

# City of the Name of God

A Novel

Brice Austin

Cidade do Nome de Deus. Não há outra mais leal.

--Inscription inside the Loyal Senate building, Macao

This city of indulgence need not fear  
The major sins by which the heart is killed,  
And governments and men are torn to pieces:

Religious clocks will strike; the childish vices  
Will safeguard the low virtues of the child;  
And nothing serious can happen here.

--W.H. Auden, from "Macao" (1938)

**1941**

## Chapter 1

Wispy clouds had settled over the choppy waters of the South China Sea, hiding the future behind a bride's white veil. Rose Blake stood at the railing of the ferry, awash in the hum of its engines and the regular beat of waves against its prow. Green, steeply-sloping islands, seemingly uninhabited, emerged at intervals from the mist. Standing beside her was her partner-in-crime, though what they had done seemed less and less a felony with each passing day; they were half-a-world away now from the offenses they'd given, all the apple carts they'd upset, the tut-tutting and whispering of society's "ladies," and the angry demands of the mob to have Jack arrested, perhaps tarred and feathered, under the statutes of the Mann Act. As though, she thought bitterly, only he was to blame. As though she herself were nothing more than a helpless, virginal victim. Things would be different here. Here, no one knew that he was forty and she only nineteen, or that they weren't really man-and-wife, or even that their names weren't their real ones, that Rose and Jack Blake were fictions, in a sense characters they had created to be the protagonists in this story they were writing together.

"See how the color of the water has changed?" he said. It was no longer green but muddy brown. "Silt from the Pearl River. We're in her estuary. It won't be long now."

As if responding to a command he'd given, the clouds parted a little. Something was there. Junks, with sails like spread paper fans, their sterns jutting up higher than their bows as though inviting a coupling. She moved closer, pressed against him, much as she had every night of the three months of nights they had spent together aboard the *Celestina*, the freighter that had brought them from Lisbon as far as Hong Kong, by way of the Cape of Good Hope.

*Why not all the way to Macao?* she had asked him during the voyage.

*The harbor there is too shallow for large ships. We'll make the last leg of our journey by ferry.*

“When do you suppose we will see it?” she asked. And then, all at once, there it was. A city of hills and illusions. Jack’s arms were around her, from behind. As she watched the scene unfold, he spoke into her hair, playing the tour guide. High atop the first of those hills stood a white tower.

“Guia,” he murmured, “the only lighthouse in this part of the world.”

An enormous, weathered stone church appeared.

“St. Paul’s, built in the sixteen-hundreds. The chapel itself was destroyed by fire at some point. All that remains is the façade you are seeing and some rather magnificent stone stairs leading up to it.”

Another hill, and a fort with black cannon along its ramparts.

“Monte,” he said, and then nothing more, as though that alone was enough.

Below, in between those imposing structures and the sea, quaint little yellow and blue and pink houses terraced the slopes. Then abruptly, the mist was gone, burned away by a bright, sinking sun. The ferry chugged on westward towards that sun for a while before veering north and east around the tip of a spit of land.

“Barra Head.”

A large, pink building graced yet another hillside. Above it flew the jaunty red-and-green Portuguese flag.

“The governor’s residence.”

A rather seedy-looking building, perhaps a dozen stories tall, came into view along the white shoreline in front of all those lush hills behind. At the top of it, there was a sign emblazoned with a series of red, freestanding Chinese ideograms.

“The Central Hotel.”

“Is that one of the places where they gamble?”

“Do they ever,” he said with a laugh.

*It seems to be ingrained in the Chinese psyche, Jack had told her during the crossing, the need to risk a little each day. And every now and then, everything.*

“Is it how you remember it, then, the city?”

He paused for a moment, then said: “Yes.”

Jack had spent his formative years in Macao, living with his father, a medic and missionary. It was why they were here now. Because he knew the language, at least one of them, knew the place and the people. Or at least he had once upon a time. He fell silent then, perhaps recalling that life, those years, or perhaps he was thinking of the family he had left behind in America, his wife and their two young daughters? Was he having regrets? His arms tightened around her as though affirming his decision. Their decision. Or perhaps he was holding on to her for dear life?

The ferry had entered a channel. That very Mediterranean-looking city lay on the right; on the left, a dark brooding mass of land. “Is that China?”

“Lapa Island. It’s a part of China, yes.”

Macao looked like an island as well, though according to Jack it was actually a peninsula, joined to the mainland by a narrow neck of land, divided from it by what was known as the Barrier Gate. The waters ahead, in the strait, were covered with an undulating layer of junks and sampans, those much smaller and much less interesting flat boats. That seething mass of ships was rather like a city unto itself, a floating one. As the ferry made its way through at greatly-reduced speed, she saw half-naked Chinese men and boys hard at work among sails and rigging, and fully-clothed women and girls on their knees on wooden decks, tending to nets filled with fish. The smell of fish was all around her in the air now, unpleasant and inescapable. For a moment, her stomach churned.

“We’re almost there,” murmured Jack, perhaps sensing her growing apprehension, hoping to tamp it down. “The quay is just ahead.”

“Where did your father’s old friend say he would meet us?”

“At the Bela Vista. Dr. Verissimo said he finds it difficult to cope with the crowds at the docks these days.”

As they emerged from the mass of junks and the port came fully into view, Rose could understand why. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of people, the vast majority of them Chinese, packed the wharf. They were shouting and waving their hands in the air. The ferry’s engines paused, and then reversed thrust, and the ship began to slow down. All those people on the shore seemed happy, at least; they seemed to be welcoming the new arrivals with open arms.

*Not us, however,* she thought with a somewhat perverse sense of satisfaction. *No one here knows who we are.* Not even this Dr. Verissimo, really, for to him Jack was still “Alberto,” still a young man of twenty, the age he had been when his father had died and he had abandoned Macao for America.

As they stood at the railing together, waiting to disembark, Jack leaned in even closer. She felt his breath on the bare back of her neck. It was warm, moist, alive. “Here we are then at last, as I promised,” he whispered, “At the very end of the world.”

Rose twisted around in his arms until she was facing him. “Kiss me,” she said.

#

They walked down the gangway together, two White people swept along in a raging river of impatient Chinese, some of whom seemed to be carrying a significant portion of their worldly belongings with them. Boxes, burlap bags, live ducks and chickens. By contrast, she and Jack had only one suitcase each, and those were in the hands of a porter. No one asked to see their papers. No one, it seemed, cared who they were. Unchallenged, they merged with the teeming crowd on the docks.

“Wait here,” Jack instructed, “I’ll find a pedicab.” And before she could protest, he had left her, pushing his way through all those madding bodies, waving one hand in the air and shouting, now in English, now in Portuguese.

Though not a particularly tall man, her lover, he was taller than nearly everyone else there, and looked very out-of-place in his Western clothes: high-waisted, pleated brown trousers and a white short-sleeved shirt, while all those locals surrounding him were wearing what appeared to be smocks of various colors. The porter came up beside her then; he bowed and smiled and said something in Chinese. Rose gave him a tight little uncomprehending smile in return, then looked back towards Jack to see what sort of progress he might have made. He was no longer there. At least, she could no longer see him. For a moment, she panicked. She realized how very dependent she was upon him, unable even to speak the language. Either of them. Well, she'd at least managed to learn a bit of Portuguese; he'd given her lessons during the three months they'd spent aboard the *Celestina*. That word on that sign over there, for instance: *barato* meant "cheap." As to what was cheap, precisely, she had no idea. Perhaps human life. It was easy to believe that when there was so very much of it churning around her, when so many strange people were pushing this way and that, desperately trying to get somewhere or another. In the end, wasn't it all a lot of running in place? Maybe that was true for the two of them as well, she and Jack; maybe their trek here to the Orient was nothing more than a futile attempt to escape from themselves?

She could see him again now, his mouse-colored hair, his baby's face that belied his age. He was bouncing his way back to her through the crowd, followed closely by a Chinese boy pedaling a bicycle with what appeared to be a bench-on-wheels attached to the back. She felt a mix of emotions then: relief, and perhaps something rather like love, and the frustration of being a woman, so often dependent upon a man.

"Cho here will take us to the Bela Vista," Jack said with a smile, no doubt oblivious to everything that was going on inside her heart and mind.

She turned to the porter, reached for her bags, determined not to be the damsel-in-distress, or even a wife. He ceded them to her but his face froze into an emotionless mask.



Jack stepped forward at once, pressed a few coins into the palm of the man's hand. Very deliberately, he said: "*Muitobrigado, Senhor.* Thank you, kind sir."

The porter was smiling again. He bowed, then made his way back towards the ferry. "Let me give you a hand with those," offered Jack.

"Never mind, I've got them," she said brusquely. She carried the two suitcases around to the rear of the pedicab and hoisted them onto a rack clearly meant for storing passengers' luggage. Then, before Jack could offer to assist her yet again, she climbed into the bench seat all by her helpless self.

He got in beside her, perhaps wondering what he might have done wrong.

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The pedicab made its way along a cobblestone street that in the dimming daylight looked like a snake's beaded bronze skin. Three- and four-story vertical signs bearing Chinese symbols jutted out from the buildings on either side of her; some of those signs, and the shop windows beneath them, abruptly blared to life with electric light as they passed. The sidewalks were very nearly as busy as the docks had been; men and women and children, virtually all of them Oriental, were moving this way and that, briskly, presumably with some purpose in mind. This was hardly the Macao she had imagined; it didn't seem in the least Portuguese. But an instant later, they found themselves in what was clearly a different part of the city, perhaps even a different city altogether, the one with hills and churches she had observed from the deck of the ferry. On her left, more of those pink and blue and yellow houses, or perhaps the same ones, scaled the slope, their pastel colors muted in the failing light. She spied verandahs, and wrought-iron railings, and mysterious, shadowy courtyards separated from the world by barred gates. On her right, the sea had appeared again, this time in the form of a lovely, curving cove, defined by a strip of white sand and a row of unfamiliar, twisted trees, dark

shapes that in the dusk called to mind shipwrecked sailors clawing at the sky, begging some maritime goddess for salvation, or perhaps merely forgiveness.

They were climbing one of the city's hills now; the street grew steeper. The cords on the neck of the boy pedaling the pedicab grew more pronounced. He was standing up, putting his entire weight, such as it was, into the effort. She could hear his labored breathing. And then, out in the twilight, church bells began pealing.

"Ah, the sound of the Christian city," said Jack, reminiscing, seemingly oblivious to their driver's distress. "All the good children will be crossing themselves, and heading homeward to prepare for the evening service."

Portuguese children, she assumed, though she couldn't actually see any. This "Christian city," as he had termed it, was as quiet as the pagan one near the docks had been bustling. The boy pedaling in the darkness ahead of them was a laboring slave; it wasn't clear that he would make it to the crest of the hill or even survive the attempt. Rose had almost decided to suggest they walk the rest of the way, not knowing how far the rest of that way might be, when the gasping child finally did manage to reach their destination: a set of white stairs leading up from the street to a two-story white building that she assumed was the Bela Vista. The church bells had stopped ringing. There was a smell of tropical flowers in the air. A soft, warm breeze was blowing in from the sea, which was a little distance below them now, glowing orange in the last fleeting instants of a distant sunset. Jack got out of the pedicab. He offered her his hand. She allowed him to help her step down, forgetting for a moment to feel condescended to, slipping back into the familiar social patterns she had grown up with in her now-forsaken, privileged world. As Jack paid the driver and he disappeared into the darkness, she recalled and regained her resolve. She picked up her suitcase before Jack could take charge of it and began climbing the white stone steps leading up towards the twinkling lights of the white hotel, determined to play an equal part in this reckless, wicked escapade.

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As soon as they had set foot in the lobby, a well-dressed, bewhiskered old gentleman got up from one of the sofas, set his newspaper and cigar aside, and strode briskly towards them. He cried out *Alberto!*, his arms open wide. The two men embraced, then struck up a conversation in animated Portuguese. Rose could only understand a word here and there. She assumed they were “catching up,” as it had been a very long time since they had seen one another, and there had been little correspondence between them until recently, when Jack had written a letter from Lisbon, and then cabled from Hong Kong. The doctor turned his attention her way as Jack chatted on, presumably relating the story of their courtship that he had concocted aboard the *Celestina*, a highly-romanticized version of the truth: that they had fallen desperately in love but her family hadn’t approved of the match, insisting that he was too old for her, that she was too young. Throwing caution to the winds, defying everyone, they had secretly married and fled to Lisbon together. But her father had followed them there, in a rage. And so, they had set sail again, traveling under assumed names to throw him off the scent, and now sought refuge here in the City of the Name of God.

It was all rather absurd and yet Jack had assured her that this fairy tale of his would be accepted at face value. “There isn’t anything in the world that the Portuguese appreciate more,” he had told her, “than a story of Love overcoming all obstacles.”

She’d been skeptical at the time but here was positive proof: the old doctor actually had tears in his eyes as he bowed and kissed her hand. “You are so very lovely, my dear!”

Rose was as surprised to hear him speak English as she was to see those tears.

Verissimo continued to speak English from that moment on, presumably out of deference to her linguistic limitations. “Come,” he said brightly, “you must have a glass of wine with me on the verandah. The view from there is quite extraordinary.”

He took her by the arm, steered her across the lobby. She bristled, yet it didn't seem prudent to resist. And so, she allowed herself to be maneuvered out onto the balcony. A row of white archways separated a long, narrow porch from the night just beyond it. White balustrades spanned the base of each of those archways; when they had reached the nearest one, they stopped and leaned against it. The annoyance she had felt at having been led there against her will dissipated before the stark beauty of the scene before her. A gibbous moon floated just above the sea and horizon. That moon glazed the surface of the waters beneath it, as well as a scattering of junks and islands, with a light that seemed to have substance, like the silk of a spider's web.

Verissimo left then, to order the wine. Jack took his place beside her at the balustrade. She wondered if he felt as intoxicated as she did by the warm breeze rising up from the dark waters below, by the realization that they had actually pulled this off, gotten away with it, that they truly were free now of the lives that had once imprisoned them.

He leaned in close. Their heads bumped together, gently. Abruptly, he whispered: "I do love you, you know."

She tensed up. She couldn't bring herself to look at him. "We said that we never would say that, remember?"

#

They were seated in white wicker chairs on the verandah, drinking what Dr. Verissimo called *vinho verde*, green wine. "Very hard to come by, these days," he lamented with a sigh, lifting his glass. "Everything good, it seems, is becoming scarce, what with the world at war."

"Portugal is still neutral, though, I take it?" said Jack. "Surely, that hasn't changed since we left Lisbon?"

"No, it has not, but the Japanese are all around us here. They have taken the island of Lapa and control the mainland on the other side of the Barrier Gate. Should they wish to invade, there is

little we could do to stop them. Though I suppose it suits their purpose to let the West have an outpost in this part of the world, at least for now. Their *Kempeitai*, their military police, are everywhere in the city, monitoring us, monitoring the British. To some degree, I suppose, even you Americans.”

Rose thought perhaps he said this last with particular emphasis, as though warning the two of them personally. As though he suspected, after all, that the tale Jack had told him wasn't the truth, not entirely. Did Verissimo think they were spies? The thought rather appealed to her, a girl who had never been much more than a marriage prospect for some Southern gentleman or another. Who had left her world precisely in hopes of becoming involved in this sort of thing, in matters of actual consequence. “Do you suppose they were watching us when we arrived?” she asked eagerly. “Do you think they might be watching us now?”

The good doctor laughed. “I doubt it, my dear. With so many people flooding into the city, so many refugees, I expect no one noticed.”

“Ah,” said Jack, “so that is why the ferry was so very crowded. At first, I thought they might be the weekend gamblers I remember, but then it isn't quite the weekend yet, is it? And they were carrying so much with them . . .”

“Their entire lives, I imagine,” Verissimo said grimly. “All they have left of those lives, in any case. Most are coming from Guangzhou, where the fighting is said to be particularly fierce. But more and more these days they come from Hong Kong, as the British position there grows ever more precarious.”

“I should think so, now that Japan has formally joined the Axis.” Jack paused for a moment, drank more wine. “Is it a regular occurrence then, that these refugees arrive in such numbers?”

Verissimo nodded. “The population of the city has swelled from seventy thousand to some three hundred thousand, over the past two years. That is the official government estimate, at least. There may well be more than that. And the rate of arrivals seems to be increasing, if anything.”

The two men fell silent. Rose was feeling the effects of the *vinho verde*; she was content to sit and let the warm wind tousle her hair, and look out across the moonlit South China Sea.

“How has the influx of refugees affected things at São Januário?”

“It’s become a bit of a madhouse, I’m afraid. In fact, we could desperately use your help, my boy. You said in your letter that you would be looking for work, did you not?”

“I’m not sure how much help I would be at the hospital,” Jack said modestly. “I’m more professor and administrator these days than clinician.”

“Nonsense. A number of years ago, just before I lost track of you altogether, weren’t you headed off to run a field hospital? Somewhere remote?”

“In the Amazon, yes.”

“Well, there you have it! *Men Deus*, I can’t imagine a better proving ground for what we are faced with here.”

“That was a very long time ago.”

“Like riding a bicycle, my boy. I’ll wager you’re every bit as capable as your father was. Now, what say you?”

Jack glanced at her, perhaps to see if she might have some objection. The idea had been that he would avoid working in the medical profession for fear that, being a man of some stature in the field, her parents might get wind of it. They were, however, on the far side of the world. And one of them, at least, would need employment right away, if they were to survive here for long. They’d left on such impulse, in the dead of night, that they’d only been able to take with them the things

that had been close at hand. Unfortunately, that hadn't included much in the way of money. And Jack didn't dare try to access his bank accounts, for fear of giving away their whereabouts.

"Very well," he said. "I'll come by the hospital tomorrow."

"Make it several days from now, if you would prefer," said Verissimo, looking at her and smiling slyly. "You've only just married, after all!"

"We've been at sea for three months," said Jack. "I'll be there tomorrow."

"Then I shall be expecting you!" The doctor tossed off the last of his wine. He stood up. "I should really be on my way. It is less and less safe these days to be out on the streets past a certain hour." He waited while Rose, inebriated, struggled up to her feet. "It was wonderful meeting you, my dear. I do hope we shall see one another again very soon!"

He bowed to her. The two men embraced. Jack said: "Thank you for everything."

#

The room they were given was modest: just a bed and a sitting area beside a rather large window, one which provided a slightly different view of the city and sea. Exhausted, Jack went to sleep almost right away. Rose sat up for a while longer, however, listening to his even breathing on the far side of that darkened space, wondering if her mother and father—especially her father—were still searching for her, searching for them.

*You know as well as I do that Cyrus won't rest until he has seen me horsewhipped in some public square or another!*

That, at least, was Jack's studied opinion on the subject. No doubt, he was right. All of them, even her older brother Preston, were so protective of her! Or so they claimed. What they were really protective of, she suspected, was their standing within Richmond's upper-crust enclave. How horrible it must be for them that she had run away with a married man! As if that were not enough, she was legally underage. A child. More of a possession, really, one Jack had stolen from them.

They couldn't conceive of the truth, couldn't bear it: that she had gone away with him of her own free will, that she had wanted precisely this, a scandalous life lived on the run.

The window was open, letting in the sea breeze. The city was out there; scattered lights flickered across the hillside leading down to the water's edge. There were clouds over that water now, obscuring the stars and moon. A beacon was shining down from the lighthouse atop the adjacent hill. *Guia*, Jack had called it, "The Guide." While she watched, that bright beam swept inexorably across the water below. Eventually, it reached the window, reached her. It flashed for an instant, as though taking a photograph, before reversing course. Then it methodically made its way back in the direction from which it had come, as if in a futile, continuous effort to clear the darkness away. Now she could hear frogs croaking from somewhere in the distance. They were the chorus to the song that was Jack's gentle breathing. What was she doing here, on the far side of the world? Was she mad?

*Perhaps so*, she thought, and then laughed to herself, imagining yet again her parents' outrage. The light from the lighthouse kept swinging this way and that, from one end of the city to the other, as though looking for something, for someone. The two of them, perhaps, the runaways. Lucy Roberts and Albert Moore. Already those two names seemed strange to her. It was as though they belonged to different people, acquaintances from some other, stillborn life.



## Chapter 2

António Alves Ferreira hadn't quite finished with dinner when his housekeeper, Mei, entered the room. "Someone to see you, Sir," she said, in her broken Portuguese.

His wife glared at him from across the table. Her green eyes said: *Yet again?* Their children didn't seem to notice, or mind. Aida, Luís, Luísa, Carinha: they were thinking only of the cup of egg pudding that Mei was placing in front of each of them.

*This is what it means to be a policeman,* Ferreira said silently to her in return, a bit annoyed that she still could not seem to understand that, after all these years. He had been a policeman, after all, when they had met in the Algarve, and when she had agreed to marry him. She had known then what sort of life they would have together. Perhaps she had thought things would be different by now, better, once he had risen through the ranks? And perhaps that would have been true if they had remained in Portugal. But his promotion to Chief of Police, ten years ago, had brought with it a transfer to Macao, and Macao was not the Algarve. Things were different here. The Japanese were here. As was the notorious bandit, Wong Kong Kit, who some said was their puppet.

"Thank you, Mei. Tell him I will be with him in a moment." He ate several bites of his pudding in rapid succession. He wiped his mouth with his napkin and stood up, avoiding Maria Eugemia's accusing eyes. He mussed up the black hair of his youngest, his favorite, Carinha. He stepped through the doorway into the parlor. Waiting for him there was Henrique Soares, the young recruit who had recently come to Macao from Timor. The man attempted a clumsy salute. "*Capitão,*" he said.

Ferreira waved a hand in the air half-heartedly, tried to put him at ease. "What has that bad man done now?" he asked, fearing the worst. For Soares would not have interrupted his dinner for anything less than news of Wong Kong Kit.

“He has ambushed Vong Kam, in the Interior Port. I am afraid everyone aboard his junk is dead.”

Ferreira swore. “And the rice?”

“At the bottom of the harbor.”

Ferreira swore again, under his breath. “How long ago did this happen?”

“Within the last hour. I have come just now from the docks.”

“You have a car?”

“Yes, sir.”

“We should be on our way, then. There may yet be time to apprehend him.” Ferreira put on his coat. They stepped out into the night together. A warm wind, typical of the end of March, was the only thing out and about, at least here in the Christian city. Soares drove along the Rua do Campo, in the direction of the Praia Grande. “No, no, not to the Interior Port,” barked Ferreira. “He will be on the way to his compound by now!”

“Horta e Costa, then?”

“See if you can head him off!”

“Yes, Sir.” The young man drove.

*This has gone on long enough*, thought Ferreira, gritting his teeth, thinking of the rice Kit had just destroyed in the harbor. People were starving to death in the streets and all the man could think of was *patacas*, his thirty pieces of silver. Payment for himself and the Japanese masters who, it was said, held his leash. How could Kit, a Chinese, in good conscience be working so closely with those who had brutally invaded his country? Who, even now, on the other side of the Barrier Gate, were butchering Communists and Nationalists alike, raping their women and some said even their children? He couldn't imagine such a thing himself, abandoning Portugal and her colonies for the

sake of money! Better to die a patriot than to live as Kit did: a rich man, to be sure, but without a shred of honor.

Soares turned onto Horta e Costa Avenue. There before them stood a wall made of barbed wire and sandbags. The street had been blocked off. Beyond that barricade, Ferreira could see torches burning. And the flickering shadows of what appeared to be men holding machine guns. Did Kit believe he owned the city now? “Pull over!”

“Yes, Sir.” Soares stopped the car. They got out. Ferreira unholstered his gun. The young recruit did the same.

“Kit!” Ferreira cried into the night, at those shadows moving back and forth in the torchlight on the other side of the barricade. “Kit! Give yourself up!”

A barrage of bullets flew out of the dark like a swarm of low-flying bats. Ferreira and Soares ducked behind the police car. Those bullets smashed the windshield, shattered the glass. “How many of them are there, can you tell?”

“I can’t be certain, Sir.”

Enough to keep the two of them pinned down. Kit himself would already be on the way to his compound, which was several blocks further along Horta e Costa. Once there, he couldn’t be reached. For Kit’s headquarters was an armed fortress, guarded by several dozen men. Bandits with machine guns and an almost unlimited supply of ammunition, reportedly provided by Colonel Sawa himself, commander of the Japanese army in this part of the world. It was said that it was the Colonel who permitted Kit to disrupt the flow of rice into the city, to buy the shipments and then resell them at a much higher price, thereby profiting them both. And so, master and lackey grew rich at the expense of the Portuguese government, which was forced to pay for the rice at inflated rates in order to keep the citizens of Macao from going hungry.

Just recently, Ferreira (with the Governor's knowledge and blessing) had tried to circumvent this arrangement with one of his own, bypassing Kit to make a deal with the Vong brothers, who were Chinese Nationalists. The Vongs would smuggle rice into the city and sell it directly to the police. The three brothers didn't want money but rather arms to fight the Japanese on the mainland. And Macao, being neutral in the war, had some weapons to give. Old rifles from the gunboat *Pátria*, which had been decommissioned long ago. Cannon from the ramparts of that ancient fort, Monte. Ferreira wasn't completely comfortable with that, bartering guns for rice with the Vongs, as he couldn't help but think that those guns might be needed someday, that Portugal might not remain neutral forever. Yet the hard truth of the matter, of Macao's situation—isolated, thousands of kilometers from the motherland—was that the Japanese could invade whenever they wished and little could be done to stop them. A reality which made this an even more dangerous game. For providing arms to Japan's enemies could easily be seen as taking sides with those enemies, it could perhaps even be construed as an act of war. Regardless, this scheme of Ferreira's—dealing directly with the Vongs—had worked for a while, several months in fact. Until tonight. Apparently, Kit's spies (or Sawa's) had found out about this particular shipment and now Vong Kam's junk, along with the rice, and presumably Vong Kam himself, lay at the bottom of the harbor.

“Do we have more men coming?”

“They are on the way, Sir.”

“When will they arrive?”

“Soon, I hope.”

“That may not be soon enough!” Kit might already be out of reach. Was there anyone at all on the other side of that barricade now, or had they all left? He could not be sure. Torches still flickered beyond the barbed wire and sandbags, but were those shadows that still moved back and forth over there simply that, shadows? Or did they belong to a few of Kit's men, left behind in

order to stall the police even further? He wished to find out. He wished to charge forth, breach that barrier, continue to pursue Kit on foot. But Maria Eugemia would never forgive him should he allow himself to be killed. And he would never forgive himself should he allow this young man, Soares, to be killed. He gritted his teeth. They should wait for reinforcements. And yet they could not afford to wait.

“Stay here.” He was willing to risk his own life to stop Kit, but didn’t wish to risk that of Soares. This young man who still had his entire life before him. Who it was said already had a Macanese girlfriend, one who lived in the Chinese Quarter and worked in *Tintin*, the marketplace.

“But, Sir . . .”

“Stay here! Cover me. You have my permission to shoot anyone who should appear from behind the barricade.”

“Yes, Sir.”

Ferreira stepped from behind the car, out into the open street. He walked slowly forward across the cobblestones, holding his pistol out in front of him. The torches flickered. He couldn’t see anyone hiding behind the barbed wire and sandbags. His footsteps echoed in the silence, ricocheting between the buildings on either side of Horta e Costa.

“Be careful, *Capitão!*”

When he reached the barricade and peered beyond it, he saw no one. Only pots of flames stood guard behind that wall. *No, wait.* There *was* someone there after all. A body. *Here, at least, lies one bandit who will no longer terrorize my city!* Once Ferreira had climbed over the sandbags, however, he discovered his error. The body lying there on the cobblestones belonged to Vong Kam. His hands had been tied behind his back. His throat had been cut. He was naked from the waist down. His genitals had been mutilated. Not by Kit, guessed Ferreira; more likely, what had been done to Kam had been done by that bandit’s wife. Kit was motivated by greed alone. She, however, was driven

by something else altogether, something far worse. The Devil himself, perhaps. Ferreira motioned for Soares to join him. Once the young man had climbed over the barricade, the two of them stood there together watching over Vong Kam's body, waiting for reinforcements to arrive. For there was no point in going on now. Horta e Costa, as far as the eye could see, lay empty. Kit and his gang would have reached their compound by now, their fortress. The shipment of rice was gone, destroyed.

Ferreira holstered his gun. Soares knelt beside the body. "What do you suppose Vong Kam's brothers will do once they learn of this?"

"There will be blood in the streets," predicted Ferreira, grimly. "With any luck at all, Kit's blood." Though that seemed unlikely, given that the man was protected by his own personal army. Given that he was backed by Colonel Sawa himself, and his *Kempeitai*. Given that that mad wife of his, who could shoot a pistol with either hand, was a demon. A demon that was said to have a literal taste for her enemies' manhood.

#

"May I drive you home, Sir?"

Ferreira stood lost in thought. "No, no thank you, Soares. I prefer to walk." The officers who had arrived too late to apprehend Kit, but who had at least managed to remove the bandit's barricade, and Vong Kam's body, had already left the scene.

"Are you certain, Sir?"

"Yes, yes." He waved the boy on. Reluctantly, Soares drove away in the car, which had bullet holes in its hood and no windshield. Ferreira was left alone on Horta e Costa Avenue. Slowly, he made his way along it towards the headquarters of Wong Kong Kit, a three-story yellow building with bars on its windows and doors, and sandbagged balconies guarded by well-armed men.

*Why do we not simply storm the place, Sir? Or blow it up? Or perhaps set fire to it in order to flush the bandits out?* Like an inquisitive child, Soares had asked a dozen such questions after his arrival here from Timor, after he had been briefed on the situation regarding Kit. Ferreira chuckled to himself as he stared up at that yellow building in the white moonlight. Why not, indeed?

“You there!” cried someone from the lowest balcony. “Move along!”

He had considered all those options before, of course, and had rejected them. Storming Kit’s headquarters would mean sacrificing the lives of too many of his men. Even then, such an assault might well fail. As for blowing the compound up . . . well, he supposed that could be done, but at the cost of innocent lives in the buildings on either side. And Kit generally held a few hostages, as insurance. And one had to consider that such a brazen act might invite retaliation from Kit’s Japanese masters, that it might even be construed as an act of war. Set fire to the place? That was the worst idea of all! The entire city might go up in flames. No, the better strategy was the one he pursued on a daily basis: apprehension of Kit while the man was engaged in illegal activities, while he was levying a tariff on a shipment of rice, or murdering someone whom he felt had betrayed him. On such occasions, Kit was as vulnerable as a *caracol*, as a snail out of its shell . . . a snail which, unfortunately, traveled with heavily-armed guards.

*Yet the time will come*, Ferreira vowed silently. *The time will come.*

He moved along, as Kit’s thug had demanded. He continued walking along Horta e Costa. He knew that he should go home, that Maria Eugemia would be waiting for him, that she would be worried, that soon she would telephone the police station, eager for some assurance that he had survived the evening. His feet, however, had other ideas. They led him to the Rua Almirante Costa Cabral, and from there to yet another street and another, taking him further and further from home. Soon, he had arrived at St. Paul’s cathedral, its stark stone façade ominous in the white moonlight, the stone stairs leading up to it populated, at this hour, not by worshippers or tourists but by

beggars, the city's Famished Ones, victims of the Japanese and their war, and Kit's relentless greed. They were the half-dead, living skeletons who seemed to be attempting to climb a stairway to heaven with what remained of their failing strength. They cried out to him now, men and women and children alike, pleading for food, for money to buy food, for deliverance. He gave them a wide berth. He quickened his footsteps, for there was little he could do to help them. A shadow surged towards him then like a dark liquid. And he, a policeman armed with a gun, fled. Had things really become so terrible, had the city's poor really become so desperate, that they would attack the Chief of Police? Apparently so. If they even recognized him. They were too weak to pursue him for long. A block later, he had left them behind. He stopped and placed his hands on his knees and gasped for air. He was no longer a young man, no longer capable of such sustained effort. Breathing hard, he surveyed his surroundings. And found himself where he had always known that he would: the Rua da Felicidade, what the Chinese called the Street of Great Happiness. Though there could be no happiness for him here. For him, it was the Street of Unfulfilled Desires, the Street of Longing, the Street of Hopelessness.

Gas lights burned in front of gray brick buildings in that lurid section of town. On the steps in front of those buildings loitered clusters of very young girls, heavily made-up and perfumed, twittering like brightly-colored caged birds. Some of them had spied him now; they called out to him in Chinese. He could not understand their words, but their practiced, coquettish gestures delivered a message that was unmistakable. Yet it was not any one of them that had brought him here.

"Ah, Captain Ferreira, back again so soon?" An old woman stepped out of the shadows. Madam Lu. She was smoking a small, black cigar. "Have your fortunes changed, then? Have you been very lucky at the games in the Central Hotel?"



“You know very well that as a public servant, I am only allowed to gamble during the festival of the Chinese New Year.”

“Ah, such a pity!” the old crone sighed. Mocking him, as usual. For she knew what it was that he wanted. And that he could never have it, never afford it. For it wasn’t one of those cheap girls on the street that he desired, but the Singsong girl herself, the Madam’s prize possession. “But a man in your position . . . a great deal of money must pass through your hands, or at least your command, from time to time, no?”

He ignored her suggestion. He would never turn to a life of crime! Betray the trust of his country? Become another Wong Kong Kit? That was unthinkable. And yet he could see the girl now, at least the outline of her, high above him in one of the windows of the uppermost story.

“She is indeed lovely, is she not?”

Why did the old woman torment him so? If all she cared about was money (and he felt certain that was the case), then what could she possibly hope to gain by continuing to taunt and tease him? Nothing. Unless she actually thought that he might eventually abandon his principles and find a way to purchase the Singsong girl, at least for one night. He did not, however, wish to buy her for only one night. He wanted to buy her freedom. He might as well wish to buy the moon that was hanging over their heads now. Those two feats seemed equally impossible. Only some wealthy Chinese from the mainland could afford such a price. No doubt, that is what the old woman hoped for. Perhaps it was what the Singsong girl herself hoped for as well, to become such a man’s concubine. That would still be a form of servitude, but perhaps a lesser form of it. At least then she might be taken care of in her declining years, which would never be the case here on the Street of Great Happiness. If she remained here until her beauty had faded, she would eventually be cast out, left to fend for herself in any way that she could.

“At least tell me her name,” pleaded Ferreira.

Madam Lu cackled. “How much will you pay for it?”

At that moment the Singsong girl, within the prison of her upper-story window, began to play her lute. And then she sang. Her voice was as high and silvery and delicate as the moonlight itself. Like a dog, Ferreira lifted his head and gazed at her, his moon. The lyrics of her song were Chinese; he could not hope to understand them. And yet they filled him with sadness and longing, with *saudade*. They pierced his heart like the Portuguese *fados* of old, those traditional, melancholy ballads that so often told tales of sailors lost at sea, of vanished empires, of a once great people’s diminished relevance upon the world stage.

“Everything that I have. On my person,” said Ferreira.

“And how much is that?” Both Lu’s voice and her black eyes had gone flat. There was nothing left in them but cunning.

Ferreira emptied his pockets. A few *patacas* glittered in his palm like drops of starlight. The old woman did not hesitate. She accepted his offering, raked it into her hand.

“She is called Lanhua. Lan the Orchid.”

For an instant, Ferreira detected something else in her voice other than greed. Pity, perhaps, for all the foolish men who fell so easily, and so helplessly, in love. She smoked her cigar. She said quietly: “You would like to have her, would you not, for the night?”

“For all time.”

She laughed heartily at the very idea of that, the idiocy of it. “You do not even know her! You do not even speak her language, nor she yours!”

That much was true. He had only ever been near her once, on a night perhaps best forgotten, a night some six months ago when he had responded to a disturbance here at Madam Lu’s house. Some Japanese *Kempeitai* were mistreating the girls. A delicate situation, given that Ferreira was expected to keep the peace and yet keep the peace . . . to preserve Portugal and Macao’s neutrality

by not provoking the Japanese too much. The men he had brought with him attended to the girls in their little rooms on the first floor. Most of the Japanese soldiers were being respectful, but a few of them had had too much to drink. They were being a bit rough with the “flowers.” His men attempted to pull them away. Fistfights began to break out. One of the *Kempeitai*, drunk and naked, got his hands on a gun. The girls began screaming. A very bad situation appeared to be at hand, perhaps even an international incident. Then a commanding voice had boomed forth from the stairwell leading to the upper floors. Colonel Sawa. It was Sawa himself, presumably ordering his men to stand down. And beside him, on the stairway, stood the most beautiful woman Ferreira had ever seen.

He had climbed those stairs, to speak directly to Sawa. The Colonel apologized, in halting English, for his men’s bad behavior. Fortunately, Ferreira knew enough of that language to understand. He found it difficult, however, to respond. Not because his English was poor, though it was, but because he could do nothing but stare at the girl. She was wearing a light purple silk *cheongsam*, that elegant traditional Chinese dress. Her white make-up was like a mask. The brown eyes behind that mask seemed lost. Those eyes seemed to be pleading with him to *do something*, to save her from her fate. Not the immediate fate of having to submit to Sawa, but the more comprehensive fate of her lot in life. Though perhaps he had only imagined all of that, projected what he thought she must feel onto his creation of her. Sawa led her back up the stairs. Her movements, no doubt practiced and practiced again since the day Madam Lu had acquired her as a very young girl, exuded grace, represented the very epitome of femininity. The idea that Sawa, that cruel and corrupt man, would soon put his hands on her, take possession of her, caused Ferreira to practically burst into flame. What was it about her, this Lan the Orchid, that had practically caused him to go mad at the first sight of her? Not her black hair, which seemed lacquered and yet fell softly upon her delicate shoulders. Not the curves of her that lay hidden beneath the silk folds of

her *cheongsam*. Not her painted lips or even the hint of her small, firm breasts. It was those eyes of hers, eyes that longed for escape, for freedom, that sang of what she might have been in another life, if Fate had not treated her so unkindly.

Later, once order had been restored below and he and his men were getting ready to leave, he heard her sing for the first time. The plucked notes of her lute, and then her silvery voice, had cascaded down the stairs like gently falling water. It seemed as though she was singing for him alone, though he knew in his heart that she was singing for Sawa. Or perhaps she was singing for no one? Perhaps she was simply doing that which she had been trained to do during her short lifetime of servitude? It had seemed to him then that what the words of her song were saying was this: *Save me. Won't you please save me?* Or perhaps instead: *No one can save me.* After he had left Madam Lu's house that night, after his men had dispersed and he was alone in the darkness on that Street of Great Happiness, he had wept tears of anguish.

Ferreira tore his eyes away from that upper story window. The old crone, Lu, was watching him. "You are a policeman. You carry a gun. You could take her from me now, if you wished," she said, taunting him. "You would need only give up everything that is dear to you. Your wife. Your children. Your position. And what would you do with her if you did? Where would you go? How would the two of you survive?"

"Enough!" he cried. He walked away from that evil woman, back into the dark streets beyond the Rua da Felicidade, away from the garish lights of the Flower Houses, away from *her*, from Lanhua. At least he knew her name now. Her song slipped into the distance like the glory days of Portugal herself, the days of Vasco da Gama, Henry the Navigator, Bartolomeu Dias. When this war was over, he thought sadly, whether the victor was the Axis or the Allies, would anything be left of Portugal's fading empire, of her holdings overseas? Timor, Macao, Goa . . . in his mind's eye, he saw all those footprints his countrymen had left upon the globe begin to slip from view, vanishing as

though they had merely existed for a time on the sands of those distant shores. The tide of History, it seemed, was changing. As it always did. He wondered if his own life, everything he held dear, might be swept away by it as well.

As he walked home alone along the cobblestone streets of the City of the Name of God, he wished that he had never laid eyes upon Lan the Orchid, that he had never heard her mournful, bewitching song.

### Chapter 3

“I have to go now, to meet Dr. Verissimo.”

“Mmmm.” Rose smiled up at him from the bed, her gray cat’s eyes still heavy with sleep. “At the hospital?”

“Yes.”

“And how far away is that?”

“Not far. Nothing is very far away here.”

“Well, tell that dear man thank you again.”

“What will you do while I’m away?”

“Find something to eat for breakfast, I suppose.”

Jack leaned down, kissed her. “They’ve set up a buffet on the verandah. Will you be able to order something?”

“*Café com leite, por favor.* That’s all I require. Well, almost.” Laughing, she tried to pull him back into bed with her.

“Behave yourself.”

“I’ll try. Maybe I’ll explore the city a bit.”

“Well, if you do venture out, be careful. Should you become lost, one of the pedicabs can bring you back here.”

“I’m not completely helpless, you know.”

“Yes, I do know that,” he said with a smile.

Jack departed the Bela Vista then, wishing he felt better about leaving Rose behind, alone. She had a way of getting into trouble. That struck him as funny and he laughed out loud as he descended the white stairs that led from the hotel to the cobblestone street below. It was, after all, a

rather ridiculous thing to have thought about a woman who had voluntarily fled halfway around the world with him, a married man twice her age.

*A married man.* Those words flitted alongside him like the bright blue dragonflies that hovered in the cool morning air. Briefly, he wondered what Clara and their two girls were doing now, right this instant. He wasn't even sure how many time zones there were between here and there. That night when he and Rose (she'd been Lucy Roberts then) had fled, he'd felt nothing but relief, a sense that the weight of the world had been lifted from his shoulders, and a wild excitement at the prospect of the freedom that lay ahead. He hadn't thought much at all about his wife and daughters. Getting away from them, obliterating the fact of them, had in some measure been the point of his flight. Then, in the beginning, there'd been nothing more important than the long conversations he was having with Rose (on Literature, Art, Destiny, the unlikelihood of there being any sort of divinity), and once they were on the train from Richmond to New York, their fierce lovemaking. Later, however, in Lisbon, and continuing for the three months they had spent aboard the *Celestina*, a sense of guilt, perhaps even regret, had brought memories of that abandoned life flooding back. He was still glad he had left it behind (he'd had no choice, really, for that existence had become intolerable), but he had a better sense now of what he had given up. For one thing, the opportunity to watch his daughters grow up. To see what sort of women they might have become. Would they marry eventually? Of course. But with no father, or perhaps a new one, to walk them down the aisle.

Pedicabs were waiting for him on the street. As soon as they saw him, a clamor arose. As quickly as possible, he selected one from among them in order to silence the rest. He said to the chosen boy "the hospital at São Januário, please," and then it was as though he was being whisked along through two cities at once: the one that lay before him, sparkling in the morning light, and the perhaps even brighter one that existed in memory, that mythical place where he had spent his

childhood. The sea, at least, was the same, and those junks and sampans bobbing up and down in the harbor, and the Christian city hadn't changed in any significant way: it seemed frozen in time. But then they descended into the Chinese Quarter, where business got done. If he squinted at the scene before him, compressed it into an Impressionist painting, it seemed roughly the same. But upon closer inspection, many of the restaurants and shops he had frequented before had different façades and names now. And here and there, a completely new building altogether had sprung up, like an affront to his youth. He remembered the frenzied activity, the selling and yelling, the clatter of vendors' knives against pots and pans, a continual percussion that gave the marketplace its name: *Tintin*. He remembered the smell of snake soup, of *frangipani*, of joss sticks burning in front of street temples, and above all the multitude of odors associated with human beings. There were so many more of them now! That was the thing that struck him most viscerally about this City of the Name of God: how many more people there were. And how many of those people were slumped along the sidewalks, sleeping in doors and underneath arches, or crying out for food from street corners. The boy pulling the pedicab ignored them, which is what everyone else seemed to be doing; it was as though the poor and hungry constituted something invisible, an unpleasant wind that one simply turned up his collar against, and pressed on.

São Januário lay just ahead of him now, a white, weathered building that looked less like a hospital than a medieval church. Perhaps that was the reason it had appealed so to his father, who had a foot in both of those worlds? A missionary as well as a doctor, he had been far more successful at the latter profession. The Catholics had had a head start of several hundred years in this part of the world, after all, so any other religion attempting to establish or expand its presence was at a distinct disadvantage. There *were* converts to be had; some of his father's no doubt lay buried alongside him in the Protestant cemetery to the north, near the Barrier Gate. A shepherd and his sheep. Jack had never subscribed to his father's vision of the afterlife, doubted that there was



such a thing, actually, but he did share the man's desire to help those in need in the here and now, and had even then. He had often assisted his father at his work in that particular realm, sometimes playing the role of orderly, sometimes that of nurse, performing any menial or unpleasant task that might need to be done.

The boy pulling the pedicab brought it as near to the building as he could. A long, curving line of what Jack presumed to be prospective patients blocked the way forward, stretching from the steps leading up to the hospital out into the plaza in front of them like the ragged, fluttering tail of some enormous kite. Men and women wearing white smocks moved back and forth through that line, seeking out those in the worst condition. The pedicab had come to a full stop at last. The hired boy walked back towards Jack, crossing himself. Yet another Catholic convert, he supposed.

“This is as far as I take you, *Senhor*,” the boy said in awkward Portuguese.

No doubt he was afraid of exposing himself to whatever infectious diseases might be lurking within that line of patients. Jack handed him a few *patacas* then stood there for a moment in the cobblestone plaza, taking in the scene before him, trying to make some sense of the fact that he was here again, in a place he had thought he would never return to. Floodgates opened; thoughts and emotions came rushing through them. Sadness, as he recalled his father's death. Regret, at having never really known his mother. Curiosity, as he wondered what had become of the few friends he had left behind here. And finally, the peculiar and yet somehow comforting sense that his coming back was somehow meant to be. He began walking towards the hospital. He assumed an air of belonging, slipped it on like one of those white gowns the staff was wearing. No one tried to stop him. The nurses and orderlies were far too busy to notice, and the prospective patients could see at a glance that he wasn't one of them. Several of them even called out to him for help as he walked by. Passing through the oxbows of the line, he mentally diagnosed some of the most apparent conditions along the way: trachoma, beriberi, yellow fever. He slipped through those tall wooden

doors at the front of São Januário. He found himself in a familiar corridor, standing on a familiar gray tile floor. Off to his left lay the main waiting room, spilling over with patients. Members of the medical staff were there, trying to keep everyone calm, and comfortable. He heard sniffles, coughs, the soul-rending cries of babies. He was able to capture the attention of one of the nurses, a rather pretty yet frazzled-looking Macanese girl.

“Where can I find Dr. Verissimo? He’s expecting me.”

She glared at him sternly at first, perhaps thinking he was a patient seeking to jump to the head of the line, but then she encountered his air of belonging, of authority. “Try the Cholera Ward, sir. It’s on the second floor. The stairs . . .”

“I know where they are.” *The Cholera Ward*. Was it possible they were actually isolating patients by disease these days, rather than ethnicity? If so, then perhaps things had changed for the better. That was one of the perpetual battles his father had fought, trying to circumvent tradition. To no avail. Jack made his way to that ward where, once upon a time, Whites with every sort of condition imaginable had been housed, spreading a multitude of diseases among themselves while maintaining racial purity. He stuck his head through the door. Rows of beds lined the walls. Every one of those beds, it seemed, was taken. Nurses flitted about like white moths. Some of the patients had intravenous drips attached to their arms. They looked like collapsed marionettes. He heard the clatter of metal instruments against metal trays. Otherwise, the room was eerily quiet. Most of the patients were no doubt too ill to have visitors. Low voices echoed off the high ceiling as the hospital staff coordinated treatment. Jack saw Dr. Verissimo then, standing beside one of the beds near a tall rectangular window along the far wall. Not wishing to get in the way, he ventured no further; instead, he stood at the entrance to the ward, waiting to be noticed. Eventually, Verissimo spied him.

“*Alberto!*” he cried as he walked across the room, removing his gloves and mask. “So, you have come after all!”

“It’s Jack Blake now, remember?” he said under his breath with a nervous smile, glancing around the ward as though what Verissimo had proposed in jest last night might actually be true, that the Japanese might be watching him.

“Yes, yes, whatever you say, dear boy. Regardless, I’m very glad you are here. As you can see, I was telling the truth: we really do need your help. Rather desperately, I’m afraid. Shall I give you the tour?” One of the nurses passed by. “Ming, I’d like you to meet our newest physician, Doctor Blake.”

The young Oriental girl stopped and bowed. “*Muito prazer.*”

Jack smiled at her. “*Muito prazer.*”

“Tell me,” said Verissimo, “how did you leave that new wife of yours?”

“She is doing quite well, thank you.”

“No, no,” he laughed, “I meant how did you ever manage to bring yourself to leave her?”

Jack smiled. “Well, it wasn’t easy, but we do have to earn a living. By the way, she asked me to thank you again for last night.”

Verissimo waved a hand in the air, dismissively. “Nothing. It was nothing. But tell me, how did you ever meet such a lovely creature?”

#

Seven months earlier, he’d been Professor and Director of the Clinic for Tropical and Infectious Diseases at Braden University, which was sometimes referred to (sometimes even beyond the borders of the campus itself) as the “Harvard of the South.” He’d had two lovely and well-behaved daughters and a wife who was not only independently wealthy but gave spectacular parties at the white-pillared, marble-floored, elegant old antebellum home that her parents had given the

couple as a wedding present. It was September, 1940, and Clara Moore was hosting yet another of those famous affairs, having as usual invited everyone remotely associated with Richmond society, as well as a select subset of the Braden faculty.

Guests began arriving at 8 o'clock, as was the fashion. As was also the fashion, they began drinking almost immediately. As was Moore's fashion, he had been drinking already, for he found those events even more tedious than his everyday life. The only way he could endure them was to tend the bar himself, though Clara had servants who were paid to do such things. From his perspective, there were a number of advantages to the arrangement, mainly unmonitored access to an almost inexhaustible supply of bourbon. He found it much easier to talk to people, as well, when he was a bit tight, when he was separated from them by the Maginot Line of the bar.

"Whiskey sours again tonight, Mrs. O'Neill?"

"Yes, of course, Albert. You do make the best ones, dear boy."

From that little island fortress, too, he could listen to the big band orchestra in the ballroom next door, without there being much danger that he would be asked to dance. Not that Clara was likely to do so; she had her choice of partners who (unlike Moore himself) had both right and left feet. But there were others who, either out of pity or some perverse desire to seduce the host, might make the attempt. And he would just as soon keep to himself.

He tossed off another bourbon. Sam came by to restock a tray with glasses of champagne, and before heading back into the crowd said, as he always did on such occasions, "I sure wish you would let me do that, Dr. Moore."

Albert nodded his thanks but as usual remained where he was, by now as much a fixture at these parties as the ballroom's enormous chandelier: a white-suited, stolid presence at the bar, a quiet, contemplative man who, to the perennial guests, must have seemed the polar opposite of his animated wife.

Warner, who taught History yet always seemed intent upon methodically obliterating his own, stopped by for what Moore guessed was already his fifth Scotch-and-soda. “So,” Moore asked as he mixed the drink, not because he was interested in the topic particularly, but because he wished to preemptively steer the conversation away from himself, “What are your thoughts on the war?”

“Which one?” the old professor growled, his strabismic and perhaps blind right eye staring up towards the ceiling, his good left one narrowing as he glared at Albert, “There are several going on at the moment. There’s always a war going on somewhere, you know. We’re a warlike species! But I suppose you mean the one in Europe?” Moore noticed that his hands were trembling. “It’s on the other side of the ocean and I’m sixty-three years old. Why should I give a damn? That’s the only good thing about being this age, Blake; the world could be coming to an end and I wouldn’t have to care about it!”

He turned away from the bar then, leaving Moore to ponder the identity of this “Blake,” and why Dr. Warner had confused him with that unknown person, and why the old man’s claim not to give a damn so disconcerted him.

He drank another bourbon, one too many it seemed, for the fine line he liked to walk between being conscious of the world and yet not too terribly involved in it began to wobble. He saw Ellis Wallace and his latest conquest approaching but their voices seemed to fade in and out like a radio signal he was having trouble receiving.

“Moore!” He heard that much but then lost whatever came afterwards. His eyes, at least, seemed to be working. Ellis’s enormous bald head welled up in front of him like a moon that was slightly lopsided. Then he saw that this new woman of his was striking, a redhead with bored green eyes and a delicate little scar on her forehead. She had the same look on her face that Ellis’s women always seemed to have: a steadfast and slightly wry smile proclaimed to the world that she “knew the score,” though Moore suspected that, at this stage of the game, she didn’t. She would know that

under the name L.S. Wallace her lover was a relatively famous New Critic and poet, and no doubt she would even know that he was married, but the fact that she hadn't yet left him meant she hadn't yet discovered how reckless he could be with people's lives, even those of his dearest friends.

"I see you have the best seat in the house again!"

"It has its advantages." As usual, a cigarette was burning in one of Ellis's hands; in the other he held an empty glass. "Another gin and tonic?" ventured Moore.

"You remembered! I'm touched!" Ellis's companion didn't seem to be drinking. "You know what I like most about Moore?" he asked her. Albert found himself focusing upon his friend's yellow teeth, his thin back mustache, his signature red bow tie.

The redhead didn't reply but finally paid attention to the man behind the bar. She seemed to be sizing him up, finding him wanting. Then she glanced back at Ellis with a bored look that seemed to say, rather sarcastically, that she couldn't imagine.

"He's as rich as Croesus! Or at least his wife is."

The woman arched a painted eyebrow.

"Isn't that simply *wonderful!*" gushed Ellis.

"It has its advantages," Moore said again. "But it has its disadvantages as well, I suppose."

"Such as?" asked the redhead, speaking at last.

For a moment, Moore wasn't sure what to say. He tried to take another drink but then remembered, as the ice cubes collided with his upper lip, that his glass was empty. "Well," he offered, a bit playfully, "they say it's harder for us to get into the Kingdom of Heaven."

"God!" spluttered Ellis. "You're on the fast track compared to someone like me!" He tilted his glass back, drained it. His companion excused herself and walked off towards the powder room, her shimmering green dress reflecting the brighter light that shone in from the ballroom next door.

"Talk about *arse poetica!*" murmured Ellis, appreciatively, watching her go.

“Where did you find this one?” asked Moore.

“You know . . .” replied Ellis, honestly astonished, “I don’t actually remember!” And he wheezed with laughter.

Moore shook his head, though at the same time he couldn’t help smiling. He felt vaguely envious of his old friend at that moment, though perhaps not because of the stunning woman; perhaps it had more to do with the fact that Ellis seemed to know what made him happy and was therefore able to pursue it with such single-mindedness.

The music from the ballroom started up again. He hadn’t realized until then that it had stopped. “You know,” he said, nodding in the direction of the powder room, “I think she may have run out on you.”

“Not a chance!”

“I’ve been meaning to ask: where is Laura these days?” Laura Wallace was Ellis’s wife of eleven years, a novelist who was almost as well-known for her books as she was for her affairs.

“Last I heard, taking an adulterous cruise down the Nile.”

“The two of you have a peculiar relationship.”

“All relationships are peculiar, if you examine them closely enough,” said Ellis, solemnly. “Each one is different and there’s no explaining any of them.” He looked over his shoulder. “I had best go check up on her. You may be right. I haven’t been particularly nice to her lately.” Ellis turned to go but then paused and looked back over his shoulder. “Say, Moore, do you absolutely forbid copulation in your powder rooms?”

*Well no, not absolutely,* he had almost decided to say. But by then Ellis was already striding across the floor, no doubt planning to follow up on that thought if he could. *Free love*, he called such encounters as they happened, and Laura was a proponent of that way of life, as well. Moore himself had always thought of the expression as a bit of an oxymoron. Love wasn’t really free at all; how

could it be? And he didn't think it was love they were talking about anyway. But then, he reflected, maybe he didn't know all that much about either of those words, love or freedom, at the end of the day.

Moore stood at the bar, watching the dancers sweep by in the ballroom. He felt oddly detached from it all, as though watching the scene from a place far above, as though Life was rushing by on a plane somewhere beneath him. He bent down to pull another bottle of bourbon from the box of bottles under the bar, and when he stood up again someone else was there: a rather oddly-dressed young woman whom he was fairly certain had never been in his house before.

"Can I get a drink?" she asked briskly.

"That's what I'm here for." She was even younger than he had thought at first, now that he had a better look at her. Young enough, perhaps, to be one of his students. She was somewhat unusual. She had black hair, neither permed nor waved as was all the rage these days, though it was somewhat difficult to be certain because of the almost brimless lavender hat that was pulled down as far as her unplucked eyebrows. The eyes themselves were gray and there was something about them, perhaps the slight tilt, that reminded him of cat. "What are you having?"

"Bourbon is fine, if that's what you have in hand."

He poured hers and then his, added ice. He kept pondering her peculiar clothes, finally deciding that she looked a bit like a flapper, though that was no longer the style and hadn't been for some time. It suddenly occurred to him that she reminded him of a little girl playing dress-up on a rainy day, with clothes from her mother's attic.

"Was that L.S. Wallace you were talking to just now?"

"It was, actually. Do you know him?"

Her bare, white elbows were propped on the bar. She was holding her glass with both hands. "Only by reputation. I hear he's something of a monster."



Moore laughed. "I suppose he is, at that. But I love him."

She looked up at him sharply then, a flicker of interest in her tilted gray eyes. "Why?" she asked, as though challenging him.

Those eyes really were quite lovely, he decided, even if the rest of her wasn't. She was almost ridiculously skinny and always seemed to be consciously bending and repositioning her arms, like a child playing with pipe cleaners. "Why?" he repeated, then shrugged. "I don't know as you can explain love in terms of why." He thought of Ellis's comments of only moments ago, on the inexplicability of all relationships.

"I have a theory about Love," she said, pushing her empty glass across the bar.

Moore poured her another. "Let's hear it," he said with a hint of a smile, convinced now that she was indeed very young.

"I don't think it has much to do with the other person, finally. I think it has to do with what's inside each of us, with some emotional need we are trying to satisfy. We have that need and then go out in search of someone who can fill it. When we find that someone, we say we're in love."

"That's a rather cynical view."

"Is it?"

"Well, it certainly seems so on the face of it." Moore sipped at his bourbon. "But perhaps there's something I've failed to grasp. Why don't we apply your theory to an actual couple and see how it fares," he suggested, in what he realized (too late and with a bit of dismay) was a professorial tone of voice.

"I don't think we have any mutual acquaintances."

"FDR and Eleanor?"

She laughed. "I wouldn't presume!"

"Rhett and Scarlett?" *Gone with the Wind* was still playing in the local theaters.

“Oh, for God’s sake! They’re fictional characters!”

“Gable and Lombard?”

“They are as well. Not that I read the gossip columns.”

“Albert and Clara Moore?” Later, he would wonder just why he had put their names out there. Perhaps he had been curious as to whether there really was some connection between himself, or his wife, and this peculiar girl. Or perhaps he had foreseen a reply very much like the one she eventually gave him and, perversely, had felt compelled to hear it.

She paused. She put her drink down on the bar. “I don’t really know them all that well,” she said, almost conspiratorially, “Though I was there at their wedding. I was only eleven years old.” She smiled and put a long white finger into her drink, swirled it around among the ice cubes. “All I really know is what I hear: that she’s rich and self-centered and he’s rather pitiful.”

“Well, lots of emotional needs to satisfy *there*,” he said dryly. He spied Sam approaching and motioned for him to take over. “I have to leave now, I’m afraid,” he said to the girl, “It was nice to have met you, though, Miss . . . ?”

“Roberts,” she said, “Lucy Roberts.” That name rang no bells. He had already started to walk away when she added, hastily: “And you are?”

“Just the bartender. Blake,” he said with a smile, suddenly remembering the name old Dr. Warner had inadvertently given him. He crossed the dark open floor to the ballroom. The band had been playing Sweet for most of the night but now launched into a song that was decidedly Swing, and as Moore skirted the edge of the room, headed towards the glass doors that let out to the patio, couples began jitterbugging in wild swirls and eddies, under the waterfall of fragmented light that spilled down from the chandelier. Mostly, it was the society contingent that was out there. He saw Clara among them, dancing furiously with a tall blonde man whom he didn’t recognize. For a moment, he experienced an almost obligatory flicker of jealousy, then succumbed once again to

what was gradually becoming a familiar emptiness. The glass doors lay straight ahead. He passed two faculty members from the English Department, who were arguing vociferously about an essay entitled (if he had heard them correctly): “The Subject-Predicate Armageddon.” He reached the doors and pushed through them, made his escape into the night and the muggy yet clean-smelling air.

He lit a cigarette and walked across the flagstones to the outer edge of the circle of light that marked the boundary between night and home. Looking back, he could see dancing silhouettes against the gauzy white curtains that covered the windows. He could still hear the music, faintly, its youthfulness and exuberance a stark contrast to the mood that was settling over him now. He turned away from the house and looked out into the dark, empty backyard. Fireflies flashed off and on among the swamp oaks that populated the lawn. Tate’s Creek, invisible yet faintly audible, slipped through the grass like a secret. Overhead, there was no moon but the sky was brimming with stars. Thin, white clouds scudded by as quickly, it seemed, as his life was passing. He was in the middle now, he thought heavily; there was no denying it. Yet he was still unsure as to where he was going, if indeed he (or anyone else, for that matter) was going anywhere.

“Dr. Moore?”

He looked over his shoulder and saw her: that same young girl he had met at the bar. He remembered her name. “Hello again, Miss Roberts.”

She came up close to him, breathlessly, and put a hand on his arm. “Dr. Moore, I’m so very sorry. Obviously, I didn’t know who you were. I didn’t know what I was talking about. I don’t even *know* you, for God’s sake, not really, and I don’t know your wife. I was just making conversation, trying to say something clever and I . . .”

He held up a hand to stop that torrent of words, the burning end of his cigarette glowing between his fingers, and said: “Well, I asked for it, didn’t I? And you were not altogether wrong.”

“Dr. Moore!” she said miserably.

“Please, call me Albert,” he said pleasantly. He was beginning to like this young girl, or at least the attention she was paying him. A sudden breeze stirred the air around them and to his surprise it seemed also, ever so slightly, to stir his blood.

“All right,” she said in a lower, richer voice, then abruptly stood on tiptoe, steadying herself by holding onto his arm, and gave him a lingering kiss on the cheek. He was too stunned by the suddenness of that kiss to react to it; by the time he had gotten over his surprise she had already turned and fled. He stood alone on the dark flagstone patio, looking back towards the lighted windows of his wife’s house, wondering what to call what had just happened to him.

## Chapter 4

An entire day lay ahead of her now, one which did not include Jack. That felt a bit strange as they had been all but inseparable for these past few months. Yet, perhaps for that very reason, there was something liberating about it as well. She stepped through the glass-paneled front doors of the Bela Vista out into the stark, late-morning light. A warm breeze rose from the sea below. Junks and sampans bobbed about on undulating green water. There were unfamiliar smells in the air: incense, fish, mysterious flowers. She had a few *patacas* in her pocket, silver breadcrumbs Jack had left her so that she could find her way home. She despised them in a way, those coins, for what they represented: her dependence upon someone else. Was that any different, or better, than being kept by her parents? Perhaps only in the sense that she had entered into this arrangement with Jack of her own free will. And that here, far from the confines of the life she had been born into, there might be opportunities to finally become her own person.

There were pedicabs and rickshaws lying in wait along the street. Their drivers called out to her in a babble of different languages, even English now and then: *Mistress, Madam, Lady! Where you want to go?* She waved them off and kept walking. Eventually, their chatter fell away. She was alone here at the end of the world. What Jack had called the “Christian city” seemed empty, abandoned, and yet she had the sense that people were watching her even so from behind those shuttered windows, or from the shadows of the courtyards beyond those wrought-iron gates, or from the crests of those white balconies overhanging the hillside above. Wives and servants, she imagined, as it was a weekday and the men would surely be off at work, the children at school. She came to a sidewalk that led up towards the top of the hill and on impulse, took it. There were trees alongside the narrow path, their densely-leafed branches filled with red flowers and green-and-yellow twittering birds. She felt out of breath as she climbed. Still, she saw no one. Still, she felt invisible, prying eyes upon her person.

At the top there was an imposing white church. And here at last there were people, most of them elderly Chinese men, seated on benches in what appeared to be a public park. More of those little birds were singing in more of those leafy trees. There were birds in bamboo cages as well, hanging from the lower branches, and they, too, were singing. The same birds singing the same songs, though some were free and others not. Some clearly belonged to those seated old gentlemen as from time-to-time one of them would point with his cane to a particular cage, to a bird that had set forth a particularly melodious sequence of notes, as if to say: *Did you hear that? Yes, one of mine!*

Rose stopped, doubled over, tried to catch her breath for a moment. Once she had recovered somewhat, once she could stand all the way up again, she looked back down the slope she had just climbed. The sea was still there, ever-changing and yet somehow always the same. To the north and east stood the fort Jack had called “Monte,” and that white lighthouse, Guia. She turned around and walked through the park. Eventually, she came to another street, this one lined with crowds of people, all of whom were craning their necks as though hoping to catch sight of something. She realized that many of them, perhaps most, were European. Portuguese, presumably. Curious, she moved closer. And now she could hear something that sounded like a drumbeat, and wailing. There was a bit of a break in that press of people lining the street and she stepped into the gap, tried to make her way to the far edge of the sidewalk. Some of the men and women standing there politely made room for her. Then she leaned out over the cobblestone street with them, looked to her right with them, to see what all the fuss was about. A man dressed in rags was laboring up the hill, carrying an enormous wooden cross on his shoulder.

The people closest to her began to wail now as well. Someone cried out “*Cristo!*” And then she remembered what she had forgotten, that the upcoming Sunday was Easter. Which meant this must be . . . Good Friday? She had lost all track of time during this flight of theirs. And religious holidays such as this one meant nothing to her. Clearly, though, the spectacle taking place now

meant something to those surrounding her; their cries were filled with what seemed genuine anguish. Their tears were real tears. The man who portrayed Christ, weighed down by his burden, continued to trudge up the hill towards her. Those drumbeats grew louder as though, step-by-step, they were climbing the hill alongside him. The wailing grew ever louder. Dry-eyed, Rose stood watching, perplexed and yet fascinated by the ritual. These people really did believe in this nonsense! It was incomprehensible, ridiculous, barbaric, and yet at the same time oddly moving. For there was such hope in it, such a desperate need for Life to have meaning!

The man carrying the cross was passing directly in front of her now. His face was contorted with what appeared to be genuine pain, genuine suffering and sorrow. The people on either side of Rose were reaching out to him, crying out to him, weeping. Some threw palm fronds onto the cobblestones before him. And then he had passed her by, propelled forward, it seemed, by those beating drums. The crowd of onlookers fell in behind him. Rose tried to back away but found that she couldn't; there were too many people packed in too closely. She was swept out into the street and carried along down the other side of the hill. There was nothing she could do but submit, and wait for the opportunity to escape. The seething crowd came to an intersection, and crossed it. On the far side, embedded in one wall of the building at the corner, there was a white ceramic tile sign with two street names emblazoned upon it in light blue. One, horizontal, was in Portuguese; the other, vertical, in that spidery script used by the Chinese. She couldn't hope to read the latter, of course, but the former proclaimed this thoroughfare to be the *Rua do Almirante*, presumably some admiral who had once done something worthy of note, at some point in Portugal's long history. She wondered if that Chinese inscription said the same thing. Somehow, she doubted it. What seemed more likely was that there were two very different ways of identifying the street, that perhaps there were even two distinct and yet intertwined streets here, that the city itself was woven from those alternating colors of thread.

That churning river of people carried her along for quite a while, until finally she spied a means by which she might leave it: an alleyway flowed into the stream from the right like a tributary. She pushed and shoved her way towards it. And then found herself in the midst of an open-air market. There were vast numbers of people here as well, but the overwhelming majority of them were Chinese, seemingly oblivious to the Passion Play taking place along the Admiral's street. And these people were moving much more slowly. Shoppers wandered this way and that among stalls where fresh fruits and vegetables were displayed: red and green peppers as festive as Christmas ornaments, pineapples topped with plumes of spiked leaves, oranges, onions, thickly-veined cabbage. Her stomach growled, reminding her that she'd had nothing but coffee and milk for breakfast. And yet she hesitated to spend the *patacas* Jack had given her, as she wasn't sure how much they were worth, or how much the food laid out before her might cost, or how much money she needed to hold in reserve for the pedicab ride back to the hotel. And she knew now that she would need that ride, for suddenly she felt exhausted. Her legs had begun to shake. Was that simply from a lack of nourishment? The world began spinning around. She might have lost her balance then and fallen if not for the people pressed against her from all sides, holding her upright. She tried to turn back, intent upon returning to the Admiral's street. That proved to be impossible with all of those bodies pushing her along from behind. There were live animals before her now, in wooden crates along the margins of the alleyway: squealing pigs, quacking ducks, bleating goats, clucking chickens. And then, without warning, carnival horrors: coiled snakes, fierce lizards, bats with outstretched wings, all of them floating in liquid inside enormous jars. They stared out at her, open-mouthed, as though they had been screaming in agony when they died, as though their soulless bodies would seek vengeance upon those who had put them there, if only escape from their glass prisons were possible.



She shuddered, soldiered on. Again, the world began spinning around. There were too many smells, too many voices, too much heat generated by all of those people milling around her. Then she found herself lying flat on her back on the cobblestones, unsure as to how she had gotten there, staring up at a narrow trough of blue sky and white clouds in between the inverted tops of all those tall buildings on either side of the alleyway. She felt something warm and wet on her face. Could that be blood? Weakly, she lifted a hand, tried to touch her cheek. Only to discover that a small, eager dog, a mop of white hair with a dark brown, compressed face, was licking her, whimpering as it did so. She felt its hot breath in her ear. She wondered then if she might be delirious, imagining all of this. She heard a voice, somewhere in the blue distance above her.

*“Arminho! Não! Arminho! Que está fazendo? Venha!”*

A shadow leaned into her narrowed field of vision. She stared up at it, dully. A man dressed in a dark suit, wearing a pince-nez attached to a silver chain, leaned down at her. He had black hair, a full black beard, and burning black eyes. He looked a bit like a fakir, she decided, or perhaps a madman.

*“A senhora está bem? Are you all right, Madam?”*

Those last words, spoken in English, brought her out of her trance. “I’m not quite sure,” she managed to say.

He knelt beside her, wiped her face with a white handkerchief. “I must apologize for Arminho. He only wishes to be of assistance. As do I.” He placed an arm behind her back and helped her sit up. “Camilo Pessanha, poet and barrister, in that order precisely, at your service. And you have already met my faithful companion, Arminho. He is a Pekinese.” The little mop of hair let out a bark, almost as though he had understood everything his master had said.

“Thank you. Rose Blake. I’m not at all certain what happened. I . . .”

“Are you ill?”

“I don’t believe so.” She put a hand to her forehead. It felt cool to the touch. “However, I haven’t eaten much of anything today.”

“Ah!” cried Pessanha. “Well, that is something which can be rather easily remedied. Come, allow me to help you up. There is an excellent restaurant on the other side of the bazaar.”

“Thank you, but I’m not certain I can afford it,” she protested, thinking again about the pedicab ride back to the Bela Vista.

“Then you will be my guest! And Arminho’s,” he added as the little dog danced around him. He stood up, helped her to her feet, steadied her. “Please, take my arm.”

She did just that. She had no choice. She didn’t trust her legs to carry her much further. The crowd, which had parted when she fell, closed in around them again but Pessanha had no difficulty pushing his way through it. He carved a diagonal path to the other side of the alley, then ushered her through a red door into a dimly-lit room, one that was brimming with tables and chairs and people, and smells that all by themselves seemed to revive her. An elderly woman came forward to meet them. Pessanha spoke with her in Chinese. They bowed to one another and then she led the way to back of the room. For an instant, Rose’s upbringing welled up within her and she felt apprehensive: what was she doing here in this strange place, with such a strange man? And yet she continued to cling to his arm as though to a life raft. She had no choice. They sat down at an empty table.

“I recommend the noodles,” Pessanha said brightly, flashing his fakir’s smile as she glanced at an incomprehensible menu. “Personally, I prefer them with beef, though that is not often available these days, what with everything that is going on in the world around us. The chicken, however, is quite acceptable. Shall I order that for you?”

She nodded. “Yes, please.”

He summoned the waiter, said something unintelligible. The man bowed and disappeared. Pessanha removed his pince-nez, cleaned the lenses with his handkerchief, then placed it back upon the bridge of his nose. In the process, his black eyes became smaller, a bit sinister, then grew larger and more genial again. “You’re quite safe here,” he said, perhaps sensing her apprehension. “Anyone will tell you that I am a respectable person. They would say that I am a bit eccentric, perhaps, but completely harmless, I assure you.” He smiled and his teeth were white against the backdrop of his black beard. Meanwhile, the little Pekinese, Arminho, flitted back and forth underneath the table between her legs and his, as though engaged in a game of its own creation. She wondered at that, a dog running loose inside a restaurant, but none of the other customers seemed to mind, or even notice. The waiter appeared again, placed upon the table a white, rotund ceramic pot with a bamboo handle.

“Ah, tea!” said Pessanha, and then poured the pale green liquid into two cups that looked like enormous, inverted ceramic thimbles. He passed one of them to her and she grasped it between trembling fingers. “It will tide you over until our food arrives. That won’t take long, I promise you. The cook, Li, is very fast. Very efficient.”

She managed a nod. The hot cup felt good between her hands. She lifted it to her lips, sipped at it carefully. As she did so, Pessanha began telling her a bit about himself, how he had come here ten years ago from Coimbra, the home of Portugal’s great university, where he had led the absinthe-drinking, poetry-writing life of a Bohemian. A Bohemian lawyer, as it were. “However, I eventually came to the conclusion that there was nothing for me there other than Death, and that I could just as easily find Him elsewhere. I decided that I wished to travel forever on a ship bound for nowhere. Never to arrive, never to arrive . . .” he said, dreamily, as though reciting the refrain from one of his poems. “But then eventually I did arrive, as you can see, here in this so-called City of the Name of God. Though of late, some might say that He has abandoned it.”