Chapter 4: The Enemy

Exercise 4.1 — Reading with Insight

Q1 There are moments in life when we have to make hard choices between our roles as private individuals and as citizens with a sense of national loyalty. Discuss with reference to the story you have just read.

SOLUTION

The story places Dr Sadao at exactly such a crossroads. As a Japanese citizen during wartime, his national duty is clear: hand over an American prisoner of war to the authorities. As a trained surgeon, his professional and moral duty is equally clear: save a dying man on his doorstep. These two roles collide the moment he turns the wounded man's face and sees it is a white American sailor.

Sadao chooses the private, human role over the patriotic one. He operates on the soldier, shelters him, and ultimately arranges his secret escape — not because he feels any warmth for Americans (the text makes plain he regards them as enemies and thinks himself their superior), but because his medical training has made it impossible for him to let a wounded man die when he has the skill to save him. 'I have been trained not to let a man die if I can help it,' he tells Hana when the servants object.

The story does not glorify Sadao's choice as heroism. He is torn, anxious, and even temporarily relieved when the General offers to send assassins, effectively taking the decision out of his hands. Hana faces the same conflict — she washes the prisoner herself when Yumi refuses, driven not by liking him but by a basic human instinct she cannot suppress. The servants, the gardener, and the cook represent the opposite pole: for them, national loyalty is unambiguous, and they leave rather than be part of sheltering the enemy. Pearl S. Buck uses this contrast to show that the choice between individual conscience and collective duty is never simple, and that acting on conscience carries real personal cost — loss of servants, social censure, and the constant fear of arrest.

Answer: Sadao's medical duty overrides national loyalty: he saves and shelters the enemy soldier not out of sentiment but because his training will not let him leave a dying man untreated, despite the cost to his safety and household.

Q2 Dr Sadao was compelled by his duty as a doctor to help the enemy soldier. What made Hana, his wife, sympathetic to him in the face of open defiance from the domestic staff?

SOLUTION

Hana's sympathy is not sentimental — the narrative is careful to note she did not like the prisoner even after days of nursing him. What moves her is a combination of instinct, shared training, and anger at the servants' defiance.

When Yumi flatly refuses to wash the wounded man, declaring 'I have never washed a white man and I will not wash so dirty a one now,' Hana's pride as the mistress of the household is

stung. It is in 'the conviction of her own superiority' over Yumi's stubbornness that she bends down and washes the prisoner herself. Her anger at Yumi, more than any tenderness toward the American, sustains her through that task.

Beyond the immediate provocation, Hana had lived in America and studied there; she is described as 'so modern.' She has seen enough of the world to feel, even if she cannot fully articulate it, that 'this is nothing but a man — and a wounded helpless man.' The sight of his piteously thin face and the deep red scars on his neck stir in her a quiet wondering about whether prisoners of war were truly tortured as rumour suggested. She hopes he had not been. That flicker of human compassion — not fondness, but simple recognition of shared vulnerability — keeps her by Sadao's side through the operation and the weeks of recovery, against the open disapproval of every servant in the house.

Answer: Hana is moved by wounded human vulnerability and provoked by Yumi's defiance; she acts from a sense of basic humanity and mistress-authority rather than any personal liking for the prisoner.

Q3 How would you explain the reluctance of the soldier to leave the shelter of the doctor's home even when he knew he couldn't stay there without risk to the doctor and himself?

SOLUTION

The young American's reluctance must be understood against his physical and psychological state. He had been shot in the back while escaping, driven through rock-spiked surf, and was so malnourished that Sadao described him as 'like a fowl that had been half-starved for a long time.' Even three days after surgery he was 'bloodless with the effort' of sitting up. Leaving a safe shelter before he had recovered enough strength was, quite literally, a gamble with his life.

There is also deep psychological fear at work. When Sadao asked what he was going to do with him, the boy's face showed 'terror as unmistakable as an animal's' — the scars on his neck crimson. He had already been shot once, presumably by Japanese forces. Outside the doctor's house lay an enemy country at war; he had no means of contact, no language, and no allies. The island Sadao eventually directs him to was tiny, storm-prone, and uninhabited, with only the chance of a passing Korean fishing boat as his hope of rescue.

The text does not show him clinging selfishly or ignoring the risk to Sadao. When Sadao explains the plan — the boat, the island, the signal code — he accepts at once with a simple 'Okay,' shakes Sadao's hand warmly, and walks out without protest. His earlier delay was survival instinct, not ingratitude. The gratitude he expresses — 'I realise you are saving my life again' — suggests he understood his position perfectly.

Answer: The soldier's reluctance stems from physical weakness after surgery and genuine terror of the enemy country outside; once fit enough and given a concrete escape plan, he leaves without hesitation.

Q4 What explains the attitude of the General in the matter of the enemy soldier? Was it human consideration, lack of national loyalty, dereliction of duty or simply self-absorption?

SOLUTION

The General's attitude is best explained by self-absorption, though the text presents it with wry humour rather than outright condemnation. When Sadao confides in him, the General does not weigh the matter in terms of law or patriotism; he weighs it entirely in terms of his own medical safety. He needs Sadao alive and free to perform his operation — 'You cannot be arrested. Suppose you were condemned to death and the next day I had to have my operation?' His promise to send private assassins to dispose of the prisoner is therefore an act of self-interest disguised as a favour to Sadao.

He never sends the assassins. When Sadao reports that the prisoner has escaped, the General confesses simply: 'I was suffering a good deal. The truth is, I thought of nothing but myself. In short, I forgot my promise to you.' This is not human consideration for the enemy soldier — he felt none. It is not lack of national loyalty — he is eager to assure Sadao it was not 'dereliction of duty.' It is pure self-absorption: the pain of his own illness crowded out every other concern.

Buck's portrait of the General is ironic. The system of 'private assassins' he mentions casually reflects the ruthlessness of the state, yet at the crucial moment the state's representative fails to act because he was too preoccupied with himself. The prisoner is saved not by mercy but by the General's self-centredness. Sadao grasps this instantly — he 'suddenly comprehended that the General was in the palm of his hand' — and uses it to secure his own safety.

Answer: The General's attitude is primarily self-absorption: consumed by his own illness and dependence on Sadao, he forgets to send the assassins — not out of human consideration or disloyalty, but because his own pain left no room for anything else.

Q5 While hatred against a member of the enemy race is justifiable, especially during wartime, what makes a human being rise above narrow prejudices?

SOLUTION

The story suggests that professional discipline, education, and the experience of living across cultures are the forces that lift individuals above wartime prejudice — not any innate goodness or sudden moral conversion.

Sadao himself is full of prejudice to the end. He considers Americans his enemies, regards himself as their superior, and recalls his American landlady with contempt even as he is helping Tom escape. His final line — 'Strange, I wonder why I could not kill him?' — shows that he never fully reconciles his humanitarian act with his nationalist feelings. What overrides his prejudice is his medical training: 'I have been trained not to let a man die if I can help it.' The discipline of the surgeon, with its commitment to the body as a universal object deserving care regardless of identity, proves stronger than the ideology of the soldier.

Hana's American education similarly gives her a reference point outside Japanese wartime

opinion. She has seen Americans as ordinary human beings — students, professors, neighbours — and that memory makes it harder to reduce the wounded man on the floor to a pure abstraction called 'the enemy.'

The story implies that what enables human beings to rise above prejudice is not sentiment but breadth of experience and a professional or moral code that cuts across national lines. The servants, who have never left Japan and whose code is entirely defined by community loyalty, cannot make that crossing. Sadao and Hana, shaped by years abroad and by a vocation demanding universal care, can — however reluctantly.

Answer: Professional codes (medicine's duty to the body) and cross-cultural experience break down wartime prejudice; Sadao never loses his bias but his surgical training overrides it, showing that discipline and exposure to the 'other' are what allow humans to act beyond narrow loyalties.

Q6 Do you think the doctor's final solution to the problem was the best possible one in the circumstances?

SOLUTION

Sadao's final solution — provisioning a small boat, directing Tom to a nearby uninhabited island, and giving him a flashlight signal code — is, given the constraints he faces, arguably the most workable option available, though it is not without risks.

The alternatives were all worse. Turning the prisoner over to the police would have meant certain death for Tom, who was a recognised escaped prisoner of war. Continuing to shelter him indefinitely was untenable: the servants had already left, the household was under strain, and discovery was only a matter of time. The General's plan of assassination was morally repugnant and, as it turned out, unreliable.

Sadao's plan is carefully thought through: the island is near enough to row to in Tom's recovered state, far enough from the mainland to be unfortified, and the Korean fishing boats that pass near it offer a plausible route to safety. He stocks the boat with food, water, quilts, and a flashlight with a signal system in case resupply is needed. He wraps Tom's blond hair in black cloth to reduce visibility. These details show a doctor's methodical attention to contingency.

The risk is real — the open sea, the dependence on a chance boat, the possibility of bad weather — but Sadao has minimised what he can control. When he searches the sea that evening and finds no signal light on the island, he knows Tom has been picked up and is safe. Given the options before him, the plan balanced Tom's survival with the protection of his own family as well as circumstances allowed. One may call it the best solution not because it was perfect but because every other path led to certain harm.

Answer: Sadao's boat-and-island plan is the most pragmatic solution available: it removes the prisoner without handing him to certain death, protects the family, and is carefully provisioned — the risks are real but every other option was worse.

Q7 Does the story remind you of 'Birth' by A. J. Cronin that you read in Snapshots last year? What are the similarities?

SOLUTION

Both 'The Enemy' and 'Birth' centre on a doctor who saves a life against considerable odds, and in both stories the act of medical rescue becomes a moment of moral and personal reckoning for the physician.

In 'Birth,' Dr Andrew Manson revives a stillborn child and saves a mother who has nearly died in labour, working through the night in desperate conditions. In 'The Enemy,' Dr Sadao operates on a gunshot wound with improvised assistance, probing close to the kidney in the patient's bedroom. Both doctors are tested to the limit of their skill and nerves, and both succeed where failure seemed likely.

The deeper similarity is the theme of duty overriding personal feeling. Manson is emotionally exhausted and distracted by his own troubled life when he is called to the delivery; he saves the baby not because he is in the mood to but because his training compels him. Sadao operates on a man he explicitly calls his enemy and says he has no wish to save; the surgeon in him acts independently of the patriot. In both cases professional vocation — the commitment never to let a patient die if skill can prevent it — is stronger than circumstance or personal sentiment.

The difference is that Sadao's dilemma extends beyond the operating table into a prolonged conflict with law, loyalty, and social pressure, whereas Manson's crisis is resolved with the act of resuscitation itself.

Answer: Both stories show a doctor saving life against the odds through sheer professional duty, overriding personal distraction or prejudice; the core similarity is that medical vocation proves stronger than the doctor's private feelings in the moment of crisis.

Q8 Is there any film you have seen or novel you have read with a similar theme?

SOLUTION

This question calls for a personal response. One well-known example is Schindler's List (novel by Thomas Keneally, film directed by Steven Spielberg), in which Oskar Schindler, a German factory owner during World War II, risks everything to save over a thousand Jewish workers — people officially designated as enemies of his nation — by sheltering them under the guise of war production. Like Sadao, Schindler does not begin as a hero; he is motivated at first by self-interest, and his transformation into a protector is gradual and costly.

The thematic parallel is strong: an individual caught between national allegiance and the basic human impulse to protect the vulnerable, ultimately choosing humanity at personal risk. Both narratives show that crossing the line between 'enemy' and 'human being' is an act of quiet, often unacknowledged courage.

Another example is The Diary of a Young Girl by Anne Frank, which depicts Dutch families hiding Jewish refugees at enormous personal danger — again the choice between obeying the

state and following conscience. Students may draw on any film or book from their own reading; what matters is identifying the common elements: wartime, an 'enemy' who is also a vulnerable human being, and the moral cost of choosing humanity over collective loyalty.

Answer: Schindler's List (Keneally/Spielberg) is a close parallel: like Sadao, Schindler shelters those his nation labels enemies at great personal risk, driven by a humanity that overrides national loyalty — any similar work the student has read or seen is equally valid.