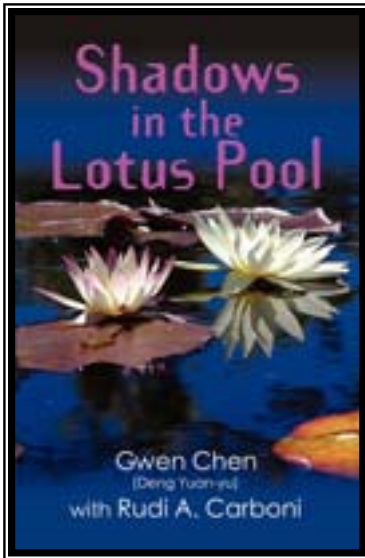


# Shadows in the Lotus Pool

Gwen Chen

(Deng Yuan-yu)

with Rudi A. Carboni



*Deng Wen-yi, a major general at age 22, has no time for his motherless daughter, Yuan-yu. He is catapulted into a series of adventures and misadventures that brings humiliations and triumphs in his close, tempestuous relationship with China's president Chiang Kai-shek. The author recounts her childhood as an unwanted child, neglected, maltreated and molested. The story of father and daughter unfolds against the background of revolutionary China of the mid-1900s.*

## SHADOWS IN THE LOTUS POOL

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## **Chapter 5**

### **Chiang and Wen-yi in Exile**

#### **Bati Bookstore**

My father had always loved books and the publishing business. Back in the spring of 1930, his assignment as one of Chiang's staff secretaries lacked challenge and left him with much idle time. He decided to open a bookstore with printing facilities. He enlisted the aid of several friends with military and cultural backgrounds in raising funds to purchase facilities and printing equipment. Raising the funds was not an easy task, but the founders managed to accumulate over \$12,000, issuing stock at \$50 per share. Wen-yi and my mother Bai-jian arranged for the use of a building with living quarters. The Bati Bookstore opened as planned. Initial offerings included three new magazines and a series of booklets on military, political, economic, and social issues. My parents also printed and marketed lectures and writings of Chiang Kai-shek, to which my father had easy access. The bookstore did a lively business.

Despite her third pregnancy my mother remained engaged enthusiastically in the bookseller project since she had worked in propaganda activity for the local Nationalist Party in Hunan. Business boomed from the start. But one month later, widespread war erupted between Chiang's forces and several allied warlord armies in the Central Plains of China. The number of military customers dwindled. In order to reduce costs, the store retained only one manager and two clerks. Bai-jian helped out whenever she was needed. She used her household money with no hesitation. My father was in the Central Plains with Chiang and the army, carrying out assignments for the Generalissimo. Nevertheless he managed to remain involved in the business, dealing with publishing and business decisions. When peace was restored the business again enjoyed vigorous growth.

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Publishing competitors, resentful of Wen-yi's success, tried to undermine the business by floating rumors the publications had a left-wing flavor. This was quickly dismissed since Wen-yi's rabid anti-Communist position was well known.

A more serious situation arose after Wen-yi's return from the Central Plains. A confidential lecture by Chiang to cadets at the Central Military Academy, two days before New Year's Day 1931, was printed by Wen-yi's paper. Kai-shek sat in his office scanning the newspaper. He noticed the article about his visit to the Academy was extremely detailed. The article included Chiang's reprimand to cadets. It had been a cold and snowy day and the gathering had been outdoors. Some cadets from the south were miserable, suffering from unaccustomed chill. Commandant Chiang, the article said, had chided them, "This weather is not that cold. If you cannot handle this, how will you be able to fight a war in the frigid cold of the Northeast? Your training needs to be stepped up!"

As Chiang read he became livid. He summoned Wen-yi to his office. My father would remember the details of this meeting for a long time. Kai-shek held the article up and furiously demanded, "Why did you release this piece? If the enemy reads about a 'war in the Northeast,' it could be misinterpreted and incite a real war! You must assume full responsibility for this idiocy!"

Wen-yi had no choice but to admit his oversight. "I was negligent in not monitoring the release of the piece. I would not have printed it."

Kai-shek grew even angrier. "You should be concentrating on your job here, without these extraneous distractions. You are making a fortune with your bookstore printing and selling my lectures and papers...exploiting my name. I am of a mind to close down your business!" Kai-shek's face was red with fury.

Chiang's volatile temper had been evident from his early youth in Xikou to his last days in Taiwan. His impulsive, ill-tempered bursts of uncontrolled rage against subordinates and others, with the possible exception of women and visitors, were



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well known. As Chiang's personal attendant, Wen-yi had many opportunities to observe the volcanic emotions of his leader. He, himself, had been the frequent target of Chiang's wrath. Chen Li-fu, a close friend and former personal secretary of Chiang's, proudly insisted Chiang had never lost his temper with him.<sup>1</sup> This may have been due to the nature of the two aides. Li-fu was more mature, disciplined, and self-contained than the younger Wen-yi. My father had earned Chiang's praise for several original initiatives he had undertaken successfully. But he had also been excoriated and demoted for what, to Chiang, had been foolish, immature actions. My father was also more inclined to argue with his leader when he felt a rebuke was unjustified. This merely served to make Chiang angrier. My mother had several times cautioned her husband to say less and be more restrained in his relationship with his superior. Yet, Wen-yi had also noted that while Chiang was usually quick to criticize and slow to praise, he occasionally showed a softer side, though self-consciously, when trying to make amends for an unjustified tirade against a hapless victim.

At this moment my father was taken aback by the passion of Chiang's outburst. His superior had accused him of making a fortune by printing and selling the leader's lectures and exploiting his name. He was now threatening to close down his publishing business! To his own surprise, Wen-yi heard himself challenging his leader. "A fortune?! What fortune? Have you received more malicious complaints which you believe?" Wen-yi felt he had to vigorously challenge these defamatory accusations in order to discourage them. Heatedly, he added, "I must tell you about my bookstore. I am running it as a means of disseminating important propaganda for you, my teacher. Who else within the party and government propaganda organizations prints your lectures and writings? Only my business prints them in large volume, and provides broad distribution to the troops and the population. We sell these at reasonable prices and expand the operation with the income. Commandant, not only do you not praise me...now you even

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scold me. If it is your wish, I will not publish your speeches and your other messages from now on!"

My father realized he was on perilous ground, but he could not stop. "As to the matter of profits, my wife and I have taken little money from the store. The editor and few clerks running the store were all trained by me. In hard times, when they have little money to buy rice, I would see that they had sufficient rice for their families. It is simply not true I am making a fortune. Commandant, you should not easily believe petty, malicious reports. You should seek the facts and truth. I cannot possibly accept your suggestions of closing the business. The store was formed with funds from many stock owners. Unless the operation is illegal or corrupt, it cannot be shut down easily."

Having said his lengthy piece, Wen-yi was aghast that he had dared to talk in this manner to his leader. Kai-shek was astounded, and now incensed. He was being lectured to by a subordinate! By Wen-yi! This was brazen insolence! The red in Chiang's face deepened. "You will not lecture me," he thundered. Surprisingly, Chiang did not cut off the discussion. He allowed it to continue, his voice getting steadily louder, as my father became increasingly apprehensive. Stories of Kai-shek's impatience and ill-tempered bursts of rage were legendary. He had once shot a man to death in anger during an argument.

By now my father was very frightened. The Generalissimo was at the edge of exploding. Wen-yi immediately broke off the argument, apologized to Chiang, asked to be excused, and left the office. As he walked past the outer office, he noticed the stricken look on the faces of two staff members. Stunned and hurt, Wen-yi remained at home for two weeks, sulking, yet remorseful. He had not informed anyone, nor sought permission for his absence. No one from Kai-shek's office called. Such action was unthinkable to colleagues who feared the temper of the Generalissimo. Yet, in this curious relationship, Kai-shek chose to ignore my father, where he might have doomed almost anyone else.

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Finally, one day, Wen-yi learned Chiang would be speaking at the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum. He decided to attend, sitting well back in the auditorium. Apparently, during his speech, Kai-shek noticed him in the audience. When the ceremony was over, Kai-shek left the well-wishers surrounding him and walked to where Wen-yi had remained seated. "How are you feeling?" he asked. My father responded that he was not sick.

"If you are not sick, why did you stay away for so long?" He cut off my father's response, saying gently, "Wen-yi, you are very bright, and when you put your mind to it you can do a fine job. But your weakness is laziness. You must reform your behavior and work hard. You will return to headquarters tomorrow morning."

The laziness remark rankled. Chiang had been complaining before that he was doing too much! Fortunately, for once, my father heeded the oft-repeated admonition from my mother, to "think carefully before you say or do anything foolish that may cost you dearly." Wen-yi was back at work the next day, and continued to manage his publishing company. (Later, a major new organization, the Three People's Principles' Lixingshe, acquired the bookstore, and the Bati Bookstore expanded into a chain of stores distributing Nationalist publications in a number of cities, including Nanjing, Hankou, Nanchang, Changsha, and Guiyany.) In his memoirs, Xiao Zuo-lin, a colleague and close friend of my father, wrote that Wen-yi's central publishing house in Nanjing produced and distributed thirty publications, including new and translated works from party members and Kai-shek.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Another Family Tragedy**

My mother was back in Nanjing, pregnant and sick, yet she continued to work at the bookstore. She was unable to go to my father in Shanghai to care for him during his recovery from an illness he contracted in the Central Plains War. However, putting to use the writing skills she had improved in school, she wrote to him regularly. Knowing he would be back to Nanjing

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soon, Bai-jian asked her parents-in-law in Liling to bring her one-year-old son and his wet nurse to join them. The group made preparations for the voyage and traveled through Changsha, Hankuo, and finally by boat on the Yangtze River toward Nanjing. They arrived in the city on the very same day as Wen-yi. The reunion was joyous. The little boy, now slightly more than a year old, screamed “Mama” and “Baba” (Daddy) at the top of his lungs, gibbering excitedly. Viewing his beautiful and energetic son, Wen-yi was happy and moved. The adults exchanged stories of events in the past few months. They had no inkling tragedy was about to strike.

The journey to Nanjing had been made during the extremely hot month of August. The ship had been exceedingly crowded. Unknowingly, the child had been exposed to a flu virus. Now united with his parents, the little boy had laughed and prattled during the day. However, by evening, the baby developed a fever and became fussy, crying constantly. His temperature continued to rise. He became weak. By daybreak, his temperature had risen to well over 100 degrees. A doctor was summoned. The doctor diagnosed the illness as influenza and urged Wen-yi to go to emergency facilities immediately. Wen-yi and his father took the baby to the hospital. The three frightened women burst into tears, and were directed to remain at home. Once in the hospital, the baby’s eyes turned dull. Within three hours he was dead despite the efforts of the hospital staff.

My father was numb with grief and disbelief. My grandfather, a devout Buddhist, would not believe the baby had died. It was a rainy and windy day. He carried the little body to the streets, and walked aimlessly chanting and praying in the pouring rain and wind for hours. My father went home to give Bai-jian the heartbreaking news. They cried in each other’s arms wordlessly. Finally my father put my mother to bed to rest. In the evening, hearing my grandfather’s laments, my mother jumped from her bed and, still dazed from sleep and grief, tumbled down an entire flight of stairs. She was knocked

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unconscious and her arms and legs were badly injured. Amazingly, the accident did not affect her pregnancy. My father was greatly concerned with my mother's physical condition and emotional anguish. He found a good doctor to attend her and tried his best to console her, with little success.

The baby was placed in a simple coffin and buried in a cemetery in the countryside, attended by Wen-yi, my grandfather, and two clerks from the bookstore. Wen-yi stared, uncomprehendingly. He had enjoyed his lively son for only one day and now he had lost him forever. My father knelt, watching and grieving over the tiny lonely grave.

#### **Turmoil over Chiang's Policy**

The year 1931 began badly for Chiang Kai-shek and his loyalists. The Generalissimo faced a number of serious problems. The recent costly War of the Central Plains had placed the government close to financial bankruptcy. Mao Zedong had molded several bandit and Communist factions effectively into a major Communist force roaming Hunan, Jiangxi, Fujian, Guangdong, and surrounding provinces. Chiang had launched what would be the first of a series of five "bandit suppression" campaigns against the Communist Army in Jiangxi. The first campaign, December 1930 to January 1931, in Jiangxi, had ended in defeat with heavy loss of men and arms.

There was deep anger within the party and throughout China concerning Chiang's policy to subdue the Communists instead of using the men and resources to oppose the Japanese threat. He had sought to buy time by appeasing the Japanese. The recently defeated warlords Yan Xi-shan and Feng Yu-xiang had been brought into the Nationalist Party and government, albeit reluctantly; they were still restless and sought more influence. Chiang's leftist opponents within the party were maneuvering to usurp his power. In an effort to mollify the edgy warlords, Chiang called a national meeting with the intent of developing a provisional constitution to meet

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some of the demands of the vanquished warlords. Hu Han-min, chairman of the Legislative Yuan (Department) and a powerful and staunch disciple of Sun Yat-sen, adamantly opposed this action, and resigned from his office in protest. Chiang placed him under house arrest and appointed a new chairman.<sup>3</sup> This was the proverbial last straw. On April 30, 1931, a group of senior party officials broke with Chiang. In the following month they met with Hu Han-min and the liberal party leader, Wang Jing-wei, in Guangzhou. The group proclaimed formation of their own Nationalist government on May 28.

#### **Mukden Incident - The Japanese Invade China**

The general population was angry and frustrated at rampant corruption, poverty, and escalation of the civil war. On July 31, 1931, my father followed Chiang on the third “bandit suppression” campaign against the Communists in Jiangxi. The offensive was showing promise of a major victory. However, on September 18, 1931, the Japanese army suddenly initiated an attack on Chinese territory which became known as the Mukden (or 918) Incident. The Japanese blew up the South Manchurian Railway tracks north of Shenyang (Mukden), then accused Chinese troops of sabotage as a justification for continued operations. Japan soon occupied three Chinese northeastern provinces. The Japanese Army encountered little resistance in its conquests. Chiang Kai-shek was preoccupied with the rebel government forming in Guangzhou headed by Hu Han-min, and with his campaign to suppress the multiplying Communists. He was also attempting to pacify a group of unhappy warlords. To buy time, he ordered Zhang Xue-liang and his Manchurian Army to maintain a policy of nonresistance and withdrawal. The country rose up in protest. Demonstrators marched in the streets proclaiming death before surrender. Chiang had to abort his promising campaign against the Communists to return to Nanjing. Wen-yi also followed him back to Nanjing. While my father was away

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with Chiang in Jiangxi my mother Bai-jian gave birth to a son, Yuan-zhong, her only surviving male child.

### **Chiang Kai-shek Resigns**

Now back in Nanjing, Chiang quickly discovered the city was not a comfortable place for him. The mood of the country was one of deep hostility toward Japan, and resentment against the Nationalist northern commander Zhang Xue-liang for not resisting the Japanese. Widespread protests, led by students and newspapers, clamored for unity of purpose in defending the country against invaders. Students at the Shanghai University organized massive protests against Chiang. They attacked party headquarters, and forced the resignation of the Shanghai mayor, a Kai-shek man. Military guards ringed government buildings in Nanjing and subdued small groups of activists inciting the populace.<sup>4</sup> Kai-shek was left with little choice. In mid-December 1931, he resigned his position as head of the government...but not his influence. He returned to his home in Xikou, taking with him only my father, a telegrapher, and two body guards.

### **My Parents Stay at Chiang's Ancestral Home**

Chiang Kai-shek and his tiny entourage arrived in his hometown of Xikou on December 23, 1931. Since their marriage Kai-shek and his wife Soong Mei-ling stayed at nearby Wen-chang Pavilion, a small villa on the riverfront beside the cemetery of his mother. They celebrated Christmas quietly. Kai-shek had become a Christian as one of the conditions for marrying Mei-ling. Chiang did very little during the first week in Xikou, refusing all attempts by Nanjing to seek his advice on a number of matters.

My father was lodged in Chiang's ancestral home, an imposing residence with 20,000 square feet of floor space surrounded by a 50,000 square foot garden. The structure of the house was traditional Chinese, with an antechamber, back-chamber, two wing-rooms on each side for guests, rooms

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upstairs, and four verandas. In the front courtyard were three gardens, connected by moon-shaped gates. The front antechamber had a large hall for receptions. A central parlor in the back chamber was used for formal family ceremonies. Each hall boasted a unique plaque, famous paintings, and sculptures. Like many successful men at the time, Chiang Kai-shek had two "official" wives prior to his marriage to Soong Mei-ling. Chiang's first wife, Mme. Mao Fu-mei, had quarters in the west wing. My father was given a guest room toward the front of the house.

Kai-shek's father, an affluent salt merchant, had died when he was seven years old. Chiang was raised by a disciplinarian mother, Mme. Wang Tsai-yu. She arranged a marriage for fourteen-year-old Kai-shek to an illiterate village girl, Mao Fu-mei, five years his senior. Since her son was still very young, the mother forbade any affection or sexual activities between the young couple. Mother-in-law Wang made sure the daughter-in-law knew her position and main role as a helper in the house.

According to Fenby,<sup>5</sup> Fu-mei told Chiang's second wife, Chen Chieh-ji, many years later, "I kept quiet and seldom spoke. More and more I avoided any direct conversation openly with him in the house. That was not easy, however, especially when he asked me questions and expected my answers. The situation went from bad to worse, and Kai-shek soon became impatient with me. I dared not say one word to defend myself, even when he scolded me, for as you know, the villagers in their narrow-mindedness would accuse me of being an un-filial and disobedient daughter-in-law...and you know what that means in an isolated village like ours! The strain gradually caused a split between Kai-shek and me. All I could do was to weep secretly over my utter helplessness, and for a long period I suffered from melancholy."

Soon after his marriage, Chiang left home to pursue an education in Japan and Russia for his future career. On occasional visits home, he would have little to do with Fu-mei. However, Chiang's mother had been told by a fortune teller that



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a son by Fu-mei would become a great, important man. She therefore commanded her son, threatening suicide, to become intimate with his wife and try for a son. Fu-mei produced a boy, Chiang Ching-kuo, Kai-shek's only son. He would one day become president of the Republic of China in Taiwan. Fu-mei regained status and respect from her husband, but they never again were bedmates. Fu-mei remained celibate and became a devoted Buddhist.<sup>6</sup>

She continued to reside in and manage the main residence efficiently until her death in 1939 during a Japanese bombardment. She was known to be kind and courteous to all visitors.

Thanks to Fu-mei, Wen-yi's daily needs and meals at Chiang's home were seen to, as though he were a family member. After his Spartan existence in the field, he found life during this brief period idyllic. He especially relished the excellent food: meat, fish, and vegetable dishes plus soup for lunch and dinner. They were far better than the spare meals at Chiang's Nanjing residence.

One day in the second week of my father's stay, Chiang invited Wen-yi to accompany him on a picnic outing. The two guards were also brought along. The small group floated down the nearby river on a raft to a large bamboo forest where they would dig for bamboo shoots and have their picnic. Chiang's mood became poetic in this beautiful, serene setting. He turned to my father and said, "Wen-yi, it is best to live life like a bamboo, with a modest, open interior, and strong, disciplined (knotted) exterior. Bamboo has profuse branches and leaves, stays green always, and enjoys a carefree life unaffected by the stormy wind and rain. Bamboo plants unite with one another. Bamboo shoots propagate vigorously to form a forest. Together, they illustrate neatness, beauty, and strength." Wen-yi was amazed and touched by this new side of his leader, and impressed by his words. When he returned to his room, ever the writer, he immediately sought to write down the words Chiang had said, as well as he could remember.

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Since they were now sharing the same house, Wen-yi would enjoy an occasional friendly chat with Fu-mei. She was delighted to know Wen-yi and her son Ching-kuo had attended Moscow University together. She told him she missed her son and asked Wen-yi anxiously, "Did Ching-kuo study hard? Was he in good health? Were the living conditions favorable?" My father assured her that her son had always studied hard and was as good as, if not better than, his older peers. He was also healthy, strong, and in good spirits. Most students liked and respected him. Fu-mei smiled happily at this bit of news. My father felt a rush of affection for this gentle woman.

My mother read and reread Wen-yi's letter describing his life in "Shangri-la." In her reply, she wrote wistfully of how wonderful it would be if she could join him. My father urged her to come, provided she could find a good wet nurse to stay home with the baby. My mother was ecstatic! She would be living in Chiang Kai-shek's family home! She quickly found a nurse and hastened to Xikou. A small problem arose. According to local custom, a couple could not live together on the property of another family unless they rented it. Even Chiang's house had to abide by the rules. However, Fu-mei promptly intervened. She was pleased at my mother's visit. She told Wen-yi and Bai-jian to occupy the west wing room. She told my father to write a simple rental agreement and pay rent of one dollar to meet the customs, which he happily did. They now enjoyed extravagant accommodations with wonderful meals served in their room daily.

My parents paid a visit to Fu-mei in her quarters to show their respect and gratitude. She asked kindly, "Are you comfortable here? Are you used to the food and living arrangement?"

Wen-yi answered, "Thank you very much. You are much too kind. We are having such a good time here. Everything is so much better than at home. You are taking such good care of us. We hope we are not imposing too much on you."

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“Not at all,” she insisted. “I love to have young people here. Have you followed Kai-shek long?” The next half-hour was taken by a summary of my father’s experience with Chiang from the early days of Whampoa to the present. My mother then told Fu-mei of her experiences and of raising her children. Fu-mei listened with much interest and asked many questions. She seemed to really enjoy what she called their “youthful enthusiasm.”

One day Kai-shek came to the family house for a visit. He sat with my parents and asked my mother many questions about her background and life. At first my father was a bit concerned with how frankly his wife spoke to the Leader. During her service in the propaganda field in Hunan she had developed firm views and had expressed them in discussions with the villagers. My father need not have worried about Kai-shek’s reaction. He saw how pleased Kai-shek seemed to be with his exchanges with this passionate but respectful young lady. Chiang asked her to give his regards to her elders at home. He also told her Wen-yi was always diligent and thoughtful in his work. He added it was extraordinary that he should read so voraciously, constantly trying to improve himself. My father was barely able to suppress an expression of amazement and thrill that China’s leader should be saying these things to his wife. Wen-yi had become much more used to receiving criticism and satirical comments from the Generalissimo. He later told my mother sheepishly, “I could be pretty inept at times in serving Chiang. He’s gotten angry with me, demoted me, praised and promoted me, then made me his personal secretary. He has emphasized my positive qualities to you but has not shared with you his impatience with the foolish things I have done.”

This visit to Chiang’s home was truly a honeymoon for Bai-jian. She loved to wander past the courtyard to gardens filled with multicolored flowers and honeysuckle which, she heard, had been planted by Chiang’s current wife Mei-ling. Wen-yi and Bai-jian explored Xikou and its vicinity. Bai-jian stared at

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the mountains and hills, the valley rich with flowers and bamboo forests, and old temples. She chattered in excitement and told her husband she had never experienced such a sense of serenity. They saw the village school Chiang had attended as a boy and the new Wu-ling School where Chiang Kai-shek served as president. My mother visited the grave of Kai-shek's mother, Mme. Wang, to pay her respects. At the gravesite Bai-jian tarried for a while, entranced by the panoramic view from the site.

Then suddenly, to Bai-jian's deep disappointment, her idyll with Wen-yi at Xikou was cut short when they received word Wen-yi's grandfather had died. She felt very sad to be leaving, especially for so sad an event. My mother returned to Liling to assist with funeral arrangements.

#### **Kai-shek Resumes Power**

While Chiang was in mini-exile in Xikou the Guangzhou faction, led by Wang Jing-wei and Sun Fo (Sun Yat-sen's son), had taken over the reins of government, which was close to bankruptcy. Frantic attempts to raise funds were unsuccessful now that fundraiser T.V. Soong and his influence with Shanghai bankers had departed with Chiang. Bankers refused to lend any more money to Nanjing. Warlords took advantage of the situation and stopped paying taxes. There was little government leaders could do since the military's allegiance was still to Chiang. The Guangzhou faction was left with little choice but to invite Chiang, T.V. Soong, and Kung to join with Wang Jing-wei and his group in leading a coalition government. Near the end of January 1932, Kai-shek returned to Nanjing, preparing once again to take control of the government, with Wang Jing-wei as prime minister.

Chiang officially took over the reins of government in March 1932. He now had the titles of Chairman of the Military Affairs Commission of the Nationalist Government and Chief of the General Staff. Wen-yi was promoted to "escort secretary" of the chairman with increased responsibilities. Chiang asked my

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father a familiar question, “Wen-yi, do you think you can handle your responsibilities without causing problems for me or for yourself?” Wen-yi answered he would make every effort to do so.

My father observed, with wry amusement, the demeanor of government and military officials assembled to greet the restored leader. When Chiang entered the hall, he was greeted with boisterous applause and shouts of good wishes. However, warm greetings and smiles could not conceal an atmosphere of apprehension. Among the greeters were the very men who, just a few weeks ago, had voted for his resignation. Those who had opposed his policies had not hidden their glee or expressions of “good riddance.” My father looked at Chiang’s impassive face and wondered what his thoughts might be as he accepted these “warm” expressions of welcome.

While Chiang was preparing himself to resume his role as leader of the government, the Japanese menace continued to increase. In January 1932 the Japanese military had instigated incidents fomenting anti-Japanese sentiment, to justify military action. These warlike acts inflamed the Shanghai natives to a point where an active economic boycott was launched against local Japanese businesses, banks, shops, and goods. Some of the Japanese inhabitants were harassed. Japan used this situation to move Japanese marines into Shanghai “to protect their countrymen.” On January 28, a three-month undeclared war was waged in Shanghai, and met with stiff resistance. An armistice agreement was signed on May 5<sup>th</sup>. Japanese troops began their withdrawal from the city on May 15 and were gone by May 31<sup>st</sup>. Yet, Chiang still would not be dissuaded from his policy of pacification first, then a united front against Japan.

## Chapter 15

### A Weed in the Wind

A Chinese proverb says a child with a mother is a jewel and a child without a mother is a weed. When I was two years old, my mother died, and I became a weed. My new stepmother Wen-ying was living in the city of Chengdu and planning to join my father in Jiangxi. My Big Brother Yuan-zhong and I were with our Grandmother Pan in our country house in the suburb of Chengdu. Our house was located in an exclusive suburban enclave, built by the government for high-ranking officers, to provide some protection from Japanese air raids. It was a large, elevated one-story house with a long, wide porch across the entire front. The property included detached quarters for guards and kitchen staff. The house was encircled by a lovely garden, and protected by a tall surrounding wall. A fig tree in the backyard provided a constant supply of delicious fruit during the season. Outside the wall was a large apple orchard.

Grandma Pan soon realized she would be alone with no steady income, no support, and a troublesome little girl on her hands. She needed to reduce her expenses. My wet nurse was the first one to be dismissed. Two maids followed. Big Brother, as the eldest son, was my father's favorite and adored by Grandma. She sent him to the best boarding school in the city. Soon only Grandma and I remained in the large country house. We still had a cook and two male servants who had no place to go. She decided to rent out the guard house, and later, part of the main house for income. She also became a vegetarian and turned to the Buddhist religion for comfort.

Grandma was not interested in me, another girl. It did not help that I was a bit of an imp, and at times, even unruly, a consequence of improper caring and discipline. Grandma constantly complained about the heartaches I caused her. She ignored me as much as she could and wished, I was sure, that I would disappear.

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I was left to fend for myself, grateful for any occasional kindness that came my way. Once, when Grandma had to be away, she locked the doors of the main house and left me in the “care” of the men servants. I was three years old. I had to share the bed of one of the servants and was molested. Fortunately I was too young to fully comprehend this horror. Eventually, all the servants were gone and there was only a local, part-time helper. Now, when Grandma had to be away, she locked me in a room. The window of the room was too high for me to climb out. I was enraged and exhausted with crying and screaming. I often ended up loudly singing songs I made up, denigrating my grandmother.

We were in the midst of the bitter Sino-Japanese War, and China was struggling for its survival. Children and adults were dying throughout the land. Peaceful Chengdu seemed like heaven under the circumstances. At age 4 or 5, I often roamed about the beautiful countryside, usually with some neighborhood children. The land was fertile and we feasted on tomatoes, peas, broad beans, and anything edible. We amused ourselves by collecting silk worms. We picked leaves from mulberry bushes to feed our personal collections of worms kept in shoe boxes. We competed in finding the choicest silk worms based on the size and color of the worms and cocoons. The lovely pink cocoons were the most desirable.

My young friends and I decided to steal apples from the trees in the orchard next door. Since I was the smallest one, I was boosted to the top of the wall to do the picking. I was busy choosing and picking the ripe apples when the angry owner descended on us. Everybody dispersed. I was left alone on top of the wall, too afraid to jump down. The neighbor helped me down roughly, and confronted my grandmother with the loot and the looter. Grandma gave me a whipping.

At the age of four I attended kindergarten. I had to walk past a large flock of geese gathered along a creek. One or two cantankerous geese would always stiffen their long necks, raise their feathers, spread their wings, and chase after me. Each day

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I approached the area cautiously, then ran as fast as I could, praying I would not stumble.

The restrictive classroom atmosphere was hard on me. I was restless and bored. Most of the pupils were from good families and well cared for. Nobody wanted to be friendly with an untidy little girl. Without tap water and proper facilities, bathing me was troublesome for Grandma. Once, when I had developed a rash due to the heat, the part-time maid bathed me with a pink water containing potassium permanganate, a primitive disinfectant.

When I was six, Uncle Wen-can, my father's cousin, came to borrow money. Of course Grandma was not going to give him any. She made me sleep with him at night, and again I was molested. I was helpless, enraged, and miserable. I hated this uncle and Grandma. The experience placed a greater distance between Grandma Pan and me.

One day, my stepmother Wen-ying made one of her rare visits, accompanied by her sister. I watched as they peeled and ate one juicy pear after another. Pears were rare and special. Though I stared, licking my lips, they did not offer me so much as a sliver. In fact, they never even looked at me. For Wen-ying, her six-year-old stepdaughter simply did not exist.

As did many children, I developed a bloated belly due to a serious case of tapeworms. There was no one to take me to the doctor or provide the needed medicine. One day the tenant of our main house spread some mysterious medicinal plant roots over the back patio to dry under the sun. They looked edible and I helped myself to a handful. The result was miraculous. I eliminated all the tapeworms from my system. I felt invincible. I had cured myself of the parasite, an award for being adventurous in eating all kinds of strange things.

I often listened to the adults as they conversed. I felt it would be wonderful to be able to use some elegant-sounding words. I found myself trying to imitate their language. When I casually told a tenant in our guardhouse that he was being "preposterous," he smiled and said to his companion, "Who



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would believe that a little girl could use words like that!" The unaccustomed compliment and kindness made me feel warm and proud.

Big brother Yuan-zhong, seven years older than I, was a happy part of my childhood, and I longed for his visits from school. Grandma and I usually ate simple vegetarian food in small portions. I was always hungry and craved meat. Only when Big Brother came home would Grandma prepare meats and plenty of food. My brother often allowed me to join him as he played with his neighborhood friends. I felt proud to be seen with him. One night he and his friends took me to a school play. As we walked home, I was delighted to see a clear moon in the creek as we crossed the little stone bridge. I noticed the bright moon always remained directly over my head. I asked my brother why the moon always seemed to follow us. He quickly changed the subject.

My brother occasionally allowed me to go with him to the market. I watched as he played the dangerous sugar-cane cutting game. For a small amount of money, he would take his turn, standing on a stool, wielding a sharp cleaver, hacking at a tall, fat, and free-standing sugar cane. It was scary yet thrilling to see the shining cleaver coming down with such speed. The hacker kept whatever piece he could chop from the cane. We shared the pieces from his prize. But the best moment for me was when he bought me a large, steaming sweet-bun. As I bit into it, hot spiced sugar and fat would squirt and drip down my face and hands. It was heavenly!

Such happy moments, however, were few. Big Brother did not come home often. Alas, when I later tried to tell Big Brother of those happy times and how much they had meant to me, he did not even recall that I had been in the Chengdu country house.

I seemed to be constantly hungry. One day, as I was playing on the street, one of Grandma's friends asked me to take her gift of four boiled eggs and four rice pastries to Grandma for the coming May festival. The temptation was too strong. I feasted

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on the treasured goods during the day, and said nothing about it to Grandma. On the May festival day, some relatives and her friend were coming. I was sure her friend would mention the eggs and pastries. I was in serious trouble. I knew the issue would come up after the company departed. I remained outdoors in the street as long as I could. Finally near dusk, I came home. Full of apprehension, I walked back and forth in the garden along the front porch, and dared not enter the house. Aunt Bi-xia, my father's youngest sister who was the most kind to her motherless nieces, was sitting on the porch with the other visitors. When they saw me they beckoned me to come in. But I was worrying about a possible whipping. I continued walking back and forth trying to decide what to do. I heard Aunt Bi-xia say, "Look at the pathetic little thing! This is so sad." She called out, "This is Aunt, Tiny Sis! Come on in! Everything will be all right!" My poor Grandma! I had no idea that the sympathy of the relatives caused her more embarrassment than the anger about the eggs and pastries.

Grandma came from a humble background. She had noted my independence and, yes, spunk, and used this as her excuse for letting me fend for myself... to grow up on my own. I would have preferred that she showed more caring and understanding. On the other hand, she never asked me to do any house chores or to wait on her. She placed me into school as early as possible. She had taken away the opportunity for her only daughter Bai-jian, my mother, to attend school so that she could help out around the house and in the field. Bai-jian had to wait until she was much older to resume her education.

Eventually, I became too much for Grandma. She informed my father and stepmother, now in Chongqing, in no uncertain terms, that she was returning me to them. She would find somebody to take me to Chongqing. Within days she found an acquaintance who would be traveling to that city. She packed my bag and sent for the man who would escort me. As I prepared to leave, my grandmother sat with me and said in a kindly voice, "I cannot take care of you any longer. You must be

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more obedient to your stepmother than you have been with me. You must control your high spirit. Do you understand?"

I nodded, then burst into tears. Clearly uncomfortable, Grandma patted my hair awkwardly and said, "Go now."

I was apprehensive about leaving Chengdu where I had lived six of my seven years. Chongqing was 200 miles east of Chengdu. Travel was slow due to the war. The bus made an overnight stop on the way. My temporary custodian was a lean, small man. During supper, he hinted to me we could have fun in bed. The glitter in his eyes frightened me. When we went to the room, I felt homesick for Chengdu, fearful of the unknown ahead, and petrified what this man was going to do to me. I started to cry loudly and miserably. My crying dampened his ardor. He said he had children of his own and he would not touch me. Tears saved me. The next day I was delivered to my father's house. I was seven years old. My life in Chengdu was over. I arrived in Chongqing, the war capital of China, in the winter of 1944.

Following Japan's massacre and occupation of Nanjing in 1937, the government was forced to move to Wuhan, and later to Chongqing which became the official provisional capital for the Nationalist Government from 1938 to 1946. The Japanese onslaught forced the Nationalist government to dismantle and move factories and equipment to the new wartime capital. With these came hordes of migrants, students, and universities, transforming the inland port into China's political, industrial, economical, and cultural center. The constant and heavy bombardment of Chongqing by the Japanese air force was alleviated only by mountains and almost perpetual fog.

Compared to Nanjing and Chengdu, Chongqing appeared almost primitive, built on steep slopes overlooking the confluence of two major rivers. Crude streets were laid out haphazardly. Local transportation consisted mainly of walking through muddy roads, climbing a series of stairways to get from the lower to upper levels of the city, or hiring sedan chairs or rickshaws. Little was done to improve the infrastructure or

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ambiance of the city, except for government buildings and grounds.

Freshly arrived in Chongqing, I was relieved to find my father had arranged a jeep and driver to wait for me at the bus station. This cheer, however, was short-lived. Our upward journey took us to Renaissance Ridge, a government housing complex for high-ranking officers. We passed an entrance heavily guarded by soldiers carrying big guns, and approached a dark forest along a lonely road with no signs of life. I felt many eyes watching from behind trees. I grew uneasy and apprehensive. "What if my stepmother does not want me? If I misbehave again, would the soldiers punish me?" I held onto my seat tightly. As the jeep moved along the seemingly endless winding road, my panic increased. I began to tremble and became nauseous. Suddenly, I was blinded by brilliant lights. I could see open earth and sky...and there, perched on the edge of a high cliff, my father's house. From the jeep, I stared into the vast space below, where two large rivers converged and intersected the city of Chongqing. But my exhilaration was momentary. There was no one outside to greet me. My worst fears were confirmed. The mistress of the spectacular house was not interested in my arrival. My father was away on assignment.

At 27, my stepmother Wen-ying felt burdened with raising two daughters of her own and being heavily pregnant with a third. She had always been intimidated by my father's large family, including my mother's relatives. She was not happy to see me, a reminder of my mother. I had borne the negligence of my grandmother in Chengdu. Now I could see the obvious resentment from my stepmother. I was afraid of her.

My stepmother carried her resentment to the dining table, pointedly keeping the better quality foods from me. I was very conscious of her scowling glances as we ate. I dared not reach for the meat and vegetable dishes. My bowl contained plain rice, with a hint of vegetable. My father was rarely home and was unaware of this mistreatment. He had always been self-

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centered and was now preoccupied with improving his unstable relationship with Chiang Kai-shek. Wen-yi spent most of his time at government headquarters or traveling. As always, he treated his daughters with a sort of benevolent neglect. My half-sisters, at least, enjoyed the affection of their mother. At one of his few appearances at the dinner table, my father remarked on my "preference" for rice. "You are picky about what you eat," he said. "You should eat more meat and vegetables. It is your sisters who should eat more rice." My eyes welled up, but I did not dare to complain.

I enrolled in a grade school for the children of officers. I was immediately an outcast because of my shabby clothes and awkward behavior. The girls were busily engaged in knitting projects. I looked on with envy. I did not have an allowance and received no encouragement at home for such frivolous things. I found two sturdy old incense sticks and asked the girls for end-pieces of yarn they discarded. One girl even gave me a generous amount. I tied the pieces together and began happily to knit a long scarf. The task gave me a sense of accomplishment. Then, the girl who gave me the large amount of yarn demanded it be returned. I had to unravel the entire project. My pent-up misery overflowed into a prolonged period of crying. My stepmother's sister who was staying with us at the time was curious and asked me what was wrong. Tearfully, I told her. She sniffed, adding, "What is the fuss? Just go and buy some." She was not aware I had no money, nor did she offer to help me.

My classmates had come to Chongqing from various parts of the country. Most conversed in cultured Mandarin. We were often required to recite verses from books during class. One day, after I had completed my recitation, the teacher asked the class, "Does everybody notice that Deng Yuan-yu converses in Sichuan dialog only, but recites in perfect Mandarin?" A compliment! I treasured that moment for the entire day.

My father's youngest sister, Aunt Bi-xia, attended college in Chongqing and visited us sometimes. On my day off from school, she occasionally took me to her dormitory and

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sometimes would allow me to remain overnight with her. These were among the few happy times of my stay in Chongqing. She bought delicious hot, spicy Sichuan dishes which we happily shared. We rode a three-piece-chair or “slippery poles” containing a piece of wood for seat, a piece for the back, and a piece for the feet roped between two long bamboo poles, shouldered by two carriers. This was a common method of transportation in the hilly city. I was thrilled and scared as the carriers ran up and down the very steep mountain paths like goats galloping in a great hurry.

I confess, I was mischievous even with my favorite young aunt. She loved to tell her friends of the day she had left me alone in her dormitory while she attended classes. When she returned to the room, she stared at my face, now completely covered with her lipstick, rouge, and eye make-up. I felt sheepish, but joyful at her howls of laughter. I cherished this young woman. She remained the only person who always remembered me and showed me constant kindness and affection during that period of my life, something I had not received from my grandmother, my brother, or my stepmother, and only sparingly from my father Wen-yi.

In September 1945 the exciting word spread throughout the city: the Japanese had surrendered to the Allies!! Aunt Bi-xia took me to town to see the victory parade. The streets were packed with people and jeeps, amid euphoria and continuous bursts from firecrackers. This was the first time I had seen so many foreigners. Many stood erect in their slow-moving jeeps, laughing and flashing the victory signs with both hands. We all laughed and waved back happily. The foreigners seemed happy and friendly, though they all looked the same to me.

During these months, I had grown substantially. My clothes became worn and tight. My young aunt was outraged at the poor quality and condition of my clothes. She complained loudly to my father and demanded money to buy proper clothing and shoes for me. Of course my father complied, which infuriated my stepmother. Her attitude toward me became even

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chillier. Then, one morning, I finally rebelled openly against my stepmother, over an egg. At breakfast, there was often a platter of fried "pocket eggs" for the whole family, except me. Eggs were special during those days. The cook and servants were aware of my stepmother's slight. In a defiant mood, I helped myself to an egg as everybody sat for breakfast. The startled maid tried to stop me. I snapped at her, "My father's money paid for all these; why can't I have one!" The table froze at this outburst. My stepmother's face turned white with anger and astonishment. She ordered me to leave the room. Word spread quickly among the servants and family. This was a first! Little Yuan-yu was the only one among the siblings who had dared to defy her stepmother! My stepmother was already frustrated with the birth of yet a third, to her, worthless baby daughter. My defiance was the last straw! She complained bitterly to my father that she was overburdened and could not handle such a "rebellious child." She persisted with her complaints and threats until my father promised to find another solution.

I was shunted from one family to another as a temporary measure. I stayed with several of my father's friends with children. They noted that I was always either fighting with the children or leading them into mischievous pursuits. One by one, they returned me to my father. I was then sent to a young couple with no children. I stayed with the Lins for several weeks. In their close living quarters, it was difficult not to see the blood in the bathroom where Auntie Lin used the toilet. I was amazed at the woman's lack of alarm, not yet aware of the normal monthly occurrence for young women. When my brother came to visit me and the young family, I loudly and excitedly related to him how "Auntie Lin was sick and passed a lot of blood in the bathroom the other day." Mrs. Lin and my brother were very embarrassed. I was soon returned to my father and stepmother, again!

My stepmother became alarmed at the prospect of having to raise me. The following weekend, my father and stepmother were chatting in the large covered patio facing the dazzling

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open valley below. I played quietly on the veranda nearby trying to overhear their conversation. I heard my stepmother's loud lament and ultimatum to my father. "You see? Nobody can handle her. She is driving everyone crazy here. She has to go. I don't care where or how!!" Shockingly, I heard my father reply: "All right, I will send her away."

I cried myself to sleep that night. What will become of me?

My father was much troubled by this problem. He finally thought of his brother Deng Wen-shi who had often jokingly teased Wen-yi to give him a couple of his daughters. Wen-yi wrote a letter to Wen-shi explaining Wen-ying just could not handle all these children and asking whether he would consider adopting me.

Uncle Wen-shi was born in 1906 in Liling, Hunan, two years after my father. He was a graduate of the fourth class at Whampoa Military Academy in 1926. While my father worked closely with Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist Regime as a senior staff officer, my uncle was an army field officer. He saw his first action as a platoon leader during the Northern Expedition against the warlords in the north. In 1936, now a lieutenant colonel, he participated in the rescue mission during Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's captivity, known as the Xian Incident. The following year, he commanded a regiment that fought valiantly in the famous Shanghai Battle against the Japanese. He was also in the one-week unsuccessful battle against Japanese invaders, resulting in the Nanjing massacre. He was forced to retreat with 1,000 troops from Nanjing. Wen-shi had seen action in many battles during the long Sino-Japanese war, and was promoted to major general in 1942. My uncle was commander of the 65th Regiment, 205<sup>th</sup> Division of the Youth Corps<sup>1</sup> in 1945.

Wen-shi was delighted to receive my father's offer. He discussed the matter with his wife Ke-ming, who was childless. They had adopted a boy, Yuan-cheng, now seven years old. They both thought it would be nice to have a little girl about the same age to play together. Wen-shi wrote back and accepted

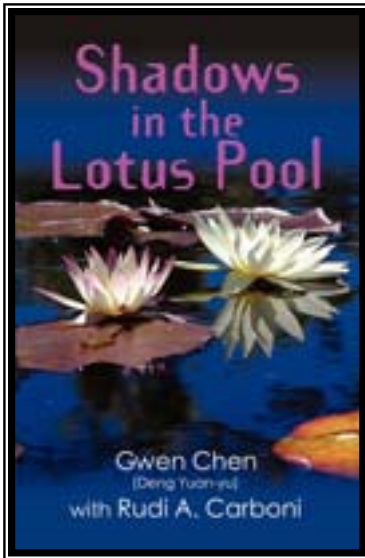


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Wen-yi's offer gladly. Several of his officers in training in Chongqing would accompany me on their trip back to Shaoguan.

My fate was settled and I was about to be handed off, once again, to another household in a strange place. Since I was still in the family, my father felt the arrangement would not change my relationship with him. Upon my departure, Wen-yi told me in a kind voice, "Yuan-yu, you will have a long journey. Your uncle and aunt do not have a daughter. They will take you into their family. You should call them Baba (Dad) and Mama. Try to be good and to please them!" I started to cry quietly. My father watched. He seemed sad and even a bit upset.

I was eight years old. I left my father's spectacular house by the same route by which I had arrived a year before. Nobody came to see me leave or to say goodbye.



*Deng Wen-yi, a major general at age 22, has no time for his motherless daughter, Yuan-yu. He is catapulted into a series of adventures and misadventures that brings humiliations and triumphs in his close, tempestuous relationship with China's president Chiang Kai-shek. The author recounts her childhood as an unwanted child, neglected, maltreated and molested. The story of father and daughter unfolds against the background of revolutionary China of the mid-1900s.*

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