



DEEP NIGHT

A NOVEL

C A R O L I N E P E T I T

DEEP NIGHT

ALSO BY THE AUTHOR

The Fat Man's Daughter

CAROLINE PETIT

DEEP
NIGHT



SOHO

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FOR
ALYSSA
AND
REBECCA

“I am not an adventurer by choice but by fate.”

—*Vincent Van Gogh*

October 8, 1941

WHITE CLOUD MOUNTAIN, NEAR CANTON, CHINA

Tokai Ito seriously doubted he'd see anything in the grey fog. The rain had cleared, but the mist still swirled. His Italian leather shoes were soaked and his socks clammy around his ankles. By his side was the Japanese captain boring him with army slogans straight out of the training manual. For the second time, the captain insisted on dragging him around the plywood installations representing the British defences in Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories.

The captain crowed: "We were able to do this because of the loyalty of Japanese businessmen in Hong Kong."

Tokai nodded. In Tokyo, his father religiously harangued their managers to be vigilant and report anything, anything at all that might help the great war machine of Japan. Striving managers then scurried around foreign cities, notebooks in hand, collecting information. One of Tokai's duties was to read their reports. Most were totally useless or repeated things that were already public knowledge. A few were valuable. These he discussed with his father and took credit for, proving himself to be a worthy son of a steel magnate and ammunitions manufacturer. As a reward, his father insisted he witness first-hand the nation's fighting spirit and that was why he was now standing on this

peak, one of the most beautiful spots in all of China, waiting for the training exercise to begin.

The captain cocked his head and his eyes moved to the mountain's edge. "Can you hear them? They've begun the climb. Let's go see."

Distantly, Tokai heard the soft grunts of men straining to climb up rope ladders. The sun peeped through and began to burn off the mist and haze. Tokai worried about grass stains on his English worsted trousers as they tromped through the long grass to peer over the ledge. Far below were hordes of uniformed men wearing dark glasses to simulate a night attack on Hong Kong.

The men climbed slowly, hand over hand, their heavy packs weighing them down. Their grunts grew louder as they struggled upwards. Finally, Tokai saw the faces of the men—boys really, country lads—sweating and straining. One soldier froze when he looked down, his companions clogging up behind. The captain bellowed to get a move on, he wasn't sightseeing. For a second, Ito thought the soldier would let go of the rope and fall, but the men behind shouted patriotic words of encouragement. Slowly, the frozen man began to move.

The first soldier to reach the top flopped onto his belly, red-faced, gasping for breath. Others joined him. The captain yelled for them to attack. Hundreds of men in khaki zigzagged around the make-believe British fortifications, firing their rifles and shouting bloodthirsty cries as they jumped across an intricate network of gullies. The captain watched with satisfaction.

White Cloud Mountain was a magical place: clouds forming and re-forming into dreamy mystical landscapes. Now it was ruined by ear-splitting gunfire, the poisoned stench of cordite and blood curdling battle cries, robbing Tokai of the ability to absorb its true beauty. Still, he was going to make a killing.