

*Friday, October 4, 1941*

An air raid warning siren began blaring. Its wailing sound gradually increased in volume and then became faint, only to grow loud and urgent again. The harried nurse in the crowded waiting room wiped the perspiration off her forehead and looked at her wrist watch.

“Ten o’clock already?” she moaned. “Come on, everyone,” she called loudly, standing up and walking towards the front door. “Let’s go out into the open. Hurry!”

“Oh, it’s only a drill,” a woman sitting on a bench along the wall complained. “The siren will stop in a few minutes. There won’t be planes. Why can’t we just sit here?”

“I know it’s only a drill,” the nurse answered, “but the British authorities require we take the drills seriously. Come on, everyone, out on the street!”

“Why don’t these foreigners pack up and go home!” the woman complained again, picking up her child and following others toward the door.

“It’s only for our safety,” the nurse explained patiently. “We don’t want to be caught inside a building should bombs start falling.”

Doctor Devi Lal was about to examine a young boy. “Oh, there goes the siren,” he said to the child’s mother. “Come, we’ll go and stand outside. I’ll finish the examination when the drill is over.”

A nurse took the mother and her child out. Devi Lal stood up and, taking a deep breath, stretched his arms above his head. He wore white

cotton pants and shirt. His red silk necktie was held in place with a small gold clip. Almost six feet tall and sixty years of age, his rugged face, gray hair and neatly trimmed mustache gave him a distinguished appearance.

As he walked through the now empty waiting room, a young woman came out of a side door marked Business Office. “You look tired, Dad,” she said, joining him. “Do you feel all right?”

“I’m fine, Khin May,” he answered, putting an arm around her shoulders. “I didn’t sleep well last night. Perhaps a brief nap this afternoon will refresh me.”

Khin May, at age 32, was a strikingly attractive woman with a mixture of classical Burmese and Indian features. Her skin was smooth and fair, her face delicate. She had high cheek bones and a long dainty neck. Her eyes were large and brown. She wore a red silk *longyi*, an ankle length sarong, tightly wrapped around her slim waist. Her pink sleeveless blouse was made of silk. Long black hair, neatly tied in a knot behind her head, was adorned with a strand of white jasmine flowers. She was not a trained nurse, but helped her father in his clinic as an office manager with the large number of patients that came in each day.

The father and daughter joined the clinic staff and the patients milling around in the bright sunshine on the sidewalk. All traffic had stopped, and the people sitting in bullock carts, cars and buses talked to each other in lowered voices. In exactly five minutes, the siren went silent.

“There, it was a drill. I told you so,” the same woman who had complained earlier muttered. “There’s no raid.” They waited for the “all clear” signal and a few minutes later the siren came on again — just a straight wail.

“Good,” the nurse announced cheerfully. “Come on, we can go back in now.”

The rest of the morning went by quickly. Devi Lal finished examining his last patient. “Your baby is better today,” he informed the mother,