

A HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE BOOK FOR YOUNG READERS

Shanghai Escape

KATHY KACER

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Second Story Press

Kacer, Kathy, 1954, author
Shanghai escape / Kathy Kacer.

(Holocaust remembrance book for young readers)

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN 978-1-927583-10-4 (pbk.).—ISBN 978-1-927583-11-1 (epub)

1. Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)—China—Shanghai—Juvenile fiction.
 2. Jewish children in the Holocaust—China—Shanghai—Juvenile fiction.
 3. Jews—China—Shanghai—Juvenile fiction. 4. World War, 1939-1945—China—Juvenile fiction.
- I. Title. II. Series: Holocaust remembrance book for young readers

PS8571.A33S53 2013 jC813'.54 C2013-903871-X
C2013-903872-8

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Edited by Kathryn Cole

Copyedited by Phuong Truong

Designed by Melissa Kaita

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Second Story Press gratefully acknowledges the support of the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts for our publishing program. We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund.



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada

Published by
SECOND STORY PRESS
20 Maud Street, Suite 401
Toronto, ON M5V 2M5
www.secondstorypress.ca

For Lily Toufar Lash – with deep gratitude

And to my children, Gabi and Jake – may you always know only freedom

Introduction

Shanghai, China. What an unlikely destination for European Jews, trying to escape the cruel, anti-Semitic laws that Adolf Hitler and his Nazi party enforced before the Second World War. As more and more Jews sought safe refuge in the 1930s, world leaders came together in France to discuss the issue of what to do about them. The meetings were known as the Evian Conference. Although everyone sympathized with Jewish families who were trying to escape the persecution in Europe, most countries around the world, including Australia, Canada, and the United States, were not willing to offer safe refuge. Shanghai was one place that allowed Jews to enter.

More than twenty thousand Jewish refugees, mostly from Austria and Germany, came to Shanghai between 1937 and 1939. In the early days of their arrival, they established lives that were not all that different from the ones they had left behind in Europe. They opened shops and restaurants; they created theaters and published newspapers; their children attended schools. They lived side by side with their Chinese neighbors in relative freedom. All of this changed after 1941, when Japan attacked the U.S. Navy in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and Japan and the United States entered the Second World War.

Japan and China had been at war for many years. By 1937, the Japanese Imperial Army had occupied Shanghai and imposed harsh conditions on the Chinese citizens who lived there. Japan was also an ally of Nazi Germany. After Pearl Harbor, and under pressure from Adolf Hitler, the Japanese government in Shanghai ordered all the Jewish refugees who had arrived there after 1937 to move into a ghetto in an area of the city called Hongkew.

Twenty thousand Jewish refugees joined nearly a hundred thousand poor Chinese citizens who already lived in Hongkew. Conditions there were harsh. There was little food to eat, poor sanitation, rampant disease, and hardly any medication. Jews needed special pass cards to leave the ghetto and to work in other parts of Shanghai, and these permits, issued by the Japanese, were difficult to obtain. At one point, there was even talk that the Japanese authorities were establishing concentration camps on the coast of Shanghai where Jews would be sent and possibly put to death. The Jewish refugees of Hongkew lived with anxiety and uncertainty about their future.

Lily Toufar and her family arrived in Shanghai in 1938, having fled from Vienna, Austria, on the eve of *Kristallnacht*, the “night of broken glass.” On that night, hundreds of synagogues in Germany and Austria were looted and ransacked, and thousands of Jews were beaten, arrested, and imprisoned. Shanghai was a strange and unfamiliar place to Lily. But life became even more difficult after her family was forced to move into the Hongkew ghetto in 1941. She, like thousands of other Jewish refugees, endured the difficult living conditions, dirt, disease, and death, always hopeful that the war would end and her family would still be alive.

This is Lily’s story.

Foreword

November 8, 1938

Their bags were packed and waiting at the door. Suitcases and boxes leaned against one another like building blocks. Lily stood next to the luggage, watching her mother count the pieces over and over.

“I hope we’ve got everything,” Mom said, in a voice so soft that Lily had to bend forward to hear her.

Why is Mom whispering when there’s no one else in the apartment to hear? Lily wondered. And why is her face so serious? Mom’s eyebrows were drawn so low they nearly touched the top of her lashes. Lily wrapped her jacket closer around her body and shivered. Even though it was only early November, she felt winter beginning to creep into the apartment. Within a month, her city of Vienna would be blanketed with snow. That had always meant Lily could go tobogganing. She loved racing down snow-covered hills with the wind blowing her short reddish curls straight out behind her. But that was before – in winters past. Now she was beginning to wonder if she would ever again see the surrounding hills of Vienna.

“Why can’t I take my other toys?” The sound of her voice echoed in the empty hallway.



Before the war began, Lily lived in Vienna with her Mom and Pop.

Mom paused and looked at her daughter. The lines around her eyes softened, and she reached over to brush Lily's hair behind her ear. "I've explained this to you already. Clothes are more important than dolls, my darling." Lily gazed up at her mother. Mom never wore a smidge of make-up and couldn't have cared less about her appearance. But even now, as she rushed about packing up last minute things, Lily marveled at how nice she still looked, as if she was planning a dinner party and not an escape from their home.

"But you packed my books, didn't you, Mom? We're not leaving those behind."

Her mother nodded. "Yes, Lily. The books you chose are packed here in this box. You see?" she added. "I've written your name on it in black ink."

"What about that?" Lily pointed to Mom's treadle sewing machine – one of the only pieces of furniture that stood amongst the cartons and cases.

Mom paused and then spoke again. "We have no idea what we will find in Shanghai. We have to be prepared with those things that are really necessary. If I'm able to sew, then I can help your father earn money for our family. Now where did I pack the pots?" She turned back to surveying the luggage while Lily slumped against the wall. *Aren't my toys as necessary as Mom's sewing machine?*

Shanghai! It had meant nothing to Lily when Mom told her the name of the city in China they were escaping to; it may as well have been the moon. The only thing she had thought of was Vienna's Prater Amusement Park close to their home where, in the middle of the merry-go-round, stood the statue of the *Calafati*, a Chinese man dressed in colorful clothing. It was huge, maybe ten times Lily's height, and would turn in slow circles as she rode up and down on one of the wooden horses. She wondered if there were giant men like that in Shanghai, a place that was halfway around the world.



When Lily tried to imagine what Shanghai would be like, all she could think of was the statue of the Calafati, a wooden Chinese man in the center of the merry-go-round that she rode as a child in Vienna.

“Is it just for a vacation, Mom? Like going to the cottage in the country?” That was the question Lily had asked weeks earlier when the plans were being carefully arranged.

Her mother had shaken her head. “No, Lily. This time we’re leaving for much, much longer.” Mom had gone on to explain that they would travel by train to Italy and then by boat to Shanghai. “It will take weeks to get there, perhaps more than a month. But we should be thankful that there’s a city anywhere in the world that still allows Jews like us to enter. God knows there aren’t many places left that will,” she had added.

The sounds of crashing and shattering glass from somewhere outside filled Lily’s apartment. Mom’s eyes suddenly wide, moved to the sitting room window and peered out at the dark streets, careful to hide behind the long curtains. Lily followed, curious about the angry cries that rose up from the street below. She could have sworn that she heard a chorus of people shouting “Down with the Jews!” *How is that possible? I must have heard wrong.*

“Lily, get back!” Mom’s voice sounded angry as she yanked Lily away from the window, pulling so hard on her arm that Lily cried out. Mom hardly noticed. “It’s starting,” she said. She turned and ran through the apartment, switching off every light until there was only one left on at the back of the flat. Darkness fell across the luggage, casting long eerie shadows up the door. Mom returned to stand next to her daughter, reaching out to pull her close. Lily’s arm was still sore, but she didn’t say a word.

“Those Nazi thugs!” Mom practically spat those words out. “They’re going to arrest Jewish men across the country. That’s why we must escape tonight. As soon as your father gets back, we’ll go. He should have been here by now,” she added. “I only pray he returns safely....” Her voice trailed off until silence joined the darkness in the apartment.

Escaping from our home? Arresting Jewish men? Lily had little understanding of what it meant. She was too young when the laws and rules restricting the freedom of Jewish citizens had been introduced. Occasionally she overheard bits of conversations between her parents or her aunts and uncles. They talked about how Jews couldn’t go to movie theaters or restaurants or the ice-cream parlor. Pop once said that Jews were being kicked on the streets and beaten in parks. For the most part it all seemed unreal to Lily; her parents had protected her from knowing about these awful things so that she wouldn’t be afraid. But tonight, when she looked into her mother’s face, she could see Mom’s hot red cheeks, her creased brow, and the fear that glittered in her eyes, even in the darkened apartment. That was real for Lily.

Shoes scraped across the staircase outside their apartment. A key turned in the lock. Lily sucked in her breath as the door opened. It was Pop.

“Oh, thank goodness!” Mom exclaimed as Lily rushed into her father’s open arms.

“No need to worry,” Pop said, gently prying Lily’s arms from around his waist and bending to face his daughter. “Are you all packed, my darling?”

Lily nodded, pointing to the box with her name on it. “My clothes are in the suitcase. That box has my books.” She glanced up at her mother. “And just a couple of toys.”

Mom sighed. “Did you get the tickets, Fritz?”

Lily’s father nodded and reached into the pocket of his overcoat, carefully removing three long envelopes. “We’re lucky that our friend warned me about tonight.”

“I’m still not sure I completely trust him,” Mom replied, as she reached for the envelopes. “After all, he’s a member of the SS. Why would someone from Hitler’s own police help us out?”

“He had no choice but to sign up, Erna. He was under pressure to join, and it would have been dangerous for him to refuse. I’ve told you this before. He doesn’t believe all the nonsense that the Nazis are saying about Jews.” Lily’s father looked tired as he patiently explained this to his wife. There were dark shadows under his eyes and his back was bent as if it was too heavy for him to straighten up. “He was very brave to warn us about the dangers,” Pop added. “He could be shot for helping us.”

Shot for helping us Jews? Lily didn’t understand that part at all.

Mom held the envelopes tightly against her chest. “You were gone so long. Did you have any trouble?”

Pop shook his head. “The line-up for tickets went for several blocks. But ours were waiting for me as promised.”

Howling police sirens filled the air outside along with the sound of more destruction and windows shattering. Pop glanced at the door then back at his wife and daughter. He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and ran it across his forehead, his hand shaking. It was the first time in Lily’s life that she had seen her father look so frightened, and it scared her.

“There’s a taxi waiting for us outside. It took a lot to convince the driver to bring me home, especially knowing that we’re Jews.”

“Will he wait?” Mom asked.

Pop nodded. “I paid him a large sum to bring me back here, and promised him even more when he drops us at the train station. Still, we must hurry before he changes his mind.”

Lily tugged on her father’s arm. “What about Oma and the others?”

“Your grandmother and your Aunt Nini and Uncle Willi will meet us at the train station,” Pop replied. “Your Aunt Stella and Uncle Walter are already in Italy waiting for us. Don’t worry, Lily,” he repeated. “We’re all going to sail to Shanghai together, just as I promised.”

“And what about our home?” Lily asked, stubbornly. “Are we all going to come back here? Together?”

Lily watched as her Mom and Pop exchanged glances above her head, just like they always did when they didn’t want her to know something. Pop dropped to one knee in front of his daughter and looked into her eyes. “That’s a question that I just don’t have an answer for.” With a deep sigh, he rose and moved toward the luggage. “Let’s get the cases downstairs. I’ll have the taxi driver help me with Mom’s sewing machine. He probably won’t be happy about that, either.” He muttered this last remark under his breath.

Mom wrapped a scarf around Lily’s neck and then one around her own. Lily looked around the apartment, trying to commit every detail to memory; the paintings on the walls, the clock that chimed every hour, and down the hallway, her bedroom with her feather-stuffed comforter and her dolls lined up on the shelf like obedient schoolchildren. She was determined to remember everything on the taxi ride to the train station – memorize everything about the city that she was leaving behind.

Pop placed a box under his arm and grabbed two large suitcases, one in each hand. Mom picked up

another two. "It's time," he said.

Lily pulled the scarf tighter around her neck and grabbed her smaller suitcase. Then she followed her parents out the door.

Chapter 1

December 7, 1941

The radio blared out an urgent message, and Lily leaned closer so that she wouldn't miss a word.

December 7, 1941, a day that will live in history. The Japanese have just attacked Pearl Harbor.

She shivered in the iciness of the small apartment. Cold air somehow always managed to find its way through the small door from the balcony, or past every windowpane, no matter how many towels Mom stuffed against them. But what Lily hated more than the cold was the dampness that crept into the walls and through the sweaters that she piled on every morning. It was only December; the worst part of winter in Shanghai still lay ahead. Today it was the ominous news coming from the radio that added to the shivers rippling up and down Lily's spine.

A small brown beetle began its slow walk across the floor of the apartment. It had a long way to go if it was going to reach the other side of the room without being trampled by Lily's family members who had gathered to listen to the radio broadcast.

"This is terrible," Pop said, shaking his head from side to side. "America will have no choice now but to join the war." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a handkerchief, mopping it across his brow. His hand was shaking, and Lily remembered another time, three years earlier, when her father had looked this nervous. This news wasn't good.

"But what will that mean?" Mom asked. "America is such a powerful country. Surely President Roosevelt will have no trouble beating back the Japanese." Mom spoke as she entered the room from the small galley kitchen, carrying a tray laden with teacups. She brushed a stray strand of hair off her forehead and proceeded to pass the tea out to her siblings and their spouses.

Lily's Aunt Stella snorted from her seat at the small table in the middle of the room. "Powerful? How powerful can the Americans be if they didn't see this attack coming?" Aunt Stella was usually the cool and unruffled one in the family. Lily always listened and respected her opinions when she spoke, but she felt a distance from this aunt that she couldn't explain. Stella's husband, Uncle Walter, nodded somberly. He was often quiet at these family gatherings, a nervous man who counted out loud when he became tense. Lily could hear him doing that now, under his breath.

"It's one thing for the war to be in Europe where that maniac, Hitler, is trying to control everything. But America is halfway around the world. How can the war be spreading so far?" This comment came from Lily's other aunt. Of her two aunts, Lily had to admit that Aunt Nini was her favorite and more like a second mother. Aunt Nini was the one who bought Lily special toys and took her for tea in the afternoon. When Aunt Nini had married a year earlier, Lily had been so worried that she and her aunt might lose their special relationship. But that wasn't the case. Lily glanced over at Nini's husband, Poldi. Usually, he loved taking Lily aside and entertaining her with Bible stories. But today, Poldi wasn't saying anything. He sat at the table, head down, fingers pressed to his temple.

Mom continued serving the tea as she spoke. “I wouldn’t worry about it so much if it weren’t for the fact that the Japanese are right here in Shanghai – right under our noses!”

That part was true. The Japanese army had been patrolling the streets of Shanghai for years, ever since they had conquered parts of China in a battle that was still raging.

“It’s what Hitler has wanted all along.” Pop continued. “He’s friends with that crazy Emperor of Japan, Hirohito. Hitler thinks he can conquer all of Europe *and* North America. It’s a world war he wants. And he may have gotten it.”



Lily came from a warm and loving family that included (from left to right) her Aunt Stella, her Oma, her Uncle Walter, and her Mo and Pop. Lily's Uncle Willi (below) loved to tease her.



This last comment brought the entire conversation to a dead stop.

It was in this tiny one-room flat that so many family events took place, and even though Lily was not yet eight years old, she was always in the center of those activities. Often it was evening tea that brought her relatives over to chat about the news of the day. Sometimes it was for celebrations – Lily’s birthday, or one of the Jewish holidays. At those times, family members competed with one another, talking louder and over each other to have the last word, laughing and sharing stories about something that had happened at Nini and Poldi’s nightclub, or Stella and Walter’s coffee house. The only person missing from the room today was Lily’s grandmother. Her Oma had died the previous year, leaving an emptiness in Lily’s heart that had been hard to fill.

As if reading Lily’s mind, Mom spoke again. “Perhaps it’s a good thing that Oma isn’t here. This news would have destroyed her.”

The mood around the table was solemn as the voice crackled from the radio once more.

Such an attack on American soil will surely bring a counterattack...President Roosevelt will naturally ask Congress for a declaration of war. There is no doubt that such a declaration will be granted.

Pop stood suddenly and began to pace the length of the room. “That’s it, then,” he said. “The war has spread around the world.”

The little brown beetle was halfway across the floor now. Pop, unaware of its presence, had almost crushed it as he walked from one end of the small flat to the other. Lily found herself rooting for the beetle. She usually hated bugs, and their apartment certainly had plenty of them. But this one was so small and alone. *It isn’t hurting anyone*, Lily thought. *Why should we hurt it?* And with that, her min

leapt back in time to when her family had arrived here in Shanghai.

Everyone knew about the war in Europe and the evil Adolf Hitler, who had made life so unbearable for Jewish people. That's why Lily and her relatives had left their homes in Vienna, Austria, three years earlier. They were getting away before they could be arrested and sent to some awful place where Jews were beaten and tortured. And for what? Just for being Jewish. That seemed ridiculous to Lily. In truth, the whole quick escape from Vienna had made little sense to her three years earlier. But now, she saw the wisdom in it.

"If you don't watch out, the ghosts are going to get you."

Lily whirled around to face her youngest uncle, Willi. The other relatives were still deep in conversation around the table. The radio had been turned off and moved to a corner of the room as if they could somehow push the bad news away by not listening.

"Stop it, Willi," Lily said, planting her feet firmly on the floor, hands on her hips. At sixteen years of age, Willi was more like a brother to Lily than an uncle. And nothing seemed to give him more pleasure than scaring her with ghost stories. There was even that time, when they were still in Austria that Willi had held her "hostage" in front of a tree at the cottage, convincing her that the birds were going to attack her. Even now, Lily's heart beat a bit faster as she thought back to how trapped she had felt until Pop had come to her rescue.

This time, Pop was still talking to her other relatives, and Willi would not let up. "Maybe the ghosts'll get you at night when you're sleeping," he continued waving his fingers in front of Lily's face. "Or they'll sneak up behind you when your back is turned."

"There's no such thing as ghosts!" Lily stared up at her uncle, refusing to let him see that the stories he told really did frighten her. Still, she loved him and was glad he was here. She couldn't help remembering that Willi had barely made it out of Vienna when the family had fled.

The night they were leaving Vienna, Willi had been arrested by the SS. Oma refused to go without him, so she and Aunt Nini stayed behind, promising that they would join the rest of the family once they had managed to get Willi out of jail, though at the time they had no idea how they could bring this about. Lily and the other family members didn't learn the details of Willi's release until much later. In desperation, Nini had turned to a Christian friend who was a lawyer, a man who was sympathetic to the Jews and their situation. He had accompanied Nini to the SS headquarters where Willi was being held. The lawyer had Willi brought in front of him and shouted, "This young man stole my watch! I'll deal with him now. He comes with me!" With that, he took Willi under the arm and escorted him out of the building. The SS officials were too stunned to do anything. They just watched Willi leave. Shortly after, Willi, Oma, and Nini left Vienna by train, bound for Italy. They boarded the next boat for Shanghai, following Lily, her parents, Stella, and Walter.

Only later did Lily and her family discover that the night they had fled Vienna actually had been given a name. People were calling it *Kristallnacht*, the night of broken glass. Synagogues across Germany and Austria had been destroyed, their windows smashed, and the buildings set on fire. Thousands of Jewish men, including Willi, had been arrested that night, though most were not as lucky as he had been. As Lily stared at her uncle, she was thankful that as much as he annoyed and taunted her, she was glad she hadn't lost him on the journey to China.

Now, Willi leaned forward and whispered in Lily's ear, "This time the ghosts are real. The Nazis may not be coming to get us. But the Japanese will!"

Chapter 2

The beetle disappeared into a tiny hole in the far wall as Lily silently cheered its victory march. Then she pushed her annoying Uncle Willi away and darted through the small door onto the balcony. She leaned over the rail, trying to still the wild beating in her chest.

Down below, the streets of Shanghai had become strangely quiet. The usual swarm of cars, bicycles, and rickshaws going in all directions had disappeared along with the hundreds of thousands of people who lived in the city. Lily wondered if all those families were also sitting in their apartments, listening to their radios, and trying to imagine what might happen. The relative quiet outside was a welcome change from the racket that normally filled the air, climbing to such decibels that Lily often covered her ears with her hands just to be able to think. And thinking is what she tried to do now, away from her relatives who were still arguing inside the apartment, and away from Willi and his grim warnings about ghosts.

She was still trying to figure out who the real bad guys were! She was very clear about the Nazis back in Austria and other European countries. But the Nazis were far away from Shanghai, and Lily had lived here for the last three years believing that she and her family were safe. This talk of the Japanese government as the new enemy was something different. Even though she saw Japanese police on the streets every day, she had never realized that Germany and Japan were allies. That was new information. *How can anyone be friends with Nazi Germany!* But if Germany and Japan were friends, and the government of Germany was intent on torturing Jews, did that mean that the Japanese army here in Shanghai would begin to terrorize families like hers, too? That was the question that worried Lily most of all.

Later that evening, after her relatives had left for their own apartments, Lily finally had a chance to talk about all of this with her father.

“Is something going to happen to us, Pop?” she asked as he tucked the blanket around her. Mom was still busy cleaning up the teacups from earlier in the evening. Lily and her parents shared the small room, so there was never any privacy. Still, Mom pretended not to listen, busying herself with working at the sink.

“Lily, my darling, you mustn’t worry,” said Pop. “I’m sorry we scared you this afternoon. The radio report was a surprise to us, that’s all.”

Lily gazed at her father. He was such a caring man, sometimes more of a mother than Mom. Usually, a few gentle words from Pop would be enough to drive her fears away. But this time she would not be quieted. “Willi said that the Japanese soldiers are going to get us now.”

Pop interrupted. “I told you, Lily, there’s nothing to worry about.”

Still Lily persisted. “But Willi said that the Japanese army is as bad as the Nazis. Is that true?”

Her father’s mouth stiffened into a tight line. “I’m going to have to have a word with your Uncle Willi. That’s it with all of the ghost stories.” He leaned close to Lily and held her in his gaze. “Now

you listen to me. Nothing is going to happen to you, or to us, do you understand?"

Lily nodded, not trusting herself to speak. Mom had stopped drying the dishes and was frozen now watching the exchange.

"Good! Now let's read. What shall it be tonight? A fairy tale?" Without waiting for an answer, Pop reached for the book next to Lily's bed and opened it to one of the pages. The book was a favorite of Lily's, one of the ones that she had brought with her from Vienna. It was filled with stories that she loved, such as *Snow White and Rose Red*, *Trusty John*, and *The Shoemaker and the Elves*. Tonight it was going to be the story of *The Wolf and the Seven Kids*.

"A mother goat left her seven kids to go and find food," Pop began, as Lily settled back onto her pillow. Pop's voice rose and fell as he read. In the story, the mother goat warned her little ones to be on guard for the wolf who was known to prowl in the woods. Before long, the wolf arrived in disguise asking to be let in. At first, the little ones refused, mindful of their mother's warning. But after the wolf had returned several times, they finally let him in. He ate all of the kids, except for the youngest who hid in the cupboard. When the mother returned, she was anguished to see that six of her children were gone. She and the remaining little goat went to look for the wolf and found him sleeping by the river. The mother goat cut open the stomach of the wolf to retrieve her babies who were happily still alive. In their place she placed heavy rocks and sewed the wolf up. When he awakened, he went to the river to drink, but the weight of the rocks in his stomach pushed him into the river and he drowned.

"So the mother goat and her seven little kids were happily reunited and lived together in safety from then on," Pop concluded, shutting the book with a soft thud.

"It's such a sad story," Lily said, even though she had heard it many times before. "The wolf was horrible, and those poor babies!"

"But the ending is a happy one," her father reminded her, kissing her lightly on the forehead. "All the children were saved, and that monster of a wolf was killed. The family was together once more."

Lily pulled the blanket up to her chin and rolled over to face the wall, treasuring those last words. Her family was together as well. And they were safe – at least for the time being.

Chapter 3

December 8, 1941

Lily left for school early the next morning, flying out the door of the apartment along with her best friend, Susie Stern. The truth is, Susie was much more than a friend; she was what Lily called her “almost cousin.” Susie and her family had also escaped from Vienna at the same time as Lily. In fact both Susie’s and Lily’s families sailed on the same ship. What’s more, Susie was Uncle Walter’s niece; Walter and Susie’s father were brothers. The two girls had known each other since they were babies. And even though Susie had lots of cousins on her side of the family, she had agreed that she and Lily could become “almost cousins” – like blood relatives, but even better.

“Good-bye, Mrs. Kinecky,” Lily called to the lady who lived up the stairs. Mrs. Kinecky lived with her husband, and although they had no children, they were hardly alone. They had four big dogs that ran up and down the stairs of the building all day and night. Behind the thin walls of their apartment, Lily was often awakened by the rough scraping of dogs’ nails on wooden stairs and loud, husky barking.

Lily smiled at the Chinese lady who lived next door. There were lots of children in this family, though Lily didn’t talk or play with them very much. The Chinese and Jewish families usually kept to themselves; just a smile and a nod most days. Sometimes Lily longed to approach the young Chinese girls and boys who lived in her building. Her parents never stopped reminding her that unlike most other countries, it was China that had allowed the Jews of Europe to enter. It would have been nice to thank these people for the kindness that their country had shown to Jewish families. Besides, as an only child, Lily was eager to have more friends. Susie was great, but Susie also had her own siblings – two brothers. Even though they were both older, they were still company for her. But the difference in language and customs made it difficult for Lily to speak to the Chinese children. A shy wave was all she could usually manage.

“Did you hear all that news yesterday?” Lily asked, as she and Susie headed down the street toward the river. She hugged her jacket around her body and lifted the collar to cover her ears.

“Hear it? My parents wouldn’t stop talking about it all night long!” Susie was a year younger than Lily, though no one could have guessed, since she stood a half a head taller. Mind you, Lily was usually the shortest one wherever she went. Everyone towered above her, from her aunts and uncles, the other children in her class. She hated being short; she had always wanted to be tall and willowy. Lily tried to make up for her lack of height in other ways. Pop sometimes joked with her and said, “I guess you have to speak louder so everyone will hear you from down there.”

“Willi says there’s going to be trouble for us, here in Shanghai,” Lily continued. “He says the Japanese army is going to start coming after us, just like the Nazis did back in Vienna.”

At this Susie looked thoughtful. “I don’t know,” she replied after a long pause. “I think the Japanese police are way too busy watching the Chinese people in this city. I don’t think they’re going to pay

much attention to us.”

It was true that the Chinese citizens of Shanghai suffered under their Japanese conquerors. Jobs had been taken away from the Chinese, along with their homes, leaving many with no way to support themselves and nowhere to live. The majority of Chinese families ended up in an area of Shanghai called Hongkew on the other side of Suzhou Creek. Hongkew was known to be the poorest part of the city. Lily never went there.

The Chinese people of Shanghai seemed so much worse off than Lily. All around her, rickshaws rolled down the street, pulled by Chinese *coolies* who wore dark cotton pants and tunics, heavily stained with sweat and dirt. The veins on their legs bulged as they pulled their loads of passengers. On their heads they wore wide-brimmed straw hats tied tightly under their chins. Some of these coolies didn't look much older than Lily and Susie, and yet here they were, working long hours for a few cents. A man walked by the girls carrying a pole across his shoulders with a large wicker basket on either end. The baskets were filled with vegetables, so heavy that the man underneath the bowed pole was bent by the weight. Even though they had left most of their belongings behind in Vienna, Lily's family seemed to get by so much easier than the Chinese people she saw every day.

“Willi says that the Japanese are just as bad as the Nazis. And they're friends with each other!”

“Oh, Willi says this, Willi says that. You've got to stop listening to your uncle.” Susie flipped her wavy hair behind her ear and pulled Lily along the street. “Look around. Do you see any Japanese soldiers? Does today look different from yesterday? Stop worrying so much, and let's get something to eat.”

Susie maneuvered Lily over to a street vendor who was selling dumplings from a bamboo steamer right in the middle of the sidewalk. Most of Lily's relatives and friends would not touch this street food, fearful that the conditions for preparing it were unhealthy. The vendor picked up two steaming dumplings with a pair of chopsticks, placed them on a square of brown paper, and handed them to the girls.

“*Xie, xie,*” said Lily. In the three years that she had lived in Shanghai, she had not learned much more Chinese than this simple thank-you.

The vendor smiled. Then he blew his nose between his fingers and flung the gooey mass behind him, wiping his hands across his chest when he was finished. Lily didn't even flinch. Would she get sick from the food? She never seemed to care about that, and neither did Susie. The girls wasted no time biting into their treats. The casing was soft and slightly chewy and the unidentified meat inside steamed after the first bite.



To reach Shanghai, Lily and her family sailed on board the *Conte Biancamano*.

Late now, the girls picked up the pace and made their way quickly toward the Bund, the main boardwalk that encircled the river and ran the length of Shanghai. They walked by streets with American-sounding names, like Broadway, streets that had at one time been hard to pronounce, like *Chaoufoong*, and streets that sounded like they were in a fairy tale, like Bubbling Well. Both Lily and Susie lived in an area of the city known as the French Concession. Most people simply called it

Frenchtown. Along with Jews, Frenchtown was inhabited by British, French, and Americans. Many of them lived and worked along the Bund, a tree-lined boulevard, with apartment buildings, hotels, café shops, and theaters. Pop sometimes called it Little Vienna, because it reminded him so much of their home. From the Bund you could look out onto the harbor and see ships with flags from many nations. In between these larger anchored vessels were dozens of Chinese *junks*, flat bamboo boats with billowing sails. It was at the port along the Bund that Lily and Susie had arrived from Vienna aboard a ship called the *Conte Biancamano*, catching their first sight of the city that seemed to go on forever. Shanghai had seemed so dirty back then, nothing like the unspoiled cleanliness of Vienna. But in the three years since arriving here, Lily's impression of Shanghai had changed. Everything was comfortable now. Shanghai had become her home, perhaps even more so than the Vienna she had left behind. Mom said that it was amazing how you got used to what you lived with, so that in time, something that was once strange became familiar.

Lily was thinking about school and what reason she could give her teacher for being late that morning. Lily attended the *École Municipale Française Rémi*, a French-language Catholic school. The *directeur* was strict and would not be easily fooled by excuses. But Lily was a decent student, especially in French, English, and Arithmetic. M. De Chollet often wrote *Bien* or even *Très bien* on her report card next to these subjects. Perhaps Lily's tardiness would be forgiven without too much trouble.

"Where is everyone?" Lily asked. Things suddenly seemed much quieter than usual. On a normal day it was so much harder for the girls to make their way through the thick mass of people that filled the streets from early in the day until late at night. "Do you think it's because of the news on the radio?"

"I was just wondering the same thing," Susie replied. "Even the bicycles have disappeared." Their bells normally kept up a steady tune that clashed with the sounds of car horns and screeching tires.

Something was definitely peculiar and just a bit eerie. Lily was deep in thought as she and Susie rounded a corner onto the Bund. She was so focussed on thinking about the near-empty streets that she was surprised by a massive crowd gathered close to the main road. It seemed as if the entire population of Shanghai was there, pushing and shoving to get closer to something that was happening on the Bund. But what?

"So this is where everyone is. Do you have any idea what's going on?" Susie asked as a group of Chinese children elbowed past the girls, trying to squeeze their way in front of the taller grown-ups.

"I think we should find out," Lily replied, grabbing her friend's hand.

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