyes.

“There's nothing more to be said. I suggest you look elsewhere for someone to discuss your business with. Good day!” I stated with a definite note of finality.

The man spat on the ground, scowled at us ominously and then turned towards his mule. After mounting, he turned to fix his ominous gaze upon me again.

“Little slut!” he muttered, then lifted his arm to show me the rope bracelet. “See this?” he asked. The Lord helped me not to flinch at the ferocity in his voice. “They make these bigger,” he hissed, “nice and long—so they fit around a person's neck!” He cackled at his own wit, then kicked at his mule and started off down the trail.



The next day after breakfast as I was clearing the table, Kai Sun lingered over his tea. “You know, Lu Yisi, something just doesn't seem right about that strange Englishman's visit to the headman yesterday.”

“I should say so!” I agreed. “There was very little right about it whatsoever.”

“Well, yes, but I mean besides the fact that he was an obvious scoundrel ... I just don't believe he was all that he appeared to be.”

“More than just a greedy, ill-mannered criminal?” I asked.

“Lu Yisi, think about him. He supposedly came all this way to strike a deal with the elders here. He spoke Chinese so well—too well to be so very ignorant of the proper way to approach the headman of a village, let alone conduct trade. A greedy man would know how to do business, even if it is unsavory business. Had he indeed been interested in making some money here, he would have not acted so offensively. It was as if he was purposely courting trouble rather than trying to make some money out of them.

“Furthermore, he was coming to offer opium in exchange for women.—Women which, by the way, he could have gotten at any village miles and miles down the trail, saving himself the effort of making the long journey all the way to *our* mountain village.

“Now the headman was not interested in his offer of opium; after all, the elder is smart enough

to know that if the people here start smoking opium, money will leave his village—money which he hopes might otherwise find its way into his pocket. Now had the Englishman offered *cash*, perhaps a deal might have been struck before we had even time to become involved. Why didn't he offer money for the women?"

"Well, maybe the Englishman had opium, but no money?" I suggested.

"Lu Yisi, he could sell the opium anywhere and offer the headman straight cash, and still come out ahead in the bargain. I don't believe he was a trader at all. I think that story was just a ruse to excuse a strange foreigner's visit to our village. And as far as his visit to the headman, guess what he talked about most of the time before we showed up?"

I looked at him with raised eyebrows.

"You!" he answered, gesturing towards me.

"Me?" I answered in astonishment. "Why we hardly exchanged more than a few words together before I directed him to the headman's house."

"Maybe so, but after he arrived there, one of the elders told me he asked endless questions about the English woman—you—who she was, how long she had lived here, did she have contact with her family in England, every question imaginable. It was only at the end of all this that the man even mentioned his rather ludicrous proposal of business. The headman only thought of involving you at all since the vagabond talked of you so incessantly. I think it rather took the scoundrel by surprise when they invited you into their parley*."

"But what do you think it all means?" I asked.

"I may be wrong, but I think that unsavory character was simply ... a spy."

"A spy! But whatever is there to spy on in Leaping Tiger Village?"

Kai Sun leveled his gaze at me. "You," he answered.

"But why would someone want to spy on me?" I laughed.

"I don't exactly know, Lu Yisi. But I love you and I want you to know I would never allow any harm to come to you, God helping me."

It sobered me to see Kai Sun so serious. Putting my arms around him, I prayed for the Lord to keep and protect us all.

THE TIME OF HARVEST

Over the next few months we were relieved to find that nothing of consequence developed from the odd stranger's visit. Hoping that we had seen the last of him, our uneasiness eventually subsided and we went about our business as usual.

It was nearing harvest time and everyone was busy in the fields. This was the busiest time of the year in the hills, for the difference between a good and bad harvest could make or break a family during the harsh winters. Every man, woman and child was needed to gather and preserve crops. Kai Sun would still make his rounds as a circuit preacher to the other villages during this season. If a family was having a difficult time and the harvest looked bleak, they often needed prayer and help. More than once I had seen Kai Sun jump in to assist in reaping a field for a frantic family, whose sick loved ones were unable to gather crops threatened by an early frost.

As for our own livelihood, we had our fields, livestock, and hired help content to be paid with a percentage of the increase, to tend them. Usually families contributed towards their children's schooling by supplying us with homespun cloth, embroidery work, quilts and blankets. Wood carvings were another commodity used to barter

tuition and our home was filled with intricately carved screens, window sills and banisters, as well as assorted furniture. Eventually we were able to sell a surplus of these items to help towards purchases of books. As for the church offerings, the majority of such were given in food which, if non-perishable, we usually saved to distribute to needy families in the community in time of trouble, as our own needs were already largely met.

I always loved the autumn, as the trees turned to blazing crimson and yellow, and the cool winds began to sweep down from the distant snow peaks. Nature brought a sense of excitement into the air which spurred on the hustle and bustle of the community as they worked the fields. Even the children sensed the thrill of the changing seasons, and Richard would plead to explore in the woods while Precious and Blessing begged to tag along. Everyone looked forward to the soon-coming harvest festival, when the work was done, and which we celebrated in grand style at the church. People would come from miles around to join in the fun and to thank the Lord for His supply.

As a new week dawned, Kai Sun felt pressed to make a visit to one of the families in Deep Well, a village about a day's ride down the trail to the south. The father of the family, who was a believer and often put Kai Sun or myself up during our visits to his village, had been slowly recovering from a serious bout of lung sickness. I knew Kai Sun was concerned about the family's crops, being that the head of the household was so ill and unable to work. He planned his visit to allow enough time to help out in whatever way he might be needed, and still be able to return in time to conduct the coming Sunday morning service.

School was out as the children were all needed at home during harvest time, so that left me with

handling the Wednesday evening prayer meeting, as well as supervising our hired help and the children with Eh Mei. After we prayed together, Kai Sun solemnly instructed each of the children to obey their mother and be good until his return. Then, when no one was looking, he cuddled each of them affectionately as they wrestled to see who would be the one to sit on his lap. Though men in the hill region were not naturally demonstrative in their affection, it was hard for Kai Sun to resist the children.

He had learned how to understand my own need for love to be expressed in hugs and endearments, even though this was something foreign for a man in his culture to give. I had to laugh as now he seemed to long for it just as much as I, though I doubted I could ever get him to admit it.

The days passed quickly and Saturday evening I prepared for Kai Sun's expected return, setting his place at the table. The hours slowly passed, the children ate and were off to bed—yet still no sign of my husband. As I prepared for bed I brushed away any sense of foreboding, and told myself perhaps he had been delayed and left Deep Well too late to make it home by sunset. Probably he was spending the night on the trail and he would make it back in time for the service next morning. I prayed fervently that God would protect and keep him, then settled down for the night, though it took me longer than usual to fall asleep.

The crow of the roosters that greeted me the next morning caused me to sit up suddenly and look about—Kai Sun was still not here! I knew if he didn't show up soon, it meant leading the Sunday service myself.

I began to grow worried for his safety. Why would he have sent no word about any possible delay? Reaching for my Bible, I prepared a hasty sermon to

share with the congregation about God's care and protection.—I needed to hear it as much as anyone else! But before I set off to lead the service, I begged Tse Ling, who was clattering pots in the kitchen, to find her husband. I needed him to ride a day's journey down the trail and inquire about Kai Sun's delay.

Due to the harvests, no one had been able to accompany Kai Sun on his trip this time. I began to regret that we had not been more cautious in sending him out alone. Thoughts of the seedy stranger filtered back into my mind. I shivered and prayed again for my husband's safety.

That night there was still no word of Kai Sun. I waited anxiously the whole of the next day until nearly sunset, when a lone rider approached our door. I shot from my chair to meet him as Lei Nor approached our steps and looked questioningly into his weary eyes.

"Madame N'gai, I am very sorry. Your husband never reached Deep Well. No one has heard any word from him, or even of him."

My head whirled for a moment, and then Eh Mei was there. Tears rolled down my cheeks and we prayed together, begging the Lord to protect Kai Sun. I kept hearing the phrase in my mind, "Fear not little flock, fear not little flock ..."

By the time we finished praying, a group of neighbors had gathered and were discussing the situation outside our door. The men had decided to form a search party, and at daybreak set out down the trail. Perhaps he had fallen from a cliff side and been injured. My heart ached, for I knew his chances of survival for a week with little water or food were minimal. I thanked our friends profusely for their help, but knew his safety rested in God's hands.

The men set out the next morning and were out of the village as soon as the first gray light of

dawn crept over the hills. They combed the trail, taking two days to reach Deep Well, which was normally but a day's journey. Returning they took another three days, searching the steep and precipitous sides of the trail as well. Meanwhile we had been praying day and night for his safety. It appeared that Kai Sun had simply vanished from the face of the earth.

When the men returned with no news, a deep sadness settled on the village. However much we hoped and prayed, for the moment there was nothing more that could be done. Our friends had already taken most of the week out of their vital harvest time to search for Kai Sun; to ask more of them was unthinkable, as it could mean hunger for their families during the coming winter.

Then the thought struck me—what better time to plan trouble than during the peak of the harvest, when everyone was desperately needed at home. Was this accidental, or had it been carefully calculated? But why? And by whom?

I fell to my knees. "Oh Jesus, I don't know what to think! Please show me what to do! Is Kai Sun dead? Did someone intentionally harm him? Please prepare my heart if so, and tell me what You would have me do now!"

How can anyone not value the guidance of the Lord in our times of deepest struggle? His calming words can do for us what no human comforter can do. The privilege of learning to listen to His voice is a wealth immeasurable!

"Do not fear, but wait and trust. All will be revealed in My time and you shall know the power of My might! For though many plot against My children, it is I who hold My own and shield them with My hand. Trust and wait upon Me, for I have a plan and I will work in the hearts of those who would know Me."

Though I did not understand all that the Lord's message meant, still I was comforted. I braced myself for the difficult task of waiting and trusting.

THE LETTER

It wasn't long before we awoke one morning to feel a cold wind sweeping down from the slopes of the high mountains. As the temperatures dropped, the villagers rushed to bring in the rest of the crops, knowing that they worked against time, for the killing frosts could come any day now. Certain plants not ready for harvest had to be covered with hay and tended carefully. Other crops had to be guarded against rain, hail and the dreaded field rot.

Storing the grain was another challenge.— Besides mold and dampness spoiling the food, rats and other animals might steal a third or more of a harvest unless there was constant vigilance. Early vegetables had to be dried before the rains came in order for a family to have a balanced diet during the lean winter months. The excitement of Kai Sun's disappearance and the ensuing search had already disrupted life to such a point that work was now dangerously behind schedule. Every able-bodied man, woman and child labored from sunrise to sunset.

It was then that a stranger climbed the trail leading to Leaping Tiger. A young tribesman from the tiny village down river arrived, bearing news of my husband!

A great crowd of people gathered outside my door, surrounding the messenger while calling and beckoning for me to quickly come. The elated smiles and happy cheers of the people caused my hopes to rise! Was Kai Sun all right? The messenger, a young and simple lad in the blue and red costume of his clan, was being clapped on the back and hailed as a hero.

"He brings news of Pastor N'gai! Your husband is alive! Praise be to God!"

Everyone was talking at once and I implored them to please quiet down. When the racket subsided enough for me to hear what the man had to say, I quickly discovered the youth himself knew very little. He had been asked to relay a message, passed on by another man from Antelope Pool village, a somewhat poor and isolated hamlet a good two days' ride over the high trails west of Leaping Tiger. Kai Sun was there, he said, recovering from typhoid fever, and had sent me a letter. Eagerly I grabbed at the parchment the man held out to me and read:

My dearest Lu Yisi,

I am ever so sorry to have caused you any worry or concern, as I know you must have suffered from my prolonged absence. I am recovering, slowly, from quite a serious sickness which I believe is typhoid fever, judging from the symptoms. Had I not been found by these very kind people who brought me to Antelope Pool and cared for me when I was near to death, I imagine I would not be with you today. Even now, however, my recovery is slow, though I am feeling better with every passing day.

I long to see you, and ask you to please leave at sunrise to join me at this village. Your care will surely help in my healing. I also ask this, that you bring our son Richard with you, for I do wish to set eyes upon him again. What a pity if these were to be my last hours and I could not see my son once again.

Please bring with you bedding, as our quarters here are quite small. The people caring for me do not have much, but they have been kind enough to share it with me. I suggest you

come alone so we do not overburden our hosts who have little food even for themselves. I would also not want to deter anyone from the important work of reaping the harvest when all are so needed there.

I suggest you pass your first night on the trail at the village of Seven Canyons, before continuing on to Antelope Pool. Forgive this short letter as I am still too weak to write more. I long to see you shortly.

Kai Sun

I stared at the letter, then looked up at the messenger. Questioning him briefly, I was soon convinced he knew nothing more than what he had already told us. Now that his job was done he wanted nothing more than to eat and be on his way. I asked Tse Ling to find him some food and went back into the house with Eh Mei.

Sitting down we got out the letter again and read through it together. After we were done I prayed for the Lord to give us wisdom.

“Eh Mei,” I asked, “do you find anything strange about this letter?”

She was silent for a moment. “Several things,” she answered. “Lu Yisi, I would not wish to worry you. I am very happy to have news that Kai Sun is well ... and the letter does appear to be written in his hand.”

“Yes,” I agreed. “It is no doubt Kai Sun’s handwriting.” The well-formed neat characters printed on the paper were unmistakably his. “But Eh Mei, what is the most striking thing about this letter, the thing that is so very out of character for Kai Sun? Do you see it?” I asked her.

She looked at the page again for a moment.

“Lu Yisi—he did not mention a single word about the Lord!”

I nodded. Anyone who knew Kai Sun would venture that was a virtual impossibility. The man was a walking, breathing testimony of praise. To think that he had written me from the point of near death without once even *mentioning* the name of Jesus was absurd.

“He also fails to mention what he was doing in a village west of here when he left headed south. Even if he was found on the trail by someone from Antelope Pool, surely word would have spread about it.—You know how quickly news travels here,” I pointed out.

“And look at this!” Eh Mei added. “He asks you to bring Richard. He did not even speak of Precious or Blessing, who he adores just as much, I dare say!”

“Yes, he asks that I bring Richard—exposing him to a communicable and possibly even fatal disease. Is that something Kai Sun would do? No, I think not. Kai Sun obviously wrote this, but I can only imagine he was forced to do so.”

“By who?” Eh Mei looked at me, eyes wide.

“I don’t know. But whoever it is, I can only conclude they are using Kai Sun to get to my son and I, hoping we will be so overjoyed that he is alive that I will not question the obvious.”

“Lu Yisi, you’re saying he was *kidnapped*?”

“I know it sounds improbable. And I can see no reason at all for it. But ever since the Englishman’s visit here, I have had a sad feeling that all has not been well.”

Eh Mei pondered all this for a moment, then said, “You say that you think Kai Sun must have been *forced* to write this. It is hard for me to believe that this letter could be written by him for the reasons we discussed, yet I’m sure the handwriting is his own. But I also cannot believe anyone could force him to do something that would bring harm to you or Richard—he would give his life sooner! Of that I am certain.”

"You're right," I nodded. It was the one factor that didn't quite fit.

"But wait!" I felt an idea dawning. "What if, in asking me to come, he was doing so to prevent a *greater* harm? If someone wished to kidnap me directly from here, I can only imagine a fight would occur. We have too many friends, and you know how fiercely protective the villagers are against an outside attack. Why, even villagers that are sworn enemies would leave their feuding and rally together in a moment if they were called on to fight an outside enemy. And they are certainly no cowards!

"So if someone were to attempt to take me away from this village forcibly, I can only imagine there would be bloodshed. What if Kai Sun wanted to prevent that? What if he wanted to spare Blessing and Precious and you—and all our friends? What if he knew I would be taken either way, one with violence and one without—would he not then cooperate?"

"Lu Yisi, those are a lot of 'what ifs!' But aside from all that, why would anyone want to take you anywhere?"

Again, I could only admit that I hadn't a clue.



By morning, I knew what I had to do. After praying most of the night, the Lord had confirmed to me clearly that I was to go. If the letter was true, then it was Kai Sun's wish to see me. If the letter was false, which I now suspected it probably was, then I still needed to go to prevent a greater calamity from occurring. At first I considered leaving Richard behind, but praying about it further, I realized that it might simply bring the worst on us if whoever was behind this was intent on having Richard as well.

I gathered my bedding, some clothes and food along with some money and medicine. As I was

packing the last of my things, Eh Mei entered the room.

"Lu Yisi, I can see what you have decided. I have also been praying. The Lord has shown me to go also."

I placed my hand on her shoulder. "I appreciate that, my dear friend, but I don't think it would be wise. The letter specifically said for me to go alone with Richard. It could mean trouble otherwise."

"Ah, but you will go alone. I did not say I would go *with* you. I simply said I would also go. I will be following afar off—from the woods along the trail."

"Eh Mei, no. I couldn't allow that! Besides, it might not work."

She smiled. "I don't think you are aware of all of my talents! I spent my childhood in the forests helping my family gather medicinal herbs. I don't mean to brag, but I can move as silently as a cat even in the densest brush. I used to track birds; my father was a hunter and often took me with him."

It was true that Eh Mei was at home in the woodlands—even the villagers from Leaping Tiger marveled at it. But still I hesitated.

"Look, I have this!" She wrapped herself in a long dark brown cloak the color of tree bark. "No one will notice me in this. Besides, if the letter was true then you will need me to help nurse Kai Sun and watch Richard. If the letter is false, then you will need someone on the outside to help you. And I've already arranged for Tse Ling to watch Precious and Blessing!"

I couldn't help but laugh. "You really have thought out your argument, haven't you? Is there anything more to further convince me?"

"Yes," she added. "Jesus told me to do this."

The three of us left at once.

A DISTANT HAUNTING

The trail was quiet and the only sound was the occasional call of a morning bird piercing the solitude. I rode on our sure-footed mule with Richard in front of me, hanging on to the saddle horn. A second mule followed behind, tied by a lead to my saddle; by faith I would bring Kai Sun back with me on the animal. I only knew that Eh Mei followed me because she had told me she would, for she had utterly disappeared into the darkness of the forest. I was often amazed at her abilities, and this was now one more at which to marvel. She had stood by us so resolutely, and at that moment I was more thankful than ever for her loyalty and friendship.

Richard was ever so excited to be making this journey. He channeled his boyish energy into pointing out every bush, tree and bird along the trail. My young son, not yet six, had no sense of the danger surrounding our mission. I must admit, however, that I was afraid enough for both of us. Despite my nervousness, I was able to cling to the promises the Lord had given concerning our quest. Knowing I was following my Savior's leading helped me to override my inner turmoil, and I used the hours as the mule plodded along the trail to pray for everything I could possibly think of. When I ran out of things to pray for, I decided to sing, and Richard raised his little voice together with me in comforting hymns of trust and praise.

The letter had told us to spend the night in the village of Seven Canyons. I suspected that I would never reach Antelope Pool, for if anyone would wish to intercept me, the path to Seven Canyons was ideal. The village was located on the edge of a vast network of limestone caverns, caves and canyons—there were many more than seven, but I suppose the seven biggest were the source of the village's name.

The trail leading into the village passed for several miles through some rather desolate landscape, dotted with hidden caves and twisting trails that could lead to anywhere. I had told Eh Mei of my suspicions before we left, having often heard of the terrain from Kai Sun's occasional treks along this precipitous route. But Eh Mei assured me she could track me through any countryside. I appreciated her reassurance, but wondered if she knew where to draw the line between confidence and desperate hope.

The trail changed and started leading steeply upwards. Rocks strewn across the path made the going slow and I appreciated my sure-footed mule more than ever. She was quite accustomed to our forays along some of the roughest trails in the area as we made the rounds to the different villages, so calmly plodded ahead. I clung tightly to Richard in the places where the trail narrowed and the sides of the cliff plunged many hundreds of feet below us. I began to seriously doubt that Eh Mei could keep up with such a climb on foot—at best I hoped she could watch for us at a distance, as the trail we followed had remained quite in the open so far.

Then the path we followed turned sharply to the left. I saw that we were to pass under a small natural stone arch which formed along the cliff wall. Suddenly a still small voice inside me told me that now was the time! I hesitated a moment, as casually as I could manage, flung a hand skyward, hoping that Eh Mei could somehow interpret that gesture and understand that I sensed our adventure was about to begin.

Passing under the arch and rounding the bend, I saw the boulder-strewn trail had widened. As I began to urge the mule forward, suddenly six mounted men left their positions behind the rocks and stepped onto the path, blocking our way. Another man dropped from a position on the archway behind me, preventing our retreat. At that moment a

supernatural calm engulfed me which I knew could only be the spirit of the Lord, for I honestly felt no fear despite the fact that I noticed each of the men was armed. Then I was taken by surprise, for as I looked more closely at the faces under the hats of the men who surrounded me, I could see plainly that they were ... foreigners.

"Top of the mornin' to ya!" snickered one of them, who I recognized as the Englishman who had been to our village some months before.

"I have come to find my husband!" I answered them, looking sternly into their faces.

"usband, is it now? Did you 'ear that, Danny boy?" He turned to the man beside him. "Been friggin' the bloody Chinks so long now she thinks she's one of 'em!" They all laughed uproariously.

A tall, rough-looking fellow rode up to me and grabbed the reins of the mule from my hand. "Allow me, m'lady!" He started to pull the animal after him up the trail.

"Where are you taking me?" I demanded.

"T' see the Colonel, where else?" he answered without pause.

After that I could not get a single word from any of them as to who they were or where they were headed. Richard started to cry, realizing that these men were not friendly. "Don't worry, Darling!" I reassured him. "Jesus is with us!"

They pulled my mule up off the path and we climbed the rugged hillside. At places the animal balked, but a flick of the whip in the hand of the man, along with a string of curses, soon got the mule moving again. After a climb of about one hundred feet I realized we were entering a parallel trail to the one I had been following below. I had not even realized it was there as it was well hidden. The men had probably been following me for miles from this hidden vantage point. The trail then

veered sharply away from the direction of Seven Canyon village. We followed the path until it dwindled down to nothing, yet the men continued to follow the indistinguishable trail effortlessly through the twisting maze of boulders, trees and underbrush.

I wondered who in the world these men could be. They talked of 'the Colonel.' Could they be soldiers? They hardly seemed like it—thugs and criminals more likely! Members of the 'Brotherhood of the Dragon'? But these were Englishmen—how could such a group of foreigners all be members of a Secret Chinese Society? Questions spun in my head as we rode on.

After several hours we came to an area filled with caves that lined the walls of the mountain, like tombs hollowed by nature's own hand. The men jumped down off their mules and indicated that I was to do the same. I dismounted and lifted Richard down also. He clung to my skirt and peeked out at the men from its folds.

"Up 'ere this way now, follow me!" one of the men grabbed my arm and shoved me in the direction of one of the nearest caves.

"What are you doing? Unhand me at once!" I struggled against him and his tightening grip. Richard, not understanding the English but becoming very alarmed at my cries, began shrieking in Chinese. "You're a bad man! Let my Mama go! Go away!" Then he prayed loudly, nearly shouting, "Jesus please make them leave my Mama alone!"

"That will be enough!" a sharp commanding voice interrupted the scuffle. A tall, aloof figure stood at the entrance to the cave, surveying the scene before him. The man's rugged face was etched with deep lines. He stood erect and dignified, obviously a man used to giving orders and having them obeyed without question.

The man dragging me called out, "But I was only bringin' 'er to see you, Colonel! Didn't mean no 'arm by it!"

"I believe she can walk on her own, thank you, Pritchard." He approached us, looked me up and down without expression, then gave a little nod acknowledging my presence. "Louisa Bannard, I am Colonel Peadmont. You are my guest here."

"Is that what you call it?" I raised an eyebrow. "Colonel Peadmont, I have come to find my husband. Is he here?"

"See for yourself," he answered with a certain air of diffidence*, and turned towards one of the caves at the farther end of the clearing. Hesitating only a moment, I decided to follow him, holding tightly to Richard's hand. Peering into the darkness I saw a guard sitting on a rock whittling away at a piece of wood. Beside him, chained to a stout log, sat Kai Sun!

"Darling!" I called.

"Papa!" Richard cried. Before I could stop him, Richard ran to his father, who embraced him in his arms.

"Oh my dearest, I've found you! Are you all right? Are you hurt?" I held him in my arms.

"No, I am fine. I am quite alright!" Kai Sun answered calmly, stroking my hair. "The Lord has been watching over me and I have been praying for you."

I turned to the Colonel, having to consciously switch languages. "What is the meaning of this? Let him go immediately!"

He cocked an eyebrow at me, amused that I would presume to order him about. Realizing how ridiculous my demands must have sounded, I looked up at him helplessly. Choosing to ignore my impertinence, he stated, "The gentleman will be fine. He has been well fed and well treated, and aside from the unfortunate

presence of the chain, has been sharing the same accommodations as the rest of us, as you'll see. We have no desire to make either of you unnecessarily uncomfortable and I regret any inconvenience. However, I suggest your son temporarily remain with his father while you and I get down to business."

Seeing as I had few other options, I quickly explained the situation to Kai Sun and left Richard in his care, while I followed the Colonel out of the cave. He led me into another similar hollowing in the mountainside which formed a spacious room with a high ceiling, which I took to be the Colonel's "headquarters," if one could call it that. A bedroll, lantern and leather satchel occupied one side of the cave. An oblong stone serving as a table and several logs drawn up to a small fire made a type of primitive sitting room. The aroma of stew filled the air and I realized for the first time that I was hungry. I thought of Richard, poor little thing, who must have been famished.

"Do sit down. Your son and his father will be dining now also. You will forgive our rather spartan menu, but we do what we can under the circumstances."

I stared at him and found it hard to comprehend that he could be so unconcerned as to my distress, and offer such a casual dinner invitation. I decided to speak. "Sir, if it is a ransom you are after, I can only tell you that we are not rich. We live a simple life as missionaries and ..."

The Colonel nearly dropped his spoon. "Good God, woman! Do you take me for a highwayman? Ransom indeed!" he laughed as if he found that most amusing.

"Then why are we here?" I asked hesitantly.

Offering me a bowl of the steaming vegetable and meat mixture, he replied, "I suggest we dine first and discuss our business afterwards. Bon appetit!"

I resigned myself to the fact that it was most probably best to follow along, and picked up the spoon beside my bowl. It had been years since I had handled European cutlery and it felt awkward in my fingers. The stew tasted good and the lull in the conversation gave me time to think and pray.

This Colonel was a paradox* if I had ever seen one. He was a commanding figure, yet seemed to be somewhat well-mannered, aside from his irksome habit of kidnapping innocent women and children. His men seemed a motley collection of uneducated thugs, and they seemed to hold him in rather high regard, which did not make me rest any easier. The man was holding me hostage while at the same time inviting me for dinner. He had plotted elaborately to kidnap my husband and myself, then resented discussion of a ransom. I prayed for the Lord to give me wisdom in handling this mind-boggling predicament.

At length Colonel Peadmont pulled a long pipe from his pocket and struck a match on the stone table. He looked at me across the table.

"There are certain individuals, in rather high positions of office back in England, who consider your presence in China somewhat of an embarrassment," he drolly* remarked as he puffed at his tobacco.

"Which individuals?" I questioned. "And why would my work be an embarrassment? Is it the plains' mission?" I could think of no one else who could have been resentful of our stay in Leaping Tiger.

This time the Colonel could not contain his amusement. "I'm afraid not my dear." He laughed heartily. "No, I wasn't exactly dispatched by your former mission."

"Well, I would certainly hope not," I answered defensively. "But of whom do you speak?"

The man regained his aloof persona* and went on in his narrative. "Let us say that, politics being what they are these days, one must be very cautious to avoid even a hint of scandal."

"And just what politician has anything to fear from me?" I asked.

"Does the name Sir Reginald Hampton ring a bell?" he asked, folding his arms and leaning back against the wall of the cave.

"Reginald Hampton ... well, yes. I've heard of him. His family is quite well off and his father had considerable influence in the House of Lords some years ago if I remember correctly. But ..."

"Sir Reginald holds an advisory position at present and rather fancies himself a rising star in the political firmament. I think he has his sights on nothing less than achieving the rank of Prime Minister at some time or another, though breeding and manners would forbid him to speak of his ambitions for the time being. Yes, Sir Reginald is a most ambitious man. And he isn't about to let someone such as yourself—someone 'living in sin' with a Chinese hill tribesman in the backwoods of China, a renegade of the church, and a religious fanatic at that, with a little half-breed son to her credit, stand in the way of his success."

The Colonel sat back and waited to see the effect these last words would have on me. I was not about to let the insults draw me into an argument. I had the impression that he very much enjoyed playing the devil's advocate*.

Looking evenly at him I asked, "Whoever would think that I could stand in the way of a man like Sir Reginald Hampton?"

"Evidently Lady Hampton does," he answered in a blasé* sort of manner, as he tapped his pipe against the log.

"I don't even know Lady Hampton!" I responded.

"Oh, I'm afraid you do, my dear." The Colonel fixed his eyes on me with a bemused expression on his face. "She is, after all, your sister."

Elizabeth! My sister Elizabeth, whom I had not seen since I left England so many years before ... was it possible she should regard me as an enemy now? How could such a thing be true? How could a member of my own family possibly be involved in such a bizarre plot? My thoughts whirled as I tried to comprehend what was happening.

"You have been away for quite some time, so I take it you haven't heard of your sister's marriage. It was quite a social event, you know. After your mother passed away, Elizabeth felt a bit freer in voicing her opinions, I would think. She rather thought you all a band of daft* religious maniacs!"

Willful Elizabeth! Until the day of my departure from England she maintained that my coming to China was a mistake—throwing my life away, she had said. I don't think she ever stopped blaming me for Charles' death. Neither did she seem to understand the miracle which had led to my mother's acceptance of my call to be a missionary. Though she respected my mother too much to oppose her openly, I imagined that since our mother was gone, and she was married to a wealthy and powerful man, she had little reason to check the bitterness that had continued to fester in her heart.

"But wait!" I waved at him to stop, as it all seemed to be unfolding too quickly for me to grasp. "Look at me! I am living in Leaping Tiger Village, virtually on the other side of the world. I have exchanged not a word with Elizabeth in years. She has not even answered a single one of my letters! I have no interest in her affairs. How am I in any way perceived even remotely as a threat to her husband or herself?"

"Do you remember your cousin Walter?" the Colonel inquired in his irritatingly nonchalant way. I held my aching head in my hands—this whole affair was becoming too much like a satirical play! "Vaguely...yes!" I was approaching the point of exasperation with this man. "He was ..." I searched to remember his place in the family tree.

"... a distant relative on your father's side," the Colonel finished the sentence for me.

Ah yes, Walter, now I remembered. He was an elderly, ill tempered and rarely spoken of relation, whom I had not seen since I was a child.

"He passed away last year, poor fellow. Quite alone, with no other living relatives it seems."

"But what has he to do with any of this?" I cried. I was beginning to feel on the verge of tears wading through this nonsensical conversation. The sudden need of recalling names and faces from a distant and almost forgotten past was not easy for me.

"Oh, I'm afraid it's the old fellow who is the cause of all this fuss!" he chuckled. I was disturbed by the sardonic* amusement Colonel Peadmont appeared to derive from the whole situation. I wondered what lay in the heart of such a man who perceived the world about him as a mere source of ironic entertainment. He smiled ever so slightly as he refilled the tobacco in the pipe's bowl. "So you see, Cousin Walter, who also happened to be the Earl of Northbrook, if you'll recall, being alone in the world as he was, passed his hereditary title on to the nearest living male relative in the family. Which would be ..."

The colonel paused, lifting his eyebrows as if waiting to see if I could guess the answer to a childish riddle.

I spoke woodenly. "... a little half-breed Chinese boy, as you put it. Is that what lies at the bottom of all this?" The grim reality of the situation was beginning to sink in.

“Quite right!” the Colonel seemed pleased that I was so quick to pick up the threads of the bizarre tapestry he was weaving.

“Of course it is plain and obvious, at least to your sister, that that would never do. A most embarrassing situation, as I’m sure you can imagine. So my orders,” he continued calmly, “are to kindly escort you back to England. Unfortunately, as you are mentally unstable and wholly unfit to handle your own affairs, your sister shall take it upon herself to manage them for you. Perhaps she feels a lunatic is easier to explain away than a religious fanatic. Thus, once you are taken care of properly, there will be no more risk of your untoward presence here tarnishing her public image, and her claim to the inheritance will also be undisputed. I imagine your son is destined for a quiet boarding school somewhere in the countryside where his parentage can be overlooked. I doubt if in a few years he will even remember his life here at all. And if you are fortunate enough, the father of your child will not be hanged.”

“How dare you!” I felt anger rising within me.

“How dare I? I have very little problem with dares. Life itself is somewhat of a dare, isn’t it?” The man rose from his chair. “But the hour is late and you must be tired. I’m sure you have a great deal to think about.”

He turned to go. “You’ll be staying here for the night—I’ll be sleeping elsewhere. Your son will continue to stay with his father for the time being.” He reached the entrance of the cave and then, almost as an afterthought, turned back to face me. By the flicker of the firelight, however, I saw something that caught my interest. I saw, for an instant, a ripple of a previously hidden emotion pass over the man’s intrusive features. It was a flicker of pain and conscience, which played on his face

as illusively as a shadow and then was gone. But I strongly sensed the Lord had allowed me to witness it, and with it I felt hope rising within my heart. I could get through to this man!

The Colonel returned his gaze to me once more. “I’m sure you realize that your cooperation in this matter is what will ultimately determine the safety and survival of your family,” he cautioned me. “I was commissioned to this assignment with the orders to find and retrieve you at all costs. It would have been easy enough to do that swiftly, if somewhat brutally, and save myself a good deal of time and trouble. But due to the kindness of my heart, and the rather ... shall we say ‘exceptional’ circumstances of the situation, I felt it more appropriate to counsel with your husband first. So I apprehended him, hoping that he would see the logic of your immediate return, and persuade you to come along willingly, rather than forcing us to complete our assignment in a less amiable* manner. Your husband agreed, after considering the alternatives, and consented to write the letter asking you to join him.”

SECRETS

“Who are you?” I asked him. “Are you a soldier?” “Special forces,” was his only reply.

I understood. “You are a mercenary. My sister hired you to bring me back to England. It would have taken Sir Reginald’s wealth and influence to find someone like you to work for him, wouldn’t it?”

He was silent for a moment. “It is men of wealth and power who rule this world, my dear. There are many wars being fought on this Earth today, even at this very moment. The outcome of each of these battles, whether the struggles be public or private, is what shapes the course of our history. It has been said that ‘All the world’s a stage,’ but few people

realize the extent of the drama played behind the scenes. That is the troublesome reality of the world I know.”

“However cynical you may be, Colonel Peadmont, may I ask what right my sister has to ruin my life and the life of my son? And what of my husband? What right do you have to take part in this?”

His features darkened. “There is a lot of ugliness in this very wicked world, my dear Miss Bannard. Whether you or I like it does not matter and will not change a thing. So before you judge me, lest you remain blissfully ignorant, I shall inform you of some further ugly and unfortunate facts. But better yet, since you prefer to live in a dream world, let me tell you a story!

“Once upon a time there was a certain rebel tribesman. That tribesman made the impertinent blunder of being born a Chinaman. It was really rather silly of him, seeing that he took a fancy to a certain idealistic young British lady who was quite bent on converting the heathen.

“To make our rather long story shorter, that certain Chinaman has been charged with the kidnapping and rape of a British subject. Special forces were requested to rescue this damsel in distress, who was so thoroughly traumatized by the event that it will become necessary to bring her to England to recover. The unfortunate product of this supposed rape is a bastard son, who is to be charitably and discretely provided for by an unnamed aunt. That same aunt has made it very clear that the retrieval of her sister is to be swift and sure. If the tribesman and father of the child would be shot during the rescue attempt, it would be an unfortunate but trivial incident that would remain, I have been assured, wholly uninvestigated.

“Unfortunately in this story, nobody lives happily ever after! That is the reality of the world I know,

Miss Bannard!” his voice grew angry. “And if it isn’t me who does it, then someone else will instead, and perhaps more quickly to boot!”

He kicked at the log and put his hands on his hips. The pain that I had seen on his face earlier returned, and with it I saw a wistful longing for a surcease from guilt. He spoke in a near-whisper now. “I wish there could be some way to spare your husband in all this. Maybe I’m getting soft.” His voice trailed off as he looked up into the air. Suddenly it was as if my eyes were opened in the spirit. I could see around the Colonel a tremendous battle being waged, the angels of the Lord on one side and the forces of evil on the other.

Silently, I called out to the Lord. “Oh Jesus, help me! I do believe you have placed this man here because there is still some part of his heart that is searching for truth, despite the ugliness that he has seen and all that he has been a part of. Do a miracle, Lord! Show me what to say! Work in his heart, Lord, and protect your children, in Jesus’ name I pray!”



Sitting around the campfire, the guards spoke together in hushed whispers. “It just ain’t like ’im, I tell you! I’ve been with the Colonel now in some o’ the stickiest situations ever a man did see. Why, we was together in that scrap in Brazil last year that woulda’ made any other bloke hang up ’is hat and lay down in the dust—it would ’ave ... but not the Colonel! I’ve never seen ’im flinch or ’estitate yet. Nerves o’ iron ’e got, and lightnin’ quick as well! But there’s somethin’ strange happening this time.”

His partner nodded. “You ... you don’t think he’d get soft for the woman, now do ya? I mean, he’s been in that there cavern with ’er a long enough time, and we ain’t heard no shoutin’ yet.”

“Wait! Did you ’ear somethin’?”

The two highly trained men stood, rifles poised and surveying the forest around them. Stepping away from the light of the campfire, they disappeared into the shadows. Walking ever so stealthily, they circled round the camp, carefully listening for any odd sound while poking into any suspicious foliage. Finally they stopped under a large tree just outside the light of the fire.

"Maybe t'was a fox or somethin'," one said.

"So it seems ..." the other replied uneasily. After carefully checking the perimeter of the camp they waited several more minutes, then returned to the warmth of the fire.

On the way they passed under a branch where Eh Mei sat, not eight inches above their heads. She had twisted her body into a curious position that bore an uncanny resemblance to the branch of a tree, an art she had learned as a child to disguise herself while tracking birds. With her eyes covered (for she had learned that it was always the eyes that betrayed one's presence) the unsuspecting fowl would sometimes even land on top of her while she remained perfectly still. The two men passed beneath her without incident.

She had counted eight men in total, all well-armed. It had taken her many hours to track them through the rough terrain. Now that she knew their location, she calculated she had little time left to seek help. On foot it would take her hours to reach Seven Canyons, the nearest village in this vicinity, which seemed her only hope. But would the people there help her? Kai Sun was not of their clan. There were Christians in the village, as Kai Sun had been faithful to reach Seven Canyons on his evangelistic trips. But they were still very young believers. Would they be willing to risk their lives for their friend?

She had to find out. Having no idea if the group would decide to break camp in the morning, she concluded she must act quickly. Hopefully they could

ride back and return by sun-up. Silently dropping to the ground, she paused a moment to make sure the guards were still oblivious to her presence. Then without so much as a rustle of a leaf, she turned and moved swiftly into the night.



Meanwhile, I took a step towards the Colonel. Touching his arm, I whispered, "There is a force greater than any of us all. It is a force so great and so powerful that no man can fight against it. Our God is greater than any evil this world can boast of."

"You speak of your God?" he looked at me curiously. "Do you still cling to a God who abandons you to suffer at the hands of a vengeful sister? Do you insist on serving a God who allows hate to cut men down like wheat and greedy men to rule over us all? We are nothing but pawns in a world ruled by the Devil himself, if you ask me!"

The hardness crept again over his features and I prayed for guidance. *Lord, please speak through me now*, I begged silently.

It was then that I noticed the jagged scar that crossed his arm. Without thinking, I let my finger trail over the wound. The word "Rio" formed in my mind so strongly that I felt as if a voice were shouting it inside my head. Unable to stop myself, I said the word aloud.

"Rio! You ... you got this wound in Rio, did you not?"

He took a step away and eyed me suspiciously. "How would you know that?"

Seeing how it affected him, I realized that I must have struck upon something that mattered deeply.

I could see the man attempt to retreat back into his callused shell. He said aloud, as if trying to convince himself, "But of course, you overheard it from the men when they brought you here. That's it!"

Lord, I prayed silently, show me something more to convince this one that You are real!

Perhaps in other circumstances, I would not have had the faith to proceed. I cannot say that I understand fully all that occurred that day, for the workings of the Spirit are far beyond mortal ken. In that desperate hour of grasping for divine help, God miraculously answered by bestowing on me the gift of knowledge, the ability to know something previously unknown. Again I felt a compelling urge to share with this man a message, which I knew was from the throne of God.

“The Lord has a message for you, Colonel Peadmont. I don’t understand it, but I hope you do. He told me that what happened to Ricardo in Rio was not your fault. Ricardo is happy and well. And Jesus told me that He has a plan for your life. He loves you!”

I never found out just who Ricardo was, or what happened in Rio, perhaps so I would always be convinced that this mystery was one which only God could unravel.

But the effect of the statement on the Colonel was stunning. He reeled as if I had struck him a blow. He sat down heavily upon the stone and I could see beads of sweat form upon his brow. I took a step towards him and put a hand on his shoulder. “It’s all right, Colonel ...” I tried to comfort him.

He pushed my arm away violently. “Keep away from me!” he rasped, breathing heavily. I stepped hastily backwards. He looked at me with a gaze similar to a wild hunted animal. Without another word, he turned on his heel and strode from the cave, leaving me alone in the silent chamber.

“Oh God, what have I done!” I cried. I had only said what I thought God was directing me to say. Perhaps I had made a horrible mistake!

But then the still small voice punched through and whispered in my heart.

“... and He shall bring all things to your remembrance. ... Fear not little flock. ... No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper.”

After a time of desperate prayer, a feeling of exhaustion overwhelmed me and I lay down upon the bedroll, where I soon drifted off into a restless sleep.

RELEASE

When dawn broke I was already awake, again praying. I had no idea what this day would bring, but I knew that my life and the lives of those I loved rested securely in the hands of God. To that thought I clung like a man tossed about in a raging sea. “All things work for good to them that love the Lord!” I repeated to myself over and over again.

One of the men brought me some food, which I picked at. I wondered whether it would be long before I saw the Colonel and could attempt to talk to him more. Perhaps I could reason with him, or plead for mercy, whatever it took to reach past the rock-hard exterior which masked that poor haunted soul.

I did not have long to wait before the familiar face peered into the entrance of the cave. “We will be leaving in precisely twenty minutes,” he informed me casually.

“Please, Colonel! Wait! I must talk with you!” He strode over to where the men readied the mules for our journey. I noticed the two animals I had brought with me were among them.

“There is no need,” he answered absent-mindedly as he adjusted his riding gloves. “We have a good deal of territory to cover today, so I am afraid that we have little time for pleasantries.”

Just then Kai Sun and Richard, accompanied by a guard, walked out of their cave.

“Mama!” Richard yelled running to my side. Kai Sun quickly joined him.

“Colonel, I beg you! In the name of God, listen to me!”

“Stop prattling, woman!” he barked. “I told you there is no need for any further discussion.”

Just then we heard a sound from the edge of the clearing where we all stood. I could tell that the Colonel’s men were wholly unused to being taken by surprise, yet surprised they were. A ring of villagers, a few armed with some rather antiquated firearms, others with clubs and knives, stood menacingly between us and the trail. What they lacked in weapons they wholly made up for in valor. Despite their courage, I realized that if the Colonel’s men opened fire on the group it would be a massacre indeed! My eyes searched the crowd and I recognized the costumes of the Seven Canyon clansmen. Among them, I saw the lovely face of Eh Mei.

Within moments, his men stood alert and prepared their weapons to open fire on the menacing crowd.

“Oh, by the way, don’t shoot,” the Colonel casually remarked to his men, as if only vaguely concerned with this seeming obstruction of his plans.

The men looked at him with puzzled expressions, and didn’t move.

“Put down your weapons,” the Colonel said with a more definite tone.

The men hesitated, but knew better than to go against the word of their master. They lowered their weapons and moved further back behind the animals, as if to leave the Colonel to the fate of his own choosing.

He turned toward me.

“I see your friends have come to receive you. Most convenient, it will save me hours of having to ride you back to your village.” He stood casually beside his mule, the reins in his hand.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“I mean, my dear woman, that you and your friends are free to go.”

“Oh Colonel!” I cried. Tears began to roll down my cheeks.

“Now don’t get all blubbery on me, woman!” The Colonel was obviously getting ruffled by my emotional outburst. “I detest a scene.” He feigned a cool exterior, but I knew he was visibly touched.

“Thompson! I need you to translate for me,” the Colonel called. The rather dubious character that had first apprehended me stepped sheepishly forward from behind the mules.

“Tell these good people that there has been a misunderstanding, a case of mistaken identity. We express our regrets and the lady, her husband, and her child are free to return to their home with our apologies.”

Thompson repeated the message as instructed, and I sobbed openly at those wonderful words. Many of the villagers did not understand Thompson’s dialect and began to get nervous when they saw my tears, so I had to calm myself and repeat the whole of it in the local vernacular.

Kai Sun looked at me amazed. “So it is all a misunderstanding? This is wonderful news! Thank You Jesus!”

The Colonel looked over at me. “Yes, obviously a case of mistaken identity. After all, your name being Louise Barnes, it was quite natural that you would be confused with a certain Louisa Bannard.”

“I beg your pardon?” I asked, not quite understanding.

“Here, see for yourself.” He tossed me a worn inland pass, properly signed and notarized by the authorities in both English and Chinese, bearing my description and the name ‘Louise Barnes.’

“Your identification papers—I’m returning them to you. Guard them well,” he said simply.

Still not quite understanding, I stared blankly at the pages. "What does this mean?" I asked him.

He sighed, as one might do when handling a rather slow and trying child. "It means, my dear, that I have mistaken you for another. Louisa Bannard died of scarlet fever some years ago, as did her only child. Pity, really."

"T'was at that!" Thompson chimed in. "Fine woman, I heard she was, Colonel!"

Peadmont ignored him and turned again to me. "So do you understand? You could not be Louisa Bannard. Instead, you are Louise Barnes."

"But ... I am Louisa Bannard ..." I began, confused.

Thompson tapped me on the shoulder. "With all respect, Miss, if the Colonel 'ere says you ain't Louisa Bannard, then you *ain't* Louisa Bannard. Got that?"

The whole of the situation suddenly dawned on me and I shook my head vigorously. "Of course, of course!"

"Very good." The Colonel looked pleased. "Lady Hampton will be sent the doctor's report proving that Louisa Bannard and her child died in the British medical mission, so she should have no more cause for concern."

The Colonel pulled a piece of paper from his vest and showed me the report verifying my own death.

"Fine piece o' workmanship, if I do say so myself, Guv'nal!" Thompson remarked, admiring the paper. "Spent 'alf the night working on it, and by firelight at that. Always said it was an 'andy thing to carry along a few 'fficial-lookin' papers."

"Yes, Thompson here always did do exemplary work. A man of many talents." The Colonel folded the paper and put it away.

A dark thought struck me. "But, Colonel Peadmont, what if someone investigates further? What if someone finds out that I am alive after all? Inquiries could be made ..."

The Colonel began to saddle his mule and looked over at me. "For someone who's supposed to believe in providence", Miss Barnes, you do a great deal of worrying!" he quipped. "Unless you yourself would attempt to lay claim to that title for your son, I see no reason for your sister to question the reports of your death. In fact—if I may be blunt—I assume she'll be most pleased with them."

As the Colonel swung into his saddle, Thompson remarked, "It was a pleasure workin' with you again, Colonel! 'Til next time!"

"He isn't going with you?" I asked.

"Oh, no," the Colonel laughed. "Whatever would Thompson do back in England? Besides, he has a price on his head, I believe."

"Just a minor misunderstanding with the authorities is all it amounts to, really," Thompson replied with an innocent smile.

"No, Thompson will remain here in China. And I imagine any further inquiries made within hearing of his friends and associates in the Brotherhood of the Dragon concerning a certain deceased missionary would be rather strongly rebuffed, isn't that right Thompson?"

"Righto, Guv'nal!" Thompson grinned. I wasn't quite sure whether to feel relieved or not.

"Then we'd all best be going," the Colonel announced.

Kai Sun, who had hardly understood a word of all the English (for even during all those years in the mission, little English had been spoken, Richard and Florence being firm believers in speaking the local language as much within the home as in the town), was still basking in the revelation that the whole matter had simply been a misunderstanding and that we were now departing friends.

"Wait!" he called after the Colonel as he began to exit the camp. "Lu Yisi, we should invite these

men to have a meal with us! Perhaps they would like to visit us at our church?" he asked.

"Um ... I think they have a rather full schedule at the moment, Darling," I explained. "That's very thoughtful of you though." I figured it would take a little time to fill him in on all the details of all that had just occurred.

So, in a merry mood, we mounted our mules and rode down the trail, surrounded by our chattering and relieved party, who had not had to fire a single shot or raise a single dagger in our defense. Everyone was in a jovial spirit for a victory had been won, no one had gotten hurt, and apologies had been offered by those strange and elusive characters, the Englishmen. For many a year the villagers in the surrounding hills would talk of the time the foreigners had made such a curious blunder.



The following year, we greeted another new life, a precious gift from God, whom we named Bright Hope. As I held her in my arms, I thanked God for the gift of life. They are so fleeting, the short years we spend on Earth. While we live them we are so busy with our seemingly vital affairs, but as we stand at the door of eternity, they blow away as chaff in the wind. Only that which is born of love remains rooted and steadfast.

The Colonel was right; few in the world see the full drama that is played out behind the scenes. But the unseen players in that drama are our Heavenly Father, and the angels that surround us. As the play unfolds, those who watch discover the reason and purpose behind what the uninformed might perceive as otherwise random acts and events in our lives.

And what is the purpose of it all, you ask? Men suffer and cry, they rise and fall, they struggle onwards to achieve their earthly goals. We make

our mark in the eyes of men by what we gather and what we build. But we make our mark in the eyes of God by how much we learn to love.

EPILOGUE

Seven years after the birth of Bright Hope, Kai Sun developed pneumonia, and not long afterwards, surrounded by his family, entered into his Heavenly reward. On his deathbed he again expressed his greatest wish, that a proper training school be conducted in order to produce native evangelists to reach the mountains of Yunnan. The following winter, the Leaping Tiger Bible Seminary conducted its first formal session, using the schoolhouse over the winter holiday. The first year there were five students interested in full-time Gospel work. The second year there were seventeen. Those missionary candidates were responsible for the message of Christ's love being spread to some of the most remote areas of the hill regions. Classes were conducted over the following five years and an unprecedented wave of evangelism took place among the rural tribal groups.

Richard followed in his father's footsteps and helped to pastor the church at Leaping Tiger after he was grown. He was killed during the struggle that ensued during the brief period of time that Yunnan attempted to secede from China. Precious and Blessing married and each had families of their own who brought great joy to their grandmother. Bright Hope lived to be nearly twelve before she fell ill and joined her father in his Heavenly home, to await the arrival of her mother and other loved ones.

Eh Mei later married one of the Leaping Tiger Bible Seminary graduates, and together they continued to serve the Lord until the day of their death.

As for the Colonel, he retired from service shortly after his last assignment in China and lived a relatively peaceful life afterwards. Rumor has it that he moved

to South America. Thompson continued on in China, though he was never seen in Leaping Tiger again.

Sir Reginald Hampton, whose name has been changed to protect his living relatives, never realized his ambition to become Prime Minister. Instead he and his wife lived out their wealthy and superficial lives in the comfort of their estate in England. It is said that in his later years, when his health suffered, Sir Reginald would often see peculiar visions of imaginary enemies who would plague and torment him, which the doctors attributed to some form of senile dementia. Upon her own death, Lady Hampton faced the unpleasant prospect of standing before God to explain certain events that had occurred during her miserable life.

The Leaping Tiger Christians endured persecution from the warlords who ruled Yunnan until the unification of China in 1949. Ransacked by the Japanese during World War II, the town suffered greatly for its lack of cooperation with the enemy. Unfortunately, any final remnants of the Leaping Tiger church were obliterated during the chaos of the turbulent period between 1966 and 1976 which became known as the Cultural Revolution.

The souls of those departed saints from the Leaping Tiger Church, however, live on. You might hear them. If you kneel in prayer, and listen to the whispers of a voice that calls, they may dare you to do more than you might have ever dreamed. They call and they plead, begging for those who would heed the cry and go to the land of China. And what of Lu Yisi? We shall let her tell you in her own words:

I lived the happiest years of my life in the mountains. I saw many changes, great changes, some for the better and some for the worse. But through it all I saw the hand of God care for and prosper His children. I lived to the ripe old age of eighty! Does that surprise you? It often did me.

But I did not die quietly in my bed, oh no! Those were turbulent years, during World War II and the dreaded invasion of the Japanese. They resented our church, and the hill people who would not submit to godless powers.

We waited in our house, for I was too old to run and climb anymore. I had the most difficult time getting those young ones out—a group of three local teenagers who had insisted on staying steadfastly by my side; they just wouldn't leave me alone with the Japanese approaching. Not until the very last, when I just had to insist. You know how young people are, God bless them.

So when the cry rose that the soldiers were already in the village, we barricaded our door. We could hear the cries outside and the shooting of rifles. We knew the enemy took no prisoners.

I drew aside the teenagers with me and explained what they must do. They were to go to the top floor at the top of the stairs, and loosen the tiles in the ceiling. They were then to climb out on top of the roof, being very careful not to be seen from below. There on the roof they would find a ladder—I always kept one there—and they were to quietly move it to the side of the yard that I always let grow wild with trees and thorns. Hopefully no one would be bothering with that side as it was quite difficult to access. They were to pray like mad, climb down the ladder and then run like rabbits into the forest, avoiding the trails.

Oh, they cried and protested that they couldn't do such a thing! How they carried on!

"Of course you can," I told them. "It's been done before!"

"But what of you?" they cried. I told them that I had my Father's business to attend to, and they were to go quickly. I barely shooed them out of the parlor in time.

As they climbed towards the roof I heard the battering on the door intensify, then someone was firing at the lock and shouting. I knelt down and began to pray. My time had come and I was ready. I felt oddly at peace, yet excited in a special way, like one who had looked forward to a long awaited surprise, hardly believing that the day of its arrival had now come.

And then the strangest thing happened. As I knelt on the wooden floor, I happened to look up and I saw that I was not alone. It was La Ong! Why, I hadn't seen my old friend in years! As beautiful as ever, she knelt beside me and smiled.

"Hello, Lu Yisi," she spoke my name tenderly, and reached for my hand. "It's time to go. We have much to talk of, don't we?"

I nodded and, turning my back on the things of this world, we began our journey home. ...

The End

Glossary

- advocate:** *one who pleads the cause of, or speaks for another*
- ajar:** *partially opened*
- ambiguous:** *unspecific, vague*
- amiable:** *friendly and agreeable*
- animism:** *a primitive religion based on the belief that inanimate objects have spirits, and that natural effects are caused by such spirits*
- auspicious:** *favored, of good circumstances*
- bawdy:** *humorously coarse, vulgar*
- blasé:** *unconcerned*
- ceremonial flint:** *a piece of rock, often with a sharp tip, and in this case used for religious purposes*
- chicanery:** *an intended deception or act of misleading*
- Chink:** *an offensive term for a Chinese person*
- chinning:** *pulling one's self up with the arms on a horizontal bar until the chin is level with the bar*
- copiously:** *abundantly*
- cosmopolitan:** *aware of many different points or spheres of interest*
- coterie:** *a small and trusted group of persons*
- daft:** *foolish, crazy*
- diffidence:** *a shy or bashful manner*
- drolly:** *amusingly*
- edifice:** *a large building*
- effigy:** *a crude figure or dummy often representing a hated person or group*
- field rot:** *any of several diseases that can attack crops and cause them to rot while still in the field*
- friggin':** *(frigging) vulgar slang for having sex*
- impasse:** *a road without an exit, meaning a situation so difficult that no desired progress can be made*
- mandarin:** *a high-ranking government official of China*
- naiveté:** *simplicity, an unsuspecting and often unrealistic perception of the world around one's self*
- paradox:** *something that seems to contradict itself, yet at the same time may nevertheless be true*
- parley:** *discussion, often with an undesirable character to settle some business*
- permeation:** *having permeated, or spread, throughout*
- persona:** *one's public image or outward role*

placate: *to turn away one's anger, often by the giving of gifts, or the making of vows to them*

powder keg: *a small barrel for holding gunpowder, meaning a potentially explosive or dangerous situation*

pragmatic: *concerned with mainly practical or factual matters and occurrences*

providence: *the control, protection and care given by God to those who follow Him*

pummel: *to beat, usually with the fists*

sardonic: *scornful or mocking*

sedan chair: *a portable and often enclosed chair for one person, carried on poles by two other people*

shaman: *a priest of certain tribal societies who claims to stand as a mediator between the people, and the invisible world of spirits, and who practices magic in an attempt to invoke healing, contact spirits, or gain control over natural events*

suitor: *a man who is courting a woman*

surreptitiously: *in a hidden manner*

taut: *tense, tight*

tract: *an expanse of land or water*

yamen: *the residence or palace of an official of the Chinese empire*

Endnotes

i - James Hudson Taylor (1832-1905). English missionary who, when he was only five years old, decided he wanted to become a missionary to China. When he was a teenager, he borrowed a book on China from a minister in town, who asked him how he proposed to go to China. Taylor replied that, like the Apostles of old, he would trust God for all his needs. "Ah, my boy, as you grow older," said the minister, "you will get wiser than that." Despite this disbelieving churchman, Taylor started preparing for China at the age of 17 and arrived there at the age of 21, after a five-and-a-half month ship voyage. He landed in the midst of a civil war at Shanghai. Rebels held the city, and there were many other fearsome circumstances to overcome. Despite many hardships, he founded the China Inland Mission, which was responsible for putting thousands of missionaries on needy fields. In a radical departure from the churches of the day, he accepted missionary candidates who had no college training, and required his missionaries to identify with the Chinese by wearing Chinese dress. Becoming Chinese was a complicated process for the blue-eyed, blond-haired Englishman. The baggy pants (two feet too wide around the waist) and the flat-soled shoes with turned-up toes would have been trial enough, but to blend in with the Chinese people, black hair and a pigtail were essential. So Taylor gave up most of his hair to the barber, dyed the remainder, plaited a pigtail, and wore Chinese spectacles, truly becoming one. The more he traveled throughout China, the greater became his burden for the souls there. His vision was to muster up 1,000 evangelists, who he hoped could reach 250 people a day with the Gospel, thus evangelizing all of China in a little over three years. He never reached his goal, but by 1895, 30 years after its founding, the China Inland Mission had more than 640 missionaries investing their lives in China.

ii - tantric Buddhism: a form of Buddhism which can involve rather bizarre sexual practices to earn spiritual merit. This form of Buddhist worship is common in India, Nepal and Tibet. It was never fully accepted by the Buddhists in China and Japan.

iii - minority groups in China: China has 55 minority groups, each speaking their own distinctive language and having their own customs and dress. The Han Chinese make up approximately 93% of the country's population. Traditionally, the Han have regarded the minority groups, who generally inhabit the border regions, as barbarians. Until the formation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the symbol for "dog" was included in the written characters for minority names, rather than the symbol for "man." Han invasions over the centuries gradually pushed the minority groups into the more rugged and isolated regions of the country.