

## **The Second Enemy**

Shanghai, International Settlement, May 1923.

The telephone rang at five-forty. Jake Greenberg checked his watch. Twenty minutes to go. It rang a second time before he picked it up. "Greenberg here."

"We are on time," the voice said. "Is everything safe?"

"Okay here."

"Good," the voice said and hung up.

Jake pushed his chair back away from his desk, straightened his tie, and left the office. Walking slowly down the stairs to the first floor, his eyes swept from left to right--the bar, the foyer, the entrance to the gaming room--all seemed normal. There were only two customers at the bar, both he knew. He crossed the white marble foyer and looked over the players. Nothing unusual about the early evening mix of well-dressed Westerners and Orientals clustered around the green baize roulette tables or playing twenty-one. Many of them were regulars. He watched the play for a few minutes, standing away from the crowd close to the Chinese dragon mural that ran the length of the wall. Then he wandered back to the foyer and paused at the bottom of the staircase. What could go wrong? Jake thought. Plenty, plenty, he said to himself in Chinese. But all seemed right so far. He

looked around one last time and went up the stairs to wait.

In the book-lined office on the second floor ceiling fans whirled, moving the humid air without cooling it. Jake loosened his tie and watched the sun settling low over China for a moment, then he sat down at his desk and began to deal cards for solitaire. He didn't feel comfortable being a go-between. It was a role he accepted reluctantly, but he wanted to help. If the meeting worked, it could change everything in China.

Jake heard a car pull into the casino's tiny back yard, its tires crunching over the gravel. Right on time. He threw down his cards and went to the window. While he slid his tie back into place, Jake watched the old man get slowly out of his car. So far, so good. He glanced at the alley behind the casino. No one lurking there. He looked down once more at the old man and headed for the hallway door.

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Sun Yat-sen climbed the narrow back steps without making any noise, taking each step carefully. His stocky bodyguard stood close behind him ready to help if Sun faltered. When he reached the second floor landing, he was breathing hard and sweating heavily. Despite the muggy weather, both Sun and his bodyguard, Wu-chi, wore heavy black suits with vests and old-fashioned stiff collars.

"Is he here?" Sun asked as he came forward to shake Jake's hand. Greenberg, two inches over six feet and thick in the chest and shoulders, towered over him.

"Not yet." Sun's hand felt spongy to Jake, as if it had no bones to support it. Far different than Wu-chi, Sun's bodyguard,

whose hand seemed cobbled together with rough plates.

Jake led Sun across the hall to a small room where the big money poker games were played. The room had bright red wallpaper, the Chinese color for good luck. In the middle of the room were a round mahogany table and five plush leather chairs.

Wu-chi followed Jake and Sun into the room, closing the door silently behind them.

"How are you feeling?" Jake asked Sun.

"Well enough," the old man said, sinking into one of the chairs.

It saddened Jake to see the Sun's health decline. He knew that his stomach hurt all the time now and doctors had been unable to help. With his small pale face and thin turned-down black mustache, he looked depressed and fragile.

Sun's bodyguard and advisor, Wu-chi, had also aged. His classic Mongol face--prominent cheek bones, slashes for eyes, and yellow-brown skin--seemed to have more wrinkles every time Jake saw him. Shielding Sun Yat-sen from his enemies as well as protecting him from his own missteps was a hard job even in the best of times. In the last few years, it had become almost impossible.

"Was Canton bad?" Jake asked.

"Terrible," the old man said. "I had hoped that we could restart the movement down there. But the Southern Warlords turned against me. Again."

"We barely escaped with our lives," Wu-chi added. "They burned his house down. We had to throw on peasant clothes and run like fools through the alleys. It was hard for him."

"Well, maybe this meeting will help," Jake said. He marveled at the tenacity of the man. Sun had led the revolution that brought down the Manchu dynasty in 1911. But instead of uniting the country, the revolution had fragmented China into warlord-controlled territories, with endless fighting between them. It was Sun's life's work, his dream, to end the bloodshed and create a strong, united China. To Jake, Sun was a great man with a big heart, but his time was running out. His body was failing him.

"Thank you for arranging this," the old man said.

"General Xi came to me," Jake said. "I did very little. If you can get the warlords up north to work together maybe we can prevent another slaughter like Ning-feng."

"Yes, yes," Sun said, looking off across the room as if he was replaying it in his mind. "You saw it, didn't you?"

"Only the result," Jake said. "I was on the train going to Peking. The soldiers had moved on by the time my train arrived at the village. I hadn't seen such mindless killing since the civil war in Russia."

The old man nodded.

They fell silent for a minute or two. Sun seemed to be studying the grain of the table, running his hand over its smooth surface. "Do you trust him?" Sun asked suddenly.

Jake paused. "I like him. Sometimes he's a pompous ass."

A lot of it is show. In private he has a sense of humor. Trust him? It depends. I've trusted him to pay his gambling debts. He has, without problems. In larger matters, I don't know. He didn't gain control of southern Hopeh Province with sweetness and light. He told me deceit was his silver bullet. He wasn't joking. Now he claims to represent a group of Northern Warlords who want to support you. Do I trust him at that level?" Jake shook his head. "If I were you, I'd be very cautious."

"What do those people want?" Wu-chi asked.

"He never mentioned terms with me and I didn't ask," Jake answered. "That's your department."

Sun sighed. "I have nothing to offer except my name."

"Don't under value it," Jake said. Although counted out by many Chinese and Westerners as a man whose time had passed, Sun was, nevertheless, revered throughout the country as China's greatest patriot.

"Maybe they are not as greedy and power-hungry as the southerners," Sun said.

Don't be so sure, Jake thought.

Just after 6:30, Jake heard the rumble of a heavy car gearing down out front. He moved the shade to look down Woosung Road toward where it joined Bubbling Well Road. "Here comes the General," Jake said, hoping his relief did not show.

"He's late," Sun said.

"The General once told me unreliability kept him alive."

Jake watched the black Buick touring car glide up Woosung Road following a car bristling with armed soldiers. Two soldiers rode on each running board, hanging on with one hand and brandishing a pistol with the other. Jake looked up and down the street. Just the usual flow of rickshaws and cars. Yet he couldn't shake the feeling that all was not right.

As the Buick eased to the curb in front of the casino, the bodyguards jumped off the running boards and stood with their backs to the car. Their leader, a six foot, broad-shouldered northerner named Lao-tang, looked over the street traffic and the small crowd of curious Chinese that had gathered. He waved his hand. The General stepped out of the car, followed by a slim, ash-blond beauty. They sauntered up the steps to the wide front door.

The Wheel House Casino, once the home of a British merchant, was a two-story square red brick building at 23 Woosung Road