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# FORBIDDEN



*By* **JOAN CONQUEST**

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# FORBIDDEN

BY

JOAN CONQUEST

AUTHOR OF "DESERT LOVE," ETC.



LONDON

T. WERNER LAURIE LTD.  
30 NEW BRIDGE STREET, E.C.4



**FIRST PUBLISHED**

**MARCH 1927**

**PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY  
NORTHUMBERLAND PRESS LIMITED, NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE**

TO  
THAT GREAT ARTIST  
RUDOLPH VALENTINO  
WHO ASKED ME FOR THE PART  
OF  
CHANG TEH-SHENG



# FORBIDDEN

## A PROLOGUE

THE Reverend Aloysius Chase, D.D., Master of Baliol, was perturbed. In fact he thought his perturbation had reached its zenith. Far from it. Had he been possessed of foresight or television perfected, either might have enabled him to see through the stout, wooden door to where Fate, with her offspring Tragedy, Danger, Revenge and Sacrifice, stood looking obliquely in his direction.

Austere dames, the lot of them. Schoolmarms who see that pupils desirous of qualifying in a Course of Life shall learn their lessons from A to Z, with t's crossed, i's dotted and p's and q's in their appointed place.

But Scotland having made a corner in foresight and television, happily, but barely moving in the Womb-of-Time he saw no further than the perturbation of the immediate moment.

"I wish I knew what to do!" he said, picking up a paper-knife with butt-end carved in the convolutions of the Chinese Imperial Dragon, crossed to the fireplace where he used it to straighten the perfectly straight print of Lincoln Cathedral and walked back to the desk. "Fielder to be sent *down!*" He turned and looked at the lilies outside the chintz-hung, leaded window, but finding no inspiration in their beauty crossed the room, straightened the perfectly straight print of Durham Cathedral and returned to ring a hand-bell on the

desk. "I wish I knew what to do!" he was in the middle of saying when the doorway framed the parlourmaid, Fate and her austere progeny peering into the room over her shoulder.

"Ask Professor Hatchway if he could spare me a moment, please, Ellen!" he said and left off drumming perplexedly on the desk to greet the eminent young man whose treatises on Chinese porcelain, any kind of, any dynasty, period, reign, age or workmanship were as far above the average head as his books, profusely illustrated on the same subject at three guineas, were beyond the average present-day pocket.

"Very good of you, Hatchway, to tear yourself away from your dusty, no, I should say dry-as-dust tomes!" he exclaimed, ponderously jocular. "Have you discovered anything further about the rare Ming or was it Ching or Ting vase?"

Professor Cyril Hatchway, B.A. and other erudite degrees, high-bred, high-brow, loose in raiment, psychologically tight, fidgety with the sharp edge of over-worked grey matter but with barely a scratch to show on his life's surface, subsided into a mellow, brown-leather armchair. "I—er—well—I haven't exactly had the—er—necessary time for—er—further research, Sir;" he said in a highly polished voice, whilst the Doctor, possessed of habits as pernicious, wondered how long his daughter would stand the Professor's of twiddling his pince-nez. "I—er—am taking Rosalie out to—er—shopping and—er—ices!"

The Doctor wagged a humorous forefinger. "Ah, ha!" he chuckled; "already strapped to love's chariot wheels;" pulled, chuckling, at his close beard and twiddled the end. "I simply can't get over Rosalie being engaged. Yesterday a mere schoolgirl as it were and to-day thinking of wedding rings, cakes, dresses, bridesmaids and presents."

"The little more and how *much* it is!" supplemented Hatchway, who leaned to verselets bound in decorative leather as an off-set to the tomes. "I—er—mean I can't help wondering what *she* sees in *me*."

The Doctor implored him not to be absurd, drew attention to his profession, his name and the letters after it, his ceramictic fame, a by-no-means-to-be-despised fortune and the assured and roseate future. "You are the coming man, my dear fellow. In fact I think we might say that, in your own line, you have most emphatically arrived. Your library, your *flair*, your collections, your——"

Hatchway despondently pointed out his lack in looks. "——by every ornithological tenet, Sir, birds of a plumage flock and Rosalie is so exquisitely pretty and dainty;" and when the Doctor consolingly advised not worrying over milk spilt long before he was born, ran a crease in his trouser-leg and remarked that the subject had to do with birds not bovines. "I lack looks *and* atmosphere. I am a withered bush in a dry place, Sir."

The Doctor laughed. What did his prospective son-in-law think looks and atmosphere would count for after a few years of married life? They would be like some beautiful view to be seen every day, any time of the day, from a certain window. "Believe me, my dear fellow, it won't be stationary views you will be watching, but the vegetable garden, subject to heat, drought, frost and slugs."

Hatchway refused to be comforted. That was the outlook in a nutshell. Having the vegetable garden, like the poor, always with her, Rosalie might clamour for the beautiful view. "I feel so——er——homely. I shall look it when she comes in to fetch me. I am taking her to Woods before the ices. There is a most beautifully illustrated book by Siren on the Gates and Walls of Peking which I want to give her as a little token of the great——er——day."

The Doctor thought tokens of masonry were all very well, but strongly advised adding a box of chocolates to the souvenir.

"Thank you, Sir, I must not forget that;" replied Hatchway in all seriousness and added, whilst writing: "Don't forget chocolates:" in Chinese characters on his cuff; "I met young Chang Teh-sheng in the High."

"A remarkably fine type of Chinese;" commented the Doctor, tracing the Chinese Dragon's convolutions with index finger-tip; "and extraordinarily good-looking for a Mongolian."

"The Northern Chinese on a whole are a very good-looking race. Tall, intellectual, highly civilized, gentle, and unutterably cruel;" Hatchway replied, despondency well in the ascendant at the thought of an Occidental's paucity in looks when compared to those of the Oriental he had met that morning. "He was coming to see you about last night's rag, Sir."

"But he wasn't mixed up in what, allowing for youth and the terrific heat, was the worst of its kind Oxford has ever experienced. Cyclonic, destructive, scandalous and scarlet." The Doctor made a wrathful move to the fireplace. "And of which social tornado the moving spirit was undoubtedly Fielder, who ought to have known better."

"Much better!" said Hatchway crisply. "He, of course, will be sent down."

The Doctor worried the ornaments on the mantel-piece. That was just what he wanted to discuss with his prospective son-in-law. To send down a youngster like Fielder, brilliant, designed for the Bar, the Woolsack as goal, would be like giving a first offender a stiff sentence without the option for stealing a ha'penny bun.

Hatchway, physically and psychologically narrowly proportioned but endowed with tenacity, was of the opinion that if the better educated could not control themselves moderation must not be expected of people who went on strike and all that kind of emotional, feverish and upsetting kind of thing. "Send him down, Sir, as an example. I imagine Chang is coming to see you about him. He and Fielder are great friends."

"You are not comfortable!" said the Doctor when the Professor coughed suddenly, half rose then sank back into the chair.

"Oh, perfectly—er—oh, most—thank you—a Mayfly—yes!" said Hatchway, coughing confusedly

at the sight of the Doctor's daughter making secretive signs at him from the door. He polished his glasses as Rosalie Chase, of red-gold curls, blue eyes, fine teeth in a red, red mouth, slim, dainty and resplendent with youth, tip-toed across to the back of her progenitor's chair, put her hands over his eyes and kissed the top of his head. "Pet, you smell just like Bonks when he's been washed;" she laughed. "Carbolical. And he's eaten the garden hose in bunny anticipation whilst we've been waiting for"—she jerked her chin at her fiancé—"him to take us out to ices."

"My dear, I wonder you don't say 'It;'" said her much-enduring parent as he pulled her hands down.

"Anything to oblige!" said Rosalie, perching upon the arm of his chair. "'It,' won't you sit?" Hatchway sat just as the door opened.

"Mr. Chang to see you, Sir!" said Ellen and added as though she referred to a basketful of snakes. "And the heathen Chinese servant, Sir!"

"Ask Mr. Chang to wait, please, Ellen." The Doctor smoothed his hair, tidied the papers on the desk. "Take Rosalie away, Hatchway, for goodness sake! You'll discover she has a most irritating habit of meddling with other people's heads."

Rosalie got up. "How you do hustle, my Poppet. Before we go just guess where 'It' is going to take me some day. You can have twice to pudding if you guess right."

The Doctor couldn't guess, had no hanker for a second helping to sweets but hoped it would be somewhere where there would be a good hairdresser.

Rosalie flung wide her arms. "I'll tell you. To Peking! 'It' has a craving to see The Forbidden City."

"The once Imperial heart of Peking, Sir, which only the elect were allowed to enter in the time of the Monarchy."

"With great, wonderful, yellow, curved roofs, Dads, secret passages, sliding doors, eunuchs—oh, I beg both your pardons—and Jade Street just outside somewhere where I am going to buy you a beautiful



jade signet-ring, my Lamb! ” said Rosalie, and when the Doctor reminded her of his position as Master to the historical Seat-of-Learning, was of the opinion that there would be a few young feller-me-lads remembering it also this merry morn after the hectic night before. “ Isn’t this Chinese, ‘ It ’? ” she ended, holding up the paper-knife.

Hatchway turned the knife over. “ This rare handle representing the—er—Chinese Imperial Dragon was—yes—fashioned in the—er—in the T’ung Dynasty; ” he said and put it down whilst Rosalie, who, in her youth, skimmed everything from emotions to intellectual pursuits even more lightly than the swallow water, informed him that if his brow got much higher it would undoubtedly get lost in his hair.

“ Quite an Anglo-Sino morning; ” said the Doctor, as the two moved to the door; “ what with The Forbidden City, you, Hatchway, so intimately connected with Peking through your fire-eating ancestor, the General, and Chang who is waiting to see me. ”

He spoke lightly, little witting his words outlined the short, sharp battle ’twixt life, love, jealousy, revenge and sacrifice to be fought to a finish in The Forbidden City of Peking.

“ Chang Teh-sheng! ” interrupted Rosalie enthusiastically, “ I suppose it means something poetical like Celestial Light or Lotus Flower! ”

“ It means The Victorious, The Enduring; ” enlightened Hatchway; “ and you will remember what I said about the vegetable garden, Sir; ” he added, when Rosalie burst into unlimited eulogies over the Chinese’s good looks, manners, speech, tailor and athletics.

“ We were discussing English garden produce, my dear fellow; ” replied the Doctor dryly; “ not exotic condiments! ”

“ Anyway we played four sets of tennis yesterday and won the lot! ” said Rosalie at a tangent; “ whilst you, ‘ It, ’ were rummaging for roots in a reference book! ”

“ That, my dear; ” said the untemperamental

Professor with finality; "was *before* we were engaged."

"What's one root amongst so many, anyway?" laughed the girl, grimaced at him, cried: "Catch me!" and was gone in a whirl from the room.

Hatchway, a little out of his depth, twiddled his glasses. "Do you really think she meant me to run after her, Sir?" he said, and when the Doctor replied that, being in love, he thought she really did, vaulted the couch and was gone in a streak.

The Doctor crossed to the fireplace and smoothed his hair in the mirror. "And *this* is Oxford!" he remarked. "Not much help, I must say. How I do wish something would happen to help me decide about Fielder!" and crossed to the desk as Ellen opened the door.

"Mr. Chang!" she announced and as though she heralded a pair of tigers, moved to one side well out of the way of the two Chinese and left the room, eyes on Wan Yen, a gigantic Oriental in native dress, body-servant to Chang Teh-sheng.

#### FATE DECIDES

"Very pleased to see you, Chang!" said the Doctor, shaking hands. "Sit down and tell me what I can do for you."

With Danger and Death closing in upon him, Chang Teh-sheng sat down in the armchair just vacated by the man who was to make a third in the triangular love-drama in Peking.

"Handsome man!" thought the Doctor; "almost Greek profile;" and flashed a look at the pale, serene, oval face with its long, dark, thickly lashed eyes, straight nose, curved mouth, perfect teeth and thatch of coal-black, quite straight hair. "Professor Hatchway told me you wanted to see me urgently;" he added.

"Yes, Sir!" said the Chinese, and as though urgency were the thing furthest from his mind.

" I am a little pressed for time ! "

The Chinese leaned forward, then smiled and begged the Doctor to pardon the liberty his servant had taken in entering the room without permission, and without turning his head ordered his man to wait outside.

" How did you know he was behind you ? " asked the Doctor, as the servant slid out of the room ; " he is absolutely noiseless in spite of his huge proportions."

A smile, the shadow of one, flickered across the face of the highly civilized Chinese as he explained. The Chinese people were possessed of a kind of cat's-whisker, sixth sense inherited from their Ancestors who had lived in danger-filled centuries. No smile on the serene, indifferent face, no movement of the slim hands, a tinge, the merest suspicion of amusement in the gentle, musical voice. " For over four thousand years we Chinese have had our actual body-servants, Sir. Wan Yen is my body-servant. He sees danger or—er—provocation in every shadow, and I think must have taken a step forward to protect me from some imaginary menace, I immediately becoming aware of his desire to shield me."

" A kind of Oriental telepathy ? "

" No, Sir, our servants are our friends."

The Doctor found it extremely interesting and psychic and changed the subject to the events of the past night. Listened. Shook his head. " You want Fielder to be let off lightly. Why ? Others have been sent down for far less."

Chang Teh-sheng looked at his silk socks. " Because I am indebted to him, Sir. I was his fag at Harrow. He befriended"—he looked up and smiled, eyes devoid of all expression—" the wretched little Chink with his yellow skin and heathen ways. Discovered a Googlie in me and kept me at it until I got into the House Eleven and finished at Lords."

Silence, the Occidental tracing hieroglyphics of indecision with the acid of a certain, latent, racial animosity, the Oriental sitting like a graven image of serene indifference.

"But that is purely personal!" said the Doctor at last, then listened, nodding and shaking his head, to Chang Teh-sheng's further explanation.

He knew Fielder's parents. Had spent his first exeat at Harrow with them. They were horribly poor. Had saved and scraped to educate their brilliant son. "They have one joint a week, Sir, which they have roast, cold, minced, hashed, harried and hacked for six days then turned into an emaciated soup on the seventh, the Day-of-Rest, a struggling country doctor's rest. Dr. Fielder gave up one week's tobacco so that I could have marmalade for breakfast, and Mrs. Fielder transferred the one silk eiderdown from her—er—their bed to the guest room."

"How did you know that?"

"My servant was with me, Sir. In fact the villagers thought we had strayed from a travelling circus in the neighbouring town, and there is nothing a Chinese servant does not know."

"How very trying!" remarked the Doctor.

"Not to the Chinese, Sir, it is just part of the game."

"Game?" repeated the Doctor at a loss.

"Of life!" said the Oriental and smiled. "At Harrow, Wan Yen? Oh, no! I parked him with his kin in Limehouse. The Chinese is an exotic plant, Sir, and thrives badly in alien soil." Then he pleaded for his friend, using great eloquence, and gesture which was French, urging that Fielder would be ruined for life were he sent down for just looking once upon wine when it was white and bubbly.

"I know! I know!" interpolated the Doctor.

"And after all the Christ was counted a wine-bibber——"

The Doctor's ruff bristled, his hair rose, he rustled where he sat. "I—really——"

"When He was nothing of the sort;" continued the Buddhist smoothly. "Sir, please, to save his parents heart-break, to save a brilliant man for England, to help me pay back my debt, won't you? His mother is so sweet. She carries a key-basket

and wears a cap with mauve-ribbon loops which she changes to black when she's sad——”

The Doctor thought it very temperamental for an Englishwoman.

“But rather awful if she did it because of her son's disgrace, Sir. Sir, won't you, instead of sending him down, let him get it in the neck to the furthest extension of the frozen limit in the way of a jolly stiff talking to and let it go at that?”

The Doctor laughed. “I must say, Chang, your English is quite remarkable. No accent and an elastic vocabulary.”

Chang Teh-sheng thought that that might be due to his father having been twice Ambassador to the Court of Great Britain. “I always spoke English with him;” he said indifferently. “About Fielder, Sir. He's so terribly sick with himself this morning. Has turned his mother's photo face-downward for fear he should catch her eye. *Won't* you make the big gesture?”

After some little hesitation and the up-rooting of divers obstructions such as procedure and the like, the Doctor made it with a sigh of relief. Fielder, the invisible hook upon which the pages of this love-story are spiked as upon a hum-drum file, would be punished to the further extension of the frozen limit, but sent down he should not be.

No sign on the Oriental's face of his intense gratitude, nor sound of it in the quiet voice. “I can't possibly thank you in words, Sir, but if ever I can help you or yours in any way, at any time, anywhere, I will. To my last ‘cash’—I should say penny—with my life itself if need be, and a Chinese——” a tinge of amusement in the gentle voice, no slightest sign of it upon the serene face as Fate, with a grin, nudged her grim offspring “—the ‘pukka,’ the—er—*uncontaminated* Chinese never goes back on his word, never breaks his promise.”

“Thank you, thank you very much indeed;” said the Doctor, who didn't see how a Chinese could ever possibly be in a position to help a Chase at any time or anywhere, and added, as he thought, at

the dictate of courtesy but really at Fate's prodding: "This is your last term, Chang. We shall all retain a very pleasant memory of your sojourn in our midst. Your cricket—your—er——" and reacting to the other's trying immobility ended the panegyric somewhat abruptly with inquiries as to what plans the Chinese had for the future.

"They are already made, Sir!" said the other tranquilly.

"Ah, Diplomacy perhaps!"

Chang Teh-sheng turned and looked out of the window, over the lilies and away to Peking. "I have only one ambition, Sir, and that is to climb the Hills with the woman I love to The-Temple-of-Perpetual-Fragrance where my ancestor was Abbot some centuries ago——"

"Ah!" breathed the Doctor, airing knowledge. "A follower of Confucius?"

"No, Sir, Buddhist! The Abbot planted the forbears of the lilies in The-Court-of-the-Rising-Sun and hung the little old bell from the end of the Temple roof. The lilies sway and the bell rings when his Spirit walks——"

"Spirits!" ejaculated the Doctor. "Is the Temple haunted?"

"There is a great deal of Ancestral Worship in the Buddhist religion, Sir;" Chang Teh-sheng explained quietly; "and when the lilies, just like those outside your window, sway and the bell rings for no earthly reason, we know that a spirit from the dead, our dead, is passing, and that it has appeared to help, in some way, some member of the family who is in need of it."

Dr. Chase looked at the lilies. "How very uncanny and Oriental!" he said, pushed the paper-knife away and inquired, just because he hadn't the nerve to terminate the interview, if the Temple was near Peking.

"From the Court;" said Chang Teh-sheng, lost in the picture of the Far East; "you look down on the City, and can watch the sun rise behind her Gates and Walls through the blues and greys and amethysts of China's vast plains;" and shook his head indiffer-

ently when the Doctor asked if he had no leaning to any kind of work. "Work?" he said and as though he spoke of some new invention. "I? Oh, no, none! Brothers and sisters? I am the only one left. My father, mother, ten brothers and eight sisters all died of the plague some years back;" and upon the Doctor's exclaiming at the size of the family explained that the brothers and sisters had not all had the same mother. "My father was an immensely wealthy man, Sir. He had a Number One wife, my Mother, and six Concubines."

"I beg your pardon!" said the slightly confused, if not shocked, elder.

"I am the first and only son by *the head wife*, Sir. The great house in Peking, with its thirty courts, the Temple and all the rest are mine——"

"Courts! Concubines!"

The Doctor looked apologetically from the paper-knife to the lilies as Chang Teh-sheng gently explained that the good old Biblical, if not actually Christian, word was used every day in China to designate the second and third and as many secondary wives as the husband's purse would afford. "Concubines are legitimate, Sir, their children are legitimate and the word is used in the very best society, even in the"—as though to emphasize his nationality he slipped the tips of his fingers up his cuffs—"the sacrosanct Legation Quarter, also amongst the revered and—er—zealous Missionaries."

Relieved by the explanation, back in the comfortable, commonplace rut of everyday, in happy ignorance of the devastating jolt in store for him, the Doctor smiled. "Of course, as you say, even in the Old Testament, even wise old King Solomon—er—yes—quite so, *quite so!* You said thirty courts. I don't quite follow."

Chang Teh-sheng described how a Chinese house was composed of a number of one-storied houses, each house a room, built round courts connected by arches or galleries to other courts.

"Thirty courts multiplied by four makes one

hundred and twenty rooms;" said the Doctor. "Dear me! What a staff that must entail. Let us trust that China will never experience the servant problem."

Chang Teh-sheng laughed. "Oh, that!" he said, lazily dismissing the distressful subject. "As my entire family is dead I suppose I am the wealthiest young man in China."

The Doctor right-heartedly congratulated him. He was to be envied. He would doubtlessly become a great power in his own land, amongst his own people.

There was no change in the Oriental's voice, no slightest movement of his hands, no sign of emotion of any kind, or any sign of anything at all on his face as he spoke. "And as such, Sir;" he said evenly; "as the descendant of one of the oldest families in China, if not in the world, I give myself the great honour of asking for the hand of your daughter in marriage."

A moment's deathly silence.

The Doctor, as though he could believe neither ears nor eyes, sat staring at the Chinese. Chang Teh-sheng sat quite still, his eyes fixed dreamily on the Doctor's beard or thereabouts, until, almost choking but clinging to the remnants of courtesy the shock had left him, the Doctor spoke.

"I—I don't think I understood what you said!" he stammered. "I don't think I *could* have heard aright."

Chang Teh-sheng shifted his expressionless eyes to the wrath-filled grey ones. "I should like your permission, Sir, to ask Miss Chase to become my one and only wife;" he repeated.

The Doctor girded up his parental and racial loins and leant across the desk. "I don't think you are aware of what you are saying, Chang;" he said, pushing the clutter on the table this way and that as though he wanted space in which to breathe. "My daughter, *your* wife, one of a lot of six Concubines and God alone knows how many Courtesans;" then, whatever being the most up-to-date term for British phlegm going completely by



the board, bounced to his feet and surged to the fireplace.

"Courts, Sir!" supplied Chang Teh-sheng gently as he rose.

The Doctor would have none of it. He made futile movements with his hands. That was subterfuge, nothing more or less than Oriental subterfuge. He thanked the Chinese for the—er—honour, but he must remember that—he pulled at his collar: "My daughter is English and you—you—" he tapped a palm with impressive forefinger—"are Chi-neese!"

The Chinese agreed and thought it sounded perfectly appalling pronounced that way.

The Doctor glared and stormed back to the desk, pointing to the chair. "Sit down, sit down." He sat, himself, tapped the desk with the inauspicious paper-knife and threw it from him. "You cannot be expected to understand. *You are an Oriental.*"

Chang Teh-sheng took his gruel gallantly, serenely drawing attention to the fact that four thousand years ago the House-of-Chang had been in power at one of the most civilized courts, perhaps the most civilized, in the world, counting out of course—he enumerated the civilized items on slender finger-tips—sanitation, telephone, wireless, gramophone and jazz, whilst Great Britain at that period had been either entirely non-existent or architecturally inclined to caves and satorially to a blue solution termed 'woad.' He ignored the Doctor's abortive attempt at interruption. He thought the Doctor's daughter the most perfect type of woman in the world. She would be his one and only wife because, not only did Confucius say that "One docile hind in the barn is worth six spitting cats on the hearth," or something to that effect, and that the East was beginning to see the wisdom of the West in such problems as matrimony, but that he loved the Doctor's daughter. "There is nothing I would not do for my wife, nothing I could not give her, no whim I could not gratify, or fancy I could not indulge. I——"

The Doctor held up his hand and spoke incisively. It was enough. It was very kindly meant of course, but it was enough. *Occidental women did not*

*marry Oriental men.* The East was East and the West was West and the *rest* of the quotation. Some misguided girls, he knew, broke from tradition and all that kind of thing, but they rued it, they rued it, emphasized the rueing with the paper-knife on the desk and barely listened when the other pointed out that, so far, the Occidental girls who had married Orientals had been almost all of low caste and of the type that saw a Rajah in every Indian student and a Mandarin, when such were, in every Chinese coolie.

"My dear Chang, and you will pardon my saying so;" the Doctor continued, being a great believer in rubbing things, from boot-polish to lectures, well in; "but an Oriental can no more change his way of thinking and living to suit a white wife than a leopard could lose his spots to become a domesticated cat." He shook a warning finger. "A high-caste white woman is as far out of reach of a Chinese, Sir, as the very heart of Peking, The Forbidden City, was, once, to the coolie." And being possessed of a solidified intuition failed to grasp the extent of the frightful insult.

The Chinese flicked an imaginary speck of dust and the insult with it from his cuff. "There is a secret passage, Sir, which runs from what was the most sacred part of The Forbidden City to a house outside the Palace Walls. No one knows about it, but it is there, with a hidden door at either end and——"

"Passages!" snorted the Doctor. "Doors!"

Did not the Doctor know that Love often used a secret path? And could one ever tell by what door Love might not enter The-City-of-the-Heart surrounded by the Walls-of-Convention and shut by the Gates-of-Custom?

The Doctor opened all the small drawers in the desk and shut them noisily. "Oriental imagery!" he said as he slammed them in. "Sheer Oriental imagery. Nothing but a mixture of Omar Khayyám and Emma Wheeler Wilcox, the Shulimar, Summerkand, pink hands and feet and the Sheik!"

"Love is love, Sir, and none can forbid it!" insisted Chang Teh-sheng.

"Parents can, in England!" snapped the Doctor; "as *many* a man has found out."

Chang Teh-sheng smiled, eyes like night. "Then I think that Love must be the real name of The Forbidden City!" he remarked.

The Doctor buckled on his lineal armour in a last effort to close the interview for good. "I don't know why I have discussed this—er—subject so intimately;" he said icily. "It is not a question of cities, forbidden or otherwise. I ought to have told you before. I regret I did not. I repeat that I am fully aware of the honour you have done my daughter, but it is only fair to tell you that the path of love, true, honest, solid, unimaginative, untemperamental love has led her elsewhere. *She is engaged to be married!*"

#### THE WARNING

Chang Teh-sheng gave no sign of the jolt, the stiffest Life had so far handed him. He rose and bowed after the manner of the Chinese, shaking hands with himself. "Had you indeed mentioned that before, Sir, it would have saved a lot of, shall we call it regrettable loss of—er—time. I hope it is not forbidden an Oriental to offer an Occidental parent congratulations;" he said evenly, bowed again and sat down.

The Doctor thanked him, none too cordially.

"It seems a morning of things forbidden;" Chang Teh-sheng remarked discursively.

"Forbidden?"

"The West forbidden the East, Miss Chase hanging out of my reach as a bunch of luscious, forbidden fruit;" he smiled across the desk. "Is it also permitted to know who has been allowed to pluck the fruit forbidden?" He looked up quickly when the Doctor supplied the information. "You mean Professor Cyril Hatchway, grandson of General John Hatchway, partly responsible for

the actual burning of the Old Summer Palace in Peking in 1860?"

The Doctor leaned back, swung a little in his chair. The match was greatly to his liking, there being history as well as name and fame attached to it. "Precisely, though better known as the greatest living authority on Chinese porcelain." He joined his finger-tips. "The Professor intends visiting Peking himself one day soon."

The Eastern leaned forward. "Then see to it that he goes before he is married, Sir;" he said quietly. "Your daughter must not on any account accompany the Professor. *She must never go to Peking with him.*"

The Doctor made an irritable gesture. "I really cannot——"

Chang Teh-sheng stopped him whilst Sacrifice nudged Tragedy behind his chair and Death bent down and looked into the expressionless, Oriental eyes. "For your daughter's sake, Sir, listen to me. No, don't look at your watch. This is a matter of life and death. Listen! you *must* listen!"

A door slammed, an errand boy whistled, a bee buzzed into the room, buzzed out. Little everyday sounds to punctuate the blood-stained tale of the Sacking of the first Summer Palace in Peking as reprisal for certain historical happenings. And with the palace the burning to the ground of the house and destruction of the treasures belonging to a nobleman named Wang who, perhaps, perhaps not, it never having been satisfactorily proved, had been mixed up in the historical happenings. Then, added to the burning of the house, the extraction of a fine heavy enough to reduce the nobleman to absolute penury; to deny him entrance to The Forbidden City and so lose him his 'face'—that strange mixture of pride, honour and sensitiveness—for ever at the Court of Old Buddha, the great Empress T'zū Hsi; to turn cold shoulders towards him on every side and add sneers and jibes to his daily rice.

The Doctor endeavoured to interrupt. It was

most unfortunate, of course, and to be deplored, but history—

Chang Teh-sheng ignored the interruption.

The Empress had had compassion. One morning the nobleman had found the yellow Imperial-Cord-of-Suicide upon his pillow. The setting of the sun had seen him swinging gently to the evening breeze. His head wife had followed his example. Her mother had died in agony from gold leaf. His grandmother from an overdose of opium.

"Well, if they are all dead it's all right!" said the Doctor with an affectation of good cheer he was far from feeling.

Chang Teh-sheng made excuses for the Doctor. Told him so withal. It was not to be expected he should understand the East, no one but an Oriental could, strive as Ministers and Missionaries did. Love, Hate and Revenge were just everyday flowers on the Chinese Tree-of-Life, Revenge, lasting the longest, producing a rare harvest of unexpected and poisonous fruit after the passing, sometimes, of many generations. "Before his parents committed suicide, Sir, the heir, a child but old enough to understand, took an oath before the Ancestral Tablets to revenge his family's loss of 'face' should he ever get the opportunity. The Professor will be making him a present of the opportunity should he go to Peking."

Stubborn through sheer racial antipathy the Doctor shook his head, crossed to the mantelpiece and examined the toes of his shoes. The family of Wang would have forgotten. Hatchway was not an uncommon name.

"You are wrong, Sir;" insisted the Chinese. "I know the descendant. Old Wang, who lives in my 'hutung,' has only two joys in life. One is gambling, and I think his beard is the only thing he wouldn't stake and that because, at his age, it might not grow again, and the other of planning what particular revenge in the shape of torture he would inflict upon the first Hatchway he had the good luck to meet. Before I came to be—er—civilized in England he used to talk to me about it

by the hour, and the only two thrills I have known in the somnolent town of Oxford have been when I first met Miss Chase walking up the High and the first time I saw the Professor, recognizing him, even to the birthmark shaped like a vase near the cheekbone, from an old print of the General my neighbour, Wang, has pinned to the wall near his bed."

The Doctor stroked his beard. "What exactly means 'hutung'?" he asked.

Chang Teh-sheng took his cue. If the elder chose to be insular and opaque out of sheer racial antipathy there was nothing more to be done or said. "'Hutung' is Chinese for the lanes or narrow paths between high walls which criss-cross the Chinese Quarter in Peking, Sir. Paths crammed from end to end with tragedy and comedy, happiness and misery, life and death. I wouldn't give a straw for the Professor's life should he ever meet old Wang in the 'hutung' late at night." He crossed to the door as he spoke, the slimness of his six-foot giving no hint of the whipcord muscle underneath, the lazy eyes no clue to his hate of the man who had plucked the fruit forbidden him. "I have already taken up too much of your time, Sir, I am sorry. But I repeat that in Peking there is spun a web of revenge, leading to a frightful death, in which Miss Chase, should she have the misfortune to marry the Professor, might easily be caught."

"Far-fetched! Utterly fantastic!" said the Doctor from the fire-place.

"No, Sir, Oriental!" replied Chang Teh-sheng opening the door on the other side of which Wan Yen stood, hands up the wide sleeves of his black-silk coat, brown, slanting eyes sliding from his Master to the Doctor and back. "I don't want you, Sir, for a moment to think I am worrying about the Professor."

At the sound of a certain gentle, mocking, steely note in the quiet voice a sudden fear flashed into the Doctor's eyes.

"Personally I don't care if he is stood in a tub

of quicklime, hung up by his thumbs<sup>1</sup> and beaten to death,<sup>1</sup> done to death by the Slow Torture, or subjected to any other of China's methods for removing folk. As a man I am totally indifferent to his qualities good or bad, as the man who has won where I have failed I should like to see him dead, but, loving your daughter, I would not have her run the risk, through your criminal indifference, Sir, to that streak of untold cruelty which blackens Oriental psychology." He bowed after the manner of his land. "But remember, Sir, that, in gratitude for your leniency to Fielder, I shall, if there should be the need, help you and yours, and the Professor will be of your family should he have the great good fortune to marry Miss Chase, and she the bad luck to become his wife, to the utmost of my ability."

At the end of his tether, the Doctor crossed to the desk and commenced ostentatiously to open papers. "I—er—I am only too happy to have been able to do as you asked about Fielder;" he said briefly, eyes like dried pebbles, then pulled himself together and laughed in an effort to dismiss a certain uneasy shadow which had fallen upon the hour. "I think, Chang, that the East takes a much too serious outlook on life, much more so than the West."

Chang Teh-sheng opened the door a little wider. "Perhaps that is why the Twain are so very far apart, Sir;" he said tranquilly.

"The Twain?"

Chang Teh-sheng looked back, a cruel line to his mouth, a hell of hate and pain in his eyes. For the briefest second the mask was lifted, then he smiled. "'For the East is East, and the West is West,' and the *rest* of the quotation, Sir!" he said, and motioned his servant to close the door.

<sup>1</sup> Both seen by the writer.

## CHAPTER I

### FLIES IN THE WEB

PEKING, safeguarded by her Gates, asleep behind her Walls.

Stars, like diamond buttons upon Night's robe, above and in her dust the mark of countless feet which had passed this and that way through the 'hutung' all the day long. Print of brocade shoe and cloth, mens' shoes and womens', maids' and babes'; the vicious hole of weary, broken, bound feet stubbing their way; hoof-print of donkey; splash of camel pad; swing of coolie gait pressed down by burden carried on coolie shoulder, persimmon, bricks, wood-for-firing, live goats and dead, children, disappointment, despair, all criss-crossed by mark of rickshaw-wheel. For light what the stars, dimmed by the advent of the slow half-moon, and a lantern here and there on the high walls, flung to the shadows. No sound until the Turnip-seller called his humdrum wares to the cry descended him through centuries; melodious; sweet; catching in the leaves of a budding locust-tree; a woman's ear-rings when, peering from a low door, she hissed softly, offered coppers for a vegetable and shut the door as softly. A haunting call, creeping through cracks in walls, paper doors and windows and the dreams of those who dwelt and slept in the shadows thrown by the curved, yellow roofs of The Forbidden City, Peking's tragic, once Imperial heart.

Of colour, one great splash. The Gate of Chang Teh-sheng's house. A double, scarlet door bedecked with round, brass knockers, guarded by stone lions



and lit by a red-paper lantern painted with the Chinese Character for Happiness.

Happiness forsooth!

As ephemeral a mark upon the heart of man as print of foot in Peking's flying dust!

Silence, then the thud-thud of a foot-bound coolie-woman, a fly in the Web-of-Revenge spun by Fate across the 'hutung' this starry night. A square, squat, cheery, ever-hopeful fly of a coolie-woman who counted the meagre coppers in her trouser pocket at the enticing and succulent sound of the Sweetmeat-seller's little gong. "Prices soaring!" she said regretfully, and went her way along nodding to a slip of an 'Amah' who came from a side-street towards the scarlet door.

Mei-hua, sewing-maid to Chang Teh-sheng and who stitched her heart into the fine embroideries she worked upon her master's delicate linen, leaned her pretty head against the scarlet wood and sighed she loved him so, then tapped and whispered: "Has he returned?" and sighed again, slipping behind the 'devil-screen' when the Door-keeper shook his head, breath too precious to waste upon a love-sick wench in jade-green satin trousers and short coat, crimsoned lips as red as the red rose behind her ear, long, black eyes as starry as the night through love.

Stout, sedate, he looked up and down the 'hutung,' deserted except for the perambulatory vendors. Remarked: "Foreign Devils!" at the sound of English voices and shut the door as Rosalie Hatchway, a-thrill at the adventure of being lost in the Chinese Quarter and followed by her husband a good deal more vexed than thrilled, came down from the north of the 'hutung.'

"We must be somewhere near the main road, Cyril!" she said in a voice most husky-sweet, a little blurred as is the voice of a woman who suffers disillusionment stoically. "Surely we must!" and dropping her bag picked it up herself.

"It was absurd to try and find our way back on foot when there were rickshaws waiting!" said Hatchway, tersely prospecting in the dust for an

exit towards the Peking Hôtel or conveyance to take them thither.

Rosalie sighed, and looked up at the scarlet lantern over the scarlet door. "I thought the stars would lead us!" she said to herself, and wistfully withal, her mind on matters other than the way back. "What does the Character on the lantern stand for?"

Hatchway looked over his shoulder. "Happiness!" he said, and by the interest in his voice might have been reading an advertisement for boot-polish instead of the Chinese sign for Life's Will-o'-the-Wisp.

"Anyway I wouldn't have missed the yellow roofs of The Forbidden City by starlight for anything," said Rosalie, back square to the lantern, then laughed. "Quick, Cyril, tell me how to say 'Please I am lost' in Chinese. Here come two. Chinese I mean. Quick, just for the fun of the thing!"

"My dear Rosalie, you can't do it. You simply cannot accost all and sundry in the Chinese Quarter."

Rosalie shrugged her shoulders. "Can't do it." The tag pasted upon most of the solid, square jars standing on the plain, deal shelves in the plain, deal cupboard of her married life. So thick the dust upon her Vase-of-Dreams that the colours of its thousand, thousand facets shone only when she blew hard against the dust. Girlhood, Adventure, the Unknown like precious unguents pushed far back upon the shelf and all this dismal clutter brought about by two years of married life to a man of tastes as dry as the dust upon her Vase-of-Dreams.

But here!

A break in Monotony's row of uniform, solid jars. One which could be filled, if only with a chip of adventure, a splinter of laughter.

The scarlet door opened as the Chinese came towards it, side by side, one old and bent, grey beard straggling upon a robe of humble cloth, skull-cap upon shaven crown and humble shoes of cloth upon his feet, his companion most beautifully gowned

in a robe of Peking-Blue brocade, black-brocade shoes, skull-cap upon thick, black hair, Fate's hand upon his shoulder.

"Excuse me——!" said Rosalie, then held out both her hands. "You! why, yes, it is! it's Mr. Chang!"

"You, Miss Chase!" said Chang Teh-sheng, flashing a glance at her and sub-consciously glad the fine feet were elevated upon high heels, but sorry that the red-gold curls had been more sedately dressed. "How too wonderful!" he added, taking both her hands. "You here all by yourself, in Peking, of all far cries from Oxford. Let me introduce——"

"Oh, but do it properly;" laughed Rosalie, beckoning Hatchway who emerged from an unproductive side-street. "You will remember Professor Hatchway. I married him. Cyril!" she called, whilst Chang Teh-sheng, at the look on the old Chinaman's face, essayed an abortive manoeuvre to get Hatchway into the shadow.

Wang Pu-hao, whose unbridled and unquenchable lust for gambling had earned him his nickname, "The Bad," pulled his friend's sleeve. "Latchlay!" he whispered, an unholy light in the small, black eyes and when Chang Teh-sheng ignored him utterly, turned to Rosalie and bowed. "You Missie Latchlay?" he said in the bastard English he had acquired as a necessary thread to the Web-of-Revenge spun across the 'hutung.'

"Yes!" said Rosalie all smiles and thinking what a perfect old dear the old thing was. "And this is my husband, Professor Hatchway, and oh, Mr. Chang, you can't *think* how exciting it is for us in Peking. I don't suppose Dad's told you that Cyril is the grandson of——"

Chang Teh-sheng, who had shaken hands with Hatchway with the same amount of enthusiasm he would have put into stroking a scorpion, made a last attempt to avert disaster. Invited Rosalie, without using her married name, in to supper, baited the hook with Bird's Nest Soup, Mandarin Fish, Velvet Chicken and Sea-Slugs in

their native brine. "I believe Wan Yen managed to get some pickled baby white-mice, too, from Canton;" he said; "and a real old Chinese house with its courts and galleries, guest-lanterns, fish-ponds, Cloud-Rocks and Gods in Shrines all over the place is well worth seeing." He motioned the door to be thrown wide. "Peking keeps the most atrocious hours. Do come!"

"I'd love to!" said Rosalie, adding, so eager was she to apply the Unguent-of-Adventure to the bruises on her enthusiasm caused by the Professor's total lack of Life's most necessary stimulant. "You can't think how interested we are in everything Chinese. You see Cyril's grandfather, General Hatchway——"

"My dear!" said Hatchway warningly as he crossed to where she stood in the lantern light. True the Doctor had left them both in blissful ignorance of the Oath-of-Revenge taken before the Ancestral Tablets of the House-of-Wang, but Hatchway thought it hardly the moment in which to resuscitate such ancient and complicated history.

As Chang Teh-sheng thought, his eyes on the old man's face which was about as enlightening as the 'hutung' wall. Had Wang Pu-hao understood? Did he know or not that his enemy stood before him in the lantern light? To all appearances, not. His black eyes gave no clue to the crafty brain behind. His serene smile seemed to register the pulsations of a perfectly tranquil heart, as do most Chinese smiles, be their owner on his way to execution or in process of gazing with rapture upon the new-born heir.

Chang Teh-sheng's heart suddenly lightened. Wang Pu-hao bowed and asked permission to depart. True whilst doing it he peered rather more closely at Hatchway than courtesy allowed, but there was nothing to show that mere idle curiosity was not the real reason of the scrutiny. "Missie scuse ol' man if he go one time sleep. Pleking late but ol' man no late!" Wang Pu-hao bowed when Rosalie bowed then turned to his young Neighbour

and cordially invited him, in spite of his own desire to sleep, to come along in and gamble until any hour for any stakes.

Perhaps. Perhaps not. Chang Teh-sheng could not promise, having, in reality, no intention of either visiting or gambling, being overcome with a desire to sit and dream a while of Rosalie with her red-gold hair all ruffled, eyes ruffled with expectancy, heart with desire.

For six months out of the last two years he had considered the idea of marriage. The famous old Go-between who had arranged more marriages between wealthy and high-caste families than any other Go-between in the land of China, had whispered to him of The-Light-of-Dawn, the third, sixteen-year-old daughter of the House-of-Fang-P'ing in the next 'hutung.' The maid was considered the greatest prize in the matrimonial market. A shade difficult, haughty and exclusive perhaps, having imbibed a certain amount of Western poison through visiting picture-houses and reading translations of foreign novels. Though all that, of course, should she be worth it, would but add a zest to the task of breaking her in. Intelligent she was most certainly. To the extent of her mordant witticisms making the round of China. Wealthy. But that was of no interest to the House-of-Chang whose master, an' he wished, could indulge in a head wife and a hundred concubines, each in her separate abode, without noticing the slightest deflation in his fortune. Not exactly a beauty, but passable. Chang Teh-sheng had seen the young termagant pass one day, sitting like a slender ramrod in her car and chaperoned by the most corrosive-looking 'Amah.' He could have sworn the girl had looked at him with interest when, against all rule and custom and just because he, too, had imbibed Western poison, he had optically morsed her the most open, if none too genuine, admiration. He had been sure the faintest pink had crept to her cheek. though her somewhat heavy mouth had remained haughtily shut and her eyebrows, plucked

to the shape of a moth's wing, most superciliously high upon her forehead.

One other time he had caught a glimpse of her. When walking in the Hills near The-Temple-of-Perpetual-Fragrance, with the austere 'Amah's' aid on account of her broken, bound feet. The smallest in China so rumour said. A deformity which, in rendering the girl almost helpless, appealed to the man's national streak of cruelty.

He had been told that her family sometimes visited The-Temple-of-the-Celestial-Horizon in the curve of a Hill near to his own Temple. Likewise that the girl's parents would look most favourably upon the union. Not astounding considering his name, wealth and beauty.

And now this. All in one hour. Everything swept by the board because of a woman forbidden him. A woman belonging to another man; a white woman who, in some subconscious way, he longed with a certain inexplicable desire to hurt; to waken; to wrap up in scented silks and satins; to brush her hair with a damp brush so that the red-gold curls stood on end, and to frighten her eyes which looked like a misty English day; whilst at the back of his mind he thought it would be infinitely good to see Hatchway lying dead. Only at the back of his mind the unformed thought, but insistent enough to draw a line to his mouth. Not that he was sure he would want to marry the English girl even were Hatchway dead.

Save for the rarest exceptions widows remained as such in China, Chinese men refusing to tolerate the passing of women from one man to another in wedlock. It savoured too much of a kind of licensed Sing-Song transaction, besides weakening the male's supreme tyrannical rights of ownership.

He looked at Hatchway and glanced at two fairly respectable rickshaw-coolies who had happened down the 'hutung' with fairly respectable rickshaws, then invited Rosalie to come up the steps and examine the rare, jade 'devil-screen' if she persisted in refusing to walk round it to supper. He

was not quite sure why he asked her up the steps, but rather hoped by doing so to make a dent, however small, in Hatchway's calm complacency.

"R'shaw! R'shaw!" chorused the coolies as Rosalie, wrapped in a Chinese shawl of many colours, walked up the steps, and Chang Teh-sheng, watching the slender feet, proud little head and white shoulders, hated the man who had won her on a mere question of pigment.

"As we, in our paganism, believe that devils can't walk round corners, we put up these 'devil-screens' to prevent the goblins from wandering into our courts;" he said, passing his hand over the white-jade panel set in a green-jade frame, then explained how, centuries back, the great and artistic Emperor Ch'ien Lung had presented the screen to the Abbot of The-Temple-of-Perpetual-Fragrance along with a marble bridge. "—but my Ancestor, thinking it wasn't square enough to keep the devils out, sent it down to his home, this house, and had it put up here. Before I left the Temple to-day—"

Rosalie clasped her hands. A Temple in the Western Hills! A dream of hers had been to visit one, to stay in it if only for an afternoon, but the manager of the Peking Hôtel had told her that they were all occupied as the priests, direly in need of funds, let them or part of them to foreigners and wealthy people from Peking for the hot weather.

Advising her to go to the Chinese for information about things Chinese, Chang Teh-sheng offered her the use of The-Temple-of-Perpetual-Fragrance for as long as she liked, whilst the rickshaw-coolies plaintively called attention to their profession and the little 'Amah,' the Chinese Rose, love, fidelity and a surpassing jealousy in her heart, watched the foreign woman from the shadowed court. "I have it!" said Chang Teh-sheng. "If you won't come to supper to-night will you lunch at the Temple to-morrow?"

Hatchway, with a perverse tweak of satisfaction, declined as Rosalie, enthralled, accepted. "We

can't, dear! We're going to the Great Wall by the early train!" he said.

Rosalie surmised that a hundred years would still see the historical barrier in the same place. Hatchway that the same stationary process would apply just as well to the Temple as to the barrier. Chang Teh-sheng, perversely consoled by the side-light and correctly labelling the diversity of opinion none too suavely expressed as cussedness on the man's part and suppression on the girl's, offered himself as a Chinese Solomon. Proposed division. The Professor to visit the Wall, Rosalie to lunch in the Hills with himself. "Yes-no? as we Chinese say?" he said, standing, framed in scarlet, against the 'devil-screen.'

Rosalie, backing down the steps to look at the perfect Oriental picture he made, called Hatchway's attention to it. He, with entire lack of enthusiasm, said he had noticed it, then, remembering Peking's reputation for aiding women to throw their bonnets, from shingle-caps to dowagers' toupées, over windmills, decided to accept the invitation to lunch, whereupon Rosalie waxed ecstatic and passed her wardrobe in a long-distance, rapid, satisfactory review.

"Has the 'devil-screen' anything to do with the superstition called 'Fêng-shui'?" she asked as she walked up the steps again, drawn up by the spell of the East which seemed as a glad *sauce piquante* to the humdrum fare she had daily tackled for the last two years, which sauce or lure being principally responsible for the shingle-caps and toupées which whirl over Peking's windmills to bite her dust.

### ' FÈNG-SHUI '

"First cousin to 'Fêng-shui,'" replied Chang Teh-sheng and clapped his hands. "We are just going to perform the nightly ceremony of Feeding-



the-Ghosts, the ghosts of dead, hungry men." He looked down at the white hand when Rosalie, scared of ghosts perhaps, or perhaps loosening her bonnet-strings, touched his arm, and explained to her how the ghosts of hungry men waited at the rich man's Gate all night, the only way to prevent them from entering and wrecking the house in search of food being to put paper loaves and fishes at the Gate, then to turn those into Spirit-Food by setting light to them. "This is Wan Yen who knew the Doctor;" he continued, as the big man appeared at the Gate, arms full of paper mock-food.

Wan Yen bowed. "Mlaster Plofesslor velly gloat man, Missie, an' my Mlaster velly gloat, blig man, he give 'chow' hungly live mlen an' glosts allee time;" and piled the paper soup-bowls, loaves, fish and fruit on both sides of the Gate.

"This ceremony is also of the 'Fêng-shui' family;" said Chang Teh-sheng and offered Rosalie a match. "Would you like to safeguard my house from psychic attack for one night?" and when she fired the two piles and the flames shot up and out, pulled her back, quickly, into his arms, whilst Meihua, watching in an agony of jealousy, crept away.

"One would think by the flames that our friendship were forbidden;" said Rosalie, laughing, a thrill to the sound, and ran down the steps the better to see the blaze which, leaping starward, died suddenly out. "Nothing left but a flimsy cinder!" she said regretfully.

Chang Teh-sheng thought it just like the first infatuation of married life in the West. Starting in flames, threatening to set fire to the country-side in a great devastation, to send cities up in smoke, and rivers in fiery spouts then dying out and flittering away on the inevitable Wind-of-Monotony. "I don't mean love, of course. Love is just like one of those quiet, glowing fires in a deep English grate. Requiring an occasional stirring, a little fuel, a log perhaps, a few cones and a sprinkle of salt sometimes just to bring out the colours. But which is something to sit near to on the worn hearth-rug

of Everyday Life and dream and dream and dream, far into the night perhaps, or on a foggy afternoon." He laughed, watching the fleeting expression of lack on the sweet face, the distrust on Hatchway's who would no more have discussed love on a doorstep than he would have lectured in pyjamas. "But as it is so late we had better leave married life and love which are Life's legitimate and illegitimate children, and you can put whichever adjective to whichever child you like, alone, and walk down that narrow passage to where my car is waiting."

"That certainly is one of the disadvantages of the 'hutung'!" said Hatchway peskily.

"Perish the thought of a car on a starry Peking night!" cried Rosalie as she beckoned the jubilant rickshaw-coolies and, lending Fate a hand, got into the nearest. "Will you come and fetch us at the Club to-morrow, Mr. Chang?" she asked gaily, her face like a white flower in the purple-grey of the night. "Cyril has to meet Gaillard, the famous French authority on Chinese china, there." She laughed when Chang Teh-sheng pulled her cloak round her and, weaving a thread into the web, surreptitiously held a corner of it. "Will you come at eleven?"

Chang Teh-sheng asked if he could call at the hotel instead. "We Chinese are forbidden to cross the Club's threshold;" he said, and laughed; "and, in Chinese clothes, forbidden to walk upon the Wall between the Hatamen and Ch'ien Men Gates. Our own Gates on our own Wall in our own City."

Rosalie didn't understand. Hatchway wished the tricky subject hadn't come up. Chang Teh-sheng explained that even the highest caste Chinese was not allowed inside the Club in Marco Polo Street.

Rosalie was apologetic and looked so sweet and distressed under the half-moon that the Chinese changed the subject. "Why worry?" he said. "Remember that The-Temple-of-Perpetual-Fragrance, which takes its name from the sweet-scented trees around it, is yours for just as long as you like. Why not bring a suit-case and stay the night, a week. Plenty of hot water, lamps, sun, moon,

rest, infinite rest. My servant, who treads like a soft, fat cat, and handles silks as he might a beloved woman's hair were he an Occidental and not a Chinese Eunuch, shall wait on you. Do! "

Rosalie hedged. There was more than one kind of flame in life, and some flames scorched fingers which went too near the fire. She feared the witchery of Peking, not because of her bonnet but because of her wardrobe which Life, so far, had filled with stout tailor-mades and worsted wear to which she *might* be tempted to add a flimsy frill or so. She would see.

And if there is anything drabber and more irritating than that commonplace procedure, what is it?

"Well, if you can't stay to-morrow night will you promise to come on The-Night-of-the-Full-Moon? Peking from The-Court-of-the-Rising-Sun under the full moon is an absolute dream. Will you promise?"

Rosalie's coolie jiggled between the shafts. "Yes!" she said as he started. "I promise."

"And I promise to be there;" answered Chang Teh-sheng; "and to show you the sunrise, too. Now don't forget. We have a date for the full moon;" and being in love, of a kind, mistook Fate's ironic laughter for the rickshaw's clatter.

"Thanks awfully!" said Hatchway as Chang Teh-sheng walked up the steps.

"Only too delighted! Good night!" said the Chinese without looking back. The hour had run down. He had no desire to wind it up again, as yet. The great door shut behind him with a little click, leaving Fate in the 'hutung' weaving the web with her shuttle.

### THE WEB

"Aren't you coming, Cyril?"

Rosalie's voice came from a distance. The sound of her impatient rickshaw-bell.

"Coming!" irritably shouted Hatchway back, his coolie fussing with the lantern. "I've a perfect fool of a coolie. You go on. I'll follow. Be quick!" he added in Chinese to the hulking fellow who grinned at him, picked up the shafts and dropped them again to tie his shoe. "Sting!" he said, grinning, and went off searching in the gutter for something with which to fasten his delapidated footwear, then felt in his tattered coat and looked stealthily about. A sweet odour floated on the air as he crept noiselessly up to behind the rickshaw, a cloth in his slender hands. A short, sharp tussle followed. A choking cry, then Hatchway crumpled up, unconscious, on the seat. A fraction of time to pull a rug from under the seat, another to pull the battered hood up. "Wine!" said the coolie as the Turnip-seller came round the corner, then turned the rickshaw and ran off north.

The Turnip-seller looked at the foreign boots under the rug. "Foreign Devil!" he said, spat and trotted off west calling his humdrum wares.

Silence and then the sound of running feet and Rosalie urging her coolie faster still, her voice full of the fear one might legitimately experience should a companion, any kind of one, fail to follow in the Chinese Quarter.

"Master not here!" she said and jumped clear of the rickshaw. "Cyril!" she called to the north and the south, the east and the west, and when there came no answer ran up the steps and rattled the little brass tongue on the round brass knocker. "Go look-see if Master in other street!" she said to the rickshaw-coolie to find, when she looked round, that there was no sign of rickshaw or coolie, only the mark of wheels going north. The 'hutung' was deserted. Then she hammered on the door until magpies rose screaming from the locust-tree and men and women crept to door and window to shut them upon the danger of themselves being implicated in the tragedy. "I want your Master!" said Rosalie when the Door-keeper looked through an inch-wide crack.

"Master not in!" he lied serenely and shut the door upon the frenzied, foreign woman.

Then she beat with fists upon the knockers and the door itself, ran back and shouted until the 'hutung' rang. "Mr. Chang! Mr. Chang! Mr. Chang!" she called, and when the door opened wide and the Door-keeper as serenely informed her that the Master had just returned, flung herself upon Chang Teh-sheng who stood smiling down at her from his great height.

"Cyril! My husband!" she cried. "Did he come back to you? He didn't follow me! He said he was coming but he didn't and there's no sign of him here! And my rickshaw's gone too! Something dreadful, terrible has happened. Oh, this dreadful, dreadful, *horrible* East!"

"But it doesn't necessarily mean that a foreigner has been done to death because his coolie hasn't understood his particular brand of Chinese;" said Chang Teh-sheng, fervently hoping that Hatchway had been murdered.

Rosalie was frantic with the facile panic of those little used to tight corners, risk, the unexpected and all the rest that gives a spice to life. Hatchway spoke Mandarin Chinese. He had come out top in the stiffest exam. That being so, something dire must have befallen him.

Chang Teh-sheng pointed out that One Li Chinese, which meant the first mile and the very best, was as unintelligible to the southerner as French to the average Englishman. "The coolie may have come from the south;" he said as he walked down the steps followed by Rosalie and examined the dust. "I will tell my man to follow the marks of this rickshaw going north!" and clapped his hands.

Rosalie clasped his arm. "What has happened? Do you think something dreadful has happened?"

Chang Teh-sheng thought and hoped that something dreadful had. "Come inside and I'll tell you——"

Rosalie wanted to hear at once! She couldn't wait! Something must be done! The police called!

“ Better come inside, the walls of China have ears and eyes fixed in with the mortar or whatever they are held together by; ” insisted Chang Teh-sheng. “ Come! ” and when Rosalie most unwillingly preceded him up the steps, pointed out that time was a most negligible quantity in the East.

The gate shut softly, the guest-lanterns glimmered in the dusky, countless courts through which they walked, servants in white bowed as they passed.

## CHAPTER II

### THE HUNDREDTH CONCUBINE

“ WHO is the foreign woman? ”

“ The woman the Master loves! ” said Wan Yen, looking down at Mei-hua who sat on the ground, sewing.

“ Is she the Foreign Devil’s Number One wife? ” she asked, bit a thread with splendid teeth and showed a slight amusement at the Foreign Devils’ strange marriage custom of having one wife to last from the year of marriage to the end of life. “ When the woman must look like a bit of frayed string and the man resemble a cat with a saucer of soured milk; ” she said, and laughed.

“ Has there yet been born man or cat who could be forced to fidelity? ” inquired Wan Yen, complacently slipping fine hands up sleeves.

“ Nay, there are always the tiles! ” sighed Mei-hua and looked across to the west door. “ Yet is my love for the Master such that I would be his hundredth Concubine so as to be his. ”

Wan Yen laughed and crossed to straighten the hard-wood armchairs most meagrely upholstered on the seat and set in pairs about the lightly-furnished room; the stools to match; touched the rare book in its cover and the still rarer jade vase upon the hard-wood, carved, highly-polished table; looked up at the orange-silk lanterns hanging from the roof beams; shifted the full-length mirror in heavy frame an inch, and disentangled a silk tassel on the lantern under which the ‘ Amah ’ sat in the centre of the south wall. “ You have but little chance, Little-Rose; ” he said, and opened a Chinese wardrobe of red and black lacquer and antiquity untold; “ the Master can have such as you for the lifting

of a finger." He shut the cupboard and crossed to another like it, talking as he went. Little sewing-girls were as far beneath their masters' notice as the dust beneath the stars and almost out of the running for the post even of a one hundredth Concubine. Though, should the Master marry the young termagant, The-Light-of-Dawn, who boxed her 'Amah's' ears and stormed the very leaves from off the trees, he, Wan Yen, for a portion of what the Master would allow his Concubine, would do his best to recommend Mei-hua as a docile, beautiful, sweet, secondary wife. There being no doubt that the Master would want a respite from the young she-devil who, so her vitriolic-tongued 'Amah' said, was crazed with love for him.

"Not that the danger to your happiness, Little-Rose, lies in the *Chinese* woman. Place a banquet before a man, but forbid him one persimmon and what does he do?"

Mei-hua shrugged her shoulders as she added a golden thread to the butterfly she embroidered upon her Master's delicate linen. "Dies of starvation coveting the forbidden fruit;" she said, and pressed the butterfly to her cheek, knowing naught, being an uncontaminated little Chinese maiden, of kisses as caresses.

"And which is the fruit, the one thing forbidden the Master who has never known denial? The foreign woman! And not only because she is the wife of the Foreign Devil but because she is of the white race and he of the yellow." Wan Yen looked down at the beautiful child. "Her hair is like the gold of yon thread and her eyes like a blue vase. She is slim and supple, with a laugh like a stream and the step of the Master's gazelle. *And she is altogether forbidden him.*"

Mei-hua's eyes looked like slits of black onyx, lifeless, dull, as she glanced at the man-servant and down. "'Twere a pity man should die of starvation;" she said; "when, should the persimmon be removed from the table, he, being man, would eat from another dish." She folded her work and



looked to the east, from which direction came the sound of shouting and hammering upon the gate. "There is trouble in the 'hutung,'" she added, and got up.

Wan Yen crossed to the east door. "Aye, there is—foreign trouble. 'Tis the forbidden woman's voice." He folded the cloth on his arm and looked back at the 'Amah.' "Remember, Little-One, that trouble is the point of opportunity for woman as well as man and cattle;" and slipped noiselessly away as Mei-hua crossed to the west door where she stopped and looked back, listening. "May the foreign fruit be seedless and rot!" she said vindictively, watched Rosalie and Chang Teh-sheng as they walked up to the open door, and slid into the shadows of the next room.

"—as I said, it's hopeless to try and hurry the East. Time is simply a negligible quantity to the Oriental;" Chang Teh-sheng said as they entered. "I will tell you what I think has happened to the Professor but it's really no use worrying about it until my man comes back with news." And to help pass the time suggested having the belated supper "Tea and fishmouth-sandwiches or"—he looked down at her, smiling, trying to rouse her—"or baby white-mice served hot on toast? Yes—no—yes?"

"I think you are a perfect brute!" said Rosalie simply, conscious of the shadows, the danger, the mockery in the man's voice, and dropped her cloak, thinking to allot him the humble task of lifting it from the ground.

He turned and beckoned and when a servant came running, pointed to it. "The perfect brute is always perfectly helpless!" he said and moved a chair for Rosalie to sit down. "And which shall it be?"

"White-mice on toast;" said she, crossing her pretty feet; "the mice cold and the toast very hot, if you don't mind. I can't stand mice tepid."

Chang Teh-sheng laughed. "First blood to the

great white race! ” he said and gave the order to the waiting servant. “ And as I am sure you would be sick if you tried to eat anything we uncivilized heathens eat I have ordered eggs and bacon as well.”

“ Thank you, that will be quite like home! ” said Rosalie and, taking a leaf out of the East’s book of utter indifference to either danger or death, looked round the room with apparent interest. “ Except for the smell of incense; ” she said at last, “ this isn’t in the least like the Chinese rooms we see on the stage in England.”

“ No, this is Chinese; ” said Chang Teh-sheng; “ though, being a little more—shall I say civilized?—than the majority of my people, I allow myself a parquet floor, bathrooms, central heating and, sometimes, an English menu.”

He stopped speaking. She waited for him to tell her about Hatchway. He waited for her to ask. She asked and made no movement as she listened, petrified, to the tale of the Sacking of the Summer Palace, the Oath-of-Revenge before the Ancestral Tablets and the promise to the Doctor. She made no comment until the end, then: “ The old man I met is—”

“ The child who took the oath and your husband, I should say, is in such danger that, if I do manage to get him back because of the promise I gave the Doctor, I may have to send you both away from here through the secret passage which leads from this room to the heart of The Forbidden City. Will you smoke? ”

Rosalie shook her head as she looked all round the room for a hidden door.

“ You don’t smoke? ”

“ Oh, yes, I do; ” she said, fear in her eyes. “ But I couldn’t, not now, not in a room with a hidden door, on a night like this.”

“ But you should; ” said Chang Teh-sheng, a suspicion of a laugh in his voice. “ Smoking in times of stress is like mixing a cold, hard-boiled egg with butter. Makes it more easy to—

er—assimilate. Smoke whilst I tell you about the hidden passage.”

“I think I am very frightened;” said Rosalie, and took a cigarette, which went out as she listened.

### THE SECRET DOOR

A passage made under the moat, centuries back, to connect the powerful House-of-Chang still more intimately with The Forbidden City. A dire way used by Eunuchs and Courtesans to facilitate the unprintable intrigues of the Court. Haunted by the shadows of death and torture. Concealed from the world by doors, which, just simply bolted on the inside, opened, one into the room in which they sat and the other into The-Gallery-of-the-White-Birds in The Forbidden City.

Rosalie, aghast, wanted to know if the doors couldn't be opened from outside.

They could, by two springs hidden in the floor and wide apart, a most simple contrivance, but which he would not show even her owing to woman's proverbial lack of reticence.

Ignoring the tilt Rosalie asked if the passage had never been discovered.

Only once in all the centuries and then by a woman. An Imperial Concubine had come prospecting up it, to be strangled by a spying Eunuch for her foolhardiness in the little alcove, which, shut off by iron doors, made a small room, a circle, in the exact centre of the passage. “I often wonder Old Buddha, our Empress, didn't hear of it and come adventuring along, being almost as great a spirit as your Queen Elizabeth;” Chang Teh-sheng continued lazily. “Not only had she a great regard for the House-of-Chang but might have found the secret very useful in her uncountable and terrible love-affairs. I have had the alcove fitted up most comfortably—armchairs, deck-chairs, books and——”

Rosalie shivered. He could not mean that he made use of the place of death and terror!

He laughed. For sheer love of adventure and drama he went down it once every month when the whole house slept, hoping that, some day, just such an emergency as had at last arisen, might arise. "It seemed such a waste to have a perfectly good secret passage and not to be able to make use of it," he ended.

Rosalie looked at him as he sat, handsome, serene, smoking on a stool. "You *hoped!*" she said. "How *can* you! How can you take things so calmly? How can China be so utterly, terribly cruel?" and when Chang Teh-sheng argued that China was much more philosophical than she was cruel, turned from the laughing face, sprang to her feet and pointed to the mirror. "Look!" she cried. "In the glass—a face——!" then drew her hand across her eyes. "It was myself—of course—but I thought I saw a woman watching us, a Chinese woman."

Chang Teh-sheng glanced at the west door. "It would have certainly been a Chinese woman, as you are the only white woman who has entered, who ever will enter, my house." He looked at her, his eyes like shreds of black glass. "Do you know that you are alone here? In a house you can't leave unless I let you go?"

Rosalie looked at him, frowning. There was a new note in his voice. He was so quiet, dominant, Oriental, so far removed from the man with whom she had once played tennis. "How strange!" she said. "I don't think I realized that you were really Eastern until now."

He smiled at her, defiant, helpless, in his power. He would not have harmed her for all the world, this girl forbidden him, but he longed to rouse her, to frighten her so that changes should sweep across her face as shadows across a grain-field. "Why not adopt a little of China's philosophy whilst you are in the country?" he said gently. "It would help you in this—er—emergency."

Rosalie made a quick, impatient gesture as Chang Teh-sheng got up and crossed to the table. "Philosophy!" she said when he walked behind her to the mirror, and sat down again as the middle of the wall behind her opened slowly, inch by inch. "You seem to forget that Cyril is my husband!"

Chang Teh-sheng looked at her out of the corner of his eyes. Here was a chance to rouse her. "I am not likely to forget that as I wanted you for my own wife;" he said gently.

Rosalie stared at him. "What!" she said. "I—I don't think I understood what you said. *You wanted to marry me!*"

Chang Teh-sheng leaned forward, watching her. "I wanted to hitch my wagon to a star the first time I saw you walking down the High. I loved you then, at once, as the East can and the West can't. I love you now, I shall always love you. I hope that Hatchway is already dead;" he watched her hands, her terrified face; "then, if you would stay, if you would let a man of a different race, high-caste, decent, pour out the love he had in his heart, and the wealth accumulated by his Ancestors through the centuries, at your beautiful feet, give you his great name, make life one beautiful, soul-filling garden for you, I would never, never let you go."

Rosalie looked at him with wide, uncomprehending eyes. "Love *me!* *You!* But you couldn't!" she said, sitting like a statue of astonishment against the black square which gaped in the wall behind her.

"Couldn't? Why couldn't I?"

It is doubtful if she would have heeded the warning had she heard it in the quiet, cold voice, but, untrained in observation, she neither heard it, nor noticed the mockery in the half-closed eyes. "Why, because you're Chi-neese!" she replied flatly and as though surprised that he had not noticed the racial chasm himself.

Chang Teh-sheng laughed. "As I told the

Doctor when I asked his permission to marry you, it does sound pretty ghastly pronounced that way;” he said and when, contrite and quite broken-hearted, she begged him to try and understand, walked over to her. “Understand? I *do* understand;” he said. “Because my skin is not the same colour as the Professor’s my feelings must also be different. Yellow, I suppose. That, although good enough to be educated at your Public Schools, your Universities, to help them win at Lords, to be asked to an occasional tea, as a partner to an occasional game of tennis, the Oriental, where a white woman and marriage is concerned, is outside the pale!”

“Don’t!” whispered Rosalie. “Please don’t. Of course I understand the great honour you——”

Chang Teh-sheng cut her short. “The speech of the fathers unto the n’th generation!” he laughed, following her as she backed from him up to the black square in the wall. “Do you think colour, customs, climate make the slightest difference where love, real love is concerned?” and when Rosalie protested, forbidding him to make love to her, pointed out that he was not making love by merely telling her that he loved her as no man had or would or could love her.

“I forbid you to talk like that to me!” said Rosalie sharply. “It isn’t right. My husband has been decoyed or kidnapped or something equally dreadful and Eastern like that and——”

“But you surely don’t expect me to share your concern for him?” said Chang Teh-sheng smiling, watching the anger in her eyes and the scorn for the yellow race in the twist of her mouth and added softly; “when I love you so;” and when she struck him across the mouth caught her by the wrists and ran her back to the opened secret door, where he pulled her hands up above her head against the wall.

Looking over her shoulder, Rosalie screamed and fought to free herself, and Chang Teh-sheng laughed, none too evenly, when the slender shoulder-strap broke.

"Let me go!" Rosalie cried. "Let me go!" and turned her head away at the passion blazing in the man's eyes.

"Let you go!" he whispered. "Let you go! Your resistance makes me long to keep you here for ever. Stop struggling if you want me to let you go. Stop resisting. Have you no insight into the East's psychology? None? Don't you know that the only woman who can hold the Oriental for all time is the woman who curbs us, resists us, plays with us. Drawing us on. Scorning us. Smiling. Frowning. Which horse out of all the stable does the Oriental crave to ride? The restive mare so that we can break her in, tame her, with the zest of knowing that, at any moment, at some whim of her scornful mind she may turn and savage us. If you could come to my stables I would show you just such a one. 'Peerless,' a snow-white Arab. She killed my head-groom last week and a moment after came asking for my favours. That——"

"You brute!" whispered Rosalie.

"If the brute lets you go;" laughed Chang Teh-sheng; "will you promise not to hit him again. If you do, with your red-gold hair all in a flurry, the blue of your eyes like breaking ice, your white shoulder, your—your white skin as snow in the corner of my eye, and the knowledge of your hate in your heart, I may shut you behind the wall with me and carry you down to where the Imperial Concubine was strangled by the Eunuch and episodes other than death have taken place."

Rosalie tore her hands free to find herself a prisoner in the circle of steel-strong arms which held her against the wall without touching her.

"Promise?"

The gentleness of the voice broke her. The mockery loosened the last knot in the strings of convention which kept her bonnet clamped tightly to her head. She looked up to find Chang Teh-sheng looking down at her out of half-closed, laughing, lazy eyes.

He raised his eyebrows.

A smile, a question, twisted the corner of his mouth.

For the triumph of overcoming he tempted her.

And the Gods alone know how this story would have ended had she continued in her resistance. Circumspectly without a doubt. Convention being a stiff last ditch to negotiate with a take-off over the Sticks-of-Propriety. But she did not resist. At his undeniable great beauty her heart missed a beat then tripped most emotionally forward. Suddenly overwhelmed with the East's allure she blushed and smiled, looked down, looked up and wondered in her heart of hearts why, after having made love to her, after having asked for her in marriage, he should take his arms from about her with a little sigh.

It would have required his man, Wan Yen, to put her wise to his Master's distaste for all which dropped into his slender hands as easily and speedily as leaves from the tree in the autumnal wind. Racial barriers had but served to strengthen his desire to marry her. That she was the wife of another man had only added a zest to the unexpected meeting. Reawakening, in part, his feeling of desire or passion or whatever it was he had felt for her. The fact that he had succeeded in breaking down her resistance to the point of her philandering, however innocently, had caused him to drop his arms from about her, had she but known.

"You are very like an ivory casket clasped with iron;" he said looking at her, smiling at her. "Or one of those little saplings surrounded by wire in your parks and gardens at home. May I fasten your shoulder-strap. My 'Amah' will be in with tea in a moment and our servants are so self-controlled in the East that it behoves us to hide our—er—shall we call them emotions when they are around."

Rosalie's eyes blazed, partly at the flick upon her pride but as much because of the loosening of her bonnet. "Then it *was* a Chinese woman spying on us!" she cried and backed still further against



the wall so that her shawl slipped from about her arms to the floor.

"It was Mei-hua, my sewing-maid;" Chang Teh-sheng replied indifferently.

"Why didn't you send her away?"

"Because she didn't know that I knew she was there;" replied Chang Teh-sheng, and bent to pick up the shawl as she bent.

"By the Gods!" he whispered, the silk of the shawl in his hands, the satin of her skin against his cheek, and turned his face as she moved so that, from the movement and therefore without actual contact on his part, his lips brushed her shoulder where the strap should have been.

There was no sound.

He looked at her slowly, from head to foot. Strong and resistive when hurt through pride, she was otherwise docile, sweet and as unprovocative as a tame bird perching on the finger. "May I use the safety-pin brooch in the front of your frock to fasten your shoulder-strap if I promise not to pollute the whiteness of your skin with the touch of my yellow fingers!" he said, a laugh in his eyes, and when she did not answer, because she could not, took it for granted that he might. "Were you my wife!" he whispered, merely to watch the colour drain from her face. "Were you——" and unfastened the pin caught by its coil in the silk, wrenching it free so that it pulled her dress loosened by the broken shoulder-strap. "I did not know that lotus-flowers were human flowers;" he whispered, and when she put both beautiful hands with flashing nails and rosy finger-tips against her breast, added, shaking his head; "or that they should be protected from the heat by white satin pent-houses embroidered in roses and diamonds;" and fastened her shoulder-strap so deftly that he touched her not at all whilst she bent her head to hide the look in her eyes as well as to smooth the little rent he had made by wrenching the pin from her frock. And to this day she could not tell you if, as he wrapped her about in the shawl, the warm

touch on her hair where it ended in a peak was that of a kiss or the fret of the fringe of the shawl across the nape of her neck.

### THE POISONED CUP

He knew, but he would not have told you, and he raised his head to listen, not because he heard any sound but because he wanted the hour to remain on the wing and not to end by perching tamely upon the finger.

"Won't you sit down?" he said, pulled the secret door to and a stool a little forward. "Here comes my 'Amah' with the tea and although she will hardly lift her eyes in my honourable presence nothing will escape them."

Rosalie slid a glance at him, and looked back over her shoulder. "There is no secret door!" she said. "None! I think I must have been dreaming when I screamed because you know that under ordinary circumstances the European considers any exhibition of feeling the very height of bad form!"

Chang Teh-sheng laughed, his eyes on the beautiful Chinese girl who came towards them with tea on a red-lacquer tray. "That;" he argued; "is simply veneer, like the Ningpoo varnish we use to cover badly planed wood." He shook his handsome head. He hated saying it but the truth was that the West was still in its infancy, was still in the raw where such affections as self-denial, restraint, temperance and all that family's manifold kith and kin were concerned. "Now look at this uneducated sewing-maid. You wouldn't think by her face that she loves me so that she would die at any moment for me and that she hates you because she knows that I love you."

Disgust, contempt and all Love's bastard relatives showed for a moment in Rosalie's face. "Love!

A sewing-girl! *You*. But how does she know that you—you—”

“Love you from the crown of your lovely head to the sole of your slender foot?” laughed Chang Teh-sheng, watching the little ‘Amah.’ “By instinct, just as I know that she loves me and would die for me as Wan Yen, my man, would die for me.” He spoke to the girl. Rosalie studied her as she came so sweetly towards them, her eyes on the tray.

“It is Jasmin tea;” he said to Rosalie and offered her a wafer-thick jade cup. “The white-mice, sea-slugs, eggs and bacon and all that goes with the assorted dishes are in the Room-of-Precious-Stones waiting for us.” He took the other cup and, as the ‘Amah’ walked slowly to the door, held it out to Rosalie. “Quick, take mine!” he said and took hers from her. “She hates you so that I think it is quite likely that she has poisoned your tea. If she has I will teach her a lesson she won’t be likely to forget.” He smiled and Rosalie shivered at the cruel line about the mouth as he outlined the lesson he would teach the girl for her sin against the hospitality of her Master’s house. When she turned and bowed at the door he would call her back and order her to drink the tea in the cup which Rosalie held and which Mei-hua, unaware of the exchange, would believe poisoned.

“It’s brutal. It’s—it’s *devilish!*” Rosalie protested. “She may die of shock, of fear!”

“A Chinese die of shock!” Chang Teh-sheng laughed. “Not possible!” and held up his hand as Mei-hua turned and bowed. “You would have been dead by now. I expect she has bought some scentless, odourless, traceless poison in the Bazaar for ten cents either to kill a cat with or have in readiness against an enemy like you.” He beckoned the girl. She came towards him, her face as serene as a lotus-pond at dawn and stood quite still in front of him, slim hands up her sleeves, whilst he, to heighten her punishment, talked about her to the foreign woman. “She doesn’t know

that I know she loves me to the extent of being willing to become my hundredth Concubine, one hundred times removed from real love——”

“ You can't mean that—that she——” Rosalie clasped her hands, every convention and commandment outraged. “ A *sewing-maid*. It's unbelievable! ”

Chang Teh-sheng laughed at her, took Mei-hua by the hand and pulled her forward for all the world as though he showed the paces of some little mare. Did the white woman think that because the maid was yellow that she could not love her master more passionately than she, Rosalie, had ever loved the man she had married? Did she really see any harm in the child becoming a legitimate, secondary wife? as she could easily have become if he had followed the custom of his land and married a Chinese woman in his youth instead of going to England and falling in love with a white woman forbidden him? Was there a sign on the beautiful ‘ Amah's ’ face of her love for him, her hate for the white woman, her horror at the punishment which, being Oriental and therefore intuitive, she knew was coming to her? Would there be a sign when he told her to drink what she would believe to be the poisoned tea and so end her life?

“ Watch! ” he said as he took the cup from Rosalie and held it out to the girl. “ Drink! ” he said. “ You have outraged the laws of hospitality. Drink! ”

Mei-hua took the cup, no sign in her eyes nor on her face of her terror. No sign of any emotion until Rosalie crying: “ Stop her! ” sprang towards her. Then she drew her slender body up very straight indeed, her supercilious, arched eyebrows threatening to disappear in her hair. “ Grant me, Master; ” she said, totally ignoring her rival, and as though she asked the favour of a new ribbon; “ that I kneel at your feet to die! ” and when he nodded, laughing at her, knelt and lifted the cup with both hands to him.

“ 'Tis poisoned, child! ” he said simply.

"If I have angered my Master I deserve to die!" she said, and bowed, and lifting the cup drained it, and sat back on her heels waiting for death with folded hands, then, as the moments passed, guessing the trick played upon her, rose and bowed. "If I have angered my Master it is well that he should humble his servant to the dust and make her lose much 'face' before the Foreign Devil!" she said, and craved permission to retire, and, the permission given, turned away, the cup of poisoned tea upon the tray.

"Mei-hua!"

"Master!"

"Bring me the cup!"

Rosalie saw disappointment flash across the girl's face. "What are you saying to her? Why are you hurting her?" she asked.

"I am stopping her from committing suicide. She means to drink the poison because I made her lose 'face' to such an extent before you;" said Chang Teh-sheng evenly, and when the girl brought the cup looked at her with a face of wrath which his laughing eyes belied. "You must live, Little-Rose!" he said.

"For you, Master?"

"Not if you try to poison my guests."

"I would die for you, Master!" whispered the girl, greatly daring, and when bidden to live for him instead, put the tray on the ground and bowed her head beside it, overwhelmed with gratitude and love.

Chang Teh-sheng called to her when she got to the door, gave her orders to send Wan Yen to him at once on his return, then turned to Rosalie. "He can't be very much longer, now, though I think we must look upon the length of time he has been away as a bad sign. He is evidently trying to buy one of Wang's men, not Li because he is as faithful to the House-of-Wang as Wan Yen to my House." He looked round the room. "I think I have shown you all there is to see. Of course we don't try to poison our guests every

day, that was just a side-show for your special benefit, and the hidden door has most certainly never been seen by anyone except myself. The bacon and eggs must be congealed, the mice like leather. You won't smoke. You know all the photographs I have of Oxford by heart. I should be brutal if we discussed the Professor. Oh, no, we haven't come quite to the end of all things. Look!" He drew his stool nearer her, so near that the faint perfume of her hair went to his mind like a very subtle wine as he stretched out his hand. "Don't be afraid;" he laughed; "I'm not going to touch you. There is no joy in jumping to try and touch a peach growing out of reach on the wall. I want you, as we are having a really poisonous night, to look at that little black speck under my nail where one would say I hadn't been properly manicured. It is the simplest, most deadly, poison in all Asia."

#### A SPECK-OF-DEATH

"I knew it!" cried Rosalie triumphantly. "I didn't believe you when you said the Chinese were never afraid of death. You see you are or you wouldn't carry that about with you always and wherever you go."

Chang Teh-sheng corrected her. He was not the slightest bit afraid of death but abnormally so of losing 'face.'

"Oh, that 'face!'" said Rosalie impatiently and asked him to explain China's national idiosyncrasy of 'Saving-the-Face' at all costs, at any time, a pernicious habit which was bringing the country to moral as well as financial bankruptcy.

Chang Teh-sheng tried. "The nearest I can get;" he said; "is that 'face' is an extraordinary flower of sensitiveness grafted through the centuries onto China's very hefty trunk of pride;" and seeing the look of total incomprehension in her eyes, tried again.

"Supposing I lost something I cared for very much;" he laughed. "Supposing you, whom I love more than anything in the world, more than life itself, fell into old Wang's hands and that I rescued you and hid you and that Wang, knowing I knew your whereabouts, got hold of me and tried to make me say where you were through torture——"

Rosalie laughed. "Absurd! such a thing could never, never happen, even in China;" she said.

"No, I know, but just supposing it did. Well, if he tortured me and I confessed I should lose 'face' for ever and ever and ever, and my House with me. I should even lose it if, being of highest caste, I screamed under the torture——"

Rosalie covered her ears. "But they don't torture, not in these days, not now that we, the British, are here;" she protested, and shook her head and refused to believe when told that the white people had barely scratched the surface of the great, terrible, inscrutable country.

"The West knows nothing of what happens just a little way in the Interior;" continued Chang Teh-sheng, despite her protestations. "Only the other day the Missionaries up the Yangtze were breaking their hearts because a pawnbroker, who refused to give the big ransom asked him by the bandits for the release of his son, was put to about one of the worst tortures known in China. The worst, I think, after the Slow Death, which is being cut into small pieces as the old Empress's favourite Eunuch was put to death because he grew too ambitious." Obsessed by a desire to hurt her; to jolt her out of her insular security; the good order of her life; to make her realize in some little way what lay outside the narrow circle in which she went round and round like a squirrel in a cage, he pulled her hands down and told her of the methods employed by the bandits to wring the ransom out of the pawnbroker, watching the sickening of her eyes. Not that the tale was anything out of the ordinary in a land where baby girls were still discarded at birth to the dust-

heap,<sup>1</sup> and, just recently, a certain city wall, as a warning, decorated with the heads of three hundred and more young soldiers executed for looting.<sup>1</sup>

"I don't know why I've always had such a horror of this special torture, perhaps because I am so fond of riding, which you couldn't really enjoy if you had no feet for the stirrups." He held her hands, looking up wistfully into the pretty face as he laid bare a little of what China hides. "They put a pile of bricks, so many bricks for the amount of days they thought it would take to break the pawnbroker's endurance, into a tub and then put quicklime into the tub as far as the top of the first brick, the one on the bottom of the tub. Then they tied him loosely to a stake and stood him on the top brick and each day took a brick away, so that each day he dropped nearer the lime." He let go her hand and looked at the Speck-of-Death. "It's recorded that only one refused to confess and that that was the first man or woman to be tortured, and when he or she did, it was too late. The feet had burned off when the prisoner dropped into the quicklime."

Rosalie, white to the lips, tried to make him stop.

"So you see;" he said; "that *that* is why I carry this. I should swallow it and go out, puff, like a blown-out candle. There would be no loss of 'face' in committing suicide, but if I confessed, or screamed under the torture, I should never be able to look my coolies in the face again," He smiled at her. "I don't know what pain is. Physically I'm as hard as nails and the East's denture is perfect!" He laughed like a boy then looked over his shoulder as Rosalie jumped to her feet.

Wan Yen stood in the doorway, bowing.

"Yes?" said Chang Teh-sheng. "Speak in Chinese, I will translate."

And as he did so Rosalie's cup of horror truly filled to the brim and ran over.

The marks of the rickshaw stopped at the House-

<sup>1</sup> Both seen by the writer.



of-Wang. There was also the mark of mens' feet going into the house and as though they carried a heavy burden.

"The white man lies bound and gagged in the room of The-Court-of-the-Laughing-Buddha, Master."

"How do you know?"

Wan Yen had extricated the information from a new coolie by means of an enormous 'kumshaw.'

"How much?"

The munificent tip or bribe had amounted to forty cents, big money.

"Twenty cents too much!" said Chang Teh-sheng, who could have bought out Rockefeller and still been the richest man in vastly wealthy China. "And what does my honourable neighbour do?"

Wang Pu-hao, disconsolate at passing an entire evening without gambling, sat in The-Court-of-the-Laughing-Buddha gazing alternately at a bowl of rose-eyed goldfish and his bound enemy.

Chang Teh-sheng beckoned his servant to a farther corner where they whispered together, then Wan Yen laughed suddenly and bowed in admiration of his Master's plan. "Twill be a good game, Master, but of a great risk!" he said and asked for ten minutes in which to get all ready for the battle of wits.

Rosalie ran to Chang Teh-sheng as the servant disappeared. "What are you going to do? What plans have you made?" she cried.

"I am going first to ask you to wait here;" said Chang Teh-sheng as he offered her a cigarette.

Rosalie threw the cigarette on the ground. She would not stay behind. Her place was by her husband's side when he was in danger.

Chang Teh-sheng sighed. If she really wanted to rouse old Wang's suspicions straight away and ruin everything, she was perfectly at liberty to do so, the Professor being her own particular property.

Reluctantly, rebelliously, Rosalie listened to reason. She would wait. "I must I suppose. But how are you, how *can* you get him back, in

this awful country?" she asked as she looked back at the wall of the hidden door.

"I am going to gamble for him;" said Chang Teh-sheng evenly.

"Gamble! *Gamble!* But that's a hundred to one chance against him!"

"Oh, no, evens!" corrected the Chinese; "the dollar must fall for or against."

"Dollar!"

"I am going to try and make old man Wang toss for you—for the Professor;" said Chang Teh-sheng. "And to while away the time whilst I'm doing it, I will send you papers and unpoisoned tea and cakes;" he said gently, then, at the door, pointed to the cigarette. "You will remember I said it was only *vencer!*" he laughed and walked away into the shadowed court.

## CHAPTER III

### THE-COURT-OF-THE-LAUGHING-BUDDHA

THERE was a fly in the ointment of Wang Pu-hao's content. The one thing necessary to round off the red-letter day, to celebrate the near recovery of the 'face' of his Ancestors, was a game of chance, of any kind, complicated or simple, with stakes unlimited.

He sat under the 'p'ong,' the reed roof built across the court in preparation for the approaching great heat. What little breeze there was came in at the rolled-up sides. The stars were hidden. He fanned himself in a great disgruntlement beneath the locust-tree from which a hanging lantern threw its light down upon the low table where, most nights, he gambled with his wealthy young Neighbour who had so miraculously delivered the enemy into his small, old, slender, ivory-tinted hands.

He looked up at the 'p'ong' and sighed for the stars, loving them after the manner of his people, and looked over his shoulder at the house behind him in which Hatchway lay bound. A one-storied building badly in need of a coat of paint, and fresh paper to the windows and upper half of the door through which a faint light shone. Lilies decorated the lower half with white bells and looked in through the arches leading to the one other court and the front gate at which had been posted a spy in the humble guise of a Bean-curd vendor. The gold-fish swam round and round in a glass bowl, the old man's thoughts beat this way and that and just because the only thing needed to steady them was the simple, almost daily or nightly game of chance. His plans for revenge were ready, had been for the last thirty years and more. Money, to compensate for the loss of the family fortune through the imposing of

the heavy indemnity in the last century, he could not extract from the House-of-Hatchway without bringing disaster upon his own shaven crown in the shape of the white people's mighty law. Besides, the House-of-Wang had not done too badly in the passing of the years. Sons and grandsons abounding had brought peace to the old heart and plenty to the family coffers. But to the last 'cash' he would pay back the sorrow, heartbreak, terror and death his Ancestors, his father and mother and their forbears, had endured. That very night. In the room behind him he would offer the white man the choice of the three deaths by which his own people had committed suicide. Hanging by the rope which dangled from a beam over Hatchway's head, an overdose of opium with all its attendant agony or a taste of gold-leaf to choke him with the same painful symptoms. After which the body would be taken outside the Ch'ien Men and casually dumped as near some Sing-Song house as possible, leaving the white man's Minister to solve the mystery if he could. There had been one moment of suspense, The white woman's rickshaw had been drawn by Hoo, the son of Li his most faithful servant and whose ancestors, as servants to it, had suffered complete loss of 'face' with the House-of-Wang, in 1860. Hoo had reported the terror of the white man's wife, her frenzied attack upon the gate of Chang Teh-sheng, her cries for help. But the suspense had passed when Wan Yen had sauntered into the Servants' Quarters with a witty imitation of the foreign woman's frenzy, and a request for the loan of an opium pipe with which to while away the time, his master being gone with the foreign woman to the Peking Hôtel where, so she had been assured, her husband would be found.

The old man put down his long pipe and taking up three jade balls, the size of big marbles, twisted them round and round in slender, supple, ivory-tinted fingers. "'Patience is the knot which secures the seam of victory,' as the wise Confucius says;" he remarked and clapped his hands.

"Tea!" he said briefly when Li, of fox eyes and brain and splendid devotion to his Master's House, slid in through the arch in response. "My bones wax brittle and my muscles soft, but my heart is young this day when the Gods have delivered the enemy into my hands!" said Wang when Li returned with the tea, then put up a bent old finger at the sound of voices through the arch leading to the front door. "Did the Door-keeper understand that those who deign to honour my unworthy threshold this night, must condescend to allow their illustrious bodies to embellish my poor waiting-room for a space?" he asked sibilantly whilst supping the tea.

Crafty servant nodded to crafty master. "Yes, Master!" Li said as softly as milk pours from jug.

"What miserable chamber do they turn into a palace of light through their glorious presence?"

"The-Room-of-the-Three-Dice, Master!"

The old man found it a most unpropitious choice of room this night when his Neighbour had evidently preferred his couch to a game of chance. "Who has condescended to visit my dwelling?" he asked, waved his fan when the servant replied that he did not know, having been busy about the task of making tea, ordered him to go and find out, and, when Li advised removing the Foreign Devil, looked indifferently over at the house. "There is no time;" he said serenely; "besides will not the risk of the open door add a zest to this night as dull as is Peking when shrouded in dust from the Gobi Desert." He looked up at the servant with affection in his shrewd old eyes. "You fear for me? Behold is fidelity a rare flower and you are as faithful to the House-of-Wang as my honourable Neighbour's servant, Wan Yen, to the House-of-Chang." He nodded his crafty old head. "You would die for me. Aye, I know it, but first help me to recover the 'face' of my House in the dispatch of my enemy."

Li bowed, fox eyes on the open door, face dark with hate. "Aye, Master, and the 'face' of your servant with it."

The old man was of the opinion that a Chinese

waited without. Had it been otherwise there would have been the sound of voices upraised in urgent questioning and other signs of want of self-control. "Police?" he chuckled at his servant's whisper. "The police are as far from my dwelling as peace from China. Besides;" he chuckled again and rubbed thumb and forefinger together; "will not a note of good currency serve to obliterate the footsteps of the law whilst acting as a sponge to its memory?" He watched his servant melt into the shadows through the arch. "Is this *not* China?" he said as the marbles and the gold-fish went round and round and his thoughts this way and that until he got up and crossed to The-Laughing-Buddha before whom countless joss-sticks of great pungency burned. He bent his old head and bent his old knees and swung his hands high up and down. "May the laugh be on my side!" he said and having made joss crossed to the house where Hatchway lay, licked his finger, applied the wet tip to the paper window, pulled it away, a speck of paper adhering, and peered like a mischievous old monkey looking for nuts through the infinitesimal peephole. "There is a scowl upon my enemy's bedimmed, sleeping face and doubtless, could they be heard, words of wrath upon his gagged lips!" he said, opened the door wide without looking into the room and returned to his stool and the soothing task of twisting the marbles round and round, which habit, to preserve the suppleness of his little old hands, he shared with the inmates of Sing-Song Street.

"Revenge that has matured for well-nigh upon seventy years is a heady but surpassing sweet vintage;" he said comfortably. "Aye, surpassing sweet 'i the palate;" and fanned himself whilst Hatchway, coming round from the drug with which Li had over-soused the cloth, idly wondered what the rope with a noose at the end of it meant by hanging just over his head, then hazily looked about. "Must be in a Chinese hotel;" he thought; lay quite still, feeling very much surprised when, with

the intent of calling "Boy," he found he could neither open his mouth nor move his hands over any part of his body; listened lazily to the sound of Li's voice; then closed his eyes and went hazily asleep.

"The Master's honourable Neighbour approaches, even now!" whispered Li from the arch, anxious eyes on the open door, finger to lips.

"Suspects he, think you? He has the eyes of a mountain-wolf and the brain of a successful statesman;" placidly remarked the old man without a flicker of eyelid or hastening of heart-beat.

Li shook his head. "The honourable Neighbour comes as he comes every night when desirous of a game of chance, Master, with his servant and his bird." He looked over his shoulder then stepped to one side, face as blank as a plum or his master's benign countenance, to allow Chang Teh-sheng, bird-cage in hand and followed by Wan Yen, to pass.

Wang Pu-hao rose and bowed. "My pathway is embellished as with flowers by the mark upon it of your honourable feet!" he said and bowed again.

Chang Teh-sheng gave the bird-cage to his servant, swung his clasped hands up and bowed. "I crave forgiveness for throwing the shadow of my unworthy self across your luminous threshold!" he said and bowed again.

The old man begged him to honour a stool by placing his august person upon the inferior wood.

Chang Teh-sheng, vowing the honour was all his, did as requested, sat on a stool near a low table and broke into a short litany of excuses for the late hour of his visit. His servant had doubtlessly acquainted the honourable House-of-Wang of the white lady's perturbation upon her husband failing to follow down the 'hutung.' A fellow he had met in England. A gad-about and of little principle. "Doubtlessly he passes the night in Sing-Song Street though I assured his woman that she would find him at the hotel to which, she being a guest of our Lord and an acquaintance of mine, I was perforce obliged to accompany her, thereby imperilling our friendly

game." Taking the tea offered him by Wan Yen who had taken the tray from Li, he sniffed the concoction after the custom of his land. With audible indrawings of breath through nostril so as to more openly express his appreciation of his neighbour's hospitality whilst the little, old, deluded man, just because the face of his visitor and his servant were as enlightening as bits of wood, believed every word uttered.

He raised his tea-cup to his visitor. "To the winning. The losing. The risk." He chuckled so pleased was he, and when the bird which Chang Teh-sheng, after the custom of the northern Chinese, had brought with him for an airing, burst into song, leaned over the table.

"Will stake the songster?" he said, falling headlong into the trap.

Chang Teh-sheng was perfectly willing if the heat allowed of such great physical exertion. He looked at the 'p'ong,' took his fan from Wan Yen who stood close behind him and commenced to fan himself. "The water would have to be brought!" he said languidly when the old man suggested they should race two drops of water down the table. "The flower would have to be plucked!" he murmured at the further suggestion of stripping a flower of its petals but thought himself capable of spinning a coin when Wang, fearing his Neighbour's laziness might imperil the game, offered the rotation of a dollar as a last resource.

"But I have no coin upon me;" said Chang Teh-sheng.

Nor had Wan Yen when asked.

Li took a thin purse from the front of his white-cotton gown. "A dollar, Master, and good!" and lifting the bit of rare embroidery on the table rang the coin.

"A comfortable piece;" remarked Wang, "though much given to the process of evaporation;" when asked to make his choice between the head or the crown of leaves upon the silver disc politely left the choice to his visitor.



## FATE TAKES A HAND

Chang Teh-sheng picked up the dollar. "I will take whatever falls uppermost;" he said, and spun the coin without the hastening of a single heart-beat. He knew Hatchway lay in the house behind, knew that if he should fail to get him back that he could, in all honour, consider himself through with his promise to the Doctor. He would have tried and failed and, having done his best, it would not be possible to quote failure discreditably against him. Should he fail, he thought, as he spun the dollar, there might be a slender chance with Rosalie. He was not sure, but he had caught a look of interest in her eyes, a thrill in her voice, a slight, ever so slight sympathy in her touch when he had spoken of his horror of torture. Not that he was sure, either, of what he would do should Hatchway die. He had not allowed himself to think the problem out. He only knew that in all honour he was bound to try and get the man back alive. He had given his word, and the whole world knew the word of an uncontaminated Chinese to be more binding than any Western contract.

He looked through the arch to where the stars shone and the lilies gleamed. Were lilies to be the symbol of love to him? They had looked in at the window when he had asked for the hand of Rosalie in marriage; they looked at him now whilst he made ready to keep his promise; would love perhaps be waiting for him should he be able to keep his Appointment-of-the-Full-Moon with Rosalie at the Temple on the Hills?

"Love!" he whispered as the dollar spun itself out and Fate sat down at the table to take a hand. "The head is mine!" he said.

Wang ordered tea, Chang Teh-sheng handed his fan to his servant standing close behind him. For an instant the eyes of the two men met in a swift look of understanding, then Wan Yen bowed and

stepped back as his Master offered the dollar to the old man.

"The bird as stake!" cried Wang and, little eyes sparkling, little hands grasping, bowed and spun the dollar. "The crown!" he cried in great jubilation and chuckled. "I win!"

"Good-bye, Beauty!" said Chang Teh-sheng, ordered his servant to put the cage beside his host and offered his cigarette-case. "Honour me!" he said.

"My opium pipe of rare wood set with silver and enamel against your cigarette-holder of amber set with diamonds;" whispered Wang, ignoring the offer of the cigarette, and spun the dollar when the other nodded, laughing. "The crown. I win." He bowed. "Honour me by accepting the small and unworthy gift of an amber holder set with jewels;" he added and passed the holder back again, upon both hands, to his guest, then, under the spell, oblivious of all things else, staked his rare Ming vase against his guest's as rare first edition of Li Po's verse.

"Content!" said Chang Teh-sheng and laughed when he lost his rare edition too. "Behold has my luck the weakest backbone;" he said, and sat back when Wang, tilting his skull-cap back and forward, cried: "Towels! towels!" and clapped his hands.

Chang Teh-sheng held out his holder, conversing whilst Wan Yen searched for the case in the front of his Master's gown and finding it, fitted a cigarette. "They say, in England, that if you are unlucky at games of chance you are lucky in love, and the other way about;" continued Chang Teh-sheng and lit his cigarette as Li came through the arch with two small bath-towels steaming in a small porcelain bowl. Wang waved the bowl towards Chang Teh-sheng who took a towel, wiped his delicate hands upon it and handed it to his servant who folded it over his arm, whilst Wang washed as much of his face, neck and forearms as he could conveniently reach whilst voicing his opinion indistinctly through the smother of the steaming towel, that the love of the West

was a poor and chancey thing and that a garment worn night and day, in and out of season, and all life long, must end by bagging at the knee and sagging at the hem. "Teal!" he barked and threw the towel at the retreating Li who most deftly caught it.

"Yes;" said Chang Teh-sheng, smoking as placidly as though life and death, failure, success and love were things unknown to him. "At the end the love of the West does seem rather like a comfortable old dressing-gown."

"With their philosophy all down at heel to match the old gown!" snapped back Wang. "There is nothing chancey in the world. It is *all* ordained, *all, everything.*"

Chang Teh-sheng blew a ring which floated away on the still night. "Then;" he said lazily; "you believe that what I win and you win, that what I lose and you lose in to-night's game has been ordained by Fate?"

"Of course;" said Wang, impatient at the interruption. "Is not fatalism the bed-rock of the Chinese character, the mother of our content, the cause of our indifference to joy and pain?" He leaned across the table. "My gold-fish with rosette-eyes and bowl against your champion wolf-dog of foreign breed with collar set with spikes!" and spun the dollar and laughed when it fell the wrong way up for him, losing him both fish and bowl.

Against his robe Chang Teh-sheng made a little surreptitious gesture as he picked the dollar up. Wan Yen made a step nearer. The old man laughed.

"My jade and ivory Mah-jong set against this tea-cup;" said Chang Teh-sheng, speaking quickly, quietly, to spur the other on.

"All China knows of Chang Teh-sheng's high bidding!" cried Wang delightedly.

"It but adds a plum of zest to the dull loaf of life;" replied Chang Teh-sheng indifferently as the dollar gyrated in the pool of light until it died. "I am the richer by one whole tea-cup!" he said and picked the coin up and spun it. "My newest car

with silver fittings against your pair of speckled Mongolian ponies without the glass coach. Yes?"

Wang, adding a chauffeur against a coachman and a year's hay against a year's petrol, watched with eager eye, a car being the summit of his wildest dreams. "Ha-ha!" he cried, tilting his skull-cap back, "I win. 'Tis good. The price of hay has gone up one hundred coppers in to-day's market." He took the dollar, rose and bowed. "My bidding must be on the same high plane as that of my honourable guest!" he said with exultation. "I stake my servant, Li, against your servant, Wan Yen, yes-no-yes?"

The servants stood as still as graven images. Chang Teh-sheng made no sign. The little old eyes flashed from the one to the other.

"Content;" said Chang Teh-sheng indifferently, then added, as he looked at his servant without a sign of his cracking anxiety lest he should lose him, that he thought, with his host's honourable permission, it would be more seemly if the men themselves played each other for the new situation.

Wang laughed. The servants advanced to the table.

"With my Master's honourable permission I will borrow the head from him for this turn of the dollar;" said Wan Yen, and bowed all round.

"If my honourable Master is content then am I likewise with the crown!" replied Li and bowed to each in turn.

To decide which of the men should spin, Wang pushed the coin towards his guest who, bowing, pushed it back to his host who spun it in eager fingers.

"The crown!" he chuckled and beckoned Li nearer. "'Tis you to play. 'Twould be grievous to lose so much fidelity;" he said, "but what I lose and what I win this night has been arranged by Fate;" and laughed and bowed when the dollar, falling against him, lost him his servant to Chang Teh-sheng. He bowed again and asked his honourable guest's permission to make an entry of the loss

lest he should pay the stake too much in wages when he entered upon his new situation. And also craved permission for his guest's new servant, of the name of Li, to be allowed to make joss to The-Laughing-Buddha so that the luck of his one-time master, called Wang, should not remain set at disaster.

Chang Teh-sheng, consenting, put up his hand for his fan as Li, without a sign of his sorrow at what had befallen him, crossed to The-Laughing-Buddha. Wan Yen glanced at his Master, and if his eyebrows were just the slightest bit raised in questioning and if Chang Teh-sheng's head gave the faintest shade of a nod, both signs of understanding were too slight to have been noticed even had Wang and Li not been occupied.

"The heat is unusual for the time of the year;" remarked Chang Teh-sheng as he took his fan and opened it.

"Plus one car, minus one servant!" murmured Wang then looked up. "The miserable 'p'ong' hides the stars from your lustrous eyes," he said politely; "—deduct wages—and the breeze from your lamentably warm but benign countenance—I am overcome with shame—one year's hay—" He mumbled for a time then pushed the notebook away. "I find I gain upon the transaction though I grieve at the loss the dollar causes me in fidelity." He clapped his hands then excused himself. "Permit that your servant or one of your two servants goes for fresh tea."

They sat and fanned themselves in silence whilst Li slipped away through the arch, and Hatchway, waking from a doze to full consciousness, struggled with the thongs which bound him, and none too kindly, to the plank-bed. "Rosalie!" he shouted against the gag, though not a sound passed the leather ball pushed into his mouth where it had swelled until his eyes protruded in semi-suffocation and his head throbbed as though someone beat upon it with a hammer. Remembering every detail of the evening, he thought mere robbery the motive behind the outrage and, knowing China, shivered

uncontrollably at the sight of the noose above his head, then strained his ears at the sound of voices quite near to him on the other side of the wall. He caught the slither of soft shoes upon stone flags, a murmur of conversation as the two men raised their cups, and wondered who gambled so near to him, when Wang, impatient at the interruption to the game, reminded his guest that it was his turn to manipulate the unworthy dross.

And then he knew.

"The honourable Chang Teh-sheng's turn to spin the dollar!" Wang said.

#### A GAME OF CHANCE!

Chang Teh-sheng, lost for a moment in dreams of Rosalie, picked up the dollar and laid it down again. That being the extent of the emotion he showed. "The head;" he said without the slightest change of voice; "and I take the Englishman back with me. The crown and he remains with you;" and bowed.

There was an instant's complete silence in which the two men fanned themselves and Hatchway lived an eternity of suspense. Wang, without movement of any kind, or expression upon his face, looked at Chang Teh-sheng who looked at him in most friendly manner, the servants stood like graven images behind their respective Masters.

Then the little old man, who had given no slightest sign of the grievous jolt dealt him, slipped his hands up his sleeves. "Fate will play this hand!" he said serenely. "Not you! Not I!" and bowing, pushed the dollar back across the table when Chang Teh-sheng, the stakes being so high, offered him the spin.

The dollar spun like a silver ball, slowed down, little by little, slower still, lay flat.

In the silence that followed Hatchway strained his

ears. Which way had it fallen? Would no one ever speak? Were the two men struck dumb? Ah, he guessed. The Chinese were acting, as all Chinese act if they get the chance, were pretending a superb indifference.

He tried to visualize the scene on the other side of the wall.

The two gamblers leaned back in their chairs. The dollar, the fate of a man depending upon it, in the middle of the table. Li offered Wan Yen tea to offer his Master, then carried the tray to his own Master. The tea drunk, Wang waved his fan. "Permit that the servants learn which side of the worn bit of metal looks up towards my miserable roof."

Chang Teh-sheng bowed and motioned Wan Yen towards the north side of the table. Li took a step nearer the south side.

"Read!" said Wang and bowed when the two men, having read, turned and bowed to Chang Teh-sheng.

Chang Teh-sheng had fulfilled his promise. The head had fallen upwards. Hatchway was safe.

"My gain is rendered sterile through your lamentable loss:" Chang Teh-sheng said and bowed to the old man who asked him to permit the servants to release the Foreign Devil from his couch, leaving the gag upon his mouth and the thongs about his arms as, being of the West and therefore somewhat deficient in self-control, he might feel an urge to run 'amok.'

Chang Teh-sheng ordered Wan Yen to remove the illustrious foreigner to his house, offering him, once there, the use of the fifth Bathroom-of-the-Silver-Taps and whatever sustenance for which he might feel a craving. "Entreat her Excellency to have speech with him, explaining the reason for this little disturbance of her peace of mind and beg their Excellencies to remain as my thrice noble guests under my unspeakable roof until I come to prostrate myself in the dust at their honourable feet;" he said.

Neither man took notice of the sounds of battle

which issued from the house when, released, Hatchway flung himself, as best he could for the thongs about his arms, upon Wan Yen. Neither servant looked at him as they gently led him, fighting, out of the room and across the court whilst their Masters sat serenely smoking.

"The car does not consume overmuch petrol!" remarked Chang Teh-sheng placidly and then, anxious to get possession of the dollar, stretched for it just as Wang picked it up.

"To round off a most agreeable evening, to leave no uncomfortable angle of thought or snag of desire, let us play one hand of 'Sticks' for the dollar before it returns to replenish your new servant's purse;" he said.

"I add my cheque for five thousand dollars to the stake;" said Chang Teh-sheng, smiling, and watched, with no sign at all of his inner perturbation, whilst his old host took three matches, laid them along his three middle fingers and placed the dollar in his palm. "I rotate the coin until the nose of his Excellency represented upon it points at one certain match, then covering the dollar with my other hand will beg you to honourably withdraw a match by the end protruding." He laughed like a gleeful old mamose. "Should you choose the match to which the pointed member points, you win;" and having arranged the coin to his liking held out his covered hand and laughed again when Chang Teh-sheng, choosing the wrong match, lost the dollar plus five thousand to him.

"A right doughty adversary!" chuckled the old fellow.

"I think my luck has curvature of the spine;" laughed Chang Teh-sheng as he rose, craving forgiveness for tearing himself away from the court and the hour suffused by the light of his honourable host's countenance. "—but I would give orders for the transfer to your peerless roof of my unworthy car, my chauffeur of little repute, petrol of foulest odour and a miserable bit of paper rendered unspeakable by my undignified effort to



inscribe upon it strokes of the pen representing five thousand dollars."

Wang Pu-hao bowed. He would offer his guest Wine-of-Roses and cakes of divers flavour only that his servant had left him during the evening for a new situation. Upon which statement, Chang Teh-sheng, playing the game as prescribed between friends, begged the old man to allow a new servant called Li, whom he had, himself, acquired that night and who would as uncomfortably clutter the Servants' Quarters as the extra chick overcrowded the nest, to remain to make tea under his old friend's spreading roof until such time that space could be found for him in his new home.

Wang protested that the honour of granting his friend's request was as heartening as the mastication of a sea-slug fresh from its native brine. He bowed. Chang Teh-sheng bowed, turned in the middle of the court and bowed again just as Li slid in through the arch and stood to one side. "May your honourable sleep be sown with poppy-dreams of sweetest perfume!" said Chang Teh-sheng at the arch.

Wang bowed. "Condescend to explain your honourable interest in the Foreign Devil!" he said and as indifferently as though he spoke of the fan in his hand.

"For a favour once done me by one who knew him;" said Chang Teh-sheng as indifferently; "I promised to be of assistance to the Foreign Devil should he ever stand in need of aid." He spread his hand in a little deprecating gesture. "I thought with death so near that he did, in some small measure, stand in need of that aid."

Wang bowed, remarked that his honourable Neighbour's heart was as full of beneficence as the persimmon of juice in the juicy season and bowed again when Chang Teh-sheng, followed by Li, melted into the shadows on the farther side of the court.

For a little while the old man stood looking after his guest, then crossed to the table where he stood, lost in thought, twisting the dollar round and round.

He shook his perplexed old head, pulled at his beard, whilst suspicion, without any foundation whatsoever, whispered somewhere at the back of his cute old brain. It had all been amazing. His Neighbour had lied from the start. Not that that mattered. It was a part of the game and the better the lie the greater the admiration of the one lied to. But how had his Neighbour found out about the foreigner, even to the room in which he had lain hidden?

### THE REASON

" 'Twas of a surpassing luck for my honourable, unscrupulous and crafty Neighbour that the dollar fell the right way up! " he said to Li who slid in through the arch just as his Master, looking towards him, twisted the dollar so that it fell off the table.

Wang looked down at the dollar stroking his beard. Li looking down at the dollar, nodded his shaven crown, then picked up the coin which had rung false on the stones.

Their heads touched as they examined the silver under the light of the lantern.

" A substitute! " said Wang.

" Aye, Master, weighted! " said Li, and rang the dollar on the table.

" Tea! " said Wang.

And when Li returned with it he saw the tricked old man, a crafty smile on his face, sitting placidly on a stool nodding his wise old head.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE WET BLANKET

MEI-HUA looked fearfully about then tapped upon the south wall.

She was not sure.

Riven with jealousy, she had crept back to spy upon Rosalie and her own Master. He had humbled her, his servant, his little sewing 'Amah,' to the dust. Had made a mock of her, then, when she had longed to die, had ordered her to live, to fling away the poison. And all with a face of wrath and a laugh in the depths of his eyes.

She did not understand. She had heard the foreigner's voice raised in anger, and, running, had reached the door just as the woman had screamed and backed from the south wall in the centre of which a big, black square had shown.

But had there been an opening in the wall? Or had it been an illusion caused by the jealousy which filled her own eyes and heart to the brim with thoughts of revenge?

There was no slightest sign of a crack anywhere. The wall sounded solid when she hit it with her fist. "I like it not!" she whispered, her lovely head against the secret door. "It bodes no good when East meets West. 'Twere better the Master married the she-devil, Light-of-Dawn, whom he could divorce when tired of her tantrums, than catch himself in a foreign net from which there would be no escape for him." Once more she searched the square about which she was not sure, turned her head to listen, and, at the sound of approaching voices, was gone like a shadow.

Dishevelled, incoherent with rage, Hatchway stormed into the room. His eyes blazed. He held

a handkerchief to his bruised mouth and through it demanded that her Excellency, his wife, should be called at once.

Rosalie came running and when she saw him stopped and stared, so white and angry he looked, then ran to him and stopped again when he backed away from her.

"Don't come near me, my dear!" he said, patting his mouth. "I am one big ache and bruise from head to foot."

"Oh, my poor, poor darling;" she cried and turned on Wan Yen who stood at the door, face like a mask, hands up sleeves. "What is the meaning of this outrage?" she demanded and stamped her foot, so mad was she, when the man, lying serenely, denied all knowledge for the reason of the Master's sore ill-treatment.

"That is a lie! That——"

Through the handkerchief Hatchway implored her to be silent. "When the sea gives up its dead one truthful Chinese may be found, washed of his gift for distorting the truth;" he said, then asked for tea and curtly refused the offer of a bath in the fifth Bathroom-of-the-Silver-Taps. "I do not wish for silver taps!" he snapped. "A Turkish bath and Everyman's Valet would be of more service at this juncture!" and when the man had departed to get the tea, sat upon a stool. Incredulous, he listened to the tale, minus any mention of the love-theme, which Rosalie had to tell, then, the tale finished, supplemented it with his own whilst Rosalie sat with hands clasped, eyes shining, and her heart at rest because her man had been returned intact.

"What a nerve!" she said at last. "I never thought he meant it. Fancy walking in just like that and spinning a dollar for you!"

Hatchway, possessed of as much *joie de vivre* as a May oyster, declared that at last he was able to understand China's craze for 'Saving-the-Face.' In making one as a stake with a job lot of Mongolian ponies, canaries and gold-fish, he had completely lost

his. It would have been quite another thing had he been included in jade and precious stones.

But livestock!

And refused to be comforted when Rosalie reminded him that, if it had not been for Chang Teh-sheng, his life might have been included in his loss of 'face.'

As for the Oath-of-Revenge and the absurd tale of the secret door which Rosalie could not substantiate, it was all balderdash.

BALDERDASH!

There was no limit to Oriental imagination. None! Chang had hypnotized her. For reasons best known to himself. Doubtlessly to make himself out a bit of a hero. As for the old madman, Wang, he had been out for highway robbery with violence, which spasm he would regret exceedingly after Hatchway's visit to the Legation the next day, or he should say that very day as it was undoubtedly long after midnight. "The poisoned tea was simply eye-wash, my dear. Nothing else. You could have seen it at home any night, comfortably and artistically, for twelve and sixpence at any theatre. Simply eye-wash!" and to belie his statement, looked round at the walls.

A stubbornness born of resentment fell upon Rosalie. She had come through a stiff evening with flying colours and prepared to look upon it all as a great adventure, to forgive old man Wang who, all said and done, had simply been out for the honour of his House, and to go down on her knees in gratitude to Chang Teh-sheng.

And now this!

Wet Blankets instead of Fireworks! A Funeral March instead of Jazz!

Repression caused her heart or mind or whatever is the correct name for that which registers disappointment, to react towards Chang Teh-sheng. She hugged the memory of the love-scene, the laughter of the handsome face, the mockery in the quiet voice, the lust to see Hatchway dead so as to keep the forbidden woman with him. It all lay like

a balm on her wounded Spirit-of-Adventure, nor did she feel surprised, come to think of it, that women so often landed in the Divorce Court.

Indeed she did not.

Which undoubtedly showed that Peking had been meddling with the strings of her shingle-cap.

She got up. "I do wish you would go and get tidy, with or without taps, before Mr. Chang comes back, you look just anyhow!" she said and crossed to the south wall. "And I wish he'd hurry, it's awful waiting in a room with a sliding door in which you nearly got poisoned;" she added and tapped upon the wall.

"Your construction of phrase is deplorable, my dear;" said Hatchway, vanity, as stout as any man's, touched. "You could not possibly be poisoned in a secret door——"

"Perhaps not!" replied Rosalie, putting her foot down firmly as she walked about. "But quite possibly in China!" and slid onto a stool as Wan Yen crossed the court with tea. "Perhaps Mr. Wang has murdered Mr. Chang because Mr. Chang prevented Mr. Wang from murdering you, after outclassing Jacob by almost forty years in the Waiting Handicap."

Hatchway, surreptitiously smoothing his hair, ignored his wife's untimely effort at light-heartedness, pooh-poohed the idea of almost three score years of hatred as an impossible and, what would be, a lamentable example of lack of self-control in an Eastern, and smiled tolerantly when Rosalie told him of Chang Teh-sheng's opinion of the West in conjunction with such complex as self-control, psychology and the like.

"Raw! Too young!" he said as the servant came in with the tea. "He is not to know that the Hatchways figure largely and plainly in the Doomsday Book;" and when Rosalie pointed out that the Chinese had been talking in thousands not hundreds of years, declared that verbally, atmospherically and climatically the East was, had been and always would be flamboyant, then changed to another stool with

his cup as she got up and the servant left the room.

"All the same I wish I could open the door;" she said; "just to prove my words;" walked round the room, stamping heavily, and grimaced at the wall when Hatchway remarked that she must have been suffering from some form of Oriental miasma when she had seen it slide back.

"You're wrong;" she said; "and the way to open it is to put your feet down on different spots at different times;" and smiled, refusing to be any further damped, when Hatchway presumed that that was the correct procedure for perambulation all the world over.

"If your brow gets much higher, my dear;" she laughed cheerily; "you'll have really to think of a wig;" and stopped talking to listen. "It is! Yes, it is! Do tidy your hair, Cyril. You look anyhow and it's Mr. Chang."

"Then I trust we shall soon be able to walk out of the house by the front door like Christians;" said Hatchway as he rose.

Rosalie looked at him over her shoulder. "In China!" she said. "My dear, you must be suffering from some kind of optimistic miasma;" she mimicked, laughing, then ran to Chang Teh-sheng, hands outstretched.

#### A SIDELIGHT

Chang Teh-sheng, in robe of palest yellow brocade, bowed and took her hands and held them as he bowed to Hatchway, made excuses for his late arrival, and refused to listen to Hatchway's sincere thanks. "I am late because I simply had to change;" he said, and hoped that Hatchway had enjoyed his bath, regretting he had not been shown to the Bathroom-of-Good-Fishing. "It's a Roman bath;" he continued as they all sat down on little stools, and talked on to deliberately heighten the impatience he saw

smouldering in Hatchway's eyes. "You go down into it by steps and when you don't want to go straight away in you sit on the top step and fish for a trout in a tank of fresh water let in at the side, then whilst you sit in the bath and meditate upon your sins or whatever is your special brand of relaxing, watch your fish-course skip about like a rainbow against the light which comes up through the alabaster floor."

"Alive! You are cruel enough to watch a fish *dying* whilst you are having a bath!" said Rosalie, horrified at the side-light thrown upon the Oriental.

"Why not?" he laughed. "Your kitchens are filled with the screams of the lobsters you boil alive to eat;" and clapped his hands. "Although we have to get the Professor out of the house, Peking and China as soon as possible, there is still time for the inevitable tea;" he said. "Tea!" he said to Wan Yen; "and listen. First make sure that the coast is perfectly clear. Examine the beggars and street-sellers and stray passers-by for spies, then, if it's safe, bring the grey racer round to the west door and all ready to go down to Tientsin at once. Come and report." He turned to Rosalie as the servant bowed. "I have thirty courts, and the Gods alone know how many gates and little doors." He clapped his hands to bring the servant back. "If anyone calls, anyone, you understand, they are to be brought here at once, only, and don't make any mistake, have them conducted here through all the thirty courts whilst you come by the shortest way. Understand?" He watched the man leave the room, inquired how much Hatchway knew of the whole affair and on learning that he knew all about it, dismissed the matter, deliberately, to enrage the man who had won where he had so grievously lost in love. "Let's amuse ourselves to pass the time;" he said. "We'll all walk about the room trying to find the springs of the hidden door like a lot of ducks looking for tadpoles."

Rosalie laughed. "You see, Cyril, I *hadn't* been hypnotized or anything like that!" she cried.



## DUCKS AND TADPOLES

For a moment Chang Teh-sheng's eyes blazed then he laughed, shortly. "The only hypnotism in Peking is in the atmosphere;" he said, and led Rosalie to the middle of the room. "We Orientals *take* what we want when we *can* in honour!" and when Hatchway suggested discussing things, turned the coldest shoulder upon the suggestion. He saw no use in it, no need for it. He had helped the Professor to escape and was still helping him because of his promise to the Doctor, and when Rosalie inquired if he wouldn't have helped in any case, asked indifferently why he should. "A Chinese has every right to recover his House's lost 'face' by killing the descendant of the man who helped to bring disgrace upon his House, and if you put that foot down you'll be much warmer;" he said, and laughed when Rosalie overbalanced so that he had to catch her by the arm to steady her.

"But that would be simply murder!" said Hatchway standing aloof from the game of "Ducks and Tadpoles."

"I thought the Christian religion taught an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth!" said the Chinese indifferently.

"Oh, why bother about ethics, Cyril?" said Rosalie, standing on one foot like a hen in a puddle. "You haven't been murdered or tortured or anything—anything—"

"Perfectly beastly and heathen like that!" supplied the Chinese, and shook his handsome head when she urged him to show Hatchway the poison under his nail and asked her if she had told the Professor *everything*.

Rosalie, understanding, shook her head, and the Chinese hugged the secret of his own illicit love-making close, revelling in the theft, however slight, from the other man, spreading it all as a balm upon

his wound. "You're warmer!" he said. "Now put your foot down here, press hard——"

Rosalie pressed with all her weight, laughing, calling upon Hatchway to bear witness to the fascination of the East. "And the 'Amah' did try to poison me, didn't she?" she asked, a-thrill with adventure.

Chang Teh-sheng assured her that she had then, apologizing, walked over to Wan Yen who stood in the doorway, finger to lips.

"There is a spy at every gate, Master, except the little Gate-of-Farewell hidden under the creeper. Also at every street corner within a *li* of your honourable dwelling, Master, loiters a doubtful beggar."

The men looked at each other.

The servant knew nothing of the secret way and feared harm would befall his Master through the Foreign Devils. Chang Teh-sheng, in his innate love of acting, of drama, of life, was keen to play a lone hand. Spies meant that the old man was wise to the trick played upon him and that that being so there might be but the barest fraction of time in which to get Rosalie safely away. Hatchway he did not think about. He was an attachment. Like a button on a shoe. Where shoe went there went button unless the thread was broken or snipped. "My orders are that the servants remain indoors whilst her Excellency walks through the courts. You stand at the front gate as though waiting for someone to come out. Lock Mei-hua in the pantry if she is about. If she breaks one biscuit she leaves my service within the hour." He went back to the others, asked them to sit down whilst he explained what had happened and sat down beside Rosalie who looked at him with disappointment tinged with annoyance in her eyes.

"I thought we might have stayed a while and then walked a little on the City Wall;" she whispered.

"Better to have married me;" he whispered back, looking at her through half-closed eyes until

the blood dyed her face. "Lack of temperament is like cold dishes on a sideboard. Passion and love, life, romance and dreams are the little stolen meals, barely tasted, behind a screen, hidden in an orchard, on a roof beneath the stars, near palms under the Southern Cross;" and got up, satisfied, having seen in her eyes the look of a child who has walked through a gate into a new garden. He crossed to the table as though to get something, then, having touched the second hidden spring, came back as the secret door opened slowly behind them, sat down and explained that the posting of spies at his gates proved that the Professor was still in the greatest danger.

"I fail to understand;" said Hatchway. "The word of a Chinese is his bond and Wang lost me in fair play."

"Oh, no, he didn't;" replied Chang Teh-sheng tranquilly. "I substituted a weighted dollar."

"What!" said Rosalie, leaning forward to look at him, whilst Hatchway drew in his toes as though they touched the edge of a mud patch.

"When Wang was making entries about his servant Li and Li was making joss for Wang, Wan Yen slipped me a weighted dollar with my fan and took the other;" said Chang Teh-sheng and further explained, and as casually as though he talked about some perfectly legitimate business transaction, how, in allowing Wan Yen to take the true dollar, he had made the great mistake. He should have kept *that* dollar up his sleeve and changed it again, later. As it was Wan Yen had walked off with it when shepherding the Professor back to the fold. "I tried to get the weighted dollar back but lost it to the old fellow on a spin. I think he has found out the trick, let the dollar drop or bitten it or something like that, he has splendid teeth."

"But;" said Rosalie; "but are you *really* dishonourable?"

Chang Teh-sheng laughed joyfully. "Not a bit, only Chi-neese!" he said, and looked at her, a

world of memory in his eyes, until she blushed and blushed.

"Do you think Wang had his suspicions?" icily inquired Hatchway.

Chang Teh-sheng thought not though Chinese invariably suspected Chinese. "He wouldn't have let you or me get away if he had!" he said, and when Hatchway peskily inquired if Chinese servants made a habit of using weighted money froze him to a full stop with a look.

"If you knew anything about China outside porcelain and burning down buildings, Professor;" he said quietly; "you would know the wisdom of not questioning your servants on anything from dollars to doughnuts!"

"You simply shouted for that, Cyril!" cried exasperated Rosalie.

"And as you are so very—er—necessary to your wife, and *only* for that reason;" continued the Chinese; "because personally it doesn't matter to me if you continue to write treatises on porcelain or if someone writes your epitaph on a tombstone, I will ask you to walk down that passage behind you and to be quick about it!"

Rosalie jumped up and round with a little cry. The two men, loving the same woman, looked at each other, a world of enmity in their steady eyes, then:

"Please!" said Chang Teh-sheng and jerked his head towards the wall.

"What did I tell you, Cyril?" cried Rosalie, looking quickly from one man to the other. "Isn't China beyond words!"

"It is!" replied Hatchway. "I'm astounded!" and crossed to the wall. "Is it real? I mean does it really lead under the moat to The Forbidden City?"

"Oh, rather!" replied Chang Teh-sheng then, as Hatchway went patting down the walls, crossed to the opening, entered the passage and took a lantern from a hook in the wall. "Come inside!" he said to Rosalie; "and help me with the lanterns."

## FORBIDDEN LOVE'S DARK WAY

A novice in the art of handling cattle, situations and men, which amounts to about the same thing, Rosalie hesitated. To be made love to in a big space, a room with doors, a field with an horizon, a road with a bend, was all right, rather like walking over a raging torrent by means of a well-built bridge. Because you were perfectly safe you leaned over the side and impertinently dropped bits of grass into the swirl. To walk down the dark, narrow passage with a man who found delight in watching live fish skip to death on the alabaster floor of the room in which he bathed, would be like crossing the same raging torrent by means of a plank, a feat to be negotiated with fear and trembling and possibly on hands and knees. "Supposing the door slid to!" she said lamely.

"We'd walk down to the Circle and have coffee and cigarettes and then walk on to the other door and out by it to The Forbidden City all ghostly and quiet under the stars, all by ourselves;" he answered and sighed a little when Rosalie, practically, reminded him that the door could be opened from the inside. "But we'd pretend it couldn't!" he said, a little sadly because of the brushing of the dust from Romance's wings.

Rosalie laughed and walked to the door. "We couldn't do that, either;" she said, looking to where Hatchway tapped the wall, his ear against it. "You see there'd be Cyril to think about."

Chang Teh-sheng made a wry face. "What a frightful thing appendages are!" he laughed. "I always did think the look in the eyes of the English husband who trailed after the family on a holiday was exactly the same as the look in the eyes of the lion at the Zoo. A Freedom-on-the-Wrong-Side-of-the-Bars-Look." He put the lantern down. "Risking it?" he said. "Think of the lovely tale to tell at hen-parties when you get back!" and held out his hands.

"Hate hen-parties!" said Rosalie, and when,

because of the beauty of him and because of the bars to her cage, she tripped and fell forward as she stepped over the threshold, stayed quite still when he lifted her right up in his arms.

A moment of great content. An instant of time in which the whole of his life spent with her passed before his eyes. The flurry of her ruffled red-gold curls against his cheek, the flurry of her heart near his. His hand closed on her arm bruising it. "I love you!" he whispered, and laughed a little and sighed and put her down, away from him, the woman, the love forbidden him. "Will you go outside whilst I explain to you both what there will be for you to do;" he said, and so evenly that Rosalie, as she went outside, felt as though Life had suddenly blown a great light out, and looked over-critically at Hatchway when, interested and mystified, he came back along the wall.

"Wonderful workmanship;" he said. "Not a sign, not a trace, and here, undiscovered, for decades;" then nodded his head and made notes on his cuff whilst Chang Teh-sheng explained.

They were to walk straight down the passage to the Circle, ventilated in some cunning and quite efficient manner. There they would have to stay until the next morning about ten when the first of the tourists usually congregated in The Forbidden City. Then, after due scouting, they would slide the door back a hair's-breadth and listen, and when they heard people, a crowd of them, in the next room, would walk out, shutting the door, and join the tourists. After that Hatchway would go to the front entrance of The Forbidden City and wait until Chang Teh-sheng's chauffeur picked him up and drove him straight to Tientsin. Rosalie, a short while after, would do the same. Wan Yen would come to her and drive her to the Temple in the Western Hills where she would wait for instructions from Tientsin.

"I will drive you to Tientsin myself;" Chang Teh-sheng ended and, loving her, mistook Fate's chuckling for the swish of Rosalie's shawl against the wall. "It is perfectly simple;" he said to

Hatchway who had stepped into the passage to examine the bolt. "You turn it and slip the catch."

"Very ingenious;" said Hatchway, then stepped out again. "But I really don't see why my wife shouldn't come with me to Tientsin, really I don't."

All over again Chang Teh-sheng patiently explained whilst listening for his servant's footsteps coming across the court. It would be easier to get the Professor away alone. Wang might have spies at every gate. The chauffeur would be told that Hatchway was on urgent business for the Legation and even Chinese chauffeurs knew that Ministers or Secretaries left their womenfolk behind when on such excursions. "I will go to the Gallery-of-the-White-Birds to-morrow after ten;" he ended; "and tap on the hidden door which opens outside by pressing two springs hidden in the middle beam in the Gallery. If there is no answer I shall know you are well away."

"What an adventure!" said Rosalie.

"Yes, think what a wonderful after-dinner yarn it will make. I should give it the title: 'The Heathen Chinee:'" Chang Teh-sheng replied and laughed.

Rosalie clasped her hands. "Oh, please don't! Please, Cyril, do, *do* thank Mr. Chang, I simply can't, properly."

The Chinese would accept no thanks. Laughed it aside. They would make an unusual entry into The Forbidden City. That was all there was to it. "The Forbidden City which the Doctor once said was as forbidden to a coolie as a white woman to an Oriental;" he ended.

"A white woman and a——"

Chang Teh-sheng regretted there was not the time necessary in which to discuss the question of pigment with the Professor, and lighting a lantern as he spoke turned it round to show the Chinese characters decorating it. "That means Chang Teh-sheng;" he said and gave it to Hatchway, bowing when the latter did his very possible best to express his sincere gratitude.

"I will write from Tientsin;" said Hatchway as he moved off down the passage. "I will tell the Doctor of the splendid way in which you fulfilled your promise to him. Come, my dear;" and started prospecting as Rosalie stepped inside.

She held out her hand. "I simply cannot——" and stopped speaking as Hatchway came back.

What was he to do? His dress-clothes! He could not possibly arrive in Tientsin, perhaps at noon, in dress-trousers.

Chang Teh-sheng bore with him. "Oh, the West!" he said. "I suppose a European on his way to the gallows would worry more over the crease in his nether raiment than about the lack of a collar."

"Cyril, *don't* waste any more precious time!" exclaimed Rosalie.

"But, my dear, what *will* the chauffeur think!"

Chang Teh-sheng said he wouldn't. They didn't, in China, which accounted for the many and astounding accidents.

Pacified, Hatchway once more hit the trail.

"I am so afraid——" said Rosalie.

"There's nothing to be afraid of;" came Hatchway's voice from some considerable distance. "It's quite easy going."

"It is for you I am afraid;" whispered Rosalie, looking at the handsome Oriental. "The old man might turn on you—might—might——"

Chang Teh-sheng put her lighted lantern on the ground at her feet. It threw a soft radiance about them, lit up his face, the love, the great courage in his eyes as he answered her. "There is nothing to be afraid of;" he said gently. "I have the poison remember. I could always escape." He looked at the Speck-of-Death under his nail, laughed at her. "And you will be safe. Thank the Gods you will be safe." He held out his hands. "Good-bye."

Rosalie, loath to let Romance for ever go, tempted him, after the manner of woman. Would he not come to the Temple at the full moon? Keep the



date they had made? She might not have heard from Tientsin. There was only a week before the full moon. "Won't you come *once* before you drive me down, just to bring me the news?"

Chang Teh-sheng closed his eyes under the exquisite agony of woman's cruelty, then looked at her, a laugh, at his own expense, in them. Well enough he guessed her incapable, through circumstance, of the big gesture. Once married, romance was as forbidden a white woman of a certain status as some rare jewel she could not buy and dared not steal. Bidden to let go of it, to leave it for some other more fortunate, she, loath to, needs must keep it on her finger a while longer. And he, because he craved so for a little happiness, let her keep the Jewel-of-Romance when he knew he should save himself heart-break by taking it from her. "I will come on The-Night-of-the-Full-Moon," he said. "Through the Moon-Gate leading to The-Court-of-the-Rising-Sun where we will sit on the parapet and look down at Peking asleep behind her Gates and Walls."

Rosalie gave him both her hands. "You promise?" she whispered.

"I promise. Together, just once, in the place I love the most on earth, where the little bell rings when the Spirit of the Abbot walks. In The-Temple-of-Perpetual-Fragrance. In the Western Hills where the day dies." High he raised her hands in both of his after the custom of his country when holding things most rare and precious. "Were I not an Oriental, were I of the lowest white caste, there would be no harm if I kissed your hand, but being Chinese of the highest caste it is forbidden me even as my love for you is forbidden;" he said and bowed over her hands. "The Gods have you always in their safe keeping."

Rosalie, her hands in his, lifted her face, wet with tears. The tears a diamond setting to the glowing ruby of passionate temptation just within her reach dare she grasp the jewel.

It was all so quiet.

So dark.

No one would ever know should the shadows hide for her one forbidden kiss. A kiss. A nothing. A little meeting. A little sound. The whisper of a sound. A sigh. Just that. And did she not dare? Then all her days before her with mere trinkets in Life's jewel-case. Odds and ends. She looked over her shoulder to where Hatchway's lantern showed, a speck of light in the distance.

Her light went out as she looked. Gentle hands slid up her arms. Strong arms held her so that quite still, the shadows so kind, she rested against them, her heart thudding to words, rough and smooth, mocking, tempting, urging, which wrapped her about as in a warm and scented mantle.

"The Cicalo-Tree, a Chinese, scented, yellow, Oriental tree, makes a safe resting place for the White Bird;" whispered Chang Teh-sheng. "A White Bird escaped for an hour from the trap set by another.

"The shadows make a dim curtain to hide the White Bird, resting upon the yellow branch, from the eyes of the hunter." The Oriental raised his eyes and through half-closed lids watched the speck of red light held by the man from whom he would reft a speck of happiness as small as the ruby light. "Shielding the White Bird weary from its flight from prison so that with ruby beak it may drink one little drop of the Water-of-Life. One drop even should Love's-Field-of-Grain glowing and swaying in the heat of the harvest noon, be forbidden it."

A little sob. A sigh. A rustle of silk and brocade. Silence. Shadows.

And had you met Love and asked him about the White Bird and the Cicalo-Tree he would not have told you.

Nor do White Birds talk.

Nor the Cicalo-Tree.

As for the Shadows, are they not the lining to Life's safe in which all secrets, even so small a one as a forbidden kiss, are closely and most well guarded?

A sigh. A little sob. A rustle of silk and brocade.

"Until the Night-of-the-Full-Moon!" he whispered.

"The Full Moon!" she whispered back.

"You promise to be there?"

"I shall be waiting. I promise."

The flare of a match. The glow of the lantern showing the blue of her eyes like broken ice.

"Until we meet again;" she whispered, the lantern high above her head and turned away as the door slid slowly to.

"Until we meet again I shall love you;" whispered Chang Teh-sheng, his words overtaking her as she walked away from him. "If we do not meet again I shall love you."

Rosalie turned and looked back, the lantern above her head. His eyes looked like burned out fires once lit to chase the shadows of a dusky night. Nor upon the beautiful face was there trace of mockery left.

He shut the door.

"Because you are forbidden me I shall always love you;" he said out loud, a trace of bitterness in the gentle voice. "And yet;" he walked to the stool and sat down; "and yet how much I shall have to thank you for." He looked up and laughed, a twist to the heavily curved mouth. "When I come to die, even at the last breath, should the Gods grant I am conscious of passing, I shall still know what it is to desire. I shall know longing, heart-ache for something, even if it is not true love, forbidden me." He looked over his shoulder, then across to the east door where Wan Yen stood, finger to lips.

"Master!" he whispered. "Trapped! Your honourable Neighbour followed me. He——" There was no time in which to finish what he had to say.

Wang Pu-hao, followed by Li, walked slowly in, glanced at Chang Teh-sheng and bowed and when Chang Teh-sheng bowed, motioned Li to cross the room.

Li walked to the table and threw the weighted dollar on it, picked it up and threw it down again, bowed to Chang Teh-sheng and walked slowly back to his Master.

There was no sound as Wang Pu-hao bowed, shook hands with himself and left the room, followed by the two servants, whilst Danger, Torture and Death, a grim trio walking arm in arm, turned their slanting eyes on Chang Teh-sheng and slunk away in the wake of the old man who had summoned them.

Chang Teh-sheng, aware, through instinct, of the hideous trio, watched them go, crossed to the table, picked the dollar up and threw it down, then walked to the hidden door and leaned his cheek against it whilst Mei-hua, fear in her long eyes, fear in her heart, watched him from the west door then, so quietly, crept into the room.

Sitting upon the floor, embroidering a charm against disaster upon her Master's delicate linen, she watched him turn his head and press his lips to the wall against which his cheek rested, and listened, most perplexed, when he spoke aloud.

"And everything forbidden me;" he said. "Forbidden! A sorry barrier raised by the white race across every path. Even a kiss which is sold so cheaply in the streets across the seas, given so easily, esteemed so lightly, forbidden me, so that, if I would have the jewel which has no price, I must add theft to the long list of my sins." He walked to the east door, laughing as he went. "The most grievous of which seems in my having been born an Oriental." He stopped at the door and looked back at the south wall. "Even a kiss really forbidden me!" he said, and left the room, unaware of love and fidelity sitting upon the floor embroidering a charm against disaster on his fine linen.

"A kiss;" said Mei-hua, who, being an uncontaminated little Chinese maid, knew naught of such as a caress. "I must ask my Master what such thing is and if, having money in my stocking, I could not procure that which the Foreign Devil denies him from the Bazaar;" and folding her work, went to seek her plank-bed.

## CHAPTER V

### UNDER THE MOAT

ROSALIE lay on the long chair listening, peering into the shadows, waiting for she knew not what, obsessed with a sense of impending danger, of something terrible to come, as though horror waited outside the heavy doors which divided the passage into two and made the Circle in which she and Hatchway waited for the slow hours to pass.

Hatchway, overcome with fatigue and pain, still drowsy from the drug, slept on the long chair beside her. He had tried to comfort her, to calm her. "It's the thought of the horrors that have taken place here, dear, that has got hold of you;" he had argued. "The strangling of the Imperial Concubine, the Eunuchs passing to and fro watching and spying;" and had held her hand, with occasional pats, until he had fallen asleep. But Rosalie knew better. Through the bond of sympathy, the narrow plank thrown across the torrent of racial difference and over which neither she nor the Oriental could pass, she knew, instinctively, that danger threatened Chang Teh-sheng. She wanted to find out if all was well with him. At once. Not only out of gratitude but because Peking had meddled with the strings of her shingle-cap. Danger, terror, laughter, love had broken through the dam of convention flung across the lives of certain types of Occidental women. A drear mass of restrictions over which, she thought, it would be good to fling her headgear, just once, so as to run round to pick it up as an excuse to see what lay on the other side of the windmill, or dam, or whatever is the correct name for that which makes a dried, waterless plain of the lives of nine married Western women out of ten.

In other words she wanted to keep the Jewel-of-Romance, which she might not wear and could not afford to purchase, for a while longer on her unjewelled finger.

She looked all around the Circle, cosy, in the lantern light, with chairs and tables, books, cushions, rugs, and ivory coffee cups on a black-lacquer table. Hatchway slept. She slipped off her chair and leant over him, put one lantern behind his chair and with the other, shoeless, eyes wide with fear, heart thudding, crept back through the passage to the secret door. Come to it she pressed her ear against the stone, softly tapped upon it then turned the bolt, pulled back the catch and ever so gently opened the door a hair's-breadth.

An odour of incense came to her out of the dark. All was quiet. No sound. No sign of life. Putting the lantern down she slid the door back and stepped out into the dim room. The faint light of the lantern made the lower part a shade less black. The stools and chairs showed like shadows. The ceiling looked like black velvet high above her. Listening, terrified, knowing that she jeopardized everything by being there, spurred to the risk through gratitude and the thought of how much she had been offered and how little she had given, she crept to the west door hoping that Chang Teh-sheng might come that way again. And when he did not and when no sound whatever disturbed the night, took her handkerchief from her gown and drew it across her face, twisting it this way and that in disappointment, then, to stifle a scream pressed it against her mouth when, turning, she saw someone watching her from the centre of the room. Quite still she stood, staring, then sighed. She was looking at her own reflection in the mirror, just that and the sound of voices, calling, questioning, in the distance.

She ran for the light shining through the crack in the wall. The fringe of her shawl caught in a stool and pulled it over with a crash. Arms slid round her, raised her and carried her to the door as sounds of many running feet came from the next room.

"Why did you risk it?" whispered Chang Teh-sheng, his lips against her red-gold hair.

"I am frightened for you!" whispered Rosalie. "I came to see if you were safe!" and slid to her feet inside the door which shut gently on her as Wan Yen, followed by many with lanterns, ran into the room.

"Yes?" said Chang Teh-sheng from where he sat serenely on a stool.

"*Ai-ya!*" said Wan Yen and pressed those with lanterns back at sight of the stern face looking at him from the shadows. "I heard a cry, Master, the sound of a fall. I feared;" and bowed, eyes on a patch of white on the floor.

"And must bring a pack from the kitchen to invade my rooms because of a cry?" asked Chang Teh-sheng. "Bring the servants back!" he ordered sharply as those with lanterns melted away into the shadows. "Who gave them orders to come? and what do you mean by bringing them tearing through the house like a pack of dogs after a cat? Put that down. Who gave you orders to touch anything?"

Wan Yen, genuinely frightened of the steely voice, dropped the perplexing handkerchief, quick eyes this way and that about the bare, empty room. "I feared for you, Master;" he said and bowed.

"When I want your help I'll ask for it!" ripped Chang Teh-sheng. "Dismiss every one of those at the door, at once, this minute. Put them outside the gate and go yourself if you have forgotten how to behave in my house. I will have peace and privacy if I change my servants every day until I find those to suit me. Neither will I have you or any of you roaming the house at night. Understand? Then get to your quarters and stay there until I sound the gong at the hour at which it will please me for you to stir!"

He watched them steal tip-toe across the court then picked up Rosalie's handkerchief and with it pressed between his heart and the delicate linen upon which Mei-hua, who so loved him, had embroidered a

butterfly most finely, released the two springs hidden in the flooring.

Without a sound he stole down the passage, without light, without hope of anything but to stand in the shadows and watch over Rosalie until the dawning.

“ I waited for her because I knew she would come back to me, that my call to her would bring her back to me; ” he said as he stood in the shadows and looked across at her stretched on the long chair, a lantern on the ground at her side. And stood there, motionless, as the hours passed, until she looked at the watch on her wrist, slipped her feet to the ground, combed her red-gold curls, powdered her face, tied a scarf round her head and got up to make coffee. The flare of the match lit her face, a white flower in the gloom, her slender feet made no sound as she moved about from biscuit tin to spirit-lamp nor when, later, lantern held high above her head, she preceded Hatchway up the passage leading to The Forbidden City, whilst Chang Teh-sheng walked back to his house where he struck a gong to inform his servants that they had his permission to move about.

### THE ESCAPE

“ Do you think we ought to bolt the big doors? ” whispered Rosalie.

Hatchway looked over his shoulder, walked back and flashed his lantern over the massive door opening into the Circle. There were heavy bolts on either side of it and a small wicket in the centre, at the height of a tall man's eyes. “ Better leave them both open; ” he said. “ If we bolt the other on the inside and this one on the outside, Chang won't be able to play at Charades in the passage unless he gets into it from The Forbidden City; ” and pushing the door wide followed Rosalie up to the other which opened into the once Imperial Palace.



He blew his lantern out. Rosalie put hers on the ground behind her and looked back. "It is just as though something horrible was creeping up behind us!" she whispered and moved closer to Hatchway, her fear for Chang Teh-sheng, which fear was just part of the plank spanning the torrent of his love, or desire, or whatever it was exactly that he felt for her, shining in her big eyes.

For a while they stood, waiting, then Hatchway looked at his watch. "Almost ten;" he said prosaically and as though he waited to enter some public institution instead of having, for his life, made his way through an underground passage once used by Imperial Eunuchs and tragic Imperial Concubines. "I think we might try;" and very gently opened the door a hair's-breadth. "Quiet!" he whispered.

A pale golden light came through the crack, the sound of Chinese voices.

### THREE STRANDS IN THE WEB

"Foreigners make a lot of work!" said the elderly, patient coolie who sat on the three steps leading down into the court from The-Gallery-of-the-White-Birds, his back, covered in a patched, faded and shrunken cotton-coat, to the hidden door. He puffed at his long pipe, his long face turned up to the pale-blue sky, his long greying queue coiled on the step behind him like an aged snake.

"Aye!" said one as faded, patched, patient and cheery, if a shade younger. "An' no extra pay for it!" and sat staring ahead, contentedly munching a lump of grey, sour, Chinese bread.

"Market prices soarin' like yon flock o' pigeons!" remarked Coolie One after a considerable time spent on thoughts of 'chow.'

"Aye, rice up!"

"Aye!" A pause and after some considerable time spent on thoughts of the next meal: "And bad."

"Water everywhere!" supplied Coolie Two later.

“ Aye! ” And after a pause filled in with thoughts of food: “ An’ drought comin’.”

Time being of no particular value to any un-westernized Chinese followed a long pause filled with thoughts of the larder, whilst the smoke of their long pipes floated away on the thin, golden air and Hatchway came as near to cursing as his temperament would allow.

“ China no place to live in! ” offered Coolie One at long last.

“ Streets lined with gold where foreigner comes from, from over seas; ” said Coolie Two and pointed vaguely with his pipe.

“ Aye! ” informed Coolie One. “ Was there. Place called London. In War.”

“ Foreigner’s War? ”

“ Aye, ours not finished. Foreign War only took four years! ”

“ Streets lined gold? ”

“ Nay—mud! ”

“ Maybe have changed.”

“ Maybe! ”

A long pause in which the only sound to break the peace was that, musical, sweet, of the wooden whistles fastened under the tails of Peking’s own flock of pigeons as it circled over her Gates and Walls.

Content with their meagre lot, Coolie One smoked and the other munched, until, shrill, ear-splitting, excruciating, the sound of a Chinese woman in song rent the stillness of the moment to minute shreds.

“ Weed-woman! ”

“ Aye! ”

“ Have you eaten? ” the Weed-coolie asked in customary salutation, bowed in the archway, thudded across the court towards them on broken, ill-bound feet, weed-stick trailing behind, sat down on the steps and pulled out her cigarette-holder.

“ Rice up! ” she said.

“ Aye, an’ wages down! ”

“ Impossible to put by! ” breathed Coolie Two through a mouthful of sour bread.

“Crippled with debt i’ the house;” said the Weed-woman; “but man’s funeral worth it. Beautiful coffin.”

“Aye! Fine show!”

“Aye, ’twas that!”

“Worth dying for!” quoth the Weed-woman between puffs.

“Aye!” from the others, whilst Hatchway stood, eye glued to the crack.

Smoke and munching filled the next five minutes then: “Plenty work the morn getting new part prinked up for foreigners;” from one of the trio.

“Aye!”

“Thankful for work!”

“Aye! else might old bones be rattlin’ whilst pullin’ rattlin’ old rickshaws round and about!”

“Full of foreigners!”

“Sparse with coppers!”

“Aye!” Whole-heartedly from the three of them.

Coolie Two wiped his mouth with his hand and looked about, the Weed-woman wiped hers on the seat of her pants and looked round for a brush. Coolie One sat immovable, thinking of the sparse First Meal to come.

“Better work!”

“Brush or do somethin’ if not hankerin’ to lose job!”

Hatchway closed the door as the Weed-woman got up. “Beams thick with dust!” she remarked, pulled the strip of cloth from round her rusty head, tied it to the end of the rake and threshed about on the beams and the two hidden springs until the dust fell in lumps and the hidden door began to slip back.

“Hold it, for God’s sake!” whispered Hatchway as it slipped out of his frantic hands.

“I can’t!” whispered Rosalie when it slipped through hers just as the Weed-woman returned to her seat, pulled the rag off the rake and twined it deftly round her rusty head.

“Perhaps the spring’s loose and the door has

to run back the full length before it can come back;" whispered Hatchway.

"What if it doesn't come back!" whispered Rosalie, her eyes on the door as it slipped slowly into the groove until it disappeared, leaving them and the secret passage for all the world to see, then went white to the lips with relief as it slid slowly forward.

Hatchway shut it gently just as the Weed-woman turned round.

"D'you hear?" she said.

"Aye, rats!"

"Swarmin'!"

The Weed-woman touched a charm. Might it not have been Spirits? It was not an over lucky day to begin new work on. The Fortune-Teller at the Bazaar had been more against than for it. There was no extra pay attached and all to be done on a stomach empty except for a bit of stale bread and the leavings of yesterday's tea warmed over.

Coolie One produced a handful of nuts from his trouser pocket and passed them round so that the sound of nuts cracking between strong teeth came to Li's ears as he took a short cut back home through the Palace grounds.

The coolies rose and bowed as he passed, offering what remained of the nuts.

"You are early abroad, Sir;" said Coolie One, and listened with interest while Li recounted his fruitless search for two foreigners in the early train starting for Kalgan and the Blue Express for Shanghai. He had an important message for them but they had not been seen at either station.

"Your Honour is Mr. Li from the big house back yonder," said the Weed-woman pointing with rake.

Li bowed and offered his cigarette-case and agreed with Coolie One that quite likely the two foreigners had put off their journey so as to visit the new part of The Forbidden City opened to the public for the first time that day.

"Foreign Devils!" chorused the tattered trio.

Li agreed and, bowing, offered them a few coppers. "Honour me by drinking a cup of tea to lighten the task of removing the dust;" he said and thought it might be worth his while to have a look at the big room beyond.

"May your Honour's purse never be empty!" said Coolie One and bowed as Li walked away.

"Nor your Honour's bowl!" cried Coolie Two, bowing.

"Nor your Honour's stomach!" called the Weed-woman, bowing.

They watched him go, vowing him a proper man and loose i' the purse-strings.

"A bowl of rice?" suggested Coolie One.

"A dish of tea?" suggested Coolie Two.

"We'll be back i' the hour!" agreed the Weed-woman and between her friends thudded off to refreshment at the outer gate.

Hatchway opened the door a hair's-breadth, Rosalie's white face at his shoulder, the lighted lantern on the ground, forgotten, behind her. "It's clear!" whispered Hatchway. "Come!" pushed the door wider and stepped out. "Quick!" he said at the sound of English voices in the distance and pulled Rosalie through.

She came quickly and as Hatchway hurried her impatiently away, shut the door, as she thought, to.

Not quite.

It remained a hair's-breadth open and through the chink the light of the lantern shone.

"What a beautiful pine!" said Hatchway loudly, crossing to the balustrade to look about.

"And the paint is really remarkably fresh!" said Rosalie as loudly, then touched his arm.

"Over there, through the door to the right, Cyril. A party of tourists with a guide. Quick. I'll follow!" Bereft of the two men, forced to fend for herself for a moment, she clung to him, a little scared. He kissed her, holding her close. "I think Chang made a frightful fuss over the getting away!" he said and kissed her again. "I hate to leave you here by yourself."

Rosalie pushed him away. "You're wrong, Cyril!" she whispered. "Think of you bound and gagged. I'm still terrified." She turned her head to look back at the secret door, then, just because Chang Teh-sheng had to walk upon the path marked out for him from the Begining, turned back quickly as Hatchway moved away a step, the light through the crack unnoticed. "Send me word to the Temple through the Legation, dear;" she said; "and remember your promise to Mr. Chang. Not a whisper about anything to the authorities."

Although it had gone distinctly against the grain, Hatchway had agreed that, owing to the recent trouble at Shanghai and the still more recent all along the Yangtze, it might be better to let old Wang Pu-hao off scot-free. He walked away through the door, away from danger, safe, himself, but a black shadow upon the path of the Oriental who had saved his life. Rosalie, head tied in a veil, shawl wrapped close around her, followed him a little later, passing mighty, yellow, once Imperial roofs, halls, temples, through countless corridors to the front gate, leaving danger and death behind, safe through the unassailable word of an uncontaminated Chinese.

### THE LIGHT THROUGH THE CRACK

Then, led by Fate along a path he had to tread, Li came back.

Sore perplexed, too. The foreigners had not been seen at either station. The spies posted about Chang Teh-sheng's house had had nothing to report. The foreigners had apparently not left the house. No one had come out. Not a single servant. No car.

Where were they? Hiding in the house of Chang Teh-sheng? Supposing they managed to escape? What if the Legation heard of the night just past?

The kidnapping? The thongs and gag and saturated cloth? The House-of-Wang, and Li as part of it, had no craving for a repetition of the British wrath of 1860. Perplexed, perturbed, he slid through the Gallery looking idly to right and left, at the pine in the court, the beams, the middle one with the painting of the White Birds so beloved of the old Empress, then, abreast of a faint gleam of light in the centre of the back wall, stopped dead.

A gleam of light and, when he stole on tip-toe towards it, the phenomenon of a crack in the wall itself.

Very gently he touched the crack, looked through it, listened at it, opened it an inch. To the east and west he looked, listening for approaching footsteps, then back to the wall and pulled the opening wider, wider still until there was space through which to squeeze his bulk.

Inside, he put his head out to listen. Not a sound. He picked up the lantern, just as, too late, the candle flickered and went out. Took it to the opening the better to see the characters inscribed upon it.

*"Chang Teh-sheng!"*

He read and laughed as the trap closed about the man who held the secret of Hatchway's whereabouts. Put the lantern down quickly at the sound of a woman's shrilling. Stepped outside, drew the door almost to and with a match from his pocket marked the thread of opening left.

The coolies, the fuller by tea and rice, bowed. He bowed and without further preamble asked how much they would want to keep the Gallery shut to the public for twenty-four hours.

"Closed?"

"Aye, to everyone!"

"Closing's policeman's job!" remarked Coolie One.

"Friend of mine!" Coolie Two nonchalantly informed the middle beam.

Li suggested sitting in a row on the step. "How much?" he said and passed his case.

Coolie One, as he lit up, remarked that they were all sweeping and dusting and minding, to which Coolie Two added the information that it was all work and no pay, whilst the Weed-woman, cigarette in an enormously long bamboo-holder stuck fiercely in the corner of her mouth, said something about the soaring proclivities of prices.

"How much the four?" asked Li.

The woman whispered behind her hand, Coolie One passed it on to Coolie Two behind his hand, Coolie Two behind his hand informed Li that the price was two dollars each.

Li got up and walked away.

The Weed-woman was after him: "'Twas top price, your Honour!" she said.

Li came back and sat. Coolie Two nudged to it by Coolie One asked what his Honour felt like giving.

"One dollar each!" said Li after a little while.

The coolies got up in a row and walked away.

"Plus a 'kumshaw!'" called Li after them.

"Policeman will squeeze!" said Coolie One as he sat.

"Rope for either end of Gallery to find!" remarked Coolie Two.

"Paint for the lettering!" supplemented the Weed-woman.

"Twenty-five cents each as 'kumshaw!'" said Li.

Having five babes at the house, Coolie One rose it to sixty each. Coolie Two with seven, nodded. The Weed-woman with nine, spat.

"Fifty!" bargained Li. "Half paid this moment."

"Big money!" they insisted, falling to immediate possession, and rose, bowing, eyes on Li's fat purse.

"No one but myself and friends to pass from now until this time to-morrow!" said Li counting the glad coins.

The coolies bowed and bowed again at the refreshing touch of metal to dry palm. "Con-



descend, your Honour;” said Coolie Two; “to explain affection for rat-smitten, barn-like Gallery?”

Li smoothly replied that he had a friend, a bird painter of some dexterity, who desired to paint the middle beam. The coolies drew in their breath with the East’s little sucking sound of appreciation and got up.

“I go to inform policeman!” said Coolie One.

“I to find rope!” said Coolie Two.

“I to fetch paint!” said the Weed-woman.

“I stay!” said Li, whereupon they bowed and, in a row, walked away, in step to the east, like three dilapidated Chinese Musqueteers.

Li watched them go, then, looking east and west, tip-toed to the secret door, opened it very carefully and went inside. Examined the bolt, the catch, drew the door almost to, opened it again. “Quite safe;” he said at last. “Quite simple. No fear of being caught.” And came outside again to look round, then, completely satisfied, went back, lit the lantern, placed it on the ground, closed the door, opened it again and closed it quite just as Chang Teh-sheng came in from the east.

He looked around. No sign of anyone. No sound. He went to the wall and tapped very gently on the hidden door. Listened, his ear against it, his eyes this way and that. Tapped again, a little harder, then walked away to the balustrade, down into the court and across to the pine.

The sun drew a lustre from his robe of mauve brocade. There was laughter in his eyes, exultation in his heart as he stood under the centuries-old pine making his plans. The woman he loved was safe. He would meet Rosalie at the full moon. To go to the Temple before would risk drawing attention to her alone in the Hills, but there was no reason why he should not drive out to Pi-an-ssu, at night, just to look up to where she would be sitting on the parapet of The-Court-of-the-Rising-Sun looking down at Peking. Everyone sat on the parapet under the stars or moon. Peking attracted them as the north pulled the needle of the compass. Nor was

there really any reason why, dressed in some dark colour in which he could pass as a Chinese of any class, he should not walk up the Hill by the back road. Just to see if there were spies about. Just to be a little nearer her.

Because of his hunger for beauty and peace he put his hand on the pine. "Push the sun round the sky with the top of your branches, Sweet;" he said; "so that the stars shine the sooner;" and walked away to where the yellow roofs showed through the trees.

"She is safe!" he said and looked back at the hidden door behind which, the lantern above his mocking face, Li stood, laughing.

## CHAPTER VI

### GOLD-SILK-BROCADE

WITH satin robes of every conceivable shade over his arm, Wan Yen stood on the edge of the Swimming-Pool.

"Which of these, Master?"

Chang Teh-sheng swam lazily across and his servant, watching the nude, lithe and steel-strong figure, thought his Master a fine man indeed and far too good to be wasted on any Foreign Devil of a white woman.

"I'm tired of those;" said Chang Teh-sheng, making joyous figures-of-eight in his exuberance at the news of Rosalie Wan Yen had brought him from the Temple, and the thought that, within the hour, perhaps, he would be on his way, driving a friend's car, to where Love perched on the top of a hill.

As he had made the appointment with Rosalie for the Full Moon he would not see her for another week. Nor had he inclination to hasten the meeting. Not only because there might be danger to her if he went to her hot on the escape she had had from a good deal worse than death, but rather from a perverted sense of pleasure in augmenting his longing for her by augmenting the pain of denial.

Indeed so much had been forbidden him over this woman that a few days, the more, the less, would but add a trifle to the clutter of things denied piled at his feet.

But there could come no harm to her if he drove out to the foot of the Hills and gazed up at the Temple to where she would be sitting on the parapet looking down at Peking. He would stay all night perhaps, the Abbot being his great friend as well as his uncle, and at sunrise look up again in the hope

of seeing Rosalie, sitting on the parapet in some of the satin and silk things Wan Yen had taken for her, her hair ruffled up by the breeze.

Wan Yen held out a dove-grey satin robe. "This, Master, you have not yet worn;" he said, looking at the garment with approval.

"But that's no reason why I shouldn't be tired of it, is it?"

Wan Yen shook his shaven crown. His Master was as slippery as any fish to handle. Not that he so much tired of things as that he craved desperately for all things new, from servants, clothes, cars, to cattle. "The Gods alone know what will happen when he begins to really notice women;" thought the man. "'Twill be Head Wife for sons and Concubines for every season, day, hour and night;" and loving his Master to the point of being willing to die for him, folded the offending robes across his arm. "There is a new brocade just come from the Chungking looms, Master;" he said as Chang Teh-sheng came up from the alabaster bottom of the bath through which divers coloured lights shone and against which he moved like some supple, exotic plant. "Outwardly, Master, the brocade is sober, a rich blue, inside it is of gold, real gold thread, soft and luminous. These silk trousers, of which I have ordered a dozen pairs, could be delicately embroidered to match, in divers golden devices, by the little 'Amah,'" he said and held the silk trousers out as Chang Teh-sheng pulled himself over the side. "Pray look."

Chang Teh-sheng looked and found them very nice and sat on the edge with a rough towel. When Wan Yen had gone back to the Temple he would go through his wardrobe by himself and choose what he wanted and he would be glad if his servant would cease from fussing over him like a nurse over some puling brat. "I must wear this and not that, eat this and not that and on no account must put foot out of doors for a full week;" he laughed, and was gone into the water.

Out of his great love for him Wan Yen, greatly

daring, took his Master to task when he came to the surface. He feared the day long for him. As he had told his Honour there were spies at every street corner within a li's radius of the house and armed men guarding the approach to the Temple. It was because of the armed men that he had crept through the bush on his chest and had come in a taxi, hired at a criminal fee for the return journey from the hotel at Pi-an-ssu, to warn his Master.

Chang Teh-sheng came up, a joyous streak, out of the bath and from the horizontal bar expressed his appreciation for all his man had done for him, assuring him that there was no need to fuss about the armed men as he, himself, had had them placed there. Buying their integrity, he hoped, with a sum Wang, The Bad, would not be able to augment. He slipped to his feet. "Have tea and fruit taken to The-Room-of-the-Foreign-Devils;" he said curtly; "and don't leave her Excellency again unless you wish to find a new master."

Wan Yen bowed, not the slightest bit perturbed. It was only when a certain steeliness lined the gentle voice that he walked delicately.

"Who else in the house knows of her Excellency's whereabouts?"

"No one, Master, and though I lie to others I do not lie to your Honour;" said Wan Yen and added, to give Mei-hua a lift over Life's rough road; "no one, Master, except the little sewing 'Amah,' who is sick with fear for your Honour's safety."

Chang Teh-sheng made an impatient movement. When he wanted anyone's opinion on his servants he would ask for it. And when Wan Yen got to the door called him back.

Starved of everything he desired, denied for the first time in his arrogant life, forbidden this and forbidden that as any child at school, mentally tormented to beyond endurance, physically trained to a hair and all exercise forbidden him for a time, he was suddenly overcome with a desire to vent his torment on someone. To make his power felt so as, in some little measure, to lessen the bitterness of the thought of

the plank over which he might not pass. "Tell Mei-hua to come and play to me whilst I have tea and fruit. Outside. On the mat. I will call her if I want her. And tell her not to wear the grey brocade, I've seen her in it twice." And when Wan Yen bowed and departed doorwards, called him back. "Tell her to have made a suit of the gold-lined brocade." He spoke sharply, whipped to despotism by the thought of the lovely girl's gentleness.

"'Tis real gold, Master."

Chang Teh-sheng, roused by the slight resistance, was on his servant in a flash, caught him by the throat and swung him round. "Am I the 'Amah's' master or not?" and when the man nodded as best he could for the stranglehold, commanded him sharply to have the order seen to at once and flung the man from him.

Wan Yen looked over his shoulder at the door.

Chang Teh-sheng stood looking down into the bath. The coloured lights through the water lit his face, played over the ripple of muscle as he suddenly stretched and laughed. "Women!" he said and picked up the silken trousers, into the pocket of which he tucked Rosalie's handkerchief.

### LOVE?

The scratching, scraping and twanging of the Chinese guitar, that instrument of excessive length of handle and dolorous sounds, came as sheer harmony to Chang Teh-sheng through the doorway.

In full, silk trousers fastened above the ankle, and satin slippers, he sat on the middle stool, his back to the south wall, to the hidden door, soothed by the music, whilst Mei-hua who, without being seen, could just see him from the corner of her long eye, wondered if her heart would endure the onslaught Love and Jealousy alternately made upon it whilst she thrummed.

With great care she had attired herself when Wan

Yen had come running with the message. In coat and trousers of softest, palest, pink satin; a new rose in the black skull-cap of her hair; slender feet in slender, black-satin shoes embroidered here and there with rosebuds; roses on her oval cheeks; eyebrows enhanced until they looked like the wings of moths ready to fly away; her mouth a perfect, crimsoned rose; her heart just as filled with love as it could possibly well be. Then, taking the instrument of dire sounds from beside the 'k'ong,' the brick bed, heated by a flue, upon which she stretched herself o' nights to keep her exquisite shape, had sped to outside The-Room-of-the-Foreign-Devils as the room had but lately come to be christened.

She hated the room. Jealousy peopled it with pictures of Rosalie. Instinct told her that Chang Teh-sheng sat on the middle stool because he had sat on it whilst talking to the foreign woman. She feared the menace of the south wall in which she had either seen or dreamed a gaping square. She loathed the fine handkerchief with the white woman's name in the corner and which, so Wan Yen had told her, her Master carried upon him all day and kept under his pillow all night.

She knew he had it with him at night because, like a shadow, she had the habit of slipping into his room. For an instant. Just to look at him as he slept, either in his Chinese room on the Chinese plank-bed, with Chinese covering, or in the foreign room upon what Wan Yen called a "di-wân," a kind of low, square couch covered with multitudinous white-silk pillows and silken sheets. She had seen the handkerchief in his hand and one night had most gently tried to pull it from his fingers, slipping behind the head of the bed and lying flat on the floor when he, awake on the instant, had sat up, staring into the dark.

And all this she did and suffered not only of set purpose and high ambition but also because she loved greatly and with that love which asks for nothing better than to serve. " 'Twould be good to be even

his hundredth Concubine; " she thought, as she softly struck the steel strings with the steel nib; " but I would be the cushion to his head and the footstool to his feet to *be* his; " and to draw his honourable attention to her unworthy existence, played, " The-Fish-and-the-Rainbow." That funny, jumpy, staccato, nothing-at-all of little discordant trills and single notes of most vibrating disharmony which brings laughter to Chinese lips and joy to Chinese heart.

Chang Teh-sheng, lost in dreams of Rosalie, looked up. " And that is all there can be, in love, between the East and the West; " he said as the music skipped and twiddled and hopped. " A rainbow, a misty coloured bridge of longing, a wispy thing which dissolves at the first breath of racial intolerance; " and listened to the skips and trills and hops, his heart a jumble of pain and resentment. " Love in this house is a sorry thing; " he said. " The little Chinese Rose loves me and I don't love her and I love the English Rose and she cannot return my love; " he sighed and clapped his hands. " Tea! " he said when Mei-hua, face a beautiful, painted mask, heart a riot of joy, bowed in the doorway, and listened to her running like a deer across the court to do his bidding. " The Chinese Rose brings me tea on a red-lacquer tray; " he said; " and the English Rose heartache as she sits on the parapet looking down at Peking." And watched the little 'Amah' indolently as she came across the court and the room towards him with jade tea-things on a red-lacquer tray, and when she looked about for something on which to place the tray told her to put it on the floor beside him and sit there herself and talk to him out of the wisdom of her youth.

Docile, over-joyed, Mei-hua obeyed, and sitting cross-legged at his feet, offered him a bowl upon both hands. " My wisdom, Master; " she said tranquilly, her heart beating like a wild bird newly caged; " is the wisdom of the house, the rice-bowl, the needle. My learning is little, my speech in your Honour's presence, halting."



Chang Teh-sheng was of the opinion that it was not exactly in need of crutches and stretched for the sewing she pulled out from her wide sleeve, asking, first, to tease, if she sewed for her bridal day.

She spread the silk vest upon her knee. "I embroider a butterfly upon the hem of your underwear, Master;" she said serenely.

"To make the wearing lighter?"

Mei-hua smiled, her teeth, most perfect, polished ivory squares, showing between her crimsoned lips, but: "Yes, Master;" was all she found to say and when asked if Life had not yet procured her a husband, replied no but that her mother had.

"Well;" laughed the man, soothed by her beauty and gentle ways; "that's about the same thing in China only the mother's the bigger tyrant;" and when the girl said: "Yes, Master:" turned her face up by the chin so that, overcome by love, her lashes lay like miniature, black-silk, Chinese brooms on her cheek. "And for goodness sake don't say, Master, Master, Master, all the time, I'm not a dragon."

Mei-hua flashed a look up through the black-silk sweepers then, demure Chinese Eve under the apple-tree, whispered: "You are very, very beautiful."

Chang Teh-sheng, really aware for the first time of the lure of her and just because she had touched the knob which tinkles the bell of masculine vanity, studied her perfect face, her exquisite little body from head to toes. There was no effrontery in her, not a whit, but she most certainly did exude a rare, sweet balm which fell healingly upon the sore wound the West had dealt his great pride two years before. A wound he had endeavoured not to acknowledge but which smarted all the same and still more grievously since his chance meeting in the 'hutung' with the white woman forbidden him.

He could do with more of this healing from the little 'Amah' of whom, of whose family or history he knew nothing, who fitted into his household as might some well-favoured cat or dog, and of whose future he had thought but little until this hour.

"But I *am* your master;" he said curtly, watching the colour whip to her face.

"Oh, yes, Master;" she said, hope in voice and face. "I mean, oh, yes;" and on being asked when her future husband would claim her as wife made a most decided movement with her hands. Marry the man chosen for her she must so that her mother should not lose 'face,' but his, as wife, she would never be, never.

Escape?

There was always the river, the poison, a vein to open.

"Life is sweet, Little-Rose,"

"When the sun shines;" she answered and looked up and down again when she found Chang Teh-sheng looking down at her without smiling; "but not when the dust blows from the Desert-of-Despair;" and took up her sewing and nodded her head when Chang Teh-sheng asked if there were another.

"Why not go to him, now, whilst there is still time?" he suggested, delighting in hurting her, in watching the swift rush of colour to her face.

"Because he does not love me, Master;" she whispered back and, when he asked her to, could not explain what she meant by love although she got to her knees, in her extremity, to try. "You describe it, Master;" she said, sitting back on her heels.

To Chang Teh-sheng love was the rain-drop which falls from the summer sky to break in pieces in the hand. The music which has no substance lost upon the air which itself is nothing. A pillar of fire chained by the girdle of chastity.

And Mei-hua, sitting back on her heels, thought it all that.

"Love is hunger and thirst, pain and sweet balming, torture and peace everlasting——"

"It is all that, Master."

"It is giving with both hands, without stint, with no seeking reward. It is fidelity and sacrifice." He looked down at her, she looked up at him. "Can you, who love, add nothing?"

Mei-hua bowed her beautiful head to his feet. "Love, Master, is helping and furthering;" she whispered.

"Doing something for the other."

She nodded and begged to be allowed to do something for him right away. To bring Wine-of-Roses, to play, sing to him, and when he inquired into her sudden anxiety to serve him, believing her fully occupied in embroidering butterflies upon the intimacies of his wardrobe, moved closer to him, clasping her hands. She was filled with fear. She dreaded he should go outside the house. Craved to keep him within.

"You know?"

"I know."

He laughed gently. "But I am going now, Little-Rose. By bribery through the City Gate to the foot of the Hills where love dwells in the scent of the pines."

Mei-hua made no sign. If it was her Master's wish to flout and torture her it was not for her to complain, the 'Amah's' lot in China being to submit to all that man subjected her to, she being the property, by common consent, of man. "Will you be long gone?" she asked.

He didn't know. A night, two, seven perhaps. It depended upon how strong he was to resist. "How strong am I?" he whispered.

Mei-hua stretched her arms wide. So strong. As strong as death, stronger where he loved, and when he asked her if she did not think it well-nigh impossible to refuse the drop of water when dying of thirst, the crumb when starving, said she was not quite sure but that she knew if a banquet were spread before a man and one persimmon kept out of his reach, that he would starve to death coveting the forbidden fruit.

"Which psycho-analyst is responsible for that gem of wisdom?"

"Wan Yen, Master;" she said, the innocent, and when he dryly remarked that he thought it might have been Confucius, shook her winsome head and

inquired still further why some seemed to get everything in life and others nothing at all, or barely anything worth speaking about.

"Because some have the sense to straightaway hitch their wagon to a star, child, whilst others bat along in the dust of the road on bare feet all their life. That's why."

She sighed, a bit out of her depth and deplored that she would not know the hour of his return so that she might have all in readiness for him and smiled, as happy as could be, when he bade her search all Peking, to come and look for him should he not have returned by The-Night-of-the-Full-Moon. "You want me to come and fetch you wherever you may be, Master? That is your command?"

"I shall want you to help me make myself very beautiful to keep an Appointment-at-the-Full-Moon;" he laughed, mimicking her.

"I would die for you, Master;" she whispered. "I will come to you wherever you are. I swear by the Gods that I will come to call you for The Appointment-of-the-Full-Moon."

"Even if it were an appointment with her Honour, The-Light-of-Dawn?"

Mei-hua flashed a smile and laughed like a peal of little bells. "That She-Devil!" she exclaimed and having said it bowed her head in mock abasement to the ground and kept it there to hide her laughing face when Chang Teh-sheng told her that Peking rumoured a union between the House-of-Chang and her Honour the She-Devil.

Mei-hua laughed again. "There are many steps to a ladder, Master;" she said, and when reprimanded for the repetition of the word pouted her red lips, shook her head and whispered most defiantly: "Master!"

Whereupon Chang Teh-sheng, the spoilt, the arrogant and despotic, took still more notice of her. "Would be the hundredth step to the ladder?" he asked, looking at her from head to feet, as might a bidder in the Market-of-Women.

## A POISON GIFT

"The mat under the ladder;" she whispered; "the cup to the hand, the cushion under my Master's beautiful head!" and when, after the manner of subtly flattered man, he protested that her jewels were meagre even for a little nothing-at-all-of-a-sewing-maid, replied that she was in want of naught but rather was desirous of making him a gift were it in her power so to do.

"A gift. *You to me!*" said the most astounded man and listened to how the night just past, as she had spied upon his Honour and the—she looked him in the eyes and added "Foreign Devil" just above her breath and most defiantly—she had overheard his Honour say something about a—she spread her hands and surely man had never been so surprised as Chang Teh-sheng when she got the new word out—*kiss* which had been denied him. "Can I give your Honour that which the Foreign Devil denied you, Master? I have money in my stocking and nothing to buy with it."

Chang Teh-sheng laughed, softly, joyfully, he who ever craved something new. "Knowst naught of the poison called a kiss, Little-One?" he asked.

"Poison!"

"'Tis a foreign poison, the kiss, little unsophisticated Rose, but a poison passing sweet and most insidious and which I must give to you before you can make a gift of it to me."

"Poison!" laughed Mei-hua, feeling more secure on ground she knew a little more about. "'Tis always poison with the Foreign Devil. I try to poison one. She refuses your Honour this kiss-poison which your Honour would poison me with so that in return I may poison your Honour." At his knee, quite at a loss, most young and sweet and unafraid, even of death, in love, she laughed up into his face, then opened her eyes wide and went white to her crimsoned lips. Very gently he drew her to

him and kissed her on the mouth then pushed her back onto her heels the better to study her as knowledge crept across her face and passion blazed in her eyes.

She touched her young breast round which China bound such a very tight, white band, then touched her mouth and laughed as leaves laugh in the budding, leaned forward and ran a slender finger-tip across his lips.

He caught her hand and held it. "Tell me;" he whispered; "what shall I give you for a bridal gift when you marry this man chosen you out of the streets? a house-coolie, perhaps, or some fat old beast from the Bazaar;" and laughed and bent to catch her words.

"The gift of one night!" she whispered, her lovely head bowed to his feet. "Master!" she added.

There was no sound in the quiet room.

Something more than a little 'Amah,' the common property of all men, knelt at his feet, something more than a waif and stray on the Highroad-of-Life snatching at anything that fell her way and that might enable her to continue the fight unto the end.

Beauty, intelligence, love and fidelity were there, not of caste high enough to lift her straightway to the first rank of Head-Wife in a noble house, but enough to make of her the Number One Concubine. A most desired post indeed, one which included a liberty verging on licence, laughter and gaiety, a niche in the world where wit reigns, wealth unlimited.

And she should be able to well fill the post. There was nothing, as far as he could see as he looked down on her, from preventing her, after due instruction from him, from ranking amongst the foremost of China's women famous for their wit and beauty.

The thought pulled him. The memory of all he had learned, seen, heard of, in the West, held him.

Truly the love of the white woman was forbidden him, for ever, but all he had learned in the years he

had passed in the cold, quiet country of the white race was not to be uprooted in a moment of sudden relaxation from the grievous smarting of the wound dealt his great pride. In a, as sudden, astounding stirring of the heart. He did not know what to do, to say. There was no sound as he tried to see a way between the East and the West, nor when Meihua lifted her beautiful head, the crimson of her mouth smeared through the rubbing of his silken raiment against it.

The storm broke as he sought for the foreign handkerchief with which to wipe the smear away.

She snatched it from him and tore it across, then sprang to her feet and back when he tried to get it from her.

"Give that to me!" he said, his voice not raised by even half a tone.

"No!" she said and when he jerked her to him by the arm, pushed the white square down the neck of her short jacket, and made no sound when he swung her round and flung her out into the court, so roughly that she fell upon her knees, cutting them and her hands and her satin clothes of softest, faintest pink.

"Go to your room!" he ordered and in the tone he might have used to some offending dog. "And stay there until I return!" and shut the door upon her as she got to her feet and stole away, blood-stained and joyous.

"Oh, Women!" he said as he sat on the stool, his back to the south wall and laughed as the hidden door opened a hair's-breadth.

### THE SECRET DOOR

"Love is a great tangle!" he said, picking up the silken vest with a golden butterfly embroidered upon the hem. "And there seems to be no peace where love is." He laughed, let the vest drop and

crossing his knees clasped his hands around them as the hidden door slid back inch by inch. "I will go and get ready so that I can drive out to the Hills where one kind of love dwells whilst another kind rubs its broken knees." He got up and stretched and, laughing, sat down again because Fate pushed him down, her hideous hand-maidens, Torture and Death, peering over Wang, The Bad's shoulder, whilst Love, in the shadows, tried to beckon him out of the room. "One cigarette before I go;" he said; "to see if Fate will make use of the smoke to point me out my path." He blew a ring to the west. It broke and spread into a thin grey veil. "The West has a veil before it;" he said; "and being superstitious because I am a heathen Chinee it would be wise to take it as a sign and let the white love go." He sighed, then, fatalism being the mainspring of his attractive—if barely civilized according to the standard of the other side of the hemisphere—complex, laughed and blew a ring towards the east as Wang, The Bad, shook a liquid of sweet-smelling and most sleep-inducing potency upon the air. The ring floated up to the lantern, the light of which shone down through its centre like some kindly, watching eye, then floated away, intact, to the east. Chang Teh-sheng smiled lazily. "And that tells me that if I leave the flesh-pots of the whites alone and live after the manner of my forefathers and upon the more meagre rice, that I shall find unending contentment and peace with Little-Love-of-the-Broken-Knees no matter"—he yawned and stretched himself, a lithe, virile, young figure in the light of the lamp—"how I upbraid her or ill-use or misuse her. A Head-Wife and sons and Little-Broken-Knees as a sweet plaything and also with sons." He dropped the cigarette on the floor and tried to put his foot on it, mistook the distance by some inches, laughed stupidly and rested his elbows on his knees. "Yet I can smell the pines, a sweet mind-perfume, even here. If I hanker after the West I shall never—never be master, never be able to break and bend and whistle the woman back



without tears and scenes and terrific upbraodings and—and"—he looked at the door through which he had flung the little 'Amah,'—"if I go now"—he closed his eyes and swayed where he sat as Wang, The Bad, crept down behind him, then opened his eyes and made a great effort to rise—"if I go—to Little-Broken-Knees I could ill-treat her and—and still whistle her—her—her back." Once more he tried to rise then smiled and closed his eyes and leaned his head back most comfortably upon the old man's shoulder.

Wang, The Bad, stood quite still, watching, one arm over his own face, the other hand holding a saturated cloth near Chang Teh-sheng's smiling mouth. Then he whispered and Li, eyes this way and that, listening, watching, fanned the air vigorously.

Very gently they lifted the slender, relaxed figure and turned it about and carried Chang Teh-sheng, feet first, into the secret passage where Li held him for a moment in his strong, relentless arms whilst his Master crept back to the door.

"An empty room!" chuckled the old man whose heart was soft towards his young Neighbour. He loved Chang Teh-sheng almost as much as his own first-born. Was bound in gratitude to him for the enlivening of many a weary hour with laughter, story-telling, music, good food and gambling. There was nothing he would not have done to show that gratitude, to repay it, even to leaving him some of his most cherished and scant possessions at his death. But the 'face' of his Ancestors stood between love and gratitude, laughter and happiness as an inaccessible mountain between one valley and another.

Recover 'face' he must if he were to lie at peace on the hill-side with his Ancestors. "'Tis my oath against his oath;" he said over his shoulder to Li, then looked about the room; "and if his is as unbreakable as mine then must I first endeavour to smash it with the thought of pain. Against that thought he will not endure. Cannot. He is strong

as steel but has suffered not a whit in all his sheltered life, therefore will suffering prove the key to the locked door behind which he keeps the secret of the white man's whereabouts." He shut the door to and went to where Chang Teh-sheng lay in his servant's arms. "I would not harm a hair of his head;" he said; "but to recover the 'face' of my Ancestors I will wring the secret from him by direst agony if need be." He touched the peaceful face. "I have naught against him for the trick he played upon me. 'Twas masterly and but his oath against mine." He sighed and, lighting the way, preceded his servant to the Circle where a stake stood in a porcelain tub of flaming orange colour.

#### AN EMPTY ROOM

Two hours after midnight, lantern held high, Little-Broken-Knees crept through the courts. Blood-stained were the knees of her night-attire, a sketchy replica of her day-time trousers and short coat, but not for anything would she have put a trace of ointment on her wounds or have wrapped a soft cloth about them.

They were more precious to her than her best pair of ear-rings, which of a truth were of little value, and one wound, she hoped, was deep enough and sore enough to leave an everlasting scar.

And what greater glory could a woman desire than to bear the scars of Love?

At the sound of a car stopping at the end of the narrow street where cars were obliged to stop, she stepped behind a Cloud-Rock to listen. She would wait and watch and when she saw her Master coming through the courts would go back to her room and on her bended, wounded knees make great joss to The-God-Securing-Good-Endings before whom scores of joss-sticks already burned for his safe return.

She waited and watched and listened. Heard the

car drive away, heard the voice of a neighbour calling. Then, heart filled to the brim with anxiety, ran swiftly to Chang Teh-sheng's bedroom. Perhaps he had returned by the Little-Gate-of-Farewell. Not that he ever did, but perhaps this once he had, for fear of his enemy. The Chinese bedroom was empty. The foreign bedroom as well. She crept wistfully about trying to find out what robe he had worn on going out. There was no indication of what he had worn. There were two empty hangers but then the tailor had made his weekly visit that very day and departed with two robes over his arm. Perhaps he had brought them or one back. That was it. Of course. And her Master had gone out in it. She stroked the exquisite satins and silks; opened the multitudinous drawers and touched the fine linen, the hundreds of silk shirts, the countless silk socks; opened a cupboard and pushed the scores of slender, satin slippers a little closer; went to the dressing-room and rearranged the ivory clutter on the dressing-table there a little more to her liking; examined the scent bottles; then went to the divan and pulled the pillows and sheets about a bit, listening, straining her ears to listen.

"I shall know no peace until he returns;" she whispered and stretched out wide her arms. "If he is gone to the Hills for a week of days and Wan Yen not near to bring me news, then I think I shall die of anxiety in this City of dark corners and whispering."

Something moved in the outer court. It was he, walking softly so that no one should hear and come to pester him with offers to help him in his night toilet. Help he loathed and would have none of in the absence of his own man. Two cats frolicked in the court. That was all. Had she been able to lay hands upon the beasts she would most gladly have tied a stone to their necks and flung them into the lotus-pond to drown.

A part of the shadows she ran to The-Room-of-Foreign-Devils.

No one there, only a faint, sickly perfume, a little fainter than when she had come before to fetch the red-lacquer tray and of which perfume she could not remember having seen the bottle on the dressing-table. "Master!" she called softly, hoping against hope to hear him answer, to see him come in from the east door which led to the front gate.

No sound, no sign of anyone about. She held the lantern high and peered into the corners.

"I know not why but I feel him quite near;" she said and walked to the stool and put out her hand as though about to touch him. "Master!" she said shyly; "won't you come back to me?" and knelt and bowed her lovely head on the stool. "Your kiss is on my mouth and your wounds upon my knees and I love you so;" and when there was no sound, got up and walked to the south wall and held the lantern close to it. "A mis-omened room;" she said, and shivered. "A room of cries, poison and distorted visions." She walked to the west door, disconsolate. "An empty room which is not empty!" she whispered and slipped away in the shadows to her plank-bed where she lay awake until the dawn, listening, her hand pressed to the mouth Chang Teh-sheng had kissed.

## CHAPTER VII

### THREE WOMEN

“ HALT! ”

“ It took more than a bayonet at her breast and the sudden jump of a young man in tattered uniform from behind a rock to startle The-Light-of-Dawn. The only thing about her to lose its balance were her feet and that because they were minute enough to rest comfortably in the palm of a man's hand. Broken and bound, in shoes so small, they gave her the air of a haughty gazelle standing on its hindlegs.

Her feet lost their balance and the fact that she had been caught abroad in trousers annoyed her. Intensely. Out of doors high-caste women wore robes of soft satin, cut to exact pattern, the hem of the trousers just showing as a proof that they'd got them on. 'Amahs,' coolie-women and other such truck wore trousers without covering. It denoted their inferior class. She had been caught out in them because, the fastener of her robe tangling in her hair, she had ripped the robe off, stamped on it, boxed her 'Amah's' ears right and left and right again and stalked out of the house, trusting that at so late an hour in the Hills no one would see her in trousers and short underjacket.

She looked at the bayonet and pushed it on one side. “ What does this person want? Ask him! ” she most imperiously ordered the long-suffering maid. “ An armed guard round The-Temple-of-Perpetual-Fragrance! ” she exclaimed upon the desired information and speaking as haughtily as she looked. “ Ask why! ”

The 'Amah' asked and, rather enjoying herself, gave the reply verbatim. “ The young man's words are: 'Tell the wench to mind her own business!' ” she said in the Chinese equivalent of

such phrasing whilst the guard, mistaking, on account of her attire, the high-born damsel for a trousered chit of no class, shut an eyelid behind his battered cap at the *bona-fide* 'Amah.'

That served to stagger The-Light-of-Dawn. She drew herself up so straight that she almost fell backward, and ordered her maid to tell the young man that he would be reported to highest quarters for his insolence. He went one better by suggesting she should start straight away reporting to the honourable Chang Teh-sheng by whose orders he had been stationed on the path and, as a faint pink stained the damsel's cheek, winked the other eye behind his hand at the genuine 'Amah.'

"Say that his Honour shall be acquainted immediately of this person's impertinence;" said The-Light-of-Dawn and turning haughtily away did as best she could in the way of a dignified gait with her deer-feet and trousers.

Hard upon her heels she made the fold of the hill *en route* to where The-Temple-of-the-Celestial-Horizon lay in a fragrant pine-belt, then, with an impatient movement of her hands, which once more imperilled the stability of her feet, stopped dead.

Down the path on donkey-back, the setting sun paving her path with red-gold, came Little-Broken-Knees. A glad sight, except for her anxious eyes, and like a young, blossoming, green rod in a suit of palest green brocade; ear-rings of pale pink soapstone swinging; mouth just pink enough to match the pink rose behind her ear; slender feet in pale-green slippers embroidered with an occasional rosebud and the female of the butterfly she had worked on the hem of her Master's underwear; the donkey a pale-grey, furry, cushiony accompaniment upon which she had ridden up the steep hill for news of Chang Teh-sheng.

Five nights out of the six, before the moon was due at her full, had passed and no news, no sign of him.

"The She-Devil, by the Gods!" she said, pulled her mount to one side, threw a leg over the wagging

ears and slipped to the ground, not only because it was her duty as an insignificant 'Amah' to make room for her betters, but also to study her rival at close range.

"Behold the meeting of the Head-Wife and the Concubine!" she said to the donkey, her satin cheek against its furry neck, then bowed.

The-Light-of-Dawn eyed her up and down whilst jealousy, at the thought of so much beauty near the Temple belonging to the man she loved and desired to wed, viciously tweaked her heart. "Ask this 'Amah' if she works at The-Temple-of-Perpetual-Fragrance;" she ordered her much-enduring maid and quite forgetting her own uncovered trousers.

"My Mistress wishes to know if you work at yon Temple!" repeated the elder woman in dour, thinly-padded, black clothes, national merriment almost extinguished in the black eyes, cheeks and heart still tingling from the young slave-driver's rough hand and tongue. "The-Temple-of-Perpetual-Fragrance!" she added and behind her Mistress's intolerant back closed a sparsely lashed lid at the young beauty near the donkey.

Emboldened by her own specific knowledge of the power she had over Chang Teh-sheng; a hold she had patiently worked to get since she had entered his service two years before; a love-garland of roses threaded on a steel chain of great and glad service; it was on the tip of Mei-hua's tongue to ask the 'Amah' to ask her Mistress to mind her own business. Her nation's diplomacy, craftiness or *finesse*, or whatever is the correct name for that one quality, if such is the right word, which makes the Chinese the most charming individual to meet, the most slippery to hold, the most difficult to understand, stopped her.

There would be time enough in which to thwart The-Light-of-Dawn and bow her proud head to the dust. In the eyes of the world the haughty girl, as Head-Wife, would stand a ladder's length above even the First Concubine. Mei-hua was content

to cede her the world's opinion. She was more than welcome to it as long as where the Master's love was concerned she perched unsteadily upon the last rung of the ladder.

Time enough indeed in which to harry her at every turn from behind the high walls of the little house she had had her long, black eye on since the moment Chang Teh-sheng had kissed her crimson mouth. A place of few courts, one lotus pool, one bamboo-grove just big enough in which to play Hide-and-Seek, and rooms sufficient with which to ring changes to satisfy even Chang Teh-sheng's easily satiated mind.

That very morning, to while away the weary hours, she had visited the little, unused house belonging to her Master. Three bedrooms she would have. Her own 'k'ong' upon which to keep her perfect shape perfect. One foreign room because she thought love amongst an infinitude of cushions must be surpassing sweet. Her Master-Lover's own room which she would not enter unless bidden, and not even then, sometimes, instinct telling her that it were better to be the free bird requiring to be enticed by cajolery into the cage than the humble sparrow pecking at crumbs from the wrong side of the threshold. One little dining-room, all red, there was, with two lilac-trees outside. A room for books, some of which, having forced her grey matter to the dire task of mastering many Chinese Characters, she would be able to read as a further surprise for the man she loved. A most satisfying kitchen which she would personally superintend, knowing that the roots of generosity, good-temper and placid progeny sprout from a man's full stomach whilst those of sharp-tongue, tight-purse and ill-grained brats from nerve-centres sharpened by under-feeding.

And all that behind high, grey walls over which, by means of well-seasoned grey matter and rice-bowl, smiles and sweetmeats, tinted finger-tips, lips and wine, in fact by titillation of the palate combined with mental and corporeal decoys she would



entice Chang Teh-sheng to the Head-Wife's everlasting undoing.

Once inside those walls she would be able to hold him, she knew it, whilst The-Light-of-Dawn would vent her wrath upon her servants, subject her lord to scenes of violent jealousy and lose her looks in overmuch child-bearing.

The subject of children, the cause of some heart-break to the women of China, Mei-hua had satisfactorily threshed out in her masterly mind. Of course her sons—and daughters if the Gods should be sour enough to inflict her with one or more—would be legitimate, but, and there was no use in trying to get away from it, the children of the Head-Wife would be endowed with just a tinge more legitimacy than the children of the Concubine.

Perhaps approval, the world's, should be substituted for legitimacy since birth boasting of no half-caste stratum one was, must be, either purely legitimate or a sheer bastard. Against the extra slice of worldly approval conceded the Head-Wife's offspring she had weighed the love which would be her children's heritage, and finding the balance strong in her favour had flicked her slender, capable fingers. Children would serve as an extra link in her rose-garland threaded on a steel chain. Two sons were all she asked for. Little creamy, black-eyed, laughing, merry wights. To the other, The-Light-of-Dawn, she wished a pack of snarly devil-brats, peevish from over-much stuffing and intolerable from being spoiled.

No, except for the agonizing absence of her Master, there was nothing to worry Mei-hua this evening. The first star shone like a diamond clasp on Night's robe whilst Day, pulling her flaming gown of purple, red, orange, indigo and green after her over the west, fled in the wake of her lover, the Sun, charging her dark sister to wrap Peking close in a purple mantle lined with the silver of the Moon.

All the same she would have one sly dig at the haughty Miss. Just to go on with. To get her hand in as it were. To give the inconsiderate, ill-

tempered damsel a foretaste of what was coming to her. So: "I do not see;" she said gently, "that the occupation of one 'Amah' concerns another 'Amah'!"

"But 'tis not I who ask;" said the elder woman most completely befogged. "'Tis her Honour, my Mistress!"

Mei-hua opened wide her eyes filled with mock surprise and swung her hands high in mock salutation. "Pardon! pardon!" she cried. "The trousers—the trousers—I mistook her Honour walking abroad in *trousers* for a low-caste girl like myself, whose shadow, even, is not worthy to fall upon her Honour's peerless path!" and before the torrent of The-Light-of-Dawn's wrath had time to break down the dam of restraint, pulled a parcel from the donkey's back, opened it, whipped out a distressing pair of mens' underpants and waved them in the evening breeze. "Acquaint her Honour that I mend for the priests at the front gate during intervals of waiting in an Eating-House at Wo-fo-su;" she lied serenely, wise to the other's jealousy of her and aware of the harm that might come about should it leak out that she served Chang Teh-sheng. "A fine patch in the seat;" she continued, showing the square she had cunningly inserted in the distressing cotton section of a house-coolie's most intimate underwear, with intent to make use of the work as a kind of sartorial passport to the Temple.

With a gesture of exceeding disgust The-Light-of-Dawn turned a glacial shoulder upon such indecency and stumped off whilst, alas that it should be chronicled, Mei-hua, before she mounted and rode away, made a force of derision in her wake just as the sun set and the twilight fell suddenly.

The tattered young guard jumped out on her and she, all prepared and having rehearsed the scene in her long mirror, threw up her hands in mock terror. "My new coat! My new coat!" she whimpered, the bayonet within an inch of her breast, and looked so devastatingly sweet and spun such a yarn anent

the priest's patched pants that the young fellow was most completely hoodwinked.

"I may not let you through!"

"Not let *me* through—*me* through!" cried Mei-hua. "Why not *me* through!" and when she heard about the guard was most perplexed and also distressed owing to the loss of eight cents, big money, due to her for the patching. "But 'tis scoundrels from the City you must keep away;" she continued; "surely not peaceful folk from the plains."

The guard flashed a glance at her green-satin suit. "You got those clothes in the Hills!" he said derisively; "when there's not a decent Eating-House or Sing-Song House nearer than Wo-fo-ssu."

"I got them in Wo-fo-ssu;" lied Mei-hua serenely; "where I work in the embroidery shop nigh The-Temple-of-the-Reclining-Buddha. Poor pay but good 'chow' which I take home to my mother."

When asked where mother had her domicile, she pointed vaguely to a patch of huddled cabins on the way to the erstwhile Royal Hunting Park, and watched the youth's eyes in which lurked that certain hunger she had noticed in the eyes of nine out of ten men who looked her way and which, she knew, an' she went warily, she could turn to good account.

She started by turning her donkey round until it faced the return journey and having pulled it a foot or so nearer the young man, bent to arrange her shoe so that the perfume of her hair might increase that certain hunger in his eyes. And when he emotionally, if somewhat bucolically, chucked her under the chin, looked at him from under half-closed lids instead of boxing his ears as she thirsted to do for his defilement of even so little that belonged to Chang Teh-sheng.

"Good night!" she said, kicking her steed's flanks and exulted inwardly when the youth jerked the bridle so that the donkey's dainty hoofs churned up the good earth.

"Where are you going?" he asked, her knee brushing his chest in which his heart thudded because of the hunger in his eyes.

"Home to my mother!" replied Mei-hua icily. "She will have to do without the extra eight cents which is a big sum to the poor and the priest without his pants which are a bare necessity in the bleak Spring days;" and banged the furry sides with iron heel.

"My way leads past your house when I am off duty in two hours' time;" said the youth, wits too opaque for him to see the sex-fly the girl dangled as a bait by which to gain admittance to the Temple. "I will call to inquire if you returned safely through the evil-spirits which infest the Hills at dusk!"

"Then I shall go back to Wo-fo-ssu;" said the chit on donkey-back and added, aware of the chronic lack of funds in coolie pocket; "I have no inclination to meet one who so discourteously refuses to allow a working girl to collect her hard-earned money."

The guard scratched his dishevelled pate. He was desirous of meeting the young beauty again. It was time he were wed, and a poor peasant girl, however well clad and beautiful, was quite within his humble matrimonial orbit. Besides, there couldn't possibly come any harm in letting her through, she being a bit of a thing with nothing more dangerous about her in the shape of a weapon than the pair of patched pants. "If I allow you to pass, will you allow me to escort you home?" he said.

Mei-hua, heart hopping like a row of little hills, looked coldly down. "I think I would rather do without the money than risk such discourtesy again;" she said and to show the stripling the beauty of her face at that angle, looked up at the sky from where stars winked at her.

The stripling laughed, took the bridle and turned the donkey round. "You'll do as you're told;" he said; "and that's to collect money from priest and

then make tracks home by this path, the only one you can come back by as t'other's well guarded by a fellow with two wives."

Mei-hua was nothing if not a finished artist. "If I linger and you should get to my home before me, ask my mother to add a touch of cinnamon to the bowl of tea—it is a delicious enhancement at a small cost;" she said, and when the enraptured youth put his hand tentatively upon the Knee-of-the-Honourable-Scars, smiled down upon him as the donkey moved, instead of smiting him across the eyes as she hungered to.

And as the donkey's little hoofs click-clacked up the steep incline towards the back entrance, Rosalie, catching the sound, called Wan Yen. "There is someone coming up the road at the back;" she said. "Perhaps a message from the Legation or Tientsin. Please see in case the deaf old cook turns him away by mistake."

She sat on the parapet, as Chang Teh-sheng knew she would be sitting, looking across at Peking. The lights of some big building there looked for all the world like a great liner, lit from bow to stern, crossing a tropic sea. A light, the night wind flicking the leaves of trees this way and that across it, morsed from the Summer Palace. Lights of cars on their way to Peking shone like immense fire-flies far below. Coolies sang softly as they made their way home after a day's grilling work for next to no pay. She sighed, the stars, the song, the suspense weighing upon her heart.

With great difficulty, amounting almost to a free fight with the guard, a wire from Hatchway announcing his safe arrival at Tientsin and the satisfactory booking of berths in the next mail-boat due for home, had been brought her. After that, nothing. No further news from him, no sign or message from Chang Teh-sheng. The absence of news from the Chinese rankled. No one had come near her except the soft-footed servant who, she knew, longed to be done with her and back with the Master he loved.

She railed at herself. She had made herself cheap to Chang Teh-sheng. The indescribable charm of Peking had upset her balance. Times without number she clasped her hands in vexation at the thought of how she had allowed him, and without remonstrance, to talk to her of love, mockingly, laughingly, but with a look in the eyes belying the raillery.

She tried not to listen to the echo of the tale of "The-Cicalo-Tree-and-the-White-Bird." She plunged into abasement as deeply as she had light-heartedly thought of flinging her headgear over an emotional windmill so as to make the retrieving of the cap an excuse to see what lay round at the back. She longed for news yet hoped the summons from Tientsin would be delayed. Once she had left China *life* would be for ever represented by the well-ordered rows of deck-chairs filled with well-ordered passengers of her own race in the process of going "Home." And in getting there, doing the same thing at the same time in the same way, from the regulation deck-exercise before breakfast to the inevitable Bridge Tournament in the middle of the Indian Ocean.

The moment she walked out of The-Temple-of-Perpetual-Fragrance the Jewel-of-Romance would slip from off her finger.

She knew it.

The next night would be the night of the Full Moon. She wanted to be gone before the Chinese arrived to keep his appointment. If he arrived. If he troubled to keep it. She wanted to wait, to find out, should he not come, why he had failed to keep his promise.

Which serves to show that what dominated her as she sat on the parapet was a mixture, equally proportioned, of suppression and pique, or wounded vanity or whatever is the correct name for that which has caused more damage in the world than cyclone, earthquake and those nameless terrors known, blasphemously, as Acts-of-God.

She clapped her hands and when Wan Yen came

sliding across the court inquired what the donkey had brought to the back entrance.

"The young relative of guard, Missie, has brought him one pair of patched underwear;" replied Wan Yen, lying for the simple reason that he wanted her to have no more to do with his Master, and to back his lie flaunted the distressing garment of good service.

"Oh, take them away!" said Rosalie abruptly and got down off the parapet. "I will have dinner as soon as it is ready!" and looked across to the Abbot's House, at the little, old bell which had hung there for centuries, and back again to the wonder of China's plains under the rising moon.

Wan Yen watched her for a moment then slid away through the Moon-Gate to where Mei-hua waited, fear in her eyes and gallant little heart.

"The Gods curse the Foreign Devil!" she said as he came to her, swiftly, as fear-stricken as she. He had run out at the sound of hoofs upon the road up, overjoyed, certain of news of his Master. And now this. She, terror in her eyes, voice and clasped hands, beseeching him for news.

"Aye, may they smite her dead for taking me from him!" he said, shut the deaf old cook out when he had deposited a bowl of tea for the visitor and continued his cross-examination. "The Master left the house saying that he might be away a night, two, perhaps six?" Mei-hua nodded. "By which door did he leave the house?" Mei-hua did not know, the Master having ordered her to bed. "He said that he was coming out here to stand and gaze up at the Temple where the white woman dwelt and that, mayhap, he might take a room in the Lower Temple so as the more easily to gaze upwards at the rising and setting of the sun." He had not been near the Temple, did Mei-hua know that? She didn't, and rapped round on the man for the imbecility of his question. How could she know seeing that the Master had not returned to tell her where he had been? "He bade you find him, to comb Peking for him if he had not returned to the

house by the night of the full moon. As though it were quite likely he might not be returned by then." Mei-hua nodded. "Then why do you fear, child? There is still a night and a day. He has stayed away a week before this to gamble with his friends in the House-of-Chu. Why do you fear?" and when Mei-hua asked him why he, too, feared, could find no satisfactory answer, a mixture of love and instinct being too nebulous a thing to which to tie a label. Indeed, he insisted that, as the Master had an appointment with the foreign woman at the full moon, he, personally, had no fear.

"With the foreign woman!" cried Mei-hua, drowned in a flood of passionate resentment. "Does he then really love her?"

Wan Yen looked over his shoulder, to the east, in which direction lay the room where Rosalie slept. "Love! love! love!" he said. "'Tis like the clacking of laying hens the day long. The white woman mooning on the parapet, you bleating like a lost goat, that She-Devil, The-Light-of-Dawn, tramping the Hills on the off-chance of meeting the Master for whom she is like to die of love."

"Die!" scoffed Mei-hua. "She of peacock-  
vanity, hen-brain and inclined to fat, die!" and ran her hands with satisfaction down her own rib-ridges.

"Aye, but she is to be Head-Wife!"

"Even so man sits by the hearth for comfort and warmth, not in the grand porch to his house!" was the wise reply. "Does the Master love the foreign woman, think you? Can tell me that out of the torrent of words in which sense seems like to drown?"

Wan Yen went warily. He felt the power in the young thing beside him. Sensed in her that inexplicable quality which, from the beginning of history, scriptural and lay, has helped to raise women of humble birth, but not necessarily of great good looks or manners, to the rank of Empress, King's Mistress, or hidden power behind the throne, even if that elevation ultimately lands them into the



Divorce Court, the gutter or amongst the dogs of the street. He liked the little 'Amah' for her own sake, but if she were destined to a high niche in the Capital of China, of China itself, he intended being well established within the shadow of her right hand, from which much would fall or might, with tact, be extracted.

The foreigner to the Master, he surmised, was like his new racing car, something for the neighbours to talk about, but when it came to love, real love, he would turn to a woman of his own land, just as, if he had to negotiate one of China's excruciating roads he would discard the racer and take a Peking-Cart. A vehicle guaranteed to withstand jolts, crashes, smashes and bog-engulfings without loosening a spoke of its iron-clamped wheels or a nail from any part of its stout heart. Which simile if somewhat lacking in poetry was just what Mei-hua hankered to hear.

They discussed the puzzling situation for a while longer, Mei-hua listening, nodding her lovely, wise head, suggesting. The man counselled beginning the combing of Peking at an early hour the next day, with the swiftest car, then, should the Master not have been found, to wait until the rim of the moon showed above the City Wall then to go to the House-of-Chu in the Street-of-the-Seven-Robbers. There his Master gambled sometimes for three days on end with an occasional visit to the new Bath-House near the Observatory. "You are sure that the coolie in the House-of-Wang can be trusted to tell you the truth?" he ended.

Mei-hua was quite sure. She supplied him with opium, which commodity, at the moment's ruinous price, was far beyond his scantily-lined purse. "His Honour Wang has made no alteration in his way of living. He smokes, eats and gambles with his friends;" she said. "Li waits upon him. There is nothing to show that they have caught the Master whilst he walked abroad and are holding him prisoner. Neither is there sign anywhere of the Master in the old man's house." And when asked

her opinion of Chang Teh-sheng's prolonged absence, brought the man she loved to the point of death by indulging in her nation's fatal pastime of 'Saving-the-Face.'

Had she said but one word about the black square she had seen or dreamed of seeing in the south wall, who knows how this love-story might have ended.

But she didn't. Uncertain of the opening in the wall she kept her secret to save her 'face,' and a little later, by a devious way, was escorted by Wan Yen, past the unsuspecting guard, down to the foot of the Hill where Chang Teh-sheng's Rolls-Royce waited for her.

"The Gates will be closed;" said Wan Yen; "how will you get back to the City?"

Little-Broken-Knees smiled. "I took the best car and a well-filled purse so that the Guard at the Gate should mistake me for a great lady;" she said tranquilly; "which it did;" and continued whilst Wan Yen, smiling in admiration of her methods, tucked a sable rug over the scarred knees. "A small gazelle will lure a hungry lion into the trap, Brother!" and left him more than ever certain that the place for himself to be was within the shadow of her small right hand.

The light shining down on her, the sable over her knees, thoughts busy about the next day, heart filled with anxiety, she sped over the long, grey roads, their dust a silver carpet in the moonlight; past huddled villages and clumps of houses, their filth and poverty picturesque in the moonshine; under arches and gates; stopped by an occasional camel-train; a Peking-Cart jolting steadily down the middle of the road; guests from a wedding-feast singing and laughing as the moon like a ship in full sail moved serenely across the sky. She turned her head away as they passed the Eunuchs' Cemetery, that grim place of countless tombs where the half-men of the once great Court within The Forbidden City lie buried with their secrets and unfulfilled longings, ambitions and dreams. The

Guard at the Gate shouted. Mei-hua, wrapped about with furs, sat with her hands crossed, fine eyebrows very high indeed, red mouth like a red, red button of patience, whilst the Guard surrounded the car, questioned the driver and peered in at this woman who so calmly requested that the rules of the City Gates should be put aside for her.

No haughty ways about Little-Broken-Knees. She listened, without making a single movement, to the whispered conversation between the men. The driver was making her out no better than she should be, in fact one of the leading lights of Sing-Song Street. She caught the covert glances of the Guard, the way the men nudged each other and pressed closer to get a better look at the notoriety.

"It is easier for one dishonest woman clad in furs to gain admittance to the Temple, than ten honest females in rags to enter a good man's house;" she quoted and cast her eyes down and pursed her mouth and looked so distractingly delectable that she came nigh to wrecking her own plans by her own charm.

"She breaks rules!" said the susceptible Sergeant-Major, or what stands for such in China. "I have a mind to keep her in the Guard-Room for the night."

The Guard laughed.

The Chauffeur pretended to.

"Best let her go;" he counselled; "she's friend of Ministers and great men and open i' the purse-strings to lesser folk."

The Guard laughed. The Chauffeur came to the window and whispered: 'Kumshaw.' Then, as intuitive as the rest of his brethren, sensing the high position which might be awaiting the girl, bowed, thinking it would be a mighty good thing to be stationed within the shadow of her right hand from which, with tact, much might be ultimately extracted for his own particular benefit.

Mei-hua handed him her purse filled with the round silver coin of her savings. Told him that although there was no stint there was pressing need

of speed. Bowed sweetly to the Guard as it bowed to a man and again as the car moved.

She glanced back as the Gate shut with a crash and up at the City Wall. "He is somewhere inside the City;" she said and scanned the huddled houses and Temples, rich mens' red gates, barred shops and go-downs, and official buildings with sentries at the gates. She tapped on the window for still greater speed. She could not stand it much longer. She must get back. He would be there. Of course. And she had wasted the precious hours seeking him outside the Walls. Round to the Little-Gate under the creeper the car sped. "Wait for me!" she whispered. "I will come back!" and ran like a deer through the courts and past open doors where servants talked and laughed. She heard them. She knew their laughter a sign that their Master had not returned. She knew. Refused to believe it. They didn't know he had returned. That was all. That was why they laughed. The bedrooms were empty. The whole court was empty and the next and the next. A coolie jogged past with water-buckets swinging from his shoulders. "Master?" he said. "No, Master not home!" and sloped off into the shadows.

Mei-hua ran back to the Little-Gate.

She would want the car to-morrow morning early. The Chauffeur would know the houses the Master frequented, where he visited, gambled.

The Chauffeur, suddenly jealous of the 'Amah' through his own love for the Master, replied laconically that he knew. "What d'you want to be combing Peking for the Master for?" he asked, none too gently.

"Because the Master told me to comb the City for him if he were not back by the dawn of the full moon;" Mei-hua whispered and offered her purse full of good silver pieces. "I fear for him, the City being a place of dark corners and histories."

The Chauffeur pushed the purse aside. "Think I want buying to help the Master, child?" he said. "I love him! We'll find him, Little-One. He's

a long time gone but we'll find him;" and added, being a believer in seizing opportunities. "And when the Master wants a good driver for his lady, will recommend me to the post as a token of gratitude if I find him?"

Mei-hua, grateful for the help and the sympathy, nodded. "That will I!" she said softly and as softly closed the door.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE COMBING

By the end of the day Peking winked.

The Chinese part of it, *bien entendu*.

A beautiful girl, posing as an 'Amah,' in a beautiful car, had vainly searched the City the day long for Chang Teh-sheng, the handsome, well-born and wealthy beyond all avaricious dreams. And after deducing its conclusions from the gossip of those who had had the luck to encounter the pseudo-'Amah' on the trail, Peking added tongue in cheek to lowered eyelid.

Long before the end of the day the gossip percolated to the Legation Quarter, that well-regulated grey patch in the centre of Peking's ragged, picturesque coat of many colours. The feminine quota turned a disdainful ear at tiffin. It had no interest in the dense masses on the farther side of the Glacis, that belt of pawky grass which, with a prescribed part of the City Wall and sections of certain Legation boundaries, divides the foreign sheep from the native goat in China's Capital.

"None at all!" echoed matrons of fine houses just outside the Legation Quarter but just inside the pale notwithstanding.

"None at all!" echoed all but the hard-worked Missionary Missies spread throughout the City.

The car had drawn attention to Mei-hua this day preceding the rising of the Full Moon. Had she started out in search of Chang Teh-sheng in a rickshaw of sorts no notice would have been taken of her in the Legation Quarter whilst contumely would most certainly have been her portion amongst her own race so prone to gibe, so easily roused to uncharitable mirth, so reluctant to succour.

Fully aware that the only way of obtaining any-

thing from information to food from her country people was by duly impressing them, counselled to it by the Chauffeur who had been drawn into the net of fear for the Master, she had set out in the Rolls Royce plus the sable rug and fresh flowers in the silver vase. Had you met her you would have sworn her born to the car's high estate instead of having its honours thrust upon her for the first time in her short life. Also you would have taken oath, on sight of her, that there existed few pictures more perfect and satisfying than that of a beautiful Chinese woman in a beautiful car.

To be the farther removed from the glances of admiration which flashed her way like a sheaf of pointed, well-barbed arrows, she sat in the middle of the car. Loving Chang Teh-sheng, she would have nothing to do with illicit admiration. Would have veiled her face and pulled down the blinds had she not dreaded to let even one car pass her without due scrutiny of its passenger.

The little mirror under the silver vase showed what drew the unlawful arrows. A cream-white face and shadowed, long-lashed eyes, flash of perfect ivory through half-open, curved, crimsoned mouth, hair like a satin cap and long neck set with dignity upon the sloping shoulders. The sentries, as she turned into the Legations, turned to look at her. N'nth Secretaries of Legations wished they hadn't kept her waiting quite so long and that she would not take her departure quite so soon after, and most unfortunately through an interpreter, they had told her that of course they knew of or had met the well-known Mr. Chang. Regretted they could not relieve her anxiety by saying that they had seen him within the last week. Promised to send word should they meet him or hear of him that day, and accompanied her to the door.

The sentry at the American Legation thought her sure the goods even for a Chink, the Interpreter at the Italian Legation let the secret out.

"Head-Wife, I suppose;" said the N'nth Secretary.

The Interpreter slipped his hands up his sleeves. " ' Amahs ' wear exposed trousers, Sir; " he said so that within the hour the gossip had spread of the beautiful sewing-girl who had stormed the sacred citadels for news of the wealthiest man in China.

" Sing-Song Street! " said the stout mother of a frazzled daughter who, matrimonially, had most unsuccessfully survived more than one season, and dismissed the unpleasant subject.

" N'nth Conk! " remarked a damsel as she negotiated the Ethiopic convolutions of the Charleston.

" Nerve! " snapped a contemptuous, long-eyed blonde who lived to hide a parentage quoted at fifty-fifty to the Chinese dollar.

Having drawn blank at the Legations, Mei-hua lost much time in trying to arouse a mede of interest in the telephone clerk and that having being accomplished, to make sense out of some coolie's futile babbling at the other end of the wire.

" Has the Master returned? " she asked, and more than once.

" Ah! " came the answer at long last. " Yes— "

She went white to the lips at the overpowering shock of relief. Her heart sang in just that one second of time. She opened wide her radiant eyes then closed them when the coolie finished the sentence after the distracting manner of his kind.

" —he has not returned; " said he.

The Chauffeur counselled the Bath House which, for discretion's sake, this book will place near the Observatory, just as discretion had given the name of Bath-House to the luxurious Chinese Club behind high, grey walls. Baths there were to it. Porcelain tubs in which to reduce superfluous adipose or remove as many traces as possible of those distressing symptoms so wont to manifest themselves in the matutinal aftermath following hard upon the preceding nocturne. Luxurious cubicles, indeed, where friend could talk prices with friend through the linen curtains embroidered in brilliant wool, or,



pushing the curtains back, gossip through the veil of steam. Cloud-Rocks screened entrance to rooms where 'tiles' slipped through fingers onto polished table with the clatter of small stones being shaken through a sieve. Near to Sing-Sing Door, as it is called, that little unassuming square of wood with an eye-hole in the centre—and if wotting of Peking you wot not of that wooden barrier it will show that you know nothing whatever of the City outside the charades, teas, receptions, dances, dinners, bridge-parties and bazaars of the L. Q. and those houses just outside the enclosure—were nooks where nothing was permitted to disturb the sleeper except the inevitable waking from poppy-dreams. Silk curtains closed apartments in which slim, satiny, bejewelled damsels of Sing-Song Street kept appointments, and circum-spectly, so as not to draw the attention of the neighbourhood, sparsely populated with foreigners, upon the lucrative holding.

Mei-hua sat with crossed hands whilst the obese door-keeper went in a hurry for the Proprietor. A slim, watchful, all-knowing-and-seeing individual, he, of velvet foot and voice and iron hand.

He bowed before all the car stood for.

"His Honour Chang Teh-sheng?" he said to the Chauffeur. "No, his Honour has not put foot across the threshold this seven days. His friends weary for him or—his money;" and listened without any change of countenance whilst the Chauffeur, lowering his voice, gave him some slight information as to the girl inside the car.

"In the running for First Concubine," said the Proprietor showing no surprise and clapped his hands and ordered tea and sweetmeats to be brought upon the instant. "Looks more like the favourite of a Number One Sing-Song House with her beauty and poise than one of a lot of women wearying in wedlock;" he said, and bowing, opened the door and begged her Excellency to descend if she would condescend to honour the House, at that early hour empty of clients, by drinking tea in it.

Mei-hua condescended. She had heard of the

man. Knew him a power in the undercurrents and caught the lightning look of surprise in the narrow, slanting eyes when the sable rug was removed from her trousered limbs.

"I am his Honour's 'Amah;'" she said simply, standing fair and square in the sunlight and bowed, content with her sure power over men, when the man bowed with not a particle of difference in his deferential demeanour. "There is a plot against his Honour's life;" she continued, her hand on the Chauffeur's arm; "and I and my friend here are out to save him." She smiled and looked the man in the eyes with the suspicion of an elevation of the slender eyebrows. "Nor will his Honour, when the day comes, forget those who may have helped me to save him."

The Proprietor, who didn't believe a word of the plot, begged her to examine every nook and corner in the place. To thoroughly satisfy herself so as to be able to give a good account to his Honour, later. He carried the ivory tray, she sipped the tea as she walked through the courts, the rooms and the grounds. "His Honour's bathroom;" she said, and looked in at the white tiles, the blue porcelain tub and little tables; "his dressing-room;" and arranged the dressing-table more to her liking, also the robes of silk and linen in the cupboard; "where he loses or wins much money at Mah-jong and where he entertains his friends with song and music from Sing-Song Street."

Sing-Song girls!

There was no slightest shade of jealousy in the long eyes.

Her Master maintained that a Sing-Song girl in the life of a man was like a tassel to a cushion. Helping to ornament it but of no earthly use by itself. Not only that. Although she had never been anything but an 'Amah' of humblest stock from the beginning, she was possessed of all a Sing-Song girl's attractions. And besides the attractions, which she had mostly acquired, knew herself endowed with just that single quality necessary to lift one Sing-

Song girl, Geisha, *demi-mondaine*, chorus-beauty, cinema-aspirant, mannequin or Society woman right out of the ruck, though just exactly what that one essential is, historian, poet, writer, prince, king, cardinal, philanthropist, doctor, priest, stockbroker and cinema-producer have not yet been able to tell the world.

She stopped near Sing-Song Door and sniffed the air, a great hope flaring in her eyes, her heart nigh to breaking with added anxiety. "Opium!" she said. "Take me to the dreamer."

The Proprietor shook his head as he led the way to a secluded room. Many of his clients did, but the Honourable Chang Teh-sheng did not, had never indulged in the slightest whiff of a pipe.

#### POPPY DREAMS

Mei-hua looked down on the two opium smokers.

The rose-wood opium couch, inlaid with mother-o'-pearl, stood under a small canopy which prevented the smoke from rising to the ceiling. A heavily carved, sparsely upholstered bit of furniture, made after the regulation pattern of all opium couches, with the seat, deep enough to allow the smoker to lie with his knees drawn up, divided down the middle by a small, low, broad partition on which the essentials to opium smoking, silver lamp, silver pin, silver tray, lay. The air was sickly with the sharp-sweet fumes, the room dim, though neither sun nor the Last Trump would have wakened either sleeper until the final shade of the dream which caused him to smile in his sleep whilst leading him slowly, step by step, to the gutter, had dissolved.

They lay on their sides, knees drawn up, hands relaxed, a little grey about the mouth as though Death not Sleep claimed them. Their breath came with a faint hissing sound. Their eyes, not quite closed, were turned up and back so that only slits

of what looked like discoloured ivory showed. Pipes of rosewood and silver ornamented with jade and with jade mouthpieces lay at their side.

"The Honourable Pu;" said Mei-hua, as she bent to look at the youngest. "'Tis a pity."

"Aye;" said the Proprietor. "Led astray by the Honourable Su who is after the youngster's money. The old one is a seasoned old rascal and the youngster just dough in his greedy hands."

"I am quite satisfied;" said Mei-hua gently and touched the youngster's cheek so sad was she over the poppy victim. "Should the honourable Master ever show inclination towards the poison;" she said as she got into the car; "honourably condescend, out of the goodness of your heart, to acquaint me of the danger, for though I am a mere 'Amah' I wot of a few things besides stitching."

### THE SEARCH

The Proprietor bowed as he tucked the sable rug round the low-caste trousers. "Should the Honourable Chang Teh-sheng, whom I love to serve, come by a son of his own loins, then, Madam, will he give up gambling and entertaining his friends with maidens from Sing Song Street;" he said and looked deep into the beautiful eyes which smiled upon him in very friendly wise.

As the car moved he counselled the well-known restaurant near the Four Pi'l'au and the other, famous for its fish, in Morrison Street. "The Honourable Ping gives a luncheon to two female Foreign Devils this day, perhaps will the Honourable Chang be likewise a guest;" he said and bowed as Mei-hua bowed and sped away.

The car drew the Proprietor out to her at the restaurant near the Four Pi'l'au. The Honourable Chang Teh-sheng had not crossed the threshold that fortnight but if Madam would like to have a look

through the peep-hole in the curtain of the room in which the Honourable Ping lunched two Missies she was welcome.

Mei-hua looked in at the Honourable Ping. A rotund and jolly soul made welcome in every foreign house of any importance and at functions more *intimes* than those which, under the warm title of "At Home," crush into one crowded hour, in one small space, once a month, every stratum of every possible clan, thereby wiping the social slate clean of small debts.

He was in the throes of giving a lesson in chopstick manipulation to a mother who, with back to light, looked almost as young as her daughter.

"Slugs!" she squealed and dropped the brown morsel she had mistaken for a pickle to the floor, whilst her daughter swore she could no further.

"'Tis a pity to waste good food upon those who cannot appreciate it!" remarked Mei-hua watching a coolie pick up the succulent *debris* and hide it in the front of his jacket for future use, then, declining all refreshment, drove away to the Fish Restaurant in Morrison Street.

There her heart leapt as she mounted the steps. In the shadowed first court into which the small, private dining-rooms open, a tall man in robe of Peking-Blue brocade stood choosing a fish in the fish tank. A piscatorial delicacy destined to have slices for frying removed from it whilst alive, then to be returned, and seemingly none the worse for wear and tear, to the tank, until further slices might be requisitioned from its translucent and wriggling anatomy.

"That one!" said the customer.

Sick at heart, Mei-hua turned away. There was no *joie de vivre*, none of youth's *limbre* in the customer's voice, therefore there was no need for her to look at the face to be sure that the man was not her Master.

The Proprietor came to her out of the big kitchen where cooks, stripped to the waist, worked in the gloom left over from past centuries. Huge, blazing,

red-hot furnaces they cooked on, without light other than the furnace-glow, or clock other than instinct by which they roasted, fried, baked, warmed and melted the day and night long without one mishap.

No, the Honourable Chang Teh-sheng had not crossed the threshold for nigh on three weeks. Should he honour the restaurant that day he would most certainly be told that an urgent message waited him at his lustrous dwelling. It was a cause for lamentation that her Honour had no time in which to embellish a bowl of wine or tea and rice by partaking therefrom.

And that, having studied the trousers, was one of the eyes that winked at the closing of a busy and prosperous day.

Out into the sunshine went Mei-hua to where the Chauffeur sat the fuller by a bowl of rice. "Nothing!" she said and spread her hands.

The Chauffeur counselled a quick run home. Perhaps the Master had returned in their absence. Colour flashed to the girl's cheek, hope flamed in her heart. Of course. Without a doubt he had returned. And she not there to greet him. She would go at once. She changed her mind. She had not the courage necessary to open the Little-Door from where she would hear the servants' laughter had he not returned. She would wait in the Central Park whilst the Chauffeur made inquiries, and he must be quick about it, the anxiety of love having plucked all patience from her heart.

Folk stared as she passed. The guard at the central gate of The Forbidden City turned to look. Men stopped to watch her get out at the entrance to the Park near-by. "Sing-Song!" she heard on all sides and caught the envious glances of certain little damsels, flat breasted on account of the tight, white band custom fastened round their chests, trousered because of their lack of caste, smiling, painted little Sing-Song butterflies of the hour.

## SING-SONG

Mei-hua turned to the left and chose a table under a tree with crimson blossoms the colour of her mouth and as lacking in leaves as her eyes of joy.

From the table she could see the entrance which was far enough away to prevent her from being stared at by those young men who did not work or who, seemingly, had no intention of trying to, strolling, instead, in the Central Park at that hour because the damsels from Sing-Song Street outside the Ch'ien Men also strolled, intent on getting a little fresh air before commencing their labours of amusing men.

"Doing well?" asked the kindly waiter misled by the trousers and with eye to the 'kumshaw' he would collect from both parties could he but negotiate an introduction between the new beauty and any one of his wealthy clients. He was gone upon her order before she could reply and on his return felt aggrieved at the sight of two young men in rich satin robes talking to her.

"Nothing doing?" said the taller and handsomer, in China's equivalent of such phrasing. "I don't believe you!"

Mei-hua smiled, being one of those few and rare wise virgins who never make an enemy could the disaster possibly be avoided. And be it understood that when she smiled dimples were loosened in her cheeks and her mouth opened just like a red-lacquer jewel-case. "I am bespoken;" she said in a voice which conjured up pictures of a cat with unlimited saucers of cream to fall back on were rodents scant.

"I can quite believe that!" said the smaller and plainer, then, metaphorically not quite sure of his footing, asked if he might be allowed to sit, which favour Mei-hua granted in the hope of learning something of her Master's late movements.

"My name is Yang!" said the taller and thought that it might have just as well been mud for all the interest in the trousered beauty's eyes.

"And mine Fang P'ing!" said the fatter, offering his case. "And I think you are far more beautiful than my sister the honourable Light-of-Dawn."

Mei-hua's eyes showed a ripple of some kind in their dusky serenity as she declined a cigarette.

"A girl from Sing-Song Street that doesn't smoke!" said Yang. "You ought to be labelled in a museum."

Mei-hua was of the opinion that she might take to smoking and other pernicious habits should she ever fall as low as the notorious street, thereby putting a full stop to the young man's facetiousness.

Fang P'ing stroked his receding chin and looked obliquely at the other lounging at the back of the Beauty's chair. Then they begged her pardon simultaneously, Mei-hua taking no notice of such unheard of abasement 'twixt Chinese male and Chinese female.

"I would have given you a car had you condescended to just sing and play for me for one night!" whispered Fang P'ing whose diplomacy was almost as entirely lacking as his chin.

Mei-hua regretted that her car, being a L'olls L'oyce, took up every inch of space in her garage.

The young men were perplexed.

Fang P'ing arranged his skull-cap, his friend came round from the back to get a further look at what he hoped was a Courtesan on the up-grade. She wore trousers. Therefore she was most certainly not a high-caste female out for a lark nor an established *demi-mondaine*, stratas higher than Sing-Song Street, out for fresh air before starting her work of extracting fortunes out of rich and beguiled men's pockets.

Who was she? Who knew her? Who would have the key to the enigma?

"How old are you?" asked Yang, completely enslaved.

"As old as love allows me to be!" replied Mei-hua, which befogging answer cheered the men, and when Fang P'ing begged to be allowed to help



her grow, informed him that she was already suited with a gardener.

The men looked at each other and laughed. It was a most entrancing hour. At *last* something new under the Peking sun. A beauty, a witty, raving beauty fallen out of the blue. A lamp just lit. A red one. There could be no doubt about the colour. She wouldn't be sitting all by herself in trousers unless she was a vestal of the red lamp. Not one of a dozen kept in rows by some filthy hag or raffish couple, but just her own particular illumination for her own particular friends.

Two slim chits, chaperoned by an old hag in black, also looked at each other as they slipped past, and again at the new, unknown star who had annexed two of their House's best clients.

"Who is she?" asked one

The hag scowled. She didn't know but would make inquiries. Times, owing to the War, were not good enough to allow any House to part with two of its most wealthy customers to a total stranger.

"Doubtlessly from the south;" contemptuously suggested the other and moved her hands about in the hope that Mei-hua would be duly impressed by the flashing of the rings for which she was badly in debt; "where the method is to catch the bull by the horns and throw him in the first round;" and still more contemptuously turned a glacial shoulder when Yang, strolling round to Mei-hua's back, semaphored his desire for information about the newly risen star.

"Tell us who you are!" urged Yang.

"All about yourself!" urged his friend.

Mei-hua's eyebrows took flight to the top of her low forehead, her mouth the shape of a red lacquer *bonbonnière* with the sweets shut inside.

"Then I shall ask Chang Teh-sheng when he's back from wherever he's gone to and if he doesn't know you he soon will. There's not a beautiful girl in trousers in Peking that he hasn't on a list. To

make a nocturnal gift of as a kind of final *douceur* to whoever he's been entertaining."

Fang P'ing sighed. "The Gods know I'm wealthy but compared to Chang I'm a beggar on a Temple's steps. What his bills in Sing-Song Street must be only he and the different proprietors who——"

"To give him his illustrious due;" interrupted Yang, too taken up with the sweep of Mei-hua's lashes to notice the light behind them; "he has nothing to do with the pleasant lassies. Not a *liaison*, not a hint of one however attenuated and——"

Fang P'ing laughed. "Wait until Chang's married my honourable sister;" he said. "He'll be living with the winsome wenches so as to forget the taste of my sister's sharp tongue and the bite of her devilish temper." He looked at his friend. "Wonder if the reason of his disappearance is that he's fallen to a jacket and gone off with her?"

Yang thought it quite possible. "Once he's got the poison of the West out of his system he'll be *quite* normal;" he said, and proceeded to explain to Mei-hua all that she knew by heart of the man she loved. "Haven't you heard of Chang Teh-sheng at the back of the illimitable beyond you grace with your peerless beauty?" he asked.

"Everyone has heard of China's richest man;" said Mei-hua indifferently, heart leaping at the sound of her Master's name on stranger lips, then put up her hand to stop the approaching Chauffeur, hoping he would not be too slow in the uptake.

As if any Chinese ever was or could be!

"Did you find the parcel?" she called as the Chauffeur, tumbling to the situation, stopped dead and far enough away to prevent recognition by his Master's friends.

"No, Madam!" he said most deferentially, bowed and returned to the car to wait for her when she motioned him away.

She ordered more tea, sipped it, allowed the brother of her rival to pay her bill and walked between the two men to the entrance where she trusted the

Chauffeur would have had the sense, Rolls Royce being rare in Peking, to hide the car in the jumble of cars and rickshaws parked round and about.

"Good afternoon!" she said to the men when some yards from the entrance. "When I am quite settled in the City I will beg the honour of your illustrious company to the Second Meal or to an evening of music provided by the winsome wenches of Sing-Song Street."

The young men were ravished at the thought of seeing her again, begged her to hasten the much-to-be-desired settlement, clamoured to be allowed to accompany her to the gate, called her hard-hearted when she refused.

They let her go then followed, curiosity being one of the apples the first Chinese Eve divided equally with her Mongolian partner. Arm in arm, as is the effeminate way of young men in China, they watched her walking like a young rod through the crowds, saw the car draw up to the kerb, watched her talking, though they could not hear her sigh on learning that Chang Teh-sheng had not returned.

Yang beckoned a small trousered thing with red ribbon in the plaits of her dusty hair. "Run to that big car and see what kind of pretty silver thing there is standing on the top of it in front and listen to where the beautiful lady is going;" he said and held up a nickel piece.

The young thing was off like an arrow and back at the same speed. "There is a beautiful silver dragon standing on its tail, your Honour;" she said, bright eyes on the bright piece; "and the beautiful lady is going to the honourable House-of-Chu;" grabbed the ten cents and was off.

Arm in arm the two young men walked away, silently laughing.

"Chang's car!" remarked Yang.

"Stung!" said Fang P'ing in the Chinese equivalent of such slang.

They walked on.

"Hope she'll remember her invitation to a meal!" said Yang, chuckling.

Fang P'ing stopped and laughed out loud. "By the Gods, my sister's in for a drubbing!" he said.

Deciding to stand by and watch the fun they made their way, still arm in arm, to the Bath-House, talking of the lovely female as they went. Had she taken the car for the fun of the thing in Chang Teh-sheng's absence? Had she intended to meet him? Had she, in jealousy, wanted news of him?

The Proprietor put them wise. Whispered to this one, to that.

"Hi!" Yang called when the man had taken his velvety departure, and ordered the coolie to pull the curtain back.

Through the steam the two young men looked at each other, laughing.

"An 'Amah'!" said Yang.

"In the running for First Concubine!" laughed Fang P'ing.

So that their eyes, that night, were added to the scores that winked over the story of the little 'Amah' who, drawing blank at the House-of-Chu, went, upon the honourable, fatherly Chu's advice, to every one of the houses Chang Teh-sheng visited.

So far did she go, so truly did she search, that the tip of the moon showed over the rim of the world when, suddenly enlightened by love, she ordered the Chauffeur to drive her home.

## CHAPTER IX

### MOON-RISE

AND whilst Mei-hua searched Peking for Chang, The Enduring, Rosalie sat on the parapet of The Temple-of-Perpetual-Fragrance watching the path below, the Abbot, leaning on the wall, watching with her.

For six days, from early morn to far into the night, she had waited, having succumbed, as all succumb, to the gentle, peaceful Hills under the sun and the moon.

Her impatience, fretfulness and resentment lay dormant.

At noon she watched the Goat-herd call his little flock into the shade of the pines, and the big, fat clouds slope across the sky towards Peking. Nor had she wearied of the City's dusky square on the misty-grey-green plain; nor of looking through powerful glasses at the Gates nearest the Hills; the glint of water in the Summer Palace's emerald patch; the river to the west like a silvery snake in lush grass; the Temples, Tombs, crumbling Watch Towers, hamlets and villages all girt about in Spring's new green.

To her the Goat-herd was a tattered Chinese Pan with a flock of cold-eyed, stubborn, noisy little fauns dancing at the heels of his ragged shoes. The wind his piping. Whilst the Turnip-seller calling his wares at dawn on his way to the City Gate linked her fast to the hour when she and Chang, The Enduring, had met in the 'hutung.' Women on donkey-back were nymphs fleeing from satyrs who peeped, laughing, through the mist and scanty undergrowth; leaving the marks of hoofs, which were of course, the goats', on the stone paths worn into

ruts by the passing of cattle, coolie and fugitive through the centuries; whilst the satyrs, also of course, were the itinerant pedlars who plied their trade in and out of the Hills, the mark of their treading making the paths which run this and that way over the hill-side like grey ribbon across moss-green velvet.

Paths, endowed with poetry, immense patience, content and resignation, which held her; pulling at her heart-strings; wringing a faint melody from whatever hour she looked out upon them; shining like silver when the sun rose from behind a hill as soft and rounded as a young breast and like blood when it slid, a ball of fire or a golden dish or a flaming shield, behind the Jade Temple on the far side of the river. She had watched the stars catch in the feathery tips of the bamboo-trees which pressed against the house where once had dwelt the great Abbot. Centuries back he had planted the lilies and hung the little bell on the end of the roof so that every passing breeze should waft the melody of its chiming to the Gods sitting in rows in the dim, upper story. And through the Moon-Gate, the perfect circle in the west wall, backed by the blue or purple of the sky, and decorated all around by lilies, she had watched the moon rise like a great, silver, dented globe suspended from the sky by some fairy and therefore invisible ribbon. Night after night it had slid up the sky, nearing the full when her Chinese lover, to whom she and the love and the life of the West were forbidden, would come to keep his appointment. And whilst watching the nymphs and satyrs, the sun and the moon, the lilies and stars, she had secretly hoped the message from Tientsin would be very long in coming; or that the ship would require new boilers or something equally essential so that the passage home might be all mussed up and take an indefinable time to straighten out; whilst she, collecting her wardrobe from the hotel, continued to watch the path below under the pretext of looking at the sun, moon and stars, lilies, nymphs and satyrs.

## THE ABBOT

She had made friends with the Abbot, a gaunt, travelled æsthetic possessed of a fluent and formidably pedantic knowledge of the English tongue, which he spoke, without the least hesitation, in the clipped accent betraying the Chinese teacher.

Leaning on the wall beside her, walking with her in the Temple's desolate, deserted, inner courts, accompanying her to help her "Pay her Respects," as she called it, to the dusty Gods in the dim, upper story, he had talked of this, that and the other.

Patience, Resignation, Fatalism.

Enticing little paths of least resistance. Steel wires clamping down the corks on Life's full, effervescing bottles. Seductive puffs ending in cloying layers of cotton-wool placed upon Endeavour's prickly prizes.

"Shall we go and pay our Evening Respects to the Gods?" he asked, heart filled with foreboding on account of his love for his young relative, Chang, The Enduring, and the dire tale which Wan Yen had told him, the first night, as they had sat in the lower court.

Rosalie slipped from the parapet. "Let's!" she said, glad of the excuse of something to do to occupy her thoughts filled with a fear she would not and had not, so far, acknowledged. She had made all manner of excuses for the non-appearance of Chang, The Enduring, and the absence of all news of him. It was unsafe for him to come or to send even a messenger. Having fixed the appointment for the full moon he would not dream of coming before. He would be there that night. She was sure he would be. Quite. And said it so often that she knew that fear not only pushed her to the reiteration but had also kept her on the parapet looking down at the path all the days long and far into the nights.

## THE GODDESS-OF-MERCY

Through the Moon-Gate they went, tap of heels and slither of priestly straw-sandals smothered in the dust; up the stairs and through the Temple Library where books in their boxes were piled in cupboards to the ceiling; along the deserted rooms to where the Goddess-of-Mercy looked down upon Offerings of rice and tea in bowls and the ruby tips of many lighted joss-sticks.

The Abbot bowed, knelt, and stayed with his head to the ground praying for the safety of Chang, The Enduring. Rosalie, as self-conscious as all Occidentals in an alien church, stood frozenly by, refraining from looking at the kneeling figure so as not to heighten the discomfort she was sure he felt at having to perform his devotions before a stranger.

He looked up at her. "Won't you, too, pray?" he said simply. "Won't you, too, kneel? Have you nothing, nobody you want to pray for?"

She wanted to. Longed to kneel. Not before the actual Goddess-of-Mercy there but to some power who could help the man who loved her, though from what she did not know, nor when, nor how. Longing to kneel beside the priest and join her prayers to his: "I am sorry but I am a Christian!" was all she found to say.

The Abbot rose and pushed the Offerings closer to the kindly Goddess. "But there is only one true religion;" he said gently; "and that one is without frontiers"—he stopped for a word then put his hand on a narrow strip of pleated gold ribbon trimming the brocade curtain before the shrine—"what would you call this unnecessary trimming?"

"A—a frill, I think," said Rosalie.

The Abbot smiled. "A religion without frontiers,



frills and fashions;” he continued, as they turned to make their way back through the shadows. “Behind Buddhist renunciation, Puritan intolerance, Roman Catholic blind-folding, the Hindoo Sacred Bull, Christian Scientist metaphysics, the Salvation Army’s big drum and Communist slaughter there is one big, outstanding principle. *Love!* Isn’t there?” and laughed when Rosalie, who took her religion as she took salt to an egg, nodded, completely at a loss for a reply. “Break down frontiers; every kind; religious and racial; fear first, then intolerance, greed, love of power, passion, envy, hatred and malice; take away those religious frills which no great Prophet, Wayshower, Messiah or Teacher ever suggested——”

“Frills?” said Rosalie as she walked out into the court.

“Ostentation; gold-bedecked churches; idols; images; jewelled rings; laces; furs; palaces; preference; honours; solos; public smiting of breasts; superstitious practises and Sees. After that do away with fashions; *man-made* rules; set days and hours for meeting in masses to pray; set preachers to preach at set hours instead of by inspiration, anywhere; set prices for seats for divine worship, the best in front near the rails as the best seats in the theatre, those for the poor of birth, raiment and breeding at the back.” He laughed gently as they stopped in the Moon-Gate to look at the wonder of the silvery sheen heralding the coming of the full moon, whilst the first star laughed down at them through the pines as it had laughed at Adam and Eve, those mythical wraiths who upset Life’s Spiritual Market by overloading it with fruit that was not desirable until law put it out of man’s reach. “Break down and through all that and what do you have?”

Rosalie, rather ill at ease, shook her head and crossed to the parapet where her heart quickened at the sight of a car coming along the road from Peking.

“You don’t know, Excellency;” said the Abbot

at her side, his heart, too, quickening at sight of the car. "You have 'Brotherhood,' the great and true religion. Not that you or I, or your children, or theirs will see it, but the seeds of Brotherhood are sprouting and it is because of the thrusting of the tendrils through the earth that we are having such upheavals of the soil."

Rosalie, sitting on the parapet the better to watch the car, looked down at him. "That sounds like Communism;" she said as the car raced along the road.

"It is. The real Communism, not the destructive, blood-stained bastard which calls itself by that name;" replied the Abbot, watching the car. "And you and I and every living soul are the Gardeners of those Seeds, to see that the true tendrils grow straight and if they don't, to raise them from the mire and tie them to Props of Love and Good-Fellowship."

Rosalie watched the car make the bend of the road near the hotel at Pi-an-ssu. "Then you advocate all frontiers down between the races, social as well as territorial?" she asked, thoughts on Chang, The Enduring, who had not come to her or written to her but whom she hoped, in her quickly beating heart, was in the car racing from Peking.

"The Gods forbid it yet a while, Excellency;" laughed the Abbot, who hoped in his anxious heart even as Rosalie hoped in hers. "Not until the East has learned from the West and the West from us. Not until the question of pigment which is a barbed wire frontier has been adjusted."

"How can it be adjusted?" said Rosalie, thoughts on the love one Chinese bore her. "Marriage between the East and West is a tragedy; the half-caste an utter abomination."

The Abbot shook his head. To his mind pigment was simply a matter of *climate*. The nearer the Equator the blacker the skin, in other words the greater the heat the deeper the sunburn. Aeons of sunburn had produced the Ethiopian, the same measure of time near the Glacier Zone, the white

race. Heat was responsible for languor, lasciviousness and ineptitude, Cold for hardness, the Divorce Court and hustle. Therefore the more people travelled and settled in a climate contrary to what they had been born and bred in, the quicker would the sun and the cold, acting physically, psychologically and tinctorially upon the settlers, bring the races to a uniformity of colour, traits and customs. The end would spell 'Brotherhood' with noses, eyes, lips, torso, hair, temper, desires, outlook, ambition and manners at table almost identical excepting for an occasional outburst in the shape of a throwback.

"When that has happened, Excellency, there will be no reason for forbidding a marriage between a Chang Teh-sheng and a white woman like your Excellency. But until that has come about, until real Communism has evolved out of chaos, the East and the West must stay as far apart as the Poles."

Rosalie looked down at him from her perch. "Then you know! Everything!" she said.

The Abbot nodded his wise head. His name was Chang. His Ancestor had also been Abbot at the Temple in the days when there had been no speck of dust on head of God. He loved Chang, The Enduring, looked upon him as he would have a son of his own. Counilled him in all trouble. Had tried to dissuade him from going to the West for education. Warned him that he would, must come back dissatisfied.

"But he went, Excellency, and now he is paying for it in a love that is forbidden him."

The colour crept to Rosalie's face. She was thankful the priest did not look at her. "Do you know about my husband? about the Hatchways?" she whispered.

The Abbot nodded. He knew everything and because he did and because he dreaded the cruelty of his countrymen, prayed the Gods that the car from Peking was bringing Chang, The Enduring, back to him.

"Why?" asked Rosalie, eyes wide with fear. "What is it? What do you think has happened?"

The Abbot looked up at her, a pucker of pain to the gentle mouth, a flicker of horror in the sexless eyes. "He has not been to see me nor sent me word for a week;" he said. "I fear for him. I fear that the honourable Wang has got hold of him to wring the whereabouts of your husband from him." He smiled gently, slipped his hands up his sleeves. "And the cruelty of China is beyond an Occidental's understanding;" he added.

Rosalie put her hand on his shoulder. "You mean——"

The priest nodded. "Yes. I mean torture, Excellency. Whilst you and I have been resting peacefully in the Hills' quiet heart my Son may have been burned or beaten or slashed to make him speak and he has never, never suffered physical pain." He looked up at her when she cried out in horror. "There are a few frills to be done away with in China, you see, Excellency;" he said quietly.

Rosalie slipped from the parapet and clapped her hands, and when Wan Yen came out of the house where the great Abbot, friend of Emperors, had once dwelt, ordered him to pack everything. She would start for Peking directly the Gates opened. She *must* have news of Chang Teh-sheng.

"It is all packed, Missie;" said Wan Yen, eyes full of hate for her, faithful heart full of dread.

Far into the preceding night he had talked with the Abbot, trying to find some good reason for his Master's silence. Far and wide in Peking the Abbot had gone on donkey-back, asking for news of the man he loved as he would have loved a son had not the spirit of renunciation been strong within him. On every side priests had made, were making inquiries, with as much success as Mei-hua, who, at the moment, was following the advice of the honourable, fatherly Chu.

But Chang, The Enduring, had disappeared from Peking and of his whereabouts no one knew.

"Packed?" said Rosalie, on the defensive as is the way of some folk, mostly women, when the native servant has had an unsolicited brain-wave. "Why? Who told you to?"

The Abbot spoke gently, prayer beads slipping through thin fingers. "I did, Excellency." He stopped speaking at the sound of a motor-horn, an agony of fear in his eyes as he looked across at Wan Yen. Again the sound of a horn, but not the horn which Chang, The Enduring, sounded joyously to let his Holiness know of his arrival.

"Let me run down the hill to meet them, your Holiness, and then run back. It will be the quicker;" implored Wan Yen.

"The guard!" said Rosalie. "You won't be able to get through."

"The guard was removed this afternoon;" replied the Abbot.

"This afternoon!" exclaimed Rosalie. "Why? By whose orders?"

"By the British Minister's, Excellency. There is no danger for you now. The Legation has taken up the question of the Professor's safety! It is sending for you. I think the car below has come from the Legation to fetch you."

And if there was the faintest edge to the gentle voice it must not be forgotten that the priest loved much.

Hate had put the finest razor-edge on the voice of Wan Yen. "But the Master, my Master, he in plenty big danger, Missie;" he cried. "His Holiness an' me we think he in plenty big danger!" He spread his arms then asked again to be allowed to run down the hill to meet whoever it might be coming up.

The Abbot shook his head. "Your Master ordered you to stay with her Excellency;" he said. "You must not leave her. You will accompany her to Peking and to Tientsin if it should be necessary."

Wan Yen broke into a torrent of words. He would not stay with the white woman once she was

safely at her Legation. He would not. Nothing would or could make him.

"Then disobey;" said the Abbot coldly; "and lose 'face' for ever before your Master."

With difficulty Wan Yen gave in to China's most formidable weapon.

"I will go down;" said the Abbot. "Bring the donkey to the back door!" and turned to Rosalie as the man went to do his bidding. "My beloved Son has an appointment with you for this night, Excellency, a love appointment because he does love you, disastrously, the love, the woman, the life of the white race being forbidden him. If all is well with him he will keep that appointment. I have never known him to break the word. Not once have I known him to. You will write a letter to him, one of explanations, informing him that because your Minister, the Representative of your Illustrious Country, has sent for you, you cannot linger to keep the appointment under the moon." Rosalie nodded, the authority in the gentle voice keeping her silent.

"You will pin your letter on the door of yonder house. If my Son does not find you here when he comes in through the Moon-Gate, as he always does, he will go to look for you in the house. That is if other than his spirit comes through the Moon-Gate."

"His *spirit!*" whispered Rosalie.

"If things have gone ill with him, Excellency, through this thrice disastrous, forbidden love, if his body has been so tortured that his valiant spirit has passed into the keeping of the Gods, it will return to keep the appointment the tortured body made with you." He looked up at the sky where the stars shone dimly through the silver mist of the rising moon. "Leave the letter in the keeping of the Spirit of his Ancestor, the Abbot, my Ancestor, Excellency." He smiled when Rosalie shivered suddenly and looked round. "You are acquainted with the tradition, Excellency——"

"He told me—and my father—in England;" Rosalie whispered. "When any member of your

House, your Holiness, is in danger or trouble, the Spirit of the Abbot is seen in this court."

The Abbot nodded his wise head. "There seems a fuller radiance to the light, the little bell up there, hundreds of years old, rings, the lilies, beauteous descendants of those flowers the Abbot himself planted, sway in the breeze that accompanies the Abbot from the Beyond." He looked up to the bell and across to the lilies standing stiff and still against the north parapet and as still amongst the bamboo-trees pressing close to the Abbot's house. "If I were to perceive the flowers moving upon this night of balm and tranquillity then, Excellency, should I know my beloved Son to be in danger of passing on to the Celestial Kingdom before the appointed time."

"Don't you think, your Holiness, that it is really the wind that rings the bell and moves the lilies?" said Rosalie and flatly, owing to the Occidental's distaste of aught outside the orderly running of everyday life.

"Do you not think the other interpretation the more beautiful and kind, Excellency?" said the Abbot as he walked to the Moon-Gate where he stopped, and looked back. "Write a letter as kind, Excellency, whilst I am down the Hill, because, patience being one of the qualities unknown in the Glacier Zone, you may have to make a quick departure." He turned again at the top of the way down. "I will, if you permit, accompany you to Peking. I would make a last search for my beloved Son. I have searched for the last three days, the little 'Amah,' Mei-hua, has searched, equally in vain, the priests of two big Temples are searching. I will join them so as to fill in the dread hours which must be passed before I return to find him here, or not." He smiled when Rosalie advocated calling in the police and in a voice that intimated that it should have been called in long before the eleventh minute of the eleventh hour. "If you want to shut every door, window and mouth in China, Excellency, mention the word police and show the hem of his

coat. Nothing is discovered in China except by secrecy, that watching and listening which discovers the one little grain of forgotten dust and overhears the one unguarded word. China is one vast Secret Service and there is nothing the man Wan Yen could not tell you of your life in Peking of the last five weeks, Excellency, including a list of the contents of your wardrobe, of your dispatch case and visiting list, a correct description of your financial negotiations at the Bank you honour, a good deal of your conversation with acquaintances and friends and their genuine opinion of you." He smiled when Rosalie made an impatient movement. "He is his Master's body-servant, Excellency, you are an enemy, therefore it was his duty to know everything about you. And that he would willingly poison you at this very moment, I have not the slightest doubt." He turned as the horn tore the peace of the Hills to shreds, and walked away. Rosalie listened to his gentle voice urging the donkey down the steep path then looked across at the house. She wanted to call Wan Yen. Not that there was the slightest need to worry over a last-minute packing. She knew the Chinese servant to be the most perfect in the world but had picked up enough in her few weeks in China to know that, once fussed, a Chinese went as completely to pieces as snow in a warm room.

She wanted to write the letter and be through with everything before the arrival of whoever it was coming up the path as the Abbot went down it. She wanted time in which to think. Things were moving. Unknown to her, messages to do with her had passed between the Temple and the Legation. The guard removed that afternoon. The few things she had with her packed, and in the last hour, whilst she had been sitting on the parapet talking to the Abbot. She felt she had been treated like a child. Was annoyed, injured, almost angry. Accustomed to the position of supremacy granted only daughters and women in their first year of marriage in England, she anathematized the secret



methods of the East. The Abbot should have deferred to her instead of treating her like a package to be sent from the City to the Hills and back.

### FEAR

She clapped her hands and when there was no answer, called and when there was still no answer looked back at the house where a light shone in the upper story. The light went out and Fear came to sit beside her on the parapet. "Look;" it whispered; "at the radiance in the Moon-Gate!" and when she turned her head and looked, because she could not help doing as Fear bid, saw, or thought she saw, a deeper radiance in the centre of the circle. Of course she knew that what she looked at was the slender trunk of a pine wrapped about in moon-mist and that was all, but shivered notwithstanding, the Abbot's fear having found lodgment in her own receptive mind. And when Fear whispered her to look at the lilies she knew quite well that they were stiff and still against the north parapet and not swaying ever so little, whilst those pressed between the bamboo-trees were just as stiff and still and not bent forward, looking out from between the slender canes as though they tried to see who stood in the centre of the Moon-Gate. Or were they trying to see? And was the Spirit of the Abbot really standing there looking across at her, the cause of the fear all felt for the man who had disappeared from Peking, leaving no trace. She wanted to call out, to get down and go indoors away from the radiance in the stone circle. She forced herself to look up. A big star shone over the Moon-Gate. Moonshine blotted out the lesser stars. The big one went out suddenly. She pressed her hand to her mouth. She knew, of course, that the moon had put it out and that the night breeze was coming gently through the dent in the Hills to

the north. Of course she knew it, but supposing the sudden exit of the star so beautiful was a sign that what the living Abbot dreaded had come to pass? That Chang, The Enduring's valiant spirit, wrung from his body in a diabolical effort to make him break his word to her father, had passed into the keeping of the Gods. She knew she was being absurd, and that she and the Chinese servant were just mere victims of the lonely life they had been leading in the Hills, just as the Abbot had been wrought upon through decades of the Spirit-Worship which made part of his religion.

But all the same she peered down the hill-side trying to see something of what was happening below and listened in the hope of hearing Chang, The Enduring's voice as he climbed the path with the Abbot, then turned to watch Wan Yen as he came out of the house and crossed to the Moon-Gate.

#### FIDELITY

He stood quite still, listening, passed out of sight, only the cracking of a twig to tell that, consumed with anxiety, longing and hope, he had walked to the top of the bridle path leading down. Came back as noiselessly and crossed to the parapet, taking no notice of Rosalie. Leaned far over, listening, then turned to go back to the house without looking at or speaking to the woman he hated through his love for his Master.

Rosalie stopped him. "Will you bring me a pencil and a piece of paper, please?" she said.

The man crossed to her, stood quite close, looking at her. "You write letter Master, Missie, say you go ways, yes-no?"

Rosalie nodded. "The Legation has sent for me. I think, so I have to go;" she said.

Wan Yén bowed. "Humble servant play high lady await Master come!" he said.

Rosalie looked round. She did not want to go. God knew she didn't. Not yet. She looked across at the far hills black against the purple sky still spread with stars nearer the far horizon. No sound, no sign of life. Fauns slept huddled with their master in some ruined temple, perhaps. Nymphs and satyrs in the hollows of trees or holes in rocks, or the satyrs chased the nymphs over the hills and far away. The big ship lighted from bow to stern sailed serenely across the Sea of Fantasy. Lights glittered in Peking where they searched for Chang, The Enduring. Of lights on the road or in the villages and hamlets there were none. All was so quiet.

No, she did not want to go back to the noise of the hotel which perhaps endured an influx from those who herd round the world in big boats requisitioned for the massing. And who, having swarmed into the great City for one night and stripped it bare of its peace and serenity as locusts into a field, eating it bare of green stuff, return to prate with authority upon the East to those who may have got no farther than Margate or Hoboken. She could not bear the noise and fret of the hotel after the peace of the Hills, she told herself, whereas, had she but been honest, she would have boldly acknowledged her longing to stay just one more night, this one of the full moon, or until Chang, The Enduring, came to keep his appointment with her, even if he did talk about love without, as he said, making love to her. That, or until, if he did not come, she had learned the real reason of his failing to keep the appointment.

"I am obliged to go;" she said and took the paper and pencil which Wan Yén had brought sullenly, and began to write, disjointedly, fretted by the man watching her. She looked at him. "I don't want you, 'Boy;'" she said; "and I shan't want you to come to the Legation with me if it has sent for me. You can either wait here for your Master

or come in on the car and go home; ” and went on writing.

Wan Yen shook a stubborn head. Nothing could make him disobey his Master. He had been told to look after the Missie, to go to Tientsin if necessary with her. “ I go L’Enland with Missie if must do! ” he said; “ if necesselly; ” whilst longing to break her neck or poison her so as to be the sooner done with the trouble she was causing.

Rosalie looked at him as she sucked the pencil. “ I quite appreciate your devotion to your master and admire it but—— ”

“ Love, Missie, not l’otion; ” interrupted the man and added, so hurt was he: “ You hurt Master if go. I behind side of Missie also hurt Master if Missie go, see Missie? ”

Rosalie went on writing. She would not encourage him by answering. It was not for her to explain that she wanted to stay as much as he longed for her to wait. Chinese servants, she had been told, were adepts at adding two and two and making the total five with a shred of gossip, a look, a flip of slender fingers. She had no more disinclination to playing with fire than most women of any age, looks or status, but she had no intention of being roasted throughout China for just one unguarded moment. “ Have you a pin? I want to fasten this to the door? ” she asked.

Wan Yen had not, and if he had would not have helped hurt the man he loved.

Rosalie felt in the belt of the one-piece, white frock she wore. Too big, the dress, or she too small through worry, she had secured the belt with a safety pin. “ This will do; ” she said; “ it’s only silver-gilt. ” Doubled the paper, wrote across it and ran the pin through the corner.

Wan Yen clasped his fine hands. “ Missie! Missie wait while. Wait till moon come up all good top-side. If Master no come ’cos of plenty big danger from Honlable Wang then li’l bell ling one piece and lilies move one piece. Will sure ling,

Missie, if Master in plenty danger dying. If bell no ling an' lilies no move than Master all one piece light."

Rosalie slipped off the parapet and stood looking up at him. "Is there any wind to-night, 'Boy'?" she whispered.

"Win, Missie?" He put his finger in his mouth then held it, wet, above his head. "No, Missie, no win' at all." He watched her look round at the lilies, saw the fear in her eyes, guessed. "Missie, you see lilies move. Say true, Missie. Yes-no?"

Rosalie looked at him, nodded her head. "I thought—I'm not sure—but I—I thought I did;" she whispered.

Wan Yen ran to the Moon-Gate. "I go find Abbot. I go tell him Master in plenty big danger. I tell him Anclester walk in court. I—"

"But perhaps your Master came in that car!"

"No, Missie, that no horn Master like. Too much noise!"

"Oh, but he may have come in a friend's car."

Wan Yen looked at her and wondered why his Master wasted a thought upon a female with such little *savoir-faire*. "To come and see you, Missie!" he said; "'sides Master has six cars, why should then take inferior friend's?" He stopped talking to listen.

There was a sound of mens' voices, the clatter of slipping hoofs coming up the hill.

Rosalie ran to Wan Yen. He took no notice. He strained his eyes so that they should the quicker see across the dividing space. His ears so that they, too, could the sooner distinguish the voices. Not that you could have guessed at the straining. He stood with his hands up his sleeves, his eyes like slits of brown onyx.

"Is it?" whispered Rosalie in a frenzy of excitement. "It is! I knew it! I—"

"It no is, Missie!" said the servant and moved a pace from her. "Lilies never tell untrue. That hard, white voice."

Rosalie told him he was mistaken. That he

couldn't possibly distinguish the voices above the clatter of hoofs.

"It no is, Missie! The foots of man are heavy. Common foots. No spling in foots. Common white man walk heavy 'cos no spling in life!" persisted the servant, as near irritation as his native upbringing would allow. The hour was black enough the Gods knew without having a woman pestering with questions and opinions like a mosquito in the hot weather. "Missie go back and sit. Missie no show touble. Coolie show touble, not high caste. Coolie cly an' make noise;" and having got as near censure of a foreigner as he dared, walked away, being uncertain of the control he had over his hands. That his Master was near to death he had not the slightest doubt. The lilies had proved it. When the bell rang a gentle little peal then his Master would be dead and it was hardly to be expected of a man to keep his hands off the person who had brought that death about.

Rosalie drew herself up and walked back into the court with a definite feeling of being right outside this horribel hour in which so much might happen and so very little, seemingly, was being done.

Whereas, had she been capable of analysis, of working back, of taking the whole twisted, tangled skein and undoing it, knot by knot, snarl by snarl, she would have found the end necessary to begin working forward from, the fact that she, alone, held the key to the secret of Chang Teh-sheng's disappearance. But analysis being the by-product of a successful survival of years of stress and storm, risks and sudden decisions, she was not capable of the mental process, life having been handed out to her in suitable and pre-digested chunks since the time when, instead of being made to get over the hanker, a comforter had been pushed into her mouth to keep her from wailing for something she wanted and couldn't have. Incapable of solid reasoning she sat in the tangle, plumb in the middle of it, feeling rather upon her dignity, too, at being pushed on one side like some useless bit of furniture.

She heard smooth Chinese voices. Could make nothing of them. The tramp of boots coming up the Moon-Gate, then the unmistakable tones of an English voice.

The Legation had sent to fetch her away!

## CHAPTER X

### THE WARNING OF THE BELL

RELIEF surged over her. In an instant she was back upon the well-trimmed, sheltered path of an orderly existence. Things would straighten out now. Her own people were taking a hand. Lilies, legends, fear and wild surmise were trampled on, flattened like weeds on the well-trimmed path by the sound of those honest, steady boots.

Three figures, solid ones, not those conceived by moonshine, showed in the stone circle.

"The Legation has sent an honourable representative for you, Excellency, and someone to carry your luggage down."

And if a flatter, tamer ending could have been devised to round up an adventure, what would it have been?

The Englishman touched his cap. "My name's Jones, Madam, and Mr. Smith is waiting in the car;" he said. "Suffering from shortness of breath, so to speak, he asked to be excused the climb."

Excusing the representative who waited below cursing his luck at missing the fancy-dress ball in aid of providing the dusky aborigines of some Foreign and Friendly Power's colony with finger-napkins, Rosalie crossed to Jones whilst Wan Yen and the Abbot talked apart. From the corner of her eye she watched the Orientals. Saw the Abbot look round at the lilies and up at the bell and smiled at him, steady, matter-of-fact. "Is 'Boy' telling you of the lilies, your Holiness?" she said as the servant went towards the house. "I had been staring so hard at the moon that everything seemed to move." She lifted her pretty face. "The breeze is quite strong!" She turned to Jones. "Isn't it?"



"Breeze, Madam!" said he, as matter-of-fact as could be. "Not a breath." He put his finger in his mouth and held it up, wet. "Not a breath!" he repeated as the Abbot walked back to the Moon-Gate.

"Oh, well, it will have died down by now;" said Rosalie brightly and crossed to the parapet where her letter to Chang, The Enduring, lay. She picked it up and stood wondering how ever she had seen fauns in goats, satyrs in pedlars and nymphs in coolie-women on donkey-back, then crossed the court to the door with its peaked porch all red, green and blue under the curved roof.

At the end of which, weather-beaten and bent, the little old bell hung.

Wan Yen came out with her cases as she pinned the letter in the middle of the door. Smitten suddenly with a sense of guilt she jerked the pin out so that the letter fell.

The man looked down at it. So did she.

"Please!" she said.

Wan Yen shook his obstinate, shaven crown. "I no hurt Master, ever, Missie!" he said stubbornly then lifted his head to listen, clutched a charm and knelt, bowing his head to the ground. There was the faintest whisper on the air. A breath of sound as though by chance one had brushed some old glass goblet, linking the moment through its music to the century in which it had been fashioned.

Rosalie ran down the steps. The Abbot knelt, his head to the ground. She looked up. The bell swung a little, as though a gentle breeze pushed it. "Oh, my God!" she whispered and ran to Jones who stood stolidly watching the scene. "It's terrible!" she whispered, her hand on his arm and watched with him as the two men rose and stood together, looking up at the bell.

"It's all right, Madam;" said Jones solidly. "They're only making joss." And wondered what had got the lady when she ran to the Abbot, clasped her hands and started to talk excitedly. Had it to do with the yarn, which had swept round

Peking, of her and her husband having been kid-napped and held for ransom in the Red Quarter? He hadn't quite got the hang of the story, but he thought that the sooner he got her away and the sooner she started for Tientsin, the better for her nervous system. He listened to the Abbot speaking. They had both evidently been expecting someone who hadn't turned up and didn't mean to. Perhaps the lady's husband. Peking was a perfectly frightful place for twisting chalk-lines out of the true. He walked across to the light luggage and picked it up. "Beg your pardon, Sir;" he said, solicitous for Rosalie's nerve-centre; "but I have to drop the lady at the Peking Hôtel, report at the Legation and drive back for her."

"We will come;" said the Abbot. "There is a donkey for her Excellency to enable her to negotiate the downward path with speed. Come!" he said to Rosalie. "It is no use grieving or even worrying. The Spirit of my Ancestor is here but he may have come to *help* my beloved Son." He motioned to the Moon-Gate and as Rosalie crossed the court picked up the letter and pinned it to the door. "He is too fine to die for a love and a woman forbidden him;" he said as the top of the moon showed above the hills like a fine silver bracelet. "He will keep his appointment when the moon hangs high in the Heavens. The Gods *must* listen to the prayers of the ten greatest Temples in Peking and mine, and his servant's." He crossed the court and gently, firmly, drove Rosalie out of The-Temple-of-Perpetual-Fragrance, out of The Kingdom-of-Romance, for ever.

Down to the car where John Smith waited.

### LOVE'S ENLIGHTENING

John Smith was fat and fatherly, a combination which had served to foist upon him the duties of standing in *locum parentis* to all Englishwomen who got into scrapes in China. Which obligation,

instead of fretting, left him ecstatic at his own celibacy, whilst filling him with wonder at fragile woman's daring, the opaque intuitive powers of such males as husbands and fathers and others less legitimate and the patience of the Recording Angel whose duty 'tis to tot up lies.

He patted Rosalie's hand. It was part of the formula. He patted all sorts. The dowager's with full five fingers in the political pie, the matron's calloused with pulling strings for progeny, the blessed demozelle's prone to pilfering on male preserves not hers by law, the maid's who'd got into the hell of a mess because of the moon. He did it as, being fatherly and fat, he would have stroked cats. And not at all ashamedly, at the moment, in spite of the Buddhist priest who had insisted upon a back seat, and the square shoulders of the Celestial who had refused to leave the Missie until she was off to Tientsin, and who doubtlessly shared his race's gift of being able to see through the back of his head.

"Your luggage is on the boat, my dear Mrs. Hatchway;" said John Smith as they sped along the silvery, dusty roads, and continued to explain that she would have to collect her dressing-case which had been left behind as security for the room which had not been given up on account of some valuable manuscript her husband had left with the Manager. "Fussy detail, my dear Mrs. Hatchway;" he continued as they neared the City Gate. "Keeping the room on, I mean. Losing so much precious time. The boat sails as soon after dawn as possible and you'll want all the time left to get down to Tientsin by that God-forsaken road overrun with water-buffaloes or bandits. I hate fuss, hate fuss;" and being the essence of it himself, patted her hand all the way along. "You must tell me all about the abducting as we go to Tientsin;" and when Rosalie asked if he was to accompany her, assured her it would be a pleasure as well as a duty to restore her safe and sound to the Professor and then, to pass the time, launched into a summary of the past

week's happenings. "Same old fun, same old faces, same old frocks;" he said, "but I wouldn't change Peking for any other City in the world." He looked back as the City Gate slammed to behind them. "Peking! The City-of-Secrets. Secrets she will never give up. Not even when her Gates and Walls have toppled and weeds spring from her ruins."

Prayer beads slipped through the Abbot's fingers as they sped up towards The Forbidden City. Rosalie pressed her face against the window the better to see the yellow, sloping roofs of the Palace from which she had so miraculously escaped. How much had Hatchway told? How much did the Legation know? It would not be fair to Chang Teh-sheng to give away his secret.

"Are there really secret passages in The Forbidden City?" she asked.

Smith laughed. "Ra-ther!" he said. "Half of the wonderful treasures looted by the Eunuchs at the fall of the Monarchy were got outside through those passages. Not that I've ever seen one, but Old Buddha—that's the old Empress—couldn't have managed her unspeakable love affairs as she did if there'd only been the orthodox, well-guarded exits to the Palace." He sat back, The Forbidden City, to him, merely a mass of yellow roofs.

Rosalie smiled. Hatchway had kept the secret. Had John Smith heard about the escape he would most certainly have mentioned it now. Then she frowned. Her mind was trying to register something. Her brain tapped a message. To——? Connected with——? With what? Something someone had asked about. It was—— Gone. And the car past The Forbidden City and almost at the hotel. The Forbidden City. Yes. It was—— What was it? Why was the message connected with The Forbidden City and Chang Teh-sheng? In perplexity she lifted her face to the little light in the roof just as Mei-hua passed.

Suddenly enlightened by love Mei-hua was racing to the house. Through love she was sure the secret

of her Master's disappearance had been revealed to her.

Through love she was resolved to lose 'face,' perhaps for ever, by ordering the middle of the wall in The-Room-of-the-Foreign-Devils to be broken through. To be torn down on the mere supposition that she thought she had seen an opening in a seemingly honest block of masonry. It would be her will against the Compradore's. Her strength pitted against the whole household. Wan Yen would not be there to back her. No matter. She would use the axe herself even if the household stood by and shouted with laughter. She wished she was certain. She wished she had someone, a man of authority, behind her. No matter. Nothing could stand against her armed with love.

Leaning forward in an effort to help the car to speed she caught a glimpse of Rosalie, her face turned up to the light. Of a Buddhist priest. Then she knocked on the window and kept on knocking even when the car had stopped.

"Turn!" she cried. "Quick! Quick! Overtake that car! Follow it! Stop it! The white woman the Master knows is in it! Quick!"

Police yelled, drivers cursed, pedestrians crossing the road leapt for their lives as the Chauffeur let the car out. The car ahead turned into the drive of the Peking Hôtel. A rickshaw twisted out of it on the wrong side just as the Chauffeur turned in. There was a grinding crash, a splintering of wood, shouts, imprecations and a wordy, prolonged battle with the police.

"I will get out and walk;" said Mei-hua; "you can follow with the car."

The police looked at her trousers and ordered her to stop where she was. Her driver had been racing the car in front, trying to pass it, to cut in. He must have names and addresses. The rickshaw-coolie was hurt, his rickshaw smashed to smithereens.

"Let him die!" cried Mei-hua. "My business with the foreign lady in the car we tried to overtake

is most important. What is a coolie the more or less?" then, remembering her savings, pulled up a trouser-leg, extracted a wad from a silk stocking and pressed a dollar into the ready palm of the guardian of the City's welfare. "Honour me by drinking a bowl of tea;" she whispered, then added loudly: "If you will call at the house of the Honourable Chang Teh-sheng before the First Meal to-morrow you shall have all details."

The police saluted. Had her Honour but mentioned the honourable House-of-Chang sooner she would not have been stopped on account of a filthy, misbegotten coolie, bowed as the car moved and kicked the remnants of the rickshaw and the coolie's shins as it slid under the portico.

"Stop that car!" said Mei-hua and so imperiously that the corpulent and Celestial commissionaire actually moved.

"Hi-i-i-i!" he yelled.

"Hi-i-i!" yelled the rickshaw-coolies sitting in an optimistic semi-circle on the inner side of the drive.

The Legation car stopped and, forgetful of her trousers, Mei-hua ran to it, to be met by the frosty stare of a big foreigner sitting beside the chauffeur.

"Where is the English Missie?" she cried.

"Inside the hotel;" said the Chinese chauffeur, "where Sing-Song girls don't get;" and winked.

Mei-hua turned and ran. Once the Englishwoman was inside she would be as hard to find as one particular bean out of a bean-field. She met the Abbot as he came through the revolving door. Clung to him whilst foreigners, new ones, part of a boat which had just disgorged at Tientsin, stood and looked at the exotic picture of a Buddhist Priest talking to a woman in brocade trousers. Which garments, in their richness, did not serve to enhance her reputation if they did her looks.

"Your Holiness;" she whispered. "You are from The-Temple-of-Perpetual-Fragrance? You are an honourable relative of my Master, Chang Teh-sheng?"

The Abbot slipped his hands up his sleeves, eyes alight, face as placid as a lotus pool at dawn. "You have news for me?" he whispered. "He has returned?"

Mei-hua shook her lovely head. "Not yet, but I hope, I hope. The name of the foreign woman. Tell me. Quick!" and repeated Latchlay, Latchlay, Latchlay, until the word tripped from her tongue. "Will your Holiness wait for me here, upon the steps, after telling my driver to be ready to start at a second's notice. I shall not be long. There is only one question, two perhaps, to ask the Foreign Devil. Then I will come back. You will wait, your Holiness?"

"I will wait until dawn, my daughter;" said the Abbot, then urged her to be quick, be quick, and told her of how the lilies had swung and the bell had rung. "Only once. Not the little peal of disaster. Just once as though to let us know that help was on the Heavenly Road."

"*Ai-ya!*" exclaimed Mei-hua, touching a charm, then walked up the steps, through the door and up to the Manager's desk, sedately, whilst longing to run and run and run.

"Missie Latchlay;" she said, eyes steady, hands up her sleeves. "I am her Honour's new 'Amah.'"

The Manager didn't think so and eyed her up and down and taking the richness of her brocade in conjunction with her trousers, called the Compradore and asked him what he thought of it. The Compradore didn't waste any on the subject. Asked the girl for a letter, a card, anything to prove her identity, whilst Mei-hua, up against one of her westernized brethren for the first time in her life, went a rosy pink. She had nothing. She had not known. This was her first job. The Compradore thought that it wasn't by a very long shot. Told her so, too, added that Missies didn't pick up 'Amahs' any old where at any old time and without a reference and told her to wait until the Missie Hatchway came down to pay her bill when she would be able to substantiate the new 'Amah's' tale.

Mei-hua, desperate, turned away and looked round the crowded hall.

Her heart leapt.

An immense Chinese, in dining-room uniform, raised his eyebrows at her from behind a pillar. She remembered her savings, drew up a trouser-leg behind a chair, extracted a wad from a silk stocking and two dollar notes out of the wad. One dollar extra, the 'Boy' known to be Peking's own Gazette and Who's Who, being bosom friend of Wan Yen, with every shred of every bit of gossip at the end of his deft, slender fingers. "Tell me the Missie Latchlay's room;" she whispered as the notes adhered cosily to the accommodating palm. "Show me how to get there."

The lift shed its passengers some of whom turned to look at the lovely little Chinese girl as she slipped in.

"The new 'Amah' for Number Thirty-Three," said the 'Boy' and waited until he was sure Mei-hua had soared to the right landing.

The lift-boy would have wished to dally with the trousered beauty on the way up. Mei-hua smiled. She was in a hurry. The bell shrilled. "That way. That door;" said the 'Boy' and in spite of the shrilling of the bell and the shaking of the gate above by someone born in the Glacier Zone, watched Mei-hua as she knocked at Number Thirty-Three, listened with her beautiful cheek against the door, then opened it and went in.

Rosalie sat at the dressing-table doing her hair. Except for a dressing-case the room was bare of luggage. She looked at Mei-hua in the mirror then turned round and stared at her. "You!" she said.

Mei-hua ran to her. Somehow or another she had to make the foreign woman understand what she wanted.

"Chang Teh-sheng?" she said and pointed to Rosalie's eyes.

Rosalie picked it up. "No have seen;" she said and shook her head.



Mei-hua touched her own forehead and raised her eyebrows. "Chang Teh-sheng?" she said.

Rosalie picked it up. "I don't know where he is;" she said and shook her head.

Mei-hua looked round the room. They were alone. The lighted dressing-room was empty. There was no 'Amah' present. No one to witness her discomfiture should she lose 'face.' She went to the dressing-room door and shut it, looked at Rosalie, then passed her hands all over the wall and said: "Chang Teh-sheng?"

Rosalie, her brain tapping the message which had not got through, waited.

With her finger Mei-hua drew a square a little lower than the door, a little wider, then opening the door and shutting it, said desperately: "Chang Teh-sheng? Chang Teh-sheng?"

Rosalie understood. Sprang to the door. The message her brain had begun to tap as she passed The Forbidden City was through. Her horror of the Circle in the centre of the secret passage came back to her. The terror she had felt in the place for Chang Teh-sheng overwhelmed her. She knew where he was. She knew. Out of all Peking she, alone, knew. Of course. He was there. In the Circle, underground. He had been seen somewhere, some time and caught by Wang, The Bad. Carried away. Drugged as Hatchway had been drugged. When? She wrung her hands. Whilst she had been sitting on the parapet watching fauns and satyrs and nymphs. Why? She knew that too. The Abbot had told her. So that the truth of Hatchway's whereabouts should be wrung from him by torture. And the lilies had swung and the little bell had rung.

"Oh God, my God!" she prayed, switched the light off in the dressing-room and pointed into the gloom. "Quick! quick!" she cried in Chinese, using one of the three words she had learned. "Quick! Chang Teh-sheng! Chang Teh-sheng!"

Mei-hua was gone.

Down the corridor she ran, down the stairs, across the hall to the revolving door.

At sight of her face the Abbot ran to her.

"You have found him?" he whispered.

"I don't know if we are in time!" Mei-hua cried and taking his hand ran with him to the waiting car. "Quick!" she ordered. "To the house. Only quick, quick, quick, if we want to find him alive."

## CHAPTER XI

### THE SUBTERRANEAN PASSAGE

A LITTLE hissing sound. A thread in the blanket of gloom which pressed down from the shadowed roof. An evil sound. As though a snake gave warning or a wisp of steam escaped from some minute hole somewhere in the dark. A little light. One small wick which had left an inch of oil in the glass bowl. Just light enough to show that of carpets, chairs, books and all that had made the Circle habitable a week ago there was no trace left.

None.

Nothing but shadows, silence, the little hissing sound, and standing out from the north wall, sagging upon the thongs which bound him loosely to a stake, Chang, The Enduring.

So still he hung you would have thought him already dead had he not breathed gently and sighed, now and again, as though he could no more.

Bound he was from broad shoulders to ankles, loosely, so that he dropped the more easily to the next stone when, each day, one flat stone was removed from the pile of six upon which he had stood above the quicklime.

The quicklime made the little hissing sound, now and then. A creamy mess in the bottom of the porcelain tub in which Chang, The Enduring, stood and which circled him just below the knees. An evil mess, as though some devil had whipped the thoughts of men to the consistency of a material malevolence which could have found a place even in the horrors of a Buddhist Hell.

It reached to within a quarter of an inch of the top of the stone resting on the bottom of the tub, and when Chang, The Enduring, sighing, straightened himself, resting all his weight on the stone

upon which he stood, the bottom stone of all sank a hair's-breadth and the lime crept up towards the top of it, the stone upon which he must ultimately stand.

In the annals of Chinese tortures, that summary of horrors unfit for print or speech or thought for fear that he who reads or speaks or thinks about even the least vile should be for ever haunted, it is recorded that only one, man or woman it does not say, refused to confess before the last stone was removed, he or she being the first to be subjected to The-Torture-by-the-Destruction-of-Feet. Also that when the obdurate victim had given in and confessed it had been too late, he or she having sunk into the quicklime which had for ever removed all power of circumambulation by removing the feet.

But, ghastly as was the torture with which Wang, The Bad, threatened the Neighbour he loved, yet had there been a mede of kindness in the choice of it. Not for one moment did he believe that Chang, The Enduring, would endure until the end, risking loss of 'face' for evermore by screaming and writhing and, at last, confessing, in his agony, to Hatchway's whereabouts. Every night after midnight, once during each day, he had come creeping down the passage from The Forbidden City followed by his servant, Li. And each time he had stood in the shadows nodding his crafty old head, rejoicing at the thought that he would be able to cut the thongs, lift his Neighbour out of the tub and, with the help of his servant, carry him, were he unable to walk from numbness due to want of exercise, up the passage to his own house where, after due scouting, they would deposit him in the centre of the room and run for their lives back into the secret passage.

But at each visit he had found Chang, The Enduring, as adamant as the stone upon which he stood, with laughter on his lips and mockery in the eyes which had sunk in the orbits until they looked like stains of ink on a white cloth.

He had refused to confess but he had not refused to eat or drink, swearing by the Gods, and laugh-

ingly, that, once free of the thongs, the tub and the quicklime, he would need all his strength to break the old man's neck as a reward for his unfriendliness. Neither had he complained at being fed by means of chopsticks. His arms, crossed on his breast, were bound by thongs to his body, also his hands to his shoulders, the left hand to the right shoulder and the other way about and not for the world, for life itself, would he have given away the secret that, by bending his head he could, with some difficulty, touch his mouth with either first finger.

He did not refuse to eat but he fussed about his food. He could not eat this, he could not drink that, had begged his persecutor to send his coolie-cook round to his own house to have lessons from the finest *chef* in Asia. Had blamed the cooking for the way his ribs stood out in ridges like sand blown by a sharp wind. For the sweat which, at times, poured from him as though rain fell. For the trembling which, at times, seized him until the stake to which he was tied, shook.

Not the trembling of fear. Not a whit. But rather the convulsion due to holding his mind in check in the gloom and the silence.

Once he had begged to be eased from the agony of the thongs which had cut into his flesh, making great bruises and weals where they pressed, and when Wang, The Bad, had inserted cotton-wool soaked with sweet unguent between the hemp and the fine skin, had called down the Gods' blessing upon the nimble, solicitous old fingers which likewise shaved him every day.

At each visit, having fixed the lantern he carried upon a hook just above the stake so that the light shone straight down upon his victim, Wang, The Bad, seated upon the one stool which stood for furniture in the grim place, had done his best to break his Neighbour's resistance, pointing out the futility of it, his ultimate disgrace, his inevitable loss of 'face' in the end.

Chang, The Enduring, handsome head back against the post, face turned up, revelled in the warmth of

the lantern's orange colour after the horror he had come to feel for that one little wick which watched him, day in, night out, from the bowl of swiftly diminishing oil; listened to his Neighbour's dissertations, laughing, shaking his head; then gently turned the conversation to such subjects as Life and Death and the Hereafter, upon which they argued right-heartedly.

"Do you sleep?" the old man had asked as he had sat on the stool at the last visitation.

"Sleep?" had replied Chang, The Enduring, standing very straight indeed and as though he had just come in from a ride and waited to be tubbed down instead of being in imminent danger of the Torture-by-the-Destruction-of-Feet. "I think so. I suppose one isn't obliged to lie down to sleep. Some cattle don't. Yes, I think I do. I suddenly find myself catching at thoughts on the Borders of Dreamland, then I come back, then I slip through the thongs and wander away in a kind of blue sky where everything is thin and clear like an early Spring day. Light and warm and where, though you don't see birds and flowers, you know they are there. And dew. And a pale sunlight. You slip in and out of the sunlight. Are there and back here and there again. Yes, I think that that is the sleep of a strained body and a wide-awake, unwilling-to-rest, brain."

Wang, The Bad, had thought it sounded more like approaching insanity and had inquired if his victim did not find the strain of standing almost beyond endurance.

Chang, The Enduring, had smiled, shaking his head. He did not exactly stand. The bonds, except those about his arms and hands were slack enough to allow him to rest upon the one which bound him about the thighs. When tired of that position he could stand up. And when tired of that, lean forward, resting his weight upon the thongs which bound him to the stake. In fact it was in that position that he slipped through the thongs into the Land-of-Sleep. And not a word had he added of his

craving to swim; to stretch his limbs; his agony of desire to sleep and sleep and sleep; his growing horror of that watchful speck of light which, more than once, he had tried to blow out, trusting his strong blowing to reach it in the Circle's horrible peace.

"When next I come, O Neighbour-born-of-Mules'-Parentage, the last brick will be removed. Remember that and be ready with the information I ask of you!" had replied Wang, The Bad, and had pattered back up the passage to The Forbidden City, entrance to which he had obtained, and without slightest difficulty, through the night-watchman, a cousin of his servant Li, by the door at the back.

The door opened into a deserted, junk-filled court which had once made part of the Boy Emperor's private quarters. The night-watchman had been bought body and soul and silence for a dollar a night just as the coolies had been bought body and soul and silence for sixty cents a day, big money.

And if there is any better than a Chinese at keeping a silent tongue when paid to keep it still, where is he found?

Chang, The Enduring, of a peace-loving race, of a people which, hating it, will bear pain without a sign, cowards in danger, panicky and totally unreliable in emergency, stoical before the inevitable, leaned back against the stake. So tired, so very, very tired, so filled to the brim with life, loving it, loath to give it up, he looked round the sinister place to the door leading to his house. A stout, well-hung barrier of solid wood, the door, clamped with iron. Shut. Bolted on the inside with heavy bolts. A flap drawn across the wicket in the centre at the height of a tall man's eyes. He turned his head and looked at the door opposite. Looked away. He had no interest in it. Through it would come Fate with her grim handmaidens, Death, Revenge and Sacrifice. Time enough to worry about that door when it was pushed wide.

But the other door! The other door!

Help was on its farther side. So near. A few

yards away, five minutes, perhaps a little more, of walking. Within reach, within calling, had there been no doors, no secrecy. He had longed to call, to send his voice ringing up the passage in the hope that perhaps some faint echo of it would make its way through the joining so cunningly concealed in the wall. To Mei-hua. The little 'Amah' who loved him, who had craved to die because of the humiliation he had subjected her to before the foreign woman, and, who, more than once, had declared herself willing to die to save him one instant's pain.

The beautiful child whom he would have raised to the rank of First Concubine had he lived to marry The-Light-of-Dawn.

But he had not called for help. 'Face' had prevented him. He could not be sure that his tormentor had not placed his servant, Li, at the end of the passage to spy, to listen, to find out what effect even the thought of the impending agony to be borne was making upon the victim's mind. No, even if death should result upon his silence he would not give the old man the satisfaction of twitting him for losing 'face,' by calling for help.

His watch chimed the hour. A fairy music in the dreadful place. A relentless reminder of the few hours left should he insist upon keeping his word, his promise to the foreigner. An exquisite mind-agony which Wang, The Bad, did not spare him, winding the watch carefully, hoping in his benevolent old heart that the little regular sound might serve to drive his victim mad and that in his insanity Chang, The Enduring, might babble Hatchway's whereabouts and so be spared the torture.

But it had not driven him mad although the little light had brought him, at times, well-nigh to frenzy, so calm, so steady it looked down there in the corner, like the unclosed eye of someone dead. He hated it. Hated it. Prayed it would go out and leave him in the dark. It would be easier to die in the dark. As die he must, having given his word to the Doctor that sunny June morning when the lilies had looked in at the window.



What was it he had said?

"—The 'pukka,' the *uncontaminated* Chinese never goes back on his word, never breaks his promise."

He, even then contaminated by Occidental impulsiveness, had said that. Out of the fullness of a grateful heart his mouth had babbled. Binding him. Whereas, had he not been so facilely emotional, he could quite peacefully have allowed old man Wang to enjoy the full measure of his revenge without having got himself mixed up in it.

He laughed. An eerie sound in the gloom. As though someone waking in the tomb and taking the imprisonment manfully had used laughter as a weapon against the horrors of death. Uncontaminated! He! When he was to die through his love of a white woman and a love forbidden him.

And all the sweetness of life to come.

Women. Sons. Love. Laughter. Travelling in foreign lands. A high appointment in his own. Perhaps. Perhaps not, honours bringing envy, hatred and malice in their train. A long life, sweet women, and at the end, so very far remote, sleep in the folds of the Hills. In the circle reached by a long avenue guarded by giant stone figures of mythological beasts and men, all surrounded by pine trees. In the middle of the circle with his women about him. Light-of-Dawn at his right, Mei-hua at his left. A place for his first-born son in the curve of his elbow, for his first-born grandson in his left hand. Wan Yen behind his left shoulder, his faithful retainers outside the circle.

And now!

He turned restlessly and pulled at the thongs. A tremor shook him from head to foot. His heart leapt against his ribs which marked the fine body with stripes as though he had been beaten. The sweat started under the effort of will it needed to quell his sudden, overwhelming horror of death as hope came nigh to dying. Hope of rescue, at the last moment, before he felt the first faint warmth of the quicklime against his feet. That moment when, to

save his 'face,' to keep his word, he would bend his head and with his teeth take the Speck-of-Death, a new little speck, placed under his nail, in his love of drama, acting, pretence, the day before he had met Rosalie in the 'hutung.'

He did not know what would come after he was dead. That was a question he could not ask and one, for fear of losing 'face' he would not, even had it been possible. Without a doubt, Wang, The Bad, would either leave him hanging for all Eternity from the stake or else, with his servant, would carry him at night to the door leading to his own house; open the door stealthily and, after due scouting, creep in like cats, as all Chinese could creep; deposit his body in some pitch-black court and creep quietly away; the secret of his death and the hidden passage safe in their hearts.

And then, he, Chang Teh-sheng, the most envied man in China, would be carried with great pomp to the Hills and buried there, all alone, wifeless, childless, without *sons* to worship at his Ancestral Tablet.

The horror of it!

But hope was not quite dead. Hope that, through love's telepathy, Mei-hua would find him, find the secret door, at the eleventh hour, so close.

He looked up at the roof and smiled. "People, cars, rickshaws passing, perhaps my little 'Amah,' perhaps the forbidden white woman and I under their heel down here with an hour, perhaps less, of life left." He shut his eyes against the watching light and opened them again, wide, at the thought of death, real death, the sharp cutting off of his life as a flower is cut from the stem. "I have slept, I have eaten, I have kept sane because I would keep my Appointment-of-the-Full-Moon and now!" He laughed and pulled against the thongs. "I think that when I am dead my body will be marked like the zebra I saw in London, in the Zoo. When I am dead, should my little 'Amah's' love be not deep enough to make her risk loss of 'face' by breaking the house down in front of a crowd of mocking servants, to find me." He bent his head

to the hand resting on his right shoulder and sighed and smiled. "I can reach it. I can pull out the speck which makes my finger look as though it had not been manicured by my Chinese Rose who polishes as well as she embroiders butterflies on my underwear." He stopped talking to wonder what his death would be like. A sudden mighty wrenching of the spirit from the body? A great rending of the soul's tissues? A great peace? then turned his head to the left.

There was a sound of voices. Coming down the passage. His watch chimed softly. They had come again. So soon. He closed his eyes. His little 'Amah's' love had not been strong enough after all.

### THE PERSECUTOR

A faint light came through the crack of the open door. Whispering. The light got brighter. He stood quite still, a beautiful, strong figure. The men came noiselessly in, Li, behind his master, holding high an orange-coloured lantern. They stopped on the threshold looking at Chang, The Enduring, the light chasing the shadows to the roof where they hung like bats and showing the place bare except for one stool and a heavy porcelain jug with a smeared stick in it.

"He is of a great stillness, Master. Perchance has the treatment been too severe. Perchance is he already dead."

Wang, The Bad, took a step forward, peering, whispering. "Dead!" he said. "Nay, fine stock like his does not die at a breath."

"Perhaps trusts he to a softening of your honourable heart, Master, before the removal of the last brick!"

Wang, The Bad, made an impatient movement with his shaven head. "Softening! He is Chinese.

He knows that my oath to revenge my Ancestors but makes a part of the Filial Piety which is China's strength."

Li moved forward, held the lantern higher. "He will suffer!" he said grimly.

Wang Pu-hao walked to the tub. "He will endure as the great of race endure, until the agony wrenches the secret from him and quickly unless he——" he stopped speaking as Chang, The Enduring, turned his head and smiled.

"Pray pardon my seeming discourtesy;" he laughed; "but my new-fashioned girdle prevents me from bending the knee in salutation."

Heart full of misery at the thought of the agony he was about to inflict on the warm, beautiful body, Wang Pu-hao looked at his young friend, touched the thongs, the full, silken trousers. "Still as stubborn as the mule which refuses to pass 'neath the Hatamen Gate until forced through by the pain of the whip?" he asked hopefully.

Chang, The Enduring, laughingly shuddered. "Ugh!" he said, "I hate even the thought of pain."

The old man motioned Li to bring the stool and when it was brought, sat down and took his long pipe from under his robe. "Then why not help me in the exercise of the Filial Piety which bids me recover the lost 'face' of my Ancestors?" he entreated.

Chang, The Enduring, watched the old man fill the minute pipe, lighting it deftly from a flint, and asked him if he would have him lose his own 'face' by breaking his word to the Foreign Devil. And when the other argued that the Foreign Devils' word counted for nothing unless written in black ink on white paper and witnessed by other names and then sealed to make it sure, laughed and added that the inking and the witnessing and the sealing had then to be secured by the affixing of a stamp. "But that is commerce!" he ended.

Wang Pu-hao laughed. "The Foreign Devil is

all commerce! " he said. " Drop the inked, signed, sealed and witnessed document in the fire and what happens? The bond goes up the chimney in smoke and that's the end of it." He chuckled. " I have proved my case! "

" Only as far as low-caste bonds. I have to do with the high-caste Foreign Devil and I am a high-caste Chinese! " countered the other and laughed a little ruefully at the thought of all that had been forbidden him on account of his race and despite his caste.

Wang Pu-hao puffed contentedly at his pipe. There was only one thong that bound high-caste and low-caste, Emperor and coolie, Oriental and Occidental, men, women and beasts together and that was pain, the bond of agony, and ordered Li to test the substance of the lime with the stick and to add water should it prove too glutinous.

Chang, The Enduring, without sign of his rising horror, watched the servant do as bidden whilst the old man railed against the guard which had been placed about the Temple in the Hills to keep the white woman safe. " How did the Foreign Devil's Legation know that she was there and in danger? " he grumbled.

Chang, The Enduring, rested his handsome head against the stake and looked up at the orange light. His heart rejoiced at the thought of Rosalie's safety. He had wondered, had ached to ask but, for fear of losing ' face ' in showing too much interest in a woman, had refrained. " I had the guard placed, directly the Foreign Devils had escaped from The Forbidden City; " he said serenely and as though there were many years before him in which to help people out of scrapes; " and then telephoned the Legation and explained things a little, asking them to be sure and send for her Excellency should she fail to report after midnight on The-Night-of-the-Full-Moon; " and continued with a description of how the Illustrious Institution had made the most frightful outcry. It had ordered the young woman to be returned to the Ministerial

Fold without delay. Had threatened him and the Chinese Government with all sorts of penalties. Then had somewhat subsided upon learning that, not only had the lady, to enjoy a respite from cunnubial upheavals, chosen the Temple, herself, but that, although the Western Hills had nothing to do with the Legation Quarter, a guard or two in khaki could be stationed round and about the Temple, should there be one or two to spare. And that was all except for a most displeasing and pungent odour rising from the disturbed lime.

Wang Pu-hao got up. "Pardon the slight inconvenience to your most honourable nostrils;" he said and taking out his fan fanned about the tub whilst explaining that a guard from the Legation had not reinforced his Neighbour's most efficient sentries.

"Pardon my to-be-regretted-nasal-fussiness," said Chang, The Enduring.

"And you risk a most grievous mutilation to keep your word given to a Foreign Devil!" grumbled the old man.

"If the British keep the given word should not the Chinese do as much?" said the other gently.

Wang Pu-hao fanned himself. Was he not keeping his bond to his Ancestors in trying to force his Neighbour into revealing the whereabouts of his enemy. The other agreed and thought there seemed an abundant harvest of promises about. "I likewise promised the foreign woman to go to her with news of her man on The-Night-of-the-Full-Moon which falls to-morrow!" he said.

"To-morrow!" chuckled the little old man. "I am in some measure revenged already. To-night is full moon."

Chang, The Enduring, moved against the ropes. "To-night!" he said. "Then I have lost count of the days."

Wang Pu-hao counted on his fingers. Five days and it was not The-Night-of-the-Full-Moon but The-Night-of-the-Sixth-Brick which, when removed, would cause the lime to rise, to creep higher, higher

still until Chang, The Enduring, The Victorious, would be for ever prevented from walking up the Hills to keep appointments with women. "Besides;" he tempted; "it would be grievous to lose 'face' before a female Foreign Devil who would laugh up her sleeve at you. There is no difficulty in keeping 'face' with her, my son. What is one Foreign man-Devil the more, the less, especially when the owner of as rare a flower as the woman in the Temple on the Hills?"

"The rare flower would wilt in my hands were I to break my promise to her father."

"Can you bear pain?"

"In all my life I have not once had to bear it."

"Then will it be like all things untried, suspense, anxiety and relief, the more potent for its novelty."

Chang, The Enduring, pointed out that his persecutor had forgotten the most potent of all driving forces.

"Hunger?"

"No, love!"

Wang Pu-hao laughed. Love would wilt when the handsome Chang Teh-sheng, the wealthy, the sought after, the fine rider and tennis player, was carried in a chair like a woman with bound feet.

"Also my shoemaker will lose a very good customer!" laughed the man whose resistance he tried to break.

Then the old man entreated. Put his pipe away, motioned the servant out of the place and stood beside the tub, pleading, the difficult tears of old age in his eyes. He had been the greatest friend of Chang Teh-sheng's father. He had known his mother, had rejoiced with her at the birth of her first son. Had played with the babe. Watched him grow up. Given him as many gifts as his scant purse would allow. He loved him, above all he loved him as his own son, more perhaps, his eldest not being worth a row of pea-nuts. Would he not listen? Would he not? A whisper. Only that. No one would ever know and what the coolie did not know that need the noble not worry about. His

servant would keep the matter behind his teeth. There would be nothing to be gained by making the affair known. If there had been it might have been otherwise. But not now. He had promised his mother to watch over her beloved son, always, but as that had been a secondary promise 't had naturally given way to the first made in 1860. He was an old man, he wanted to end his life in peace, with love and laughter about him, but love and laughter would fold their bruised wings and steal away if his beloved Neighbour continued in his obstinacy. A whisper. See, he would stand close to the tub. Was his enemy in Peking? He could tell him that. He must be in China because he would not leave his wife behind. Neither had he left by any of the ports because spies had been posted at the gangway of every outgoing vessel. Besides, his wife was up on the Hills. A whisper. Ah, his Neighbour had seen the folly of his ways. Had recognized the sweetness of life. He would whisper. It was good. It was very good. He rubbed his hands softly then, holding by the top of the tub, stood on tip-toe.

Chang, The Enduring, bent his head, his heart filled with the love of life, the love of women, the desire for sons. "I cannot!" he whispered, renouncing all.

For ever!

Wang, The Bad, stood down on his heels, his face suffused with wrath. So his Neighbour thought he could joke with him. Joke! He would show him how far joking would take him in the matter. "One could but admire courage of such persistency;" he rasped; "if the courage were not the outcome of some psychological opacity."

"Nay!" said Chang, The Enduring, gently. "It is you, O Neighbour, who suffer from moral myopia!"

"Then I will *make* you. *Force* you to confess. Within the hour I shall know where my enemy is and before many dawns shall have made big joss before the Tombs of my Ancestors who will have



recovered the 'face' lost in the last century." The old man clapped his hands and brusquely beckoned Li to him.

Chang Teh-sheng laughed, his heart pounding against his ribs. "For an Oriental you are, O Neighbour, in a most indecorous hurry. Will take a bet?"

### THE BETTING

Wang Pu-hao swung round, eyes alight, searching in his robe for his betting-book. "With all my heart!" he cried. "Behold have I wearied for you exceedingly. The nights drag immeasurably because of ought to fill the lagging hours." He opened his notebook. "The stakes? What are the stakes?"

"If I confess under the torture;" said Chang, The Enduring; "then shall my house with all that therein is be yours to do what you like with."

"With the six motor-cars and the electric device for making ice-cream!" added Wang, The Bad, as keen on the profits as a monkey on nuts.

"And all the fans and heaters!" supplemented Chang, The Enduring, and added, as the other made hieroglyphics in the notebook: "And if I do not confess, if I should die under the torture, you will so arrange that my body shall be found by my servant, Wan Yen, who will place it with my Ancestors in the Western Hills."

Wang, The Bad, laughed. His Neighbour would not die. There was no fear of that. He would be most carefully tended so that until the end of his days the whole of China should know of his loss of 'face' by his loss of feet.

"But if by the grace of the Gods I manage to get out of this tightest of uncomfortable corners——"

Wang Pu-hao scoffed. He could not escape, any more than a mouse could get from a trap. No

one knew of the secret door, not even the young sewing 'Amah' who wandered about the house in her Master's absence like a love-sick cat in the Spring.

"I am only supposing to heighten the stakes;" said Chang, The Enduring, lightly. "If I do, will you give me your word, the unbreakable word of the uncontaminated Chinese, that you will let the foreign man and woman leave the country in safety?"

The old man, sensing a trap, looked up from his writing. The other, haggard, white, striped with bruises, laughing, looked down at him. Wang, The Bad, nodded. "Aye!" he said; "I am an old man with an ever-increasing love for peace. If the impossible should happen I will leave the revenge as an heritage to my seven sons and seventeen grandsons."

Chang, The Enduring, laughed. "And I would come at all speed and gamble with you for canaries, gold-fish and speckled ponies."

Wang Pu-hao smiled. "Honourably permit that drops of water which cannot be weighted be substituted for the coin."

"I pledge my word as to my honest dealings."

"Aye, and I take it." The old man clasped his hands. "Look at the lime! Look at your slender feet!"

"I would really rather not!"

"Consider! Consider!" he urged. "Give in! Now! Give in!"

"I regret!"

The old face looked peaked and worn in the soft light. "You fool!" he whispered. "Oh, you fool!" and beckoned his servant as he pushed back his sleeves. "Hold my honourable Neighbour up by the waist whilst I withdraw the stone." He glanced up at the face above him. A smile broke over it, a light of mockery shone in the eyes, then a look of disgust flashed across it as the low-caste hands of the servant lifted him by the waist.

"Be quick and let me down!" ordered Chang,

The Enduring. "Your touch is repugnant to me!" and shook his head and his shoulders as best he could and as though to throw something unpleasant from him, frowned when Li let him slip through his arms with a little thud on to the next stone, then smiled when the old man, panting from the exertion, pulled the stone out from under his feet and held it up.

"Look!" he cried. "The edge is wet with lime. It means that the lime creeps to the top of the one on which you stand. There is yet time, yet time!" and when the other shook his head, threw the stone on the ground and cried that barely a quarter of an hour lay between his Neighbour and the worst of tortures and that within the hour he would have learned all that he wanted to know through the other's grievous moanings, which would be the sign of his having lost 'face' in the eyes of mankind for all time.

"That is on the knees of the Gods!"

And it was not as though the other's suffering would serve any good purpose, the old man urged. He would find the Foreign Devil. Through the woman and the clumsy working of the Legation which, though honest and friendly, was as a buzzing bluebottle in a web in its diplomatic methods with the Chinese. "And your heart is full of this woman!" he said looking into the tub and up at his friend.

"You are of a great and honourable observation!" remarked Chang, The Enduring.

"Grains of sand make a desert, drops of water an ocean, unconsidered actions place one man in the power of another. My servant watching——"

Chang, The Enduring, laughed. "The worm snaffles the fish, the servants' gossip fills an idle mind's idle hour, the gleam of a lighted lantern in daytime betrayed the secret passage——"

Wang, The Bad, chuckled. "My servant, Li, acting as rickshaw-coolie, observed that when the female Foreign Devil entered the rickshaw you held her cloak for a space longer than was necessary,

that night when I snaffled her husband as the fish the worm."

"Perchance I desired to feel the quality of the satin!"

Wang, The Bad, was of the opinion that when the feet of his Neighbour-of-Unbelievable-Tenacity felt the first warmth of the lime he would not speak with such regrettable frivolity.

Chang, The Enduring, begged that until the Moment-of-Warmth they should speak lightly.

The old man beckoned Li, his servant. Together they tightened the thongs below the knee to the ankle. He would not wait for fear the first screams of agony might soften his benevolent heart. He would stand outside the door leading to The Forbidden City and when the screams came ringing up the passage would walk down slowly so that the confession should be waiting on his Neighbour's lips. Also he would leave the lantern so that Chang, The Enduring, could watch the quicklime rise. "You will not listen?" he said.

"I have lived too long with the high-caste Foreign Devil not to have—er—shall we say assimilated—a little of his high code of honour."

Wang, The Bad, his face a pucker of grief, walked to the door, where he turned and bowed.

Chang, The Enduring, smiled across at him. "Pardon the seeming discourtesy of my salutation. My rope girdle prevents my bending the knee!"

"You fool! Oh, you fool!" said Wang, The Bad, then, a victim of the inexorable, unwritten laws of his land, of Filial Piety, of Ancestral Worship, pattered away up the shadowed passage leaving the man he loved to envisage the horrors of hell alone.

## CHAPTER XII

### DEATH WITH HONOUR

“ LOVE! ” said Chang, The Enduring, as he watched the lime, almost on a level with the top of the stone on which he stood. “ The man for the maid and she for him. The wife for the husband. He, sometimes, for her. The East for the West, the West never for the East, never really.” He shut his eyes. The lime crept up and he had never suffered physical pain. Creeping as love, or what he had mistaken for love, had stolen to his heart in the old English town. He bent his head to the hand on his right shoulder. Suicide. A coward’s death the British said. But if unable to withstand pain? If death were the only way in which to keep his word? Surely not a coward’s death, then. If he died, if he did not see Rosalie again, then he would lose just a little ‘ face ’ by not keeping his appointment with her and that Love would forgive. If he broke his word then he would lose much ‘ face ’ and that Honour would not forgive, not the honour of the Foreign Devils with whom he had lived and who had treated him so well.

He laughed. The little old lady, whose son, in looking upon the wine when it was white and bubbly, was the real cause of his death, would hang black loops in her cap if he broke his word, but pink, or blue, perhaps, if he kept it in death. He pulled suddenly against the thongs. Violently. Overwhelmed with a desire to live. Lifted his death-white face and looked about. Life was so dear. Love was so sweet. He would make an Offering of both to the Gods so that his forbidden woman should be protected wherever she went and also the little ‘ Amah ’ who tugged at his heart-strings in spite of her love having lacked the

strength with which to find him in his emergency. He lifted his beautiful head. "Into the keeping of the Gods I will put my English and my Chinese Rose and make Offerings to them of my life!" he whispered, then bent his head to his shoulder and lifted it again, so loath to die. The white cream tipped the edge of the stone sunk a little by his weight. Had the thongs not been tightened he might have pulled his knees up against them, a little, enough, perhaps, to prolong his life if only by one second. But now! In a breath of time he would hold the Speck-of-Death between his teeth. Then would follow the one overwhelming moment of life in which he held it there. All his past life, all his life to come crushed into that one infinitesimal second. And after? His dog had given one sharp yelp and died. Would he, by strength of will, by concentration on the effort, be able to die without yelping like a dog? To yelp would lose him 'face.' His watch chimed the hour. His last. When it chimed again he would be dead, having mastered the passing, he trusted, without yelping. How much time had he left? How long would it take the lime to creep over the edge and along the inch of stone to his feet? He did not know, but if he took the poison speck between his teeth he would have a little longer to live, or rather, more life to crush into the last moment. The speck his Chinese Rose who manicured so expertly had always railed against. Tender, beautiful, self-sacrificing child. She would be a rich little lady after his death and everything tied up securely for her at the Bank in Legation Street. Wan Yen would be quite a wealthy man, too, and everyone most comfortably provided for, whilst his vast fortune, torn to shreds, would be divided amongst his predatory distant relatives of which there were not a few.

Would his Chinese Rose remember him, always? Or would she marry and have sons? He did not like the thought of children to her by another man, death having shown him that he loved her. Such

a lonely death. Death with Mei-hua near would not have been so hard. No, she, loving him, would not marry, would not bear sons to another man. She would follow him. Of course. There was not the slightest shadow of a doubt that, should he never return to her, she, too, would commit suicide, thereby making the contamination of his impulsiveness responsible for two deaths.

The lime was over the edge. Just as the tide turns suddenly and comes back. It was time, but, by the Gods, how hard to die! To walk straight out into the dark about which Christian seemed in as much of a haze as Buddhist or Taoist or any other sect. There was nothing to be gained by waiting. Nothing! Even for one little second. Love had not been strong enough to find him. He raised his first finger under the nail of which the black speck showed quite plainly and bent his head whilst Death crept in at the door, her grim handmaidens behind.

Quite easily the gritty speck came away. Too easily. It slipped between his teeth and it took some manipulation to get it back between them. It stuck to the roof of his mouth. He had almost swallowed it. It reminded him of the awful moment when he had risked losing 'face' by almost choking at his first breakfast at Harrow. He wanted to laugh but could not with the gritty gate to a new life between his teeth. It would be good to laugh. In his last moment. To go out laughing. How sweet life and love and laughter were. He would lean his head back against the post so that he might, he hoped, be standing straight and bravely when the old man came to see why he was so long in yelping. The lime had crept forward a hair's breadth. He leant his head against the post and closed his eyes and opened them again, his heart leaping.

**A dull thudding. Again. And then! And then!  
A sound of crashing blows! Of splintering wood!  
A mighty hammering!  
In the distance! In the distance!**

The speck between his teeth, he turned his head to listen, looked down at the lime, across to the door.

Love had found him. Love had found the secret door. But would they be in time? The lime was so near. What were they hammering with? They should use iron. Those heavy iron mallets with which The-Court-of-the-Peonies was being pounded flat. Ah! Men shouting! Men shouting! And—ah, yes!

“Master! Master! Master!”

Clear and sweet Mei-hua's voice above the din of splintering wood and crash of iron upon the splintering wood.

Would they be in time? Would they be in time?

There was the other door to force, the near door, bolted on the inside. A stout, well-hung barrier, clamped with iron. He dare not let the speck go from between his teeth. Supposing——! No, it could not be! Life could not be snatched from him, now, nor could mutilation be the bitter outcome of the hour. Yet he dare not let the poison speck go. Nor, because of it between his teeth, could he call to his rescuers, to hasten them.

Quick!

They must be quick!

The lime was so near and a light showing through the door ajar leading to the other passage. The old man Wang was coming. He and his servant. What if they were first and pushed him down into the lime, wringing the secret from him at the last moment? or forcing him to die? Ah! Men shouting! Men shouting! Nearer! Nearer! And Mei-hua's sweet voice calling, calling! A light through the wicket! A strong light and Mei-hua calling!

“Master! Master! Master! Courage! I come! I come! Master! Master! Master!”

Her scream of terror. Why? Someone had told her. Even on tip-toe she could not see through the wicket. Someone had told her. She knew.



She was urging them, cursing their slowness. Calling. Calling.

A man's voice. One he knew. So kind. Calling to him through the wicket to be of good courage.

Crash! the door shook! Crash! the door shook! The lime so near his foot and the light coming down the far passage.

Crash! the door splintered. Crash! the door splintered!

"Master! Master! Master!" over and over again.

Crash! and the door gave, broke, and against a background of faces and lanterns Mei-hua running, running to him.

"Master!" she cried. "I call you for The-Appointment-of-the-Full-Moon!" then: "Torture!" she screamed. "Torture!" and flung herself down by the tub. "Bolt that door! Quick!" she called to the Abbot as he ran past her, and leaning over, crushing her breast against the porcelain, lifted the great weight of the man she loved by the knees, pushing him up against the thongs which held him down, holding him just an inch above the lime as it crept up to the place where he had been standing. "Cut the thongs!" she cried and laughed up at the Chauffeur as he hacked and hacked and hacked and across at the Abbot who, the door flung wide, barred the way with lifted hand to the two who had come running down the passage.

"It is all over!" he said gently.

Wang, The Bad, wrung his hands. "He is dead? My beloved Neighbour is dead?" he whispered.

### THE GAME-OF-LOVE

The Abbot laughed and looked back to where Mei-hua held her Master by the knees and the Chauffeur hacked the thongs which bound him.

Then the little old man pushed the Abbot on one side and ran like a little old deer to his Neighbour whilst the servants, all with lanterns, all shouting and laughing, crowded to the broken door. "Stand back, all of you!" ordered Mei-hua over her shoulder whilst vehemently refusing coolie help. Then the Abbot, her friend, put his arms under his beloved Son's knees as the thongs dropped from about him and lifted him over the side of the tub just as the quicklime covered the stone.

All stripped their robes off to make a soft couch for the Master they loved so, crying out at his bruises, his sharp ribs, his great eyes, his numbed arms.

And when the Chauffeur made a sudden pounce at Wang Pu-hao and caught him and shook him like a rat, the Abbot rushed the Chauffeur. And Chang, The Victorious, laughing, watched the old man and his servant most unceremoniously hustled up the passage out of the aching reach of the servants who clamoured to rub the faces of those who had so hurt their Master in the lime.

Then Mei-hua, kneeling behind her Master so that his head should the more comfortably rest upon her knee, took complete charge of the situation and of everybody, but especially of the Compradore who had laughed at her story of the secret door, forcing her, with the aid of the Abbot and the Chauffeur, to lift the heavy mallet and strike the first blow against the wall. She would teach him. Never fear. She would show him that life and 'face' and position counted nothing in the balance with love. Let him only wait. "You!" she cried and as though she addressed a clot of mud. "Get a warm bath ready, with vinegar, unguents and warm towels. Move yourself. By the Gods, move yourself!" and jerked her dimpled chin, as she worked upon her Master's numbed arms, at the Head-Cook who hopped on one foot so eager his desire to render assistance. "Order broth!" she commanded. "Warm, not hot, and coffee, and don't take until the New Year to get it done!" She looked down

at the man she loved, his head on her lap, his eyes closed. He had not spoken. Perhaps he could not. Perhaps relief had sapped his strength where dread had left no mark. Bruised, broken, spent, yet she would not let him lose 'face' with himself. Not for all the world. Finger to lips she looked up at the Abbot.

Hurriedly, desperately, whilst driving back from the Peking Hôtel to the house, they had made their plans, if they should arrive in time to save him from death, to also save Chang Teh-sheng from his infatuation for the white woman.

The Abbot had counselled keeping her departure secret, allowing Chang Teh-sheng, were he able, to go to the Temple in the Hills to keep his appointment with her and there to find her gone.

"Aye!" had replied Mei-hua, instinct telling her that the counselling was good. "As the proverb says, 'When the wine cellar is empty then will man climb to the pure stream on the mountain-side.'" She had folded her hands. "Besides, your Holiness;" she had continued; "were he not to keep this Appointment-of-the-Full-Moon he would connect your Holiness and me, always, with his loss of 'face' in so failing." She had turned and looked him in the eyes. "There is no fish so slippery, no bird so quick to a new field, no lion so arrogant, so relentless as my Master."

And now she turned to the Chauffeur and most sweetly, because he had so valiantly wrought for her, said: "Please get the car ready, with furs and cushions. Our Master has an appointment to keep at The-Temple-of-Perpetual-Fragrance." And when Chang, The Victorious, opened his eyes and smiled up at her, felt for all the world as though the Gods had pushed the sun, moon and stars, the scent of flowers and the song of birds into that one moment.

She bowed her lovely head to the ground beside him, raised herself and picked up some hind's robe. Laying it gently upon him she begged him to forgive her for placing the filthy garment belonging

to some low person upon his illustrious body, then pointed to four stalwarts. "You;" she said; "and you three;" and ordered them to lift their Master. "And if you fail to move as the shadows of lambs in a field you leave the house this night;" and tucked the unseemly garment about the wounded body whilst the ecstatic stalwarts moved as gently as an elephant with a child, let alone the shadows of lambs in a field.

Chang, The Victorious, lay quite still, watching, listening, absorbing the peace, the safety of the moment. Gifts of his Chinese Rose. "How do you come here, my holy relative?" he whispered to the Abbot, not that he need speak below his breath but so as not to shatter the moment.

Mei-hua put finger to lips behind his head. "His Holiness came to find you, Master," she prompted.

"I was afraid, my Son;" said the Abbot picking it up. "I sleep at The-Temple-of-Wisdom this night hungering for the moment when I shall learn the reason for this outrage."

Chang, The Victorious, laughed as he lay with his head on his 'Amah's' lap. "Mei-hua;" he said, and looked up at her looking down at him like a young moon from a midsummer sky. "Tell me about the secret door."

But Mei-hua, fully aware of the lure of denial to all men, at all times, shook her head. "When you are strong, Master, then I will tell;" she said, and withdrew her hands from under his head, slowly, so that her fingers upon his face felt like the sound made by the tips of bamboo-trees fretting the Temple wall.

Chang, The Victorious, smiled and begged her of her honourable condescension to look into the tub and see if upon the creamy surface of the lime there was one black speck, and if so, by the aid of a hair-pin, to condescendingly withdraw it.

Smiling, because sure of the success of her tactics, she very gently laid his head down and hung over the tub. "Yes, Master, such speck there is;" she said and taking off her slipper and with the aid of a

hairpin from the black skull-cap of her hair, manoeuvred the speck onto the top of her footwear. "What is to be done with it, Master?"

"Have it given to a mange-ridden street dog and report the manner of its death to me;" said Chang, The Victorious, as he got to his feet. "Do you think I am a skin stuffed with wool, child?" he asked at the astonishment writ large upon her countenance; "or like a hide filled with water? I am weary but that will pass with strong black coffee and I am numb about the arms and hands yet, but that will pass under your gentle ministrations;" and laughing, discarded the unseemly robe, and laughed again, gently, at sight of a pouting underlip. "Why does the mouth look like a sad rose?" he whispered.

"Will always make a mock of me, Master? You mocked me before the Foreign Devil;" she whispered back and in a tone which suggested that had she not been of cleanly habits she would have spat. "And you make mock of me now by *pretending* to want my help."

"'Tis a bad habit, Little-Rose, like the other I possess of loving to watch the colour dye your face;" and laughed as she blushed a rosy pink and walked away, his hand on her shoulder and his arm through the Abbot's.

Through rows of bowing, smiling servants he passed and as serenely as though dressed in robes of softest satin instead of a pair of most dishevelled underwear and a vest of ribs as sharp as knives. "Will take the numbness from my arms, Little-One?" he asked at the door of the Sixth Bathroom full of steam and fragrance; "whilst someone in the place of Wan Yen makes me presentable enough to pay my respects to the great white lady?"

Mei-hua kept her eyes down as she shook her head. Time enough at the Temple for her Master to discover the trick she would spring on him. She played a lone hand. Woman's instinct her only guide. And instinct whispered that before the dawn was the moment to play her highest card. To drive

in the fact of the foreign woman's want of faith with him, to drive it in until he suffered in his great pride through it. To let him, overstrung with pain and endurance, find the Temple abandoned by this woman. To sit on the parapet as was his habit, alone. He, the most sought after man in China. Then it would be for her, his servant, could she, unseen, get to the Temple with him, to fill the dark hour, in some way which she would think out later, with laughter. Catch him in the web of it so that he would come to wonder why he had wasted two thoughts on a woman who had brought him nothing but trouble: "—with her hideous, red, twisted hair and enormous eyes as hard and blue as any cheap saucer!" she ended vindictively to herself.

She begged to be excused the joy of removing the to-be-regretted- numbness from his honourable arms. There would be only men in the room with her Master. She begged to be excused. And looked sideways and down and so modest withal that he thrilled, as she intended he should, at the thought of the hour when she would do as she was told in spite of protestations. Besides, she was dishevelled. She looking like a new pin. Her dress was stained with dust. She would change it. She was minus one shoe. Also she wished to give the black speck to the dog herself so as to be able to report personally upon its death. And added a few more excuses to deny the man the satisfaction of having her near him whilst he underwent the process of being made beautiful for another woman.

There was a limit to the humiliation she would bear in regard to other women, even to give him pleasure.

"But I may not be back until after dawn, Little-One;" he said persistently, somewhat at a loss, also resentful and wakened at being denied by her.

"The dress will not be worn out by then, Master. 'Tis a brocade but fresh from the looms of Chung-king;" she answered and slipped away, on the task

of killing dogs when the man, who stood in *locum tenens* to Wan Yen, appeared at the door to await his Master's autocratic pleasure.

### A BUNDLE OF FUR

In robes of sheer white satin, serene, without a thought to the horror just past, new-born to life, joyous, forgiving through understanding, Chang, The Victorious, walked to the front gate. Through rows of bowing servants each with a red lantern, the colour of joy, swinging to lighten his path, each with thanksgiving on his lips. Rows which stretched all the way down the little street at the end of which the car waited in the shadows. With his hand on the Abbot's shoulder he walked, dominant, beautiful, so full of life that his light foot left scarce a mark in the dust. For one moment he stopped in the frame of the red Gate, looking down, smiling at the cinders of the Spirit Food; the thought of the meeting of just a week ago; of all that had happened since; of all, thanks to the strength of love, that was to come. He walked down the steps, slowly, the 'hutung's' entire population seething, pushing and craning behind the arrogant, jubilant servants for a better view of the man, who, so rumour had it, had been discovered buried alive in a secret passage.

"Beautiful!" breathed a damsel whose hideous fringe flipping over her small eyes denoted her unmarried state.

"Thin and white as death!" whispered Grannie, grandsons, roused from sleep to witness the triumphal progress, clutching at her panties.

"Like a young God!" thought one whose husband, from over-eating, breathed stertorously behind her.

"Mine, if I play the hand right!" said Mei-hua to herself as she lifted a corner of the fur rug under which she lay in a coil on the floor beside the Chauffeur.

Sable lined the car, covered the floor, the seats, the cushions. The light shaded with red. Red flowers in the gold vase. Peace, power, as Chang, The Victorious, stopped. "Take my orders!" he said to the Compradore. "The swimming bath to be made ready, scented with myrrh. The courts to be filled with flowers. Joss-sticks burned before each God. Every Temple in the City requested to make joss before The-God-Securing-Good-Endings. The cooks to make ready a feast for the household to-morrow. No beggar to be turned away empty to-day. If they swarm, have food for them outside the nearest Gate. Fireworks to be ordered in sufficient quantity to last from midnight to sunrise. Each servant to have a new suit of clothes by this evening, so get 'Amahs' sufficient from the City. The place to be swept and garnished from end to end. Flowers everywhere. Get help from the City. Letters of invitation to dine to-night, to all my friends, all to be stamped with my seal, the scribes to start working at once. The letter to the Honourable Wang to be embellished with drawings of gold and silver. Rouse Silver Street and Jade Street and tell them to send their best silver, jade and jewels by noon. Everything to be laid out for me to examine on my return with a list of my friends to whom the gifts will be offered. A list of every Temple in the City and coolies sent to find out what would be acceptable to each as an offering of thanksgiving." He stood with a foot on the step and turned to the seething crowd. "Ask the illustrious people here to honour me by filling my miserable Jade Court with their peerless presence at the First Meal;" and when the Compradore cleared his throat requested him to get on with the peroration without any more fuss.

Most of the crowd got to its knees and bowed to the ground, those who couldn't, through age or corpulence, swung their hands up as high as they could, calling down the Gods' blessings in showers upon his Honour's most illustrious head.

Chang, The Victorious, arrogant, high-born,



master of men, bowed as the car moved. The moon sank to her rest as they sped over the dusty roads. The City Gate opened just wide enough to let the car slip through on a most outstanding bribe. The coming dawn patterned the path up which, straight as a young pine, in his carrying chair, he went to keep his appointment with the woman forbidden him.

The bundle of fur stirred, then, finger to lips, Mei-hua crept out. Swinging and swaying in her chair she followed up the path to play her highest card in the Game-of-Love.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE-COURT-OF-THE-RISING-SUN

DAWN breaking behind Peking. The Hills black and velvety against a thin purple out of which the stars died. Purple to silver-grey and still more stars dead as a bird, like a shred of charred paper, flew across them. Dawn coming. Another day. A further span of life. And because the Sun was on his way, a great hush. Everything kept quiet. Birds, the wind, the trees, as though they feared that Day, at a sound, might slip down again behind the Hills.

Rose-grey to the east. Through the Moon-Gate a silver radiance where the full moon lay hid behind the world's rim. And from the peaked porch under the Temple roof a spurious ring of light thrown by the lantern hanging there.

It was so still.

As though someone had left in a hurry or had died with no friend about to tidy things away. An open book on a chair, a jade cup on a red-lacquer tray, the door to the Abbot's House open and a light in the upper story behind the paper windows.

And yet, for all the things that lay about, you knew the place deserted because of the absence of heart-beats there.

Instinct warning him of the desolation, Chang Teh-sheng stopped in the centre of the Moon-Gate. Quite still he stood, listening, then looked over his shoulder at the radiance the moon had left behind. The moon had set. The Full Moon. Was he then, because the moon was no longer in the sky, too late? By an hour or so? In the West time was a thing limited, to be accounted for in seconds or cycles. The lilies stood stiff and still, their flowers like ivory bells without tongues with which to ring a melody. Was that why it was so quiet? The

parapet showed like a stone barrier across the court and nothing else. Not a place upon which to sit and watch the sun rise behind Peking. No one on the parapet, nor in the court, yet a light in the upper story and a yellow-gold ring of light under the porch.

As though he walked out of a warm room into a frosty night Chang Teh-sheng slid his hands up his sleeves. An involuntary act of protection against the first breath of desertion he had felt in all his sheltered life. Not that there was anything tangible or visible to prove the desertion. Only the parapet, and the silence in the court at the back entrance where his chair and coolies waited. He had expected Wan Yen to be about, no matter what the hour of his arrival. But his non-appearance at the sound of the coolies upon the path up could easily be explained by the contamination of the West. The white race wrapped their servants in cotton-wool and got nothing worth speaking about out of them in return. Exceptions, of course, being the butler, valet and housekeeper, a domestic, perfect and solely British by-product. But then, again, his forbidden woman was not of that perfected trinity's category. He remembered the stiff, starched retainer Ellen. Would Rosalie, perhaps, when the moon sank, have sent the staff to bed? Of course, that was it. And she was asleep, too, with her red-gold curls standing up in a ruff against the pillow. He walked into the court, his pride sighing with relief. The lantern burned, although of course, it could do that for twelve hours, being lit with foreign nightlight. But there was, also, a coffee-cup left on the table. Another sign of servant-coddling, and, of course, the light in the upper story was to show that she was up there like a white bird on a bough. The bough of the Cicalo-Tree? The question was, how to waken her? How to bring her down? She wasn't asleep. The light proved that. She was waiting for him, listening. She would be sure to look out to see if he were there. Pride would send her peeping. So he would sit on the parapet and watch Peking come out of the mist and wait until,

in silk things and Chinese slippers and all soft with sleep or the warmth of the bed, she came down to him, though the roof would fall in in horror were he to go up to her and sit on the end of the bed and talk.

Nor would he want to move an inch from the foot of the bed. He was not quite sure that the sensation he had called love and which had urged him to ask for the white girl in marriage had not been an abnormal hunger bred of strange surroundings. An effort, as it were, on the part of Nature to help him acclimatize to the weather, customs and food of the life he had been leading. Just as one quite naturally got accustomed to eating macaroni in Italy and frogs in France. Not that that was the only reason for him not moving an inch from the end of the bed. Added to the analysis of abnormal hunger there was also a latent fear of the solid, terrifyingly everlastingness of things Occidental. From meals to marriage, everything in the West was cut, dried, labelled and arranged. Like a museum-case in which objects were placed and stayed put for all time as part of the institution.

Whereas—

He sat on the parapet and looked down at Peking. Her Gates and Walls were guarded. Even she, proud Capital, was not safe. Life teemed there. Tragedy, comedy, marriage, birth, danger, death jostled each other in her streets. At the pinnacle of fame to-day, a man might beg his bread the morrow. There was all the delicious savour of uncertainty in life, there. No museum-cases. Rather rows of fragile, precious vases liable to break at a touch. So with women, there. So with love of women, there. They slipped in and out of the hands as might silken scarves instead of hanging like a weather-proof coat in the hall, ready for all seasons. Had not one of his wealthy friends thirty-one Concubines because of his inability to stand the sight of the same face more than once a month at the First Meal.

Women in China could be represented by a cushion hung round with tassels.

There was always the loved one whichever one she might be, Head-Wife or favourite Concubine. She was the body of the cushion. The part you honestly loved and longed for when weary or perplexed. Tassels stood for the rest of the women. To be changed, snipped off, sewn on again, at pleasure and leisure. As to marriage with one woman and one only, for all time! No! indeed! That savoured too much of the bolster in a long, plain cover. A kind of prop which helped you to breakfast comfortably in bed if you wanted to, occasionally.

He looked up at the window. There was no shadow on it. He looked down at the plain and across to the far horizon where a faint pink flush broke and a far-away cloud turned the same colour. He smiled, thinking of the way the colour flew to the oval cheeks of the Chinese Rose who tugged at his heart-strings. Tantalizing, lovely, tender, slender, little, little thing. She, surely, would be waiting for him when he got back. There was all the warmth and the comfort of the cushion about her and all the light, colour and variety of the tassel as well. How lovely she would look propped up in bed with a lot of pillows behind her.

Would he sit at the end of the bed then?

Would he?

### A FOOL'S ERRAND

He rose, suddenly restless, suddenly irritated. He would go through the house to where the servants slept and order his man-servant out of bed to make tea. To sleep like that was hoggish. The man was getting fat. He would see that he went short of food and sleep for a week. He turned to look at the sky. The hills were a velvety grey. Peking a topaz in a silver setting. A flicker of mist. A pink veil on the Hill. A rift in the sky,

a lattice through which looked Dawn, when, Night, the wanton, out at all hours and covered in jewels, called him as she ran away, leaving the earth cluttered with dark deeds and sweet love, the wind her sighing, the dew her tears of farewell which tumbled from her cloak as she gathered it up and fastened it to her by the last star.

It would be good to have a woman near in the hush of the dawning. He would go and look up the stair to see if the one forbidden him stirred. He crossed the court and stopped to look at the book, went on, the lantern flickering as though ashamed of its paltry light or grieved to show the white patch in the centre of the door.

He saw the white patch and stopped, the lantern light shining on the half-closed eyes, the twisted, scornful, mouth.

He knew.

There was no need for him to take the white patch from the door. No reason to read what was written there. Western women were prone to writing letters when they went away. Screeds which almost always proved a fertile source of trouble by being read by the wrong person. He would not take it down. He would take it down in case, it, too, should end by being read by the wrong person. Someone who would learn how he, the sought after, the spoilt, the proud, had been brought on a fool's errand, alone, at dawn, to the Hills. He pulled the pin out. the paper came with it. The lantern flickered and to read quickly what had been written, before the light went out, he held the letter up.

And so little. Written hastily in pencil. Words of gratitude. Stereotyped expressions. So heart-broken to have to go, to break her promise, but the boat sailed sooner than expected. *So grateful. So very grateful.* Would write from Tientsin. *So grateful.* Mention of her father's and her husband's gratitude. *Again.* A postscript as badly written as the rest.

“ P.S.—The Abbot will explain.”

The Abbot!

What had he, the holy man, to do with it all?

“Wan Yen!”

The sharp words cracked like revolver shots in the silence. Two crows rose, cawing, from a pine and sailed away towards Peking, a flutter of little twittering birds away over the Moon-Gate. Of course. His servant had gone with her. He was alone. Quite. Deserted. And for this he had suffered. Had risked death. For *this!* He was suddenly overwhelmed by a violent, passionate resentment born of the past agony, of a great fatigue underlying the superficial energy. It shook him from head to foot. There was no one there. No witness to the sudden break-down of iron self-control which had bade him laugh at pain, at death. He leaned against the door, the letter crushed against it, and cried out sharply when the pin pierced his palm. He flung round and stared out at the sky up which a great, golden shaft shot, straight up, a golden finger blazing across the dawn, lighting the tops of the City's eastern Gates.

“No one cares!” he cried. “No one! Even Mei-hua, even the child who asked the gift of one night and went white under one kiss, could not miss her bed to come with me to the Hills. Of course she sleeps, too. She must *sleep*, when, for the asking, she could have come all wrapped in sable to the Hills, with me, her Master, her lover.” He went back to the parapet and leaned on it watching the glory of the sky which mocked the emptiness of the new day for him. “Alone! I!” he said, his pride as tattered as the shreds of night to north and south and sat on the parapet and looked down through the trees to the path where two women, far below, went their way to work. He tore the letter across and across and crushed the remnants in his hand. Mocked! Derided! A few, ill-chosen, ill-written words on a half sheet of paper. All that was left of the love or the infatuation or whatever it was that had urged him to ask for the woman in marriage of the man, her father, who had told him

that a white woman was as out of reach of an Oriental as The Forbidden City to a coolie.

*Coolie!*

No coolie in China would stand such treatment from women. Left by one. Bed preferred to him by the other. By the Gods! To complete his humiliation, it but needed The-Light-of-Dawn to come flaunting by in her red Bridal Chair on her way to some other man.

A second golden rod flamed across the sky heralding the sun. The sun! when it was the moon which, despite pain and weariness, had brought him upon the fool's errand.

A bird sang from a top branch and flew away to its mate singing on the hill-side. A lily-petal curled back. It was as though a woman looked out of a window. Another bird flashed past. The Turnip-seller's centuries-old, melodious cry came up the hill-side as he made his way to the City. From somewhere below, as they walked up the path, came the sound of two women talking.

## LOVE AND DUTY

Chang Teh-sheng looked down. "Peace!" he said; "with *women* about!" and looked towards Peking where one woman slept and back to the Moon-Gate where the moon, which should have brought him to another woman, had sunk behind the pine, and sat so still, staring, you would have thought him a beautiful statue of utter astonishment had you been out in the dawning.

The pine and the lilies made a background and the Moon-Gate a frame to Mei-hua as she stood, a gleaming, slender figure in Peking-Blue brocade, in the centre of the stone circle; in her hands, which looked like lotus petals, so white they were, clouded amber tea-things on a jade tray; the red of her crimson mouth as red as the rose in her hair.



" You! " whispered Chang Teh-sheng, the word a caress on the soft air, his heart leaping, his pride healed of its many and grievous wounds. " You! " and watched her as she knelt, the tray a green patch on the grey stones, and bowed to the ground; looking at him through long lashes; knowing, by the peace that had so swiftly come to the beautiful, driven face, that she had won in the Game-of-Love.

But when she rose and crossed to him with the tea-tray, she went as his servant fulfilling a duty and not as the woman of his heart which she was to become for all time, and with no foreknowledge of the high place amongst China's most famous women, to which her beauty and wit and graciousness were to raise her.

Without a word she laid the tray upon the parapet and poured out tea, offering the tea-cup on both hands.

" You knew? " said Chang Teh-sheng, taking it from her and putting it down.

" I knew, Master! "

" And you came! Why did you come? "

" I thought the Temple would be lonely at dawn with all gone, Master! "

" You followed me? "

" Oh, no, Master. I lay under the fur rug beside the Chauffeur who, likewise, is your Honour's most devoted servant. "

Chang Teh-sheng sighed in sheer ecstasy of a love so great, then looked down at the sound of womens' voices, stared, frowned and laughed. Now was the appointed time for establishing all things to do with those ill-tuned step-sisters, Marriage and Love. For once and for all. For all time.

*Now, by the Gods!*

" Her Honour, The-Light-of-Dawn, walks abroad to watch the sun-rise accompanied by her ' Amah '! " he whispered.

" The She-Devil! " replied Mei-hua politely, slipping her hands up her sleeves. " Who is to bear your Honour sons. "

Chang Teh-sheng was not so sure about that.

He would try, at once, to make certain if she would be graciously pleased to accept the position of First Wife. "Fetch me a flower, Little-Rose, a red one from those outside the Gate. If she smiles when she catches it, if she catches it being a woman, then she bears me sons. If she frowns then——"

"The streets are lined with maidens waiting, willing, dying to fulfil that duty towards your Honour!" laughed Mei-hua and was gone like a flash to the Moon-Gate. "Two, Master!" she said. "Yellow ones for bad temper!" and laughed when he reprimanded her for her impertinence towards the honourable lady and held the tea-pot in both hands to keep it warm whilst Chang Teh-sheng established things in marriage by means of yellow flowers. The first fell in front of The-Light-of-Dawn as she came awkwardly along the path, her hand on her servant's arm. Very surprised she was at the missile, and in view of the fact that the gleam of the man's white satin robe in the sun-rising was visible for miles around, much too surprised for her astonishment to be genuine.

"Oh! oh!" she said as she looked up, then turned her face away. "A man! 'Amah,' a man!"

"A man indeed, your Honour!" said the 'Amah' playing her mistress's game of make-believe. "And I do declare it is his Honour Chang Teh-sheng."

"Oh, no! oh, no!" said The-Light-of-Dawn. "What will he think of my being out at this hour!"

"That you came on the off-chance of seeing him;" thought the 'Amah'; "the chair-coolie having sent word of his arrival i' the night!"

As Chang Teh-sheng was also thinking, being wise to the machinations of maids in Peking despite their outward and overwhelming modesty.

The 'Amah,' longing to be rid of her young Mistress through marriage, counselled taking a chance and bowing in return, the hour being early and no one about.

"Oh, do you think so?" said the girl and

without giving the woman time to change her mind and counselling, looked up and bowed just as Chang Teh-sheng, through Western contamination, threw the other yellow missile.

"Does she bear me sons, Little-Rose?" he whispered. "She does. She smiles upon the flower and up at me!"

Things therefore were established. He would send the Go-between to The-Light-of-Dawn's parents that day. Negotiations would begin immediately and he wed and through with it as soon as possible. He bade Mei-hua remind him to go, the morrow, to the famous Astrologer outside the Ch'ien Men with intent to bribe him into fixing a lucky day for the wedding right early. He watched the haughty damsel, who was to bear him two daughters, walk awkwardly away and when she looked over her shoulder, having inherited her share of Chinese salt, bowed again and down to the parapet.

"His Honour will start negotiations at once;" remarked the 'Amah.' "'Twill be a great match, your Honour!"

"It will!" said The-Light-of-Dawn, little wotting of her rival behind the parapet.

Chang Teh-sheng looked down at Mei-hua, serene, undisturbed, the yellow tea-pot in her hands. "Put that down and come closer!" he said. "I can't hear you speak at so great a distance;" and told her, when she stood at his knee, that his arms were numb from throwing flowers and that only her white hands in the warmth of the Swimming-Pool would take the pains away.

Mei-hua shook her head. There would be men present to attend upon her Master, might she honourably be excused?

"Only as many men as I allow;" he said and added: "Look up!" knowing that she would not, even if she could.

But when she turned her face up without raising her eyes, he took her lovely head gently between his hands and kissed her on her crimson mouth and

held her so, and when, as sweetly pink as the little further clouds and shy and overcome, she pulled his hands down, he let her go and watched her run like a beautiful, frightened hind through the Moon-Gate. And when, at the foot of the Hill, he found her sitting sedately by the Chauffeur, ordered her into the car and as they sped away, just as the sun leapt above the Hill, smothered her, except for her lovely face, all up in sables.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE SWIMMING-POOL

A LOIN-CLOTH and a seeming vest of bruises, cuts and knife-edged ribs clothed Chang Teh-sheng as he sat on the top of the flight of steps leading down to the alabaster Swimming-Pool. He sat relaxed against a jade pillar which matched the water; the green silk curtains screening dressing-rooms; windows and doors; the centre of the pool formed by lotus and their green leaves; the leaves of lilies which stood in rows and white-jade pots across the tiles and made of the place a fragrant field.

All white and green tiles, flowers and green leaves, soft, white, silken towels with green-silk fringes over rattan chairs and couches which were renewed each time the Master bathed, scented with the sharp-sweet odour of myrrh, the Swimming-Pool soothed the man's agonizingly awake mind and weary body.

Of sound but little. A chuckling of water flowing in and out. Voices of men talking softly as they worked to deck the courts with flowers in preparation of the midnight feasting. The Turnip-seller's cry from the far 'hutung.' Tap on little drum. Shrill of childrens' laughter.

Famished, Chang Teh-sheng sat with no sign of his craving for rice and tea, which simple fare his wounded body demanded just as his overwrought mind longed for laughter before he slept. Mei-hua would bring him the tea and rice upon a tray and he wondered what she would wear and whether her mentality would respond to the sartorial need of the moment.

The wrong colour would shatter the illusive quality of it to bits. Peking-Blue, pink, green,

would fit the hour's mood as ill as laughter a Buddhist ceremony. Any other than the perfect shade, whichever it might be, would bring back the sombreness of the past week, break across the memory of her in the centre of the Moon-Gate, wipe the soothing balm of her sweet ways, thoughts and laughter from his mental wounds. Knowing he drifted from the normal in his thoughts upon the matter, quite aware that in the name of sanity he should turn and walk the other way, he made not the slightest effort to do as he should as he sat in the scent of the lilies and myrrh.

He was so tired. So very tired, eyes half-closed, ears keen for the sound of laughter before he slept. Sleep!

He laughed a little and stretched his arms to intensify the pain. He would sleep on his Chinese bed, on the hard, unyielding wooden planks with one linen sheet as covering. His agonizing body should learn that, at a given point, just as the tide turns, pain must lessen, the pain, that is, of superficial wounds such as bruises and rope-stripes. Nor would he soften even the whit of allowing others to minister to his hurts. If man would be master of men, women and beasts he must be master of himself and as pain was but a whining of the mind, man had but to harness thought to lessen the whimpering.

As with love.

He could this day, this hour, if he so wished, an 'Amah' being a negligible quantity in the life of man, fill his hands to the brim with the fulfilment of that desire miscalled love. Fill them to find them empty with the hour run out. Whereas, were he to master desire, make it his servant, dominate the pain which was but the thought of love's desire, he would grow the stronger for the abstinence. Plank-beds for wounds and bruises, abstinence for love, real love, then the full hour stretched upon a divan strewn with cushions and that other hour, sweet, remote, overflowing with all from which he had abstained.

Food. Sleep. Love.

The masters of man were man not proof against them.

In an effort to forget the jailers three, he sent his thoughts abroad. They drifted to Tientsin. Got idly entangled in Rosalie's red-golden hair then leapt back to the moment.

The rings of the curtain screening the far door rattled. Followed a pause behind an ivory screen. As though someone not quite sure or perhaps a little shy or perhaps still overcome by the gentle kiss upon the parapet stood there. Afraid to come walking through the lilies to where waited a love she, being Chinese, knew nothing about.

Chang Teh-sheng knew that Mei-hua stood behind the screen, afraid to come walking through the lilies. Nor had he any intention of helping her overcome her shyness, finding solace in his power to make her walk haltingly through the flower-field to where he sat waiting for her, for love.

There was no sound.

Perhaps she was not sure if he were there or not? Or perhaps she had not changed the Peking-Blue brocade and was suddenly aware of her mistake?

He waited.

Mei-hua waited, wondering would she satisfy her arrogant Master's love of beauty. Then, sure of herself, smiled and walked round the screen whilst Chang Teh-sheng wondered if China could show another woman as beautiful. In white brocade patterned with faintest silver she gleamed like the lilies through which, without brushing even one of the snow-white bells, she walked to where love waited. He watched her come, a rose in her hair and on either cheek, a crimson rose her mouth. Fine ears jewelled with pearls. An ivory tray, set with crystal bowls, in her hands. She walked amongst the lilies as through a Spring garden, eyes on the man she loved, his slender, wounded body, his slender, wounded limbs. A pucker of pain to her crimson mouth and the most solicitous shake of her lovely head as she knelt, placed the tray on the ground before him and bowed.

Very softly she touched the wounds with gentle fingers, put her palm above his heart to see if the bruise there was hot with fever, then shook her head again and sat back on her heels.

"You are very, very beautiful in your wounds;" she whispered, first dexterously applying the sure unguent of flattery to his scarred pride; "but, oh, so very tired;" and touched his eyes gently and ran her fingers down his cheeks and down to the angry bruise where the rope had fretted his breast; "and very, very hurt;" she ended and then, because she grieved for the pain he endured and also because she wished to try her skill, leant forward, like a bird coming shyly to the hand, heart racing, face as white as the lilies and the pearls in her ears, kissed the wound made by the fretting rope and bowed her lovely, scented head to the ground, whilst Chang Teh-sheng clasped his hands round his knees so that he should not break his Vow-of-Abstinence.

"Who taught you the ways of love, Little-Rose?"

"Love, Master!" she whispered, as pink as the flower in her hair, then turned her head away to look at the lilies who didn't know how to blush at all, and, fully aware of the disaster, through repletion, likely to result from feeding the starving more than crumbs, ruthlessly, swiftly, brushed the incident of the sweet caress aside.

"Master, you must eat;" she said with solicitous authority. "See, I threw the rice out three times before I deemed it worthy of your honourable appetite. The broth has been in the stewing this long time and six chicks I had killed before finding one of sufficient tenderness and succulence." She lifted a small saucepan from a small charcoal brazier and filled a crystal bowl. "Drink it, Master, all of it, and should your honourable hands be too numbed to hold the chopsticks, in your condescension allow me to hold them for you;" and bowed, offering the bowl upon both hands and bowed when he took it from her.

"Tell me how the dog died?"



"The dog?" She shook her head. "A hard death, Master. It was long a-dying with overmuch yelping and dire contortions of the body and frothings." She gently took his hand and laid her cheek against it. "Cast the Speck-of-Death away, Master, and permit that I stand at your honourable right hand, always. To receive the knife wound or the bullet. To taste your food in strange houses for fear of poison. To sleep at the foot of your honourable couch for fear of robbers in the night;" and during her dissertation took the empty bowl of broth, knelt down close to Chang Teh-sheng and fed him with rice, whilst he sat with his supple hands round his knees and his handsome head against the jade pillar.

#### PEARLS AND ANGER

Of this she told him and that and of how merchants from Silk and Embroidery Street, Silver and Jade Street cluttered the back entrance.

He took the bowl and chopsticks from her, and ordered her to tell the Compradore to put the best the jewel merchants had brought on a tray and to give the tray to her.

"Shall the Compradore not bring the tray, Master?"

He laughed, mimicking her. "'There will be men attending upon you, Master. I beg to be honourably excused;'" and watched the colour flash to her cheeks as, very dignified and hurt, she got up and walked away through the lilies to the far door.

Finishing the rice and the tea whilst she was gone and wishing there were more, he watched her come back through the lilies with a tray piled high with set and uncut jewels, rings, great diamond solitaires, ear-rings, bracelets, brooches, buttons, rubies, emeralds, sapphires and swinging from her arm a pearl necklace it had taken decades and many lives to match.

She spilled it all out on to the floor as though it were so much dust and watched him turn the flashing heap about. Ear-rings he held up, the great pearls swinging to and fro, and frowned. "There is nothing really good enough;" he said, heaped all the rest back on to the tray and took the necklace from Mei-hua's arm. "Perfect!" he said with the East's little sucking sound of appreciation and held the lustrous, wondrous rope to cheek and mouth. "Kneel!" he said. "Bow your arrogant head!" and when she did as bidden slipped the necklace round her neck and very gently, if somewhat awkwardly, took the artificial pearls from her ears and clipped the others on.

It being the first time he had had ought to do with woman's toilet it took some little time in doing, the colour flaming across her face when his cheek brushed hers as he bent to the task of decking her in jewels fit for a royal crown.

The ear-rings swung, the necklace reached her knees when, all overcome, she stood up. "For me!" she whispered. "For me!" and held the gleaming string to her cheek and then, being already contaminated, to her lips where Chang Teh-sheng had held it to his. Whereupon he rose in his wrath, pulled the necklace over her head and flung it into the pool. "Must give your kisses to a bit of shell because it cost some hundreds of thousands of silver pieces and the Gods know how many lives to make?" he said, his voice a whip. "Would sell your kisses as the harlot of the West sells hers. To the highest bidder?" and when frightened, or pretending to be, she turned to run away through the lilies, caught her by the wrist, jerked her back and took the ear-rings, and none too gently, from her ears. "If you want the jewels you kiss, go into the Pool and get them;" he said harshly and flung the ear-rings in such wise that the pearls fell on a lotus-leaf where they rested like white snails. "What have you got on under your coat?" he asked as curtly.

"A silk chemise, Master;" whispered Mei-hua shyly.

“ Then go into the dressing-room and get out of your things. Come to me in your silk chemise and I will give you your first swimming lesson; ” he ordered her. “ And if at the end of the lesson you can swim three strokes alone, I will dive and get the jewels you so love to kiss. ”

### THE SWIMMING LESSON

But she didn't come in a silk chemise. Nor did Chang Teh-sheng, aware of the ungainliness of Chinese underwear, and therefore out of the kindness of his heart, watch for her appearance between the green-silk curtains. The lilies moved this way and that, then through them he saw Mei-hua slipping, the black satin of her hair a bathing-cap, silver shining on her slender figure, something white wound about one knee.

He sat quite still, watching, and when she stopped amongst the lilies, afraid to leave their sanctuary so scant her attire, rose and stood against the jade column, looking at her, a white and silver rod tipped with ebony.

A vest of silvered silk, fashioned after a much abbreviated bathing-dress she had once seen in the Legation Stores, fitted the slender, supple figure like a well-made glove, leaving the limbs, arms and sloping shoulders bare; mouth a scarlet bow; hands like lotus petals fashioned of ivory and feet so slender that when he looked at her, slowly, from head to foot as though he bought her in the open mart, he wondered that they bore even her slight weight.

Crossing to her amongst the lilies he took her hands, held her at arm's length and turned her slowly round, smiled at her when she shyly changed from one foot to the other, lifted her face by the chin and when she would not look at him, took her hand and led her to the steps, where they sat down. Half-way. Their feet in the warm, scented

water. She, out of sheer pity for his wounds—perhaps—with her cool cheek against the angry rope-stripes on his arm.

So still they sat, the abstemious lovers beautiful. Not that in the waiting for their marriage he did not intend to make love to her, order her about, try her patience in a hundred, hundred ways, for the sheer joy of seeing how she withstood temptation. Whilst she, as she leaned her cheek against his arm, made a vow to try him to the uttermost to prove the strength of his resistance.

Surrounded by lilies and love, laughter, at the trick she was about to play upon him, in her long eyes, they sat making plots against each other as the water chuckled.

“What is this?” he asked and touched the linen strip wound about the knee.

“It binds my wounds, Master!” she said and when he warned her that should she use the word again she would be thrown into the pool to drown, whispered: “Master,” to bring his arms about her as a first trial of his Vow-of-Abstinence.

“Wounds? What wounds? Who dared to lay hands upon you, to hurt you, my woman?” and laughed joyously when, untying Rosalie’s handkerchief, she showed him, and with no little fussing three long scratches where her knee had bit the dust when he had flung her through the door.

“Sweet!” he said, translating the foreign word as best he could whilst tearing the handkerchief across and across; “shall I heal your wounds as you healed the one upon my heart?” and when she lifted questioning eyebrows bent and kissed her knee, then her hands, holding them gently. “’Tis a foreign medicine, Sweet;” he said, coining love-words of his own, China possessing but a right scant store of such verbal amenities; “as love-making is a foreign essence distilled from poison-roots. A little at a time, the one thousandth part of a drop giving man life, the one thousandth part too much bringing death by satiation;” and having hurt her just a little as he intended so to hurt, smiled when

she drew away from him and running down the steps held out his arms to her.

"I put out my arms like that;" she said, listening to his instructions upon the art of swimming and illustrating the lecture; "then push the water back like this;" pulled up the scanty shoulder-strap of her silver vest and imitated all he did. "You, in honourable condescension, will hold me up by my unworthy chin and middle whilst I must refrain from sinking to my despicable nostrils for fear I choke with much gurgling." She stood up, looking down at him, holding out her arms to him, a tantalizing foreshadow of sweet hours to come, then walked down the steps. Crying out when the water reached her breast she screamed a little when he tipped her forward flat on the water, one hand under her chin, the other under her waist and splashed with her feet and flapped with her hands with many gurglings. And when, after valiant and violent striving she said she thought she had mastered the stroke, he turned on his back and holding her under the waist while she screamed and splashed, floated away to the lotus-centre with her.

And suddenly, like a silver fish, she turned and was gone to the far side. "Put out your arms like this!" she mocked, a silver dart in the green water; "and I will support you by the chin;" and laughed, the little waves of her Lover's pursuing kissing her crimson mouth as she doubled and dashed for the centre. "See!" she cried and flung the ear-rings into the air. "If you want your jewels go into the Pool and get them;" and made intricate figures-of-eight whilst she mocked at and laughed at the man who pursued her. "I come from the sea, near Wei-Hai-Wei;" she cried. "I swam when I was no higher than your honourable knee and if it were not for wetting my hair and disturbing the crimson of my mouth I would dive from the high board to rescue the jewels!" and swam hard for the side, her Lover on her heels.

He caught her as she clung to the golden chain and held her, sweet, supple and wet, on his arm

and pulled her away from the golden chain so that the water pressed her against him. "You are like a fish, all silver and slippery against my heart;" he whispered; "it is difficult to hold you so;" and slid his arm about her, crushing her, watching the colour run from dimpled chin to slender brows. "No, you are like a rose-leaf floating on the water;" and let go of the golden chain. "Rest your chin on my shoulder, Sweet, and let me bear the rose-burden through the water;" and floated with her towards the steps, watching her through half-closed eyes, the little waves lapping her chin.

And near the centre of the Pool he caught her under her long arms and pulled her higher still. "Kiss me, Sweet!" he whispered. "You don't know how! Oh, Sweet, then I shall sink to the bottom of the Pool and drown and then the Pool will be the fuller by your tears shed because your hard heart killed me."

Nothing moved but the ripples as she put one slender arm across his breast. There was no sound when her crimsoned lips touched his so lightly, so shyly whilst he watched the water quiver as passion flamed in her long eyes and shook her from lovely head to slender feet which rested on his as slender. "Is that all?" he whispered. "There is a weighty drop of water near my lashes, heavy enough to sink us if not removed;" and held her very close about her slim waist when, resting upon his breast, she kissed his closed eyes so gently and then his mouth once more as the water covered them in a pale-green sheet. "So lightly?" he whispered. "Ah! you fear the crimson of your lips may stain mine! When will the crimson be removed from the distracting bow of your sweet mouth? At night! Alas!" and sighed because of the many days which stretched between The-Hour-of-the-Swimming-Lesson and The-Day-of-the-Bridal-Chair. "Let us wash away the stain, Sweet, now!" he tempted, the jade step under his hand. "Kiss me through the water which will wash the stain away;" and resting his handsome head against the step so that

the water covered his mouth, closed his eyes when the kiss he craved for came through the water which did not remove the stain but served to wash all shyness all away.

And if a crimson stain showed on his shoulder and another under his chin and yet another upon his breast as he stood on the high board, Love would not have told you anything about the Lesson, had you been indiscreet enough to ask him.

Nor would the Lilies have told you what had been taught the Chinese Rose.

Nor does water talk.

"You are beautiful, beautiful!" Mei-hua cried, holding up her arms to her Lover as he stood on the board high above her head and when he flashed into the water without splash or noise, leaned forward to watch him swim over the floor of the Pool picking up the jewels worthy of a royal crown, then swam to meet him as he came up with them and swam with him back to the steps.

"You shall be covered in jewels if you so desire, Chinese Rose of mine!" he said, dropping the necklace over her head and fastening the rings in her ears. "There is nothing I will not give you, loving you so, from the highest position, in time, to many sons who shall be the rosebuds on our love-tree;" and his arm about her drew her up the steps and walked with her through the lilies to her dressing-room where he left her to find something in which to wrap her.

"Can I come in?" he asked, a while later, this man who, heretofore, had reckoned women as little better than a doormat and a good deal less than a pedigree Fighting-Thrush and when Mei-hua, wrapped in a big silk towel said: "Oh, no, indeed you may not!" asked why not and when she said because she was clad solely in a towel: "Oh yes, a big one:" went through the silk curtains to her and looked at her crimsoning her lips, the towel held about her breast with the pearl-necklace, pearl ear-rings swinging.

Wrapped, himself, in a green-lined, white-silk

sheet he sat beside her to watch her make herself beautiful for him and looked around at her satin garments and silk things. "You are a sapphire in blue, Chinese Rose, and a pearl in white, and your mouth is a ruby clasp;" he said.

"Aye!" said she looking at him from the corner of her long eye, thereby carelessly—perhaps—smudging her mouth. "The lining to the sapphire was of pure gold thread;" she informed as best she could for rectifying the smudge with slender finger-tip. "From the looms of Chungking, costing two hundred dollars, big money, the half-yard!" and put her lovely head on one side. "My hands are cold from learning how to swim;" she continued. "Were your honourable hands not so benumbed I would ask you in your condescension to draw a pleasing bow to my displeasing mouth;" and pursed her lips until they looked like a crimson knot.

"It will be grievous to put a robe upon you, Sweet!" he said as he held her chin and carefully rectified the smudged crimson line.

"Robe?" said Mei-hua as best she could.

"When you are my Head-Wife;" he said and touched her slender, arched, 'moth' eyebrows.

"Head-Wife!" said Mei-hua in utter and genuine astonishment. "I thought the She-Devil, Light-of-Dawn, was to be Head-Wife."

So she was Chang Teh-sheng explained, the negotiations for her starting the morrow, but as girls ran direly in the House-of-Fang-P'ing there was a chance she would disgrace him by giving birth to daughters. "Should she give me two I shall divorce her;" he said indifferently, closing Mei-hua's eyes with gentle fingers and arranging the fringe of lashes on her cheek; "and promote you to her place."

### THE FIRST CONCUBINE

Mei-hua pulled his hand down and looked at him, smiling, shaking her head. She begged to be



excused the honourable position. It would be irksome. There would be many stern relations and no laughter. Everything would be dignified and stiff, everyone, always, on their best behaviour.

"The Head-Wife has position, Master;" she said wisely, pouting her mouth until it looked like a ruby circle of distress. "But the First Concubine license!" and laughed when he laughed and scolded her for her shamelessness.

This way and that they fought about the matter, the strain of the past hours, of a great fatigue, slashing their beautiful faces with shadow.

"I would have a secrecy to our meetings, Master;" she begged; "and sometimes the meetings altogether wrecked because of the many stern relations. 'Bar the way and folk strive to walk upon it. Throw wide the gates and they pass by to find something to break down;'" she quoted. "Is not that a wise saying of the wise man who lived on the top of Ti-shan?" And when Chang Teh-sheng acknowledged the wisdom of Confucius wrested a further vow from him.

"Her Honour, The-Light-of-Dawn, shall be the figure-head and you, my Sweet, the corner-stone of my heart's dwelling!" he said at last. "I promise, I give my word!"

"Say rather that the She-Devil shall be your Duty, Lord, and I your Desire;" she corrected shamelessly, and then got up, dismissing the subject as though it were a matter of but slight importance. The divan was ready and waiting for him. The room dim. The workmen three courts distant of his slumber and under penalty of dismissal should they make one sound. And when he asked what she would be doing the day long, forgetting, as is the way of self-centred man, that she had passed two days and one whole night without sleep for love of him, said that she, too, would sleep awhile then waken to arrange the flowers for the midnight feast. And wrapping herself in the silken sheet lined with green moved away from him when he would have wrapped it a little closer yet, so that he

wondered what caused the tinge of frost which so suddenly appeared upon the precious flower of her laughter, and left her, hurt and wondering.

For jewels she would not have told him the cause of the slight frost but, after peeping through the curtains to be sure she was alone, she told it to the lilies, which she kissed in ecstasy of love. "Blow hot, blow cold, blow from north, south, east and west upon man's vanity, white bells;" she said; "and he will be too much taken up in accustoming himself to the new wind to find the time to spare for the sun of other eyes." And walked down the galleries all wrapped about in silk, to the workmen's unbounded astonishment, and across divers courts to where Chang Teh-sheng slept.

"Beautiful!" she whispered. "Beautiful!" and stretched her arms and yawned a little she was so infinitely tired.

### LOVE'S STRENGTH

And when the shadows fell, Wan Yen, walking delicately, having learned of many things, stood in the door-way and looked across at his Master asleep and about the dim, warm, scented room.

For a while he stood, then, without sound, turned to go.

"Yes?" said Chang Teh-sheng, wakened instinctively and instantly as is the way of the East where danger makes herself the constant companion of man.

"Their Excellencies sailed at noon, Master!" said Wan Yen softly and as though he had just returned from some unimportant errand in the City.

"And my guests for to-night?"

"Every one of your Honour's illustrious guests has accepted. The three Banqueting Halls are ready and each menu, inscribed and illuminated, is kept in place upon the table with one rare jewel. That

of his Honour Wang Pu-hao, who is seated at your Honour's right hand, being a great ruby, the colour of rejoicing, slipped deftly across the frontier from Russia."

Chang Teh-sheng lay still. Peace had returned to his dwelling. Of his love or whatever the correct name for that which he had felt for the white woman, of his striving after a different standard of living, of his plans for grafting the methods of the West on to the polished, smooth, exotic trunk of the East, not one whit left. He stretched, well content, and turned his head and looked about, into the corners of the room, through a curtained doorway, and sighed. The agony of his limbs had lessened truly, but his heart ached. He had thought, on waking, to see Mei-hua there. Was sure she would be by. Waiting for his waking. She must have been very tired, of course, but still, somehow—

"There is no love, no real love;" he thought. "Not the love that endures all things for the one beloved;" and pulled a pillow down for fear the man should see the pain in his eyes even through the shadows. "Ring the bell in the fifth court to waken me an hour before midnight;" he said. "You can go;" and added as the man turned away: "Where is my 'Amah'?"

"She sleeps at the foot of your Honour's bed;" the man replied serenely and slipped out of the room.

Joy running through him as the warmth of the rising sun across the cold, grey plain, Chang Teh-sheng lay still. His peace so exquisite a thing he barely breathed for fear of shattering it. To guard him, to be ready for his wakening, his Chinese Rose had slept on the floor the day long. How was she lying? On what? Where? She must be sleeping soundly not to have wakened at the sound of voices. If only she had trusted him, believed in his given word, she need not have slept at the foot of the bed.

"If only all things in love were not forbidden man by woman;" he said softly as he looked down

at Mei-hua stretched on the bare floor, her head on her arm, a sheet over her. "Forbidden. Forbidden. Denied the joy of just holding her, asleep, in my arms until the still distant day when she will come to me in her red Bridal Chair. Forbidden to make love to her, joyously, with laughter under the Vow-of-Abstinence. Forbidden! By the Gods I thought the drear word belonged to the white race and now my Chinese Rose makes use of it as a sharp, protective thorn because she does not trust me to hold her in honour until her marriage day."

"Oh, Master!" came a whisper from the floor and when Chang Teh-sheng knelt and the shadows fell about them gently, Mei-hua, wide awake, looked up at him from the bend of her arm.

#### THE VOW-OF-ABSTINENCE

All wrapped about in the silken sheet he gathered her up and when, so cold from sleeping on the floor, she shivered uncontrollably, carried her to the divan, laid her down in the warmth of the cushions and knelt beside her to watch her go to sleep.

But she did not go to sleep in the warmth of the cushions. Desolate because she thought he knew himself not strong enough to endure until the Vow-of-Abstinence should be lifted from him, she sat up, all slender and white in the dusk, then, in her love for him and to lighten in some slight measure the waiting of the many days ahead, pitted her reasoning powers against his.

"Explain the dread word 'Forbidden' to me, Master."

"Master?"

"Aye, always Master, dear, my Lord."

He could not.

Could she, out of the depths of woman's wisdom?

She loved him so she laughed, he having fallen headlong into the trap laid for him and begged him

rise and, of his condescension, honour her by sitting amongst the cushions whilst she, to the best of her poor ability, essayed to thresh the matter of the drear injunction out.

" 'Forbidden' is a cold, sad word fashioned for the weak only, Master; " she said after some little time in which, whilst pondering, she rested in the shelter of his arms.

" The *weak!* "

" Is there, would there be need to, sense in employing coercion to such as you, Master? " she asked, shaking her lovely head and clasping her gentle hands. " Strong to overcome, to endure until the end, if must be, would there be reason in applying force to the invincibles? In the strength of your given word, that unyielding bond which brought you near to torture unspeakable and nigh to death, you, Master, are *above the laws* to which the harsh word 'Forbidden' belongs. Laws!" she laughed, softly, triumphantly, knowing by the tightening of his arms about her that his hurt, at last, was truly healed. " Rather are they not offensive crutches to the miserably weak? " She looked up at him. " Do you understand, dear, my Lord, that because of your unassailable word there can be *nothing forbidden you?* "

He sat a while thinking out her gentle, strengthening, healing philosophy then bent and kissed her hands in homage. " I understand! " he whispered and kissed her sweet, red mouth in love.

And so it was that when the curiosity-ridden stars looked in, they spied her sleeping most tenderly and safely upon his heart and he so peacefully holding her because, strong in love, unassailable in the strength of his given word there had been no cause for aught to be forbidden him.

And so with the Night-Wind.

When Mei-hua laughed softly in her sleep, waking her Lover and Master with the joyous little sound, it tip-toed into the dim, scented room to discover why she laughed.

For a while Chang Teh-sheng lay listening to the

sweet echo then kissed his Chinese Rose half awake. Held her to him when she stretched in his arms. Pressed her head back against his shoulder to watch her smile. Listened to the laughter in her sighing.

“ ‘ For the East is East and the West is West ’— and the rest of the quotation! ” he whispered and fell asleep again, holding her a little closer still.

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