

SHANGHAI MOON

Sylvia, Mrs. Carroll (2 women)

1930's Shanghai. Sylvia, the beautiful young American born wife of elderly British aristocrat is visiting Shanghai with her husband. She has become embroiled in a wild affair her host, the mysterious warlord, General Gong Fei, who has gotten her hooked on opium. He has also engaged her in a plot to give a truth serum hidden in a cup of tea to the General's enemy, the bordello owner, Mrs. Paula Carroll.

MRS. CARROLL

Good afternoon, Lady Allington.

SYLVIA
(startled)

Mrs. Carroll, thank you accepting my invitation on such short notice.

MRS. CARROLL

It's not often I'm invited for tea with a titled lady. How could I resist?

SYLVIA

Do please sit down.

MRS. CARROLL

I was frankly surprised to hear from you. Somehow I didn't think you'd be staying in Shanghai this long.

SYLVIA

Nor did I. My husband has not been well. His doctors thought it best not to move him until he becomes stronger. May I serve you some tea?

MRS. CARROLL

That would be lovely.

(Mrs. Carroll notices Sylvia's trembling hands as she pours the tea.)

MRS. CARROLL

You seem out of sorts, my dear.

SYLVIA

Do I? Well, perhaps I'm not quite myself today. My host has had some sort of business reversal and the entire household has been at sixes and sevens.

MRS. CARROLL

I think I've heard something about his business reversal.

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SYLVIA

I don't know anything about it, only it must be quite terrible. I think you should enjoy this tea. I brought it with me from England. I suppose I invited you here today because, well, because I need a friend. Someone who speaks my own language.

MRS. CARROLL

Oh?

SYLVIA

You're a worldly woman. You must know something about intimate relations between the sexes.

MRS. CARROLL

One might say my livelihood is based upon it.

SYLVIA

I know a woman back in London. She came from a very sordid background, grew up dirt poor and raised herself to a position of wealth and power by ways that weren't exactly elegant. But during her marriage to a much older man, she never strayed. Not once.

MRS. CARROLL

I think I may have heard of your friend and there were quite a few rumors to the contrary.

SYLVIA

Yeah, well them rumors were based on nothing but a bunch of hatchet-faced dames who couldn't heat up a bed with a blowtorch. Anyway, this friend of mine was visiting an exotic locale and fell under the spell of a very beautiful man, a man of extraordinary allure and sensuality. To her dismay, she finds herself no longer in control of her own passions.

MRS. CARROLL

Well, Lady Allington, if you want my advice, I'd tell your friend to leave Shanghai on the next boat. Even if it's a tramp steamer or cargo freighter. You see, I too had a friend. A delicate young girl, straight from the convent, who carried with her the unsolved mystery of her birth. She knew deep in her heart the answer to the riddle and allowed it bring her to Shanghai. The years took their toll. One day she woke up and found herself the much feared madame of a string of brothels. It's brought her riches but little else.

SYLVIA

I frankly don't see that happening to my friend. She has not quite your friend's nose for business. I hope you don't mind if I fix myself a cocktail. I'm not really in the mood for tea. Would you care for something stronger?

MRS. CARROLL

No, thank you, tea will do. If I may be frank, I'd venture to say that alcohol isn't the only vice your friend has been indulging in.

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SYLVIA

Whatever do you mean?

MRS. CARROLL

You've been smoking opium, my dear Lady Allington, and plenty of it. By the way your hands are trembling, I'd say you were hooked.

SYLVIA

I will confess that I smoked a little before you arrived. My nerves have been a frazzle and I --.

MRS. CARROLL

I'd say you've been on a toot for the past week. I'll give you another piece of good advice, a man such as General Gong Fei --

SYLVIA

I think I've heard enough advice for today. But I have a little advice for your friend.

MRS. CARROLL

I'll pass on the message.

SYLVIA

Tell her to stay clear of the waterfront. Word's out that her sticky fingers have been on other people's property and that party isn't terribly pleased about it.

MRS. CARROLL

At least my friend sticks to the waterfront for business. I understand your friend goes there for sex and smoke. A fatal combination, my dear.

SYLVIA

The sex angle is one thing your old friend needn't worry about.

MRS. CARROLL

Yeah, well, your friend isn't looking so good herself. The bloom is decidedly off the rose.

SYLVIA

Your friend ain't gonna look so swell with a split lip and a busted snozzola. (*controlling herself*) Perhaps you should drink your tea before it gets cold. I wouldn't want to keep you from the frenzied world of commerce.

MRS. CARROLL

You call the shots, my dear. (*she downs the tea.*) Hmmmm. Strange but it doesn't taste like english tea. No. It's chinese. But not ordinary chinese tea. What is it? It's strangely bitter.

SYLVIA

You don't care for it? A bit more sugar?

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MRS. CARROLL
(feeling its effect)

There's something in this tea. Isn't there? Isn't there?

SYLVIA
(nervously)

I don't know.

MRS. CARROLL

Why did you ask me here? Something funny going on. Something very funny. My head, it's spinning -- I-- I must --

(She tries to stand but swoons and sinks back into the chair. As the poison consumes her, she writhes, groans and gasps in agony. Eventually, she is rendered unconscious and quite dead.)

SYLVIA

Mrs. Carroll? Mrs. Carroll? Talk to me. Say something. You will now tell me everything you know about Pug Talbot's boat. Who are you in cahoots with? Where'd you stash the boodle? Mrs. Carroll, tell me what you know. Mrs. Carroll?

(She checks her pulse and is horrified to find the woman is dead.)

SYLVIA

Oh my God! Gong Fei! Gong Fei!

(Mrs. Carroll suddenly awakens for one last gasp and grabs Sylvia's arm. Sylvia tries to get her off her.)

SYLVIA

Get offa me!

(Mrs. Carroll collapses once more and is truly dead.)

SYLVIA

Gong Fei! Gong Fei!