

More bandits continued moving into the area daily, and part of the gang moved to a temple farther back into the mountains to accommodate their swelling numbers. All the local stores closed, and the family's store of millet and flour dwindled. The U.S. Embassy sent Laura a letter stating that the Embassy had learned that several hundred bandits were taking over her neighborhood in the Western Hills. They urged her to move into Peking as soon as possible. Laura read the letter several times.

"... move the children into the city as soon as possible." How was she supposed to do that? It had been hard enough moving three miles from Chao Yang An to the Russian Retreat Place when she had had only five babies and two young girls who were old enough to manage the hike. Now she had twelve babies plus twelve older children, hardly any of them old enough to manage even a three-mile hike, much less the ten-mile distance into Peking. It was true that the family would be somewhat safer living closer in to the American Embassy, even though Peking was now occupied by Japanese troops. Also, it would be easier for volunteers to come and teach the children to read and write. She was becoming concerned, after all, about how to give the older children their academic education.

On the other hand, city life would be complicated. She would probably have to register the orphanage with city officials. It would be expensive, too. Rent would be higher, she would probably have to start buying water again from a carrier, and how would the family raise their goats and chickens? Without the supplements that their animals and garden supplied, the family's food costs would skyrocket.

In any case, there seemed no way to do it. The transportation problem was too great. So Laura decided to stay put and try to weather the crisis. Maybe something would happen to make the bandits go away.

But the men in black stayed and found another way to exploit the local people. Neighbors reported that the bandits were forcing the villagers to help them dynamite and plunder the Tomb of the Princess. Every day the people of one of the villages had to butcher a pig and carry it up the mountain to the men in black, along with two sacks of flour, vegetables, and other supplies. The bandits forced local carpenters, masons and other skilled workmen to help excavate the tomb.

Opening the long passage to the door of the tomb took longer than the men in black expected, but after a number of days of hard work, they broke through and opened the door. Laura's carpenter friend told her that they found delicate leaves fashioned from silver and gold strewn over the remains of the princess's body. Precious pearls had been placed under her tongue, and a golden bowl rested at her feet. This bowl was so highly polished, the carpenter reported, that if a candle were placed inside it, it would reflect three candles.

All the time the excavation work was going on, the kidnapping continued. Nights were becoming noisy now with the barking of dogs and the echoing cries of terrified captives on the mountain trail opposite the mission. The children slept poorly through the commotion.

For several months Laura had been able to hire a village woman to help her do the laundry. The washerwoman now developed a nervous twitch in her left eye, and the gatekeeper's motions slowed almost to a halt, as if his limbs were becoming gradually paralyzed by fear. The children started to pick up the adults' uneasiness. One day when six-year-old Rachel was pumping the swing high above the courtyard wall, she suddenly screamed and tumbled out of the swing seat in a panic. She

rushed over to Laura, sobbing. Laura put her arms around her, wondering what had happened.

“A bad man, Mama!” Rachel wailed. Her small frame shook, and Laura could feel her little heart thudding. “A bad man was looking at me!”

Laura looked over the wall. Rachel loved to swing. It was her favorite way to play. This morning she apparently swung so high she could see over the courtyard wall to the mountain facing the mission. One of the men in black was standing on the path, hands hidden in his black sleeves, staring in the direction of the mission. To Rachel it must have seemed that he was staring at her. The little girl didn't seem to know why he scared her. She said he was bad, that was all.

Laura kissed her daughter gently and told her that she and the other children were no longer allowed to play on the swings.

Soon after that incident, the Embassy sent a second urgent message, pressing Laura to take immediate action to move Canaan Home to Peking. War would erupt in her neighborhood soon, they warned. The Japanese were making plans to return and drive the bandits out of their stronghold. Laura carried the letter into her bedroom for a few quiet moments to think and pray.

It was now over three weeks since the men in black had first appeared. The family was nearly out of millet and flour, and there was no telling how long it would be before local stores opened again. Certainly they would stay closed until the Japanese moved in to fight the bandits, and the Russian Retreat Place was located too close to the bandits' stronghold to hope to escape the fighting. In fact, the Japanese would probably want to use the old Russian mission to house soldiers and store supplies. It looked like the time had come to find a new location for Canaan Home.

Laura sent a message to the laundry woman asking her to babysit the children for a day. She also sent a message to her friend the carpenter, asking him to accompany her into Peking in the morning.

A crashing thunderstorm drowned the cries of the bandits' captives that night, and it was still drizzling when Laura woke early. She checked the children. They were sleeping soundly. There seemed no point in waking them to say good-bye.

At the gatehouse, the laundress and the carpenter showed up promptly, glancing nervously over their shoulders at the trail to the bandits' hideout. Fortunately there was no sign of any of the men in black on the mountain. Laura hoped it would keep raining all day. Foul weather would make her journey less conspicuous. Perhaps she could go all the way into Peking and come home again without anyone noticing her absence.

The air was thick with the combined fragrances of damp fields, open toilets and human offal spread out for fertilizer. Laura and her companion slipped and slid upon the wet grass along the narrow path through the villages to the main road. Laura's shoes soon became caked with mud. Her gown grew sodden and cold. At the main road the pair hired rickshaws for the last eight miles into the city. The charcoal skies dripped on.