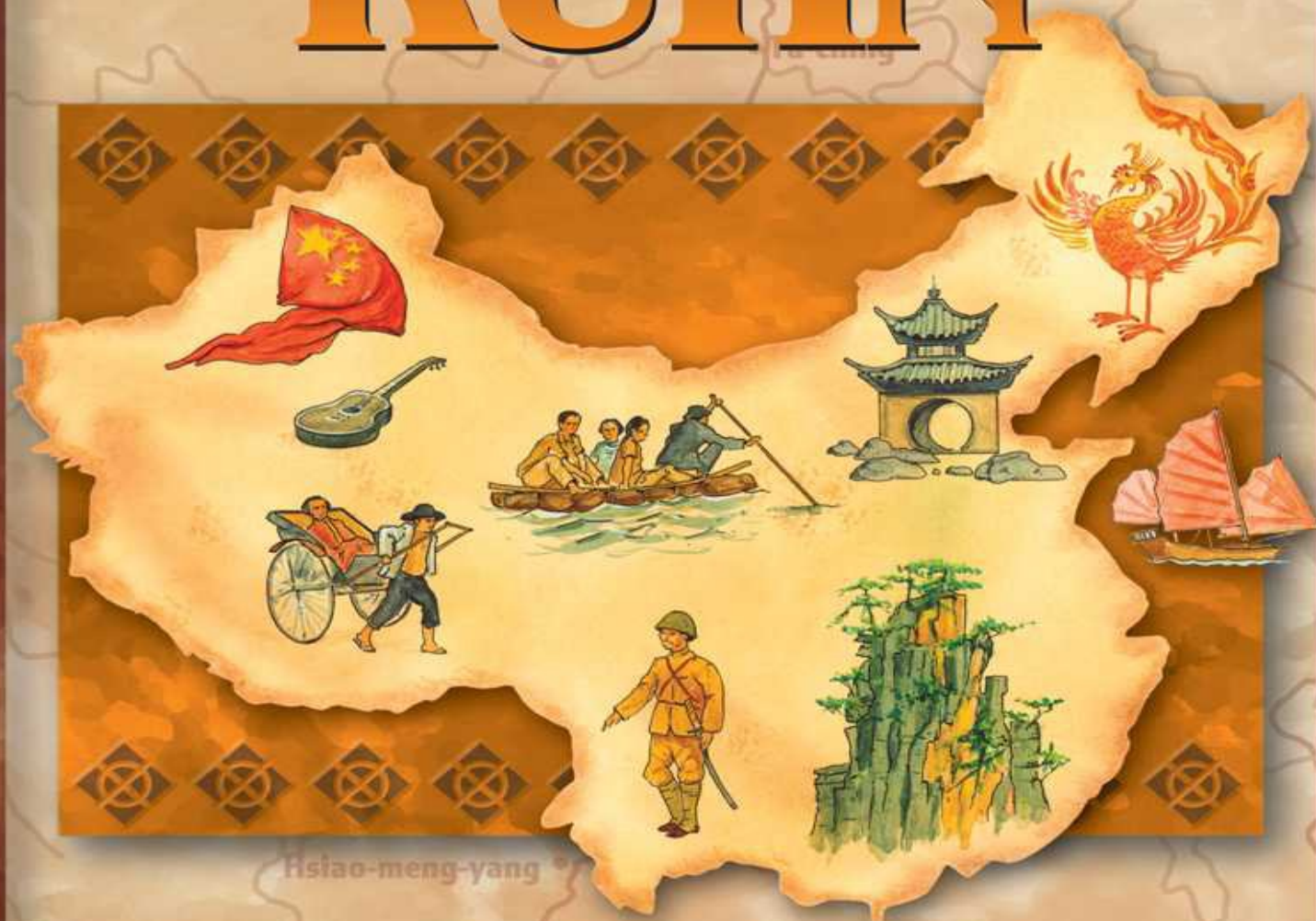


CHRISTIAN HEROES: THEN & NOW

# ISOBEL KUHIN



On the Roof  
of the World

JANET & GEOFF BENGE

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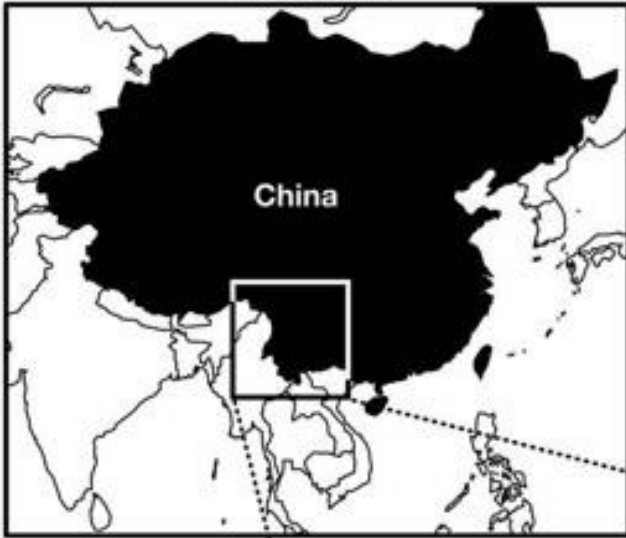
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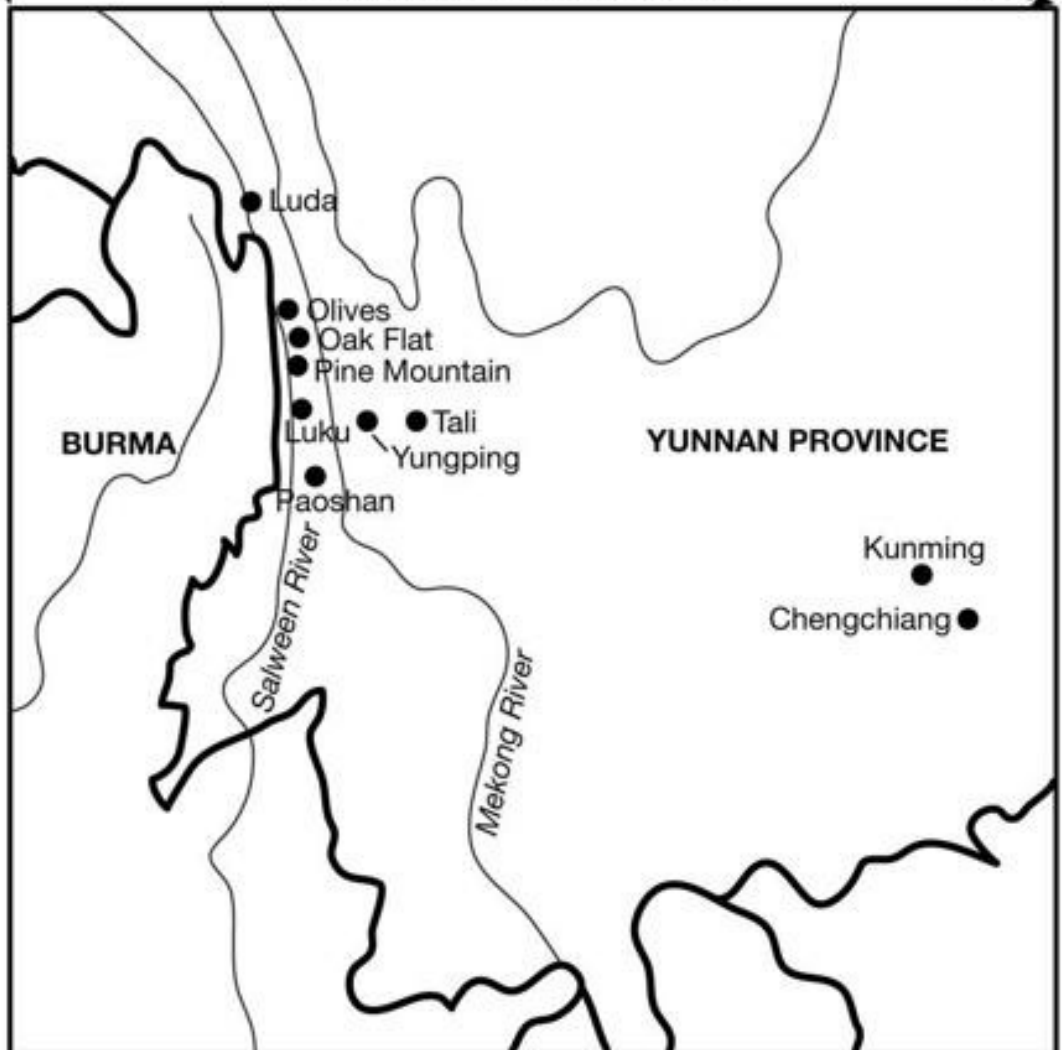
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# China



# Yunnan Province



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## **Over the Mountains**

**W**hen they reached the top of the ridge of mountains, Isobel Kuhn, or Belle, as she preferred to be called, could see for miles. The scene that stretched out before her reminded her of folds of blue and brown velvet pinched together until the folds were parallel to each other. Each pine-covered ridge of mountains rose almost straight up. And in the valleys at the bottom of each fold flowed an icy cold river that ran all the way from the Tibetan highlands. Sometimes it seemed to Belle that she could reach out and almost touch the top of the next ridge of mountains. It also almost looked possible to string a long bridge between the mountaintops, but alas, there was no bridge. The only way to travel was to go straight up one side of a ridge and then down the other side, cross the river in the valley, and go straight up and over the next ridge of mountains. “If only there were a bridge,” Belle sighed as she willed herself to remain balanced on the back of Jasper, her mule.



They had been traveling now for eight days, and for most of that time Belle had been feeling weak and sick with dysentery. But they'd finally reached the Salween River Valley, and their destination, Pine Mountain Village, was only two mountain ridges away. Two more descents into the valleys and two more climbs up the other side. By the look of it to Belle, staring out from her perch across the endless mountains of China's western Yunnan Province, the trails that led up and down those two mountain ridges were steeper than any they had been on so far.

Sure-footed Jasper negotiated his way down the narrow, steep trail as Belle held tightly to his reins and wrapped her legs around his girth. She tried not to look down; it was better that way. In places, the side of the trail dropped hundreds of feet to the valley below. One wrong step from the mule and they would both be over the edge.

But Jasper knew these trails, and he carried Belle safely to the valley floor, where they crossed the frigid, fast-flowing river. Then it was time to climb up again. But because the trail that led up from the river was too steep for Belle to ride on Jasper, she dismounted the mule and began walking up the trail behind him.

Breathing hard, Belle finally made it to a rocky outcrop about halfway up the mountainside and stopped to rest. Her heart soared as she looked down at the river far below and saw how far she had come. After years of planning and prayer, Belle had nearly reached her first Lisu village.

As she sat and rested, Belle marveled at how events had unfolded in her life. Trekking through the mountains of Yunnan Province as a missionary was a long way from the life of a city girl in British Columbia, Canada, especially considering the fact that the last thing she ever wanted to grow up to be was a missionary. Belle smiled as she thought back to the time in Vancouver when, as a fourteen-year-old, she first realized that missionary life was definitely not for her.



## An Agnostic

It was 1915, and fourteen-year-old Isobel Miller stood on the dock, her long brown hair streaming in the wind. It was a typical summer's day in Vancouver, British Columbia, and she was glad that she had brought a light jacket. She was at the dock to say farewell to two missionaries, Dr. and Mrs. Isaac Page, who were returning across the vast Pacific Ocean to continue their work in China.

The Pages were by no means the only missionaries that Isobel had waved goodbye to in the three years she had lived on the west coast of Canada. Her father, Samuel Miller, was involved in lay preaching, and her mother, Alice, was the president of the Women's Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. As a result, missionaries often stayed in the Miller house, either coming from or going to the mission field.

It had once seemed exciting and dramatic to listen to the stories the missionaries

told and to touch the woven baskets and headscarves they presented to her mother as thank-you gifts. But now Belle found it all a little tiresome. She wondered what really motivated people to give up their home and so much more and venture across the world to a life of hardship, danger, deprivation, and sometimes even death.

Finally the deep groan of the ship's horn, the sign for the remaining passengers to get on board for departure, broke into Belle's thoughts. Then she felt Dr. Page's hand pat her shoulder. "Isobel," he said, beaming down at her, "I am going to pray that God will send *you* to China as a missionary."

Belle's heart dropped as she concealed her surprise. *You mean thing! I have no intention of going anywhere as a missionary*, she wanted to reply, but she kept her thoughts to herself. Belle found it was easier that way. Her whole family was much too religious for her liking. Her grandfather Miller had been a Presbyterian minister and opened a home for seamen's widows and orphans in England before immigrating with his young family to Eastern Canada. Her parents were always doing something with the Presbyterian Church or some other group of do-gooders. Until recently both Belle and her older brother Murray had to accompany their parents to the rescue mission hall in the slums of Vancouver, where their father would preach to the tenants and their mother would play the piano while Belle and Murray sang gospel songs.

The family outreaches had stopped now that Murray, three years older than Belle, was preparing to ship out with the Canadian Expeditionary Force to fight alongside British and French soldiers against the Germans in the Great War in Europe. Alice Miller had now turned her attention to making Belle a "socially fit" young woman. It had surprised Belle when her mother signed her up for speech classes and dancing lessons, but Belle didn't complain. They were much more fun than singing gospel songs at the rescue mission, and for whatever reason, her mother thought that it was the next step for Belle.

At home, later that night, Belle tried to pray. She had been used to praying most nights before she went to bed, but this night no prayer came to her mind. She thought of Dr. and Mrs. Page on the ship. They were both probably thoroughly seasick by now, and she wondered why they made so much effort to go overseas as missionaries. What difference did it really make whether a bunch of Chinese peasants in some unpronounceable village heard about Jesus? This was a question that Belle did not think about much after that. Life for her was simply too busy with other things. Her brother Murray finally left to fight on the battlefield in France.

Belle could tell that it nearly broke her mother's heart to say good-bye to Murray. After Murray had left, her father told Belle something she had not known before. Before her parents married, Belle's mother had been a promising student at the Toronto Conservatory of Music. She was also very sensitive. Within a one-year period her father's business had collapsed and then her father had died suddenly. Another tragedy hit after that; her brother Fred died of tuberculosis. Combined, the two deaths had

caused Belle's mother to suffer a nervous breakdown, from which she was still recovering when she married Belle's father.

"We must be careful not to overburden your mother at the moment," Belle's father concluded earnestly. "If anything happens to Murray, I don't know what she'll do. She's put every ounce of her efforts into raising you two children."

Belle smiled weakly. As the only child at home, she had the double burden of trying to be perfect and of distracting her mother from her brother's absence.

The weeks and months passed, with occasional letters arriving from Murray, who was fighting in France. Each letter talked about the mud the soldiers had to trudge around in, or the shortage of meat or coffee for them to eat and drink. Even though the letters were not cheerful, each one brought relief to the Miller family, as they knew that Murray was still alive.

While her brother was away fighting, Belle threw herself into her schoolwork. She was an exceptionally well-rounded student who excelled in just about everything she did. She played the piano and guitar. She expertly sewed many of her own dresses. She was the best dancer in her dance class, she won the speech prize at school, and then, astonishingly, she won first place for academic achievement in the whole province of British Columbia. For that honor she received a special medal from the governor general of Canada.

Belle could tell that her parents were very proud of her various honors, and her mother began to talk about Belle "marrying well." Although she went along with such talk, Belle did not let her parents in on her own plans for the future, but she did have set ideas. She planned to attend the University of British Columbia and then go on to become a university professor. There was one subject that she loved more than any other—English—and she knew that she would spend her life happily studying and teaching English literature to students.

Throughout her remaining years of high school, Belle secretly pursued her goal of attending the University of British Columbia. Sure enough, she graduated easily and then prepared for the transition to being a university student.

While putting away her high school memorabilia in preparation for college, Belle came across an autograph book she had forgotten about. She flipped through the pages of the book until she came to her grandmother's distinctive cursive writing.

A noble life is not a blaze  
Of sudden glory won.  
But just an adding up of days  
In which good work is done.

Belle shrugged her shoulders as she read the words. She still missed her grandmother, who lived back in Toronto where Belle had been born, but she felt that her

grandmother was one hundred percent wrong about the quote. She could think of nothing more dull than adding up days of good work. Absolutely not! She was off to university, and she promised herself that she was going to have a blazing amount of fun while she was there.

From the first day she set foot in the institution, seventeen-year-old Belle loved the hustle and bustle of campus life at the University of British Columbia. The university was located within tram distance of the Miller house, and Belle was able to attend while still living at home. On her first day of college, Belle held her head high, determined that she was going to squeeze every ounce of enjoyment out of the four years of study for her degree. It was August 1918. The Great War was winding down, Murray was on his way back home to Canada, and everyone, it seemed, was in a good mood.

During her first week at the University of British Columbia, Belle made a decision that would affect her time at the university. Dr. Sedgewick, head of the English department, was lecturing the roughly one hundred students in his freshman English literature course. In the course of the lecture he offhandedly remarked, "Of course, no one in this enlightened age believes anymore in the myths of Genesis..." Dr. Sedgewick paused for a moment as Belle listened closely. "Maybe I had better test that out before being so dogmatic," he added. And then he asked matter-of-factly, "Is there anyone here who believes that there is a heaven and a hell? Or who believes that the story of Genesis is true? Please raise your hand."

Belle immediately raised her hand and looked around to see who else in the class believed as she did. Seeing that only one other person had raised a hand, she was overcome with embarrassment. And more so when Dr. Sedgewick retorted, "Oh, you just believe that because your mama and papa told you so." With that he proceeded with his lecture.

As Belle walked home that night, she thought about what had transpired in Dr. Sedgewick's English literature class earlier in the day. Was she wrong and the professor right? Why did she believe the Bible? Why did she believe in heaven and hell? And was the Genesis account of creation really true?

As she pondered these questions, Belle came to the conclusion that maybe Dr. Sedgewick was right. From her earliest memory she had been taught to believe these things by her parents. But was simply believing something because your parents told you so a good enough basis on which to build your life in the modern world? Of course, she had seen many startling answers to prayer in her family. But did such answers really prove that God existed? After all, she had learned in her psychology class that the mind could exert a powerful effect on matter. Was what she thought were the answers to prayers just coincidences? Or maybe those who had prayed had inadvertently answered their own prayers.

Belle's mind was abuzz with thoughts as she sifted through her questions and their possible answers. Before she reached home that night, she made a decision that from

now on she was going to be an agnostic. She chose this position rather than atheism because she was not fully convinced that God didn't exist. Maybe, she decided, He was out there but just not interested in what happened to mankind.

Since she was now an agnostic, Belle could find no good reason to continue attending church with her parents on Sundays or reading her Bible each morning. With no church on Sunday, she would be able to stay out later on Saturday nights dancing and use her Bible-reading time for study. Belle could see that her parents were not happy about her decision to stop attending church, but neither did they try to force her to go with them each Sunday.

Her first year at the University of British Columbia was everything that Belle had hoped for. She found it easy to keep up her grades and still have time to go to parties and participate in the college drama group. In fact, Belle made so many new friends during her first year at college that in her second year she was elected secretary of the student council, a feat previously unheard of for a sophomore.

Better yet, during her second year at the university Belle fell in love. The object of her affection was a returned soldier from the Great War named Ben. Ben was everything Belle (and her mother) hoped for. He was tall and athletic, a star player on the varsity rugby and basketball teams. He was also charismatic and charming, and although a Baptist, he didn't take it all too seriously. He liked to dance and have a good time.

For the next two years, as they continued their university studies, Belle and Ben were inseparable. They became unofficially engaged, and Belle's parents welcomed Ben into the family. And then Belle was struck a bitter blow.

One day during her final year at the University of British Columbia, Belle was walking toward the library with her friend Cora. "I think someone has to tell you this, even though it will hurt. I'm sorry I have to be the one to do it," Cora said as they walked.

Belle stopped in her tracks and waited for what her friend had to say. What could possibly be *that* bad?

Cora continued. "Remember when you were sick and Ben asked if he could take Reba to the fraternity ball?"

Belle nodded.

"I hate to say this, but that wasn't the end of it. Lots of people have seen Ben and Reba around together since then."

*Lots of people except me*, Belle thought to herself and then mumbled something like a thank-you to Cora before walking off alone.

A jumble of thoughts flooded Belle's mind as she walked by herself. Surely Ben would not be seeing another woman behind her back, and certainly not someone on campus. How was that possible? They were supposed to be getting married in a year. Belle couldn't believe it, but then she couldn't think of any reason why Cora would lie to her. She decided to confront Ben directly and see whether there was some kind of

misunderstanding.

The following day Belle caught up with Ben outside the entrance to the university. She walked up to him and said abruptly, “Someone told me that she’s seen you out with Reba a lot lately. Is that true?”

Ben looked startled. His lips curled into a smile, and his voice became soothing. “Why Isobel, you’re such a softy! You don’t supposed that after we’re married I’m not going to take out another woman if I want to.”

Belle felt her heart skip a beat at Ben’s reply. Then in a trembling voice she said, “Then we part. Good-bye, Ben.”

Belle tried hard to meter her steps and move at a steady pace as she walked away, at least until she was out of sight of Ben. Then she stopped and burst into tears. As waves of humiliation rolled over her, she pondered what she was going to do now. Did everyone on campus except her know that her boyfriend was a womanizer? All of her dreams, all of her hopes, were tied up in marrying Ben, and now they were shattered. Marrying Ben was out of the question.



## Trying Out God

I don't know what happened between you and Ben, but it can't be the end of the world, dear. Why don't you get together and talk it out? That's the way to handle the situation."

Belle took a deep breath. It felt like the hundredth time that week she had heard her mother say the same thing. She knew that her mother meant well, but Belle was too heartbroken to talk to anyone about her breaking up with Ben.

The breakup affected every part of Belle's life. She couldn't sleep or eat. She had a slim build to begin with, so losing even five pounds made her begin to look haggard. And she was having a hard time focusing on her university studies.

Alice Miller persisted with her daughter. "Look, Belle, you will be twenty years old next week, and two weeks after that it's Christmas. You have to figure a way to make up with Ben and get your life and relationship back on track. This should be the happiest time of your life, and look at you. Surely there's something you can do to make



things right.”

Belle hardly needed reminding that it was nearly December 17, her birthday. That was also the day she and Ben had planned to tell the world about their engagement. But now that dream was shattered.

As Belle walked out of the kitchen, she tuned her mother’s conversation out. She saw no use in talking to anyone about what had gone wrong between her and Ben. It was time to move on.

Late that night Belle’s father came into her bedroom. He knelt down quietly beside his daughter’s bed and began to pray for her. Belle was still wide awake, however, even though her eyes were closed. The idea that her father was asking God to intervene and help her infuriated Belle. As soon as he stopped for a breath, Belle propped herself up on her elbows and said to him, “Thanks, Dad. I know you mean well, but praying doesn’t go beyond the ceiling. So don’t bother.”

Samuel Miller got slowly up off his knees, groaned, and left the room. Belle tried to will herself to go to sleep after he left, but it was no use. The same haunting thoughts played over and over in her mind. *Life is pointless. What does it matter whether I marry Ben or not? What does it matter whether I celebrate my birthday? And what would it matter if I hadn’t been born at all? Life is just a big joke that God plays at our expense.*

As the days rolled by, no matter how hard she tried, Belle could not seem to sleep at night. She became more and more exhausted and distraught. Her twentieth birthday came and went, but she barely remembered it. Then one night, a few days before Christmas, things came to a head. Unable to get to sleep, as Belle tossed and turned, she heard the faint whisper of a voice in her head: “You’re never going to be loved the way you want to be loved. Your standards are too high. You’re not going to be happy, so why go on living? There’s no purpose to it all. Why not slip out of bed and go to the medicine cabinet in the bathroom, pick up the bottle marked ‘Poison,’ and drink it. All your troubles will then be over. You will fall into a sleep you will never have to wake from.”

Before she knew it, Belle was out of bed and heading down the hallway to the bathroom. As far as she was concerned, the voice she had heard in her head was right. It was time to end the frustration and misery that her life seemed to have evolved into. It was time to drink the poison and be done with life once and for all.

Belle had her hand on the doorknob to the bathroom door when she heard her father groan in his sleep. Something in his groan cut right through her confused thinking. *How can I do this to my father?* she thought. *If I kill myself, he will spend the rest of his life wondering whether I went to hell, even though I don’t believe such a place exists. Can I do that to him? And how would he handle the headlines that would be sure to follow in the newspaper: “Honors student at University of British Columbia votes most popular kills herself”?* What sort of Christmas present would that be?

With that, Belle let go of the doorknob, turned around and tiptoed back to her bedroom. She would not drink the poison.

Back in her bedroom Belle sat on the edge of her bed. As she pondered what had just happened, a line of poetry from a recent poetry test came to mind. The line, which was from Dante Alighieri, was in Latin. *In la sua voluntade e nostra pace*. Belle translated the line into English in her head. *In His will is our peace*. She pondered how odd it was that this passage should come back to her. Dante believed in God, but even more than that, he seemed to think that peace could be found in God's will. The idea seemed dry and unappealing, but Belle had nothing better to replace it with, so she struck a bargain with God. In the dark, she lifted her hands in the air and said, "God, if there be a God, if You will prove to me that You are, and if You will give me peace, I will give You my whole life. I'll do anything You ask me to do, go anywhere You send me, for the rest of my life."

No stars fell from the sky, and bright lights did not flash around Belle when she finished making her bargain. She climbed into bed and shut her eyes. The following morning she awakened having enjoyed the longest stretch of peaceful sleep since breaking up with Ben.

When Belle awoke, the events of the night before were vivid in her memory. Belle pondered what to do about them. One thing was for certain: she was not going to tell another person about her prayer. That was out of the question. It was a private arrangement between her and God—if He existed—and no one else. Besides, she couldn't imagine what her parents would do if they knew that she had prayed as she had. Her father would be kneeling at her bedside every night, and her mother would be nagging her into attending every missionary prayer meeting between their house and the Rocky Mountains! No, Belle promised herself, now was not the time to tell anyone about her experiment with God, and maybe the right time would never come.

That night and the night after, Belle slept soundly. She started to feel better about the breakup with Ben, better about her future, and better about the possibilities that lay ahead. In the privacy of her bedroom she started to study the Bible, just the words of Jesus at first, underlining anything that He said to do and promising herself that she would try her best to do them. After her daily Bible reading, she prayed to God for strength and understanding to get through another day.

While nothing dramatic changed on the outside, inside Belle could feel herself thawing. She became more relaxed about her experience with Ben. The bitterness faded, and her life turned from black-and-white back to color once again.

Belle did not realize just how much she had changed inside until her friend Jill invited her to attend her birthday party. Jill's family had just built a spacious new home in Vancouver, complete with a dance floor in the parlor, and Jill seemed eager to show it off to her friends.

On the night of the party, Belle was dancing with a friend from college when the

doorbell rang. With a swish of cold air, a new group of partygoers entered the house. Belle's heart raced as she recognized two of the new guests—Ben and Reba. *How dare they*, Belle thought when she saw them. *They know Jill is my friend and that I would be here.*

Unable to control her trembling, Belle quickly excused herself from her partner and ran upstairs. She slammed the door in the dressing room where she and the other girls had left their purses and shawls. Waves of rage swept over her. It was as if she were living the humiliation all over again of Ben telling her that he wanted to be with other women. Belle shook violently, and her teeth chattered at the vividness of the memory.

And then Belle recalled the line of poetry from Dante Alighieri, *In His will is our peace*. She also recalled her promise to try to live up to Jesus' teaching to pray about everything. Belle lifted her hands and said out loud, "O God, if You are real, please give me..." Suddenly she felt as though an electric shock had jolted her body, and she was left feeling as if liquid peace were oozing through her pores. She looked at her hands; they were steady and not trembling. She imagined herself going downstairs and continuing to dance—even dancing with Ben—and then she realized that she was smiling.

*How odd*, she thought. *I'm calm and smiling and ready to continue celebrating Jill's birthday. I don't feel bitter or humiliated or like I want Ben and Reba to suffer at all!*

Belle skipped down the stairs to the party and resumed dancing. Ben asked her to dance, and she accepted. It was magical to be back in his arms. Ben was an extraordinary dancer, and the two of them made a handsome couple on the dance floor.

"You look so beautiful tonight, Belle," Ben whispered into her ear as they danced.

Belle accepted the compliment, but it did not feel the same to her as it once would have. God—or something from outside of herself—had answered her prayers and given her peace.

Still, Belle was not yet ready to tell anyone else what she was experiencing. It was still too much for her to take in, and she didn't want to be bothered with other people's expectations for her.

The one thing she did allow her mother to do was to talk her into attending a Sunday afternoon Bible class with Professor Ellis. The first time Belle attended the Bible class it was as a favor to her mother, but the professor, an educated and gentle Christian man, soon captivated her interest. He talked about many of the liberal ideas Belle had been taught at college, and one by one he intelligently refuted them.

Soon Belle found herself eagerly awaiting Sundays and her afternoon Bible class. She knew that her action was probably confusing her parents, especially since she gave them no other outward clue that she was "trying God out" for herself.

Life continued, and big changes lay ahead in the Miller family. Since his return from fighting in the Great War in Europe, Belle's brother Murray had been too restless

to find a job. Eventually Samuel and Alice Miller decided it was time for them to intervene in their son's life. They sold their home in Vancouver and bought a chicken farm not far from Victoria on Vancouver Island. Belle's father, a pioneer in the field of using X-ray technology in medicine, commuted regularly between Victoria and Vancouver, where he worked for a doctor. He would continue with his medical work while Murray ran the chicken farm.

This left everyone with a place to live except Belle, who had finally graduated from the University of British Columbia in May 1922 and accepted a job teaching third-grade students at Cecil Rhodes School in Vancouver. She really wanted to become a college professor, but this would require more study, and she decided to wait until she was a little older before embarking on it. No one was going to take a twenty-year-old graduate seriously.

With the family home sold, Belle looked around for somewhere else to live. With few alternatives, she settled on boarding with a woman named Mrs. McMillian and her brood of children. In all, nine people were living in the McMillian house, including a baby, and Belle found herself impacted by the bustle of their lives. Everyone, it seemed, was into playing cards and gambling. Night after night someone would produce a pack of cards, and the table in the parlor would be cleared. "Do you want to play, Belle?" someone would ask. At first Belle agreed to play sometimes, but she soon became frustrated with wasting time. She would much rather spend an hour each evening in prayer and Bible study. However, the beer-induced laughter that emanated from the card game in the parlor rang throughout the house, making it impossible for Belle to concentrate on her chosen activities.

Undeterred, Belle prayed that God would wake her at two o'clock every morning. By then the last of the card players had gone to bed and the house was still. Belle's prayer was answered. Night after night Belle awoke around two to pray and read her Bible, and then returned to a sound sleep until morning.

Belle also began attending evening lectures at the Vancouver Bible College, but she found it hard to make new friends there. The students at the Bible school were nothing like the sparkling, fun-filled students she had attended the University of British Columbia with. Her university friends were now scattered across Canada and the United States, and as much as she hated to admit it to herself, for the first time in her life, Belle was feeling lonely.

Being a schoolteacher was not working out as Belle had imagined it would. She dreaded the long, rainy days when she would be stuck inside all day with a class of thirty eight-year-olds. Day after day she labored, teaching the same simple math and reading concepts. Some of her students, knowing that she was young and inexperienced, tried all kinds of tricks on her.

Belle had been a high-spirited child herself, and a part of her wanted to laugh at the children's antics. But another part of her was annoyed that these little people took up

so much of her time and energy. She began to ask herself whether she really wanted to be a teacher for the next five years.

The answer, she decided, was no. But what alternative was there? It was the 1920s, and girls basically had one of three career choices available to them after high school and college: nursing, secretarial work, or teaching. It was too late for her to change tracks and become a nurse, and Belle could not imagine herself stuck in an office all day. No, she had chosen teaching, and she would have to make the most of it.

With that in mind, Belle decided to attend a teachers' convention being held in Seattle, Washington, over the Easter holiday break. She hoped the companionship of other teachers and learning some new teaching techniques would refresh her vision for teaching third graders.

When Belle told her father what she was planning to do, he arranged for her to stay with his friends Otis and Julia Whipple. This made Belle angry. Surely her father realized that she was too old to have arrangements made for her. However, since Belle received news of her father's arrangements only just before she boarded the ferry for the trip to Seattle, she had no time to telegraph him to let him know that she would prefer to stay with younger people.

It was a frustrated Belle that got off the ferry in downtown Seattle. Deep down she did not think that the teachers' convention would rekindle any kind of love for elementary school teaching, and the thought of staying with an older religious couple made her roll her eyes.

That night Belle met Otis and Julia Whipple, who were not at all as she had imagined them to be. She found herself sitting happily by the fire eating Julia Whipple's delicious chocolate cookies and listening to stories about a place called The Firs. Julia told Belle that she and her husband, who was an architect, had spent their life savings to buy a lot of land and had turned it into a Christian campground. Excitement glowed in her eyes as she talked of the missionary convention they were planning at The Firs for the summer and how her recently widowed sister-in-law was going to be one of the speakers.

Julia's enthusiasm was not exactly infectious, but as Belle lay in bed that night, she did admit to herself that the middle-aged woman was quite likeable and that there were worse places where she could be staying in Seattle.

The conference turned out to be nowhere near as inspiring as Belle had hoped it would be and left her plenty of time for sightseeing. On Easter Sunday afternoon she met up with Mamie, an old college friend from the University of British Columbia. The two women spent a fun-filled afternoon walking along the waterfront and then climbing Queen Anne Hill for a panoramic view of Seattle.

All was going well until Mamie finally got around to asking Belle how she liked being a teacher. Belle was forced to hold back the tears as she replied, "I'm not happy at all. I never imagined it would be like this. I wish I were teaching high school, but I

am still too young for that. It's so boring teaching spelling and arithmetic day after day..."

Mamie put her hand on Belle's shoulder and interrupted. "I know just what you need. A friend of ours is coming to dinner tonight, and he's a phrenologist. He normally charges a lot for his services, but if you came as my dinner guest, I'm sure he would read your head for free and tell you what you should be doing."

Belle's heart soared. It was just what she needed: someone to help her see the way ahead, and who better to do that than a phrenologist? After all, phrenologists—trained medical men who could look at the shape of a person's skull and tell the person what kind of job he or she was suited to—were all the rage.

Then Belle remembered that she was supposed to be back at the Whipples for dinner. "Mamie, that sounds just wonderful, except that I don't know if I can get away at dinnertime. I am staying with a very religious couple, and I don't know what they would think about my seeing a phrenologist—and on Easter Sunday too."

"But you have to come," Mamie countered. "You don't want to be a grim old schoolmarm ten years from now. You owe it to yourself to find out what you really should be doing."

Belle nodded. "I know I do. I think I can work it out. I need to go back to the Whipples and explain the situation, and then I will phone you. I'm sure they won't mind if I explain the bind I'm in. Besides, they don't own me. I am just staying in their house."

Mamie nodded in agreement. "If anyone can explain her way out of dinner, it's you, Belle. I'll be waiting for your telephone call."

Belle and Mamie parted company. Belle's heart was light as she headed back to the Whipple home. At last she was on the trail of some answers. Surely tonight her future would unfold before her.



## A Plan for Life

One hour after parting company with Mamie, Belle found herself sitting on the bed in the small second-floor bedroom of the Whipple house and talking to Julia Whipple.

“Now, what’s this about going to a phrenologist to see what your future holds?” Julia asked gently. “I’m not sure I understand.”

Belle took a deep breath and began. “I thought I would be happy teaching. I always wanted to be a teacher, but the truth is, I find it dreadfully boring. The students run all over me, and I dread going to school each day. My friend Mamie has a phrenologist coming to dinner, and I know it’s Sunday, but I would love to have him read my head and tell me what I’m really suited to do.”

“I see,” Julia replied.

There was a long pause, which Belle felt obliged to fill. “So I was just wondering do you think there would be a problem with my seeing a phrenologist on a Sunday?”

Julia shook her head. “Belle, dear, I don’t think it really matters so much what day of the week it is. I think the important thing you need to know is that God has a plan for your life. The book of Ephesians tells us that you and I were created for good works in Christ. Now, if that’s true, you would be much better off asking God what His plans are for you rather than consulting someone who will examine the lumps and bumps on your head. Don’t you think so?”

Belle sat back and closed her eyes. In all the hundreds of Sunday school lessons and church sermons she had sat through she could not recall a single reference to God having an individual plan for a person’s life. This was an exciting thought to her. What if God did have something special for her to do?

Tears filled Belle’s eyes as she looked at Julia. “How would I find God’s plan for my life?” she asked.

Julia reached for her Bible. She patted its cover. “I have always found God’s will through His Word—this book,” she said, handing the Bible to Belle.

Impulsively Belle opened the Bible and let her finger fall on some text. She read it aloud: “Keep thee from a false matter.” Belle stared at the words she had just read. Was phrenology a false matter? Was God—the God of the universe—talking to her, warning her to keep away from such things as phrenology and put her life in His hands? It seemed incredible, but somewhere deep inside, Belle believed that was exactly what God was saying to her.

In that instant a lifetime of worrying about her future, of worrying about who she would marry and what she should do for a living, evaporated. She felt freer than she could ever remember. The answer was simple, so simple: God would unfold the way ahead for her. He would lay out the plan for her life, and she would follow it.

At this realization Belle began to let out heavy sobs of relief. She had no need to consult a phrenologist today or any other day. The answers she sought were right there in the Bible.

The rest of her time at the teachers’ conference in Seattle flew by. Yet as Belle attended the remaining conference sessions, she sensed that her life would not revolve around teaching Canadian third graders.

By the time she left the Whipples’ house, Belle was ready and willing to return to Vancouver. Julia tucked a copy of a book called *The Growth of a Soul* about Hudson Taylor, the founder of China Inland Mission, into her bag. She also invited Belle to attend the Bible conference being held at The Firs in July. Belle declined the offer, however. She was already enrolled to attend Teachers Summer School in Victoria, and besides, she did not think she would enjoy being around so many enthusiastic, worked-up Christians. To Belle, Christianity was still a very private matter, not something to be dissected and displayed in public.

What Belle did not account for was Julia’s persistence. A month after returning to Vancouver, Belle received a note from Julia. “Isobel, I think it would be so wonderful



if you could come to The Firs this summer. I have enclosed \$5 for your ferry ticket, and the accommodations would be free, as you would be my invited guest. Won't you please pray about it and consider coming?" the note read.

Belle sighed. Julia Whipple was not one to give up, and now Belle had a five-dollar bill in hand that obliged her to at least consider the offer to attend the Bible conference at The Firs. However, Belle needed the teaching credits that she would earn from attending summer school and could not afford to drop any of the courses to attend the conference. Still, since she now had five dollars from Julia, she felt that she should see what she could do. At the end of the school year, after she had returned to Victoria to stay with her parents for the summer, Belle decided to go downtown to the office of the registrar of the summer school and ask for ten days off in the middle of her classes. She was certain the registrar would say no. One of her friends had already asked for seven days off, and the registrar had flatly refused the request. But at least, Belle reasoned, she would have tried and could report back to Julia honestly that she could not make it to The Firs.

Things did not work out exactly as Belle had thought they would. When she asked the registrar for time off, he barely looked up from the ledger he was studying. "Ten days?" he said. "You want ten days off to go to Bellingham on a personal matter, Miss Miller? When?"

"In the middle of summer school," Belle replied.

"Fine," the registrar agreed. "I will sign off for your time away, and you can still have full credit for your courses. Enjoy yourself. I hope it doesn't rain the whole time."

Belle left the registrar's office in a daze. Had he just given her ten days off? Without losing any credits? It didn't seem possible! A bolt of excitement overcame Belle. Was this God? Was this part of the plan He had for her life? Suddenly the thought of attending the conference at The Firs energized Belle. Maybe God wanted to use the conference to show her His direction for her life.

As soon as she arrived and saw Julia, Belle knew she had made the right decision to come to The Firs. Belle took a deep breath as the scent of cedar filled her lungs. In a flurry of activity, Belle was introduced to her roommate, Edna Gish, a young woman about five years older than she was. The two would share a wonderful little log cabin nestled away from the main camp. The cabin looked out on Lake Whatcom, the pristine lake that bordered The Firs. As she walked around the seven-acre campground, Belle discovered a new peace. All the tension of her first year of teaching left her in this calming environment.

During the conference, Belle enjoyed getting to know Edna and found her life story inspiring. Edna was Otis Whipple's sister, and she had married a man named Ellis Gish. Together they had set out for China to serve as missionaries, but then tragedy struck. While vacationing at a local mountain resort, Ellis, an expert swimmer, had inexplicably drowned. This had occurred less than a year ago, and now Edna was at

The Firs leading the youth portion of the Bible conference program.

Living in the same cabin as Edna gave Belle plenty of opportunities to watch her and see whether Edna really was able to live a victorious Christian life after the tragic thing that had happened to her. Belle watched as Edna prayed each morning before anyone else was up and read her Bible before retiring at night. Belle could see that Edna was sad at times, but Edna also had a wonderful sense of peace and hope about her that belied the terrible year she had just experienced.

In one of the conference sessions, when Edna asked the gathered young people which of them would be willing to give their whole future to God, even if it meant that hardships lay ahead, Belle found herself raising her hand. After watching Edna closely, Belle had become willing to try to follow her lead.

By the end of the conference, Belle was convinced that God wanted her to be a missionary, and she determined to take some steps in that direction. Whatever form her missionary service would take, she knew that she would need two solid years of study at a Bible college. She would have loved to enroll in Bible school full-time, but she had just finished paying off her student loan and did not have any savings with which to support herself while she studied. For the next year she would content herself with teaching third grade during the day and attending classes two nights a week at the Vancouver Bible College with renewed vigor.

Remembering that her father had dedicated her to missions as a baby, Belle was eager to tell her parents about her new direction. Over dinner one night back at her parents' house in Victoria, Belle announced, "I have wonderful news! God has called me to the foreign mission field, to China to be exact."

Belle watched her mother's face turn red as she spat out her response. "Isobel Miller, you will be a missionary over my dead body!"

Belle recoiled in shock. Had her mother really uttered those words?

"But Mother, surely you don't mean that?"

"You heard me right," her mother replied emphatically. "I will not have my only daughter out there traipsing around the world relying on charity. Just think, people passing the hat for my daughter. I could never live with the disgrace of it!"

Belle excused herself from the dinner table, pulled on her coat, and left the house. She walked alone, trying to digest what she had just heard her mother say. It made no sense. After all, her mother had been the president of the Women's Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church since Belle started elementary school. In fact, Belle's whole upbringing had revolved around serving others in the name of God. What could possibly be the problem with wanting to serve God as a missionary?

Several days later, when things at home had calmed down some, Belle asked her father about her mother's response. He shook his head. "Your mother has certain ideas," he said, "and there is no telling where they come from. But I can tell you this, she is getting more and more worked up about your being a missionary. Every time I try to

discuss the idea with her, she bursts into tears or throws a fit. I'm afraid it's too much for her." He turned to Belle, his own eyes brimming with tears. "I'm going to have to ask you not to bring up this topic again, Belle. As far as your mother is concerned, you are not going to be a missionary, and I am not willing to stand against her. I just don't know what it would do to her..." His voice trailed off.

Once again Belle felt totally betrayed, this time by her father. Wasn't this the man who had knelt by her bed when she lost her faith? The man who had gently encouraged her to seek God? And now he had sided with her mother against missionary service! It stood everything Belle thought she knew about her family on its head. How was she ever going to follow the biblical commandment to honor her father and mother at the same time that she followed through on her commitment to be a missionary?



## Missionary Intent

At the beginning of the new school year, Belle returned to Vancouver for her second year of teaching third graders at Cecil Rhodes School. Her heart may have been in becoming a missionary, but the reality was that she did not have the money or her parents' blessing to forge out in that direction. She decided that all she could do was keep praying and see what happened.

The children in her class were a little easier for her to control this time around, and Belle knew her way around the curriculum much better. Once she had settled back into teaching her class, she started attending evening classes at the Vancouver Bible College as a step toward reaching her goal. However, Belle calculated that at her present rate of study at the Bible college, it would be thirty-five years before she got to the mission field!

Meanwhile, Belle had little Christian fellowship with anyone her own age in

Vancouver, but she did link up with Miss Fouch, a middle-aged woman who'd had to retire early from her missionary service in Formosa because of asthma. Belle and Miss Fouch got together once a week for prayer and encouragement. Sometimes, though, Belle had to admit that it wasn't very encouraging at all. She did not see how she could possibly escape her situation and get off to the mission field. Other people had miraculous stories of God providing for them, but Belle felt like she was just plodding along from one paycheck to the next.

Christmas, and then New Year 1924, came and went as Belle carried on teaching during the day and attending night classes. Then one evening in the spring of 1924, Belle received a phone call—a call that would change her life. A young woman named Marjorie Harrison, whom Belle had met at The Firs the previous summer, made a request that sounded a little mysterious. “I am staying at the China Inland Mission home here in Vancouver. I would like you to come over and visit me right now, if possible.”

Belle agreed, and on the tram ride to meet Marjorie she tried to imagine what the meeting could possibly be about. The two of them had spoken a few times while at The Firs, but they'd had no contact with each other since then. As far as Belle could recall, Marjorie was a candidate to be a missionary with China Inland Mission (or CIM, a most people referred to it) and should have been in China by now. What could she possibly want to talk to Belle about?

Marjorie was standing at the door of the CIM guesthouse waiting for Belle. The two women embraced each other in a big hug. “It is so wonderful to see you again, Belle!” Marjorie exclaimed. “Come up to my room. I have lots to tell you.”

Belle followed Marjorie upstairs and took a seat on a small chair while Marjorie sat on the bed. “Let me tell you what's been happening,” Marjorie started. “I'm sure you know that I was to go out to China with CIM.”

Belle nodded. Everyone at The Firs over the summer knew that Marjorie had been planning for several years to go to China and was in the final stages of preparation.

“Things have not gone quite as I thought they would,” Marjorie continued. “Everything was ready to go, and all I had to do was get my medical examination.” Her voice then dropped. “But the doctor would not pass me. I have suffered from headaches for years, and he told me the CIM experience has been that if you are prone to headaches at home, they will be ten times worse in the heat and bustle of China.”

Belle sat in shock. “You mean you're not going to China? After all that planning? How can they do that to you? Why don't they let you go and see whether your headaches are really that bad?”

Marjorie smiled. “Belle, it's fine. I prayed about the matter, and I'm fine with the decision. Of course I wanted to go, but I know God has something else for me here.”

Belle sat, still wondering why she was there. Obviously Marjorie didn't want someone simply to commiserate with her.

Belle noted a twinkle in Marjorie's eyes as she continued to talk. “And that brings

me to where I am now. I worked and saved enough money for my passage to China, but I feel that it's the Lord's money. When I found that I could not go to China, I prayed about the money and asked God to show me what to do with it. Tonight Miss Fouch happened to come to dinner, and she mentioned that you have a call to be a missionary in China. Right then I knew that God was telling me to give you the money."

Belle gulped, and she felt her eyes growing wide. For once in her life she couldn't think of anything to say.

"And," Marjorie continued, "I would like you to use the money to attend Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. There should be enough money to pay your train fare there as well as your first year's tuition and board."

Belle felt tears rolling down her cheeks. "Are you sure?" she asked. "That's a lot of money. You could still use it, I'm sure."

Marjorie reached out and held Belle's hand. "I saved every penny of that money believing that it was to be used to send a missionary to China. At the time I thought that person was me, but now I believe it is you, so please let me use the money to help you get there. Of course," she added, "you will still have to believe God for your pocket money and your second year's tuition. Will that be an obstacle?"

"Not my biggest obstacle," Belle responded. "Neither of my parents is happy to see me go, nor is my brother. And my father is in financial difficulties right now. I can't think of a worse time to leave them all, unless God is calling me to go, and I believe He is."

"Then I will believe with you," Marjorie said, "and together we will pray that God removes the obstacles and that you are sitting in class at Moody this September!"

Belle left the China Inland Mission guesthouse in a daze. Could she really be on her way to the mission field? How would her mother ever let her go?

That weekend while visiting her parents, Belle tried once again to gently broach the subject of her becoming a missionary. But her mother, it seemed, was as determined as ever to prevent her from becoming a missionary. "Isobel Miller, haven't I already told you, you will go over my dead body!" she yelled and then dissolved into weeping before running to her bedroom. She did not come down for the rest of the day, saying that she was too ill to get up or eat.

Belle's father gave Belle another talking to about upsetting her mother, and Belle decided that God would have to perform another miracle because she could not see any other way to get to China.

That summer Julia Whipple invited Belle to return to The Firs and offered her work as a waitress in the cafeteria in exchange for free room and board. This time Belle jumped at the opportunity to go. There was no place she would rather be for the summer.

Belle had spoken so enthusiastically about her experience at The Firs the year before that her father decided to sign up for the summer conference as well. The two of

them set out together from Victoria for Bellingham, Washington.

The main speaker at the conference at The Firs that summer was a man named James Fraser. No one in attendance at the conference seemed to know much about the man except that he was an English missionary who served with China Inland Mission.

Belle found a seat in the open-air auditorium set in a clearing amid a glade of fir trees. She sat with the other conference attendees waiting for the first evening session of the conference to get under way. After the singing of several hymns, James was introduced to the crowd. He was a slender man in his late thirties with a slightly balding hairline and blue-gray eyes. In a clipped English accent he told those gathered a little about himself. He had been born in London, and while attending university, he had felt the call to be a missionary. In 1908, at the age of twenty-two, he had gone to China to serve with China Inland Mission, where he served for sixteen years before taking his first furlough.

James told how CIM had sent him to work near the Burmese border in Yunnan Province in southern China. For the first several years of his service there, he shared the gospel with Chinese residents of the area and helped to establish small churches. During this time he often saw in the marketplace a group of people dressed in bright clothing made from strips of woven fabric sewn together. The women's tunics were trimmed with cowrie shells and silver ringlets. As well, the people wore flat, colorful, turbanlike hats. James had noticed that the people did not speak Chinese among themselves but spoke a language he had never heard before. James learned that the people were not even Chinese. They were the Lisu, a tribe of people who lived in the mountains that bordered the Salween River Valley. James then began to tell about his first contact with the Lisu people. His description was so vivid that Belle felt like she was no longer sitting in a glade of fir trees in Washington State but had been transported to China and the mountains above the Salween River.

As James described a harrowing journey to reach a Lisu village, traveling over steep mountain trails with sheer drops to the tumultuous river at the bottom of the canyon below, Belle was there in her mind, walking right behind the missionary. She could smell the scent of pine that filled the air and feel the sharp rocks of the trail beneath her feet. When the missionary described the small cluster of houses that made up the village, jutting out on poles over the steep terrain, to Belle it was as if she were there. And when James described the Lisu people and their belief in demons and ancestor worship, Belle could almost reach out and touch the villagers.

All too soon an hour had passed and James finished his presentation, promising to take his audience back to the land of the Lisu and describe more of his work among them the following night. Belle could hardly wait. The next night she was seated early in the outdoor auditorium, waiting for the missionary to begin speaking.

When James rose to speak, he talked about the language of the Lisu. He told how the people had no written language and how over many months sitting with Lisu families

in their homes he had learned to speak their language. He had begun to converse with them in something more than the little Chinese some of them could speak. Once he had learned their language, James had set about producing a written form of the language, which became known as the "Fraser Script." He described how he and two others had begun translating the New Testament into the written form of the Lisu language. Again, Belle sat spellbound throughout the missionary's presentation.

The following evening James talked about the great struggle at first to win converts. Despite all his efforts in learning the Lisu language and producing a written form of it and in traveling from high mountain village to high mountain village to sit and talk and share the gospel with the Lisu people, there were virtually no converts. Openly and honestly, James told how this circumstance had thrown him into a deep depression and how the arrival by mail of a Christian magazine he had never heard of before had opened his eyes to the power of prayer in all that he did. He wrote to his mother and asked her and her Christian friends to pray for him and the Lisu people, that God would open their eyes to the truth and power of the gospel.

Sure enough, things began to change among the Lisu. More and more Lisu began to accept the gospel and become Christians, leaving their reverence of demons behind and taking down and burning the household altars to their ancestors. But, as James noted, there was plenty more work to be done among the Lisu, who inhabited not only parts of China but also Burma and the mountains of Siam (Thailand), where most of the people were totally oblivious to the existence of the gospel.

On the last night of the conference at The Firs, James made an appeal to those in attendance: CIM needed more young, male missionaries to work among the Lisu people. He explained that for any man who went, it would be a challenging life, full of loneliness and sacrifice as he made his way about the mountains where the Lisu lived. It would be both physically and spiritually challenging. But it would also be a life that brought deep joy and fulfillment, knowing that he was serving God in the greatest way possible.

As she listened to James make his appeal, Belle was deeply moved. And as the missionary pleaded for male missionaries, Belle silently prayed, "I'll go, Lord. I'm willing to go. I am not a man, but I will go..."





### Moody at Last

It was early morning, and Belle sat by the window of the summerhouse her father had rented for the family and looked out across Oak Bay. Samuel Miller had roomed with James Fraser throughout the conference at The Firs and had been so impressed that he had invited the missionary to stay with the Miller family for a week. Belle loved having James around, as did her mother. It turned out that James was a multitalented man. He held a degree in electrical engineering from London University, and he was an accomplished concert pianist. Belle herself played the piano and the guitar, and given her mother's musical background, the three of them loved to sit around and talk about music and listen as James entertained on the piano. But having James around also heightened Belle's frustration at not being able to get to the mission field herself.

The water in Oak Bay was glassy smooth this morning, not at all like the turmoil that raged inside Belle. It was Friday morning, the last day before she had to commit to

another year teaching third grade at Cecil Rhodes School in Vancouver. But Belle did not want to go back to Vancouver. She desperately wanted to get to Chicago and attend Moody Bible Institute. And Marjorie Harrison had money waiting in a bank account for her to use for that purpose. Belle knew she'd been called to be a missionary and wondered how she could get to Moody as the first step of missionary service.

In despair Belle prayed quietly as the morning sun streamed through the window. "Lord, what shall I do? If I don't decide this weekend, I will have to go back to teaching school."

When she had finished praying, as clearly as if someone had spoken the words aloud to her, Belle heard a voice say, "Talk to your mother about Ernest going to Moody."

Belle was startled. Her father had forbidden her to talk to her mother about China or about becoming a missionary, but surely her mother would not object to knowing that Ernest, a friend of Belle's, was off to study at Moody Bible Institute. After all, Belle's mother was obsessed with the idea of her daughter marrying well, and she had made no secret of the fact that she thought Belle and Ernest would make a fine couple.

Belle sat down at the wooden kitchen table where her mother was enjoying a morning cup of tea. "Mother," she began, "I just found out that Ernest is planning to go to Moody Bible Institute this fall. Really, if Ernest's family thinks the place is good enough for him, I don't know why you are so against my going there."

Her mother put down the teacup, with a surprised look on her face. "Who said I was against you going, dear? You can go if you like. You know we can't help you out financially at the moment, that's all. Ernest is a fine young man, and it would be good to know someone when you got there."

Belle almost jumped out of her chair. "Mother, do you really mean that? Because if you do, I won't go back to Cecil Rhodes School. I'll go to Moody this fall instead."

"Yes, I mean it," Alice Miller replied. "You can go to Moody with Ernest, but I didn't say you could go to China!"

Belle stayed at the table while she ate some toast, but in her mind she was already at Moody in Chicago learning how to be a missionary!

A million thoughts raced through Belle's head. She would need a visa to study in the United States, and would have to fill out the student application forms for Moody. She would also need to find a way to earn spending money to buy winter clothes. Belle wondered if students at Moody were allowed to work their way through school. If only she knew someone in Chicago that she could ask.

Idly she reached under the cushion of the chair she was seated on at the table and pulled out two magazines she discovered there. As she set them on the table, something caught her eye on a page of one of the magazines. "Dr. and Mrs. Isaac Page have been transferred to the Chicago area. If anyone wishes to communicate with them, their address is..."

Belle sat bolt upright in astonishment. The Pages were long-time friends of her parents. As he and his wife were leaving Vancouver by ship to return to their mission work in China, Dr. Page had rankled Belle by declaring that he would pray for her to be called to China as a missionary. And now, nine years later, the Pages were living in Chicago.

As soon as she could, Belle left the house, a letter of resignation from her teaching job in Vancouver in one hand and a draft of a telegram to Dr. Page in the other. The telegram read, "Is it possible to work one's way through Moody Bible Institute? Please wire collect. Isobel Miller."

Before nightfall, Belle had an answer. "Yes, indeed. The institute even has an employment bureau to help you find appropriate work. Hoping to see you soon. Isaac Page," was the message Belle received by return telegraph.

The following day James and Belle walked together beside the bay. Belle was grateful to have someone to unburden her heart to. She told James all about her mother's opposition to her being a missionary and how her mother had changed her mind about letting her go to Moody.

"She may well change it back again," James cautioned as seagulls wheeled above their heads. He looked up and then spoke softly, almost as if he was thinking aloud to himself. "In fact, I wonder whether you will ever get to China. You are very young, and you have so many obstacles ahead of you." After a pause he continued. "It's even conceivable that after you get to Bible school, Satan will try to tempt you from your path. For example, a telegram might come telling you your mother is very ill and asking you to come home right away. Now"—he turned to look at Belle, his blue eyes bright—"if that should happen, you cannot leave as soon as you get the telegram. Is there some Christian here that you could trust to check on the situation and advise you on the seriousness of the illness?"

Belle had to think for a moment. The strangeness of the request had caught her off guard. "Why, yes, I would trust Charles Thomson of China Inland Mission."

"Right! If you get such a telegram, wire Mr. Thomson and ask his opinion before you leave Chicago," James said.

"I can do that," Belle said, wondering where he had come up with such a strange notion.

On the one hand, Belle was happy that James was convinced she would make it to Moody Bible Institute. But on the other hand, it did not sound as though he thought her troubles were over yet.

Sure enough, the next month proved one of the most difficult ever for Belle. Within days her mother was back to her weeping fits, claiming that if Belle loved her she would not leave Victoria, especially not now. Belle could see her point; the family was in disarray. Her brother Murray was not making money chicken farming, and he seemed unable to stick to any other work. And her father had a malpractice lawsuit pending

against him. The suit was based on lies, but if it succeeded in court, the Miller family's meager savings would be wiped out, and Samuel Miller could spend up to ten years in jail. Such an outcome would leave Belle as the sole breadwinner for the family.

Against this background it was a daunting task for Belle to continue preparing for Moody, and she was glad of small signs of God's blessings along the way. James Fraser gave her some money toward her expenses and promised to pray regularly for her. Marjorie Harrison sent the train ticket for Belle to get to Chicago, and Isaac Page wrote to say that he would be waiting at the station to meet Belle when she arrived.

Finally, departure day arrived for Belle. It was a day she would never forget. The ferryboat to Seattle was to leave Victoria at two thirty in the afternoon, and that morning Samuel Miller was to make his final appearance in court to hear the verdict in his malpractice trial. Belle dared not think about what she would do if the verdict went against her father and he was led away from court in handcuffs. She sent her trunk ahead to the ferry dock and waited by the telephone to hear from her father. At 10:30 AM the phone rang. Belle picked up the receiver and heard the clear and strong voice of her father on the other end of the line say, "Praise God! Fully acquitted."

Belle heaved a huge sigh of relief. She would not be deserting her family in their most desperate time of need after all. The Millers gathered at the ferry dock and said their good-byes before Belle boarded the ferry. As she glanced back from the gangway, Belle saw her mother on the dock sobbing into a handkerchief. Belle smiled courageously and waved. Whatever lay ahead, she had set her course, and now she was on her way.

In Seattle, Belle caught the train to Chicago, and on September 3, four days after setting out from Victoria, she finally arrived at Moody Bible Institute, just in time to begin classes. In 1886 evangelist Dwight L. Moody had founded the Bible institute that bore his name. The school's campus was located in downtown Chicago, a large, bustling city, far bigger than Victoria or even Vancouver.

Belle had a lot to do during the first week of school. She signed up for classes in comparative religion, the history of missions, singing and conducting groups, and preaching. During her first year Belle shared a room with another young, former schoolteacher, Lillian Billington, whom she had met at The Firs. The two of them soon became good friends.

Belle soon learned, however, that she could not look for a job. She had been unaware that during their first semester at Moody, students were not allowed to work outside the institute. Her heart sank when she learned this, as Belle knew that she did not have enough spending money to make it through the year. Winter was on its way, and Belle needed warmer clothes to withstand the bone-chilling arctic wind she was told regularly swept through Chicago from Lake Michigan. Faced with this situation, she decided the best thing to do was pray about the matter, and pray she did.

Within days of her praying, Isaac Page paid Belle a visit. "Put on your hat and

coat, Isobel,” he instructed. “I’m taking you around the corner to introduce you to someone.”

Belle obeyed, assuming that Dr. Page wanted her to meet some missionary friend of his. Instead the doctor marched Belle into a bank and introduced her to the manager.

“Just put your signature here, Miss Miller,” the bank manager said, handing Belle a pen, “and then you will be set.”

Belle signed the official-looking paper, after which the bank manager handed her a blue bankbook.

“There’s one hundred dollars in the account to get you started,” Dr. Page said with a smile.

Belle was speechless. One hundred dollars was a lot of money. If she managed it carefully, the money would carry her a long way.

After thanking Dr. Page profusely, Belle returned to her studies, her worries taken care of, or so she thought.

It was only a few weeks later that Belle received a startling letter from her mother. Apparently her mother had just learned that she had cancer and had not yet decided whether she would have an operation to remove the tumor or undergo radiology treatments. Belle was stunned. Her mother was only in her mid-fifties and had seemed fit and well when she left her at the dockside back in Victoria. Belle read her mother’s letter five or six times, hoping to find some more information in it. What kind of cancer did she have? How far had it spread? And what was her prognosis?

After receiving the letter, part of Belle wanted to flee back to Victoria and find the answers to her questions, but she contented herself knowing that her father would make sure her mother got the best possible medical treatment. She waited anxiously for the next letter to arrive, telling her more of her mother’s illness.

It was not a letter, however, but a telegram that arrived next. The telegram bore terrible news from her father. Alice Miller had chosen to have surgery to remove the cancerous tumor from her body but had died on the operating table while undergoing surgery. In the telegram Belle’s father urged her to stay at school, since she could not make it home to Victoria in time for the funeral anyway.

After receiving the telegram Belle locked herself in her room and wept bitterly. Her mother’s words “You will go to the mission field over my dead body” kept playing in her mind. And now her mother *was* dead. Belle wondered whether she had made the right decision to leave her mother and come to Chicago, so far away from home. If she had chosen to teach another year in Vancouver, she would most likely have been able to be with her mother to the end. Her questions were unanswerable, and Belle could find no peace.

Belle prayed about the situation, and soon afterward she received an unexpected letter from one of her mother’s friends. The woman told Belle that her mother had written to her the night before her operation. In this letter Alice had confessed to her

friend that she had done a lot of what she called “busy work” for the Lord but that deep down she knew that Isobel was doing the right thing devoting her whole life to God. She confided in her friend that if she lived through the cancer, she would try to follow Belle’s example of sacrifice. This letter made Belle feel much better. How wonderful it was to know that her mother had understood her calling to missions and approved of it before her death.

At dinner one night not long after learning of her mother’s death, Belle waited in line to be served food to take back to those sitting at her table in the cafeteria. As she waited for the bell to sound that would signal it was time to start serving food, Belle found herself daydreaming about the events of the past several weeks and looking ahead to what China would be like. When the bell finally did sound, it brought Belle’s wandering mind back to the cafeteria with a start. As she looked up, Belle found herself staring into the bright blue eyes of the young man operating the dishwashing machine. Why, she asked herself, hadn’t she noticed him before? Her eyes locked momentarily with his. It was as if electricity surged through her. Belle did not know the young man’s name or anything about him, but in her heart she was sure that a bond had been forged between them in that brief glance.

Belle spent a quiet Christmas at Moody. The institute drew students from all over North America, as it had the best missions program available. Like Belle, because of distance, many of those students were unable go home for Christmas. Belle joined in some of the Christmas carol singing and testimony evenings at Moody over the Christmas break, but she worried about her father and brother home alone for Christmas.

Nineteen twenty-five finally arrived, and now that she was in her second semester at Moody, Belle wasted no time in getting herself a job. It was definitely not her dream job, but it was a job nonetheless. For two hours each day Belle worked as a waitress in the staff cafeteria of a nearby Montgomery Ward department store. She served employees their meals and cleared the dishes away when they were done. Many of the full-time waitresses in the cafeteria were large, strapping women who boasted of being able to carry five or more complete dinners on a tray at once and balancing the tray while they served the meals. But the best Belle could manage was two dinners at a time on her tray. Still, she stuck at the job. She needed the money, and over time she was accepted by the other waitresses and cooks in the kitchen as part of the team.

With the start of a new semester, Belle also made a fresh commitment to pray regularly throughout the remainder of her time at Moody Bible Institute. Until now, she had sometimes become too busy attending classes and doing assignments to fit in an hour of prayer a day, but now she decided that prayer had to be a priority. It was hard to imagine how she would do it, since her roommate liked to sleep in until breakfast, but finally Belle worked out a plan. She awoke at five thirty each morning and crept out of bed and down the hall to the mop cupboard. She slipped inside the cupboard, turned a

scrubbing bucket upside down, and sat on it. There she sat each morning with the mops dangling above her and the cleaning rags stacked beside her, praying for herself, her college friends, and the work she would do among the Lisu people in China.

No sooner had Belle settled into this new routine than she was called out from class one day and told to go straight to the dean's office. As she hurried along the polished wooden floor of the institute, Belle sensed a feeling of dread enveloping her.



## **Not Recommended**

**B**elle opened the heavy wooden door of the dean's office with trembling hands. Inside she took one look at the dean's face and knew that the matter was serious.

"I have a telegram here," the dean said, seated behind her desk. "Please sit down, dear." She gestured for Belle to sit in one of the leather chairs to the left of her desk.

"Please, read it to me," Belle said as she sat down. "Tell me quickly. What has happened?"

The dean cleared her throat and spoke softly. "It says, 'Father critically injured in elevator accident. Come home at once. Murray.'"

Belle sat in stunned silence—first her mother and now her father.

"Who is Murray?" the dean asked.

"My brother," Belle said. "But I can't stand it; my father too!" Tears began to flow down her cheeks. She did not want to cry in front of the dean, but she was powerless to



help herself.

“Is there anyone you could call for help?” the dean inquired.

A memory suddenly flashed through Belle’s head of her walking along the beach at Oak Bay on Vancouver Island with James Fraser. She recalled James telling her what to do if she received a telegram with bad news about her mother while she was at Moody. Belle sat upright in the chair. This situation was happening almost exactly as James suggested it might, only with her father and not her mother. James’s words echoed in her mind: “If that should happen, you cannot leave as soon as you get the telegram...”

Belle felt a new resolve. God was with her in this situation, and He would see her through. “I would like you to contact Dr. Isaac Page and ask him to come. He will be able to help me,” she told the dean.

A half hour later, Dr. Page arrived at the dean’s office. “I took a taxi as soon as I heard, my dear,” he said. “What can I do for you?”

Belle explained what James had told her before she set out for Moody, and she asked Dr. Page to contact Charles Thomson of CIM in Vancouver to find out whether or not her father was critically injured. In the meantime, Belle would go back to her dorm and pack her trunk, though she would not leave for the train station until she heard back from Charles.

That evening before supper, Belle was called once again to the dean’s office. This time the awaiting telegram was more hopeful. “Father improving. Sends love and says stay at your post. Writing. Thomson.”

Waves of relief rolled over Belle as she read the telegram. It sounded as if her father was going to be all right. He was talking, and he had told Charles to tell Belle to stay put in Chicago. When she got back to her room, Belle sank to her knees on the floor beside her bed and thanked God for saving her father and for preventing her from making an unnecessary trip halfway across the North American continent.

A letter from Charles soon followed, telling Belle how her father had been four stories up in an elevator when the cable had slipped and the elevator car had crashed to the concrete floor in the basement. Belle’s father had been severely shaken and suffered some internal injuries, but everything was now stabilized, and he was expected to make a full recovery in time.

Belle was very relieved to get both that letter and another letter that followed soon afterward. This second letter was from Julia Whipple, who was in China with her husband. Otis Whipple was a well-known Seattle architect who had volunteered to design a missionary hospital in China. As she read the letter, Belle got an extraordinary boost to her faith. The letter was in response to a letter Belle had written to Julia about her mother’s death. Julia wrote to say that she had checked her prayer diary, and on the day Belle’s mother died she had been deeply burdened for Alice Miller. She had spent a long time praying for her, and at the end of the prayers she felt sure that Belle’s mother was at peace with God.

Tears filled Belle's eyes as she read Julia's words. And there was more. "But now as I write," Julia continued, "I have another burden that presses upon me. It is for you and is somehow connected with your father. I am in much prayer for you, dear, and for him. I do not know what is happening, but God has called me today to intercede for you both and claim only His will to be done upon each of you."

Belle looked at the date the letter was written—it was the same day that her father had the accident in the elevator. Chills ran up and down her spine. Julia had no way of knowing what was happening halfway around the world, unless, as Belle realized, God had spoken to her!

With the boost she received to her faith from receiving Julia's letter, Belle threw herself into her studies with the certainty that God was able to work things out for her no matter how the circumstances appeared.

Belle's father made a full recovery, but when he had recovered, he decided to quit his job and join Murray in investing through the buying and selling of stocks. It was 1925, and as her father pointed out in a letter to Belle, there was no way to lose—investing in stocks was the new way to get rich! To boost his moneymaking potential, Samuel Miller had sold the family home in Victoria and moved into a small bungalow in North Vancouver, putting the proceeds from the house sale into stock purchases.

Belle was appalled by this move. She knew that her mother was the one with the steady financial hand, and she had no idea that her father would take such financial risks now that her mother was gone. Still, remembering Julia's letter and James's prediction, Belle was able to continue concentrating on her studies and leave her father's fate in God's hands.

Belle finished her first year at Moody with high grades and spent the summer of 1925 in Toronto, Canada, with her aunt before returning to Chicago for her second year. Unfortunately, early in the year Belle became ill and had to cut back the number of classes she was taking. This meant that she would have to take an extra four months of study to graduate.

Nonetheless, Belle was feeling well enough to be one of eight Moody students to attend the Foreign Missions Convention being held in Washington, D.C., in February 1926. She did not have any extra money to pay for the conference on her own, but an anonymous donor paid Belle's conference fees and travel expenses to and from Washington, D.C., and even gave Belle twenty dollars to spend on herself.

Belle had a wonderful time at the Foreign Missions Convention. The group was hosted at an event at the White House, where Belle got to meet President Calvin Coolidge. Belle also toured George Washington's home at Mount Vernon and heard many inspiring missionaries from around the world speak during the conference sessions.

Perhaps best of all, Belle got to spend time with the blue-eyed dishwasher whose gaze she had caught back at Moody several months before. His name was John Kuhn

and he was one of the other conference delegates from Moody Bible Institute. In the week they were together at the conference, Belle got to know John. She was drawn to his steady, quiet ways and how he intelligently thought through situations.

Once they returned to Chicago, Belle agreed to double-date John, along with John's best friend Francis Fitzwilliam and Belle's friend Jenny. The four of them spent many happy Sunday afternoons picnicking and talking. Their talk often turned serious. Belle told John that she was one hundred percent committed to going to China to reach the Lisu people, while John told her that he felt a more general call to serve in China.

Because Belle lagged behind a semester as a result of her illness, John graduated before her and entered China Inland Mission's candidate school in Toronto. But before they parted, he and Belle promised to write to each other, though Belle made it clear that she was not prepared to make any greater commitment than that. Her calling to the Lisu people in China came first in her life.

Belle completed all her required studies and graduated from Moody in December 1926. She was elected to be the female class speaker, and her father, full of excitement about his latest stock tips, came to Chicago for the graduation ceremony.

After graduation, Belle went straight to China Inland Mission's candidate school in Toronto. By then, John and his sister Kathryn had already left for China, leaving Belle the only missionary candidate at the school at the time. The Reverend Brownlee and his wife ran the candidate school. At the same time that Belle was there, Mr. Seaman, a missionary on furlough, was staying in the CIM house in Toronto. Belle began taking basic Chinese language lessons from Mr. Seaman and participated in daily Bible study with Mr. and Mrs. Brownlee. Meanwhile, the references Belle had supplied on her application to serve with China Inland Mission were being meticulously checked out. As well, Belle had to undergo a physical examination, which she passed.

Belle had been in Toronto a month when it was finally her time to go before the CIM council for eastern Canada to learn whether she was a suitable missionary candidate for the organization. She was nervous about her appearance before the council. She had no idea what questions council members might ask her, and she preferred to have time to think about her answers rather than have to answer the questions right away. Everything seemed to go well: the council was impressed with Belle's grades and the subjects Belle had chosen to study at Moody. The council members asked Belle some questions about language study and then asked her to leave the room.

Belle's heart beat wildly as she waited outside while the council members discussed her candidacy. As she waited, she thought over her answers to the questions she had been asked. She was relieved that she had not made any mistakes during the interview.

Finally Mr. Brownlee called Belle back into the room and began a stern summation of the council's deliberations. "The council is very satisfied with the answers you have

given, and you have been a wonderful addition to us here at CIM in Toronto. However, we do have one serious issue to raise with you. We checked all of your references, and one of the people replying to our inquiry indicated that they could not recommend you for a post with us.”

Belle looked blankly from one council member’s face to the next, hardly able to take in what she was hearing. Did this mean that she would be rejected from serving with the mission?

Mr. Brownlee continued. “The person in question said that you are proud, disobedient, and most likely to turn into a troublemaker. This person has known you a long time, and we don’t feel like we can totally ignore the person’s input.”

“Who was it?” Belle asked, her throat dry and raspy.

“We cannot tell you,” Mr. Brownlee replied. “We never say who said what, because we want our referees to feel free to be completely honest. But I feel I need to point out to you how difficult the forenamed qualities would make your life and the lives of others around you on the mission field.”

Belle dropped her head in dismay as Mr. Brownlee spent the next hour lecturing her on cases of missionaries who had caused problems overseas. By the end of his lecture, she was nearly in tears. However, Mr. Brownlee finished off what he had to say with the words, “I am not sure how much you know about this, but there is an antifoignier uprising in China at the moment, and we have just received word to suspend all new missionary operations. So we would not be sending you to China anyway. Instead, we recommend that you go back to Vancouver and wait for China to open up again. In the meantime, we will be watching to see if you exhibit any of the traits mentioned in the letter. If you prove to us that you have conquered these traits, the Western Council of CIM will approve you and send you out with the first party of missionaries when the situation in China resolves itself. We are confident that you can have the victory here, and we have voted to pay your train fare home as the first leg of your trip to China. How does that sound?”

It sounded awful to Belle, but she mumbled some kind of thanks to Mr. Brownlee and fled to her room. Three words kept repeating themselves over and over in her head—proud, disobedient, troublemaker—along with the phrase “If you prove to us that you have conquered these traits...” Conquered them! Belle became indignant every time she thought of those words; they implied that the council believed the reference and that they really thought she had issues with such things as pride, disobedience, and troublemaking.

How Belle wished she knew who it was that had written such things about her to the council. She imagined what she would say to that person! In fact, Belle was so indignant that she wrote to a friend from Moody, explaining to him how unfairly she had been treated. His reply to her letter was a surprise. “Belle, you need to think of it differently. If someone had accused me of those traits, I would have answered, ‘Amen,

brother! You haven't told the half of it.”

Belle thought long and hard about her friend's letter and finally conceded that he was right. Perhaps other people saw things in her that she did not see in herself. What was she trying to hide? Eventually she would run into some difficulty on the mission field. Everyone did, and pride might well rear its head within her. Perhaps it was better to agree with the reference writer than to argue the matter. This new attitude liberated Belle from resentment, and she felt relaxed leaving the matter for God to sort out. In His time and His way, she told herself, she would make it to China to work among the Lisu people.

Back in Vancouver Belle tried to figure out what to do next. She did not want to return to teaching school, because she would have to sign a contract to do so, and who knew how long it would be before China opened up again. Instead, she took a job supervising the Vancouver Girls' Corner Club, a Christian club designed to encourage young working women in their faith and give them the opportunity to invite their coworkers to evangelistic meetings.

Belle found the job invigorating but exhausting. She lived with her father and brother on the north side of Vancouver, which meant that she had to catch a ferry to and from downtown Vancouver, where the club offices were located. The ferry did not sail frequently in the evenings, and it was often midnight before Belle was able to catch one home.

As 1928 rolled around, a stream of mail flowed between Belle and John Kuhn. John told of the difficulties the uprising in China had caused and how he was glad that she was not living in China. For her part, Belle told John about the Girls' Corner Club and her concerns for her father, who was still gambling with the family money on Wall Street.

Finally the letter that Belle had been waiting for arrived. Belle's future depended on the content of the letter. John had finished his language studies and had been deemed among the most gifted linguists that China Inland Mission had ever trained. Now it was time for him to be assigned as a missionary to a province in China. The decision of where he went was partly his—he was able to say where he felt called to serve—and partly that of CIM, who got to say where he was needed the most. Would he be sent to the far northwest of China, where he had originally intended to go, or south to Yunnan Province, where the Lisu lived?

Belle could hardly contain her excitement when she read that John was on his way to serve as a missionary in Yunnan Province. Even more than that, in his letter John asked Belle to be his wife and partner in life and in the mission. “Cable the word ‘light’ if you accept the proposal and ‘dark’ if you refuse,” he ended his letter.

“Light!” was the one-word telegram that Belle delightedly sent to John in China. Now, if only China Inland Mission would reopen the borders, she could be on her way!

In October 1928—eighteen months after Belle had left candidate school in Toronto

—a party of CIM missionary candidates was asked to sail for China. By this time all thought of Belle's being unfit for missionary service was erased. In fact, Charles Thomson wrote Belle a letter explaining his opinion. It read, "I have never mentioned to you that little condition of the Toronto council. From the first, both Professor Ellis and I felt there was a mistake somewhere, and I want you to know that so thorough is our confidence in you that we do not find it necessary to call the Western Council together. I have called each of them, and they all agreed that you are a unanimous choice. You have our complete blessing."

Belle wept as she read Charles's letter. She recalled just how close she had come to "defending" herself, and now the matter had completely turned itself around without her help.

Belle eagerly began packing her trunk. Among the items she packed were a rug, curtains, and a large homemade quilt that a friend had given her as a going-away present. Belle planned to use these to help furnish the house that she and John would eventually share after they were married. Belle also packed her guitar to take along with her.

Finally Belle was done packing. On October 11, 1928, she would set sail for China, where her future husband and the Lisu people all awaited her.



## China at Last

**B**elle peered over the railing of the *Empress of Russia*. The sky was battleship grey and melted into the sea at the horizon. So far, eight days into the voyage from Vancouver to Shanghai, China, the sea had been rough and the temperature cool for fall, but Belle did not mind. She was ecstatic to finally be on her way, though it had been sad to say good-bye to her father and brother when the ship made a brief stop in Victoria.

On board the *Empress of Russia* with her were eleven other CIM missionaries—nine new recruits and two experienced missionaries returning to China from furlough. One of these returning missionaries was Ruth Paxson, who conducted an hour-long Bible study each morning. Belle eagerly attended the Bible study. She loved listening to Ruth's stories about China and her advice on how to fit in as a missionary. But this particular morning Ruth said something that upset Belle. Ruth looked from the face of one eager young missionary to the next and pronounced, "When you get to China, all the

scum of your nature will rise to the top.”

Belle was indignant. Was Ruth Paxson saying they all had scum in their nature? The other missionaries on the voyage seemed like kind, generous people, and Belle felt *scum* was too strong a word to describe their response to the challenges they would face on the mission field. Belle did not anticipate any major problems adjusting to missionary life; God had called her to the mission field, and that was all she needed to know.

Six weeks after setting sail from Vancouver, Belle stood at the rail of the *Empress of Russia* and watched as the coast of China came into view. The land was lush and green, and as the ship moved closer to land, Belle could see small villages dotted about the landscape. Eventually the ship passed through the mouth of the Yangtze River, whose water was a muddy brown color. Soon afterward, the ship turned south into the Hwang-poo River. After traveling fifteen miles up the Hwang-poo, it arrived at Shanghai. By now all of the missionaries aboard were lined up along the railing as the *Empress of Russia* inched her way closer to the dock.

Chicago had been a bustling city, and even Vancouver, but Belle had never before seen anything like Shanghai. The whole city seemed to be a seething mass of activity. The Hwang-poo River was clogged with vessels of all sizes. Ships were coming and going amid hundreds of junks and smaller sampans that zipped up and down and across the river.

Belle could see men everywhere on the dock. Some were waiting to tie up their ship and move the gangway into position, while others were moving freight from ships docked nearby. Men were carrying heavy loads slung from bamboo poles that rested on their shoulders, while others pushed along wheelbarrow-like contraptions piled high with goods. It all looked like total chaos to Belle, but she noted that the hundreds of men she saw seemed to know what they were doing and where they were going with their loads.

Soon after the *Empress of Russia* had docked, a representative from China Inland Mission came aboard to escort the new arrivals to the CIM guesthouse. As the group made its way through the streets of Shanghai, Belle was once again dumbfounded by all the activity. Western-style office buildings lined many of the streets. Street vendors were selling vegetables that Belle had never seen before, not to mention meat that she had no idea what animal it came from. Flies languished on the meat in the sun, and a stench unlike anything Belle had ever smelled before permeated the air. Amid all of this, children played in the street, men drank tea under the tattered awnings of street-side teahouses, and women haggled with street vendors over the price of goods.

Belle was glad when they finally made it to the CIM guesthouse, a small oasis amid the teeming bustle and activity that was Shanghai. She was also overjoyed to find James Fraser waiting for her at the guesthouse. “Welcome to China at last,” he said.

How wonderful it was for Belle to see a familiar face and someone who knew her



parents. James looked a little gaunt, but his eyes were still ablaze with the same enthusiasm she remembered from The Firs and from his weeklong visit with her family in Victoria.

James explained to Belle how on his return to China from furlough he had not been sent back to work among the Lisu people. Instead, he had been appointed as a special assistant to D. E. Hoste, the general director of China Inland Mission. He was disappointed about this decision because his heart was with the Lisu people. Still, he could not escape the fact that he believed God had opened this new door of service for him, and so he had accepted it. Now that the antiforeigner uprising was over, James served as the superintendent of CIM's work in all of Yunnan Province, which allowed him to be closer to the Lisu.

Two days after arriving in Shanghai, James led a small group of the new missionary recruits, including Belle, who were assigned to work in Yunnan Province to Kunming, the provincial capital. Kunming was located twelve hundred miles southwest of Shanghai, and to get there the group traveled by river and by train.

Exhausted but excited to be in Yunnan Province and closer to the Lisu people, Belle arrived at the CIM guesthouse in Kunming. Waiting there for her was John Kuhn. While the two of them had corresponded faithfully since John left Moody Bible Institute back in Chicago, for the first time since their engagement, Belle was looking into the eyes and listening to the voice of the man she would spend the rest of her life with. For some reason she felt strangely shy.

Belle's shyness did not last for long. After all, the two of them had a lot to talk about. Mrs. Helms, who ran the CIM guesthouse, served them tea and scones while John told Belle all about his experiences during the antiforeigner uprising. John had fled to Shanghai for a time, but his journey there, while still hair-raising, had been a lot less life-threatening than James's journey to safety. On the trip to Kunming, James Fraser had told Belle a little about his experience. He had been much farther inland when the call came for foreigners to evacuate to the coast. With so much antiforeigner feeling in the countryside, it was too dangerous for the fleeing missionaries to travel overland to the coast. Instead they took to the Yellow River in three makeshift rafts. It was a harrowing journey: robbers followed them along the riverbank, one of the rafts got caught in a whirlpool for several hours, and one of the missionaries died along the way. But eventually James had led the group to safety in Tientsin.

Sadly, John could not stay long with Belle in Kunming. He had to get back to his work in Chengchiang to the south, and it was time for Belle to begin her language classes. The two parted knowing the plan ahead: Belle would stay at the guesthouse for three months for language study and then transfer to an outlying mission station to work alongside a more experienced female missionary while continuing to learn the language. China Inland Mission had a strict policy mandating that engaged couples in the mission needed to live and work in China for two years before they could marry. That meant that

John and Belle could not marry until November 1930, a date that seemed such a long way off. Still, they both had plenty of work to keep them busy until then, and they anticipated seeing each other only a few times before their wedding.

The weeks of language study in Kunming seemed to fly by, and soon Belle had completed her first unit of Chinese language study. Now it was time for her to move out to the countryside, where for the first time she was surrounded by many tiny villages filled with peasants who had never before heard the gospel. Belle was thrilled by this part of missionary life. This was the opportunity she had prayed for. But she had not anticipated her revulsion at living like the locals. On a bad day everything irritated her: Bathrooms were unheard of, and she had to find a private spot in a field to relieve herself. There was no hot water or way to bathe effectively, and soon she was as infested with lice and fleas as everyone else around her. The food was fatty and tasteless to her, and she threw it up more often than she kept it down. In despair she began to wonder what kind of bride she would make. She certainly had not imagined herself trying to delice and soothe mounds of fleabites for her wedding day.

Still, Belle persevered. Her missionary coworker told her that things would get easier, and Belle certainly hoped so. However, she did not have much time to find out. Late one night only nine days into her assignment at the outlying mission station, the CIM supervisor for the district arrived at the door of their mud hut. Belle opened the door, and the supervisor rushed inside, sweat dripping off his brow. "I've come to get you both and take you back to the capital," he said. "The governor has sent his army upcountry to support another army, and a band of guerrillas is trying to take over the countryside in their absence. You are right in their path here. God grant us the speed to keep ahead of them! We must be off first thing in the morning. Pray that they do not overtake us."

Belle passed a restless night with her ears tuned in to any slight noise outside. Nothing unusual happened, and first thing in the morning the three of them gathered their belongings and set off back to Kunming, managing to stay ahead of the guerilla band. They arrived safely in Kunming to find the CIM guesthouse overflowing with missionaries who had also fled their posts. Many of them, like Belle, were single women working in pairs. Mr. Hoste, CIM's general director, declared that it was too unsafe for them to work outside the city walls until the situation improved, and that it looked like it might be a long way off. It appeared that Belle would be stuck inside Kunming for a year and a half until she married John and was able to travel outside the city with him.

At the same time that this was happening in Kunming, China Inland Mission reviewed its rules on engaged couples and decided that a couple could marry once they had spent a year in China. Belle was overjoyed when she heard of this policy change. She could now marry John a year earlier and get back to pioneer mission work.

Planning for the wedding began. Belle wanted a small, private ceremony; after all,

she hardly knew anyone in Kunming. But Mrs. Helms had other ideas. “It’s not just about you,” she told Belle. “It’s a social event here in China—and a happy one. We all attend our share of fellow missionary funerals, and we need to balance that out with weddings. Of course, you will have to invite all of the Europeans in the town.”

Belle balked at the idea, but in the weeks before the wedding, so many European women she met told her how much they were looking forward to receiving an invitation to the event that she gave in—the whole expatriate population of Kunming was invited to the wedding.

John and Belle were married at the Chinese Church of Kunming on November 4 1929. A large crowd, half of whom Belle could not even name, gathered to witness the ceremony.

The couple spent a week honeymooning at the luxurious French hotel in town. The honeymoon, a gift from John’s father, was a time to relax before they faced the austere life at John’s mission station in Chengchiang.

After the honeymoon, Belle and John returned to the guesthouse to collect Belle’s belongings. Belle was particularly eager to open the trunk she had brought with her from Canada. The trunk was filled with all sorts of things to make their house in Chengchiang a real home.

Just as the newlyweds were about to leave the guesthouse, Mr. Hoste arrived to pray with them. When he had finished praying, he said to Belle, “You know, Belle, if I had a beautiful quilt, I would throw it in the river.”

Belle felt her face turn red. *What a strange thing to say, she thought. How does Mr. Hoste know I brought a quilt with me, and why would he say that anyway? Surely it can’t hurt to surround myself with small reminders of home and a little beauty.*

It did not take Belle long to realize why Mr. Hoste had made the comment.



## A Naive Missionary Bride

It took a whole day for Belle and John to make the trip from Kunming to Chengchiang. Belle was so exhausted by the time they arrived that she went straight to bed. The next day John showed her around Chengchiang. A large wall with two enormous wooden gates surrounded the town. “The gates close each evening at 6:00 PM, and a watchman keeps guard throughout the night,” John told Belle.

After the tour of Chengchiang, Belle set to work turning their living quarters into a home. She and John shared two upstairs rooms in a house on a market street. In two smaller rooms downstairs lived Yin-chang and his new bride, who served as cook and housekeeper for John and Belle. Before long Belle had the two upstairs rooms repainted, she laid new rugs on the floor, and a new bamboo sofa and chairs adorned the front room. In one corner of the front room Belle placed her trunk, which she covered with a green and crimson travel rug. In the other corner of the room was John’s

desk, which doubled as their dining table. Their bed in the second room consisted of a mattress set on planks supported by two trestles, over which Belle spread her new blue and white quilt. Before long Belle had transformed their rooms from the sparsely furnished bachelor apartment it had been into a cozy home the two of them could enjoy.

One day, soon after their new home had been arranged and decorated, John called up from outside the house. "Visitors, Belle," he said.

Belle looked around and smiled. Everything was as perfect as it could be. The new bamboo couch and chairs contrasted nicely with the brown rug, and the quilt covering the bed hid the variety of boxes that were stuffed underneath it. Belle was excited. She had been in Chengchiang for two weeks now, and these were her first visitors. They were local Muslim women and their children whom Belle had met while out walking. "Welcome," Belle said in her best Chinese as they reached the top of the stairs, and then she beckoned for them to come in and sit down.

John followed the women upstairs, walked over, and pushed open the folding doors to give them some light in the room. Belle bristled a little as he did so. The upstairs rooms had no windows, only folding doors on two sides of each room that could be pushed open to let in the sunlight. The only problem was that when the doors were pushed open, they exposed to the street below everything going on inside the room. As a result, Belle found herself caught between wanting light and heat from the sun to stream into their rooms and wanting privacy from the people in the street below who stopped to stare up and see what the foreign missionaries were doing. This made Belle feel like an exhibit in a zoo.

Putting her irritation aside, Belle poured the visiting women cups of newly made green tea and spoke with them in her halting Chinese. The women paid attention to what Belle said and seemed to be able to understand most of it. Belle relaxed. Finally she felt as though she was getting somewhere with the missionary business.

Then, as Belle continued to talk, an older woman sitting on the trunk in the corner blew her nose loudly into her hand and then proceeded to wipe the slimy mess onto the travel rug that covered the trunk. Belle set a smile on her face to cover the revulsion she felt at the woman's action. Then one of the young mothers in the group held her bare-bottomed baby boy over the rug and laughed and nodded as he urinated on it.

Inside Belle wanted to scream, "Get out, all of you, now!" But she held her tongue and continued with the visit, even though her heart was no longer in it.

When the visiting women finally left, Belle surveyed the damage. The travel rug would have to be washed and the floor covering rinsed off and dried in the sun. However, Belle wondered just how many more times this could be done before the coverings were ruined. And then the words of Mr. Hoste came back to her. "You know, Belle, if I had a beautiful quilt, I would throw it in the river."

Glumly Belle realized that she knew what the general director had meant. If she was going to protect her beautiful things from destruction, she was going to have to

scold the Chinese people who came into her home or ask them not to come at all. How could she scold them when they were only doing what they did in their own mud huts? No, she sighed, it was not the Chinese people that needed to change; she was the one who had to change. Did she want a home that was open to all visitors or one where guests felt strange and out of their depth?

Belle knew the answer. She would keep the rug and quilt for as long as they lasted, but she would not worry about how they were treated. And when they were gone, she would replace them with the same type of coverings that the poor Chinese people used. That would make them feel more at home when they visited her.

With that issue behind her, Belle felt more confident that she was turning into a “real” missionary—until she and John were invited to dinner at the house of a poor Christian couple. It was a hot afternoon as they gathered around the table. Flies buzzed in the air, and the stench of the pigsty next door filled the room. Once Belle and John were seated, their hostess brought in several large dishes and placed them on the table. Naturally, one of the dishes contained rice, but it was the content of the other dish that alarmed Belle. The dish contained large chunks of boiled pork fat. Belle could feel her stomach heave as she looked at the boiled fat. “John, do I have to eat this? I think it will make me vomit,” she whispered.

Smiling at their hostess, John took a large chunk of the fat and placed it on the rice in his bowl. At the same time he whispered to Belle, “When our hostess’s back is turned, give your helping of fat to our friend under the table.” John was referring to the mangy dog stretched out under the table.

Belle scooped some rice into her mouth and began to chew. When their hostess turned her back, Belle seized the moment to slip the helping of boiled fat under the table. The dog hungrily gulped it down and then licked Belle’s fingers. Belle let out a sigh of relief at John’s solution to the situation, though John himself seemed to be enjoying eating his portion of the fat. Belle was also sure that it would not be the only time she was served boiled pig fat. John informed her that the dish was a staple among the rural Chinese of this region.

Another food that Belle found difficult to keep down was bean curd. The curd reminded her of a woolen sponge—not something she would ever choose to add to her menu. Yin-chang seemed to cook a lot of bean curd, and Belle tried to eat it when it was put in front of her. She knew that employing Yin-chang and his wife allowed her the time to continue her Chinese language studies and for John to preach and work with the tiny church at Chengchiang.

As the weeks rolled by, Belle became eager to get out into the countryside and begin evangelizing some of the smaller villages nearby that had never heard the gospel before. One such village was Yangtsung, seventeen miles from Chengchiang. John proposed that he go and preach in and around the village, taking Belle, Yin-chang and his wife, and Mr. Yang, a local Christian convert, with him. Belle jumped at the

opportunity, and the party of five set out together over the hills and into the valley beyond.

To get to Yangtsung they made their way over the rolling hills of Yunnan Province. Belle marveled at the patchwork of colors spread across the landscape and reveled in the beauty that surrounded her. By nightfall they had reached their destination.

Of course, there was no hotel in Yangtsung; the only visitors to the place were family members of people who lived there. Instead, the missionary band was offered an upstairs room in an old temple in which to stay. Belle was happy enough with the accommodations. The only thing she did not have was privacy. Belle was the first white woman to ever visit Yangtsung, and the locals were enthralled with her. They gathered to listen to her rehearsed short sermon and surrounded her every time she left the temple. Adventurous boys would scale the walls of nearby buildings and peer through the window into their room, yelling down reports to those waiting on the ground of what Belle was up to. At night, when Belle lay down on her bedroll to sleep, word got around and the village women would come to see if they could visit her in bed! It was all a little exhausting for Belle.

During the day John and Belle walked out into the nearby countryside to meet the local people. Yang-tsung was located at one end of a narrow valley. A crystal-blue lake sparkled in the sun in the middle of the valley, and rice paddies covered most of the rest of the valley floor. Small farming enclaves dotted the edges of the valley, with mud brick houses set among tall, lush groves of bamboo. John and Belle and Mr. Yang would walk on until they found an open spot near one of the enclaves. There Belle would take out her guitar, and the three of them would sing songs in Chinese. If and when people began to gather, John would preach a short sermon in Chinese and Mr. Yang would give his testimony. When they were done, they would invite those who had stopped to hear them to come that evening to Yangtsung, where they were holding open-air gospel meetings. Then they would move on to the next enclave and do the same thing all over again. In this way, over several days they worked their way along the whole length of the valley, preaching the gospel to those they met.

As the week went by, however, Belle found that she had less and less energy. This was partly because Yin-chang prepared only bean curd and rice for their meals. Belle assumed that this was all that was available in Yangtsung, until she got up early one morning and visited the market. To her astonishment, baskets were overflowing with plump red tomatoes, potatoes, carrots, onions, and cabbage—all foods that she longed to eat.

Belle hurried back to their room and told John to ask Yin-chang to fix her a big plate of fresh vegetables for dinner. But that night the same meal was served—bean curd and rice. Belle, who had not eaten all day in anticipation of her evening meal, asked, “Isn’t there anything else in this place to eat?”

“Nothing. We did not see anything else at the market today,” Yin-chang’s wife

replied.

By now Belle was seething with frustration. Just what did Yin-chang and his wife do all day, anyway? Tears welled up in her eyes, and before she knew it she was sobbing into her pillow. She knew she looked like a child having a tantrum, but Belle didn't care. She was exhausted and hungry and angry with the hired help. Suddenly, in the midst of her tantrum, Belle's mind flashed back to Ruth Paxson on the *Empress of Russia* on the voyage to Shanghai from Canada. "When you get to China, all the scum of your nature will rise to the top," Ruth had told the new missionary recruits. Now Belle knew exactly what Ruth meant by those words. Nonetheless, she carried on with her tantrum until she eventually fell asleep. She awoke around midnight, her stomach growling with discontent. John brought her a little rice with bean curd on top, and Belle was so hungry that she ate it.

Upon their return to Chengchiang, Yin-chang and his wife became even more of a frustration to Belle. Even though they were paid well, they appeared to like to do as little work as possible. Not only that, they seemed to make sure that they had the best of everything in the house.

Things came to a head one day when Belle was studying Chinese in the front room with a local teacher. The doors were closed, but a cold northerly wind whistled in through the gaps around the folding door. When Belle began to shiver, she realized that it was time to do something about the temperature in the room. She called Yin-chang and asked him to fill the new portable stove with coal and bring it to her. Half an hour passed before Yin-chang reappeared with a tiny stove in which glowed two or three coals.

"Where is the big stove?" Belle asked.

Yin-chang shrugged, put down the small stove, and left the room.

When the language lesson was over, Belle decided to get to the bottom of the matter. John might have a relaxed attitude toward the servants, but she would not stand for an employee shrugging his shoulders at her!

Belle marched downstairs to Yin-chang's room and knocked on the door. Yin-chang opened the door sheepishly. Looking over his shoulder, Belle could see in the room her new stove stuffed with brightly burning coals. A wave of warm air whooshed out the door. Belle turned and walked away before she exploded in anger.

Similar situations occurred. Yin-chang's wife took their bathtub and started helping herself to Belle's toiletries. With each new offense Belle became more and more angry, until one day she told John that he had to dismiss Yin-chang.

John did not agree. He pointed out that servants were hard to find and that Yin-chang did many things well. Also, Yin-chang had served John faithfully for several years while both men were bachelors. Now Belle was furious with both Yin-chang and his wife, and with John. She grabbed her shawl and hat and stomped out the door, slamming it behind her.



Belle walked for miles, arguing with herself, making up conversations to have with John about how she would not live another day with a lazy servant. Finally, as dusk began to descend, Belle stopped and looked around. She was in a village she had not visited before, and many people were looking at her curiously. Suddenly Belle realized how inappropriate it was for her to be walking alone at dusk. All respectable women were at home by now. She turned around and hurried back along the path she had come. As she walked, she calmed down enough to realize that this was more “scum” coming to the surface. No matter how Yin-chang and his wife behaved, she had to admit that she had behaved just as badly. She wondered what John was thinking of her now. And what of the people who had seen her walking along with a scowl on her face. What kind of Christian example had she been to them? Perhaps the residents of Chengchiang were laughing about Pastor John and his bad-tempered wife!

Belle hurried along as fast as she could, making it back inside the city gate before it was totally dark. She made her way up the cobblestone street to her house. John looked relieved to see her when she walked in but did not say much.

That night, after their Bible reading and prayers together, John turned to Belle. “If Yin-chang and his wife bother you that much, you may dismiss them. But I have to tell you, it will be difficult to replace them with anyone better.”

Belle felt the tenseness leave her body. “Thank you so much,” she replied. “I would rather do the extra work myself than depend on a lazy servant. And I am sure the Lord will send us someone better eventually.”

The Chengchiang church was not happy that Belle had dismissed Yin-chang and his wife. “There are worse sins for a servant than being lazy,” one of the deacons told her.

But Belle was more than glad to finally have the house to herself, that is, until she realized just how much work was involved in bargaining for their meat and vegetables every morning at the market, carrying the water by hand from the village well to wash the clothes and then iron them with a charcoal-filled iron, and balancing the pots on the fire grate so that everything cooked evenly but nothing boiled or tipped over.

Before too long John and Belle were asked if they would employ another servant, this time a woman who had been abandoned by her husband with only the clothes she was wearing. They agreed to hire the woman, who proved to be loyal and industrious. The woman cooked vegetables every day and completed the laundry in half the time it had taken Belle.

Belle was glad to be able to get back to her language study full-time. She still had a long way to go before she became fluent in Chinese, but she felt that she could now understand a lot of what was being spoken around her.

John and Belle had served together at Chengchiang for nearly six months, and while Belle was content, she was also anxious. It had now been over seven years since she'd heard about the Lisu people and dedicated herself to serving among them. Yes, she was in China, but the Lisu still seemed a long way off to her. She began to wonder

just when China Inland Mission would appoint her and John to work among the Lisu.

Then one day John returned from a meeting with James Fraser in Kunming. He had a broad grin on his face. "We're headed west!" he exclaimed to Belle.

"To the Lisu?" Belle gasped.

"No, not quite that far," John replied. "I asked James if we could be stationed there, but he is worried that your health might be too delicate for that. But he did say that they need a couple to take over the work in the ancient city of Tali. The CIM house there has been vacant for a year, and the small church in the city needs encouragement and leadership."

Belle hugged John tight. "It might not be Lisu territory, but it's a whole lot closer. We might even be able to go on a mission expedition to the Lisu!"

It was the best news Belle had heard in a long time, and she started to pack immediately. Not that there was a lot to pack. She left her pretty furniture behind and vowed to buy sturdier, more easily cleaned furniture when they got to the new house.

Tears ran down Belle's cheeks as she walked through the gates of Chengchiang for the last time. Six months before, when she first passed through the gates, she had been a naive missionary bride. But in the time she had spent living in Chengchiang, she had learned so much. The local church leaders had been patient with her as she came to terms with the hardships of missionary life. Now, at twenty-eight years of age, Belle felt she was ready for the next step in her missionary calling.



## Challenges

**B**elle braced herself for the challenging ten-day journey to Tali, which would be completed on foot, horseback, and sedan chair. Along the way, she and John and the team of coolies helping them move planned to stay in local inns, as there were no other accommodations. Belle loved the freedom the journey gave her to share the gospel with so many people who had never heard the message before, but she dreaded spending the nights in the inns.

For one thing, the inns were very loud; men, women, and children, along with their small livestock, lay down together in one or two common rooms. Roosters crowed all night, and the inevitable lice and bedbugs moved from one warm body to the next. Some travelers staying at the inns rose early, while others arrived late at night, making it difficult to get a good night's sleep. Worst of all, as far as Belle was concerned, were the filthy conditions. A layer of soot from the fire coated everything in the inns,

including the walls and floor, and chickens foraged under the table for dropped food.

Still, since every night spent in an inn was one night closer to their new home, Belle learned to bear the conditions, that is, until the third night, when she experienced the most gripping stomach cramps she had ever had. Then she began to vomit. Belle knew that she could not go on with the journey.

Fortunately, the group was near the town of Tsuhsiang, where an American woman missionary and a Chinese nurse, Miss Ling, lived. Belle was fading in and out of consciousness by the time John carried her into the mission compound. She was laid on a comfortable bed and fed boiled honey water with a spoon. At one point Belle heard Nurse Ling say, "It's dysentery for sure. I have nursed many cases of this in Shanghai, but this is the worst I have ever seen."

The word stuck in Belle's mind. Dysentery—thousands of Chinese and many foreigners died every year from the illness caused by contaminated water or food. She tried to think back to what she had eaten at the last inn, but it required too much effort.

Belle did not die from the disease, although she was seriously ill for two weeks before she began to feel a little better. Never in her life had Belle been so grateful for Ritz crackers and canned tomato soup, which the American missionary willingly shared with her.

In all, three weeks passed before the group could resume their travels. They made their way at a slower pace this time so that Belle could keep up. At times Belle even had the energy to look up at the beautiful mountains of Yunnan Province, though most of the time she just clung to the side of her sedan chair, carried by two coolies, and looked down at the rocky road they were traveling over.

The longer they seemed to travel, the more interesting the landscape became. Tali was in a particularly old part of China, an area where the best marble in the country had been quarried for thousands of years. The houses in the area were made of brick and had wonderful gardens filled with vegetables and fruit trees that thrived in the moderate climate.

By the time they reached Tali, Belle had used up every ounce of her energy. She simply could not muster the strength to walk the final fifty yards to the CIM mission compound—her and John's new home. So John wrapped his arms around her thin body, lifted her up, and carried her the last leg of the journey. Since the house had no furniture, because the coolies had not yet arrived with their belongings, John lay Belle down on the marble floor of the house. It had been a difficult journey from Chengchiang, and Belle had nearly died along the way, but as she lay on the marble floor, she gave thanks to God for bringing them closer to her dream of reaching the Lisu people.

Shortly after their arrival at Tali, a knock at the door attracted Belle's attention, though she was too weak to get up and answer it. The visitor turned out to be the local church leader, Pastor Li. Belle realized that she looked a little unconventional lying on the floor by the entranceway, but there was nothing she could do about it.

Soon Pastor Li came back with blankets and warm food, which helped Belle regain her strength. While Belle recovered, John surveyed the mission compound, bringing back the most wonderful news. The compound had rooms to spare! Pastor Li lived in the front part of the compound, and the Kuhns would share the back—six rooms encircling a neatly kept lawn and a huge garden, complete with flowering plum and peach trees. After living in public view in Chengchiang, Belle was finally going to get some privacy—and fresh vegetables as well.

John and Belle had much different missionary roles to play in Tali than before. China Inland Mission had put out a call for two hundred new workers to volunteer in the next two years, and James Fraser was particularly concerned that these new missionaries receive a positive first experience of China. He planned to send many of them to Tali for cultural and language orientation with John and Belle. Not only that, but Tali was on a widely traveled route, and Belle and John were told to expect many extra visitors on their way to and from more remote areas of the province.

Now that she was closer to Lisu territory, Belle eagerly looked forward to hosting visitors who might have news of CIM's work with the Lisu. Since James had not returned to work among the Lisu, a married couple, Allyn and Leila Cooke, had been sent to live and work among them. The Cookes worked hard nurturing Lisu churches along the Salween River Valley. Two groups of churches were located about a week's journey apart. Belle prayed faithfully for the Cookes each day and longed for the time when she could meet them in person.

Before she could fully settle into her new home, Belle felt ill again. This time, though, it was for the happiest of reasons—she was expecting a baby. But this presented John and Belle with a problem. The nearest Western doctor worked at the hospital in Kunming, fourteen days' journey away. If Belle was going to have the baby in Kunming and be attended by a Western doctor, to make the journey safely she would have to leave Tali when she was about six months pregnant. Belle shuddered at the idea of staying in the dark, dirty inns along the way to the hospital and then staying in them with a newborn baby on the return trip. In the end she decided that she couldn't do that—there had to be a better solution. Then she remembered Nurse Ling at Tsuhsiang who had nursed her through her scrape with dysentery. Belle recalled Nurse Ling telling her that she had trained as a midwife under an English doctor in Shanghai. Perhaps she could be persuaded to come and stay in Tali once Belle's delivery date got nearer.

John wrote a letter to Nurse Ling and after a long wait received a reply from her. Nurse Ling said she would be happy to come and deliver the baby, and she would bring her textbook on difficult births just in case she needed it. Belle knew that Nurse Ling was trying to make her feel relaxed about the birth, but the thought of birthing difficulties made her nervous. She was even more nervous when Nurse Ling finally arrived and showed her several pages of gruesome diagrams concerning birth. Belle began to pray extra hard when she realized just how few missionary wives had their babies in such

remote places.

Any fears Belle may have had about giving birth in such a remote location were unrealized, and on April 10, 1931, Kathryn Ann Kuhn was born. The child was also given the Chinese name Hong-En, meaning "vast grace." Kathryn was a healthy, happy baby, with Belle's black hair and hazel eyes.

Most of the local residents of Tali had never seen a white baby before, and soon a constant stream of visitors were coming to the house to look at Kathryn and pinch her cheeks for good luck.

For the next year and a half, John and Belle worked hard at their missionary tasks. Many new missionaries settled in the area, and John was responsible for finding and negotiating their housing and helping them establish a Christian fellowship. The work was difficult, but it suited John well. He was one of the most fluent Chinese speakers in the China Inland Mission, and he loved setting out on long treks over the mountains to escort new missionaries to their posts.

At the end of 1932, John and Belle received a letter from James Fraser asking them to move farther west to open up a work in the Yungping Valley. Belle's heart jumped for joy when she heard the news. This was another step closer to the Lisu, but John was despondent. He had visited Yungping and described the place as a tiny valley filled mostly with Muslims. Of all the cultural groups in China, the Muslims were often considered the most difficult to reach with the gospel message. Still, John and Belle trusted James's judgment and agreed to exchange their beautiful home and thriving ministry in Tali for a dirty, crumbling house in the tiny Chinese village of Old Market, situated at the north end of Yungping Valley.

John rented a house alongside the river in Old Market for the family to live in. The house consisted of three wings set around a courtyard, with a crumbled brick wall in front by the river. A carpenter was hired to put new wooden floors in the house, repair the roof, and strengthen the walls. Then Belle and a local Chinese helper set to work cleaning up the place, scraping away years of accumulated dirt. Finally everything was ready, and the Kuhns moved into their new home.

Not long after John and Belle and Kathryn Ann had moved into the house, a delegation of Buddhists from the village came to visit. John invited them to come in and sit down.

"We have noticed that you do not drink alcohol or smoke tobacco," the leader of the group explained. "As a result we have decided that a Christian church would have a good influence on our town. So we want to help you in any way we can."

Belle glanced at John. She could tell that he was as surprised as she was at this outcome. It had not been what they were expecting.

"Thank you for your kind offer," John began. He then went on to tell them about Jesus Christ and the gospel.

The members of the delegation smiled and nodded as he spoke.

“Yes, Christianity is a fine moral religion,” the group’s leader interjected. “Buddhism and its idols are old-fashioned.”

Things were going fine until John said, “As Christians you cannot worship any other god except the God of the Bible—not even your ancestors.”

At this the smiles left the faces of the members of the delegation. “Surely you cannot expect us to do that. We have always worshiped our ancestors,” another member of the delegation replied.

“Then you cannot become a Christian until you are willing to do so,” John replied firmly but politely. “Thank you for coming to visit. You may come back at any time to discuss further what we have been talking about.”

“Satan will first try to cooperate with us. Persecution is only his second-best method,” John told Belle after the delegation had left the house.

“I know,” Belle replied. “Our ministry here will be challenging.”

Sure enough, it was. Belle drew up a map and visited every village in the valley. The women were more attentive than the men, but they were illiterate and seemed to have little idea of what she was talking about. How could they? Belle wondered, since most of them had never climbed up and over the mountains that surrounded their valley and had little idea what the rest of the world was like. In spite of John and Belle’s best efforts, there were few converts—either Muslim or Buddhist—and never enough to form the core of a thriving church fellowship.

Despite the challenges, the Kuhns’ time living in the Yungping Valley seemed to fly by. Baby Kathryn adapted to the new conditions and grew from a baby into a curious two-year-old. Yet Belle could not help but feel isolated living in the Yungping Valley. She was grateful when other CIM missionaries came to stay with them. And she was delighted in August 1933, when two female missionaries arrived to live with them. Belle welcomed their company for another reason. For some time John had wanted to scout out an area to the north for potential missionary sites, and Belle had discovered that she was expecting another baby. With the arrival of the two new missionaries, John could head out on his adventure, knowing that Belle and Kathryn had help at home.

The plan would have worked well except for the unusually heavy rains that fell that summer. With almost no warning, the Yungping River flooded, pouring into the bottom floor of the Kuhns’ house beside the river. The three women hauled as much of the furniture and personal belongings upstairs as they could. It was a race against the rising floodwaters, and in the rush of the moment, Belle gave little thought to her pregnancy. That night, as Kathryn lay snuggled beside her, Belle felt the cramping begin. Tears began to roll down her cheeks and wet her pillow. She knew that she was losing her unborn baby.

It was a difficult time for Belle. John was far away, and many of the family’s belongings were ruined in the flooding. But most of all Belle grieved that the hope of a new life was over. She struggled to remain cheerful for the sake of those around her, but

she was despondent.

Three weeks after Belle had miscarried the baby, John arrived home to learn the sad news. He tried to comfort Belle. "God must have some purpose in this," he said. "Let's pray and ask Him what good can come from this."

Belle nodded. She promised to try to look for some positive outcome, though she could not think of any.

The day after John's arrival home, a passing mule train dropped off a letter from James Fraser. "I want you to pray over a difficult problem," Belle read aloud to John from the letter, which went on to say that the situation among the Lisu people had reached a breaking point. The Lisu churches were being persecuted because they had refused to grow opium for the local warlord. The warlord threatened to annihilate the churches in response, and so Allyn and Leila Cooke had separated so that each grouping of churches could have a missionary to serve as a buffer between them and the warlord. Doing this was a brave act, but as James pointed out, it was not a permanent solution. Someone else needed to join them in protecting the local churches, but who? James concluded his letter by asking John and Belle if they could think of anyone who could go, either temporarily or permanently.

Belle, her heart beating rapidly in her chest, looked at John. She could think of one wonderful solution. She and John could go to the Lisu and take over one of the locations. This would have been impossible to do with a newborn baby, but not now.

John was excited too and wrote to James, asking whether he and Belle could be assigned to the Salween River Valley, where the Lisu lived. The days dragged on as Belle waited for a response, but when it finally arrived, it was not quite the good news she had been hoping for. But at least it was a foot in the door.

James had suggested that John and Belle visit Leila Cooke. John could then gauge the latest developments in the opium situation and talk with some of the local officials, and Belle could spend time with Leila and decide whether she herself could withstand living such a harsh existence.

When Belle finished reading the letter, she let out a whoop of joy. Ten years had now passed since she had first heard the call to serve among the Lisu people, and now she was finally on her way to their territory.





## Lisuland

It will take us ten days to get there. We can spend a month with Leila spying out the land, and then it will be a ten-day journey back,” John told Belle.

“I can hardly wait,” Belle replied. “This trip has been in my heart for ten years!”

John nodded knowingly.

Belle knew that John also was looking forward to being with the Lisu people, though over the years he had not felt the same single focus toward them as she had.

The only difficult issue in the whole plan for Belle was the thought of leaving three-year-old Kathryn behind with two women missionaries. Belle knew that her daughter would be well taken care of and that it would not be wise to take Kathryn with them until they understood just how difficult living with the Lisu people would be.

Finally, in early March 1934, Belle and John said good-bye to their daughter and set off on the trip with several local Christians. It was springtime, and the abundance of

wild purple and red rhododendrons delighted Belle. What a contrast these bright flowers were to the filthy, airless inns that they stayed in each night. As usual, the food was a trial to Belle, and two days into the journey she became weak with dysentery, but she refused to stop traveling. "I am just as likely to get well on the back of Jasper the mule," she insisted, "as I am staying in one of these inns." She prayed for the concentration necessary to hold onto the reins and balance on the mule's back. Up and down steep slopes they went, with John cheerfully consulting a crude map of the area and yelling out the heights of the mountains they scaled. "Eight thousand feet, Belle. Magnificent, isn't it?" and "Twelve thousand feet up. Imagine it, Belle, we're on the roof of the world!"

Belle tried to get into the spirit of traveling, though it was obvious to her that John was a natural mountain climber and she was not.

Eight days and many switchback trails later, Belle and John descended into the Salween River Valley and came to a tiny market town named Luku, which means "six treasures." Luku was nestled alongside the Salween River and was the gateway to the land of the Lisu. The mountains beyond the town, which included much of the territory of the Lisu, were steeped in feudalism. Three warlords lived in Luku and controlled the surrounding countryside. Those who lived in the territory were obliged to offer allegiance to the warlords and pay them taxes.

That night, one of the warlords invited Belle and John to eat with him at his Yamen, or official home. He took delight showing the two missionaries through his castle-like home, pointing out stashes of weapons and various fortifications. As they ate together, the warlord told Belle and John about the land he controlled and the people who lived there. He talked about the money he made from salt mines located deep in the Salween River Valley and from a tax on the crops the people grew. Among those crops was opium. When it came to describing the Lisu people, he said, "Ah, the Lisu, they are like animals. High up there on the mountains, they are only good for farming and for paying taxes. We call them the 'Monkey People.'"

Animals! Monkey People! The warlord's characterization of the Lisu shocked Belle. To her the Lisu were like lost sheep, in desperate need of hearing the gospel message of hope, love, and forgiveness.

Later that night John took Belle for a walk alongside the river. When they came to a small rise, they stood and looked out across the Salween River. Belle could make out the silhouette of mountains rising like black towers from the water's edge and disappearing into the sky.

"See those specks of light high on the mountains over there?" John said.

"Yes," Belle replied, her eyes squinting into the darkness.

"Those are Lisu fires—Lisu villages. You are now in Lisuland."

A chill ran down Belle's spine as the realization washed over her. After so many years, she was now standing on the edge of Lisu territory.

Early the next morning Belle and John set off in search of their first Lisu village. The mountains of Lisuland were even steeper than those they had already crossed to reach the Salween River Valley. As they reached the top of the first mountain, Belle could see for miles. The scene that stretched out before her from the top of the mountain reminded her of folds of blue and brown velvet pinched together until the folds were parallel to each other. Each pine-covered ridge of mountains rose almost straight up. And in the valleys at the bottom of each fold flowed an icy cold river that ran all the way from the Tibetan highlands. Sometimes it seemed to Belle that she could reach out and almost touch the tops of the next row of mountains. It also almost looked possible to string a long bridge between the mountaintops, but there was no bridge. The only way to travel was to go straight up and then straight down, cross the river in the valley, and then go straight up and over the next ridge of mountains.

By midday they reached their first Lisu village. Belle stood in amazement as she took in the sight and looked around. The village was just as James had described a Lisu village ten years before at The Firs in Bellingham, Washington. Only this time Belle was seeing the village not with her mind's eye but with her own eyes.

The villagers welcomed the couple warmly and invited them into a shanty for a meal. Although Belle and John spoke no Lisu, some of the locals close to the "outside" spoke some Chinese, and so they were able to communicate enough to find out that the family they were eating with had been converted to Christianity through James.

The house where John and Belle were guests consisted of one room set atop sturdy wooden poles dug into the mountainside so that the back of the dwelling butted up to the mountainside and the front stuck out into the air as the steep mountain dropped away beneath it. The floor was made of wooden slats and woven bamboo. The roof was made from slats laid over beams and held in place by large pine logs, and the walls were woven bamboo. Livestock and chickens were penned up under the house. It all seemed a little precarious to Belle, and more so when she learned that not a nail was used to build the place. Strips of tough tree bark held everything together. Belle wondered whether the knots ever came undone. If they did, surely the house would roll down the mountainside and topple all the way to the river far below. Nonetheless, Belle was grateful for the hospitality the Lisu family was showing them.

By the time the corn and pork rind meal was over, Belle could hardly wait to continue the journey onward to find Leila. Leila's village, Pine Mountain Village, was located on the side of the next ridge of mountains less than five hours' trek away.

The afternoon sun was casting long shadows by the time Belle rounded a rocky outcrop and spotted three small huts. Belle's heart raced. Surely one of them belonged to Leila. Belle suddenly felt a wave of shyness overcome her. She had never met Leila, a veteran CIM missionary and noted author.

It was obvious to Belle that John had been thinking about their first meeting too. He turned to her and said, "Now remember, dear, you know how you like to talk! Try to

restrain yourself from overdoing it.”

Belle nodded. She had been telling herself the same thing. It would not do to chatter on like a nervous schoolgirl on her first meeting with Leila Cooke.

Belle need not have worried. Leila was delighted to welcome the weary visitors into her traditional Lisu hut, much like the one they had eaten lunch in. As she fed them homemade muffins and green tea, she explained that it had been nearly a year since she'd seen a fellow white woman, and she had so much she wanted to talk about.

Within hours, Belle felt like the two of them were old friends. Leila told Belle a great deal about the Lisu people. She explained to her that there were two distinct groups of Lisu: the Black Lisu, who were called “black” because they wore unadorned dark colors; and the Flowery Lisu, who wore more “flowery” clothing, colorfully woven and brightly embroidered. It was the Black Lisu who lived around the Pine Mountain Village area.

James had first come and evangelized among the Flowery Lisu in the south of Lisuland, where he had established small churches of believers in the various Lisu villages scattered across the area. The churches had been established as independent, self-sustaining entities. A pastor and group of deacons had led each church, and many congregations had also supported evangelists who traveled throughout the area sharing the gospel. Leila and Allyn Cooke had succeeded James Fraser in overseeing the work among the Lisu. Slowly, mostly because of the efforts of Lisu evangelists, the work had spread and churches had been established in the area where Leila now lived.

Over the years evangelists had spread the gospel to the area around Luda, a weeklong perilous journey up the Salween River Canyon. Allyn Cooke was now living there and overseeing the growing Christian work. Leila was careful to point out that the churches throughout the area followed the pattern James had established. These churches were independent, self-sustaining, and self-propagating. The missionary's job was not to run or financially support the churches but to encourage the local Christians in their faith and mentor the church leaders.

After the dinner dishes had been cleared away, Lisu Christians made their way to Leila's hut. The scene brought tears to Belle's eyes. The group comprised men, women, and children who had heard and accepted the gospel and been taught to read and write. They were all squatting on the floor of Leila's hut singing hymns and earnestly listening as passages from the Bible were read aloud. In all her years in China, Belle had never seen such openness.

The next few days confirmed Belle's view of the Lisu. While a large percentage of the Lisu people were not Christians, those who were believers were joyful and loving and ready to share their faith and live it out before others.

Belle had the opportunity to spend time with several native leaders of the church, and although Belle could not speak their language, Leila told her their stories. “That man there,” she said, gesturing with her head toward the man squatting in the corner of

the room.

Belle looked at him and smiled.

“That is Me-do-me-pa,” Leila went on. “He is the headman of Oak Flat Village and he is an evangelist and a good preacher. He has been preaching down in Horse Grass Level Village. Several years ago he was beaten badly by the warlord for being a Christian. But he lived through the ordeal, and because of him, the church in the area is stronger than ever.”

Belle and John were deeply touched by the man’s story. But it was the three men who came to Leila’s hut early on the fifth morning who captured Belle’s imagination like no others. Each man wore loose white pants and a jerkin and had a bright red turban on his head. By now Belle knew enough about Lisu dress to realize that the men must be Flowery Lisu, since they did not wear the navy blue turbans of the Lisu in the area.

Leila offered the men stools to sit on, but the men preferred to squat on the bamboo mat. Soon Leila and the men were deep in conversation in Lisu while Belle and John sat and observed. Belle could see Leila’s face light up the more they talked. Finally Leila turned to Belle and John and said to them in English, “This is Mark and his two friends. They are from Goo-moo in Burma, a great distance away across the mountains. They have traveled for seven days to get here and have endured snow and much bad weather.”

Belle asked Leila what the men were doing so far from home.

“They have come on behalf of their village to find a teacher who can come and tell them about Jesus. They first heard about Jesus eleven years ago and have been trying to follow His ways. But the people of the village have no books to read and no teacher to tell them more about Jesus. When they learned that the Lisu Christians on the other side of the mountains had both books and teachers to tell them about Jesus, they decided that a group from the village would cross the mountains and find a teacher to come back with them. Two groups tried to cross the mountains and failed, but these three men have succeeded. It was a perilous journey for them, but here they are, and they say they will not return home until they have found a teacher to go with them.”

Chills ran down Belle’s spine as she heard their story. When Belle looked at John, she realized he was feeling the same thing.

Leila let out a sigh and said, “I wish we had a teacher to send with them. Simor could do it, but he will not be back for another month. I told them we have no teacher to send with them right now, and they say they will stay and wait until we do have someone who can go with them. In the meantime they want to study the Bible with Moses.”

With that, the three men stood and followed Moses, the pastor of the church in Pine Mountain Village, out the door.

The following morning Leila announced that she was leaving. With Belle and John in place at Pine Mountain Village, she had decided to make the six-day journey north to

Luda to join her husband, who was overseeing the churches in that area. She had asked Moses to watch over them while she was away and act as their interpreter, since he spoke Chinese.

Belle was a little awed by the responsibility Leila had thrust upon her and John, but she was astounded when Leila casually added before she left, "By the way, Moses' wife, Grace, is expecting a baby any day. I promised to help her, but if the baby comes while I am gone, you'll have to take over."

Belle's stomach lurched. Belle was no nurse, she was sure of that. The sight of blood made her squeamish. "Oh," she finally replied. "I couldn't possibly do that. I've never seen a baby being born, I have no idea what to do."

Leila smiled and patted Belle's hand. "I haven't had any training either, but you have a daughter, don't you? You must know what to expect."

Belle shook her head. "I wasn't taking notes when Kathryn was born!"

Leila pointed to a couple of books on the shelf. "Take a look at those. They should help you out. Anyway, if something does happen to the baby, don't be too distressed and don't feel like it's your fault. All of Grace's other babies have been stillborn. Just do your best. It would be wonderful for Moses if he did have one live child, though."

Belle stood dumbfounded as Leila kissed her good-bye on the cheek and set off with two guides. *What have I gotten myself into?* Belle wondered as she watched Leila head off down the trail.

Two days later, when Leila was too far along the trail to be called back, Grace went into labor. Belle pored over the medical textbooks to try to discover what she should do. The books were exactly like the frightening ones Nurse Ling had brought with her when she came to deliver Kathryn. The pictures still made Belle squirm as she read.

Grace's labor went on all day and through the night, and then all the second day. By that evening Moses and Belle were both exhausted.

"What if the baby never comes?" Moses asked despondently.

Belle looked at the medical books once again, though she already knew they did not offer any advice on how to speed up a birth. She closed her eyes and prayed for strength to go on, wishing that the nearest doctor were closer than two weeks' journey away.

Grace's fate and the fate of her baby were in Belle's and God's hands, and Belle prayed fervently for wisdom to know what to do. Then somewhere in the back of her mind she recalled reading that quinine could be used to speed up labor. Or had she? The more Belle thought about it, the less sure she was that she'd actually read that fact. Yet she did have quinine in her medical supplies. Should she give Grace some of it?

She talked to Moses about her notion, and they both prayed for God's direction.

"Let's go ahead," Moses said when they were done praying.

"I feel that God is telling us to do that too," Belle replied. "So since we both

agree, I will give her quinine.”

With trembling hands Belle fed Grace a two-grain pill of quinine and waited. Nothing happened, so she returned to her hut to rest. “Come and get me if anything changes,” she told Moses as she left.

It was midnight when Moses knocked on the side of the house. “Please, you must come,” he blurted.

Belle jumped to her feet. She had been sleeping in her clothes, and she ran out the door and up the hill after Moses. When she arrived in the dimly lit hut, she shined her flashlight on Grace, just in time to see a newborn baby slip out. The baby did not make a sound.

“It’s dead, like the others,” Moses wailed.

Belle’s heart lurched. Had she killed the child with the quinine?

“Waaa!” The cry rose from the pile of rags on the floor. Belle scooped up the baby. It was a girl, and she was very much alive.

Belle cut the umbilical cord while Moses let out a whoop of joy. When she was done, Moses took the child from Belle and thanked God for giving him a live baby at last. Belle let out her own prayer of thanks. The experience was one she never wanted to repeat.

Baby Esther, as Moses and Grace named their daughter, grew stronger each day, and Moses took to carrying her everywhere, showing her off to anyone who would take the time to look at the little bundle in his arms.

The rest of the month with the Lisu at Pine Mountain Village flew by, and, much to Belle’s relief, no more medical dramas took place. During their month there Belle and John were able to witness a baptism. Christians from the local church gathered at a small mountain pool located near Pine Mountain Village. Belle watched as the church deacons lined up along one side of the pool. Members of the congregation stood together behind the deacons and sang hymns while the candidates for baptism waited on the other side of the pool dressed in thin clothes. Finally Moses entered the frigid water of the mountain pool and began the baptism. One at a time a candidate would enter the water, and Moses would dip the person below the surface. Then, dripping wet and usually shivering, each person would climb out on the opposite side of the pool and shake the hand of each deacon before rushing to a makeshift shelter to put on warm, dry clothes.

At first Belle had been puzzled by the Lisu Christians’ desire to continually shake hands with each other. Then she learned that shaking hands was an important sign of Christian fellowship among the Lisu. Apparently, when James first came and evangelized the Lisu, the people had noted his English penchant for shaking hands and had taken the gesture to have some Christian meaning. Since that time, Lisu Christians shook hands regularly.

Witnessing the baptism, along with the openness among the Lisu people to hear the

gospel, excited Belle. How different the Lisu were from the Chinese. Belle could never imagine three Chinese men walking across the mountains for days for the sole purpose of bringing a Christian teacher back to their village to explain the gospel to them more fully. Evangelizing among the Chinese was so much more difficult than evangelizing among the Lisu.

As their month in Pine Mountain Village drew to a close, Belle began to grow anxious. As much as she would have loved to stay longer in Lisuland, she had promised the two women looking after Kathryn that she would not stay longer than a month, and now that time was up. However, John had not been able to make much progress in dealing with the opium situation. One of the warlords was still threatening to destroy the Christian churches throughout the territory if church members did not grow opium for him, as they were required to do. And he was ordering those who refused to grow the opium to pay twice the amount of tax they owed him. John had talked to many people about the state of affairs, but the situation remained unresolved. As a result, John felt that he should stay on in Pine Mountain Village to brief Leila when she finally returned.

In the end the couple decided that Belle should return with a local escort while John stayed another month or so with the Lisu. Belle was relieved to hear that on the way back they would be following a slightly more direct route through many tiny towns. Ma Fu-yin, one of Belle's escorts, told Belle that she was the only white woman who had ever traveled that trail. Belle could believe it. As they moved along, every time they stopped for the night, a crowd of onlookers would gather around Belle, poking at her and trying to get her to speak English.

As she trekked up and down the mountains on the trip back, Belle had plenty of time to think about going and living among the Lisu. Was it really what God had called her to do? It would be much harder living in the mountains with the Lisu than on the plains and in the valleys of China where there were many markets and an abundance of produce to buy. There were few markets in which to buy food among the Lisu. Vegetables and corn had to be coaxed to grow out of the rocky ground, and the Cookes kept hens that needed constant attention in order to produce eggs. As well, the Lisu homes had no furniture beyond a few woven baskets to hold food and a communal plank that everyone used to eat from, and no one washed. Water had to be carried from a well, both for drinking and for the laborious job of washing clothing by hand. There was also the constant threat of falling down the mountainside or having part of the mountainside come loose and fall on you!

In the end, however, all these things paled away when Belle remembered the Lisu Christians she had met. There was Moses, who had recently headed north to help Allyn Cooke, leaving behind the pride of his life, his newborn daughter Esther. There was Me-do-me-pa, who had suffered at the hands of the warlord for his faith and yet remained steadfast and joyful in that faith and was an inspiration to others. And there were the three Flowery Lisu men who had hiked for days from Burma to reach Pine



Mountain Village and refused to leave until someone went with them to teach the people of their village about Jesus.

Deep in her heart Belle knew that she had found her life's calling. With Christians as devout as those she had met in and around Pine Mountain Village, she would count it a privilege to spend the rest of her life teaching them more about God's ways. Now all she had to do was convince James that she was physically strong enough for the challenge of life among the Lisu.



## Back to Pine Mountain

Nearly two months later, John arrived back at their mission house at Old Market in the Yungping Valley. Soon after his return from the Lisu, a flow of letters began between the Kuhns and James Fraser. James had recently married a fellow missionary named Roxie. The new couple were now expecting their first child.

John and Belle wrote back with their congratulations and news that John had recently been sick with amoebic dysentery and had also undergone a hernia operation under primitive conditions in Tali.

Finally, in November 1934, John and Belle received permission to relocate to Lisuland to take over the work Leila had been overseeing. “Not permanently,” James wrote. “Just for two years until your furlough, and then we will see where you are needed after that.”

This time Belle was packing not for a visit but for a two-year stint living among the

Lisu. She wrote lists of everything that she would need to take with her: kerosene for the heaters, clothes for a growing three-year-old, canned milk and meats, medicines, her guitar, a typewriter, reams of paper, pen, ink... Belle watched in dismay as the lists grew longer and longer. Yet she realized that every single item she listed was vital if they were to work effectively.

Eventually, eleven mules, loaded and ready to set out on the journey, stood outside their house. Belle took one last look around the place. She would miss the Yungping River running outside her door and the long, flat plain that spread out in front of her. She wondered how long it would be before she saw another flat stretch of land.

John gave the order, and the mule train began to move. Belle lifted Kathryn up into a small sedan chair, and off they went. At first the journey was relatively easy going. Since it was December, as they started to climb up the Mekong River Valley, the air soon grew thin and cold.

The mule train climbed over high mountain ridges, the mules laboring under their loads, and then dropped down steeply into the bottom of a narrow canyon. The trail then ran along the bubbling river at the bottom of the canyon. As the travelers made their way along the river, sheer rock faces rose up on either side of the canyon. High above, huge boulders jutted out from the cliff face. Then the travelers began to encounter places where these boulders had come crashing down in landslides that almost blocked the canyon and covered the trail. They were forced to clamber over the landslides, which became more frequent the farther up the canyon they went.

At one stage the muleteer pleaded with John to turn back and take the other trail to the Salween River Valley. The mules, he said, were having great difficulty making it over the numerous landslides with their loads. John thought about it, but they were already five days into the journey, and their food supplies were beginning to run low. The muleteer became stubborn and insisted they go back, but John reasoned with the man and told him to lighten the mules' loads even if he had to make two trips across the landslide with the animals to get everything across. Grudgingly the muleteer agreed, and on they went.

At one particularly treacherous landslide, the mule train came upon a group of travelers headed down the canyon. The two groups of travelers stopped and talked awhile, and Belle was relieved to learn that this was the last major landslide they would have to cross. The travelers also told John and Belle that a week earlier in this very landslide a British consul had lost all of his supplies.

After six days the group reached the Salween River, the entrance to Lisuland. Belle's heart soared when she finally saw the river. They stopped for lunch at a village called Deer Pool, where John had stayed on his way back to the Yungping Valley. "There is a Christian girl here called Hoday," he told Belle. "We'll share our food with her. She is a remarkable girl; wait and see. She even speaks some Chinese."

Soon a plump young woman dressed from turban to toe in navy blue emerged from

a hut beside a pigsty. It did not take Belle long to see why John had described Hoday as remarkable. Hoday was quiet, but she exuded an air of confidence as she helped prepare rice for lunch while at the same time entertaining Kathryn.

After lunch, as the group said good-bye, Belle hoped that she would have the chance to spend more time with Hoday. She did not have to wait long. The next day Belle glanced back and spotted Hoday climbing the trail behind them, a bedroll on her back. Belle dropped back to allow her to catch up. "Are you coming to join us?" she asked. Hoday nodded. "Yes. I would like to live with you and help look after your little girl if you want me to."

Belle flung her arms around Hoday, not sure whether that was an acceptable gesture or not. She was too excited to care. She now had a wonderful Christian woman to disciple and a helper all in one. Belle's heart overflowed with gratitude to God.

One more surprise was yet to come. At dusk, Job, a Lisu evangelist, met them on the trail. "God told me to come and help you," he said.

And help he did. John, Belle, and Kathryn were able to walk the last few miles to Pine Mountain Village while Job stayed and directed the mules and muleteer, who had to climb the final mountain at a much slower pace.

Darkness had enveloped the mountain by the time the Kuhns arrived at their new home. Belle remembered the first time she had been in it, chatting with Leila and enjoying her freshly baked muffins. But Leila had already left to join her husband farther north in Luda, and now the house was empty except for a couple of dusty bookshelves. An icy wind whipped through the loosely woven bamboo walls.

As Belle lit a lamp, she felt a tug on her arm. "Mommy, let's just stay for a couple of days and then go, can we?" Kathryn asked, her big hazel eyes raised to Belle's.

With her daughter's words, Belle felt her resolve drain away. Tears filled her eyes. Was this really what she had prayed for through the years? Did she want living in a one-room hut high on a mountainside to be among Kathryn's first memories? What had she done? Then in the glow of the lamp, Belle spotted a piece of paper pinned to the wall opposite her. "My God shall supply all your needs" was written on the paper in crayon by a childish hand. *A child who was praying for the Cookes must have sent this to them*, Belle thought. Then she remembered all of the people who were praying for them as well. "Forgive me, Lord," she whispered. "You brought us here, and You will carry us through." Then she looked down at Kathryn.

Kathryn smiled hopefully back at her mother, and then hand in hand the two of them walked with new strength out of the dimly lit hut to find John and begin setting up their home.

It took Belle only a day to organize her house. Each corner of the room had a designation: clothing, office supplies, food, bedding. She folded the clothes and put them into their designated corner, stacked the food in its corner, and placed the bedding and paper and pens and ink in their respective corners. Then she was done. Now it was

time to turn her attention to the Lisu.

Christmas was approaching, and preparations for celebrating it were already under way at Pine Mountain Village. Christmas was the one time of the year when all the Lisu Christians gathered to celebrate with their fellow Christians from across the area and with the missionaries. Before John and Belle arrived, Pine Mountain Village had been designated the host church for the Christians in the southern area of the Salween River Valley.

Belle watched as small pine shelters were built to house the guests and cooking stoves were set up. An arch of freshly cut greenery was also set up as a welcome gate for the visitors. The day before Christmas, a watchman scanned the trails leading to Pine Mountain Village for approaching visitors. When he saw someone, he would fire two shots from his rifle into the air as a signal, and the Christians of Pine Mountain Village would emerge to welcome the visitors, lining up on both sides of the arch. When the guests arrived, the Christians serenaded them with song, and of course there was lots of handshaking.

The day after Christmas a baptismal service was held at the same nearby pool where Belle had witnessed the baptism on her earlier visit to Pine Mountain Village. Belle helped Kathryn climb up onto a large rock near the pool, and together they watched as twenty-nine Lisu Christians were baptized.

The Lisu people near Oak Flat and Pine Mountain had seen several white missionaries over the years, among them James Fraser and Leila and Allyn Cooke. But when Belle and John left Kathryn with Homy and ventured farther afield, they often met locals who ran from them. With her dark brown hair and hazel eyes, Belle seemed less frightening to them than John, who had bright blue eyes and a long nose.

“He is a bird demon! See, his nose is like a beak, and his eyes are plucked from the sky! He eats children!” people would shriek as they ran away from Belle and John.

Such moments made it hard for the Kuhns to press into new areas, but the two of them persisted. They mastered the Lisu language, and Belle translated many new songs and hymns into the language. The Lisu loved to sing in four-part harmony and were mesmerized when Belle would play her guitar and sing.

Within the local area, Belle spent much of her time teaching the Bible. To date, the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts had been translated into Lisu, and James was still busy trying to complete the first translation of the entire New Testament into Lisu. As a result, church elders were eager for Belle to teach them from other parts of the Bible, especially about the history of the Jews in the Old Testament.

July 1935 proved to be a difficult month for the Kuhn family. Belle and John liked to take Homy and Kathryn with them on their travels around Lisuland as often as they could. On a trip to a northern village during July, four-year-old Kathryn caught malaria. She became deathly ill, and Belle nursed her daughter day after day as Kathryn's tiny body struggled to fight off the disease.

No sooner had Kathryn begun to recover from the malaria than Belle began to feel ill. Her body was soon covered with a rash, and she could not stand the smell of food. She decided that it was not malaria, though she had no idea what the illness was. With Kathryn feeling somewhat better, John had just left on a trip to meet with the new Christians across the mountains in Goo-moo, Burma. In John's absence, Belle knew that Hoday was doing all she could to care for her. She just didn't know whether it would be enough. The nearest doctor was a two-week journey away, and Belle knew that she did not have the strength to make it that far.

Every night the Lisu church members came and sang outside Belle's hut, and one or two of the elders came inside to pray for her. Belle was heartened by their concern for her, but she did not seem to be getting any better.

Then one morning Hoday told Belle that Job, the church evangelist, had gone for help, promising to run all the way to Paoshan to fetch someone. The reality of his journey brought Belle to tears. It was the middle of the rainy season, and traveling was particularly dangerous throughout the area. The rain loosened rocks, which tumbled down the mountainsides, wiping out huts or animals or anything else in their way, including lone travelers. Huge landslides blocked the common trails, forcing anyone traveling that way to scramble across unknown routes.

Belle began to lapse in and out of consciousness, praying for Job's safe passage to Paoshan when she was lucid enough to think. Job made it to Paoshan in record time, covering the distance in four days rather than the normal six days. He arrived back in the village from Paoshan with two missionary nurses and infected feet from running so far in bare feet.

Belle was barely aware of the nurses' presence as they lifted her off the plank on which she was lying and placed her on a portable cot they had brought with them. It felt like she was resting on a cloud.

From the blur around her, Belle heard one of the nurses whisper, "It's just a skin disease. It shouldn't have done this to her. I think she's starving to death as a side effect. Hoday says she won't eat."

Hour after hour the nurses spooned nourishing food into Belle's mouth. The chicken broth and lentil soup slowly strengthened her until she was well enough to be carried down from the mountains to Paoshan, where a doctor could examine her.

Hoday and Kathryn came along on the journey, as well as the two nurses. Once Belle had a steady supply of good food, her health improved quickly, and the doctor was able to treat her rash successfully.

Three months later Belle was back in Lisuland, more determined than ever to make a difference there in the six months before she and John were scheduled to leave for furlough. The six months went by swiftly, and in March 1936 it was time for the Kuhn family to return to North America. Leila offered Hoday a place in her home until John and Belle returned. This eased Belle's mind, as did the fact that Hoday had just

accepted a marriage proposal from an outstanding young Christian man named Joseph. All seemed stable in Lisuland as John, Belle, and Kathryn once again made their way down from the steep mountainside.

The trip to Shanghai was long, and Belle was glad to walk up the gangway of the SS *President McKinley*. Now, at last, she could start to unwind. She stood on deck and watched the Shanghai skyline disappear over the horizon as the ship moved off down the Hwang-poo River. Eight years had passed since she had sailed to China. Belle smiled to herself recalling how indignant she had been when Ruth Paxton suggested that “all the scum of your nature will rise to the top.” It surely had, Belle mused. The food, the fleas, the filth, the exhausting mountain paths, the drafty huts, giving birth hundreds of miles from the nearest doctor, and so many other things she had been exposed to—none of these experiences had been easy transitions to missionary life for her. But she had stayed at her post, and she was so glad that she had.

Playing a part in Christianity’s spread throughout China and seeing how it changed lives made every hardship Belle had been through worthwhile. “God,” she prayed quietly as she stared down at the muddy river water, “please let me come back.”



## Furlough

After several weeks of crossing the Pacific Ocean, the *SS President McKinley* docked in Seattle. The Kuhn family disembarked ship and transferred to a ferry to take them to Vancouver, where Belle's father, her brother Murray, and a large group of Corner Club girls were waiting at the pier for them to arrive. It was quite a reunion for Belle and an introduction for John and Kathryn, who had not yet met any of Belle's family.

Now that they were back on the North American continent, John and Belle had to adjust to many new things. It was May 1936, and the United States and Canada were quite different from the places they had left in the mid-1920s. For one, North America was in the grip of an economic depression, which meant that many people, including some of their friends, were out of work. Fashions had also changed, as had musical tastes. There were new roads with many more cars on them, and there were many more electrical appliances in the homes. Belle could also see that some things had not



changed. During this tumultuous time, Belle's father had tried his hand at some stock deals and was now five hundred dollars in debt as a result. Belle worried about the effects that amount of debt might have on her father's health.

After three weeks in Vancouver, the Kuhn family headed south to Bellingham, Washington, where they attended the Bible and Missionary Conference held at The First. How wonderful it was to see Otis and Julia Whipple again. Belle spent many hours telling Julia all about her adventures in China. She also spent time walking the wooded paths of the conference grounds, where she reflected on how her life had been forever changed as a result of past visits to The First. All too soon the conference was over, and John and Belle transferred to nearby Orcas Island, where they had been offered the use of a small cottage. Belle's father came along as well.

The Orcas Island cottage was just what Belle needed. In the mornings she could sleep in as long as she wanted while her father took Kathryn fishing or on some other little adventure around the island.

After a month of rest and recuperation at the cottage, Belle felt ready to tackle the long train trip east to Pennsylvania, where John had been raised. Apart from meeting John's sister, Belle had not been introduced to other members of his family. John was eager for Belle to meet his many relatives who still lived in and around Manheim in Lancaster County. Belle and Kathryn also were eager to meet them, though John's father had died several years earlier while John was in China, and his mother had died when John was three years old.

Belle was enchanted with Manheim, located in eastern Pennsylvania. It was deep in Amish country, and many of the local people still spoke a form of German. The houses reminded her of pictures she'd seen of European villages, with the homes all grouped together and their front doors opening right out onto the street. John proudly drove his family around, pointing out the local sights and the places where he and his sister had preached at open-air meetings when they visited home from Moody Bible Institute.

The family also visited John's father's grave and gave thanks for the financial inheritance John's father had left them. It was a substantial amount of money and would have made a nice backup financial plan for them, except for one thing. On the voyage home from China they had both read the story of another missionary, C. T. Studd, who had started his missionary service in China before moving on to Africa. What had impressed John and Belle the most about C. T. Studd's story was the way he had given away his own, much larger inheritance.

As they studied the documents relating to their inheritance, John and Belle decided to follow C. T. Studd's example and give away the money. The first check they wrote was for five hundred dollars, which they sent to Belle's father to cover his debt. Other checks were written to support missionaries in Russia, South America, and Africa. They also helped with the tuition of students at Moody Bible Institute. One of these students

would take the money only on condition that she repay it when she could. "Don't worry about it," Belle countered. "It is a gift, not a loan."

By the time they left Manheim for the trip west, the Kuhns had given away the entire amount of the inheritance, except for two thousand dollars in shares. A Christian friend who was on the board of the particular company urged them to keep their shares of the company's stock, and John and Belle decided to do so as a personal favor to him.

As the Kuhn family made their way back to the West Coast, they stopped at various churches along the way to speak to the congregations about their missionary work among the Lisu. Belle was continually delighted to meet strangers who had read the prayer letters she had written which her father and others had duplicated and sent out. Many of these people said they prayed regularly for the family and their mission. They also told Belle that in her letters she painted such vivid pictures with her words that they felt they were right there among the Lisu. Their response to the prayer letters excited Belle, especially when the people asked about local Lisu Christians by name and wanted updates on them.

One person they often asked about was Homay. When they did inquire, Belle would ask them to pray especially hard for Homay. Since departing on furlough, Belle had learned that Homay had suffered a terrible loss when her fiancé Joseph drowned on the way back from a mission trip to Goo-moo in Burma. Leila had written to say that Homay had taken the news like a valiant Christian, but Belle knew how much Homay had loved Joseph, and she was very sad for her.

Before Belle knew it, a year and a half had passed, and it was time to return to China. Belle had spent much of the last month at home buying supplies and packing. This time Kathryn had to have her own bags because it was time for her to go to school. It was not an easy decision for Belle to come to, but she knew it was one that had to be made. Kathryn was a bright little girl who had blossomed among her new friends in Canada and the United States. Belle knew that she would be very lonely living back with the Lisu and also needed to be intellectually stimulated. Although Kathryn spoke Chinese and Lisu as well as English, she was ready for new learning challenges.

Thankfully, the parting would not be too sad, as John's sister and brother-in-law, Kathryn and David Harrison, had been assigned to work at Kunming, where there was a small CIM school that young Kathryn could attend. And since it was a boarding school Kathryn could regularly visit her Aunt Kathryn and Uncle David and stay with them for long weekends. Belle felt sure that either she or John would be able to go down to Kunming once a year and bring Kathryn back to vacation with them in Lisuland.

On Friday, August 30, 1937, the Kuhn family, along with Belle's father and brother, attended a farewell service held for them at the China Inland Mission house in Vancouver. They were set to sail for China the next day. It was a wonderful service, and Belle hoped that she would remember the faces and prayers of all her friends during tough times in China.

No sooner had Belle tucked Kathryn into bed after the farewell service than the telephone rang. *That will be one of our friends wishing us well*, she thought as she strained to hear John, who had answered the phone. If she were to listen for a couple of sentences, she might be able to figure out which friend it was calling. But John didn't say much. He listened to the voice on the other end of the line for what seemed an eternity to Belle, and then she heard him say, "So we won't be going tomorrow?" Belle could hear the disappointment in John's voice. The person on the other end of the line spoke some more, and John listened before saying, "Thank you for calling, Dr. Wilcox."

Belle's heart skipped a beat. Dr. Wilcox was the head of the CIM home missions board. Belle turned to John, a look of surprise on her face.

"Well, Belle, dear, we are not going to China tomorrow," John said.

"Why not?" she asked.

"Because war has broken out between Japan and China in the north around Manchuria. The mission has canceled all passages to China. Even Miss Maitland, who embarked in Seattle today, will have to disembark here tomorrow."

Belle felt her face growing red with frustration as she stared at the trunks stacked neatly beside the front door. "But the fighting is in Manchuria in the north, and we are about as far south in China as we could be. Doesn't the home missions board know its geography? We will be safe. There's no need to hold us up from returning!" Belle hated the desperation that had crept into her voice.

In contrast, John's reply was calm and soothing. "Now, Belle, don't try to run the mission. They are sending us, and they can delay us if they see fit. We need to submit to them, and submit happily."

Belle stared at her husband. She could see he was not going to challenge Dr. Wilcox and the decision of the home missions board. She was sure that someone higher up in CIM had totally overlooked the fact that they were going to the far south of China and would not be in danger from the fighting. Yet she decided to keep quiet and not push the point. More discussion on the matter would only make John more stubborn.

A short while later Belle sat down with John for their nightly devotions. John turned to Psalm 91 and read verse one: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

*There, Belle thought, we will be safer in China under the shadow of the Almighty than we would be anywhere else in the world.*

She heard John sigh beside her after reading the verse, and she was sure that he was thinking the same thing. They prayed together, and then John got up. "I have to agree with you, Belle," he said. "I will call Dr. Wilcox. I think it would be a good idea to bring the fact that we are in the south of China to his attention. Perhaps he can talk to the higher-ups, and they might consider reassessing our situation."

Belle could hardly keep the smile off her lips. She was sure things would work out and that the family would be on their way to China aboard the *Hikawa Maru* the

following day. And they were. At 9:00 AM the following morning Dr. Wilcox called to say that Dr. Glover, his superior, had sent a telegram approving their departure for China. Belle could barely contain her excitement at the news.

Twenty days later, after a smooth trip across the Pacific, the *Hikawa Maru* docked in Hong Kong. From Hong Kong the Kuhns would have to book passage on a ship to take them down the coast to Haiphong in French Indo-China (Vietnam), and from there they would travel overland by train to Kunming in Yunnan Province.

While John investigated the options for their onward travel, Belle imagined herself having time to relax in Hong Kong. But it was not to be. A telegram awaited her at the CIM house in Hong Kong that read, "Send Kathryn to Chefoo with Grace Liddell."

Belle's hand touched her face as she read the telegram and felt the sting of tears in her eyes. How could it be? Everything was arranged for Kathryn to go to school in Kunming, where the Harrisons were waiting for her. It seemed impossible to think of parting with her bright, happy six-year-old daughter and sending her north to CIM's main school for missionary children in Chefoo. And wasn't north where the fighting was?

Grace Liddell was also staying at the CIM guesthouse. Belle had not yet met her but she had heard from others that Grace was a very effective worker in Yunnan Province. Despite Grace's effectiveness in Yunnan Province, China Inland Mission was short of teachers at the school in Chefoo, and Grace had been asked to take up a teaching position there.

Belle liked Grace immediately, but she still did not want to entrust her daughter to her. Throughout the rest of that day and the next, Belle wrestled with the situation. She agonized over every part of Kathryn's life that she would miss out on with her being so far away in Chefoo. She would not be there to read her bedtime stories, comb her hair, help her dress, answer her questions, or watch her learn to read and draw and play music. Everything Belle had hoped to do with Kathryn was all about to be ripped from her.

John tried to reason with her. He pointed out to Belle that Chefoo had a wonderful school, much larger and with more opportunities than the little school at Kunming. Kathryn would be with loving adults, all of them missionaries themselves, who would care for her like their own, and she would be surrounded with other children who were in the same situation.

Belle knew that John spoke the truth, but it did not make the situation any easier. Still, as she prayed about the matter, Belle felt that it was God's direction, and so she allowed Grace to take Kathryn's hand and lead her onto another boat that would take them north to Chefoo.

As soon as Kathryn was out of sight, Belle burst into uncontrollable tears. John walked the streets of Hong Kong with her all night, as she could not sleep. By the time they set sail from Hong Kong for Haiphong the next day, Belle was exhausted. And once

they arrived in Haiphong and boarded the train for Kunming, she continued to weep silently. As the train wound its way toward Yunnan Province, it was taking Belle farther away from Kathryn. Dark thoughts ran through her mind. What if Kathryn forgot her altogether and preferred to be with Grace Liddell or one of the other teachers? Or what if Kathryn got ill and died and Belle never saw her again?

About halfway through the train trip, the fog in Belle's mind began to lift. Belle took a good look at what she was doing. Yes, she was grieving for all the things that she would never experience with Kathryn. But what good had all that grief done? Was she any better off for all her weeping? Was Kathryn any better off? Had her marriage to John been strengthened by her wallowing in self-pity? The answer to all of these questions was no, and with that realization Belle dried her tears. There would be more good-byes to come—it was part of being a missionary—and it was best not to dwell too long on them. If such partings was part of God's will, He would have to bear the burden. It was not one that Belle could carry. She prayed and asked God to forgive her for indulging her grief. Now it was time for her to look ahead.

As the train rolled along, snow-capped mountains began to appear in the background through the window. John and Belle were already in Yunnan Province and would soon be arriving in Kunming. Belle refused to think about how Kathryn was supposed to be going to school in Kunming and instead focused on how wonderful it would be to see John's sister and brother-in-law and fill them in on all the news from home.

Another blow awaited Belle in Kunming, however. Belle had been so focused on returning to the Lisu that she never considered the possibility that James Fraser would not reassign them there. But he did not. Instead he posted John and Belle temporarily to Paoshan, from where, he told them, they could make trips into Lisuland. As far as their future in China went, James asked John to consider becoming the assistant superintendent of CIM for the western part of Yunnan Province.

Belle was speechless when she learned of their new posting. First Kathryn had been taken from her, and now the Lisu people. But this time Belle did not wallow in grief. Instead she set aside a day to pray about the situation. At the end of the day, she was certain that God had promised her she would return and live permanently among the Lisu. A huge grin spread across her face at this realization, but she kept it in check. Belle decided not to tell anyone—not even John—about what she had felt from God. It was a special secret God had shared with her, and now Belle was eager to see how it would work itself out.

Belle sang as she packed her bags for the trip to Paoshan. After all, she told herself, it was just a steppingstone to Lisuland. She noticed John giving her a couple of strange looks as she packed, but she resisted the urge to tell him that she *knew* they would be returning to Lisuland soon.

And they did. A month after arriving in Paoshan, a desperate letter came from

James, asking John and Belle if they would go up to Oak Flat Village and help settle a problem that had arisen in the church. At the same time they could escort Victor Christianson, the new missionary going to work among the Lisu, and help get him settled and on his way to learning the Lisu language. The letter ended with the words, "Remember, this is not a permanent designation. You do not need to move all your things. But you will need to set up housekeeping for a few months. It would be good for Victor to have the comfort of experienced seniors for a little while."

Belle nodded politely as John read the letter to her, but in her heart she was dancing! John and James might think she was going back for only a few months, but Belle was certain that she would be back among her Lisu people for good. She could hardly wait to see what would happen next.



## Rainy Season Bible School

**E**very minute must count while we're with the Lisu!" Belle exclaimed, soon after she and John had settled in at Oak Flats Village. "We have to find the best ways possible to bring the Good News to the remote areas while strengthening the local Christians as well."

John nodded in agreement. "Is there something you have in mind?" he asked.

Belle laughed. Her husband knew her well. "As a matter of fact, there is. Here at Oak Flats there is preaching every Sunday. But other Lisu throughout the area do not have a way to learn Bible truths except from each other. That can lead to all sorts of strange teachings. It would be wonderful to bring better Bible teaching to hundreds of Lisu men and women."

"Hundreds of men and women," John said, echoing her words.

Belle nodded. "Maybe not to begin with, but John, I can see it already. We could

get Hoday to type out the books of Galatians and Corinthians in Lisu, and everyone could have his own copy. Think of the truths the people could learn from Saint Paul!”

“I suppose we could ask James about it,” John conceded, “though I don’t know when we’d do it.”

“During the rainy season, of course,” Belle interjected. “We’ll call it the ‘Rainy Season Bible School’—RSBS for short. It’s the perfect time to run a Bible school. There’s hardly anything to do in the fields, and it’s hard for anyone to travel over the slippery slopes. What do you think?”

“I think that you have it all planned out in your head. If you can convince the Oak Flat Church to go ahead and I get permission from James, we’ll hold the first ever Bible school for the Lisu,” John said, patting Belle’s hand.

That was all the encouragement Belle needed, and she set straight to work on the project. She had brought a typewriter back with her from furlough and was soon teaching Hoday, who had recently returned from the Cookes in Luda to live with them, how to use it. James had finally finished his translation of the New Testament into Lisu, but at that point only the Gospels and the book of Acts were in print. Belle planned to have Hoday type out the unpublished books of Galatians and 1 Corinthians in Lisu using carbon paper so that up to five copies could be made at a time. The typed pages would then be sewn together to make study books for the students attending the Bible school.

At first the church elders at Oak Flat were not enthusiastic as Belle laid out the plan to run a three-month program of Bible teaching based at the church. “If fifteen people come and stay in the village for three months, we will have to supply them with a lot of corn. We have never done this before. Where would the church find so much food?” Me-do-me-pa, the church evangelist, asked.

“We will watch God supply it for us all,” Belle replied, knowing that this was a stretching idea for the Lisu Christians at Oak Flat.

More talk about the program ensued, and eventually the church elders voted to approve the Rainy Season Bible School. Soon after their vote, John and Belle received a letter from James giving them permission to begin the program. “How much better it is for the Lisu Christians to teach each other and continue to build a strong native church, independent of foreign missionaries,” he wrote in his letter.

Belle knew what he meant. It was 1938, and the Japanese had pushed farther south into China, capturing Peking and Shanghai and occupying large parts of northern and central China. The Chinese army, which had been involved in a civil war against Communist forces wanting to turn the country into a Marxist state, had now joined forces with their enemy, and together they were trying to stop the Japanese advance, but with little success. While the treacherous high mountain trails and sparse resources of the region gave the Japanese little reason to bother the Lisu, people in other regions of China were laboring under the brutal occupation of the Japanese. It was still unclear what would become of the missionaries in China. So James’s admonition to build a



strong local church that was independent of foreign missionaries had seemed farsighted to Belle.

James ended his letter with the news that he was sending two young, single male missionaries to help with the work among the Lisu. Belle was elated. She would have more time to devote to preparing for the Bible school; all it needed now were students. To that end she sent invitations to church leaders and evangelists throughout the mountain region informing them of the RSBS.

On May 28, 1938, the students began arriving at Oak Flat for the Bible school. The first to show up was Job from Pine Mountain Village. At thirty-eight years of age, he was the oldest student. Others soon appeared with clothes and sleeping bags slung across their backs and carrying sacks of rice and corn with them. By the end of the day, eighteen students had shown up for the school. Fifteen of them were men, and three, including Hoday, were women. Of course, Hoday had an advantage over the others since she had typed out the curriculum for the school. The students settled into the small bamboo shanties that would be their home for the duration of the RSBS, and they met for class in a large hut with weathered, woven bamboo sides.

Belle, who was the main teacher in the RSBS, got straight to work teaching the next day. Each weekday was divided into periods of Bible study, preaching practice, and personal evangelism techniques, along with hymns and choruses. On the weekends the students braved the rainy deluges and visited nearby villages to practice their newly developed skills. As the weeks went by, some students walked in pairs up to twenty-five miles each way to preach at a Sunday service or visit a village that had not yet heard the gospel.

People in the surrounding villages were so grateful to hear more Christian teaching that they sent the young evangelists back to Oak Flat with food and even silver coins, so that there was enough food and drink to feed everyone for the three months of the school.

Every day of the RSBS was a new adventure for Belle, who loved getting to know the students in the school. Besides Job, there was Aristarchus, who had left a job that paid him sixty dollars a year to attend the Bible school. And twenty-three-year-old Silas, who seemed to have great difficulty remembering his lessons in class but could talk in great detail about minor points of doctrine. Not to mention twenty-two-year-old Nathanael, who had difficulty reading and writing but could preach sermons that kept people riveted.

Hoday blossomed in the school. She seemed to get along particularly well with Thomas, one of the other students. It excited Belle to see Hoday's shining eyes and bright smile when she was with him, especially after the death of her fiancé, Joseph.

Belle also faced some interesting teaching challenges. Since the Lisu language had no word for conscience, it took some creative explaining for her to get the concept of a conscience across to her students. Neither were there Lisu words for *holiness* and *humility*, concepts that took some explaining. Belle found that she had to spend a lot of

time teaching the students not to be so preoccupied with the Lisu cultural practice of appeasing demons but to instead focus on God—Wu-sa—and worship Him, because He was greater than any demon. She also spent time explaining the difference between *law* and *grace*.

Nonetheless, Belle persisted, and at the end of three months, a closing ceremony was held for the RSBS in the church at Oak Flat. The students dressed in their best clothes and placed a flower in a buttonhole. One of the students was chosen to preach during the closing ceremony, while the others each stood and gave a five-minute testimony. Another student, Junia, couldn't decide what was the best combination of clothes to wear to the ceremony, so he simply put on all his clothes. By the time he rose to give his five-minute testimony he was sweating profusely, which caused the other students to laugh. Lots of singing was featured in the service as the students showed off all the choruses and hymns they had learned. At the end of the ceremony, each student was given a certificate to signify that he or she had successfully completed the RSBS.

Once the Rainy Season Bible School was over, Belle made a list of ideas to incorporate the following year. Also, immediately following the completion of the school, Homay and Thomas were married, much to Belle's delight. Belle thought they made a fine couple.

"There are Lisu here who need to hear the gospel in their own language," read the letter John and Belle received just as the Bible school was drawing to a close. The letter was from a missionary in the Yongpeh, a tribal area east of the Yangtze River gorge, about a two-week journey from Oak Flat. The missionary asked the Kuhns if they could send two Lisu evangelists to work among the Lisu of the Yongpeh. John and Belle presented the request to the Oak Flat church elders, who prayed over it and eventually decided to send Aristarchus and Secundus, who had both just finished RSBS, to Yongpeh.

Once the two young men had set out on the journey to Yongpeh, Belle turned her attention to putting her experiences among the Lisu into book form. She tried to fit some typing time in each day, and her manuscript, titled *Precious Things of the Lasting Hills*, came together easily. Belle was able to use copies of her many prayer letters home to help fill in the details.

Having completed a draft of the manuscript, Belle then focused on the next project—a trip across the mountains to Goo-moo, Burma, to support the local Christian work there. Preparations for the trip were made. Thomas and Homay, Lucius (one of the students from the RSBS), and seven other Christian men (a guide, an interpreter, a cook, a mule boy, and three carriers) would accompany John and Belle on the journey. They planned to set off for Goo-moo in early October at the end of the rainy season.

Just before the group set out on the trip, a messenger arrived with sad news: James Fraser had died of malaria in Paoshan on September 25. Belle could scarcely believe what she was hearing. There was no one else in the world who understood their work

among the Lisu and could give her and John sound advice. Belle's heart went out to James's widow, Roxie, and their three young daughters, and she immediately wrote a letter of condolence to Roxie Fraser.

For Belle, James not only had been the person who introduced her to the plight of the Lisu people fourteen year before at The Firs in Bellingham, Washington, but over the intervening years had also been an adviser and spiritual mentor to her. She would miss him deeply. In her diary, after hearing of James's death, she wrote:

There was no one else on earth who had such a complete knowledge of the details of our problems and so no one could share so perfectly in our joys and sorrows.... John and I have, perforce, to enter an entirely new epoch of our lives, for life can never again be quite the same without him.

Upon hearing of James's death, the Lisu Christians went into mourning. In their grief they banded together and collected the sum of twenty dollars in silver to pay for the missionary's burial in Paoshan. A delegation of Lisu then made its way to Paoshan to deliver the money and attend James's memorial service. Belle longed to go with them and pay her last respects to her friend and mentor, but the plans for the trip to Goo-moo were firmly in place, and she and John would be leaving shortly on the journey.

As far as Belle was concerned, one positive thing came out of James's unexpected death. The fighting in China was growing worse by the day, and James had been the man who best understood how the fighting affected the various CIM missionary opportunities and postings throughout the region. Now that he was gone, the leaders of CIM decided that it would be wise to leave all the missionaries posted where James had placed them. As a result, John and Isobel Kuhn's temporary posting among the Lisu at Oak Fla became permanent. It was not quite how Belle would have liked their permanent posting among the Lisu to have occurred. Nonetheless, she accepted the news with a grateful heart.

Finally the missionaries set out on the journey to Goo-moo. Belle was aware that the journey would be arduous, yet she was excited to be on her way. She thought back to her first trip to Lisuland, four years before, and how the three young men from Goo-moo had arrived at Leila Cooke's door begging for a teacher to go back with them to their village in Burma and teach them more about Jesus. Over the years a number of Lisu evangelists had gone to Goo-moo in answer to the need, and now Belle would get to see firsthand the results of their labor.

The first day of the trip was spent descending the mountain range they lived on, crossing the river, and then climbing the next range. When they made camp that night on the top on the next range of mountains, Belle could look back across the valley and see the roof of their bamboo house at Oak Flat. The next day they traveled on, crossing more mountain ridges, and they did the same the following day. Then they began to climb

eleven thousand feet up to Pien-Ma Pass, the gateway to Burma. As they reached the pass late in the afternoon and crossed the border, Belle took in the sight. Behind her, in China, the mountains stretched out as far as she could see, as did the mountains in Burma which lay in front of her. They hurried down the other side of Pien-Ma Pass hoping to get as far down the mountain as possible before darkness descended. When the darkness did finally envelop them, they camped for the night beside a deserted British fort.

The weather in Burma was decidedly warmer, and the pine trees that clung to the mountains on the Chinese side of the border gave way to lush jungle. For the next three days the group traveled on, making their way through lush valleys festooned with orchids and with waterfalls that seemed to drop from heaven to the valley floor. Belle was entranced by the beauty around her, though the journey on this side of the mountains was not without its difficulties. Leeches were everywhere underfoot, looking for bare skin to latch on to, and Belle noticed a number of large snakes slither off the trail in front of them.

Finally, late in the afternoon they reached the last river to cross before getting to Goo-moo. To get over this river they had to float in a flimsy, two-person raft bound together with strips of bark. By the time darkness fell over the river only half the group had made it across in the raft. Once it was dark, the men rowing the raft refused to go back for those who had not yet made it across. They explained that they might hit a submerged rock and be swept away in the fast-flowing current. However, when a bright full moon emerged two hours later, the rowers agreed to continue ferrying the rest of the group across. Belle watched as the raft returned, bringing the mules across the river. The terrified animals were tied to the raft by their tails, and the men guiding the raft reached out and held their heads above water as they swam alongside the raft. Belle had never seen mules so glad to reach the other side of a river.

When everyone was safely across, it was time to make their way to Goo-moo, which sat on the mountainside two thousand feet above them. The trail that led from the river up the side of the mountain was so steep that Belle could not ride her mule, Jasper, up it. Instead, she walked behind Jasper, holding his tail and allowing him to pull her up the mountain. In the dark she had no idea where she was stepping. She just followed Jasper one step at a time, all the while hoping that no big snakes were lurking on the trail in the dark.

Shortly after midnight, the group made it to Goo-moo, where the local Christians were eagerly awaiting their arrival. When they got to the village, there was, as usual, a lot of handshaking.

The people of the village had built a bamboo hut with a banana-leaf roof for John and Belle to sleep in. Belle was grateful to crawl into bed to sleep that night.

For the next several weeks, John and Belle stayed in the Goo-moo area, teaching the local Christians and leading them in singing in the small, white chapel they had built

in the village. They also preached in outlying villages where people had not yet heard the gospel.

All too soon, however, it was time for the missionaries to head back across the mountains to Oak Flat. The local Lisu Christians had grown very fond of Hoday and Thomas, and they begged the Kuhns to leave the couple behind in the village for six months so that they could learn more from the Bible. John and Belle agreed, and Hoday and Thomas moved into the bamboo hut. The remainder of the group arrived back in Oak Flat just in time to help plan the Christmas festivities.

Waiting for John and Belle upon their arrival back was a letter from Aristarchus and Secundus in Yongpeh. What an amazing tale their letter told! The two of them had made contact with the Lisu in the area. They had borrowed a house in one village and held regular Christian services in it. They had also gone to other Lisu villages throughout the area and preached in them. As a result of their effort, thirty-five families, about two hundred Lisu in all, had become Christians.

The men's report excited Belle. Here were two students from the RSBS preaching the gospel to people who had never heard it before and seeing many converts. The result was even more than Belle had hoped for when she first conceived of the Bible school.

The letter also contained more exciting news. Aristarchus and Secundus had made contact with the Lolo tribe. Belle knew of the tribe. It had a fearsome reputation throughout the Yongpeh district. About one hundred thousand Lolo, an aggressive people who often kidnapped Chinese and Lisu alike and held them for ransom, were living in the area. Since 1928, James Fraser had prayed for the Lolo and searched for a way for CIM missionaries to enter their territory and share the gospel with them. And now two young men from the RSBS had made that first contact and were taking tentative steps toward doing that very thing. Aristarchus and Secundus asked that they be allowed to stay longer in the Yongpeh district to continue the work they had begun. John and Belle sent back a letter giving an unqualified yes to the men's request.

Soon after the Christmas celebrations were over, Belle began making preparations for the next Rainy Season Bible School. At the same time, the Cookes returned home for furlough, and the Kuhns took over the responsibility for their ongoing missionary work with the Lisu in the Luda area.

Belle loved the challenges all of this responsibility brought, but most of all she liked the challenge of planning an even better Bible school than the first one. Again her efforts paid off. The next RSBS was also a great success, with a number of participants from the first school returning for a second time. On fine evenings the students would sit outdoors around a fire while those from the first school recounted their adventures in faith since completing their school. While the school was still in progress, Thomas and Hoday returned from Goo-moo with wonderful stories to add to those the other past students had told.

Another letter arrived from Aristarchus and Secundus describing how about two

hundred fifty Lolo had become Christians and were now hard at work building a chapel in which to hold services. The two young evangelists asked if more helpers from Oak Flat could be sent to help them in their work. Aristarchus and Secundus often explained that they were so busy that they had to part ways and go and teach and preach alone. John and Belle discussed the situation and eventually decided to send Gad and Daniel two students from the first school, to Yongpeh to assist Aristarchus and Secundus.

As the second RSBS drew to a close, Belle's only concern was for Thomas Homa's husband. Since returning from Goo-moo, Thomas had begun to suffer terrible headaches that sometimes affected his vision so much that he could barely see. Belle and John discussed the problem and decided that the best course of action was to send Thomas back to Burma to the missionary hospital located there. The trek back across the mountains to the hospital was long and dangerous, and Homa would not be able to go with Thomas on the journey, as she had just learned that she was expecting a baby. As soon as the RSBS was over, Thomas set out with several Christian men to get medical attention.

Missionary life among the Lisu fell into a pattern for John and Belle. There were the Christmas and Easter festivities, followed by the Rainy Season Bible School followed by treks to Christian outposts near and far throughout Lisuland. In February 1940, the long-awaited New Testament in the Lisu language finally arrived, making the prospect of the next RSBS even more exciting for everyone. In the meantime, Thomas had returned to Oak Flat from Burma feeling much better, and on his arrival Homa had presented him with their new baby son! Everything seemed to be going well, but deep shadows were about to fall across Belle's corner of the world.



## War Zone

**I**n March 1940, the next Rainy Season Bible School got under way. Belle and John took turns teaching the students, among whom was their first Lolo convert from the evangelistic work of Aristarchus and Secundus in the Yongpeh district. As the school progressed, however, the health of Me-do-me-pa, the evangelist at Oak Flat, began to fail. Belle wasn't sure what the problem was, but she suspected that he had cancer. Night after night she and Hoday would visit his hut, where she would play her guitar and the two women would sing choruses to the evangelist. Belle wished that she could do more to help this man who had been the first in the area to become a Christian, a man who had been a pillar in the church and a friend and helper to her and John. But nothing could be done, and as the RSBS drew to a close, Me-do-me-pa died.

Belle and Hoday stood side by side at Me-do-me-pa's funeral, which was held outdoors at night on Sunset Ridge. A bonfire crackled beside them as John eulogized

Me-do-me-pa. Belle felt it was a wonderful service, one that suitably honored Me-do-me-pa for all his achievements in the community. But as she looked around in the flickering firelight at the faces of those gathered for the service, Belle would never have guessed how soon she'd be attending another funeral.

A few months following Me-do-me-pa's funeral, Hoday began to become weak and lethargic. At first Belle thought the strains of motherhood were too much for her, but then she realized that was ridiculous. Hoday was the most efficient, capable young woman for miles around, or at least she had been. But now she tired easily and slept during the day. After three months of this, Hoday's plump body had wasted away. There seemed to be nothing Belle or anyone else could do for Hoday's condition, and Hoday died in spring 1941, leaving behind her husband, Thomas, and their eighteen-month-old son.

Hoday's death was almost too much for Belle to bear, but she knew she had to go on. With China in the grip of war, it was likely that she would face many more tragedies before the war was over.

The next shock for Belle came at the end of 1941 and from halfway around the world. Belle and John just stared at each other, finding the news—which was three weeks old by the time it reached them—hard to digest. Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on December 7, 1941, and as a result, the United States had declared war on Japan. Belle sighed. At times like these it was hard to be so far away from any kind of news. Who knew what had happened since then? Perhaps the United States had already attacked Japan or the Japanese had taken Burma. Anything was possible, and Belle worked hard to control her active imagination regarding what might be happening.

As Belle thought about the situation, her thoughts raced to Kathryn, and then she felt panic rise in her. Until now, both the Chinese and the Japanese had treated Europeans in China as neutral and allowed them to go about their business. But now that the United States and the Allies were enemies of Japan, things would surely change for Europeans in China. When Belle heard a rumor that the Japanese were close to overrunning Chefoo, every motherly instinct she possessed urged her to pack her things and go find her daughter. Thankfully, common sense prevailed. Neither Belle nor John would have any way to get through to Chefoo if the place was under attack. Belle knew that the best thing was to leave ten-year-old Kathryn in God's hands and trust that the loyal staff of the CIM school in Chefoo would do its best to take care of her daughter, no matter what.

The following week John, who since James Fraser's death had served as the head of CIM's work in West Yunnan Province, left for a conference in Chungking. He planned to be gone from Oak Flat for three months. With Kathryn's fate weighing on her mind and John away, Belle decided to hold a Bible school just for the Lisu women. On February 1, 1942, twenty-four women responded enthusiastically to the invitation to attend the school. One of the younger women who signed up for the Bible school was a blind girl named Sah-me-nyio. Belle had a few reservations about accepting her. An eye



infection had robbed Sah-me-nyio of her eyesight, but before the girl became blind, she had been able to read and write. Now, however, she would have to have someone read aloud to her and write down the things she wanted to say.

As the month-long school began, Belle soon realized why Sah-me-nyio was known as the Blind Singing Girl of Deer Pool Village. Sah-me-nyio was one of the happiest Christians Belle had ever met, and one of the smartest too. Sah-me-nyio memorized large portions of the New Testament and passed all the tests near the top of the class. When the school was over, she asked Belle if she could be sent over the mountains to preach.

Belle did not know how to answer Sah-me-nyio's request. She had never dreamed that a blind Lisu woman would want to scramble over mountains to share the gospel with other Lisu, but now one wanted to do just that. Belle eventually decided that if that was what Sah-me-nyio wanted to do, she should be allowed. But before such a preaching trip could be arranged, Sah-me-nyio became ill with typhoid fever, and it soon became obvious that she was dying from the disease. Belle burst into tears when she learned that the last thing Sah-me-nyio had told her family was, "Two things I know—that God loves us, that God is faithful. When I am gone, keep God's honor high. Don't complain. Go on believing. I shall wake up in the Land of Light."

Toward the middle of March, Belle knew that she had to address another situation—her own health. Since Christmas, her tooth had been aching and had now reached an unbearable threshold of pain. No matter what she did, Belle could not get any relief from her throbbing tooth. Reluctantly she made plans to go to the nearest competent dentist, who was located in Kunming. The only things that cheered her about making the trip was the expectation of seeing Kathryn and David Harrison, John's sister and brother-in-law, in Kunming. She also thought that she might meet up with John and together they could travel back home to Oak Flat.

The trip to Kunming proved to be more hair-raising than Belle could have imagined. There was the usual long trek from Oak Flat to Paoshan, where Belle met two pilots with the Flying Tigers, the popular name for the First American Volunteer Group. This was a group of American ex-military pilots who had volunteered to serve with the Chinese Air Force, flying fighter planes to defend against Japanese air attacks. Originally these pilots had been based in Burma, defending the Port of Rangoon and the Burma Road that ran all the way from there to Kunming, China, an important supply route for the Chinese. But when the Japanese finally captured Rangoon and more and more Burmese territory, the Flying Tigers had been ordered to relocate their base of operations to Paoshan. The two Flying Tigers pilots whom Belle had met were about to drive to Kunming, and they kindly offered to take Belle along with them for the ride. And what a ride it proved to be as they followed the Burma Road east toward Kunming!

The Burma Road had been completed three years before, but this was Belle's first experience traveling on it. Belle had thought it would be easier to travel to Kunming by

car or truck on the road rather than by foot, as she usually did, but her assumption proved to be wrong. As it descended from the mountains, the Burma Road looped back on itself like a contorted snake, and at almost every bend in the road Belle could look far down below and see the wreckage of some previous vehicle that had failed to negotiate the bend at the appropriate angle and speed. Because of the harrowing, steep hairpin bends, their progress was slow, and often hours would pass without their seeing another person traveling the road.

Then on the fourth day of traveling down the Burma Road, the car broke down. The two airmen knew little about Chinese culture and decided that under the circumstances the best thing for them to do was to pull over the next vehicle that passed by and force the driver to take them along with him, at gunpoint if necessary. Belle cringed at the idea and set about convincing the airmen to allow her to handle the negotiations with the driver. She felt nervous about doing this, mostly because she had not used her Chinese language skills for several years now.

Thankfully her fluency in Chinese did not have to be put to the test, as the first vehicle to come by was driven by a European who offered them a ride. Unfortunately the vehicle had no room for their luggage, and Belle had to leave her bed and clothing bundle in the car. The airmen said they would send someone back for it, but Belle knew she would never see it again.

By the time she arrived at the Harrisons' house in Kunming, Belle was exhausted and felt quite sick. She nearly burst into tears when she learned that Kathryn and David were not in Kunming but were out in the countryside preaching. Fortunately Eva, a Chinese pastor's daughter who was charged with taking care of the Harrisons' home while they were gone, let Belle into the house and set about taking care of her.

The next day Belle made it to the dentist. He examined the aching tooth and informed her that the infection in her tooth had spread throughout her body, which was what was making her feel so sick. Had she delayed coming for help, even by one day, it might have been too late to save her life.

Much to Belle's relief, Kathryn and David arrived home several days later, and then on April 5, 1942—Easter Sunday—John joined them in Kunming. The news he brought was not good. The Japanese had become more aggressive and were pushing farther into China and now also controlled much of Burma. Belle forced herself to remain calm, despite the fact that both her daughter and her home at Oak Flat were in danger.

As if to underscore the dire news John brought, Japanese aircraft bombed Paoshan killing fifteen hundred people there. Belle could scarcely comprehend the waste of so many precious lives. And more bad news followed. The Japanese were now descending on Yunnan Province by foot from three directions. As a result, John felt that he should go and warn the CIM missionaries in the area of this turn of events. Most of the missionaries were serving in areas where there was no radio reception, and John did

not want the Japanese to take them completely unawares.

Belle spent anxious days praying that her husband would make it back safely, which he did. But then he set out on another equally dangerous mission to warn missionaries in Tali. From this trip he did not return, and there was no news of what had happened to him. David Harrison tried to reassure Belle that things would be fine, that John had most likely been waylaid on his trip by fighting between the Chinese and Japanese armies.

Meanwhile, Belle had a predicament of her own. News reached Kunming that the Japanese had completely overrun Burma and had advanced along the Burma Road all the way to the Salween River Valley. As a result, the Chinese authorities were now allowing only people with passes to move about the countryside, and the authorities would not issue Belle a pass to enter such a volatile area, even if her home was located there.

Belle prayed about what to do, but she could find no peace. Finally the decision of what to do next was made for her. The British consul in the area, to whom as a Canadian citizen Belle was answerable, ordered her to join the Royal Air Force convoy heading north to Szechwan Province. Belle was reluctant to leave because she would be heading away from Oak Flat and leaving John somewhere out in Yunnan Province in the fighting. But she was consoled when the Harrisons decided it was time for them to evacuate Kunming with Belle, and more so when the Royal Air Force commander allowed Eva to come with them. Belle had grown fond of Eva, and a friendship had developed between the two of them during her stay at the Harrisons.

The bumpy trip north took seven days. *Seven days farther away from John*, thought Belle as she shielded her eyes from the dust that swirled around the trucks in the convoy. Finally they reached northern Szechwan Province, where the missionaries who served in this area welcomed Belle and the other missionaries in the convoy.

As she slept on a pallet on the floor her first night with the missionaries, Belle tried to think through what she should do next. She was hundreds of miles from anyone she knew; she had no money, only the clothes on her back; and she did not have permission to travel. What should she do? Eventually she came to the conclusion that there was little she could do except work for the mission and pray for God to open the way for her.

Belle had even more to pray about in the following days when she learned that the Japanese had captured the ninety-seven missionary children at the CIM school in Chefoo. Belle's heart skipped a beat thinking about Kathryn all alone with no brothers or sisters to comfort and encourage her. The Japanese had been so cruel to Chinese women and children that Belle shuddered as she thought about what they might do to her precious daughter.

After a week of agonizing, Belle learned that Kathryn and the other children from the school had been placed in a Japanese internment camp and that the teachers and

staff, along with Roxie Fraser, James's widow, and their three young daughters, were also with them. Knowing this made Belle rest a little easier, though she wished with all her heart that she had John to lean on right then. She tried not to let her imagination run wild and instead kept reminding herself that John was still alive and that wherever he was, God was watching over him.

A month passed in Szechwan Province before news filtered through that the Japanese had been pushed back from the Salween River and that the Lisu in Oak Flat had been untouched by the fighting. Belle breathed a prayer of thanks. She was sure that God intended for her to get back home to Oak Flat. The question was, how? She had no money and no transportation by which to make the trip. And just as important, she had no official invitation from John to travel there. As acting head of CIM in western Yunnan Province, John needed to issue such an invitation before Belle would be allowed to cross into a war zone.

Unsure of what else to do, Belle visited a nearby churchyard, where she was sure she would be left alone. There she poured out her needs to God in prayer. When she left the churchyard, she left with a confidence that her situation would change.

Sure enough, it did. The next morning Belle received a telegram from John. She felt greatly relieved to know that he was still alive. In the telegram, John specifically asked for her to join him in Tali. That was the official request from him that she needed to travel.

Then a bag of mail made it to the mission house in Szechwan Province. It was the first mail Belle had seen for months. Inside the bag were two letters for her, dated six months apart. Belle eagerly opened the letters, which were both from the same person, the young woman attending Moody Bible Institute to whom Belle and John had given money when they were home on furlough. Even though Belle had said the money was a gift, the woman insisted that she would repay them, and she had! Each letter contained a check for fifty dollars, enough to pay Belle's way to Kunming.

A friend heard about a convoy of three privately owned trucks going south to Kunming, and the convoy had room for two more passengers. Belle laughed with pure delight as she began the trip home to Oak Flat. She had enough money in hand to pay for passage on the convoy for both her and Eva. Belle had to admit to being surprised when she told Eva of her plans to return to the Lisu and Eva had begged to go along as her assistant. The Chinese of the area, even Chinese Christians, despised the Lisu and the other ethnic tribes that lived in the mountains of western Yunnan Province. According to Chinese legend, when God had finished making the world, He scraped the mud from the soles of His sandals and fashioned from it the Lisu and the other tribes. Thus the Chinese referred to them as earth-people. Belle found it extraordinary that as a Chinese person, Eva wanted to lay this prejudice aside and come with her to the Lisu.

The trip to Kunming was awful: Belle had no other word to describe it. However, both she and Eva eventually arrived unharmed. From Kunming the two women pushed

on to Tali, where John had said to meet him. They arrived in Tali, only to find that John had gone with a Quaker ambulance team into the fighting zone around Paoshan. When she learned this, Belle wondered how much more she could bear. Since she could not get a permit to follow John to Paoshan, she would have to wait and pray for the safe return of her husband.

After a day of waiting, however, Belle decided that she'd had enough of that. It was time to take action! She walked to the headquarters of General Song, the Chinese general in charge of the western Yunnan battlefield, and asked to see him. Her plan was to ask the general for a pass to travel to Paoshan to be with John. A guard at the headquarters told her to wait at the gate. Hours passed as she waited. A few soldiers came to look at her. Belle realized that she was probably quite a sight—a scrawny white woman in ragged clothes, with a fierce look of determination on her face. Eventually she persuaded one of the soldiers to take her request for a meeting to General Song. The soldier returned a short while later to say that the general had turned her request down.

As Belle walked back to the CIM mission house in Tali, she wondered whether the general had even received the request. Perhaps the entire day of waiting at the gate to his headquarters had been for nothing. Late that night, however, Belle was delighted to find that General Song had paid attention to her. He sent a message to her saying that she could expect her husband back in Tali soon, that the general had summoned him, and that both of them were expected to attend a banquet the general would be hosting. Belle was puzzled by the message. What could General Song possibly be up to?

Several days later, on August 4, 1942, John arrived back in Tali. Belle was delighted to see him again, and the two of them wrapped their arms around each other in a long embrace. Then it was time to go to General Song's banquet.

"The general obviously wants something from us," John said as they walked to his headquarters.

What a different reception Belle received when she and John reached the headquarters. The same guards who had ignored her and left her standing at the gate for hours now bowed to her and John and led them into the general's private residence. General Song welcomed them warmly and introduced them to his wife, a refined woman who spoke perfect English.

Over a lavish dinner, the general got right to the point. "The position is this," he began. "Yes, we checked the Japanese advance at the bridge over the Salween River, as you know. But our enemy then made their way north up the valley in search of another place to cross the river. As they did so, they enlisted the help of the heathen tribes there and set up outposts. We Chinese have neglected these people for a long time, but now we must enlist their help and stop the Japanese from establishing outposts farther up the valley."

John and Belle looked at each other and knew they were thinking the same thing.

Yes, the Chinese had neglected and exploited not just the Lisu but all the tribes that lived in the mountains of the region, referring to them as subhuman earth-people. Was it any wonder, then, that some of them had been enticed to help the Japanese?

General Song went on. "I called the warlords to come and meet with me in the hope that I might get them to use their influence with the Lisu to win them to our cause, but they turned out to be nothing but opium sots. All they cared about was opium. They had no concern for those who lived in their territory."

Belle felt like interjecting, *What did you expect from men who refer to the Lisu as Monkey People?* But she bit her tongue and was silent.

"And then I thought of you two," General Song said. "You are respected in the area. You speak Chinese and Lisu. So I sent for you. Will you help us to gain the friendship of the Lisu and warn them of the danger of cooperating with the Japanese?"

"That is what we have been doing since the war began," John said. "We have told the people in our area that if the Japanese came to them and they cooperated with them, the Japanese would oppose their being Christians. And you will notice, General, that in those parts where there are many Lisu Christians, the Japanese have managed to obtain no footholds. So, yes, we will help you."

General Song explained that he wanted John to act as an adviser to Colonel Hsie who would be heading up the Nationalist Chinese Guerilla unit in the Oak Flat district. John accepted the position. Then, as far as Belle was concerned, came the best news of the evening. General Song informed them that he had given Colonel Hsie orders to provide them a military escort all the way back to Oak Flat. Belle could scarcely believe it. Not only were they being allowed to return to a war zone, but also they were going to have a military escort.

The group traveled south from Tali in a military truck until they came to the Burma Road and then headed west along the road toward Paoshan. Their trip was delayed when the soldier driving the truck struck a large rock in the road, making the vehicle undrivable. They had to camp out in the road until another truck could come from Paoshan and pick them up.

When they got to Paoshan, Belle was shocked. The town had been a thriving market center for the region, always bustling with people. But Japanese bombing had destroyed much of the town, and many of the town's residents had fled.

In Paoshan, John and Belle bought flour and sugar and other food staples to take back with them to Oak Flat, while Colonel Hsie procured horses for the trip up the Salween River Valley. Soon Colonel Hsie, John, Belle, Eva, and a group of soldiers were mounted up and on their way. The trip up the valley was much slower than John and Belle were used to, but eventually, at the end of August, they arrived back at Oak Flat.

As Belle excitedly opened the door to her house, she realized that six months had passed since she had left the village to have her toothache attended to in Kunming. How

things had changed in that time! Kathryn was now in a Japanese internment camp, John had risked his life numerous times, and she had been halfway across China to northern Szechwan Province and back. As she shut the door behind her, Belle wondered what might happen next.



## Windwords

**B**elle read the powerful words in her Bible: “There will be wars and rumors of wars.” *How right that is*, she thought. The Lisu had a word for rumors—*windwords*. Belle could see firsthand just how destructive these words—carried on the wind by no one in particular—were. Even the Lisu Christians, who were glad to have John and Belle back with them after six months, seemed paralyzed by rumors of war. One day they heard that some soldiers in unfamiliar uniforms had been spotted just beyond the northern village of Cow’s Hump. Many of the Lisu, assuming that they were Japanese soldiers, fled into the mountains, only to discover that they were actually Chinese soldiers dressed in unfamiliar uniforms. Belle sighed when she saw the people’s reaction. If they jumped like that at every windword, they would all go mad!

Since John was away so much after their return to Oak Flat advising Colonel Hsieh and visiting outlying churches, Belle decided that it was up to her to set an example of



Christian strength. She determined that things at the church at Oak Flat should proceed as usual. The Christmas and Easter festivals would be celebrated and the Rainy Season Bible School would continue, though starting in January rather than with the onset of the rainy season. The change in start date for the RSBS allowed Belle to embark on a new project—a Bible school for teenage boys. She wrote the curriculum for the school and some new songs, which she thought would appeal to the young students.

During the RSBS, Japanese fighter planes began flying over the mountains of Lisuland. The Lisu, who had never seen airplanes before, were puzzled by them and referred to the airplanes as a thousand purring tigers with wings that did not flap. When Belle told them that they actually had people inside them, they started calling them flying houses.

On the day that the Bible school for teenagers opened, March 6, 1943, new windwords swirled throughout the community: the Japanese were nearby at Six Treasures, just a day's journey away, and had destroyed the boats that ferried travelers across the Salween River. To Belle the reports were just rumors, and she refused to call off the school. Despite the windwords, seventy-six boys arrived for the Bible school. Belle could scarcely believe the number of boys who had shown up, and the thought of overseeing so many boys exhausted her. And she knew why. At the age of forty-one, she was shocked to learn that she was pregnant and expecting a baby in the summer.

Despite the pregnancy, and with the able help of her new assistant Eva, Belle gave herself wholeheartedly to teaching the boys. She knew that it might be their last chance to receive solid Christian teaching. If the Japanese continued to advance into Lisu territory, many of the boys would most likely be captured or killed in the ensuing fighting.

The school ran for a month, and at the end of it many of the boys had committed their lives to spreading the gospel throughout Lisuland, no matter what the cost. One of these boys was Chi-lee, the lone Christian from a remote area called the Heathen Patch. Belle took a special interest in him, and she was excited to see how seriously he studied. Chi-Lee did not know how to read or write at the beginning of the school, and he still had a long way to go at the end of it. Sensing that Chi-lee had a sincere heart, Belle invited him to return in August, when she planned to hold another Bible school for the boys.

The spring passed quickly, and Belle was glad when a missionary nurse from Tali agreed to come and stay with her at Oak Flat until the baby was born. On August 1, 1943, Daniel Kuhn entered the world. His head was covered with downy red hair, and his skin was pearly white. The Lisu stared in wonder at the newborn; they had never seen anything like him before. Both John and Belle were delighted with their new son, though Belle could not help wondering what the future held for him. And she wished with all her heart that she had some way of telling Kathryn that she had a little brother.

August rolled on, and a new Bible school for boys began. To Belle's surprise,

however, Chi-lee did not arrive for it. She had been sure that he would come back. Then she learned the terrible truth of what had happened to Chi-lee. He had gone home to the Heathen Patch as planned at the end of the first school and began preaching the gospel. At first his neighbors just jeered at him. Then they beat him. Then they burned down his house and drove him out into the mountains, where Chi-lee built himself a shelter from pine branches in which to live. Soon afterward he contracted malaria and died from the disease. It was a bitter blow for Belle, but she consoled herself with the thought that Chi-lee was now in heaven with Me-do-me-pa and Hoday and so many other faithful Lisu Christians.

The strain of living under the constant threat of Japanese invasion continued, and hundreds of Chinese troops were deployed into the area. This carried with it its own set of problems, as the Lisu were ordered to feed and house the Chinese troops. And because the Christians in the villages were the most reliable members of the community, the burden of doing this fell unfairly on them. Yet their joyfulness, even under pressure, heartened Belle.

The Chinese also stopped much of the travel in the area. The Lisu now needed a special permit to cross the Salween River, making it a time-consuming task to get everyone to the various programs being held at Oak Flat. Still, Belle pressed on. John was gone much of the time fulfilling his duties as an adviser to Colonel Hsie and overseeing the work of CIM in western Yunnan Province. In his absence, Belle decided to hold a Bible school for girls in February 1944 and followed it with another school for the boys.

Given the tense situation in the Salween River Valley, no supplies had made it to Oak Flat in months. As a result, the students attending the Bible schools had no pencils or paper to use. Belle prayed about the situation, and the answer to her prayer dropped from the sky—literally. Five American soldiers parachuted into the Salween River Valley and found their way to Oak Flat. The soldiers were on a secret mission, which they said they could tell Belle nothing about. Nonetheless, Belle took them in and gave them all a hearty meal. When they left Oak Flat, the five Americans inquired whether there was anything they could do for her. Belle asked if they might be able to find some stationery for the students, and within days a special delivery of paper, pencils, pens, and ink arrived at Oak Flat.

In the fall, Belle received the best news possible. Kathryn was in the United States! The Japanese had repatriated her and many of the other CIM children to their home countries. With the news, Belle felt a great weight lift off her, and she thanked God that it was only a few months now before she, John, and baby Danny would be headed home on furlough themselves. By Christmas, God willing, the Kuhn family would once again all be together.

The thought of soon being reunited with Kathryn spurred Belle on. Since China was now closed to new and returning missionaries, Belle was unsure whether she

would ever get back to Lisu territory after furlough. She used every ounce of her effort to make sure that she taught and reached out to as many people as possible before she left Oak Flat.

In October 1944 it was time for the family to leave. The trip home with a one-year-old was more grueling than Belle could have imagined. The family traveled out of the mountains to Kunming and then boarded an airplane that flew them over the Himalayas to India, where they boarded a troop ship carrying refugees to the United States. The trip across the Indian Ocean and then the Pacific took thirty-six days. Unlike the relaxed voyages Belle had previously made to and from China, this voyage was harrowing. The troop ship was crammed with people, the captain forbade anyone to go above deck, Danny cried from colic most of the way, and the men were separated from the women and children. Belle saw John for only two hours a day. By the time the ship docked in Southern California, Belle and John were completely exhausted. But Belle's spirits were soon revived when she got to speak to Kathryn by telephone. Kathryn was staying with friends in Pennsylvania, and Belle started counting down the days until they were reunited once again.

Danny's colic was no better on the train trip across the United States, but Belle's thoughts were not on her son's constant crying but on seeing her now thirteen-year-old daughter again. When Belle finally got into Pennsylvania, mother and daughter wrapped their arms around each other in a long embrace. Belle was impressed with the lovely young woman Kathryn was becoming. Kathryn loved her new brother Danny and was a great help to Belle in entertaining him. Still, staying in other people's homes with a toddler was exhausting for Belle, who longed for a home of her own with a fenced yard where Danny could explore to his heart's content.

And that is what she got. The two thousand dollars' worth of shares that she and John had decided not to sell from John's inheritance from his father had grown in value to six thousand dollars. John and Belle cashed in the shares and used the money to buy a small house in Dallas, where John had been studying at Dallas Theological Seminary between itinerating trips for CIM around the United States.

Of course, Belle, being who she was, had to do something to help the Lisu people, even if she was thousands of miles away. While Danny took naps during the day, she got out her typewriter and began writing another book, which she entitled *Nests Above the Abyss*. The book told the stories of many of the brave Lisu Christians whom she had known. As she wrote, tears streamed down her cheeks, and memories of Hoday, Medo-me-pa, and Chi-lee flooded back to her. Belle tried hard to capture on paper the courageous spirits of these special people.

On August 6, 1945, John and Belle learned on the radio that the United States had dropped an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Three days later they learned that a second atomic bomb had been dropped, this time on Nagasaki. They waited to see how Japan would respond to the bombing and were relieved when, on

August 15, Japan announced its surrender to the Allies. World War II had finally come to an end. Belle breathed a sigh of relief; she would get to see Lisuland once again.

With the surrender of Japan, things moved swiftly for John and Belle. China was once again open to missionaries, and China Inland Mission asked its area superintendents, including John, to return to China immediately, a year ahead of the rest of their families. In January 1946, John kissed Belle and his children good-bye and set sail for China.

Belle and the children stayed on in Dallas for a year after John left, with Belle finishing the manuscript for *Nests Above the Abyss* and arranging for it to be published. Then it was time for the family to head back to China as well. Belle sold the house to the first person who came to look at the place, for more money than she and John had paid for it, and then she packed up the family's belongings.

Belle and Danny were due to set sail for China from Houston. First the family had to travel to Pennsylvania, where Kathryn would stay behind with friends to finish high school in the United States. Belle hated having to say good-bye to her daughter yet again, but she had learned by now that part of being a missionary meant saying good-bye to those you loved in order for some greater good to be accomplished.

From Pennsylvania, Belle and three-year-old Danny caught the train to Houston where they boarded the *Joseph Lee*, a decrepit old freighter, but the only ship available for the trip to China. Forty-six days after setting sail from Houston, the *Joseph Lee* docked in Shanghai. Belle and Danny were glad to get off the ship and be back in China.

In Shanghai John and Isobel were reunited. John described the chaotic state of affairs in the countryside. "Bridges everywhere are blown up, roads are gone, villages are burned, robbers are everywhere, and the people generally are living in a state of fear." Because conditions were too dangerous for Belle and Danny to navigate by road, they would fly to Yunnan Province while John and a friend would drive to Yunnan in a truck loaded with their belongings and supplies for the Lisu people.

The Kuhn family were soon safely together again in Tali, where Belle was delighted to find Eva enrolled in a nursing school. As soon as Eva saw Belle, she begged to be allowed to quit nursing school and return to the Lisu with the Kuhns. Belle was tempted to give in to Eva's request, as Eva was a hard worker and a good friend, but she resisted. She told Eva she needed to stay and finish the school and then she could join them once again at Oak Flat.

John had superintendent business to take care of in western Yunnan Province and could not leave right away to return to the Lisu. However, since Belle was eager to get back to the Lisu as quickly as possible, John secured a guide to escort Belle and Danny home to Oak Flat.

At the end of the trek, as Belle and her son neared Oak Flat, a group of Christians rushed out to meet them. They led Danny along the final leg of the journey on a white horse with silver bells on its bridle. Belle smiled as Danny waved like a little prince

from atop the horse. She knew that he would surely enjoy his new home.

On Sunday, three hundred Lisu from all over the valley came to greet Belle and bring her gifts. Since corn and vegetables were in scarce supply because of a long drought, most people gave eggs instead—over one hundred in all.

Once the official welcome was over, it was straight back to work for Belle. John finally made it back to Oak Flat, and together he and Belle ran the biggest Rainy Season Bible School ever. During the school Belle was able to demonstrate some new ways of evangelizing children that she had learned while on furlough in the United States. The RSBS was a huge success, but as soon as it was finished, John was again on his way to take care of more CIM business.

No sooner had John left than Belle began to feel more alone than she had ever felt before. She and Danny were the only Europeans for miles around, and Danny had contracted typhoid fever. More often than not the disease was a killer, and Belle prayed fervently that it would not take the life of her young son. Night after night she sat with Danny, wiping his brow with cold water and moistening his dry lips with ointment. Belle had no time to send for help. All she could do was pray for strength for Danny to fight the disease in his body. And that is what happened. Slowly, over many days, Danny's condition began to improve.

Danny had not fully recovered when Belle had to handle another crisis on her own. While the Kuhns had been away on furlough, some of the Christians in the church had chosen to go after positions of power in the village, even if it meant leaving their Christian principles behind. One of those who had done this was a man named Keh-deh-seh-pa, who had decided that his son deserved to be a teacher at the new Christian school that had been set up, even though no one else thought the son was fit for the job. The resident missionary had to give his or her approval of the appointment, and Belle refused to do so.

Instead of going along with the decision of Belle and the church elders, Keh-deh-seh-pa used force and craftiness to try to get his own way. First he tried to frighten Belle into recommending his son for the job. One night Belle heard men outside under her window communicating with each other using birdcalls. The hairs on her neck rose as she crept over to Danny's bed and crawled in beside him. She hugged Danny and prayed that the men would not come inside and harm them. The night passed without their being harmed. The next day Keh-deh-seh-pa tried a new tactic. He talked the local magistrate into detaining two prisoners right in Belle's kitchen. The prisoners were tied to the door jambs, and Belle was told that if they went missing from her kitchen, she would be charged with interfering with the course of justice.

"Justice!" Belle snorted, angry at how a man who had been a Christian could stoop to doing this to secure a teaching job for his son. Still, she decided it was wise not to touch the prisoners, who stayed tied up in her kitchen for several days until John returned, cut the prisoners free, and dealt with the situation.

Belle was relieved to have her hut to herself again, but deep down she could see that the winds of change were blowing up the Salween River Valley. The chaos in China after the defeat of the Japanese had now turned into civil war between the Nationalist Chinese and the Communists. As time went on and snippets of news drifted back to Oak Flat, it seemed that the Communists were gaining the upper hand in the fighting and now controlled more and more of the Chinese countryside. Slowly reports came that the Communists were operating in the mountains and valleys of western Yunnan.

Some of the reports were nothing more than windwords, but others were real. It seemed that the Communists had a strategy for taking over villages. First they would let bands of thugs terrorize villages, killing people and stealing their belongings. Their brutality would shock the local population so much that when Communist soldiers came to liberate their village from the bands of thugs, the villagers would be so grateful that they would give allegiance to the Communists. Even a number of Christians were doing so, much to Belle's chagrin. And now the Communists were starting to use this tactic along the Salween River Valley.

Just before Christmas 1948, Belle had to agree with the Christian men of the village. It was no longer safe for her and Danny to stay alone at Oak Flat. The men told her that she would be safer on the western side of the valley at Village of the Olives. Lucius, a church elder, built a house for Belle right next to his own house on the track that led to the center of town.

Belle was relieved that she had moved when she learned that on Christmas Eve a band of thugs had come looking for her at Oak Flat. When they did not find her, they had turned their attention to nearby Place-of-Action Village. In the dead of night they dropped hand grenades on sleeping villagers, killing thirteen men and wounding many more.

After this incident, many people began urging Belle to leave the Salween River Valley altogether before more violence erupted. Belle was well aware that CIM missionaries throughout China were being persecuted and some even killed by the Communists. In fact, it seemed to Belle that it was only a matter of time before the Communists would eventually gain control over all of China. But until that time, she wanted to use every minute available to reach as many of the Lisu as possible with the gospel.



### Climb or Die

**O**ne of the advantages, Belle soon discovered, of being located at Village of the Olives was that she was much closer to many Lisu who had never before heard the gospel, and so she kept herself busy evangelizing among them.

Communist troops became more active in the mountains of western Yunnan Province. On one occasion a group of Communist soldiers took up residence in the village, demanding that the locals feed them and work for them. Fortunately the soldiers did not harass Belle, who, along with everyone else in the village, breathed a sigh of relief when they moved on.

Belle loved it when John was home with her, but in such troubled times he was often away taking care of CIM business and trying to encourage beleaguered missionaries throughout western Yunnan Province. On one of his trips away John was trapped for two months in Paoshan when the town came under siege from Communist

forces. When he returned to Village of the Olives, the news he brought was gloomy. The Communists were now in firm control of Northern China and were pushing south. It wasn't long before news filtered back into the mountains that the governor of Yunnan Province had ceded control of the province to the Communists. Then on October 1, 1949, the Communist leader Mao Zedong proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Nationalist Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek and about two million people had fled to the island of Formosa, leaving mainland China in the hands of the Communists.

In early January 1950, John again returned to Village of the Olives, and to Belle's delight he brought with him Eva, who had finished her nursing training. In fact, Eva turned out to be a skilled nurse, and her reputation quickly spread throughout the region.

As John and Belle talked over the situation in the country, John conceded that it was time for Belle and Danny to leave China. Because of the situation, it would be impossible for Belle and Danny to make it overland to the coast and catch a ship back to North America. Instead, they would have to cross the mountains to Burma and make their way home from there. John would not be going with them, because he felt that he needed to remain in China as long as he could to encourage the local Christians in such troubled times. Belle had expected this, but it was not easy for her to bear. Then John said something that redirected her attention. "Before you go, let's hold the biggest and best Bible school ever! When we leave, the future of the church in this valley will depend on Lisu Christians, so let's prepare them by giving them the best teaching possible."

John and Belle set to work and quickly arranged the school. What followed was indeed the biggest and the best RSBS they had ever run among the Lisu. Then it was time for Belle and Danny to leave, and on March 10, 1950, they set out. As they headed off up the trail, Belle looked one last time at the village and people she loved. In her heart she knew that she would never see them again. John stood on a rocky outcrop and waved, and Belle wondered when she would see her husband again.

John had arranged for a group of faithful Lisu men to guide his wife and six-year-old son to safety over the mountains. It would be a long and treacherous journey at this time of year. The snow on eleven-thousand-foot Pien-Ma Pass would be deep and the going slow. Belle knew that in guiding them over the mountains, their Lisu guides would be risking their own lives to get their missionary to safety. She was grateful for their commitment to her and Danny.

The trip was every bit as difficult as Belle had expected, but eventually they made it over the snowbound pass and into Burma. Once in Burma they faced a ten-day trek through the jungle—staying close together to discourage tiger attacks—to the Burmese town of Myitkyina. At Myitkyina Belle said good-bye to her Lisu guides, and eventually she and Danny made it to Rangoon. Of course, fleeing China in the manner they had meant that their visas and paperwork were not in order, and they had no money. They



experienced delays while things were sorted out, but eventually Belle and Danny were able to fly from Rangoon to Hong Kong, where they secured passage on a ship headed for North America. Nearly three months had passed from the time Belle and Danny had set out from Village of the Olives until the ship carrying them steamed into Vancouver Harbor. An exhausted Belle was heartened to be greeted by her brother, the Whipple children, and several women who had once been part of the Girls' Corner Club where Belle had worked so many years before.

Belle slept for a couple of days after arriving in Vancouver. Then she set out on the next leg of her journey, with only one aim in mind—to be reunited with her daughter. Kathryn was now a nineteen-year-old junior at Wheaton College outside Chicago, and Belle arrived just after Kathryn had completed her final exams for the year. What a wonderful reunion the three of them had.

Belle was surprised to learn that many old friends were also staying in the Wheaton area. When she had been a student at Moody Bible Institute in the mid-1920s Belle had two close friends there, Jenny Kingston and Ella Dieken. Both of them had also felt the missionary call to China, and they too had married missionary husbands and served in China. But now both their husbands were dead, Jenny's from contracting typhoid fever in China and Ella's husband having died while home on furlough. This caused Belle to pray fervently for John's safety, wherever he was right then.

After spending time together and renewing acquaintances, the three friends decided to pool their money and buy a large house in Wheaton. The place had three floors, and each woman set up home on one of the floors. Belle, Danny, and Kathryn took the second floor, where Belle had room to set up a small office. Belle loved the peaceful, genteel life of the Midwestern United States, and slowly her nerves began to unwind from the tension she had been living under for the past few years in China.

Before long, though, Belle was thinking of ways to help the Lisu. Her heart ached at the probability of never seeing them again, but she still wanted to find ways to aid them. Soon her fingers were tapping away on the keys of her typewriter as she began work on another book. *Stones of Fire*, as the book was titled, recounted her time living with the Lisu. Fortunately, before things had gotten out of control in China, Belle had shipped home her collection of prayer letters and journals, from which she drew source material for her new book. The book, along with her previous two books, *Precious Things of the Lasting Hills* and *Nests Above the Abyss*, put her in demand as a speaker. Wherever she spoke, Belle used the opportunity to share her burden for the Lisu people.

Belle had been home for over two months before a letter from John arrived. In it John explained that he had been ordered out of China, which involved making a long trek to the coast and then south to Hong Kong. But he was safe. Belle had to wipe the tears from her eyes before she read on. John explained that he would not be returning to the United States for a while. He had agreed to undertake a survey for CIM of the tribal people of northern Thailand, and then he would be attending a planning conference in

England. Since every foreign missionary had now been expelled from China, China Inland Mission had a lot of rethinking and planning to do.

Belle was not altogether shocked when John's next letter home gushed with enthusiasm about the possibilities of working in Thailand. In part the letter read,

Moreover Belle, we can use the Chinese language in reaching almost all the Thailand tribes. I always found someone who understood me. And Orville Carlson and I were even able to point some souls to the Lord in the short time I was there. The government is friendly. The tribes are approachable. The field is before us. The time may be short.

After reading the letter, Belle sank down onto the couch and let out a weary sigh. She was fifty years old; surely John could see that they were too old for a new posting. Belle tallied up some of the obstacles that stood in their way: learning a new language, understanding a different culture, and, worst of all, leaving behind Kathryn and Danny. Belle quickly wrote a letter back to her husband, saying, "Please do not offer for the new fields until you get home and we can discuss everything together."

John arrived home six months later full of news about the changes in CIM. For one thing, the organization had a new name, Overseas Missionary Fellowship, OMF for short. The name change reflected the fact that the missionaries would now be working in other areas of Asia, since China had receded behind a Communist "Bamboo Curtain." John explained to Belle how new goals had been set to reach the Chinese and native peoples of Malaya, Burma, and Thailand, three countries that bordered China. At the conference in England, John's name had been put forward to be the new OMF superintendent in Thailand.

Belle could not help but notice how John's eyes shined as he talked about the new opportunities. She found herself thinking back to a quotation from a book by Amy Carmichael she had recently read. In the book Amy had likened the Christian journey to a trek up a hillside, something Belle could easily relate to. Amy had also said that there are times when people have to keep climbing, because if they stay in one place, they will die.

"Climb or die." Belle could not get the words out of her mind. Somewhere deep inside she knew that she had to take on this new missionary challenge or her spiritual life would wither. She shared her insight with John, and together the two of them began making plans to return to Asia as missionaries.

Since the old CIM school at Chefoo had been disbanded, John and Belle had no option but to leave Danny behind with friends in Portland, Oregon, to attend school. Kathryn moved there as well to begin advanced training at Multnomah School of the Bible. When both children were settled, John and Belle set out for Thailand.

On October 8, 1952, the couple were riding the train north from Bangkok,

Thailand, headed for the hill country along the Thai border with China and Burma. As they rode along, Belle was struck with how green and fertile everything looked and how many meandering rivers and streams they crossed. How different this landscape was from the rugged mountains of western China with their steep canyons and raging rivers.

The train trip terminated in the city of Chiang-mai at the end of the railway line, where John and Belle set up the new OMF headquarters. Belle soon found that some aspect of hospitality took up most of her time. She ran an eight-bedroom guesthouse for OMF missionaries working with the tribal people of northern Thailand. Among these tribal people were about five thousand Lisu, and Belle questioned visitors to the guesthouse for news of the people she loved.

Once things were running smoothly at the new guesthouse, Belle began to feel a longing to get back to some pioneering mission work. Missionaries from six other mission groups worked throughout the mountain areas, but none of them was involved in reaching the Lisu villages far up in the mountains. When Belle learned this, her heart raced, and she began praying about the possibility of going to the villages herself.

Belle's opportunity to focus more closely on the Lisu came when a couple arrived to take over running the OMF guesthouse. With no more hospitality responsibilities, Belle accompanied John on trips up into the mountains. On one of these trips she had her first contact with a Lisu village. The Lisu of Thailand spoke a slightly different dialect from the Lisu in China, but Belle was still able to make herself understood. The Lisu, of course, were amazed to find a white woman who could speak their language.

Belle and another young missionary woman, Edna McLaren, then decided to make another trip to the Lisu village, which was named Ta-Mgo. Since the Lisu of northern Thailand had never before heard the gospel, the two missionaries set about sharing it with anyone willing to listen. Belle had to admit, it was not easy at first. The Lisu people would listen to what she had to say, but they were unwilling to commit to it. And then, finally, one old Lisu man announced that he wanted to become a Christian. Because the man's family name translated to Wood in English, Belle took to calling the man Father Wood.

Father Wood and his wife, Wu-be, were both opium addicts. Also, Father Wood was crippled with arthritis, and his wife suffered from beriberi. Yet their conversion was real. Much to the shock and surprise of the other Lisu, who continued to hold fast to the Lisu belief in appeasing demons, Father Wood ordered the altar to demons taken out of his house and burned. Most likely, Belle reasoned, the Lisu were waiting for demons to descend on Father Wood and destroy him for his action. When that did not happen, they began to take note and be more open to this new religion. They especially paid attention when Belle and Edna began giving Father Wood some medication to relieve the pain and symptoms of his arthritis, and he was able to get up and walk around once more.

Whenever she could, Belle made more trips to the Lisu villages of northern

Thailand. She was delighted when younger missionaries moved into the Lisu areas to continue the work of evangelization among them.

Belle was saddened to learn a year later that Father Wood had died suddenly. His son told her that he had woken up one morning in intense pain and told his wife, "Today I am going home to God." A short while afterward, he died. Unfortunately, after Father Wood's death, persecution followed for his family. The headman of the village forbade anyone to help with the burial, fearing reprisals from demons, and Father Wood's wife and children were left to dig his grave and bury him and grieve alone. Soon afterward the family was driven from the village. Wu-be remained strong in her faith, however, and thanks to the efforts of Gospel Recordings, who had recorded Father Wood sharing about Jesus and the gospel, his strong voice continued to be heard by the Lisu throughout the mountains of northern Thailand.



### **“There Is No Gloom in Our Hearts”**

**A**t the time of Father Wood’s death, Belle did not know it, but she herself was ill with breast cancer. She first noticed signs of the cancer in 1953, but a doctor did not confirm the diagnosis until October 1954. Belle took a deep breath when she heard the news. At fifty-three years of age, she had one last journey to take with God, and this one was going to be her toughest yet.

An excellent surgeon was located in Chiang-mai. He performed surgery on Belle after which she returned to the United States for radiation treatment. Belle urged John to stay on in Thailand and continue his work while they waited to learn whether the radiation treatment would help Belle, or whether he needed to fly home to be by her side.

The radiation treatment was carried out at a hospital in Philadelphia. It was

successful to a point, but the doctors told Belle that her cancer would eventually spread throughout her body and kill her. No one, though, could predict how long this might take.

As soon as Belle was feeling strong enough, she moved back into her second-floor apartment in Wheaton, Illinois. Danny, who was now eleven years old, joined her there and started attending a nearby school. Kathryn, who had completed her degree at Multnomah School of the Bible, also came to stay with her.

As always, Belle looked for ways to serve the Lisu people, and she decided that more books should be written about them. She got out her collection of prayer letters, her journal, and her typewriter and set to work. The words flowed, and soon Belle had composed *Ascent to the Tribes*, about OMF's work in northern Thailand; *Green Leaf in Drought*, the story of the last two missionaries out of China; and *By Searching* and *In the Arena*, collections of stories from her own life.

Belle also continued to write prayer letters that were widely distributed. It was hard for her to tell those who read the prayer letters that she had cancer, but she knew that she had to. In one of the letters she wrote, "John and I are anxious that this news should not cast a gloom over you. There is no gloom in our hearts; there is no gloom in His heart as He watches over me—why should there be in yours? Look up for His direction in praying for me; that is all."

In February 1955, Kathryn Kuhn was accepted to be a missionary with OMF. Belle braced herself when she heard the news that Kathryn had been posted to northern Thailand. She knew that if she asked her daughter to postpone setting out for Thailand, she would. But then Belle thought back to her own mother and how she had tried to stop her from following God's call to the mission field. *No*, Belle told herself. *Even if I am dying, I will not stand in God's way. My daughter has been called to serve, and I must let her go.*

Yet there were tears as the time for Kathryn's departure approached, tears of sadness because Belle knew that she would never see her daughter on earth again, and tears of joy because her daughter was continuing the call to preach to the Lisu and other needy tribal people.

Once Kathryn got to Thailand, letters passed between mother and daughter. Belle was delighted when she learned that her daughter had become engaged to fellow missionary Don Rulison. Belle knew the young man well and was confident that he would make a wonderful husband for Kathryn and a good father one day.

In July 1955, OMF sent John home from Thailand to be with Belle. Soon after John arrived in Wheaton, a letter came from Oak Flat. It was from Lucius, who reported, "All the evangelists are safe and the RSBS began with nearly eighty students." He went on to say that he visited over thirty villages a year, where he counted a total of 270 Christian families. He also said that since the Communists had taken over China, there had been over seven hundred Lisu baptisms.

Belle's heart soared at the news, and for a moment she felt like she was back in

Lisuland. She could see herself scurrying along steep, narrow mountain trails, going from village to village to share the gospel with those Lisu who had never heard it before, and teaching and discipling those who were Christians. She had endured many hardships in the course of doing this, but to read Lucius's letter made it all worthwhile. The work she and John had done was paying off. Despite now being under the control of the Communists, who despised Christianity and persecuted Christians, the Lisu church was flourishing.

Over the next year Belle spent more and more time in bed. She had many visitors and received letters from people who had read her books and been inspired by them, all of which encouraged Belle. Inscribed on a card on her nightstand was a verse, "I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:9–10)."

On March 20, 1957, the end came for Isobel Kuhn. At the age of fifty-five, Belle died quietly with John at her side.

Two days later, Belle's funeral service was held at College Church of Christ in Wheaton, Illinois, and she was buried in the city.

Among Belle's letters and notes that were donated to the archives at Wheaton College was the poem Belle's grandmother had written in her autograph book so many years before:

A noble life is not a blaze  
Of sudden glory won.  
But just an adding up of days  
In which good work is done.

When she had read those words as a teenager, Belle could think of nothing duller than adding up days of good work. But as it turned out, her life had not been dull. It had added up to a life overflowing with adventure and challenges.

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## *About the Authors*

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Janet and Geoff Benge are a husband and wife writing team with more than twenty years of writing experience. Janet is a former elementary school teacher. Geoff holds a degree in history. Originally from New Zealand, the Benges spent ten years serving with Youth With A Mission. They have two daughters, Laura and Shannon, and an adopted son, Lito. They make their home in the Orlando, Florida, area.

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