

# GRETA'S ADVENTURES



**G**RETA and her twin sister on the death of their Aunt determine to join in the pleasures of fashionable London. The twin sister, however, after a lightning courtship, leaves with her husband for China, but later on Greta follows her sister out to China. Both girls had been brought up entirely for the things of this world, but the unexpected happens and Greta is brought into contact with prospective missionaries during their hospital training. The results of these contacts, and the many exciting adventures which she encounters, both in China and on her way thither, make interesting reading, while the references to China and the Chinese are not only instructive, but appealing. Altogether it is a really good tale.

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THE PIRATES WERE HEADING AS FAST AS POSSIBLE FOR THE SHORE (Page 62)

# Greta's Adventures

GRACE PETTMAN



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*An Evening at Thames Royal*

“SPEED! Oh, how I adore speed! Can’t we go faster—faster, Brian?”

“Not on your life here, old thing! There are limits even on these great By-pass Roads, you know. If I touched her up to seventy or eighty, as I could, well, it would mean the Police Court for me, a black mark against my name, and on my licence—or else a crash which would put ‘paid’ to my account in this life, and perhaps yours too, Gay!”

Gay Guildford’s laugh rang out, a merry, light tinkle. Danger? death? What girl has time to give a moment’s thought to these things, when she is young and beautiful, riding in a costly, high-powered sports car with a well-to-do and handsome man by her side?

Gay’s twin sister, Greta, sitting in the back seat, caught only snatches of the chatter of the two in front; they seemed to have a lot to say to each other this evening.

Was it possible that it was less than a month ago they had met Brian Audley for the first time? Of course, Greta knew quite well, had known from the beginning, that it was only Gay who mattered—had always mattered from the earliest moment. She herself was merely the twin sister, inseparable so far, as they had always been all their lives.

Left orphans very early in life, Gay and Greta had been adopted by a well-to-do aunt, a thorough woman of the world, as far as the narrow limits of a provincial town were concerned. The girls were sent to a fashionable school, where music, dancing and accomplishments ranked as of greater importance than training the pupils

for the necessity of earning their own living. When Miss Guildford died suddenly soon after their education was finished, it had been a terrible shock to her nieces.

But the exuberance of youth soon triumphed. Who mourns long for folks nowadays, anyhow? They were left comfortably off: they were tired of their particular set in the provincial town where they had lived, and longed for the light and gaiety of London. So for the last few months they had begun to taste its pleasures to the full.

Their aunt's comfortable roomy house was snapped up immediately by the newly-married local doctor. He took off their hands a good deal of the furniture and fittings. The girls stored just enough to come in handy if they decided to take a flat. "A flat? Yes, perhaps—but not till later on," so Gay had declared. "For the present, we'll go to that smart boarding house, Bayswater Court, where we once or twice stayed with poor Aunt Hettie." Gay always referred to anyone who had died as "poor." To her pleasure-loving heart the chief idea of death was that life, with its fun and laughter was lost—for ever. Neither Gay nor Greta had ever stopped to ask the age-old question: What then?

*After the songs of earth,  
After its joy and mirth,  
After its dreams so bright  
After its love and light,*

*What then?*

Indeed, if either of these girls, brimming over with love of life, had stopped to ask the question, the answer would have been beyond them.

"We shall get to know smart folks who stay at Mrs. Wiltshire's; she gets quite a crowd off and on. Bayswater isn't exactly fashionable, but it's on the fringe of things. There will be people from abroad, too."

As it happened, the first visitor from abroad was Brian Audley. He was spending in England the last few weeks of his six months' furlough from China, where he was partner in his father's trading concern.

Returning via Vancouver, he had made a whirlwind trip to some of the cities of Canada and the States, crossed by a crack French liner, to spend a lively month or two in Paris, Vienna, and the tail end of the Winter Sports' season in Switzerland, the playground of Europe. Then London to finish his holiday. Putting up at Bayswater Court, he came down to dinner the first night to find himself facing a fair and fascinating girl. Before the meal was over, Brian Audley had decided that she was the most attractive being he had ever seen in his life.

After years in a city of Inland China, where he represented the great British firm in Shanghai of which his father was the senior partner, Brian was ready to flail himself because he had not come straight to England first of all, and spent the whole of his leave in London. It would have given him the chance of making Gay Guildford's acquaintance four months sooner. Why, by this time!—well, there were still nearly two months left, and that very first evening Brian resolved to make the most of every hour of them.

He had certainly kept his word. The fact that Gay and her sister were entirely their own mistresses simplified matters. There were no tiresome relatives to put obstacles in the way of a whirlwind acquaintance. Nor could he have found two girls who were more completely kindred spirits with himself, full of zest for enjoyment, and determined to get the most fun out of life—"Bright Young Things" indeed!

Brian was not very long in discovering one or two young men about town, who could tell him all he wished to know concerning the latest amusements, including cabarets and night clubs, carefully discriminating between

places to which one could take a well brought up girl, and resorts where one certainly could not.

Meeting at meal times at the Bayswater boarding house, Gay and Greta were soon invited to join in Brian's plans; indeed, in the case of Gay, no persuasion was needed. Bubbling over with life and laughter, she was out to enjoy every minute of her existence. Greta had always been the quieter one, quite ready to take the line of least resistance, and follow the lead of her animated twin sister.

Still, even Greta was not prepared to find Gay swept off her feet so completely and so easily by a stranger. True, Brian Audley was well off and had had an English education. His father's firm stood among the highest in the British commercial ventures in the great cities of the Far East. Who had not heard of Audley & Audley, of Shanghai, Peking, Nanking, and, it seemed, almost everywhere else worth mentioning?

Brian and Gay were talking China now in a compulsory slow-down as they neared a built-up area. Greta, comfortably settled in her luxurious corner behind them, could hear Gay's questions and Brian's answers. It was a new thing for her twin sister to be interested in foreign affairs of any kind. Hitherto China had merely been to her a place on the map of the world.

"I suppose all Chinese speak 'pidgin English'?" Gay was saying.

"Pidgin English? 'Take-ee mississee bag topside,' kind of stuff, you mean? the sort you read of in books? Well, yes, some," said Brian with a laugh, "but you don't imagine that China has been sitting still this last half century, do you? Many of the people crave for Western education; see they get it too. They lap it up as a cat laps milk. Did you never hear of a big public dinner—I believe it was given here in London. Lots of foreigners were present, and an Englishman who knew nothing of Eastern affairs, found himself sitting next to a Chinese,

who was very silent. Hoping to show himself agreeable, the Englishman turned to his neighbour during the first course, saying: 'Lik-ee soup-ee?' He was delighted to find the Chinese understood, for he nodded. So he ventured next: 'Lik-ee fish-ee?' and was again rewarded with a mere nod. After dinner, speeches—and the Britisher was dumbfounded when the Chinese was called on to reply to a toast, and made no end of a good speech in perfect English! When he sat down he turned to his neighbour, who was naturally covered with confusion, saying meaningly: 'Lik-ee speech-ee?'"

Gay laughed immoderately. "Oh, how utterly priceless!"

"Yes, wasn't it? I could tell you the other side, too, the odd things my own 'boys' do say, in 'pidgin' English; also, the queer mix up when a Britisher tries to talk Chinese."

"You have to go about in junks, don't you?"

"Not on your life, Gay, at least, not where my job takes me. Why, there are big river steamers and railways of sorts, and cars, pretty well all over China now. There's a big junk population on the rivers—they are the inland waterways of course. The first pioneers, some of the first missionary johnnies and travellers, took three or four months over their journeys into the far Western provinces. Now an aeroplane can do the journey in a couple of days."

The car had stopped for a moment and Greta took the opportunity to lean forward and chime in:

"They must have been very brave to go when they knew they weren't wanted and might meet with death. Don't you think so? Don't you approve of missionaries, Mr. Audley?"

"Oh, well, they're well meaning, I darcsay," he answered carelessly, "and they certainly have come in useful in famines and times of flood—you know one old

river is called 'China's Sorrow.' What I say is, one religion's as good as another! Let the Chinese keep to their own, that's all. I've no use for religion of any kind."

"But I thought—" Greta's sentence broke in half suddenly, for Brian Audley took a chance, and twisting in and out among several other cars, got ahead. To talk to the man at the wheel under such circumstances would be foolhardy: still less was it the moment to involve him in a theological discussion. Still, Greta had vague memories of having heard, on the rare occasions when she had gone to church as a mere matter of form, something about the need for missionary effort, because all was not well. "One religion's as good as another?"; well, weren't there some strange and dreadful things about the religions of China?

But Gay was still turning to the man beside her, asking questions. "Aren't there always exciting things in China? Wars and robbers—"

"China has a population of some four hundred and fifty millions, so there's room for all sorts," said Brian gaily.

"As to troubles and trials, there are plenty out there as elsewhere in the world. But the very vastness of the great country means that what is happening in one part of China may not affect us in another province!"

Brian Audley spoke gaily enough, yet in his heart he knew that he was only telling half the truth. But why throw a shadow over the precious moments he was spending with this girl he had met so recently. Yet it had been long enough for him to know he loved her—so passionately and devotedly that he was determined to win her for himself. China was China, of course—but this was England, and the mystic radiance of an English summer night was theirs. He had made up his mind that it should not be his fault if this evening did not bring him the crowning joy of his young life!

"Let's forget China!" he said gaily. "Here we are!"

## CHAPTER II

### *I Have Heard the Call of the Cross*

**A**CCCELERATING speed, he swept round a bend in the road. "This is Thames Royal. The gayest place outside London. I've only been here once, and I'm sure you'll love it."

Certainly no Riverside Club could have had a fairer setting—an old-fashioned country house, with large new dancing saloons flung out to right and left, gardens with shady trees, sequestered nooks, and flower-festooned terrace walks only a few feet above the river.

Brian slipped his arm through Gay's, and led the way into the cocktail bar, where he gave a quick order. For the first time, Greta felt a little bit *de trop*, an uncomfortable third, indeed. Brian was evidently completely satisfied with Gay's company. Was he even anxious to get rid of the superfluous twin sister in order to monopolise Gay for the evening?

It seemed so, for he speedily hunted up Ben Barnsley, a man he knew, though the acquaintance was a slight one, and introduced him to Greta, leaving them together.

Mr. Barnsley suggested another cocktail which Greta refused. She could not as yet accustom herself to the continual round of drinks in which so many of the young people indulged. He gulped his down in fashion that told it was not by any means the first he had had that evening, nor was it likely to be the last. Then he suggested dancing, and led Greta into one of the great new white and gold salons, already filled with whirling couples.

Now, when Greta had come to London and taken up

residence with her twin sister at the Bayswater boarding house, she had been all out for a life of pleasure and enjoyment, and expected to find it completely satisfying. Gay certainly did: she threw herself heart and soul into any and every form of pleasure. When they were not "doing a show," or a cinema, or attending dances, Gay was bored. A quiet evening at the boarding house seemed intolerable.

But Greta had begun to find that for her there was something like greater boredom in the incessant round of pleasure-seeking. She was not so passionately fond of dancing as her sister, and whereas Gay thought nothing of cocktails and champagne, which were indulged in by the merry crowd of young folk who were their friends, Greta was satisfied, and more than satisfied with one glass.

To-night, as the man to whom she had been introduced whirled her away to join in the giddy mazes of a dance, Greta suddenly found herself shuddering at the touch of his strange hand on her bare back. Besides, it was evident that he had been drinking heavily, and a feeling of repulsion possessed her. She endured the dance with him for a few moments, then at the first pause she drew away from him, and slipped through an open French window into the garden.

Greta walked down through the flower-decked gardens towards the river. "I—I don't think I am really cut out for this sort of thing, night after night. This jazz sounds more like the jungle music one hears about, a little goes a long way! I don't like the look of some of those people who were dancing either, that man Barnsley especially. I rather wonder that Brian Audley brought us to a fast place like this! What has become of him? They vanished from the dance hall. Why was Gay so very anxious to hear so much about China, I wonder?"

Greta was soon to know. She stood by the side of

the swift flowing Thames till the last sunset gleam had faded, and the silver and gold of the river shadowed into grey. Then she walked along the terrace, festooned with flowering creepers, until she came to a splendid rose-pergola.

From the shelter of the masses of twining crimson flowers came the tinkle of a girlish laugh, exultant, excited, full of sheer delight.

Greta stopped short. She knew that laugh: but there was something new about it to-night. There was the scrunch of footsteps on the fine gravel in the arbour. Whoever was concealed there among the flowers was rising from the garden seat. Suddenly Gay's voice rang out.

"Oh, Brian! We must find her at once and tell her. Isn't life heavenly? Isn't love wonderful? I never thought it was possible to be as happy as I am to-night."

There was a moment's pause. A man's voice murmured some words in tones of deep gratification. Then silence: was it for the first sacred embrace of two who had found each other from out of all the world?

They came out hand in hand from among the flowers—Greta had drawn back noiselessly, and was leaning on the low parapet bordering the river.

"She's here! Greta's here!" shrilled Gay, running forward and throwing her white arms exultantly round her sister. "Oh, Greta! I'm so happy I can hardly bear myself for joy. Brian and I are engaged. We are to be married in less than a month, and I am going with him to China!"

Greta stood still: the customary words of congratulation dying on her lips. Although she had been expecting something of the kind, now the moment had actually come she was overwhelmed.

Gays' whirlwind courtship to be followed at once by a whirlwind wedding, and then? Her twin from whom

she had scarcely been parted for an hour in their lives, sailing away into the unknown and mysterious East? . . . It sounded incredible.

Then realizing that the happy couple were much too occupied with themselves to notice her dismay, Greta tried to smile, and stammered: "I hope—I hope you will be very happy."

"Happy!" Gay's laugh trilled out like that of a joyous bird. "Why, I didn't know such happiness could be. Come, Brian, let's go and have another cocktail to celebrate. There's the band again. I feel as if life won't be half long enough for all the dancing we're going to have."

Brian hesitated a moment. He had been wondering how it was that Greta was there alone on the terrace above the river. He did not quite like leaving her by herself. He knew better than she did the type of people who frequented Thames Royal. However, for the moment he was completely under the spell of the beautiful girl beside him, too full of his own radiant happiness because she had willingly, eagerly promised to be his bride. So with a careless, "See you later, Greta," both of them turned back towards the Club, and left her standing there.

A month! only a month, and Gay, as a new-made bride, would be on a great liner taking her to China; while she herself—well, what was to become of Greta? Had neither of them given a thought to the girl who was to be left behind—alone?

There was a sudden hubbub further up the garden of the night club: hectic badinage, and delirious peals of laughter. Some of the merry dancers were escaping from the overheated salons, and coming out to the cool freshness of the riverside.

Greta looked this way and that . . . there seemed to be several groups of people coming through the grounds

... She did not want to encounter any of them. Was there no way of escape?

Turning, Greta fled along the terrace. To her relief she came up to a small garden door in the wall. Unbolting it, she slipped outside, and found herself in a narrow road that ran down to the river. Opposite, there was the garden entrance to another house. Someone was coming down this lonely road, someone who was walking with quick, light steps. Greta half drew back thinking that one of the giddy crowd had come out from Thames Royal in search of her. Then, in the soft twilight, she saw it was a girl—a stranger; no, not a stranger!

Greta stepped forward, and as they met, there was mutual recognition.

“Margaret! Margaret Kent—here?”

“Greta Guildford—you?”

The girl’s radiant face clouded. With one soft, swift glance she took in Greta’s elaborately dressed hair, scarlet lips, bare shoulders, and daring dance frock.

“I—I live here, Greta,” she said quietly, nodding towards the secluded house, “didn’t you know? Why, we have not seen each other since we left St. Roland’s School. Strange I should meet you to-night of all nights, my old school chum. It is the very happiest moment of my life. The year after we left school at Keswick I heard the Call of the Cross! I gave myself to Christ for His great service. To-night I have been accepted as a missionary to China.”

## CHAPTER III

### *Face to Face*

TWILIGHT was fading: the silver-grey of the Thames set into strong relief the dark shadows of the magnificent trees that grew almost to the water's edge on the opposite bank of the river.

But above the tree tops the moon rose full and clear, and fell on the faces of the two girls who had met again after some years.

"Greta! I can't believe it is really you! What are you doing here beside the river at night, alone, and dressed like that?"

Margaret Kent's large soulful eyes were full of pain as her glance swept over Greta's low, very low-cut evening frock.

"This is a lonely road. It only leads to our bungalow," she went on. "You ought not to be down here alone. Were you coming to see me by any chance?"

"To see you?" Greta's laugh was almost hysterical. "Why no! I had no idea where you lived. I thought it was at Eastbourne."

"It was in our schooldays. But my father died, and mother moved here to be nearer London. The boys are studying in the University. I have been training at a London hospital."

"A nurse—you? Oh, Margaret, it seems as if the whole world has turned upside down since we met. You, a nurse, accepted as a missionary to China? I just can't believe it. Why—why—" Greta laughed uneasily, "China seems to be looming large on the horizon of life just now. Not a quarter of an hour ago, Gay—you remember my twin sister? She has just promised to

marry a man in a month's time, and go straight off with him to China!"

"To China—Gay?" It was Margaret's turn to look bewildered. "I do not understand. Has Gay, too, heard the Call of the Cross, the Cross of Christ? How glorious if so!"

"No! Oh, no! Brian Audley, the man to whom she has got engaged to-night, says he has no use for religion: he doesn't care for missionaries. He was only saying so as we came here."

"Here? But where is 'here'? Have you been having a river picnic without even a shoulder wrap?"

Margaret stretched out her hand and clasped Greta's fingers; they were chill fingers, for a cold breeze was coming up river. There was a note of real pain in the voice of the young missionary-elect as she said:

"Greta, don't tell me you have been to that place of all places—Thames Royal?"

"Well, and why not?" Greta suddenly felt defiant. "Mr. Audley brought us down; he and Gay are there now, among the dancers. We have not known him long, but all we know is good. He is over on furlough, and fell in love with Gay at first sight I think. Would he have brought the girl he loves down here to propose to her if he had thought it was not a suitable place for her and for me?"

"He doesn't know: he cannot, on holiday in England; that can be his only excuse. We do know—unfortunately; only this bye-lane to the river parts us from Thames Royal grounds. Mother often talks of moving away. The place was a quiet country house belonging to a very old family when we took the bungalow. Now, it is one of the most notorious riverside clubs, and the noise goes on almost all night. Greta, why are you outside the grounds?"

"Oh, well, it was so hot and—and I didn't like the man

I was introduced to and danced with. I don't care for more than one cocktail either."

"I should think not! Oh, Greta, you are tasting the Apple of Pleasure, so you think; but it will prove the Apple of Sodom and soon turn to dust and ashes in your mouth. Alas! I was much the same when we were at school together. Now, I have learned to drink of the river of God's pleasures, and the greatest of all joys, to seek to win souls for Him."

"You are talking what sounds like a foreign language to me," said Greta, "but even now I can't believe it. Gay, going off to China as a married woman in a month's time—and you? When? and why China?"

"A million a month in China are dying without God; that's why! I knew the Call was for China from the first. Directly I fully surrendered myself to Christ I regarded myself as a candidate in waiting, and began to study. How little I really knew of my Bible! Then I entered the hospital, and have passed my last exams. Nurses are wanted very badly in an inland station, so I am sailing for China as soon as arrangements can be made. Oh, Greta, you here at this terrible fast club. I can't believe it! You won't stay, will you? Come indoors with me to get a wrap, and I will walk with you to the nearest station. You live in London? The last train will not be gone yet."

But Greta shook her head.

"No, thanks all the same, I can't do that. Gay is almost off her head with excitement at her engagement, but she'll be frantic if she misses me, and think I've fallen into the river, or something. I left the gate open when I slipped out. The gardens seem quiet now. I'll go in and round to the front entrance, and get my wraps. Brian Audley's car is parked in the drive. I can get in and sit there, sending a message that I prefer to wait there for them—that I've a headache, or something."

"A heartache, more likely!" said Margaret gently. "Greta, we have not met for nothing to-night. It is all part of God's plan, I am sure it is. I am not going to lose sight of you, either. Our bungalow is called 'River Home.' Come and see me any time you feel like it: I shall be here now until I sail for China. If Gay is going off in this whirlwind fashion, the question is, what are you going to do?"

"I—I do not know," faltered Greta, "I haven't had time to think of it. It's all come about so suddenly you see."

"You poor child; trying to steer the frail barque of your own life in such stormy seas. What would you think of me if I were foolish enough to start off in a flimsy boat of my own choosing for China, without having on board a qualified captain, a chart, and a compass? It's even greater folly to face life without the Word of God as our Guide, and Christ as the Captain of our Soul. Greta, I'm going home to pray for you, as I've never prayed before!"

Margaret was true to her word. The two girls clasped hands and parted.

Greta slipped through the garden gate of Thames Royal and sped up a deserted rose-walk towards the Clubhouse. The fun was waxing faster and faster, and the noise more and more furious. Sudden distaste for it all seized Greta. The memory of Margaret's sweet, earnest face, lit up with a radiance that was not the reflection of the moonlight, stabbed her to the heart.

Hitherto she had been completely satisfied with sharing the life of her pleasure-loving sister. She slipped into Thames Royal, avoiding the dancers, seized her wraps and a rug, and gave the attendant a message for her sister.

Then she found Brian Audley's smart car, parked in a quiet corner of the drive, and slipping into the back

seat, wrapped herself warmly and leaned back in the shadows, where she would be unseen.

Greta's brain seemed to be in a whirl. What an evening it had been! Was it possible they had come away from London only a little earlier, and rushed out into the glittering sunlight of a golden summer night—down to the Riverside Club which she had never even heard of before?

Beautiful for situation—one of the choicest of Thames-side spots, flowers and trees in all their splendour—and the silver river wending its quiet way below the velvet lawns: and yet—Greta had soon seen enough, and heard enough, to be glad to slip out of the big dancing saloons, and make her way down to the quiet walks above the river. How little she expected to hear what she actually did hear! Her sister's merry, joyous laugh, and words which gave the tidings of her whirlwind engagement to this young man from China, even before they were actually spoken to her!

Well, Gay and Brian had sought her out and broken the great news. Since they were too occupied with their own sudden happiness to heed her company, Greta had slipped away—too overwhelmed with surprise to be capable of connected thought. She wanted to be alone, and going out of a side door into a bye-road, she had come face to face with the last person she might have expected to meet—a former school-fellow, Margaret, now accepted as a missionary to China! It was Margaret's question concerning her own future that had suddenly brought her face to face with the problem that would confront her very soon—so soon that it seemed impossible it could be true. Gay married and off to China in a month! She herself left behind—what for? To continue the sort of life she had been living—but alone? The bare idea seemed unthinkable. It had always been Gay who had set the pace as to the doings of the day—or rather, night!

## CHAPTER IV

### *Left Behind*

IT was the eve of Gay Guildford's wedding day. Every one concerned had been completely swept off their feet by her whirlwind engagement to Brian Audley, the son of a prosperous English merchant in China. Meeting Gay at the Bayswater boarding house, to see her was to be conquered, and in the end to become the conqueror. Gay had never before even imagined herself to be really in love. She lived only for a continual round of pleasure-seeking.

But when Brian asked her to be his wife, and to marry him before he went to China, Gay had thought herself the happiest girl in the world, and the luckiest. To travel to the Far East, to find a new home in a strange country: what did it matter—what did anything matter if the man to whom she had given her whole heart was by her side?

Nobody seemed to realize at first how her twin sister's hasty marriage would affect Greta: the two had never been parted in their lives. As for Greta herself, she was happy in her sister's joy, and too overwhelmed with the rush of busy preparation to have time to worry as to what would become of her when left alone in London while Gay was far away. Reaction would come later.

At last everything seemed to be ready, as far as preparation was possible for such a hasty wedding for a bride who was off to the other side of the world.

Brian Audley himself had been a tower of strength when it came to the all-important trousseau, for neither his girl-bride nor her twin had the remotest idea what

Gay should take, and what she should leave-behind.

"Fur coat? Chiffon? Why, yes!—both," had been his astounding decision. "The climate at Tang-Chu, where I'm in charge of one of our biggest branches, has a hot summer, but sometimes a very chilly winter. We're not far from the hills, you see, though the city itself is on one of China's largest rivers. As for society—well, there's not much. Two other Englishwomen near are quiet tabbies, in a village outside, missionaries, more than middle-aged, who are still doing what they imagine will help the people; they have a school for the children. After all, China's craze for modern education really started with these Mission Schools. Anyhow, they're not your sort, Gay, and you're not likely to meet them. The other Europeans are men, not English, either. I know it sounds pretty lonely——"

"I shan't mind, I shall have you!" Gay lifted eyes glowing with happiness.

"All the same, I have to be away from home a day or two sometimes. I wonder——"

Brian paused, and looked at Greta as if a sudden thought had struck him.

It was not until the last details were completed that Brian Audley found himself with a breathing space. He happened to be alone with Greta for the moment Gay was busy with her dressmaker, a final fitting of the all-important wedding gown.

Gay's bridal trunks stood ready packed for shipment to the great liner which was to carry her away to those wonderful foreign lands she had never seen.

Greta looked round with anxious eyes: had anything essential been forgotten?

"Look here, Greta," said Brian, "you've done nothing but think about us! Not a word about yourself. The question is: when Gay and I have gone half across the world, what are you going to do?"

It was a question Greta had pushed into the background, except during the wakeful silence of the night. Now, all suddenly, she had to face it. For a moment she could not speak. A lump rose up in her throat, and her eyes grew dim with threatening tears. At last she managed to gasp:

"I don't know: I haven't had time to think—yet."

"I'm afraid you'll have more than enough time to think after to-morrow," he said kindly. "We've — I've been selfish, I'm afraid, I never realized what losing Gay would mean to you!"

"Don't—don't let Gay know I mind." The words were almost a sob.

"Mind? She must realize you mind, Greta! I feel ashamed never to have thought of it before, but both of us have been so full of our own glorious happiness. Look here, Greta, Gay will soon feel a bit lonely, even though, at first, we shall naturally be more than enough for each other. But later on, say in six months or a year's time, why shouldn't you come out and join us?"

"I—I come out to China?" gasped Greta.

"Why not? You are your own mistress. You have no relatives to hinder your comings and goings. You'd enjoy the voyage, and see strange lands. There's heaps of room in my compound. Think what it would mean for Gay, to have you even for a time; though you could stay as long as ever you liked——"

Brian stopped short. He had been so completely absorbed in his love for Gay that he had never really taken much notice of her twin sister.

Greta had not Gay's fascinating beauty and charm: she was not bubbling over with vivacity. Yet there was something about her that would be very appealing to those who preferred a quiet, thoughtful girl.

There were many unattached and well-to-do Englishmen in China; their comings and goings frequently

brought them to Tang-Chu. What more natural than that Greta should marry one of them and settle down near her sister?

Though the idea had only been born in his own mind in that moment, it was quickly followed by a succession of thoughts all bearing on the possibility, all leading him to believe that he had hit on the best of all possible solutions for the problem of Greta's future.

"I mean it, Greta!" he went on earnestly. "I only wish I had thought of it before. There would have been time to talk it over. You see, beyond the two Miss Golds, the missionaries I mentioned, who live in a village a good distance from me, there are no white women in Tang-Chu, though there are several business men, Europeans of sorts and all sorts. Anyway, won't you think about it?"

"Don't say anything to Gay," whispered Greta, as her sister's merry laugh told she was returning to them. "Just now, she—she won't think it possible there could ever come a time when she wanted me while she has you."

Brian did not speak, but his look said volumes. He could have told Greta, had he chosen, that the life of a newly-married white girl in the lonelier spots of the Far East, was not always unclouded happiness. Though it had never occurred to him before, it seemed to Brian that the suggestion that Greta should come out to them in China might prove a solution to a good many possible difficulties in the future. As for Greta, startled as she was by the idea, she was forced just then by circumstances to put the notion into the background of her mind altogether.

The last few hours she and her sister had together sped by all too quickly. Gay was too radiantly happy to realize the parting that was to come so soon.

Gay's wedding day dawned bright and fair. Since the girls were alone in the world, and Brian Audley's real

home was in China, there were not many guests, either at the church or the luncheon which followed. Then Gay changed her bridal white for a travelling dress suited to a few days' motoring honeymoon in Wales.

At last they were off! Bayswater Court seemed singularly empty when Greta went back to the boarding house, but the remembrance of the radiant glow on Gay's fair face made Greta ready to chide herself for the tears that fell fast when she found herself alone.

Still, there was a kind of pitiful comfort to be derived from the fact that this was not the final parting. She would see Gay once more, as they passed through London, staying only a night before joining the huge white liner at Tilbury.

However, when Gay returned from her brief but blissful honeymoon, Greta had only time to realize that in actual fact Gay had really passed out of her life. Her heart, as well as her future, belonged wholly to her husband.

The last day came. Only for a moment did Greta find herself alone with her new-made brother-in-law.

"Take good care of her, Brian," she said tearfully. "China sounds such a long way off—and so—so unknown—so full of perils."

"Not on your life!" he said with a smile. "John Chinaman and his country are very different now from what they were even twenty years ago. As for me—well, am I not a host in myself? Gay is more precious than my own life, by far! You know that. Besides, you've thought it over? You are coming out later on?"

Greta nodded. "If—if the way opens up."

"We must open it up ourselves, that's all," he said easily. Then suddenly his face grew grave. "There's one thing, Greta. It's worried me a bit—illness! There's no hospital near us and no European doctor. As for the old unspeakable Chinese remedies and treatments, the less said the better. They persist still in our district.

Before you come, why don't you pick up some knowledge of what to do in illness? After all, dancing and cocktails aren't much preparation for facing the hard facts of life, when you're up against them. Surely one can learn a lot, even in a few months?"

Gay returned just then; there was no time for more conversation.

All their luggage had already gone on board the liner. There was nothing to be done but to enter the waiting car, which was to drive them the whole way down to Tilbury Docks.

Never would Greta forget that drive, though the snatches of conversation were of the usual banal type when parting draws near.

"Write? Of course I'll write! Post cards from every port of call—oh, yes, and a diary-letter, a bit written every day. I'm just longing to get there. Think of it, off to live in China! A couple of months ago I should have just as soon expected to be going into residence up in the moon."

"That's our liner, the *Princess Elizabeth*, look, lying out in mid-stream. Isn't she a beauty?" said Brian. "I came home in her, so I know how jolly she is. We go out to her in a tender."

"There are people on board already. Why, who's that singing?"

A group of people standing by the taffrail on the liner were singing: what were the words? The echo came clearly over the water, to be taken up by their friends on the shore:

*Like a river glorious, is God's perfect peace,  
Over all victorious, in its bright increase!  
Perfect, yet it floweth fuller every day,  
Perfect, yet it groweth deeper all the way!  
Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blest,  
Finding as He promised, perfect peace, and rest!*

"Missionaries!" said Brian laconically. "They always sing that kind of thing. Helps them, I suppose. Hope they realize what they have to face—if they go where they aren't wanted! Well, Greta, I suppose it's 'Good-bye' now."

There was no time for more. Perhaps it was just as well that the parting between the sisters had to be very brief. A final embrace, and Brian and Gay were hurrying aboard the tender. They were the last to go: the mooring rope was cast off. The little steamer drew away from the landing stage . . . Greta stepped to the very edge, watching that space of water widening from a few inches to feet, from feet to yards, and then . . . a big streak of the river lay between her and her sister, typical of thousands of miles of tossing ocean that would soon part them—for how long?

A glance at the group on the deck of the *Princess Elizabeth* had convinced Greta that Margaret Kent was not one of the outgoing missionaries, nor was she among the party of friends who had come to see them off. She watched Gay and Brian board the liner: saw them appear a moment later on the promenade deck, where they stood waving.

A startling blare of the mighty siren. The liner slipped from her moorings, and dropped down stream slowly, very slowly, at first. Then, gathering speed, the huge white vessel went on her way . . . the faces of those on deck faded into dimness . . .

Greta turned away at last, and found herself following in the wake of the group of missionaries' friends, as they walked towards the station.

"When am I going to China?" she heard one girl say quietly, "I'm not quite sure. I've not finished at St. Rhoda's, you know. No, it's not one of the big hospitals, but it serves a needy district, and they take a few of us for real intensive training. It's surprising how much they let us learn in a few months."

The girl and her companions passed on. Greta followed slowly. Suddenly there came back to her with tremendous force the memory of Brian's last words to her alone, spoken in all seriousness: "After all, dancing and cocktails aren't much preparation for facing the hard facts of life, when you're up against them. Surely one can learn a lot, even in a few months?"

Where was St. Rhoda's Hospital? She resolved to find out all about it.

So it was that a little later on, after some preliminary enquiries and correspondence, Greta Guildford was almost surprised to find herself facing the keen, discerning eyes of the experienced and clever matron of one of the smaller East End hospitals.

"You are not thinking of offering yourself as a missionary? No? You and your twin sister, who has recently married and gone to China, are alone in the world, and so you hope to go out and join her? An inland city, with no hospital or European doctor near? You are very wise to acquire some knowledge. We give a special intensive course here, and we are associated with a Medical Mission. You can offer to pay the fees so as to be no charge on the hospital? Yes, I can take you, let me see—in three weeks' time——"

So it was settled. Surely Greta Guildford was being led by a way that she knew not, and still the Guiding Hand seemed to be pointing the way to China.

## CHAPTER V

### *Pirates*

THE three weeks appointed by the Matron of St. Rhoda's went by like a flash.

Even more quickly, so it seemed, the months that followed sped by, for Greta found herself living in a wholly new and busy world. Instead of the ease of a comfortable country house, the almost spartan life in a nurses' home, where as the newest untrained "pro." she found herself up against hard work, and long hours, obliged every day to tackle tasks she would never have thought it possible she could undertake.

Greta made no special friends among the nurses. There were two types at St. Rhoda's. A few eager, devoted Christian girls, getting as much knowledge as they could before sailing for the Mission Field. On the other hand, the regular staff and probationers were women who intended to take up the Nursing profession seriously, and make it the whole business of their lives. Kindness itself though both of these groups were to her, Greta never really belonged to either.

From the moment Brian Audley made the suggestion, her longing to go out to join her sister had grown to a decision, even if she only remained in China for a time. All she wanted was to learn enough to make herself useful, and not be utterly helpless in any emergency which might arise in that distant land.

When Gay's letters began to arrive, they were full to the brim of interesting details, first of the voyage and her fellow passengers, then her journey inland with the strange faces of Celestials, an odd medley of tongues, and what seemed to her unbelievably queer customs.

When Tang-Chu was reached, Gay's letters became even longer for she had a good deal of time on her hands. Brian Audley's compound was delightful, built four-square round a nice courtyard, full of flowers, with shady mulberry trees. Apart from unpacking wedding presents, placing all her possessions in order, and supervising the housekeeping, Gay had little to do.

"Boys', our Chinese servants, do everything. But, oh, Greta, I have made some amazing discoveries of how they try to 'do' an unsuspecting bachelor employer! Think of it. When I began to 'run' the household accounts in my own way, I found that poor Brian had been innocently paying for about 1000 eggs, countless chickens, bags of rice, and eighty pounds of sugar *every month!* Talk about English servants' 'perquisites'! Our Chang could give any of them points. Of course, the Chinese 'boy' resented my digging and delving into the household accounts, to stop all this petty thieving—it was nothing else, of course—for the sake of his own kith and kin. So what does Chang do, but ask Brian, 'If the new missee had come to stop?' When Brian firmly explained that I 'was certainly stopping,' since an Englishman's wife naturally shares his home, poor Chang went off in a huff. 'She too much lookee me,' he grumbled. So I have taken care to 'lookee' the doings of Chang's successor pretty carefully, you may be sure. Isn't it odd? Chang 'lost face' in his own eyes, and the eyes of his family who had batted on his pilfering. Not because of his thieving—that didn't matter—but because he was found out! What can one do with a mentality like that? Yet Brian says that's China. A man must not feel he is humiliated, or he 'loses face.' Can I ever hope to make a success of life out here? I could fill pages with details of Chinese customs, especially the shopping. Most of what one wants is brought to your door, even live fish sometimes, so that you can choose

your poor victim swimming about in a pail. I don't think I shall ever get used to some things, though. It's hard luck being so far from the coast, where there's every kind of gaiety. Anyway there's nothing dull about being here: it's brimful of surprises. There have been beauty shops and cosmetics in China from the days when our Ancient Britons ran about in skins! I expected to see every Chinese man wearing a long pigtail, and the women hobbling about with their tiny tortured feet cramped from birth to keep them small and fashionable. Happily both are practically unknown here now."

Gay appeared supremely happy, and in any case the novelty had had no time to wear off.

Several months had passed for Greta in St. Rhoda's Hospital, when Gay's letters began to take on a different note.

"I haven't been feeling any too fit just lately. They say English brides don't become acclimatised so readily if they come here directly they are married. I was a bit in the dumps yesterday, not feeling I wanted even to dance to the radio—can you imagine that? It's not knowing what may lie before me, some day in the future. I am so afraid of being afraid! Once I saw a tiny missionary chapel with a graveyard near by. There was a white stone in memory of a Scottish girl, a missionary's wife, who died just a year after she came out. She and her little child are buried together. Brian is so loving and tender; there cannot be a better husband in the world. Yet I felt yesterday that I just longed for an Englishwoman to talk to, one of the real motherly sort. Above all, I wanted you! Oh, Greta, I even cried! And then Brian told me he had suggested you should come out to us if ever I needed you. That it had been his suggestion you should gain some knowledge of what to do in illness. Is it really true that you had this in

mind when you went to that awful East End hospital? I never understood it—I thought it must be just a fad. Oh, Greta, hurry up and come to keep me company.”

Greta folded up the letter, and looked at the calendar. Her time at St. Rhoda's had well-nigh expired. The particular training she had set herself to undergo was almost completed. She had learned much and seen much; not only in the general and special wards of St. Rhoda's, but in accompanying the District Sister on her visits to the mothers and children, and infant welfare centres. She knew that if she were at hand in an emergency she would not prove wholly useless.

The last few weeks passed on flying wings. Greta booked her passage to Shanghai. Here she was to change to a local steamer. Brian's tender thought for his girl wife, had led him to suggest a short holiday at one of China's health resorts on the coast, during the most trying seasons of the year.

Leaving St. Rhoda's Hospital, Greta returned to stay at Bayswater Court while she made preparations for the voyage. There seemed so much to be done, and so little time left to crowd it all in.

Since there was no knowing what the future might hold for her, Greta arranged to leave in store such of the furniture as they had retained from their aunt's country home. However, there were some trunks full of personal possessions which might, or might not, be worth keeping. Greta arranged for these to be brought to Bayswater Court. One of the trunks was old and full of her aunt's papers. Greta resolved to go through them, and destroy what need no longer be kept. This was a task she knew ought to have been undertaken before, but they had sold their aunt's home and come to London rather hurriedly.

At the very bottom of one of the trunks was an old wallet. She could not remember having seen it before. It bore her own initials, G.M.G. It must have belonged

to the mother the twins had lost in babyhood, since she herself bore the same name: Greta Mary Guildford.

Her own long lost mother! Strange that the wallet had been hidden from sight so long. What did it contain? Letters—some faded and old, love letters from Greta's father to his bride. There had been no need for letters afterwards. Husband and wife had never been parted during their short married life. There was an unopened envelope: Greta drew a breath of wonder when she saw the inscription in a shaky hand:

“To my twin daughters, to be given to them when they reach maturity.”

A letter for Gay and herself! It seemed to Greta as she opened it tenderly, with trembling hands, that she was going to receive a veritable message from the dead!

“My darling twin babies; you, Gay and Greta, will be no longer babies when this comes to your hands. What are you like, I wonder, as you read these lines? My little girls, no longer little: Gay, with her sunny curls and roguish baby smile; Greta, inclined to be the quieter one, none the less beautiful, none the less dear—more so, perhaps, because more akin to my own reserved nature. My children, I am dying, they have not told me so, but I know. I shall never live to see you grow up. But I want you to take this message from your mother in Eternity. Give yourselves in your glad young days to God. I have only lived for pleasure and enjoyment. Not what is called ‘wrong doing’, but thinking only of myself and my own amusement and happiness. Now, when I have only a few weeks, days, perhaps, I have been seeking Christ and His Salvation. I have found Him, found Him wholly through the reading of His precious Word. He says, ‘Come!’ and I came. He says to the soul thirsting for His Salvation, ‘Take of the water of life freely.’ Well, I have sought—and found, and taken, and because He has taken my sins away, I am not afraid

to go and meet Him. But, oh, the wasted years! I might have spent them for Him; I might have brought forth fruit to His praise. Now I have nothing to take to Him, nothing but leaves. Oh, my babies, girls grown big by the time this reaches you, seek Him! and live for Him. We have only one life to live; let it be His, wholly. This letter will reach your hands at God's right time. Your mother."

The writing trailed off weakly. Looking at the date, Greta saw that it was penned only a few days before her mother's death.

Tears were falling fast as Greta replaced the letter in the wallet, and put it among the special treasures she was taking with her to China. It must be shared with Gay; but when? Would her mother's words prove prophetic, and reach both the girls at God's right time?

Greta had little time or inclination for thought just then. Every hour was filled to the full with preparation.

Only a few days after she had found that message penned by her mother's dying hand, Greta took the journey that Gay had taken down to Tilbury, her passage booked by the same palatial liner *Princess Elizabeth*. Once on board she felt impatient of every hour's delay before she would be with Gay once more.

A calm sea and a prosperous voyage seemed indicated; but alas! less than twenty-four hours brought a change. A sudden storm in the English Channel, then the big Atlantic rollers in the Bay of Biscay, proved that Greta, on her first sea voyage, was that most to be pitied of mortals, a very indifferent sailor! Most of her time was spent in her cabin. Even calmer seas and tropical suns found her white and weak, too listless to care to join much in the shipboard amusements of the other passengers. All she longed for was the end of the voyage, and then . . .

At Port Said, and later in Colombo, Greta had her

first glimpse of the colourful East. But it was not until they were nearing Shanghai that she began to feel her old self again.

Her old self? Yes, and yet there was a change. Something in her mother's letter had awakened her heart, never to sleep again. Strange, passing strange, that the message should have been hidden away all these years: was it now as the letter declared, "God's right time?"

China at last!

In the hustle of disembarking from the great liner, and going aboard a much smaller coasting steamer for the voyage northward, Greta had scarcely time for a look at Shanghai, one of the mightiest cities of the world, with its polyglot population of three millions and its huge "Bund," where the buildings on the waterfront tower skyward in imposing fashion.

Shanghai the marvellous, where, although "East is East and West is West," the twain do actually seem to meet, but only apparently! The racial differences and customs, the Concessions and Settlements of this nation and that, in those days all went to prove that in very truth East and West are still in many ways veritably poles apart.

The latter part of the voyage on the *Princess Elizabeth* had been pretty rough. The liner's captain had only managed by skilful seamanship to skirt the edge of a typhoon in the China Sea.

So Greta was feeling shaky when she went on board the small local steamer. What mattered? Only a short voyage of some three days now, and she would be with her sister Gay once again.

Greta went to her cabin and turned in, hoping the weather would moderate by the time they reached the open sea again. Alas! once clear of Woo Sung and the river mouth, it seemed as if the little steamer was trying her hardest to stand on her head, or as an alternative,

lic down like a dog between the waves and indulge in a good roll!

Sleep was impossible. The dreaded sea-sickness was probably a thing of the past, since she had suffered so much on the outward voyage. Still, even when morning came, she was more than content to remain in her berth. The gale seemed to lessen a bit as the day wore on. Greta had managed a meal brought by a Chinese steward. Then she lay half dozing, counting the hours till she could hope to see Gay.

Suddenly she heard a great noise on deck—men running to and fro, shouts, orders which nobody seemed to be obeying, cries of alarm. Then the ship stopped . . . and in the sudden lull when the engines ceased, Greta distinctly heard the sound of a shot. She sprang up in great alarm. What could have happened? Already half dressed, it did not take her very long to slip on a warm frock, her leather coat, and rubber boots, for waves had been breaking on deck from time to time.

Before she could open her cabin door, the Chinese lad who waited on her came rushing in, his face yellower than ever with terror, and his eyes starting out of his head.

He locked the door, and stood with his back against it crying: "Jen Tao!—Jen Tao!"—pointing towards the deck above. Now Greta had no idea that "Jen Tao" meant "bad men"; even if she had, she would have been equally mystified. Something was very much the matter—and a shot meant somebody had been hurt. All that was noblest and tenderest in womanhood surged up suddenly in Greta's heart.

She drew herself up, and summoning what she believed was her very best "pidgin" English, ordered the Chinese lad to open the door.

"No! Jen Tao—shoot—killee missec! Killce captain——"

"All samce open door—Missec go looksee——"

Amazed that a white girl should show such courage, the boy stood back, but made no attempt to follow her when she went along the alley way towards the saloon.

Then, on the threshold, her heart stood still. Men were just lifting the injured captain on to a couch. The Chief Officer, held fast by a couple of appalling looking men who were armed, was trying to explain what had happened. A number of Southern Chinese had shipped as steerage passengers. They had kept quiet until they were well out to sea. Then these men, who were all armed, had crept out and made a simultaneous attack on the principal officers and engineers, who were overpowered. The Captain, rushing out of his cabin attempting defiance, was shot and badly injured.

“Pirates! they have already turned the ship southward, they will loot everybody and then put into their usual lair—Bias Bay! They think there is treasure on board, they threaten to murder anyone who resists, anybody who is armed will be shot at once.”

The terrible truth had to be faced, for it was the truth. The marauders who had come aboard as passengers had captured the vessel. They were helpless—in the hands of Chinese pirates.

For a moment Greta stood there in silence—stunned by the realization of what it meant. Strange as it seemed, at that moment her first feeling was one of thankfulness that Gay was not there beside her. Then, even the short year of discipline and training at St. Rhoda’s stood Greta in good stead. Yet, she realized her limitations only too clearly. A young student-probationer, taking a comparatively short but intensive course in view of life abroad?

“Oh, God, help me!” The cry came from Greta’s heart as she heard the hubbub and cries of alarm.

Then she went forward.

*In the Hands of Chinese Pirates*

“PIRATES! We are in the hands of Chinese pirates! They will kill us: they will murder us all!” In the saloon the cry was going from lip to lip in varying tongues.

A tall, fine-looking Englishman who had been bending over the injured captain suddenly stood upright.

In calm, clear tones he addressed the few Europeans first in English, and afterwards the large crowd of Chinese passengers, rich business men and merchants, for the most part.

“I have been talking to the man who appears to be the leader of the pirates. He declares that no European will be killed unless we attempt resistance, are found to be armed, or try to attract the attention of any passing ship. Then they will not hesitate to shoot. They want loot, and think there is a quantity of silver on board. By threats and show of weapons they are compelling the crew to work the ship towards their lair—presumably around Bias Bay. There is nothing we can do but wait—and pray!” He bent his head for a moment, and there was silence in the saloon save for a sob.

“Now,” he said, “the captain’s injury is serious. I am not a medical missionary, unfortunately, and my First Aid Case is in my luggage, and my knowledge is slight. Is there a doctor among the passengers?”

Again silence. Then he said:

“No? I feared as much. Any lady who has some knowledge of nursing?”

Greta was standing in the doorway of the saloon of the steamer. Now, quite suddenly, she felt as if

her own terror dropped from her like an outworn garment. Here was an emergency she had been prepared for: and it found her ready. She crossed the saloon to the spot where the tall Englishman was standing.

"I have had some hospital training—St. Rhoda's. Will you let me help? The first thing is to carry the Captain to his own cabin, where we can examine him properly. Then hot water, sheets. I have an emergency case in my cabin, with bandages and antiseptics."

It seemed from that moment as if Greta, rising to the occasion, was compelled by the very force of circumstances to take control.

Under her directions the Captain was placed on a mattress and carried to his cabin. Here his own steward, terrified and trembling, took the orders; he was almost too scared to obey till the Englishman sternly bade him pull himself together and do what the lady required.

There had been a midnight shooting affray among some hooligans in the East End of London, and one or two of the injured had been brought to St. Rhoda's Hospital, when Greta was on duty to help the House Surgeon and Night Sister. She had carefully noted what had been done.

After examining the injured Captain, and doing what she could in the way of a tourniquet and bandages, at length Greta stood up.

"His leg must have been broken when he fell on the deck. I must put it in a temporary splint till it can be properly set. As for the shot in his ribs—I cannot locate or extract the bullet: only try to arrest the bleeding. He ought to be in hospital for X-ray and surgical treatment."

"Exactly! but how and when that will be 'possible only God knows. You have done what you could, and if you will allow me to say so, done it splendidly, probably saving his life. Since we are both British, and fellow victims in the pirates' hands, may I know

your name? Mine is Philip Cranmere. You are too, I expect, a missionary returning to your station?"

A crimson flush mounted to the girl's cheeks.

"No, oh, no, nothing of the sort."

He looked surprised at Greta's almost vehement protest, so she added hurriedly:

"I only landed in Shanghai in time to join this steamer to go North, and join my sister at Pei-tai. I have come out to stay with her for a time. I was at a loose end for a few months after they left England, and my brother-in-law suggested I might find even a slight knowledge of nursing useful. They live in the interior—Tang Chu."

"Tang-Chu!" he repeated in startled tones. "Yes, indeed, English people living there might well be in dire need of help, and find none available."

"You know Tang-Chu?" said Greta eagerly, suddenly conscious of a hope that Philip Cranmere had not come into her life merely to pass out of it again, as ships pass in the night. If?—of course, there was the all-present and terrible "if" created by what had befallen them. Were they likely to escape with their lives in this awful predicament?

"Yes, I know Tang-Chu well," said Philip Cranmere smiling. "My own Mission Station is more than a hundred and fifty miles up the great river, but that is a mere nothing as distances go in China. Tang-Chu is our nearest great city, walled city I mean."

The Captain's Chinese steward came in just then with some nourishment Greta had ordered, and she held it to the injured man's lips.

"Kind—good—English nurse?" he murmured, opening his eyes for a moment. "Glad you were here . . . the scoundrels! Others hurt . . .?"

"No, only yourself. The other officers are uninjured. Try to sleep, and do not worry."

He tried to struggle up, only to fall back with a bitter groan.

"Pirates . . . silver . . . traitor must have let them know . . . I must go up to the bridge and take command!"

"No, sir," said Mr. Cranmere, stepping forward, "at the moment it is the lady who is in charge—of you! If you lie still and obey orders you will be back on that bridge all the sooner, but not just yet."

Greta and Philip Cranmere exchanged glances: both of them knew that with a broken leg and a gunshot wound, that "not just yet" was likely to be a long way off!

But doughty Captain Martock was used to command, not to obey. Again he tried to struggle up, but Greta laid a firm hand on his arm.

"Please lie still," she implored. "Your leg is—is injured, and I have only been able to fix it up temporarily: it needs a surgeon's skill."

But the Captain was already obeying, because nature itself insisted that he should. The agony of any attempt at movement was too great: he sank back half-fainting and closed his eyes.

"I have given him a mild injection to ease his pain," whispered Greta, "it will help him to sleep. Although I only had a year at St. Rhoda's, their training for those going abroad is very comprehensive and intensive. I think the one privilege I valued most was being taught how to ease awful pain—if no one better qualified is at hand, to be capable of dealing with such agony myself in an emergency like this."

Philip Cranmere looked at her in wonder. This quiet, capable girl, calm and competent, even though a novice to China and the Chinese, a passenger in a coastal steamer captured and now in the hands of a gang of notorious pirates, what a missionary she would have made! Yet, on her own showing, she was "nothing of the sort!" merely joining her married sister in an

inland city. How Philip Cranmere coveted a girl of her type for the great service in which he himself was engaged. But was she pledged to that same service? He felt it behoved him to find out.

"We are here alone with the Captain," he said quietly, "and since the officers and crew will be compelled by the pirates to be otherwise occupied, may I suggest that we volunteer to undertake the care of the wounded Captain with his own steward? You and I together by day. Then I will of course stay here with him myself by night——"

"By night?" gasped Greta, "you think we may be kept at the mercy of these awful pirates for days?"

"We are in God's hands, Miss Guildford. Has He not promised to care for His own? We two are here together, and for the moment there is nothing more we can do for our unfortunate Captain. Shall we spend a moment in prayer, seeking God's healing for him, since we can do little, and asking protection for our fellow passengers and ourselves?"

Greta's face flushed, then paled.

"You—you pray," she murmured. "I never pray—I mean, aloud!"

She sank slowly to her knees while Philip Cranmere, in words of passionate pleading, took hold by faith of the promises of the Living God, claiming His deliverance for the captives, and pleading for the life of the injured Captain.

Greta had never heard a prayer like that: it was as if the young Missionary knew that God Himself was there in living presence, and that through the Atoning Blood of Christ, and in His Name, he could speak to Him as One face to face.

With a choking sob Greta slipped out of the Captain's cabin, and made her way to the deck. Seas were breaking over the captive vessel. It had been

turned off its course, and was meeting the full force of the storm. On the bridge one of the pirates with a loaded gun was forcing the officer on watch to keep on the course the pirates had decided. With the unhappy helmsman and the engineers below, the position was the same. To refuse would mean instant death, not only for themselves, but it might be for the rest of the crew and the unfortunate passengers. Avoiding the saloon where the European passengers were still huddled in terror, under the watchful eye of one of the most terrible looking of the pirates, Greta made her way with difficulty to her own cabin. Other cabins she had passed were being ransacked by ruthless hands, and everything of value seized. Much to Greta's surprise her own possessions had not so far been molested. She hurriedly fastened the door, flung herself upon her knees, and burst into tears.

"Oh God! if only I had the same right to call upon Thee in this hour of peril as Mr. Cranmere. He is Thine and I am not. But, oh, God, I know I am not ready to meet Thee! Don't let me be killed by those awful men, to die in the dark."

Suddenly, as if words of a command had been spoken in her hearing, Greta obeyed an impulse to rise from her knees. She pulled out her cabin trunk, unlocked it, and dived down underneath the things she had packed as being "wanted on the voyage!"

When she had transhipped from the liner *Princess Elizabeth*, to this small coastal steamer, Greta had only packed in this particular trunk what she expected she would need for the rest of the journey—a matter of a very few days! But was it going to be only a matter of a few days now? In the hands of the dreaded pirates it might be a long—a very long time—before she saw her sister, Gay, again. Indeed, knowing something of the character of these desperadoes, life itself

might be ended for her before many hours had passed.

The thought was too terrible to be borne. For Gay's sake—for her own sake—she must employ every and any means of safety. When she had repacked this trunk “for a few days,” and had fastened up a larger case to go with her heavier luggage, she had found to her dismay that she had left out of it a parcel—carefully folded and packed as flat as possible to take up little room.

She had put it at the very bottom of her small trunk rather annoyed with herself for having left it out of the bigger one.

What had put it into her mind at this terrible moment? Was it an answer to her prayer?

She retrieved the parcel, unfolded the paper carefully, and took out—the uniform she had worn as a Special Probationer taking the Intensive Course at St. Rhoda's Hospital! To slip it on was the work of a moment or two, though her fingers trembled as she fastened the snowy apron and carefully folded cap.

She was scarcely ready, when there came a thundering crash at her cabin door, and the voice of the pirates demanding admission. She opened the door before they could break in—to stand astonished on the threshold at the sight of a slip of a girl—dressed in a uniform that the worst of them had learned to respect! Somehow—how was it?—even the leader of that group recognized that dress—and had learned to respect it. Also, he seemed to have picked up a few English words.

“Nurse?” he growled, “Red Cross? Hospital?”

Greta nodded.

“Hospital—England—London.”

It was enough. A very perfunctory glance through her opened trunk, a few raucous orders to his fellows, and Greta found herself alone!

God Himself had heard and answered her prayer; she was safe!

*Nurse Guildford*

LEFT alone with the injured Captain after Greta had disappeared, Philip Cranmere pulled out his little Pocket Bible. But memory was true. He had scarcely need to look at the familiar words which have brought help and comfort to countless millions in an hour of direst need.

*God is our Refuge and Strength, a very present help in trouble . . . Be still and know that I am God!*

Then he closed his eyes and prayed—prayed, too, for this brave young fellow passenger who had been so strangely thrown across his path:

By and by the door opened and Greta came in, closing it softly behind her. At first glance he scarcely recognized her; she was now wearing the becoming uniform of a nurse, a neat silver-grey dress, white apron and simple snowy cap.

She smiled when she saw his surprise, and said in a modest deprecating fashion:

“We who take the short intensive training at St. Rhoda’s are allowed to retain our Probationer’s uniform when we leave. Indeed, we are recommended to wear it if it seems advisable on any occasion, and I—I thought this was one.”

“It certainly is,” said Philip Cranmere warmly. “Not only is there something very re-assuring about uniform, but everyone respects the Red Cross, or should do. So any lady dressed as a nurse is honoured as worthy of more regard than one wearing her usual garb.”

Greta’s face whitened. “You think there is need to be—to be afraid of these dreadful men?”

Philip Cranmerc's lips tightened. Not for worlds would he alarm this English girl. But had he chosen he could have repeated many terrible stories concerning pirates, bandits, and other lawless robber bands in China, things that were not fiction, but fact.

"We are in God's hands. Have we not sought His protection?" said Philip Cranmerc. He crossed to the porthole and stood looking out. Greta Guildford followed him, saying in a low voice: "What will they do with us, with the ship?"

"As long as no one attempts resistance, or pulls out a gun, I do not think they will harm any of the European passengers. The mighty power that lies behind those of us who are protected by the Union Jack, or the French Tricolour, puts fear into them. I don't fancy there are any American subjects. They want loot, and somehow discovered that there is a consignment of specie on board. They will probably rob all the Chinese passengers of every dollar. The crew are being compelled by their threatening guns to work the ship southward to their lair, probably the notorious Bias Bay. Then they will signal to their fellow pirates ashore, who will pull out their sampans, Chinese small boats. They will load these up with the money, pull ashore, and leave the ship to continue the voyage. At least, that is what has actually happened before; once, when a number of missionaries' children were returning to their beautiful schools in Chefoo. But none of them was injured, nor their teachers in charge. Still, it was a terrifying experience, and a time of anxiety for their friends. As for killing us, the pirates know better."

"But the bandits have killed British and American missionaries, and the Boxers too."

"I know," he said gravely, "and one never knows when trouble may not break out again. But as I said, we are in God's hands."

"I can't understand why such people still exist," said Greta, "bandits—boxers—pirates! Is there no ordered Government?"

Mr. Cranmere shrugged his shoulders.

"China is a difficult country to govern—so vast, so overcrowded with masses of people all struggling for existence. There is no possible comparison between this great unmanageable country, and our little, well-ordered England. There is another thing, something that counts far more because it is greater than all else. British laws are more or less founded on, and adapted from the great Laws of God: and for centuries the Bible has been an open Book in our land, actually the text-book of our moral and civil government. Normally at least, the teaching of the Word of God is the foundation on which the Christian religion is built, although, alas! some of the super-structures that man-made efforts have erected have been very different from the simple Faith of the New Testament, the Gospel of God which is Salvation through Christ alone. But at least there is an outward respect for these things, so that Britain is leavened with regard for the right. Out here—why, Miss Guildford, when you have been in this vast country for a time, and have come in contact with even the fringe of the China of the Chinese, as we missionaries seek to do, you will see the difference. Irresponsible and thoughtless people who know nothing of the real facts, sometimes say, 'All religions are alike: let the Chinese keep their own!' You have heard that said?" for Philip Cranmere noticed that Greta started.

"Why, yes—by my brother-in-law, Brian Audley."

"Yes, and yet, if his name marks him as a member of of the great Audley trading firm, the family have had associations with China for a couple of generations. How can the conflicting mixture of superstition which goes by the name of 'Religion' out here, compare with the

Gospel of Christ? Think of a man bringing home one new wife after another, until a longed for son, or sons, is born, to carry out the age-old rites of 'Ancestor Worship' for their father. Girls? Daughters are regarded as a misfortune, and among the poverty-stricken classes who struggle for existence on the border-line of starvation in some districts, girls are often sold by their parents into a kind of domestic slavery, and worse. It would not do for us English to lift the veil and reveal what we know goes on, unblushingly, and the sufferings of the poor little girl victims. Yet to the Chinese there is no sense of sin as such in the sight of God: the one great desire is not to 'lose face,' that is, be humiliated by being found out. When detection of the result of moral wrong-doing becomes too evident to be denied, it is put down to some malevolent *Kui*, an evil spirit. Their religion is full of fear of demons: yes, and we missionaries know that there is real Devil possession in China—I myself have seen cases of the kind we read of in our Lord's life on earth. That sort of thing is a terrible reality indeed out here. In England, the open, visible power of Evil is restrained—at least, on the surface of things."

"I never thought of it like that," said Greta humbly. "What terrible people are these pirates who have us in their power. If only I could get a message sent to my sister. The ship will be missed; she will be ill with anxiety. The ship's wireless——?"

"Is in the pirates' hands, of course; possibly put out of action. 'Sparks,' the young Radio officer, could not approach it without having a gun pointed at his head: these men are regardless of human life when it suits them. A radio message would reveal the position of the captured ship. Will you leave it to me, Miss Guildford? You have been an angel of mercy to our poor injured captain, and as soon as ever we are out of the pirates' hands, and able to get to the nearest port, our

first care must be to see that he is taken to hospital. Then, if you give me your sister's address, I will get a message sent first of all: We can do nothing except care for the Captain. I suggest we watch beside him in turns: he cannot be left. First of all, however, I am going to see what the stewards have been able to do in the way of a meal. You must eat, you know!"

"Eat!" Greta stared aghast. "I couldn't touch a mouthful, I am sure! Why, some of those dreadful armed pirates will be in the saloon, watching us——"

"Yes, no doubt," said Mr. Cranmere calmly, "but possibly we shall be in their hands for two or three days, and what will you be fit for, what will anyone be fit for, if we do not try to get meals—of sorts? I will come back soon."

He went out of the Captain's cabin leaving Greta alone. She stood by the porthole looking out at the tumbling grey sea. Dusk was deepening tonight—night, on those lone cold seas, and in the hands of pirates! Who would have thought such a thing to be possible, in this prosaic twentieth century? Of course, Greta had read in the press of such happenings, recent happenings, too. But as long as China was half the world away, such horrors had seemed incredible. To read short foreign cables in cold print in the security of an English home, and to face the reality, was different indeed.

It was not long before Philip Cranmere returned. "Come, Nurse Guildford," he said smiling, "Scared as the Chinese stewards are, they have managed to get some sort of dinner together. When I appeared I was besieged by the passengers new to China and the Chinese, and bombarded with questions about the condition of our poor Captain. People had just sat down to dinner. Rather selfish of me, perhaps, but I thought the simplest plan would be to sit down and join them. During the

hasty meal, I could tell them as much as I knew myself, so that you should not be worried with needless questions. Are you ready to go down? Don't hurry; have a good meal in the strangest circumstances under which you have ever had dinner, I have no doubt!"

Philip Cranmere was certainly right!

Greta slipped on her leather coat over her uniform, and made her way with difficulty from the Captain's cabin to the dining saloon. Here most of the European passengers and a few wealthy Chinese who were trying to adopt Western ways, were making some sort of a meal.

Greta slipped into a vacant seat, only to be immediately pounced on by two ladies who were her immediate neighbours.

"Oh, you're a nurse?" said one of them, glancing at Greta's uniform in mingled interest and relief. "Don't remember seeing anyone in uniform before—"

"No—yes—it is! You are the English mees who offered to help the poor capitaine?" said a voluble Frenchman whose English was as faulty as most of his fellow passengers' French.

"Oh! Now I understand, you are the one who is helping with the captain," said another lady. "My dear, I congratulate you, your uniform is very becoming."

Greta flushed, none too well pleased.

"Is it? I never even thought about that. I supposed under the circumstances I had better wear it, that is all!"

Greta did not feel it was needful she should deign to satisfy the woman's curiosity by explaining further. She merely replied to questions as to the captain's welfare, and then went on with her hurried meal.

Dinner, under the very eyes of a horde of desperate bandits! Well, the very fact was enough to take away one's appetite, certainly.

Yet, there they were, huddled in the far corner of the saloon, chattering, gesticulating, arguing in angry

tones; were they discussing the fate that was to be meted out to the unfortunate passengers? Greta could not see what they were doing from where she sat, her back being towards them. But a man who was her *vis-avis* bent across and asked in a low tone:

"You can't see what they are up to? I thought not. They are sharing the loot, and quarrelling over it."

"Loot! They have been robbing everybody then? So far I have not found my cabin has been ransacked."

"Probably you will not find anything of yours missing. These men are ruthless, but they have a wholesome respect for the Governments which are behind the Europeans. But from what I hear, they have stripped their fellow Chinese of everything of value, even some of their clothes! Of course, all their money, as well as rifling the ship's strong room. Now they are making a division—of sorts! Since their quarrelling is a pretty serious affair sometimes, we must not be surprised if it ends in a fight!"

Greta shuddered. Was it for this that she had left a life of peace? For the moment she wished herself back again in England. Then there came the memory of Gay! Gay, brilliant, irresponsible, and fun-loving, had never known the meaning of danger. True, Tang-Chu was far from the sea, and the pirate-infested delta of the great river towards which the pirates were presumably heading to their lair. Still, China was a vast, over-populated country of long, long history, and ever deepening mystery—one never knew.

*Sunday—as Captives*

“WILL this awful state of things never end?” Greta’s hands were tightly clenched as she stood by the porthole of the captain’s cabin, gazing out on the waste of tumbling waters.

The sun was slowly westering, gilding sky and sea with unearthly light.

Another night and day had passed, and still there seemed no hope of release for the captured ship and passengers. It was an alarming experience: one that no one on board was ever likely to forget. Stories were whispered from lip to lip, too, concerning the terrible things that had happened, when these pirates had put out of their lairs in the great bays and natural harbours formed by the delta of some great river.

Coming as ordinary passengers on board some hapless coastal steamer, these Southern Chinese pirates chose an opportune moment to appear simultaneously in their true guise—as desperate armed men.

They had previously killed captains and officers who tried to resist and regain command of the ship. Then they had plundered everybody, looted the vessel of valuable cargo, and carried off any passengers of importance as captives, demanding immense sums of money as a ransom.

All these things had happened before; were they going to happen again? Greta wondered miserably, as she stood watching the tossing waters, every wave tinged with sunset gold. The captain was sleeping: his injuries were very serious and when he recovered consciousness he had discovered the true position of affairs, and it was

breaking his honest heart. His ship, cargo, and the passengers for whom he was responsible, were at the mercy of one of the notorious hordes of pirates which infested the China coast. It completely overwhelmed him to realize his helplessness, when he ought to be taking command upon the bridge. Those who were doing their best for him knew that he was distraught with anxiety. He had dire need of skilled attention, but how long would it be before that could be given him?

With the ship off her course, heading southwards towards the pirates' lair—what awaited them all?

I know not what awaits me  
God Himself veils my eyes . . .

Where He may lead I'll follow,  
My trust in Him repose,  
And every hour in perfect peace,  
I'll sing, 'He knows! He knows!'

Greta started and opened the cabin door a trifle. By this time she was getting used to seeing an armed bandit posted outside. Yet she had already discovered that even these vilest of men respected her uniform, which to them was in some vague way associated with the care and healing of the sick. At the moment there was only the injured captain inside the cabin.

As for Philip Cranmere, he spoke their language, and was merely a "foreign devil" who had come to bring a strange religion to their country. Why should he? They thought Ancestor Worship and the burning of sacrificial joss-sticks to hideous idols were good enough for them, that is, if heathen men capable of leading such evil lives acknowledged any religion at all! Anyhow, Philip Cranmere was regarded as the most harmless of the passengers: he had no wealth to loot, they had already satisfied themselves on that point. Besides, he and this young nurse were British subjects. They were trying to save the captain's life—an important point in the eyes

of men who realized that, if they were caught, and the commander died, a serious crime would be laid at their doors.

So Greta knew no fear, even of the bandit with his weapon. As she stood at the door, she could hear the words more clearly; the saloon in which the terrified passengers were huddled was just below, and a ventilator was wide open. She recognized the voice of the singer; it was Philip Cranmere and no other. Surely, too, that was his firm touch upon the piano keys? When he finished a murmur of voices was heard, apparently people were asking for more.

"Of course, if it is your wish," said the young missionary. "It occurred to me some of you might like some of these dear old hymns, not only because of the terrible plight we are in, but because it is Sunday evening."

Sunday evening! Was it possible? Most of them had forgotten it was God's holy day at all.

In the safety and security of the homeland, bells would be ringing out, over hill and dale, people wending their way across green fields and along country lanes to the church where their ancestors had worshipped for centuries past. Others would be hurrying along the streets of towns and cities, to their own places of worship, none daring to make them afraid.

Philip Cranmere struck up some old favourites, and one by one he was joined by the terrified people who were in the hands of pirates.

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me."

Afterwards somebody asked for another, and another.

Jesus, Lover of my soul,  
Let me to Thy bosom fly,  
While the nearer waters roll,  
While the tempest still is high!

Other Refuge have I none,  
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee . . .

Tears filled Greta's eyes: she had never felt more utterly helpless than at that moment. Oh, to have a firm foundation for faith such as Philip Cranmere possessed!

Then came the clear notes of "Cwm Rhondda," and the even more stirring prayer:

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,  
 Pilgrim thro' this barren land.  
 I am weak, but Thou art mighty,  
 Hold me with Thy powerful Hand!  
 Bread of Heaven  
 Feed me till my want is o'er!

Open now, the crystal fountain,  
 Whence the healing waters flow;  
 Let the fiery, cloudy pillar,  
 Lead me all my journey through;  
 Strong Deliverer!  
 Be Thou still my strength and shield!

Then the sound of Philip Cranmere's voice. With one glance at the sleeping captain in his cabin, Greta took a couple of steps nearer the ventilator.

"There are words which bring hope in all times of distress—shall I read them?"

"God is our Refuge and Strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear. The heathen raged, the Kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted. Be still, and know that I am God . . . I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our Refuge.'"

Then Philip Cranmere's voice rose in prayer as he pleaded for deliverance for themselves; for life and healing for the injured captain—yes, he was even praying for the heathen pirates who had them at their mercy, closing with the great petition our Lord Himself bade His disciples use, "Our Father! . . . Thy will be done . . .

Give us this day our daily bread . . . forgive us our trespasses . . . deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, for ever and ever, Amen."

As Greta stepped back to the cabin she almost collided with the young armed pirate who was on sentry guard; was it possible that he, too, had drawn nearer to listen?

Yes, it was certain! For he raised a head that had been bowed as if in reverence, and to Greta's great amazement she saw that his eyes were dim with tears.

"You—understand—English?" she said. He nodded.

"Little . . . Mission . . . School . . . boy," he faltered. "English missee not fear—no hurt—"

At that moment Philip Cranmere appeared. Knowing the desperate character of the pirates he never cared to leave Greta alone on watch in the captain's cabin longer than was necessary.

His face was a study in blank astonishment when he saw that she was apparently conversing with the pirate on guard. Greta gave the man a smile, and stepped into the cabin and when Philip Cranmere had followed her, she closed the door.

"I heard! That young pirate heard too!" she said in a low tone. "The saloon ventilator was just above your head and it was open. That poor fellow who's on guard just now, he crept up to listen . . . his eyes were dim. A pirate in tears! He understood at least a part; he said something about having been a boy in a mission school. Do speak to him."

With an exclamation of surprise the young missionary slipped out of the cabin and closed the door.

For some time afterwards there came the low murmur of voices. When at last Philip Cranmere returned to the cabin his face was a study.

"A real life story; one of the saddest I've ever heard! That chap is quite young still, yet he is in the clutches of

this awful gang of pirates, and cannot escape. It's quite true, he was in a mission school when a boy, in a sea coast village. The pirate horde raided the place, killed without mercy and dragged him off with them. He was too terrified to try and escape. He has grown up with them and been forced to adopt their manner of life. Yet he has never forgotten some of the things he learned at school, and a little of the English he picked up from the missionaries. He is determined to escape, and I have promised to help him if it is at all possible. He says they would kill him on the spot if they knew what he revealed to me of their plans. But he declares we shall not be held captives very much longer. The pirates have been through the ship with a comb and found far less than they expected. Still, they have robbed all the Chinese passengers of more than they care to lose. The officers are being forced at the point of the gun to steer the ship to one of the many lone and hidden harbours where they have their lair. They seem to be able to live unmolested in some almost inaccessible places among the hills.

“As soon as the ship is sighted by other ruffians ashore, they will put off in boats, take off the loot and the robber gang. He does not think they will risk taking any passengers captive, in hopes of ransom. So, very soon we shall be free.”

## CHAPTER IX

### *Freedom*

HE was right. The young Chinese who had become a member of the pirates' gang in spite of himself, had spoken even more truly than he knew.

When morning came, the first streak of dawn revealed the fact that the captured coasting steamer was dropping anchor in an almost land-locked inlet, with a low, rocky shore and range of steeply sloping hills behind.

Apparently the whole bay was deserted. But, no! far from it!

Scarcely had the anchor come to rest in the muddy bed of the inlet than a flock of Chinese sampans appeared apparently from nowhere. These native boats pushed out rapidly towards the captured steamer.

Greta had spent an almost sleepless night, to doze off at last just before morning.

She was awakened at dawn by the sound of voices, and the noise of a great commotion on deck. What could be happening?

She had only half undressed: she had merely to don her uniform to look her usual picture of finished neatness.

There seemed to be a lot of confusion on the deck, but no one barred her progress as she hurried to the captain's cabin, to find Philip Cranmere, who had spent the night with the injured commander, standing at the door.

He drew her inside hastily, saying in anxious tones: "How did you get here? I would have come in search of you, but I was not allowed to leave this cabin. I

expected they would have forced you to remain where you were."

"No one stopped me. I slipped past quickly—they were all shouting and clamouring. What does this mean? What is actually happening?"

"Watch from the port hole," said Philip Cranmere, "but do not let yourself be seen! We are still in danger! This is the pirates' lair, and the rest of the gang came out from the shore."

"Then it is the crisis, the end, and the next few minutes will decide our fate?"

"No! We are in the hands of a God Who is greater in power than all the evil in the world: and we have put our trust in Him! The captain is still sleeping: we can but go on waiting and praying."

Then things began to happen quickly. A sharp order had been given that the passengers were to remain in their cabins at their peril. This was a pitiful reminder that they were still captives in the hands of the pirates who could do with them what they willed. Were these evil men going to carry them off to their lair in the mountains and keep them hidden in caves in utter misery and starvation while demanding a heavy ransom for their release?

So far, there had been no sign that the robbers were bent upon such a desperate step.

The pirates' boats reached the anchored vessel, and other fresh members of the gang swarmed aboard, and gave themselves the run of the ship, ransacking everything again in case their accomplices had missed anything of value. However, they soon satisfied themselves that the silver and specie had been looted, and the unfortunate Chinese passengers stripped of everything of value.

Before very long all the plunder had been dumped into the sampans. Then the pirates themselves tumbled down into their own little boats. Almost before anyone

thought it possible they were heading as fast as possible for the shore.

No doubt it would have been a tremendous satisfaction to the officers and crew of the steamer to have fired a few parting shots at their captors. But the pirates had cleared off with every gun on board the vessel. Just as well, perhaps: anything like retaliation in the way of indiscriminate firing would have brought swift retribution. Possibly the pirates would have returned on board the ship and proceeded to massacre the passengers and crew they had so far spared.

When the very last of the pirate boats had pushed off and was heading towards shore, it seemed far too good to be true that they were free—at last.

The Chief Officer automatically assumed command owing to the Captain's illness. He ordered the anchor to be raised at once, and never was a command more cheerfully and quickly obeyed! Then the passengers, who had been living under the shadow of death for days, tumbled out of their cabins with all speed, some laughing, others hysterical, while the rich Chinese business men who had been ruthlessly robbed were bemoaning the loss of all they had had in their possession.

"Free! Does all this really mean that we are free? Is it possible?"

"Yes! Thank God! It is true. We are free!"

Philip Cranmere's eyes were dim as he touched Greta's hand, and held it for a moment in his own.

"Free," she whispered. "Oh, can it be really true?"

"Really true," said Philip, speaking with emotion, and he led her outside the cabin. There was no sign of a threatening gun now. No armed ruffians were on watch. Passengers who had been at the pirates' mercy for days, were crowding the decks, gazing watchfully, yet thankfully towards the disappearing boats.

Already the ship was turning away from the notorious

bay, and pointing her nose towards her true element, the open sea of freedom.

Speed—speed! to get clean away from the haunt of piracy, where even the beauty of sea and mountain, sky and sunshine seemed to have been made hateful by the vile deeds of evil men.

It seemed as if even the engines were anxious to do their bit in the skilled hands of engineers and firemen. On the bridge the Chief Officer, now in command gave orders, rang the engine room "Full Speed Ahead," studied charts, conferred with his fellow officers, and lost not a moment in rushing away from the dangerous delta where lurked their lawless enemies.

Soon the ship was riding free of the Bay, riding the dancing waves in the morning sunlight, like a joyous bird released from a hated cage. Passengers laughed, sang and joked, and in his cabin the Captain roused from his feverish dreams to rejoice on the glad tidings that the pirates had cleared off; his ship was free, and heading with all speed to safety and shelter. Yet the injured man sank back on his pillows with a groan. It was the first disaster to a ship under his command, and he had spent long years at sea.

Even so, his ship had fared far better than others which had been captured at sea by the gangs of pirates who infested those notorious bays and islets of South China; only the ship's cargo had been looted, and the rich Chinese passengers robbed. Europeans had been carefully left alone. In other cases lives had been ruthlessly sacrificed, and men and women carried off as captives to the pirates' lair to be held to ransom or put to death if the money was not forthcoming.

Now the great urge for speed was upon all the officers and passengers alike. The unfortunate Captain must be rushed to hospital at the nearest port. Such authority as existed must be invoked. The ship must have been

missed days ago, and search begun. Passengers' friends would be frantic, thinking the vessel had been sunk without trace during the recent storm.

"Where will they take us?" said Greta as they snatched a few moments from their watch beside the Captain to pace the deck together, while the dancing waves in the sunshine seemed to be singing their hearts' song of freedom.

"Probably Hong Kong," said Philip Cranmere. "From there you can send a wire to your sister, assuring her of your safety. There may be some delay—formalities connected with the capture of the ship and the looting."

As the day wore on, excitement increased to fever heat. Emancipated from dire peril, and not themselves robbed of their possessions, the European passengers were full of glee. What a tale they would have to tell of being in the hands of notorious pirates for days! Now they were steaming to safety and shelter actually under the British flag; the news had soon passed from lip to lip that Hong Kong was to be their destination, and they reached it with all speed.

News that the coasting steamer was missing had heralded a search, but no tidings had come to hand that the vessel was in the hands of pirates until the robbers left the ship free to go on her way. Then hasty repairs to the radio, which had been damaged by the marauders, enabled the ship to send out the startling news that she had been in pirates' hands, but was now free, and heading for port with all speed.

Never, in all the time of danger, had there been such excitement! As the hours passed, bringing the actual moment of deliverance nearer, the tide of enthusiasm rose higher and higher.

Greta found herself wondering if any of the delighted passengers remembered that in the hour of direst peril, they had seemed very glad to listen to Philip Cranmere,

as he read words of comfort from the Word of God, and had led them in prayer for deliverance. Did they think of that now? No, apparently, not one!

Yes! one! Greta was mistaken. She was standing alone by the taffrail, watching with glad eyes the tumbling seas through which the little coasting steamer was racing at top speed—every knot meaning a greater distance between themselves and the pirates' lair.

A lady passenger came up to Greta, regarding her curiously.

"I think we owe a good deal to you, nurse, for the care you have taken of our poor injured Captain—you and that gentleman named Cranmere! Is he one of your party?"

Greta smiled and shook her head.

"I do not belong to any party—I am merely travelling alone to join my married sister near Chefoo. Mr. Cranmere is a missionary returning to his station in Inland China."

"He was the only one who thought of asking God to save us all!" said the lady, "I wish—I wish I knew him well enough to tell him how much he helped me in that terrible hour! Now, I feel I'd like him to lead us in Thanksgiving to God Who has saved us. Will you ask him?"

"Why, here he is—coming towards us! Do, please tell him yourself; he will be so glad!"

Philip Cranmere's face lit up with joy when the lady stopped him, with her request. No time like the present! So as soon as he knew most of the passengers would be in the saloon he stepped forward and spoke of the lady's suggestion. It met with an immediate response, and as evening fell, voices joined heartily in the general Thanksgiving. Then Philip Cranmere led in prayer, and read the thirty-seventh Psalm. "The Salvation of the righteous is of the Lord . . . The Lord shall help them and deliver them . . . because they trust in Him!"

## CHAPTER X

### *New Friends*

**F**REE! Actually free!  
Greta's heart beat fast as the ship put at last into one of the most beautiful natural harbours in the world. Lovely little bays with beaches of creamy sand ran down to the crystal clear sea; while houses of the white residents rose on steep slopes in the background.

What a reception awaited the people who had passed through such a racking experience! The vessel had been reported missing, so the excitement and relief were great indeed. Reporters armed with notebooks swarmed on the quay, and cameras clicked. But over and above all there was the pompous protective flutter of gold lace and buttons, as officials in uniform swarmed aboard, determined to have the first say.

As for hospitality, it was overwhelming! No need for Greta to go ashore and put up by herself at a strange hotel. Unknown to her, Philip Cranmere had sent a message by radio to a missionary friend mentioning that he was on board the captured steamer, and might be in port a few days; also, that among his fellow passengers was an English lady travelling alone.

To an exiled Britisher the world over that would be enough. Once the arrival of the escaped steamer had been heralded, both Mr. and Mrs. Surrey set out from their little bungalow in the small, well-worn car they used for their work, and rushed into the city with all speed. They would not hear of Philip Cranmere remaining on board the escaped steamer while formalities were completed and the vessel re-coaled. Once he had

seen the injured Captain safely in hospital he must come and put in the time at their bungalow. As for Greta Guildford, she was whisked away to their home at once, and felt that a greater welcome could scarcely have awaited her had she been Mrs. Surrey's own sister. It was well for Greta, too, that she could have her first glimpse of China in the company of people who had spent long years in the interior of the vast country.

Shops with elaborate and unknown signs, and crowds of Chinese in the streets told her she was in a foreign land. Yet many of the wares displayed were European.

It seemed like the awakening from a terrible nightmare to find herself sitting down to a well-served meal in a simple Christian home that might well have been in England, not China, save for the native servants, addressed in the unfamiliar "pidgin" English by her hosts.

But Greta felt strangely out of it all when Philip Cranmere joined them, after waiting to hear the report of the doctor on the Captain's condition.

"They have operated and extracted the bullet: there is hope that he will pull through now," he said in a tone of relief, "thanks under God to your skilful nursing, Miss Guildford."

"My experience was too short for me to have a great deal of knowledge for such a critical case. I only did what I could."

"None of us can do more than that," said Mr. Surrey. "Don't you remember that the very highest praise the Lord Jesus ever gave to anyone was to a woman: 'She hath done what she could!?' None can do more than that."

Greta was silent and her eyes dimmed. The conversation became general, save for herself. The exigencies and difficulties of missionary work: the joys and successes, triumphs of the Cross, and disappointments over those who, having once turned towards Christ,

had shrunk from the hardness of the Narrow Way, and "walked no more with Him." Saddest of all was the realization that the greatest stumbling block in their way was often the lives of the Europeans around them, so-called Christians who had merely a name to live, but were dead. Business, money-making, pleasure seeking, and irresponsible gaiety, apparently made up the sum total of the lives of most of them, far away from the restraints of home.

Then came prayers, which Philip Cranmere was asked to conduct. Surely there was a new ring of joy in his voice as he read the familiar triumph song of those released from a horrible captivity.

"When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter and our tongue with singing. Then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them. The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad!"

"That is true," said Mrs. Surrey when, after prayer, they rose from their knees. "You have had a greater deliverance than you can realize! When we were waiting for your steamer in the Bund, we heard people marvelling at your escape: telling terrible stories of what had happened to other captured ships. You, Miss Guildford, as a novice to everything Chinese, can hardly realize what an escape you had! Now," added the hostess briskly, "you have not had a proper night's sleep for days, I am sure, what with helping to nurse the poor Captain, and realizing you were in the hands of pirates. Come with me, and let me see you settled for the night."

Mrs. Surrey linked her arm in Greta's, and led her into a little room simply furnished in English fashion.

"Our 'prophet's chamber,'" she said smiling. "Many of the Lord's prophets have had a good night's rest here.

There is very little more in it than the great woman of Shunem provided for Elisha in the room she prepared for him." Greta looked a trifle puzzled, to Mrs. Surrey's surprise.

"Why, don't you remember? The little room upon the wall, furnished with just a bed, a table, a stool, and a candlestick. And what a reward she had, the son that every Eastern woman longed for. Well, we have a son, and a dear little daughter, but they are at school in England. That is one of the hardest things a missionary mother has to bear—being separated from her children during the most critical years of their lives.

"Now, my dear, sit down a minute, and tell me about yourself. I don't know anything of you except your name, and that you were Philip Cranmere's fellow passenger on the captured coasting vessel. Do you belong to the same Missionary Society as he does, and are you on your way to the same Station?"

"No! oh, no."

Suddenly Greta's eyes dimmed and she burst into tears.

Mrs. Surrey sat down beside her, and placing her arm round the shaking form she drew the girl's head down upon her own shoulder.

Realizing the strain that the experience of the last few days must have been to a new comer to the land of mystery and strife, Mrs. Surrey let the girl sob unrestrainedly for a few moments, knowing how often tears bring relief.

At last Greta wiped her eyes, and sitting upright faltered: "Oh, how foolish you must think me, Mrs. Surrey! But I have felt to-night that I am accepting all your kindness under false pretences, and your taking it for granted that I was a fellow missionary was just the last straw! It broke me down completely. I think Mr. Cranmere knows; he must, by this time. Far from being a missionary, I am not—am not—"

Greta could get no further: tears overflowed.

"You are trying to tell me that you have not even surrendered yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ as yet?" said Mrs. Surrey gently. "If so, you cannot of course claim the immense privilege, given to those who belong to Him, of giving the glorious Gospel for a witness to those who have never heard His Name! But, my dear, why hesitate a moment longer? Christ has said, 'Come'—you have only to accept His invitation, and take Him at His Word. His sacrifice for sin upon the Cross of Calvary avails for you!"

"Somehow it is all dark! I can't seem to realize it is for me. All my life has been spent for everything so different, and yet—and yet I was never really satisfied. Will you let me tell you about it?"

So the two Englishwomen who had met under strange circumstances in far off China, settled down for a quiet hour together, and Greta told her story. The quiet, provincial town where she and her twin sister Gay had been brought up by a well-to-do aunt, who saw to it that they had their full share of any local amusement and pleasure seeking: their determination after her death to find out for themselves what life in London had to offer them. Then had come Gay's whirlwind courtship and marriage to Brian Audley, the son of one of the best known European business men in China, and her hurried departure for the great unknown land. A word of suggestion from her new-made brother-in-law—the only time she had known Brian Audley to speak seriously—had led to her entering St. Rhoda's for the intensive course of training they offered in special cases. Then she had started to join her sister Gay.

"How wonderful it seems too, that you were able to help in that terrible emergency on the coasting steamer when the pirates shot down the captain! Besides, it led to you being thrown into Philip Cranmere's company

more or less, and he is one of the finest men, and most whole-hearted missionaries I have ever met. You cannot have been in contact with him during this terrible adventure without being tremendously influenced by the power of his consecrated life."

Greta nodded. For the moment words were denied her. Not even to herself had she admitted how great his influence had been. Yet in her heart of hearts Greta was fully determined that if ever she made the same great decision which Philip Cranmere and his friends had made, it should not be because of the power exercised by any other human being, but simply and solely a surrender to the paramount claims of Christ.

In this Greta was right.

Long after her kindly hostess had bidden her good night Greta lay awake, thinking, thinking over it all. By how strange a way had she been led: what lay before her now?

How wonderful it seemed to be resting in peace in a comfortable room, after the terrible nights and days through which she had passed, listening to the soft murmur of the wind in the trees, instead of the raucous voices of armed desperadoes, and the roar of an angry sea.

"I feel I am a fraud to be staying as the guest of missionaries. Why am I always coming in contact with them? Is there some purpose in it all? First, Margaret Kent, one of the gayest and giddiest of girls when we were at school together. How horrified she was to meet me outside that night club, Thames Royal! and I was equally startled to learn that she had consecrated her life to Christ and China, and had been that very day accepted as a missionary! Then my training at St. Rhoda's, due to the words of Brian Audley spoken almost by chance; no, it couldn't have been chance. How well I remembered his words, those words from a man of the world! 'After all, dancing and cocktails

aren't much preparation for facing the facts of life, when you're up against them."

Brian had been right; how right, he and his girl-wife Gay were already finding out.

"Yet I am out of it all," Greta sighs as she lay tossing in the darkness. "When I join Gay at last after all this delay, I shall be drawn into just such a circle of pleasure seeking and amusement as before—if she is well enough. Will it satisfy me again now I have had a glimpse of something quite different? I wonder, yet I know in my heart I am still outside. These people have something which I do not possess."

At long last Greta fell asleep, to be awakened to the bright sunshine of another morning. Mrs. Surrey was standing smiling by her side, with a dainty breakfast tray in her hands.

"Oh, is it late? Have I overslept?" cried Greta, springing up. "Why didn't you have me called? I am so sorry."

"Why sorry? You need all the rest you can have after those terrible nights when the vessel was in the pirates' hands. Besides, I expect you did not fall asleep easily in a strange country. Look, here is a cable for you. Mr. Cranmere has been down to the ship's offices."

"A cable? Oh, it must be from Gay, my twin sister. I sent her a message I was safe. Oh!"

Greta tore it open and her face blanched.

It was not from Gay. It was from Brian.

"Your cable has relieved our anxiety. Hurry on here at once. Gay dangerously ill. Brian."

"Gay! Gay! dangerously ill! Oh, I must go to her at once. How soon can I start?"

Greta sprang up, and began to dress in frantic haste.

Mrs. Surrey laid a gentle hand upon her arm, and led her to a basket chair, placing the forgotten breakfast tray on a little table by her side.

"There is no chance of a steamer to the North till later in the day. Without any idea of the sad news contained in your cable, Mr. Cranmere knew how anxious you would be to get on as quickly as possible, and he made inquiries when he was down at the offices. My dear! your cup has indeed been filled full to overflowing; you have already suffered so much. Your sister—was she all right when you last had news?"

"As—as well as one could expect," said Greta in a low tone, "she seemed to be having a right busy time of fun and amusement, as she always did. And yet—" Greta's voice broke, "she mentioned that before long she would be going into the European Hospital where she had booked a private ward. You see—she—they—were looking forward to having a little Gay—or Brian—of their own!"

Mrs. Surrey's eyes were dim with sympathy and understanding.

"My dear!" she laid her hand tenderly on Greta's bowed head, "If she is there, she is in good hands: I know that hospital by repute. Above all, she is in the hands of God! We will pray for her—here and now!"

Greta would never forget Mrs. Surrey's tender words of pleading—for Gay, and for Greta herself, who had come half across the world to join her twin sister in a strange land. When they rose from their knees the kindly missionary said: "Now, the best way you can help your dear sister is by keeping up your own strength till you join her. You positively must have this meal I prepared for you. Then, write out a message to be cabled to your sister's husband. We will see it goes—and as soon as ever the coasting steamer is available, we will ourselves go down with you to the ship!"

"Oh!" cried Greta impulsively, taking her hostess' hands in her own, "you are good to me! I shall never forget your kindness—never!"

## CHAPTER XI

### *With Gay at Last*

**G**AY! Could this possibly be Gay, her bright, mirth-loving twin sister, bubbling over with excitement and laughter?

No . . . No . . . it couldn't be! There must be some appalling mistake. Gay? Why the real Gay she knew would have come to meet Greta, dancing in joyous abandon as was her wont, throwing her arms about her sister's neck, crying aloud her delight. Joy at this reunion would have been all the greater after over a year of separation, followed by days of torturing anxiety, when the coastal steamer from Shanghai had not arrived in port and nothing could be heard of it.

The appalling news that they had been captured by pirates was followed soon afterwards by Greta's reassuring message announcing her safety, but that she was now far to the South in Hong Kong waiting till she could once more join a coasting steamer and come to her sister.

There had been delays: a tedious journey—happily this time without untoward accidents or interference. When at last Greta arrived at Pei-tai, the Northern coast resort where Gay was staying, she found awaiting her a broken distracted man she hardly recognized as debonair, irresponsible Brian.

"Gay!" she faltered, forgetful of all else when she saw the look of agony on Brian's grey, drawn face. "Oh. Brian, Gay!—is she—is she—"

"Just alive, and that's all," he said brokenly, "it's hardly possible she may pull through; all depends

whether her strength will hold out a little longer. Oh, Greta, why did it happen? My beautiful, laughter-loving Gay! The baby?" he added, reading Greta's unspoken question in her anguished eyes. "Oh, it died. They could not save them both. It is only Gay who matters now—she is all my world: I shall not want to go on living if——"

His voice broke and Greta managed to sob out: "Where?"

"Hospital, of course. European doctors—good nurses—that's why we came to Pei-tai Beach—to be near."

Brian pulled himself together with an effort, and turned to his "boy" waiting in the rear.

"You catchee one piece rickshaw. Then takee missec cases bungalow. Missee come by and by chop chop."

The quaint pidgin English would have made Greta smile under different circumstances. As it was she scarcely noticed the novelty of even the rickshaw ride along the front, and through the strange streets of one of China's favourite seaside resorts for Europeans.

"Gay! Gay! I must be with Gay! Take me to her quickly, oh, quick! Oh, God, save her, save her,"

She cried out of the torture of her heart. Greta had never known the real meaning of prayer until the last terrible days.

At last the beautiful little European hospital, the quiet, shaded room—and Gay!

But what a meeting after the long, long year of parting! Gay? Her face white well nigh as the snowy pillow, her features drawn with pain, her eyes dark and shadowed by fierce suffering. Was it possible this was the same girl who, radiant with pulsing life and overflowing in joyous excitement, had waved her sister "good-bye" from the liner *Princess Elizabeth*, little more than a year ago?

Overwhelmed as she was with fear lest Gay was

at the very point of death, Greta knew well enough that for her this was not the hour for strong emotion. She must not, dared not give way.

Quietly she stepped forward and sank on her knees beside her sister.

Gay had opened her eyes and closed them again: she seemed scarcely conscious of the arrival of her twin whom she had last seen half the world away.

Greta laid her hand on the chill fingers that rested on the bedspread and whispered softly: "Gay! Gay! It's Greta! I'm here at last, darling!"

The closed eyes opened again. A ghost of a smile flitted across Gay's waxen face.

"Greta . . . at last . . . save me—I'm sinking—down—down." Her fingers closed on Greta's hand and held it fast, then once more her eyes closed. Greta knelt motionless fearing to move. But was this natural sleep, which the poor young wife needed so much? or was it . . . ?

Greta dared not try to think. She just knelt there, hand clasped in hand. How long she never knew. But by and by the Sister stepped up and motioned to her to disengage Gay's clinging finger.

She drew the grief-stricken girl away. Greta's eyes were full of agony. She could only whisper the question, "Gone?"

"Gone?" the kindly English sister smiled. "No, oh, no! We have heard how brave you were helping to nurse the injured Captain. Surely you saw that she has at last dropped into restful, natural sleep—sleep that may mean life, not death! Poor little Mrs. Audley. What she has suffered! No one but herself will ever know. It may be your coming has made all the difference. She was almost gone a few hours ago . . . we tried to make her understand that you would soon be here, and it seemed as if she made an effort to pull herself back from the

very gates of death. It is said, you know, that there is sometimes a strange sympathy between twins. At any rate, your coming has brought about one thing we longed for her—sleep.”

“Let me be with her as much as possible,” pleaded Greta. “Why, why was her case so serious? She seemed so full of life: so strong.”

The Sister looked at Greta keenly and shrugged her shoulders.

“Not so strong as she herself imagined! May I speak quite plainly for her sake? You have had some training, you will understand. If—when—she recovers, it will be up to you to try and persuade her to look differently upon the life that should be led by a young wife—and mother—in a new country and a strange climate. You see, she was bubbling over with the love of pleasure, and in her home in the interior she had not had very much chance of gay doings. When she came down here she flung herself into all the fun and amusement going. Mr. Audley took one of those delightful bungalows close to the beach, where hundreds of Europeans spend their summer crowding every possible amusement into each hour of the day—cocktails, cards, and then dancing, and a hectic time, half the night. Mrs. Audley flung herself into all, going the pace with the gayest of the gay, when she ought to have taken great care of herself, and rested quietly. Consequently she was terribly ill-fitted to face all that she had to go through. We never thought she could live. As it is it will be a very long time——”

The kindly, wise Sister of the hospital was right. Gay slept on for hours—health-bringing, life-giving sleep. Greta was told to go away and return again, so Brian took her to the delightful bungalow just above the shore where women by the hundred were laughing and splashing gaily in the sunlit sea or strolling the front in the showiest and most daring beach attire.

Somehow their hectic boisterousness and irresponsible abandon stabbed Greta to the heart. She could not forget the words of the English nursing Sister. She could well believe Gay had flitted like a butterfly from pleasure to pleasure: flinging herself headlong into every amusement offered by the presence of their fellow Europeans, all bent on getting the most out of life. Some of them, like Gay, lived in the great Chinese cities of the interior, wives of European officials and business men, all of them out for a hectic life of gaiety.

Gay had gone the pace with the rest, and gone further than the rest. But why?

It was not for some time that Greta learned the reason, though she had guessed it all along.

At length they told her that her coming had meant the turning of the corner for poor suffering Gay. She had been at the very point of death before the arrival of her sister. That mysterious and inexplicable link between twins had apparently been proved once again. The touch of Greta's hand holding fast to the dying girl's clinging finger, the consciousness of her presence by her side, had done what skilled attention, and Brian's devoted love, had failed to do.

Soothed by Greta's presence and the touch of her hand, Gay had dropped at last into natural sleep. From that moment it seemed as if the ebbing tide of Gay's young life was checked in its outgoing. Slowly, very slowly, the tide turned once again, and Gay came back from the gates of death.

For a long time she was far too ill to talk, too weak to do more than be content with the presence of Greta, or Brian himself, by her side.

Then there came a great day of rejoicing; a glad day when Gay was able to be taken back to the pretty bungalow beside the sea. Even then she had no strength to walk, no longing to join the merry, carefree women who

splashed in and out of the sea, only a few yards away. It was enough for her to lie still upon the broad, shady verandah and content herself with merely a nod and a smile to the women she knew, who ran in for a passing word—formal calls were out of the question yet.

“I—I don’t feel I want them now,” Gay said piteously one day, “their fun and chatter make me tired. It’s all so—so empty. Yet only a little while ago I was the maddest and the merriest of them all. And now I’m too tired even to think!”

“Why did you go the pace with the rest when you should have taken care and rested, Gay?”

Gay looked at her sister with haunted, startled eyes, eyes that looked bigger than ever, now that the lustre and sparkle had gone from them.

“Why, Greta, didn’t you guess? I knew—I knew I must soon go down very near to the Valley of the Shadow, and I—I wanted to forget all that might be . . . I just went the pace to hide my fears. I knew . . . I knew I wasn’t ready to die! Oh, Greta, when, after all, I found I was going to live, you don’t know what it meant. Life—life once more for me, but I don’t feel I want to join the giddy crowd again—yet—cocktails, dancing, racing talk. Somehow, when you are face to face with death it seems so—so worthless!”

“I’ve learned that too,” whispered Greta, “I have been led by strange paths to see things in their true perspective, to discover their real values, and the worthlessness of the rest.”

“Gay, I have something to show you. After you were married I decided to go to St. Rhoda’s Hospital to get some training; it was Brian’s suggestion, as you know. I sent for some of the old trunks that were stored rather hurriedly with our furniture, to go through them in case there was anything of importance. There certainly was! At the very bottom of one of our aunt’s trunks

was an old wallet. It bore our mother's initials . . . I think aunt must have forgotten there was a letter intended for us when we were grown up."

"A letter for us?"

Greta nodded, and leaving Gay on her couch in the shady verandah above the sea, she went into her own room.

A moment later she came back holding a letter in her hands. She showed Gay the words written on the envelope by their long-lost mother:

"To my twin daughters, to be given them when they reach maturity."

Gay drew the letter from the envelope and read it—not once, but twice.

Greta sat beside her, with her hands clasped about her knees, watching the crowd of merry-makers in the sea or strolling on the shore. Snatches of a babel of European tongues reached her, the chatter of people living aimless lives. The betting on the races in England, France, America, or local sports . . . flirtation, the latest scandal, the newest jazz, the next big dance, cocktail party . . .

Once Greta could have entered into it with all imaginable zest. But her eyes had been opened to see how little it all amounted to, how terrible and lasting indeed, were the results of this mad and hectic going the pace—and calling it "Life!"

Not only in London during her hospital training, but since her coming to the East, had Greta seen the terrible results of hard drinking, late hours; the exhausting, restless life which could not be continued without artificial aid, and so the jaded seeker of so-called pleasure had recourse to drugs.

Even poor, laughter-loving Gay had had to pay a terrible price. Though she had escaped death by a hair's breadth it was doubtful whether she would ever be her old bright self again.

Suddenly Gay laid down their mother's letter and her voice was a sob as she spoke.

"Greta! You found this while I was on my way out here as a bride. Why did you not tell me?"

Greta pointed to the last sentence in the letter.

"Would you have taken any notice of it then, Gay? You were too full of zest for life and joy. You would only have looked upon it with awe, as a message from beyond the grave, and forgotten it as soon. I found it just when I had begun to realize that all this fun and frolic is like dust and ashes in one's mouth—at the end. The Way is not clear to me yet—even now. Our mother's letter came into my hands, and now it has come into your hands just when she says, 'At God's right time' . . ."

The twin sisters were silent . . . their hearts were very full.

"Greta!" she said abruptly, "I've been most awfully selfish. I've asked you so little—in fact, nothing, about your terrible experience when the pirates captured you. I've just been occupied with myself, I'm afraid! You only gave us the bare facts. Do let me hear the whole story."

"There's not a very great deal more to tell—beyond what you know!"

Just then Brian Audley appeared, and dropped into a chair beside them. He had arrived in time to hear his young wife's question, and Greta's reply. "That's right!" he said, "I'm more than interested, too. By all accounts, Greta, you came into the limelight more than you expected—and the injured Captain probably owes you his life!"

"No, Brian—under God, it's owing to you. You suggested I should get some idea of what to do in illness, before coming to a country where one might be far from help."

However, Greta took up the story of those fateful days, and told it in greater detail than she had done before—saying how much more was really due to the courage and example of the English missionary who was on board.

Not until the story was fully told did Gay and Brian realize just how terrible an experience it had been!

A day or two later the girls were together on the verandah as usual, when Brian Audley appeared, coming along the shore road. He joined the two girls, kissed his wife tenderly and looked at her with anxious eyes.

“Feeling a bit more fit, Gay? Do you think we shall be able to get back home to Tang-Chu next week? I ought to be there—business is not going very well in my absence, and I’d like you to be settled at home before the cold weather begins. It’s a long journey, part of the way by rail, and part in our own car. Besides, our tenancy of this bungalow ends then, and we don’t want to stay on by the sea when the autumn comes.”

“I think I can manage it,” Gay smiled reassuringly, “with you two dear people to look after me.”

Brian turned suddenly to Greta.

“By the way, who was that missionary whose name you mentioned? The one who was on the steamer when the pirates captured you all, and helped you nurse the Captain?”

“Mr. Philip Cranmere.” Greta’s voice faltered in spite of herself. “Why—what—”

“Bad news, I’m afraid! Poor fellow, he’d hardly got back to his station in Inland China, when the city was invaded by a horde of bandits. Cranmere and one of his companions were carried off as prisoners. They are held to ransom in the robbers’ caves somewhere in the mountains!”

## CHAPTER XII

### *Tang-Chu*

TANG-CHU at last!

To Greta the journey inland from the beautiful coast resort would have held all the joy of sheer novelty, had it not been for the terrible blow Brian Audley had unconsciously dealt his young sister-in-law.

Delivered, like herself, from the pirates, Philip Cranmere was now a prisoner in the hands of the notorious Chinese bandits, carried off to the mountains to be half-starved perhaps, or wholly starved. He might undergo nameless tortures and, in the end, suffer a shameful and dreadful death, if the ransom demanded by the robbers were not forthcoming.

Nor would the huge sum of money the bandits demanded be paid: Greta felt quite sure of that!

During one of their many quiet talks on board the captured steamer, while they shared the watch beside the injured Captain, knowing not whether the pirates would take them to their lair and hold them to ransom, Philip Cranmere had expressed himself emphatically upon that point, as regarded the great Missionary Society to which he himself belonged. He, and the other missionaries themselves, had been quite definitely united in a decision to urge their own Society never to pay, or consent to the payment of, the vast sums demanded by these marauding bands of robbers which infested China. To place a big fortune in the hands of these devil-ridden men in order to set one or two captives free would be to encourage them to make fresh raids on other towns, capturing more innocent citizens and foreigners

whom they imagined had limitless wealth behind them.

The missionaries concerned, knowing they were in the hands of God, their lives given to serve Him even unto death, would choose to suffer martyrdom, if need be, rather than put temptation in the way of the hordes of robbers to capture still more missionaries.

So with a sinking heart, Greta realized that there was no likelihood of emancipation for Philip Cranmere by way of ransom . . . he would be the first to say, "No!"

But if not?—well, terrible possibilities opened up to the imagination of anyone who cared for him, possibilities of which Greta dared not think.

For Greta did care—care far more than she had so far dared to whisper to herself, even in the secret of her own heart.

Philip Cranmere was one of the unexpected forces which had recently come into her own life, bringing an awakening which was wholly new and strange, and he had been the most powerful influence of all.

Yet, she knew quite well that she had no right to care for him at all! He was a servant of God, fearless, devoted, wholly consecrated to the One to Whose service his life was pledged. Were it possible for him to guess the secret of Greta's heart, he would not—could not feel free to care for her in return. No, if ever he chose a wife to share the hardships and difficulties of his life in China, it would have to be a woman who shared his own devotion to his Lord, and also was fitted for the same great work. Had she not once heard him read some words upon which he seemed to lay special emphasis?: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers . . ." and, "Can two walk together except they be agreed?"

That would settle it, as far as Philip Cranmere was concerned, in relation to herself. Not that he had given Greta cause to think he regarded her as anything

more than a friend thrown across his path under strange circumstances.

He had not suggested meeting her when they parted, and she came at last to join Gay at Pei-tai. She knew he was hoping to get back to his station farther up in the interior than Tang-Chu itself.

Now had come news, terrible news indeed! The town where he lived had been raided by a horde of desperadoes who had ransacked and looted everything, and carried Philip Cranmere and others away into a horrible captivity.

So the journey inland was for Greta a time of torturing anxiety, her one great concern being to conceal her misery from her sister and Brian Audley. Perhaps it was a good thing for her sake that Gay was still so weak and listless that she needed a good deal of attention.

During the journey, of course, Greta had every excuse for keeping her head turned towards the carriage windows, to watch the strange panorama of endless fields, green plains and countless mulberry trees, so none could see her threatened tears.

Then came Peking, now called Peiping, filled to the full with the glamour of ancient history—history of a people who were cultured and learned in the far back ages, when Britain was the home of prehistoric man.

There was so much to see, so much to do, and so little time to do it in! But for the continued stream of rickshaws, drawn by half-naked coolies, Greta felt that in some ways part of the Chinese city was as modernized as London. Yet the odd clash of sounds of East mingling with West was heard, the grunts of strings of Mongolian camels from the desert mingling with the klaxons of up-to-date motor cars, the creaking of clumsy mule carts and what not. The great many-storeyed modern hotel where they spent the night, actually overlooked part of the vast range of old Imperial palaces, with their

enormous encircling walls, blue pagoda, gleaming lakes and the golden-yellow roofs of the Forbidden City itself.

Once it would have meant torture and death for a foreigner to walk round these glittering palaces and gaze on the treasures of Ming porcelain, jade, and marble.

Yet even the wonder of it all left Greta cold. What was the use of all this ancient and wasteful splendour in a country which could not grow enough food to keep its terribly overcrowded millions from starving? How could she enjoy all the luxuries of a modern hotel when Philip Cranmere, kept prisoner by the bandits far up in the interior, might be denied even a mouthful of rice or a share of the unappetizing fare devoured by the robbers themselves?

Greta was glad when they left the former Imperial City of Wonders behind them, though by and by they had to leave the train, and continue the journey, first by one of the great river boats, and then in Brian's own motor car.

This part of the journey was a veritable nightmare in some places, where the roads were tracks full of ruts and holes.

At last—Tang-Chu, one of the great walled cities of the interior, where the mercantile firm of Audley had a flourishing branch business.

"Home! Oh, how glad I am to be once more at home!" said Gay wearily, as Brian drew her arm through his and she walked with still feeble steps into the big Chinese mansion which had been modernized to meet European taste.

The huge square courtyard was shaded by mulberry trees, and the cool splashing of a fountain in a marble basin set in a grass plot and flower beds made one forget the dust and heat of the long road journey.

The courtyard was surrounded by the living rooms,

which were well furnished to accord, as far as possible, with English taste and given delightful homely touches by Gay herself.

The courtyard led into others, the kitchen quarters, and rooms where the servants lived. Altogether, the place formed a self-contained compound of considerable size entered, however, by only one central gate.

"A useful precaution—no back door for bandits to sneak in before we know where we are," said Brian gaily, little thinking how much that great gate would come to mean to them some day.

As it happened, Greta had little time at first to take notice of her surroundings, strange and full of interest though they were.

The trying journey from the coast back to her home at Tang-Chu, proved to have been too much for Gay.

At first the excitement and pleasure of being once more in her lovely home had seemed to lead to some improvement in Gay's strength. Then there came a night that Greta would never forget. Midnight had come and gone. A knock at her door, the sound of Brian Audley's voice—agitated, anxious—persistent.

"Greta! Greta! quick! Can you come! Gay is ill—very ill! She seems unconscious: I can't rouse her!"

"She is not—not—?" he faltered.

"No—not dead, or even dying," said Greta quietly, "we have had cases like this at St. Rhoda's. The journey was too much for her—I was afraid of a collapse. Just fetch—" Brian hurried off, and soon Greta heard the sounds of commotion as the Chinese boys were wakened to do his bidding. But it was not long before Gay came round—and even then her sister saw just how much more care would be needed. When at last she was sleeping quietly, Brian took his sister-in-law's hand and said fervently. "Thank God, Greta, that you were here to-night!"

## CHAPTER XIII

### *Unexpected Guests*

GRETA was never likely to forget those early weeks in her sister's home in the city of Tang-Chu.

All was strange and unfamiliar, both inside and outside Brian Audley's home. There was so much to see, so much to learn concerning new ways and a new country, far from the more or less westernized parts of China of which she had had just a glimpse.

It was not until some little time later, when Gay was able to be about again, that Greta really had time to spare to make a tour of inspection of the big buildings round the compound. As they passed the Great Gate, Brian's words concerning bandits came back to her.

"Your one big gate looks solid enough even to keep out bandits," she said.

Gay had been left to rest. Brian was showing his sister-in-law round his spacious Chinese home.

Greta's thoughts flew to Philip Cranmere, a captive in the robbers' hands.

"Surely you stand in no danger of them coming here?"

"There are some notorious bands in the mountains, a few days' journey beyond the city wall: it is rumoured they have become more daring while we have been down at the coast resort. I ought not to have stayed away so long—business has suffered. But, of course, Gay was my first consideration. Now I almost wish I had left her behind with you to keep her company. Not at Pei-tai, for those summer bungalows by the sea would not be habitable in a North China winter."

"She would never have consented to that, Brian," said Greta quickly.

"No, I'm afraid not, and I didn't really know how much unrest there was in the country round here till we came back to Tang-Chu. Now I have seen my staff, and heard some of the rumours that are going about outside the city, and what is more than mere rumour, news brought in by the men of the mule and camel caravans on the trade routes. The Hunghutze—bandits—are getting busy again."

"Mr. Cranmere," faltered Greta, "have you heard anything of him?"

Brian Audley shook his head.

"Nothing definite. His mission station was wrecked and the whole town looted, when he was carried off. Where—nobody knows. Not a word of this to Gay, mind, Greta."

Brian Audley added hastily: "She is still so frail and weak, and doesn't seem to regain strength as she should. Other women—"

"Other women rest and take care of themselves when they should. Gay did not," said Greta gently. "No, I am not giving you my own opinion, though Gay has been all the world to me all my life. It was that nice Sister at the hospital who told me quite plainly why Gay was so ill. She just went the pace night and day like other pleasure-loving women at Pei-tai, and so wore herself out completely, though she did not know it."

"She was always true to her name—Gay," said the young husband with a sigh, "and I was not with her all the time at that lively watering place; I had to be at Tientsin and Peiping on business a good many times. I must say I wondered however Gay had the strength to go through with it all; she seemed to live on the crest of a wave of seething excitement—so did I, as a matter of fact, when I was with her at the bungalow. I thought it must be good for her."

"All that razzle-dazzle and drinking, cards, and

dancing, races, theatricals, and—for most of them—loafing on the shore and roaming the front in beach attire, when not actually in the sea? I know the dry climate is exhilarating, but Nature exacts a penalty on people who never rest. The doctors out here say many women break down completely because they allow themselves no relaxation! Once I was pretty well as fond of fun as Gay, but I could never have stood such an endless round of night and day dissipation. Did you ever guess why Gay went the pace like that, why she joined in it all?”

“Why—no! Only that she was bent on enjoying herself.”

“It was not only that,” said Greta quietly, “Gay was afraid—afraid of what the future might hold for her: afraid of death. Her mad quest of pleasure was to prevent her having time to think, because she refused to think. Well, in the end she escaped with her life, but it will be a long time before she is her old self again—if ever!”

Suddenly Brian Audley stopped short and looked at his sister-in-law keenly.

“I say, Greta! You’re different, very different from the girl I first met in London. What has made you so changed?”

“You—partly!” was Greta’s surprising answer. “Yes, I mean it! Do you remember that night you took us to the Thames Royal Club? By the way, Brian, you were a stranger and didn’t know it, but it was not the sort of place to take two young girls like Gay and myself. I wandered outside the grounds to escape from that man you introduced me to as dancing partner, and I ran into an old schoolfellow, Margaret Kent. She had just been accepted as a missionary to China: I wonder if she’s out here somewhere in this vast country? It gave me a shock—the appalling contrast between that champagne

drinking razzle-dazzle crowd at that club, and the devoted useful life of a missionary.”

“Then, when you and Gay sailed for China you said something which made me think still more deeply. You asked me to consider the idea of coming out here. You asked me if it would be possible to pick up a bit of nursing knowledge, and you added: ‘After all, dancing and cocktails aren’t much preparation for facing the hard facts of life when you’re up against them!’ Brian, those words sent me to take that short intensive course of training at St. Rhoda’s—and how useful even the little knowledge I had gained came in when I helped to nurse the Captain on the captured steamer. Once again I was thrown into the company of another devoted missionary! Now he, Mr. Cranmere, is a prisoner again in those dreadful bandits’ hands! We—we may never know his fate.”

Greta’s voice faltered in spite of herself.

“Then I suppose,” said Brian slowly, “you have been what religious people call converted?”

“Oh, no! I—I can’t say that!” said Greta sadly, “I wish—I wish I could. I seem all at a loss: I have lost my old standing ground in life, when I thought pleasure satisfied. I have learned that it is merely living on the hollow crust of a volcano, which lets you down the moment real troubles arise! Yet I have not found for myself as yet that firm foundation people like Margaret Kent and Philip Cranmere talk about.”

“I don’t know anything about such things, never gave them a thought till now. But you seem very near it all,” said Brian seriously, “surely it is only a step from realizing that you are on ‘hollow ground,’ as you say, to getting on to something firm and solid—terra-firma, in fact.”

“God’s terra-firma,” said Greta with a sigh. “Oh, Brian, I just long for that more than anything—peace,

real peace and joy—not cocktails and jazz and cards, but a firm foundation for time and for eternity!”

“What are you two people talking about so seriously?” A voice from the verandah floated out to them as they stood in the shade of the mulberry trees.

Gay was standing there, and in spite of the smile on her wan, thin features, there was a note of anxiety in her voice. “Brian! I want you—and you, Greta! Our ‘boy’ Koo, has just been in and his face registers as much terror as if he had seen a hostile army! He said:

“Mississee run coast one time! Hunghutze! Hunghutze catchee mississee—come! . . . Man—womans run—one time—come Tang-Chu.’ Whatever is he trying to talk about?”

Brian understood well enough! He uttered an exclamation of dismay and strode off across the courtyard towards that part of the compound where the servants lived.

“Go in, Gay, I’m just going to tell Koo not to come to you with his tales.”

But there had been a look of anxiety on Brian’s face that had not escaped Greta.

When he returned some time later, Gay had gone indoors; Greta was alone on the verandah.

“I say, Greta,” he said in a low voice, “keep it from Gay as long as you can, but there’s trouble ahead—the Hunghutze—bandits—have swarmed down from the hills, and have sprung a surprise on the people not far off!”

“Not far off?” Greta’s face blanched. “Brian, *you* surely can’t mean that they are coming *here*?”

“Pretty near, I’m afraid! You heard what Gay said? Happily, Koo’s pidgin English did not convey a great deal to her! But I’ve asked him the ins and outs of it—in Chinese, of course, and found out where he got his information. . . . A mule cart caravan from across the

Gobi Desert arrived here yesterday, having narrowly escaped capture by the bandits. As it was, they came through villages that had been looted and pillaged, and gave a wide berth to some small towns where the robbers were in possession. At one or two of the last places they passed, they heard that the 'foreign devils' were escaping, guessing the fate that would await them, for these fellows imagine that all Europeans have the wealth of Croesus behind them, if held to ransom. They know better than to take many prisoners from among their half-starved fellow countrymen. According to Koo's tale, the English ladies in an out-station a few miles off have been warned by the Mandarin that they had better leave their work for a time, and come into the city."

"Coming here? White women coming here?" cried Greta in great excitement.

"Yes, and it must be 'here' literally!" was Brian Audley's surprising answer, "our compound is the only one in the city where there are English women to receive them as guests. You have seen for yourself what a big place ours is, with no end of large rooms round the courtyard. They are not all furnished, for I have had no use for them so far, but that is a small matter. These people will bring their own personal belongings, if they can manage to get away by mule cart before the robbers swarm down on their station. They may have one or two of the native Christians with them."

Missionaries again! thought Greta: strange, passing strange, how they seemed continually to be crossing her path. Aloud she said: "Will they be safe here—and—and Gay?"

"We are better defended than anyone knows, except myself. I have lived in this disturbed district long enough to be prepared for emergencies, and my staff are pretty faithful, I think. We have high protecting walls and only one entrance. Koo's tale is that they are

already on the way, so I must go out and offer them hospitality. Will you go and prepare Gay for these unexpected guests? Whatever you do, don't alarm her: let her think it is merely a matter of precaution! Let her busy herself a bit in giving orders to get things ready for them."

"I'll see about that for her, once I know what to do!" said Greta, "but who is likely to come? I've only heard you mention two sisters named Gold."

Brian nodded. "Yes, and that's what I can't quite make out, though Koo is quite positive. He told Gay, 'Man—womans—run, one-time Tang-Chu' but I never heard of a man at the Mission Station! They are two lone women, middle-aged ladies who spent long years in China, and then came here on their own to do pioneer work, and their medical knowledge has opened doors for them in many of the small places where no white woman has ever been before."

"Two women—living alone, with hordes of bandits not far off! What courage!"

"Yes, and it needs courage—more than you think; you don't know what the Hunghutze are capable of yet!" said Brian gravely, "but Koo is positive there are others there beside. Perhaps foreigners from other places have taken refuge at their station, and now they are driven out before the advancing horde of bandits, they are, of course, bringing them along too. No one knows when they will arrive. I must be off to meet them at the outer gate of the city."

So Greta hurried indoors, to prepare Gay for the surprising arrival of the visitors—how many, and for how long, it was, of course impossible to tell.

Greta made light of the possible danger they themselves were in, with this terrible robber band not very far away. Would they content themselves with what loot they had obtained by ransacking smaller places, and leave

a large walled city like Tang-Chu alone? But if not—?

Greta shuddered at the bare possibility conjured up, and put the idea away. Somehow she felt there was something very comforting in the thought that these people were missionaries whom Brian was inviting to find shelter in his home, missionaries who had left all they held dear on earth to proclaim the Gospel to those who had never heard the Name of Christ. They knew how to pray—and had power with God and prevailed. To Greta it brought a sense of protection and comfort that they were going to be within Brian Audley's compound if danger drew near.

It was some time later that Greta heard a commotion at the entrance of the compound. She ran across the courtyard to the gate, ready to give the fugitives a welcome on her sister's behalf. Gay was awaiting their guests in her large dining-room, where a bountiful meal was spread.

Greta gasped when she saw the advancing cavalcade—Brian had met them outside and stood back to allow the advance guard to enter the compound—a native hooded cart, drawn by mules and jolting painfully over the rough street.

It stopped just inside the gate, and two middle-aged women alighted, dressed inconspicuously in Chinese fashion. Yet they were unmistakably British, and Greta went forward holding out her hand.

Then to her surprise, a younger woman sprang more nimbly out of the rough conveyance and came up to Greta. There was a low cry of startled recognition from each.

“Margaret—you?”

“Greta Guildford, here in China? Is it possible?”

Each held the other's hand in mutual surprise. Then Greta, remembering her duty as deputising for her sister, led the way to where Gay was waiting.

"Our guests, Gay—Miss Gold—Miss Mary Gold. And, of all people, here is our old school-fellow, Margaret Kent!"

It was a meeting to be remembered, but this was not the moment for excited reminiscences—those could keep.

Gay, forgetting her weakness for the moment, acted the perfect hostess. But Greta saw just how much the effort was taking out of her sister, and tried to do yeoman service herself. The missionaries had had a long and tiring journey—*anxious*, too, because of the terror that had dogged their footsteps all the way.

But their first thought was Thanksgiving for having been brought so far in safety, to find English voices to welcome them—and the luxury of a real home.

Even before a substantial meal—since they could scarcely remember when they last had one—Miss Gold and her sister and Margaret, craved the luxury of hot water, to rid themselves of the stains of travel. Greta herself attended to this, seeing that the boy, "Koo," had provided what was needful, and showing them to the rooms which had been hastily prepared for them.

"Now, you can only be allowed a quarter of an hour, then you must—positively must—come and have the real English meal my sister has had prepared for you!"

"Yes, an English missionary who took refuge with us only yesterday." Greta did not actually catch the name, she was darting out into the courtyard. Under the mulberry trees Brian Audley was talking to a tall man, dressed—well, exactly how was he dressed? His nondescript garments, part European and part Chinese, were torn and travel stained . . . he was gaunt and thin, his face worn and bearded. Yet when he turned round, Greta knew she was not mistaken. It was Philip Cranmere himself!

*A God of Deliverances*

FOR the brief space of a second, Philip Cranmere and Greta gazed at each other too amazed for speech. All the colour flew to Greta's face, and her eyes grew dim. That worn, unshaven face, that shrunken figure in torn, dishevelled clothes—the same, well-groomed, quietly dressed Englishman she had parted with not so very long before—was it possible?

“You!” faltered Greta, then her smile chased away the threatening tears. “Oh, you are free, safe! I thought—we heard—”

She could get no further for she was conscious of Brian's look of surprise.

“You heard I was captured and held a prisoner, Miss Guildford?” said Philip gently, “it was true. It is also true, much more true, that our God is a God of Deliverances!”

Brian Audley hurried away; he had orders to give to his Chinese staff, concerning the disposal of the luggage and the housing in the compound of the native Christian ‘boys’ who had accompanied the missionaries.

Greta and Philip Cranmere walked slowly towards the houses together.

“I never thought of finding you here,” he said quietly. “I only reached the Misses Gold's Mission station yesterday, and found their town in a state of panic, because a large horde of bandits had been reported not far off. They were advancing rapidly, looting and pillaging everywhere. So there was nothing to be done but to join them in packing up, and coming in to Tang-Chu.”

"For safety? It seems to me there is no safety in this part of China!"

"We are in God's care," he answered. "Only His powerful hand could have set me free—as He did! It is too long a story to tell you just now," he added, as Greta led the way indoors.

Gay was giving orders for the comfort of the lady missionaries, and the "boy" Koo was flitting hither and thither.

"Gay! Another wonderful surprise! Who said China was such a vast place of far distances, after all? Not only Margaret Kent whom we knew at school in England, but here is Mr. Philip Cranmere, who was with me on the captured steamer. What next?"

"What next—is a hot bath and a change of clothes for Mr. Cranmere!" said Brian, coming in himself at that moment, and despatching Koo in haste to make the needful preparations. "Then, the first substantial meal our guests have been able to have for a good many hours, I expect."

And what a meal, served English fashion, when at last they were all gathered round the table. Gay had been roused by the crying needs of others to something of her former life and spirits: she felt she could not do enough for these unexpected guests, ladies who had escaped from threatening peril, and an Englishman, who had actually been a captive in the bandits' hands.

"How did you manage to escape?" asked Brian over the coffee afterwards.

"I—I hardly know myself, now I look back upon the last few days," said Philip Cranmere slowly, "it all came about so suddenly and yet in a very simple way. There are several lesser groups of these robbers—Hunghutze—roaming the district, and it was a small band which looted our station far up in the hills and carried me off. My fellow missionary escaped, but I was taken off to a cave

in the mountains, and kept there. Little food, and that of the worst description, abundant dirt and no possibility of even a wash! A close prisoner. Some of the robbers went off to attack other places. When they returned there was no end of a commotion—the leader, a young man, had been seriously wounded, and was bleeding to death. Needless to say, I offered to do what I could . . . but it was touch and go for a time. I called on the Great Physician, Who knew my lack of medical skill—knew, too, that if I failed to save his life, his death would be laid at my door, however unjustly, and I should be killed immediately. So, in answer to prayer he pulled round, and then to my amazement, I discovered who he really was. Put in charge of one of the minor groups of marauding robbers, he was the only son of the most dreaded bandit in China, the chief of the bandits, Chin Sheng. I believe his name means ‘Golden Voice,’ but I assure you he is ill-named! As you know, all Chinese have one obsession—to have a son who will do honour to their memory and carry out the heathen ceremonies when they are dead; this ancestral worship is the basis of their religion. Well, news of his son’s accident reached Chin Sheng, and you can imagine his terror at the idea of having no son left to perform these ancestral rites. He ruled all the bandit hordes in this part of China; bringing with him the main detachment of the rabble of robbers, he came post haste to the caves where I was kept in hiding, and where his injured son had taken shelter. He had brought with him one of the native ‘doctors,’ of whose methods and treatment the less said the better. But to his amazement and delight he found his son was well on the road to recovery. Then, of course, it all came out, and instead of pulling out his sword, or ordering the hated ‘foreign devil’ to be beheaded instantly, the bandit chief ordered me to be set free—on condition that I did not reveal their actual

whercabouts to the Chinese soldiers who were in search of them. Then I was sent off, escorted by armed bandits until it was not safe for them to show themselves for fear of discovery. By that time I was only two or three days' walking distance from the town which I knew to be the Misses Gold's station. When I arrived I found them preparing to seek shelter here—"

"So," said Mary Gold, "instead of resting after that awful journey on foot over some of the roughest of rough country, Mr. Cranmere only waited to snatch a hasty meal with us, and then helped us with our final preparations for leaving our station. By all accounts the bandits were advancing rapidly, and it was by the Mandarin's orders that all foreigners left the place. We could not even wait to offer poor Mr. Cranmere a bath, and certainly we had no change of clothes—even Chinese—for him."

"Hence my terrifying appearance when I arrived here!" said Philip Cranmere with a smile.

Greta's eyes filled with tears and her heart shrank from the thought of what he must have suffered. Starved and shrunken, dishevelled and unshaven only an hour or two ago: was it possible? Now Philip Cranmere, refreshed, no longer hungry, was restored to something like his usual appearance as a normal Englishman, wearing a smart cut London tailored tweed suit belonging to Brian Audley.

Rest was the next thing needed by the refugees, so a move was made at an early hour. Before the party broke up for the night, however, Greta whispered to Gay and Brian that she knew Philip Cranmere would be reluctant to say "Good-night" until he had led them all in a prayer of thanksgiving for their great deliverance.

Family prayer in the home of Brian Audley and Gay! It sounded incredible. Perhaps Margaret was the most surprised. Had she not met Greta outside the notorious

"Thames Royal" country club, and learned that she had come there in company with Gay and her bridegroom to be?

Margaret longed for the moment when she and Greta could be alone and have a heart to heart talk. She felt sure a great deal must have happened of which she had no knowledge. Prayer changes things, and she had prayed for Greta and her sister ever since that meeting outside one of the fastest of the many fast dancing and drinking clubs around London. Well, she was to share Greta's room to-night: when they were alone at last there would be so much to tell, and possibly so much to hear.

But alas! for Margaret's hope for a quiet *tete-a-tete*, a hope which Greta herself shared to the full, since she was longing for a talk. She had come near, very near, to the Kingdom, drawn in the most unexpected ways. But none knew better than Greta herself that she was still outside.

Not far, not far from the Kingdom,  
But still in the shadow of sin,  
How many are coming and going,  
How few there are entering in!

Brian drew his sister-in-law aside, saying in a low tone: "Greta! Go and share Gay's room to-night, will you? Make the excuse that yours is wanted for Miss Kent, or something. Gay must not be left alone, under any circumstances, and I—well, I wouldn't have Gay know it for the world, but there may be trouble ahead for us!"

"For us? You mean these robber bands may attack us here in a walled city like Tang-Chu?"

"I fear it is only too probable. News filters through in strange ways in this disordered country, and it seems that there is a massing of the hordes of bandits who have been roving the country in bands, robbing and pillaging everywhere. I have long since made what preparations

were possible, both here and at my business premises, for meeting these 'gentlemen of the road.' I need not go into details: it is best none of the womenfolk should know. But since I have no idea just how far off they may be, nor yet how near, I am going to snatch what rest I can without undressing, on a couch in the sitting room. Then I shall go round the whole compound from time to time to see that all is well. I have talked with one of Miss Gold's Chinese Christians, a faithful and trustworthy fellow, and he will share my vigil. Without alarming Gay I will make some excuse that with so many strangers in our compound, I think it advisable."

So it was settled. Greta saw the wisdom of Brian's arrangements. Margaret Kent had only recently come from the Missionary Language School to join Miss Gold and her sister at their station: she badly needed a quiet night's rest, free from alarms, and her talk with Greta must wait until the morrow.

To Greta herself, too, there was something comforting in the knowledge that Brian Audley was keeping vigil through the night together with the faithful converted Chinese.

The night passed quietly, and when the sun rose in a cloudless sky, heralding a glorious day, Greta began to wonder whether Brian's fears for their safety had not been something of a nightmare after all! Everything seemed as usual.

There were the mulberry trees in the courtyard, their leaves dancing in the soft breeze: there was the fountain, though no water splashed and sparkled in the sun. Not knowing how long he might have to act as host to strangers unawares, Brian had wisely decided to conserve every drop of precious water; even though his compound was well supplied.

The day passed peaceably but busily enough, with so many people coming and going, and so many guests

to entertain. Brian himself said nothing concerning bandits, but Greta noticed his face was lined and careworn. Was it merely because he had passed an almost sleepless night? At any rate, he was very unlike the carefree young man who had gone the pace in the hectic night life of London.

When night came again, it was only by accident that Greta discovered that Philip Cranmere himself had insisted he should share Brian Audley's vigil. Refreshed by one long night's sleep and a restful quiet day and good meals after semi-starvation, he declared he was feeling almost himself again. Besides, if there were actual danger from any of the advancing robber hordes, who could deal with the situation better than a man who had been a captive in their hands?

But that night, in spite of the sense of security, doubled by the knowledge that he was sharing Brian Audley's vigil, Greta could not sleep.

Though at last she dropped into troubled slumber, she was wakened suddenly by Gay's voice full of alarm.

"Greta! Greta! wake up! Listen!"

Greta sprang up, wide awake on the instant. Far away in the distance, somewhere round about the city walls of Tang-Chu, came the noise of tumult, shrieks of fear—shouts—and then the sharp menace of a shot—another—and another—and hoarse cries of terror: "Hunghutze!"

"Hunghutze—the bandits!" Greta said hoarsely, "they have crept up silently in the night. The robbers are here!"

## CHAPTER XV

### *Hunghutze*

IT was true! How terribly true, everyone in Brian Audley's big compound found out in a moment of time. Save for some of the irresponsible Chinese staff, however, there was no confusion, no wild display of cowardice and fear. Somehow—how, he himself could scarcely have told, Philip took command of the situation—quietly, fearlessly, as one who knows the Power of God is behind him, in life or death. Brian Audley was only too willing to be guided by his counsel, and glad to hand over to him the responsibility of issuing orders, while he himself saw that they were obeyed.

“Get all the ladies into your own house, and tell them to stay there. Let them, if they like, busy themselves over preparing bandages and so on. Since the shooting began at dawn there are sure to be casualties. You have arms here, Mr. Audley? Whatever you do, don't shoot or display force; the bandits are out to kill if there is resistance, as you know! As for me, I will stand at your courtyard gate—unarmed: if they swarm upon us, I will dally with them as long as I can. Other European refugees from the city will come pouring down—ah, I thought so!” For cries were heard, and the sound of a hurrying mob in the street.

“We must only admit women and children who seek refuge in your courtyard, Mr. Audley, do you agree? Yours is the largest and safest compound in the city. As for the men of Tang-Chu, they must stay outside to defend their homes from robbery and pillage—if that is possible!”

Brian Audley saw the wisdom of these suggestions and insisted they should be carried out. Despite his long association with China, he had never been so close to the peril of attack by bandits as now. It was not for himself he feared; all his concern was for Gay, and for her sister who had come out at his request to join them in China. The tumult increased. A reign of terror held the city in its grip. Resistance met with swift retribution; the people fled before the advancing horde of bandits who poured into the city, pillaging and robbing right and left. They clamoured for admittance to the fancied greater security of Brian Audley's big compound with its high protecting walls, and Philip Cranmere and Brian faced those who came to the great gate demanding admission with the terror-stricken cry: "Hunghutze! Hunghutze!"

Women and children, crying, terrified, were admitted, but the men were told it was their duty to stay without, and do what they could to stem the tide of violence. Suddenly the tumult increased to an uproar. It sounded as if wave after wave of a human tempest was advancing towards the compound, with shouts and threats, wreaking vengeance on every side. What could be happening? Miss Gold and her sister, with Margaret Kent, had left the shelter of the house, in spite of Brian's orders, directly they saw the advance guard of women and children passing through the gate. Greta joined them; in that hour of peril she knew not the meaning of fear. Soon the great compound was crowded with terrified women, fleeing before the advancing host of robbers. A few men who had been wounded were brought in, and Greta and the missionaries found their hands full doing what they could. Still the tumult increased. It was evident that a pitched battle was being fought in the streets, and the tide of that battle was sweeping nearer—closer. Crossing the courtyard fearlessly towards the entrance to assist a

woman who was sinking with exhaustion, Greta saw that Philip Cranmere was in the act of hastily closing and barring the great gate. She went towards him.

"Keep away, Greta!" Even in that moment of terror her heart thrilled as she noticed he had called her for the first time by her Christian name.

The sound of shouts were drawing nearer, one man's voice sounded above all the rest. It was clear, whoever it was, he was advancing at the head of the robber band, and they were coming to batter down the gate and attack the house.

Then Greta saw Philip Cranmere suddenly stiffen and stand still in surprise. The robbers' shouts grew louder, but it was evident he understood quite well what was being said.

So did Brian Audley! He sprang to Philip Cranmere's side, when the missionary laid his hand on the heavily barred gate as if to open it.

"No! No! Don't show yourself! You'll be shot dead on the spot!"

"But don't you understand? It is the bandit chief who is outside the gate with his horde, and he is clamouring for me—and for me alone!"

"But why? Why? Don't go out!" pleaded Brian.

"I am going—it may be a matter of life or death for the rest of you!"

He turned to Greta, who, white-faced at the thought of his imminent peril, had come close to him. He held out his hand.

"Greta! If it is to be death for me, let God have you altogether, and carry on in my stead!"

Their hands clasped for a moment, and perhaps in her terror, the secret of Greta's heart was revealed in her eyes.

"Philip, don't go," she faltered. "Why should you face the mob?"

“Because, though you cannot understand what they are saying, it is I whom he wants. The leader of the robbers is out there himself, demanding me! If I gain time by parleying with him, it may mean life—for you—and the rest. Greta! Good-bye!”

He nodded to Brian and the Chinese Christian by his side to help him unbar the gate and open it a little way. Then Philip Cranmere slipped through and went out to meet the advancing mob alone. Brian ordered the great gate to be fastened again, in spite of Greta’s cry of protest.

“Yes! I know it seems like sending him forth to his death, but it may have been merely a ruse, to get us to leave the gate open, so that the Hunghutze hordes could rush in and kill us all! You didn’t understand what the robber leader was shouting as he rushed down the street: ‘Where is the foreigner from Wolu?’ That is Philip Cranmere and none other! Wolu was his station, looted when he was taken captive.”

In spite of the danger Greta drew closer to the gate. For the moment the din outside had subsided. What was happening? Were they seizing Philip Cranmere, making him a prisoner again, to carry him off to the horrors of torture and starvation, the same captivity from which he had so recently escaped? Philip Cranmere’s voice was heard, quiet, and courteous as ever. Then followed a torrent of Chinese, emphatic, imperative, in a loud voice. What could it mean? Suddenly Brian Audley turned to Greta, and uttered a cry of relief.

“Saved!” he cried. “Thank God we are saved—all of us—all who have taken refuge in our compound. Saved! and all because of the presence of Philip Cranmere! The bandit who has led his hordes here to our very gate is the famous—or infamous—robber chief himself, Chin-Sheng!”

*The Scarlet Line*

CHIN-SHENG! "Golden Voice," the dreaded chief of the bandits, whose name was a terror over a vast district of China—was it possible? The hubbub inside the gate subsided. Brian could hear most of what the two men were saying. Soon there came three taps on the outside gate—the signal they had agreed upon if Philip Cranmere wished to be readmitted, though no one expected to see him back safe and sound. Greta drew nearer as Brian Audley cautiously opened the great gate. To the last day of her life she would not forget the extraordinary spectacle that met her gaze. A fierce, bearded man, whose evil face might have inspired some mediæval painter of the Inferno, stood there at the head of a band of wild Hunghutze as terrible looking as himself. The others had halted, apparently in response to imperative orders. And there, just outside the gate, stood Philip Cranmere alone—unarmed, quietly listening to the loudly shouted orders of the leader of the gang. Not till afterwards did Greta know the meaning of the words called out in that terrible voice accustomed to giving orders for torture and death.

"You are the foreigner who saved my son's life! Yes?" The chief of the Hunghutze bands turned for confirmation to a younger man, an exact replica of himself, save in age.

"Yes! Yes! my son—my only son—you, foreigner, saved his life! I spared yours—now I spare it again, yes! and all those within this compound with you! I, Chin-Sheng, the chief, have spoken! See!"

The bandit leader suddenly tore off a crimson sash he was wearing, and thrust it into Philip Cranmere's hands.\*

"See! My scarf, worn by myself! Take it! Fasten it to this gate where all can see it. It is a sign that you are safe! My orders are given: none can harm you while you display that sign! Take it! Show it. Let none come out of your compound. None can harm you while you display my crimson sign!"

Like one in a dream, Philip Cranmere advanced to the now wide open gate, carrying the robber's crimson sash held high in his hand. His face was transfigured with relief and joy. What a deliverance God had wrought! The bandit horde under their chief swept on their way through the helpless city, pillaging, robbing, ransacking, wounding any who showed resistance . . .

By this time the great courtyard of Brian Audley's home was crowded with a motley throng of refugees. Women, children, elderly folk . . . terrified, crying . . . expecting every minute the dreaded Hunghutze would rush through the gate and wreak vengeance on them all.

But, no! the great gate was closed once more, and heavily barred, but not before Philip Cranmere himself had climbed up and affixed to some projecting spike, high out of reach, the robber chief's crimson scarf.

Then, making his way through the crowd in the compound, he jumped up on to a stone block beside the fountain, and calling aloud for silence, spoke to the huddled throng of Chinese.

Standing by Brian's side, Greta said: "What is he saying?"

In an answering whisper, Brian, with trembling lips, translated word for word:

"Friends! We are safe! The Living God, Whom we who live among you worship, has brought a great deliverance for us. We are safe—safe as long as we are

\* This is true!

sheltered by that Crimson Sign! The man to whom it belongs, Chin-Sheng, is the leader of the Hunghutze; his word is life—or death. You in Tang-Chu do not know me, but at Wolu, I was taken captive by Chin-Sheng's only son; he is outside here now, too. Through God's mercy I was able to help him when wounded, and Chin-Sheng set me free. He heard I had taken refuge here, and that Crimson Scarf he gave me is the sign that all who are here are safe, as long as we shelter beside it. Yes, and that is the very same message that we who are God's servants have come half across the world to bring you. God is Holy, and cannot look upon sin! Sin brings death—for no sin can enter His Presence. So He sent His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, to die for sin in our stead, to take our place, to shed His precious Blood for us. If we trust Him, and seek His pardon, God sees, not our sin, but the Precious Blood, the crimson stream of Calvary, which cleanseth us from all sin! That is the message we have come to give you: Sin forgiven—shelter . . . safety . . . new life in Him, for He says, 'When I see the blood I will pass over you!'"

Tears were raining down Greta's cheeks, but there was a new light in her eyes.

"I see it! I see it now! Thank God for the Crimson Sign!"

That evening there was a memorable gathering under Brian Audley's roof.

The bandits had gone. Looting, ransacking, robbing the defenceless Chinese, who were too terrified to put up more than a feeble resistance, the dreaded Hunghutze had for once contented themselves with pillage, and gone off with their booty to their lair far away.

No one had been taken prisoner or killed, but some were wounded, and to help these stricken ones, the missionaries and Greta emerged from the shelter of the compound, and did what they could to help.

Then, when the glad cry rang through the city that the rabble of robbers had actually cleared off, the Chinese who had crowded for shelter within Brian Audley's courtyard began to melt away. Torn with anxiety and fear, they went back to their homes, to find pillage and destruction everywhere.

But each of them who had taken refuge as they passed out of the great gate, glanced up at the gleaming red of the sign of their salvation—the robbers' crimson scarf!

Some of them who had heard had heeded Philip Cranmere's message. Some of them would remember, and wend their way to the "Jesus Hall," to hear what more the missionary had to tell them of their Saviour, Christ the Lord. That evening as the sun sunk to its setting over a city now silent and still, but safe, there came a memorable hour for those gathered in the home of Brian Audley and his girl wife, Gay.

Philip Cranmere opened his Bible to read once again a story of deliverance, as he had done after the release of the steamer captured by the pirates.

Now again, the God of Deliverance had wrought wonders—

"Then said they among the heathen, the Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad!"

Then he read the old familiar story which from henceforth would be revealed to them in a new and wonderful light. Had they not actually seen its counterpart in startling fashion that very day?

The great deliverance of the people of God from the Egyptians, the Passover night, the institution of the Feast kept by their children's children to this day. That first Passover Lamb was eaten in haste. They were ready to start when at midnight the hour of their Redemption struck . . . and the Passing of the Angel of Death brought judgment and terror to Egypt, for the firstborn had been stricken down.

But those who had put their trust in God were safe, for they had obeyed. Every house in Israel, every soul within that house, was sheltered by the shed blood of the Lamb of Sacrifice, sprinkled on the side posts and the upper door post of every home. Had not God said:

"The blood shall be to you for a token . . . : and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, . . . ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever."

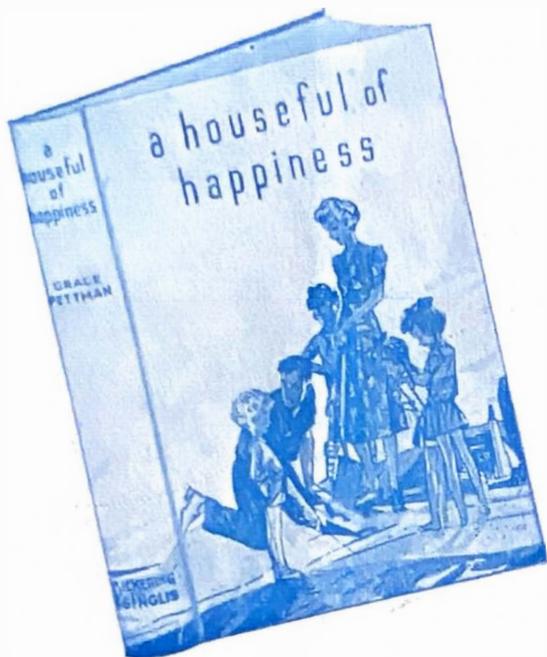
"Why? because the Passover Lamb foretold the coming of One, Himself the Lamb of God, to take away the sin of the world, the Christ of Calvary. And from His Cross comes the message: we are saved by His Cross, for the Blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin!"

To those who had been sheltered that day by the Crimson Sign upon the courtyard gate the words would henceforth hold a new and wonderful meaning.

Later, when the full moon rose high and clear over the city, Philip Cranmere and Greta stood together under the mulberry trees in the great courtyard.

"I—I want to tell you something," whispered Greta. "To-day, when you were pointing out to the Chinese that Crimson Sign upon the courtyard gate, and telling them of Salvation through Christ's Redeeming love, I saw it all! I was awakened long since to see the folly of a life of pleasure. But though I knew my need I could get no rest. To-day, God has given me His Peace. Henceforth I am His, to do His will, and if it be possible, to live a life of usefulness for Him."

"Thank God! Oh, thank God!" Philip Cranmere turned and took both her hands in his. One day he would tell her all that was in his heart, his hope that in future they might serve Him together!



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