

PEARL S. BUCK

The Final Chapter



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by

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just didn't know what to do with it.

When Ted was hospitalized in the summer of 1973 with depression and exhaustion, I visited him in the Rutland Hospital. I vowed then that no matter how bad everything seemed, how badly Miss Buck's dreams were being shattered and trampled by people who just did not know who she was and what she wanted, I vowed that someday the world would know and understand the truth.

That summer and fall, I stood in a little book store in Danby which we had started to feature her books and talk about her work - I stood in that little store and had people pour out their hearts to me about what a great lady she was and what a terrible thing had happened that her secretary, her business manager, and all those evil people with her when she died had forced her to sign over all her possessions to them. I listened and talked back to them, sometimes revealing that I was that evil secretary they had read about in the newspapers. Of course, I reminded them sarcastically, everything you read in the newspapers is always true. Sometimes I did not reveal who I was, taking the stings and the nasty barbs, for I was too weary to fight back.

At home, I moved out of the bedroom I had shared for so many years with my husband. I moved as a last resort to salvage what dignity and peace I had left. My exit created repercussions that ended in my husband brandishing a shotgun first at me, then at himself. It was our son, Tom, who rushed in to protect me and his brother, and his father too, from bodily harm. It was Tom who turned around that terrible incident so that we were not hurt, any of us, except in dreadful emotional scars which took a very long time to heal. And it was that occasion that saw the re-entry into my life of an old friend who had long stayed away because he and my

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husband always argued when they were together. The old and dear friend later became my wise and understanding husband, without whose constant encouragement I would not now be writing these words.

Such a horror as the gun-brandishing can sometimes become the straw that breaks the camel's back. I think it was then that my back was broken and things became too much, too complicated, too entangled, and I was too exhausted to even try to straighten them out any more. I sought escape from the personal agony. I started drinking with a vicious disregard to moderation and the little glasses of sweet sherry I had always enjoyed, sipped delicately from a Waterford crystal glass, became bottles and bottles of the insidious poison, guzzled at first secretly in desperation, then consumed blatantly anytime anywhere. Little did I know at that time that I had no tolerance whatsoever for alcohol; the extent I drank even though it was for a relatively short period of time, swiftly sent me over the edge into the alcoholic oblivion known as black-outs, and I stumbled through the next three years in a semi-conscious state. The terrors of creeping alcohol addiction cannot be adequately described. Alcohol in any amount never solved any problems and creates more and more on its own. But at terrible expense it does succeed in blotting out the real world for a while, turning off the brain and the heart in a brief respite. It is not respite, not a rest, but a living Hell, and I shall spare the reader the Hell I went through in order to climb back up again into the real world. It is probably coincidence that once I had made up my mind to tell this story about how I met Pearl Buck, how I went to work for her and all the tangled things that happened after that - once I had made up my mind to tell the whole story, the need for alcohol - my need for escape - vanished completely. Coincidence? Miss