WAITING AT THE PEACE HOTEL

Sassoon’s Mansions in Nanjing Road East was really for Victor’s penthouse on top of his private hotel. Those were the days.

Latterly, when the Party had finished erasing the last tastes of shame for those years of infamy and foreign occupation, they renamed it with fine irony, perhaps, the Peace Hotel.

Tourists could come to its threadbare opulence, sleep as Coward had, in its vaulted guest rooms, dine in the oiled teak banquet hall. Or take time even to this day to hear play the old-time jazz performers, still tinkling keys, thrumming strings or warbling saxophone notes.

Enough, I’m standing here now next to the doorman in uniform by his revolving door, watching the taxis come and go and flag-led tourist hordes back from Bund or Pearl Tower or the People’s Park. Meanwhile I look at my watch and await peace for my feet at last.