



Twilight over Burma: My Life as a Shan Princess (Kolowalu Books (Paperback))

By Inge Sargent

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Just married and returning to live in her new husband's native land, a young Austrian woman arrived with her Burmese husband by passenger ship in Rangoon in 1953. They were met at dockside by hundreds of well-wishers displaying colorful banners, playing music on homemade instruments, and carrying giant bouquets of flowers. She was puzzled by this unusual welcome until her embarrassed husband explained that he was something more than a recently graduated mining engineer - he was the Prince of Hsipaw, the ruler of an autonomous state in Burma's Shan mountains. And these people were his subjects!

She immersed herself in the Shan lifestyle, eagerly learning the language, the culture, and the history of the Shan hill people. The Princess of Hsipaw fell in love with this remote, exotic land and its warm and friendly people. She worked at her husband's side to bring change and modernization to their primitive country. Her efforts to improve the education and health care of the country, and her husband's commitment to improve the economic well-being of the people made them one of the most popular ruling couples in Southeast Asia. Then the violent military coup of 1962 shattered the idyllic existence of the previous ten years. Her life irrevocably changed. Inge Sargent tells a story of a life most of us can only dream about. She vividly describes the social, religious, and political events she experienced. She details the day-to-day living as a "reluctant ruler" and her role as her husband's equal - a role that perplexed the males in Hsipaw and created awe in the females. And then she describes the military events that threatened her life and that of her children.

Twilight over Burma is a story of a great happiness destroyed by evil, of one woman's determination and bravery against a ruthless military regime, and of the truth behind the overthrow of one of Burma's most popular local leaders.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Sargent's sad, exotic story survives her deeply flawed telling of it, but she would have been better advised to stick with a straightforward memoir. While at school in Colorado in the early '50s, the Austrian-born author met and married fellow student Sao Kya Seng. Because he wanted a wife who would marry him "for the right reasons," Sao chose not to tell Inge he was prince of Hsipaw, one of 34 independent Shan states in northeastern Burma (although the convertible Nash Rambler and the ruby-and-diamond engagement ring might have tipped her off.) For eight years the couple presided over the modernization of their small state, sadly unaware of the weak political leadership plaguing Burma since the 1947 assassination of General Aung San (father of jailed Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi). Then in 1962, General Ne Win seized power and Sao disappeared. Shadowed by Ne Win's men, Sargent waited desperately for news of her husband, until two years later friends convinced her to escape to Austria. Sargent's descriptions of life in the small, tropical state and of her machinations to smuggle out her daughters (both Burmese citizens) are strong enough to withstand her unconvincing re-creation of decades-old dialogue (even extensive sections on the vanished Sao's unknowable last thoughts) and the near-fatal decision to write in third person. Much of the book smacks of writing school exercises and the gutsy author often seems self-indulgent in descriptions of herself: "this attractive and unusual girl had constantly been on his mind. Her warmth, her cheerfulness, and her poise made him long for her company."

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From Library Journal

To marry a prince should portend living happily ever after in a kingdom filled with tranquillity and love. Sargent's "ever after" with her Shan prince lasted little more than a decade: in a 1962 coup d'etat by Burmese Army General Ne Win, her husband, Sao Kya Seng, the Prince of Hsipaw (a Shan state in Northern Burma) was executed. An Austrian by birth, Sargent records in a tender, affecting manner their courtship and her introduction and adaptation to the varied social and cultural aspects of Shan life. Without being doctrinaire, she comments on the dictatorship of Ne Win and clearly presents the plight of the Burmese people. Her story can be viewed in the larger context of the human condition in the 20th century. And yet with all her universal themes of love and the needs of the state, Sargent never forgets the intimate detail that makes this narrative so personal and heartbreaking to read. For public libraries.

John F. Riddick, Central Michigan Univ. Lib., Mt. Pleasant

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From [Booklist](#)

When Inge Eberhard married a Burmese student she met in Colorado, she had no idea of the incredible future awaiting her as a princess. Unbeknownst to the young Austrian woman at the time, the man she called Sao would reveal himself to be a prince and the beloved leader of an ethnically diverse Shan state upon their arrival in Burma. In a stirring tribute to a remarkable man--and a gripping tale from beginning to end--Sargent reflects back on her loving, cross-cultural marriage to the prince of Hsipaw, with whom she had two children, a marriage that prospered until the disappearance of Sao Kya Seng during the 1962 coup d'etat and takeover by dictator Ne Win. Although the prince was never seen again, Sargent manages to illuminate the harsh conditions in Burma over the last quarter-century in a touching memoir that would read like a fairy tale were it not for the unfortunate ending. *Alice Joyce*

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