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"Blending the personal with pivotal world history, Zia succeeds in creating a universal, timeless story. . . . Gathered, analyzed, and distilled with insight and meticulous documentation, Zia's book gives voice to a history almost lost."—"The Christian Science Monitor" "A deftly woven, deeply moving chronicle of the extraordinary ordeals of four ordinary Chinese in a world torn by war and fractured by ideology. . . . a fascinating read as an intimate family memoir, as well as a missing chapter of modern history finally coming to light. . . . What makes the Shanghai story unique. . . . is that we didn't really know you. Except in some films and novels that make passing references to this episode of Chinese history—often as a nostalgic backdrop, equivalent to a crowd scene in cinematic terms—the real human cost of the massive exodus has remained a mystery. Official records, if any, are suppressed, and research in this area has been sketchy. In this sense, Helen Zia's new book, Last Boat Out of Shanghai: The Epic Story of the Chinese Who Fleed Mao's Revolution. . . . fills a gap in our collective memory."—"San Francisco Chronicle" "Beautifully crafted, carefully researched. . . . Last Boat Out of Shanghai is an engaging work of high-quality popular history. It has things to offer not just to general readers with little knowledge about the city's intriguing past, but even to specialists. . . . Ms. Zia lets us eavesdrop on the conversations in 'hushed voices' of several people whose childhoods are brought vividly to life. . . . Last Boat Out of Shanghai is so good I'll certainly need to add it to the syllabus for my class. That means something else will have to go—or my students will simply have four hundred more pages of fascinating reading."—"Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, The Wall Street Journal" "A dramatic story of four young people who were among the thousands fleeing China after 1949's communist revolution. Eye-opening."—"People" Zia's portraits are compassionate and heartbreaking, and they are, ultimately, the universal story of many families who leave their homeland as refugees and find a less-than-welcoming circumstances on the other side. I read with a personal hunger to know the political and personal exigencies that led to those now-or-never decisions for their mirror the story of my own mother, who also left on virtually the last boat out of Shanghai—"Amy Tan, author of The Joy Luck Club" "I have long been an admirer of Helen Zia's writing and scholarship, but Last Boat Out of Shanghai is at a whole new level. It's a true page-turner. Zia has proven once again that history is something that happens to real people. I stayed up late reading night after night, because I wanted to know what would happen to Benny, Ho, Bing, Annuo, and their friends and families."—"Lisa See, author of The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane Chapter 1BennyAge 9Shanghai, August 14, 1937Racing north on the treelined French concession side of Avenue Haig, a nimble boy weaved his way around the sidewalk's throngs, dodging ahead of basket-laden shoppers and old men out for an afternoon stroll. He barely glanced at the hawkers with their motley goods spread out on the pavement or the threadbare beggars cross-legged on the hard ground, their body hands extended to passersby for some pity and a coin.With his unruly black hair, his knee socks bunched at the ankles, and the tail of his white shirt climbing out of his short pants, there was still no mistaking this child for a street urchin making off with something pilfered. Benny Pan was lithe and strong, his skin fair and his cheeks ruddy with a healthy glow. More telling was his open, confident manner, his eyes wide without a trace of guile. He could have been any child of the city's sizable middle class of professionals and service workers who tended to the giant metropolises. He might have even been a scion of Shanghai's bourgeoisie, the newly rich Chinese capitalists who had taken over the sectors of industry and commerce not already controlled by the foreigners. Or, most exclusive of all, his family could have been compradors, the Chinese who served as trusted go-betweeners for the rich and powerful foreign taipans, the European and American empire builders whose vast wealth derived from the opium trade, in return for being their agents, the compradors were richly rewarded with the money and access to power that were held only by the foreigners in treaty port cities like Shanghai, concessions established after China failed in its effort to halt the opium traffic.For this privileged child of Shanghai, the broad expanse of Avenue Haig was a playground. Its wide, curving lanes formed the western border of the French Concession, where he lived. He could ride his bike northward on the avenue into the British-run International Settlement to the elite American missionary institutions: McTeYre School, St. John's University, and St. Mary's Hall; his parents had attended the latter two and expected him to study at St. John's one day. A mile to the south was St. Ignatius Cathedral and its towering spires.Benny had explored all points of interest on the east side of Avenue Haig. He was forbidden, however, to cross to the west side of that border street, an area of contested jurisdiction. Shanghai's foreign settlements stood as virtual islands inside China's sovereign territory, allowed to rule themselves with foreign laws—an arrangement forced upon China by the British and Americans after their "gunboat diplomacy" defeated the Qing dynasty emperor in the Opium Wars of the mid-1800s. Though the boundaries of the foreign-ruled enclaves were clearly delimited by treaty, over the years the British had continued to push out roads, country estates, luxurious villas, schools, country clubs, hunting grounds, and a racetrack beyond the border and into the "extra-boundary" or "extra-settlement" areas, all against China's objections. In this zone of ambiguous jurisdiction, gambling houses, opium dens, brothels, and gangsters also flourished, just out of reach of British or French police. The area was so lawless and dangerous that it was known to locals as the Badlands. Benny's father forbade the boy to cross Avenue Haig into the crime-ridden Badlands.On rare occasions, Benny accompanied his father, an accountant and officer in the police auxiliary, into those nether reaches. At such times Benny saw for himself the stark conditions of the Chinese sections: dilapidated shacks and squalid tenements reeking of raw sewage and general decay, overcrowded with people in tattered clothing who navigated the unpaved lanes in rope sandals or bare feet. These were the city's laboring people, who toiled in the factories and carried the backbreaking loads, pulling the rickshaws, carts, and pedicabs. But at least they had roofs over their heads, his father would note, unlike the homeless beggars and refugees forced to sleep in any vacant patch they could find. Boys like Benny could be kidnapped for ransom—or worse—in those dangerous areas, his parents sternly cautioned.They needn't have worried, for Benny was not the sort to defy his parents' wishes. He found plenty to keep himself occupied in his neighborhood on the east side of Avenue Haig, where the extremes of Shanghai society collided in curious ways. With two hospitals nearby, afflicted and frightening-looking unfortunates lingered on the sidewalks each day, hoping to be treated before they expired. None of that was shocking to Benny. After all, his amah had taught him from the moment he could walk, "If you see a dead body on the street, just go the other way." That was a simple rule of self-preservation in this unforgiving metropolis where abject misery coexisted with unabashed opulence.On this day, Benny noticed something different in the usual assemblage of deformity and disease lined up at one of the hospitals. Several people had fresh wounds to their heads and faces or bloodied rags wrapped around twisted or missing limbs. Startled, he realized they might be casualties from the battle with Japan that had begun the day before on the north side of the city in Zabei, a Chinese section. At any other time, his curiosity might have slowed him for a better look. But he was in too much of a rush to get home: He had to tell his mother what he had just seen in the sky.As Benny approached a busy intersection, a tall, bearded police officer standing in a kiosk above the street raised his baton, forcing the boy and the traffic to an abrupt halt. "Phooey," he declared in the American accent that he had learned at school. The swarthy, bearded cop wore a standard-issue khaki police uniform—topped by a telltale red turban. He was a Sikh, one of a few hundred warriors that the British brought from their India colony to be cops in Shanghai. Hong du ai sei—red-hatted monkey—was the disparaging name that local Shanghainese gave these fierce Sikhs.Near Benny, some pedicab drivers and their well-dressed foreign passengers pulled to a stop. The sick and infirm nearest the foreigners thrust their hands out for alms. One was a boy about his own age with no legs, only stumps, while an old woman had just one eye. Benny knew instantly that the foreigners must be longtimers in Shanghai since no one flinched or displayed even the slightest dismay at the appalling humanity beside them.When the red-hatted traffic cop finally waved them on, Benny sped a fox pelt on the shoulders of one of the yellow-haired women. Its glass-eyed head bounced with each lurch of the pedicab before disappearing through the gates of the German country club off Avenue Haig. As the little fox head bobbed out of sight, Benny's eye caught something else: a red band adorned with a black swastika on the arm of a pale-faced foreigner in one of the pedicabs. He recognized the symbol from the flags that were cropping up with greater frequency on the German buildings in his neighborhood. To the boy, it was just another foreign curiosity in his international city.Soon he reached the gate leading to his neighborhood, the Dashing lilong, a Shanghai-style enclosed residential complex that was popular with both foreigners and well-to-do Chinese. Just outside the gate, the proprietor of his favorite bookstore called out to him: "Benny, come have a look!" The boy raised an arm in greeting without pausing for his customary scan of the latest magazines and comic books. Turning, he nearly slammed into an old man whose heavy baskets of neatly stacked bitter melons dangled from the pole that he balanced on one shoulder. "Damn you, little devil," he snarled.By then Benny had already mumbled, "Excuse me" as he passed by the heavy iron gate and dozing watchman into the narrow lanes of his lilong. He stopped only after reaching the thick green door of a three-story building attached to its neighbors on each side.Once inside the mosaic-tiled vestibule, he shouted: "Mother! Amah! The Japanese are coming!" "Young Master, be quiet or you'll wake Little Brother and Little Sister!" his amah scolded.A slender woman appeared from behind a polished wood-paneled door. Her movement was so graceful that the air seemed undisturbed by her approach. As usual, she looked impeccable in a stylish qipao dress, with her hair knotted in a neat chignon. "Long-Long, what are you so excited about?" she asked with a puzzled look. She addressed the boy by his nickname, Little Dragon, chosen because he was born in 1928, during the Year of the Dragon, the most powerful creature of the Chinese zodiac."I saw them, Mother. I saw the planes! The Japanese planes are flying to the Waitian!" he shouted, referring to the famous Bund by its Chinese name.His mother gently brushed the hair from his face with her fingers. Before she could reply, an unmistakable boom shook the quiet of the house. "See, Mother? Let's go look from the roof!" He was already dashing up the three flights of stairs, his mother not far behind. As they climbed, they could hear another loud boom in the distance. On the roof, they ducked under the drying laundry to reach the open patio where fragrant gardenias and peonies bloomed in large pots. Toward the east, plumes of black smoke rose above the cityscape near the tall Broadway Mansions, a clear landmark."The Japanese must be bombing Zabei, just like on 1-2-8!" he ventured, using the colloquial shorthand for the date January 28, 1932, which was sealed into the minds of schoolchildren and grown-ups alike because of the infamous Japanese attack on Shanghai that day, just five years earlier.Throughout the country, Chinese were seething with outrage at Japan's most recent aggressions. Their island neighbor had launched numerous "incidents"—as Tokyo euphemistically called their incursions on Chinese soil—each bolder than the last. In 1931 Japan had invaded Manchuria, with its rich coal and mineral reserves, in China's northeast, locking in its control after installing a puppet government with Puyi, the deposed last emperor of China, to be the region's figurehead ruler. Such puppets would become Japan's model for occupation in China.The Chinese Nationalist government had protested these incidents at the League of Nations to no avail. Just one month earlier, on July 7, 1937, Japan had staged another aggression—this time in Beijing at Lukouqiao, known to Westerners as the Marco Polo Bridge. Frustrated Chinese leaders had been calling on Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek to respond decisively to Japan in a united front that included the Communists. But instead of confronting Japan, he seemed focused on eliminating the Reds. Only the year before, in 1936, one of Chiang's own generals had precipitated a national crisis by kidnapping him, to force the generalissimo to stand up to Japan. Finally, after this latest provocation in Beijing, Chiang's army was fighting back—with Shanghai as the battleground,just beyond the gates of his lilong. Benny could hear newspaper hawkers barking out the latest headlines each day. Usually, he paid them no mind, letting their voices blend into the din. But in recent weeks, more than three hundred thousand Nationalist soldiers had been mobilized to the countryside surrounding Shanghai. Young boys like Benny who lived in the protected foreign enclaves with little fear of attack were thrilled at the prospect of soldiers, weaponry, and the coming showdown.This new battle for Shanghai had been launched only the day before, on Friday, August 13, 1937. The sound of distant artillery reverberated through the city. Could it be that Japan was mounting an air attack on Shanghai? That would explain the low-flying aircraft.Five years earlier, many residents in the foreign concessions had watched from their rooftops as that previous battle with Japan had raged in the nearby Chinese sections. Mesmerized, they had oohed and aahed at the glowing cannon fire and ensuing infernos as though they were spectators at the races. This time would be no different—or so everyone thought. After all, the French consul still ruled the French Concession, and the British and Americans governed the International Settlement through the Shanghai Municipal Council. In addition to the British, Americans, and French, there were tens of thousands of foreigners from nearly every European country living in these two jurisdictions, as well as thousands of Japanese civilians. No one imagined that the Tokyo government would want to fight Britain or America or that it would risk killing off its own nationals living in Shanghai. That's why Chinese from surrounding areas habitually ran to the foreign concessions in troubled times and why families like Benny's who could afford to live anywhere chose to live among Shanghai's many foreigners.From their rooftop, Benny's mother gazed out toward the billowing smoke and nearby landmarks. Her face turned pale. "Oh no, Long-Long! Those fires aren't in Zabei. They're inside the International Settlement!" Around them, other rooftop patios were filling with people, all straining for a glimpse. Someone shouted, "The Waitian has been bombed. Smoke is rising from the Cathay Hotel!" The pyramid-shaped copper roof of the ten-story hotel was the showpiece of Victor Sassoon, one of Shanghai's most prominent Jewish businessmen. A stunned murmur of disbelief arose from the observers—the presumed shield over the foreign concessions had been shattered.As they watched intently, another small plane appeared. A man with binoculars on a nearby building suddenly shouted, "Those planes have Chinese insignia on their sides—the blue, red, and white of the Republic of China! They're our planes, not Japan's!" The onlookers gasped as more bombs fell, their thunderous blasts reverberating in the air,just then the plane veered west toward Avenue Haig, and Long-Long's mother pulled him from the roof. "Hurry. It's not safe up here," she said, dragging the boy inside as he wriggled for a better view.Back downstairs, Benny ran from window to window to see if any soldiers were coming down the streets. With his mother and amah busy gathering up his sisters and brother, he slipped out the door. Beyond the quiet lanes of Dashing lilong, fire trucks and police cars sped by, sirens wailing. People buzzed about, seeking news and sharing rumors. Some said that thousands of people had been killed near the British racecourse, in the heart of the International Settlement.Suddenly a hand clamped on to his arm. Benny jumped. It was his amah. "Young Master, you must come home now. Your mother is talking on the telephone with your father. He will be very angry if a bomb kills you!"Amah had been with the family for so long that she had been his mother's amah too. On another day, Benny might have dared her to catch him, but he sensed that this was not the time. Back inside their home, he could hear his mother talking on the phone in his father's study."What? In the International Settlement on Tibet Road? Thousands of people killed near the Great World?" She paused, then asked, "How is Grandfather?" Benny straightened as his mother spoke of his beloved grandfather, whose large mansion was on Tibet Road, not far from the Great World Entertainment Center. His grandfather sometimes took him there to wander through its funhouse mirrors, roller-skating rink, and multiple stories of curiosities and attractions. His mother disapproved, wary of the drunken sailors, beckoning women, and other unsavory characters who lingered there. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. The dramatic real life stories of four young people caught up in the mass exodus of Shanghai in 1949 Communist revolution, a heartrending precursor to the struggles faced by emigrants today. "A true and remarkable as well as less-than-welcoming circumstances on the other side."—Amy Tan, author of The Joy Luck Club Helen Zia is the author of Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People, a finalist for the Kiriyama Pacific Rim Book Prize (Bill Clinton referred to the book in two separate Rose Garden speeches). Zia is the co-author, with Wen Ho Lee, of My Country Versus Me: The First-Hand Account by the Los Alamos Scientist Who Was Falsely Accused of Being a Spy. She is also a former executive editor of Ms. magazine. A Fulbright Scholar, Zia first visited China in 1972, just after President Nixon's historic trip. A graduate of Princeton University, she holds an honorary doctor of laws degree from the City University of New York School of Law and lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. Chapter 1BennyAge 9Shanghai, August 14, 1937Racing north on the treelined French concession side of Avenue Haig, a nimble boy weaved his way around the sidewalk's throngs, dodging ahead of basket-laden shoppers and old men out for an afternoon stroll. He barely glanced at the hawkers with their motley goods spread out on the pavement or the threadbare beggars cross-legged on the hard ground, their body hands extended to passersby for some pity and a coin.With his unruly black hair, his knee socks bunched at the ankles, and the tail of his white shirt climbing out of his short pants, there was still no mistaking this child for a street urchin making off with something pilfered. Benny Pan was lithe and strong, his skin fair and his cheeks ruddy with a healthy glow. More telling was his open, confident manner, his eyes wide without a trace of guile. He could have been any child of the city's sizable middle class of professionals and service workers who tended to the giant metropolises. 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