

CHAPTER

17

BING

Age 19

SHANGHAI, LATE SUMMER 1948

AFTER STAYING AT THE WEIDA HOTEL ON AVENUE DU ROI ALBERT for nearly a year, Bing had grown accustomed to the large single room. Elder Sister, Kristian, and Peter slept on a bed and cot in one corner, while Bing unfurled her bedroll at night and slept on the floor by the makeshift kitchen next to the bathroom. There was still enough room for Bing and Ah Mei to play with Peter and Ole, now five and nine. During the day, Kristian and Elder Sister were usually away—he at Texaco's Caltex offices and she socializing with friends. After the evening meal together, Ma would take a reluctant Ole with her to stay the night at her small room in a nearby *lilong*.

A few months earlier, Ah Mei had married a portly Jewish man from Iran. He was part of Elder Sister's circle of friends who enjoyed going to clubs and dance halls. Occasionally he'd stay for dinner. No one suspected a romance until he and Ah Mei surprised everybody by eloping. In the evenings, Ah Mei would stay with her new husband. Bing was happy for her and glad that she had found someone who treated her well. And she could still see her friend every day.

After Ma, Ah Mei, and Ole left for the night, Bing would ready Peter for bed. Then she'd relax and listen to Elder Sister and her husband launch into the same ongoing debate: When should they leave? Where could they go? How would they start again? They'd managed

to pull through the long occupation years. Like so many others, they wondered, could the Communists be worse than the Japanese?

"The Russians who waited too long lost everything. When they got to Shanghai, they could only find work as bodyguards and dance-hall girls," Elder Sister would sniff.

"At least they were alive, unlike the ones who didn't leave and were slaughtered by the Bolsheviks," her husband would remind her. Here was the heart of the quandary: No one in Shanghai wanted to risk death, nor did they want to follow the path of the humbled White Russians to become lowly "White Chinese."

As a Danish citizen, Kristian expected no problems in getting the visas to repatriate to Denmark with his wife and sons. Those plans did not include Bing, nor would she have expected them to—of course an adopted sister-in-law counted for nothing. She'd be left behind, just as when Mama Hsu went off to Chongqing. But now she was older and more confident, able to maneuver around Shanghai and to stick up for herself. At least Ma and Ah Mei would still be there. Though Bing would miss Elder Sister and the boys, they could be back within the year, after the Communist government collapsed—that was what everybody said.

On this much Elder Sister and her husband agreed. But they could not decide where to go. Kristian did not want to return to Denmark; it would be too stifling after forty years in China. Besides, Elder Sister and the boys spoke no Danish. He had his eye on Australia instead. "It's a modern country, and English is the common language," he'd venture once again. Bing would groan to herself. The mere mention of Australia made Elder Sister bristle.

"How many times do I have to remind you that Australia is for whites only?" she would scold. "That's okay for you, but what about me? And our half-Chinese boys?"

America was also high on Kristian's list. It was on everyone's wish list, especially with much of Europe and Asia still recovering from the war. But while a Northern European like Kristian Jarldane could get a visa, prospects for Elder Sister and the boys were dim. The U.S. Congress had recently authorized entry visas for several thousand stateless Jews and European refugees, but Chinese were another story.

"Don't you know that America had a law to keep Chinese out—just Chinese! Even now, only a hundred and five Chinese people are allowed to immigrate each year—no matter where in the world they're from," Elder Sister would sputter indignantly. "Only the richest Chinese with the best connections will get those slots." If they decided to take their chances and apply for the necessary visas, the process could take weeks, perhaps months. By then it might be too late to get out.

Hong Kong was just across the border from Guangdong Province and would be relatively easy for them to reach. But it would also be easy for the Communists to take Hong Kong. On the other hand, Elder Sister had heard rumors that certain employees at the U.S. consulate in Hong Kong could be bribed—and were selling visas to the States for three thousand U.S. dollars apiece. For four of them, that would be a huge amount to bet on a rumor. If it turned out to be a trick to take their money with no visas forthcoming, they'd be stuck in Hong Kong and heavily in debt.

They nixed Singapore, the Philippines, Malaya, and other points in Southeast Asia because too many other Chinese were fleeing to those countries and Kristian might have trouble finding work. With the massive influx of Chinese and others, the swelling antiforeign resentment was also a consideration. At least the two of them agreed that Taiwan was a place for Chinese Nationalist diehards, not for people like them who found politics and corruption to be different sides of the same filthy coin. Brazil, Argentina, and Peru were possibilities with more relaxed immigration requirements. Brazil encouraged skilled people from China, Germany, Italy, and elsewhere to immigrate. But South America was so remote and undeveloped—and neither of them could speak Spanish or Portuguese.

The next day, they'd pick up the debate where they'd left off, adding new intelligence from the latest rumors. But as the summer of 1948 pushed on, their nightly exchange took on a more urgent tone following a spate of Nationalist defeats in Manchuria and three northern provinces—the Communist—"liberated" areas were now encircling Beijing. Communist commanders under Chairman Mao had successfully transformed their guerrilla campaigns against the Japanese into larger units. The Red Army had become capable of beating back the

Nationalist troops by integrating large numbers of defecting enemy soldiers. In addition, their land reform efforts throughout their liberated zones were winning the Communists significant local support. The Nationalist armies, demoralized and stretched too thin over large expanses of territory, were losing up to half a million troops in each major battle as the Red Army advanced southward toward the Yangtze—and toward Shanghai, only four hundred miles from the main battle zones.

WITH THE LOCAL ECONOMY spinning further into chaos, Bing found new and technical-sounding words in Kristian's English newspapers. *Hyperinflation* was one. As Elder Sister explained, "It means that prices are going up like crazy—even faster and higher than the price increases during the Japanese occupation. No end in sight." Bing nodded. Everyone in Shanghai had had the unsettling experience of looking in a shopwindow as a clerk reached in to cross out one price and scrawl a new, much higher price, often x-ing out prices several times in a single day. Not even the belt-tightening inflation during the war had prepared them for costs that seemed to multiply by the minute. In June 1948, a sack of rice had cost 6.7 million yuan; within a few weeks, the price had reached 63 million.

To address the massive discontent over the crushing inflation, on August 19, 1948, Chiang Kai-shek appointed his thirty-eight-year-old son, Major General Chiang Ching-kuo, to fix the worsening financial crisis. The young Chiang, born of his father's first marriage, used his authority as a finance commissioner to announce new policies to end hoarding, stock manipulation, black-market speculation, and price gouging. He told a nervous city that the new rules would apply to everyone, including the rich, powerful, and well-connected, who were known to be the most egregious speculators. They amassed vast fortunes by creating shortages through hoarding, driving up prices to then make huge profits by selling the hoarded goods.

Diverging from the usual topic of conversation at the hotel room, the grown-ups' discontent turned to these economic developments. Kristian hoped the Chiang government was finally getting serious

about the out-of-control inflation. Elder Sister and Ma remained skeptical—especially when chaos erupted over Chiang Ching-kuo's most dramatic edict.

The newly appointed finance commissioner ordered citizens to hand over to the government all of the gold, silver, foreign currency, and the old version of Chinese yuan in their possession. Scofflaws would be executed, he declared. But the middle class and wealthy closely guarded their savings of precious metals and stable foreign currency, their main protection against the rampant inflation. To allay those fears, young Chiang guaranteed that his freshly minted currency would hold its value. To persuade the doubters, he dispatched trucks with loudspeakers throughout the former foreign concessions to blare his harsh warnings: "Those who hoard are public enemies" and "Those who damage the new gold-based currency will have their heads chopped off!" The government claimed to have special metal detectors that would root out any gold, silver, or other metal hidden in walls or floors, sending shivers of fear through the city.

At first, it seemed that Chiang Ching-kuo's economic reforms had some teeth. He arrested a number of businessmen and, with much fanfare, executed some low-level black marketers. Fearing the government's threats, many middle-class Shanghainese turned over their life savings to the government. Even Ma considered it, but couldn't bring herself to part with her small savings.

However, the well-intentioned younger Chiang went too far when he jailed the son of powerful Green Gang boss Du Yuesheng. If that wasn't enough to show he was serious, Chiang Ching-kuo also arrested David Kung, the nephew of his stepmother, Madame Chiang. Upon learning that her favorite nephew was in jail, Madame Chiang stormed into her stepson's office and slapped his face. Then she wired her husband, the generalissimo, who reportedly walked out of an important meeting with his generals in Beijing to address the family crisis.

Chiang Ching-kuo's reputation was in shambles after he'd suffered this major loss of face at the hands of his stepmother. Forced to abandon his currency reform program, he released the wealthy cheaters from jail. His monetary conversion plan crashed in a spectacular fiasco

when it became clear that the government would not stand up to the wealthy and corrupt who were fleecing the failing economy. The newly issued currency collapsed, becoming instantly worth less than the paper it was printed on. Everyone who had obeyed the government's orders to use the new currency lost everything; their assets of gold, silver, and foreign currency were now locked in Chiang Kai-shek's treasury—and lining the pockets of profiteers.

China's economy resumed its rapid plunge, while Ma was overjoyed that she hadn't been duped. "Never trust politicians who grow fat when everyone else is lean," she warned Bing.

As hyperinflation careened out of control, it became common on Shanghai streets to see people with baskets, handcarts, and pedicabs overflowing with near-worthless paper yuan to buy a few vegetables. Anyone on fixed salaries paid in Chinese yuan had to spend their pay as soon as they received it, before it lost more value. Workers went on strike, demanding to get paid in rice and commodities, not in cash.

For many of Shanghai's wealthy capitalists, the economy's collapse was the last straw. It was now riskier to stay in Shanghai than to leave. The most prescient had already made arrangements to flee, renting space in Hong Kong and moving their chief assets there: bank accounts, factory equipment, key employees, eldest sons—hoping to salvage what they could from a country in free fall.

Kristian was fortunate to be paid in U.S. dollars, better than gold against the collapsing new Chinese yuan. But his Chinese colleagues faced financial ruin. Shanghai's middle classes were outraged, saying that Chiang's government had once again used lies and trickery to steal from hardworking people. The middle classes were stripped bare while ordinary workers and the poor were flayed to the bone. Strikes and work stoppages by employees of all kinds disrupted the city daily, as ordinary people could no longer afford basic necessities. From day to day, it became impossible to know if streetcars, buses, and other city services would still be operating.

It reached the point where Shanghailanders no longer discussed *if* they planned to leave but rather *when*. Chiang's days were numbered, they all agreed. Many regretted not having fled as soon as General

George Marshall left Shanghai to become President Truman's secretary of state. Marshall, having witnessed the Nationalist government's incompetence and corruption, opposed any further American military support for Chiang, in spite of Madame Chiang's concerted lobbying of Congress with the aid of her influential American friends, such as the publisher of *Time* magazine, Henry R. Luce.

In the face of the growing unrest and military defeats, the Nationalists imposed martial law over Shanghai in late 1948. They enforced a curfew and sent censors to newspapers and radio stations to screen all news, including both foreign and Chinese media. Newspapers appeared with blank spaces showing the caption "Removed by censor." But it was impossible to suppress the news of one huge military defeat after another—not when hidden contraband radios told of the millions of Chinese soldiers and civilians dead. Though the Nationalists insisted they would defend Shanghai to the bitter end, no one believed them. Every office worker overlooking the Bund could see long lines of coolies chanting, "Hey ho, hey ho" as they hauled China's entire treasury of gold, silver, and foreign currency onto Nationalist ships docked on the Huangpu River, all bound for Taiwan. The ships were also carrying nearly four thousand crates of China's greatest art treasures to the island. Nationalist officials packed up or destroyed documents, equipment, vehicles, lightbulbs, toothpaste, screws—anything of possible use—to keep them out of the hands of the Communist "bandits."

By November 1948, newspapers were headlining the mass exodus under way:

CHINESE RUSH TO GET OUT OF SHANGHAI: The stampede to get out of Shanghai gained momentum yesterday. . . . At the North station an unprecedented crowd fought to purchase tickets and get aboard trains which were already jam-packed. . . . In the afternoon four persons were trampled to death during the rush to board the train. On the Bund, crowds were prevented from climbing aboard overladen ships by seamen with firehoses who played streams of water and kept them back.

AS THE NEW YEAR APPROACHED, Elder Sister and Kristian decided it was time to go. They ended their debate and opted for Denmark, their surest path. They'd go by boat to the States, then by train to New York and take another boat to Denmark. There was a lot to be done: Find tickets for a ship out of Shanghai; obtain Danish passports and U.S. visas; purchase a required five-hundred-dollar bond for each of them in case the U.S. government needed to deport them.

Getting their Danish passports and U.S. visas from the consulates in Shanghai was easy, while getting tickets out, even for a foreigner, was near impossible. Ticket agents at the train stations, airports, and shipping docks were mobbed with people fighting for a seat to anywhere. "Who do you know?" became the most valuable currency of all as desperate people sought help from every friend and acquaintance.

Bing read articles in Kristian's English newspaper about panic selling:

MOTORCARS, APARTMENTS, CHEAP, BUT NO BUYERS

The steadily worsening political and military situation has brought a sharp increase in the local supply of apartments, houses, motorcars, electric refrigerators and household goods. Many Shanghai residents who are in a hurry to leave before the storm breaks have found that their properties formerly valued in the thousands of American dollars have suddenly melted away.

Panic filled the hotel room when, on January 31, 1949, the Red Army seized Beijing not long after taking the nearby port city of Tianjin. Bing had never seen Elder Sister so anxious. Now there was nothing to keep the Communists from pushing south to the capital in Nanjing—and then to Shanghai.

In a great stroke of good luck, the next day Elder Sister connected with a business agent she'd known during the occupation. In exchange

for almost two thousand U.S. dollars, some fine English furniture that she procured from a vacant apartment, and several bolts of cloth, she bartered and bought four first-class tickets on the *General Gordon*, departing on May 4, 1949, bound for San Francisco.

As the family celebrated its good fortune, Elder Sister whispered to Bing, "Don't worry. I will find a way to bring you too." Bing shrugged, not knowing how she could get a passport when she didn't even know her own birth date. But Elder Sister surprised her by producing a blue Republic of China passport—with her name and photo in it! It listed Singapore as her birthplace and a birth date that added a year to her age. Elder Sister said one of her dance-club friends had helped her get the passport as a special favor.

Inside the passport was another surprise: a tourist visa for America! Elder Sister bragged that to get the visa she had visited another dance-club friend—an American who worked at the consulate. The midlevel clerk had invited Betty and her girlfriends to parties at his apartment a few times—and sharp-eyed Elder Sister had noticed that he brought the visa stamps home each night for safekeeping. She arranged another visit to his place, and while her girlfriends distracted him, Elder Sister stamped Bing's passport with an official visitor visa. "Now I just need to find a ticket for you—and I will!" Elder Sister declared. Though Bing remained skeptical, she couldn't help feeling an electric thrill.

But Elder Sister and Kristian still had more to do for their own exits. Getting the required five-hundred-dollar bond through an agent recognized in the United States was proving more difficult than getting the tickets. With time growing short, Kristian decided to trust a European friend who said his relative could get the bond. Kristian gave a few thousand U.S. dollars to the friend's relative. Then the man disappeared. After a frantic search, Kristian could only conclude that his friend's relative had absconded with the cash. Bing had never seen him so furious, his pale face bright red, with his veins bulging out of his neck. After many angry words, Kristian's friend paid back half of the stolen funds. The rest was lost, but at least the family eventually managed to obtain the necessary bonds.

The Communist forces had almost reached the Yangtze River by April 1949. Nationalist general Tang Enbo, the Nationalist com-

mander in chief of the defense of Shanghai, decided to build a ten-foot wooden wall around the city's perimeter. The beleaguered citizens scoffed at such folly, saying the only purpose of the fence was to enrich Tang's friends in the lumber business. It was evident to all that a wall would do nothing to stop the Communist advance.

By May 2, the panicked clamor to escape had become so intense that the China National Aviation Corporation announced that it had suspended its flight schedules, allowing passengers to board almost immediately and planes to depart as soon as they were full.

As the family's departure date approached, the Red Army captured several nearby cities including Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Nanjing. Elder



As the Communist armies made their way south toward Shanghai in 1949, boats large and small were overloaded with people and cargo on the Huangpu River along the Bund, trying to get out of the city.

Sister and Kristian anxiously awaited their May 4 sailing date, as the Communists now seemed poised to encircle Shanghai.

BING PREPARED HERSELF TO be left behind again. She didn't care, she told herself. Still, she was aware that Elder Sister continued searching for another ticket even as she prepared to leave, asking everyone she knew if they had a single ticket on the *General Gordon*. Bing never expected Elder Sister to find one.

Then just a day before the ship was due to depart, the telephone rang. One of Elder Sister's contacts had a relative who had changed his mind about leaving and was having trouble finding someone with a passport and visa to buy his ticket. Elder Sister snatched it up for three hundred U.S. dollars. When she returned with it in hand, she was ebullient. "I got you a ticket—you're coming to America with us; start packing!" she shouted.

Bing couldn't trust herself to respond to Elder Sister's announcement. Incredulous, she could only ask, "But what about Ma?"

Elder Sister had a ready answer. "Everything is set. Ma has her sisters here. She thinks it's a good idea for you to come along with me, to help me with the boys."

It was true. When they went to Ma's place that afternoon, she was waiting for Bing. "You should go with Elder Sister. You can help take care of each other." Then she reached under her bed and pulled out a small weathered valise. "I carried this when I first came to Shanghai. Now I give it to you."

After so many harsh words from Ma, Bing was unprepared for this kindness. In the ten years that Bing had lived with her, there had been only a few moments of softness when she had shown that she cared. Then again, the mother who had given birth to Bing in Changzhou had abandoned her. And so had Mama Hsu. Ma was the one who had not only kept her but also taken her back after she ran away. Bing felt a twinge of sadness at leaving, but at least Ma wouldn't be alone.

Then there was Ah Mei. Saying goodbye to her one and only friend would be the hardest. Bing would not only miss the birth of her best friend's child, but the two might never see each other again, since Ah

Mei and her Iranian Jewish husband were planning to go with other Jews to Israel after the baby came. But Ah Mei was happy for Bing's good fortune, chiding her friend, "Don't be sad—we're both starting our new lives."

Bing had few regrets about leaving Shanghai and China. She knew that once she was on the ship she would never see her *baba* again. Bing felt that familiar stab to her heart. But now she had to think about herself. She had never dared to dream before. In Denmark, or America, or wherever she landed she'd make a fresh start. Now it was time to leave the bad luck behind. The very thought offered her an unfamiliar feeling: hope.

The next day, everyone rose early on their final morning in Shanghai. They had to get to the American President Lines docks on the Huangpu River with enough time to get through customs. Ma said goodbye to them at the apartment. She patted the boys on their heads and nodded to Kristian. She told Elder Sister to write and send money when she could. Then Ma surprised Bing by reaching for her hand. "I know you only remember the times that I cursed you," Ma said. "It was for your own good. Don't forget what I taught you. You've been a good daughter; take care of yourself."

Bing tried to say something back, but her words stuck in her throat. She nodded goodbye to the only mother she'd really known.

With that, Elder Sister, the two boys, and Kristian piled into the car that he had arranged. The four had so much luggage that there wasn't room for Bing. Instead, she took her valise and climbed into a pedicab headed toward the Bund.

BING ARRIVED AT THE SHANGHAI Hongkou Wharf late and flustered after almost getting struck by a car driven by some college boy on his way to Taiwan. When she found Elder Sister, just in time to check in for the voyage, Bing could finally calm herself. Standing in line to check in, she scanned her surroundings slowly, trying to etch these last moments in Shanghai into her memory. Everyone looked charged with emotion—alive with excitement for the imminent journey, anxious for an uncertain future, relieved at the chance to escape.

Kristian was actually jovial to be leaving the chaos of Shanghai. "It was a great city, but it's become a hellhole," he declared, his parting words.

From out of nowhere, Ah Mei and her husband appeared. Somehow Bing's heavily pregnant friend had managed to make her way through the crush until she found Bing and the family. Bing and Ah Mei clasped hands and remembered how they had held each other tight during their first years together as two lonely, abandoned girls. They promised to meet up again one day, knowing it would probably never happen.

Once on the deck of the *General Gordon*, Bing could see the skyline of the Bund stretched before her. She almost expected to be put ashore and told that there had been a mistake. Before that could happen, she found her way down to the third-class deck, where there were only hammocks left to choose from. She didn't know how she would manage to climb into one. Deciding she'd worry about that later, she took the stairs to the first-class level to see Elder Sister's cabin. Like the third-class deck, it was cramped, with six others in the small room in addition to Elder Sister and Peter: a German matron and her three half-Chinese daughters, plus a Chinese woman from the Philippines with her daughter. Kristian and Ole went to their similarly crowded cabin in the men's section.

Standing back on the main deck near Elder Sister, Kristian, and the boys, Bing was surrounded by a jubilant crowd of Europeans, Americans, and Chinese. To the shy teenager, the other passengers seemed so sharp and sophisticated, speaking English, French, and Mandarin in cultured, high-class tones. There were Americans on their way home, some born and raised in Shanghai, others who had come seeking fortune and adventure in the arms of the Paris of the Orient; nuns dressed in long black habits that looked so heavy and hot, leaving behind a lifetime of missionary work; Jewish refugees from Europe who had escaped the gruesome Nazi death camps only to find themselves in Shanghai, now finally on their journey to freedom in America. And so many fancy-looking Chinese in Western suits and beautiful dresses.

The captain sounded several deep, plaintive bellows of the ship's

horn, and the *General Gordon* pulled away from the dock. Bing mustered a halfhearted wave toward shore.

"Goodbye, Baba." Bing felt her chest tighten in that empty place. "I'll never find you now," she whispered.

"Goodbye, Mama Hsu. I hope you made it safely through the war years.

"Goodbye, Shanghai."

Bing's eyes grew watery, but no tears fell. She wished to leave behind the bitterness and struggle, bad luck and loss, that she had known in Shanghai. No one would ever call an abandoned girl like her lucky, yet good fortune must have touched her. After all, she had made it this far, she mused, squaring her shoulders. Shanghai had offered her a refuge from the worst cruelties of the war years. Now it was time to go.

THE MORE THAN THREE WEEKS at sea passed by in one sickening blur. Each morning, Bing gingerly climbed off her hammock after a fitful night of swaying to the roll of the ship. On good days she managed to swallow some hot tea and a bite of the unappealing foreign food in the third-class mess hall. Then she headed to the first-class level for a woozy day with Elder Sister and the boys. By dinnertime, she was ready for her hammock deep below the main deck.

Bing couldn't wait to reach land. But when the ship pulled into San Francisco Bay, the immigration inspectors took her to the purser's office and refused to let her disembark. Bing felt her body freeze in fear. Did they notice that her passport and visa were fake? Would she be hauled off to jail in America? Or worse, sent back to Shanghai?

When Bing failed to appear at the departure area, Elder Sister stormed through the ship until she found her. Flashing her friendliest smile as she sized up the immigration agents, Elder Sister said in her most dulcet tones, "My young sister's English isn't so good, sir. Can I help you in any way?"

Unimpressed, he answered brusquely: "We have no record that your sister possesses the five-hundred-dollar bond required to enter

the United States. She's young and Chinese—if she goes illegal, we'll catch her and need the five hundred dollars to send her back. Without it, she can't get off the ship.”

Suddenly the problem was clear: Bing's ticket had been purchased in such haste that there had been no time to get the bond in advance of sailing. Elder Sister had hoped the oversight would go unnoticed. Now they needed to get a bond for Bing as soon as possible, before the ship headed back to sea. If they didn't, Bing would have to stay on board, sailing on to points unknown.

Kristian was dispatched into the city to find an agent who could issue the five-hundred-dollar bond. Purchasing the bond for Bing would require digging into the family's limited cash. Elder Sister and the boys waited on shore while Bing was detained on the ship.

Hours later, as the sun fell behind the towers of the Golden Gate Bridge, Kristian returned triumphant. Bing was unceremoniously released after the immigration inspector marked her passport with a visa for a six-month stay. “Welcome to America,” one agent offered flatly.

Elder Sister had not sat idle. As her boys chased seagulls nearby, she had managed to strike up conversations with friendly men eager to assist a beautiful damsel in distress. Through their leads, she learned of an inexpensive rooming house on nearby Columbus Avenue where the family could spend the night.

When they reached the house, Bing was surprised to find that the proprietors were Japanese. At first Bing tensed up. The terrible memories of war were still fresh in the mind of every Chinese. There had been few Japanese left in Shanghai once they were rounded up and repatriated. But these Japanese were American, speaking English with American accents. Elder Sister and Kristian didn't seem worried. Bing relaxed.

After dropping off their bags and freshening up, they set out for dinner. Passing by a newsstand, they were stunned to learn that two days earlier the Communists had taken over their city. Shanghai had fallen! Elder Sister kept repeating, “Oh my God!” and Kristian kept muttering in Danish as they pored over the reports. They gave thanks upon learning that the takeover had been largely peaceful. Bing closed her eyes with thoughts of Ma and Ah Mei, grateful that the city had

been spared the mass destruction it had suffered during the Japanese war.

They soon found themselves in an area called Chinatown. Bing admired the strangeness of America: Compared to Shanghai, the streets were clean, and the air smelled fresh, and when she had stepped off the ship, the sun had been so strong, her eyes had hurt. There were no crumbled buildings, no bomb craters, no façades riddled by machine-gun bullets. Not a single hint of war.

Pulling herself from her thoughts, she held on to Ole's and Peter's hands. “Can you see how different this place is from home? Not even this Chinatown is like China. Welcome to America,” she said, smiling at their bright-eyed faces.