

The Peace Hotel

by Lonnie Carter

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The Peace Hotel in Old Shanghai's no five star joint for certain
it's the kind of house where you flop or crash and you never get right
the curtain
there's a note on the bed says they'll change the sheets but only if you say so
not one or two but every three days and if you said six ten or twelve
they'd never more
replace-o
is it the soap they use, their keen concern, and the suds that's so pollutin'?
the streets are clean in a dampish way there ain't no guns there ain't
no shootin'
No Saturday night specials no snub-nosed revolvs
nary an automatic assault weapon and the psycho crimes it solves
no high speed chases, no Uzis at thirty paces, this ain't no Hong Kong movie set
if the smack and the crack in life's door's not opened - much or yet
it's 'cause a dash of cocaine and ten of mary jane gets you a slug in the head,
you bet
there are those who think this'll deter the gents,
(forget the deter-gents that's sudsin' up the rivers, canals and on to the sea
these boys, death-defying givers, your bosom-buddies, want a pretty
China doll sit on your knee?)
me thinks those who think deter-ent, they're the ones heads been bent
'cause these guys don't give a rat's ass in this Year of the Rat
whether they lose it all, crap in a hole or your hat
enough folks being paid off, my guess
that all concerned, more or less,
be holding their fire, down to the wire
with bigger fish to fry in the land at hand where farm folks who were
pouring into the city for years 'cause they were starving in the
countryside are now being re-country-ated 'cause they're starving in the
city but, wait, they're being re city-ated because all the

con-job-struction and dee-struction so bloody hard that the Beijingers
want no part of it leave shit-work to country-folk - of a lower culture,
heard say from one Chinese to an ex-pat - and the government thinks
that if they get moved back and forth often enough, as long as they
finish building before they collapse (as if that's not what's going to
happen to these buildings) from one starvation site to the next that
they'll all just drop dead in transit somewhere and nobody'll have to
worry about them no more no how on the theory not of divide and conquer,
but move 'em up, head 'em on out, keep 'em rounded, branded, muzzled,
grizzled, sizzled like pork on a spit, gristle-chewed, bristle-brewed,
snout-hair pie with fruit juice fresh from sty of the eye
now these are folks who'll eat anything with four legs but the table
and some'll eat the wood, toothpickin' the splinters
'cause they're southern
and the level of their culture is hinter
and othern
so say folks from the north
why, they'll eat anything with wings but an airplane and its cable and some'll eat
the cock-pit
spitting out the rooster and swallowing it
and you ain't heard the half
what folks from the south say 'bout northern trash
The World Famous Peace Hotel's right on the Bund
which separates Shanghai fom Pudong as in Poodooong
where all the gleaming needle towers of commerce get kept
in the haystack of mirrored, glassed and smoky eco-gnomics
The Peace is triangular, almost, coming not to quite a point
The prow of its ship looks directly across the canal
over the heads of the promenaders who stop along the rails
to take their photographs to take home to look at and show off to prove
that they've been there to others as they themselves forget where hey've been
Is not this the way of all things photographic perpetrated by those who write in
light?
As one large family, eight or nine, takes their turn to have their image
memorialized,
the shutterbug dad chain-smokes and casually hands the still burning fag-end to
his son
who plays at stubbing the butt against the latticed iron fascinated by the sparks
that rise past his face
And it takes dad so long and he smokes so fast that he a second time hands the
newer
fag to his son who repeats the process, sparks rising no closer
to his face amazed

Seven small boats attached, sampan-tug hybrids, glide by, pulled by the lead chugger
Two crewpersons each boat, one resting, one on his or her feet, walking the deck,
dipping a bucket, splashing it across the boards, smoking the Chinese cigs
offered me by the concession man at the Great Wall the week before,
the empty packs floating many times over in the hunted-green water
And the question, again and always - where are they going?
Are they employed by state-run industries, labor-intensive (doesn't that just mean
that people work hard?) casualties of market forces?
And what of this Communist experiment, was that against market forces?
And haven't the Chinese always had the silk market, the flower market,
the pearl market, the wicker market and, best of all, the dirt market,
where they sell dirt of all grades,
dirt on your floor, dirt on the floor you don't have, dirt under your nails,
dirt under the nails that've been pulled from your cuticles,
dirt beneath dirt, the dirt that dare not speak its name?
I take a taxi from the front of the Peace Hotel with my Chinese characters
saying Huai Hai Road so the driver understands
He offers me a 555 cigarette wanting to be my friend as is the custom
and I turn him down because cigs no longer my custom
He drops me off at Huai Hai Park and I pull out my rmbs for payment
and he takes the twelve something yuans and hands me a hundred
I say no because already the money changers - 'chahnggdamoaneye' -
ringing in my eyes
And he say something jigga jigga jegga jegga something more and I get it
He wants MY hundred, he'll give me his hundred
My hundred rare, his common, I say what the moaneye
And walk out into almost Old Shanghai
Past the site of the First National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party
closed from 11:30 to 13:00
Across from the first French primary school now Chinese
closed for the summer
Didn't Chou En Lai live around here someplace?
Past Shanghai Science and Tech Research Center for Artificial Limbs
Dr. Sun Yat-sen had a pad here someplace, Dr Sun, the founder of the
Chinese nation
here 'tis, o, closed, hey, guys, 12 year olds, bouncing your
Michael Jordan basketballs
with your Chicago Bull's caps turned around backwards, you guys
know why Dr. Sun's
crib be shut up tight?

Off the lobby of the Peace Hotel is a saloon, world-famous, I'm assured,
time-honored on the mahogany trail, replete with Old Jazz Band, seven strong,
average age 7 - 0, and yes,
they play 'O, when the Saints', 'Chicago is my kind of Town', 'New York, New
York',
'All of Me', and the trumpeter is a gas
7 - 0, that is, seventy selections they'll play for you then and there,
order by number and two hundred in their repertoire,
keep you returning night after night
'Missed the Saturday dance, heard they crowded the floor
Awfully lonely without you, don't get around much anymore'
Fresh from dinner upstairs at the 'world famous' French restaurant
Frunchies, what'sitsface?
My Mandarin fish giving a new definition to 'smothered in onions'
My Peace cocktail made, I'm assured, with real grape wine
My chocolate ice cream - you have chocolate? Hagendas. Chocolate? Yes,
coffee or caramel? Chocolate? Yes, chocolate. Coffee or caramel?
I'll have chocolate -
Well-heeled mama and papa with uncle, youngish, with 11 year old girl
who answers them in unaccented English as they pepper her with Chinese and
she
eats her hotpot
The ever-present cellular phone insisting on the complete eradification
of everyone's privacy
The Peace Hotel gift shop with a 2 and a half by 3 feet scroll of the
Blessed Virgin Mary
Coca-Cola whose Chinese name is Caco-Laco, which in fact means soothing
drink to take the rust off your motor scooter
Kodak, everywhere, meaning, are you ready?, absolutely nothing at all
The drawing of famous Chinese leader on the bus stop sign dead ringer for
Robert Mitchum
The escalator in new gleaming department store goes up one floor and as
you turn to go up
again you have the down escalator
And so every time you want to go in one direction more than one floor
you have to turn
around and go to the other end of the floor
Is this Confucian?
He who go one way must turn 'round go other way to come back long
distance correctly
The muzak is definitely Eastern, eastern Appalachia, as 'O my darling
Clementine' swirls among the ladies' foundations
Striking watercolorist at the immense new Shanghai Art Museum, Chen Chi,
writes -

Un-building
Re-building
Ever-building
On and on in man's garden
I paint

And my favorite -

I myself, no self
I paint

Favorite painting - a small figure doing something indeterminable.
Title - Juggling Ropes
Two prominent dissidents each named Wang, Wang and Wong, 'king' in Chinese, though somehow
'The World of Susie Wang' doesn't have the same bong to it, a
clear case of two Wangs making a rights' movement, forming a new political party,
catch 23 and a half, you can form one, but not before registering it
and you can't register it
Back to Beijing (where maybe I'm beginning to understand things?) where
last week after seeing a play at the Central China Experimental Theater
deep in the lower intestine of the oldest mongoose
the Quing Dynasty could possibly recall
my driver Mr Ao tells me 'Close the windows'
as I see workers with huge fire hoses spraying tall trees
and scores hundreds of people walking along showered
Mr Ao - 'Animals live in trees, must be sprayed'
and today in front of the Spanish Embassy in broad daylight,
that is, as light as the smog-ghost-grey gets,
two city workers with masks aiming same fire hoses into the tall trees
as clouds of liquid spew out over the more scores of people
within dropping distance and Mr Ao once again says
'Close the windows, they're spraying the little animals that
live in the trees'