

A Study in Insanity

Vera worked as a taxi dancer in a night club frequented by the underworld of Shanghai. She danced and entertained all comers, at fifty cents a dance, or for the price of a bottle of champagne, she will sit a customer's table for one hour, which is the time limit for one bottle.

Although ravishingly beautiful, She is not as popular as she might be among the local customers, because she is too obviously out to make all she can from them. At her work, she can be gay, witty, comical and hard, depending on the type of customer she has to deal with.

Yet to the discerning, one can detect that these qualities are but a veneer, a defense mechanism acquired purely for her job and that beneath this exterior, there is a innate refinement and dignity born of good breeding. Unlike many of the other girls reputed to be aristocratic White Russian refugees, but who, in reality, were common prostitutes, Vera was truly the daughter of the destitute Russian aristocracy stranded in Shanghai.

In this atmosphere, Vera exercised wisdom and caution. She was not disdainful of her unfortunate compatriots. As a matter of fact, to many of them she was a good friend. Others, who were jealous of her because they felt she thought herself superior to them, Vera

ignored, or, if they became quarrelsome, dealt with them as befitted the occasion. In many an instance, she would help a friend who was not getting any customers, and when one came to dance with her she would tell him it was booked, but if he would dance with her friend, she would give him the next one. And, if she was invited at a table of good spenders, she would inveigle them into inviting her less-fortunate friends. She loaned money and helped them whenever she could, giving advice to one and sympathy to another.

One girl in particular was devoted to her, a little prostitute

who was deeply touched by the true friendship of Vera who sensed all the best in her. Sonia was good-natured, generous, easy-going, with a soft maternal instinct that probably accounted for her easy [xxx]. She would give her money to a p. i. And was always being imposed upon. She was always in love and was always being [xxx]

which situation would usually terminate in a brawl between Sonia and her rivals and Sonia would drown her sorrows by ordering real whiskey, when a customer bought her a drink, instead of weak tea that passed for it. In this spell, Vera would take hold of her, and by consoling her and reasoning with her would bring her to herself.

Sonia's life story was a human doctrine of the vicissitudes of a girl whose love, tenderness, and bigness of heart brought about her downfall. Brought up in poverty and thrown into a brothel at an early age, she was driven out of Russia

arriving in Shanghai. Securing a job in a night club, she intended to go straight and to try and forget her past. She could earn enough now as a taxi dancer not to go back to her old life again. But she was ordained to meet a man whom she fell in love with, an Englishman who was stranded in Shanghai and an invalid who invited her pity and who brought up in her all her maternal feeling to care and look after him. Becoming desperately ill, it was necessary to send him to a sanitarium. This cost her more than she could earn honestly, and so she drifted into her former life. Regaining his health, they lived together happily, promising that

to take her away from the life she was leading, and to marry her as soon as he was able to get a job and to save enough money to start some business. But as time went on, nothing happened and living off of her became a liability. But she always hoped for the best. Frequenting the night club where she worked, he met another woman who fell for him. When Sonia realized what had happened she took him to task for it and they quarreled, he telling her that he was through with her. Embittered by this experience, Sonia turned to drugs and drink until Vera got hold of her and put her on her feet.

That's why Sonia is grateful to Vera and admires her and tries to emulate her.