THE EXILE

by

Pearl S. Buck

a JOHN DAY book

REYNAL & HITCHCOCK

NEW YORK

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FIGHTING ANGEL

A HOUSE DIVIDED

THE MOTHER

THE FIRST WIFE
AND OTHER STORIES

SONS

THE GOOD EARTH

EAST WIND: WEST WIND

. . .

ALL MEN ARE BROTHERS
[SHUI HU CHUAN]
TRANSLATED FROM THE CHINESE

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THE EXILE

I

OUT of the swift scores of pictures of her that pass through my memory I choose one that is most herself. I take this one. Here she stands in the American garden she has made in the dark heart of a Chinese city on the Yangtse River. She is in the bloom of her maturity, a strong, very straight figure, of a beautiful free carriage, standing in the full, hot sunshine of summer. She is not tall, nor very short, and she stands sturdily upon her feet. There is a trowel in her hand; she has been digging in her garden. It is a good, strong hand that holds the trowel, a firm brown hand not too whitely well kept, and bearing evidence of many kinds of labor. But it is shapely in spite of this, and the fingers are unexpectedly pointed and delicate at the tips.

The tropical sun beats down on her but she holds her head up to it, unafraid, and her eyes are open and clear to it, hazel brown eyes, gold-flecked, under dark brows, very direct in their gaze and set in short, thick, black lashes. At this time in her life one did not stop to see whether she was beautiful or not. One was caught and held with the vigor and the strength of life in her face, a straight nose not too small and with a good wide space between the eyes, a mobile mouth, very expressive and

changeful, its lips not too thinly cut, a small, firm, well-shaped chin and beautiful neck and shoulders. The sun falls hotly upon her hair. It is thick and soft and curls about her face. In color it is a warm chestnut, except where she has swept it up from her temples and there, above her low, broad forehead, it shows two wings of white, and where it is heaped upon her head in a great full knot, the white mingles again and again in the strands.

Strange strong figure there in that American garden she has made in the dark heart of a Chinese city! She could pass for none other than an American, although the foreign sun has burned her skin browner than is its nature. A lounging Chinese gardener leans against a bamboo that is one of a cluster near her, his blue cotton coat and trousers girdled loosely at his waist, a wide hat made of bamboo splits upon his shaven crown.

But neither bamboo nor gardener can make her exotic. She is quite herself. Indeed, he has had little to do with that garden of hers, beyond carrying buckets of water for its watering. It is she who has planted American flowers there, wallflowers and bachelor's buttons and hollyhocks against the enclosing brick wall of the compound. It is she who has coaxed the grass to grow smooth and clipped under the trees and has set a bed of English violets against the foot of the veranda. Over the ugly, angular lines of the mission house she has persuaded a Virginia creeper to climb, and it has covered two sides already. At one end of

the long veranda a white rose hangs heavy with bloom, and if you go near it she will call you sharply away, for there is a turtle dove's nest there and she is guarding it as zealously as the mother bird guards it. Once I saw her angry—and she can be angry often—because that lounging gardener robbed the nest, and she poured out on him a torrent of well-articulated Chinese, and he skulked astonished from her presence. Then in a passionate pity she turned to the fluttering mother bird and her voice fell until one would not have said it was the same voice, and she coaxed the mother bird and twisted the rose branches this way and that and picked up the despoiled nest and put it tenderly back, and sorrowfully and angrily she gathered the broken eggshells together and buried them. And who more joyous than she when the mother bird laid four more small eggs in the replaced nest!

"Now that was good and brave of her!" the woman cried, her eyes flashing.

But this picture of her in the American garden she made in a strange country is not the beginning. It does not explain her, nor how, forever American as she was, she came to be making the garden in China, if, indeed, she can ever be explained. Nevertheless, the beginning at least must be told.

Her family sprang from sturdy, well-to-do, independent Dutch stock. Her grandfather had been a thriving mer-

chant in the city of Utrecht in Holland. In that day of hand labor he was accounted rich, for he owned a factory that employed a hundred artisans, and there he made cabinet furniture from imported woods. Out of that factory, doubtless, came many of the desks of rosewood and the inlaid tables and mahogany pieces of that time.

This Dutchman, Mynheer Stulting, had a passion for fine workmanship and the perfection of detail. He was thrifty, too, and he laid up his money until it was considered that he had a fortune. He lived with his family in the typical city house of Utrecht, compact, comfortable, roomy, and full of solid, beautiful furniture, all of it neat and clean beyond imagination. He was essentially a city man, but he had his garden, a square garden at the back of the house, where he experimented, in a small way, with tulips and bulbs, and here he sat in the evening over his long pipe and his goblet of wine.

On the Sabbath day, which he held unalterably the Lord's day, he and his wife and their son, the youngest and the last at home, went to church. It would not have occurred to them to do otherwise, for among the three hundred souls who made up that church there was none to whom it was more important than to Mynheer Stulting, and he gave to it generously. He had a big voice and in church it rolled out of his short, thick throat, leading the psalms he loved to sing. His son, a slight, slender lad, stood beside him always, singing also. He was shorter

than his father and much more slender in build, and meticulous in his garb. On the other side was his mother, large, soft, kindly, murmuring the tune of the psalm gently, her mind never quite detached from the immense Sunday dinner now warm in the porcelain oven of the stove in her spotless kitchen.

There was religion in that church of a Sunday morning. The pastor braced himself to it, a tall, lean whip of a figure, his eyes burning, his voice sonorous. To him there was at times a challenge well-nigh unbearable in the eyes of these three hundred souls who gathered without fail to hear him; fine, straight, level eyes, thinking, tranquil, hungering, critical. They knew well whether a man had been with God or not when he prepared his sermon. They expected solid meat, food for the brain, strength for the spirit. This he gave to them without sparing himself.

Then came the time, brief enough in history, of religious intolerance in Holland, and the burden of this intolerance fell upon these worshippers. On the Sunday following the issuance of the edict which took from them their freedom of worship, these three hundred met again, not this time to listen to their pastor, but to talk together of what they must do. As the quiet talk waxed fuller, it became evident that one thing at least was clear; these men and women would brook no interference with their religious liberty. It was Mynheer Stulting who at the end

rose heavily to his feet and reared his thick neck back and flashed his dark, heavy-lidded eyes over the group. His great voice came forth like a trumpet call.

"As for me and my house," he cried, "we will serve the Lord! If we cannot serve Him in our own country, then will we leave our country!"

He paused and gazed piercingly about him. Well they all knew there was not one of them who had more to lose than he, the goodly merchant! He paused and then he shouted sonorously,

"Let us go forth! Who will go?"

Quick as a dart of flame the white-haired pastor stood up, smiling in a sort of ecstasy. A score of young men sprang to their feet, their lips pressed together in straight lines, their eyes shining. Slowly the older men followed. They had more to lose: established businesses, thriving concerns, houses and lands. Last of all the women rose, a young woman here and there following with her eyes the leap of a lad to his feet and then, not too soon after, rising shyly. Last of all the mothers rose, holding little children pressed against them, their eyes troubled and frightened and greatly bewildered. At the end the three hundred souls stood, and their pastor, seeing them, felt the tears upon his cheeks for triumph that of such was his kingdom. He lifted his arms to pray and they fell upon their knees under the power of his look, and such prayer as went up filled the church with its force and

presence. These were to go forth, forsaking all for the sake of God and liberty.

Of such stuff was this American woman made.

When the deep emotion of the day was over no whit of the determination passed. Mynheer with his solid Dutch thrift sold his factory at a good price and realized upon all he owned.

Nor would he make it too hard for his wife. She wept as she went about the house, but she wept softly and with her face turned away, for she would not do anything to move her husband away from his duty, nor did she indeed doubt that he knew far better than she what was God's will. She who was always busy at roasting and washing and cleaning and superintending the maidservants had little time to think of God and she must leave it to her husband. Besides, it took so long for her to spell out a few verses in the Book that she trusted to his reading the Scriptures morning and night, and it was a grief to her that even so in the morning her mind would of its own accord wander to the kaffee cake and to the sausage when she would fain have listened to the good word, and at night it was more shame still that do what she would she often fell asleep at prayer so that her husband had to awaken her and lift her from her knees. This made her humble, and the more humble because he never reproached her but only said in his big, kind way,

"Now, my good Huldah, how tired you are, aren't you?"

"Ach, Johann," she always replied contritely, "I want truly to hear the Good Word and why cannot I listen?"

Therefore if he said they must go she was sure they must, but he was not too hard upon her, and he let her take the things she loved most, and they packed huge boxes of feather beds and blue and white dishes and silver and what furniture they needed.

The two older sons were married and had their homes to break up, too, for they were all in the same church, but at Mynheer Stulting's house there was left Hermanus, the youngest son, who held himself so stiff and straight in his youth. He had not been put to the trade as the others had, for he was born late in his mother's life after the death of several children, and he was delicate. Moreover, when he grew to manhood there was enough and to spare in the prosperous house, and the lad was proud and sensitive and filled with the love of beauty, and his father and mother let him choose what he wanted to learn for a trade. He chose then to learn the craft of a jeweler, because he loved the color and touch of jewels, and he learned how to make and to repair watches, for he was fascinated with the instant and delicate precision of their fairy machinery.

Hermanus was on the whole a son surprising from these stocky, thrifty parents. Standing between them in