

The Enemy

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by Pearl S. Buck

Class 12 Vistas Chapter 4

About the author

Pearl S. Buck (1892 to 1973).

American novelist, daughter of missionaries who served in China.

Spent most of her life in China.

Famous for 'The Good Earth'.

Won the Nobel Prize for

Literature in 1938.

About the story

Set in Japan during World War

II. A Japanese surgeon, Dr

Sadao Hoki, finds a wounded

American prisoner of war washed

up on the shore by his house.

The story is the inner conflict

between his duty as a doctor

and his duty as a patriot.

Setting and the main man

War-time Japan, 1940s. Sadao's house sits on a narrow rocky coast facing the Pacific.

Dr Sadao Hoki :

- * skilled surgeon and scientist
- * trained in America for 8 years
- * not sent to the front - the old General needs him
- * married to Hana, also raised partly in America
- * two small children

Sadao's father insisted he marry a Japanese woman - which is why he waited till he met Hana in America.

western training + Japanese duty

← the inner split

He recalls boarding rejections he faced in America.

The body on the shore

One foggy evening Sadao and Hana step out for fresh air.

They see a man crawling out of the mist towards the rocks.

He is :

- * young, blond, white
- * an American prisoner of war
- * shot in the back, bleeding
- * close to dying

His name turns out to be Tom.

The first decision

Three options pass through

Sadao's mind :

- (i) push him back into the sea
- (ii) hand him to the police
- (iii) take him in and treat him

The doctor in him takes over.

He cannot let a wounded man die in front of him.

Servants in revolt

When the servants find an American in the master bedroom they are shocked.

- * the old gardener - tradition says the foreigner must die
- * the cook - 'the master will be punished'
- * Yumi the maid - refuses to wash the enemy

After three days they walk out. Hana herself has to clean Tom with her own hands.

The operation

Sadao operates that very night. Hana gives the anaesthetic. She faints once but holds on.

bullet removed, life saved

Tom survives the surgery.

Sadao tells the General

The old General is Sadao's patient - he depends on him for a coming gall-bladder operation.

Sadao confesses the truth.

The General is amused, not angry. He promises private assassins will come at night and remove the American quietly.

promise of assassins - never kept

Sadao waits three nights.

No one comes.

The General has simply forgotten - preoccupied with his own pain.

A small but biting line :
the General's self-interest is greater than his patriotism.
He needs Sadao alive more than he needs Tom dead.

The plan of escape

Realising the assassins will never come, Sadao acts.

The plan :

- * his own small motor-boat
- * a coastal Korean island, safe
- * food, water, blanket
- * a flashlight - two signals if Tom runs out of supplies

Tom waits on the island and watches for a passing boat that will take him to a Japanese fishing village.

Tom never needs to signal.

A passing ship picks him up.

The closing reflection

Standing alone, Sadao wonders - why could he not kill an enemy he had been taught to hate ?
He has no answer.

Themes

(a) Humanity above nation

The story's heart - a doctor's oath outweighs a soldier's loyalty.

(b) Duty in conflict

Sadao is torn between doctor, husband, son of Japan.

(c) Racism and prejudice

Sadao faced racism in America.

The servants feel racial hatred for the white prisoner.

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(d) Loyalty and marriage

Hana stands by Sadao although she is afraid. Quiet courage.

(e) Self-interest of power

The General forgets the assassins because his own health worries him more.

War magnifies the smallness of

Craft and irony

Buck builds irony at each turn :

- * the enemy washes up at the doctor's door
- * the patriotic surgeon saves the enemy soldier
- * the General is too selfish to enforce his own order

The setting helps - the lonely house on the cliff is both isolation* and protection.

Quick revision

Q. Why does Sadao save Tom ?

A. The doctor in him is stronger than the patriot.

Q. Why does the General fail to send assassins ?

A. Self-interest. He needs Sadao alive for his own surgery.

Q. What does the title mean ?